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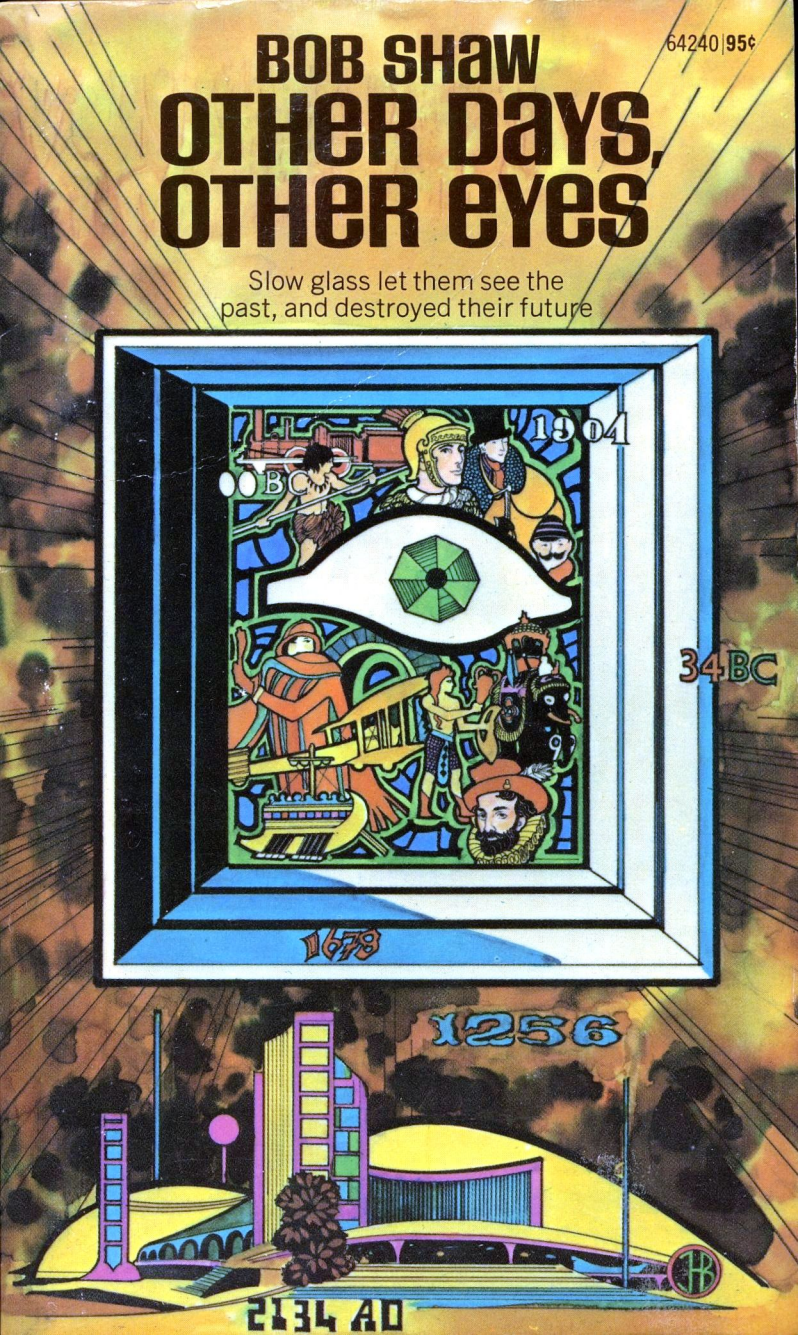
BOB SHAW
OTHER DAYS, OTHER EYES

Slow glass let them see the past, and destroyed their future



The overloaded viewphone screen went blank.

Garrod wiped a cool film of sweat from his forehead and a moment later the viewphone circuits established themselves through reserve channels. When the picture reappeared the expended scenedow was a panel of polished obsidian, black as midnight. The sections of the laboratory he could see at the sides of the slow glass panel looked strangely colorless, as though seen in monochrome television. A few seconds later he heard the door opening and then Esther's voice.

"Alban," she said timidly. "The room has changed. . . . There's no color left in anything."

The possessor of a superb narrative style, Bob Shaw has the distinction of being well-known on both sides of the Atlantic. His other Ace books include ONE MILLION TOMORROWS, #62938, 75¢, and THE PALACE OF ETERNITY, #65050, 75¢.

OTHER DAYS, OTHER EYES

by Bob Shaw

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OTHER DAYS, OTHER EYES

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CHAPTER 1

At first the other car was just a blood-red speck in the dwindling perspectives of the highway, but even at that distance—and in spite of the glare caused by the keyhole-shaped iris of his left eye—Garrod was able to identify the year and the model. It was a 1982 Stiletto. Prompted by an illogical apprehension, he eased his foot off the throttle and his own car began slowing from its 90 mph cruise. Even with the smoothness of his movement the turbine gave a moan of mechanical disappointment on the overrun.

"What's the matter?" His wife was predictably and instantly alert.

"Nothing."

"But why did you slow down?" Esther liked to keep a close watch on all her property, in which category she included her husband, and her stiffly-lacquered broad-brimmed hat made scanning movements like those of a radar dish.

"No particular reason." Garrod smiled his protest at

being questioned, and watched as the Stiletto ballooned larger in the windshield. Suddenly—as he had known it would—the Stiletto's left-hand turn signal began to flash orange light. Garrod checked and saw the side road which branched off the highway at a point midway between the two cars. He hit the brake and his Turbo-Lincoln dipped its nose as the tires gripped the road. The red Stiletto swerved across their path and vanished up the side road in a cloud of saffron dust. Garrod had a fleeting impression of a boy's face at the sports car's side window, the mouth a dark circle, shocked, accusatory.

"My God, did you see that?" Esther's neat features were momentarily haggard. "Did you *see* that?"

Because his wife was acting as spokesman for their anger, Garrod was able to remain calm. "You bet I saw it."

"If you hadn't slowed down when you did, that stupid kid would have been right into us. . . ." Esther paused and turned sideways to look at him as the thought struck her. "Why *did* you slow down, Alban? It was almost as if you knew what was going to happen."

"I've learned not to trust kids in red sports cars, that's all." Garrod laughed easily, but his wife's question had disturbed him more than it would have had no spoken comment been made. What had prompted him to throttle back just when he did? On one level, he was entitled to have a special interest in the current-model Stiletto car—it was the first production line vehicle to be fitted with a Thermgard windshield made in his own factory; but that did not explain the icy heavings in his subconscious, the sense of having looked at something ghastly and of having erased the memory.

"I knew we should have gone on the official plane," Esther said.

"You also wanted to make a little vacation out of the trip."

"I know, but I didn't expect . . ."

"There's the airfield now," Garrod interrupted, as a high wire fence appeared on their left. "We've made good time."

Esther nodded reluctantly and settled back to stare at the runway markers and landing aids which had become visible beyond the wavering blur of fence poles. This was their second wedding anniversary and Garrod had a niggling suspicion she resented such a large portion of the day being taken up by a business appointment. There was nothing he could do about that, however—even if her family's money had saved the Garrod organization from collapse. The United States had been disastrously late in entering the civil supersonic transport field, but the Mach 4 Aurora would go into service before very long—just at a time when the SSTs of other countries were beginning to show their age—and he, Alban Garrod, had made a contribution. He could not say exactly why it was so important for him to be present at the Aurora's first public flight, but he knew nothing would stop him seeing the titanium eagle take to the air and find its way aloft with the eyes he had given it.

In five minutes they were at the main gate of the United Aircraft Constructors' field. A guard in crisp, oatmeal-colored linens saluted and waved them through when he saw Garrod's contractor's invitation card. They drove slowly through the crowded administration complex. Brightly-painted direction signs glowed in the morning sunlight, creating a fairground atmosphere. Everywhere Garrod looked he saw leggy golden girls in the uniforms of the airlines which had placed advance orders for the Aurora.

Esther placed a possessive hand on his thigh. "Lovely, aren't they? I'm beginning to see why you were so determined to be here."

"I wouldn't have come without you," Garrod lied. He

squeezed Esther's knee to reinforce his words, and felt the sudden rigidity of her muscles.

"Look, Alban, *look!*" Her voice was pitched high. "That must be the Aurora. Why didn't you tell me it was so *beautiful?*"

Garrod felt a pang of vicarious pride as he glimpsed the vast silvery shape, sentient, futuristic yet prehistoric, a mathematical organism. He had not expected Esther to appreciate the Aurora and his eyes prickled with gratification. Abruptly, he was completely happy—the incident with the red Stiletto had been too trivial for words. Another guard waved them into the small parking lot which had been created for the benefit of contractors by stringing varicolored ropes on portable standards at the edge of the field. Garrod got out of the car and breathed deeply, trying to fill his lungs with the pastels of morning. The air was warm, evocatively laced with kerosene fumes.

Esther was still staring raptly at the Aurora, which loomed beyond the roof of a red-and-white marquee. "The windows seem so small."

"Only because of the scale. That's a big airplane, you know. We're more than four hundred yards from it."

"I still think it looks a little . . . shortsighted. It's like a bird with its eyes all squeezed, trying to see."

Garrod took her elbow and guided her toward the marquee. "The point is that it *has* eyes, just like an ordinary aircraft. That's why our Thermgard was so important to the project—it let the designers cut out all the weight and complexity of the heatshields used on the sort of SSTs that are flying around now."

"I was only teasing you, Mr. Garrod, sir." Esther playfully hugged his left arm with both of hers as they entered the comparative shadiness of the marquee, and her small, precision-cast features developed new facets as she smiled. With one part of his mind Garrod noted that,

once again, his rich wife had contrived to have a firm and obvious grip on her property as they joined a gathering of strangers, but he was in no mood to object. A sense of excitement was building up within him as a tall man with gold-and-silver hair and a tanned boyish face came shouldering through the crowd. It was Vernon Maguire, president of United Aircraft Constructors.

"Glad you could make it, Al." Maguire eyed Esther appreciatively. "And this is Boyd Livingstone's little girl, is it? How is your father these days, Esther?"

"Busier than ever—you know what he's like about work." Esther shook hands with Maguire.

"I hear he's thinking about going into politics. Is he still so touchy about gambling?"

"He wants to blow up every racetrack in the country." Esther smiled at Maguire, and Garrod was surprised to feel a faint twinge of annoyance. Esther knew nothing about the aviation industry, was present only on a courtesy basis, yet Maguire's attention was fully on her. Money was talking to money.

"Give him my regards, Esther." A look of theatrical concern passed over Maguire's young, not-young face. "Say, why didn't you bring the old boy along with you?"

"We just didn't think of asking him," she said. "But I'm sure he would have enjoyed the first flight of . . ."

"This isn't the first flight," Garrod put in with more severity than he had intended. "It's the first public demonstration."

"Don't be too hard on the little lady, Al." Maguire laughed, pushing his fist against Garrod's shoulder. "Besides, as far as your windshields are concerned this *is* the first flight."

"Oh? I thought the Thermgard went in last week."

"It was supposed to, Al, but we've been pushing ahead so fast with the low-speed trials we couldn't take time out from the program to change the shields."

"I didn't know that," Garrod said. Inexplicably, he recalled the red Stiletto and the startled, accusing face of its driver. "So this is the first flight with my windshields?"

"That's what I just said. They went in last night, and if there aren't any hitches the Aurora goes supersonic on Friday. Why don't you two order yourselves a drink and find a seat out front? I have to keep moving." Maguire smiled briefly and edged away.

Garrod stopped a hostess and ordered an orange juice for Esther and a vodka tonic for himself. They took the drinks out to where seats had been placed in rows facing the airfield. The sudden increase in light intensity ran a needle of pain into Garrod's left eye, which was ultrasensitive to glare as the result of a partial irisectomy carried out when he was a child. He put on polarized glasses to make viewing easier. Groups of men and women were sitting watching the activity around the enormous brooding shape of the Aurora. Trailers containing the ground services were clustered beneath the aircraft and technicians in white overalls moved on the steps which led into its belly.

Garrod sipped his drink, found it cold and clean-tasting, with a little extra bite which suggested a high proportion of spirits. It was rather early in the day for serious drinking, especially as he always found that a morning drink had the same effect as three in the evening, but he decided the occasion warranted a little bending of the rules. During the half hour which elapsed before the Aurora was ready to take off he quickly but unobtrusively downed three vodka tonics, thereby gaining entrance to a glittery, relaxed, optimistic world where beautiful people sipped sunfire from hollowed diamonds. Representatives of top management with other contracting companies came and went in jovial succession and Wayne Renfrew, the chief test pilot for UAC, made a

brief appearance, smiling with practiced ruefulness as he refused a drink.

Renfrew was a small man, homely, with a reddish nose and thinning crew-cut hair, but he had an abstracted air of self-possession which reminded people he had been chosen to teach a two-billion dollar piece of experimental hardware how to fly like an airplane. Garrod felt curiously uplifted when the pilot singled him out to make a comment on just how much the Thermgard transparencies meant to the Aurora project. He watched gratefully as Renfrew, walking with the straight back of a short man, made his way out to a white jeep and was driven the few hundred yards to the aircraft.

"Remember me?" Esther said jealously. "I can't fly an airplane, but I'm a good cook."

Garrod turned to look at his wife, wondering if her words had conveyed her exact meaning. Her brown eyes locked with his, positive as the bolt of a rifle, and he understood that on the morning of their second wedding anniversary, at an important business-cum-social function, merely because his attention had strayed from her for a few minutes she was hinting that he had homosexual tendencies. He entered the fact in a mental dossier, then gave her his very best smile.

"Sweetheart," he said warmly, "let me get you another drink."

She smiled back immediately, mollified. "I think I'll have a Martini this time."

He brought it from the bar personally and was setting it on their table when the Aurora's engines gave a deep whine which within a few seconds was lost in a ground-disturbing rumble as ignition was fully established. The sound continued at the same level for several interminable minutes, was stepped up as the aircraft began to roll, becoming almost unbearable when the Aurora turned toward the main runway and its jet pipes momen-

tarily pointed at the marquee. Garrod felt his chest cavity begin to resonate. He experienced something close to animal panic—then the aircraft had moved on and there came comparative quietness.

Esther took her hands away from her ears. "Isn't it *exciting*?"

Garrod nodded, keeping his eyes on the Aurora. The lustrous titanium shape crept away into the distance—ungainly on its elongated undercarriage, like a wounded moth—and flashed sunlight as it turned its prow into the wind. With surprisingly little delay it rolled along the runway, gathered speed and reared into the air. Dust storms raced along the ground behind the Aurora as it cleaned itself for true flight, drawing in its appendages and flaps, and banked away to the south.

"It's beautiful, Al." Esther caught his arm. "I'm glad you brought me."

Garrod's throat closed with pride. Behind him a loudspeaker made a coughing sound and a male voice began to intone a nontechnical description of the Aurora. It spoke impassively while the aircraft itself faded out of sight in the pulsing blueness, and concluded by saying that, while the Aurora was not yet cleared to carry passengers, UAC would try to give its guests an impression of what the aircraft was like to fly by hooking up the public address system to the communications link.

"Hello, ladies and gentlemen." Renfrew's voice came in on cue. "The Aurora is approximately ten miles south of your position, and we are flying at a height of four thousand feet. I am putting the aircraft into a left-hand turn and will be over the airfield again in slightly less than three minutes. The Aurora handles like a dream and . . ." Renfrew's professionally sleepy voice faded out for a moment, then returned with a note of puzzlement.

"She seems just a little slow in responding to control demands this morning, but that's probably due to the

combination of low speed and hot, thin air. As I was saying . . ."

Vernon Maguire's aggrieved voice suddenly filled the marquee. "That's a test pilot for you. We put him on the air to do a sales pitch for the Aurora and all he does is try to find fault with the goddamn flying controls." He burst out laughing and most of the men near him joined in. Garrod stared into the southern sky until he saw the Aurora shining like a star, a planet, a small moon which resolved itself into a silver dart. It passed slightly to the east of the airfield at about a thousand feet, flying at low speed, with its nose held high.

"I am about to make another left-hand turn and then will do a low-speed pass along the main runway to demonstrate the Aurora's excellent handling qualities in this section of the flight envelope." Renfrew's voice now sounded perfectly normal and unstressed, and Garrod's sense of unease faded. He looked down at Esther and saw she had taken out a compact and was powdering her nose.

She noticed his glance and made a face at him. "A girl's got to . . ."

Renfrew's voice came from the loudspeaker, all sleepiness gone. "There's that sluggishness again. I don't like it, Joe. I'm coming in on . . ." There was a loud click as the hookup to the public address system was broken. Garrod shut his eyes and saw the red Stiletto sports car speeding closer and closer.

"Don't run away with the idea that this is any kind of emergency," Maguire said reassuringly. "Wayne Renfrew is the best test pilot in the country, and he got there by being cautious and safe. If you want to see a perfect landing—just watch this."

The crowd in the marquee fell silent as the Aurora sliced quietly across the sky at the northern end of the airfield, shape changing as the undercarriage was low-

ered and the flaps spread. It aligned itself with the runway and came in, sinking fast, nose held high and landing gear reaching tentatively for the ground in the characteristic manner of all high-speed aircraft in the last moments of flight. The descent continued into the shimmering whiteness of the runway, and Garrod discovered he could not breathe.

"Flare out," a man whispered close by. "For Christ's sake, Wayne, flare out!"

The Aurora continued to sink at the same rate, struck the runway and made an awkward slewing leap back into the sky. It seemed to hang in the air for a second, then one wing dipped. The undercarriage on that side crumpled as it met the concrete again, then the aircraft was down, wallowing, sliding, twisting. Multiple reports of explosive bolts rang out above the screeching of metal as the Aurora shed its wings with their deadly load of fuel, allowing the fuselage to slither and skid ahead like a javelin thrown on a frozen lake. Both wings, fluttering their separate ways, bucked into the air and one of them exploded in a fountain of fire and black smoke. The fuselage slid on for a further half-mile, squandering its kinetic energy in showers of glowing metal before coming reluctantly to rest.

There was a moment of silence.

Utter calm.

Far across the airfield sirens were beginning to sound as Garrod lowered himself into his seat. The face of the boy in the red Stiletto wavered in his vision—shocked, accusing.

Garrod pulled his wife down onto the seat beside him. "I did that," he said in a level, conversational voice. "I destroyed that aircraft."

CHAPTER 2

The Leygraf Computer Bureau occupied a smallish suite of offices in one of the older business blocks in downtown Portston. Garrod entered the compact reception area, approached the gray-faced efficient-looking woman who presided at the desk and gave her his card.

"I would like to see Mr. Leygraf for a few minutes."

The receptionist smiled apologetically. "I'm sorry—Mr. Leygraf is in conference, and if you have no appointment . . ."

Garrod smiled in return, then glanced at his watch. "It is now precisely one minute past four o'clock. Correct?"

"Mmm . . . yes."

"Which means that Carl Leygraf is sitting alone in his office sipping his first drink of the day. The drink is a tall, weak Scotch and soda with plenty of ice, and I want something in that line myself. Please let him know I'm here."

The woman hesitated before speaking into an intercom set. A few seconds later Leygraf emerged from the

inner office with a dewy glass in his hand. He was a slim, carelessly dressed man, prematurely bald and with concerned gray eyes.

"Come in, Al," he said. "You're just in time for a drink."

"I know." Garrod went into his office, a silvery room in which complex mathematical models of wire and string took the place of ornaments. "I could use a drink. My car flamed out on me two blocks from here and I had to abandon it and walk. Do you know anything about turbine engines?"

"No, but tell me the symptoms and I might be able to work something out."

Garrod shook his head. One of the things he liked about Leygraf was the way in which the man was quite prepared to take interest in any subject under the sun and have a conversation about it. "That's not what I came to see you about."

"Oh? Vodka tonic you go for, isn't it?"

"Thanks. Not too strong."

Leygraf mixed the drink and brought it to the desk where Garrod was sitting. "Are you still worried about those Stiletto cars?"

Garrod nodded but took a long swallow from his glass before speaking. "I've got some new data for you."

"Such as?"

"I suppose you heard about the Aurora crash two days ago?"

"*Heard* about it! I've heard nothing else, friend. My wife bought some UAC new issue last year on my advice, and she's been . . ." Leygraf paused with his glass at his lips. "What do you mean by new data?"

"The Aurora had Thermgard windshields."

"I knew you had that contract, Al, but surely that aircraft's been flying around for months."

"Not with my shields in. United were anxious to get ahead with the low-speed part of the flight test program,

so they flew it for a while with conventional transparencies." Garrod stared into his glass and saw the minute currents of cold liquid shimmering down from the ice cubes. "Tuesday's flight was the first with my Thermgard installed."

"Coincidence!" Leygraf snorted emphatically. "What are you trying to do to yourself?"

"You came to me, Carl. Remember?"

"Yeah, I know—but I also told you it was a freak run of the figures. When you're analyzing anything as complex as urban travel demands you're bound to turn up all kinds of statistical sports. . . ."

"On the way to McPherson Field Esther and I almost got hit by a Stiletto which was making a left turn."

"You're spoiling my best drink of the day," Leygraf said aggrievedly, pushing his glass away. "Step outside the problem for a minute—how could a new type of windshield glass cause accidents? For God's sake, Al, how could it possibly happen?"

Garrod shrugged and fixed his mind on one of the mathematical models for a moment, trying to identify the equation it represented. "I grew a new kind of crystal. Tougher than any known glass. It shouldn't even be transparent, because it reflects energy at practically every wavelength in the spectrum. Only the visible wavelengths get through. No heat. So I patented myself the best windshield material in the world." Garrod spoke abstractedly, his soul sliding on the curves and generators of the model.

"But supposing some other kind of radiation gets through, perhaps even gets amplified or focused? Something we don't know about."

"Something that turns good drivers and pilots into bad ones?" Leygraf, apparently forgetting he had renounced his drink, seized the glass and drained it. "Do they also sprout hairs all over their faces and grow teeth like this?"

He pushed his knuckles into his mouth and wriggled downward-projecting fingers.

Garrod laughed gratefully. "Don't remind me how crazy it sounds. All I'm trying to do is think in other categories. I seem to have read something about a road in France which was an accident blackspot, and nobody knew why because it was one of those straight and wide affairs lined with poplars. Turned out the poplars were spaced in such a way that if you drove along that road at the speed limit the sunlight coming through the trees flickered at ten cycles a second."

"What's that supposed to . . . ?" Leygraf looked blank. "Oh, I get it—the brain's alpha rhythm. Hypnosis."

"Yeah. And there's epilepsy. Did you know that it isn't safe for an epileptic to try adjusting a television set which has slow rolling flickers?"

Leygraf shook his head. "Different type of phenomenon, Al."

"Maybe it isn't. What if Thermgard oscillates? Produces a pulse effect?"

"It wouldn't explain the significance of the turns. My company's survey showed that practically all the Stiletto accidents occurred during left-hand turns. If you ask me the steering geometry on that automobile is suspect."

"It isn't," Garrod said firmly. "I've seen the advance reports."

"Of course, the Aurora was turning when it crashed." Leygraf's gray eyes had widened slightly. "You could say an aircraft turns in the vertical plane when it lands, couldn't you?"

"Yes, it's called the flare-out—except that in this case Renfrew didn't flare out soon enough. He almost flew the Aurora straight into the ground."

Leygraf jumped to his feet. "He turned too late! And that's what the Stiletto drivers tend to do. They under-

estimate the time they need to cross the opposing line of traffic. That's it, Al."

Garrod's heart began to fill his chest like a pillow. "That's what?"

"Your common factor, of course."

"But where does it get us?"

"Nowhere—it validates your new data, that's all. But I'm beginning to swing in favor of your idea that Thermgard affects the light which passes through it—supposing it alters the wavelength of ordinary light and makes it harmful? A sick driver or pilot would probably . . ."

Garrod was shaking his head. "In that case colors wouldn't be true when seen through the material. Windshields have to meet all kinds of standards, you know."

"Well *something* has to slow the drivers' reactions," Leygraf said. "Look, Al, you're dealing with two factors here. There's light itself—which is an invariant—and there's the human. . . ."

"Don't say any more. Don't speak!" Garrod gripped the arms of his chair as the floor seemed to tilt ponderously beneath him. He felt a cool prickling sensation on his forehead and cheeks, and when he tried to voice the thought which had just occurred to him the gulf between logic and language proved too great to bridge.

Two hours later, after a punishing drive through the rush hour traffic, the two men reached the cream-colored building which was the research and administration center of Garrod Transparencies, Inc. It was a fine October evening, and the air was soft and thick, nostalgic. From the parking lot they could see a distant tennis court, gem-like in a setting of trees, where white figures played perhaps the final game of the season.

"That's what I should be doing," Leygraf said bitterly as they walked to the main entrance. "Do you have to be so secretive about why you dragged me out here?"

"I'm not being secretive." Garrod could feel himself moving carefully, like a man who was unsure of his footing. "It's just that I don't want to influence your thinking in any way. I'm going to show you something, and you have to tell me what it means."

They entered the building and took the elevator to Garrod's second-floor office suite. The building had seemed deserted, but a stocky man who wore screwdrivers in his breast pocket like fountain pens met them in the corridor.

"Hi, Vince," Garrod said. "You got my message?"

Vince nodded. "I got it, but I don't understand it. Did you really want a breadboard rig with two room lamps on it? And a rotary switch?"

"That's what I wanted." Garrod slapped Vince on the shoulder, a gesture of apology for not explaining the mystery, and went into his office. It was a combination of executive suite and design facility, with a drafting table sharing pride of place with a large untidy desk.

Leygraf pointed at the blackboard which ran the length of the wall. "Do you really use that thing? I thought they only had those in the movies. Old William Holden movies."

"It helps me to think. When there's a problem on that board I can see it and work on it no matter what's going on in here." Garrod spoke slowly as he examined the piece of makeshift equipment on his desk. It consisted of a chipboard base carrying two lamps and a variable-speed rotary switch, all connected by plastic-covered wire and linked to a power point. *Some day,* he thought, with a curious lack of emotion, *the world's science museums will be bidding against each other for this assembly of junk.* He plugged the cord into a wall socket, operated the rotary switch and both lamps began to flash in unison. Moving the switch control slightly, he adjusted

the cycle so that the lamps were lit for roughly a second, out for roughly a second.

"Just like Times Square." Leygraf sniffed loudly to draw attention to his sarcasm.

Garrod caught his arm and drew him closer to the desk. "Do you see the kind of circuit we have here? Two lamps and a switch wired in series."

"It wasn't covered in my computer course at Cal Tech, but I think I get the general drift. I think my mind is expanding to grasp the advanced technology involved."

"I just wanted to be certain you appreciate . . ."

"For God's sake, Al!" Leygraf's patience began to desert him. "What is there to appreciate?"

"Just this." Garrod opened a cabinet and removed what appeared to be an ordinary, if rather thick, piece of glass. "Thermgard."

He carried it to the desk where the two lamps were blinking in unison, and stood it vertically in front of the breadboard rig, positioning it so that only one of the lamps was visible through the glass.

"What way are the lamps behaving now?" Garrod did not look at them himself.

"How *can* they behave, Al? You haven't done anything to . . . Oh, Jesus!"

"Precisely." Garrod leaned sideways and looked at the two lights from approximately the same angle as Leygraf. The lamp behind the glass was still emitting its one-second flashes, but now it was out of step with the other. He removed the glass and both lamps were in unison again. He replaced the glass and they were out of phase.

"I wouldn't have believed it," Leygraf said.

Garrod nodded. "Remember, I said Thermgard had no right to be transparent? It appears that even light has difficulty in passing through it—so much difficulty that the journey of half an inch through this piece of material takes it about one second. That's why drivers of Stilettos

have been involved in too many accidents, and that's why the pilot of the Aurora almost flew it into the ground—they were out of step with their surroundings, Carl."

"They were seeing the world as it had existed one second in the past!"

"But why should the effect show up so much in turns?"

"It will have been present in other circumstances too, causing misjudgments of distance and probably some minor bumper-to-bumper collisions between cars in the same line of traffic. But in those cases the relative speeds are small and not much harm would be done. It's only when a driver mistimes a turn against opposing traffic—and it's amazing how finely we judge the split seconds in those turns, Carl—that the relative speeds are high and the result is disastrous."

"How about when turning a corner?"

"Speeds are low, and the corner isn't rushing toward you at sixty miles an hour. Probably, too, when turning a corner the driver is also looking out the side window at the footpath and instinctively compensating, but when turning across a traffic lane his eyes are fixed exclusively on the oncoming car visible through his windshield—and his eyes are fed faulty information."

Leygraf rubbed his chin. "I suppose all that applies in aviation, too?"

"Yes. In straight-line flight the delay would make little difference—don't forget the Aurora had the sky to itself—but a turn magnifies the phenomenon."

"How come?"

"Simple trigonometry. If a pilot is lined up with a mountain peak a hundred miles away and he initiates even a two-degree turn that peak should slide off his course by . . . by . . . Come on, Carl, you're the mathematician."

"Ah . . . three or four miles."

"That sort of thing gives the pilot a very sensitive in-

dicator to turning performance, or lack of it. And, of course, in the flare-out phase of landing, with the aircraft only feet away from the ground and still traveling at two hundred miles an hour . . ."

Leygraf thought for a moment. "You know, you could have something pretty fantastic on your hands if you could develop this material even further. Do you think you could step up the delay to the point where it was obvious?"

"That," Garrod replied, "is what I'm going to find out."

