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Edited By KATE WILHELM

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Dedication

A writers' workshop does not simply happen. Months of planning and preparation are needed, and the cooperation, and indeed dedication, of everyone involved at any level. The eighth annual Clarion SF Writers' Workshop owes its existence, and its tremendous success, to the following people: Dr. Herman King, Director of Academic Services, Michigan State University; Dr. Leonard Isaacs and Dr. R. Glenn Wright of the English Department, Justin S. Morrill College, MSU; Dr. Robin Scott Wilson, who started it all in Clarion, Pennsylvania; and to the other visiting writers: Samuel R. (Chip) Delany, Gene Wolfe, Roger Zelazny, Joe Haldeman, and Damon Knight. This book is dedicated to all of them.

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Introduction

The campus of Michigan State University is a dreamland of trees, a winding stream, vistas of lawns, groupings of low dense shrubs. Robins go about their business; a cardinal flashes scarlet; an invisible bird sings from deep inside a birch tree. The school season population of 40,000 or more is reduced to a handful in the summer and there is a feeling of tranquility. Against this background, inside one of the charming buildings of the Justin S. Morrill College twenty-five students undergo six weeks of intensive training in what can rightly be called a conversion process.

What they learn is as old as humanity—the sharing of dreams in a way that is pleasing to the audience. Everyone dreams, and the dreams are clothed in the images common to the times. Myths, sagas, epic poetry, allegories, fairy tales . . . science fiction, they all speak with the symbols that have meaning to the people of their cultures.

For most people the wishes, fears, fantasies of dreams return to the deep unconscious upon awakening; there is now and then a reminder of something beautiful, or hideous, that causes the dreamer to pause before the image again swirls away. For the writer, the artist, the poet, the scientist, these images are more permanent; they demand attention; they demand explanation or at least ventilation. Out of these images come new scientific discoveries, great poetry, stories.

Everyone dreams, but let a neighbor or friend start to relate a particular dream and our minds wander, we pay scant attention. Between the dream and the telling of the dream there falls the shadowed area we call creative talent.

A highly talented, creative person who recognizes the value of dreams and experiences and who wants to tell them can train himself or herself to become a writer. Most writers are self-trained, and in the end most writers share a common knowledge of what will or won't work in fiction with very little disagree-

ment. Most writers take from five to ten years to develop this knowledge into a reliable tool. What we try to do at Clarion is shorten the process.

We cannot dole out dreams, or alter experiences, or provide talent. The six visiting writers can share their own experiences as writers; talk about the problems that beset writers at every stage and the possible solutions to them; confess to their own failures and rejections and times of discouragement as well as their triumphs.

And we workshop. Each student writes endlessly, and everyone reads and makes notes and thinks hard about the stories due for discussion. Everyone talks about each story, finding its flaws, its virtues, ways to make it better. The students help each other; no matter what field of expertise is needed, someone knows enough about it to satisfy the story demands, or knows where to find out.

For six weeks the students live writing, think writing, dream writing, when they take time out to sleep at all, and sometime during that period the conversion occurs. The student becomes a writer.

Temporarily at least, their ability to read indiscriminately is destroyed—they have become too critical. Their ability to accept without scepticism what is said is destroyed. They have to probe for hidden meanings, for the causes behind the actions. Their ability to dash off a finished story in as short a time as it takes to type it is destroyed. They are too aware that having and understanding the dream is only half the struggle: how the dream is told—the language, syntax, style—is as important as the content. The critical standards they have learned have generalized and they can apply the same yardsticks to their own work. They have become writers.

Not all of them are able to stick with it. The pressures of the world are tremendous; they have school to finish; they have livings to earn; the compulsion to express their dreams fades as other necessities arise. But for most of them , whether or not they continue as writers, the Clarion workshop is a peak experience of their lives.

I want to express my respect, awe and admiration for the enormous amount of work these new writers do each year, and my gratitude for the privilege of witnessing the coming together of fine new talents, of dreamers and interpreters of dreams, and the first tentative grasp of techniques that daily becomes firmer and surer of itself.

In this book are thirteen stories by these new writers. They are sharing their dreams, and if you, the reader, find yourself nodding and thinking, yes, that is right, you'll know they are also reinterpreting your dreams. More than that we cannot ask of any art form.

Kate Wilhelm
September, 1975

CLARION SF

Larry W. Martin *is a professor of linguistics at the University of Iowa, where he specializes in English and general syntactic theory. He grew up in Dallas and spent many summers in the Arkansas Ozarks. He writes: "My most secret and impossible ambition: to speak with aliens, and write a grammar of their tongue." This tender and compassionate story makes me believe he would do a remarkable job on both accounts.*

Landscape With Aliens

Larry W. Martin

We stood in the chill morning on a bluff above the abandoned railroad trestle and watched the icy breezes tickle the placid waters. The sun, burnt orange in the tips of the pines, spun long golden threads in Karla's hair. She raised the green bottle to her lips and drank. Eyes still steady on the lake, she thrust the wine at arm's length toward the alien. Without a glance in her direction, Dlagan grasped the bottle, upended it, swallowed, and wiped his lips on the back of his hand. He handed me the bottle, which still held a few drops.

"Perfect," I said. "Where did you pick that up, Dlagan?"

Dlagan smiled; he raised his eyebrows and hunched his shoulders, but said nothing. He had learned that too.

Karla pulled her leather jacket about her as the breeze whipped her hair across her face. "We ought to go in, Phil. You have classes today." She started trudging up the hill to her bike.

My gut was shivering in the chill. I had my hands in the pockets of my jeans. I was due in town for the copter to Fay-

etteville in twenty minutes. I would lecture with a hangover, no breakfast, and no sleep.

Dlagan turned his head and caught me with his purple eyes. "Perhaps we must head in."

"*Should*," I said. "Not *must*. But you're right. It's going to be a shitty day. I'm not sure the sunrise was worth it." We started up the hill. Karla's bike caught on the first try, mumbled and hiccupped at us as we topped the ridge. Dlagan and I got in the government car and followed Karla down the winding roads back into town. Dlagan rode shotgun with one arm slung over the back of the seat. It's odd, but I've never been able to do that without feeling self-conscious. Dlagan giggled once on the way in, ducking his head and hiding his mouth with his hand, the way the Japanese do. When I asked him what brought it on, he didn't answer.

When we got to my place I invited Karla to crash in my bed. She kissed me on the eyes as she always does, gave Dlagan a hug, snapped off her helmet and fell to the mattress. Dlagan waved me a good night/good morning and even simulated a yawn. As he started toward his room I heard the dull thucking of the university copter overhead.

The lectures were awful. The first was about ergative languages and I couldn't dredge up a single Basque example. The second was in phonetics and my tongue was too thick to make dental stops that you could tell from alveolars. The students played it well, though. Spotting my hangover, they asked questions they knew I could lecture on without thinking. And they never once asked me about Dlagan, his people, their language, or the ship they came in. They would get their A's and B's.

When I got home Karla had already left to open up the bar. Dlagan was napping on the couch. I stared until I had embarrassed myself at the pale green and ivory of his stocky body, then I drank a dipper of spring water from the barrel on the porch, and tumbled to the bed that was as cool as if Karla had never been there.

I awoke to the smell of freshly-made coffee. Dlagan didn't like the taste and claimed it ruined his digestion, so I knew the coffee was for me. He padded quietly into the room and perched on the bed, cup in hand. "Wake up, Earthling!" he said in a grim, hushed voice. "The Bug-Eyed Monster has arrived with its toxic brew."

I chuckled and a few drops of coffee trembled over the brim of the cup. I raised myself on my elbow and took the cup. "What time is it?"

"A quarter to martinis," he said, checking an imaginary wristwatch. "But I'd like to get some work done first."

"I ought to do some too," I said. I swung my legs over the side of the bed. "And we need something in our stomachs." Dlagan gave a low hiss and scratched my shoulder lightly with his extruded claws. It was a gesture he never got rid of, although he never performed it in public. It meant something like "I could eat a horse," and something like "Let's have dinner together," but it was a more intimate thing, suggesting something vaguely perverse and immensely pleasurable. I always blushed, and Karla did too. "Anything from Washington or New York today?"

"No. I had a radiogram from the ship, mostly routine. One of my hallmates is thinking of asking for euthanasia, but there's not much else."

"Good Lord," I said. "Isn't there anything you can do?"

"Do?"

"You know: write to him, radio him, even—" I looked away and the cup clattered in its saucer. "—go up and see him?"

"Why would I do that?"

"Don't you want to stop him, Dlagan?"

Now it was Dlagan who was staring somewhere else. He turned back to face me. "You don't understand, Phil. It's a *friend*, not just someone I've heard of or happen to know."

"I don't get it. Why don't you want to help?"

Dlagan sighed. "How could I help? It'll be a personal decision. I can't interfere with anything like that, not with a friend. It would be thoughtless or . . . rude. Come on," he said, grinning and slapping my thigh. "Let's get to work." He stood up and headed for the study.

I sat on the edge of the bed, sipping my coffee. I thought only of green and ivory surfaces which, bent one way, seemed to talk in idioms, and twisted another, seemed to yawn and smile. I could not see beyond them. I looked at the reflection of my eyes in the coffee cup. I couldn't see anything behind them, either. I drained the cup and left it tilted on the bed and headed for the study to work with an alien I feared and loved and did not know.

Dlagan agreed that my grammar was messy and incomplete, but he had set me anyway to translating the *Vgau dna Ghlebim*, or Song of the Ghleb. The Ghleb was the ship of Dlagan's people

which rode above the earth. The Song seemed to be a hodgepodge recounting the adventures of the ship, interspersed with moralistic aphorisms and descriptions of the ship's functions.

I had learned the blocky characters quickly and swallowed huge chunks of syntax whole. There were a few surprises: Dlagan's poet didn't mind having his chorus utter sentences that would translate literally as: *Then Vridlu killed the engineer who her mother had betrayed the programmer who gave birth to her lover and*. It was difficult working with materials which violated general constraints on human language in such wholesale fashion. Throwing presuppositions to the winds, I translated: *The programmer whom Vridlu's mother betrayed gave birth to Vridlu's lover and the engineer whom Vridlu then killed*. Dlagan would agree in such cases that was about as good as I could do, and he would agree with me that the best was pretty bad.

The vocabulary gave me fits, of course, because I simply didn't know a lot of the referents of the terms. When they were used metaphorically I was sometimes completely stumped. I finally gave up on *Vridlu ???ed the engineer or the captain's aide, dying as she lived, alone*, and confronted Dlagan.

"It's one you might not know," he said. "It's a verb, of course; it means 'to float helpless in free fall, unable to move toward any useful surface.' "

I read the sentence over. "It doesn't work, Dlagan. Maybe I'm misreading something else. Take a look."

"Hey, I'm sorry, Phil." he said, handing the text back. "Here it's a metaphor, meaning something like 'to have failed to make a vital decision until no decision was possible.' In the context, Vrudlu—" and he made a circling gesture that I had not seen before—"must choose between the engineer and the captain's aide for mating. She is unable to make up her mind and becomes estranged from everyone. You'll see it in the next lines, where her hallmates debate the correctness of her inaction."

It was important to me to get it at least halfway right. When Dlagan's ship left—in fewer days than I wanted to think of—the language would be for us humans as good as dead. We could not even count on uncovering texts hidden in the earth. Every fragment that I could extract would count.

Dlagan was busy too. I found out that night at what. When I agreed to the government's request to house an alien during their visit, I accepted the rules. One was: Do not disturb the alien in his work. I thought Dlagan was a general observer, and the

remarks he made at the bar later that night confirmed that. Anyway he taped and typed and drew with a light pen on the portable console he had brought with him. The drawings reminded me of the sketches you see for blocking stage plays, or strategies for a down in football. Once I had become familiar with the syllabary, Dlagan let me use his typer for copying out texts and making commentaries. Even after several hours, I still felt a little awkward using the alien machine.

We worked hard for a few hours, and then broke to watch the sunset from the back porch. Dlagan was fascinated with sunrises and sunsets, and was astonished that we had no ritual based on them. "It would be for us like not celebrating midpoint on a starhop, when the ship changes configuration and we have to live for a while in free fall. But a sunset is not only important but . . . beautiful."

"It's a mystery to me too. We humans tend not to worship natural things, at least not lately. Come on," I said, cuffing him lightly on the chin. "I'm hungry and thirsty. Let's go down to Karla's and see what she has for supper."

We walked down the steep road that led from the houses on the mountain-top to the shops in the valley below. People pretended that the air was warmer than it was, and sat out on their porches to stare at "the greenie and the perfessor," but I couldn't really blame them. They were curious rather than hostile—you could tell by the nods and greetings from the rockers as we made our way down the mountainside. At the base of the street, across from the Baptist Church, the marquee of the movie theater announced *The Andromeda Connection*. We laughed as we made our way into the tavern, and if we had had more days in front of us, we would have gone to see it.

It was late enough when we got to Karla's bar that the after-work beers and early dinners had already been served, and early enough that the serious drinkers had not yet arrived. The Sweet Spring Bar and Grill was built over a spring of cold mineral water, and it was the only bar I knew where they offered you water before they put a beer in your hand.

Karla looked up from where she was writing tomorrow's menus, flipped her long hair over her shoulder, and came to the door where we were letting our eyes adjust to the soft lighting. She kissed me on the cheeks, just below the eyes, and pinched Dlagan on the rear. "I hope you're not too hungry," she said. "We're already out of the special." She began mixing my martini without asking. Dlagan pointed to the Wild Turkey, and

she set him down a shot glass of bourbon and a tumbler of water. Karla drew a very small beer, and we toasted each other. Apparently Dlagan had never done that before, or he was feeling very relaxed, for he brought out his portable recorder and made a few remarks into it. Karla put her hand on his wrist when he was finished.

"Who and what are you, Dlagan, that we know you so little and love you so much?"

Dlagan smiled and threw the question off: "Why, Ah'm jist a lonely stranger, Ma'am, passin' through town. Karla, Phil and I have a real case of the hungries. What can you do us for?"

Karla smiled with her lips and frowned with her eyes. "I've got some real nice T-bones. And the trout is fresh."

"Make mine trout," I said. "French fries and Eyetalian on the salad."

"I'll have the trout too," Dlagan said, "and make mine—"

"I know," Karla said. "Raw. No fries and a double salad with lemon and olive oil. You're a real gourmet, Dlagan."

We drank our drinks and wolfed our dinners and dawdled, as they say, over coffee. The waitresses came on for the late crowd, and Karla joined us at the table. Pretty soon several of the regulars were there too, and Dlagan, without working at it, was the center of attention. The group was warm and hearty and maybe a little shy and no one played the juke box. Everyone, including my alien, bought at least one round. They couldn't produce a voiced lateral affricate, of course, so they called him Mr. D.

"Hey, Mr. D.! Did you hear the one about the astronaut who got it caught in the airlock?" And of course he had, and so he hadn't, and he laughed when it was time.

"Hey, Mr. D.! How do you like earthside nooky? Have you had any yet?" And suddenly Karla was busy arranging the liqueurs on the backbar, and Dlagan claimed that he couldn't make it fit.

"Hey, Mr. D.! Is there a Mrs. D.? What do you do for fun up in that there ship?" And Dlagan told them, amid low whistles and a couple of long, drawn-out *no shit*'s. And Dlagan asked them to tell him *exactly* what they did and with what and to whom and for how many times, and the replies were so outlandish that the whole table burst into red-faced laughter and ordered another round. Karla came over to where I sat quietly in the group.

"Is anything wrong, Phil?" she asked, running her hand through my hair.

I caught her hand and brought it around and kissed the palm. "I was just thinking," I said, low enough so only she could hear, "that he can do this better than I can. I couldn't sit in a bar and talk it up like that. And he isn't even human," I smiled up at her. "I'm just a little tired, is all."

Karla called closing time and shooed a couple of pool-playing teenagers out of the bar. She drew the blinds and invited us to stay behind. She started counting the till and a couple of the regulars stocked the beer for her. The rest of us got into a hearts game. "What do you do, Mr. D.?" said someone, as the cards were shuffled and dealt. Karla looked up sharply from her counting. "Are you an anthropologist?" He had practiced the word.

Everyone passed three cards to the left. "Not exactly," said Dlagan. "But it's something like that. I don't just go out and observe and record." Silence and raised eyebrows at the table.

"You mean you're recording us?" asked a truck driver. "Right now"

"No," Dlagan said, and paused. "But sometimes I do. A little." I hoped the recorder was out of sight.

Someone's chair tilted forward. "I'm not too wild about that," he said.

"Well, shit," Dlagan said, picking up his cards. "It's part of my job. I don't see what harm it does. Who's got the deuce of clubs?"

Someone threw out the deuce and looked Dlagan straight in the eye. "He's an actor, that's what he is. He comes in and tries to act like one of us and when he's done it well enough to pass, he's done his job."

Dlagan put his cards down and stared back. "That's part of the job too. Not just to learn about the local culture, but to get into it far enough that I can exhibit it on board ship." Karla was signalling: straighten this out or end it. I tried to think of a way.

"So you get to know us," the truck driver said. "Real well, playin' cards and all. And we don't get to know you, the real you, the you that flies between all them stars, the least little damn bit."

"Hey," I said. "Dlagan's just a tourist. From a long way away, maybe, but a tourist anyhow. Take it easy; he doesn't know all the ropes."

"Fine," said the truck driver, backing off. "But I don't play with tourists." He threw down his cards and headed out the door. The rest of the regulars followed him, looking sheepish and mumbling goodbyes to Karla. She tossed her hair back and handed me the keys to the bar.

"Finish up for me, will you, Phil? I want to take Dlagan for a ride on the bike."

I nodded. Dlagan was still sitting at the table pretending to be busy with the recorder. I went over to him and put my hand on his bald head, at the side of the drooping crest. He turned his head back and looked up at me. "I ruined it, Phil," he said. "I almost had it done, and I blew it." I looked at him and wondered if he had.

"Go get some air," I said. "I'll see you tomorrow." Karla pulled the extra helmet from behind the bar and steered Dlagan out the back. I locked the doors and ran hot water for the glasses and pitchers.

I heard the bike rumble from the shed and move off down the twisting, sloping main street. I wanted to be riding with them, and I was angry that they wanted to be alone. I polished the last glass, let myself out and trudged back up the chilly, silent hill.

I was even angrier as I let myself into the house. Karla's machine stood flecked with moonlight under the trees, and light seeped under the door to Dlagan's room. I went to the phone and called the Washington number that I had hoped I would never have to use. I stabbed at the dial but I was shaking so much that I had to do it twice.

I got an answer immediately, and told them in a quiet voice that Dlagan had aroused the citizenry and was in trouble. They asked for details and I gave them. They asked me to hold and I heard noises on the line that I had never heard before. I suppose it was Washington patching into the Ghleb. Finally a pleasant voice asked me to prepare Dlagan for a copter ride and reassignment in the morning. I put the phone back on the hook and stood in the darkness, waiting for nothing to happen.

"Phil?" It was Karla, moving toward me in the dark.

"Go to bed, Karla. It's a long day tomorrow."

"I heard." She put her hand on my shoulder; I yanked away. "I thought Dlagan needed to be alone with someone. I took him out into the country and tried to talk with him, but I didn't get very far. When I saw it wasn't going to work, I brought him on back into town. Come try to talk to him, Phil."

I wanted to, so I let her take my hand and lead me into the room I had avoided all the time he had been here. There was gadgetry about, but the room was much as it had been before.

Dlagan sat on a bed, his back to me. I sat down beside him. He stared at his feet.

"I have to leave tomorrow, don't I?"

"I guess you do."

He took my hand between his. His claws were sheathed. "I don't want to go yet," he said. "There's still so much to do, still so much that I don't know . . ." Karla stood in front of him, rubbing his brow.

"Is that all?" Karla asked. "Is that all you want, Mr. D.?"

