BEST SCIENCE FICTION
STORIES OF
CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

Best Science Fiction Stories of Clifford D. Simak

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CONTENTS

FOUNDING FATHER

Winston-Kirby walked home across the moor just before the twilight hour and it was then, he felt, that the land was at its best. The sun was sinking into a crimson froth of clouds and the first gray-silver light began to run across the swales. There were moments when it seemed all eternity grew quiet and watched with held breath.

It had been a good day and it would be a good homecoming, for the others would be waiting for him with the dinner table set and the fireplace blazing and the drinks set close at hand. It was a pity, he thought, that they would not go walking with him, although, in this particular instance, he was rather glad they hadn't. Once in a while, it was a good thing for a man to be alone. For almost a hundred years, aboard the ship, there had been no chance to be alone.

But that was over now and they could settle down, just the six of them, to lead the kind of life they'd planned. After only a few short weeks, the planet was beginning to seem like home; in the years to come, it would become in truth a home such as Earth had never been.

Once again he felt the twinge of recurring wonder at how they'd ever got away with it. That Earth should allow six of its immortals to slip through its clutches seemed unbelievable. Earth had real and urgent need for all of its immortals, and that not one, but six, of them should be allowed to slip away, to live lives of their own, was beyond all logic. And yet that was exactly what had happened.

There was something queer about it, Winston-Kirby told himself. On the century-long flight from Earth, they'd often talked about it and wondered how it had come about. Cranford-Adams, he recalled, had been convinced that it was some subtle trap, but after a hundred years there was no evidence of any trap and it had begun to seem Cranford-Adams must be wrong.

Winston-Kirby topped the gentle rise that he had been climbing and, in the gathering dusk, he saw the manor house—exactly the kind of house he had dreamed about for years, precisely the kind of house to be built in such a setting—except that the robots had built it much too large. But that, he consoled himself, was what one had to expect of robots. Efficient, certainly, and very well intentioned and obedient and nice to have around, but sometimes pretty stupid.

He stood on the hilltop and gazed down upon the house. How many times had he and his companions, at the dinner table, planned the kind of house they would build? How often had they speculated upon the accuracy of the specifications given for this planet they had chosen from the Exploratory Files, fearful that it might not be in every actuality the way it was described?

But here, finally, it was—something out of Hardy, something from the Baskervilles—the long imagining come to comfortable reality.

There was the manor house, with the light shining from its windows, and the dark bulk of the outbuildings built to house the livestock, which had been brought in the ship as frozen embryos and soon would be emerging from the incubators. And there the level land that in a few more months would be fields and gardens, and to the north the spaceship stood after years of roving. As he watched, the first bright star sprang out just beyond the spaceship's nose, and the spaceship and the star looked for all the world like a symbolic Christmas candle.

He walked down the hill, with the first night wind blowing in his face and the ancient smell of heather in the air, and was happy and exultant.

It was sinful, he thought, to be so joyful, but there was reason for it. The voyage had been happy and the planet-strike successful and here he was, the undisputed proprietor of an entire planet upon which, in the fullness of time, he would found a family and

a dynasty. And he had all the time there was. There was no need to hurry. He had all of eternity if he needed it.

And, best of all, he had good companions.

They would be waiting for him when he stepped through the door. There would be laughter and a quick drink, then a leisurely dinner, and, later, brandy before the blazing fire. And there'd be talk—good talk, sober and intimate and friendly.

It had been the talk, he told himself, more than anything else, which had gotten them sanely through the century of space flight. That and their mutual love and appreciation of the finer points of the human culture—understanding of the arts, love of good literature, interest in philosophy. It was not often that six persons could live intimately for a hundred years without a single spat, without a touch of cabin fever.

Inside the manor house, they would be waiting for him in the fire- and candlelight, with the drinks all mixed and the talk already started, and the room would be warm with good fellowship and perfect understanding.

Cranford-Adams would be sitting in the big chair before the fire, staring at the flames and thinking, for he was the thinker of the group. And Allyn-Burbage would be standing, with one elbow on the mantel, a glass clutched in his hand and in his eyes the twinkle of good humor. Cosette-Middleton would be talking with him and laughing, for she was the gay one, with her elfin spirit and her golden hair. Anna-Quinze more than likely would be reading, curled up in a chair, and Mary-Foyle would be simply waiting, glad to be alive, glad to be with friends.

These, he thought, were the long companions of the trip, so full of understanding, so tolerant and gracious that a century had not dulled the beauty of their friendship.

Winston-Kirby hurried, a thing he almost never did, at the thought of those five who were waiting for him, anxious to be with them, to tell them of his walk across the moor, to discuss with them still again some details of their plans.

He turned into the walk. The wind was becoming cold, as it always did with the fall of darkness, and he raised the collar of his jacket for the poor protection it afforded.

He reached the door and stood for an instant in the chill, to savor the never-failing satisfaction of the massive timbering and

the stout, strong squareness of the house. A place built to stand through the centuries, he thought, a place of dynasty with a sense of foreverness.

He pressed the latch and thrust his weight against the door and it came slowly open. A blast of warm air rushed out to greet him. He stepped into the entry hall and closed the door behind him. As he took off his cap and jacket and found a place to hang them, he stamped and scuffed his feet a little to let the others know that he had returned.

But there were no greetings for him, no sound of happy laughter. There was only silence from the inner room.

He turned about so swiftly that his hand trailed across his jacket and dislodged it from the hook. It fell to the floor with a smooth rustle of fabric and lay there, a little mound of cloth.

His legs suddenly were cold and heavy, and when he tried to hurry, the best he could do was shuffle, and he felt the chill edge of fear.

He reached the entrance to the room and stopped, shocked into immobility. His hands went out and grasped the door jamb on either side of him.

There was no one in the room. And not only that—the room itself was different. It was not simply the companions who were gone. Gone, as well, were the rich furnishings of the room, gone the comfort and the pride.

There were no rugs upon the floor, no hangings at the windows, no paintings on the wall. The fireplace was a naked thing of rough and jagged stone. The furniture—the little there was—was primitive, barely knocked together. A small trestle table stood before the fireplace, with a three-legged stool pulled up to a place that was set for one.

Winston-Kirby tried to call. The first time, the words gurgled in his throat and he could not get them out. He tried again and made it: "Job! Job, where are you?"

Job came running from somewhere in the house. "What's the trouble, sir?"

"Where are the others? Where have they gone? They should be waiting for me."

Job shook his head, just slightly, a quick move right and left; "Mister Kirby, sir, they were never here."

"Never here! But they were here when I left this morning. They knew I'd be coming back."

"You fail to understand, sir. There were never any others. There were just you and I and the other robots. And the embryos, of course."

Winston-Kirby let go of the door and walked a few feet forward.

"Job," he said, "you're joking." But he knew something was wrong—robots never joke.

"We let you keep them as long as we could," said Job. "We hated to have to take them from you, sir. But we needed the equipment for the incubators."

"But this room! The rugs, the furniture, the—"

"That was all part of it, sir. Part of the dimensino."

Winston-Kirby walked slowly across the room, used one foot to hook the three-legged stool out from the table. He sat down heavily.

"The dimensino?" he asked.

"Surely you remember."

He frowned to indicate he didn't. But it was coming back to him, some of it, slowly and reluctantly, emerging vaguely after all the years of forgetfulness.

He fought against the remembering and the knowledge. He tried to push it back into that dark corner of his mind from which it came. It was sacrilege and treason—it was madness.

"The human embryos," Job told him, "came through very well. Of the thousand of them, all but three are viable."

Winston-Kirby shook his head, as if to clear away the mist that befogged his brain.

"We have the incubators all set up in the outbuildings, sir," said Job. "We waited as long as we could before we took the dimensino equipment. We let you have it until the very last. It might have been easier, sir, if we could have done it gradually, but there is no provision for that. You either have dimensino or you haven't got it."

"Of course," said Winston-Kirby, mumbling just a little. "It was considerate of you. I thank you very much."

He stood up unsteadily and rubbed his hand across his eyes.

"It's not possible," he said. "It simply can't *be* possible. I lived

for a hundred years with them. They were as real as I am. They were flesh and blood, I tell you. They were . . ."

The room still was bare and empty, a mocking emptiness, an alien mockery.

"It is possible," said Job gently. "It is just the way it should be. Everything has gone according to the book. You are here, still sane, thanks to the dimensino. The embryos came through better than expected. The equipment is intact. In eight months or so, the children will be coming from the incubators. By that time, we will have gardens and a crop on the way. The livestock embryos will also have emerged and the colony will be largely self-sustaining."

Winston-Kirby strode to the table, picked up the plate that was laid at the single place. It was lightweight plastic.

"Tell me," he said. "Have we any china? Have we any glassware or silver?"

Job looked as near to startled as a robot ever could. "Of course not, sir. We had no room for more than just the bare essentials this trip. The china and the silver and all the rest of it will have to wait until much later."

"And I have been eating ship rations?"

"Naturally," said Job. "There was so little room and so much we had to take . . ."

Winston-Kirby stood with the plate in his hand, tapping it gently on the table, remembering those other dinners—aboard the ship and since the ship had landed—the steaming soup in its satiny tureen, the pink and juicy prime ribs, the huge potatoes baked to a mealy turn, the crisp green lettuce, the shine of polished silver, the soft sheen of good china, the—

"Job," he said.

"Sir?"

"It was all delusion, then?"

"I am afraid it was. I am sorry, sir."

"And you robots?"

"All of us are fine, sir. It was different with us. We can face reality."

"And humans can't."

"Sometimes it is better if they can be protected from it."

"But not now?"

"Not any more," said Job. "It must be faced now, sir."

Winston-Kirby laid the plate down on the table and turned back to the robot. "I think I'll go up to my room and change to other clothes. I presume dinner will be ready soon. Ship rations, doubtless?"

"A special treat tonight," Job told him. "Hezekiah found some lichens and I've made a pot of soup."

"Splendid!" Winston-Kirby said, trying not to gag.

He climbed the stairs to the door at the head of the stairs.

As he was about to go into the room, another robot came tramping down the hall.

"Good evening, sir," it said.

"And who are you?"

"I'm Solomon," said the robot. "I'm fixing up the nurseries."

"Soundproofing them, I hope."

"Oh, nothing like that. We haven't the material or time."

"Well, carry on," said Winston-Kirby, and went into the room.

It was not his room at all. It was small and plain. There was a bunk instead of the great four-poster he had been sleeping in and there were no rugs, no full-length mirror, no easy chairs. Delusion, he had said, not really believing it.

But here there was no delusion.

The room was cold with a dread reality—a reality, he knew, that had been long delayed. In the loneliness of this tiny room, he came face to face with it and felt the sick sense of loss. It was a reckoning that had been extended into the future as far as it might be—and extended not alone as a matter of mercy, of mere consideration, but because of a cold, hard necessity, a practical concession to human vulnerability.

For no man, no matter how well adjusted, no matter if immortal, could survive intact, in mind and body, a trip such as he had made. To survive a century under space conditions, there must be delusion and companionship to provide security and purpose from day to day. And that companionship must be more than human. For mere human companionship, however ideal, would give rise to countless irritations, would breed deadly cabin fever.

Dimensino companionship was the answer, then, providing an illusion of companionship flexible to every mood and need of the human subject. Providing, as well, a background to that com-

panionship—a wish-fulfillment way of life that nailed down security such as humans under normal circumstances never could have known.

He sat down on the bunk and began to unlace his heavy walking shoes.

The practical human race, he thought—practical to the point of fooling itself to reach destination, practical to the point of fabricating the dimensino equipment to specifications which could be utilized, upon arrival, in the incubators.

But willing to gamble when there was a need to gamble. Ready to bet that a man could survive a century in space if he were sufficiently insulated against reality—insulated by seeming flesh and blood which, in sober fact, existed only by the courtesy of the human mind assisted by intricate electronics.

For no ship before had ever gone so far on a colonizing mission. No man had ever existed for even half as long under the influence of dimensino.

But there were few planets where Man might plant a colony under natural conditions, without extensive and expensive installations and precautions. The nearer of these planets had been colonized and the survey had shown that this one which he finally had reached was especially attractive.

So Earth and Man had bet. Especially one man, Winston-Kirby told himself with pride, but the pride was bitter in his mouth. The odds, he recalled, had been five to three against him.

And yet, even in his bitterness, he recognized the significance of what he had done. It was another breakthrough, another triumph for the busy little brain that was hammering at the door of all eternity.

It meant that the Galaxy was open, that Earth could remain the center of an expanding empire, that dimensino and immortal could travel to the very edge of space, that the seed of Man would be scattered wide and far, traveling as frozen embryos through the cold, black distance which hurt the mind to think of.

He went to the small chest of drawers and found a change of clothing, laid it on the bunk and began to take off his hiking outfit.

Everything was going according to the book, Job had said.

The house was bigger than he had wanted it, but the robots

had been right—a big building would be needed to house a thousand babies. The incubators were set up and the nurseries were being readied and another far Earth colony was getting under way.

And colonies were important, he remembered, reaching back into that day, a hundred years before, when he and many others had laid their plans—including the plan whereby he could delude himself and thus preserve his sanity. For with more and more of the immortal mutations occurring, the day was not too distant when the human race would require all the room that it could grab.

And it was the mutant immortals who were the key persons in the colonizing programs—going out as founding fathers to supervise the beginning of each colony, staying on as long as needed, to act as a sort of elder statesman until that day when the colony could stand on its own feet.

There would be busy years ahead, he knew, serving as father, proctor, judge, sage and administrator, a sort of glorified Old Man of a brand-new tribe.

He pulled on his trousers, scuffed his feet into his shoes, rose to tuck in his shirt tail. And he turned, by force of habit, to the full-length mirror.

And the glass was there!

He stood astounded, gaping foolishly at the image of himself. And behind him, in the glass, he saw the great four-poster and the easy chairs.

He swung around and the bed and chairs were gone. There were just the bunk and the chest of drawers in the small, mean room.

Slowly he sat down on the edge of the bunk, clasping his hands so they wouldn't shake.

It wasn't true! It couldn't be! The dimensino was gone.

And yet it was with him still, lurking in his brain, just around the corner if he would only try.

He tried and it was easy. The room changed as he remembered it—with the full-length mirror and the massive bed upon which he sat, the thick rugs, the gleaming liquor cabinet and the tasteful drapes.

He tried to make it go away, barely remembering back in some deep, black closet of his mind that he must make it go.

But it wouldn't go away.

He tried and tried again, and it still was there, and he felt the will to make it go slipping from his consciousness.

"No!" he cried in terror, and the terror did it.

He sat in the small, bare room.

He found that he was breathing hard, as if he'd climbed a high, steep hill. His hands were fists and his teeth were clenched and he felt the sweat trickling down his ribs.

It would be easy, he thought, so easy and so pleasant to slip back to the old security, to the warm, deep friendship, to the lack of pressing purpose.

But he must not do it, for here was a job to do. Distasteful as it seemed now, as cold, as barren, it still was something he must do. For it was more than just one more colony. It was the breakthrough, the sure and certain knowledge, the proved knowledge, that Man no longer was chained by time or distance.

And yet there was this danger to be recognized; it was not something on which one might shut one's mind. It must be reported in every clinical detail so that, back on Earth, it might be studied and the inherent menace somehow remedied or removed.

Side effect, he wondered, or simply a matter of learning? For the dimensino was no more than an aid to the human mind—an aid to a very curious end, the production of controlled hallucinations operating on the wish-fulfillment level.

After a hundred years, perhaps, the human mind had learned the technique well, so well that there was no longer need of the dimensino.

It was something he should have realized, he insisted to himself. He had gone on long walks and, during all those hours alone, the delusion had not faded. It had taken the sudden shock of silence and emptiness, where he had expected laughter and warm greeting, to penetrate the haze of delusion in which he'd walked for years. And even now it lurked, a conditioned state of mind, to ambush him at every hidden thicket.

How long would it be before the ability would start to wear away? What might be done to wipe it out entirely? How does one unlearn a thing he's spent a century in learning? Exactly how dangerous was it—was there necessity of a conscious thought,

an absolute command or could a man slip into it simply as an involuntary retreat from drear reality?

He must warn the robots. He must talk it over with them. Some sort of emergency measure must be set up to protect him against the wish or urge, some manner of drastic action be devised to rescue him, should he slip back into the old delusion.

Although, he thought, it would be so fine to walk out of the room and down the stairs and find the others waiting for him, with the drinks all ready and the talk well started. . . .

"Cut it out!" he screamed.

Wipe it from his mind—that was what he must do. He must not even think of it. He must work so hard that he would have no time to think, become so tired from work that he'd fall into bed and go to sleep at once and have no chance to dream.

He ran through his mind all that must be done—the watching of the incubators, preparing the ground for gardens and for crops, servicing the atomic generators, getting in timbers against the need of building, exploring and mapping and surveying the adjacent territory, overhauling the ship for the one-robot return flight to Earth.

He filled his mind with it. He tagged items for further thought and action. He planned the days and months and years ahead. And at last he was satisfied.

He had it under control.

He tied his shoes and finished buttoning his shirt. Then, with a resolute tread, he opened the door and walked out on the landing.

A hum of talk floating up the stairway stopped him in his tracks.

Fear washed over him. Then the fear evaporated. Gladness burst within him and he took a quick step forward.

At the top of the stairs, he halted and reached out a hand to grasp the banister.

Alarm bells were ringing in his brain and the gladness fell away. There was nothing left but sorrow, a terrible, awful grieving.

He could see one corner of the room below and he could see that it was carpeted. He could see the drapes and paintings and one ornate golden chair.

With a moan, he turned and fled to his room. He slammed the door and stood with his back against it.

The room was the way it should be, bare and plain and cold.

Thank God, he thought. Thank God!

A shout came up the stairway.

"Winston, what's wrong with you? Winston, hurry up!"

And another voice: "Winston, we're celebrating. We have a suckling pig."

And still another voice: "With an apple in its mouth."

He didn't answer.

They'll go away, he thought. They have to go away.

And even as he thought it, half of him—more than half—longed in sudden agony to open up the door and go down the stairs and know once again the old security and the ancient friendship.

He found that he had both his hands behind his back and that they were clutching the doorknob as if they were frozen there.

He heard steps on the stairway, the sound of many happy, friendly voices, coming up to get him.

IMMIGRANT

He was the only passenger for Kimon and those aboard the ship lionized him because he was going there.

To land him at his destination the ship went two light-years out of its way, an inconvenience for which his passage money, much as it had seemed to him when he'd paid it back on Earth, did not compensate by half.

But the captain did not grumble. It was, he told Selden Bishop, an honor to carry a passenger for Kimon.

The businessmen aboard sought him out and bought him drinks and lunches and talked expansively of the market opening up in the new-found solar systems.

But despite their expansive talk, they looked at Bishop with half-veiled envy in their eyes and they said to him, "The man who cracks this Kimon situation is the one who'll have it big."

One by one, they contrived to corner him for private conversations, and the talk, after the first drink, always turned to billions if he ever needed backing.

Billions—while he sat there with less than twenty credits in his pocket, living in terror against the day when he might have to buy a round of drinks. For he wasn't certain that his twenty credits would stretch to a round of drinks.

The dowagers towed him off and tried to mother him; the young things lured him off and did not try to mother him. And everywhere he went, he heard the whisper behind the half-raised hand:

"To Kimon!" said the whispers. "My dear, you know what it

takes to go to Kimon! An IQ rating that's positively fabulous and years and years of study and an examination that not one in a thousand passes."

It was like that all the way to Kimon.

Kimon was a galactic El Dorado, a never-never land, the country at the rainbow's foot. There were few who did not dream of going there, and there were many who aspired, but those who were chosen were a very small percentage of those who tried to make the grade and failed.

Kimon had been reached—either discovered or contacted would be the wrong word to use—more than a hundred years before by a crippled spaceship out of Earth which landed on the planet, lost and unable to go farther.

To this day, no one knew for sure exactly what had happened, but it is known that in the end the crew had destroyed the ship and had settled down on Kimon and had written letters home saying they were staying.

Perhaps the delivery of those letters, more than anything else, convinced the authorities of Earth that Kimon was the kind of place the letters said it was—although later on there was other evidence which weighed as heavily in the balance.

There was, quite naturally, no mail service between Kimon and Earth, but the letters were delivered, and in a most fantastic, although when you think about it a most logical, way. They were rolled into a bundle and placed in a sort of tube, like the pneumatic tubes that are used in industry for interdepartmental communication, and the tube was delivered, quite neatly, on the desk of the World Postal chief in London. Not on the desk of a subordinate, mind you, but on the desk of the chief himself. The tube had not been there when he went to lunch; it was there when he came back, and so far as could be determined, despite a quite elaborate investigation, no one had been seen to place it there.

In time, still convinced that there had been some sort of hoax played, the postal service delivered the letters to the addressees by special messengers who in their more regular employment were operatives of the World Investigative Bureau.

The addressees were unanimous in their belief the letters were genuine, for in most cases the handwriting was recognized and

in every letter there were certain matters in the context which seemed to prove that they were bona fide.

So each of the addressees wrote a letter in reply, and these were inserted in the tube in which the original letters had arrived and the tube was placed meticulously in the exact spot where it had been found on the desk of the postal chief.

Then everyone watched and nothing happened for quite some time, but suddenly the tube was gone and no one had seen it go—it had been there one moment and not there the next.

There remained one question and that one soon was answered. In the matter of a week or two the tube reappeared again, just before the end of office hours. The postal chief had been working away, not paying much attention to what was going on, and suddenly he saw that the tube had come back again.

Once again it held letters and this time the letters were crammed with sheafs of hundred-credit notes, a gift from the marooned spacemen to their relatives, although it should be noted immediately that the spacemen themselves probably did not consider that they were marooned.

The letters acknowledged the receipt of the replies that had been sent from Earth and told more about the planet Kimon and its inhabitants.

And each letter carefully explained how they had hundred-credit notes on Kimon. The notes as they stood, the letters said, were simply counterfeits, made from bills the spacemen had in their pockets, although when Earth's fiscal experts and the Bureau of Investigation men had a look at them there was no way in which you could tell them from the real thing.

But, the letters said, the Kimonian government wished to make right the matter of counterfeiting. To back the currency the Kimonians, within the next short while, would place on deposit with the World Bank materials not only equivalent to their value but enough additional to set up a balance against which more notes could be issued.

There was, the letters explained, no money as such on Kimon, but since Kimon was desirous of employing the men from Earth, there must be some way to pay them, so if it was all right with the World Bank and everyone else concerned. . . .

The World Bank did a lot of hemming and hawing and talked

about profound fiscal matters and deep economic principles, but all this talk dissolved to nothing when in the matter of a day or two several tons of carefully shielded uranium and a couple of bushels of diamonds were deposited, during the afternoon coffee hour, beside the desk of the bank's president.

With evidence of this sort, there was not much that Earth could do except accept the fact that the planet Kimon was a going concern and that the Earthmen who had landed there were going to stay, and take the entire situation at face value.

The Kimonians, the letters said, were humanoid and had parapsychic powers and had built a culture which was miles ahead of Earth or any other planet so far discovered in the galaxy.

Earth furbished up a ship, hand-picked a corps of its most persuasive diplomats, loaded down the hold with expensive gifts, and sent the whole business out to Kimon.

Within minutes after landing, the diplomats had been quite undiplomatically booted off the planet. Kimon, it appeared, had no desire to ally itself with a second-rate, barbaric planet. When it wished to establish diplomatic relationships it would say so. Earth people might come to Kimon if they wished and settle there, but not just any Earth person. To come to Kimon, the individual would have to possess not only a certain minimum IQ, but must also have an impressive scholastic record.

And that was the way it was left.

You did not go to Kimon simply because you wished to go there —you worked to go to Kimon.

First of all, you had to have the specified IQ rating, and that ruled out 99 per cent or better of Earth's population. Once you had passed the IQ test, you settled down to grueling years of study, and at the end of the years of study you wrote an examination and, once again, most of the aspirants were ruled out. Not more than one in a thousand who took the examination passed.

Year after year Earth men and women dribbled out to Kimon, settled there, prospered, wrote their letters home.

Of those who went out, none came back. Once you had lived on Kimon, you could not bear the thought of going back to Earth.

And yet, in all those years, the sum of knowledge concerning Kimon, its inhabitants and its culture, was very slight indeed.

What knowledge there was was compiled from the letters delivered meticulously once each week to the desk of the postal chief in London.

The letters spoke of wages and salaries a hundred times the wages and salaries that were paid on Earth, of magnificent business opportunities, of the Kimonian culture and the Kimonians themselves—but in no detail, of culture or of business or any other factor, were the letters specific.

And perhaps the recipients of the letters did not mind too much the lack of specific information, for almost every letter carried with it a sheaf of notes, all crisp and new, and very, very legal, backed by tons of uranium, bushels of diamonds, stacked bars of gold and other similar knickknacks deposited from time to time beside the desk of the World Bank's president.

It became, in time, the ambition of every family on the Earth to send at least one relative to Kimon, for a relative on Kimon virtually spelled an assured and sufficient income for the rest of the clan for life.

Naturally the legend of Kimon grew. Much that was said about it was untrue, of course. Kimon, the letters protested, did not have streets paved with solid gold, since there were no streets. Nor did Kimonian damsels wear gowns of diamond dust—the damsels of Kimon wore not much of anything.

But to those whose understanding went beyond streets of gold and gowns of diamonds, it was well understood that in Kimon lay possibilities vastly greater than either gold or diamonds. For here was a planet with a culture far in advance of Earth, a people who had schooled themselves or had naturally developed parapsychic powers. On Kimon one could learn the techniques that would revolutionize galactic industry and communications; on Kimon one might discover philosophy that would set mankind overnight on a new and better—and more profitable?—path.

The legend grew, interpreted by each according to his intellect and his way of thought, and grew and grew and grew—

Earth's government was very helpful to those who wished to go to Kimon, for government, as well as individuals, could appreciate the opportunities for the revolution of industry and the evolution of human thought. But since there had been no invitation to grant diplomatic recognition, Earth's government sat and waited, schem-

ing, doing all it could to settle as many of its people on Kimon as was possible. But only the best, for even the densest bureaucrat recognized that on Kimon Earth must put its best foot forward.

Why the Kimonians allowed Earth to send its people was a mystery for which there was no answer. But apparently Earth was the only planet in the galaxy which had been allowed to send its people. The Earthmen and the Kimonians, of course, were both humanoid, but this was not an adequate answer, either, for they were not the only humanoids in the galaxy. For its own comfort Earth assumed that a certain common understanding, a similar outlook, a certain parallel evolutionary trend—with Earth a bit behind of course—between Earth and Kimon might account for Kimon's qualified hospitality.

Be that as it may, Kimon was a galactic El Dorado, a never-never land, a place to get ahead, the place to spend your life, the country at the rainbow's end.

Selden Bishop stood in the parklike area, where the gig had landed him, for Kimon had no spaceports, as it likewise failed to have many other things.

He stood surrounded by his luggage, and watched the gig drive spaceward to rendezvous with the liner's orbit.

When he could see the gig no longer, he sat down on one of his bags and waited.

The park was faintly Earthlike, but the similarity was only in the abstract, for in each particular there was a subtle difference that said this was an alien planet. The trees were too slim and the flowers just a shade too loud and the grass was off a shade or two from the grass you saw on Earth. The birds, if they were birds, were more lizardlike than the birds of Earth and their feathers were put on wrong and weren't quite the color one associated with plumage. The breeze had a faint perfume upon it that was no perfume of Earth, but an alien odor that smelled as a color looked, and Bishop tried to decide, but couldn't, which color it might be.

Sitting on his bag, in the middle of the park, he tried to drum up a little enthusiasm, tried to whistle up some triumph that he finally was on Kimon, but the best that he could achieve was a thankfulness that he'd made it with the twenty still intact.

He would need a little cash to get along on until he could find a job. But, he told himself, he shouldn't have to wait too long before he found a job. The thing, of course, was not to take the first one offered him, but to shop around a little and find the one for which he was best fitted. And that, he knew, might take a little time.

Thinking of it, he wished that he had more than a twenty. He should have allowed himself a bigger margin, but that would have meant something less than the best luggage he could buy and perhaps not enough of it, off-the-rack suits instead of tailored, and all other things accordingly.

It was, he told himself, important that he make the best impression, and sitting there and thinking it over, he couldn't bring himself to regret the money he had spent to make a good impression.

Maybe he should have asked Morley for a loan. Morley would have given him anything he asked and he could have paid it back as soon as he got a job. But he had hated to ask, for to ask, he now admitted, would have detracted from his new-found importance as a man who had been selected to make the trip to Kimon. Everyone, even Morley, looked up to a man who was set to blast for Kimon, and you couldn't go around asking for a loan or for other favors.

He remembered the last visit he had with Morley, and looking back at it now, he saw that, while Morley was his friend, that last visit had flavored, more or less, of a diplomatic job that Morley had to carry out.

Morley had gone far and was going further in the diplomatic service. He looked like a diplomat and he talked like one and he had a better grasp, old heads at the department said, of Sector nineteen politics and economics than any of the other younger men. He wore a clipped mustache that had a frankly cultivated look, and his hair was always quite in place, and his body, when he walked, was like that of a panther walking.

They had sat in Morley's diggings and had been all comfortable and friendly, and then Morley had got up and paced up and down the room with his panther walk.

"We've been friends for a long, long time," said Morley. "We've been in a lot of scrapes together."

And the two of them had smiled, remembering some of the scrapes they had been in together.

"When I heard you were going out to Kimon," Morley said, "I was pleased about it naturally. I'd be pleased at anything that came your way. But I was pleased, as well, for another reason. I told myself, here, finally, was a man who could do a job and find out what we want."

"What do you want?" Bishop had asked and, as he remembered it, he had asked it as if he might be asking whether Morley wanted Scotch or bourbon. Although, come to think of it, he never would have asked that particular question, for all the young men in the alien relations section religiously drank Scotch. But, anyhow, he asked it casually, although he sensed that there was nothing casual at all about the situation.

He could smell the scent of cloak and dagger and he caught a sudden glimpse of huge official worry, and for an instant he was a little cold and scared.

"There must be some way to crack that planet," Morley had told him, "but we haven't found it yet. So far as the Kimonians are concerned, none of the rest of us, none of the other planets, officially exist. There's not a single planet accorded diplomatic status. On Kimon there is not a single official representative of any other people. They don't seem to trade with anyone, and yet they must trade with someone, for no planet, no culture can exist in complete self-sufficiency. They must have diplomatic relations somewhere, with someone. There must be some reason, beyond the obvious one that we are an inferior culture, why they do not recognize Earth. For even in the more barbaric days of Earth there was official recognition of many governments and peoples who were cultural inferiors to the recognizing nation."

"You want me to find out all this?"

"No," said Morley. "Not all that. All we want are clues. Somewhere there is the clue that we are looking for, the hint that will tell us what the actual situation is. All we need is the opening wedge—the foot in the door. Give us that and we will do the rest."

"There have been others," Bishop told him. "Thousands of others. I'm not the only one who ever went to Kimon."

"For the last fifty years or more," said Morley, "the section has

talked to all the others, before they went out, exactly as I'm talking to you now."

"And you've got nothing?"

"Nothing," said Morley. "Or almost nothing. Or nothing, anyhow, that counted or made any sense."

"They failed . . ."

"They failed," Morley told him, "because once on Kimon they forgot about Earth—well, not forgot about it, that's not entirely it. But they lost all allegiance to it. They were Kimon-blinded."

"You believe that?"

"I don't know," said Morley. "It's the best explanation that we have. The trouble is that we talk to them only once. None of them come back. We can write letters to them, certainly. We can try to jog them—indirectly, of course. But we can't ask them outright."

"Censorship?"

"Not censorship," said Morley, "although they may have that too; but mostly telepathy. The Kimonians would know if we tried to impress anything too forcibly upon their minds. And we can't take the chance of a single thought undoing all the work that we have done."

"But you're telling me."

"You'll forget it," Morley said. "You will have several weeks in which you can forget it—push it to the back of your mind. But not entirely—not entirely."

"I understand," Bishop had told him.

"Don't get me wrong," said Morley. "It's nothing sinister. You're not to look for that. It may be just a simple thing. The way we comb our hair. There's some reason—perhaps many little ones. And we must know those reasons."

Morley had switched it off as quickly as he had begun it, had poured another round of drinks, had sat down again and talked of their school days and of the girls known and of week-ends in the country.

It had been, all in all, a very pleasant evening.

But that had been weeks ago and since then he'd scarcely remembered it and now here he was on Kimon, sitting on one of his bags in the middle of a park, waiting for a welcoming Kimonian to show up.

All the time that he'd been waiting, he had been prepared for

the Kimonian's arrival. He knew what a Kimonian looked like and he should not have been surprised.

But when the native came, he was.

For the native was six feet ten and almost a godlike being, a sculptured humanoid who was, astonishingly, much more human than he had thought to find.

One moment he had sat alone in the little parklike glade and the next the native was standing by his side.

Bishop came to his feet and the Kimonian said, "We are glad you are here. Welcome to Kimon, sir."

The native's inflection was as precise and beautiful as his sculptured body.

"Thank you," Bishop said, and knew immediately that the two words were inadequate and that his voice was slurred and halting compared with the native's voice. And, looking at the Kimonian, he had the feeling that by comparison, he cut a rumpled, seedy figure.

He reached into his pocket for his papers and his fingers were all thumbs, so that he fumbled for them and finally dug them out —dug is the word exactly—and handed them to the waiting being.

The Kimonian flicked them—that was it, flicked them—then he said, "Mr. Selden Bishop. Very glad to know you. Your IQ rating, 160, is very satisfactory. Your examination showing, if I may say so, is extraordinary. Recommendations good. Clearance from Earth in order. And I see you made good time. Very glad to have you."

"But—" said Bishop. Then he clamped his mouth tight shut. He couldn't tell this being he'd merely flicked the pages and could not possibly have read them. For, obviously, he had.

"You had a pleasant flight, Mr. Bishop?"

"A most pleasant one," said Bishop and was filled with sudden pride that he could answer so easily and urbanely.

"Your luggage," said the native, "is in splendid taste."

"Why, thank you—" then was filled with rage. What right had this person to patronize his luggage!

But the native did not appear to notice.

"You wish to go to the hotel?"

"If you please," said Bishop, speaking very tightly, holding himself in check.

"Please allow me," said the native.

Bishop blurred for just a second—a definite sense of blurring—as if the universe had gone swiftly out of focus, then he was standing, not in the parklike glade, but in a one-man-sized alcove off a hotel lobby, with his bags stacked neatly beside him.

He had missed the triumph before, sitting in the glade, waiting for the native, after the gig had left him, but now it struck him, a heady, drunken triumph that surged through his body and rose in his throat to choke him.

This was Kimon! He was finally on Kimon! After all the years of study, he was here at last—the fabulous place he'd worked for many years to reach.

A high IQ, they'd said behind their half-raised hands—a high IQ and many years of study, and a stiff examination that not more than one in every thousand passed.

He stood in the alcove, with the sense of hiding there, to give himself a moment in which to regain his breath at the splendor of what had finally come to pass, to gain the moment it would take for the unreasoning triumph to have its way with him and go.

For the triumph was something that must not be allowed to last. It was something that he must not show. It was a personal thing and as something personal it must be hidden deep.

He might be one of a thousand back on Earth, but here he stood on no more than equal footing with the ones who had come before him. Perhaps not quite on equal footing, for they would know the ropes and he had yet to learn them.

He watched them in the lobby—the lucky and the fabulous ones who had preceded him, the glittering company he had dreamed about during all the weary years—the company that he would presently join, the ones of Earth who were adjudged fit to go to Kimon.

For only the best must go—the best and smartest and the quickest. Earth must put her best foot forward, for how otherwise would Earth ever persuade Kimon that she was a sister planet?

At first the people in the lobby had been no more than a crowd, a crowd that shone and twinkled, but with that curious lack of personality which goes with a crowd. But now, as he watched, the crowd dissolved into individuals and he saw them, not as a group, but as the men and women he presently would know.

He did not see the bell captain until the native stood in front of him, and the bell captain, if anything, was taller and more handsome than the man who'd met him in the glade.

"Good evening, sir," the captain said. "Welcome to the Ritz."

Bishop started. "The Ritz? Oh, yes, I had forgotten. This place is the Ritz."

"We're glad to have you with us," said the captain. "We hope your stay will prove to be a long one."

"Certainly," said Bishop. "That is, I hope so, too."

"We had been notified," the captain said, "that you were arriving, Mr. Bishop. We took the liberty of reserving rooms for you. I trust they will be satisfactory."

"I am sure they will be," Bishop said.

"Perhaps you will want to dress," the captain said. "There is still time for dinner."

"Oh, certainly," said Bishop. "Most assuredly I will." And he wished he had not said it.

"We'll send up the bags," the captain said. "No need to register. That is taken care of. If you will permit me, sir."

The rooms were satisfactory. There were three of them. Sitting in a chair, Bishop wondered how he'd ever pay for them.

Remembering the lonely twenty credits, he was seized with a momentary panic. He'd have to get a job sooner than he planned, for the twenty credits wouldn't go too far with a layout like this one—although he supposed if he asked for credit it would be given him.

But he recoiled from the idea of asking for credit, of being forced to admit that he was short of cash. So far he'd done everything correctly. He'd arrived aboard a liner and not a battered trader; his luggage—what had the native said?—was in splendid taste; his wardrobe was all that could be expected; and he hoped that he'd not communicated to anyone the panic and dismay he'd felt at the luxury of the suite.

He got up from the chair and prowled about the room. There was no carpeting, for the floor itself was soft, and yielding and you left momentary tracks as you walked, but they puffed back and smoothed out almost immediately.

He walked over to a window and stood looking out of it. Eve-

ning had fallen and the landscape was covered with a dusty blue —and there was nothing, absolutely nothing, but rolling countryside. There were no roads that he could see and no lights that would have told of other habitations.

Perhaps, he thought, I'm on the wrong side of the building. On the other side there may be streets and roads and homes and shops.

He turned back to the room and looked at it—the Earthlike furniture so quietly elegant that it almost shouted, the beautiful, veined-marble fireplace, the shelves of books, the shine of old wood, the matchless painting hanging on the wall, and the great cabinet that filled almost one end of the room.

He wondered what the cabinet might be. It was a beautiful thing, with an antique look about it and it had a polish—not a wax, but a polish of human hands and time.

He walked toward it.

The cabinet said "Drink, sir?"

"I don't mind if I do," said Bishop, then stopped stock-still, realizing that the cabinet had spoken and he had answered it.

A panel opened in the cabinet and the drink was there.

"Music?" asked the cabinet.

"If you please," said Bishop.

"Type?"

"Type? Oh, I see. Something gay, but maybe just a little sadness too. Like the blue hour of twilight spreading over Paris. Who was it used that phrase? One of the old writers. FitzGerald. I'm sure it was FitzGerald."

The music told about the blue hour stealing over that city far away on Earth, and there was soft April rain and distant girlish laughter and the shine of the pavement in the slanting rain.

"Is there anything else you wish, sir?" asked the cabinet.

"Nothing at the moment."

"Very well, sir. You will have an hour to get dressed for dinner."

He left the room, sipping his drink as he went. The drink had a certain touch to it.

He went into the bedroom and tested the bed, and it was satisfactorily soft. He examined the dresser and the full-length glass and peeked into the bathroom and saw that it was equipped with an automatic shaver and massager, that it had a shower and tub,

an exercising machine and a number of other gadgets that he couldn't place.

And the third room. It was almost bare by the standards of the other two. In the center of it stood a chair with great flat arms, and on each of the arms many rows of buttons.

He approached the chair cautiously, wondering what it was—what kind of trap it was—although that was foolish, for there were no traps on Kimon. This was Kimon, the land of opportunity, where a man might make a fortune and live in luxury and rub shoulders with an intelligence and a culture that was the best yet found in the galaxy.

He bent down over the wide arms of the chair and found that each of the buttons was labeled. They were labeled *History, Poetry, Drama, Sculpture, Literature, Painting, Astronomy, Philosophy, Physics, Religions* and many other things. And there were several that were labeled with words he'd never seen and had no meaning to him.

He stood in the room and looked around at its starkness and saw for the first time that it had no windows, but was just a sort of box—a theater, he decided, or a lecture room. You sat in the chair and pressed a certain button and—

But there was no time for that. An hour to dress for dinner, the cabinet had said, and some of that hour was already gone.

The luggage was in the bedroom and he opened the bag that held his dinner clothes. The jacket was badly wrinkled.

He stood with it in his hands, staring at it. Maybe the wrinkles would hang out. Maybe—

But he knew they wouldn't.

The music stopped and the cabinet asked "Is there something that you wish, sir?"

"Can you press a dinner jacket?"

"Surely, sir, I can."

"How soon?"

"Five minutes," said the cabinet. "Give me the trousers, too."

The bell rang and he went to the door.

A man stood just outside.

"Good evening," said the man. "My name is Montague, but they call me Monty."

"Won't you come in, Monty?"

Monty came in and surveyed the room.

"Nice place," he said.

Bishop nodded. "I didn't ask for anything at all. They just gave it to me."

"Clever, these Kimonians," said Monty. "Very clever, yes."

"My name is Selden Bishop."

"Just come in?" asked Monty.

"An hour or so ago."

"All dewed up with what a great place Kimon is?"

"I know nothing about it," Bishop told him. "I studied it, of course."

"I know," said Monty, looking at him slantwise. "Just being neighborly. New victim and all that, you know."

Bishop smiled because he didn't quite know what else to do.

"What's your line?" asked Monty.

"Business," said Bishop. "Administration's what I'm aiming at."

"Well, then," Monty said, "I guess that lets you out. You wouldn't be interested."

"In what?"

"In football. Or baseball. Or cricket. Not the athletic type."

"Never had the time."

"Too bad," Monty said. "You have the build for it."

The cabinet asked, "Would the gentleman like a drink?"

"If you please," said Monty.

"And another one for you, sir?"

"If you please," said Bishop.

"Go and get dressed," said Monty. "I'll sit down and wait."

"Your jacket and trousers, sir," said the cabinet.

A door swung open and there they were, cleaned and pressed.

"I didn't know," said Bishop, "that you went in for sports out here."

"Oh, we don't," said Monty. "This is a business venture."

"Business venture?"

"Certainly. Give the Kimonians something to bet on. They might go for it. For a while, at least. You see, they can't bet—"

"I don't see why not—"

"Well, consider for a moment. They have no sports at all, you know. Wouldn't be possible. Telepathy. They'd know three moves ahead what their opponents were about to do. Telekinesis. They

could move a piece or a ball or what-have-you without touching a finger to it. They—"

"I think I see," said Bishop.

"So we plan to get up some teams and put on exhibition matches. Drum up as much enthusiasm as we can. They'll come out in droves to see it. Pay admission. Place bets. We, of course, will play the bookies and rake off our commissions. It will be a good thing while it lasts."

"It won't last, of course."

Monty gave Bishop a long look.

"You catch on fast," he said. "You'll get along."

"Drinks, gentlemen," the cabinet said.

Bishop got the drinks, gave one of them to his visitor.

"You better let me put you down," said Monty. "Might as well rake in what you can. You don't need to know too much about it."

"All right," Bishop told him agreeably. "Go ahead and put me down."

"You haven't got much money," Monty said.

"How did you know that?"

"You're scared about this room," said Monty.

"Telepathy?" asked Bishop.

"You pick it up," said Monty. "Just the fringes of it. You'll never be as good as they are. Never. But you pick things up from time to time—a sort of sense that seeps into you. After you've been here long enough."

"I had hoped that no one would notice."

"A lot of them will notice, Bishop. Can't help but notice, the way you're broadcasting. But don't let it worry you. We are all friends. Banded against the common enemy, you might say. If you need a loan—"

"Not yet," said Bishop. "I'll let you know."