"Is this what you've been working on all these weeks?" Esther Garrod stared dubiously at the crystal rectangle which covered her husband's right hand. "It looks like an ordinary piece of glass."

"But it isn't." Garrod took a childish delight in prolonging the moment. "This is . . . *slow* glass." He tried to identify the expression on her neat, diamond-cut features, refusing to accept that it might be hostility.

"Slow glass. I wish I could understand what has happened to you, Alban. On the phone you said you were bringing me a piece of glass which was two million miles thick."

"But this glass *is* two million miles thick—as far as a ray of light is concerned." Garrod became aware he was using the wrong approach, but could not decide how to change his course. "Or, to put it another way, this piece of glass is almost eleven light-seconds thick."

Esther's lips moved silently and she turned away toward the window beyond which a single beech tree shone like a fire in the late sunlight.

"Look, Esther." Garrod spoke urgently. He held the crystal rectangle steady with his left hand and quickly took his right hand away from underneath it. Esther looked at his hand and screamed as she saw yet another right hand still framed in the glass.

"I'm sorry," Garrod said helplessly. "That was a stupid thing to do. I'd forgotten what it's like the first time."

Esther stared at the glass until the hand in it, moving with a life of its own, flicked to one side and ceased to exist. "What did you do?"

"Nothing, darling. I simply held my hand behind the glass until its image, the light being reflected from it, had passed through. This is a special kind of glass that light takes eleven seconds to pass through, so the image was still visible in it eleven seconds after my hand had been removed. There's nothing spooky about it."

Esther shook her head. "I don't like it."

Garrod felt the beginnings of a kind of desperation. "Esther, you're going to be the first woman in the history of the entire human race to see her own face as it really is. Look into the glass, please." He held the rectangular crystal before her.

"This is silly. I've looked in mirrors. . . ."

"It isn't silly—go along with it and see. The reason I said no woman had ever really seen her own face is that a mirror reverses left and right. If you had a mole on your left cheek, the woman you saw in the mirror would have a mole on her right cheek. But with slow glass . . ."

Garrod turned the glass, and Esther was looking into her own face. Her image persisted for eleven seconds, mouthing silently, until the light had made its way through the crystalline structure of the material—then it vanished. He waited for her to speak.

She smiled wanly. "Am I supposed to be impressed?"

"Frankly, yes."

"I'm sorry, Alban." She walked back to the window and stood gazing out at the descending vistas of lawns. Looking at the silhouette, Garrod noticed how her arms hung clear of her body, elbows slightly bent. He remembered from anthropology classes that this was normal differentiation from a male, whose arms would be expected

to hang straight, but to his imagination it made Esther's compact form seem assertive, tensed to exert her control. A cold white star of anger began to burn inside him.

"You're sorry," he snapped. "Well, I'm sorry too—sorry you haven't the vision to realize what this material is going to mean to us and the rest of the world when it's fully developed."

She turned to face him. "I didn't want to mention this tonight, when we're both tired, but as you have raised the point . . ."

"Go on."

"I was talking to Mawson in accounts last week and he told me you were scheduling research and development costs of over a million for your . . . slow glass." She gave him a sad smile. "You realize, of course, that it's too preposterous for words."

"I don't see why."

"I don't see why," she repeated scornfully. "Don't you see that no parlor trick is worth that kind of money?"

"I really am sorry for you, Esther."

"Don't be." Her voice grew rich and warm as she played the trump card which during their two years of marriage had often been selected but never laid on the table. "I'm afraid I just couldn't allow you to be so careless with Dad's money."

Garrod took a deep breath. He had dreaded this moment for days, yet now that it was here he felt a curious elation in acting out the little tableau. "Have you been talking to Mawson within the last two days?"

"No."

"I'll reprimand him on your behalf—he doesn't make the grade as a commercial spy."

Esther glanced up at him, suddenly wary. "What are you talking about?"

"Mawson should have informed you that I leased out a couple of subsidiary patents on Thermgard this week.

It was done in secret, of course, but he should have been on to it."

"Is that all? Listen, Alban, the fact that you have finally managed to earn a few dollars off your own bat doesn't . . ."

"Five million," Garrod said pleasantly.

"What?" The color had left Esther's face.

"Five million. I paid your father off this afternoon." Garrod watched his wife's jaw drop, and one part of his mind noted that the look of openmouthed, white-toothed astonishment made her look more beautiful than at any other time he could remember. "He looked almost as shocked as you do now."

"I'm not surprised at that." Esther, always good at infighting, altered her tack on the instant. "I don't understand how you managed to get five million out of a windshield material which is useless for windshields, but you did it by using Dad's money as a springboard—don't forget he let you have an unsecured loan at minimum interest. A gentleman would have offered him the chance . . ."

"To buy in solid? Sorry, Esther—Thermgard belongs to me. Alone."

"You'll get nowhere with it," she predicted. "You'll lose every cent."

"Think so?" Garrod walked to the window, held the rectangular crystal up to it, then strode quickly to the darkest corner of the room. When he turned to face her, Esther took a step backward and shielded her eyes. In his hands, blinding in its red-gold magnificence, Garrod held the setting sun.

SIDELIGHT ONE: Light of Other Days

Leaving the village behind, we followed the heady sweeps of the road up into a land of slow glass.

I had never seen one of the farms before and at first

found them slightly eerie—an effect heightened by imagination and circumstance. The car's turbine was pulling smoothly and quietly in the damp air so that we seemed to be carried over the convolutions of the road in a kind of supernatural silence. On our right the mountain sifted down into an incredibly perfect valley of timeless pine, and everywhere stood the great frames of slow glass, drinking light. An occasional flash of afternoon sunlight on their wind bracing created an illusion of movement, but in fact the frames were deserted. The rows of windows had been standing on the hillside for years, staring into the valley, and men only cleaned them in the middle of the night when their human presence would not matter to the thirsty glass.

They were fascinating, but Selina and I didn't mention the windows. I think we hated each other so much we both were reluctant to sully anything new by drawing it into the nexus of our emotions. The holiday, I had begun to realize, was a stupid idea in the first place. I had thought it would cure everything, but, of course, it didn't stop Selina being pregnant and, worse still, it didn't even stop her being angry about being pregnant.

Rationalizing our dismay over her condition, we had circulated the usual statements to the effect that we would have liked having children—but later on, at the proper time. Selina's pregnancy had cost us her well-paid job and with it the new house we had been negotiating and which was far beyond the reach of my income from poetry. But the real source of our annoyance was that we were face-to-face with the realization that people who say they want children later always mean they want children never. Our nerves were thrumming with the knowledge that we, who had thought ourselves so unique, had fallen into the same biological trap as every mindless rutting creature which ever existed.

The road took up along the southern slopes of Ben

Cruachan until we began to catch glimpses of the gray Atlantic far ahead. I had just cut our speed to absorb the view better when I noticed the sign spiked to a gatepost. It said: SLOW GLASS—QUALITY HIGH, PRICES LOW—J. R. HAGAN. On an impulse I stopped the car on the verge, wincing slightly as tough grasses whipped noisily at the bodywork.

"Why have we stopped?" Selina's near, smoke-silver head turned in surprise.

"Look at that sign. Let's go up and see what there is. The stuff might be reasonably priced out here."

Selina's voice was pitched high with scorn as she refused, but I was too taken with my idea to listen. I had an illogical conviction that doing something extravagant and crazy would set us right again.

"Come on," I said, "the exercise might do us some good. We've been driving too long anyway."

She shrugged in a way that hurt me and got out of the car. We walked up a path made of irregular, packed clay steps nosed with short lengths of sapling. The path curved through trees which clothed the edge of the hill and at its end we found a low farmhouse. Beyond the little stone building tall frames of slow glass gazed out toward the voice-stilling sight of Cruachan's ponderous descent toward the waters of Loch Linnhe. Most of the panes were perfectly transparent but a few were dark, like panels of polished ebony.

As we approached the house through a neat cobbled yard a tall middle-aged man in ash-colored tweeds arose and waved to us. He had been sitting on the low rubble wall which bounded the yard, smoking a pipe and staring toward the house. At the front window of the cottage a young woman in a tangerine dress stood with a small boy in her arms, but she turned disinterestedly and moved out of sight as we drew near.

"Mr. Hagan?" I guessed.

"Correct. Come to see some glass, have you? Well, you've come to the right place." Hagan spoke crisply with traces of the pure highland which sounds so much like Irish to the unaccustomed ear. He had one of those calmly dismayed faces one finds on elderly road-menders and philosophers.

"Yes," I said. "We're on holiday. We saw your sign."

Selina, who usually has a natural fluency with strangers, said nothing. She was looking toward the now empty window with what I thought was a slightly puzzled expression.

"Up from London, are you? Well, as I said, you've come to the right place—and at the right time too. My wife and I don't see many people this early in the season."

I laughed. "Does that mean we might be able to buy a little glass without mortgaging our home?"

"Look at that now," Hagan said, smiling helplessly. "I've thrown away any advantage I might have had in the transaction. Rose, that's my wife, says I never learn. Still, let's sit down and talk it over." He pointed at the rubble wall, then glanced doubtfully at Selina's immaculate skirt. "Wait till I fetch a rug from the house." Hagan limped quickly into the cottage, closing the door behind him.

"Perhaps it wasn't such a marvelous idea to come up here," I whispered to Selina, "but you might at least be pleasant to the man. I think I can smell a bargain."

"Some hope," she said with deliberate coarseness. "Surely even you must have noticed that ancient dress his wife is wearing? He won't give much away to strangers."

"Was that his wife?"

"Of course that was his wife."

"Well, well," I said, surprised. "Anyway, try to be civil with him. I don't want to be embarrassed."

Selina snorted, but she smiled whitely when Hagan

reappeared and I relaxed a little. Strange how a man can love a woman and yet at the same time pray for her to fall under a train.

Hagan spread a tartan blanket on the wall and we sat down, feeling slightly self-conscious at having been translated from our city-orientated lives into a rural tableau. On the distant slate of the Loch, beyond the watchful frames of slow glass, a slow-moving steamer drew a white line toward the south. The boisterous mountain air seemed almost to invade our lungs, giving us more oxygen than we required.

"Some of the glass farmers around here," Hagan began, "give strangers, such as yourselves, a sales talk about how beautiful the autumn is in this part of Argyll. Or it might be the spring, or the winter. I don't do that—any fool knows that a place which doesn't look right in summer never looks right. What do you say?"

I nodded compliantly.

"I want you just to take a good look out toward Mull, Mr. . . ."

"Garland."

". . . Garland. That's what you're buying if you buy my glass, and it never looks better than it does at this minute. The glass is in perfect phase, none of it is less than ten years thick—and a four-foot window will cost you two hundred pounds."

"*Two hundred!*" Selina was shocked. "That's as much as they charge at the Scenedow shop in Bond Street."

Hagan smiled patiently, then looked closely at me to see if I knew enough about slow glass to appreciate what he had been saying. His price had been much higher than I had hoped—but *ten years thick!* The cheap glass one found in places like the Vistaplex and Pane-o-rama stores usually consisted of a quarter of an inch of ordinary glass faced with a veneer of slow glass perhaps only ten or twelve months thick.

"You don't understand, darling," I said, already determined to buy. "This glass will last ten years and it's in phase."

"Doesn't that only mean it keeps time?"

Hagan smiled at her again, realizing he had no further necessity to bother with me. "Only, you say! Pardon me, Mrs. Garland, but you don't seem to appreciate the miracle, the genuine honest-to-goodness miracle, of engineering precision needed to produce a piece of glass in phase. When I say the glass is ten years thick it means it takes light ten years to pass through it. In effect, each one of those panes is the light-years thick—more than twice the distance to the nearest star—so a variation in actual thickness of only a millionth of an inch would . . ."

He stopped talking for a moment and sat quietly looking toward the house. I turned my head from the view of the Loch and saw the young woman standing at the window again. Hagan's eyes were filled with a kind of greedy reverence which made me feel uncomfortable and at the same time convinced me Selina had been wrong. In my experience husbands never looked at wives that way, at least, not at their own.

The girl remained in view for a few seconds, dress glowing warmly, then moved back into the room. Suddenly I received a distinct, though inexplicable, impression she was blind. My feeling was that Selina and I were perhaps blundering through an emotional interplay as violent as our own.

"I'm sorry," Hagan continued, "I thought Rose was going to call me for something. Now, where was I, Mrs. Garland? Ten light-years compressed into a quarter of an inch means . . ."

I ceased to listen, partly because I was already sold, partly because I had heard the story of slow glass many times before and had never yet understood the principles involved. An acquaintance with scientific training had

once tried to be helpful by telling me to visualize a pane of slow glass as a hologram which did not need coherent light from a laser for the reconstitution of its visual information, and in which every photon of ordinary light passed through a spiral tunnel coiled outside the radius of capture of each atom in the glass. This gem of, to me, incomprehensibility not only told me nothing, it convinced me once again that a mind as nontechnical as mine should concern itself less with causes than effects.

The most important effect, in the eyes of the average individual, was that light took a long time to pass through a sheet of slow glass. A new piece was always jet black because nothing had yet come through, but one could stand the glass beside, say, a woodland lake until the scene emerged, perhaps a year later. If the glass was then removed and installed in a dismal city flat, the flat would—for that year—appear to overlook the woodland lake. During the year it wouldn't be merely a very realistic but still picture—the water would ripple in sunlight, silent animals would come to drink, birds would cross the sky, night would follow day, season would follow season. Until one day, a year later, the beauty held in the subatomic pipelines would be exhausted and the familiar gray cityscape would reappear.

Apart from its stupendous novelty value, the commercial success of slow glass was founded on the fact that having a scenedow was the exact emotional equivalent of owning land. The meanest cave dweller could look out on misty parks—and who was to say they weren't his? A man who really owns tailored gardens and estates doesn't spend his time proving his ownership by crawling on his ground, feeling, smelling, tasting it. All he receives from the land are light patterns, and with scenedows those patterns could be taken into coal mines, submarines, prison cells.

On several occasions I have tried to write short pieces

about the enchanted crystal but, to me, the theme is so ineffably poetic as to be, paradoxically, beyond the reach of poetry—mine at any rate. Besides, the best songs and verse had already been written, with prescient inspiration, by men who had died long before slow glass was discovered. I had no hope of equaling, for example, Moore with his:

Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Oft in the stilly night,
Fond Memory brings the light,
Of other days around me . . .

It took only a few years for slow glass to develop from a scientific curiosity to a sizable industry. And much to the astonishment of we poets—those of us who remain convinced that beauty lives though lilies die—the trappings of that industry were no different from those of any other. There were good scenedows which cost a lot of money, and there were inferior scenedows which cost rather less. The thickness, measured in years, was an important factor in the cost but there was also the question of *actual* thickness, or phase.

Even with the most sophisticated engineering techniques available thickness control was something of a hit-and-miss affair. A coarse discrepancy could mean that a pane intended to be five years thick might be five and a half, so that light which entered in summer emerged in winter; a fine discrepancy could mean that noon sunshine emerged at midnight. These incompatibilities had their peculiar charm—many night workers, for example, liked having their own private time zones—but, in general, it cost more to buy scenedows which kept closely in step with real time.

Selina still looked unconvinced when Hagan had finished speaking. She shook her head almost imperceptibly

and I knew he had been using the wrong approach. Quite suddenly the pewter helmet of her hair was disturbed by a cool gust of wind, and huge clean tumbling drops of rain began to spang round us from an almost cloudless sky.

"I'll give you a check now," I said abruptly, and saw Selina's green eyes triangulate angrily on my face. "You can arrange delivery?"

"Aye, delivery's no problem," Hagan said, getting to his feet. "But wouldn't you rather take the glass with you?"

"Well, yes—if you don't mind." I was shamed by his readiness to trust my scrip.

"I'll unclip a pane for you. Wait here. It won't take long to slip it into a carrying frame." Hagan limped down the slope toward the seriate windows, through some of which the view toward Linnhe was sunny, while others were cloudy and a few pure black.

Selina drew the collar of her blouse closed at her throat. "The least he could have done was invite us inside. There can't be so many fools passing through that he can afford to neglect them."

I tried to ignore the insult and concentrated on writing the check. One of the outsize drops broke across my knuckles, splattering the pink paper.

"All right," I said, "let's move in under the eaves till he gets back." *You bitch,* I thought as I felt the whole thing go completely wrong. *I just had to be a fool to marry you. A prize fool, a fool's fool—and now that you've trapped part of me inside you I'll never ever, never ever,* never ever *get away.*

Feeling my stomach clench itself painfully, I ran behind Selina to the side of the cottage. Beyond the window the neat living room, with its coal fire, was empty but the child's toys were scattered on the floor. Alphabet blocks and a wheelbarrow the exact color of freshly

pared carrots. As I stared in, the boy came running from the other room and began kicking the blocks. He didn't notice me. A few moments later the young woman entered the room and lifted him, laughing easily and wholeheartedly as she swung the boy under her arm. She came to the window as she had done earlier. I smiled self-consciously, but neither she nor the child responded.

My forehead prickled icily. *Could they both be blind?* I sidled away.

Selina gave a little scream and I spun toward her.

"The rug!" she said. "It's getting soaked."

She ran across the yard in the rain, snatched the reddish square from the dappling wall and ran back, toward the cottage door. Something heaved convulsively in my subconscious.

"Selina," I shouted. "Don't open it!"

But it was too late. She had pushed open the latched wooden door and was standing, hand over mouth, looking into the cottage. I moved close to her and took the rug from her unresisting fingers.

As I was closing the door I let my eyes traverse the cottage's interior. The neat living room in which I had just seen the woman and child was, in reality, a sickening clutter of shabby furniture, old newspapers, cast-off clothing and smeared dishes. It was damp, stinking and utterly deserted. The only object I recognized from my view through the window was the little wheelbarrow, paintless and broken.

I latched the door firmly and ordered myself to forget what I had seen. Some men who live alone are good housekeepers; others just don't know how.

Selina's face was white. "I don't understand. I don't understand it."

"Slow glass works both ways," I said gently. "Light passes out of a house, as well as in."

"You mean . . . ?"

"I don't know. It isn't our business. Now steady up—Hagan's coming back with our glass." The churning in my stomach was beginning to subside.

Hagan came into the yard carrying an oblong, plastic-covered frame. I held the check out to him, but he was staring at Selina's face. He seemed to know immediately that our uncomprehending fingers had rummaged through his soul. Selina avoided his gaze. She was old and ill-looking, and her eyes stared determinedly toward the nearing horizon.

"I'll take the rug from you, Mr. Garland," Hagan finally said. "You shouldn't have troubled yourself over it."

"No trouble. Here's the check."

"Thank you." He was still looking at Selina with a strange kind of supplication. "It's been a pleasure to do business with you."

"The pleasure was mine," I said with equal, senseless formality. I picked up the heavy frame and guided Selina toward the path which led to the road. Just as we reached the head of the now slippery steps Hagan spoke again.

"Mr. Garland!"

I turned unwillingly.

"It wasn't my fault," he said steadily. "A hit-and-run driver got them both, down on the Oban road six years ago. My boy was only seven when it happened. I'm entitled to keep something."

I nodded wordlessly and moved down the path, holding my wife close to me, treasuring the feel of her arms locked around me. At the bend I looked back through the rain and saw Hagan sitting with squared shoulders on the wall where we had first seen him.

He was looking at the house, but I was unable to tell if there was anyone at the window.

CHAPTER 3

On the morning of his eleventh wedding anniversary Garrod had an important appointment scheduled at the Pentagon. He wanted to be at his fittest for it, and so decided to fly to Washington on the previous evening. Esther made some perfunctory objections about his appearing to snub people she had invited for dinner, but he was ready for her and dealt with them easily. His private transport took off from Portston at 19:00 hours, went supersonic a few minutes later and leveled out at a height of ten miles for the ninety minute flight east.

The missile-like climb to cruising altitude never failed to exhilarate Garrod—he had once calculated that if someone flying over the airfield at fifty thousand feet dropped a rock, Garrod's own jet could take off at the same instant and be up with the intruder before the rock hit the ground. He undid the seat belt, looked out through the windows of certified zero-delay Thermgard at the sunlit cloud-kingdoms far below, and wondered what he should do about Esther.

Nine years had passed since he turned the tables on her with his abrupt metamorphosis from the unsuccessful engineer/chemist whose business would have failed without a transfusion of Livingstone money to the independent billionaire who could buy and sell her entire family. Those years had been immensely satisfying for Garrod on almost every level he could think of, yet—incredibly—he remembered the previous two years of marriage with a certain nostalgia.

The relationship with Esther had been seriously flawed by her need to treat him as property, but it had been a reality of existence. There had been a tight hard bond which, with its very constriction, had in an odd way compensated for his own inability to experience real love or possessiveness or jealousy—the things Esther had demanded from him. Now, of course, she demanded nothing. It appeared that some deep sense of insecurity prevented her from entering a relationship unless she had all the big battalions on her side, ready to deal with unforeseen developments. Since he had achieved financial independence his wife and he had been like components of a binary sun—linked together, influencing each other's movements, but never making contact. Garrod had considered a divorce, but neither the disadvantages of his present existence nor the appeal of another had been powerful enough to prompt him to act.

As usual, the effort of trying to think constructively about his emotional life or lack of it brought a weary impatience. He opened his briefcase to do some preparatory work for the morning meeting and hesitated when he saw the confidential files, each carrying a red sticker which said.

SECRET! THIS FILE MAY BE OPENED ONLY IN APPROVED ENVIRONMENTS, ZERO LIGHT

CONDITIONS OR UNDER COVER OF A CERTIFIED SECURITY CLOAK TYPE U.S. 183.

Garrod hesitated for a moment. His security cloak was neatly rolled up in its proper compartment in the case, but the thought of unfurling its beehive shape and putting on the supporting headband with its tiny light was suddenly irksome. He looked around the interior of the aircraft wondering if it would be safe to work in the open, then realized he was deceiving himself by even trying to detect a glass eye. Slow glass—now officially named Retardite—had replaced cameras for all spying activities. Agents had been known to operate successfully with little rods of it inserted into their pores like blackheads. On returning to his base the agent had only to squeeze out the fleck of glass which under magnification would subsequently redisplay everything it had "seen" during its delay period. Anybody, even Garrod's personal pilot, could have pushed a needle of slow glass into the fabric trimming the ceiling of the cabin and he would have no hope of finding it. Closing the briefcase, he decided to get some rest.

"I'm going to have a sleep, Lou," he said into the intercom. "Call me fifteen minutes before touchdown. All right?"

"Right, Mr. Garrod."

Garrod fully reclined his seat and closed his eyes, not really expecting to sleep, but the next thing of which he was aware was the pilot's announcement that they were arriving. He went into the washroom and freshened up quickly. In the mirror his square, almost fleshless face had a rueful look, acknowledging that his compulsion to wash his hands and face before meeting people was a legacy from a childhood spent with—to put it kindly—a highly individual aunt and uncle. Uncle Luke's incredible fear of spending even the smallest sums of money had

left certain marks on Garrod, but Aunt Marge had been the one who created the most lasting impressions. She had been a school teacher and her phobias about dirt and germs were so morbid that when she dropped a pencil she never touched it again—one of the pupils had to pick it up, snap it in two and throw the pieces into a wastebin. Also, she never touched a door knob with her bare hands, and when the handle was of a type which could not be worked by her elbow she would wait for quite long periods for someone to arrive by chance and open it. From her Garrod had acquired a certain fastidiousness, and even in adult life still felt compelled to wash his hands *before* urinating to prevent the transference of germs onto his person.

He was strapped into his seat again before the little jet dropped solidly onto the runway at Washington. The night felt cool and fresh as he was walking down the airstair. He had an unusual urge to go for a plain old-fashioned walk, but a limousine was waiting at the steps as arranged by his secretarial staff and he decided against upsetting the schedule. In a further thirty minutes he was at his hotel and had checked into his suite. He had planned to go to bed early but the rest on the airplane, coupled with the fact that he had gained time on the supersonic eastbound flight, made the idea of retiring seem faintly ludicrous.

Irritated at his inability to relax, he opened his briefcase, took out the security cloak and put it on. Sitting on a chair at the center of the black beehive he began to go over his files by the glow of the lamp attached to his forehead. The paperwork was perversely unmanageable in the cramped confines—some of it being minutes of a previous meeting taken down in SpeedBraille but which he had omitted to have transcribed into normal text. The subject was the provision of a series of Retardite disks of varying delay periods for a proposed system of stra-

tegic survey satellites, and there was much technical argument about delay increments and the eventual desirability of building numerous short-term disks into a long-delay composite which might be recalled to Earth for splitting at any desired point.

Garrod sat for perhaps an hour, running his fingers over the embossed SpeedBraille characters, hoping his meeting in the morning would be in one of the Pentagon's up-to-date "approved environment" rooms. The last two had been in the older zero-light rooms and had seemed like black eternities of unseen voices, rustling papers and the urgent clicking of Braille shorthand machines. One of Garrod's private nightmares was that somebody would invent a sound recording device as efficient and ubiquitous as Retardite was for light, in which case confidential meetings might have to be held not only in darkness but in utter silence.

He had begun to consider putting his notes away again when the wall viewphone chimed. Glad to escape from underneath the cloak, he closed his case, went to the screen and pressed the answer button. The image of a black-haired girl appeared before him. She was gray-eyed, with a pale oval face and lips that were painted silver. Her face was one that Garrod might have seen in a dream, just once, a long time ago. He stared at her for a still moment trying to analyze the emotion he was experiencing, but could identify only one component—he felt *privileged* just to be looking at her. It came to him that a man could accept a woman as being beautiful, perhaps for years, a lifetime, because he had never met his personal ideal and therefore was adopting the standards of others. But if he ever did encounter his own ultimate, then everything had to change and no other woman could any longer be considered as perfect. This girl had the wide-mouthed sensuality of a comic strip heroine,

modified by a hint of Oriental subtlety and perhaps cruelty, and . . .

"Mr. Garrot?" Her voice was pleasant but unremarkable. "I'm sorry to disturb you at this late hour."

"You aren't disturbing me," Garrot said. *At least,* he thought, *not in the way you mean.*

"My name is Jane Wason. I work for the Department of Defense."

"I've never seen you there."

She smiled, showing very regular, very white teeth. "I work in the background, on the secretarial staff."

"Oh? Well, what brought you into the foreground?"

"I called your Portston office and they told me I'd reach you at this number. Colonel Mannheim sends his apologies, but he will not be able to meet you in the morning."

"That's too bad." Garrod tried to sound disappointed. "Would you consider having dinner with me this evening?"

Apart from a slight widening of her eyes, the girl ignored his question. "The colonel had to fly to New York this evening, but he'll be back in the morning. Could you postpone your meeting with him until three o'clock?"

"I could—but it means spending the morning alone in Washington. Will you have lunch with me?"

A tinge of color appeared in Jane Wason's cheeks. "At three o'clock, then."

"Wouldn't that be too late for lunch? That's when I'm meeting the colonel."

"I was simply confirming your new appointment with Colonel Mannheim," she said firmly. A second later the screen went blank.

"You fouled that one up beautifully," Garrod said aloud, puzzled about what had happened to him. Even as a teenager he had known he was not the type to bring off an instant pickup with success, yet the girl had upset his judgment. He had been convinced she would respond

to him as he had to her, and now—he had to admit it—he was bitterly disappointed. Disappointed because a strange girl with silver lips had not looked at him and developed a "Some Enchanted Evening" syndrome. Across a crowded viewphone channel. Shaking his head in wonderment, he went into the bathroom to take a shower before dinner. He was unbuttoning his pants when his gaze fell on a notice beside the shower.

The management has taken every possible precaution to ensure that no objects made of Retardite, Spyglass, or any similar substance have been left in the rooms, but patrons who wish to have zero light conditions will find green masterswitches in convenient locations.

Garrod had heard about this trend developing in larger cities but this was the first occasion on which he had ever encountered evidence of a public reaction against slow glass. He shrugged, found a green pull-switch beside the shower and jerked the tasseled string. The room was plunged into a darkness which was complete except for a faint luminosity from the tassel. Taking a shower in these conditions, he decided, would be like drowning. Putting on the light again, he finished undressing, stepped into the shower cubicle and at once noticed a small black shiny object lying in one corner. He picked it up and examined it closely. It looked like a bead or part of a button which had fallen from a woman's dress, but something prompted him to drop it carefully into the cubicle's outlet pipe.

CHAPTER 4

The meeting, much to Garrod's relief, was short and took place in one of the newer "approved environment" rooms which the Pentagon regarded as having been sufficiently proofed against glass eyes as to be suitable for important conferences. In practice, this meant that the walls, floor and ceiling had been sprayed with quick-setting plastic under official supervision minutes before the meeting. The treatment was also applied to the table and chairs, giving them an appearance reminiscent of nursery furniture. A thick, buttery smell of fresh plastic had pervaded the entire meeting. When it was over Garrod lingered at the door and intercepted Colonel Mannheim as casually as possible, but with an unwarranted pounding in his chest.

"Nice idea that," he said, glancing around the gleaming walls, "but there's one drawback, John. The room's bound to be getting smaller and smaller. Someday it'll disappear altogether."

"So what's wrong with that?" Mannheim, a well-pre-

served man in his fifties had clear eyes and a ruddy skin which suggested he liked open-air activities. "Aren't there too many rooms in this damned place?"

"That's the impression I get. Give me a small efficient setup every . . ." Garrod put on what he hoped was a convincing look of astonishment. "Say! Do you know something? I've never visited your Retardite Applications Group in . . . in . . ."

"Macon, Georgia."

"That's it."

