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edited by

Frederik Pohl

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Editor's Note

More than three decades ago a large magazine, printed on a sort of compressed blotting paper, appeared in a second-hand store at a time when I happened to have ten cents. It contained the first installment of a story by a man named Jack Williamson (then as now one of the best writers in the science-fiction field), a story called *The Stone from the Green Star* which so enraptured me that I scraped together a quarter to buy the next installment first-hand, hot off the newsstand. That was the moment of decision. The drug had been tasted and the addiction formed; thirty years haven't broken the habit.

For science fiction is a hard habit to break. You may come to it because of the brilliant satire of *Brave New World* or of *1984;* you may grow into it through *Captain Video* or the science-fiction comic strips like *Beyond Mars;* you may find your way into it by picking up a collection of science-fiction stories like this one. Once you acquire the taste, you're unlikely to lose it, for it's a limitless field, as spacious as space itself. Publishers, critics and a good many readers have a tendency to think of science fiction as one of the "categories" of publishing, in the specific sense of the term; like detective stories and Westerns. But unless you can think of *The Big Sky* as a Western or *Hamlet* as a whodunit, you can hardly class in a tight little group so widely variant an assortment of stories as justly fit under the common label of science fiction. One can get tired of cowboys or corpses; it's hard to tire of a field that can take you anywhere in space, time or the dimensions.

Just as science fiction can give one reader as wide a choice of stories as any one can ask, so can science fiction

give any number of readers, however diverse their backgrounds or inclinations, a full measure of enjoyment. I had always thought this to be true; years ago I had it proved to me. With C. M. Kornbluth I committed a novel which ran serially in Galaxy Science Fiction. A trade paper called Advertising Age gave the novel a lengthy and laudatory write-up; within a matter of weeks thereafter it got an equally laudatory and still longer press notice in the pages of the Industrial Worker, official organ of the I.W.W. I do not think that in all of America you will find two publications further apart in viewpoint or objectives. But both were enthusiastic; and what is more important, the editors of both were revealed as science-fiction fans.

Of course, you need be neither huckster nor Wobbly to enjoy science fiction—as I trust you will prove to yourself in the stories that follow. Some of the brightest stars in the science-fiction firmament have done their best for you in these tales. To all of them, my thanks and—I hope—yours.

Frederik Pohl

WILLIAM MORRISON

There are few persons better qualified to put the "science" in science fiction than William Morrison, possessor of a doctor's degree in chemistry, translator of scores of obscure and enormously technical scientific papers—and an author of such astonishing versatility as to have written a successful television show for children, a book (with his wife, and under his real name of Joseph Samachson) on the art of the ballet, and several score popular science-fiction stories. With his background, Morrison never needs to fudge on the authenticity of his scientific lore—and that he never allows the accurate science to interfere with sheer story-telling pleasure is adequately attested by . . .

Country Doctor

He had long resigned himself to thinking that opportunity had passed him by for life. Now, when it struck so unexpectedly and so belatedly, he wasn't sure that it was welcome.

He had gone to sleep early, after an unusually hectic day. As if the need for immunizing against the threat of an epidemic hadn't been enough, he had also had to treat the usual aches and pains, and to deliver one baby, plus two premature Marsopolis calves. Even as he pulled the covers over himself, the phone was ringing, but he let Maida answer it. Nothing short of a genuine first-class emergency was going to drag him out of the house again before morning if he could help it. Evidently the call wasn't that important, for Maida hadn't come in to bother him about it, and his last feeling, before dropping off to sleep, was one of gratitude for her common sense.

He wasn't feeling grateful when the phone rang again. He awoke with a start. The dark of night still lay around the house, and from alongside him came the sound of his wife's slow breathing. In the next room, one of the kids, he couldn't tell which, said drowsily, "Turn off the alarm." Evidently the sound of the ringing hadn't produced complete wakefulness.

While he lay there, feeling too heavy to move, Maida moaned slightly in her sleep, and he said to himself, "If that's old Bender, calling about his constipation again, I'll feed him dynamite pills." Then he reached over to the night table and forced himself to pick up the phone. "Who is it?"

"Doctor Meltzer?" He recognized the hoarse and excited tones of Tom Linton, the city peace officer. "You better get over here right away!"

"What is it, Tom? And where am I supposed to get?"

"Over at the space port. Ship out of control—almost ran into Phobos coming down—and it landed with a crash. They need you fast."

"I'm coming."

The sleep was out of his eyes now. He grabbed his emergency equipment, taking along a plentiful supply of antibiotics and adjustable bandages. There was no way of knowing how many men had been hurt, and he had better be ready to treat an entire crew.

Outside the house, his bicar was waiting for him. He tossed in his equipment and hopped in after it. A throw of the switch brought in full broadcast power, and a fraction of a second later he had begun to skim over the smooth path that led over the farmland reclaimed from the desert.

The space port was less than twenty miles away, and it took him no more than ten minutes to get there. As he approached, the light blinked green at an intersection. Ah, he thought, one advantage of being a country doctor with a privileged road is that you always have the right of way. Are there any other advantages? None that you can think of off hand. You go through college with a brilliant record, you dream of helping humanity, of doing research in medicine, of making discoveries that will lengthen human life and lend it a little added happiness. And then, somehow, you find yourself trapped. The frontier outpost that's supposed to be the

steppingstone to bigger things turns out to be a lifetime job. You find that your most important patients are not people, but food-animals. On Mars there are plenty of men and women, but few cows and sheep. Learn to treat *them*, and you really amount to something. Save a cow, and the news gets around faster than if you saved a man. And so, gradually, the animals begin to take more and more of your time, and you become known and liked in the community. You marry, you have children, you slip into a routine that dulls the meaning of the fast-hurrying days. You reach fifty—and you realize suddenly that life has passed you by. Half your allotted hundred years are gone, you can't tell where. The opportunities that once beckoned so brightly have faded in the distance.

What do you have to show for what the years have taken? One wife, one boy, one girl—

A surge of braking-power caught him from the direction of the space port. The sudden deceleration brought him out of his musings to realize that the entire area was brightly lit up. A huge ship lay across the middle of the field. Its length was at least a thousand feet, and he knew that there must be more than two dozen men in its crew. He hoped that none had been killed.

"Doc!"

Tom was rushing over to him. "How many hurt, Tom?"

"Our injuries are all minor, Doctor," said a sharp voice. "Nothing that I can't handle well enough myself."

As he stared at the man in the gold-trimmed uniform who was standing alongside Tom, he had a feeling of disappointment. If there were no serious injuries, what was the rush all about? Why hadn't they telephoned him while he was riding over, told him there was no need of him, let him get back to bed?

"I thought there was a serious crash."

"The crash was nothing, Doctor. Linton, here, was excited by our near-miss of Phobos. But we've no time to waste discussing that. I understand, Doctor Meltzer, that you're a first-class vet."

He flushed. "I hope you didn't drag me out of bed to treat a sick dog. I'm not sentimental about ship's pets—"

"This is no pet. Come along, and I'll show you."

He followed silently as the Captain led the way up the

ramp and into the ship. Inside the vessel, there were no indications of any disorder caused by the crash. One or two of the men were bandaged around the head, but they seemed perfectly capable of getting around and doing their work.

He and the Captain were on a moving walkway now, and for three hundred feet they rode swiftly along it together, toward the back of the ship. Then the Captain stepped off, and Dr. Meltzer followed suit. When he caught sight of the thing that was waiting for him, his jaw dropped.

Almost the entire stern of the ship, about one third its length, was occupied by a great reddish creature that lay there quietly like an overgrown lump of flesh taken from some giant's butcher shop. A transparent panel walled it off from the rest of the ship. Through the panel Dr. Meltzer could see the thirty-foot-wide slit that marked the mouth. Above that was a cluster of breathing pores, looking like gopher holes, and above these was a semicircle of six great eyes, half closed and dulled as if with pain.

He had never seen anything like it before. "My God, what is it?"

"For lack of a better name, we call it a space-cow. Actually, it doesn't inhabit free space—we picked it up on Ganymede as a matter of fact—and as you can see, it doesn't resemble a cow in the least."

"Is that supposed to be my patient?"

"That's it, Doctor."

He laughed, with more anger than amusement. "I haven't the slightest idea what that behemoth is like and what's wrong with it. How do you expect me to treat it?"

"That's up to you. Now, wait a minute, Doctor, before you blow up. This thing is sic .. It isn't eating. It hardly moves. And it's been getting worse almost from the time we left Ganymede. We meant to land at Marsopolis and have it treated there, but we overshot the place and when something went wrong with our drive we had no choice but to come down here."

"Don't they have any doctors to spare from town?"

"They're no better than you are. I mean that, Doctor. The vets they have in Marsopolis are used to treating pets for a standard series of diseases, and they don't handle animals as big as the ones you do. And they don't meet the

kind of emergencies you do, either. You're as good a man as we can get."

"And I tell you, I don't know a thing about this overgrown hunk of protein."

"Then you'll just have to find out about it. We've radioed Earth, and hope to be getting some information soon from some of their zoo directors. Meanwhile—"

The crewmen were bringing over what appeared to be a diver's uniform. "What's this?" he asked suspiciously.

"Something for you to wear. You're going to go down into this animal."

"Into that mass of flesh?" For a moment horror left him with his mouth open. Then anger took over. "Like hell I am."

"Look, Doctor, it's necessary. We want to keep this beast alive—for scientific purposes, as well as possible value as a food animal. And how can we keep it alive unless we learn something about it?"

"There's plenty we can learn without going into it. Plenty of tests we can make first. Plenty of—"

He caught himself abruptly because he was talking nonsense and he knew it. You could take the thing's temperature —but what would the figure you got tell you? What was normal temperature for a space-cow? What was normal blood pressure—provided the creature had blood? What was normal heartbeat—assuming there was a heart? Presumably the thing had teeth, a bony skeleton—but how to learn where and what they were? You couldn't X-ray a mass of flesh like this—not with any equipment he had ever seen, even in the best-equipped office.

There were other, even more disquieting ways in which he was ignorant. What kind of digestive juices did the thing have? Suppose he did go down in a diver's uniform—would the juices dissolve it? Would they dissolve the oxygen lines, the instruments he used to look around and probe the vast inside of the beast?

He expressed his doubts to the Captain, and the latter said, "These suits have been tested, and so have the lines. We know that they can stand a half hour inside without being dissolved away. If they start to go, you'll radio up to us, and we'll pull you up."

"Thanks. How do I know that once the suit starts to go, it

won't rip? How do I know that the juices simply won't eat my skin away?"

There was no answer to that. You just didn't know, and you had to accept your ignorance.

Even while he was objecting, Dr. Meltzer began putting on the suit. It was thin and light, strong enough to withstand several atmospheres of pressure, and at the same time not so clumsy as to hamper his movements considerably. Sealed pockets carried an assortment of instruments and supplies. Perfect two-way communication would make the exchange of ideas—such as they might be—as easy as if the person he was talking to were face to face with him. With the suit came a pair of fragile-looking gloves that left his hands almost as free as if they were bare. But the apparent fragility was misleading. Mechanical strength was there.

But what about resistance to biological action? The question kept nagging him. You can't know, he told himself. About things like that you take a chance. You take a chance and hope that if anything goes wrong, they'll pull you up before the juices have time to get working on you.

They had everything in readiness. Two of the other men were also wearing uniforms like his own, and when he had put his on, and tested it, the Captain gave the signal, and they all went into a small airlock. The door sealed behind them, a door in front opened. They were in the chamber where the great beast lay and quivered dully as if in giant pain.

They tied strong thin plastic cords around Doctor Meltzer's waist, tested the oxygen lines. Then they put a ladder up in front of the beast's face. Doctor Meltzer had a little trouble breathing, but it was not because of anything wrong with the oxygen supply. That was at the right pressure and humidity, and it was mixed with the correct amount of inert gases. It was merely the thought of going down into the creature's belly that constricted his throat, the idea of going into a strange and terrible world so different from his own, of submitting to unimaginable dangers.

He said hoarsely into the radio speaker, "How do I get in anyway, knock? The mouth's at least forty feet off the ground. And it's closed. You've got to open it, Captain. Or do you expect me to pry it open myself?"

The two men with him stretched out a plastic ladder. In

the low gravity of Mars, climbing forty feet was no problem. Dr. Meltzer began to pull his way up. As he went higher, he noticed that the great mouth was slowly opening. One of the men had poked the creature with an electric prod.

Dr. Meltzer reached the level of the lower jaw, and with the fascinated fear of a bird staring at a snake, gazed at the great opening that was going to devour him. Inside there was a gray and slippery surface which caught the beam of his flashlight and reflected it back and forth until the rays faded away. Fifty feet beyond the opening, the passage made a slow turn to one side. What lay ahead, he couldn't guess.

The sensible thing was to go in at once, but he couldn't help hesitating. Suppose the jaws closed just as he got between them? He'd be crushed like an eggshell. Suppose the throat constricted with the irritation he caused it? That would crush him too. He recalled suddenly an ancient fable about a man who had gone down into a whale's belly. What was the man's name, now? Daniel—no, he had only gone into a den of lions. Job—wrong again. Job had been afflicted with boils, the victim of staphylococci at the other end of the scale of size. Jonah, that was it. Jonah, the man whose name was a symbol among the superstitious for bad luck.

But a scientist had no time for superstition. A scientist just thrust himself forward—

He stepped off the ladder into the great mouth. Beneath him, the jaw was slippery. His feet slid out from under him, and then his momentum carried him forward, and he glided smoothly down the yawning gullet. It was like going down a Martian hillside on a greased sled, the low gravity making the descent nice and easy. He noticed that the cords around his waist, as well as the oxygen lines, were descending smoothly after him. He reached the turn, threw his body away from the gray wall, and continued sliding. Another fifty feet, and he landed with a small plash in a pool of liquid.

The stomach? Never mind what you called it, this was probably the beginning of a digestive tract. He'd have a chance now to see how resistant his suit was.

He was immersed in the liquid now, and he sank slowly until his feet touched more solid flesh again. By the beam from his flashlight, he saw that the liquid around him was a light green. The portion of the digestive tract on which he stood was slate gray, with bright emerald streaks.

A voice spoke anxiously in his ears. "Doctor Meltzer! Are you safe?"

"Fine, Captain. Having a wonderful time. Wish you were here."

"What's it like in there?"

"I'm standing at the bottom of a pool of greenish liquid. I'm fascinated, but not greatly instructed."

"See anything that might be wrong?"

"How the devil would I tell right from wrong in here? I've never been in one of these beasts before. I've got sample bottles, and I'm going to fill them in various places. This is going to be sample one. You can analyze it later."

"Fine, Doctor. You just keep on going."

He flashed the beam around him. The liquid was churning gently, possibly because of the splash he himself had made. The gray-green walls themselves were quiet, and the portion underfoot yielded slightly as he put his weight upon it, but was otherwise apparently undisturbed by his presence.

He moved ahead. The liquid grew shallower, came to an end. He climbed out and stepped cautiously forward.

"Doctor, what's happening?"

"Nothing's happening. I'm just looking around."

"Keep us informed. I don't think there's any danger, but—"

"But in case there is, you want the next man to know what to watch out for? All right, Captain."

"Lines all right?"

"They're fine." He took another step forward. "The ground—I suppose I can call it the ground—is getting less slippery. Easier to walk on. Walls about twenty feet apart here. No sign of macrosocopic flora or fauna. No artifacts to indicate intelligent life."

The Captain's voice sounded pained. "Don't let your sense of humor carry you away, Doctor. This is important. Maybe you don't realize exactly how important, but—"

He interrupted. "Hold it, Captain, here's something interesting. A big reddish bump, about three feet across, in the gray-green wall."

"What is it?"

"Might be a tumor. I'll slice some tissue from the wall itself. That's sample number two. Tissue from the tumor, sample number three."

The wall quivered almost imperceptibly as he sliced into it. The fresh-cut surface was purple, but it slowly turned red again as the internal atmosphere of the beast got at it.

"Here's another tumor, like the first, this time on the other side of the wall. And here are a couple more. I'm leaving them alone. The walls are getting narrower. There's still plenty of room to walk, but—wait a minute, I take that back. There's some kind of valve ahead of me. It's opening and closing spasmodically."

"Can you get through?"

"I'd hate to take a chance. And even if I did make it while it was open, it could crush the oxygen lines when it closed."

"Then that's the end of the road?"

"I don't know. Let me think."

He stared at the great valve. It moved rapidly, opening and closing in a two-second rhythm. Probably a valve separating one part of the digestive system from another, he thought, like the human pylorus. The green-streaked gray flesh seemed totally unlike human muscle, but all the same it appeared to serve a similar function. Maybe the right kind of drug would cause muscular relaxation.

He pulled a large hypodermic syringe from one of the sealed pockets of his diver's uniform. He plunged the needle quickly into the edge of the valve as it paused for a fraction of a second before closing, shot a pint of drug solution into the flesh, and ripped the needle out again. The valve closed once more, but more slowly. It opened, closed again, opened once more—and stayed open.

How long before it recovered, and shut off his retreat? He didn't know. But if he wanted to find out what was on the other side, he'd have to work fast. He plunged forward, almost slipping in his eagerness, and leaped through the motionless valve.

Then he called up to tell the Captain what he had done.

The Captain's voice was anxious. "I don't know whether you ought to risk it, Doctor."

"I'm down here to learn things. I haven't learned much yet. By the way, the walls are widening out again. And there's another pool of liquid ahead. Blue liquid, this time."

"Are you taking a sample?"

"I'm a sampler from way back, Captain."

He waded into the blue pond, filled his sample bottle, and put it into one of his pockets. Suddenly, in front of him something broke the surface of the pond, then dived down again.

He came to a full stop. "Hold it, Captain. There seems to be fauna."

"What? Something alive?"

"Very much alive."

"Be careful, Doctor. I think there's a gun in one of the pockets of that uniform. Use it if necessary."

"A gun? Don't be cruel, Captain. How'd you like to have somebody shooting off guns inside you?"

"Be careful, man!"

"I'll use my hypodermic as a weapon."

But the creature, whatever it was, did not approach him again, and he waded further into the blue pond. When his eyes were below the surface of the liquid, he saw the thing moving again.

"Looks like an overgrown tadpole, about two feet long."

"Is it coming close?"

"No, it's darting away from me. And there's another one. I think the light bothers it."

"Any signs that the thing is dangerous?"

"I can't tell. It may be a parasite of the big creature, or it may be something that lives in symbiosis with it."

"Stay away from it, Doctor. No use risking your life for nothing."

A trembling voice said, "Larry! Are you all right?"

"Maida! What are you doing here?"

"I woke up when you left. And then I had trouble going to sleep again."

"But why did you come to the space port?"

"Ships began to flash by overhead, and I began to wonder what had happened. So I called up—and they told me."

"Ships overhead?"

The Captain's voice cut in again. "The news services, Doctor. This case has aroused great interest. I didn't want to tell you before, but don't be surprised if you come up to find yourself famous."

"Never mind the news services. Have you heard from Earth yet?"

"No messages from Earth. We did hear from the curator of the Marsopolis Zoo."

"What did he say?"

"He never even heard of a space-cow, and he has no suggestions to make."

"That's fine. By the way, Captain, are there any photographers around from those news services?"

"Half a dozen. Still, motion picture, television—"

"How about sending them down inside to take a few pictures?"

There was a moment of silence. Then the Captain's voice again: "I don't think they can go down for a while yet. Maybe later."

"Why can't they go down now? I'd like to have some company. If the beast's mouth is open—" A disquieting thought struck him. "Say, it is open, isn't it?"

The Captain's voice sounded tense. "Now, don't get upset Doctor, we're doing all we can!"

"You mean it's closed?"

"Yes, it's closed. I didn't want to tell you this, but the mouth closed unexpectedly, and then, when we did have the idea of sending a photographer down inside, we couldn't get it open again. Apparently the creature has adapted to the effects of the electric shock."

"There must be some way of getting it open again."

"Of course there's a way. There's always a way. Don't worry, Doctor, we're working on it. We'll find it."

"But the oxygen—"

"The lines are strong, and the mouth isn't closed tight enough to pinch them off. You can breathe all right, can't you?"

"Now that I think of it, I can. Thanks for telling me."

"You see, Doctor, it isn't so bad."

"It's perfectly lovely. But what happens if my uniform or the oxygen lines start to dissolve?"

"We'll pull you out. We'll do something to open the mouth. Just don't get caught behind that valve, Doctor."

"Thanks for the advice. I don't know what I'd do without it, Captain."

He felt a sudden surge of anger. If there was one thing he hated, it was good advice, given smugly when the giver could stand off to one side, without sharing the danger

of the person he was helping. Don't let this happen, don't get caught here, take care of yourself. But you were down here to do a job, and so far you hadn't done it. You hadn't learned a thing about what made this monstrous creature tick.

And the chances were that you wouldn't learn, either. The way to examine a beast was from the outside, not from within. You watched it eat, you studied the transfer of the food from one part of the body to another, you checked on the circulation of the body fluids, using radioactive tracers if no other methods offered, you dissected specimens of typical individuals. The Captain should have had a few scientists aboard, and they should have done a few of these things instead of just sitting there staring at the beast. But that would have made things too easy. No, they had to wait for you to come aboard, and then send you deliberately sliding down into the guts of an animal you didn't know anything about, in the hope of having a miracle happen to you. Maybe they thought a loop of intestine or some gland of internal secretion would come over to you and say, "I'm not working right. Fix me, and everything will be fine."

Another of the tadpole-like creatures was swimming over toward him, approaching slowly, the forepart twitching like the nose of a curious dog. Then, like the others, the creature turned and darted away. "Maybe that's the cause," he thought. "Maybe that's the parasite that's causing the trouble."

Only—it might just as well be a creature necessary to the larger creature's health. Again and again you were faced with the same problem. Down here you were in a world you knew nothing about. And when everything was so strange to you—what was normal, and what wasn't?

When in doubt, he decided, move on. He moved.

The blue pool was shallow, and once more he came up on what he decided to call dry ground. Once more the walls grew narrow again. After a time he could reach out and touch the walls on either side of him at the same time.

He flashed his light into the narrow passage, and saw that a dozen yards ahead of him it seemed to come to an end. "Blind alley," he thought. "Time to turn back."

The Captain's voice came to him again. "Doctor, is everything all right?"

"Beautiful. I've had a most interesting tour. By the way, did you get the creature's mouth open yet?"

"We're still working on it."

"I wish you luck. Maybe when those reports from Earth come in—"

"They've come. None of the curators knows anything about space-cows. For some reason, the electric-shock method doesn't work any more, and we're trying all sorts of other stimuli."

"I take it that nothing is effective."

"Not yet. One of the photo service men suggested we use a powerful mechanical clamp to pull the jaws open. We're having one flown over."

"Use anything," he said fervently. "But for God's sake, get that *mouth* open!"

Dr. Meltzer cursed the photo service people, to whom he meant nothing more than a series of colored lines in space. Then he added an unkind word or two for the Captain, who had got him into this mess, and started back.

The tadpole creatures seemed to be interested in his progress. They came swarming around him, and now he could see that there were almost a dozen of them. They moved with quick flips of their tails, like the minnows he had once seen back on Earth, where he had attended medical school. Between each pair of flips there was a momentary pause, and when they came close he was able to get a reasonably good look at them. He was surprised to see that they had two rows of eyes each.

Were the eyes functional or vestigial? In the former case, they must spend some part of their life cycle outside the host creature, in places where they had need of the sense of sight. In the latter case, they were at least descended from outside creatures. Maybe I'll try to catch one of them, he thought. Once I get it outside I can give it a real examination.

Once I get it outside, he repeated. Provided I get outside myself.

He waded through the pond again. As he reached the shallow part of the blue liquid, a voice came to him—this time his wife's voice. "Larry, are you all right?"

"Doing fine. How are the kids?"

"They're with me. They woke up during the excitement, and I brought them along."

"You didn't tell me that before!"

"I didn't want to upset you."

"Oh, it doesn't upset me in the least. Nothing like a nice family picnic. But how do you expect them to go to school in the morning?"

"Oh, Larry, what difference does it make if they miss school for once? A chance to be in on something like this happens once in a lifetime."

"That's a little too often to suit me. Well, now that I know they're here, let me talk to them."

Evidently they had been waiting for the chance, for Jerry's voice came at once. "Hiya, Dad."

"Hiya, Jerry. Having a good time?"

"Swell. You oughtta be out here, Dad. There are a lot of people. They're treatin' us swell."

Martia cut in. "Mom, he isn't letting me talk. I want to talk to Daddy too."

"Let her talk, Jerry. Go ahead, Martia. Say something to Daddy."

A sudden blast almost knocked out his eardum. "Dad, can you hear me?" Martia screamed. "Can you hear me, Dad?"

"I can hear you, and so can these animals. Not so loud, sweetheart."

"Gee, Dad, you oughtta see all the people. They took pictures of me and Mom. Oh, we're so thrilled!"

"They took pictures of me too, Dad," said Jerry.

"They're sending the pictures all over. To Earth and Venus, and everywhere. We're gonna be on television too, Dad. Isn't it exciting?"

"It's terrific, Martia. You don't know what this does for my morale."

"Aw, all she thinks about is pictures. Mom, make her get away from the microphone, or I'll push her away."

"You've had your chance, Martia. Let Jerry talk again."

"You know what, Dad? Everybody says you're gonna be famous. They say this is the only animal of its kind ever discovered. And you're the only person ever went into it. Can I go down there too, Dad?"

"No!" he yelled.

"Okay, okay. Say, Dad, know what? If you bring it back

alive, they're gonna take it to Earth, and put it in a special zoo of its own."

"Thank them for me. Look, Jerry, did they get the animal's mouth open yet?"

"Not yet, Dad, but they're bringing in a great big machine."

The Captain's voice again: "We'll have the mouth open soon, Doctor. Where are you now?"

"Approaching the valve again. Have you heard anything that could be useful? Maybe some explorer or hunter might be able to tell you something about space-cows—"

"Sorry, Doctor. Nobody knows anything about space-cows."

"That's what you said before. All right, Captain, stand by for further news. I've got a shoal of these tadpole beasts in attendance. Let's see what happens now."

"They're not attacking, are they?"

"Not yet."

"You feel all right otherwise?"

"Fine. A little short of breath, though. That may be the result of tension. And a little hungry. I wonder how this beast would taste raw—my God!"

The Captain asked anxiously, "What is it?"

"That valve I paralyzed. It's working normally once more!"

"You mean it's opening and closing?"

"The same rhythm as before. And every time it closes, it squeezes those oxygen tubes. That's why I sometimes feel short of breath. I have to get out of here!"

"Do you have enough drug to paralyze the valve again?"

"No, I don't. Keep quiet, Captain, let me figure this out."

The valve was almost impassable. If he had found a good place to take off from, he might have dived safely through the opening during the near-second when the muscles were far apart. But there was no place for a take-off. He had to approach up a slippery slope, hampered by uniform and lines. And if he misjudged the right moment to go through, he'd be caught when the valve closed again.

He stood there motionless for a moment, sweat pouring down his forehead and into his eyes. Damn it, he thought, I can't even wipe it away. I've got to tackle this thing half blind.

Through one partially fogged eyeplate he noticed the tadpole creatures approaching more closely. Were they vicious

after all? Were they coming closer because they sensed that he was in danger? Were they closing in for the kill?

One of them plunged straight at him, and involuntarily he ducked. The thing turned barely aside at the last moment, raced past him, slithered out of the blue liquid, and squirmed up the slope toward the valve.

Unexpectedly, the valve opened to twice its previous width, and the creature plunged through without trouble.

"Doctor Meltzer? Are you still all right?"

"I'm alive, if that interests you. Listen, Captain, I'm going to try getting through that valve. One of the tadpole beasts just did it, and the valve opened a lot wider to let it through."

"Just how do you expect to manage?"

"I'll try grabbing one of the beasts and hitch-hike through. I just hope it isn't vicious, and doesn't turn on me."

But the tadpole creatures wouldn't let themselves be grabbed. In this, their home territory, they moved a great deal faster than he did, and even though they didn't seem to be using their eyes to see with, they evaded his grasp with great skill.

At last he gave up the attempt and climbed out of the blue pool. The creatures followed him.

One of the biggest of them suddenly dashed forward. Sensing what the thing was going to do, Dr. Meltzer hurried after it. It scurried up the slope, and plunged through the valve. The valve opened wide. Dr. Meltzer, racing desperately forward, threw himself into the opening. The valve paused, then snapped at him. He felt it hit his heel.

The next moment he was gasping for breath. The oxygen lines had become tangled.

He fought frenziedly to untwist them, and failed. Then he realized that he was trying to do too much. All he needed to do was loosen the knot and straighten out the kinks. By the time he finally succeeded, he was seeing black spots in front of his eyes.

"Doctor Meltzer, Doctor Meltzer!"

The sound had been in his ears for some time. "Still alive," he gasped.

"Thank God! We're going to try to open the mouth now, Doctor. If you hurry forward, you'll be in a position to be pulled out."

"I'm hurrying. By the way, those tadpoles are still with me.

They're trailing along as if they'd found a long-lost friend. I feel like a pie-eyed piper."

"I just hope they don't attack."

"You're not hoping any harder than I am."

He could catch his breath now, and with the oxygen lines free, the perspiration that had dimmed his sight slowly evaporated. He caught sight of one of the reddish tumors he had noticed on his forward passage.

"May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," he mummured. "It would take an axe really to chop that tumor out, but I may as well slice into it and see what I can learn."

From one of his pockets he took a sharp oversize scalpel, and began to cut around the edges.

The tumor throbbed convulsively.

"Well, well, I may have something here," he said, with a surgeon's pleasure. He dug deeper.

The tumor erupted. Great gobs of reddish liquid spurted out, and with one of them came another of the tadpole creatures, a small one, half the average size of those he had first encountered.

"Glory be," he muttered. "So that's the way they grow."

The creature sensed him and darted aside, in the direction of the valve. As it approached, the open valve froze in place, and let the small creature through, further into the host, without enlarging. Then the valve began to close again.

They're adapted to each other, he thought. Probably symbiosis, rather than a one-side parasitism.

He moved upwards, toward the greenish liquid.

An earthquake struck.

The flesh heaved up beneath his feet, tossing him head over heels into the pool. The first shock was followed by a second and a third. A tidal wave hit him, and carried him to the side of the pool. He landed with a thud against the hard side and bounced back.

The sides began to constrict, hemming him in.

"Captain!" he yelled. "What's going on out there? What are you doing to the beast?"

"Trying to pry open its mouth. It doesn't seem to like the idea. It's threshing around against the walls of the ship."

"For God's sake, cut it out! It's giving me a beating in here."

They must have halted their efforts at once, for immediately afterwards the beast's movements became less convulsive. But it was some time before the spasmodic quivering of the side walls came to an end.

Dr. Meltzer climbed out of the pool of liquid, making an automatic and entirely useless gesture to wipe the new perspiration from his forehead.

"Is it better in there, Doctor?"

"It's better. Don't try that again," he panted.

"We have to get the mouth open some way."

"Try a bigger electric shock."

"If you want us to. But it may mean another beating for you, Doctor."

"Then wait a minute. Wait till I get near the upper part of the gullet."

"Whenever you say. Just tell us when you're ready."

Better be ready soon, he thought. My light's beginning to dim. When it goes out altogether, I'll probably be in a real panic. I'll be yelling for him to do anything, just to get me out of there.

And what about the suit and the oxygen lines? I think the digestive fluid's beginning to affect them. It's hard to be sure, now that the light's weakening, but they don't have the clear transparent look they had at first. And when they finally go, I go with them.

He tried to move forward faster, but the surface underfoot was slimy, and when he moved too hastily, he slipped. The lines were getting tangled too. Now that the creature's mouth was closed, it was no use tugging at the cord around his waist. That wouldn't get him up.

"Doctor Meltzer!"

He didn't answer. Instead, he pulled out his lancet and cut the useless cords away. The oxygen lines too were a nuisance, in constant danger of kinking and tangling, now that they were no longer taut. But at least the gas was still flowing through them and would continue to flow—until the digestive fluid ate through.

The tadpole creatures seemed to have developed a positive affection for him. They were all around him, not close enough for him to grab them, but still too close for comfort. At any moment they might decide to take a nip out of his suit or an

oxygen line. And with the plastic already weakened, even a slight tear might be fatal.

He reached the sharp slope that signified the gullet. "Dr. Meltzer?"

"What do you want?"

"Why didn't you answer?"

"I was busy. I cut the cord away from around my waist. Now I'm going to try climbing up inside this thing's throat."

"Shall we try that sharp electric shock?"

"Go ahead."

He had a pair of small surgical clamps, and he took one in each hand. The flashlight he put in a holder at his waist. Then, getting down on all fours, he began to crawl up, digging each pair of clamps into the flesh in turn to give him a grip. A slow wave ran away in both directions every time he inserted one of the pairs of clamps into the flesh, but otherwise the beast didn't seem to mind too much.

He was about halfway up, when the earthquakes began again. The first one sent him tumbling head over heels down the slope. The others added some slight injury to the insult, knocking him painfully against the walls. They must have used a powerful electric jolt, for some of it was transmitted through the creature to him, making his skin tingle. He hadn't lost his flashlight, but by now it was exceedingly dim, and shed only a feeble circle of light. Far ahead of him, where the mouth was to open, was blackness.

"No luck, Captain?"

"No luck, Doctor. We'll try again."

"Don't. You just make things worse."

"Larry, were you hurt? Larry—"

"Don't bother me now, Maida," he said roughly. "I have to figure out a way to get out."

A faint hiss came from the oxygen line. A leak. Time was growing short.

The tadpole creatures were swimming around faster now. They too must have been upset by the shock. One of them darted ahead of him, and wriggled ahead until it was lost in blackness.

That seems to be trying to get out too, he told himself. Maybe we can work this together. There must be some way, something to get this creature to open its mouth. Maybe the Captain can't do it from outside, but I'm in here, where

the beast's most sensitive. I can hit it, slash at it, tickle it—

There's a thought. Tickle it. It's a monster, and it'll take some monstrous tickling, but sooner or later, something should affect it.

He stamped hard with his foot. No effect. He took his large lancet from his pocket and slashed viciously with it. A shudder ran through the flesh, but that was all.

And then he had an idea. That green liquid undoubtedly contained hormones. Hormones, enzymes, co-enzymes, antibiotics, biological chemicals of all kinds. Stuff to which some tissues would be adapted and some would not. And those that weren't would react violently.

He turned back, filled his hypodermic syringe with the greenish liquid, and ran forward again. The light was almost gone by now, and the hissing from the oxygen line was growing ominously, but he climbed forward as far as he could, before plunging the hypodermic in and injecting its contents.

The creature heaved. He dropped hypodermic, light, and clamps, and let the huge shuddering take him where it would. First it lifted him high. Then it let him fall suddenly—not backwards, but in the same place. Two of the tadpole beasts were thrown against him. Then he was lifted way up again, and this time forward. A huge cavern opened before him. Light bathed the gray surface and he was vomited out.

The light began to flicker, and he had time for one last thought. Oxygen lack, he told himself. My suit's ripped, the lines have finally torn.

And then blackness.

When he came to, Maida was at his side. He could see that she had been crying. The Captain stood a little further off, his face drawn, but relieved.

"Larry, dear, are you all right? We thought you'd never get out."

"I'm fine." He sat up and saw his two children, standing anxious and awe-stricken on the other side of the bed. Their silence showed how strongly they had been affected. "I hope you kids didn't worry too much about me."

"Of course I didn't worry," said Jerry bravely. "I knew you were smart, Dad. I knew you'd think of a way to get out."

"While we're on the subject," interposed the Captain, "What *was* the way out?"

"I'll tell you later. How's the patient?"

"Doing fine. Seems to have recovered completely."

"How many of the tadpoles came out with me?"

"About six. We're keeping them in the same low-oxygen atmosphere as the creature itself. We're going to study them. We figure that if they're parasites—"

"They're not parasites. I finally came to a conclusion about them. They're the young."

"What?"

"The young. If you take good care of them, they'll eventually grow to be as big as the mother-monster you've got in the ship."

"Good God, where will we keep them?"

"That's your worry. Maybe you'd better expand that zoo you're preparing. What you'll do for money to feed them, though, I don't know."

"But what—"

The trouble with that monster—its 'illness'—was merely that it was gravid."

"Gravid?"

"That means pregnant," exclaimed Jerry.

"I know what it means." The Captain flushed. "Look, do we have to have these kids in here while we discuss this?"

"Why not? They're a doctor's children. The know what it's all about. They've seen calves and other animals being born."

"Lots of times," said Martia.

"Confined as it was on the ship, your beast couldn't get the exercise it needed. And the young couldn't get themselves born."

"But that was the digestive tract you went down—"

"What of it? Are all animals born the same way? Ask the average kid where a baby grows, and he'll tell you that it's in the stomach."

"Some kids are dopes," said Jerry.

"They wouldn't be in this case. What better place to get a chance at the food the mother eats, in all stages from raw to completely digested? All that beast needed to give birth was a little exercise. You gave it some from the outside, but not enough. I finished the job by injecting some of its own

digestive fluid into the flesh. That caused a pretty little reaction."

The Captain scratched his head. "Doctor, you did a good job. How would you like to take care of that beast permanently? I could recommend you—"

"To go down inside that monster again? No, thanks. From now on, I treat nothing but small monsters. Sheeps, cows—and human beings."

There was a pounding of feet in the hallway. Then the door swung in, violently. Flashbulbs that gave invisible light began to pop with inaudible bursts of high-frequency sound. Cameras pointed menacingly at him and sent his image winging to Earth and far-off planets. Reporters began to fire their questions.

"My God," he muttered wearily, "who let these animals in here? They're worse than the ones I met inside the blue pool."

"Be nice to them, dear," chided Maida gently. "They're turning you into a great man."

Then Maida and Jerry and Martia grouped themselves around him, and the cameras caught them too. The proud look on their faces was something to see. And he realized that he was glad for their sake.

Opportunity had knocked, and when he had opened the door to it, it had proved to be an exacting guest. Still, he hadn't been a bad host—not a bad host at all, he thought. And slowly his features relaxed into a tired and immediately famous grin.

C. M. KORNBLUTH

At an age when most of us were cramming high-school grammar and practicing dance steps before a mirror, C. M. Kornbluth, under no fewer than 18 pseudonyms, was writing almost the entire contents of at least two science-fiction magazines. Still short of 30, his published works included several hundred magazine pieces, two novels of his own (one the memorable Takeoff, *published by* DOUBLEDAY) *and two in collaboration (with Judith Merril, under the joint pen-name of Cyril Judd). At 34, C. M. Kornbluth's brilliant career was cut short, leaving us with such clear-cut examples of his talent as . . .*

Dominoes

"Money!" his wife screamed at him. "You're killing yourself, Will. Pull out of the market and let's go some place where we can live like human—"

He slammed the apartment door on her reproaches and winced, standing in the carpeted corridor, as an ulcer twinge went through him. The elevator door rolled open and the elevator man said, beaming: "Good morning, Mr. Born. It's a lovely day today."

"I'm glad, Sam," W. J. Born said sourly. "I just had a lovely, lovely breakfast." Sam didn't know how to take it, and compromised by giving him a meager smile.

"How's the market look, Mr. Born?" he hinted as the car stopped on the first floor. "My cousin told me to switch from Lunar Entertainment, he's studying to be a pilot, but the *Journal* has it listed for growth."

W. J. Born grunted: "If I knew I wouldn't tell you. You've

got no business in the market. Not if you think you can play it like a craps-table."

He fumed all through his taxi ride to the office. Sam, a million Sams, had no business in the market. But they were in, and they had built up the Great Boom of 1975 on which W. J. Born Associates was coasting merrily along. For how long? His ulcer twinged again at the thought.

