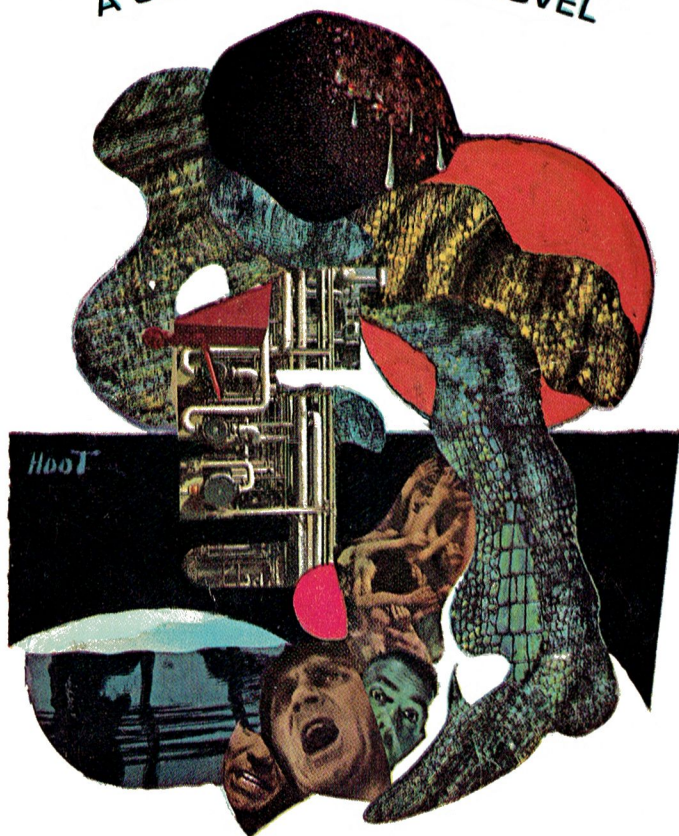


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# THE CLONE

A SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL



**Theodore L. Thomas  
and Kate Wilhelm**





## THE CLONE IN ACTION:

The clone pulsed up beyond the sink drain, and it was then that Maude Wendall saw it.

She frowned with annoyance at the sink stoppage, and prodded at it with her pot scraper. It resisted. She tried to push the mass back down the drain, but it would not go. Clicking her tongue in exasperation, she dropped the pot scraper and prodded the mass with her finger.

Through the permeable cell wall of the clone's tissue flowed the enzyme-laden ichor. On contact with human tissue, the enzymes immediately broke down its proteinaceous structure and utilized the amino acids and other residues to construct new clone tissue. There was no pain in the finger. It was several seconds before the woman realized that her finger had disappeared, had been replaced by the clone's tissue. She screamed then, and lunged back from the sink . . .



# **THE CLONE**

**Theodore L. Thomas  
and Kate Wilhelm**



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*clone, n. . . . Biol. The aggregate of individual organisms descended by asexual reproduction from a single sexually produced individual; . . . Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Ed.*

## CHAPTER ONE

12:33 A. M.

The city glittered, unsuspecting in the night. The night breeze drifted from the edge of the city out over Lake Michigan. The night was clear, except for high, thin wisps of clouds that sometimes dimmed the stars. From the west, still out of sight, a storm front approached, carrying with it several inches of rainfall.

A large city never really sleeps, and this one bustled with late-night activity. Office buildings were brightly lighted as the scrubwomen methodically sponged up the day's accretion of dirt. Cars and buses prowled the streets, and people crowded the neon-lighted sidewalks. Some parts of the city lay in gloom; the manufacturing processes inside the buildings in these areas were stilled for the night. It was a city like any other city a little after midnight—no hint of disaster, no forebodings of doom, nothing but normal activity. The clone had not yet been born.

Deep beneath the surface of the streets were the veins and arteries and nerve fibers of the city. Water lines delivered water to every building, and sanitary sewer lines carried away waste products. Telephone cables tied the city together and linked it with the rest of the world. Electric conduits, steam lines, air lines, forgotten conduits, rusted pipes wormed through the dirt and rock, some pulsing with energy, some feebly active, some inert—veins, arteries, and nerve fibers of the city, without which the city could not live.

The array of chemical compounds carried by the sewer

system of a city is unbelievable. There are ground-up foods of every conceivable kind. There are soaps and detergents, discarded medicines, spices and flavorings and colorings and inks, cosmetics and rinses and bleaches, resins and catalysts and enzymes, and the waste products of life processes. The blending of these materials in an almost infinite variety of concentrations and under a wide range of temperatures and pressures produces a chemist's cauldron from which anything might spring. It is surprising that life in some form does not spring forth oftener from the rich primeval broth that flows beneath the streets of any great city.

It was 12:33 A. M. when it began.

Near the center of the city, a block from City Hospital, stood a building whose fourteenth floor was being remodeled. The second shift had left, and a few workmen stayed behind to clean up and leave the area in condition for occupancy the next morning. Henry Pollini straightened and looked with satisfaction at the clean pipes under the set tubs in the mop room. He rubbed his back, then bent and threw his handful of rags in the waste can. He started to throw in his bottle of muriatic acid, but stopped when he saw that it was half full. He did not quite dare to throw the acid in the waste can. He looked around; no one was watching. He quickly pulled the glass stopper and poured the acid down the drain. Hydrogen chloride fumes caught at his throat, and hastily he turned on the water tap to flush the acid down the drain. Then he dropped the empty bottle in the waste can, and left for home.

The acid swirled down the drainpipe, through the trap, and into the main downpipe. Down the entire fourteen stories it ran, undiluted by any other use of the pipe at the moment. The solution plunged into a lateral beneath the basement floor, passed out of the building under the footings, and emptied into a larger pipe beneath the street. The larger pipe ran to the nearest street intersection and spilled into a great concrete collector box two feet beneath the curbing where the sidewalk joined the road-bed. Several lines led into the box, and one large pipe left it, on the way to the sewage treatment plant.

Below the outlet, and to one side, was a casting fault



where an air bubble had been trapped during the pouring of the concrete. The thin shell of concrete that had separated the bubble from the interior of the box had eroded, leaving a pool hollowed out into the wall of the box, a pool of about one cubic foot in volume, reaching back to within three inches of the outside wall of the box.

A foot beyond the outside wall was an elbow bend of a high-pressure steam line, buried in the tamped earth. Heat poured from the elbow and flowed toward the pool; it maintained the pool at a constant 101° Fahrenheit.

The muriatic acid, dumped down the drain by Henry Pollini, was emptied into the collector box, became diluted with its contents, and swirled into the pool; it neutralized the excess alkalinity there, and converted the fluid into something very much like amniotic fluid. The pool, the concrete pool, became a womb. The time was 12:48 A. M.

Henry Pollini had not yet left the fourteenth floor when the second step took place. A scrubwoman in a nearby building straightened and pushed the backs of her hands into the small of her back. She sighed and wrung the mop out for the last time into a bucket of blackened water. She looked around the well scrubbed floor of the ladies' room and decided that it was clean enough; no one would notice that streak of dirt in the corner. She picked up the bucket and hobbled over to a sink. Without a thought she poured it down, as she had every night except Saturday for the past eighteen years. The dirty water coursed down the drainpipe as it had innumerable times before. Though it was black with dirt particles, grease and hair, scraps of paper and rubber, the water was a fairly strong solution of trisodium phosphate. It flowed into the network of laterals and finally entered the collector box fifteen seconds after the charge of muriatic acid. It entered from a different pipe, and the swirl that carried it deposited only a minute part of the trisodium phosphate in the pool. But it was enough.

Meanwhile, a busboy in a hamburger joint had scraped into the disposal unit a large volume of leftover meat scraps that were beginning to smell too much to be served up the next day. The whirling teeth of the unit did an excellent job of converting the meat to microscopic size, so small that the meat particles needed only a

slightly acid medium to pass into solution. The hamburger joint was closest of all to the collector box; the partially solubilized meat entered the box a few seconds after the charge of trisodium phosphate.

The three principal ingredients were now present, immersed in a rich mother liquor, warm, seething, ready. A minor current swirled past the pool. It carried a fleck of silica gel that had bobbed up and down in the collector box for a week, taking up a few atoms of mercury from mercurochrome, a few atoms of zinc from an ointment-smeared gauze bandage, an odd titanium-chromium complex that had formed from some paint residues, and some aluminum hydroxide in an unusual state of hydrolysis. The surface of the mote of silica gel was in a perfect catalytic state as it swept in through the mouth of the pool, and settled on the bottom near the back where the temperature was a fraction of a degree higher than in the rest of the pool.

The time was 12:49 A. M.

A hemin molecule from the meat was half in solution, half out when it touched the surface of the silica gel. One end of the molecule bonded to the surface, and the polarity of the entire molecule changed. It hung and quivered, and the charge from its other end picked up from the water another, unnamed molecule, brought it to the surface, and bound it. The two molecules bent toward each other and touched in the middle to form a third molecule which instantly dropped off the surface and floated nearby. The same sequence of events happened again, for the water in the pool was rich in nutrients and other complex materials. Soon the water around the mote was thick with H-shaped molecules, all with their stems pointed toward the center of the mote. The time was 12:50 A. M.

Into the viscous, concentric shells that now surrounded the mote drifted two atoms of iodine from the remnants of tincture of iodine. Instantly the shells of H-shaped compounds clotted into two large strands, one on each side of the mote. It was then that a lateral pipe emptied into the collector box. Nothing entered the pool at the place where the mote was, but the waters were disturbed slightly, and the two strands drifted against the wall into a region of increased concentration of calcium carbonate.



The pH changed, the calcium carbonate became part of the molecule, and chemical action stopped for the moment. There came another swirl in the collector box, another gentle pulse in the pool, and the two separate molecules closed and became one. At that instant, the clone was born. The time was 12:51 A. M.

Many things could have happened to stop the growth at that point. Slight excesses of any acid or alkali instantly would have disrupted the long, thin, fragile chain of molecules. Reactive radicals of any kind would have terminated the ability of the chain to reproduce itself. But none of these things occurred. The waving, thin chain remained untouched by disaster. Smaller molecules began to drop into place along the chain, conforming to it, wrapping themselves around it. Soon the helix was complete, and another began to form around it. The pool was rich in nutrients and complex materials; the tiny chain drew on them and built new chains. When four had been completed, they separated two by two, still linked at the ends, and continued the process. By 1:50 A. M., after one hour, the growing structure was large enough to be seen with the naked eye—as large, almost, as a grain of sand. As it grew, its rate of growth increased, and by 2:50 A. M. it had formed a marble-sized mass of pulsing tissue. It reached the point where it no longer needed the precise compounds that fitted along the thin chains. It was able to seize other materials and convert them to its own use, make from them the substances that it needed for continued growth. The clone was a creature of growth, and all the nutrients it needed were at hand in the pool.

In another hour it was a full cubic foot large; it had filled the pool with its substance, and its tissues protruded slightly into the collector box itself. A profusion of nutrients awaited it there, and it began to grow even faster. Conforming to the shape of the box, it adhered to the walls and began to grow along them. Its tissues at first only one-sixteenth inch in thickness, the clone spread over the interior of the box and its extended length measured in feet. Growth ceased toward the top where there were no liquids, but it continued around the lower regions where nourishment was easy to find.

By the third hour after its birth, the clone had lined the fluid-filled portion of the box completely, and the

lining began to thicken. It grew around the mouths of the lateral pipes where they entered the box, leaving openings so that materials continued to come into the box. But the time came when the lower portion of the box was a solid mass of clone tissue, pulsing, substantial, and seeking other directions for growth. It had to go somewhere. At first it merely grew up the walls of the box above the level of the liquids. The box walls were wet and slimy, but the clone tissue cleansed them as it grew, strongly clinging to the cement walls, and finally lining the entire box. The clone had reached a state in its growth where it could resist the effects of corrosive chemicals, and it could grow around the materials that it did not absorb and convert into its own tissue.

The laterals continued to pour into the box, but at a reduced rate, and the clone began to feel the effects of reduced nourishment. It craved nitrogenous substances particularly, and there was a good supply in the underground pipes; but as the clone grew, its requirements became greater. It had to grow, and the collector box was too small to contain it. There was no place to go except out the laterals. The clone entered the pipe from which the most nutrients poured. The time was 4:55 A. M.

The clone grew as an interior sleeve along the pipe, growing at a much faster rate in the much smaller pipe. The tissues that lined the pipe were one-eighth inch thick at the growing edge. The growth advanced now at the rate of five feet a minute, and the rate was increasing. As the edge advanced through the pipe, the tissue behind slowly thickened as nutrients became available. When the growing edge had gone fifty feet, the clone tissue thickened sufficiently to close the lateral pipe completely. The clone absorbed most of the material, so there was no backup in the pipes.

When the growing edge had progressed almost two hundred feet down the first pipe, a second growth started from the collector box down another pipe. The clone needed additional food-seeking shoots.

Now the clone developed a means to strengthen its growth. When it came to a pipe joint—an annular region of increased diameter inside the pipe—it deposited a new kind of tissue. It was in the nature of nervous tissue, a kind of control center that kept the growing edge vigorous



and adaptable, and made it unnecessary to maintain all genes in the tissue at the growing edge. As the clone grew, therefore, it developed a potential for regrowth in the event disaster eliminated one or more of its food-seeking growing edges.

The clone grew down the first lateral pipe until it came to a lateral that led into a large apartment house. Normally it would have grown around the opening but, at the moment it came to the junction, the flow in the collector pipe was drastically diminished, while the flow from the lateral was profuse. Accordingly, the clone turned up the lateral. But the flow in the lateral was of short duration, a mere burst of activity in the apartment building. Fifty feet inside the lateral, the flow dropped to a mere trickle. The clone tissue became ravenous. It drew energy from a little additional flow and speeded its growth. It turned upward, up one of the narrower soil pipes leading to an apartment. Water was flowing down this pipe, carrying scraps of nitrogenous matter. The clone followed the flow back until its tissues lay just beneath the sink where Maude Wendall stood scraping the breakfast dishes down the sink.

## CHAPTER TWO

7:35 A. M.

A ring of clone tissue built up just beneath the drain of the sink, and there it thickened. Maude Wendall was sleepy, and she continued scraping the dishes and pans and did not see the clone. The thickening of the tissues continued until a ring bulged slightly into the sink itself. Sunlight flooding in through the window fell on the ring of tissue, and for the first time the clone felt the impact of the energy in light. Cross-links formed in the tissues; new molecules came into being. The tissue took on a greenish tinge, and the gentle pulsings became writhings. The clone pulsed up beyond the sink drain, and it was then that Maude Wendall saw it.

She frowned with annoyance at the sink stoppage, and prodded at it with her pot scraper. It resisted. She tried to push the mass back down the drain, but it would not go. Clicking her tongue in exasperation, she dropped the pot scraper and prodded the mass with her finger.

Through the permeable cell walls of the clone tissue flowed the enzyme-laden ichor. On contact with human tissue, the enzymes immediately broke down its proteinaceous structure and utilized the amino acids and other residues to construct new clone tissue. There was no pain in the finger. It was several seconds before the woman realized that her finger had disappeared, had been replaced by the clone's tissue. She screamed then, and lunged back from the sink.

The clone tissue stretched as she pulled it away from the sink, and as it stretched and grew thinner, it grew stronger. Three feet from the sink the strand of clone tissue had a strength approximating that of a wire cable. The sudden stop jerked Maude Wendall to her knees, swinging her to one side, sweeping some glasses off the counter top and sending them crashing to the floor. It took a few seconds for her eyes to focus again on her hand. The hand was gone, and the wrist, and part of the forearm, replaced by the greenish luminescent tissue that stretched over the rim of the sink and down the drain. She screamed once more.

Frank Wendall had been packing his sample kit in the living room, getting ready for another day's selling. At his wife's first scream he looked toward the kitchen and called, "What's amatter now?" He listened to the crash of glasses, then got to his feet and ambled toward the kitchen door. When he entered, he saw his wife on her knees in front of the sink, pulling against what looked like a clothesline leading up into the sink.

He said, "Oh for Pete's sake." He walked over to the line, grabbed it with both hands and began to pull on it. It did not give, so he leaned over and looked at the drain in the bottom of the sink. He saw the mass of tissue that filled it and which rapidly necked down to the thin strand he held in his hands. He looked at his hands. His eyes widened and he choked back a gasp and looked down at his wife. The clone had taken her right arm and part of her shoulder and chest and was about to engulf her head.



The water content of the human body is about 60 percent by weight. The clone tissue, on the other hand, contained only about 40 percent by weight of water. As the clone absorbed human tissue and converted it to its own kind, it was able to utilize only the amount of water it needed for itself. As a consequence, the line of demarcation that divided clone tissue from human was marked with a dripping line of water that poured to the floor. The line of demarcation advanced rapidly, so the excess water left both clone and human tissues soaking wet, saturating the clothing of the human being, then running down the body and accumulating on the floor.

Frank Wendall saw the dripping line disappear inside his wife's dress, and he saw the dress gradually grow wetter downward. The right upper side of her torso took on an odd shapelessness, and the dress began to collapse inward. The head disappeared, changed into a thickened cylinder of clone tissue, and she rolled over on the floor in a puddle of water, stretching the clone a little more.

Frank Wendall recovered his senses enough to bellow and try to leap back from the sink, but he, too, was dragged to a sudden stop. He thrashed and twisted and turned, making hoarse sounds as he fought the clone. But his twistings and turnings entwined the clone around his body so that it began to take him in several places at once. It quickly reached his chest, and the noises he was making stopped. For another ten seconds his body flopped and twitched, and then it lay still.

In the next apartment the Knapps woke up and looked at each other, screams still ringing faintly in their ears. George Knapp shook his head sleepily and said, "All the time fight, fight, fight. I don't know why they do it. Why do they put up with each other?"

His wife sniffed. "She's too good for him, she thinks. He should be doing better, she thinks. If she only knew. She's lucky to have him, her with her airs. Hmff." And they both turned over and went back to sleep.

There was no more sound from the Wendall apartment. The kitchen floor was wet. The clone had rejected thirty-six pounds of water from the man, and twenty-four pounds of water from the woman, a total of 7.2 gallons of warm water. Too much to be absorbed by the clothing, it spread out in a large puddle on the kitchen floor and

worked its way through the cracks in the flooring tile. The clone moved around in the puddle. It took the nylon undergarments of the woman, and the wool trousers of the man, but it rejected her cotton dress and the man's cotton undergarments. It took the shoes of both, and then there was nothing left to take. It formed a film on the floor and explored the wax coating on the flooring tile, and the floor tile itself, and the metal legs of the kitchen table and chairs, and the painted molding where the wall joined the floor. It did not take any of these things.

The clone had found the nourishment it craved, for the moment. The pressure of hunger had not yet grown so great as to force molecular rearrangements in its tissue. The tendrils and films of the clone tissue in various parts of the kitchen consolidated, moving back toward the sink. The strand drew itself over the rim and squeezed back into the drain and lay motionless just below the sink. The water on the floor finally worked its way through the tiles and the subfloor and began to drip from the ceiling into the kitchen of the apartment below.

The time was 7:45 A. M. In the buried pipes beneath the city the clone continued to grow. It entered more and more branches where laterals joined the main collector pipes. As before, it grew out mainly at its ends, and the tissues left behind consolidated and grew thicker. Bunches of nervous tissue grew more and more numerous. The clone entered other collector boxes, and filled them, and then went on. Time after time it turned off into laterals that led to buildings and stores and other structures where people were. The static portions of its body required relatively small quantities of nutrients, while the parts that were growing needed large amounts. The clone reached the point in its growth where one edge region could grow rapidly if the nutrients flowed freely, while another edge region lay dormant until such time as nutrients flowed for it.

The clone underlay a full ten city blocks, edging its way into most of the structures in the area, but not leaving the pipes in any. At 7:55 A. M. it entered a lateral that led to a large office building with a restaurant on the first floor. Dishwashing was at its height in the restaurant, and there was a constant flow of rich water down the drain. The clone followed the stream of water up the



lateral, then entered the line that led to the main dishwashing tub. A final surge of water brought the clone to the rim of the drain; then it bulged out of the drain and formed a nodule of matter fluorescing faintly green at the bottom of the tub.

Harry Schwartz, dishwasher, stared at the gently pulsing ball; he poked at it with his polyurethane sponge. The sponge stuck to the clone, and Harry watched it disappear into the clone tissue. He looked around to his sidekick and said, "Hey, Joe, looka here. Damn thing ate my sponge."

"Huh?" Joe stepped up to the tub and looked in. He snorted when he saw the ball. "Aw," he said, "why doncha clean your tub?" He began to reach down, but Harry Schwartz grabbed his arm.

"Don't touchit. It'll eatcha just like it ate my sponge."

Joe shook him off, reached in and scooped up the clone with both hands. He pulled at it and was brought up short. He pulled harder, but he could not move farther than one step from the tub. "What a mess you got here!" He tried to pull again.

"Look atcha," shouted Harry, "it's eating your hands! It's eating ya!"

Joe looked at his hands and saw that they were almost gone. He yelled and threw his weight against the clone, but he was held fast. He screamed to Harry, "Get it off. Get it off, quick."

Harry Schwartz started to reach for the strand of tissue that bound Joe, but thought better of it. "Wait. I'll get a knife." He turned and ran toward the board on the far wall that held the knives used in food preparation.

But Joe was in a panic. With his arms half gone, he ran back and forth in front of the tub like a puppy on the end of a rope, screaming, "Get it off me. Get it off me."

A second cook and a busboy and a waiter ran over to him. The cook said, "Shut up, will you? The customers'll hear you. What are you doing with that?" He reached for the strand of clone.

From across the room Harry Schwartz shouted at him, "Don't touch it. It'll eatcha." But the cook paid no attention. He grabbed the strand, pulled, and was caught. He tried to back away and dragged the strand of clone

against the arm of the busboy. The waiter, too, seized the clone and began to pull.

The weight of the four men was appreciable, but with so much new tissue being produced every moment, the clone was able to pay out increasing lengths of itself, and the men reeled back from the tub, drawing out the clone tissue as they went. The strands knocked over two small tables, and swept clear the baker's table piled high with newly baked pastries and buns. The clone fastened to the baked goods as it touched them, and more offshoots grew.

The noise brought others of the staff running to the kitchen, and they saw the entangled men struggling with what looked like a gigantic piece of chewing gum. Some flung themselves into the midst of the struggling group, but some hung back when they saw that only partial bodies remained jerking and twisting in the seething mass. A woman shrieked, a man fainted and fell limp to the floor. A strand of clone was dragged across his body and consumed it while he lay unconscious.

Harry Schwartz found himself trapped in a corner, imprisoned there by strands of clone. He held a meat cleaver in his hand, and he waited for a chance to use it. Right in front of him the clone finished taking the second cook, and a thickened mass of clone tissue lay still for the moment, connected to the washtub by a much thinner strand that stretched across the floor. Harry waited for a moment when there was no struggling near him; then he acted.

He carefully reached over the thickened mass to the thin connecting strand, raised the meat cleaver high in the air, and brought it swiftly down. The cleaver bit through the tissue and into the floor tile. Harry lifted the cleaver, and watched incredulously as the cut pieces of clone flowed together. He looked up wildly at the rest of the kitchen.

Great puddles of water were everywhere, and water flowed from the food preparation counters. There was little screaming now. In the doorway stood a small man, looking calmly at what was happening. Harry shouted at him, "Get help, willya? Don't just stand there. Get help!"

The small man looked at him, and then calmly stepped back through the door and out of sight. He was replaced by several breakfast customers. They looked and their eyes



widened; they stiffened. Harry shouted, "Get help, willya? Get help!"

One of them saw Harry cowering in the corner, and he started toward him, stepping over the strands of clone that were nearby. "Get back, it'll eatcha, don't come in here," yelled Harry. The man did not listen, and the last strand of clone touched him and clung to his foot, swiftly absorbing the shoe and passing inward to the sock and the foot. The man kicked out violently then, and when that did no good, he began to scream hoarsely.

Harry Schwartz came out of his corner with his cleaver poised again. He circled the trapped man and bent over the strand that led to the foot. He swung the cleaver again, buried it in the tile right through the clone's body. This time, instead of lifting the cleaver straight up, he pushed it sideways, separating the clone tissue. It separated easily, and for the first time a piece of clone tissue lay separated from the parent.

Harry straightened and looked at the man's foot. Nothing had changed. The clone just as swiftly continued absorbing the man's flesh, the circle of water pouring down as the absorption advanced.

"Take it off! Take it off!" The man stopped screaming long enough to shout at Harry.

Harry shook his head. "Mac, I can't. Wait a minute, though." Harry turned back to his corner and grabbed a large pot and carried it over to a nearby faucet. He turned on the hot water, waited until it blasted forth half steam and half boiling-hot water, and then he filled the pot. He stepped carefully back to the man who was now kicking futilely with the little that was left of his one leg. Harry said, "Hold on, now." And he poured the boiling water down the man's side.

The man's screams rang out anew. "You're killing me. You're killing me. Stop it!" He swung a fist at Harry. He lost his balance with no leg to support him, and fell to the floor right on top of the mass of clone tissue. Part of it touched his face, and his cries were stifled.

Harry bent to look at the portion of clone on which he had poured the boiling water. It had whitened a little, but it still pulsed, and beneath the thin surface whiteness he could still see a faint greenish coloration. Other than that, the individual portion of the clone seemed unaffected. It

had grown larger, and Harry realized he was in danger. He retreated to his corner and climbed on a ledge, picking up the cleaver again. He looked at the door and saw Gracie, one of the waitresses. He shouted at her to get out, but she was too stunned to hear. There was nothing more Harry could do.

## CHAPTER THREE

8:00 A. M.

By 8:00 A. M. the city was stirring more briskly. Traffic was flowing in from the suburbs bearing white collar workers who had had no time yet for morning coffee and doughnuts. Extra buses and trains were easing into place in the morning lineup; car-pool drivers paused, honked once or twice, and crept back into the lines of cars that extended along all the major arteries of the city. Coffee shops, drugstore counters, cafeterias, all braced themselves for the regular influx of the hurrying morning trade. News vendors shuffled change; from the apartments spewed forth the city's children to resume the play left off the night before in the bare dirt of the pens of backyards, shadowed again and again by the roaring, crammed cars of the elevated. The children seldom looked overhead at the monsters that thundered past; the passing herds on wheels seldom looked down.

On South Cullerton the apartments were walkups over small, gasping shops, whose life blood was feeling the squeeze of urban renewal, with block on block of high-rise apartments springing up from the ashes of razed tenements and stores. Daily the shopowners wrung their hands, eyeing the progress of the ball wrecker and the 'dozers, speechless over the din of the avaricious machines, and here and there on Cullerton packing had commenced. Mark Kenniston stepped from the grimy doorway of his apartment house, careful not to touch the frame with any part of his white-clad body. Before 8:00 A. M. was officially rung in by the bells of the Presby-



terian Church three blocks away, dust was rising from the construction site where wrecking and building seemed to be taking place simultaneously. The dust hung in the morning air, already heavy with vapor and exhaust fumes, and the light had a dirty look. It was going to be another of the hottest days of the summer, even though the calendar read September, and summer should have been a thing of memory by then.

Mark shrugged, turning his eyes from the dust devils, and started his eight-block walk to work. He kept his eyes on his white shoes and watched the dirt fill in the worn cracks. Mark Kenniston was thirty; he was tall, six feet one, and too thin. He tended to be careless about haircuts, and his dark blond hair that morning was too long. There was a sharp rise of eyebrows over gray eyes, and his mouth was firm. It was not a memorable face. He was employed by the city as a junior pathologist, and had no money that September morning for a new pair of shoes; as he walked he tried not to think of the jobs he might have taken. He could have accepted the advice of his friend and teacher at Northwestern who had told him to go into biological warfare research for the government, or to one of the major corporate labs where similar work was being done. The pay would have been good; the hours fine; prestige. . . . A thin trickle of perspiration itched between his shoulder blades and he twitched, blotting it into his shirt. It wasn't too late, he told himself, and another quieter voice mocked him even as he said it. The same teacher also had said: "You want money, that's the way. You want experience, work for City Hospital a couple of years."

He scowled and kicked at a heap of dirt and then scowled more deeply when most of it settled on his once-white shoes. He headed for Al's Place for breakfast. At the doorway he picked up the morning paper, found his customary table and waited for his coffee to appear. The restaurant was noisier than usual that morning, and a free-for-all seemed to be taking place in the kitchen. Mark glanced toward the back room in annoyance. Gracie was backing out through the swinging doors. He folded his paper to the editorial page and scanned it quickly. The noise level rose and he stopped looking at

the paper. He heard Harry's voice over the cries and shouts, and he left his table.

Harry Schwartz had taught Mark the tricks of a short-order cook when Mark first arrived in the city, broke, but enrolled, one term paid, in the university. Harry had given him a lumpy couch to sleep on and had fed him when his lunch money had gone for books. When Harry raised his voice, something was wrong.

Gracie had backed out of the kitchen and stopped, her tray held askew, her face ashen and blank. People were leaving the restaurant, and in the corner a man was dialing the phone, his eyes fastened in a horrified gaze on the swinging door that led to the kitchen.

Mark strode across the restaurant and touched Gracie's shoulder. She didn't move and he had to put her to one side. He pushed open the door, stepped into the kitchen.

At first he thought a bunch of schoolboys must have gotten in and had themselves a water fight; water was everywhere on the floor, still swirling about in spots, with pieces of clothing in sodden disarray underfoot. And something faintly green. . . . He blinked. A hand was clutching the leg of the ancient stove where bacon and eggs burned unattended. The hand and wrist clutched the stove leg, and up the wrist a line of the green stuff crept, spilling water as it went, the wrist vanishing. The hand disappeared and the green stuff touched the iron of the stove and then seemed to retreat into itself, losing shape, flowing backward.

"Doc! For God's sake, get outa here!" It was Harry Schwartz' voice, unnaturally high with excitement. Mark looked up and saw the little man crouched on a ledge across the room where the work counter met the cabinet shelves. Hanging on with one hand, he was swinging a meat cleaver with the other. "Get help, Doc!" he shouted. "Don't let it touch you!" He swung the cleaver at a snakelike appendage of the green stuff as it went by him on the cabinet front. The severed part twisted into itself, and then groped, looking like an amoeba as it searched for . . . what? Mark couldn't move as he watched the small part send out tendrils, finally coming in contact once more with the larger mass of the stuff, to be immediately assimilated by it.