Mannheim looked doubtful. "I've just come from there, Al, and I'm not scheduled to go back for a week or more."

"Too bad—I've got the rest of the day free, but I have to be back in Portston in the morning."

"Of course . . ." Mannheim paused for what seemed an eternity to Garrod. "I don't actually have to *be* there with you, though there are one or two Retardite tricks I'd like to have shown you in person—after all, you invented the stuff."

"Discovered might be a better word," Garrod said. "As you say, you don't have to take time off to go with me. Why not just hand me over to a science officer? I really would like to look around your organization there." Garrod wondered if he was sounding too anxious.

"I tell you what! I'll let young Chris Zitron look after you. He's the chief development officer and he'll get a real kick out of meeting you. Let's go to a viewphone."

While Mannheim was making the call to the Macon research center Garrod stood directly behind him and kept an eye on the screen. Three female staff members appeared briefly as the visit was arranged, but none of them was Jane Wason. Garrod's disappointment was mingled with a sense of shock as he realized what he was doing. His actions were remarkably similar to those of other men he had seen when they were completely bowled over by a woman, but he could feel nothing of

the mystic elation which was supposed to accompany the experience. There was only a dogged, uncomfortable determination to see the girl in person.

When the arrangements were completed and Mannheim had hurried away, he went into the viewer booth, contacted his pilot at Dulles and told him to file a new flight plan to Macon. He went up to the roof and caught a special DoD helijet flight to the airport, but the airspace above Dulles was more than usually congested and it was past four o'clock when his jet blasted its way up through the haze. There was no guarantee that he would be at the Macon base before the clerical staff quit for the day—in which case the whole trip was pointless.

Garrod lifted the intercom. "I'm in a hurry, Lou. Open her up. Top speed."

"We have to fly at twenty thousand feet in this corridor, Mr. Garrod. The boom reflectors aren't too effective at that height, though."

"I don't care."

"The FAA will come down on us, and there's bound to be other flights in the same . . ."

"It's my responsibility, Lou. Start burning." Garrod sat back and allowed himself to be driven into the seat by acceleration as the compact jet went supersonic, riding rock-steady on the reflector wing which dispersed most of its shockwave upward toward the stratosphere. The six hundred mile flight lasted thirty-two minutes from takeoff to touchdown, and he was leaving the aircraft almost before it had stopped rolling.

"The FAA computer complex was interrogating us most of the way, Mr. Garrod." Lou Nash's red-bearded face registered his disapproval as he called after Garrod from the exit hatch. "They had to clear two scheduled freight flights out of our path."

"Relax, Lou, I'll fix it." One part of Garrod's mind told him he had committed a fairly serious traffic offense

which might not be easy to square, even for a man in his position, but the rest of him was incapable of caring. *Is this what it's like?* he wondered feverishly as he walked toward the Army transport which was coming out to meet him from a cluster of low, sand-colored buildings. *If it is, I was better off before.*

Lieutenant Colonel Chris Zitron turned out to be a youngish man with a thin face, an intense way of speaking and long, knobbly-fingered hands. Without any preamble he began talking about his work on slow glass applications, going into fine detail on dual image systems —one transmitted through ordinary glass, the other through short-term Retardite—used for target speed computers, air-to-ground missile guidance, and terrain clearance systems for high-speed low-altitude aircraft. Garrod allowed the torrent of words to flow around him while he occasionally asked a question to show that his attention was not wandering, but he kept scanning the glass-screened administration offices. Each time he glimpsed a black-haired secretary he felt a surge of panic which turned to disappointment as the face proved to be the wrong one. He felt a dull sense of astonishment that a girl who had registered in his mind as unique could be resembled by so many other girls.

"I don't know how John Mannheim manages to keep track of all three different projects," he said during one of Zitron's infrequent silences. "Has he a permanent office right here in the research complex?"

"No. The colonel operates out of Admin One. Over there." Zitron pointed through a window toward a two-story block, the windows of which glowed like copper in the dying sunlight. Garrod examined the building and saw men and women emerging in a steady stream from the front entrance. Cars glinted brightly, like beetles' shells, as they began to move out of the parking lot.

"What's the quitting time around here? I hope I'm not keeping you late."

Zitron laughed. "I usually work till my wife sends out search parties, but most sections go at five-fifteen."

Garrod looked at his watch. The time was five-fifteen. "You know, I'm becoming more and more interested in the impact that a good clean administrative setup has on the ultimate efficiency of a research and development unit. Do you mind if we walk over to the offices?"

"Not at all." Zitron looked faintly puzzled as he led the way out of the laboratory they were in. Garrod fought to make himself walk at the same casual speed as he saw a black-haired girl in an oatmeal-colored suit come out of the main building. Was it Jane Wason? In spite of himself, he began to forge ahead of the other man.

"Hold on there, Mr. Garrod," Zitron yelped suddenly. "What am I doing?"

"I'm sorry."

"I almost let you walk off without seeing the purest application of the lot. Step through here a moment." Zitron held open a door leading into a long prefabricated building.

Garrod glanced toward the administration block. The girl was in the parking lot, only her dark head visible above the cars. "I'm running a bit short of . . ."

"You'll appreciate this, Mr. Garrod. We've gone right back to basic principles on this one." He caught Garrod's arm and walked him into the building which was little more than four walls with a roof made entirely of glass. In place of a floor it had a stretch of glass, with occasional shrubs and artificial-looking boulders toward the far end. The building was deserted but as he looked along it Garrod had an uneasy sense of something wrong, of being observed.

"Now watch this," Zitron said. "Keep watching me." He hurried away down one side of the building and at

the other end disappeared into the shrubs. There was silence in the too-hot enclosure except for the distant sound of car doors slamming. A full minute dragged by with no further sign of Zitron and impatience began to pound in Garrod's temples. He half-turned toward the door but froze as the grass nearby—where there was no visible agency—emitted a rustling sound. Suddenly Zitron appeared out of thin air a few paces away, with a triumphant grin.

"That was a demonstration of CAT—Covert Advance Technique," he said. "What did you think of it?"

"Excellent." Garrod opened the outer door. "Really effective."

"In this experimental setup we use very short delay Retardite panels—you will see me sneaking up on you at any moment." Zitron pointed along the hall where occasional touches of reflected light now betrayed to Garrod's eyes the presence of slow glass panels standing upright in the grass. A duplicate of Zitron was seen making a supernaturally silent zigzag approach before vanishing from the nearest panel.

"Of course," Zitron continued, "in the field we would use longer delay panels to give infantry slightly more time to set up the CAT screen. One of the things we're trying to determine is the maximum useful delay—make it too short and the men have no time to consolidate; make it too long and an observer has a better chance of detecting disparities in light strength and shadow angles. Another problem is the selection of the best curve geometry for the panels, to cut down reflection. . . ."

"Pardon me a moment," Garrod said. "I think I see somebody I know."

He walked away toward the parking lot beside the administrative building, moving as quickly and determinedly as possible to discourage Zitron from following. The girl in the oatmeal suit was standing at the exit,

looking in his direction. She was slim, black-haired and —as the distance between them narrowed—he saw the sheen of silver on her lips. A tight breathless feeling developed in Garrod's chest as he accepted that he was looking at Jane Wason.

"Hi, there!" He tried to sound breezy and unconcerned. "Remember me?"

She looked at him doubtfully. "Mr. Garrod?"

"Yes. I'm here on a business trip and I thought I recognized you coming out of Colonel Mannheim's office. Look, I was being very presumptuous when we spoke on the viewphone last night, and I just wanted to apologize. I don't usually . . ." Garrod abruptly ran out of words, leaving himself helpless and vulnerable, but he saw the tinges of color rising in her cheeks, and he knew he had made contact with her on a level far removed from anything covered by what he had said.

"It's all right," she said quietly. "There was no need . . ."

"But there was." He was looking at her with gratitude, allowing the image of her to expand through his vision, when a pale blue Pontiac swished up to the curb beside them. The driver, a cool-looking lieutenant in gold-rimmed glasses, was lowering his window before the car came to a halt.

"Let's go, Jane," he said crisply. "We're late."

The passenger door swung open and Jane, looking flustered, got in. Her lips moved silently. She looked out at Garrod as the car whisked her away and it seemed to him that her eyes were troubled, regretful. Or was she simply being apologetic for the suddenness of her departure?

Swearing bitterly under his breath, Garrod walked back to face Lieutenant Colonel Zitron.

SIDELIGHT TWO: Burden of Proof

Harpur peered uncertainly through the streaming windows of his car. There had been no parking space close

to the police headquarters, and now the building seemed separated from him by miles of puddled concrete and parading curtains of rain. The sky sagged darkly and heavily between the buildings around the square.

Suddenly aware of his age, he stared for a long moment at the old police block and its cascading gutters, before levering himself stiffly out of the driving seat. It was difficult to believe the sun was shining warmly in a basement room under the west wing. Yet he knew it was, because he had phoned and asked about it before leaving home.

"It's real nice down here today, Judge," the guard had said, speaking with the respectful familiarity he had developed over the years. "Not so good outside, of course, but down here it's real nice."

"Have any reporters shown up yet?"

"Just a few so far, Judge. You coming over?"

"I expect so," Harpur had replied. "Save a seat for me, Sam."

"Yes, *sir!*"

Harpur moved as quickly as he dared, feeling the cool rain penetrate to the backs of his hands in his showerproof's pockets. The lining clung round the knuckles when he moved his fingers. As he climbed the steps to the front entrance a preliminary flutter in the left side of his chest told him he had hurried too much, pushed things too far.

The officer at the door saluted smartly.

Harpur nodded to him. "Hard to believe this is June, isn't it, Ben?"

"Sure is, sir. I hear it's nice down below, though."

Harpur waved to the guard, and was moving along the corridor when the pain closed with him. It was very clean, very pure. As though someone had carefully chosen a sterile needle, fitted it into an antiseptic handle, heated it to whiteness and—with the swiftness of compassion—

run it into his side. He stopped for a moment and leaned on the tiled wall, trying not to be conspicuous, while perspiration pricked out on his forehead. *I can't give up now,* he thought, *not when there's only another couple of weeks to go. . . . But, supposing this is it? Right now!*

Harpur fought the panic, until the entity that was his pain withdrew a short distance. He drew a shuddering breath of relief and began to walk again, slowly, aware that his enemy was watching and following. But he reached the sunshine without any further attacks.

Sam Macnamara, the guard at the inner door, started to give his usual grin and then, seeing the strain on Harpur's face, ushered him quickly into the room. Macnamara was a tall Irishman whose only ambition seemed to be to drink two cups of coffee every hour on the hour, but they had developed a friendship which Harpur found strangely comforting. He shook out a fold-up chair at the back of the room and held it steady while Harpur sat down.

"Thank you, Sam," Harpur said gratefully, glancing around at the unfamiliar crowd, none of whom had noticed his arrival. They were all staring toward the sunlight.

The smell of the rain-damp clothing worn by the reporters seemed strangely out of place in the dusty, underground room. It was part of the oldest wing of the police headquarters and, until five years before, had been used to store obsolete records. Since then, except on special press days, its bare concrete walls had housed nothing but a bank of monitoring equipment, two very bored guards, and a pane of glass mounted in a frame at one end of the room.

The glass was of the very special variety through which light took many years to pass. It was the sort people used to capture scenes of exceptional beauty for their homes.

To Harpur's eyes, the view through this piece of slow

glass had no particular beauty. It showed a reasonably pretty bay on the Atlantic coast, but the water was cluttered with sports boats, and a garishly-painted service station obtruded in the foreground. A connoisseur of slow glass would have thrown a rock through it, but Emile Bennett, the original owner, had brought it to the city simply because it contained the view from his childhood home. Having it available, he had explained, saved him a two hundred mile drive any time he felt homesick.

The sheet of glass Bennett had used was five years thick, which meant that it had had to stand for five years at his parents' home before the view from there came through. It continued, of course, to transmit the same view for five years after being brought back to the city, regardless of the fact that it had been confiscated from Bennett by impatient police officers who had a profound disinterest in his parental home. It would report, without fail, everything it ever saw—but only in its own good time.

Slumped tiredly in his seat, Harpur was reminded of the last time he had been to a movie. The only light in the room was that coming from the oblong pane of glass, and the reporters sat fidgeting in orderly rows like a movie audience. Harpur found their presence distracting. It prevented him from slipping into the past as easily as usual.

The shifting waters of the bay scattered sunlight through the otherwise dismal room, the little boats crossed and recrossed, and silent cars occasionally slid into the service station. An attractive girl in the extremely abbreviated dress of a decade ago walked across a garden in the foreground, and Harpur saw several of the reporters jot some personal angle material in their notebooks.

One of the more inquisitive left his seat and walked round behind the pane of glass to see the view from the

other side, but came back looking disappointed. Harpur knew a sheet of metal had been welded into the frame at the back, completely covering the glass. The county had ruled that it would have been an invasion of the senior Bennetts' privacy to put on public view all their domestic activities during the time the glass was being charged.

As the minutes began to drag out in the choking atmosphere of the room, the reporters grew noticeably restless, and began loudly swapping yarns. Somewhere near the front, one of them began sneezing monotonously and swearing in between. No smoking was permitted near the monitoring equipment which, on behalf of the state, hungrily scanned the glass, so relays of three and four began to drift out into the corridor to light cigarettes. Harpur heard them complaining about the long wait and he smiled. He had been waiting for five years, and it seemed even longer.

Today, June 7th, was one of the key days for which he and the rest of the country had been standing by, but it had been impossible to let the press know in advance the exact moment at which they would get their story. The trouble was that Emile Bennett had never been able to remember just what time, on that hot Sunday, he had driven to his parents' home to collect his sheet of slow glass. During the subsequent trial it had not been possible to pin it down to anything more definite than "about three in the afternoon."

One of the reporters finally noticed Harpur sitting near the door and came over to him. He was sharply dressed, fair-haired and impossibly young-looking.

"Pardon me, sir. Aren't you Judge Harpur?"

Harpur nodded. The boy's eyes widened briefly, then narrowed as he assessed the older man's present news value.

"Weren't you the presiding judge in the . . . Raddall

case?" He had been going to say the "Glass Eye" case, but immediately changed his mind.

Harpur nodded again. "Yes, that's correct. But I no longer give interviews to the press. I'm sorry."

"That's all right, sir. I understand." He went on out to the corridor, walking with quicker, springier steps. Harpur guessed the young man had just decided on his angle for today's story. He could have written the copy himself:

Today Judge Kenneth Harpur—the man who five years ago presided in the controversial "Glass Eye" case, in which twenty-one-year-old Ewan Raddall was charged with a double slaying—sat on a chair in one of the underground rooms at police headquarters. An old man now, the Iron Judge has nothing at all to say. He only watches, waits, and wonders. . . .

Harpur smiled wryly. He no longer felt any bitterness over the newspaper attacks. The only reason he had stopped speaking to journalists was that he had become very, very bored with that aspect of his life. He had reached the age at which a man discards the unimportant stuff and concentrates on essentials. In another two weeks he would be free to sit in the sun and note *exactly* how many shades of blue and green there were in the sea, and just how much time elapsed between the appearance of the first evening star and the second. If his physician allowed it, he would have a little good whisky, and if his physician refused it, he would still have the whisky. He would read a few books, and perhaps even write one. . . .

As it turned out, the estimated time given by Bennett at the trial had been pretty accurate.

At eight minutes past three Harpur and the waiting newsmen saw Bennett approach the glass from the far side with a screwdriver in his hand. He was wearing the

sheepish look people often have when they get in range of slow glass. He worked at the sides for a moment, then the sky flashed crazily into view, showing the glass had been tilted out of its frame. A moment later the room went dark as the image of a brown, army-type blanket unfolded across the glass, blotting out the laggard light.

The monitors at the back of the room produced several faint clicking noises which were drowned out by the sound of the reporters hurrying to telephones.

Harpur got to his feet and slowly walked out behind the reporters. There was no need to hurry now. Police records showed that the glass would remain blanked out for two days, because that was how long it had lain in the trunk of Bennett's car before he had got round to installing it in a window frame at the back of his city home. For a further two weeks after that it would show the casual day-to-day events which took place five years before in the children's public playground at the rear of the Bennett house.

Those events were of no particular interest to anyone; but the records also showed that in the same playground, on the night of June 21, 1986, a twenty-year-old typist, Joan Calderisi, had been raped and murdered. Her boy friend, a twenty-three-year-old auto mechanic named Edward Jerome Hattie, had also been killed, presumably for trying to defend the girl.

Unknown to the murderer, there had been one witness to the double-killing—and now it was getting ready to give its perfect and incontrovertible evidence.

The problem had not been difficult to foresee.

Right from the day slow glass first appeared in a few very expensive stores, people had wondered what would happen if a crime were to be committed in its view. What would be the legal position if there were, say, three suspects and it was known that, five or ten years later, a piece of glass would identify the murderer beyond all

doubt? Obviously, the law could not risk punishing the wrong person; but, equally obviously, the guilty one could not be allowed to go free all that time.

This was how tabloid feature writers had summed it up, although to Judge Kenneth Harpur there had been no problem at all. When he read the speculations it took him less than five seconds to make up his mind—and he had been impressively unruffled when the test case came his way.

That part had been a coincidence. Erskine County had no more homicides and no more slow glass than any other comparable area. In fact, Harpur had no recollection of ever seeing the stuff until Holt City's electrical street-lighting system was suddenly replaced by alternating panels of eight-hour glass and sixteen-hour glass slung in continuous lines above the thoroughfares. That was several years after techniques had been developed for the mass production of slow glass, or—as it was officially known—Retardite.

It had taken some time for a Retardite capable of producing delays measured in years to evolve from the first sheets which held light back by roughly half a second. The original material was developed by a glass manufacturer trying to produce a transparency which was both shatterproof and a really efficient insulator. Its unique properties might never have been noticed but for the fact that it was first used—unfortunately for a number of people—in automobile windshields.

The auto manufacturer concerned spent upward of half a million dollars trying to find out why one batch of one model had been involved in a statistically improbable number of accidents involving left-hand turns. Expensive as the investigation was, it paid off because Retardite became a major industry in a matter of months.

"Scene-stealing" was one of the prime applications, and slow glass farms sprang up at beauty spots all over

the world. A large part of the commercial success of slow glass lay in the fact that there was absolutely no difference, emotionally, between owning a "scenedow" and owning the land which had charged it with light. The occupant of the most airless, glove-tight duplex in a city could look out on pine-clad valleys—and in very important respect they were *his.*

It was also discovered that, for many applications, cameras had become obsolete. All planetary expeditions, manned or robotic, carried practically weightless Retardite slivers of appropriate periods. In any cinematic field, from industrial recording to bird watching, where large footages had normally been wasted while waiting for an unpredictable key event, short-period slow glass was used instead. The cameras were turned on it—with comfortable hindsight—at the right moment. Spy cameras became tiny flecks of glass which operatives had been known to push into their pores, like blackheads.

But no matter how varied the purpose, all slow glass applications had one thing in common. The user had to be absolutely certain of the time delay he wanted—because there was no way of speeding the process up. Had Retardite been a "glass" in the true sense of the word, it might have been possible to plane a piece down to a different thickness and get the information sooner; but, in reality, it was an extremely opaque material. Opaque in the sense that light never actually got *into* it.

Radiations with wavelengths in the order of that of light were absorbed on the face of a Retardite panel and their information converted to stress patterns within the material. The piezoluctic effect by which the information worked its way through to the opposite face involved the whole crystalline structure, and anything which disturbed that structure instantaneously randomized the stress patterns.

Infuriating as the discovery was to certain researchers,

it had been an important factor in the commercial success of Retardite. People would have been reluctant to install scenedows in their homes, knowing that everything they had done behind them was being stored for other eyes to see years later. So the burgeoning piezoluctics industry had been quick to invent an inexpensive "tickler" by which any piece of slow glass could be cleaned off for reuse, like a cluttered computer program.

This was also the reason why, for five years, two guards had been on a round-the-clock watch of the scenedow which held the evidence in the Raddall case. There was always the chance that one of Raddall's relatives, or some publicity-seeking screwball, would sneak in and wipe the slate clean before its time came to resolve all doubts.

There had been moments during the ten years when Harpur had been too ill and tired to care very much, times when it would have been a relief to have the perfect witness silenced forever. But usually the existence of the slow glass did not bother him.

He had made his ruling in the Raddall case, and it had been a decision he would have expected any other judge to make. The subsequent controversy, the enmity of sections of the press, the public, and even some of his colleagues had hurt at first, but he had got over that.

The Law, Harpur had said in his summing up, existed solely because people believed in it. Let that belief be shaken—even once—and the Law would suffer irreparable harm.

As near as could be determined, the killings had taken place about an hour before midnight.

Keeping that in mind, Harpur ate dinner early, then showered and shaved for the second time that day. The effort represented a sizable proportion of his energy quota for the day, but it had been hot and sticky in the

courtroom. His current case was involved and, at the same time, boring. More and more cases were like that lately, he realized. It was a sign he was ready to retire, but there was one more duty to perform—he owed that much to the profession.

Harpur put on a lightweight jacket and stood with his back to the valet-mirror which his wife had bought a few months earlier. It was faced with a sheet of fifteen-second retardite which allowed him, after a slight pause, to turn around and check his appearance from the back. He surveyed his frail, but upright, figure dispassionately, then walked away before the stranger in the glass could turn to look out.

He disliked valet-mirrors almost as much as the equally popular truviewers, which were merely pieces of short-term retardite pivotal on a vertical axis. They served roughly the same function as ordinary mirrors, except that there was no reversal effect. For the first time ever, the makers boasted, you could really see yourself as others saw you. Harpur objected to the idea on grounds he hoped were vaguely philosophical, but which he could not really explain, even to himself.

"You don't look well, Kenneth," Eva said as he adjusted his tie minutely. "You haven't *got* to go down there, have you?"

"No, I haven't *got* to go—that's why I've got to go. That's the whole point."

"Then I'll drive you."

"You won't. You're going to bed. I'm not going to let you drive around the city in the middle of the night." He put an arm round her shoulders. At fifty-eight, Eva Harpur was on a seemingly endless plateau of indomitable good health, but they maintained a fiction that it was he who looked after her.

He drove himself into the city, but progress through the traffic was unusually slow and, on impulse, he stopped

several blocks from the police headquarters and began to walk. Live dangerously, he thought, but walk slowly —just in case. It was a bright warm evening and, with the long daylight hours of June, only the sixteen-hour panels slung above the thoroughfare were black. The alternating eight-hour panels were needlessly blazing with light they had absorbed in the afternoon. The system was a compromise with seasonal variations in daylight hours, but it worked reasonably well and, above all, the light was practically free.

An additional advantage was that it provided the law enforcement authorities with perfect evidence about events like road accidents and traffic violations. In fact, it had been the then brand-new slow glass lighting panels on Fifty-third Avenue which had provided a large part of the evidence in the case against Ewan Raddall.

Evidence on which Harpur had sent Raddall to the electric chair.

The salient facts of the case had not been exactly as in the classic situation proposed by the tabloids, but they had been near enough to arouse public interest. There had been no other known suspect apart from Raddall, but the evidence against him had been largely circumstantial. The bodies had not been found until the next morning, by which time Raddall had been able to get home, clean himself up and have a night's sleep. When he was picked up he was fresh, composed and plausible —and the forensic teams had been able to prove almost nothing.

The case against Raddall was that he had been seen going toward the public playground at the right time, leaving it at the right time, and that he had bruises and scratches consistent with the crime. Also, between midnight and nine-thirty in the morning, when he was taken in for questioning, he had "lost" the plasticord jacket he

had worn on the previous evening, and it was never found.

At the end of Raddall's trial the jury had taken less than an hour to arrive at a verdict of guilty—but during a subsequent appeal his defense claimed the jury was influenced by the knowledge that the crime was recorded in Emile Bennett's rear window. The defense attorney, demanding a retrial, put forward the view that the jury had dismissed their "reasonable doubt" in the expectation that Harpur would, at the most, impose a life sentence.

But, in Harpur's eyes, the revised legal code drafted in 1977, mainly to give judges greater power in their own courts, made no provision for wait-and-see legislation, especially in case of first-degree murder. In January 1987, Raddall was duly sentenced to be executed.

Harpur's straightforward contention, which had earned him the name "Iron Judge," was that a decision reached in a court of law always had been, and still was, sacrosanct. The superhuman entity which was the Law must not be humbled before a fragment of glass. Reduced to its crudest terms, his argument was that if wait-and-see legislation were introduced, criminals would carry pieces of fifty-year retardite with them as standard equipment.

Within two years the slow-grinding mills of the Supreme Court had ratified Harpur's decision and the sentence carried out. The same thing on a microscopic scale, had occurred many times before in the world of sport; and the only possible, the only workable solution, was that the umpire was always right—no matter what cameras or slow glass might say afterward.

In spite of his vindication, or perhaps because of it, the tabloids never warmed to Harpur. He began making a point of being indifferent to all that anybody wrote or said. All he had needed during the five years was the knowledge that he had made a good decision, as distinct from a wrong one—now he was to discover if he had

made a good decision, as distinct from a bad one.

Although this night had been looming on his horizon for half a decade, Harpur found it difficult to realize that, in a matter of minutes, they would know if Raddall was guilty. The thought caused a crescendo of uncomfortable jolts in his chest and he stopped for a moment to snatch air. After all, what difference did it really make? He had not made the law, so why feel personally involved?

The answer came quickly.

He was involved because he was part of the law. The reason he had gone on working against medical advice, was that it was he, not some abstract embodiment of Webster's "great interest of man on earth," who had passed sentence on Ewan Raddall. And he was going to be there, personally, to face the music if he had made a mistake.

The realization was strangely comforting to Harpur as he moved on through the crowded streets. Something in the atmosphere of the late evening struck him as being odd, then he noticed the city center was jammed tight with out-of-town automobiles. Men and women thronged the sidewalks, and he knew they were strangers by the way their eyes occasionally took in the upper parts of buildings. The smell of grilling hamburger meat drifted on the thick, downy air.

Harpur wondered what the occasion might be, then he noticed the general drift toward the police headquarters. So that was it. People had not changed since the days when they were drawn toward arenas, guillotines and gallows. There would be nothing for them to see, but to be close at hand would be sufficient to let them taste the ancient joy of continuing to breathe in the knowledge that someone else has just ceased. The fact that they were five years out of date, too, made no difference at all.

Even Harpur, had he wanted to, could not have got

into the underground room. Apart from the monitors, there would be only six chairs and six pairs of special binoculars with low magnifications and huge, light-hungry objective lenses. They were reserved for the state-appointed observers.

Harpur had no interest in viewing the crime with his own eyes—he simply wanted to hear the result; then have a long, long rest. It occurred to him he was being completely irrational in going down to the police building, with all the exertion and lethal tension the trip meant for him, but somehow nothing else would do. *I'm guilty,* he thought suddenly, *guilty as . . .*

He reached the plaza in which the building was situated and worked his way through the pliant, strength-draining barriers of people. By the time he was halfway across sweat had bound his clothes so tightly he could hardly raise his feet. At an indeterminate point in the long journey he became aware of another presence following close behind—the sorrowful friend with the white-hot needle.

Reaching the untidy ranks of automobiles belonging to the Press, Harpur realized he could not go in too early, and there was at least half an hour left. He turned and began forcing his way back to the opposite side of the plaza. The needle point caught up with him—one precise thrust—and he lurched forward clawing for support.

"What the . . .!" A startled voice boomed over his head. "Take it easy, old timer." Its owner was a burly giant in a pale blue one-piece, who had been watching a 3-D television broadcast when Harpur fell against him. He snatched off the receiver spectacles, the tiny left and right pictures glowing with movement like distant bonfires. A wisp of music escaped from the earpiece.

"I'm sorry," Harpur said. "I tripped. I'm sorry."

"That's all right. Sayl Aren't you Judge . . ."

Harpur pushed on by as the big man tugged excitedly

on the arm of a woman who was with him. *I mustn't be recognized,* he thought in a panic. He burrowed into the crowd, now beginning to lose his sense of direction. Six more desperate paces and the needle caught him again—right up to its antiseptic hilt this time. He moaned as the plaza tilted ponderously away. Not here, he pleaded, not here, *please.*

Somehow, he saved himself from falling and moved on. Near at hand, but a million miles away, an unseen woman gave a beautiful, carefree laugh. At the edge of the square the pain returned, even more decisively than before—one, two, three times. Harpur screamed as he felt the life-muscle implode in cramp.

He began to go down, then felt himself gripped by firm hands. Harpur looked up at the swarthy young man who was holding him. The handsome, worry-creased face looming through reddish mists looked strangely familiar. Harpur struggled to speak.

"You . . . you're Ewan Raddall, aren't you?"

The black eyebrows met in puzzlement. "Raddall? No. Never heard of him. I think we'd better call an ambulance for you."

Harpur thought hard. "That's right. You couldn't be Raddall. I killed him five years ago." Then he spoke louder. "But, if you never heard of Raddall, why are you here?"

"I was on my way home from a bowling match when I saw the crowd."

The boy began getting Harpur out of the crowd, holding him up with one arm, fending uncomprehending bodies away with the other. Harpur tried to help, but was aware of his feet trailing helplessly on the concrete.

"Do you live right here in Holt?"

The boy nodded emphatically.

"Do you know who I am?"

"All I know about you, sir, is you should be in the hos-

pital. I'll call an ambulance on the liquor store phone."

Harpur felt vaguely that there was some tremendous significance in what they had been saying, but had no time to pursue the matter.