He arrived at 9:15. Already the office was a maelstrom. The clattering tickers, blinking boards and racing messengers spelled out the latest, hottest word from markets in London, Paris, Milan, Vienna. Soon New York would chime in, then Chicago, then San Francisco.

Maybe this would be the day. Maybe New York would open on a significant decline in Moon Mining and Smelting. Maybe Chicago would nervously respond with a slump in commodities and San Francisco's Utah Uranium would plummet in sympathy. Maybe panic in the Tokyo Exchange on the heels of the alarming news from the States—panic relayed across Asia with the rising sun to Vienna, Milan, Paris, London, and crashing like a shock-wave into the opening New York market again.

Dominoes, W. J. Born thought. A row of dominoes. Flick one and they all topple in a heap. Maybe this would be the day.

Miss Illig had a dozen calls from his personal crash-priority clients penciled in on his desk pad already. He ignored them and said into her good-morning smile: "Get me Mr. Loring on the phone."

Loring's phone rang and rang while W. J. Born boiled inwardly. But the lab was a barn of a place, and when he was hard at work he was deaf and blind to distractions. You had to hand him that. He was screwy, he was insolent, he had an inferiority complex that stuck out a yard, but he was a worker.

Loring's insolent voice said in his ear: "Who's this?"

"Born," he snapped. "How's it going?"

There was a long pause, and Loring said casually: "I worked all night. I think I got it licked."

"What do you mean?"

Very irritated: "I said I think I got it licked. I sent a clock and a cat and a cage of white mice out for two hours. They came back okay."

"You mean—" W. J. Born began hoarsely, and moistened his lips. "How many years?" he asked evenly.

"The mice didn't say, but I think they spent two hours in 1977."

"I'm coming right over," W. J. Born snapped, and hung up. His office staff stared as he strode out.

If the man was lying—! No; he didn't lie. He'd been sopping up money for six months, ever since he bulled his way into Born's office with his time machine project, but he hadn't lied once. With brutal frankness he had admitted his own failures and his doubts that the thing ever would be made to work. But now, W. J. Born rejoiced, it had turned into the smartest gamble of his career. Six months and a quarter of a million dollars—a two-year forecast on the market was worth a billion! Four thousand to one, he gloated; four thousand to one! Two hours to learn when the Great Bull Market of 1975 would collapse and then back to his office armed with the information, ready to buy up to the very crest of the boom and then get out at the peak, wealthy forever, forever beyond the reach of fortune, good or bad!

He stumped upstairs to Loring's loft in the West 70's.

Loring was badly overplaying the role of casual roughneck. Gangling, redheaded and unshaved, he grinned at Born and said: "Watcha think of soy futures, W. J.? Hold or switch?"

W. J. Born began automatically: "If I knew I wouldn't—oh, don't be silly. Show me the confounded thing."

Loring showed him. The whining generators were unchanged; the tall Van de Graaf accumulator still looked like something out of a third-rate horror movie. The thirty square feet of haywired vacuum tubes and resistences were still an incomprehensible tangle. But since his last visit a phone booth without a phone had been added. A sheet-copper disk set into its ceiling was connected to the machinery by a ponderous cable. Its floor was a slab of polished glass.

"That's it," Loring said. "I got it at a junkyard and fixed it up pretty. You want to watch a test on the mice?"

"No," W. J. Born said. "I want to try it myself. What do you think I've been paying you for?" He paused. "Do you guarantee its safety?"

"Look, W. J.," Loring said, "I guarantee nothing. I *think* this will send you two years into the future. I *think* if you're

back in it at the end of two hours you'll snap back to the present. I'll tell you this, though. If it *does* send you into the future, you had better be back in it at the end of two hours. Otherwise you may snap back into the same space as a strolling pedestrian or a moving car—and an H-bomb will be out of your league."

W. J. Born's ulcer twinged. With difficulty he asked: "Is there anything else I ought to know?"

"Nope," Loring said after considering for a moment. "You're just a paying passenger."

"Then let's go." W. J. Born checked to make sure that he had his memorandum book and smooth-working pen in his pocket and stepped into the telephone booth.

Loring closed the door, grinned, waved and vanished —literally vanished, while Born was looking at him.

Born yanked the door open and said: "Loring! What the devil—" And then he saw that it was late afternoon instead of early morning. That Loring was nowhere in the loft. That the generators were silent and the tubes dark and cold. That there was a mantle of dust and a faint musty smell.

He rushed from the big room and down the stairs. It was the same street in the West 70's. Two hours, he thought, and looked at his watch. It said 9:55, but the sun unmistakably said it was late afternoon. Something had happened. He resisted an impulse to grab a passing high-school boy and ask him what year it was. There was a newsstand down the street, and Born went to it faster than he had moved in years. He threw down a dime and snatched a *Post,* dated—September 11th, 1977. He had done it.

Eagerly he riffled to the *Post's* meager financial page. Moon Mining and Smelting had opened at 27. Uranium at 19. United Com at 24. Catastrophic lows! The crash had come!

He looked at his watch again, in panic. Nine-fifty-nine. It had said 9:55. He'd have to be back in the phone booth by 11:55 or—he shuddered. An H-bomb would be out of his league.

Now to pinpoint the crash. "Cab!" he yelled, waving his paper. It eased to the curb. "Public library," W. J. Born grunted, and leaned back to read the *Post* with glee.

The headline said: 25000 RIOT HERE FOR UPPED JOBLESS DOLE. Naturally; naturally. He gasped as he saw who had won the 1976 presidential election. Lord, what odds he'd be

able to get back in 1975 if he wanted to bet on the nomination! NO CRIME WAVE, SAYS COMMISSIONER. Things hadn't changed very much after all. BLONDE MODEL HACKED IN TUB; MYSTERY BOYFRIEND SOUGHT. He read that one all the way through, caught by a two-column photo of the blonde model for a hosiery account. And then he noticed that the cab wasn't moving. It was caught in a rock-solid traffic jam. The time was 10:05.

"Driver," he said.

The man turned around, soothing and scared. A fare was a fare; there was a depression on. "It's all right, mister. We'll be out of here in a minute. They turn off the Drive and that blocks the avenue for a couple of minutes, that's all. We'll be rolling in a minute."

They were rolling in a minute, but for a few seconds only. The cab inched agonizingly along while W. J. Born twisted the newspaper in his hands. At 10:13 he threw a bill at the driver and jumped from the cab.

Panting, he reached the library at 10:46 by his watch. By the time that the rest of the world was keeping on that day it was quitting-time in the midtown offices. He had bucked a stream of girls in surprisingly short skirts and surprisingly big hats all the way.

He got lost in the marble immensities of the library and his own panic. When he found the newspaper room his watch said 11:03. W. J. Born panted to the girl at the desk: "File of the *Stock Exchange Journal* for 1975, 1976 and 1977."

"We have the microfilms for 1975 and 1976, sir, and loose copies for this year."

"Tell me," he said, "what year for the big crash? That's what I want to look up."

"That's 1975, sir. Shall I get you that?"

"Wait," he said. "Do you happen to remember the month?"

"I think it was March or August or something like that, sir."

"Get me the whole file, please," he said. Nineteen seventy-five. His year—his real year. Would he have a month? A week? Or—?

"Sign this card, mister," the girl was saying patiently. "There's a reading machine, you just go sit there and I'll bring you the spool."

He scribbled his name and went to the machine, the only one vacant in a row of a dozen. The time on his watch was 11:05. He had fifty minutes.

The girl dawdled over cards at her desk and chatted with a good-looking young page with a stack of books while sweat began to pop from Born's brow. At last she disappeared into the stacks behind her desk.

Born waited. And waited. And waited. Eleven-ten. Eleven-fifteen. Eleven-twenty.

An H-bomb would be out of his league.

His ulcer stabbed him as the girl appeared again, daintily carrying a spool of 35-millimeter film between thumb and forefinger, smiling brightly at Born. "Here we are," she said, and inserted the spool in the machine and snapped a switch. Nothing happened.

"Oh, darn," she said. "The light's out. I *told* the electrician."

Born wanted to scream and then to explain, which would have been just as foolish.

"There's a free reader," she pointed down the line. W. J. Born's knees tottered as they walked to it. He looked at his watch—11:27. Twenty-eight minutes to go. The ground-glass screen lit up with a shadow of the familiar format; January 1st, 1975. "You just turn the crank," she said, and showed him. The shadows spun past on the screen at dizzying speed, and she went back to her desk.

Born cranked the film up to April, 1975, the month he had left 91 minutes ago, and to the sixteenth day of April, the very day he had left. The shadow on the ground glass was the same paper he had seen that morning: SYNTHETICS SURGE TO NEW VIENNA PEAK.

Trembling he cranked into a vision of the future; the *Stock Exchange Journal* for April 17th, 1975.

Three-inch type screamed: SECURITIES CRASH IN GLOBAL CRISIS: BANKS CLOSE; CLIENTS STORM BROKERAGES!

Suddenly he was calm, knowing the future and safe from its blows. He rose from the reader and strode firmly into the marble halls. Everything was all right now. Twenty-six minutes was time enough to get back to the machine. He'd have a jump of several hours on the market; his own money would be safe as houses; he could get his personal clients off the hook.

He got a cab with miraculous ease and rolled straight to the loft building in the West 70's without hindrance. At 11:50 by his watch he was closing the door of the phone booth in the dusty, musty-smelling lab.

At 11:54 he noticed an abrupt change in the sunlight that filtered through the dirt-streaked windows and stepped calmly out. It was April 17th, 1975, again. Loring was sound asleep beside a gas hotplate on which coffee simmered. W. J. Born turned off the gas and went downstairs softly. Loring was a screwy, insolent, insecure young man, but by his genius he had enabled W. J. Born to harvest his fortune at the golden moment of perfection.

Back in his office he called his floor broker and said firmly: "Cronin, get this straight. I want you to sell every share of stock and every bond in my personal account immediately, at the market, and to require certified checks in payment."

Cronin asked forthrightly: "Chief, have you gone crazy?"

"I have not. Don't waste a moment, and report regularly to me. Get your boys to work. Drop everything else."

Born had a light, bland lunch sent in and refused to see anybody or take any calls except from the floor broker. Cronin kept reporting that the dumping was going right along, that Mr. Born must be crazy, that the unheard-of demand for certified checks was causing alarm, and finally, at the close, that Mr. Born's wishes were being carried out. Born told him to get the checks to him immediately.

They arrived in an hour, drawn on a dozen New York banks. W. J. Born called in a dozen senior messengers, and dealt out the checks, one bank to a messenger. He told them to withdraw the cash, rent safe-deposit boxes of the necessary sizes in those banks where he did not already have boxes, and deposit the cash.

He then phoned the banks to confirm the weird arrangement. He was on first-name terms with at least one vice president in each bank, which helped enormously.

W. J. Born leaned back, a happy man. Let the smash come. He turned on his flashboard for the first time that day. The New York closing was sharply off. Chicago was worse. San Francisco was shaky—as he watched, the flashing figures on the composite price index at San Francisco began to drop. In five minutes it was a screaming nosedive into the pit. The closing bell stopped it short of catastrophe.

W. J. Born went out to dinner after phoning his wife that he would not be home. He returned to the office and watched a board in one of the outer rooms that carried Tokyo Exchange through the night hours, and congratulated himself as the figures told a tale of panic and ruin. The dominoes were toppling, toppling, toppling.

He went to his club for the night and woke early, eating alone in an almost-deserted breakfast room. The ticker in the lobby sputtered a good-morning as he drew on his gloves against the chilly April dawn. He stopped to watch. The ticker began spewing a tale of disaster on the great bourses of Europe, and Mr. Born walked to his office. Brokers a-plenty were arriving early, muttering in little crowds in the lobby and elevators.

"What do you make of it, Born?" one of them asked.

"What goes up must come down," he said. *"I'm* safely out."

"So I hear," the man told him, with a look that Born decided was envious.

Vienna, Milan, Paris and London were telling their sorry story on the boards in the customers' rooms. There were a few clients silting up the place already, and the night staff had been busy taking orders by phone for the opening. They all were to sell at the market.

W. J. Born grinned at one of the night men and cracked a rare joke: "Want to buy a brokerage house, Willard?"

Willard glanced at the board and said: "No thanks, Mr. Born. But it was nice of you to keep me in mind."

Most of the staff drifted in early; the sense of crisis was heavy in the air. Born instructed his staff to do what they could for his personal clients first, and holed up in his office.

The opening bell was the signal for hell to break loose. The tickers never had the ghost of a chance of keeping up with the crash, unquestionably the biggest and steepest in the history of finance. Born got some pleasure out of the fact that his boys' promptness had cut the losses of his personal clients a little. A very important banker called in midmorning to ask Born into a billion-dollar pool that would shore up the market by a show of confidence. Born said no, knowing that no show of confidence would keep Moon Mining and Smelting from opening at 27 on September 11th, 1977. The banker hung up abruptly.

Miss Illig asked: "Do you want to see Mr. Loring? He's here."

"Send him in."

Loring was deathly pale, with a copy of the *Journal* rolled up in his fist. "I need some money," he said.

W. J. Born shook his head. "You see what's going on," he said. "Money's tight. I've enjoyed our association, Loring, but I think it's time to end it. You've had a quarter of a million dollars clear; I make no claims on your process—"

"It's gone," Loring said hoarsely. "I haven't paid for the damn equipment—not ten cents on the dollar yet. I've been playing the market. I lost a hundred and fifty thousand on soy futures this morning. They'll dismantle my stuff and haul it away. I've got to have some money."

"No!" W. J. Born barked. "Absolutely not!"

"They'll come with a truck for the generators this afternoon. I stalled them. My stocks kept going up. And now—all I wanted was enough in reserve to keep working. *I've got to have money."*

"No," said Born. "After all, it's not my fault."

Loring's ugly face was close to his. "Isn't it?" he snarled. And he spread out the paper on the desk.

Born read the headline—again—of the *Stock Exchange Journal* for April 17th, 1975: SECURITIES CRASH IN GLOBAL CRISIS: BANKS CLOSE; CLIENTS STORM BROKERAGES! But this time he was not too rushed to read on: "A world-wide slump in securities has wiped out billions of paper dollars since it started shortly before closing yesterday at the New York Stock Exchange. No end to the catastrophic flood of sell orders is yet in sight. Veteran New York observers agreed that dumping of securities on the New York market late yesterday by W. J. Born of W. J. Born Associates pulled the plug out of the big boom which must now be consigned to memory. Banks have been hard-hit by the—"

"Isn't it?" Loring snarled. "Isn't it?" His eyes were crazy as he reached for Born's thin neck.

Dominoes, W. J. Born thought vaguely through the pain, and managed to hit a button on his desk. Miss Illig came in and screamed and went out again and came back with a couple of husky customers' men, but it was too late.

LESTER DEL REY

Many men have made a life work of editing a magazine; Lester del Rey, very nearly single-handedly, edited five—at least one of them, Space Science Fiction, close to the top of its field. Since this occupied fewer than 60 of the 168 hours in a week, he filled his idle time with a writing production schedule which has been known to top 50,000 words over a weekend. (In spite of the fact that, it has reliably been reported, he is unable to so much as type his name on a page until he has taken apart, oiled and reassembled the typewriter—of which he owns seven.) What is more, the words are very good words indeed. For instance, see . . .

Idealist

Waking was filled with fear. He tried to cling to the absolute unconsciousness his sleep had once been, but it was impossible. His mind jumped and quivered. There was pain there, but the vague memory of pain was stronger than the reality. He felt himself holding his breath, and let it out slowly, waiting for the sounds of violence.

Everything was silent, except for the ticking near him that was too slow to be a clock. There were no sounds of the Station . . .

The Station! He chased the thought down, and drew a complete blank. This was no railroad station. This was some neverland where even weight was missing. He seemed to be floating in emptiness, with only a faint draft of air across part of his face, and a weak pressure of something warm on the rest of him.

Then he smelled the faint odor in the air and knew it must be a hospital room. The warmth of the cloth around his

head became bandages. The weightless feeling must be the aftereffect of drugs. Even the deepness of his sleep and the fear of some dreadful vagueness could be products of the drug. In that case, his expectation of violence was a hangover from the accident that . . .

Memory failed, just as something touched it. It was as if it came to a stone wall and bounced back. The dreadful word *amnesia* struck at him, but was followed at once by reassurance. He was Paul Fenton, who would finish his engineering work at Caltech some day and have a chance to work on the rockets that would give men wings to the planets. He was in the Air Force now, first in his group, anxious to rid the world of the menace that lay over it and get back to his studies. He'd just been assigned . . .

Again there was a slipping of his memory, but it didn't matter. He knew he was sane, hungry, and burning with thirst. The pain still bothered him, but it was going away.

He tried to sit up, but something held him back. Tardily, his eyes opened, to see a webbing sack apparently surrounding his body. Four thin elastic cords led from it to the walls—metal walls in a tiny room, with everything apparently fastened down. There was a chair on the ceiling, machines on two walls, and a bottle bobbing about in the air currents from a small ventilator, unsupported in mid-air!

Space! It wasn't speculation, but certainty. He was in free fall, in a space-ship. His first wild idea of an alien race vanished before it was full-blown. The things he could see were clearly of human make—and he'd known somehow that it had to be human.

Attached to his arm was a tube that led up to a clicking machine, where a meter registered zero. The drug must have been continuously dripped from there, until it was exhausted.

"Nurse!" His voice echoed hollowly against the metal walls. He waited, without answer, and shouted again. "Nurse! Doctor! Somebody!"

The ship was silent, except for the ticking of the machine and the faint drone of a fan. Fenton jerked the needle from under the bandage and began pulling himself out of the cocoon. His body moved well enough, now. On one wall was a plastic bag with a strange, green uniform in it, and he found that the clothes fitted him. He zipped the jacket closed, and automatically located and lit a cigarette. The smoke re-

lieved some of the tension, until he noticed the *P.F.* engraved over an elaborate seal on the lighter. It showed a stylized space-ship leaving Earth, heading to what might have been a space station.

He sucked harder, considering why his initials should be there, and why the uniform seemed tailored for him. Then it dawned on him that he had no memory of learning to smoke.

When he finally found a flat surface on one machine that could serve as a mirror, another shock hit him. It was his own face, under the bandage that was wound around the top of his skull—but an older, grimmer face, with bitter crow's-feet around the eyes. His body had filled out, and what little hair he could see had touches of gray mixed with the brown. He might have been thirty-five, instead of the eighteen he remembered.

The lost years hit him where nothing else had touched. He screamed and threw himself to the door of the tiny room. It wrenched open in his hand, showing a long tube.

"Nurse! Hey! Help!"

But the only answer was the echo of his own voice bouncing off the tube walls. The ship, or whatever it was, was a dead thing. He called until his lungs ached, and nothing happened.

Slow, steady! He thought the words, but his heart went on racing, and a clammy sweat broke out, itching under the bandages. With a desperate lunge, he went sailing up the tube, braking his landing against the further door with his hands. He stopped there, feeling a faint weight. He knew automatically that weight picked up as he went further from the center of the spinning Station, but he had no time to consider the odd knowledge.

He ripped open the door, and dropped through it, into a room filled with green plants in tanks. Again he shouted, driving himself to a frenzy of sound that rebounded savagely from the metal walls.

But it was useless. The Station was as silent as the growing plants that replenished its air supplies. There was no sound of humanity to reach his ears.

Instinct sent his legs pumping, driving him toward the door of the room. He was reaching for it when he tripped

over something and fell to his hands and knees, skidding forward in the light pseudo-gravity.

It was a corpse. The lieutenant bore the stylized symbol of Hydroponics on his shoulder, but there was only part of a head above it. Fenton jerked back from contact with the gore, and then saw that the corner of one of the tanks was spattered. The man's head had crashed there violently, and the tank had stood the shock better than his skull.

There were other marks of violence. Some of the tanks had spilled, leaving the floor damp in places, even though the water had been drained away. Others had broken under some shock. The plants had stood it, in some places. In others, they were matted down as if a hand had squashed them.

Fenton got up, the sickness stronger in him, and opened the door with some effort. It had warped, and stuck. But beyond it, there was worse than what lay behind.

Part of a girl lay smashed against a wall, and here the smell showed that she had been lying there for more than a single day. The sick, cloying odor of human death was heavy in the room where the plants had not covered it. Fenton saw a man's body, with a lever projecting from it, and then he was out of there.

The next room held nothing, beyond some wrecked machinery. But the one beyond that had been a bunkroom! He dashed through it, and through others beyond. Something had hit the space-station—he knew it was a station now—and the violence of that had been enough to kill and maim anything or anyone not specifically protected. He'd been lucky. The elastic webbing suspension must have soaked up enough of the blow to save him. And, apparently, the center of the Station hadn't been touched as heavily as the outer edges.

That could only mean an explosion of some kind. Raw space wouldn't carry an explosive force for any distance. He was aware of a lot of such details now, without having any real memory of how he came to the place. But the back of his head was taking it for granted that sometime during his memory blackout he'd been sent here. A lot could happen in fifteen years or so.

Then he glanced at his own shoulders, and the device had sudden meaning for him. He took it for granted now that this was his own uniform—and the symbol showed that he

had been a lieutenant, serving as a pilot on the little ferries that worked between the supply ships and the Station.

Somehow, that was too much for his mind, yet. Everything ebbed out of it, and he stood motionless, trying to think where he was, and why his mother had left him there. But it passed quickly. He jerked his hand off a section of the wall where blood had spattered, and the rebound of his senses brought wisps of memory with it.

He'd been assigned from the Air Force to study the piloting of rockets. There were scraps of memory which indicated that he had spent several years piloting ships up, while the Station was built, until it was assembled and he was berthed here permanently by his own desires. The great Station had become his life. Why not? It would forever end the threat of war. With it, men could take their struggles out against space, instead of against themselves. It was the opening achievement of man's final triumph, the great ideal to which his generation had striven.

"Idealism!" he said, suddenly, and spat on the floor. He shook himself, then. It was as senseless a gesture as any human could make. Without idealism, what was there for the race but the mud from which they had pulled themselves?

Section by section, he went through the silent Station, but it was pretty much the same. In the other half, he found the great control room closed and locked. He back-tracked, no longer sick at the sight of death.

Now he was afraid of being alone, and driven to a frenzy of speed by the need to keep his mind from wondering what had caused this. He couldn't think of that.

He came to the section of the Station farthest from that in which he had first emerged. Here the shock had been much weaker—softened enough by distance from whatever the source was to leave few signs of it. Hope quickened in him, then. There might still be people here.

He found a man, finally. The section had been practically deserted. It was a quadrant of the ship devoted to scientific exploration, and to the study of space itself. Something seemed to have drawn the men away from here, before the blow came.

But the man was as dead as the others. A bullet had gone through his right temple and had come to rest six inches

beyond, against the metal wall. It wasn't suicide—there was no gun there.

Further on, before he came to the section where the signs of shock grew stronger again, he found a dead man seated in a strap affair and a woman floating in a tank of some liquid. There were holes caused by bullets to show the cause of death, in both cases.

Then he was at the other entrance to the control room. He jerked it open. "Captain Allistair! Lieutenant Morgan!"

They sat there in their webbing control seats, but they could never answer him. Bullets had found them, apparently while they were working their controls. The other men who had filled the room were also dead. But these had not died quietly. They were in positions which indicated that they had tried to reach the door where Fenton now stood—and had failed. There were spots of lead along the walls, as if someone had opened up with a machine gun, spraying the whole of the room. Even the shock that had hit the Station could hide none of the attempt the men inside had made, but here there had been nothing but corpses before that shock came.

Fenton realized that his mind was slipping again, but this time he let it go. The bandage on his head hurt suddenly, and he reached for it, sobbing softly. "Sue. Sue! Suzy, don't let them . . ."

But Susan wasn't there. It was her day off, and the neighborhood kids were throwing rocks at him. They were bad kids . . .

He came back sharply this time, to find that he was clawing at a door, with the bandages held in one hand. He stopped sharply, and studied his head in the polished metal of the door. There was only a small, shaven section, with signs of stitches and healing around it. The concussion he'd gotten when he miscalculated the approach speed on his last desperate race back with more bombs from the supply ship must have cracked his skull. It must not have been too bad, though, even if he could remember screaming in pain until they gave him the first of the continuous drugging. The bombs had . . .

He almost had it when a scream echoed down the corridor, faint, yet with all the hell of agony carried with it.

Fenton yelled back, and was rushing toward the sound,

around the huge circle of the Station. It wasn't repeated, and he stopped to yell from time to time, and to listen. His heart was pounding again, and a sudden fear washed through him as he remembered the man with the machine gun.

Then he stumbled into the man—but he was a corpse, like the others. The machine gun was still clutched tightly, but a section of shelving had cut him half in two, and he hung there, an expression of utter bewilderment on his face. Fenton must have missed him the first time, or paid no attention to one body among the rest; the gunman had been before the first corpse with the bullet wound. Probably he'd been on his way to kill more when the shock hit him.

Fenton recoiled mentally from the picture of a man who could proceed on a mission of murder deliberately. But then the sound of a human voice reached him faintly, and he dashed on.

It was coming from the tube that led to the center of the Station, a weak moaning. Now it was less human, as if an animal had been wounded and left to die there.

He slid down the tube. The door to the room in which he had come to was still open, but there was another one beside it. He ripped it open, and one beyond that. There were only four rooms here in the tiny infirmary, and the last one had to be right. As if to prove it, another moan came.

He opened the door cautiously this time, but there was nothing to fear. In a cocoon like the one in which he had awakened, and with a similar drug tube in the arm, a girl's body lay. It was contorted in agony now, and the tied-down hands were threshing slightly. The face was twisted, and a steady moan came from the opened mouth.

"Martha!" Fenton leaped forward, and then stopped. It had been Martha Graves, once. But now the body there was only human by definition. Too much work in the radiation laboratory had caught up with her, starting a vicious and almost impossibly rapid brain tumor. The doctor had been forced to operate here, and most of the brain that had once held the genuine genius of the physicist had gone with the tumor, leaving only the animal functions behind. She had been supposed to leave on the next ship up.

Fenton couldn't understand the pain, though. They had meant to take her off the drugs the same day he had been hurt. Then a twinge from his own stomach supplied the an-

swer. He dashed out toward the nearest galley, grabbing whatever unspoiled food was available and a plastic bulb of water. He swallowed rapidly on his way back.

The mouth of the unhappy creature drooled at the smell of the food. She sucked down the water, making a mess of it, and began swallowing some of the food. Her moans cut off, and a few minutes later she was asleep.

He pulled the needle out of her arm quietly, and stood debating with himself. Then he grimaced. The eighteen-year-old section of his mind had been uppermost, obviously. Nothing he could do now would worry what had been Martha Graves. He located a bottle of alcohol in the pharmacy, poured it into a bulb, and took it back to the gravity-free center, where he sponged her off gently. She awoke when he pulled her from the cocoon, and again when he put her back, but she fell asleep almost at once in both cases.

Then he went out and was sick. The idea had finally hit him. He was alone here with something that was still female, but no longer human. And as far as he knew, there might be no other human beings in the whole universe. The supply ships should have been here before the length of time that had obviously passed.

He was surprised at that, amazed at the fact that his brain had speculated on the end of the Earth, and had almost accepted it, below the level of his consciousness, while he had tended to the needs of the girl.

With a leap, he spun to the nearest hatch leading to the outer edge of the Station. He'd never even thought to investigate it, before. Then he saw the red signal over the lock, indicating that the half of the doughnut-tube farthest from the center was without air. Whatever had hit the Station must have opened the outer edge to space, and the inner section had been saved only by the automatic seals that had immediately shut down.

He found a space-suit and climbed into it, checking its air supply. Then he set the hatch to manual, and crawled through.

It was worse than it had been below. Apparently the whole great outer seam of the Station had sprung open. The corpses here were bloated things, puffed out by the air pressure within them as they died.

But after the living death below, this didn't hit him as it might have done before. He made his way through the

shambles that had been man's finest achievement. His half-memory of bombs was nagging at him, together with the things his brain had guessed at.

He located the big bomb bay, which was never to have been used, but to have prevented war by its mere existence. Here, five hundred H-bombs rested, their tubes ready to drive them on controlled courses to Earth. And here, probably, had been the place where the ones he was ferrying from the supply ship had been brought. How many? He had no idea. But now there were only a score of them, while the hand of one of the corpses was still tightly locked on the release lever of one of those.

Below him, the giant ball that was Earth lay cradled in space, blue-green on the lighted half towards which the Station was moving. He wondered whether the exact two-hour rotation of the Station had been disturbed. Probably not enough to show. And even completely wrecked, it could still sail on its orbit here forever, with nothing to slow it, and no way to fall at its present speed.

Then his eyes focused on a tiny spot of light on the dark side of the Earth—tiny here, but still larger and brighter than anything he could remember. It was as if the whole of a city had burst into flames.

He stood there, unwilling to believe what alone could explain it all. Somehow, the impossible had happened. War that had threatened so long had finally broken out. Men had turned against men—when all of space lay waiting for their conquest! Nation with atomic bombs had been pitted against nation with bacteriological weapons. The threat of the bombs from the Station had become reality, and Earth had somehow reached up a long finger of wrath to strike back.

There had even been treason here. The man with the machine gun—Peter Olin, master mechanic, ten years with the Station, Fenton suddenly remembered—had betrayed them. It must have been in his mind for years, since there was no other reason for a smuggled gun here. He'd gotten control over the officers so quickly that no word had spread, and then had begun working backwards, killing as he went, not caring about the noise here where so many sounds passed down the echoing metal walls. And the great guided missile—perhaps from his own nation—had struck him down along with

those he had wanted to betray. Only the two in the infirmary had been spared.

"Why?" he shouted. "Why?"

He was sobbing wildly, and his cries rang in his ears when he found himself back in the control room. The incipient insanity in his own voice snapped him back, slowly this time, through his childhood horror of violence, his bravado as a youth setting out to help save the world, and finally the present where his whole hope and faith had been tied up in this great hulk of metal around him.

It had failed. He faced it now—and he knew that even without all its slowly returning memories, his mind was back to the thirty-five-year level. There were twisted, bitter thoughts still, but he faced the fact which he couldn't have accepted once. The Station had failed, and his fellow men had blown out the spark of divinity in them and gone back to the jungles, with all the power of the science that could have made them star-men.

He was still crying, and he made no effort to stop it. But he was in control of himself.

Slowly, with a sick fear of what he must see, he moved to the screen that was set to show the scene on Earth toward which the telescope pointed. He flipped it on, adjusting the levers that controlled the instrument by a process of trial and error. For a moment he stopped then, and looked up toward the Moon that rode in space so far above him.

Men had been about to reach that. He'd even hoped that he might go along. Now it was lost.

Then he looked down, seeing the vision of what had been a city through the thin veil of clouds. Atmospheric disturbance blurred some of the outlines, but enough showed through. It was a slag heap, burned out of all resemblance to a scene of Earth. And for fifty miles beyond it, desolation spread out—a land where no life could live.

He shifted the telescope from time to time as the Station moved across the Earth, jumping from city to city, and finally seeking out the lesser ones. Some of those had obviously been hit only by the old-style A-bombs—but damage was complete enough.

He dropped the controls and let the scene below slide by as the Station cruised on. For a few minutes, a welcome

numbness hit him. Then he stood up slowly. There would be poison in the dispensary.

He reached for the screen switch, and froze. In the scene, dots moved slowly. He dropped back to the webbing seat, staring down, trying to increase the magnification. The Station was over Africa now—and that meant that he was watching some of the larger animals, probably. But . . .

Something else moved, a mere dot in the screen, but still having a vague shape. Its speed told the real story though. It was an airplane. And now that he looked closer, he saw that the dots below were traveling too straight for beasts. They must be cars on a road!

Life still went on.

Fenton shook himself, and his trembling fingers reached for the switch of the ultra-frequency radio. He knew too little about it to do much more than turn it on and move the tuning dial across the band. For a minute there was silence. Then a faint sputter sounded, and he detected Morse code. He tuned in more carefully, until it was faint but clear, and reached for the microphone.

But the transmitter refused to go on, and the signal was in a language which he couldn't understand. Men, he thought for the thousandth time, should have a common speech to reflect their common origin. But it really didn't matter. He yanked open the housing of the transmitter, and jiggled with the tubes inside, knowing it was foolish, but in an automatic hope.

One of the tubes was dark. He fumbled for the locker under the table, and began pawing through spare parts, hoping that the shock of the H-bomb that had probably exploded outside the Station had left one good tube of that type. He was in luck. The meter on the transmitter flashed on as soon as he made the change.

But now the Morse had vanished, since the Station had probably gone over the horizon. Even that didn't matter. Where some survived, there would be others. The cities and the sciences would be gone, but the race would continue. And down there now, he'd be needed, as every man who had any of the old skills would be needed.

Maybe men with some engineering training couldn't build more space-ships this generation. But they could help rebuild a world that might again look to the stars. And after

the bitter lesson of this nearly fatal holocaust, there would surely be no more wars to hold them back.

It was sheer reaction to his depression, Fenton knew. But it made sense, too.

And he could return. There was the little emergency ship, with fuel enough to reach Earth easily. He could stock it with all the supplies available—there was no telling what might be short on Earth now. The oxygen tanks were gone with the wreckage of the outer half. But he could put in plants from the hydroponic section; in some ways, they'd be even better. With them to replace the oxygen in the air, there was no theoretical limit to how long a man could live in the closed world of a space-ship.

He got up from the radio desk and went out and toward the loading tube, where the little ship lay waiting.

Some measure of reality returned to cancel his false optimism, while he loaded the ship to the limit. The fact that men still lived didn't make their acts in this final war any less horrible, nor did it bring the conquest of space any nearer. Little by little, his sickness and his horror returned. But there was at least some hope, and without life there was none. Even the dumbest animals learned in time; and this time, man had been given a lesson that could never be overlooked, while the great ruins of his cities still stood there to remind him.

It would be a bitter and a horrible life in such a world. But someday, in the far future, Fenton's descendants would stand on the Lunar Apennines and look up at Earth with pride on their faces.

Fenton finished his work and came back up through the ruined Station. Minute by minute the air seemed to be growing more foul with the smell of death. He came to the corpse of the traitor, Peter Olin, and his eyes dropped. Sometime, he'd have to face the fact that his race had produced men such as that; but not now—not now . . .

For a final time, his mind reeled and tried to run back to its childhood. But he held it firm, and walked past the corpse. That was the past. And from now on men would have to live for the future.

He came to the control room with his muscles knotted in his sudden need to hear human voices. The station had circled

the Earth and a little more. They were over America now, and it would be no foreign tongue. He wiped the sweat from his hands, and picked up the microphone.

"Calling Earth. Calling Earth. This is Space Station, calling Earth. I'm green at this, so keep answering until I can find you. Space Station calling Earth." His own voice was hoarse in his throat.

But in a few seconds he located the signal that was coming back at him. ". . . wondered. Damn it, some of those bombs went wild! We lost ninety-five percent, and things are pretty bad down here. But we got most of the other bastards before they could take us. Better land near me—I'll tell you where. Some places they blame you guys for starting it all. And before you leave, if you've got a bomb left on your racks, give them hell over there, Space Station. Give them the . . ."

Fenton spun the dial, and got a series of screams in his ears. Out of the hysteric nonsense, he gathered that the operator was suggesting that he bring down every culture in the biological experimental laboratory, before the enemies they feared could strike. "Only one bug! You've got a lot of unclassifieds," the voice was urging frantically. "Bring the whole lot, and we'll find any that we can use. We've got to strike first! We need . . ."

Fenton's fingers fumbled on the dials of the radio, and he swayed over the desk. But there was no escape. Another turn of the tuning dial brought it into place with a click that locked it. It could only be the official frequency.

". . . Temporary HQ to Space Station. Come in." It was a flat, hard voice—the voice of a man who has been on duty for days without relief. "Come in."

"I'm getting you, HQ," Fenton acknowledged, and some of the life came back into him at the realization that there was an organization still functioning down there.

The voice answered almost at once. "Good. We've been signaling you for days. Thought you were all taken out by that damned enemy missile that got through. Can you still control . . . no, cancel that. I've just got an order for you. By our figures, you have nineteen bombs left, unless one or two missed our spotters. Here are your targets—and for God's sake, don't slip up the way you did before! First one goes to—get these, because I won't repeat—first to . . ."

Fenton cut off the radio and stood up slowly. He walked

out of the corpse-littered control room, past the bodies of those shot by Olin's bullets, and past the corpse of Olin himself. He moved through the area where the explosion had snuffed out the lives of others. The dead no longer bothered him. They were nothing compared to what must exist on Earth.

He picked his way, surely out of already-acquired habit, until he found a space-suit and mounted up through the hatch to the outer section. The bombs still stood there, and there were twenty instead of nineteen. Beside them lay the bodies of men who had come up here to lead mankind to the stars, and who had died because of hatreds that should never have left Earth.

There were no longer nations down there—only enemies. They had learned nothing, and they had biological warfare left to complete what they had been unable to do with their bombs.

He found the body of a gentle old scientist he had known —a man who had been trying to find a cure out here for cancer, and had been near success. He touched his fingers to the clot of blood beside the corpse, and then to one of the bombs. One by one, he christened all twenty. And one by one, he pulled back the firing levers, watching them take off for Earth. Somewhere down there, they would land. It didn't matter where. Men had sent their messengers of death out into space. Now they were going home. And if they helped to send men further back toward savagery, it didn't matter—with enough time, they might return. They might even unite now, believing that the Station had started the war, and bonding nation to nation to get up here faster to seek vengeance.

Paul Fenton didn't give a damn.

He went down to the infirmary to do what he had to do for what was left of Martha Graves. For a moment, he stood over her with a needle, and then shrugged, and picked her up. Maybe she wasn't human any more, but who was? And she could still get pleasure, if only from the taste of food and the comfort of sleep.

Outside, the little space-ship was waiting, and it could carry them far enough, and land. With the plants and provisions, they could go on living in it as long as he chose, probably.

No man had ever seen the other side of the Earth's satellite. That had to be corrected. No race should go on forever without leaving some monument to show that it has gone beyond its own narrow world, even if it could send only a single ship one way. The men who had dreamed and built the Station deserved that much, at least.

Paul Fenton paused inside the space-ship while the locks sealed shut, and he spat slowly at the floor under his feet.

"Idealist!" he swore at himself bitterly.

But his eyes were rising to stare at the Moon as he hit the controls and blasted off. The Earth began dropping further behind. He did not look back.

FRITZ LEIBER

Most writers hide behind their typewriters and perhaps it is better so; there are few matinee idols in the field. But, while Fritz Leiber continues to tell his marvelous tales, it cannot be said that there are none at all. In Hollywood (where he made a specialty of playing the husband of the leading lady, usually coming to no good end), and on the stage (with the Shakespearean troupe of the elder Fritz Leiber, his father), Leiber made feminine hearts yearn. He now devotes full time to writing such splendid science fiction as his novel Gather, Darkness! (PELLEGRINI & CUDAHY) *and this nobly funny travesty called . . .*

The Night He Cried

I glanced down my neck secretly at the two snowy hillocks, ruby peaked, that were pushing out my blouse tautly without the aid of a brassière. I decided they'd more than do. So I turned away scornfully as his vast top-down convertible cruised past my street lamp. I struck my hip and a big match against the fluted column, and lit a cigarette. I was Lili Marlene to a T—or rather to a V-neckline. (I must tell you that my command of earth-idiom and allusion is remarkable, but if you'd had my training you wouldn't wonder.)

The convertible slowed down and backed up. I smiled. I'd been certain that my magnificently formed milk glands would turn the trick. I puffed on my cigarette languorously.

"Hi, Babe!"

Right from the first I'd known it was the man I was supposed to contact. Handsome hatchet face. Six or seven feet tall. Quite a creature. Male, as they say.

I hopped into his car, vaulting over the low door before he opened it. We zoomed off through New York's purple, smelly twilight.

"What's your name, Big Male?" I asked him.