Harry grabbed at a pan of boiling water and splashed



it down at the stuff. It stopped, whitened, for a brief moment and he flung himself from his perch, leaped over the water on the floor and reached Mark's side, gasping for breath.

"Doc, let's get outa here! It ate them! Joe, Mickie and Al . . . it ate them."

Mark resisted, staring at the stuff in the kitchen. It had been slowed by the scalding water, not killed. It was drawing itself together, back toward the sink, and he saw a thinner strand of it hanging over the edge of the sink. The clone swelled as he continued to watch it, swelled and bulged, rippling sinuously along its length as it flowed upward.

Mark watched until it was gone. Then he became aware of Harry, now silent, large-eyed and shaking his head. "Are you all right?" Mark asked.

"Yeah. It didn't touch me. What is it, Doc?" Harry's voice was hoarse now, and perspiration was running down his face. He seemed not to notice it. He continued shaking his head and staring at the sink.

Behind them there was a crash of pottery and glass-ware and they turned to see Gracie on the floor in a faint. Mark kneeled and examined her hurriedly, then turned her over to the care of two women who were pressing in nearer, and pulled Harry's arm, nodding toward the door. Harry followed him, still clutching the meat cleaver.

The restaurant was pandemonium as they pushed their way out. The ferrety little man was still on the phone, and Mark hoped that, after he passed his tips to the papers, he would think to call the police. But for the moment there was little the police, or papers, could do there. He guided Harry into the sidewalk and started toward the hospital.

"Tell me exactly what happened," he said.

Harry glanced back over his shoulder and paced them a little faster. "I don't know, Doc. I was standing there, at the sink, see, and all at once, Joe . . . he tried to poke the stuff back down the sink, and it began eating him. Honest to God, Doc, it ate him and spit out his clothes like they was nutshells or something. He kept yelling, and Al tried to pull it off, and it ate Al, and then Mickie started to run out and he fell in the water

and was crawling and it got him by the foot and he kept crawling, stretching it like, and . . .”

“Take it easy, Harry,” Mark said, digging his fingers into Harry’s arm. “Take it easy.” Harry was panting and they were almost running when they rounded the hospital to enter by the service entrance. Mark led Harry directly to the lab. The lab secretary, Elinor, was at the desk leaning over her tiny compact mirror applying lipstick.

“Get the chief,” Mark said, pushing Harry on through to the small office.

Mark waited impatiently for the call to be completed. Agnew would know who to contact, what steps should be taken. . . . The light blinked and he grabbed the phone.

“Dr. Agnew? This is Mark Kenniston. There is an emergency situation here.” He didn’t pause for Agnew’s sputter at the other end to become intelligible. “You know Al’s Restaurant, over on Michigan at Eighteenth? I was just over there, and I saw a creature or an organism of some sort there capable of dissolving human tissue . . .” The sputter at the other end of the line had increased to a bellow, and Mark stopped to listen.

“Is that you, Kenniston? What the devil are you trying to do? I’m shaving now, Kenniston. What are you talking about?”

“An organism of some sort, Doctor. I don’t know what it was. It dissolved people . . .”

“Good Christ! Kenniston, go get yourself some black coffee!” The line was jarred by the crash of his receiver against the cradle.

Mark jerked the telephone from his ear and stared blankly for a moment at Harry. It hadn’t occurred to him that no one would believe him.

“The sewers,” he said. “Who is in charge of the sewer system?”

“Sanitation Department,” Harry answered. “O’Herlihy. Office won’t be open yet, Doc.”

Several minutes later Mark was again staring at a telephone gone dead in his hand. O’Herlihy’s response had been explosive.

“He’s going out of town—has a nine-thirty plane to catch,” Mark said dully to Harry. “I should write him a letter.” They stared at one another for a moment.



"What are you going to do now, Doc?"

"I'll go down the list, I guess. Police, Health Commissioner, the papers, whoever will listen."

"Doc, all them big shots ain't going to be in their offices yet. Why don't you call Eddie Dwyer over at the precinct station and see what he says about it."

Mark shrugged and told Elinor to place the call. Harry nodded, satisfied.

"Sergeant Dwyer? This is Mark Kenniston over at City Hospital. I was in Al's Place this morning when all the trouble started. . . . Yes, I have Harry Schwartz with me. Sure, Sergeant. Right away." He hung up and motioned Harry. "Come on, pal. We tried to start this thing at the top. Now we'll see how far we get telling our story at the bottom." To Elinor he said, "Tell Agnew I'll be back soon. You'd better get a radio in here and keep it turned on one of the local stations. This isn't going to be one of your quieter days."

## CHAPTER FOUR

8:30 A. M.

Miss Carmel Maria Shea turned up the school steps with the usual sinking sensation in her stomach. The traffic on Sixteenth Street was too noisy, and the air was too smelly from gasoline fumes, and the brick wall of the school confronting her too dirty. Yet she walked up the steps as she had done every school day for the last thirty years to face another day of teaching and to shrivel a little more. At the top of the stairs she stopped a moment, breathing deeply of the gasoline fumes, unwilling to trade them for the musty, floor-oil-and-onion smell of the interior. She knew that once she had been inside for half an hour she would no longer be able to detect the stench, but she always knew it was there, and the thought made her a little sick. She braced herself and walked in and went up to the dingy teachers' lounge. She took off her hat, patted her stringy hair into place

and then hung up her coat. The noise of the first arriving pupils resounded through the old building. Other teachers came in and hung up their coats and hats, not looking at each other, not saying anything at first, putting on lipstick, straightening ties, disappearing into the bathrooms, reading the morning papers. Miss Shea sat stiffly in a chair looking at the wall across the room, getting herself ready to face the day. None of the others sat near her; none looked at her. A cold aura around her was a barrier to any overt acts of friendliness.

"Well," said Mr. Walls, heaving himself out of his chair and folding his newspaper, "I guess we'd better get ready to face the dear, sweet, little children. The Growler will be along any minute now." He was a fat man, and the belt that held up his pants passed beneath his stomach, making it look as if his trousers were constantly about to fall down. The other teachers looked at Mr. Walls and smiled. He was the only one among them who dared refer to Mr. Bent, the principal, as The Growler, the name given him by three generations of pupils.

Miss Shea did not smile. She turned her gaze from the wall and looked at Mr. Walls or, more precisely, at his pants. For twenty years she had waited for those pants to fall, dreading the event, yet hoping it would come about. She waited now, staring at the pants, and Mr. Walls, uncomfortably aware of her scrutiny, left the room.

The others got up and prepared to leave, coughing, patting clothes into place, reluctantly girding themselves for the struggle. Mr. Bent appeared at the doorway, saw they were getting ready to leave, and nodded approvingly. He rubbed his hands and said, "Yes, another day about to start. Time to go to our classes now. And how are you this morning, Miss Grabowski? Everything going satisfactorily?"

Miss Grabowski, the newest of the teachers, still slim and fresh-eyed, was the target of the year for Mr. Bent. There was some guessing among the teachers about how long Miss Grabowski would hold out. No one gave her more than three months, and the consensus was that another month would do it. She smiled brightly at Mr. Bent and said, "Very well, thank you, sir," and she



squeezed by him on the way out. Miss Grabowski knew exactly what she was doing.

Miss Shea deliberately walked to the window for another look to show that she was above the need for immediate obedience. Mr. Bent was well aware of her thoughts, so he ignored her completely, and as soon as all the others had left, he turned to follow them. When they were gone, Miss Shea turned and went out the door. In the hall, she stopped and shivered unaccountably. She looked at the thermometer near the door. It read 76°, the usual uncomfortable temperature in the building. She looked around, wondering at the source of the chill, unable to find it.

Deep beneath the old building, the clone had entered the lateral. It was an old pipeline, corroded away in many places, but filled in at the corroded regions with the deposits of more than half a century of use. In the summer when the building was not in use, the deposits hardened and densified; they served to contain the materials that flowed in the pipes during the rest of the year.

When the clone entered the old pipes, its growth slowed as it absorbed these hard, tough materials. But there were ample nutrients to support its continued forward movement. It made the turn upward in the lateral into the downflowing main soil pipe. Here too the pipe condition was unusual. The pipe had not corroded, but it was lined with rich accumulations over its entire inner surface. The clone grew into the soil pipe in a thicker layer than usual, forming an inch-thick sheath. There were not many smaller pipes in the building, but the clone entered them all. It approached the outlets on the second floor.

Miss Shea shuddered and went on down the hall to her schoolroom. The hush that fell over the room as she entered was the first thing that had happened that day that had made her feel better. The youngster who had been room monitor slipped into her seat, and the pupils looked at the teacher expectantly. She ignored them, sat at her desk, placed piles of corrected papers on it, opened a book to the proper place, and said without looking up, "We will now have our inspection, and I

certainly hope you are cleaner than you were yesterday." Her voice was high, sharp and piercing.

She stood up and looked at the class, and all the students obediently got to their feet. It did not escape the attention of Miss Shea that the three boys, Henry, Joseph, and Allan, who habitually sat in the back of the room, got to their feet more slowly than the rest and stood glaring sullenly at her. At yesterday's inspection she had had to point out to the class just how filthy these three boys were, and to explain that steps would have to be taken if they did not present themselves in a decent condition the next morning.

As Miss Shea began to pass down the rows of pupils, she could almost feel the growing animosity pouring from the back of the room. She ignored the timid smiles from some of the girls who had obviously gone far beyond normal scrubbing requirements. And with a glow of anticipation Miss Shea finally came to Henry. He held out his hands to her.

Only thirty years of daily confrontation of surly pupils kept her from gasping. Henry's hands from fingertips to mid-forearm dripped with mud and filth. He had obviously rubbed his hands carefully in wet dirt just before coming into school.

Without a change of expression, she passed on to Joseph and Allan. Their hands were the same way, covered a quarter inch thick with mud that was beginning to dry in places.

Miss Shea went slowly to the front of the class and turned to face them. They waited expectantly.

She said, "Our three childish little boys have muddied their hands, playing with mud pies, I suppose. Well, we all know how little boys are, so we'll just have to put up with it. You three go to the washroom and rinse that mud off your hands and be back here in five minutes. If you are not back in five minutes, I will have Mr. Farley come up and wash them for you before I take you to the principal for playing with mud pies." Mr. Farley was the janitor.

The class tittered, and the three boys went out of the room with red faces. Miss Shea had won the battle. They went down the hall gritting their teeth. They went in the door marked "Boys' Room," and Joe said, "What



a blast that was. I thought you said she'd pop her cork?"

"Ahh," growled Al, "who knows what old ratface will do? Don't worry none. We bugged her good. She just didn't let on. What do you say we have a butt?"

The other two nodded, looked at their hands and went over to the sink to wash them. The three of them lined up at the three sinks, turned on the water and quickly rinsed their hands. They used paper towels to dry them.

Al said, "We don't want nobody busting in on us. I'll fix the door." He carried the used-towel can over to the door and wedged it tight under the doorknob. He then fished a crumpled pack of cigarettes out of his pocket, carefully handed one to each of the other two, and then lit all three. The three boys dragged on the cigarettes, and time went by. They did not talk. They waited, united in an unspoken agreement not to return to the classroom until well after their five minutes had run out.

At the end of five minutes the cigarettes, vigorously smoked, were down to tiny stubs. Henry walked over to a sink to flush his down. He turned on the water and dropped the cigarette down the drain. He turned off the water and began to step away from the sink, but something caught his eye. He stepped up to the sink again and looked at the bulging mass of greenish material that quivered at the mouth of the drain. "Hey, you guys," he called, "look at this!"

The others came over and looked. Joe said, "Cheez, what a crumby joint." He reached down and prodded the mass with his finger. He stared unbelievably as the mass quickly flowed up his hand to the wrist. He yanked at it and yelled at Henry, "Take it off!"

Henry grabbed it and immediately he, too, was unable to let go. He screamed at Allan, and in a moment the three boys were frantically trying to free themselves from the tough strands that bound them. When the clone reached their elbows, all three began to scream for help.

Miss Shea and Mr. Farley heard the screams as they came down the hall to the boys' room. Mr. Farley tried the doorknob. The door gave a little, then resisted as the trash can seated itself under the doorknob.

"Push it open, you fool," snapped Miss Shea.

"Can't," said Mr. Farley. "They've got something against it on the inside."

"Push harder, then. Here, I'll help you." Miss Shea put a skinny shoulder against the door and heaved with Mr. Farley. Although they could hear the screams from the inside, the closed door dampened them enough so no one else in the school could hear.

Suddenly the screams stopped.

Mr. Farley and Miss Shea stopped momentarily and looked at each other, then attacked the door again. The side of the can bent and the door opened six inches. By pulling it toward them and then throwing all their weight against it, they finally got the door open. Mr. Farley fell to his hands and knees, while Miss Shea reeled across the room before she caught her balance.

She looked down. She stood in a large puddle of water. Five feet in front of her lay the clothes of the three boys, the top half of all the clothes flat in the puddle. As she watched she could see the region of the waist pulse and move and twist, and the moving region traveled toward the feet that protruded from the pants. One of Henry's pants legs was up to his knee. Miss Shea could see the white flesh where it disappeared into the shoe and sock. She saw a mass of greenness emerge from the pants leg, dripping with water, and swiftly engulf the foot. For the first time she saw the strand of green matter stretching up into the sink. Behind her she heard Mr. Farley groan and say, "I can't get up. My leg. Get a doctor."

The clone passed into the shoes, converted them to its own tissue, and then left the remnants of the clothes. It quickly formed a film that coalesced into a single thick strand which rapidly passed back up the sink toward the drain. As the last of it re-entered the drain and disappeared from sight, Miss Shea threw her arms up and screamed. The door of the boys' room was open, and everyone on the second floor heard her. After the scream she drew a deep wrenching breath and screamed again, this time uttering the words, "I knew it." Teachers and students poured into the halls, collected in the doorway outside the boys' room. Mr. Bent went in and put a hand on Miss Shea's shoulder. He said sharply, "Stop that screaming, woman."

Miss Shea was not used to being addressed as "woman," and the word penetrated her hysteria. She turned



on Mr. Bent and screamed at him, "I told you they were filthy crawling things, I told you, I told you. Now they've gone back down the drain where they belong. They changed into filth and crawled back in the drain. I saw it! I saw it with my own eyes! There's their clothes right there." She pointed, and the principal looked. "Right before my eyes they turned back into the slime they came from and crawled down the sewer." The hysteria in her voice frightened the younger pupils. Some of them began to sob. Miss Grabowski suddenly began to cry loudly, and the children on the fringes broke and ran for the doors. The panic spread swiftly; soon children were pouring out the front door.

## CHAPTER FIVE

9:05 A. M.

The precinct house was crowded with eighteen or twenty people when Mark and Harry arrived. Women in house-dresses clutching young children by their hands, men in work clothes, some carrying lunch bags, a small knot of teenagers huddled together near the door. They all appeared frightened, dazed, shocked; they were all making noise, clamoring for help, for attention. At the desk another group huddled; one of the women, thin, sharp-looking, was screaming hysterically while a very fat man tried to calm her. Everyone in the outer room was talking excitedly, or weeping, or screaming like the thin woman. Mark and Harry were met at the door by an officer. "You Kenniston and Schwartz? Follow me."

They were taken to an office behind the rail. People were being admitted here one by one. A sergeant was listening to them, making notes as they talked. Another desk was being pushed into the outer office. At the back of the room a uniformed officer was trying to keep up with a switchboard that seemed to be completely lit up with incoming calls.

The officer tapped at a door and pushed it open with-

out waiting for an answer. "Here's Kenniston and Schwartz, sir."

Three men were in the office, Sergeant Dwyer and two other officers, one of them talking in a low voice over the telephone. Dwyer hurried across the room to grasp Kenniston's arm. "Do you know what's going on?" he asked.

"The stuff in the drain?"

Dwyer nodded.

"Not much. It seems to be able to dissolve people and then flow back down the drain."

Dwyer said, "Okay, wait a second, tell Captain Prescott."

They waited without speaking and Mark could hear part of the telephone conversation. The captain was saying, "... seventeen at least. No trace left. No eye-witnesses ... no interviews yet. I'll let you know." He hung up with a scowl. "Goddamn reporters," he said. He turned to Mark. "You were in Al's Restaurant, that right? What happened?"

Mark told him as much as he knew, and then Harry filled in details. The captain didn't stop scowling. When they finished he turned from them angrily.

"Green stuff! Organism!" He stamped to the window and without turning again to face them he said, "So far, at least seventeen people have vanished, probably more—we can't keep up with the reports. And what do our only eye-witnesses tell us? Green stuff!" He turned then and motioned with his thumb. "Okay. Out. Leave a statement with the desk . . ."

"Captain, what are you doing about this?" Mark asked, not moving.

"What can I do, issue a warrant?"

"You can contact the Mayor, the Sanitation Department. Get the drains plugged. Search for the organism, or whatever the hell it is . . ."

"I've got no authority to go to the Mayor," Prescott said. "I gave the report to the Commissioner. It's up to him."

"By the time he gets around to realizing something's up, how many more people are going to vanish in a pool of water? Captain, will you cut the red tape and call the Mayor now?"



"Get them out of here, Dwyer," Prescott said. Dwyer opened the door and, when Mark hesitated, took his arm and pulled him. Mark resisted only a moment. With the opening of the door all the noise of the outer office flooded in, making it impossible to talk. Prescott already was on the phone again.

"Don't forget your statements," Dwyer said in a loud voice close to Mark's ear. Mark jerked away.

"To hell with that," he said and motioned Harry toward the door. Dwyer started to follow them, his face red and angry, then shrugged and returned to the inner office. Mark and Harry pushed and shoved their way through the crowds to the exit.

It was 9:26 A. M. when they got back to the hospital emergency entrance and entered through the basement. Miss Malenov, on duty at the emergency registration desk, smiled pleasantly at them, and for a moment Mark could almost forget it wasn't just another work day. In the familiar surroundings, the emergency room to his left, the out-patient clinics stretching down the corridor to the right, then the steady stream of customers for the cafeteria—it was just like any other day. His eyes followed the staring gaze of Miss Malenov and registered the cleaver in Harry's hand, and he was back in the nightmare world with a start.

"Come on," he urged. "Coffee." He led the way to the cafeteria down the corridor that smelled of disinfectant and wax, and illness. He got their coffee while Harry found a table.

"What are you going to do today?" he asked.

"Cheez, I ain't thought." Harry looked perplexed for a moment. "I gotta find another job, I guess. Maybe today I'll just hang around and wait for you to get through. . . . If you don't care."

Mark appreciated Harry's feeling of dread at being alone that day; he felt it also. There was the helplessness of being able to do nothing, of having their words ignored, their warnings falling like isolated raindrops in a bureaucratic ocean. A part of his mind was keeping itself coolly removed from the terror and the horror of what he had seen, and that part recognized the atavistic fear that had been aroused within him. This was the nameless, formless unknown of the worst nightmares, and only

those who had experienced the nightmares could sympathize with others who were caught in the numbing frightfulness of them.

"Sure," Mark said, "stick around. It isn't over by a long shot yet. I think I'd want you to be . . ."

He didn't finish. His words were cut off by a scream, quickly muffled, that came from the kitchen. Fear, disbelief, horror all sounded in the one cry. Before the cafeteria crowd could resume the broken conversations, before the last echo of the scream had quieted, Mark had crossed the room and was at the door, with Harry close at his heels. It was there.

The clone had come from the drain of the stainless-steel sink, and whatever food had been on the counter was now gone. Three cooks had backed from it, and two counter boys stood frozen, staring in awe at the viscous green stuff spreading over the floor toward them. Part of it had found the trays of sandwiches being wrapped for the lunch crowds, and another part had found the meats being prepared for roasting. Soundlessly the clone was taking them: sandwiches, roasts, scraps, spreading out along the counters, with only one thick flowing appendage as yet on the floor, and it moving slowly.

"Don't let it touch you," Mark shouted. The five faces turned toward him uncomprehendingly. "You two jump over it and get out!" Mark said urgently to the two counter boys on the other side of the greenish snakelike part of the clone. "Hurry, before it starts spreading out more!" The first of the boys jumped over it, turned and fled. The second boy started to jump; the clone whipped around, as if somehow sensing life within reach, and the boy started backing away. "Not there, not there!" Mark called. It was too late. The boy had backed into the refrigerator units and there was no farther retreat. He stared at the advancing mass of translucent greenness, and he screamed and kicked at it.

Mark turned sickened eyes from him and jerked around as a scream rent the air behind him. He whirled around to see the clone spreading out along the counter, flowing over the sides, to the stools where some people hadn't moved away quickly enough.

"We gotta get out of here!" Harry said, starting to edge along the wall, keeping distance between him and the



drains in the sinks behind the counter. People were crowding the entrances, trying to see in; others were trying to force their way out. The screaming of those being taken was continual.

"Clear the doors!" Mark called to Harry. Harry raised his cleaver and bellowed at the bewildered crowd and they fell away before him. Slowly Mark started to follow, knowing there was nothing he could do for those already touched by the clone. The three cooks were at his heels, the first of them muttering prayers as fast as she could. Somehow the steady drone of her monotone was reassuring. Mark put out a hand and stopped them when he came to the end of the counter space.

The clone had covered the top of the counter; only three feet from them, and a thin strand was starting to cross the pathway they would have to take to get to the clear area of the tables. Mark reached across some of the greenish stuff and seized a large jar of sugar, used to refill the table sugar dispensers. He opened it quickly and scattered the sugar on the far side of the searching strand. It doubled back instantly, spreading out, taking every grain, and Mark darted past, continuing to sprinkle the sugar until the cooks were on the safe side of the counter. He moved aside to let them run past him. One of the tables held a butcher knife dropped there by one of the waitresses and he scooped it up, shaking sugar as he went. The clone sent streamers out after the scattered grains.

One strand elongated six inches, then ten, fifteen. Mark wielded the knife with a flashing, hard stroke, severing the strand from the parent body, and with the same motion knocking it some seven feet away. It came to a stop and for a second or so lay motionless. Before it could start moving, Mark jammed the almost empty sugar jar over it. The stuff flowed upward along the glass, taking the sugar as it went. Quickly Mark flipped the container upright and rammed the top on it. The small bit of the clone he had captured settled to the bottom, conforming to the shape of the glass jar, until all the sugar had been assimilated. Then it began sending tendrils up the sides, as if seeking a way out. Mark shuddered and tightened the lid.

In all, not more than ten minutes had elapsed from the

time that Mark heard the first scream of warning. He didn't know how many persons had been killed in the cafeteria. There was still a mob at the doorway, straining to see what was going on, voices raised in questions, hysterical sobbing from one or two of those who had been inside and survived. A hospital guard was pushing his way through. He pulled out his gun at the sight of Harry brandishing his cleaver. "What's going on?"

"Guard, clear this whole floor," Mark said authoritatively. To his relief, the guard hesitated only a moment, then holstered the gun and straightened his shoulders. He would take orders.

"Clear the floor as fast as you can. Seal off the lower entrances immediately. No one is to enter."

"Is it a bomb, sir?" the guard asked, half turned to carry out an order he could understand.

"Something like that," Mark said. "Hurry. Get what help you need, but be fast."

Other guards had appeared, along with a policeman or two, and Mark heard the word bomb being repeated. The guards knew what to do for gas, or smoke, fire, bomb threats, any of the normal hazards for which they had been trained. For the thing in the cafeteria they would show only confusion and panic. Mark didn't correct the impression. He motioned to Harry and sprinted toward the stairs. The guards would do their job down here; his job now lay in the lab with the specimen of the clone that he had captured.

At the ground floor Mark led Harry toward the elevator bank and pushed his way through several people ambling along in front of him. There were startled grunts, a muttered invective from an interne, and they had possession of the express elevator. Here was none of the panic and confusion that existed one flight below: internes and nurses, patients signing in or out, a small girl with her arm in a cast flying along the corridor on a tricycle. . . . On the way up to the seventh floor laboratory Mark suddenly swore and hit the five button.

"What is it, Doc?" Harry asked, looking about quickly.

"It didn't confine its attacks to the basement or even first floor in those other reports," Mark said, his voice tight and hard. "It can go up to any level. I'm getting Edie."



Harry nodded. "I'll stay here and keep the elevator for ya."

Mark ran down the fifth-floor corridor to the X-ray wing where Edie Hempstead worked. She was seated behind her desk, her glossy blue-black head bent over a report she was writing.

"Edie! We need you upstairs—emergency."

She looked up, surprised. "I'm on duty. I can't just leave."

"Honey, don't argue. Come on. I'll explain."

She hesitated only a moment, then, leaving her report as it was, she got up and left her desk to join him.

## CHAPTER SIX

9:15 A. M.

The three walked rapidly along the hall to the pathology laboratory, and Mark explained rapidly to Edie. He carried the sugar jar containing the specimen of the clone in both hands out in front of him, gingerly, watching it as he walked. Harry walked a little ahead of them, turning slightly toward Mark to keep an eye on the clone. Harry carried the meat cleaver in a half-raised position as if to strike out at any moment. Mark noticed it and said, "What are you getting ready to do with that cleaver, Harry, belt me with it?"

"I don't know, Doc. But I'm going to do *something* if that thing gets out. I don't know what, but something." He was quiet for a moment, and then he asked, "Doc, what do you suppose it is? Where did a thing like that come from?"

Edie's quick look at the bottle was involuntary; she turned away quickly.

Mark shook his head. "I don't know. Maybe we'll find out in here." They had come to the lab, and they went in through the door. Mark went over to a stone-topped laboratory bench and carefully placed the jar down in the hood. He turned on the hood fan, then bent down and

put his face four inches from the container and stared in at the clone.

"Jeez, Doc, watch it, willya?" Harry moved to his side, hefting the meat cleaver. He felt jittery at the closeness of Mark's face to the clone. The clone, feeling a minute increase in heat, pulsed restlessly, obviously responding to Mark's nearness.

Mark straightened and shook his head and said, "It senses my presence, all right, probably from the heat of my face. Well, let's run a few tests and see what shows up. Edie, you and Harry will have to give me a hand. Nobody will show up around here until about nine-thirty. Pathology waits on business hours around here."

"Mark, is it really alive?" Edie asked, staring at the bottle.

"That is what we are trying to find out," Mark said.

"What's pathology, Doc?" Harry asked.

"You try to understand what's going on with living tissues by examining dead ones, most of the time. Now let's see. Let's try to get an idea of how this . . . this creature absorbs living tissue. Let's weigh this jar."

Mark stepped to a balance and weighed the clone and jar. He said, "Now, we want a mouse." Edie went over to the cages, and brought out a mouse. "Weigh it, please," Mark said. She weighed a jar, made a note, then added the mouse. Mark nodded. "Harry, I'm going to drop this mouse in with that creature. You unscrew the top, I'll drop in the mouse, and you put the top on again, fast. Got that?"

"You sure you want to take the top off that thing, Doc?"

"We've got to run some tests on it if we're going to find out anything about it. You ready?"

Harry nodded and put down his meat cleaver. He held the base of the jar with one hand, placed his other on the cover, and looked questioningly at Mark. Mark opened the mouse jar and said, "Okay." Harry turned the lid of the clone jar, lifted it, and Mark dumped in the mouse, all in one quick motion. Harry slammed the lid back on and turned it tight. They watched.

It was almost as if the mouse had fallen into water. It sank quickly into the greenish tissues, and a tablespoonful of clear water ran to the edges of the jar. Then all



was quiet in the jar. Edie drew in a quick, audible breath. Mark shook his head and said, "We sure can't tell much about how it does it. Well, let's see what a weight balance tells us." Mark did some addition and subtraction on a piece of scratch paper to get the weight of the mouse. He weighed the clone jar again, and said to Harry, "I'd like to pour off that water that formed in there. Think we can do it?"

Edie stepped forward. "I'll help."

"You just watch right now," Mark said. "Ready?" he asked Harry.

"Sure, Doc." Harry was beginning to feel more confident now that they had handled the clone, and weighed it, and fed it, all in a controlled manner. Harry said, "You hold the jar and tip it, and I'll loosen the lid and let the water run out. Okay?"

"Okay. We'll run the water into this beaker, but let's weigh it first." Edie took it and weighed it, making another note. Mark placed the beaker in the middle of the lab bench, and said, "Well, here goes nothing." He picked up the jar and held it near the beaker. Harry took a deep breath and grabbed the lid. Mark quickly tipped the jar, Harry loosened the lid and watched the water drip into the beaker. The clone stirred, feeling the warmth of Mark's hands, and began to flow toward the lid. Harry watched it approach his hands and the crack in the lid, but just before it arrived, he quickly turned the lid tight to seal it, and helped Mark set the jar carefully on its base.

The three of them looked at each other, and Harry said, "Jeez, Doc, I think we got its number. What'll we do next?" He was enjoying himself.

"We weigh the water before we figure what we do next, and don't get too cocky, old buddy. Don't forget, that thing in the jar can kill you, quick."

Edie looked up at him quickly, not questioning the statement.

Harry nodded as he watched Edie weigh the water and make some more notes, which she handed to Mark. He said, "I know it'll eatcha. I knew it from the first time I seen it. It ain't gonna get a chance at me, not while I got my cleaver." He picked it up again.

Mark straightened from his paper and walked over to the clone. He said, "This thing only takes about seventy

percent of the total body weight of an animal, probably the same with a man. It does not use all the water available in a mammalian body, that's all there is to it. That's why there is always so much water around. Remember, Harry? In the kitchen, the school and then downstairs? It just leaves some of the water behind. I wonder what's in the water?" He took up the beaker and held it up to the light and then he smelled it. His face was bent closely over the beaker.

Edie said quickly, "Mark, be careful." At the same time Harry said, "Watch yourself, Doc. There may be some of it in that water."

Mark looked surprised. "Don't think so. Well, let's test it." He thrust a finger in the small amount of water at the bottom of the beaker. Harry jumped to his side, but nothing happened. "It's warm," Mark said. "But I guess it's safe." He removed his wet finger and delicately touched it to his tongue. He grimaced and said, "Still lots of salts or organics in solution, though. At least it's not pure water."

Harry wrinkled his face in distaste and said, "Jeez, Doc. You go all the way with this pathology business, don't ya? Ugh."

Mark turned back to the clone. "Let's see. Glass seems to hold it pretty safely. I wonder if metals do as well. Let's stick in a piece of iron and see what it does. Here, we'll use this spatula." He began to open the lid.

Harry grabbed his hand. "Wait a minute, Doc. That thing can crawl up a post pretty fast. Don't hold on to nothing you stick in there."