"Listen," he said, forcing himself to stand upright for a moment. "I don't want an ambulance. I'll be fine if I can just get home. Can you help me get a cab?"

The boy looked uncertain, then he shrugged, "It's your funeral."

Harpur opened his door carefully and entered the friendly darkness of the big old house. During the ride out of town his sweatsoaked clothes had become clammy cold, and he shivered uncontrollably as he felt for the light switch.

With the light on, he sat down beside the telephones and looked at his watch. Almost midnight—by this time there would be no mystery, no doubt, about exactly what had happened in the Fifty-third Avenue playground five years earlier. He picked up the handset, and at the same moment heard his wife begin to move around upstairs. There were several numbers he could ring to ask what the slow glass had revealed, but the thought of talking to any police executive or someone in City Hall was too much. He called Sam Macnamara.

As a guard, Sam would not know the result officially, but he would have the answer just the same. Harpur tried to punch out the number of the direct line to the guard kiosk but his finger joints kept buckling on impact with the buttons and he gave up.

Eva Harpur came down the stairs in her dressing gown and approached him apprehensively.

"Oh, Kenneth!" Her hand went to her mouth. "What have you done? You look . . . I'll have to call Dr. Sherman."

Harpur smiled weakly. *I do a lot of smiling these days,* he thought irrelevantly, *it's the only response an old man*

can make to so many situations.

"All I want you to do is make me some coffee and help me up to my bed; but first of all get me a number on this contraption." Eva opened her mouth to protest, then closed it as their eyes met.

When Sam came to the phone Harpur worked to keep his own voice level.

"Hello, Sam. Judge Harpur here. Is the fun all over yet?"

"Yes, sir. There was a press conference afterward and that's over, too. I guess you heard the result on the radio."

"As a matter of fact, I haven't Sam. I was . . . out until a little while ago. Decided to ring someone about it before I went to bed, and your number just came into my head."

Sam laughed uncertainly. "Well, they were able to make a positive identification. It was Raddall, all right—but I guess you knew that all along."

"I guess I did, Sam." Harpur felt his eyes grow hot with tears.

"It'll be a load off your mind all the same, Judge."

Harpur nodded tiredly, but into the phone he said, "Well, naturally I'm glad there was no miscarriage of justice—but judges don't make the laws, Sam. They don't even decide who's guilty and who isn't. As far as I'm concerned, the presence of a peculiar piece of glass makes very little difference, one way or the other."

It was a good speech for the Iron Judge.

There was a long silence on the line, then, with a note of something like desperation in his voice, Sam persisted, "I know all that, Judge . . . but, all the same, it must have been a big load off your mind."

Harpur realized, with a warm surprise, that the big Irishman was pleading with him. *It doesn't matter anymore,* he thought. *In the morning I'm going to retire and rejoin the human race.*

"All right, Sam," he said finally. "Let's put it this way —I'll sleep well tonight. All right?"

"Thank you, Judge. Good night."

Harpur set the phone down and, with his eyes tight-closed, waited for peace.

CHAPTER 5

It was past midnight when Garrod arrived home. The domestic staff had gone to bed, but a glimmer of yellow light from the half-open door of the library suggested that Esther was still up. She did not read much, preferring to watch television, but she liked sitting in the library's brown friendliness. Garrod suspected this was because it was the only room he had not extensively modernized five years earlier, soon after he bought the place. He went in and found Esther curled up in a high-backed leather chair with television glasses covering her eyes.

"You're late." She raised one hand in greeting, but did not remove the screens from her eyes. "Where have you been?"

"I had to go to an Army research center at a place called Macon."

"What do you mean, 'at a place called Macon'?"

"That's the name of the place."

"You made it sound as if you expected me never to have heard of it."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean . . ."

"Macon is in Georgia, right?"

"That's right."

"The rest of us aren't completely stupid, Alban." Esther adjusted her television glasses and wriggled to a more comfortable position.

"So who said . . .?" Garrod bit his lip and went over to the sideboard where decanters glowed warmly in a pool of light. "Are you having a drink?"

"I don't need one, thanks."

"I don't need one either, but I'm going to enjoy it just the same." Garrod kept his voice level, wondering why Esther was needling him. It was as if she had some advance knowledge of what he wanted to say. He mixed a weak Bourbon and water, and sat down close to the fireplace. The gray-and-white husk of a log lay in the hearth, crackling faintly, sending occasional orange sparks swirling up into the darkness of the flue.

"There's a whole sheaf of messages on the desk," Esther said disapprovingly. "A man in your position really shouldn't disappear for days on end without keeping in touch with his office."

"That's why I employ high-priced managers. If they can't keep things going for a few hours they're no good to me."

"The great mind mustn't be soiled by thinking about money. Is that it, Alban?"

"I don't claim to have a great mind."

"No, you don't come right out and say it, but you really set yourself apart. When you condescend to talk to people there's a little smile on your face which says, 'I know this remark is being wasted but I'll throw it in for amusement and see if anybody comes close to understanding it.'"

"For Christ's sake!" Garrod leaned forward in his seat. "Esther, let's get a divorce."

She took off the glasses and looked at him. "Why?"

"*Why?* What's the point in our going on like this?"

"We've been doing it for quite a few years and you never mentioned divorce before."

"I know." Garrod took a long swallow of his drink. "But there has to be a limit. This isn't what marriage is meant to be."

In a second Esther was out of her chair and peering closely into his face. She gave a shaky laugh. "By God, I believe it has finally happened to you."

"It?" A vision of full, silvery lips flashed into Garrod's mind.

"What's her name, Alban?"

He laughed in turn, incredulously. "There's no other woman involved."

"Did you meet her on this trip?"

"I tell you it's just *you*. I've had enough."

"She lives in Macon. That's why you suddenly decided to go there."

Garrod gave his wife a look of disdain, but inwardly he was afraid of her. "Let me spell it out for you—there is no other woman. Since we got married I haven't so much as held hands with anybody else. I just happen to think we've gone on too long."

"That's what I mean. You're a cold fish, Alban—I found that out pretty damn quick—but now something's got you going. And she must have been really something to light your little bonfire."

"I've had enough of this nonsense." Garrod got to his feet and walked across the room to his desk. "What do you say to a divorce?"

"I say—nothing doing, buster." Esther followed him, still holding her glasses, and he could hear dwarves' voices coming from the earpieces. "This is the first thing

you've wanted from me since you discovered you didn't need Dad's money. This is the first thing you've asked me for—and I'm going to enjoy making sure you don't get it."

"You're a real treasure," he said heavily, unable to express his anger.

"I know." She went back to her chair, sat down and put the image-filled glasses on again. A look of peaceful concentration spread over her small features.

Garrod picked up the slim bundle of message tapes from his desk. Most of them were mechanical transcripts of voice messages, a system he found more convenient than having to play through a series of recordings. The one on top of the pile was timed only an hour earlier and it was from Theo McFarlane, his chief of research in the Portston laboratories. It read:

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. I AM NINETY PERCENT CERTAIN OF ACHIEVING TRIGGERED EMISSION TONIGHT. I KNOW YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE PRESENT BUT I HAVEN'T GOT UNLIMITED PATIENCE, AL. I'LL HOLD OFF TILL MIDNIGHT. THEO."

An icy excitement gripped Garrod as he flicked through the sheaf and saw a series of messages on the same subject from McFarlane. They were timed at intervals right through the day. Glancing at his watch he saw the time was twenty-five after midnight. He walked up the room and threw the messages into Esther's lap to draw her attention from the television.

"Why did nobody contact me today and let me know what Theo was up to?"

"Nobody is permitted to interrupt your little hotrod jaunts, remember. That's why you employ managers, Alban, darling."

"You know the lab work is different," Garrod snapped,

fighting an impulse to snatch the glasses from Esther's face and wrench them in two. He hurried to the viewphone and punched in the number of the direct channel to McFarlane's office. A second later McFarlane's thin, bespectacled face appeared on the screen. His eyes blinked tiredly behind the double-concave lenses which made them look smaller than normal.

"There you are, Al," he said reprovingly. "I've been trying to get you all day."

"I was out of town. Have you done it yet?"

McFarlane shook his head. "Union trouble. The technicians insisted on stopping for coffee." He looked disgusted.

"You never could adjust to working with human beings, Theo. I'll be there in twenty minutes." Garrod broke the connection, ran through the house and out to the garage. He chose the rotary-engined Mercedes two-seater as being the best for a trip around the edge of the city. As he was hurling the little car down the winding shrub-walled road from the house it occurred to him that he had left without speaking to Esther, but then there was nothing to say except that he would get the divorce one way or the other—and that could wait till morning.

During the hectic drive he thought about the implications of the message he had received from McFarlane. In spite of nine years of continuous research, slow glass had retained its integrity in one vital respect—it refused to yield information any sooner than specified by the delay period built into its crystalline structure. A piece of Retardite one year thick retained its stored images for one year, and no amount of coaxing by an army of research workers had persuaded it to do otherwise. Even with its inflexibility in this respect, Retardite had found thousands of applications in every field from costume jewelry to outer planet exploration—but had it been possible to change the delay period in retrospect, to release

information at will, then slow glass would truly have come into its own.

The basis of the difficulty was the way in which images were not stored inside the material *as images.* Variations in the arrangement of light and shade were translated into stress patterns which gradually made their way from one face of the glass to the other. Discovery of this fact had solved one theoretical objection to the Retardite principle. In the early days, when it was thought that the time delay was a function of the thickness of the crystalline material, some physicists had pointed out that images passing through at an angle should have emerged considerably later than images which traversed the material at right angles. To overcome the anomaly it had been necessary to postulate an infinitely high index of refraction for Retardite, a measure which Garrod had instinctively disliked. Subsequently he had found great personal satisfaction in establishing the true nature of the piezoluctic transfer phenomenon, and in seeing it named the Garrod Effect in scientific texts.

Establishing the nature of the effect, however, had not altered the fact that there was no random access to the stored images. If the time delay had been directly related to thickness it might have been possible to split Retardite into thinner sheets and get at the information sooner. As it was, any attempt—no matter how subtle or insidious—to interfere with the crystalline structure resulted in a near-instantaneous relieving of the stress patterns. There was not even a glimmer of released light. The material simply relaxed its grip on the past and became jet black, a vitreous slate awaiting the imprint of new memories.

Although he found it increasingly difficult to put in time in the laboratories Garrod still had a strong personal interest in solving the problem of triggered emission. This sprang partly from his scientist's possessiveness regarding his own discovery, partly from a vague aware-

ness that there were cases in which slow glass acted as a tantalus cup, torturing individuals whose overwhelming need was for immediate drafts of knowledge. Only recently Garrod had read a newspaper story about a judge who had died a few months after a five-year wait to learn if a man he had sent to the chair would be proved guilty by the piece of slow glass which had been sole witness to the murder.

Above the thoroughfare along which he was driving, the illuminating panels of slow glass glowed with the blue of the daytime sky, creating the effect of speeding through a wide tunnel with rectangular holes cut in the roof. In one of them he glimpsed the silvery dart of an airliner which had flown over the spot earlier in the day.

The night security man saluted from his kiosk as Garrod swung the Mercedes in through the gates of the research and development building. Most of the block was in darkness but McFarlane's section was ablaze with golden light. Garrod slipped off his jacket and threw it onto a chair as he walked into the laboratory and saw a group of men gathered around one of the benches. The only one not in shirtsleeves was McFarlane himself—as always the research chief was wearing a neat, square-shouldered business suit. It was said that he had not once touched a soldering iron since the day he made management, but his control of what went on in his own department was absolute, and detailed.

"You're just in time," McFarlane said, nodding to Garrod. "I've a feeling we're going to connect."

"You're still following up on the modified Cerenkov radiation approach?"

"And getting results, too." McFarlane pointed at a pure black panel of slow glass which was mounted in a frame and surrounded by a complex of gray boxes, oscilloscopes and a lashed-up instrument panel. "That's a piece of three-day glass which was wiped clean yesterday. The

images it picked up since then aren't due out this side until tomorrow, but I think we're going to drag 'em through a little faster."

"How do you know?"

"Look at those diffraction patterns." McFarlane indicated a display tube. "See how different it is from what we usually get when we shoot X-rays through Retardite? That shimmering effect shows that the image velocity and the Cerenkov radiation velocity have begun to equalize."

"Maybe you've just slowed down the Cerenkov."

"I'm betting we've speeded up the image."

"Something wrong here," one of the technicians remarked in conversational tones. "The distance-over-time curve is starting to look . . . exponential."

Garrod examined the oscilloscope trace and thought of light pouring into the panel of slow glass, for perhaps thirty-six hours, now gathering on itself, forming a wave, a peak. . . .

"Cover your eyes," McFarlane shouted. "Get away from that thing!"

Garrod flung his arm over his face as the technicians stampeded outward, then there was a silent, bleaching flash of brilliance; a flash which froze movement on punished retinas; a flash which clutched Garrod's heart because it should have been accompanied by the detonation of a hell-bomb. He lowered his arm and saw the other men only dimly through a screen of green and orange afterimages. The slow glass panel was black as night once more, and as peaceful.

McFarlane spoke first, in a subdued voice. "I told you we'd squeeze some light out of that panel—and we sure as hell did."

"Is everybody all right?" Garrod peered around the group that was slowly converging again on the bench. "Did anybody take it right in the face?"

They shook their heads. "We're all right, Mr. Garrod."

"We'll call it a night, then. Book in a full night shift, and give your eyes plenty of time to recover before you drive home." Garrod turned to McFarlane. "You'll have to draw up a new set of safety procedures before taking this any further."

"Don't I know it!" McFarlane's eyes looked bruised behind their diminishing lenses. "But we got *light*, Al. That was the first time in nine solid years of trying that anybody ever modified a Retardite lattice and didn't simply relieve the stress patterns. We really got light."

"I'll say we did." Garrod picked up his jacket as they walked slowly toward McFarlane's private office. "You'd better get our patent lawyers on to it first thing in the morning. Are there any talkative types among your boys?"

"They know better."

"Fine. I don't know what the applications will be for this gadget of yours, but there'll be plenty of them."

"Weapons," McFarlane hazarded gloomily.

"I don't think so. Too cumbersome, and the range would be pretty short with atmospheric absorption. But there's flash photography. Signaling in space. I'll bet if you hauled a five-year panel all the way out to Uranus on a probe and triggered it the flash would be detectable on Earth."

McFarlane opened the door of his office. "Let's have a drink to celebrate—I've been saving a bottle for this occasion."

"I don't know, Theo."

"Come on, Al. Besides, I've got a new line for you. How's this?" He pointed ahead with a fierce frown on his face, and shouted, "Stop fiddling with that belt, Van Allen!"

"Not bad. Not very good, but not bad either." Garrod smiled at his research chief, who had been a friend since

college days. They had a running joke which involved a fantasy in which all the great scientists who had given their names to discoveries were children in a classroom together. Even at a tender age each was concerned in some way with the field of research in which he would triumph in later life, but the harassed teacher had no way of knowing this, and kept trying to force them to pay attention. So far in the fantasy sequence he had shouted, "What have you got in that bottle, Klein?" to an incipient topologist; "Stop that fidgeting, Brown," to the future discoverer of molecular agitation; and "Make up your mind, Heisenberg," to the child who would one day formulate the Uncertainty Principle. Garrod had almost stopped trying because it was difficult to find a new line with the required degree of universality, but McFarlane was still working away and produced a new line every week.

Garrod hesitated at the door. "It's a little early to celebrate. We still have to figure out why we got a runaway reaction and what to do about it."

"Now that we've got this far, the rest is only a matter of time," McFarlane said emphatically. "I'll guarantee you that within three months you'll be able to take a piece of slow glass and view any scene in it at will—just like a home movie. Think what that's going to mean."

"Yeah, for people like the police." Garrod thought about his nameless judge. "And the government."

McFarlane shrugged. "Spying, you mean? Glass eyes? Invasion of privacy? The only people who have to worry about that are the crooks." He took a bottle of whisky from a cabinet and poured two generous measures into gold-rimmed tumblers. "I'll tell you one thing, though—I wouldn't like to be any guy who's up to things he doesn't want his wife to know about."

"Neither would I," Garrod said. In the bottom of his glass, where the interplay of reflection and refraction

created a miniature universe, he saw a girl with black hair and silver lips.

When he arrived home an hour later he expected to find the house in darkness, but lights were on in several rooms and he saw Esther standing at the open front door of the house. She was wearing a belted tweed coat and had a scarf tied over her hair. Garrod got out of the Mercedes and, with a premonition of trouble, went up the steps. The wall lights showed that Esther's face was pale and streaked with tears. Was this, he wondered, a delayed reaction to his request for a divorce? Yet, she had seemed so cool. . . .

"Alban," she said quickly, before he could speak. "I tried to get you at the plant but the patrolman said I had just missed you."

"Is there something wrong?"

"Will you drive me to see Dad?"

"Is he ill?"

"No. The police have arrested him."

Garrod almost burst out laughing. "But that would be lese majesty! What's he supposed to have done?"

Esther covered her mouth with trembling hands as she spoke. "They're saying he killed a man."

CHAPTER 6

"The evidence is all there," Lieutenant Mayrick said, with an easy helpfulness which suggested he was so certain of his ground that he could see no danger in being frank. He was a thick-shouldered young man with prematurely graying hair and a scarred, competent face.

"What evidence? So far nobody has offered me any evidence." Garrod tried to sound as alert and competent as the lieutenant, but it had been an incredibly long day and the whisky he had drunk with McFarlane had died in him.

Mayrick's gaze was level. "I know who you are, Mr. Garrod. And I know how much money you have. But I also know that I'm not required to defer to you."

"Forgive me, Lieutenant—I'm very tired and all I want to do is go home and get to bed, but I know my wife won't let me sleep unless I can put her mind at ease about this thing. Now, what happened?"

"I don't know if this will help you put Mrs. Garrod's mind at ease." Mayrick lit a cigarette and threw the pack onto his desk.

"One of our patrol cars was going east of Ridge Avenue just before one o'clock and the officers in it found Mr. Livingstone's car sitting with one wheel up on the sidewalk. He was slumped over the steering wheel, drugged to the eyeballs. At the other side of the street they found a dead man who has since been identified as one William Kolkman. The reason he was dead was that he had been struck by an automobile moving at considerable speed. The front left-hand fender of Mr. Livingstone's car was dented in a manner exactly consistent with Kolkman's injuries, and we have already matched paint samples taken from his clothes with the paint on the car.

"How does all that sound to you?" Mayrick leaned back and puffed contentedly on his cigarette.

"It sounds like you've already convicted my father-in-law."

"That's your own reaction—all I did was summarize the evidence."

"I still can't take it in," Garrod said slowly. "There's this business about the drugs. Boyd Livingstone was born back in the Thirties, so he likes liquor—to him it isn't a drug—but he has a built-in antipathy to anything that comes out of a pillbox."

"We've given him a medical checkup, Mr. Garrod, and he's loaded with MSR." Mayrick opened a blue folder and placed some large photographs in front of Garrod. "Do these make it any more believable?"

The pictures, all with certified time-recording dials in the corners, showed Livingstone lying over the steering wheel of his car, close-ups of the dented fender, a shabbily-dressed dead man crumpled in an appallingly large pool of blood, and general views of the accident scene under floodlighting.

"What are these?" Garrod pointed to dark objects like broken rock scattered on the concrete of the street.

"Bits of caked mud dislodged from inside the wheel

arch by the impact." Mayrick smiled briefly. "That's something your realistic moviemakers forget about when they're staging accident scenes."

"I see." Garrod got to his feet. "Thanks for telling me all this, Lieutenant. I'll just have to try to make my wife face up to this thing."

"That's all right, Mr. Garrod."

They shook hands and Garrod left the small, coldly-lit office. He walked along the corridor and found Esther and Grant Morgan, the Livingstones' lawyer, in an anteroom near the police building's main entrance. Esther's brown eyes locked on his, pleading with him to say what she wanted him to say.

Garrod shook his head. "I'm sorry, Esther. It looks bad. I don't see how your father can avoid a manslaughter charge."

"But it's ridiculous!"

"To us—yes. To the police—well, they couldn't have got him more dead to rights."

"I think you'd better let me decide that, Al," Morgan put in. He was an aristocratic-looking man in his sixties, immaculately dressed even in the middle of the night. At that moment he was earning his retainer simply by exuding reassurance for Esther's benefit. "We'll soon have this nonsense straightened out."

"Good luck," Garrod replied, causing Esther to glance angrily at him.

"Mr. Morgan," she said. "I know that all this has to be a mistake and I want to hear my father's side of it. When can I see him?"

"Right now—I think." Morgan opened the door, looked inquiringly at someone outside, then nodded in satisfaction. "It's all arranged, Esther. I want you not to worry about how things might seem at this minute." He ushered Esther and Garrod out into the corridor, where a police captain and two other men escorted them to a room at

the rear of the building. As they entered the room a uniformed officer gathered coffee cups onto a tray and left. The captain and his two companions had a whispered conversation with Morgan and stepped back into the corridor, allowing him to close the door. Boyd Livingstone, fully dressed in a tuxedo, was lying on a hospital-type bed. His face was unnaturally pale but he gave Morgan and Garrod a wan smile as Esther ran to him.

"It's a hell of a mess," he whispered over her shoulder. "Are there any reporters out there?"

Morgan shook his head. "I'll handle the press, Boyd," he said soothingly.

"Thanks, Grant, but we'll need experts on this job. You'd better get hold of the Party's publicity agent, Ty Beaumont, and get him to see me immediately. This is going to look bad and it's got to be handled the right way."

Listening to the conversation, Garrod was slightly taken aback until he remembered that his father-in-law was the Republican Commonwealth candidate for Portston's representation on the County Board. He had never taken Livingstone's belated involvement in small-time politics seriously, but it looked as though Livingstone himself did, and no doubt the ultra-right Republican Commonwealth party would be unhappy about their man being charged with drug abuse and manslaughter. Livingstone's particular crusade was against gambling, but he took a strong line on all kinds of vice.

Morgan wrote something in a notebook. "I'll get Beaumont on the phone, Boyd, but first things first. Were you hurt in the accident?"

Livingstone looked blank. "Hurt! How could I have been hurt?" he bellowed, recovering some of his vigor. "I was driving home from the Opera House trustees' dinner when I started to feel a bit woozy. So I pulled onto the side and waited for it to pass off. I guess I must

have dozed off or passed out or something, but I wasn't involved in any accident. Not me!" His fatigue-reddened eyes surveyed the group belligerently and settled on Garrod. "Hello, Al."

Garrod nodded. "Boyd."

"All right, we'll come back to that in a minute," Morgan said, still making notes. "Was there much drug-taking at the dinner?"

"The usual amount, I guess. The waiters were distributing it like confetti."

"How much did you have?"

"Now just a minute, Grant." Livingstone swung himself upright on the bed. "You know I don't go in for that kind of thing."

"You're saying you had none?"

"Damn right, I am."

"Then how do you account for the fact that, along with the alcohol in your blood, the police surgeon found substantial traces of MSR?"

"MSR?" Livingstone wiped some perspiration from his forehead. "What in hell is MSR?"

"It's a kind of synthetic cannabis—a rather potent variety."

"My father obviously isn't feeling well," Esther said. "Why are you . . . ?"

"All these questions have to be asked," Morgan said with a firmness Garrod had not expected of him. "They *will* be asked, and we have to have a good set of answers ready."

"I'll give you a good answer." Livingstone tried to tap Morgan on the shoulder but his spatial judgment was so far off that his fingers prodded thin air. "Somebody slipped me the stuff. It was done on purpose—so that I'd lose the election."

Morgan sighed unhappily. "I'm afraid . . ."

"Don't heave your chest at me, Grant. I tell you that's

what must have happened. Anyway, the drug question is irrelevant. They can't charge me with knocking this man down while driving under the influence of drugs—because I pulled over and stopped the car before anything happened."

Garrod moved over beside the bed. "That doesn't add up, Boyd. I've seen the photographic evidence."

"I don't care what photographs you've seen. I was *there,* and—even if somebody did half-poison me—I know what I did and what I did not do." Livingstone caught Garrod's hand and held onto it, looking upward into his face. Garrod felt a pang of pity for the other man and with it came a sudden illogical conviction that he was telling the truth, that in spite of all the conclusive evidence there was room for doubt.

Morgan put his notebook away. "I think I've got enough to go on in the meantime, Boyd. The first thing to do now is to get you out of here."

"I'm going to have another word with Lieutenant Mayrick," Garrod said impulsively. "Think back, Boyd. Is there anything else you can remember that might help?"

Livingstone eased himself back onto the pillow and closed his eyes. "I . . . I was sitting there at the curb . . . and I could hear the engine . . . no, that can't be right because I must have switched it off. . . . I . . . I see this man in front of me, and I'm coming up on him *fast* . . . the engine's very loud now. . . . I hit the brake but it doesn't do any good . . . the smack, Al, that awful pulpy smack. . . ." Livingstone stopped speaking, on a note of shock, as though he was learning something for the first time, and tears began to leak out from under his closed eyelids.

Garrod got up early in the morning and breakfasted alone because Esther had stayed overnight at her parents' home. His eyes had a gritty feeling caused by lack of

sleep, but he drove straight to the plant with the intention of getting down to work with McFarlane and the company's patent lawyers. He found it impossible to concentrate, however, and after an hour of futile trying delegated responsibility for the meeting to his chief executive, Max Fuente. In the privacy of his inner office, he called Portston police headquarters and asked to speak to Lieutenant Mayrick. The attractive-looking operator told him that Mayrick would not come on duty till noon.

It occurred to Garrod that he was being unreasonable. Morgan, with his trained legal mind, obviously believed in Livingstone's guilt. Esther had accepted it and, in the end, even Livingstone himself—yet something in the evidence seemed to be gnawing into Garrod's piece of mind. Or was this an example of the intellectual egotism of which he had been accused by Esther? When all others concerned believed that Livingstone had killed a man while driving his car in a drug-laden haze—was Alban Garrod prompted to confound them, and set himself apart, by discovering an unsuspected truth? *Even if that's the case,* he decided, *the end result will be the same.*

He thought for a moment, then decided to employ an old technique for stimulating inspiration. Taking a large block of paper from a drawer, he began writing on it—at widely-spaced intervals—headings covering every aspect he could remember of Mayrick's and Livingstone's statements. He next filled in subheadings relating to details, no matter how trivial, and induced thoughts. By the time thirty minutes had passed the sheet was almost filled. Garrod rang for coffee and stared at the sheet while he sipped the hot liquid. Finally, partway through the second cup, he picked up his pen and drew a ring round a sentence Livingstone had used the previous night. It was under the heading, *The car,* and read: "The engine is very loud now."

Garrod had been in Livingstone's turbine-powered

Rolls, and he was familiar with the type of car. In his experience it was virtually impossible to hear the engine, even at full throttle.

While finishing the coffee he drew a ring round another subheading, then called Grant Morgan. "Good morning. How's the old man?"

"Fast asleep—under sedation." Morgan looked impatient. "Did you want to see me about anything special, Al? I'm working rather hard on Boyd's behalf."

"So am I, as a matter of fact. Last night he said something about having been drugged by someone who wanted him to lose his little election. I know how wild this sounds—but *is* there anybody who has a good reason to keep him off the County Board?"

"Now, Al, you're galloping . . ."

"Off in all directions. I know that, but will you answer my question, or will I make inquiries downtown?"

Morgan shrugged, a strangely incongruous movement. "Well, you know how Boyd feels about gambling. He's been pushing for tighter controls on casinos for some time now, and if he makes the Board he's certain to force a big clampdown. I doubt, though . . ."

"That's good enough. I'm not really interested in a motive—just the possibility. Now, have you ever been in Boyd's car?"

"A Rolls, isn't it? Yes, I've ridden with him several times."

"How does the engine sound?"

Morgan ventured a smile. "Has it got an engine? I had a feeling it was pulled along by an invisible wire."

"You mean you've never heard the engine?"

"Ah . . . yes."

"Then how do you explain this remark Boyd made last night?" Garrod picked up his block of paper and read. "The engine is very loud now."

"If I had to explain it I'd say that a possible side-effect

of MSR is increased sensory awareness."

"Is this increased sensory awareness compatible with falling unconscious over the steering wheel?"

"I'm not a narcotics expert, but . . ."

"Forget it, Grant. I've taken up enough of your time." Garrod broke the connection and returned to studying his notes. A little before noon he told his secretary, Mrs. Werner, that he was going out on personal business, left the plant and drove to the police headquarters under a steel-gray sky. The building was crowded and he had to wait twenty minutes before being admitted to Lieutenant Mayrick's office.

"I'm sorry about the delay," Mayrick said when they were seated together at his desk, "but you're partly to blame for the overload of work in this department."

"How's that?"

"So many glass eyes in use these days. Peeping Toms used to present a minor problem—when there was a complaint the guy either ran off or you took him, and the risk involved stopped it becoming too popular a pastime. Now you have people planting spyglass all over the place—hotel bedrooms, washrooms, everywhere you could think of. And when somebody notices it and puts in a complaint you have to stake the place out and wait for the peeper to come back and collect his property. Then you have to prove he was the one who put it there in the first place. . . ."

"I'm sorry."

Mayrick shook his head slightly. "Why did you come to see me?"

"Well, you must have guessed it's about the charges against my father-in-law. Is your mind completely closed to the possibility that he just might have been framed?"