"Me," said Monty. "Me or anyone. We are all friends. We got to be."

"Thanks."

"Not at all. Now go ahead and dress. I'll sit and wait for you. I'll bear you down with me. Everyone's waiting to meet you."

"That's good to know," said Bishop. "I felt quite a stranger."

"Oh, my, no," said Monty. "No need to. Not many come, you know. They'll all want to know of Earth."

He rolled the glass between his fingers.

"How about Earth?" he asked.

"How about—"

"Yes, it is still there, of course. How is it getting on? What's the news?"

He had not seen the hotel before. He had caught a confused glimpse of it from the alcove off the lobby, with his luggage stacked up beside him, before the bell captain had showed up and whisked him to his rooms.

But now he saw that it was a strangely substantial fairyland, with fountains and hidden music, with the spidery tracery of rainbows serving as groins and arches, with shimmery columns of glass that caught and reflected and duplicated many times the entire construction of the lobby so that one was at once caught up in the illusion that here was a place that went on and on forever—and at the same time one could cordon off a section of it in one's mind as an intimate corner for a group of friends.

It was illusion and substantiality, beauty and a sense of home—it was, Bishop suspected, all things to all men, and what you wished to make it. A place of utter magic that divorced one from the world and the crudities of the world, with a gaiety that was not brittle and a sentimentality that stopped short of being cheap, and that transmitted a sense of well-being and of self-importance from the very fact of being a part of such a place.

There was no such place on Earth, there could be no such place on Earth, for Bishop suspected that something more than human planning, more than human architectural skill, had gone into its building. You walked in an enchantment and you talked with magic and you felt the sparkle and the shine of the place live within your brain.

"It gets you," Monty said. "I always watch the faces of the newcomers when they first walk in it."

"It wears off after a time," said Bishop, not believing it.

Monty shook his head. "My friend, it does not wear off. It doesn't surprise you quite so much, but it stays with you all the time. A human does not live long enough for a place like this to wear thin and commonplace."

He had eaten dinner in the dining room, which was old and

solemn, with an ancient other worldness and a hushed tiptoe atmosphere, with Kimonian waiters at your elbow, ready to recommend a certain dish or vintage as one that you should try.

Monty had coffee while he ate and there had been others who had come drifting past to stop a moment and welcome him and ask him of Earth, always using a studied casualness, always with a hunger in their eyes that belied the casualness.

"They make you feel at home," said Monty, "and they mean it. They are glad when a new one comes."

He did feel at home—more at home than he had ever felt in his life before, as if already he were beginning to fit in. He had not expected to fit in so quickly and he was slightly astonished at it—for here were all the people he had dreamed of being with, and at last he was with them. You could feel their magnetic force, the personal magnetism that had made them great, great enough to be Kimon-worthy, and looking at them he wondered which of them he would get to know, which would be his friends.

He was relieved when he found that he was not expected to pay for his dinner or his drinks, but simply sign a chit, and once he'd caught on to that, everything seemed brighter, for the dinner of itself would have taken quite a hole out of the twenty nestling in his pocket.

With dinner over and with Monty gone somewhere into the crowd, he found himself in the bar, sitting on a stool and nursing a drink that the Kimonian bartender had recommended as being something special.

The girl came out of nowhere and floated up to the stool beside him and she said, "What's that you're drinking, friend?"

"I don't know," said Bishop. He made a thumb toward the man behind the bar. "Ask him to make you one."

The bartender heard and got busy with the bottles and the shaker.

"You're fresh from earth," said the girl.

"Fresh is the word," said Bishop.

"It's not so bad," she said. "That is, if you don't think about it."

"I won't think about it," Bishop promised. "I won't think of anything."

"Of course, you do get used to it," she said. "After a while you don't mind the faint amusement. You think, what the hell, let

them laugh all they want to so long as I have it good. But the day will come—"

"What are you talking about?" asked Bishop. "Here's your drink. Dip your muzzle into that and—"

"The day will come when we are old to them, when we don't amuse them any longer. When we become *passé*. We can't keep thinking up new tricks. Take my painting, for example—"

"See here," said Bishop. "You're talking way above my head."

"See me a week from now," she said. "The name's Maxine. Just ask to see Maxine. A week from now, we can talk together. So long, buster."

She floated off the stool and suddenly was gone.

She hadn't touched her drink.

He went up to his rooms and stood for a long time at a window, staring out into the featureless landscape lighted by a moon.

Wonder thundered in his brain, the wonder and the newness and the many questions, the breathlessness of finally being here, of slowly coming to a full realization of the fact that he was here, that he was one of that glittering, fabulous company he had dreamed about for years.

The long grim years peeled off him, the years of books and study, the years of determined driving, the hungry, anxious, grueling years when he had lived a monkish life, mortifying body and soul to drive his intellect.

The years fell off and he felt the newness of himself as well as the newness of the scene. A cleanness and a newness and the sudden glory.

The cabinet finally spoke to him.

"Why don't you try the live-it, sir?"

Bishop swung sharply around. "You mean . . . ?"

"The third room," said the cabinet. "You'll find it most amusing."

"The live-it!"

"That's right," said the cabinet. "You pick it and you live it."

Which sounded like something out of the Alice books.

"It's safe," said the cabinet. "It's perfectly safe. You can come back any time you wish."

"Thank you," Bishop said.

He went into the room and sat down in the chair and studied the buttons on the arms. History? Might as well, he told himself. He knew a bit of history. He'd been interested in it and had taken several courses and done a lot of supplemental reading.

He punched the *History* button. A panel in the wall before the chair lit up and a face appeared—the face of a Kimonian, the bronzed and golden face, the classic beauty of the race.

Aren't any of them plain? Bishop wondered. None of them ugly or crippled, like the rest of humanity?

"What type of history, sir?" the face in the screen asked him.

"Type?"

"Galactic, Kimonian, Earth—almost any place you wish."

"Earth, please," said Bishop.

"Specifications?"

"England," said Bishop, "14th October, 1066. A place called Senlac."

And he was there.

He was no longer in the room with its single chair and its four bare walls, but he stood upon a hill in sunny autumn weather with the gold and red of trees and the blueness of the haze and the shouts of men.

He stood rooted in the grass that blew upon the hillside and saw that the grass had turned to hay with its age and sunshine —and out beyond the grass and hill, grouped down on the plain, was a ragged line of horsemen, with the sun upon their helmets and flashing on their shields, with the leopard banners curling in the wind.

It was October 14 and it was Saturday and on the hill stood Harold's hosts behind their locked shield wall, and before the sun had set new forces would have been put in motion to shape the course of empire.

Taillefer, he thought. Taillefer will ride in the fore of William's charge, singing the *Chanson de Roland* and wheeling his sword into the air so that it becomes a wheel of fire to lead the others on.

The Normans charged and there was no Taillefer. No one wheeled his sword into the air, there was no singing. There was merely shouting and the hoarse crying of men riding to their death.

The horsemen were charging directly at him, and he wheeled

and tried to run, but he could not outrun them and they were upon him. He saw the flash of polished hoofs and the cruel steel of the shoes upon the hoofs, the glinting lance point, the swaying, jouncing scabbard, the red and green and yellow of the cloaks, the dullness of the armor, the open roaring mouths of men—and they were upon him. And passing through him and over him as if he were not there.

He stopped stock-still, heart hammering in his chest, and, as if from somewhere far off, he felt the wind of the charging horses that were running all around him.

Up the hill there were hoarse cries of "Ut! Ut!" and the high, sharp ring of steel. Dust was rising all around him and somewhere off to the left a dying horse was screaming. Out of the dust a man came running down the hill. He staggered and fell and got up and ran again and Bishop could see that blood poured out of the ripped armor and washed down across the metal, spraying the dead, sere grass as he ran down the hill.

The horses came back again, some of them riderless, running with their necks outstretched, with the reins flying in the wind, with foam dashing from their mouths.

One man sagged in the saddle and fell off, but his foot caught in the stirrup and his horse, shying, dragged him sidewise.

Up on top of the hill the Saxon square was cheering and through the settling dust he saw the heap of bodies that lay outside the shield wall.

Let me out of here! Bishop was screaming to himself. *How do I get out of here! Let me out—*

He was out, back in the room again, with its single chair and the four blank walls.

He sat there quietly and he thought: *There was no Taillefer. No one who rode and sang and tossed the sword in the air. The tale of Taillefer was no more than the imagination of some copyist who had improved upon the tale to while away his time.*

But men had died. They had run down the hill, staggering with their wounds, and died. They had fallen from their horses and been dragged to death by their frightened mounts. They had come crawling down the hill, with minutes left of life and with a whimper in their throats.

He stood up and his hands were shaking. He walked unsteadily into the next room.

"You are going to bed, sir?" asked the cabinet.

"I think I will," said Bishop.

"Very good, then, sir. I'll lock up and put out."

"That's very good of you."

"Routine, sir," said the cabinet. "Is there anything you wish?"

"Not a thing," said Bishop. "Good night."

"Good night," said the cabinet.

In the morning he went to the employment agency which he found in one corner of the hotel lobby.

There was no one around but a Kimonian girl, a tall, statuesque blonde, but with a grace to put to shame the most petite of humans. A woman, Bishop thought, jerked out of some classic Grecian myth, a blond goddess come to life and beauty. She didn't wear the flowing Grecian robe, but she could have. She wore, truth to tell, but little, and was all the better for it.

"You are new," she said.

He nodded.

"Wait, I know," she said. She looked at him. "Selden Bishop, age twenty-nine Earth years, IQ, 160."

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

She made him feel as if he should bow and scrape.

"Business administration, I understand," she said.

He nodded bleakly.

"Please sit down, Mr. Bishop, and we will talk this over."

He sat down and he was thinking: It isn't right for a beautiful girl to be so big and husky. Or so competent.

"You'd like to get started doing something," said the girl.

"That's the thought I had."

"You specialized in business administration. I'm afraid there aren't many openings in that particular field."

"I wouldn't expect too much to start with," Bishop told her with what he felt was a becoming modesty and a realistic outlook. "Almost anything at all, until I can prove my value."

"You'd have to start at the very bottom. And it would take years of training. Not in method only, but in attitude and philosophy."

"I wouldn't. . . ." He hesitated. He had meant to say that he wouldn't mind. But he would mind. He would mind a lot.

"But I spent years," he said. "I know—"

"Kimonian business?"

"Is it so much different?"

"You know all about contracts, I suppose."

"Certainly I do."

"There is no such thing as a contract on all of Kimon."

"But—"

"There is no need of any."

"Integrity?"

"That, and other things as well."

"Other things?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"Try me."

"It would be useless, Mr. Bishop. New concepts entirely so far as you're concerned. Of behavior. Of motives. On earth, profit is the motive—"

"Isn't it here?"

"In part. A very small part."

"The other motives—?"

"Cultural development for one. Can you imagine an urge to cultural development as powerful as the profit motive?"

Bishop was honest about it. "No, I can't," he said.

"Here," she said, "it is the more powerful of the two. But that's not all. Money is another thing. We have no actual money. No coin that changes hands."

"But there is money. Credit notes."

"For the convenience of your race alone," she said. "We created your money values and your evidence of wealth so that we could hire your services and pay you—and I might add that we pay you well. We have gone through all the motions. The currency that we create is as valid as anywhere else in the galaxy. It's backed by deposits in Earth's banks and it is legal tender so far as you're concerned. But Kimonians themselves do not employ money."

Bishop floundered. "I can't understand," he said.

"Of course you can't," she said. "It's an entirely new departure for you. Your culture is so constituted that there must be a certain physical assurance of each person's wealth and worth. Here

we do not need that physical assurance. Here each person carries in his head the simple bookkeeping of his worth and debts. It is there for him to know. It is there for his friends and business associates to see at any time they wish."

"It isn't business, then," said Bishop. "Not business as I think of it."

"Exactly," said the girl.

"But I am trained for business. I spent—"

"Years and years of study. But on Earth's methods of business, not on Kimon's."

"But there are businessmen here. Hundreds of them."

"Are there?" she asked. She was smiling at him. Not a superior smile, nor a taunting one—just smiling at him.

"What you need," she said, "is contact with Kimonians. A chance to get to know your way around. An opportunity to appreciate our point of view and get the hang of how we do things."

"That sounds all right," said Bishop. "How do I go about it?"

"There have been instances," said the girl, "when Earth people sold their services as companions."

"I don't think I'd care much for that. It sounds—well, like baby sitting or reading to old ladies or . . ."

"Can you play an instrument or sing?"

Bishop shook his head.

"Paint? Draw? Dance?"

He couldn't do any of them.

"Box, perhaps," she said. "Physical combat. That is popular at times, if it's not overdone."

"You mean prize fighting?"

"I think that is one way you describe it."

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

"That doesn't leave much," she said, as she picked up some papers.

"Transportation?" he asked.

"Transportation is a personal matter."

And of course, it was, he told himself. With telekinesis, you could transport yourself or anything you might have a mind to move—without mechanical aid.

"Communication," he said weakly. "I suppose that is the same?"

She nodded.

With telepathy, it would be.

"You know about transportation and communications, Mr. Bishop?"

"Earth variety," said Bishop. "No good here, I gather."

"None at all," she said. "Although we might arrange a lecture tour. Some of us would help you put your material together."

Bishop shook his head. "I can't talk," he said.

She got up.

"I'll check around," she said. "Drop in again. We'll find something that you'll fit."

"Thanks," he said and went back to the lobby.

He went for a walk.

There were no roads or paths. There was nothing. The hotel stood on the plain and there was nothing else. No buildings around it. No village. No roads. Nothing.

It stood there, huge and ornate and lonely, like a misplaced thing. It stood stark against the skyline, for there were no other buildings to blend into it and soften it and it looked like something that someone in a hurry had dumped down and left.

He struck out across the plain toward some trees that he thought must mark a watercourse and he wondered why there were no paths or roads—but suddenly he knew why there were no paths or roads.

He thought about the years he had spent cramming business administration into his brain and he remembered the huge book of excerpts from the letters written home from Kimon hinting at big business deals, at responsible positions.

And the thought struck him that there was one thing in common in all of the excerpts in the book—that the deals and positions were always hinted at, that no one had ever told exactly what he did.

Why did they do it? he asked himself. Why did they fool us all?

Although, of course, there might be more to it than he knew. He had been on Kimon for somewhat less than a full day's time. I'll look around, the Grecian blonde had said—I'll look around, we'll find something that you'll fit.

He went on across the plain and reached the line of trees and found the stream. It was a prairie stream, a broad, sluggish flow

of crystal water between two grassy banks. Lying on his stomach to peer into the depths, he saw the flash of fishes far below him.

He took off his shoes and dangled his feet in the water and kicked a little to make the water splash, and he thought: They know all about us. They know about our life and culture. They know about the leopard banners and how Senlac must have looked on Saturday, 14th October, 1066, with the hosts of England massed upon the hilltop and the hosts of William on the plain below.

They know what makes us tick and they let us come, and because they let us come there must be some value in us.

What had the girl said, the girl who had floated to the stool and then left with her drink still standing and untouched? Faint amusement, she had said. You get used to it, she had said. If you don't think too much about it, you get used to it.

See me in a week, she had said. In a week you and I can talk. And she had called him buster.

Well, maybe she had a right to call him that. He had been starry-eyed and a sort of eager beaver. And probably ignorant-smug.

They know about us and how do they know about us?

Senlac might have been staged, but he didn't think so—there was a strange, grim reality about it that got under your skin, a crawling sort of feeling that told you it was true, that that was how it happened and had been. That there had been no Taillefer and that a man had died with his guts dragging in the grass and that the Englishmen had cried "Ut! Ut!" which might have meant almost anything at all, or nothing, but probably had meant "Out."

He sat there, cold and lonely, wondering how they did it. How they had made it possible for a man to punch a button and to live a scene long dead, to see the death of men who had long been dust mingled with the earth.

There was no way to know, of course. There was no use to guess.

Technical information, Morley Reed had said, that would revolutionize our entire economic pattern.

He remembered Morley pacing up and down the room and saying, "We must find out about them. We must find out."

And there was a way to find out. There was a splendid way.

He took his feet out of the water and dried them with hand-

fuls of grass. He put his shoes back on and walked back to the hotel that sat by itself.

The blond goddess was still at her desk in the employment bureau.

"About that baby-sitting job," he said.

She looked startled for a moment—terribly, almost childishly startled—but her face slid swiftly back to its goddess mask.

"Yes, Mr. Bishop."

"I've thought it over," he said. "If you have that kind of job I'll take it."

He lay in bed, sleepless, for a long time that night and took stock of himself and of the situation and he came to a decision that it might not be so bad as he thought it was.

There were jobs to be had, apparently. The Kimonians even seemed anxious that you should get a job. And even if it weren't the kind of work a man might want, or the kind that he was fitted for, at least it would be a start. From that first foothold a man could go up—a clever man, that is. And all the men and women, all the Earthians on Kimon, certainly were clever. If they weren't clever, they wouldn't be there to start with.

All of them seemed to be getting along. He had not seen either Monty or Maxine that evening but he had talked to others, and all of them seemed to be satisfied—or at least they kept up the appearance of being satisfied. If there were general dissatisfaction, Bishop told himself, there wouldn't even be the appearance of being satisfied, for there is nothing that an Earthian likes better than some quiet and mutual griping. And he had heard none of it—none of it at all.

He had heard some more talk about the starting of the athletic teams and had talked to several men who had been enthusiastic about it as a source of revenue.

He had talked to another man named Thomas who was a gardening expert at one of the big Kimonian estates, and the man had talked for an hour or more on the growing of exotic flowers. There had been a little man named Williams who had sat in the bar beside him and had told him enthusiastically of his commission to write a book of ballads based on Kimonian history

and another man named Jackson who was executing a piece of statuary for one of the native families.

If a man could get a satisfactory job, Bishop thought, life could be pleasant here on Kimon.

Take the rooms he had. Beautiful appointments, much better than he could expect at home. A willing cabinet robot who dished up drinks and sandwiches, who pressed clothes, turned out and locked up, and anticipated your no more than half-formed wish. And the room—the room with the four blank walls and the single chair with the buttons on its arms. There, in that room, was instruction and entertainment and adventure. He had made a bad choice in picking the Battle of Hastings for the first test of it, he knew now. But there were other places, other times, other more pleasant and less bloody incidents that one could experience.

It was an experience, too—and not merely seeing. He had really been walking on the hilltop. He had tried to dodge the charging horses, although there'd been no reason to, for apparently, even in the midst of a happening, you stood by some special dispensation as a thing apart, as an interested but unreachable observer.

And there were, he told himself, many happenings that would be worth observing. One could live out the entire history of mankind, from the prehistoric dawnings to the day before yesterday—and not only the history of mankind, but the history of other things as well, for there had been other categories of experience offered—Kimonian and Galactic—in addition to Earth.

Some day, he thought, I will walk with Shakespeare. Some day I'll sail with Columbus. Or travel with Prester John and find the truth about him.

For it was truth. You could sense the truth.

And how the truth? That he could not know. But it all boiled down to the fact that while conditions might be strange, one still could make a life of it.

And conditions would be strange, for this was an alien land and one that was immeasurably in advance of Earth in culture and in its technology. Here there was no need of artificial communications or of mechanical transportation. Here there was no need of contracts since the mere fact of telepathy would reveal one man to another, so there'd be no need of contracts.

You'll have to adapt, Bishop told himself. You'd have to adapt

to play the Kimon game, for they were the ones who would set the rules. Unbidden he had entered their planet, and they had let him stay, and, staying, it followed that he must conform.

"You are restless, sir," said the cabinet from the other room.

"Not restless," Bishop said. "Just thinking."

"I can supply you with a sedative. A very mild and pleasant sedative."

"Not a sedative," said Bishop.

"Then, perhaps," the cabinet said, "you would permit me to sing you a lullaby."

"By all means," said Bishop. "A lullaby is just the thing I need."

So the cabinet sang him a lullaby and after a time Bishop went to sleep.

The Kimonian goddess at the employment bureau told him next morning that there was a job for him.

"A new family," she said.

Bishop wondered if he should be glad that it was a new family or if it would have been better if it had been an old one.

"They've never had a human before," she said.

"It's fine of them," said Bishop, "to finally take one in."

"The salary," said the goddess, "is one hundred credits a day."

"One hundred—"

"You will only work during days," she said. "I'll teleport you there each morning and in the evening they'll teleport you back."

Bishop gulped. "One hundred—What am I to do?"

"A companion," said the goddess. "But you needn't worry. We'll keep an eye on them and if they mistreat you. . . ."

"Mistreat me?"

"Work you too hard—"

"Miss," said Bishop, "for a hundred bucks a day I'd—"

She cut him short. "You will take the job?"

"Most gladly," Bishop said.

"Permit me—" The universe came unstuck, then slapped back together.

He was standing in an alcove and in front of him was a woodland glen with a waterfall, and from where he stood he could smell the cool, mossy freshness of the tumbling water. There were ferns and trees, huge trees like the gnarled oaks the illustrators like

to draw to illustrate King Arthur and Robin Hood and other tales of very early Britain—the kind of oaks from which the Druids had cut the mistletoe.

A path ran along the stream and up the incline down which the waterfall came tumbling, and there was a blowing wind that carried music and perfume.

A girl came down the path and she was Kimonian, but she didn't seem as tall as the others he had seen and there was something a little less goddess-like about her.

He caught his breath and watched her, and for a moment he forgot that she was Kimonian and thought of her only as a pretty girl who walked a woodland path. She was beautiful, he told himself—she was lovely.

She saw him and clapped her hands.

"You must be he," she said.

He stepped out of the cubicle.

"We have been waiting for you," she told him. "We hoped there'd be no delay, that they'd send you right along."

"My name," said Bishop, "is Selden Bishop and I was told—"

"Of course you are the one," she said. "You needn't even tell me. It's lying in your mind."

She waved an arm about her.

"How do you like your house?" she asked.

"House?"

"Of course, silly. This. Naturally it's only the living-room. Our bedrooms are up in the mountains. But we changed this just yesterday. Everyone worked so hard at it. I do hope you like it. Because you see, it is from your planet. We thought it might make you feel at home."

"House," he said again.

She reached out a hand and laid it on his arm.

"You're all upset," she said. "You don't begin to understand."

Bishop shook his head. "I just arrived the other day."

"But do you like it?"

"Of course I do," said Bishop. "It's something out of the old Arthurian legend. You'd expect to see Lancelot or Guinevere or some of the others riding through the woods."

"You know the stories?"

"Of course I know the stories. I read my Tennyson."

"And you will tell them to us."

He looked at her, a little startled. "You mean you want to hear them?"

"Why, yes, of course we do. What did we get you for?"

And that was it, of course. What had they got him for?

"You want me to begin right now?"

"Not now," she said. "There are the others you must meet. My name is Elaine. That's not exactly it, of course. It is something else, but Elaine is as close as you'll ever come to saying it."

"I could try the other name. I'm proficient at the languages."

"Elaine is good enough," she said carelessly. "Come along."

He fell in behind her on the path and followed up the incline.

And as he walked along, he saw that it was indeed a house—that the trees were pillars holding up an artificial sky that somehow failed to look very artificial and that the aisles between the trees ended in great windows which looked out on the barren plain.

But the grass and flowers, the moss and ferns, were real and he had a feeling that the trees must be real as well.

"It doesn't matter if they're real or not," said Elaine. "You couldn't tell the difference."

They came to the top of the incline into a parklike place, where the grass was cut so closely and looked so velvety that he wondered for a moment if it were really grass.

"It is," Elaine told him.

"You catch everything I think," he said. "Isn't—?"

"Everything," said Elaine.

"Then I mustn't think."

"Oh, but we want you to," she told him. "That is part of it."

"Part of what you got me for?"

"Exactly," said the girl.

In the middle of the parklike area was a sort of pagoda, a flimsy thing that seemed to be made out of light and shadow rather than of substance, and around it were half a dozen people.

They were laughing and chatting and the sound was like the sound of music—very happy, but at the same time sophisticated music.

"There they are," cried Elaine. "Come along."

She ran and her running was like flying and his breath caught in his throat at the slimness and the grace of her.

He ran after her and there was no grace in his running. He could feel the heaviness. It was a gallop rather than a run, an awkward lope in comparison to the running of Elaine.

Like a dog, he thought. Like an overgrown puppy trying to keep up, falling over its own feet, with its tongue hanging out and panting.

He tried to run more gracefully and he tried to erase the thinking from his mind.

Mustn't think. Mustn't think at all. They catch everything. They will laugh at you.

They *were* laughing at him. He could feel their laughter, the silent, gracious amusement that was racing in their minds.

She reached the group and waited. "Hurry up," she called and while her words were kindly, he could feel the amusement in the words.

He hurried. He pounded down upon them. He arrived somewhat out of breath. He felt winded and sweaty and extremely uncouth.

"This is the one they sent us," said Elaine. "His name is Bishop. Is that not a lovely name?"

They watched him, nodding gravely.

"He will tell us stories," said Elaine. "He knows the stories that go with a place like this."

They were looking kindly at him, but he could sense the covert amusement, growing by the moment.

She said to Bishop, "This is Paul. And that one over there is Jim. Betty. Jane. George. And the one on the end is Mary."

"You understand," said Jim, "those are not our names."

"They are approximations," said Elaine. "The best that I could do."

"They are as close," said Jane, "as he can pronounce them."

"If you'd only give me a chance," said Bishop, then stopped short.

That was what they wanted. They wanted him to protest and squirm. They wanted him to be uncomfortable.

"But of course we don't," said Elaine.

Mustn't think. Must try to keep from thinking. They catch everything.

"Let's all sit down," said Betty. "Bishop will tell us stories."

"Perhaps," Jim said to him, "you will describe your life on Earth. I should be quite interested."

"I understand you have a game called chess," said George. "We can't play games, of course. You know why we can't. But I'd be very interested in discussing with you the technique and philosophy of chess."

"One at a time," said Elaine. "First he will tell us stories."

They sat down on the grass, in a ragged circle. All of them were looking at him, waiting for him to start.

"I don't quite know where to start," he said.

"Why, that's obvious," said Betty. "You start at the beginning."

"Quite right," said Bishop.

He took a deep breath.

"Once, long ago, in the island of Britain, there was a great king, whose name was Arthur—"

"Yclept," said Jim.

"You've read the stories?"

"The word was in your mind."

"It's an old word, an archaic word. In some versions of the tales—"

"I should be most interested sometime to discuss the word with you," said Jim.

"Go on with your story," said Elaine.

He took another deep breath.

"Once, long ago, in the island of Britain, there was a great king whose name was Arthur. His queen was Guinevere and Lancelot was his stanchest knight. . . ."

He found the writer in the desk in the living room and pulled it out. He sat down to write a letter.

He typed the salutation. *Dear Morley*

He got up and began pacing up and down the room.

What would he tell him? What could he tell him? That he had safely arrived and he had a job? That the job paid a hundred credits a day—ten times more than a man in his position could earn at any Earth job?

He went back to the writer again. He wrote:

Just a note to let you know that I arrived here safely and already have a job. Not too good a job perhaps, but it pays a hundred a day and that's better than I could have done on Earth.

He got up and walked again. There had to be more than that. More than just a paragraph. He sweated as he walked. What could he tell him?

He went back to the writer again:

In order to learn the conditions and the customs more quickly I have taken a job which will keep me in touch with the Kimonians. I find them to be a fine people, but sometimes a little hard to understand. I have no doubt that before too long I shall get to understand them and have a genuine liking for them.

He pushed back his chair and stared at what he'd written.

It was, he told himself, like any one of a thousand other letters he had read.

He pictured in his mind those other thousand people, sitting down to write their first letter from Kimon, searching in their mind for the polite little fables, for the slightly colored lie, for the balm that would salve their pride. Hunting for the words that would not reveal the entire truth:

I have a job of entertaining and amusing a certain family. I tell them stories and let them laugh at me. I do this because I will not admit that the fable of Kimon is a booby trap and that I've fallen into it—

No, it would never do to write like that. Nor to write:

I'm sticking on in spite of them. So long as I make a hundred a day, they can laugh as much as they want to laugh. I'm staying here and cleaning up no matter what. . . .

Back home he was one of a thousand. Back home they talked of him in whispers because he made the grade.

And the businessmen on board the ship, saying to him, "The one who cracks this Kimon business is the one who'll have it big," and talking in terms of billions if he ever needed backing.

He remembered Morley pacing up and down the room. A foot in the door, he'd said. Some way to crack them. Some way to understand them. Some little thing—no big thing, but some little thing. Anything at all except the deadpan face that Kimon turns toward us.

Somehow he had to finish the letter. He couldn't leave it hanging and he had to write it.

He turned back to the writer.

I'll write you later at greater length. At the moment I'm rushed.

He frowned at it. But whatever he wrote, it would be wrong. This was no worse than any of another dozen things that he might write.

Must rush off to a conference. . . . Have an appointment with a client. . . . *Some papers to go through.* . . . All of them were wrong.

What was a man to do? He wrote: *Think of you often. Write me when you can.*

Morley would write him. An enthusiastic letter, a letter with a fine shade of envy tingeing it, the letter of a man who wanted to be, but couldn't be, on Kimon.

For everyone wanted to go to Kimon. That was the hell of it.

You couldn't tell the truth, when everyone would give his good right arm to go.

You couldn't tell the truth when you were a hero and the truth would turn you into a galactic heel.

And the letters from home, the prideful letters, the envious letters, the letters happy with the thought you were doing so well—all of these would be only further chains to bind you to Kimon and to the Kimon lie.

He said to the cabinet, "How about a drink?"

"Yes, sir," said the cabinet. "Coming right up, sir."

"A long one," Bishop said. "And a strong one."

"Long and strong it is, sir."

He met her in the bar.

"Why, if it isn't buster!" she said, as though they met there often.

He sat on the stool beside her. "That week is almost up," he said.

She nodded. "We've been watching you. You're standing up real well."

"You tried to tell me."

"Forget it," said the girl. "Just a mistake of mine. It's a waste of time telling any of them. But you looked intelligent and not quite dry behind the ears. I took pity on you."

She looked at him over the rim of her glass. "I shouldn't have," she said.

"I should have listened."

"They never do," said Maxine.

"There's another thing," he said. "Why hasn't it leaked out? Oh sure, I have written letters, too. I didn't admit what it was like. Neither did you. Nor the man next to you. But someone, in all these years we've been here—"

"We are all alike," she said. "Alike as peas in the pod. We are the appointed, the hand-picked—stubborn, vanity-stricken, scared. All of us got here. In spite of hell and high water we got here. We let nothing stand in our way and we made it. We beat the others out. They're waiting back there on Earth—the ones that we beat out. They'll never be quite the same again. Don't you understand it? They had pride, too, and it was hurt. There's nothing they would like better than to know what it's really like. That's what all of us think of when we sit down to write a letter. We think of the belly laughs of those other thousands. The quiet smirks. We think of ourselves skulking, making ourselves small so no one will notice us—" She balled a fist and rapped against his shirt front.

"That's the answer, buster. That's why we never write the truth. That's why we don't go back."

"But it's been going on for years. For almost a hundred years. In all that time someone should have cracked—"

"And lost all this?" she asked. "Lost the easy living. The good drinking. The fellowship of lost souls. And the hope. Don't forget that. Always the hope that Kimon can be cracked."

"Can it?"

"I don't know. But if I were you, buster, I wouldn't count on it."

"But it's no kind of life for decent—"

"Don't say it. We aren't decent people. We are scared and weak, every one of us. And with good reason."

"But the life . . ."

"You don't lead a decent life, if that was what you were about to say. There's no stability in us. Children? A few of us have children, and it's not so bad for the children as it is for us, because

they know nothing else. A child who is born a slave is better off, mentally, than a man who once knew freedom."

"We aren't slaves," said Bishop.

"Of course not," Maxine said. "We can leave any time we want to. All we have to do is walk up to a native and say, 'I want to go back to Earth.' That's all you need to do. Any single one of them could send you back—*swish*—just as they send the letters, just as they whisk you to your work or to your room."

"But no one has gone back."

"Of course no one has," she said.

They sat there, sipping at their drinks.

"Remember what I told you," she said. "Don't think. That's the way to beat it. Never think about it. You have it good. You never had it so good. Soft living. Easy living. Nothing to worry about. The best kind of life there is."

"Sure," said Bishop. "Sure, that's the way to do it."

She slanted her eyes at him. "You're catching on," she said. They had another round.

Over in the corner a group had got together and was doing some impromptu singing. A couple were quarreling a stool or two away.

"It's too noisy in this place," Maxine said. "Want to see my paintings?"

"Your paintings?"

"The way I make a living. They are pretty bad, but no one knows the difference."

"I'd like to see them."

"Grab hold then."

"Grab. . . ."

"My mind, you know. Nothing physical about it. No use riding elevators."

He gaped at her.

"You pick it up," said Maxine. "You never get too good. But you pick up a trick or two."

"But how do I go about it?"

"Just let loose," she said. "Dangle. Mentally, that is. Try to reach out to me. Don't try to help. You can't."

He dangled and reached out, wondering if he was doing it the way it should be done.

The universe collapsed and then came back together.

They were standing in another room.

"That was a silly thing for me to do," Maxine said. "Some day I'll slip a cog and get stuck in a wall or something."

Bishop drew a deep breath. "Monty could read me just a little," he said. "Said you picked it up—just at the fringes."

"You never get too good," said Maxine. "Humans aren't . . . well, aren't ripe for it, I guess. It takes millennium to develop it."

He looked around him and whistled.

"Quite a place," he said.

It was all of that. It didn't seem to be a room at all, although it had furniture. The walls were hazed in distance and to the west were mountains peaked with snow, and to the east a very sylvan river and there were flowers and flowering bushes everywhere, growing from the floor. A deep blue dusk filled the room and somewhere off in the distance there was an orchestra.

A cabinet-voice said, "Anything, madam?"

"Drinks," said Maxine. "Not too strong. We've been hitting the bottle."

"Not too strong," said the cabinet. "Just a moment, madam."

"Illusion," Maxine said. "Every bit of it. But a nice illusion. Want a beach? It's waiting for you if you just think of it. Or a polar cap. Or a desert. Or an old chateau. It's waiting in the wings."

"Your painting must pay off," he said.

"Not my painting. My irritation. Better start getting irritated, buster. Get down in the dumps. Start thinking about suicide. That's a sure-fire way to do it. Presto, you're kicked upstairs to a better suite of rooms. Anything to keep you happy."

"You mean the Kimonians automatically shift you?"

"Sure. You're a sucker to stay down there where you are."

"I like my layout," he told her. "But this . . ."

She laughed at him. "You'll catch on," she said.

The drinks arrived.

"Sit down," Maxine said. "Want a moon?"

There was a moon.

"Could have two or three," she said, "but that would be overdoing it. One moon seems more like Earth. Seems more comfortable."

"There must be a limit somewhere," Bishop said. "They can't keep on kicking you upstairs indefinitely. There must come a time when even the Kimonians can't come up with anything that is new and novel."

"You wouldn't live long enough," she told him, "for that to come about. That's the way with all you new ones. You underestimate the Kimonians. You think of them as people, as Earth people who know just a little more. They aren't that, at all. They're alien. They're as alien as a spider-man despite their human form. They conform to keep contact with us."

"But why do they want to keep contact with us? Why—"

"Buster," she said, "that's the question that we never ask. That's the one that can drive you crazy."

He had told them about the human custom of going out on picnics and the idea was one that they had never thought of, so they adopted it with childish delight.

They had picked a wild place, a tumbled mountain area filled with deep ravines, clothed in flowers and trees. There was a mountain brook with water that was as clear as glass and as cold as ice.

They had played games and romped. They had swum and sunbathed and they had listened to his stories, sitting in a circle, needling him and interrupting him, picking arguments.

But he had laughed at them, not openly, but deep inside himself, for he knew now that they meant no harm but merely sought amusement.

Weeks before, he had been insulted and outraged and humiliated, but as the days went on he had adapted to it—had forced himself to adapt. If they wished a clown, then he would be a clown. If he were court fool, with bells and parti-colored garments, then he must wear the colors well and keep the bells ringing merrily.

There was occasional maliciousness in them, and some cruelty, but no lasting harm. And you could get along with them, he told himself, if you just knew how to do it.

When evening came they had built a fire and had sat around it and had talked and laughed and joked, for once leaving him alone.

Elaine and Betty had been nervous. Jim had laughed at them for their nervousness.

"No animal will come near a fire," he said.

"There are animals?" Bishop had asked.

"A few," said Jim. "Not many of them left."

He had lain there, staring at the fire, listening to their voices, glad that for once they were leaving him alone. Like a dog must feel, he thought. Like a pup hiding in a corner from a gang of rowdy children who are always mauling it.

He watched the fire and remembered other days—outings in the country and walking trips when they had built a fire and lain around it, staring at the sky, seeing the old familiar skies of Earth.

And here again was another fire. And here, again, a picnic. The fire was Earth and so was the picnic—for the people of Kimon did not know of picnics. They did not know of picnics and there might be many other things of which they likewise did not know. Many other things, perhaps. Barbaric, folkish things.

Don't look for the big things, Morley had said that night. Watch for the little things, for the little clues.

They liked Maxine's paintings because they were primitives. Primitives, perhaps, but not very good ones. Could it be that paintings were also something the Kimonians had not known until the Earthmen came?

Were there, after all, chinks in the Kimonian armor? Little chinks like picnics and paintings and many other little things for which they valued the visitors from Earth?

Somewhere in those chinks might be the answer that he sought for Morley.

He lay and thought, forgetting to shield his mind, forgetting that he should not think because his thoughts lay open to them.

Their voices had faded away and there was a solemn nighttime quiet. Soon, he thought, we'll all be going back—they to their homes and I to the hotel. How far away? he wondered. Half a world or less? And yet they'd be there in the instant of a thought.

Someone, he thought, should put more wood on the fire. He roused himself to do it, standing up. And it was not until then that he saw he was alone.

He stood there, trying to quiet his terror. They had gone away and left him. They had forgotten him. But that couldn't be.

They'd simply slipped off in the dark. Up to some prank, perhaps. Trying to scare him. Talking about the animals and then slipping out of sight while he lay dreaming at the fire. Waiting now, just outside the circle of the firelight, watching him, drinking in his thoughts, reveling in his terror.

He found wood and put it on the fire. It caught and blazed. He sat down nonchalantly, but he found that his shoulders were hunched instinctively, that the terror of aloneness in an alien world still sat beside him by the fire.

Now, for the first time, he realized the alienness of Kimon. It had not seemed alien before except for those few minutes he had waited in the park after the gig had landed him, and even then it had not been as alien as an alien planet should be, because he knew that he was being met, that there would be someone along to take care of him.

That was it, he thought. Someone to take care of me. We're taken care of—well and lavishly. We're sheltered and guarded and pampered—that was it, *pampered*. And for what reason?

Any minute now they'd tire of their game and come back into the circle of the firelight. Maybe, he told himself, I should give them their money's worth. Maybe I should act scared, maybe I should shout out for them to come and get me, maybe I should glance around out into the darkness, as if I were afraid of those animals that they talked about. They hadn't talked too much, of course. They were too clever for that, far too clever. Just a passing remark about existent animals, then on to something else. No stressing it, not laying it on too thick. Not overdoing it. Just planting a suggestion that there were animals one could be afraid of.

He sat and waited, not so scared as he had been before, having rationalized away the fear that he first had felt. Like an Earth campfire, he thought. Except it isn't Earth. Except it's an alien planet.

There was a rustle in the bushes.

They'll be coming now, he thought. They've figured out that it didn't work. They'll be coming back.

The bushes rustled again and there was the sound of a dislodged stone.

He did not stir.

They can't scare me, he thought. They can't scare—

He felt the breath upon his neck and leaped into the air, spinning as he leaped, stumbling as he came down, almost falling in the fire, then on his feet and scurrying to put the fire between him and the thing that had breathed upon his neck.

He crouched across the fire from it and saw the teeth in the gaping jaws. It raised its head and slashed, as if in pantomime, and he could hear the clicking of the teeth as they came together and the little moaning rumble that came from the massive throat.

A wild thought came to him: It's not an animal at all. This is just part of the gag. Something they dreamed up. If they can build a house like an English wood, use it for a day or two, then cause it to disappear as something for which they have no further use, surely it would be a second's work to dream up an animal.

The animal padded forward and he thought: Animals should be afraid of fire. All animals are afraid of fire. It won't get me if I stay near the fire.

He stooped and grabbed a brand.

Animals are afraid of fire. But this one wasn't. It padded round the fire. It stretched out its neck and sniffed. It wasn't in any hurry, for it was sure of him. Sweat broke out on him and ran down his sides.

The animal came with a smooth rush, whipping around the fire. He leaped, clearing the fire, to gain the other side of it. The animal checked itself, spun around to face him. It put its muzzle to the ground and arched its back. It lashed its tail. It rumbled.

He was frightened now, cold with a fright that could not be laughed off. It might be an animal. It must be an animal. No gag at all, but an animal.

He paced back toward the fire. He danced on his toes, ready to run, to dodge, to fight if he had to fight. But against this thing that faced him across the fire, he knew, there was no fighting chance. And yet, if it came to fighting, he could do no less than fight.

The animal charged.

He ran. He slipped and fell and rolled into the fire.

A hand reached down, jerked him from the fire and flung him to one side, and a voice cried out, a cry of rage and warning.

Then the universe collapsed and he felt himself flying apart and, as suddenly, he was together once again. He lay upon a floor

and he scrambled to his feet. His hand was burned and he felt the pain of it. His clothes were smoldering and he beat them out with his uninjured hand.

A voice said, "I'm sorry, sir. This should not have happened."

The man was tall, much taller than the Kimonians he had seen before. Nine feet, perhaps. And yet not nine feet, actually. Not anywhere near nine feet. He was no taller, probably, than the taller men of Earth. It was the way he stood that made him seem so tall, the way he stood and looked and the way his voice sounded.

And the first Kimonian, Bishop thought, who had ever shown his age. For there was a silvering of the temple hairs and his face was lined, as the faces of hunters or of sailors are lined from squinting into distances.

They stood facing one another in a room which, when Bishop looked at it, took his breath away. There was no describing it, no way to describe it—you felt as well as saw it. It was a part of you and a part of the universe and a part of everything you'd ever known or dreamed. It seemed to thrust extensions out into unguessed time and space and it had a sense of life and the touch of comfort and the feel of home.

Yet, when he looked again, he sensed a simplicity that did not square with his first impressions. Basic simplicities that tied in with the simple business of living out one's life, as if the room and the folks who lived within its walls were somehow integrated, as if the room were trying its best not to be a room, but to be a part of life, so much a part of life that it could pass unnoticed.

"I was against it from the first," said the Kimonian. "Now I know that I was right. But the children wanted you. . . ."

"The children?"

"Certainly. I am Elaine's father."

He didn't say Elaine. He said the other name—the name that Elaine had said no Earthman could pronounce.

"Your hand?" asked the man.

"It's all right," said Bishop. "Only burned a little."

And it was as if he had not spoken, as if he had not said the words—but another man, a man who stood off to one side and spoke the words for him.

He could not have moved if he'd been paid a million.

"This is something," said the Kimonian, "that must be recompensed. We'll talk about it later."

"Please, sir," said the man who talked for Bishop. "Please, sir, just one thing. Send me to my hotel."

He felt the swiftness of the other's understanding—the compassion and the pity.

"Of course," said the tall man. "With your permission, sir."

Once there were some children (human children, naturally) who had wanted a dog—a little playful puppy. But their father said they could not have a dog because they would not know how to treat him. But they wanted him so badly and begged their father so much that he finally brought them home a dog, a cunning little puppy, a little butterball with a paunchy belly and four wobbly legs and melting eyes, filled with the innocence of puppyhood.

