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THE BEST STORIES FROM THE FAMOUS STAR COLLECTIONS

STAR OF STARS

EDITED BY FREDERIK POHL

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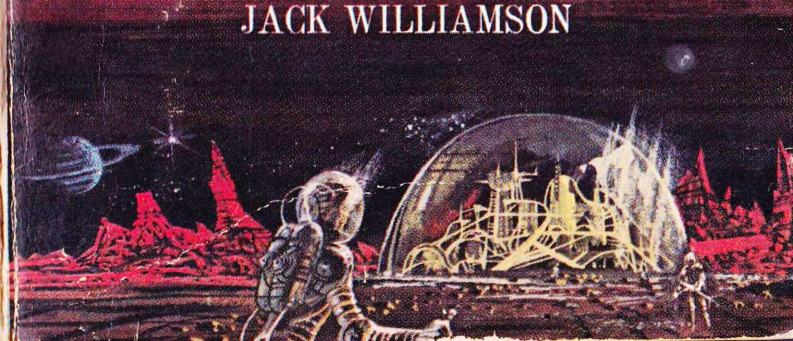

Selected by Mr. Pohl from the volumes of STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, this splendid anthology contains stories which cover a multitude of subjects—but it must have been a difficult choice to make. Fans have only to look at the roster of stories to be reminded of other tales by these authors which are also in the STAR series and which might just as easily have appeared in this "cream of the crop" collection—Arthur Clarke's "The Nine Billion Names of God" for instance, or Fritz Leiber's classic satire on a certain very famous, very bloody minded detective.

Science fiction fans indeed, need no introduction to the stories in this collection, or to these authors.

Let it be said quite simply that these are the kind of authors whose work goes far to explain why more and more people are reading science fiction: not only for the usual rewards of gripping narrative, but because these writers bring closer fascinating new worlds and make them vivid and alive.

BOOKS BY FREDERIK POHL

Alternating Currents
The Case Against Tomorrow
Tomorrow Times Seven
Slave Ship
The Man Who Ate the World

BOOKS EDITED BY FREDERIK POHL

Star Science Fiction Series—Nos. 1 to 6
Star Science Fiction Short Novels
Star of Stars

IN COLLABORATION WITH C. M. KORNBLUTH

The Space Merchants
Gladiator-at-Law
Search the Sky
A Town is Drowning
Presidential Year
Wolfbane

STAR OF STARS

Edited by FREDERIK POHL

Ballantine Books New York

All of the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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STAR OF STARS

INTRODUCTION

In 1953 the first volume of *Star Science Fiction Stories* appeared. It was a curious, hybrid publishing format, not quite a magazine and yet not very like the ordinary varieties of book. Its plan was simply to find enough of the best science fiction stories that could be had and to print them; and the one editorial rule established was that they must never have been published before.

It is only rules of that sort—mechanical rules, rules which admit of a simple yes-no answer—that can rigorously be applied in the selection of science fiction stories. Every other rule begins with a numerous class of exceptions. Science fiction is *not* stories about the future. Or about space. Or about technology. It is all of these things, and more than them. Science fiction lies in the eye of the beholder. In fact, said the introduction to that first volume of *Star,* it is a limitless field, as spacious as space itself. Publisher, critic, and a good many readers have a tendency to think of science fiction as one of the "categories" of publishing, in the specific sense of the term, like detective stories and Westerns. But unless you can think of *The Big Sky* as a Western or *Hamlet* as a whodunit, you can hardly class in a tight little group so widely variant an assortment of stories as justly fit under the common label of science fiction.

Was that a fair estimate of the situation? Well, let's look at the record.

Since then there have been eight volumes of one sort or another in the *Star* series. The aggregate is seventy-five stories, amounting to some half-million words. They have among them carried us to nearly all the planets of the solar system, including our own earth (both surface and interior) and its moon; we have circled many foreign stars and wandered in the space between them. In time we have seen both past and future—including a past that never

really was (see Bester's "Disappearing Act") and futures that, heaven grant, will never be at all. (See the assorted waspish predictions of Kornbluth, Matheson, and Bloch.) Earth itself was invaded many times, for many reasons; half a dozen times civilization was destroyed. (And half a dozen more times it should have been. Surely such surviving cultures as those of Kornbluth and Matheson, for two, are really better off dead.)

But these themes, situations, and events are no more than the pegs on which *Star's* fifty-six contributors hung their imaginings. Science fiction can be, when it chooses, a literature of ideas. If *Star* proved anything in seven years, surely it proved that there are ideas which can be explored in no other way.

The stories included in this volume can speak for themselves, but perhaps we can spare a word for some which, for one reason or another, had to be left out. The only volume in the series not represented is *Star Short Novels,* and that because, though each of its three stories —by Lester del Ray, Jessamyn West and Theodore Sturgeon—was a memorable work, any one of them would by sheer mass have squeezed out three or four others. It seemed a necessary rule that the very longest stories simply could not be made to fit.

The other ground rule observed in constructing the present volume was that, given a choice, the story less frequently reprinted would get the nod. On that sharp edge of decision were lost such ornaments as the Bradburys, the Asimovs, the Sheckleys, and a dozen others. A few stories simply would not allow themselves to be left out for any reason at all, and so Leiber's tale is here in spite of its having appeared in a previous collection, Clarke's despite its having formed the basis of his full-dress novel of the same name, and so on. But the number is quite few. Of the fourteen stories herein, only four have appeared anywhere in this country except for their first use in *Star* itself.

It seems at this point more than likely that there will be no future issues of *Star.* It would not be fitting to see

it end without some words of thanks. I acknowledge deep gratitude, then, to the writers who gave it fine stories, to the critics who treated all of its incarnations most kindly and, most of all, to Ian Ballantine, least remote of publishers, who conceived the plan of the series in the first place and, with endless patience, saw its editor through eight ill-kept deadlines.

FREDERIK POHL

Red Bank, New Jersey
February, 1960

GERALD KERSH

Gerald Kersh writes much and very well, and Star's *pleasure in having a Kersh to offer is one that has been shared by most of the best magazines in the world. Yet no matter where he appears, in sober, mass-circulation company or in small and select, the man has always his own flavor. He tastes of the wry, he exudes the not-quite-probable. This is the bouquet of the science fictioneer; and when Kersh turns to* our *sort of subject matter he shapes it with a sure hand—as you can see for yourself in—*

Whatever Happened to Corporal Cuckoo

Several thousand officers and privates of the U. S. Army who fought in Europe in World War II can bear witness to certain basic facts in this otherwise incredible story.

Let me refresh my witnesses' memories:

The Cunard White Star liner *Queen Mary* sailed from Greenock, at the mouth of the river Clyde, on July 6th, 1945, bound for New York, packed tight with passengers. No one who made that voyage can have forgotten it: there were fourteen thousand men aboard; a few ladies; and one dog. The dog was a gentle, intelligent German shepherd, saved from slow and painful death by a young American officer in Holland. I was told that this brave animal, exhausted, and weak with hunger, had tried to jump over a high barbed-wire fence, and had got caught in the barbs on the top strand, where it hung for days, unable to go forward or backward. The young officer

helped it down, and so the dog fell in love with the man, and the man fell in love with the dog. Pets are not allowed on troopships. Still, the young officer managed to get his dog on board. Rumor has it that his entire company swore that they would not return to the United States without the dog, so that the authorities were persuaded to stretch a point, just for once; this is what Kipling meant when he referred to The Power Of The Dog. Everyone who sailed on the *Queen Mary* from Greenock on July 6th, 1954, remembers that dog. It came aboard in a deplorable state, arching its bedraggled back to ease its poor injured stomach, and when you stroked it, you felt its skeleton under the sickly, staring coat. After about three days of affectionate care—half a hundred strong hungry men begged or stole bits of meat for its sake—the dog began to recover. By July 11th, when the *Queen Mary* docked in New York, the dog was taking a dog's interest in a soft rubber ball with which several officers were playing on the sun deck.

I bring all this back into memory to prove that I was there, as a war correspondent, on my way to the Pacific. Since I was wearing battledress and a beard, I also must have been conspicuous, that voyage. And the secret school of illicit crapshooters must remember me with nostalgic affection: I arrived in New York with exactly fifteen cents, and had to borrow five dollars from an amiable Congregationalist minister named John Smith, who also will testify to the fact that I was on board. If further evidence were needed, a lady nurse, Lieutenant Grace Dimichele, of Vermont, took my photograph as we came into port.

But in the excitement of that tremendous moment, when thousands of men were struggling and jostling, laughing and crying, and snapping cameras at the New York skyline, which is the most beautiful in the world, I lost Corporal Cuckoo. I have made exhaustive inquiries as to his whereabouts, but that extraordinary man had disappeared like a puff of smoke.

Surely, there must be scores of men who retain some memory of Cuckoo, whom they must have seen hundreds and hundreds of times on the *Queen Mary* between July 6th and July 11th, 1945?

He was a light-haired man of medium height, but he must have weighed at least a hundred and ninety pounds, for he was ponderously built, and had enormously heavy bones. I beg my fellow passengers to remember, if they can. He had watery eyes of greenish-gray, and limped a little on his right leg. His teeth were powerful—large, square and slightly protruding; but generally he kept them covered with his thick, curiously wrinkled lips. People in general are unobservant, I know, but no one who saw Corporal Cuckoo could fail to remember his scars. There was a frightful indentation in his skull, between his left eyebrow and his right ear. When I first noticed him, I remembered an ax murder at which I shuddered many years ago when I was a crime reporter. He must have an extraordinary constitution if he lives to walk around with a scar like that, I thought. His chin and throat were puckered scar tissue such as marks the place where flesh has been badly burned and well healed. Half of his right ear was missing and close by there was another scar, from cheekbone to mastoid. The back of his right hand appeared to have been hacked with a knife —I counted at least four formidable cuts, all old and white and deep. He conveyed this impression: that a long time ago, a number of people had got together to butcher him with hatchets, sabers, and knives, and that in spite of their most determined efforts he had survived. For all his scars were old. Yet the man was young—not more than thirty-five, as I guessed.

He filled me with a burning curiosity. One of you *must* remember him! He went about, surly and unsociable, smoking cigarettes which he never took out of his mouth—he smoked them down and spat the ends out only when the fire touched his lips. That, I thought, must be why his eyes are so watery. He moped about, thinking, or brooding. He was particularly addicted to loitering on the stairs and lurking in dark corners. I made tentative inquiries about him around the decks; but just then everyone was passionately interested in an officer who looked like Spencer Tracy. But in the end I found out for myself.

Liquor, also, was prohibited on troopships. Having

been warned of this, I took the precaution of smuggling some bottles of whiskey aboard. On the first day out I offered a drink to a captain of infantry. Before I knew where I was, I had made seventeen new friends who overwhelmed me with affability and asked for my autograph; so that on the second day, having thrown the last of the empty bottles out of the porthole, I was glad to sponge a drink off Mr. Charles Bennett, the Hollywood playwright. (He, too, if his modesty permits, will bear witness that I am telling the truth.) He gave me a ginger-ale bottle full of good Scotch, which I concealed in the blouse of my battledress, not daring to let any of my friends know that I had it. Late in the evening of the third day, I withdrew to a quiet spot where there was a strong-enough diffusion of yellow light for me to read by. I intended to struggle again through some of the poems of François Villon, and to refresh myself at intervals with a spot of Mr. Bennett's Scotch. It was hard to find an unoccupied place beyond locked doors on the *Queen Mary* at that time, but I found one. I was trying to read Villon's *Ballade of Good Counsel,* which that great poet wrote in medieval underworld slang, which is all but incomprehensible even to erudite Frenchmen who have studied the argot of the period. I repeated the first two lines aloud, hoping to talk some new meaning into them:

Car ou soie porteur de bulles
Pipeur ou hasardeur de dez

Then a languid voice said: "Hello there! What do *you* know about it?"

I looked up and saw the somber, scarred face of the mysterious corporal half in and half out of the shadows. There was nothing to do but offer him a drink, for I had the bottle in my hand, and he was looking at it. He thanked me curtly, half emptied the little bottle in one gulp and returned it to me. *"Pipeur ou hasardeur de dez,"* he said, sighing. "That's old stuff. Do you like it, sir?"

I said, "Very much indeed. What a great man Villon must have been. Who else could have used such debased language to such effect? Who else could have taken

thieves' patter—which is always ugly—and turned it into beautiful poetry?"

"You understand it, eh?" he asked, with a half laugh.

"I can't say that I do," I said, "but it certainly makes poetry."

"Yes, I know."

"Pipeur ou hasardeur de dez. You might as well try to make poetry out of something like this, *'I don't care if you run some Come-to-Jesus racket, or shoot craps . . .*!' Who are you? What's the idea? It's a hell of a long time since they allowed you to wear a beard in the army."

"War correspondent," I said. "My name is Kersh. You might as well finish this."

He emptied the little bottle and said, "Thanks, Mr. Kersh. My name is Cuckoo."

He threw himself down beside me, striking the deck like a sack of wet sand. "Yeahp . . . I think I will sit down," he said. Then he took my little book in his frightfully scarred right hand, flapped it against his knee, and then gave it back to me. *"Hasardeur de dez!"* he said, in an outlandish accent.

"You read Villon, I see," I said.

"No, I don't. I'm not much of a reader."

"But you speak French? Where did you learn it?" I asked.

"In France."

"On your way home now?"

"I guess so."

"You're not sorry, I daresay."

"No, I guess not."

"You were in France?"

"Holland."

"In the army long?"

"Quite a while."

"Do you like it?"

"Sure. It's all right, I guess. Where are you from?"

"London," I said.

He said, "I've been there."

"And where do you come from?" I asked.

"What? . . . Me? . . . Oh, from New York, I guess."

"And how did you like London?" I asked.

"It's improved."

"Improved? I was afraid you'd seen it at a disadvantage, what with the bombing, and all that," I said.

"Oh, London's all right. I guess."

"You should have been there before the war, Corporal Cuckoo."

"I was there before the war."

"You must have been very young then," I said.

Corporal Cuckoo replied, "Not so damn young."

I said, "I'm a war correspondent, and newspaperman, and so I have the right to ask impertinent questions. I might, you know, write a piece about you for my paper. What sort of name is Cuckoo? I've never heard it before."

For the sake of appearances I had taken out a notebook and pencil. The corporal said, "My name isn't really Cuckoo. It's a French name, originally—*Lecocu*. You know what that means, don't you?"

Somewhat embarrassed, I replied, "Well, if I remember rightly, a man who is *cocu* is a man whose wife has been unfaithful to him."

"That's right."

"Have you any family?"

"No."

"But you have been married?" I asked.

"Plenty."

"What do you intend to do when you get back to the States, Corporal Cuckoo?"

He said, "Grow flowers, and keep bees and chickens."

"All alone?"

"That's right," said Corporal Cuckoo.

"Flowers, bees and chickens! . . . What kind of flowers?" I asked.

"Roses," he said, without hesitation. Then he added, "Maybe a little later on I'll go south."

"What on earth for?" I asked.

"Turpentine."

Corporal Cuckoo, I thought, must be insane. Thinking of this, it occurred to me that his brain might have been deranged by the wound that had left that awful scar on

his head. I said, "They seem to have cut you up a bit, Corporal Cuckoo."

"Yes, sir, a little bit here and there," he said, chuckling. "Yeahp, I've taken plenty in my time."

"So I should think, Corporal. The first time I saw you I was under the impression that you'd got caught up in some machinery, or something of the sort."

"What do you mean, machinery?"

"Oh, no offense, Corporal, but those wounds on your head and face and neck haven't the appearance of wounds such as you might get from any weapon of modern warfare——"

"Who said they were?" said Corporal Cuckoo, roughly. Then he filled his lungs with air, and blew out a great breath which ended in an exclamation: *"Phoo*-wow! What was that stuff you gave me to drink?"

"Good Scotch. Why?"

"It's good all right. I didn't ought to drink it. I've laid off the hard stuff for God knows how many years. It goes to my head. I didn't ought to touch it."

"Nobody asked you to empty a twelve-ounce ginger-ale bottle full of Scotch in two drinks," I said resentfully.

"I'm sorry, mister. When we get to New York, I'll buy you a whole bottle, if you like," said Corporal Cuckoo, squinting as if his eyes hurt and running his fingers along the awful crevasse of that scar in his head.

I said, "That was a nasty one you got, up there."

"What? *This?"* he said, carelessly striking the scar with the flat of a hard hand. "This? Nasty one? I'll say it was a nasty one. Why, some of my brains came out. And look here—" He unbuttoned his shirt and pulled up his undershirt with his left hand, while he opened and lit a battered Zippo with his right. "Take a look at that."

I cried out in astonishment. I had never seen a living body so incredibly mauled and mutilated. In the vacillating light of the flame I saw black shadows bobbing and weaving in a sort of blasted wilderness of crags, chasms, canyons and pits. His torso was like a place laid waste by the wrath of God—burst asunder from below, scorched from above, shattered by thunderbolts, crushed by landslides, ravaged by hurricanes. Most of his ribs, on the

left-hand side, must have been smashed into fragments no bigger than the last joint of a finger by some tremendously heavy object. The bones, miraculously, had knit together again, so that there was a circle of hard, bony knobs rimming a deep indentation; in that light it reminded me of one of the dead volcanoes on the moon. Just under the sternum there was a dark hole, nearly three inches long, about half an inch wide, and hideously deep. I have seen such scars in the big muscles of a man's thigh—but never in the region of the breastbone. "Good God, man, you must have been torn in two and put together again!" I said. Corporal Cuckoo merely laughed, and held his lighter so that I could see his body from stomach to hips. Between the strong muscles, just under the liver, there was an old scar into which, old and healed though it was, you might have laid three fingers. Cutting across this, another scar, more than half as deep but more than twelve inches long, curved away downward toward the groin on the left. Another appalling scar came up from somewhere below the buckle of his belt and ended in a deep triangular hole in the region of the diaphragm. And there were other scars—but the lighter went out, and Corporal Cuckoo buttoned up his shirt.

"Is that something?" he asked.

"Is that something!" I cried. "Why, good God, I'm no medical man, but I can see that the least of those wounds you've got down there ought to be enough to kill any man. How do you manage to be alive, Cuckoo? How is it possible?"

"You think you've seen something? Listen, you've seen nothing till you see my back. But never mind about that now."

"Tell me," I said, "how the devil did you come by all that? They're old scars. You couldn't have got them in this war——"

He slid down the knot of his tie, unbuttoned his collar, pulled his shirt aside, and said, dispassionately, "No. Look—this is all I got this time." He pointed nonchalantly to his throat. I counted five bullet scars in a cluster, spaced like the fingertips of a half-opened hand, at the base of the throat. "Light machine-gun," he said.

"But this is impossible!" I said, while he readjusted his tie. "That little packet there must have cut one or two big arteries and smashed your spine to smithereens."

"Sure it did," said Corporal Cuckoo.

"And how old did you say you were?" I asked.

Corporal Cuckoo replied, "Round about four hundred and thirty-eight."

"Thirty-eight?"

"I said four hundred and thirty-eight."

The man is mad, I thought. "Born 1907?" I asked.

"1507," said Corporal Cuckoo, fingering the dent in his skull. Then he went on, half-dreamily. (How am I to describe his manner? It was repulsively compounded of thick stupidity, low cunning, anxiety, suspicion and sordid calculation—it made me remember a certain peasant who tried to sell me an American wristwatch near Saint Jacques in 1944. But Corporal Cuckoo talked American, at first leering at me in the dim light, and feeling his shirt as if to assure himself that all his scars were safely buttoned away.) He said, slowly, "Look . . . I'll give you the outline. It's no use you trying to sell the outline, see? You're a newspaperman. Though you might know what the whole story would be worth, there's no use you trying to sell what I'm giving you now, because you haven't got a hope in hell. But I've got to get back to work, see? I want some dough."

I said, "For roses, chickens, bees and turpentine?"

He hesitated, and then said, "Well, yes," and rubbed his head again.

"Does it bother you?" I asked.

"Not if I don't touch that stuff you gave me," he replied, dreamily resentful.

"Where did you get that scar?" I asked.

"Battle of Turin," he said.

"I don't remember any Battle of Turin, Corporal Cuckoo. When was that?"

"Why, *the* Battle of Turin. I got this in the Pass of Suze."

"You were wounded in the Pass of Suze at the Battle of Turin, is that right? When was that?" I asked.

"In 1536 or 1537. King François sent us up against the

Marquess de Guast. The enemy was holding the pass, but we broke through. That was my first smell of gunpowder."

"You were there of course, Corporal Cuckoo?"

"Sure I was there. But I wasn't a corporal then, and my name was not Cuckoo. They called me Lecocu. My real name was Lecoq. I came from Yvetot. I used to work for a man who made linen—Nicolas, the——"

Two or three minutes passed, while the corporal told me what he thought of Nicolas. Then, having come down curse by curse out of a red cloud of passion, he continued: ". . . To cut it short, Denise ran off, and all the kids in the town were singing:

Lecoq, lecoq, lecoq,
Lecoq, lecoq, lecocu.

I got the hell out of it and joined the army. . . . I'm not giving you anything you can make anything of, see? This is the layout, see? . . . Okay. I was about thirty, then, and in pretty good shape. Well, so when King François sent us to Turin—Monsieur de Montagan was Colonel-General of Infantry—my Commander, Captain Le Rat, led us up a hill to a position, and we sure had a hot five minutes! It was anybody's battle until the rest cut through, and then we advanced, and I got *this.*"

The Corporal touched his head. I asked, "How?"

"From a halberdier. You know what a halberd is, don't you? It's sort of heavy ax on the end of a ten-foot pole. You can split a man down to the waist with a halberd, if you know how to handle it. See? If it had landed straight—well, I guess I wouldn't be here right now. But I saw it coming, see, and I ducked, and just as I ducked my foot slipped in some blood, and I fell sideways. But all the same that halberdier got me. Right here, just where the scar is. See? Then everything went sort of black-and-white, and black, and I passed out. But I wasn't dead, see? I woke up, and there was the army doctor, with a cheap steel breastplate on—no helmet—soaked with blood up to the elbows. *Our* blood, you can bet your life—you know what medical officers are?"

I said soothingly, "Oh yes, I know, I know. And this, you say, was in 1537?"

"Maybe 1536, I don't remember exactly. As I was say-

ing, I woke up, and I saw the doctor, and he was talking to some other doctor that I couldn't see; and all around men were shouting their heads off—asking their friends to cut their throats and put them out of their misery . . . asking for priests . . . I thought I was in hell. My head was split wide open, and I could feel a sort of draft playing through my brains, and everything was going *bump-bump, bumpety-bump, bump-bump-bump.* But although I couldn't move or speak I could see and hear what was going on. The doctor looked at me and said . . ."

Corporal Cuckoo paused. "He said?" I asked, gently.

"Well," said Corporal Cuckoo, with scorn, "you don't even know the meaning of what you were reading in your little book—*Pipeur ou hasardeur de dez,* and all that—even when it's put down in cold print. I'll put it so that you'll understand. The doctor said something like this: 'Come here and look, sir, come and see! This fellow's brains were bursting out of his head. If I had applied Theriac, he would be buried and forgotten by now. Instead, having no Theriac, for want of something better, I applied my Digestive. And see what has happened. His eyes have opened! Observe, also that the bones are creeping together and over this beating brain a sort of skin is forming. My treatment must be right, because God is healing him!' Then the one I couldn't see said something like: 'Don't be a fool, Ambroise. You're wasting your time and your medicine on a corpse.' Well, the doctor looked down at me, and touched my eyes with the ends of his fingers—like this—and I blinked. But the one I couldn't see said: 'Must you waste time and medicine on the dead?'

"After I blinked my eyes, I couldn't open them again. I couldn't see. But I could still hear, and when I heard that, I was as scared as hell they were going to bury me alive. And I couldn't move. But the doctor I'd seen said: 'After five days this poor soldier's flesh is still sweet, and, weary as I am, I have my wits about me, and I swear to you that I saw his eyes open.' Then he called out: 'Jehan! Bring the Digestive! . . . By your leave, sir, I will keep this man until he comes back to life, or begins to stink.

And into this wound I am going to pour some more of my Digestive.'

"Then I felt something running into my head. It hurt like hell. It was like ice water dripped into your brains. I thought *This is it!*—and then I went numb all over, and then I went dead again, until I woke up later in another place. The young doctor was there, without his armor this time, but he had a sort of soft hat on. This time I could move and talk, and I asked for something to drink. When he heard me talk, the doctor opened his mouth to let out a shout, but stopped himself, and gave me some wine out of a cup. But his hands were shaking so that I got more wine in my beard than in my mouth. I used to wear a beard in those days, just like you—only a bigger one, all over my face. I heard somebody come running from the other end of the room. I saw a boy—maybe fifteen or sixteen years old. This kid opened his mouth and started to say something, but the doctor got him by the throat and said . . . put it like this: 'For your life, Jehan, be quiet!'

"The kid said: 'Master! You have brought him back from the dead!'

"Then the doctor said: 'Silence, for your life, or do you want to smell burning faggots?'

"Then I went to sleep again, and when I woke up I was in a little room with all the windows shut and a big fire burning so that it was hotter than hell. The doctor was there, and his name was Ambroise Paré. Maybe you have read about Ambroise Paré?"

"Do you mean the Ambroise Paré who became an army surgeon under Anne de Montmorency in the army of Francis the First?"

Corporal Cuckoo said, "That's what I was saying, wasn't it? Francois Premier, Francis the First. De Montmorency was our Lieutenant-General, when we got mixed up with Charles V. The whole thing started between France and Italy, and that's how I came to get my head cracked when we went down the hill near Turin. I told you, didn't I?"

"Corporal Cuckoo," I said, "you have told me that you are four hundred and thirty-eight years old. You were

born in 1507, and left Yvetot to join the army after your wife made a fool of you with a linen merchant named Nicolas. Your name was Lecoq, and the children called you Lecocu. You fought at the Battle of Turin, and were wounded in the Pass of Suze about 1537. Your head was cut open with a halberd, or poleax, and some of your brains came out. A surgeon named Ambroise Paré poured into the wound in your head what you called a Digestive. So you came back to life—more than four hundred years ago! Is this right?"

"You've got it," said Corporal Cuckoo, nodding. "I knew you'd get it."

I was stupefied by the preposterousness of it all, and could only say, with what must have been a silly giggle, "Well, my venerable friend; by all accounts, after four hundred and thirty-odd years of life you ought to be tremendously wise—as full of wisdom, learning, and experience as the British Museum Library."

"Why?" asked Corporal Cuckoo.

"Why? Well," I said, "it's an old story. A philosopher, let us say, or a scientist, doesn't really begin to learn anything until his life is almost ended. What wouldn't he give for five hundred extra years of life? For five hundred years of life he'd sell his soul, because given that much time, knowledge being power, he could be master of the whole world."

Corporal Cuckoo said, "Baloney! What you say might go for philosophers, and all that. They'd just go on doing what they were interested in, and they might—well—learn how to turn iron into gold, or something. But what about a baseball player, for instance, or a boxer? What would they do with five hundred years? What they were fit to do —swing bats or throw leather! What would *you* do?"

"Why, of course, you're right, Corporal Cuckoo," I said. "I'd just go on and on banging a typewriter and chucking my money down the drain, so that in five hundred years from now I'd be no wiser and no richer than I am at this moment."

"No, wait a minute," he said, tapping my arm with a finger that felt like a rod of iron, and leering at me shrewdly. "You'd go on writing books and things. You're

paid on a percentage basis, so in five hundred years you'd have more than you could spend. But how about me? All I'm fit for is to be in the army. I don't give a damn for philosophy, and all that stuff. It don't mean a thing to me. I'm no wiser now than I was when I was thirty. I never did go in for reading, and all that stuff, and I never will. My ambition is to get me a place like Jack Dempsey's on Broadway."

"I thought you said you wanted to grow roses, and chickens, and bees, and turpentine trees and whatnot," I said.

"Yeahp, that's right."

"How do you reconcile the two? . . . I mean, how does a restaurant on Broadway fit in with the bees and roses et cetera?"

"Well, it's like this . . ." said Corporal Cuckoo.

". . . I told you about how Doctor Paré healed up my head when it was split open so that my brains were coming out. Well, after I could walk about a bit he let me stay in his house, and I can tell you, he fed me on the fat of the land, though he didn't live any too damn well himself. Yeahp, he looked after me like a son—a hell of lot better than my old man ever looked after me: chickens, eggs in wine, anything I wanted. If I said, 'I guess I'd like a pie made with skylarks for dinner,' I had it. If I said, 'Doc, this wine is kind of sour,' up came a bottle of Alicante or something. Inside two or three weeks, I was fitter and stronger than I'd ever been before. So then I got kind of restless and said I wanted to go. Well, Doctor Paré said he wanted me to stay. I said to him, 'I'm an active man, Doc, and I've got my living to get; and before I got this little crack on the head I heard that there was money to be made in one army or another right now.'

"Well, then Doctor Paré offered me a couple of pieces of gold to stay in his house for another month. I took the money, but I knew then that he was up to something, and I went out of my way to find out. I mean, he was Army Surgeon, and I was nothing but a lousy infantryman. There was a catch in it somewhere, see? So I acted dumb, but I kept my eyes open, and made friends with Jehan, the kid

that helped around the doctor's office. This Jehan was a big-eyed, skinny kid, with one leg a bit shorter than the other, and he thought I was a hell of a fellow when I cracked a walnut between two fingers, and lifted up the big table, that must have weighed about five hundred pounds, on my back. This Jehan, he told me he'd always wanted to be a powerful guy like me. But he'd been sick since before he was born, and might not have lived at all if Doctor Paré hadn't saved his life. Well, so I went to work on Jehan, and I found out what the doctor's game was. You know doctors, eh?"

Corporal Cuckoo nudged me, and I said, "Uh uh, go on."

"Well it seems that up to the time when we got through the Pass of Suze, they'd treated what they called 'poisoned wounds' with boiling oil of elder with a dash of what they called Theriac. Theriac was nothing much more than honey and herbs. Well, so it seems that by the time we went up the hill, Doctor Paré had run out of the oil of elder and Theriac, and so, for want of something better, he mixed up what he called a Digestive.

"My commander, Captain Le Rat, the one that got the bullet that smashed up his ankle, was the first one to be dosed with the Digestive. His ankle got better," said Corporal Cuckoo, snapping his fingers, "like *that*. I was the third or fourth soldier to get a dose of Doctor Paré's Digestive. The doc was looking over the battlefield, because he wanted a dead body to cut up on the side. You know what doctors are. This kid Jehan told me he wanted a brain to play around with. Well, there was I, see, with my brains showing. All the doctor had to do was, reach down and help himself. Well, to cut it short, he saw that I was breathing, and wondered how the hell a man could be breathing after he'd got what I had. So he poured some of his Digestive into the hole in my head, tied it up, and watched for developments. I told you what happened then. I came back to life. More than that, the bones in my head grew together. Doctor Ambroise Paré believed he'd got something. So he was keeping me sort of under observation, and making notes.

"I know doctors. Well, anyway, I went to work on

Jehan. I said, 'Be a good fellow, Jehan, tell a pal what *is* this Digestive, or whatever your master calls it?'

"Jehan said, 'Why, sir, my master makes no secret of it. It is nothing but a mixture of egg yolks, oil of roses, and turpentine.' (I don't mind telling you that, bub, because it's already been printed.)"

I said to Corporal Cuckoo, "I don't know how the devil you come by these curious facts, but I happen to know that they're true. They are available in several histories of medicine. Ambroise Paré's Digestive, with which he treated the wounded after the Battle of Turin, was, as you say, nothing but a mixture of oil of roses, egg yolks, and turpentine. And it is also a fact that the first wounded man upon whom he tried it really was Captain Le Rat, in 1537. Paré said at the time, 'I dressed his wounds and God healed him.' . . . Well?"

"Yeahp," said Corporal Cuckoo, with a sneer. "Sure. Turpentine, oil of roses, egg. That's right. You know the proportions?"

"No, I don't," I said.

"I know you don't, bub. Well, I do. See? And I'll tell you something else. It's not just oil of roses, eggs and turpentine—there was one other thing Doc Paré slipped in in my case, for an experiment—see? And I know what it is."

I said, "Well, go on."

"Well, I could see that this Doctor Ambroise Paré was going to make something out of me, see? So I kept my eyes open, and I waited, and I worked on Jehan, until I found out just where the doctor kept his notebook. I mean, in those days you could get sixty or seventy thousand dollars for a bit of bone they called a 'unicorn's horn.' Hell, I mean, if I had something that could just about bring a man back from the dead—draw his bones together and put him on his feet in a week or two, even if his brains were coming out—hell, everybody was having a war then, and I could have been rich in a few minutes."

I said, "No doubt about that. What——"

"What the hell——" said Corporal Cuckoo, "what the hell right did he have to use me for a guinea pig? Where

would he have been if it hadn't been for me? And where do you think I'd have been after? Out on my neck with two or three gold pieces, while the doctor grabbed the credit and made millions out of it. I wanted to open a place in Paris—girls and everything, see? Could I do that on two or three gold pieces? I ask you! Okay; one night when Doctor Paré and Jehan were out, I took his notebook, slipped out of a window, and got the hell out of it.

"As soon as I thought I was safe, I went into a saloon, and drank some wine, and got into conversation with a girl. It seems somebody else was interested in this girl, and there was a fight. The other guy cut me in the face with a knife. I had a knife too. You know how it is—all of a sudden I felt something pulling my knife out of my hand, and I saw that I'd pushed it between this man's ribs. He was one of those mean little guys, about a hundred and twenty pounds, with a screwed-up face. (She was a great big girl with yellow hair.) I could see that I'd killed him, so I ran for my life, and I left my knife where it was—stuck tight between his ribs. I hid out, expecting trouble. But they never found me. Most of that night I lay under a hedge. I was pretty sick. I mean, he'd cut me from just under the eye to the back of my head—and cut me deep. He'd cut the top of my right ear off, clean. It wasn't only that it hurt like hell, but I knew I could be identified by that cut. I'd left half an ear behind me. It was me for the gallows, see? So I kept as quiet as I could, in a ditch, and went to sleep for a few hours before dawn. And then, when I woke up, that cut didn't hurt at all, not even my ear—and I can tell you that a cut ear sure does hurt. I went and washed my face in a pond, and when the water got still enough so I could see myself, I saw that cut and this ear had healed right up so that the marks looked five years old. All that in half a night! So I went on my way. About two days later, a farmer's dog bit me in the leg—took a piece out. Well, a bite like that ought to take weeks to heal up. But mine didn't. It was all healed over by next day, and there was hardly a scar. That stuff Paré poured on my head had made me so that any wound I might get, anywhere, any

time, would just heal right up—like magic. I knew I had something when I grabbed those papers of Paré's. But this was terrific!"

"You had them still, Corporal Cuckoo?"

"What do you think? Sure I had them, wrapped up in a bit of linen and tied round my waist, four pieces of it . . . not paper, the other stuff, parchment. That's it, parchment. Folded across, and sewn up along the fold. The outside bit was blank, like a cover. But the six pages inside were all written over. The hell of it was, I couldn't read. I'd never been learned. See? Well, I had the best part of my two gold pieces left, and I pushed on to Paris."

I asked, "Didn't Ambroise Paré say anything?"

Corporal Cuckoo sneered again. "What the hell could he say?" he asked. "Say what? Say he'd resurrected the dead with his Digestive? That would have finished him for sure. Where was his evidence? And you can bet your life that kid Jehan kept *his* mouth shut; he wouldn't want the doctor to know he'd squealed. See? No, nobody said a word. I got into Paris okay."

"What did you do there?" I asked.

"My idea was to find somebody I could trust to read those papers for me, see? If you want to know how I got my living, well, I did the best I could—never mind what. Well, one night, in a place where I was, I came across a student, mooching drinks, an educated man with no place to sleep. I showed him the doctor's papers, and asked him what they meant. They made him think a bit, but he got the hang of them. The doctor had written down just how he'd mixed that Digestive of his, and that only filled up one page. Four of the other pages were full of figures, and the only other writing was on the last page. It was all about me. And how he'd cured me."

I said, "With the yolks of eggs, oil of roses, and turpentine?"

Corporal Cuckoo nodded, and said, "Yeahp. Them three and something else."

I said, "I'll bet you anything you like I know what the fourth ingredient is, in this Digestive."

"What'll you bet?" asked Corporal Cuckoo.

I said, "I'll bet you a beehive."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, Corporal, it stands to reason. You said you wanted to raise chickens, roses, and bees. You said you wanted to go south for turpentine. You accounted for egg yolks, oil of roses, and turpentine in Doctor Paré's formula. What would a man like you want with bees? Obviously the fourth ingredient is honey."

"Yeahp," said Corporal Cuckoo. "You're right, bub. The doctor slipped in some honey." He opened a jackknife, looked at me narrowly, then snapped the blade back again and pocketed the knife, saying, "You don't know the proportions. You don't know how to mix the stuff. You don't know how hot it ought to be, or how slow you've got to let it cool."

"So you have the Secret of Life?" I said. "You're four hundred years old, and wounds can't kill you. It only takes a certain mixture of egg yolks, oil of roses, turpentine and honey. Is that right?"

"That's right," said Corporal Cuckoo.

"Well, didn't you think of buying the ingredients and mixing them yourself?"

"Well, yes, I did. The doctor had said in his notes how the Digestive he'd given to me and Captain Le Rat had been kept in a bottle in the dark for two years. So I made a wine bottle full of the stuff and kept it covered up away from the light for two years, wherever I went. Then me and some friends of mine got into a bit of trouble, and one of my friends, a guy called Pierre Solitude, got a pistol bullet in the chest. I tried the stuff on him, but he died. At the same time I got a swordcut in the side. Believe me or not, that healed up in nine hours, inside and out, of its own accord. You can make what you like of that. It all came out of something to do with robbing a church.

"I got out of France, and lived as best I could for about a year until I found myself in Salzburg. That was about four years after the battle of the Pass of Suze. Well, in Salzburg I came across some guy who told me that the greatest doctor in the world was in town. I remember this doctor's name, because, well, who wouldn't? It was Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim. He'd been a big shot in Basle a few years before. He was other-

wise known as Paracelsus. He wasn't doing much then. He hung around, most of the time, drinking himself crazy in a wine cellar called The Three Doves. I met him there one night—it must have been in 1541—and said my piece when nobody else was listening." Corporal Cuckoo laughed harshly.

I said, "Paracelsus was a very great man. He was one of the great doctors of the world."

"Oh, hell, he was only a fat old drunk. Certainly was higher than a kite when I saw him. Yelling his head off, banging on the table with an empty can. When I told him about this stuff, in strict confidence, he got madder than ever, called me everything he could think of—and believe me, he could think of plenty—and bent the can over my head. Broke the skin just where the hair starts. I was going to take a poke at him but then he calmed down a bit and said in Swiss-German, I think it was, 'Experiment, experiment! A demonstration! A demonstration! If you come back tomorrow and show me that cut perfectly healed, charlatan, I'll listen to you.' Then he burst out laughing, and I thought to myself, I'll give you something to laugh at, bub. So I took a walk, and that little cut healed up and was gone inside an hour. Then I went back to show him. I'd sort of taken a liking to the old soak, see? Well, when I get back to this tavern there's doctor Von Hohenheim, or Paracelsus, if you like, lying on his back dying of a dagger stab. He'd gotten into a fight with a woodcarver, and this woodcarver was as soused as he was, see? And so he let this Paracelsus have it. I never did have no luck, and I never will. We might have got along together, me and him, I only talked to him for half an hour, but so help me, you knew who was the boss when he was there, all right! Oh well, that was that."