Mayrick smiled and reached for his cigarettes. "I know it isn't the done thing to admit to having a closed mind about anything, but sometimes I get tired of trying to

sound all liberal and aware, et cetera, so—yes, my mind is closed to that possibility. What now?"

"Do you mind if I raise a few points?"

"No. Go ahead." Mayrick waved grandly, creating whirlpools of smoke.

"Thank you. Number one—I heard on the radio this morning that William Kolkman, the man who was killed, was a pool hall attendant down by the river. Now, what was he doing walking along Ridge Avenue, of all places, at that time of the night?"

"Couldn't say. Perhaps he was going to burgle one of those custom-built houses—but that wouldn't entitle motorists to declare open season on him."

"You don't think its important?"

"No."

"Nor even relevant?"

"Nope. Have you any other points?"

"One of my father-in-law's recollections of the accident is of hearing a loud engine noise, but"—Garrod hesitated, suddenly aware of how superficial his words must seem—"his car makes no sound at all."

"It must be nice for your father-in-law having such a fine car," Mayrick said in a carefully neutral voice. "How does that affect the case?"

"Well, if he heard . . ."

"Look, Mr. Garrod," Mayrick said abruptly, losing patience. "Leaving aside the fact that your father-in-law was so high on MSR that he probably thought he was flying a bomber—other people heard this supposedly noiseless automobile. I have signed statements from people who heard the impact, were on the scene within thirty seconds, found Kolkman still pumping out his life's blood in the gutter, and saw Mr. Livingstone in the car which killed him."

Garrod was shocked. "You didn't mention the witnesses last night."

"Perhaps that was because I was busy last night. And I'm going to be busy today."

Garrod got to his feet, prepared to leave, but found himself still speaking in a stubborn voice. "Your witnesses didn't actually *see* the accident?"

"No, Mr. Garrod."

"What sort of street lighting is there in Ridge Avenue? Retardite panels?"

"Not yet." Mayrick looked maliciously amused. "You see, the moneyed residents of that area have objected to big sheets of spyglass being hung up near their homes, and the city is still fighting them over it."

"I see." Garrod mumbled an apology for having intruded on the lieutenant's working day and left the building. The faint, illogical glimmer of hope that he could prove the world wrong about Livingstone's accident had vanished, yet he discovered he was unable to return to the plant. He drove north, traveling slowly at first, then picking up speed as he finally admitted to himself where he was going.

Ridge Avenue was a tree-lined ribbon of ferrocrete which snaked up toward a minor offshoot of the Cascades. Garrod located the scene of the accident, indicated by yellow chalk marks on the road, and parked close by. Feeling strangely self-conscious, he got out of the car and surveyed the midday sleepiness of sloping green roofs, lawns and dark foliage. This was an area where there was no real need for scenedows, the views from the houses being pleasant enough, but window-sized panels were still sufficiently expensive to make them good status symbols. Of the six dwellings which overlooked the place where the accident had occurred, two had windows which looked like rectangular sections chopped out of hillsides.

He got back into his car, picked up the viewphone and put a call through to his secretary. "Hello, Mrs. Werner.

I want you to find out which store supplied a large scenedow to the occupants of two-o-o-eight Ridge Avenue. Get on to it right away, please."

"Yes, Mr. Garrod." The miniature image of Mrs. Werner registered the disapproval which always accompanied any assignment she regarded as being outside her normal duties.

"When you've done that, contact the manager of the store and get him to buy the scenedow back again. He can make up any reason he likes and pay any price."

"Yes, Mr. Garrod." Mrs. Werner's face darkened even further. "What then?"

"Have it delivered to my home. By tonight, if possible."

Garrod had intended staying away from the office for an indefinite period, but an absence of only five days had built up such a pressure of work, coupled with hints of resignation from Mrs. Werner, that he reluctantly agreed to put in several hours at the plant. He slid his car into its reserved slot in the parking lot and sat for a moment trying to shake off his tiredness. The early evening sun was flooding the world with a red-gold light which made the surrounding buildings seem curiously unreal, and in the distance—framed by industrial perspectives—he could see tiny white figures playing a game of tennis. A beam of mellow, nostalgic light picked out the silent players, translating them into a perfect Augustin miniature. Garrod had a vague recollection of observing the same scene years earlier, and the memory was charged with significance as though it was connected with an important phase of his life, but he could not pinpoint the occasion. The sound of footsteps in the gravel interrupted his thoughts and he turned to see Theo McFarlane approaching the car. He lifted his briefcase and got out.

McFarlane pointed at him. "You never change, do you, Planck?"

"Give it up, Mac." Garrod nodded a greeting. "Any developments?"

"Nothing so far. I've been plotting a whole range of frequencies and running the time-over-distance curves through the computer, but it's bound to take a little while before we strike lucky. How about you?"

"Much the same, except that I'm experimenting with heterodyning several frequencies at once to see if it's possible to speed up the pendulum effect."

"I think you're trying to push too fast, Al," McFarlane said doubtfully. "We've triggered about fifty more panels in the lab and got runaways every time. I quite like this multiple frequency approach of yours, but I honestly don't see it stabilizing the . . ."

"I've already told you why I can't afford to hang around. Esther believes her father couldn't take a spell in prison, from the health point of view, and he's facing political death unless . . ."

"But, *All* Even if somebody wanted to frame him they just couldn't have done it—not in those circumstances. I mean, it's so painfully obvious that he knocked a man down and killed him."

"Maybe it's too obvious," Garrod said doggedly. "Maybe it's all too pat."

McFarlane sighed and drew his toe across the gravel, exposing damp layers. "And you shouldn't be working at home with two-year glass, Al. You saw the kind of flash we got with only a two-day buildup."

"There's no heat storage. It isn't as if a runaway would set my lab on fire."

"Even so . . ."

"Theo," Garrod cut in. "Don't fight me on this."

McFarlane raised his square-pointed shoulders in resignation. "Me? Fight you? I'm a mental judoist from way back. You know my philosophy for dealing with people —there can be no action without reaction."

Suddenly, inexplicably, his words seemed to spear right through Garrod. McFarlane waved good-bye and walked toward his own car. Garrod tried to wave back, but all his attention was drawn inward to the disturbances inside his own body. His knees felt loose, his heart had lapsed into an unsteady, lumping rhythm, and a chill extended downward from stomach to groin. In his head there was a pressure which rapidly built up to a peak and exploded in a kind of psychic orgasm.

"Theo," he said softly, "I don't need the slow glass—I know how it was done."

McFarlane failed to hear him, got into his car and drove away. Garrod stood absolutely still in the center of the parking lot until the other man's car had vanished from sight, then he emerged from his trance and ran toward his office. Mrs. Werner was waiting for him, her sallow face taut with impatience.

"I can only stay behind for two hours," she said, "so it would . . ."

Garrod brushed past her. "Go home *now*. I'll see you in the morning."

He went into his private office, slammed the door and threw himself into his chair. *Action and reaction.* It was all so simple. A car and a man collide at speed, and with sufficient force to dent the vehicle's fender and to render the human body lifeless. Because cars usually move quickly and men usually move slowly, an investigator coming on the scene is preconditioned to interpret it in only one way. In the context of everyday life, the car must have struck the man; but, treating it as a proposition in pure mechanics, the same fatal result would be obtained if the man struck the car.

Garrod nursed his head in his hands as he tried to visualize the method. You drug the driver of the car, carefully judging the amount and the time at which the dose is administered so that he will become incapable of

control at roughly the location you desire. If he kills himself or anybody else in the process, this is an added benefit, and you do not need to put Phase Two of the plan into action. But if he brings his car safely to a halt, you are ready with a suitable victim who has been stunned or doped into unconsciousness. You suspend him from a vehicle—a breakdown truck with projecting crane would be ideal—and you smash him into the stationary car. He bounces off it, to be found lying dead several yards away, while you are escaping from the scene at high speed, probably without lights.

Taking his block of paper from a drawer, Garrod ticked off all the peculiar features of the case which could be accommodated by his new theory. It accounted for Kolkman's presence in Ridge Avenue at that time of night. It explained the loud engine noise which had been heard by Livingstone and the other witnesses. "I hit the brake but it doesn't do any good," Livingstone had said while still in shock—hitting the brake would have changed nothing when his car was not moving.

And how could the crime be detected at this stage? The dead man would have traces of a drug in his blood, or would have an extra injury not consistent with the "accident." His clothing would have been marked by a hook or other means of suspension, and a check of slow glass monitors on the roads leading to the Ridge Avenue area could prove that a breakdown truck or other suitable vehicle had been in the right place at the right time.

Garrod decided to call Grant Morgan and was turning to the viewphone when it chimed to announce an incoming call. He pressed the acceptance button and found himself looking at his wife. The background of shelves and miscellaneous equipment told him Esther was in his laboratory at home.

Esther touched her coppery hair nervously. "Alban, I . . ."

"How did you get in there?" he demanded. "I locked the door, and I told you to keep away from the place."

"I know you did, but I heard a kind of buzzing sound so I took the spare key the cleaner uses and came in."

Garrod went rigid with alarm. The buzzer must have been the automatic monitor signaling that the scenedow's piezoluctic constant was a constant no longer and had begun to increase. His equipment was programmed to cut out the radiation bombardment when this happened, but there was absolutely no guarantee that it would have any effect. The slow glass panel could erupt like a nova at any time.

". . . scenedow is behaving strangely," Esther was saying. "It has got a lot brighter, and everything has speeded up in it. Look." The viewphone panned round and came to rest with the scenedow filling the screen. Garrod found himself looking at a tree-lined lake with a range of mountains in the background. The scene should have been peaceful, but instead it was suffused with unnatural activity. Clouds swirled across the sky, animals and birds were nearly-invisible blurs of speed, and the sun was falling like a bomb.

Garrod tried to keep the panic in his voice under control. "Esther, that panel is going to blow. You've got to get out of the laboratory right now and close the door behind you. Go immediately!"

"But you told me we might see something in it which would help Dad."

"Esther," he shouted, "if you don't get out of there right now you'll never see anything again! For Christ's sake, run!"

There was a pause, then he heard the sound of her running footsteps and the slamming of the door. His raw fear ebbed slightly—Esther was safe—but the spectacle of the scenedow preparing to annihilate two years of stored sunlight in one withering flash held him motionless

in his chair. The sun plunged behind the mountains and darkness fell—but only for one minute in which the moon crossed the sky like a silver bullet. Another day came as a ten-second blast of hellfire, then . . .

The overloaded viewphone screen went blank.

Garrod wiped a cool film of sweat from his forehead and a moment later the viewphone circuits established themselves through reserve channels. When the picture reappeared the expended scenedow was a panel of polished obsidian, black as midnight. The sections of the laboratory he could see at the sides of the slow glass panel looked strangely colorless, as though seen in monochrome television. A few seconds later he heard the door opening and then Esther's voice.

"Alban," she said timidly. "The room has changed. There's no color left in anything."

"You'd better stay out of there till I get back."

"But it's safe now—and the room's all white. Look at it." The viewphone panned again and he saw Esther, her red hair and bottle-green dress standing out with incredible vividness against the bleached ghost of a room. Faint ripples of a new alarm began to spread through Garrod's mind.

"Listen," he said, voicing his unease. "I still think it would be better if you get out of there."

"But everything's so *different*. Look at this vase—it used to be blue." Esther turned the little vase over, revealing a disk of its original coloring on the underside which had been protected from the light. Garrod's sense of alarm grew stronger and he tried to force his numbed brain into action. Now that the scenedow had given up its stored light, what danger could there possibly be in the laboratory? The light had been absorbed by the walls and ceiling and . . .

"Cover your eyes and get out, Esther," he said hoarsely. "The place is full of experimental pieces of slow glass and

some of them have delays of only . . ."

Garrod's voice died as the screen lit up yet again. Esther screamed through a network of brilliant rays and her image flared with a ghastly radiance, like that of someone caught in a crossfire of laser beams. Garrod ran for the door of his office, but Esther's voice pursued him into the corridor and all the way home.

"I'm blind," she was screaming. "I'm blind!"

CHAPTER 7

Eric Hubert was a surprisingly young man to have reached the pinnacle of his profession. He was plump, pink and probably had lost his hair prematurely, because he was wearing one of the ultra-new spray-on wigs. A black organic adhesive had been painted over his scalp, forming an exaggerated widow's peak, and black silky fuzz had been air-blasted onto it. Garrod found it difficult to cast him as one of the best eye specialists in the Western Hemisphere. He felt obscurely glad that Esther could not see Hubert as she sat bolt upright at the other side of the huge, smooth desk.

"This is the moment we've all been waiting for," Hubert said in a deep, drawling voice which was completely at variance with his appearance. "All those tiresome tests are behind you now, Mrs. Garrod."

This sounds bad, Garrod thought. *If the news was good would he have started off like that?* Esther leaned forward slightly, her small face apparently composed behind the tinted glasses. Hubert's relaxed tones seemed to be providing comfort in her darkness. Garrod, escaping into

irrelevancy, remembered a middle-aged friend of his Aunt Marge's who wanted to learn the piano and, being self-conscious about her age, had chosen a blind tutor.

"What did the tests show?" Esther's voice was firm and clear.

"Well, you've taken a real punch on the jaw with this one, Mrs. Garrod. The cornea and lens capsule of each eye have been opaqued by the flash, and—at the present state of the art—there is nothing that optical surgery can do for the condition."

Garrod shook his head disbelievingly. "Surely people get cornea transplants every day. And the opacity of the lens—isn't that the same as a cataract? What's to stop you performing both operations at suitable intervals?"

"We're dealing with an entirely new physical condition here. The actual *structure* of the cornea has been altered in such a way that grafts would be rejected within a few days. In fact, we're lucky that progressive degeneration of the tissue hasn't taken place. We could, of course, remove the lens capsules in the same way—as you quite rightly pointed out—we treat an ordinary cataract." Hubert paused and fingered his incongruously demonic widow's peak. "But without a healthy, transparent cornea in front to transmit light your wife would be no better off."

Garrod glanced at Esther's peaceful face and quickly looked away again. "I must say I find it utterly incredible that a pig's heart could be put into my chest almost as a matter of routine, yet a simple eye operation . . ."

"In this case the operation would not be simple, Mr. Garrod," Hubert said. "Look—your wife has taken a bad kick on the shins, and now she'll just have to get up and keep right on walking."

"Is that so?" Hubert's trick of using analogies like punches on the jaw and kicks on the shin when referring to the catastrophe of being blinded suddenly enraged

Garrod. "It seems to me that . . ."

"Alban!" Esther's voice was strangely regal. "Mr. Hubert has given me the best attention and advice that money can buy. And I am sure he must have many other patients to attend."

"You don't seem to understand what he's saying." Garrod could feel the panic building up inside him.

"But I understand perfectly, darling. I'm blind—that's all there is to it." Esther smiled at a point just to the right of Garrod's shoulder and took off her glasses, revealing the blanched orbs that were her eyes. "Now take me home."

Garrod could think of only one way to describe his reaction to Esther's courage and self-possession—he had been humbled.

The whole way down to the street level in the elevator he tried vainly to think of something to say, but his silence seemed not to trouble her. She stood holding his arm with both hands, head well back, smiling slightly. In the main entrance of the Medical Arts building several men were waiting with cameras.

"I'm sorry, Esther," Garrod whispered. "There are television crews waiting—they must have been tipped off we were in town."

"It doesn't matter. You're a famous man, Alban." She held his arm even more tightly as they passed through the group of newsmen and got into the waiting limousine. Garrod refused to make any comment for the benefit of the microphones, and in a few seconds the limousine was surging away toward the airport. Esther had not been exaggerating about his fame. He was at the center of two separate stories which had caught and held public interest—one was a sensationalized version of how he had single-handedly exposed a Portston gambling syndicate's attempt to ruin his father-in-law; the other was a multi-

layered story of secret slow glass research producing a fearsome new weapon which had claimed the inventor's wife as its first victim. Garrod's early attempts to make the news media get the facts into perspective had achieved exactly the opposite effect, and he had adopted a policy of noncommunication.

Arriving at the airport, Garrod picked out Lou Nash's red-bearded face above the crowd and steered Esther toward him. Other reporters and cameramen were waiting near his aircraft but they got airborne quickly and made the brief northward hop to Potston. A larger crowd of newsmen were waiting, but at this end he had the help of Manston, his public relations manager, and in a surprisingly short time they were at home.

"Let's sit in the library," Esther said. "It's the one room I can see without eyes."

"Of course." He ushered her to her favorite armchair, and sat down opposite. The cool brown silence of the room closed around them.

"You must be tired," he said after a minute. "I'll have some coffee brought in."

"I don't want anything."

"A drink?"

"Nothing. I just want to sit here with you, Alban. There are so many adjustments I have to make. . . ."

"I see. Is there anything I can do?"

"Just be with me."

Garrod nodded and sat back to watch the late afternoon sun cross the high windows. The old clock in the corner ticked stolidly, creating and destroying distant universes with each sweep of its pendulum.

"Your parents will soon be arriving," he said once.

"No—I told them we wanted to be on our own tonight."

"But the company would be good for you."

"You're all the company I need."

They had dinner alone, then returned to the library.

Each time Garrod tried to start a conversation Esther made it clear that she preferred not to talk. Garrod glanced at his watch—midnight was far away, at the crest of a mountain of time.

"How about the sound books I got you? Wouldn't you like to listen to something?"

Esther shook her head. "You know I never cared much for reading."

"But this would be different. It would be more like listening to radio."

"I could listen to real radio if I wanted."

"The point is . . . Forget it." Garrod forced himself to remain silent, picked up a book and began to read.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing—just reading."

"Alban, there is something I would quite enjoy," Esther said after perhaps fifteen minutes.

"What is it?"

"Could we watch some television together?"

"Ah . . . I don't know what you mean."

"We could wear a set each." Esther seemed childishly eager. "I'll listen to the sound on my set and if I'm missing anything on vision you can tell me what's happening. That way we would both be taking part in it together."

Garrod hesitated. The word "together" had cropped up again, as happened so frequently in Esther's conversation these days. Neither he nor she had ever again referred to the question of his divorce.

"All right, honey," he said. He went to a drawer, took out two tri-di sets and placed one of them on Esther's patiently expectant face. The uphill climb toward midnight had become longer and steeper.

On the fourth morning he gripped Esther's shoulders and held her face-to-face with him. "I accept it," he said. "I accept that it is partially my fault that you've lost

your sight, but I can't take any more of this."

"Any more of what, Alban?" She looked hurt and surprised.

"This *punishment.*" Garrod drew a quavering breath. "You're blind, but I'm not blind. I have to go on with my work . . ."

"That's why you employ managers."

". . . and with my life, Esther."

"You still want a divorce!" Esther twisted away from him, ran a few paces and fell over a low table. She made no attempt to rise, but lay on the floor sobbing quietly. Garrod stared at his wife for a moment, helplessly, then gathered her up in his arms.

That afternoon he received a call from McFarlane. The research chief looked pale and tired, but his eyes—diminished by their concave lenses—glinted like zircons. He began by inquiring about Esther in a casual manner which failed to hide his excitement.

"Esther's all right," Garrod said. "There's this adjustment period. . . ."

"I can imagine. Ah . . . when will you be down at the lab again, Al?"

"Soon. A few days perhaps. Did you call me just to pass the time of day?"

"No. As a matter of fact . . ."

Garrod felt a premonition. "You've done it, haven't you, Theo?"

McFarlane nodded solemnly. "We've got triggered emission *with* control. It was a fairly straightforward pendulum effect, but with a variable frequency controlled by feedback on the X-ray frequency. The boys have a section of slow glass in the rig right now and they're running it just like a home movie. Speeding it up to an hour a minute, slowing it down where they feel like it, almost freezing the images."

"Perfect control!"

"I told you I'd have it within three months, Al—and that was only ten weeks ago." McFarlane looked uncomfortable, as though he had said something he would have preferred to keep back, and Garrod took the point immediately. If he had not been egotistical enough to try, in spite of being years behind on lab development, making the breakthrough on his own his wife would still have her sight. The responsibility and the guilt were his, and his alone.

"Congratulations, Theo," he said.

McFarlane nodded. "I expected to feel elated. Retardite is perfected now. The fixed delay was all that was holding it back—but from today on a simple piece of slow glass is superior to the most expensive movie camera in the world. All that went before is nothing to what's coming."

"So what's your problem, Theo?"

"I've just realized that I may never be truly alone again."

"Don't worry about it," Garrod said quietly. "That's something we've all got to learn to live with."

SIDELIGHT THREE: A Dome of Many-colored Glass

Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity.
P. B. Shelley

The duel between The Planner and The Private was entering its sixth year.

It was a quiet, bitter struggle, characterized and made remarkable by the fact that it had lasted more than the same number of weeks. By all the unwritten rules that govern such things, The Planner should have been victorious at an early stage—because all the resources, all the advantages were on his side.

The Planner's name was Lap Wing Chon and, although he was answerable in the long run to Chairman Lin, his reputation in his own province was such that he had the authority of an emperor. A brilliant civil engineer —the profession had earned him his popular name—he had graduated to politics, earned a reputation as a theoretician and had at one stage of his long life seemed destined to join the chief executive of the People's Republic. His progress in that direction had been checked by the related failings of personal egotism and provincialism, but these very faults strengthened his position with the people of the estuary in which he had been born. The system of flood control installations he had designed and insisted on building, despite certain prior claims the national plan had made on the area's productivity, had saved an estimated half-million lives within five years of its completion. He was tough, stubborn, clever, chauvinistic—and loved by the people. Within the boundaries of his own province, Lap Wing Chon had what amounted to absolute power. He could, for instance, have had The Private executed at any moment during the six long years of their duel, but that was not his way, and not what he had set out to do.

The Private was not a private at all, and it was in the nature of their struggle that only he and Lap Wing Chon knew, or understood, why he was so called. His name was Laurence Bell Evans. He had been born in Portsmouth, England, but had grown up in Massachusetts, and had been a lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force when his aircraft was struck by lightning during a flight from Manila to Seoul. It was forced down in The Planner's domain and Evans, the navigator, had been the only crew member to survive the crash. Two decades earlier he would have been transported to Peking for diplomatic auction to his own country, but there had been considerable development and change within the Party. The air-

man had no political value, and so his fate rested solely with Lap Wing Chon.

They—The Planner and The Private—had met briefly one afternoon when the former was on a routine visit to the Twelfth Century fortress which was supposed to be an historical monument, but which served as a convenient place in which to keep a variety of political freaks and misfits.

And the intermittent six-year duel had begun. . . .

At first The Planner's degree of involvement had not been great. The affair had been little more than a stray notion, a whim. He had despised Evans immediately and instinctively for his gangling underdeveloped body, the baby pinkness of his face, and—most of all—for the softness he saw in the airman's nervous gray eyes. That softness, the obvious lack of political or social will, had been an affront to The Planner's whole existence, and something had prompted him to mold the clay which had been placed in his hands.

He had begun by presenting Evans with the classical proposition. It was self-evident that the American had been engaged in activities hostile to the Republic. Furthermore, the U.S. Air Force had written him off as dead with the rest of the crew of the lost aircraft; therefore there was no political machinery working on Evans' behalf. He was alone and could be buried without a trace. The Republic was entitled to have Evans executed without further delay, but the humanitarian ideals which inspired the leaders of the revolution prompted them to be merciful. If Evans would confess to his crime, and to acknowledge the greater crimes of his masters, he would be returned to his own country immediately.

As was to be expected, Evans had refused.

Lap Wing Chon had smiled patiently, indulgently. And increased the pressure.

It was during the sixth month that he began to realize he had misjudged his man. Evans was politically naïve, he was physically weak, he had a great fear of pain and death—yet he had an inner core of certitude, a philosophical armature, which was unbreakable.

"I *want* to sign the confession, I *want* to go home," he used to say, "but we both know it's untrue—therefore I can't sign."

And on one occasion: "If you yourself believed what it says in this paper I might be able to sign it, and trick you, because then it wouldn't be very important. But you know the truth, and I know the truth, so what you're asking me to do is sit down with you and cancel out . . . *willingly* cancel out my entire previous life. This can't be done."

At this stage Lap Wing Chon still thought of his prisoner as "Evans" or "the American"—then Evans was found in his cell one morning suffering from lobar pneumonia. During the subsequent fevers Lap watched over him anxiously, fearing the intervention of death, and during one bedside vigil heard the young man whisper in delirium.

"*Last night,*" the words were barely audible in the long hospital room. "Last night, among his fellow roughs, he jested, quaffed and swore. . . ."

The Planner, meticulous in everything he did, wrote the words down in his notebook and later, when he was satisfied Evans would recover, had a search made for their source. It was with some curiosity that he picked up the photoprint brought by his secretary and read a poem called "The Private of the Buffs," with greater wonderment that he set the sheet aside. The verse—he could not class it as poetry—told a story which had some obvious parallels with Evans' situation. A lone Englishman in the hands of the Chinese . . . commanded to perform the *Kowtow* . . . refuses to yield, accepts death before dis-

honor. The idea that any adult human might be influenced by, and even cherish, the Imperialist principles embodied in the piece both amused and startled The Planner. It also affected his approach to Evans, because he now understood the politically primeval level on which his life and that of his prisoner interacted. This was a clash, not ideology, but of the archetypal Idea.

He allowed several months to pass, then visited Evans in his cell. Evans was not surprised to see Lap Wing Chon because it was during a period in which he was being allowed fairly frequent contact with other human beings. The Planner allowed the conversation to wander aimlessly for a while before he touched on the subject of the poem.

"I think you once told me," he began, "that you are fond of poetry."

"Did I? I don't remember."

"I may be able to arrange for you to have some anthologies."

"Really?" Evans sounded uninterested.

"Who are your favorite poets?"

"The good ones."

The Planner nodded and examined the wood-grained skin of his hands. "The good ones? What do you think of the distinguished English doggerel-writer, Sir Francis H. Doyle?"

Evans frowned slightly. "As you say, he wrote distinguished English doggerel."

The Planner laughed compliantly. " 'The Private of the Buffs'! The ultimate in jingoism, don't you think?"

"It out-Kipples Kipling. By the way, the word jingoism has been obsolescent for rather a long time."

" 'Let dusky Indians whine and kneel, An English lad must die.' Isn't it incredible?"

"Fantastic."

Evans' reaction had not been what The Planner ex-

pected, and so he changed his approach. "Is that how you see yourself, Larry? 'The Private of the Buffs'?"

"You've got to be joking."

"But the parallels are so obvious," The Planner insisted. "The situation is virtually identical."

"No. There's one very big difference."

"And that is . . . ?"

"In the poem, at the private's first refusal to perform the *Kowtow* the Chinese warlord had him killed. You see, the warlord was sure of himself—it wasn't all that important to him whether the Private of the Buffs yielded or not." Evans smiled, revealing teeth which were beginning to show signs of dietary deficiencies.

"But you wouldn't kill me, would you?"

For perhaps the hundredth time, The Planner opened the tiny, leather-covered box and examined its contents. Two small glassy disks glowed at him from their nests of velvet. They were slightly domed, shining with every color of life, like cabochons of some exquisite precious stone.

These arrived just in time, he thought, closing the box again. *After six years, The Private's health has almost been destroyed.*

He took a deep breath and entered the discreetly positioned hospital room to which the prisoner had been transferred. Doctor Sing and two white-coated orderlies were standing by the bed. Evans was lying perfectly still, staring at the high ceiling, his wasted body covered to the chin.

"Is that you, Lap?" he said weakly. "Got something good for me this time?"

"Something very special this time, Larry." The Planner opened his little box again and held it close to Evans' face.

Evans narrowed his eyes. "Jewels?"

"Retardite. Slow glass. You're familiar with the material?"

"Oh, that stuff." Evans lowered his head back onto the pillow. "They were making jewelry out of it when I was . . ." His voice faded away uncertainly.

"It has much more important uses now, Larry. Techniques have been developed for controlling the emission of stored light. It is possible to see everything a piece of slow glass has seen, exactly when you want to see it." The Planner made sure his voice revealed none of the excitement and hunger and fear which pounded within him.

"What has that to do with me?"

"Look at the box again, Larry. Look at the *shapes.* What do they remind you of?"

Evans raised his head with obvious effort. "Two little domes of glass. They're like contact lenses. For me?"

The Planner nodded. "Very good, Larry. You're going on a trip."

"Where to?" Evans' voice was guarded now.

"Have you heard of a Vietnamese village called My Lai?"

"I'm not sure."

"Your memory will be refreshed. Your journey will take you to My Lai and a hundred other similar places. In some cases what you see will obviously be filmed material, but as you get more up-to-date you will be looking through slow glass which was at the actual scenes. You'll be *there,* Larry. As far as the evidence of your eyes is concerned, you will really be present at all these places. Even when you're asleep you'll still be there, watching and watching and . . ."

"What sort of places are you talking about?"

"You'll see. You're going on a conducted tour of those areas of the world which your country has liberated with the aid of napalm and cluster bombs. You're going to see

yourself as others have seen you."

"You . . . you can't make me look at anything I don't want to see."

"No?" The Planner nodded, and the two watchful orderlies threw straps across the bed, buckling them down tightly over Evans' chest, hips and legs. Evans responded by rolling his eyes frantically to prevent them being worked upon. Doctor Sing picked up a gleaming hypodermic gun from his instrument tray and fired a tiny cloud of a highly specialized anesthetic into Evans' temple. The rapid eye movements ceased almost at once and Evans' jaw sagged. Using an object like a small, chromium-plated shoehorn, Doctor Sing expertly turned the prisoner's eyes in their sockets until they were staring directly ahead.