"Right again. Well, I'll break off the blade of the spatula and drop it in. Here goes." He did so. The metal blade fell onto the clone, and the tissue quickly closed over it. The blade rapidly settled through the clone tissue until it rested on the bottom of the jar. As far as they could tell, the metal was unchanged. "Good," said Mark. "It looks like it'll leave metal alone. I wonder what else it won't touch."

Edie said, "Isn't that glass beginning to look a little frosted?"

Mark quickly bent over the jar, then held it up to the light, tipping it to make the clone run up a part of one side. Very faintly, in the area where the clone had been,



the glass had a pitted appearance. "It might be etching the glass at that," he said. "But it'll hold it for a while."

The door of the lab opened and three people came in, breaking off their conversation when they saw the group already in the lab. Mark looked at them and said, "It must be nine twenty-five." He looked at his watch. "Yup. The head man is due in in five minutes. He's having his coffee right about now. Good morning." This last to the two men and a woman who were struggling into white coats as they came over to him.

"Hi, Mark," said the woman, nodding to Edie. "What's all the fuss downstairs this morning? They've got the cafeteria closed. Say, that means that Doctor Agnew will be here right away; he can't get his morning coffee."

The door swung open and Doctor Rudolph Agnew entered. He was a large man, well tanned from a summer out of doors on Lake Michigan. He had blue eyes and heavy cheekbones, and a snow-white streak in his black hair ran from his forehead to his neck on the left side. He saw Mark and called across the lab in a deep, booming voice, "What is going on in this hospital, Doctor? I am given to understand that you gave orders to close the cafeteria after some gas killed some people there. Would you mind explaining?" He stopped in front of Mark.

Mark nodded coolly. "We have a problem, Doctor. Some kind of creature, a living creature, exists in the pipes under the city. It has made three appearances that I personally know of, crawling out of the pipes, attacking people, killing them. It struck here in the cafeteria, and I don't know how many people it killed. I ordered it closed. I came up here because we managed to get a specimen of the creature. This is it." He waved at the jar containing the clone.

Doctor Agnew looked down his nose at the sugar jar with the green jelly at the bottom. "You mean this . . . this pusillanimous fleck of gelatinous matter killed people? Come now, Doctor, what do you take me for?"

Harry Schwartz looked Doctor Agnew up and down and said to Mark, "Should we tell him what we take him for, Doc? Or should we let him find out the hard way?"

Mark sighed and said, "It's okay, Harry. Doctor Agnew, this is just a small piece of the original animal. I saw it first in a restaurant, then it struck in a school more than

a block away from the restaurant, then it appeared here, more than a block from the school. In each case it entered a room from the drain pipes and spread out all over the floor, and actually killed people it touched. Now, I am hoping that the animal simply crawls through the sewer pipes from one place to another. I hope it does not exist beneath all the area I have just mentioned. If it does, I'm afraid the entire city may be in danger unless we find a way to counteract it, and fast."

Doctor Agnew said, "Rubbish. You're hysterical, Doctor. I never heard of such nonsense in my life."

"Dr. Agnew," Edie said, "I saw it consume a mouse."

Mark felt his face grow hot. "I suggest you examine this specimen, Doctor, before you jump to any conclusions. Over twenty people have been killed already." Agnew snorted and wheeled about after a contemptuous glance at the jar. Mark grabbed his arm, pulling him a step backward.

"Doctor Kenniston." The voice of Doctor Agnew thundered throughout the lab. "I have had enough of your impertinence. I will see to it that you are barred from this hospital and every other hospital in this city. You are incompetent and stupid, and I consider you a menace to the medical profession and the patients you are supposed to diagnose." His tanned face turned almost black from rage, and his voice cracked and growled and trailed off to a rumble.

Mark said, "Why, you poor . . ."

"Say, Doc." It was Harry. "What do you say we give him the regular fifty-cent show?" Harry held a kicking white mouse by its tail.

Mark turned to see Edie holding the sugar jar. She twisted off the top. Harry dropped in the mouse and Edie sealed the jar again quickly. She was very pale. It was quickly and smoothly done, and Doctor Agnew could not help seeing what happened. The mouse dropped to the top of the clone tissue and was quickly engulfed by it. In three seconds there was nothing in the jar except clone tissue and a little extra water. Doctor Agnew moved to the bench and bent over the jar to look more closely. No one else said a word.

Doctor Agnew shook his head and said, "Must be a



gelatinous acid of some kind. Must be strongly acidic, an acidic jelly."

Mark had himself under control. He said softly, "What kind of acid have you ever heard of that would do that, Doctor?"

Doctor Agnew, engrossed in watching the clone, said, "I don't know. I must confess, I don't know. Are you trying to tell me that that mass of jelly is actually alive? It can't be. What's its source of energy? What controls it? Where is its brain tissue?"

Mark nodded. His animosity was gone as he considered the problem before him. He said, "It simply seems to convert animal tissue into its own tissue. I don't know what the driving force is. I've never seen or heard of anything like it. It slowly attacks glass; it seems not to attack stainless steel. It absorbs sugar. And the water it leaves behind when it absorbs animal tissue seems to be loaded with salts, so it doesn't take up everything."

Doctor Agnew said, "Drop in another mouse. I want to see this more closely."

Harry quickly produced another mouse, and Doctor Agnew watched closely as the clone took it. He shook his head. "I don't understand it." He straightened up and said, "Well, let's run some tests on it. Let's get a Kjeldahl nitrogen, total inorganics, carbohydrates, fats as a starter. Make some slides so we can examine that tissue; try it with all stains, crossed Nichols, and make up specimens for X-ray and electron microscopes. We can then decide where to go. . . . What's the matter with everybody? Why aren't you moving?"

Nobody spoke for a moment. Then Mark said, "Doctor, it is unsafe to handle that creature. I'm not sure how to go about taking a small sample of it to make a nitrogen determination. I certainly would not want any of it on a slide under any microscope I was looking through. I want to subject it to some more tests in that jar, to see how it behaves when confronted with various materials. We've checked it with acids, strong acids, and they have no effect. Let's try some other materials. Frank," he turned to one of the technicians, "bring over an armful of reagent bottles, and we'll drop in a little of each and see what happens."

"Wait," said Doctor Agnew angrily. "That's kindergar-

ten thinking, completely unscientific and unproductive of useful information. I'll take care of obtaining the specimens." He picked up the sugar jar and unscrewed the lid. Harry leaped back away from him, and the technicians did the same. Edie moved to Mark's side.

Mark shouted. "You fool, close it. One touch and you're a dead man." He tried to replace the lid, but Agnew twisted away from him and put the jar, on its side, on the bench top. Mark tried to right it, but Agnew, shouting angrily, knocked his hand away and then stepped between Mark and the clone to block him.

Mark stepped back and circled to see what was happening. Agnew picked up a steel spatula and pressed it into one edge of the clone tissue. The tissue began to flow over it, and Agnew quickly yanked it away. It came away clean. He tried again, cutting more quickly, but he could not separate a piece. He yanked the spatula away again and went to work on a smaller section of the clone. He had almost separated a pea-sized portion of the tissue, when he looked over at Mark with a smile of triumph on his face. That moment was enough. A thin strand of clone had crept up the underside of the spatula unnoticed, and it flowed onto the underside of Agnew's fingers. He did not realize it at first; then he saw it creep around from beneath his hand and begin to take his fingers where he could see them. Edie screamed once. Agnew's face turned white. He dropped the spatula, flung his hand up violently and then snapped it down over the bench top. The clone lifted with his hand, but it did not string out very far. It continued to flow over the hand. Agnew looked at his hand, now resting on the bench top. His eyes were wide; his face gray.

He began to speak hoarsely. "There is no sensation of pain, no sensation at all. I can just feel the warmth of that water that's flowing from the tissue line. I can see that my fingers are gone, but I still imagine that they are there, phantom fingers. My mind is stunned at what I see is happening, but physically there is nothing to it." He stopped and stared at the clone. The others stood rooted, unable to think, to move, to help him. The clone reached his wrist, and he continued. "I can see that when it reaches a vital organ there would be no pain, just a lapsing into unconsciousness while this creature finished



its . . . finished its . . . finished . . . No." He flung out his hand again, and Mark dodged just in time to avoid being struck.

The clone clung to Agnew's arm like a thick sausage. Agnew raised it and beat it repeatedly on the bench top, but without effect. He swung wildly again, and the sausage swept off a row of glass bottles from the bottle stand above the bench. Glass smashed and liquids flowed. The hydrochloric acid fumes reached the ammonium hydroxide fumes, and thick clouds of smoke rose from the shambles. Agnew swung again, reeling across the laboratory, flailing his arm, striking at everything that loomed before him. The other people in the lab kept far away from him and the growing tissue that was part of his right arm. Agnew kept swinging his arm, and thin streams of water poured off the end of it and sprayed around the lab. All of them were pelted with the warm droplets, and one of the lab technicians frantically tried to remove the water as soon as it hit him.

Agnew lurched sideways and hit his head on the edge of a bottle rack. The blow stunned him, and he fell across a bench and lay motionless, moaning. Harry jumped to his side and looked at the arm. The clone had reached the elbow. Sweat droplets sprang out on his forehead.

"Doc," yelled Harry. "Quick, c'mere!" Without looking up, he raised his meat cleaver high, then brought it down with all his strength on Agnew's arm just above the elbow. The arm tissue parted, blood spurted. Harry threw Agnew to the floor. The clone remained on the bench, and in ten seconds had converted the rest of the severed arm into clone tissue.

Mark jumped to Agnew's side and pressed in strongly on the inside of the arm stump to stop the blood's spurt-ing from the severed artery. While he held the artery, Edie ripped off Agnew's tie. She made a tourniquet from it, tightening it with a length of glass tubing. Mark looked up at Harry Schwartz and said, "By God, you got it all. Nice going. This is the first man that's been touched and lived, as far as I know. Nice going."

Harry was busy at the bench. The mound of clone tissue lay isolated on the bench, and every time it began to drift away, Harry pushed it back with the meat cleaver. He bent over his work, watching it closely, care-

fully, holding the cleaver with his fingers back near the end of the handle. Without looking up he said, "Yeah. It's a tough way to do it, but it works. Good thing it didn't have him by the head. Whata we gonna do with this thing now, Doc? We gotta get it back in a bottle."

"Yeah." Mark got to his feet, leaving Edie in charge of Agnew. "Frank, bring me a wide-mouth common jar, two gallons or so. Quick." The technician ran to the glassware cabinets. "Joyce, call emergency up here and get Agnew to surgery." She ran to the phone. "Charlie, get a sheet of metal or glass or something and help Harry there to keep that thing contained. You all right, Harry?"

"Yeah, Doc, so far. Say, what's the matter with that edge over there?" With his head Harry nodded at the edge of the pile of clone tissue farthest from him.

Mark looked, and saw that the tissue had turned brown and wrinkled. As he watched, the region of brownness advanced toward the center of the mass of clone tissue. The pulsing had stopped and the green luminescence was gone, and it was apparent that the tissue was dying. Further out toward the edge of the clone was a murky puddle of liquid from the shattered bottles. Mark circled around to see the puddle better. He leaned forward to smell it, but choked from the fumes of glacial acetic acid, nitric acid, and a few other reagents that had puddled together on the bench top. He straightened and said, "I can't tell what it is. There's too much stuff mixed in here. But we know it isn't the nitric acid; we have already tried it and it doesn't hurt it at all. The other acids don't bother it either. I wonder why the liquid is so dark. We didn't try anything dark before."

"I don't know, Doc. But I sure hope you find out soon. I don't know how long I can keep this thing from getting all over the room here."

The door burst open and three litter carriers came into the room. They ran over to Doctor Agnew and put the stretcher down alongside him. The intern said, "What happened to him? His arm's cut off!"

Mark was in no mood for conversation. "Good diagnosis, Doctor. Now get him out of here and into surgery, quick." The intern looked around at the shambles in the lab, and signaled the stretcher bearers. They loaded Doctor Agnew and left. Edie washed her hands, rejoining



Mark as she dried them on paper toweling. Her hands were very steady.

Mark began searching through the broken glass on the floor near the clone. The bottles were broken, but not shattered into small pieces; he could read labels on most of them. "Sodium bisulfite, sodium hydroxide, sodium persulfate, phenolphthalein, para nitrophenol, iodine solution, ortho-cresolphthalein, malachi . . . wait a minute. Iodine solution." He scooped up a little of the liquid in a beaker, held it over the mound of tissue, and poured out a few drops. The purple liquid fell on the clone. The tissue jerked spasmodically and pulled away from the site leaving a hole right down to the lab bench. The edges of the hole were brown and wrinkled as if a tongue of flame had licked through. Mark said, "That's it, all right! That solution kills the animal, and I think it's iodine solution." He carried the beaker over to a metal cabinet and began rummaging through the bottles there.

The door burst open and a policeman and several doctors came in. They stopped short and looked around at the shambles in the lab. One of the doctors stepped forward. "What's going on here? What happened to Doctor Agnew?" He was one of the residents.

Mark said, "That creature—" he nodded to where Harry constantly pushed the clone back into a single mound—"touched Agnew on the arm and almost killed him. We cut his arm off to save him, the first man we've been able to save since this thing began coming out of the pipes."

"You mean you deliberately cut off his *arm*, because that stuff touched him? Are you out of your mind?" The doctor walked over to Harry. "What is that thing?"

"Stay back, Doc. It'll catcha. Stay away from it." Harry put out his free arm to ward off the young doctor.

Mark called over, "Do what he says, Doctor. That thing is deadly. Ah, here it is, starch." He pulled out the bottle and dumped a little of the white powder into a clean beaker. He went over to a sink, ran the water steaming hot, and added a little to the white powder. He swirled the mixture around and then poured into it a few drops from the beaker that had shriveled the clone tissue. The mixture turned a deep purple. Mark held it high over his head and said, "That's it, all right. Iodine. Iodine solution kills that thing. Now we'd better make

some up." He began rummaging in the cabinet again.

The second young doctor bent over the clone, closely inspecting the pulsing tissue. Harry yelled at him, "Get away from it, willya? Doc, tell him to get away."

Mark turned, holding a bottle of purple crystals, and called to the intern, "Keep away from that, Doctor. If you touch it, it will cost you your arm. Harry, let's try to put the thing back in a bottle where it belongs."

Other people crowded in through the door; the laboratory began to fill up. Mark called to the policeman, "Officer, will you clear this lab? Somebody's going to get hurt in here. That creature has killed a lot of people already, and we don't want any more." The policeman hesitated a moment, and then began herding the spectators out the door. Mark continued, "Frank, help Harry get it in the bottle." Frank had been standing staring, holding the bottle in the crook of one arm. He stepped forward gingerly.

Harry said, "Okay, Doc. Lay the bottle on its side while I see if I can scrape the thing in there." His movements were smooth and quick now as he neatly blocked off the flowing motion of the clone. He still held the meat cleaver at the end of the handle, but not by his fingertips. "Watchit," he continued. "Hold that bottle by the back end there so your hands won't touch it. Doc—" this last to the intern who hovered nearby, "willya please move back so we can work with this thing?"

The intern said, "I've never seen anything like it. What is it?"

"God knows, but it'll eatcha if you touch it. Now back away."

With deft movements Harry stroked the clone into a narrow band, one end of which lay at the mouth of the bottle. He then piled up the tough tissue at the mouth of the bottle, and it began to flow in. He said, "We got it going in good. Hold the bottle steady. There she goes now. Doc, get your hands away from it, willya?"

The intern, fascinated by the mass of tissue, placed his hand on the handle of the cleaver to get the feel of the tissue. He helped Harry shove the clone into the bottle, and in a moment all but one streamer was inside. Harry held the cleaver to retain the clone while he thought for a moment about how to push in that last bit. It was then



that the intern let go the handle and quickly pressed his finger against the small streamer of tissue to shove it in the bottle. He did it so fast that Harry did not have a chance to react.

The intern immediately tried to pull his finger away, but all he did was draw the clone out of the bottle onto the bench, forcing the meat cleaver aside. Frank frantically held the bottle in place, and the three of them watched in silence as the intern stared unbelieving at the progress of the clone up the finger and halfway up his hand. Harry called to Mark, "Doc, bring that stuff over here, quick. This guy's got it on him and I don't wanna cut his hand off."

Mark ran over, carrying a beaker of iodine solution, and poured it on the wrist and hand of the intern. Clone tissue shriveled and turned dark brown where the liquid touched it. The intern started to lift his arm, but Mark said, "Hold still. I think we've got it licked." He poured a little more of the solution on the clone tissue in front of what was left of the intern's hand. And then they stood and watched.

There was no further advance; the clone did not move beyond the wrist region that it had reached before the solution hit it. The intern said, "I can't feel a thing. Are my fingers all right under that brown mess?"

Mark shook his head. "I'm afraid not, Doctor. You'll have to specialize in diagnosis from now on. Harry, I had hoped it would drop off when we killed it with iodine. Now we have to figure out how to get the dead tissue off his hand."

They watched it for a moment more. The clone tissue farthest from the hand simply lay and pulsed in the normal manner. Mark turned away to make up more solution. Frank backed away with the empty bottle and placed it on the bench top several feet from the puddle of water and iodine solution that surrounded the part of the clone that was fastened to the intern's hand. Harry hefted the meat cleaver and looked thoughtfully at the brown clone, bending over to inspect the wrist more closely.

The intern said, "Don't get any ideas with that cleaver. I've got enough troubles now."

Harry shook his head and said, "I don't like it on you like that. I don't like it."

"It's dead, isn't it?"

"Well, part of it is." He raised his voice to talk to Mark. "Whaddya think, Doc? Shouldn't we kill all of it with that stuff? This thing's dangerous to have around. Somebody's always gonna get hurt like this guy."

Mark was finishing making another beaker of solution. He brought it over and said, "I guess so. But damn it, no! We need to learn more about it, and we may never get another chance."

"Mark." It was Edie who had backed off and was simply standing and watching. She pointed to the bench and continued, "Where's all that water coming from?"

Mark and Harry stared at the puddle on the bench top. Even as they watched, they saw it flow slowly beyond the base of the bottle and move on down the bench top. Mark looked at the bottle, and then followed with his eyes the puddle in which it rested on back to the discolored puddle containing some of the excess iodine solution. At the end of the discolored puddle lay the brown and shriveled clone, and then came the intern's hand. The stream of water was coming from the deadened clone tissue. He stared in puzzlement, and then in a moment of horror he realized what was happening. He looked at the intern, who was standing with a perplexed frown on his face watching the expanding puddle. Mark looked at Harry just in time to see the shock of understanding appear on his face. Harry's jaw dropped, and he gasped, "*Doc, it's inside him.*" The meat cleaver flashed through the air, striking the intern's hand at the wrist. This time there was no spurt of blood.

The intern stepped back and yelled at Harry, "What'd you do? You cut off my hand, you fool. What do—" He stopped and stiffened. A look of surprise froze on his face; he slumped to the floor.

Mark jumped to his side and looked at the wrist stump. No human bone or tissue was visible, only a solid core of green luminescent tissue. The green core was enclosed in a circle of brown, wrinkled tissue about one-eighth inch thick.

Mark straightened and found the policeman at his side. "What happened to him?"



"That thing got him. It's inside him now, so for God's sake, stay away from it. Stay by the door and keep people out of here until we bring this thing under control."

"Yes, sir." The policeman ran to the door and put his back against it.

"Harry, you and Frank get that mass on the bench in that bottle, quick. I'll try to take care of this one down here. Go, man."

Frank stepped up and picked up the bottle, holding it away from him so the water did not run down his pants. Harry began scraping up the clone into a pile, including the brown tissue. Mark bent over the intern and carefully began pouring iodine solution over him, first on the arm, then on the shoulder. He straightened and looked up and said, "Edie, make a gallon of iodine solution. Fill a jug with water, dump in a handful of potassium iodide, and then a handful of iodine, mix it. See how fast you can do it. The stuff's all out there." He waved to the cabinet. Then he bent over the intern again.

Down at one hip, under the trousers, he saw motion. He poured iodine on the spot, and the motion stopped. In another moment the ankle tissue turned green, and he doused that. A large puddle of water flowed from under the body, but Mark ignored it. He used the last of his solution to wet down both ankles. He stepped back and looked up to see that Harry and Frank had placed the screw top on the bottle. Harry came over to his side and looked down. Harry said, "This is a bad one, Doc. How we gonna get that thing outa him?"

"We can't. The thing *is* him by now. It's too big for us to handle now. We've got to kill it somehow. Maybe chop it up and kill each little piece with iodine. Then . . ." He swung around to the policeman. "What?"

"I said, Commissioner Sorenson is at the door here. Shall I let him in?"

"Yes, yes. Get him in here." Sorenson was the city Health Commissioner. Mark turned to Edie. "That solution ready?"

"Yes, Mark. Here it is." She came over carrying a one-gallon bottle, gingerly walking around the body on the floor. She handed Mark the bottle just as Sorenson came up to him.

Sorenson was a slim man, impeccably dressed; not a

hair on his blond head was out of place. He looked around the laboratory, then questioningly at Mark. Mark sighed and said, "This is going to be a little hard to explain to you so you'll believe it, Commissioner, but I'll do my best."

Sorenson said, "I'm in a frame of mind to believe anything. Have you been listening to the radio? Turn one on."

Mark nodded to Edie, who went to turn on a radio. Mark said to Frank, "Bring over a large pair of scissors. Harry, stand by with your cleaver. Mr. Sorenson, this man—" he pointed to the intern on the floor—"has just been killed by a specimen of the creature that seems to be living in our sewer system. Every once in a while it seems to get hungry, or something like that, and it comes out of the sewers, attacks people, and then retreats into the sewers again. We cut off this specimen when it attacked the hospital a while ago. We've found out some of its characteristics, but not enough to control it. Iodine will kill it quickly, but iodine has to touch it, and it only kills the tissue it touches. This man got careless and was converted into the creature, whatever it is. Now we're going to try and kill it. Please stand back for now. Ready, Harry?"

Harry nodded, and the two of them bent to their work. Mark pulled on rubber gloves, not knowing if they would help or not, but not wanting to touch even the brown, dead-looking tissue. He snipped off the clothing that was soaked in iodine, exposing the clone beneath. Harry whittled away pieces of it with the cleaver, and Mark poured iodine solution on them. Each was meticulously careful not to touch the tissue, and each was careful of the other. Sorenson watched for a moment and then walked over to the sink and retched. The radio played the latest hit records. Sorenson wiped his mouth and returned, pale and wide-eyed, but as unrumpled as ever. Mark and Harry continued their work.

It was some minutes later that Mark's rubber glove-clad finger came into contact with a hair-thin bit of clone. The clone ignored it as it had the stainless-steel spatula blade. Edie made a low throat noise and Mark grinned at her briefly, and then went back to the job of killing the clone on the floor.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

9:55 A. M.

Irene Appel tapped a shapely foot impatiently, looking from her watch to the large clock on the wall. Five minutes until air time. She didn't move her silver-blond head; only her roving eyes belied the quiet of the rest of her body—her eyes, and the restless foot. It was inside her that the turmoil churned, as it did before every broadcast. Someone thrust a sheaf of papers into her hand and she scanned the inch-high print quickly, familiarizing herself with it again. She had read through it already, half an hour ago. She stopped suddenly, jerking her head away from the slender fingers of the hairdresser.

"Miss Appel," he wailed, "please!"

"Shut up!" Irene Appel snapped. "Buz," she called over her shoulder, her eyes on the paper, "Buz Kingsley! Where the hell is the lousy . . . ?"

He appeared before her, a massive man with a square face forever shadowed with an imminent beard. "What kind of a goof-up is this?" she demanded. "What kind of a story do you call this thing? You trying to be cute or something?"

Buz ran a hand through his crew cut. "Calm down, Irene," he said. "It's legit, all right. We'll be doing follow-ups every half hour."

She stared at him for a moment, hating him, feeling something like the feeling she had had the morning she recounted her first eye-witness story of the bomb. She knew Buz wasn't lying to her, just as she had known that other morning that she was saying words whose import she would be trying to understand for the rest of her life. "Thirty-five people?" she said, not so much asking him, as she was asking herself to understand it. "Where did they go?"

"Down the drain," he said. Neither of them smiled.

Minutes later Irene Appel, the nation's most beautiful newscaster, was saying: "And our big local story this morning, ladies and gentlemen, is a horror story. Thirty-five people, men, women and children have vanished, leaving no trace of where or how they disappeared. Witnesses report that screams were heard, but on entering the witnesses were unable to do anything but stand and watch what must be the most grisly vanishing act in the history of mankind. The victims, if we may call them that, seem to change into a substance that flows down the drains of sinks, or other pipes . . ." She caught the bulletin signal and turned, not knowing how long she had been off the air.

Buz Kingsley's big face was on the monitor, and he was saying, ". . . repeat: the substance is extremely corrosive. Do not touch it. Do not try to wash it back down the drain. The authorities are investigating the matter and expect to have it under control within the hour. Meanwhile, leave any green-looking substance you might see alone. Do not touch it."

Irene followed Buz into the newsroom where a radio was blaring. "Shh," Dave Romaine said, touching his fingers to his lips. They listened.

". . . and so, kiddies, that's our story. According to our eye-witness, people are changing into something that is able to flow into the drains. Which people, and why? Miss Carmel Shea told you her theory: evil returns to evil, filth to filth. Remember that is Miss Shea's story, not mine." He laughed brightly. "Other theories, and there aren't many others, I'll tell you, include an acid that is bubbling up in sinks; or, and think about this one, kiddies, an end-of-the-long-hot-summer hoax. How about that one?" He laughed again, louder, and there was a crash of cymbals followed by a whistle. "Hey, that's our song! Coming up Number Thirty-Six. Thirty-six! Thirty-six . . ."

Dave Romaine flipped the dial with a look of disgust. He slung his camera over his shoulder. "You set, Buz?"

"Yeah. Stay on the desk, Irene. We'll be calling . . ." The two men left her there, listening to one station after another, in between answering the phone that was being loaded beyond capacity. When it ceased work-



ing, she was not surprised. She looked up to see the station manager entering the newsroom.

"Hi, Irene. You okay?"

"Sure, boss," she said, turning down the radio volume. "What's the latest?"

"Over a hundred," he said. "Mayor's called for a conference. I can't get Buz now. You'll have to go. I'll cover in here."

Irene was up instantly, her gloves on, notebook in her purse before she had even reached the door. "You're a doll, boss," she said. "I'll be back as soon as it's over." He nodded glumly and took her place at the radio.

The Honorable John Michael Slattery drummed his fat, pink fingers on the smooth desktop, his small eyes darting from one to the other of the men on the opposite side of his desk. They were the Health Commissioner and the Police Commissioner. Dr. Ian Sorenson, the Health Commissioner, was talking.

". . . the truth, Jack. We simply don't know what it is at this time. I don't know what else you can tell them."

Jack Slattery made a pink fist and hit the desktop with it. "And make a goddam fool out of myself! That's what I'd be doing! I'll break that bastard for running and leaving this in my lap!" He meant the Sanitation Commissioner, who, at that moment, was sipping iced coffee on the sundeck of the apartment of one Patricia Bauer, on the eighteenth floor of one of the newest, and most expensive, of a line of lake-front apartments.

Patricia was lying on the deck, her naked tanned body contrasted against a snowy mat, as she sunned herself. Timothy O'Herlihy sipped his long, cold drink, his eyes moist as he ran his gaze over the slender girl on the mat. Earlier they had had the radio on, but they had turned it off. Timothy forced his eyes from the girl and turned to look out over the lake, gray-looking and heavy. In the distance low clouds looked like dead mountains. No wind stirred, and the sundeck was hot. He ran a finger under his collar. He wanted to go inside where the air-conditioning made the apartment bearable, but she would pout, and things had been going so well. . . . He took another sip of his coffee. With all day stretching out before him, and the night, he didn't want a minute of it spoiled by a pout. For a few minutes that morning

he had been afraid his entire day had been ruined by that fool of a doctor, and the later brief report he had heard over the radio. Kenniston, he said to himself. Kenniston. They'd have to teach him not to call up city officials before office hours. Patricia stirred, her arm lowered from her face, and she smiled sleepily at him.

"Timmy, honey," she said in her delicious little-girl voice, "maybe after a while we could go out on your boat, huh?"

He nodded, swallowing hard as she raised up. He forgot about the radio, and the short, disturbing account he had heard of something that seemed to be coming out of the pipes, or going into them. It didn't seem very important now.

In the Mayor's office Timothy O'Herlihy was cursed for another minute or so before the Honorable John Michael Slattery dismissed the two commissioners. They were fools! Like the rest of the administration, as soon as something really important happened they melted into their chairs and had nothing to say. He paced his office for a moment, an idea forming in his busy brain, and by the time the reporters had assembled, waiting for his appearance, he had their story prepared for them.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said sincerely, "I have appointed a committee to investigate this menace threatening our city. Meanwhile I've ordered my staff to prepare an emergency broadcast system, using the Civil Defense communications setup. I personally will be on hand at the Civil Defense headquarters in the Record Building to go on the air at any given moment with whatever news is available. The committee will report directly to me there with its plans and findings, and I will take to the air immediately to divulge these reports to the populace. Meanwhile, we have no concrete data as to the exact nature of this ghastly occurrence. We ask you to refrain from spreading rumors which may in themselves do more damage than this menace." He paused to moisten his lips with the water before him. It sounded weaker than he had thought it would. The reporters' faces were for the most part impassive, only here and there a skeptical look showed. They knew he was ignorant about what was going on, that his plan to



make himself available for broadcasting was a grandstand play.

"Mayor Slattery, do you mean that only the emergency stations will be broadcasting?"

Did he? He hadn't thought of it, but he guessed that by saying they would use the C. D. system, he had said just that. He cleared his throat, his mind racing along the many ramifications if he did that. He said, "No, not at all. It is not my place at this time to close a single air wave. We will, however, be ready to cut in and interrupt any broadcast . . ."

He should have stuck to the original. He knew as soon as he said it that he had erred.

Buz Kingsley and Dave Romaine drove slowly down State Street, looking for the Chevy Arms Apartments. Dave's face was pale. Traffic was heavy, heavier than the time of day warranted, and they knew the crowding was caused by the curious out looking for a thrill. Buz almost hoped they would find it. They spotted the apartment and parked half a block away, carrying the heavy equipment with them. Inside they interviewed a woman and two men, all dazed and in varying degrees of shock.