Scorning to answer, he stripped me with his eyes. But I had confidence in my milk glands. Lord knows, I'd been hours perfecting them.

"Slickie Millane, isn't it?" I prompted recklessly.

"That's possible," he conceded, poker-faced.

"Well then, what are we waiting for?" I asked him, nudging him with the leftermost of my beautifully conical milk glands.

"Look here, Babe," he told me, just a bit coldly, "I'm the one who dispenses sex and justice in this area."

I snuggled submissively under his encircling right arm, still nudging him now and again with my left milk gland. The convertible sped. The skyscrapers shrank, exfoliated, became countryside. The convertible stopped.

As the hand of his encircling arm began to explore my prize possessions, I drew away a bit, not frustratingly, and informed him, "Slickie dear, I am from Galaxy Center . . ."

"What's that—a magazine publisher?" he demanded hotly, being somewhat inflamed by my cool milk glands.

". . . and we are interested in how sex and justice are dispensed in all areas," I went on, disregarding his interruption and his somewhat juvenile fondlings. "To be bold, we suspect that you may be somewhat misled about this business of sex."

Vertical, centimeter-deep furrows creased his brow. His head poised above mine like a hawk's. "What are you talking about, Babe?" he demanded with suspicious rage, even snatching his hands away.

"Briefly, Slickie," I said, "you do not seem to feel that sex is for the production of progeny or for the mutual solace of two creatures. You seem to think—"

His rage exploded into action. He grabbed a great big gun out of the glove compartment. I sprang to my two transmuted nether tentacles—most handsome gams if I, the artist, do say so. He jabbed the muzzle of the gun into my midriff.

"That's exactly what I mean, Slickie," I managed to say before my beautiful midriff, which I'd been at such pains to perfect, erupted into smoke and ghastly red splatter. I did a

backward flipflop out of the car and lay still—a most fetching corpse with a rucked-up skirt. As the convertible snorted off triumphantly, I snagged hold of the rear bumper, briefly changing my hand back to a tentacle for better gripping. Before the pavement had abraded more than a few grams of my substance, I pulled myself up onto the bumper, where I proceeded to reconstitute my vanished midriff with material from the air, the rest of my body, and the paint on the truck case. On this occasion the work went rapidly, with no artistic gropings, since I had the curves memorized from the first time I'd worked them out. Then I touched up my abrasions, stripped myself, whipped myself up a snazzy silver lamé evening frock out of chromium from the bumper, and put in time creating costume jewelry out of the tail light and the rest of the chrome.

The car stopped at a bar and Slickie slid out. For a moment his proud profile was silhouetted against the smoky glow. Then he was inside. I threw away the costume jewelry and climbed over the folded top and popped down on the leather-upholstered seat, scarcely a kilogram lighter than when I'd first sat there.

The minutes dragged. To pass them, I mentally reviewed the thousand-and-some basic types of mutual affection on the million-plus planets, not forgetting the one and only basic type of love.

There was a burst of juke-box jazz. Footsteps tracked from the bar toward the convertible. I leaned back comfortably with my silver-filmed milk glands dramatically highlighted.

"Hi, Slickie," I called, making my voice sweet and soft to cushion the shock.

Nevertheless it was a considerable one. For all of ten seconds he stood there, canted forward a little, like a wooden Indian that's just been nudged from behind and is about to topple.

Then with a naive ingenuity that rather touched me, he asked huskily, "Hey, have you got a twin sister?"

"Could be," I said with a shrug that jogged my milk glands deliciously.

"Well, what are you doing in my car?"

"Waiting for you," I told him simply.

He considered that as he slowly and carefully walked around the car and got behind the wheel, never taking his

eyes off me. I nudged him in my usual manner. He jerked away.

"What are you up to?" he inquired suspiciously.

"Why are you surprised, Slickie?" I countered innocently. "I've heard this sort of thing happens to you all the time."

"What sort of thing?"

"Girls turning up in your car, your bar, your bedroom—everywhere."

"Where'd you hear it?"

"I read it in your Spike Mallet books."

"Oh," he said, somewhat mollified. But then his suspicion came back. "But what are you really up to?" he demanded.

"Slickie," I assured him with complete sincerity, bugging my beautiful eyes, "I just love you."

This statement awakened in him an irritation so great that it overrode his uneasiness about me, for he cuffed me in the face—so suddenly that I almost forgot and changed it back to my top tentacle.

"I make the advances around here, Babe," he asserted harshly.

Completely under control again, I welled a tiny trickle of blood out of the left-hand corner of my gorgeous mouth. "Anything you say, Slickie, dear," I assented submissively and cuddled up against him in a prim, girlish way to which he could hardly take exception.

But I must have bothered or at least puzzled him, for he drove slowly, his dark-eaved eyes following an invisible tennis ball that bounded between me and the street ahead. Abruptly the eaves lifted and he smiled.

"Look, I just got an idea for a story," he said. "There's this girl from Galaxy Center—" and he whipped around to watch my reactions, but I didn't blink.

He continued, "I mean, she's sort of from the center of the galaxy, where everything's radioactive. Now there's this guy that's got her up in his attic." His face grew deeply thoughtful. "She's the most beautiful girl in the universe and he loves her like crazy, but she's all streaming with hard radiations and it'll kill him if he touches her."

"Yes, Slickie—and then?" I prompted after the car had dreamed its way for several blocks between high buildings.

He looked at me sharply. "That's all. Don't you get it?"

"Yes, Slickie," I assured him soothingly. My statement seemed to satisfy him, but he was still edgy.

He stopped the car in front of an apartment hotel that thrust toward the stars with a dark presumptousness. He got out on the street side and walked around the rear end and suddenly stopped. I followed him. He was studying the gray bumper and the patch of raw sheet metal off which I'd used the paint. He looked around at me where I stood sprayed with silver lamé in the revealing lamp light.

"Wipe your chin," he said critically.

"Why not kiss the blood off it, Slickie?" I replied with an ingenuousness I hoped would take the curse off the suggestion.

"Aw nuts," he said nervously and stalked into the foyer so swiftly he might have been trying to get away from me. However, he made no move to stop me when I followed him into the tiny place and the even tinier elevator. In the latter cubicle I maneuvered so as to give him a series of breathtaking scenic views of the Grand Tetons that rose behind the plunging silver horizon of my neckline, and he unfroze considerably. By the time he opened the door of his apartment he had got so positively cordial that he urged me across the threshold with a casual spank.

It was just as I had visualized it—the tiger skins, the gun racks, the fireplace, the open bedroom door, the bar just beside it, the adventures of Spike Mallet in handsomely tooled leather bindings, the vast divan covered with zebra skin . . .

On the last was stretched a beautiful ice-faced blonde in a filmy negligee.

This was a complication for which I wasn't prepared. I stood rooted by the door while Slickie walked swiftly past me.

The blonde slithered to her feet. There was murder in her glacial eyes. "You two-timing rat!" she grated. Her hand darted under her negligee. Slickie's snaked under the left-hand side of his jacket.

Then it hit me what was going to happen. She would bring out a small but deadly silver-plated automatic, but before she could level it, Slickie's cannon would make a red ruin of her midriff.

There I was, standing twenty feet away from both of them —and this poor girl couldn't reconstitute herself!

Swifter than thought I changed my arms back to upper dorsal tentacles and jerked back both Slickie's and the girl's elbow. They turned around, considerably startled, and saw me standing twenty feet away. I'd turned my tentacles back to arms before they'd noticed them. Their astonishment increased.

But I knew I had won only a temporary respite. Unless something happened, Slickie's trigger-blissful rage would swiftly be refocused on this foolish fragile creature. To save her, I had to divert his ire to myself.

"Get that little tramp out of here," I ordered Slickie from the corner of my mouth as I walked past him to the bar.

"Easy, Babe," he warned me.

I poured myself a liter of scotch—I had to open a second bottle to complete the measure—and downed it. I really didn't need it, but the assorted molecules were congenial building blocks and I was rather eager to get back to normal weight.

"Haven't you got that tramp out of here yet?" I demanded, eyeing him scornfully over my insouciant silver-filmed shoulder.

"Easy, Babe," he repeated, the vertical furrows creasing his brow to a depth of at least a centimeter and a half.

"That's telling her, Slickie," the blonde applauded.

"You two-timing rat!" I plagiarized, whipping up my silver skirt as if to whisk a gun from my nonexistent girdle.

His cannon coughed. Always a good sportsman, I moved an inch so that the bullet, slightly mis-aimed, took me exactly in the right eye, messily blowing off the back of my head. I winked at Slickie with my left eye and fell back through the doorway into the bedroom darkness.

I knew I had no time to spare. When a man's shot one girl he begins to lose his natural restraint. Lying on the floor, I reconstituted my eye and did a quick patch-job on the back of my head in seventeen seconds flat.

As I emerged from the bedroom, they were entering into a clinch, each holding a gun lightly against the other's back.

"Slickie," I said, pouring myself a scant half liter of scotch, "I told you about that tramp."

The ice-blonde squawked, threw up her hands as if she'd

had a shot of strychnine, and ran out the door. I fancied I could feel the building tilt as she leaned on the elevator button.

I downed the scotch and advanced, shattering the paralyzed space-time that Slickie seemed to be depending on as a defense.

"Slickie," I said, "let's get down to cases. I am indeed from Galaxy Center and we very definitely don't like your attitude. We don't care what your motives are, or whether they are derived from jumbled genes, a curdled childhood, or a sick society. We simply love you and we want you to reform." I grabbed him by a shivering shoulder that was now hardly higher than my waist, and dragged him into the bedroom, snatching up the rest of the scotch on the way. I switched on the light. The bedroom was a really lush love-nest. I drained the scotch—there was about a half liter left—and faced the cowering Slickie. "Now do to me," I told him uncompromisingly, "the thing you're always going to do to those girls, except you have to shoot them."

He frothed like an epileptic, snatched out his cannon and emptied its magazine into various parts of my torso, but since he hit only two of my five brains, I wasn't bothered. I reeled back bloodily through the blue smoke and fell into the bathroom. I felt real crazy—maybe I shouldn't have taken that last half liter. I reconstituted my torso faster even than I had my head, but my silver lamé frock was a mess. Not wanting to waste time and reluctant to use any more reconstituting energy, I stripped it off and popped into the off-the-shoulders evening dress the blonde had left lying over the edge of the bathtub. The dress wasn't a bad fit. I went back into the bedroom. Slickie was sobbing softly at the foot of the bed and gently beating his head against it.

"Slickie," I said, perhaps a shade too curtly, "about this love business—"

He sprang for the ceiling but didn't quite burst through it. Falling back, by chance on his feet, he headed for the hall. Now it wasn't in my orders from Galaxy Center that he run away and excite this world—in fact, my superiors had strictly forbidden such a happening. I had to stop Slickie. But I was a bit confused—perhaps fuddled by that last half liter. I hesitated—then he was too far away, had too big a start. To

stop him, I knew I'd have to use tentacles. Swifter than thought I changed them and shot them out.

"Slickie," I cried reassuringly, dragging him to me.

Then I realized that in my excitement, instead of using my upper dorsal tentacles, I'd used the upper ventral ones I kept transmuted into my beautiful milk glands. I do suppose they looked rather strange to Slickie as they came out of the bosom of my off-the-shoulders evening dress and drew him to me.

Frightening sounds came out of him. I let him go and tried to resume my gorgeous shape, but now I was really confused (that last half liter!) and lost control of my transmutations. When I found myself turning my topmost tentacle into a milk gland I gave up completely and—except for a lung and vocal cords—resumed my normal shape. It was quite a relief. After all, I had done what Galaxy Center had intended I should. From now on, the mere sight of a brassière in a show window would be enough to give Slickie the shakes.

Still, I was bothered about the guy. As I say, he'd touched me.

I caressed him tenderly with my tentacles. Over and over again I explained that I was just a heptapus and that Galaxy Center had selected me for the job simply because my seven tentacles would transmute nicely into the seven extremities of the human female.

Over and over again I told him how I loved him.

It didn't seem to help. Slickie Millane continued to weep hysterically.

CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

Science-fiction magazines have been published in this country for more than a quarter of a century; a short time in history, but a long, long period in the development of the field. Today's readers would recognize hardly a name in the stories published two or more decades ago—but at least one name was a leader in the field then and remains one today: Clifford D. Simak, for memorable short stories like . . .

Contraption

He found the contraption in a blackberry patch when he was hunting cows. Darkness was sifting down through the tall stand of poplar trees and he couldn't make it out too well and he couldn't spend much time to look at it because Uncle Eb had been plenty sore about his missing the two heifers and if it took too long to find them Uncle Eb more than likely would take the strap to him again and he'd had about all he could stand for one day. Already he'd had to go without his supper because he'd forgotten to go down to the spring for a bucket of cold water. And Aunt Em had been after him all day because he was so no-good at weeding the garden.

"I never saw such a trifling young'un in all my life," she'd shrill at him and then she'd go on to say that she'd think he'd have some gratitude for the way she and Uncle Eb had taken him in and saved him from the orphanage, but no, he never felt no gratitude at all, but caused all the trouble that he

could and was lazy to boot and she declared to goodness she didn't know what would become of him.

He found the two heifers down in the corner of the pasture by the grove of walnut trees and drove them home, plodding along behind them, thinking once again about running away, but knowing that he wouldn't, because he had no place to go. Although, he told himself, most any place would be better than staying here with Aunt Em and Uncle Eb, who really were not his uncle and aunt at all, but just a couple of people who had took him in.

Uncle Eb was just finishing milking when he came into the barn, driving the two heifers before him, and Uncle Eb still was plenty sore about the way he'd missed them when he'd brought in the other cows.

"Here," said Uncle Eb, "you've fixed it so I had to milk my share and yours, too, and all because you didn't count the cows, the way I always tell you to so you'll be sure you got them all. Just to teach you, you can finish up by milking them there heifers."

So Johnny got his three-legged milk stool and a pail and he milked the heifers and heifers are hard things to milk, and skittish, too, and the red one kicked and knocked Johnny into the gutter, spilling the milk he had in the pail.

Uncle Eb, seeing this, took the strap down from behind the door and let Johnny have a few to teach him to be more careful and that milk represented money and then made him finish with his milking.

They went up to the house after that, Uncle Eb grumbling all the way about kids being more trouble than they're worth, and Aunt Em met them at the door to tell Johnny to be sure he washed his feet good before he went to bed because she didn't want him getting her nice clean sheets all dirty.

"Aunt Em," he said, "I'm awful hungry."

"Not a bite," she said, grim-lipped in the lamplight of the kitchen. "Maybe if you get a little hungry you won't go forgetting all the time."

"Just a slice of bread," said Johnny. "Without no butter or nothing. Just a slice of bread."

"Young man," said Uncle Eb, "you heard your aunt. Get them feet washed and up to bed."

"And see you wash them good," said Aunt Em.

So he washed his feet and went to bed and lying there, he remembered what he had seen in the blackberry patch and remembered, too, that he hadn't said a word about it because he hadn't had a chance to, what with Uncle Eb and Aunt Em taking on at him all the blessed time.

And he decided right then and there he wouldn't tell them what he'd found, for if he did they'd take it away from him the way they always did everything he had. And if they didn't take it away from him, they'd spoil it so there'd be no fun or satisfaction in it.

The only thing he had that was really his was the old pocket knife with the point broken off the little blade. There was nothing in the world he'd rather have than another knife to replace the one he had, but he knew better than to ask for one. Once he had, and Uncle Eb and Aunt Em had carried on for days, saying what an ungrateful, grasping thing he was and here they'd gone and taken him in off the street and he still wasn't satisfied, but wanted them to spend good money for a pocket knife. Johnny worried a good deal about them saying he'd been taken in off the street, because so far as he knew he'd never been on any street.

Lying there, in his bed, looking out the window at the stars, he got to wondering what it was he'd seen in the blackberry patch and he couldn't remember it very well because he hadn't seen it too well and there'd been no time to stop and look. But there were some funny things about it and the more he thought about it, the more he wanted to have a good look at it.

Tomorrow, he thought, I'll have a good look at it. Soon as I get a chance, tomorrow. Then he realized there'd be no chance tomorrow, for Aunt Em would have him out, right after morning chores, to weed the garden and she'd keep an eye on him and there'd be no chance to slip away.

He lay in bed and thought about it some more and it became as clear as day that if he wanted a look at it he'd have to go tonight.

He could tell, by their snoring, that Uncle Eb and Aunt Em were asleep, so he got out of bed and slipped into his shirt and britches and sneaked down the stairs, being careful to miss the squeaky boards. In the kitchen he climbed up on a chair to reach the box of matches atop the warming oven of the old wood-burning stove. He took a fistful of

matches, then reconsidered and put back all but half a dozen because he was afraid Aunt Em would notice if he took too many.

Outside the grass was wet and cold with dew and he rolled up his britches so the cuffs wouldn't get all soaked, and set off across the pasture.

Going through the woods there were some spooky places, but he wasn't scared too badly, although no one could go through the woods at night without being scared a little.

Finally he got to the blackberry patch and stood there wondering how he could get through the patch in the dark without ripping his clothes and getting his bare feet full of thorns. And, standing there, he wondered if what he'd seen was still there and all at once he knew it was, for he felt a friendliness come from it, as if it might be telling him that it still was there and not to be afraid.

He was just a little unnerved, for he was not used to friendliness. The only friend he had was Benny Smith, who was about his age, and he only saw Benny during school and then not all the time, for Benny was sick a lot and had to stay home for days on end, And since Benny lived way over on the other side of the school district, he never saw him during vacation time at all.

By now his eyes were getting a little used to the darkness of the blackberry patch and he thought that he could see the darker outline of the thing that lay in there and he tried to understand how it could *feel* friendly, for he was pretty sure that it was just a thing, like a wagon or a silo-filler, and nothing alive at all. If he'd thought that it was alive, he'd been really scared.

The thing kept right on feeling friendly toward him.

So he put out his hands and tried to push the bushes apart so he could squeeze in and see what it was. If he could get close to it, he thought, he could strike the matches in his pocket and get a better look at it.

"Stop," said the friendliness and at the word he stopped, although he wasn't sure at all that he had heard the word.

"Don't look too closely at us," said the friendliness, and Johnny was just a little flustered at that, for he hadn't been looking at anything at all—not too closely, that is.

"All right," he said. "I won't look at you." And he won-

dered if it was some sort of a game, like hide-and-seek that he played at school.

"After we get to be good friends," said the thing to Johnny, "we can look at one another and it won't matter then, for we'll know what one another is like inside and not pay attention to how we look outside."

And Johnny, standing there, thought how they must look awful, not to want him to see them, and the thing said to him, "We would look awful to you. You look awful to us."

"Maybe, then," said Johnny, "it's a good thing I can't see in the dark."

"You can't see in the dark?" it asked and Johnny said he couldn't and there was silence for a while, although Johnny could hear it puzzling over how come he couldn't see when it was dark.

Then it asked if he could do something else and he couldn't even understand what it tried to say and finally it seemed to figure out that he couldn't do whatever it had asked about.

"You are afraid," said the thing. "There is no need to fear us."

And Johnny explained that he wasn't afraid of them, whatever they might be, because they were friendly, but that he was afraid of what might happen if Uncle Eb and Aunt Em should find he had sneaked out. So they asked him a lot about Uncle Eb and Aunt Em and he tried to explain, but they didn't seem to understand, but seemed to think he was talking about government. He tried to explain how it really was, but he was pretty sure they didn't understand at all.

Finally, being polite about it so he wouldn't hurt their feelings, he said he had to leave and since he'd stayed much longer than he'd planned, he ran all the way home.

He got into the house and up to bed all right and everything was fine, but the next morning Aunt Em found the matches in his pocket and gave him a lecture about the danger of burning down the barn. To reinforce the lecture, she used a switch on his legs and try as hard as he could to be a man about it, she laid it on so hard that he jumped up and down and screamed.

He worked through the day weeding the garden and just before dark went to get the cows.

He didn't have to go out of his way to go past the blackberry patch, for the cows were in that direction, but he knew

well enough that if they hadn't been, he'd gone out of his way, for he'd been remembering all day the friendliness he'd found there.

It was still daylight this time, just shading into night, and he could see that the thing, whatever it might be, was not alive, but simply a hunk of metal, like two sauce dishes stuck together, with a rim running around its middle just like there'd be a rim if you stuck two dishes together. It looked like old metal that had been laying around for a long time and you could see where it was pitted like a piece of machinery will get when it stands out in the weather.

It had crushed a path for quite a ways through the blackberry thicket and had plowed up the ground for twenty feet or so, and, sighting back along the way it had come, Johnny could see where it had hit and smashed the top of a tall poplar.

It spoke to him, without words, the way it had the night before, with friendliness and fellowship, although Johnny wouldn't know that last word, never having run across it in his school books.

It said, "You may look at us a little now. Look at us quick and then away. Don't look at us steadily. Just a quick look and then away. That way you get used to us. A little at a time."

"Where are you?" Johnny asked.

"Right here," they said.

"Inside of there?" asked Johnny.

"Inside of here," they said.

"I can't see you, then," said Johnny. "I can't see through metal."

"He can't see through metal," said one of them.

"He can't see when the star is gone," said the other.

"He can't see us, then," they said, the both of them.

"You might come out," said Johnny.

"We can't come out," they said. "We'd die if we came out."

"I can't ever see you, then."

"You can't ever see us, Johnny."

And he stood there, feeling terribly lonely because he could never see these friends of his.

"We don't understand who you are," they said. "Tell us who you are."

And because they were so kind and friendly, he told them who he was and how he was an orphan and had been taken in by his Uncle Eb and Aunt Em, who really weren't his aunt and uncle. He didn't tell them how Uncle Eb and Aunt Em treated him, whipping him and scolding him and sending him to bed without his supper, but this, too, as well as the things he told them, was there for them to sense and now there was more than friendliness, more than fellowship. Now there was compassion and something that was their equivalent of mother love.

"He's just a little one," they said, talking to one another.

They reached out to him and seemed to take him in their arms and hold him tight against them and Johnny went down on his knees without knowing it and held out his arms to the thing that lay there among the broken bushes and cried out to them, as if there was something there that he might grasp and hold—some comfort that he had always missed and longed for and now finally had found. His heart cried out the thing that he could not say, the pleading that would not pass his lips and they answered him.

"No, we'll not leave you, Johnny. We can't leave you, Johnny."

"You promise?" Johnny asked.

Their voice was a little grim. "We do not need to promise, Johnny. Our machine is broken and we cannot fix it. One of us is dying and the other soon will die."

Johnny knelt there, with the words sinking into him, with the realization sinking into him and it seemed more than he could bear that, having found two friends, they were about to die.

"Johnny," they said to him.

"Yes," said Johnny, trying not to cry.

"You will trade with us?"

"Trade?"

"A way of friendship with us. You give us something and we give you something."

"But," said Johnny. "But I haven't . . ."

Then he knew he had. He had the pocket knife. It wasn't much, with its broken blade, but it was all he had.

"That is fine," they said. "That is exactly right. Lay it on the ground, close to the machine."

He took the knife out of his pocket and laid it against

the machine and even as he watched something happened, but it happened so fast he couldn't see how it worked, but, anyhow, the knife was gone and there was something in its place.

"Thank you, Johnny," they said. "It was nice of you to trade with us."

He reached out his hand and took the thing they'd traded him and even in the darkness it flashed with hidden fire. He turned it in the palm of his hand and saw that it was some sort of jewel, many-faceted, and that the glow came from inside of it and that it burned with many different colors.

It wasn't until he saw how much light came from it that he realized how long he'd stayed and how dark it was and when he saw that he jumped to his feet and ran, without waiting to say goodbye.

It was too dark now to look for the cows and he hoped they had started home alone and that he could catch up with them and bring them in. He'd tell Uncle Eb that he'd had a hard time rounding them up. He'd tell Uncle Eb that the two heifers had broken out of the fence and he had to get them back. He'd tell Uncle Eb—he'd tell—he'd tell—

His breath gasped with his running and his heart was thumping so it seemed to shake him and fear rode on his shoulders—fear of the awful thing he'd done—of this final unforgivable thing after all the others, after not going to the spring to get the water, after missing the two heifers the night before, after the matches in his pocket.

He did not find the cows going home alone—he found them in the barnyard and he knew that they'd been milked and he knew he'd stayed much longer and that it was far worse than he had imagined.

He walked up the rise to the house, shaking now with fear. There was a light in the kitchen and he knew that they were waiting.

He came into the kitchen and they sat at the table, facing him, waiting for him, with the lamplight on their faces and their faces were so hard that they looked like graven stone.

Uncle Eb stood up, towering toward the ceiling, and you could see the muscles stand out on his arms, with the sleeves rolled to the elbow.

He reached for Johnny and Johnny ducked away, but the hand closed on the back of his neck and the fingers wrapped around his throat and lifted him and shook him with a silent savagery.

"I'll teach you," Uncle Eb was saying through clenched teeth. "I'll teach you. I'll teach you . . ."

Something fell upon the floor and rolled toward the corner, leaving a trail of fire as it rolled along the floor.

Uncle Eb stopped shaking him and just stood there holding him for an instant, then dropped him to the floor.

"That fell out of your pocket," said Uncle Eb. "What is it?"

Johnny backed away, shaking his head.

He wouldn't tell what it was. He'd never tell. No matter what Uncle Eb might do to him, he'd never tell. Not even if he killed him.

Uncle Eb stalked the jewel, bent swiftly and picked it up. He carried it back to the table and dropped it there and bent over, looking at it, sparkling in the light.

Aunt Em leaned forward in her chair to look at it.

"What in the world!" she said.

They bent there for a moment, staring at the jewel, their eyes bright and shining, their bodies tense, their breath rasping in the silence. The world could have come to an end right then and there and they'd never noticed.

Then they straightened up and turned to look at Johnny, turning away from the jewel as if it didn't interest them any longer, as if it had had a job to do and had done that job and no longer was important. There was something wrong with them—no, not wrong, but different.

"You must be starved," Aunt Em said to Johnny. "I'll warm you up some supper. Would you like some eggs?"

Johnny gulped and nodded.

Uncle Eb sat down, not paying any attention to the jewel at all.

"You know," he said, "I saw a jackknife uptown the other day. Just the kind you want . . ."

Johnny scarcely heard him.

He just stood there, listening to the friendliness and love that hummed through all the house.

JOHN WYNDHAM

When Collier's published John Wyndham's serial, The Revolt of the Triffids, *they hardly knew what they were starting. Since then, the inhabitants of a large fraction of the earth's surface—including Holland, Denmark, New Zealand, Italy, the United Kingdom and miscellaneous other areas—have had opportunity to read about Wyndham's famous man-eating plants in one or another of the dozen editions currently in print. But Wyndham's novels are only a part of his wonderfully literate and entertaining writing; it would be a pity if they were to overshadow such bright short stories as . . .*

The Chronoclasm

I first heard of Tavia in a sort of semi-detached way. An elderly gentleman, a stranger, approached me in Plyton High Street one morning. He raised his hat, bowed, with perhaps a touch of foreignness, and introduced himself politely:

"My name is Donald Gobie, Doctor Gobie. I should be most grateful, Sir Gerald, if you could spare me just a few minutes of your time. I am so sorry to trouble you, but it is a matter of some urgency, and considerable importance."

I looked at him carefully.

"I think there must be some mistake," I told him. "I have no handle to my name—not even a knighthood."

He looked taken aback.

"Dear me. I *am* sorry. Such a likeness—I was quite sure you must be Sir Gerald Lattery."

It was my turn to be taken aback.

"My name *is* Gerald Lattery," I admitted, "but Mister, not Sir."

He grew a little confused.

"Oh, dear. Of course. How very stupid of me. Is there—" he looked about us, "—is there somewhere where we could have a few words in private?" he asked.

I hesitated, but only for a brief moment. He was clearly a gentleman of education and some culture. Might have been a lawyer. Certainly not on the touch, or anything of that kind. We were close to *The Bull,* so I led the way into the lounge there. It was conveniently empty. He declined the offer of a drink, and we sat down.

"Well, what is this trouble, Doctor Gobie?" I asked him.

He hesitated, obviously a little embarrassed. Then he spoke, with an air of plunging:

"It is concerning Tavia, Sir Gerald—er, Mr. Lattery. I think perhaps you don't understand the degree to which the whole situation is fraught with unpredictable consequences. It is not just my own responsibility, you understand, though that troubles me greatly—it is the results that cannot be foreseen. She really must come back before very great harm is done. She *must,* Mr. Lattery."

I watched him. His earnestness was beyond question, his distress perfectly genuine.

"But, Doctor Gobie—" I began.

"I can understand what it may mean to you, sir, nevertheless I do implore you to persuade her. Not just for my sake and her family's, but for everyone's. One has to be so careful; the results of the least action are incalculable. There has to be order, harmony; it must be preserved. Let one single seed fall out of place, and who can say what may come of it? So I beg you to persuade her—"

I broke in, speaking gently because whatever it was all about, he obviously had it very much at heart.

"Just a minute, Doctor Gobie. I'm afraid there *is* some mistake. I haven't the least idea what you are talking about."

He checked himself. A dismayed expression came over his face.

"You—?" he began, and then paused in thought, frowning. "You don't mean you haven't met Tavia yet?" he asked.

"As far as I know, I do. I've never even heard of anyone called Tavia," I assured him.

He looked winded by that, and I was sorry. I renewed my offer of a drink. But he shook his head, and presently he recovered himself a little.

"I am so sorry," he said. "There has been a mistake indeed. Please accept my apologies, Mr. Lattery. You must think me quite light-headed, I'm afraid. It's so difficult to explain. May I ask you just to forget it, please forget it entirely."

Presently he left, looking forlorn. I remained a little puzzled, but in the course of the next day or two I carried out his final request—or so I thought.

The first time I did see Tavia was a couple of years later, and, of course, I did not at the time know it was she.

I had just left *The Bull.* There was a number of people about in the High Street, but just as I laid a hand on the car door I became aware that one of them on the other side of the road had stopped dead, and was watching me. I looked up, and our eyes met. Hers were hazel.

She was tall, and slender, and good-looking—not pretty, something better than that. And I went on looking.

She wore a rather ordinary tweed skirt and dark-green knitted jumper. Her shoes, however, were a little odd; low-heeled, but a bit fancy; they didn't seem to go with the rest. There was something else out of place, too, though I did not fix it at the moment. Only afterwards did I realize that it must have been the way her fair hair was dressed —very becoming to her, but the style was a bit off the beam. You might say that hair is just hair, and hairdressers have infinite variety of touch, but they haven't. There is a kind of period-style overriding current fashion; look at any photograph taken thirty years ago. Her hair, like her shoes, didn't quite suit the rest.

For some seconds she stood there frozen, quite unsmiling. Then, as if she were not quite awake, she took a step forward to cross the road. At that moment the Market Hall clock chimed. She glanced up at it; her expression was suddenly all alarm. She turned, and started running up the pavement, like Cinderella after the last bus.

I got into my car wondering who she had mistaken me for. I was perfectly certain I had never set eyes on her before.

The next day when the barman at *The Bull* set down my pint, he told me:

"Young woman in here asking after you, Mr. Lattery. Did she find you? I told her where your place is."

I shook my head. "Who was she?"

"She didn't say her name, but—" he went on to describe her. Recollection of the girl on the other side of the street came back to me. I nodded.

"I saw her just across the road. I wondered who she was." I told him.

"Well, she seemed to know you all right. 'Was that Mr. Lattery who was in here earlier on?' she says to me. I says yes, you was one of them. She nodded and thought a bit. 'He lives at Bagford House, doesn't he?' she asks. 'Why, no, Miss,' I says, 'that's Major Flacken's place. Mr. Lattery, he lives out at Chatcombe Cottage.' So she asks me where that is, an' I told her. Hope that was all right. Seemed a nice young lady."

I reassured him. "She could have got the address anywhere. Funny she should ask about Bagford House—that's a place I might hanker for, if I ever had any money."

"Better hurry up and make it, sir. The old Major's getting on a bit now," he said.

Nothing came of it. Whatever the girl had wanted my address for, she didn't follow it up, and the matter dropped out of my mind.

It was about a month later that I saw her again. I'd kind of slipped into the habit of going riding once or twice a week with a girl called Marjorie Cranshaw, and running her home from the stables afterwards. The way took us by one of those narrow lanes between high banks where there is barely room for two cars to pass. Round a corner I had to brake and pull right in because an oncoming car was in the middle of the road after overtaking a pedestrian. It pulled over, and squeezed past me. Then I looked at the pedestrian, and saw it was this girl again. She recognized me at the same moment, and gave a slight start. I saw her hesitate, and then make up her mind to come across and speak. She came a few steps nearer with obvious intention. Then she caught sight of Marjorie beside me, changed her mind, with as bad an imitation of not having intended to come our way at all as you could hope to see. I put the gear in.

"Oh," said Marjorie in a voice that penetrated naturally, and a tone that was meant to, "who was that?"

I told her I didn't know.

"She certainly seemed to know you," she said, disbelievingly.

Her tone irritated me. In any case it was no business of hers. I didn't reply.

She was not willing to let it drop. "I don't think I've seen her about before," she said presently.

"She may be a holiday-maker for all I know," I said. "There are plenty of them about."

"That doesn't sound very convincing, considering the way she looked at you."

"I don't care for being thought, or called, a liar," I said.

"Oh, I thought I asked a perfectly ordinary question. Of course, if I've said anything to embarrass you—"

"Nor do I care for sustained innuendo. Perhaps you'd prefer to walk the rest of the way. It's not far."

"I see. I am sorry to have intruded. It's a pity it's too narrow for you to turn the car here," she said as she got out. "Good-bye, Mr. Lattery."

With the help of a gateway it was not too narrow, but I did not see the girl when I went back. Marjorie had roused my interest in her, so that I rather hoped I would. Besides, though I still had no idea who she might be, I was feeling grateful to her. You will have experienced, perhaps, that feeling of being relieved of a weight that you had not properly realized was there?

Our third meeting was on a different plane altogether.

My cottage stood, as its name suggests, in a coombe—which, in Devonshire, is a small valley that is, or once was, wooded. It was somewhat isolated from the other four or five cottages there, being set in the lower part, at the end of the track. The heathered hills swept steeply up on either side. A few narrow grazing fields bordered both banks of the stream. What was left of the original woods fringed between them and the heather, and survived in small clumps and spinneys here and there.

It was in the closest of these spinneys, on an afternoon when I was surveying my plot and deciding that it was about time the beans came out, that I heard a sound of

small branches breaking underfoot. I needed no more than a glance to find the cause of it; her fair hair gave her away. For a moment we looked at one another as we had before.

"Er—hullo," I said.

She did not reply at once. She went on staring. Then:

"Is there anyone in sight?" she asked.

I looked up as much of the track as I could see from where I stood, and then up the opposite hillside.

"I can't see anyone," I told her.

She pushed the bushes aside, and stepped out cautiously, looking this way and that. She was dressed just as she had been when I first saw her—except that her hair had been a trifle raked about by branches. On the rough ground the shoes looked even more inappropriate. Seeming a little reassured, she took a few steps forward.

"I—" she began.

Then, higher up the coombe, a man's voice called, and another answered it. The girl froze for a moment, looking scared.

"They're coming. Hide me somewhere, quickly, please," she said.

"Er—" I began, inadequately.

"Oh, quick, quick. They're coming," she said urgently.

She certainly looked alarmed.

"Better come inside," I told her, and led the way into the cottage.

She followed swiftly, and when I had shut the door she slid the bolt.

"Don't let them catch me. Don't let them," she begged.

"Look here, what's all this about. Who are 'they'?" I asked.

She did not answer that; her eyes, roving round the room, found the telephone.

"Call the police," she said. "Call the police, quickly." I hesitated. "Don't you *have* any police?" she added.

"Of course we have police, but—"

"Then call them, please."

"But look here—" I began.

She clenched her hands.

"You must call them, please. Quickly."

She looked very anxious.

"All right, *I'll* call them. *You* can do the explaining," I said, and picked up the instrument.

I was used to the rustic leisure of communications in those parts, and waited patiently. The girl did not; she stood twining her fingers together. At last the connection was made:

"Hullo," I said, "is that the Plyton Police?"

"Plyton Police—" an answering voice had begun when there was an interruption of steps on the gravel path, followed by a heavy knocking at the door. I handed the instrument to the girl and went to the door.

"Don't let them in," she said, and then gave her attention to the telephone.

I hesitated. The rather peremptory knocking came again. One can't just stand about, not letting people in; besides, to take a strange young lady hurriedly into one's cottage, and immediately bolt the door against all comers—? At the third knocking I opened up.

The aspect of the man on my doorstep took me aback. Not his face—that was suitable enough in a young man of, say, twenty-five—it was his clothes. One is not prepared to encounter something that looks like a close-fitting skating-suit, worn with a full-cut, hip-length, glass buttoned jacket; certainly not on Dartmoor, at the end of the summer season. However, I pulled myself together enough to ask what he wanted. He paid no attention to that as he stood looking over my shoulder at the girl.

"Tavia," he said. "Come here!"

She didn't stop talking hurriedly into the telephone. The man stepped forward.

"Steady on!" I said. "First, I'd like to know what all this is about."

He looked at me squarely.

"You wouldn't understand," he said, and raised his arm to push me out of the way.

I have always felt that I would strongly dislike people who tell me that I don't understand, and try to push me off my own threshold. I socked him hard in the stomach, and as he doubled up I pushed him outside and closed the door.

"They're coming," said the girl's voice behind me. "The police are coming."

"If you'd just tell me—" I began. But she pointed.

"Look out!—at the window," she said.

I turned. There was another man outside, dressed similarly to the first who was still audibly wheezing on the doorstep. He was hesitating. I reached my twelve-bore off the wall, grabbed some cartridges from the drawer and loaded it. Then I stood back, facing the door.

"Open it, and keep behind it," I told her.

She obeyed, doubtfully.

Outside, the second man was now bending solicitously over the first. A third man was coming up the path. They saw the gun, and we had a brief tableau.

"You, there," I said. "You can either beat it quick, or stay and argue it out with the police. Which is it to be?"

"But you don't understand. It is most important—" began one of them.

"All right. Then you can stay there and tell the police how important it is," I said, and nodded to the girl to close the door again.

We watched through the window as the two of them helped the winded man away.

The police, when they arrived, were not amiable. They took down my description of the men reluctantly, and departed coolly. Meanwhile, there was the girl.

She had told the police as little as she well could—simply that she had been pursued by three oddly dressed men, and had appealed to me for help. She had refused their offer of a lift to Plyton in the police car, so here she still was.

"Well, now," I suggested, "perhaps you'd like to explain to me just what seems to be going on?"

She sat quite still facing me with a long level look which had a tinge of—sadness?—disappointment?—well, unsatisfactoriness of some kind. For a moment I wondered if she were going to cry, but in a small voice she said:

"I had your letter—and now I've burned my boats."

I sat down opposite to her. After fumbling a bit I found my cigarettes and lit one.

"You—er—had my letter, and now you've—er—burnt your boats?" I repeated.

"Yes," she said. Her eyes left mine and strayed round the room, not seeing much.

"And now you don't even know me," she said.

Whereupon the tears came, fast.

I sat there helplessly for a half-minute. Then I decided to go into the kitchen and put on the kettle while she had it out. All my female relatives have always regarded tea as the prime panacea, so I brought the pot and cups back with me when I returned.

I found her recovered, sitting staring pensively at the unlit fire. I put a match to it. She watched it take light and burn, with the expression of a child who has just received a present.

"Lovely," she said, as though a fire were something completely novel. She looked all round the room again. "Lovely," she repeated.

"Would you like to pour?" I suggested, but she shook her head, and watched me do it.

"Tea," she said. "By a fireside!"

Which was true enough, but scarcely remarkable.

"I think it is about time we introduced ourselves," I suggested. "I am Gerald Lattery."