The Planner handed him the leather-covered box. "You're sure he's conscious?"

"He is fully conscious," Sing replied. "We have merely deprived him of the control of certain delicate muscles." Squeezing a drop of clear fluid onto each of Evans' eyes, he picked up the slow glass disks with a suction tube and placed them on the immobilized eyeballs. He made certain the disks were properly orientated by checking that the red dot on the edge of each was in the twelve o'clock position, and stepped back from the bed. Evans now had brilliantly-glowing multicolored disks in place of eyes. Sing picked up an object like a black flashlight, moved its slide and pointed it briefly at the prisoner's face.

The jewels came to life, swirling with microscopic movement.

The Planner waited until his prisoner had been touring Atrocityville for a full twelve hours, then he returned to the bedside. He gazed down at the bearded El Greco face for a long moment with a mixture of pity and contempt. Evans' mouth was open, his lips drawn back from

the blackened ruins of his teeth, and a fine thread of saliva glinted on his cheek. The Planner sat down and put his mouth close to Evans' ear.

"Larry," he said gently. "I'm still your friend, and I'm sorry we had to force the truth on you in this way. I want to bring you back from wherever you are right now—all you have to do is sign the confession. What's your answer, Larry?"

He peered into Evans' face, and into the eyes which were orange ports of hell. The Planner's own eyes widened with shock. He stood up and backed away from the bed, his fingers fluttering nervously to his mouth.

"There's something wrong," he mumbled. "The Private is smiling."

Doctor Sing spoke emotionlessly behind him. "I warned you this might happen, comrade. Your prisoner has escaped from you."

In the end, Evans was able to make the transition to psychosis smoothly. There had been a long journey, filled with pain and horror, but all that was behind him now. He was back in England, Queen Victoria was secure on her throne, and soon he would be home. There was only a short distance to walk.

Far Kentish hop-fields round him seem'd,
Like dreams, to come and go;
Bright leagues of cherry-blossom gleam'd,
One sheet of living snow;
The smoke above his father's door,
In gray soft eddyings hung . . .

Brushing the dust from his torn khaki uniform, Private Evans slung his rifle over his shoulder, and strode gratefully into the sunlight of a bygone century.

CHAPTER 8

The news that Esther was to see again—but in a uniquely unnatural manner—came when Garrod was tied up with a series of appointments.

Earliest in the morning was a meeting with Charles Manston to discuss "broad matters of public relations policy." Manston was a tall, lean man with aquiline features and floppy black hair. He affected a very British style of dress, including dark blue cravats with white spots, and spoke with what Garrod thought of as a mid-Atlantic accent; but he had been a topflight journalist and now was a perceptive and efficient PR man.

"I've been watching it happen for the past year or more," he said, puffing a gold-tipped cigarette into life. "The whole tide of public opinion is turning against our products."

Garrod fingered the stacks of press cuttings and broadcast transcripts Manston had set on his desk. "Aren't you overselling me on this one? Is there really such an animal as a tide of public opinion?"

"Believe me, Alban, the tide is very real and very powerful. If it's going the way you want it—great; if it's running against you—you're in trouble." Manston handed over a sheet of paper. "This is an analysis of our image acceptance as revealed by these cuttings. Almost sixty percent of the stories are openly unfavorable towards Retardite and related products, and another twelve percent have hostile connotations.

"That, Alban, is what is known in the trade as a bad press."

Garrod looked at the tabulated figures, but Manston's habit of addressing him by his full Christian name had reminded him of Esther and the message he had received from Eric Hubert. The operation had been successful, and now Esther was to see again—if one accepted the surgeon's startling proposal as a means of "seeing." . . .

"Just look at the breakdown," Manston was saying. "Look how many items deal with strikes and other industrial actions caused by unions objecting to slow glass monitors being installed in plants. Look at all these stories about civil rights associations fighting the government's decision that all road vehicles must carry slow glass telltales. And there's the new Privacy League—it's getting stronger every . . ."

"What do you propose to do about it?" Garrod said.

"We'll have to spend money. I can get the agency to draw up a PR campaign, but it's bound to cost at least a million."

The meeting lasted a further twenty minutes while Manston went on to outline his preliminary ideas on how the campaign ought to be laid out. Garrod, who had been only half-listening, gave his approval and watched Manston hurry away filled with enthusiasm and gratitude. He had a feeling that if the press clippings had been totally in favor of Retardite the public relations man would still have urged him to invest a million, to ride the crest of

the wave. A million meant less to him now than a single dollar had done in his childhood in Barlow, Oregon, yet he had never quite managed to break the conditioning imposed by years of his uncle's pennypinching. Each time he wrote a large check or authorized heavy capital expenditure he saw his uncle turning gray with apprehension.

His next meeting was with Schickert, head of the Liquid Light Paints Division. Its basic product was a thixotropic emulsion of clear resin and powder fine slow glass beads with mixed delay periods ranging from hours to days. The paint's main application was architectural—buildings coated with it shone with a soft radiance at night—but there had been an unprecedented demand for the Retardite particles from other paint manufacturers. Schickert wanted authorization for a new plant which would increase output by a thousand tons a week. Again, Garrod allowed himself to be sold the proposal while his thoughts were elsewhere. Finally, he looked at his watch, saw with relief that he was due to leave for Los Angeles in less than an hour, and made his escape from the office.

"There's a little discomfort at this stage," Eric Hubert said, "but Mrs. Garrod is seeing again."

"Already!" Garrod had difficulty matching the words to the kaleidoscope of his feelings. "I . . . I'm grateful."

Hubert gently fingered the V-shaped artificial hairline which made him look like a pink plastic Mephistopheles. "The operation itself was quite simple—once we had sealed the anterior chamber with a skin of inert plastic jelly. That made it possible for us to remove the lens capsules and form small permanent slits in the corneas without losing the . . . I'm sorry—do you find this distressing?"

"It's all right."

"One of the drawbacks of being an eye surgeon is that

you can't do much boasting about your work. The eye is a surprisingly tough organ, yet most people—especially men—can't bear to hear details of even the simplest operation. People *are* their eyes, you know. It's a kind of instinctive recognition of the fact that the retina is an extension of the brain, and therefore . . ."

"May I see my wife now?"

"Of course." Hubert made no attempt to get up from his chair. He began rearranging small piles of paperwork. "Before we go to Mrs. Garrod's room I want to make sure you know what's required of you."

"I don't understand." Garrod began to feel uneasy.

"I tried to convince Mrs. Garrod that it would be much better if a trained ophthalmic nurse called to see her every day, but she wouldn't hear of it." Hubert gave Garrod a level, appraising stare. "She wants you to change her disks every morning."

"Oh!" Garrod felt his abdomen contract in revulsion, the attempt of his genitals to steal back into the body's protective cavities. "What does that involve exactly?"

"Nothing you can't handle," Hubert said kindly, and Garrod suddenly despised himself for having allowed his opinion of the surgeon to be influenced by the man's rather ludicrous appearance. "These are the disks."

He opened a flat case and exposed a number of small glass objects arranged in pairs. They were disks of less than a centimeter in diameter, with up-curving glass tails attached, like miniature translucent frying pans. Some of the disks were jet black, others glowed with color and light.

Hubert smiled briefly. "I don't need to tell *you* what kind of material this is. These Retardite disks have different delay periods—one, two or three days. One day is the shortest period because I don't recommend opening the slits in the corneas any more frequently than once every twenty-four hours.

"To change them you will have to spray your wife's eyes with a combined immobilizer and anesthetic, grip the old disks firmly by the extensions, slide them out, slide in the new disks, and squeeze a little sealant gel over the slits. It might sound like a major undertaking, but we'll put you through the routine a few times before your wife leaves the clinic. After a while you'll think nothing of it."

Garrod nodded slowly. "And, as far as my wife is concerned, she'll have real vision again?"

"That's it—except, of course, that everything she sees will be one, two or three days late, depending on which disks she's using."

"I wonder how it'll compare with having normal eyes."

"The important thing, Mr. Garrod," Hubert said firmly, "is how it compares with having no eyes at all."

"I'm sorry—I must have sounded as though I don't appreciate what you've done, and that isn't the case. How is Esther reacting?"

"Beautifully. She tells me she used to watch a lot of television, and now she can do that again."

Garrod frowned. "How about the sound?"

"That can be recorded and played back in synch with what she's seeing." Hubert's voice became enthusiastic. "This operation will help a lot of people—perhaps someday we'll have State-sponsored television stations broadcasting sound on a separate wavelength exactly twenty-four hours later than their visual transmissions. That way, an ordinary tri-di set with only slight modification to the audio circuits . . ."

Garrod's attention wandered as he began to accept the fact that his wife could see again. Esther had been blind for almost a year, during which time they had not spent one evening apart and had gone out on perhaps only six occasions. It seemed to Garrod that he had endured eons in the brown dimness of the library, describing the

events on endless television shows.

"That's an interesting voice," Esther would say. *"Does the owner match it?"*

At other times she would take the lead and give long visualizations of the owners of voices, then ask him to confirm that she had been right. But, almost invariably, she was wrong—even in cases where Garrod suspected she could have described the person from memory—and greeted his corrections with a taut, wistful smile which told him he was forgiven for blinding her, and being forgiven was even deeper in thrall. Or at other times she would say the most forgiving, most smothering words of all, the ones Garrod dreaded to hear, delivered with a radiant countenance:

"I'm sure the scenery I'm creating for this play is much better than what the viewers have to watch."

Now, however, Esther could supply her own images, the light for her own eyes, and perhaps he would be able to breathe again.

"We'll go along and visit Mrs. Garrod now if you like," Hubert said.

Garrod nodded and followed the surgeon to the private suite. Esther was sitting up in bed in a bright room filled with prisms of sunlight slanting from the windows. She was wearing heavy, side-shielded glasses and, judging by the continuing rapt expression on her face, had not heard them enter the room. Garrod crossed to the bed and, deciding he had better get used to the results of the bizarre surgery, looked into his wife's face. Flawless blue eyes blinked at him through the lenses of her glasses. The eyes of a stranger. He took an involuntary step backward, then noticed that the eyes had not responded to his presence.

"I should have told you," Hubert whispered. "Mrs. Garrod decided against dark glasses. Those are Retardite lenses programmed with another person's eyes."

"Where did you get them?"

"They're available commercially. Girls with pretty eyes can earn extra cash by wearing Retardite lenses all day. Some women who haven't got eye complaints wear them for cosmetic reasons—by using a fine grating of Retardite you can make spectacles through which a person can see normally, but anybody looking at them sees the programmed eyes. Surely you've seen them before?"

"No, I hadn't—I've been out of circulation lately." Garrod spoke loudly to attract Esther's attention.

"Alban," she said immediately, and held out her hands to him. Garrod gripped his wife's warm dry fingers and kissed her lightly on the lips, and all the while the stranger's blue eyes gazed tolerantly through Esther's glasses.

He lowered his gaze. "How do you feel?"

"Wonderful! I can see again, Alban."

"Is it just like . . . before?"

"Better than before—I've just discovered I was always a little shortsighted. Right now I'm looking out over the ocean at Piedras Blancas Point, I think it is, and I can see for *miles*. I'd forgotten how many shades of blue and green there are in the sea. . . ." Esther's voice faded away and her lips parted with pleasure.

Garrod felt the beginnings of hope. "I'm glad, Esther. I'll send your disks anywhere in the world you want to see. You'll be able to take in Broadway plays, pleasure trips. . . ."

Esther laughed. "But that would be like being away from you."

"You won't really be away. And I'll always be around."

"No, darling. I don't want to waste this gift by spending the rest of my life watching travelogs." Esther's fingers closed over his. "I want to do simple personal things. Things that concern us—like going for walks together in our own gardens."

"That's a nice idea, honey, but you wouldn't be able to *see* the garden."

"Yes, I would—provided we went for our walk at the same time every day, and always along the same paths."

A cool breeze seemed to blow over Garrod's forehead. "That means living in yesterday. You'd be walking in a garden one day but seeing it as it was the day be fore. . . ."

"Won't it be wonderful?" Esther raised his hand to her mouth and kissed his knuckles. Her breath was warm on the back of his hand. "You'll wear a pair of disks for me, won't you, Alban? I want you to wear them all the time, everywhere you go. That way we'll always be together."

Garrod tried to withdraw his hand, but Esther clung to it.

"Tell me you'll do it, Alban." Her words were glass rods snapping. "Tell me you'll share your life with me."

"Don't worry about it," Garrod said. "I'll do whatever you want."

He raised his eyes from her frantically clawing hands and looked into her face. The stranger's blue eyes regarded him with a calm, vacant contentment.

CHAPTER 9

The murder of Senator Jerry Wescott took place at 2:33 A.M. on a lonely road several miles north of Bingham, Maine.

His death was timed with precision because the weapon used was a laser cannon so powerful as to vaporize most of the car in which the senator had been traveling. The murderer had chosen a spot where the road dipped abruptly through a hollow and thus had prevented the flash from being seen by anybody in the surrounding area, but it had been picked up by a Sk-eye II military observation satellite and the information telemetered to an underground tracking station. From there it went to the Pentagon and eventually, but still within the hour, came into the hands of the civil authorities.

A laser cannon, while effective, is anything but discreet and it was deduced that it had been employed because it was certain to destroy the Retardite telltales on the car and any other pieces of slow glass which may have been in the vehicle. The criminal community had been quick

to learn that it was inadvisable to be "seen" by a piece of slow glass even at night, even at a distance, because of the special optical techniques which could be employed for interrogating the glass. And now that Retardite could be played back at will, without having to wait for its nominal delay period to elapse, it was even more imperative to take precautions against it.

In this instance, the laser did effectively destroy all incriminating Retardite on the vehicle. It also charred the senator's body far beyond recognition and, had it not failed to incinerate the contents of his fireproof briefcase, the identity of the dead man may not have been ascertained for some days.

As it was, the expanding ripple of information which had begun with a minute surge of photons in an orbiting camera spread outward through the broadcasting networks and, within a matter of hours, had assumed the proportions of a tidal wave.

No matter how much it might have been predicted, no matter how many times it had occurred in the past, the assassination of a man who in less than a year would probably have been President of the United States was still big news.

CHAPTER 10

It was a sunny evening, but they walked in the gardens while Esther admired yesterday's rain.

"It's really wonderful, Alban." She pulled on his arm, forcing him to pause near a clump of deep-hued shrubs. He remembered they had halted at the same place on the previous day, and Esther like to create an illusion of being normally sighted by matching today's bodily movements with yesterday's changing viewpoints.

"I can see the rain falling all round me," she continued, "but all I can feel is warm sunlight. The sun is my umbrella."

Garrod was almost certain Esther was trying to be profound or poetic, so he squeezed her hand encouragingly, while making sure his face did not come within range of the two black disks which glinted on her lapel. He had discovered that a look of impatience or anger recorded by Esther's vicarious eyes, but not passed to her brain until twenty-four hours later, was a bigger strain on the relationship than a spontaneous mutual clash.

"I think we should go in now," he said. "Dinner is almost ready."

"In a moment. We walked to the pool yesterday so that I could see the rain falling on it."

"All right." Garrod walked with his wife to the edge of the long pool. She stood at its turquoise-tiled rim for a moment, and once leaned over above their reflections. Looking downward at the water's smooth surface, Garrod was able to see the same stranger's enormous blue eyes behind Esther's glasses. Close to them, due to the foreshortening of her reflection, were the two night-black specks which were her real windows on the world, but which would not yield these images until the same time the following day. His own reflection shivered and shrank beside hers, anonymous dark pits for eyes, like a detail from an oil painting magnified to a size which revealed all its imperfections. *That's the real me down there,* the fugue-like thought came. *And I'm the real reflection.* He breathed deeply, but the air seemed not to reach his lungs. His heart swelled like a pillow, filling his chest with its frustrated fluffy poundings, strangling him.

"We're walking now," Esther commanded. "Come along."

They moved off toward the ivy-covered house for the evening meal. As usual, Esther had a sea-food salad—she preferred a repetitious diet to eating varied foods whose tastes were not in accordance with yesterday's images. Garrod ate lightly from his own servings, then stood up. Esther unclipped the disks from her lapel and handed them to him. He took the plastic mount from her and went through to his laboratory at the rear of the house to prepare the evening's television viewing.

In a corner of the laboratory he had set up one of the old-style large-screen television sets, a sound recorder and an automatic control which switched channels according to Esther's pre-selected viewing requirements.

Facing the set was a stand on which he placed his wife's eye disks to absorb that evening's shows. Also on the stand was what looked like an ordinary pair of glasses but which had two disks of twenty-four hour slow glass in place of conventional lenses. These were his.

Garrod replaced the glasses with a similar pair, switched on the television set, the sound recorder and the control unit. He took a tape cassette and his charged glasses into the library, where Esther was already waiting in her wingback chair. When he put the glasses on he found himself watching a newscast which had gone out exactly twenty-four hours earlier. He plugged the cassette into a playback machine, worked for a moment to synchronize the recorded sound, and sat down beside his wife. Another evening at home had begun.

Normally Garrod was able to take in day-old newscasts with complete indifference, but with that morning's announcement of Senator Westcott's assassination fresh in his mind the experience was nerve-racking. Yesterday was as distant and lost and futile as the Punic Wars. And yesterday was the place where his wife was making him live. He sat with clenched hands and thought of the one and only time, a month earlier, when he had tried to break free. Esther had snatched the Retardite disks out of her own eyes, screaming with pain, and endured blindness for days afterward, refusing to see again until he promised to restore their previous degree of "togetherness." Again the sense of asphyxiation came on him and he fought it with deep, controlled breathing.

Perhaps an hour had passed when McGill, the majordomo, quietly entered the library and told Garrod there was a priority call from Augusta, Maine.

Garrod glanced at his wife's impassive face. "You know I don't accept business calls while at home. Get Mr. Fuente to deal with it."

"Mr. Fuente has already been on another channel, Mr.

Garrod. He said it was he who gave this caller your private number and that it's imperative for you to take the call personally." McGill was whispering out of deference to Esther, but there was a stubborn expression on his jowled face.

"In that case . . ." Garrod got to his feet, pleased at the unexpected break in the stultifying routine, set his glasses down and went to the ground floor room he used as an office. In the viewphone he saw an expensively-dressed, powerfully-built black man who had fierce eyes and a spectacular streak of white in his hair.

"Mr. Garrod," the caller said. "I am Miller J. Pobjoy, chief executive of the State of Maine police commission."

Garrod had a feeling he had heard the name already that day, but was unable to place it. "What can I do for you?"

"A great deal, I think. My department is investigating the murder of Senator Wescott, and I'm asking for your assistance."

"In a murder investigation! I don't see how I can help."

Pobjoy smiled, showing very white, slightly uneven teeth. "Come now, Mr. Garrod—next to Sherlock Holmes you're the most famous amateur detective I can think of."

"Strictly an amateur, Mr. Pobjoy. The business about my father-in-law was meant to be a private matter."

"I appreciate that—I should explain that I was only joking about the gumshoeing. The reason I've called is . . . I presume this is a secure channel?"

Garrod nodded. "It is. I have a type one-eighty-three security cloak here too, if you want."

"Not necessary. We've recovered the remains of the Retardite telltales from the senator's car and we're appointing a panel of experts whose job it will be to see if they contain any information about the killer or killers."

"Remains?" Garrod felt his interest quicken. "What sort of remains? I understood from the radio broadcasts

that the whole vehicle was puddled."

"Well, that's just the point—we aren't too sure just what we've got. We have some chunks of drippy-looking metal here, and we think one of them might have a Retardite telltale inside it. The best technical advice we've got so far is that it would be risky to slice into the metal in case the stresses damaged the glass."

"It won't make any difference," Garrod said emphatically. "If the telltale has been in contact with white-hot metal all its interior stress patterns will have been relieved. The information is gone."

"We don't know how hot the metal was, or even if it was truly molten at the time these chunks were formed. There were explosive forces at work on it."

"I still say the information is gone."

"But can you, as a scientist—a scientist who hasn't even seen what we've got—make a positive statement to that effect?" Pobjoy leaned forward, intent.

"Of course not."

"Then will you agree to look at the material?"

Garrod sighed. "All right—have it sent to my Portston laboratories."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Garrod, but you would have to come here. This is being handled within the state of Maine."

"I'm sorry, too. I don't see how I could spend that much time and . . ."

"There's a lot at stake, Mr. Garrod. Assassins have robbed this country of too much already."

Garrod thought of Jerry Wescott's burning commitment to social reform, his Darrow-like hatred of the kind of injustice which is born of inequality of opportunity. Anger at the senator's premature death had been an undercurrent in his thoughts all day, but suddenly it was overlaid by an entirely new consideration. He thought: *I would have to go without Esther.*

"I'll try to help," he said aloud. "Tell me where to meet you."

When they had finished speaking and the screen had gone dead, he stood for a moment staring into its spurious gray infinities. His first reaction was one of childish elation, but the very intensity of the emotion inspired a sobering query. *Why have I allowed Esther to nail me down?*

It came to him that the most escape-proof jail of all was one in which the door was always unlocked—provided the prisoner had the guts to push it open and walk out. His responsibility for her blindness was hinged on the fact that he had forgotten there was a spare key to his laboratory, but if one adult warns another in clear terms . . .

"So you're going to Augusta," Esther said from behind him.

He turned to face her. "I couldn't very well refuse."

"I know, darling. I heard what Mr. Pobjoy said."

Garrod was surprised at the calmness of his wife's voice. "You don't mind?"

"Not as long as you take me with you."

"That's out of the question," he said stiffly. "I'm going to be working and traveling all the . . ."

"I realize I'd be in the way—if I went in person." Esther smiled and held out her hand.

"But what other . . . ?" Garrod's voice trailed away as he saw that Esther was offering him one of the flat cases containing her spare sets of eyes.

He would not be alone, after all.

CHAPTER 11

Garrod's plane took off early in the morning, twisting and skidding in the clear but turbulent air over Portston, and climbed away toward the east.

"Have to fly low this morning," Lou Nash reminded him over the intercom. "We're still barred from the commercial lanes."

"You've mentioned that before now, Lou," Garrod said comfortably, recalling the penalty the air traffic tribunal had meted out for his crazy dash to Macon an eternity ago. "Don't worry about it."

"It's costing you money, this flying low and slow."

"I said, don't worry about it." Garrod smiled, aware that Nash's concern was not with the economics of the flight, but with the fact that he was prevented from giving the plush-lined projectile its head. He settled back in his chair and watched the miniaturized world drift by below. After a moment he noticed that Esther's eye disks, in the small plastic holder in his lapel, were below the level of the window. He unclipped the device which in-

corporated a sound recorder and set it on the lower rim of the window, with the watchful black circles facing outward. *Enjoy the view,* he thought.

"There's another one!" Nash's voice rapped excitedly from the concealed speakers.

"Another what?" Garrod looked downward at a panorama of tan-colored hills flecked with scrub and traversed by a single highway. He saw nothing unusual.

"Crop-spraying job at about two thousand feet."

Garrod's unpracticed eye still had not found anything resembling another aircraft. "But there aren't any crops out here."

"That's what's funny about it. I've seen three of those Joes in the last month, though."

The plane banked to the right, increasing the downward view on that side, and suddenly Garrod found a tiny gleaming crucifix far below, moving across their line of flight and trailing a white feather of what appeared to be smoke. As he watched, the feather abruptly vanished.

"He's just spotted us," Nash said. "They always quit spraying when they see you."

"Two thousand feet is too high for crop-spraying, isn't it? What's the normal height?"

"Practically on the deck—that's something else that's queer."

"Somebody must be testing spraying equipment, that's all."

"But . . ."

"Lou," Garrod said severely, "there are too many automatic controls on this airplane—and that means you're sitting up there all alone with nothing to occupy your mind. Would you please either fly this thing yourself or do a crossword?"

Nash muttered semi-audibly and lapsed into a silence which lasted for the rest of the flight. Garrod, who had

curtailed his night's sleep in preparing for the trip, dozed, drank coffee, and dozed again until the viewphone built into the forward bulkhead chimed for his attention. He accepted the call and found himself looking at the hawkish features of Manston, his public relations manager.

"Good morning, Alban," Manston said in his neutral accent. "Seen any newscasts or papers this morning?"

"No, I hadn't time."

"You're back in the headlines again."

Garrod sat upright. "In what way?"

"According to all the splash stories I've seen you're on your way to Augusta full of confidence that you can pinpoint Senator Wescott's murderer by examining the remains of his car."

"*What?*"

"There are all kinds of hints that you have a new technique for getting images out of fragmented or fused slow glass."

"But that's crazy! I told Pobjoy there was no . . ." Garrod took a steadying breath. "Charles, did you make any statements about this to the press last night?"

Manston adjusted his blue spotted cravat and looked pained. "Please!"

"Then it must have been Pobjoy."

"Do you want me to issue a counter-statement of any kind?"

Garrod shook his head. "No—let it ride. I'll sort it out with Pobjoy when I see him. Thanks for calling, Charles."

Garrod terminated the call. He sat back in his chair and tried to drift off to sleep again but a thread of annoyance was wavering in his thoughts, like a bright serpent squirming across the surface of a pool. The past year with Esther had made him very sensitive to some things, and at this moment he had a strong sense of being manipulated, of being used by another person. Pob-

joy's statements to the press were not merely ill-considered, they were blatantly contrary to the entire gist of the single conversation he had had with Garrod. He had not given the impression of being a man who would act without a well thought-out motive, but what had he hoped to gain?

It was a clear brassy noon when Garrod's aircraft dropped onto the runway at an airport close to Augusta. As it rolled to a halt in the private aircraft arrivals bay Garrod looked through the ports and saw the now-familiar grouping of reporters and cameramen. Some of the latter were holding Retardite panels, but the others—reflecting the struggles that were taking place between branches of the photo-journalists' union—were carrying conventional photographic equipment. At the last moment Garrod remembered to lift Esther's disks from the window and clip them to his lapel. When he stepped out of his aircraft the newsmen surged toward the tarmac, but were held back by a strong contingent of uniformed police. The tall, powerful figure of Miller Pobjoy came into view wearing a suit of midnight blue silk.

"Sorry about the crowd," he said easily, shaking Garrod's hand. "We'll get you out of here in no time." He gave a hand signal, a limousine appeared beside the aircraft, and in a matter of seconds Garrod was inside it and being driven toward the airport gates. "I guess you're used to the celebrity treatment by this time?"

"I'm not that much of a celebrity," Garrod replied quickly. "What was the idea of feeding all that bull to the press last night?"

"Bull, Mr. Garrod?" Pobjoy looked puzzled.

"Yeah—the stuff about my being confident of pinpointing the killer with new Retardite interrogation techniques."

Pobjoy's brow was restored to the smoothness and sheen of a new chestnut. "Oh, *that!* Somebody in our

publicity department got a little overenthusiastic, I guess. You know how it is."

"As a matter of fact, I don't. My publicity manager would sack any member of his staff who pulled one like that. Then I would sack him for having allowed it to happen."

Pobjoy shrugged. "Somebody got carried away, lost his head, that's all. It's a big embarrassment to the state that Wescott got himself murdered here—the only reason it happened in Maine was that the senator came up here regularly for the fishing and hunting—so everybody's very anxious to show willingness."

Garrod found the black man's attitude strangely unsatisfactory, but he decided to let the matter slide. On the ride into downtown Augusta he learned that the other members of the expert panel were an FBI man called Gilchrist and a military research chief who had temporarily been detached from the Army for the purpose. The latter turned out to be Colonel John Mannheim, one of the very few men in the military establishment with whom Garrod was on comfortable drinking terms. Mannheim was also—and the thought caused Garrod's heart to lurch slightly—the immediate boss of the Korean-looking silver-lipped girl who, without raising a finger, had destroyed Garrod's sanity for a day. He opened his mouth to ask if the colonel had brought any of his secretarial staff with him, then remembered the vision and sound recorder on his lapel. His hand rose instinctively to the smooth plastic.

"That's an unsual gadget you've got there." Pobjoy smiled. "Is it a camera?"

"Sort of. Where are we going now?"

"To your hotel."

"Oh. I thought we'd have gone straight to police headquarters."

"Have to get you freshened up and fed first." Pobjoy

smiled again. "A man can't give of his best on an empty stomach, can he?"

Garrod shook his head uncertainly as the feeling of being manipulated returned. "Have you arranged for laboratory and workshop facilities?"

"All laid on, Mr. Garrod. After you meet the other members of the panel and have lunch we're all driving up to Bingham so you can see the scene of the murder for yourself."

"What good will that do?"

"It's hard to say how much good it ever does—but it's the natural starting point for all homicide investigations." Pobjoy began scanning the street through which they were passing. "It helps, you know, to get the best possible picture of the actual crime. The relative positions and angles. . . . Here's the hotel now—what do you say to a drink before lunch?"

Another group of reporters were waiting on the sidewalk outside the hotel, and again they were being held in check by a larger force of police. Pobjoy waved to the newsmen in a friendly manner as he urged Garrod quickly through into the foyer.

"You don't need to register," Pobjoy said. "I've taken care of all the details and your baggage is right behind us."

They crossed an area of lush, expensive carpet, rode up three floors in the elevator, and walked a short distance to a large, pale green, sunny room which appeared as though it might have been used for Rotary Club meetings. On this occasion a single table was laid with about twenty places. A bar had been set up in a corner and a number of men who looked like politicians and police executives were standing around in small groups. Garrod at once picked out John Mannheim, looking slightly uncomfortable in a business suit.