"I know you so little," he said. "Oh, I know your surfaces. Not perfectly, but damn near. I can pass, in spite of tonight."

"I know you can," I said.

"But I don't know what lies beneath." Dlagan chewed on his lip, something I'd never seen him do before. We've spent a lot of time in this house together," he finally said, "just acting out parts in a play,"

"Me too?"

"You too, Phil," Karla said. "And me."

"Phil, Karla," the stocky alien said, raising his glistening purple eyes. "I want to know you. I have to know you." He put one arm around Karla's waist, and one around my back. I raised his face to mine and kissed his eyes, and Karla turned out the light.

The government copter woke us. No time for embraces, we scurried about the room, throwing on clothes, and gathering Dlagan's gear. By the time the doorbell rang, we looked bleary-eyed but presentable. We walked with Dlagan to the picket fence. He turned and shook our hands. "There wasn't enough time," he said.

Karla brushed imaginary lint from his tunic. "It's always like that," she said. "Either there's not enough time, or there's too much. Goodbye, Mr. D."

"Goodbye, Dlagan," I said. "Act us well on the ship."

"I'll try," he said. He pronounced our names one last time, almost to himself, and made twice, once to Karla, and once to me, that odd circling gesture with his hand, his head bowed low. I took Karla's hand, and we watched the copter lift.

"What was that?" Karla asked, as soon as the roar of the rotors had died away. "That funny business with his hands?"

"Respect, maybe. Or love. Or something vulgar," I said. "I don't know. I never will."

She straddled her bike. "Are you going to classes today?"

"I have to. It'll be another lousy performance." I stooped to pick up her helmet. "You going home now? You can sleep here if you want."

"Thanks. But I want a long shower and my own bed. Are you coming in to the bar tonight?"

"I don't know. I have a lot to think about. A lot of work I've let slip, too." She looked a little hurt. "Karla, it wasn't easy for me with him. But it's going to be difficult without him."

"I know, Phil," she said. "Tomorrow then. Or the next day." She stabbed the machine to life with one quick thrust of her leg. I leaned over to hand her the helmet. And kissed her alien eyes.

***Pat Hodgell** (called PC, pronounced "peacy") is a graduate student in English at the University of Minnesota. She has a green belt in judo, and a kyu blue in aikido, and she does art as a hobby. There are a number of* Jame *stories in various stages of completion, and eventually there will be a novel. I feel certain that after reading this, her first story, many people will look forward to the novel with eagerness.*

A Matter of Honor

P. C. Hodgell

It was sunset in the free city of Tai-tastigon. To the west, fire rimmed the Ebonbane Mountains, streaking their summits with veins of snow-kindled crimson. Far below, the last light was climbing the towers of the city's thousand temples. Shadows flowed into the labyrinthian streets.

In the southeast quarter the merchants were closing their shops. Strongroom doors swung shut, traps were set, guards emerged from the dusk to take their posts. Darkness settled there bit by bit, but to the north torches flared as the thieves' bazaar began its nightly trade. Those favored by the Master of the Brotherhood had set up their stalls within the protection of his great courtyard offering cream furs and emeralds, jacinth and blood velvet. Others, less fortunate, established themselves in nearby passageways, as wary now of the street merchants gathering up their wares for the night as the latter had been of them earlier. Meanwhile, everywhere the temples had begun to speak. Night came as always to Tai-tastigon with the murmur of chants and hawkers' cries, bells and barter.

This night, from somewhere in the maze of passages near the

eastern gate, a sudden howl sliced through the twilight hum of the city.

"Ai, Baio-caina, Baio-caina, ai!"

The merchants on Half Moon Street who had not yet taken down their stalls paused, listening. Then they hurriedly gathered up all they could carry and ran.

Two figures rushed down the street. They were women, hardly, in fact, more than girls. Each held something out before her as though to keep it as far from her body as possible, something long, red, and dripping. Wailing, they raced on toward the Judgment Square where all roads met.

A low roar followed in their wake: many feet, many voices. Preceded by torches, a black mass surged. In another second, the tide of bodies swept Half Moon Street, crushing the abandoned stalls under foot. There were hundreds, thousands of them, young, beautiful, terrible. They ran hand in hand in five long chains.

The Talisman Jamethiel stopped at the mouth of the narrow lane, biting her lip in exasperation. In the excitement of her own chase, she had forgotten about the festival of the goddess Baio-caina. She had forgotten that certain roads would be inaccessible because of it. It was inexcusable for an apprentice of the Brotherhood, much less for a Kencyr. If they caught her here, by the third face of God, she deserved it.

The celebrants had seen her. They were calling to her.

"Talisman, Talisman! Join us! Dance with us!"

Jame glanced quickly over her shoulder. Two large forms had appeared at the other end of the alley. She jerked her cap down over her ears, took a deep breath, and plunged forward into the rushing mass. Hands closed eagerly on her hands. She was swept away. Baffled, the two guardsmen stopped just short of the spot where the girl had stood a moment before.

The celebrants moved swiftly, filling the street from side to side. As the way broadened, some hundred paces from the entrance to the central square, the five lines began to weave themselves into intricate patterns. Jame whirled with them. Despite precautions, her cap had been lost in the first few minutes and her long jet hair whipped in her eyes, half blinding her. She threw back her head, laughing out loud at the swift grace of the dance.

Then they were in the Judgment Square. Jame twisted free and slipped out of the crowd. A moment later she stood on the edge of the square. The celebrants were dancing around the Mercy

Block in the center of the area. So many flowers had been thrown on it that not a stone was visible. There was something sticking out near the top of the fragrant hill, something that looked at a distance like a large, dark red spider streaked with brown. It was a human hand, stripped of its skin. The rest of the body, as flayed as the single protruding member, was buried in white and amber blossoms. Up until the third hour of the afternoon it had still twitched at the touch of every fly. Not so now. The captured thief was at last dead.

Jame gave him and the worshippers a solemn salute, dodged two of the latter who wanted her to stay, broke the wrist of a third who was more persistent, and set off for home.

The inn where Jame lived and earned the honest part of her living as a senetha dancer was located on the north side of the Belching Kinka marketplace in the southwest quarter of the city. It was a popular place and did a roaring business from about the eleventh hour on, but this early in the evening it was usually deserted. It was a surprise, as she pushed open the heavy oak door, to see a wine goblet flying at her head. It was so much of a surprise that she almost forgot to duck.

"Whore . . . pervert . . . defiler of the one true temple! I saw you! I saw you dancing with them. I saw you honor that . . . that . . ."

The tirade turned into a sputter, and the sputter into a scream of rage as a Gorgo high priest rushed at her in a storm of whipping gray and silver fabric, brandishing a pudgy fist and continuing to shriek. Jame stared at him. The sheer ineptitude of the attack filled her with something very like awe. It would be almost a desecration not to let it fall apart of its own accord, she thought, but then, as the would-be assassin rushed toward her, she found herself instinctively slipping under the wild swing. The edge of her foot clipped the priest's left ankle, caught the right as it swung forward, and then, as the little man's momentum shot him forward over the threshold, swept up both sharply in a fine, high kick. It was a perfect demonstration of a senetha dance step altered into a movement of the lethal senethara fight form of the Kencyrath.

Jubain the innkeeper was waddling toward her across the room, wiping sausage fingers on his apron as he came.

"I don't think the honorable Loogan likes me very much," she said, closing the door. "Never play a joke on a priest. They have no sense of humor and they never forget."

"Priests," said Jubain with a fine rumble of contempt, "are

not what you would call normal people. You should know that after all your trouble with M'lord Ishtier. Were you down in the square worshipping the goddess?''

''I was there,'' said Jame, making a face, ''but hardly worshipping. It was a choice between dancing with the Baio-cainites and being taken and probably raped by the guards. They must have known that Marc has been hurt.''

''Otherwise he would have been there to take them apart piece by piece, eh? They'll have their turn when his head heals, I'm sure. But Baio-caina . . . for a moment I thought you'd finally seen reason and given up the Three-Faced God. How you Kencyrs ever came to settle on such a grim master is beyond me.''

''We didn't settle on him,'' said Jame sourly. ''He settled on us. You have no idea what a curse it is to be a member of a chosen race. But I had better go see if Marc is all right.''

''Remember,'' he bellowed after her as she started up the stairs, ''you dance at midnight. You gave your word . . . and try *eating* something once in a while. No one's going to pay to see a skin full of bones, even if it *is* the only senetha dancer in town.''

Jame stopped short on the steps. With the air of a street magician, she produced two overripe peaches from the wallet that hung with her belt.

Jubain broke into a roar of laughter. ''The best apprentice thief in the Brotherhood, and she uses her talents to steal half rotten fruit! What would the Master say to that?''

Jame smiled sweetly and pulled out a small leather bag. The innkeeper stared, slapped at his apron, and began to swear.

''He would probably say that practice perfects,'' said the Talisman, and tossed the bag of coins down to its owner.

Jubain knew his Kencyrs too well by half, Jame thought wryly as she bounded up the stairs two at a time. He knew it was safe to keep a thief child in his house because any Kencyr would rather lose a hand than break the laws of hospitality, and his life outright rather than break his sworn word. It was all a matter of honor, and honor, along with a fierce loyalty to each other, and a resentful but unquestioning belief in the god of the three faces, was an obsession among the people of the Kencyrath.

Jame shared their preoccupation with this concept of honor and the code called the Law that embodied it, but for reasons of her own. With neither strength nor friends to rely on, her survival in a violent world had always depended on wits, the same unquenchable desire to learn anything and everything that had led to her apprenticeship in the Brotherhood, and a moral

flexibility that most of her kinsmen seemed to lack. She suspected that the latter was due to tainted blood. Her mother, after all, had been a priestess, and every Kencyr knew that prolonged contact with the Three-Faced God resulted in a certain contamination of mind and body. All her life Jame had fought the darkness in her, the sense of power and damnation moving together under the surface of her mind. Her loyalty to the letter of the Law, if not to its spirit, was her one grip on the normal world of the Kencyrath as she understood it. If the day ever came when she found she could lie under oath, do injury to a kinsman, or break her word, for any reason whatsoever, she would know that she was lost.

All such thoughts faded as the girl emerged on the fourth floor. It wasn't much more than a loft, with many apertures of varying sizes and the promise on this autumn night of many cold nights to come. Beneath the irregular line of windows that overlooked the market place, Marc a Agonoth lay face up on his pallet, snoring loudly. The big Kencyr was still in his guard's uniform except for the boot that Jame had hauled off the evening before, only to find she couldn't budge the other one. Beyond that, the only unusual thing about his appearance was the bandage wrapped around his temples. It hardly seemed enough to justify the fact that for a night and a day he had been lying as motionlessly as a corpse, although not as soundlessly. It had been his boast, when he came staggering home with his broken head, that he could sleep off anything short of total decapitation. Now he was proving it.

As she checked her friend's condition, Jame wondered what he would think if he ever found out what she had caused to happen to the man who had injured him. At the time it had seemed in keeping with the best traditions of the Kencyrath, but now she suspected that she had overdone it a bit.

Satisfied at last that all was well, she stood up. Her reflection rose to meet her on the polished surface of the buckler that hung from the support between the windows. She regarded it with raised eyebrows. Eyes too big, cheekbones too high, lips too thin. Jubain, damn him, was right: she looked like a winter famine colt. Jame grimaced at the mirrored features and turned her back on them.

That was when she saw it. Lying on her own pallet was a small folded square of parchment. Jame crossed the room and picked it up. She frowned when she turned it over and saw the emblem stamped on it in black wax. She broke it open and read. The

frown deepened. The girl stood there for a long moment with the paper in her hands, biting her lip. Then she turned back to the sleeping guardsman.

She crouched beside him and shook his shoulder. The snoring continued without a break. Another harder shake and a light cuff were equally ineffective. Then she braced herself and began to pummel him on the chest, gently at first and then with force. The sleeper muttered and made a vague sweeping gesture with one hand as though to brush away an annoying insect.

The girl sat back on her heels, massaging her knuckles, and regarded him thoughtfully. Of course, it was to be expected. The first impulse of any wounded Kencyr was to sleep and sleep deeply. It could easily be another two days before he woke of his own accord. Was it worthwhile to keep trying? Under the circumstances, probably not, but Marc would be more upset later if she didn't try than if she succeeded.

Accordingly, Jame stood up, unhooked the buckler, and swung it with all her strength against the stone support. The resulting crash might not have been sufficient to wake the dead, but Marc, after all, was only asleep. His eyelids peeled back slowly.

"Huh? Whazzamatter?" he said.

Jame knelt beside him and took his gray head in her hands.

"Marc, listen a minute. I've been summoned to the temple by Prince Ishtier, Trinity only knows why. If I'm not back by the time you wake up again, I suppose you'll have to come after me. Do you understand?"

"Issshtier . . . ?" Marc struggled up on one elbow. "You can't do that . . . he hates you."

"That's no distinction. He hates everyone. Now go back to sleep."

Marc gave his head a fierce shake as though to clear it, and immediately began to swear, one hand groping for the bandage. "God's claws," he muttered. "When I get my hands on the lad with the club . . ."

"No need to worry about him now," said Jame, suddenly expressionless. "He . . . uh . . . had an accident early this morning. His grapnel line snapped as he was climbing out of Merchant Dazda's compound with a few borrowed gems. Your brother guards caught him. Now he, or at least what's left of him, is in the Judgment Square on the Mercy Block. Put down that boot. You aren't fit to do anything but sleep."

"Ha!" said Marc with a cheerful but somewhat blurry grin,

climbing unsteadily to his feet and stomping to force his foot down into the heel of the boot. "You've raised the beast right and proper, and now you'll have to put up with him. I'm going with you."

Jame swore luridly under her breath. Of course he would say that. For the first time in her life she had a genuine protector even if, at the ripe middle age of eighty-three, he was old enough to be her great grandfather, and she was worse at coping with him than with her bitterest enemy. With a sigh, she helped the guardsman find and buckle on his old cross-hilted broadsword.

They went by way of the twisting streets that linked the southwest quarter of Tai-tastigon with the south. The passage-ways were full of life that night. Hawkers cried their wares. Merchants' sons strutted their finery. Men with bold quick eyes slipped through the crowd. They passed the end of the incense sellers' street where clouds of myrrh, lavender and allentine waged war in the air and made the torches burn blue. Jame wrinkled her nose at the confusion of odors and jerked the trailing hem of her cloak out from under the hooves of a cart horse. Twice already someone had nearly stepped on it. It was of the sort favored by most thieves, voluminous and loosely fastened at the throat to tear off easily in the hands of a pursuer, but this particular garment was a hand-me-down from a much larger colleague. Jame swore to herself again to take up the hem as soon as she could, and promptly forgot all about it as a troupe of ophiolaters rushed past carrying the longest, limpest snake she had ever seen.

All activity and noise died away behind them as they neared their destination. The streets were completely deserted by the time the two reached the area of the temple. All was darkness and silence and slow decay there. No one asked what had happened to the buildings that lay in the shadow of the god of the Kencyrath; no one wanted to know the answer.

Jame and Marc paused on the steps. Above them, the front of the temple stretched up to the black sky as smooth and white as living bone. They crossed the threshold side by side, with Marc's great paw of a hand on Jame's shoulder.

Inside, there were floors of onyx, ivory walls, and the red, fitful winking of many torches. For Jame there was also the slow, suffocating pressure without and the growing core of darkness within that told her she was very near a source of the ancient power. The hereditary currents of her blood carried her to it unerringly through many stark rooms with Marc striding

behind her. When she stopped, it was done so suddenly that the man nearly ran her down. They had come to the central chamber, and the great black granite image of the Three-Faced God loomed over them, three shrouded shapes melted into one another. Two of the dark figures were turned away. The third faced the room. It was overlaid with plates of pale marble carved so thin that they almost resembled a veil. The face and all the body except for certain sinuous curves and one hand were concealed in the stone shroud. The hand reached out and upward through a fissure in the masonry as though beckoning. Each long scythe-curved finger was tipped in ivory, honed and gleaming. Jame felt her own abnormally long fingers curl into fists at her side.

The presence of the statue was so overpowering that it was a full minute before either Jame or Marc realized that Ishtier was standing in front of it, watching them with unblinking yellow eyes. He was dressed all in white in honor of the image that towered above him, white for Regonereth, the most feared of the god's three aspects, white for That-Which-Destroys. His figure seemed sunken into the hieratic robes and the face in the shadow of the cowl was almost as fleshless as a skull's. Toward the end of most Kencyrs' lives, at some age between one hundred forty and one hundred fifty-five, it was natural for them to go into the sudden physical and mental decline that preceded death. Although Ishtier's body had been slowly collapsing in on itself longer than anyone could remember, his mind had never once been known to falter in its subtlety. Long contact with the god had been known to have even stranger effects than this.

"You wished to see me, My Lord?" said Jame.

"You, yes. Not him," he said brusquely. A curious humming murmur seemed to fill up the spaces between his words.

The strange noise made Jame frown, but she had no time to consider it. At that point Marc, despite a commendably brisk start half an hour before, suddenly began to sway. Jame slipped an arm around his waist to hold him steady and punched him in the ribs to forestall a rising snore.

"Pardon, My Lord," she said to Ishtier, getting her shoulder under Marc's armpit and heaving him upright. "We come as a set. If you try to put him out now, I shall tip him over on you."

Ishtier regarded the swaying giant sourly for a moment. Then, abruptly, something flickered through his expression. It was gone too quickly to be recognized. When his eyes turned back to

Jame, they were as hard and unreadable as before.

"I have an assignment for you, thief," he said coldly.

Jame stared at him. "You want something stolen? For six months you do your best to make life impossible for me because I'm temporarily one of the Brotherhood, and now you want me to steal for you? Priest, you have a strange sense of humor."

"Hunzzaagg," said Marc.

"What?" snapped Ishtier.

"Never mind him," Jame said hastily. "He thinks he's awake. It's a common delusion."

"Humph!" the priest said. "Listen to me, wench. I said nothing of stealing. Look here." He stepped aside. There was a small altar behind him, with a fine silver chain lying shattered upon it. Jame caught her breath. "You see?" said that strange humming voice. "The Scroll of the Law is gone. Stolen. In this temple, until it is returned, only I the priest stand between the people of the Kencyrath and their god, all dread be to him. I want you to retrieve it."

Jame struggled with an answer. The murmur was no longer only in her ears but in her mind as well. It had slipped between her thoughts, deadening as heavy folds of cloth. The air of the room had suddenly become too thick to breathe. There was nothing before her but the monstrous image of Regonereth. The ivory tipped fingers were reaching out. . . .

Then Jame realized what was happening. She threw back her head and shouted with all the breath that was in her. Beside her, she felt Marc jerk awake and heard his startled snort, but her eyes were locked on Ishtier. At last she knew why the priest had been attacking her so long and so viciously over the past months. He had seen the darkness in her. He had suspected that she was closer to his god by right of blood than he could ever be. The test had come and gone before she was aware of it, and she had betrayed herself by breaking free from his will. The face that flared back at her was contorted with hatred and jealousy. Now it would be war between them to the end, for he would never again let her live in peace.

But there was something else at stake now, she remembered, still struggling with the fading wisps of mind mist. It was neither priest nor god that she was being asked to serve, but the Law. If she refused, the one link that she had chosen to acknowledge with her people would be broken. An abyss had opened; if she turned her back on that empty altar, it would be beneath her feet.

There was only one way to go.

"Where is the scroll?" she asked in a low voice. "Do you know?"

"I know. It has been taken to the temple of Gorgo. Promise before our god that you will bring me the scroll that lies in the arms of the false image there. Your word on it, thief!"

"Priest," said Jame grimly, "death break me, darkness take me, the scroll will be in your hands within three hours. My word on it."

"What in the three worlds," said Marc as they left the temple, "was all of that shouting about?"

"He tried to whisper the power down on me," Jame said with a gesture of contempt, although she still felt rather shaken. "The old fool. If much more of it had come, he might have whispered the building down on us all. But you had better go home now. This next bit of work calls for my talents, such as they are, not yours."