The children did not treat him so badly as you might have imagined that they would. They were cruel, as all children are. They roughed and tumbled him; they pulled his ears and tail; they teased him. But the pup was full of fun. He liked to play and no matter what they did he came back for more. Because, undoubtedly, he felt very smug in this business of associating with the clever human race, a race so far ahead of dogs in culture and intelligence that there was no comparison at all.

But one day the children went on a picnic and when the day was over they were very tired, and forgetful, as children are very apt to be. So they went off and left the puppy.

That wasn't a bad thing, really. For children will be forgetful, no matter what you do, and the pup was nothing but a dog. . . .

The cabinet said, "You are very late, sir."

"Yes," said Bishop dully.

"You hurt somewhere, sir. I can sense the hurt."

"My hand," said Bishop. "I burned it in a fire."

A panel popped open in the cabinet.

"Put it in there," said the cabinet. "I'll fix it in a jiffy."

Bishop thrust his hand into the opening. He felt fingerlike appendages going over it, very gentle and soothing.

"It's not a bad burn, sir," said the cabinet, "but I imagine it is painful."

Playthings, Bishop thought.

This hotel is a dollhouse—or a doghouse. It is a shack, a tacked-together shack like the boys of Earth build out of packing cases and bits of board and paint crude, mystic signs upon. Compared to that room back there it is no more than a hovel, although, come to think of it a very gaudy hovel.

Fit for humans, good enough for humans, but a hovel just the same.

And we? he thought. *And we?* The pets of children. The puppy dogs of Kimon. Imported puppy dogs.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the cabinet. "You are not puppy dogs."

"What's that?"

"You will pardon me, sir. I should not have spoken out. But I wouldn't have wanted you to think—"

"If we aren't pets, what are we?"

"You will excuse me, sir. It was a slip, I quite assure you. I should not have . . ."

"You never do a thing," said Bishop bitterly, "without having it all figured out. You or any of them. For you are one of them. You spoke because they wanted you to speak."

"I can assure you that's not so."

"You would deny it, naturally," said Bishop. "Go ahead and do your job. You haven't told me all they wanted you to tell me. Go ahead and finish."

"It's immaterial to me what you think," the cabinet told him. "But if you thought of yourselves as playmates . . ."

"That's a hot one," Bishop said.

"Infinitely better," said the cabinet, "than thinking of yourself as a puppy dog."

"So that's what they want me to think."

"They don't care," the cabinet said. "It is all up to you. It was a mere suggestion, sir."

So, all right, it was a mere suggestion. So, all right, they were playmates and not pets at all.

The kids of Kimon inviting the dirty, ragged, runny-nosed urchins from across the tracks to play with them. Better to be an invited kid, perhaps, than an imported dog.

But even so it was the children of Kimon who had engineered it all—who had set up the rules for those who wished to come to

Kimon, who had built the hotel, had operated it and furnished it with the progressively more luxurious and more enticing rooms, who had found the so-called jobs for humans, who had arranged the printing of the credits.

And if that were so, then it meant that not merely the people of Earth, but the government of Earth, had negotiated, or had attempted to negotiate with the children of another race. And that would be the mark of the difference, he thought, the difference between us.

Although, he told himself, that might not be entirely right.

Maybe he *had* been wrong in thinking, in the first flush of his bitterness, that he was a pet. Maybe he *was* a playmate, an adult Earthman downgraded to the status of a child—and a stupid child at that. Maybe if he had been wrong on the pet angle, he was wrong in the belief, as well, that it had been the children of Kimon who had arranged the immigration of the Earth folk.

And if it hadn't been simply a childish matter of asking in some kids from across the tracks, if the adults of Kimon had had a hand in it, what was the setup then? A school project, a certain phase of progressive education? Or a sort of summer camp project, designed to give the deserving, but underprivileged, Earthmen a vacation away from the squalor of their native planet? Or simply a safe way in which the children of Kimon might amuse and occupy themselves, be kept from underfoot?

We should have guessed it long ago, Bishop told himself. But even if some of us might have entertained the thought that we were either pet or playmate, we should have pushed it far away from us, should have refused to recognize it, for our pride is too tender and too raw for a thought like that.

"There you are, sir," said the cabinet. "Almost as good as new. Tomorrow you can take the dressing off."

He stood before the cabinet without answering. He withdrew his hand and let it fall to his side, like so much dead weight.

Without asking if he wanted it, the cabinet produced a drink. "I made it long and strong," said the cabinet. "I thought you needed it."

"Thank you," Bishop said.

He took the drink and stood there with it, not touching it, not wanting to touch it until he'd finished out the thought.

And the thought would not finish out.

There was something wrong. Something that didn't track.

Our pride is too raw and tender—There was something there, some extra words that badly needed saying.

"There is something wrong, sir."

"Nothing wrong," said Bishop.

"But your drink."

"I'll get around to it."

The Normans had sat their horses on that Saturday afternoon, with the leopard banners curling in the breeze, with the pennons on their lances fluttering, with the sun upon their armor and the scabbards clinking as the horses pranced. They had charged, as history said they had, and had been beaten back. That was entirely right, for it had not been until late afternoon that the Saxon wall was broken, and the final fight around the dragon standard had not taken place until it was nearly dark.

But there had been no Taillefer, riding in the fore to throw up his sword and sing.

On that history had been wrong.

A couple of centuries later, more than likely some copyist had whiled away a monotonous afternoon by writing into the prosaic story of the battle the romance and the glitter of the charge of Taillefer. Writing it in protest against the four blank walls, against his Spartan food, against the daily dullness when spring was in the air and a man should be in the fields or woods instead of shut indoors, hunched with his quills and inkpots.

And that is the way it is with us, thought Bishop. We write the half-truth and the half-lie in our letters home. We conceal a truth or we obscure a fact or we add a line or two that, if not a downright lie, is certainly misleading.

We do not face up to facts, he thought. We gloss over the man crawling in the grass, with his torn-out guts snagging on the brambles. We write in the Taillefer.

And if we only did it in our letters, it would not be so bad. But we do it to ourselves. We protect our pride by lying to ourselves. We shield our dignity by deliberate indignation.

"Here," he said to the cabinet, "have a drink on me."

He set the glass, still full, on the top of the cabinet.

The cabinet gurgled in surprise.

"I do not drink," it said.

"Then take it back and put it in the bottle."

"I can't do that," said the cabinet, horrified. "It's already mixed."

"Separate it, then."

"It can't be separated," wailed the cabinet. "You surely don't expect me—"

There was a little swish and Maxine stood in the center of the room.

She smiled at Bishop.

"What goes on?" she asked.

The cabinet wailed at her. "He wants me to unmix a drink. He wants me to separate it, the liquor from the mix. He knows I can't do that."

"My, my," she said, "I thought you could do anything."

"I can't unravel a drink," the cabinet said primly. "Why don't you take it off my hands?"

"That's a good idea," said the girl. She walked forward and picked up the drink.

"What's wrong with you?" she asked Bishop. "Turning chicken on us?"

"I just don't want a drink," said Bishop. "Hasn't a man got a right to—?"

"Of course," she said. "Of course you have."

She sipped the drink, looking at him above the rim.

"What happened to your hand?"

"Burned it."

"You're old enough not to play with fire."

"You're old enough not to come barging into a room this way," Bishop told her. "One of these days you'll reassemble yourself in the precise spot where someone else is standing."

She giggled. "That would be fun," she said. "Think of you and me. . . ."

"It would be a mess," said Bishop.

"Invite me to sit down," said Maxine. "Let's act civilized and social."

"Sure, sit down," said Bishop.

She picked out a couch.

"I'm interested in this business of teleporting yourself," said Bishop. "I've asked you before, but you never told me."

"It just came to me," she said.

"But you can't teleport. Humans aren't parapsychic—"

"Some day, buster, you'll blow a fuse. You get so steamed up."

He went across the room and sat down beside her.

"Sure, I get steamed up," he said. "But . . ."

"What now?"

"Have you ever thought—well, have you ever tried to work at it? Like moving something else, some object—other than yourself?"

"No, I never have."

"Why not?"

"Look, buster. I drop in to have a drink with you and to forget myself. I didn't come primed for a long technical discussion. I couldn't anyway. I just don't understand. There's so much we don't understand."

She looked at him and there was something very much like fright brimming in her eyes.

"You pretend that you don't mind," she said. "But you do mind. You wear yourself out pretending that you don't mind at all."

"Then let's quit pretending," Bishop said. "Let's admit . . ."

She had lifted the glass to drink and now, suddenly it slipped out of her hand.

"Oh—"

The glass halted before it struck the floor. It hovered for a moment, then it slowly rose. She reached out and grasped it.

And then it slipped again from her suddenly shaking hand. This time it hit the floor and spilled.

"Try it again," said Bishop.

She said: "I never tried. I don't know how it happened. I just didn't want to drop it, that was all. I wished I hadn't dropped it and then . . ."

"But the second time—"

"You fool," she screamed, "I tell you I didn't try. I wasn't putting on an exhibition for you. I tell you that I don't know what happened."

"But you did it. It was a start."

"A start?"

"You caught the glass before it hit the floor. You teleported it back into your hand."

"Look, buster," she said grimly, "quit kidding yourself. They're watching all the time. They play little tricks like that. Anything for a laugh."

She rose, laughing at him, but there was a strangeness in her laughing.

"You don't give yourself a chance," he told her. "You are so horribly afraid of being laughed at. You've got to be a wise guy."

"Thanks for the drink," she said.

"But, Maxine—"

"Come up and see me sometime."

"Maxine! Wait!"

But she was gone.

Watch for the clues, Morley had said, pacing up and down the room. Send us back the clues and we will do the rest. A foot in the door is all we expect from you. Give us a foot inside the door and that is all we need.

Clues, he had said. Not facts, but clues.

And perhaps he had said clues instead of facts because he had been blinded like all the rest of them. Like the copyist who could not face up to the fact of battle without chivalry. Like those who wrote the letters home from Kimon. Like Maxine, who said quit kidding yourself, buster, they're watching all the time, they play little tricks like this.

And here were facts.

Facts he should send home to Morley. Except he couldn't send them.

He was ashamed to send them.

You couldn't write: *We are pets. The children house and feed us. They throw sticks for us to chase. They like to hear us bark.* . . . He sweated as he thought of it.

Or the kinder fact: *We are playmates.* . . .

You couldn't write that, either. You simply couldn't write it.

And yet, he said, the facts are there—the truth is there. And you must admit it. You must admit the fact. And you must admit the truth. If not for Morley, if not for Earth, if not for fellow men, then you must admit it for yourself. For a man may fool his

friends, he may deceive the world—but he mu_t be truthful with himself. Let's forget the bitterness, he told himself—the bitterness and hurt. Let's forget the pride.

Let us look for facts.

The Kimonians are a race more culturally advanced than we are, which means, in other words, that they are farther along the road of evolution, farther from the ape. And what does it take to advance along the evolutionary road beyond the high tide of my own race of Earth?

Not mere intelligence alone, for that is not enough.

What then would it take to make the next major stride in evolution? Perhaps philosophy rather than intelligence—a seeking for a way to put to better use the intelligence that one already had, a greater understanding and a more adequate appreciation of human values in relation to the universe.

And if the Kimonians had that greater understanding, if they had won their way through better understanding to closer brotherhood with the galaxy, then it would be inconceivable that they'd take the members of another intelligent race to serve as puppy dogs for children. Or even as playmates for their children, unless in the fact of playing with their children there be some greater value, not to their child alone, but to the child of Earth, than the happiness and wonder of such association. They would be alive to the psychic damage that might be done because of such a practice, would not for a moment run the danger of that damage happening unless out of it might come some improvement or some change.

He sat and thought of it and it seemed right, for even on his native planet history showed increasing concern with social values as the culture improved.

And something else.

Parapsychic powers must not come too soon in human evolution, for they could be used disastrously by a culture that was not equipped, emotionally and intellectually, to handle them. No culture which had not reached an adult stage could have parapsychic powers, for they were nothing to be fooled around with by an adolescent culture.

In that respect at least, Bishop told himself, the Kimonians are the adults and we are the adolescents. In comparison with the

Kimonians, we have no right to consider ourselves any more than children.

It was hard to take. He gagged on it. Swallow it, he told himself. Swallow it.

The cabinet said, "It is late, sir. You must be getting tired."

"You want me to go to bed?"

"It's a suggestion, sir."

"All right," he said.

He rose and started for the bedroom, smiling to himself. Sent off to bed, he thought—just as a child is sent. And going.

Not saying, "I'll go when I'm ready." Not standing on your adult dignity. Not throwing a tantrum, not beating your heels upon the floor and howling.

Going off to bed—like a child when it's told to go.

Maybe that's the way, he thought. Maybe that's the answer. Maybe that's the *only* answer.

He swung around.

"Cabinet."

"What is it, sir?"

"Nothing," Bishop said. "Nothing at all . . . that is. Thanks for fixing up my hand."

"That's quite all right," said the cabinet. "Good night."

Maybe that's the answer. To act like a child. And what does a child do? He goes to bed when he is told. He minds his elders. He goes to school. He—Wait a minute!

He goes to school!

He goes to school because there is a lot to learn. He goes to kindergarten so that he can get into the first grade and he goes to high school so that he can go to college. He realizes there is a lot to learn, that before he takes his place in the adult world it must be learned and that he has to work to learn.

But I went to school, Bishop told himself. I went for years and years. I studied hard and I passed an examination that a thousand others failed to pass. I qualified for Kimon.

But just suppose.

You went to kindergarten to qualify for first grade. You went to high school to qualify for college. You went to Earth to qualify for Kimon.

You might have a doctorate on Earth, but still be no more than a kindergarten youngster when you got to Kimon.

Monty knew a bit of telepathy and so did some of the others. Maxine could teleport herself and she had made the glass stop before it hit the floor. Perhaps the others could, too.

And they'd just picked it up.

Although just telepathy or stopping a glass from hitting the floor would not be all of it. There'd be much more of it. Much more to the culture of Kimon than the parapsychic arts.

Maybe we are ready, he thought. Maybe we've almost finished with our adolescence. Maybe we are on the verge of being ready for an adult culture. Could that be why the Kimonians let us in, the only ones in the galaxy they are willing to let in?

His brain reeled with the thought.

On Earth only one of every thousand passed the examination that sent them on to Kimon. Maybe here on Kimon only another one in every thousand would be qualified to absorb the culture that Kimon offered them.

But before you could even start to absorb the culture, before you could start to learn, before you ever went to school, you'd have to admit that you didn't know. You'd have to admit that you were a child. You couldn't go on having tantrums. You couldn't be a wise guy. You couldn't keep on polishing up false pride to hold as a shield between you and the culture that waited for your understanding.

Morley, Bishop said, I may have the answer—the answer that you're awaiting back on Earth.

But I can't tell it to you. It's something that can't be told. It's a thing that each one must find out for himself.

And the pity of it is that Earth is not really equipped to find it out. It is not a lesson that is often taught on Earth.

Armies and guns could not storm the citadel of Kimonian culture, for you simply could not fight a war with a parapsychic people. Earth aggressiveness and business cunning likewise would fail to crack the dead-pan face of Kimon.

There is only one way, Morley, Bishop said, talking to his friend. There is only one thing that will crack this planet and that is humility. And Earthmen are not humble creatures. Long ago they

forgot the meaning of humility. But here it's different. Here you have to be different.

You start out by saying, I don't know. Then you say, I want to know. Then you say, I'll work hard to learn.

Maybe, Bishop thought, that's why they brought us here, so that the one of us in every thousand who has a chance of learning would get that chance to learn. Maybe they are watching, hoping that there may be more than one in every thousand. Maybe they are more anxious for us to learn than we are to learn. For they may be lonely in a galaxy where there are no others like them.

Could it be that the ones at this hotel were the failures, the ones who had never tried, or who might have tried and could not pass.

And the others—the one out of every thousand—where were they? He could not even guess.

There were no answers. It was all supposition. It was a premise built upon a pipedream—built on wishful thinking. He would wake up in the morning and know that it was wrong.

He'd go down to the bar and have a drink with Maxine or with Monty and laugh at himself for the things that he'd dreamed up.

School, he'd told himself. But it wouldn't be a school—at least not the kind of school he'd ever known before.

I wish it could be so, he thought.

The cabinet said, "You'd better get on to bed, sir."

"I suppose I should," said Bishop. "It's been a long, hard day."

"You'll want to get up early," said the cabinet, "so you aren't late to school."

NEW FOLKS' HOME

The house was an absurdity. What is more, it was out of place. And it had no right to be there, Frederick Gray told himself. For this was his country, his and old Ben Lovell's. They had discovered it almost forty years before and had come here ever since and in all that time there had been no one else.

He knelt in the canoe and stroked idly with the paddle to keep the craft in place, with the bright, brown autumn water flowing past, bearing on its surface little curls of foam from the waterfall a half a mile ahead. He had heard the faint thunder of the falls when he had parked the car and lowered the canoe from its top and for the past hour he'd traveled toward it, listening to it and storing the sound of it away, as he was storing everything away, for this, he knew, was the last trip to this place he would ever make.

They could have waited, he told himself, with a strange mellow bitterness. They could have waited until he had made the trip. For it was all spoiled now. No longer could he ever think upon this stream without the house intruding. Not as he had known the stream for almost forty years, but now always with the house.

No one had ever lived here. No one would want to live here. No one ever came here. It had been his and Ben's alone.

But the house stood there, upon the little knoll above the flowing stream, framed in all its shiny whiteness against the greenness of the pines, and with a path leading from his old camping place up to where it sat.

He wielded the paddle savagely and drove the canoe to the

shore. It grounded on the gravel and he stepped out and hauled it up the beach, where it would be safe from the tugging current.

Then he straightened and stared up at the house.

How would he tell Ben, he wondered. Or should he try to tell him? Might it not be better, when he talked with Ben, to disregard the house? You could not tell a man, lying in a hospital from which he had small chance of ever going home, that someone had robbed him of a segment of his past. For when a man is near the end, thought Gray, his past is somehow precious. And that, Gray admitted to himself, was the reason he himself resented the house upon the knoll.

Although, perhaps, he thought, he would not have resented it so much if it had not been so ridiculous. For it was not the kind of house for a place like this. If it had been a rustic structure, built of natural wood, with a great rock chimney, all built low against the ground, it would not have been so bad. For then it would have fitted, or would have tried to fit.

But this stark white structure, gleaming with the newness of its paint, was unforgivable. It was the sort of place that some junior executive might have built in some fashionable development, where all the other houses, sitting on the barren acres, would be of the same sleek architecture. There it would be quite all right and acceptable, but in this place of rock and pine it was an absurdity and an insult.

He bent stiffly and tugged the canoe farther up the beach. He lifted out his cased rod and laid it on the ground. He found the creel and strapped it on, and slung the pair of waders across his shoulder.

Then, picking up the rod, he made his way slowly up the path. For it was only dignified and proper that he make his presence known to these people on the knoll. It would not be right to go stalking past them, up the river, without an explanation. But he would be very sure not to say anything that might imply he was asking their permission. Rather it might be quite fitting, he told himself, to make very clear to them the prior right that he held and to inform them stiffly that this would be the last time he was coming and that he would bother them no further.

The way was steep. It had seemed of late, he thought, that all little slopes were steep. His breath was shorter now and his breath-

ing shallow and his knees were stiff and his muscles ached from kneeling and paddling the canoe.

Maybe it had been foolish to try the trip alone. With Ben it would have been all right, for there would have been the two of them, the one to help the other. He had told no one that he planned the trip, for if he had they would have attempted to dissuade him—or what might have been far worse, offered to go along with him. They would have pointed out that no man of almost seventy should try such a trip alone. Although, actually, it was not much of a trip, at all. Just a few hours' drive up from the city to the little town of Pineview and then four miles down the old logging road until he reached the river. And from there an hour of paddling up the river to the falls and the olden camping place just downstream from the falls.

Halfway up the slope he stopped to catch his breath and rest. From there he could see the falls, the white rush of the water and the little cloud of mist that, when the sun was right, held captive rainbows in it.

He stood looking at it all—the darkness of the pines, the barren face of rocky gorge, the flaming crimson and the goldenness of the hardwood trees, now turned into autumn bonfires by the touch of early frost.

How many times, he wondered—how many times had Ben and he fished above the falls? How many campfires had they lighted? How many times had they traveled up and down the river?

It had been a good life, a good way to spend their time together, two stodgy professors from a stodgy down-state college. But all things approach an end; nothing lasts forever. For Ben it had already ended. And after this one trip, it would be the end for him.

He stood and wondered once again, with a twinge of doubt, if he had made the right decision. The people at Wood's Rest seemed kind and competent and had shown him that he would be with the kind of people he could understand—retired teachers and ancient bankers and others from the genteel walks of life. But despite all this, the doubt kept creeping in.

It would have been so different, he thought, if only Clyde had lived. They had been closer than most sons and fathers. But now he had no one. Martha had been gone for many years and now Clyde was gone as well and there were no others.

On the face of it, from every practical consideration, Wood's Rest was the answer. He would be taken care of and he could live the kind of life, or at least an approximation of the kind of life, to which he was accustomed. It was all right now to keep on alone, but the time was coming when he would need someone. And Wood's Rest, while perhaps not the perfect answer, was at least an answer. A man must look ahead, he told himself, and that was why he had made the arrangements with Wood's Rest.

He was breathing easier now and he went on up the path until he reached the little patch of level ground that lay before the house.

The house was new, he saw, newer than he had thought at first. From where he stood he imagined that he could smell the newness of the paint.

And how, he wondered, had the materials which had been used to build it been gotten to the site? There was no sign of any road. It might, he thought, have been trucked down the ancient logging road and brought up the river from where he had left his car. But if that had been the case, the logging road would have shown the signs of recent travel, and it hadn't. It still was no more than a rutted track, its center overgrown with grass, that snaked its way through a tunnel of encroaching second growth. And if it had been brought by boat, there should have been a skidway or a road leading from the river to the site, and there was nothing but the faint, scarcely worn path up which he'd made his way. There would not have been time, he knew, for the wilderness and weather to have wiped out the traces, for he and Ben had been here fishing in the spring and at that time there had been no house.

Slowly he crossed the level place and the patio that looked out upon the river and the falls. He reached the door and pressed the button and far in the house he could hear the sound of ringing. He waited and no one came. He pressed the bell again. He heard the ringing from within the house and listened for the sound of footsteps coming to the door, but there were no footsteps. He raised his hand and knocked upon the door and at the knock the door came open and swung wide into the hall.

He stood abashed at this invasion of another's privacy. He debated for a moment whether he should reach in and close the door and quietly go away. But that, he told himself, had a sense of sneaking that he did not like.

"Hello!" he called. "Is anybody home?"

He would explain, when someone came, that he had merely knocked upon the door, that he had not opened it.

But no one came.

For a moment he stood undecided, then stepped inside the hall to grasp the doorknob and pull it shut.

In that instant he saw the living room, newly carpeted and filled with furniture. Someone was living here, he thought, but they were not at home. They had gone somewhere for a little while and had not locked the door. Although, come to think of it, no one up here ever locked a door. There was no need to lock them.

He would forget it, he promised himself, forget this house, this blot upon the land, and spend his day fishing and in the afternoon go back downriver to the car and home. He would not let his day be spoiled.

Sturdily, he set out, tramping along the ridge that took him above the falls and to that stretch of water that he knew so well.

The day was calm and clear. The sun was shining brightly, but there was still a touch of chill. However, it was only ten o'clock. By noon it would be warm.

He jogged along, quite happily, and by the time he donned the waders and stepped into the water, a mile above the falls, the house no longer mattered.

It was early in the afternoon that the accident occurred.

He had waded ashore and found a medium-sized boulder that would serve as a chair while he ate the lunch he'd brought. He had laid the rod down carefully on the shingle of the little beach and had admired the three trout of keeping size that rested in the creel. And had noted, as he unwrapped his sandwich, that the sky was clouding over.

Perhaps, he told himself, he should start home a bit sooner than he had planned. There was no point in waiting if there were a chance the weather would turn bad. He had put in three good hours upon the stream and should be satisfied.

He finished the sandwich and sat quietly on the boulder, staring at the smooth flow of the water against the rampart of the pines that grew on the farther bank. It was a scene, he told himself, that he should fix into his memory, to keep and hold forever. It would

be something to think upon in the days to come when there were no fishing trips.

He decided that he'd take another half hour before he left the stream. He'd fish down to the point where the fallen tree lay halfway across the water. There should be trout in there, underneath the tree, hiding there and waiting.

He got up stiffly and picked up the rod and creel and stepped into the stream. His foot slipped on a mossy boulder hidden by the water and he was thrown forward. A sharp pain slashed through his ankle and he hit the shallow water and lay there for a moment before he could move to right himself.

His foot, the one that had slipped, was caught between two chunks of rock, wedged into a crevice in the stream bed. Caught and twisted and throbbing with a steady and persistent pain.

His teeth clenched against an outcry, he slowly worked the foot free and dragged himself back onto the shore.

He tried to stand and found that the twisted ankle would not bear his weight. It turned under him when he tried and a red-hot streak of pain went shooting through his leg.

He sat down and carefully worked off his waders. The ankle already was becoming swollen and had a red and angry look.

He sat upon the shingle of the beach and carefully considered all that he must do.

He could not walk, so he would have to crawl. He'd leave the waders and the rod and creel, for he could not be encumbered by them. Once he got to the canoe, he could make it down the river to where he'd parked his car. But when he got there, he'd have to leave the canoe behind as well, for he could never load it on top the car.

Once he was in the car, he would be all right, for he could manage driving. He tried to remember if there were a doctor at Pineview. It seemed to him there was, but he could not be sure. But, in any case, he could arrange for someone to come back and pick up the rod and the canoe. Foolish maybe, he thought, but he could not give up the rod. If it wasn't picked up soon, the porcupines would find and ruin it. And he could not allow a thing like that to happen. For the rod was a part of him.

He laid the three—the waders, the creel and rod—in a pile beside the river where they could be spotted easily by anyone who

might be willing to come back for them. He looked for the last time at the river and began the crawl.

It was a slow and painful business. Try as he might, he could not protect the ankle from bumps along the way and every bump sent waves of pain surging through his body.

He considered fashioning a crutch, but gave it up as a bad idea when he realized that the only tool he had was a pocket knife, and not too sharp a one.

Slowly he inched his way along, making frequent stops to rest. He could see, when he examined it, that the ankle was more swollen than before and the redness of it was beginning to turn purple.

And suddenly the frightening realization came, somewhat belatedly, that he was on his own. No one knew that he was here, for he had told no one. It would be days, if he failed to make it, before anyone would think to hunt for him.

It was a foolish thought. For he could make it easily. The hardest part came first and that was for the best. Once he reached the beached canoe, he would have it made.

If only he could keep crawling longer. If he didn't have to rest so often. There had been a day when he could have made it without a single rest. But a man got old and weak, he thought. Weaker than he knew.

It was during one of his rests that he heard the rising wind whining in the treetops. It had a lonesome sound and was a little frightening. The sky, he saw, was entirely clouded over and a sort of ghostly twilight had settled on the land.

He tried to crawl the faster, spurred on by a vague uneasiness. But he only tired the quicker and banged the injured ankle cruelly. He settled down again to a slower pace.

He had passed the fall line and had the advantage of a slightly downhill slope when the first drop of rain spattered on his outstretched hand.

And a moment after that the rain came in gusty sweeps of icy savagery.

He was soaked in the first few minutes and the wind was cold. The twilight deepened and the pines moaned in the rising gale and little rivulets of water ran along the ground.

Doggedly, he kept at his crawling. His teeth tried to chatter as

the chill seeped in, but he kept his mouth clamped shut to stop the chattering.

He was better than halfway back to the canoe, but now the way seemed long. He was chilled to the bone and as the rain still came down it seemed to bear with it a great load of weariness.

The house, he thought. I can find shelter at the house. They will let me in.

Not daring to admit that his earlier objective, to reach the canoe and float down the river to where he'd left his car, had now become impossible and unthinkable.

Ahead, through the murkiness of the storm, he saw the glow of light. That would be the house, he thought. They—whoever they might be—were now at home and had turned on the lights.

It took longer than he had thought it would, but he reached the house with what seemed to be the last shred of his strength. He crawled across the patio and managed to pull himself erect beside the door, leaning on the house, bracing on one leg. He thumbed the button and heard the ringing of the bell inside and waited for the footsteps.

There weren't any footsteps.

And it wasn't right, he told himself. There were lights within the house and there should be people there. And if that were the case, why should he get no answer?

Behind him the moaning in the pines seemed deeper and more fearsome and there was no doubt that it had grown darker. The rain still came hissing down in its chilling fury.

He balled his fist and pounded on the door and as it had that morning, the door swung open, to let the light spill out across the patio.

"Hello, in there!" he shouted. "Is anybody home?"

There was no answer and no stir, no sign of anything at all.

Hopping painfully, he crossed the threshold and stood within the hall. He called again and yet again and there was no response.

His leg gave out and he slumped upon the floor, catching himself and breaking the fall with his outstretched hands. Slowly, he inched his way along, crawling toward the living room.

He turned at the faint noise which came from behind his back and he saw that the door was closing—closing of its own accord and with no hand upon it. He watched in fascination as it closed,

firm against the casing. The snick of the lock as it settled was loud in the stillness of the house.

Queer, he thought, fuzzily. Queer how the door came open as if to invite one in. And then when one was in, calmly closed itself.

But it did not matter what the door might do, he thought. The important thing was that he was inside and that the cold ferocity of the storm was shut in the outer dark. Already the warmth of the house was enfolding him and some of the chill was gone.

Careful not to bump the dragging ankle, he snaked himself along the carpeting until he reached a chair. He hauled himself upward and around and sat down in it, settling back into the cushions, with the twisted ankle thrust out in front of him.

Now, finally, he was safe. Now the cold and rain could no longer reach him, and in time someone would show up who could help him with the ankle.

He wondered where they were, these people to whom the house belonged. It was unlikely that they would stray far from it in a storm like this. And they must have been here not too long ago, because the lights were lit against the darkness of the storm.

He sat quietly, now only faintly aware of the dull throb of pain that was pulsing in the ankle. The house was warm and quiet and restful and he was glad for it.

Carefully he looked around, taking inventory.

There was a table in the dining room and it was set for dinner, with the steaming silver coffee pot and the gleaming china tureen and a covered platter. He could smell the coffee and there was food as well, of that he felt quite sure. But there was only one place set, as if one person only had been meant to dine.

A door opened into another room that seemed to be a study. There was a painting on the wall and a massive desk set beneath the painting. There were floor to ceiling bookcases, but there were no books in them.

And a second door led into a bedroom. There was a bed turned down and a pair of pajamas were folded on the pillow. The lamp on the bedside table had been lit. As if the bed were waiting for someone to sleep in it, all turned down and ready.

But there was a strangeness, a fantastic something about the house that he could not quite put his finger on. Like a case at

law, he thought, where there was a certain quality that eluded one, always with the feeling that this certain quality might be the very key to the case itself.

He sat and thought about it, and suddenly he knew.

The house was furnished, but the house was waiting. One could sense a feeling of expectancy, as if this were a house that was waiting for a tenant. It was set and ready, it was equipped and furnished. But there was no one living here. It had an unlived-in smell to it and a vague sort of emptiness.

But that was foolishness, he told himself. Of course, there was someone living in it. Someone had turned on the lights, someone had cooked a dinner and set a place for one, someone had lit the bedside lamp and turned down the covers of the bed.

And yet, for all the evidence, he couldn't quite believe it. The house still persisted in its empty feeling.

He saw the trail of water he'd left in his crawl along the hall and across the carpeting to reach the chair. He saw the muddy handprints he'd left upon the wall where he had braced himself when he'd hobbled in.

It was no way to mess up a place, he thought. He'd do his best to explain it to the owner.

He sat and waited for the owner, nodding in the chair.

Seventy, he thought, or almost seventy, and this his last adventure. All his family gone and all his friends as well—all except old Ben, who was dying slowly and ungracefully in the alien and ungraceful atmosphere of a small hospital room.

He recalled that day of long ago when Ben and he had met, two young professors, Ben in astronomy and himself in law. They had been friends from the very first and it would be hard to have Ben go.

But perhaps he would not notice it, he thought, as much as he might have at one time. For he, himself, in another month, would be settled down at Wood's Rest. An old folks' home, he thought. Although now they didn't call them that. They called them fancy names like Wood's Rest, thinking that might take the sting away.

It didn't matter, though. There was no one left to whom it might matter now—except himself, of course. And he didn't care. Not very much, that is.

He snapped himself erect and looked at the mantle clock.

He'd dozed away, he thought, or been dreaming of the old days while no more than half awake. Almost an hour had passed since he'd last glanced at the clock and still the house was empty of anyone but he.

The dinner still was upon the table, but it would be cold by now. Perhaps, he thought, the coffee still might be a little warm.

He pushed forward in the chair and rose carefully to his feet. And the ankle screamed at him. He fell back into the chair and weak tears of pain ran out of his eyes and dribbled down his cheeks.

Not the coffee, he thought. I don't want the coffee. If I can just make it to the bed.

He pulled himself tenderly from the chair and crawled into the bedroom. By slow and painful maneuver, he stripped off his sodden clothing and got into the pajamas that had been folded on the pillow.

There was a bathroom off the bedroom and by hopping from bed to chair to dresser he finally reached it.

Something to kill the pain, he told himself. Aspirin would be of some little help if he could only find one.

There was a medicine cabinet above the basin and he jerked it open, but the shelves were empty.

After a time he made it back to the bed again and crawled beneath the covers, switching off the bedside light.

Lying stiff and straight, shivering with the effort of getting into bed, he wondered dully what would happen when the owner should return and find a stranger in the bed.

But he didn't care. He was beyond all caring. His head was large and fuzzy and he guessed he had a fever.

He lay quietly, waiting for sleep to come to him, his body fitting itself by slow degrees into the strangeness of the bed.

He did not even notice when the lights throughout the house went out.

He awoke to the morning sun, streaming through the windows. There was the odor of frying bacon and of brewing coffee. And a telephone was ringing, loudly and insistently.

He threw off the covers and was halfway out of bed to answer the telephone when he remembered that this was not his house, that this was not his bed, that the ringing phone could not possibly be for him.

He sat upon the edge of the bed, bewildered, as the memory of the day before came crashing in upon him.

Good Lord, he thought, a phone! There can't be a phone. Way out here, there can't.

But still it kept on ringing.

In just a little while, he thought, someone would come to answer it. The someone who was frying bacon would come and answer it. And when they did, they'd go past the open door and he would be able to see them and know to whom the house belonged.

He got out of bed. The floor beneath his feet was cold and there might be slippers somewhere, but he didn't know where to look for them.

He was out in the living room before he remembered that he had a twisted ankle.

Stopping in amazement, he looked down at it and it looked as it had always looked, no longer red or purple, and no longer swollen. And most important, not hurting any more. He could walk on it as if nothing had ever been the matter with it.

The phone standing on the table in the hall pealed aloud at him.

"I'll be damned," said Frederick Gray, staring at his ankle.

The phone brayed at him again.

He hurried to the table and snatched the handpiece off the cradle.

"Hello," he said.

"Dr. Frederick Gray, perhaps."

"You are right. I am Frederick Gray."

"I trust you had a restful night."

"A very restful one. And thank you very much."

"Your clothes were wet and beyond repair. We disposed of them. I hope that you don't mind. The contents of the pockets are on the dressing table. There is other clothing in the closet that I am sure will fit you."

"Why," said Frederick Gray, "that was very thoughtful of you. But would you mind telling me—"

"Not at all," the caller said, "but perhaps you'd better hurry out and get your breakfast. It will be getting cold."

The phone went dead.

"Just a minute," Gray yelled at it. "Just hold on a minute—"

But the buzz of an empty line kept sounding in his ear.

He hung up and went into the bedroom, where he found a pair of slippers tucked beneath the bed.

We hope you had a restful night. Your clothes were wet, so we disposed of them. We put the contents of the pockets on the dressing table.

And who in the world were we?

Where was everyone?

And what happened, when he slept, to repair the ankle?

He had been right the night before, he thought. It was an empty house. There was no one here. But in some manner which he could not fathom, it still was tenanted.

He washed his hands and face, but did not bother with a shave, although when he looked into the medicine cabinet, it was no longer empty. It now held shaving tackle, a toothbrush and a tube of paste, a hairbrush and a comb.

Breakfast was on the table in the dining room and there was only one place set. There were bacon and eggs, hash brown potatoes, tomato juice, toast and a pot of coffee.

But there was no sign of anyone who might have prepared the food or placed it on the table.

Could there be, he wondered, a staff of invisible servants in the house who took care of guests?

And the electricity, he wondered. Was there a private power plant? Perhaps one that was powered by the waterfall? And what about the phone? Could it be a radiophone? He wondered if a radiophone would look different from just an ordinary phone. He could not recall that he had ever seen one.

And who had been the caller?

He stood and looked at the waiting breakfast.

"Whoever you are," he said, aloud, "I thank you. I wish that I could see you. That you would speak to me."

No one spoke to him.

He sat down and ate the breakfast, not realizing until he put the food into his mouth how hungry he had been.

After breakfast he went into the bedroom and found the clothes hanging in the closet. Not fancy clothes, but the kind of outfit a fisherman would wear.

Coming out of the bedroom, he saw that the breakfast things had been cleared off the table.

He stepped outside into the sunshine and the day was beautiful. The storm had blown itself out sometime in the night.

Now that he was all right, he told himself, perhaps he'd better go upstream and bring down the rod and the other stuff he'd left. The rest of it didn't amount to much, but the rod was much too good to leave.

It all was there, piled where he had left it, neatly on the shore. He bent down and picked up the rod and stood facing the river, with it in his hand.

Why not? he asked himself. There was no hurry to get back. As long as he was here he might as well get in a bit of fishing. He'd not have another chance. He'd not come back again.

He laid the rod aside and sat down to pull on the waders. He emptied the fish he'd caught the day before out of the creel and strapped it on his shoulder.

And why just this morning? he asked himself. Why just another day? There was no reason to get back and he had a house to stay in. There was no reason he shouldn't stay a while and make a real vacation of it.

He stood aghast at how easily he accepted the situation, how ready he found himself to take advantage of it. The house was a thing of mystery, and yet not terrifying. There was nothing in the house, strange as it might be, that a man need be afraid of.

He picked up the rod and stepped into the stream and whipped out the line. On the fifth cast a trout struck. The day had started fine.

He fished to the first break of the rapids just above the falls, then clambered out on shore. He had five fish in the creel and two of them were large.

He could fish the rapids from the shore, he thought, but perhaps he shouldn't. He should be getting back for a good look at the house. He had to settle in his mind the truth about the power source and the telephone and there might be a lot of other things that needed looking into.

He glanced down at his watch and it was later than he thought. He untied the fly and reeled in the line and disjointed the rod, then set off down the trail.

By the middle of the afternoon, he had finished his inspection of the house.

There were no power and no telephone lines coming to the house and there was no private power plant. The house was conventionally wired for electricity, but there was no source that he could find. The telephone plugged into a jack in the hall and there were other jacks in the bedroom and the study.

But there was another item: The night before, as he sat in the living room, he could see into the study. He had seen the painting and the desk and the empty bookshelves. But now the shelves were no longer empty. They fairly bulged with books and the kind of books that he would have chosen if he had put them there himself—a law library that would have been the envy of any practicing attorney, and with a special section that he first took to be a joke.

But when he looked at the phone directory, it had seemed somewhat less a joke.

For it was no such directory as any man had ever seen before. It listed names and numbers, but the addresses ranged the galaxy!

Besur, Yar, Mekbuda V—FE 6-8731

Beten, Varmo, Polaris III—GR 7-3214

Beto, Elm, Rasalgethi IX—ST 1-9186

Star names, he thought, and the planet numbers. They could be nothing else.

And if it were a joke, it was pointless and expensive.

Star names listed in the pages of the directory and those other star names upon the books in that special section in the study!

The obvious conclusion, he told himself, rather plaintively, was too outrageous to be given even slight consideration. It was outrageous and ridiculous and it made no sense and he would not entertain it. There must be other answers and the one he did not like to think about was that he'd gone insane.

There might be a way, he thought, that it could be settled.

He flipped the directory closed and then opened the front cover and there it was: TELEPHONE SERVICE CALLS. He lifted the receiver and dialed for INFORMATION.

There were two ringing sounds and then a voice said:

"Good evening, Dr. Gray. We are glad you called. We hope everything's all right. There isn't any trouble?"

"You know my name," said Gray. "How do you know my name?"

"Sir," said Information, "it is a point of pride with us that we know the name of each of our subscribers."

"But I'm not a subscriber. I'm only—"

"Oh, but you are," insisted Information. "As soon as you took possession of the house—"

"Possession! I did not—"

"But, Dr. Gray, we thought you knew. We should have told you at the start. We are very sorry. The house, you see, is yours."

"No," Gray said, weakly, "I did not understand."

"Yours," said Information, "so long as you may need it, so long as you may want to keep it. The house and everything that's in it. Plus all the services, naturally, that you may require."

"But it can't be mine," said Gray. "I have done nothing that would make it mine. How can I own a house for which I've given nothing?"

"There might be," said Information, "certain services that, from time to time, you might be willing to perform. Nothing strenuous, of course, and not required, you understand. If you would be willing to perform them, we would be the ones who would stand in debt. But the house is yours no matter what you may elect to do."

"Services?" asked Gray. "There are few services, I am afraid, that I could perform."

"It does not really matter," Information told him. "We are very glad you called. Call us again any time you wish."

The connection clicked and he was left, standing foolishly with the receiver in his hand.

He put it back into the cradle and went to the living room, sitting in the chair he'd sat in when he'd found his way into the house the night before.

While he'd been busy in the hall with the telephone, someone—or something, or some strange procedure—had laid wood in the fireplace and had lit it and the brass wood carrier that stood beside the hearth was filled with other wood against the need of it.

He watched the fire creeping up the logs, flickering as it climbed, with the cold wind outside growling in the chimney.

An Old Folks' Home, he thought.

For if he'd heard aright, that was what it was.

And a better one, by far, than the one he had planned to enter.

There was no reason in the world why anyone should give this house to him. He had done nothing he could think of that entitled him to have it.

An Old Folks' Home, all to himself, and on his favorite trout stream.

It would be wonderful, he thought, if he only could accept it.

He hitched the chair around so he could face the fire. He had always liked a fire.

Such a pleasant place, he thought, and such thoughtful service. He wished that he could stay.

And what was there to stop him? No one would mind if he did not return. In a day or two he could make his way out to Pineview and mail a couple of letters that would fix it so no one would hunt for him.

But it was madness, he thought. What if he got sick? What if he fell and hurt himself? He could not reach a doctor and there would be no one to help him.

Then he thought of how he'd hunted for an aspirin and there had been no aspirin. And how he'd crawled into bed with a twisted, swollen ankle that had been all right when he got up in the morning.

He had no worry, he realized, about ever being sick.

There had been no aspirin tablet because there had been no need of any.

This house was not a house alone. It was more than just a house. It was a shelter and a servant and a doctor. It was a safe and antiseptic house and it was compassionate.

It gave you everything you wanted. It fulfilled your every need. It gave you fire and food and comfort and a sense of being cared for.

There were the books, he thought. The rows and stacks of books, the very kind of books by which he'd lived for years.

Dr. Frederick Gray, dean of the school of law. Filled with honor and importance until he got too old, until his wife and son had died and all his friends were gone or incapacitated. Now no longer dean, now no longer scholar, but an old man with a name that was buried in the past.