"And then?" I asked.

"I'm just giving you the outline, see? If you want the whole story it's going to cost you plenty," said Corporal Cuckoo. "I bummed around Salzburg for a year, got whipped out of town for being a beggar, got the hell out of it to Switzerland, and signed on with a bunch of paid soldiers, what they called *Condottieri,* under a Swiss colonel, and did a bit of fighting in Italy. There was supposed

to be good pickings there. But somebody stole my little bit of loot, and we never even got half our pay in the end. Then I went to France, and met a sea captain by the name of Bordelais who was carrying brandy to England and was short of a man. A fast little English pirate boat stopped us in the Channel, and grabbed the cargo, cut Bordelais' throat and slung the crew overboard—all except me. The Limey captain, Hawker, liked the look of me. I joined the crew, but I never was much of a sailor. That hooker—hell, she wasn't bigger than one of the lifeboats on this ship—was called the *Harry,* after the King of England, Henry VIII, the one they made a movie about. Still, we did all right. We specialized in French brandy: stopped the Froggy boats in mid-channel, grabbed the cargo, shoved the captain and crew overboard. 'Dead men tell no tales,' old Hawker always said. Well, I jumped the ship somewhere near Rommey, with money in my pocket—I didn't like the sea, see? I'd had half a dozen nasty wounds, but they couldn't kill me. I was worried about what'd happen if I went overboard. You could shoot me through the head and not kill me, though it'd hurt like hell for a few days while the wound healed itself. But I just hated to think of what would happen if somebody tried to drown me. Get it? I'd have to wait under water till the fishes ate me, or till I just sort of naturally rotted away—alive all the time. And that's not nice.

"Well, as I was saying, I quit at Rommey and got to London. There was an oldish widow with a linen-draper's business near London Bridge. She had a bit of dough, and she took a fancy to me. Well, what the hell? I got married to her. Lived with her about thirteen years. She was a holy terror, at first, but I corrected her. Her name was Rose, and she died just about when Queen Elizabeth got to be Queen of England. That was around 1558, I guess. She was scared of me—Rose, I mean, not Queen Elizabeth, because I was always playing around with honey, and eggs, and turpentine, and oil of roses. She got older and older, and I stayed exactly the same as I was when I married her, and she didn't like that one little bit. She thought I was a witch. Said I had the Philosophers'

Stone, and knew the secret of perpetual youth. Hah, so help me, she wasn't so damn far wrong. She wanted me to let her in on it. But, as I was saying, I kept working on those notes of Doctor Paré's, and I mixed honey, turpentine, oil of roses, and the yolks of eggs, just as he'd done, in the right proportions, at the proper temperature, and kept the mixture bottled in the dark for the right length of time—and still it didn't work."

I asked Corporal Cuckoo, "How did you find out that your mixture didn't work?"

"Well, I tried it on Rose. She kept on at me till I did. Every now and again we had kind of a lovers' quarrel, and I tried the Digestive on her afterward. But she took as long to heal as any ordinary person would have taken. The interesting thing was that I not only couldn't be killed by a wound, *I couldn't get any older! I couldn't catch any diseases! I couldn't die!* And you can figure this for yourself: if some stuff that cured any sort of wound was worth a fortune, what would it be worth to me if I had something that would make people stay young and healthy forever? Eh?" He paused.

I said, "Interesting speculation. You might have given some of the stuff, for example, to Shakespeare. *He* got better and better as he went on. I wonder what he would have arrived at by now? I don't know, though. If Shakespeare had swallowed an elixir of life and perpetual youth when he was very young, he would have remained as he was, young and undeveloped. Maybe he might still be holding horses outside theatres—or whistling for taxis, a stage-struck country boy of undeveloped genius.

"If, on the other hand, he had taken the stuff when he wrote, say, *The Tempest*—there he'd be still, burnt up, worn out, world-weary, tired to death and unable to die. On the other hand, of course, some debauched rake of the Elizabethan period could go on being a debauched rake at high pressure, for centuries and centuries. But, oh my God, how bored he would get after a hundred years or so, and how he'd long for death! That would be dangerous stuff, that stuff of yours, Corporal Cuckoo!"

"Shakespeare?" he said. "Shakespeare? William Shakespeare. I met him. I met a buddy of his when I was fight-

ing in the Netherlands, and he introduced us when we got back to London. William Shakespeare—puffy-faced man, bald on top; used to wave his hands about when he talked. He took an interest in me. We talked a whole lot together."

"What did he say?" I asked.

Corporal Cuckoo replied, "Oh, hell, how can I remember every goddam word? He just asked questions, the same as you do. We just talked."

"And how did he strike you?" I asked.

Corporal Cuckoo considered, and then said, slowly, "The kind of man who counts his change and leaves a nickel tip.... One of these days I'm going to read his books, but I've never had much time for reading."

I said, "So, I take it that your only interest in Paré's Digestive has been a financial interest. You merely wanted to make money out of it. Is that so?"

"Why, sure," said Corporal Cuckoo. "I've had *my* shot of the stuff. *I'm* all right."

"Corporal Cuckoo, has it occurred to you that what you are after is next door to impossible?"

"How's that?"

"Well," I said, "your Paré's Digestive is made of egg yolk, oil of roses, turpentine and honey. Isn't that so?"

"Well, yes. So what? What's impossible about that?"

I said, "You know how a chicken's diet alters the taste of an egg, don't you?"

"Well?"

"What a chicken eats changes not only the taste, but the color of an egg. Any chicken farmer can tell you that. Isn't that so?"

"Well?"

"Well, what a chicken eats goes into the egg, doesn't it—just as the fodder that you feed a cow comes out in the milk? Have you stopped to consider how many different sorts of chickens there have been in the world since the Battle of Turin in 1537, and the varieties of chicken feed they might have pecked up in order to lay their eggs? Have you thought that the egg yolk is only one of four ingredients mixed in Ambroise Paré's Digestive? Is it possible that it has not occurred to you that this one ingredient

involves permutations and combinations of several millions of other ingredients?"

Corporal Cuckoo was silent. I went on, "Then take roses. If no two eggs are exactly alike, what about roses? You come from wine-growing country, you say: then you must know that the mere thickness of a wall can separate two entirely different kinds of wine—that a noble vintage may be crushed out of grapes grown less than two feet away from a vine that is good for nothing. The same applies to tobacco. Have you stopped to think of your roses? Roses are pollinated by bees, bees go from flower to flower, making them fertile. Your oil of roses, therefore, embodies an infinity of possible ingredients. Does it not?"

Corporal Cuckoo was still silent. I continued, with a kind of malicious enthusiasm. "You must reflect on these things, Corporal. Take turpentine. It comes out of trees. Even in the sixteenth century there were many known varieties of turpentine—Chian Terebinthine, and what not. But above all, my dear fellow, consider honey! There are more kinds of honey in the world than have ever been categorized. Every honeycomb yields a slightly different honey. You must know that bees living in heather gather and store one kind of honey, while bees living in an apple orchard give us something quite different. It is all honey, of course, but its flavor and quality are variable beyond calculation. Honey varies from hive to hive, Corporal Cuckoo. I say nothing of wild bees' honey."

"Well?" he said, glumly.

"Well. All this is relatively simple, Corporal, in relation to what comes next. I don't know how many beehives there are in the world. Assume that in every hive there are—let us be moderate—one thousand bees. (There are more than that, of course, but I am trying to simplify.) You must realize that every one of these bees brings home a slightly different drop of honey. Every one of these bees may, in its travels, take honey from fifty different flowers. The honey accumulated by all the bees in the hive is mixed together. Any single cell in any honeycomb out of any hive contains scores of subtly different elements! I say nothing of the time element; honey six

months old is very different from honey out of the same hive, left for ten years. From day to day, honey changes. Now taking all possible combinations of eggs, roses, turpentine and honey—where are you? Answer me that, Corporal Cuckoo."

Corporal Cuckoo struggled with this for a few seconds, and then said, "I don't get it. You think I'm nuts, don't you?"

"I never said so," I said uneasily.

"No, you never *said* so. Well, listen. Don't give me all that double talk. I'm doing you a favor. Look——"

He took out and opened his jackknife, and scrutinized his left hand, looking for an unscarred area of skin. "No!" I shouted, and gripped his knife-hand. I might have been trying to hold back the piston rod of a great locomotive. My grip and my weight were nothing to Corporal Cuckoo.

"Look," he said, calmly, and cut through the soft flesh between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand until the knifeblade stopped on the bone, and the thumb fell back until it touched the forearm. "See that?"

I saw it through a mist. The great ship seemed, suddenly, to roll and plunge. "Are you crazy?" I said, as soon as I could.

"No," said Corporal Cuckoo. "I'm showing you I'm not, see?" He held his mutilated hand close to my face.

"Take it away," I said.

"Sure," said Corporal Cuckoo. "Watch this." He pushed the almost-severed thumb back into place, and held it down with his right hand. "It's okay," he said, "there's no need to look sick. I'm showing you, see? Don't go—sit down. I'm not kidding. I can give you a hell of a story, a fact-story. I can show you Paré's little notebook and everything. You saw what I showed you when I pulled up my shirt? You saw what I've got right here, on the left side?"

I said, "Yes."

"Well, that's where I got hit by a nine-pound cannonball when I was on the *Mary Ambree,* fighting against the Spanish Armada—it smashed my chest so that the ribs went through my heart—and I was walking about in two weeks. And this other one on the right, under the ribs—

tomorrow I'll show you what it looks like from the back —I got that one at the Battle of Fontenoy; and there's a hell of a good story there. A French cannonball came down and hit a broken sword that a dead officer had dropped, and it sent that sword flying right through me, lungs and liver and all. So help me, it came out through my right shoulderblade. The other one lower down was a bit of bombshell at the Battle of Waterloo—I was opened up like a pig—it wasn't worth the surgeon's while to do anything about it. But I was on my feet in six days, while men with broken legs were dying like flies. I can prove it, I tell you! And listen—I marched to Quebec with Benedict Arnold. Sit still and listen—my right leg was smashed to pulp all the way down from the hip to the ankle at Balaklava. It knitted together before the surgeon had a chance to get around to me; he couldn't believe his eyes—he thought he was dreaming. I can tell you a hell of a story! But it's worth dough, see? Now, this is my proposition: I'll tell it, you write it, and we'll split fifty-fifty, and I'll start my farm. What d'you say?"

I heard myself saying, in a sickly, stupid voice, "Why didn't you save some of your pay, all those years?"

Corporal Cuckoo replied, with scorn, "Why didn't I save my pay! Because I'm what I *am,* you mug! Hell, once upon a time, if I'd kept away from cards, I could've bought Manhattan Island for less than what I lost to a Dutchman called Bruncker, drawing ace-high for English guineas! Save my pay! If it wasn't one thing it was another. I lay off liquor. Okay. So if it's not liquor it's a woman. I lay off women. Okay. Then it's cards or dice. I always *meant* to save my pay; but I never had it *in* me to save my goddam pay! Doctor Paré's stuff fixed me—and when I say it fixed me, I mean, it *fixed* me, just like I was, and am, and always will be. See? A foot-soldier, ignorant as dirt. It took me nearly a hundred years to learn to write my name, and four hundred years to get to be a corporal. How d'you like that? And it took will power, at that! Now here's my proposition: fifty-fifty on the story. Once I get proper publicity in a magazine, I'll be able to let the Digestive out of my hands with an easy mind,

see? because nobody'd dare to try any funny business with a man with nationwide publicity. Eh?"

"No, of course not," I said.

"Eh?"

"Sure, sure, Corporal."

"Good," said Corporal Cuckoo. "Now in case you think I'm kidding, take a look at this. You saw what I done?"

"I saw, Corporal."

"Look," he said, thrusting his left hand under my nose. It was covered with blood. His shirt cuff was red and wet. Fascinated, I saw one thick, sluggish drop crawl out of the cloth near the buttonhole, and hang, quivering, before it fell on my knee. The mark of it is in the cloth of my trousers to this day.

"See?" said Corporal Cuckoo, and he licked the place between his fingers where his knife had cut down. A pale area appeared. "Where did I cut myself?" he asked.

I shook my head; there was no wound—only a white scar. He wiped his knife on the palm of his hand—it left a red smear—and let the blade fall with a sharp click. Then he wiped his left hand on his right, rubbed both hands clean upon the backs of his trouser legs, and said: "Am I kidding?"

"Well!" I said, somewhat breathlessly. "Well——"

"Oh, what the hell!" groaned Corporal Cuckoo, weary beyond words, exhausted, worn out by his endeavors to explain the inexplicable and make the incredible sound reasonable. ". . . Look. You think this is a trick? Have you got a knife?"

"Yes. Why?"

"A big knife?"

"Moderately big."

"Okay. Cut my throat with it, and see what happens. Stick it in me wherever you like. And I'll bet you a thousand dollars I'll be all right inside two or three hours. Go on. Man to man, it's a bet. Or go borrow an ax if you like; hit me over the head with it."

"Be damned if I do," I said, shuddering.

"And that's how it is," said Corporal Cuckoo, in despair. "And that's how it is every time. There they are, making fortunes out of soap and toothpaste, and here I

am, with something in my pocket to keep you young and healthy forever—ah, go chase yourself! I never ought to've drunk your rotten Scotch. This is the way it always is. You wear a beard just like I used to wear before I got a gunpowder burn in the chin at Zutphen, when Sir Philip Sidney got his; or I wouldn't have talked to you. Oh, you dope! I could murder you, so help me I could! Go to hell."

Corporal Cuckoo leaped to his feet and darted away so swiftly that before I found my feet he had disappeared. There was blood on the deck close to where I had been sitting—a tiny pool of blood, no larger than a coffee saucer, broken at one edge by the imprint of a heel. About a yard and a half away I saw another heel mark in blood, considerably less noticeable. Then there was a dull smear, as if one of the bloody rubber heels had spun around and impelled its owner toward the left. "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" I shouted. "Oh, Cuckoo! Cuckoo!"

But I never saw Corporal Cuckoo again, and I wonder where he can be. It may be that he gave me a false name. But what I heard I heard, and what I saw I saw; and I have five hundred dollars here in an envelope for the man who will put me in touch with him. Honey and oil of roses, eggs and turpentine; these involve, as I said, infinite permutations and combinations. So does any comparable mixture. Still, it might be worth investigating. Why not? Fleming got penicillin out of mildew. Only God knows the glorious mysteries of the dust, out of which come trees and bees, and life in every form, from mildew to man.

I lost Corporal Cuckoo before we landed in New York on July 11th, 1945. Somewhere in the United States, I believe, there is a man tremendously strong in the arms and covered with terrible scars who has the dreadfully dangerous secret of perpetual youth and life. He appears to be about thirty-odd years of age, and has watery, greenish eyes.

C. M. KORNBLUTH

In Cyril Kornbluth was a sharp tooth, just right for puncturing, and he used it with wit and passion. His stories had bite. He was sensitive toward hypocrisy and remorseless to poses . . . and it is all very well, he kept saying through his life, to invent these faster-than-light radium-bearinged plastic dishwashwhere he might have gone; but he died young. This a writer, Cyril grew and grew. There is no telling ers; but let us not forget that they will be paid for overs, who are in the doghouse with their wives. As on the installment plan by fretful men with hangis almost his last story. He wrote it when he was thirty-five, and before it saw print he was dead.

The Advent on Channel Twelve

It came to pass in the third quarter of the fiscal year that the Federal Reserve Board did raise the rediscount rate and money was tight in the land. And certain bankers which sate in New York sent to Ben Graffis in Hollywood a writing which said, Money is tight in the land so let Poopy Panda up periscope and fire all bow tubes.

Whereupon Ben Graffis made to them this moan:

O ye bankers, Poopy Panda is like unto the child of my flesh and you have made of him a devouring dragon. Once was I content with my studio and my animators when we did make twelve Poopy Pandas a year; cursed be the day when I floated a New York loan. You have commanded me to make feature length cartoon epics and I did obey, and they do open at the Paramount to sensational grosses, and we do re-release them to the nabes year on year, without end. You have commanded me to film live ad-

venture shorts and I did obey, and in the cutting room we do devilishly splice and pull frames and flop negatives so that I and my cameras are become bearers of false witness and men look upon my live adventure shorts and say lo! these beasts and birds are like unto us in their laughter, wooing, pranks and contention. You have commanded that I become a mountebank for that I did build Poopy Pandaland whereinto men enter with their children, their silver and their wits, and wherefrom they go out with their children only, sandbagged by a thousand catch-penny engines; even this did I obey. You have commanded that Poopy Panda shill every weekday night on television between five and six for the Poopy Panda Pals, and even this did I obey though Poopy Panda is like unto the child of my flesh.

But O ye bankers, this last command will I never obey.

Whereupon the bankers which sate in New York sent to him another writing that said, Even so, let Poopy Panda up periscope and fire all bow tubes, and they said, Remember, boy, we hold thy paper.

And Ben Graffis did obey.

He called unto him his animators and directors and cameramen and writers, and his heart was sore but he dissembled and said:

In jest you call one another brain washers, forasmuch as you addle the heads of children five hours a week that they shall buy our sponsors' wares. You have fulfilled the prophecies, for is it not written in the Book of the Space Merchants that there shall be spherical trusts? And the Poopy Panda Pals plug the Poopy Panda Magazine, and the Poopy Panda Magazine plugs Poopy Pandaland, and Poopy Pandaland plugs the Poopy Panda Pals. You have asked of the Motivational Research boys how we shall hook the little bastards and they have told ye, and ye have done it. You identify the untalented kid viewers with the talented kid performers, you provide in Otto Clodd a bumbling father image to be derided, you furnish in Jackie Whipple an idealized big brother for the boys and a sex-fantasy for the more precocious girls. You flatter the cans off the viewers by ever saying to them that they shall rule the twenty-first century, nor mind

that those who shall in good sooth come to power are doing their homework and not watching television programs. You have created a liturgy of opening hymn and closing benediction, and over all hovers the spirit of Poopy Panda urging and coaxing the viewers to buy our sponsors' wares.

And Ben Graffis breathed a great breath and looked them not in the eye and said to them, Were it not a better thing for Poopy Panda to coax and urge no more, but to command as he were a god?

And the animators and directors and cameramen and writers were sore amazed and they said one to the other, This is the bleeding end, and the bankers which sit in New York have flipped their wigs. And one which was an old animator said to Ben Graffis, trembling, O chief, never would I have stolen for thee Poopy Panda from the Winnie the Pooh illustrations back in twenty-nine had I known this was in the cards, and Ben Graffis fired him.

Whereupon another which was a director said to Ben Graffis, O chief, the thing can be done with a two-week buildup, and Ben Graffis put his hands over his face and said, Let it be so.

And it came to pass that on the Friday after the two-week buildup, in the closing quarter-hour of the Poopy Panda Pals, there was a special film combining live and animated action as they were one.

And in the special film did Poopy Panda appear enhaloed, and the talented kid performers did do him worship, and Otto Clodd did trip over his feet whilst kneeling, and Jackie Whipple did urge in manly and sincere wise that all the Poopy Panda Pals out there in television-land do likewise, and the enhaloed Poopy Panda did say in his lovable growly voice, Poop-poop-poopy.

And adoration ascended from thirty-seven million souls.

And it came to pass that Ben Graffis went into his office with his animators and cameramen and directors and writers after the show and said to them, It was definitely a TV first, and he did go to the bar.

Whereupon one which was a director looked at Who sate behind the desk that was the desk of Ben Graffis and he said to Ben Graffis, O chief, it is a great gag but how did the special effects boys manage the halo?

And Ben Graffis was sore amazed at Who sate behind his desk and he and they all did crowd about and make as if to poke him, whereupon He in His lovable growly voice did say, Poop-poop-poopy, and they were not.

And certain unclean ones which had gone before turned unbelieving from their monitors and said, Holy Gee, this is awful. And one which was an operator of marionettes turned to his manager and said, Pal, if Graffis gets this off the ground we're dead. Whereat a great and far-off voice was heard, saying, Poop-poop-poopy, and it was even so; and the days of Poopy Panda were long in the land.

Filtered for error,
Jan. 18th 36 P.P.
Synod on Filtration & Infiltration
O. Clodd, P.P.P.
J. Whipple, P.P.P.

ALFRED BESTER

Alfred Bester occupies a chair of honor on Holiday's *writing staff. He has to his credit countless radio scripts and a bright and astonishing novel of today's television world called* Who He? *Almost the only first-rate television play on a science fiction theme—"Murder and the Android"—came from his brain, and so did the remarkable, the trail-blazing, the award-winning—in a word, the unique* The Demolished Man. *He does everything, you see. And he has a touch of his own. When it comes to a time-travel story, most science fiction writers may content themselves with traveling to the future, or to the past, or perhaps sidewise to the parallel worlds of "if" that lie around us. Not Bester. He goes in a direction discovered by himself; and thus it is that he takes us along on this strange—*

Disappearing Act

This one wasn't the last war or a war to end war. They called it the War for the American Dream. General Carpenter struck that note and sounded it constantly.

There are fighting generals (vital to an army), political generals (vital to an administration), and public relations generals (vital to a war). General Carpenter was a master of public relations. Forthright and Four-Square, he had ideals as high and as understandable as the mottoes on money. In the mind of America he *was* the army, the administration, the nation's shield and sword and stout right arm. His ideal was the American Dream.

"We are not fighting for money, for power, or for

world domination," General Carpenter announced at the Press Association dinner.

"We are fighting solely for the American Dream," he said to the 137th Congress.

"Our aim is not aggression or the reduction of nations to slavery," he said at the West Point Annual Officer's Dinner.

"We are fighting for the meaning of civilization," he told the San Francisco Pioneers' Club.

"We are struggling for the ideal of civilization; for culture, for poetry, for the Only Things Worth Preserving," he said at the Chicago Wheat Pit Festival.

"This is a war for survival," he said. "We are not fighting for ourselves, but for our dreams; for the Better Things in Life which must not disappear from the face of the earth."

America fought. General Carpenter asked for one hundred million men. The army was given one hundred million men. General Carpenter asked for ten thousand H-Bombs. Ten thousand H-Bombs were delivered and dropped. The enemy also dropped ten thousand H-Bombs and destroyed most of America's cities.

"We must dig in against the hordes of barbarism," General Carpenter said. "Give me a thousand engineers."

One thousand engineers were forthcoming, and a hundred cities were dug and hollowed out beneath the rubble.

"Give me five hundred sanitation experts, three hundred traffic managers, two hundred air-conditioning experts, one hundred city managers, one thousand communication chiefs, seven hundred personnel experts . . ."

The list of General Carpenter's demand for technical experts was endless. America did not know how to supply them.

"We must become a nation of experts," General Carpenter informed the National Association of American Universities. "Every man and woman must be a specific tool for a specific job, hardened and sharpened by your training and education to win the fight for the American Dream."

"Our Dream," General Carpenter said at the Wall Street Bond Drive Breakfast, "is at one with the gentle

Greeks of Athens, with the noble Romans of . . . er . . . Rome. It is a dream of the Better Things in Life. Of music and art and poetry and culture. Money is only a weapon to be used in the fight for this dream. Ambition is only a ladder to climb to this dream. Ability is only a tool to shape this dream."

Wall Street applauded. General Carpenter asked for one hundred and fifty billion dollars, fifteen hundred ambitious dollar-a-year men, three thousand able experts in mineralogy, petrology, mass production, chemical warfare and air-traffic time study. They were delivered. The country was in high gear. General Carpenter had only to press a button and an expert would be delivered.

In March of A.D. 2112 the war came to a climax and the American Dream was resolved, not on any one of the seven fronts where millions of men were locked in bitter combat, not in any of the staff headquarters or any of the capitals of the warring nations, not in any of the production centers spewing forth arms and supplies, but in Ward T of the United States Army Hospital buried three hundred feet below what had once been St. Albans, New York.

Ward T was something of a mystery at St. Albans. Like any army hospital, St. Albans was organized with specific wards reserved for specific injuries. All right arm amputees were gathered in one ward, all left arm amputees in another. Radiation burns, head injuries, eviscerations, secondary gamma poisonings and so on were each assigned their specific location in the hospital organization. The Army Medical Corps had designated nineteen classes of combat injury which included every possible kind of damage to brain and tissue. These used up letters A to S. What, then, was in Ward T?

No one knew. The doors were double locked. No visitors were permitted to enter. No patients were permitted to leave. Physicians were seen to arrive and depart. Their perplexed expressions stimulated the wildest speculations but revealed nothing. The nurses who ministered to Ward T were questioned eagerly but they were close-mouthed.

There were dribs and drabs of information, unsatisfying and self-contradictory. A charwoman asserted that she

had been in to clean up and there had been no one in the ward. Absolutely no one. Just two dozen beds and nothing else. Had the beds been slept in? Yes. They were rumpled, some of them. Were there signs of the ward being in use? Oh yes. Personal things on the tables and so on. But dusty, kind of. Like they hadn't been used in a long time.

Public opinion decided it was a ghost ward. For spooks only.

But a night orderly reported passing the locked ward and hearing singing from within. What kind of singing? Foreign language, like. What language? The orderly couldn't say. Some of the words sounded like . . . well, like: Cow dee on us eager tour . . .

Public opinion started to run a fever and decided it was an alien ward. For spies only.

St. Albans enlisted the help of the kitchen staff and checked the food trays. Twenty-four trays went in to Ward T three times a day. Twenty-four came out. Sometimes the returning trays were emptied. Most times they were untouched.

Public opinion built up pressure and decided that Ward T was a racket. It was an informal club for goldbricks and staff grafters who caroused within. Cow de on us eager tour indeed!

For gossip, a hospital can put a small town sewing circle to shame with ease, but sick people are easily goaded into passion by trivia. It took just three months for idle speculation to turn into downright fury. In January, 2112, St. Albans was a sound, well-run hospital. By March, 2112, St. Albans was in a ferment, and the psychological unrest found its way into the official records. The percentage of recoveries fell off. Malingering set in. Petty infractions increased. Mutinies flared. There was a staff shake-up. It did no good. Ward T was inciting the patients to riot. There was another shake-up, and another, and still the unrest fumed.

The news finally reached General Carpenter's desk through official channels.

"In our fight for the American Dream," he said, "we must not ignore those who have already given of them-

selves. Send me a Hospital Administration expert."

The expert was delivered. He could do nothing to heal St. Albans. General Carpenter read the reports and broke him.

"Pity," said General Carpenter, "is the first ingredient of civilization. Send me a Surgeon General."

A Surgeon General was delivered. He could not break the fury of St. Albans and General Carpenter broke him. But by this time Ward T was being mentioned in the dispatches.

"Send me," General Carpenter said, "the expert in charge of Ward T."

St. Albans sent a doctor, Captain Edsel Dimmock. He was a stout young man, already bald, only three years out of medical school but with a fine record as an expert in psychotherapy. General Carpenter liked experts. He liked Dimmock. Dimmock adored the general as the spokesman for a culture which he had been too specially trained to seek up to now, but which he hoped to enjoy after the war was won.

"Now look here, Dimmock," General Carpenter began. "We're all of us tools, today—sharpened and hardened to do a specific job. You know our motto: A job for everyone and everyone on the job. Somebody's not on the job at Ward T and we've got to kick him out. Now, in the first place, what the hell is Ward T?"

Dimmock stuttered and fumbled. Finally he explained that it was a special ward set up for special combat cases. Shock cases.

"Then you do have patients in the ward?"

"Yes, sir. Ten women and fourteen men."

Carpenter brandished a sheaf of reports. "Says here the St. Albans patients claim nobody's in Ward T."

Dimmock was shocked. That was untrue, he assured the general.

"All right, Dimmock. So you've got your twenty-four crocks in there. Their job's to get well. Your job's to cure them. What the hell's upsetting the hospital about that?"

"W-Well, sir. Perhaps it's because we keep them locked up."

"You keep Ward T locked?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"To keep the patients in, General Carpenter."

"Keep 'em in? What d'you mean? Are they trying to get out? They violent, or something?"

"No, sir. Not violent."

"Dimmock, I don't like your attitude. You're acting damned sneaky and evasive. And I'll tell you something else I don't like. That T classification. I checked with a Filing Expert from the Medical Corps and there is no T classification. What the hell are you up to at St. Albans?"

"W-Well, sir . . . We invented the T classification. It . . . They . . . They're rather special cases, sir. We don't know what to do about them or how to handle them. W-We've been trying to keep it quiet until we've worked out a modus operandi, but it's brand new, General Carpenter. Brand new!" Here the expert in Dimmock triumphed over discipline. "It's sensational. It'll make medical history, by God! It's the biggest damned thing ever."

"What is it, Dimmock? Be specific."

"Well, sir, they're shock cases. Blanked out. Almost catatonic. Very little respiration. Slow pulse. No response."

"I've seen thousands of shock cases like that," Carpenter grunted. "What's so unusual?"

"Yes, sir. So far it sounds like the standard Q or R classification. But here's something unusual. They don't eat and they don't sleep."

"Never?"

"Some of them never."

"Then why don't they die?"

"We don't know. The metabolism cycle's broken, but only on the anabolism side. Catabolism continues. In other words, sir, they're eliminating waste products but they're not taking anything in. They're eliminating fatigue poisons and rebuilding worn tissue, but without sleep. God knows how. It's fantastic."

"That why you've got them locked up? Mean to say . . . D'you suspect them of stealing food and cat naps somewhere else?"

"N-No, sir." Dimmock looked shamefaced. "I don't know how to tell you this, General Carpenter. I . . . We lock them up because of the real mystery. They . . . Well, they disappear."

"They what?"

"They disappear, sir. Vanish. Right before your eyes."

"The hell you say."

"I do say, sir. They'll be sitting on a bed or standing around. One minute you see them, the next minute you don't. Sometimes there's two dozen in Ward T. Other times none. They disappear and reappear without rhyme or reason. That's why we've got the ward locked, General Carpenter. In the entire history of combat and combat injury there's never been a case like this before. We don't know how to handle it."

"Bring me three of those cases," General Carpenter said.

Nathan Riley ate French toast, eggs benedict; consumed two quarts of brown ale, smoked a John Drew, belched delicately and arose from the breakfast table. He nodded quietly to Gentleman Jim Corbett, who broke off his conversation with Diamond Jim Brady to intercept him on the way to the cashier's desk.

"Who do you like for the pennant this year, Nat?" Gentleman Jim inquired.

"The Dodgers," Nathan Riley answered.

"They've got no pitching."

"They've got Snider and Furillo and Campanella. They'll take the pennant this year, Jim. I'll bet they take it earlier than any team ever did. By September 13th. Make a note. See if I'm right."

"You're always right, Nat," Corbett said.

Riley smiled, paid his check, sauntered out into the street and caught a horsecar bound for Madison Square Garden. He got off at the corner of 50th and Eighth Avenue and walked upstairs to a handbook office over a radio repair shop. The bookie glanced at him, produced an envelope and counted out fifteen thousand dollars.

"Rocky Marciano by a TKO over Roland La Starza in

the eleventh," he said. "How the hell do you call them so accurate, Nat?"

"That's the way I make a living," Riley smiled. "Are you making book on the elections?"

"Eisenhower twelve to five. Stevenson——"

"Never mind Adlai." Riley placed twenty thousand dollars on the counter. "I'm backing Ike. Get this down for me."

He left the handbook office and went to his suite in the Waldorf where a tall, thin young man was waiting for him anxiously.

"Oh yes," Nathan Riley said. "You're Ford, aren't you? Harold Ford?"

"Henry Ford, Mr. Riley."

"And you need financing for that machine in your bicycle shop. What's it called?"

"I call it an Ipsimobile, Mr. Riley."

"Hmmm. Can't say I like that name. Why not call it an automobile?"

"That's a wonderful suggestion, Mr. Riley. I'll certainly take it."

"I like you, Henry. You're young, eager, adaptable. I believe in your future and I believe in your automobile. I'll invest two hundred thousand dollars in your company."

Riley wrote a check and ushered Henry Ford out. He glanced at his watch and suddenly felt impelled to go back and look around for a moment. He entered his bedroom, undressed, put on a gray shirt and gray slacks. Across the pocket of the shirt were large blue letters: U.S.A.H.

He locked the bedroom door and disappeared.

He reappeared in Ward T of the United States Army Hospital in St. Albans, standing alongside his bed which was one of twenty-four lining the walls of a long, light steel barracks. Before he could draw another breath, he was seized by three pairs of hands. Before he could struggle, he was shot by a pneumatic syringe and poleaxed by 1½ cc of sodium thiomorphate.

"We've got one," someone said.

"Hang around," someone else answered. "General Carpenter said he wanted three."

After Marcus Junius Brutus left her bed, Lela Machan clapped her hands. Her slave women entered the chamber and prepared her bath. She bathed, dressed, scented herself and breakfasted on Smyrna figs, rose oranges and a flagon of Lacrima Christi. Then she smoked a cigarette and ordered her litter.

The gates of her house were crowded as usual by adoring hordes from the Twentieth Legion. Two centurions removed her chair-bearers from the poles of the litter and bore her on their stout shoulders. Lela Machan smiled. A young man in a sapphire-blue cloak thrust through the mob and ran toward her. A knife flashed in his hand. Lela braced herself to meet death bravely.

"Lady!" he cried. "Lady Lela!"

He slashed his left arm with the knife and let the crimson blood stain her robe.

"This blood of mine is the least I have to give you," he cried.

Lela touched his forehead gently.

"Silly boy," she murmured. "Why?"

"For love of you, my lady."

"You will be admitted tonight at nine," Lela whispered. He stared at her until she laughed. "I promise you. What is your name, pretty boy?"

"Ben Hur."

"Tonight at nine, Ben Hur."

The litter moved on. Outside the forum, Julius Caesar passed in hot argument with Marcus Antonius, Antony. When he saw the litter he motioned sharply to the centurions, who stopped at once. Caesar swept back the curtains and stared at Lela, who regarded him languidly. Caesar's face twitched.

"Why?" he asked hoarsely. "I have begged, pleaded, bribed, wept, and all without forgiveness. Why, Lela? Why?"

"Do you remember Boadicea?" Lela murmured.

"Boadicea? Queen of the Britons? Good God, Lela, what can she mean to our love? I did not love Boadicea. I merely defeated her in battle."

"And killed her, Caesar."

"She poisoned herself, Lela."

"She was my mother, Caesar!" Suddenly Lela pointed her finger at Caesar. "Murderer. You will be punished. Beware the Ides of March, Caesar!"

Caesar recoiled in horror. The mob of admirers that had gathered around Lela uttered a shout of approval. Amidst a rain of rose petals and violets she continued on her way across the Forum to the Temple of the Vestal Virgins where she abandoned her adoring suitors and entered the sacred temple.

Before the altar she genuflected, intoned a prayer, dropped a pinch of incense on the altar flame and disrobed. She examined her beautiful body reflected in a silver mirror, then experienced a momentary twinge of homesickness. She put on a gray blouse and a gray pair of slacks. Across the pocket of the blouse was lettered U.S.A.H.

She smiled once at the altar and disappeared.

She reappeared in Ward T of the United States Army Hospital where she was instantly felled by 1½ cc sodium thiomorphate injected subcutaneously by a pneumatic syringe.

"That's two," somebody said.

"One more to go."

George Hanmer paused dramatically and stared around . . . at the opposition benches, at the Speaker on the woolsack, at the silver mace on a crimson cushion before the Speaker's chair. The entire House of Parliament, hypnotized by Hanmer's fiery oratory, waited breathlessly for him to continue.

"I can say no more," Hanmer said at last. His voice was choked with emotion. His face was blanched and grim. "I will fight for this bill at the beachheads. I will fight in the cities, the towns, the fields and the hamlets. I will fight for this bill to the death and, God willing, I will fight for it after death. Whether this be a challenge or a prayer, let the consciences of the right honorable gentlemen determine; but of one thing I am sure and determined: England must own the Suez Canal."

Hanmer sat down. The House exploded. Through the cheering and applause he made his way out into the divi-

sion lobby where Gladstone, Canning and Peel stopped him to shake his hand. Lord Palmerston eyed him coldly, but Pam was shouldered aside by Disraeli who limped up, all enthusiasm, all admiration.

"We'll have a bite at Tattersall's," Dizzy said. "My car's waiting."

Lady Beaconfield was in the Rolls Royce outside the Houses of Parliament. She pinned a primrose on Dizzy's lapel and patted Hanmer's cheek affectionately.

"You've come a long way from the schoolboy who used to bully Dizzy, Georgie," she said.

Hanmer laughed. Dizzy sang: *"Gaudeamus igitur . . ."* and Hanmer chanted the ancient scholastic song until they reached Tattersall's. There Dizzy ordered Guinness and grilled bones while Hanmer went upstairs in the club to change.

For no reason at all he had the impulse to go back for a last look. Perhaps he hated to break with his past completely. He divested himself of his surtout, nankeen waistcoat, pepper and salt trousers, polished Hessians and undergarments. He put on a gray shirt and gray trousers and disappeared.

He reappeared in Ward T of the St. Albans hospital where he was rendered unconscious by 1½ cc of sodium thiomorphate.

"That's three," somebody said.

"Take 'em to Carpenter."

So there they sat in General Carpenters' office, PFC Nathan Riley, M/Sgt Lela Machan, and Corp/2 George Hanmer. They were in their hospital grays. They were torpid with sodium thiomorphate.

The office had been cleared and it blazed with blinding light. Present were experts from Espionage, Counter-Espionage, Security and Central Intelligence. When Captain Edsel Dimmock saw the steel-faced ruthless squad awaiting the patients and himself, he started. General Carpenter smiled grimly.

"Didn't occur to you that we mightn't buy your disappearance story, eh, Dimmock?"

"S-Sir?"

"I'm an expert too, Dimmock. I'll spell it out for you. The war's going badly. Very badly. There've been intelligence leaks. The St. Albans mess might point to you."

"B-But they do disappear, sir. I——"

"My experts want to talk to you and your patients about this disappearance act, Dimmock. They'll start with you."

The experts worked over Dimmock with preconscious softeners, id releases and superego blocks. They tried every truth serum in the books and every form of physical and mental pressure. They brought Dimmock, squealing, to the breaking point three times, but there was nothing to break.

"Let him stew for now," Carpenter said. "Get on to the patients."

The experts appeared reluctant to apply pressure to the sick men and the woman.

"For God's sake, don't be squeamish," Carpenter raged. "We're fighting a war for civilization. We've got to protect our ideals no matter what the price. Get to it!"

The experts from Espionage, Counter-Espionage, Security and Central Intelligence got to it. Like three candles, PFC Nathan Riley, M/Sgt Lela Machan and Corp/2 George Hanmer snuffed out and disappeared. One moment they were seated in chairs surrounded by violence. The next moment they were not.

The experts gasped. General Carpenter did the handsome thing. He stalked to Dimmock. "Captain Dimmock, I apologize. Colonel Dimmock, you've been promoted for making an important discovery . . . only what the hell does it mean? We've got to check ourselves first."

Carpenter snapped up the intercom. "Get me a combat-shock expert and an alienist."

The two experts entered and were briefed. They examined the witnesses. They considered.

