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Brilliant and challenging fiction by

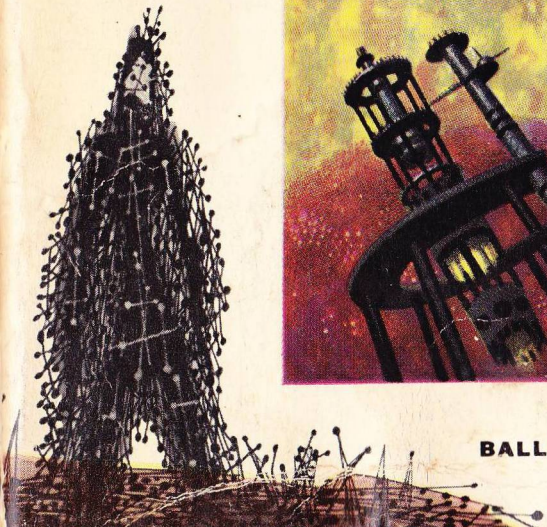
THEODORE STURGEON

LESTER DEL REY

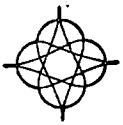
JESSAMYN WEST

STAR Short Novels

edited by FREDERIK POHL



BALLANTINE BOOKS



JESSAMYN WEST—author of such best-selling novels as CRESS DELAHANTY and THE WITCH DIGGERS, makes her debut in fantasy with a story of our world as it might be if there were a sudden interchange of size—but nothing else—between children and adults.

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Three gifted authors have here contributed their unique and diverse talents to bring you a truly distinguished collection of imaginative fiction.

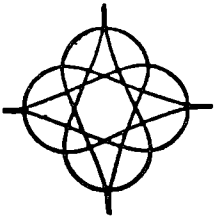
Anthologies edited by Frederik Pohl

STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES NO. 2

STAR SHORT NOVELS

This is an original collection—not a reprint—published by Ballantine Books, Inc. Each of these novels appears here in print for the first time.

Star 

SHORT NOVELS

Edited by FREDERIK POHL

BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK

Contents

Introduction

THIS BOOK HAD TO BE. There are stories in science fiction which cannot be told in a few words, and yet will not fill a book; stories which, caught in the limbo between short stories and full-length novels, may flicker briefly in a magazine but are less than likely to manage the permanence of book publication. And yet—they deserve to live.

For science fiction has much to say to all of us; it is not merely a clutch of thrills (though it can have its tingling excitement!), nor a literature of escape (though good reading is always good fun). Science fiction, at its best, is a mirror in which we see our world, our future, and ourselves. Like the diffraction grating of the physicists, it reflects, and it analyzes. Turn it upon whatever subject you will; the image is caught, torn apart, and returned to you, in neat spectroscopic bands. You may not recognize your own face or your own home town in the picture at first glance; but they are there, all the same, in aspects you perhaps had never before seen.

For we know ourselves by our extremes. We study the delusions of paranoia to understand what tiny tremors disturb our dreams; the vegetable quiet of the catatonic helps explain our slowness, sometimes, to respond to a challenge. Science fiction shows us extremes. We do not expect, you and I, to find ourselves in a world where Martians invade. But perhaps thinking about horn-skinned, bloodless aliens from another planet will teach us something about getting along with the divergent races, creeds, and sects who are our own human cousins.

Science fiction is the truthful expansion of a lie. The science-fiction writer may start out with whatever enormous lie he chooses to state; he may say that the Earth has been invaded by Martians, or that it is possible to travel in time, or that a dog can be bred to be smarter than a man. But once he has told his lie he is ruled by it as tyrannically as the Civil War historian is ruled by Lee's surrender: For the purposes of his story, that lie is true and incontrovertible, and cannot be ignored.

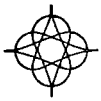
Jessamyn West, in the present volume, tells us a magnificent lie in her "Little Men." Having got off her whopper, she shows what becomes of the world—*if;* and it would be a courageous man who, granting the basic statement of the story, could find fault with a single word of the things that follow. Theodore Sturgeon's lie involves a single man; the statement concerns only the man, and the story is the story of the man's life alone. And Lester del Rey—ah, Lester del Rey. Read *that* one for yourself. I shall not attempt to describe it, only to say that I can imagine no more thought-provoking theme, nor can I imagine any way of writing it but in a science-fiction story. . . .

I hope you'll like these stories; I think you will. If so, thanks in large measure are due the authors—not only the three represented in this book, but the score or more of others who, for one reason or another, could not be. Collectively, these men and women are writing far more than their share of the most stimulating and satisfying stories in the world today; and it is a great pleasure for me to unveil this showcase of three pieces selected from the very top.

Frederik Pohl

Little Men

By JESSAMYN WEST



When I was a boy there were men who made appearances on school platforms as the last survivor of the battle of Gettysburg, or as the last living man to have seen Lincoln. I always felt sorry for them. It seemed a pity to have been born a man, capable of having done something yourself, and then in the end be remembered only because you once saw another man. I used to sit on a hard chair and tilt my head at the old man on the platform and wonder how he would have felt at twenty if some one had told him, "Sixty years from now you'll be remembered only because the image of another man once moved across your eyes. They won't care who you were or are. You'll just be a mirror reflecting someone else." I thought then that the twenty-year-old would have been fighting mad to hear those words and would have hit fist against palm and sworn to be a man in his own right and be remembered for himself.

It is because I can remember so clearly my feeling as a boy for those old men, that it seems doubly strange now, and doubly bitter too, to be one of them myself, to be writing as a "last survivor" and as an "eyewitness." But the likeness isn't absolute. I didn't just "see Lincoln." The thing that happened, actually happened to me first and not to another. If it wasn't something I did, what I write of is at least not something done by another or done to me. And now that I am myself an old man, and have seen the changes that have come since that day sixty years ago, I am convinced that we can not

always be thinking of ourselves and the figure we cut, but must have some concern for the wishes of other people.

* * * * * * [1]

What happened to me sixty years ago has since happened to almost every living man and woman. Some now think that they see signs of a gradual change back to the old way. I myself have seen none of these signs. But if there are signs of a change it is all the more important that authentic records of the first days of the Chileking Era be made. It is for these reasons that I am assenting to the wishes of the Committee for the Commemoration of the First Sixty Years, and setting down for them my memories of that first terrible hour and the scarcely less terrible days that followed. And, as I have said, it is fitting that I should do this since I not only saw with my own eyes the unbelievable and indeed horrifying changes of that October morning, but I myself was the first man on any continent to experience Subtraction.

My son and daughter, were they alive, should have their memories of that fateful day included with mine, for what I experienced first as an adult, they experienced first as children. I do not myself believe that Addition was for them as horrifying and shattering an experience as Subtraction was for me but I suppose Addition has played, if anything, a more sub-

[1] Asterisks have been used throughout this account to indicate a deletion of material. Two kinds of material have been deleted: 1. Excessive and boring statements of the narrator's personal opinions, prejudices, complaints, and general homesickness for life as it was lived when he was a boy. 2. Paragraphs and sometimes pages either recounting events of which he was not an eyewitness or belaboring matters which are of everyday familiarity to us all.

When possible I have left enough of the narrator's text to permit the reader to see the trend of his thinking—or as is more often the case—feeling. In any case all cuts have been made with an eye to increasing the pertinence and readability of the manuscript.

If there are those who would like to read the document in its entirety (it runs about half again as long as the published manuscript), photostatic copies will be made available for their perusal by the Committee for Commemoration.

S.L.H., EDITOR

stantial part in the world reversals which we have seen in the past half century.

There is no need for me to write of those reversals. We live among them. I had no hand in them, and more frequently than not opposed them. I shall however try to keep my account unbiased and factual and simply report what happened in those terrible days. Those horrors I know as no one else can. I was then the first man, as I am now one of the few survivors. I would not have chosen, as I said before, to be remembered for this. It was not after all something I did, but something that happened to me willy-nilly. I had thought my name in my old age would be associated with memorable developments in military tactics, particularly with those having to do with the use of guided missiles. But so far from my name being remembered in that connection, there are today very few people who even remember the enormous future the guided missile was thought to have in 1950. That is being sanguine: few even remember the name, and those who do lump it indiscriminately with the catapult or battering-ram. They forget that there are those alive who, except for the events of that fateful October, would have carried the guided missile to a point of perfection, few, even then, foresaw. But I do not propose to sigh either for past glories or for enterprises of the future which died stillborn.

* * * * * *

It is my purpose to write of what happened, not of what did not happen. And I make no apology for using in this account the phraseology of my youth. It is, in a sense, appropriate that the facts of those days should be written in the language then used. The Chilekings have authorized the use of many new, and more often than not, fantastic terms for the description of those early events. "Subtraction" is but one of many instances of this. I remember their shouts during November, when they ranged up and down the streets crying, "Daddy's been Subtracted. Daddy's been Subtracted." "Diminished" would have been a much more exact and dignified word, but constant repetition has established the other. So I

shall employ the classic usage of my youth except where it is entirely lacking in a suitable or understandable terminology.

I am an old man now, ninety-four years of age, but I shall never, though my existence should be extended for another century (and I most earnestly hope that this will not happen) lost my constant awareness of even the minutiae of that October morning.

I was then, as you have doubtless already deduced, thirty-four years old. I was a captain in the old army; stationed at the Presidio in San Francisco, California, and living in San Francisco. I was married. I had two children; a girl, Mary Frances, aged eleven, and a boy, David, aged eight. My career to this point had been unusually satisfying. I had published two books: *The Use of the Phipps-Viorsky Tank in Mountainous Terrain* and *Modern Co-ordination of Tank and Artillery*.

I mention these books particularly because I had been at work on a revision of the Phipps-Viorsky manual on the evening of October thirtieth. Amy, my wife, was in Pacific Grove for the evening, nursing her mother who was down with an attack of erysipelas. Mary Frances and David had been busy all evening making a pumpkin jack-o'-lantern. I helped them with the carving of the teeth, a bit of workmanship which required more exactitude in the handling of a knife than they possessed. I let them stay up a little past their bedtime in order that they might finish it. They took it upstairs with them when they went to bed and put it on the newel post in the hall, "so that we'll all be scared when we wake up in the morning." My God! Fright was something they never needed to plan for again.

After they went to bed I sat in my own room for some time meditating upon the coming elections; turning over in my mind a mechanical problem associated with the new Russian developments of so-called "jet repulsors." I was not pleased with what my mind encountered in either situation.

It had never been my habit to waste time in any non-utilitarian perusal of the landscape, nor to permit the loss of emotional energy in a sentimental identification with its transitory aspects. It was not, then, according to any estab-

lished custom that I sat until late that night by my window, looking across the moonlit city. The night was mild as fall nights in California always are, and it was fog-free. That is somewhat unusual here by the Coast, but October, more than any other month, brings such nights. We had had early rain that year and there was already a little smoke of green on the hills, and a smell of this false spring in the air.

I remember these things so clearly, I suppose, because I have so often gone back in my memory to those first hours before my Smalfri transformation (to employ a Chileking word used—as many have forgotten—humorously, at first and with no thought that it would find universal acceptance). Gone back to them at first with an intensity that I hoped might break the barriers of reality; for what happened to me that night seemed then not only shocking, but degrading. You who will read this have had that experience blunted for you by repetition. It is impossible for you to remember a time when it was not. You have heard tell of how it was with your grandfather, and his son, and how it will be with you. You were born with the anticipation of it in your blood. It was not so with me. I was the first man. My children were the first children. Try to think how it would be with you if you came to that experience unprepared. But you cannot, no more than you can imagine a world without death. But the first man who saw the rot of death? I have thought some about him in the past sixty years. No, no, the fact that my experience has since been shared by most human beings has never reconciled me to it, nor changed my opinion of its essential character.

The world was not, on that October night, in a state to inspire confidence or happiness; but I thought as I looked out onto the moonlit waters that I at least was equipped to be of service to my country in an emergency, and that on this very night, products of my mind, both mechanical and theoretical, were being of assistance to more than one nation in the maintenance of the *status quo. Status quo!* That is not a word one hears nowadays either; and my concern for it at that particular time is added proof of an irony that lies close to the very core of things.

I undressed slowly that night, taking, as I have said, an unwonted pleasure in the moonlit landscape. Before getting into bed I opened the door that separated my room from David's so that I would be able to hear him if he, by chance, called out to me in the night. But it was he who heard my cries, and came to me!

The next morning I awakened after a night of deep, heavy, unrefreshing sleep. I awakened while the light was still gray against my closed lids, and with the sense of having just emerged from some very disturbing and portentous dream. I lay with closed eyes trying to work my way back into that dream, to discover what it had been to leave me in this unwonted state of uneasiness and oppression. But the dream eluded me completely; only the feeling of a heaviness, at once physical and psychical remained, unchanging. I opened my eyes sufficiently to see that a particularly heavy fog had come up in the night and that the screens were beaded and dripping. This would account for the pressure I felt on my chest, this choking fog that had come up in the night. I was still more than half-asleep and felt overwhelmed by the weight and amount of bedclothes about me. My pajamas seemed to have slipped from my shoulders so that my hands were engulfed in sleeves. I managed to get my left hand free, and thrust it down beneath the covers to gain some leverage in hoisting myself up. There it encountered a circular metallic object almost as broad across as my palm. I let my hand close about it, speculating as to what it could be and how it had gotten into my bed. I lay with closed eyes amusing myself by trying to identify it by sense of touch alone. I decided that it must be a bracelet belonging to Mary Frances; it would slip over two or three of my fingers but not over my entire hand. When I had identified it as best I could by the feel of it alone, I lifted it to have a look. As chance would have it I raised it at such an angle that I saw first of all the inscription engraved inside it. "Amy—Robert" That was my wedding ring! What had happened to me, or it, to cause it to lie in my hand as large as a napkin ring, or a child's bracelet?

I held it near my wrist and saw that my wrist was very

little larger in circumference. A horrible throb of sick apprehension beat through my whole body. If what I seemed to see existed actually as I saw it, something horrible, something beyond the bounds of known phenomena had taken place. If what I seemed to see did not actually exist as seen, then I was mad, living in an hallucination. My mind flinched from either conclusion. It lurched in a wounded way after some other, after any other, conclusion. I tried to remember whether I had ever read of a person suffering from an optical illusion which distorted for him the apparent size of objects. But this was not, if it was illusion, optical alone. My hand, as well as my eye, reported that either my hand had shrunk, or the ring increased in size.

It is useless to try to report in cold logical sentences my first sensations that morning. My mind twitched; it swung in nauseating arcs from one impossibility to another. I laid my hand on my brow, I traced nose, chin and mouth. I felt my teeth, my ears. They felt to my hand as they should. If then my hand had shrunk, so had they. I was in an agony of apprehension and horror. I must get to the bottom of the matter, but when I got there I would find myself either a madman or an appalling monstrosity. I must go on—and I could not. I cried. I sweat. I called out, and my voice echoed in the room as thin as the squeak of a trapped rat.

Then I was calm, as a man who has screamed for days in fear of death is somehow able at the last minute to face the firing squad with honor and dignity. I struggled to sit up, uncover myself; but I was so bound about with my pajamas, so weighed down with bedclothes that I made little headway. I saw with horror the flailings of my feet far above even the middle of the bed. Finally I worked myself free of the bedclothes with infinite patience, undid the saucerlike buttons of my pajamas, untied the ropelike belt, and sat mother-naked on my pillow. There could be no doubt about it; I was a dwarf, a midget, a monstrosity, a hop-o'-my-thumb, no longer than the pillow I sat on. Either that, or every material object in the room had grown to six times its usual size. My body was not the body of a baby or a child; it was a man's body, hairy and sinewy. The feet were middle-aged feet,

calloused and warped by years of shoe-wearing; the legs bulged with the muscles of my early soldiering days. This was myself, complete in every nick and scar and pockmark, but diminished, diminished.

I looked over the edge of the bed—and drew back. I seemed to be perched on a scaffolding, so far away and dwarfed was the floral jungle of the carpet below me. I was marooned on my own bed. The realization was frightful and revolting. I was not only a man, but a soldier and campaigner accustomed to bend circumstances to my own needs. Here was a circumstance without flexibility. Nowhere would it give. And then as I examined again that attenuated, that hideously minimized body, which could not and yet must be mine if I existed at all, I cried out again and again in that tormented bird whistle, that thin marionette wail which was the only voice I had.

The voice which echoed so shrilly in my own ears evidently carried. I heard a great thud in my son David's room, and then my diminished ears seemed not large enough to contain the heavy, flapping sounds of his bare feet as he came down the hall. I remember wondering dully if I had shrunk in relation to everything: if all sounds but my own were to be thunderous.

Then my son David, my eight-year-old, stood in the door of my room.

"Daddy," he called, "Daddy, look! I've grown up. I grew up in the night. I'm as big as you now."

And he had—he had. He stood in the doorway looking down at himself, not seeing me yet, and I thought, "This is the final proof of my madness," for my son, David, my eight-year-old, filled the doorway. He was stark-naked, pink, boyish, and unmuscled; over six feet, and heavy of shoulder and arm.

We have now grown accustomed to big babies and little men, and this reversal no longer seems revolting. But that morning, that first morning, it was a horrible thing to see that babyish form so extended, that childish gap-toothed face above those heavy shoulders. Surely, my feeling for my son did not hinge upon his being of a size I could dandle, or toss upon my shoulders? Surely, fatherhood was more than the

feeling one has for small things? Yet, I did not feel fatherly toward that baby-faced giant who stood in my doorway proudly punching his big pink thighs, even though his face was that, though enlarged, of my son David.

He looked up finally from his delighted examination of his own body.

"Daddy," he said, "isn't it wonderful?"

Then he saw me. There was fear and loathing in his face. He started to run. Then he turned back. "Get out of my daddy's bed, you nasty little man. Get out. My daddy will come back and throw you out of the window."

"David," I said. "David, my boy."

"I'm not your boy. You can't make me your boy."

Then it suddenly came to him, that he needn't wait for his father to come to throw me out of the window. He was himself strong enough to do with me as he liked. He couldn't put his loathing from him, but he came menacingly toward me. "I'll throw you out the window and smash you in a thousand pieces. Where's my daddy?"

I thought he would do it. I couldn't but admire the child. I thought, "He is my son after all." But at the final second he couldn't bring himself to touch me. I was like a spider he had cornered but couldn't kill. He turned and flung himself on the floor and lay there naked and sobbing, "I want my daddy. I want my daddy."

I was suddenly shaking with cold. I was still sitting cross-legged and unclothed on my bed, and fog wisps were still blowing clammily through the window. But I was calm now; my son's outbreak had quieted my own hysteria.

"David," I said, "David, you'll take cold there. Get up and put something on. Get up and stop that crying."

The boy stopped crying and stood up. "Go to my closet, get my dressing gown and put it on." He obeyed me in a sullen, dazed way. The dressing gown left his wrists and ankles bare. He was three or four inches taller than I was—than I had been. He stood by the door looking at me fearfully and incredulously.

I pulled my pajama top about my shoulders and leaned back against the headboard of the bed.

"David, I am your father. You can see that, surely. I helped you carve your jack-o'-lantern last night. Something very strange and terrible has happened to us. While we slept you have grown as big as a man and I have shunk as small as a baby. But you are still my son and I'm your father. See, here's where I cut my thumb last night making your jack-o'-lantern. You can see I'm your father, can't you—only smaller?"

"Yes," he hiccuped, "you look like my daddy, but my daddy is a big man. You look like a Halloween goblin. You look——" and he threw his arm over his face and began to cry again.

"David," I cried sharply. "I know that—I look horrible, awful, but I am your father and we must help each other." But I was repelled by the sight of those heavy, heaving shoulders, and those childish gulps and sniffles coming from behind that big pink hand.

"David," I shouted. "Stop it, stop it, I say. Something terrible has happened and we must get the doctor here at once. Perhaps he can do something for us. Make us as we were last night."

My son looked up, "I like to be big. I don't want to be little again. Only have Dr. Hinch give you something so you won't look so awful."

The phone was in the hall. "David," I said, "I want you to carry me to the hall and put me on the chair by the telephone table. I'm going to talk to Dr. Hinch. And while I'm talking to Dr. Hinch, I want you to tiptoe down to Mary Frances' room. If she's asleep don't waken her, but see—see what size she is."

The boy was beginning to get hold of himself, but it took a good deal of effort for him to be able to touch me, or for me to endure that touch. He lifted me easily, but clumsily, wadding my pajama coat about my waist so that my legs dangled bare. It was not until I attempted to dial Hinch that I realized that I had lost in strength as in stature. The dial barely rotated beneath my pygmy finger. It took all the strength of my wrist and forearm to budge it. At last the six figures were dialed. Dr. Hinch himself answered the phone from his bed.

"Hinch," I said, "this is Phipps speaking. Captain Phipps."

"Speak up, speak up," Hinch roared sleepily. "I can't hear you."

"Hinch," I cried, "this is Phipps. Something ghastly has happened! Something ghastly. Get here at once. Come right up to my room, and in God's name, hurry."

"All right, David," he said at last, "I'll be right over."

As I hung up the receiver David came down the hall to me.

"Is she asleep?" I asked.

David nodded.

"Is she big—or little, David?"

"Big," he whispered.

Poor Mary Frances. Poor Mary Frances.

"Help me to the floor, David. I want to walk."

You accept that doll's pace now. And you say, perhaps, as you read, "The old man takes it pretty hard," or "The old fellow doesn't let the story lose anything in the telling," or maybe, "It gets sadder every time he tells it."

All right. All right. You have your say; then I'll have mine. It's easy enough in these after days when all has been explained, rationalized, accepted. You toddle happily enough now. But then! That morning, when for the first time I stood in my own hall on those pitiful baby feet and started to walk to my own room—my own and my wife's room. Step, step, step, and less than a yard covered. Walking along with my nose a foot and a half above the floor boards, and with the furniture hanging over my head like wooden precipices. Come to your own bed, and need a ladder to get into it, and have your own chair as inaccessible as a tree top, and crouch finally on your hassock like a toad. Do that for the first time with no blanket of rationalization to shield you from the sharp reality!

David spent a good deal of the time while we awaited Dr. Hinch's coming looking at himself in the mirror. It was curiously repellent to see in that big body those childish attitudes—as if my son were a half wit. I knew this wasn't fair. The boy was eight years old, but you can not after a lifetime —yours and the universe's—associate intelligence and adult-

hood with stature, and have that association broken suddenly without some bleeding.

Dr. Hinch was an experienced, hard-bitten army surgeon; and you may read, perhaps have read, in his own memoirs of his sensations that October morning. While we waited for him I kept thinking that this was perhaps something doctors knew about—but kept hushed up. I'd never been sick then, and still had a layman's faith in a doctor's ability to be able to do something.

When Dr. Hinch stood in the door of my room and saw me sitting on the hassock, and David standing over me, he fainted; he went down like a bombed building, wavering a minute, then collapsing with legs and arms sprawled confusedly like broken cornices, smashed façades. I saw how bad it was with us then.

David fetched water from the bathroom, and between us we brought him round. He lay there for a long time, though, with his biscuit-colored face in a pool of water. I was close enough to see clearly the look in his eyes when at last he opened them: it was the look of a man who fears he is mad.

I think Hinch in his memoirs misrepresents that morning's happenings, though no doubt unconsciously. He was after all a physician and I have yet to meet the physician who is able to confess having made a mistake. Hinch was no exception. In the first place he fails to mention that the first thing he did on entering my room that morning was to faint. This omission alone gives an entirely false air of capability and resourcefulness to his account. In addition he fails to say that such plans as were made that morning were mine; and worst of all he definitely suggests that he, on that morning, anticipated the approaching universality of the change I had experienced. If he did, it was only with hindsight.

* * * * * *

But, as I have said, we brought him around finally and David got him onto his feet and into a chair. He sat there with his hand over his eyes saying, "My God, my God," and

occasionally peeping out at us from between his fingers. David began to whimper again at his strange actions.

I talked to him collectedly enough I think, the circumstances being considered, and finally had him sufficiently calm to give his attention to our problem. But I could see that, though he listened to me, he could not escape feeling that a diminution in brain had accompanied my physical diminution. He talked to me as if I were a child, as though my years, experience, training had dropped from me with my lost inches. He talked in a loud, slow, patient voice using small words. It was unendurable.

"Look here, Hinch," I said at last, "nothing's happened to my mind. Get that straight and don't talk baby talk to me. If you have any doubt concerning my mental processes, give me any test you like and you'll find my power of thought undiminished. Pull yourself together, man. God knows this is awful enough as it is without your reading into it changes that haven't occurred. All I want to know is whether or not you as a medical man have any knowledge of what's happened to me and David and Mary Frances. It's a simple yes or no situation. Has medical history records of such cases? Have you yourself ever encountered any such thing?"

He said this and that but the upshot of it was that he knew nothing of such a happening either through study or experience. There had been cases where men had lost a few inches —probably as the result of a calcium deficiency; and as a young practitioner in southern Kentucky he had taken care of a child, much dwarfed, whose parents said it had the "little-growth." The child had died, though, before he himself had observed any shrinkage in it.

There is something hateful about always having to look up at a man—at anyone. It is not only that the neck tires and the eyes glaze, but that there is implicit in the attitude some deference, some recognition of superiority. It is an association pattern without intrinsic truth, but centuries of use has made the mental response slavish that accompanies the curved neck, the uplifted eye. The rulers of men stand on balconies, ride horseback; the crucified Christ hangs above us on his cross. When the man comes who can dig himself a pit and, standing

below us, yet lead us, then there will be true leadership. What the Chilekings have done has had its roots in our uplifted eyes.

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My first perceptions of all this came to me that October morning as I sat on the hassock looking up into Hinch's pale, puffy face. I called to David sharply to help me up on to the bed. But the boy had gone to sleep. He was lying face down across the bed breathing audibly. The fog had cleared away; the sun filled the room with warm yellow light. It was getting on toward midmorning. None of us had eaten and David and I had had a shattering experience.

"David," I called, "David, wake up, boy."

He roused himself bewilderedly, sat up, and said, "Daddy, I'm hungry."

"Hinch," I said, "go downstairs and tell Maria we want coffee and toast and scrambled eggs up here at once. Enough for four. Mary Frances had as well be awakened."

I remember David asked to have some of his "Muscleo," a breakfast food popular at the time. He was saving coupons and wanted to use boxes as quickly as possible. It seemed intolerably half-witted to have this young giant crying for "Muscleo" and coupons for model airplanes.

"You'll have scrambled eggs," I said sharply.

"What am I to tell Maria?" Hinch asked.

"Tell her anything you like except the truth. Tell her we all have scarlet fever and are quarantined and she's not to put a foot abovestairs. My God! Man, you don't want every newsreel cameraman in California in here, do you?"

Hinch hadn't thought of that. As he went into the hall the phone rang. It was his wife. I listened to him tell her that we were all down with scarlet fever, and that he would be with us the rest of the morning. Then at my suggestion he called Headquarters and my wife, giving them the same story. He told Amy he would keep in touch with her, that we were seriously but not dangerously ill, and that she should make no attempt to see us. I was glad to have that matter attended

to. I tried to keep my mind off Amy and our future relationship.

While Hinch was downstairs getting our breakfast, David and I washed and dressed. He helped me onto a chair so that I could reach the lavatory. I didn't attempt shaving that morning. David got into a sweater and a pair of old slacks of mine. My shoes were too small for him but he managed to get his toes into a pair of *espadrilles.*

I put on an outworn play suit of his. For a minute as I stood on the hassock in that ridiculous blue-frilled garment I was tempted to plunge out the window, let the concrete below put an end to this pitiful travesty. There on the table lay the notes I had made the night before for the revision of the Phipps-Viorsky manual. I saw clearly, as I stood there looking out into the sunlit morning, that never again would I be accepted as the man who wrote that: I would be hereafter simply the man who had shrunk, the monstrosity.

Hinch came back upstairs with our breakfast. I left the awakening of Mary Frances to him. The poor child had none of David's delight in the change. She came into the room wrapped about in a negligee of her mother's, a great, strapping, sexless figure carrying her doll and crying passionately. She was taller than Hinch who was a little, pursy man, and it was ridiculous to see him pat her and murmur, "There, there, my child: Now, now. Don't take on so, don't take on."

"Don't take on!" It was too late to ask that, but Hinch, as those who have read his memoirs will remember, had no humor in him.

* * * * * * [2]

I had to face again in Mary Frances all the horror and disgust I had seen in David's eyes. It was a strange breakfast party, an unequaled one, I dare say. There wasn't much said

[2] It has been necessary to omit a good deal of material here having to do with doctors in general and Hinch in particular. Phipps never ceases to blame the doctors for not "doing something" about Subtraction. He seems to feel that if they had been as competent in their field as he was in his, they would have "repulsed" the "invasion" by the forces of Subtraction.

beyond attempts to reassure Mary Frances. David ate most of the food. I found myself watching with deep disgust the clumsy, greedy way he piled great forkfuls of eggs into his gap-toothed mouth. And there was something loutish and overbearing in the way he disregarded my suggestions that he'd had enough. And Mary Frances pressing her doll to her big, flat chest and saying, "Don't you want a bite, dollie, dear?" and Hinch breaking out, "Lord, what a paper I can write on this!" No, that is a meal I can never forget.

As soon as we had eaten I sent the children to the playroom, though David was determined to go out, show his friends what had happened.

"Well, Hinch," I said when they had gone, "What's to be done?"

"God only knows," he muttered, "God only knows: this is beyond me."

He walked over to me and I thought he was going to pat me on the head, say, "There, there, little man." Hinch never got far beyond exterior appearances.

"I'll want to have a consultation of course; have Dr. Kleigh and Dr. Marbot here. There'll have to be X-rays, blood tests. I'd like to have a psychiatrist, see if there has been any fundamental personality change."

I agreed so long as the matter be kept secret. Hinch, I think, actually pictured himself as the entrepreneur of a successful "racket"—to use a pre-Chileking word popular in my youth—a sort of latter-day Barnum. I agreed to the examinations, but insisted that they be secret and postponed for at least three days, for I clung to the fantastic hope that there might be some spontaneous recovery in that time.

I sat propped up in the corner of my big chair like an organ-grinder's monkey, while Hinch, with his buttons catching the sunlight, paced the room like a general. He would walk away from me, then turn suddenly on his heel, flash a look in my direction, and start perceptibly, to see me still there, still the same size, the same shape.

I finally put an end to it. "There's no need taking more of your time, Hinch," I said. "Will you stop in the kitchen,

remind Maria about coming abovestairs, bring us up some sandwiches and fruit, and drop in tonight about six?"

It was noon when he left. I got the children to take naps after lunch and I was left alone in my room at last. I had had Mary place my books and papers in the seat of a chair, and by using the hassock to sit on I had a pretty fair desk. Before I permited myself any thought concerning my present condition, my future, and that of my wife and children, I wanted to test, once and for all, whether or not I had suffered any diminution of mental ability. I resolutely turned to the revision with which I had been occupied the night before. I became completely absorbed in the specific problems with which I had been working, and the solution that had till then evaded me came to me that afternoon. There was no doubt about it. There was nothing miniature, nothing juvenile about my mind. It was my appearance only which was altered. I worked until dusk, then got off the hassock and paced about exultantly feeling again my former self. The furniture, the room, even the books dwarfed me, but the man inside was unaltered.

Before I knew it, it was six o'clock and Hinch was back, and had brought our dinner upstairs. I went to the playroom to call the children. I hadn't seen them since they left to take their naps. I found them both lying full length on the playroom floor talking in low voices. I stood for a moment listening to them.

"Well," said David, "I guess from now on we do what we want to."

"Yes," said Mary Frances, "we're the grownups now and Daddy's the baby. Poor Daddy. He looks just like a monkey, doesn't he? But we'll have to let him have his way sometimes, Dave. He was kind to us lots of times. Really he was, Dave. 'Member how he helped you with your jack-o'-lantern last night?" and she laughed maliciously.

Dave snorted. "I could have done it. He took it away from me just when it was most fun."

"Yes," Mary Frances agreed, "he's always been like that. But we've got to be kind to him. He looks so awful, and he can't help it."

I could bear to hear no more. The children to whom I had

given life and for whom I had been willing to sacrifice everything! We were not then aware of the profound influence of size in the relationship of parents and children. None had then guessed the part force and fear played in that relationship. I was the first man to have a glimpse of that truth, listening to that conversation. But I could not credit it. Had my children obeyed me, not because they *loved* me, because I was reasonable, but because they *feared* my superior size? I could not then believe it. Their dear, childish natures had been warped, disfigured by this alteration. They had not had time, I thought, to learn the true relativity of size.

I cleared my throat. "Children," I called. "David, Mary Frances, time for dinner."

Mary Frances answered pleasantly, "Yes, Daddy," but David came running out of his room bellowing in that many-times-amplified child's voice of his, "Damn it, I'm hungry."

"David," I started, but before I could continue he stooped down, picked me up with an easy swoop and held me awkwardly over his head. I was filled with fury, but could do nothing but kick and squeak. He was shamefaced when he put me down.

"David," I cried, "Never do that again. I don't like it."

"I never liked it, either," he said.

Down the hall Hinch stood looking on sardonically.

Dinner was a strained and unhappy meal. As soon as it was over I asked Hinch and the children to leave me. I was exhausted by the day's events and as soon as I was alone I undressed, pushed a chair next to my bed, and clambered laboriously up its rungs to the seat, and from the seat to the bed. I lay there, with the great bolsterlike pillow thrusting my head out at a right angle from my body, and pulled the covers of the unmade bed up over my wretched gnome-like body.

Dully I picked up the evening paper which Hinch had brought me. There was no use pretending that I felt any real interest in what had happened that day in the world. Because of the change in me the world was no longer what it had been. It no longer fitted me. The newspaper itself was an annoyance and irritation. Great, bulky, flapping thing that I had to struggle with. You, with your neat little built-to-size accom-

modations, know nothing of the perverse and recalcitrant nature that then infested the very things in which we had been wont to find our greatest pleasures and conveniences. When at last I had bent and shaped the paper into a size I could handle I was almost too tired to read it. But I let my eyes run over the print hunting some anodyne, something that would, even for the short time my eyes rested on it, let me forget myself. But there seemed to be no news of importance that night.

I did not sleep at all during the first part of the night, but I was deep in sleep the next morning when the incessant ringing of the phone roused me. I came up out of sleep, forgetful of what happened to me, and plunged out of bed onto the floor with a thud that momentarily stunned me. But in spite of this I limped out to the hall, climbed up the chair to the telephone table.

"Yes," I said.

"Phipps, Phipps," came an anguished and squeaky voice. "My God! Phipps."

"What is it?" I cried. "Who is speaking? Who is it? Speak louder." But in my bones I knew and was glad.