Marc only snorted.

The one-sided argument continued street after street, past the subtle fire of the opal market, the crystal temple of Jacarth, and the Judgment Square, which Jame was careful to skirt by several blocks. Several times the girl considered slipping away. Even with his wits fully about him, Marc could never have caught her in the alleys and on the rooftops. But he knew where she was going. It would only mean that he was likely to come shambling in at some awkward moment, if he didn't fall asleep in some doorway first, and Tai-tastigon at night was no place for an unconscious man. It wasn't until they were crouching in the shadows outside the silver-streaked temple of Gorgo the Lugubrious God that she finally accepted the inevitable.

The sound of ritual mourning was rolling out of the wide gate and down the steps to them. Marc stared up at the bright entrance and the stream of celebrants passing through it. His eyes had a suspiciously unfocused look to them.

"How do we get in?" he asked.

Jame took a deep breath. "The most obvious way," she said. "Put your hood over your head like a proper worshipper, and try to wail a bit."

They went up the steps together and joined the crowd within. All were gathered in the outer chamber, waiting for the evening-ceremony to begin and working themselves into the approved tearful state. There were seven tall pillars spaced around the edge of the room. Loogan was perched precariously on top of the

one nearest the door to the inner chamber with his long silver gray robe flowing down to the floor on all sides of it. From below, one might have supposed him either to be a very tall man with a very small head or a street performer on stilts. The combination of his loud, simulated grief and the wild circling of his arms every few minutes to maintain balance added a good deal to the liveliness of the assembly.

The young thief began to edge her way across the packed floor. Behind her, she could hear a sound vaguely like the hoarse bellowing of a love-starved bull. Marc, who had never wept out loud in his life, was valiantly doing something profoundly foolish. There was an apprehension growing in the back of her mind that refused to take on a definite shape. Something about the expression on Ishtier's face . . .

A sudden pain in her hands brought her back to the present with a start. She had been holding her fists so tightly clenched at her side that the sharp nails had actually broken the skin. It was then that she realized she was not holding up her cloak. She made a quick grab for it a second too late. Marc's foot came down on the trailing hem. The clasp at the throat immediately let go, as it had been designed to do, and the whole garment fluttered down out of sight even as she twisted around to catch it.

From his high perch, Loogan gave a shrill yelp.

"The blasphemer, the Baio-cainite!" he screamed, pointing down at the slender, hated figure. "Take her, take her! A sacrifice, a sacrifice for the great Gorgo!"

Panic caught Jame by the throat. Scores of faces were turning toward her, contorted in rage, scores of hands were reaching out. The mass of humanity in the room rose about her like the crest of a tidal wave. The nightmare quality of the scene froze her where she stood.

"Sweet Trinity," she heard Marc say under his breath in a tone of self-disgust, and then she flinched as the full throated war cry of the Kencyrath boomed out almost in her ear. The human wave froze. Up on his pedestal, Loogan did a passable imitation of an unbalanced statue. At that moment the inner chamber door opened and another priest, startled by the sudden roar, peered out. Marc reached past Jame with a muttered "Excuse me," caught the man by the front of his robe, and threw him over his shoulder as easily as if he were a three-day-old pup. Instantly the room was bedlam. Loogan pitched head first off the column with a squeal. Roaring, the crowd of worshippers rushed forward. Marc grabbed Jame by the collar and threw her into the inner

room. A stride carried him across the threshold after her. Pivoting, he slammed the door shut with his shoulder and dropped the bar into place across it.

"Well," said Jame, gingerly picking herself up off the floor, "here we are."

The inner sanctum of the temple was small but high-vaulted. The only thing in it, beside some long, heavy benches pushed back against the wall, was the stone image of Gorgo. The statue was of an obese, crouching man at least three times life size with unusually long legs; the bent knees rose a good two feet above the head. It had the most sorrow-stricken face imaginable. A steady stream of water tickled out of tiny holes in the corners of its green glass eyes. Its huge hands, cupped together to receive burnt offerings, stretched out between the towering shins. There was a long roll of parchment balanced across them over a bed of old ashes.

"Ah ha," said Jame. "There it is . . . or is it?" She stepped forward quickly, a frown growing on her face. Something about the length, the color of the paper . . .

"Marc, see if you can find another door. I think something is very wrong here."

While the big guardsman began a slow circuit of the room, Jame took the scroll out of the stone hands and carefully unrolled it. She examined it, then gave a low whistle.

"Marc, come and see this."

There was a scraping sound and a muffled grunt from behind the statue.

"What *are* you doing?"

"There's some sort of a lever back here. Maybe it controls a secret exit. I think I can . . ."

There was a crack, a deep gurgle, and a second later Jame sprang back, barely in time to escape a dousing as the glass eyes of the idol flew out of their sockets, closely followed by two thick jets of water.

Marc emerged from the shadows, looking sheepish. He held out a metal bar in the broad palm of his hand. "It broke off," he said apologetically.

"Never mind that," said Jame. "Better to be drowned than sacrificed anyway. Just look at this." She held the scroll out to him. He stared at the swirl of brightly inked words on it, making an obvious effort to focus.

"That isn't the Law Scroll," he said.

"I'll say it isn't. Do you see that?" She pointed to a line of

runes drawn in magenta and gold. "A name: Eloi ac Arribar. This thing is the lost treatise on the bridging of the three worlds. Trinity knows how Loogan got his fat hands on it, or Ishtier ever found out that it was in Tai-tastigon."

"Is it important?" Marc asked, staring owlishly at the roll of paper.

"If the legends about it are true," said Jame grimly, "yes, very, and also very dangerous. Nine centuries ago the Kencyr scrollsmen on the border watches claimed that this bit of parchment held the secret to the destruction of the barriers between the worlds. If they were right and the barriers can be and are brought down, nothing, neither priest nor Law, will be left to stand between this cockleshell world and the three faces of god. It would be the ultimate disaster. Of course, the stories may be apocryphal, and perhaps Ishtier won't be able to read this—Trinity knows I'm not going to translate the parts I can make out for him—but it's too big a risk. I can't give it to him."

"It isn't the Law Scroll," said the guardsman, beginning to sway gently. "You don't have to give it to him."

"I swore to bring him the scroll in the arms of the idol," Jame said unhappily. "My word binds me."

Marc shook himself fiercely. "Aaaugh! But listen: if you take it now, lass, it will be stealing, not retrieving, and my word as a guardsman will bind *me* to turn you over to the merchants . . ."

". . . who will be delighted to see me in the central square minus my skin, and probably without even the benefit of the flowers. Oh, what a mousetrap this is! I thought Ishtier was plotting something, but his confounded whispering had me too confused to guess what it was. I never dreamed it would be anything so magnificent. Look you: if I take him the scroll, I may be opening the way to an incredible disaster; if I'm killed, he at least will have the satisfaction of my death; if I refuse, I'll be breaking my word and he will declare me a renegade, which would be a good deal worse than being dead. With you here, I get flayed alive if I do the former, and he has a Kencyc witness if I go the latter way. No wonder he decided to let you come with me. I could love that man for his subtlety . . . if only we weren't the ones caught by the tail."

At that moment, three things happened more or less simultaneously: the whole face of the image gave way, releasing a torrent of water into the already half-flooded room; the bar across the door began to splinter under repeated heavy blows

from the outside; and Marc suddenly fell asleep standing up.

Jame looked around the room with raised eyebrows, and then back at the scroll in her hands. One complication would have been manageable, two a calamity, three ridiculous, but four? It would be an excellent time, she thought, to burn the manuscript and drown herself, but then there was Marc, who didn't deserve to die alone, much less asleep on his feet. Almost with a feeling of regret, she reached over and tapped the swaying giant on his chest.

"You'd better see to the door," she said. "I think we're about to have company."

"Zaugh . . . oh!" said Marc, blinking at her. He turned and waded through the water which now reached almost to his waist over to the opposite wall. While Jame took refuge on top of one of the statue's kneecaps, the guardsman began to wedge benches in front of the rapidly weakening door, handling their weighty bulk easily. As he was lifting the last one into position, he suddenly swore out loud and dropped it, creating a miniature tidal wave.

"Lass!" he bellowed over the roar of the water, splashing back across the room toward her. "I've got it! You can't steal the scroll, but I can!"

Jame saw his hand sweeping up at her out of the corner of her eye. She had been studying the manuscript intently and had only half heard him. Instinctively, she twisted away from what, from anyone but Marc, would have been a threatening gesture. The stone beneath her was slick with spray. The suddenness of her movement threw her sideways off her perch with a sharp cry into the surging water.

Marc fished her out and set her sputtering back on her feet. She swept a streaming lock of hair out of her eyes, gave herself a shake, and then stopped short with a gasp. Her eyes turned to him, enormous in her thin face.

"D . . . did you just say what I think you just said?"

The big guardsman shifted his weight uncomfortably, giving the impression that he would have liked to shuffle his feet if only there hadn't been so much water on them. "I wouldn't be stealing from a Kencyr, you know," he said in a half-pleading voice. "It wouldn't be breaking the Law, just . . . uh . . . bending it a little."

Jame's stunned gaze dropped to the soggy piece of parchment in her hand. She caught her breath, and then threw back her head with a sudden shout of laughter.

Marc stared at her.

She held the scroll out to him. Bright streaks of color spiraled across it into a muddy lower margin. Not a letter remained legible. "By Trinity, M'lord Ishtier may be subtle, but he's not omniscient. This is one solution he could never have foreseen. Here, take the thing! Only this once, I'll let you steal for me. Now in all the gods' names, let's get out of here."

"Uh, lass . . . how? There's only one door and no windows at all."

"Oh, use your head," said Jame, regaining her slippery perch on the stone kneecap with a spring like a young cat's. "Where there's fire," she pointed to the wet ashes in the cupped hands, "there's usually smoke. Where there's smoke, there had better be some sort of ventilation." Her finger traced a line from the offering bowl to the ceiling far above. "There. Do you see it? A hole, not very big, but large enough, I think." She began to pull small pieces of metal out of her belt and to fit them into a spidery form. "I thought we'd find at least that much of an exit before we walked into this place, but damned if I thought we'd have to use it." The grapnel complete, she unwrapped a line from around her slim waist and snapped it on. "Of course, we could wait for the room to flood completely, but you look ready to capsize as it is." On the third try, the hook shot straight up through the dark hole and caught firmly on something outside on the roof.

Jame threw the end of the line to Marc. "You go first, and try to stay awake at least until you get to the top. Remember, if you slip, I can only pick up the pieces."

Either contact with her had corrupted him, she thought as she struggled to anchor the line, up to her shoulders in water and half choked with the spray, or perhaps Kencyrs weren't quite what she had thought, and she wasn't so hopelessly tainted after all. At that moment something hard and cold began to dissolve inside her. She found herself singing out loud above the voice of the water as she followed her friend up the rope. By far the smallest part of her exuberance was due to the fact that she had not been obliged to commit suicide after all.

Marc, by some miracle, did not fall asleep half way up the line, nor as Jame guided him across the uneven roof tops of the city, nor even on the threshold of the temple of the Three Faced God, though when the high priest snatched the limp scroll out of his hand, he very nearly pitched head first after it. Jame led him out reeling.

As they passed out under the dark entry arch, they heard from

the heart of the temple a high wail scarcely human in its disappointment and rage.

"That," said Jame, "is the best thing I've heard all evening."

They staggered home arm in arm through the festival crowds of night, both singing at the top of their lungs and both very much off key.

At the stroke of midnight, as Marc a Agonoth lay on his pallet snoring happily and the temples of Tai-tastigon heralded the new day with bells, chants, and laughter, the Talisman Jamethiel walked down the stairway with the traditional silver and black streamers of a senetha dancer flowing behind her, and the waiting crowd greeted her with a roar of welcome.

At his station across the room beside a huge keg of ale, Jubain beamed at her. Trust a Kencyr to always keep her word.

***Carter Scholz** has a bewildering array of talents: he is a fine artist, an accomplished musician, and a very good writer. This story was written when he was nineteen. Since Clarion he has sold a long story to Damon Knight for* Orbit, *and he is gradually devoting more time to writing than to the other arts. I expect we'll be seeing his name more and more often.*

Closed Circuit

Carter Scholz

Picture a man in a studio, performing before a camera. Now remove the man, remove the studio, remove the camera . . .

In the darkness, a flicker of light, blue, hard, fast. Far from the warm yellow of incandescence, past even the white of long fluorescent tubes: it was the blue of an electric fog, a distant aurora. Alive in a tube, in a matrix, where electron guns might sweep five hundred lines and thereby spark a phosphordot ghost of an image, thirty times a second.

Off, on; on, on, off; off, off, on, on; the dots lit, flickered, faded, were lit again. Every picture, every image—grim faces, blurred actions, choreographed nonsense, insipid smiling people with soap or cigarettes or something for sexual enrichment in a spray can—they were all just dots. Twenty thousand on the face of a screen could determine any picture, any series of pictures, simply by turning on or off, thirty times a second.

"Good evening, I'm Greg Conway, and this is the eleven o'clock news."

Heads, commercial, lead stories, commercial, regional,

local, commercial, sports, weather, kicker, out. His image went out to an estimated fifty million sets nightly.

"That's the way it is this Thursday night. I'm Greg Conway for Channel Eight, wishing you a pleasant good night."

Hold on the fine firm face for credits over, electronic theme music up and out. Fade to black.

In his office, Greg Conway snapped off his set.

"Well," he said, after staring awhile into the dark. "Well."

For the last half hour he had watched himself, live, broadcasting from a studio two doors down the hall. It had unnerved him.

Conway considered his feelings. He had wanted to jump up, run screaming down the hall into the studio, arrest that impostor, explain yourself, sir! Even knowing that the studio was empty, dark, the image was so convincing it sent coldness across the nape of his neck, the backs of his hands. He had never done the things he had just seen himself do.

He went down the hall to the studio now, at leisure, because he was in no hurry to go elsewhere. Bill Scott, the engineer, was there, shutting off equipment.

"Hey, Greg. Saw you on the news. Looked real good."

"Yeah. So did Charlie." The weatherman. Now on a fishing vacation some hundred miles away. "First time in weeks he hasn't dropped his pointer." They both laughed, and then went silent.

"You, ah . . . you're out of a job now, huh?"

Conway rubbed his nose. "Well, yeah. But I'm not complaining. They gave me my severence pay, and legally I'm still on the air, collecting residuals. It'll be enough to live on for a while."

Scott nodded. "Yeah. Not a bad deal." He tapped a few more switches, patted the machine, and stepped out of the double glassed room, locking it behind him. Conway gazed around the studio outside that room.

"Empty already," he breathed.

"Yeah. Everything gone. Sold for surplus. Cameras, booms, mikes, even your news desk. Everything. Somebody thought they were getting a bargain." Scott laughed. "If only they knew."

"They're anxious to get their investment back, I guess."

"Don't I know it. And they will. Hell, ten years ago that box would have filled this whole building. Now, microcircuits, large scale integration, bing, bang, boom, a complete video synthesizer in a breadbox."

Conway nodded. The box, the little box that would put so many people out of work.

He looked around the room. "You know, we had some fine times here."

Picture a man in a studio, performing before a camera. Now remove the man, remove the studio, remove the camera. And let the image remain. Let the image remain.

Technically it was a matrix-switching box where twenty thousand devices could be simultaneously and/or sequentially switched on and off according to a preprogrammed pattern, thirty times a second. It could generate television pictures.

They had his voiceprint and photograph electronically recorded. Mannerisms, the way the jaw muscles moved on certain words, the twitch of eyebrows, all were coded in strict mathematical on/off terms on a tape connected to the box. The news copy for the day would be typed in (including colloquialisms and a few bloopers for verisimilitude), the program timed, and, at the flick of a switch, newsman Greg Conway would be there, all twenty thousand dots of him, his actions and lip movements precisely synced with his words. Every thirtieth of a second, the box would prepare a new image, break it into dots, and sweep the screen again.

It was unlikely that anyone out there knew that tonight, for the first time, Greg Conway and his trained voice had come from inside a series of transistors, capacitors, and silicon chips.

One programmer could produce not just a newscast, but complete dramas. Sets, characters, all programmed by a single man. Castles, cities, exploding galaxies, any combination of lights and darks, ons and offs, were possible. Is your leading lady too short? Turn this knob and watch her grow. Your star's nose is too large? Program it smaller. Would you like Richard Burton with Orson Welles's voice and Kirk Douglas's physique? Nothing easier.

The Screen Actors Guild was up in arms.

Conway smiled, black humor. The American Federation of Radio and Television Actors had folded immediately; no one yet knew why. It reeked of scandal. The members had all gone to Equity, pleading for aid, legal succor against the machine; all, that is, but Greg Conway and his peers, the newscasters. The ones with no thespic talents, no reason or rationale for entering the Guild. They either quit the networks in sympathy, or, like

Greg, agreed to be retired with pensions, after recording their facial and vocal characteristics. Every time they were used on the air they collected residuals. Terms of contract. That had suited Greg Conway just fine, then.

But tonight, faced with the reality and the empty studio, he found it strangely disturbing to think that, inside that metal box, another Greg Conway lived.

Bill Scott smoked a cigarette in the dark. "How did it feel, Greg?"

"Hm?"

"Watching yourself. Knowing it wasn't you at all."

Conway shook his head. "Scared the living hell out of me."

Picture his wife. Slumped in the sofa, colorless in the blizzard of static wiping the face of the unwatched set.

He leaned and kissed her softly, so as not to wake her. As he passed the set, to turn it off, he saw their Neilsen box glowing, ticking, quietly recording, filling Mindy's role as she slept. It was one of a million now; and the networks' eventual goal was to have one on every set, a surrogate for every viewer. He looked again at his wife. She sighed, an echo of the gentle sound from the speaker. Poor Mindy, he thought. Even in sleep, linked to the fantasies, the phantasms, tied to the ghosts of the screen. Mindy and her vaginal sprays and plastic-flavored lipsticks and powders and creams and gels and lotions and salves and balms . . . Consumers, all of them, viewers, bodiless, limbless, sexless. How long since they'd made love? A week? Two? How had he ended up in this apartment, with this woman? It wasn't something he could explain. Best not to think about it. Tired, he allowed himself to be briefly hypnotized by the set's flow before slipping away to bed, alone. He left the set on.

Next morning was gray and cold. The wind out of the northwest died on some streets, damped by concrete, but on others it was funnelled, howling, past leaning pedestrians. It lifted skirts and snatched hats. Conway's eyes stung from the gale. For the first time in years he had not really listened to the weather report, and he was underdressed.

He went to the studio to finish cleaning out his office. There wasn't much to do there; but maybe the damned box would break and they'd need him for the news. Not likely. Still, if he stayed home, he would be certain to regret it. Mindy and he had been overly polite to each other the past week, and that was always a bad sign. It meant the words were more lubricant than meaning,

aimed at letting them move past each other with a minimum of friction. Today he could not take that strain, so he was out moving, working his limbs, grinning into the icy wind as it brought blood to his skin. Proving he was alive, at least for the moment.

Gusting into the network building, the air turned warm and sluggish and tried to follow him up the elevator into Bellamy's office, but died, hushed, in the pile carpets.

"Ah, Greg." Bellamy wrinkled his face. "How's it going?"

"Fine, just fine. I thought I'd check in one last time before leaving."

"Good, good. Have you found another job?"

"No . . . you know me, I'm a newscaster. I could get a job at a smaller studio or maybe a backwoods radio station, but I won't. I don't have it in me to go back to that. I think I'll just live off my pension for a while, and hope the residuals keep coming in." He smiled pleasantly.

"Well, tell me. What would you do if you *had* to work?"

"You mean to live?"

"Yes, to live, to pay the rent."

"Well," Conway squinted at the ceiling, trying to feel at ease. There were serrated woodgrain panels, set with fluorescent lights. "I don't know. Not an office job. Something freelance. Writing, maybe . . ."