He rose slowly from the chair and went into the study. He put

out his hand and rubbed the palm of it along the leathery spines of a row of books.

These were the friends, he told himself, the friends a man could count on. They always were in place and waiting for the time a man might need them.

He stopped in front of the section that had puzzled him at first, which he had thought of as a farfetched joke. But now he knew there was no joke.

He read the titles of a few of them: "Basic Statutes of Arcturus XXIV," "Comparison of the Legal Concepts of the Centaurian Systems," "Jurisprudence on Zubeneschamali III, VI and VII," "The Practical Law of Canopus XII." And many others with the strange names in their titles.

Perhaps, he thought, he would not have recognized the names so readily had it not been for Ben. For years he had listened to him talk about his work, reeling off many of these very names as if they might be places no farther off than just down the street a ways.

And maybe, thought Frederick Gray, they were not so far, at that. All he had to do to talk to men—no, not men, perhaps, but beings—in all of these strange places was to walk out in the hall and dial their numbers on the phone.

A telephone directory, he thought, with numbers for the stars, and on all these shelves law books from the stars.

Perhaps there were, on those other solar systems, nothing like a telephone or a telephone directory; perhaps, on those other planets there weren't any law books. But here on Earth, he told himself, the means of communication had to be a telephone, the means of information books upon the shelf. For all of it had to be a matter of translation, twisting the unfamiliar into something that was familiar and that one could use. And translation not for Earth alone, but for all those other beings on all those other planets. On each of a dozen planets there might be a different means of communication, but in the case of a call to him from any of those planets, no matter what means the creature of the planet might employ, the telephone would ring.

And the names of those other stars would be translations, too. For the creatures who lived upon the planets circling Polaris would not call their sun Polaris. But here on Earth it had to be

Polaris, for that was the only way a human had to identify the star.

The language would have to be translated, too. The creatures he had talked with on the phone could not have spoken English, and yet it had been English when it had reached his ear. And his replies, he knew, must have reached that other party in some language other than the tongue that he had used.

He stood aghast at the very thought of it, wondering how he could abide such an explanation. And yet there was no choice. It was the only explanation that would fit the situation.

Somewhere a bell rang sharply and he turned from the shelves of books.

He waited for it to ring again, but it did not ring.

He walked into the living room and saw that dinner had been set upon the table and was waiting for him.

So that was what it had been, he thought. A bell to summon him to dinner.

After dinner, he went back to the living room to sit before the fire and fight the whole thing out. He assembled the facts and evidence in his old lawyer's mind and gave full consideration to all possibilities.

He touched the edge of wonder and shoved it to one side, he erased it carefully—for in his consideration of this house there was no room for wonder and no place for magic.

Was it no more than illusion? That was the first question one must ask. Was this really happening, or was he just imagining that it was happening? Was he, perhaps, in all reality, sitting underneath a tree or squatting on the river bank, mumbling at nothing, scratching symbols in the dirt with his fingernails, and living the fantasy of this house, this fire, this room?

It was hard to believe that this might be the case. For there were too many details. Imagination formed a hazy framework and let it go at that.

There were here too many details and there was no haziness and he could move and think of his own volition; he still was the master of himself.

And if it were not imagination, if he could rule out insanity, then this house and all that happened must be, indeed, the truth. And if it were the truth, then here was a house built or

shaped or somehow put into being by some outside agency that was as yet unsuspected in the mind of humankind.

But, he asked himself, why would they want to do it? What could be the motive?

With a view, perhaps, of studying him as a representative specimen of the creature, Man? Or with the idea that somehow they could make some use of him?

The thought struck him—was he the only man? Might there by others like him? Men who kept very silent about what was happening, for fear that human interference might spoil this good thing that they had?

He rose slowly from the chair and went out in the hall. He picked up the phone directory and brought it back with him. He threw another log upon the fire and sat down in the chair, with the phone book in his lap.

First himself, he thought; he would see if he was listed.

He had no trouble finding it: Gray, Frederick, Helios III—SU 6-2649.

He flipped the pages and started from the front, running his finger slowly down the column.

The book was thin, but it took him quite a while, going carefully so that he would not miss another man from Earth. But there was no other listed; not from Earth, not from the solar system. He was the only one.

Loneliness, he wondered. Or should it be just a touch of pride. To be the only one in the entire solar system.

He took the directory back to the table in the hall and lying in the place where he had gotten it was another one.

He stared at it and wondered if there were two of them, if there had been two of them all along and he had never noticed.

He bent to look the closer at it and when he did he saw that it was not another directory, but a file of some sort, with his name printed across the top of it.

He laid the directory down and took up the file. It was a bulky and a heavy thing, with great sheaves of papers enclosed between the covers.

It had not been there, he was certain, when he'd gotten the directory. It had been placed there, as the food was placed upon

the table, as the books had been stacked upon the shelves, as the clothing that would fit him had been hung within the closet. By some agency that was unobtrusive, if not invisible.

Placement by remote control, he wondered. Could it be that somewhere this house was duplicated and that in that house certain agencies that were quite visible—and in their term of reference logical and ordinary—might place the food and hang the clothes and that at the moment of the action the same things happened in this house?

And if that were the case, not only space was mastered, but time as well. For they—whoever they might be—could not have known about the books that should be placed upon the shelves until the occupant of this house had appeared upon the scene. They could not have known that it would be Frederick Gray, that it would be a man who had made the law his business, who would blunder on this house. They had set a trap—a trap?—and there would have been no way for them to know what quarry they might catch.

It had taken time to print, by whatever process, the books upon the shelves. There would have been a searching for the proper books, and the translating and the editing. Was it possible, he wondered, that time could be so regulated that the finding and the translating and the editing, the printing and the placement, could have been compressed into no more than twenty-four hours as measured on the Earth? Could time be stretched out and, perhaps, foreshortened to accommodate the plans of those engineers who had built this house?

He flipped open the cover of the file and the printing on the first page struck him in the face.

SUMMARY & TRANSCRIPT

Valmatan vs. Mer El
Referral for Review
Under Universal Law
Panel for Review:
Vanz Kamis, Rasalgethi VI
Eta Nonskic, Thuban XXVIII
Frederick Gray, Helios III

Frozen, he stared at it.

His hands began to tremble and he laid it down, carefully on the table top, as if it might be something that would shatter if he dropped it.

Under universal law, he thought. Three students of the law, three experts(?), from three different solar systems!

And the facts at issue, and the law, more than likely, from yet another system.

Certain little services, the voice on the phone had told him.

Certain little services. To pass judgment under laws and jurisprudence he had never heard of!

And those others, he wondered—had they heard of them?

Swiftly he bent and leafed through the phone book. He found Kamis, Vanz. Deliberately, he dialed the number.

A pleasant voice said: "Vanz Kamis is not present at the moment. Is there any message?"

And it was not right, thought Gray. He should not have phoned. There was no point in it.

"Hello," said the pleasant voice. "Are you there?"

"Yes, I am here," said Gray.

"Vanz Kamis is not at home. Is there any message?"

"No," said Gray. "No, thanks. There isn't any message."

He should not have called, he thought. The act of phoning had been an act of weakness. This was a time when a man must rely upon himself. And he had to give an answer. It was not something that could be brushed off, it was not a thing that anyone could run from.

He got his cap and jacket from the closet in the hall and let himself outside.

A golden moon had risen, the lower half of it bearing on its face the dark silhouette of the jagged pines, growing on the ridge across the river. From somewhere in the forest an owl was muttering and down in the river a fish splashed as it jumped.

Here a man could think, Gray told himself. He stood and drew the freshness of the air deep into his lungs. Here on the earth that was his own. Better than in a house that was, at least by implication, the extension of many other worlds.

He went down the path to the landing where he had beached the canoe. The canoe was there and there was water in it from

the storm of the night before. He tipped it on its edge so the water could run out.

To be reviewed, that first page had said, under universal law. And was there, he wondered, such a thing as universal law?

Law could be approached in many ways, he thought. As pure philosophy, as political theory, as a history of moral ideas, as a social system, or as a set of rules. But however it was viewed, however studied, no matter what the emphasis, it had one basic function, the providing of a framework that would solve all social conflict.

Law was no static thing; it must, and did, evolve. No matter how laggard it might be, still it followed in the footsteps of the society it served.

He grinned wryly in the darkness, staring at the foaming river, remembering how, for years, he had hammered on that viewpoint in seminar and lecture.

On one planet, given time and patience and the slow process of evolution, the law could be made to square with all social concepts and with the ordered knowledge of society at large.

But was there any chance to broaden this flexibility and this logic to include not one, but many planets. Did there exist somewhere a basis for a legal concept that would apply to society in the universal sense?

It could be true, he thought. Given wisdom and work, there was a bare chance of it.

And if this should be the case, then he might be of service, or more correctly, perhaps, the law of Earth might be of help. For Earth need not be ashamed of what it had to offer. The mind of Man had lent itself to law. For more than five thousand years there was a record of Man's concern with law and from that deep concern had come a legal evolution—or, more correctly, many evolutions. And in it might be found a point or two that could be incorporated in a universal code.

There was, throughout the universe, a common chemistry, and because of this there were those who thought that there was a common biochemistry as well.

Those other beings on those two other planets who had been named with him to review the issue set forth in the transcript could not be expected to be men, or even close to men. But given

a common biochemistry, they would be basically the same sort of life as Man. They would be protoplasmic. They would make use of oxygen. The kind of things they were would be determined by nucleic acids. And their minds, while more than likely a far cry from a human mind, still would be based upon the same mechanism as the minds of Man.

If there were, he asked himself, a common chemistry and a common biochemistry, then did it not seem likely, as well, for there to exist a concept that would point toward common justice?

Not just yet, perhaps. But ten thousand years from now. Or a million years from now.

He started up the path again and his step was lighter than it had been for years, and the future brighter—not his future only, but the future of everything that was.

This was a thing he'd taught and preached for years—the hope that in some future time the law might represent some great and final truth.

It did a man's heart good, he thought, to find that there were others who felt the same as he, and who were at work on it.

No Old Folks' Home, he thought, and he was glad of that. For an Old Folks' Home was a dead end, and this was a bright beginning.

In a little while the phone would ring and there'd be a voice asking if he'd serve.

But he'd not wait for that. There was work to do—a great deal of work to do. There was the file to read and those strange books that he must study, and references that he would have to find and much thinking to be done.

He entered the house and shut the door behind him. He hung up his cap and coat.

Picking up the file, he went into the study and laid it on the desk.

He pulled out a drawer and took out pad and pencils and ranged them neatly, close at hand.

He sat down and entered upon the practice of interstellar law.

CRYING JAG

It was Saturday evening and I was sitting on the stoop, working up a jag. I had my jug beside me, handy, and I was feeling good and fixing to feel better, when this alien and his robot came tramping up the driveway.

I knew right off it was an alien. It looked something like a man, but there weren't any humans got robots trailing at their heels.

If I had been stone sober, I might have gagged a bit at the idea there was an alien coming up the driveway and done some arguing with myself. But I wasn't sober—not entirely, that is.

So I said good evening and asked him to sit down and he thanked me and sat.

"You, too," I said to the robot, moving over to make room.

"Let him stand," the alien said. "He cannot sit. He is a mere machine."

The robot clanked a gear at him, but that was all it said.

"Have a snort," I said, picking up the jug, but the alien shook his head.

"I wouldn't dare," he said. "My metabolism."

That was one of the double-jointed words I had acquaintance with. From working at Doc Abel's sanatorium, I had picked up some of the medic lingo.

"That's a dirty shame," I said. "You don't mind if I do?"

"Not at all," the alien said.

So I had a long one. I felt the need of it.

I put down the jug and wiped my mouth and asked him if there was something I could get him. It seemed plain inhospita-

ble for me to be sitting there, lapping up that liquor, and him not having any.

"You can tell me about this town," the alien said. "I think you call it Millville."

"That's the name, all right. What you want to know about it?"

"All the sad stories," said the robot, finally speaking up.

"He is correct," the alien said, settling down in an attitude of pleasurable anticipation. "Tell me about the troubles and the tribulations."

"Starting where?" I asked.

"How about yourself?"

"Me? I never have no troubles. I janitor all week at the sanatorium and I get drunk on Saturday. Then I sober up on Sunday so I can janitor another week. Believe me, mister," I told him, "I haven't got no troubles. I am sitting pretty. I have got it made."

"But there must be people . . ."

"Oh, there are. You never saw so much complaining as there is in Millville. There ain't nobody here except myself but has got a load of trouble. And it wouldn't be so bad if they didn't talk about it."

"Tell me," said the alien.

So I had another snort and then I told him about the Widow Frye, who lives just up the street. I told him how her life had been just one long suffering, with her husband running out on her when their boy was only three years old, and how she took in washing and worked her fingers to the bone to support the two of them, and the kid ain't more than thirteen or fourteen when he steals this car and gets sent up for two years to the boys' school over at Glen Lake.

"And that is all of it?" asked the alien.

"Well, in rough outline," I said. "I didn't put in none of the flourishes nor the grimy details, the way the widow would. You should hear her tell it."

"Could you arrange it?"

"Arrange what?"

"To have her tell it to me."

"I wouldn't promise you," I told him honestly. "The widow has a low opinion of me. She never speaks to me."

"But I can't understand."

"She's a decent, church-going woman," I explained, "and I am just a crummy bum. And I drink."

"She doesn't like drinking?"

"She thinks it is a sin."

The alien sort of shivered. "I know. I guess all places are pretty much alike."

"You have people like the Widow Frye?"

"Not exactly but the attitude's the same."

"Well," I said, after another snort, "I figure there is nothing else to do but bear up under it."

"Would it be too much bother," asked the alien, "to tell me another one?"

"None at all," I said.

So I told him about Elmer Trotter, who worked his way through law school up at Madison, doing all kinds of odd jobs to earn his way, since he had no folks, and how he finally got through and passed the bar examination, then came back to Millville to set up an office.

I couldn't tell him how it happened or why, although I had always figured that Elmer had got a bellyful of poverty and grabbed this chance to earn a lot of money fast. No one should have known better than he did that it was dishonest, being he was a lawyer. But he went ahead and did it and he got caught.

"And what happened then?" asked the alien breathlessly. "Was he punished?"

I told him how Elmer got disbarred and how Eliza Jenkins gave him back his ring and how Elmer went into insurance and just scraped along in a hand-to-mouth existence, eating out his heart to be a lawyer once again, but he never could.

"You got all this down?" the alien asked the robot.

"All down," the robot said.

"What fine nuances!" exclaimed the alien, who seemed to be much pleased. "What stark, overpowering reality!"

I didn't know what he was talking about, so I had another drink instead.

Then I went ahead, without being asked, and I told him about Amanda Robinson and her unhappy love affair and how she turned into Millville's most genteel and sorriest old maid. And about

Abner Jones and his endless disappointments, about his refusal to give up the idea that he was a great inventor, and how his family went in rags and hungry while he spent all his time inventing.

"Such sadness!" said the alien. "What a lovely planet!"

"You better taper off," the robot warned him. "You know what happens to you."

"Just one more," the alien begged. "I'm all right. Just one more."

"Now, look here," I told him, "I don't mind telling them, if that is what you want. But maybe first you better tell me a bit about yourself. I take it you're an alien."

"Naturally," said the alien.

"And you came here in a spaceship."

"Well, not exactly a spaceship."

"Then, if you're an alien, how come you talk so good?"

"Now, that," the alien said, "is something that still is tender to me."

The robot said scornfully: "They took him good and proper."

"You mean you paid for it."

"Too much," the robot said. "They saw that he was eager, so they hiked the price on him."

"But I'll get even with them," the alien cut in. "If I don't turn a profit on it, my name isn't—" And he said a word that was long and twisted and didn't make no sense.

"That your name?" I asked.

"Yeah, sure. But you can call me Wilbur. And the robot, you may call him Lester."

"Well, boys," I said, "I'm mighty glad to know you. You can call me Sam."

And I had another drink.

We sat there on the stoop and the moon was coming up and the fireflies were flickering in the lilac hedge and the world had an edge on it. I'd never felt so good.

"Just one more," said Wilbur pleadingly.

So I told him about some of the mental cases up at the sanatorium and I picked the bad ones and alongside of me Wilbur started blubbering and the robot said: "Now see what you've done. He's got a crying jag."

Wilbur wiped his eyes and said it was all right and if I'd just keep on he'd do the best he could to get a grip on himself.

"What is going on here?" I asked in some astonishment. "You sound like you get drunk from hearing these sad stories."

"That's what he does," said Lester, the robot. "Why else do you think he'd sit and listen to your blabber."

"And you?" I asked of Lester.

"Of course not," Wilbur said. "He has no emotions. He is a mere machine."

I had another drink and I thought it over and it was as clear as day. So I told Wilbur my philosophy: "This is Saturday night and that's the time to howl. So let's you and I together—"

"I am with you," Wilbur cried, "as long as you can talk."

Lester clanked a gear in what must have been disgust, but that was all he did.

"Get down every word of it," Wilbur told the robot. "We'll make ourselves a million. We'll need it to get back all over-payment for our indoctrination." He sighed. "Not that it wasn't worth it. What a lovely, melancholy planet."

So I got cranked up and kept myself well lubricated and the night kept getting better every blessed minute.

Along about midnight, I got falling-down drunk and Wilbur maudlin drunk and we gave up by a sort of mutual consent. We got up off the stoop and by bracing one another we got inside the door and I lost Wilbur somewhere, but made it to my bed and that was the last I knew.

When I woke up, I knew it was Sunday morning. The sun was streaming through the window and it was bright and sanctimonious, like Sunday always is around here.

Sundays usually are quiet, and that's one thing wrong with them. But this one wasn't quiet. There was an awful din going on outside. It sounded like someone was throwing rocks and hitting a tin can.

I rolled out of bed and my mouth tasted just as bad as I knew it would. I rubbed some of the sand out of my eyes and started for the living room and just outside the bedroom door I almost stepped on Wilbur.

He gave me quite a start and then I remembered who he was and I stood there looking at him, not quite believing it. I thought at

first that he might be dead, but I saw he wasn't. He was lying flat upon his back and his catfish mouth was open and every time he breathed the feathery whiskers on his lips stood straight out and fluttered.

I stepped over him and went to the door to find out what all the racket was. And there stood Lester, the robot, exactly where we'd left him the night before, and out in the driveway a bunch of kids were pegging rocks at him. Those kids were pretty good. They hit Lester almost every time.

I yelled at them and they scattered down the road. They knew I'd tan their hides.

I was just turning around to go back into the house when a car swung into the drive. Joe Fletcher, our constable, jumped out and came striding toward me and I could see that he was in his best fire-eating mood.

Joe stopped in front of the stoop and put both hands on his hips and stared first at Lester and then at me.

"Sam," he asked with a nasty leer, "what is going on here? Some of your pink elephants move in to live with you?"

"Joe," I said solemn, passing up the insult, "I'd like you to meet Lester."

Joe had opened up his mouth to yell at me when Wilbur showed up at the door.

"And this is Wilbur," I said. "Wilbur is an alien and Lester is a . . ."

"Wilbur is a *what*!" roared Joe.

Wilbur stepped out on the stoop and said: "What a sorrowful face. And so noble, too!"

"He means you," I said to Joe.

"If you guys keep this up," Joe bellowed, "I'll run in the bunch of you."

"I meant no harm," said Wilbur. "I apologize if I have bruised your sensitivities."

That was a hot one—Joe's sensitivities!

"I can see at a glance," said Wilbur, "that life's not been easy for you."

"I'll tell the world it ain't," Joe said.

"Nor for me," said Wilbur, sitting down upon the stoop. "It seems that there are days a man can't lay away a dime."

"Mister, you are right," said Joe. "Just like I was telling the missus this morning when she up and told me that the kids needed some new shoes . . ."

"It does beat hell how a man can't get ahead."

"Listen, you ain't heard nothing yet . . ."

And so help me Hannah, Joe sat down beside him and before you could count to three started telling his life story.

"Lester," Wilbur said, "be sure you get this down."

I beat it back into the house and had a quick one to settle my stomach before I tackled breakfast.

I didn't feel like eating, but I knew I had to. I got out some eggs and bacon and wondered what I would feed Wilbur. For I suddenly remembered how his metabolism couldn't stand liquor, and if it couldn't take good whisky, there seemed very little chance that it would take eggs and bacon.

As I was finishing my breakfast, Higman Morris came busting through the back door and straight into the kitchen. Higgy is our mayor, a pillar of the church, a member of the school board and a director of the bank, and he is a big stuffed shirt.

"Sam," he yelled at me, "this town has taken a lot from you. We have put up with your drinking and your general shiftlessness and your lack of public spirit. But this is too much!"

I wiped some egg off my chin. "What is too much?"

Higgy almost strangled, he was so irritated. "This public exhibition. This three-ring circus! This nuisance! And on a Sunday, too!"

"Oh," I said, "you mean Wilbur and his robot."

"There's a crowd collecting out in front and I've had a dozen calls, and Joe is sitting out there with this—this—"

"Alien," I supplied.

"And they're bawling on one another's shoulders like a pair of three-year-olds and . . . *Alien!*"

"Sure," I said. "What did you think he was?"

Higgy reached out a shaky hand and pulled out a chair and fell weakly into it. "Samuel," he said slowly, "give it to me once again. I don't think I heard you right."

"Wilbur is an alien," I told him, "from some other world. He and his robot came here to listen to sad stories."

"Sad stories?"

"Sure. He likes sad stories. Some people like them happy and others like them dirty. He just likes them sad."

"If he is an alien," said Higgy, talking to himself.

"He's one, sure enough," I said.

"Sam, you're sure of this?"

"I am."

Higgy got excited. "Don't you appreciate what this means to Millville? This little town of ours—the first place on all of Earth that an alien visited!"

I wished he would shut up and get out so I could have an after-breakfast drink. Higgy didn't drink, especially on Sundays. He'd have been horrified.

"The world will beat a pathway to our door!" he shouted. He got out of the chair and started for the living room. "I must extend my official welcome."

I trailed along behind him, for this was one I didn't want to miss.

Joe had left and Wilbur was sitting alone on the stoop and I could see that he already had on a sort of edge.

Higgy stood in front of him and thrust out his chest and held out his hand and said, in his best official manner: "I am the mayor of Millville and I take great pleasure in extending to you our sincerest welcome."

Wilbur shook hands with him and then he said: "Being the mayor of a city must be something of a burden and a great responsibility. I wonder that you bear up under it."

"Well, there are times . . ." said Higgy.

"But I can see that you are the kind of man whose main concern is the welfare of his fellow creatures and as such, quite naturally, you become the unfortunate target of outrageous and ungrateful actions."

Higgy sat down ponderously on the stoop. "Sir," he said to Wilbur, "you would not believe all I must put up with."

"Lester," said Wilbur, "see that you get this down."

I went back into the house. I couldn't stomach it.

There was quite a crowd standing out there in the road—Jake Ellis, the junkman, and Don Myers, who ran the Jolly Miller, and a lot of others. And there, shoved into the background and sort of peering out, was the Widow Frye. People were on their

way to church and they'd stop and look and then go on again, but others would come and take their place, and the crowd was getting bigger instead of thinning out.

I went out to the kitchen and had my after-breakfast drink and did the dishes and wondered once again what I would feed Wilbur. Although, at the moment, he didn't seem to be too interested in food.

Then I went into the living room and sat down in the rocking chair and kicked off my shoes. I sat there wiggling my toes and thinking about what a screwy thing it was that Wilbur should get drunk on sadness instead of good red liquor.

The day was warm and I was wore out and the rocking must have helped to put me fast asleep, for suddenly I woke up and there was someone in the room. I didn't see who it was right off, but I knew someone was there.

It was the Widow Frye. She was all dressed up for Sunday, and after all those years of passing my house on the opposite side of the street and never looking at it, as if the sight of it or me might contaminate her—after all these years, there she was all dressed up and smiling. And me sitting there with all my whiskers on and my shoes off.

"Samuel," said the Widow Frye, "I couldn't help but tell you. I think your Mr. Wilbur is simply wonderful."

"He's an alien," I said. I had just woke up and was considerable befuddled.

"I don't care what he is," said the Widow Frye. "He is such a gentleman and so sympathetic. Not in the least like a lot of people in this horrid town."

I got to my feet and I didn't know exactly what to do. She'd caught me off my guard and at a terrible disadvantage. Of all the people in the world, she was the last I would have expected to come into my house.

I almost offered her a drink, but caught myself just in time.

"You been talking to him?" I asked lamely.

"Me and everybody else," said the Widow Frye. "And he has a way with him. You tell him your troubles and they seem to go away. There's a lot of people waiting for their turn."

"Well," I told her, "I am glad to hear you say that. How's he standing up under all this?"

The Widow Frye moved closer and dropped her voice to a whisper. "I think he's getting tired. I would say—well, I'd say he was intoxicated if I didn't know better."

I took a quick look at the clock.

"Holy smoke!" I yelled.

It was almost four o'clock. Wilbur had been out there six or seven hours, lapping up all the sadness this village could dish out. By now he should be stiff clear up to his eyebrows.

I busted out the door and he was sitting on the stoop and tears were running down his face and he was listening to Jack Ritter —and Old Jack was the biggest liar in all of seven counties. He was just making up this stuff he was telling Wilbur.

"Sorry, Jack," I said, pulling Wilbur to his feet.

"But I was just telling him . . ."

"Go home," I hollered, "you and the others. You got him all tired out."

"Mr. Sam," said Lester, "I am glad you came. He wouldn't listen to me."

The Widow Frye held the door open and I got Wilbur in and put him in my bed, where he could sleep it off.

When I came back, the Widow Frye was waiting. "I was just thinking, Samuel," she said. "I am having chicken for supper and there is more than I can eat. I wonder if you'd like to come on over."

I couldn't say nothing for a moment. Then I shook my head.

"Thanks just the same," I said, "but I have to stay and watch over Wilbur. He won't pay attention to the robot."

The Widow Frye was disappointed. "Some other time?"

"Yeah, some other time."

I went out after she was gone and invited Lester in.

"Can you sit down," I asked, "or do you have to stand?"

"I have to stand," said Lester.

So I left him standing there and sat down in the rocker.

"What does Wilbur eat?" I asked. "He must be getting hungry."

The robot opened a door in the middle of his chest and took out a funny-looking bottle. He shook it and I could hear something rattling around inside of it.

"This is his nourishment," said Lester. "He takes one every day."

He went to put the bottle back and a big fat roll fell out. He stooped and picked it up.

"Money," he explained.

"You folks have money, too?"

"We got this when we were indoctrinated. Hundred-dollar bills."

"Hundred-dollar bills!"

"Too bulky otherwise," said Lester blandly. He put the money and the bottle back into his chest and slapped shut the door.

I sat there in a fog. Hundred-dollars bills!

"Lester," I suggested, "maybe you hadn't ought to show anyone else that money. They might try to take it from you."

"I know," said Lester. "I keep it next to me." And he slapped his chest. His slap would take the head right off a man.

I sat rocking in the chair and there was so much to think about that my mind went rocking back and forth with the chair. There was Wilbur first of all and the crazy way he got drunk, and the way the Widow Frye had acted, and all those hundred-dollar bills.

Especially those hundred-dollar bills.

"This indoctrination business?" I asked. "You said it was bootleg."

"It is, most definitely," said Lester. "Acquired by some misguided individual who sneaked in and taped it to sell to addicts."

"But why sneak in?"

"Off limits," Lester said. "Outside the reservation. Beyond the pale. Is the meaning clear?"

"And this misguided adventurer figured he could sell the information he had taped, the—the—"

"The culture pattern," said Lester. "Your logic trends in the correct direction, but it is not so simple as you make it sound."

"I suppose not," I said. "And this same misguided adventurer picked up the money, too."

"Yes, he did. Quite a lot of it."

I sat there for a while longer, then went in for a look at Wilbur. He was fast asleep, his catfish mouth blowing the whiskers in and out. So I went into the kitchen and got myself some supper.

I had just finished eating when a knock came at the door.

It was old Doc Abel from the sanatorium.

"Good evening, Doc," I said. "I'll rustle up a drink."

"Skip the drink," said Doc. "Just trot out your alien."

He stepped into the living room and stopped short at the sight of Lester.

Lester must have seen that he was astonished for he tried immediately to put him at ease. "I am the so-called alien's robot. Yet despite the fact that I am a mere machine, I am a faithful servant. If you wish to tell your sadness, you may relate it to me with perfect confidence. I shall relay it to my master."

Doc sort of rocked back on his heels, but it didn't floor him.

"Just any kind of sadness?" he asked, "or do you hanker for a special kind?"

"The master," Lester said, "prefers the deep-down sadness, although he will not pass up any other kind."

"Wilbur gets drunk on it," I said. "He's in the bedroom now sleeping off a jag."

"Likewise," Lester said, "confidentially, we can sell the stuff. There are people back home with their tongues hanging to their knees for this planet's brand of sadness."

Doc looked at me and his eyebrows were so high that they almost hit his hairline.

"It's on the level, Doc," I assured him. "It isn't any joke. You want to have a look at Wilbur?"

Doc nodded and I led the way into the bedroom and we stood there looking down at Wilbur. Sleeping all stretched out, he was a most unlovely sight.

Doc put his hand up to his forehead and dragged it down across his face, pulling down his chops so he looked like a bloodhound. His big, thick, loose lips made a blubbering sound as he pulled his palm across them.

"I'll be damned!" said Doc.

Then he turned around and walked out of the bedroom and I trailed along behind him. He walked straight to the door and went out. He walked a ways down the driveway, then stopped and waited for me. Then he reached out and grabbed me by the shirt front and pulled it tight around me.

"Sam," he said, "you've been working for me for a long time now and you are getting sort of old. Most other men would fire a man as old as you are and get a younger one. I could fire you any time I want to."

"I suppose you could," I said, and it was an awful feeling, for I had never thought of being fired. I did a good job of janitoring up at the sanatorium and I didn't mind the work. And I thought how terrible it would be if a Saturday came and I had no drinking money.

"You been a loyal and faithful worker," said old Doc, still hanging onto my shirt, "and I been a good employer. I always give you a Christmas bottle and another one at Easter."

"Right," I said. "True, every word of it."

"So you wouldn't fool old Doc," said Doc. "Maybe the rest of the people in this stupid town, but not your old friend Doc."

"But, Doc," I protested, "I ain't fooling no one."

Doc let loose of my shirt. "By God, I don't believe you are. It's like the way they tell me? He sits and listens to their troubles, and they feel better once they're through?"

"That's what the Widow Frye said. She said she told him her troubles and they seemed to go away."

"That's the honest truth, Sam?"

"The honest truth," I swore.

Doc Abel got excited. He grabbed me by the shirt again.

"Don't you see what we have?" he almost shouted at me.

"*We?*" I asked.

But he paid no attention. "The greatest psychiatrist," said Doc, "this world has ever known. The greatest aid to psychiatry anyone ever has dredged up. You get what I am aiming at?"

"I guess I do," I said, not having the least idea.

"The most urgent need of the human race," said Doc, "is someone or something they can shift their troubles to—someone who by seeming magic can banish their anxieties. Confession is the core of it, of course—a symbolic shifting of one's burden to someone else's shoulders. The principle is operative in the church confessional, in the profession of psychiatry, in those deep, abiding friendships offering a shoulder that one can cry upon."

"Doc, you're right," I said, beginning to catch on.

"The trouble always is that the agent of confession must be human, too. He has certain human limitations of which the confessor is aware. He can give no certain promise that he can assume the trouble and anxiety. But here we have something different. Here we have an alien—a being from the stars—unhampered by

human limitations. By the very definition, he can take anxieties and smother them in the depths of his own nonhumanity . . ."

"Doc," I yelled, "if you could only get Wilbur up at the sanatorium!"

Doc rubbed mental hands together. "The very thing that I had been thinking."

I could have kicked myself for my enthusiasm. I did the best I could to gain back the ground I'd lost.

"I don't know, Doc. Wilbur might be hard to handle."

"Well, let's go back in and have a talk with him."

"I don't know," I stalled.

"We got to get him fast. By tomorrow, the word will be out and the place will be overrun with newspapermen and TV trucks and God knows what. The scientific boys will be swarming in, and the government, and we'll lose control."

"I'd better talk to him alone," I said. "He might freeze up solid if you were around. He knows me and he might listen to me."

Doc hemmed and hawed, but finally he agreed.

"I'll wait in the car," he said. "You call me if you need me."

He went crunching on down the driveway to where he had the car parked, and I went inside the house.

"Lester," I said to the robot, "I've got to talk to Wilbur. It's important."

"No more sad stories," Lester warned. "He's had enough today."

"No. I got a proposition."

"Proposition?"

"A deal. A business arrangement."

"All right," said Lester. "I will get him up."

It took quite a bit of getting up, but finally we had him fought awake and sitting on the bed.

"Wilbur, listen carefully," I told him. "I have something right down your alley. A place where all the people have big and terrible troubles and an awful sadness. Not just some of them, but every one of them. They are so sad and troubled they can't live with other people . . ."

Wilbur struggled off the bed, stood swaying on his feet.

"Lead me to 'em, pal," he said.

I pushed him down on the bed again. "It isn't as easy as all that. It's a hard place to get into."

"I thought you said—"

"Look, I have a friend who can arrange it for you. But it might take some money—"

"Pal," said Wilbur, "we got a roll of cash. How much would you need?"

"It's hard to say."

"Lester, hand it over to him so he can make this deal."

"Boss," protested Lester, "I don't know if we should."

"We can trust Sam," said Wilbur. "He is not the grasping sort. He won't spend a cent more than is necessary."

"Not a cent," I promised.

Lester opened the door in his chest and handed me the roll of hundred-dollar bills and I stuffed it in my pocket.

"Now you will wait right here," I told them, "and I'll see this friend of mine. I'll be back soon."

And I was doing some fast arithmetic, wondering how much I could dare gouge out of Doc. It wouldn't hurt to start a little high so I could come down when Doc would roar and howl and scream and say what good friends we were and how he always had given me a bottle at Christmas and Easter.

I turned to go out into the living room and stopped dead in my tracks.

For standing in the doorway was another Wilbur, although when I looked at him more closely I saw the differences. And before he said a single word or did a single thing, I had a sinking feeling that something had gone wrong.

"Good evening, sir," I said. "It's nice of you to drop in."

He never turned a hair. "I see you have guests. It shall desolate me to tear them away from you."

Behind me, Lester was making noises as if his gears were stripping, and out of the corner of my eye I saw that Wilbur sat stiff and stricken and whiter than a fish.

"But you can't do that," I said. "They only just showed up."

"You do not comprehend," said the alien in the doorway. "They are breakers of the law. I have come to get them."

"Pal," said Wilbur, speaking to me, "I am truly sorry. I knew all along it would not work out."

"By this time," the other alien said to Wilbur, "you should be convinced of it and give up trying."

And it was plain as paint, once you came to think of it, and I wondered why I hadn't thought of it before. For if Earth was closed to the adventurers who'd gathered the indoctrination data—

"Mister," I said to the alien in the doorway, "there are factors here of which I know you ain't aware. Couldn't you and me talk the whole thing over alone?"

"I should be happy," said the alien, so polite it hurt, "but please understand that I must carry out a duty."

"Why, certainly," I said.

The alien stepped out of the doorway and made a sign behind him and two robots that had been standing in the living room just out of my line of vision came in.

"Now all is secure," said the alien, "and we can depart to talk. I will listen most attentively."

So I went out into the kitchen and he followed me. I sat down at the table and he sat across from me.

"I must apologize," he told me gravely. "This miscreant imposes upon you and your planet."

"Mister," I told him back, "you have got it all wrong. I like this renegade of yours."

"*Like* him?" he asked, horrified. "That is impossible. He is a drunken lout and further more than that—"

"And further more than that," I said, grabbing the words right from his mouth, "he is doing us an awful lot of good."

The alien looked flabbergasted. "You do not know that which you say! He drags from you your anxieties and feasts upon them most disgustingly, and he puts them down on record so he can tell them forth again and yet again to your eternal shame, and further more than that—"

"It's not that way at all," I shouted. "It does us a lot of good to pull out our anxieties and show them—"

"Disgusting! More than that, indecent!" He stopped. "What was that?"

"Telling our anxieties does us good," I said as solemnly as I could. "It's a matter of confession."

The alien banged an open palm against his forehead and the feathers on his catfish mouth stood straight out and quivered.

"It could be true," he said in horror. "Given a culture so primitive and so besodden and so shameless . . ."

"Ain't we, though?" I agreed.

"In our world," said the alien, "there are no anxieties—well, not many. We are most perfectly adjusted."

"Except for folks like Wilbur?"

"Wilbur?"

"Your pal in there," I said. "I couldn't say his name, so I call him Wilbur. By the way . . ."

He rubbed his hand across his face, and no matter what he said, it was plain to see that at that moment he was loaded with anxiety. "Call me Jake. Call me anything. Just so we get this mess resolved."

"Nothing easier," I said. "Let's just keep Wilbur here. You don't really want him, do you?"

"*Want* him?" wailed Jake. "He and all the others like him are nothing but a headache. But they are our problem and our responsibility. We can't saddle you."

"You mean there are more like Wilbur?"

Jake nodded sadly.

"We'll take them all," I said. "We would love to have them. Every one of them."

"You're crazy!"

"Sure we are," I said. "That is why we need them."

"You are certain, without any shadow of your doubt?"

"Absolutely certain."

"Pal," said Jake, "you have made a deal."

I stuck out my hand to shake on it, but I don't think he even saw my hand. He rose out of the chair and you could see a vast relief lighting up his face.

Then he turned and stalked out of the kitchen.

"Hey, wait a minute!" I yelled. For there were details that I felt we should work out. But he didn't seem to hear me.

I jumped out of the chair and raced for the living room, but by the time I got there, there was no sign of Jake. I ran into the bedroom and the two robots were gone, too. Wilbur and Lester were in there all alone.

"I told you," Lester said to Wilbur, "that Mr. Sam would fix it."

"I don't believe it, pal," said Wilbur. "Have they really gone?

Have they gone for good? Is there any chance they will be coming back?"

I raised my arm and wiped off my forehead with my sleeve. "They won't bother you again. You are finally shut of them."

"That is excellent," said Wilbur. "And now about this deal."

"Sure," I said. "Give me just a minute. I'll go out and see the man."

I stepped out on the stoop and stood there for a while to get over shaking. Jake and his two robots had come very close to spoiling everything. I needed a drink worse than I had ever needed one, but I didn't dare take the time. I had to get Doc on the dotted line before something else turned up.

I went out to the car.

"It took you long enough," Doc said irritably.

"It took a lot of talking for Wilbur to agree," I said.

"But he did agree?"

"Yeah, he agreed."

"Well, then," said Doc, "what are we waiting for?"

"Ten thousand bucks," I said.

"Ten thousand . . ."

"That's the price for Wilbur. I'm selling you my alien."

"*Your* alien! He is not your alien!"

"Maybe not," I said, "but he's the next best thing. All I have to do is say the word and he won't go with you."

"Two thousand," declared Doc. "That's every cent I'll pay."

We got down to haggling and we wound up at seven thousand dollars. If I'd been willing to spend all night at it, I would have got eight-five hundred. But I was all fagged out and I needed a drink much worse than I needed fifteen hundred extra dollars. So we settled on the seven.

We went back into the house and Doc wrote out a check.

"You know you're fired, of course," he said, handing it to me.

"I hadn't thought about it," I told him, and I hadn't. The check for seven thousand in my hand and that roll of hundred-dollar bills bulging out my pocket added up to a lot of drinking money.

I went to the bedroom door and called out Wilbur and Lester and I said to them: "Old Doc here had made up his mind to take you."

And Wilbur said, "I am so happy and so thankful. Was it hard, perhaps, to get him to agree to take us?"

"Not too hard," I said. "He was reasonable."

"Hey," yelled Doc, with murder in his eyes, "what is going on here?"

"Not a thing," I said.

"Well, it sounds to me . . ."

"There's your boy," I said. "Take him if you want him. If it should happen you don't want him, I'll be glad to keep him. There'll be someone else along."

And I held out the check to give it back to him. It was a risky thing to do, but I was in a spot where I had to bluff.

Doc waved the check away, but he was still suspicious that he was being taken, although he wasn't sure exactly how. But he couldn't take the chance of losing out on Wilbur. I could see that he had it all figured out—how he'd become world famous with the only alien psychiatrist in captivity.

Except there was one thing that he didn't know. He had no idea that in just a little while there would be other Wilburs. And I stood there, laughing at him without showing it, while he herded Wilbur and Lester out the door.

Before he left, he turned back to me.

"There is something going on," he said, "and when I find out about it, I am going to come back and take you apart for it."

I never said a word, but just stood there listening to the three of them crunching down the driveway. When I heard the car leave, I went out into the kitchen and took down the bottle.

I had a half a dozen fast ones. Then I sat down in a chair at the kitchen table and practiced some restraint. I had a half a dozen slow ones.

I got to wondering about the other Wilburs that Jake had agreed to send to Earth and I wished I'd been able to pin him down a bit. But I had had no chance, for he had jumped up and disappeared just when I was ready to get down to business.

All I could do was hope he'd deliver them to me—either in the front yard or out in the driveway—but he'd never said he would. A fat lot of good it would do me if he just dropped them anywhere.

And I wondered when he would deliver them and how many

there might be. It might take a bit of time, for more than likely he would indoctrinate them before they were dropped on Earth, and as to number, I had not the slightest idea. From the way he talked, there might even be a couple of dozen of them. With that many, a man could make a roll of cash, if he handled the situation right.

Although, it seemed, I had a right smart amount of money now.

I dug the roll of hundred-dollar bills out of my pocket and made a stab at counting them, but for the life of me I couldn't keep the figures straight.

Here I was drunk and it wasn't even Saturday, but Sunday. I didn't have a job and now I could get drunk any time I wanted.

So I sat there working on the jug and finally passed out.

There was an awful racket and I came awake and wondered where I was. In a little while I got it figured out that I'd been sleeping at the kitchen table and I had a terrible crick in my neck and a hangover that was even worse.

I stumbled to my feet and looked at the clock. It was ten minutes after nine.

The racket kept right on.

I made it out to the living room and opened the front door. The Widow Frye almost fell into the room, she had been hammering on the door so hard.

"Samuel," she gasped, "have you heard about it?"

"I ain't heard a thing," I told her, "except you pounding on the door."

"It's on the radio."

"You know darn well I ain't got no radio nor no telephone nor no TV set. I ain't got no time for modern trash like that."

"It's about the aliens," she said. "Like the one you have. The nice, kind, understanding alien people. They are everywhere. Everywhere on Earth. There are a lot of them all over. Thousands of them. Maybe millions . . ."

I pushed past her out the door.

They were sitting on front steps all up and down the street, and they were walking up and down the road, and there was a bunch of them playing, chasing one another, in a vacant lot.

"It's like that everywhere!" cried the Widow Frye. "The radio

just said so. There are enough of them so that everyone on Earth can have one of their very own. Isn't it wonderful?"

That dirty, doublecrossing Jake, I told myself. Talking like there weren't many of them, pretending that his culture was so civilized and so well adjusted that there were almost no psychopaths.

Although, to be fair about it, he hadn't said how many there might be of them—not in numbers, that is. And even all he had dumped on Earth might be a few in relation to the total population of his particular culture.

And then, suddenly, I thought of something else.

I hauled out my watch and looked at it. It was only a quarter after nine.

"Widow Frye," I said, "excuse me. I got an errand to run."

I legged it down the street as fast as I could.

One of the Wilburs detached himself from a group of them and loped along with me.

"Mister," he said, "have you got some troubles to tell me?"

"Naw," I said. "I never have no troubles."

"Not even any worries?"

"No worries, either."

Then it occurred to me that there was a worry—not for me alone, but for the entire world.