"This is Hinch," came back the thin voice that I hated because I knew that it echoed my own. "This is Hinch and it's happened to me. I've shrunk. We've all shrunk. Everyone in the house. My wife. We're dwarfs. My God, the world is ending. Or has ended!"

I suddenly felt cheerful. "Come, Hinch," I shouted. "Buck up. You've just lost a few inches."

"I've had calls all morning. It's happening to everyone."

"Town people, too?" I could hardly hear him. The phone service was very bad at the moment.

"No—only our own people so far. I think it's infectious. I think I caught it from you. Oh God, why did you ever call me over?"

"Did you see everyone yesterday who has called you this morning?"

"No," he admitted.

"Well, it can't be infectious," I said.

Hinch lost control of himself then and began to whimper

hysterically. This man who had thought of me as a subject for a scientific paper the day before!

* * * * * *

"Hinch," I said, "I'll be over at once. As soon as I can get the children up. Be calm now. Get yourself together."

I put the phone back on the table and smiled. I will not dissemble what I felt then. Relief, hope. I, my family, were not singled out. We were all in the grip of some wide-spread malady. Now there were those I too could pity. I need not carry the burden of every other creature's pity and commiseration—nor watch the man who pitied me swell up with the joy of being not as I was. No, I will not deceive you. Tears of relief filled my eyes. I saw, even then, it would not be so bad a thing to be a little man with other little men. But still I did not foresee what it would mean to be a little man in a Chile-king world.

As I stood supporting myself on the chair in the hall, rubbing my bruised arms and legs, I heard little thin cries of distress from the bottom of the stairs and awkward plodding steps. I went to the head of the stairs and looked over. There was Maria, a poor, gray-haired midget wrapped about in a formless garment, crying and clambering like some stray dog. She was a pitiable object. I have never thought that women have been able to undergo Subtraction as gracefully as men. You would think otherwise: that the female, being by nature slighter and more fragile than men, would be a better subject for Subtraction—but it was not proved so. Her bulges and curves become crowded when she is shortened, so that she is like a little country with too much topography. Well, be that as it may, Maria was the first female I had ever seen who had suffered Subtraction, the first adult of either sex, in fact, and her miserable crawling figure stays in my mind even after a lapse of sixty years.

When I had eased her mind as best I could concerning what had happened, and had warned her to let no one see her, I roused the children and told them that they were to drive me to Dr. Hinch's; they were immediately beside themselves with

excitement. Mary Frances could drive after a fashion and I could see nothing for it but to risk her being able to get us there safely. There was no question of my being able to drive. I would have sat under the wheel like an elf under a toadstool. The children dressed with care—David using my clothes, Mary Frances her mother's—but they were grotesque figures when they had finished. They stood, broad and shapeless like cloth-draped planks. I made my first trip, after Subtraction, in a laundry basket with a sheet covering me. That is not a ride I like to recall: Mary Frances driving with an unevenness that I thought at any moment would either wreck us or attract the attention of some passing motor cop. But we finally arrived at Hinch's, safe enough.

My memories now concern events which have been exhaustively written about. Hinch's own account in his memoirs is known everywhere, as is Colonel Werle's *The First Decade.* Whitmore, who was at Hinch's that first morning, is the author of the standard *Psychology of Subtraction.* The events they write of were so extraordinary, they moved at so swift a pace, the change in accepted practices was so revolutionary, that it is little wonder that their reports are conflicting. When a man's life breaks up about him he has neither the time nor the emotional stability to classify the splinters. And so it is that one of these men will emphasize one thing and perhaps omit altogether something which struck me as being of paramount significance.

The scene at Hinch's that morning was sad enough, but it had a grisly, diabolic humor too. Goyen's imaginative painting, "The Little Men" based on that morning's meeting is in no wise too bitter or too violent in its emphasis of that grotesquerie. I had had a day and a night in which to accustom myself to what had happened to me. The men I saw that morning in Hinch's library had had a few hours at most. Then too they were army men, accustomed to the protection a uniform gives. Here they were, worse than naked, wrapped about in the cast-off rag, tag, and bobtail of their children. Accustomed to order and hierarchies, here they were stripped of all insignia of rank, almost of all signs of humanity. Earlier that morning when Hinch had told me what was happening I

had rejoiced that I was not to be separated because of my size from my fellow men. But as I stood looking at that collection of monkeys in motley, these erstwhile men, I felt myself, in spite of my size, to be unlike them; surely from my throat would never rise any such sad, simian gibber, such uncontrolled quavers. There were thirty-four men in the room. That is the exact figure. I counted them as I stood there. Some had managed to crawl up into chairs; others were sitting on the slightly elevated hearth holding hands they could not believe were theirs toward the fireplace in which no fire burned; but most were walking about in an aimless, tormented way, clutching their fantastic garments about them.

While I stood there, Captain Mayberry, who killed himself a few months later, saw me, and clambered laboriously up the steps to where I was standing. He was a very young man for his rank, thin and brown, with a goatee. Subtraction suited him better than any man I have ever seen. He seemed completely unconcerned over what had happened, an ironical troll or faun.

"Well, Phipps," he smiled, "you too? This is a wonderful thing—an interesting thing—I don't mean what's happened—but the way they're taking it. Actually, how have we changed? Our clothes, our furniture don't fit us, but otherwise how have we changed? Besides we're not going to have to worry about things much longer. They'll take things out of our hands," and he nodded his head toward the living room where the children—they weren't the Chilekings yet, were lounging about.

"You forget they're only children," I said.

"But they feel big, and people who feel big, act big; they are big," he replied. "And we are small and feel smaller. And will act smaller."

"They know nothing—we have the knowledge."

"That won't last long. Who brought you here this morning? Mary Frances? I thought so. Well, the car's hers now."

"Mayberry, you're not married. You don't know anything about the parental relationship. The matter of size is relative."

He looked at me and laughed, "They're proposing already

down there that the boys be trained to take our places at the Post."

I had already thought of that. "They ought to," I said, "for the time being—until adjustments can be made."

"You too?" Mayberry asked.

"Why not?" I wanted to know. "It's not safe, leaving us defenseless this way, an easy target for any country. We can't man any of our equipment now—but they could, with instructions from us."

"Perhaps they could. Will they? As you say? Anyway, how long do you think this can be kept secret?"

"I don't know. But it's worth trying for a good many reasons. And there might be a reversal at any time."

"You think so?" Mayberry smiled skeptically. Poor fellow. He shot himself a few months later when the girl he was engaged to was not Subtracted.

Mayberry and I talked together for some time before we joined the men in the room below. The two of us felt a bond —a bond that united us, and separated us from those poor, lamenting figures. He, because of his naturally reflective, ironic nature, I, because of the somewhat longer period of adjustment I had had, were loath to step down into that room of molten emotion. But it had to be done. That was our world now. It is impossible to report with any detail or accuracy what was said there. Those men did not so much talk as emit jets of feeling, raw lumps of bleeding emotion. I remember Lieutenant Hildebrand though. He'd been having something to drink—had it with him in fact. He kept singing snatches from a movie that had been popular about two decades before. I forget its name, something about a band of dwarfs. Afterwards we used to speak of its unconscious prophecy. Strange that Hildebrand's irrelevancies should stick with me when much of that morning's serious conversation has escaped me. But Hildebrand I can still see, draped in something white and togalike, toddling uncertainly about the room tilting his bottle as big as his head and singing a song, one snatch of which went, "Heigh-ho, it's off to work we go." No, Goyen's picture is no exaggeration.

Colonel Oren, the senior officer there that morning, was

able finally to bring about some organized consideration of what we were to do. It was he who railroaded us into the fantastic idea, and dangerous too, as it later proved, of having our sons take our places at the Presidio. The times were extremely uncertain internationally just then. Oren was afraid that if news concerning our Subtraction leaked out other nations would be quick to take advantage of weakness. He, like me, hoped for a spontaneous restoration of size in time, and he argued that, even if this did not occur, by the time other countries became aware of what was happening in California, our sons, with us to direct them, would be able to give a good account of themselves. It is true Oren had had for a number of years an *idée fixe* concerning Russia's desire to attack us; and this shrinkage seemed to him to provide them with the logical moment of attack—the moment when he, Oren, would be unable to do anything to resist them.

In the light of what followed, much that we planned that morning was worse than silly. I have heard that many times since, and especially have I heard it from the Chilekings. It is extremely easy to be wise after the event. It has always seemed remarkable to me that we were able to plan anything that morning, miserable, overnight-midgets that we were.

It was Oren's plan then, but I fully admit it was agreed to by every man there, including myself (in spite of disclaimers after the disaster) except Mayberry and Hildebrand. Hildebrand was snoozing under the library table and past awakening when it came to a vote, and Mayberry alone opposed it with, as it afterwards proved, his extremely well-founded fears. But Mayberry was overruled and we agreed, without other dissent, to exercise every possible caution toward keeping this night's happenings secret, and in the interval until the matter should be known, to train our sons to replace us—in some of the essential defensive practices at least.

The meeting broke up about noon with a pathetic flurry of salutes; the children, who had been playing rummy and dominoes in the living room, and bolting all the food they could find in the kitchen, got their variously disguised and hidden parents out to the waiting cars. Mayberry, Oren, and I stayed on sometime longer talking with Hinch. I asked Hinch if he

still believed there had been mental as well as physical changes. He was now convinced that the change was physical alone.

Mayberry broke in, "A month from now, a year from now ask yourself that question. A man is his size; his thoughts, attitudes, are molded not only by what he is, but by the figure he sees himself cut alongside his fellow men. Did you ever know a dwarf? I did. Do you think he wasn't influenced by his size—and that your children haven't been?"

"You forget," I reminded him, "that your dwarf friend was an isolated case. We'll be surrounded by others like ourselves. We'll be the norm."

"You at thirty inches, the norm, with your son looking down on you from a four-foot advantage? Perhaps."

Oren, who with his round, red face, and faded blond hair, needed only a frilled bonnet to look like a real baby, objected heatedly to this. "Our entire civilization has been built on the theory that mind and intellect are the criteria by which to judge men and nations. Are you ready to renounce that now, Mayberry? To say that size and physical strength are paramount? I myself never felt more convinced of the contrary."

Mayberry laughed as if he were really enjoying himself. "And you an old army man. Well, well." He threw back his head. Mayberry's laugh was clear and pleasant, not the little goat-giggle of most of us Subtracted men. "Well, Oren, I hope your idealism is justified." He left us and went over to the hearth where Hinch was trying to get a fire started. With Mayberry's help, Hinch was able to lift a eucalyptus log onto the blazing kindling. I never, to this day, smell eucalyptus smoke without remembering that scene.

Oren turned to me, "My wife's pregnant, you know," he said, and stroked his bulging baby's brow as if embarrassed that a creature his size should be an expectant father.

"What does Hinch say?"

"He's too taken up with himself to have any mind for anything else. Says it will be all right."

"Well, it seems reasonable," I tried to console him, "that if Helen has diminished the child has too, and the birth will be normal."

"But the child, the child? What can it be?"

I didn't know. No one knew then, and for Oren the prospect was terrifying.

The fire was blazing comfortably now, and we all sat on the hearth's edge to warm ourselves before leaving.

Mayberry said, "You know Marsha's still her own size?" Marsha was the girl he was engaged to, a teacher who lived in Sausalito.

"You saw her?"

"God, no," he grimaced, "but she called this morning, and she's all right."

"I don't know about my own wife," I said. (As a matter of fact she and her mother had both been Diminished the night before, but I didn't have word of it until I returned home.)

Hinch said, "This is striking like any disease. Some have more resistance—hold out longer than others."

"But certain people have complete resistance to some diseases," Mayberry reminded him. "Perhaps Marsha has. Beautiful opportunity to test your theory, Oren." His laugh was unpleasant then.

As experience proved, Mayberry was right about that, too. Some never were Subtracted. Some children never experienced Addition. They were very few, a handful really. I remember the names of most of the men of my generation who for some reason or another were never Diminished. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason for their escape. They made up an extraordinarily diverse group: Einstein, the physicist, was one. Max Baer, a local prize fighter, was another. There were two or three poets whose names I never knew well and have forgotten. In California beside Marsha O'Brien, there was a sister at an Ursuline Academy who was never Subtracted.

A good deal of investigation and writing has been done on the subject of the Unchanged, but none of it, to my mind, has been very convincing.

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Certainly, however, it begins to appear that whatever it is

that gives to these persons their immunity to Subtraction, it is a quality which is not inherited, transferred from one generation to the next. Though it has proved, I think, an exceedingly doubtful gift. Those adults who have not been Subtracted live among us like half-breeds—they are at ease neither with the Chilekings who are their own size, nor with their contemporaries, who walk about them at knee level, horrible monstrosities. It has often seemed to me that all those adults who have not been Subtracted, have had about them something childlike, ingenuous. Certainly it is true that in those great upheavals of policy in which the Chilekings and Smalfri have been opposed, the Unchanged have always sided with the Chilekings. And their position has been the more untenable because the Chilekings resented them, considered them spies from the Smalfri. Their position, however trying, has not been anything like as bad as that of the children who were not Expanded. But I am getting ahead of my story.

These memories take more care in the telling than I at first anticipated. On the one hand there is the temptation to give readers a quantity of purely personal detail and reaction which they may find boring. On the other hand, if I avoid the personal, retell the high lights of those first days, I will repeat much that has already been many times retold. My best course is, I think, to confine myself to those events in which I was either a participant, or observed at first hand, and which were in themselves significant or momentous.[3] God knows there were plenty of those. Many which did not seem so at the time have since proved to be extremely "seminal," to use once more a word fashionable sixty years ago.

The day after our meeting at Hinch's, we went with, or rather were taken by, our sons, to the Post. Nothing untoward marked our arrival. Every man at the Post, had that morning, as it was later ascertained, experienced Subtraction. Most were not on duty, but were still hiding in their barracks or homes, not yet aware that what had happened to them had happened to all. Orders had been given excluding all civilians

[3] A fine resolve, but one which Phipps is unable to keep consistently.

from the Post, and by some lucky chance, nothing of what had happened had yet gotten into the papers.

The boys were in uniform, and from a distance they weren't so bad to look at—a big, hulking beefy line. But close up they were most unsoldierly. Not only were they physically lumpish and shapeless, but their plump, characterless faces above their uniforms made them look like an exercise group at an imbecile's home. The fact that my son was one of them did not mitigate this impression.

But however they looked, they were extremely quick to catch on. There were no boys younger than David in the group, and a few were fifteen or over—but all of the older boys picked up almost at once all that was necessary for the manning of the guns which then constituted our chief harbor defense. Much of this was done through electrical controls, and except for the scale on which everything was constructed, a scale which made our manipulation of the guns after Subtraction hazardous as well as difficult, we might have been able to carry on alone. But in time of attack swiftness and dexterity of manipulation are essential. That we could not manage, and they, with our instruction, could. In the matter of sighting an invisible target, a matter which requires a good deal of mathematical ability, they had of course to rely on our calculations. That at least we were still fit to do. It was heartbreaking work though, in spite of their responsiveness: to stand, dwarfed and antlike, beside those you had, the day before, been able to dominate. There were tears and curses as well as instruction the day the Chilekings took over.

All went well that first day until about four o'clock when we called for a brief break in the work. It was hard to remember that six-footers like David were accustomed to a nap and a glass of milk in the middle of the afternoon. I had told David to lie down for awhile, and had placed, with considerable effort, a coat across him (he had never outgrown a tendency to croup). Then I had gone over to sit on the ground and look out across the quiet bay toward the green hills of Sausalito, while I considered the outcome of these crushing and amazing happenings. I had been there perhaps a half an hour when I was shaken and momentarily stunned by the

detonation of one of the big sixteen-inch guns. As I ran stumbling and falling toward the guns I saw at a glance what had happened.

The gun had been fired and a direct hit had been made on the Russian ship, the *Stalingrad,* which was anchored in the harbor with a delegation of representatives from Communist or Communist-dominated countries here for a "last" conference with the anti-Communist nations. These delegates, with typical Communist caution about fraternizing with foreigners, were all housed aboard their ship rather than in the hotels of San Francisco as would have been the case with the representatives from any other countries. The boys knew this, of course, but I did not, at the time, understand the connection between their knowledge and the firing of the shot. I assumed that the firing was accidental and it was not until later that I learned that it was deliberate, the result of what seemed to the Chilekings to be logical thinking. These boys had grown up at a time when they had heard continual talk of the danger of Communism, of the menace of the Communist countries and of Russia as our enemy in a cold war and our potential attacker in a hot one. This being true, they saw no reason, in their forthright and childish way, why they should not do something to mitigate this danger. Children have wonderfully single-track minds. They are unable to understand that action need not follow upon recognition of a need for action. They had accepted our words concerning the danger and it seemed stupid to them, as they said later, not to take advantage of a God-given chance to lessen it. If it was true that Russia was only biding her time, waiting an opportunity to attack us, why wait? Why not strike the first blow? They had heard, being army children, more of that talk than most. Combine that conviction with the natural love most boys have for playing with mechanical toys and the action they took was, I suppose, highly predictable. Wanting to fire those guns, with or without cause, completely unaware for the most part of the meaning of death in reality, though very familiar with it as an abstraction through their television, comic book and motion picture experiences, they were easily able to convince themselves that they should fire them. An-

other element, though it is not one the Chilekings have ever themselves admitted, played its part in their action. It is an element which has been a constantly present and determining one in the relationship of Chilekings and Smalfri: I refer to the children's resentment toward and hatred of adults—especially such adults as had the misfortune of being their parents. This bitterness before Subtraction had gone unnoticed, since the children had been unable, because of their size, to do much about it. And by the time most of them (before Subtraction) had reached a size which made it possible for them to retaliate with any degree of success, they had been so inculcated with their parents' principles, "Honor your father and your mother," and the like, that they had lost heart for revolt and reprisal. Of course an occasional child, even before Subtraction, of unusual energy and determination, managed to blow off his father's head or stab his mother. Such overt aggressive tactics were no longer necessary after Subtraction. The Chilekings had the upper hand and they knew it—nevertheless their relationship with us has continued to be more or less punitive.

* * * * * *

So the gun was fired not only for "fun," not only because the firing made sense to the children, but as an act of defiance against us. It was fired because after a lifetime of denial, of "hands off," "don't touch," or "do as Father says," it was glorious to touch, to do exactly the opposite of what Father said. So the gun was fired.

These facts were ascertained and these conjectures made afterwards, of course. There was no time then for getting at reasons; and, as I said earlier, we all, then, took for granted that both the firing of the shot and the hitting of the *Stalingrad* were accidental. There was of course immediate pandemonium both at the Post and in San Francisco. Oren and those of his officers who were with him at the time put off for the scene of the catastrophe in a launch belonging to one of the officers. I say "put off" euphemistically. The Chilekings put off. We were passengers on the launch, helpless as pa-

pooses in their mother's carrying bags. Dangerous as it had now proved to entrust any knowledge of equipment to the children, it was nevertheless absolutely necessary to make use of their help in boarding and manning the launch.

The decision to go out to the stricken *Stalingrad* had been preceded by another decision—a difficult one to make. A decision to give up any attempt at secrecy. As we made the short trip out to the sinking ship my mind was filled with a despairing conflict of ideas. I forgot my size, which would in itself have put an end to my army career, and thought that all was now over with me: that this incident would mean war for my country and court-martial and probable death for all of us.

We were among the first to reach the *Stalingrad*—and, although it had been struck only twenty minutes earlier, it had already heeled over onto its port side at an angle that indicated that it had not much longer to live. The ship had listed so quickly and so badly, and so many of both crew and passengers had been killed outright that no lifeboats had been put over. The water was filled with the dead and wounded—many, both of the living and dead, being terribly maimed—headless, dismembered, disembowelled. I had been an army man all my life but as chance would have it I had never participated in an engagement. This was my first sight of carnage—and I was not prepared for what I saw and heard: the screams, the bloodstained water, entrails afloat on the encarmined bay like lush aquatic plants. I report these gruesome facts so that you can better understand the subsequent reactions of the Chilekings. They, of course, had the actual work of lifting these torn and bleeding bodies into the launch. We were as helpless as babies would have been attempting to rescue full-grown men. The Chilekings had the size for it and the strength—but not the stomach. All the gore of television and comics had not prepared them for the real thing—any more than their reading of the wooing and wedding of Sleeping Beauty, say, could have prepared them for the realities of marriage. I remember one young boy, a Chinese I would guess, with his arm off at the shoulder, who screamed pitifully until he died. One of the Chilekings refused to go

on with the rescue work and bent over him sobbing and crying, "Don't die, don't die." But he did die and the Chileking shook him and patted him the way a small boy will pet a puppy when it dies—unable to believe that his own will and desire—to which the pet has always before responded—will not cause the animal once more to respond.

The last person we were able to take onto the launch was, we thought, another, though smaller, child. When we turned him onto his back we saw, though he was no larger than a four-year-old, that he had a full beard and the marked and lined face of a man well past middle age. We Smalfri were more unnerved by this sight than by that of all the injured put together. Oren clutched my arm and whispered, "This is the end for us." By "us," he meant both the world as we had known it—and we, the adults who had made that world. And he was absolutely right. "Our" world, the world we had made and dominated, had ended that day—and we as "dominators" ended then too. The Chileking Era had already, though we did not then know it, begun.

In spite of the confusion and terror, the make-up of the crew of our launch—midget officers directing a crew of imbeciles is how it looked I suppose—had not gone unnoticed. Subtraction (or Deflation, as the Chilekings call it), as I said earlier, had begun first and with a hundred per cent effectiveness at the Presidio. On the morning of the thirty-first, most of San Francisco was as yet unaware of what was taking place —all over the world as it later proved. A launch on which there were several representatives of the press, including not only the local dailies but a number of the national press services had been near us while we were picking up survivors, and their own lifesaving efforts had not blinded them to our peculiarities—to use rather a cheerful and inadequate word for what had happened to us. Hemworth of the "Chronicle," who knew Oren and me well but did not recognize us, reduced, shouted over to us, "In God's name who are you guys? What have you got there? That's a Post launch isn't it? The shot was fired from the Post wasn't it? For God's sake where did you come from and who are you? Look at this! Do you know anything about this?" He was pointing at a Subtracted

Russian whom the newsmen had picked up. "Is he one of you?"

"He is one of us," Oren called back in mournful recognition, but his answer was lost in the general cry that went up to put away from the *Stalingrad* which was then sinking fast. There were survivors still in the water but our boat was already overfull—and in any case we could not help those in the water by lingering to be ourselves engulfed. The *Stalingrad* went down quietly, with a kind of organic shudder as she slid from sight. Hemworth's launch had kept close to us as we swung out to avoid the *Stalingrad.* Oren, who as I said knew Hemworth well, shouted to him, "Hemworth, I'm Oren, Colonel Oren of the Post. Let me come on board. I've a story for you."

Hemworth called back, "If you're Oren, I'm Malenkov."

Oren said, "What have you got to lose?"

"What have I got to gain?" Hemworth answered, but his launch pulled in close to ours and a more than willing Chilekking tossed Oren over to the newsmen like a sack of potatoes—a nephew of Oren's, it was. Both boats, already dangerously overloaded, then put in for shore where private cars and ambulances were waiting to relieve us of our injured. We made two more trips out into the bay—on the last trip picking up only dead bodies—one of which was another reducee, a woman this time. (On the whole women were more tardily reduced than the men.)

It is quite remarkable that we were able, in the midst of the pain and near panic of the occasion, and in the face of the increasing interest in the make-up of our crew, to get our craft and the Chilekings back to the dock. A cold damp night was now upon us. The Chilekings, who had been sick repeatedly during the rescue operations, were now shivering with cold and weakness. I ordered them all to the mess hall where there were flickering lights—the electric system was beginning to go out—and where I thought, in spite of the day's events, we might find some food. At the word "food" the Chilekings began to run—like the children they were—in spite of the day's work behind them—run and whimper, and in their fatigue, both physical and emotional, waver and stum-

ble. I let them run. "Let" is ironical. What else could I do? We "men"—to use another word ironically, could neither restrain nor keep up with the Chilekings. I realize that in the last few pages I have slipped into a constant use of the word "Chilekings." Chronologically this is inexact, for they were not, these overblown children, so called at the time. "Chilekings" came later and was their own name for themselves when they began to assume the characteristics of child kings.

Mayberry, who in Oren's absence from the Post was commanding officer, toddled out to meet us.

"All back safely?" he asked.

I told him yes and asked about food.

"Plenty for all, such as it is," he said. "The work had to be done by the kids—and they weren't interested in anything very complicated. Do you know," he asked, "I can't even take the top off a can of beer?"

I tried to cheer him up by reminding him that he had never, even before reduction, been a muscle man.

"I could open a can of beer," he said obstinately. Then he asked, "You know this thing's busted wide open? Calls are coming in from everywhere. We haven't been able to handle them."

I told him that Oren was with Hemworth and the other newspaper men—giving them a full report, so far as he knew it—of what had happened at the Post.

He already knew that—Oren had talked with him on the phone. "You understand what's happening?" he asked.

"No," I said, "I don't understand a thing, except that we are the victims of a tragedy—or a farce—I don't know which. Or madness, universal delusion and madness."

"It's universal all right," Mayberry said. "It's not just us. It's not just the military. Hasn't the news from England had any meaning for you? From Spain? The lack of news from France? The adjournment of Congress? I've been talking to Hermes at March Field. It's happened there—it's happening everywhere!"

"We've got to organize," I said, "we've got to get control. We've got to map out our strategy."

"Against Russia?" he asked.

For the moment I had forgotten about *them*—that it was *their* ship, *their* crew, *their* delegates our children had sent to the bottom of the bay. What I had meant was: organize against the *children*, map out a strategy to control *them*.

"I had forgotten the Russians," I said.

"It isn't likely they've forgotten us," he said.

"But look," I told him, "they're being reduced too. Hasn't any one told you that we picked up reduced Russians in the water?"

"No," he said, "I hadn't heard that."

"You didn't think some one whole nation was escaping did you?"

"No—but if any did, it might be Russia."

"Why Russia?"

"They're more kidlike in some ways than other nations—believe in fairy tales—black and white—absolute goodness—absolute badness——"

"Nonsense," I said. "*You're* the child if you swallow that; they don't believe that—not the policy makers—they're a hard-headed lot—they'll be reduced as fast as any one."

"How does that help us any? We're reduced—they're reduced—things are still equal—we're just where we started."

"They can't man any of their equipment in case they want to attack."

"They can man it the same way we manned the launch, if they want to——"

We had reached the mess hall, and labored up the steps—occasionally even having to help ourselves with our hands. The Chilekings, with no one to make them wash and sit at the table, had, for the most part, grabbed plates of food with their still bloodstained hands and gathered around the fireplace. There they sat, huddled about the hearth, not knowing how to manage their big bodies, awkward, some still sick after their experience with the survivors, others wolfing down their food. I didn't want anything to eat and told Mayberry so.

"You'd better eat," he said. "Things are going to get worse. You're not likely to get any sleep tonight."

I climbed up onto a chair to get a cup of coffee—but the spigot on the coffee urn first stuck—then, as I put all my

strength into my effort to budge it, swung wide open letting a scalding stream of coffee pour down—not on me—I was able to draw back in time, but onto the table and floor. David, who was one of the children clustered around the fireplace, saw what happened and ran over and turned off the spigot for me.

"Did you hurt yourself?" he asked, not unkindly.

I told him I hadn't.

"It was just luck," he said. "Don't try it again."

"I'm hungry," I complained. "I haven't had anything to eat." I wasn't hungry—I was simply trying to justify myself—to my own eight-year-old son.

"Here," David said, drawing me a cup. "Next time ask someone bigger to help you." He walked back to the waiting Chilekings, leaving me standing on the chair, holding the cup of coffee which curved in my two hands bowl-large, wondering how to get down. I was damned if I'd ask David to come lift me. Carefully stooping I got the coffee cup to the table. Then I got down from the chair—and though I was in momentary danger of scalding myself, managed alone to get the cup from the table. I could not bring myself to call to David, scald or no, "Come help Daddy with his coffee." The Chilekings about the fireplace had all the chairs—they no longer suited us anyway—so I squatted on the floor, my cold fingers enjoying the warmth of the cup I had to hold as does a child.

Oren's son Wilbur, who had been the sickest of the lot on our rescue trip—he was, or had been, a lank blond boy of fourteen or fifteen—turned to me and said truculently, "You can't blame me for what happened. Russia is our enemy. I've read father's book."

So had I and most Americans—an amazing runaway (considering its subject matter) best seller called *Strike The First Blow*.

"Wilbur," I said patiently (the reversal in our sizes no doubt had something to do with my patience), "your father's policy has always been highly controversial."

"Nerts," said Wilbur.

"And even if we all believed in the efficacy of such a policy,

there would still be the question of 'when.' 'When' is not decided singlehanded by a child. There has to be concerted action, unanimity of mind——"

". . . unanimity of mind," Wilbur repeated, using a word he would never have thought of using the day before. "There were the guns and there was the enemy. We did the right thing. What are guns for?"

"They're for our defense."

". . . defense," Wilbur said, with shocking vulgarity.

"If you wait until the enemy strikes the first blow you are morally in a sound position."

"Morally sound," Wilbur said, "with both legs missing."

Then he suddenly changed his tune. He snatched off his horn-rimmed spectacles, which he had secured around his suddenly enlarged head by means of a rubber band. His head had become larger without his eyes becoming better. Then, with his glasses out of the way, he put his big, pale, myopic face down close to mine and shouted in a voice powerful but not masculine, "Lies, lies, lies. We were little so you told us whatever you wanted to. Whatever made things easy for you. 'Strike the first blow!' father wrote. And now you say, 'Not really. It's just a theory. It's controversial, we didn't really mean it.' 'Death is easy,' you told us. 'People just go to sleep, dear. They just rest forever, dear.' Why didn't you tell us they bled so much? And screamed so much? Why didn't you tell us their guts come out? You think it's all right to shoot the guts out of people. You've spent your whole life learning how to do that. And just because you didn't give orders you start saying it's wrong."

I felt sorry for the boy—the first sight of blood is always upsetting, but to have him call me a liar—and get away with it simply because he was larger, was a little too much.

"Get out and stay out until you can talk sense," I told him. I raised or tried to raise my voice—but there is no degree of will power which will lend authority to the sounds which issue from a mouth the size of a buttonhole.

I was surprised by what happened—on two counts. I was cuffed on the ears, not once, but a half-dozen times. This in

itself—being something I had not experienced since the age of seven or so—was an enormous surprise. But what surprised me even more was that the slapping came, not from Wilbur, but from some boy unknown to me who punctuated his blows by "You can't talk that way to Wilbur."

This was the first inkling I received that there was, for the Chilekings anyway, something special about Wilbur; and my wonder at this, together with my anger at the unfairness of being struck by someone so much larger than I, immobilized me beneath the combined punishments of hand and tongue.

But what could I have done, amazed or unamazed? Angered or unangered? There were no more threats I could make. Spank? Turn off the television? Cut down on the allowance? Nonsense. The children were in the saddle and they knew it. What else could I do? Whimper? Run? Plead for mercy?

Such scenes are now far less common than at the beginning of the Chileking Era. Then, in their new-found freedom they, as the newly freed so often do, misused their power.

* * * * * *

There were beatings and manhandlings, some very brutal; though the Chilekings always referred to them as "spankings," and professed to find no pleasure in what they did. Pleasure or not, it was not until the first batch of Chilekings experienced reduction themselves that there was any letup of the roughness.

It was Mayberry who handled the situation for me—his urbanity, whatever his physical size, still undiminished. "We don't do that in the army, buddy," he said, and the boy, who had been ready to let fly at me with another round of cuffing, sat down confused and apologetic. The Chilekings also had habits and inclinations which were unchanged by their alteration in size. They were accustomed to an early bedtime. Big heads began to nod, childish eyelids to fall. They fought their sleepiness. It no longer matched their own ideas of themselves. And they could no longer plead, "Let me stay up," relying on their parents not to take them at their word. They

were their own masters now—and more and more, as they quickly discovered, ours too. Having decided to go to bed it was pitiful to see some of these young six-footers, my own David among them, reluctant to go out into the dark alone. They were of a size, certainly, to defend themselves from any night attackers. But their minds, their imaginations were still of an eight- or ten-year size.

Mayberry and a dozen others beside myself lingered on in the mess hall after these man-sized infants left. First of all we prepared as accurate and objective a statement as we could manage of the day's happenings. Then we all signed it. This seemed to us of first importance. There was simply no telling what might happen next. We had not the least assurance that diminution had stopped; that the Subtraction we had already experienced might not be a first step only in a process which might finally diminish us right out of existence. We had no assurance that the Chilekings might not throw us into the bay; or that we might not, in despair, all leap in ourselves. And chiefly we had no way then of knowing whether or not there would be retaliatory blows struck by those countries whose nationals had died in the blowing up of the *Stalingrad*. H-bombs and A-bombs might be falling on San Francisco within the next twenty-four hours. From the mechanical side alone the recording of this statement was an enormous undertaking —almost beyond us. A thousand difficulties confronted us at every turn. Our fingers could no longer manage the typewriter keys; our short stubby legs could no longer get us up to within striking distance of the keys in the first place, without a lot of climbing, rearranging of furniture, and so forth. Nowadays Smalfri have furniture designed for them; then, except for high chairs, toilet-training seats, velocipedes, and the like, nothing fitted, and, as you can see, what did fit we had little desire for. I don't want to harp on the discomforts and frustration of those first days—but to find a world which we had equipped for our own pleasure and convenience suddenly useless was like living in a misfit nightmare. That is the exact word for it. Have you ever dreamed of being in a room in which everything was unaccountably heavy or oversized?

Intractable, immovable, so that all of your efforts are either hampered or balked? That was our situation, exactly.

* * * * * *

At last we had done everything—I started to write "humanly possible"; what I should say is "midgetly possible," I suppose. We were scarcely human that night. Messages had been prepared for the President, the Secretary of Defense, the Chiefs of Staff.

It was long after midnight by this time—and we were all tired, as we had never been tired before in our lives. To say nothing of what we had suffered emotionally, we had physically accomplished what was about equal to an assault on Everest, that day. It was Mayberry who first said, "Let's turn in. My feet are killing me." He looked down ruefully at his shoes. "Mary Jane" pumps, they were called—something intended for little girls. God knows where he had picked them up. "I think my arches are broken," he said, rubbing his insteps.

He had just kicked off his shoes when Oren and Hemworth came in. Hemworth, still unsubtracted, was pushing the semi-collapsed Oren before him in a perambulator—or perhaps it was called a stroller—a vehicle for transporting the very young, anyway. It was either do that, or abandon him. Or carry him. Oren, ordinarily one of the stiffest, most dignified men in the army—which is saying a good deal more than, "in the world"—was too worn out to protest. If Hemworth had stuffed him into a shopper's handbag and had carried him over his shoulder like a squaw's papoose I don't think he would have objected. Oren was little and he was tired; how he got home was of no importance to him at the moment.