"Manny was standing there," the woman said in a flat voice. "Just standing there and before I knew what was happening he was sinking down to the floor and there was only a puddle of water, and some of his clothes. I ran away." She would have continued repeating it over and over with no variation, but Buz turned from her and indicated to Dave that he should turn off the tape recorder. That made eight of the interviews, none of them any more helpful, none of them giving any indication of what the stuff was, what happened.

They turned to go, and were halted by a series of screams coming from one of the first-floor apartments. Buz and Dave were the first to the door, Dave thrusting his microphone close to the door as Buz shouted and pounded on it.

"Open up! Let us in!"

The two dazed men had joined them, and were watching vacantly. One had seen his wife go; the other had lost three children. With a sudden inarticulate cry, the one whose children had vanished before his eyes attacked the door with his fists, screaming, weeping, sob-

bing, and by the time Buz had pulled him away, his hands were bloodied and bruised.

With a stomach-lurching feeling Buz now saw something coming out from under the door. It was something green and luminous. Talking constantly, although unaware of his words, he described it into the microphone held by a shaking Dave Romaine. The man who had attacked the door stood unmoving, staring at the spreading film of green stuff. It thickened to an inch, then two inches. The man started to laugh, and laughing he threw himself face down on it. The clone took him from underneath. His clothes stirred restlessly and then sank into a widening pool of water—cotton seersucker pants, cotton shirt, sneakers, socks. The clothes lay there undisturbed, flat.

Buz and Dave backed away, speechless. At the door they turned and ran. Inside their car again, Buz added a few words to wind up the tape. His voice was shaky, although it steadied and firmed before he got to the end of the tape. Dave turned it off and they looked at one another, both pale and afraid.

Dave said it. "I don't think we can do anything about it. I don't think anyone can."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

10:15 A. M.

The clone lay beneath thirty city blocks, filling all the laterals and collector boxes. Nothing could flow through the pipes. The clone's volume was enormous, its weight staggering. Yet the nutrients available to it were proportionately less, since it could feed only at its outer extremities. At those extremities, it continued to grow, but the nutrients that it passed back to the main body of tissue diminished more and more. In reaching its vast size, the clone had passed through stages of reduced intake, but nothing as acute as that it now faced. The huge



mass of tissue lay almost motionless, feeling the increasing effects of starvation.

There came a moment of adaptation when the odd spirals that served as genes in the clone tissue suddenly responded to the chemical changes brought about by reduced food intake. A new ichor came into being throughout the tissue, and new means for distributing it in the main body. At one instant the clone lay almost motionless, bulging slightly at the mouth of each of ten thousand drains. At the next instant the bulging mounds of tissue shot from the drains and soared through the air, hitting the ceilings where there were any. The clone clung to the things it struck, and the ichor went to work.

For the first time the tissue put forth tiny fibrils that plumbed the minute surface irregularities in all wood. The clone extracted the minute amounts of protein in the wood, and in the process rendered the wood slightly more porous. Utilizing the increased porosity, the clone forced its fibrils deeper into wood and slowly began converting the cellulose into starch. Next it broke the starches down into sugars, and then quickly absorbed the sugars. A mat of clone tissue spread out from the thick tendrils that had emerged from the drains, and each mat was underlaid with millions of the tiny fibrils.

Some of the emerging tendrils struck walls of plaster, concrete, stone, or brick. Again the fibrils sought and found tiny openings in the surface. The acidic nature of the ichor and its enzymes broke down the calcium carbonate, converting it into a soluble, organic calcium salt. These salts combined with the sugars and the small amounts of nitrogenous compounds, and allowed the clone to continue its growth, even in the center regions of its vast body where the nutrients could no longer flow through the sewer system.

In a few minutes the effects of the new ability of the clone were apparent to the eye. Wooden floors weakened, and where the floors were none too thick to start with, they collapsed. Plaster walls, too, began to cave in, and even concrete floors thinned. Certain bricks in walls had only small amounts of calcium carbonate in their composition, and these were not seriously affected by the clone. However, it absorbed the cement and concrete that

bound the bricks together, and the walls lost their strength and sagged.

But the evolutionary advancement of the clone struck at people even more disastrously than at structures. At the corner of Sixteenth and Federal, Renniger's Meat Market continued business as usual, with only a slightly uncertain atmosphere to mar the usual friendly business of the store. The clone flung out its tendrils, and the several tubs and sinks in Renniger's produced a lattice-work of clone tissue. In momentary and stunned silence the butchers and the customers looked at the writhing strands of greenish material that laced the store. As they watched, the strands produced filaments that flowed quickly down the main strands and spread out on their own. Then the offshoots produced offshoots, and in ten seconds the large store was a maze of tissue from which there was no escape.

Customers dropped bundles and tried to run. Butchers dropped knives and saws and cleavers, tried to get out from behind the counters. Person after person was trapped in the tissue, dragging some of it with him as he tried to get to another place. But there was no other place. The cries and screams soon came to an end, and the clone tissue then formed a thick film over everything. It reached into the great iceboxes and freezers and took the meat, bones and all, leaving behind water that swiftly turned to ice. The clone flowed up the walls and penetrated the plaster and the laths behind it, and attacked the concrete and wood floors. It clung to the plaster ceiling. When it had extracted the calcium from it, the ceiling collapsed. Clone tissue fell to the floor on top of clone tissue, and the two masses of tissue fused to form a unified thick mass which then continued to press sideways. In this manner the clone progressed through walls from one structure to another, meeting itself as it went through walls and through ceilings and floors.

The new behavior of the clone was confined to the dozen blocks in the center of the city, centered on the collector box in which the clone was born. No communications were possible from the dozen blocks in which the clone emerged with such frightening energy. In stores, in apartments, in halls and foyers, in alleys, the clone was everywhere. The most devastating attack was



at Steinway's Department Store, one of the largest in the city.

Steinway's was holding its annual fall sale, the last before getting ready for the Christmas buying spree. The doors opened at 9:30, and a little thing like a rumor did not stop the sale or the women who flocked to take advantage of it. The sale was store-wide; all ten floors were bedlam as people gathered around counters to pick over the bargains. When the clone exploded from the pipes and writhed among the people, it took a full four minutes before the shoppers turned their attention from the sale to the menace among them.

A short, heavy woman in a cloth coat with a fur collar had turned her back to the sock counter and was taking a drink at a water fountain. She did not notice the drain with its cap of greenish tissue. The water came from the reservoir, but the drain connected to the sanitary sewer system. She was drinking as the clone shot forth. The tissue struck her squarely in the mouth and flowed sideways to cover her whole face. She fell back, unable to cry out, and lay at the foot of the drinking fountain. The clone quickly engulfed her head, spreading to the fur collar but leaving the cotton coat for the moment.

All through the great store the clone appeared. It indiscriminately took leather goods, nylon, and people. When the panic finally broke, four minutes after the clone came out of the pipes, it was much, much too late. Great carpets of clone filled the aisles and covered the walls, counters, floors, and ceilings. Clone tissue entered the escalator machinery and stripped insulation from the wires. The machinery shorted and stopped. Other shorts in the store's wiring opened the circuit breakers; elevators stopped and lights went out. In the semi-darkness people struggled with the clone, each in his own fashion. With most there was mindless, raw panic. With some there was a purposeful struggle, an attempt to remove the tough, clinging tissue and get away to safety. With a few, there were acts of self-sacrifice. A mother flung herself into the main mass of clone after a tendril had touched and clung to her six-month-old baby. A young woman refused to leave the side of her sister, pulling on her as the clone

slowly overtook her, until she herself stepped on a mat of tissue.

From the tenth floor, water began to drip down the stairs and escalators. In five minutes the dripping water had changed to a thin sheet. On the ninth floor the flow of water increased, and on the eighth it grew larger still. Water released on one floor quickly joined the water on the floors below, for the clone had struck on all floors simultaneously. On the second floor the water cascaded in torrents down the stairs and escalators. An alert clerk on the first floor had avoided the clone when it first struck, and he soon saw the disaster that awaited those who touched it. With meticulous care he worked his way through and around the thick strands and mats of clone tissue, sometimes doubling back when he found himself in a blind alley. He ignored all cries and shouts around him, intent only on picking his way out of the building and into the safety of the street. As he delicately walked near the foot of the escalator, a group of four struggling women stretched a strand of clone tissue that was attached to all of them, and lunged into him. His feet shot out from under him on the slippery floor, and as he fell his head smashed into the bottom of the escalator support. He lay unconscious, his head immersed in a solid stream of flowing water pouring off the bottom step. His lungs quickly filled with salty water, and he drowned.

Up on the sixth floor Charles Hallingford had been carefully inspecting the suits in the Men's Store. He had come to Steinway's great fall sale after due consultation with his wife and three or four of his fellow electrical engineers. The problem of whether the sale at Steinway's offered the best available opportunity in which to buy a new suit during a three- or four-month period had been thoroughly analyzed. It had been the consensus that if a good suit was to be had for less than fifty dollars, then Steinway's sale was the time and place to buy it. Accordingly, Charles Hallingford was going down the rack, feeling the sleeves of all the suits marked "36XL." It was relatively quiet in the Men's Store. Mostly there were five or six men looking over the suits in each size, price, and category. A few women disdainfully snatched coats off racks, inspected them and tossed them back to the top of the racks, but the men stayed away from the



women. A water fountain stood in a corner, and the clone exploded from it. No one noticed it at first. Screams and cries began to be heard from other parts of the sixth floor and from upstairs and downstairs. At first the screams seemed to signal nothing more than the discovery of a new series of bargains somewhere, but the sound grew and took on a note of terror. Then one of the men noticed the clone. It was spreading over the ceiling and the water cooler. He pointed at it and said, "What's that?"

Charles Hallingford paid no attention, since he had just located a black suit with a purple check, and its price was forty-nine ninety-five. One of the other men walked over to the water fountain and prodded the clone with his hand. The usual struggle and screams followed, and the other men went over to see what was happening. Soon the area around the water fountain was flooded with water and with half-converted people. Charles Hallingford slipped on the jacket of the suit with the purple checks, and stepped in front of a mirror to see how he looked. He turned and pivoted in front of the mirror and decided to try on the pants, too. Walking back to the rack, he noticed the uproar in front of the water cooler. When he saw the remaining fragments of human bodies in the midst of the greenish tissue, he knew something was wrong. He carefully went back to the rack, hung up the coat, put his own back on, and carried the hanger and the black suit with him as he went over to inspect the situation around the water cooler; he knew that the suit would probably not be there when he went back, and he had almost made up his mind that he wanted it.

He bent over the edge of the tissue and immediately saw that the water flowed from the line of demarcation between human and clone tissue. "Hmm," he said. "Strange. Conversion to a new kind of tissue that does not demand the same water content. And look here." He had seen that some of the clothing was converted immediately, and that other clothing appeared to remain unchanged. "It takes some, rejects some, possibly the fabric that contains nitrogen, like human flesh." He straightened, stepped to the nearest rack, selected a nylon suit, and dropped the jacket half on the tissue. Immediately the clone converted the nylon, flowing outward in a shape

that conformed for a moment to the outline of the jacket.

Charles Hallingford nodded, selected a woolen suit, and watched the same thing happen. Then he tried a cotton suit, and saw that the clone did not convert it. He looked around, spotted a yardstick, got it, and prodded the cotton jacket to see how it felt as it rested on the clone. He stepped back and watched critically as two men near him got themselves embroiled in the clone and began the last struggles. He nodded to himself as he saw that their shoes converted as quickly as their flesh. He looked down to make sure the clone was not approaching his own shoes. It was, and he moved back a few steps.

That portion of the Men's Store was now bedlam. Looking furtively around, Charles Hallingford saw that no one was watching him. He tipped over a rack of clothes on the clone, pushed back his left sleeve, and noted the time required by the clone to convert the fabrics. He raised his eyebrows at its speed. He circled to an edge of the spreading patch of tissue that was uncluttered, and there he began to probe and poke the tissue with the yardstick. He crouched at the edge poking with his right hand, holding the suit and hanger with his left. Whenever the clone began to flow up the yardstick, he yanked it away with a powerful jerk. He selected the very edge of the tissue, where it was thin, and pounded down hard with the end of the yardstick. The tissue gave way beneath the pressure, but it was not damaged. He then began to try to chop off a small specimen, but the yardstick was not strong enough to do it. It broke, and he stood up in disgust.

He carefully folded the suit and hanger and placed it on top of a counter, and then put his own suit jacket over it. He removed the top from a large metal smokestand that stood on the floor, and returned to the edge of the clone. Working with the thinnest section possible, he succeeded in separating a piece of the clone about three inches on a side. He placed the sleeve of a nylon suit jacket on it, and watched it convert the nylon to its own tissue. He shook his head and muttered, "Enormous driving force. What can the source of that energy be?" He hacked off a smaller piece, an inch square, and tried again. It converted the nylon.



Kneeling to his work, he succeeded in cutting off a piece of clone about a quarter inch square. It did not convert the nylon, and so Charles Hallingford promptly scooped up the fragment with his fingers and held it in the palm of his hand. He stood up, holding it right up to his glasses the better to inspect it. He pursed his lips and carefully sniffed at it, noticing for the first time the faint, acrid odor. He kneaded it with the fingers of his other hand, looked up at the ceiling thoughtfully, and said, "About 60° F, I should think."

He held his specimen to the light and peered through it. It was faintly translucent, and he could see thin lines running through it. He saw a slight wetness appear on his hand, and for a moment he thought it had begun to convert the tissue of his hand. Then he saw that the liquid was being discharged from the clone, and he nodded. "Keep trying, little fellow, but I don't think you can muster enough energy to get a foothold on me. Chemicals, I'll bet, and I know a few chemists who would give everything they own to have a lovely little specimen like you. I think I'll take you along. Let's see. How can I carry you out of here?" He looked around. The counter on which he had placed his suit was half covered with clone, dragged there by someone's struggles. He yelled, and ran toward it, and grabbed up his suit just as the clone closed on one end. He quickly tried to wipe the clone off, and it fastened on his hand. He watched it progress up his arm, and he reached over with his other hand and gently placed the small fragment of clone on top of the larger piece. The little one fused indistinguishably into the parent. Charles Hallingford stood amazed at the lack of sensation as the clone took him. He tugged gently on it to test its strength, until it reached his chest and he fell over.

On the fourth floor, Ellie Hagen had been in the Women's Sweaters department, one of the most active in the entire store. Long counters were piled high with sweaters, each counter having a huge dangling piece of cardboard suspended above it with the marked-down price on it. Store employees stood guard at each end of each counter to keep customers from sneaking a sweater from an expensive counter to a cheaper counter, and periodically one would dart forward and seize such a

customer. The argument that followed added to the din as women pulled, tugged, flung sweaters to the floor, shoved each other, shouted abuse, gave opinions at the top of their voices, and generally went through a normal sales day at Steinway's.

Ellie Hagen picked her way through the sweaters on the ten ninety-eight counter, size forty. Her mind was only partly on what she was doing. The night before had been a bad one for Ellie. She had finally made up her mind to have an affair with Henry; after all, she was twenty-six years old, and not getting any younger. For two years she had successfully put off all his advances, keeping him quite interested all the while. Three times a week they had gone to the Red Room together to rehearse for whatever play the Red Room was presenting that month. Ellie was doing well, too, often considered these days for leading roles. She was, in fact, doing much better than Henry, at least with the Red Room Players. At the office, during the day, Henry was rising fast as a bright young marketing manager at the wax company where they both worked during the day. It had been pretty much assumed by everybody that Henry and Ellie would be married one day. As Ellie became more known in theatrical circles, Henry pursued her harder than ever, responding to her increased flashiness, her more provocative manner. Ellie put him off, knowing she held him in the palm of her hand, controlling him with the constant threat of the presence of her other would-be suitors. Then last week she had realized she was twenty-six years old. It was time. Henry had just had another promotion. The situation was ripe for a bit of pushing.

Dinner at her apartment, her roommate out for the night. Candlelight and wine, creamed chicken and sautéed mushrooms, angel pie, Cointreau on the sofa, her hostess gown slowly loosening at the waist. Then Henry put down his empty cordial glass and explained to her that he was getting married next month, and how grateful he was to her for her friendship all these years, and how Margaret wanted so much to meet her.

It had been a bad night for Ellie, and she had decided not to go to the office the next morning, but to go to the sale at Steinway's instead. Perhaps some new clothes. . . . Earlier she had considered sleeping pills, a great



many sleeping pills. Or perhaps an open vein, initiated in the women's washroom, and finally gushing rich red fluid all over Henry's nice new desk. That could come later if necessary. In the meantime, some new clothes at Steinway's fall sale might help, and so she plucked at the sweaters on the most expensive counter.

She was standing fifty feet from the nearest water cooler when the clone shot to the ceiling, and so she was in no immediate peril. Nearby was a tiny room with set tubs, and the clone quickly came out from under the door. Ellie looked around in mild interest as the screams and uproar increased. When, in a few minutes, she saw the clone and what it was doing, she left the sweater counter to move toward it. She then fully appreciated for the first time what was happening, and she was confronted for the first time in her life with the fact of death. Yet it all seemed unreal to her, as if it were all on a plane where it did not really matter. She listened to the sounds and she saw the sights, and they were all very interesting. She walked around the edges of the spreading mat of clone tissue, being careful not to let it touch her because it was sticky and wet-looking. She watched the others in its midst, once even bending over to see what was happening to the legs of a woman who was trying to claw her way to the top of one of the sweater counters. She covered her ears with her hands to shut out the too-loud sounds, and moved on to a quieter corner.

The clone spread farther, reaching all the counter tops, and closing in on the people who had so far avoided it. The time came when Ellie found herself trapped in the corner, but she was not concerned. In a kind of daze she deliberately stepped out on the clone and planted her feet firmly side by side on the tissue. The clone took her feet as Ellie continued to look around at what was happening to the others. She swayed slightly as her support changed, but by moving her arms out, she was able to remain upright. Her weight caused her to settle as the clone took her, and she settled faster than the clone climbed. To an onlooker, she would have appeared to be sinking slowly down through the clone and the floor as she looked around and moved her arms to keep her balance. She had sunk to her thighs when she looked down

to see how close she was to the clone. She raised her eyes then and said in clear piercing tones, "Yes, it is a better thing I do by far than remain on this earth as a burden to him and to the one he loves. Henry, my beloved, my darling, farewell." She raised both hands to her mouth and threw kisses toward the ceiling. The clone was at her waist, her head held high a little over two feet from the surface of the clone. She continued throwing kisses to the ceiling and calling "Henry" until the clone reached the region of her stomach, when her arms dropped and her head fell forward. She remained upright as she continued the inexorable slow fall until there was nothing but the hair on her head, then that, too, was gone.

The clone cleaned the store, forming thick mats of tissue that lay everywhere. When there was no more readily available protein, the tissue formed the tiny fibrils that penetrated the wood and masonry, and the store began to cave in. It took approximately fourteen minutes for the clone to clean the store of all its contents, but it took another thirty minutes to absorb the store itself. The time was 10:59 A. M.

In spreading throughout the store, the clone overran stairs and escalators. The clone covered the basement floor beneath a foot-deep sheet of water. Both the water and the clone flowed down the steps that led out of the basement into the subway station below the store. The water ran fast, but the clone moved slowly beneath it, absorbing wood, floor tile, and concrete as it went. It finally came down the last flight of stairs, parted in the middle of the flowing sheet, and began to move along the subway platform. There were people there, a few stragglers, frightened by the uproar upstairs, who waited irresolutely for the next subway train to take them away from the noise and confusion. A train pulled to a stop, and the people hastily boarded. A hundred people got off, then stopped uncertainly as they saw the wet wave of green material on the subway platform. A dozen of them approached it cautiously, and some of the others, encouraged by the curiosity of the dozen, followed. They gathered in front of the clone. "What is it?" "Maybe they're rebuilding the platform." "That's a disgusting



mess to leave around; I'm going to complain." "I'll get my shoes dirty." "I don't like the looks of it."

The inevitable moment came when one of the men reached forward with his foot and nudged the pulsing tissue. The inevitable struggle then took place, and the inevitable attempts to help him led only to the inevitable outpouring of water. Some of those who were not touched dropped to the tracks and made their way to an exit from a platform on the other side. They burst out on a street scene that was already frenzied, but they succeeded in telling a policeman about the menace in the subway, and the policeman reported the situation to headquarters.

On the subway platform, the clone worked its way through all available food materials. It had just finished when a second subway train followed the first to the platform. The train shrieked to a halt, opened its doors, and disgorged its passengers on top of the clone. Pandemonium broke loose. The clone quickly got into the subway cars themselves, and soon water poured out the doors. A minute after the train had pulled in, the conductors tried to close the doors and get the train out of the station. The doors would not close; the clone had jammed them. The engineer pulled the emergency cord, and the whine of a siren sounded through the tunnels. All through the tunnels, trains came to a halt as the alarm system stopped the operation of the subways. Thousands of passengers sat in the stalled trains and wondered what had gone wrong this time.

The alarm brought out a trained group of men equipped to deal with almost any kind of emergency. Emergency handcars left control centers, guided by the communications net that told where the trouble was. Up on the streets, trucks began converging on the station. Phase One of the emergency procedure went into action.

A handcar arrived on the track ahead of the first car in the stalled train. Eight men leaped from the car and climbed up on the end of the platform. The foreman looked down the platform at the clone and saw the mass of pulsing tissue spread out on the platform, running into the stalled train and reaching up the interior walls of the cars. He motioned his men to halt, pointed to the clone and said, "What the hell is that thing?"

As if to answer, the clone took a passenger inside one of the nearby cars, a man who had climbed up on a seat to escape it. The foreman looked in the window and saw the clone converting the man's body. He smashed in the window with a wrench and hammered on the tissue that lay on the seat beneath the window. He quickly realized that pounding did no good. He stepped back and said, "Don't let that thing touch you; it'll kill you. I don't know where in the hell it came from, but we've got to get it out of here. Frank, bring up that torch. Turn it on and try singeing that thing right at the edge there."

Frank wheeled up the oxygen-acetylene bottles, lighted the torch, and turned the blue flame on the clone tissue. The tissue turned white, and a small vee appeared where the flames struck it as the tissues volatilized. Frank played the flame back and forth, and succeeded in cutting a swath through the tissue.

The foreman said, "Hold it. It'll take us six months to get that thing out of here at that rate. Charlie, bring up some shovels. All right, you birds, let's get going on those shovels. Don't let it touch you. Roll it back." In thirty seconds of shoveling, it was apparent that the clone would not roll back.

The electrician said, "How about a little juice, Chief?" "Try it."

In two minutes more, it was clear that electricity wasn't the answer either. "There's too much of it, and it's tough," said the foreman. "All right. We'll have to call in some help on this one." He went to a phone box down on the tracks, picked up the receiver and said, "Who's on as supervisor this morning? Toby Seed? Good, put him on here quick. This here's Vern Worden. Hello, Toby? Look, we got a new one in eighteen station, and we ain't never going to get this train going unless somebody comes up with a pip. There's this thick mat of tough jelly, and it dissolves people and most clothes, and it even seems to dissolve the concrete. I think the stuff is alive. It's all over the station and train. We tried everything we can think of to clean it out, but we ain't done nothing but make it mad. You better get some of the longhairs down here, them chemists and doctors and things. . . . Yeah, we tried juice. Nothing. I see Frank up there now hitting it with fire foam. Lemme see how he did." He held the



phone away from his mouth and bellowed, "Any good, Frank?" Then back into the phone, "Naw, Toby. Nothing. Look, you better get going on this. It's killed some people down here, I don't know how many. No, I'm not putting you on. Yeah, go. You get everybody down here, you won't have too much. Oh, Toby. Tell 'em to come up to it quiet and careful like, will you? This thing touches them, they're dead. Okay? Okay, be in touch."

He hung up and jumped back up on the platform. The clone was closer now. Charlie was poking and prodding it with a shovel. "Cut that out, Charlie. You lunkheads try and think of something, will you? Don't just stand around! How we going to clean up that mess?" He took off his crash helmet and dropped it on the edge of the clone. The clone did not take it, and they all nodded and raised their eyebrows. For twenty minutes they threw things at the clone to see what would happen, and when the longhairs arrived, the group was able to tell them what the clone would or would not convert to water.

Ralph Hansen was the only chemist with the new arrivals. The foreman told him what he knew.

"Fits," said Hansen. "Some doctor over at City Hospital been playing around with it, too. He learned some things; he had a piece of this in the laboratory. Let me try and get him to help us. This damn thing—" he waved at the clone—"is popping up over half the city. We got more troubles than just here. Well, let's get going."

## CHAPTER NINE

11:00 A. M.

The first edition was being hawked in the streets when Irene Appel left the Mayor's ill-planned meeting. She glanced through the paper hastily, finding nothing new, only more distortion than she had already heard. Now the thing under the drains was being called a variety of snakes, or snakelike things.

She looked up when a car horn blasted at her. Mike

Morris, one of the news bureau men, was there, leaning on the horn, his face at the open window.

"Hey, there's something going on down in Chinatown. Want to go see?"

She was inside almost before he finished. His radio was tuned in to the police band and it was sputtering furiously. He touched it, careening around a corner, and Irene removed his fingers from the dial and tried to adjust it herself.

". . . Steinway's Department Store," Mike grunted, blatting the horn at a truck that pulled out in front of them. They swung over to Clark Street heading south. The radio continued to sputter without words. Not noticing when the change began to occur, they both became aware of the difference in the traffic. It was mostly heading north, and there were policemen on the corners trying to keep it moving. Mike said, "They gave the disaster signal."

Irene felt the fear she had let go dormant in the Mayor's office rise once more. Sounds of sirens, always present in a large city, grew in volume and Mike pulled to a screaming stop. Three official vehicles pulled around them, screeching, sirens full blast. Two of the vehicles were fire trucks, the third an emergency rescue unit. Mike and Irene exchanged looks but didn't comment. He pulled out, following the trucks.

They were stopped at the corner of Clark and West 21st. The area was closed to nonofficial traffic, an officer told them. Circling four blocks, they finally were allowed to proceed south again; all the traffic in the area was moving against them. At Wabash and Cermak they were again waved to detour. Mike grunted and pulled in to park at the precinct station in mid-block.

"We aren't going to get any closer than this," he said. "You want to wait here?" Irene looked surprised at the suggestion and opened her door.

They walked together, dodging a stream of people, some sobbing, some blank-faced, some simply bewildered. Irene glanced at the sky from time to time. The clouds were coming in now, but no rain was falling. The street was full of water. Water and bits of clothing, swirling about, getting caught in the sewer drains, accumulating,



and the water rising to the curbing. She shuddered despite the heat of the day.

They could get no closer than the other side of the street from the department store. Fire trucks and equipment, police, ambulances were in the way.

"I'll get through," Mike said grimly. "You'd better stay here."

Irene nodded and stepped inside a soda shop. She pulled out her notebook. "What happened?" she asked the proprietor.

"My God!" he said, "everyone's gone nuts. All at once, everyone's nuts. Stop up all the drains, the cop says. Don't go near the water. Run if something comes out of them. What's to come out of them? Lady, do you know what's going on? Where all them people are going?"

She left and entered the next shop, a small delicatessen. From there she went to the next, and so on. A policeman gave her more information than all the owners put together. He said: "Lady, just say we don't know, will you? Some of 'em call it snakes, some say people turn into water and run off in the streets, some say something dissolves them . . ." He turned back a group of teenagers dressed in shorts and striped shirts, all with identical haircuts, the girls discernible only by the rounder shirt fronts.

Irene Appel moved on, and entered one of the apartments from which the occupants were being moved. Water was in the lobby; the electricity had been turned off.

She caught the arm of a woman struggling with a suitcase and two children. "Where are you going?"

"I don't know. Water's in there. My husband tried to shove it back. . . . The dog bit it. Water's all over the place." She pushed past Irene, pulling the younger of the children by the hand, keeping the other one in front of her. Irene stepped aside. She approached the apartment and reached out with her pen, pushing the door open.

Inside the apartment a green film seemed to be spreading out in all directions simultaneously, flowing up the walls, over the curtains, draperies, spreading out on the rug, up over the furniture, and in its wake there was nothing left but junk, odds and ends of material, bits of metal. The drapery fixtures jangled as the weight was

removed from them, and then were silent. The green film spread out, eerie, soundless, taking as it went, almost to her feet before she was capable of moving. With a choking cry she stepped back, dropping her notebook from numb fingers. The small notebook was covered immediately. Irene turned and ran.

At the door she stopped and looked back. The lobby floor was being covered. The elevator stopped and fifteen people emerged, hurrying, overloaded with possessions. As Irene screamed, three of them stepped into the green stuff, and began sinking into the floor, water forming, running away, spreading. Their screams merged with hers. The others darted around the stuff, ran past her and escaped. Someone had her by the arm and she was running, sobbing.

"Honey, we've got a story to do, remember? Snap out of it!" It was Mike, and he was taking her away from the green stuff. By the time they got back to the precinct house, Irene was again thinking of it in terms of the story that it was.

Captain Prescott shoved the message before the radio operator. The man hardly even looked at it before he began, "Calling all cars, calling all cars . . ."

Prescott turned and pushed his way back to the small office where there was less of a mob. Irene Appel and Mike Morris were among the people inside the smaller room. "That's it," Captain Prescott said. "We are evacuating the area bounded by Twenty-sixth south, U. S. 66 north, U. S. 41 east, and Ashland Avenue west. Those who have places to go in the city are being directed to them; others are being put on buses heading for the railroad stations, bus depots, and Midway."

"That's about a square mile!" someone gasped. Prescott nodded grimly.

"What if it gets to the stockyards?" someone else asked. A momentary hush fell on the crowded room; then there was a break for the door.

Pete Laurenz hummed as the big wheels of his DC-8 touched the ground, hardly bumping as they did; he continued to hum as his eyes observed automatically, and his hands reacted, all without conscious thought on his part. He was a short, wiry man of thirty-six. He was



a happy man. He had cause to be happy. After a barren marriage of fourteen years, the Laurenzes were about to produce a child. Every time he thought of it, a wide grin cracked his homely face, and his black eyes sparkled.

He left the plane to be refueled and checked, and he dog-trotted to a phone to make the call he had been anticipating for the past four hours. In Detroit he had called, but his home line had been busy, and he had been forced to leave. This time he had twenty minutes, and he would wait. He hummed as he dialed for the operator, and his voice was cheerful giving the number. Idly he wondered about the larger than usual crowd at Midway, but shrugged it off when the phone at the other end started to ring.