Bellamy smiled. "Ah. There we are. Just the man I wanted to see. If you really want to stay in television, that's the way." He leaned forward, confidential. "The Equity case is about to break, you know. We've got 'em."

Conway widened his eyes. "How did that happen?"

"Our lawyers. Bright kids. 'Don't we pay actors scale for recording their voiceprints, your Honor? Don't they get residuals every time we use them? What are we doing wrong? Aren't we adhering to union terms? Look at these contracts.' " He imitated the bright young lawyers. "Equity's lost and they know it. So . . ." He thumbed through papers on his desk. ". . . we're going ahead with these projects. Got one that should be right up your alley. Been reading your classics, Greg?"

"Classics?"

Bellamy gave a firm nod. "Adaptations are where the money is." He shook the paper in his hand, read it. "Here's a précis on Hamlet. Shakespeare. Great writer. A little wordy, but we can cut around that. Keep the blood and thunder. And the ghost bit, where he talks to his father. Just terrific."

"That play's been done an awful lot . . ."

"Great! The voice of experience. That way we know it's a winner."

"Aren't you going to do any contemporary drama?" Greg thought of the synthesizer, of abstract dots, starships, exploding galaxies. "No. Stuff's too depressing. Just old material, good old classics. That's culture. We've got quite a lot to choose from, out of the past." He shoved the précis across his desk. "Of course, there are certain things we can't do—I've got some guidelines here—just because this is a commercial medium. Can't step on any toes. Remember the Supreme Court decision of '73? If we try any sex we get blanked from Sacramento to Seattle. I understand there's a lot of that in Shakespeare—double entendres, sexual innuendoes. I'll count on you to edit that out. You studied Shakespeare in school, didn't you?"

Conway stared in blank disbelief. "Now wait. Wait just a minute. I'm not going to . . . to castrate Shakespeare . . ."

"God damn, boy, we're not castigating him, we're adapting him!"

Greg studied the ceiling. "All the money's in adaptation," he mumbled.

Bellamy clapped his shoulder. "That's the boy! Here, just look this over and see what you can do, okay? You do a good job here, and we'll see if we can't get your face onto one of the leading characters, you know what I mean?"

He stared.

"Yeah, that's right. This play's being done on our magic box."

He caught himself on the news at six that night.He followed the image's eyes from the desktop to the page of copy to the camera, noticed things he'd always done and never observed from the inside, unconsciously miming his duplicate onscreen, fascinated with this perfect marionette, this friendly zombie reading places and names he had never heard before. That was odd, to get his present out of a television, like the rest of the world. He had always been a source, never a receiver, always inside the box, giving information from the other side of the interface. Now he was in **both** places and therefore nowhere at all. He could believe in neither version of Greg Conway.

Once, perhaps three years ago, a small child had recognized him on the street. His mother had shyly approached and said, "Are you Greg Conway, the newsman?" and he had smiled,

yes, and the mother had said, "See, Billy? It *is* the man on the TV," and the child had said, "But why aren't you at home in our TV?"

Mindy came in with dinner.

"Hey, Mind, pinch me, will you?"

"Sure." Her hair fell into his face from above, and she kissed him, a taste like frozen strawberries. "What's the matter?"

"I don't know. That guy on the screen looks so damned familiar." He forced a laugh. "What's for dinner?"

"Steak, potatoes, beans. A good workingman's meal."

"But I'm not working anymore."

"Sure you are." She indicated the screen.

The figure onscreen made an unfamiliar gesture.

"Huh!"

"What is it?"

"The damned machine screwed up. I never shift my glasses that way—I'm very careful about it, it looks amateur."

After the news a game show came on. Conway almost bit his tongue when he appeared on it.

"When did you film that, honey?" Mindy asked idly.

"I didn't. They must be using my tapes."

He chewed slowly. From what little he knew of the process, he was sure that the entire picture had to be synthesized; they couldn't just drop "him" onto a real set. That meant that all the other contestants, the MC whom he recognized, the audience . . . Good Christ! Every goddam face in the audience was clear. The show was very well put together. Downright eery. Especially when the MC asked "him" the capital of South Dakota, where he'd worked for two years, and he couldn't answer.

"*Pierre*, you dumb shit!" he prompted his ghost.

"I'm sorry, your time is up," commiserated the MC.

An entire quiz show! But it made sense: no contestants, no prizes; and the ad revenue still comes in, as well as kickbacks from manufacturers who didn't care whether the plugs were to real people or to phantoms. God, what a stink there would be if the NAB heard of it. The network was moving very fast and very silently with their new toy.

The silence grew, with Mindy alternately watching the set and him; he stared straight ahead, he refused guilt entrance. The television filled the gaps nicely with nonsense, music, mush, sound and fury; and thus their evening passed with a minimum of unpleasantness.

Much later she leaned over him and asked, "Ready for bed?"

He glanced up. "Uh . . . not really. I want to watch a bit longer, see if I can spot any more faked shows. I'll be up later, okay?"

"Yeah. Sure." She padded away.

The eleven o'clock news he watched through a shifting veil of sleep, simulated dreams, surreal confusion, all the while trying to study the *Hamlet* précis Bellamy had written:

"Today in Berkeley, California scientists announced the perfection of a new device that may revolutionize the television industry. The video synthesizer . . ."

Could do play as a musical. Check on using classical music with music director. Bach, Beethoven, that stuff.

". . . broadcasters are reluctant to speculate on its potential impact, but a spokesman for a major network said that cost and production techniques made its use unfeasible in the near future . . ."

All scenes of violence or sexual innuendo must go. Be careful to excise lines that, though originally inoffensive, may have acquired offensive meanings in the modern world.

". . . meanwhile, Actor's Equity filed suit against Video Systems of Berkeley, alleging that . . ."

General guidelines: play up the sense of the past, of heritage, the glory and the splendor of those days . . .

". . . the session, behind closed doors . . ."

No social commentary on anything that can be construed as such. News and editorial programs have the lowest ratings ever. People are not interested in their present day problems. This will be escapist entertainment. Our drama department will deal with yesterday's dreams, not tomorrow's problems. Delete any lines that could be misinterpreted.

. . . and electronic arpeggios, rousing him so that his final waking sight was of himself, smiling, not all Conway, a touch of Cronkite, a smidgen of Jensen, theme music up and out.

He slept.

Snow fell the next morning, rapid and wet and straight down from a colorless sky, melting as soon as it hit the street. An hour in the whirlpool bath relaxed Conway's stiff muscles enough for him to walk to the studio. He was abstracted the whole way. It was true that he didn't have to take the *Hamlet* job; the adaptation was bound to be vulgar, offensive, in execrable taste. But still, mightn't he be able to bring something to it, salvage some small portion—?

"Shit." His mind was up to its old tricks, running commentary on one topic while the thing in need of real introspection hid in the muck. Mindy, of course; things were in a state of increasing decay that he could no longer ignore by going to work. Beneath the perfect skin of marriage, the legal state, was a state of emotional dry rot, a silent growing corrosion that had reduced passion to pantomime, love to familiarity. Routine. He sensed it would grow worse with the great amounts of time he would now be spending at home. It was as if they had had an allotment of love when they married that weekend almost three years ago, which they had spent too soon. But still they clung, from inertia, from a blind hope of recovering what they had once had. They had grown apart. It happens, Greg realized; but they were married, they were obliged to cling. They would go on clinging, he at his job, she at hers: he creating the fantasies, she absorbing them, their closest contact through the flowing, anaesthetizing tube.

But hadn't it always been so? The nights spent in deadly silence, stoned on one thing or another: television or music or dope or in company of various acquaintances. Words and feelings withered during those nights; silence fed on itself until the things that needed saying could never be said, could only die and sour the soul. Those emotions lost—how trivial they were, but how important to say: "It bothers me when you do that," or "I feel lousy tonight, please help," or even "I'm not sure I love you now." Everything they had both left unsaid, that could now never come out without the threat of violence. So they lived silently on, preferring the ice to fire.

Back in the studio again, feeling futile, but having mentally postured enough to go from helpless-sad to helpless-mad. Through the carpeted door, and into a confrontation:

"Mr. Bellamy, I'd like my contract back."

"Why, we can't do that, Greg. We have an agreement."

"On paper, maybe, but not in spirit. You've been using me for quiz shows, idiot commercials, and you've been tampering with my image on the news. That wasn't agreed upon."

"Not verbally, perhaps; but legally . . ."

"Oh, cut the shit! I see myself, and I don't know me! I dance, I caper, and you pull the strings. It's demeaning, for Christ's sake!"

Bellamy frowned.

"Why use my face at all? Why not just pipe the goddam news in direct from the teletype, over a blank screen?"

"The people need something to look at."

"Something to look at!"

"Yes. That *is* the purpose of television, you know."

Greg felt sick. "Once upon a time, I conceived of it as somewhat nobler than that; a way to inform, or at least to entertain. . ."

"Well, now learn different." Bellamy tapped a pencil on the desk. "Television is pap, Greg. Get used to it. You've been in news all your life, which is as close as TV ever gets to the real world. Most of the time we live in the past. You know the last time an original screenplay was produced? 1980! Too expensive, too much trouble! Rewrite the old ones; a little window dressing, change the characters' names, and nobody knows the difference. We provide an ocular massage parlor."

"And we make pudding of *Hamlet.*"

"That too. Lots of people like pudding."

"I don't."

"You don't have to like it. You're not eating it, you're making it."

Greg said nothing.

"Look, now . . ."

He had an insane impulse; he blurted," 'Whither wilt thou lead me? Speak, I'll go no further.' "

The reference was lost on Bellamy. He simply smiled and said, "Oh, but you will, if you want to keep on eating. You'll go much further."

"What?"

Bellamy tapped the desk again. "Have you noticed that we're adding certain mannerisms to your newscasts?"

"Of course."

"We have to pay residuals to the actors that furnished them. That means your cut gets less and less. Furthermore, we're working out a deal with the Guild so that only their members get paid scale. Are you a member?"

"You know damned well I'm not."

"Then you'd better start writing pretty quick. Or else starve in your garret."

Frustrated, hurting, Conway stormed out.

If blame there was, it could be laid at the box, the catalyst that had started his fragmented life actively toppling to ruin. So it seemed only natural that he find himself in the empty studio with the machine.

The lights were out, but the machine hummed. He felt a

presence; body heat in the room, a machine warmth, the smell of heated transistors. . . . There was something there beyond the gentle whir of air conditioning and the hum of idling circuits; something almost sentient. Compelling . . .

He ran his fingers lightly over the machine, caressing, testing the buttons to gauge how much pressure they needed, how tightly their insides were wound; not really meaning to turn it on . . .

The monitor bloomed with light. Shocked, he recoiled. The screen blacked.

Someone had left it on.

But . . . had that been *him,* in that instant of light? He started to turn, to leave, not wanting to care. Then the compulsion returned, slipped soft hands under his shirt, drew him back.

He touched the button again.

Light lashed him, forcing a squint. It *was* him on the screen, just a still shot, nothing supernatural.

"Hello."

Random noise drifted over the still face.

"At least you have some job security," he said, jocular.

Nothing. Conway turned to leave, then whirled in anger.

"Do you have any idea what kind of mess you've made my life? Just sit there, grinning, reading the news . . . Since when do I sit home watching the world, watching it fall to little pieces around me? How did you get in there, leaving me out in the cold like this? Huh? Answer me!" And somewhere in there was the glimmer of an answer, something about what he was, what he had become from long years at either end of a glass screen . . . but he was too tired and heartsick to really look for it.

"Shit." He was being a fool. He turned . . . and there was a movement behind him, where nothing could be moving. "What . . . ?" He spun back around.

His image on the screen moved its lips. "You need to know something."

Electric shock. "Yes," Conway's synapses answered for him, before he had a chance to sift thoughts and say impossible, this can't happen, you're cracking up, or did someone leave programming in the machine? and his brain echoed it, yes, that's right, oh yes, I *do* need to know . . .

"What . . . what do I do?" The whisper frightened him with its fear.

A shimmer; a current circled a contact, and the word formed:

"Adapt."

The image began to break, as if somewhere power had died, and was being pulled, counterclockwise, into a center transistor.

Conway found himself whispering one last thing to the ghost machine, the place where he lived:

"What's it like in there—?"

Fade to black.

The panel was dark, indisputably off, like himself, for this thirtieth of a second, the next, and the next.

It might never have been on.

In the week following he wrote the first forty pages of *Hamlet,* deleting a total of one hundred ten lines. He received an advance and Mindy used the money to renovate the kitchen.

When the play was finally aired, he got the part of the father; the ghost had his face, and Richard Burton's voice. He and Mindy sat in silence, watching, watching in silent communion, their Nielsen box ticking, recording, as thousands, millions, tens of millions of others were doing in the endless winter night.

Picture a man. . .

Greg Conway, in a blue-lit room, watching himself, watching a screen, watching nothing at all.

Flurries outside.

The contented warmth of terminal frostbite within.

In the living room, only flickers, the illusion of motion.

Ghosts speaking to ghosts, in a language of whispers and yesterday's dreams.

Marc Scott Zicree *does sculpture—he has a bust of himself that uses marbles for eyes. He does portraits—not of people as they are now, but as they will be when they grow old. He did a short film in which he asked people to state their names. Everyone he asked cooperated, and everyone giggled. "John Smith. Tee hee hee." "Mary Jones. Tee hee hee." Intrigued, Marc repeated the experiment, this time asking only that the participants state their ages. Again, a series of numbers and giggles. I think it is safe to predict that whatever Marc does, what we can expect is the unexpected.*

The Leader of the Club

Marc Scott Zicree

Tom McIntyre, the thirty-four-year-old president of the Disney Corporation, sat in his Florida office watching the President of the United States on television. So far, the President was performing up to expectations. McIntyre watched the screen intently. How fortunate it was that the real President had decided to give his State of the Union address at Disneyworld; it had made it so much easier to replace him with the robot duplicate. On the screen, the robot rambled on, sounding exactly like the original. At one point it paused and blinked its left eye twice. Damn it, McIntryre thought, that wasn't supposed to happen.

McIntyre let his gaze wander around the office. His eyes paused momentarily on the pictures of Walt and Roy mounted on the far wall. Both gone now. Directly to the left of the picture of Roy was a photograph of McIntyre taken the day he had been

appointed president of the Disney Corporation, the youngest one ever. Next to that picture was a smaller one of the Dumbo ride at Disneyland in California. Laughing children filled the seats of the flying elephants. McIntyre wondered how long the children would laugh if they knew the Dumbos were nuclear missiles with warheads concealed in their trunks.

The voices of the television commentators brought his eyes back to the screen. The speech was over. The President was back with the technicians and would soon be off to the White House. McIntyre turned the set off. He sat behind his desk, his left hand tapping a slow rhythm on the desk top. Now that the President was a Disney robot, many grave decisions would have to be made in the coming months. So far, the plan was working perfectly. The Disney Corporation had been able to work covertly, without any confrontations. He hoped it would continue to be so. He did not want to use the Dumbos, but he realized he would if he had to.

His intercom buzzed; his secretary reminded him that he was due at a meeting in ten minutes. He pushed his seat back and rose. He picked his security badge up off the desk and clipped it to his lapel. What was the subject of the meeting? He couldn't recall. So many projects were under development that it was impossible to keep track of all of them. McIntyre stepped out of his office, closing the door softly behind him.

The bell chimed and McIntyre awoke. He was well over one hundred now and most of his body was replacement parts. The bed's autopump fed the proper chemical stimulants and nutrients into his blood stream. He blinked his eyes. Today was the day. Finally. He had lived for this day for the past twenty years. It was the only thing that had kept him going. Today was the Resurrection.

He reached the Shrine in just under an hour. Quietly, reverently, he made his way through the thousands of pilgrims who had held a silent vigil at the Shrine for many months. He entered the main hall. The hall alone had cost over fifteen million dollars (now affectionately referred to as "Mickeys") and had taken twelve years to build. Massive and somber, the hall was a miracle of engineering. McIntyre looked overhead at the vast network of speakers and realized that even now a subliminal vibration was being broadcast to enhance the feelings of awe and reverence.

Every line in the hall had been designed to lead the eye to the

altar in the center of the hall. The altar was immense and metallic. A deep hum issued from somewhere within it. High on the altar rested a figure encased in glass. The interior of the glass was filled with liquid nitrogen.

McIntyre walked up to the podium that stood in front of the altar. The indicators on the podium showed green. All that remained was the final step. McIntyre had been retired for a long time, but the public still thought of him fondly. He had been chosen to initiate the final sequence.

McIntyre fed the proper code into the altar's computer. In answer, soft, low music began. Huge fountains of water sprang up behind the altar. A brilliant blue light fell on the figure on the altar. A red light joined the blue, and then a yellow. Tegether the three lights formed a blinding white light which radiated outward from the figure. Rings of flame burst from the floor and spiraled up around the altar. Slowly, the nitrogen drained from the glass. The lighting became more subdued, the flames were extinguished. A new, higher pitched vibration issued from the altar. The top of the glass case folded back. A collective gasp came from those assembled in the hall as the figure in the case sat up. The nitrogen sleep was finally over. Walt was alive.

A choir of a hundred girls, virgins, each more lovely than Walt's own Snow White, broke into "The Hallelujah Chorus." The thousands in the hall were applauding and whistling, and the sound shook the building. Walt rose from the glass casket. He walked down the altar steps and looked around at the joyous faces. McIntyre approached him, trying to maintain his dignity in spite of being completely overwhelmed.

"Welcome back, sir," McIntyre said shakily, "You've got quite a lot to catch up on. Please come with me."

Walt, looking as benign as McIntyre had remembered, followed him into the restricted area of the Shrine. Here there were no artistically fluted columns, no inlaid arches, only white walls and complex machinery as far as the eye could see.

"It's great to be alive again," said Walt, "but I feel different somehow, younger and stronger. Could I see myself?"

McIntyre brought Walt to a large mirror set within a control panel. Walt looked himself over. "Why, I look at least twenty years younger than I was. There's something else different as well. What is it? My face looks the same but . . . Why, I have a halo!" A circle of light six inches in diameter floated over his head.

McIntyre smiled. "The boys in endocrinology cooked that

one up. All it took was a simple restructuring of a few hormones.''

Walt chuckled, a deep, throaty sound. ''Saint Walt . . .'' he mused to himself.

''Everything went just as you planned, sir,'' McIntyre said.

''Tell me. Tell me everything,'' said Walt.

''It's all yours, sir, the entire planet. America, Europe, Australia, Asia—''

''Africa too?''

''It's called Adventureland now, sir. We did away with all of the animals and replaced them with robot hippos and elephants. We did the same thing with China and Russia, only now they're called Orientland and Winterland, respectively.''

''Did you have any problems?''

''Only minor ones. Population reconditioning and redistribution in Europe and Asia was the largest problem. But that's all taken care of now. There are no more problems any more, no more struggles, no more wars. Your dream is a reality, sir. Your world.''

''Disneyworld . . .'' One lone tear rested on Walt's cheek.

McIntyre felt a lump in his throat. ''Come outside, sir. There's one more thing I'd like you to see.''

McIntyre led Walt out into the open air. The sun was setting. In the distance the calls of birds were audible.

Walt smiled. ''I hear birds. How lovely.''

McIntyre corrected him. ''Tape recordings, sir. We did away with all the live birds. Only robot birds now.'' McIntyre looked up. ''Ah. Watch the skies, sir.''

The sky darkened as night approached. A star appeared, then another and another. Soon the night sky was illuminated with stars. From on high, the familiar face beamed down at them.

''The Mickey Way,'' McIntyre said.

Walt was crying now. ''How wonderful,'' he said, ''How very, very wonderful.''

''I knew you'd like it, sir,'' said McIntyre softly.