"Of course," she said, nodding. It was not to my mind an altogether appropriate reply, but she followed it up by: "I am Octavia Lattery—they usually call me Tavia."

Tavia?—Something clinked in my mind, but did not quite chime.

"We are related in some way?" I asked her.

"Yes—very distantly," she said, looking at me oddly. "Oh, dear," she added, "this is difficult," and looked as if she were about to cry again.

"Tavia . . ?" I repeated, trying to remember. "There's something . . ." Then I had a sudden vision of an embarrassed elderly gentleman. "Why, of course; Now what was the name? Doctor—Doctor Bogey, or something?"

She suddenly sat quite still.

"Not—not Doctor Gobie?" she suggested.

"Yes, that's it. He asked me about somebody called Tavia. That would be you?"

"He isn't here?" she said, looking round as if he might be hiding in a corner.

I told her it would be about two years ago now. She relaxed.

"Silly old Uncle Donald. How like him! And naturally you'd have no idea what he was talking about?"

"I've very little more now," I pointed out, "though I can understand how even an uncle might be agitated at losing you."

"Yes. I'm afraid he will be—very," she said.

"*Was:* this was two years ago," I reminded her.

"Oh, of course you don't really understand yet, do you?"

"Look," I told her. "One after another, people keep on telling me that I don't understand. I know that already—it is about the only thing I do understand."

"Yes. I'd better explain. Oh dear, where shall I begin?" I let her ponder that, uninterrupted. Presently she said: "Do you believe in predestination?"

"I don't think so," I told her.

"Oh—no, well perhaps it isn't quite that, after all—more like a sort of affinity. You see, ever since I was quite tiny I remember thinking this was the most thrilling and wonderful age—and then, of course, it was the time in which the only famous person in our family lived. So I thought it was marvelous. Romantic, I suppose you'd call it."

"It depends whether you mean the thought or the age—" I began, but she took no notice.

"I used to picture the great fleets of funny little aircraft during the wars, and think how they were like David going out to hit Goliath, so tiny and brave. And there were the huge clumsy ships, wallowing slowly along, but getting there somehow in the end, and nobody minding how slow they were. And quaint, black and white movies; and horses in the streets; and shaky old internal combustion engines; and coal fires; and exciting bombings; and trains running on rails; and telephones with wires; and, oh, lots of things. And the things one could do! Fancy being at the first night of a new Shaw play, or a new Coward play, in a real theater! Or getting a brand new T. S. Eliot, on publishing day. Or seeing the Queen drive by to open Parliament. A wonderful, thrilling time!"

"Well, it's nice to hear somebody think so," I said. "My own view of the age doesn't quite—"

"Ah, but that's only to be expected. You haven't any

perspective on it, so you can't appreciate it. It'd do you good to live in ours for a bit, and see how flat and stale and uniform everything is—so deadly, deadly dull."

I boggled a little: "I don't think I quite—er, live in your *what?*"

"Century, of course. The Twenty-Second. Oh, of course, you don't know. How silly of me."

I concentrated on pouring out some more tea.

"Oh dear, I knew this was going to be difficult," she remarked. "Do you find it difficult?"

I said I did, rather. She went on with a dogged air:

"Well, you see, feeling like that about it is why I took up history. I mean, I could really *think* myself into history —some of it. And then getting your letter on my birthday was really what made me take the mid-Twentieth Century as my Special Period for my Honors Degree, and, of course, it made up my mind for me to go on and do postgraduate work."

"Er—my letter did all this?"

"Well, that was the only way, wasn't it? I mean there simply wasn't any other way I could have got near a history-machine except by working in a history laboratory, was there? And even then I doubt whether I'd have had a chance to use it on my own if it hadn't been Uncle Donald's lab."

"History-machine," I said, grasping a straw out of all this. "What is a history-machine?"

She looked puzzled.

"It's, well—a history-machine. You learn history with it."

"Not lucid," I said. "You might as well tell me you make history with it."

"Oh, no. One's not supposed to do that. It's a very serious offense."

"Oh," I said. I tried again: "About this letter—"

"Well, I had to bring that in to explain about history, but you won't have written it yet, of course, so I expect you find it a bit confusing."

"Confusing," I told her, "is scarcely the word. Can't we get hold of something concrete? This letter I'm supposed to have written, for instance. What was it about?"

She looked at me hard, and then away. A most surprising blush swept up her face, and ran into her hair. She made herself look back at me again. I watched her eyes go shiny,

and then pucker at the corners. She dropped her face suddenly into her hands.

"Oh, you *don't* love me, you *don't,*" she wailed. "I wish I'd never come. I wish I was dead!"

"She sort of—sniffed at me," said Tavia.

"Well, she's gone now, and my reputation with her," I said. "An excellent worker, our Mrs. Toombs, but conventional. She'll probably throw up the job."

"Because I'm here? How silly!"

"Perhaps your conventions are different."

"But where else could I go? I've only a few shillings of your kind of money, and nobody to go to."

"Mrs. Toombs could scarcely know that."

"But we weren't, I mean we didn't—"

"Night, and the figure two," I told her, "are plenty for our conventions. In fact, two is enough, anyway. You will recall that the animals simply went in two by two; their emotional relationships didn't interest anyone. Two; and all is assumed."

"Oh, of course, I remember, there was no probative then—now, I mean. You have a sort of rigid, lucky-dip, take-it-or-leave-it system."

"There are other ways of expressing it, but—well, ostensibly at any rate, yes, I suppose."

"Rather crude, these old customs, when one sees them at close range—but fascinating," she remarked. Her eyes rested thoughtfully upon me for a second. "You—" she began.

"You," I reminded her, "promised to give me a more explanatory explanation of all this than you achieved yesterday."

"You didn't believe me."

"The first wallop took my breath," I admitted, "but you've given me enough evidence since. Nobody could keep up an act like that."

She frowned.

"I don't think that's very kind of you. I've studied the mid-Twentieth very thoroughly. It was my Special Period."

"So you told me, but that doesn't get me far. All historical scholars have Special Periods, but that doesn't mean that they suddenly turn up in them."

She stared at me. "But of course they do—licensed historians. How else would they make close studies?"

"There's too much of this 'of course' business," I told her. "I suggest we just begin at the beginning. Now this letter of mine—no, we'll skip the letter," I added hastily as I caught her expression. "Now, you went to work in your uncle's laboratory with something called a history-machine. What's that—a kind of tape-recorder?"

"Good gracious, no. It's a kind of cupboard thing you get into to go to times and places."

"Oh," I said. "You—you mean you can walk into it in 21something, and walk out into 19something?"

"Or any other past time," she said, nodding. "But, of course, not anybody can do it. You have to be qualified and licensed and all that kind of thing. There are only six permitted history-machines in England, and only about a hundred in the whole world, and they're strict about them.

"When the first ones were made they didn't realize what trouble they might cause, but after a time historians began to check the trips made against the written records of the periods, and started to find funny things. There was Hero demonstrating a simple steam-turbine at Alexandria sometime B.C.; and Archimedes using a kind of napalm at the siege of Syracuse; and Leonardo da Vinci drawing parachutes when there wasn't anything to parachute from; and Eric the Red discovering America in a sort of off-the-record way before Columbus got there; and Napoleon wondering about submarines; and lots of other suspicious things. So it was clear that some people had been careless when they used the machine, and had been causing chronoclasms."

"Causing—what?"

"Chronoclasms—that's when a thing goes and happens at the wrong time because somebody was careless, or talked rashly.

"Well, most of those things had happened without causing very much harm—as far as we can tell—though it *is* possible that the natural course of history was altered several times, and people write very clever papers to show how. But everybody saw that the results might be extremely dangerous. Just suppose that somebody had carelessly given Napoleon the idea of the internal combustion engine to add to the

idea of the submarine; there's no telling what would have happened. So they decided that tampering must be stopped at once, and all history-machines were forbidden except those licensed by the Historians' Council."

"Just hold it a minute," I said. "Look, if a thing is done, it's done. I mean, well, for example, I am here. I couldn't suddenly cease to be, or to have been, if somebody were to go back and kill my grandfather when he was a boy."

"But you certainly couldn't be here if they did, could you?" she asked. "No, the fallacy that the past is unchangeable didn't matter a bit as long as there was no means of changing it, but once there was, and the fallacy of the idea was shown, we had to be very careful indeed. That's what a historian has to worry about; the other side—just *how* it happens—we leave to the higher-mathematicians.

"Now, before you are allowed to use the history-machine you have to have special courses, tests, permits, and give solemn undertakings, and then do several years on probation before you get your license to practice. Only then are you allowed to visit and observe on your own. And that is all you may do, observe. The rule is very, very strict."

I thought that over. "If it isn't an unkind question—aren't you breaking rather a lot of these rules every minute?" I suggested.

"Of course I am. That's why they came after me," she said.

"You'd have had your license revoked, or something, if they'd caught you?"

"Good gracious. I could never qualify for a license. I've just sneaked my trips when the lab has been empty sometimes. It being Uncle Donald's lab made things easier because unless I was actually caught at the machine, I could always pretend I was doing something special for him.

"I had to have the right clothes to come in, but I dared not go to the historians' regular costume-makers, so I sketched some things in a museum and got them copied—they're all right, aren't they?"

"Very successful, and becoming, too," I assured her. "—Though there is a little something about the shoes."

She looked down at her feet. "I was afraid so. I couldn't find any of quite the right date," she admitted. "Well, then," she went on, "I was able to make a few short trial trips.

They had to be short because duration is constant—that is, an hour here is the same as an hour there—and I couldn't get the machine to myself for long at a time. But yesterday a man came into the lab just as I was getting back. When he saw these clothes he knew at once what I was doing, so the only thing I could do was to jump straight back into the machine—I'd never have had another chance. And they came after me without even bothering to change."

"Do you think they'll come again?" I asked her.

"I expect so. But they'll be wearing proper clothes for the period next time."

"Are they likely to be desperate? I mean, would they shoot, or anything like that?"

She shook her head. "Oh, no. That'd be a pretty bad chronoclasm—particularly if they happened to kill somebody."

"But you being here must be setting up a series of pretty resounding chronoclasms. Which would be worse?"

"Oh, mine are all accounted for. I looked it up," she assured me, obscurely. "They'll be less worried about me when they've thought of looking it up, too."

She paused briefly. Then, with an air of turning to a more interesting subject, she went on:

"When people in your time get married they have to dress up in a special way for it, don't they?"

The topic seemed to have a fascination for her.

"M'm," mumbled Tavia. "I think I rather like Twentieth Century marriage."

"It has risen higher in my own estimation, darling," I admitted. And, indeed, I was quite surprised to find how much higher it had risen in the course of the last month or so.

"Do Twentieth Century marrieds always have one big bed, darling?" she inquired.

"Invariably, darling," I assured her.

"Funny," she said. "Not very hygienic, of course, but quite nice all the same."

We reflected on that.

"Darling, have you noticed she doesn't sniff at me any more?" she remarked.

"We always cease to sniff on production of a certificate, darling," I explained.

Conversation pursued its desultory way on topics of personal, but limited, interest for a while. Eventually it reached a point where I was saying:

"It begins to look as if we don't need to worry any more about those men who were chasing you, darling. They'd have been back long before now if they had been as worried as you thought."

She shook her head.

"We'll have to go on being careful, but it is queer. Something to do with Uncle Donald, I expect. He's not really mechanically minded, poor dear. Well, you can tell that by the way he set the machine two years wrong when he came to see you. But there's nothing we can do except wait, and be careful."

I went on reflecting. Presently:

"I shall have to get a job soon. That may make it difficult to keep a watch for them," I told her.

"Job?" she said.

"In spite of what they say, two can't live as cheap as one. And wives hanker after certain standards, and ought to have them—within reason, of course. The little money I have won't run to them."

"You don't need to worry about that, darling," Tavia assured me. "You can just invent something."

"Me? Invent?" I exclaimed.

"Yes. You're already fairly well up on radio, aren't you?"

"They put me on a few radar courses when I was in the R.A.F."

"Ah! The R.A.F.!" she said, ecstatically. "To think that you actually fought in the Second Great War! Did you know Monty and Ike and all those wonderful people?"

"Not personally. Different arm of the Services," I said,

"What a pity, everyone liked Ike. But about the other thing. All you have to do is to get some advanced radio and electronics books, and I'll show you what to invent."

"You'll—? Oh, I see. But do you think that would be quite ethical?" I asked, doubtfully.

"I don't see why not. After all the things have got to be invented by somebody, or I couldn't have learnt about them at school, could I?"

"I—er, I think I'll have to think a bit about that," I told her.

It was, I suppose, coincidence that I should have mentioned the lack of interruption that particular morning—at least, it *may* have been: I have become increasingly suspicious of coincidences since I first saw Tavia. At any rate, in the middle of that same morning Tavia, looking out of the window, said:

"Darling, there's somebody waving from the trees over there."

I went over to have a look, and sure enough I had a view of a stick with a white handkerchief tied to it, swinging slowly from side to side. Through field-glasses I was able to distinguish the operator, an elderly man almost hidden in the bushes. I handed the glasses to Tavia.

"Oh, dear! Uncle Donald," she exclaimed. "I suppose we had better see him. He seems to be alone."

I went outside, down to the end of my path, and waved him forward. Presently he emerged, carrying the stick and handkerchief bannerwise. His voice reached me faintly: "Don't shoot!"

I spread my hand wide to show that I was unarmed. Tavia came down the path and stood beside me. As he drew close, he transferred the stick to his left hand, lifted his hat with the other, and inclined his head politely.

"Ah, Sir Gerald! A pleasure to meet you again," he said.

"He isn't Sir Gerald, Uncle. He's Mr. Lattery," said Tavia.

"Dear me. Stupid of me. Mr. Lattery," he went on, "I am sure you'll be glad to hear that the wound was more uncomfortable than serious. Just a matter of the poor fellow having to lie on his front for a while."

"Poor fellow—?" I repeated, blankly.

"The one you shot yesterday."

"I shot?"

"Probably tomorrow or the next day," Tavia said, briskly. "Uncle, you really are dreadful with those settings, you know."

"I understand the *principles* well enough, my dear. It's just the operation that I sometimes find a little confusing."

"Never mind. Now you are here you'd better come indoors," she told him. "And you can put that handkerchief away in your pocket," she added.

As he entered I saw him give a quick glance round

the room, and nod to himself as if satisfied with the authenticity of its contents. We sat down. Tavia said:

"Just before we go any further, Uncle Donald, I think you ought to know that I am married to Gerald—Mr. Lattery."

Dr. Gobie peered closely at her.

"*Married?*" he repeated. "What for?"

"Oh, dear," said Tavia. She explained patiently: "I am in love with him, and he's in love with me, so I am his wife. It's the way things happen here."

"Tch, tch!" said Dr. Gobie, and shook his head. "Of course I am well aware of your sentimental penchant for the Twentieth Century and its ways, my dear, but surely it wasn't quite necessary for you to—er—go native?"

"I like it, quite a lot," Tavia told him.

"Young women will be romantic, I know. But have you thought of the trouble you will be causing Sir Ger—er, Mr. Lattery?"

"But I'm *saving* him trouble, Uncle Donald. They *sniff* at you here if you don't get married, and I didn't like him being sniffed at."

"I wasn't thinking so much of while you're here, as of after you have left. They have a great many rules about presuming death, and proving desertion, and so on; most dilatory and complex. Meanwhile, he can't marry anyone else."

"I'm sure he wouldn't *want* to marry anyone else, would you darling?" she said to me.

"Certainly not," I protested.

"You're quite sure of that, darling?"

"Darling," I said, taking her hand, "if all the other women in the world—"

After a time Dr. Gobie recalled our attention with an apologetic cough.

"The real purpose of my visit," he explained, "is to persuade my niece that she *must* come back, and at once. There is the greatest consternation and alarm throughout the faculty over this affair, and I am being held largely to blame. Our chief anxiety is to get her back before any serious damage is done. Any chronoclasm goes ringing unendingly down the ages—and at any moment a really serious one may

come of this escapade. It has put all of us into a highly nervous condition."

"I'm sorry about that, Uncle Donald—and about your getting the blame. But I am *not* coming back. I'm very happy here."

"But the possible chronoclasms, my dear. It keeps me awake at night thinking—"

"Uncle dear, they'd be nothing to the chronoclasms that would happen if I *did* come back just now. You must see that I simply *can't,* and explain it to the others."

"Can't—?" he repeated.

"Now, if you look in the books you'll see that my husband—isn't that a funny, ugly old-fashioned word? I rather like it, though. It comes from two ancient Icelandic roots—"

"You were speaking about not coming back," Dr. Gobie reminded her.

"Oh, yes. Well, you'll see in the books that first he invented submarine radio communication, and then later on he invented curved-beam transmission, which is what he got knighted for."

"I'm perfectly well aware of that, Tavia. I do not see—"

"But, Uncle Donald, you must. How on earth can he possibly invent those things if I'm not here to show him how to do it? If you take me away now, they'll just not be invented, and then what will happen?"

Dr. Gobie stared at her steadily for some moments.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I must admit that that point had not occurred to me," and sank deeply into thought for a while.

"Besides," Tavia added, "Gerald would hate me to go, wouldn't you darling?"

"I—" I began, but Dr. Gobie cut me short by standing up.

"Yes," he said. "I can see there will have to be a postponement for a while. I shall put your point to them, but it will be only for a while."

On his way to the door he paused.

"Meanwhile, my dear, do be careful. These things are so delicate and complicated. I tremble to think of the complexities you might set up if you—well, say, if you were to do something irresponsible like becoming your own progenetrix."

"That is one thing I can't do, Uncle Donald. I'm on the collateral branch."

"Oh, yes. Yes, that's a very lucky thing. Then I'll say au revoir, my dear, and to you, too, Sir—er—Mr. Lattery. I trust that we may meet again—it has had its pleasant side to be here as more than a mere observer for once."

"Uncle Donald, you've said a mouthful there," Tavia agreed.

He shook his head reprovingly at her.

"I'm afraid you would never have got to the top of the historical tree, my dear. You aren't thorough enough. That phrase is *early* Twentieth Century, and, if I may say so, inelegant even then."

The expected shooting incident took place about a week later. Three men, dressed in quite convincing imitation of farmhands, made the approach. Tavia recognized one of them through the glasses. When I appeared, gun in hand, at the door, they tried to make for cover. I peppered one at considerable range, and he ran on, limping.

After that we were left unmolested. A little later we began to get down to the business of underwater radio—surprisingly simple, once the principle had been pointed out—and I filed my applications for patents. With that well in hand, we turned to the curved-beam transmission.

Tavia hurried me along with that. She said:

"You see, I don't know how long we've got, darling. I've been trying to remember ever since I got here what the date was on your letter, and I can't—even though I remember you underlined it. I know there's a record that your first wife deserted you—'deserted,' isn't that a dreadful word to use: as if I would, my sweet—but it doesn't say when. So I must get you properly briefed on this because there'd be the most frightful chronoclasm if you failed to invent it."

And then, instead of buckling down to it as her words suggested, she became pensive.

"As a matter of fact," she said, "I think there's going to be a pretty bad chronoclasm anyway. You see, I'm going to have a baby."

"No!" I exclaimed delightedly.

"What do you mean, 'no'? I *am*. And I'm worried. I don't

think it has ever happened to a traveling historian before. Uncle Donald would be terribly annoyed if he knew."

"To hell with Uncle Donald," I said. "And to hell with chronoclasms. We're going to celebrate, darling."

The weeks slid quickly by. My patents were granted provisionally. I got a good grip on the theory of curved-beam transmission. Everything was going nicely. We discussed the future: whether he was to be called Donald, or whether she was going to be called Alexandra. How soon the royalties would begin to come in so that we could make an offer for Bagford House. How funny it would feel at first to be addressed as Lady Lattery, and other allied themes . . .

And then came that December afternoon when I got back from discussing a modification with a manufacturer in London and found that she wasn't there any more . . .

Not a note, not a last word. Just the open front door, and a chair overturned in the sitting room . . .

Oh, Tavia, my dear . . .

I began to write this down because I still have an uneasy feeling about the ethics of not being the inventor of my inventions, and that there should be a straightening out. Now that I have reached the end, I perceive that "straightening out" is scarcely an appropriate description of it. In fact, I can foresee so much trouble attached to putting this forward as a conscientious reason for refusing a knighthood, that I think I shall say nothing, and just accept the knighthood when it comes. After all, when I consider a number of "inspired" inventions that I can call to mind, I begin to wonder whether certain others have not done that before me.

I have never pretended to understand the finer points of action and interaction comprehended in this matter, but I have a pressing sense that one action now on my part is basically necessary: not just to avoid dropping an almighty chronoclasm myself, but for fear that if I neglect it I may find that the whole thing never happened. So I must write a letter.

First, the envelope:

To my great, great grandniece,
Miss Octavia Lattery.

(To be opened by her on her 21st birthday.
6th June 2136.)

Then the letter. Date it. Underline the date.

My sweet, far-off, lovely Tavia,
Oh, my darling . . .

WILLIAM TENN

If you have read Child's Play, Betelgeuse Bridge, Brooklyn Project *or* Errand Boy, *you know who William Tenn is; if you haven't, it is plain that you've missed most of the science-fiction anthologies published in the past few years. Tenn's first science-fiction story was written between watches as a Merchant Marine radio operator just after the war; his second was written within a matter of hours after recovering from the shock of getting an immediate check for the first. That was* Child's Play—*anthologied, to date, no fewer than six times, with more coming up. It was a brilliant beginning for a career. To prove that the career has brilliantly continued, we need only offer for evidence . . .*

The Deserter

November 10, 2039—

Terran Supreme Command communique No. 18,673 for the twenty-four hours ending 0900 Monday, Terran capital time:

. . . whereupon sector HQ on Fortress Satellite Five ordered a strategic withdrawal of all interceptor units. The withdrawal was accomplished without difficulty and with minimal loss.

The only other incident of interest in this period was the surrender of an enemy soldier of undetermined rank, the first of these creatures from Jupiter to be taken alive by our forces. The capture was made in the course of defending Cochabamba, Bolivia, from an enemy commando raid. Four Jovians were killed in this unsuccessful assault upon a vital tin-supplying area after which the fifth laid down his arms and begged that his life be

spared. Upon capture by our forces, the Jovian claimed to be a deserter and requested a safe-conduct to . . .

Mardin had been briefed on what to expect by the MP officer who'd escorted him into the cave. Inevitably, though, his first view of the tank in which the alien floated brought out a long, whimpering grunt of disbelief and remembered fear. It was at least sixty feet long by forty wide, and it reared off the rocky floor to twice the height of a man. Whatever incredible material its sides had been composed of had hours ago been covered by thick white layers of ice.

Cold air currents bouncing the foul, damp smell of methane back from the tank tweaked his nose and pricked at his ears. *Well, after all,* Mardin thought, *those things have a body temperature somewhere in the neighborhood of minus 200° Fahrenheit!*

And he had felt this cold once before . . .

He shivered violently in response to the memory and zipped shut the fur-lined coveralls he'd been issued at the entrance. "Must have been quite a job getting that thing in here." The casualness of his voice surprised him and made him feel better.

"Oh, a special engineer task force did it in—let me see, now—" The MP lieutenant, a Chinese girl in her late teens, pursed soft, coral lips at his graying hair. "Less than five hours, figuring from the moment they arrived. The biggest problem was finding a cell in the neighborhood that was big enough to hold the prisoner. This cave was perfect."

Mardin looked up at the ledge above their heads. Every ten feet, a squad of three men, highly-polished weapons ready for instant action. Atomic cannon squads alternating with men bent down under the weight of dem-dem grenades. Grim-faced young subalterns, very conscious of the bigness of the brass that occupied the platform at the far end of the cave, stamped back and forth along the ledge from squad to squad, deadly little Royster pistolettos tinkling and naked in their sweating hands. *Those kids,* he thought angrily, *so well adjusted to it all!*

The ledge ran along three sides of the cave; on the fourth, the low entrance from which Mardin had just come, he had seen five steel Caesars implanted, long, pointed snouts throbbingly eager to throw tremendous gusts of stellar

energy into the Jovian's rear. And amid the immense rock folds of the roof, a labyrinth of slender, pencil-like bombs had been laid, held in place by clamps that would all open simultaneously the moment a certain colonel's finger pressed a certain green button . . .

"If our friend in the tank makes one wrong move," Mardin muttered, "half of South America goes down the drain."

The girl started to chuckle, then changed her mind and frowned. "I'm sorry, Major Mardin, but I don't like that. I don't like hearing them referred to as 'friends.' Even in a joke. Over a million and a half people—three hundred thousand of them Chinese—have been wiped out by those—those ammoniated flatworms!"

"And the first fifty of which," he reminded her irritably, "were my relatives and neighbors. If you're old enough to remember Mars and the Three Watertanks massacre, young lady."

She swallowed and looked stricken. An apology seemed to be in the process of composition, but Mardin moved past her in a long, disgusted stride and headed rapidly for the distant platform. He had a fierce dislike, he had discovered long ago, for people who were unable to hate wholesomely and intelligently, who had to jog their animus with special symbols and idiotic negations. Americans, during the War of 1914-18, changing sauerkraut into liberty cabbage; mobs of Turks, in the Gibraltar Flare-up of 1985, lynching anyone in Ankara caught eating oranges. How many times had he seen aged men in the uniform of the oldsters' service, the Infirm Civilian Corps, make the socially accepted gesture of grinding out a worm with their heels whenever they referred to the enemy from Jupiter!

He grimaced at the enormous expanse of ice-covered tank in which a blanket of living matter large enough to cover a city block pursued its alien processes. "Let me see you lift your foot and step on *that!*" he told the astonished girl behind him. *Damn all simplicity-hounds,* anyway, he thought. A *week on the receiving end of a Jovian question-machine is exactly what they need. Make them nice and thoughtful and give them some inkling of how crazily complex this universe can be!*

That reminded him of his purpose in this place. He became thoughtful himself and—while the circular scar on his

forehead wrinkled—very gravely reminiscent of how crazily complex the universe actually was . . .

So thoughtful, in fact, that he had to take a long, relaxing breath and wipe his hands on his coveralls before climbing the stairs that led up to the hastily constructed platform.

Colonel Liu, Mardin's immediate superior, broke away from the knot of men at the other end and came up to him with arms spread wide. "Good to see you, Mardin," he said rapidly. "Now listen to me. Old Rockethead himself is here—you know how *he* is. So put a little snap into your salute and sort of pull back on those shoulders when you're talking to him. Know what I mean? Try to show him that when it comes to military bearing, we in Intelligence don't take a—Mardin, are you listening to me? This is very important."

With difficulty, Mardin took his eyes away from the transparent un-iced top of the tank. "Sorry, sir," he mumbled. "I'll—I'll try to remember."

"This the interpreter, Colonel Liu? Major Mardin, eh?" the very tall, stiffly erect man in the jeweled uniform of a Marshal of Space yelled from the railing. "Bring him over. On the double, sir!"

Colonel Liu grabbed Mardin's left arm and pulled him rapidly across the platform. Rockethead Billingsley cut the colonel's breathless introduction short. "Major *Igor* Mardin, is it? Sounds Russian. You wouldn't be Russian now, would you? I hate Russians."

Mardin noticed a broad-shouldered vice-marshal standing in Billingsley's rear stiffen angrily. "No, sir," he replied. "Mardin is a Croat name. My family is French and Yugoslav with possibly a bit of Arab."

The Marshal of Space inclined his fur-covered head. "Good! Couldn't stand you if you were Russian. Hate Russians, hate Chinese, hate Portuguese. Though the Chinese are worst of all, I'd say. Ready to start working on this devil from Jupiter? Come over here, then. And move, man, move!" As he swung round, the dozen or so sapphire-studded Royster pistolettos that swung picturesquely from his shoulder straps clinked and clanked madly, making him seem like a gigantic cat that the mice had belled again and again.

Hurrying after him, Mardin noticed with amusement that

the stiff, angry backs were everywhere now. Colonel Liu's mouth was screwed up into a dark pucker in his face; at the far end of the platform, the young lieutenant who'd escorted him from the jet base was punching a tiny fist into an open palm. Marshal of Space Rudolfo Billingsley enjoyed a rank high enough to make tact a function of the moment's whim—and it was obvious that he rarely indulged such moments. "Head thick as a rocket wall and a mouth as filthy as a burned-out exhaust, but he can figure out down to the smallest wound on the greenest corporal, exactly how much blood any attack is going to cost." That was what the line officers said of him.

And that, after all, Mardin reflected, was just the kind of man needed in the kind of world Earth had become in eighteen years of Jovian siege. He, himself, owed this man a very special debt . . .

"You probably don't remember me, sir," he began hesitantly as they paused beside a metal armchair that was suspended from an overhead wire. "But we met once before, about sixteen years ago. It was aboard your space-ship, the *Euphrates,* that I—"

"The *Euphrates* wasn't a space-ship. It was an interceptor, third class. Learn your damned terminology if you're going to dishonor a major's uniform, mister! And pull that zipper up tight. Of course, you were one of that mob of mewling civilians I pulled out of Three Watertanks right under the Jovians' noses. Let's see: that young archaeologist fellow. Didn't know then that we were going to get a real, first-class, bang-up, slaughter-em-dead war out of that incident, did we? Hah! You thought you had an easy life ahead of you, eh? Didn't suspect you'd be spending the rest of it in uniform, standing up straight and jumping when you got an order! This war's made men out of a lot of wet jellyfish like you, mister, and you can be grateful for the privilege."

Mardin nodded with difficulty, sardonically conscious of the abrupt stiffness of his own back, of the tightly clenched fingers scraping his palm. He wondered about the incidence of courts-martial, for striking a superior officer, in Billingsley's personal staff.

"All right, hop into it. Hop *in,* man!" Mardin realized the significance of the cupped hands being extended to him. A Marshal of Space was offering him a boost! Billingsley be-

lieved nobody could do *anything* better than Billingsley. Very gingerly, he stepped into it, was lifted up so that he could squirm into the chair. Automatically, he fastened the safety belt across his middle, strapped the headset in place.

Below him, Old Rockethead pulled the clamps tight around his ankles and called up: "You've been briefed? Arkhnatta contacted you?"

"Yes. I mean yes, *Sir.* Professor Arkhnatta traveled with me all the way from Melbourne Base. He managed to cover everything, but of course it wasn't the detail he'd have liked."

"Hell with the detail. Listen to me, Major Mardin. Right there in front of you is the only Jovian flatworm we've managed to take alive. I don't know how much longer we can *keep* him alive—engineers are building a methane plant in another part of the cave so he'll have some stink to breathe when his own supply runs out, and the chemistry johnnies are refrigerating ammonia for him to drink—but I intend to rip every bit of useful military information out of his hide before he caves in. And your mind is the only chisel I've got. Hope I don't break the chisel, but the way I figure it you're not worth as much as a secondary space fleet. And I sacrificed one of those day before yesterday—complement of two thousand men—just to find out what the enemy was up to. So, mister, you pay attention to me and keep asking him questions. And shout out your replies good and loud for the recording machines. Swing him out, Colonel! Didn't you *hear* me? How the hell long does it take to swing him out?"

As the cable pulled the chair away from the platform and over the immense expanse of monster, Mardin felt something in his belly go far away and something in his brain try to hide. In a few moments—at the thought of what he'd be doing in a minute or two he shut his eyes tightly as he had in childhood, trying to wish the bad thing away.

He should have done what all his instincts urged way back in Melbourne Base when he'd gotten the orders and realized what they meant. He should have deserted. Only trouble, where do you desert in a world under arms, on a planet where every child has its own military responsibilites? But he should have done something. *Something.* No man should have to go through this twice in one lifetime.

Simple enough for Old Rockethead. This was *his* life, negative as its goals were, moments like these of incipient destruction were the fulfillment for which he'd trained and worked and studied. He remembered something else now about Marshal of Space Billingsley. The beautiful little winged creatures on Venus—*Griggoddon,* they'd been called —who'd learned human languages and begun pestering the early colonists of that planet with hundreds of questions. Toleration of their high-pitched, ear-splitting voices had turned into annoyance and they'd been locked out of the settlements, whereupon they'd made the nights hideous with their curiosity. Since they'd refused to leave, and since the hard-working colonists found themselves losing more and more sleep, the problem had been turned over to the resident military power on Venus. Mardin recalled the uproar even on Mars when a laconic order of the day—"Venus has been rendered permanently calm: Commodore R. Billingsley."—announced that the first intelligent extra-terrestrial life to be discovered had been destroyed down to the last crawling segmented infant by means of a new insecticide spray.

Barely six months later the attack on sparsely settled Mars had underlined with human corpses the existence of another intelligent race in the solar system—and a much more powerful one. Who remembered the insignificant *Griggoddon* when Commodore Rudolfo Billingsley slashed back into the enemy-occupied capital of Southern Mars and evacuated the few survivors of Jupiter's initial assault? Then the Hero of Three Watertanks had even gone back and rescued one of the men captured alive by the Jovian monsters—a certain Igor Mardin, proud possessor of the first, and, as it eventually turned out, also the only, Ph.D. in Martian archaeology.

No, for Old Rockethead this horrendous planet-smashing was more than fulfillment, much more than a wonderful opportunity to practice various aspects of his trade: it represented reprieve. If mankind had not blundered into and alerted the outposts of Jovian empire in the asteroid belt, Billingsley would have worked out a miserable career as a police officer in various patrol posts, chained for the balance of his professional life to a commodore's rank by the *Griggoddon* blunder. Whenever he appeared at a party some fat woman would explain to her escort in a whisper full of highly audible sibilants that this was the famous Beast of

Venus—and every uniformed man in the place would look uncomfortable. The Beast of Venus it would have been instead of the Hero of Three Watertanks, Defender of Luna, the Father of the Fortress Satellite System.

As for himself—well, Dr. Mardin would have plodded on the long years tranquilly and usefully, a scholar among scholars, not the brightest and best possibly—here, a stimulating and rather cleverly documented paper, there, a startling minor discovery of interest only to specialists—but a man respected by his colleagues, doing work he was fitted for and liked, earning a secure place for himself in the textbooks of another age as a secondary footnote or additional line in a bibliography. But instead the Popa Site Diggings were disintegrated rubble near the ruins of what had once been the human capital of Southern Mars and Major Igor Mardin's civilian skills had less relevance and value than those of a dodo breeder or a veterinarian to mammoths and mastodons. He was now a mildly incompetent field grade officer in an unimportant section of Intelligence whose attempts at military bearing and deportment amused his subordinates and caused his superiors a good deal of pain. He didn't like the tasks he was assigned; frequently he didn't even understand them. His value lay only in the two years of psychological hell he'd endured as a prisoner of the Jovians and even that could be realized only in peculiarly fortuitous circumstances such as those of the moment. He could never be anything but an object of pathos to the snappy, single-minded generation grown up in a milieu of no-quarter interplanetary war: and should the war end tomorrow with humanity, by some unimaginable miracle, victorious, he would have picked up nothing in the eighteen years of conflict but uncertainty about himself and a few doubtful moments for some drab little memoirs.

He found that, his fears forgotten, he had been glaring down at the enormous hulk of the Jovian rippling gently under the transparent tank-surface. This quiet-appearing sea of turgid scarlet soup in which an occasional bluish-white dumpling bobbed to the surface only to dwindle in size and disappear—this was one of the creatures that had robbed him of the life he should have had and had hurled him into a by-the-numbers purgatory. And why? So that their own peculiar concepts of mastery might be maintained, so

that another species might not arise to challenge their dominion of the outer planets. No attempt at arbitration, at treaty-making, at any kind of discussion—instead an overwhelming and relatively sudden onslaught, as methodical and irresistible as the attack of an anteater on an anthill.

A slender silvery tendril rose from the top of the tank to meet him and the chair came to an abrupt halt in its swaying journey across the roof of the gigantic cave. Mardin's shoulders shot up against his neck convulsively, he found himself trying to pull his head down into his chest—just as he had scores of times in the prison cell that had once been the Three Watertanks Public Library.

At the sight of the familiar questing tendril, a panic eighteen years old engulfed and nauseated him.

It's going to hurt inside, his mind wept, twisting and turning and dodging in his brain. *The thoughts are going to be rubbed against each other so that the skin comes off them and they hurt and hurt and hurt . . .*

The tendril came to a stop before his face and the tip curved interrogatively. Mardin squirmed back against the metal chair back.

I won't! This time I don't have to! You can't make me—this time you're our prisoner—you can't make me—you can't make me—

"Mardin!" Billingsley's voice bellowed in his head phones. "Put the damn thing on and let's get going! Move, man, move!"

And almost before he knew he had done it, as automatically as he had learned to go rigid at the sound of *atten-shun!* Mardin's hand reached out for the tendril and placed the tip of it against the old scar on his forehead.

There was that anciently familiar sensation of inmost *rapport,* of new-found completeness, of belonging to a higher order of being. There were the strange double memories: a river of green fire arching off a jet-black trembling cliff hundreds of miles high, somehow blending in with the feel of delighted shock as Dave Weiner's baseball hit the catcher's mitt you'd gotten two hours ago for a birthday present; a picture of a very lovely and very intent young female physicist explaining to you just how somebody named Albert Fermi Vannevar derived $E=MC^2$, getting all confused with the time to begin the many-scented dance to the surface

because of the myriad of wonderful soft spots you could feel calling to each other on your back.

But, Mardin realized with amazement in some recess of autonomy still left in his mind, this time there was a difference. This time there was no feeling of terror as of thorough personal violation, there was no incredibly ugly sensation of tentacles armed with multitudes of tiny suckers speeding through his nervous system and feeding, feeding, greedily feeding . . . This time none of his thoughts were dissected, kicking and screaming, in the operating theater of his own skull while his ego shuddered fearfully at the bloody spectacle from a distant psychic cranny.

This time he was *with*—not *of*.

Of course, a lot of work undoubtedly had been done on the Jovian question-machine in the past decade. The single tendril that contained all of the intricate mechanism for telepathic communion between two races had probably been refined far past the coarse and blundering gadget that had gouged at his mind eighteen years ago.

And, of course, this time *he* was the interrogator. This time it was a Jovian that lay helpless before the probe, the weapons, the merciless detachment of an alien culture. This time it was a Jovian, not Igor Mardin, who had to find the right answers to the insistent questions—and the right symbols with which to articulate those answers.

All that made a tremendous difference. Mardin relaxed and was amused by the feeling of power that roared through him.

Still—there was something else. This time he was dealing with a totally different personality.

There was a pleasant, undefinable quality to this individual from a world whose gravity could smear Mardin across the landscape in a fine liquid film. A character trait like—no, not simple tact—certainly not timidity—and you couldn't just call it gentleness and warmth—

Mardin gave up. Certainly, he decided, the difference between this Jovian and his jailor on Mars was like the difference between two entirely different breeds. Why, it was a pleasure to share part of his mental processes temporarily with this kind of person! As from a distance, he heard the Jovian reply that the pleasure was mutual. He felt instinctively they had much in common.

And they'd have to—if Billingsley were to get the information he wanted. Superficially, it might seem that a mechanism for sharing thoughts was the ideal answer to communication between races as dissimilar as the Jovian and Terrestrial. In practice, Mardin knew from long months of squeezing his imagination under orders in Three Watertanks, a telepathy machine merely gave you a communication potential. An individual thinks in pictures and symbols based on his life experiences—if two individuals have no life experiences in common, all they can share is confusion. It had taken extended periods of desperate effort before Mardin and his Jovian captor had established that what passed for the digestive process among humans was a combination of breathing and strenuous physical exercise to a creature born on Jupiter, that the concept of taking a bath could be equated with a Jovian activity so shameful and so overlaid with pain that Mardin's questioner had been unable to visit him for five weeks after the subject came up and thenceforth treated him with the reserve one might maintain toward an intelligent blob of fecal matter.

But mutually accepted symbols eventually had been established—just before Mardin's rescue. And ever since then, he'd been kept on ice in Intelligence, for a moment like this . . .