"Hi, honey," he said even before the operator had a chance to confirm that Maria would accept the collect call. "What's new?"

The call was made official before she answered, her voice as gay as his. "Nothing yet, Pete. Take it easy. I told you, tonight."

"Okay. I'll be home in . . ." he consulted his watch. It was 11:05. ". . . three hours. You wait, you hear?" He grinned deeper at her chuckle and presently hung up. The crowds had increased, and for the first time he became aware of the difference in the people. They weren't dressed to travel, for one thing. They were like . . . he caught the door of the booth and shook his head hard, trying to get the brief incongruous image out of his mind. The crowds reminded him of the rescue missions he had flown in Korea, flying refugees from the front lines. There was the same lack of preparation, the same aura of fear and despair.

The feeling passed and Pete Laurenz started back to his plane. He was met by his co-pilot, looking worried. "New flight plan scheduled," the co-pilot said. He was ten years younger than Pete, a bachelor, with a heavy date for later on in the afternoon. His date, Pete remembered, was in Cleveland. "We're to take over a shuttle run between here and Milwaukee," the co-pilot said. There was puzzlement in his voice.

Pete stopped and was jostled from behind. The image of streams of refugees returned, stronger, and for a moment the faces he scanned in the hurrying masses of

people assumed an oriental expression. It faded quickly. "What's up?" he asked, not showing the concern he felt.

"Damned if I know."

The DC-8 was filled to capacity and airborne before Pete learned that there was something under the streets, or in the drain system, or in the people themselves, that made evacuating numbers of residents imperative. He circled Chicago once before heading north, and below him the city was as usual, traffic snarls here and there, boats in dock, others in the shipping canal, smoke billowing from countless factories. The city was unaffected by whatever was driving out the people. He shrugged. At least it wasn't being bombed and strafed and razed by war. In any event he was due to be relieved at 1 P. M., and at 1 P. M. he would knock off and hitch a ride to Toledo and home and the newest member of the Laurenz family, yet to bow into the world.

In a shed at the northeast corner of the stockyards, near the corner of Pershing and Halstead, there was a large drain in the center of the concrete floor. This was about five miles from the collector box in which the clone had been born. A tendril of clone tissue spurted up from that drain.

The shed adjoined a pen. In the pen was a herd of beef cattle, placid Herefords, sleek and fat from a summer's grazing.

The tendril struck the ceiling, thick with grime and rich with dusted manure. The clone quickly began to spread, and when it had covered the ceiling, it dropped a streamer to the floor, two feet from the nearest Hereford. The animal looked at the swaying strand incuriously, then turned its head away.

The clone spread out on the floor, finding nutrients there, until it finally came into contact with the left rear hoof of the animal. The hoof was mostly keratin, a scleroprotein containing a fair amount of nitrogen; the clone swiftly engulfed it. The animal felt no sensation until so much of its leg had been converted that its hindquarter began to sag. It shifted its position restlessly, but could not find support for its left hind leg. When it tried to walk away, its hindquarters collapsed. It strug-



gled to regain its balance, but could not. It sat, its fore-legs stiff, but since it felt no sensation at all, it did not panic; it submitted to the gentle restraint. In another minute, only its forequarters remained, and they were slowly settling into a spreading mud puddle. The head hung limp and fell to the mat of pulsing tissue beneath it. Then the clone began expanding.

It reached the hooves of nearby cattle and began converting four animals at once. One of these tried to walk away when the clone was halfway up a front leg. The animal started to fall, but recovered. It dropped its head and peered at the mat of tissue beneath it. It was a nervous animal; it became uneasy and made another effort to move away. This time the restraint made it panic, and it lunged, drawing the clone out to an inch-thick strand before the tension of the clone tissue dragged it to an abrupt halt. The steer thrashed around, bawling madly; the rest of the herd in the pen began milling and snorting. Several animals on the outside of the restless herd turned and ran along the inside of the fence that confined them. They ran right through the original mat of tissue that had dropped from the ceiling. They fell when the clone caught their feet. The bawling this time set herds in nearby pens in motion.

There were other drains throughout the stockyards; the clone came out of them too. Uneasiness among the animals spread slowly, but with increasing intensity. The sheep barns and pens were a shambles. The animals bleated and tried to leap the fences. They climbed on each others' backs in an effort to get out.

The sheep were the only animals to feel any sensation as the clone tried to take them. The clone fastened to the thick coats of wool and could not immediately reach down to the skin and flesh. Many of the terrified sheep lunged away from the clone while it was fastened merely to a patch of wool. The wool pulled out of the skin, and the sheep was free, for the moment.

Of all the animal species in the stockyards, only the hogs showed no signs of panic. Many of them tried to root in the clone—to eat the tissue—and this quickly stifled any squeals. When the danger of the clone became apparent to the rest of the hogs from the struggles of those that were caught, many simply charged the

pulsing tissue, snorting and stamping and slashing at it. None moved away. Some lay in their wallows watching the advancing film of tissue, snorting slightly as it approached, ears perked high and forward, alert and curious.

Several pens of horses created the worst uproar. They quickly panicked, rising on their hind legs and blindly flailing their forefeet through the air, smashing at fences, walls, other horses. Their neighing rose to a pitch that sounded like a torrent of human screams.

Soon after the cattle began to panic, men came running to see what was the matter. There was no direction to the panic of any of the animals. The cattle, the sheep, the horses, did not seem to be trying to get away from anything; they simply wanted to get out. The men worked hard to bring the panic under control, and did not have time to seek its cause at first.

Tiny Andersen sat on the fence of a cattle pen and shouted, "Haw, now, haw, now," at the milling cattle. He began to climb down inside, trying to shove a steer aside with his cattle cane. He quickly saw that the animal would not respond, and that it was dangerous in the pen, so he went back to his seat on the top of the fence. He yelled over to Frank Crewson, "What spooked 'em?"

Crewson was trying to relieve the press of cattle in a corner of the pen; a small six-hundred pounder was being crushed. He shrugged. Andersen dropped down to the walkway and circled the pen at a trot to keep the animals away from a broken fence slat on the other side. As he rounded a corner, he slipped and fell in a mud puddle covered with an inch of water.

"Where'd that come from?" he muttered, as he picked himself up and wiped the mud off his hands. He went on to the broken slat, climbed the fence and jabbed at the cattle, trying to drive them away. It took several minutes, but he finally cleared a space.

Off to one side was an odd-looking mat. As he looked at it, it moved. Streamers ran from it toward the legs of the cattle. One of the streamers touched an animal's leg, and Andersen saw a wet spot appear under the hoof. The mat covered the leg and moved up out of the dust and dirt, and Andersen saw the greenish color of it. He looked around to see if anyone else was near, and



when he looked back, the steer was fighting the tissue. Andersen slid along the top of the fence to get closer, and reached down to prod the tissue with his cane. The leg of the steer was gone by this time, and Andersen could see what was happening. He suddenly realized that this must be the thing that was panicking all the animals in the stockyards.

Andersen stood on the top rail to look out over the raging animals in the cattle pens, trying to see who else was near. Two animals simultaneously crashed into the fence ten feet below where he was standing. The sturdy fence lurched enough to dislodge him, and he fell inside the pen. His feet struck the mat of tissue as his knees hit the ground. He tried to pull his feet away, but the clone had the leather of his high-heeled shoes, and the shoes were too tight for him to slip them off. In three seconds the clone had gone through the shoe leather and into his feet. A steer thundered past, stepped on him and ran on. Andersen pulled himself closer to the fence and began crying out for help. No one could hear him over the uproar of the animals.

Crewson had seen him fall. He waited a moment to see if Andersen would pull himself out of the pen. When he did not, Crewson ran around to help. He found Andersen working his way to the bottom of the fence. Crewson said, "You all right, Tiny?"

Andersen pointed to the lower half of his body. Crewson looked, and his jaw dropped. Andersen gasped, "Tell them, tell them don't touch it. Look at it. Tell them."

Crewson said, "I'll pull you out of it." He started to get up.

Andersen grabbed him through the fence. "You can't do it, Frank. The steers can't break away. Just stay here a minute, will you? I don't want to be alone. This won't take long. Just stay here another couple of minutes, and then—" He looked down. "Yeah," he continued, "it won't take long now and then you go tell them. Tell them don't touch . . ." The clone reached the tip of his spine, and the upper part of his body stiffened. His eyes stared. It was another ninety seconds before the part that was left relaxed.

Crewson stood up and backed away, watching the end. Then he turned to run toward the office. On the way

he tried to tell some of the others what he had seen, but his news was not new. The others had seen men and animals taken, and they all knew that something was loose in the stockyards, killing everything it touched.

Many of the fences had been broken down, and cattle raced in the walkways and chutes. Pandemonium was complete. The clone was everywhere, on the animals, stringing out over manure piles, on fences, on the ground, in the buildings. Police cars raced to the scene, but there was nothing they could do.

Dory Bernheim turned the radio volume down and stood with legs slightly apart, hands on hips. Stuff coming out of the pipes! Dory had little patience with games, less with fools, and he considered this report to be the end product of a fool playing a game.

He turned his attention back to the Ford he was working on, whistling slightly as he pondered whether it needed only a tune-up, or a valve job. He hoped it needed a valve job. He loved tearing a car down and then, lovingly, painstakingly, reassembling it. His one-man shop was on Kedzie Avenue, near Douglas Park where he ate his paper-bagged lunch every day and fed the pigeons, and watched the kids play at recess. He liked summer best when the kids were there every day and he didn't have to hit it at their school recess, but, he shrugged philosophically, if he had to miss them now and then, why it couldn't be helped. He listened again to the motor of the car and felt happiness settling in his soul. It needed a valve job, all right. He looked at his big pocket watch and decided to tackle it after lunch. Washing up he listened again to the radio, and all the stations seemed to have nothing but stories about the stuff that was killing people. Wiping his hands on a rag that was black and wet with gasoline, he walked to the door of his shop and glanced at the street beyond. It was quiet as usual, traffic maybe a little heavier, but nothing else. He frowned at the radio, and then, acting on impulse, climbed into his truck to drive to the park some four blocks away.

They said an area was being closed and cleared out, he mused, driving slowly in the undoubtedly heavier-than-usual traffic. Must be something. . . . He had to stop, unable to advance farther, and he parked the truck.



Then he heard the first scream. It was coming from the industrial school and the one voice raised in terror was added to by others until the din was all he could hear. He didn't know when, or even why, he grabbed his acetylene torch, but he found that he was running with it in his hands, and when he pushed his way to the door of the school, he had it ready to operate.

The boys were in the shop rooms; water was on the floor of the corridor; the screams continued unabated. Anyway they were still able to yell, he thought as he ran down the hallway cautiously, remembering some of the details of the broadcasts he had listened to so skeptically. It was green, and stayed mostly on the floor, the guy had said. Then he saw it. A green moving wave, covering the entire hall from wall to wall, entering rooms as it got to them. It was approaching the doorway of the shop room. Quickly he adjusted the nozzle of his torch and took another step toward the stuff. There was more of it farther down the hall. That must be why the kids hadn't been able to run out of the building in the first place, had gathered instead in the shop room. He recalled that the windows had burglar bars on them and he cursed rapidly and feelingly. He started to burn the stuff as he advanced. The green stuff curled back from the flames, and started oozing up the walls, seeking a new front. He cleared enough of the hall to let the kids leave the shop, and they began running past him. He stood on guard, wondering how long before the floor caught on fire. There must have been a couple of hundred kids in the room. He turned the flame upward, and immediately the stuff started coming forward on the floor again.

"Hurry up, you kids!" he yelled. One of them caught his arm, and pointed toward the center stairs. They were dry.

"Mr. Lucarno's class is still up there. The stuff is in the hall and they can't get out. It ain't found them yet. We could hear them talking over the intercom."

Dory sprayed the stuff on the walls and floor one last time, saw the last boy flee from the shop. He sprinted up the stairs. The thing was there in the hallway, making the same methodical searching progress along the hall floor, entering each room only after it covered the main

escape route. Again Dory burned his way through it to the room where the excited voices were screaming for help. This time the trapped youngsters numbered fewer, less than fifty. Dory urged them out, keeping them together with the teacher's help, and the body of them moved down the staircase, coming to a halt on the lower third of the stairs. The green stuff was all over the first floor again. Dory burned a path through, working frantically to keep it burned back until they could run out to the street. It was coming down the stairs faster now, working its way along the walls, even the ceiling. The kids' movements seemed agonizingly slow. He fell in behind them as they neared the door, the way ahead now cleared and safe.

Suddenly the torch sputtered and the flame turned yellow for a second or two, decreasing in length, dying. It was ten feet more to the door, and Dory yelled to the kids to run for their lives. They did, but they were slower than the green stuff that advanced from all sides, overtaking the last three kids, overtaking Dory. He caught up one of the boys to him and held the terrified youngster in his arms until there was nothing left to hold, and nothing to hold with.

## CHAPTER TEN

11:59 A. M.

The red camera eye watched as Buz Kingsley read through the list of places where the clone had been sighted, or had attacked, during the past half hour. Behind him there was a map with a heavy dotted line closing in an area that was constantly expanding; even as he spoke a second man changed the line again to take in two more blocks. Buz glanced at it and then turned to Irene Appel, seated at his right.

"Now for our second direct report, Miss Irene Appel."

"Thank you, Buz. Steinway's Department Store was full of shoppers this morning, taking advantage of the



annual fall sale. The store is tragically empty now, with water running along the aisles, and bits of clothing piling up against posts and pillars. The shoppers are gone; the store personnel are gone; many of the goods themselves are gone, the store is falling apart . . .”

Buz resumed after she finished.

“Now for a direct pickup from our various mobile units scattered throughout the city. First, Ralph Bondo at Union Station. Come in, Ralph. What’s the story at Union Station?”

“A story of mass evacuation, Buz . . .” The picture was fuzzy and jumpy, but Bondo’s voice was clear. “People are leaving the city by the hundreds. Those from the affected areas who have nowhere to go within the city are being sent out to the suburbs, out to the county schools, to the fire stations in the surrounding countryside, to the various Civil Defense stations. They are leaving with nothing more than they can carry in their hands.”

“Peter Vashli at Illinois Central Station. Come in, Peter.”

“It’s the same story here, Buz. People are running away as fast as they can board the trains that promise to take them to safety. Families have been split by this thing: mothers leaving with youngsters, not knowing where their husbands are, or their older children who went to school this morning and failed to return. Fathers leaving . . .” There was a break in his voice, then it was back, firm and clear, “The green stuff has invaded Illinois Central Station!” There was too much background noise for his next words to be heard over the screaming sounds of panic. Then, “. . . no way out of here . . . pale green sheet like someone tilted a glass with melted paraffin in it, coating the sides, covering everything in its path, people vanishing into it, just sinking away! Vanishing, turning to water . . . station master’s office, trying to get there now . . .” His voice faded out again and only shrieks were heard. Then he was back. “I’m in the station master’s glass-enclosed office now, overlooking the main concourse. The office is so full that we can’t even move in here, but it seems safe for the moment . . . oh, a thread of the stuff has got in under the door . . . it’s growing . . .” Screams drowned him out,

and when they ended there was dead silence on the microphone.

Through his earphone Buz heard the slightly hysterical voice of the station manager. "We switch now to the temporary office set up by the Mayor for an important development."

The Honorable John Michael Slattery cleared his throat and sipped his water before he spoke. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have several important announcements to make at this time. As I promised earlier, I will be at this desk with this microphone to bring to you directly any new developments that occur with this dreadful matter that we now must cope with. And we will cope with it, ladies and gentlemen. You must remain calm. You must not panic, or all our plans will be in vain. We are still awaiting the preliminary report from the laboratory at City Hospital concerning the makeup of these things that have invaded our city. Until further notice, or until the reports are completed, we must assume that they are snakelike creatures that have the ability to enter our homes and buildings through the drainage system. There is no doubt that these green snakes are extremely dangerous, that to touch them is to die. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, you must stay away from all open drains of any sort.

"I repeat, stay away from the drains in your homes, in the lavatories, in the buildings where you work. Plug up these drains wherever possible and then keep away from them.

"Our traffic engineering department has completed a plan for the evacuation of the section of the city that follows: starting with Taylor Street, south to Twenty-sixth Street, and from the South Branch Chicago River west to Columbus Drive. Immediately following this brief announcement Mr. Eugene Griswold, the traffic commissioner, will detail the evacuation route. Please follow his orders to avoid traffic jams. The police department is sealing off the area as described, and no one, repeat, no one will be allowed to enter with the exception of official vehicles. Do not attempt to enter this area. You will simply add to the congestion already there, and you may endanger your own lives."

He drank deeply, his eyes darting over the sheets of



paper before him. He continued, "There will follow a list of centers being readied for those who are forced to vacate their homes. Please listen carefully for the one nearest your own home. Go directly to these centers. There you will be directed to remain if there is room there for you, or plans will be made to remove you from the city. Do not go directly to the railroad stations, the bus terminals, or the airports. You will be transported from the centers to the nearest available transportation, or you will be housed here in the city.

"All government employees are directed to report to work immediately. All firemen and police officers are to report at once to their stations for further orders. We are in touch with the Governor, and Civil Defense officials in Washington. The situation is being studied with suggestions already starting to flow into the city for possible control of this menace. Our first step in this control program is to flush the creatures from our drainage system, out to the lake where they can be sprayed and killed. The order has gone out to the sanitation department to flush out the sewers in the area that is closed off, and in doing this we believe we will rid our city of these creatures. Meanwhile, do not go near the drains. Run if you see the green creatures. Do not try to do battle with them." He looked up and smiled weakly. "Now, our Traffic Commissioner with instructions for the evacuation of the area just described. Mr. Griswold."

In City Hospital, Mark turned the volume down and swung around to face the others gathered in the laboratory. "Well," he said bitterly, "that's our Mayor. Snakes!"

"Our report must not have got through," Sorenson said thoughtfully. He was gazing out the window, still wondering what he was doing in the lab. Beyond the glass the streets were emptying; the hospital was well inside the area to be evacuated. He swung around to look at Mark. "One of us will have to deliver the message personally."

"Not only the message," Mark replied. "He has to countermand that order to flush out the sewers. Can he do that? Can it be done?"

"Lord only knows," Sorenson said. As Health Commissioner he attended monthly meetings with Timothy O'Herlihy, but he didn't know the man, didn't want to

know him. "Tim O'Herlihy would know, but they say he's out of town today. I wish," he added, pleasantly, "he was hanging somewhere by his thumbs. I am certain that he could advise about closing down the system, sealing off areas . . ." He shrugged. "But he is 'out of town.'"

The assistant to the Sanitation Commissioner looked at the spreading shape on his wall map, and compared it to the map being displayed on the television set. He pursed his lips in worry. His wife worked in the Conrad Hilton Hotel, just two blocks north of the closed-off area. He lifted the phone and jiggled it until the girl on the board answered. "Try the Conrad Hilton again," he said. His voice had a whine in it that was intensified over the telephone. The switchboard operator stuck out her tongue, put honey in her voice and replied, "No outside calls are getting through, sir. I can keep trying, however."

"Keep trying," he said. He paced the office several times and then came to a decision. It wasn't his job to open Mr. O'Herlihy's message from the Mayor. It wasn't for him to decide whether they should close the system, or open it, maybe let the stuff spread clear out to the lake. He had been hired because his uncle and Mr. O'Herlihy had gone to school together, and his uncle was the right-hand man of Boss Alletti. No one ever told him he'd have to decide things like whether to close the sewers or open them. If he left the message, Mr. O'Herlihy would find it. He'd decide. On the other hand . . . he started to scribble the order to open all the boxes, but quickly he tore up the half completed note and then tore it again. Nothing in writing. He told the secretary in the outer office to pass the word instead. She was expendable. Then he left to collect his wife and go home to Evanston, away from it all.

The radio was on normal volume again in the laboratory at City Hospital. Commissioner Sorenson was again at the window watching a gang of boys walking down the street. "Looters," he said absently. "They'll pick it clean."

Mark was at the desk typing furiously. He looked up, shrugged, and returned to his paper. After a moment he yanked it from the typewriter. "That's it," he said. "Our findings, five copies." He folded one and put it in his breast pocket, and handed one to Edie, one to Harry



Schwartz, and one to Sorenson. The last one he put in an open safe, closed the door and spun the knob. "Okay. Edie, you hold the fort here until they evacuate the hospital. Keep the radio on and get out as soon as the national guard, or whatever they send, gets here. Understand?"

She nodded. For a moment their eyes held; suddenly she was in his arms, and her arms were hard and tight on his back. "Mark, be careful! In some places it has covered the streets."

She stopped, aware that she was telling him nothing he didn't already know. Before she released him she kissed him and whispered, "Come back, Mark."

He left her, but paused at the door. "Remember, if it gets into the hospital, get up here and stuff the sheets under the door."

She nodded. They had plugged the drains in the laboratory, and they counted on the sheeting to halt its progress, if it should invade the building. Cotton seemed one of the safe materials, a substance it didn't take or flow through. Her eyes swung around to the bell jar with the shapeless lump of green stuff in the bottom, and she shivered. Despite the large amount they had killed, it was five or six times bigger than the bit Mark had first brought into the lab.

Mark, followed by Commissioner Sorenson and Harry Schwartz, left the hospital, starting the trip to the Record Building in Dr. Sorenson's official automobile.

The block the hospital occupied was empty of traffic, but as they headed north, turning onto Michigan Avenue, they were immediately in a traffic jam. Mark swore. Every corner they passed was blocked off, with police waving them on. They were over half an hour going four blocks. The traffic stopped altogether then, and Mark finally got out and climbed on the roof of the car to see why. All he could see ahead of them were more cars, some with drivers on top, others bare. A wave of panic passed through the throngs, and people started to leave the cars, running away.

"It must be up there," Harry said.

"I can't tell," Mark said. "But we can't just sit here. Come on, let's walk."

Two blocks farther they saw the cause of the jam:

three cars and a truck had collided violently at an intersection. Passing the wreckage, they got into a parked car with keys in the ignition, and drove swiftly northward. They were now past the area of clone sightings. As they left it behind them, there were fewer indications of the panic conditions behind, and by the time they reached Milwaukee Avenue and Higgins Road, the city appeared to be normal, with hardly more than the usual flow of cars.

Outside the Record Building a crowd of reporters was being held back by police. Mark swore briefly. He started to go past the building, to search for another entrance.

"Double park," Sorenson said. "I'll get you through them."

Mark jammed on the brakes, pocketed the keys, and left the car in the street. Almost immediately Sorenson was recognized and they were surrounded.

"Hey, Commissioner, what's new?"

"Have you located the monster yet?"

"Is the National Government moving in with troops?"

They moved through the mass of reporters, Sorenson leading the way, up to the door being guarded by police, and through it, the police now escorting them. One of the policemen headed for a telephone at the reception desk, but Sorenson moved on past him toward the elevators. Mark and Harry kept close to him. The man on the telephone was waving to them to wait when Harry pushed the button to close the door.

"Where?" Harry asked.

"Twentieth floor," Sorenson said. "It's the Civil Defense broadcasting room." He was examining a gun, a small pistol that he had taken from his pocket. "I keep it in the glove compartment," he explained. "I didn't want to leave it when we abandoned the car." He handed it to Mark. "You might need it."

Mark hefted the pistol and slipped it into his pocket.

On the twentieth floor, they were stopped almost immediately by a security guard. "Sorry, Commissioner. The Mayor's on the air; he can't see anybody now."

From under his white kitchen coat Harry pulled out the cleaver. Mark took his hand from his pocket; in it was Sorenson's pistol. "Get out of the way," he said.

The guard backed up, moving involuntarily toward a closed door. Sorenson pushed it open; beyond it was an-



other door with a red light flashing over it: *On The Air*. Two more security guards looked up, started to rise, and sat down again when they saw the gun in Mark's hand. He indicated the door with the red light, and the three of them entered.

Mayor Slattery was saying into the microphone, "... as stated earlier, the situation is near the point of full control. Do not panic..." he broke off when Mark came into his line of vision. He made frantic motions. A technician stepped forward.

"What the hell are you guys doing in here? We were on the air!"

"And we'll be on the air again in just a minute," Mark said. "Mayor, didn't you receive our lab report?"

"Of course we did," the Honorable John Slattery retorted belligerently. "Insane! That's what it was! One organism the size of thirty square blocks!" He greeted Sorenson then for the first time. "And, you, where the hell have you been all morning?"

"Put him on the air," Mark said to the technician. "This is Health Commissioner Ian Sorenson."

The technician frowned at Sorenson, turned partially toward the Mayor, and finally nodded. "One minute," he said. He adjusted his earphone and microphone and spoke in an undertone.

"You can't spread that story," Slattery protested. "Have you realized what it would do to morale to say something that big is under the streets? The whole city will panic!"

"Better they should panic and run than stay calm and get eaten," Harry said.

The Mayor didn't look at him. He kept his eyes on Sorenson, and his voice was low when he said, "I got the word, we aren't to panic the people any more than necessary. We evacuate a block at a time if we have to, but something like this will empty the whole city."

"I won't go along with it, John," Sorenson replied. "We are pressing for an immediate and total evacuation of the city, just as fast as people can get out, any way they can get out. And we are pressing for the stoppage of the flow of sewage from the city, and the closing of the storm sewers wherever that is possible. It won't stop it, but it will slow it down some, maybe."

Slattery grunted. "You'll flood the city, you fool. You know who'll be after your scalp then?"

"I don't give one little goddamn if every lot he owns stands knee-deep in water for eternity," Sorenson said. The technician was holding his hand up, watching a large clock on the desk. The hand came down smartly. Sorenson said into the microphone, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is an emergency message. Listen carefully, there is under our streets a single organism that now covers an area of over thirty square blocks and is growing at an increasing rate of one tenth of a block in all directions every five minutes . . ."

Mark leaned against the door, suddenly tired. This part was done. Now they would know what it was that threatened them. Now let them run. Let them run like hell! And maybe some of them would even be lucky enough to be able to run fast enough.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

1:04 P. M.

The clouds pressed lower and lower against the skyscrapers, making the air below on the streets feel squeezed and heavy, thick with heat. It was an uneasy sky, uneasy air. Faces turned upward again and again, looking for a sign of a break in the clouds, or for the first drops of rain—anything to break the ominous stillness. At last it came—a lightning bolt that danced from spire to sky to spire for more than five seconds, flashing brilliantly against the black clouds, leaving the smell of ozone after it was gone. Thunder rolled in the canyons of the streets. The wind came, and wind brought rain.

It came in sheets that cut visibility to less than half a block, and made the sky seem close enough to touch. A hard, merciless rain, it drove against flesh, against windows, ripped awnings from frames, gouged holes in the ground in the park. The clouds raged over the lake and churned it to a pounding sea. The storm was like a



gigantic waterwheel, dumping, again and again, sheets and torrents of rain, tons of rain. It pounded against bits and scraps of clothing caught in the bars of the storm sewer covers; it drove them in tighter, compressed them into tight plugs, and then began rising above them, over the curbing, spreading across the street, to meet swirling water advancing from the other side, merging in the middle to run down the streets, to fill in dips and underpasses, and basements, to rise higher and higher against the footings of buildings.

Sump pumps whined and groaned at the load and couldn't keep up, but did pump out hundreds of gallons of water per minute from every building.

In the main sewage treatment plant, Stuart Dvorjak stood at the door watching the driving sheets of rain, listening to the radio over the thunder. There was a good deal of static and he missed much of what was being said. He turned around and caught up the transistor radio, holding it closer to his ear when the Health Commissioner started to talk about the sewers. That was his department, and he had just turned the valve to full open.

"... must be closed as much as possible," the Commissioner was saying. Static interrupted and his voice came back. "... can be confined to a certain degree, not indefinitely, we know, but slowed down to permit evacuation. This is an official order: the sewer system must be closed as far as it is possible ..."

"But it'll flood," Dvorjak heard himself muttering, as he glanced again at the murderous rain hurling down from the sky.

As if answering the objection the Commissioner said, "There will be flood conditions in some parts of the city. Flooding is preferable to the rapid, uncontrolled spread of this organism ..."

Stuart stopped listening. He was at work with his dials and knobs. When he had finished, he left the station in charge of a junior engineer and ran out to his car. He would have to make the rounds personally, be sure that the system was closed at every substation. He knew he couldn't count on the others to hear the announcement, or, hearing it, to obey. Mentally he drew a map, locating the nearest stations, plotting his course with the minimum of wasted time. Within half an hour, he decided, it

would be noticeable that the system was not draining; sump pumps would cease working when the overflow from the sanitary system started to back up, and with the rain that was still coming, there would be a major flood problem within an hour in much of the city.

On the corner of Eighteenth and Clark the rain drove against the ornate cornices of a condemned apartment building. The cornices sloped in toward the building, oriental fashion, making a trough in which the rain collected in the first few seconds of the storm. The clone had sent its searching tendrils throughout the building, taking the calcium from the concrete, taking much of the wood, honeycombing the flooring of terrazzo. The rain seeped into the interstices left by the clone, followed them downward into the substructures, along the floors. The floors grew heavy and sagged, and side walls bowed outward, bulging, as if the building had been pumped full of water.

One of the floor joists, a four-inch steel I-beam, slipped from the bulging sidewall, scraped its way down the wall with a rending noise and came to rest on the floor below. Interior partitions collapsed; the ceiling above it caved in. The floor below held for only a few seconds; then it too fell, and with the inside reinforcement gone, the outside walls suddenly buckled the other way, curved inward, and shook, groaning. The building, twelve floors, shuddered for a minute, then slid down on itself, crumpled, collapsed. The thunder of the crashing building rivaled the thunder of the crashing sky. Then a few screams were heard. Not many; the building had been nearly emptied an hour earlier. Six or seven of the inhabitants had refused evacuation, had preferred their chances with the stuff that came out of the sinks, to their chances with others of their kind. Until the collapse of the building, it had seemed that they had chosen wisely; the clone had not returned after its initial foray.

Miguel Lazarus was the first to realize that the clone had not really left, that it had simply been occupied elsewhere. He lay pinned among the wreckage of the building, calling lustily for help. He was held fast by a beam across one leg, but he was uninjured. Miguel lay with his head in a pool of water, and the clone appeared within three feet of him, a pale greenish ropelike thing that undulated slightly as it moved toward his face. In the



distance he could hear other calls for help change in tone, and he knew the clone had found other cave-in victims. He ducked his head, shielding his face with his arm, and didn't even know when the clone began to take him.