Hemworth was big and he was excited. He gave, out of sheer exuberance, Oren's baby carriage a fast shoot into the room. He miscalculated and except that a Smalfri risked his life (actually) stopping it, it would have banged into the wall with possibly serious results.

"God in heaven!" Hemworth cried, staring at us all once again as if he'd never seen us before—"this is unbelievable!"

Then he rapped his head with his knuckles. "Lord! Lord! Why haven't I been more temperate with my words? Here I am a man of words and no word for this. It's the colossal in reverse and all of my training's been in describing the merely colossal."

Hemworth's verbal centers were irritated; he could not cease talking and as he talked, he walked about looking at us, shaking his head, unable to doubt that what he saw existed, yet unable to convince himself that it was possible for such objects to exist. Nor could he rid himself, it was obvious, of the feeling that he was a grownup dealing with children.

Finally, his visual curiosity momentarily satisfied, he gave us the big, the terrible news. "Boys," he said, "here it is. The President, while taking a nap at two-thirty this afternoon, was reduced, decimated, shrunken, concentrated, condensed, what you will—made small."

The message, after the first shock, was variously received. But to all of us, Subtracted men as we were, there was something ghastly in the thought that the head of our nation was now just such another little, wizened monstrosity as ourselves. Misery, they say, loves company. Well, we didn't love it that much—not to the extent of wanting *him* to become one of us.

Mayberry, as usual, was less concerned with the particular event than with its meaning. "Hemworth," he asked, "has anyone been reduced except when asleep?"

"There aren't any statistics on it yet—no questionnaires have been sent out." Hemworth saw that we didn't think this was funny and gave Mayberry a straight answer. "So far as I know, there's been no waking shrinkage. And I've been thinking about that too, Mayberry. I figure on staying up tonight. I'd like my clothes to fit me when I wake up in the morning."

Well, Hemworth could joke about it then. It hadn't happened to him yet. But at some time that night he must have dozed off. Next morning his clothes *didn't* fit. But that night he still inhabited a world tailored to his size and felt the confidence that fit gave him. "We'll know soon enough if they do," he went on. "Let a few drivers, pilots, radio announcers, and the like, get reduced on their jobs and we'll soon hear about it."

"What about Russia?" somebody wanted to know. "Has

there been any protest filed about what happened this afternoon?"

"It's hard to tell for sure about Russia—her news sources are pretty well bottled up—but Matthews got a cable through. There hasn't been any protest—they've got trouble of their own nearer home. They're shrinking, and shrinking fast. The Chinese are shrinking too, nowhere near so fast though. The ratio is about four to one, Matthews says. The Japanese are jittery as hell, but the Chinese seem to think it's a great joke."

"Who on?" Mayberry asked.

"Matthews didn't say."

"If this keeps up," Mayberry said, stroking his black, satyr's beard, now about the size of a number-two paintbrush, "we aren't going to have a man's world any longer."

"A child's world?" Hemworth asked.

"Women and children's."

"Why women? They're shrinking as fast as the men from all reports. The world's going to belong to the kids, obviously."

"Indirectly, yes. Physically, they'll have the upper hand—but they'll turn to their mothers for advice as they've always done. The world of the adult male is done for. Hemworth is probably one of its last representatives."

Oren, who had been too weary to take any part in the discussion, now suggested that we have something to eat and go to bed. Hemworth volunteered to get the food together for us. He had just left the room when two heavy explosions rocked the building. Most of us were knocked off our feet. I fell heavily, the glass in my hand breaking with a clatter which was lost in the crash of breaking windows. My first thought was of Russian retaliation. The sounds were those of explosives near at hand. We struggled to our feet and stood for a minute without speaking, waiting for the next blast. I noticed that my hand was bleeding badly from the broken glass.

While we were waiting, Wilbur Oren and a half-dozen of the older Chilekings burst in, frightened, we believed. They were; but they were defiant, too.

"No one's ever going to be killed again by that gun," young Oren shouted.

"What gun?" his father asked.

"The one that sunk the *Stalingrad*. I've seen to that. And I'm going to fix every other gun in the United States."

The boy was obviously in a state of psychic shock. His skin was pale, pupils dark and dilated, voice pitched in a high monotone. "We blew it sky high. Now figure out some other way to kill people."

"Wilbur," his father said, "how do you expect us to protect ourselves in case of attack?"

"There won't be any attack," Wilbur said. "We'll give other countries a chance to destroy their weapons—if they won't do it themselves, we'll do it for them."

"Wilbur, my boy," Oren said in a fatherly squeak, "you are not yourself. You need rest. Now you run along——"

Wilbur stopped him in midsentence. "I'm not taking orders from you any longer. We've taken a vow"—he indicated the group of Chilekings about him—"not to stop until every gun and bomb in the United States is destroyed. You can't make them without us, and you can't stop us from destroying the ones you have. Can you?" he asked.

Oren searched the faces of his fellow officers looking for help.

"Can you?" Wilbur persisted, picking his father up bodily and holding him so that their faces were on a level. "Can *you*, Daddy?"

"No," Oren said, "I can't."

With that Oren set his father down, not gently, and with his band of big-headed, soft-faced Chilekings at his heels turned and lumbered, in the awkward way the blown-up children have for the first two or three weeks, out of the building.

And he was as good as his word, better than his word. Without him the Second Children's Crusade (which has swept the world with all the fanaticism and a thousand times the effectiveness of the First) might never have been. The moral shock, if that is what it was, which Wilbur Oren received the day he saw the human suffering caused by the shots he fired at the *Stalingrad* gave him a drive, an eloquence which carried all before him.

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It has been my plan to speak only in passing of those events of which I do not have a firsthand knowledge. The first Chileking Demilitarization Mission to Russia is an example. I was not a member of this Mission and much has been written of it by those who were. I propose to say only what is necessary concerning this, and like events, to fill in the background for my very personal eyewitness account. Chronologically I am far ahead of myself in mentioning this Mission at all. But having mentioned it, I will dispose of it now. The American Chilekings under Wilbur Oren—and I do mean under, for he dominated them as only hero-worshiping children are capable of being dominated—were fanatically set on the destruction of all armaments—so set, that when they did not find immediate like-mindedness in the Russian Chilekings they proceeded without a minute's hesitation and with childlike logic and brutality to blast a large section of the Russian countryside to a moonlike bareness. And the Russian Chilekings, for they were in complete control there, accepted this act as children do the losing of a game. It had been played, they had lost, and, since it had not seemed a very interesting game in the first place, they did not care to play it over in an effort to try for a win the second time. Children, we discovered, have none of an adult's normal pride. They have short memories. They are incapable of the concentrated effort which a retaliatory program requires. And, except for the mesmeric power exercised over them by Wilbur Oren, I doubt that we would have experienced this long period of Demilitarization. The land is still strewn with the wreckage effected by this one Chileking. Forts, garrisons, training fields, factories, ammunition stores, bomb depots, the result of years of patriotic and scientific effort were all smashed in a decade. And not only in America —everywhere.

In a sense it was our fault—this world-wide destruction. We had permitted our children to form "pen leagues," to correspond with children of other countries, to exchange handiwork. We had let the sense of nationality become undermined in them. They had begun to feel like a "band of brothers," these children of the world. [In our schools and churches, in spite of the efforts of clear thinkers from 1940 on, there had

been a concerted attempt on the part of men and women, themselves without any concept of national dignity or integrity, to indoctrinate our children with a pacific internationalism. Because we took no stock in this un-American fanaticism, we took for granted (as in the old days we took so many things for granted about our children) that our children did not believe in it, either. How wrong and stupid we were! They were inexperienced and impressionable. And they came to power with these ideas of brotherhood and equality simmering in their undeveloped minds. And since those ideas, except for our laxness, would never have been there, it is unfair to blame the destruction of the past fifty years wholly on them. We had our own guilty part to play in the razing of every fort, the demolition of every station for experimenting with guided missiles.]

Of course it is true that, except for one fact, the entire Demilitarization Program might not have succeeded as it did: if Wilbur Oren had subsequently suffered Subtraction as most Chilekings did, he would not have continued to exercise his enormous power over them. But because he never changed physically nor lessened a whit in his fiery determination to rid the world of what had, at the critical moment of the change, caused him so much suffering, he has remained for all these years the Chileking's dictator. This, quite probably, although it also is chronologically out of place, is as good a place as any to speak of the varieties of Chilekings and Smalfri that have so far made their appearance. Subtraction has taken place at almost every age—at ages when the size loss was so small as to be almost unnoticeable. The youngest Subtracted person, in so far as our records go, was four. The oldest, ninety-two. Subtraction seems to take place when a certain degree of "maturity" has been reached; although the word "maturity" is a controversial one (to use an adjective which dates me). Some, those who are late Subtractees for the most part, insist that Subtraction simply indicates a kind of rigidity, an end of spiritual and mental growth. Some four- and six-year-olds, born without curiosity, without the ability or desire to enlarge themselves spiritually or mentally, shrink early, they say. Most are Subtracted in their forties, with a consider-

able number experiencing the change in the decades on each side of forty. Some few are never Subtracted at all. These people have always struck me as being childlike, in spite of the fact that some have been eminent in their professions, poets, scientists, musicians, and so forth. These un-Subtracted adults have always, both by virtue of their size and the quality of their minds, been very much at home with the Chilekings. And alas, they, who might have been expected to caution, to guide, and restrain the Chilekings in their excesses, have been the very ones, out of the entire adult population, who have had the least inclination to do so.

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So then, there were Smalfri of all ages. Men of fifty the same size as early Shrinkees of eight and ten; and of course, the same size as the un-Shrunk toddlers of two and three. (These poor babies, the real babies, never knew quite what to make of us whiskered pygmies of their own size. There we stood, eyes on a level with theirs, but with no desire to catch frogs, suck lollipops or play in the mud.) There was prevalent in the first years of the Chileking Era a slang labelling of the small which has since been superseded by more exact terms. "Real Babes," "No Babes," and "Go Babes," were the phrases used then. I was a "Go Babe," as were all shrunken adults. "No Babes" were those who had experienced Subtraction while young and who oftentimes were confused with the "Real Babes"—those who, as is no doubt plain in the terminology itself, were real babies; that is, veritable infants.

Chilekings also had their classifications. Amplification took place at various ages—occasionally very early, occasionally very late. Sometimes, though this is unusual, a person who had never been amplified, who had accomplished what was once considered a "normal" growth and who was expected to finish life without ever becoming a Smalfri either, was belatedly overamplified, swollen to gigantic proportions. This was quite unusual however and there have never been enough of these oddities about to be more than passing curiosities.

Occasionally[4] in this narrative I find myself ruminating about matters and meanings which rightly have no part in an "eyewitness" account. The matters I have been discussing in the above paragraphs are common knowledge to all now alive and as such have no particular interest. However, since this manuscript will be published only in a form approved by the Chileking Commission for Preservation of Old Records, I needn't worry about the inclusion of matter extraneous to the central purpose of my narrative. It will be stricken out, anyway, if not wanted.[5] In view of this I want to make a final point, for my own satisfaction. Although the rationale of these processes has not yet been completely understood, yet it is clear that there *is* a rationale. It was and is no hit-or-miss matter. There is some meaning in these physical alterations, a correspondence of some kind between inner growth or shrinkage and the outer waxing or waning. But exactly what this correspondence is, we are not yet able to say, though many studies are now in progress. One change in attitudes obvious to all, has been caused by the discrepancy which now exists between the outer appearance and the inner reality. In the old days, "big" meant adult. "Big" can mean *anything* now, so far as the interior person is concerned. "Big" means "big" now, nothing more. So, by analogy, "black" is coming to mean "black"; "white," "white"; "little," "little," and nothing more. The visual surface is less and less meaningful. The result has been, I'm afraid, an undermining of standards. If things are not what they appear, it is very easy to call them what you like. And what you "like" is seldom what's good for you.

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This is all beside the point—which is to report what I saw with my own eyes; but it is difficult for a thinking, feeling man to make a mechanical recording machine of himself at this late date in life. What I next saw with my own eyes was

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[4] Great understatement.
[5] Right.

that roomful of gnomes expressing pity to Oren for the derangement of his son—pity, as later events have proved, which was entirely uncalled for. Wilbur Oren had taken that night the first steps which would little by little elevate him to a position as dictator of the Chilekings—and that meant of Smalfri as well.

Hemworth, alone, wasted no time on expressions of sympathy but went outside to examine the damage caused by this latest blast. The rest of us were too exhausted mentally and physically to care what had happened.

The knowledge that if we went to sleep we would awaken the size of gnats would not have kept us from sleeping that night. We turned in where we were, cuddling up like a cageful of wizened monkeys trying to keep warm on a chilly evening. The fire died out. Getting logs into it was not worth the labor. Some had a drink before sleeping. It was a mistake. We had not yet learned to adjust our intake to our reduced capacities. That night, which should have been one of prayer and contemplation, was one instead of drunken snores and sodden sleep.

I was still sleeping next morning when David came in. "Come on out, Daddy," he said when he had awakened me, "and see how quiet it is."

I got up without awakening the others and limped along beside David, stiff and sore. (The Chilekings have never, to this day, learned that our legs are shorter than theirs. They either leave us far behind them, unless we jog trot to keep up with them or, impatient with our slowness, grab our arms and pull us along at a pace which is both physically painful and psychically hateful.) That morning with David was my first, though since many times reaffirmed, experience of this. "Can't you hurry up, Daddy?" he called back fretfully, as if my steps were small out of a deliberate desire on my part to impede him.

But he was right about the quietness. Not a boat moved on the bay, not a train on a rail. No factory whistles sounded. No planes flashed across the sky. On the highways there were a few slow-moving autos. It was one of those fine, clear, windy mornings common to San Francisco in the fall when, in spite

of the abundance of water, there is a tang of desert dryness in the air. On such days I have often thought I could look from the Presidio into the open windows of the office buildings in San Francisco and read the letters rolling out from under the typists' fingers. In spite of this wonderful magnifying clarity, there was nothing to be seen on the morning of November 2nd, except a dead world—or an apparently dead world. For I knew that behind those solid and shining walls there was hidden an emotional activity so quivering and feverishly alive as to put into the shade all of yesterday's merely mechanical movement.

As I stood there at David's knee looking, pitying, speculating, Mayberry came out to us. He pulled his wrist watch, which he could no longer keep on his arm, out of some placket or fold of his clothes. It was near eight o'clock.

He looked about the Post. "It didn't take long for discipline to disappear, did it? Oren's sick. I'm calling all officers and men together at eleven. Usual routines are impossible, of course, but we'd better decide what we are to do—or what we can do. San Francisco is going to need martial law before the day's over—only God knows who she can get to maintain it."

"I say," somebody called, "I don't think I look so bad." It was Hemworth, scrambling awkwardly down the steps of the officers' barracks where he had gone to sleep, "like a man," instead of sleeping with us Smalfri on the messroom floor. He was bundled up in a towel. "How do you like my swaddling clothes?" he asked jauntily. He took a look around. "Well, boys, it has, I take it, really struck."

It had struck. That day, I suppose, was the most momentous the world has ever known. Everywhere on that day, as later investigation proved, men and women were Subtracted, and children inflated. On remote South American rancheros, in equatorial jungles, in the Ukraine, even in the Vatican. There were thousands of suicides that day: men and women who thought they were alone in their gnomish reduction and preferred to die rather than face the world so dwarfed. There were many deaths not self-sought; on ships where wholesale reduction made it impossible to bring the ship into port. The

recent teledrama, "Subtraction at Sea," has made magnificent use of the horrors of such a situation. There was heroism at sea, too. The English passenger ship *Laurentia* with 1200 aboard came safely into New York harbor in spite of the fact that every man and woman on board was Subtracted.

The wars that were in progress that day died in mid-stride. What could men do with weapons they could no longer handle? Of what value were planes to men who could no longer control them? Russia was, I suppose it has been agreed, the most seriously affected. She had in India with her army of occupation, no children. The Indians had on the other hand, innumerable Chilekings available who, because of the agelong oriental philosophy of parental regard, were far more easily controlled by the Indian Smalfri than were Chilekings elsewhere. These Chilekings, together with the Indian adults, who as a whole were very tardy shrinkers, placed almost the entire Russian army there in prison camps. Then, with the breakdown of all international transportation, and with conditions in Russia as chaotic as elsewhere, Russia simply abandoned this expeditionary force of hers. Today they have become thoroughly assimilated into the Indian nation. The Chileking delegate from India to the last International Congress here was the son of one of these reduced Russian soldiers.

In Spain that day, though word of it did not reach us at once, all the adult population was very substantially reduced. Germany, with its weakness for leaders, has provided more recruits than any other country to the anti-war crusade of Wilbur Oren. The Orenites, who in this country are fanatic enough, God knows, have in Germany added a mysticism to their fanaticism which makes Orenism nothing less than a religion. Nowhere has there been such a cleavage between Chileking practices and the Smalfri practices which they superseded as in Germany.

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Once again and in spite of my resolution, I find myself slipping into matters of opinion, abandoning my chronological outline, writing of happenings as familiar to you as to myself.

These slips will no doubt be taken care of in the offices of the Commemoration Commission. I find it easier to write as I please, and trust them to delete.

In San Francisco on that first day of general Reduction and Amplification we were not only subjected to an overwhelming emotional shock, but deprived of those material conveniences which we had come to believe were essential. Not a streetcar, not a bus moved. Telephone and telegraph services were completely disrupted. Some communication was kept up by means of amateur short-wave radio operators. The commercial radio systems were silent. Stores did not open. Restaurants and movie houses were locked.

Toward evening of that first day when the news began to get about that the catastrophe was general, the roads began to fill up again—carloads of gaping, bewildered Smalfri piloted by proud Chilekings; Smalfri, reassured, and at the same time stunned and shocked to see in a thousand other dwarfed ones their own lineaments. This riding about in cars did not last long. California had gasoline again, sooner than other states, for we had no long-distance transportation problems to cope with and we had stores of gas on hand—but it was years before there were again long lines of cars bumper to bumper on the highways.

I found that I had no car at all. Mary Frances pedalled up to the Presidio about noon on a borrowed bicycle to get news of me for her mother.

"Where is the car?" I asked her.

"Elizabeth has it today."

"Elizabeth?" I wanted to know.

"Yes, you know. My friend Elizabeth Purdy. They don't have a car so I said she could have ours every other day. They need it a lot."

Oh, the seeds of almost everything that followed were right there in the happenings of that first week, had we then had the eyes to see them. Little laxities, concessions, which in the emotional upheaval of the time we permitted, were seized and held by the Chilekings, made an entering wedge which, in time, separated us Smalfri from every right and privilege we had ever enjoyed as parents and adults.

When, twelve years afterwards, the Smalfri made a united effort to regain their control of the world, it was too late. I knew it at the time, though I was heart and soul in the movement. Useless blood was shed then. Had the blow been struck earlier, before the Chilekings had become so expert technologically, we would have won. But we waited too long. And though I shall never be content with this world reversal under which I live, it has advantages which I will not try to deny. Our present custom of work in youth and study in age, for instance, has proved far more feasible than I ever anticipated.

It grew, naturally enough, out of the necessity in those early days of having the Chilekings carry on the work of which we were incapable. Of course we could have made no headway with this, had the Chilekings been of another mind. But they would have done it even had we opposed them. They were determined to drive the tractors, man the generators, operate the grain elevators. They left their schools as though leaving prisons. We had at that time in our schools a philosophy of learning by doing—but what the students learned by doing was usually of no possible use to them outside the school room. They had looms on which they made little rugs—or they made clay jugs like those of the Egyptians, or Indian bows and arrows, and they knew how to build a stockade like those of our pioneer forefathers, or duplicate the slave galleys of the Roman Empire. But out of school there was hardly any demand for, or pleasure in, stockades or slave galleys—and even while they made these things the Chilekings have confessed they felt as if they were working with shadows. They knew well enough this was sugar, and not very palatable sugar, on a pill being rammed down their throats.

Now, set loose among the realities of our own day, they learn processes, techniques, operational routines in weeks instead of months and years as in the old days. There were mistakes and fatalities of course, but they acquired these muscular patterns far faster than the Smalfri had ever been able to do. It began to appear that our schools had been, not so much a place for teaching children, as a place where adults served as governors on the child's natural learning speed.

When the Chileking later becomes a Smalfri and takes up, if

he wishes, his speculative and abstract studies, it appears that his learning habits have, as a result of this practical work, become so sharpened and acute that his progress here is also helped. And in his years of work he has gained a desire to relate his studies to the concrete world which gave them wonderfully increased point and validity.

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I have taken no pains to hide the fact that many things that have come with the Chileking reversal are to me lastingly intolerable; but I freely admit that this revolution is not one of them. It is still, I confess, a shock to see our great universities filled with these little, bearded, gnomish figures—these Peascods and Buttercups; see the gridirons and diamonds grass-grown. Organized athletics have become a thing of the past. It appears now that the young never had, actually, nearly as much pleasure in the bruising, semiprofessional collegiate sports as did the adults who were their spectators. Once out from under the directorial thumb of the adults there was a spontaneous abandonment of these grueling athletic contests and a growth of interest in rather ragged, so far as performance is concerned, spontaneous sports.

Our system of universal compulsory education has naturally broken down. Now only those Smalfri who have some real hunger for learning go to school. The results are mixed but not wholly bad. It is certainly strange, for one who remembers the old world, to find men, like Goyen the painter, scarcely able to pick out the headlines and never twice spelling a word the same way. But it hasn't seemed to hurt his painting. In the old days it often happened that a man who wrote or painted had scarcely ever smelled the real world. He put his nose into a book, and never took it out until he was twenty-six, when he then suspended it over a piece of foolscap and began writing.

Oh, yes, the seeds of almost everything that has followed were seen in that first chaotic week. It is easy enough to say that we should have stopped it at the time. We did say "No,"

and we were not listened to. And at that time a civil war between fathers and children was unthinkable.

When, toward the end of that first week, certain foodstuffs began to grow scarce, the Chilekings made a collection of these scarce articles and apportioned them equally among the people. What could we do? They wielded the crowbars that broke in the doors of the warehouses, they drove the trucks that distributed the food.

The economic structure was incapable of bearing the burden of this and similar quixoticisms. The profit system disappeared and today we have the uninspiring spectacle of men content simply to have a home and sufficient food; to travel a little, to have a few objects they believe to be beautiful, and to spend their Smalfrihood in study or in some unprofitable avocation. The memory of the great men of my youth has almost left the earth: men who did not permit their needs to become the measure of their productivity, but who accumulated oil fields and railroads and ships and factories. From a thousand chimneys there once poured the smoke of one man's furnaces; he put wages into the hands of ten thousand men; in the banks he counted his reserves in the millions.

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But these spacious days are forever gone. And in large part, it is our fault. The Chilekings had received an unrealistic upbringing. There was a dichotomy in their training which they were never able to bridge. We had permitted them to hear in school and in church the old sentimental platitudes about sharing their plenty. We continually said to them, "Don't be selfish—give Johnny half," considering this but a charming grace which they would give up when they left childhood behind. The trouble was that they came to power before childhood was left behind, and someone with more taste for irony that I might smile at the way in which they have proceeded to put us Smalfri over these same platitudinous hurdles.

I think the chief trouble was that the Chilekings had no real conception of the significance of money. They had never had much themselves and they had been fairly content. Money

to them was simply a metal that would take them to a show—or buy a bag of candy. They had no understanding whatever of money as a productive agent. They had no desire to have more of it than they needed for the day. They literally took no thought for the morrow. Well, you know as well as I where that has brought us. The Chilekings have been far more cruel and unscrupulous in their seizure of an individual's property than the Smalfri would ever have been. Since they themselves are not interested in anything beyond their daily needs, they cannot enter into the minds of men more imaginative than themselves. They can see distributed without a qualm the properties men had spent a lifetime accumulating. Their only concern has been the anthill, beehive, regard of seeing that all have enough to eat and drink. It is as simple as that for them. And we Smalfri are helpless. I watched my own son David loading the Chileking trucks that first week.

There have always been those who have opposed distributionism and we Smalfri who have kept faith with the old order have now and again been able to make numerous converts even among the Chilekings. This has usually proved extremely unrewarding labor however, for a Chileking seemed no sooner to be converted to reason than he was Subtracted. And Subtracted, he was of very little use to us in any actual overthrow of the Chilekings.

Because of my firsthand knowledge, I know a report of the earliest meetings for "Chilesex" is expected of me. Inadvertently, hunting Mary Frances, who had slipped off to attend a "rally" she said, at one of the barracks, I happened in upon the first of these get-togethers. (Later, when the practice became more ritualistic and better organized such a phrase would not be suitable. At this state "get-together" is about right.)

I am loath, in spite of expectations, to say anything at all about a practice so entirely repellent to me. After all I was brought up in an era in which sex was a private matter for adults, not a public one for adolescents. I am no historian, no anthropologist. Nor do their protestations that practices similar to those of our Chilekings have been common with primitive peoples throughout history move me. I am not a primitive and it was never my intention that my children should behave

as if they were. Before the Chileking Era there was never a more demure, self-respecting, modest child than Mary Frances. One month after Inflation and she was behaving like a South Sea Islander in a grass hut.

I know that such meetings and practices are today a commonplace. We see signs, "Chilesex Headquarters," as openly displayed as, "Public Library," or "Men's Room." "Meeting for Chilesex at Seven Tonight," is as common now as "Choir Practice at Seven," was in my youth. Familiarity has nevertheless not diminished either my disapproval nor my early feeling of shock, and I find it completely impossible to make any concrete report of what I encountered that first night in "A" barracks. Lighthearted, affectionate (they tell me) experimental sexual play on the part of Chilekings, some as young as twelve! How am I, for whom such matters were of life and death importance, to react to these Chileking practices?

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They tell me that these Chilesex activities are less seriously regarded by their participants than the activities of a communal reading hour! Chilekings hoot with unbelief when I tell them that in my day sexual union was so sacred a matter that men often shot their mates for obtaining sexual gratification outside a legal union, then committed suicide themselves. Sex was no trivial matter with us. Chilekings consider death for such a cause on a plane with death for reading a poem with an "illegal" person or for drinking an "unsanctified" soda. Sex has lost the deep, awful, and romantic meaning it had for us. I can not, I freely confess, understand what man's deepest instinct can mean to those who have, from the time of puberty to marriage, expressed it quite freely. When I ask them they jibe at me. "Fun," they answer and look down at me laughing, as if I were an insect, not a man, and unknowing about these matters. Fun! indeed.

But how were we to stop them? Once they had the upper hand physically over us, parents, and teachers, there was no longer any reason not to be public about practices which (they now tell us) were formerly quite commonly indulged in se-

cretly. Children; it now appears, are born without shame, and since the Change, parents have been too preoccupied with their own troubles to instill in their offspring suitable feelings about sex. Since the Chilekings made full use, from the beginning, of our own contraceptive devices there has been surprisingly enough no increase in illegitimacy.

But something is lost, I feel sure, in today's marriages. There is no longer that sense of breathless wonder as the two young people approach the moment of unveiling. Weddings have become quite cheerful, unromantic, matter-of-fact. My feeling when I attend one is of witnessing the establishment of a partnership between two business associates, rather than the legalizing of the union of two tremulous, innocent, and yearning young bodies: which was marriage as we experienced it fifty years ago, I do assure you.

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My contention that Chilesex has taken the bloom off marriage and the romance out of the man-woman relationship is borne out by the fact that, once wedded, Chilekings cling to their original marriage beds with all the unimaginative obstinacy of a pair of ring-necked doves! Not that I do not believe in conjugal fidelity. I do, indeed. But the Chilekings practice this fidelity, once they are married, not as we did, because it was our duty, but because they can think of nothing better to do! Their imaginations have been depleted, their zest destroyed by their early experiences. They have, in fact, only derisive terms for those who seek romance outside of marriage. A "Go Babe," as I have related earlier, is the name for a Smalfri of middle age. But an adulterous "Go Babe" is called by the Chilekings a "Slobabe." Why? Because they think it is "slow," that is, "stupid," not to have experienced enough, learned enough in the "Meetings for Chilesex" to enable one to pick out a permanently satisfactory mate. The "Slobabe" is regarded today much as a retarded child was regarded in my time. No criticism is attached to his incompetence, rather a kind of pity.

Now this is surely a far cry from the days of my youth

when men and women took sex seriously enough to die for it. Or at least to kill for it. Are there any Paolas and Francescas today? Any Heros and Leanders? Any Tristrams and Iseults? Tristram today would be a "Slobabe." Is this an advance in civilization?

And though what has happened in the area of reproduction cannot be "blamed" on the Chilekings, and though from all I gather they like it as little as we, still it is part and parcel of the topsy-turvy world which is theirs. No Subtracted woman, whatever her age, bears children. But a woman who has never been Subtracted goes right on having children, if she wants to (and several have), until her death—even if she lives until she is in her seventies or eighties. I must say that I find a pregnant woman of seventy a shocking sight.

A Subtracted man is capable of fathering children in unions with un-Subtracted women. Not many such unions exist however.

The Amplified, as soon as they are sexually mature—and this maturity comes chronologically at the age it always has —can and do have children. The fact of early Chilesex together with the inability of the Subtracted to have children has induced early marriage and childbearing. Nevertheless the birth rate is falling off considerably and I foresee a time when we must . . .

I know this is not what was asked of me by the Commission. They want what "I saw," not what "I think." Well, they have the power to strike this out if they want. Or strike me. It won't be the first time. I am an old man and a little one. But what I saw is locked behind my two eyes and is not to be exposed at command.

One "eyewitness" event which I *can* report with a free conscience is the first Chileking Meeting for Worship. I was there; through no desire on my part, it is true. Amy and I were bundled up willy-nilly, and taken there for the good of our souls—so we were told. My own feeling is that the Chilekings knew that the whole experience would be most miserable for us and for this reason forced it sadistically upon us. When any group has the power the Chilekings have over us Smalfri it is impossible to determine to what extent they are

exercising power for its own sake and covering up by telling us it is for our own "good."

Whatever their reasons, Mary Frances told her mother and me the day before, that there would be a service of prayer and thanksgiving in the cathedral next morning at dawn. This was toward the end of the third month of the Chileking Era.

"Dawn?" I asked, seizing, as one does in astonishment, upon the least significant detail of all.

"Yes," she replied, "dawn is the best time to propitiate the gods."

"The gods?" I echoed, staring up into her face.

She answered without self-consciousness. "Wilbur thinks, and so do all of us, that there are more gods than one. God and Jesus are the greatest and best we think. But the Devil is a god too, and perhaps if he were honored more, he would be more content. Wilbur says you have all tried to act as if there wasn't any evil. You kill people or starve them and you call it 'economic necessity,' but Wilbur says it's just plain evil and probably the Devil's work."

"But that's true—such things do grow out of conditions beyond our control. We don't want to do them."

"That's the reason Wilbur thinks it's the Devil's work. Since it does happen, *someone* must want it done. Wilbur says that things that no one wants done, don't happen. So, tomorrow morning we will honor him—that doesn't mean worship. But Wilbur says we can't resist until we have recognized."

I was too amazed to speak any more with Mary Frances at the time. This eleven-year-old talking religion and economics; but talking it like some primitive medicine man with forces of evil to be propitiated. Neither Amy nor I had been churchgoers but we had, like many other people, sent our children to Sunday School, and had taught them to say their prayers. It had always seemed a pretty sight to us to see them kneel at bedtime in their night clothes prattling in their sweet unformed voices the old familiar words. But now to hear them planning to pray in cold blood, meaning it, and in public, and at dawn! And talking of the devil! I was shocked at this revelation of the depths of their naïveté. But this was only another instance of their faulty training. Though when they

were receiving that training in Sunday School, we had, of course, no inkling that they would not have sufficient time before they came to power to learn to distinguish between the ideal and the workable.

I had no intention of attending those services to propitiate the devil, but long before it was light next morning David came into our room.

"It's time to get up," he said.

"What do you mean coming in here this time of the morning?" I wanted to know.

"It's time to get ready for the Services."

Then I remembered. "Your mother and I aren't going."

"Wilbur said to bring our parents. There's going to be a special place reserved for the little ones where they can see. We promised Wilbur we would bring you," he said quietly. "I wouldn't want to break my promise. Not to Wilbur."

I saw what he meant. "Tell Maria to make us some coffee then," I said. We still had coffee at that time. The electric power was off, but Maria was managing some rudimentary cooking on the barbecue grill in the backyard. She had a kind of scaffolding of boxes and cartons on which she mounted to get at the grill.

"We aren't to have any breakfast," David said, "we're to pray fasting."

I had no doubt that David and Mary Frances were so completely under Wilbur Oren's power, that if we were to refuse they would simply hustle us into the car and take us there by force. So Amy and I dressed quietly and were waiting for them when they came for us.

I well remember that ride through the raw, foggy morning. We used the last of our gasoline for the trip and it was months before we were to drive again. It was still some time before sunup and there were no street lights. We moved slowly through the gray gloom. Amy and I huddled together in the back seat, not talking. There were still a number of cars on the road that morning, but the sidewalks were already beginning to fill up with the makeshift wagons in which the Chilekings were transporting the Smalfri of their families to the meeting.

When we reached the cathedral we found it lit only by the wavering light of candles. High in the groined arches it was still deep night. Great shadows rose and fell across the supporting pillars. The air was thick with some heavy, oversweet incense. A Chileking, some beginning student, I suppose, was playing the organ. Over and over he played a monotonous wailing sort of five-finger exercise. The Smalfri were all seated in the front of the cathedral, and behind them and against the walls at the sides ranged the Chilekings, big, heavy, smooth-faced, and intent.

The cathedral was soon filled and the doors closed. Gray light began to seep through the arched windows. The organ continued its long four-or-five-note wail. Now and then a veering candle flame sent a splash of pale light across one of the faces near me.

Suddenly over the organ's monotone came a sound or series of sounds that prickled my skin: something halfway between the brass clang of a cymbal and the muffled beat of a drum. What mumbo jumbo are we to have now I wondered—and as I looked at the Chilekings, lined along the walls, with their big, round faces lit by the flickering candlelight, it was easy to imagine them savages, gathered about some ritual fire. Well, I thought, there isn't really much difference; children and primitives aren't far separated.

Organ wail and drum throb, if drum it was, continued. Then a door to the left of the altar slowly opened and three towering figures emerged and crossed ponderously to a position in front of the altar. The central figure I recognized as that of Wilbur Oren; the other two I did not know. Each was costumed in a habit that had as its basis, vestments of either the Roman or Anglican church. Over this vestment the three Chilekings wore long, red, capelike garments. On the back of each cape was affixed the insignia, then so strange, and now so common of the Antlered Egg. On their heads was something that was neither military shako, nor bishop's miter, but that somehow resembled both.