***Gene Wolfe**, Nebula winner, author of THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS, and more recently, PEACE, (published by Harper and Row, 1975) is an editor for* Plant Engineering. *Clarion, 1975, gave him his first taste of teaching. There is no way to prepare students or lecturers for what is to come in such a high-pressure atmosphere, and* everyone *learns something. Here is Gene's account of his week at Clarion.*

The Bellman's Wonder Ring

Gene Wolfe

On Wednesday afternoon after a bad workshop session—by far the worst of the five I was to conduct at Clarion—I spent five or ten minutes thinking about heavy questions. I was depressed anyway, and I felt I might as well wallow in it.

Naturally I started with, What went wrong? But that meant dealing with the much stickier stuff of, What would have been right? Somewhere between the Michigan State campus and a bookstore that had no copies of my new novel, I got everything broken down to three questions. Hand me my bullet-box, Mister Typesetter, please.

- What did our twenty-five-chosen-from-a-hundred-applicants come here to learn?
- Is that what they really need to know?
- Can it be taught?

Weighty stuff. I'd already talked to the students enough to guess how they would answer the first question. *How to write science fiction*. How to write fiction. How to write. At that

point, Professor Ludwig von Drake, who was almost as inclined to haunt our little sessions as Lewis Carroll's Bellman, popped out of the back of my head and said: "Zo vat are dey doink now, dummkopf? Dos manuscripts dey keep giffink Seth McEvoy for copying—dot's writing. Vat do dey need you for?"

Selling.

Up to the time when I was walking back to the campus—halfway through the second week of the course and my own week as instructor—I had seen much originality, some wit, and even a little polish. But I had seen nothing that could be depended on to sell on fingers-of-one-hand submissions. To put it in another, less philistine way, I had seen nothing successful.

Then *that* was what they had come for—the thing that would turn brilliant failures into successes.

Which was just too damn bad. I had read the writers' magazines religiously during the seven years it had taken me to make a journeyman short story technician of myself, and if there was one thing I knew, it was: There is No Royal Road. No secret handclasp. No magic ring.

Anyway, was a magic ring what they really needed at this juncture? Most of them couldn't maintain a consistent point of view for half a page, or confine a story to the past tense with a whip and chair. What was worse, many of them really felt that it didn't make a particle of difference whether they did or not—"What's the good of Mercator's North Poles and Equators, /Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?"/ So the Bellman would cry: and the crew would reply,/"They are merely conventional signs!"

In other words, schoolteacher stuff. (May I say here that I am not now, nor have I ever been, a schoolteacher.)

Lastly, was there anything that I—or for that matter Chip Delany, Roger Zelazny, Joe Haldeman, Kate Wilhelm, or Damon Knight, (the other instructors booked for the six-week course) could actually tell them that would make them better writers?

When Dr. Leonard Isaacs had approached me about teaching at Clarion, he had asked me if I thought I would have any trouble criticizing student stories, and I had said I would not. At the time, I had given insufficient thought to the difference between the workshopping I had done—criticizing professional stories—and the work he wanted me to do—which was to help students become writers. The difference is qualitative, not quantitative.

The advice one professional gives another is aimed at making him (and the advisor) a better writer. But what the Clarion students needed was . . . Well, back to Question 2 again.

Was professionalism.

A professional—or so it seems to me—knows that how he says something is as important as what he says, for one thing. More, he knows that it is a part of what he says; and he knows the difference between a story and an idea, and between a story and no idea. And that was what they had come to learn. Could it be taught? "The thing can be done," said the Butcher, "I think./ The thing must be done, I am sure./The thing shall be done! Bring me paper and ink,/The best there is time to procure."

The Butcher, faced with the intellectual challenge of convincing the Beaver that two and one are three, instinctively called for the materials of the writer, the materials I am using now. Their great advantage is that they permit—and in fact enforce—a detached and generalized approach eminently suited to chewing over problems: "The result we proceed to divide, as you see,/By Nine Hundred and Ninety and Two:/Then subtract Seventeen, and the answer must be/Exactly and perfectly true."

The disadvantages of these materials, however, are what most occupy the attention of writers. Paper and ink interpose a barrier between the storyteller and his audience in a way that vocal speech—even speech transmitted by TV or radio—does not; and the circumstance that the writer writes (if he is fortunate) in solitude, exposes him to a deadly temptation to entertain (and perhaps also reassure) himself by loading his story with more freight than it will carry: "My father and mother were honest, though poor—/"Skip all that!" cried the Bellman in haste./"If it once becomes dark, there's no chance of a Snark—/We have hardly a minute to waste!"

No chance for a Snark—or a climax. And that, by a roundabout route (But the principal failing occurred in the sailing, /And the Bellman, perplexed and distressed,/Said he *had* hoped, at least, when the wind blew due East/That the ship would *not* travel due West!) brings me to a place to which I had no intention of going, but at which I really should be.

There is, of course, ample room for all sorts of family background—for any kind of background—in a novel. In a short story there is not. Yet the work at Clarion is by necessity largely restricted to the short story because that work requires a constant flow of writing delivered for critique, and because only a succes-

sion of short pieces can permit the student to embody in new work the principles he has learned from the reactions of his fellow students and the current resident pro to his previous work.

Then whether we like it or not, it is by and large the art of the speculative fiction short story that is being taught in the Clarion workshop; and it comes as no surprise that writers like Ed Bryant and George Alec Effinger who have received training there have attracted attention as writers of short stories. The novels, when they have come at all, have come later.

Yet there are writers for whom the novel is the natural mode of expression—writers who cannot force themselves into the short story mode without anguish: "I skip forty years," said the Baker, in tears,/And proceed without further remark/To the day when you took me aboard of your ship/To help you in hunting the Snark."

The fourth question, then, is

- Should these potential writers of novels be made to write short fiction simply because that is the only way we know in which to teach them?

My own answer is no. If (as we decided a moment ago) what the students needed to learn was professionalism, it consists in part of the writer's knowing what he wants to do, and doing it. Len Isaacs and Glenn Wright, who conduct the course, and the people like me who come in for a week at a time to teach it, will have to develop a system that will permit the would-be speculative fiction novelist to write a novel. By working with outlines, and with sample chapters and scenes, I think it could be done.

"Zo now, dummy, vot you goink to do mit der three kvestions vrom der beginnink?"

Oh yes. Those. I summarize: The students have come to learn how to write *stories* in place of merely writing writing. What they need is professionalism—a conscious appreciation of the nature of narrative, coupled with a professional's pride in doing every aspect of the work well.

Can that be taught? No, but it can be learned, and I think mostly from association with professional writers as *writers*. I don't know whether I was the first to put that idea into words, but even if I was, Clarion's past successes show that many, and perhaps all, of the other instructors have been putting it into practice.

So there is a magic ring! If it sounds too simple, I can only say that I did it, meeting with Bill Johnson and Lois Metzger and

Richard Bready and the others not as one of the gang and not as a teacher, but as a professional writer; and that Wednesday afternoon was better than Wednesday morning, and Thursday morning was better yet. All because—so I like to believe—I thought those heavy thoughts between the bookstore and the campus. "In one moment I've seen what has hitherto been/Enveloped in absolute mystery,/And without extra charge I give you at large/A lesson in Natural History."

***Richard S. Bready** is another triple threat man. His areas of expertise include popping ping-pong balls by mouth across the room, and also into the air and catching them again in his mouth; dancing (he broke his big toe when he caught it in the cuff of his jeans); and mimicry (he can do all the Monty Python routines.) Until very recently he taught at Northwestern and now plans to live on his savings and work seriously at writing.*

The Enemy You Killed, My Friend

Richard S. Bready

The first thing he knew after he died was a garden. It was not the one into which he had plummeted from the burning plane. That image still hung behind his eyelids: hot pink and orange blooms across the dark French earth like frosting on a chocolate, the canal he had jumped for shiny as tin along the ground that rushed up to break him.

He opened his eyes again, propped himself up on his elbows, shook his head. Bordering a shadowed oval of grass, pale flowers jostled together. The slope beyond them was covered with flossy rhododendron bushes. A wall crowned the rise, and he could see treetops on the other side. Above him dangled spade-shaped poplar leaves. He stood and pressed his back to the trunk. A fragrant breeze bathed his face. Bumblebees looped back and forth over the grass.

He looked down at himself. He wore uniform tunic, breeches, boots and puttees. All were clean and new, without indentification patches. His helmet and jacket were gone, his pockets empty. He brought his hands up and examined them, then

touched his face. His burns had vanished.

Warily, hands held away from his sides, he crossed the lawn and looked back. The poplar shimmered like swift water over rocks. Behind it, unbroken, bushes lined the slope. There was nothing on the grass. The breeze ruffled his neck hairs; under his eye a muscle pulsed. He glanced left and right, then called upward.

"Hello!" He heard nothing but wind. "Is anybody here? Please answer me! Where are you? I am Raoul Lufbery from the Lafayette Escadrille, please answer me!"

A bee hummed past. With thumb and forefinger he smoothed his moustache. Sweat cooled along his brow.

"Hello? Am I a prisoner?" He spun and shouted hoarsely. "Show yourselves! What is this? Filthy Huns, do not play with me!"

Only an echo came back. He stood for a minute, hands in his pockets and shoulders hunched, his eyes downcast. Then he shrugged and walked rapidly to the flowers. He trampled them down until he came to the tangled shrubbery, where he dropped and crawled up the twisting space beneath the branches.

Framed by stems, the wall was a sudden grey window. He rose and found that the trees beyond were barely visible when he craned his neck. The wall rose fifteen feet, a smooth parapet lapped by rhododendron branches all around the ridge. Chest high in greenery, he beat the stone lightly with his fist, over and over.

Then he wheeled and ran downhill in a crash of leaves, staggering and falling, making no effort to pick his way. He cut a second track through the flowers to the lawn, fell again, and lay outstretched. Gradually, his fists opened. His trembling stilled, and his breathing grew regular. He slept.

And was in the Nieuport, diving upon the wounded plane that stuttered homeward through wispy clouds. The wind tore at his face, stinging the flesh between his goggles and scarf. He had to strain to keep his head upright. Between the clouds he saw green splotches seamed with brown thread. Far past his right wings, almost out of sight, trenches gashed the earth. They would be watching down there. The antiaircraft crews held their fire, leaving him the kill. His nineteenth. Through the drumming engine he could feel his wings creak as he stooped to battle.

The Aviatik emerged from a cloud four hundred feet below. It turned to the right and began to climb. Black crosses caught the

sunlight. He banked to follow and pulled his stick back, an unconsciously delicate movement through the heavy flying glove. He would drop past the German and then curve up, hidden from the rear gunner, to rake the other plane's belly. It was a familiar maneuver.

They had seen him. The Aviatik's left wings rose nearly vertical as the plane slipped abruptly right and down. He put the Nieuport into a sharp turn. His grip on the stick tightened. He could see the rear gunner, his goggles flashing over the barrel. Tracer bullets stitched a red line toward the Nieuport. He bit his cheeks. Eye to the gunsight, he flattened the dive.

His engine exploded. Even as the shock hammered his head against the seat, and flames filled his vision, he pulled the stick back hard. Fire poured up the plane into the cockpit. Streamers licked the wings and flowed outward, a dirty orange wave. The scarf was a torch in his face. He tore at it, and fire bubbled over his hands. He screamed, then inhaled flame.

And woke. He lay on his side, knees pulled up. His fingers were spread over his nose and mouth. Hollow as surf, his breath rasped between them. His heart pounded, and his chest ached. He was soaked with sweat.

As terror slowed, his muscles relaxed, and he began to shake. His panting evened into regular dry sobbing, then stopped. He yawned deeply, several times, and rolled onto his back.

Leaves twinkled overhead. Veil upon sequined veil, they bickered and hissed, and scattered the sun into his dazzled eyes. He turned his head and then got up quickly. He was in a forest. Near the path where he stood, silver birches crested a grassy knoll. Trees fringed his sight everywhere else, a blurring overlay slanted with syrupy light.

Thumb and finger stroking his moustache, he walked a few paces down the path and found that it soon angled into the wood. He tried the other direction, with no more success. Back at the knoll, he sat on the grass. As he did so, he noticed that he was wearing white duck trousers and jumper, both dirt-stained, and canvas athletic shoes. He buried his face in his hands.

"Luf, my friend! How goes it?"

Lufbery sprang to his feet and whirled around. By the birch grove, tall and slender as the trees, a youth stood smiling. Heavy russet hair framed his pale face. One hand rested on his hip; the other, braceleted with ivory, twirled a spray of flowers. His white sleeveless dress brushed the grass.

"Who are you? How do you know my name?" Lufbery took one step up the hill.

"Come now," said the other, "who could fail to recognize you? The papers, French and American, all proclaim your bold exploits. You are a hero, the universal cynosure."

Lufbery's hand pushed air away from him. "That farce. Who are you? Where is this place?"

"Such difficult questions." The youth gathered his skirts and sat. Arms folded across his knees, chin on his wrist, he gazed at the man. Behind thick lashes, his eyes were like caramel. "You may call me, I think, Arden. A pretty name, don't you agree?"

Lufbery's cheeks burned. His eyes strayed continually from the figure above. "Where am I?"

Arden pulled a blossom from the stalk in his hand, bit and spat out the tip, and sucked noisily at the perforation. He held out the spray. "Would you care for some honeysuckle?"

"Damn you, where am I?" Lufbery ran up the hill. He seized the youth by the shoulders and pulled him up. "Where is this place?"

"Oh, sir, and we've only just met." Arden smiled and disengaged himself. "How impetuous you soldiers are. Don't you remember how you came here?"

"I died." Lufbery's face went slack. "The fire, and I jumped . . . I'm dead. Aren't I?" His eyes returned from a distant focus to his companion's face.

"I don't know, I wasn't there at the time." Arden raised one eyebrow. "Does it make a difference?"

"Of course it—but I'm here, I'm alive. What is this place? What's happening to me?" Lufbery's voice shook.

"My dear Major, you are distressing yourself. Come, let us have a stroll. It will help you to regain your composure." Arden stood, lifted his skirts, and walked down the hillock. When Lufbery did not follow, the youth called to him. "Now I insist. You've no idea how lovely the forest is. Do let me show it to you."

Slowly, the man turned and descended. Tears leaked from his eyes. His fingers worked against his palms. When he reached the path, Arden took his arm and led him. "The worst problem," said the youth, "is beavers. There's a family in a pond not half a mile off, and they've quite ruined some lindens I was very fond of. It's nature's way, I suppose, but I wish they'd take the maples instead."

After several minutes, Lufbery came out of his daze. The path

went downward now, bending frequently through dense underbrush. Beside him, Arden chattered merrily. Lufbery did not look at the youth or speak. Once he glanced over his shoulder at the path behind. He stumbled, and the hand on his arm steadied him. Lufbery flinched and tried to shake it off, but the thin fingers tightened.

"Manners, my dear Luf, manners!" The brown eyes were warm on his. "How do you like my forest?"

The man bit his lip and looked around. They had come to an oak spinney, a canopy of foliage that cut off the light and checked the brush. By the trunks, dotting the heavy shadow, mushrooms clustered. Without replying, Lufbery walked to them. He smiled. Arden knelt beside him as he crouched.

"Chanterelles." Lufbery turned to the youth. "I used to search for these in the woods around the aerodrome. A way to avoid people, at first, but I got to like them." He looked back at the brown and white cups, pinched one gently. "They're good even raw. Better, maybe."

"Splendid! You know more about my home than I do." Arden shook his hair back and grinned. "How many can we eat before we get a stomach-ache?"

Lufbery chuckled. "You know, I like your forest."

Later, as the path declined more sharply, he slackened his pace. "Arden?" He studied the vine that laced a fallen elm. "Who are you? What sort of . . . I mean, if you don't mind, why are you dressed like that?"

"Like this?" Arden pulled him forward. "I always wear white, it's my best color. Don't dawdle, Luf, we're almost there. Was there anything else you wanted to ask?"

Lufbery frowned. "Where are we going?"

"You'll see when we get there. I won't spoil your surprise." Arden's smile pulled his lips down at the corners. "But it will be a whole new beginning, I assure you."

The descent steepened, and they had to pick their steps over rock outcroppings. Lufbery felt his mouth become dry. When they reached a sheer drop, he pulled free. He sat, slid over the lip, caught the ledge, and dropped neatly to the path.

Arden looked down, brows arched, all innocent bewilderment. "I don't think I can do that. You'll have to lift me down, please." He stooped and held out his arms.

Gritting his teeth, Lufbery took the other's hips. Arden leaned forward until his hands grasped the man's shoulders. Then he jumped, laughing, skirts and hair aswirl, as Lufbery pivoted

from the rock face. The two stood swaying for a moment. Lufbery's chest was tight. He snatched his hands loose and hurried away. Laughter echoed about him.

They came at last by a narrow crevice to a shaft ringed with granite cliffs. On the summit, twenty feet above the jutting platform where they stood, wind flailed the crooked pines. An equal distance below, the ground seethed. Dry earth ran from all sides to the center and was sucked down like sand in a glass. Despite the constant drain, the earth stayed level, a fixed reddish line against the glistening grey-black stone.

Lufbery, his nostrils flared, looked from the pit to his companion. "What is that?"

"I told you before, Major. It's the beginning." Arden's eyes were steady, his expression grave.

"What do you mean? What happens here?" Lufbery scowled.

"You jump. Into that." Arden waved at the vortex. "And then it all starts over again. That's the way it works." His eyes fell to his bracelet as he turned it round his arm. "I mean, you are dead, you know."

"You're lying to me. Is this some kind of joke?" Lufbery backed away from the edge, into the cleft.

"No joke, no lies." Arden looked up and smiled fondly. "This is where the dead go. One of the places, actually; there are others. Please don't hang back, we haven't all eternity. I know it's rather a surprise, Major, but I must say I expected you to show more aplomb, after the risks you've taken." He grinned. "I had a German through here not long ago who went down at attention, saluting all the way."

Lufbery pressed his hands against the cleft. He stood rigid, eyes closed, face lowered. When he spoke, his voice faltered. "The dead? I knew that, I suppose, really, but . . . all the dead?"

"Well, a lot. Did you have anyone in particular in mind?"

The rock was slippery under his sweaty palms. His eyes rose to meet Arden's. "His name was Marc Pourpe. He died in 1914. A French airman. Did he come this way?"

Arden's forefinger tilted his chin. "Pourpe. The name is familiar, but I meet so many. Was he important to you?"

Lufbery stepped onto the platform. "He was important to me. Do you remember him?"

"Oh, I see. Forgive me, I forget what you soldiers do as well

as kill one another.'' Arden winked. ''You two were, how shall I say it, intimate. Yes?''

''Bastard!'' Fingers clawed, Lufbery lunged forward. Arden danced aside and tripped him. Lufbery hurtled into the shaft.

He landed on his back and fought to catch his breath. The suction pulled his legs down. Over the platform appeared a pale face, hair tumbling about it like wings. ''Thank you for the mushrooms,'' Arden called. ''Good fortune, Luf!'' He blew a kiss. Dirt covered Lufbery's face, spilled into his mouth. He fainted.

And found himself in total darkness. He tried to open his eyes. Nothing happened. When he tried to touch his face, he discovered that he could not move. His will strained, forcing at remembered links to his arms and legs. Still he could not feel, could not even locate, his body.

Then he realized that all sensation was missing. No ghost of light pricked his eyelids. No heartbeat throbbed in his ears. With all his concentration, he felt for his mouth, tried to swallow, to recall the wet strip along his tongue. There was nothing. It burst upon him that he was buried, that earth clasped and filled his body. Panic clenched his mind. He imagined his lungs as sacks of dirt, and he struggled through whelming horror to breathe. He could not. He labored next to sense his clogged organs. He pictured the rope of dirt down his throat, clods in his nose and mouth, the heavy lump in his stomach, but he could not feel them. Only a shrinking knot of thought remained, bereft of place or action in the encompassing void.