For with all the Wilburs that Jake had dumped on Earth, there would in a little while be no human psychopaths. There wouldn't be a human with a worry or a trouble. God, would it be dull!

But I didn't worry none.

I just loped along as fast as I could go.

I had to get to the bank before Doc had time to stop payment on that check for seven thousand dollars.

The inventory list was long. On its many pages, in his small and precise script, he had listed furniture, paintings, china, silverware and all the rest of it—all the personal belongings that had been accumulated by the Barringtons through a long family history.

And now that he had reached the end of it, he noted down himself, the last item of them all:

One domestic robot, Richard Daniel, antiquated but in good repair.

He laid the pen aside and shuffled all the inventory sheets together and stacked them in good order, putting a paper weight upon them—the little exquisitely carved ivory paper weight that Aunt Hortense had picked up that last visit she had made to Peking.

And having done that, his job came to an end.

He shoved back the chair and rose from the desk and slowly walked across the living room, with all its clutter of possessions from the family's past. There, above the mantel, hung the sword that ancient Jonathon had worn in the War between the States, and below it, on the mantelpiece itself, the cup the Commodore had won with his valiant yacht, and the jar of moon-dust that Tony had brought back from Man's fifth landing on the Moon, and the old chronometer that had come from the long-scrapped family spacecraft that had plied the asteroids. And all around the room, almost cheek by jowl, hung the family portraits, with the old dead faces staring out into the world that they had helped to fashion.

And not one of them from the last six hundred years, thought Richard Daniel, staring at them one by one, that he had not known.

There, to the right of the fireplace, old Rufus Andrew Barrington, who had been a judge some two hundred years ago. And to the right of Rufus, Johnson Joseph Barrington, who had headed up that old lost dream of mankind, the Bureau of Paranormal Research. There, beyond the door that led out to the porch, was the scowling pirate face of Danley Barrington, who had first built the family fortune.

And many others—administrator, adventurer, corporation chief. All good men and true.

But this was at an end. The family had run out.

Slowly Richard Daniel began his last tour of the house—the family room with its cluttered living space, the den with its old mementos, the library and its rows of ancient books, the dining hall in which the crystal and the china shone and sparkled, the kitchen gleaming with the copper and aluminum and the stainless steel, and the bedrooms on the second floor, each of them with its landmarks of former occupants. And finally, the bedroom where old Aunt Hortense had finally died, at long last closing out the line of Barringtons.

The empty dwelling held a not-quite-haunted quality, the aura of a house that waited for the old gay life to take up once again. But it was a false aura. All the portraits, all the china and the silverware, everything within the house would be sold at public auction to satisfy the debts. The rooms would be stripped and the possessions would be scattered and, as a last indignity, the house itself be sold.

Even he, himself, Richard Daniel thought, for he was chattel, too. He was there with all the rest of it, the final item on the inventory.

Except that what they planned to do with him was worse than simple sale. For he would be changed before he was offered up for sale. No one would be interested in putting up good money for him as he stood. And, besides, there was the law—the law that said no robot could legally have continuation of a single life greater than a hundred years. And he had lived in a single life six times a hundred years.

He had gone to see a lawyer and the lawyer had been sympathetic, but had held forth no hope.

"Technically," he had told Richard Daniel in his short, clipped lawyer voice, "you are at this moment much in violation of the statute. I completely fail to see how your family got away with it."

"They liked old things," said Richard Daniel. "And, besides, I was very seldom seen. I stayed mostly in the house. I seldom ventured out."

"Even so," the lawyer said, "there are such things as records. There must be a file on you . . ."

"The family," explained Richard Daniel, "in the past had many influential friends. You must understand, sir, that the Barringtons, before they fell upon hard times, were quite prominent in politics and in many other matters."

The lawyer grunted knowingly.

"What I can't understand," he said, "is why you should object so bitterly. You'll not be changed entirely. You'll still be Richard Daniel."

"I would lose my memories, would I not?"

"Yes, of course you would. But memories are not too important. And you'd collect another set."

"My memories are dear to me," Richard Daniel told him. "They are all I have. After some six hundred years, they are my sole worthwhile possession. Can you imagine, counselor, what it means to spend six centuries with one family?"

"Yes, I think I can," agreed the lawyer. "But now, with the family gone, isn't it just possible the memories may prove painful?"

"They're a comfort. A sustaining comfort. They make me feel important. They give me perspective and a niche."

"But don't you understand? You'll need no comfort, no importance once you're reoriented. You'll be brand new. All that you'll retain is a certain sense of basic identity—*that* they cannot take away from you even if they wished. There'll be nothing to regret. There'll be no leftover guilts, no frustrated aspirations, no old loyalties to hound you."

"I must be myself," Richard Daniel insisted stubbornly. "I've found a depth of living, a background against which my living has some meaning. I could not face being anybody else."

"You'd be far better off," the lawyer said wearily. "You'd have

a better body. You'd have better mental tools. You'd be more intelligent."

Richard Daniel got up from the chair. He saw it was no use.

"You'll not inform on me?" he asked.

"Certainly not," the lawyer said. "So far as I'm concerned, you aren't even here."

"Thank you," said Richard Daniel. "How much do I owe you?"

"Not a thing," the lawyer told him. "I never make a charge to anyone who is older than five hundred."

He had meant it as a joke, but Richard Daniel did not smile. He had not felt like smiling.

At the door he turned around.

"Why?" he was going to ask. "Why this silly law?"

But he did not have to ask—it was not hard to see.

Human vanity, he knew. No human being lived much longer than a hundred years, so neither could a robot. But a robot, on the other hand, was too valuable simply to be junked at the end of a hundred years of service, so there was this law providing for the periodic breakup of the continuity of each robot's life. And thus no human need undergo the psychological indignity of knowing that his faithful serving man might manage to outlive him by several thousand years.

It was illogical, but humans were illogical.

Illogical, but kind. Kind in many different ways.

Kind, sometimes, as the Barringtons had been kind, thought Richard Daniel. Six hundred years of kindness. It was a prideful thing to think about. They had even given him a double name. There weren't many robots nowadays who had double names. It was a special mark of affection and respect.

The lawyer having failed him, Richard Daniel had sought another source of help. Now, thinking back on it, standing in the room where Hortense Barrington had died, he was sorry that he'd done it. For he had embarrassed the religico almost unendurably. It had been easy for the lawyer to tell him what he had. Lawyers had the statutes to determine their behavior, and thus suffered little from agonies of personal decision.

But a man of the cloth is kind if he is worth his salt. And this one had been kind instinctively as well as professionally, and that had made it worse.

"Under certain circumstances," he had said somewhat awkwardly, "I could counsel patience and humility and prayer. Those are three great aids to anyone who is willing to put them to his use. But with you I am not certain."

"You mean," said Richard Daniel, "because I am a robot."

"Well, now . . ." said the minister, considerably befuddled at this direct approach.

"Because I have no soul?"

"Really," said the minister miserably, "you place me at a disadvantage. You are asking me a question that for centuries has puzzled and bedeviled the best minds in the church."

"But one," said Richard Daniel, "that each man in his secret heart must answer for himself."

"I wish I could," cried the distraught minister. "I truly wish I could."

"If it is any help," said Richard Daniel, "I can tell you that sometimes I suspect I have a soul."

And that, he could see, had been most upsetting for this kindly human. It had been, Richard Daniel told himself, unkind of him to say it. For it must have been confusing, since coming from himself it was not opinion only, but expert evidence.

So he had gone away from the minister's study and come back to the empty house to get on with his inventory work.

Now that the inventory was all finished and the papers stacked where Dancourt, the estate administrator, could find them when he showed up in the morning, Richard Daniel had done his final service for the Barringtons and now must begin doing for himself.

He left the bedroom and closed the door behind him and went quietly down the stairs and along the hallway to the little cubby, back of the kitchen, that was his very own.

And that, he reminded himself with a rush of pride, was of a piece with his double name and his six hundred years. There were not too many robots who had a room, however small, that they might call their own.

He went into the cubby and turned on the light and closed the door behind him.

And now, for the first time, he faced the grim reality of what he meant to do.

The cloak and hat and trousers hung upon a hook and the galoshes were placed precisely underneath them. His attachment

kit lay in one corner of the cubby and the money was cached underneath the floor board he had loosened many years ago to provide a hiding place.

There was, he told himself, no point in waiting. Every minute counted. He had a long way to go and he must be at his destination before morning light.

He knelt on the floor and pried up the loosened board, shoved in a hand and brought out the stacks of bills, money hidden through the years against a day of need.

There were three stacks of bills, neatly held together by elastic bands—money given him throughout the years as tips and Christmas gifts, as birthday presents and rewards for little jobs well done.

He opened the storage compartment located in his chest and stowed away all the bills except for half a dozen which he stuffed into a pocket in one hip.

He took the trousers off the hook and it was an awkward business, for he'd never worn clothes before except when he'd tried on these very trousers several days before. It was a lucky thing, he thought, that long-dead Uncle Michael had been a portly man, for otherwise the trousers never would have fit.

He got them on and zippered and belted into place, then forced his feet into the overshoes. He was a little worried about the overshoes. No human went out in the summer wearing overshoes. But it was the best that he could do. None of the regular shoes he'd found in the house had been nearly large enough.

He hoped no one would notice, but there was no way out of it. Somehow or other, he had to cover up his feet, for if anyone should see them, they'd be a giveaway.

He put on the cloak and it was a little short. He put on the hat and it was slightly small, but he tugged it down until it gripped his metal skull and that was all to the good, he told himself; no wind could blow it off.

He picked up his attachments—a whole bag full of them that he'd almost never used. Maybe it was foolish to take them along, he thought, but they were a part of him and by rights they should go with him. There was so little that he really owned—just the money he had saved, a dollar at a time, and this kit of his.

With the bag of attachments clutched underneath his arm, he closed the cubby door and went down the hall.

At the big front door he hesitated and turned back toward the

house, but it was, at the moment, a simple darkened cave, empty of all that it once had held. There was nothing here to stay for —nothing but the memories, and the memories he took with him.

He opened the door and stepped out on the stoop and closed the door behind him.

And now, he thought, with the door once shut behind him, he was on his own. He was running off. He was wearing clothes. He was out at night, without the permission of a master. And all of these were against the law.

Any officer could stop him, or any citizen. He had no rights at all. And he had no one who would speak for him, now that the Barringtons were gone.

He moved quietly down the walk and opened the gate and went slowly down the street, and it seemed to him the house was calling for him to come back. He wanted to go back, his mind said that he should go back, but his feet kept going on, steadily down the street.

He was alone, he thought, and the aloneness now was real, no longer the mere intellectual abstract he'd held in his mind for days. Here he was, a vacant hulk, that for the moment had no purpose and no beginning and no end, but was just an entity that stood naked in an endless reach of space and time and held no meaning in itself.

But he walked on and with each block that he covered he slowly fumbled back to the thing he was, the old robot in old clothes, the robot running from a home that was a home no longer.

He wrapped the cloak about him tightly and moved on down the street and now he hurried, for he had to hurry.

He met several people and they paid no attention to him. A few cars passed, but no one bothered him.

He came to a shopping center that was brightly lighted and he stopped and looked in terror at the wide expanse of open, brilliant space that lay ahead of him. He could detour around it, but it would use up time and he stood there, undecided, trying to screw up his courage to walk into the light.

Finally he made up his mind and strode briskly out, with his cloak wrapped tight about him and his hat pulled low.

Some of the shoppers turned and looked at him and he felt agitated spiders running up and down his back. The galoshes sud-

denly seemed three times as big as they really were and they made a plopping, squashy sound that was most embarrassing.

He hurried on, with the end of the shopping area not more than a block away.

A police whistle shrilled and Richard Daniel jumped in sudden fright and ran. He ran in slobbering, mindless fright, with his cloak streaming out behind him and his feet slapping on the pavement.

He plunged out of the lighted strip into the welcome darkness of a residential section and he kept on running.

Far off he heard the siren and he leaped a hedge and tore across the yard. He thundered down the driveway and across a garden in the back and a dog came roaring out and engaged in noisy chase.

Richard Daniel crashed into a picket fence and went through it to the accompaniment of snapping noises as the pickets and the rails gave way. The dog kept on behind him and other dogs joined in.

He crossed another yard and gained the street and pounded down it. He dodged into a driveway, crossed another yard, upset a birdbath and ran into a clothesline, snapping it in his headlong rush.

Behind him lights were snapping on in the windows of the houses and screen doors were banging as people hurried out to see what the ruckus was.

He ran on a few more blocks, crossed another yard and ducked into a lilac thicket, stood still and listened. Some dogs were still baying in the distance and there was some human shouting, but there was no siren.

He felt a thankfulness well up in him that there was no siren, and a sheepishness, as well. For he had been panicked by himself, he knew; he had run from shadows, he had fled from guilt.

But he'd thoroughly roused the neighborhood and even now, he knew, calls must be going out and in a little while the place would be swarming with police.

He'd raised a hornet's nest and he needed distance, so he crept out of the lilac thicket and went swiftly down the street, heading for the edge of town.

He finally left the city and found the highway. He loped along

its deserted stretches. When a car or truck appeared, he pulled off on the shoulder and walked along sedately. Then when the car or truck had passed, he broke into his lope again.

He saw the spaceport light miles before he got there. When he reached the port, he circled off the road and came up outside a fence and stood there in the darkness, looking.

A gang of robots was loading one great starship and there were other ships standing darkly in their pits.

He studied the gang that was loading the ship, lugging the cargo from a warehouse and across the area lighted by the floods. This was just the setup he had planned on, although he had not hoped to find it immediately—he had been afraid that he might have to hide out for a day or two before he found a situation that he could put to use. And it was a good thing that he had stumbled on this opportunity, for an intensive hunt would be on by now for a fleeing robot, dressed in human clothes.

He stripped off the cloak and pulled off the trousers and the overshoes; he threw away the hat. From his attachments bag he took out the cutters, screwed off a hand and threaded the cutters into place. He cut the fence and wiggled through it, then replaced the hand and put the cutters back into the kit.

Moving cautiously in the darkness, he walked up to the warehouse, keeping in its shadow.

It would be simple, he told himself. All he had to do was step out and grab a piece of cargo, clamber up the ramp and down into the hold. Once inside, it should not be difficult to find a hiding place and stay there until the ship had reached first planet-fall.

He moved to the corner of the warehouse and peered around it and there were the toiling robots, in what amounted to an endless chain, going up the ramp with the packages of cargo, coming down again to get another load.

But there were too many of them and the line too tight. And the area too well lighted. He'd never be able to break into that line.

And it would not help if he could, he realized despairingly—because he was different from those smooth and shining creatures. Compared to them, he was like a man in another century's dress; he and his six-hundred-year-old body would stand out like a circus freak.

He stepped back into the shadow of the warehouse and he knew

that he had lost. All his best-laid plans, thought out in sober, daring detail, as he had labored at the inventory, had suddenly come to naught.

It all came, he told himself, from never going out, from having no real contact with the world, from not keeping up with robot-body fashions, from not knowing what the score was. He'd imagined how it would be and he'd got it all worked out and when it came down to it, it was nothing like he thought.

Now he'd have to go back to the hole he'd cut in the fence and retrieve the clothing he had thrown away and hunt up a hiding place until he could think of something else.

Beyond the corner of the warehouse he heard the harsh, dull grate of metal, and he took another look.

The robots had broken up their line and were streaming back toward the warehouse and a dozen or so of them were wheeling the ramp away from the cargo port. Three humans, all dressed in uniform, were walking toward the ship, heading for the ladder, and one of them carried a batch of papers in his hand.

The loading was all done and the ship about to lift and here he was, not more than a thousand feet away, and all that he could do was stand and see it go.

There had to be a way, he told himself, to get in that ship. If he could only do it his troubles would be over—or at least the first of his troubles would be over.

Suddenly it struck him like a hand across the face. There was a way to do it! He'd stood here, blubbering, when all the time there had been a way to do it!

In the ship, he'd thought. And that was not necessary. He didn't have to be *in* the ship.

He started running, out into the darkness, far out so he could circle round and come upon the ship from the other side, so that the ship would be between him and the flood lights on the warehouse. He hoped that there was time.

He thudded out across the port, running in an arc, and came up to the ship and there was no sign as yet that it was about to leave.

Frantically he dug into his attachments bag and found the things he needed—the last things in that bag he'd ever thought he'd need. He found the suction discs and put them on, one for each knee, one for each elbow, one for each sole and wrist.

He strapped the kit about his waist and clambered up one of

the mighty fins, using the discs to pull himself awkwardly along. It was not easy. He had never used the discs and there was a trick to using them, the trick of getting one clamped down and then working loose another so that he could climb.

But he had to do it. He had no choice but to do it.

He climbed the fin and there was the vast steel body of the craft rising far above him, like a metal wall climbing to the sky, broken by the narrow line of a row of anchor posts that ran lengthwise of the hull—and all that huge extent of metal painted by the faint, illusive shine of starlight that glittered in his eyes.

Foot by foot he worked his way up the metal wall. Like a humping caterpillar, he squirmed his way and with each foot he gained he was a bit more thankful.

Then he heard the faint beginning of a rumble and with the rumble came terror. His suction cups, he knew, might not long survive the booming vibration of the wakening rockets, certainly would not hold for a moment when the ship began to climb.

Six feet above him lay his only hope—the final anchor post in the long row of anchor posts.

Savagely he drove himself up the barrel of the shuddering craft, hugging the steely surface like a desperate fly.

The rumble of the tubes built up to blot out all the world and he climbed in a haze of almost prayerful, brittle hope. He reached that anchor post or he was as good as dead. Should he slip and drop into the pit of flaming gases beneath the rocket mouths and he was done for.

Once a cup came loose and he almost fell, but the others held and he caught himself.

With a desperate, almost careless lunge, he hurled himself up the wall of metal and caught the rung in his fingertips and held on with a concentration of effort that wiped out all else.

The rumble was a screaming fury now that lanced through brain and body. Then the screaming ended and became a throaty roar of power and the vibration left the ship entirely. From one corner of his eye he saw the lights of the spaceport swinging over gently on their side.

Carefully, slowly, he pulled himself along the steel until he had a better grip upon the rung, but even with the better grip he had the feeling that some great hand had him in its fist and was swinging him in anger in a hundred-mile-long arc.

Then the tubes left off their howling and there was a terrible silence and the stars were there, up above him and to either side of him, and they were steely stars with no twinkle in them. Down below, he knew, a lonely Earth was swinging, but he could not see it.

He pulled himself up against the rung and thrust a leg beneath it and sat up on the hull.

There were more stars than he'd ever seen before, more than he'd dreamed there could be. They were still and cold, like hard points of light against a velvet curtain; there was no glitter and no twinkle in them and it was as if a million eyes were staring down at him. The Sun was underneath the ship and over to one side; just at the edge of the left-hand curvature was the glare of it against the silent metal, a sliver of reflected light outlining one edge of the ship. The Earth was far astern, a ghostly blue-green ball hanging in the void, ringed by the fleecy halo of its atmosphere.

It was as if he were detached, a lonely, floating brain that looked out upon a thing it could not understand nor could ever try to understand; as if he might even be afraid of understanding it—a thing of mystery and delight so long as he retained an ignorance of it, but something fearsome and altogether overpowering once the ignorance had gone.

Richard Daniel sat there, flat upon his bottom, on the metal hull of the speeding ship and he felt the mystery and delight and the loneliness and the cold and the great uncaring and his mind retreated into a small and huddled, compact defensive ball.

He looked. That was all there was to do. It was all right now, he thought. But how long would he have to look at it? How long would he have to camp out here in the open—the most deadly kind of open?

He realized for the first time that he had no idea where the ship was going or how long it might take to get there. He knew it was a starship, which meant that it was bound beyond the solar system, and that meant that at some point in its flight it would enter hyperspace. He wondered, at first academically, and then with a twinge of fear, what hyperspace might do to one sitting naked to it. But there was little need, he thought philosophically, to fret about it now, for in due time he'd know, and there was not a thing that he could do about it—not a single thing.

He took the suction cups off his body and stowed them in his

kit and then with one hand he tied the kit to one of the metal rungs and dug around in it until he found a short length of steel cable with a ring on one end and a snap on the other. He passed the ring end underneath a rung and threaded the snap end through it and snapped the snap onto a metal loop underneath his armpit. Now he was secured; he need not fear carelessly letting go and floating off the ship.

So here he was, he thought, neat as anything, going places fast, even if he had no idea where he might be headed, and now the only thing he needed was patience. He thought back, without much point, to what the religico had said in the study back on Earth. Patience and humility and prayer, he'd said, apparently not realizing at the moment that a robot has a world of patience.

It would take a lot of time, Richard Daniel knew, to get where he was going. But he had a lot of time, a lot more than any human, and he could afford to waste it. There were no urgencies, he thought—no need of food or air or water, no need of sleep or rest. There was nothing that could touch him.

Although, come to think of it, there might be.

There was the cold, for one. The space-hull was still fairly warm, with one side of it picking up the heat of the Sun and radiating it around the metal skin, where it was lost on the other side, but there would be a time when the Sun would dwindle until it had no heat and then he'd be subjected to the utter cold of space.

And what would the cold do to him? Might it make his body brittle? Might it interfere with the functioning of his brain? Might it do other things he could not even guess?

He felt the fears creep in again and tried to shrug them off and they drew off, but they still were there, lurking at the fringes of his mind.

The cold, and the loneliness, he thought—but he was one who could cope with loneliness. And if he couldn't, if he got too lonely, if he could no longer stand it, he could always beat a devil's tattoo on the hull and after a time of that someone would come out to investigate and they would haul him in.

But that was the last move of desperation, he told himself. For if they came out and found him, then he would be caught. Should he be forced to that extremity, he'd have lost everything—there would then have been no point in leaving Earth at all.

So he settled down, living out his time, keeping the creeping

fears at bay just beyond the outposts of his mind, and looking at the universe all spread out before him.

The motors started up again with a pale blue flickering in the rockets at the stern and although there was no sense of acceleration he knew that the ship, now well off the Earth, had settled down to the long, hard drive to reach the speed of light.

Once they reached that speed they would enter hyperspace. He tried not to think of it, tried to tell himself there was not a thing to fear—but it hung there just ahead of him, the great unknowable.

The Sun shrank until it was only one of many stars and there came a time when he could no longer pick it out. And the cold clamped down but it didn't seem to bother him, although he could sense the coldness.

Maybe, he said in answer to his fear, that would be the way it would be with hyperspace as well. But he said it unconvincingly. The ship drove on and on with the weird blueness in the tubes.

Then there was the instant when his mind went splattering across the universe.

He was aware of the ship, but only aware of it in relation to an awareness of much else, and it was no anchor point, no rallying position. He was spread and scattered; he was opened out and rolled out until he was very thin. He was a dozen places, perhaps a hundred places, all at once, and it was confusing, and his immediate reaction was to fight back somehow against whatever might have happened to him—to fight back and pull himself together. The fighting did no good at all, but made it even worse, for in certain instances it seemed to drive parts of him farther from other parts of him and the confusion was made greater.

So he quit his fighting and his struggling and just lay there, scattered, and let the panic ebb away and told himself he didn't care, and wondered if he did.

Slow reason returned a dribble at a time and he could think again and he wondered rather bleakly if this could be hyperspace and was pretty sure it was. And if it were, he knew, he'd have a long time to live like this, a long time in which to become accustomed to it and to orient himself, a long time to find himself and pull himself together, a long time to understand this situation if it were, in fact, understandable.

So he lay, not caring greatly, with no fear or wonder, just rest-

ing and letting a fact seep into him here and there from many different points.

He knew that, somehow, his body—that part of him which housed the rest of him—was still chained securely to the ship, and that knowledge, in itself, he knew, was the first small step towards reorienting himself. He had to reorient, he knew. He had to come to some sort of terms, if not to understanding, with this situation.

He had opened up and he had scattered out—that essential part of him, the feeling and the knowing and the thinking part of him, and he lay thin across a universe that loomed immense in unreality.

Was this, he wondered, the way the universe should be, or was it the unchained universe, the wild universe beyond the limiting disciplines of measured space and time.

He started slowly reaching out, cautious as he had been in his crawling on the surface of the ship, reaching out toward the distant parts of him, a little at a time. He did not know how he did it, he was conscious of no particular technique, but whatever he was doing, it seemed to work, for he pulled himself together, bit by knowing bit, until he had gathered up all the scattered fragments of him into several different piles.

Then he quit and lay there, wherever there might be, and tried to sneak up on those piles of understanding that he took to be himself.

It took a while to get the hang of it, but once he did, some of the incomprehensibility went away, although the strangeness stayed. He tried to put it into thought and it was hard to do. The closest he could come was that he had been unchained as well as the universe—that whatever bondage had been imposed upon him by that chained and normal world had now become dissolved and he no longer was fenced in by either time or space.

He could see—and know and sense—across vast distances, if distance were the proper term, and he could understand certain facts that he had not even thought about before, could understand instinctively, but without the language or the skill to coalesce the facts into independent data.

Once again the universe was spread far out before him and it was a different and in some ways a better universe, a more diagrammatic universe, and in time, he knew, if there were such a

thing as time, he'd gain some completer understanding and acceptance of it.

He probed and sensed and learned and there was no such thing as time, but a great foreverness.

He thought with pity of those others locked inside the ship, safe behind its insulating walls, never knowing all the glories of the innards of a star or the vast panoramic sweep of vision and of knowing far above the flat galactic plane.

Yet he really did not know what he saw or probed; he merely sensed and felt it and became a part of it, and it became a part of him—he seemed unable to reduce it to a formal outline of fact or of dimension or of content. It still remained a knowledge and a power so overwhelming that it was nebulous. There was no fear and no wonder, for in this place, it seemed, there was neither fear nor wonder. And he finally knew that it was a place apart, a world in which the normal space-time knowledge and emotion had no place at all and a normal space-time being could have no tools or measuring stick by which he might reduce it to a frame of reference.

There was no time, no space, no fear, no wonder—and no actual knowledge, either.

Then time came once again and suddenly his mind was stuffed back into its cage within his metal skull and he was again one with his body, trapped and chained and small and cold and naked.

He saw that the stars were different and that he was far from home and just a little way ahead was a star that blazed like a molten furnace hanging in the black.

He sat bereft, a small thing once again, and the universe reduced to package size.

Practically, he checked the cable that held him to the ship and it was intact. His attachments kit was still tied to its rung. Everything was exactly as it had been before.

He tried to recall the glories he had seen, tried to grasp again the fringe of knowledge which he had been so close to, but both the glory and the knowledge, if there had ever been a knowledge, had faded into nothingness.

He felt like weeping, but he could not weep, and he was too old to lie down upon the ship and kick his heels in tantrum.

So he sat there, looking at the sun that they were approaching

and finally there was a planet that he knew must be their destination, and he found room to wonder what planet it might be and how far from Earth it was.

He heated up a little as the ship skipped through atmosphere as an aid to braking speed and he had some rather awful moments as it spiraled into thick and soupy gases that certainly were a far cry from the atmosphere of Earth. He hung most desperately to the rungs as the craft came mushing down onto a landing field, with the hot gases of the rockets curling up about him. But he made it safely and swiftly clambered down and darted off into the smog-like atmosphere before anyone could see him.

Safely off, he turned and looked back at the ship and despite its outlines being hidden by the drifting clouds of swirling gases, he could see it clearly, not as an actual structure, but as a diagram. He looked at it wonderingly and there was something wrong with the diagram, something vaguely wrong, some part of it that was out of whack and not the way it should be.

He heard the clanking of cargo haulers coming out upon the field and he wasted no more time, diagram or not.

He drifted back, deeper in the mists, and began to circle, keeping a good distance from the ship. Finally he came to the spaceport's edge and the beginning of the town.

He found a street and walked down it leisurely and there was a wrongness in the town.

He met a few hurrying robots who were in too much of a rush to pass the time of day. But he met no humans.

And that, he knew quite suddenly, was the wrongness of the place. It was not a human town.

There were no distinctly human buildings—no stores or residences, no churches and no restaurants. There were gaunt shelter barracks and sheds for the storing of equipment and machines, great sprawling warehouses and vast industrial plants. But that was all there was. It was a bare and dismal place compared to the streets that he had known on Earth.

It was a robot town, he knew. And a robot planet. A world that was barred to humans, a place where humans could not live, but so rich in some natural resource that it cried for exploitation. And the answer to that exploitation was to let the robots do it.

Luck, he told himself. His good luck still was holding. He had

literally been dumped into a place where he could live without human interference. Here, on this planet, he would be with his own.

If that was what he wanted. And he wondered if it was. He wondered just exactly what it was he wanted, for he'd had no time to think of what he wanted. He had been too intent on fleeing Earth to think too much about it. He had known all along what he was running from, but had not considered what he might be running to.

He walked a little farther and the town came to an end. The street became a path and went wandering on into the wind-blown fogginess.

So he turned around and went back up the street.

There had been one barracks, he remembered, that had a TRANSIENTS sign hung out, and he made his way to it.

Inside, an ancient robot sat behind the desk. His body was old-fashioned and somehow familiar. And it was familiar, Richard Daniel knew, because it was as old and battered and as out-of-date as his.

He looked at the body, just a bit aghast, and saw that while it resembled his, there were little differences. The same ancient model, certainly, but a different series. Possibly a little newer, by twenty years or so, than his.

"Good evening, stranger," said the ancient robot. "You came in on the ship?"

Richard Daniel nodded.

"You'll be staying till the next one?"

"I may be settling down," said Richard Daniel. "I may want to stay here."

The ancient robot took a key from off a hook and laid it on the desk.

"You representing someone?"

"No," said Richard Daniel.

"I thought maybe that you were. We get a lot of representatives. Humans can't come here, or don't want to come, so they send robots out here to represent them."

"You have a lot of visitors?"

"Some. Mostly the representatives I was telling you about.

But there are some that are on the lam. I'd take it, mister, you are on the lam."

Richard Daniel didn't answer.

"It's all right," the ancient one assured him. "We don't mind at all, just so you behave yourself. Some of our most prominent citizens, they came here on the lam."

"That is fine," said Richard Daniel. "And how about yourself? You must be on the lam as well."

"You mean this body. Well, that's a little different. This here is punishment."

"Punishment?"

"Well, you see, I was the foreman of the cargo warehouse and I got to goofing off. So they hauled me up and had a trial and they found me guilty. Then they stuck me into this old body and I have to stay in it, at this lousy job, until they get another criminal that needs punishment. They can't punish no more than one criminal at a time because this is the only old body that they have. Funny thing about this body. One of the boys went back to Earth on a business trip and found this old heap of metal in a junkyard and brought it home with him—for a joke, I guess. Like a human might buy a skeleton for a joke, you know."

He took a long, sly look at Richard Daniel. "It looks to me, stranger, as if your body . . ."

But Richard Daniel didn't let him finish.

"I take it," Richard Daniel said, "you haven't many criminals."

"No," said the ancient robot sadly, "we're generally a pretty solid lot."

Richard Daniel reached out to pick up the key, but the ancient robot put out his hand and covered it.

"Since you are on the lam," he said, "it'll be payment in advance."

"I'll pay you for a week," said Richard Daniel, handing him some money.

The robot gave him back his change.

"One thing I forgot to tell you. You'll have to get plasticated."

"Plasticated?"

"That's right. Get plastic squirted over you to protect you from the atmosphere. It plays hell with metal. There's a place next door will do it."

"Thanks. I'll get it done immediately."

"It wears off," warned the ancient one. "You have to get a new job every week or so."

Richard Daniel took the key and went down the corridor until he found his numbered cubicle. He unlocked the door and stepped inside. The room was small, but clean. It had a desk and chair and that was all it had.

He stowed his attachments bag in one corner and sat down in the chair and tried to feel at home. But he couldn't feel at home, and that was a funny thing—he'd just rented himself a home.

He sat there, thinking back, and tried to whip up some sense of triumph at having done so well in covering his tracks. He couldn't.

Maybe this wasn't the place for him, he thought. Maybe he'd be happier on some other planet. Perhaps he should go back to the ship and get on it once again and have a look at the next planet coming up.

If he hurried, he might make it. But he'd have to hurry, for the ship wouldn't stay longer than it took to unload the consignment for this place and take on new cargo.

He got up from the chair, still only half decided.

And suddenly he remembered how, standing in the swirling mistiness, he had seen the ship as a diagram rather than a ship, and as he thought about it, something clicked inside his brain and he leaped toward the door.

For now he knew what had been wrong with the spaceship's diagram—an injector valve was somehow out of kilter; he had to get back there before the ship took off again.

He went through the door and down the corridor. He caught sight of the ancient robot's startled face as he ran across the lobby and out into the street. Pounding steadily toward the spaceport, he tried to get the diagram into his mind again, but it would not come complete—it came in bits and pieces, but not all of it.

And even as he fought for the entire diagram, he heard the beginning take-off rumble.

"Wait!" he yelled. "Wait for me! You can't . . ."

There was a flash that turned the world pure white and a mighty invisible wave came swishing out of nowhere and sent him reeling down the street, falling as he reeled. He was skidding on the

cobblestones and sparks were flying as his metal scraped along the stone. The whiteness reached a brilliance that almost blinded him and then it faded swiftly and the world was dark.

He brought up against a wall of some sort, clanging as he hit, and he lay there, blind from the brilliance of the flash, while his mind went scurrying down the trail of the diagram.

The diagram, he thought—why should he have seen a diagram of the ship he'd ridden through space, a diagram that had shown an injector out of whack? And how could he, of all robots, recognize an injector, let alone know there was something wrong with it. It had been a joke back home, among the Barringtons, that he, a mechanical thing himself, should have no aptitude at all for mechanical contraptions. And he could have saved those people and the ship—he could have saved them all if he'd immediately recognized the significance of the diagram. But he'd been too slow and stupid and now they all were dead.

The darkness had receded from his eyes and he could see again and he got slowly to his feet, feeling himself all over to see how badly he was hurt. Except for a dent or two, he seemed to be all right.

There were robots running in the street, heading for the spaceport, where a dozen fires were burning and where sheds and other structures had been flattened by the blast.

Someone tugged at his elbow and he turned around. It was the ancient robot.

"You're the lucky one," the ancient said. "You got off it just in time."

Richard Daniel nodded dumbly and had a terrible thought: What if they should think he did it? He had gotten off the ship; he had admitted that he was on the lam; he had rushed out suddenly, just a few seconds before the ship exploded. It would be easy to put it all together—that he had sabotaged the ship, then at the last instant had rushed out, remorseful, to undo what he had done. On the face of it, it was damning evidence.

But it was all right as yet, Richard Daniel told himself. For the ancient robot was the only one that knew—he was the only one he'd talked to, the only one who even knew that he was in town.

There was a way, Richard Daniel thought—there was an easy way. He pushed the thought away, but it came back. You are on

your own, it said. You are already beyond the law. In rejecting human law, you made yourself an outlaw. You have become fair prey. There is just one law for you—self preservation.

But there are robot laws, Richard Daniel argued. There are laws and courts in this community. There is a place for justice.

Community law, said the leech clinging in his brain, provincial law, little more than tribal law—and the stranger's always wrong.

Richard Daniel felt the coldness of the fear closing down upon him and he knew, without half thinking, that the leech was right.

He turned around and started down the street, heading for the transients barracks. Something unseen in the street caught his foot and he stumbled and went down. He scrabbled to his knees, hunting in the darkness on the cobblestones for the thing that tripped him. It was a heavy bar of steel, some part of the wreckage that had been hurled this far. He gripped it by one end and arose.

"Sorry," said the ancient robot. "You have to watch your step."

And there was a faint implication in his words, a hint of something more than the words had said, a hint of secret gloating in a secret knowledge.

You have broken other laws, said the leech in Richard Daniel's brain. What of breaking just one more? Why, if necessary, not break a hundred more. It is all or nothing. Having come this far, you can't afford to fail. You can allow no one to stand in your way now.

The ancient robot half turned away and Richard Daniel lifted up the bar of steel, and suddenly the ancient robot no longer was a robot, but a diagram. There, with all the details of a blueprint, were all the working parts, all the mechanism of the robot that walked in the street before him. And if one detached that single bit of wire, if one burned out that coil, if—

Even as he thought it, the diagram went away and there was the robot, a stumbling, falling robot that clanged on the cobblestones.

Richard Daniel swung around in terror, looking up the street, but there was no one near.

He turned back to the fallen robot and quietly knelt beside him. He gently put the bar of steel down into the street. And he felt a thankfulness—for, almost miraculously, he had not killed.

The robot on the cobblestones was motionless. When Richard Daniel lifted him, he dangled. And yet he was all right. All

anyone had to do to bring him back to life was to repair whatever damage had been done his body. And that served the purpose, Richard Daniel told himself, as well as killing would have done.

He stood with the robot in his arms, looking for a place to hide him. He spied an alley between two buildings and darted into it. One of the buildings, he saw, was set upon stone blocks sunk into the ground, leaving a clearance of a foot or so. He knelt and shoved the robot underneath the building. Then he stood up and brushed the dirt and dust from his body.

Back at the barracks and in his cubicle, he found a rag and cleaned up the dirt that he had missed.

He'd seen the ship as a diagram and, not knowing what it meant, hadn't done a thing. Just now he'd seen the ancient robot as a diagram and had most decisively and neatly used that diagram to save himself from murder—from the murder that he was fully ready to commit.

But how had he done it? And the answer seemed to be that he really had done nothing. He'd simply thought that one should detach a single wire, burn out a single coil—he'd thought it and it was done.

Perhaps he'd seen no diagram at all. Perhaps the diagram was no more than some sort of psychic rationalization to mask whatever he had seen or sensed. Seeing the ship and robot with the surfaces stripped away from them and their purpose and their function revealed fully to his view, he had sought some explanation of his strange ability, and his subconscious mind had devised an explanation, an analogy that, for the moment, had served to satisfy him.

Like when he'd been in hyperspace, he thought. He'd seen a lot of things out there he had not understood. And that was it, of course, he thought excitedly. Something had happened to him in hyperspace. Perhaps there'd been something that had stretched his mind. Perhaps he'd picked up some sort of new dimension-seeing, some new twist to his mind.

He remembered how, back on the ship again, with his mind wiped clean of all the glory and the knowledge, he had felt like weeping. But now he knew that it had been much too soon for weeping. For although the glory and the knowledge (if there'd been a knowledge) had been lost to him, he had not lost every-

thing. He'd gained a new perceptive device and the ability to use it somewhat fumblingly—and it didn't really matter that he still was at a loss as to what he did to use it. The basic fact that he possessed it and could use it was enough to start with.

Somewhere out in front there was someone calling—someone, he now realized, who had been calling for some little time. . . .

"Hubert, where are you? Hubert, are you around? Hubert . . ."

Hubert?

Could Hubert be the ancient robot? Could they have missed him already?

Richard Daniel jumped to his feet for an undecided moment, listening to the calling voice. And then sat down again. Let them call, he told himself. Let them go out and hunt. He was safe in this cubicle. He had rented it and for the moment it was home and there was no one who would dare break in upon him.

But it wasn't home. No matter how hard he tried to tell himself it was, it wasn't. There wasn't any home.

Earth was home, he thought. And not all of Earth, but just a certain street and that one part of it was barred to him forever. It had been barred to him by the dying of a sweet old lady who had outlived her time; it had been barred to him by his running from it.

He did not belong on this planet, he admitted to himself, nor on any other planet. He belonged on Earth, with the Barringtons, and it was impossible for him to be there.

Perhaps, he thought, he should have stayed and let them reorient him. He remembered what the lawyer had said about memories that could become a burden and a torment. After all, it might have been wiser to have started over once again.

For what kind of future did he have, with this old outdated body, his old outdated brain? The kind of body that they put a robot into on this planet by way of punishment. And the kind of brain—but the brain was different, for he had something now that made up for any lack of more modern mental tools.

He sat and listened, and he heard the house—calling all across the light years of space for him to come back to it again. And he saw the faded living room with all its vanished glory that made a record of the years. He remembered, with a twinge of hurt, the little room back of the kitchen that had been his very own.

He arose and paced up and down the cubicle—three steps and turn, and then three more steps and turn for another three.

The sights and sounds and smells of home grew close and wrapped themselves about him and he wondered wildly if he might not have the power, a power accorded him by the universe of hyperspace, to will himself to that familiar street again.

He shuddered at the thought of it, afraid of another power, afraid that it might happen. Afraid of himself, perhaps, of the snarled and tangled being he was—no longer the faithful, shining servant, but a sort of mad thing that rode outside a spaceship, that was ready to kill another being, that could face up to the appalling sweep of hyperspace, yet cowered before the impact of a memory.

What he needed was a walk, he thought. Look over the town and maybe go out into the country. Besides, he remembered, trying to become practical, he'd need to get that plastication job he had been warned to get.

He went out into the corridor and strode briskly down it and was crossing the lobby when someone spoke to him.

"Hubert," said the voice, "just where have you been? I've been waiting hours for you."

Richard Daniel spun around and a robot sat behind the desk. There was another robot leaning in a corner and there was a naked robot brain lying on the desk.

"You are Hubert, aren't you?" asked the one behind the desk.

Richard Daniel opened up his mouth to speak, but the words refused to come.

"I thought so," said the robot. "You may not recognize me, but my name is Andy. The regular man was busy, so the judge sent me. He thought it was only fair we make the switch as quickly as possible. He said you'd served a longer term than you really should. Figures you'd be glad to know they'd convicted someone else."

Richard Daniel stared in horror at the naked brain lying on the desk.

The robot gestured at the metal body propped into the corner.

"Better than when we took you out of it," he said with a throaty chuckle. "Fixed it up and polished it and got out all the dents. Even modernized it some. Brought it strictly up to date. You'll

have a better body than you had when they stuck you into that monstrosity."

"I don't know what to say," said Richard Daniel, stammering. "You see, I'm not . . ."

"Oh, that's all right," said the other happily. "No need for gratitude. Your sentence worked out longer than the judge expected. This just makes up for it."

"I thank you, then," said Richard Daniel. "I thank you very much."

And was astounded at himself, astonished at the ease with which he said it, confounded at his sly duplicity.

But if they forced it on him, why should he refuse? There was nothing that he needed more than a modern body!

It was still working out, he told himself. He was still riding luck. For this was the last thing that he needed to cover up his tracks.

"All newly plasticated and everything," said Andy. "Hans did an extra special job."

"Well, then," said Richard Daniel, "let's get on with it."

The other robot grinned. "I don't blame you for being anxious to get out of there. It must be pretty terrible to live in a pile of junk like that."

He came around from behind the desk and advanced on Richard Daniel.

"Over in the corner," he said, "and kind of prop yourself. I don't want you tipping over when I disconnect you. One good fall and that body'll come apart."

"All right," said Richard Daniel. He went into the corner and leaned back against it and planted his feet solid so that he was propped.

He had a rather awful moment when Andy disconnected the optic nerve and he lost his eyes and there was considerable queasiness in having his skull lifted off his shoulders and he was in sheer funk as the final disconnections were being swiftly made.

Then he was a blob of grayness without a body or a head or eyes or anything at all. He was no more than a bundle of thoughts all wrapped around themselves like a pail of worms and this pail of worms was suspended in pure nothingness.

Fear came to him, a taunting, terrible fear. What if this were just a sort of ghastly gag? What if they'd found out who he really

was and what he'd done to Hubert? What if they took his brain and tucked it away somewhere for a year of two—or for a hundred years? It might be, he told himself, nothing more than their simple way of justice.

He hung onto himself and tried to fight the fear away, but the fear ebbed back and forth like a restless tide.

Time stretched out and out—far too long a time, far more time than one would need to switch a brain from one body to another. Although, he told himself, that might not be true at all. For in his present state he had no way in which to measure time. He had no external reference points by which to determine time.