"Mardin!" Old Rockethead's voice ripped out of his earphones. "Made contact yet?"

"Yes. I think I have, sir."

"Good! Feels like a reunion of the goddam old regiment, eh? All set to ask questions? The slug's cooperating? Answer me, Mardin! Don't sit there gaping at him!"

"Yes, sir," Mardin said hurriedly. "Everything's all set."

"Good! Let's see now. First off, ask him his name, rank and serial number."

Mardin shook his head. The terrifying, straight-faced orderliness of the military mind! The protocol was unalterable: you asked a Japanese prisoner-of-war for his name, rank and serial number; obviously, you did the same when the prisoner was a Jovian! The fact that there was no interplanetary Red Cross to notify his family that food packages might now be sent . . .

He addressed himself to the immense blanket of quiescent living matter below him, phrasing the question in as broad a set of symbols as he could contrive. Where would the

answer be worked out, he wondered? On the basis of their examination of dead Jovians, some scientists maintained that the creatures were really vertebrates, except that they had nine separate brains and spinal columns; other biologists insisted that the "brains" were merely the kind of ganglia to be found in various kinds of invertebrates and that thinking took place on the delicately convoluted surface of their bodies. And no one had ever found anything vaguely resembling a mouth or eyes, not to mention appendages that could be used in locomotion.

Abruptly, he found himself on the bottom of a noisy sea of liquid ammonia, clustered with dozens of other newborn around the neuter "mother." Someone flaked off the cluster and darted away; he followed. The two of them met in the appointed place of crystallization and joined into one individual. The pride he felt in the increase of self was worth every bit of the effort.

Then he was humping along a painful surface. He was much larger now—and increased in self many times over. The Council of Unborn asked him for his choice. He chose to become a male. He was directed to a new fraternity.

Later, there was a mating with tiny silent females and enormous, highly active neuters. He was given many presents. Much later, there was a songfest in a dripping cavern that was interrupted by a battle scene with rebellious slaves on one of Saturn's moons. With a great regret he seemed to go into suspended animation for a number of years. *Wounded?* Mardin wondered. *Hospitalized?*

In conclusion, there was a guided tour of an undersea hatchery which terminated in a colorful earthquake.

Mardin slowly assimilated the information in terms of human symbology.

"Here it is, sir," he said at last hesitantly into the mouthpiece. "They don't have any actual equivalents in this area, but you might call him Ho-Par XV, originally of the Titan garrison and sometime adjutant to the commanders of Ganymede." Mardin paused a moment before going on. "He'd like it on the record that he's been invited to reproduce five times—and twice in public."

Billingsley grunted. "Nonsense! Find out why he didn't fight to the death like the other four raiders. If he still claims to be a deserter, find out why. Personally, I think

these Jovians are too damn fine soldiers for that sort of thing. They may be worms, but I can't see one of them going over to the enemy."

Mardin put the question to the prisoner . . .

Once more he wandered on worlds where he could not have lived for a moment. He superintended a work detail of strange dustmotes, long ago conquered and placed under Jovian hegemony. He found himself feeling about them the way he had felt about the *Griggoddon* eighteen years ago: they were too wonderful to be doomed, he protested. Then he realized that the protest was not his, but that of the sorrowing entity who had lived these experiences. And they went on to other garrisons, other duties.

The reply he got this time made Mardin gasp. "He says all five of the Jovians were deserting! They had planned it for years, all of them being both fraternity-brothers and brood-brothers. He says that they—well, you might say *parachuted* down together—and not one of them had a weapon. They each tried in different ways, as they had planned beforehand, to make their surrender known. Ho-Par XV was the only successful one. He brings greetings from clusters as yet unsynthesized."

"Stick to the facts, Mardin. No romancing. Why did they desert?"

"I am sticking to the facts, sir: I'm just trying to give you the flavor as well as the substance. According to Ho-Par XV, they deserted because they were all violently opposed to militarism."

"Wha-at?"

"That, as near as I can render it, is exactly what he said. He says that militarism is ruining their race. It has resulted in all kinds of incorrect choices on the part of the young as to which sex they will assume in the adult state (I don't understand that part at all myself, sir), it has thrown confusion into an art somewhere between cartography and horticulture that Ho-Par thinks is very important to the future of Jupiter—and it has weighed every Jovian down with an immense burden of guilt because of what their armies and military administration have done to alien life-forms on Ganymede, Titan and Europa, not to mention the half-sentient bubbles of the Saturnian core."

"To hell with the latrine-blasted half-sentient bubbles of the Saturnian core!" Billingsley bellowed.

"Ho-Par XV feels," the man in the suspended metal armchair went on relentlessly, staring down with delight at the flat stretch of red liquid whose beautifully sane, delicately balanced mind he was paraphrasing, "that his race needs to be stopped for its own sake as well as that of the other forms of life in the Solar System. Creatures trained in warfare are what he calls 'philosophically anti-life.' The young Jovians had just about given up hope that Jupiter *could* be stopped, when humanity came busting through the asteroids. Only trouble is that while we do think and move about three times as fast as they do, the Jovian females—who are the closest thing they have to theoretical scientists—know a lot more than we, dig into a concept more deeply than we can imagine and generally can be expected to keep licking us as they have been, until we are either extinct or enslaved. Ho-Par XV and his brood-brothers decided after the annual smelling session in the Jovian fleet this year to try to change all this. They felt that with our speedier metabolism, we might be able to take a new weapon, which the Jovians have barely got into production, and turn it out fast enough to make a slight—"

At this point there was a certain amount of noise in the headphones. After a while, Old Rockethead's voice, suavity gone, came through more or less distinctly: "—and if you don't start detailing that weapon immediately, you mangy son of a flea-bitten cur, I will have you broken twelve grades below Ordinary Spaceman and strip the skin off your pimply backside with my own boot the moment I get you back on this platform. I'll personally see to it that you spend all of your leaves cleaning the filthiest commodes the space fleet can find! Now *jump* to it!"

Major Mardin wiped the line of sweat off his upper lip and began detailing the weapon. *Who does he think he's talking to?* his mind asked bitterly. *I'm no kid, no apple-cheeked youngster, to be snapped at and dressed down with that line of frowsy, ugly barracks-corporal humor! I got a standing ovation from the All-Earth Archaeological Society once, and Dr. Emmanuel Hozzne himself congratulated me on my report.*

But his mouth began detailing the weapon, his mouth went

on articulating the difficult ideas which Ho-Par XV and his fellow deserters had painfully translated into faintly recognizable human terms, his mouth dutifully continued to explicate mathematical and physical concepts into the black speaking cone near his chin.

His mouth went about its business and carried out its orders—but his mind lay agonized at the insult. And then, in a corner of his mind where tenancy was joint, so to speak, a puzzled, warm, highly sensitive and extremely intelligent personality asked a puzzled, tentative question.

Mardin stopped in mid-sentence, overcome with horror at what he'd almost given away to the alien. He tried to cover up, to fill his mind with memories of contentment, to create *non-sequiturs* as psychological camouflage. What an idiot to forget that he wasn't alone in his mind!

And the question was asked again. *Are you not the representative of your people? Are—are there others . . .* unlike *you?*

Of course not! Mardin told him desperately. *Your confusion is due entirely to the fundamental differences between Jovian and Terrestrial thinking—*

"Mardin! Will you stop drooling out of those near-sighted eyes and come the hell to attention? Keep talking, chowderhead, we want the rest of that flatworm's brain picked!"

What fundamental differences? Mardin asked himself suddenly, his skull a white-hot furnace of rage. There were more fundamental differences between someone like Billingsley and himself, than between himself and this poetic creature who had risked death and become a traitor to his own race—to preserve the dignity of the Life-force. What did he have in common with this Cain come to judgment, this bemedaled swaggering boor who rejoiced in having reduced all the subtleties of conscious thought to rigidly simple, unavoidable alternatives: kill or be killed! damn or be damned! be powerful or be overpowered! The monster who had tortured his mind endlessly, dispassionately, in the prison on Mars would have found Old Rockethead much more *simpatico* than Ho-Par XV.

That is true, that is so! the Jovian's thought came down emphatically on his mind. And now, friend, *blood-brother, whatever you may choose to call yourself, please let me*

know what kind of creature I have given this weapon to. Let me know what he has done in the past with power, what he may be expected to do in hatching cycles yet to come. Let me know through your mind and your memories and your feelings—for you and I understand each other.

Mardin let him know.

> . . . to the nearest legal representative of the entire human race. As the result of preliminary interrogation by the military authorities a good deal was learned about the life and habits of the enemy. Unfortunately, in the course of further questioning, the Jovian evidently came to regret being taken alive and opened the valves of the gigantic tank which was his space-suit, thus committing suicide instantly and incidentally smoldering his human interpreter in a dense cloud of methane gas. Major Igor Mardin, the interpreter, has been posthumously awarded the Silver Lunar Circlet with doubled jets. The Jovian's suicide is now being studied by space fleet psychologists to determine whether this may not indicate an unstable mental pattern which will be useful to our deep-space armed forces in the future . . .

H. L. GOLD

In science fiction, nearly everybody reads Galaxy—but how many of its numerous and increasing readers realize that the man who edited their well-loved magazine is also the man who wrote much of the best science and fantasy fiction of the immediate pre-war years? H. L. Gold's novel None But Lucifer *and short stories like* Trouble With Water, *and* Warm, Dark Places *ornamented John Campbell's fondly remembered magazine, Unknown, for most of its all-too-short career. An Army hitch in the South Pacific suspended Gold's writing for the duration and a bit more—but subsequently, it went ahead, bigger and better than ever, as you can see by . . .*

The Man With English

Lying in the hospital, Edgar Stone added up his misfortunes as another might count blessings. There were enough to infuriate the most temperate man, which Stone notoriously was not. He smashed his fist down, accidentally hitting the metal side of the bed, and was astonished by the pleasant feeling. It enraged him even more. The really maddening thing was how simply he had goaded himself into the hospital.

He'd locked up his drygoods store and driven home for lunch. Nothing unusual about that; he did it every day. With his miserable digestion, he couldn't stand the restaurant food in town. He pulled into the driveway, rode over a collection of metal shapes his son Arnold had left lying around, and punctured a tire.

"Rita!" he yelled. "This is going too damned far! Where is that brat?"

"In here," she called truculently from the kitchen.

He kicked open the screen door. His foot went through the mesh.

"A ripped tire and a torn screen!" he shouted at Arnold, who was sprawled in angular adolescence over a blueprint on the kitchen table. "You'll pay for them, by God! They're coming out of your allowance!"

"I'm sorry, Pop," the boy said.

"Sorry, my left foot," Mrs. Stone shrieked. She whirled on her husband. "You could have watched where you were going. He promised to clean up his things from the driveway right after lunch. And it's about time you stopped kicking open the door every time you're mad."

"Mad? Who wouldn't be mad? Me hoping he'd get out of school and come into the store, and he wants to be an engineer. An engineer—and he can't even make change when he—hah!—helps me out in the store!"

"He'll be whatever he wants to be," she screamed in the conversational tone of the Stone household.

"Please," said Arnold. "I can't concentrate on this plan."

Edgar Stone was never one to restrain an angry impulse. He tore up the blueprint and flung the pieces down on the table.

"Aw, Pop!" Arnold protested.

"Don't say 'Aw, Pop' to me. You're not going to waste a summer vacation on junk like this. You'll eat your lunch and come down to the store. And you'll do it every day for the rest of the summer!"

"Oh, he will, will he?" demanded Mrs. Stone. "He'll catch up on his studies. And as for you, you can go back and eat in a restaurant."

"You know I can't stand that slop!"

"You'll eat it because you're not having lunch here any more. I've got enough to do without making three meals a day."

"But I can't drive back with that tire—"

He did, though not with the tire—he took a cab. It cost a dollar plus tip, lunch was a dollar and a half plus tip, bicarb at Rite Drug Store a few doors away and in a great hurry came to another fifteen cents—only it didn't work.

And then Miss Ellis came in for some material. Miss Ellis could round out any miserable day. She was fifty, tall,

skinny and had thin, disapproving lips. She had a sliver of cloth clipped very meagerly off a hem that she intended to use as a sample.

"The arms of the slipcover on my reading chair wore through," she informed him. "I bought the material here, if you remember."

Stone didn't have to look at the fragmentary swatch. "That was about seven years ago—"

"Six-and-a-half," she corrected. "I paid enough for it. You'd expect anything that expensive to last."

"The style was discontinued. I have something here that—"

"I do not want to make an entire slipcover, Mr. Stone. All I want is enough to make new panels for the arms. Two yards should do very nicely."

Stone smothered a bilious hiccup. "Two yards, Miss Ellis?"

"At the most."

"I sold the last of that material years ago." He pulled a bolt off a shelf and partly unrolled it for her. "Why not use a different pattern as a kind of contrast?"

"I want this same pattern," she said, her thin lips getting even thinner and more obstinate."

"Then I'll have to order it and hope one of my wholesalers still has some of it in stock."

"Not without looking for it first right here, you won't order it for me. You can't know *all* these materials you have on these shelves."

Stone felt all the familiar symptoms of fury—the sudden pulsing of the temples, the lurch and bump of his heart as adrenalin came surging in like the tide at the Firth of Forth, the quivering of his hands, the angry shout pulsing at his vocal cords from below.

"I'll take a look, Miss Ellis," he said.

She was president of the Ladies' Cultural Society and dominated it so thoroughly that the members would go clear to the next town for their dry goods, rather than deal with him, if he offended this sour stick of stubbornness.

If Stone's life insurance salesman had been there, he would have tried to keep Stone from climbing the ladder that ran around the three walls of the store. He probably wouldn't have been in time. Stone stamped up the ladder

to reach the highest shelves, where there were scraps of bolts. One of them might have been the remnant of the material Miss Ellis had bought six-and-a-half years ago. But Stone never found out.

He snatched one, glaring down meanwhile at the top of Miss Ellis's head, and the ladder skidded out from under him. He felt his skull collide with the counter. He didn't feel it hit the floor.

"God damn it!" Stone yelled. "You could at least turn on the lights."

"There, there, Edgar. Everything's fine, just fine."

It was his wife's voice and the tone was so uncommonly soft and soothing that it scared him into a panic.

"What's wrong with me?" he asked piteously. "Am I blind?"

"How many fingers am I holding up?" a man wanted to know.

Stone was peering into the blackness. All he could see before his eyes was a vague blot against a darker blot.

"None," he bleated. "Who are you?"

"Dr. Rankin. That was a nasty fall you had, Mr. Stone—concussion of course, and a splinter of bone driven into the brain. I had to operate to remove it."

"Then you cut out a nerve!" Stone said. "You did something to my eyes!"

The doctor's voice sounded puzzled. "There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with them. I'll take a look, though, and see."

"You'll be all right, dear," Mrs. Stone said reassuringly, but she didn't sound as if she believed it.

"Sure you will, Pop," said Arnold.

"Is that young stinker here?" Stone demanded. "He's the cause of all this!"

"Temper, temper," the doctor said. "Accidents happen."

Stone heard him lower the venetian blinds. As if they had been a switch, light sprang up and everything in the hospital became brightly visible.

"Well!" said Stone. "That's more like it. It's night and you're trying to save electricity, hey?"

"It's broad daylight, Edgar dear," his wife protested. "All Dr. Rankin did was lower the blinds and—"

"Please," the doctor said. "If you don't mind, I'd rather take care of any explanations that have to be made."

He came at Stone with an ophthalmoscope. When he flashed it into Stone's eyes, everything went black and Stone let him know it vociferously.

"Black?" Dr. Rankin repeated blankly. "Are you positive? Not a sudden glare?"

"Black," insisted Stone. "And what's the idea of putting me in a bed filled with bread crumbs?"

"It was freshly made—"

"Crumbs. You heard me. And the pillow has rocks in it."

"What else is bothering you?" asked the doctor worriedly.

"It's freezing in here." Stone felt the terror rise in him again. "It was summer when I fell off the ladder. Don't tell me I've been unconscious clear through till winter!"

"No, Pop," said Arnold. "That was yesterday—"

"I'll take care of this," Dr. Rankin said firmly. "I'm afraid you and your son will have to leave, Mrs. Stone. I have to do a few tests on your husband."

"Will he be all right?" she appealed.

"Of course, of course," he said inattentively, peering with a frown at the shivering patient. "Shock, you know," he added vaguely.

"Gosh, Pop," said Arnold. "I'm sorry this happened. I got the driveway all cleaned up."

"And we'll take care of the store till you're better," Mrs. Stone promised.

"Don't you dare!" yelled Stone. "You'll put me out of business!"

The doctor hastily shut the door on them and came back to the bed. Stone was clutching the light summer blanket around himself. He felt colder than he'd ever been in his life.

"Can't you get me more blankets?" he begged. "You don't want me to die of pneumonia, do you?"

Dr. Rankin opened the blinds and asked, "What's this like?"

"Night," chattered Stone. "A new idea to save electricity—hooking up the blinds to the light switch?"

The doctor closed the blinds and sat down beside the bed. He was sweating as he reached for the signal button and pressed it. A nurse came in, blinking in their direction.

"Why don't you turn on the light?" she asked.

"Huh?" said Stone. "They are."

"Nurse, I'm Dr. Rankin. Get me a piece of sandpaper, some cotton swabs, an ice cube and Mr. Stone's lunch."

"Is there anything he shouldn't eat?"

"That's what I want to find out. Hurry, please."

"And some blankets," Stone put in, shaking with the chill.

"Blankets, Doctor?" she asked, startled.

"Half a dozen will do," he said. "I think."

It took her ten minutes to return with all the items. Stone wanted them to keep adding blankets until all seven were on him. He still felt cold.

"Maybe some hot coffee?" he suggested.

The doctor nodded and the nurse poured a cup, added the spoon and a half of sugar he requested, and he took a mouthful. He sprayed it out violently.

"Ice cold!" he yelped. "And who put salt in it?"

"Salt?" She fumbled around on the tray. "It's so dark here—"

"I'll attend to it," Dr. Rankin said hurriedly. "Thank you."

She walked cautiously to the door and went out.

"Try this," said the doctor, after filling another cup.

"Well, that's better!" Stone exclaimed. "Damned practical joker. They shouldn't be allowed to work in hospitals."

"And now, if you don't mind," said the doctor, "I'd like to try several tests."

Stone was still angry at the trick played on him, but he cooperated willingly.

Dr. Rankin finally sagged back in the chair. The sweat ran down his face and into his collar, and his expression was so dazed that Stone was alarmed.

"What's wrong, Doctor? Am I going to—going to—"

"No, no. It's not that. No danger. At least, I don't believe there is. But I can't even be sure of that any more."

"You can't be sure if I'll live or die?"

"Look." Dr. Rankin grimly pulled the chair closer. "It's broad daylight and yet you can't see until I darken the room. The coffee was hot and sweet, but it was cold and salty to you, so I added an ice cube and a spoonful of salt and it tasted fine, you said. This is one of the hottest days on record and you're freezing. You told me the sandpaper felt smooth and satiny, then yelled that somebody had put pins in the cotton swabs, when there weren't any, of course. I've tried you out with different colors around the room and

you saw violet when you should have seen yellow, green for red, orange for blue, and so on. Now do you understand?"

"No," said Stone frightenedly. "What's wrong?"

"All I can do is guess. I had to remove that sliver of bone from your brain. It apparently shorted your sensory nerves."

"And what happened?"

"Every one of your senses has been reversed. You feel cold for heat, heat for cold, smooth for rough, rough for smooth, sour for sweet, sweet for sour, and so forth. And you see colors backward."

Stone sat up. "Murderer! Thief! You've ruined me!"

The doctor sprang for a hypodermic and sedative. Just in time, he changed his mind and took a bottle of stimulant instead. It worked fine, though injecting it into his screaming, thrashing patient took more strength than he'd known he owned. Stone fell asleep immediately.

There were nine blankets on Stone and he had a bag of cement for a pillow when he had his lawyer, Manny Lubin, in to hear the charges he wanted brought against Dr. Rankin. The doctor was there to defend himself. Mrs. Stone was present in spite of her husband's objections—"She always takes everybody's side against me," he explained in a roar.

"I'll be honest with you, Mr. Lubin," the doctor said, after Stone had finished on a note of shrill frustration. "I've hunted for cases like this in medical history and this is the first one ever to be reported. Except," he amended quickly, "that I haven't reported it yet. I'm hoping it reverses itself. That sometimes happens, you know."

"And what am I supposed to do in the meantime?" raged Stone. "I'll have to go out wearing an overcoat in the summer and shorts in the winter—people will think I'm a maniac. And they'll be *sure* of it because I'll have to keep the store closed during the day and open at night—I can't see except in the dark. And matching materials! I can't stand the feel of smooth cloth and I see colors backward!" He glared at the doctor before turning back to Lubin. "How would *you* like to have to put sugar on your food and salt in your coffee?"

"But we'll work it out, Edgar dear," his wife soothed. "Arnold and I can take care of the store. You always wanted him to come into the business, so that ought to please you—"

"As long as I'm there to watch him!"

"And Dr. Rankin said maybe things will straighten out."

"What about that, Doctor?" asked Lubin. "What are the chances?"

Dr. Rankin looked uncomfortable. "I don't know. This has never happened before. All we can do is hope."

"Hope, nothing!" Stone stormed. "I want to sue him. He had no right to go meddling around and turn me upside down. Any jury would give me a quarter of a million!"

"I'm no millionaire, Mr. Stone," said the doctor.

"But the hospital has money. We'll sue him and the trustees."

There was a pause while the attorney thought. "I'm afraid we wouldn't have a case, Mr. Stone." He went on more rapidly as Stone sat up, shivering, to argue loudly. "It was an emergency operation. Any surgeon would have had to operate. Am I right, Dr. Rankin?"

The doctor explained what would have happened if he had not removed the pressure on the brain, resulting from the concussion, and the danger that the bone splinter, if not extracted, might have gone on traveling and caused possible paralysis or death.

"That would be better than this," said Stone.

"But medical ethics couldn't allow him to let you die," Lubin objected. "He was doing his duty. That's point one."

"Mr. Lubin is absolutely right, Edgar," said Mrs. Stone.

"There, you see?" screamed her husband. "Everybody's right but me! Will you get her out of here before I have a stroke?"

"Her interests are also involved," Lubin pointed out. "Point two is that the emergency came first, the after-effects couldn't be known or considered."

Dr. Rankin brightened. "Any operation involves risk, even the excising of a corn. I had to take those risks."

"*You* had to take them?" Stone scoffed. "All right, what are you leading up to, Lubin?"

"We'd lose," said the attorney.

Stone subsided, but only for a moment. "So we'll lose. But if we sue, the publicity would ruin him. I want to sue!"

"For what, Edgar dear?" his wife persisted. "We'll have a hard enough time managing. Why throw good money after bad?"

"Why didn't I marry a woman who'd take my side, even

when I'm wrong?" moaned Stone. "Revenge, that's what. And he won't be able to practice, so he'll have time to find out if there's a cure . . . and at no charge, either! I won't pay him another cent!"

The doctor stood up eagerly. "But I'm willing to see what can be done right now. And it wouldn't cost you anything, naturally."

"What do you mean?" Stone challenged suspiciously.

"If I were to perform another operation, I'll be able to see which nerves were involved. There's no need to go into the technical side right now, but it is possible to connect nerves. Of course, there are a good many, which complicates matters, especially since the splinter went through several layers—"

Lubin pointed a lawyer's impaling finger at him. "Are you offering to attempt to correct the injury—gratis?"

"Certainly. I mean to say, I'll do my absolute best. But keep in mind, please, that there is no medical precedent."

The attorney, however, was already questioning Stone and his wife. "In view of the fact that we have no legal grounds whatever for suit, does this offer of settlement satisfy your claim against him?"

"Oh, yes!" Mrs. Stone cried.

Her husband hesitated for a while, clearly tempted to take the opposite position out of habit. "I guess so," he reluctantly agreed.

"Well, then it's in your hands, Doctor," said Lubin.

Dr. Rankin buzzed excitedly for the nurse. "I'll have him prepared for surgery right away."

"It better work this time," warned Stone, clutching a handful of ice cubes to warm his fingers.

Stone came to foggily. He didn't know it, but he had given the anesthetist a bewildering problem, which finally had been solved by using fumes of aromatic spirits of ammonia. The four blurred figures around the bed seemed to be leaning precariously toward him.

"Pop!" said Arnold. "Look, he's coming out of it! Pop!"

"Speak to me, Edgar dear," Mrs. Stone beseeched.

Lubin said, "See how he is, Doctor."

"He's fine," the doctor insisted heartily, his usual bedside manner evidently having returned. "He must be—the blinds

are open and he's not complaining that it's dark or that he's cold." He leaned over the bed. "How are we feeling, Mr. Stone?"

It took a minute or two for Stone to move his swollen tongue enough to answer. He wrinkled his nose in disgust.

"What smells purple?" he demanded.

JUDITH MERRIL

A few writers have made their reputations on a single book; but the number who have done so on one short story is very nearly zero. Nevertheless, within a matter of weeks after her first published story appeared in Astounding Science Fiction, Judith Merril was one of the most talked about and uniformly popular writers in the science-fiction field. Its name was That Only a Mother; *it's a lovely and horrifying little piece, and included editing two anthologies* (Shot in the Dark—BANTAM—*and* Beyond Human Ken—RANDOM HOUSE), *the two Cyril Judd novels in collaboration with C. M. Kornbluth, aforementioned, and one of the few science-fiction novels that can fairly be called a critical success:* Shadow on the Hearth (DOUBLEDAY). *For one more from Miss Merril's agile typewriter, look below to . . .*

So Proudly We Hail

. . . at the twilight's last gleaming . . .

Great gray plain of poured concrete, level and bare, save for the network of construction at the center. There, ensnared in wood and metal, shadow-shrouded, the clumsy bottom of the tapered rocket rested on the Earth. Far above, the nose pierced the thin air, a bloody beacon in the sunset.

A spiral ramp curved out from the high loading port, sweeping across the concrete to where the human builders of the spacebird lived and worked: twelve hollow cubes poured from the same concrete on which they stood.

Behind one lighted window, scattered groups of men and women lingered over the evening meal. They drummed their

fingers, and shifted nervously between each other and the lurid light outside. They talked in quick soft voices, laughed too loud; sipped steaming coffee, or bit into bread and meat that could not satisfy the hungers they were feeling.

. . . in the rocket's red glare . . .

The words kept running through her head, absurdly appropriate, two solid centuries after they were written by a man who also had to wait till dawn. The old words hummed in her head, replacing the others—the ones she'd saved up for tonight. The ones she had to speak, soon, *now*:

"I guess I better tell you now."

In the wall mirror, Sue could see her own lips form the words, making precise movements against the set mask of her face. The careful mask of civilized conformity, red-and-white satin out of jars and boxes that could hide the pallor of fear and the blush of desire, both. She could see the words, but she couldn't hear them. She had no way of telling whether she spoke aloud, or whether the shapes in the mirror were only an echo of the intention in her mind.

He didn't hear. In the mirror she could see him too, his head turned from her to look out the window, watching the metal monster where it waited, crouched to spring at dawn.

He doesn't even know I'm here.

The thought came bitterly, perversely reassuring. She gulped at too-hot coffee, seeing over the rim of the cup the familiar thrusting angle of his shoulder, the slight backward tilt of his head.

But he'd know if I wasn't here, she reassured herself, and the coffee was bitter in her mouth.

"I guess I better tell you now," she said again, and this time she knew she spoke aloud. She could *feel* her mouth moving to make the words: the lips, tongue, teeth, jaw, muscles of the cheek, working habitual patterns of speech beneath the mask. "I guess I better not wait any longer," she said, and watched him start to turn, reluctantly, back toward her.

"Sure, Baby. What is it?"

She knew the suppressed impatience of that tone as she knew, intimately, every sound his mouth could make and every shape it had. His face was in profile, and she saw the pushed-out firmness of the lower lip that could completely hide the sensitivity of the upper; the stubborn set of jaw that

made you forget how quickly the forehead wrinkled with trouble or tension. When she looked into his eyes, she knew what she would find there, too: a veil of tenderness not quite able to conceal the glitter of irritation.

"What is it, Baby?" he asked. "What's the matter?"

She shook her head. "Drink your coffee," she said, grotesquely wifelike. "You won't get any coffee on Mars, you know."

"Huh?" He shook his head once sharply, like a man immersed in sleep or fog. His eyes opened wide, and he looked down at the coffee cup with astonishment; shrugged and picked it up; sipped once, symbolically, not to disagree; then put it down to look away again.

Sudden brilliance flashed through the window, and she turned too, watching over his shoulder while the lights came on outside, to play through the night on the monster. She looked at the man, and past him, to the embodied dream outside, trying to see what he saw, to suffer the same bewitchment. But the dream was his. It was no longer, even by sharing, hers.

. . . o'er the ramparts we watched . . .

On the ramp, a gang of workmen was loading the last stack of crates into the ship, hauling and pushing, making wide gestures, shouting to each other in a last burst of eager energy.

Man and wife, they watched the scene together, and fascination held them both. It seemed impossible that he could sit there, close enough to touch, and still not know how great a distance the rocket had already made between them.

He was hypnotized, she thought, spellbound by the mesmeric movements of the work gang and the flashing lights outside.

He stared out the window, not thinking or feeling, not wanting to know, not *letting* her tell him. Whatever it was, it was nothing. Nothing that mattered. The rocket outside was proof enough of that: a symbol of rightness triumphant; a tower of silver that would roar skyward on bolts of lightning at dawn, carrying five hundred motes of humanity beyond blackness to the planet Mars. Married couples, mostly, like Sue and himself. Healthy and skilled, trained for the job over years of preparing; big men and big women with brawn and

brains and courage and a sense of humor in time of adversity. The kind of people to build a frontier in the sky and make it thrive.

He had spent his whole life preparing himself for this. His whole life, and the last five years of it with Sue. She'd wanted it as he did . . .

Or had she?

Face it, jerk! He felt her eyes on the back of his head, and had to struggle not to turn around. She was scared, that's all. Worried. Natural enough.

A woman gets that way, that's all. He knew what she was thinking. No sense talking about it, not any more. They'd be in it soon enough, and she'd see it wasn't as bad as her fears had built it up to be.

Or else she'd turn out to be right. It *would* be bad. A lot of it was bound to be. Okay! Why drag it out? Why make it worse before it happened?

If he turned around now, they'd go all through it again. About the first two expeditions, and what could have happened to them. About the mosses and lichens and red hills of Mars. About living in steel cubicles and breathing through an oxygen mask; Then later, with luck, living in pressure chambers instead. About all the dangers and trials and troubles she could dream up.

He wasn't going to talk about it any more. Not now. This one last night to get through, and then they'd be on board, and once it started, she'd get over worrying. They'd be too busy to worry.

One more night. Nothing at all, after two months. Two months of waiting since they got their OK slips. Nine weeks of watching the strain around her mouth pull her lips into angry lines; of meeting her eyes too seldom; of hearing her speak her love too often. Of talking and reassuring her about the worries she never voiced and wouldn't admit to.

It's your own damn fault! he told himself again. Just once, he'd laughed at her fears. A long time ago, but she didn't forget. She wouldn't, *couldn't*, admit it any more.

His eyes flickered sideways, to the mirror, took in the stiff mask of her face, and flickered back to the window, to the workmen finishing their job up high on the ramp. The contrast was funny, he thought. So funny it tied knots in his belly, and made his eyes burn for wanting to laugh.

. . . oh, say can you see? . . .

Dust whirled in slow eddies of illumination around the blast-revetments that girded the rocket's base. An Earth-breeze stirred the dust, an Earth-breeze that had wandered out of the Puget Sound, across Wyoming, and into Kansas where the concrete plain buried acres of flatland. The breeze sifted faint dust from the prairie all around, on the ramp and the bales and on the work gang that handled them. It whispered through the storm fence, and along the street between the concrete cubes into the cafeteria where they sat.

Sue felt the breeze on her face, and covered the cheek with the palm of her hand to keep the cool, to hold it for some future need.

But the need is his, she thought. *The breeze will still be mine tomorrow.* The breeze and trees and grass, and the warm sun on ocean beaches that they'd known together. All hers, now.

"Will!" she said desperately. The name was a prayer.

He groped behind him for her hand. "What is it, Baby?" he said to the air in front of him, to the window, the rocket, the lights outside. He didn't turn around. "Something wrong?" he said.

Yes! The sudden wave of fury took her by surprise. It shocked her body, stiffening her spine; making her toes curl so her feet dug against the floor; winding her hands into tight fists under the table. It snapped her head back, so that when the shock-wave reached him and he turned to her at last, smiling a little sheepishly, her eyes were flashing straight into his.

And there it was again.

I love you, Will! The sudden sharp intake of breath; the reaching-forward feeling in her arms, spreading down through her whole body; the total sense of physical well-being, taking over after the tightness of the anger, that was gone now as quickly as it had come. Five years: five years of closeness, day after day, and it was still the same, whenever they returned to each other from even the most subtle of departures.

"I'm sorry, Baby," he said. "I guess I wasn't really listening." He sounded tired, as if it took great effort to say so little. But he was trying, anyhow. "What's the matter, Sue?"

"I love you, Will."

His eyes mapped her face, narrowing. There was a tightening at the corner of his jaw. "Why say it like that?" he asked finally. "You sound like it's something to say at a funeral."

"Can you think of a better thing to say at a funeral?"

"You're in a hell of a mood!"

Oh, you noticed, did you? She almost said the words out loud, but the song saved her, still running through her head. . . . *through the perilous fight* . . .

"Sorry," she said.

Dismayed, he watched the stars film her eyes.

"What are you crying about?" He hadn't meant to growl like that.

"I'm not." She dabbed at her eyes.

"All right," he said. "Okay. Then there's nothing to worry about, I guess. Everything's just peachy. Hunky-dory." He was turning back to the window, when the loudspeaker over the door coughed and croaked at them officiously:

"All colonists report for final briefing and examination at nine o'clock. *All colonists.* White-slip holders, and yellow-slip reserve list, report to the Ad Building in forty-five minutes. Bring all papers and personal effects. *All* colonists *and* reserves, nine o'clock in the Ad Building. There will be a warning siren at eight fifty-five."

The speaker coughed once more. Will turned back to his wife and took her hand in his. Now, if ever, he could pull her back with him, into the realization of the dream. Now . . .

Her hand was cold in his. He tried to squeeze warmth into it, to let his own thought and hope flow into her through their twined fingers. For just a moment he thought he had succeeded. Then the speaker cleared its throat again.

"Announcement: Provisions have been made for the accommodation of relatives of all colonists during the night. All authorized visitors who wish to remain until take-off may register for bedspace . . ."

He didn't hear the rest of it, because she pulled her hand away, suddenly, jerkily, and he understood what he wouldn't yet say even to himself in words.

"There isn't much more time," she said, in a strange tinny voice.

Forty-five minutes, he thought. Forty-four now . . . three.

"What's *that* supposed to mean?" he demanded. *Make her say it now.*

"Well, they'll be . . . the announcement . . ." She blinked her eyes, trying to dry them. "They said nine o'clo . . ."

"I heard it. All right, Sue, what is it? What do you want to say?"

Her eyes, suddenly clear, were wide and warm. *Big brown eyes a man could drown in.* Looking straight at him, the way she always used to. No faking now. And love . . . crazy love you couldn't doubt when she looked like that.

"I'm not going," she said.

"Yeah. That's what I figured." He felt nothing at all, not inside or out. He could see his hand still holding hers, but he couldn't feel the curl of his own fingers, or the skin of hers. "I'm glad you got around to telling me," he said, and found he could still manipulate his muscles. He disentangled his hand, and pushed back his chair. The legs scraped on the linoleum with nerve-splitting shrillness.

She was watching him, her eyes still wide, but baffled now.

"Where are you . . . ?"

"Out," he told her. "I want to take a walk."

"All right." She started to get up, and he had to hold his left arm, the one near her, tight against his side to keep from shoving at her, forcing her back into the seat.

"Look, Sue," he said very evenly, casually, "I want to be alone for a while."

"But I . . ."

"I'll be back. Okay? I'll see you."

He walked off quickly, before she could answer, or make up her mind about sitting or standing. Walked out of the bright-lit room into the dusk, and paused a moment on the steps to light his pipe. *Smoke your pipe, Will,* he jeered at himself, mimicking. *You won't have any smoking oxygen on Mars!*

He snorted his scorn, and strode down the steps, onto the ramp, up toward the storm fence. The breeze was cooler now, and it cooled his skin, but not the inferno raging inside him.

He wanted to hate her. He wanted to rend and tear and bellow.

Why? He twisted the blade of agony in the wound. *How*

long? How long had she lied and cheated and tricked him? How long since she made up her mind?

No need to ask that; he knew how long. The night they celebrated; the night the white slips came. But—*why?*

Why did she have to lie at all? Why make a mockery of everything they'd had before by this last cheap pretense? *How could she?*

. . . and the angry red stare, the words bursting in air . . . the song had become a part of her by now, changing itself to suit her needs . . . *gave proof through the night that our love was still there . . .*

She tried to get up. She wanted to go after him, run after him, explain it all to him, but her legs were rubbery and useless. She dropped back into the chair, and sat there, helpless, till she heard a voice over her shoulder.

"Feeling sick, lady?" the busboy asked.

"Oh. No," she said. "No, I'm all right. Thank you." She stood up. Her legs worked all right now. She smiled mechanically at the busboy. "Sorry. I guess you want to get the table cleared."

"We're getting ready to close up," he said. "I can get a doctor if you . . ."

"I'm just fine," she said. "I'm sorry."

She walked out steadily, and stood on the steps, shivering. In all the darkness around her the only thing she could see was the area of garish brilliance centered on the rocket. It hurt her eyes, and she turned from it till gradually her vision acclimated to the pink-fringed grayness that had followed the gory sunset. She could make out shapes of other buildings, and then the near part of the ramp; bits of the storm fence; and finally a few scattered figures.

Which one was Will she did not know. If she'd known, she wasn't sure any more that she'd have gone to find him.

Will! she pleaded, *Will, come back! I haven't told you yet. Will—please!*

He said he knew. Maybe he thought he knew. But he didn't. And maybe it was best that way, still. Maybe it was best for him never to know. To go hating her, as he did now. To leave without regrets.

You're going to Mars, Will. Alone. I can't go, Will. Don't you see? They wouldn't let me go. They turned me down . . .

But he didn't see. He couldn't. Because she hadn't told him. The words had deserted her. The words, the shining words, drilled daily for two months to march past her lips in shining ranks tonight; the treacherous, useless words had abandoned her in her hour of need.

She giggled, shivering again, wondering what to do. Silly to stand here in the cold, thinking melodramatic thoughts.

But if she left, he might not find her when he came back. The light went out in the cafeteria window, and she stood there, undecided. She opened her handbag, and reached down to the bottom, fingering the pink slip under the compact and the handkerchief. Too dark to read here if she took it out, but she didn't need to look at it. It was burned into memory behind her eyelids.

"Susan Barth," it said in neat typed letters on the mimeoed form. "3-45-A-7821. Disqualified. Medical Requ 44-B-3. Calcified node. Left lung."

That was all. Two lines of type on a pink slip, and the end of marriage, the end of plans and hopes and all that life meant to her.

And now it was ending again. A different end: the end of loving and lying; of hoping against hope; of hating. And waiting. For her, that is.

For him, for Will, it was the end of waiting only, and the beginning of the dream. The beginning of hate, maybe, too.

They'll tell him, she promised herself. *They'll tell him later, on the rocket. Or after they land.* It wasn't as if he'd go through life not knowing. He'd find out. No need to tell him now. It would be easier for him this way.