But the strangest thing about those three Chilekings was not their costumes, but the great, life-size figures they bore aloft. The figure carried by the Chileking on Wilbur Oren's

right was obviously a representation of the Christ, though very unlike those commonly seen at that time. The face of that Christ was neither bearded nor thorn crowned, but young and unlined. Christ before Golgotha, before Gethsemane, before the temptation in the wilderness even. The modeling of the face was a little uncertain, but there was no denying that it had great power and sweetness. A young face, full of hope; a Chileking's conception of a Chileking, in fact.

The figure on the left was at first difficult to place; it was that of a woman, big-breasted, heavy, rounded, gray-haired, with a face compassionate, double-chinned, and motherly. Motherly—was this the Chileking's conception of Mary, I wondered? The Fathers of the Church had made her young and comely, Mary the Maiden; but perhaps the Chilekings saw in her only Mary, the real mother. No compromise in the words, "Mary, Mother," with the image of an untouched virgin.

The central figure, the one Wilbur Oren held aloft, towered high above the other two. In the half-light that filled the cathedral it looked like an African witch doctor. A hideous black creature with little red eyes that seemed to flicker evilly in the shifting light, and a big, loose-lipped, white mouth. This figure of evil—for he was obviously that, was hung about with various oddments of broken glass, of tufts of hair, of old cartridges and pierced coins. In one respect he was an orthodox devil—he had a tail, sinuous, and scaly. And this figure of evil was, unlike the other two, jointed—for he was kept aquiver with grimacings and jerkings and lurchings.

We have had time enough now to adapt ourselves to this fantastic mummery of the Chilekings: Antlered Eggs, spirits propitiated, and shrines at every crossroad. These attract little attention now, but then we were accustomed, in such religious practices as we still retained, to a certain dignity of ritual, a certain reassuring decorum. And yet in spite of my distaste for such primitive religious flummery as we were seeing that cold, gray morning, I was deeply impressed. More so, I regret to say, than at my usual place of worship. I was no doubt the victim of a very elementary sort of mass psychology. About me washed great waves of Chileking belief and ardor and I

was unable to escape a certain degree of submergence in that flood of feeling. We Smalfri, perched uneasily on the edges of our seats so that we might bend our knees, with the tall, grave Chilekings pressing closely in about us, were like a little band of simians surrounded by water buffaloes or elephants. With us, we felt, were knowledge and wisdom; but what could they avail against this bulk, and this belief? And as the tempo of the services increased and the pitch mounted I began to wonder what they would do.

As I have said, much of what happened seemed to me farcical; yet in spite of myself, as I've already confessed, I was deeply moved. My mind recognized the naïveté, the Huck Finn, caveman quality of the proceedings; and yet because not too long ago (as mankind counts its years) I had bowed my own head before just such images and stamped to just such drum beats, I could not, however cool my thinking, control my pulse beats.

* * * * * * *

Wilbur Oren spoke for a long time. I don't think he said a sentence worth remembering, nor do I believe the words now attributed to him and known as the "Cathedral Speech," are authentic in any detail. That speech, the official one, outlines in considerable detail subsequent Chileking policies. I heard that speech and there was nothing of that kind in it. There was nothing in it whatever but a kind of eloquent hysteria, a reiteration of "God wills it," a shocked, inexperienced boy's denunciation of what had hurt him.[6] That was all there was to it. Though to say that was all, is not to say it was not effective. It was effective, terribly so. As that high voice continued and daylight came, I could see those big, empty Chileking faces contorted with conviction and washed with tears.

When Oren finished, the three figures were again held aloft, and all the Chilekings in the building filed past them. And as they passed they held out their hands to a fourth Chileking

[6] This, though obviously the report of a shocked Smalfri concerning what has hurt him, I have let stand in spite of its misrepresentation of the Cathedral Speech of Wilbur Oren.

who had joined the three at the altar. He made a cut in their hands so that a fair quantity of blood flowed from the wound. Then each Chileking held his gashed hand over a big brass or gold bowl so that the blood of all mingled there. I was there and saw all this done, and my gorge rose at the sight of this savage blood-brotherhood ritual. I saw my own children let their blood drip into this pot—David and Mary Frances—and Smalfri all about me shivered. But what could we do? Our day had passed.

* * * * * * *

As I watched that long line of Chilekings file past, and saw them wince as the blade flashed across their hands, and heard them mumble some vow as they pressed the blood out of the cut flesh into that pot, I knew that something portentous was afoot, a revolution beyond anything our world has yet seen. I will not pretend, as many have, that I foresaw all that has happened. But I saw a little that morning—enough to frighten me with grim forebodings.

I do not know whether this paper is what the Commemorative Committee had in mind when they asked me to write of my experiences during the first days of Subtraction or not. I am an old man and not a professional writer; I have done the best I can. I have tried not to be bitter, but there is no use denying that my life stopped sixty years ago. Since then I have only been an onlooker.

For I Am A Jealous People!

By LESTER DEL REY

I

. . . the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves . . . and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low . . . they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish . . . because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets . . .

ECCLESIASTES, XII, 3-5.

There was the continuous shrieking thunder of an alien rocket overhead as the Reverend Amos Strong stepped back into the pulpit. He straightened his square, thin shoulders slightly, and the gaunt hollows in his cheeks deepened. For a moment he hesitated, while his dark eyes turned upwards under bushy, grizzled brows. Then he moved forward, placing the torn envelope and telegram on the lectern with his notes. The blue-veined hand and knobby wrist that projected from the shiny black serge of his sleeve hardly trembled.

His eyes turned toward the pew where his wife was not. Ruth would not be there this time. She had read the message before sending it on to him. Now she could not be expected. It seemed strange to him. She hadn't missed service since Richard was born nearly thirty years ago.

The sound hissed its way into silence over the horizon, and Amos stepped forward, gripping the rickety lectern with both hands. He straightened and forced into his voice the resonance and calm it needed.

"I have just received word that my son was killed in the battle of the moon," he told the puzzled congregation. He lifted his voice, and the resonance in it deepened. "I had asked, if it were possible, that this cup might pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, Lord, but as Thou wilt."

He turned from their shocked faces, closing his ears to the sympathetic cry of others who had suffered. The church had been built when Wesley was twice its present size, but the troubles that had hit the people had driven them into the worn old building until it was nearly filled. He pulled his notes to him, forcing his mind from his own loss to the work that had filled his life.

"The text today is drawn from Genesis," he told them. "Chapter seventeen, seventh verse; and chapter twenty-six, fourth verse. The promise which God made to Abraham and to Isaac." He read from the Bible before him, turning the pages unerringly at the first try.

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee."

"And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

He had memorized most of his sermon, no longer counting on inspiration to guide him as it had once done. He began smoothly, hearing his own words in snatches as he drew the obvious and comforting answer to their uncertainty. God had promised man the earth as an everlasting covenant. Why then should men be afraid or lose faith because alien monsters had swarmed down out of the emptiness between the stars to try man's faith? As in the days of bondage in Egypt or captivity in Babylon, there would always be trials and times when the fainthearted should waver, but the eventual outcome was clearly promised.

He had delivered a sermon from the same text in his for-

mer parish of Clyde when the government had first begun building its base on the moon, drawing heavily in that case from the reference to the stars of heaven to quiet the doubts of those who felt that man had no business in space. It was then that Richard had announced his commission in the lunar colony, using Amos' own words to defend his refusal to enter the ministry. It had been the last he saw of the boy.

He had used the text one other time, over forty years before, but the reason was lost, together with the passion that had won him fame as a boy evangelist. He could remember the sermon only because of the shock on the bearded face of his father when he had misquoted a phrase. It was one of his few clear memories of the period before his voice changed and his evangelism came to an abrupt end.

He had tried to recapture his inspiration after ordination, bitterly resenting the countless intrusions of marriage and fatherhood on his spiritual forces. But at last he had recognized that God no longer intended him to be a modern Peter the Hermit, and resigned himself to the work he could do. Now he was back in the parish where he had first begun; and if he could no longer fire the souls of his flock, he could at least help somewhat with his memorized rationalizations for the horror of the alien invasion.

Another ship thundered overhead, nearly drowning his words. Six months before, the great ships had exploded out of space and had dropped carefully to the moon, to attack the forces there. In another month, they had begun forays against Earth itself. And now, while the world haggled and struggled to unite against them, they were setting up bases all over and conquering the world mile by mile.

Amos saw the faces below him turn up, furious and uncertain. He raised his voice over the thunder, and finished hastily, moving quickly through the end of the service.

He hesitated as the congregation stirred. The ritual was over and his words were said, but there had been no real service. Slowly, as if by themselves, his lips opened, and he heard his voice quoting the Twenty-Seventh Psalm. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"

His voice was soft, but he could feel the reaction of the

congregation as the surprisingly timely words registered. "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." The air seemed to quiver, as it had done long ago when God had seemed to hold direct communion with him, and there was no sound from the pews when he finished. "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."

The warmth of that mystic glow lingered as he stepped quietly from the pulpit. Then there was the sound of motorcycles outside, and a pounding on the door. The feeling vanished.

Someone stood up and sudden light began pouring in from outdoors. There was a breath of the hot, droughty physical world with its warning of another dust storm, and a scattering of grasshoppers on the steps to remind the people of the earlier damage to their crops. Amos could see the bitterness flood back over them in tangible waves, even before they noticed the short, plump figure of Dr. Alan Miller.

"Amos! Did you hear?" He was wheezing as if he had been running. "Just came over the radio while you were in here gabbling."

He was cut off by the sound of more motorcycles. They swept down the single main street of Wesley, heading west. The riders were all in military uniform, carrying weapons and going at top speed. Dust erupted behind them, and Doc began coughing and swearing. In the last few years, he had grown more and more outspoken about his atheism; when Amos had first known him, during his first pastorate, the man had at least shown some respect for the religion of others.

"All right," Amos said sharply. "You're in the house of God, Doc. What came over the radio?"

Doc caught himself and choked back his coughing fit. "Sorry. But damn it, man, the aliens have landed in Clyde, only fifty miles away. They've set up a base there! That's what all those rockets going over meant."

There was a sick gasp from the people who had heard, and a buzz as the news was passed back to others.

Amos hardly noticed the commotion. It had been Clyde

where he had served before coming here again. He was trying to picture the alien ships dropping down, scouring the town ahead of them with gas and bullets. The grocer on the corner with his nine children, the lame deacon who had served there, the two Aimes sisters with their horde of dogs and cats and their constant crusade against younger sinners. He tried to picture the green-skinned, humanoid aliens moving through the town, invading the church, desecrating the altar! And there was Anne Seyton, who had been Richard's sweetheart, though of another faith . . .

"What about the garrison nearby?" a heavy farmer yelled over the crowd. "I had a boy there, and he told me they could handle any ships when they were landing! Shell their tubes when they were coming down——"

Doc shook his head. "Half an hour before the landing, there was a cyclone up there. It took the roof off the main building and wrecked the whole training garrison."

"Jim!" The big man screamed out the name, and began dragging his frail wife behind him, out toward his car. "If they got Jim——"

Others started to rush after him, but another procession of motorcycles stopped them. This time they were traveling slower, and a group of tanks was rolling behind them. The rear tank drew abreast, slowed, and stopped, while a dirty-faced man in an untidy major's uniform stuck his head out.

"You folks get under cover! Ain't you heard the news? Go home and stick to your radios, before a snake plane starts potshooting the bunch of you for fun. The snakes'll be heading straight over here if they're after Topeka, like it looks!" He jerked back down and began swearing at someone inside. The tank jerked to a start and began heading away toward Clyde.

There had been enough news of the sport of the alien planes in the papers. The people melted from the church. Amos tried to stop them for at least a short prayer and to give them time to collect their thoughts, but gave up after the first wave shoved him aside. A minute later, he was standing alone with Doc Miller.

"Better get home, Amos," Doc suggested. "My car's half a block down. Suppose I give you a lift?"

Amos nodded wearily. His bones felt dry and brittle, and there was a dust in his mouth thicker than that in the air. He felt old and, for the first time, almost useless. He followed the doctor quietly, welcoming the chance to ride the six short blocks to the little house the parish furnished him.

A car of ancient age and worse repair rattled toward them as they reached Doc's auto. It stopped, and a man in dirty overalls leaned out, his face working jerkily. "Are you prepared, brothers? Are you saved? Armageddon has come, as the Book foretold. Get right with God, brothers! The end of the world as foretold is at hand, amen!"

"Where does the Bible foretell alien races around other suns?" Doc shot at him.

The man blinked, frowned, and yelled something about sinners burning forever in hell before he started his rickety car again. Amos sighed. Now, with the rise of their troubles, fanatics would spring up to cry doom and false gospel more than ever, to the harm of all honest religion. He had never decided whether they were somehow useful to God or whether they were inspired by the forces of Satan.

"In my Father's house are many mansions," he quoted to Doc, as they started up the street. "It's quite possibly an allegorical reference to other worlds in the heavens."

Doc grimaced, and shrugged. Then he sighed and dropped one hand from the wheel onto Amos' knee. "I heard about Dick, Amos. I'm sorry. The first baby I ever delivered—and the handsomest!" He sighed again, staring toward Clyde as Amos found no words to answer. "I don't get it. Why can't we drop atom bombs on them? What happened to the moon base's missiles?"

Amos got out at the unpainted house where he lived, taking Doc's hand silently and nodding his thanks.

He would have to organize his thoughts this afternoon. When night fell and the people could move about without the danger of being shot at by chance alien planes, the church bell would summon them, and they would need spiritual guid-

ance. If he could help them to stop trying to understand God, and to accept Him . . .

There had been that moment in the church when God had seemed to enfold him and the congregation in warmth—the old feeling of true fulfillment. Maybe, now in the hour of its greatest need, some measure of inspiration had returned.

He found Ruth setting the table. Her small, quiet body moved as efficiently as ever, though her face was puffy and her eyes were red. "I'm sorry I couldn't make it, Amos. But right after the telegram, Anne Seyton came. She'd heard—before we did. And——"

The television set was on, showing headlines from the *Kansas City Star*, and he saw there was no need to tell her the news. He put a hand on one of hers. "God has only taken what he gave, Ruth. We were blessed with Richard for thirty years."

"I'm all right." She pulled away and turned toward the kitchen, her back frozen in a line of taut misery. "Didn't you hear what I said? Anne's here. Dick's wife! They were married before he left, secretly—right after you talked with him about the difference in religion. You'd better see her, Amos. She knows about her people in Clyde."

He watched his wife go. The slam of the outside door underlined the word. He'd never forbidden the marriage; he had only warned the boy, so much like Ruth. He hesitated, and finally turned toward the tiny, second bedroom. There was a muffled answer to his knock, and the lock clicked rustily.

"Anne?" he said. The room was darkened, but he could see her blond head and the thin, almost unfeminine lines of her figure. He put out a hand and felt her thin fingers in his palm. As she turned toward the weak light, he saw no sign of tears, but her hand shook with her dry shudders. "Anne, Ruth has just told me that God has given us a daughter—"

"God!" She spat the word out harshly, while the hand jerked back. "God, Reverend Strong? Whose God? The one who sends meteorites against Dick's base, plagues of insects, and drought against our farms? The God who uses tornadoes to make it easy for the snakes to land? That God, Reverend Strong? Dick gave you a daughter, and he's dead! Dead!"

Amos backed out of the room. He had learned to stand the faint mockery with which Doc pronounced the name of the Lord, but this was something that set his skin into goose-pimples and caught at his throat. Anne had been of a different faith, but she had always seemed religious before.

It was probably only hysteria. He turned toward the kitchen door to call Ruth and send her in to the girl.

Overhead, the staccato bleating of a ram-jet cut through the air in a sound he had never heard. But the radio description fitted it perfectly. It could be no Earth ship!

Then there was another and another, until they blended together into a steady drone.

And over it came the sudden firing of a heavy gun, while a series of rapid thuds came from the garden behind the house.

Amos stumbled toward the back door. "Ruth!" he cried.

There was another burst of shots. Ruth was crumpling before he could get to the doorway.

II

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? . . . I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou has brought me into the dust of death. PSALMS, XXII, 1, 14, 15.

There were no more shots as he ran to gather her into his arms. The last of the alien delta planes had gone over, heading for Topeka or whatever city they were attacking.

Ruth was still alive. One of the ugly slugs had caught her in the abdomen, ripping away part of the side, and it was bleeding horribly. But he felt her heart still beating, and she moaned faintly. Then as he put her on the couch, she opened her eyes briefly, saw him, and tried to smile. Her lips moved, and he dropped his head to hear.

"I'm sorry, Amos. Foolish. Nuisance. Sorry."

Her eyes closed, but she smiled again after he bent to kiss her lips. "Glad now. Waited so long."

Anne stood in the doorway, staring unbelievingly. But as Amos stood up, she unfroze and darted to the medicine cabinet, to come back and begin snipping away the ruined dress and trying to staunch the flow of blood.

Amos reached blindly for the phone. He mumbled something to the operator, and a minute later to Doc Miller. He'd been afraid that the doctor would still be out. He had a feeling that Doc had promised to come, but could remember no words.

The flow of blood outside the wound had been stopped, but Ruth was white, even to her lips. Anne forced him back to a chair, her fingers gentle on his arm.

"I'm sorry, Father Strong. I—I——"

He stood up and went over to stand beside Ruth, letting his eyes turn toward the half-set table. There was a smell of something burning in the air, and he went out to the old wood-burning stove to pull the pans off and drop them into the sink. Anne followed, but he hardly saw her, until he heard her begin to cry softly. There were tears this time.

"The ways of God are not the ways of man, Anne," he said, and the words released a flood of his own emotions. He dropped tiredly to a chair, his hands falling limply onto his lap. He dropped his head against the table, feeling the weakness and uncertainty of age. "We love the carnal form and our hearts are broken when it is gone. Only God can know all of any of us or count the tangled threads of all our lives. It isn't good to hate God!"

She dropped beside him. "I don't, Father Strong. I never did." He couldn't be sure of the honesty of it, but he made no effort to question her, and she sighed. "Mother Ruth isn't dead yet!"

He was saved from any answer by the door being slammed open as Doc Miller came rushing in. The plump little man took one quick look at Ruth, and was beside her, reaching for plasma and his equipment. He handed the plasma bottle to Anne, and began working carefully.

"There's a chance," he said finally. "If she were younger or stronger, I'd say there was an excellent chance. But now, since you believe in it, you'd better do some fancy praying."

"I've been praying," Amos told him, realizing that it was

true. The prayers had begun inside his head at the first shot, and they had never ceased.

They moved her gently, couch and all, into the bedroom where the blinds could be drawn, and where the other sounds of the house couldn't reach her. Doc gave Anne a shot of something and sent her into the other room. He turned to Amos, but didn't insist when the minister shook his head.

"I'll stay here, Amos," he said. "With her. Until we know, or I get another call. The switchboard girl knows where I am."

He went into the bedroom and closed the door. Amos stood in the center of the living room, his head bowed, for long minutes.

The sound of the television brought him back. Topeka was off the air, but another station was showing scenes of destruction.

Hospitals and schools seemed to be their chief targets. The gas had accounted for a number of deaths, though those could have been prevented if instructions had been followed. But now the incendiaries were causing the greatest damage.

And the aliens had gotten at least as rough treatment as they had meted out. Of the forty that had been counted, twenty-nine were certainly down.

"I wonder if they're saying prayers to God for their dead?" Doc asked. "Or doesn't your God extend his mercy to races other than man?"

Amos shook his head slowly. It was a new question to him. But there could be only one answer. "God rules the entire universe, Doc. But these evil beings surely offer him no worship!"

"Are you sure? They're pretty human!"

Amos looked back to the screen, where one of the alien corpses could be seen briefly. They did look almost human, though squat and heavily muscled. Their skin was green, and they wore no clothes. There was no nose, aside from two orifices under their curiously flat ears that quivered as if in breathing. But they were human enough to pass for deformed men, if they were worked on by good make-up men.

They were creatures of God, just as he was! And as such,

could he deny them? Then his mind recoiled, remembering the atrocities they had committed, the tortures that had been reported, and the utter savagery so out of keeping with their inconceivably advanced ships. They were things of evil who had denied their birthright as part of God's domain. For evil, there could be only hatred. And from evil, how could there be worship of anything but the powers of darkness?

The thought of worship triggered his mind into an awareness of his need to prepare a sermon for the evening. It would have to be something simple; both he and his congregation were in no mood for rationalizations. Tonight he would have to serve God through their emotions. The thought frightened him. He tried to cling for strength to the brief moment of glory he had felt in the morning, but even that seemed far away.

There was the wail of a siren outside, rising to an ear-shattering crescendo, and the muffled sound of a loud-speaker driven beyond its normal operating level.

He stood up at last and moved out onto the porch with Doc as the tank came by. It was limping on treads that seemed to be about to fall apart, and the amplifier and speakers were mounted crudely on top. It pushed down the street, repeating its message over and over.

"Get out of town! Everybody clear out! This is an order to evacuate! The snakes are coming! Human forces have been forced to retreat to regroup. The snakes are heading this way, heading toward Topeka. They are looting and killing as they go. Get out of town! Everybody clear out!"

It paused, and another voice blared out, sounding like that of the major who had stopped before. "Get the hell out, all of you! Get out while you've still got your skins outside of you. We been licked. Shut up, Blake! We've had the holy living pants beat off us, and we're going back to momma. Get out, scram, vamoose! The snakes are coming! Beat it!"

It staggered down the street, rumbling its message, and now other stragglers began following it—men in cars, piled up like cattle; men in carts of any kind, drawn by horses. Then another amplifier sounded from one of the wagons.

"Stay under cover until night! Then get out! The snakes won't be here at once. Keep cool. Evacuate in order, and under cover of darkness. We're holing up ourselves when we get to a safe place. This is your last warning. Stay under cover now, and evacuate as soon as it's dark."

There was a bleating from the sky, and alien planes began dipping down. Doc pulled Amos back into the house, but not before he saw men being cut to ribbons by shots that seemed to fume and burst into fire as they hit. Some of the men on the retreat made cover. When the planes were gone, they came out and began regrouping, leaving the dead and hauling the wounded with them.

"Those men need me!" Amos protested.

"So does Ruth," Doc told him. "Besides, we're too old, Amos. We'd only get in the way. They have their own doctors and chaplains, probably. They're risking their lives to save us, damn it—they've piled all their worst cases there and left them to warn us and to decoy the planes away from the rest who are probably sneaking back through the woods and fields. They'd hate your guts for wasting what they're trying to do. I've been listening to one of the local stations, and it's pretty bad."

He turned on his heel and went back to the bedroom. The television program tardily began issuing evacuation orders to all citizens along the road from Clyde to Topeka, together with instructions. For some reason, the aliens seemed not to spot small objects in movement at night, and all orders were to wait until then.

Doc came out again, and Amos looked up at him, feeling his head bursting, but with one clear idea fixed in it. "Ruth can't be moved, can she, Doc?"

"No, Amos." Doc sighed. "But it won't matter. You'd better go in to her now. She seems to be coming to. I'll wake the girl and get her ready."

Amos went into the bedroom as quietly as he could, but there was no need for silence. Ruth was already conscious, as if some awareness of her approaching death had forced her to use the last few minutes of her life. She put out a frail hand timidly to him. Her voice was weak, but clear.

"Amos, I know. And I don't mind now, except for you. But there's something I had to ask you. Amos, do you——?"

He dropped beside her when her voice faltered, wanting to bury his head against her, but not daring to lose the few remaining moments of her sight. He fought the words out of the depths of his mind, and then realized it would take more than words. He bent over and kissed her again, as he had first kissed her so many years ago.

"I've always loved you, Ruth," he said. "I still do love you."

She sighed and relaxed. "Then I won't be jealous of God any more, Amos. I had to know."

Her hand reached up weakly, to find his hair and to run through it. She smiled, the worn lines of her face softening. Her voice was soft and almost young. "And forsaking all others, cleave only unto thee——"

The last syllable whispered out, and the hand dropped.

Amos dropped his head at last, and a single sob choked out of him. He folded her hands tenderly, with the worn, cheap wedding ring uppermost, and arose slowly with his head bowed.

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Father, I thank thee for this moment with her. Bless her, O Lord, and keep her for me."

He nodded to Doc and Anne. The girl looked sick and sat staring at him with eyes that mixed shock and pity.

"You'll need some money, Anne," he told her as Doc went into the bedroom. "I don't have much, but there's a little——"

She drew back, choking, and shook her head. "I've got enough, Reverend Strong. I'll make out. Doctor Miller has told me to take his car. But what about you?"

"There's still work to be done," he said. "I haven't even written my sermon. And the people who are giving up their homes will need comfort. In such hours as these, we all need God to sustain us."

She stumbled to her feet and into the bedroom after Miller. Amos opened his old desk and reached for pencil and paper.

III

The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation.

I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree.

PSALMS, XXXVII, 14, 35.

Darkness was just beginning to fall when they helped Anne out into the doctor's car, making sure that the tank was full. She was quiet, and had recovered herself, but avoided Amos whenever possible. She turned at last to Doc Miller.

"What are you going to do? I should have asked before, but——"

"Don't worry about me, girl," he told her, his voice as hearty as when he was telling an old man he still had forty years to live. "I've got other ways. The switchboard girl is going to be one of the last to leave, and I'm driving her in her car. You go ahead, the way we mapped it out. And pick up anyone else you find on the way. It's safe; it's still too early for men to start turning to looting, rape, or robbery. They'll think of that a little later."

She held out a hand to him, and climbed in. At the last minute, she pressed Amos' hand briefly. Then she stepped on the accelerator and the car took off down the street at its top speed.

"She hates me," Amos said. "She loves men too much and God too little to understand."

"And maybe you love your God too much to understand that you love men, Amos. Don't worry, she'll figure it out. The next time you see her, she'll feel different. I'll see you later."

Doc swung off toward the telephone office, carrying his bag. Amos watched him, puzzled as always at anyone who could so fervently deny God and yet could live up to every commandment of the Lord except worship. They had been friends for a long-time, while the parish stopped fretting about it and took it for granted, yet the riddle was no nearer solution.

There was the sound of a great rocket landing, and the smaller stutterings of the peculiar alien ram-jets. The ships passed directly overhead, yet there was no shooting this time.

Amos faced the bedroom window for a moment, and then turned toward the church. He opened it, throwing the doors wide. There was no sign of the sexton, but he had rung the bell in the tower often enough before. He took off his worn coat and grabbed the rope.

It was hard work, and his hands were soft. Once it had been a pleasure, but now his blood seemed too thin to suck up the needed oxygen. The shirt stuck wetly to his back, and he felt giddy when he finished.

Almost at once, the telephone in his little office began jangling nervously. He staggered to it, panting as he lifted it, to hear the voice of Nellie, shrill with fright. "Reverend, what's up? Why's the bell ringing?"

"For prayer meeting, of course," he told her. "What else?"

"Tonight? Well, I'll be——" She hung up.

He lighted a few candles and put them on the altar, where their glow could be seen from the dark street, but where no light would shine upwards for alien eyes. Then he sat down to wait, wondering what was keeping the organist.

There were hushed calls from the street and nervous cries. A car started, to be followed by another. Then a group took off at once. He went to the door, partly for the slightly cooler air. All along the street, men were moving out their possessions and loading up, while others took off. They waved to him, but hurried on by. He heard telephones begin to ring, but if Nellie was passing on some urgent word, she had forgotten him.

He turned back to the altar, kneeling before it. There was no articulate prayer in his mind. He simply clasped his gnarled fingers together and rested on his knee, looking up at the outward symbol of his life. Outside, the sounds went on, blending together. It did not matter whether anyone chose to use the church tonight. It was open, as the house of God must always be in times of stress. He had long since stopped trying to force religion on those not ready for it.

And slowly, the strains of the day began to weave themselves into the pattern of his life. He had learned to accept;

from the death of his baby daughter on, he had found no way to end the pain that seemed so much a part of life. But he could bury it behind the world of his devotion, and meet whatever his lot was to be without anger at the will of the Lord. Now, again, he accepted things as they were ordered.

There was a step behind him. He turned, not bothering to rise, and saw the dressmaker, Angela Anduccini, hesitating at the door. She had never entered, though she had lived in Wesley since she was eighteen. She crossed herself doubtfully, and waited.

He stood up. "Come in, Angela. This is the house of God, and all His daughters are welcome."

There was a dark, tight fear in her eyes as she glanced back to the street. "I thought—maybe the organ——"

He opened it for her and found the switch. He started to explain the controls, but the smile on her lips warned him that it was unnecessary. Her calloused fingers ran over the stops, and she began playing, softly as if to herself. He went back to one of the pews, listening. For two years he had blamed the organ, but now he knew that there was no fault with the instrument, but only with its player before. The music was sometimes strange for his church, but he liked it.

A couple who had moved into the old Surrey farm beyond the town came in, holding hands, as if holding each other up. And a minute later, Buzz Williams stumbled in and tried to tiptoe down the aisle to where Amos sat. Since his parents had died, he'd been the town problem. Now he was half-drunk, though without his usual boisterousness.

"I ain't got no car and I been drinking," he whispered. "Can I stay here till maybe somebody comes or something?"

Amos sighed, motioning Buzz to a seat where the boy's eyes had centered. Somewhere, there must be a car for the four waifs who had remembered God when everything else had failed them. If one of the young couple could drive, and he could locate some kind of a vehicle, it was his duty to see that they were sent to safety.

Abruptly, the haven of the church and the music came to an end, leaving him back in the real world—a curiously unreal world now.

He was heading down the steps, trying to remember whether the Jameson boy had taken his flivver, when a panel truck pulled up in front of the church. Doc Miller got out, wheezing as he squeezed through the door.

He took in the situation at a glance. "Only four strays, Amos? I thought we might have to pack them in." He headed for Buzz. "I've got a car outside, Buzz. Gather up the rest of this flock and get going!"

"I been drinking," Buzz said, his face reddening hotly.

"Okay, you've been drinking. At least you know it, and there's no traffic problem. Head for Salina and hold it under forty and you'll be all right." Doc swept little Angela Anduccini from the organ and herded her out, while Buzz collected the couple. "Get going, all of you!"

They got, with Buzz enthroned behind the wheel and Angela beside him. The town was dead. Amos closed the organ and began shutting the doors to the church.

"I've got a farm tractor up the street for us, Amos," Doc said at last. "I almost ran out of tricks. There were more fools than you'd think who thought they could hide out right here. At that, I probably missed some. Well, the tractor's nothing elegant, but it can take those back roads. We'd better get going."

Amos shook his head. He had never thought it out, but the decision had been in his mind from the beginning. Ruth still lay waiting a decent burial. He could no more leave her now than when she was alive. "You'll have to go alone, Doc."

"I figured." The doctor sighed, wiping the sweat from his forehead. ". . . I'd remember to my dying day that believers have more courage than an atheist! No sale, Amos. It isn't sensible, but that's how I feel. We'd better put out the candles, I guess."

Amos snuffed them reluctantly, wondering how he could persuade the other to leave. His ears had already caught the faint sounds of shooting; the aliens were on their way.

The uncertain thumping of a laboring motor sounded from the street, to wheeze to silence. There was a shout, a pause, and the motor caught again. It might have run for ten seconds before it backfired, and was still.

Doc opened one of the doors. In the middle of the street, a man was pushing an ancient car while his wife steered. But it refused to start again. He grabbed for tools, threw up the hood, and began a frantic search for the trouble.

"If you can drive a tractor, there's one half a block down," Doc called out.

The man looked up, snapped one quick glance behind him, and pulled the woman hastily out of the car. In almost no time, the heavy roar of the tractor sounded. The man revved it up to full throttle and tore off down the road, leaving Doc and Amos stranded. The sounds of the aliens were clearer now, and there was some light coming from beyond the bend of the street.

There was no place to hide. They found a window where the paint on the imitation stained glass was loose, and peeled it back enough for a peephole. The advance scouts of the aliens were already within view. They were dashing from house to house. Behind them, they left something that sent up clouds of glowing smoke that seemed to have no fire connected to their brilliance. At least, no buildings were burning.

Just as the main group of aliens came into view, the door of one house burst open. A scrawny man leaped out, with his fat wife and fatter daughter behind him. They raced up the street, tearing at their clothes and scratching frantically at their reddened skin.

Shots sounded. All three jerked, but went racing on. More shots sounded. At first, Amos thought it was incredibly bad shooting. Then he realized that it was even more unbelieveably good marksmanship. The aliens were shooting at the hands first, then moving up the arms methodically, wasting no chance for torture.

For the first time in years, Amos felt fear and anger curdle solidly in his stomach. He stood up, feeling his shoulders square back and his head come up as he moved toward the door. His lips were moving in words that he only half understood. "Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up thine hand; forget not the humble. Wherefore doth the wicked condemn God? He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not requite it. Thou hast

seen it, for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless. Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil ones; seek out their wickedness till thou find none . . ."

"Stop it, Amos!" Doc's voice rasped harshly in his ear. "Don't be a fool! And you're misquoting that last verse!"

It cut through the fog of his anger. He knew that Doc had deliberately reminded him of his father, but the trick worked, and the memory of his father's anger at misquotations replaced his cold fury. "We can't let that go on!"

Then he saw it was over. They had used up their targets. But there was the sight of another wretch, unrecognizable in half of his skin . . .

Doc's voice was as sick as he felt. "We can't do anything, Amos. I can't understand a race smart enough to build star ships and still going in for this. But it's good for our side, in the long run. While our armies are organizing, they're wasting time on this. And it makes resistance tougher, too."

The aliens didn't confine their sport to humans. They worked just as busily on a huge old tomcat they found. And all the corpses were being loaded onto a big wagon pulled by twenty of the creatures.

The aliens obviously had some knowledge of human behavior. At first they had passed up all stores, and had concentrated on living quarters. The scouts had passed on by the church without a second glance. But they moved into a butcher shop at once, to come out again, carrying meat which was piled on the wagon with the corpses.

Now a group was assembling before the church, pointing up toward the steeple where the bell was. Two of them shoved up a mortar of some sort. It was pointed quickly and a load was dropped in. There was a muffled explosion, and the bell rang sharply, its pieces rattling down the roof and into the yard below.

Another shoved the mortar into a new position, aiming it straight for the door of the church. Doc yanked Amos down between two pews. "They don't like churches, damn it! A fine spot we picked. Watch out for splinters!"

The door smashed in and a heavy object struck the altar, ruining it and ricocheting onto the organ. Amos groaned at the sound it made.