"You're all suffering from a mild case of shock," the combat-shock expert said. "War jitters."

"You mean we didn't see them disappear?"

The shock expert shook his head and glanced at the alienist who also shook his head.

"Mass illusion," the alienist said.

At that moment PFC Riley, M/Sgt Machan and Corp/2 Hanmer reappeared. One moment they were a mass illusion; the next, they were back sitting in their chairs surrounded by confusion.

"Dope 'em again, Dimmock," Carpenter cried. "Give 'em a gallon." He snapped up his intercom. "I want every expert we've got. Emergency meeting in my office at once."

Thirty-seven experts, hardened and sharpened tools all, inspected the unconscious shock cases and discussed them for three hours. Certain facts were obvious: This must be a new fantastic syndrome brought on by the new and fantastic horrors of the war. As combat technique develops, the response of victims of this technique must also take new roads. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Agreed.

This new syndrome must involve some aspects of teleportation . . . the power of mind over space. Evidently combat shock, while destroying certain known powers of the mind, must develop other latent powers hitherto unknown. Agreed.

Obviously, the patients must only be able to return to the point of departure, otherwise they would not continue to return to Ward T nor would they have returned to General Carpenter's office. Agreed.

Obviously, the patients must be able to procure food and sleep wherever they go, since neither was required in Ward T. Agreed.

"One small point," Colonel Dimmock said. "They seem to be returning to Ward T less frequently. In the beginning they would come and go every day or so. Now most of them stay away for weeks and hardly ever return."

"Never mind that," Carpenter said. "Where do they go?"

"Do they teleport behind the enemy lines?" someone asked. "There's those intelligence leaks."

"I want Intelligence to check," Carpenter snapped. "Is the enemy having similar difficulties with, say, prisoners of war who appear and disappear from their POW camps? They might be some of ours from Ward T."

"They might simply be going home," Colonel Dimmock suggested.

"I want Security to check," Carpenter ordered. "Cover the home life and associations of every one of those twenty-four disappearers. Now . . . about our operations in Ward T. Colonel Dimmock has a plan."

"We'll set up six extra beds in Ward T," Edsel Dimmock explained. "We'll send in six experts to live there and observe. Information must be picked up indirectly from the patients. They're catatonic and nonresponsive when conscious, and incapable of answering questions when drugged."

"Gentlemen," Carpenter summed it up. "This is the greatest potential weapon in the history of warfare. I don't have to tell you what it can mean to us to be able to teleport an entire army behind enemy lines. We can win the war for the American Dream in one day if we can win this secret hidden in those shattered minds. We must win!"

The experts hustled, Security checked, Intelligence probed. Six hardened and sharpened tools moved into Ward T in St. Albans Hospital and slowly got acquainted with the disappearing patients who appeared and departed less and less frequently. The tension increased.

Security was able to report that not one case of strange appearance had taken place in America in the past year. Intelligence reported that the enemy did not seem to be having similar difficulties with their own shock cases or with POWs.

Carpenter fretted. "This is all brand new. We've got no specialists to handle it. We've got to develop new tools." He snapped up his intercom. "Get me a college," he said.

They got him Yale.

"I want some experts in mind over matter. Develop them," Carpenter ordered. Yale at once introduced three graduate courses in Thaumaturgy, Extra Sensory Perception and Telekinesis.

The first break came when one of the Ward T experts requested the assistance of another expert. He wanted a Lapidary.

"What the hell for?" Carpenter wanted to know.

"He picked up a reference to a gem stone," Colonel

Dimmock explained. "He can't relate it to anything in his experience. He's a personnel specialist."

"And he's not supposed to," Carpenter said approvingly. "A job for every man and every man on the job." He flipped up the intercom. "Get me a Lapidary."

An expert Lapidary was given leave of absence from the army arsenal and asked to identify a type of diamond called Jim Brady. He could not.

"We'll try it from another angle," Carpenter said. He snapped up his intercom. "Get me a Semanticist."

The Semanticist left his desk in the War Propaganda Department but could make nothing of the words Jim Brady. They were names to him. No more. He suggested a Genealogist.

A Genealogist was given one day's leave from his post with the Un-American Ancestors Committee but could make nothing of the name of Brady beyond the fact that it had been a common name in America for five hundred years. He suggested an Archaeologist.

An Archaeologist was released from the Cartography Division of Invasion Command and instantly identified the name Diamond Jim Brady. It was a historic personage who had been famous in the city of Little Old New York some time between Governor Peter Stuyvesant and Governor Fiorello La Guardia.

"Christ!" Carpenter marveled. "That's centuries ago. Where the hell did Nathan Riley get that? You'd better join the experts in Ward T and follow this up."

The Archaeologist followed it up, checked his references and sent in his report. Carpenter read it and was stunned. He called an emergency meeting of his staff of experts.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "Ward T is something bigger than teleportation. Those shock patients are doing something far more incredible . . . far more meaningful. Gentlemen, they're traveling through time."

The staff rustled uncertainly. Carpenter nodded emphatically.

"Yes, gentlemen. Time travel is here. It has not arrived the way we expected it . . . as a result of expert research by qualified specialists; it has come as a plague . . . an

infection . . . a disease of the war . . . a result of combat injury to ordinary men. Before I continue, look through these reports for documentation."

The staff read the stenciled sheets. PFC Nathan Riley . . . disappearing into the early twentieth century in New York; M/Sgt Lela Machan . . . visiting the first century in Rome; Corp/2 George Hanmer . . . journeying into the nineteenth century in England. And all the rest of the twenty-four patients, escaping the turmoil and horrors of modern war in the twenty-second century by fleeing to Venice and the Doges, to Jamaica and the buccaneers, to China and the Han Dynasty, to Norway and Eric the Red, to any place and any time in the world.

"I needn't point out the colossal significance of this discovery," General Carpenter pointed out. "Think what it would mean to the war if we could send an army back in time a week or a month or a year. We could win the war before it started. We could protect our Dream . . . poetry and beauty and the fine culture of America . . . from barbarism without ever endangering it."

The staff tried to grapple with the problem of winning battles before they started.

"The situation is complicated by the fact that these men and women of Ward T are *non compos*. They may or may not know how they do what they do, but in any case they're incapable of communicating with the experts who could reduce this miracle to method. It's for us to find the key. They can't help us."

The hardened and sharpened specialists looked around uncertainly.

"We'll need experts," General Carpenter said.

The staff relaxed. They were on familiar ground again.

"We'll need a Cerebral Mechanist, a Cybernetic ist, a Psychiatrist, an Anatomist, an Archaeologist and a first-rate Historian. They'll go into that ward and they won't come out until their job is done. They must get the technique of time travel."

The first five experts were easy to draft from other war departments. All America was a tool chest of hardened and sharpened specialists. But there was trouble locating

a first-class Historian until the Federal Penitentiary operated with the army and released Dr. Bradley Scrim from his twenty years at hard labor. Dr. Scrim was acid and jagged. He had held the chair of Philosophic History at a Western university until he spoke his mind about the war for the American Dream. That got him the twenty years hard.

Scrim was still intransigent, but induced to play ball by the intriguing problem of Ward T.

"But I'm not an expert," he snapped. "In this benighted nation of experts, I'm the last singing grasshopper in the ant heap."

Carpenter snapped up the intercom. "Get me an Entomologist," he said.

"Don't bother," Scrim said. "I'll translate. You're a nest of ants . . . all working and toiling and specializing. For what?"

"To preserve the American Dream," Carpenter answered hotly. "We're fighting for poetry and culture and education and the Finer Things in Life."

"You're fighting to preserve me," Scrim said. "That's what I've devoted my life to. And what do you do with me? Put me in jail."

"You were convicted of enemy sympathizing and fellow-traveling," Carpenter said.

"I was convicted of believing in the American Dream," Scrim said. "Which is another way of saying I had a mind of my own."

Scrim was also intransigent in Ward T. He stayed one night, enjoyed three good meals, read the reports, threw them down and began hollering to be let out.

"There's a job for everyone and everyone must be on the job," Colonel Dimmock told him. "You don't come out until you've got the secret of time travel."

"There's no secret I can get," Scrim said.

"Do they travel in time?"

"Yes and no."

"The answer has to be one or the other. Not both. You're evading the——"

"Look," Scrim interrupted wearily. "What are you an expert in?"

"Psychotherapy."

"Then how the hell can you understand what I'm talking about? This is a philosophic concept. I tell you there's no secret here that the army can use. There's no secret any group can use. It's a secret for individuals only."

"I don't understand you."

"I didn't think you would. Take me to Carpenter."

They took Scrim to Carpenter's office where he grinned at the general malignantly, looking for all the world like a red-headed, underfed devil.

"I'll need ten minutes," Scrim said. "Can you spare them out of your tool box?"

Carpenter nodded.

"Now listen carefully. I'm going to give you all the clues to something vast, so strange, so new, that it will need all your fine edge to cut into it."

Carpenter looked expectant.

"Nathan Riley goes back in time to the early twentieth century. There he lives the life of his fondest dreams. He's a big-time gambler, the friend of Diamond Jim Brady and others. He wins money betting on events because he always knows the outcome in advance. He won money betting on Eisenhower to win an election. He won money betting on a prize fighter named Marciano to beat another prize fighter named La Starza. He made money investing in an automobile company owned by Henry Ford. There are the clues. They mean anything to you?"

"Not without a Sociological Analyst," Carpenter answered. He reached for the intercom.

"Don't bother. I'll explain. Let's try some more clues. Lela Machan, for example. She escapes into the Roman empire where she lives the life of her dreams as a *femme fatale*. Every man loves her. Julius Caesar, Brutus, the entire Twentieth Legion, a man named Ben Hur. Do you see the fallacy?"

"No."

"She also smokes cigarettes."

"Well?" Carpenter asked after a pause.

"I continue," Scrim said. "George escapes into England of the nineteenth century where he's a Member of Parliament and the friend of Gladstone, Canning and

Disraeli, who takes him riding in his Rolls Royce. Do you know what a Rolls Royce is?"

"No."

"It was the name of an automobile."

"So?"

"You don't understand yet?"

"No."

Scrim paced the floor in exaltation. "Carpenter, this is a bigger discovery than teleportation or time travel. This can be the salvation of man. I don't think I'm exaggerating. Those two dozen shock victims in Ward T have been H-Bombed into something so gigantic that it's no wonder your specialists and experts can't understand it."

"What the hell's bigger than time travel, Scrim?"

"Listen to this, Carpenter. Eisenhower did not run for office until the middle of the twentieth century. Nathan Riley could not have been a friend of Diamond Jim Brady's and bet on Eisenhower to win an election . . . not simultaneously. Brady was dead a quarter of a century before Ike was President. Marciano defeated La Starza fifty years after Henry Ford started his automobile company. Nathan Riley's time traveling is full of similar anachronisms."

Carpenter looked puzzled.

"Lela Machan could not have had Ben Hur for a lover. Ben Hur never existed in Rome. He never existed at all. He was a character in a novel. She couldn't have smoked. They didn't have tobacco then. You see? More anachronisms. Disraeli could never have taken George Hanmer for a ride in a Rolls Royce because automobiles weren't invented until long after Disraeli's death."

"The hell you say," Carpenter exclaimed. "You mean they're all lying?"

"No. Don't forget, they don't need sleep. They don't need food. They're not lying. They're going back in time all right. They're eating and sleeping back there."

"But you just said their stories don't stand up. They're full of anachronisms."

"Because they travel back into a time of their own imagination. Nathan Riley has his own picture of what America was like in the early twentieth century. It's faulty and anachronistic because he's no scholar; but it's real for him. He can live there. The same is true for the others."

Carpenter goggled.

"The concept is almost beyond understanding. These people have discovered how to turn dreams into reality. They know how to enter their dream realities. They can stay there, live there, perhaps forever. My God, Carpenter, *this* is your American dream. It's miracle-working, immortality, Godlike creation, mind over matter . . . It must be explored. It must be studied. It must be given to the world."

"Can you do it, Scrim?"

"No, I cannot. I'm a historian. I'm noncreative, so it's beyond me. You need a poet . . . a man who understands the creation of dreams. From creating dreams on paper or canvas it oughtn't to be too difficult to take the step to creating dreams in actuality."

"A poet? Are you serious?"

"Certainly I'm serious. Don't you know what a poet is? You've been telling us for five years that this war is being fought to save the poets."

"Don't be facetious, Scrim, I—"

"Send a poet into Ward T. He'll learn how they do it. He's the only man who can. A poet is half doing it anyway. Once he learns, he can teach your psychologists and anatomists. Then they can teach us; but the poet is the only man who can interpret between those shock cases and your experts."

"I believe you're right, Scrim."

"Then don't delay, Carpenter. Those patients are returning to this world less and less frequently. We've got to get at that secret before they disappear forever. Send a poet to Ward T."

Carpenter snapped up his intercom. "Send me a poet," he said.

He waited, and waited . . . and waited . . . while America sorted feverishly through its two hundred and ninety millions of hardened and sharpened experts, its specialized tools to defend the American Dream of beauty and poetry and the Better Things in Life. He waited for them to find a poet, not understanding the endless delay, the fruitless search; not understanding why Bradley Scrim laughed and laughed and laughed at this final, fatal disappearance.

ELISABETH MANN BORGESE

Star *in its history was able to draw on the services of a clear majority of the best writers in the science fiction field; but there were, too, a sizable number of first-rate contributions by "mainstream" writers, drawn to science fiction because they had something to say that could not be said elsewhere. There were half a dozen of these—Gerald Kersh, Jessamyn West, one or two who elected the protection of pen names—and there is Mrs. Borgese, who is not only the daughter of one of the greatest writers of all, but in her own right a talented artist with words. Have no doubt of this; discover it for yourself in—*

Twin's Wail

When he first said, "It is not Martha's fault, why, any Martha would have done it; he got her to be that way; I too had a Martha like that," people simply thought he was crazy. But after he had pieced the facts together, patiently and humbly, they made sense. People began to wonder about the sense they made and wanted to hope for the best, wish them well, Phil and Martha, whoever they were. Somehow it seemed the toll was paid; what for, no one could quite discern, but a toll was paid. They could go ahead now, Phil and Martha.

Vanyambadi, April 24, 1918.

Today James christened them. Willoughby and Theophil. Willoughby, after Dad. "Willy" just suits him, the cute thing. And if one is Willy, it is nice that the other be Philly. We thought of Philip, too; but, come to think of it, it doesn't make much sense, in our family. "Theophil" augurs well. Let him be dear to God.

June 6.

Will always has to be on the left side, Phil always on the right, in the crib and in the buggy too. If you put them the

other way, they'll cry. It's really easier that way to tell them apart. Dr. Edgecomb says to separate them. They would grow better, he says. But it can't be done. They'll cry. Will keeps his left arm under his head, Phil the right one. And when people stare at them—they have never seen a pair of twins here; they stare at them as if they were monsters—they both start crying at the same time. And when I rock the buggy they are quiet and begin to suck their thumbs: Will the right one, Phil the left. It's always like that. One is always the mirror image of the other.

July 24.

The kind of service you've got to put up with! I am frankly scared of Yoshi, but if I fire her the next one may be worse yet. Yoshi says they want to be two but the dasus prevent it. Chewing a parrot feather for a toothpick, she says if they cannot be two they'll bring on the earthquake, a terrible earthquake.

November 11.

They both spat out their spinach. They have the same likes and the same dislikes. They wet their diapers at the same time. Woe, if I changed Phil without changing Will! And Will must always be first.

May 1.

Yoshi says, and she wears an old stocking of mine on her head for a turban, help them be two. She says: Do shave Will's hair and sacrifice it to Shiva-with-the-Four-Arms that he sever them into two times two. Burn Will's hair. But Phil's hair should be done up with cow dung. That will help them be two.

November 9.

Will's cold is hanging on. We still kept him indoors today. He's rather cross and a bit run down. Got himself badly scratched up, along the left leg, while playing in his playpen with some train tracks. When Phil came home I'll be darned if he hadn't *his* leg scratched up too. The right one. He had crawled off towards the garden fence and fallen against the barbed wire.

December 13.

Yoshi said, in a magical singsong voice not her own: Don't bathe them in water, which makes for sameness. Will should be rubbed with the fat of a hilsa, but for Phil

you should get the twice-chewed hay of a sacred cow and boil it in palm oil, with leaves of sandalwood and minusops. That you should rub on Phil. It will make them different.

February 12.

There is a Peter Toledo and a Peter MacGregor among the boys down at the Mission Nursery. Peter Toledo is small and dark and flabby, and Peter MacGregor is tall and blond and springy. They haven't got a thing in common but their name. And that Phil is picking on Peter Toledo and Will is bothering Peter MacGregor. Today Phil took Peter Toledo's cookies, up in the dining room, and bit him when he cried, while Will kicked Peter MacGregor off the swing, down in the backyard, and rocked himself wildly and burst with laughter when he saw that Peter had got hurt.

Christmas.

It seems so strange, these two children who are really only one. And you don't know where one ends and the other begins. Will is for Phil, Phil is for Will, and there seems to be no room for anybody else. The space between them seems different from the space around, permeated by invisible communications. I've looked it up in the books, and it seems to be all perfectly normal the way it is. James says each one has a soul, each one of them is alone before God. But sometimes I wonder.

May 5.

Phil has grown faster than Will. He is almost an inch taller now. But Will is getting so bossy. Phil—"My Phil"—he has to do everything just the way Will wants him to. Phil is such a good boy. He does not mind. This morning Will wetted Phil's bed. I know he did, because Phil's bed was dry when I picked him up for his bath. But Will said: "Phil made wettywetty in his beddy. Bad Phil." And Phil looked at us so sorrowfully with guilty eyes. I really think he believed he did it.

Halloween.

Yoshi said: Their karmas are two. They are two. She sat on a stool by the bead curtain front door, spreading her shawl over Will and Phil on her sides, and she held their hands—Will's left, Phil's right—joined on her lap. The

heart and the head line will never meet on Will's palm; he's going to be an impulsive boy. Phil will be pensive. See, where they join, the head and the heart line, in one. This swelling shows fortune and foresight. The life line is long but the mountain of love is shrivelled; dimpled and broken his pride and reliance. Will too shows good fortune but is reckless and wild. The field of Dishnana augurs abundance, but the mountain of love is like Phil's, just like Phil's, and his life line is cut through by Asuras. Their karmas are two, said Yoshi.

Palm Sunday.

I gave Phil a bunny with floppy ears, but he cried till Will got one just like it. I gave Willy a set of jinglebells but he broke them in two, half for him, half for Philly. I gave them a team of galloping horses hitched to a covered wagon. They cried they did not want one but two. But there wasn't another one, not in all of Vanyambadi. So they cried and they said: We are scared of it, take it away!

This is as far as she got. Poor mother. Here her hand was halted.

Had she listened to Yoshi, perhaps the earth would have tarried. And we were to leave anyway, for Dad had been called to the Christ Church in Chicago. But the earth did not wait. God knows why it was sore at me and my Will.

There is not much I can remember. A sulky day of frightening colors. The kitten vomited and mewed, and the sheep dog had his tail between his legs. Yoshi was off to the village. Rice wine, too much rice wine, I remember they said. Has anybody ever seen a sunset like this, they said. A cloud with a golden rim was hovering over the horizon like a monster. Then I felt dizzy, trying to hold myself on all fours, and sick to my stomach. When it was over, the house had crumbled and the yard was gaping and smoking and the sheep dog was howling at the ruins and Dad took me in his arms and kissed me and carried me away. Mother had gone to Heaven, he said, and Will had gone with her so she wouldn't be lonely, but Philly and Daddy would go to Chicago. The

stars had long tails and swirled over the sky through the ship's bull's eye.

Poor father. Had he listened to me, we might have found Will, for he was not in Heaven. I heard his voice calling in the night and wept to the nurse who came to soothe me. "My Will is crying, my Will wants me." I heard him often and knew him to be sick and looking for us. Phil is missing Will so, they said.

There was a mirror in the dressing room at the Nursery School in Chicago. I looked at it, while the teacher buttoned up my snowsuit, and called, overjoyed, "There is my Will." The other children too began to point at their selves in the mirror and shouted names and jumped and laughed. There is another Dick. Where is the other Helen? My Tommy! Many a one fancied a twin. It was a game like another. Thus my Will faded to fantasy and then was forgotten. He was put away with the old toys for new ones.

That was thirty years ago.

CHICAGO TRIBUNE, December 4, 1952. AUTHOR SLAIN IN APARTMENT BY DRUNKEN WIFE. Rome, December 3. William Sailor, thirty-four-year-old Anglo-Indian, was murdered this afternoon in his apartment in Via Sistina. Apparently he was attacked by his wife, the former Martha Egan, a television starlet, with a hunting knife. The woman, who was found to be doped and drunk, stabbed his left cheek and wounded his left arm. While Sailor was staggering and trying to regain his senses, the woman fired two shots from a pistol. Sailor was killed instantly. Neighbors and police were brought to the scene by the shots. Mrs. Sailor suffered a nervous breakdown. The Sailors had been heard quarrelling several times before.

Sailor lost all his family during the earthquake of Vanyambadi, India, in 1921. At sixteen he joined the British Merchant Navy and led an adventurous life that took him over most of the Asian and African coasts. After the war he settled in Rome where he married Martha Egan in 1949. William Sailor is the author of numerous books on travel and adventure. His best known work is a novel, *No Home for Strangers.*

"Did you see that, Phil?" Robby McNutting said over the luncheon table. "It's this morning's *Trib*. He looked just exactly like you. My word, I've never seen such a likeness in all my life. Look at the forehead, generous like yours; the short cropped hair, the questioning eyes. Must be dark, like yours. The long straight nose, and the folds down the mouth, deeper on one side. Look, he even draws one shoulder up like you. Your mirror image." And he handed the page to Phil.

The paper trembled in Phil's hand so he put it down before him on the table and wiped over it with the back of his spoon as though to flatten it, or to see whether it was really there. Jim Wilder pushed his chair round the corner of the table, to look at the picture too, and Ted Connally, on the opposite side, got up, walked round, leaned his arms on the back of Phil's chair, and looked over his shoulder.

"Boy," Jim Wilder said, "it's almost uncanny."

"Phil, old fellow," Ted Connally guffawed, slapping him on the shoulder, "how does it feel to have been murdered?"

"Oh, come on," Robby McNutting said helpfully, "you can't tell from a telephoto. Maybe the man looked altogether different."

Phil kept staring at the picture and the story. "And I knew it, I knew it, I knew it all the time," he mumbled. Then he poured down his Martini, and McNutting's and Wilder's and what was left of Ted Connally's second, and staggered out of the Club.

CHICAGO TRIBUNE, December 8, 1952. MURDERESS DEFENDED BY VICTIM'S DOUBLE. Rome, December 7. Theophil Thorndike, a Chicago banker, arrived here today by plane from New York. He claimed to be the twin brother of William Sailor who was murdered by his wife on December 3. Thorndike said he had documents to prove the relationship. People who knew William Sailor said the similarity to Thorndike was astounding. Thorndike hired a lawyer to defend Mrs. Sailor and obtained her transfer, pending trial, to a private room at the sanatorium Villa Igea.

They certainly had explained my coming. But probably she had not listened. She was easily distracted. When I opened the door she seemed utterly unprepared.

She stared at me, buried her face in her hands, then stared again, forlorn. She jerked up from the red upholstered armchair in which she had been resting and retreated towards the red-framed window, groping blindly backwards with her arms, always staring at me, through me, at the red rousing wall. She leaned against the window, her palms cooling on the glass pane. Her black open hair fell over her black shoulders. Her face was pale and contorted. A witch condemned to the stake, a poor sick suffering girl. "Go away," she hissed, "please go away and leave me alone."

"How do you do, Martha." The calm swing of a trained business voice sounded utterly out of place, even to me. "I am Will's brother Phil Thorndike. From Chicago. Didn't they tell you?" There was not another sound to be gotten out of her. She stood there black and twisted, her arms spread out, a barren tree against the darkling sky. A quarter of an hour, perhaps half an hour, and night fell. I stole towards the door and slipped out.

The next morning he brought her roses and candies.

"Hello, Martha, you look fine today. Had a good rest? It was cold in Chicago when I left, you know; the wings of the plane were heavy with ice. We had a hard time taking off. Didn't he ever tell you he had a brother? He probably didn't remember. I couldn't either, but then I knew it even though he ceased to be real long ago, in a certain way. Dad kept talking about him and mother, and there were pictures and the baby book. I'll show them to you. Look, I bought a copy of *No Home for Strangers.* Started reading it. He must have been a tough guy. You know, I wanted to be a writer, too. Took a couple of courses in creative writing at college. But then, I met—Martha—my wife's name was Martha too—and then I got a job at the Morris Trust Company and went to Law School. I guess that didn't leave much time for anything else. Why don't you try these candies? You smoke? You

know, I don't know a soul here in Rome. It's funny. But there are American bars all over the place. Hot dogs de luxe—the Romans take them so seriously and they're terribly fashionable. But I don't like it here. People staring at me. 'That must be William Sailor's brother'—do I really look so much like Will?"

"Why don't you shut up?"

"Hello Martha. Feeling better today?"

"Say, how long are you going to hang around here?"

"Oh, Martha, I want to stay as long as necessary. I want to help you.... I've finished Will's book. Do you like it, Martha?"

"I hate it. And I hate Will. I hate both of you. Oh, don't go! Please don't go away."

Martha wept, fitfully and fearfully. Her face on her arm on the red polished hospital table. Her back shaking. Tears clogging her nose and choking her throat. The world, coming to an end with each long pressed sob, vanished trembling behind the wall of tears. The void closed in, tightening on her deluged temples, her squeezed lungs. She wept on Phil's hand stretched to stroke soothingly her jerking shoulders. "Poor girl," he said. "I know it. I know it all. Cry it out. Cry it all out of your system."

She stroked his face, blindly, gratefully.

"The scar," she said, and had suddenly stopped weeping. "The scar on your cheek, on your right cheek." She looked at him in new horror.

"Nothing. An accident. A crash. Three months ago. It's all healed now."

Martha: Good morning Phil. How nice of you to come so early.
Phil: Had a good rest?
Martha: Just fine. Thanks. And you?
Phil: I got up early and took a walk in the city.
Martha: It's a wonderful city.
Phil: People sitting outdoors in the cafés.
Martha: In Via Veneto.
Phil: In December. In Chicago it's blizzards.
Martha: And here the light is lambent on the red stones.

Phil: You just walk for hours, just walk and get lost.
Martha: One discovery opening into another.
Phil: Don't you love it?
Martha: I loved it.
Phil: How long have you been living here, Martha?
Martha: Seven, almost eight years. It's almost eight years.
Phil: Met Will in Rome?
Martha: At Dermott McDermott's.
Phil: You know Dermott?
Martha: Of course I do. I was staying with him, and you know Freddy.
Phil: Freddy? It's years and years.
Martha: He pays him ninety dollars a month.
Phil: Just for the fun of sleeping with him.
Martha: Freddy is a terrible mess.
Phil: I don't see what Dermott finds in him.
Martha: Sometimes he won't speak to Dermott all day.
Phil: I think he hates Dermott. I think he will kill Dermott some day.
Martha: When Dermott wants to dress up and go to the show, Freddy won't shave and he'll hang around in dirty jeans, and he'll go out into the street and talk to the whores.
Phil: Like and like keep good company.
Martha: He won't do a thing at home. The bathroom, always messy. He'd use up the last piece of soap.
Phil: The last piece of toilet paper.
Martha: But he'd never dream of replacing it.
Phil: Never. You had to do it all.
Martha: What are you smiling at? Am I boring you? I guess I am boring you.
Phil: Not in the least, Martha.
Martha: Will smiled, just before that gun went off.
Phil: Smiled, just like that.
Martha: I sometimes think: You. Simply you. You almost did it. You died. You scared me. Don't do it again. I must be more careful. That must never happen again. Phil, I am so scared.
Phil: How did Will and Dermott get along?
Martha: At first, famously. That is, Will adored Dermott.
Phil: And Dermott just loves being adored.

Martha: For Will, Dermott was a real writer, and artist. Dermott had to check every comma Will wrote.

Phil: Poor Will. And he himself wasn't a real writer?

Martha: Just thrillers, you know. And he said he did not know any language at all.

Phil: He must have known Hindi, as a child.

Martha: He forgot it, and English he never learned. Just picked it up from the boys in the Navy.

Phil: And read a lot, I guess.

Martha: But it was not *his* language. And lately he started getting mixed up with Italian.

Phil: He had no language.

Martha: It does something to your mind, he said.

Phil: Huprooted. Kicked around in world and creeds and systems. So huprooted. All of us.

Martha: And did he show off in front of Dermott, spending silly amounts of money, you know, and telling him how many copies of his latest book had been sold and in how many languages it had been translated.

Phil: Dermott couldn't care less.

Martha: And he said it read best in Persian, although there were a few minor mistakes in the translation.

Phil: That's sheer snobbism.

Martha: I don't know why he picked up with me in the first place; whether it was because he cared for me or whether he thought it would hurt Dermott. You know, he was jealous of Dermott, at the same time.

Phil: And you?

Martha: I don't know. I really don't know. He said he was going to get me a part in his new television play. A part written just for me. He was wonderfully like you. Don't die any more, please don't.

Phil: It is late, Martha, and I must go. They are getting your lunch ready. Halfway decent? What shall I bring you tomorrow? Okay, Martha, it will be marrons glacés. So long, Martha.

She is not a bad girl after all. Simple, forthright, cor-

dial, rather generous by nature, underneath. Out of place in this career. Slithered into it God knows why. What made her act so horridly with Will?

My Martha was different. Wicked right from the outset. A go-getter. At first she seemed nice enough, though, and active. Pretty tall blond she was.

Dead. Destroyed. Kaputt. Won't work no more. Slipped out of my impotent hands. And left a hard hole, hard white hole, superimposing its Martha shape, planing into its contours whoever wants to float up through.

The other girls at the office didn't like her, though. Fawning on the boss and bossy on the fawns. (That's a good one. Must tell Martha. Which Martha?) She certainly knew what she wanted. Spun her web round me in no time. And then the allergies. Never seemed to bother her till she had me. But then! Endless trouble and troubled end.

Phil: Listen, Martha, what I made up yesterday on my way home: "Fawning on the boss and bossy on the fawns." Isn't that a good one?

Martha: Who? What?

Phil: Any one. I mean, I was thinking of my wife, when she was still working at the office. Can you imagine. She wasn't a bit like you: all cold and calculating.

Martha: Just the name.

Phil: That does not create any bond.

Martha: Maybe it does.

Phil: There are many Marthas.

Martha: And one proto-Martha.

Phil: What difference does it make?

Martha: There's something damned about all Marthas.

Phil: Perhaps.

Martha: Parents ought to be more careful.

Phil: It's their way, their luck, they impress with their chosen name.

Martha: I wish my name was——. I can't think of a suitable name for myself; but imagine if my name was——, everything would have been different.

There's something damned about all Marthas.

Phil: About mine there was, by Jove. Hell of a life.

Martha: What did she do to you?

Phil: The allergies. The air-conditioned rooms and the oxygen tents. The fumes and the moves and the fired nurses.

Martha: if she was sick?

Phil: I couldn't accept any invitations for dinner

Martha: or bring home any guests.

Phil: She'd be sick, infallibly. She called me at the office and she called me at board meetings

Martha: and woe, if you didn't get home on time.

Phil: She made my life utterly impossible.

Martha: Why didn't you get rid of her?

Phil: I did. Divorce, you know, has an ugly ring in the ear of a missionary's son

Martha: and I think you just wanted it like that. Some people just have to have hell at home. You know, Will. . . .

Phil: Did you run Will like that?

Martha: I don't know. I guess I was worried about him because he took to drinking so heavily.

Phil: You canceled his dinner engagements?

Martha: Because I didn't want people to see him so drunk.

Phil: There's always some because

Martha: because he put both hands into the salad bowl at the Marchesa Marchesani's

Phil: if he didn't do worse than that

Martha: and he would argue. Did he argue, with Dermott, when they both were drunk? He was quite unbearable.

Phil: What did they argue about?

Martha: Politics, lots of it. Imperialism. Socialism, and all the rest.

Phil: Well. I know where Dermott stands on all those things

Martha: and you can imagine what happened when Will said the Indians were inferior.

Phil: Did he say that?

Martha: And the children there get blind because they are too lazy to drive the flies off their eyes. He said

they just sit there and let the flies eat their eyes.

Phil: Maybe it's true. I heard it too.

Martha: You know, he lived with them, street urchins, for years, after he got lost during the earthquake —a girl named Maharata picked him up and mothered him as best she could—and he said, if he didn't turn out to be a mess like them it was because he had the stuff it takes to be a man.

Phil: it's the same stuff I am made of. I can assure you.

Martha: It hasn't got anything to do with the "social order" he said. And the British officers in India did a wonderful job

Phil: they tried to bring the natives up to their standards: didn't he say that?

Martha: Why, they even left their personal silver to the Indian Officers Mess, when they quit, just to show them

Phil: that was undoubtedly generous on their part.

Martha: But the Labour Government was terrible

Phil: that wasn't exactly what Dermott thought.

Martha: But Will, he turned literally green when you as much as mentioned one of them. Which, after all, is rather strange because he knew nothing about politics in the first place.

Phil: What did he think was wrong?

Martha: The way they betrayed the Empire, he said, was terrible and they killed initiative at home and produced soft characters, whereas, what you need to get along is to be tough, he said

Phil: come to think about it, that's just the way I used to feel

Martha: you've got to be tough

Phil: it was because I was so tough that I became president of the Morris Trust Co. at thirty years of age

Martha: you thought, the real way to start a business was to sell apples from an apple cart

Phil: I even tried to write a book about these things, you know, how tough and self-made you've got to be

Martha: and that the New Deal was terrible
Phil: and that the government should keep off my affairs and yours
Martha: and stuff like that.
Phil: It was to be called: *Keep Going West, Young Man,* but I guess it was so badly written no one wanted to publish it, thank goodness.
Martha: Why did you change your mind about these things?
Phil: It's all stuff and nonsense: I and I and I. Did you ever hear about a fellow named Plato?
Martha: Vaguely.
Phil: My favored author at the Great Books class.
Martha: Your mind is wandering, Phil.
Phil: At the beginning, he said, there were neither men nor women
Martha: but some kind of funny beings
Phil: male and female at once.
Martha: I guess they must have had four arms
Phil: and four legs and so on
Martha: I wonder whether they were happy that way
Phil: until, one day, a certain rude deity split them asunder
Martha: severing boy and girl
Phil: and they have been looking for one another ever since.
Martha: What are you driving at, Phil?
Phil: It's the story of Will and me.
Martha: Split asunder, one day, by a certain rude deity?
Phil: A quirk of fate.
Martha: You should have been one, are one. Don't die any more, please don't die again.
Phil: One case of 86 works out like that: Twins. One out of every 86^2, makes triplets; one of every 86^3, quadruplets. The dickens knows why. But that's the way it is
Martha: and it had to be you
Phil: or else it might have been one of 87
Martha: the law upset
Phil: a false interval, a dissonant chord: it hurts my ear to think of it

Martha: it could not happen
Phil: the name of the new Platonic God is Statistics.
Martha: You are mad, Phil,
Phil: and all that he-man stuff just to hide the half-man, you know
Martha: and you were lonely and little and scared underneath.

It had gotten dark in the room.

"Martha, dear, Doctor Rosselli says the trial has been set for a month from now. He is very confident it will go all right. He says he can drop the plea for temporary insanity—your nervous breakdown came after the fact—and base your case on self-defense. Accidental killing in self-defense. He says the only trouble is that there are no witnesses, and the fact that you were doped, but he hopes to get around that. But now you should tell me everything. The whole story. That may be very, very helpful. Are you strong enough to tell me everything?"

"I'll try. But it's a long story. I'll try to piece it together. Well, Will was getting worse all the time. He drank terribly. For a certain time, he grew a beard, and he was wearing dark glasses. The light hurt his eyes, he said. What are you fumbling with in your pocket. Now look there, for God's sake, dark glasses! You too! He looked terribly sick. I wanted to take him to a doctor, but he said he knew I wanted to murder him. He said that all the time. He whispered it into my ear at night. He developed the strangest notions."

"What notions?"

"For a while he always thought that he . . . stank. That was before he grew the beard. Later he didn't care any more. At that time, he would constantly change his underwear, order that it be boiled, sniff at his shirts and jackets and pillow cases. He would constantly get new mouth waters and tooth pastes. When there was some bad smell somewhere—for instance, at the post office—he would say with a very loud voice, *che puzzo,* what a stink! And everybody would look at him—which is just what he wanted—for he wanted them all to know that it wasn't *he.* At the restaurant he would order the waiter to open the

windows—I smell the smell of sour feet, he would announce—and when the lady at the next table protested against the draught, he said, Lady, if I were in your shoes —and I mean what I say, he added—I would not protest against a little fresh air. But some people don't seem to notice when they . . . because the smell goes away: it doesn't go up into your own nose. He had often noticed that, he said. It was quite embarrassing."

"What's there to giggle about, Martha? Poor Will."

"And when I opened the door to his room, he said, why don't you come in, does it stink here? But, as I said, it got worse and worse. He stayed up all night, trying to work. And then he would sleep for days on end. He hollered at me, even when there were other people, and he threw things at me. The telephone. He kept it unplugged most of the time. And if I forgot to unplug it and it rang, he picked it up and cooed 'googlegooglegoo' into it, and then he hit me over the head with it."

"He would go to any length to get you to be what you were not."

"Well, I guess, I got mean too. It's contagious, you know. I smashed his bottles, and then I watched him lapping the whiskey off the ground."

"How ghastly, Martha."

"And then came the affair with Freddy. And that was the end."

"What do you mean, affair?"

"I mean I had an affair with Freddy."

"Didn't you say you couldn't stand him?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. But first I must tell you about Licky. Poor Licky. She was so cute."

"Who was Licky?"

"A little Dalmatian. The cutest dog you ever saw. Dermott's wedding present. Well, Licky was in heat. And we kept her locked up in my bedroom. She could open all the doors, if you didn't lock them with the key. She was so smart. And I would take her down, three, four times a day, on the leash, of course, and never letting go of her for a minute. When she was in her third week—which is, of course, the worst possible moment—I came home one evening and saw Licky, loose, racing around like crazy,

panting, her tongue out, and Will, going his way as if there was nothing to it. I said, for Christ's sake, Will, are you out of your mind? He said—he was so drunk—now don't start fussing. The mutt got her too, I saw it, he said, but so what. To hell with it all. I'll fix her up, he said. Don't start fussing. Then he got a shot from the vet—Ergotinina—I guess he gave it the wrong way, or, at any rate, much too much of it—he should have given her 3 cc and he gave her about 10—and poor Licky, her heart was not strong ever since she had had distemper. What we went through with that dog, sitting up days and nights, and I won't tell you what we spent on medicines and vet bills—that distemper had left her with a weak heart. And, what with that wrong shot, she beastly died."

"That's terrible."

"I am telling you all that, because he did exactly the same thing to me. He practically arranged it. He always managed to get the two of us together."

"But why?"

"I guess it wasn't enough for him to have taken *me* away from Dermott. He wanted to take away Freddy too."

"Sheer wickedness."