She went down one more step, and let herself look at the rocket. The workmen were still there. The metal dragon swallowed all they fed it, stolid, indifferent, letting itself be stuffed, for now, with bits and pieces of paraphernalia, oddments of fiber and metal, of glass and wood. But all the while it waited, knowing the feast that was coming soon, brooding and hungering for the living flesh that would feed it this night. Resting and planning for the moment of dawn when, with its belly full, it would belch fire and vanish from the earth.

. . . and the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air . . .

No sense waiting. It was better not to see him. She stood there, staring and shivering.

The wire of the storm fence was tearing his fingers and his hands. He made himself relax his clutching grip.

Coward! he raged futilely. *Cheat and coward!*

"Nervous, buddy?"

He whirled, his torn hands clenching into welcome fists, the muscles of his arms literally aching for trouble.

"Maybe," he said tightly.

It was one of the colonists, a man he knew by sight but not by name; a stocky, sandy-haired character with too many teeth in his smile. "Came out to get away from the wife a minute," the man said cheerfully. "Yakkety yakkety yak, that's all I get. And every other word about what a tough time we're in for. Your wife like that?"

"I—haven't got a wife."

"No kidding? I didn't know they were taking any bachelors. If I'd of known that . . . Clara and I got married because both of us wanted to go."

"That's tough!"

"Yeah—*Say!* what'd you mean by that crack?"

"Beat it, Shorty," Will said coldly. "Unless you're looking for trouble." His knuckles itched with the urge to erase some of the expanse of tooth from the man's idiotic smile.

Shorty flushed, hitched up his belt. "I could use a little," he offered, "if you got some to spare."

They faced each other stonily for a few seconds. "A-a-a-h—skip it!" Will said, and turned back to stare through the fence again.

"Dame trouble?" Shorty asked, too sympathetically.

Will shrugged.

"That's too bad." The other guy was going to go when he was good and ready, not just because Will told him to. "Another guy, huh?" The sympathy was laid on now, too obviously. But even Shorty seemed to know when he'd gone far enough.

Determinedly unresponsive, Will suffered himself to be jovially slapped on the back, and listened gratefully as he heard the man's footsteps recede into the distance. When he looked around again, he could no longer find the lighted square of window that had marked the cafeteria building.

Just a huddle of squared-off silhouettes against the dark gray sky. In the center, on top of the Administration Building, a clock glowed a warning.

Twenty-five minutes till nine.

He had to go back. He told her he'd come back.

Another guy? Well, what about it? Why not? *Another guy!* It was the only possible answer, and he'd needed a grinning ape like Shorty to show it to him! Two months of worrying and wondering, noticing all the little changes, all the things that weren't quite *right.* Telling himself she was frightened. Telling himself he was wrong. Keeping the knowledge just below the surface of his mind. It spewed up now in all its rottenness, leaving him weak and clean.

It was the only possible explanation.

Will knocked his cold pipe against a fence-post, and put it back in his pocket. He considered slowly, surprisingly calm, what he wanted to do with the rest of the time. Nineteen minutes more, the clock told him.

Was she waiting, still?

Did he care?

He felt cool—indifferent or numb. It didn't matter which. He'd promised to come back. What difference did a promise make, to *her?* Another man—was she with him now, sharing the lovely joke? Telling him she loved him? Telling him she was free at last?

Will turned his back on the storm fence and the rocket. He paced slowly the hundred yards down the ramp. He didn't want to see her. He wanted to tell her that he understood. If there had been any emotion in him at all, he'd have wanted to denounce her, shame her, spit on her; what he might have felt now was not anger, but a bitter cold contempt.

Only he felt nothing.

. . . Oh, say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave . . .

The song still ran insanely through her head, and now she knew why, remembering the moment of getting the envelope, of opening it, of looking and seeing the two slips of paper, his and hers—white and pink. White for success and pink for failure. The song had been playing on the radio then, while she stood in the middle of the kitchen and stared at the incongruous slips of paper that didn't match. The first

time ever that things hadn't somehow fitted together for her and Will.

Bit by bit, while the song played through and finished, and somebody started to make a speech, the meaning of it had penetrated to the vital centers of her consciousness.

I'm not going . . . the statement was complete at last, the lesson fully learned . . . *I can't go.*

She didn't show Will the slips that night. She had to think it through first, decide what to do, how to tell him. Because as soon as the lesson of failure was thoroughly learned for herself, another piece of knowledge took shape within her.

If she told him, he'd stay too. He'd stay at home, and go out to stand in the yard on starry nights. He'd stare at the sky, smoking his pipe, the way he always did—the way he always had—but it would be different. He would stand alone, and his hand would not touch her arm, nor would she be with him. And when he came back into the house, his eyes would avoid her, and he would hate.

You're going, Will, she promised in her heart when she understood that much. *It's the thirst of your soul, and I shall see that you drink, though it drains me!*

Well, she was entitled to a little melodrama in her private thoughts, and the phrase gave her strength to act.

Next day she checked with the medics. "Calcified node." Just a little hardened-over spot that would never give her any trouble on Earth—but could kill her on Mars.

"I don't care," she told them, pleading.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Barth. You understand we can't use passenger space on the rocket for anyone who isn't as fit as possible to survive the rigors of colonization . . ."

They were kindly, sympathetic, understanding—but firm.

By that night, she had the duplicate slip ready—the one that wasn't good enough to get her on the ship, but looked enough like Will's to convince him if he didn't question it. She showed him both, and they went out for dinner and got a little tight together, *celebrating!*

After he was asleep, she crept out of bed and went outside to stare at the sky herself. She sat on the soft grass and cried; and when he woke up too, and found her missing, and came out looking for her, he thought he understood. He carried her back inside, and was gay and tender and funny and strong. They made cocoa in the kitchen while he talked

about the dangers they would face together, making a joke of them, reassuring her, promising all his strength and support to help her through.

That was the last time she cried. After that she schooled herself, night and day, to feel nothing but her love for Will, to do nothing, say nothing, *be* nothing but a perfect living lie designed to give him what he wanted if it killed them both!

And now at last it was safe to tell him. Safe because it was too late for him to change his mind. He wouldn't stay back now.

But now he didn't want to hear. And maybe—

Maybe it was better that way.

Where is he? Why didn't he come back? He *said* he would . . . For the first time she thought: *I may never see him again!* The words had no meaning in her mind, but she doubled over as though she'd been hit in the middle.

It's better this way, she told herself, straightening up painfully. *Better for him . . . "Will!* Here I am!"

He'd almost walked right past her. "Will . . ."

"Oh . . . hi!"

Casual. Just like that. As if it was any night, and he'd gone for a walk. As if there was still a tomorrow.

For him, there was. *I gave it to you, Will. Give me credit for that at least . . .* And immediately, she was ashamed of the thought. What difference did blame or credit make now?

"I guess we might as well say goodbye." His face was a cold stone carving in the dark. "No sense in you hanging around till dawn," he said. "You told them, didn't you?" he asked. "I mean, I take it I'm the last to know?"

All right, he was mad. She didn't have to fight back. "I'd rather stay," she said, forcing the words through the dryness of her mouth. "But we can say goodbye now if you'd rather."

"I would."

He grinned, a tightstretching of lips across teeth that gave away the bravado of his nonchalance completely. "So long, Sue," he said, and one corner of his mouth quirked up. "It's been nice to know you."

He put his hands lightly on her shoulders, leaned forward and kissed her once, chastely, on the forehead.

Oh, no! Not this way, Will! Oh, no! Her own hurt, anger, sorrow faded to vanishing beside what she now understood

of his. "Will, please," she said steadily. "Listen to me a minute. I want to tell you . . ."

"Maybe you better not, Sue."

She swallowed slowly, moistened the caked dryness of her lips, blinked back the burning in her eyes, and started again.

"I think it's better if I do. I'm . . . I was dis . . ."

"Maybe I don't want to hear it!" he exploded; and she saw his face tighten, his jaw tremble; felt his fingers bite into her shoulders as he struggled to maintain a semblance of calm.

Silence again. Frozen silence while the narrowed slits of his blue eyes locked with her wide brown ones.

"I . . ." She opened her mouth, but it was no longer possible to make the words come out. At last she managed a sort of croaking parody of speech: "Will, I . . ."

"Skip it!" he said, and then with sudden gentleness: "It's all right, Baby. I understand." A spasm of bitterness twisted his mouth, belying his words; and he said again fiercely, "Just skip it, that's all!" Then the hands on her shoulders slid down her back, and his aching hunger crushed her too close for a breath to pass between them. For a moment, too close even for her own breath to leave or enter. But what need of breath, with his mouth covering hers, and the passion of a lost lifetime compressed into one everlasting moment?

He understands! For the little spell of the embrace she believed it, *wanted* to believe it. But as his arms released her, some cooler portion of her mind stood back in helpless laughter, mocking the kiss, the passion, her will to believe, and his stubborn refusal to listen, all at once. *He understands!* What did he think he understood? He had no way to know the truth. His anger proved he didn't know it.

I hate you! she thought, as she shifted her weight to regain her balance. *I hate your wonderful guts for wanting to go so much!*

"All right," she said quietly. "I'll skip it," and she smiled for a last time. This was a good way to say goodbye. The best she could have hoped for. No need to add anything now. He knew, he *had* to know after that kiss, that whatever her reason was, she loved him still and always. She watched him whirl around and stride away, and realized that she was

going too; a part of her at least would be with him forever, wherever he went.

Six angry steps away, he turned back long enough to say: "And tell him for me, he better be worth it!"

Line up here. Get your papers stamped. Shots. Another line. Over here now. Final phys. ex.: no communicable diseases. Line up here now. Got your slips? Strip again. Standard issue coveralls. Clothing to be deposited in these containers, will be returned to next of kin. Shots. Another paper stamped. Final psych. ex.:

"You see, it's a bit unusual, Mr. Barth, for a husband or wife to decide to go ahead when the other's been disqualified."

Smile. No, that's not right. Just act the way the man expects you to. Think it out later. Line up here. Stamp that paper! Hold that line!

". . . disqualified!"

They were all through now, and an hour to go before take-off. Someone came around with coffee and some pills. Sedative? Stimulant? He didn't know. He swallowed the pills, gulped the coffee.

Disqualified?

But she never said . . . she didn't . . . she had a white slip just like his.

He stood up, to go find someone who would know, and remembered the psychofficer's words and doubtful attitude. If he asked any questions now, if they found out he hadn't known . . .

But he had to know.

Disqualified? What for? There was nothing wrong with her. Wrong . . . something wrong . . . *what was it?*

There must be someone around who'd know. He couldn't go if . . . *couldn't go?* But if she needed him . . . ?

You, you stupid little fool! he thought. *What did you think you were doing?*

"I love you, Will," she'd said. And he'd snarled back at her.

Maybe he could see her now. Maybe she'd stayed over after all. Maybe—somebody around here would know.

. . . whose broad stripes and bright stars . . .

The hands of the clock were stripes, and the numbers were stars, and so she couldn't tell the time, and didn't have to know how long she had yet to wait. She edged over to her side on the narrow cot, trying not to make it squeak, not wanting to disturb the women on the other cots in the big room.

Are they asleep? she wondered. Or were they, too, turning over soundlessly, staring out the window at the clock on the Ad Building next door.

It was nineteen minutes after four. She must have slept a while after all. She remembered now, the roman candles and flaring sky-rockets of her dream, and right after that remembered his words again: *". . . tell him from me . . ."*

She couldn't lie still any longer. She got up, walked the length of the room on tiptoe, barefoot, carrying her clothes. There was a bathroom at the other end. She went in, and closed the door, locking herself in with the sink and mirror and the blinding overhead light. She got into her clothes, rumpled and wrinkled from lying on the floor where she'd dropped them in the dark, a few hours ago.

Cold water on her face, and she was used to the light by then. The mirror was shock enough to wake her up. She fished in her bag for the compact, and felt the pink slip under it, and what difference did it make? She wouldn't see him, not to talk to. He wouldn't see her at all.

But if she went out now, and got there first, she could stand right near the gate. She knew which one they'd use. She'd almost be able to touch him as he went past.

Almost an hour till dawn. Probably other people had the same idea, though. She went out quickly, walked past the cafeteria where the light was on again, and people were drinking coffee, eating quick breakfasts.

It wasn't too late. She found a place with the other early-waiters, near the gate, and edged forward every time she saw an opening. By the time the band showed up and began tuning instruments, she was right next to the gate itself. When they started to play, she had to check the beginnings of hysteria. Everybody else started singing, so she sang too:

"Oh, say, can you see, by the dawn's early light . . ."

Only it wasn't dawn yet. Not quite. When it was, the monstrous ship would be gone. It would be full of people, then, and Will would be one of them. Part of the human

sacrifice that would slake the dragon's thirst, and make it go away . . .

The priests were coming now, herding the sacrifice along. Priests in business suits: presidents and professors and newspapermen.

Right behind them came the captives, all alike, five hundred heads, five hundred sets of arms and legs, all in the same white uniform, marching unmanacled, willingly, to their doom.

They marched past her, right under her nose, and some of them were smiling. Some were cowards, and they cried. She felt most sympathetic to the ones who just walked deadpan straight ahead.

A few of them looked at her, or right through her, as if they sought some other face or figure in the crowd that pressed behind her. One of them opened his mouth when he walked by. He seemed to speak, or try to speak.

His name was Will. He had seen her; he had said something. He . . .

He doesn't know! He hates me! He thinks . . .

She couldn't remember what it was he thought. Something bad. *Awful.*

There was something she had to tell him, explain to him, to make it all right. *Something he said to me . . . what was it?*

What did he try to say when he walked past? She closed her eyes, remembered the face, the shape of the mouth, tried not to hear the sounds around her, or the band, or anything; just to hear what he'd been saying with his mouth that special shape.

She knew the shape; knew each and every shape his mouth could make. The word was "Baby." Another word was "love." But that was wrong. She was putting the shapes together wrong, because he hated her now.

Faint edge of light over the horizon, and the band was still, and one of the priests intoned a prayer.

And a shrill siren screamed, and screeched again, and the air was full of thunder, and people shouting.

"Stand back!"

"Get back, there, you!"

"Blastoff . . . zero . . . *Back!*"

They pulled at her arms and legs, and somebody grabbed

at her middle too, but they couldn't hold her. She was free now. Racing forward, running hard, before they could catch her.

They weren't following any more.

They were afraid, she thought. *Poor fools, afraid!* They thought it was better to stay behind and live. They didn't know. Maybe for them it was better, poor fools, poor dears, let them live.

She had to let him know. Had to find out. What did he say, she say, could say, would say?

Baby . . . love . . .

"I love you, Will!" she whispered as the blast rent the air, and concrete shook under her feet with the final savagery of the dragon's pouncing departure. Then flame washed through her, and she fell on the trembling ground, and lay still, watching, looking straight up to Will, who could see her, surely, through the flames on which he stood.

The last thought she had was blessed awareness: *they'll tell him. He'll find out.*

And the last thing she heard was the end of the song: *". . . of the free, and the home of the brave."*

RAY BRADBURY

Editors, like executioners, are properly faceless and anonymous shadows, most useful when they are least seen; but this editor begs the indulgence of the reader to be for the moment obtrusive and to reminisce. When we were all very much younger and the atom bomb was still in the science-fiction magazines where it belonged, a story came in to the science-fiction magazine which then employed me, from a young science-fiction fan in California. It was a good story, and we bought it; what none of us knew at the time was that it was the First Ray Bradbury Science-Fiction Story. There have been a great many since, and at least two first-rate books: The Martian Chronicles *and* The Illustrated Man. *Which is only one of the reasons why I am proud to offer you . . .*

A Scent of Sarsaparilla

Mr. William Finch stood quietly in the dark and blowing attic all morning and afternoon for three days. For three days in late November, he stood alone, feeling the soft white flakes of Time falling out of the infinite cold steel sky, silently, softly, feathering the roof and powdering the eaves. He stood, eyes shut. The attic, wallowed in seas of wind in the long sunless days, creaked every bone and shook down ancient dusts from its beams and warped timbers and lathings. It was a mass of sighs and torments that ached all about him where he stood sniffing its elegant dry perfumes and feeling of its ancient heritages. Ah. Ah.

Listening, downstairs, his wife Cora could not hear him

walk or shift or twitch. She imagined she could only hear him breathe, slowly out and in, like a dusty bellows, alone up there in the attic, high in the windy house.

"Ridiculous," she muttered.

When he hurried down for lunch the third afternoon, he smiled at the bleak walls, the chipped plates, the scratched silverware, and even at his wife!

"What's all the excitement?" she demanded.

"Good spirits is all. Wonderful spirits!" he laughed. He seemed almost hysterical with joy. He was seething in a great warm ferment which, obviously, he had trouble concealing. His wife frowned.

"What's that *smell?*"

"Smell, smell, smell?" He jerked his graying head back and forth.

"Sarsaparilla." She sniffed suspiciously. *"That's* what it is!"

"Oh, it couldn't be!" His hysterical happiness stopped as quickly as if she'd switched him off. He seemed stunned, ill at ease, and suddenly very careful.

"Where did you go this morning?" she asked.

"You *know* I was cleaning the attic."

"Mooning over a lot of trash. I didn't hear a sound. Thought maybe you weren't in the attic at all. What's that?" She pointed.

"Well, now how did *those* get there?" he asked the world.

He peered down at the pair of black spring-metal bicycle clips that bound his thin pants cuffs to his bony ankles.

"Found them in the attic," he answered himself. "Remember when we got out on the gravel road in the early morning on our tandem bike, Cora, forty years ago, everything fresh and new?"

"If you don't finish that attic today, I'll come up and toss everything out myself."

"Oh, no," he cried. "I have everything the way I want it!"

She looked at him coldly.

"Cora," he said, eating his lunch, relaxing, beginning to enthuse again, "you know what attics are? They're Time Machines, in which old, dim-witted men like me can travel back forty years to a time when it was summer all year round and children raided ice wagons. Remember how it

tasted? You held the ice in your handkerchief. It was like sucking the flavor of linen and snow at the same time."

Cora fidgeted.

It's not impossible, he thought, half closing his eyes, trying to see it and build it. Consider an attic. Its very atmosphere is Time. It deals in other years, the cocoons and chrysalises of another age. All the bureau drawers are little coffins where a thousand yesterdays lie in state. Oh, the attic's a dark, friendly place, full of Time, and if you stand in the very center of it, straight and tall, squinting your eyes, and thinking and thinking, and smelling the Past, and putting out your hands to feel of Long Ago, why, it . . .

He stopped, realizing he had spoken some of this aloud. Cora was eating rapidly.

"Well, wouldn't it be interesting," he asked the part in her hair, "if Time Travel *could* occur? And what more logical, proper place for it to happen than in an attic like *ours,* eh?"

"It's not always summer back in the old days," she said. "It's just your crazy memory. You remember all the good things and forget the bad. It wasn't always summer."

"Figuratively speaking, Cora, it was."

"Wasn't."

"What I mean is this," he said, whispering excitedly, bending forward to see the image he was tracing on the blank dining room wall. "If you rode your unicycle carefully between the years, balancing, hands out, careful, careful, if you rode from year to year, spent a week in 1909, a day in 1900, a month or a fortnight somewhere else, 1905, 1898, you could stay with summer the rest of your life."

"Unicycle?"

"You know, one of those tall chromium one-wheeled bikes, single-seaters the performers ride in vaudeville shows, juggling. Balance, true balance, it takes, not to fall off, to keep the bright objects flying in the air, beautiful, up and up, a light, a flash, a sparkle, a bomb of brilliant colors, red, yellow, blue, green, white, gold; all the Junes and Julys and Augusts that ever were, in the air, about you, at once, hardly touching your hands, flying, suspended, and you, smiling, among them. Balance, Cora, *balance.*"

"Blah," she said, "blah, blah." And added, "Blah!"

He climbed the long cold stairs to the attic, shivering.

There were nights in winter when he woke with porcelain

in his bones, with cool chimes blowing in his ears, with frost piercing his nerves in a raw illumination like white cold fireworks exploding and showering down in flaming snows upon a silent land deep in his subconscious. He was cold, cold, cold, and it would take a score of endless summers, with their green torches and bronze suns to thaw him free of his wintry sheath. He was a great tasteless chunk of brittle ice, a snowman put to bed each night, full of confetti dreams, tumbles of crystal and flurry. And there lay winter outside forever, a great leaden winepress smashing down its colorless lid of sky, squashing them all like so many grapes, mashing color and sense and being from everyone, save the children who fled on skis and toboggans down mirrored hills which reflected the crushing iron shield that hung lower above town each day and every eternal night.

Mr. Finch lifted the attic trapdoor. But here, *here.* A dust of summer sprang up about him. The attic dust simmered with heat left over from other seasons. Quietly, he shut the trapdoor down.

He began to smile.

The attic was quiet as a thundercloud before a storm. On occasion, Cora Finch heard her husband murmuring, murmuring, high up there.

At five in the afternoon, singing *My Isle of Golden Dreams,* Mr. Finch flipped a crisp new straw hat in the kitchen door. "Boo!"

"Did you sleep all afternoon?" snapped his wife. "I called up at you four times and no answer."

"Sleep?" He considered this and laughed, then put his hand quickly over his mouth. "Well, I guess I did."

Suddenly she saw him. "My God!" she cried, "where'd you get that *coat?*"

He wore a red candy-stripe coat, a high white, choking collar and ice-cream pants. You could smell the straw hat like a handful of fresh hay fanned in the air.

"Found 'em in an old trunk."

She sniffed. "Don't smell of mothballs. Look brand-new."

"Oh, no!" he said hastily. He looked stiff and uncomfortable as she eyed his costume.

"This isn't a summer stock company," she said.

"Can't a fellow have a little fun?"

"That's all you've ever had," she slammed the oven door. "While I've stayed home and knitted, Lord knows, you've been down at the store helping ladies' elbows in and out doors."

He refused to be bothered. "Cora." He looked deep into the crackling straw hat. "Wouldn't it be nice to take a Sunday walk the way we used to do, with your silk parasol and your long dress whishing along, and sit on those wire-legged chairs at the soda parlor and smell the drug store the way they used to smell? Why don't drug stores smell that way any more? And order two sarsaparillas for us, Cora, and then ride out in our 1910 Ford to Hannahan's Pier for a box-supper and listen to the brass band. How about it?"

"Supper's ready. Take that dreadful uniform off."

"If you could make a wish and take a ride on those oak-laned country roads like they had before cars started rushing, would you *do* it?" he insisted, watching her.

"Those old roads were dirty. We came home looking like Africans. Anyway," she picked up a sugar jar and shook it, "this morning I had forty dollars here. Now it's gone! Don't tell me you ordered those clothes from a costume house. They're brand-new—they didn't come from any trunk!"

"I—" he said.

She raved for half an hour, but he could not bring himself to say anything. The November wind shook the house and, as she talked, the snows of winter began to fall again in the cold steel sky.

"Answer me!" she cried. "Are you crazy, spending our money that way, on clothes you can't wear?"

"The attic—" he started to say.

She walked off and sat in the living room.

The snow was falling fast now and it was a cold dark November evening. She heard him climb up the stepladder, slowly, into the attic, into that dusty place of other years, into that black place of costumes and props and Time, into a world separate from this world below.

He closed the trapdoor down. The flashlight, snapped on, was company enough. Yes, here was all of Time compressed in a Japanese paper flower. At the touch of memory, everything would unfold into the clear water of the mind, in beautiful blooms, in spring breezes, larger than life. Each of the bureau drawers, slid forth, might contain aunts and cousins

and grandmamas, ermined in dust. Yes, Time was here. You could feel it breathing, an atmospheric instead of a mechanical clock.

Now the house below was as remote as another day in the past. He half-shut his eyes and looked and looked on every side of the waiting attic.

Here, in prismed chandelier, were rainbows and mornings and noons as bright as new rivers flowing endlessly back through time. His flashlight caught and flickered them alive, the rainbows leapt up to curve the shadows back with colors, with colors like plums and strawberries and concord grapes, with colors like cut lemons and the sky where the clouds drew off after storming and the blue was there. And the dust of the attic was incense, burning, and all of time burning, and all you needed do was peer into the flames. It was indeed a great machine of Time, this attic, he knew, he felt, he was sure, and if you touched prisms here, doorknobs there, plucked tassels, chimed crystals, swirled dust, punched trunk-hasps, and gusted the vox-humana of the old hearth-bellows until it puffed the soot of a thousand ancient fires into your eyes, if, indeed, you played this instrument, this warm machine of parts, if you fondled all of its bits and pieces, its levers and changers and movers, then, then, *then!*

He thrust out his hands to orchestrate, to conduct, to flourish. There was music in his head, in his mouth shut tight, and he played the great machine, the thunderously silent organ, bass, tenor, soprano, low, high, and at last, at last, a chord that shuddered him so that he had to shut his eyes!

About nine o'clock that night she heard him calling, "Cora!" She went upstairs. His head peered down at her from above, smiling at her. He waved his hat. "Goodbye, Cora."

"What do you mean?" she cried.

"I've thought it over for three days, and I'm saying goodbye."

"Come down out of there, you fool!"

"I drew five hundred dollars from the bank yesterday. I've been thinking about this. And then when *it* happened, well . . . Cora . . ." He shoved his eager hand down. "For the last time, will you come along with me?"

"In the attic? Hand down that stepladder, William Finch. I'll climb up there and run you out of that filthy place!"

"I'm going to Hannahan's Pier for a bowl of Clam Chowder," he said. "And I'm requesting the brass band to play *Moonlight Bay*. Oh, come on, Cora . . ." He motioned his extended hand.

She simply stared at his gentle, questioning face.

"Goodbye," he said.

He waved gently, gently. Then his face was gone, the straw hat was gone.

"William!" she screamed.

The attic was dark and silent.

Shrieking, she ran and got a chair and used it to groan her way up into the musty darkness. She flourished a flashlight. "William! William!"

The dark spaces were empty. A winter wind shook the house.

Then she saw the far west attic window, ajar.

She fumbled over to it. She hesitated, held her breath. Then, slowly, she opened it. The ladder was placed outside the window, leading down onto a porch roof.

She pulled back from the window.

Outside the opened frame the apple trees were in bloom, it was twilight of a summer day in July. Faintly, she heard explosions, firecrackers going off. She heard laughter and distant voices. Rockets burst in the warm air, softly, red, white, and blue, fading.

She slammed the window and stood reeling. "William!"

Wintry November light glowed up through the trap in the attic floor behind her. Bent to it, she saw the snow whispering against the cold clear panes down in that November world where she would spend the next thirty years.

She did not go near the window again. She sat alone in the black attic, smelling the one smell that did not seem to fade. It lingered like a gentle smile, like a sigh of satisfaction, on the air. She took a deep, long breath.

The old, the familiar, the unforgettable scent of drug store sarsaparilla.

ISAAC ASIMOV

Isaac Asimov has been leading a double life for at least thirty years—as a favorite writer of fiction (such novels as Pebble in the Sky *and* I, Robot, *plus a dozen more) and as a respected professor of biochemistry at Boston University and co-author of such frivolous 800-page volumes as* Biochemistry and Human Metabolism. *With a typewriter constantly at white heat he emits such sparks as . . .*

"Nobody Here But . . ."

You see, it wasn't our fault. We had no idea anything was wrong until I called Cliff Anderson and spoke to him when he wasn't there. What's more, I wouldn't have known he wasn't there, if it wasn't that he walked in while I was talking to him.

No, no, no, *no*—

I never seem to be able to tell this straight. I get too excited. —Look, I might as well begin at the beginning. I'm Bill Billings; my friend is Cliff Anderson. I'm an electrical engineer, he's a mathematician, and we're on the faculty of Midwestern Institute of Technology. Now you know who we are.

Ever since we got out of uniform, Cliff and I have been working on calculating machines. You know what they are. Norbert Wiener popularized them in his book, *Cybernetics.* If you've seen pictures of them, you know that they're great big things. They take up a whole wall and they're very complicated; also expensive.

But Cliff and I had ideas. You see, what makes a thinking machine so big and expensive is that it has to be full of relays

and vacuum tubes just so that microscopic electric currents can be controlled and made to flicker on and off, here and there. Now the really important things are those little electric currents, so—

I once said to Cliff, "Why can't we control the currents without all the salad dressing?"

Cliff said, "Why not, indeed." and started working on the mathematics.

How we got where we did in two years is no matter. It's what we got after we finished that made the trouble. It turned out that we ended with something about this high and maybe so wide and just about this deep—

No, no. I forget that you can't see me. I'll give you the figures. It was about three feet high, six feet long, and two feet deep. Got that? It took two men to carry it but it could be carried and that was the point. And still, mind you, it could do anything the wall-size calculators could. Not as fast, maybe, but we were still working.

We had big ideas about that thing, the very biggest. We could put it on ships or airplanes. After a while, if we could make it small enough, an automobile could carry one.

We were especially interested in the automobile angle. Suppose you had a little thinking machine on the dashboard, hooked to the engine and battery and equipped with photoelectric eyes. It could choose an ideal course, avoid cars, stop at red lights, pick the optimum speed for the terrain. Everybody could sit in the back seat and automobile accidents would vanish.

All of it was fun. There was so much excitement to it, so many thrills every time we worked out another consolidation, that I could still cry when I think of the time I picked up the telephone to call our lab and tumbled everything into the discard.

I was at Mary Ann's house that evening— Or have I told you about Mary Ann yet? No. I guess I haven't.

Mary Ann was the girl who would have been my fiancee but for two ifs. One, if she were willing, and two, if I had the nerve to ask her. She has red hair and crams something like two tons of energy into about 110 pounds of body which fills out very nicely from the ground to five and a half feet up. I was dying to ask her, you understand, but each time

I'd see her coming into sight, setting a match to my heart with every movement, I'd just break down.

It's not that I'm not good-looking. People tell me I'm adequate. I've got all my hair; I'm nearly six feet tall; I can even dance. It's just that I've nothing to offer. I don't have to tell you what college teachers make. With inflation and taxes, it amounts to just about nothing. Of course, if we got the basic patents rolled up on our little thinking machine, things would be different. But I couldn't ask her to wait for that, either. Maybe, after it was all set—

Anyway, I just stood there, wishing, that evening, as she came into the living room. My arm was groping blindly for the phone.

Mary Ann said, "I'm all ready, Bill. Let's go."

I said, "Just a minute. I want to ring up Cliff."

She frowned a little, "Can't it wait?"

"I was supposed to call him two hours ago," I explained.

It only took two minutes. I rang the lab. Cliff was putting in an evening of work and so he answered. I asked something, then he said something, I asked some more and he explained. The details don't matter, but as I said, he's the mathematician of the combination. When I build the circuits and put things together in what look like impossible ways, he's the guy who shuffles the symbols and tells me whether they're really impossible. Then, just as I finished and hung up, there was a ring at the door.

For a minute, I thought Mary Ann had another caller and got sort of stiff-backed as I watched her go to the door. I was scribbling down some of what Cliff had just told me while I watched. But then she opened the door and it was only Cliff Anderson after all.

He said, "I thought I'd find you here— Hello, Mary Ann. Say, weren't you going to ring me at six. You're as reliable as a cardboard chair." Cliff is short and plump and always willing to start a fight, but I know him and pay no attention.

I said, "Things turned up and it slipped my mind. But I just called, so what's the difference?"

"Called? Me? When?"

I started to point to the telephone and gagged. Right then, the bottom fell out of things. Exactly five seconds before the doorbell had sounded I had been on the phone

talking to Cliff in the lab, and the lab was six miles away from Mary Ann's house.

I said, "I—just spoke to you."

I wasn't getting across. Cliff just said, "To me?" again.

I was pointing to the phone with both hands now, "On the phone. I called the lab. On this phone here! Mary Ann heard me. Mary Ann, wasn't I just talking to—"

Mary Ann said, "I don't know whom you were talking to.—Well, shall we go?" That's Mary Ann. She's a stickler for honesty.

I sat down. I tried to be very quiet and clear. I said, "Cliff, I dialed the lab's phone number, you answered the phone, I asked you if you had the details worked out, you said, yes, and gave them to me. Here they are. I wrote them down. Is this correct or not?" I handed him the paper on which I had written the equations.

Cliff looked at them. He said, "They're correct. But where could you have gotten them? You didn't work them out yourself, did you?"

"I just told you. You gave them to me over the phone."

Cliff shook his head, "Bill, I haven't been in the lab since seven fifteen. There's nobody there."

"I spoke to somebody, I tell you."

Mary Ann was fiddling with her gloves. "We're getting late," she said.

I waved my hands at her to wait a bit, and said to Cliff, "Look, are you sure—"

"There's nobody there, unless you want to count Junior." Junior was what we called our pint-sized mechanical brain.

We stood there, looking at one another. Mary Ann's toe was still hitting the floor like a time bomb waiting to explode.

Then Cliff laughed. He said, "I'm thinking of a cartoon I saw, somewhere. It shows a robot answering the phone and saying, 'Honest, boss, there's nobody here but us complicated thinking machines.' "

I didn't think that was funny. I said, "Let's go to the lab."

Mary Ann said, "Hey! We won't make the show."

I said, "Look, Mary Ann, this is very important. It's just going to take a minute. Come along with us and we'll go straight to the show from there."

She said, "The show starts—" And then she stopped talking, because I grabbed her wrist and we left.

That just shows how excited I was. Ordinarily, I wouldn't ever have dreamed of shoving her around. I mean, Mary Ann is quite the lady. It's just that I had so many things on my mind. I don't even really remember grabbing her wrist, come to think of it. It's just that the next thing I knew, I was in the auto and so was Cliff and so was she, and she was rubbing her wrist and muttering under her breath about big gorillas.

I said, "Did I hurt you, Mary Ann?"

She said, "No, of course not. I have my arm yanked out of its socket every day, just for fun." Then she kicked me in the shin.

She only does things like that because she has red hair. Actually, she has a very gentle nature, but she tries very hard to live up to the redhead mythology. I see right through that, of course, but I humor her, poor kid.

We were at the laboratory in twenty minutes.

The Institute is empty at night. It's emptier than a building would ordinarily be. You see, it's designed to have crowds of students rushing through the corridors and when they aren't there, it's unnaturally lonely. Or maybe it was just that I was afraid to see what might be sitting in our laboratory upstairs. Either way, footsteps were uncomfortably loud and the self-service elevator was downright dingy.

I said to Mary Ann, "This won't take long." But she just sniffed and looked beautiful.

She can't help looking beautiful.

Cliff had the key to the laboratory and I looked over his shoulder when he opened the door. There was nothing to see. Junior was there, sure, but he looked just as he had when I saw him last. The dials in front registered nothing and except for that, there was just a large box, with a cable running back into the wall socket.

Cliff and I walked up on either side of Junior. I think we were planning to grab it if it made a sudden move. But then we stopped because Junior just wasn't doing anything. Mary Ann was looking at it, too. In fact, she ran her middle finger along its top and then looked at the finger tip and twiddled it against her thumb to get rid of the dust.

I said, "Mary Ann, don't you go near it. Stay at the other end of the room."

She said, "It's just as dirty there."

She'd never been in our lab before, and of course she didn't realize that a laboratory wasn't the same thing as a baby's bedroom, if you know what I mean. The janitor comes in twice a day and all he does is empty the wastebaskets. About once a week, he comes in with a dirty mop, makes mud on the floor, and shoves it around a little.

Cliff said, "The telephone isn't where I left it."

I said, "How do you know?"

"Because I left it there." He pointed. "And now it's here."

If he were right, the telephone had moved closer to Junior. I swallowed and said, "Maybe you don't remember right." I tried to laugh without sounding very natural and said, "Where's the screw driver?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Just take a look inside. For laughs."

Mary Ann said, "You'll get yourself all dirty." So I put on my lab coat. She's a very thoughtful girl, Mary Ann.

I got to work with a screw driver. Of course, once Junior was really perfected, we were going to have models manufactured in welded, one-piece cases. We were even thinking of molded plastic in colors, for home use. In the lab model, though, we held it together with screws so that we could take it apart and put it together as often as we wanted to.

Only the screws weren't coming out. I grunted and yanked and said, "Some joker was putting his weight on these when he screwed these things in."

Cliff said, "You're the only one who ever touches the thing."

He was right, too, but that didn't make it any easier. I stood up and passed the back of my hand over my forehead. I held out the screw driver to him, "Want to try?"

He did, and didn't get any further than I did. He said, "That's funny."

I said, "What's funny?"

He said, "I had a screw turning just now. It moved about an eighth of an inch and then the screw driver slipped."

"What's funny about that?"

Cliff backed away and put down the screw driver with two fingers, "What's funny is that I saw the screw move back an eighth of an inch and tighten up again."

Mary Ann was fidgeting again. She said, "Why don't

your scientific minds think of a blowtorch, if you're so anxious." There was a blowtorch on one of the benches and she was pointing to it.

Well, ordinarily, I wouldn't think any more of using a blowtorch on Junior than on myself. But I was thinking something and Cliff was thinking something and we were both thinking the same thing. *Junior didn't want to be opened up.*

Cliff said, "What do you think, Bill?"

And I said, "I don't know, Cliff."

Mary Ann said, "Well, hurry up, lunkhead, we'll miss the show."

So I picked up the blowtorch and adjusted the gauge on the oxygen cylinder. It was going to be like stabbing a friend.

But Mary Ann stopped the proceedings by saying, "Well, how stupid can men be? These screws are loose. You must have been turning the screw driver the wrong way."

Now there isn't much chance of turning a screw driver the wrong way. Just the same, I don't like to contradict Mary Ann, so I just said, "Mary Ann, don't stay too close to Junior. Why don't you wait by the door."

But she just said, "Well, look!" And there was a screw in her hand and an empty hole in the front of Junior's case. She had removed it by hand.

Cliff said, "Holy Smoke!"

They were turning, all dozen screws. They were doing it by themselves, like little worms crawling out of their holes, turning round and round, then dropping out. I scrabbled them up and only one was left. It hung on for a while, the front panel sagging from it, till I reached out. Then the last screw dropped and the panel fell gently into my arms. I put it to one side.

Cliff said, "It did that on purpose. It heard us mention the blowtorch and gave up." His face is usually pink, but it was white then.

I was feeling a little queer myself. I said, "What's it trying to hide?"

"I don't know."

We bent before its open insides and for a while we just looked. I could hear Mary Ann's toe begin to tap the floor again. I looked at my wrist watch and I had to admit to

myself we didn't have much time. In fact, we didn't have *any* time left.

And then I said, "It's got a diaphragm."

Cliff said, "Where?" and bent closer.

I pointed, "And a loud speaker."

"You didn't put them in?"

"Of course I didn't put them in. I ought to know what I put in. If I put it in, I'd remember."

"Then how did it get in?"

We were squatting and arguing. I said, "It made them itself, I suppose. Maybe it grows them. Look at that."

I pointed again. Inside the box at two different places, were coils of something that looked like thin garden hose, except that they were of metal. They spiraled tightly so that they lay flat. At the end of each coil, the metal divided into five or six thin filaments that were in little sub-spirals.

"You didn't put those in either?"

"No, I didn't put those in either."

"What are they?"

He knew what they were and I knew what they were. Something had to reach out to get materials for Junior to make parts for itself; something had to snake out for the telephone. I picked up the front panel and looked at it again. There were two circular bits of metal cut out and hinged so that they could swing forward and leave a hole for something to come through.

I poked a finger through one and held it up for Cliff to see, and said, "I didn't put this in either."

Mary Ann was looking over my shoulder now, and without warning she reached out. I was wiping my fingers with a paper towel to get off the dust and grease and didn't have time to stop her. I should have known Mary Ann, though; she's always so anxious to help.

Anyway, she reached in to touch one of the—well, we might as well say it—tentacles. I don't know if she actually touched them or not. Later on she claimed she hadn't. But anyway, what happened then was that she let out a little yell and suddenly sat down and began rubbing her arm.

"The same one," she whimpered. "First you, and then *that*."

I helped her up. "It must have been a loose connection, Mary Ann. I'm sorry, but I told you—"

Cliff said, "Nuts! That was no loose connection. Junior's just protecting itself."