There was no further activity when they slipped back to their peepholes. The aliens were on the march again, moving along slowly. In spite of the delta planes, they seemed to have no motorized ground vehicles, and the wagon moved on under the power of the twenty green-skinned things, coming directly in front of the church.

Amos stared at it in the flickering light from the big torches burning in the hands of some of the aliens. Most of the corpses were strangers to him. A few he knew. And then his eyes picked out the twisted, distorted upper part of Ruth's body, her face empty in death's relaxation.

He stood up wearily, and this time Doc made no effort to stop him. He walked down a line of pews and around the wreck of one of the doors. Outside the church, the air was still hot and dry, but he drew a long breath into his lungs. The front of the church was in the shadows, and no aliens seemed to be watching him.

He moved down the stone steps. His legs were firm now. His heart was pounding heavily, but the clot of feelings that rested leadenly in his stomach had no fear left in it. Nor was there any anger left, nor any purpose.

He saw the aliens stop and stare at him, while a jabbering began among them.

He moved forward with the measured tread that had led him to his wedding the first time. He came to the wagon, and put his hand out, lifting one of Ruth's dead-limp arms back across her body.

"This is my wife," he told the staring aliens quietly. "I am taking her home with me."

He reached up and began trying to move the other bodies away from her. Without surprise, he saw Doc's arms moving up to help him, while a steady stream of whispered profanity came from the man's lips.

He hadn't expected to succeed. He had expected nothing.

Abruptly, a dozen of the aliens leaped for the two men. Amos let them overpower him without resistance. For a sec-

ond, Doc struggled, and then he too relaxed while the aliens bound them and tossed them onto the wagon.

IV

He hath bent his bow like an enemy: he stood with his right hand as an adversary, and slew all that were pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: he poured out his fury like fire.

The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath swallowed up all her palaces: he hath destroyed his strong holds, and hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation.

The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the Lord, as in the day of a solemn feast.

LAMENTATIONS, II, 4, 5, 7.

Amos' first reaction was one of dismay at the ruin of his only good suit. He struggled briefly on the substance under him, trying to find a better spot. A minister's suit might be old, but he could never profane the altar with such stains as these. Then some sense of the ridiculousness of his worry reached his mind, and he relaxed as best he could.

He had done what he had to do, and it was too late to regret it. He could only accept the consequences of it now, as he had learned to accept everything else God had seen fit to send him. He had never been a man of courage, but the strength of God had sustained him through as much as most men had to bear. It would sustain him further.

Doc was facing him, having flopped around to lie facing toward him. Now the doctor's lips twisted into a crooked grin. "I guess we're in for it now. But it won't last forever, and maybe we're old enough to die fast. At least, once we're dead, we won't know it, so there's no sense being afraid of dying."

If it was meant to provoke him into argument, it failed. Amos considered it a completely hopeless philosophy, but it

was better than none, probably. His own faith in the hereafter left something to be desired; he was sure of immortality and the existence of heaven and hell, but he had never been able to picture either to his own satisfaction.

The wagon had been swung around and was now being pulled up the street, back toward Clyde. Amos tried to take his mind off the physical discomforts of the ride by watching the houses, counting them to his own. They drew near it finally, but it was Doc who spotted the important fact. He groaned. "My car!"

Amos strained his eyes, staring into the shadows through the glare of the torches. Doc's car stood at the side of the house, with the door open! Someone must have told Anne that he hadn't left, and she'd swung back around the alien horde to save him!

He began a prayer that they might pass on without the car being noticed, and it seemed at first that they would. Then there was a sudden cry from the house, and he saw her face briefly at a front window. She must have seen Doc and himself lying on the wagon!

He opened his mouth to risk a warning, but it was too late. The door swung back, and she was standing on the front steps, lifting Richard's rifle to her shoulder. Amos' heart seemed to hesitate with the tension of his body. The aliens still hadn't noticed. If she'd only wait . . .

The rifle cracked. Either by luck or some skill he hadn't suspected, one of the aliens dropped. She was running forward now, throwing another cartridge into the barrel. The gun barked again, and an alien fell to the ground, bleating horribly.

There was no attempt at torture this time, at least. The leading alien jerked out a tubelike affair from a scabbard at his side and a single sharp explosion sounded. Anne jerked backward as the heavy slug hit her forehead, the rifle spinning from her dead hands.

The wounded alien was trying frantically to crawl away. Two of his fellows began working on him mercilessly, with as little feeling as if he had been a human. His body followed

that of Anne toward the front of the wagon, just beyond Amos' limited view.

She hadn't seemed hysterical this time, Amos thought wearily. It had been her tendency to near hysteria that had led to his advising Richard to wait, not the difference in faith. Now he was sorry he'd had no chance to understand her better.

Doc sighed, and there was a peculiar pride under the thickness of his voice. "Man," he said, "has one virtue which is impossible to any omnipotent force like your God. He can be brave. He can be brave beyond sanity, for another man or for an idea. Amos, I pity your God if man ever makes war on Him!"

Amos flinched, but the blasphemy aroused only a shadow of his normal reaction. His mind seemed numbed. He lay back, watching black clouds scudding across the sky almost too rapidly. It looked unnatural, and he remembered how often the accounts had mentioned a tremendous storm that had wrecked or hampered the efforts of human troops. Maybe a counteract had begun, and this was part of the alien defense. If they had some method of weather control, it was probable. The moonlight was already blotted out by the clouds.

Half a mile further on, there was a shout from the aliens, and a big tractor chugged into view, badly driven by one of the aliens, who had obviously only partly mastered the human machine. With a great deal of trial and error, it was backed into position and coupled to the wagon. Then it began churning along at nearly thirty miles an hour, while the big wagon bucked and bounced behind. From then on, the ride was physical hell. Even Doc groaned at some of the bumps, though his bones had three times more padding than Amos'.

Mercifully, they slowed when they reached Clyde. Amos wiped the blood off his bitten lip and managed to wriggle to a position where most of the bruises were on his upper side. There was a flood of brilliant lights beyond the town where the alien rockets stood, and he could see a group of non-human machines busy unloading the great ships. But the drivers of the machines looked totally unlike the other aliens.

One of the alien trucks swung past them, and he had a clear view of the creature steering it. It bore no resemblance to humanity. There was a conelike trunk, covered with a fine white down, ending in four thick stalks to serve as legs. From its broadest point, four sinuous limbs spread out to the truck controls. There was no head, but only eight small tentacles waving above it.

He saw a few others, always in control of machines, and no machines being handled by the green-skinned people as they passed through the ghost city that had been Clyde. Apparently there were two races allied against humanity, which explained why such barbarians could come in space ships. The green ones must be simply the fighters, while the downy cones were the technicians. From their behavior, though, the pilots of the planes must be recruited from the fighters.

Clyde had grown since he had been there, unlike most of the towns about. There was a new supermarket just down the street from Amos' former church, and the tractor jolted to a stop in front of it. Aliens swarmed out and began carrying the loot from the wagon into its big food lockers, while two others lifted Doc and Amos.

But they weren't destined for the comparatively merciful death of freezing in the lockers. The aliens threw them into a little cell that had once apparently been a cashier's cage, barred from floor to ceiling. It made a fairly efficient jail, and the lock that clicked shut as the door closed behind them was too heavy to be broken.

There was already one occupant—a medium-built young man whom Amos finally recognized as Smithton, the Clyde dentist. His shoulders were shaking with sporadic sobs as he sat huddled in one corner. He looked at the two arrivals without seeing them. "But I surrendered," he whispered. "I'm a prisoner of war. They can't do it. I surrendered——"

A fatter-than-usual alien, wearing the only clothes Amos had seen on any of them, came waddling up to the cage, staring in at them, and the dentist wailed off into silence. The alien drew up his robe about his chest and scratched his rump against a counter without taking his eyes off them. "Humans,"

he said in a grating voice, but without an accent, "are peculiar. No standardization."

"I'll be damned!" Doc swore. "English!"

The alien studied them with what might have been surprise, lifting his ears. "Is the gift of tongues so unusual, then? Many of the priests of the Lord God Almighty speak all the human languages. It's a common miracle, not like levitation."

"Fine. Then maybe you'll tell us what we're being held for?" Doc suggested.

The priest shrugged. "Food, of course. The *grethi* eat any kind of meat—even our people—but we have to examine the laws to find whether you're permitted. If you are, we'll need freshly killed specimens to sample, so we're waiting with you."

"You mean you're attacking us for *food?*"

The priest grunted harshly. "No! We're on a holy mission to exterminate you. The Lord commanded us to go down to Earth where abominations existed and to leave no living creature under your sun."

He turned and waddled out of the store, taking the single remaining torch with him, leaving only the dim light of the moon and reflections from further away.

Amos dropped onto a stool inside the cage. "They had to lock us in a new building instead of one I know," he said. "If it had been the church, we might have had a chance."

"How?" Doc asked sharply.

Amos tried to describe the passage through the big, unfinished basement under the church, reached through a trap door. Years before, a group of teen-agers had built a sixty-foot tunnel into it and had used it for a private club until the passage had been discovered and bricked over from outside. The earth would be soft around the bricks, however. Beyond, the outer end of the tunnel opened in a wooded section, which led to a drainage ditch that in turn connected with the Republican River. From the church, they could have moved to the stream and slipped down that without being seen, unlike most of the other sections of the town.

Doc's fingers were trembling on the lock when Amos finished. "If we could get the two hundred feet to the church—— They don't know much about us, Amos, if they lock us in

where the lock screws are on our side. Well, we'll have to chance it."

Amos' own fingers shook as he felt the screwheads. He could see what looked like a back door to the store. If they could come out into the alley that had once been there, they could follow it nearly to the church—and then the trees around that building would cut off most of the light. It would be a poor chance. But was it chance? It seemed more like the hand of God to him.

"More like the carelessness of the aliens to me," Doc objected. "It would probably be a lot less complicated in most other places, the way they light the town. Knock the bottom out of the money drawer and break off two slats. I've got a quarter that fits these screws."

Smithton fumbled with the drawer, praying now—a childhood prayer for going to sleep. But he succeeded in getting two slats Doc could place the quarter between.

It was rough going, with more slipping than turning of the screws, but the lock had been meant to keep outsiders out, not cashiers in. Three of the screws came loose, and the lock rotated on the fourth until they could force the cage open.

Doc stopped and pulled Smithton to him. "Follow me, and do what I do. No talking, no making a separate break, or I'll break your neck. All right!"

The back door was locked, but on the inside. They opened it to a backyard filled with garbage. The alley wasn't as dark as it should have been, since open lots beyond let some light come through. They hugged what shadows they could until they reached the church hedge. There they groped along, lining themselves up with the side office door. There was no sign of aliens.

Amos broke ahead of the others, being more familiar with the church. It wasn't until he had reached the door that he realized it could have been locked; it had been kept that way part of the time. He grabbed the handle and forced it back —to find it open!

For a second, he stopped to thank the Lord for their luck. Then the others were with him, crowding into the little kitchen where social suppers were prepared. He'd always hated those

functions, but now he blessed them for a hiding place that gave them time to find their way.

There were sounds in the church, and odors, but none that seemed familiar to Amos. Something made the back hairs of his neck prickle. He took off his shoes and tied them around his neck, and the others followed suit.

The trap door lay down a small hall, across in front of the altar, and in the private office on the other side.

They were safer together than separated, particularly since Smithton was with them. Amos leaned back against the kitchen wall to catch his breath. His heart seemed to have a ring of needled pain around it, and his throat was so dry that he had to fight desperately against gagging. There was water here, but he couldn't risk rummaging across the room to the sink.

He was praying for strength, less for himself than the others. Long since, he had resigned himself to die. If God willed his death, he was ready; all he had were dead and probably mutilated, and he had succeeded only in dragging those who tried to help him into mortal danger. He was old, and his body was already treading its way to death. He could live for probably twenty more years, but aside from his work, there was nothing to live for—and even in that, he had been only a mediocre failure. But he was still responsible for Doc Miller, and even for Smithton now.

He squeezed his eyes together and squinted around the doorway. There was some light in the hall that led toward the altar, but he could see no one, and there were drapes that gave a shadow from which they could spy the rest of their way. He moved to it softly, and felt the others come up behind him.

He bent forward, parting the drapes a trifle. They were perhaps twenty feet in front of the altar, on the right side. He spotted the wreckage that had once stood as an altar. Then he frowned as he saw evidence of earth piled up into a mound of odd shape.

He drew the cloth back further, surprised at the curiosity in him, as he had been surprised repeatedly by the changes taking place in himself.

There were two elaborately robed priests kneeling in the center of the chapel. But his eye barely noticed them before it was attracted to what stood in front of the new altar.

A box of wood rested on an earthenware platform. On it were four marks which his eyes recognized as unfamiliar, but which his mind twisted into a sequence from the alphabets he had learned, unpronounceable yet compelling. And above the box was a veil, behind which Something shone brightly without light.

In his mind, a surge of power pulsed, making patterns that might almost have been words through his thoughts—words like the words Moses once had heard—words that Amos, heartsick, knew. . . .

"I AM THAT I AM, who brought those out of bondage from Egypt and who wrote upon the wall before Belshazzar, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN, as it shall be writ large upon the Earth, from this day forth. For I have said unto the seed of Mikhtchah, thou art my chosen people and I shall exalt thee above all the races under the heavens!"

V

And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword.

REVELATIONS, XIII, 7, 10.

The seed of Mikhtchah. The seed of the invaders. . . .

There was no time and all time, then. Amos felt his heart stop, but the blood pounded through his arteries with a vigor it had lacked for decades. He felt Ruth's hand in his, stirring with returning life, and knew she had never existed. Beside him, he saw Doc Miller's hair turn snow-white and knew that it was so, though there was no way he could see Doc from his position.

He felt the wrath of the Presence rest upon him, weighing his every thought from his birth to his certain death, where

he ceased completely and went on forever, and yet he knew that the Light behind the veil was unaware of him, but was receptive only to the two Mikhtchah priests who knelt, praying.

All of that was with but a portion of his mind so small that he could not locate it, though his total mind encompassed all time and space, and that which was neither; yet each part of his perceptions occupied all of his mind that had been or ever could be, save only the present, which somehow was a concept not yet solved by the One before him.

He saw a strange man on a low mountain, receiving tablets of stone that weighed only a pennyweight, engraved with a script that all could read. And he knew the man, but refused to believe it, since the garments were not those of his mental image, and the clean-cut face fitted better with the strange headpiece than with the language the man spoke.

He saw every prayer of his life tabulated. But nowhere was there the mantle of divine warmth which he had felt as a boy and had almost felt again the morning before. And there was a stirring of unease at his thought, mixed with wrath; yet while the thought was in his mind, nothing could touch him.

Each of those things was untrue, because he could find no understanding of that which was true.

It ended as abruptly as it had begun, either a microsecond or a million subjective years after. It left him numbed, but newly alive. And it left him dead as no man had ever been hopelessly dead before.

He knew only that before him was the Lord God Almighty, He who had made a covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and with their seed. And he knew that the covenant was ended. Mankind had been rejected, while God now was on the side of the enemies of Abraham's seed, the enemies of all the nations of earth.

Even that was too much for a human mind no longer in touch with the Presence, and only a shadow of it remained.

Beside him, Amos heard Doc Miller begin breathing again, brushing the white hair back from his forehead wonderingly as he muttered a single word, "God!"

One of the Mikhtchah priests looked up, his eyes turning

about; there had been a glazed look on his face, but it was changing.

Then Smithton screamed! His open mouth poured out a steady, unwavering screaming, while his lungs panted in and out. His eyes opened, staring horribly. Like a wooden doll on strings, the man stood up and walked forward. He avoided the draperies and headed for the Light behind the veil. Abruptly, the Light was gone, but Smithton walked toward it as steadily as before. He stopped before the falling veil, and the scream cut off sharply.

Doc had jerked silently to his feet, tugging Amos up behind him. The minister lifted himself, but he knew there was no place to go. It was up to the will of God now . . . Or . . .

Smithton turned on one heel precisely. His face was rigid and without expression, yet completely mad. He walked mechanically forward toward the two priests. They sprawled aside at the last second, holding two obviously human-made automatics, but making no effort to use them. Smithton walked on toward the open door at the front of the church.

He reached the steps, with the two priests staring after him. His feet lifted from the first step to the second and then he was on the sidewalk.

The two priests fired!

Smithton jerked, halted, and suddenly cried out in a voice of normal, rational agony. His legs kicked frantically under him and he ducked out of the sight of the doorway, his faltering steps sounding further and further away. He was dead—the Mikhtchah marksmanship had been as good as it seemed always to be—but still moving, though slower and slower, as if some extra charge of life were draining out like a battery running down.

The priests exchanged quick glances and then darted after him, crying out as they dashed around the door into the night. Abruptly, a single head and hand appeared again, to snap a shot at the draperies from which Smithton had come. Amos forced himself to stand still, while his imagination supplied the jolt of lead in his stomach. The bullet hit the draperies, and something else.

The priest hesitated, and was gone again.

Amos broke into a run across the chapel and into the hall at the other side of the altar. He heard the faint sound of Doc's feet behind him.

The trap door was still there, unintentionally concealed under carpeting. He forced it up and dropped through it into the four-foot depth of the uncompleted basement, making room for Doc. They crouched together as he lowered the trap and began feeling his way through the blackness toward the other end of the basement. It had been five years since he had been down there, and then only once for a quick inspection of the work of the boys who had dug the tunnel.

He thought he had missed it at first, and began groping for the small entrance. It might have caved in, for that matter. Then, two feet away, his hand found the hole and he drew Doc after him.

It was cramped, and bits of dirt had fallen in places and had to be dug out of the way. Part of the distance was covered on their stomachs. They found the bricked-up wall ahead of them and began digging around it with their bare hands. It took another ten minutes, while distant sounds of wild yelling from the Mikhtchah reached them faintly. They broke through at last with bleeding hands, not bothering to check for aliens near. They reached a safer distance in the woods, caught their breath, and went on.

The biggest danger lay in the drainage trench, which was low in several places. But luck was with them, and those spots lay in the shadow.

Then the little Republican River lay in front of them, and there was a flatbottom boat nearby.

Moments later, they were floating down the stream, resting their aching lungs, while the boat needed only a trifling guidance. It was still night, with only the light from the moon, and there was little danger of pursuit by the alien planes. Amos could just see Doc's face as the man fumbled for a cigarette.

He lighted it and exhaled deeply. "All right, Amos—you were right, and God exists. But damn it, I don't feel any better for knowing that. I can't see how God helps me—nor even how He's doing the Mikhtchah much good. What do they get out

of it, beyond a few miracles with the weather? They're just doing God's dirty work."

"They get the Earth, I suppose—if they want it," Amos said doubtfully. He wasn't sure they did. Nor could he see how the other aliens tied into the scheme; if he had known the answers, they were gone now. "Doc, you're still an atheist, though you now know God is."

The plump man chuckled bitterly. "I'm afraid you're right. But at least I'm myself. You can't be, Amos. You've spent your whole life on the gamble that God is right and that you must serve him—when the only way you could serve was to help mankind. What do you do now? God is automatically right—but everything you've ever believed makes Him completely wrong, and you can only serve Him by betraying your people. What kind of ethics will work for you now?"

Amos shook his head wearily, hiding his face in his hands. The same problem had been fighting its way through his own thoughts. His first reaction had been to acknowledge his allegiance to God without question; sixty years of conditioned thought lay behind that. Yet now he could not accept such a decision. As a man, he could not bow to what he believed completely evil, and the Mikhtchah were evil by every definition he knew.

Could he tell people the facts, and take away what faith they had in any purpose in life? Could he go over to the enemy, who didn't even want him, except for their feeding experiments? Or could he encourage people to fight with the old words that God was with them—when he knew the words were false, and their resistance might doom them to eternal hellfire for opposing God?

It hit him then that he could remember nothing clearly about the case of a hereafter—either for or against it. What happened to a people when God deserted them? Were they only deserted in their physical form, and still free to win their spiritual salvation? Or were they completely lost? Did they cease to have souls that could survive? Or were those souls automatically consigned to hell, however noble they might be?

No question had been answered for him. He knew that God existed, but he had known that before. He knew nothing now

beyond that. He did not even know when God had placed the Mikhtchah before humanity. It seemed unlikely that it was as recent as his own youth. Yet otherwise, how could he account for the strange spiritual glow he had felt as an evangelist?

"There's only one rational answer," he said at last. "It doesn't make any difference what I decide! I'm only one man."

"So was Columbus when he swore the world was round. And he didn't have the look on his face you've had since we saw God, Amos! I know now what the Bible means when it says Moses' face shone after he came down from the mountain, until he had to cover it with a veil. If I'm right, God help mankind if you decide wrong!"

Doc tossed the cigarette over the side and lighted another, and Amos was shocked to see that the man's hands were shaking. The doctor shrugged, and his tone fell back to normal. "I wish we knew more. You've always thought almost exclusively in terms of the Old Testament and a few snatches of Revelations—like a lot of men who become evangelists. I've never really thought about God—I couldn't accept Him, so I dismissed Him. Maybe that's why we got the view of Him we did. I wish I knew where Jesus fits in, for instance. There's too much missing. Too many imponderables and hiatuses. We have only two facts, and we can't understand either. There is a manifestation of God which has touched both Mikhtchah and mankind; and He has stated now that he plans to wipe out mankind. We'll have to stick to that."

Amos made one more attempt to deny the problem that was facing him. "Suppose God is only testing man again, as He did so often before?"

"Testing?" Doc rolled the word on his tongue, and seemed to spit it out. The strange white hair seemed to make him older, and the absence of mockery in his voice left him almost a stranger. "Amos, the Hebrews worked like the devil to get Canaan; after forty years of wandering around a few square miles God suddenly told them this was the land—and then they had to take it by the same methods men have always used to conquer a country. The miracles didn't really decide anything. They got out of Babylon because the old prophets

were slaving night and day to hold them together as one people, and because they managed to sweat it out until they finally got a break. In our own time, they've done the same things to get Israel, and with no miracles! It seems to me God took it away, but they had to get it back by themselves. I don't think much of that kind of a test in this case."

Amos could feel all his values slipping and spinning. He realized that he was holding himself together only because of Doc; otherwise, his mind would have reached for madness, like any intelligence forced to solve the insoluble. He could no longer comprehend himself, let alone God. And the feeling crept into his thoughts that God couldn't wholly understand Himself, either.

"Can a creation defy anything great enough to create it, Doc? And should it, if it can?"

"Most kids have to," Doc said. He shook his head. "It's your problem. All I can do is point a few things out. And maybe it won't matter, at that. We're still a long ways inside Mikhtchah territory, and it's getting along toward daylight."

The boat drifted on, while Amos tried to straighten out his thoughts and grew more deeply tangled in a web of confusion. What could any man who worshipped devoutly do if he found his God was opposed to all else he had ever believed to be good?

A version of Kant's categorical imperative crept into his mind; somebody had once quoted it to him—probably Doc. "So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only." Was God now treating man as an end, or simply as a means to some purpose, in which man had failed? And had man ever seriously treated God as an end, rather than as a means to spiritual immortality and a quietus to the fear of death?

"We're being followed!" Doc whispered suddenly. He pointed back, and Amos could see a faint light shining around a curve in the stream. "Look—there's a building over there. When the boat touches shallow water, run for it!"

He bent to the oars, and a moment later they touched bot-

tom and were over the side, sending the boat back into the current. The building was a hundred feet back from the bank, and they scrambled madly toward it. Even in the faint moonlight, they could see that the building was a wreck, long since abandoned. Doc went in through one of the broken windows, dragging Amos behind him.

Through a chink in the walls, they could see another boat heading down the stream, lighted by a torch and carrying two Mikhtchah. One rowed, while the other sat in the prow with a gun, staring ahead. They rowed on past.

"We'll have to hole up here," Doc decided. "It'll be light in half an hour. Maybe they won't think of searching a ruin like this."

They found rickety steps, and stretched out on the bare floor of a huge upstairs closet. Amos groaned as he tried to find a position in which he could get some rest. Then, surprisingly, he was asleep.

He woke once with traces of daylight coming into the closet, to hear sounds of heavy gunfire not far away. He was just drifting back to sleep when hail began cracking furiously down on the roof. When it passed, the gunfire was stilled.

Doc woke him when it was turning dark. There was nothing to eat, and Amos' stomach was sick with hunger. His body ached in every joint, and walking was pure torture. Doc glanced up at the stars, seemed to decide on a course, and struck out. He was wheezing and groaning in a way that indicated he shared Amos' feelings.

But he found enough energy to begin the discussion again. "I keep wondering what Smithton saw, Amos? It wasn't what we saw. And what about the legends of war in heaven? Wasn't there a big battle there once, in which Lucifer almost won? Maybe Lucifer simply stands for some other race God cast off?"

"Lucifer was Satan, the spirit of evil. He tried to take over God's domain."

"Mmm. I've read somewhere that we have only the account of the victor, which is apt to be pretty biased history. How do we know the real issues? Or the true outcome? At least he

thought he had a chance, and he apparently knew what he was fighting."

The effort of walking made speech difficult. Amos shrugged, and let the conversation die. But his own mind ground on.

If God was all-powerful and all-knowing, why had He let them spy upon Him? Or was He all-powerful over a race He had dismissed? Could it make any difference to God what man might try to do, now that He had condemned him? Was the Presence they had seen the whole of God—or only one manifestation of Him?

His legs moved on woodenly, numbed to fatigue and slow from hunger, while his head churned with his basic problem. Where was his duty now? With God or against Him?

They found food in a deserted house, and began preparing it by the hooded light of a lantern, while they listened to the news from a small battery radio that had been left behind. It was a hopeless account of alien landings and human retreats, yet given without the tone of despair they should have expected. They were halfway through the meal before they discovered the reason.

"Flash!" the radio announced. "Word has just come through from the Denver area. A second atomic missile, piloted by a suicide crew, has fallen successfully! The alien base has been wiped out, and every ship is ruined. It is now clear that the trouble with earlier bombing attempts lay in the detonating mechanism. This is being investigated, while more volunteers are being trained to replace this undependable part of the bomb. Both missiles carrying suicide bombers have succeeded. Captive aliens of both races are being questioned in Denver now, but the same religious fanaticism found in Portland seems to make communication difficult."

It went back to reporting alien landings, while Doc and Amos stared at each other. It was too much to absorb at once.

Amos groped in his mind, trying to dig out something that might tie in the success of human bombers, where automatic machinery was miraculously stalled, with the reaction of God to his thoughts of the glow he had felt in his early days. Something about man . . .

"They can be beaten!" Doc said in a harsh whisper.

Amos sighed as they began to get up to continue the impossible trek. "Maybe. We know God was at Clyde. Can we be sure He was at the other places to stop the bombs by His miracles?"

They slogged on through the night, cutting across country in the dim light, where every footstep was twice as hard. Amos turned it over, trying to use the new information for whatever decision he must reach. If men could overcome those opposed to them, even for a time . . .

It brought him no closer to an answer.

The beginnings of dawn found them in a woods. Doc managed to heave Amos up a tree, where he could survey the surrounding terrain. There was a house beyond the edge of the woods, but it would take dangerous minutes to reach it. They debated, and then headed on.

They were just emerging from the woods when the sound of an alien plane began its stuttering shriek. Doc turned and headed back to where Amos was behind him. Then he stopped. "Too late! He's seen something. Gotta have a target!"

His arms swept out, shoving Amos violently back under the nearest tree. He swung and began racing across the clearing, his fat legs pumping furiously as he covered the ground in straining leaps. Amos tried to lift himself from where he had fallen, but it was too late.

There was the drumming of gunfire and the earth erupted around Doc. He lurched and dropped, to twitch and lie still.

The plane swept over, while Amos disentangled himself from a root. It was gone as he broke free. Doc had given it a target, and the pilot was satisfied, apparently.

He was still alive as Amos dropped beside him. Two of the shots had hit, but he managed to grin as he lifted himself on one elbow. It was only a matter of minutes, however, and there was no help possible. Amos found one of Doc's cigarettes and lighted it with fumbling hands.

"Thanks," Doc wheezed after taking a heavy drag on it. He started to cough, but suppressed it, his face twisting in agony. His words came in an irregular rhythm, but he held his voice

level. "I guess I'm going to hell, Amos, since I never did repent —if there is a hell! And I hope there is! I hope it's filled with the soul of every poor damned human being who died in less than perfect grace. Because I'm going to find some way——"

He straightened suddenly, coughing and fighting for breath. Then he found one final source of strength and met Amos' eyes, a trace of his old cynical smile on his face.

"——some way to open a recruiting station!" he finished. He dropped back, letting all the fight go out of his body. A few seconds later, he was dead.

VI

. . . Thou shalt have no other peoples before me . . . Thou shalt make unto them no covenant against me. . . . Thou shalt not foreswear thyself to them, nor serve them . . . for I am a jealous people . . .

EXULTATIONS, XII, 2-4.

Amos lay through the day in the house to which he had dragged Doc's body. He did not even look for food. For the first time in his life since his mother had died when he was five, he had no shield against his grief. There was no hard core of acceptance that it was God's will to hide his loss at Doc's death. And with the realization of that, all the other losses hit at him as if they had been no older than the death of Doc.

He sat with his grief and his newly sharpened hatred, staring toward Clyde. Once, during the day, he slept. He awakened to a sense of a tremendous sound and shaking of the earth, but all was quiet when he finally became conscious. It was nearly night, and time to leave.

For a moment, he hesitated. It would be easier to huddle here, beside his dead, and let whatever would happen come to him. But within him was a sense of duty that drove him on. In the back of his mind, something stirred, telling him he still had work to do.

He found part of a stale loaf of bread and some hard cheese and started out, munching on them. It was still too light to

move safely, but he was going through woods again, and he heard no alien planes. When it grew darker, he turned to the side roads that led in the direction of Wesley.

In his mind was the knowledge that he had to return there. His church lay there; if the human fighters had pushed the aliens back, his people might be there. If not, it was from there that he would have to follow them.

His thoughts were too deep for conscious expression, and too numbed with exhaustion. His legs moved on steadily. One of his shoes had begun to wear through, and his feet were covered with blisters, but he went grimly on. It was his duty to lead his people, now that the aliens were here, as he had led them in easier times. His thinking had progressed no further.

He holed up in a barn that morning, avoiding the house because of the mutilated things that lay on the doorstep where the aliens had apparently left them. And this time he slept with the soundness of complete fatigue, but he awoke to find one fist clenched and extended toward Clyde. He had been dreaming that he was Job, and that God had left him sitting unanswered on his boils until he died, while mutilated corpses moaned around him, asking for leadership he would not give.

It was nearly dawn before he realized that he should have found himself some kind of a car. He had seen none, but there might have been one abandoned somewhere. Doc could probably have found one. It was too late to bother, then. He had come to the outskirts of a tiny town, and started to head beyond it, before realizing that all the towns must have been well searched by now. He turned down the small street, looking for a store where he could find food.

There was a small grocery with a door partly ajar. Amos pushed it open, to the clanging of a bell. Almost immediately, a dog began barking, and a human voice came sharply from the back.

"Down, Shep! Just a minute, I'm a-coming." A door to the rear opened, and a bent old man emerged, carrying a kerosene lamp. "Darned electric's off again! Good thing I stayed. Told them I had to mind my store, but they wanted

me to get with them. Had to hide out in the old well. Darned nonsense about——"

He stopped, his eyes blinking behind thick lenses, and his mouth dropped open. He swallowed, and his voice was startled and shrill. *"Mister, who are you?"*

"A man who just escaped from the aliens," Amos told him. He hadn't realized the shocking appearance he must present by now. "One in need of food and a chance to rest until night. But I'm afraid I have no money on me."

The old man tore his eyes away slowly, seeming to shiver. Then he nodded, and pointed to the back. "Never turned nobody away hungry yet," he said, but the words seemed automatic.

An old dog backed slowly under a couch as Amos entered. The man put the lamp down and headed into a tiny kitchen to begin preparing food. Amos reached for the lamp and blew it out. "There really are aliens—worse than you heard," he said.

The old man bristled, met his eyes, and then nodded slowly. "If *you* say so. Only it don't seem logical God would let things like that run around in a decent state like Kansas."

He shoved a plate of eggs onto the table, and Amos pulled it to him, swallowing a mouthful eagerly. He reached for a second, and stopped. Something was violently wrong, suddenly. His stomach heaved, the room began to spin, and his forehead was cold and wet with sweat. He gripped the edge of the table, trying to keep from falling. Then he felt himself being dragged to a cot. He tried to protest, but his body was shaking with ague, and the words that spilled out were senseless. He felt the cot under him, and waves of sick blackness spilled over him.

It was the smell of cooking food that awakened him finally, and he sat up with a feeling that too much time had passed. The old man came from the kitchen, studying him. "You sure were sick, Mister. Guess you ain't used to going without decent food and rest. Feeling okay?"

Amos nodded. He felt a little unsteady, but it was passing. He pulled on the clothes that had been somewhat cleaned for him, and found his way to the table. "What day is it?"

"Saturday, evening," the other answered. "At least the way I figure. Here, eat that and get some coffee in you." He watched until Amos began on the food, and then dropped to a stool to begin cleaning an old rifle and loading it. "You said a lot of things. They true?"

For a second, Amos hesitated. Then he nodded, unable to lie to his benefactor. "I'm afraid so."

"Yeah, I figured so, somehow, looking at you." The old man sighed. "Well, I hope you make wherever you're going."

"What about you?" Amos asked.

The old man sighed, running his hands along the rifle. "I ain't leaving my store for any bunch of aliens. And if the Lord I been doing my duty by all my life decides to put Himself on the wrong side, well, maybe He'll win. But it'll be over my dead body!"

Nothing Amos could say would change his mind. He sat on the front step of the store, the rifle on his lap and the dog at his side, as Amos headed down the street in the starlight.

The minister felt surprisingly better after the first half mile. Rest and food, combined with crude treatment of his sores and blisters, had helped. But the voice inside him was driving him harder now, and the picture of the old man seemed to lend it added strength. He struck out at the fastest pace he could hope to maintain, leaving the town behind and heading down the road that the old man had said led to Wesley.

It was just after midnight that he saw the lights of a group of cars or trucks moving along another road. He had no idea whether they were driven by men or aliens, but he kept steadily on. There were sounds of traffic another time on a road that crossed the small one he followed. But he knew now he was approaching Wesley, and speeded up his pace.

When the first light came, he made no effort to seek shelter. He stared at the land around him, stripped by grasshoppers that could have been killed off if men had worked as hard at ending the insects as they had at their bickerings and wars. He saw the dry, arid land, drifting into dust, and turning a fertile country into a nightmare. Men could put a stop to that.

It had been no act of God that had caused this ruin, but

man's own follies. And without help from God, man might set it right in time.