Overhead, a helicopter hovered, then darted away to hover four blocks farther west. Beside the pilot, Mike Morris was speaking in fast, clipped tones, his mouth pressed close to the microphone he held.

"... St. Paul's Episcopal Church is tottering. The south spire is leaning and falling. Good Lord! There are people..." He motioned the pilot to get lower. "... they are trying to get out, and the whole building is shuddering now. It's going to come down." He stopped then, knowing his words were drowned out by the explosive force of the collapsing church. Moments later when he resumed, his voice was sick. "The stuff is there in the ruins. It's under the water that is everywhere, and the people who got out of the church are being caught by it." Suddenly his tight voice broke and he cried out, "My God, can't anyone help them? Send helicopters! Send something!" Circling, the helicopter left the scene.

A fire started in the ruins of a high-rise apartment building, completed only six months earlier. It burned in the rain, billowing steam and smoke skyward. Across the street in another of the new buildings, a group of teenagers huddled and watched, waiting for a lull in the rain, to dash down the street to the corner where they had left a stolen car. They had their arms and pockets full, and if now and then one of them glanced nervously over his shoulder, the others pretended not to notice.

Callie Bickel was the boss, and Callie said they should wait for a couple of minutes. Evan Lombino was jittery. They had seen the clone in one of the rooms they rifled, and they had backed out, slamming the door on it, flying down the stairs to the street level, but the clone was in the building, and Evan didn't like the idea of waiting in the building for the rain to stop. Evan was behind the others, posted to watch for the green stuff. When he saw it, his cry was shrill.

Callie jerked around, his eyes grim. He was carrying a transistor short-wave radio—must have cost five, six hundred dollars—and he didn't want it ruined by the rain that was pounding down beyond the glass door. He saw

the green stuff flowing down the stairs, like a carpet being unrolled. He fired four bullets into it and saw the stuff splash where they hit, but it closed up again right away. It was two-thirds of the way down the stairs. Callie snatched up a morning paper from the floor and ripped it apart. He held his cigarette lighter to the paper and threw the blazing paper at the stuff as it flowed down the stairs. It stopped, turned a dirty gray, then started to ooze up the wall—still advancing, coming around the burning paper on the floor.

The boys dropped their loot and darted out into the rain, pelting as fast as they could toward the corner and the hot car. Callie screamed curses over his shoulder all the way. They were almost to the corner, then the building exploded as if it had been bombed. Evan grinned weakly. He had turned on gas jets as they roved through the building, and the fire had touched it off. There was a second, smaller explosion, and his grin deepened. This was the best one he'd done yet. He watched rapturously as the burning building belched fire and smoke and a third explosion rent the air. Bits of the blazing building were thrown out, lodged in other buildings nearby, and they caught fire. The boys stood on the corner, awed by the immensity of their act.

"The whole goddamned block's gonna go," Callie said finally. He cuffed Evan in mock fury. "You lousy bastard, look what you done!"

Whistling in unison, the troop crowded into the car and laid rubber leaving the scene.

There was no telephone service in the city. Now the electricity was failing, and gas was being turned off as building after building collapsed or caught fire. The rain settled to a hard, steady downpour that the forecasters predicted would continue for the remainder of the day; the air from the lake was chilly. The hot lake radiated, as did the summer-heated buildings and streets; the warm air rose, mingled with the cooler air being driven in by the storm, and fog formed, coming in patches at first, gradually building up to a density that dropped visibility almost to zero.

The helicopters surveying the damage to the city circled lower and lower. One by one they droned back to their fields, blinded by the rain, fog, and smoke that screened off the city below. Only the glow from many fires flick-



ered in the grayness, making the scene like something out of Dante. Here and there a feeble red aura around a light on one of the skyscrapers added to the infernal effect. On the lake a fog horn sounded dismally; in the distance a train whistle answered. Automobiles and buses, bumper to bumper, continued to thread their way out of the city. In the railroad yards, crews worked feverishly to clear the tracks of freight cars and replace them with passenger cars. Two of the city's train stations had been invaded by the clone and were now useless. The trains intended to arrive in them were lined up outside the city for miles, blocking other tracks and streets.

At Midway, a few planes were still landing and taking off. The fog threatened to end all such flights; planes stacked up over the lake were starting to leave for other destinations.

At 1:10 P. M. Pete Laurenz circled to land. Below him the city was shrouded in fog, with red fuzzy glares dotting the area. Rain drove against the plane, against the windshield. Pete listened to the control voice attentively, automatically obeying the orders being given for the blind landing until he had dropped to an altitude of five hundred feet, and could finally see the runway lights. He was going in too fast; it would not be a smooth landing. Pete didn't care. He wanted only to get down, pick up a load of people and get out again.

He didn't want to look at the people he picked up. He didn't want to think of the ones that wouldn't get picked up. Twice he had caught himself looking upward into the black clouds and rain, half expecting to see MIGs swooping down with guns firing. Each time he had brought himself up sharply, back into the present, but it was the same. The people were the same. Frightened, running people, not dressed for traveling, carrying nothing, just running.

He taxied to a stop and heard the ground crew hit the side of the plane with the stairs. He left his seat then and opened the door. Neither of the stewardesses was with him; they had been ordered off back in Milwaukee. The copilot hadn't been ordered off, he simply had left. Pete didn't care; it meant that they could get three extra people aboard.

The cold rain blew in on him as he supervised the loading. He saw to it that seat belts were fastened, and then motioned for several additional passengers. With no baggage they could take extras. They might get jarred, but they would be out of the city. Somehow the voices of the people seemed not to penetrate the air about his ears and he was aware only that the plane was full of them, wet, miserable, afraid, some talking, some sobbing, some praying. A man had herded six children inside, then had run away, shouting something over his shoulder. Pete hadn't caught it. Three of the youngsters were crying. They were all under eight or so. Pete lifted one of the boys from his seat, a little one, about four, and carried him forward and placed him in the co-pilot's seat. Returning to the door, he held up one finger, and a young woman was allowed to board. Her face was the color of putty, her eyes mad; water ran down her face, and she didn't seem aware of it. Pete fastened her in the seat vacated by the youngster, and then his plane was loaded to capacity, past capacity.

One of the ground crew motioned for him to go. Pete knew they were afraid the thousands of people being held back might break through the rope barriers and swarm over the runways.

He closed and fastened the door and made his way forward. A woman reached out as he passed her, touching his arm. "God bless you," she said. Pete looked at her for a second and went on. He closed the door and took his seat, first tousling the tow-headed youngster who was no longer crying, but staring raptly at the control panel. The voice from the tower directed the takeoff, and before he was out of range Pete asked the voice to please call his wife for him, to tell her he would be delayed.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

1:05 P. M.

Mark leaned against the door, feeling the tiredness pour deeper into his bones. At least the word was out now.



People knew exactly what was after them. Or did they? All they really knew was that some kind of monster was loose among them. Well, that was better than thinking it was snakes, or thinking that people were turning into some kind of slime. Mark rubbed his hands across his face and shifted his weight against the door. Mayor Slatery stepped up to him.

"You've got a good talent for starting trouble, Doc," said the Mayor. "Why don't you go to some other city and do good there for a while, huh?"

Mark just looked at him, too tired to bother to answer.

"Guys like you know all the answers, don't you? Know just what to do so long as you don't have to be responsible, don't you? You guys just sit while other guys run the show and make their mistakes the way they always have and always will, then you come running up and yell about this or that. Where the hell were you when we built the new school out on Indiana, or got the cops a raise, or rewrote the traffic laws? We blow some and you come along and make like a little tin Jesus. Yessir, you're a real big help to the people, you are, you and your kind. Well, let me tell you something, Doc. If it weren't for us guys who do the work and stick our necks out, you wouldn't have it so nice and cozy and you wouldn't look like a hero to yourself and your snot-nose friends. Without us, your kind couldn't live any way, shape or form."

Mark's tiredness was fast going away; he had listened because he did not want to talk. He looked at the Mayor in surprise. The Mayor continued, "And you're not as damned smart as you think you are, either. Look at you now. You come butting in making my decisions—what about doing your own job for a change? Why the hell haven't you found out some way to kill that thing?"

Mark's tiredness was gone. He straightened, wonderment in his face. He looked at the Mayor and said, "Well, yes, I did my work. I know what will kill it. Iodine will kill it. What good's that do me now?"

"You mean you know something that'll stop that thing, and you lean against a goddamn door? What's the matter with you, Doc? What do you need?"

"Lots of iodine and water and some potassium iodide

and some way to spray the solution, and I need some men to do the work, and I could use . . .”

“I know what you could use,” said the Mayor, “you could use the Fire Department on this job, the toughest bunch of well trained men in the city. Where do you get this chemical you mentioned?”

“Chemical supply warehouses will have it, maybe already made up in a solution. It’s only iodine—you know what iodine is. All we’d have to do is spray it.”

“Can you handle the job?”

Mark grinned at him. “You’re damn tooting I can handle the job. Put me in touch with the fire chief.”

The Mayor pushed past Mark to a phone in the outer office, waving away the people that swarmed around him. He tried placing a phone call, but the lines were jammed and he could not reach even an operator. He swung to one of the plain-clothesmen, called for a radio, and got through on the radio network. Very carefully he explained what was wanted, who would be in charge, and where they would meet. Then he turned to Mark. “The chief will meet you on the street in front of the building here in five minutes. You’ve got my personal authority to tell him what to do. Get going.”

The two of them stopped for a moment, looking at each other. The Mayor said, “I still hate your guts, son, but we’re all in this together. Maybe if you pull this one off, you and I can have a talk again some time about the facts of life. I know some things even you doctors don’t.”

Mark hesitated a moment, then thrust out his hand. The Mayor took it.

Down in the street, Mark and Harry found traffic pretty much stalled, but every so often a line of cars would spurt forward. The sidewalks were crowded with hurrying people, many of them carrying a few belongings in their arms, or staggering with overweighted suitcases.

A siren sounded up the block, and Harry pointed to a bright red car swinging around the corner on the sidewalk. People scattered into the street as it came. It stopped in front of Mark. He went over and identified himself.

“Climb in here,” said a red-faced man in the back



seat, "and tell me again what you think you want. The Mayor didn't make much sense."

"Iodine solution," said Mark as he got in. "All we can lay our hands on, and some way to spray it."

"We got hand sprays, back-pack sprays, tank sprays, engine sprays, you name it."

"We want them all. You locate any iodine?"

"Yeah. We called Havers Chemical, Cyanamid, du Pont, Monsanto, Paton Chemical, all of them. We hit it big at Paton. They got three tank cars of the stuff sitting on their tracks ready to go into some kind of process. Let me tell the boys to go ahead and load up the engines."

The chief picked up the microphone and barked some orders, then told his men to stand by while he found a place for them to meet. "Where do you think we ought to start, Doc? We'll meet the boys there."

Mark shook his head. "Doesn't matter as far as I know. Where is it the worst?"

The chief got back on the radio and checked both with his own units and the police units. Mark could hear all that was said, but it was hard to understand the radio jargon, and the crackle of static made it worse. Finally the chief said, "Well, they all seem to think the thing is worse down around Eighteenth and State; it's even in the subways down there. You know any reason why we shouldn't start there?"

"No, that's good. I think that's the region where it first showed up, so let's hit it there."

The chief got back on the radio and began issuing orders for units to converge at Eighteenth and State. He took into account the shambles that existed in the streets, and gave alternate routes to get the solution to the site. Then he turned to his driver and told him to get going.

Even the siren did not do much good in clearing a path. The closer they got to Eighteenth and State the thicker grew the mobs on the streets. They turned up Cullerton and the sidewalks were as bad as the streets. Abandoned cars stood askew in the street, some on the sidewalk. Windows were smashed, but here there were a few people left on foot. The few who walked the sidewalks stopped at the stores and carefully prowled around in the front windows. "Damn looters," muttered the

chief, and he pulled a large revolver from a compartment under the back seat.

Behind them a fire engine weaved up the street, its siren going full blast. The chief got out carrying the revolver, turned to the engine and waved it in behind his car. A hundred feet ahead, shouts came out of a broken store front. Three men struggled with the clone, caught by it as they picked up goods from the broken display windows. Mark and Harry and the chief turned to look and saw a thick film of the clone flow slowly out the store and onto the sidewalk. The chief said to the driver of the engine, "You got the iodine solution with you?"

"Yeah, Chief. We got five hundred gallons of it in the tanks like you said. You want to use it here? Looks like we ain't going nowhere."

"Yeah. Crank her up and run that hose up to the store there. See what you can do to that thing crawling out on the sidewalk. Doc here will tell you how to play it. Doc, seems to me you ought to have the hose put out a fog rather than a thick stream here. What do you think?"

Mark nodded, and began to approach the clone. Harry followed him, meat cleaver in hand. Four men from the truck unlimbered the hose and ran it up the sidewalk toward them. Mark said, "Place the spray at the edge of the building, if you can. We can cut off a big chunk that way and keep it from getting back to the sewers, then we can kill it. Okay?"

"Anything you say, Doc. You're the chief." The man at the nozzle made some adjustments, moved closer to the edge of the building, and turned and shouted over his shoulder, "Okay, Charlie. Turn her on."

A great cloud of purple mist appeared at the tip of the nozzle and floated out over the sheet of clone on the sidewalk. The cloud traveled twenty-five yards from the hose before it began to settle. At that distance it covered an area much larger than the sidewalk, reaching out more than halfway across the street. The great cloud drifted down, finally touching the pulsing mat of tissue that was the clone. The effect was instantaneous.

The entire spread of greenish tissue touched by the cloud of iodine immediately flattened and flowed sideways as if it were water. Mark and Harry, used to unexpected behavior from the clone, leaped to the hood of a



stalled automobile, and escaped the rush. But the man on the nozzle and the three men with him barely had time to turn and take three running steps before the clone had swept over their feet and halfway up their legs. The film of clone tissue was thin where it took them, and they kept running after their legs were coated. Then their steps slowed, and they strained to lift their feet. All three stopped and kicked at the tissue as the water began to pour down their legs. Harry yelled over at the man with the nozzle, "Drench yaself with the iodine. Spray it on ya, quick."

The man with the nozzle had been a fireman for twenty years. He was used to acting coldly and calmly, and he did so now. The three men disappeared in a huge cloud of iodine solution as he turned the nozzle on the clone at their feet. The cloud boiled and surged around them, then shot out to one side as the nozzle turned toward the car where Mark and Harry kneeled.

The cloud thinned around the three men, and in a moment it was possible to see through it. All three were sitting down in the midst of a crinkled mass of brown material, and the man on the nozzle continued to play it around him, coughing and gasping from the iodine. The other two men shifted the hose to make it easier for the nozzle man to do his job.

The lower parts of the legs of all three men could no longer support their weight. The lower limbs were not completely missing, but most of the flesh was gone, and the white bones gleamed through in several places. But all around them, the clone was dead.

The nozzle man turned and shouted, "Get a couple more men up here. This stuff'll kill it all right, but you got to watch it. Charlie, send up a couple guys, will ya?"

Men were on the way. They ran up, took the hose and advanced on the clone tissue. Others picked up the three men, took them back to the engine and got busy on the radio.

The thin sheets of clone tissue quickly shriveled under the touch of the iodine cloud, and the firemen worked their way farther and farther through the mass of tissue. It flowed away from them; much of it flowed into the street. They finally had a mass of it isolated in the street. Mark and Harry joined the firemen and had them turn

off the iodine spray while they looked over the situation. Mark said, "We should be able to kill all that stuff out in the street, but I'm afraid it might get away. See any place it could go?"

Harry pointed to a storm sewer opening in the street and said, "Yeah, it could go right down there, couldn't it?"

They all nodded. Mark said, "Play a thick stream of iodine on that sewer opening. That should keep it out. See any other place?" None of them could spot another escape route. The man on the nozzle made an adjustment and then gave the sewer opening a one-second squirt of iodine. He readjusted the nozzle and looked at Mark expectantly.

Mark said, "Okay, drench it. But be careful. If it comes this way, all of us will get up on the cars here. Let her go."

The cloud shot out and began to settle on the thicker film of clone tissue. The clone surged and began to flow sideways into thinner films, but it found no escape from the solution. The surging stopped and the top layers of clone tissue turned brown. Then in one quick rush the entire layer of clone flowed in on itself and formed a mound in the center of the street. The mound was roughly circular and about twenty feet in diameter. It was about five feet thick. The man on the nozzle turned it off and said, "Well, I'll be damned."

The iodine solution condensed and collected on top of the mound and flowed down the sides to the street, flowing down in thin cracks and grooves in the brown material that covered the mound. Mark shook his head. "Look at that. It's protecting itself under dead tissue. It'll take a week for the iodine to soak all the way through that stuff. Harry, chuck a piece of glass out there."

Harry picked up a fragment of shattered store window and carefully flipped it toward the pile so that it struck jagged edge down. It sank into the mound and allowed some of the iodine to flow in with it. The iodine killed the tissue and allowed the glass to slip in farther, and so on. Mark saw what was happening and said, "Play a thin stream on the glass." Soon the glass had disappeared in the clone tissue, leaving a large, hollow place where it had been—a hollow place filled with soft brown



material. "Well," said Mark. "I guess that's the way it will have to be done. Shut the hose off and come with me." He picked up a thick strip of aluminum, walked to the edge of the mound and began stirring the clone with the aluminum strip. The stirring allowed a bit of the iodine to penetrate the layer of dead tissue and reach the live tissue. A spray of iodine every so often kept the clone in check. Mark shook his head. "Slow work. It kills it, but it takes too long. We need some way to get the solution through that protective layer of dead tissue. Maybe a wetting agent along with the iodine would help."

The man with the nozzle was about to answer when a clap of thunder stopped him. They all looked up at the sky. It was churning with black clouds, and as they looked the rains poured down. The individual raindrops were huge, and they fell so thickly that the buildings on the sides of the street were obscured. In ten seconds the street ran with water. The raindrops made a strange soggy, pounding sound as they plopped on the layer of mushy, dead tissue that covered the mound of the clone. The rain quickly washed away the iodine solution, and they could see the tissue begin again to pulsate and heave. They stepped back, and the man with the nozzle sent a cloud of solution over the mound. The clone subsided, but in a moment the solution had been washed away by the drenching rain, and the clone's movements started again.

"We can't hold it in this rain," shouted Mark. "Get back to the truck, and watch yourself. It may come out of anywhere around here." Carefully, shaking the water out of their eyes, they got back to the chief's car, and found other trucks had arrived with additional iodine solution. Several of them climbed shivering from the cold rain into the chief's car for a conference.

The chief shook his head. "I don't like this rain. Part of the city to the west of us is already flooding. That damned thing—" he waved toward the clone—"seems to have the storm sewers plugged up as well as the sanitary sewers. Even the drains in the subway are getting plugged; there's two feet of water in them now, and it's rising fast. Weather bureau says the rainstorm will be a heavy one, too. We didn't have enough troubles, it had to rain. Look at that thing."

The mound of clone tissue, dimly seen through the rain, began to flatten as the clone flowed sideways in all directions and began to fill the street again. The thick film that had retreated into the building appeared again out of the broken store front and began to flow down the sidewalks. "Maybe we better get out of here, chief, while we still can," the driver said.

The chief sighed and started to speak, but Mark said, "Wait. Look, the water in the street is running from us toward it." He cranked down a window and shouted to the man with the hose, "Shoot a layer of iodine in the street, all the way across from one side to the other. The water'll carry it down. See?"

The hose man nodded, made his adjustment, and sent a stream of solution back and forth in the street. The men could see the darkened water begin to flow toward the clone in a flat, street-wide sheet, covering even the sidewalks. The edge of the flowing sheet was harder to see as it moved away from them and the splashing rain threw up a wall of mist. Vaguely they saw the dark sheet and the pulsing web of clone come together. The web flung backward, throwing a wall of water with it as it lurched, and the street turned into a nightmare of shooting tendrils and leaping columns. Where the solution washed over the clone, dead tissue began to accumulate. More clone tissue rose, forming a steep barrier. The solution lapped against it, and the tissue died. Water began to build up behind the barrier. The water quickly reached the height of eight inches, flowed over the curb and sidewalk and into the buildings. Behind the barrier, the clone continued its ceaseless pulsing and spreading.

"Well," said the chief, "that stuff of yours kills it, all right, but it seems to know what to do about it. Wait a minute." He turned to the radio.

Harry said to Mark, "We can squirt some iodine on the other side of the dam it made. Keep doing like that and we'll get it all after a while."

"Good. Let's get with it." Mark climbed out into the rain, Harry with him, and they walked through the lake that had formed in the street over to the man with the nozzle. Mark had to shout to be heard over the pounding of the downpour, but he explained what he wanted to



try. The nozzle man nodded, waved two assistants to follow him, and dragged the nozzle toward the barrier of dead tissue. When they reached it, the nozzle man unhesitatingly stepped into the dead tissue while Mark and Harry held back. Harry leaned over and looked into the footprint in the tissue, looked at Mark, shrugged his shoulders, and stepped into it too. Twenty feet beyond was the film of live tissue.

The nozzle man made his adjustments and laid down a belt of iodine solution just ahead of the live tissue, and then shut off the hose and watched. The results were the same as before, but this time, the nozzle man shot a sheet of fog out over the turbulent clone tissue, not giving it a chance to marshal a wave of matter to form a barrier. In great sweeps he misted over the entire width of the street, stopping now and then to direct some of the solution into the water running down the street. The technique worked, and the group found itself advancing through thick layers of dead clone tissue. It was necessary to be careful of their flanks, and so they drenched the fronts of buildings and poured quantities of the solution through doorways and display windows as they moved down the street. They had covered almost a hundred yards when the solution suddenly stopped coming.

Momentarily they froze, looking wildly about as if the clone, sensing the failure of their weapon, might suddenly attack. But the iodine solution lay all around them, and the clone was effectively held in check for the moment. They turned and trudged through the rain to the truck which had followed them as they moved. The pump man cranked down his window and shouted, "All gone here. We need another load."

Mark stepped up to the window, livid with anger, and yelled in the man's face. "What do you think we're doing out there, washing the street? Don't ever let the pump run dry when we're out fighting that thing. You crazy or something?"

"Keep your pants on, Mac, you got no troubles. I could see you was all drenched with this stuff. That thing wouldn't touch you."

Mark opened his mouth to yell an answer, but he closed it and turned to look at the rest of the group. They were all deep purple, hair, face, hands, clothes, every-

thing saturated and soaked in iodine. Harry said, "You know, Doc? He might have something there. Maybe it can't get started if we're covered with it this way."

The pump man said, "You mean you don't know if it protects you? Jeez, I thought you guys knew what you was doing. All right, I'll let you know next time." He cranked down the window.

The chief came over to the pump truck and said, "We're bringing up some more solution, but there isn't much left in the city. The other trucks have been using it up fast; haven't been doing as well as we have either. The thing gets covered with a layer of dead tissue, and that's that. We've got a few tons of iodine running around the gutters of the streets in the city, but most of it is just running down a storm sewer somewhere, although a good many of them are blocked. The subways around the Federal and Cermak are beginning to fill with water, and we can't get at the center line to get iodine in." He stopped and shook his head. "The water rises from there, we got real troubles. What we need is skin divers to take in a hose."

"Some diving," said Mark. "Zero visibility."

The chief looked at him, surprised, and said, "You a diver?"

"Well, yeah, I've been diving for a few years."

"Had any training?"

"I took the NAUI course, passed it. Why?"

The chief rubbed his chin and said, "We got a Water Search and Rescue Team in the department, but I couldn't ask them to go into a hole . . . a place like that. But if a guy like you was to head them up, a guy who knows what he's doing, maybe . . ." He rubbed his chin again.

"Now look," Mark said, "I've dived under lousy conditions before, but nothing like this. Zero visibility water, in a subway, with that thing loose in there? Oh man, never!"

They stood in the pounding rain. The water in the street was getting deeper. It flowed over the sidewalks and into the buildings, and the black water that contained the iodine had obviously lightened considerably. In the misty distance, one hundred feet away, they could see the clone stirring. The familiar pulses and throbbings



appeared, and they knew that it would not be long before the creature grew active again. The chief said, "We'd better get ready to move back if the iodine doesn't come up right away." He shook his head, and continued softly, "All over the city it's the same thing, move back and give it room. If we can't stop it now . . ."

A fireman came up and said, "Running out all over, chief. The truck bringing up our supply had to use half of it to get through. It'll be here in five minutes. That thing is spreading faster than ever now. The rain seems to help it. There's a threat of flooding. The low places are filling up fast."

The chief looked significantly at Mark, but Harry stepped up and said, "Aw c'mon, Chief. You can't ask a guy to do that. Jeez, think of what it'd be like in there."

The chief said, "I'm thinking of what it'll be like in the city in an hour unless we do something. If we get that thing out of the subways maybe we have a chance to save the city. What's the latest weather forecast, Charlie?"

"Last I heard, steady downpour for several hours yet."

The chief sighed and turned slowly away. Mark looked at Harry, shrugged, raised his hands and let them drop. "Okay, Chief," he said. "You have full face masks among your equipment?"

The chief turned back. "Hell, yes, we got everything you want and a lot more besides. You'll take the boys in?"

Harry said, "Doc, you know what you're doing?"

Mark shook his head. "No, I'm an idiot, but I'll take a crack at it. Maybe we can do some good. Will you stand by my line and tend it for me?"

Harry nodded. The chief said, "Let's get going then. I'll start pulling the team together." They all went back to the chief's car. The chief had some trouble on the radio; the net was crowded and it took him half a minute to clear it to get his messages through and set up a rendezvous. All the frequencies other than the chief's channel were totally unusable. They were flooded with hysterical messages that conveyed little information other than the devastation being wrought in the city. But the chief finally got things set up, and the car and fire trucks began to move to the rendezvous.

It was slow traveling. Often they had to stop and clear a path with iodine. On one occasion they had to hook up a chain to two cars and haul them off the curb where they had blocked the only possible opening in the street. It took them twenty-five minutes to reach the entrance to the subway system. Once there they had to wait another ten minutes for the truck carrying the diving team.

The chief introduced the divers. "Doc, this is Sy Riker, Bob Fulton, Charlie Kline, Joe Reilly, Ed Wolfert, Bill Heidig, Chuck Danton. Fellows, this is the doc who figured out how to kill that thing. He's a diver, so we're going to try to get a small hose down in the center of the flooded tunnel. Anybody got any ideas on how we ought to go about it without getting lost down there?"

"Yeah," said Charlie Kline. "Don't get in it."

"My ears hurt." "My regulator's not working." "I have a cold." "I'm out of air." There was a chorus of standard divers' excuses, but a grin came with each one.

Bob Fulton said, "We could feel our way down the stairs, keeping to the inside wall, then cross the platform, find the track . . . will there be any juice in the track or wires?"

The chief sent a man to make sure the power was cut off. Reilly said, "I've used this station a lot. I know my way around in there, so I can lead."

"How do we follow in zero visibility?" asked Sy Riker.

"We feel, that's how. Let's suit up and get going. It won't get any easier by waiting." Reilly turned away and began hauling equipment out of the truck.

Mark went over with him and laid out several extra wet suits to check the sizes. He found one that was a fair fit, stripped down and began hauling on the pants. He said to the group of divers, "Not the slightest bit of skin can be exposed. That thing won't touch rubber, so the foam neoprene will protect you. But watch out with the hoods at the back of the neck; if the hood rolls up, and that thing touches you, you've had it."

"Will it eat glass, Doc?"

"No. I had it in a bottle in the lab for several hours, and not much happened. It won't take glass, steel, cotton, rubber, and a . . . Wait a minute. Those lines are no good." Mark pointed to a heap of nylon line that Ed



Wolfert had dragged out of the truck. "The creature will absorb nylon in no time. Got any cotton, or manila?"

They searched the back of the truck and found a pile of dirty-looking manila lines. Reilly said, "Sy, you and I and Fulton and Danton will go. The doc and I will stay out in front in close contact. You guys with the tanks of stuff—" he waved at the tanks of iodine— "come right up behind us, ready to hand us the tanks or use them yourselves if you have to. We'll use hand signals by pressing on a guy's arm. Now, who's going to tend lines?"

Harry said, "I'll take care of the doc's."

"Wouldn't you rather have a diver on your line, Doc?"

Mark shook his head. "The line tenders will all be side by side anyway, talking with each other."

Reilly nodded and assigned some of the divers to tend the lines of the ones who were going in. They finished putting on their equipment, and then checked one another out to make sure no skin was exposed, or likely to become exposed around the neck. They called over some of the other firemen to help carry the gear, then headed for the steps of the subway.

The water level had reached halfway up the stairway, just below a landing. They stacked the gear on the landing and looked at the water. For a long moment there was silence, broken only by the beat of the rain up on the street. The water was black and motionless, covered with a floating layer of grease and grime, laden with cigarette butts, chewing-gum wrappers, sodden newspapers, a stained handkerchief, a dead rat, and the other debris that litters a subway station.

One of the men who had carried the gear said softly, "For the first time I thank God I'm just a plain old fireman, and all I gotta do is climb ladders and go in burning buildings."

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

3:00 P. M.

Mark felt his stomach tie itself into knots at the sight of that vicious water. He had never dived in anything like that. And beneath it somewhere lay the clone. Mark opened his mouth to gulp air. His knees were weak. He leaned against the dirty tile, and shook his head. He couldn't do it. It had been easy to be brave back there on the street, but down here, with that water in front of him, that ten-foot-across patch of water that led to death, it was different.

Sy Riker said, "I never thought I'd see the day I'd be ready to puke just looking at the water I'm about to dive in. Well, what are we going to do about it? We going back up? Or are we going to make a dive that we and everybody who hears about it will be talking about for a long time to come?"

"Yeah," said Fulton. "This is a dive we can tell lies about for the next twenty years. Hell, you can't give up a chance like that."

They all looked at each other, and at Mark.

Mark pushed himself away from the wall. Suddenly, he was no longer afraid. "Sure glad I got seven years of medical school behind me. It's going to do me a lot of good now."

They laughed and pounded him on the shoulder. Charlie Kline said, "Yeah, me too. I put in two years at television school, and, boy, am I glad for that."

They tied the safety lines around their waists, slipped into their tank harness, put on their weight belts, and ran through a last checkout on the rope signals. The line tenders hung underwater lights on their weight belts, with much joking about how useful they were going to be. Finally, the divers carefully positioned their full-face masks, and called for a last inspection to make sure the hoods overlapped the masks.