Pobjoy brought Garrod a vodka tonic from the bar

and took him around the assembly performing introductions. The only name which stuck with Garrod was that of Horace Gilchrist, the FBI forensic expert, who was a sand-colored man with cropped, forward-growing hair and the intent expression of someone whose hearing is poor but is determined not to miss a word. Garrod was on his second extra-strong drink and an air of unreality was stealing over him by the time he reached Mannheim.

He drew the colonel aside. "What's going on here, John? I feel like I'm taking part in a charade."

"But that's exactly what it is, Al."

"What do you mean?"

An amused expression appeared on Mannheim's ruddy fisherman's face. "Nothing."

"You meant something."

"Al, you know as well as I do that murders aren't solved at this level. . . ."

"Lunch is served, gentlemen," Pobjoy, ringing his glass loudly with a spoon. "Please be seated."

At the long table Garrod found himself directly opposite John Mannheim, though just too far away for discreet conversation. He kept trying to catch Mannheim's eye but the colonel was drinking quickly and talking to the men on each side of him. During the meal Garrod answered occasional questions from his own neighbors and did his best to disguise his impatience with the proceedings. He was moodily stirring his coffee when he became aware that a woman had entered the room and was leaning over Mannheim's shoulder, whispering to him. Garrod glanced up and felt his throat go dry as he recognized her black, black hair and silver-painted lips. It was Jane Wason.

At that instant she raised her eyes and they locked into Garrod's with a directness which seemed to drain the strength from his body. The businesslike set of the beautiful face appeared to soften momentarily, then she was

hurrying away from the table. Garrod stared after her, filled with the elated certainty that he had shaken Jane Wason as she had shaken him.

A full minute had passed before he remembered Esther's eyes clipped to his lapel, and again his hand rose of its own accord to cover the sentient glassy disks.

In the afternoon Garrod freshened up, changed his clothes and joined the other men—Mannheim, Gilchrist and Pobjoy—who were being driven to Bingham to examine the scene of the crime. There was a sleepy, well-fed atmosphere in the limousine and they spoke very little as it worked its way into the northbound traffic flow. Garrod kept thinking about Jane Wason, seeing her face shimmering in his vision like a bright afterimage, and they had traveled perhaps three miles before he absorbed the fact that they kept passing work crews who were replacing slow glass lighting panels above the road.

"What's going on?" He tapped Pobjoy's broad knee and nodded at one of the maintenance trucks.

"Oh, that!" Pobjoy grinned. "We've got a really active chapter of the Privacy League here in Augusta. Some nights they go out in their cars with the sunroofs open and shoot up the lighting panels with duck guns."

"But that would only blank out the glass for a few hours until the light came through again."

Pobjoy shook his head. "As soon as the material is holed or cracked it's considered unsafe structurally and has to be replaced. City ordinance."

"It must be costing the city a fortune."

"Not only this city—it's the new national sport, man. And I know I don't need to tell *you* that people don't buy scenedows much anymore."

"As a matter of fact," Garrod said guiltily, "I've been neglecting the business for the last year, so I'm out of touch with the sales position."

"I daresay it'll get in touch with you soon enough. Hotheads in the League throw bricks through scenedows. The more subtle types blank them out with ticklers and the proud home-owners are left with black windows."

"What sort of person do you find in this Privacy League?"

"That's just it—you couldn't say that any special group or subdivision supports the League. We pick up college professors, clerks, cabdrivers, school kids . . . right across the board."

Garrod leaned back in the deep upholstery and stared thoughtfully into the distance. He was learning things on his excursion into the world that still existed and struggled and changed outside his library windows. Manston had been right when he said the tide of public opinion was turning against Retardite, but it appeared that even he was underestimating the speed and growing power of the reaction.

"Personally, I don't quite understand the public's antipathy," he said. "How do you feel about it?"

"Personally," Pobjoy replied, "I would say it's a fairly predictable reaction."

"But what about the drop in crime figures? And the big jump in successful detections and prosecutions? Doesn't the public care about that?"

"They do." Pobjoy grinned with what could have been malice. "You see, it's the public who breaks all the laws."

"Nobody likes to be spied on," Gilchrist put in unexpectedly.

Garrod opened his mouth to say something, then he remembered that Esther was watching and listening from his lapel, and that he hated her for it. A silence descended over the four men and remained virtually unbroken while the vehicle made its effortless climb into mountain and lake country.

"If you begin to lose money with slow glass," Pobjoy

said in a jovial voice at one point, "you could try that kind of investment, Al."

Garrod opened his eyes and looked out. They were passing the entrance to a vacation center, the curving fence of which bore a freshly-painted sign: HONEYMOON HEIGHTS—*100 idyllic acres guaranteed free from slow glass, spyglass, glass eyes, etc.* He closed his eyes again, and the thought entered his mind that where slow glass was concerned the natural order of things was reversed, the legend giving rise to the event. One of the first folk stories to spring up after the introduction of Retardite was about a salesman who gave a newlywed couple a scenedow at a ridiculously low price, then called back a week later and replaced it with an even better one, free of charge. The classically simpleminded couple in the story, pleased at their good fortune, did not know that Retardite worked in both directions, nor that subsequently they were going over big at stag parties. Childish as the yarn was, it illustrated humanity's basic fear of being watched at those times when, for sound biological as well as social reasons, they wished to be apart from their fellows and unseen.

The limousine stopped for a time in Bingham, where the three members of the expert panel were introduced to representatives of the county police and then had coffee. It was late in the afternoon when they reached the scene of Wescott's assassination. A section of the road and nearby hillside had been roped off, but the ruined vehicle had been removed and there was little to see apart from heat scars gouged deeply into the surface.

Garrod's conviction that the investigation was futile returned to him. He spent the best part of an hour tramping around the site, picking up odd droplets of metal under the watchful gaze of a group of reporters who were not allowed inside the roped enclosure. As he had expected, the entire exercise—including a little lecture from

Pobjoy about the probable type and positioning of the laser cannon—was valueless. Garrod expressed his growing impatience with the proceedings by sitting on a low outcropping of rock and gazing into the sky. Far above him, in virtual silence, a small white aircraft of the type used in crop-spraying drifted across the blueness.

On the drive back to Augusta somebody switched on a radio and picked up a news broadcast, two items of which were of particular interest to Garrod. One was to the effect that the state attorney's office had announced substantial progress toward establishing the identity of Senator Wescott's killer; the other said that the postal workers' unions had taken their long-expected industrial action over the installation of Retardite monitors in the sorting centers, and therefore no mail was being handled.

Garrod looked squarely at Pobjoy. "What progress has been made?"

"I didn't say anything about progress," Pobjoy protested.

"That eager-beaver publicity man again?"

"I expect so. You know how it is."

Garrod snorted and was about to criticize the organization of some parts of the attorney's office again when the personal implications of the newly announced postal strike came home to him. The arrangement he had with Esther was that he would send her a set of eye disks by the stratocourier service each night, which meant they would be in Portston every morning in time for her nurse to slip them under the corneas before breakfast. His anger at the degree of neurosis Esther had displayed in forcing the scheme on him made it all the more important that he make some overt effort toward an alternative arrangement. He took a communicator stick from his pocket, turned the slides to Lou Nash's code and pressed the call button.

Nash's voice was heard almost immediately. "Mr. Garrod?"

"Lou, there's a post office strike on, so I'm going to have to use you as a mailman while I'm in Augusta."

"That's all right, Mr. Garrod."

"It means flying to Portston every night and coming back in the mornings."

"No problem—except for the low-and-slow injunction. Portston Field won't stay open any later than midnight, which means I'll have to get out of Augusta by about eleven o'clock."

Garrod opened his mouth to insist on the airfield being held open, regardless of expense, but an uncharacteristic mood of slyness came over him. He arranged to meet Nash at six o'clock in the hotel, and sat back in his seat with a pleasurable sense of guilt. An evening on his own, off the hook, in a strange city. Esther would demand to know why he had not worn eye disks for the evening but he could argue that her eyes for that day were absorbing the images of Nash's flight back to Potston, and there was no way she could cram an extra six hours of seeing into a twenty-four hour day. All he had to do now was decide what he would do with this bonus of time, *free* time. Garrod considered several possibilities, including the theater or a straightforward mind-annihilating drunk, then realized he was deceiving himself—and if he was going to start cheating his wife it was important that he be honest with himself about it.

What he was going to do that evening was, if circumstances permitted, to do his best to bed down with John Mannheim's silver-lipped secretary.

Garrod pinned the brooch-like disk-holder onto Lou Nash's lapel, smiled a farewell into the sentient black beads, and watched the pilot walk away across the hotel lobby. It seemed to him that Nash was walking differ-

ently, self-consciously, and he got a sudden insight into how his own marriage must look to an outsider. Nash had passed no comment when he learned what the disks were for, but he had been unable to conceal the mystification in his eyes. Why was it, the unspoken question had been, that a man who was in a position to have a beautiful new woman each week, each day, until all strength and desire were sucked out of him, remained subject to Esther? Why indeed? Garrod had never thought much about it, usually considering himself a natural monogamist, but supposing the truth was that Esther—money-wise and value-seeking in all transactions—had been clever enough to buy exactly the sort of man she required?

"There he is!" Mannheim's voice came from close behind. "Let's have a drink before dinner."

Garrod turned with the intention of refusing the invitation, then he saw that Mannheim was accompanied by Jane Wason. She was wearing a black evening dress so fine and sheer that her breasts seemed to have no more covering than a film of glossy paint and there was a soft triangular bulge of hair below the plummy curve of her belly. Prismatic highlights flowed on her body like oil.

"A drink?" Garrod spoke absently, realizing Jane was smiling at him with an oddly uncertain look. "Why not? I hadn't made any plans for dinner."

"You don't make plans for dinner—you just relax and enjoy it. You've got to eat with us. Isn't that right, Jane?"

"We can't force Mr. Garrod to have dinner with us if he doesn't want to."

"But I do!" Garrod gave himself a mental shake and began grabbing the custom-built opportunity. "In fact, I was about to contact you two and ask you to eat with me."

"The two of us?" Mannheim slid his arm around his

secretary's waist and drew her to him. "I wasn't even sure you liked me, Al."

"I'm crazy about you, John." Garrod smiled at the older man, but as he saw the easy familiarity with which Jane leaned against him he discovered he wished desperately for Mannheim to have a heart attack and collapse on the spot. "How about that drink?"

They went into the dim cave of one of the hotel bars and at Mannheim's insistence ordered outsize Zombie Christophes. Garrod sipped his drink, not appreciating its burnt candy flavor, and wondered about the relationship between Mannheim and Jane. She was at least twenty years the younger, but she might find his zesty unpretentiousness attractive, and he had had all the time and opportunity in the world to make his mark. And yet, Garrod noticed—or was it his imagination?—that Jane was sitting a little closer to him than to Mannheim. The faint light in the bar allowed Garrod's faulty eye to function practically as well as the other and he was able to see her with what was, for him, a preternatural three-dimensional clarity. She looked impossibly beautiful, like a gilded Hindu goddess. Each time she smiled Garrod's newfound hatred for Mannheim caused a cold tightness in his stomach. They stayed in the hotel for dinner, during which Garrod tried to steer a course between the overly direct approach he had tried the first time they had spoken and the danger of not challenging Mannheim's apparent claim. The meal ended too quickly for him.

"I enjoyed that," Mannheim said, prodding ruefully at his thickening waist. "The least you can do now is take care of the bill."

Garrod, who had intended paying for the dinner anyway, felt his resentment flare up almost uncontrollably, then he noticed that Mannheim had gotten to his feet with every appearance of a man about to leave in a

hurry. Jane, on the other hand, gave no sign of wanting to move.

"You aren't leaving?" Garrod fought to mask his joy.

"I'm afraid I am. There's a stack of paperwork to take care of up in my room."

"That's too bad."

Mannheim shrugged. "The thing worrying me is that I'm starting to *like* sitting inside my security cloak. A womb with no view. That just has to be a bad sign."

"You're giving away your age," Jane said with a smile. "Freud is completely *passé*, you know."

"That puts him level with me." Mannheim bade her good night, gave Garrod a comradely sidewise flick of the head, and made his way out of the restaurant.

Garrod gazed after him with affection. "Too bad he had to leave."

"That's the second time you've said that."

"Overdoing it, huh?"

"A little. You're making me feel like one of the boys."

"All right," Garrod said. "I was sitting here wondering how I could arrange for John to receive a fake call to go to Washington. I would have tried it, too, only I wasn't sure just how things were. . . ."

"With John and me?" Jane gave a low laugh.

"Well—he had his arm around you, and . . ."

"How beautifully Victorian!" Her face became serious. "You've absolutely no technique with girls, have you, Al?"

"I've never needed one."

"Because you're rich and good-looking they just fall into your lap."

"I didn't mean that," he said a little desperately. "It's just . . ."

"I know what you mean, and I'm flattered." Jane put her hand on his, the contact sending a thrill along his arm. "You are married, aren't you?"

"I . . . am." Garrod broke through a mental barrier. "For the time being, that is."

She looked directly into his eyes for a long moment, then her jaw dropped. "One of your pupils is shaped like a . . ."

"A keyhole," he said. "I do know about it. I had an operation on that eye when I was a kid."

"But you don't need to wear dark glasses just for that. It looks a bit unusual, but one would hardly notice it."

Garrod smiled as he realized the goddess had her own set of human frailties. "I don't wear tinted glasses for cosmetic reasons. The eye admits twice as much light as it should, and when I'm outside in bright daylight it hurts."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"It's nothing. What would you like to do now?"

"Could we go for a drive? I hate being cooped up in cities too long."

Garrod nodded. He signed the bill and, while Jane was away getting her wrap, arranged for a rental car to be brought to the hotel entrance. Ten minutes later they were heading toward the southern outskirts of the city, and in a further thirty were in the country.

"You seem to know where you're going," Jane said.

"I don't. All I know is this is the opposite direction to the way I went this morning."

"I see." He was aware of Jane looking at him. "You aren't happy with this so-called investigation, are you?"

"No."

"I thought not—you're too honest."

"Honest? What do you mean, Jane?"

There was a protracted silence. "Nothing."

"I think you meant something. Pobjoy's been acting strangely and earlier today John said something about a charade. What is it, Jane?"

"I told you—nothing."

Garrod swung off the highway onto a side road, braked sharply and cut the engine. "I want to know, Jane," he said. "You've either said too much or too little."

She looked away from him. "You'll probably be able to go back home tomorrow."

"Why?"

"The only reason Miller Pobjoy asked you to come here was so that he could use your name."

"Sorry—I don't get it."

"The police know who killed Senator Wescott. They've known it from the start."

"If that's true they would have picked the killer up."

"It is true." Jane turned to him, her face an undine mask in the green light of the instrument panel. "I don't know how they know, but they do."

"It still doesn't make sense! Why did they send for me if . . . ?"

"It's all a cover-up, Al. Don't you see it yet? They know, but they don't want anybody to know *how* they know."

Garrod shook his head. "Too much."

"John told me you got pretty uptight with Mr. Pobjoy over the stories his department released to the press," Jane said insistently. "Why do you think they did that? Most people now believe you've developed a new kind of interrogation technique for slow glass. Even if you deny it the rumors will still be going the rounds."

"So?"

"So when they arrest the killer they won't need to make public how they knew his identity!" Jane lunged for the car's ignition key and now her voice was angry. "Why am I bothering?"

Garrod caught her arm. She resisted for a second, then they were kissing, drinking from each other's mouths, breathing each other's breath. Garrod tried, without much success, to think on two levels. If Jane's theory was correct—and as Mannheim's secretary she would have

access to top secret files—it would explain several things which had been bothering him, important things . . . but she felt and tasted just the way he had imagined she would, and her breast firmed naturally and easily into his hand, pressing outward through the fingers.

When they finally separated he said, "Do you remember the afternoon I saw you in Macon?"

She nodded.

"I flew from Washington just for that purpose, just hoping I would see you. . . ."

"I know, Al," she murmured. "I kept telling myself I was conceited, and it was impossible, but I knew."

They kissed again. When he touched the satin-smooth skin of her knees they parted for an instant, then closed hard, gripping his fingers.

"Let's go back to the hotel," she said.

On the drive back into town, despite a pounding sexuality such as he had never known, the mental habits of years kept sending his mind back to the riddle of Miller Pobjoy and his motives. And in her bedroom, by the time they had gone through the ritual of undressing each other, yet more thoughts were intruding, of Esther, of the watchful black beads that were his eyes, of his wife saying, "You're a cold fish, Alban."

And, when they coupled on the cool sheets, he felt the destructive tensions grow within him. The delay between the first moment in the car and this one had been too great.

"Relax," Jane whispered in the darkness. "Love me."

"I am relaxed," he said with a growing sense of panic. "I do love you."

And at that moment Jane, in her wisdom, saved him. One of her fingertips traced a line down his spine and as it reached the small of his back a diamond-bright plume of ecstasy geysered through his body. As she entered him, ever so gently, from the rear he experienced

a staccato, explosive climax which she shared and which annihilated all his repressions, all his fears.

They can drop the bomb now, he thought. *It doesn't matter anymore.*

A moment later, simultaneously, they both began to laugh, silently at first, then with a childish helplessness. And in the hours which followed Garrod's renaissance was completed.

CHAPTER 12

Next morning Garrod called his home, although he knew that—because of the time difference—Esther would still be asleep. He left her a short recorded message:

"Esther, I can no longer agree to wearing eye disks for you. When the set which reaches you this morning is expended, you will simply have to make some other arrangements—about everything. I'm sorry, but that's the way it is."

Turning away from the viewplate he felt a powerful sense of relief that he had finally taken positive action. It was only when he was eating breakfast alone in his room that he began to wonder about the timing of his call. The positive way to look at it was that he had phoned immediately after he awoke because he had an unshakable resolve to break free and would tolerate no delay. But within his personality was another Garrod who, judging by past performance, would deliberately have chosen to place the call at a time when he would not be forced to confront Esther directly. The notion

disturbed him. He took a shower with a vague hope of driving it away, and emerged feeling refreshed. There was an unaccustomed warmth inside him, a feeling of *easiness,* which seemed to nestle in his pelvis and radiate along his limbs.

I've gone sane, he thought. *It took a hell of a long time, but I finally experienced the madness which brings sanity.*

Unexpectedly, Jane had insisted that they separate and spend the last hours of the night in their own rooms. Now he felt a deep sense of wrongness that she had not been with him during breakfast and in the shower. He decided to call her as soon as he had finished dressing, but within a few seconds his own viewphone chimed. He strode to it eagerly and activated the screen.

The caller was Miller Pobjoy, his face as smooth and glossy as a newly-hatched chestnut. "Morning, Al. I hope you got a good night's sleep."

"An excellent night, thanks." Garrod refrained from mentioning sleep.

"Good! I want to tell you our program for the day. . . ."

"First let me tell you mine," Garrod cut in. "In a few moments I'm going to call my public relations manager and instruct him to issue a statement to all media that the investigation you're conducting here is a pure sham, that you've no evidence from Wescott's car, and that I'm resigning from . . ."

"Hold on, man! This channel may not be secure."

"I hope it isn't. A good news leak is usually more effective than straight announcements."

"Don't take any action till I see you," Pobjoy said, frowning. "I'll be there in twenty minutes."

"Make it fifteen." Garrod broke the connection, lit a cigarette and smoked it slowly as he analyzed his situation. He had two reasons for wanting to remain in Augusta. The first and most important was that Jane was likely to be here for some time yet; the second was that

he had become involved in a mystery and hated to walk away from it. If he could bully Pobjoy into letting him in on the real investigation he could satisfy his curiosity, stay with Jane, and at the same time have a perfect excuse to give to Esth—Garrod gnawed his lower lip. He did not need to explain or justify anything to Esther. Ever again. Never, ever again.

"Now, Mr. Garrod," Pobjoy said, lowering his bulk into an armchair. "What *is* all this?"

Garrod noted the other man's return to the formal mode of address, and he smiled. "I'm tired of playing games, that's all."

"I don't get it. What sort of games?"

"The sort in which you use my name and reputation to make the public think there's useful evidence in the ashes of Wescott's car—when all the time you and I both know there isn't any."

Pobjoy looked up at him over steepled fingers. "You can't prove that."

"I'm a trusting sort of a person," Garrod said patiently. "It's easy to bluff me once. I don't need to prove what I say. All I have to do is put you in the position of needing to prove what *you* say. And that's what I'm about to do."

"Who's been talking to you?"

"You underestimate me, Pobjoy. Politicians are known to tell damn stupid lies when they get into tight corners, but they're accepted only by a public which is ignorant of the facts. I'm not a member of the public, in this instance, and I had a front row seat during your whole pantomime.

"Now tell me—who killed Senator Wescott?"

Pobjoy chuckled. "What makes you think I know?"

Garrod was tempted to mention Jane Wason—after all, he was in a position to recompense her for the loss of a

job in multiples of a lifetime's salary—but he decided to carry it through alone. "I think you know because you tried bloody hard to make it appear that I, who couldn't possibly help, was able to provide the answer. You identified the killer—but the method you used is packed with too much political dynamite for it to be made public."

"This is just *so* stupid, man. Can you even suggest such a method?" Pobjoy spoke in a scathing, relaxed manner, but there were barely perceptible inflections in his second sentence which spurred Garrod on. A chilly intuition stirred far back in his consciousness. He turned away and busied himself with another cigarette, both to hide his face from Pobjoy and to give himself time to think.

"Yeah," he said, mind still racing. "I can suggest a method."

"Such as?"

"A highly illegal use of Retardite."

"That's just a vague generality, Mr. Garrod—not a method."

"All right, I'll be a little less vague." Garrod sat down facing Pobjoy and stared into his eyes, filled with a new certainty. "Slow glass has already been used in satellites, but the ordinary man-in-the-street—even your average member of the Privacy League—doesn't mind that, because the recorded information is beamed down by television and nobody believes we'll ever have a TV system which could show up details as small as individual human beings. At orbital heights the loss of picture quality makes that impossible."

"Go on," Pobjoy said cautiously.

"But the resolution of slow glass is so good that in the right circumstances and atmospheric conditions and with the right optical equipment, turbulence compensators, et cetera, you could follow the movements of people and cars—provided you bring the glass down out of orbit for direct interrogation in a lab. And to do that all you need

is a transfer system, small robot spacecraft, torpedoes really, which the mother satellite could fire down to prearranged pickup areas."

"Nice idea—but have you thought of the expense?"

"Astronomical, but justifiable in certain circumstances—such as major political assassinations."

Pobjoy lowered his face into his hands, sat quietly for a moment, then spoke through his fingers. "Does that idea horrify you?"

"It constitutes the most massive invasion of privacy anybody's ever heard of."

"When we were driving up to Bingham yesterday you said something about the huge drop in crime figures compensating for the citizens' loss of some rights."

"I know—but this new idea carries it to the point where a man couldn't be sure of being alone even on a mountaintop or in the middle of Death Valley."

"Do you think the Government of the United States would spend millions of dollars just to watch a family having a picnic?"

Garrod shook his head. "You're admitting I'm right?"

"No!" Pobjoy jumped to his feet and walked to the window. He stared out into the verticalities of the city, then added in a quieter voice, "If . . . *if* such a thing were true—how could I admit it?"

"But if it were true, it would put you in the curious position of knowing Wescott's killer yet having to prove your case or appear to prove it by some other means."

"We've already gone over that ground, Mr. Garrod, but that's roughly the situation we *would* be in. What I need to know now is—are you still determined to spread your theory around?"

"As you pointed out—it's only a theory."

"But one which could do a lot of"—Pobjoy chose his word with obvious care—"mischief."

Garrod stood up and followed the other man to the

window. "I could be persuaded not to. As the inventor of slow glass I feel sort of responsible—also I hate walking away from an unsolved problem."

"You mean you'll stay on as a member of the advisory panel?"

"Not on your life," Garrod said cheerfully. "I want to work on the real investigation. If you know your man we ought to be able to find some way to pin this thing on him."

Ten minutes later Garrod was in Jane Wason's room, in her bed. After yet another merging of bodies had ratified his new contract with life, he—although bound to secrecy—let her know that all her suspicions about Pobjoy's handling of the investigation had been correct.

"I thought so," she said. "John never said anything to me about it, but I know he's been trying to figure out their secret method."

"You mean he doesn't know?" Garrod was unable to resist boasting. "He mustn't have used the right approach with Pobjoy."

"I've working with John long enough to know he uses the right approach to everything." She raised herself on one arm and looked down at Garrod. "If he wasn't able to find out . . ."

Garrod laughed as he saw the speculative look in Jane's eyes and the beginning of a frown disturbing the fine line of her eyebrows. "Forget it," he said easily as he pulled the already-familiar torso across his own.

CHAPTER 13

It was obvious right from the start that Captain Peter Remmert disapproved of Garrod's intrusion. (He was a moody, changeable man; sometimes laconic and at others voluble in an incongruously bookish manner. Once during coffee he said to Garrod, "The rich amateur who solves murders as a hobby is no longer a credible figure, even in cheap fiction, thanks to the leveling out of the distribution of wealth. His heyday was the first half of the century when the anomality of his position wasn't appreciated by the poor to whom the rich were incomprehensible beings who might very well turn detective just to pass the time.") But Remmert cooperated fully on what must have been, from his point of view, a tiresome and frustrating case. At the outset, all he knew was that he and a small selected team had been sworn to secrecy, given a name and address in Augusta, and told to do all they could to link the suspect with the assassination of Senator Wescott.

The suspect's name was Ben Sala. He was aged forty-one, of Italian extraction, and he ran a small wholesale

business specializing mainly in detergents and disinfectants. He lived, with his wife, in a smallish house in a middle-class district on the city's west side. They had no children and the upper part of the house was sublet to a fifty-year-old bachelor, Matthew H. McCullough, who drove for the local transit system.

As a matter of routine, Remmert did some checking into Sala's Italian ancestry and family, looking for a connection with the Mafia, but drew a blank. As he had been instructed not to make a direct approach to Sala about the assassination, the investigation seemed about to end almost before it had begun—until another death occurred.

On the morning after Senator Wescott's death among the exploding metallic vapors of his car, Sala's lodger—McCullough—died of a heart attack while climbing up into his bus.

The coincidence did not come to the attention of Remmert's team for several hours, and when it did they regarded it as little more than a ready-made excuse to pay a direct visit to Sala's home—at first. At that stage the results of certain interrogations of Traffic Department slow glass monitors became available. And they gave Remmert an unpleasant and unwanted surprise. He had been instructed to prove that Sala had carried out the assassination, and the monitors collaborated to the extent that they showed Sala's battered delivery truck leaving his home, heading north toward Bingham some hours before the killing, and returning by the same route some hours after it. There was a drawback, however.

The trapped images showed clearly that the truck had been driven by Matthew McCullough—the man who had died a natural death a few hours later.

And he had been alone.

"It meant we were able to go into the Sala house and work properly," Remmert said. "The idea was that we

were supposed to be checking up on McCullough, but all the time we were getting what we could on Sala."

"And what did you get?" Garrod kept starting at the projection screen on which was a still hologram of the front of Sala's house.

"Nothing, of course. McCullough was the guilty party."

"Wasn't it a little too convenient the way he dropped dead the next morning?"

Remmert snorted. "If that's convenient, I hope I remain inconvenienced till I'm a hundred."

"You know what I mean, Peter. If Sala was the killer, didn't everything drop into place a little too nicely when a man he could pin the blame on was silenced permanently the very next morning?"

"Sala isn't pinning the blame on McCullough—*I* am. Anyway I don't follow that line of reasoning. Supposing Sala had done it—would he want his tenant to attract the attention of the police by dropping dead? Besides, no matter what Pobjoy says, Sala didn't do it. We've got all kinds of evidence which backs up his statement."

"Let's run over the evidence."

Remmert sighed audibly but put the holoprojector on fast rewind. They had requisitioned a scenedow from a house which was almost directly opposite Sala's place and had made a holofilm covering the suspect's life during the previous year. The information from the scenedow was also stored in Retardite recorders but—because slow glass had the disadvantage of not being able to go into reverse—conventional holofilm was used for the practical work of examining evidence.

On the screen there appeared an image of the Sala house as it had been a year ago when the scenedow had been installed. It was an ordinary two-story frame building with a bay window downstairs supporting a small verandah on the upper level. The front garden was neatly kept and there was a garage attached to the main

structure with its front flush with the building line. The windows in the top half of the garage door provided the only view of the interior.

Remmert began skipping through the reel, pausing here and there to show scenes of Sala and McCullough entering and leaving the place. Sala was a smallish thick-set man with black curling hair in the center of which his scalp could be seen glistening like polished leather. McCullough was taller and slightly stooped. He had steel-colored hair brushed back from a long doleful face, and appeared to keep very much to his own part of the house.

"McCullough doesn't look like a high-powered political assassin to me," Garrod commented. "Sala does."

"That's about the sum total of your case against him," Remmert said, freezing on an image of Sala working in his garden, shirt straining across a protuberant stomach. "He's got the pycnic build."

"The what?"

"The pycnic build—that's the name psychiatrists have given to that shortish, plumpish thick-shouldered build which occurs so often among psychotic killers. But lots of harmless people are put together in exactly the same way."

Other images followed—diamond-clear fragments of ice snatched from the river of time—of Sala and his dark-haired wife, arguing, eating, dozing, reading, sometimes engaging in unsubtle loveplay, while all the time McCullough's lonely and humorless face brooded at the upper windows. Sala went to and from his place of business at regular hours in a white current model pickup truck. Fall advanced quickly into winter and the snows came; then Sala was seen using a dented five-year-old utility truck instead of the newer model.