God had deserted men. But mankind hadn't halted. On his own, man had made a path to the moon and had unlocked the atom. He'd found a means, out of his raw courage, to use those bombs against the aliens when miracles were used against him. He had done everything but conquer himself—and he could do that, if he were given time.

Amos saw a truck stop at the crossroads ahead and halted, but the driver was human. He saw the open door and quickened his step toward it. "I'm bound for Wesley!"

"Sure." The driver helped him into the seat. "I'm going back for more supplies myself. You sure look as if you need treatment at the aid station there. I thought we'd rounded up all you strays. Most of them came in right after we sent out the word on Clyde."

"You've taken it?" Amos asked.

The other nodded wearily. "We took it. Got 'em with a bomb, like sitting ducks, then we've been mopping up since. Not many aliens left."

They were nearing the outskirts of Wesley, and Amos pointed to his own house. "If you'll let me off there——"

"Look, I got orders to bring all strays to the aid station," the driver began firmly. Then he swung and faced Amos. For a second, he hesitated. Finally he nodded quietly. "Sure. Glad to help you."

Amos found the water still running. He bathed slowly. Somewhere, he felt his decision had been made, though he was still unsure of what it was. He climbed from the tub at last, and began dressing. There was no suit that was proper, but he found clean clothes. His face in the mirror looked back at him, haggard and bearded, as he reached for the razor.

Then he stopped as he encountered the reflection of his eyes. A shock ran over him, and he backed away a step. They were eyes foreign to everything in him. He had seen a shadow of what lay in them only once, in the eyes of a great evangelist; and this was a hundred times stronger. He tore his glance away to find himself shivering, and avoided them all through the shaving. Oddly, though, there was a strange satisfaction

in what he had seen. He was beginning to understand why the old man had believed him, and why the truck driver had obeyed him.

Most of Wesley had returned, and there were soldiers on the streets. As he approached the church, he saw the first-aid station, hectic with business. And a camera crew was near it, taking shots for television of those who had managed to escape from alien territory after the bombing.

A few people called to him, but he went on until he reached the church steps. The door was still in ruins and the bell was gone. Amos stood quietly waiting, his mind focusing slowly as he stared at the people who were just beginning to recognize him and to spread hasty words from mouth to mouth. Then he saw little Angela Anduccini, and motioned for her to come to him. She hesitated briefly, before following him inside and to the organ.

The little Hammond still functioned. Amos climbed to the pulpit, hearing the old familiar creak of the boards. He put his hands on the lectern, seeing the heavy knuckles and blue veins of age as he opened the Bible and made ready for his Sunday-morning congregation. He straightened his shoulders and turned to face the pews, waiting as they came in.

There were only a few at first. Then more and more came, some from old habit, some from curiosity, and many only because they had heard that he had been captured in person, probably. The camera crew came to the back and set up their machines, flooding him with bright lights and adjusting their telelens. He smiled on them, nodding.

He knew his decision now. It had been made in pieces and tatters. It had come from Kant, who had spent his life looking for a basic ethical principle, and had boiled it down in his statement that men must be treated as ends, not as means. It had been distilled from Doc's final challenge, and the old man sitting in his doorway.

There could be no words with which to give his message to those who waited. No orator had ever possessed such a command of language. But men with rude speech and limited use of what they had had fired the world before. Moses had come down from a mountain with a face that shone, and had

overcome the objections of a stiff-necked people. Peter the Hermit had preached a thankless crusade to all of Europe, without radio or television. It was more than words or voice.

He looked down at them when the church was filled and the organ hushed.

"My text for today," he announced, and the murmurs below him hushed as his voice reached out to the pews. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make men free!"

He stopped for a moment, studying them, feeling the decision in his mind, and knowing he could make no other. The need of him lay here, among those he had always tried to serve while believing he was serving God through them. He was facing them as an end, not as a means, and he found it good.

Nor could he lie to them now, and deceive them with false hopes. They would need all the facts if they were to make an end to their bickerings and to unite themselves in the final struggle for the fullness of their potential glory.

"I have come back from captivity among the aliens," he began. "I have seen the hordes who have no desire but to erase the memory of man from the dust of the earth that bore him. I have stood at the altar of their God. I have heard the voice of God proclaim that He is also our God, and that He has cast us out. I have believed Him, as I believe Him now."

He felt the strange, intangible something that was greater than words or oratory flow out of him, as it had never flowed in his envied younger days. He watched the shock and the doubt arise and disappear slowly as he went on, giving them the story and the honest doubts he still had. He could never know many things, or even whether the God worshipped on the altar was wholly the same God who had been in the hearts of men for a hundred generations. No man could understand enough. They were entitled to all his doubts, as well as to all that he knew.

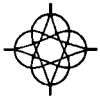
He paused at last, in the utter stillness of the chapel. He straightened and smiled down at them, drawing the smile out of some reserve that had lain dormant since he had first tasted inspiration as a boy. He saw a few smiles answer him, and then

more—uncertain, doubtful smiles that grew more sure as they spread.

"God has ended the ancient covenants and declared Himself an enemy of all mankind," Amos said, and the chapel seemed to roll with his voice. "I say this to you: He has found a worthy opponent."

To Here and the Easel

By THEODORE STURGEON



Up here in the salt mine I've got a log jam to break.

And that about expresses the whole thing. I mix pigments like I mix metaphors; so why not? Who's a writer?

Trouble is, maybe I'm not a painter. I was a painter, I will be a painter, but I'm not a painter just now. "Jam every other day," as Alice was told in Wonderland, as through a glass darkly; "Jam yesterday and jam tomorrow, but never jam today." I know what I'll do, I'll paint for calendars; isn't this the '54 boom for the 44 bust? I'll skip the art and do handsprings eternal on the human breast.

So quickly: grab the brush, sling the oils; *en garde!* easel; you're nothing but a square white window to *me;* I'll throw a wad of paint through you so's we can all take a good long look inside. I'll start just *here* with the magenta, or maybe over *here,* and——

And nothing.

So down I go on the chair, I look at the canvas, it looks back at me, and we're right where we started. Didn't start.

Up here in the salt mine, as I began to say, I've got a log jam to break. The salt mine is my studio, studio being a name for a furnished room with a palette in it. The log jam is in my head. Why is it I can't work just because my brains are tied in a knot? "Giles," the maestro, the old horse's tail of a maes-

tro used to say to me, "Giles, don't paint with your brains. Paint with your glands," he used to say, "your blood. Sweat is a pigment. Dip your brush in——"

Shucks, Maestro! Get me a job in a sign shop. I'll sell everything else. Ad in the paper: for sale cheap, one set sable-tipped vesicles. One heart: ventricle, sinister; auricle, Delphic. Nine yards plumbing with hot and cold running commentaries, and a bucket of used carmine, suitable for a road-company Bizet-body.

Was a painter, will be a painter, ain't a painter. Make a song of that, Giles, and you can die crazy yelling it like Ravel chanting the Bolero. Ravel, unravel. Giles's last chants.

Ain't a painta, ain't a painta, ain't a painta *pow!* Ain't a painta, ain't a painta, ain't a painta *now!*

You better shut up, Giles, you're going to have another one of those dreams.

Well, I'll have it anyway, won't I? . . . the dreams, that's what's the matter with me. My glands I got, but my brains, they keep running off with me, glands and all. No not running off; more like a jail. I used to be a something, but I'm locked up in my own brains till I'm a nothing. All I have to do is figure a way out.

Or maybe somebody'll come and let me out. Boy, what I wouldn't do for somebody who'd come let me out. Anything. The way I see it, the other guy, the one in the dream, he's locked up too. I should figure a way out for him. So maybe he'll get on the ball and figure a way out for me. He was a knight in shining armor, he will be a knight in shining armor, but he ain't nothing but a nothing now. There shall be no knight. He got a prison turns night into eternal afternoon, with dancing girls yet.

I should get him out of a spot like that? What's the matter with a castle on a mountain with dancing girls?

On the other hand a knight who was a knight and who wants to be a knight is just a nothing, for all his dancing girls, if you lock him up in a magic castle on a magic mountain. I wonder if *his* brains are working str——

—aight because mine are sore churned. *Aiee!* and here the

echoes roll about amongst the vaults and groinings of this enchanted place. No sword have I, no shield, no horse, nor amulet. He has at least the things he daubs with, 'prisoned with him. And yet if he would paint, and cannot, is he not disarmed? Ay, ay . . . *aiee!* we twain are bound, and each of us enchanted; bound together, too, in some strange way, and bound nowhere. And whose the hardest lot? He has a brush; I have no sword, and so it seems his prisoning is less. Yet I may call my jailer by a name, and see a face, and know the hands which hold the iron key. But he, the 'prisoned painter, languishes inside himself, his scalp his fetters and his skull his cell. And who's to name his turnkey?

Mine I can name; he comes now, soft leather awhisper on marble, his very stride abhorrent magic, the pressures of the unalive against the never-living. Atlantes, hated Atlantes, of the soft eyes and stone mouth, Atlantes who, controlling me, would alter fate itself.

"Rogero, is all well with thee? Such a cry . . . like a great wind tearing the rocks." (His beard is full, he is too wise, he has no soul.)

"Ay, all is well!" I tell him scornfully. "Would I were such a wind, to tear and be torn on the rocks, and gladly, under the open sky; and never again to know a slow death of silks and sweets and boredom, the like of this . . . give me my sword."

"Ay, I will. And an enchanted shield to blind thine enemies, and a steed to master earth and air; this castle to shelter thee and all in it for thine own, and my powers for thy convenience—and all for a word."

Atlantes is tall; yet, rising, I may make him lift his beard to face me. Going to him, thunder-furious, I may come close, yet unlike other men he will not flinch. I may not strike him, nor anyone here nor any thing, so cautiously is he bemagicked. "For a word!" My voice stirs the hangings and sets the great stone halls athrum. "You call my faith a word, my fealty, my every drop of blood and all my days. I will never be your knight, Atlantes."

And of all things, I hate his smile. "Thee will, Rogero, unless thy choice is to languish here forever instead. My plans for

thee are better ones than fate dictated," he says, and laughs at me. His voice booms inside my skull as my voice boomed a moment ago within the castle. "This is thy destiny, knight: that a maiden shall free thee, and that through her thou shalt embrace a new faith of sobriety and humility, and spend thy days accursed with earthbound slowness like a tortoise, dressed like a wren-hen; swordless and somber and chained."

I think about this, and look at the carvings, the silks, the aromatic mounds of fabulous fruits. At last, "Maiden?" I ask.

"Just the one for such adventures," he says laughing again, for he has trapped me into responding. "And a just return for thy kind of stubbornness. She shall hold her faith a greater thing than thy flesh; she shall prefer to walk like a peasant rather than be borne like a gentlewoman; she shall scorn satin and lace and cover herself like a winterbound tree earth-hued and hard-barked. And worst of all, she shall have more brains than thee."

"Surely you speak of some afterlife, some penance for a great sin!"

"Na, lad! Thine afterlife is in other hands than mine. 'Tis all thy destiny, lad. Thou may'st not take whatever part of it that pleases thee, and cut the rest to fit thy fancy. The maid will not come here; but should she come here she shall not free thee; but should she free thee, thou wilt indeed finish thy life like a clip-winged hawk, hobbling about amongst the sweating serfs and calling them thine equals."

He reasons right; and fury from inside me pounds my hair-roots. And as the anger mounts, my mind's aswirl again; I seem to be here in this hall with the wizard, yet there, in the dream, in that dusty box of poverty and miracles inhabited by the painter who may not paint. I fight against it, even clinging to this hated hall, holding to the familiar enchantments like Atlantes' hippogriff and unbearable shield, his castle set in everlasting afternoon, and the silent and invisible chains by which he holds me; these, to me, are real, for all they are magic, and not beyond understanding like the painter's chamber with its window overlooking swift horseless chariots, its squat black demon-sculpture which first shrills, then speaks with the voices of people outside the room; its music box no

bigger than my two fists, with the glowing golden eye and the sound, sometimes, of a hundred musicians; and all the marvels which are part of his poverty. Again I am he, myself, and he again one, the other, then both, then neither, and again my brains churn in transition. My mouth holds the aftertaste of grapes and mead, then the blue smoke he sucks constantly from his little glowing white sticks; I taste one, the other, both, neither.

I turn from Atlantes and his hated smile and throw myself across the yielding mound of silks and furs. And far away I hear the golden clarion of a bell, the great gong of the castle's magic gate. I hear Atlantes' odd gasp, half surprise, half pleasure; I hear his soft feet on the hard marble. Who comes, who comes a-ringing, challenging, and unwanted—and unafraid of this castle and its many devils? If I am the knight, Rogero, I will watch from the window; if I am Giles, the painter, and I think I am, I will let the goddam doorbell ring. Whoever heard of a doorbell in a magic castle? *What* magic castle?

Here's a dirty bed, and there a dirty window, and over yonder the cleanest canvas yet; now wait, wait—Giles is my name, paint is my trade, if I was a knight, I'd have me a blade. *Give me my sword!*

What sword? Will you for God's sake get away from that doorbell so I can hear myself think? I almost had it then, that business about the knight, whoever he is—or is he *me?*—and his magic mountain, or is that really a furnished room? Ah, *shaddap* with that doorbell already!

"Whaddayewant?"

All it does, it rings.

"Who is it?"

Ring, ring.

All right, you asked for it, I'm going to snatch that door open, I'm going to haul off, no questions asked, and punch the nose that's ringing my doorbell. Twist the knob, snatch the door, knock the ringer, to the floor. *Blam,* a dead ringer.

So sometimes a tenth of a second is as long as a paragraph or your arm. The door is open and I'm standing still and tight like a kid looking through a knothole, being with and of the ball game but standing quiet, watching. I watch my hand fly

through the door, making a fist on the way, I watch it reach her cheekbone and curl and compact there, pudgy and hard. Back she goes, not falling but standing straight, across the narrow lighted hall and against the wall, *wump-thump!* She is a little brown thing with hair unwonderful, beautiful lashes opening now to make her eyes round and glazed, and that's about all there is to her. "Mmmmmm," she says, and slowly slides down the wall to sit, slowly bends her head to one side, the hair ahang like a broken wing. "Well I told you to get away, ringing that bell!" "Mmmm," she breathes.

So I scoop her up, and up she comes, light as a leg o' lamb and common as cabbage, and I kick the door closed and I throw her on the dirty bed, akimbo-crumpled and immodest as a dropped doll, and who cares?—not the artist, who's seen better and wastes no time on the likes of this; not the man, for he is, as the saying goes, not quite himself just now. Here's a dry paint rag to be wet at the sink and wrung out, and pressed against the smooth beige-brown brow over the smooth lids with the tender row of feathers over the seal . . . lashes, I will admit, lashes she has. She has damn-all else but my God! those lashes.

And the rag, coming away, leaves a stain on the brow, verdigris. One can pretend she is a brazen head, skinned with old silk, and the bronze staining through. But only until her eyes open; then there is no pretense, but only a dowdy girl on my bed, a pallor 'pon my unpalatable pallet. She gazes past the green-brown stain and the anger of her brutalized cheek, and she has no fear, but a sadness. "Still nothing?" she murmurs, and I turn and look with her, and it's my empty canvas she is sad for and "Still nothing," half whispering about.

"I am going to punch your face again." It is a faithful promise.

"All right, if you will paint."

"I'll paint or not, whatever I feel like," I am saying in a way that makes my throat hurt. Such a noise it makes, a Day-Glo fluorescent dazzle of a noise. "Giles is my name and paint is my trade, and you keep your nose out of it. Your nose," I say, "looks like a piece of inner tube and you got no more side-

silhouette than a Coca-Cola bottle. What you want to be ringing my doorbell for?"

"Can I sit up?"

By which I discover I am hanging over her close, popping and spitting as I bellow and peal. "Get up, get out!" I touch my neck and the scarlet swelling of an artery there, I spin to the easel to strike it but cannot touch it, so go on to the wall and drive my fist against it. It is better than a cheekbone which hardly leaves a mark.

"Oh please, don't hurt yourself. Don't," she says, her voice high and soft-textured around the edges, like light through a hole in worn velvet, "don't!" all pitying, all caring, "don't be angry . . ."

"Angry I am not," I say, and hit the wall again, "angry; I'm a devil and dangerous to boot, so don't boot me. You," I say, pointing at her, and there is blood on my hand, "are a draggletail; bad lines, wrong tone, foreground distracting—" (that would be my easel)—"background unappetizing." (That would be my bed). "The whole thing's not composed, it's—it's —decomposed. Where'd you get that awful dress?"

She plucks at it, looks at her hand plucking, makes a faint brief frown, trying to remember. She can't remember, and she is not afraid, she is only trying to answer my question.

"Well don't bother; I don't care where you got the dress. What do you want?"

Up come the lashes. "I want you to paint again."

"Why?"

"Don't, don't," she whispers. "You'll hurt your throat. I know everything you've painted. You're getting good; you're getting great. But you don't paint any more."

"I asked you why; you didn't say why, you just said what happened." She looks at me, still not afraid, still puzzled. This girl, I think, is not only homely, she is stupid. "I asked you why—why? What do *you* care?"

"But I told you!" she cries. "You were going to be great, and you stopped. Isn't that enough?"

"No, not for people. People don't want things like that, greatness, goodness." I begin to be more angry at people than angry at myself. Much better, Giles—*much* better. "People

want their work done easily. People want kisses and to feel important. People want to be amused and to be excited safely. People want money. Do you want money? Here's a quarter. Here's forty cents, even. Get out of here, people."

"I don't want money. I just want you to paint again."

"Why?"

Down go the lashes, away goes the voice like a distant wind. "I saw them clustered around your Spanish picture, *Candlelight Malaga*—two young people, holding hands very hard, very quiet; and an old man, smiling; and there was a little boy tugging at a woman's sleeve: 'Ma? Ma?' and when she said, 'Yes, dear,' she kept her eyes on the picture so he cried. I saw a man come away from Garret's, where your *Smoke* was hanging, and he laughed and said to all the strangers, 'All I have to do is *tell* her: she'll love me, it's right there in the picture.' " She spreads her square unwomanly hands to say, "That's what I mean, it's proved."

I don't care about the people, the crying child, the man who speaks to strangers, and all the rest of them. I never painted for them, I painted for—for—but it wasn't for them. So they're all intruders, and for them I've done enough, too much already. If what they have taken was really in the pictures, they have robbed me. If what they took was not there, they are fools. Must I paint for thieves and fools?

All this comes to me clearly, but there is no way to say it to the girl. "It's for those things," she says, as if my silence means I am agreeing with her. "So paint again."

"Paint, how can I paint?"

"Why not? What's the matter?"

"It's my head." I hold it, hard. My elbows knock together; I speak at her, peek at her through the wedge. "I'll tell you because it doesn't make any difference. I'll tell you," I say painfully, "because you don't make any difference." (And oh, no, she wouldn't wince.) "When I painted, I was Giles, Giles yesterday and Giles today, so that where I stopped I could start, and even find the stopping place by tomorrow. And tomorrow I'd be Giles, and knew it so well I never thought about it. Now . . . now I'm Giles. Before that I was—somebody else, and before that I was Giles again. And being

Giles now doesn't matter, because soon I'll be someone else again, and after that, Giles. You don't understand that."

"No," she says. "Neither do you."

"Right, so right; the first right thing you've said, no compliments intended, whatever's-your-name."

"Brandt."

"Brandt. *Miss* Brandt, surely, there being limits beyond which the most foolish of men will not go. Painting, Miss Brandt, is a thing having a beginning, a middle, and an end; and the beginning is part of the end of the painting before, and the end is part of the beginning of the next picture. I am Giles, and being Giles I suppose I could paint; but before—an hour or a while ago—say when you were ringing my doorbell, you and your fat nerve—I was somebody else. And soon my brains will scramble and words will mean two things or three, and yonder is either a naked canvas or a far granite wall, and under me a dirty bed or a mound of silks and furs, and what I want will be to paint or to regain my sword; I will be Rogero and Giles, one, the other, both neither; until suddenly Giles is gone, the easel, the painting—no, not gone, but like a dream, not really remembered because not really real."

"Let Rogero paint," says the fool girl as if she believes me.

There's a noise like one-third of a scream, one-half of a howl, and it's mine. "Rogero paint? He can't paint! He couldn't believe in it, couldn't think it, wouldn't know a tint from a T square. Listen, you; listen to me: can you imagine me as a knight, imprisoned on a magic mountain, surrounded by spells I not only believe in—I *must* because they're real—jailed by a magician who rides a hippogriff? A hippogriff, Miss Unimportant Q. Brandt, you hear? A shining hippogriff whose dam was a brood mare and whose sire was a gryphon—a gryphon whose mother was a lion and whose father was an eagle. This hippogriff is real, real as the spells, real as the magic mountain, real as the knight that you, Miss Interfering W. Brandt, can't imagine me being." (Have I been climbing, running? I am out of breath.) "To that knight," I say when I can, "my telephone and my radio are laughable wonders without foundation in fact, my inability to paint is of no importance except to give me his sympathy; he too is captured

and fettered. He can do as little with my brushes as I might do with his sword. And you, Miss Unbeautiful Brandt, could only be the most piddling of small nastinesses intruding into his unbelievable fantasy. Now you know; now I've told you. There's nothing you can do, nothing you can believe, and your coming here or not coming means nothing. If you came to help, you've failed. If you came to fight something, you're beaten."

There is a time for wondering, wondering what someone will say, and this is it, and it is good. Good as anything could be now, where *that* is real or *this* is real, never both. For I lie under a weight and I cannot move it, and when it disappears I am no longer myself, and it is good to defeat someone, something, even an unimportant, unlovely girl; even when in the defeat there can be no victory for me, nor a lessening of the weight. So I wait, wondering in which of several possible ways she will acknowledge her defeat; and here it comes from the usual lips and the eyes behind the unusual lashes; here:

"May I use your phone?"

Because I said she doesn't matter, I may not let this matter either; I step away from the phone and turn my back, and soft footsteps pass me and soft fingers take up the hard phone; there's a chorus of clicks, composed in syncopes, seven measures long. And a ring, and a ring.

What portals open to this lady's ringing, this Brandt for the burning? What dilates to this dialling, this braw, bricht, moonlicht nictitation? My God, my God, here it comes again, the words like lyings in their layers, and I am he, and he is—— either or, both, neither. Of these, "or" is king; I wear a coat d'or, that dry, exclusive little word. For we are desiccated to the preposition that all men are created sequels. The "or" is golden but my heart has been read, my mind has been lead; read, lead; just the color of Floradora orange-youth.

"Hello," says the telephone tinily because it can speak two syllables without moving its open mouth; "Giles," says Miss Brandt, "just Giles," and the telephone laughs and says, "Okay."

Soft footsteps on the wooden, or is it marble floor, and the ring has been answered with a shout of laughter; and soft-

footed, swift, Atlantes strides to the casement and the curtains of cloud leave the court, the mist melts away from the meadow below, the great golden gate is agleam in the sun, and gone is the gloaming. "Rogero!" he cries (but am I not Giles, imprisoned in a dream, who says he is where a felon needs a friend? *Aiee!* Sharper than a serpent's truth is an ungrateful Giles!) "Rogero, come and see thy destiny!" and in Atlantes' laugh lies such a triumph, such a scorn, I can only come and see. I go to stand beside him.

To either hand are buttresses of weather-hammered stele; before me the castellated wall like a cliff, like a sea becalmed and stood on edge, falls to the courtyard. Away and down and away rolls the magic meadow to its lower margin, mighty walls patrolled by poisoned gnomes. And when I see the gate I am myself again; Rogero, 'prisoned knight, hungering for that craggy path beyond the gate.

"Thy destiny, knight—you see it?"

I look again; and there like a mole under a monument is a small brown person, dun and dowdy. In one hand is a crooked staff little changed from its soil-sprung origins, and it is this which now again strikes the golden bell and sends its clang and hum to shake the shining air. "My destiny?"

He laughs again; there is battle in such laughter. "Look again!" With thumb and finger he makes a circle, and thrusts the hand before my face, and through that circle I see the gate —but not from the mountaintop, but as if I stood but twenty paces away. And though his magic is despicable to me, I yet must look.

Silently, for a long time I gaze. At last I say, "Of all you have told me of my destiny, magician, I see but one thing to bear you out, and that is, that yonder mudball is a maiden, for it is unthinkable that such a one could be anything else. As to the rest, it is not possible that fate should have stored for me anything so . . . unadorned."

"Ah, then thee need only swear fealty to me, and we will squash this beetle together." The bell rings again. "If not, I must do it myself, and keep thee bound as thou art. But one or the other must be done, for that rude clanging is indeed

the voice of thy fate, and that barefoot damsel has come as fate dictates, to challenge me and set thee free."

"She challenges *you!*"

"Ay, lad, with nothing but that crooked staff and the homespun cassock beneath which she generously hides her uninteresting limbs. Oh, and a piddling faith in some unimportant system of gods."

"The staff is enchanted, then."

"No."

"She's mad!"

"She is." He laughs. "So tell me, good fool: wouldst go to her and spend thy days with her, swordless, horseless, tending the plaguey brats of peasants and slaves? Or wouldst thou ride with me and turn her into a damp spot on the meadow, and after, own the earth?"

"I'll choose, wizard, but a choice of mine own devising. I'll not go to her nor ride with you. I shall stay here and watch thy bravery and thine historic victory over that little brown shemonk, with her dried tree-branch arrayed against nothing but thy magic steed, thy mighty armaments, and thine army of gnomes. And when she is vanquished——"

"Thee would see her vanquished?" he mocks. "Thy last chance to be free? Thy destiny contains no other savior."

"When she is vanquished, come back to me that may spit in thy face and tell thee that of my three possible hells, I choose the one which can give thee no pleasure."

He shrugs and turns away from me. At the door he gives me his evil smile. "I knew that one day thee'd call me 'thou,' Rogero."

I snatch up a heavy censer and hurl it. With a crash it stops in mid-air before him and, broken, falls at his feet. His smile is a laugh now. "Be certain, wizard, that I use not the 'thou' of an intimate, but that of an animal," I roar, and he laughs again; and surely one day, when I find a way, I shall kill this clever creature. I go to the casement.

Far below, I can still see the gate and the shining wall. The gnomes file away and down out of sight; and there, one fragile hand on the golden bars, the other holding the staff, the girl clings peering. Her courage is too foolhardy to be admired

and her strength too small to be considered at all; surely Atlantes need only laugh once (that thunder of evil) or raise his brows, to shrivel up this audacious sparrow.

There on the brow of the flying buttress stands Atlantes, the wind whipping his figured mantle, the sun all startled by his jewels.

He raises a hand and turns it, and the gate, so far below, so far away, stands open. Nothing as massive as those golden bars should move so swiftly and noiselessly; the tiny figure at the entrance nearly falls. The girl stands in emptiness, the gate looming about her, the rocky hill behind her, and high and massive over her, Atlantes' castle crowned by the glittering magician himself. She is very small and very alone as she begins to mount the slope.

Atlantes, laughing, claps his hands twice——

And from a copse in the meadow comes a thunder of wings, and a glory. There with an eagle's cruel head and the foreclaws of the mightiest of lions; with the splendid haunches of a stallion and golden hooves—there rises, there floats, there hurtles the hippogriff. His cry ripples the grass; it is a clarion, a roar, and a scream, and through it and through it is a thing which makes my heart melt as never a woman could do, and mine eyes are scalded with pity and fellowship. For he, even he, the hippogriff is enthralled; and with all his soul he hates his master!

I am glad there is no one by, for I weep like a child. I am a knight, and I know my merits; yet everything splendid is behind me. My shackles may not be broken, and my very destiny is without beauty. Yet here before me is beauty crystallized, shaking the world with its piteous, powerful protest . . . crystallized? Nay, alive, alive as a man could never be. See the sun on his golden plumes, oh see his purple flanks . . . he is more than I can bear to look on, to think on . . . I shall have him, mount him!

But if he sees me, knows my heart, I know not, for he sweeps past and hovers, and the top of the buttress takes him like a cupped palm. From the parapet Atlantes takes a curious shield, with its cover of soft bat skins cleverly pieced. He buckles it to the hippogriff's harness, then with a hand on the

parapet and a hand on the shield, he climbs to the great beast's back; and oh! I am proud that the steed kneels not for him.

Atlantes leans forward and speaks, and what his word is I may not hear, but the animal's sweet, strong pinions spread and flick the stone but once, and skyward they ride.

In a great circle the hippogriff wheels, with Atlantes leaning from the saddle. His piercing eyes, and all his magic to aid him, must discover any invisible armament she might have; and she must have none, for I hear his distant laughter as he leans over his steed's neck to speak another secret command. The wings go up together and hold like a great wedge, and down they drop just to the height of her head, and with a single thrust and the sound of soft thunder, their speed is checked and they are meadow-borne. Fifty paces away, the girl drops her staff and waits, weaponless.

Tiny and evil, Atlantes' mirth comes to me on the wind. He swings down from the beast's broad back, unbuckles his shield, and with a deft twist casts off its cover.

Now, he stands between me and the girl so that the shield faces away from me. Were it any other way, I should have seen nothing; this I knew when I saw the blaze of light which fanned out and down; when I saw birds swing and flutter and fall, and a stag turn away and blunder into a tree trunk. I had heard of this shield, but until now I had not seen it. In unspeakable ways, its gilded surface had been polished until it struck blind any who saw it. This, then, and the hippogriff, are what Atlantes brings to bear against one girl's fragile madness. Ah, a mighty magician he, and confident.

Beaten and dazzled, she stands frozen, waiting for—no, not mercy; she cannot expect that. Waiting, then, for him.

The work of the shield is done. He covers it and confidently he strides down the slope to her. If he speaks, I cannot hear; I doubt he does, for he knows I am watching, and he will want me to understand. He stoops to pick up the useless staff she has dropped, and thrusts it into her hand; he takes her by the shoulders and turns her about to face the gate; he steps back, then throws up his shaggy head and bellows with laughter. Such dismissal of the blind thing might have been predicted; instant death would have been, for him, too gentle a thing.

And so he stands, laughing, impregnable even to such strength as mine, with the invisible wall his spells have built about him; cruel and victorious—ah, a mighty magician indeed!

So, defeated, she moves toward the door . . . door? the gate of gold . . . but no, it is not longer a meadow, but a room where I keep my easel and my . . . and now I see them both, the room and the meadow, as if one were painted upon glass and through it I saw the other; and which? which the painting? *Aiee!* my brains are mixed and muddled again, I am one, the other, both, neither. I see a curtain of sky with mountains for its ragged hem . . . a dirty wall, with one small bright spatter of my blood where I struck it, and the dazed dun maiden raising her staff, which is a small blue book with gold letters on it. "But you're blind!"

Miss Brandt has a twisted smile. Her teeth are no better and no worse than the rest of her, and not to be compared with her lashes. "I've been told that before, but I don't think I am. This is for you—here!" and she gives me the book.

Before or behind my eyes there's a flash, too bright; I think it's a hippogriff. Up here in the salt mines I stand and shiver until the crazy thing passes; I open my eyes slowly and secretively so that I can snatch a reality and make it real. And Miss Brandt is here (or still here, I forget which) and the meadow and the hippogriff become a memory again (or maybe a dream.)

"Are you all right?" Her voice and her hand touch me together.

"Stay away from me! I'm crazy, don't you know that?" (Her lashes are up.) "You better get out of here. I'm liable to do practically anything. Look, you're already getting a black eye." I'm yelling again. "Aren't you afraid? Damn you, be afraid!"

"No."

It's a very puzzling thing, the way she should be dressed like a monk, and be holding a crooked stick; but that was a small blue book—that's right. I'm shaking my head, or is it a shudder; the girl and the wall and the door blur by me and my teeth are side-sliding, making a switch-frog sound. It can be halted by holding the heels of the hands on the halves of

the head very hard . . . and slowly saliva is swallowed . . . libation, libration, liberation, and quiet at last. In that moment of stillness, when at last I am *here* altogether, I know that my . . . dream, the Rogero thing, whatever it is . . . takes no time at all. For she was at the phone when it began, that last time, and all those things had happened to Rogero while she hung up and took two steps behind me . . . yes, and I heard the steps. So when I become Rogero again, no matter what happens here, how many hours it takes, I shall see Atlantes and the vanquished maid, down and away below, and she fumbling the dry rough stick, blind, defeated destiny of mine.

So open your eyes to here and the easel and Miss Brandt who is not afraid. Hold out the hand with the book. "What's this?"

"Money."

It's a checkbook, sky-green and very disciplined and trackless inside, and sturdy and blue outside. "Blank checks."

"Cartes blanches," she smiles; and this is no place for smiling. So just wait, and the smile will go away. Ah. Unsmiling, she says, "It's money; all you want. Just fill in a check and sign it."

"You're crazy." But she shakes her head gravely.

So: "Why bring me money?"

"You can do whatever you want now."

"I can't paint. Do you think you can make me paint by giving me money?"

When her tongue touches her lips, they are the same color. No one, no woman, should be like that. Such a mouth could taste nothing, take nothing. It says, "Not if you don't want to. But you can do all the other things you want to do—all you have ever wanted to do."

What else have I ever wanted to do but paint? There must be something. Oh, there is, there is; I never had a chance to—to—and then my hand is crushing the book, the book of excellent quality which yields only slightly and, when my hand opens, is bland again. "It's just paper."

"It's money. Don't you believe me? Come with me. Come to the bank. Write out a check and see."

"Money. How much money?"

Again: "All you want." She is so very certain.

"What for?"

"Whatever you like. Anything."

"I didn't mean that." Things are becoming real as real now. "When you take money you give something; you always give something, a painting or a promise or——"

Her head turns briefly, a little, right, left, right, her eyes steady on me, so sliding between the lashes. "Not this money."

"Why are you giving me money?" (You know, Giles, you're frightened?) "What I can do for money mostly is paint. But not now. Not now."

"You don't have to paint. Not unless you want to, and then not for me. Giles, maybe you can't paint because you want to do other things. Well, *do* them. Do them all; finish them until they're all done and there's only one thing left. Maybe then you can work again."

"Then the money's for painting!"

Oh, she is so patient; oh, how I hate anyone as patient as that. "No. It's just for you. Do whatever you want. I don't want the money and I don't ever want it back. It isn't mine to begin with, so why should I care about it?"

"But you'd care if I didn't paint again."

The fringes fall, the lashes hide the ordinary eyes. "I care about that now. I'll always care." And now she has the door open. "Come to the bank. Come get your money. Then you'll believe me."

"The bank, yes, and then what? Go with you, I suppose, and you'll tell me what to buy and where to go and how to——"

"It's yours to do as you please. Now will you come? I'll leave you at the bank if you like."

"I like."