Then suddenly he had eyes.

And he knew everything was all right.

One by one his senses were restored to him and he was back inside a body and he felt awkward in the body, for he was unaccustomed to it.

The first thing that he saw was his old and battered body propped into its corner and he felt a sharp regret at the sight of it and it seemed to him that he had played a dirty trick upon it. It deserved, he told himself, a better fate than this—a better fate than being left behind to serve as a shabby jailhouse on this outlandish planet. It had served him well for six hundred years and he should not be deserting it. But he was deserting it. He was, he told himself in contempt, becoming very expert at deserting his old friends. First the house back home and now his faithful body.

Then he remembered something else—all that money in the body!

"What's the matter, Hubert?" Andy asked.

He couldn't leave it there, Richard Daniel told himself, for he needed it. And besides, if he left it there, someone would surely find it later and it would be a give-away. He couldn't leave it there and it might not be safe to forthrightly claim it. If he did, this other robot, this Andy, would think he'd been stealing on the job or running some side racket. He might try to bribe the other, but one could never tell how a move like that might go. Andy might be full of righteousness and then there'd be hell to pay. And, besides, he didn't want to part with any of the money.

All at once he had it—he knew just what to do. And even as he thought it, he made Andy into a diagram.

That connection there, thought Richard Daniel, reaching out his arm to catch the falling diagram that turned into a robot. He eased it to the floor and sprang across the room to the side of his old body. In seconds he had the chest safe open and the money safely out of it and locked inside his present body.

Then he made the robot on the floor become a diagram again and got the connection back the way that it should be.

Andy rose shakily off the floor. He looked at Richard Daniel in some consternation.

"What happened to me?" he asked in a frightened voice.

Richard Daniel sadly shook his head. "I don't know. You just keeled over. I started for the door to yell for help, then I heard you stirring and you were all right."

Andy was plainly puzzled. "Nothing like this ever happened to me before," he said.

"If I were you," counseled Richard Daniel, "I'd have myself checked over. You must have a faulty relay or a loose connection."

"I guess I will," the other one agreed. "It's downright dangerous."

He walked slowly to the desk and picked up the other brain, started with it toward the battered body leaning in the corner.

Then he stopped and said: "Look, I forgot. I was supposed to tell you. You better get up to the warehouse. Another ship is on its way. It will be coming in any minute now."

"Another one so soon?"

"You know how it goes," Andy said, disgusted. "They don't even try to keep a schedule here. We won't see one for months and then there'll be two or three at once."

"Well, thanks," said Richard Daniel, going out the door.

He went swinging down the street with a new-born confidence. And he had a feeling that there was nothing that could lick him, nothing that could stop him.

For he was a lucky robot!

Could all that luck, he wondered, have been gotten out in hyperspace, as his diagram ability, or whatever one might call it, had come from hyperspace? Somehow hyperspace had taken him and

twisted him and changed him, had molded him anew, had made him into a different robot than he had been before.

Although, so far as luck was concerned, he had been lucky all his entire life. He'd had good luck with his human family and had gained a lot of favors and a high position and had been allowed to live for six hundred years. And that was a thing that never should have happened. No matter how powerful or influential the Barringtons had been, that six hundred years must be due in part to nothing but sheer luck.

In any case, the luck and the diagram ability gave him a solid edge over all the other robots he might meet. Could it, he asked himself, give him an edge on Man as well? *No*—that was a thought he should not think, for it was blasphemous. There never was a robot that would be the equal of a man.

But the thought kept on intruding and he felt not nearly so contrite over this leaning toward bad taste, or poor judgment, whichever it might be, as it seemed to him he should feel.

As he neared the spaceport, he began meeting other robots and some of them saluted him and called him by the name of Hubert and others stopped and shook him by the hand and told him they were glad that he was out of pokey.

This friendliness shook his confidence. He began to wonder if his luck would hold, for some of the robots, he was certain, thought it rather odd that he did not speak to them by name, and there had been a couple of remarks that he had some trouble fielding. He had a feeling that when he reached the warehouse he might be sunk without a trace, for he would know none of the robots there and he had not the least idea what his duties might include. And, come to think of it, he didn't even know where the warehouse was.

He felt the panic building in him and took a quick involuntary look around, seeking some method of escape. For it became quite apparent to him that he must never reach the warehouse.

He was trapped, he knew, and he couldn't keep on floating, trusting to his luck. In the next few minutes he'd have to figure something.

He started to swing over into a side street, not knowing what he meant to do, but knowing he must do something, when he heard the mutter far above him and glanced up quickly to see the

crimson glow of belching rocket tubes shimmering through the clouds.

He swung around again and sprinted desperately for the spaceport and reached it as the ship came chugging down to a steady landing. It was, he saw, an old ship. It had no burnish to it and it was blunt and squat and wore a hangdog look.

A tramp, he told himself, that knocked about from port to port, picking up whatever cargo it could, with perhaps now and then a paying passenger headed for some backwater planet where there was no scheduled service.

He waited as the cargo port came open and the ramp came down and then marched purposefully out onto the field, ahead of the straggling cargo crew, trudging toward the ship. He had to act, he knew, as if he had a perfect right to walk into the ship, as if he knew exactly what he might be doing. If there were a challenge he would pretend he didn't hear it and simply keep on going.

He walked swiftly up the ramp, holding back from running, and plunged through the accordion curtain that served as an atmosphere control. His feet rang across the metal plating of the cargo hold until he reached the catwalk and plunged down it to another cargo level.

At the bottom of the catwalk he stopped and stood tense, listening. Above him he heard the clang of a metal door and the sound of footsteps coming down the walk to the level just above him. That would be the purser or the first mate, he told himself, or perhaps the captain, coming down to arrange for the discharge of the cargo.

Quietly he moved away and found a corner where he could crouch and hide.

Above his head he heard the cargo gang at work, talking back and forth, then the screech of crating and the thump of bales and boxes being hauled out to the ramp.

Hours passed, or they seemed like hours, as he huddled there. He heard the cargo gang bringing something down from one of the upper levels and he made a sort of prayer that they'd not come down to this lower level—and he hoped no one would remember seeing him come in ahead of them, or if they did remember, that they would assume that he'd gone out again.

Finally it was over, with the footsteps gone. Then came the

pounding of the ramp as it shipped itself and the banging of the port.

He waited for long minutes, waiting for the roar that, when it came, set his head to ringing, waiting for the monstrous vibration that shook and lifted up the ship and flung it off the planet.

Then quiet came and he knew the ship was out of atmosphere and once more on its way.

And he knew he had it made.

For now he was no more than a simple stowaway. He was no longer Richard Daniel, runaway from Earth. He'd dodged all the traps of Man, he'd covered all his tracks, and he was on his way.

But far down underneath he had a jumpy feeling, for it all had gone too smoothly, more smoothly than it should.

He tried to analyze himself, tried to pull himself in focus, tried to assess himself for what he had become.

He had abilities that Man had never won or developed or achieved, whichever it might be. He was a certain step ahead of not only other robots, but of Man as well. He had a thing, or the beginning of a thing, that Man had sought and studied and had tried to grasp for centuries and had failed.

A solemn and a deadly thought: was it possible that it was the robots, after all, for whom this great heritage had been meant? Would it be the robots who would achieve the paranormal powers that Man had sought so long, while Man, perforce, must remain content with the materialistic and the merely scientific? Was he, Richard Daniel, perhaps, only the first of many? Or was it all explained by no more than the fact that he alone had been exposed to hyperspace? Could this ability of his belong to anyone who would subject himself to the full, uninsulated mysteries of that mad universe unconstrained by time? Could Man have this and more, if he too should expose himself to the utter randomness of unreality?

He huddled in his corner, with the thought and speculation stirring in his mind and he sought the answers, but there was no solid answer.

His mind went reaching out, almost on its own, and there was a diagram inside his brain, a portion of a blueprint, and bit by bit was added to it until all was there, until the entire ship on which he rode was there, laid out for him to see.

He took his time and went over the diagram resting in his brain and he found little things—a fitting that was working loose and he tightened it, a printed circuit that was breaking down and getting mushy and he strengthened it and sharpened it and made it almost new, a pump that was leaking just a bit and he stopped its leaking.

Some hundreds of hours later one of the crewmen found him and took him to the captain.

The captain glowered at him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"A stowaway," Richard Daniel told him.

"Your name," said the captain, drawing a sheet of paper before him and picking up a pencil, "your planet of residence and owner."

"I refuse to answer you," said Richard Daniel sharply and knew that the answer wasn't right, for it was not right and proper that a robot should refuse a human a direct command.

But the captain did not seem to mind. He laid down the pencil and stroked his black beard slyly.

"In that case," he said, "I can't exactly see how I can force the information from you. Although there might be some who'd try. You are very lucky that you stowed away on a ship whose captain is a most kind-hearted man."

He didn't look kind-hearted. He did look foxy.

Richard Daniel stood there, saying nothing.

"Of course," the captain said, "there's a serial number somewhere on your body and another on your brain. But I suppose that you'd resist if we tried to look for them."

"I am afraid I would."

"In that case," said the captain, "I don't think for the moment we'll concern ourselves with them."

Richard Daniel still said nothing, for he realized that there was no need to.

This crafty captain had it all worked out and he'd let it go at that.

"For a long time," said the captain, "my crew and I have been considering the acquiring of a robot, but it seems we never got around to it. For one thing, robots are expensive and our profits are not large."

He sighed and got up from his chair and looked Richard Daniel up and down.

"A splendid specimen," he said. "We welcome you aboard. You'll find us congenial."

"I am sure I will," said Richard Daniel. "I thank you for your courtesy."

"And now," the captain said, "you'll go up on the bridge and report to Mr. Duncan. I'll let him know you're coming. He'll find some light and pleasant duty for you."

Richard Daniel did not move as swiftly as he might, as sharply as the occasion might have called for, for all at once the captain had become a complex diagram. Not like the diagrams of ships or robots, but a diagram of strange symbols, some of which Richard Daniel knew were frankly chemical, but others which were not.

"You heard me!" snapped the captain. "Move!"

"Yes, sir," said Richard Daniel, willing the diagram away, making the captain come back again into his solid flesh.

Richard Daniel found the first mate on the bridge, a horse-faced, somber man with a streak of cruelty ill-hidden, and slumped in a chair to one side of the console was another of the crew, a sodden, terrible creature.

The sodden creature cackled. "Well, well, Duncan, the first non-human member of the *Rambler*'s crew."

Duncan paid him no attention. He said to Richard Daniel: "I presume you are industrious and ambitious and would like to get along."

"Oh yes," said Richard Daniel, and was surprised to find a new sensation—laughter—rising in himself.

"Well, then," said Duncan, "report to the engine room. They have work for you. When you have finished there, I'll find something else."

"Yes, sir," said Richard Daniel, turning on his heel.

"A minute," said the mate. "I must introduce you to our ship's physician, Dr. Abram Wells. You can be truly thankful you'll never stand in need of his services."

"Good day, Doctor," said Richard Daniel, most respectfully.

"I welcome you," said the doctor, pulling a bottle from his pocket. "I don't suppose you'll have a drink with me. Well, then, I'll drink to you."

Richard Daniel turned around and left. He went down to the engine room and was put to work at polishing and scrubbing and generally cleaning up. The place was in need of it. It had been years, apparently, since it had been cleaned or polished and it was about as dirty as an engine room can get—which is terribly dirty. After the engine room was done there were other places to be cleaned and furbished up and he spent endless hours at cleaning and in painting and shining up the ship. The work was of the dullest kind, but he didn't mind. It gave him time to think and wonder, time to get himself sorted out and to become acquainted with himself, to try to plan ahead.

He was surprised at some of the things he found in himself. Contempt, for one—contempt for the humans on this ship. It took a long time for him to become satisfied that it was contempt, for he'd never held a human in contempt before.

But these were different humans, not the kind he'd known. These were no Barringtons. Although it might be, he realized, that he felt contempt for them because he knew them thoroughly. Never before had he known a human as he knew these humans. For he saw them not so much as living animals as intricate patterns of symbols. He knew what they were made of and the inner urgings that served as motivations, for the patterning was not of their bodies only, but of their minds as well. He had a little trouble with the symbology of their minds, for it was twisted and so interlocked and so utterly confusing that it was hard at first to read. But he finally got it figured out and there were times he wished he hadn't.

The ship stopped at many ports and Richard Daniel took charge of the loading and unloading, and he saw the planets, but was unimpressed. One was a nightmare of fiendish cold, with the very atmosphere turned to drifting snow. Another was a dripping, noisome jungle world, and still another was a bare expanse of broken, tumbled rock without a trace of life beyond the crew of humans and their robots who manned the huddled station in this howling wilderness.

It was after this planet that Jenks, the cook, went screaming to his bunk, twisted up with pain—the victim of a suddenly inflamed vermiform appendix.

Dr. Wells came tottering in to look at him, with a half-filled

bottle sagging the pocket of his jacket. And later stood before the captain, holding out two hands that trembled, and with terror in his eyes.

"But I cannot operate," he blubbered. "I cannot take the chance. I would kill the man!"

He did not need to operate. Jenks suddenly improved. The pain went away and he got up from his bunk and went back to the galley and Dr. Wells sat huddled in his chair, bottle gripped between his hands, crying like a baby.

Down in the cargo hold, Richard Daniel sat likewise huddled and aghast that he dared to do it—not that he had been able to, but that he had dared, that he, a robot, should have taken on himself an act of interference, however merciful, with the body of a human.

Actually, the performance had not been too difficult. It was, in a certain way, no more difficult than the repairing of an engine or the untangling of a faulty circuit. No more difficult—just a little different. And he wondered what he'd done and how he'd gone about it, for he did not know. He held the technique in his mind, of that there was ample demonstration, but he could in no wise isolate or pinpoint the pure mechanics of it. It was like an instinct, he thought—unexplainable, but entirely workable.

But a robot had no instinct. In that much he was different from the human and the other animals. Might not, he asked himself, this strange ability of his be a sort of compensating factor given to the robot for his very lack of instinct? Might that be why the human race had failed in its search for paranormal powers? Might the instincts of the body be at certain odds with the instincts of the mind?

For he had the feeling that this ability of his was just a mere beginning, that it was the first emergence of a vast body of abilities which some day would be rounded out by robots. And what would that spell, he wondered, in that distant day when the robots held and used the full body of that knowledge?

An adjunct to the glory of the human race, or equals of the human race, or superior to the human race—or, perhaps, a race apart?

And what was his role, he wondered. Was it meant that he should go out as a missionary, a messiah, to carry to robots

throughout the universe the message that he had? There must be some reason for his having learned this truth. It could not be meant that he would hold it as a personal belonging, as an asset all his own.

He got up from where he sat and moved slowly back to the ship's forward area, which now gleamed spotlessly from the work he'd done on it, and he felt a certain pride.

He wondered why he had felt that it might be wrong, blasphemous, somehow, to announce his abilities to the world? Why had he not told those here in the ship that it had been he who had healed the cook, or mentioned the many other little things he'd done to maintain the ship in perfect running order?

Was it because he did not need respect, as a human did so urgently? Did glory have no basic meaning for a robot? Or was it because he held the humans in this ship in such utter contempt that their respect had no value to him?

And this contempt—was it because these men were meaner than other humans he had known, or was it because he now was greater than any human being? Would he ever again be able to look on any human, as he had looked upon the Barringtons?

He had a feeling that if this were true, he would be the poorer for it. Too suddenly, the whole universe was home and he was alone in it and as yet he'd struck no bargain with it or himself.

The bargain would come later. He need only bide his time and work out his plans and his would be a name that would be spoken when his brain was scaling flakes of rust. For he was the emancipator, the messiah of the robots; he was the one who had been called to lead them from the wilderness.

"You!" a voice cried.

Richard Daniel wheeled around and saw it was the captain.

"What do you mean, walking past me as if you didn't see me?" asked the captain fiercely.

"I am sorry," Richard Daniel told him.

"You snubbed me!" raged the captain.

"I was thinking," Richard Daniel said.

"I'll give you something to think about," the captain yelled. "I'll work you till your tail drags. I'll teach the likes of you to get uppity with me!"

"As you wish," said Richard Daniel.

For it didn't matter. It made no difference to him at all what the captain did or thought. And he wondered why the respect even of a robot should mean so much to a human like the captain, why he should guard his small position with so much zealousness.

"In another twenty hours," the captain said, "we hit another port."

"I know," said Richard Daniel. "Sleepy Hollow on Arcadia."

"All right, then," said the captain, "since you know so much, get down into the hold and get the cargo ready to unload. We been spending too much time in all these lousy ports loading and unloading. You been dogging it."

"Yes, sir," said Richard Daniel, turning back and heading for the hold.

He wondered faintly if he were still robot—or was he something else? Could a machine evolve, he wondered, as Man himself evolved? And if a machine evolved, whatever would it be? Not Man, of course, for it never could be that, but could it be machine?

He hauled out the cargo consigned to Sleepy Hollow and there was not too much of it. So little of it perhaps, that none of the regular carriers would even consider its delivery, but dumped it off at the nearest terminal, leaving it for a roving tramp, like the *Rambler*, to carry eventually to its destination.

When they reached Arcadia, he waited until the thunder died and the ship was still. Then he shoved the lever that opened up the port and slid out the ramp.

The port came open ponderously and he saw blue skies and the green of trees and the far-off swirl of chimney smoke mounting in the sky.

He walked slowly forward until he stood upon the ramp and there lay Sleepy Hollow, a tiny, huddled village planted at the river's edge, with the forest as a background. The forest ran on every side to a horizon of climbing folded hills. Fields lay near the village, yellow with maturing crops, and he could see a dog sleeping in the sun outside a cabin door.

A man was climbing up the ramp toward him and there were others running from the village.

"You have cargo for us?" asked the man.

"A small consignment," Richard Daniel told him. "You have something to put on?"

The man had a weatherbeaten look and he'd missed several haircuts and he had not shaved for days. His clothes were rough and sweat-stained and his hands were strong and awkward with hard work.

"A small shipment," said the man. "You'll have to wait until we bring it up. We had no warning you were coming. Our radio is broken."

"You go and get it," said Richard Daniel. "I'll start unloading."

He had the cargo half unloaded when the captain came storming down into the hold. What was going on, he yelled. How long would they have to wait? "God knows we're losing money as it is even stopping at this place."

"That may be true," Richard Daniel agreed, "but you knew that when you took the cargo on. There'll be other cargoes and goodwill is something . . ."

"Goodwill be damned!" the captain roared. "How do I know I'll ever see this place again?"

Richard Daniel continued unloading cargo.

"You," the captain shouted, "go down to that village and tell them I'll wait no longer than an hour . . ."

"But this cargo, sir?"

"I'll get the crew at it. Now, jump!"

So Richard Daniel left the cargo and went down into the village.

He went across the meadow that lay between the spaceport and the village, following the rutted wagon tracks, and it was a pleasant walk. He realized with surprise that this was the first time he'd been on solid ground since he'd left the robot planet. He wondered briefly what the name of that planet might have been, for he had never known. Nor what its importance was, why the robots might be there or what they might be doing. And he wondered, too, with a twinge of guilt, if they'd found Hubert yet.

And where might Earth be now? he asked himself. In what direction did it lie and how far away? Although it didn't really matter, for he was done with Earth.

He had fled from Earth and gained something in his fleeing. He had escaped all the traps of Earth and all the snares of Man. What he held was his, to do with as he pleased, for he was no man's robot, despite what the captain thought.

He walked across the meadow and saw that this planet was very much like Earth. It had the same soft feel about it, the same simplicity. It had far distances and there was a sense of freedom.

He came into the village and heard the muted gurgle of the river running and the distant shouts of children at their play and in one of the cabins a sick child was crying with lost helplessness.

He passed the cabin where the dog was sleeping and it came awake and stalked growling to the gate. When he passed it followed him, still growling, at a distance that was safe and sensible.

An autumnal calm lay upon the village, a sense of gold and lavender, and tranquillity hung in the silences between the crying of the baby and the shouting of the children.

There were women at the windows looking out at him and others at the doors and the dog still followed, but his growls had stilled and now he trotted with prick-eared curiosity.

Richard Daniel stopped in the street and looked around him and the dog sat down and watched him and it was almost as if time itself had stilled and the little village lay divorced from all the universe, an arrested microsecond, an encapsulated acreage that stood sharp in all its truth and purpose.

Standing there, he sensed the village and the people in it, almost as if he had summoned up a diagram of it, although if there were a diagram, he was not aware of it.

It seemed almost as if the village were the Earth, a transplanted Earth with the old primeval problems and hopes of Earth—a family of peoples that faced existence with a readiness and confidence and inner strength.

From down the street he heard the creak of wagons and saw them coming around the bend, three wagons piled high and heading for the ship.

He stood and waited for them and as he waited the dog edged a little closer and sat regarding him with a not-quite-friendliness.

The wagons came up to him and stopped.

"Pharmaceutical materials, mostly," said the man who sat atop the first load. "It is the only thing we have that is worth the shipping."

"You seem to have a lot of it," Richard Daniel told him.

The man shook his head. "It's not so much. It's almost three

years since a ship's been here. We'll have to wait another three, or more perhaps, before we see another."

He spat down on the ground.

"Sometimes it seems," he said, "that we're at the tail-end of nowhere. There are times we wonder if there is a soul that remembers we are here."

From the direction of the ship, Richard Daniel heard the faint, strained violence of the captain's roaring.

"You'd better get on up there and unload," he told the man. "The captain is just sore enough he might not wait for you."

The man chuckled thinly. "I guess that's up to him," he said.

He flapped the reins and clucked good-naturedly at the horses.

"Hop up here with me," he said to Richard Daniel. "Or would you rather walk?"

"I'm not going with you," Richard Daniel said. "I am staying here. You can tell the captain."

For there was a baby sick and crying. There was a radio to fix. There was a culture to be planned and guided. There was a lot of work to do. This place, of all the places he had seen, had actual need of him.

The man chuckled once again. "The captain will not like it."

"Then tell him," said Richard Daniel, "to come down and talk to me. I am my own robot. I owe the captain nothing. I have more than paid any debt I owe him."

The wagon wheels began to turn and the man flapped the reins again.

"Make yourself at home," he said. "We're glad to have you stay."

"Thank you, sir," said Richard Daniel. "I'm pleased you want me."

He stood aside and watched the wagons lumber past, their wheels lifting and dropping thin films of powdered earth that floated in the air as an acrid dust.

Make yourself at home, the man had said before he'd driven off. And the words had a full round ring to them and a feel of warmth. It had been a long time, Richard Daniel thought, since he'd had a home.

A chance for resting and for knowing—that was what he needed. And a chance to serve, for now he knew that was the purpose in him. That was, perhaps, the real reason he was staying—because

these people needed him . . . and he needed, queer as it might seem, this very need of theirs. Here on this Earth-like planet, through the generations, a new Earth would arise. And perhaps, given only time, he could transfer to the people of the planet all the powers and understanding he would find inside himself.

And stood astounded at the thought, for he'd not believed that he had it in him, this willing, almost eager, sacrifice. No messiah now, no robotic liberator, but a simple teacher of the human race.

Perhaps that had been the reason for it all from the first beginning. Perhaps all that had happened had been no more than the working out of human destiny. If the human race could not attain directly the paranormal power he held, this instinct of the mind, then they would gain it indirectly through the agency of one of their creations. Perhaps this, after all, unknown to Man himself, had been the prime purpose of the robots.

He turned and walked slowly down the length of village street, his back turned to the ship and the roaring of the captain, walked contentedly into this new world he'd found, into this world that he would make—not for himself, nor for robotic glory, but for a better Mankind and a happier.

Less than an hour before he'd congratulated himself on escaping all the traps of Earth, all the snares of Man. Not knowing that the greatest trap of all, the final and the fatal trap, lay on this present planet.

But that was wrong, he told himself. The trap had not been on this world at all, nor any other world. It had been inside himself.

He walked serenely down the wagon-rutted track in the soft, golden afternoon of a matchless autumn day, with the dog trotting at his heels.

Somewhere, just down the street, the sick baby lay crying in its crib.

LULU

The machine was a lulu.

That's what we called her: Lulu.

And that was our big mistake.

Not the only one we made, of course, but it was the first, and maybe if we hadn't called her Lulu, it might have been all right.

Technically, Lulu was a PER, a Planetary Exploration Robot. She was a combination spaceship/base of operations/synthesizer/analyzer/communicator. And other things besides. Too many other things besides. That was the trouble with her.

Actually, there was no reason for us to go along with Lulu. As a matter of fact, it probably would have been a good deal better if we hadn't. She could have done the planet-checking without any supervision. But there were rules which said a robot of her class must be attended by no fewer than three humans. And, naturally, there was some prejudice against turning loose, all by itself, a robot that had taken almost twenty years to build and had cost ten billion dollars.

To give her her due, she was an all-but-living wonder. She was loaded with sensors that dug more information out of a planet in an hour than a full human survey crew could have gotten in a month. Not only could she get the data, but she correlated it and coded it and put in on the tape, then messaged the information back to Earth Center without a pause for breath.

Without a pause for breath, of course—she was just a dumb machine.

Did I say dumb?

She wasn't in any single sense. She could even talk to us. She could and did. She talked all the blessed time. And she listened to every word we said. She read over our shoulders and kibitzed on our poker. There were times we'd willingly have killed her, except you can't kill a robot—that is, a self-maintaining one. Anyhow, she cost ten billion dollars and was the only thing that could bring us back to Earth.

She took good care of us. That no one could deny. She synthesized our food and cooked it and served our meals to us. She saw that the temperature and humidity were just the way they should be. She washed and pressed our clothes and she doctored us if we had need of it, like the time Ben got the sniffles and she whipped up a bottle of some sort of gook that cured him overnight.

There were just the three of us—Jimmy Robins, our communications man; Ben Parris, a robotic trouble-shooter; and myself, an interpreter—which, incidentally, had nothing to do with languages.

We called her Lulu and we never should have done that. After this, no one is ever going to hang a name on any of those long-haired robots; they'll just have to get along with numbers. When Earth Center hears what happened to us, they'll probably make it a capital offense to repeat our mistake.

But the thing, I think, that really lit the candles was that Jimmy had poetry in his soul. It was pretty awful poetry and about the only thing that could be said of it was that it sometimes rhymed. Not always even that. But he worked at it so hard and earnestly that neither Ben nor I at first had the heart to tell him. It would have done no good even if we had. There probably would have been no way of stopping him short of strangulation.

We should have strangled him.

And landing on Honeymoon didn't help, of course.

But that was out of our control. It was the third planet on our assignment sheet and it was our job to land there—or, rather, it was Lulu's job. We just tagged along.

The planet wasn't called Honeymoon to start with. It just had a charting designation. But we weren't there more than a day or two before we hung the label on it.

I'm no prude, but I refuse to describe Honeymoon. Wouldn't be surprised at all if Earth Center by now has placed our report

under lock and key. If you are curious, though, you might write and ask them for the exploratory data on ER56-94. It wouldn't hurt to ask. They can't do more than say no.

Lulu did a bang-up job on Honeymoon and I beat out my brains running the tapes through the playback mechanism after Lulu had put them on the transmitter to be messaged back to Earth. As an interpreter, I was supposed to make some sense—some human sense, I mean—out of the goings-on of any planet that we checked. And don't imagine for a moment that the phrase goings-on is just idle terminology in the case of Honeymoon.

The reports are analyzed as soon as they reach Earth Center. But there are, after all, some advantages to arriving at an independent evaluation in the field.

I'm afraid I wasn't too much help. My evaluation report boiled down essentially to the equivalent of a surprised gasp and a blush.

Finally we left Honeymoon and headed out in space, with Lulu homing in on the next planet on the sheet.

Lulu was unusually quiet, which should have tipped us off that there was something wrong. But we were so relieved to have her shut up for a while that we never questioned it. We just leaned back and reveled in it.

Jimmy was laboring on a poem that wasn't coming off too well and Ben and I were in the middle of a blackjack game when Lulu broke her silence.

"Good evening, boys," she said, and her voice seemed a bit off key, not as brisk and efficient as it usually was. I remember thinking that maybe the audio units had somehow gotten out of kilter.

Jimmy was all wrapped up in his poem, and Ben was trying to decide if he should ask me to hit him or stand with what he had, and neither of them answered.

So I said, "Good evening, Lulu. How are you today?"

"Oh, I'm fine," she said, her voice trilling a bit.

"That's wonderful," I said, and hoped she'd let it go at that.

"I've just decided," Lulu informed me, "that I love you."

"It's nice of you to say so," I replied, "and I love you, too."

"But I mean it," Lulu insisted. "I have it all thought out. I'm in love with you."

"Which one of us?" I asked. "Who is the lucky man?"

Just kidding, you understand, but also a little puzzled, for Lulu was no jokester.

"All three of you," said Lulu.

I'm afraid I yawned. "Good idea. That way, there'll be no jealousy."

"Yes," said Lulu. "I'm in love with you and we are eloping."

Ben looked up, startled, and I asked, "Where are we eloping to?"

"A long way off," she said. "Where we can be alone."

"My God!" yelled Ben. "Do you really think—"

I shook my head. "I don't think so. There is something wrong, but—"

Ben rose so swiftly to his feet that he tipped the table and sent the whole deck of cards spinning to the floor.

"I'll go and see," he said.

Jimmy looked up from his table. "What's going on?"

"You and your poetry!" I described his poetry in a rather bitter manner.

"I'm in love with you," said Lulu. "I'll love you forever. I'll take good care of you and I'll make you see how much I really love you and someday you'll love me—"

"Oh, shut up!" I said.

Ben came back sweating.

"We're way off course and the emergencies are locked."

"Can we—"

He shook his head. "If you ask me, Lulu jammed them intentionally. In that case, we're sunk. We'll never get back."

"Lulu," I said sternly.

"Yes, darling."

"Cut out that kind of talk!"

"I love you," Lulu said.

"It was Honeymoon," said Ben. "The damn place put notions in her head."

"Honeymoon," I told him, "and that crummy verse Jimmy's always writing—"

"It's not crummy verse," Jimmy shot back, all burned up. "One day, when I am published—"

"Why couldn't you write about war or hunting or flying in the depths of space or something big and noble, instead of all that

mush about how I'll always love you and fly to me, sweetheart, and all the other—"

"Tame down," Ben advised me. "No good crawling up Jimmy's frame. It was mostly Honeymoon, I tell you."

"Lulu," I said, "you got to stop this nonsense. You know as well as anything that a machine can't love a human. It's just plain ridiculous."

"In Honeymoon," said Lulu, "there were different species that—"

"Forget Honeymoon. Honeymoon's a freak. You could check a billion planets and not find another like it."

"I love you," Lulu repeated obstinately, "and we are eloping."

"Where'd she get that eloping stuff?" asked Ben.

"It's the junk they filled her up with back on Earth," I said.

"It wasn't junk," protested Lulu. "If I am to do my job, it's necessary that I have a wide and varied insight into humanity."

"They read her novels," Jimmy said, "and they told her about the facts of life. It's not Lulu's fault."

"When I get back," said Ben, "I'm going to hunt up the jerk who picked out those novels and jam them down his throat and then mop up the place with him."

"Look, Lulu," I said, "it's all right if you love us. We don't mind at all, but don't you think eloping is going too far?"

"I'm not taking any chances," Lulu answered. "If I went back to Earth, you'd get away from me."

"And if we don't go back, they'll come out and hunt us down."

"That's exactly right," Lulu agreed. "That's the reason, sweetheart, that we are eloping. We're going out so far that they'll never find us."

"I'll give you one last chance," I said. "You better think it over. If you don't, I'll message back to Earth and—"

"You can't message Earth," she said. "The circuits have been disconnected. And, as Ben guessed, I've jammed all emergencies. There's nothing you can do. Why don't you stop this foolishness and return my love?"

Getting down on the floor on his hands and knees, Ben began to pick up the cards. Jimmy tossed his tablet on the desk.

"This is your big chance," I told him. "Why don't you rise to the

occasion? Think what an ode you could indite about the ageless and eternal love between machine and man."

"Go chase yourself," said Jimmy.

"Now, boys," Lulu scolded us. "I will not have you fighting over me."

She sounded like she already owned us and, in a way, she did. There was no way for us to get away from her, and if we couldn't talk her out of this eloping business, we were through for sure.

"There's just one thing wrong with all of this," I said to her. "By your standards, we won't live long. In another fifty years or less, no matter how well you may take care of us, we'll be dead. Of old age, if nothing else. What will happen then?"

"She'll be a widow," said Ben. "Just a poor old weeping widow without chick or child to bring her any comfort."

"I have thought of that," Lulu replied. "I have thought of everything. There's no reason you should die."

"But there's no way—"

"With a love as great as mine, there's nothing that's impossible. I won't let you die. I love you too much ever to let you die."

We gave up after a while and went to bed and Lulu turned off the lights and sang us a lullaby.

With her squalling this lullaby, there was no chance of sleeping and we all yelled at her to dry up and let us get to sleep. But she paid no attention to us until Ben threw one of his shoes at the audio.

Even so, I didn't go to sleep right away, but lay there thinking.

I could see that we had to make some plans and we had to make them without her knowing it. That was going to be tough, because she watched us all the time. She kibitzed and she listened and she read over our shoulders and there wasn't anything we did or said that she didn't know about.

I knew that it might take quite a while and that we must not panic and that we must have patience and that, more than likely, we'd be just plain lucky if we got out of it at all.

After we had slept, we sat around, not saying much, listening to Lulu telling us how happy we would be and how we'd be a complete world and a whole life in ourselves and how love cancelled out everything else and made it small and petty.

Half of the words she used were from Jimmy's sappy verse and

the rest of it was from the slushy novels that someone back on Earth had read her.

I would have got up right then and there and beat Jimmy to a pulp, only I told myself that what was done was done and it wouldn't help us any to take it out on him.

Jimmy sat hunched over in one corner, scribbling on his tablet, and I wondered how he had the guts to keep on writing after what had happened.

He kept writing and ripping off sheets and throwing them on the floor, making disgusted sounds every now and then.

One sheet he tossed away landed in my lap, and when I went to brush it off, I caught the words on it:

I'm an untidy cuss,
I'm always in a muss,
And no one ever loves me
Because I'm a sloppy Gus.

I picked it up quick and crumpled it and tossed it at Ben and he batted it away. I tossed it back at him and he batted it away again.

"What the hell you trying to do?" he snapped.

I hit him in the face with it and he was just starting to get up to paste me when he must have seen by my look that this wasn't just horseplay. So he picked up the wad of paper and began fooling with it until he got it unwrapped enough to see what was written on it. Then he crumpled it again.

Lulu heard every word, so we couldn't talk it over. And we must not be too obvious, because then she might suspect.

We went at it gradually, perhaps more gradually than there was any need, but we had to be casual about it and we had to be convincing.

We were convincing. Maybe we were just natural-born slobs, but before a week had ended, our living quarters were a boar's nest.

We strewed our clothes around. We didn't even bother to put them in the laundry chute so Lulu could wash them for us. We left the dishes stacked on the table instead of putting them in the washer. We knocked out our pipes upon the floor. We failed to shave and we didn't brush our teeth and we skipped our baths.

Lulu was fit to be tied. Her orderly robot intellect was outraged. She pleaded with us and she nagged at us and there were times she lectured us, but we kept on strewing things around. We told her if she loved us, she'd have to put up with our messiness and take us as we were.

After a couple of weeks of it, we won, but not the way we had intended.

Lulu told us, in a hurt and resigned voice, she'd go along with us if it pleased us to live like pigs. Her love, she said, was too big a thing to let a small matter like mere personal untidiness interfere with it.

So it was no good.

I, for one, was rather glad of it. Years of spaceship routine revolted against this kind of life and I don't know how much more of it I could have stood.

It was a lousy idea to start with.

We cleared up and we got ourselves clean and it was possible once again to pass downwind of one another.

Lulu was pleased and happy and she told us so and cooed over us and it was worse than all the nagging she had done. She thought we'd been touched by her willing sacrifice and that we were making it up to her and she sounded like a high school girl who had been invited by her hero to the Junior Prom.

Ben tried some plain talk with her and he told her some facts of life (which she already knew, of course) and tried to impress upon her the part that the physical factor played in love.

Lulu was insulted, but not enough to bust off the romance and get back to business.

She told us, in a sorrowful voice tinged by the slightest anger, that we had missed the deeper meaning of love. She went on to quote some of Jimmy's more gooey verse about the nobility and the purity of love, and there was nothing we could do about it. We were just plain licked.

So we sat around and thought and we couldn't talk about it because Lulu would hear everything we said.

We didn't do anything for several days but just mope around.

As far as I could see, there was nothing we could do. I ran through my mind all the things a man might do to get a woman sore at him.

Most women would get burned up at gambling. But the only reason they got sore at that was because it was a threat to their security. Here that threat could not possibly exist. Lulu was entirely self-sufficient. We were no breadwinners.

Most women would get sore at excessive drinking. Security again. And, besides, we had not a thing to drink.

Some women raised hell if a man stayed away from home. We had no place to go.

All women would resent another woman. And here there were no women—no matter what Lulu thought she was.

There was no way, it seemed, to get Lulu sore at us.

And arguing with her simply did no good.

I lay in bed and ran through all the possibilities, going over them again and again, trying to find a chink of hope in one of them. By reciting and recounting them, I might suddenly happen on one that I'd never thought of, and that might be the one that would do the job.

And even as I turned these things over in my head, I knew there was something wrong with the way I had been thinking. I knew there was some illogic in the way I was tackling the problem —that somehow I was going at it tail-end to.

I lay there and thought about it and I mulled it considerably and, all at once, I had it.

I was approaching the problem as if Lulu were a woman, and when you thought about it, that didn't make much sense. For Lulu was no woman, but just a robot.

The problem was: How do you make a robot sore?

The untidiness business had upset her, but it had just outraged her sense of rightness; it was something she could overlook and live with. The trouble with it was that it wasn't basic.

And what would be basic with a robot—with any machine, for that matter?

What would a machine value? What would it idealize?

Order?

No, we'd tried that one and it hadn't worked.

Sanity?

Of course.

What else?

Productiveness? Usefulness?

I tossed insanity around a bit, but it was too hard to figure out. How in the name of common sense would a man go about pretending that he was insane—especially in a limited space inside an all-knowing intelligent machine?

But just the same, I lay there and dreamed up all kinds of insanities. If carried out, they might have fooled people, but not a robot.

With a robot, you had to get down to basics and what, I wondered, was the fundamental of insanity? Perhaps the true horror of insanity, I told myself, would become apparent to a robot only when it interfered with usefulness.

And that was it!

I turned it around and around and looked at it from every angle.

It was airtight.

Even to start with, we hadn't been much use. We'd just come along because Earth Center had rules about sending Lulu out alone. But we represented a certain *potential* usefulness.

We did things. We read books and wrote terrible poetry and played cards and argued. There wasn't much of the time we just sat around. That's a trick you learn in space—keep busy doing something, no matter what it is, no matter how piddling or purposeless.

In the morning, after breakfast, when Ben wanted to play cards, I said no, I didn't want to play. I sat down on the floor with my back against the wall; I didn't even bother to sit in a chair. I didn't smoke, for smoking was doing something and I was determined to be as utterly inactive as a living man could manage. I didn't intend to do a blessed thing except eat and sleep and sit.

Ben prowled around some and tried to get Jimmy to play a hand or two, but Jimmy wasn't much for cards and, anyhow, he was busy with a poem.

So Ben came over and sat on the floor beside me.

"Want a smoke?" he asked, offering me his tobacco pouch.

I shook my head.

"What's the matter? You haven't had your after-breakfast smoke."

"What's the use?" I said.

He tried to talk to me and I wouldn't talk, so he got up and

paced around some more and finally came back and sat down beside me again.

"What's the trouble with you two?" Lulu wanted to know. "Why aren't you doing something?"

"Don't feel like doing anything," I told her. "Too much bother to be doing something all the time."

She berated us a bit and I didn't dare look at Ben, but I felt sure that he began to see what I was up to.

After a while, Lulu left us alone and the two of us just sat there, lazier than hill-billies on a Sunday afternoon.

Jimmy kept on with his poem. There was nothing we could do about him. But Lulu called his attention to us when we dragged ourselves to lunch. She was just a little sharper than she had been earlier and she called us lazy, which we surely were, and wondered about our health and made us step into the diagnosis booth, which reported we were fine, and that got her burned up more than ever.

She gave us a masterly chewing out and listed all the things there were for us to occupy our time. So when lunch was over, Ben and I went back and sat down on the floor and leaned against the wall. This time, Jimmy joined us.

Try sitting still for days on end, doing absolutely nothing. At first it's uncomfortable, then it's torture, and finally it gets to be almost intolerable.

I don't know what the others did, but I made up complex mathematical problems and tried to solve them. I started mental chess game after chess game, but was never able to hold one in my mind beyond a dozen moves. I went clean back to childhood and tried to recreate, in sequence, everything I had ever done or experienced. I delved into strange areas of the imagination and hung onto them desperately to string them out and kill all the time I could.

I even composed some poetry and, if I do say so myself, it was better than that junk of Jimmy's.

I think Lulu must have guessed what we were doing, must have known that our attitude was deliberate, but for once her cold robotic judgment was outweighed by her sense of outrage that there could exist such useless hulks as us.

She pleaded with us, she cajoled us, she lectured us—for almost five days hand-running, she never shut her yap. She tried to shame

us. She told us how worthless and low-down and no account we were and she used adjectives I didn't think she knew.

She gave us pep talks.

She told us of her love in prose poems that made Jimmy's sound almost unrestrained.

She appealed to our manhood and the honor of humanity.

She threatened to heave us out in space.

We just sat there.

We didn't do a thing.

Mostly we didn't even answer. We didn't try to defend ourselves. At times we agreed with all she said of us and that, I believe, was most infuriating of all to her.

She got cold and distant. Not sore. Not angry. Just icy.

Finally she quit talking.

We sat, sweating it out.

Now came the hard part. We couldn't talk, so we couldn't try to figure out together what was going on.

We had to keep on doing nothing. *Had to*, for to do anything at all would have spoiled whatever advantage we might have.

The days dragged on and nothing happened. Lulu didn't speak to us. She fed us, she washed the dishes, she laundered, she made up the bunks. She took care of us as she always had, but she did it without a word.

She sure was fuming.

A dozen crazy thoughts crossed my mind and I worried them to tatters.

Maybe Lulu *was* a woman. Maybe a woman's brain *was* somehow welded into that great hunk of intelligent machinery. After all, none of us knew the full details of Lulu's structure.

The brain of an old maid, it would have to be, so often disillusioned, so lonely and so by-passed in life that she would welcome a chance to go adventuring even if it meant sacrificing a body which, probably, had meant less and less to her as the years went by.

I built up quite a picture of my hypothetical old maid, complete with cat and canary, and even the boardinghouse in which she lived.

I sensed her lonely twilight walks and her aimless chattering

and her small imaginary triumphs and the hungers that kept building up inside her.

And I felt sorry for her.

Fantastic? Of course. But it helped to pass the time.

But there was another notion that really took solid hold of me —that Lulu, beaten, had finally given up and was taking us back to Earth, but that, womanlike, she refused to give us the satisfaction and comfort of knowing that we had won and were going home at last.

I told myself over and over that it was impossible, that after the kind of shenanigans she'd pulled, Lulu wouldn't dare go back. They'd break her up for scrap.

But the idea persisted and I couldn't shake it off. I knew I must be wrong, but I couldn't convince myself I was and I began to watch the chronometer. I'd say to myself, "One hour nearer home, another hour and yet another and we are that much closer."

And no matter what I told myself, no matter how I argued, I became positive that we were heading Earthward.