He tried forever to lose consciousness, and failed. Finally a sluggish despair took him. He drifted, while language and emotion coiled dissolving scraps, until he had almost forgot his predicament. Without his willing it, an image formed then, clear and watery as if in a stereopticon.

Dawn flushed the sleeping car window. The renewing light silhouetted a board shack and fence posts absurdly regular along invisible wire. Like posts escaped and fleeing, tall cactuses scattered across a dust-colored plain. The mesas, world's wall squared and streaked with light, held day from darkness. The train slipped forward, and the rampart glided past the window, stately as dream elephants.

The picture faded, leaving behind it the clifftop profile, stress lines folded into the surrounding black. As he noticed it, the

pattern changed. Convolutions sprang up between the major lines, swelling while the borders dwindled until the whole was an unparted maze. It began to move. The twisting intricacies tugged at his thought, drew his attention so that he was not aware that he observed them.

Abruptly, he refocussed his mind. He could not remember his name. He barely knew that he was he. The maze spread wider. He strained to recapture the image he had viewed, jabbing himself with fear. Anger at failure proved him; desire shaped the elusive knowledge. He demanded that the world exist. A scene cohered.

He pushed through bamboo stalks, the leaves scraping like torn paper, and came to a stream. Jungle webbed the water on either side. He took off his boots, hung them by the laces around his neck, thought about leeches, and waded upstream between layered green brocades. Damp smoke came around a bend.

In a clearing by the water, huddled natives were broiling fish. When they saw his uniform, three men scrambled to their feet. One grabbed a machete. They splashed toward him. He yanked his pistol out and fired blindly. Then he ran. A woman screamed. He scrambled up the bank into the bamboo. Terrible lineations flashed past.

The pattern was everywhere. Writhing distraction englobed him. It broke into segments that moved apart. Whichever he concentrated on, it seized his mind, then withdrew, increasingly detailed and compelling as it grew fainter. He wrenched his attention from one to another until they all receded at once. a drag that tore his thinning self to shreds. Agony lashed him to a final vault of will.

A crowd had gathered down the paradeground. He strolled toward it, his curiosity aroused, under the banyans that lined the sunbaked clay. Above the shawls and turbans he saw painted canvas, like a windmill vane stretched parallel to the ground. An aeroplane. He had seen photographs, but never the machine itself. He walked faster.

Through the welter of foreign tongues, a voice called loud English words. The pilot offered half an hour's flight to anyone not afraid to see the world from a mile in the sky. Close up, the biplane was a distorted dragonfly, gleaming metallically. He used his European's weight and height to shoulder through the gesturing crowd. Curry stung his nose, reminding him that he had not eaten that day. No matter; he fingered his last sovereign as he reached the machine. He walked toward its nose, stopped

at the wings, and ran his palm over the tricolor on the cockpit door. By the propellor, the pilot turned and smiled at him, white teeth brilliant in the tanned face.

His heart broke. The image roiled, like a reflecting pool brushed by the wind, and fell apart. The cross-hatchings multiplied, zigzagged, darted back and forth. He made no attempt to resist them. Networks joined and separated again, creased and split his awareness. Grief urged him toward them, then faded as he forgot himself. Certain patterns attracted him almost familiarly, until one altogether occupied his mind. Its branches forked. The maze wove into a sheet, pulsating and claimant.

Just as it took him, a last unbidden image fused. Mottled green and brown, fluffy white streaks, dappling shadow, expanse outstretched to a luminous misty horizon, it hung before him. Between joy and longing, his thought went out. He was absorbed.

And rolled with his group along a defile between spongy vegetation. All of them stayed spherical and isothermal; this was no time for needless activity or information exchange. He concentrated on their commander, distinguishable in the van by a prickly band on its otherwise smooth surface.

The commander halted and tersely changed temperature. The other sort were up ahead. Lufbery felt his top flatten. The commander radiated orders, a barely perceptible volley. With six followers, it pressed low to the plant. Their upper surfaces formed broad attentive circles. The remaining four left the trough quickly.

Lufbery and a companion were dispatched to the sunward side. They lengthened into slender cylinders, raised one end to crannies in the wall, and hoisted themselves up. Hold by hold they scaled the plant, until they reached a bumpy plateau beneath a great escarpment of growth. The contrast between the crag's hot density and the shadowed upon space below jarred Lufbery's senses. He and his companion sped forward, hunching along the track as they had climbed.

The plateau grew narrow, its craters deeper. It veered into a transverse gorge that sloped upward. As they ascended, Lufbery felt the wall that had diverted them thinning, its pull on him steadily weaker. His companion, covered with alternating smooth and ridged patches, stopped suddenly and cooled. Lufbery inched forward and lay full length against it. Their internal density structures fluctuated rapidly. Then both flattened into

discs and rippled slowly ahead.

The wall was a mere screen now. Their enemies bulked through it: three of them. Lufbery's skin resistance increased and lessened at the disc's opposite sides. Energy surged across the gradient. He and his companion shrank to stubby rods and sprinted forward.

They flexed, sprang, hit the wall halfway up. It folded, trapping two others underneath. The attackers landed on a broad ledge. The trough that their group had been following lay shelterless below. They changed form again, circular fans held perpendicular to the ground on squat supporting trunks, and shifted temperature in startling bursts.

Up the ledge was the exposed other, still spherical. Round nodes dotted its skin. As the enemy rolled away, Lufbery's companion cupped its fan and let fly a bolt that caught the fugitive at its center. The other exploded in a spray of shrivelling gobbets. Its death message bathed Lufbery's skin with heat.

He swung his fan to the lifting wall. The two others lay uncovered and helpless. He felt energy course to his focus, ready to arc out, and beside him his companion's regathering strength. He cupped his rim.

Then Raoul Lufbery, slightest presence, faintest memory, refused. He would not, would not again. And the poised bolt flashed back, stabbed, scorching down his base, rayed the charring fan, frilled his edges with a brief intolerable corona. He died.

And thrashed madly in a falling reflex. He floated amid a shining grey cloud. His limbs convulsed, then grew still as touch assured him that he lay on a solid plane. He rested, gasping, then sat up.

Around him, swimming in and out of focus like a fogbank, was translucence beaded with light, everywhere random and the same, as if he were inside a quartz crystal. He could not see the floor, could not tell if the substance about him was next to his face or miles away.

Dizzy and nauseous, he got to his feet. He grasped his temples, then jerked his hands back into view. He looked down next at his naked human body. With trembling fingers he explored the face. He twisted his thigh and found a long puckered scar. It was his own body. He was himself again.

He squinted into the glow and extended his arms. Nothing met his hands.

Shuffling like a man on a tightwire, he groped forward. After some five yards, he touched a wall. It was cool and slick under his palms, but he could not see it. He fumbled down the wall and discovered that it curved without break into the floor. Working back up, he felt wall as high as he could stretch. He jumped, one hand over his head, but struck no ceiling. He jumped again and found that the wall extended past his reach. His bare feet slapped the floor. It did not vibrate.

His hand on the wall, he turned and cried out. Across from him, its size and distance indefinable against the glow, was a purple ovoid. Hemispherical lumps stippled its surface.

"Oh, God," Lufbery moaned, "oh God where am I, what's happening to me?" He cringed against the wall. The ovoid did not move.

Watching the other constantly, Lufbery sidled along the wall. It curved so that he advanced toward the ovoid as he went. When he had taken a few steps, the ovoid shifted. He stopped, then continued hesitantly. The other rolled sideways, a curve that matched Lufbery's. Little by little they circled the room.

Lufbery sat down crosslegged, back to the wall, the purple shape at rest directly opposite him. If he had come full circuit, the space was perhaps thirty yards around. The ovoid, then, was as high as his knees and a yard wide.

"What in God's name are you?" Lufbery's voice broke. "Are you my jailer? Did you make me dream that I was like you? Oh, I'm mad, I've gone mad, please somebody help me." He clasped his head, mouth open, and rocked from side to side. Tears fell and collected in his moustache. When he could cry no more, he glanced across the chamber. The other had not stirred.

"Can you understand me? Can you hear me? What are you, why are we here?" His right hand milked at his left thumb. "Are we dead, does it go on like this forever? Please, do something; move, make a sound, show me I'm not mad." The ovoid did not respond. Lufbery covered his face and was silent.

When he looked up, his face was set. The muscle under his eye jumped. He smoothed his moustache, pressing out the moisture.

"Permit me to introduce myself," he said shakily. "Major Raoul Gervaise Lufbery, late of the United States Air Service, late of the world, at your command. And you are?" He barely paused, hand flat on his breast. "I thought not. You are a surly fellow, even for a giant grape. No matter. I shall make conversation for us both."

He uncrossed his legs and slid down the wall, elbows propped on the floor. "I am tired of this dying, let us talk of life. Was your life an interesting one, my friend? No matter. Mine was. When I was twelve, my mother died. My father remarried and moved to America. I was born in France, you understand. That is why both countries love me so. Do you love me, grape? This silence is disturbing. I fear I have offended you."

He sat upright. "Have I offended you? Pray forgive me. Tell me that you forgive me!" He stood and walked toward the ovoid. It changed shape at once. Its sides contracted. From its top opened a circular fan. Mass poured up the base, and the fan stretched wider, rotating so that its surface bore upon the man. Violet tendrils flowed from the rim to coalesce in a central orb of white light. The rim curved inward.

Halfway across the room, Lufbery stopped short. He was shivering. "No," he said. "No. I remember." He backed away. "Please, I do not want to die again. It hurts." His back hit the wall, and he crumpled.

The rim drew back. The violet tendrils dimmed. Still the white circle blazed. Lufbery turned and stared into the nebulous depths. He forced words through chattering teeth.

"Your pardon, dear grape, I am not myself any longer. I will not thrust my acquaintance upon you. There are formalities, it is understood." He ran his hands down his face, folding the slack skin. "Where was I? Yes, my father. He left me to make my own way. When I was fourteen, I had a job in a chocolate factory, I hated it. The stench, always, sweet as women's perfume and abominable, overpowering."

He pulled his knees to his chest and wrapped his arms around them, his side to the wall. "I ran off. To Africa first, then Constantinople, Serbia, Germany. Those were not good times, though I learned much. Then my father sent for me. He would give me a home."

He rocked away from the wall and back, hitting it with his shoulder, rhythmically. "But when I got there, he was not waiting. A business trip, they said. My own father. No matter. I did not wait either. I travelled through America, all the way across it. That is a good place. They love me there. Many people love me, dear grape, I am a hero. Was a hero. I did not mean to threaten you."

He turned his head. The other had resumed its original shape. The white circle had disappeared. Tentatively, arms still about his legs, Lufbery shifted to face the ovoid.

"You are not angry any more? I am happy. May we be friends? It will be lonely here. I have not had many friends. Only one, really, though they all love me. A man named Marc. You have met him perhaps? No matter. He was a brave man, my friend. He taught me to fly. I was his mechanic, and a good one. Then he died. As we are dead, dear grape, unless I am mad, and if we are dead why is not Marc here?"

He was crying again. He released his legs. They slid to the floor as he hugged himself. The ovoid did not move.

"But I am before my story." Lufbery's voice rose to treble. "In America I joined the Army. They sent me to the Philippines and took care of me for two years. I was a good soldier. But I was lonely. Life is even lonelier than dying, my friend. I have been right round the world, and I know."

He let go of himself, leaned forward, and got up on all fours. Lifting each hand and knee with exaggerated care, he crawled along the wall.

"We must be company for each other, my grape," he said, "or we shall be very lonely here. See how respectfully I approach you. Do not be afraid, I will not harm you. I will comfort you, and tell you stories, and we will be perfect friends."

As he crawled, the other rolled away. The only sound was Lufbery's ragged panting. He watched the floor. The two circled the chamber time after time. Finally the man halted and turned his head.

"As ever," he said. His breathing steadied. He sat up, arms crossed on his knees, chin on his wrist. His eyes were hooded. "No matter, I am used to it. You are like all the others. But I will finish my story. I do not like to leave things unfinished."

He stroked his moustache and sighed. "From the Philippines I went to Japan and China. You recognize the names, of course. Then India, where in Calcutta I met Marc Pourpe, an aviator. He taught me to fly, or did I tell you? We flew together across Asia to Egypt and then France. There was a war. Do not tell me that you do not know what war is. Marc arranged to have me with him in the air service. But he was killed. That is the end."

He swivelled on his hip and lay down. He closed his eyes. Then he opened them again and said, "No, I forgot. Afterwards I shot down eighteen planes and became a hero. What do you think of that, dear grape?"

The ovoid was still, a purple dot against the sparkling cloud that seemed to billow about them. Lufbery shut his eyes once

more. "I will sleep now. Pray for me that I do not dream. Do what you will." He turned his face to the wall, cushioning his head on his arm.

After the man had lain a long while motionless, the other rolled slowly toward him. It stopped halfway across the room. The nodes diminished until it was completely smooth. It rolled closer. In rapid succession, it formed ripples, pocks, grooves, spikes. At last it was featureless again.

It moved then within Lufbery's reach. A cup opened, facing him, about a handspan wide. Violet filaments ran to the center, where a white spark flared. Lufbery did not move. The spark grew smaller, brighter. Then fire leapt the gap between them and stabbed at the man's buttocks.

He whimpered and flopped onto his belly. The arm that had been under his head fell out to the side. The ovoid retreated quickly. Lufbery lay silent and still. The other kept its distance for a long time.

Then, even more slowly than before, it rolled toward the man. It stopped inches away. He did not move. Delicately, the ovoid nestled against Lufbery's ribs.

He woke later and found himself on his side, his arms embracing the other, holding it to his chest. Its body was the same temperature as his. He closed his eyes. They lay without stirring, purple flesh and brown in a haze of light.

***Bill Johnson** is only eighteen and already nine or ten feet tall, with a talent to match. He turned out story after story with marvelously detailed technical backgrounds ranging from hurricanes in the Caribbean (this story) to black holes in the depths of space. He is studying physics and journalism at the University of Iowa. I don't know where he will go from here, but wherever it is, he will be a force to contend with.*

Stormfall

Bill Johnson

It started as a tropical storm southeast of Jamaica. Warm air rose and trapped cooler air underneath, moisture condensed down as rain. The heat exchange continued, a cycle that built the winds to a higher and higher level. By the time it hit southern Cuba it was officially Hurricane Alice.

Brady shivered in his light jacket as he hurried across the landing apron. The damp wind shifted and a trailing rain squall swirled around him. He pulled open a flimsy screen door, knocking the water loose from the grid, and stepped into the office.

"Señor Brady," said the man behind the old wooden desk. Brady ignored him and walked to the plastic weather map on the far wall. He let his fingers rove across the raised pressure ridges and gently caress the indented lows.

Alice was a blazing white disk to the north of Kingston. Yellow and blue lights streaked through her as the wind speed changed in the arms. The eye of the storm was the axle in the wheel, a dull grey on the outside where the winds were weak,

and a deep, calm black in the center.

"How soon can you be ready, Molina?" Brady asked.

"Half an hour, Señor. The storm ripped a fabric section loose and I had to send for Esteban to repair it. He's working on it now."

Brady turned toward Molina. Light reflected off the silver half globes strapped over Brady's eyes. "Half an hour, Molina," he agreed. "Make sure all the equipment is on board."

A fly bumped its head against the polarized window, a tap that Brady could barely hear over the hum of the air conditioner. The room freshener had a sharp lemony odor and he sniffed, enjoying the underlying tang of opened medicines. He heard the doctor's hand come to rest on papers—lab reports.

"I'm sorry, Tom, but those blinders have got to come off," the doctor said. "Deterioration back along the optic nerve hasn't started yet, but the antigen count is building. You're way over last month's levels."

Brady nervously rubbed his finger along the wood armrest of his chair, tracing the little ridges and whorls in the grain with his fingernail. He stopped suddenly and pressed his hands together.

"What happens now?"

"You have a choice," the doctor said. "First, you can take your blinders off. Once your eyes are exposed to light the optic nerve will stop atrophying. You'll be a normal, sighted man."

"Will I be able to fly?" Brady asked.

"No," the doctor said harshly. "You'll come to depend on your eyes instead of your other senses. Your sensitivity to pressure and wind changes will diminish. You would be worse than useless in hurricane control."

"What's the other choice?" Brady asked. "Surgical removal of the eyeball. This way we could remove the optic nerve before it degenerates. Instead of being blind six months of the year you'll be blind permanently. But you could fly."

Brady picked up two paperclips and twisted them together. For a while, he thought. A year, two years.

"What if I do nothing?"

"You can't seriously consider leaving them in?" the doctor said. Brady said nothing. "All right. Permanent blindness when the optic nerve finally degenerates. General susceptibility to infection. Eventually cancer."

"Would I be able to fly?"

"Yes. Up to the point where your judgment is so affected that

you die in a hurricane. Or can't even get off the ground. And then it's a little too late.''

With its nose pointed directly into the wind, the dirigible settled toward the tower. A long cone linked onto the nose. The ground crew ran for the tag lines that spilled from the side of the dirigible.

Each man grabbed one of the thin steel cables and ran the line through rings imbedded in the concrete. Brady, following each movement through its sound, heard them loop the lines tightly and then step away. The dirigible swayed slightly in the wind. The cables stretched taut and held.

Brady stripped off his outer clothing and packed it carefully into a cardboard box and signed his name on the tag. Under his clothes he was dressed in an orange one-piece jumpsuit.

He ran his hands down his body, pressing the filmy material tightly against himself. Air pockets bulged and flattened as air escaped with a series of gasps until the suit fitted like a second skin.

''Mr. Brady?'' a crewman asked.

''Yes,'' Brady said. He pulled a rubber cap over his head and tucked his hair underneath it. ''Is the ship ready?''

''Yes sir,'' the crewman said. He picked up the suitcase. ''I'll take care of this, sir. One of the groundsmen will take your clothing. If you'll follow me.''

They reached the dirigible tower and stepped inside the elevator. A cool breeze sifted into the open iron cage and fanned Brady's face with the smell of fresh rain. He remembered another storm long ago.

Pink clouds in the front of the hurricane had trailed long streamers whipped off the edges. Then came the sullen, black thunderheads of the main storm, heavy hammers that towered over the clouds and threatened to engulf everything.

He grasped his father's hand tightly. They were standing on the edge of a rocky cliff that fell into the sea. Storm winds whipped around them.

''Look at it, Tom. Go on, look at it,'' his father said. ''It's beautiful, isn't it.''

Tom heard his father's voice break. He tried to turn away from the storm but the strong hands held him. He stared up at his father's face and his metal skull patch.

The wind front reached the cliff. It stung at Tom and his father with the smell of salt spray and fresh rainwater. Tom saw the

waves pound higher and whitecaps form on the bay. He looked up at his father, puzzled.

"No, Tom, I can't go out," the father said sadly. "I ran the winds too long and it caught up with me. I can't even hear the winds any more."

"You can go out though, Tom. You can go out for me when they put the blinders on you. You can be my blindness."

The elevator took them silently up the tower. Brady leaned in one corner while the crewman stood in front of the door. Brady felt the elevator stop. A breeze crossed his face as the door opened.

A sealed catwalk ran from the nose of the dirigible to the cabin underneath the main body of the balloon. Brady led the way, his hand sliding along the guide rail to the door of the control room. He opened the door and entered.

"Good morning, Mr. Brady," the captain said.

Brady stepped aside to let the crewman pass. "Good morning, Captain. Has your fabric been repaired?"

"Repaired and tested. Everything is ready."

Brady nodded, "I'll be in the preparation room."

The first breezes of Alice hit the dirigible ninety kilometers north of Kingston. Brady felt it shudder and twist slightly as it ran into the outer fringes of the storm. His finger jumped from the raised landmarks of his map of southern Cuba.

The intercom bleeped. "Mr. Brady, we'll be reaching the launch point in a few moments. After you leave we'll run ahead of the storm so our position is a straight line back to Kingston. We'll wait until pickup. Good luck."