But no, this doesn't hurt her, and no, she is not angry; there's only one thing that touches her, and that one thing reaches through the closed door as we walk in the corridor, stretches down the stairs and past the lintels and the newels and the curbs and cabs and garbage all the way down to the bank; and that one thing is my white, clean, blind square eye of canvas.

I wonder if she knows; I wonder. Wondering under the polyglot columns corralling the bank (Doric they are, with Corinthian capitals, yes but the door is not Doric but arched and Byzantine, closed with a fanlight. I'd say from Virginia). "I wonder if you know."

"If I know what?" she says, still patient.

"Why I can't paint."

"Oh yes," she says, "I know."

"Well I don't, Miss Brandt. I really don't."

"It's because you don't know why you *can* paint," she says, and her eyes are no longer patient, but waiting. It is very different.

And when I shake my head (because that is no answer) her eyes are patient again. "Come," she says; and in we go from the portico, and wouldn't you know the ceiling is red with ropes of gilded plaster draped in altogether Moorish squares.

And here in a low wall made of glazed marble, and flat-topped with marbleized glass, is a little black gate that swings both ways. On the other side is a polished desk and a polished pate bearing polished glasses: "Mr. Saffron," says Miss Brandt; "Mr. Saffron" says the chock-shaped sign on his desk, gold on black.

Mr. Saffron's glittering glasses tilt up; then straight and slowly he rises, like the Lady of the Lake. When he stands, his glasses lose some high lights, and I can see his eyes. They are blue and shiny—not polished, but wet; turned to Miss Brandt they are so round they go pale; turned to me they are slits gone all dark, with a little eave of pink flesh all the way across over both of them. And here is a man who is astonished by Miss Brandt and repelled by me; what a wonderful way he has of showing it, over and over again: round-pale, slit-dark, the whole time.

"This is Giles."

Mr. Saffron gives his slits to my brush-wipe khaki pants, and to my yellow shirt with russet cuffs which is really the top of my ski-pajamas, and to my face. "You're quite sure, Miss Brandt?"

"Of course!"

"If you say so," says Mr. Saffron, and sits. "We're quite

ready. Will you sign this, Mr. Ahhh?" I hear a drawer move but I am sure he pulls the white card from his spotless stomach. With the shiny pen from his desk-set I write *Giles.*

"First name?" says Mr. Saffron to the card, another shiny pen in hand.

"Yes."

"Last name?"

"Yes," I say again; and up come the glasses. "That's his name, just Giles," Miss Brandt says quickly. And then she recites my address. Mr. Saffron writes it, putting no more of his boiled-veal fingers on the card than he has to.

Miss Brandt says, "You want to cash a check now?"

"Oh sure." I fumble around and get the book. Miss Brandt comes close with a finger. "You write the date there, and the——" But I just sit there looking up at her until she goes away. What's the matter, does she think I don't know how to write a check? I write the check.

Mr. Saffron takes the check by its two ends and it flips softly like a little trampolin. He turns it over with a brittle snap and does a squiggle with his pen. "Sixty-eight dollars. All right, the cashier will give you your money." From his drawer he takes a yellow, ruled pad and curls down over it as if there were sudden fire in his watch pocket. Out we go through the little black gate, and when I look back he is not busy with his paper at all, but staring after us the round-pale way.

"Is that all you want—sixty-eight dollars?"

I look at her. "What would I do with more than sixty-eight dollars?"

Patient, patient she says, "Anything, Giles. *Anything.*"

So we go to a cage and a fierce face says in a sweet voice, "How do you want it?"

"Cash."

"Any way at all," says Miss Brandt.

So he gives me the money and we go to a marble table in the middle of the bank while I look at it. Miss Brandt says, "Is that right?"

"What?"

"Is it all there? Weren't you counting it?"

"Oh no. I was just looking at it. It really is real money."

"I told you."

"Is there more?"

Again she says, "All you want."

"Okay, good. Well, Miss Brandt, you can stay here or go do whatever you want."

"All right."

I walk away and when I get to the big door with the fanlight I look back. Miss Brandt is standing there by the table, not exactly looking my way. I come walking back. I have a feeling inside that makes the base of my nose hurt. I stop by her and look at her while I wet my lips. She has a real sunset of a shiner by now but the lashes are all right. So I tell her, "You just don't care what happens to me now."

"You know I do."

"Well, why didn't you try to stop me if you cared so much?"

She says, "You're not going to do anything important just now."

"With all this money? How do you know?"

She doesn't say.

"I guess you want me to come running back to you so you can take care of me."

"No, Giles, truly," she says in that absolutely certain way. "You don't understand. I'm not important. I'm not trying to be important. I just don't matter in any of this."

"Not to me." Why does she make me so mad anyway? "So what *is* important?"

"Why you could paint. Why you can't paint. That's all."

"Well, the hell with that for now. Well—maybe I'll see you around."

She sort of shrugs. I just go. Maybe I want to turn around but I don't. There's something in my head about how do I get in touch with her if I should want to, but the hell with that too.

By all the paint pots of perdition, nobody's ever going to make Giles admit he's a part of the works, like she does. People like her, all they do is go around believing in something and trying to trap other people into believing it too. "I just don't matter in any of this." What kind of a way to get along is that, the silly bitch?

I get out of line of the bank door and then go across the

street and stand in a low areaway where I can watch her when she comes out. From now on by God my business is *my* business. Who does she think she's brushing off?

It's getting chilly out, but who cares? I've got lots of time. Lots of money. Lots of patience. Miss Brandt, now, she's *really* got patience. On the other hand, all God's chillun got patience. Will you look at that bank, now; those big fat pillars are doing just what? Holding up a pseudo-Parthenonic frieze, that's what. That's really patience. Year in, year out they stand there holding it up and nobody knows it's there but the starlings. Patience—look at the work that went into carving all those figures, that fat, baggy nude in the middle clear down to the chow dogs or lions or whatever they are at the ends. *Stiacciato,* they call that work, the lowest form of relief, and that fat one in the center, she sure would be. So they in turn are patient, the hodgepodge of Hermes and Demeters and blind Justices, holding still for the starlings. And when it's cold the starlings freeze on the marble stool, and when it's warm they stool on the marble frieze, and the meek shall inhibit the earth.

Oh holy Pete what's happening to my head . . . listen, Giles, hold on to this area rail and keep your wall eyes on that bank and don't go off into no magic mountains. Watch that clock over the door. Watch it? I can *hear* it! Well listen to it then and keep your head in the here and now and don't let yourself go splitting the definitive. That, now, is a sick clock, it must be three hours slow, and listen to it moan. Oh I know a bank where the wild time groans . . . Hang on, Giles boy; think of something else, like San Francisco where the second-story men from across the Bay are called berkelers, and the Golden G— no! Think of the statue down the block, the Mayor's father on a horse, that's in the papers every other day should they move it or not . . . My father's horse has many mentions . . . and in the bank, now, Miss Brandt is leaving, see the gate is open and agleam in the sun as she stumbles on stones; it is as if Atlantes' mirth alone were bending her down to be crushed like a tree in a thunder-wind. And across the street—but meadow, meadow's the word—the blue-black helmets of the beastly gnomes show as they watch this . . .

could it be called a challenge? Ay; but a battle, no; only a defeat.

All this in a flash of stern anger, and then—yea, she is sinking, twisting about as if to fall at his feet . . . then up she comes in a whirl, her crude staff invisible, lost in speed, and with a whip's crack, the staff . . . *Aiee!*

For a moment I cling to the casement, scrabbling like a cat half-fallen from a wall; in that incredible moment I have leaned forward to shout and have all but pitched out through the window; and what of my destiny then?

Back at last and looking outward:

And the gate is lead, and shrunken, and the gnomes but a herd of goats; I stand not on a mighty parapet, but on the roof of a byre. Gone are the swan pools, the great gray halls, the soft-footed dancers and the grape-girls. Atlantes, mighty Atlantes, lies on his back with his eyes glazed and the bright blood flowing from his broken head . . . lying, *aiee!* like a goatherd after a bottle-fight on market day. And his steed—but horror itself! has she then turned the hippogriff into a milch cow? May the mandrake curdle her bowels if she's harmed my hippogriff!

Ah but no; there he stands, the blazing beauty, and throws back his eagle's head, and hurls his joy away to the farthest mountains. I mingle my shout with his, leap free of the wall, and run and tumble down the meadow.

In a transport I stretch myself against the unenchanted grass, and twist and turn in it until I can smell its sweet green ichor; and in just such a turning mine eyes fall upon her who stands meekly by, her two hands folded about the piece of her broken staff, her eyes downcast—but not so far they see me not.

"But 'tis thee, my warrior-maid!" I roar. "Here to me lass, and I'll buss thee well for thy trouble!"

But she stands where she is, so I must go to her. That at least I can do; has she not set me free?

(Or is she here to imprison me again? Destiny, now, is not fragile; yonder's a fractured magician for proof. Still——) "How do they call thee, maid?"

"Bradamante," says she; now, the Arabs breed a long-maned

horse, and in the distance that silken banner on their necks looks like this maid's lashes close to.

"Well, Bradamante, I owe thee my freedom if not my life. And should I pay the reckoning, what would thee do with them?"

Up to me she looks, with a deep calm which destroys my reckless smile; and up past me she looks further; and she says gently, "I would do the Lord's will with them."

"Call me not Lord!" I cry; this creature embarrasses me.

"I was not." Quiet as ever, her voice, yet somehow she chides me. "I meant the Lord Whom I serve, Who is King of kings."

"Is He now! And what would He have thee do with a belly-hungry, prison-broke hellion of a swordless knight?"

"If thou wilt serve Him——"

"Hold, lass. Yon wizard told me a tale of thee and me betrothed, and crawling the mud like worms among worms with never a jewel to our cloaks. He said 'twas my destiny to be freed by thee, and free me thee did. Though I can't say how."

"I but struck him with my staff."

"Na, lass. Even I could never do that; he could not be touched."

She gives me her hand; I take it and then follow her gaze to it. It wears a simple golden ring. Gently she frees herself and removes the ring. "The Lord sent this my way; who wears it is proof against all enchantments. I need it no longer." The ring flashes in the sun as she casts it aside; with my quick thumb and forefinger I pluck it out of the air.

"But keep it, Bradamante! Thee cannot discard such a treasure!"

"It was given me to free thee, and thou art free. As to the future——the Lord will provide."

I slip the ring upon my smallest finger, and though it is thick as her thumb, the ring clasps me like mine own. (Even without it, girl, thee'd have better fortune with an angry basilisk than thee would with me, if thee would persuade me to join thee on thy rocky pilgrimages. But now——) "This much of my destiny is complete, then, Bradamante, and I

am in thy debt. But surely the wizard was wrong about the rest of it."

"It is in the hands of the Lord."

"Thee doesn't expect me to cast aside my brocades for a scratchy gown like thine, and go with thee among the peasants!"

"We do as the Lord directs. We do it freely and with all our hearts, and are saved, or we do it blindly until we end in darkness; but serve Him we shall."

Such confidence is more unnerving than any magic. "I cannot believe that."

"*Will* not," she corrects me calmly.

"But I've choice! Here we stand, Bradamante, and in the next heartbeat I might slay thee or woo thee or bite thee or fall on the earth and gobble grass; and which of these things I do is for me to decide!"

Slowly and so surely she shakes her head. "It is in thee to serve the Lord, else I should not have been sent to thee. Choice thee has: Thee may serve Him willingly or thee may serve Him blindly; and none has a third way."

"Thee cannot force——"

She puts up her hands. "We do not force. We do not kill. We need not. The Lord——"

"Thy Lord let thee kill Atlantes!"

"No, Rogero. He is not dead."

I spring to the crumpled magician; and indeed, he is but stunned. I snatch out his own poiniard, and instantly, under its point, Bradamante thrusts her firm brown arm. "The Lord will take him in his own time, Rogero. Spare him."

"Spare him! He would have killed thee!"

"But he did not. He too is a servant of God, though unwilling. Spare him."

I fling down the blade so violently that nought but the jewelled knob at the hilt-top shows between the grass-blades. "Then I will; and having done thee the one service, I shall call my debts discharged. Art satisfied, girl?"

She makes my head bubble, this quiet creature; and I recall Atlantes' scoffing words, that this dedicated beetle of a

Bradamante shall think more of her faith than of my flesh, and that she shall have more brains than I.

Her lashes fall, and "Sobeit," she says, and not another word.

I need my sword, and to get it I must turn my back on her —a good need. So up the slope I go lightly, just as if her very presence were not like a heat on my shoulder blades. I close my eyes as I spring up the smooth grassway, and it does nothing to shut her out.

Patience, Rogero! Down the hill, over the rise, and she'll be forgotten!

And in any case, one could come back if one must . . .

So I let my eyes come open again, and gasp; for there stands the hippogriff, and he has never let me come so close. If I am to continue upward I must go round him, or I must move him. For a split second I falter, and his great head comes round to me; and oh, I've looked in the wells of Kazipon which are bottomless, I've followed the light of my torch in the endless caverns of Qual, and I've known a night when the stars went out; and never before have I looked into such depths and such reaches as the eyes in his eagle head. True bird's eyes they are, fierce in their very structure and unreadable. Through them the beast sees—what? A soft sac of blood and bones to be a sheath for that golden beak . . . or a friend . . . or a passing insect . . . I should flee. I should stand. I should sidle about him and be wary. I should, I should——

But I shall ride him!

I finish my stride and go straight to him, and when my hand falls on his purple shoulder he swings his head forward and high, and trembles so that from his wings comes a sound like soft rain on a silken tent. My heart leaps so that I must leap with it or lose it, and with a single motion I am on his back and my knees have him. *Aiee!* such a shout comes from me, it would rival his own; it is full of the joyous taste of terror. With it I fetch him a buffet on the withers which jars me to the very neckbones, and before I can feel the blow as any more than a shock, his wings are open and thrusting, and he rears and *leaps* . . .

It is a leap that never will end; fast he flies and faster hurtling higher just at the angle of his leap, and the surges of his body are most strange to a horseman. Only the glint of the golden ring convinces me that we are not involved in an enchantment; for flying sunward warms nothing, curious as it may seem, and the bright air grows cold as the hoary hinges of perdition's door.

I think of poor sod-shackled Bradamante, and look back and down; but by now she is lost in that indeterminate new place between haze and horizon, and there, for all of me, she may stay. I shrug, and find that I have not shrugged away the picture of her face, which is strange, since it is hardly one worth remembering. Surely, Rogero, thou art not smitten?

With her? With—*that?*

Ah no, it could not be. There must be something else, something buried in the whole mosaic of our meeting. Of our parting . . . ah; that was it!

Atlantes is not dead.

That in itself is nothing; Atlantes distant is, to me, as good as Atlantes dead. But Atlantes slowly waking in the meadow, his enchantments all destroyed, his shield and steed gone—and the peaceful author of his ruin doubtless helping him to his feet with her sturdy unwomanly hands . . . this is another matter.

But forget it! The sly-tongued termagant could, by the time Atlantes was fully conscious, have him so morassed in debate he would forget to be angry. Bradamante has a most powerful helplessness; she attacks with the irresistible weapon of being unarmed, immobilizes the enemy by surrendering, and at last sits on his feeble form, holding by the great weight of her passivity. I need not fear for Bradamante.

But the ring flicks a mote of light into mine eye, and I know I have taken her last defense and left her at the mercy of the merciless, and this is small thanks indeed for what she dared for me.

But what else would a knight, a true knight, do?

One thing a knight would do, I tell myself bitterly, is to regain his sword if he lost it, and not pleasure himself with

a hippogriff, however beautiful. Thou art no knight, Rogero; not yet, not again. Regain thine own holy blade, its very hilt encrusted with thy sacred promises, ere thee call thyself knight again.

Back, then, for the sword, and decide then about the maiden; and keep thyself armed with the thought of thy destiny —it is with her, and means soaking in meekness until I am mushy as bread in a milk bowl . . . *no!* by the heart of the fire in the nethermost pit, I shall get my blade and hew out a new destiny!

There are no reins, and I remember that the magician controlled the beast with words. "Enough, my beauty!" I cry. "Back now—take me back!" And somewhere inside a voice sniggers *Thee deludes thyself with the matter of the sword; it's the plight of the maid that drives thee.* "No!" I cry, "she shall not have me! Let her King of kings save her, she's His ward, not mine!" And I thump the hippogriff with my hard-tooled heels: "Back, my beauty, take me back!"

And the hippogriff tilts to the wind, and balances and sails as before, for these are not the magic words.

"Turn! Turn!" I bellow, rowelling him. I ball my fist and sink half of it in the feathered root of his neck just forward of the shoulder; for by this, if rightly done, one may stagger a horse. "Mule!" I shriek. "Turn thy spavined carcass about ere I tie a knot in thy neck!"

At this the eagle's head turns about like an owl's and the measureless eyes loom over me. Slowly the beak opens that I may see the spear tip and the scissor sides of that frightful weapon. Like a blind animal, the gray-pink tongue shifts and searches and settles again; the tongue itself is adversary enough for any soldier. Fear, however, is an assistant to safety only up to a point, and I am far past it. "Go back, aborted monster, ere I snatch out that ugly horn and crack thine eyeballs together! By the pleasure-bred blood of thy half-bred dam and the——" Thus far I rant, and he strikes. And would he had killed with the one stroke; for instead he has slipped the point of his beak between my saddle and my hams, and I am flipped, unharmed and sore humiliated, high in the air over him. I am spinning like a broken lance, or the earth is

circling me head to heel, chased by a blazing band of sun. I see the glory-tinted wings below me, too small and far away; around I go and see them again closer; and again, and this time I must touch, clutch; I claw my hands and flex my legs, and turn again—and the hippogriff slips away to the side to let me plunge past him.

I cover my eyes and I scream; I scream till my tendons cannot bear it, sob and scream again fit to startle the starlings off every bank from here to Brookline, Mass. I recant, I'll accept my destiny and honestly wed the little brown nun, if she'll have me; ay, and do for her Lord what paltry dog-tricks He'll ask of me; only make this hippogriff, this lovely, legitimate, honorable beauty of a hippogriff save me. *Aiee!* and I'll lie on my back on a scaffold and paint Thee murals, Lord, and I swear never to punch Miss Brandt in the eye, or anywhere else again, if thee'll but send me a cloud or an eagle or a parachute or a helicopter . . . oh holy Pete, what a spot for him to lose his mind in and be me again. I wonder if he knows it won't take any real time at all, where he is. And there below me the mottled earth pursues a sun-turned-rocket . . . whew. Giles old boy, don't you shut your eyes again until you have to—— "Hullo!"

There at the area railing stands a smut-faced urchin and a smaller but female version of himself, all eyeballs and streaky cheeks. "Gee, mister, you all right? You sick?" and the smaller one: "Canchasee, he's *dyne!*"

"Don't mind me, kids," I mumble. "I just fell off a hippogriff." I find I'm half-kneeling and try to stand, and it seems my hands are locked around the iron uprights of the railing. I stay there stooped and feeling very foolish while they watch me, and I concentrate from my stone-cold marrow up and out until at last my left fingers begin to stir. With a little more effort the hand comes free, and with it I disengage the right, one finger at a time. I straighten up then and look a while at my hands and wiggle them. "He ain't dyne," says the boy in a robbed tone, and his cohort says defensively, "Anyway he *wuz* dyne," because her ardent hopes had made it her production.

Briefly, a sun flashes past, but I ignore it; I'll be all right

now. You get so you know the signs. "Here," I say, "I'll try to do better next time," and I give them money, I don't know how much but it must be enough; they beat it.

I put my elbows on the railing, keeping these spastic hands away from it, and look across the street. The clock hands haven't moved any that I can see, and Miss Brandt, who was just starting out the door when my addled brains caught up with me, is pausing on the portico, the door just closing behind her. Two seconds, three maybe. My God, what a way to live!

Miss Brandt looks up the street and down, descends the shallow steps and turns right toward the old Mayor's statue. When she has quite gone I cross to the bank and go inside. At the island table I write a check, and take it to the wicket where the fierce-faced man is caged. He takes the paper and turns it over with the same snap Mr. Saffron used, and that is a trick I must learn one day. "You'll need to get this initialed," he says. So off I go to Mr. Saffron again, and stand in front of his shiny desk until he looks up at me and makes the pink meaty ridge across and above his narrowed eyes. The man disapproves of me to the point of ecstasy, and I take this as a kindness; for it makes us both feel important. I let the check fall to him, and he looks, snaps, looks, and grunts. "All right, Mr. Ahh," he says, and squiggles on it with his personal pen. I take the check and stand where I am.

"Well?"

"I want to know whose money this is."

"Yours." He has a way of snapping off the margins of his words as if he doesn't want you to have a whole one.

"Yes, but——"

"The deposit is in your name; surely that's sufficient!"

I look at the check. "Is there any more left?"

He is offended by the whole thing, but he is stuck with it. "There is," he says.

"Much?"

"More than you can spend today," he says. "Or this week."

"Well, dammit, how *much?*"

He sort of spreads his pale-pink hands, which means, I

gather, that this is not an account like other accounts and he wishes he could do something about the irregularity but he can't. He says, "That is the one and final checkbook you get. Aside from that, there doesn't seem to—ahh—be any upper limit. And now you'll excuse me, I've a great deal to good day Mr. Mmmm." And down he goes to his papers.

Well, I've asked enough questions to know there won't be any answers. I go back to the wicket and slide the fierce one the check. "Half in hundreds and the rest in small bills." He makes a long snort or a short sigh, clicks the bars between us down tight, lets himself out the back with a key, and is gone for too long, but I don't mind about that just now. Pretty soon he's back with a sack. He opens the wicket and starts taking stacks out of the sack and sliding them to me. The sixty hundreds go into my socks; they have elastic tops and pull up high enough. The sixty fifties fan out flat enough to go between my belly and my knit shorts, though they hump up some. Then I spend some time with the hundred and eighty twenties and tens, cramming 'em into two side and one back pants pocket. By now I'm lumpy as a sofa cushion just out of the wet wash and I've collected quite a crowd. The fierce face flutes, "You're going to run into trouble, carrying all that money that way," as if it was a wish, and I say "No I won't. They all think I'm crazy, and there's no telling what a crazy man will do." I say it good and loud, and all the people watching stop their buzz-buzz and back off a little. They make a wide empty aisle for me when I start away.

"Wait!" cries the teller, and punches some keys on his little machine. Coins slide down the half-spiral chute and pile up in the cup at the bottom with a cast-iron clink. "Wait! Here's your twenty-eight cents!"

"Keep it!" I bellow from the door, and go out feeling a lot happier than I've been feeling lately. All my life I've wanted to leave twenty-eight cents for a bank teller, who wouldn't put it in his pocket to save his soul, and who hasn't got any place for it in his books.

Down the street there's a big men's shop with little letters over the door and a windowful of somber-colored suits with

no creases in the jacket-arms. I look them over until I find the one with the most pockets and then I go inside.

It's like a church in there, but with wall-to-wall broadloom, and the only showcases I can see are two little ones set into mahogany pillars, one with tie-clasps and collar pins, one with four hand-painted silk ties. I go look at the first one. Every velvet box has a humble little card with "the" on it: *$200 the set. $850 the pair.* I'm on my way to look at the ties when a tall man with a paper carnation steps out of a potted palm and stands where I have to run him down in case I'm not going to stop.

"What," he says, "do you want?" The "you" is a little bigger than the other words and the whole thing sounds like he's pretty disgusted. I tell him about the suit in the window.

He laughs with his mouth. "That is a three-hundred-dollar suit."

"Well, drag it on out."

"I'm rawtha sure we don't carry your size," he says, looking at my painting pants.

"Then we'll hack it till it fits," I tell him. "Come on, buster, quit stalling."

"I'm afraid that——"

So I start yelling a little, and he backs off and bleats "Mr. Triggle, Mr. *Trig*gle!" and from somewhere—I guess another potted palm, there's plenty around—comes another tall man in the same sort of funeral suit, but this one's got a real carnation. "Here," he says, "Here-here-here. What's this, what?"

"You're selling, I'm buying. Only he don't think so," I tell the real carnation, pointing at the paper one.

The paper one says, "The gentleman—" (dirtiest word I ever heard, the way he says it)— "The gentleman is inquiring after the von Hochmann worsted in the window."

The real carnation nickers. "My good man, I'm afraid you've come to the wrong——" and then I put twenty dollars in his hand. He looks at it and the other one looks at it so I give him one too. They look at each other, so I pass out two more. "Get the suit."

"Won't you step into the sample room?" says the real car-

nation, and you wouldn't know it was the same man. It certainly isn't the same voice. "We have quite a selection in——"

"I don't want a selection, I want that suit in the window. That very goddam selfsame suit and not one like it."

"Oh but we can't get a suit out of the——" So I give them each twenty dollars. "Yes, *sir!*" says the paper one, and dives to the front.

"Now let's see," says the real carnation, pulling at his chin and trying to imagine me with my face washed. "Once we get the suit out of the way, we'll look at some cravats, and perhaps an English broadcloth, hmmm? Handmade? Rolled collar, studs? Yes indeedy."

"No indeedy. I got a shirt." I pluck at the yellow ski-pajama top. This shuts him up without any money changing hands.

The other tall man comes back with the suit and we parade into the fitting room which looks more than ever like part of a funeral home, only bigger. The two of them stand in the middle of the room wringing or rubbing their hands while I step into a curtained booth and put the suit on. The pants got no cuffs yet and the coat's too tight. I come out and they jump all over me like Hansel and Gretel on the gingerbread house. When they get to measuring the pants they find out I still got my old ones on underneath. Forty dollars fixes that up too, before they can say anything.

So when they're finished chalking and pinning they want to know when I want the suit. "Now!" I roar, and before either of them can so much as "But we——" I give them money again. "How many people you got back in there, altering?"

"Eight, sir."

"Well, here." I give him eight twenties. "Give 'em this and put 'em all to work on this one suit. You've got nine minutes."

"Yes *sir,*" and off goes paper carnation, breathing hard.

The other one says, "You said you were in the movie line?"

"I did not."

"Ahh," he says. "Oil."

"Nup. Ladies' wear. I put out a line of underskirts with prints of umbrellas and telephones on 'em. You've seen 'em."

"I—ahh—don't know that I have."

"What?" I shout, "You never heard of a Freudian slip?"

"Why, I——" and after that he shuts up. He keeps looking at me.

They don't get the suit ready in nine minutes but they make it in eleven. As soon as the man shows with the suit over his arm, I tell him, "Hey, I forgot. I want the left sleeve three-eighths of an inch shorter than the right one." His jaw drops, but the real carnation says "Do it, Hopkinson." And the other one goes out with the suit, me diving along right behind him. We get to a door about the same time. Inside is a real patchy workroom with bright lights and racks of suits, two old women and six old men. "But sir, you can't——"

"Shut up and give me that," I say, and snatch the suit. "I didn't want the sleeve fixed, I just wanted to see these people. Listen," I say to the whole room, "Did he give you any money just now, this guy with the paper flower?"

All those old people stand and blink at me till somebody says "Money?" and then they all shrug their shoulders and wag their heads. Paper flower, all nods and smiles, steps forward and says, "Why, I was going to give it to them just as soon as the suit was satisfactory," and he takes the eight twenties out of his side pocket. I bang them out of his hand and stick them into my pants. "You were like hell, you crumb." I go down into my sock and haul out the pack of hundreds and go around the room giving one to each of the old people. The real carnation sticks his head in just then and I tell him, "You better get that guy out of my sight before something happens around here even my money won't fix." The paper flower disappears.

I go back to the booth and this time I take off the old pants. I spread the money around through all the pockets in the suit —it's got fourteen—and get dressed. I give the carnation three hundred dollars and my old pants. "You keep 'em. They should fit pretty good." I have to admire him; I can see he's all aquiver inside, but he still walks like a bishop at a coronation as we go to the door, and as he walks he's carefully folding my old pants, which hasn't happened since I

brought them home from Kresge's two years ago, until they hang flat as an antimaccassar over his forearm. He opens the door for me and by God, *bows*. "Thank you *so* much, and come back to us soon, Mr. Freud."

It's close to nighttime, eating time. Around the corner and up the street is a restaurant I've heard about that used to be a stable. I'm just pushing through the door when in front of me there grows a soft wall made of maroon serge and brass buttons and a monstrous braided golden silk rope. I step back and look up, and it isn't a wall, but the prow of a commodore-type doorman; and I swear he's eight feet tall before the hat starts.

"Sorry, sir; you can't go in like that."

The suit, it seems, gets me a "sir" but not any courtesy in the voice. "Like what?"

He puts up a hand like a punching bag and taps himself on the Adam's apple. I put up my hand and touch only my yellow ski pajama top. "Oh, the tie," I say.

"Oh," he says, "the tie." Mimicking somebody like that, now that's for murder; that's worse than what Rogero called the hippogriff. "Well, you didn't happen to notice I got no tie."

He pushes out his chest. It looms up and over me like the business end of a hydraulic forging press. "I did happen to notice you got no tie," he says, still copying my voice and you know? He's pretty good at it.

"You did, for sure?" I say, and give him twenty dollars.

"Well, kind of one-eyed I did," he says in a new voice which wasn't mine and wasn't the "sir" voice I first heard, but one which seems to come easiest of all to him. I give him another twenty, and he lets me go on in.

A man meets me at the inner door—quite a man, boiled shirt, tailcoat, and the magnificent head you see in college lobbies, the oil painting of the previous Dean. With one flick of his eyes—and mind you, the light's not too good just there—he does with me what Mr. Saffron does with a check; he reads me, turns me over with a snap, puts his squiggle on me so that the inside man will do what's absolutely correct.

It must be a problem, with the new suit and the worn shoes and the dirty face and the fact that the doorman let me in; but if it bothers him he doesn't show it. "Good evening, sir," he says. His tone has the depth of one of those console radios they built in the thirties, when the more money you had, the more bass you bumped your belly with. "Step right this way."

But I knock his elbow. "It bothers you I got no necktie."

"Why—no, sir."

"Yes it does." I take out a hundred-dollar bill and fold it lengthwise and pleat it good and tight, and then I take a fifty and fold it flat and narrow, and wind it once around the middle of the hundred. Then I take the two pleated ends and spread them so I have a bow, tied in the middle. He stands there waiting for me as if people did this kind of thing all the time. "Now lend me the pin off that flower of yours." He hands it to me, carrying it the last half inch of the way by a subtle and courteous bow from the waist. I pin the bow to the front of my yellow ski-pajama top. "A tie. Okay with you?"

"Quite suitable, sir."

"I thought you'd like it." I pull it off and hand it to him. "I want a table for eight on the edge of the floor."

"Yes, sir. I have just the one." Off he goes, and me after him, and sure enough, there's a big round table. He plucks a subdued ivory *Reserved* card off it and sits me down. "And when do you expect the rest of your party?"

"I'm the rest of the party."

"Very good, sir. And you're drinking——"

"Brandy. Double. The kind that nobody but you knows is the best in the place."

"I have just the year. Water? Soda?"

"Yoghurt," I say. "About half-and-half."

"Right away, sir."

So I have that and a liver and oatmeal sandwich and crepes suzettes with a jubilee sauce made (by four men with three shiny carts) with those little tiny wild French strawberries, and you know? It costs eighty-four bucks to eat in that place.

I sit and I watch the show, and I watch the watchers watching the show. And I plan the things I shall do with more money than I can spend. I shall leave here when it is too late to hire anything and I'll make my money rent a powerboat. I'll leave twice the price with the owner and I'll sink it, and never be seen again by him, so he'll wonder. I'll buy two islands with two mansions, and on one I'll pretend to be a prude while through an agent I'll lease everything but my house to nudists; and the other island I'll populate with prudes while I go naked. I'll buy Thomas Moore's own harp from the Institute and build in a contact microphone and a music box which will play "Red Wing" for forty minutes at double tempo if anyone touches it. I'll train up a man who can fascinate as many hungry people as Huey Long and as many frightened people as Joe McCarthy, both at the same time, and when he takes over he'll pull a switch on them all and be as gentle and as poor and as strong as Jesus of Nazareth. And I'll supply every male teen-ager with a hand-tainted pie, and every female with a totally new orgasmic term to apply to sundaes, convertibles, knobby-faced pop vocalists and shoe straps. For Bradamante a transparent lipstick so she can feel like a woman even if she doesn't want it to show, and for Atlantes (poor little rich man) the full realization of destiny's indestructibility.

Look yonder: look! There by herself, with a candle on her table, sits the most beautiful woman who ever lived. Her hair is soft sable, long, straight, fine, and thick; her eyes and cheekbones the delicate strong interacting Eurasian arch-sequence. Her nostrils are petal-textured, moving as indetectably as the shift from one aurora-pattern to the next, but sensitively in motion even from her shallow breathing as she sits still, so still . . . and surely she is the saddest woman who ever lived, or a mouth such as hers could not be sleeping so, nor the head turned and held just that way of all ways, nor the shoulders so careless and the hands so forgotten. Is she grieving from loneliness, in the knowledge that never in life can she meet her like? Or has she been hurt by a small someone, and cannot understand?

I raise a hand, and the Dean-faced obsolescent console drifts to me. "Who is she?"

"I'll find out for you in a moment, sir."

"No, don't!" It bursts from me. "Please don't." (Now, why not?) "You mustn't do that."

"Very well, sir," and as if he senses my distress, "really I won't."

"Why is she so sad?" And I don't know I've spoken until he answers: "I think she has been disappointed, sir. She has been sitting there alone for a long while." He bends a little closer, as if to add a great importance to what he has to say. "I think, sir, that she is very young."

And somehow I understand precisely what he means; he means that she is frightened, but will not suggest fear in the burnished security of this moneyed place, of which he is such a piece.

Fear . . . there are fears and fears, depending upon one's origins and sense of value. Seimel, who hunts tigers with a spear, faces death without fear, and I know a man who is struck numb at the sound of a key in a Yale lock; who's to say which terror is great or small, or that it's a small thing to be a girl who dare not leave a table because she has no money? "Well, let her go. I'll take her check."

"Yes, sir." His glossy finish emits, like an alpha particle, a brief bright flash of approval. "Shall I take her your card?"

"Oh God no!" Again the thought of knowing her at all distresses me. "Just say a hippogriff flew by."

Unperturbed he says, "Quite, sir," and, as a good piece of furniture should, rolls silently and unbendingly away on his casters.

I wait, and I wait; and there coming in is a chinchilla coat which will be flung over a chair somewhere just under a light, and yonder a fat face laughs too loudly; the trombone, part of a chord, still gives me two notes exactly right for a girl's inexpressible loneliness and my feelings about it, and the man with the shiny-cart moves the heel of a silver spoon deftly through the pure transparent heat springing bluely from the bubbling blood of the jubilee . . . and as if by accident, the

fine Dean's head bows over the girl's table and he speaks to her.