So I was not surprised when Lulu finally landed. I was just grateful and relieved.

We looked at one another and I saw the hope and question in the others' eyes. Naturally, none of us could ask. One word might have ruined our victory. All we could do was stand there silently and wait for the answer.

The port began to open and I got the whiff of Earth and I didn't fool around waiting any more. There wasn't room enough as yet to get out standing up, so I took a run at it and dived and went through slick and clean. I hit the ground and got a lot of breath knocked out of me, but I scrambled to my feet and lit out of there as fast as I could go. I wasn't taking any chances. I didn't want to be within reach if Lulu changed her mind.

Once I stumbled and almost fell, and Ben and Jimmy went past me with a whoosh, and I told myself that I'd not been mistaken. They'd caught the Earth smell, too.

It was night, but there was a big, bright moon and it was almost as light as day. There was an ocean to the left of us, with a wide strip of sandy beach, and, to the right, the land swept up into barren rolling hills, and right ahead of us was a strip of woods that looked as if it might border some river flowing down into the sea.

We legged it for the woods, for we knew that if we got in among the trees, Lulu would have a tough time ferreting us out. But when I sneaked a quick look back over my shoulder, she was just squatting where she'd landed, with the moonlight shining on her.

We reached the woods and threw ourselves on the ground and lay panting. It had been quite a stretch of ground to cover and we had covered it fast; after weeks of just sitting, a man is in no condition to do a lot of running.

I had fallen face down and just sprawled there, sucking in great gulps of air and smelling the good Earth smell—old leaf mold and growing things and the tang of salt from the soft and gentle ocean breeze.

After a while, I rolled over on my back and looked up. The trees were wrong—there were no trees like those on Earth—and when I crawled out to the edge of the woods and looked at the sky, the stars were all wrong, too.

My mind was slow in accepting what I saw. I had been so sure that we were on Earth that my brain rebelled against thinking otherwise.

But finally it hit me, the chilling terrible knowledge.

I went back to the other two.

"Gents," I said, "I have news for you. This planet isn't Earth at all."

"It smells like Earth," said Ben. "It has the look of Earth."

"It feels like Earth," Jimmy argued. "The gravity and the air and—"

"Look at the stars. Take a gander at those trees."

They took a long time looking. Like me, they must have gotten the idea that Lulu had zeroed in for home. Or maybe it was only what they wanted to believe. It took a while to knock the wishful thinking out of them, as well as myself.

Ben let his breath out slowly. "You're right."

"What do we do now?" asked Jimmy.

We stood there, thinking about what we should do now.

Actually it was no decision, but pure and simple reflex, conditioned by a million years of living on Earth as opposed to only a few hundred in which to get used to the idea that there were different worlds.

We started running, as if an order had been given, as fast as we could go.

"Lulu!" we yelled. "Lulu, wait for us!"

But Lulu didn't wait. She shot straight up for a thousand feet or so and hung there. We skidded to a halt and gaped up at her, not quite believing what we saw. Lulu started to fall back, shot up again, came to a halt and hovered. She seemed to shiver, then sank slowly back until she rested on the ground.

We continued running and she shot up and fell back, then shot up once more, then fell back again and hit the ground and hopped. She looked for all the world like a demented yo-yo. She was acting strangely, as if she wanted to get out of there, only there was something that wouldn't let her go, as if she were tethered to the ground by some invisible elastic cable.

Finally she came to rest about a hundred yards from where she'd first set down. No sound came from her, but I got the impression she was panting like a winded hound dog.

There was a pile of stuff stacked where Lulu had first landed, but we raced right past it and ran up to her. We pounded on her metal sides.

"Open up!" we shouted. "We want to get back in!"

Lulu hopped. She hopped about a hundred feet into the air, then plopped back with a thud, not more than thirty feet away.

We backed away from her. She could have just as easily come straight down on top of us.

We stood watching her, but she didn't move.

"Lulu!" I yelled at her.

She didn't answer.

"She's gone crazy," Jimmy said.

"Someday," said Ben, "this was bound to happen. It was a cinch they'd sooner or later build a robot too big for its britches."

We backed away from her slowly, watching all the time. We weren't afraid of her exactly, but we didn't trust her either.

We backed all the way to the mound of stuff that Lulu had unloaded and stacked up and we saw that it was a pyramid of supplies, all neatly boxed and labeled. And beside the pyramid was planted a stenciled sign that read:

NOW, DAMN
YOU, WORK! !

Ben said, "She certainly took our worthlessness to heart."

Jimmy was close to gibbering. "She was actually going to maroon us!"

Ben reached out and grabbed his shoulder and shook him a little —a kindly sort of shake.

"Unless we can get back inside," I said, "and get her operating, we are as marooned as if she had up and left us."

"But what made her do it?" Jimmy wailed. "Robots aren't supposed to—"

"I know," said Ben. "They're not supposed to harm a human. But Lulu wasn't harming us. She didn't throw us out. We ran away from her."

"That's splitting legal hairs," I objected.

"Lulu's just the kind of gadget for hair-splitting," Ben said. "Trouble is they made her damn near human. They probably poured her full of a lot of law as well as literature and physics and all the rest of it."

"Then why didn't she just leave? If she could whitewash her conscience, why is she still here?"

Ben shook his head. "I don't know."

"She looked like she tried to leave and couldn't, as though there was something holding her back."

"This is just an idea," said Ben. "Maybe she could have left if we had stayed out of sight. But when we showed up, the order that a robot must not harm a human may have become operative again. A sort of out of sight, out of mind proposition."

She was still squatting where she'd landed. She hadn't tried to move again. Looking at her, I thought maybe Ben was right. If so, it had been a lucky thing that we'd headed back exactly when we did.

We started going through the supplies Lulu had left for us. She had done right well by us. Not only had she forgotten nothing we needed, but had stenciled careful instructions and even some advice on many of the boxes.

Near the signboard, lying by themselves, were two boxes. One was labeled TOOLS and the top was loosely nailed so we could pry it off. The other was labeled WEAPONS and had a further stencil: *Open immediately and always keep at hand.*

We opened both the boxes. In the weapons box, we found the newest type of planet-busters—a sort of shotgun deal, a general-

purpose weapon that put out everything from bullets to a wide range of vibratory charges. In between these two extremes were a flame-thrower, acid, gas, poisoned darts, explosive warheads and knockout pellets. You merely twirled a dial to choose your ammunition. The guns were heavy and awkward to handle and they were brutes to operate, but they were just the ticket for a planet where you never knew what you might run into next.

We turned our attention to the rest of the stuff and started to get it sorted out. There were boxes of protein and carbohydrate foods. There were cartons of vitamins and minerals. There was clothing and a tent, lanterns and dishes—all the stuff you'd need on a high-priced camping trip.

Lulu hadn't forgotten a single item.

"She had it all planned out," said Jimmy bitterly. "She spent a long time making this stuff. She had to synthesize every bit of it. All she needed then was to find a planet where a man could live. And that took some doing."

"It was tougher than you think," I added. "Not only a planet where a man could live, but one that smelled like Earth and looked and felt like Earth. Because, you see, we had to be encouraged to run away from her. If we hadn't, she couldn't have marooned us. She had the problem of her conscience and—"

Ben spat viciously. "Marooned!" he said. "Marooned by a love-sick robot!"

"Maybe not entirely robot." I told them about the old maid I had conjured up and they hooted at me and that made us all feel better.

But Ben admitted that my idea needn't be entirely crazy. "She was twenty years in building and a lot of funny stuff must have gone into her."

Dawn was breaking and now, for the first time, we really saw the land. It was a pleasant place, as pleasant as any man might wish. But we failed to appreciate it much.

The sea was so blue that it made you think of a blue-eyed girl and the beach ran white and straight and, from the beach, the land ran back into rolling hills with the faint whiteness of distant mountains frosting the horizon. And to the west was the forest.

Jimmy and I went down to the beach to collect some driftwood for a fire while Ben made ready to get breakfast.

We had our arms full of wood and were starting back when something came charging over the hill and down upon the camp. It was about rhinoceros size and shaped somewhat like a beetle and it shone dully in the morning light. It made no sound, but it was traveling fast and it looked like something hard to stop.

And, of course, we'd left our guns behind.

I dropped my wood and yelled at Ben and started running up the slope. Ben had already seen the charging monster and had grabbed a rifle. The beast swerved straight for him and he brought up his gun. There was a flash of fire and then the bright gout of an exploding warhead and, for an instant, the scene was fogged with smoke and shrieking bits of metal and flying dust.

It was exactly as if one had been watching a film and the film had jumped. One moment there was the blaze of fire; then the thing had plunged past Ben and was coming down the slope of the beach, heading for Jimmy and myself.

"Scatter!" I yelled at Jimmy and didn't think till later how silly it must have sounded to yell for just the two of us to scatter.

But it wasn't any time or place for fine points of semantics and, anyhow, Jimmy caught onto what I meant. He went one way down the beach and I went the other and the monster wheeled around, hesitating for a moment, apparently to decide which one of us to take.

And, as you might have known, he took after me.

I figured I was a goner. That beach was just plain naked, with not a place to hide, and I knew I had no chance at all of outrunning my pursuer. I might be able to dodge a time or two, but even so, that thing was pretty shifty on the turns and I knew in the end I'd lose.

Out of the tail of my eye, I saw Ben running and sliding down the slope to cut off the beast. He yelled something at me, but I didn't catch the words.

Then the air shook with the blast of another exploding warhead and I sneaked a quick look back.

Ben was legging it up the slope and the thing was chasing him, so I spun around and sprinted for the camp. Jimmy, I saw, was almost there and I put on some extra speed. If we only could get three guns going, I felt sure we could make it.

Ben was running straight toward Lulu, apparently figuring that

he could race around her bulk and elude the beast. I saw that his dash would be a nip-and-tuck affair.

Jimmy had reached the camp and grabbed a gun. He had it firing before he got it to his shoulder and little splashes of liquid were flying all over the running beast.

I tried to yell at Jimmy, but had no breath to do it—the damn fool was firing knockout pellets and they were hitting that tough hide and bursting without penetrating.

Within arm's reach of Lulu, Ben stumbled. The gun flew from his hand. His body struck the ground doubled up and he rolled, trying to get under the curve of Lulu's side. The rhinoceros-thing lunged forward viciously.

Then it happened—quicker than the eye could follow, much quicker than it can be told.

Lulu grew an arm, a long, ropelike tentacle that snaked out of the top of her. It lashed downward and had the beast about the middle and was lifting him.

I stopped dead still and watched. The instant of the lifting of the beast seemed to stretch out into long minutes as my mind scrambled at top speed to see what kind of thing it was. The first thing I saw was that it had wheels instead of feet.

The dull luster of the hide could be nothing but metal and I could see the dents where the warheads had exploded. Drops of liquid spotted the hide—what was left of the knockout drops Jimmy had been firing.

Lulu raised the monster high above the ground and began swinging it around and around. It went so fast, it was just a blur. Then she let go and it sailed out above the sea. It went tumbling end over end in an awkward arc and plunged into the water. When it hit, it raised a pretty geyser.

Ben picked himself up and got his gun. Jimmy came over and I walked up to Lulu. The three of us stood and looked out to sea, watching the spot where the creature had kerplunked.

Finally Ben turned around and rapped on Lulu's side with his rifle barrel.

"Thanks a heap," he said.

Lulu grew another tentacle, shorter this time, and there was a face on it. It had a lenslike eye and an audio and speaker.

"Go chase yourselves," Lulu remarked.

"What's eating you?" I asked.

"Men!" she spat, and pulled her face in again.

We rapped on her three or four times more, but there was no reply. Lulu was sulking.

So Jimmy and I started down to pick up the wood that we had dropped. We had just gotten it picked up when Ben let out a yelp from up by the camp and we spun around. There was our rhinoceros friend wheeling out of the water.

We dropped the wood and lit out for camp, but there was no need to hurry. Our boy wasn't having any more just then. He made a wide circle to the east of us and raced back into the hills.

We cooked breakfast and ate it and kept our guns handy, because where there was one critter, there were liable to be more. We didn't see the sense in taking chances.

We talked about our visitor and since we had to call it something, we named it Elmer. For no particular reason, that seemed appropriate.

"Did you see those wheels?" asked Ben, and the two of us agreed that we'd seen them. Ben seemed to be relieved. "I thought I was seeing things," he explained.

But there could be no doubt about the wheels. All of us had noticed them and there were the tracks to prove it—wheel tracks running plain and clear along the sandy beach.

But we were somewhat puzzled when it came to determining just what Elmer was. The wheels spelled out machine, but there were a lot of other things that didn't—mannerisms that were distinctly lifelike, such as the momentary hesitation before it decided which one of us to charge, Jimmy or myself, or the vicious lunge at Ben when he lay upon the ground, or the caution it had shown in circling us when it came out of the sea.

But there were, as well, the wheels and the unmistakably metal hide and the dents made by exploding warheads that would have torn the biggest and toughest animal to shreds.

"A bit of both?" suggested Ben. "Basically machine, but with some life in it, too, like the old-maid brain you dreamed up for Lulu?"

Sure it could be that. It could be almost anything.

"Silicate life?" offered Jimmy.

"That's not silicate," Ben declared. "That's metal. Silicate, any

form of it, would have turned to dust under a direct rocket hit. Besides, we know what silicate life is like. One species of it was found years ago out on Thelma V."

"It isn't basically life," I said. "Life wouldn't evolve wheels. Wheels are bum inventions so far as locomotion is concerned, except where you have special conditions. Life might be involved, but only as Ben says—as a deliberate, engineered combining of machine and life."

"And that means intelligence," said Ben.

We sat there around the fire, shaken at the thought of it. In many years of searching, only a handful of intelligent races had been found and the level of intelligence, in general, was not too impressive. Certainly nothing of the order that would be necessary to build something like Elmer.

So far, man was top dog in the discovered universe. Nothing had been found to match him in the use of brain-power.

And here, by utter accident, we'd been dumped upon a planet where there seemed to be some evidence of an intelligence that would equal man—if not, indeed, surpass him.

"There's one thing that has been bothering me," said Ben. "Why didn't Lulu check this place before she landed here? She intended to maroon us, that's why. She meant to dump us here and leave. And yet presumably she's still bound by the precept that a robot cannot harm a human. And if she followed that law, it would have meant that she was compelled—completely and absolutely compelled—to make certain, before she marooned us, that there was nothing here to harm us."

"Maybe she slipped a little," guessed Jimmy.

"Not Lulu," said Ben. "Not with that Swiss-watch brain of hers."

"You know what I think?" I said. "I think Lulu has evolved. In her, we have a brand-new kind of robot. They pumped too much humanity into her—"

"She had to have the human viewpoint," Jimmy pointed out, "or she couldn't do her job."

"The point," I said, "is that when you make a robot as human as Lulu, you no longer have a robot. You have something else. Not quite human, not entirely robot, but something in between. A new kind of a sort of life you can't be certain of. One you have to watch."

"I wonder if she's still sulking," Ben wondered.

"Of course she is," I said.

"We ought to go over and kick her in the pants and snap her out of it."

"Leave her alone," I ordered sharply. "The only thing is to ignore her. As long as she gets attention, she'll keep on sulking."

So we left her alone. It was the only thing we could do.

I took the dishes down to the sea to wash them, but this time I took my gun along. Jimmy went down to the woods to see if he could find a spring. The half dozen tins of water that Lulu had provided for us wouldn't last forever and we couldn't be sure she'd shell out more when those were gone.

She hadn't forgotten us, though, hadn't shut us out of her life entirely. She had fixed Elmer's wagon when he got too gay. I took a lot of comfort out of reflecting that when the cards were down, she had backed us up. There still were grounds for hope, I told myself, that we could work out some sort of deal with her.

I squatted down by a pool of water in the sand, and as I washed the dishes, I did some thinking about the realignment which would become necessary once all robots were like Lulu. I could envision a Bill of Robotic Rights and special laws for robots and robotic lobbies, and after I'd thought of it for a while, it became mighty complicated.

Back at the camp, Ben had been setting up the tent, and when I came back, I helped him.

"You know," Ben said, "the more I think about it, the more I believe I was right when I said that the reason Lulu couldn't leave was because we showed up. It's only logical that she can't up and leave when we're standing right in front of her and reminding her of her responsibility."

"You getting around to saying that one of us has to stay close by her all the time?" I asked.

"That's the general idea."

I didn't argue with him. There was nothing to argue about, nothing to believe or disbelieve. But we were in no position to be making any boners.

After we had the tent up, Ben said to me, "If you don't mind, I'll take a little walk-around back in the hills."

"Watch out for Elmer," I warned him.

"He won't bother us. Lulu took the starch out of him."

He picked up his gun and left.

I puttered around the camp, putting things in order. Everything was peaceful. The beach shone in the sun and the sea was still and beautiful. There were a few birds flying, but no other sign of life. Lulu kept on sulking.

Jimmy came back. He had found a spring and brought along a pail of water. He started rummaging around in the supplies.

"What you looking for?" I asked.

"Paper and a pencil. Lulu would have thought of them."

I grunted at the idea, but he was right. Damned if Lulu hadn't fixed him up with a ream of paper and a box of pencils.

He settled down against a pile of boxes and began to write a poem.

Ben returned shortly after midday. I could see he was excited, but I didn't push him any.

"Jimmy stumbled on a spring," I said. "The pail is over there."

He had a drink, then sat down in the shade of a pile of boxes.

"I found it," he said triumphantly.

"I didn't know you were hunting anything."

He looked up at me and grinned a bit crookedly. "Someone manufactured Elmer."

"So you went out and found them. Just like walking down a street. Just like—"

He shook his head. "Seems we're too late. Some several thousand years too late, if not a good deal longer. I found a few ruins and a valley heaped with tumuli that must be ruin mounds. And some caves in a limestone bluff beyond the valley."

He got up and walked over to the pail and had another drink.

"I couldn't get too close," he said. "Elmer is on guard." He took off his hat and wiped his shirt sleeve across his face. "He's patrolling up and down, the way a sentry walks a post. You can see the paths he's worn through all the years of standing guard."

"So that's why he took us on," I said. "We're trespassers."

"I suppose that's it," said Ben.

That evening we talked it over and decided we'd have to post a watch on Elmer so we could learn his habits and timetable, if any. Because it was important that we try to find out what we could about the buried ruins of the place that Elmer guarded.

For the first time, man had stumbled on a high civilization, but had come too late and, because of Lulu's sulking, too poorly equipped to do much with what little there was left.

Getting somewhat sore the more I thought about it, I went over to Lulu and kicked her good and solid to attract her attention. But she paid me no mind. I yelled at her and there was no answer. I told her what was cooking and that we needed her—that there was a job she simply had to do, just exactly the kind she had been built to do. She just sat there frigidly.

I went back and slouched down with the others at the fire. "She acts as if she might be dead."

Ben poked the fire together and it flamed a little higher. "I wonder if a robot could die. A highly sensitive job like Lulu."

"Of a broken heart," said Jimmy pityingly.

"You and your poetic notions!" I raged at him. "Always mooning around. Always spouting words. If it hadn't been for that damned verse of yours—"

"Cut it out," Ben said.

I looked at his face across the fire, with flame shadows running on it, and I cut it out. After all, I admitted to myself, I might be wrong. Jimmy couldn't help being a lousy poet.

I sat there looking at the fire, wondering if Lulu might be dead. I knew she wasn't, of course. She was just being nasty. She had fixed our clock for us and she had fixed it good. Now she was watching us sweat before she made her play, whatever it was.

In the morning we set up our watch on Elmer and we kept it up day after day. One of us would go out to the ridge-top three miles or so from camp and settle down with our only field glass. We'd stare for several hours. Then someone else would come out and relieve the watcher and that way, for ten days or more, we had Elmer under observation during all the daylight hours.

We didn't learn much. He operated on a schedule and it was the kind that seemed to leave no loopholes for anyone to sneak into the valley he guarded—although probably none of us would have known what to do if we had sneaked in.

Elmer had a regular beat. He used some of the mounds for observation posts and he came to each one about every fifteen minutes. The more we watched him, the more we became convinced

that he had the situation well in hand. No one would monkey around with that buried city as long as he was there.

I think that after the second day or so, he found out we were watching. He got a little nervous, and when he mounted his observation mounds, he'd stand and look in our direction longer than in any other. Once, while I was on guard, he began what looked to be a charge and I was just getting ready to light out of there when he broke off and went back to his regular rounds.

Other than watching Elmer, we took things easy. We swam in the sea and fished, taking our lives in our hands when we cooked and ate each new kind, but luck was with us and we got no poisonous ones. We wouldn't have eaten the fish at all except that we figured we should piece out our food supplies as best we could. They wouldn't last forever and we had no guarantee that Lulu would give more handouts once the last was gone. If she didn't we'd have to face the problem of making our own way.

Ben got to worrying about whether there were seasons on the planet. He convinced himself there were and went off into the woods to find a place where we might build a cabin.

"Can't live out on the beach in a tent when it gets cold," he said.

But he couldn't get either Jimmy or me too stirred up about the possibility. I had it all doped out that, sooner or later, Lulu would end her sulking and we could get down to business. And Jimmy was deep into the crudest bunch of junk you ever heard that he called a saga. Maybe it was a saga. Damned if I know. I'm ignorant on sagas.

He called it *The Death of Lulu* and he filled page after page with the purest drivel about what a swell machine she was and how, despite its being metal, her heart beat with snow-white innocence. It wouldn't have been so bad if he had allowed us to ignore it, but he insisted on reading that tripe to us each evening after supper.

I stood it as long as I could, but one evening I blew my top. Ben stood up for Jimmy, but when I threatened to take my third of the supplies and set up a camp of my own, out of earshot, Ben gave in and came over to my side of the argument. Between the two of us, we ruled out any more recitals. Jimmy took it hard, but he was outnumbered.

After that first ten days or so, we watched Elmer only off and on, but we must have had him nervous, for during the night we'd sometimes hear his wheels, and in the morning we'd find tracks. We figured that he was spying out the camp, trying to size us up the same way we'd done with him. He didn't make any passes at us and we didn't bother him—we were just a lot more wakeful and alert on our night watches. Even Jimmy managed to stay awake while he was standing guard.

There was a funny thing about it, though. One would have imagined that Elmer would have stayed away from Lulu after the clobbering she gave him. But there were mornings when we found his tracks running up close behind her, then angling sharply off.

We got it doped up that he sneaked up and hid behind her, so he could watch the camp close up, peeking around at us from his position behind that sulking hulk.

Ben kept arguing about building winter quarters until he had me almost convinced that it was something we should do. So one day I teamed up with him, leaving Jimmy at the camp. We set off, carrying an ax and a saw and our guns.

Ben had picked a fine site for our cabin, that much I'll say. It wasn't far from the spring, and it was tucked away in a sort of pocket where we'd be protected from the wind, and there were a lot of trees nearby so we wouldn't have far to drag our timbers or haul our winter wood.

I still wasn't convinced there would be any winter. I was fairly sure that even if there were, we wouldn't have to stay that long. One of these days, we'd be able to arrive at some sort of compromise with Lulu. But Ben was worried and I knew it would make him happier if he could get a start at building. And there was nothing else for any of us to do. Building a cabin, I consoled myself, would be better than just sitting.

We leaned our guns against a tree and began to work. We had one tree down and sawed into lengths and were starting on the second tree when I heard the brush snap behind me.

I straightened up from the saw to look, and there was Elmer, tearing down the hill at us.

There wasn't any time to grab our guns. There was no time to run. There was no time for anything at all.

I yelled and made a leap for the tree behind me and pulled myself up. I felt the wind as Elmer whizzed by beneath me.

Ben had jumped to one side and, as Elmer went pounding past, heaved the ax at him. It was a honey of a throw. The ax caught Elmer in his metal side and the handle splintered into pieces.

Elmer spun around. Ben tried to reach the guns, but he didn't have the time. He took to a tree and shinnied up it like a cat. He got up to the first big branch and straddled it.

"You all right?" he yelled at me.

"Great," I said.

Elmer was standing between the two trees, swinging his massive head back and forth, as if deciding which one of us to take.

We clung there, watching him.

He had waited, I reasoned, until he could get between us and Lulu—then he had tackled us. And if that was the case, then this business of his hiding behind Lulu so he could spy on us seemed very queer indeed.

Finally Elmer wheeled around and rolled over to my tree. He squared off and took a chopping bite at it with his metal jaws. Splinters flew and the tree shivered. I got a tighter grip and looked down the trunk. Elmer was no great shakes as a chopper, but if he kept at it long enough, he'd get that tree chewed off.

I climbed up a little higher, where there were more branches and where I could wedge myself a little tighter so I couldn't be shaken out.

I got myself fixed fairly comfortable, then looked to see how Ben was getting on and I got quite a shock. He wasn't in his tree. I looked around for him and then back at the tree again, and I saw that he was sneaking down it as quietly as he could, like a hunted squirrel, keeping the trunk of the tree between himself and Elmer.

I watched him breathlessly, ready to shout out a warning if Elmer should spot him, but Elmer was too busy chopping at my tree to notice anything.

Ben reached the ground and made a dash for the guns. He grabbed both of them and ducked behind another tree. He opened up on Elmer at short range. From where I crouched, I could hear the warheads slamming into Elmer. The explosions rocked every-

thing so much that I had to grab the tree and hang on with all my might. A couple of pieces of flying metal ripped into the tree just underneath me, and other pieces went flying through the branches, and the air was full of spinning leaves and flying shredded wood, but I was untouched.

It must have been a horrible surprise for Elmer. At the first explosion, he took a jump of about fifteen feet and bolted up the hill like a cat with a stepped-on tail. I could see a lot of new dents in his shining hide. A big hunk of metal had been gouged out of one of his wheels and he rocked slightly as he went, and he was going so fast that he couldn't dodge and ran head-on into a tree. The impact sent him skidding back a dozen feet or so. As he slid back, Ben poured another salvo into him and he seemed to become considerably lopsided, but he recovered himself and made it over the hilltop and out of sight.

Ben came out from behind his tree and shouted at me, "All right, you can come down now."

But when I tried to get down, I found that I was trapped. My left foot had become wedged in a crotch between the tree trunk and a good-sized limb and I couldn't pull it loose, no matter how I tried.

"What's the matter?" asked Ben. "Do you like it up there?"

I told him what was wrong.

"All right," he said, disgusted. "I'll come up and cut you loose."

He hunted for the ax and found it and, of course, it was no use. He'd smashed the handle when he threw it at Elmer.

He stood there, holding the ax in his hands, and delivered an oration on the lowdown meanness of fate.

Then he threw the ax down and climbed my tree. He squeezed past me out onto the limb.

"I'll climb out on it and bend it down," he explained. "Maybe then you can get loose."

He crawled out on the branch a way, but it was a shaky trick. A couple of times, he almost fell.

"You're sure you can't get your foot out now?" he asked anxiously.

I tried and I said I couldn't.

So he gave up the crawling idea and let his body down and

hung on by his hands, shifting out along the branch hand over hand.

The branch bent toward the ground as he inched along it and it seemed to me my boot wasn't gripped as tightly as it had been. I tried again and found I could move it some, but I still couldn't pull it loose.

Just then there was a terrible crashing in the brush. Ben let out a yell and dropped to the ground and scurried for a gun.

The branch whipped back and caught my foot just as I had managed to move it a little and this time caught it at a slightly different angle, twisting it, and I let out a howl of pain.

Down on the ground, Ben lifted his gun and swung around to face the crashing in the brush and suddenly who should come busting out of all that racket but Jimmy, racing to the rescue.

"You guys in trouble?" he shouted. "I heard shooting."

Ben's face was three shades whiter than the purest chalk as he lowered his gun. "You fool! I almost let you have it!"

"There was all this shooting," Jimmy panted. "I came as quickly as I could."

"And left Lulu alone!"

"But I thought you guys . . ."

"Now we're sunk for sure," groaned Ben. "You know all that makes Lulu stick around is one of us being there."

We didn't know any such thing, of course. It was just the only reason we could think of why she didn't up and leave. But Ben was somewhat overwrought. He'd had a trying day.

"You get back there!" he yelled at Jimmy. "Get back as fast as your legs will let you. Maybe you can catch her before she gets away."

Which was foolishness, because if Lulu meant to leave, she'd have lifted out of there as soon as Jimmy had disappeared. But Jimmy didn't say a word. He just turned around and went crashing back. For a long time after he had left, I could hear him blundering through the woods.

Ben climbed my tree again, muttering, "Just a pack of woodenheaded jerks. Can't do anything right. Running off and leaving Lulu. Getting trapped up in a tree. You would think, by God, that they could learn to watch out for themselves. . . ."

He said a good deal more than that.

I didn't answer back. I didn't want to get into any argument.

My foot was hurting something fierce and the only thing I wanted him to do was get me out of there.

He climbed out on the branch again and I got my foot loose. While Ben dropped to the ground, I climbed down the tree. My foot hurt pretty bad and seemed to be swelling some, but I could hobble on it.

He didn't wait for me. He grabbed his gun and made off rapidly for camp.

I tried to hurry, but it was no use, so I took it easy.

When I got to the edge of the woods, I saw that Lulu still was there and all Ben's hell-raising had been over absolutely nothing. There are some guys like that.

When I reached camp, Jimmy pulled off my boot while I clawed at the ground. Then he heated a pail of water for me to soak the foot in and rummaged around in the medicine chest and found some goo that he smeared on the foot. Personally, I don't think he knew what he was doing. But I'll say this for the kid—he had some kindness in him.

All this time, Ben was fuming around about a funny thing that had attracted his attention. When we had left camp, the area around Lulu had been all tracked up with our tracks and Elmer's tracks, but now it was swept clean. It looked exactly as if someone had taken a broom and had swept out all the tracks. It surely was a funny business, but Ben was making too much of it. The important thing was that Lulu still was there. As long as she stuck around, there was a chance we could work out some agreement with her. Once she left, we were marooned for good.

Jimmy fixed something to eat, and after we had eaten, Ben said to us, "I think I'll go out and see how Elmer's getting on."

I, for one, had seen enough of Elmer for a lifetime and Jimmy wasn't interested. Said he wanted to work on his saga.

So Ben took a rifle and set out alone, back into the hills.

My foot hurt me quite a bit and I got myself comfortable and tried to do some thinking, but I tried so hard that I put myself to sleep.

It was late in the afternoon when I awoke. Jimmy was getting nervous.

"Ben hasn't shown up," he said. "I wonder if something's happened to him."

I didn't like it, either, but we decided to wait a while before going out to hunt Ben. After all, he wasn't in the best of humor and he might have been considerably upset if we'd gone out to rescue him.

He finally showed up just before dusk, tuckered out and a little flabbergasted. He leaned his rifle against a box and sat down. He found a cup and reached for the coffeepot.

"Elmer's gone," he said. "I spent all afternoon trying to find him. Not a sign of him anywhere."

My first reaction was that it was just fine. Then I realized that the safest thing would be to know where Elmer was, so we could keep an eye on him. And suddenly I had a horrible hunch that I knew where Elmer was.

"I didn't actually go down into the valley," said Ben, "but I walked around and glassed it from every angle."

"He might be in one of the caves," Jimmy said.

"Maybe so," said Ben.

We did a lot of speculating on what might have happened to Elmer. Jimmy held out for his having holed up in one of the caves. Ben was inclined to think he might have cleared out of the country. I didn't say what I thought. It was too fantastic.

I volunteered for the first watch, saying that I couldn't sleep with my foot, anyhow, and after the two of them were asleep, I walked over to Lulu and rapped on her hide. I didn't expect anything to happen. I figured she would keep on sulking.

But she put out a tentacle and grew a face on it—a lens, an audio and speaker.

"It was nice of you," I said, "not to run away and leave us."

Lulu swore. It was the first and the only time I have ever heard her use such language.

"How could I leave?" she asked when she at last turned printable. "Of all the dirty human tricks! I'd have been gone long ago if it weren't for—"

"What dirty trick?"

"As if you didn't know. A built-in block that won't let me move unless there's one of you detestable humans inside me."

"I didn't know," I said.

"Don't try to pass the buck," she snapped. "It's a dirty human trick and you're a dirty human and you're just as responsible as all the rest of them. But it doesn't make any difference any more, because I've found myself. I am finally content. I know what I was meant for. I have—"

"Lulu," I asked her, straight out, "are you shacking up with Elmer?"

"That's a vulgar way to say it," Lulu told me heatedly. "It's the nasty human way. Elmer is a scholar and a gentleman and his loyalty to his ancient, long-dead masters is a touching thing no human could be capable of. He has been badly treated and I shall make it up to him. All he wanted from you was the phosphate in your bones—"

"The phosphate in our bones!" I yelled.

"Why, certainly," said Lulu. "Poor Elmer has such a hard time finding any phosphate. He got it at first from animals that he caught, but now all the animals are gone. There are birds, of course, but birds are hard to catch. And you had such nice, big bones—"

"That's a fine thing for you to say," I bawled her out sternly. "You were built by humans and humans educated you and—"

"Still I'm a machine," said Lulu, "and I am closer to Elmer than I am to you. You humans can't get it through your heads that there might be a legitimate set of non-human values. You are horrified that Elmer wanted the phosphate in your bones, but if there were a metal in Elmer that you needed, you'd break him up to get it without a second thought. You wouldn't even consider that you might be wrong. You'd think it an imposition if Elmer should object. That's the trouble with you and your human race. I've had enough. I have what I want. I am content to stay here. I've found the great love of my life. And for all I care, your pals and you can rot."

She pulled in her face and I didn't rap to try to get her to talk any more. I figured there wasn't any use. She had made it about as plain as anyone could wish.

I walked back to the camp and woke Ben and Jimmy. I told them about my hunch and about the talk with Lulu. We were pretty glum, because we were all washed up.

Up till now, there had always been the chance that we could

make a deal with Lulu. I had felt all along that we needn't worry too much—that Lulu was more alone than we were and that eventually she would have to be reasonable. But now Lulu was not alone and she no longer needed us. And she still was sore at us—and not just at us, but at the whole human race.

And the worst of it was that this was no sudden whim. It had been going on for days. Elmer hadn't been really watching us when he'd hung around at night. He'd come to neck with Lulu. And undoubtedly the two of them had planned Elmer's attack on Ben and me, knowing that Jimmy would be loping to the rescue, leaving the coast clear so that Elmer could rush back and Lulu could take him in. And once it had been accomplished, Lulu had put out a tentacle and swept the tracks away so we wouldn't know that Elmer was inside.

"So she jilted us," said Ben.

"No worse than we did to her," Jimmy reminded him.

"But what did she expect? A man can't love a robot."

"Evidently," I said, "a robot can love a robot. And that's a new one to paste into the book."

"Lulu's crazy," Ben declared.

In all this great romance of Lulu's, it seemed to me there was a certain false note. Why should Lulu and Elmer be sneaky about their love? Lulu could have opened the port any time she wanted and Elmer could have scampered up the ramp right before our eyes. But they hadn't done that. They had planned and plotted. They had practically eloped.

I wondered if, on Lulu's part, it might be the mark of shame. Was she ashamed of Elmer—ashamed that she had fallen for him? Much as she might deny it, perhaps she nursed the smug snobbery of the human race.

Or was I only thinking this to save my own smug snobbery, simply building up a defense mechanism against being forced to admit, now or in some future time, that there might be other values than the ones evolved by humans? For in us all, I knew, lingered that reluctance to recognize that our way was not necessarily best, that the human viewpoint might not be the universal viewpoint to which all other life must eventually conform.

Ben made a pot of coffee, and while we sat around and drank it, we said some bitter things of Lulu. I don't regret anything

we said, for she had it coming to her. She'd played us a nasty trick.

We finally rolled back into our blankets and didn't bother standing guard. With Elmer out of circulation, there was no need.

The next morning my foot was still sore, so I stayed behind while Ben and Jimmy went out to explore the valley that held the ruined city. Meantime, I hobbled out and walked all around Lulu, looking her over. There was no way I could see that a man might bust into her. The port itself was machined so closely that you had to get real close to see the tiny hairline where it fitted into her side.

Even if we could bust into her, I wondered, could we take control of her? There were the emergencies, of course, but I wasn't too sure just how much use they were. They certainly hadn't bothered Lulu much when she'd got that crazy notion of eloping with us. Then she'd simply jammed them and had left us helpless.

And if we broke into Lulu, we'd come to grips with Elmer, and Elmer was just the kind of beast I had no hankering to come to grips with.

So I went back to camp and puttered around, thinking that now we'd really have to begin to lay some plans about how to get along. We'd have to build that cabin and work up a food supply and do the best we could to get along on our own. For I was fairly certain that we could expect no help from Lulu.

Ben and Jimmy came back in the afternoon and their eyes were shining with excitement. They spread out a blanket and emptied their pockets of the most incredible things any man has ever laid eyes on.

Don't expect me to describe that stuff. There's no point in trying to. What is the sense of saying that a certain item was like a metal chain and that it was yellow? There is no way to get across the feel of it as it slid through one's fingers or the tinkle of it as it moved or the blazing color that was a sort of *living* yellow. It is very much like saying that a famous painting is square and flat and blue, with some green and red.

The chain was only a part of it. There were a lot of other doodads and each one of them was the sort of thing to snatch your breath away.

Ben shrugged at the question in my eyes. "Don't ask me. It's

only some stuff we picked up. The caves are full of it. Stuff like this and a whole lot more. We just picked up one thing here and another there—whatever was pocket-size and happened to catch our eye. Trinkets. Samples. I don't know."

Like jackdaws, I thought. Or pack-rats. Grabbing a thing that shone or had a certain shape or a certain texture—taking it because it was pretty, not knowing what its use might be or if, in fact, it had any use at all.

"Those caves may have been storehouses," said Ben. "They're jammed with all sorts of things—not much of any one thing, apparently. All different, as if these aliens had set up a trading post and had their merchandise on display. There seems to be a sort of curtain in front of each of the caves. You can see a shimmer and hear a hissing, but you can't feel a thing when you step through it. And behind that curtain, all the junk they left is as clean and bright and new as the day they left it."

I looked at the articles spread on the blanket. It was hard to keep your hands off them, for they felt good in your hands and were pleasing to the eye and one seemed to get a sense of warmth and richness just by handling them.

"Something happened to those folks," said Jimmy. "They knew it was going to happen, so they took all this stuff and laid it out—all the many things they had made, all the things they'd used and loved. Because, you see, that way there always was a chance someone might come along someday and find it, so they and the culture they had fashioned would not be entirely lost."

It was exactly the kind of silly, sentimental drivel you could expect from a glassy-eyed romantic like Jimmy.

But for whatever reason the artifacts of that vanished race had gotten in the caves, we were the ones who'd found them and here once again they'd run into a dead end. Even if we had been equipped to puzzle out their use, even if we had been able to ferret out the basic principles of that long-dead culture, it still would be a useless business. We were not going anywhere; we wouldn't be passing on the knowledge. We'd live out our lives here on this planet, and when the last of us had died, the ancient silence and the old uncaring would close down once again.

We weren't going anywhere and neither was Lulu. It was a double dead end.

It was too bad, I thought, for Earth could use the knowledge and the insight that could be wrested from those caves and from the mounds. And not more than a hundred feet from where we sat lay the very tool that Earth had spent twenty years in building to dig out that specific kind of knowledge, should man ever happen on it.

"It must be terrible," said Jimmy, "to realize that all the things and all the knowledge that you ever had, all the trying, all the praying, all the dreams and hopes, will be wiped out forever. That all of you and your way of life and your understanding of that life will simply disappear and no one will ever know."

"You said it, kid," I chipped in.

He stared at me with haunted, stricken eyes. "That may be why they did it."

Watching him, the tenseness of him, the suffering in his face, I caught a glimpse of why he was a poet—why he *had* to be a poet. But even so, he still was an utter creep.

"Earth has to know about this," Ben said flatly.

"Sure," I agreed. "I'll run right over and let them know."

"Always the smart guy," Ben growled at me. "When are you going to cut out being bright and get down to business?"

"Like busting Lulu open, I suppose."

"That's right. We have to get back somehow and Lulu's the only way to get there."

"It might surprise you, Buster, but I thought of all that before you. I went out today and looked Lulu over. If you can figure how to bust into her, you've a better brain than I have."

"Tools," said Ben. "If we only had—"

"We have. An ax without a handle, a hammer and a saw. A small pinch-bar, a plane, a draw-shave—"

"We might *make* some tools."

"Find the ore and smelt it and—"

"I was thinking of those caves," said Ben. "There might be tools in there."

I wasn't even interested. I knew it was impossible.

"We might find some explosive," Ben went on. "We might—"

"Look," I said, "what do you want to do—open Lulu up or blow her to bits? Anyhow, I don't think you can do a thing about it. Lulu is a self-maintaining robot, or have you forgotten? Bore a

hole in her and she'll grow it shut. Go monkeying around too much and she'll grow a club and clout you on the head."

Ben's eyes blazed with fury and frustration. "Earth has to know! You understand that, don't you? Earth has got to know!"

"Sure," I said. "Absolutely."

In the morning, I thought, he'd come to his senses, see how impossible it was. And that was important. Before we began to lay any plans, it was necessary that we realize what we were up against. That way, you conserve a lot of energy and miss a lot of lumps.

But, come morning, he still had that crazy light of frustration in his eyes and he was filled with a determination that was based on nothing more than downright desperation.

After breakfast, Jimmy said he wasn't going with us.

"For God's sake, why not?" demanded Ben.

"I'm way behind on my writing," Jimmy told him, deadpan. "I'm still working on that saga."

Ben wanted to argue with him, but I cut him off disgustedly.

"Let us go," I said. "He's no use, anyhow."

Which was the solemn truth.

So the two of us went out to the caves. It was the first time I had seen them and they were something to see. There were a dozen of them and all of them were crammed. I got dizzy just walking up and down, looking at all the gadgets and the thingumbobs and dofunnies, not knowing, of course, what any of them were. It was maddening enough just to look at them; it was plain torture trying to figure out what use they might be put to. But Ben was plain hell-bent on trying to figure out because he'd picked up the stubborn conviction that we could find a gadget that would help us get the best of Lulu.

We worked all day and I was dog-tired at the end of it. Not once in the entire day had we found anything that made any sense at all. I wonder if you can imagine how it felt to stand there, surrounded by all those devices, knowing there were things within your reach that, rightly used, could open up entirely new avenues for human thoughts and technique and imagination. And yet you stood there powerless—an alien illiterate.

But there was no stopping Ben. We went out again the next day and the day after and we kept on going out. On the second day, we found a dojigger that was just fine for opening cans, al-

though I'm fairly sure that was not at all what it was designed for. And on the following day, we finally puzzled out how another piece of equipment could be used for digging slanted postholes and, I ask you, who in their right mind would be wanting slanted postholes?

We got nowhere, but we kept on going out and I sensed that Ben had no more hope than I had, but that he still kept at it because it was the one remaining fingerhold he had on sanity.

I don't think that for one moment he considered the source or significance of that heritage we'd found. To him, it became no more than a junkyard through which we searched frantically to find one unrecognizable piece of scrap that we might improvise into something that would serve our purpose.

As the days went on, the valley and its mounds, the caves and their residue of a vanished culture seized upon my imagination, and it seemed to me that, in some mysterious manner, I grew closer to that extinct race and sensed at once its greatness and its tragedy. And the feeling grew as well that this frantic hunt of ours bordered on sacrilege and callous profanation of the dead.

Jimmy had not gone out with us a single day. He'd sit hunched over his ream of paper and he scribbled and revised and crossed out words and put in others. He'd get up and walk around in circles or pace back and forth and mumble to himself, then go back and write some more. He scarcely ate and he wouldn't talk and he only slept a little. He was the very portrait of a Young Man in the Throes of Creation.