I had thought the same thing, myself. I had thought lots of things. Junior was a new kind of machine. Even the mathematics that controlled it were different from anything anybody had worked with before. Maybe it had something no machine previously had ever had. Maybe it felt a desire to stay alive and grow. Maybe it would have a desire to make more machines until there were millions of them all over the earth, fighting with human beings for control.

I opened my mouth and Cliff must have known what I was going to say, because he yelled, "No. No, don't say it!"

But I couldn't stop myself. It just came out and I said, "Well, look, let's disconnect Junior— What's the matter?"

Cliff said bitterly, "Because he's listening to what we say, you jackass. He heard about the blowtorch, didn't he? I was going to sneak up behind it, but now it will probably electrocute me if I try."

Mary Ann was still brushing at the back of her dress and saying how dirty the floor was, even though I kept telling her I had nothing to do with that. I mean, it's the janitor that makes the mud. Anyway, she said, "Why don't you put on rubber gloves and yank the cord out?"

I could see Cliff was trying to think of reasons why that wouldn't work. He didn't think of any, so he put on the rubber gloves and walked towards Junior.

I yelled, "Watch out!"

It was a stupid thing to say. He *had* to watch out; he had no choice. One of the tentacles moved and there was no doubt what they were now. It whirled out and drew a line between Cliff and the power cable. It remained there, vibrating a little with its six finger-tendrils splayed out. Tubes inside Junior were beginning to glow. Cliff didn't try to go past that tentacle. He backed away and after a while, it spiraled inward again. He took off his rubber gloves.

"Bill," he said, "we're not going to get anywhere. That's a smarter gadget than we dreamed we could make. It was smart enough to use my voice as a model when it built its diaphragm. It may become smart enough to learn how to—" He looked over his shoulder, and whispered, "how to generate its own power and become self-contained.

"Bill, we've got to stop it, or someday someone will tele-

phone the planet Earth and get the answer, 'Honest, boss, there's nobody here anywhere but us complicated thinking machines!' "

"Let's get in the police," I said. "We'll explain. A grenade, or something—"

Cliff shook his head, "We can't have anyone else find out. They'll build other Juniors and it looks like we don't have enough answers for that kind of a project after all."

"Then what do we do?"

"I don't know."

I felt a sharp blow on my chest. I looked down and it was Mary Ann, getting ready to spit fire. She said, "Look, lunkhead, if we've got a date, we've got one, and if we haven't, we haven't. Make up your mind."

I said, "Now, Mary Ann—"

She said, "Answer me. I never heard such a ridiculous thing. Here I get dressed to go to a play, and you take me to a dirty laboratory with a foolish machine and spend the rest of the evening twiddling dials."

"Mary Ann, I'm not—"

She wasn't listening; she was talking. I wish I could remember what she said after that. Or maybe I don't; maybe it's just as well I can't remember, since none of it was very complimentary. Every once in a while I would manage a "But, Mary Ann—" and each time it would get sucked under and swallowed up.

Actually, as I said, she's a very gentle creature and it's only when she gets excited that she's ever talkative or unreasonable. Of course, with red hair, she feels she ought to get excited rather often. That's my theory, anyway. She just feels she has to live up to her red hair.

Anyway, the next thing I *do* remember clearly is Mary Ann finishing with a stamp on my right foot and then turning to leave. I ran after her, trying once again, "But, Mary Ann—"

Then Cliff yelled at us. Generally, he doesn't pay any attention to us, but this time he was shouting, "Why don't you ask her to marry you, you lunkhead?"

Mary Ann stopped. She was in the doorway by then but she didn't turn around. I stopped too, and felt the words get thick and clogged up in my throat. I couldn't even manage a "But, Mary Ann—"

Cliff was yelling in the background. I heard him as though he were a mile away. He was shouting, "I got it! I got it!" over and over again.

Then Mary Ann turned and she looked so beautiful— Did I tell you that she's got green eyes with a touch of blue in them? Anyway she looked so beautiful that all the words in my throat jammed together very tightly and came out in that funny sound you make when you swallow.

She said, "Were you going to say something, Bill?"

Well, Cliff had put it in my head. My voice was hoarse and I said, "Will you marry me, Mary Ann?"

The minute I said it, I wished I hadn't, because I thought she would never speak to me again. Then two minutes after that I was glad I had, because she threw her arms around me and reached up to kiss me. It was a while before I was quite clear what was happening, and then I began to kiss back. This went on for quite a long time, until Cliff's banging on my shoulder managed to attract my attention.

I turned and said, snappishly, "What the devil do you want?" It was a little ungrateful. After all, he had started this.

He said, "Look!"

In his hand, he held the main lead that had connected Junior to the power supply.

I had forgotten about Junior, but now it came back. I said, "He's disconnected, then."

"Cold!"

"How did you do it?"

He said, "Junior was so busy watching you and Mary Ann fight that I managed to sneak up on it. Mary Ann put on one good show."

I didn't like that remark because Mary Ann is a very dignified and self-contained sort of girl and doesn't put on 'shows.' However, I had too much in hand to take issue with him.

I said to Mary Ann, "I don't have much to offer, Mary Ann; just a school teacher's salary. Now that we've dismantled Junior, there isn't even any chance of—"

Mary Ann said, "I don't care, Bill. I just gave up on you, you lunkheaded darling. I've tried practically everything—"

"You've been kicking my shins and stamping on my toes."

"I'd run out of everything else. I was desperate."

The logic wasn't quite clear, but I didn't answer because I remembered about the show. I looked at my watch and said, "Look, Mary Ann, if we hurry we can still make the second act."

She said, "Who wants to see the show?"

So I kissed her some more; and we never did get to see the show at all.

There's only one thing that bothers me now. Mary Ann and I are married, and we're perfectly happy. I just had a promotion; I'm an associate professor now. Cliff keeps working away at plans for building a controllable Junior and he's making progress.

None of that's it.

You see, I talked to Cliff the next evening, to tell him Mary Ann and I were going to marry and to thank him for giving me the idea. And after staring at me for a minute, he swore he hadn't said it; he hadn't shouted for me to propose marriage.

Of course, there was something else in the room with Cliff's voice.

I keep worrying Mary Ann will find out. She's the gentlest girl I know, but she *has* got red hair. She can't help trying to live up to that, or have I said that already.

Anyway, what will she say if she ever finds out that I didn't have the sense to propose till a *machine* told me to?

ROBERT SHECKLEY

The first science-fiction magazine was born in 1926; two years later was born a boy baby to a quiet and previously unremarkable Brooklyn family. Young Bob Sheckley was late getting into the science-fiction field; his first story appeared only one year before the original publication date of this collection. But what he lacked in promptness he made up in velocity, for at the conclusion of his first full year of writing he had sold more than thirty stories, to almost every major science-fiction magazine in the country and to such lesser periodicals as Collier's and Today's Woman as well. We offer you . . .

The Last Weapon

Edsel was in a murderous mood. He, Parke, and Faxon had spent three weeks in this part of the deadlands, breaking into every mound they came across, not finding anything, and moving on to the next. The swift Martian summer was passing, and each day became a little colder. Each day Edsel's nerves, uncertain at the best of times, had frayed a little more. Little Faxon was cheerful, dreaming of all the money they would make when they found the weapons, and Parke plodded silently along, apparently made of iron, not saying a word unless he was spoken to.

But Edsel had reached his limit. They had broken into another mound, and again there had been no sign of the lost Martian weapons. The watery sun seemed to be glaring at him, and the stars were visible in an impossibly blue sky. The afternoon cold seeped into Edsel's insulated suit, stiffening his joints, knotting his big muscles.

Quite suddenly, Edsel decided to kill Parke. He had dis-

liked the silent man since they had formed the partnership on Earth. He disliked him even more than he despised Faxon.

Edsel stopped.

"Do you know where we're going?" he asked Parke, his voice ominously low.

Parke shrugged his slender shoulders negligently. His pale, hollow face showed no trace of expression.

"Do you?" Edsel asked.

Parke shrugged again.

A bullet in the head, Edsel decided, reaching for his gun.

"Wait!" Faxon pleaded, coming up between them. "Don't fly off, Edsel. Just think of all the money we can make when we find the weapons!" The little man's eyes glowed at the thought. "They're right around here somewhere, Edsel. The next mound, maybe."

Edsel hesitated, glaring at Parke. Right now he wanted to kill, more than anything else in the world. If he had known it was like this, when they formed the company on Earth . . . It had seemed so easy, then. He had the plaque, the one which told where a cache of the fabulous lost Martian weapons were. Parke was able to read the Martian script, and Faxon could finance the expedition. So, he had figured all they'd have to do would be to land on Mars and walk up to the mound where the stuff was hidden.

Edsel had never been off Earth before. He hadn't counted on the weeks of freezing, starving on concentrated rations, always dizzy from breathing thin, tired air circulating through a replenisher. He hadn't thought about the sore, aching muscles you get, dragging your way through the thick Martian brush.

All he had thought about was the price a government—any government—would pay for those legendary weapons.

"I'm sorry," Edsel said, making up his mind suddenly. "This place gets me. Sorry I blew up, Parke. Lead on."

Parke nodded, and started again. Faxon breathed a sigh of relief, and followed Parke.

After all, Edsel thought. I can kill them anytime.

They found the correct mound in mid-afternoon, just as Edsel's patience was wearing thin again. It was a strange, massive affair, just as the script had said. Under a few

inches of dirt was metal. The men scraped and found a door.

"Here, I'll blast it open," Edsel said, drawing his revolver. Parke pushed him aside, turned the handle and opened the door.

Inside was a tremendous room. And there, row upon gleaming row, were the legendary lost weapons of Mars, the missing artifacts of Martian civilization.

The three men stood for a moment, just looking. Here was the treasure that men had almost given up looking for. Since man had landed on Mars, the ruins of great cities had been explored. Scattered across the plains were ruined vehicles, artforms, tools, everything indicating the ghost of a titanic civilization, a thousand years beyond Earth's. Patiently deciphered scripts had told of the great wars ravaging the surface of Mars. The scripts stopped too soon, though, because nothing told what had happened to the Martians. There hadn't been an intelligent being on Mars for several thousand years. Somehow, all animal life on the planet had been obliterated.

And, apparently, the Martians had taken their weapons with them.

These lost weapons, Edsel knew, were worth their weight in radium. There just wasn't anything like them.

The men went inside. Edsel picked up the first thing his hand reached. It looked like a .45, only bigger. He went to the door and pointed the weapon at a shrub on the plain.

"Don't fire it," Faxon said, as Edsel took aim. "It might backfire or something. Let the government men fire them, after we sell."

Edsel squeezed the trigger. The shrub, seventy-five feet away, erupted in a bright red flash.

"Not bad," Edsel said, patting the gun. He put it down and reached for another.

"Please, Edsel," Faxon said, squinting nervously at him. "There's no need to try them out. You might set off an atomic bomb or something."

"Shut up," Edsel said, examining the weapon for a firing stud.

"Don't shoot any more," Faxon pleaded. He looked to Parke for support, but the silent man was watching Edsel. "You know, something in this place might have been

responsible for the destruction of the Martian race. You wouldn't want to set it off again, would you?"

Edsel watched a spot on the plain glow with heat as he fired at it.

"Good stuff." He picked up another, rod-shaped instrument. The cold was forgotten. Edsel was perfectly happy now, playing with all the shiny things.

"Let's get started," Faxon said, moving toward the door.

"Started? Where?" Edsel demanded. He picked up another glittering weapon, curved to fit his wrist and hand.

"Back to the port," Faxon said. "Back to sell this stuff, like we planned. I figure we can ask just about any price, any price at all. A government would give billions for weapons like these."

"I've changed my mind," Edsel said. Out of the corner of his eye he was watching Parke. The slender man was walking between the stacks of weapons, but so far he hadn't touched any.

"Now listen," Faxon said, glaring at Edsel. "I financed this expedition. We planned on selling the stuff. I have a right to —well, perhaps not."

The untried weapon was pointed squarely at his stomach.

"What are you going to do?" he asked, trying not to look at the gun.

"To hell with selling it," Edsel said, leaning against the cave wall where he could also watch Parke. "I figure I can use this stuff myself." He grinned broadly, still watching both men.

"I can outfit some of the boys back home. With the stuff that's here, we can knock over one of those little governments in Central America easy. I figure, we could hold it forever."

"Well," Faxon said, watching the gun, "I don't want to be a party to that sort of thing. Just count me out."

"All right," Edsel said.

"Don't worry about me talking," Faxon said quickly. "I won't. I just don't want to be in on any shooting or killing. So I think I'll go back."

"Sure," Edsel said. Parke was standing to one side, examining his fingernails.

"If you get that kingdom set up, I'll come down," Faxon said, grinning weakly. "Maybe you can make me a duke or something."

"I think I can arrange that."

"Swell. Good luck." Faxon waved his hand and started to walk away. Edsel let him get twenty feet, then aimed the new weapon and pressed the stud.

The gun didn't make any noise; there was no flash, but Faxon's arm was neatly severed. Quickly, Edsel pressed the stud again and swung the gun down on Faxon. The little man was chopped in half, and the ground on either side of him was slashed, also.

Edsel turned, realizing suddenly that he had left his back exposed to Parke. All the man had to do was pick up the nearest gun and blaze away. But Parke was just standing there, his arms folded over his chest.

"That beam will probably cut through anything," Parke said. "Very useful."

Edsel had a wonderful half hour, running back and forth to the door with different weapons. Parke made no move to touch anything, but watched with interest. The ancient Martian arms were as good as new, apparently unaffected by their thousands of years of disuse. There were many blasting weapons, of various designs and capabilities. Then heat and radiation guns, marvelously compact things. There were weapons which would freeze, and weapons which would burn; others which would crumble, cut, coagulate, paralyze, and any of the other ways of snuffing out life.

"Let's try this one," Parke said. Edsel, who had been on the verge of testing an interesting-looking three-barreled rifle, stopped.

"I'm busy," he said.

"Stop playing with those toys. Let's have a look at some real stuff."

Parke was standing near a squat black machine on wheels. Together they tugged it outside. Parke watched while Edsel moved the controls. A faint hum started, deep in the machine. Then a blue haze formed around it. The haze spread as Edsel manipulated the controls, until it surrounded the two men.

"Try a blaster on it," Parke said. Edsel picked up one of the explosive pistols and fired. The charge was absorbed by the haze. Quickly he tested three others. They couldn't pierce the blue glow.

"I believe," Parke said softly, "this will stop an atomic bomb. This is a force-field."

Edsel turned it off and they went back inside. It was growing dark in the cave as the sun neared the horizon.

"You know," Edsel said, "You're a pretty good guy, Parke. You're O.K."

"Thanks," Parke said, looking over the mass of weapons.

"You don't mind my cutting down Faxon, do you? He was going straight to the government."

"On the contrary. I approve."

"Swell. I figure you must be O.K. You could have killed me when I was killing Faxon." Edsel didn't add that it was what he would have done.

Parke shrugged his shoulders.

"How would you like to work on this kingdom deal with me?" Edsel asked, grinning. "I think we could swing it. Get ourselves a nice place, plenty of girls, lots of laughs. What do you think?"

"Sure," Parke said. "Count me in." Edsel slapped him on the shoulder, and they went through the ranks of weapons.

"All these are pretty obvious," Parke said, as they reached the end of the room. "Variations on the others."

At the end of the room was a door. There were letters in Martian script engraved on it.

"What's that stuff say?" Edsel asked.

"Something about 'final weapons,'" Parke told him, squinting at the delicate tracery. "A warning to stay out." He opened the door. Both men started to step inside, then recoiled suddenly.

Inside was a chamber, fully three times the size of the room they had just left. And filling the great room, as far as they could see, were soldiers. Gorgeously dressed, fully armed, the soldiers were motionless, statue-like.

They were not alive.

There was a table by the door, and on it were three things. First there was a sphere about the size of a man's fist, with a calibrated dial set in it. Beside that was a shining helmet. And next was a small, black box with Martian script on it.

"Is it a burial place?" Edsel whispered, looking with awe at the strong unearthly faces of the Martian soldiery. Parke, behind him, didn't answer.

Edsel walked to the table and picked up the sphere. Carefully he turned the dial a single notch.

"What do you think it's supposed to do?" He asked Parke.

"Do you think—" Both men gasped, and moved back.

The lines of fighting men had moved. Men in ranks swayed, then came back to attention. But they no longer held the rigid posture of death. The ancient fighting men were alive.

One of them, in an amazing uniform of purple and silver, came forward and bowed to Edsel.

"Sir, your troops are ready." Edsel was too amazed to speak.

"How can you live after thousands of years?" Parke asked. "Are you Martians?"

"We are the servants of the Martians," the soldier said. Parke noticed that the soldier's lips hadn't moved. The man was telepathic. "Sir, we are Synthetics."

"Whom do you obey?" Parke asked.

"The Activator, sir." The Synthetic was speaking directly to Edsel, looking at the sphere in his hand. "We require no food or sleep, sir. Our only desire is to serve you, and to fight." The soldiers in the ranks nodded approvingly.

"Lead us into battle, sir!"

"I sure will!" Edsel said, finally regaining his senses. "I'll show you boys some fighting, you can bank on that!"

The soldiers cheered him, solemnly, three times. Edsel grinned, looking at Parke.

"What do the rest of these numbers do?" Edsel asked. But the soldier was silent. The question was evidently beyond his built-in knowledge.

"It might activate other Synthetics," Parke said. "There are probably more chambers underground."

"Brother!" Edsel shouted. "*Will* I lead you into battle!" Again the soldiers cheered, three solemn cheers.

"Put them to sleep and let's make some plans," Parke said. Dazed, Edsel turned the switch back. The soldiers froze again into immobility.

"Come on outside."

"Right."

"And bring that stuff with you." Edsel picked up the shining helmet and the black box and followed Parke outside. The sun had almost disappeared now, and there were black shad-

ows over the red land. It was bitterly cold, but neither man noticed.

"Did you hear what they said, Parke? Did you hear it? They said I was their leader! With men like those—" He laughed at the sky. With those soldiers, those weapons, nothing could stop him. He'd really stock his land—prettiest girls in the world, and would he have a time!

"I'm a general!" Edsel shouted, and slipped the helmet over his head. "How do I look, Parke? Don't I look like a—" He stopped. He was hearing a voice in his ears, whispering, muttering. What was it saying?

". . . damned idiot, with his little dream of a kingdom. Power like this is for a man of genius, a man who can remake history. Myself!"

"Who's talking? That's you, isn't it Parke?" Edsel realized, suddenly, that the helmet allowed him to listen in on thoughts. He didn't have time to consider what a weapon this would be for a ruler.

Parke shot him neatly through the back with a gun he had been holding all the time.

"What an idiot," Parke told himself, slipping the helmet on his head. "A kingdom! All the power in the world, and he dreamed of a little kingdom!" He glanced back at the cave.

"With those troops—the force-field—and the weapons—I can take over the world." He said it coldly, knowing it was a fact. He turned to go back to the cave, to activate the Synthetics, but stopped first to pick up the little black box Edsel had carried.

Engraved on it, in flowing Martian script, was, "The Last Weapon."

I wonder what it could be, Parke asked himself. He had let Edsel live long enough to try out all the others; no use chancing a misfire himself. It was too bad he hadn't lived long enough to try out this one, too.

Of course, I really don't need it, he told himself. He had plenty. But this might make the job a lot easier, a lot safer. Whatever it was, it was bound to be good.

Well, he told himself, let's see what the Martians considered their last weapon. He opened the box.

A vapor drifted out, and Parke threw the box from him, thinking about poison gas.

The vapor mounted, drifted haphazardly for a while, then began to coalesce. It spread, grew, and took shape.

In a few seconds, it was complete, hovering over the box. It glimmered white in the dying light, and Parke saw that it was just a tremendous mouth, topped by a pair of unblinking eyes.

"Ho ho," the mouth said. "Protoplasm!" It drifted to the body of Edsel. Parke lifted a blaster and took careful aim.

"*Quiet* protoplasm," the thing said, nuzzling Edsel's body. "I *like* quiet protoplasm." It took down the body in a single gulp.

Parke fired, blasting a ten-foot hole in the ground. The giant mouth drifted out of it, chuckling.

"It's been so long," it said.

Parke was clenching his nerves in a forged grip. He refused to let himself become panicked. Calmly he activated the force-field, forming a blue sphere around himself.

Still chuckling, the thing drifted through the blue haze.

Parke picked up the weapon Edsel had used on Faxon, feeling the well-balanced piece swing up in his hand. He backed to one side of the force-field as the thing approached, and turned on the beam.

The thing kept coming.

"Die, die!" Parke screamed, his nerves breaking.

But the thing came on, grinning broadly.

"I like *quiet* protoplasm," the thing said as its gigantic mouth converged on Parke.

"But I also like *lively* protoplasm."

It gulped once, then drifted out the other side of the field, looking anxiously around for the millions of units of protoplasm, as there had been in the old days.

HENRY KUTTNER *and* C. L. MOORE

This story pretends to be a collaboration between two persons; it would be at least as fair to call it a collaboration among eight or ten. Fans of Lewis Padgett (author of such fantasy books as A Gnome There Was *and outstanding mysteries like* The Brass Ring*) and of Lawrence O'Donnell (who wrote, among others, the splendid short novel* Fury*) will note traces of their favorites in this story, which is only fair for they—and half a dozen others—are pen-names of Kuttner and Moore. See if you can tell where one leaves off and the other begins in . . .*

A Wild Surmise

"Do you feel that you are dreaming now, Mr. Hooten?" Dr. Scott asked gently.

Timothy Hooten evaded the psychiatrist's eyes.

He fingered the smooth leather of the chair arms, found the sensation unsatisfactory, and turned his head to gaze out the window at the Empire State's tower.

"It's like a dream, isn't it?" he said evasively.

"What is?"

"That." Hooten nodded at the needle-like mooring mast on

the top of the tower. "Imagine mooring a dirigible to that thing. They never did, did they? It's just the sort of thing that would happen in a dream. You know. Big plans, and then somehow everybody forgets about it and starts something new. Oh, I don't know. Things get unreal."

Solipsism, Dr. Scott thought, but suspended judgment.

"What things?" he murmured.

"You, for example," Hooten said. "You've got the wrong shape."

"Can you amplify that, Mr. Hooten?"

"Well, I don't know that I can," Hooten said, looking with faint alarm at his own hands. "I've got the wrong shape too, you see."

"Do you know what the right shape is?"

Hooten closed his eyes and thought hard. A look of astonishment passed fleetingly across his face. He scowled. Dr. Scott, studying him closely, made a note on a desk pad.

"No," Hooten said, opening his eyes very wide and assuming a negativistic attitude. "I haven't the least idea."

"Don't you want to tell me?"

"I—ah—I don't know. I simply don't know."

"Why did you come to see me, Mr. Hooten?"

"My doctor said I should. So did my wife."

"Do you feel they were right?"

"Personally," Hooten said, with an air of quiet triumph, "I don't feel that it makes the least difference what I do in a dream. Imagine walking on two legs!" He paused, startled. "Maybe I shouldn't have said that," he added.

Dr. Scott smiled slightly.

"Suppose you tell me a little more about the dream."

"About now, you mean? It's just that everything's wrong. Even talking. Wiggling the tongue this way." Hooten fingered his jaw exploringly, and Dr. Scott made another note. "I'm dreaming, that's all."

"Are you ever awake?"

"Only when I'm asleep," Hooten said. "How strange that sounds. I wonder what I mean."

"This is the dream world?" Dr. Scott asked.

"Of course."

"Can you tell me what your problem is, Mr. Hooten?"

"I haven't any problems," Hooten said, surprised. "If I had, they'd just be dream problems, wouldn't they?"

"Do you have problems when you're—awake?"

"I'm sure I must have," the patient said. He looked thoughtful. "It seems to me I've got a psychiatrist in the real world, too. That's where my conscious mind is. This, of course, is my unconscious."

"Can you tell me a little more about that?"

Hooten closed his eyes again.

"I'll try," he said. "When I'm asleep, you see, when I'm dreaming, the conscious mind is unconscious. That's here and now. Well, in the real, waking world—the other world—I think my psychiatrist is trying to probe into my unconscious. What seems to you like my waking mind."

"Very interesting," Dr. Scott said. "This other psychiatrist, now, could you describe him? What kind of a man is he?"

"Man?" Hooten said, opening his eyes again. He hesitated. Then he shook his head. "I don't know, exactly. I can't remember what things are like in the real world. Different. That I know. Quite, quite different." He spread out his hand and regarded it thoughtfully. He turned it over and looked at the lines of his palm. "My, my," he murmured. "What won't they think of next."

"Try to remember," Dr. Scott urged.

"I have tried. You dream-people keep telling me to try. But it's no use. I must have a block in my mind," he finished triumphantly.

"We must try to find out what this block is, then. I'd like to try a little test, Mr. Hooten, if you don't mind. I'm going to show you a picture, and I want you to tell me a story about it."

"Make up a story, you mean?"

"Exactly," Dr. Scott said, and handed Hooten a large card, on which were inartistically depicted two ambiguous and semi-shapeless figures.

"How strange," Hooten said. "Their bones are inside them."

"Go on."

"They're two psychiatrists," Hooten murmured. "Anyone could see that. One's awake and one's asleep. One's real and one isn't. They're both treating me. One is named Scott and the other—the other—"

"Go on," Scott said.

"—is named—"

"What is his name?"

"Rasp," Hooten said faintly. "Dr. Rasp. I have an appointment with him at two o'clock in the morning, when I'm awake."

* * *

"Do you feel that you are dreaming now?" Dr. Rasp telepathized gently.

Timothy Hooten evaded the psychiatrist's faceted gaze. He swung his oval body around to stare out the sky-slit at the distant polyhedron of the Quatt Wunkery. Then he waved his antennae gently and clicked his mandibles.

"It's like a dream, isn't it?" he said evasively, though naturally not audibly. "Imagine building a Wunkery simply to pleat Quatts. Of course they never showed up. That sort of thing could happen only in a dream. Oh, you can't convince me. This *is* a dream. Imagine walking around on all sixes."

Dr. Rasp scratched a memorandum on his left wing-case.

"How do you think you should walk?" he asked.

"I wonder," Hooten said. "I do it all the time when I'm awake, but this is one of those recurrent dreams where I seem to get amnesia. I've tried and tried to remember what it's like, but it's no use. It's like trying to pleat Quatts in a Wunkery. Oh, how idiotic."

"Just what is your problem, Mr. Hooten?"

"Well, this absurd body I'm wearing, for one thing. My bones are in the wrong place." Hooten's faceted eyes glittered in a startled fashion. "Did I just say that? A minute ago, I mean? It reminds me of something."

"No," Dr. Rasp said. "What does it remind you of?"

Hooten irritably scratched his belly with a hind foot. There was a sharp, scraping sound.

"I've forgotten," he said.

"I would like to try a little test," Dr. Rasp said. "I'm going to project a thought, and I would like you to tell me what it makes you think of. Are you ready?"

"I suppose so," Hooten said.

Dr. Rasp projected a curly nebular thought. Hooten studied it.

"That's my conscious mind," he pointed out presently. "It

might be an Angry Curler—the kind that live in the Antipodes, I mean—but what it reminds me of is my conscious mind, because of the psychiatrist swimming around in the middle of it."

"Psychiatrist?" Dr. Rasp inquired, surprised.

"He's treating my conscious mind—I think," Hooten explained uncertainly. "He lives in the waking world with my conscious. You and I, Dr. Rasp, inhabit my unconscious, here and now. This other doctor—he's treating both of us."

"This other doctor does not exist," Dr. Rasp telepathized rather sourly. Then he caught himself and went on in a more professional tone, "Tell me about him, Mr. Hooten. What does this psychiatrist look like?"

"Tartuffe," said Hooten, to the surprise of Dr. Rasp, who had never heard the name. "No, Tartan. No, Scott. That's it. A psychiatrist named Dr. Scott who lives in my conscious mind. I have an appointment with him at two P.M. tomorrow, when I'm awake."

* * *

Timothy Hooten looked out the window at the Empire State Building. He was taking a word association test.

"Home," Dr. Scott said.

"Estivate," Hooten replied.

"Sex."

"Eggs."

"Mother"

"Larva."

"Psychiatrist."

"Bugs," Hooten said.

Dr. Scott paused. "Larva," he said.

"Clouds of glory," Hooten said briskly. "Trailing."

"Bugs," Dr. Scott said.

"Awake."

"Glory."

"Nuptial flight," Hooten said rather dreamily.

Dr. Scott made a note.

"Bugs," he said.

"Appointment. Two A.M. Dr. Rasp."

* * *

"This word *man,*" Dr. Rasp said. "It keeps cropping up in your mind. Exactly what does it mean?"

"I haven't the least idea," Hooten told him, looking through the sky-slit at the Quatt Wunkery.

"What does it make you think of?"

"Being awake," Hooten said.

Dr. Rasp rubbed his right mandible.

"I'd like to try a little experiment," he said. "You've been coming here for nearly twelve glitters, and we still haven't got past that block in your mind. You're resisting me, you know."

"I can't help it if I'm dreaming, can I?" Hooten demanded.

"That's the exact point. Are you trying to evade responsibility?"

"Certainly not," Hooten said with dignity. "Not when I'm awake. But I'm not awake now. You're not real. *I'm* not real—at least, this ridiculous body of mine isn't. And as for the Quatt Wunkery—!"

"The experiment I'd like to try," Dr. Rasp said, "is a matter of quasi-estivation. Do you know what this is?"

"Certainly," Hooten said glibly. "Hypnosis."

"I don't think I know the word," Dr. Rasp said. "What does it mean?"

"Quasi-estivation. My conscious mind blanks out and my unconscious mind cuts in."

Dr. Rasp suppressed whatever reaction he might have had to this lucid explanation. "Very well," he said, extending his antennae. "Shall we try it? Just relax. Let your wing-cases hang. Open your mandibles just a little. That's right." He crossed antennae with Hooten and looked fixedly into the patient's faceted eyes with his own. "Now you are estivating. You are in a burrow. It is warm and delightfully musty. You are curled up and estivating. Are you estivating?"

"Yes," Hooten telepathized dully.

"There is a block in your mind. Something in your mind is fighting me. Something keeps insisting that you are dreaming. In a short time I shall order you to wake up. Will you obey me?"

"Yes."

"Will you be awake then?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you're a dream," the estivated Hooten said languidly.

"Who says so?"

"Dr. Scott."

"There is no Dr. Scott," Dr. Rasp said with great firmness. "Dr. Scott is imaginary. You unconscious mind has created Dr. Scott, to protect itself. You do not want to find out what is really troubling you, and so you have created another psychiatrist to fight me. But he does not really exist. There are no such creatures as *men*. Their world is imaginary. Dr. Scott is just a censor in your mind. He is not real. Do you understand that?"

Hooten's antennae twiddled.

"Y-yes," he said reluctantly.

"Is Dr. Scott real?"

"Certainly," Hooten said. "I've got an appointment with him at two P.M. He's going to give me narcosynthesis." He added kindly, "That is a form of estivation."

There was a pause.

Then Dr. Rasp said, "You will return to *this* office at two P.M. You will not keep your appointment with Dr. Scott. You will undergo quasi-estivation again. Do you understand?"

"But I . . . yes."

"When I count to minus one you will wake up. Minus ten, minus nine. . . ."

At minus one Hooten woke up. He looked uneasily at Dr. Rasp.

"What happened?" he inquired.

"We are making progress," the psychiatrist said. "I think it wise that we continue the treatment as soon as possible. Suppose you meet me here at two P.M.

"Two P.M.?" Hooten said. "What an unearthly hour."

"I have a reason," Dr. Rasp said.

* * *

"I'm sorry to be late," Hooten said, coming into Dr. Scott's office. "I guess I was daydreaming or something."

"That's all right," Dr. Scott said. "Are you ready for the narcosynthesis?"

"Oh, I suppose so," Hooten said. "But I've got a funny feeling."

"What kind of a feeling?"

"That I'm beginning to wake up."

Dr. Scott looked pleased.

"Well, suppose you take off your coat and roll up your left sleeve. Lie on the couch there, that's right. Now I'm going to give you an injection, and you'll begin to feel sleepy. Simply relax. That's all you have to do."

"Ouch," Hooten said.

"That's all there is to it," Dr. Scott said, withdrawing the hypodermic. "Suppose you look at something and tell me when it begins to look blurry."

"All right," Hooten said obediently, staring out the window. "The Empire State—you know, it doesn't look right even now. It's got the wrong shape. Not like a Wunkery at all."

"Like a what?" Dr. Scott asked.

"A Wunkery. Dr. Rasp's sky-slit has a fine view of a—"

"You know there is no such thing as a Wunkery, don't you?" Dr. Scott broke in with a slight touch of undoctorly impatience. "Dr. Rasp is a creation of your unconscious mind. When you go to sleep you simply dream like anyone else. There is no world full of Wunkeries and Rasps. All that is just a defense against me, isn't it?"

"No," Hooten said drowsily.

Dr. Scott sighed. "Do things begin to look blurry yet?"

"No, but I'm . . . I'm beginning to. . . ."

"To what?"

"To wake up," Hooten said indistinctly, and closed his eyes. "Hello, Dr. Rasp."

"There is no Dr. Rasp," Dr. Scott said in an impatient voice. "Dr. Rasp is imaginary."

"Dr. Rasp says you don't exist," Hooten murmured, his eyes shut. "Yes, Dr. Rasp. . . ."

* * *

Hooten opened his faceted eyes and stared through the sky-slit at the Quatt Wunkery. He shook his head dizzily.

"What's the matter?" Dr. Rasp asked.

"Dr. Scott just gave me an injection of sodium pentothal," Hooten said.

The psychiatrist made a quick note on his wing-case. Then he crossed his antennae with Hooten's again and turned on the juice.

"Dr. Scott is simply a defense," he pointed out. "There is no Dr. Scott. There is no such thing as sodium pentothal. You are going to estivate now, do you hear me? You will be deeply asleep, so deeply that Dr. Scott cannot wake you up. You will obey *me,* not Dr. Scott. I tell you to estivate. Do you hear me?"

"Yes . . . but I'm afraid it isn't going to work very well. You see, if I estivate I'll just wake up in Dr. Scott's—"

"There is no Dr. Scott. Forget Dr. Scott."

"But—"

"Estivate. Estivate."

"All right. Now I'm . . . oh, hello, Dr. Scott."

* * *

Dr. Scott reached for another hypodermic and used it.

"Just relax," he said gently.

"I'm beginning to hate this," Hooten said pettishly. "I'm caught right in the middle. Something's going to give if we keep on. I don't know what, but—can't we postpone it till tomorrow and let Dr. Rasp have his innings?"

"I am your doctor," Scott pointed out. "Not Dr. Rasp. You refer Dr. Rasp to me if he tries to—"

"Oh, those antennae," Hooten murmured. "I can't—I—"

"Just relax," Dr. Scott said. "There is no Dr. Rasp."

Hooten struggled feebly. "This can't go on," he protested in a drowsy voice. "I tell you, something will have to give. I—oh, for God's sake, Dr. Rasp keeps telling me to estivate."

"Hush," Dr. Scott said, looking thoughtfully toward the hypodermics.

* * *

"Estivate," said Dr. Rasp.

"Look out!" Hooten said wildly, struggling. "He's going to give me another shot."

Dr. Rasp curled his antennae tightly around Hooten's and poured on more juice.

"Estivate," he said, and then had a sudden idea. "You too, Dr. Scott. Do you hear me? You're going to estivate, Dr. Scott. Relax. Stop struggling. You're in a warm, comfortable, musty burrow. You're beginning to estivate, Dr. Scott. . . ."

* * *

"Now he's trying to make you estivate," Hooten said, squirming on the couch.

Dr. Scott smiled grimly. He bent forward and fixed Hooten with a compelling gaze.

"Relax," he said. "I'm talking to you, Dr. Rasp. Relax and sleep. I'm going to give you another shot of pentothal in a moment, and that will put you to sleep. Do you hear me, Dr. Rasp?"

"Oh, God," Hooten said, blinking his eyes very rapidly indeed. "I feel as though I'm on an alternating current. What's going to happen? I warn you—we'd better stop this before—"

He squealed faintly as Dr. Scott punctured his skin with a hypodermic, filled, however, with nothing but a harmless and ineffective solution designed for psychosomatic purposes only. Hooten was already at the brink of tolerance for sodium pentothal and should have been fathoms deep long ago.

"Go to sleep, Dr. Rasp," Dr. Scott commanded in a firm, confident voice.

* * *

"Estivate, Dr. Scott," Dr. Rasp ordered.

* * *

"Sleep."

* * *

"Estivate."

* * *

"Sleep!"

* * *

"Estivate!"

* * *

"Wow!" cried Timothy Hooten, springing to his feet with the certain conviction that something had at last, quite resoundingly, given.

* * *

In the middle of Dr. Scott's office the air was still quivering around a buglike form that staggered on all sixes. Dr. Rasp's antennae vibrated almost to invisiblity as he fixed his faceted stare in dazed disbelief upon the window, the Empire State Building, and the absurdly bipedal form of Timothy Hooten.

* * *

Dr. Scott in a shimmer of disturbed space-time gazed in wild surmise at the figure reclining before him, all six legs curled in comfortable relaxation, faceted eyes staring. "Hallucination, of course," he told himself dizzily. "Of course, of course, of course. . . ."

He turned his head for the reassuring sight of his own office around him and his eyes fell upon the sky-slit and the view beyond. The first glimmers of awful conviction began to dawn. He had never seen a Quatt Wunkery before.

MURRAY LEINSTER

If you ever read the mass-circulation slick magazines, you can't have missed the beautifully constructed stories by Will F. Jenkins that graced them for years; if you read the magazines specializing in science fiction, you are certain to know Jenkins' alter ego and pen-name, Murray Leinster. Like Simak, Jack Williamson and just about no one else, Leinster's first appearance in science-fiction magazines began very shortly after the magazines themselves began to appear and he has evolved and grown with the field. Like almost no one but himself, he blends a brilliant and detailed imagination with warm human writing to produce such compassionate stories as . . .

The Journey

It was the year Joe graduated from college, and he signed on the *Mavourneen* for one trip out and back. He wanted to do it, he explained carefully to his father, just to get used to standing on his own feet and earning his living the hard way before beginning to practice the profession his father had paid to have him study for. His father admitted that it was normal for a young man to want to spend a certain amount of time making a fool of himself.

"It's a sort of honeymoon with life," he told Joe, "when you and the cosmos seem especially made for each other and you're sure you'll never quarrel. All right. Go ahead."

He did better than consent. He pulled some highly necessary wires so Joe could join the *Mavourneen* as a spaceman, second class, in spite of competition. And eventually he and Joe's mother went down to see the *Mavourneen* lift off. The ship was not new or impressive. She carried cargo only, so

Joe was visible to them only as a figure in a white duck crew-suit, working a cargo-crane as the last bales went on board. He saw them and waved, and presently the cargo port closed and sealed, and then the lift-warning horn blared. There was nothing overhead, so it didn't make a bit of difference, but it was custom. Then came that curious rumbling sound which is a drive warming up, and Joe's father and mother tried to get rid of the cotton-woolly feeling it made in their ears, and after a little the outside speaker said hollowly: *"Seconds to lift:—ten,—nine—eight—seven—"*

Joe's father and mother felt the way parents would feel at that moment, but Joe felt fine. He was sealed up in the *Mavourneen* for his first cruise—which would probably be his only one, things being as they were. It wasn't likely that he'd ever again be able to spare eight months out of his life to go traveling on a freighter, with a living to make which he had to try to nurse into a career.

Then the ungainly bulk of the *Mavourneen* lifted heavily and seemed to go grunting skyward.