Garrod held up his hand for the film to stop. "Was Sala's business not going so well?"

"It's doing all right—he seems to be a shrewd businessman at his own level."

"Did you ask him why he began using that old truck?"

"As a matter of fact, I did," Remmert replied. "In old-style detective work it's the sort of thing which wouldn't crop up, but in a Retardite runthrough it becomes glaringly noticeable."

"What did he say?"

"He'd been planning to keep the newer truck for only another six or eight months anyway, then somebody made him a good offer for it. Sala said he just couldn't turn it down."

"Did you ask him how much he got?"

"No. I didn't care."

Garrod jotted a note down in his pad, and motioned for the holofilm to continue. The snows receded, sifted out of existence by the greens and blossom-colors of spring and summer. Fall was approaching again when a length of blue tarpaulin appeared on the roof of the garage. It was large enough to stretch over the entire roof and an edge hung down at the front, covering the windows of the door.

"What's the idea of that?" Garrod raised his hand again.

"His garage roof began to leak."

"Did it look bad? I didn't notice."

Remmert moved back in time a little and the roof was seen with disturbed felt tiles in several places. A few days earlier and they all appeared normal.

"That happened a bit suddenly, didn't it?"

"Beginning of September—there were a couple of freak storms. Sala is going to build a new garage so it wasn't worth his while to have a proper repair job done on the roof."

"Everything still clicking into place."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. Look at the sloppy way the tarpaulin hangs down over the front of the garage, but Sala is very fussy about everything else."

"It probably keeps the rain out better that way." Remmert was beginning to sound impatient as Garrod made another note. "What could you make out of that?"

"Perhaps nothing—but when you've lived with slow glass as long as I have it changes your way of looking at things." Garrod suddenly realized he was sounding pompous. "I'm sorry, Peter—is there anything of special interest between then and the night of the murder?"

"*I* don't think so, but maybe you . . ."

"Let's move up to the big night," Garrod said.

It was dark when the garage door swung up and then slid inward with a movement which reminded Garrod of flaps being retracted on an airliner's wing. The truck nosed its way out toward the street, the door closing automatically behind it, and the image on the screen grew brighter as light intensifiers came into play. Remmert froze the action and the driver was clearly revealed as McCullough. He was wearing a hat which shaded his eyes, but there was no mistaking the long sad countenance.

"Traffic monitors recorded him right to the northern limits of the city," Remmert said. "Now watch the garage —the tarpaulin's been folded back a little and you can see in."

He speeded up the time flow, then dropped back to normal time when the digital indicator in a corner of the picture showed that half an hour had passed. The dark rectangles which were the garage windows flooded with white radiance and a man was seen within. He was stubby and black-haired—unmistakably Ben Sala.

While Sala was moving about the garage doing odd

cleaning and tidying jobs, Remmert touched a button which triggered a recording of the suspect's statement:

"Well, 'round about seven that even' Matt came downstairs. He wasn't lookin' too good—sorta gray, you know—and he was rubbin' his left arm like there was a pain in it. Matt told me the transit company had asked him to do a few hours' overtime that night. Most of the time he went everywhere by bus 'cause he was allowed to ride everywhere free, but this time he asked me for the lend of the truck. He said it was 'cause he was tired and didn't feel up to walkin' up to the bus stop on the main road.

"I told him okay he could have the truck, so he went off in it about eleven. After he'd gone I did some work in the garage for about an hour, then I went to bed. I heard Matt bringin' the truck back some time in the middle of the night, but I didn't look to see what time it was. Next mornin' he went out to work like he always does, and that was the last time I saw him alive."

Remmert switched off the recording. "What do you think of that?"

"What do you think of it?"

"It was just a statement—I've taken thousands of them."

Garrod kept his eyes on the screen, where Sala's image could still be seen occasionally as he moved around the garage. "Sala doesn't talk like a professional communicator, and yet . . ."

"And yet?"

"He packed a tremendous amount of information into a short statement—all of it relevant, well-ordered, logical. Out of those thousands of statements you've taken, Peter, how many were there in which not one word was wasted?"

"The weight of damning evidence is piling up against Sala," Remmert said tartly. "He looks like he could be

an assassin, and he talks sensibly. You know we interview lots of people in here who don't use academic English, yet can make you see a thing better than a university don can. Have you never noticed that in interrogation scenes in crime movies the tough slum kids always get the best lines? The screenwriter's talent must be liberated by the knowledge that for a while—in this character—he can kick the subjunctive out the window."

Garrod thought for a moment. "I've got an idea."

Remmert was not listening. "One night last year I had a kid in here for questioning on a manslaughter charge, and I asked him why he had done it. Do you know what he said? He said, 'All that the public ever reads in the papers about young people is that they keep going around doing welfare work and voluntary service—I wanted to let them see that some of us are real bastards.' Now, that's *better* than anything I've heard in the movies."

"Listen," Garrod said. "I'm seeing this holofilm for the first time, isn't that right?"

"Right."

"Would it improve my credibility if I made a prediction about something we're going to see later in the film?"

"It might. Depends."

"All right." Garrod pointed at the screen. "Note that the tarpaulin on the garage roof has been folded back so that we can see inside through the door windows. My prediction is that after we've seen McCullough driving the truck back into the garage, the edge of that tarp will somehow fall down again and cover the windows."

"What if it does? We've *seen* McCullough driving away and leaving Sala behind. . . ." Remmert stopped speaking as the truck appeared on the screen, moved down the drive. The coded frequency in its headlight beam caused the garage door to swing up and the vehicle disappeared

into the now-darkened interior. As the door was swinging down behind it, a loose strand from the tarpaulin seemed to snag part of the locking mechanism and the covering twitched downward over the windows.

"That was pretty good," Remmert conceded.

"I thought so too."

"But you can't make predictions like that without a theory to base them on. What have you got up your sleeve?"

"I'm going to tell you, but first I need one extra piece of information," Garrod said. "Just to confirm it in my own mind."

"What do you want to know?"

"Can you find out how much Sala actually got paid for the truck he sold?"

"Huh? Come through to my office—I haven't got a computer terminal here." Remmert gave Garrod a frankly puzzled look as they walked to his office, but he refrained from asking any more questions. At his desk he tapped briefly on the keys of the terminal which was linked to the big police computer at the other side of the city. The machine chimed a second later and Remmert tore off a strip of photoprinter tape.

He glanced at it and became even more puzzled. "It says here he got fifteen hundred dollars for it from a dealer out along the line."

"I don't know about you," Garrod said, the old triumphal pounding now filling his chest, "but if that truck had been mine I'd have had no difficulty in turning down that kind of an offer."

"It's hellish low, I must admit—which means Sala was drifting a bit in that part of his statement anyway. I can't understand why a sharp businessman like him would practically give away a good truck and buy a beat-up utility model."

"If you ask me, it was like this." Garrod began to explain his theory.

When the word came to Ben Sala that it was time to move against Senator Wescott, he was dismayed. He had been hoping that the call would never come, somehow, but now that it had he had no choice but to act—the alternative would have been death, perhaps by a bomb planted in his next consignment of detergent. In any case, the plan had been so carefully worked out that there was practically no risk of detection.

The first step was to get hold of a G.M. Burro, an ultra-cheap delivery truck which had been tried out, then discontinued by the manufacturers four years earlier. Its big feature, as far as Sala was concerned, was that all its transparencies were of flat glass and the windshield could be pivoted to admit air. Sala, however, was not concerned with letting air in—but with seeing out.

He sold his own truck and bought a Burro. The latter was quite difficult to obtain and he had to accept a model in poor condition, but it was adequate for his needs. He took the Burro home, began using it for his daily transportation, and set other phases of the plan into action. The first night on which there was a high wind he went into the garage by the kitchen entrance and, working in complete darkness, loosened several roof tiles from the under side. A couple of days later he covered the roof with what appeared to be a randomly chosen piece of tarpaulin from his warehouse, but which had actually been carefully designed for its task. With the interior of his garage now hidden from the gaze of the scenedow across the street, he was able to go ahead with assembly of the laser cannon which had been mailed to him piece by piece in small packages.

He also began work on one of the most delicate parts of the operation.

Thanks to the simplistic design of the Burro it was easy to remove the windshield and replace them with panels of Retardite. But getting Matt McCullough to sit in the driving seat for the best part of an hour was more difficult, even though he had been selected as a tenant because of his dullness. Sala solved the problem by telling McCullough the Burro had developed a fault in the steering linkage and that he was going to repair it himself. McCullough, who would only have been brooding at one of his windows anyway, agreed to sit in the truck and turn the wheel each time Sala called out to him. He even wore his old hat in case it would be drafty in the garage.

There was a crucial moment when McCullough got in and closed the door, but he failed to notice he was seeing the garage not as it actually was that night—and Sala was careful to stay underneath the vehicle the whole time. The truck's front wheels were in pools of thick oil which enabled them to be turned easily, and Sala—who had carefully timed the drive along a simple, crossing-free route out of the city—was able to get McCullough to twist the steering wheel according to the prearranged program.

With the slow glass panels suitably charged with images of McCullough, Sala slowed their emission rate down to almost zero and put them away for future use. On another night, working under cover of the tarpaulin, he removed the windows from his garage door, replaced them with Retardite panels and spent an hour pottering about doing small jobs. These panels, too, he removed, slowed down almost to a standstill and put into storage for when they would be required. He was now ready to commit the foolproof murder.

On the evening he received the coded message to proceed he began by slipping Matt McCullough a strong sedative which would keep him away from the windows

of the duplex at a time when he was supposed to be out driving. Sala then made certain the garage windows were covered from the outside, and put the assembled laser cannon into the truck. He clipped the Retardite panels into the garage door and into the frames of the Burro, increased their emissions to normal rate, and drove out of town toward Bingham.

It was at this stage that the unique design of the Burro played a vital role, because in a normal vehicle Sala would have had no vision of the road as it was that night. He tilted the windshield back until there was a hairline crack between the glass and the frame, through which he could see forward. The sharply restricted view made the trip fairly difficult, and there was an unexpected hazard in that the sound of the engine and the sense of movement contrasted with the static view of the interior of his own garage in a way which produced disorientation and nausea.

Out in the country, however, beyond the view of slow glass monitors he was able to tilt the windshield back a little further and drive in comparative comfort. He also slowed the Retardite emissions down almost to zero, preserving the stored images of McCullough for the journey back through the city. The telltales on any car he met on the way would yield images of a motionless McCullough at the wheel, but this would be acceptable for highway conditions in which virtually no control movements were required of the driver. In any case, all these precautions were unlikely to be necessary because the murder would not be traced to the point where Sala would be involved. It was simply part of the plan that an entire back-up line of defense was included.

At the site chosen for the assassination Sala set up his cannon. A short time later a close-range personal radio message told him the senator's car was near—and when it

reached the bottom of the hollow he burned it and the driver into a heap of glowing, crackling slag.

On the trip back, he stopped several miles along the road and buried the cannon. He drove the rest of the way without incident and got back into his garage well before dawn. The hanging strand device he had carefully but unobtrusively rigged up drew the tarpaulin down over the windows as the garage door closed behind him. Sala took the Retardite panels out of the door and truck and replaced them with ordinary glass. He then used a tickler on the slow glass to disturb its crystalline structure, blanking out the mute evidence forever. As a further precaution he broke the panels into small fragments and fed them into the furnace in the basement.

Only the final step in the plan remained. He went upstairs to McCullough's bedroom, took off the other man's hat and hung it in its usual place on the back of the door. He then took out a vial of specially prepared thrombogenic poison which had been sent to him by the organization. McCullough was still in a drugged sleep and he did not waken up while Sala was rubbing the traceless poison into the skin of his left arm. The position of the site on which Sala had chosen to apply the poison meant that McCullough would die of a massive embolism approximately four hours later.

Well satisfied with his night's work, Sala had a glass of milk and a sandwich before joining his wife in bed.

"When you concoct a theory," Remmert said slowly, "you really do it in a big way."

Garrod shrugged. "I used to be in the theory-concocting business. Actually this is a good one in that it explains all the observed facts, but it falls down in one major respect."

"Too complicated. Occam's Razor."

"No—in these days all murder plans have to be compli-

cated. It's just that I can't think of any way to demonstrate its truth. I'll bet you'll find fresh scratches on the window frames in the truck and on the garage door—but that proves nothing."

"We might pick up traces of Retardite in the furnace."

"Possibly. But there's no law against incinerating slow glass, is there?"

"Isn't there?" Remmert bumped his forehead with the heel of his hand as if trying to jar his memory into action. Visual sarcasm. "Would you like to drive out to the Sala place? Have a look at the real thing?"

"Okay." Accompanied by another detective called Agnew they drove out to the west side of the city. The morning was now well advanced, with clouds fleeing across the blue ceramic of the sky, changing the quality of the light which reflected from the neat houses. The car climbed into a hilly suburb and stopped outside a white-painted house. Garrod experienced a peculiar thrill as he recognized the Sala place, his eyes picking out all the familiar details of the structure, garden and garage.

"It looks quiet," he said. "Is anybody likely to be at home?"

"I don't think so. We allow Sala to attend to his business but we have keys and he told us to go in anytime. He's cooperating like hell."

"In his position he has to do all he can to help you pin the blame on McCullough."

"I guess you'll be more interested in the garage than anywhere else."

They walked down the short drive and Remmert used a key to open the garage door manually. The interior smelled of paint, gasoline and dust. Watched by the two officers, Garrod walked around the garage self-consciously lifting odd objects, empty cans and old magazines, and setting them down again. He had a conviction

he was making a fool of himself, but was reluctant to leave the garage.

"I don't see any oil patches on the floor," Remmert said. "How did he turn the wheels?"

"With these." Garrod's memory came to his aid. He pointed at two glossy magazines which had tire marks on the covers and heavily creased pages inside. "It's an old DIY trick—you run the front wheels onto slick magazines and they turn easily."

"It doesn't prove anything, does it?"

"It does to me," Garrod said stubbornly.

Remmert lit a cigarette and Agnew a pipe, and the two detectives wandered out into the nervously buffeting air. They stood smoking for a good ten minutes, conversing in low voices, then began glancing at their watches to indicate they were ready for lunch. Garrod felt the same way—he had arranged to eat with Jane—yet he had a feeling that if he did not make a breakthrough on this visit, when he was seeing the interior of the garage with that special clarity which is present only when something is viewed for the first time, he would never get anywhere.

Agnew tapped out his pipe with a gentle clicking sound and went to sit in the car. Remmert sat down on the low garden wall and appeared to take an intense interest in cloud formations. Wishing the others would go away and leave him, Garrod took a final walk around the garage and saw a fragment of glass close to the wall which adjoined the house. He knelt and picked it up, but the simplest test—moving a finger behind it—showed that it was ordinary glass.

Remmert stopped inspecting the sky. "Get anything?"

"No." Garrod shook his head dispiritedly. "Let's go."

"You bet." Remmert pulled the overhead door partway down, darkening the garage.

Garrod's face was close to the unpainted inner wall and

as he moved, in the very instant of straightening up, he saw a faint circular image appear on the dry boards. There was a dim silhouette of a rooftop, a ghostly tree waving its branches—and they were upside-down. Spinning on his heels, he faced the outer wall of the garage and saw a bright, white star shining there, about five feet above the floor. There was a small hole in the woodwork. He approached it and put his eye to the tiny aperture. A jet of cold air from outside played on his eye like a hose, producing tears, but he saw through to the sunlit world of ascending hillside and houses nesting in baskets of shrubbery. He went to the door, stopped below its lower edge and beckoned to Remmert.

"There's a small hole in this wall," he said. "It's angled downward slightly, so you don't notice it when you're walking about."

"What difference . . . ?" Remmert stopped and looked through the hole. "I don't know—do you think it's big enough to be of any use?"

"Of course! If Sala really had been moving around in here an outside observer would see the chink of light blinking on and off—but if he wasn't here, only programmed into the slow glass in the windows, the light will have remained constant.

"How many houses can you see through there?"

"Ah . . . twelve for sure. Some of them are pretty far away, though."

"It doesn't matter. If one of those houses has a scenedow facing this way you can wind up the case this afternoon." Garrod kicked the fragment of glass he had discovered out into the shifting sunlight—he was certain a slow glass witness would be found.

Remmert stared at him for a moment, then punched his shoulder. "I've got binoculars in the car."

"Go and get them," Garrod said. "I'll make a location sketch of the houses we're interested in."

He took out his notepad and looked through the hole again, but decided the sketch was unnecessary. The hill had been plunged into cloud-shadow, and even with the naked eye he could see that one of the houses had a window which glittered green with transposed sunlight, like a rectangular emerald.

CHAPTER 14

The news that Ben Sala had been arrested for the murder of Senator Wescott was broadcast in the late afternoon. Garrod was alone in his olive-and-gold suite, waiting for Jane to finish her day's secretarial work with John Mannheim. For almost an hour he had been standing at a window looking at the street twenty stories below, and he had not been able to rid himself of the sense of apprehension which heaved coldly in his stomach.

Arriving back at the hotel after lunch, he had received a message from Esther, one he had been expecting. It said: *I am arriving in Augusta this evening and will be at your hotel by 11:00* P.M. *Wait for me. Love, Esther.*

Since sending his own message he had been hoping to hear from his wife, wanting to get the final confrontation tucked into the past where it ought to be—but now, suddenly, he was afraid. His wife's final sentence—*Love, Esther*—read in context, meant there was not going to be a clean break, that she still regarded him as her property.

It was all going to be drawn-out, bloody and abrasive.

Analyzing his own feelings, he realized he was afraid of his own moral softness, the almost pathological inability to hurt other people, even when it was necessary, even when all parties would benefit from a swift, decisive stroke. He could think of dozens of examples, but in the introspective mood his mind sprang to the very earliest, back when he was a boy of ten running with a small gang in Barlow, Oregon.

The young Alban Garrod had never fitted in very well and he was desperately anxious to win the approval of the gang leader, a plump but physically powerful boy called Rick. His chance came when he was walking home from school with an unlikable lad named Trevor, who was high on the gang's "execution list." Trevor incautiously made a disparaging remark about Rick, and—in spite of feelings of self-revulsion—Alban reported the incident to Rick. Rick accepted the news gratefully and conceived a plan. The gang was to surround Trevor in an alley and Rick would utter a formal accusation. If Trevor admitted his guilt he would be worked over to teach him a lesson, and if he denied it he was calling both Rick and Alban liars, which would earn him an equally severe punishment. Everything went well until the crucial moment.

After the ritual ripping open of his fly, which was always done to put an enemy at a psychological disadvantage, Trevor was backed against a wall, with his lapels gathered up in Rick's fist. He frantically denied ever having uttered the fateful words. In accordance with his own obscure code, Rick was not yet entitled to deal a blow. He looked at Alban for confirmation.

"He said it, didn't he?"

Alban stared at Trevor, a boy he despised, and quailed when he saw the terror and pleading in his eyes. Feeling

sick inside, he said, "No. I didn't hear him saying anything about you."

Rick released his hold on his prisoner and allowed him to scurry away to safety, then he turned to Alban with a look of bafflement which changed to contempt and anger. He advanced with heavy fists swinging. The ten-year-old Alban accepted his beating with something approaching relief—all that mattered was that he had not had to crush another human being.

With Garrod's personal history, and without Jane actually there to steady him, there was a possibility—a very faint one, but a possibility nonetheless—that if Esther came at him the right way he would agree to go back home with her and become a dutiful husband again. The thought brought a tingle of cool perspiration to his face. He leaned his head against the glass of the window and stared down at the minute colored rectangles which were automobiles and the even smaller specks which were people in the street below. Seen from almost directly overhead the pedestrians had no identity—it was barely possible to separate men from women—and he found it difficult to accept that each one of the creeping dots regarded itself as the center of the universe. Garrod's depression grew more intense.

He went into his bedroom, lay on top of the bedcovers and tried to doze, but sleep was impossible. After twenty restless minutes he broke one of his strictest rules by activating the bedside viewphone and calling his Portston headquarters to check on how things were going. He spoke to Mrs. Werner first and got a rundown on the important developments of the past few days; then he talked to several divisional and department heads, including Manston, who wanted guidance on how to handle Garrod's connection with the current news break. Another was Schickert, in a near-panic over the fact that a

governmental purchasing agency was placing new priority orders for Retardite particles so quickly that even if the new Liquid Light Paints plant had been in operation it would have been impossible to keep up. Garrod soothed him down and spent an hour in conference with other senior management.

By the time he had finished there was less than an hour to go till Esther's arrival and he was in no mood for sleeping. He went to the bathroom and, scorning the idea of blacking it out, took a shower with all the lights on. His short association with Jane Wason, he realized, was what had made him careless of vicarious watchers. Conscious of and uplifted by the beauty of her own body, she simply refused to hide under cover of darkness at any time, including the hours with him. The thought of her brought with it a mingled pang of desire and regret. Life with Jane would have been so . . .

Garrod panicked as he understood that already, before a word had been spoken, he was anticipating a victory for Esther.

I choose Jane, he told himself, stepping out of the shower cubicle. *I choose life.*

But later when his doorbell sounded he felt himself begin to die. He opened it slowly and saw Esther standing there accompanied by her personal nurse. She was carefully dressed, with a minimum of makeup, and was wearing ordinary black glasses of the type used by people who have disfigured eyes.

"Alban?" she said in a pleasant voice. *She's going to be brave,* he thought sadly. *Blind—hence the dark glasses —but brave.*

"Come in, Esther." He included the nurse in his gesture, but she had obviously been primed by his wife and moved backward into the corridor, her coral-pink antiseptic face showing her disapproval of him.

"Thank you, Alban." Esther held out her hand, but he took her elbow instead and led her to a chair.

He sat down opposite. "Did you have a good trip?"

She nodded. "You were right all along, Alban. I *can* get around in spite of my handicap. I've just flown thousands of miles to be with you."

"I'm . . ." The significance of Ether's final words was not lost on Garrod. "That's wonderful, for you."

She in turn picked up his final words. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

"Of course I'm glad to see you out and about again."

"That isn't what I asked you."

"Isn't it?"

"No." Esther was sitting very erect, hands neatly folded in her lap. "When did you begin to hate me, Alban?"

"For God's sake! Why should I hate you?"

"That's what I'm asking myself. I must have done something very . . ."

"Esther," he said firmly. "I don't hate you." He looked closely at her precision-cast features, saw the faint lines of stress there, and his heart sank.

"You just don't love me, is that right?"

This is it, he thought. *This is the exact second on which your whole future depends.* He opened his mouth to give the answer she had invited, but his mind was engulfed in a cryogenic chill. He stood up, went to the window and looked into the street below. The anonymous specks which thought of themselves as people were still swarming down there. *How the hell,* he asked himself, *could an observer in a satellite, looking straight down, tell one man from another?*

"Answer me, Alban."

Garrod swallowed, wishing he could escape, but unrelated pictures were flickering behind his eyes. A small crop-spraying aircraft drifting across the sky, shining like a silver crucifix. Schickert in a panic because his

plant could not keep up with orders for Retardite dust. The dark countryside, glowing. . . .

Esther's groping hands touched his back. She had risen from the chair without his noticing. "You've given me all the answer I need," she said.

"Have I?"

"Yes." Esther took a deep, quavering breath. "Where is she now?"

"Who?"

Esther laughed. "Who? Your new bedmate, that's who. That . . . *hooker* who wears the silver makeup."

Garrod was appalled. It seemed to him that Esther had used a frightening power to look into his mind. "What makes you think . . . ?"

"Do you think I'm a fool, Alban? Did you forget you were wearing my eye disks at the luncheon on the day you got here? Do you think I didn't see the way John Mannheim's girl looked at you?"

"I don't remember her looking at me in any special way," Garrod fenced.

"I'm blind," Esther said bitterly, "but I'm not as blind as you pretend to be."

Garrod stared at her and again his thoughts ricocheted away. *Miller Pobjoy didn't mention satellites. I was the one who thought up the satellite story, and all he did was let me go along with it! I've known this all along, and it's been chewing me up, but I couldn't face . . .*

The door swung open and Jane Wason walked in. "I've just finished, Al, and . . . Oh!"

"It's all right, Jane," Garrod said. "Come in and meet my wife. Esther, this is Jane Wason. She does secretarial work for . . . John Mannheim."

Esther smiled sweetly, but deliberately facing in the wrong direction to emphasize her blindness. "Yes, do come in, Jane. We've just been talking about you."

"I think it would be better if I didn't intrude."

Esther's voice hardened. "I think it would be better if you stayed. We're trying to decide exactly who is the real intruder around here."

Jane advanced into the room, her large eyes fixed on Garrod's face, waiting for him to speak. He felt utterly incapable of dealing with the situation.

"Speak up, Alban. Let's make it clean and sharp and final," his wife said.

Garrod looked down into Esther's face. Her age and tiredness were showing up in contrast to Jane's lush youthfulness. She had just crossed a continent, blind, to face him. Of the three people in the room she was the only one at a crippling disadvantage, yet she was dominating the group. She was strong. She was brave, but sightless and helpless, waiting with her face turned up to his. All he had to do was take the verbal ax firmly in both hands—and swing on her. . . .

He closed his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them Jane was leaving the room. Garrod ran to her. "Jane," he said desperately, "give me a chance to think."

She shook her head. "Colonel Mannheim's finished in Augusta now. I just came by to tell you I'll be flying down to Macon with him on the late plane."

He caught her wrist but she twisted free with unexpected strength. "Leave me alone, Al."

"I can work this thing out."

"Yes, Al. You can—just the way you worked it out about the . . ." The end of her sentence was lost in the slamming of the door, but Garrod did not need to hear it. He knew the last word had been "satellites."

His legs were rubbery as he turned back into the room and sat down. Esther found her way to him and rested her hands on his shoulders. "My poor dear Alban," she whispered.

Garrod lowered his face into cupped hands. *There are no satellites,* he thought. *No torpedoes carrying Retardite*

eyes down out of orbit. They don't need them. Not when they're dusting the whole world with slow glass!

A preternatural calm seemed to descend over his brain as he considered the mechanics of the proposition. The resolution of Retardite's crystalline structure was so fine that a usable image could be obtained from a particle a few microns in diameter. Yet each speck would be invisible to the naked eye under normal conditions. They were using it in hundreds of tons—Retardite dust of mixed delays, swirling down over the entire continent from crop-sprayer aircraft. Such aircraft generally used electrically charged ejector nozzles, giving the particles an electromagnetic potential which caused it to be attracted onto the crops rather than drift straight onto the ground. Only in this case, the slow glass micro-eyes were being released from high up so that they would cling to everything—trees, buildings, telegraph poles, flowers, mountain slopes, birds, flying insects. It would be in people's clothing, in their food, in the water they drank.

From now on, came the silent scream inside his head, *anybody, any agency, with the right equipment, can find out anything about ANYBODY! This planet is one huge, unblinking eye watching everything that moves on its surface. We're all encased in glass, asphyxiating, like bugs dropped into an entomologist's killing bottle.*

And I . . . The seconds crept by, noisy with the sound of blood pulsing in his veins. *And I did it!*

When Garrod stood up he lifted the incomprehensible weight of the planet with him. And he discovered, with infinite gratitude, that he could support it.

"Esther," he said peacefully, "you asked me an important question a while ago."

"Yes?" Her voice was wary, as though she could already sense a change in him.

"The answer is—no. I don't love you, Esther, and I realize now that I never did."

"Don't be stupid," she said, with a frightened harshness in her voice.

"I'm sorry, Esther. You asked me, and I told you how it is. I must go and find Jane now. I'll send in your nurse." He walked out of the room without hurrying, without needing to hurry, and went to Jane's room on the floor below. The outer door was open and he could see she had begun to pack. She was bending over one of her cases in an unintentionally voluptuous pose which produced a slow and powerful hammering in his chest.

"You lied to me," he said in mock severity. "You said you were taking the late plane."

Jane turned to face him with transparent ribbons of tears on her cheeks. "Please let me get away from you Al."

Garrod said, "No. Not ever again."

"Al, have you . . . ?"

"Yes. I've ended one thing that should never have started, and I want your help while I do the same thing with something else."

Jane was with him when he went to a newspaper office and told his story, and she was with him during the hard months which followed when a panic-stricken government was forced by the people to create new legislation banning the production of slow glass. She was with him during the even harder years when it was realized that other countries were continuing with Retardite production, eventually adulterating the oceans with it, and the air itself—even up to the stratosphere. In later decades, men were to come to accept the universal presence of Retardite eyes, and they learned to live without subterfuge or shame as they had done in a distant past when it was known that the eyes of God could see everywhere.

Jane was with him through all that, and one of the

ways in which he knew he loved her was that, no matter how hard he tried, he could not visualize her beautiful face ever growing older. To him she was ageless, eternal —like a lovely image enshrined forever in a prism of slow glass.

Slow glass was an amusing scientific toy. Light traveled through it so slowly that, looking through a pane of it, you might see what had happened five minutes ago on the other side—or five years. It stopped being a toy when great new jetliners began to crash, car accidents multiplied astronomically and a mounting toll of deaths and disasters revealed its true potential. And it was no toy at all when blackmailers discovered how to use it to see into the secret life of any victim—and government officials found it could permit surveillance of any person, any time, anywhere!

OTHER DAYS, OTHER EYES

is a major new novel by one of science-fiction's finest writing talents. Bob Shaw's famous story **LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS** began to tell the story of this thrilling future world —now here it is in book form, in full, for the first time anywhere.