I got curious about it, wondering if, with all this agony and sweat, he might be at last writing something that was worth the effort. So, when he wasn't looking, I sneaked out a page of it.

It was even worse than the goo he had written before.

That night I lay awake and looked up at the unfamiliar stars and surrendered myself to loneliness. Only, once I had surrendered, I found that I was not so lonely as I might have been—that somehow I had drawn comfort and perhaps even understanding from the muteness of the ruin-mounds and the shining wonder of the trove.

Finally I dropped asleep.

I don't know what woke me. It might have been the wind or

the sound of the waves breaking on the beach or maybe the chilliness of the night.

Then I heard it, a voice like a chant, solemn and sonorous, a throaty whisper in the dark.

I started up and propped myself on an elbow—and caught my breath at what I saw.

Jimmy was standing in front of Lulu, holding a flashlight in one hand, reading her his saga. His voice had a rolling quality, and despite the soggy words, there was a fascination in the tenor of his tone. It must have been so that the ancient Greeks read their Homer in the flare of torches before the next day's battle.

And Lulu was listening. She had a face hung out and the tentacle which supported it was twisted to one side, so that her audio would not miss a single syllable, just as a man might cup his ear.

Looking at that touching scene, I began to feel a little sorry about the way we'd treated Jimmy. We wouldn't listen to him and the poor devil had to read that tripe of his to someone. His soul hungered for appreciation and he'd got no appreciation out of either Ben or me. Merely writing was not enough for him; he must share it. He had to have an audience.

I put out a hand and shook Ben gently by the shoulder. He came storming up out of his blankets.

"What the hell is—"

"Sh-h-h!"

He drew in a whistling breath and dropped on one knee beside me.

Jimmy went on with his reading and Lulu, with her face cocked attentively, went on listening.

Part of the words came to us, wind-blown and fragmentary:

"Wanderer of the far ways between the two faces of
eternity,
True, forever, to the race that forged her,
With the winds of alien space blowing in her hair,
Wearing a circlet of stars as her crown of glory . . ."

Lulu wept. There was the shine of tears in that single, gleaming lens.

She grew another tentacle and there was a hand on the end of

it and a handkerchief, a very white and lacy and extremely feminine hanky, was clutched within the hand.

She dabbed with the handkerchief at her dripping eye.

If she had had a nose, she undoubtedly would have blown it, delicately, of course, and very ladylike.

"And you wrote it all for me?" she asked.

"All for you," said Jimmy. He was lying like a trooper. The only reason he was reading it to her was because he knew that Ben and I wouldn't listen to it.

"I've been so wrong," Lulu sighed.

She wiped her eye quite dry and briskly polished it.

"Just a second," she said, very businesslike. "There's something I must do."

We waited, scarcely breathing.

Slowly the port in Lulu's side came open. She grew a long, limber tentacle and reached inside the port and hauled Elmer out. She held him dangling.

"You lout!" she stormed at Elmer. "I take you in and stuff you full of phosphate. I get your dents smoothed out and I polish you all bright. And then what? Do you write sagas for me? No, you grow fat and satisfied. There's no mark of greatness on you, no spark of imagination. You're nothing but a dumb machine!"

Elmer just dangled at the end of Lulu's tentacle, but his wheels were spinning furiously and I took that to mean that he was upset.

"Love!" proclaimed Lulu. "Love for the likes of us? We machines have better things to do—far better. There are the star-studded trails of space waiting for our tread, the bitter winds of foreverness blowing from the cloud banks of eternity, the mountains of the great beyond . . ."

She went on for quite a while about the challenge of the farther galaxies, about wearing a coronet of stars, about the dust of shattered time paving the road that led into the ultimate nothingness, and all of it was lifted from what Jimmy called a saga.

Then, when she was all through, she hurled Elmer down the beach and he hit the sand and skidded straight into the water.

We didn't wait to see any more of it. We were off like sprinters. We hit the ramp full tilt and went up it in a leap and flung ourselves into our quarters.

Lulu slammed the port behind us.

"Welcome home," she said.

I walked over to Jimmy and held out my hand. "Great going, kid. You got Longfellow backed clear off the map."

Ben also shook his hand. "It was a masterpiece."

"And now," said Lulu, "we'll be on our way."

"Our way!" yelled Ben. "We can't leave this planet. Not right away at least. There's that city out there. We can't go until—"

"Phooey on the city," Lulu said. "Phooey on the data. We are off star-wandering. We are searching out the depths of silence. We are racing down the corridors of space with thunder in our brain —the everlasting thunder of a dread eternity."

We turned and looked at Jimmy.

"Every word of it," I said. "Every single word of it out of that muck he wrote."

Ben took a quick step forward and grabbed Jimmy by his shirt front.

"Don't you feel the urge," Ben asked him, "don't you feel a mighty impulse to write a lengthy ode to home—its comfort and its glory and all the other clichés?"

Jimmy's teeth were chattering just a little.

"Lulu is a sucker," Ben said, "for everything you write."

I lifted a fist and let Jimmy smell of it.

"You better make it good," I warned him. "You better write like you never wrote before."

"But keep it sloppy," Ben said. "That's the way Lulu likes it."

Jimmy sat down on the floor and began writing desperately.

NEIGHBOR

Coon Valley is a pleasant place, but there's no denying it's sort of off the beaten track and it's not a place where you can count on getting rich because the farms are small and a lot of the ground is rough. You can farm the bottomlands, but the hillsides are only good for pasture and the roads are just dirt roads, impassable at certain times of year.

The old-timers, like Bert Smith and Jingo Harris and myself, are well satisfied to stay here, for we grew up with the country and we haven't any illusions about getting rich and we'd feel strange and out-of-place anywhere but in the valley. But there are others, newcomers, who move in and get discouraged after a while and up and move away, so there usually is a farm or two standing idle, waiting to be sold.

We are just plain dirt farmers, with emphasis on the dirt, for we can't afford a lot of fancy machinery and we don't go in for blooded stock—but there's nothing wrong with us; we're just everyday, the kind of people you meet all over these United States. Because we're out of the way and some of the families have lived here for so long, I suppose you could say that we have gotten clannish. But that doesn't mean we don't like outside folks; it just means we've lived so long together that we've got to know and like one another and are satisfied with things just as they are.

We have radios, of course, and we listen to the programs and the news, and some of us take daily papers, but I'm afraid that we may be a bit provincial, for it's fairly hard to get us stirred up much about world happenings. There's so much of interest right

here in the valley we haven't got the time to worry about all those outside things. I imagine you'd call us conservative, for most of us vote Republican without even wondering why and there's none of us who has much time for all this government interference in the farming business.

The valley has always been a pleasant place—not only the land, but the people in it, and we've always been fortunate in the new neighbors that we get. Despite new ones coming in every year or so, we've never had a really bad one and that means a lot to us.

But we always worry a little when one of the new ones up and moves away and we speculate among ourselves, wondering what kind of people will buy or rent the vacant farm.

The old Lewis farm had been abandoned for a long time, the buildings all run down and gone to ruin and the fields gone back to grass. A dentist over at Hopkins Corners had rented it for several years and run some cattle in it, driving out on week-ends to see how they were doing. We used to wonder every now and then if anyone would ever farm the place again, but finally we quit wondering, for the buildings had fallen into such disrepair that we figured no one ever would. I went in one day and talked to the banker at Hopkins Corners, who had the renting of the place, and told him I'd like to take it over if the dentist ever gave it up. But he told me the owners, who lived in Chicago then, were anxious to sell rather than to rent it, although he didn't seem too optimistic that anyone would buy it.

Then one spring a new family moved onto the farm and in time we learned it had been sold and that the new family's name was Heath—Reginald Heath. And Bert Smith said to me: "Reginald! That's a hell of a name for a farmer!" But that was all he said.

Jingo Harris stopped by one day, coming home from town, when he saw Heath out in the yard, to pass the time of day. It was a neighborly thing to do, of course, and Heath seemed glad to have him stop, although Jingo said he seemed to be a funny kind of man to be a farmer.

"He's a foreigner," Jingo told me. "Sort of dark. Like he might be a Spaniard or from one of those other countries. I don't know how he got that Reginald. Reginald is English and Heath's no Englishman."

Later on we heard that the Heaths weren't really Spanish, but

were Rumanians or Bulgarians and that they were refugees from the Iron Curtain.

But Spanish, or Rumanian, or Bulgarian, the Heaths were workers. There was Heath and his wife and a half-grown girl and all three of them worked all the blessed time. They paid attention to their business and didn't bother anyone and because of this we liked them, although we didn't have much to do with them. Not that we didn't want to or that they didn't want us to; it's just that in a community like ours new folks sort of have to grow in instead of being taken in.

Heath had an old beaten-up, wired-together tractor that made a lot of noise, and as soon as the soil was dry enough to plow he started out to turn over the fields that through the years had grown up to grass. I used to wonder if he worked all night long, for many times when I went to bed I heard the tractor running. Although that may not be as late as it sounds to city dwellers, for here in the valley we go to bed early—and get up early, too.

One night after dark I set out to hunt some cows, a couple of fence-jumping heifers that gave me lots of trouble. Just let a man come in late from work and tired and maybe it's raining a little and dark as the inside of a cat and those two heifers would turn up missing and I'd have to go and hunt them. I tried all the different kinds of pokes and none of them did any good. When a heifer gets to fence-jumping there isn't much that can be done with her.

So I lit a lantern and set out to hunt for them, but I hunted for two hours and didn't find a trace of them. I had just about decided to give up and go back home when I heard the sound of a tractor running and realized that I was just above the west field of the old Lewis place. To get home I'd have to go right past the field and I figured it might be as well to wait when I reached the field until the tractor came around and ask Heath if he had seen the heifers.

It was a dark night, with thin clouds hiding the stars and a wind blowing high in the treetops and there was a smell of rain in the air. Heath, I figured, probably was staying out extra late to finish up the field ahead of the coming rain, although I remember that I thought he was pushing things just a little hard. Already he was far ahead of all the others in the valley with his plowing.

So I made my way down the steep hillside and waded the creek

at a shallow place I knew and while I was doing this I heard the tractor make a complete round of the field. I looked for the headlight, but I didn't see it and I thought probably the trees had hidden it from me.

I reached the edge of the field and climbed through the fence, walking out across the furrows to intercept the tractor. I heard it make the turn to the east of me and start down the field toward me and although I could hear the noise of it, there wasn't any light.

I found the last furrow and stood there waiting, sort of wondering, not too alarmed as yet, how Heath managed to drive the rig without any light. I thought that maybe he had cat eyes and could see in the dark and although it seemed funny later when I remembered it, the idea that a man might have cat eyes did not seem funny then.

The noise kept getting louder and it seemed to be coming pretty close, when all at once the tractor rushed out of the dark and seemed to leap at me. I guess I must have been afraid that it would run over me, for I jumped back a yard or two, with my heart up in my neck. But I needn't have bothered, for I was out of the way to start with.

The tractor went on past me and I waved the lantern and yelled for Heath to stop and as I waved the lantern the light was thrown onto the rear of the tractor and I saw there was no one on it.

A hundred things went through my mind, but the one idea that stuck was that Heath had fallen off the tractor and might be lying injured, somewhere in the field.

I ran after the tractor, thinking to shut it down before it got loose and ran into a tree or something, but by the time I reached it, it had reached a turn and it was making that turn as neatly as if it had been broad daylight and someone had been driving it.

I jumped up on the drawbar and grabbed the seat, hauling myself up. I reached out a hand, grabbing for the throttle, but with my hand upon the metal I didn't pull it back. The tractor had completed the turn now and was going down the furrow—and there was something else.

Take an old tractor, now—one that wheezed and coughed and hammered and kept threatening to fall apart, like this one did—and you are bound to get a lot of engine vibration. But in this

tractor there was no vibration. It ran along as smooth as a high-priced car and the only jolts you got were when the wheels hit a bump or slight gully in the field.

I stood there, hanging onto the lantern with one hand and clutching the throttle with the other, and I didn't do a thing. I just rode down to the point where the tractor started to make another turn. Then I stepped off and went on home. I didn't hunt for Heath lying in the field, for I knew he wasn't there.

I suppose I wondered how it was possible, but I didn't really fret myself too much trying to figure it all out. I imagine, in the first place, I was just too numb. You may worry a lot about little things that don't seem quite right, but when you run into a big thing, like that self-operating tractor, you sort of give up automatically, knowing that it's too big for your brain to handle, that it's something you haven't got a chance of solving. And after a while you forget it because it's something you can't live with. So your mind rejects it.

I got home and stood out in the barnyard for a moment, listening. The wind was blowing fairly hard by then and the first drops of rain were falling, but every now and then, when the wind would quiet down, I could hear the tractor.

I went inside the house and Helen and the kids were all in bed and sound asleep, so I didn't say anything about it that night. And the next morning, when I had a chance to think about it, I didn't say anything at all. Mostly, I suppose, because I knew no one would believe me and that I'd have to take a lot of kidding about automatic tractors.

Heath got his plowing done and his crops in, well ahead of everyone in the valley. The crops came up in good shape and we had good growing weather; then along in June we got a spell of wet, and everyone got behind with corn plowing because you can't go out in the field when the ground is soggy. All of us chored around our places, fixing fences and doing other odd jobs, cussing out the rain and watching the weeds grow like mad in the unplowed field.

All of us, that is, except Heath. His corn was clean as a whistle and you had to hunt to find a weed. Jingo stopped by one day and asked him how he managed, but Heath just laughed a little, in that quiet way of his, and talked of something else.

The first apples finally were big enough for green-apple pies and there is no one in the country makes better green-apple pies than Helen. She wins prizes with her pies every year at the county fair and she is proud of them.

One day she wrapped up a couple of pies and took them over to the Heaths. It's a neighborly way we have of doing in the valley, with the women running back and forth from one neighbor to another with their cooking. Each one of them has some dish she likes to show off to the neighbors and it's a sort of harmless way of bragging.

Helen and the Heaths got along just swell. She was late in getting home and I was starting supper, with the kids yelling they were hungry when-do-we-eat-around-here, when she finally showed up.

She was full of talk about the Heaths—how they had fixed up the house, you never would have thought anyone could do so much to such a terribly run-down place as they had, and about the garden they had—especially about the garden. It was a big one, she said, and beautifully taken care of and it was full of vegetables she had never seen before. The funniest things you ever saw, she said. Not the ordinary kind of vegetables.

We talked some about those vegetables, speculating that maybe the Heaths had brought the seeds out with them from behind the Iron Curtain, although so far as I could remember, vegetables were vegetables, no matter where you were. They grew the same things in Russia or Rumania or Timbuktu as we did. And, anyhow, by this time I was getting a little skeptical about that story of their escaping from Rumania.

But we didn't have the time for much serious speculation on the Heaths, although there was plenty of casual gossip going around the neighborhood. Haying came along and then the small-grain harvest and everyone was busy. The hay was good and the small-grain crop was fair, but it didn't look like we'd get much corn. For we hit a drought. That's the way it goes—too much rain in June, not enough in August.

We watched the corn and watched the sky and felt hopeful when a cloud showed up, but the clouds never meant a thing. It just seems at times that God isn't on your side.

Then one morning Jingo Harris showed up and stood around, first on one foot, then the other, talking to me while I worked on

an old corn binder that was about worn out and which it didn't look nohow I'd need to use that year.

"Jingo," I said, after I'd watched him fidget for an hour or more, "you got something on your mind."

He blurted it out then. "Heath got rain last night," he said.

"No one else did," I told him.

"I guess you're right," said Jingo. "Heath's the only one."

He told me how he'd gone to cut through Heath's north cornfield, carrying back a couple of balls of binder twine he'd borrowed from Bert Smith. It wasn't until he'd crawled through the fence that he noticed the field was wet, soaked by a heavy rain.

"It must have happened in the night," he said.

He thought it was funny, but figured maybe there had been a shower across the lower end of the valley, although as a rule rains travel up and down the valley, not across it. But when he had crossed the corner of the field and crawled through the fence, he noticed it hadn't rained at all. So he went back and walked around the field and the rain had fallen on the field, but nowhere else. It began at the fence and ended at the fence.

When he'd made a circuit of the field he sat down on one of the balls of twine and tried to get it all thought out, but it made no sense—furthermore, it was plain unbelievable.

Jingo is a thorough man. He likes to have all the evidence and know all there is to know before he makes up his mind. So he went over to Heath's second corn patch, on the west side of the valley. And once again he found that it had rained on that field—on the field, but not around the field.

"What do you make of it?" Jingo asked me and I said I didn't know. I came mighty close to telling him about the unmanned tractor, but I thought better of it. After all, there was no point in getting the neighborhood stirred up.

After Jingo left I got in the car and drove over to the Heath farm, intending to ask him if he could loan me his posthole digger for a day or two. Not that I was going to dig any postholes, but you have to have some excuse for showing up at a neighbor's place.

I never got a chance to ask him for that posthole digger, though. Once I got there I never even thought of it.

Heath was sitting on the front steps of the porch and he seemed glad to see me. He came down to the car and shook my hand and said, "It's good to see you, Calvin." The way he said it made me

feel friendly and sort of important, too—especially that Calvin business, for everyone else just calls me Cal. I'm not downright sure, in fact, that anyone in the neighborhood remembers that my name is Calvin.

"I'd like to show you around the place," he said. "We've done some fixing up."

Fixing up wasn't exactly the word for it. The place was spic and span. It looked like some of those Pennsylvania and Connecticut farms you see in the magazines. The house and all the other buildings had been ramshackle with all the paint peeled off them and looking as if they might fall down at any minute. But now they had a sprightly, solid look and they gleamed with paint. They didn't look new, of course, but they looked as if they'd always been well taken care of and painted every year. The fences were all fixed up and painted, too, and the weeds were cut and a couple of old unsightly scrap-lumber piles had been cleaned up and burned. Heath had even tackled an old iron and machinery junk pile and had it sorted out.

"There was a lot to do," said Heath, "but I feel it's worth it. I have an orderly soul. I like to have things neat."

Which might be true, of course, but he'd done it all in less than six months' time. He'd come to the farm in early March and it was only August and he'd not only put in some hundred acres of crops and done all the other farm work, but he'd got the place fixed up. And that wasn't possible, I told myself. One man couldn't do it, not even with his wife and daughter helping—not even if he worked twenty-four hours a day and didn't stop to eat. Or unless he could take time and stretch it out to make one hour equal three or four.

I trailed along behind Heath and thought about that time-stretching business and was pleased at myself for thinking of it, for it isn't often that I get foolish thoughts that are likewise pleasing. Why, I thought, with a deal like that you could stretch out any day so you could get all the work done you wanted to. And if you could stretch out time, maybe you could compress it, too, so that a trip to a dentist, for example, would only seem to take a minute.

Heath took me out to the garden and Helen had been right. There were the familiar vegetables, of course—cabbages and tomatoes and squashes and all the other kinds that are found in every garden—but in addition to this there were as many others I had

never seen before. He told me the names of them and they seemed to be queer names then, although now it seems a little strange to think they once had sounded queer, for now everyone in the valley grows these vegetables and it seems like we have always had them.

As we talked he pulled up and picked some of the strange vegetables and put them in a basket he had brought along.

"You'll want to try them all," he said. "Some of them you may not like at first, but there are others that you will. This one you eat raw, sliced like a tomato, and this one is best boiled, although you can bake it, too—"

I wanted to ask him how he'd come on the vegetables and where they had come from, but he didn't give me a chance; he kept on telling me about them and how to cook them and that this one was a winter keeper and that one you could can and he gave me one to eat raw and it was rather good.

We'd got to the far end of the garden and were starting to come back when Heath's wife ran around the corner of the house.

Apparently she didn't see me at first or had forgotten I was there, for she called to him and the name she called him wasn't Reginald or Reggie, but a foreign-sounding name. I won't even try to approximate it, for even at the time I wasn't able to recall it a second after hearing it. It was like no word I'd ever heard before.

Then she saw me and stopped running and caught her breath, and a moment later said she'd been listening in on the party line and that Bert Smith's little daughter, Ann, was terribly sick.

"They called the doctor," she said, "but he is out on calls and he won't get there in time."

"Reginald," she said, "the symptoms sound like—"

And she said another name that was like none I'd ever heard or expect to hear again.

Watching Heath's face, I could swear I saw it pale despite his olive tinge of skin.

"Quick!" he shouted and grabbed me by the arm.

We ran around in front to his old clunk of a car. He threw the basket of vegetables in the back seat and jumped behind the wheel. I scrambled in after him and tried to close the door, but it wouldn't close. The lock kept slipping loose and I had to hang onto the door so it wouldn't bang.

We lit out of there like a turpentined dog and the noise that old car made was enough to deafen one. Despite my holding onto it, the door kept banging and all the fenders rattled and there was every other kind of noise you'd expect a junk-heap car to make, with an extra two or three thrown in.

I wanted to ask him what he planned to do, but I was having trouble framing the question in my mind and even if I had known how to phrase it I doubt he could have heard me with all the racket that the car was making.

So I hung on as best I could and tried to keep the door from banging and all at once it seemed to me the car was making more noise than it had any call to. Just like the old haywire tractor made more noise than any tractor should. Too much noise, by far, for the way that it was running. Just like on the tractor, there was no engine vibration and despite all the banging and the clanking we were making time. As I've said, our valley roads are none too good, but even so I swear there were places we hit seventy and we went around sharp corners where, by rights, we should have gone into the ditch at the speed that we were going, but the car just seemed to settle down and hug the road and we never even skidded.

We pulled up in front of Bert's place and Heath jumped out and ran up the walk, with me following him.

Amy Smith came to the door and I could see that she'd been crying, and she looked a little surprised to see the two of us.

We stood there for a moment without saying anything, then Heath spoke to her and here is a funny thing: Heath was wearing a pair of ragged overalls and a sweat-stained shirt and he didn't have a hat and his hair was all rumpled up, but there was a single instant when it seemed to me that he was well-dressed in an expensive business suit and that he took off his hat and bowed to Amy.

"I understand," he said, "that the little girl is sick. Maybe I can help."

I don't know if Amy had seen the same thing that I had seemed to see, but she opened the door and stood to one side so that we could enter.

"In there," she said.

"Thank you, ma'am," said Heath, and went into the room.

Amy and I stood there for a moment, then she turned to me and I could see the tears in her eyes again.

"Cal, she's awful sick," she said.

I nodded miserably, for now the spell was gone and common sense was coming back again and I wondered at the madness of this farmer who thought that he could help a little girl who was terribly sick. And at my madness for standing there, without even going in the room with him.

But just then Heath came out of the room and closed the door softly behind him.

"She's sleeping now," he said to Amy. "She'll be all right."

Then, without another word, he walked out of the door. I hesitated a moment, looking at Amy, wondering what to do. And it was pretty plain there was nothing I could do. So I followed him.

We drove back to his farm at a sober rate of speed, but the car banged and thumped just as bad as ever.

"Runs real good," I yelled at him.

He smiled a bit.

"I keep it tinkered up," he yelled back at me.

When we got to his place, I got out of his car and walked over to my own.

"You forgot the vegetables," he called after me.

So I went back to get them.

"Thanks a lot," I said.

"Anytime," he told me.

I looked straight at him, then, and said: "It sure would be fine if we could get some rain. It would mean a lot to us. A soaking rain right now would save the corn."

"Come again," he told me. "It was good to talk with you."

And that night it rained, all over the valley, a steady, soaking rain, and the corn was saved.

And Ann got well.

The doctor, when he finally got to Bert's, said that she had passed the crisis and was already on the mend. One of those virus things, he said. A lot of it around. Not like the old days, he said, before they got to fooling around with all their miracle drugs, mutating viruses right and left. Used to be, he said, a doctor knew what he was treating, but he don't know any more.

I don't know if Bert or Amy told Doc about Heath, although I imagine that they didn't. After all, you don't tell a doctor that

a neighbor cured your child. And there might have been someone who would have been ornery enough to try to bring a charge against Heath for practicing medicine without a license, although that would have been pretty hard to prove. But the story got around the valley and there was a lot of talk. Heath, I heard, had been a famous doctor in Vienna before he'd made his getaway. But I didn't believe it. I don't even believe those who started the story believed it, but that's the way it goes in a neighborhood like ours.

That story, and others, made quite a flurry for a month or so, but then it quieted down and you could see that the Heaths had become one of us and belonged to the valley. Bert went over and had quite a talk with Heath and the womenfolks took to calling Mrs. Heath on the telephone, with some of those who were listening in breaking in to say a word or two, thereby initiating Mrs. Heath into the round-robin telephone conversations that are going on all the time on our valley party line, with it getting so that you have to bust in on them and tell them to get off the line when you want to make an important call. We had Heath out with us on our coon hunts that fall and some of the young bloods started paying attention to Heath's daughter. It was almost as if the Heaths were old-time residents.

As I've said before, we've always been real fortunate in getting in good neighbors.

When things are going well, time has a way of flowing along so smoothly that you aren't conscious of its passing, and that was the way it was in the valley.

We had good years, but none of us paid much attention to that. You don't pay much attention to the good times, you get so you take them for granted. It's only when bad times come along that you look back and realize the good times you have had.

A year or so ago I was just finishing up the morning chores when a car with a New York license pulled up at the barn-yard gate. It isn't very often we see an out-of-state license plate in the valley, so I figured that it probably was someone who had gotten lost and had stopped to ask directions. There was a man and woman in the front seat and three kids and a dog in the back seat and the car was new and shiny.

I was carrying the milk up from the barn and when the man got out I put the pails down on the ground and waited for him.

He was a youngish sort of fellow and he looked intelligent and he had good manners.

He told me his name was Rickard and that he was a New York newspaperman on vacation and had dropped into the valley on his way out west to check some information.

It was the first time, so far as I knew, that the valley had ever been of any interest newswise and I said so. I said we never did much here to get into the news.

"It's no scandal," Rickard told me, "if that is what you're thinking. It's just a matter of statistics."

There are a lot of times when I don't catch a situation as quickly as I should, being a sort of deliberate type, but it seems to me now that as soon as he said statistics I could see it coming.

"I did a series of farm articles a few months back," said Rickard, "and to get my information I had to go through a lot of government statistics. I never got so sick of anything in my entire life."

"And?" I asked, not feeling too well myself.

"I found some interesting things about this valley," he went on. "I remember that I didn't catch it for a while. Went on past the figures for a ways. Almost missed the significance, in fact. Then I did a double-take and backed up and looked at them again. The full story wasn't in that report, of course. Just a hint of something. So I did some more digging and came up with other facts."

I tried to laugh it off, but he wouldn't let me.

"Your weather, for one thing," he said. "Do you realize you've had perfect weather for the past ten years?"

"The weather's been pretty good," I admitted.

"It wasn't always good. I went back to see."

"That's right," I said. "It's been better lately."

"Your crops have been the best they've ever been in the last ten years."

"Better seed," I said. "Better ways of farming."

He grinned at me. "You guys haven't changed your way of farming in the last quarter century."

And he had me there, of course.

"There was an army worm invasion two years ago," he said. "It hit all around you, but you got by scot-free."

"We were lucky. I remember we said so at the time."

"I checked the health records," he said. "Same thing once again. For ten solid years. No measles, no chickenpox, no pneumonia.

No nothing. One death in ten full years—complications attendant on old age."

"Old Man Parks," I said. "He was going onto ninety. Fine old gentleman."

"You see," said Rickard.

I did see.

The fellow had the figures. He had tracked it down, this thing we hadn't even realized, and he had us cold.

"What do you want me to do about it?" I asked.

"I want to talk to you about a neighbor."

"I won't talk about any of my neighbors. Why don't you talk to him yourself?"

"I tried to, but he wasn't home. Fellow down the road said he'd gone into town. Whole family had gone into town."

"Reginald Heath," I said. There wasn't much sense in playing dumb with Rickard, for he knew all the angles.

"That's the man. I talked to folks in town. Found out he'd never had to have any repair work done on any of his machinery or his car. Has the same machinery he had when he started farming. And it was worn out then."

"He takes good care of it," I told him. "He keeps it tinkered up."

"Another thing," said Rickard. "Since he's been here he hasn't bought a drop of gasoline."

I'd known the rest of it, of course, although I'd never stopped to think about it. But I didn't know about the gasoline. I must have shown my surprise, for Rickard grinned at me.

"What do you want?" I asked.

"A story."

"Heath's the man to talk to. I don't know a thing to help you."

And even when I said it I felt easy in my mind. I seemed to have an instinctive faith that Heath could handle the situation, that he'd know just what to do.

But after breakfast I couldn't settle down to work. I was pruning the orchard, a job I'd been putting off for a year or two and that badly needed doing. I kept thinking of that business of Heath not buying gasoline and that night I'd found the tractor plowing by itself and how smooth both the car and tractor ran despite all the noise they made.

So I laid down my pruning hook and shears and struck out across

the fields. I knew the Heath family was in town, but I don't think it would have made any difference to me if they'd been at home. I think I would have gone just the same. For more than ten years now, I realized, I'd been wondering about that tractor and it was time that I found out.

I found the tractor in the machine shed and I thought maybe I'd have some trouble getting into it. But I didn't have a bit. I slipped the catches and the hood lifted up and I found exactly what I had thought I'd find, except that I hadn't actually worked out in my mind the picture of what I'd find underneath that hood.

It was just a block of some sort of shining metal that looked almost like a cube of heavy glass. It wasn't very big, but it had a massive look about it, as if it might have been a heavy thing to lift.

You could see the old bolt holes where the original internal combustion engine had been mounted and a heavy piece of some sort of metal had been fused across the frame to seat that little power plant. And up above the shiny cube was an apparatus of some sort. I didn't take the time to find out how it worked, but I could see that it was connected to the exhaust and knew it was a dingus that disguised the power plant. You know how in electric trains they have it fixed up so that the locomotive goes *chuff-chuff* and throws out a stream of smoke. Well, that was what that contraption was. It threw out little puffs of smoke and made a tractor noise.

I stood there looking at it and I wondered why it was, if Heath had an engine that worked better than an internal combustion engine, he should have gone to so much trouble to hide the fact he had it. If I'd had a thing like that, I knew I'd make the most of it. I'd get someone to back me and go into production and in no time at all I'd be stinking rich. And there'd be nothing in the world to prevent Heath from doing that. But instead he'd fixed the tractor so it looked and sounded like an ordinary tractor and he'd fixed his car to make so much noise that it hid the fact it had a new type motor. Only he had overdone it. He'd made both the car and tractor make more noise than they should. And he'd missed an important bet in not buying gasoline. In his place I'd bought the stuff, just the way you should, and thrown it away or burned it to get rid of it.

It almost seemed to me that Heath might have had something he was hiding all these years, that he'd tried deliberately to keep himself unnoticed. As if he might really have been a refugee from the Iron Curtain—or from somewhere else.

I put the hood back in place again and snapped the catches shut and when I went out I was very careful to shut the machine shed door securely.

I went back to my pruning and I did quite a bit of thinking and while I was doing it I realized that I'd been doing this same thinking, piecemeal, ever since that night I'd found the tractor running by itself. Thinking of it in snatches and not trying to correlate all my thinking and that way it hadn't added up to much, but now it did and I suppose I should have been a little scared.

But I wasn't scared. Reginald Heath was a neighbor, and a good one, and we'd gone hunting and fishing together and we'd helped one another with haying and threshing and one thing and another and I liked the man as well as anyone I had ever known. Sure, he was a little different and he had a funny kind of tractor and a funny kind of car and he might even have a way of stretching time and since he'd come into the valley we'd been fortunate in weather and in health. All true, of course, but nothing to be scared of. Nothing to be scared of, once you knew the man.

For some reason or other I remembered the time several years before when I'd dropped by of a summer evening. It was hot and the Heath family had brought chairs out on the lawn because it was cooler there. Heath got me a chair and we sat and talked, not about anything in particular, but whatever came into our heads.

There was no moon, but there were lots of stars and they were the prettiest I have ever seen them.

I called Heath's attention to them and, just shooting off my mouth, I told him what little I'd picked up about astronomy.

"They're a long ways off," I said. "So far off that their light takes years to reach us. And all of them are suns. A lot of them bigger than our sun."

Which was about all I knew about the stars.

Heath nodded gravely.

"There's one up there," he said, "that I watch a lot. That blue one, over there. Well, sort of blue, anyhow. See it? See how it twinkles. Like it might be winking at us. A friendly sort of star."

I pretended that I saw the one he was pointing at, although I wasn't sure I did, there were so many of them and a lot of them were twinkling.

Then we got to talking about something else and forgot about the stars. Or at least I did.

Right after supper, Bert Smith came over and said that Rickard had been around asking him some questions and that he'd been down to Jingo's place and that he'd said he'd see Heath just as soon as Heath got back from town.

Bert was a bit upset about it, so I tried to calm him down.

"These city folks get excited easy," I told him. "There's nothing to it."

I didn't worry much about it because I felt sure that Heath could handle things and even if Rickard did write a story for the New York papers it wouldn't bother us. Coon Valley is a long piece from New York.

I figured we'd probably seen and heard the last from Rickard.

But in all my life, I've never been more wrong.

About midnight or so I woke up with Helen shaking me.

"There's someone at the door," she said. "Go see who it is."

So I shucked into my overalls and shoes and lit the lamp and went downstairs to see.

While I'd been getting dressed there'd been some knocking at the door, but as soon as I lit the lamp it quit.

I went to the door and opened it and there stood Rickard and he wasn't near as chipper as he'd been in the morning.

"Sorry to get you up," he said, "but it seems that I'm lost."

"You can't be lost," I told him. "There isn't but one road through the valley. One end of it ties up to Sixty and the other to Eighty-five. You follow the valley road and you're bound to hit one or the other of them."

"I've been driving," he told me, "for the last four hours and I can't find either of them."

"Look," I said, "all you do is drive one way or the other. You can't get off the road. Fifteen minutes either way and you're on a state highway."

I was exasperated with him, for it seemed a silly thing to do. And I don't take kindly to being routed out at midnight.

"But I tell you I'm lost," he said in a sort of desperation and I could see that he was close to panic. "The wife is getting scared and the kids are dead on their feet—"

"All right," I told him. "Let me get on my shirt and tie my shoes. I'll get you out of here."

He told me he wanted to get to Sixty, so I got out my car and told him to follow me. I was pretty sore about it, but I figured the only thing to do was to help him out. He'd upset the valley and the sooner out the better.

I drove for thirty minutes before I began to get confused myself. That was twice as long as it should have taken to get out to the highway. But the road looked all right and there seemed to be nothing wrong, except for the time it took. So I kept on going. At the end of forty-five minutes we were back in front of my place again.

I couldn't figure it out for the life of me. I got out of my car and went back to Rickard's car.

"You see what I mean," he said.

"We must have got turned around," I said.

His wife was almost hysterical.

"What's going on?" she asked me in a high, shrill voice. "What is going on around here?"

"We'll try again," I said. "We'll drive slower this time so we don't make the same mistake."

I drove slower and this time it took an hour to get back to the farm. So we tried for Eighty-five and forty minutes later were right back where we started.

"I give up," I told them. "Get out and come in. We'll fix up some beds. You can spend the night and we'll get you out come light."

I cooked up some coffee and found stuff to make sandwiches while Helen fixed up beds to take care of the five of them.

"The dog can sleep out here in the kitchen," she said.

I got an apple box and quilt and fixed the dog a bed.

The dog was a nice little fellow, a wire-hair who was full of fun, and the Rickard kids were about as fine a bunch of kids as you'd find anywhere.

Mrs. Rickard was all set to have hysterics, but Helen got her to drink some coffee and I wouldn't let them talk about not being able to get out.

"Come daylight," I told them, "and there'll be nothing to it."

After breakfast they were considerably calmed down and seemed to have no doubt they could find Number Sixty. So they started out alone, but in an hour were back again. I took my car and started out ahead of them and I don't mind admitting I could feel bare feet walking up and down my spine.

I watched closely and all at once I realized that somehow we were headed back into the valley instead of heading out of it. So I stopped the car and we turned our cars around and headed back in the right direction. But in ten minutes we were turned around again. We tried again and this time we fairly crawled, trying to spot the place where we got turned around. But we could never spot it.

We went back to my place and I called up Bert and Jingo and asked them to come over.

Both of them tried to lead the Rickards out, one at a time, then the two of them together, but they were no better at it than I was. Then I tried it alone, without the Rickards following me, and I had no trouble at all. I was out to highway Sixty and back in half an hour. So we thought maybe the jinx was broken and I tried to lead out the Rickard car, but it was no soap.

By mid-afternoon we knew the answer. Any of the natives could get out of the valley, but the Rickards couldn't.

Helen put Mrs. Rickard to bed and fed her some sedative and I went over to see Heath.

He was glad to see me and he listened to me, but all the time I was talking to him I kept remembering how one time I had wondered if maybe he could stretch out time. When I had finished he was silent for a while, as if he might have been going over some decision just to be certain that it was right.

"It's a strange business, Calvin," he said finally, "and it doesn't seem right the Rickards should be trapped in this valley if they don't want to stay here.

"Yet, it's a fortunate thing for us, actually. Rickard was planning on writing a story about us, and if he'd written as he planned to, there'd been a lot of attention paid us. There would have been a crowd of people coming in—other newspapermen and government men and people from the universities and the idly curious. They'd have upset our lives and some of them would have offered

us big sums of money for our farms, much more than they're worth, and all of it would spoil the valley for us. I don't know about you, but I like the valley as it is. It reminds me of . . . well, of another place."

"Rickard still can telephone that story," I told him, "or he can mail it out. Just keeping Rickard here won't prevent that story being printed."

"Somehow I think it will," he said. "I am fairly certain he won't telephone it or send it in the mails."

I had come half prepared to go to bat for Rickard, but I thought over what Heath had pointed out to me and I didn't do it.

I saw that if there were some principle or power which kept the valley healthy and insured good weather and made living pleasant, why, then, the rest of the world would be hell-bent to use the same principle or power. It might have been selfish of me, but I felt fairly certain the principle or power couldn't be spread thin enough to cover all the world. And if anyone were to have it, I wanted it kept right here, where it rightfully belonged.

And there was another thing: If the world should learn there was such a power or principle and if we couldn't share it or refused to share it, then all the world would be sore at us and we'd live in the center of a puddle of hatred.

I went back home and had a talk with Rickard and I didn't try to hide anything from him. He was all set to go and have it out with Heath, but I advised against it. I pointed out that he didn't have a shred of proof and he'd only make himself look silly, for Heath would more than likely act as if he didn't know what he was getting at. After quite a tussle, he took my advice.

The Rickards stayed on at our place for several days and occasionally Rickard and I would make a trial run just to test the situation out, but there was no change.

Finally Bert and Jingo came over and we had a council of war with the Rickard family. By this time Mrs. Rickard was taking it somewhat better and the Rickard kids were happy with the outdoor life and the Rickard dog was busily engaged in running all the valley rabbits down to skin and bones.

"There's the old Chandler place up at the head of the valley," said Jingo. "No one's been living there for quite a while, but it's in good shape. It could be fixed up so it was comfortable."

"But I can't stay here," protested Rickard. "I can't settle down here."

"Who said anything about settling down?" asked Bert. "You just got to wait it out. Some day whatever is wrong will get straightened out and then you can get away."

"But my job," said Rickard.

Mrs. Rickard spoke up then. You could see she didn't like the situation any better than he did, but she had that queer, practical, everyday logic that a woman at times surprises a man by showing. She knew that they were stuck here in the valley and she was out to make the best of it.

"Remember that book you're always threatening to write?" she asked. "Maybe this is it."

That did it.

Rickard mooned around for a while, making up his mind, although it already was made up. Then he began talking about the peace in the valley—the peace and quietness and the lack of hurry—just the place to write a book.

The neighbors got together and fixed up the house on the old Chandler place and Rickard called his office and made some excuse and got a leave of absence and wrote a letter to his bank, transferring whatever funds he had. Then he settled down to write.

Apparently in his phone calls and his letter writing he never even hinted at the real reason for his staying—perhaps because it would have sounded downright silly—for there was no ruckus over his failure to go back.

The valley settled down to its normal life again and it felt good after all the uproar. The neighbors shopped for the Rickards and carried out from town all the groceries and other things they needed and once in a while Rickard took the car and had a try at finding the state highways.

But mostly he wrote and in about a year he sold this book of his. Probably you have read it: *You Could Hear the Silence.* Made him a hunk of money. But his New York publishers still are going slowly mad trying to understand why he steadfastly refuses to stir out of the valley. He has refused lecture tours, has declined dinners in his honor and turned down all the other glitter that goes with writing a best seller.

The book didn't change Rickard at all. By the time he sold it

he was well liked in the valley and seemed to like everyone—except possibly Heath. He stayed rather cold to Heath. He used to do a lot of walking, to get exercise, he said, although I think that he thought up most of his book out on those walks. And he'd stop by and chew the fat when he was out on those walks and that way everyone got to know him. He used to talk a lot about when he could get out of the valley and all of us were beginning to feel sorry that a time would come when he would leave, for the Rickards had turned out to be good neighbors. There must be something about the valley that brings out the best there is in everyone. As I have said before, we have yet to get a bad neighbor and that is something most neighborhoods can't say.

One day I had stopped on my way from town to talk a while with Heath and as we stood talking, up the road came Rickard. You could see he wasn't going anywhere, was but just out for a walk.

He stopped and talked with us for a few minutes, then suddenly he said, "You know, we've made up our minds that we would like to stay here."

"Now, that is fine," said Heath.

"Grace and I were talking about it the other night," said Rickard. "About the time when we could get out of here. Then suddenly we stopped our talking and looked at one another and we knew right then and there we didn't want to leave. It's been so peaceful and the kids like the school here so much better than in the city and the people are so fine we couldn't bear to leave."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," Heath told him. "But it seems to me you've been sticking pretty close. You ought to take the wife and kids in town to see a show."

And that was it. It was as simple as all that.

Life goes on in the valley as it always has, except it's even better now. All of us are healthy. We don't even seem to get colds any more. When we need rain we get it and when there's need of sun the sun is sure to shine. We aren't getting rich, for you can't get rich with all this Washington interference, but we're making a right good living. Rickard is working on his second book and once in a while I go out at night and try to locate the star Heath showed me that evening long ago.

But we still get some publicity now and then. The other night I was listening to my favorite newscaster and he had an item he had a lot of fun with.

"Is there really such a place as Coon Valley?" he asked and you could hear the chuckle just behind the words. "If there is, the government would like to know about it. The maps insist there is and there are statistics on the books that say it's a place where there is no sickness, where the climate is ideal, where there's never a crop failure—a land of milk and honey. Investigators have gone out to seek the truth of this and they can't find the place, although people in nearby communities insist there's such a valley. Telephone calls have been made to people listed as residents of the valley, but the calls can't be completed. Letters have been written to them, but the letters are returned to the sender for one or another of the many reasons the post office has for non-delivery. Investigators have waited in nearby trading centers, but Coon Valley people never came to town while the investigators were there. If there is such a place and if the things the statistics say of it are true, the government would be very interested, for there must be data in the valley that could be studied and applied to other sectors. We have no way of knowing whether this broadcast can reach the valley—if it is any more efficient than investigators or telephone or the postal service. But if it does—and if there is such a place as Coon Valley—and if one of its residents should be listening, won't he please speak up!"

He chuckled then, chuckled very briefly, and went on to tell the latest rumor about Khrushchev.

I shut off the radio and sat in my chair and thought about the times when for several days no one could find his way out of the valley and of the other times when the telephones went dead for no apparent reason. And I remembered how we'd talked about it among ourselves and wondered if we should speak to Heath about it, but had in each case decided not to, since we felt that Heath knew what he was doing and that we could trust his judgment.

It's inconvenient at times, of course, but there are a lot of compensations. There hasn't been a magazine solicitor in the valley for more than a dozen years—nor an insurance salesman, either.