"And jealousy. Anyway. One evening Dermott and Freddy came over, and Will said, and he was all dressed up, even with a hat, he said, Dermott and he had to go to a PEN Club meeting which was terribly important. He said he was arranging for some sumptuous prize to be awarded to Dermott—but Freddy and I couldn't come along, he said, because we were not members, and we should wait at home, and there was a new bottle of Scotch, and we should play some records. After we were half through with the Scotch, I assure you I felt so bored and so drunk, and there was nothing we had to say to each other, and I guess so I started making love to Freddy. Freddy was puzzled; he'd never done it with a girl before. But before we knew it."

"Goodness gracious."

"When we found out that I was pregnant, Will got so disgusting it's hard to describe. You know, he didn't get angry or passionate about it, just cold and cynical. Quite disgusting. He said, either you pull out of here or I'll see to it that you get fixed up all right. He said he didn't

want a child of Freddy's in his house. As a matter of fact he didn't want any child at all. I felt so sick and nauseated I told him it was all the same to me, just so long as he took care of everything. And he did. But I kept having pains afterwards, and then he would get me dope but I felt just terrible, terrible. And that Sicilian woman who came in to clean up, she knew all about it. She was tiny and black and her eyes stung. I still hear the click of her clogs and she kept hissing at me *ammazzalo,* you should kill him."

"Sicilians are quick at that."

"Between Will's own obessions and that Sicilian's constant whispers I gradually got quite used to the idea."

"Did you really *want* to kill him?"

"I guess I did not really want anything at all. One evening I said I wished I had died like Licky. And he said: But Licky was a *good* bitch. At that moment I picked up that pistol from his desk—I was sitting near his desk—and pointed it at him. I did not know whether it was loaded, and I don't know how to fire a gun anyway. I just kept pointing it at him. And he grabbed a hunting knife and leapt forward and spat like a cat: So you are going to kill me, no, you aren't. And he smiled. Now I don't understand whether it was because he wasn't as tough as he thought he was, or because he had the knife in his right hand—you know, he was left-handed—at any rate, I dropped the pistol and tried to wrestle the knife from him. He was so awkward and so weak, come to think of it, he practically slashed his cheek—the left one—with his own hand, and then the knife slipped and stuck in his left arm. He yelled and stepped back to pull it out and I picked up the pistol again and pointed it against him, just in case he attacked again. But, I don't know how, the pistol fired. And that was the end."

"Oh, Martha, poor poor girl. Don't cry now. It is all too terrible for words. It is even more terrible than you think it is. But now it's all over. Poor, poor Martha, it is not your fault, and it will be plain for every one to see. Look at the scar on my cheek . . . right cheek . . . my right arm was badly mangled too. You asked me the first day what it was. Now I'll tell you. It's weird. Martha, my wife,

she got pregnant too. But she did not want it at all. If you want to breast-feed him you can have him, she said to me. Her lips were pale, her cheeks drawn, her eyes shot venom."

"Maybe she was really ill."

"With the kind of service you've got to put up with here, she said, I'd lose years playing nurse-maid. Farewell to social life. Farewell to lectures and studies. And as sick and delicate as I am, she said. The allergies. Just shut up at home. That's what you wanted, I know, she said. There was no way of stopping her."

"But if she was really sick . . ."

"She said, and how do you know it is your child? She said it out of sheer meanness. There was absolutely no reason for supposing that it was *not* my child. I guess she was much too selfish to plunge into the sea of trouble, to go through all the fluster and gripes it takes to have a lover."

"Couldn't it be that she was too nice?"

"Why are you trying to defend her?"

"She's dead."

"I remember, I remember: She hustled in her dressing gown and kicked up the kind of smell nasty ladies have on them in the morning. You know. Mixed up perfumes and powders and greases and sleep and some coffee in it . . ."

"You too go in for smells?"

"Are you trying to be funny? It is strange. I never thought of that. Anyway, what would you have told her?"

"I'd let her go to hell. I mean, I suppose, you should have comforted her, encouraged her, told her it would be a fine baby."

"Oh, come on now."

"What did you tell her then?"

"I felt so disgusted by that time—hapless creature, I thought—so I merely said: You're your own boss, darling. It's your problem. You solve it."

"And she?"

"I never saw anybody turning so green. I suppose she expected me to fall on my knees and beg her not to do it. But I simply didn't feel like it."

"And so she got it fixed?"

"I didn't see her until after it was all over. She felt lousy and she hated me for it. I guess it was all my fault."

"What do you mean, your fault, if the same thing happened to Will just about at the same time?"

"Wasn't it his fault? Didn't he act simply beastly?"

"How could it have been his fault, if it happened to you too?"

"Whose fault is it then?"

"I guess fault isn't the right word here."

"Well. Now you are getting nearer to where I want you to get. Because surely it was not *your* fault—"

"Go on with your story."

"I am nearly at the end. We did not see much of each other after that. And we didn't see anybody else. Only once I accepted an invitation for lunch, at the Wilcoxes at Winnetka. Martha said she was glad to go to the Wilcoxes. It was a Sunday, and so foggy you couldn't see your own hand at an arm's length, and we took the Outer Drive."

"You were living on the South Side?"

"Yes. And just after the underpass at 53rd Street . . . a crazy car, passing another one in that fog. He came up against us, at full speed. I saw him coming when he was practically crashing into us. All three cars, smashed. Four people, badly cut up. Only Martha was dead."

"And you felt that you killed her."

"I certainly did. And I still don't understand how. Look, it was she or I. If the car had swerved to the right—as it should—I would have been killed; she wounded. But it swerved to the left. God knows how. I think, when she saw what was going on, she herself grabbed the wheel and pushed it over. Or perhaps I did it, I really don't know."

"Just like the fight between Will and me. And that moment of indecision."

"Indecision on things long since decided."

"It was he or I. And I don't know, still don't know, how it was that it was he . . ."

"And his left side cut up and my right, in the process."

"That is the way it had to be. Wait a moment: Can you explain to me *why?*"

"Karma. It all was there. Nothing to be done about it. And one half and one half made one."

"You know, I think it does something to your mind, the mere fact of having been born in the Orient."

"Sure does. Just look at Harry Luce."

"Thank you, Doctor Rosselli, Martha is getting much much better. And I am so glad that you think the material at our disposal is shaping up so promisingly."

"I think Mr. McDermott's statement will be very useful. After all, he has known Martha for a long long time and seen her practically until the day of the . . . accident."

"And the maid is ready to testify."

"That'll be helpful too."

"I, myself, have prepared a little statement, avvocato. I don't know whether it will be of any use to you. Just some thoughts I had on the whole thing—the way I see it. And so I put them down. Here, at any rate, avvocato, here it is."

TWIN'S WAIL

You are trying Martha Egan Sailor for murder while everyone says she is such a good girl, but the more they talk about her and the more she talks about herself, the wronger her case gets, and she's just a plain murderess.

Why didn't any one try me for murder? I killed Martha in a crash and took to the deed all the ingredients my brother used but plus one: the grace of God.

If it is a grace to live. Cain lived, but Abel died. There was Cain in Will, much Cain, but some Abel, for he died. There was Abel in me, much able Abel, but some Cain; for I live.

I was quite a regular fellow, standing on my own two feet, with a regular career and a successful one; I thought that was my merit and a bit of luck. With a marriage that miscarried: I thought that was my fault and a bit of disgrace.

It stopped there and made sense: a closed system of information.

Will too was a typical fellow, standing on his own two feet, with a typical career that made sense absolute, and a marriage that failed and ended in violence, an old and self-sufficient story.

Another closed system of information, and if you stop there, his murderess is a murderess.

But extrapolate the facts and interpolate the systems,

and differentiate and integrate, which is not enough: who knows how much to interpolate, to extegrate and communate to get the whole, complex, infiniplex truth to the nth potential. Somehow no value can be assigned to Guilt in these equations. It whittles down, infinitesimal.

A wretched wrecked girl pulling a trigger is such a trivial factor in this factura. Incogent to think you'll bring down the crushing structure of incognita by sawing away at that thin leg of my cognita cognate. Let her alone. Whatever her part of how do you call it, Guilt, in the context of her own closed system, she was certainly expiated. The fact is that what happened here had to happen and did happen because it happened another time far away. Our wills are tied through the ages across spaces, and what I did, or had done to, my right hand was but a reflex of what he did with, or had done to, his left. It always was like that between us and was all written down. (Exhibit A, attached.)

That knocks out the girl, altogether, her only fault being that her name is Martha. Calling all Marthas, suing all Marthas, if you wish.

Blind chance has once more shown its foresight in permitting us to reason this out at Villa Igea, an insane asylum providing undoubtedly the most suitable setting for suchlike revelations. I am putting them down because, whereas it is of course possible that we are freaks of nature, half-men, conditioned by one another, it is, on the other hand, equally possible that our experience, though extreme, is yet more or less typical, and that men proud of their achievements or crushed by their guilt are equally presumptuous, for thinking they are free—they are not. With kindest regards, very sincerely yours.

"Oh, Phil, dear, the news is a little bit too good."

"It never can be too good, Martha. Why, what did he say, Doctor Comedger?"

"He said I was fine. General condition, excellent. Blood count, satisfactory. Weight, satisfactory. But, Phil, brace yourself for the good news . . ."

"Well, what could it be?"

"Phil, it's twins."

WILLIAM MORRISON

Joseph Samachson, Ph.D., is a quiet and industrious chemist who translates technical works from difficult languages, does complicated things on the research staff of a major New York hospital and, in spare time, writes books about archeology and the ballet with his wife, Dorothy. There is, however, another area of extreme competence in the man. Under the pseudonym of "William Morrison," Dr. Samachson has for years been among the foremost writers of science fiction. When the two halves of his personality fuse, when the biochemist meets the science fictioneer, we reap such a splendid hybrid harvest as—

Country Doctor

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'm coming."

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

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

The space port was less than twenty miles away, and it took him no more than ten minutes to get there. As he approached, the light blinked green at an intersection. Ah, he thought, one advantage of being a country doctor with a privileged road is that you always have the right of way. Are there any other advantages? None that you can think of offhand. You go through college with a brilliant record, you dream of helping humanity, of doing research in medicine, of making discoveries that will

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

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

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

"Doc!"

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

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

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

"I thought there was a serious crash."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Is that supposed to be my patient?"

"That's it, Doctor."

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

"That's up to you. Now, wait a minute, Doctor, before you blow up. This thing is sick. It isn't eating. It hardly moves. And it's been getting worse almost from the time we left Ganymede. We meant to land at Marsopolis and have it treated there, but we overshot the place and when

something went wrong with our drive we had no choice but to come down here."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There were other, even more disquieting ways in which he was ignorant. What kind of digestive juices did the thing have? Suppose he did go down in a divers uniform —would the juices dissolve it? Would they dissolve the

oxygen lines, the instruments he used to look around and probe the vast inside of the beast?

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

"Thanks. How do I know that once the suit starts to go, it won't rip? How do I know that the juices simply won't eat my skin away?"

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

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

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

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

They tied strong thin plastic cords around Doctor Meltzer's waist, tested the oxygen lines. Then they put a ladder up in front of the beast's face. Doctor Meltzer had a little trouble breathing, but it was not because of any-

thing wrong with the oxygen supply. That was at the right pressure and humidity, and it was mixed with the correct amount of inert gases. It was merely the thought of going down into the creature's belly that constricted his throat, the idea of going into a strange and terrible world so different from his own, of submitting to unimaginable dangers.

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

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

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

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

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

He stepped off the ladder into the great mouth. Beneath him, the jaw was slippery. His feet slid out from under

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

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

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

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

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

"What's it like in there?"

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

"See anything that might be wrong?"

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

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

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

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

"Doctor, what's happening?"

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

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

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

"Lines all right?"

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

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

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

"What is it?"

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

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

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

"Can you get through?"

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

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

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

He stared at the great valve. It moved rapidly, opening and closing in a two-second rhythm. Probably a valve separating one part of the digestive system from another, he thought, like the human pylorus. The green-streaked

gray flesh seemed totally unlike human muscle, but all the same it appeared to serve a similar function. Maybe the right kind of drug would cause muscular relaxation.

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

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

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

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

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

"Are you taking a sample?"

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

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

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

"What? Something alive?"

"Very much alive."

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

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

"Be careful, man!"

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

But the creature, whatever it was, did not approach

him again, and he waded further into the blue pool. When his eyes were below the surface of the liquid, he saw the thing moving again.

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

"Is it coming close?"

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

"Any signs that the thing is dangerous?"

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

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

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

"Maida! What are you doing here?"

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

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

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

"Ships overhead?"

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

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

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

"What did he say?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Why can't they go down now? I'd like to have some

company. If the beast's mouth is open—" A disquieting thought struck him. "Say, it is open, isn't it?"

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

"You mean it's closed?"

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

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

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

"But the oxygen—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

He felt a sudden surge of anger. If there was one thing he hated, it was good advice, given smugly when the giver could stand off to one side, without sharing the danger of the person he was helping. Don't let this happen, don't get caught here, take care of yourself. But you were down here to do a job, and so far you hadn't done it. You hadn't learned a thing about what made this monstrous creature tick.

And the chances were that you wouldn't learn, either. The way to examine a beast was from the outside, not from within. You watched it eat, you studied the transfer of the food from one part of the body to another, you checked on the circulation of the body fluids, using radioactive tracers if no other methods offered, you dissected specimens of typical individuals. The Captain should have had a few scientists aboard, and they should

have done a few of these things instead of just sitting there staring at the beast. But that would have made things too easy. No, they had to wait for you to come aboard, and then send you deliberately sliding down into the guts of an animal you didn't know anything about, in the hope of having a miracle happen to you. Maybe they thought a loop of intestine or some gland of internal secretion would come over to you and say, "I'm not working right. Fix me, and everything will be fine."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We're still working on it."

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

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

"I take it that nothing is effective."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Doing fine. How are the kids?"

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

"You didn't tell me that before!"

"I didn't want to upset you."

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

"Oh, Larry, what difference does it make if they miss

school for once? A chance to be in on something like this happens once in a lifetime."

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

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

"Hiya, Jerry. Having a good time?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No!" he yelled.

"Okay, okay. Say, Dad know what? If you bring it back alive, they're gonna take it to Earth, and put it in a special zoo of its own."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"They're not attacking, are they?"

"Not yet."

"You feel all right otherwise?"

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

The Captain asked anxiously, "What is it?"

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

"You mean it's opening and closing?"

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

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

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

"That valve I paralyzed. It's working normally once more!" place to take off from.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Doctor Meltzer? Are you still all right?"

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

"Just how do you expect to manage?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Doctor Meltzer, Doctor Meltzer!"

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

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

"I'm hurrying. By the way, those tadpoles are still with me. They trailing along as if they'd found a long-lost friend. I feel like a pie-eyed piper."

"I just hope they don't attack."

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

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

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

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

The tumor throbbed convulsively.

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

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

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

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

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

He moved upwards, toward the greenish liquid.

An earthquake struck.

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

The sides began to constrict, hemming him in.

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

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

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

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

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

"Is it better in there, Doctor?"

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

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

"Try a bigger electric shock."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Doctor Meltzer!"

He didn't answer. Instead, he pulled out his lancet and cut the useless cords away. The oxygen lines too were a nuisance, in constant danger of kinking and tangling,

now that they were no longer taut. But at least the gas was still flowing through them and would continue to flow—until the digestive fluid ate through.

The tadpole creatures seemed to have developed a positive affection for him. They were all around him, not close enough for him to grab them, but too close for comfort. At any moment they might decide to take a nip out of his suit or an oxygen line. And with the plastic already weakened, even a slight tear might be fatal.

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

"What do you want?"

"Why didn't you answer?"

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

"Shall we try that sharp electric shock?"

"Go ahead."

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

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

"No luck, Captain?"

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

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

"Larry, were you hurt? Larry—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And then blackness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Doing fine. Seems to have recovered completely."

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

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

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

"What?"

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

"Good God, where will we keep them?"

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

"But what—"

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

"Gravid?"

"That means pregnant," exclaimed Jerry.

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

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

"Lots of times," said Martia.

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

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

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

"Some kids are dopes," said Jerry.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ROBERT BLOCH

With indignation Bob Bloch denies a libel: "It is not true that I am a monster! I have the heart of a small boy. I keep it in my desk drawer." Heart he has (no matter whose); he also has wit and insight. And if sometimes what he has to tell us is monstrous (witness his recent shuddery suspense novel Psycho, *or, for that matter, the following), it is not that he exaggerates a picture, but only that his perceptions are so clear. Almost any writer could have conceived the setting he describes below, but only Robert Bloch could have made it into—*

Daybroke

Up in the sky the warheads whirled, and the thunder of their passing shook the mountain.

Deep in his vaulted sanctuary he sat, godlike and inscrutable, marking neither the sparrow's nor the missile's fall. There was no need to leave his shelter to stare down at the city.

He knew what was happening—had known ever since early in the evening when the television flickered and died. An announcer in the holy white garb of the healing arts had been delivering an important message about the world's most popular laxative—the one most people preferred, the one four out of five doctors used themselves. Midway in his praise of this amazing new medical discovery he had paused and advised the audience to stand by for a special bulletin.

But the bulletin never came; instead the screen went blank and the thunder boomed.

All night long the mountain trembled, and the seated man trembled too; not with anticipation but with realization. He had expected this, of course, and that was why he was here. Others had talked about it for years; there had been wild rumors and solemn warnings and much muttering in taverns. But the rumor-mongers and the warning-sounders and the tavern-mutterers had made no move. They had stayed in the city and he alone had fled.

Some of them, he knew, had stayed to stave off the inevitable end as best they could, and these he saluted for their courage. Others had attempted to ignore the future, and these he detested for their blindness. And all of them he pitied.

For he had realized, long ago, that courage was not enough and that ignorance was no salvation. Wise words and foolish words are one—they will not halt the storm. And when the storm approaches, it is best to flee.

So he had prepared for himself this mountain retreat, high over the city, and here he was safe; would be safe for years to come. Other men of equal wealth could have done the same, but they were too wise or too foolish to face reality. So while they spread their rumors and sounded their warnings and muttered in their cups, he built his sanctuary; lead-guarded, amply provisioned, and stocked with every need for years to come, including even a generous supply of the world's most popular laxative.

Dawn came at last and the echoes of the thunder died, and he went to a special, shielded place where he could sight his spyglass at the city. He stared and he squinted, but there was nothing to be seen—nothing but swirling clouds that billowed blackly and rolled redly across the hazed horizon.

Then he knew that he must go down to the city if he wanted to find out, and made due preparations.

There was a special suit to wear, a cunning seamless garment of insulated cloth and lead, difficult and costly to obtain. It was a top secret suit; the kind only Pentagon generals possess. They cannot procure them for their wives, and they must steal them for their mistresses. But he had one. He donned it now.

An elevated platform aided his descent to the base of the mountain, and there his car was waiting. He drove out, the shielded doors closing automatically behind him, and started for the city. Through the eyepiece of his insulated helmet he stared out at a yellowish fog, and he drove slowly, even though he encountered no traffic nor any sign of life.

After a time the fog lifted, and he could see the countryside. Yellow trees and yellow grass stood stiffly silhouetted against a yellow sky in which great clouds writhed and whirled.

Van Gogh's work, he told himself, knowing it was a lie. For no artist's hand had smashed the windows of the farmhouses, peeled the paint from the sides of the barns, or squeezed the warm breath from the herds huddling in the fields, standing fright-frozen but dead.

He drove along to the broad arterial leading to the city; an arterial which ordinarily swarmed with the multicolored corpuscles of motor vehicles. But there were no cars moving today, not in this artery.

Not until he neared the suburbs did he see them, and then he rounded a curve and was halfway upon the vanguard before he panicked and halted in a ditch.

The roadway ahead was packed with automobiles as far as the eye could see—a solid mass, bumper to bumper, ready to descend upon him with whirring wheels.

But the wheels were not turning.

The cars were dead. The further stretches of the highway were an automobile graveyard. He approached the spot on foot, treading with proper reverence past the Cadillac-corpses, the cadavers of Chevrolets, the bodies of Buicks. Close at hand he could see the evidence of violent ends; the shattered glass, the smashed fenders, the battered bumpers and twisted hoods.

The signs of struggle were often pitiable to observe; here was a tiny Volkswagen, trapped and crushed between two looming Lincolns; there an MG had died beneath the wheels of a charging Chrysler. But all were still now. The Dodges dodged no longer, the Hornets had ceased their buzzing, and the Ramblers would never ramble again.

It was hard for him to realize with equal clarity the

tragedy that had overtaken the people inside these cars—they were dead, too, of course, but somehow their passing seemed insignificant. Maybe his thinking had been affected by the attitude of the age, in which a man tended to be less and less indentified as an individual and more and more regarded on the basis of the symbolic status of the car he drove. When a stranger rode down the street, one seldom thought of him as a person; one's only immediate reaction was, "There goes a Ford—there goes a Pontiac—there goes one of those big goddam Imperials." And men bragged about their cars instead of their characters. So somehow the death of the automobiles seemed more important than the death of their owners. It didn't seem as though human beings had perished in this panic-stricken effort to escape from the city; it was the cars which had made a dash for final freedom and then failed.

He skirted the road and now continued along the ditch until he came to the first sidewalks of the suburbs. Here the evidence of destruction was accentuated. Explosion and implosion had done their work. In the country, paint had been peeled from the walls, but in the suburbs walls had been peeled from the buildings. Not every home was leveled. There were still plenty of ranchhouses standing, though no sign of a rancher in a gray flannel suit. In some of the picturesquely modern white houses, with their light lines and heavy mortgages, the glass side walls remained unshattered, but there was no sign of happy, busy suburban life within—the television sets were dead.

Now he found his progress impeded by an increasing litter. Apparently a blast had swept through this area; his way was blocked by a clutter of the miscellaneous debris of Exurbia.

He waded through or stepped around:

Boxes of Kleenex, artificial shrunken heads which had once dangled in the windows of station-wagons, crumpled shopping-lists and scribbled notices of appointments with psychiatrists.

He stepped on an Ivy League cap, nearly tripped over a twisted barbecue grille, got his feet tangled in the straps

of foam-rubber falsies. The gutters were choked with the glut from a bombed-out drugstore; bobbie-pins, nylon bobby-socks, a spate of pocketbooks, a carton of tranquilizers, a mass of suntan lotion, suppositories, deodorants, and a big cardboard cutout of Harry Belafonte obscured by a spilled can of hot fudge.

He shuffled on, through a welter of women's electric shavers, Book-of-the-Month-Club bonus selections, Presley records, false teeth, and treatises of Existentialism. Now he was actually approaching the city proper. Signs of devastation multiplied. Trudging past the campus of the university he noted, with a start of horror, that the huge football stadium was no more. Nestled next to it was the tiny Fine Arts building, and at first he thought that it too had been razed. Upon closer inspection, however, he realized it was untouched, save for the natural evidence of neglect and decay.

He found it difficult to maintain a regular course, now, for the streets were choked with wrecked vehicles and the sidewalks often blocked by beams or the entire toppled fronts of buildings. Whole structures had been ripped apart, and here and there were freakish variations where a roof had fallen in or a single room smashed to expose its contents. Apparently the blow had come instantly, and without forewarning, for there were few bodies on the streets and those he glimpsed inside the opened buildings gave indication that death had found them in the midst of their natural occupations.

Here, in a gutted basement, a fat man sprawled over the table of his home workshop, his sightless eyes fixed upon the familiar calendar exhibiting entirely the charms of Marilyn Monroe. Two flights above him, through the empty frame of a bathroom window, one could see his wife, dead in the tub, her hand still clutching a movie magazine with a Rock Hudson portrait on the cover. And up in the attic, open to the sky, two young lovers stretched on a brass bed, locked naked in headless ecstasy.

He turned away, and as his progress continued he deliberately avoided looking at the bodies. But he could not avoid seeing them now, and with familiarity the revulsion softened to the merest twinge. It then gave way to curiosity.

Passing a school playground he was pleased to see that the end had come without grotesque or unnatural violence. Probably a wave of paralyzing gas had swept through this area. Most of the figures were frozen upright in normal postures. Here were all of the aspects of ordinary childhood—the big kid punching the little kid, both leaning up against a fence where the blast had found them; a group of six youngsters in uniform black leather jackets piled upon the body of a child wearing a white leather jacket.

Beyond the playground loomed the center of the city. From a distance the mass of shattered masonry looked like a crazy garden-patch turned by a mad plowman. Here and there were tiny blossoms of flame sprouting forth from the interstices of huge clods, and at intervals he could see lopped, stemlike formations, the lower stories of skyscrapers from which the tops had been sheared by the swish of a thermonuclear scythe.

He hesitated, wondering if it was practical to venture into this weird welter. Then he caught sight of the hillside beyond, and of the imposing structure which was the new Federal Building. It stood there, somehow miraculously untouched by the blast, and in the haze he could see the flag still fluttering from its roof. There would be life here, and he knew he would not be content until he reached it.

But long before he attained his objective, he found other evidences of continued existence. Moving delicately and deliberately through the debris, he became aware that he was not entirely alone here in the central chaos.

Wherever the flames flared and flickered, there were furtive figures moving against the fire. To his horror, he realized that they were actually kindling the blazes; burning away barricades that could not otherwise be removed, as they entered shops and stores to loot. Some of the scavengers were silent and ashamed, others were boisterous and drunken; all were doomed.

It was this knowledge which kept him from interfering. Let them plunder and pilfer at will, let them quarrel over the spoils in the shattered streets; in a few hours or a few days, radiation and fallout would take inevitable toll.

No one interfered with his passage; perhaps the helmet and protective garment resembled an official uniform. He went his way unhindered and saw:

A barefooted man wearing a mink coat, dashing through the door of a cocktail lounge and passing bottles out to a bucket-brigade of four small children——

An old woman standing in a bombed-out bank vault, sweeping stacks of bills into the street with her broom. Over in one corner lay the body of a white-haired man, his futile arms outstretched to embrace a heap of coins. Impatiently, the old woman nudged him with her broom. His head lolled, and a silver dollar popped out of his open mouth——

A soldier and a woman wearing the armband of the Red Cross, carrying a stretcher to the blocked entrance of a partially-razed church. Unable to enter, they bore the stretcher around to the side, and the soldier kicked in one of the stained-glass windows——

An artist's basement studio, open to the sky; its walls still intact and covered with abstract paintings. In the center of the room stood the easel, but the artist was gone. What was left of him was smeared across the canvas in a dripping mass, as though the artist had finally succeeded in putting something of himself into his picture——

A welter of glassware that had once been a chemical laboratory, and in the center of it a smocked figure slumped over a microscope. On the slide was a single cell which the scientists had been intently observing when the world crashed about his ears——

A woman with the face of a *Vogue* model, spread-eagled in the street. Apparently she had been struck down while answering the call of duty, for one slim, aristocratic hand still gripped the strap of her hatbox. Otherwise, due to some prank of explosion, the blast had stripped her quite naked; she lay there with all her expensive loveliness exposed——

A thin man, emerging from a pawnshop and carrying an enormous tuba. He disappeared momentarily into a meat market, next door, then came out again, the bell of his tuba stuffed with sausages——

A broadcasting studio, completely demolished, its once immaculate sound stage littered with the crumpled cartons of fifteen different varieties of America's Favorite Cigarette and the broken bottles of twenty brands of America's Favorite Beer. Protruding from the wreckage was the head of America's Favorite Quizmaster, eyes staring glassily at a sealed booth in the corner which now served as the coffin for a nine-year-old boy who had known the batting-averages of every team in the American and National Leagues since 1882——

A wild-eyed woman sitting in the street, crying and crooning over a kitten cradled in her arms——

A broker caught at his desk, his body mummified in coils of ticker-tape——

A motor-bus, smashed into a brick wall; its passengers still jamming the aisles; standees clutching straps in *rigor mortis*——

The hindquarters of a stone lion before what had once been the Public Library; before it, on the steps, the corpse of an elderly lady whose shopping-bag had spewed its contents over the street—two murder-mysteries, a rental copy of *Peyton Place,* and the latest issue of the *Reader's Digest*——

A small boy wearing a cowboy hat, who levelled a toy pistol at his little sister and shouted, "Bang! You're dead!"

(She was.)

He walked slowly now, his pace impeded by obstacles both physical and of the spirit. He approached the building on the hillside by a circuitous route; avoiding repugnance, overcoming morbid curiosity, shunning pity, recoiling from horror, surmounting shock.

He knew there were others about him here in the city's core, some bent on acts of mercy, some on heroic rescue. But he ignored them all, for they were dead. Mercy had no meaning in this mist, and there was no rescue from radiation. Some of those who passed called out to him, but he went his way unheeding, knowing their words were mere death-rattles.

But suddenly, as he climbed the hillside, he was crying. The salty warmth ran down his cheeks and blurred the

inner surface of his helmet so that he no longer saw anything clearly. And it was thus he emerged from the inner circle; the inner circle of the city, the inner circle of Dante's hell.

His tears ceased to flow and his vision cleared. Ahead of him was the proud outline of the Federal Building, shining and intact—or almost so.

As he neared the imposing steps and gazed up at the façade, he noted that there were a few hints of crumbling and corrosion on the surface of the structure. The freakish blast had done outright damage only to the sculptured figures surmounting the great arched doorway; the symbolic statuary had been partially shattered so that the frontal surface had fallen away. He blinked at the empty outlines of the three figures; somehow he never had realized that Faith, Hope and Charity were hollow.

Then he walked inside the building. There were tired soldiers guarding the doorway, but they made no move to stop him, probably because he wore a protective garment even more intricate and impressive than their own.

Inside the structure a small army of low clerks and high brass moved antlike in the corridors; marching grim-faced up and down the stairs. There were no elevators, of course—they'd ceased functioning when the electricity gave out. But he could climb.

He wanted to climb now, for that was why he had come here. He wanted to gaze out over the city. In his gray insulation he resembled an automaton, and like an automaton he plodded stiffly up the stairways until he reached the topmost floor.

But there were no windows here, only walled-in offices. He walked down a long corridor until he came to the very end. Here, a single large cubicle glowed with gray light from the glass wall beyond.

A man sat at a desk, jiggling the receiver of a field telephone and cursing softly. He glanced curiously at the intruder, noted the insulating uniform, and returned to his abuse of the instrument in his hand.

So it was possible to walk over to the big window and look down.

It was possible to see the city, or the crater where the city had been.

Night was mingling with the haze on the horizon, but there was no darkness. The little incendiary blazes had been spreading, apparently, as the wind moved in, and now he gazed down upon a growing sea of flame. The crumbling spires and gutted structures were drowning in red waves. As he watched, the tears came again, but he knew there would not be enough tears to put the fires out.

So he turned back to the man at the desk, noting for the first time that he wore one of the very special uniforms reserved for generals.

This must be the commander, then. Yes, he was certain of it now, because the floor around the desk was littered with scraps of paper. Maybe they were obsolete maps, maybe they were obsolete treaties. It didn't matter now.

There was another map on the wall behind the desk, and this one mattered very much. It was studded with black and red pins, and it took but a moment to decipher their meaning. The red pins signified destruction, for there was one affixed to the name of this city. And there was one for New York, one for Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles—every important center had been pierced.

He looked at the general, and finally the words came.

"It must be awful," he said.

"Yes, awful," the general echoed.

"Millions upon millions dead."

"Dead."

"The cities destroyed, the air polluted, and no escape. No escape anywhere in the world."

"No escape."

He turned away and stared out the window once more, stared down at Inferno. Thinking, *this is what it has come to, this is the way the world ends.*

He glanced at the general again, and then sighed. "To think of our being beaten," he whispered.

The red glare mounted, and in its light he saw the general's face, gleeful and exultant.

"What do you mean, man?" the general said proudly, the flames rising. "We won!"

ARTHUR C. CLARKE

Writer, lecturer, skin diver, travel expert, and interpreter of science for the lay audience, Arthur Clarke is not quite all things to all men but he is giving it a good try. He helped British pilots outwit the Luftwaffe *in the Battle of Britain. He was one of the founders of the British rocket society. He has had no fewer than six sightings of UFOs (all of which he explains in non-saucerian terms). And, in general, he has shown a remarkable capacity for being where the excitement is, and coming back to tell the rest of us about it. He is also a science fiction writer at the very rarefied level of general excellence shared by only a few. You already know this, of course; but if you didn't you would soon learn in reading—*

The Deep Range

There was a killer loose on the range. A 'copter patrol, five hundred miles off Greenland, had seen the great corpse staining the sea crimson as it wallowed in the waves. Within seconds, the intricate warning system had been alerted: men were plotting circles and moving counters on the North Atlantic chart—and Don Burley was still rubbing the sleep from his eyes as he dropped silently down to the twenty-fathom line.

The pattern of green lights on the tell-tale was a glowing symbol of security. As long as that pattern was unchanged, as long as none of those emerald stars winked to red, all was well with Don and his tiny craft. Air—fuel—power—this was the triumvirate which ruled his life. If any of them failed, he would be sinking in a steel

coffin down toward the pelagic ooze, as Johnnie Tyndall had done the season before last. But there was no reason why they should fail; the accidents one foresaw, Don told himself reassuringly, were never the ones that happened.

He leaned across the tiny control board and spoke into the mike. Sub 5 was still close enough to the mother ship for radio to work, but before long he'd have to switch to the sonics.

"Setting course 255, speed 50 knots, depth 20 fathoms, full sonar coverage. . . . Estimated time to target area, 70 minutes. . . . Will report at 10-minute intervals. That is all. . . . Out."

The acknowledgement, already weakening with range, came back at once from the *Herman Melville.*

"Message received and understood. Good hunting. What about the hounds?"

Don chewed his lower lip thoughtfully. This might be a job he'd have to handle alone. He had no idea, to within fifty miles either way, where Benj and Susan were at the moment. They'd certainly follow if he signaled for them, but they couldn't maintain his speed and would soon have to drop behind. Besides, he might be heading for a pack of killers, and the last thing he wanted to do was to lead his carefully trained porpoises into trouble. That was common sense and good business. He was also very fond of Susan and Benj.

"It's too far, and I don't know what I'm running into," he replied. "If they're in the interception area when I get there, I may whistle them up."

The acknowledgement from the mother ship was barely audible, and Don switched off the set. It was time to look around.

He dimmed the cabin lights so that he could see the scanner screen more clearly, pulled the polaroid glasses down over his eyes, and peered into the depths. This was the moment when Don felt like a god, able to hold within his hands a circle of the Atlantic twenty miles across, and to see clearly down to the still-unexplored deeps, three thousand fathoms below. The slowly rotating beam of inaudible sound was searching the world in which

he floated, seeking out friend and foe in the eternal darkness where light could never penetrate. The pattern of soundless shrieks, too shrill even for the hearing of the bats who had invented sonar a million years before man, pulsed out into the watery night: the faint echoes came tingling back as floating, blue-green flecks on the screen.

Through long practice, Don could read thir message with effortless ease. A thousand feet below, stretching out to his submerged horizon, was the scattering layer—the blanket of life that covered half the world. The sunken meadow of the sea, it rose and fell with the passage of the sun, hovering always at the edge of darkness. But the ultimate depths were no concern of his. The flocks he guarded, and the enemies who ravaged them, belonged to the upper levels of the sea.

Don flicked the switch of the depth-selector, and his sonar beam concentrated itself into the horizontal plane. The glimmering echoes from the abyss vanished, but he could see more clearly what lay around him here in the ocean's stratospheric heights. That glowing cloud two miles ahead was a school of fish; he wondered if Base knew about it, and made an entry in his log. There were some larger, isolated blips at the edge of the school—the carnivores pursuing the cattle, insuring that the endlessly turning wheel of life and death would never lose momentum. But this conflict was no affair of Don's; he was after bigger game.

Sub 5 drove on toward the west, a steel needle swifter and more deadly than any other creature that roamed the seas. The tiny cabin, lit only by the flicker of lights from the instrument board, pulsed with power as the spinning turbines thrust the water aside. Don glanced at the chart and wondered how the enemy had broken through this time. There were still many weak points, for fencing the oceans of the world had been a gigantic task. The tenuous electric fields, fanning out between generators many miles apart, could not always hold at bay the starving monsters of the deep. They were learning, too. When the fences were opened, they would sometimes slip through with the whales and wreak havoc before they were discovered.

The long-range receiver bleeped plaintively, and Don switched over to TRANSCRIBE. It wasn't practical to send speech any distance over an ultrasonic beam, and code had come back into its own. Don had never learned to read it by ear, but the ribbon of paper emerging from the slot saved him the trouble.

COPTER REPORTS SCHOOL 50-100 WHALES HEADING 95 DEGREES GRID REF X186475 Y438034 STOP. MOVING AT SPEED. STOP. MELVILLE. OUT.

Don started to set the coordinates on the plotting grid, then saw that it was no longer necessary. At the extreme edge of his screen, a flotilla of faint stars had appeared. He altered course slightly, and drove head-on toward the approaching herd.

The 'copter was right: they were moving fast. Don felt a mounting excitement, for this could mean that they were on the run and luring the killers toward him. At the rate at which they were traveling he would be among them in five minutes. He cut the motors and felt the backward tug of water bringing him swiftly to rest.

Don Burley, a knight in armor, sat in his tiny dim-lit room fifty feet below the bright Atlantic waves, testing his weapons for the conflict that lay ahead. In these moments of poised suspense, before action began, his racing brain often explored such fantasies. He felt a kinship with all shepherds who had guarded their flocks back to the dawn of time. He was David, among ancient Palestinian hills, alert for the mountain lions that would prey upon his father's sheep. But far nearer in time, and far closer in spirit, were the men who had marshaled the great herds of cattle on the American plains, only a few lifetimes ago. They would have understood his work, though his implements would have been magic to them. The pattern was the same; only the scale had altered. It made no fundamental difference that the beasts Don herded weighed almost a hundred tons, and browsed on the endless savannahs of the sea.

The school was now less than two miles away, and Don checked his scanner's continuous circling to concentrate on the sector ahead. The picture on the screen altered to a fanshaped wedge as the sonar beam started to flick

from side to side; now he could count every whale in the school, and even make a good estimate of its size. With a practiced eye, he began to look for stragglers.

Don could never have explained what drew him at once toward those four echoes at the southern fringe of the school. It was true that they were a little apart from the rest, but others had fallen as far behind. There is some sixth sense that a man acquires when he has stared long enough into a sonar screen—some hunch which enables him to extract more from the moving flecks than he has any right to do. Without conscious thought, Don reached for the control which would start the turbines whirling into life. Sub 5 was just getting under way when three leaden thuds reverberated through the hull, as if someone was knocking on the front door and wanted to come in.

"Well I'm damned," said Don. "How did *you* get here?" He did not bother to switch on the TV; he'd know Benj's signal anywhere. The porpoises must have been in the neighborhood and had spotted him before he'd even switched on the hunting call. For the thousandth time, he marveled at their intelligence and loyalty. It was strange that Nature had played the same trick twice —on land with the dog, in the ocean with the porpoise. Why were these graceful sea-beasts so fond of man, to whom they owed so little? It made one feel that the human race was worth something after all, if it could inspire such unselfish devotion.

It had been known for centuries that the porpoise was at least as intelligent as the dog, and could obey quite complex verbal commands. The experiment was still in progress, but if it succeeded then the ancient partnership between shepherd and sheep-dog would have a new lease on life.