Her face, when she looks up, blinds me for a moment. Or maybe my tears do. She radiates no happiness—some great grief is bred too deeply into this girl's fine bones—but there is a change which permits hands to be remembered and a mouth to live again. It could have been fear and its removal, an excision which works wonders with dogs and humans, and might, I imagine, even with nations.

And so she may turn her head away from sorrow, and when she does, the breath catches in my throat; in the nocturnal texture of her hair lies a single streak of silver, a hue of just the deadness, just the distance of a winter moon. No other color could treat with such precision of an inherent sorrow, and no other creature has been so correctly branded as this girl.

I saw motion pictures of a lily growing; shoot to blossom in a brace of seconds; and as it rose and burst, so she rises and shakes back her hair. I saw a strand of spider web drift by and away, streaming; and so she passes. I saw a bird die in the hollow of my hand, its open crystal eyes unchanging; and so I sit now unchanged, except that something is gone out of me.

I shall invoke Rogero, and escape from this tomb into terror; I shall not wait for a summons to his world. Better to be falling away through a shining sky with angry wings above me and a sudden quiet below, than to sit here in the meshes of my several madnesses. Insanity is only wisdom of a sort, too deeply driven for the sphincters of the mind to compass; and this is the riddle of the sphinx. Brushless Giles, the ex-painter, is (when you come right down to it) a far wiser person than Swordless Rogero, ex-knight. Put me on a hippogriff without a driver's license and I won't sit and bawl "Back, sir!"; I'll push the buttons and pull the levers and watch what happens until I can back into anybody's downhill driveway. And if words are the reins, the throttle, and clutch, then words I'll try, until at last I have a "Gee" for him and a "Haw" for him and above all a big fat "Whoa!" Rogero, now,

he's a fool, and rather healthier than I and therefore more alive; his uncertainties are a little less well-founded in fact than mine. *Whoosh!* and is that the hot, gentle ignition of brandy over yonder, or the sun passing my feet? Is that polite patter halfhearted applause for the band or is it the wind in the wings of the wheeling beast above me? Catch me, catch me, good knight and I shall die gladly with thee, free of both these insupportable worlds. But I am not falling; I hang here in dusk, supported by a rushing wind, a central point for the looming earth and the hurtling sun as they rotate about me. (And if hanging thou art, why are the crags of Earth larger each time they pass thee?) *Aiee,* could I but die of foolhardiness, like a Bradamante challenging the powers of evil, and not thus crotch-flung in penance for the silly vapors of my foul mouth, not humiliated and screaming like a whipped serf. (Waiter, bring me an orchestra playing Rampart Street, I have fallen from Grace, who is a hippogriff.)

Shining one, can thee not forgive me my temper and my tongue? Is there nothing in thee which recalls the swift romp on Atlantes' mountain, and thee dancing away from me like a playmate, sharing my joy? *That* is Rogero, good hippogriff, and not the furious mote who offended thee . . . I'll beg thee no more, but pray only that thee might escape thy conscience, as I failed to do when I left my sword and my destiny with Bradamante.

And he comes, he comes, his wings all but folded, backbent, beating a very buzz to fly downward faster than I can fall. And faster he is; he looms to me, blasts himself to one side so close he tumbles me anew, so that the sun is still above me, but below the mountains turn like clay on a potters wheel. The hippogriff's wings are wide now, and working weightily, and again he grows in mine eye; and now I can hear him; he is screaming, screaming . . . gods! What a terror-struck cry! Then the screaming stops, and his lion's voice rumbles with laughter—ah, he mocks me, he mocks me, the son of . . . of a mighty gryphon and a blooded mare, most beautiful of creatures. There, hippogriff: mock me, it is thy privilege; let me die, it is thy right.

And again the thunder of his humor; he twists his wings, one up, one down, rolling like a summer swallow; and as I fall to meet him he is on his back like a swimmer, and, blessed angel of a hippogriff, he takes me!

I hang from his talons like a newt, mine eyes a-pop from the pressure of his holding and the surge of his climb; and climb he must. for he has caught me in a valley, no further aloft than the height of a tall pine tree; the mountains all about are above us. He could not have waited the tenth part of a heartbeat and saved me still. He is confident and beautiful and he has a most cruel sense of humor.

I am lifted now to his beak; I face his eyes, and from his open maw his laughter rumbles, and I like a captured puppy plead to be set down. And indeed, had I a tail I'd wag for him; I'd whimper if I felt it would reach him.

He dips his head and turns it, and his beak's about my waist. Now he lifts me, turns his head back to front, lowers me, twists that my feet may go down and my head up—and I am astride him again, perched on his shoulders a forearm's span away from the saddle. He nudges me back, and I bump my way to the saddle like a babe on a fence-prop, bottom foremost and clumsy with fright. Not until I am firm in the saddle does he release me; indeed, for a moment it occurs to me that, purely in jest, he might bite me in twain once I think I am safe. Through my thighs I sense another thunderous chuckle at my expense. I bite my lip and cast mine eyes down, but there is no escaping his mirth.

Now the mountains are behind. The sea is a haze and the sky sea-colored, and where they meet there is no longer a line; by a twist of my mind I may imagine naught but sky around us in an Earthless universe, and a twist again, and it is the sea all about, up and over, my hippogriff and I the sole population of an empty bubble in a universe of water.

And it comes to me then, like a sending—words, odd and small; "Gee," and "Haw," and "Whoa!" and each carries the nostriled flavor of Giles and the smoke in his mouth. So "Gee!" I murmur—and my hippogriff wheels; "Haw," say I, and the other way he turns. . . . I can ride him, fly him! He is mine, he is mine!

But mine too is the humiliation, and the lesson of his laughter, cackling like a conscience. Ahead is the sea, across it adventure and freedom. Behind are the hills, and my sword, my duty, my debt, and a weaponless wench. My steed is silent, as if waiting: "So *haw* then, and let me be damned to my destiny," I cry, and he swings about to tuck the distant shore under his golden chin; to take me back to my grubby fate. And grubby or not, I preen; I am a knight who will not be swayed nor turned aside; straight to my sword I will fly, to mine honor, to——

But below, a clot of white on the rock takes mine eye, and *"Whoa!"* I cry with all my heart; and the hippogriff's bellow of laughter fairly puts whitecaps on the waves below. And down we drop, and down, the roar and crash of beastly laughter in the van, the flanks, the trailing wind of our descent. There is a peal of it for knights without swords, for true courses set and forsaken; there's a rumbling gust of it for gratitude confessed but unpaid, and one for the man who would plan an escape for himself if he were on time to rescue a maiden in peril, or who would plant a bluebell for her if he were late, if he happened to pass that way. But the shrillest laughter, the one having the most cold gold eagle in it, was for a knight who claimed to value his sword for the vows it carried.

I have a moment of shame and one of fury, and then a tortured time of both together. All I need do to cut off this obscene bellowing—ay, and gain the beast's respect, I wouldn't doubt—is to press my heels to his flanks, and straight to Atlantes' mountain we'd go; to Bradamante; to my sword; to the completion of my promises and the payment of my debts.

And it is in the muscles of my legs to draw back those heels; it is in my heart to be humble and accept the beast's deafening censure and cleanse myself; it is, it is, but once again I look below, and am lost; for chained to the rock is a naked woman of such unearthly beauty she can be compared only with the hooded shield I carry . . . with this difference: that whosoever looks upon this shield is blinded, but who looks upon this woman sees so clearly that he cannot live.

Down comes my steed and hovers, searching for a foothold

on the windswept rock; and finding it, settles in. Before he is fully earth-borne I am away from him and his subsiding chuckles, slipping and scrambling to the seaward slope. Braced against the iron loops to which she is chained, I cower down close to her, cover mine eyes against that blaze, not of light, but of beauty; and when I can, I peer quickly through my fingers and drink the vision in small and frightened sips.

Her ankles are cruelly bound by a single hoop, hinged, hasped by the double chain which anchored it below. A smaller version of the same device was given each slender wrist, and there she lies, stretched tight against the cold rock, wet with spray, and the wind tugging her hair.

I touch the shackles, the chains. Anchored as they are, it seems the rock itself would lift from the sea bottom before those loops could be drawn. Turning hopelessly from this examination, I meet her eyes and the impact melts me; I fall to my knees and bow my head.

"Who art thou?" she whispers into the shouting wind.

"Rogero, a knight, come to save thee. Who has done this to thee, princess? . . . surely thou art princess . . .?

"Ay," she breathes, "Angelica of Cathay, shipwrecked here on the very day the oracle at Ebuda demanded the most beautiful Ebudan maid as a sacrifice to some wrathful god. But since they had me . . ."

"Ebuda is that village yonder?"

"Ay." Ah, but she is weary; her voice may be heard at all only because its sound was so very different; it differed, almost, from sound itself. "But go not to the village, good knight; they are barbarians and would tear thee to pieces rather than replace me here with one of their own. Best go whence thee came, and my blessing goes with thee; but I am doomed."

"To die of cold and the pecks of sea eagles? I'll die here with thee rather!"

"Nay, it will be quicker than that," she murmurs. "Knowest the monster Orc?" Her eyes are calm, seaward now. As the wind tumbles her hair, I see that it is mystically marked with a stripe of cold silver; there has never been anything so lovely and far away as that swath of starshine.

"Orc? Oh, ay; a legend, a tale to frighten children. He is big as an island and has scales of iron and the tusks of a boar. And thou art chained here for Orc? The eagles will have thee before such a fable comes."

"But he comes now," she says calmly; and two things happen to me which will leave their mark for all my days; one, that as she spoke, grave and quite contained, her tears flowed and I knew that I saw a strength here as wondrous as her beauty; but for the tears, she might have been in her garden, half dreaming and at peace, for all her face showed it. And I turn away from her and see the second thing, the monster Orc.

With a shout I spin to Angelica, take her prisoned hand and on it slip my golden ring. "This will guard thee, Princess!" I cry, and my heart cries with it, *only from my shield,* and I stumble to the hippogriff.

He is ready, flexed, spread, trembling to be off; I have but one foot in the stirrup as he launches himself. The monster comes, and we fly out to meet it; and when we have flown what seemed far enough at first, there is yet another mile to go. It looms over us like a thundercloud; it rises higher and higher from the water, and there is more and still more of it, shapeless, immeasurable, and blind.

Blind! Swordless, lacking pike or halberd, axe or hook, mine only weapon is a giver of blindness; against this, the monster brings the only possible defense; "Blind, it is blind," I cry, and my mount utters a shriek, part despair, but a fine part challenge, and mounts the sky to get above the creature and be sure.

And still it rises until we are but a wasp at a bull's shoulder, until the black rock below is but a steppingstone to this great living hulk.

And the hippogriff, unbidden, folds his wings and we drop, down and down past the upright acres of filthy, streaming iron. I am past thought, incapable of anything except keeping my saddle in the weightless drop. Even my first long fall from the beast's back had seemed not so long as this. Then out come the wings, and I groan against the pressure inside my doublet.

Down we go still, the hippogriff battling the wind of our fall, and checking us at last.

We are in a roaring, stinking steam of water and evil fumes, somewhere between Orc's looming bulk and the black rock. Across, and turn, and back, and turn; steamed and spumed and soaked and splattered with stiff salt slime. And for the second time that day I face death despised by the hippogriff . . .

I see his face again, I think for the last time. And had I years of life to give for the ability to read those bright implacable eyes, I would do it, and gladly; but I've but a few weary minutes. I gaze up hopelessly, and he brings his shining head closer to me, touches my head with a rough gentleness. With his eyes on mine, he makes a single soft sound, and then it is time to turn again. It seems for a moment he cannot and then he does, bravely, and labors back again. Belatedly I see that his wings are wet, and like Pegasus near death in dragon's blood, he cannot remain aloft much longer. Ah, to know what it was he tried to tell me! Who would know? Giles? Ah, but I hate what I was, and what I am . . .

Together we scream a challenge, and the hippogriff finds strength, somehow, to drive up twice, three times the height of a man and, descending, flutter away a great weight of water from his wings. He passes close to the widening mouth, drives down near the hinge of the jaw just as it emerges. What appears at first as a bony projection from the hinge is suddenly a slimy opal, alight and alive—Orc's eye, set like a whale's. The hippogriff must have known, he must have known!

His small downward drive gives us speed—almost too much. As if alive, however, the shield trembles under my hands, turns to the sun for a bright beam, and hurls it across and back, on, and into the eye. And then we are past and tilting steeply; once more the hippogriff shivers away a mist of heavy water and fights to rise, and back we come the long, long distance around that mountain of a snout, past and past the yawning great arch of the open mouth, to the eye on the other side.

It must be only now that the mighty mass of dim-nerved flesh feels the pain of his dazzle-tattered eye. Something un-

speakable moves inside the arch, and a gout of water and ichor shoots skyward. I see it rise, I see it curl; our wings will not survive this, so *"Gee!"* I cry, the sum total of terror and self-hate, of love for the hippogriff and the enchantment of Angelica; of anger, regret, remorse. His response is instant and beyond his control, and he wheels shoreward as I stand on the saddle, fall toward the monster, and kick back at that purple flank with both legs and all my strength. Even as I fall I look back under one arm, for a flash of Angelica's body and the sight of my hippogriff flailing down into the water, short of the shore line. One wet wing-elbow rises like a sail and sinks as slowly; his neck, so pathetically thin without the dry golden ruff of feathers, is stretched toward the rock, but not far enough: he has died for me, and his laughter is dead with him; does thee know now, fool knight, what it was he told thee with that touch of his beak? Only that for all his jibes and hurtful scorn, he was ready to die with thee . . . And dying, Rogero, thy steed could not know thee heard, or would ever understand.

All this, in the instant of catapult, stretched achingly from my kick, with speed my only wings, my brain racing and my heart wrenched; and before me the magic shield of Atlantes. The shield strikes the water first, and my arrowing body slips under the thundering waterspout as it descends. Like a flat stone the shield skips on its curved face, and my forehead rings it like a gong. It tries to skip again, but my body plops in stingingly at the same instant, and stays it.

And at last I squat in the corner of that beastly smile, and all the hate I have ever known pours out of my arms and into the flailing of the shield. Edge and edge, flat and edge again, I belabor that viscid mound just back of my perch. It yields slowly, and at first I must work with my face but an arrows-length away; I feel it is burning me, filling me with a brutal and primitive madness that surely must turn my brain into what one finds in a dryrotted chestnut. But then it ceased to be, and was no more, and surely no less horrid than any part of the beast.

How long this pounding? I know not . . . but at length pain reaches it, and a convulsion such as should be impossible

to anything so ponderous. My handhold disappears; there is a moment of strangling and a moment of crushing weight, a blow precisely where, earlier, my forehead struck the shield. And then I am thrashing in shallows on black rock, my legs tangled with the limp neck of the hippogriff.

The anchor of the Princess's leg-shackle grinds my small ribs; I shift away from it, clutch it between arm and side, and lock my legs about the neck of the hippogriff, lest his body be swept out to sea. Water runs and runs, tugs and cascades off the rock, and for a long time my sky is full of black specks shifting and twinkling. But I will not let go.

When the tugging stops, I raise my head. The water is back to something like normal. More than half the hippogriff's body is aground. The rock is completely free of litter—the last cascade having swept it clear. Out at sea stands a new mountain: I think it is dead now. It is sinking, ever so slowly, or sliding down some age-old chute it has worn in the ocean floor.

"Rogero——"

I kick free of the hippogriff's heavy neck and head, and crawl to her.

"Princess!"

"Thou art bravest of knights."

"Nay, Angelica," I mumble. "I am neither brave, nor a knight. I must free thee."

"A simple matter."

"Ay, had I his strength," and I nod to the dead hippogriff.

"Mourn him not, Rogero," says the Princess. "Thee stayed by him as he died, and thee will be rewarded."

"Then must we wait on another hippogriff to strike thy chains?"

"No. The ring, Rogero; take off the ring."

I stumble up the slope to her shackled hand, and take the ring, while she says, "It is a greater amulet, possibly, than thee knows. I was seeking it when I was shipwrecked here; I never thought to see it again; to have it brought to me makes thee part of a miracle."

"See it again? It is thine?"

"It was stolen from my treasure house long ago, and has

been on many hands. Its last use, so I was told in the north, was to be by a maiden who wished to free some dolt stupid enough to be entrapped by a magician and too stupid to break free. How came thee by it?"

"It was . . . cast aside as worthless." My ears burn. "Princess, I must free thee."

In her chains, she stretches lazily. "Whenever we like. These bonds mean nothing. Rogero, I am in thy debt."

"No, Princess, for I have seen thee. It is enough."

"Prettily said, and I believe thee." And it seems she is amused. "Then do as I ask, and thee shall see a new power of the ring. Put the ring in my mouth."

I held it to her parted lips. "Thou art a sweet and somewhat slow-witted man," she whispers. "Goodbye, Rogero." She takes the ring.

The shackles lie empty, and I crouch there over the black rock which pillowed her, my one hand extended, my mind awhirl at the nearness . . .

Nearness? She is gone!

Ah, she might have told me of this magic before demonstrating it! Is the world and all its magics leagued against me? Has the universe itself been designed to make me out a fool? "Thou art a sweet and somewhat slow-witted man." *Aiee!* I shall have that carven on my tomb!

Slowly I mount the rock, and face the rocky spine leading to the mainland, to and through the barbarians; through mountains and hunger and poverty and illness; to aid and be aided along the way, until at last I have won what was given me and what, unearned, was cast aside; afoot, acrawl—to my destiny.

"Are you quite all right, sir?"

Now that, old Dean-head, is a question. The music is surf and feathers in all its upbeats, strictly society on the down: scherzophrenic. A hot, transparent, blue flame whuffs out, and suddenly that is a matter of supreme importance, though I can't think why. Slowly I look up at him. "Me?"

"It seemed for a second or two that you weren't quite—with us, sir."

"A second or two," I say, "that's all it takes." Now I remember: that blue flame on the jubilee tray is the one I was looking at when I went under, or other, or wherever Rogero keeps his world. Surely I know where that is! I look up again. Deans read books. "Listen, what do you know about Atlantes?"

"Atlantis, sir?" This guy, you couldn't ruffle him with a williwaw. "As I recall, it sank under the sea."

"No, Atlant*es*—a magician."

"Ah. I believe there was a necromancer of that name in Ariosto, somewhere."

I put an accurate forefinger on his second stud and push it triumphantly. *"Orlando Furioso!* So *that's* it! Hey, do you remember what ever happened to Bradamante?"

He puts his hands behind his back and looks at the wall meeting the ceiling. Good head on that man; splendid. "As I remember, sir, she married a knight——"

"*E*x-knight," I say, and it hurts. "Also, good night." I give him a whole heap of money and head out.

"Good night, sir," says the doorman.

"Oh," I say, "You. Hey, a girl about so high and so wide with a silver streak in her hair, she left here. How long ago?"

He says he doesn't recall so I give him some money. "About four minutes," he says. "That way," and points.

"Only four?" I have something in me like a pain. "That way, you're sure?"

"You should be able to catch her," he says. He closes his eyes and smiles. "Pretty."

"The Grand Canyon," I say, "it's cute too." I run the way he points. It's to the river.

So it's *Orlando* all this time, I think, and something has kept me from recognizing it. Atlantes and Bradamante, Angelica, princess of Cathay, the hippogriff and the Orc, all there. And what am I doing, acting it out? Atlantes kept Rogero from being a knight; some sort of magic keeps me from being a painter. Only nowadays they call it a neurosis.

So where am I going in such a hurry?

Got to save the Princess from the Orc. Orc, variant of urp,

a real nauseating beast. Better I should go right back to the studio and mind my own business. Yes, that's what Rogero kept telling himself. And he landed by the Princess anyway, no matter how his hippogriff laughed. Well laugh then, hippogriff. You're not long for this world anyway.

There she is!

Walk now. Get your wind. See what happens to her. She's chained naked on no rock yet. Or maybe she is . . . analogies being what they are . . .

Now cut it out, Giles! You're all right now. It's all just a story you read and mooned over when you were a kid. There were others; but did you really live it up with "The Little Lame Prince"; did you referee that go between the firedrake and the remora in Andrew Lang's book; did you feel the icicle pierce your heart in "Back of the North Wind?" So maybe your subconscious is trying to tell you something with Ariosto. Tell you what? To get religion? Or (and this is the idea that feels like pain) that you're no more a painter than Rogero is a knight, in the long run . . . in spite of some initial successes?

Go home, go home, and paint the way Miss Brandt wants you to. Go home now and your hippogriff will love you for it; yes, and live, whatever that might mean.

But wait; Miss Brandt wants you to be a painter and Bradamante didn't want Rogero to be a knight. My story doesn't coincide with his; it just sort of resonates. All the more reason to get out of here, Giles; go home. You've got all the money in the world; all the freedom, all the time to go anywhere and do anything. *Paint anything.* You know what happened to Rogero, his hippogriff, and his magic ring—yes, and his shield too, when he let his bumbling chivalry override his derisive conscience. (Conscience? Since when can a conscience be as beautiful as a hippogriff?)

So, go home. But look; look there, she has stopped at the River Road, and stands under a light, her gray silk gone all silver and the margins of her hair sinking a little over her slender shoulders as she raises her face to the sky. What is in that face? I can't see, I can't see . . . an appeal, a submission

rather; such sadness as hers is past hope and therefore past appealing to anything.

Princess, what is your rock, what your Orc? What comes, and you helpless; what shows itself without form, grows to fill the sky; what is impregnable, ironclad, and filthy, unspeakable? What fills your world and your short future, and proves at the same time that it shows only its slimy skull, and there is measurelessly more below?

You don't scream, Princess?

You are only calm; but I have seen your tears.

She crosses the road to the trees, and takes a path toward the water; so laugh, hippogriff. I'll go to her.

But she's gone in the shadows: hurry, hurry——

And there in a quiet place I come on her and, like Rogero on the black rock, I sip the vision; for to gulp it would be more than I could bear.

There is a hole in the grove, an empty place by the water to let the night in. Part of a moon floats a train across the water to her as she sinks to a bench. Her head turns and tilts a little, as if to a footfall (does she hear me? Does she know there is more than her sadness in the world?) and she is completely in silhouette except for the single beam cupping a cheekbone, and the silver streak in her hair; with that small shard of cold white, the path on the water has a part of moon at each end!

And still more, just a little, her head turns, so her perfect profile lies in liquid moon; and now, if she turns only her eyes, she may see me. She does.

"I knew you'd be around." Her voice . . . a bell, a bird, a sound-unlike-sound . . . no. A voice, just a voice. Think about that, Giles; but not now.

"May I . . . I mean . . ."

"Sure," she says, indicating the bench. "Why not?"

I sit timidly at the other end of the bench, watching her as she stares out over the water. Her eyes are hooded and her face a chalice of sadness, brimming. And suddenly I know her Orc.

Poverty can be the Orc. Poverty can be the monster visible

and nearing, which comes slimy and stinking out of the pit to fill the sky and yet be showing only its smallest part. Poverty can come to one chained, disregard one's station and one's virtues, and take one at its leisure.

Then I might be Rogero yet, for there is money in my pocket, neat, obedient, omnipotent money. Should I challenge her monster?

She might be angry. (Angelica? Angry? No; she bade the knight leave her and save himself.)

I look at her, and the sadness in her is greater than the money in my pocket. I see abruptly that my gesture would not anger her after all. She would simply pity me. My effort would be lost in her great need.

Then I'll share what I have. Half what I have is still, effectively, all the money there is.

She is looking at the moon, so distant and so dead; she has the mark of distance and death upon her. Rogero offered no part of himself to his princess; he offered it all.

All of it? I touch the lapel of the most expensive suit I have ever owned; good new money whispers under my hand of miles and years of color and startlement, tastes and textures and toys; all the things, the thrills I've never had because it took too much time to be just Giles.

"I wish you wouldn't stare like that."

"I'm sorry," I whisper. "Sorry."

"What's on your mind?"

Only that when tomorrow's sun comes to you, you might give back to it as much gladness as a daffodil. Just that by giving you all I ever owned, so new that my own hands have not touched it, you might never be afraid again. "Just that I'd like to . . . borrow your pen."

"My—well, I suppose." She has it in her handbag; finds it and gives it to me.

I take my elegant, one and final blue book, and crouching close in the moonlight, *Giles,* I write, *Giles,* and *Giles,* and *Giles,* until I've written on the bottom line of every perforated page.

I hold it out to her with the pen. Here (I would say, but I

cannot speak) here is all the magic I own, since I lost my shield. Here are my hooves and my talons. Here are my wings.

"What's this?"

"Yours," I croak. "I don't want it. Any of it."

"God," she says.

She rises like the lily—but now, in the moonlight, more like a cereus—and looks at me. "You're sure, now."

"Never more sure."

"I thought," she says, "that you'd turn out to be a lot more fun than this." And she throws the book into the river.

I sit in a dream by the corpse of a dream. It grows cold. Loneliness lives in my very pores as sadness lives in her face. She is gone, the moon is gone, and something else has gone, too. I do not know its name but it once kept me warm.

When she left, her leaving a completion of the absent gesture of throwing the book, I said nothing and I did not move; I am not sure that I really saw her leave.

Rogero, I think, I need you. I wish I could have a word with you.

For when you were stripped and alone, somewhere in yourself you found a way to travel, through wild countries, through poverty and sickness and hardship, certain that they would refine you for your destiny. You see, dear dopple, the twentieth-century man has no destiny; at least, he has no magicians to read it off for him, so he can never quite be sure. But take his amulets away, his spells and cantrips graven with the faces of dead presidents—and he'll look over no mountains toward an unshakable faith. He'll stare at nothing but his own terror.

Rogero, the universe is indeed leagued together to make fools of us.

I leave the bench and the river, not to be a pilgrim, but just to take my misery to familiar surroundings and wrap it up in weariness. And tomorrow I shall wake with the comfort—if such it is—that I am Giles and will continue to be Giles without the intrusion of Signor Ariosto's parables. It had better be a comfort; I may not even turn my staring white canvas to the wall, now that I think of it; I wouldn't be able to bring myself to touch it.

So I walk and I walk. And then up the long steps and down the long hall, fling open the door which unveils the dirty—

But it isn't a dirty bed, and I have one mad moment of childish panic; I have burst into the wrong place; and then I see the easel, the bright clean easel, and I know I am home.

"I hope you don't mind; the door was open, and I thought . . . so to keep myself busy while I waited, I——" She makes a smile, and tries harder and makes another, but smiles over hands which rapidly clasp and unclasp are unconvincing. "I'll go," says Miss Brandt, "but I wanted to tell you I think you did a splendid thing."

I look at the clean, shelved dishes and the drum-tight bedclothes, and my paints and brushes sensibly left untouched. But what impresses me is the unthinkable statement that I have done a splendid thing. I sit on the bed and look at her.

"How did you ever find out?" she asks. "You weren't to know, ever."

"I know a lot now," I tell her. "What specially do you mean?"

"About the money. Giving it back."

"I gave it away," I admit. And, because it's the truth, "I don't call that so splendid."

"It was, if . . ." And then, as if she's had the question held down tight and can't control it any longer, she flashes a glance at the easel, and asks, "Does it mean you'll paint again?"

My eye follows hers and I shudder. She turns pale as the new light at the window. "Oh," she says in a very small voice. "I—guess I've done the wrong thing." She snatches up a shiny black pocketbook and runs to the door. But there's a Giles standing there first, who pushes her back hard so she sits down—*plump!*—on the bed.

I am tired and hurt and disappointed and I want no more wonderments. "You tell me all the things you've done, wrong and otherwise, right from the beginning."

"Oh, how it began. Well, I'm her secretary, you know, and we had a sort of quarrel about you. She's a mean, small, stupid sort of person, Giles, for all her money and the way

she looks—she is lovely, isn't she? In case you want to know (everybody does) that streak of silver is real. Anyway, I——"

"You're *her* secretary?"

"Yes. Well I got so terribly distressed about——" She waves at the easel again, and the miraculous lashes point away, "——you, you know, that I suppose I got on her nerves. She said some mean things about you and I sort of blew up. I said if I had her money I'd see to it that you started painting again."

"Just like that."

"I'm sorry. It was—so important; I couldn't bear to have you just——"

"Go on with the story."

"She said if I had her money and tried to use it that way I'd just make a fool of myself. Well, maybe she was right, but . . . it went like that until she swore at me and said if I was so positive, go ahead. Take all the money I wanted and just see how far I'd get." All the while she talks she is pleading, underneath. I don't listen to that part of it. "So I came here yesterday and I was to phone her the way you sign your name, and she would call the bank and fix it up."

"Nice of her."

"No it wasn't. She did it because she thought it would be amusing. She has so much money that it wouldn't cost her anything. Anything she'd notice. And then you found out about it, I don't know how, and gave her the checkbook. When she came back last night she was wild. It wasn't half the fun she thought. All you did was to be amusing in a restaurant for a couple of hours. Please don't look at me like that. I just did what I could. I—had to. Please—I had to."

I keep on looking at her, thinking. Finally, "Miss Brandt, you said a thing yesterday—my God, was it only yesterday? —about my not being able to paint now because I don't know why I painted before. Do you know what you were talking about?"

"I——" and the lashes go down, the hands busy themselves, "——I only know sort of generally. I mean, if you can do a thing and know how you do it and—and especially

why, and then something stops you, I think it's easy to see the thing that stops you."

So I lean against the door and look at her in the way that makes her squirm (I'm sorry but that's the way I look when I'm thinking) and I think:

Does anyone ask a painter—even the painter himself—*why* he paints? Now me, I painted . . . used to . . . whatever I saw that was beautiful. It had to be beautiful to me, through and through, before I would paint it. And I used to be a pretty simple fellow, and found many completely beautiful things to paint.

But the older you get the fewer completely beautiful things you see. Every flower has a brown spot somewhere, and a hippogriff has evil laughter. So at some point in his development an artist has to paint, not what he sees (which is what I've always done) but the beauty in what he sees. Most painters, I think, cross this line early; I'm crossing it late.

And the simple—child?—artist paints for himself . . . but when he grows up he sees through the eyes of the beholder, and feels through his fingertips, and helps him to see that which the artist is gifted to see. Those who had wept over my work up to now, I used to say, had stolen meanings out of it, against my will. When I grow up, perhaps they will accept what I willingly give them. And because Miss Brandt feels this is worth giving, she has tried to get more of it for people.

So I had stopped painting because I had become too discerning, and could find nothing perfect enough to paint. But now it occurs to me that the girl with the silver in her hair can be painted for the beauty she has, regardless of her other ugliness. Atlantes had a magic, and in it one walked the battlements of a bastion—which was only, in truth, a byre. Miss Brandt can paint me, in her mind, as a man who turned back all the money in the world, and, for her, this is a real nobility.

The only key to the complexity of living is to understand that this world contains two-and-a-half-billion worlds, each built in a person's eyes and all different, and all susceptible to beauty and hungry for it.

I ran out of things to paint . . . and now, now, there'll never be enough time to paint beauty! Rogero did a knightly thing on the black rock, because he was not a good knight. I did a manly thing about the money because I was a fool. All successes are accidents in someone's world . . . so: "You tell her it worked, Miss Brandt. I'm going to paint, Miss Brandt; I'm going to paint *you,* Miss Brandt, because you're beautiful."

And I paint, and she is, because I paint, because she is.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The vitality of science fiction can be measured in part by the writers it attracts. In this collection, three writers of widely divergent interests have contributed their unique talents to tell stories that attest to the excitement of an imagination-kindling idea.

JESSAMYN WEST is one of America's best-selling and most distinguished authors. Her published works include THE FRIENDLY PERSUASION (a collection of stories) and two novels, each of which has been extraordinarily well received by both critics and readers. THE WITCH DIGGERS was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in 1951. Joseph Henry Jackson wrote of it in the *San Francisco Chronicle:* "There will be few novels, this season or any other season, as well done or with as much to say that the honest and serious reader will recognize as universal truth." Most recently she has published CRESS DELAHANTY (also a Book-of-the-Month Club choice), a series of story sketches of adolescence which *The Saturday Review* described as "very true and very good." "Little Men" bears evidence of her exceptional powers as a novelist, and marks her debut into a new field.

LESTER DEL REY, in fifteen prolific years of writing, has written almost every conceivable kind of story in science fiction and fantasy. His interests range from archaeology to zoomorphisms, and explain in part the versatility and power of his fiction. But only in part, for the hallmark of a del Rey story is a mastery of narrative construction that is as unpredictable as it is satisfying—as readers of *Galaxy* or *Astounding Science Fiction* can testify. In "For I Am a Jealous People!" he explores a challenging idea in a new and wholly unexpected way.

THEODORE STURGEON, in the years since his first stories were appearing in *Unknown,* has amused, terrified, and delighted a growing audience with such superlative fantasies as "It," "The Ultimate Egoist," and "Maturity." During this period he also wrote a novel, THE DREAMING JEWELS, and published two collections of his shorter fiction, WITHOUT SORCERY and E PLURIBUS UNICORN. His latest novel is MORE THAN HUMAN, a brilliant conception of a new kind of superman, that the *New York Herald Tribune* has hailed as "a masterpiece of provocative storytelling."

FREDERIK POHL is both a top-ranking editor and a deftly satiric author of science fiction (THE SPACE MERCHANTS, SEARCH THE SKY). His two previous annual collections of STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES have drawn reviews such as these: "prime quality" (from *The New York Times*) and "first rate . . . a bright, fresh collection, lively in ideas and writing." (*New York Herald Tribune.*) STAR SHORT NOVELS, dedicated to the intermediate length in which so much of the best science fiction has appeared, may well be his finest collection yet.

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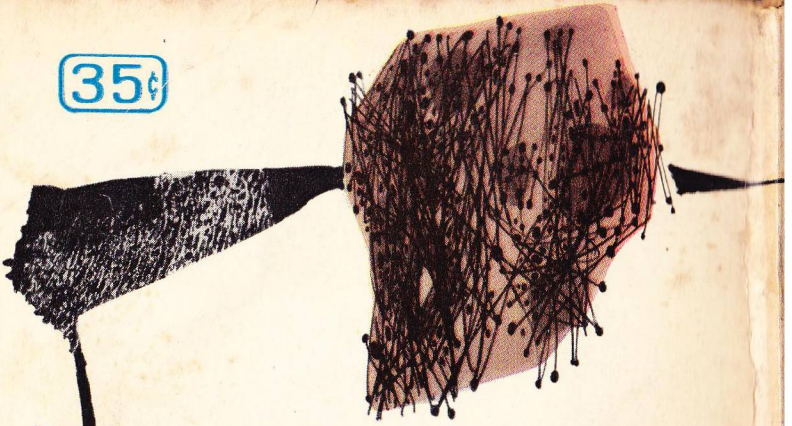

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