Brady unlocked his suitcase. Inside was a large pair of anodized beryllium wings. He twisted the cylinder locks shut on the exoskeleton braces and settled the power pack between his shoulder blades.

Across his chest he strapped a pair of oxygen bottles and he attached a mask to his face. On his arms went the silver iodide jets.

He snapped his arms out. The wings stiffened under the stress. Metal flux lines realigned themselves into a crystal-tough matrix and then relaxed. He put on goggles of metallic plastic over his blinders.

The dirigible shuddered again and its speed dropped to a crawl. Brady walked down the corridor to the skimmer pod. He opened the hatch and crawled into the needle.

Behind him the hatch dogged shut automatically and sealed the needle off from the dirigible. He inserted a key into the control panel and twisted it left, then right, and the launch door opened.

"Ready to eject," he said into the cabin link. "Ejecting."

Solid fuel rockets fired and the needle exploded from the side of the ship. Brady ducked his head and let the fixed strapping inside the needle absorb his acceleration shock until he felt the speed start to drop. He flexed his shoulder muscles and the wings stiffened. The latches on the floor released.

Pieces of aluminum erupted around him, the thin bottom of the needle shattering as he fell out. He snapped his arms and forced the wings taut while he used his forward momentum to dive into the storm.

Brady tacked and dived, using different wind levels to work his way into the hurricane, a gold speck against the storm. An updraft forced him aloft until he could see the entire system by the pressure on his skin. He laughed and dived, loosening his wing tension.

The old man sat back in his chair on the front porch facing the ocean. A storm was moving in over the bay, quick lightning flashes illuminating the interior of the clouds. Breezes fanned out in front of the rain and formed whitecaps on the water.

Brady walked around the front of the porch. His wings hung loosely from his arms, their tension points limp.

"Well, Tom?" the old man asked.

Tom Brady licked the air and moved his arm in a tight little circle next to his body. He shifted uneasily. "Stormwind coming in. Night wind from off the beach. Over by the cliffs there should be an updraft."

"Yes," the old man said slowly. "An updraft where the wind hits the rocks."

Tom Brady rocked forward on the balls of his feet, back and forward again. He grabbed the tips of the wings and half-ran off the porch down the gravel path. He knew the old man waited patiently, the bottle held tightly in his lap.

Lightning flared in the clouds. There was a shift in the wind, a wave of ozone. He hesitated and dived for the updraft by the cliffs, and forgot the broken old man who stared off into the storm silently and clutched fiercely at his bottle.

Brady dived and pirouetted on his wingtip. He stiffened it and

twisted around in a tight circle, his other arm thrown out for balance. He moved through his routine more and more swiftly while he ignored the howl of the storm.

A dancer inside the winds, Brady forgot he was scheduled for surgery, forgot the dirigible, forgot everything but the dance. He wove his way farther inside the storm. Wild winds lifted him as he forced his straining wings to curve and flatten and pull him even higher.

The storm shouted at him, screaming at his ears and body with the only word the storm knows: "No!" He flew on, his arms automatically stiffening and loosening the wings.

Wind, a fluid medium like water. Brady felt the heavy rainfall patter of wind run up his arms. His wings moved in slower and slower circles until they gradually fell into a rhythmic, repeating pattern. He was near the eye of the storm. The power of the hurricane was balanced precariously here, each movement met and counteracted by an opposing movement. This was the stormfall.

Stormfall was the high wall of wind that separated the calm of the eye from the power of the arms: a circular wave front that enclosed the center of the hurricane. Brady could feel the quiet power of the stormfall, the tugging on his wings.

He was tired, his arms more like lead than flesh. The metal struts in his exoskeleton creaked and groaned in the wind. Little whirlpools of turbulence dragged at him. The stormfall loomed over him, a mountain ridge set in motion.

"You can go out for me, Tom. You can be my memories." Brady remembered a frail, embittered old man who sat on a porch by the sea. He clutched a half-empty bottle; the blue of ruptured veins spotted his nose. His eyes were clear, the irises unclouded, and little bloodshot lines covered the whites.

"You can go out for me, Tom. You can be my memories."

Brady wrinkled his face and felt the cool metal of his blinders touch his cheeks. He flew quietly for a few moments, each solution accepted and analyzed. A stray gull feather whipped past his forehead and curled around his neck.

He stretched his arms and spread his wings wide. Metal creaked and groaned as he spiraled up into the stormfall.

Near the eye the stormfall was still building. Brady slid to the edge of the turbulence. Tension points formed there, the circular pins which hinged the stormfall together.

Deeper inside the stormfall each point was supported by

hundreds of others. Brady couldn't affect those, he couldn't carry enough jets. Here the winds were still hesitant, the pins wobbly.

Brady breathed deeply in his oxygen mask and dived into the turbulence. Winds slammed him to the side and he heard the screech of tortured metal. His exoskeleton supports bent and held. He twisted himself so that his wing edge bit into the winds.

A tension point swirled in front of him, a contorted column of power. Brady tilted his wing and swept by the point. He fired his silver iodide jets into it as he slid past.

Energy exploded inside the point and for a moment the entire column glowed. Brady felt the energy grow and grow until the whole column erupted. Part of the stormfall crumbled into turbulence, an inner support collapsed.

Brady dived past the points again and again. He was numb now. Another jet slipped into a tension point.

The stormfall shuddered like a trapped animal. Like a great stone wall whose support has turned to mud, it buckled, twisted, settled and collapsed.

Wind energy scattered throughout the storm. Brady was smashed under a giant fist and sent tumbling across the ruins of the stormfall.

Dazed and hurt, he dived for the eye. One moment he fought the wind, the next he flew in quiet air.

The eye was a calm disk with a roiling wall surrounding it. Brady sensed the changes as the wall wavered and collapsed inward. He could barely feel his body. The jumpsuit was ripped and torn. Underneath it he could feel bruises swelling. A stray gust of wind reached him and sent him sprawling. He checked his oxygen, ejected the last few iodide jets, and began to climb.

The walls of the storm leaned over him and tried to block his escape. Brady shot through a narrow circle of sky and caught the storm's updraft over the clouds.

When he leveled off the storm was far below him. He shivered in his tattered jumpsuit and pumped his arms. Cold oxygen burned a trail through his nostrils and down his throat. Pain lanced his chest.

It was peaceful above the storm. He flew in long sweeps to both sides that ended in tight circles.

He brushed his goggles off with his arm and nudged his blinders aside. Fresh air bit into his face and he turned his cheek to catch more of it. Above him he could almost see the stars burning brightly in a purple sky. The sun flared down.

Brady saw the dirigible at the edge of the storm. A long white streamer stretched out from the storm, the dirigible pointed into it. A narrow strip of blue water separated them.

The scalpel or the wind, Brady thought. He turned on his back and stared at the sky. He was calm now, the passions of the storm far below him.

A light smell of ozone seared his nostrils and he realized he was too high. A cold chill wracked his body and he had to gasp in his airmask. He started to fly down and stopped.

The scalpel or the wind, Brady thought. The dirigible waited far below him. He stared up at the sky.

Then he cupped his wings and floated slowly upward in a great spiral. He smiled and removed his oxygen mask.

***Vonda McIntyre** attended one of the early Clarions, when it was still in Pennsylvania, and afterward she was the coordinator of Clarion West for three years. In 1975 she won the Nebula Award for her short story, "Of Mist, And Grass, And Sand." Her novel THE EXILE WAITING was a fall 1975 selection of the Science Fiction Book Club; it was published in January, 1976, by Gold Medal.*

Can *Anything* Be Taught?

Vonda N. McIntyre

In high school I was an excellent student: dedicated, withdrawn, inept, despised; an intellectual snob. I took all the "creative writing" classes, which I approached as I approached all my courses: with priggish philosophies like "You have to learn the rules before you have a right to break them." This suited my teachers, as it made me extremely compliant. My efforts never resulted in anything worth mentioning (in "creative writing" or any other subject) because I was neither wise nor brave enough to notice that all I ever did was busy work. (Probably my only notable achievement in high school was to prevent the junior class president from killing himself during chemistry. His brains did not match his beauty: his idea of how to make sodium chloride, for example, was to throw a chunk of pure sodium into the collecting bottle of a chlorine generator.) Nothing ever challenged my abilities—or my opinions. Approval came to any student who parroted establishment assumptions, be they about clothes and haircuts, hippies ("fringies," in Washington state, *circa* 1965), or the war in Vietnam. There were no war protestors in my high school. Conformity was the ideal; I conformed to the adult ideal of the perfect high school student: silent, cowed,

trouble-free, easily ignored. I mouthed, and believed, all the bullshit about how school was really there to teach us to think. At the same time I obediently cranked out all the rote work that negated the very idea of thought. I never questioned why straight A's brought me vague approval at best, while having my hair done and wearing a skirt of fashionable length (which I did twice, I think, in my high school career) brought cries of delight from teachers and "girlfriends." Nor did I ever question why I was seldom excited about all this marvellous "learning," why I was always bored, why I managed to miss so many school days with vague aches and pains, why I was encouraged to look no farther than the state university for college, while the fellow I prevented from blowing himself up was pushed into Harvard.

High school creative writing did not teach me to write.

Everything about that school, and, I'm convinced, about schools in general, was geared not to teaching students how to think, how to write, or anything else, but to forcing us to conform to the Natural Order of Things (the middle class life-style for middle class students; one's proper place for others), and to obey orders. In short, there was no "creativity" in creative writing, no exploration in science, no humanity in humanities. Creativity was censored, exploration was punished, Shakespeare was bowdlerized. There was only intimidation, and I was prime material; I crept through the corridors certain I would be suspended any second for some real (but unintentional!) or fancied crime.

I was the class valedictorian.

Then came college. I grew to be a bit more cynical. Few of the classes even pretended anything more than presenting in oral form material more easily and quickly assimilated from books. The professors and teaching assistants visibly resented having to teach calculus or even honors English: Insert Approved Module #2-B into Freshman's Left Ear. In college, the creative writing classes were free hours for credit, easy A's. Once I cut class for six weeks (no one noticed), using the time to work on an sf novel. The prof read it and gave it back. "That's okay," he said. "But why don't you write about something real?" He did not consider sf a proper subject for a fiction writer; without a proper subject there could be no discussion of style or grace or word usage. The proper tradition is *important*: the professor's choice of proper tradition, not the student's. Even if I had written about something "real" (non-sf, that is), my reality would have had no validity in his eyes.

The result was a class of nineteen-year-olds, dutifully writing about big game hunting, bullfighting, saloon brawls, blood, pain, sex (more precisely, rape, the mythological kind in which the victim either loves it or asks for it in the first place), War. At the same time, we nodded knowingly and recited "Write about what you know." None of us ever seemed the least bit confused.

That class did not teach me to write.

That kind of class, that kind of professor, teach nothing. They elicit performances. Performing—spouting out dates or pages of prefabricated opinion or mathematical formulae; switching from one set of rules to another to another as the day goes on—is all people care to do when they have no interest in a subject or when their interest is extinguished. People can be intimidated or coerced into performing, into following rules. We cannot be bludgeoned into Being Taught.

The first time I ever received any useful feedback—any opinion at all, in fact, from anyone not set up as a godlike and uncontradictable Professor—was at the Clarion Writers' Workshop, vintage 1970. The people there were the first to mention that I had the right to decide what is important to me. They were the first to say outright that it is not a sin to disagree, that it is permissable to say—even to the "teacher"—"Thanks for your opinion; I think it's a lot of bull."

The workshop challenged the cowardice that all my other experiences had so carefully nurtured, and the challenge was a great revelation, a great release. It made me *think* about what I was doing: whether what I had been doing was worthwhile, whether I could be good enough, honest enough, strong enough to do anything worthwhile in the future. I had never been with people who valued uniqueness. No one had ever said to me before that my individual experience and integrity were more important than someone else's conception of what was a "proper" topic for a Real Author, or a "proper" lifestyle, or "proper" opinions. The writers in residence said that as if it were not even radical. And they did not "teach," but instead made their experience available, advised, suggested, and offered the benefit of usually infallible instincts for pointing out crap.

Yet Clarion did not teach me to write. Rather, it allowed me to learn to write.

And writing is not unique, because learning itself is active, not passive. Despite the efforts of most schools, information cannot be jammed into people like stuffing into a turkey. If a monolithic

bureaucracy not only decides what is important but orders that the same things be equally important for everyone, then teacher and student will face each other and perform meaningless rituals, with little communication. But if some revolution (the real kind: a revolution in attitudes) ever allows people to make their expertise and their knowledge available to other human beings who want or need what is offered, then learning, and perhaps even teaching, will happen. It must occur, however, on a larger scale than in John Holt's books, scattered alternative schools, and minuscule gatherings of sf writers.

Kim Stanley Robinson *is another graduate student: he is also a mountain nut. He should have attended the 1974 workshop, but because of a foul-up in the postal system he was not notified in time and made other plans. His submission story was bought for* Orbit. *This year he was one of the first to be accepted. He is reaching out in every direction with his fiction, trying to find the limits, and so far has found none. His stories range from the close in, here and now, to very distant futures, far away places, and they vary just as much in tone and style as in content.*

The Thing Itself

Kim Stanley Robinson

He woke just before dawn. He snuggled deeper under his blanket of dirt, moving carefully to keep it evenly distributed over him. It was early spring, and at this hour it was cold: Valerian put his head back into the warm hollow it had made during the night, and fell asleep again. The mound of dirt in his cage shifted often as he tossed. He slept fitfully as the day grew brighter.

Then the sun edged over the mountains, flooding the air with the raw yellow of morning. Only the palace below Valerian's hill was still in the cool purple of shadow. Valerian's eyes felt the sunlight and he blinked awake, shaking the dirt out of his hair. He couldn't remember what his dreams had been about.

He knew that he couldn't sleep with the sun over the mountains; he pushed himself up and dirt fell away from him, partly refilling the trench that was his bed. Moving stiffly he stood, shivering in the sudden chill. Beating his thin legs to help their circulation, he limped over to the south corner of his cage. He moved slowly to avoid making the cage sway; it hung high in the

air, suspended from a massive gallows-like structure that held it out over the cliff.

In the south corner of the cage was Valerian's bucket of water; he lifted it and took a couple of swallows. He was tempted to wash the layer of grime from his face, for there hadn't been a rain in several days; but there wasn't much water left, and his guards might forget to refill the bucket that evening. He took another swallow.

He put his back between two bars of the cage, squatted, and shoved himself out and down. There was barely room for his hips and back between the close-set bars. When he was wedged between them so that his ass hung over the edge, he shat. Then he pulled and wriggled his way back into the cage. The effort made every vein in his mottled brown arms stand out, even the ones crossing his biceps. After two years of hunger Valerian was down to his minimum weight; his ribs were perfectly defined, his collar and hip bones protruded from his flat chest and belly, and his limbs were like slender sticks.

To keep warm he walked around the cage, a study in browns, and pulled at his scraggly beard. After a while he sat down at the west corner of the cage, which was his usual perch during the day. The cage was a cube of iron bars and an iron floor, twenty feet on a side, but he had its layer of dirt clearly divided in his mind into bedroom, dining room and sitting room. The west corner was his sitting room; it was where he did most of his carving. And he could look out to sea. This morning the ocean was a flat blue plate, marred only by tall white puffs of cloud that sailed above it, at about the height of the cage. Wind flurries made swirling dark smears across the water's sheen.

His vantage point was really excellent, he thought for the thousandth time, but on this day his heart wasn't in it. To the north and south the land jumped out of the ocean, clad in the pale greens of early spring, still shrouded in the mists and shadows of morning. To the east the foothills rose up to the slopes of the white mountains, that seemed to be much closer than they were because of their immense size. Offshore a mile or so a chain of islands stretched to the north, green and black in the blue sea.

But it was the same view as always and Valerian wasn't pleased. It was one of those mornings when he felt discouraged. It was his blood, he told himself, he always felt bad when his blood had no spirit. For a moment he considered making a small gash in his hand and sucking it, for he believed that his spirit was in his blood and he was convinced that cycling it through his

stomach was an energy-building action, but he decided not to. It wasn't worth the trouble, and lately his cuts had been getting infected.

Instead, he dug his statuettes out of the dirt. He had hidden them there so that the chief guard wouldn't smash them. There were fourteen of them now, over a year's work. He carved them out of the bones that were thrown in with his food, using rocks for tools; then he covered the bones with cut sections of vedanjrak shell. The exoskeleton of the vedanjrak was hard and polished, and it gleamed with lines of color; cut into small sections and stuck to the bones with mud, the rainbow lines were broken into patterns that Valerian liked. They reminded him of the shattered visions he had seen through a kaleidoscope he had owned as a small child. He would look at the statuettes for hours, rubbing his brown fingers over their smooth, colored surface. Some of his most recent ones he thought were very pretty: the pile of turtles, the gargoyle biting a man's ear, the monkey playing with a vedanjrak, the family sitting in a turtleshell, the fat man laughing, the two gargoyles wrestling, the men ferrying a bound anjrak in a small boat. He liked quite a few of them.

But on this particular morning, even the detailing of his statuettes failed to interest him. He felt strange. He flopped on his stomach and hung his head over the edge of the cage, and stared down at the palace below.

The hillside dropped in a complex pattern of terraced green to the sea. Many levels were lined with paths and streams and hedges, dotted with trees, fountains, waterfalls, white gazebos. On the lower levels, nearer the palace, square pools like chunks of turquoise lay in courtyards. Near them the crenelated walls of the palace began, marble walls broken by archways and long mosaic murals. The palace was topped with spires and domes, and the light green tops of trees marked inner courtyards. At the far side of the palace, near the water, a square white tower rose high into the air. At its top was an open platform, ringed by flags; that was where the anjraks landed. Beyond the tower was a small bay protected by hilly peninsulas; within it several boats, all of them schooner-rigged, lay baremasted at anchor.

The entire palace lay so far below Valerian that to him it was like looking at a miniature. It was so tiny, so detailed, so perfect, that he sometimes mistook it all for one of his own statuettes. At one time, before he had been usurped, he had owned all of it as surely as he owned the shell-and-bone figures around him; everything he could see had belonged to him, and he had ruled

every man and creature in the land with absolute authority. It was a thought that hardly ever occurred to him anymore; and when it did, he could scarcely believe it.

He was still staring at the palace, not thinking and not actually seeing anything, when dots appeared on the horizon behind the islands to the north. Anjraks, he thought. Someone was coming to visit.

When the group of dots reached the farthest island they all turned at once and dropped toward it, so that the shells of the creatures blinked in the sun. When they rose again he could just make out the pumping of their huge wings, and their riders were still tiny dots. One of the dots seemed to Valerian to be bright red.

Valerian scrambled up and ran over to the northern corner of his cage, making it sway, and stared intently at the flying beasts. As they approached they continued to climb, however, and Valerian could see only their underbellies and the expanse of their wings. Soon they were tiny dots again, directly above him so that he had to lean his head out between the bars to see them. Then the wings of one disappeared and it quickly grew larger; first a black granule, then a grey pebble, then a large stone with a crustacean head thrust toward him—then the creature's wings snapped out with an audible *pop*! and it zigzagged swiftly down to the palace. Each of the anjraks dove in succession; and the rider of the last one wore red.

Red was the royal color and only one man wore it: Valerian's uncle, Harn the Usurper. Valerian ran back to the west corner, his heart pounding, and watched as each rider in turn circled his anjrak over the white tower and floated down among the flags. When the last rider landed, his red cloak clearly visible, a huge scarlet flag was hoisted to the top of the highest flagpole. It hung there, hardly stirred by the gentle breeze, the banner of the king.

Valerian could feel his blood pulsing in his hands and stomach. It was the first time his uncle had visited the summer palace since the previous autumn.