Joe's mother waved her handkerchief until the ship was a bare speck. Then she wept, as mothers do when their sons take one step nearer to not needing their mothers any more. His father rumbled unhappily. He remembered, poignantly, how magnificently confident and competent a young man can feel. Then they drove homeward with their thoughts on the *Mavourneen*—out of atmosphere before they were a mile from the field—and they thought of the clumsy, bulbous-shaped ship as speeding splendidly toward the stars, with sunlight shining on her outer plates. They knew that was how Joe had been thinking of it.

But Joe was busy. He was rated as spaceman, second class, which is as low as a rating can go. The first hour up he worked in the cargo hold putting braces in place so the cargo wouldn't shift. That's always done, and at some time or another between take-off and landing the skipper puts his ship through her paces to see just how she handles with the trim for this particular voyage. The second hour up, Joe followed a spaceman, first class, along a seemingly interminable corridor with white-painted walls and ceilings and a gray-painted floor. This was to learn where motors were—there were motors in most unexpected places—and exactly how they should be oiled.

He knew that outside the ship the sky had long since turned from blue to dark purple and then to black, and that it was no longer night or day but both at once. Which was because the sun was always shining outside the ship, and the stars shone too—in uncountable multiples of the number to be seen when looking up from one's bedroom window at home.

But Joe didn't see the stars. When he'd followed the spaceman, first class, along the corridor, he went to the crew's quarters and found his bunk and his possessions exactly where he'd dumped them. His name was on a duty list, so he went and got a swab and wiped down a floor that didn't need wiping. Then he went to mess—the food was not at all bad—and he found out his watch, and learned that now he could turn in while other people walked around white-painted corridors and swabbed floors.

He lay in his bunk and thought gloriously that now he was in space. He saw, of course, nothing but the underside of the bunk above his and the strictly aseptic crew's quarters. He had exactly the physical sensations of anybody in an air-conditioned, metal-walled space anywhere at all. But he knew that outside there was illimitable emptiness, and the sun glared fiercely and silently in the middle of all of it, spurting out pseudopods of flame, and Earth would only be a ball that was momently growing smaller. By now it would be about the size of an orange—but a little greenish for an orange, with patches of fungus-looking white stuff at its poles. And all around would be the stars. Millions and billions and quintillions of them, tinier specks than anybody could imagine and more than anyone could think of counting. But he did not see them. Naturally!

He didn't sleep well that first night. —It wasn't really night, but only a certain number of hours of ship-time. His mother didn't sleep well either. Back on Earth, she and Joe's father went to bed and lay quite still, each pretending to the other to be asleep. But it was unbearable. Quite suddenly his mother gave up the pretense and said worriedly in the darkness of the bedroom: "Do you suppose they're nice boys in the ship?— They all looked so young!"

And Joe's father said with a dryness that Joe's mother didn't catch: "Oh, yes! They're nice boys. They're star-crazy and ships can pick and choose their crews, you know."

This was perfectly true, because the most romantic thing in the world— No. The most romantic things in all the solar system were the ships that floated magnificently from one planet to another. There weren't but so many. There was a stodgy fleet that hauled metal from Mercury—ready-smelted metal. There were brisk liners that went to the domes on Venus—it was proof that one was a millionaire to spend a few weeks every year on Venus—and there were a couple of ships hauling back the things the scientists were finding in the ruined cities on Mars. Then there were the ships that went to the Jovian moons—two of them—and to the mines on Uranus and Pluto. That was all. There was work for perhaps a hundred space-ships. There wasn't work for more. So every year there were several thousand space-crazy young men trying frantically for each one of the very few vacancies in their crews. The ships could pick their crews on any basis their skippers pleased. Joe was lucky to be signed on.

But he didn't see the stars. A week from Earth, he was trusted to remember all the motors and places that had to be oiled. Thereafter he made his round alone. Each watch, he made a trudging progress along what seemed miles of white-painted corridor, dutifully stopping at each place where a motor lurked behind a door or panel, and conscientiously made sure that each one was adequately lubricated. And he had divers other official duties, of which swabbing floors seemed to be most prominent.

When he was two weeks out he realized that he was pretty well ignored by the rest of the crew. He was acutely and gloriously aware that he was in space. They prided themselves upon being space-hardened. Which meant having no illusions about the romance of space travel. The older men may even have meant it, but the ones around Joe's age were self-consciously disillusioned. They were raucously amused at any suggestion that being a spaceman was anything but a tedious and not-too-well-paid job. They conceded only that their profession entitled them to—and secured them—their choice of female companionship in the dives they spent their pay in back on Earth. They talked as nearly as possible in four-letter words only. Which proved their sophistication but made their talk unduly monotonous. Lost in his rapt contemplation of the fact that he was in space, Joe bored them.

Once the man whose bunk was above Joe's took action. He sneaked a spare gravity coil out of the electrician's storeroom and set it up above Joe's bunk. When Joe was asleep he turned it on. It neatly neutralized the normal gravitation of the ship. Joe woke, weightless, gasping in terror. It was that nightmare sensation of unending fall—the sensation the very first rocketeers had when they essayed to "coast" to the moon on their own momentum. They could not sleep, because when they dozed off they woke instantly in the primeval horror of falling. Even on the moon they could not sleep. The gravity was not enough. Some of them died of sleeplessness and— But everybody knows all about that.

The gravity coil was intended as a joke. But it was used nightly, and many times a night, until Joe began to feel an hysterical terror of sleeping. Then an old hand exposed the trick and showed Joe the other trick of strapping himself down so that there was always pressure on his body. It was a substitute for the feel of something—or someone—holding him comfortingly fast. But it was a long time before Joe got back real confidence in sleep.

Back on Earth, Joe's mother and father very carefully made a boast of Joe's journeying. They said proudly to their friends that Joe was away out beyond Mars now, which was true. They said that he was an old hand in space now. Which was probably true, too. But he hadn't seen the stars. He only traveled among them.

On the trip out he actually saw the stars just once, and then it was a bare glimpse. It was a little beyond the orbit of Jupiter, when the *Mavourneen* was something over two months out from Earth and still accelerating—still going a little bit faster every instant than she'd been going the instant before. Joe was trudging the weary, endless, unchanging corridor in which he oiled motors. He saw the *Mavourneen's* first mate coming in the opposite direction.

The mate stopped by a round plate set in the outer wall of the corridor. He took a key from his pocket, unlocked something, and swung the plate inward on a hinge. He looked at what was uncovered.

Joe passed, going on his round. He glanced where the mate looked. Then he froze. The mate was making a routine check of the few, emergency, rarely-or-never-used viewports in the ship's hull. In the unthinkable event of disaster to the

control room—from which the stars were normally viewed—the ship could be navigated by hand with men at such ports as this, reporting to a jury-rigged control room. The mate was simply verifying that they were ready for use. But he uncovered the stars. And Joe looked.

He looked with his own eyes into infinity—past the mate's head and shoulders, of course. He saw the stars. Their number was like the number of grains of sand. Their color varied beyond belief. For the first time Joe realized that they differed only in brightness and color, because they were all so far away that they were the same size. None was larger than a mathematical point. It was a sight which no man has ever seen save through some such window as the mate had uncovered.

Joe gazed with absolute rapture. The mate matter-of-factly made his verification of the condition of the port and the shutters that closed over it outside—the shutters which infinitesimal meteorites might pit with their tiny, violent explosions if they struck. The mate closed the inner plate, making sure that the outer shutters closed with it. He locked it and turned to go on. He saw Joe, dazed and agitated, staring at the metal plate which had just locked out the universe.

Joe said, swallowing:

"I—never saw the stars before, sir."

The mate said, "Oh," and went on.

Joe continued about his duties, but his actions were purely automatic. For two watches he did not see anything much but the tiny, remembered segment of the cosmos, glimpsed beyond the head and shoulders of the *Mavourneen's* first mate. He did not notice what he ate. He had seen the stars!

He expanded the vision in his mind. He pictured the cosmos as that small scene multiplied until he could imagine looking in every direction and seeing nothing else, as if he were disembodied in emptiness. By the mere fact of thinking he discovered that odd quirk in man's constitution by which human beings stay sane in emptiness. The quirk is that the stars do not look far away. There is no feeling of distance. They are so remote that—like the toy-sized houses and roads and forests seen from a transport plane on earth—they lose all scale. They do not move. One knows that there is vastness about, but the sensation is comfortably that of

occupying a stable, solid building out of whose windows one sees a backdrop punctured with multitudes of holes. One simply does not feel empty distance all around, through which one might fall screaming for a thousand million years. And therefore men stay sane in space.

Nearing a planet, it is different. Refraction in an atmosphere makes a planet seem round. It is visibly a solid ball and nearer than its background of stars. One has a sensation of height and a conviction that it is far away, and a panicky, desperate need to reach it and feel its huge and reassuring mass . . .

It is a fortunate thing that one has to use power to get down to a planet's surface from space.

Joe's meditations told him all this. Perhaps his companions had seen the stars with the same eagerness as himself, in time past. After the first thrill they felt disappointment. And therefore they voiced their disillusionment in raucous scorn. But still they stayed spacemen . . .

Back on Earth, Joe's father and mother noticed that the later vision-casts were quite fascinating. They mentioned the matter to each other, pretending astonishment. They admitted ruefully that they were staying up too late and not getting enough sleep. But they didn't refer to their separate discoveries that it was much wiser to be thoroughly tired out before thinking of going to bed—if one wanted to sleep. To their friends they said brightly that Joe's ship was out beyond Saturn.

It was. Joe oiled motors and swabbed decks. Presently his parents back on Earth were able to tell their friends confidently that Joe was out beyond Uranus' orbit. He was. He still swabbed decks and oiled motors and trudged through a white-painted corridor and listened to his companions' talk —almost exclusively four-letter words—and sometimes he made use of the ship's crew's library. Sometimes he watched taped vision-casts.

After a while the ship was beyond Neptune.

Joe's mother and father knew the *Mavourneen* was decelerating, now. It made a non-stop voyage because that was the most practical way to make the run. The early rocket explorers hopped from one planet to another, carefully building up fuel stores for their ships before daring to go further. This was because fuel was their great problem.

Atomic-powered ships like the *Mavourneen* handled the matter otherwise. They wanted to use the smallest possible atom-piles, so they used the least power that would lift them. But fuel was no problem, so they kept the power on for half their journeys, building up speed second by second. On the second half of their voyages they used the same power to check the speed they had so painstakingly built up. Doubling the distance traveled in this way did not nearly double the time required to travel it. So, short journeys or broken ones were vastly wasteful of time. Therefore the *Mavourneen* made no stops on the way to Pluto.

But it was not an exciting journey. Each day Joe oiled and inspected more small motors than he had known could exist, before joining the *Mavourneen's* crew. Each day he swabbed decks, broke out stores, painted, polished, and performed other duties incident to the career of a spaceman, second class. On the way out to Pluto he spent a total of more than seven hundred hours at menial tasks, requiring neither skill nor the education his father had paid for. But he was very happy. He had seen a very small portion of the firmament for something like thirty seconds past the head and shoulders of a preoccupied first mate.

Back on Earth, his mother told her friends confidentially that she hadn't the least idea how she'd managed it, but she'd lost several pounds and wasn't it wonderful to lose weight without dieting? Joe's father apologetically admitted to his friends that he was getting a little bit absent-minded these days. Joe? His son Joe? Oh, Joe was fine! Out on a cargo ship to Pluto to get space-hunger and the wanderlust out of his system at the same time. Come to think of it, his ship ought to be landing on Pluto any day now . . .

It was time for landing. Three days from landing the first mate inspected the cargo holds and had some extra braces put in place. Later, the ship performed elephantine maneuvers in space. The sensation on board was precisely what would be produced by a slow and deliberate earthquake, when all of solidity changed its position, and changed back, and changed again, and again, and again. It was productive of pure, instinctive panic.

Naturally, Joe gave no sign of his sensations. He knew that a pale disk had appeared in the stars before the *Mavourneen.* It was not bright like the face of a planet near the sun. Here

the sun was only a bright star, yielding about as much light as the moon does to Earth. There were no days on Pluto. There was night; yes. Night without a moon, and with infinitesimal stars, much brighter than on Earth, shining in incredible multitudes from every crack and cranny of the heavens. And there was twilight. That was when the star-sized sun was overhead. But there was no day.

Joe knew, too, that the ghost disk to be seen from the *Mavourneen's* control room ports showed no markings at all. There were no seas. If there was water, it was frozen. There was no air. It was frozen, too. The planet was a featureless gray phantom of solidity as the *Mavourneen* approached its twilight side.

The ship's space radio was sending a beam of radio waves on ahead to notify its coming. Other signals were coming back from the tiny human settlement deep under the planet's frigid surface. Joe tried to imagine how explorers had found the heart to search such a planet for the mineral deposits which made a settlement worth while. The settlement itself, of course, was no problem. A ship like the *Mavourneen* would need only to settle to solidity anywhere, and it could run a shaft down to something which would neither evaporate or run away as a liquid at a temperature at which human beings could live. One ship could establish a village, which other ships could supply and increase down under the cold. For more than fifty years, now, there had been humans living on Pluto and working its mines. There were even families . . .

But Joe could not quite imagine family life on Pluto.

He knew that the landing was due, but he did not know when the ship went down to the planet-wide plain which a radio beam assured the *Mavourneen's* skipper was his destination. Joe did not see the tiny, flickering, pinpoint of brightness which was the landing-beacon and the first actual contact with human beings outside the ship for some thousands of millions of miles. He was swabbing a floor when his ears abruptly felt strange. There was something very odd about all his surroundings. It was seconds before he realized what had happened.

The drive was off. It had been in his ears every second of the time since leaving Earth. Now it had stopped.

The *Mavourneen* had landed on Pluto.

Joe continued to swab. But his feelings were remarkable.

During his next watch, the unloading of cargo on Pluto began. The ship was sealed to the ground by a wall attached to the rounded hull at the top, and to the landing-platform at the bottom. It was made of stuff squirted out of hoses, which hardened where it landed and almost as it splashed. It was water, mined at the end of one of the galleries leading in all directions from the underground settlement. It made an airtight connection of the ship to the ground. In thick work jackets, the crew of the *Mavourneen* unloaded cargo in this temporary ice-walled cavern. Their breaths were frosty in the glare of the unloading-lights. The cargo vanished into shafts going down into the village.

In his watch off, Joe was given shore-leave. He was permitted to go down to the village on Pluto. There were nearly two thousand people here, and ships came fairly often. There was no loneliness. The folk who lived here felt no such hunger for talk as Joe felt. They had a reasonably spacious community, with metal walls and ceilings—mostly painted white—and they had shops and homes, and life went on very comfortably. The air had a peculiar, invigorating smell to it, because of the hydroponic gardens which grew fresh vegetables. It was warmer, too, than on the ship. The community had an atom pile for power, and mined uranium as part of its way of life. Part of the cargo for Earth was pigs of uranium.

The only thing Joe could really note down as distinctive was that the settlement was warmer than he was at all used to. Otherwise the feel of things was like that in a medium-sized village, assuming only that it lived in a single apartment house and that all the time was night. —That was because all the light was artificial. But this did not seem strange to Joe. He had seen no other sort of light all the way out on the ship.

He bought souvenirs for his parents—minerals, and some of those inexplicable fossil-bearing lumps of transparent rock that are familiar enough in museums. There was no other distinctive local product to buy. The settlement on Pluto was small, but it was prosperous and up-to-date. The only thing in the least backward about it was the visi-screen shows. They were brought out recorded on tape, and Joe had seen all of them.

Just before the last of the ship's cargo was unloaded, Joe

broke his arm. It was one of those unforeseeable accidents. A cargo sling let go the fraction of a second before it should have. A bale came tumbling, and Joe tried to stop it with a cargo hook, and the bale was heavier than it should have been. His arm was flicked aside with a deceptive gentleness, and he felt the bones snap.

It was nothing very serious. There was a hospital, of course, where highly professional X-rays determined the exact damage, and a perfectly competent surgeon pinned the bones, put the arm in a light plastic cast, and told Joe he was quite fit for light duty. Even the first mate took it casually.

"I'll give you second steward rating on the way back," he said matter-of-factly. "That'll mean a little better pay, even. You wait on table and help the cook for the officers' mess."

"But the work I was doing—"

"A second steward's signing off," said the mate. "He'll stay out here between ships. Good pay in the mines. And there's a man wants to get back to Earth. He's made a stake. His papers say he's an engineer, third, but he'll go back as spaceman, second class."

And that was that. There was no passenger traffic to Pluto. There was nothing to see. While the ship was aground Joe never saw the surface, and aside from the souvenir minerals the only oddity he remembered was the warm, man-made climate.

He was helping the cook with the officers' mess when the *Mavourneen* took off again. He felt the cotton-wooly sensation in his ears when the drive warmed up, and he knew the moment of take-off because the sound changed. And of course he knew it would no longer be possible to go down into the underground settlement on his watch off. But that was all. He regretted that he hadn't been able to see the ice seal melted down by space-suited figures using torches to melt the ship free. The water would have frozen again instantly, of course. Then the walls would be broken up and taken down into the village to be used again later.

But when the *Mavourneen* was only two hours out from Pluto, bound back to Earth, Joe had the first inkling of the event that was to make his whole journey remarkable. The first mate brought a girl into the kitchen and said briefly:

"This is Miss Alice Cawdor. She rates as supernumerary

steward. The skipper had orders to bring her to Earth if she wanted to make the trip. See that she has meals. She isn't required to do any work, but if she wants to, she may."

He went away. The girl said politely:

"How do you do?"

She looked at Joe with a friendly reserve which was exactly the way a small-town girl looks at people she has not met before. Not suspicious, and not stand-offish, but like somebody who's known the same people all her life, and knows that some new people will become her friends and some won't. Joe had been pretty lonely on Pluto, and he'd expected to be lonely on the way back. He found himself hoping that this girl would decide he was worth making friends with.

Back on Earth his father and mother were beginning to talk about taking a vacation somewhere. They needed it. Joe's father was drawn pretty fine, now, and his mother had had to take in all her clothes. There could be no communication by radio beyond a distance to be measured in thousands of miles. The distance to where Joe was was thousands of millions of miles. So there would be no word from or about Joe until his ship got back. The next three and a half months were going to be hard to last through.

Joe's new duties as a second steward were easier than those of a spaceman, second class. He set the table for the officers and put the food on it. He took out the dishes and put them in the washer. Later he stacked them. He did some polishing of cutlery and pans. Not much. The girl stayed in an empty cabin most of the time. She came and got her meals from the kitchen and took them to her cabin to eat, alone. She was pleasant, but reserved.

During the first week, though, she did ask Joe if there were any books or vision-tapes to read or look at. He found some for her and set up a small tape-viewer for her to watch the vision-tapes in. He mentioned one record he thought she'd like.

The sun, at that time, was a flaring bright star four light-hours away. It would take the *Mavourneen* a little over three and a half months to reach a spot eight light-minutes away from it, where there should be a certain small planet called Earth.

Joe worked in the kitchen and served the officers' meals.

He thought often and deeply about the stars. He set a table and cleared it and put dishes in a washer and later stacked them. Once he thought about the profession he had studied to practice. He also thought about the vision-reels in the ship's library, and the books, and picked out some others for the girl to see when she wanted them.

Two weeks out of Pluto they were talking about other subjects than books and vision-reels. With a little embarrassment she told him she'd been born on Pluto and had lived all her life in the underground settlement there.

"My mother got tired of it, finally," she said. "She used to get homesick for Earth. I don't remember, but she made my father promise that he'd send me back to Earth to see it, anyway, before I married somebody out there."

"Have you picked him out?" asked Joe.

She shook her head.

By the time they passed the orbit of Neptune they were friends. And Joe knew that she'd estimated him carefully before she gave him her friendship. He felt that the honor was great. His selection of vision-reels and books became even more painstaking. But they talked quite a lot. Sometimes about the stars outside the ship. She had never seen the stars, either.

"You'll see them on Earth," Joe promised. "You'll see them every night."

She said uncomfortably:

"Night . . . It must be strange. That's when there isn't any light. And the stars are in the sky . . ." She said uncertainly. "I can't imagine what a sky is like. My father says there isn't any ceiling over your head . . ."

Joe looked at her in astonishment. Then he realized. He, himself, had not seen a sky for nearly five months. She had never seen one. She had never been out-of-doors. Not that she had suffered physically from the fact. Lamps supplied needed ultraviolet in the ship, and certainly in the settlement on Pluto.

"And sunshine," she added uneasily. "It's yellow, isn't it? I wonder what I'll look like in—daylight?"

Joe tried to tell her. He was very earnest about it. But when he was by himself, sometimes he doubted the accuracy of the descriptions he gave her. It had been a long time since he'd seen a sky or the sun or trees, or grass, or even the

stars as they look from the bottom of Earth's ocean of air.

The *Mavourneen* floated on through emptiness toward Earth. Around her the stars shone by myriads of myriads. Some were brighter than others, and some were yellow and some were blue and pink and even green. But none was larger than any other. All were pinpoints—unwinking and infinitely small.

All but the sun.

That had visibly a disk when the *Mavourneen* crossed the orbit of Uranus. Not that Joe saw the planet, nor did Alice Cawdor, the girl. As a matter of fact, Uranus was around on the other side of the sun and was not seen even by the officers and crew-members who had occasion to enter the control room and look out of its ports. Saturn was visible, but the ship would not pass within hundreds of millions of miles of it. There was not much excitement even in duty in the control room of the *Mavourneen*.

The firmament gave no impression of distance. It looked like an all-encompassing backdrop in which someone had prickled countless tiny holes through which lights shone. There was the sun ahead, but it was merely a distinct bright light of small but appreciable size. Navigating the *Mavourneen* was merely a matter of working controls so that dials would read what mathematics said they should. One had no feeling of movement or adventure.

The ship passed the orbit of Saturn. Back on Earth, Joe's mother began to find it more difficult to sleep. Joe might be home in two months more. If nothing had happened . . . Joe's father smoked too much. But he would have grinned at the suggestion that he worried about Joe. Joe was all right. Of course!

Then Jupiter and the sun and the *Mavourneen* were at the three corners of an equilateral triangle, if anybody cared. The ship had been decelerating for a long time when she reached that point and kept on sunward toward the orbit of Mars. She continued to decelerate. The only noteworthy thing that turned up in Joe's life was that he discovered Alice did not know that on Earth everybody went to sleep at night. Without really thinking about it, she'd assumed that life on Earth was like life on Pluto, and that people were awake and slept in shifts—as on Pluto—and that there was always brightness outside one's room and somebody up and

about and working or amusing themselves. She found it frightening to think of everybody asleep at once. It seemed to her that somebody ought to be on duty to make sure there was light and heat and air. On Pluto there was.

Joe felt a sort of compassionate protectiveness toward her now. He told her about his family, and assured her that his mother would instantly invite her to visit and grow used to Earth in his home. She had been bound for some institutional hotel where she would be properly guarded against her unsophistication in Earth customs.

They passed the orbit of Mars.

Now Joe was enormously impatient for the *Mavourneen* to land. He wanted to show Alice the sky. She had never seen it. He wanted to show her the stars—not from space, but from Earth. He was going to show her the sunset, and the rain, and a sunrise. There would be mountains to be regarded, and the ocean. She must see—and be protected from terror at the sight of—more people than lived on all of Pluto, dining at once in one great room, with many times more moving about outside. She must hear bird songs in the morning. She must—

She grew scared.

"I—want to see the sky," she said uneasily, "but—what will I look like, Joe, in the sunlight?"

Joe said:

"You'll look beautiful!"

And he kissed her tenderly.

They'd reached *that* point above the asteroid belt. The *Mavourneen* had made a parabolic curve above the plane of the ecliptic to dodge the asteroids, which may be the fragments of that planet which ought to lie between Earth and Mars, but doesn't. The ship was then curving down again to a rendezvous with Earth. The sun was an angry ball of seething flame, floating in emptiness and spouting streamers of fire. It was already too bright to be looked at directly from the control room ports. Mars could be plainly seen, and Venus was almost as bright as the sun itself appeared from Pluto.

But Joe and Alice did not even think what space looked like, outside the ship. Joe served the meals for the officers and cleared away the dishes and put them in the washer and

later stacked them. He did some polishing of cutlery. But then he hastened to find excuses to talk to Alice.

She grew afraid. She had watched vision-tape plays about life on Earth. She had seen pictures. She had read. But by anticipation she felt a shaking agoraphobia. Yet she wanted desperately to see the sky.

Eight hours before landing, she wept bitterly. Joe's arms were tightly about her, for comfort, but she was terrified. Then she tried to smile at him with wet eyes and her breath still coming in little gasps from past sobbing.

"I—I don't know what I'd do without you, Joe. You—encourage me so! What would I do without you?"

"You'll never find out," he told her. "You'll never be without me!"

It was quite definitely settled that they were going to marry. After all, Joe had finished college and was trained to a profession, and so was able to support a wife as soon as he got started. Anyhow, his father would help out at the beginning. Obviously Joe couldn't let Alice try to make her way about Earth alone! So of course they would be married immediately. His father would agree that it was the only sensible arrangement. Nothing else was thinkable!

And so the *Mavourneen,* huge and swollen of shape and ungraceful to look at and horribly clumsy to handle in atmosphere—so the *Mavourneen* reached Earth. Joe's mother and father were at the field when the ship landed. It came down out of nowhere, and Joe's mother saw it first, but it was instantly blotted out by tears. It grew larger and larger, and its few, unbeautiful exterior features became visible, and then it seemed to sway crushingly overhead. Then it settled down, very heavily and gruntingly, and was on Earth again.

It was not like a passenger-liner landing. Joe's father and mother were the only people to meet it except those whose livelihood it made. But presently they saw Joe. There was, then, no sign of his having broken an arm. It was long since healed. He came down the landing-ladder with Alice. He helped her to the ground, with the swelling hull of the *Mavourneen,* above them, blotting out the sky. He hurried her toward his father and mother—but he did not see them. He stopped no more than a dozen feet away from them. Joe's mother could not speak. His father simply looked.

Joe said exultantly:

"Look, darling! That's the sky! Look at it! Isn't it wonderful?"

Joe's mother and father saw a pretty girl. A young girl. A sweet-faced girl, in every way suitable to rouse their son's enthusiasm. Joe's father and mother looked at Joe, and at her. And Alice was frightened and desperately yearning. She did not look at the sky. Her eyes clung affrightedly to Joe's face, searching his expression. She said in a scared voice:

"H—how do I look—in daylight?"

"Beautiful!" said Joe. It had not occurred to him to have any doubt. There had been no reason for doubt. He kissed her joyously.

His father and mother waited for him to see them. His mother's eyes overflowed. It was at least partly the result of seeing that Joe had taken another step toward not needing a mother any more. Joe's father's face was a little bit gaunt. The last eight months had been pretty bad for him.

They waited while Joe kissed Alice triumphantly, and then faced her about and commanded her to look at the sky and the grass and the trees beyond the field. He showed her a cloud. He showed her the sun.

Presently he noticed his father and mother.

ARTHUR C. CLARKE

Like John Wyndham, Arthur C. Clarke is a British prophet of science fiction who has found his greatest honor in this country. He has published here such fine science-fiction novels as Prelude to Space *and* Childhood's End, *and many shorter stories; his non-fiction books include* The Exploration of Space *and have reached several hundred thousand book-club members as well as special fans. Clarke, former head of the British Interplanetary Society, is as well qualified as any man to write about the far planets. To prove that he can do as well right here on Earth, see . . .*

The Nine Billion Names of God

"This is a slightly unusual request," said Dr. Wagner, with what he hoped was commendable restraint. "As far as I know, it's the first time anyone's been asked to supply a Tibetan monastery with an Automatic Sequence Computer. I don't wish to be inquisitive, but I should hardly have thought that your—ah—establishment had much use for such a machine. Could you explain just what you intend to do with it?"

"Gladly," replied the Lama, readjusting his silk robe and carefully putting away the slide rule he had been using for currency conversions. "Your Mark V Computer can carry out any routine mathematical operation involving up to ten digits. However, for our work we are interested in *letters*, not numbers. As we wish you to modify the output circuits, the machine will be printing words, not columns of figures."

"I don't quite understand . . ."

"This is a project on which we have been working for the last three centuries—since the lamasery was founded, in fact.

It is somewhat alien to your way of thought, so I hope you will listen with an open mind while I explain it."

"Naturally."

"It is really quite simple. We have been compiling a list which shall contain all the possible names of God."

"I beg your pardon?"

"We have reason to believe," continued the Lama imperturbably, "that all such names can be written with not more than nine letters in an alphabet we have devised."

"And you have been doing this for three centuries?"

"Yes: we expected it would take us about fifteen thousand years to complete the task."

"Oh." Dr. Wagner looked a little dazed. "Now I see why you wanted to hire one of our machines. But exactly what is the *purpose* of this project?"

The Lama hesitated for a fraction of a second and Wagner wondered if he had offended him. If so, there was no trace of annoyance in the reply.

"Call it ritual, if you like, but it's a fundamental part of our belief. All the many names of the Supreme Being—God, Jehovah, Allah, and so on—they are only man-made labels. There is a philosophical problem of some difficulty here, which I do not propose to discuss, but somewhere among all the possible combinations of letters which can occur are what one may call the *real* names of God. By systematic permutation of letters, we have been trying to list them all."

"I see. You've been starting at AAAAAAAAA . . . and working up to ZZZZZZZZZ . . ."

"Exactly—though we use a special alphabet of our own. Modifying the electromatic typewriters to deal with this is, of course, trivial. A rather more interesting problem is that of devising suitable circuits to eliminate ridiculous combinations. For example, no letter must occur more than three times in succession."

"Three? Surely you mean two."

"Three is correct: I am afraid it would take too long to explain why, even if you understood our language."

"I'm sure it would," said Wagner hastily. "Go on."

"Luckily, it will be a simple matter to adapt your Automatic Sequence Computer for this work, since once it has been programed properly it will permute each letter in

turn and print the result. What would have taken us fifteen thousand years it will be able to do in a hundred days."

Dr. Wagner was scarcely conscious of the faint sounds from the Manhattan streets far below. He was in a different world, a world of natural, not man-made mountains. High up in their remote aeries these monks had been patiently at work, generation after generation, compiling their lists of meaningless words. Was there any limit to the follies of mankind? Still, he must give no hint of his inner thoughts. The customer was always right . . .

"There's no doubt," replied the doctor, "that we can modify the Mark V to print lists of this nature. I'm much more worried about the problem of installation and maintenance. Getting out to Tibet, in these days, is not going to be easy."

"We can arrange that. The components are small enough to travel by air—that is one reason why we chose your machine. If you can get them to India, we will provide transport from there."

"And you want to hire two of our engineers?"

"Yes, for the three months the project should take."

"I've no doubt that Personnel can manage that." Dr. Wagner scribbled a note on his desk pad. "There are just two other points—"

Before he could finish the sentence the Lama had produced a small slip of paper.

"This is my certified credit balance at the Asiatic Bank."

"Thank you. It appears to be—ah—adequate. The second matter is so trivial that I hesitate to mention it—but it's surprising how often the obvious gets overlooked. What source of electrical energy have you?"

"A diesel generator providing 50 kilowatts at 110 volts. It was installed about five years ago and is quite reliable. It's made life at the lamasery much more comfortable, but of course it was really installed to provide power for the motors driving the prayer wheels."

"Of course," echoed Dr. Wagner. "I should have thought of that."

The view from the parapet was vertiginous, but in time one gets used to anything. After three months, George Hanley was not impressed by the two-thousand-foot swoop into the abyss or the remote checkerboard of fields in the

valley below. He was leaning against the wind-smoothed stones and staring morosely at the distant mountains whose names he had never bothered to discover.

This, thought George, was the craziest thing that had ever happened to him. "Project Shangri-La," some wit at the labs had christened it. For weeks now the Mark V had been churning out acres of sheets covered with gibberish. Patiently, inexorably, the computer had been rearranging letters in all their possible combinations, exhausting each class before going on to the next. As the sheets had emerged from the electromatic typewriters, the monks had carefully cut them up and pasted them into enormous books. In another week, heaven be praised, they would have finished. Just what obscure calculations had convinced the monks that they needn't bother to go on to words of ten, twenty or a hundred letters, George didn't know. One of his recurring nightmares was that there would be some change of plan, and that the High Lama (whom they'd naturally called Sam Jaffe, though he didn't look a bit like him) would suddenly announce that the project would be extended to approximately 2060 A.D. They were quite capable of it.

George heard the heavy wooden door slam in the wind as Chuck came out on to the parapet beside him. As usual, Chuck was smoking one of the cigars that made him so popular with the monks—who, it seemed, were quite willing to embrace all the minor and most of the major pleasures of life. That was one thing in their favor: they might be crazy, but they weren't bluenoses. Those frequent trips they took down to the village, for instance . . .

"Listen, George," said Chuck urgently. "I've learned something that means trouble."

"What's wrong? Isn't the machine behaving?" That was the worst contingency George could imagine. It might delay his return, than which nothing could be more horrible. The way he felt now, even the sight of a TV commercial would seem like manna from heaven. At least it would be some link with home.

"No—it's nothing like that." Chuck settled himself on the parapet, which was unusual because normally he was scared of the drop. "I've just found what all this is about."

"What d'ya mean—I thought we knew."

"Sure—we know what the monks are trying to do. But we didn't know *why*. It's the craziest thing—"

"Tell me something new," growled George.

"—but old Sam's just come clean with me. You know the way he drops in every afternoon to watch the sheets roll out. Well, this time he seemed rather excited, or at least as near as he'll ever get to it. When I told him that we were on the last cycle he asked me, in that cute English accent of his, if I'd ever wondered what they were trying to do. I said 'Sure'—and he told me."

"Go on: I'll buy it."

"Well, they believe that when they have listed all His names—and they reckon that there are about nine billion of them—God's purpose will be achieved. The human race will have finished what it was created to do, and there won't be any point in carrying on. Indeed, the very idea is something like blasphemy."

"Then what do they expect us to do? Commit suicide?"

"There's no need for that. When the list's completed, God steps in and simply winds things up . . . bingo!"

"Oh, I get it. When we finish our job, it will be the end of the world."

Chuck gave a nervous little laugh.

"That's just what I said to Sam. And do you know what happened? He looked at me in a very queer way, like I'd been stupid in class, and said 'It's nothing as trivial as *that.*' "

George thought this over for a moment.

"That's what I call taking the Wide View," he said presently. "But what d'ya suppose we should do about it? I don't see that it makes the slightest difference to us. After all, we already knew that they were crazy."

"Yes—but don't you see what may happen? When the list's complete and the Last Trump doesn't blow—or whatever it is they expect—*we* may get the blame. It's our machine they've been using. I don't like the situation one little bit."

"I see," said George slowly. "You've got a point there. But this sort of thing's happened before, you know. When I was a kid down in Louisiana we had a crackpot preacher who said the world was going to end next Sunday. Hundreds of people believed him—even sold their homes. Yet nothing happened, they didn't turn nasty as you'd expect. They just decided that

he'd made a mistake in his calculations and went right on believing. I guess some of them still do."

"Well, this isn't Louisiana, in case you hadn't noticed. There are just two of us and hundreds of these monks. I like them, and I'll be sorry for old Sam when his lifework backfires on him. But all the same, I wish I was somewhere else."

"I've been wishing that for weeks. But there's nothing we can do until the contract's finished and the transport arrives to fly us out."

"Of course," said Chuck thoughtfully, "we could always try a bit of sabotage."

"Like hell we could! That would make things worse."

"Not the way I meant. Look at it like this. The machine will finish its run four days from now, on the present twenty-hours-a-day basis. The transport calls in a week. O.K. —then all we need do is to find something that wants replacing during one of the overhaul periods—something that will hold up the works for a couple of days. We'll fix it, of course, but not too quickly. If we time matters properly, we can be down at the airfield when the last name pops out of the register. They won't be able to catch us then."

"I don't like it," said George. "It will be the first time I ever walked out on a job. Besides, it would make them suspicious. No. I'll sit tight and take what comes."

"I *still* don't like it," he said, seven days later, as the tough little mountain ponies carried them down the winding road. "And don't you think I'm running away because I'm afraid. I'm just sorry for those poor old guys up there, and I don't want to be around when they find what suckers they've been. Wonder how Sam will take it?"

"It's funny," replied Chuck, "but when I said good-bye I got the idea he knew we were walking out on him—and that he didn't care because he knew the machine was running smoothly and that the job would soon be finished. After that —well, of course, for him there just isn't any After That . . ."

George turned in his saddle and stared back up the mountain road. This was the last place from which one could get a clear view of the lamasery. The squat, angular buildings were silhouetted against the afterglow of the sunset: here and there, lights gleamed like portholes in the sides of an

ocean liner. Electric lights, of course, sharing the same circuit as the Mark V. How much longer would they share it, wondered George. Would the monks smash up the computer in their rage and disappointment? Or would they just sit down quietly and begin their calculations all over again?

He knew exactly what was happening up on the mountain at this very moment. The High Lama and his assistants would be sitting in their silk robes, inspecting the sheets as the junior monks carried them away from the typewriters and pasted them into the great volumes. No one would be saying anything. The only sound would be the incessant patter, the never-ending rainstorm, of the keys hitting the paper, for the Mark V itself was utterly silent as it flashed through its thousands of calculations a second. Three months of this, thought George, was enough to start anyone climbing up the wall.

"There she is!" called Chuck, pointing down into the valley. "Ain't she beautiful!"

She certainly was, thought George. The battered old DC 3 lay at the end of the runway like a tiny silver cross. In two hours she would be bearing them away to freedom and sanity. It was a thought worth savoring like a fine liqueur. George let it roll round his mind as the pony trudged patiently down the slope.

The swift night of the high Himalayas was now almost upon them. Fortunately the road was very good, as roads went in this region, and they were both carrying torches. There was not the slightest danger, only a certain discomfort from the bitter cold. The sky overhead was perfectly clear and ablaze with the familiar, friendly stars. At least there would be no risk, thought George, of the pilot being unable to take off because of weather conditions. That had been his only remaining worry.

He began to sing, but gave it up after a while. This vast arena of mountains, gleaming like whitely hooded ghosts on every side, did not encourage such ebullience. Presently George glanced at his watch.

"Should be there in an hour," he called back over his shoulder to Chuck. Then he added, in an afterthought: "Wonder if the computer's finished its run? It was due about now."

Chuck didn't reply, so George swung round in his saddle. He could just see Chuck's face, a white oval turned towards the sky.

"Look," whispered Chuck, and George lifted his eyes to heaven. (There is always a last time for everything.)

Overhead, without any fuss, the stars were going out.

About Frederik Pohl

The man whom Kingsley Amis calls "the most consistently able writer in science fiction" is also one of the field's outstanding anthologists. Frederik Pohl first became a science-fiction editor at the age of 19; now, more than three decades later, he is Editor-in-Chief of Ace Books and has compiled more than a dozen science-fiction anthologies, including *Assignment in Tomorrow, Beyond the End of Time* and the *Star Science Fiction* series.

As a writer, Mr. Pohl's science fiction includes the novel *Drunkard's Walk* and such short-story collections as *The Case Against Tomorrow* and *Turn Left at Thursday.* In what one reviewer described as a "heaven-born" collaboration, with the late C. M. Kornbluth, he was the author of many short stories and novels, including one of the most popular science-fiction novels of all time, *The Space Merchants,* which has gone through a number of American and British editions, been translated into French, Swedish, Spanish, Japanese, Portuguese, German and other languages, and appeared on the air as a two-part dramatization on The Columbia Workshop.

Outside of the science-fiction field, Messrs. Pohl and Kornbluth wrote several novels of the "mainstream," including *Presidential Year,* a study of politics in America, now being made into a motion picture. Alone, Mr. Pohl has written several nonfiction books and one mathematical essay, *How to Count on Your Fingers,* which was widely republished and is now being used to train engineers in the complications of binary arithmetic.

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