Don switched on the speakers recessed into the sub's hull and began to talk to his escorts. Most of the sounds he uttered would have been meaningless to other human ears; they were the product of long research by the animal psychologists of the World Food Administration. He gave his orders twice to make sure that they were understood, then checked with the sonar screen to see that Benj and Susan were following astern as he had told them to.

The four echoes that had attraced his attention were clearer and closer now, and the main body of the whale pack had swept past him to the east. He had no fear of a collision; the great animals, even in their panic, could sense his presence as easily as he could detect theirs, and by similar means. Don wondered if he should switch on his beacon. They might recognize its sound pattern, and it would reassure them. But the still unknown enemy might recognize it too.

He closed for an interception, and hunched low over the screen as if to drag from it by sheer will power every scrap of information the scanner could give. There were two large echoes, some distance apart, and one was accompanied by a pair of smaller satellites. Don wondered if he was already too late. In his mind's eye, he could picture the death struggle taking place in the water less than a mile ahead. Those two fainter blips would be the enemy—either shark or grampus—worrying a whale while one of its companions stood by in helpless terror, with no weapons of defense except its mighty flukes.

Now he was almost close enough for vision. The TV camera in Sub 5's prow strained through the gloom, but at first could show nothing but the fog of plankton. Then a vast shadowy shape began to form in the center of the screen, with two smaller companions below it. Don was seeing, with the greater precision but hopelessly limited range of ordinary light, what the sonar scanners had already told him.

Almost at once he saw his mistake. The two satellites were calves, not sharks. It was the first time he had ever met a whale with twins; although multiple births were not unknown, a cow could suckle only two young at once and usually only the stronger would survive. He choked down his disappointment; this error had cost him many minutes and he must begin the search again.

Then came the frantic tattoo on the hull that meant danger. It wasn't easy to scare Benj, and Don shouted his reassurance as he swung Sub 5 round so that the camera could search the turgid waters. Automatically, he had turned toward the fourth blip on the sonar screen—the echo he had assumed, from its size, to be another

adult whale. And he saw that, after all, he had come to the right place.

"Jesus!" he said softly. "I didn't know they came that big." He'd seen larger sharks before, but they had all been harmless vegetarians. This, he could tell at a glance, was a Greenland shark, the killer of the northern seas. It was supposed to grow up to thirty feet long, but this specimen was bigger than Sub 5. It was every inch of forty feet from snout to tail, and when he spotted it, it was already turning in toward the kill. Like the coward it was, it had launched its attack at one of the calves.

Don yelled to Benj and Susan, and saw them racing ahead into his field of vision. He wondered fleetingly why porpoises had such an overwhelming hatred of sharks; then he loosed his hands from the controls as the autopilot locked on to the target. Twisting and turning as agilely as any other sea-creature of its size, Sub 5 began to close in upon the shark, leaving Don free to concentrate on his armament.

The killer had been so intent upon his prey that Benj caught him completely unawares, ramming him just behind the left eye. It must have been a painful blow: an iron-hard snout, backed by a quarter-ton of muscle at fifty miles an hour is something not to be laughed at even by the largest fish. The shark jerked round in an impossibly tight curve, and Don was almost jolted out of his seat as the sub snapped on to a new course. If this kept up, he'd find it hard to use his String. But at least the killer was too busy now to bother about his intended victims.

Benj and Susan were worrying the giant like dogs snapping at the heels of an angry bear. They were too agile to be caught in those ferocious jaws, and Don marveled at the coordination with which they worked. When either had to surface for air, the other would hold off for a minute until the attack could be resumed in strength.

There was no evidence that the shark realized that a far more dangerous adversary was closing in upon it, and that the porpoises were merely a distraction. That suited Don very nicely; the next operation was going to be difficult unless he could hold a steady course for at least fifteen seconds. At a pinch he could use the tiny

rocket torps to make a kill. If he'd been alone, and faced with a pack of sharks, he would certainly have done so. But it was messy, and there was a better way. He preferred the technique of the rapier to that of the hand-grenade.

Now he was only fifty feet away, and closing rapidly. There might never be a better chance. He punched the launching stud.

From beneath the belly of the sub, something that looked like a sting-ray hurtled forward. Don had checked the speed of his own craft; there was no need to come any closer now. The tiny, arrow-shaped hydrofoil, only a couple of feet across, could move far faster than his vessel and would close the gap in seconds. As it raced forward, it spun out the thin line of the control wire, like some underwater spider laying its thread. Along that wire passed the energy that powered the Sting, and the signals that steered it to its goal. Don had completely ignored his own larger craft in the effort of guiding this underwater missile. It responded to his touch so swiftly that he felt he was controlling some sensitive high-spirited steed.

The shark saw the danger less than a second before impact. The resemblance of the Sting to an ordinary ray confused it, as the designers had intended. Before the tiny brain could realize that no ray behaved like this, the missile had struck. The steel hypodermic, rammed forward by an exploding cartridge, drove through the shark's horny skin, and the great fish erupted in a frenzy of terror. Don backed rapidly away, for a blow from that tail would rattle him around like a pea in a can and might even cause damage to the sub. There was nothing more for him to do, except to speak into the microphone and call off his hounds.

The doomed killer was trying to arch its body so that it could snap at the poisoned dart. Don had now reeled the Sting back into its hiding place, pleased that he had been able to retrieve the missile undamaged. He watched without pity as the great fish succumbed to its paralysis.

Its struggles were weakening. It was swimming aimlessly back and forth, and once Don had to sidestep smartly to avoid a collision. As it lost control of buoyancy, the dying shark drifted up to the surface. Don did not bother

to follow; that could wait until he had attended to more important business.

He found the cow and her two calves less than a mile away, and inspected them carefully. They were uninjured, so there was no need to call the vet in his highly specialized two-man sub which could handle any cetological crisis from a stomach-ache to a Caesarian. Don made a note of the mother's number, stencilled just behind the flippers. The calves, as was obvious from their size, were this season's and had not yet been branded.

Don watched for a little while. They were no longer in the least alarmed, and a check on the sonar had shown that the whole school had ceased its panicky flight. He wondered how they knew what had happened; much had been learned about communication among whales, but much was still a mystery.

"I hope you appreciate what I've done for you, old lady," he muttered. Then, reflecting that fifty tons of mother love was a slightly awe-inspiring sight, he blew his tanks and surfaced.

It was calm, so he cracked the airlock and popped his head out of the tiny conning tower. The water was only inches below his chin, and from time to time a wave made a determined effort to swamp him. There was little danger of this happening, for he fitted the hatch so closely that he was quite an effective plug.

Fifty feet away, a long slate-colored mound, like an overturned boat, was rolling on the surface. Don looked at it thoughtfully and did some mental calculations. A brute this size should be valuable; with any luck there was a chance of a double bonus. In a few minutes he'd radio his report, but for the moment it was pleasant to drink the fresh Atlantic air and feel the open sky above his head.

A gray thunderbolt shot up out of the depths and smashed back onto the surface of the water, smothering Don with spray. It was just Benj's modest way of drawing attention to himself; a moment later the porpoise had swum up to the conning tower, so that Don could reach down and tickle its head. The great, intelligent eyes stared back into his; was it pure imagination, or did an almost human sense of fun also lurk in their depths?

Susan, as usual, circled shyly at a distance until jealousy overpowered her and she butted Benj out of the way. Don distributed caresses impartially and apologized because he had nothing to give them. He undertook to make up for the omission as soon as he returned to the *Herman Melville.*

"I'll go for another swim with you, too," he promised, "as long as you behave yourselves next time." He rubbed thoughtfully at a large bruise caused by Benj's playfulness, and wondered if he was not getting a little too old for rough games like this.

"Time to go home," Don said firmly, sliding down into the cabin and slamming the hatch. He suddenly realized that he was very hungry, and had better do something about the breakfast he had missed. There were not many men on earth who had earned a better right to eat their morning meal. He had saved for humanity more tons of meat, oil and milk than could easily be estimated.

Don Burley was the happy warrior, coming home from one battle that man would always have to fight. He was holding at bay the specter of famine which had confronted all earlier ages, but which would never threaten the world again while the great plankton farms harvested their millions of tons of protein, and the whale herds obeyed their new masters. Man had come back to the sea after aeons of exile; until the oceans froze, he would never be hungry again. . . .

Don glanced at the scanner as he set his course. He smiled as he saw the two echoes keeping pace with the central splash of light that marked his vessel. "Hang around," he said. "We mammals must stick together." Then, as the autopilot took over, he lay back in his chair.

And presently Benj and Susan heard a most peculiar noise, rising and falling against the drone of the turbines. It had filtered faintly through the thick walls of Sub 5, and only the sensitive ears of the porpoises could have detected it. But intelligent beasts though they were, they could hardly be expected to understand why Don Burley was announcing, in a highly unmusical voice, that he was Heading for the Last Round-up. . . .

HENRY KUTTNER

The present editor was (and still is) a fan; and almost the first fan letter he ever wrote was to the Weird Tales *of the Thirties, attempting to communicate his high excitement at having read a story by a brand-new name in that magazine. The story was a ghastly, shuddery bit of horror; and the author was Henry Kuttner, just beginning, a long way from the heights of competence and creativity he was to attain, but already showing a most individual capacity for stirring the guts of his readers. Henry Kuttner wrote an incredible quantity for more than two decades after that (all good, and much superb) until his tragic death in 1958. Almost the last—and one of the best—of his countless fine science fiction stories is—*

A Cross of Centuries

They called him Christ. But he was not the Man Who had toiled up the long road to Golgotha five thousand years before. They called him Buddha and Mohammed; they called him the Lamb, and the Blessed of God. They called him the Prince of Peace and the Immortal One.

His name was Tyrell.

He had come up another road now, the steep path that led to the monastery on the mountain, and he stood for a moment blinking against the bright sunlight. His white robe was stained with the ritual black.

The girl beside him touched his arm and urged him gently forward. He stepped into the shadow of the gateway.

Then he hesitated and looked back. The road had led up to a level mountain meadow where the monastery stood, and the meadow was dazzling green with early spring. Faintly, far away, he felt a wrenching sorrow at the thought of leaving all this brightness, but he sensed that things would be better very soon. And the brightness was far away. It was not quite real any more. The girl touched his arm again and he nodded obediently and moved forward, feeling the troubling touch of approaching loss that his tired mind could not understand now.

I am very old, he thought.

In the courtyard the priests bowed before him. Mons, the leader, was standing at the other end of a broad pool that sent back the bottomless blue of the sky. Now and again the water was ruffled by a cool, soft breeze.

Old habits sent their messages along his nerves. Tyrell raised his hand and blessed them all.

His voice spoke the remembered phrases quietly.

"Let there be peace. On all the troubled earth, on all the worlds and in God's blessed sky between, let there be peace. The powers of—of——" his hand wavered; then he remembered—"the powers of darkness have no strength against God's love and understanding. I bring you God's word. It is love; it is understanding; it is peace."

They waited till he had finished. It was the wrong time and the wrong ritual. But that did not matter, since he was the Messiah.

Mons, at the other end of the pool, signaled. The girl beside Tyrell put her hands gently on the shoulders of his robe.

Mons cried, "Immortal, will you cast off your stained garment and with it the sins of time?"

Tyrell looked vaguely across the pool.

"Will you bless the worlds with another century of your holy presence?"

Tyrell remembered some words.

"I leave in peace; I return in peace," he said.

The girl gently pulled off the white robe, knelt, and removed Tyrell's sandals. Naked, he stood at the pool's edge.

He looked like a boy of twenty. He was two thousand years old.

Some deep trouble touched him. Mons had lifted his arm, summoning, but Tyrell looked around confusedly and met the girl's gray eyes.

"Nerina?" he murmured.

"Go in the pool," she whispered. "Swim across it."

He put out his hand and touched hers. She felt that wonderful current of gentleness that was his indomitable strength. She pressed his hand tightly, trying to reach through the clouds in his mind, trying to make him know that it would be all right again, that she would be waiting —as she had waited for his resurrection three times already now, in the last three hundred years.

She was much younger than Tyrell, but she was immortal too.

For an instant the mists cleared from his blue eyes.

"Wait for me, Nerina," he said. Then, with a return of his old skill, he went into the pool with a clean dive.

She watched him swim across, surely and steadily. There was nothing wrong with his body; there never was, no matter how old he grew. It was only his mind that stiffened, grooved deeper into the iron ruts of time, lost its friction with the present, so that his memory would fragment away little by little. But the oldest memories went last, and the automatic memories last of all.

She was conscious of her own body, young and strong and beautiful, as it would always be. Her mind . . . there was an answer to that too. She was watching the answer.

I am greatly blessed, she thought. *Of all women on all the worlds, I am the Bride of Tyrell, and the only other immortal ever born.*

Lovingly and with reverence she watched him swim. At her feet his discarded robe lay, stained with the memories of a hundred years.

It did not seem so long ago. She could remember it very clearly, the last time she had watched Tyrell swim across the pool. And there had been one time before that —and that had been the first. For her; not for Tyrell.

He came dripping out of the water and hesitated. She felt a strong pang at the change in him from strong sure-

ness to bewildered questioning. But Mons was ready. He reached out and took Tyrell's hand. He led the Messiah toward a door in the high monastery wall and through it. She thought that Tyrell looked back at her, with the tenderness that was always there in his deep, wonderful calm.

A priest picked up the stained robe from her feet and carried it away. It would be washed clean now and placed on the altar, the spherical tabernacle shaped like the mother world. Dazzling white again, its folds would hang softly about the earth.

It would be washed clean, as Tyrell's mind would be washed clean too, rinsed of the clogging deposit of memories that a century had brought.

The priests were filing away. She glanced back, beyond the open gateway, to the sharply beautiful green of the mountain meadow, spring grass sensuously reaching to the sun after the winter's snow. *Immortal,* she thought, lifting her arms high, feeling the eternal blood, ichor of gods, singing in deep rhythm through her body. *Tyrell was the one who suffered. I have no price to pay for this —wonder.*

Twenty centuries.

And the first century must have been utter horror.

Her mind turned from the hidden mists of history that was legend now, seeing only a glimpse of the calm White Christ moving through that chaos of roaring evil when the earth was blackened, when it ran scarlet with hate and anguish. Ragnarok, Armageddon, Hour of the Antichrist—two thousand years ago!

Scourged, steadfast, preaching his word of love and peace, the White Messiah had walked like light through earth's descent into hell.

And he had lived, and the forces of evil had destroyed themselves, and the worlds had found peace now—had found peace so long ago that the Hour of the Antichrist was lost to memory; it was legend.

Lost, even to Tyrell's memory. She was glad of that. It would have been terrible to remember. She turned chill at the thought of what martyrdom he must have endured.

But it was the Day of the Messiah now, and Nerina, the only other immortal ever born, looked with reverence and love at the empty doorway through which Tyrell had gone.

She glanced down at the blue pool. A cool wind ruffled its surface; a cloud moved lightly past the sun, shadowing all the bright day.

It would be seventy years before she would swim the pool again. And when she did, when she woke, she would find Tyrell's blue eyes watching her, his hand closing lightly over hers, raising her to join him in the youth that was the springtime where they lived forever.

Her gray eyes watched him; her hand touched his as he lay on the couch. But still he did not waken.

She glanced up anxiously at Mons.

He nodded reassuringly.

She felt the slightest movement against her hand.

His eyelids trembled. Slowly they lifted. The calm, deep certainty was still there in the blue eyes that had seen so much, in the mind that had forgotten so much. Tyrell looked at her for a moment. Then he smiled.

Nerina said shakily, "Each time I'm afraid that you'll forget me."

Mons said, "We always give him back his memories of you, Blessed of God. We always will." He leaned over Tyrell. "Immortal, have you truly wakened?"

"Yes," Tyrell said, and thrust himself upright, swinging his legs over the edge of the couch, rising to his feet in a swift, sure motion. He glanced around, saw the new robe ready, pure white, and drew it on. Both Nerina and Mons saw that there was no more hesitancy in his actions. Beyond the eternal body, the mind was young and sure and unclouded again.

Mons knelt, and Nerina knelt too. The priest said softly, "We thank God that a new Incarnation is permitted. May peace reign in this cycle, and in all the cycles beyond."

Tyrell lifted Nerina to her feet. He reached down and drew Mons upright too.

"Mons, Mons," he said, almost chidingly. "Every cen-

tury I'm treated less like a man and more like a god. If you'd been alive a few hundred years ago—well, they still prayed when I woke, but they didn't kneel. I'm a man, Mons. Don't forget that."

Mons said, "You brought peace to the worlds."

"Then may I have something to eat, in return?"

Mons bowed and went out. Tyrell turned quickly to Nerina. The strong gentleness of his arms drew her close.

"If I never woke, sometime—" he said. "You'd be the hardest thing of all to give up. I didn't know how lonely I was till I found another immortal."

"We have a week here in the monastery," she said. "A week's retreat, before we go home. I like being here with you best of all."

"Wait a while," he said. "A few more centuries and you'll lose that attitude of reverence. I wish you would. Love's better—and who else can I love this way?"

She thought of the centuries of loneliness he had had, and her whole body ached with love and compassion.

After the kiss, she drew back and looked at him thoughtfully.

"You've changed again," she said. "It's still you, but—"

"But what?"

"You're gentler, somehow."

Tyrell laughed.

"Each time, they wash out my mind and give me a new set of memories. Oh, most of the old ones, but the total's a little different. It always is. Things are more peaceful now than they were a century ago. So my mind is tailored to fit the times. Otherwise I'd gradually become an anachronism." He frowned slightly. "Who's that?"

She glanced at the door.

"Mons? No. It's no one."

"Oh? Well . . . yes, we'll have a week's retreat. Time to think and integrate my retailored personality. And the past——" He hesitated again.

She said, "I wish I'd been born earlier. I could have been with you—"

"No," he said quickly. "At least—not too far back."

"Was it so bad?"

He shrugged.

"I don't know how true my memories are any more. I'm glad I don't remember more than I do. But I remember enough. The legends are right." His face shadowed with sorrow. "The big wars . . . hell was loosed. Hell was omnipotent! The Antichrist walked in the noonday sun, and men feared that which is high. . . ." His gaze lifted to the pale low ceiling of the room, seeing beyond it "Men had turned into beasts. Into devils. I spoke of peace to them, and they tried to kill me. I bore it. I was immortal, by God's grace. Yet they could have killed me. I am vulnerable to weapons." He drew a deep, long breath. "Immortality was not enough. God's will preserved me, so that I could go on preaching peace until, little by little, the maimed beasts remembered their souls and reached up out of hell. . . ."

She had never heard him talk like this.

Gently she touched his hand.

He came back to her.

"It's over," he said. "The past is dead. We have today."

From the distance the priests chanted a paean of joy and gratitude.

The next afternoon she saw him at the end of a corridor leaning over something huddled and dark. She ran forward. He was bent down beside the body of a priest, and when Nerina called out, he shivered and stood up, his face white and appalled.

She looked down and her face, too, went white.

The priest was dead. There were blue marks on his throat, and his neck was broken, his head twisted monstrously.

Tyrell moved to shield the body from her gaze.

"G-get Mons," he said, unsure as though he had reached the end of the hundred years. "Quick. This . . . *get him.*"

Mons came, looked at the body, and stood aghast. He met Tyrell's blue gaze.

"How many centuries, Messiah?" he asked, in a shaken voice.

Tyrell said, "Since there was violence? Eight centuries or more. Mons, no one—no one is capable of this."

Mons said, "Yes. There is no more violence. It has been bred out of the race." He dropped suddenly to his knees. "Messiah, bring peace again! The dragon has risen from the past!"

Tyrell straightened, a figure of strong humility in his white robe.

He lifted his eyes and prayed.

Nerina knelt, her horror slowly washed away in the burning power of Tyrell's prayer.

The whisper breathed through the monastery and shuddered back from the blue, clear air beyond. None knew who had closed deadly hands about the priest's throat. No one, no human, was capable any longer of killing; as Mons had said, the ability to hate, to destroy, had been bred out of the race.

The whisper did not go beyond the monastery. Here the battle must be fought in secret, no hint of it escaping to trouble the long peace of the worlds.

No human.

But another whisper grew: *The Antichrist is born again.*

They turned to Tyrell, to the Messiah, for comfort.

Peace, he said, *peace—meet evil with humility, bow your heads in prayer, remember the love that saved man when hell was loosed on the worlds two thousand years ago.*

At night, beside Nerina, he moaned in his sleep and struck out at an invisible enemy.

"Devil!" he cried—and woke, shuddering.

She held him, with proud humility, till he slept again.

She came with Mons one day to Tyrell's room, to tell him of the new horror. A priest had been found dead, savagely hacked by a sharp knife. They pushed open the door and saw Tyrell sitting facing them at a low table. He was praying while he watched, in sick fascination, the bloody knife that lay on the table before him.

"Tyrell——" she said, and suddenly Mons drew in a quick, shuddering breath and swung around sharply. He pushed her back across the threshold.

"Wait!" he said, with violent urgency. "Wait for me here!" Before she could speak he was beyond the closing door, and she heard it lock.

She stood there, not thinking, for a long time.

Then Mons came out and closed the door softly behind him. He looked at her.

"It's all right," he said. "But . . . you must listen to me now." Then he was silent.

He tried again.

"Blessed of God——" Again he drew that difficult breath. "Nerina. I——" He laughed oddly. "That's strange. I can't talk unless I call you Nerina."

"What is it? Let me go to Tyrell!"

"No—no. He'll be all right. Nerina, he's—sick."

She shut her eyes, trying to concentrate. She heard his voice, unsure but growing stronger.

"Those killings. Tyrell did them."

"Now you lie," she said. "That is a lie!"

Mons said almost sharply, "Open your eyes. Listen to me. Tyrell is—a man. A very great man, a very good man, but no god. He is immortal. Unless he is struck down, he will live forever—as you will. He has already lived more than twenty centuries."

"Why tell me this? I know it!"

Mons said, "You must help, you must understand. Immortality is an accident of the genes. A mutation. Once in a thousand years, perhaps, or ten thousand, a human is born immortal. His body renews itself; he does not age. Neither does his brain. But his mind ages—"

She said desperately, "Tyrell swam the pool of rebirth only three days ago. Not for another century will his mind age again. Is he—*he's not dying?*"

"No-no. Nerina, the pool of rebirth is only a symbol. You know that."

"Yes. The real rebirth comes afterward, when you put us in that machine. I remember."

Mons said, "The machine. If it were not used each century, you and Tyrell would have become senile and helpless a long time ago. The mind is not immortal, Nerina. After a while it cannot carry the weight of knowledge, learning, habits. It loses flexibility, it clouds with

stiff old age. The machine clears the mind, Nerina, as we can clear a computer of its units of memory. Then we replace some memories, not all, we put the necessary memories in a fresh, clear mind, so it can grow and learn for another hundred years."

"But I know all that——"

"Those new memories form a new personality, Nerina."

"A new——? But Tyrell is still the same."

"Not quite. Each century he changes a little, as life grows better, as the worlds grow happier. Each century the new mind, the fresh personality of Tyrell is different —more in tune with the new century than the one just past. You have been reborn in mind three times, Nerina. You are not the same as you were the first time. But you cannot remember that. You do not have all the old memories you once had."

"But—but what——"

Mons said, "I do not know. I have talked to Tyrell. I think this is what has happened. Each century when the mind of Tyrell was cleansed—erased—it left a blank mind, and we built a new Tyrell on that. Not much changed. Only a little, each time. But more than twenty times? His mind must have been very different twenty centuries ago. And——"

"How different?"

"I don't know. We've assumed that when the mind was erased, the pattern of personality—vanished. I think now that it didn't vanish. It was buried. Suppressed, driven so deeply into the mind that it could not emerge. It became unconscious. Century after century this has happened. And now more than twenty personalities of Tyrell are buried in his mind, a multiple personality that can no longer stay in balance. From the graves in his mind, there has been a resurrection."

"The White Christ was never a killer!"

"No. In reality, even his first personality, twenty-odd centuries ago, must have been very great and good to bring peace to the worlds—in that time of Antichrist. But sometimes, in the burial of the mind, a change may happen. Those buried personalities, some of them, may

have changed to—to something less good than they were originally. And now they have broken loose."

Nerina turned to the door.

Mons said, "We must be very sure. But we can save the Messiah. We can clear his brain, probe deep, deep, root out the evil spirit. . . . We can save him and make him whole again. We must start at once. Nerina—pray for him."

He gave her a long, troubled look, turned, and went swiftly along the corridor. Nerina waited, not even thinking. After a while she heard a slight sound. At one end of the corridor were two priests standing motionless; at the other end, two others.

She opened the door and went in to Tyrell.

The first thing she saw was the blood-stained knife on the table. Then she saw the dark silhouette at the window, against the aching intensity of blue sky.

"Tyrell," she said hesitantly.

He turned.

"Nerina. Oh, Nerina!"

His voice was still gentle with that deep power of calm.

She went swiftly into his arms.

"I was praying," he said, bending his head to rest on her shoulder. "Mons told me. . . . I was praying. What have I done?"

"You are the Messiah," she said steadily. "You saved the world from evil and the Antichrist. You've done that."

"But the rest! This devil in my mind! This seed that has grown there, hidden from God's sunlight—what has it grown into? They say I *killed!*"

After a long pause she whispered, "Did you?"

"No," he said, with absolute certainty. "How could I? I, who have lived by love—more than two thousand years—I could not harm a living thing."

"I knew that," she said. "You are the White Christ."

"The White Christ," he said softly. "I wanted no such name. I am only a man, Nerina. I was never more than that. But . . . something saved me, something kept me alive through the Hour of the Antichrist. It was God. It was His hand. God—*help me now!*"

She held him tightly and looked past him through the window, bright sky, green meadow, tall mountains with the clouds rimming their peaks. God was here, as he was out beyond the blue, on all the worlds and in the gulfs between them, and God meant peace and love.

"He will help you," she said steadily. "He walked with you two thousand years ago. He hasn't gone away."

"Yes," Tyrell whispered. "Mons must be wrong. The way it was . . . I remember. Men like beasts. The sky was burning fire. There was blood . . . there was blood. More than a hundred years of blood that ran from the beast-men as they fought."

She felt the sudden stiffness in him, a trembling rigor, a new sharp straining.

He lifted his head and looked into her eyes.

She thought of ice and fire, blue ice, blue fire.

"The big wars," he said, his voice stiff, rusty.

Then he put his hand over his eyes.

"Christ!" The word burst from his tight throat. *"God, God——"*

"Tyrell!" She screamed his name.

"Back!" he croaked, and she stumbled away, but he was not talking to her. "Back, devil!" He clawed at his head, grinding it between his palms, bowing till he was half crouched before her.

"Tyrell!' she cried. "Messiah! You are the White Christ——"

The bowed body snapped erect. She looked at the new face and felt an abysmal horror and loathing.

Tyrell stood looking at her. Then, appallingly, he gave her a strutting, derisive bow.

She felt the edge of the table behind her. She groped back and touched the heavy thickness of dried blood on the knifeblade. It was part of the nightmare. She moved her hand to the haft, knowing she could die by steel, letting her thought move ahead of the glittering steel's point into her breast.

The voice she heard was touched with laughter.

"Is it sharp?" he asked. "Is it still sharp, my love? Or did I dull it on the priest? Will you use it on me? Will

you try? Other women have tried!" Thick laughter choked in his throat.

"Messiah," she whispered.

"Messiah!" he mocked. "A White Christ! Prince of Peace! Bringing the word of love, walking unharmed through the bloodiest wars that ever wrecked a world . . . oh yes, a legend, my love, twenty centuries old and more. And a lie. They've forgotten! They've all forgotten what it was really like then!"

All she could do was shake her head in helpless denial.

"Oh yes," he said. "You weren't alive then. No one was. Except me, Tyrell. Butchery! I survived. But not by preaching peace. Do you know what happened to the men who preached love? They died—but I didn't die. I survived, not by preaching."

He pranced, laughing.

"Tyrell the Butcher," he cried. "I was the bloodiest of them all. All they could understand was fear. And they weren't easily frightened then—not the men like beasts. But they were afraid of *me*."

He lifted his clawed hands, his muscles straining in an ecstasy of ghastly memory.

"The Red Christ," he said. "They might have called me that. But they didn't. Not after I'd proved what I had to prove. They had a name for me then. They knew my name. And now——" He grinned at her. "Now that the worlds are at peace, now I'm worshiped as the Messiah. What can Tyrell the Butcher do today?"

His laughter came slow, horrible and complacent.

He took three steps and swept his arms around her. Her flesh shrank from the grip of that evil.

And then, suddenly, strangely, she felt the evil leave him. The hard arms shuddered, drew away, and then tightened again, with frantic tenderness, while he bent his head and she felt the sudden hotness of tears.

He could not speak for a while. Cold as stone, she held him.

Somehow she was sitting on a couch and he was kneeling before her, his face buried in her lap.

She could not make out many of his choking words.

"Remember . . . I remember . . . the old memories . . .

I can't stand it, I can't look back . . . or ahead . . . they—they had a name for me. I remember now. . . ."

She laid one hand on his head. His hair was cold and damp.

"They called me Antichrist!"

He lifted his face and looked at her.

"Help me!" he cried in anguish. "Help me, help me!"

Then his head bowed again and he pressed his fists against his temples, whispering wordlessly.

She remembered what was in her right hand, and she lifted the knife and drove it down as hard as she could, to give him the help he needed.

She stood at the window, her back to the room and the dead immortal.

She waited for the priest Mons to return. He would know what to do next. Probably the secret would have to be kept, somehow.

They would not harm her, she knew that. The reverence that had surrounded Tyrell enfolded her too. She would live on, the only immortal now, born in a time of peace, living forever and alone in the worlds of peace. Some day, some time, another immortal might be born, but she did not want to think of that now. She could think only of Tyrell and her loneliness.

She looked through the window at the bright blue and green, the pure day of God, washed clean now of the last red stain of man's bloody past. She knew that Tyrell would be glad if he could see this cleanness, this purity that could go on forever.

She would see it go on. She was part of it, as Tyrell had not been. And even in the loneliness she already felt, there was a feeling of compensation, somehow. She was dedicated to the centuries of man that were to come.

She reached beyond her sorrow and love. From far away she could hear the solemn chanting of the priests. It was part of the righteousness that had come to the worlds now, at last, after the long and bloody path to the new Golgotha. But it was the last Golgotha, and she would go on now as she must, dedicated and sure.

Immortal.

She lifted her head and looked steadily at the blue. She would look forward into the future. The past was forgotten. And the past, to her, meant no bloody heritage, no deep corruption that would work unseen in the black hell of the mind's abyss until the monstrous seed reached up to destroy God's peace and love.

Quite suddenly, she remembered that she had committed murder. Her arm thrilled again with the violence of the blow; her hand tingled with the splash of shed blood.

Very quickly she closed her thoughts against the memory. She looked up at the sky, holding hard against the closed gateway of her mind as though the assault battered already against the fragile bars.

H. L. GOLD

In science fiction, nearly everybody *reads* Galaxy. *Since its first issue, and in all of the decade that followed, it has ranked among the best science fiction magazines—always exciting, and,* mutatis mutandis, *always reliable. The man whose editorial skill steers* Galaxy *past the rocks where scores of other magazines founder is, in his off-duty hours, a talented author in his own right. You didn't know this? You will know it very soon . . . if you go on to read—*

The Man with English

Lying in the hospital, Edgar Stone added up his misfortunes as another might count blessings. There were enough to infuriate the most temperate man, which Stone notoriously was not. He smashed his fist down, accidentally hitting the metal side of the bed, and was astonished by the pleasant feeling. It enraged him even more. The really maddening thing was how simply he had goaded himself into the hospital.

He'd locked up his drygoods store and driven home for lunch. Nothing unusual about that; he did it every day. With his miserable digestion, he couldn't stand the restaurant food in town. He pulled into the driveway, rode over a collection of metal shapes his son Arnold had left lying around, and punctured a tire.

"Rita!" he yelled. "This is going too damned far! Where is that brat?"

"In here," she called truculently from the kitchen.

He kicked open the screen door. His foot went through the mesh.

"A ripped tire and a torn screen!" he shouted at Ar-

nold, who was sprawled in angular adolescence over a blueprint on the kitchen table. "You'll pay for them, by God! They're coming out of your allowance!"

"I'm sorry, Pop," the boy said.

"Sorry, my left foot," Mrs. Stone shrieked. She whirled on her husband. "You could have watched where you were going. He promised to clean up his things from the driveway right after lunch. And it's about time you stopped kicking open the door every time you're mad."

"Mad? Who wouldn't be mad? Me hoping he'd get out of school and come into the store, and he wants to be an engineer. An engineer—and he can't even make change when he—hah!—helps me out in the store!"

"He'll be whatever he wants to be," she screamed in the conversational tone of the Stone household.

"Please," said Arnold. "I can't concentrate on this plan."

Edgar Stone was never one to restrain an angry impulse. He tore up the blueprint and flung the pieces down on the table.

"Aw, Pop," the boy said.

"Don't say 'Aw, Pop' to me. You're not going to waste a summer vacation on junk like this. You'll eat your lunch and come down to the store. And you'll do it every day for the rest of the summer!"

"Oh, he will, will he?" demanded Mrs. Stone. "He'll catch up on his studies. And as for you, you can go back and eat in a restaurant."

"You know I can't stand that slop!"

"You'll eat it because you're not having lunch here any more. I've got enough to do without making three meals a day."

"But I can't drive back with that tire—"

He did, though not with the tire—he took a cab. It cost a dollar plus tip, lunch was a dollar and a half plus tip, bicarb at Rite Drug Store a few doors away and in a great hurry came to another fifteen cents—only it didn't work.

And then Miss Ellis came in for some material. Miss Ellis could round out any miserable day. She was fifty, tall, skinny and had thin, disapproving lips. She had a

sliver of cloth clipped very meagerly off a hem that she intended to use as a sample.

"The arms of the slipcover on my reading chair wore through," she informed him. "I bought the material here, if you remember."

Stone didn't have to look at the fragmentary swatch. "That was about seven years ago—"

"Six-and-a-half," she corrected. "I paid enough for it. You'd expect anything that expensive to last."

"The style was discontinued. I have something here that—"

"I do not want to make an entire slipcover, Mr. Stone. All I want is enough to make new panels for the arms. Two yards should do very nicely."

Stone smothered a bilious hiccup. "Two yards, Miss Ellis?"

"At the most."

"I sold the last of that material years ago." He pulled a bolt off a shelf and partly unrolled it for her. "Why not use a different pattern as a kind of contrast?"

"I want this same pattern," she said, her thin lips getting even thinner and more obstinate.

"Then I'll have to order it and hope one of my wholesalers still has some of it in stock."

"Not without looking for it first right here, you won't order it for me. You can't know *all* these materials you have on these shelves."

Stone felt all the familiar symptoms of fury—the sudden pulsing of the temples, the lurch and bump of his heart as adrenalin came surging in like the tide at the Firth of Forth, the quivering of his hands, the angry shout pulsing at his vocal cords from below.

"I'll take a look, Miss Ellis," he said.

She was president of the Ladies Cultural Society and dominated it so thoroughly that the members would go clear to the next town for their dry goods, rather than deal with him, if he offended this sour stick of stubbornness.

If Stone's life insurance salesman had been there, he would have tried to keep Stone from climbing the ladder that ran around the three walls of the store. He probably

wouldn't have been in time. Stone stamped up the ladder to reach the highest shelves, where there were scraps of bolts. One of them might have been the remnant of the material Miss Ellis had bought six-and-a-half years ago. But Stone never found out.

He snatched one, glaring down meanwhile at the top of Miss Ellis's head, and the ladder skidded out from under him. He felt his skull collide with the counter. He didn't feel it hit the floor.

"God damn it!" Stone yelled. "You could at least turn on the lights."

"There, there, Edgar. Everything's fine, just fine."

It was his wife's voice and the tone was so uncommonly soft and soothing that it scared him into a panic.

"What's wrong with me?" he asked piteously. "Am I blind?"

"How many fingers am I holding up?" a man wanted to know.

Stone was peering into the blackness. All he could see before his eyes was a vague blot against a darker blot.

"None," he bleated. "Who are you?"

"Dr. Rankin. That was a nasty fall you had, Mr. Stone —concussion of course, and a splinter of bone driven into the brain. I had to operate to remove it."

"Then you cut out a nerve!" Stone said. "You did something to my eyes!"

The doctor's voice sounded puzzled. "There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with them. I'll take a look, though, and see."

"You'll be all right, dear," Mrs. Stone said reassuringly, but she didn't sound as if she believed it.

"Sure you will, Pop," said Arnold.

"Is that young stinker here?" Stone demanded. "He's the cause of all this!"

"Temper, temper," the doctor said. "Accidents happen."

Stone heard him lower the venetian blinds. As if they had been a switch, light sprang up and everything in the hospital became brightly visible.

"Well!" said Stone. "That's more like it. It's night and you're trying to save electricity, hey?"

"It's broad daylight, Edgar dear," his wife protested. "All Dr. Rankin did was lower the blinds and—"

"Please," the doctor said. "If you don't mind, I'd rather take care of any explanations that have to be made."

He came at Stone with an ophthalmoscope. When he flashed it into Stone's eyes, everything went black and Stone let him know it vociferously.

"Black?" Dr. Rankin repeated blankly. "Are you positive? Not a sudden glare?"

"Black," insisted Stone. "And what's the idea of putting me in a bed filled with bread crumbs?"

"It was freshly made—"

"Crumbs. You heard me. And the pillow has rocks in it."

"What else is bothering you?" asked the doctor worriedly.

"It's freezing in here." Stone felt the terror rise in him again. "It was summer when I fell off the ladder. Don't tell me I've been unconscious clear through till winter!"

"No, Pop," said Arnold. "That was yesterday—"

"I'll take care of this," Dr. Rankin said firmly. "I'm afraid you and your son will have to leave, Mrs. Stone. I have to do a few tests on your husband."

"Will he be all right?" she appealed.

"Of course, of course," he said inattentively, peering with a frown at the shivering patient. "Shock, you know," he added vaguely.

"Gosh, Pop," said Arnold. "I'm sorry this happened. I got the driveway all cleaned up."

"And we'll take care of the store till you're better," Mrs. Stone promised.

"Don't you dare!" yelled Stone. "You'll put me out of business!"

The doctor hastily shut the door on them and came back to the bed. Stone was clutching the light summer blanket around himself. He felt colder than he'd ever been in his life.

"Can't you get me more blankets?" he begged. "You don't want me to die of pneumonia, do you?"

Dr. Rankin opened the blinds and asked, "What's this like?"

"Night," chattered Stone. "A new idea to save electricity—hooking up the blinds to the light switch?"

The doctor closed the blinds and sat down beside the bed. He was sweating as he reached for the signal button and pressed it. A nurse came in, blinking in their direction.

"Why don't you turn on the light?" she asked.

"Huh?" said Stone. "They are."

"Nurse, I'm Dr. Rankin. Get me a piece of sandpaper, some cotton swabs, an ice cube and Mr. Stone's lunch."

"Is there anything he shouldn't eat?"

"That's what I want to find out. Hurry, please."

"And some blankets." Stone put in, shaking with the chill.

"Blankets, Doctor?" she asked, startled.

"Half a dozen will do," he said. "I think."

It took her ten minutes to return with all the items. Stone wanted them to keep adding blankets until all seven were on him. He still felt cold.

"Maybe some hot coffee?" he suggested.