Reilly took up a position on the stairs with the water up to his chest. Mark stood alongside him. The others arranged themselves behind them in the positions they were going to maintain in the water. Reilly looked around, nodded, and settled beneath the water.

Mark bent his knees and submerged. As soon as his head was beneath the surface, he could see nothing. He bent to feel the stairs with his hands, and could not make up his mind whether to keep his eyes open or closed. As he pulled himself down the stairs he found that, with his eyes open, he distracted himself by wide-eyed staring and seeking for a trace of light. So he closed his eyes; then he could concentrate better on where he was and what he was doing.

They moved down the stairs, made a right turn, then down more stairs. They came to the bottom, and waited a moment to make sure all the divers were in position. They reached out and felt each other, and Mark noticed that the hands that touched him lingered a little longer than was really necessary. He also took comfort from holding momentarily the arms of the three men behind him as he checked their position. Then they moved on.

They pulled themselves alongside the wall of the subway platform. From the fact that he had had to clear his ears twice, Mark estimated that they were about thirty feet deep. They came to a crack in the pavement and followed it out to the edge of the platform. Harry was doing a good job on the line, making him take it, keeping a reasonable tension on it.

They came to the edge of the subway platform, and stopped again to check positions. This time there was a delay while they located one of the men who had wandered too far to the left.

While he was waiting, Mark put his light against the faceplate of the mask, and turned it on. Dimly, he could see the light, circular in shape, yellow through the dirty water, and he could see the shape of the glowing filament. It was comforting, and he felt more at ease when he let the light dangle from his waist.

They went out over the edge of the platform, and dropped down to the tracks. Mark could feel the concrete ties and the track, and he could feel the increased pressure in his ears. They made another right turn and

began to follow the tracks. Mark was surprised to realize that they only had about fifty yards to go to reach the region where the three tunnels left the subway station and entered solid rock. Somewhere along here, it was possible that they would meet the clone.

Twenty yards later they stopped again to check their grouping. Reilly was alongside and the other three were tight behind. Mark recognized the symptoms from night dives he had made out in Lake Michigan: the divers swam close as sardines, pressing in on each other as they moved through the black water. Five men were moving in the space that one man might normally occupy, pressed together by the blackness and the fear of the creature that was there with them.

They moved on, and now Mark momentarily expected to feel the clone close in around him. It was difficult to pull his lifeline now; it was scraping around too many corners behind him. He felt Reilly to his right, and the other three pressing in against his legs, making it hard to swim. He moved his legs carefully, getting most of his swimming drive from flexing his ankles. He moved slowly, cautiously. He felt they must have gone far enough, so he reached out toward Reilly to halt him. Before he could touch him, Reilly stopped, and Mark felt Reilly's hand on his shoulder. They had arrived.

Mark reached behind him and pulled on Riker's shoulder to bring him and his iodine tank on up. The others came with him so the five men were lying, three on two, along the concrete ties, between the two tracks. There was nothing for Mark to do at the moment, so he lay there and felt the motions of the three men above him as they groped for their valves in the black water and made ready to release the iodine. One of them seemed to be groping for something down Mark's left side, reaching under him between the ties, lifting him slightly. To his right he could feel Reilly taking the hose and nozzle from Fulton, getting ready to release the iodine into the water. Mark could feel a gentle current running from behind him into the tunnel ahead. The hand that was groping under his left side turned to a fist and lifted him higher. Slightly annoyed, he reached down to pull it out.

His gloved fingers closed on a thick, pulsing mat of



tissue that immediately began to enclose his hand. Though he had been expecting it at any moment, Mark's skin twitched. His muscles convulsed and blind panic took him. He screamed into his mouthpiece, a thin scream that carried through the water to the others. He lurched back and up, snatched his hand away. Blindly he pushed off from the bottom and rose straight up through the water until his head smashed into the ceiling. Only the quarter-inch foam rubber of his hood saved him from knocking himself unconscious.

The smashing blow broke the panic, and he lay against the ceiling, panting, allowing his muscles to come under control, forcing his mind to consider what to do next. He did not know what had become of the others, but they must be somewhere below him. He reached out and grasped his lifeline, grateful that his arm and hand coordinated. Then he held his breath and pushed off from the ceiling, straight down into the blackness, hands out in front of him, fully prepared this time to embed them in a mass of rubbery tissue. But he hit the concrete ties and settled on them, puzzled. Where were the others? Then something touched his left leg. His muscles started to convulse, but he quickly brought them under control. He gulped a deep breath of air, held it, and reached around to the thing that had touched him. He found it and grabbed it. It was a hand, a human hand, gloved, and it grabbed his. Mark clung to the hand and breathed again. Then he felt that the hand was trying to disengage from his frantic clutch, so he eased off, turned and pulled himself alongside the other diver. He could not tell which man it was, but another diver was alongside him. That made three of them. Two were missing, scattered in the tunnel.

Mark felt the backs of the two with him, and only one was carrying an iodine tank. That meant one of the two was Reilly. He felt over the iodine tank on the other and found that the valve was open. By placing his finger over the nozzle, Mark could feel the current as the solution discharged. It was comforting to know that the water around him was loaded with iodine. With the knowledge, his presence of mind returned.

He felt for his line; it stretched out behind him, showing the way they had come. He felt the ties; they showed

the way the tunnel lay. Gently he pulled Reilly and the other diver forward into the tunnel, keeping himself in the middle, holding the other two out at each side. In this manner they swept the tunnel with their arms, feeling their way, looking for the missing divers. Mark felt Reilly lurch, and knew that he had hit something. Then hands went over his back and a fourth diver joined them. Reilly urged them all forward, and they moved on. It was then that Mark realized that if the missing diver were ahead of them, his lifeline should be trailing past them where they now were. He pressed the group to a halt, and made a big fuss of feeling around on the tracks with his hands. The others soon began to do the same, and almost immediately it worked.

The diver to Mark's left—Mark decided that it was Sy Riker, although he did not know why—pulled him over and placed his hands on a quarter-inch line that ran along the tracks parallel to their direction. Mark pulled on it gently. It resisted, so he pulled harder, without result. He began to follow the line, making sure the others were moving up with him. In ten feet he came upon a diver's leg and followed it up the rest of the body. Mark's hands patted the neck, and then hit a solid wall stretching in all directions. He rubbed the wall. It was resilient inside, but the outer surface seemed to be brittle; Mark could feel pieces flake off as he rubbed it. He realized what it was. The tunnel was filled solidly with clone tissue, but the outside of it was dead tissue, killed by the iodine. The clone had isolated itself; the iodine could not reach it.

In a fury, Mark drew back his arm and smashed a fist with all his strength into the wall in front of him. His fist sank into the tissue, crushing the dead tissue, exposing new, living tissue. But as he held his fist there, he could feel the tissue turn hard and brittle as the iodine killed it, and a new wall of dead tissue formed. It was no good, and Mark backed away a little.

Other hands patted over him and over the fifth diver whose head was part of the wall in front of them. The four men grabbed the fifth by the shoulders and pulled. By bracing their feet against the tissue wall in front of them, they finally drew him away. None of them felt the head; none patted to see what was left.



Mark reached for his line and gave three long, deliberate, spaced tugs. Gratefully he felt the line tighten around his waist as Harry began to pull him in. Mark reached out to make sure the other four were also being taken in, and the four of them rode their lines down the black tunnel, each with an arm out to keep from hitting anything. They felt the turn of the lines as they were lifted off the tracks and up to the platform, then across the platform and to the bottom of the stairs.

Mark felt his ears pop several times, and he was careful to breathe shallowly and rapidly. He slid up the stairs on his stomach. He could hear the clicking of the buckle on his weight belt as it struck the metal edge of the steps. He did not know his head was out of the water until he heard Harry yell, "Hey, Doc. Open your eyes." The light was blinding, even through the dirt-stained and oil-streaked mask. He pushed his mask back, stood up and walked up the stairs until he was out of the filthy water; then he vomited.

He shook himself out of his gear and wiped his face with a towel someone had handed him. Then he looked back at the water. Three divers were splashing up the stairs, and Mark could see a fourth floating, face down, in the water. The chief said to him, "What went wrong down there? The water's higher than ever. Couldn't you kill that thing?"

Mark shook his head, still looking at the floating diver, and said, "It walled off the entire tunnel, top to bottom. There's a plug of dead tissue that the solution can't penetrate. Like back on the street." He pointed to the floating diver. "Who is that?"

They were pulling him in, but the head was completely gone, and the tissue and bone at the neck looked clean and smooth. They had to look at the living divers to tell who it was. "Chuck Danton," said the chief, turning away. He waved them all up the steps and said, "Let's get out of here. They can't say we didn't try. My God, we tried." They all went on up into the clean, pure rain-storm.

At the top of the stairs the chief stopped and looked around. The clone was everywhere, in the streets, on the sides of buildings, strung between buildings, on roof-

tops. They looked, and all of them understood for the first time what was going to happen.

The chief said, "Well, I'm afraid this is the end of it. That thing is solid under the city. It's coming out fast, now, over the whole city. We can't even make contact with many of our radio links. Yeah," he looked at Mark, "while you were down there, it got into the radio station where Commissioner Sorenson was broadcasting. He ignored it, kept on talking, telling the people what to do—to get out of the city, fast. You could tell the thing was there with him from the screams of the people in the background, but he kept on talking like it was a Sunday afternoon. Finally, you could hear a little change in his voice, but he kept on talking. Then he gulped, like he'd been hit in the stomach. He cleared his throat, tried to say something, but he couldn't. That was the last." He shook his head. "He did a lot of good, that guy. Never thought he could die like that. Calmed people down, the way he died. You could see it from here." He sighed and turned away and said, "Well, let's go. We got to get out of the city while we still can. We got enough juice left to make it?"

Mark and Harry looked at each other. Mark said softly, "Go with him, Harry. I've got to go back to the hospital. Edie's there; I've got to get her. Now, don't argue with me. Go with them."

Harry laughed, hefted his meat cleaver and said, "Let's go get her, Doc."

Mark shrugged. They gathered some equipment, nodded at the firemen, and headed down the street in the rain.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

3:05 P. M.

Irene Appel ended her spot-news broadcast and sat unmoving for a few seconds. She was numbed through and could no longer feel fear, or surprise, or disbelief. What-



ever was printed on the slips of paper they handed her, she read, in a steady, unemotional voice.

Buz touched her arm. She rose and followed him to the news office where several others were gathered. They were leaving the building, she heard. Her gaze roamed restlessly and following it she found herself at the wide, glass wall, staring out across the four blocks of lesser structures to the Record Building. The twentieth floor was only slightly above where she was standing, she thought.

It was there, only four blocks away. And they said it was spreading out steadily. . . . But it wasn't. It was *racing* out in one direction after another, appearing a mile beyond its known periphery without warning, giving the victims no time to prepare, no time to flee. And then a report would come in, spotting it a mile in another direction, or two miles. How big was it? "How big?" she repeated in a flat voice.

"Over ten miles now," someone answered. It was a fact too big to comprehend. One organism, over ten miles wide in places . . . Irene heard laughter and didn't recognize it as hers until Buz grasped her arm in a cruel grip. She stopped.

"Sorry," she said then, calmness back like a shield between her and the world that let such a thing exist.

"Have you heard anything that's been said?" Buz asked.

She shook her head. "It doesn't matter. Just tell me what to do. I'll do it."

Buz swallowed and touched her cheek with big fingers that were suddenly gentle. "I know it, kid," he said. "Here's the plan. We're pooling, all of us. We're putting the skywatch station over the city, circling at thirty thousand, and it will rebroadcast until there's nothing left to broadcast. Anyway, you're to stay with Maury Cooper and cover the National Guard units. You are *not* to get more than fifty feet away from the egg-beater at any time, and at the first sign of the stuff, up you go. Understand?" She nodded and he continued to look at her hard for a moment before he turned away. She caught his arm. "Where are you going to be, Buz?"

"In Simak's whirlybird covering the rescue operations. I'll be in touch." He hesitated a minute and then said, "Buy you a drink tomorrow, okay?"

"Sure," she said.

The helicopters landed on the roof, sounding long before they came into sight in the hard rain. Irene pulled her borrowed mackintosh tighter about her and stepped in to take a seat next to Maury Cooper. Maury normally did traffic reports from aloft with one of the lesser reporters at the mike. He grinned at Irene. His face was wet and his hair plastered down to his skull, and he had an angelic grin. She found that she was grinning back.

At 3:30 Mark and Harry Schwartz were picking their way back to City Hospital. Mark's mouth was tight and his hands clenching the wheel were white-knuckled. The entire city now was caught up in the panic that had been isolated earlier. But Mark barely saw the masses of people running crazily, or the other cars swarming on the streets. He was remembering that thing down in the subways, in the canal, under the streets he was driving on. He had told the reporters that flight was the only answer now, and he intended to be among those who got out. First he had to get Edie, and then they would join the throngs leaving the city. There was nothing they could do now but wait for spray planes to isolate the thing with the iodine solution, and then finish it off, or let starvation finish it off. Meanwhile all anyone could do was run like hell. He kept to the side streets as he drove, knowing the major avenues were impassable with traffic and stalled and wrecked cars. Several times he had to come to a screeching stop, back up and turn around: twice when the streets were filled with rubble from collapsed buildings, and once when he spotted a moving layer of green under the swirling water.

Once he thought the car was going to be flooded out when they went through water that seeped under the doors, but he kept his foot light on the accelerator, and only his brakes failed. Driving with his foot on the brake pedal dried them out again, and he kept going.

As they neared the area where the clone had been born, more and more buildings were in ruins, with fires still raging in some of them, smouldering feebly in others where the rain had been able to get inside. Mark didn't know he had been holding his breath until he saw the



hospital. Harry grunted at the same time and they exchanged looks of relief.

But there was a difference; Mark felt it as soon as he parked the car at the emergency entrance. The hospital was deserted, was his first thought. Evacuated, was his second.

There was a roaring, shuddering noise overhead and the shadow of a helicopter made a dark patch in the already dark sky. The evacuation was going on now, Mark realized, and he started forward toward the elevator. Harry caught his arm. The hand that restrained him trembled. Mark followed the direction of Harry's pointing finger and saw the area of green that lay along the wall, stretching out across the elevator doorway.

The clone was changing its tactics; it was not expending any more energy than it had to in its continuing search for food. Instead of massive, all-embracing arms, it was sending forth long tendrils to probe until it located new supplies of nutrients. There was the narrow line of the clone the full length of the hall, covering the floor gradually in a backward and forward sweeping motion.

Mark turned toward the stairs. They were free, but he and Harry slowed at the top; stretched across the opening of the stairwell doorway was a second strand of green. The stairs themselves seemed free of it. At the fourth floor they stopped again. Harry was panting slightly, Mark icy cold. There had been no sound from any of the floors they had passed. On this floor they could hear faint calls for help. The clone was stretched out across the opening of the doorway.

"Cheez, Doc, now what?" Harry asked. "It's all over the joint."

"What kind of socks do you have on?" Mark asked as he took off his shoes.

"Cotton," Harry said, mystified.

"Get your shoes off then. It won't go through cotton socks. Stuff your slacks down into your socks like this . . ." Harry nodded, his fingers moving quickly. They tied their cuffs tight against their legs with their shoestrings.

"You stay here and watch, first," Mark said. "I don't know how responsive it is to vibrations, or to body heat. We'll see." Harry opened his mouth to protest, but before

he could voice the words, Mark advanced to the doorway, hesitated, then stepped over the strand of clone. Immediately a tendril of green left the larger strand; it seemed to follow the sound, or the vibration, or body heat and came into contact with the cotton clad foot. Mark didn't move as it started up his foot, twisting, weaving back and forth, touching the cotton lab trousers, advancing another inch or so, and then retreating. Mark breathed out quietly. The tendril was resorbed into the thicker bit of clone; the whole length moved slightly, spread out an inch more than it had been, and again lay quietly.

"Okay, Harry. Easy does it. Don't jar any more than you can help on this side, and don't move if it touches you."

Harry's gaze was stricken when he looked across the death-dealing bridge to Mark; he started to speak, but clamped his mouth tight. Mark could see his fingers move and realized that he had crossed them. Then Harry stepped across, and again the tendril formed and investigated. It didn't go up the sock this time, as if it had learned that this was not its food. When it withdrew, the two men started walking quietly down the wide corridor, keeping in the center, careful not to put their feet down any more heavily than they had to. Twice tendrils formed; one of them missed them altogether, wove about for a second or two, and withdrew. The second one crept up Mark's foot, halfway up to his waist. Moving as quickly as he could without disturbing it, he undid his leather belt and eased it from the loops. The tendril got to his shirt, started to circle around, and he realized with a sickening shock that it would go between the layers where the shirt buttoned. It was within two inches of the buttons when it stopped, changed direction, and headed down again, withdrawing.

Mark was drenched with perspiration when it left his foot and was reassimilated by the larger piece of clone. He looked at Harry, whose face was shiny and mottled white. "Are you all right?" Mark asked roughly. He didn't want Harry to faint now and fall. . . . Harry nodded. "Hang your head down and count to five," Mark commanded. Harry did, and when he raised his face again the color was returning, and perspiration was running freely down his cheeks.



The south wing made a right angle, swinging doors separating the children's ward from the main corridor. The calls were coming from the children's ward. Nearly drowning them out was the continuing roar of the helicopter hovering over the building. A clone trap lay across the junction of the south wing with the main corridor.

As far as Mark could see none of it was in the south wing itself. He started forward and then stopped abruptly. It was in there. It was in the form of a rug, spread out before three of the closed doors at the other end of the hall. Mark could see that the doors were covered with it. Moving quickly but cautiously, he stepped across the strand of clone that guarded the entrance to the south wing, and before the searching tendril could find him he sprinted down the hall for ten or twelve feet. "Wait a minute, Harry, and then come on over," he called. He ran inside the dispensary that serviced the ward. For a moment he felt a despairing futility as he searched through the supplies. They must have taken all the iodine from the stocks. . . . Then he found one quart jar nearly two-thirds full. Working feverishly he emptied an insect spray bottle and refilled it with the iodine. As he was doing so, Harry joined him.

"It's coming down the hall after us, Doc. I must've disturbed it more than you did, or something."

"Okay. Get all the alcohol that you can carry and put it in squirt bottles like this one," Mark said. He put the iodine bottle in his coat pocket and went to the door in time to see the advancing bit of clone. When it was close enough he squirted it with the iodine; it pulled back as if it had been burned. He sprayed a two-foot section of the snakelike appendage, and then carefully sprayed a line across the hall floor, taking it up the walls and across the ceiling. Behind him, Harry was finished gathering the alcohol and filling the few squirt jars he had found. His pockets drooped and bulged with his load. He came to Mark's side and silently they watched the clone. The parts he had destroyed were turning color, hardening, crusting over. The mother body had sent other streamers from itself and they had flowed around the dead section, filling in again when they had bypassed it. The mass was flowing toward the line Mark had sprayed. He felt

Harry's fingers hard on his arm as the clone got closer and closer to the line.

The clone touched the iodine drying on the floor, and withdrew. A smaller bit was sent forth a foot from the original encounter, and it too withdrew. Then a sheet of clone tissue started to slide toward the wall, giving the gray tiles a shiny, deeper luster. It tried at one foot off the floor, and again at three feet, and again near the ceiling. It crept around the ceiling, sending hairlike strings to test for the iodine, and each time it touched the line sprayed on the ceiling, walls and floor, it backed up.

Harry sighed deeply. "It's gonna hold it, Doc."

Mark held the bottle of iodine to the light—half used already. He made no reply. They went on down the hall, where the doors were being attacked by a larger mass of the green stuff.

"You going to spray it with the iodine again?" Harry asked, slowing unconsciously as they neared the clone.

"Too much of it. This time you use the alcohol after I build a fence." Mark sprayed the demarcation line again and then directed Harry to squirt as much of the clone as he could with the alcohol. "Then we toss it a match," he said tightly.

"But hot stuff don't hurt it!" Harry said as he sprayed with a will.

The clone seemed to ignore the alcohol, hardly moving when the cool compound touched it and spread, collecting where there were hollows, running off in other spots.

"I just want to make it back off so we can clear the area in front of one of the doors," Mark said. He motioned Harry to stop. He lighted a match and tossed it on top of the mass of green stuff.

The clone jerked with the flames, trying to retreat from the charring heat. The alcohol burned with a blue-white flame, burned furiously and was gone. The clone was three feet farther away. The bitter, tangy smoke in the hall made Mark's and Harry's eyes tear, and their throats feel raspy. They burned the clone back three more feet and then Mark sprayed another cleared area with the iodine and they were able to get to the door. Mark pounded on it.



The door was opened only enough to permit them to slip through. The press of people inside the rooms would not allow it to be opened farther. There were three large wards, designed so that they could be opened to form one very large room, and that was what had been done. Mark searched through the crowd anxiously, but didn't see Edie.

A white-coated man made his way through the press. He was Dr. Almquist, technically in charge of this particular operation, he told Mark. Miss Hempstead? He hadn't the foggiest idea where she was, or where anyone else was. This was supposed to have been over with by 1:30 at the latest. They were already two hours behind schedule, and there were others trapped on every floor of the place.

"How are you keeping it out of here?" Mark asked.

"They announced over the intercom that if any of the stuff showed up, to barricade everyone behind ward doors—they're metal, you know—and fill in the cracks with cotton sheeting, or whatever. That it would even be more effective if the cotton was soaked in iodine first." Almquist was a florid-faced man of forty, so fatigued at that moment that he looked twenty years older. "What they didn't say," he continued, "was how we should get out of the barricaded rooms after we got in, and how we were supposed to get to the roof and get rescued, and what we were supposed to do when the building started to fall in. Sit here, I guess. But you got through! Has the thing left?"

Mark explained briefly. He didn't add that their cries had been the only ones he had heard so far. He looked over the seventy-five or eighty people in the room and asked, "How many are ambulatory in here?"

"Most of them. We got the bed patients to the roof first, and then the wheelchair cases. Got so it wasn't safe to wait up there, so we began waiting our turn in the various wards." Dr. Almquist laughed nervously and ruffled his sandy hair with a hand that trembled slightly. "The thing is, uh, on the roof some of the time, you know."

Mark nodded absently. He wondered if the clone were covering all buildings as it was this one. "Here's what we'll have to do, Doctor. Harry and I will clear a path to

the fire stairs; they are the closest exit to us here. You'll have to get these people up the two flights to the sundeck of Seven South, and we'll flag the helicopter to pick them up there. Don't start until we whistle for you, understand? Do you have any more iodine?"

There were two quarts remaining in the ward, and Mark took them, hoping it would be enough, hoping the clone didn't develop a defense against it before the hospital had been cleared. He and Harry left the ward and started clearing operations on the next two flights of stairs upward, and the hall they would need to reach the stairs. It took them half an hour to make the area safe for the trapped patients and the doctor. When the last of them had been herded to the rain-drenched sun-deck, and the helicopter swung away with the first load, Mark turned to Almquist and asked, "Why did *you* stay? You're a pediatrician, aren't you?"

Almquist nodded and then looked at Mark with a slight grin. "I make almost one hundred thousand a year," he said. "And I have three spastic children," he added quietly. He turned his eyes again to the group of youngsters, getting soaked while waiting their turn, and there was a warm light in his eyes. Mark said nothing for a moment, then turned abruptly and started for the door to re-enter the hospital.

"I still have to locate Edie," he said to Harry. "You'd better stay here and hitch a ride with the next whirly-bird."

Harry blinked away a hurt look that showed briefly in his eyes. "Who's gonna squirt it with alcohol if I ain't with you, Doc?"

"Okay, let's go," Mark said. After a momentary hesitation he crossed to Almquist again and thrust his hand out. "I'm sorry."

Almquist grinned and clasped the offered hand in a firm grip. He wished them both luck and turned again to his patients.

The clone had built up a massive body on the other side of the iodine barrier, and Mark wondered when it would start sending streamers through the air to land on this side. One little bridge over the iodine. . . . He pushed the thought aside and considered how to get past it, to Seven East where Edie was bound to be, safe and wait-



ing patiently in the lab. He was still standing undecided, when he heard his name being called. He whirled about as another helicopter drowned out further speech. Almquist was beckoning to him. He ran back out in the pouring rain.

"Say, Kenniston, isn't your girl the one who gave the information on the speaker system about the iodine?" Almquist shouted over the roar of the helicopter.

Mark nodded.

"Then she's gone. Rescue mission somewhere. . . . Let me think." He closed his eyes a moment and then said, "Girls' Home, or detention school, something of the sort. The press should know. They took a group. . . . That's their bird up there now."

Mark turned his gaze upward and saw the second craft hovering. Rain filled his nostrils and eyes instantly and he blinked hard, waving to the craft to come down.

"Hey, it's Kenniston!" someone in the helicopter shouted. It swooped lower and landed. "Ladies and gentlemen, we are preparing now to pick up Dr. Mark Kenniston. He is the young pathologist who made the first report about this organism, and it was he who literally invaded the studio to put on the air Commissioner Sorenson, who since has died." Buz Kingsley paused until the big blade subsided a bit and then called out, "Get in, Doctor! Welcome aboard. Have you anything to say to the radio audience still listening in?"

Mark glared at him and said, "Anyone who is listening and not moving out of the city is a fool! All I have to say is this: clear the city as fast as you can. Get out by any means available to you. And be pretty goddamn careful where you put your feet down!" He motioned Buz to turn the mike off and then asked, "You took a rescue mission to one of the girls' schools? Which one?"

"Davis Square Home for Girls," Buz answered. "Area seems relatively free of the stuff, but buildings are falling down. Couple of hundred girls were there, dozens of them pinned, or hurt one way or other. They're getting them out as fast as they can."

"Can you take me over there?" Mark asked.

Buz looked at him curiously. He shrugged. "I'm covering rescue operations in the whole area," he said. "No

reason why we can't go back there. Him too?" He pointed to Harry.

Mark grinned and nodded. "Him too." They climbed in and waved goodbye to Dr. Almquist, left with about a dozen patients now. They looked small and lonely, standing in the hard rain on the sundeck.

Seconds later, inside the hospital, the clone threw out an arching, stiffened tentacle of itself, and flowing along it as if crossing on a bridge, the mass of the clone crossed the nearly invisible strip of iodine that had been its cage. It searched the floor, found the door to the sunporch, and sent investigatory fibrils out into the rain. When the rescue helicopter returned, the sundeck was bare. Here and there on it, in the pools of water, lay empty, sodden clothing.

Buz Kingsley pointed downward, and they could see a slab-sided building, squat and ugly, with no ornamentation whatever—a gray-windowed box rising from a deepening pool of water. Buz mouthed, "That's it." He could speak over the radio, keeping his mouth close to the mike, knowing his words were being carried, amplified, and broadcast, but to speak to another person and hear in return was impossible when the copter was in the air.

Mark nodded, keeping his eyes on the building. Nearby, other buildings showed signs of the clone's ravage; some had collapsed completely, others only partially, but hardly a building remained whole.

The detention home appeared relatively undamaged; its south side had leaned inward, and part of the roof had caved in, but for the most part the side walls were still erect. The roof was unsafe for landing, and they descended on a swinging ladder, stepping into water as they left it.

A face appeared from a hatchway that rose on the other side of the roof. A hard-faced woman said, "Oh, I thought it was the rescue helicopter. The roof is falling in. It can't land here again." She started to withdraw and Mark shouted at her. She paused.

"Nurse Hempstead? Is she inside?"

"She's here," the woman said. "You here to help, or to ask questions?"

Mark followed her down the iron steps to the floor



below. Inside, the building seemed more badly damaged than it had appeared outside. Plaster littered the floors, and rain was pouring in through half a dozen holes in the roof.

Harry and the woman eyed each other with mutual hostility. She turned again to Mark. "Where's your bag? You going to give first aid, or aren't you?"

"Where is Miss Hempstead?"

She turned and motioned them to follow. She led them gingerly, testing the floor before she put her weight on it, skirting areas that seemed uncertain. They went down three flights of stairs before she turned again into a hallway. Here small, cell-like rooms lined the hall, and the damage seemed heavier than it had above. "Gets worse nearer the south side," she said once, stepping over a barrier of fallen studs. They could hear the girls now, sobbing, some crying softly, others without restraint. The woman led them into an auditorium and suddenly Edie was flying across the room, into Mark's arms.

"Mark, it's so awful! It came in here, and they couldn't run away, or anything. They had to watch it coming closer and closer and there was nothing they could do . . ."

He held her shivering body. "What are you doing now?" he asked.

"Some of them were caught in the wreckage. The thing didn't finish all of them, missed two whole sections of the building when it went through, and they were caught when it started to fall in. Thank God the stuff doesn't come twice!"

Mark tightened his arms about her and didn't add to her terror by contradicting her.

"Most of them are gone already," she said. "Several volunteers are going through the ruins looking for others. Mark, how can it wreck buildings like that? It just began falling apart!"

The hard-faced woman moved in on them then, touching Edie's arm without gentleness. "There's still work to be done, Missy, before the helicopter gets back. I told you we can't take 'em to the roof any more. It's crumbling away. We have to get them out to the courtyard."

Edie pulled away from Mark. "She's right. There's still so much to do . . ." She moved back toward the girls lying on the floor, or sitting propped against the wall.

"Minimum first aid is all," Edie said. "I ran out of supplies already. Did you bring anyth. . . ?" She saw his empty hands and sighed. "It doesn't matter, I guess. It's only a question of half an hour or so." She knelt by the girl she had left when she saw Mark. The girl moaned feebly and didn't open her eyes as Edie resumed binding a gash on her head. It was swollen and black and had been bleeding freely. "I think she has a broken leg," Edie said indicating the next girl. Mark dropped to his knees and went to work with her. For the next half hour they said little. The matron had put Harry to work with the other volunteers searching through the rubble for other victims of the collapsing building.

The men began reporting in before Mark had finished putting a temporary splint on the last girl. She had a fractured forearm, and a contusion that probably meant skull fracture. She was limp and cold.

"Can't find no more of 'em," the man said, leaning tiredly against the door. His face was dirty, streaked with plaster and sweat and rain. He turned as footsteps pounded up the hallway and two more men burst into the auditorium. One of them was Harry.

"Doc, it's here! In the building again. It's got the doors and windows blocked up, we can't get out anywheres!"