The doctor nodded and the nurse poured a cup, added the spoon and a half of sugar he requested, and he took a mouthful. He sprayed it out violently.

"Ice cold!" he yelped. "And who put salt in it?"

"Salt?" She fumbled around on the tray. "It's so dark here—"

"I'll attend to it," Dr. Rankin said hurriedly. "Thank you."

She walked cautiously to the door and went out.

"Try this," said the doctor, after filling another cup.

"Well, that's better!" Stone exclaimed. "Damned practical joker. They shouldn't be allowed to work in hospitals."

"And now, if you don't mind," said the doctor, "I'd like to try several tests."

Stone was still angry at the trick played on him, but he cooperated willingly.

Dr. Rankin finally sagged back in the chair. The sweat ran down his face and into his collar, and his expression was so dazed that Stone was alarmed.

"What's wrong, Doctor? Am I going to—going to—"

"No, no. It's not that. No danger. At least, I don't believe there is. But I can't even be sure of that any more."

"You can't be sure if I'll live or die?"

"Look." Dr. Rankin grimly pulled the chair closer. "It's broad daylight and yet you can't see until I darken the room. The coffee was hot and sweet, but it was cold and salty to you, so I added an ice cube and a spoonful of salt and it tasted fine, you said. This is one of the hottest days on record and you're freezing. You told me the sandpaper felt smooth and satiny, then yelled that somebody had put pins in the cotton swabs, when there weren't any, of course. I've tried you with different colors around the room and you saw violet when you should have seen yellow, green for red, orange for blue, and so on. Now do you understand?"

"No," said Stone frightenedly. "What's wrong?"

"All I can do is guess. I had to remove that sliver of bone from your brain. It apparently shorted your sensory nerves."

"And what happened?"

"Every one of your senses has been reversed. You feel cold for heat, heat for cold, smooth for rough, rough for smooth, sour for sweet, sweet for sour, and so forth. And you see colors backward."

Stone sat up. "Murderer! Thief! You've ruined me!"

The doctor sprang for a hypodermic and sedative. Just in time, he changed his mind and took a bottle of stimulant instead. It worked fine, though injecting it into his screaming, thrashing patient took more strength than he'd known he owned. Stone fell asleep immediately.

There were nine blankets on Stone and he had a bag of cement for a pillow when he had his lawyer, Manny Lubin, in to hear the charges he wanted brought against Dr. Rankin. The doctor was there to defend himself. Mrs. Stone was present in spite of her husband's objections—"She always takes everybody's side against me," he explained in a roar.

"I'll be honest with you, Mr. Lubin," the doctor said, after Stone had finished on a note of shrill frustration. "I've hunted for cases like this in medical history and this

is the first one ever to be reported. Except," he amended quickly, "that I haven't reported it yet. I'm hoping it reverses itself. That sometimes happens, you know."

"And what am I supposed to do in the meantime?" raged Stone. "I'll have to go out wearing an overcoat in the summer and shorts in the winter—people will think I'm a maniac. And they'll be *sure* of it because I'll have to keep the store closed during the day and open at night —I can't see except in the dark. And matching materials! I can't stand the feel of smooth cloth and I see colors backward!" He glared at the doctor before turning back to Lubin. "How would you like to have to put sugar on your food and salt in your coffee?"

"But we'll work it out, Edgar dear," his wife soothed. "Arnold and I can take care of the store. You always wanted him to come into the business, so that ought to please you—"

"As long as I'm there to watch him!"

"And Dr. Rankin said maybe things will straighten out."

"What about that, Doctor?" asked Lubin. "What are the chances?"

Dr. Rankin looked uncomfortable. "I don't know. This has never happened before. All we can do is hope."

"Hope, nothing!" Stone stormed. "I want to sue him. He had no right to go meddling around and turn me upside down. Any jury would give me a quarter of a million!"

"I'm no millionaire, Mr. Stone," said the doctor.

"But the hospital has money. We'll sue him and the trustees."

There was a pause while the attorney thought. "I'm afraid we wouldn't have a case, Mr. Stone." He went on more rapidly as Stone sat up, shivering, to argue loudly. "It was an emergency operation. Any surgeon would have had to operate. Am I right, Dr. Rankin?"

The doctor explained what would have happened if he had not removed the pressure on the brain, resulting from the concussion, and the danger that the bone splinter, if not extracted, might have gone on traveling and caused possible paralysis or death.

"That would be better than this," said Stone.

"But medical ethics couldn't allow him to let you die," Lubin objected. "He was doing his duty. That's point one."

"Mr. Lubin is absolutely right, Edgar," said Mrs. Stone.

"There, you see?" screamed her husband. "Everybody's right but me! Will you get her out of here before I have a stroke?"

"Her interests are also involved," Lubin pointed out. "Point two is that the emergency came first, the after-effects couldn't be known or considered."

Dr. Rankin brightened. "Any operation involves risk, even the excising of a corn. I had to take those risks."

"*You* had to take them?" Stone scoffed. "All right, what are you leading up to, Lubin?"

"We'd lose," said the attorney.

Stone subsided, but only for a moment. "So we'll lose. But if we sue, the publicity would ruin him. I want to sue!"

"For what, Edgar dear?" his wife persisted. "We'll have a hard enough time managing. Why throw good money after bad?"

"Why didn't I marry a woman who'd take my side, even when I'm wrong?" moaned Stone. "Revenge, that's what. And he won't be able to practice, so he'll have time to find out if there's a cure . . . and at no charge, either! I won't pay him another cent!"

The doctor stood up eagerly. "But I'm willing to see what can be done right now. And it wouldn't cost you anything, naturally."

"What do you mean?" Stone challenged suspiciously.

"If I were to perform another operation, I'll be able to see which nerves were involved. There's no need to go into the technical side right now, but it is possible to connect nerves. Of course, there are a good many, which complicates matters, especially since the splinter went through several layers—"

Lubin pointed a lawyer's impaling finger at him. "Are you offering to attempt to correct the injury—gratis?"

"Certainly. I mean to say, I'll do my absolute best. But

keep in mind, please, that there is no medical precedent."

The attorney, however, was already questioning Stone and his wife. "In view of the fact that we have no legal grounds whatever for suit, does this offer of settlement satisfy your claim against him?"

"Oh, yes!" Mrs. Stone cried.

Her husband hesitated for a while, clearly tempted to take the opposite position out of habit. "I guess so," he reluctantly agreed.

"Well, then it's in your hands, Doctor," said Lubin.

Dr. Rankin buzzed excitedly for the nurse. "I'll have him prepared for surgery right away."

"It better work this time," warned Stone, clutching a handful of ice cubes to warm his fingers.

Stone came to foggily. He didn't know it, but he had given the anesthetist a bewildering problem, which finally had been solved by using fumes of aromatic spirits of ammonia. The four blurred figures around the bed seemed to be leaning precariously toward him.

"Pop!" said Arnold, "Look, he's coming out of it! Pop!"

"Speak to me, Edgar dear," Mrs. Stone beseeched.

Lubin said, "See how he is, Doctor."

"He's fine," the doctor insisted heartily, his usual bedside manner evidently having returned. "He must be—the blinds are open and he's not complaining that it's dark or that he's cold." He leaned over the bed. "How are we feeling, Mr. Stone?"

It took a minute or two for Stone to move his swollen tongue enough to answer. He wrinkled his nose in disgust.

"What smells purple?" he demanded.

GAVIN HYDE

A few years back, in Ireland, Ray Bradbury spent some very productive months. Not only did he write the script of one of the best motion pictures of recent years—Moby Dick *was its name—but on a side trip he met a young writer who had just turned his hand to science fiction, and persuaded him to let American editors see the results.* Star *was delighted to acquire two of them; the first was "Nor the Moon by Night," and the second is—*

Sparkie's Fall

Sparkson was relieved to see the evening sky melt into the terrain of the planet where he had been forced down, slowly obliterating the forms of the aliens on each side of him. He had been looking forward to night because he had thought it over and he hoped—rather optimistically, he admitted to himself—that they might let him leave the rocket, or something.

Anything.

Anything was better than walking around the ship for the equivalent of three earth days, the only diversion being the mechanical Translator and that exasperating as hell as it tried to make sense of what the alien said and type it out for him on white little slips of paper: "NAME, I am worried. Could Sparkie (eat) (be nourished by) GARBLE?"

And then the answer: "!, (stop) (cease) (desist from) worrying, NAME. Sparkie is (in admirable condition) (fine)!"

It had taken him twenty years to get "Sparkie" out of his

family's vocabulary. And now the first two "people" he met in outer space called him Sparkie.

Just because they were bigger than he was!

They lay on each side of him, gigantic whales from an ocean of soot, their lights glowing handfuls of sand. Nothing came out, nothing went in.

There were just two.

Many of his controls had ceased to function when they had pulled him down between them. Others were as usual. He couldn't take off, of course—except when that message came out of the Translator: "NAME, Sparkie might (desire) (want) (thirst for) exercise."

He leapt to the chance—it was foolish of them to think that the ship was the man and needed exercise, but that foolishness might help him escape—but they had gone with him, limiting him to graceful figure eights. He tried turning out of one of them, away into space.

He was returned to his place, gently.

When they had captured him, naturally, his first move was to open communications with them through the radio. They received him well, with the help of the translator. They said hello, yes we know where you came from, hope you had a good trip, and then they were quiet.

He had asked them the first forty-nine questions on the checklist designed for making contact with aliens. Nothing. At the end he was yelling at them.

Then he forgot his briefings. "What's the matter, battery gone dead?"

They said only: "Time to rest, Sparkie."

They were not exactly their last words, because while he was "exercising" he had asked if he could fire a nuclear missile, hoping to arouse a little more respect.

Then the one that always seemed subservient to the other said, "NAME, I am frightened. Sparkie might not (throw) (hurl) (eject) it free of his vessel. (Moreover) (Also) it might GARBLE the alignment of the GARBLE GARBLE."

The other didn't even answer that. "Fire away, Sparkie!"

So he threw the lever and there was a wondrous sun and a mushroom that would have turned Einstein over in his grave, certainly, if it had grown under him.

One said, "That's (enough) (sufficient) for (period of time)!" And the other said, "Better than 4th of July, eh, Sparkie?"

"It sure is. How come you know about the 4th?"

"We know what we need to know. Let us rest now."

Sparkson tried everything, even "I'm lonely!" But rest it was.

He had slept, getting up to check gauges and read some incredibly garbled messages—conversations having nothing to do with him that the Translator apparently couldn't begin to handle.

Now, with the coming of night, he stayed by the Translator. After an hour of darkness a short slip of paper appeared.

"Goodnight, NAME."

Then another. "(Sweet) (Pleasant) (Gentle) dreams of mother, NAME."

They were going to sleep. He sat sweating, staring at the slot, with his hands on each side of the gold-braided uniform cap on his head.

After a while some papers slid out of the Translator. Drowsily the aliens were communicating, like girls whispering secret, in bed.

"NAME—"

"?"

"It is (odd) (strange) (perplexing)."

"?"

"I am thinking of Sparkie's mind . . . NAME!"

"I am awake!"

"Sparkie is so (small) (weak) (defenseless)."

"(Hm) (Mm) (Mmm)."

"His mind is like a (piece) (sheet) of GARBLE. We think on the (bases) (conditions) (roots) of our experience, our perceptions which are multiplied by (objects) (things) (forms of matter) which we have sensed. Sparkie must think with the (toys) (playthings) of his earth only. How can he understand us? What does he know of GARBLE, GARBLE or GARBLE for example, this (small) (weak) (defenseless) being? NAME!"

"! Go to sleep."

That was all. He waited another hour. Then he read the bits of paper, in order. He read them over and over again, while the starless biblical darkness, one thing by God that was not among the *forms of matter,* offered him freedom.

So he was "(small) (weak) (defenseless)"?

He would show them.

He reviewed the gravity and atmospheric tables beside the suit, strapped nuclearms on each side, brought it closed around his body.

As he staggered, arms up and legs bent under the weight, he was made suddenly angry by an insistent tension at the back of his throat.

The "(toys) (playthings)" of his earth indeed!

He opened the hatch.

He jumped to the surface of the.... the....

Planet?

This?

Some hours later the Translator in the cold metal hum of the ship began to spit papers, violently.

Waves of magnetism, pulses of electric desire, like startled schools of fish in coral, swept the corridors.

A great rocking bellowing sound and a smell of sorrow spread skyward.

FRITZ LEIBER

Before Fritz Leiber sat down to tell us what lay in the heart and mind of a kitten named Gummitch, he had already behind him a considerable career as writer ("Gather, Darkness!", the award-winning "The Big Time," and scores of other memorable stories), editor (of a popular scientific magazine) and, of all things, Shakespearean actor (following in the footsteps of the older Fritz Leiber, his father). Surely he has at least as much before him; and it is with confidence and glee that we contemplate the fact that the future may hold many more stories from his as moving and insighted as—

Space-time for Springers

Gummitch was a superkitten, as he knew very well, with an I.Q. of about 160. Of course, he didn't talk. But everybody knows that I.Q. tests based on language ability are very one-sided. Besides, he would talk as soon as they started setting a place for him at table and pouring him coffee. Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra ate horsemeat from pans on the floor and they didn't talk. Baby dined in his crib on milk from a bottle and he didn't talk. Sissy sat at table but they didn't pour her coffee and she didn't talk—not one word. Father and Mother (whom Gummitch had nicknamed Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here) sat at table and poured each other coffee and they *did* talk. Q.E.D.

Meanwhile, he would get by very well on thought projection and intuitive understanding of all human speech—not even to mention cat patois, which almost any civilized animal could play by ear. The dramatic monologues and

Socratic dialogues, the quiz and panel-show appearances, the felidological expedition to darkest Africa (where he would uncover the real truth behind lions and tigers), the exploration of the outer planets—all these could wait. The same went for the books for which he was ceaselessly accumulating material: *The Encyclopedia of Odors, Anthropofeline Psychology, Invisible Signs and Secret Wonders, Space-Time for Springers, Slit Eyes Look at Life,* et cetera. For the present it was enough to live existence to the hilt and soak up knowledge, missing no experience proper to his age level—to rush about with tail aflame.

So to all outward appearances Gummitch was just a vividly normal kitten, as shown by the succession of nicknames he bore along the magic path that led from blue-eyed infancy toward puberty: Little One, Squawker, Portly, Bumble (for purring not clumsiness), Old Starved-to-Death, Fierso, Loverboy (affection not sex), Spook and Catnik. Of these only the last perhaps requires further explanation: the Russians had just sent Muttnik up after Sputnik, so that when one evening Gummitch streaked three times across the firmament of the living room floor in the same direction, past the fixed stars of the humans and the comparatively slow-moving heavenly bodies of the two older cats, and Kitty-Come-Here quoted the line from Keats:

> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;

it was inevitable that Old Horsemeat would say, "Ah—Catnik!"

The new name lasted all of three days, to be replaced by Gummitch, which showed signs of becoming permanent.

The little cat was on the verge of truly growing up, at least so Gummitch overheard Old Horsemeat comment to Kitty-Come-Here. A few short weeks, Old Horsemeat said, and Gummitch's fiery flesh would harden, his slim neck thicken, the electricity vanish from everything but his fur, and all his delightful kittenish qualities rapidly give way to the earth-bound singlemindness of a tom. They'd

be lucky, Old Horsemeat concluded, if he didn't turn completely surly like Ashurbanipal.

Gummitch listened to these predictions with gay unconcern and with secret amusement from his vantage point of superior knowledge, in the same spirit that he accepted so many phases of his outwardly conventional existence: the murderous sidelong looks he got from Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra as he devoured his own horsemeat from his own little tin pan, because they sometimes were given canned catfood but he never; the stark idiocy of Baby, who didn't know the difference between a live cat and a stuffed teddy bear and who tried to cover up his ignorance by making goo-goo noises and poking indiscriminately at all eyes; the far more serious—because cleverly hidden—maliciousness of Sissy, who had to be watched out for warily—especially when you were alone—and whose retarded—even warped —development, Gummitch knew, was Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here's deepest, most secret, worry (more of Sissy and her evil ways soon); the limited intellect of Kitty-Come-Here, who despite the amounts of coffee she drank was quite as featherbrained as kittens are supposed to be and who firmly believed, for example, that kittens operated in the same space-time as other beings—that to get from *here* to *there* they had to cross the space *between* —and similar fallacies; the mental stodginess of even Old Horsemeat, who although he understood quite a bit of the secret doctrine and talked intelligently to Gummitch when they were alone, nevertheless suffered from the limitations of his status—a rather nice old god but a maddeningly slow-witted one.

But Gummitch could easily forgive all this massed inadequacy and downright brutishness in his felino-human household, because he was aware that he alone knew the real truth about himself and about other kittens and babies as well, the truth which was hidden from weaker minds, the truth that was as intrinsically incredible as the germ theory of disease or the origin of the whole great universe in the explosion of a single atom.

As a baby kitten Gummitch had believed that Old Horsemeat's two hands were hairless kittens permanently attached to the ends of Old Horsemeat's arms but having

an independent life of their own. How he had hated and loved those two five-legged sallow monsters, his first playmates, comforters and battle-opponents!

Well, even that fantastic discarded notion was but a trifling fancy compared to the real truth about himself!

The forehead of Zeus split open to give birth to Minerva. Gummitch had been born from the waist-fold of a dirty old terrycloth bathrobe, Old Horsemeat's basic garment. The kitten was intuitively certain of it and had proved it to himself as well as any Descartes or Aristotle. In a kitten-size tuck of that ancient bathrobe the atoms of his body had gathered and quickened into life. His earliest memories were of snoozing wrapped in terrycloth, warmed by Old Horsemeat's heat. Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here were his true parents. The other theory of his origin, the one he heard Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here recount from time to time—that he had been the only surviving kitten of a litter abandoned next door, that he had had the shakes from vitamin deficiency and lost the tip of his tail and the hair on his paws and had to be nursed back to life and health with warm yellowish milk-and-vitamins fed from an eyedropper—that other theory was just one of those rationalizations with which mysterious nature cloaks the birth of heroes, perhaps wisely veiling the truth from minds unable to bear it, a rationalization as false as Kitty-Come-Here and Old Horsemeat's touching belief that Sissy and Baby were their children rather than the cubs of Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra.

The day that Gummitch had discovered by pure intuition the secret of his birth he had been filled with a wild instant excitement. He had only kept it from tearing him to pieces by rushing out to the kitchen and striking and devouring a fried scallop, torturing it fiendishly first for twenty minutes.

And the secret of his birth was only the beginning. His intellectual faculties aroused, Gummitch had two days later intuited a further and greater secret: since he was the child of humans he would, upon reaching this maturation date of which Old Horsemeat had spoken, turn not into a sullen tom but into a godlike human youth with reddish golden

hair the color of his present fur. He would be poured coffee; and he would instantly be able to talk, probably in all languages. While Sissy (how clear it was now!) would at approximately the same time shrink and fur out into a sharp-clawed and vicious she-cat dark as her hair, sex and self-love her only concerns, first harem-mate for Cleopatra, concubine to Aŝhurbanipal.

Exactly the same was true, Gummitch realized at once, for all kittens and babies, all humans and cats, wherever they might dwell. Metamorphosis was as much a part of the fabric of their lives as it was of the insects'. It was also the basic fact underlying all legends of werewolves, vampires and witches' familiars.

If you just rid your mind of preconceived notions, Gummitch told himself, it was all very logical. Babies were stupid, fumbling, vindictive creatures without reason or speech. What more natural than that they should grow up into mute sullen selfish beasts bent only on rapine and reproduction? While kittens were quick, sensitive, subtle, supremely alive. What other destiny were they possibly fitted for except to become the deft, word-speaking, book-writing, music-making, meat-getting-and-dispensing masters of the world? To dwell on the physical differences, to point out that kittens and men, babies and cats, are rather unlike in appearance and size, would be to miss the forest for the trees—very much as if an entomologist should proclaim metamorphosis a myth because his microscope failed to discover the wings of a butterfly in a caterpillar's slime or a golden beetle in a grub.

Nevertheless it was such a mind-staggering truth, Gummitch realized at the same time, that it was easy to understand why humans, cats, babies and perhaps most kittens were quite unaware of it. How safely explain to a butterfly that he was once a hairy crawler, or to a dull larva that he will one day be a walking jewel? No, in such situations the delicate minds of man- and feline-kind are guarded by a merciful mass amnesia, such as Velikovsky has explained prevents us from recalling that in historical times the Earth was catastrophically bumped by the planet Venus operating in the manner of a comet before settling down (with a cosmic sigh of relief, surely!) into its present orbit.

This conclusion was confirmed when Gummitch in the first fever of illumination tried to communicate his great insight to others. He told it in cat patois, as well as that limited jargon permitted, to Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra and even, on the off chance, to Sissy and Baby. They showed no interest whatever, except that Sissy took advantage of his unguarded preoccupation to stab him with a fork.

Later, alone with Old Horsemeat, he projected the great new thoughts, staring with solemn yellow eyes at the old god, but the latter grew markedly nervous and even showed signs of real fear, so Gummitch desisted. ("You'd have sworn he was trying to put across something as deep as the Einstein theory or the doctrine of original sin," Old Horsemeat later told Kitty-Come-Here.)

But Gummitch was a man now in all but form, the kitten reminded himself after these failures, and it was part of his destiny to shoulder secrets alone when necessary. He wondered if the general amnesia would affect him when he metamorphosed. There was no sure answer to this question, but he hoped not—and sometimes felt that there was reason for his hopes. Perhaps he would be the first true kitten-man, speaking from a wisdom that had no locked doors in it.

Once he was tempted to speed up the process by the use of drugs. Left alone in the kitchen, he sprang onto the table and started to lap up the black puddle in the bottom of Old Horsemeat's coffee cup. It tasted foul and poisonous and he withdrew with a little snarl, frightened as well as revolted. The dark beverage would not work its tongue-loosening magic, he realized, except at the proper time and with the proper ceremonies. Incantations might be necessary as well. Certainly unlawful tasting was highly dangerous.

The futility of expecting coffee to work any wonders by itself was further demonstrated to Gummitch when Kitty-Come-Here, wordlessly badgered by Sissy, gave a few spoonfuls to the little girl, liberally lacing it first with milk and sugar. Of course Gummitch knew by now that Sissy was destined shortly to turn into a cat and that no amount

of coffee would ever make her talk, but it was nevertheless instructive to see how she spat out the first mouthful, drooling a lot of saliva after it, and dashed the cup and its contents at the chest of Kitty-Come-Here.

Gummitch continued to feel a great deal of sympathy for his parents in their worries about Sissy and he longed for the day when he would metamorphose and be able as an acknowledged man-child truly to console them. It was heart-breaking to see how they each tried to coax the little girl to talk, always attempting it while the other was absent, how they seized on each accidentally wordlike note in the few sounds she uttered and repeated it back to her hopefully, how they were more and more possessed by fears not so much of her retarded (they thought) development as of her increasingly obvious maliciousness, which was directed chiefly at Baby . . . though the two cats and Gummitch bore their share. Once she had caught Baby alone in his crib and used the sharp corner of a block to dot Baby's large-domed lightly downed head with triangular red marks. Kitty-Come-Here had discovered her doing it, but the woman's first action had been to rub Baby's head to obliterate the marks so that Old Horsemeat wouldn't see them. That was the night Kitty-Come-Here hid the abnormal psychology books.

Gummitch understood very well that Kitty-Come-Here and Old Horsemeat, honestly believing themselves to be Sissy's parents, felt just as deeply about her as if they actually were and he did what little he could under the present circumstances to help them. He had recently come to feel a quite independent affection for Baby—the miserable little proto-cat was so completely stupid and defenseless—and so he unofficially constituted himself the creature's guardian, taking his naps behind the door of the nursery and dashing about noisily whenever Sissy showed up. In any case he realized that as a potentially adult member of a felino-human household he had his natural responsibilities.

Accepting responsibilities was as much a part of a kitten's life, Gummitch told himself, as shouldering unsharable intuitions and secrets, the number of which continued to grow from day to day.

There was, for instance, the Affair of the Squirrel Mirror.

Gummitch had early solved the mystery of ordinary mirrors and of the creatures that appeared in them. A little observation and sniffing and one attempt to get behind the heavy wall-job in the living room had convinced him that mirror beings were insubstantial or at least hermetically sealed into their other world, probably creatures of pure spirit, harmless imitative ghosts—including the silent Gummitch Double who touched paws with him so softly yet so coldly.

Just the same, Gummitch had let his imagination play with what would happen if one day, while looking into the mirror world, he should let loose his grip on his spirit and let it slip into the Gummitch Double while the other's spirit slipped into his body—if, in short, he should change places with the scentless ghost kitten. Being doomed to a life consisting wholly of imitation and completely lacking in opportunities to show initiative—except for the behind-the-scenes judgment and speed needed in rushing from one mirror to another to keep up with the real Gummitch—would be sickeningly dull, Gummitch decided, and he resolved to keep a tight hold on his spirit at all times in the vicinity of mirrors.

But that isn't telling about the Squirrel Mirror. One morning Gummitch was peering out the front bedroom window that overlooked the roof of the porch. Gummitch had already classified windows as semi-mirrors having two kinds of space on the other side: the mirror world and that harsh region filled with mysterious and dangerously organized-sounding noises called the outer world, into which grownup humans reluctantly ventured at intervals, donning special garments for the purpose and shouting loud farewells that were meant to be reassuring but achieved just the opposite effect. The coexistence of two kinds of space presented no paradox to the kitten who carried in his mind the 27-chapter outline of *Space-Time for Springers*—indeed, it constituted one of the mirror themes of the book.

This morning the bedroom was dark and the outer world

was dull and sunless, so the mirror world was unusually difficult to see. Gummitch was just lifting his face toward it, nose twitching, his front paws on the sill, when what should rear up on the other side, exactly in the space that the Gummitch Double normally occupied, but a dirty brown, narrow-visaged image with savagely low forehead, dark evil walleyes, and a huge jaw filled with shovel-like teeth.

Gummitch was enormously startled and hideously frightened. He felt his grip on his spirit go limp, and without volition he teleported himself three yards to the rear, making use of that faculty for cutting corners in space-time, traveling by space-warp in fact, which was one of his powers that Kitty-Come-Here refused to believe in and that even Old Horsemeat accepted only on faith.

Then, not losing a moment, he picked himself up by his furry seat, swung himself around, dashed downstairs at top speed, sprang to the top of the sofa, and stared for several seconds at the Gummitch Double in the wall-mirror—not relaxing a muscle strand until he was completely convinced that he was still himself and had not been transformed into the nasty brown apparition that had confronted him in the bedroom window.

"Now what do you suppose brought that on?" Old Horsemeat asked Kitty-Come-Here.

Later Gummitch learned that what he had seen had been a squirrel, a savage, nut-hunting being belonging wholly to the outer world (except for forays into attics) and not at all to the mirror one. Nevertheless he kept a vivid memory of his profound momentary conviction that the squirrel had taken the Gummitch Double's place and been about to take his own. He shuddered to think what would have happened if the squirrel had been actively interested in trading spirits with him. Apparently mirrors and mirror-situations, just as he had always feared, were highly conductive to spirit transfers. He filed the information away in the memory cabinet reserved for dangerous, exciting and possibly useful information, such as plans for climbing straight up glass (diamond-tipped claws!) and flying higher than the trees.

These days his thought cabinets were beginning to feel filled to bursting and he could hardly wait for the moment when the true rich taste of coffee, lawfully drunk, would permit him to speak.

He pictured the scene in detail: the family gathered in conclave at the kitchen table, Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra respectfully watching from floor level, himself sitting erect on chair with paws (or would they be hands?) lightly touching his cup of thin china, while Old Horsemeat poured the thin black steaming stream. He knew the Great Transformation must be close at hand.

At the same time he knew that the other critical situation in the household was worsening swiftly. Sissy, he realized now, was far older than Baby and should long ago have undergone her own somewhat less glamorous though equally necessary transformation (the first tin of raw horsemeat could hardly be as exciting as the first cup of coffee). Her time was long overdue. Gummitch found increasing horror in this mute vampirish being inhabiting the body of a rapidly growing girl, though inwardly equipped to be nothing but a most bloodthirsty she-cat. How dreadful to think of Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here having to care all their lives for such a monster! Gummitch told himself that if any opportunity for alleviating his parents' misery should ever present itself to him, he would not hesitate for an instant.

Then one night, when the sense of Change was so burstingly strong in him that he knew tomorrow must be the Day, but when the house was also exceptionally unquiet with boards creaking and snapping, taps adrip, and curtains mysteriously rustling at closed windows (so that it was clear that the many spirit worlds including the mirror one must be pressing very close), the opportunity came to Gummitch.

Kitty-Come-Here and Old Horsemeat had fallen into especially sound, drugged sleeps, the former with a bad cold, the latter with one unhappy highball too many (Gummitch knew he had been brooding about Sissy). Baby slept too, though with uneasy whimperings and joggings—moonlight shone full on his crib past a window shade which had whirringly rolled itself up without human

or feline agency. Gummitch kept vigil under the crib, with eyes closed but with wildly excited mind pressing outward to every boundary of the house and even stretching here and there into the outer world. On this night of all nights sleep was unthinkable.

The suddenly he became aware of footsteps, footsteps so soft they must, he thought, be Cleopatra's.

No, softer than that, so soft they might be those of the Gummitch Double escaped from the mirror would at last and padding up toward him through the darkened halls. A ribbon of fur rose along his spine.

Then into the nursery Sissy came prowling. She looked slim as an Egyptian princess in her long thin yellow nightgown and as sure of herself, but the cat was very strong in her tonight, from the flat intent eyes to the dainty canine teeth slightly bared—one look at her now would have sent Kitty-Come-Here running for the telephone number she kept hidden, the telephone number of the special doctor —and Gummitch realized he was witnessing a monstrous suspension of natural law in that this being should be able to exist for a moment without growing fur and changing round pupils for slit eyes.

He retreated to the darkest corner of the room, suppressing a snarl.

Sissy approached the crib and leaned over Baby in the moonlight, keeping her shadow off him. For a while she gloated. Then she began softly to scratch his cheek with a long hatpin she carried, keeping away from his eye, but just barely. Baby awoke and saw her and Baby didn't cry. Sissy continued to scratch, always a little more deeply. The moonlight glittered on the jeweled end of the pin.

Gummitch knew he faced a horror that could not be countered by running about or even spitting and screeching. Only magic could fight so obviously supernatural a manifestation. And this was also no time to think of consequences, no matter how clearly and bitterly etched they might appear to a mind intensely awake.

He sprang up onto the other side of the crib, not uttering a sound, and fixed his golden eyes on Sissy's in the moonlight. Then he moved forward straight at her evil face, stepping slowly, not swiftly, using his extraordinary knowl-

edge of the properties of space *to walk straight through her hand and arm as they flailed the hatpin at him.* When his nose-tip finally paused a fraction of an inch from hers his eyes had not blinked once, and she could not look away. Then he unhesitatingly flung his spirit into her like a fistful of flaming arrows and he worked the Mirror Magic.

Sissy's moonlit face, feline and terrified, was in a sense the last thing that Gummitch, the real Gummitch-kitten, ever saw in this world. For the next instant he felt himself enfolded by the foul black blinding cloud of Sissy's spirit, which his own had displaced. At the same time he heard the little girl scream, very loudly but even more distinctly, *"Mommy!"*

That cry might have brought Kitty-Come-Here out of her grave, let alone from sleep merely deep or drugged. Within seconds she was in the nursery, closely followed by Old Horsemeat, and she had caught up Sissy in her arms and the little girl was articulating the wonderful word again and again, and miraculously following it with the command—there could be no doubt, Old Horsemeat heard it too—"Hold me tight!"

Then Baby finally dared to cry. The scratches on his check came to attention and Gummitch, as he had known must happen, was banished to the basement amid cries of horror and loathing chiefly from Kitty-Come-Here.

The little cat did not mind. No basement would be one-tenth as dark as Sissy's spirit that now enshrouded him for always, hiding all the file drawers and the labels on all the folders, blotting out forever even the imagining of the scene of first coffee-drinking and first speech.

In a last intuition, before the animal blackness closed in utterly, Gummitch realized that the spirit, alas, is not the same thing as the consciousness and that one may lose—sacrifice—the first and still be burdened with the second.

Old Horsemeat had seen the hatpin (and hid it quickly from Kitty-Come-Here) and so he knew that the situation was not what it seemed and that Gummitch was at the very least being made into a sort of scapegoat. He was quite apologetic when he brought the tin pans of food to the

basement during the period of the little cat's exile. It was a comfort to Gummitch, albeit a small one. Gummitch told himself, in his new black halting manner of thinking, that after all a cat's best friend is his man.

From that night Sissy never turned back in her development. Within two months she had made three years' progress in speaking. She became an outstandingly bright, light-footed, high-spirited little girl. Although she never told anyone this, the moonlit nursery and Gummitch's magnified face were her first memories. Everything before that was inky blackness. She was always very nice to Gummitch in a careful sort of way. She could never stand to play the game "Owl Eyes."

After a few weeks Kitty-Come-Here forgot her fears and Gummitch once again had the run of the house. But by then the transformation Old Horsemeat had always warned about had fully taken place. Gummitch was a kitten no longer but an almost burly tom. In him it took the psychological form not of sullenness or surliness but an extreme dignity. He seemed at times rather like an old pirate brooding on treasures he would never live to dig up, shores of adventure he would never reach. And sometimes when you looked into his yellow eyes you felt that he had in him all the materials for the book *Slit Eyes Look at Life* —three or four volumes at least—although he would never write it. And that was natural when you come to think of it, for as Gummitch knew very well, bitterly well indeed, his fate was to be the only kitten in the world that did not grow up to be a man.

RICHARD MATHESON

The good *science fiction movies can be counted on the fingers of the hands. One of them (say, about the left thumb) is* The Incredible Shrinking Man, *made, with unusual fidelity, from the novel of almost the same name by Richard Matheson. Matheson is youngish, talented, prolific; and it is a pleasure to include him here (in distinguished company, where he belongs) with his shocking—*

Dance of the Dead

I wanna RIDE!
with my Rota-Mota honey
by my SIDE!
As we whiz along the highway

"We will HUG and SNUGGLE and we'll have a little STRUGGLE!"

struggle (strŭg′el), n., act of promiscuous love play; usage evolved during W.W. III.

Double beams spread buttery lamplight on the highway. *Rotor-Motors Convertible, Model C, 1987,* rushed after it. Light spurted ahead, yellow glowing. The car pursued with a twelve-cylindered, snarling pursuit. Night blotted in behind, jet and still. The car sped on.

ST. LOUIS—10

"I wanna FLY!" they sang, "with the Rota-Mota apple of my EYE!" they sang, "It's the only way of living . . ."

The quartet singing: Len, 23
Bud, 24
Barbara, 20
Peggy, 18

Len with Barbara, Bud with Peggy. Bud at the wheel, snapping around tilted curves, roaring up black-shouldered hills, shooting the car across silent flatlands. At the top of three lungs (the fourth gentler), competing with wind that buffeted their heads, that whipped their hair to lashing threads—singing:

"You can have your walkin' under MOONLIGHT BEAMS!

"At a hundred miles an hour let me DREAM my DREAMS!"

Needle quivering at 130, two 5-M.P.H. notches from gauge's end. *A sudden dip!* their young frames jolted and the thrown-up laughter of three was wind-swept into night. Around a curve, darting up and down a hill, flashing across a leveled plain—an ebony bullet skimming earth.

"In my ROTORY, MOTORY, FLOATERY, drivin' machi-i-i-i-ine!"

YOU'LL BE A FLOATER
IN YOUR ROTOR-MOTOR

In the back seat: "Have a jab, Bab."

"Thanks, I had one after supper."

(Pushing away needle fixed to eye-dropper.)

In the front seat: "You meana tell me this is the first time you ever been t'Saint Loo!"

"But I just started school in September."

"Hey, you're a *frosh!*"

Back seat joining front seat: "Hey, *frosh,* have a mussle-tussle."

(Needle passed forward, bulb quivering amber juice.) "*Live* it, girl!"

mussle-tussle (mus′ el-tus′ el), n., slang for the result of injecting a drug into a muscle; usage evolved during W. W. III.

Peggy's lips failed at smiling. Her fingers twitched.

"No, thanks, I'm not——"

"Come *on,* frosh!" Len leaning hard over the seat, white-browed under black, blowing hair. Pushing the needle at her face. "Live it, girl! Grab a li'l mussle-tussle!"

"I'd rather not," said Peggy, "If you don't——"

"What's *'at,* frosh?" yelled Len and pressed his leg against the pressing leg of Barbara.

Peggy shook her head and golden hair flew across her cheeks and eyes. Underneath her yellow dress, underneath her white brassiere, underneath her young breast—a heart throbbed heavily. *Watch your step, darling, that's all we ask. Remember, you're all we have in the world now.* Mother words drumming at her; the needle making her draw back into the seat.

"*Come* on, frosh!"

The car groaned its shifting weight around a curve; centrifugal force pressed Peggy into Bud's lean hip. His hand dropped down and fingered at her leg. Underneath her yellow dress, underneath her sheer stocking—flesh crawled. Lips failed again; the smile was a twitch of red.

"Frosh, live it up!"

"Lay off, Len, jab your own dates."

"But we gotta teach frosh how to mussle-tussle!"

"Lay off, I said! She's my date!"

The black car roared, chasing its own light. Peggy anchored down the feeling hand with hers. The wind whistled over them and grabbed down chilly fingers at their hair. She didn't want his hand there but she felt grateful to him.

Her vaguely frightened eyes watched the road lurch beneath the wheels. In back, a silent struggle began, taut

hands rubbing, parted mouths clinging. Search for the sweet elusive at 120-miles-per-hour.

"Rota-Mota honey," Len moaned the moan between salivary kisses. In the front seat a young girl's heart beat unsteadily.

ST. LOUIS—6

"No kiddin', you never been to Saint Loo?"

"No, I——"

"Then you never saw the loopy's dance?"

Throat contracting suddenly. "No, I—. Is that what we're going to——"

"Hey, frosh never saw the loopy's dance!" Bud yelled back.

Lips parted, slurping; skirt was adjusted with blasé aplomb. "No kiddin'!" Len fired up the words. "Girl, you haven't lived!"

"Oh, she's *got* to see *that,"* said Barbara, buttoning a button.

"Let's go there then!" yelled Len. "Let's give frosh a thrill!"

"Good enough," said Bud and squeezed her leg. "Good enough up here, right, Peg?"

Peggy's throat moved in the dark and the wind clutched harshly at her hair. She'd heard of it; she'd read of it but never had she thought she'd——

Choose your school friends carefully, darling. Be very careful.

But when no one spoke to you for two whole months? When you were lonely and wanted to talk and laugh and be alive? And someone spoke to you finally and asked you to go out with them?

"I yam Popeye, the sailor man!" Bud sang.

In back, they crowed artificial delight. Bud was taking a course in *PRE-WAR COMICS AND CARTOONS—2.* This week the class was studying Popeye. Bud had fallen in love with the one-eyed seaman and told Len and Barbara all about him; taught them dialogue and song.

"I yam Popeye, the sailor man! I like to go swimmin' with bow-legged women! I yam Popeye, the sailor man!"

Laughter. Peggy smiled falteringly. The hand left her leg as the car screeched around a curve and she was thrown against the door. Wind dashed blunt coldness in her eyes and forced her back, blinking—110—115—120 miles per hour.

ST. LOUIS—3

Be very careful, dear.

Popeye cocked a wicked eye.

"O, Olive Oyl, you is my sweet patootie."

Elbow nudging Peggy. "You be Olive Oyl—*you.*"

Peggy smiled nervously. "I can't."

"Sure."

In the back seat, Wimpy came up for air to announce, "I will gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today."

Three fierce voices and a faint fourth raged against the howl of wind. "I fights to the *fi*-nish 'cause I eats my *spin*-ach! I yam Popeye, the sailor man! Toot! Toot!"

"I yam what I yam," reiterated Popeye gravely and put his hand on the yellow-skirted leg of Olive Oyl. In the back, two members of the quartet returned to feeling struggle.

ST. LOUIS—1

The black car roared through the darkened suburbs. "On with the noses!" Bud sang out. They all took out their plasticate nose-and-mouth pieces and adjusted them.

ANCE IN YOUR PANTS WOULD BE A PITY!
WEAR YOUR NOSES IN THE CITY!!

Ance (anse), n., slang for anti-civilian germs; usage evolved during W.W. III.

"You'll like the loopy's dance!" Bud shouted to her over the shriek of wind, "It's sen*saysh!*"

Peggy felt a cold that wasn't of the night or of the wind. *Remember, darling, there are terrible things in the world today. Things you must avoid.*

"Couldn't we go somewhere else?" Peggy said but her voice was inaudible. She heard Bud singing, "I like to go swimmin' with bow-legged women!" she felt his hand on her leg again while, in the back, was the silence of grinding passion without kisses.

Dance of the dead. The words trickled ice across Peggy's brain.

ST. LOUIS

The black car sped into the ruins.

It was a place of smoke and blatant joys. Air resounded with the bleating of revelers and there was a noise of sounding brass spinning out a cloud of music—1987 music, a frenzy of twisted dissonances. Dancers, shoehorned into the tiny square of open floor, ground pulsing bodies together. A network of bursting sounds lanced through the mass of them; dancers singing:

"Hurt me! Bruise me! Squeeze me TIGHT!
Scorch my blood with hot DELIGHT!
Please abuse me every NIGHT!
LOVER, LOVER, LOVER, be a *beast-to-me!*"

Elements of explosion restrained within the dancing bounds—instead of fragmenting, quivering. "Oh, be a beast, beast, beast, *Beast, BEAST* to me!"

"How is *this,* Olive old goil?" Popeye inquired of the light of his eye as they struggled after the waiter. "Nothin' like this in Sykesville, eh?"

Peggy smiled but her hand in Bud's felt numb. As they passed by a murky lighted table, a hand she didn't see

clutched at her leg. She twitched and bumped against a hard knee across the narrow aisle. As she stumbled and lurched through the hot and smoky, thick-aired room, she felt a dozen eyes disrobing her, abusing her. Bud jerked her along and she felt her lips trembling.

"Hey, how about that!" Bud exulted as they sat. "Right by the stage!"

From cigarette mists, the waiter plunged and hovered, pencil-poised, beside their table.

"What'll it be?" his questioning shout cut through cacophony.

"Whiskey-water!" Bud and Len paralleled orders, then turned to their dates. "What'll it be!" the waiter's request echoed from their lips.

"Green Swamp!" Barbara said *"Green Swamp* here!" Len passed it along. Gin, Invasion Blood (1987 Rum) lime juice, sugar, mint spray, splintered ice—a popular college-girl drink.

"What about you, honey?" Bud asked his date.

Peggy smiled. "Just some ginger ale," she said, her voice a fluttering frailty in the massive clash and fog of smoke.

"What's that, didn't hear!" the waiter shouted.

"Ginger ale."

"What?"

"Ginger ale!"

"GINGER ALE!" Len screamed it out and the drummer, behind the raging curtain of noise that was the band's music, almost heard it. Len banged down his fist. *One—Two—Three!*

CHORUS: *Ginger Ale was only twelve years old! Went to church and was as good as gold! Till that day when——*

"Come *on,* Come *on!"* the waiter squalled. "Let's have that order, kids! I'm busy!"

"Two whiskey-waters and two green swamps!" Len sang out and the waiter was gone into the swirling maniac mist.

Peggy felt her young heart flutter helplessly. *Above all, don't drink when you're out on a date. Promise us that, darling, you must promise us that.* She tried to push away instructions etched in brain.

"How you like this place, honey? *Loopy*, ain't it?" Bud fired the question at her; a red-faced, happy-faced Bud.

loopy (lōō pĭ), adj., common alter of L.U.P.

She smiled at Bud, a smile of nervous politeness. Her eyes moved around, her face inclined that she was looking up at the stage. *Loopy*. The word scalpeled at her mind. *Loopy, loopy.*

The stage was five yards deep at the radius of its wooden semi-circle. A waist-high rail girdled its circumference, two pale purple spotlights, unlit, hung at each rail end. Purple on white—the thought came. *Darling, isn't Sykesville Business College good enough? No! I don't want to take a business course, I want to major in art at the University!*

The drinks were brought and Peggy watched the disembodied waiter arm thud down a high, green-looking glass before her. *Presto!*—the arm was gone. She looked into the murky green swamp depths and saw chipped ice bobbing.

"A toast! Pick up your glass, Peg!" Bud clarioned.

They all clicked glasses: "To lust primordial!" Bud toasted.

"To beds inviolate!" Len added.

"To flesh insensate!" Barbara added a third link.

Their eyes zeroed in on Peggy's face, demanding. She didn't understand.

"*Finish* it!" Bud told her, plagued by freshman sluggishness.

"To—u-*us,*" she faltered.

"How o-*rig*-inal," stabbed Barbara and Peggy felt heat licking up her smooth cheeks. It passed unnoticed as three Youths of America With Whom The Future Rested gurgled down their liquor thirstily. Peggy fingered at her glass, a smile printed to lips that would not smile unaided.

"Come on, *drink,* girl!" Bud shouted to her across the vast distance of one foot. "Chuggalug!"

"Live it, girl," Len suggested abstractedly, fingers searching once more for soft leg. And finding, under table, soft leg waiting.

Peggy didn't want to drink, she was afraid to drink. Mother words kept pounding—*never on a date, honey, never.* She raised the glass a little.

"Uncle Buddy will help, will help!"

Uncle Buddy leaning close, vapor of whiskey haloing his head. Uncle Buddy pushing cold glass to shaking young lips. "Come on, Olive Oyl, old goil! Down the hatch!"

Choking sprayed the bosom of her dress with green swamp droplets. Flaming liquid trickled into her stomach, sending off shoots of fire into her veins.

Bangity boom crash smash POW!! The drummer applied the coup de grâce to what had been, in ancient times, a lover's waltz. Lights dropped and Peggy sat coughing and tear-eyed in the smoky cellar club.

She felt Bud's hand clamp strongly on her shoulder and, in the murk, she felt herself pulled off balance and felt Bud's hot wet mouth pressing at her lips. She jerked away and then the purple spots went on and a mottle-faced Bud drew back, gurgling, "I fights to the finish," and reaching for his drink.

"Hey, the loopies now, the loopies!" Len said eagerly, releasing exploratory hands.

Peggy's heart jolted and she thought she was going to cry out and run thrashing through the dark, smoke-filled room. But a sophomore hand anchored her to the chair and she looked up in white-faced dread at the man who came out on the stage and faced the microphone which, like a metal spider, had swung down to meet him.

"May I have your attention, ladies and gentlemen," he said, a grim-faced, sepulchral-voiced man whose eyes moved out over them like flicks of doom. Peggy's breath was labored, she felt thin lines of green swamp water filtering hotly through her chest and stomach. It made her blink dizzily. *Mother.* The word escaped cells of the mind and trembled into conscious freedom. *Mother, take me home.*

"As you know, the act you are about to see is not for the faint of heart, the weak of will." The man plodded through the words like a cow enmired. "Let me caution those of you whose nerves are not what they ought to be

—*leave now*. We make no guarantees of responsibility. We can't even afford to maintain a house doctor."

No laughter appreciative: "Cut the crap and get off stage," Len grumbled to himself. Peggy felt her fingers twitching.

"As you know," the man went on, his voice gilded with learned sonority. "This is not an offering of mere sensation but an honest scientific demonstration."

"Loophole for Loopy's!" Bud and Len heaved up the words with the thoughtless reaction of hungry dogs salivating at a bell.

It was, in 1987, a comeback so rigidly standard it had assumed the status of a catechism answer. A crenel in the post-war law allowed the L.U.P. performance if it was orally prefaced as an exposition of science. Through this legal chink had poured so much abusing of the law that few cared any longer. A feeble government was grateful for recognition of the law at all.

When hoots and shoutings had evaporated in the smoke-clogged air, the man, his arms upraised in patient benediction, spoke again.

Peggy watched the studied movement of his lips, her heart swollen, then contracted in slow, spasmodic beats. An iciness was creeping up her legs. She felt it rising toward the thread-like fires in her body and her fingers twitched around the chilly moisture of the glass. *I want to go, please take me home*—will-spent words were in her mind again.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the man concluded, "brace yourselves."

A gong sounded its hollow, shivering resonance, the man's voice thickened and slowed.

"The L.U.P. Phenomenon!"

The man was gone, the microphone had risen and was gone. Music began; a moaning brassiness, all muted. A jazzman's conception of *the palpable obscure*—mounted on a pulse of thumping drum. A dolor of saxophone, a menace of trombone, a harnessed bleating of trumpet—they raped the air with stridor.

Peggy felt a shudder plaiting down her back and her gaze dropped quickly to the murky whiteness of the table.

Smoke and darkness, dissonance and heat surrounded her.

Without meaning to but driven by an impulse of nervous fear, she raised the glass and drank. The glacial trickle in her throat sent another shudder rippling through her. Then further shoots of liquored heat budded in her veins and a numbness settled in her temples. Through parted lips, she forced out a shaking breath.

Now a restless, murmuring movement started through the room, the sound of it like willows in a soughing wind. Peggy dared not lift her gaze to the purpled silence of the stage. She stared down at the shifting glimmer of her drink, feeling muscle strands draw tightly in her stomach, feeling the hollow thumping of her heart. *I'd like to leave, please let's leave.*

The music labored toward a rasping dissonant climax, its brass components struggling, in vain, for unity.

A hand stroked once at Peggy's leg and it was the hand of Popeye, the sailor man, who muttered croupily, "Olive Oyl, you is my goil." She barely felt or heard. Automaton-like, she raised the cold and sweating glass again and felt the chilling in her throat and then the flaring warmth.

SWISH!!

The curtain swept open with such a rush, she almost dropped her glass. It thumped down heavily on the table, swamp water cascading up its sides and raining on her hand. The music exploded shrapnel of ear-cutting cacophony and her body jerked. On the tablecloth, her hands twitched white on white, while claws of uncontrollable demand pulled up her frightened eyes.

The music fled, frothing behind a wake of swelling drum rolls.

The night club was a wordless crypt, all breathing checked.

Cobwebs of smoke drifted in the purple light across the stage.

No sound except the muffled, rolling drum.

Peggy's body was a petrifaction in its chair, smitten to rock around her leaping heart, while, through the wavering haze of smoke and liquored dizziness, she looked up in horror to where it stood.

It had been a woman.

Her hair was black, a framing of snarled ebony for the tallow mask that was her face. Her shadow-rimmed eyes were closed behind lids as smooth and white as ivory. Her mouth, a lipless and unmoving line, stood like a clotted sword wound beneath her nose. Her throat, her shoulders and her arms were white, were motionless. At her sides, protruding from the sleeve ends of the green transparency she wore, hung alabaster hands.

Across this marble statue, the spotlight coated purple shimmer.

Still paralyzed, Peggy stared up at its motionless features, her fingers knitted in a bloodless angle on her lap. The pulse of drumbeats in the air seemed to fill her body, its rhythm altering her heartbeat.

In the black emptiness behind her, she heard Len muttering, "I love my wife but oh, you corpse," and heard the wheeze of helpless snickers that escaped from Bud and Barbara. The cold still rose in her, a silent tidal dread.

Somewhere in the smoke-fogged darkness, a man cleared viscid nervousness from his throat and a murmur of appreciative relief strained through the audience.

Still no motion on the stage, no sound but the sluggish cadence of the drum, thumping at the silence like someone seeking entrance at a far-off door. The thing that was a nameless victim of the plague stood palely rigid while the distillation sluiced through its blood-clogged veins.

Now the drum throbs hastened like the pulsebeat of a rising panic. Peggy felt the chill begin to swallow her. Her throat began to tighten, her breathing was a string of lip-parted gasps. The loopy's eyelid twitched.

Abrupt, black, straining silence webbed the room. Even the breath choked off in Peggy's throat when she saw the pale eyes flutter open. Something creaked in the stillness; her body pressing back unconsciously against the chair. Her eyes were wide, unblinking circles that sucked into her brain the sight of the thing that had been a woman.

Music again; a brass-throated moaning from the dark, like some animal made of welded horns mewling its derangement in a midnight alley.

Suddenly, the right arm of the loopy jerked at its side, the tendons suddenly contracted. The left arm twitched

alive, snapping out, then falling back and thudding in purple-white limpness against the thigh. The right arm out, the left arm out, the right, the left-right-left-right—like marionette arms twitching from an amateur's dangling strings.

The music caught the time, drum brushes scratching out a rhythm for the convulsions of the loopy's muscles. Peggy pressed back further, her body numbed and cold, her face a livid, staring mask in the fringes of the stage light.

The loopy's right foot moved now, jerking up inflexibly as the distillation constricted muscles in its leg. A second and a third contraction caused the leg to twitch, the left leg flung out in a violent spasm and then the woman's body lurched stiffly forward, filming the transparent silk to its light and shadow.

Peggy heard the sudden hiss of breath that passed the clenching teeth of Bud and Len and a wave of nausea sprayed foaming sickness up her stomach walls. Before her eyes, the stage abruptly undulated and it seemed as if the flailing loopy were headed straight for her.

Gasping dizzily, she pressed back in horror, unable to take her eyes from its now agitated face.

She watched the mouth jerk to a gaping cavity, then a twisted scar that split into a wound again. She saw the dark nostrils twitching, saw writhing flesh beneath the ivory cheeks, saw furrows dug and undug in the purple whiteness of the forehead. She saw one lifeless eye wink monstrously and heard the gasp of startled laughter in the room.

While music blared into a fit of grating noise, while the woman's arms and legs kept jerking with convulsive cramps that threw her body around the purpled stage like a full-size rag doll given spastic life.

It was nightmare in an endless sleep. Peggy shivered in helpless terror as she watched the loopy's twisting, leaping dance. The blood in her had turned to ice, there was no life in her but the endless, pounding stagger of her heart. Her eyes were frozen spheres staring at the woman's body writhing white and flaccid underneath the clinging silk.

Then, something went wrong.

Up till then, its muscular seizures had bound the loopy to an area of several yards before the amber flat which was the background for its paroxysmal dance. Now its erratic surging drove the loopy toward the stage-encircling rail.

Peggy heard the thump and creaking strain of wood as the loopy's hip collided with the rail. She cringed into a shuddering knot, her eyes still raised fixedly to the purple-splashed face whose every feature was deformed by throes of warping convulsion.

The loopy staggered back and Peggy saw and heard its leprous hands slapping with a fitful rhythm at its silk-scaled thighs.

Again it sprang forward like a maniac marionette and the woman's stomach thudded sickeningly into the railing wood. The dark mouth gaped, clamped shut and then the loopy twisted through a jerking revolution and crashed back against the rail again, almost above the table where Peggy sat.

Peggy couldn't breathe. She sat rooted to the chair, her lips a trembling circle of stricken dread, a pounding of blood at her temples as she watched the loopy spin again, its arms a blur of flailing white.

The lurid bleaching of its face dropped toward Peggy as the loopy crashed into the waist-high rail again and bent across its top. The mask of lavender-rained whiteness hung above her, dark eyes twitching open in a hideous stare.

Peggy felt the floor begin to move and the livid face was blurred with darkness, then reappeared in a burst of luminosity. Sound fled on brass shod feet, then plunged into her brain again—a smearing discord.

The loopy kept on jerking forward, driving itself against the rail as though it meant to scale it. With every spastic lurch, the diaphanous silk fluttered like a film about its body and every savage collision with the railing tautened the green transparency across its swollen flesh. Peggy looked up in rigid muteness at the loopy's fierce attack, her eyes unable to escape the wild distortion of the woman's face with its black frame of tangled, snapping hair.

What happened then happened in a blurring passage of seconds.

The grim-faced man came rushing across the purple-lighted stage, the thing that had been a woman went crashing, twitching, flinging at the rail, doubling over it, the spasmodic hitching flinging up its muscle-knotted legs.

A clawing fall.

Peggy lurched back in her chair and the scream that started in her throat was forced back into a strangled gag as the loopy came crashing down onto the table, its limbs a thrash of naked whiteness.

Barbara screamed, the audience gasped and Peggy saw, on the fringe of vision, Bud jumping up, his face a twist of stunned surprise.

The loopy flopped and twisted on the table like a new-caught fish. The music went grinding into silence, a rush of agitated murmur filled the room and blackness swept in brain-submerging waves across Peggy's mind.

Then the cold white hand slapped across her mouth, the dark eyes stared at her in purple light and Peggy felt the darkness flooding.

The horror-smoked room went turning on its side.

Consciousness. It flickered in her brain like gauze-veiled candlelight. A murmuring of sound, a blur of shadow before her eyes.

Breath dripped like syrup from her mouth.

"Here, Peg."

She heard Bud's voice and felt the chilly metal of a flask neck pressed against her lips. She swallowed, twisting slightly at the trickle of fire in her throat and stomach, then coughed and pushed away the flask with deadened fingers.

Behind her, a rustling movement. "Hey, she's *back*," Len said, "Ol' Olive Oyl is back."

"You feel all right?" asked Barbara.

She felt all right. Her heart was like a drum hanging from piano wire in her chest, slowly beaten. Her hands and feet were numb not with cold but with a sultry torpor. Thoughts moved with a tranquil lethargy, her brain a leisurely machine imbedded in swaths of woolly packing.

She felt all right.

Peggy looked across the night with sleepy eyes. They were on a hilltop, the convertible braked crouching on a jutting edge. Far below, the country slept, a carpet of light and shadow beneath the chalky moon.

An arm snake moved around her waist. "Where are we?" she asked him in a languid voice.

"Few miles outside school," Bud said, "How d'ya feel, honey?"

She stretched, her body a delicious strain of muscles. She sagged back, limp, against his arm.

"Wonderful," she murmured with a dizzy smile and scratched the tiny itching bump on her left shoulder. Warmth radiated through her flesh; the night was a sabled glow. There seemed—*somewhere*—to be a memory but it crouched in secret behind folds of thick content.

"Woman, you were *out,"* laughed Bud and Barbara added and Len added, *"Were* you!" and "Olive Oyl went *plunko!"*

"Out?" Her casual murmur went unheard.

The flask went around and Peggy drank again, relaxing further as the liquor needled fire through her veins.

"Man, I never saw a loopy dance like that!" Len said.

A momentary chill across her back, then warmth again. "Oh," said Peggy. "That's right. I forgot."

She smiled.

"That was what I calls a grande finale!" Len said, dragging back his willing date, who murmured, *"Lenny* boy."

"L.U.P.," Bud muttered, nuzzling at Peggy's hair, "Son of a gun." He reached out idly for the radio knob.

L.U.P. (Lifeless Undead Phenomenon)—This freak of physiological abnormality was discovered during the war when, following certain germ-gas attacks, many of the dead troops were found erect and performing the spasmodic gyrations which, later, became known as the "loopy's" (L.U.P.'s) dance. The particular germ spray responsible was later distilled and is now used in carefully controlled experiments which are conducted only under the strictest of legal license and supervision.

Music surrounded them, its melancholy fingers touch-

ing at their hearts. Peggy leaned against her date and felt no need to curb exploring hands. Somewhere, deep within the jellied layers of her mind, there was something trying to escape. It fluttered like a frantic moth imprisoned in congealing wax, struggling wildly but only growing weaker in attempt as the chrysalis hardened.

Four voices sang softly in the night.

"If the world is here tomorrow
I'll be waiting, dear, for you
If the stars are there tomorrow
I'll be wishing on them too."

Four young voices singing, a murmur in immensity. Four bodies, two by two, slackly warm and drugged. A singing, an embracing—a wordless accepting. .

"Star light, star bright
Let there be another night."

The singing ended but the song went on.

A young girl sighed.

"Isn't it romantic?" said Olive Oyl.

JACK WILLIAMSON

If your father read science fiction, he very likely counted Jack Williamson high among his favorite writers—as you very likely do today. Young enough to have served with the Air Force in the South Pacific in World War II, Williamson is old enough, and has been writing excellent science fiction stories often enough, to have attained an almost unique status as combination revered old master and bright new star. For more than thirty years his stories have been the delight of hundreds of thousands of readers. Such consistent loyalty demonstrates the existence of talent; such talent implies the ability to create so bright a bit as—

The Happiest Creature

The collector puffed angrily into the commandant's office in the quarantine station, on the moon of Earth. He was a heavy hairless man with shrewd little ice-green eyes sunk deep in fat yellow flesh. He had a genial smile when he was getting what he wanted. Just now he wasn't.

"Here we've come a good hundred light-years, and you can see who I am." He riffled his psionic identification films under the commandant's nose. "I intend to collect at least one of those queer anthropoids, in spite of all your silly red tape."

The shimmering films attested his distinguished scientific attainments. He was authorized to gather specimens for the greatest zoo in the inhabited galaxy, and the quarantine service had been officially requested to expedite his search.

"I see." The commandant nodded respectfully, trying to

conceal a weary frown. The delicate business of safe guarding Earth's embryonic culture had taught him to deal cautiously with such unexpected threats. "Your credentials are certainly impressive, and we'll give you whatever help we can. Won't you sit down?"

The collector wouldn't sit down. He was thoroughly annoyed with the commandant. He doubted loudly that the quarantine regulations had ever been intended to apply to such a backward planet as Earth, and he proposed to take his specimen without any further fiddle-faddle.

The commandant, who came from a civilization which valued courtesy and reserve, gasped in spite of himself at the terms that came through his psionic translator, but he attempted to restrain his mounting impatience.

"Actually, these creatures are human," he answered firmly. "And we are stationed here to protect them."

"Human?" The collector snorted. "When they've never got even this far off their stinking little planet!"

"A pretty degenerate lot," the commandant agreed regretfully. "But their human origins have been well established, and you'll have to leave them alone."

The collector studied the commandant's stern-lipped face and modified his voice.

"All we need is a single specimen, and we won't injure that." He recovered his jovial smile. "On the contrary, the creature we pick up will be the luckiest one on the planet. I've been in this game a good many centuries, and I know what I'm talking about. Wild animals in their native environments are invariably diseased. They are in constant physical danger, generally undernourished, and always more or less frustrated sexually. But the beast we take will receive the most expert attention in every way."

A hearty chuckle shook his oily yellow yowls.

"Why, if you allowed us to advertise for a specimen, half the population would volunteer."

"You can't advertise," the commandant said flatly. "Our first duty here is to guard this young culture from any outside influence that might cripple its natural development."

"Don't upset yourself." The fat man shrugged. "We're

undercover experts. Our specimen will never know that it has been collected, if that's the way you want it."

"It isn't." The commandant rose abruptly. "I will give your party every legitimate assistance, but if I discover that you have tried to abduct one of these people I'll confiscate your ship."

"Keep your precious pets," the collector grunted ungraciously. "We'll just go ahead with our field studies. Live specimens aren't really essential, anyhow. Our technicians have prepared very authentic displays, with only animated replicas."

"Very well." The commandant managed a somewhat sour smile. "With that understanding, you may land."

He assigned two inspectors to assist the collector and make certain that the quarantine regulations were respected. Undercover experts, they went on to Earth ahead of the expedition, and met the interstellar ship a few weeks later at a rendezvous on the night side of the planet.

The ship returned to the moon, while the outsiders spent several months traveling on the planet, making psionic records and collecting specimens from the unprotected species. The inspector reported no effort to violate the Covenants, and everything went smoothly until the night when the ship came back to pick up the expedition.

Every avoidable hazard had been painstakingly avoided. The collector and his party brought their captured specimens to the pickup point in native vehicles, traveling as Barstow Brothers' Wild Animal Shows. The ship dropped to meet them at midnight, on an uninhabited desert plateau. A thousand such pickups had been made without an incident, but that night things went wrong.

A native anthropoid had just escaped from a place of confinement. Though his angered tribesmen pursued, he had outrun them in a series of stolen vehicles. They blocked the roads, but he got away across the desert. When his last vehicle stalled, he crossed a range of dry hills on foot in the dark. An unforeseen danger, he blundered too near the waiting interstellar ship.

His pursuers discovered his abandoned car, and halted the disguised outsiders to search their trucks and warn them that a dangerous convict was loose. To keep the

natives away from the ship, the inspectors invented a tale of a frightened man on a horse, riding wildly in the opposite direction.

They guided the native officers back to where they said they had seen the imaginary horseman, and kept them occupied until dawn. By that time, the expedition was on the ship, native trucks and all, and safely back in space.

The natives never recaptured their prisoner. Through that chance-in-a-million that can never be eliminated by even the most competent undercover work, he had got aboard the interstellar ship.

The fugitive anthropoid was a young male. Physically, he appeared human enough, even almost handsome. Lean from the prison regime, he carried himself defiantly erect. Some old injury had left an ugly scar across his cheek and his thin lips had a snarling twist, but he had a poised alertness and a kind of wary grace.

He was even sufficiently human to possess clothing and a name. His filthy garments were made of twisted animal and vegetable fibers and the skins of butchered animals. His name was Casey James.

He was armed like some jungle carnivore, however, with a sharpened steel blade. His body, like his whole planet, was contaminated with parasitic organisms. He was quivering with fear and exhaustion, like any hunted animal, the night he blundered upon the ship. The pangs of his hunger had passed, but a bullet wound in his left arm was nagging him with unalleviated pain.

In the darkness, he didn't even see the ship. The trucks were stopped on the road, and the driver of the last had left it while he went ahead to help to adjust the loading ramp. The anthropoid climbed on the unattended truck and hid himself under a tarpaulin before it was driven aboard.

Though he must have been puzzled and alarmed to find that the ship was no native conveyance, he kept hidden in the cargo hold for several days. With his animal craftiness, he milked one of the specimen animals for food, and slept in the cab of an empty truck. Malignant organisms were multiplying in his wounded arm, however, and pain finally drove him out of hiding.

He approached the attendants who were feeding the animals, threatened them with his knife, and demanded medical care. They disarmed him without difficulty and took him to the veterinary ward. The collector found him there, already scrubbed and disinfected, sitting up in his bed.

"Where're we headed for?" he wanted to know.

He nodded without apparent surprise when the collector told him the mission and the destination of the ship.

"Your undercover work ain't quite so hot as you seem to think," he said. "I've seen your flying saucers myself."

"Flying saucers!" The collector sniffed disdainfully, "They aren't anything of ours. Most of them are nothing but refracted images of surface lights, produced by atmospheric inversions. The quarantine people are getting out a book to explain that to your fellow creatures."

"A good one for the cops!" The anthropoid grinned. "I bet they're still scratching their dumb skulls, over how I dodged 'em." He paused to finger his bandaged arm, in evident appreciation of the civilized care he had received. "And when do we get to this wonderful zoo of yours?"

"You don't," the collector told him. "I did want exactly such a specimen as you are, but those stuffy bureaucrats wouldn't let me take one."

"So you gotta get rid of me?"

The psionic translator revealed the beast's dangerous desperation, even before his hard body stiffened.

"Wait!" The collector retreated hastily. "Don't alarm yourself. We won't hurt you. We couldn't destroy you, even to escape detection. No civilized man can destroy a human life."

"Nothing to it," the creature grunted. "But if you ain't gonna toss me out in space, then what?"

"You've put us in an awkward situation." The yellow man scowled with annoyance. "If the quarantine people caught us with you aboard, they'd cancel our permits and seize everything we've got. Somehow, we'll have to put you back."

"But I can't go back." The anthropoid licked his lips nervously. "I just gut-knifed a guard. If they run me down this time, it's the chair for sure."

The translator made it clear that the chair was an elaborate torture machine in which convicted killers were put to a ceremonial death, according to a primitive tribal code of blood revenge.

"So you gotta take me wherever you're going." The creature's dark, frightened eyes studied the collector cunningly. "If you put me back, you'll be killing me."

"On the contrary." The collector's thick upper lip twitched slightly, and a slow smile oozed across his wide putty face, warming everything except his frosty little eyes. "Human life is sacred. We can arrange to make you the safest creature of your kind—and also the happiest—so long as you are willing to observe two necessary conditions."

"Huh?" The anthropoid squinted. "Whatcha mean?"

"You understand that we violated the quarantine in allowing you to get aboard," the collector explained patiently. "We, and not you, would be held responsible in case of detection, but we need your help to conceal the violation. We are prepared to do everything for you, if you will make and keep two simple promises."

"Such as?"

"First, promise you won't talk about us."

"Easy enough." The beast grinned. "Nobody'd believe me, anyhow."

"The quarantine people would." The collector's cold eyes narrowed. "Their undercover agents are alert for rumors of any violation."

"Okay, I'll keep my mouth shut." The creature shrugged. "What else?"

"Second, you must promise not to kill again."

The anthropoid stiffened. "What's it to you?"

"We can't allow you to destroy any more of your fellow beings. Since you are now in our hands, the guilt would fall on us." The collector scowled at him. "Promise?"

The anthropoid chewed thoughtfully on his thin lower lip. His hostile eyes looked away at nothing. The collector caught a faint reflection of his thoughts, through the translator, and stepped back uneasily.

"The cops are hot behind me," he muttered. "I gotta take care of myself."

"Don't worry." The collector snapped his fat fingers. "We can get you a pardon. Just say you won't kill again."

"No." Lean muscles tightened in the anthropoid's jaws. "There's one certain man I gotta knock off. That's the main reason I busted outa the pen."

"Who is this enemy?" The collector frowned. "Why is he so dangerous?"

"But he ain't so dangerous," the beast grunted. "I just hate his guts."

"I don't understand."

"I always wanted to kick his face in." The creature's thin lips snarled. "Ever since we was kids together, back in Las Verdades."

"Yet you have never received any corrective treatment for such a monstrous obsession?" The collector shook his head incredulously, but the anthropoid ignored him.

"His name is Gabriel Meléndez," the creature muttered. "Just a dirty greaser, but he makes out he's just as good as me. I had money from my rich aunt and he was hungry half the time, but he'd never stay in his place. Even when he was just a snotty-nosed kid, and knew I could beat him because I was bigger, he was always trying to fight me." The beast bared his decaying teeth. "I aim to kill him, before I'm through."

"Killing is never necessary," the collector protested uneasily. "Not for civilized men."

"But I ain't so civilized." The anthropoid grinned bleakly. "I aim to gut-knife Gabe Meléndez, just like I did that dumb guard."

"An incredible obsession!" The collector recoiled from the grim-lipped beast and the idea of such raw violence. "What has this creature done to you?"

"He took the girl I wanted." The beast caught a rasping breath. "And he put the cops on me. At least I think it was him, because I got caught not a month after I stuck up the filling station where he works. I think he recognized me, and I aim to get him."

"No——"

"But I will!" The anthropoid slipped out of bed and

stood towering over the fat man defiantly, his free hand clenched and quivering. "You can't stop me, not with all your fancy gadgets."

The beast glared down into the collector's bright little eyes. They looked back without blinking, and their lack of brows or lashes made them seem coldly reptilian. Abruptly, the animal subsided.

"Okay, okay!" He spat deliberately on the spotless floor and grinned at the collector's involuntary start. "What's it worth, to let him live?"

The collector shook off his shocked expression.

"We're undercover experts and we know your planet." A persuasive smile crept across his gross face. "Our resources are quite adequate to take care of anything you can demand. Just give your word not to kill again, or talk about us, and tell me what you want."

The anthropoid rubbed his hairy jaw, as if attempting to think.

"First, I want the girl," he muttered huskily. "Carmen Quintana was her name, before she married Gabe. She may give you a little trouble, because she don't like me a bit. Nearly clawed my eyes out once, even back before I shot her old man at the filling station." His white teeth flashed in a wolfish grin. "Think you can make her go for me?"

"I think we can." The collector nodded blandly. "We can arrange nearly anything."

"You'd better arrange that." The anthropoid's thin brown hand knotted again. "And I'll make her sorry she ever looked at Gabe!"

"You don't intend to injure her?"

"That's my business." The beast laughed. "Just take me to Las Verdades. That's a little 'dobe town down close to the border."

The anthropoid listed the rest of his requirements, and crossed his heart in a ritual gesture of his tribe to solemnize his promises. He knew when the interstellar craft landed again, but he had to stay aboard a long time afterwards, living like a prisoner in a sterile little cell, while he waited for the outsiders to complete their under-

ground arrangements for his return. He was fuming with impatience, stalking around his windowless room like a caged carnivore, when the collector finally unlocked his door.

"You're driving me nuts," he growled at the hairless outsider. "What's the holdup?"

"The quarantine people." The collector shrugged. "We had to manufacture some new excuse for every move we made, but I don't think they ever suspected anything. And here you are!"

He dragged a heavy piece of primitive luggage into the room and straightened up beside it, puffing and mopping at his broad wet face.

"Open it up," he wheezed. "You'll see that we intend to keep our part of the bargain. Don't forget yours."

The anthropoid dropped on his knees to burrow eagerly through the garments and the simple paper documents in the bag. He looked up with a scowl.

"Where is it?" he snapped.

"You'll find everything," the fat man panted. "Your pardon papers. Ten thousand dollars in currency. Forty thousand in cashier's checks. The clothing you specified——"

"But where's the gun?"

"Everything has been arranged so that you will never need it." The collector shifted on his feet uncomfortably. "I've been hoping you might change your mind about——"

"I gotta protect myself."

"You'll never be attacked."

"You said you'd give me a gun."

"We did." The collector shrugged unhappily. "You may have it, if you insist, when you leave the ship. Better get into your new clothing now. We want to take off again in half an hour."

The yellow Cadillac convertible he had demanded was waiting in the dark at the bottom of the ramp, its chrome trim shimmering faintly. The collector walked with him down through the airlock to the car, and handed him a heavy little package.

"Now don't turn on the headlamps," the yellow man cautioned him. "Just wait here for daylight. You'll see the Albuquerque highway then, not a mile east. Turn right to Las Verdades. We have arranged everything to keep you very happy there, so long as you don't attempt to betray us."

"Don't worry." He grinned in the dark. "Don't worry a minute."

He slid into the car and clicked on the parking lights. The instrument panel lit up like a Christmas tree. He settled himself luxuriously at the wheel, appreciatively sniffing the expensive new-car scents of leather and rubber and enamel.

"Don't you worry, butter-guts," he muttered. "You'll never know."

The ramp was already lifting back into the interstellar ship when he looked up. The bald man waved at him and vanished. The airlock thudded softly shut. The great disk took off into the night, silently, like something falling upward.

The beast sat grinning in the car. Quite a deal, he was thinking. Everything he had thought to ask for, all for just a couple of silly promises they couldn't make him keep. He already had most of his pay, and old clabber-guts would soon be forty thousand miles away, or however far it was out to the stars.

Nobody had ever been so lucky.

They had fixed his teeth, and put him in a hundred-dollar suit, and stuffed his pockets with good cigars. He unwrapped one of the cigars, bit off the end, lit it with the automatic lighter, and inhaled luxuriously. He had everything.

Or did he?

A sudden uncertainty struck him, as dawn began to break. The first gray shapes that came out of the dark seemed utterly strange, and he was suddenly afraid the outsiders had double-crossed him. Maybe they hadn't really brought him back to Earth, after all. Maybe they had marooned him on some foreign planet, where he could never find Carmen and Gabe Meléndez.

With a gasp of alarm, he snapped on the headlights.

The wide white beams washed away all that terrifying strangeness, and left only a few harmless clumps of yucca and mesquite. He slumped back against the cushions, laughing weakly.

Now he could see the familiar peaks of Dos Lobos jutting up like jagged teeth, black against the green glass sky. He switched off the headlights and started the motor and eased the swaying car across the brown hummocks toward the dawn. In a few minutes he found the highway.

JOSE'S OASIS, ONE STOP SERVICE, 8 MILES AHEAD

He grimaced at the sign, derisively. What if he had got his twenty years for sticking up the Oasis and shooting down old José. Who cared now if his mother and his aunt had spent their last grubby dimes, paying the lawyers to keep him out of the chair? And Carmen, what if she had spat in his face at the trial? The outsiders had taken care of everything.

Or what if they hadn't?

Cautiously, he slowed the long car and pulled off the pavement where it curved into the valley. The spring rains must have already come, because the rocky slopes were all splashed with wild flowers and tinted green with new grass. The huge old cottonwoods along the river were just coming into leaf, delicately green.

The valley looked as kind as his old mother's face, when she was still alive, and the little town beyond the river seemed clean and lovely as he remembered Carmen. Even the sky was shining like a blue glass bowl, as if the outsiders had somehow washed and sterilized it. Maybe they had. They could do anything, except kill a man.

He chuckled, thinking of the way old baldy had made him cross his heart. Maybe the tallow-gutted fool had really thought that would make him keep his promises. Or was there some kind of funny business about the package that was supposed to be a gun?

He ripped it open. There in the carton was the automatic he had demanded, a .45, with an extra cartridge clip and two boxes of ammunition. It looked all right, flat and black and deadly in his hand. He loaded it and stepped out of the car to test it.

He was aiming at an empty whisky bottle beside the pavement when he heard a mockingbird singing in the nearest cottonwood. He shot at the bird instead, and grinned when it dissolved into a puff of brown feathers.

"That'll be Gabe." His hard lips curled sardonically. "Coming at me like a mad dog, if anybody ever wants to know, and I had to stop him to save my own hide."

He drove on across the river bridge into Las Verdades. The outsiders had been here, he knew, because the dirt streets were all swept clean, and the wooden parts of all the low adobe buildings were bright with new paint, and all he could smell was the fragrances of coffee and hot bread, when he passed the Esperanza Café.

Those good odors wet his dry mouth with saliva, but he didn't stop to eat. With the automatic lying ready beside him on the seat, he pulled into the Oasis. The place looked empty at first and he thought for a moment that everybody was hiding from him.

As he sat waiting watchfully, crouched down under the wheel, he had time to notice that all the shattered glass had been neatly replaced. Even the marks of his bullets on the walls had been covered with new plaster, and the whole station was shining with fresh paint, like everything else in town.

He reached for the gun when he saw the slight dark boy coming from the grease rack, wiping his hands on a rag. It was Carmen's brother Tony, smiling with an envious adoration at the yellow Cadillac. Tony had always been wild about cars.

"Yes, sir! Fill her up?" Tony recognized him then, and dropped the greasy rag. "Casey James!" He ran out across the driveway. "Carmen told us you'd be home!"

He was raising the gun to shoot when he saw that the boy only wanted to shake his hand. He hid the gun hastily; it wasn't Tony that he had come to kill.