Mark looked past the girl he was treating and his eyes stopped at the window. Stretching across it were half a dozen weblike threads. He got up and ran past Harry to the exit, and at the top of the stairs he could see a web being spun, spiderless, but efficiently, a web growing before his eyes. At his elbow, Harry said, "That's how it's doing all the doors. And, Doc, the iodine don't stop it now. I tried some. It just makes a bridge and crosses over it. Why, Doc? Is it getting smarter or what?"

And meanwhile there were nineteen injured girls, one nurse, who happened to be his fiancée, one matron, and three volunteer workers, and they were all trapped inside the building as securely as if every door had been fitted with a special lock that no longer had a key.

Burning it off wasn't the answer this time, not the way it had learned to spread itself out. Burned parts could be replaced as fast as they dropped off. Edie's eyes were fearful when he turned to her, and he had nothing to say to her.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

3:30 P. M.

Irene Appel spoke into her microphone, clearly, with no trace of the deep dread that had penetrated every cell of her body. The helicopter swung low over the solid mass of refugees, the cars moving along the highways below them at a steady fifteen miles an hour. Every vehicle capable of rolling, it seemed, had been put to work to move the people out. The sight was one of chaos, a nightmare scene, but with a certain interior order of its own. The people had reacted almost automatically, and little of the panic that had swept through the city was apparent in the evacuation lines. There was no place to display panic, Irene thought, no place to run if panic did start, no choice except the inexorable forward movement.

The helicopter lifted a bit and picked up speed, getting to the front end of the line that was as wide as the street itself. In the front, motorcycle patrolmen were zigzagging up and down the streets, inspecting every side street that joined the main highway, pausing now and then for a closer look, and then, mercifully, going on.

The clone had spread like a disease to other parts of the city. The very cars and trucks in which people had tried to escape it had been responsible for its spread. Clinging to the tires, penetrating small cuts and nicks in the rubber, converting the nylon contents, the clone had broken rather than given up this source of food, and in breaking from the parent body, had multiplied itself; now the inferior parts were growing—a pocket in the far north end of the city, another in the suburb of Chicago Heights, others being reported minute by minute in other suburbs, other sections. Where these lesser parts met, they converged, melted together and moved on as one.

Irene motioned to the pilot to turn back, and they circled, headed back over another flowing mass of evacuees. Irene continued to describe the people below as

they went, and her voice remained calm and unemotional. They landed at the National Guard Headquarters where a Captain Rutherford nodded to Irene and continued speaking to a group of uniformed men.

"This area is clean now," he said, indicating a wall map. It was a section of the city, six blocks wide by fifteen long. He drew heavy black lines across some streets. "These sewers have been closed and will hold. We don't know about some of the others. Our plan is to dump gasoline here and light it. This whole section will burn, but most of it has already collapsed, and is burning anyway."

Irene reported on the latest plan, one known to be ineffective as a final weapon against the thing, but meant to slow it down, to cut back some of its growth.

The Sanitation Commissioner listened to the mixture of static and reports and ground his teeth without hearing the grating noise they made. Patricia shuddered.

"Timmy, honey," she said, "please . . ."

"Shut up!" Timothy O'Herlihy snapped and she clamped her mouth in a tight line, suddenly looking ten years older. She swung away from him and drew her housecoat tighter about her slender figure. Her windows faced the lake, invisible through the fog and rain, but she knew it was there, felt safety in the knowledge that it still lay out there, untouched, unchanged. She didn't believe the radio reports of the damage to the city, and if she had believed, she wouldn't have cared. They were not part of it. Her apartment, in the exclusive Lake Forest area, was not in any danger. She yawned and lit a cigarette, and thought what a dull day it had been, glancing resentfully at the thick man hunched over the radio.

Without turning off the radio, Timothy O'Herlihy tied his shoes, put on his coat and felt for his car keys. Seething fury mottled and blotched his face, and his hands shook. They were going to burn down his city! He poured a quick double Scotch and gulped it, still without speaking. Patricia watched his movements in fear. Whatever she felt about the man as a person didn't matter. He was her meal ticket, and he seemed ready to leave her. She caught his sleeve, her face pleading and very little-girlish.

"Timmy, honey, you aren't going to leave me alone with all this going on, are you?"



She was unprepared for the sweeping, heavy right hand that knocked her halfway across the room. She slammed against the stereo with an impact that took her gasping for breath to her knees, and slumped gradually to the floor. When she was able to breathe again, he was gone.

Timothy O'Herlihy drove maniacally toward the section the radio had said was to be burned, and he got closer to it, the anger within him increased until he was weeping. His city! It was falling apart and burning, and the fools were running away from it. Leaving it to burn! He kept to the side streets, avoiding the heavy traffic moving in the opposite direction, and he careened around corners, over curbs onto the sidewalks when the streets were impassable with stalled cars. When he came to a roadblock too large to bypass, he left his car and took another.

His fury grew, and in his anger he didn't notice the first time his heart seemed to shudder and then leap forward to the next beat. He didn't pay any attention to the throbbing, numbing pain that jerked his left arm and shoulder. He jammed his foot harder on the accelerator and rammed his way through a police barricade. They couldn't keep him from his city! Ahead the street seemed to shimmer under the headlights that hardly penetrated the rain and fog, and he didn't even slow down. The clone attached itself to his tires, and his first awareness of it was the lurching, sliding motion of the car, as if it had a flat tire. He cursed vehemently and again drew his arm up in a reflexive movement against a stabbing pain. This time for a moment the car, and streets, and the buildings about him seemed caught up in a whirlwind while black-and-white patterns burned in his eyes. His vision recovered and he saw the stuff covering the windshield of the car, taking the nylon wiper blades. Somehow the car had come to a stop against a parked truck, and he couldn't start it again. He wrenched open the door and flung himself, bawling obscenities, at the mass of stuff that was destroying his city. And there was nothing to throttle, nothing to kill.

The clone took him and then went through the car, stripping it of the nylon seat covers, the polyurethane foam cushions, the padding of the dashboard. It did not take long.

At 2:10 Pete Laurenz had been told by the control-tower voice that his wife was having pains at ten-minute intervals, and he had grinned. That had been more than two hours ago, he realized, landing too fast, braking too abruptly. Outside he could see the shortened concrete runway lighted like a Christmas tree, and he thought of the other field where he had landed and taken off again and again—guttled with shellfire, glistening with rain. Suddenly he stiffened. Something else was out there shimmering on the runway. Something faintly green and mobile. He felt a knot of fear in his stomach and his hands tightened on the stick. The thing was here at Midway!

The people were hurried aboard—treated like cattle. The green stuff was everywhere—sheets of it undulating on the runway, farther up, away from the landing and loading areas. He saw men using flame throwers, improvised from the gasoline trucks and their high-pressure hoses, to keep the stuff back.

They were on the ground only five minutes this time—not even time to refuel. The girl at the mike in the control tower had been replaced, and the new voice knew nothing about his wife and her baby. The voice in the tower sounded hysterical, he noticed. “It’s in the building! Oh, God! It’s in the building.” There was a brief silence, then another voice, quieter, more distant.

“Wally? Is that you, Wally?” Pete asked.

“Yeah. You set, Pete? Last flight, boy. Check for confirmation in Milwaukee. Okay?”

Pete swallowed hard and said the necessary things. Then he was taking off after a shortened run. He climbed steeply, ignoring the sudden scream that came through the earphone; a second later he removed the headpiece carefully, listening to a scream within his own plane, coming as if to echo the other one. He banked, and saw a stream of water flowing under the door. He stared at it for a second, then transferred his attention to the ground below. He had to find a building that was already demolished, one with no people left in it. “Not the lake!” he said aloud. “It can live in the lake, spread even more. No, a nice ruined building, preferably one that’s burning . . .” Then he saw it: one of the plusher apartment buildings. He climbed slightly, circled it once, rising, and then dipped



the nose. A thin green streamer was following the stream of water into the cockpit and he watched it for a second before he closed his eyes and started to pray. "Dear God, may it be a boy. Please let me die with my plane, not from that stuff." The plane hit with an explosive roar while he was praying.

Mark Kenniston visualized the clone, bridging over the iodine lines that had been sprayed down, latticing doorways and windows. He knew there was practically no chance this time of outmaneuvering the stuff. He closed his eyes a moment thinking of the girls. Some of them were whimpering softly, and two of them had clasped hands, praying steadily. The matron stood in the doorway looking down the hall toward the fire exit.

"There it is," she said finally, and Mark opened his eyes and squeezed Edie's hand that somehow had got into his.

"Harry, you and the other guys round up all the sheets you can find, quick!" Mark ordered.

Without even taking time to nod, Harry and the other two men darted out of the auditorium. Their racing footsteps could be heard echoing through the ruined building.

"You," Mark said to the matron, "start tearing that bandaging into strips, as narrow as possible without weakening them so that they can't be used for strings." He looked over the injured girls, mentally separating those who could walk from those who couldn't. Harry tossed two sheets into the room and ran out again. Mark grabbed one of them and started tearing it into sixteen-inch strips.

"What we are going to do," he said, working feverishly, "is make mummies out of all of you." He started binding one of the girls, wrapping the strips about her legs, careful to cover every inch of her skin. "Take over here," he said to Edie, and started on the next girl.

"Just be sure no flesh is exposed." He glanced at Edie's work and nodded. "That's right. Now the head—mouth, eyes and all." He grinned at the terrified girl and reached over to pat her. "Think of it as a game of blind-man's buff, honey," he said. Edie put a strip over her eyes, and

her swathed head nodded once, then was quiet as Edie tied the strips firmly in place with the gauze bandaging.

Half a dozen more sheets were tossed inside the auditorium door, and then another six or seven, and this time the man didn't run out again. "Can't go back that way any more," he said. "It's covering the floor."

"Okay," Mark said, "rip them apart, strips about a foot and a half wide. Bind yourself, with plenty of overlap." He finished another of the girls, went on to the next. The second volunteer and Harry returned, with more sheets.

"This is all, Doc," Harry said. He slammed the door shut and wedged one of the sheets under the crack. "Won't stop it forever, but it might slow it down." He started ripping sheets, and for the next several moments there was quiet in the large room. Once the matron grunted and Mark looked at her. She pointed, indicating a pale green thread that had found a hole in the plaster and was snaking back and forth on the wall, forty feet from where they were working.

They had finished the girls. Mark bound Edie while Harry worked on the matron. Mark was the last to be covered with the sheeting. The clone reached the first girl on the floor and started playing over her inert figure. She didn't move, and Mark hoped she had fainted. He pulled a pillowcase over his head then, and saw no more, only a patch of lightness where the windows must be. He tied his last string about his neck as tight as he could stand it.

"Everyone ready?" he asked then, hearing his voice muffled. There were answering grunts. "Okay, the matron is going to lead, and we all hold hands and follow. Each of the men is going to carry one of the girls who can't walk, and . . ."

The matron interrupted. "I'll carry Millie; she's light enough."

Mark nodded, remembered they couldn't see his nod and said, "Fine. That will leave two of the girls that we'll have to come back for."

There was a gasp and a stifled scream. "It's on me! I can feel it!"

"It's going to be on all of us!" Mark said sharply, knowing that hysteria and panic now could ruin the whole plan. "Be quiet! When you feel it on you, keep moving with



even, deliberate motion. Don't stop, and don't jerk. It will stretch and go with you for a while and then it will drop off when it finds it can't convert the sheeting. Whatever you do, don't panic and try to run. It can throw you down that way and if you fall in a mass of it, some might penetrate . . ."

He found that he could see just enough to distinguish open spaces before him, and he made his way to the first girl still on the floor. She had a broken leg, he remembered. "One of you men," he ordered. One of them touched his arm, and he could hear the sounds of the girl being lifted. Harry picked up another girl. Then the matron was there. "Millie?" There was an answering whimper and the matron's voice was gentle as she said, "Hush, now. I'll try not to hurt you."

Mark lifted the next girl in the line on the floor, and he sensed that the next one was trying to rise. "Please don't leave me here with it," she begged, falling back again. "I can walk, honest I can, if someone will help me just a little."

Several of the girls with lesser injuries gathered about the two remaining on the floor. "We ain't going to leave you," a tough voice said. "Come on, up you go!"

Mark clenched his jaw when he heard the sound of a bone crunching, and knew the temporary splint had been jostled out of position. The girl screamed once, then was silent. "We got her," the tough voice said. "Maybe she won't walk no more, but she won't die." Together the girls got the last remaining one, who was unconscious from a probable skull fracture. The group started to move toward the door, the matron with Millie slung over a broad shoulder leading the way, groping along with one hand on the wall. The man behind her kept in touch by holding Millie's hand, and he could feel the slight tug now and then on the girl he carried.

It was a hellish trip, a nightmare without end. Again and again the clone touched Mark's legs. Once it hobbled him, and he had to mince along taking steps of less than six inches. He didn't stop, and finally it either split or fell off; he couldn't tell which. The matron led them slowly, picking her way carefully over and around the rubble. The hallway seemed endless.

Mark heard himself talking and wondered at the quiet

reassurance in his voice. "We just keep together," he said, "nice and easy. No sudden jerks, or stops. You might feel it, just keep going. Don't try to knock it off, or break away from it." He talked on, not knowing if he made sense or not, not caring. The clone had reached out and touched him on the chest, was flowing up the pillow case that covered his head.

He felt a trickle of sweat on his cheek and moved just enough for the pillow case to blot it; another trickle was running down his back. The pressure on his face increased and the light area was being obscured. He closed his eyes quickly and felt the weight of the clone on his lids. It flowed down his cheek and he clamped his mouth shut. He shivered, suddenly very cold, and he fought nausea, feeling that at any moment he was going to vomit.

The matron's voice sounded, very distant and muffled, "We start down the stairs now."

The girl Mark carried whimpered and he tightened his hold on her. The clone left his face, pressed the pillow case against his neck, down his chest, then was gone. He knew it was on the girl. She went limp. He could hear someone ahead sobbing; he started to talk again. The sobbing stopped. They were listening to him, afraid of missing directions, probably, but listening. They were clinging to his voice the way he had clung to his guide line in the subway. His chill passed, and the nausea. He continued to talk. He started down the stairs, wondering how Edie was making out ahead of him, visualizing her supporting a girl on her arm, leading her, keeping her from panicking. He was glad he had Edie.

In some places the clone was underfoot, and it was like walking on partially inflated sleeping bags. The line slowed down and he said, "Don't stop! Even if you are only going an inch a minute, don't stop!"

The matron's voice came back, "It's all over me, around my waist, neck . . ."

The line continued to move ahead, very slowly now, and Mark felt the weight of the clone as it spread over his own body. The clone flowed over him, coating him, then thickening, increasing in weight, still yielding to his movements, but slowly. It got heavier, molded the girl to him. Each step became an agony now, each breath tortured.



He couldn't keep going; his legs were being bound together. . . . He moved an inch, and it was like trying to walk in an ocean of tar. Then it left his head again and he drew in a gasping breath, and he started to talk again. One of the girls screamed shrilly. Mark raised his voice. "Remember, it can't go through cotton. Keep moving." The girl on his shoulder was weeping hysterically and he whispered, "Relax, it can't get to you. Relax." She did, and for the next twenty feet, he carried her and the clone, but the line kept moving. He kept talking.

If any of the injured girls started bleeding through the bindings. . . . If anyone fell, or snagged the hastily tied sheets. . . . If the body of any of them became too overcome by the mass of the clone. . . . Mark repeatedly jerked his thoughts away from the many things that could happen, and the line continued to move, down another flight of stairs, and another. How long had they been moving? He couldn't tell. Time seemed to have stopped. Nightmarelike, he couldn't seem to recall starting the flight, couldn't remember anything he had said, couldn't remember how far down they had to go, how far away the courtyard was from the back entrance, or if there was an entrance. . . .

More stairs, and they were going down a hallway, almost stopped again; they about-faced, into a room, and out another door, over rubble that they had to feel their way across. And the line moved on toward a sudden rush of air. Then rain was hitting Mark, plastering the pillowcase to his face, forcing his eyes closed.

"The courtyard's just ahead," the matron's voice floated back. He stumbled over a beam or something. The girl clutched his neck. He caught his balance, steadying himself with one hand on the wall that was spongy with the clone. He could feel it moving under his hand, and slowly he withdrew it, feeling it cling. He moved ahead. It dropped away.

Then the rain was hitting him with full force; he maintained contact with the girl ahead of him, and walked through rivers of water, almost bumping into her when she stopped.

"This is it," the matron called.

Carefully he put his girl down, and for a moment her

arms clung to his neck. He heard her whisper, "Thank you, Doctor. Thank you."

Cautiously Mark slipped the pillowcase from his face and studied the courtyard. It was free of the clone. He told the others they could uncover their faces, but must keep the cotton sheeting ready to cover up again. They settled down to wait for the helicopter rescue unit, not even noticing the rain.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

4:35 P. M.

They waited in the courtyard as the rain beat down on them, glad to be there, looking at each other and smiling, catching their breath, glad to be there. A voice boomed through the pounding of the rain, startling them. "Hey there. You all right?"

They turned to see a fireman with a tank on his back coming through an archway. Mark recognized him as one of the men in the group that had tended the diving lines. The fireman saw Mark at the same time. "Well, hi, Doc! We been looking all over for you. They want to fly you out. There's a check point four blocks from here. We'll see you get to it."

Mark looked around at the women and girls, then at the fireman. The fireman followed his eyes. "Okay, okay. We'll take this bunch in tow. We got a truck out on the street and we're getting ready to leave anyhow. This stuff—" he nodded his head at the tank on his back—"is beginning to run out and we can't get any more. C'mon, follow me, all of you."

Mark herded the women after the fireman, and brought up the rear himself. They carried the injured as before. When they reached the truck, they loaded them all on it. The driver said to Mark, "Doc, go down to the end of the block and turn right for two blocks. One of our trucks is down there at the intersection and



they'll call in a copter for you. You hurry now." Mark nodded and turned to Edie and Harry.

"Hop up," he said, waving at the truck. "I'll see you as soon as we get out."

Edie and Harry looked at each other, then looked at Mark and shook their heads as if they had just had a long discussion and reached a unanimous conclusion. Edie said quietly, "We are going to stay with you, so let's not discuss it. We had better get going. There isn't much time any more."

Mark started to argue, but could not find the words. A feeling of warmth welled up inside him, and he found himself swallowing hard. He turned his head away, and nodded agreement, and then he was able to turn back. He looked at Edie and Harry in their ridiculous strips of cotton wrapping. He said to the driver, "Hey, you got any wet suits here?"

"Yeah." He jerked a thumb at the bed of the truck. Mark led Edie and Harry to the back, and they pawed through the wet suits until they found three that would fit. They stripped to their underwear and tugged the wet suits on. The three of them then turned down the street with the "God-bless-you's" of the women ringing in their ears and with a cheerful wave from the fireman. They turned right at the corner and stopped, appalled.

The street was filled with the clone. Films of it lay everywhere, writhing, flowing, crawling up and down the walls that were still standing. Mounds of shattered masonry lay in the street, and it was difficult to see down the block. Harry shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well, let's go. It ain't going to roll back and let us through."

He led the way down the street. There was no sound but the pelting of the rain, no movement but the splash of raindrops and the stirring of the clone. Harry stepped around peninsulas of clone tissue. When it was not possible to avoid the clone tissue, he gingerly stepped on it, quickly lifting his feet before the up-welling tissue had a chance to enfold his leg. The others followed him. Near the end of the block Mark said to them, "Do you realize how we've changed in our approach to this thing? Here we are, walking on it, as if we did this every afternoon."

Edie turned to him and smiled. "Yes, and that's why we're going to find a way to beat it. Oh!" She had not

looked where she was walking and had passed too close to a section of collapsed wall tipped with a broken and jagged brick. Mark's heart leaped with fear when he saw that the point of the brick had caught her wet suit just above the knee on the right leg. The suit had stretched and given way, leaving a long tear through which he could see her skin. In an instant, everything had changed. Mark looked frantically around to see if any portion of the clone threatened to touch Edie. He swung her away from the wall section that was partially covered with clone tissue and said, "Harry, can you see the truck yet? We've got to get her out of here."

"Can't see nothing yet, Doc. Let's look around this corner here."

They rounded the corner, Edie hobbling as she bent over to try to keep her skin covered with her wet suit mittens. They looked down the street. It looked much like the last one, but at the end of it there was a mound of rubble that prevented their seeing farther. Mark shook his head. "Let's go."

They walked as fast as they could, looking carefully all around them. Once they had to dodge a sudden streamer of clone tissue, ejected from a second-story window frame. Finally they circled the mound of rubble and found the truck. It was covered almost entirely with clone tissue. No people were anywhere in sight.

Harry said, "See what happened? Truck got jammed in here with all this falling junk. I hope the guys got out, but that don't help us none. Now where do we go?"

They looked around and saw a desolate sight—no sign of human life, nothing but ruined buildings, cluttered and flooded streets. The street they had just come down filled with the clone as they looked at it. The other streets were even worse. There was no way out, no place to go.

Mark pointed to a parking garage fifty yards away. The ramps were coated with clone, but the tissue layers were not as deep as elsewhere. "Let's try in there. Maybe we can get to the roof and get a copter's attention." Edie and Harry looked dubious. "Got any better ideas?"

They shrugged. The three of them worked their way to the entrance and started up. Mark stayed on Edie's right side to protect her leg from tendrils of clone. As they went up gingerly over the clone, patches of con-



crete slid from a nearby vertical pillar and crashed to the ramp below them, to be engulfed by the clone as soon as they hit.

Above, the bare steel framework showed dark red in the gloom, but it was at least free of tissue. They finally reached a place on the ramp where the clone had stripped it, and from then on they walked carefully over the reinforcing grid that had been buried in the concrete. The higher they climbed, the more sparse was the clone. When they finally came out on the roof in the rain, they found the clone was there only in discrete patches. But these patches of tissue had almost exhausted all the nutrients available here, and they were shooting out tendrils in all directions.

They looked up into the leaden sky, but could see only the rain-laden clouds. "I guess we wait," said Mark, "and hope they come for us." They gathered near some ironwork at an edge of the building, and settled down.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

5:30 P. M.

"How long. . . ?" Edie asked. She didn't finish the question, and Mark tightened his arm around her shoulders.

They were seated on the ironwork twelve stories above the flooded streets. They couldn't see the street below, only swirling fog, and rain, and the occasional lashing green tentacles that swept in front of them. How high up was the thing able to hurl them? Mark couldn't even guess.

They sat without speaking for the next few minutes, Edie's head resting on his shoulder, her eyes closed, only the hard knot of a fist in his hand indicating that she was not relaxed.

"Will they be able to stop it here?" she asked after a while.

"They'd better. If it gets to the lake . . ." All the lakes would feel its presence, and all the land about the great

lakes, the cities falling one by one as it advanced over the land, the people driven farther and farther, and coming one day to the oceans, with it still following, still growing.

He thought of the organic life that teemed in the oceans, and a spasm knotted his stomach.

Edie drew in sharply, closer to him, and he saw a waving tendril of the stuff, sweeping the air, searching. . . . It touched her arm, coiled, and withdrew from the rubber of the wet suit. The clone vanished into the rain.

Mark pressed her legs closer to his, covering the torn place in the leg of her wet suit with his legs. Neither spoke again of the stuff that was searching the buildings, searching the streets, the very air itself, seeking food, desperate for food now. Looking over her head Mark could see the glow of vast fires dotting the hazy landscape of fog and clouds, and he knew that the fog was playing tricks on him, that actually he could see no farther through it than the next block, and that the fires must be within the block.

He could smell smoke, and he knew that if the helicopter didn't come soon, it would be too late. He wondered if the helicopter would even spot them, and as he wondered, he heard one approaching. Instantly Harry was on his feet, shouting and waving his arms to attract the pilot's attention. The copter drifted up through the fog. It was the same one that had taken him to the girls' detention home, Mark realized. Buz Kingsley waved to them, one hand holding his everlasting microphone.

The ladder was swinging in the wind. Harry and Mark caught it and held it steady for Edie, unable to speak in the roar and the hurricane of wind. She climbed up, and Harry gave him a slight shove, taking a backward step as he did so. As Mark started up, a tendril whipped about his arm. He released the ladder immediately, thrashed with one arm to regain his balance, and clung to the steelwork of the building until the tendril fell off him and weaved its way out of sight. The helicopter had lifted ten or fifteen feet when he let go the ladder; cautiously it descended again, and this time he climbed up into it. Harry followed quickly. Before they could pull the ladder up after him, a tendril caught it, and the clone was advancing up it toward the body of the helicopter. With a



grunt, Harry swung his cleaver and slashed the ladder free, letting it fall away. The pilot jerked them, climbing as steeply as he could, and they were out of it, higher and higher over the city, flying through a world of grayness and rain.

Faintly Mark was aware of Buz Kingsley's voice droning away over his microphone, but he didn't try to hear the words.

They landed at Gary, Indiana, and Buz must have radioed ahead, for they were met by a jeep bearing a U. S. Army major. A second jeep was following, and in it were Irene Appel and Maury Cooper. Irene stood on the seat and waved to Buz.

"We're grounded, Buz. Visibility zero, no more flights over the city. Sprayers are moving in."

Buz joined her in the jeep and they raced away. Mark looked after them. Another time, he thought. Another time they would all have dinner and compare notes and memories, but not yet. There was still more to be done.

The major introduced himself as Tom Arlington. He took them to the headquarters set up in the armory. Inside the building someone thrust dry clothing at them as they were hurried behind screens to change, and someone else was serving soup and hot coffee, and without pause they were discussing the means of stopping the clone.

"You're the expert, Dr. Kenniston—what do we do now? We're expecting spray planes within the next ten minutes, each one capable of spraying two thousand acres, and they are loaded with a solution of iodine. Now—what's our best point of attack? Where do they start?"

Mark pushed the soup bowl away and looked up at the map that covered one wall. It showed the city and suburbs; a thick red line took in most of it. Inside that line lay the clone, growing minute by minute, breaking out again and again to appear miles away from the main body. He got up, went to the map and ran his finger along the lake front. "The shore line will have to be kept wet with the solution. We have to keep it away from the lake, or heaven help us," he said.

The planes started just off shore, spraying a strip fifty feet wide, returning to widen it to one hundred feet, then half a mile. Other planes started miles to the west and

worked inward, widening the belt of poison. The city was completely ringed with iodine, in a band that was a mile wide after the first two hours. The rivers were sprayed heavily; daring helicopters dropped from the sky and dumped undiluted iodine in them by the ton.

The edges of the clone thrust outward, searching ceaselessly for more and more nutrients. The heart of the city no longer produced enough to sustain it. Bare steel skeletons reached skyward, marking the sites of some of the tallest buildings. Lower down, thick layers of clone tissue covered everything. There was no place for the clone to go. At the edges, the iodine confronted it and contained it. In the city, there was nothing left. It filled the sewers, the subways and the basements. It lay inside the structures, converting the last of the calcium salts as best it could. In its frantic search for nutrients, the great mass of clone tissue began to pulse more violently than ever. Clumps and tendrils violently surged out from the main body, flung through the air like streamers at a monstrous New Year's Eve party.

The rain had all but stopped now, and as the airplanes and helicopters hovered over the devastated city, the men who flew them could not believe what they saw.

The entire surface of the clone, more than one hundred square miles of it, lashed and twisted and erupted. It was as if the city itself were alive, and in mortal pain. As far as the eye could see, the violent throes of the clone obscured the city. It pressed outward into the bands of iodine, and died. It tried to climb over its own dead tissue, and failed. Whenever men saw a weak point in the black perimeter, they rushed to it and doused it with more iodine.

The time came when the starving clone no longer had enough energy to sustain its activity. Its streamers no longer soared as far; its lashings subsided. Its structure, under pressure of a total lack of nutrients, underwent another molecular transformation in an effort to adapt to the new situation.

Clone tissue everywhere suddenly stopped moving, and the sudden stillness was almost as shocking to the eye as the violent movement had been. The men in the air could sense that the clone was regrouping its forces to meet this



new challenge, and the radio net crackled with apprehension as the word went out.

It took only twenty seconds for the change to take place in the structure of the clone tissues, but there was no immediate sign that it was done. For this time, the solution found by those highly adaptive molecules was a bad one for the clone. It began to feed on its own tissues, converting its own substance into the energy it needed. After a time, pits and gaps appeared in its surface. As men went back to spraying with iodine, the gaps appeared more frequently.

By 10 P. M. the men knew they had contained it. No more outbreaks had occurred, and the clone had not been able to get to the lake. The fires raging in the city were totally out of control, and much of the clone was being destroyed along with the buildings. There was nowhere it could go to escape the flames and heat, and it writhed, twisted, flung up streamers in its frantic efforts to escape; and it died. The writhings became more frantic, and now the few portions of buildings that had escaped the initial plunder of their traces of nutrients were searched and researched and stripped of all that the clone could convert. Where the buildings had been merely weakened by the first attack, they collapsed under the added weight of its mass as it covered them.

The city was flooded, ruined and burning. Watching the map with the belt of poison edging inward, ring after ring being penciled on the map, Mark could almost feel the death struggles of the city, and of the thing that had killed it. He felt Edie's hand slip into his. The city died, but not man. Not yet.

But beneath every great city there flow streams of water rich in nutrients and minerals, and containing ample energy to supply the driving force for almost every chemical reaction. There are ground-up foods of every conceivable kind. There are soaps and detergents, discarded medicines, spices and flavorings and colorings and inks, cosmetics and rinses and bleaches, resins and catalysts and enzymes, and the waste products of life processes. The blending of these materials, in an almost infinite variety of concentrations and under a wide range of temperatures and pressures, produces a chemist's cauldron—from which almost anything might spring.

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# THE CLONE

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One night, beneath the streets of the city, four ingredients found their way into the same collector box in the underground sewer system. There these ingredients—muriatic acid; trisodium phosphate; a bit of meat; and a fleck of silica gel—combined in a warm, seething liquid and gave birth to a hideous, destructive force: **the clone...**

A microscopic mass at first, the clone grew rapidly, feeding on the nutrients in the sewer, converting everything it touched into its own pulsing tissue. It spread in all directions, filling the pipes beneath the sleeping metropolis. Then seeking more food, the deadly green tissue reached upward and entered the unsuspecting city...

It moved through houses and stores and spread into the streets, absorbing all that lay in its path. ***Nothing could stop it...***

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Kate Wilhelm is best known for her collection of stories **THE MILE-LONG SPACESHIP**. She is married to Damon Knight and lives in Milford, Pa. Theodore L. Thomas is a patent attorney by profession and lives in Lancaster, Pa. **THE CLONE** is his first full-length novel.