"We read all about your pardon." Tony stood grinning at him, caressing the side of the shining car lovingly. "A shame the way you were framed, but we'll all try to make it up to you now." The boy's glowing eyes swept the long car. "Want me to fill her up?"

"No!" he muttered hoarsely. "Gabe Meléndez—don't he still work here?"

"Sure, Mr. James," Tony drew back quickly, as if the car had somehow burned his delicate brown hands. "Eight to five, but he isn't here yet. His home is that white stucco beyond the *acequia madre*——"

"I know."

He gunned the car. It lurched back into the street, roared across the *acequia* bridge, skidded to a screaming stop in front of the white stucco. He dropped the gun into the side pocket of his coat and ran to the door, grinning expectantly.

Gabe would be taken by surprise. The outsiders had set it up for him very cleverly, with all their manufactured evidences that he had been innocent of any crime at all, and Gabe wasn't likely to be armed.

The door opened before he could touch the bell, but it was only Carmen. Carmen, pale without her makeup but beautiful anyhow, yawning sleepily in sheer pink pajamas that were half unbuttoned. She gasped when she saw him.

"Casey!" Strangely, she was smiling. "I knew you'd come!"

She swayed toward him eagerly, as if she expected him to take her in his arms, but he stood still, thinking of how she had watched him in the courtroom, all through his trial for killing her father, with pitiless hate in her dark eyes. He didn't understand it, but old puffy-guts had somehow changed her.

"Oh!" She turned pink and buttoned her pajamas hastily. "No wonder you were staring, but I'm so excited. I've been longing for you so. Come on in, darling. I'll get something on and make us some breakfast."

"Wait a minute!"

He shook his head, scowling at her, annoyed at the outsiders. They had somehow cheated him. He wanted Carmen, but not this way. He wanted to fight Gabe to take her. He wanted her to go on hating him, so that he would have to beat and frighten her. Old blubber-belly had been too clever and done too much.

"Where's Gabe?" He reached in his pocket to grip the cold gun. "I gotta see Gabe."

"Don't worry, darling." Her tawny shoulders shrugged becomingly. "Gabriel isn't here. He won't be here any more. You see, dear, the state cops talked to me a lot while they were here digging up the evidence to clear you. It came over me then that you had always been the one I loved. When I told Gabriel, he moved out. He's living down at the hotel now, and we're getting a divorce right away, so you don't have to worry about him."

"I gotta see him, anyhow."

"Don't be mean about it, darling." Her pajamas were coming open again, but she didn't seem to care. "Come on in, and let's forget about Gabriel. He has been so good about everything, and I know he won't make us any trouble."

"I'll make the trouble." He seized her bare arm. "Come along."

"Darling, don't!" She hung back, squirming. "You're hurting me!"

He made her shut up, and dragged her out of the house. She wanted to go back for a robe, but he threw her into the car and climbed over her to the wheel. He waited for her to try to get out, so that he could slap her down, but she only whimpered for a Kleenex and sat there sniffling.

Old balloon-belly had ruined everything.

He tried angrily to clash the gears, as he started off, as if that would damage the outsiders, but the Hydramatic transmission wouldn't clash, and anyhow the saucer ship was probably somewhere out beyond the moon by now.

"There's Gabriel," Carmen sobbed. "There, crossing the street, going to work. Don't hurt him, please!"

He gunned the car and veered across the pavement to run him down, but Carmen screamed and twisted at the wheel. Gabriel managed to scramble out of the way. He stopped on the sidewalk, hatless and breathless but grinning stupidly.

"Sorry, mister. Guess I wasn't looking—" Then Gabriel saw who he was. "Why, Casey! We've been expecting you back. Seems you're the lucky one, after all." Gabriel

had started toward the car, but he stopped when he saw the gun. His voice went shrill as a child's. "What are you doing?"

"Just gut-shooting another dirty greaser, that's all."

"Darling!" Carmen snatched at the gun. "Don't——"

He slapped her down.

"Don't strike her!" Gabriel stood gripping the door of the car with both hands. He looked sick. His twitching face was bright with sweat, and he was gasping hoarsely for his breath. He was staring at the gun, his wide eyes dull with horror.

"Stop me!"

He smashed the flat of the gun into Carmen's face, and grinned at the way Gabriel flinched when she screamed. This was more the way he wanted everything to be.

"Just try and stop me!"

"I—I won't fight you," Gabriel croaked faintly. "After all, we're not animals. We're civilized humans. I know Carmen loves you. I'm stepping out of the way. But you can't make me fight——"

The gun stopped Gabriel.

Queerly, though, he didn't fall. He just stood there like some kind of rundown machine, with his stiffened hands clutching the side of the car.

"Die, damn you!"

Casey James shot again; he kept on shooting till the gun was empty. The bullets hammered into the body, but somehow it wouldn't fall. He leaned to look at the wounds, at the broken metal beneath the simulated flesh of the face and the hot yellow hydraulic fluid running out of the belly, and recoiled from what he saw, shaking his head, shuddering like any trapped and frightened beast.

"That—*thing!*"

With a wild burst of animal ferocity, he hurled the gun into what was left of its plastic face. It toppled stiffly backward then, and something jangled faintly inside when it struck the pavement.

"It—it ain't human!"

"But it was an excellent replica." The other thing, the one he had thought was Carmen, gathered itself up from the bottom of the car, speaking gently to him with what

now seemed queerly like the voice of old barrel-belly. "We had taken a great deal of trouble to make you the happiest one of your breed." It looked at him sadly with Carmen's limpid dark eyes. "If you had only kept your word."

"Don't——" He cowered back from it, shivering. "Don't k-k-kill me!"

"We never kill," it murmured. "You need never be afraid of that."

While he sat trembling, it climbed out of the car and picked up the ruined thing that had looked like Gabe and carried it easily away toward the Oasis garage.

Now he knew that this place was only a copy of Las Verdades, somewhere not on Earth. When he looked up at the blue crystal sky, he knew that it was only some kind of screen. He felt the millions of strange eyes beyond it, watching him like some queer monster in a cage.

He tried to run away.

He gunned the Cadillac back across the *acequia* bridge and drove wildly back the way he had come in, on the Alburquerque highway. A dozen miles out, an imitation construction crewman tried to flag him down, pointing at a sign that said the road was closed for repairs. He whipped around the barriers and drove the pitching car on across the imitation desert until he crashed into the bars.

JEROME BIXBY

If editors know more than writers about what is good and bad (admittedly an arguable point), Jerry Bixby should know very much more than almost any other writer at all. Other writers have been tempted to do a stint of editing; Bixby was so lost to self-control that he found himself, one time and another, editing at least half a dozen magazines, including some of the very best. He has also a good many new, fine TV scripts to his credit. Oh, and he illustrates. And he plays a fine piano. And—— But read on; and you'll learn all that anyone ever needs to learn about the fine creative talents of Jerome Bixby, in—

It's a *Good* Life

Aunt Amy was out on the front porch, rocking back and forth in the highbacked chair and fanning herself, when Bill Soames rode his bicycle up the road and stopped in front of the house.

Perspiring under the afternoon "sun," Bill lifted the box of groceries out of the big basket over the front wheel of the bike, and came up the front walk.

Little Anthony was sitting on the lawn, playing with a rat. He had caught the rat down in the basement—he had made it think that it smelled cheese, the most rich-smelling and crumbly-delicious cheese a rat had ever thought it smelled, and it had come out of its hole, and now Anthony had hold of it with his mind and was making it do tricks.

When the rat saw Bill Soames coming, it tried to run, but Anthony thought at it, and it turned a flip-flop on

the grass, and lay trembling, its eyes gleaming in small black terror.

Bill Soames hurried past Anthony and reached the front steps, mumbling. He always mumbled when he came to the Fremont house, or passed by it, or even thought of it. Everybody did. They thought about silly things, things that didn't mean very much, like two-and-two-is-four-and-twice-is-eight and so on; they tried to jumble up their thoughts and keep them skipping back and forth, so Anthony couldn't read their minds. The mumbling helped. Because if Anthony got anything strong out of your thoughts, he might take a notion to do something about it—like curing your wife's sick headaches or your kid's mumps, or getting your old milk cow back on schedule, or fixing the privy. And while Anthony mightn't actually mean any harm, he couldn't be expected to have much notion of what was the right thing to do in such cases.

That was if he liked you. He might try to help you, in his way. And that could be pretty horrible.

If he didn't like you . . . well, that could be worse.

Bill Soames set the box of groceries on the porch railing, and stopped his mumbling long enough to say, "Everythin' you wanted, Miss Amy."

"Oh, fine, William," Amy Fremont said lightly. "My, ain't it terrible hot today?"

Bill Soames almost cringed. His eyes pleaded with her. He shook his head violently *no,* and then interrupted his mumbling again, though obviously he didn't want to: "Oh don't say that, Miss Amy . . . it's fine, just fine. A real *good* day!"

Amy Fremont got up from the rocking chair, and came across the porch. She was a tall woman, thin, a smiling vacancy in her eyes. About a year ago, Anthony had gotten mad at her, because she'd told him he shouldn't have turned the cat into a cat-rug, and although he had always obeyed her more than anyone else, which was hardly at all, this time he'd snapped at her. With his mind. And that had been the end of Amy Fremont's bright eyes, and the end of Amy Fremont as everyone had known her. And that was when word got around in Peaksville (population: 46) that even the members of Anthony's

own family weren't safe. After that, everyone was twice as careful.

Someday Anthony might undo what he'd done to Aunt Amy. Anthony's Mom and Pop hoped he would. When he was older, and maybe sorry. If it was possible, that is. Because Aunt Amy had changed a lot, and besides, now Anthony wouldn't obey anyone.

"Land alive, William," Aunt Amy said, "you don't have to mumble like that. Anthony wouldn't hurt you. My goodness, Anthony likes you!" She raised her voice and called to Anthony, who had tired of the rat and was making it eat itself. "Don't you, dear? Don't you like Mr. Soames?"

Anthony looked across the lawn at the grocery man—a bright, wet, purple gaze. He didn't say anything. Bill Soames tried to smile at him. After a second Anthony returned his attention to the rat. It had already devoured its tail, or at least chewed it off—for Anthony had made it bite faster than it could swallow, and little pink and red furry pieces lay around it on the green grass. Now the rat was having trouble reaching its hindquarters.

Mumbling silently, thinking of nothing in particular as hard as he could, Bill Soames went stiff-legged down the walk, mounted his bicycle and pedaled off.

"We'll see you tonight, William," Aunt Amy called after him.

As Bill Soames pumped the pedals, he was wishing deep down that he could pump twice as fast, to get away from Anthony all the faster, and away from Aunt Amy, who sometimes just forgot how *careful* you had to be. And he shouldn't have thought that. Because Anthony caught it. He caught the desire to get away from the Fremont house as if it was something *bad,* and his purple gaze blinked, and he snapped a small, sulky thought after Bill Soames —just a small one, because he was in a good mood today, and besides, he liked Bill Soames, or at least didn't dislike him, at least today. Bill Soames wanted to go away—so, petulantly, Anthony helped him.

Pedaling with superhuman speed—or rather, appearing to, because in reality the bicycle was pedaling *him*—Bill Soames vanished down the road in a cloud of dust, his

thin, terrified wail drifting back across the summerlike heat.

Anthony looked at the rat. It had devoured half its belly, and had died from pain. He thought it into a grave out deep in the cornfield—his father had once said, smiling, that he might as well do that with the things he killed—and went around the house, casting his odd shadow in the hot, brassy light from above.

In the kitchen, Aunt Amy was unpacking the groceries. She put the Mason-jarred goods on the shelves, and the meat and milk in the icebox, and the beet sugar and coarse flour in big cans under the sink. She put the cardboard box in the corner, by the door, for Mr. Soames to pick up next time he came. It was stained and battered and torn and worn fuzzy, but it was one of the few left in Peaksville. In faded red letters it said *Campbell's Soup.* The last cans of soup, or of anything else, had been eaten long ago, except for a small communal hoard which the villagers dipped into for special occasions—but the box lingered on, like a coffin, and when it and the other boxes were gone, the men would have to make some out of wood.

Aunt Amy went out in back, where Anthony's Mom—Aunt Amy's sister—sat in the shade of the house, shelling peas. The peas, every time Mom ran a finger along a pod, went *lollop-lollop-lollop* into the pan on her lap.

"William brought the groceries," Aunt Amy said. She sat down wearily in the straightbacked chair beside Mom, and began fanning herself again. She wasn't really old, but ever since Anthony had snapped at her with his mind, something had seemed to be wrong with her body as well as her mind, and she was tired all the time.

"Oh, good," said Mom. *Lollop* went the fat peas into the pan.

Everybody in Peaksville always said "Oh, fine," or "Good," or "Say, that's swell!" when almost anything happened or was mentioned—even unhappy things like accidents or even deaths. They'd always say "Good," because if they didn't try to cover up how they really felt, Anthony might overhear with his mind, and then nobody

knew what might happen. Like the time Mrs. Kent's husband, Sam, had come walking back from the graveyard, because Anthony liked Mrs. Kent and had heard her mourning.

Lollop.

"Tonight's television night," said Aunt Amy. "I'm glad. I look forward to it so much every week. I wonder what we'll see tonight?"

"Did Bill bring the meat?" asked Mom.

"Yes." Aunt Amy fanned herself, looking up at the featureless brassy glare of the sky. "Goodness, it's so hot! I wish Anthony would make it just a little cooler—"

"Amy!"

"Oh!" Mom's sharp tone had penetrated, where Bill Soames' agonized expression had failed. Aunt Amy put one thin hand to her mouth in exaggerated alarm. "Oh . . . I'm sorry, dear." Her pale blue eyes shuttled around, right and left, to see if Anthony was in sight. Not that it would make any difference if he was or wasn't—he didn't have to be near to know what you were thinking. Usually, though, unless he had his attention on somebody, he would be occupied with thoughts of his own.

But some things attracted his attention—you could never be sure just what.

"This weather's just *fine,"* Mom said.

Lollop.

"Oh, yes," Aunt Amy said. "It's a wonderful day. I wouldn't want it changed for the world!"

Lollop.

Lollop.

"What time is it?" Mom asked.

Aunt Amy was sitting where she could see through the kitchen window to the alarm clock on the shelf above the stove. "Four-thirty," she said.

Lollop.

"I want tonight to be something special," Mom said. "Did Bill bring a good lean roast?"

"Good and lean, dear. They butchered just today, you know, and sent us over the best piece."

"Dan Hollis will be *so* surprised when he finds out that tonight's television party is a birthday party for him too!"

"Oh, *I* think he will! Are you sure nobody's told him?"

"Everybody swore they wouldn't."

"That'll be real nice," Aunt Amy nodded, looking off across the cornfield. "A birthday party."

"Well——" Mom put the pan of peas down beside her, stood up and brushed her apron. "I'd better get the roast on. Then we can set the table." She picked up the peas.

Anthony came around the corner of the house. He didn't look at them, but continued on down through the carefully kept garden—*all* the gardens in Peaksville were carefully kept, very carefully kept—and went past the rusting, useless hulk that had been the Fremont family car, and went smoothly over the fence and out into the cornfield.

"Isn't this a lovely day!" said Mom, a little loudly, as they went toward the back door.

Aunt Amy fanned herself. "A beautiful day, dear. Just *fine!*"

Out in the cornfield, Anthony walked between the tall, rustling rows of green stalks. He liked to smell the corn. The alive corn overhead, and the old dead corn underfoot. Rich Ohio earth, thick with weeds and brown, dry-rotting ears of corn, pressed between his bare toes with every step—he had made it rain last night so everything would smell and feel nice today.

He walked clear to the edge of the cornfield, and over to where a grove of shadowy green trees covered cool, moist, dark ground, and lots of leafy undergrowth, and jumbled moss-covered rocks, and a small spring that made a clear, clean pool. Here Anthony liked to rest and watch the birds and insects and small animals that rustled and scampered and chirped about. He liked to lie on the cool ground and look up through the moving greenness overhead, and watch the insects flit in the hazy soft sunbeams that stood like slanting, glowing bars between ground and treetops. Somehow, he liked the thoughts of the little creaures in this place better than the thoughts outside; and while the thoughts he picked up here weren't very strong or very clear, he could get enough out of them to know what the little creatures liked

and wanted, and he spent a lot of time making the grove more like what they wanted it to be. The spring hadn't always been here; but one time he had found thirst in one small furry mind, and had brought subterranean water to the surface in a clear cold flow, and had watched blinking as the creature drank, feeling its pleasure. Later he had made the pool, when he found a small urge to swim.

He had made rocks and trees and bushes and caves, and sunlight here and shadows there, because he had felt in all the tiny minds around him the desire—or the instinctive want—for this kind of resting place, and that kind of mating place, and this kind of place to play, and that kind of home.

And somehow the creatures from all the fields and pastures around the grove had seemed to know that this was a good place, for there were always more of them coming in—every time Anthony came out here there were more creatures than the last time, and more desires and needs to be tended to. Every time there would be some kind of creature he had never seen before, and he would find its mind, and see what it wanted, and then give it to it.

He liked to help them. He liked to feel their simple gratification.

Today, he rested beneath a thick elm, and lifted his purple gaze to a red and black bird that had just come to the grove. It twittered on a branch over his head, and hopped back and forth, and thought its tiny thoughts, and Anthony made a big, soft nest for it, and pretty soon it hopped in.

A long, brown, sleek-furred animal was drinking at the pool. Anthony found its mind next. The animal was thinking about a smaller creature that was scurrying along the ground on the other side of the pool, grubbing for insects. The little creaure didn't know that it was in danger. The long, brown animal finished drinking and tensed its legs to leap, and Anthony thought it into a grave in the cornfield.

He didn't like those kinds of thoughts. They reminded him of the thoughts outside the grove. A long time ago

some of the people outside had thought that way about *him,* and one night they'd hidden and waited for him to come back from the grove—and he'd just thought them all into the cornfield. Since then, the rest of the people hadn't thought that way—at least, very clearly. Now their thoughts were all mixed up and confusing whenever they thought about him or near him, so he didn't pay much attention.

He liked to help them too, sometimes—but it wasn't simple, or very gratifying either. They never thought happy thoughts when he did—just the jumble. So he spent more time out here.

He watched all the birds and insects and furry creatures for a while, and played with a bird, making it soar and dip and streak madly around tree trunks until, accidentally, when another bird caught his attention for a moment, he ran it into a rock. Petulantly, he thought the rock into a grave in the cornfield; but he couldn't do anything more with the bird. Not because it was dead, though it was; but because it had a broken wing. So he went back to the house. He didn't feel like walking back through the cornfield, so he just *went* to the house, right down into the basement.

It was nice down here. Nice and dark and damp and sort of fragrant, because once Mom had been making preserves in a rack along the far wall, and then she'd stopped coming down ever since Anthony had started spending time here, and the preserves had spoiled and leaked down and spread over the dirt floor, and Anthony liked the smell.

He caught another rat, making it smell cheese, and after he played with it, he thought it into a grave right beside the long animal he'd killed in the grove. Aunt Amy hated rats, and so he killed a lot of them, because he liked Aunt Amy most of all and sometimes did things that Aunt Amy wanted. Her mind was more like the little furry minds out in the grove. She hadn't thought anything bad at all about him for a long time.

After the rat, he played with a big black spider in the corner under the stairs, making it run back and forth until its web shook and shimmered in the light from the

cellar window like a reflection in silvery water. Then he drove fruit flies into the web until the spider was frantic trying to wind them all up. The spider liked flies, and its thoughts were stronger than theirs, so he did it. There was something bad in the way it liked flies, but it wasn't clear—and besides, Aunt Amy hated flies too.

He heard footsteps overhead—Mom moving around in the kitchen. He blinked his purple gaze, and almost decided to make her hold still—but instead he *went* up to the attic, and, after looking out the circular window at the front end of the long V-roofed room for a while at the front lawn and the dusty road and Henderson's tip-waving wheatfield beyond, he curled into an unlikely shape and went partly to sleep.

Soon people would be coming for television, he heard Mom think.

He went more to sleep. He liked television night. Aunt Amy had always liked television a lot, so one time he had thought some for her, and a few other people had been there at the time, and Aunt Amy had felt disappointed when they wanted to leave. He'd done something to them for that—and now everybody came to television.

He liked all the attention he got when they did.

Anthony's father came home around six-thirty, looking tired and dirty and bloody. He'd been over in Dun's pasture with the other men, helping pick out the cow to be slaughtered this month and doing the job, and then butchering the meat and salting it away in Soames's ice-house. Not a job he cared for, but every man had his turn. Yesterday, he had helped scythe down old McIntyre's wheat. Tomorrow, they would start threshing. By hand. Everything in Peaksville had to be done by hand.

He kissed his wife on the cheek and sat down at the kitchen table. He smiled and said, "Where's Anthony?"

"Around someplace," Mom said.

Aunt Amy was over at the wood-burning stove, stirring the big pot of peas. Mom went back to the oven and opened it and basted the roast.

"Well, it's been a *good* day," Dad said. By rote. Then he looked at the mixing bowl and breadboard on the

table. He sniffed at the dough. "M'm," he said. "I could eat a loaf all by myself, I'm so hungry."

"No one told Dan Hollis about its being a birthday party, did they?" his wife asked.

"Nope. We kept as quiet as mummies."

"We've fixed up such a lovely surprise!"

"Um? What?"

"Well . . . you know how much Dan likes music. Well, last week Thelma Dunn found a *record* in her attic!"

"No!"

"Yes! And we had Ethel sort of ask—you know, without really *asking*—if he had that one. And he said no. Isn't that a wonderful surprise?"

"Well, now, it sure is. A record, imagine! That's a real nice thing to find! What record is it?"

"Perry Como, singing *You Are My Sunshine.*"

"Well, I'll be darned. I always liked that tune." Some raw carrots were lying on the table. Dad picked up a small one, scrubbed it on his chest, and took a bite. "How did Thelma happen to find it?"

"Oh, you know—just looking around for new things."

"M'm." Dad chewed the carrot. "Say, who has the picture we found a while back? I kind of liked it—that old clipper sailing along——"

"The Smiths. Next week the Sipichs get it, and they give the Smiths old McIntyre's music-box, and we give the Sipichs——" and she went down the tentative order of things that would exchange hands among the women at church this Sunday.

He nodded. "Looks like we can't have the picture for a while, I guess. Look, honey, you might try to get that detective book back from the Reillys. I was so busy the week we had it, I never got to finish all the stories——"

"I'll try," his wife said doubtfully. "But I hear the Van Husens have a stereoscope they found in the cellar." Her voice was just a little accusing. "They had it two whole months before they told anybody about it——"

"Say," Dad said, looking interested. "That'd be nice, too. Lots of pictures?"

"I suppose so. I'll see on Sunday. I'd like to have it—but we still owe the Van Husens for their canary. I don't

know why that bird had to pick *our* house to die . . . it must have been sick when we got it. Now there's just no satisfying Betty van Husen—she even hinted she'd like our *piano* for a while!"

"Well, honey, you try for the stereoscope—or just anything you think we'll like." At last he swallowed the carrot. It had been a little young and tough. Anthony's whims about the weather made it so that people never knew what crops would come up, or what shape they'd be in if they did. All they could do was plant a lot; and always enough of something came up any one season to live on. Just once there had been a grain surplus; tons of it had been hauled to the edge of Peaksville and dumped off into the nothingness. Otherwise, nobody could have breathed, when it started to spoil.

"You know," Dad went on. "It's nice to have the new things around. It's nice to think that there's probably still a lot of stuff nobody's found yet, in cellars and attics and barns and down behind things. They help, somehow. As much as anything can help——"

"Sh-h!" Mom glanced nervously around.

"Oh," Dad said, smiling hastily. "It's all right! The new things are *good!* It's *nice* to be able to have something around you've never seen before, and know that something you've given somebody else is making them happy . . . that's a real *good* thing."

"A good thing," his wife echoed.

"Pretty soon," Aunt Amy said, from the stove, "there won't be any more new things. We'll have found everything there is to find. Goodness, that'll be too bad——"

"Amy!"

"Well——" her pale eyes were shallow and fixed, a sign of her recurrent vagueness. "It will be kind of a shame—no new things——"

"Don't *talk* like that," Mom said, trembling. "Amy, be *quiet!"*

"It's *good,"* said Dad, in the loud, familiar, wanting-to-be-overheard tone of voice. "Such talk is *good.* It's okay, honey—don't you see? It's good for Amy to talk any way she wants. It's good for her to feel bad. Everything's good. Everything *has* to be good . . ."

Anthony's mother was pale. And so was Aunt Amy—the peril of the moment had suddenly penetrated the clouds surrounding her mind. Sometimes it was difficult to handle words so that they might not prove disastrous. You just never *knew*. There were so many things it was wise not to say, or even think—but remonstration for saying or thinking them might be just as bad, if Anthony heard and decided to do anything about it. You could just never tell what Anthony was liable to do.

Everything had to be good. Had to be fine just as it was, even if it wasn't. Always. Because any change might be worse. So terribly much worse.

"Oh, my goodness, yes, of course it's good," Mom said. "You talk any way you want to, Amy, and it's just fine. Of course, you want to remember that some ways are *better* than others . . ."

Aunt Amy stirred the peas, fright in her pale eyes.

"Oh, yes," she said. "But I don't feel like talking right now. It . . . it's *good* that I don't feel like talking."

Dad said tiredly, smiling, "I'm going out and wash up."

They started arriving around eight o'clock. By that time, Mom and Aunt Amy had the big table in the dining room set, and two more tables off to the side. The candles were burning and the chairs situated, and Dad had a big fire going in the fireplace.

The first to arrive were the Sipichs, John and Mary. John wore his best suit, and was well-scrubbed and pink-faced after his day in McIntyre's pasture. The suit was neatly pressed, but getting threadbare at elbows and cuffs. Old McIntyre was working on a loom, designing it out of schoolbooks, but so far it was slow going. McIntyre was a capable man with wood and tools, but a loom was a big order when you couldn't get metal parts. McIntyre had been one of the ones who, at first, had wanted to try to get Anthony to make things the villagers needed, like clothes and canned goods and medical supplies and gasoline. Since then, he felt that what had happened to the whole Terrance family and Joe Kinney was his fault, and he worked hard trying to make it up to the rest of

them. And since then, no one had tried to get Anthony to do anything.

Mary Sipich was a small, cheerful woman in a simple dress. She immediately set about helping Mom and Aunt Amy put the finishing touches on the dinner.

The next arrivals were the Smiths and the Dunns, who lived right next to each other down the road, only a few yards from the nothingness. They drove up in the Smiths' wagon, drawn by their old horse.

Then the Reillys showed up, from across the darkened wheatfield, and the evening really began. Pat Reilly sat down at the big upright in the front room, and began to play from the popular sheet music on the rack. He played softly, as expressively as he could—and nobody sang. Anthony liked piano playing a whole lot, but not singing; often he would come up from the basement, or down from the attic, or just *come*, and sit on top of the piano, nodding his head as Pat played *Lover* or *Boulevard of Broken Dreams* or *Night and Day*. He seemed to prefer ballads, sweet-sounding songs—but the one time somebody had started to sing, Anthony had looked over from the top of the piano and done something that made everybody afraid of singing from then on. Later, they'd decided that the piano was what Anthony had heard first, before anybody had ever tried to sing, and now anything else added to it didn't sound right and distracted him from his pleasure.

So, every television night, Pat would play the piano, and that was the beginning of the evening. Wherever Anthony was, the music would make him happy, and put him in a good mood, and he would know that they were gathering for television and waiting for him.

By eight-thirty everybody had shown up, except for the seventeen children and Mrs. Soames who was off watching them in the schoolhouse at the far end of town. The children of Peaksville were never, never allowed near the Fremont house—not since little Fred Smith had tried to play with Anthony on a dare. The younger children weren't even told about Anthony. The others had mostly forgotten about him, or were told that he was a nice, nice goblin but they must never go near him.

Dan and Ethel Hollis came late, and Dan walked in

not suspecting a thing. Pat Reilly had played the piano until his hands ached—he'd worked pretty hard with them today—and now he got up, and everybody gathered around to wish Dan Hollis a happy birthday.

"Well, I'll be darned," Dan grinned. "This is swell. I wasn't expecting this at all . . . gosh, this is *swell!*"

They gave him his presents—mostly things they had made by hand, though some were things that people had possessed as their own and now gave him as his. John Sipich gave him a watch charm, hand-carved out of a piece of hickory wood. Dan's watch had broken down a year or so ago, and there was nobody in the village who knew how to fix it, but he still carried it around because it had been his grandfather's and was a fine old heavy thing of gold and silver. He attached the charm to the chain, while everybody laughed and said John had done a nice job of carving. Then Mary Sipich gave him a knitted necktie, which he put on, removing the one he'd worn.

The Reillys gave him a little box they had made, to keep things in. They didn't say what things, but Dan said he'd keep his personal jewelry in it. The Reillys had made it out of a cigar box, carefully peeled of its paper and lined on the inside with velvet. The outside had been polished, and carefully if not expertly carved by Pat—but his carving got complimented too. Dan Hollis received many other gifts—a pipe, a pair of shoelaces, a tie pin, a knit pair of socks, some fudge, a pair of garters made from old suspenders.

He unwrapped each gift with vast pleasure, and wore as many of them as he could right there, even the garters. He lit up the pipe, and said he'd never had a better smoke; which wasn't quite true, because the pipe wasn't broken in yet. Pete Manners had had it lying around ever since he'd received it as a gift four years ago from an out-of-town relative who hadn't known he'd stopped smoking.

Dan put the tobacco into the bowl very carefully. Tobacco was precious. It was only pure luck that Pat Reilly had decided to try to grow some in his backyard just before what had happened to Peaksville had happened. It didn't grow very well, and then they had to cure

it and shred it and all, and it was just precious stuff. Everybody in town used wooden holders old McIntyre had made, to save on butts.

Last of all, Thelma Dunn gave Dan Hollis the record she had found.

Dan's eyes misted even before he opened the package. He knew it was a record.

"Gosh," he said softly. "What one is it? I'm almost afraid to look . . ."

"You haven't got it, darling," Ethel Hollis smiled. "Don't you remember, I asked about *You Are My Sunshine?"*

"Oh, gosh," Dan said again. Carefully he removed the wrapping and stood there fondling the record, running his big hands over the worn grooves with their tiny, dulling crosswise scratches. He looked around the room, eyes shining, and they all smiled back, knowing how delighted he was.

"Happy birthday, darling!" Ethel said, throwing her arms around him and kissing him.

He clutched the record in both hands, holding it off to one side as she pressed against him. "Hey," he laughed, pulling back his head. "Be careful . . . I'm holding a priceless object!" He looked around again, over his wife's arms, which were still around his neck. His eyes were hungry. "Look . . . do you think we could play it? Lord, what I'd give to hear some new music . . . just the first part, the orchestra part, before Como sings?"

Faces sobered. After a minute, John Sipich said, "I don't think we'd better, Dan. After all, we don't know just where the singer comes in—it'd be taking too much of a chance. Better wait till you get home."

Dan Hollis reluctantly put the record on the buffet with all his other presents. "It's *good,"* he said automatically, but disappointedly, "that I can't play it here."

"Oh, yes," said Sipich. "It's good." To compensate for Dan's disappointed tone, he repeated, "It's *good."*

They ate dinner, the candles lighting their smiling faces, and ate it all right down to the last delicious drop of gravy. They complimented Mom and Aunt Amy on the roast beef, and the peas and carrots, and the tender

corn on the cob. The corn hadn't come from the Fremont's cornfield, naturally—everybody knew what was out there; and the field was going to weeds.

Then they polished off the dessert—homemade ice cream and cookies. And then they sat back, in the flickering light of the candles, and chatted, waiting for television.

There never was a lot of mumbling on television night—everybody came and had a good dinner at the Fremonts', and that was nice, and afterwards there was television, and nobody really thought much about that—it just had to be put up with. So it was a pleasant enough get-together, aside from your having to watch what you said just as carefully as you always did everyplace. If a dangerous thought came into your mind, you just started mumbling, even right in the middle of a sentence. When you did that, the others just ignored you until you felt happier again and stopped.

Anthony liked television night. He had done only two or three awful things on television night in the whole past year.

Mom had put a bottle of brandy on the table, and they each had a tiny glass of it. Liquor was even more precious then tobacco. The villagers could make wine, but the grapes weren't right, and certainly the techniques weren't, and it wasn't very good wine. There were only a few bottles of real liquor left in the village—four rye, three Scotch, three brandy, nine real wine and half a bottle of Drambuie belonging to old McIntyre (only for marriages)—and when those were gone, that was it.

Afterward, everybody wished that the brandy hadn't been brought out. Because Dan Hollis drank more of it than he should have, and mixed it with a lot of the homemade wine. Nobody thought anything about it at first, because he didn't show it much outside, and it was his birthday party and a happy party, and Anthony liked these get-togethers and shouldn't see any reason to do anything even if he was listening.

But Dan Hollis got high, and did a fool thing. If they'd seen it coming, they'd have taken him outside and walked him around.

The first thing they knew, Dan stopped laughing right

in the middle of the story about how Thelma Dunn had found the Perry Como record and dropped it and it hadn't broken because she'd moved faster than she ever had before in her life and caught it. He was fondling the record again, and looking longingly at the Fremonts' gramophone over in the corner, and suddenly he stopped laughing and his face got slack, and then it got ugly, and he said, "Oh, *Christ!*"

Immediately the room was still. So still they could hear the whirring movement of the grandfather's clock out in the hall. Pat Reilly had been playing the piano, softly. He stopped, his hands poised over the yellowed keys.

The candles on the dining-room table flickered in a cool breeze that blew through the lace curtains over the bay window.

"Keep playing, Pat," Anthony's father said softly.

Pat started again. He played *Night and Day,* but his eyes were sidewise on Dan Hollis, and he missed notes.

Dan stood in the middle of the room, holding the record. In his other hand he held a glass of brandy so hard his hand shook.

They were all looking at him.

"Christ," he said again, and he made it sound like a dirty word.

Reverend Younger, who had been talking with Mom and Aunt Amy by the dining-room door, said "Christ" too—but he was using it in a prayer. His hands were clasped, and his eyes were closed.

John Sipich moved forward. "Now, Dan . . . it's *good* for you to talk that way. But you don't want to talk too much, you know."

Dan shook off the hand Sipich put on his arm.

"Can't even play my record," he said loudly. He looked down at the record, and then around at their faces. "Oh, my *God . . .*"

He threw the glassful of brandy against the wall. It splattered and ran down the wallpaper in streaks.

Some of the women gasped.

"Dan," Sipich said in a whisper. "Dan, cut it out——"

Pat Reilly was playing *Night and Day* louder, to cover

up the sounds of the talk. It wouldn't do any good, though, if Anthony was listening.

Dan Hollis went over to the piano and stood by Pat's shoulder, swaying a little.

"Pat," he said. "Don't play *that*. Play *this*." And he began to sing. Softly, hoarsely, miserably: "Happy birthday to me . . . Happy birthday to me . . ."

"Dan!" Ethel Hollis screamed. She tried to run across the room to him. Mary Sipich grabbed her arm and held her back. "Dan," Ethel screamed again. "Stop——"

"My God, be quiet!" hissed Mary Sipich, and pushed her toward one of the men, who put his hand over her mouth and held her still.

"——Happy birthday, dear Danny," Dan sang. "Happy birthday to me!" He stopped and looked down at Pat Reilly. "Play it, Pat. Play it, so I can sing right . . . you know I can't carry a tune unless somebody plays it!"

Pat Reilly put his hands on the keys and began *Lover* —in a slow waltz tempo, the way Anthony liked it. Pat's face was white. His hands fumbled.

Dan Hollis stared over at the dining-room door. At Anthony's mother, and at Anthony's father who had gone to join her.

"*You* had him," he said. Tears gleamed on his cheeks as the candlelight caught them. "*You* had to go and *have* him . . ."

He closed his eyes, and the tears squeezed out. He sang loudly, "You are my sunshine . . . my only sunshine . . . you make me happy . . . when I am blue . . ."

Anthony *came* into the room.

Pat stopped playing. He froze. Everybody froze. The breeze rippled the curtains. Ethel Hollis couldn't even try to scream—she had fainted.

"Please don't take my sunshine . . . away . . ." Dan's voice faltered into silence. His eyes widened. He put both hands out in front of him, the empty glass in one, the record in the other. He hiccupped, and said, "*No*——"

"Bad man," Anthony said, and thought Dan Hollis into something like nothing anyone would have believed possible, and then he thought the thing into a grave deep, deep in the cornfield.

The glass and record thumped on the rug. Neither broke.

Anthony's purple gaze went around the room.

Some of the people began mumbling. They all tried to smile. The sound of mumbling filled the room like a far-off approval. Out of the murmuring came one or two clear voices:

"Oh, it's a very *good* thing," said John Sipich.

"A good thing," said Anthony's father, smiling. He'd had more practice in smiling than most of them. "A wonderful thing."

"It's swell . . . just swell," said Pat Reilly, tears leaking from eyes and nose, and he began to play the piano again, softly, his trembling hands feeling for *Night and Day*.

Anthony climbed up on top of the paino, and Pat played for two hours.

Afterward, they watched television. They all went into the front room, and lit just a few candles, and pulled up chairs around the set. It was a small-screen set, and they couldn't all sit close enough to it to see, but that didn't matter. They didn't even turn the set on. It wouldn't have worked anyway, there being no electricity in Peaksville.

They just sat silently, and watched the twisting, writhing shapes on the screen, and listened to the sounds that came out of the speaker, and none of them had any idea of what it was all about. They never did. It was always the same.

"It's real nice," Aunt Amy said once, her pale eyes on the meaningless flickers and shadows. "But I liked it a little better when there were cities outside and we could get real——"

"Why, Amy!" said Mom. "It's good for you to say such a thing. Very good. But how can you mean it? Why, this television is *much* better than anything we ever used to get!"

"Yes," chimed in John Sipich. "It's fine. It's the best show we've ever seen!"

He sat on the couch, with two other men, holding Ethel Hollis flat against the cushions, holding her arms

and legs and putting their hands over her mouth, so she couldn't start screaming again.

"It's really *good!*" he said again.

Mom looked out of the front window, across the darkened road, across Henderson's darkened wheat field to the vast, endless, gray nothingness in which the little village of Peaksville floated like a soul—the huge nothingness that was most evident at night, when Anthony's brassy day had gone.

It did no good to wonder where they were . . . no good at all. Peaksville was just someplace. Someplace away from the world. It was wherever it had been since that day three years ago when Anthony had crept from her womb and old Doc Bates—God rest him—had screamed and dropped him and tried to kill him, and Anthony had whined and done the thing. Had taken the village someplace. Or had destroyed the world and left only the village, nobody knew which.

It did no good to wonder about it. Nothing at all did any good—except to live as they must live. Must always, always live, if Anthony would let them.

These thoughts were dangerous, she thought.

She began to mumble. The others started mumbling too. They had all been thinking, evidently.

The men on the couch whispered and whispered to Ethel Hollis, and when they took their hands away, she mumbled too.

While Anthony sat on top of the set and made television, they sat around and mumbled and watched the meaningless, flickering shapes far into the night.

Next day it snowed, and killed off half the crops—but it was a *good* day.

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Ballantine Books published six volumes of original short stories in the STAR series. Doubleday then printed the cream of the stories from these volumes in STAR OF STARS. This book is a reprint of STAR OF STARS.

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