And this time, Valerian was going to kill him. He had decided on it in the depth of the winter, shivering under a thick layer of dirt that had been dumped in the cage to keep him alive; and the thought of it was what had enabled him to survive. He would be taken down to the courtyard in the tower to be humiliated in the ritual of departure: he was his uncle's mounting stool. And this time he would kill him. Then he would be killed, he thought, and

both thoughts pleased him equally. He had barely survived his second winter, and now it was spring and everything was yellow-green, but he knew that after it would come summer without enough water, another winter without enough food, year after year for as long as he cared to keep struggling. It would be good to have it all over.

And it would be good to kill his uncle. He was surprised at the power of his own hatred, that the mere sight of Harn's red cloak would send his blood racing. He looked at his hands, nothing but tendons and bone under the tough brown skin, and knew that given the chance they had the strength to strangle the man. The thought made him smile.

It was near midday when his guards came for him. Valerian was surprised; he had thought he would have a few more days. But it made sense. After the winter in the tropics to the north, Harn and his men would be anxious to begin hunting the great eagles that inhabited the mountain range behind them. Valerian himself could remember the thrill of diving through the sky to grapple with the giant, fierce birds, who were more than a match for the anjraks, but not for the dangerous animals strapped between the anjraks' wings.

He had been engaged in that very activity when the coup took place. He could remember every minute detail of the day: the chill of the air, the amber eyes of the eagle he had killed; the red soldiers clumped on the landing platform. He should have known then and flown back into the mountains, to live with eagles and plot his return. But he hadn't and they had caught him. His memory of subsequent events unravelled into a tangle of abuse and increasing darkness, until it disappeared and there was a blank time of indeterminate length. The first thing he could remember clearly after that was waking up in the cage and finding it befouled with his own dung, as if he had been there weeks, or months, and had not even been aware enough to shit over the side.

The cage began to jerk toward the hilltop as the guards cranked the handle of the massive chain drum. The familiar motion made Valerian suddenly fearful. He wished he could have had a few more days. He nervously tried to push his fingers through his tangled mat of hair. The chief guard saw him.

"That's right, make yourself pretty," Chief called. "Time to justify your existence, your Highness." Chief was a short man, with close-set eyes and the bristles of a constant half-beard. He

was much more dangerous than the soldier who assisted him; the soldier was a bulky, strong man, but he had none of Chief's malice. Valerian was afraid of Chief.

The cage thumped to rest. Chief unlocked the hinged bar and pulled it up so Valerian could slip out. As Valerian crawled under the bar, trembling, Chief grabbed him by the shoulder and pulled, then shoved him so that he lost his balance. Valerian rolled to his feet and jumped away, feeling sick. Chief laughed. It was a capital offense even to touch a member of the nobility; during his childhood and his brief time as king Valerian had only been touched by nurses, and later by his wife, and nothing that had happened since had conditioned him to being handled by men.

They began walking down the path to the palace, Valerian staying as far away from Chief as he was allowed. In their ceremonial garb the two soldiers gleamed like biped crustaceans, their armor shaped to imitate the polished exoskeletons of the anjraks. Occasionally Chief would flick his heatwhip towards Valerian, and tell him to stay closer to the path. Once the beam, nothing but a shimmery disturbance of the air, struck Valerian on the thigh, and he howled; almost immediately the red welt blistered. It felt as if a white-hot iron had been applied to his flesh and left there. He wondered what it would feel like to die by the whip, but quickly shut the thought from his mind.

As they descended the path through the green terraces they began to come to hairpin turns that Valerian remembered from his childhood, shaded corners with statues and benches, where he had played for hours. Sometimes the memories were so strong that he could actually see his old nurse, sitting on a stone bench under a tree; but when he called to her she wouldn't answer, and Chief would snap his whip, so that he hurried down the path.

But this time, intent on murder, he saw nothing. They worked their way down across several terraces, avoiding the spots where shrubbery had overgrown the path. Harn cared nothing for the grounds, and his hirelings had abandoned the gardening. All the sharp edges of the terracing were being blunted by the advance of the shrubs and grasses, and now that the leaves had opened, the destruction of the artful landscaping could be clearly seen.

They began passing trophies of Valerian's short reign, tossed by the pathway deliberately for him to see. All of the booty of his one campaign, when he had flown to the south and conquered the cold kingdom of Rintrah, had been taken out of the palace by his

uncle and heaped in piles on one of the terraces. The finest artwork of Rintrah, all the jointed armor, all the stone statuary, all the intricate and exquisite musical machines, lay jumbled together, broken and disintegrating.

Then they came to the highest courtyard, and he couldn't ignore what it contained. In the middle of the courtyard was a long shallow pool, blue as the sky; and frollicking around it were his wife Cesonia, and all the friends of his youth.

Only they weren't, not really. At first he hadn't been able to tell for sure. Cesonia's long white body had seemed exactly as he remembered it, and she had gazed at him with the same knowing look they had shared with each other since childhood. It was that very fact that made him suspicious. After he had recovered from the shock of first seeing them, still shaking uncontrollably in his cage, he had thought far into the night, and he had come to the conclusion that they were simulacra. It would be impossible for the woman he had known, *Cesonia*, to splash cheerfully in a pool while he hung in the cage above them. To believe otherwise would erase the goodness that had existed in his life, and leave only the solid, demonstrably real hatred of his uncle.

Thus his uncle had actually done him a favor when he had had his soldiers take an axe to the Cesonia while Valerian was being led through the courtyard; they tried to make it look like a real murder, but one of them made a mistake and the intricate clockwork of the simulacrum was spilled all over the poolside. The Cesonia that later replaced it was even more real than before, but Valerian never doubted that it was also a machine.

After that, every time he was taken through the courtyard, he was affected differently. Sometimes he didn't even recognize the figures. Other times he did, and he would weep with anguish at the thought of his wife and friends dead, still other times he would become confused, and think that he was still the king. He would wander around the poolside and have long, vivid conversations with Arnon and Nicolin; he would kiss Cesonia on the shoulder or the cheek, talk with her face-to-face for hours, swim in the pool with her; he would play happily with them all, as white as the rest of them—and then something would happen, a blow from Chief or a stumble in the path, and he would stagger back into the present, confused and disoriented.

This time none of that happened. He stared at the simulacrum and thought, this was the last time he would see the image of her. But she had been dead two years. They had all been dead for two years. The machines disgusted him and he became angry. And

all the way through the palace, as they wound through hallways and open courtyards, archways and high-ceilinged rooms, and up the long spiral staircase in the tower, he thought with growing intensity of revenge, and death.

When they came to the high courtyard it was filled with Harn's noblemen. They were already mounted on their anjraks, and shielded by their chitinous armor they looked like curious colored appendages of the beasts. The wind had risen, tossing the flags and the anjraks were nervous. They wanted to be in flight. They skittered sideways, crashing into each other, and the efforts of their riders were devoted to controlling them, by jerking on the reins that held their wings up and kept them from springing into flight. The crashing and shouting, the snap of the flags and the high whistles of the beasts filled the air.

Valerian's guards led him, unnoticed, to the raised platform at one end of the courtyard. Two years ago the sight of the dirty, naked man who had once ruled them had convulsed the nobles with mirth; now they considered him to be a warning to them, and they ignored him. It made no difference to Valerian anymore.

He climbed the steps up to the platform, alone now, and walked toward his uncle's anjrak. For the first time he was not frightened of it. Its round eyes looked at him; they were as polished as its shell, as polished as every other surface on it. Its wings were arched high above it, held there by reins that punctured their grey membrane and then were tied together at the saddle. Its long body sparkled in the sun, the grey shell throwing out points and lines of red and blue and green. Its big hind legs were bunched, ready to spring when its wings were released.

Several grooms surrounded it, snapping at it with heatwhips when it wandered too far from the mosaic circle in the center of the platform. One of them gestured to Valerian. Valerian walked over to the black square in the mosaic and got down on his hands and knees. He marvelled at his lack of fear, his clarity of vision. He stared out to the west, ignoring the spectacle around him, trying to draw as much of the world into himself as he could. The black tiles under him were warm. Out to sea the sun broke through the clouds in shafts that lit the grey sea's surface, scattering a trail of silver coins to the edge of the world. The wind pushed his hair in his eyes. His thigh hurt.

Then the anjrak crabbed across the circle and its foreleg

knocked him sprawling. He rose to his knees, dazed, and looking out across the courtyard he thought he was king again. He stood up shakily and gestured outward, about to address the noblemen, when one of the grooms' heatwhips lashed the side of his head and he went down again. When he came to a second later he knew where he was, and, head aflame, he crawled back to the black tiles. He knelt on them. He tasted the blood in his mouth, and watched it drip steadily onto the tiles. His diaphragm pushed his ribs up and down in quick gasps. The desire to kill filled him like the pain in his head. The heatwhips, he thought.

Then there was silence except for the flags, and a few high whistles from the last anjraks brought harshly under control. The king had arrived. He stood in the far archway, the only spot of red in the entire panoply of color; every eye was drawn to that bright spot. Valerian watched his slow approach, remembering clearly the vast bulk, shaped like a waterdrop; the albino-white hair, cropped close to the skull; the laugh, revealing long yellow teeth. When he stands on you, Valerian thought, collapse under him and go for his throat. Do it. His hands tensed against the tile. For a second he saw and felt it all happen, then he blinked and his uncle was still there, climbing the steps. The huge red figure crossed the platform, laughing at him. Valerian couldn't swallow. He looked down at the tile. Kill him, he thought.

He felt Harn's casual kick to his hip, checking to see if he was steady. Then the hard sole of the riding boot, placed in the center of his back. Then the man was up, and Valerian felt his knees crack. He felt Harn rock back and forth, slowly, felt the fat leg swing up, *it has to be now*, he thought, *now, now, now*—

And then they were off. They were off. Chin on the black tile, flattened by wingwash, Valerian saw the sun flash prismatic light from the anjraks rising. He closed his eyes.

When he opened his eyes again the courtyard was empty, as if everything that had just occurred had been a hallucination. His two guards approached him. "Excellent job, Your Highness," Chief said. The tall guard grabbed him by the arm and pulled him up; Valerian's mind was too benumbed to notice the touch, though his body cringed reflexively. They led him out of the sun and down the long staircase.

Valerian walked. He didn't see the palace, didn't notice the simulacra by the pool. His mind was empty, he was a thoughtless animal making the timeless trudge back up the shimmering

green of the terraces. Once again he had failed. He stared at his brown feet, padding endlessly through the dust of the path, and felt nothing.

Near the top of the hill, at one of the turns where the benches were placed, he saw Cesonia sitting, dressed in blue. Her black hair was drawn up in a knot and on her hand was the ring he had given her when they were fifteen. Her level gaze was expressionless, but he was suddenly afraid. He cried out. He ran up the path away from her, past the guards, and kept running until Chief tripped him and he fell. Chief shouted at him but he paid no attention. He hurried up the path and crawled under the bar into his cage, quickly so Chief wouldn't see and give him a helping kick. Chief laughed at that.

"He's crazier than before," he said to the tall guard.

"Yes, he is," the tall guard said. "It's no surprise, either." Valerian tried not to hear.

The two of them cranked the cage back out over the terrace. There was a slight rocking before the cage settled. The guards left.

Valerian sat in the dirt and stared sightlessly to the west. His vision blurred and he raised his hand, found the tears running over his cheeks and through his beard. He crawled to his bed and curled up in it, arms over his head, and watched his tears make little circles of mud in the dirt beneath him. Finally he fell asleep.

Valerian had a dream. He dreamed he was a child again, the young prince of the kingdom, sitting in the west corner of his cage, although it had not been there until after the coup. He was looking at the world through his kaleidoscope. He pointed it at the string of islands to the north and watched shards of green shift in the field of blue. Then he pointed it down at the palace. Fragments of white broke in the center and spread out into the geometry of greens, a rose bush splashed a pattern of reds through the glass. He gave the tube a final turn, and suddenly the vision snapped into clear and unbroken focus. It was as if he were looking through a telescope. And the telescope's power was growing. At first it had been nearly like looking through window glass, but soon he could see quite clearly the lighthouse on the headland far to the south, the boulders on the slopes of the mountains behind him. When he turned it on the palace he could see the tiles of a mosaic, and then the ring around the bottom of a thorn on a rose bush. He turned it to the horizon and saw an anjrak flying riderless, cavorting in the air. The telescope's

power grew swiftly, as if Valerian were rushing at great speed through the air toward the creature, until the entire field of the glass was filled with the shimmery grey of the anjrak's shell; and he continued falling into the shell, deeper and deeper, until, suddenly, it was a kaleidoscope vision again, a shattered pattern of scintillating colors, infinitely more beautiful than before.

The jerk of the cage being hauled in woke him up. He did not remember the dream.

It was sunset. The sun, now a flattened red-gold disk, hung just above the horizon, smearing a streak across the ocean and feathering the clouds with orange. In the east, behind the sun-colored mountains, the sky was already getting dark.

It was the tall guard with Valerian's dinner. He went to the south corner and took out the empty food bucket, replaced it with a full one; did the same with the water bucket. Then he cranked the cage back out over the cliff.

Valerian inspected his meal. It was, as always, the remains of the guards' mess. There were four pangolin leg bones, slender things about two feet long, and a variety of scraps. He laid the four bones carefully beside him, and began on the scraps. He had learned during his first winter to take his food seriously, for he was constantly hungry and the guards were inconsistent in their feeding. Engrossed as he was in the act of eating, he thought little of the events of the day.

When the bucket was empty and polished clean he picked up the first bone and brushed the dirt from it. He pulled pieces of meat from around the joint, working carefully with his fingernails, and popped them into his mouth. Then he gnawed the gristle away until the bone was completely bare, and beat it against the bar beside him to crack it. He pulled the bone apart carefully, and sucked the spongy marrow out. He didn't like the taste of the marrow but he was sure that it helped, so he ate it all and then washed it down with water.

The next bone had already been gnawed down to the gristle. "Chief's bone," Valerian muttered angrily, as he did at all the well-stripped ones.

As he was washing down the marrow from the last bone, a vedanjrak the size of his hand flew into the cage and onto a bone. It was nearly a miniature version of the anjraks, but its wings were mere stubs. Valerian eyed it closely; he needed more vedanjrak shell to plate his next statuette.

This vedanjrak was looking for food. It crawled over the pile

of bones, exploring with the tiny claws on its forelegs, and scraping occasionally with its mandibles, but Valerian had done a good job and there wasn't much for it.

He picked up a piece of bone and knocked the thing into the dirt a few feet away. It crawled towards the pile. He knocked it back again, and again it worked its way towards the bones. He repeated the action several times and the creature kept returning. It couldn't even remember what had happened seconds previously; it lived only in the present, in which food was just feet away. Valerian laughed out loud.

Then the vedanjrak flew toward the bars and he had to act fast. He slashed at it and knocked it to the dirt, and before it could jump into the air again he smashed its head. It twitched wildly for a moment, then lay still.

Valerian picked up the animal and pulled off its wings. He put a fingernail behind the head and pulled; the forelegs and what was left of the head came off in one section. Then he cracked the shell on the bottom and held it open so that the sac containing the guts fell out with a push of his finger. A harder yank and the shell cracked cleanly down the back, exposing the insides. He pulled a strip of the veined white meat from the inside wall of the shell, and ate it. It was rubbery, salty meat, and tasted very good, especially after the marrow. Dessert, thought Valerian. At the same moment a torch on the palace wall flared.

Dessert. Valerian laughed. He looked down at the palace and remembered when he had eaten in it, when all the meals had been desserts, when tables two hundred feet long had been filled with all the sweet and exotic foods of the land.

No one down there tasted food as he did. The thought struck him with the force of revelation. He shook his head. No one down there felt the weather, or watched the seasons, or saw the world as well as he did. No one down there was as alive as he was.

He stood up. His cheeks were aflame, his whole body was glowing. It felt as if his skin had been stripped away. He looked at the meat in the broken shell in his hand and he could see every tiny red thread running through it. He pulled off another piece and chewed it, and the salty tang of it seemed to cut right through him.

He cried out in an outburst of joy, slapped himself in the leg. Both his leg and his hand felt the sting buzzing clearly. "Afraid to be touched!" he cried, and slapped himself again. He pounded himself in the chest, laughing madly, knocked himself

5around the cage until it swayed violently; then he forgot and hit himself on the head, on the side that had been whipped, and that hurt. He sat down cross-legged, feeling the cage swing through the cool air, hearing the silence, seeing the last red sliver of sun on the sea.

Black dots were falling on the palace's torch-ringed tower; the hunters were returning. Again Valerian laughed. He stood up and walked to the west corner; spoke aloud to them.

"You hunt to make yourselves alive, and to unwrap yourselves from things. Strip away all the crusts and there is still a naked I; breathe and eat, lie on the earth, touch the world! With nothing you live most alive. I stand before you the thing itself, unaccommodated by all of your vast and meaningless experience. Each man must learn it anew."

Then he sat down.

Evening had fallen. The sun was gone. Behind him the mountains were ice-blue against the night. On the western horizon the sky was still light, a velvet blue that glowed and crackled where it met the darker sky above. The ocean was inky against the dark purples of the land, then changed to the same lambent blue near the horizon, as if the sun were shining through it. The pinpoints of torches defined the palace below.

For a long time Valerian sat there, until all the ten thousand stars had appeared and the cool air turned chill. Then he got up and cleared the trench that he slept in. He laid his brown body in his dirt bed; laid his brown head against his dirt pillow. Much later he fell asleep. And dreamed.

***Michael West** writes: "I said, 'Is that all there is?' when I became an accountant of some merit, and was not satisfied." Of Croatian and Italian descent, with coalminers and saloon keepers in the lineage, he says, "On paper I can swash and buckle without giving up blood and teeth and still not deny the aggressive impulse." He lives in Chicago with his wife, whom he met at MSU, where she was taking summer classes, not workshopping.*

Poppin' Fresh

Michael West

Everyone had told her that once thrown, she had to remount as soon as possible to overcome the fear. She looked at the studio clock. Seconds to air time. If there was to be another attempt, another transmission, then conditions were at their best at this time. So she hoped.

Her director said, "OK, twelve seconds and take two!"

As usual at this moment, time seemed to falter for Miss Carla Conners, the Universal Chef. She felt uneasy. Something inside her was begging her to reconsider. The set was in order again, she knew. People were in place, cameras awaiting only a signal from the director who had her arm raised, hand poised to swiftly descend on the exact second that transmission was to begin; her countdown would start at her fingertips.

Twelve. Eleven. The Uni-Chef counted to herself. She looked at her utensils, knowing by her practiced sight check-off that everything was in place, repositioned after the first disastrous take. Pots and pans gleamed. Bowls and knives ready at her fingertips.

An almost complete stock of ingredients was handy but hardly comforting. The main ingredient was missing. She had been promised that it would be along momentarily. They had told her that before the first take, and all hell had broken loose when it had not arrived at all. One hell of a way to start out a retake, she thought. But then she was only the chef, not the director.

She wanted to wait, she had told them. She did not want to make a fool out of herself again on the air. And why did this have to be live? Transmission timing, of course, they had told her.

The production crew had confident, supportive looks for her. She wondered if they could see her nervousness. More importantly, would the cameras pick it up? A little nervousness was usual, but now it was mounting, turning into an amateurish stage fright.

There had never been a failure before. Little things had gone wrong, of course, but never before had the equipment failed. And here she was going to go on with the identical setup. How could they be so confident?

Miss Connors was not confident. She was agitated, and only through a subconscious professionalism was she disguising the fear, keeping it from the cameras.

It was taking forever to make the jump from eleven seconds to ten. Suppose the same thing happened again? Would there be a third attempt? Surely not, she thought, some kind of network apology would have to go out, and another program run in her place.

Someone coughed loudly, startling her out of her concentration on the near future. She quickly glanced up. A split second of panic widened her eyes, went deep within her to her stomach, icing as it went. At least the crew was out there; she could see silhouettes behind the glare of the lights. But still the dragging time had them frozen, unmoving.

The cold fear was spreading. She was powerless to stop it from numbing her. The stage lights were getting brighter. If she did not close her eyes, she would faint.

She told herself that that could not happen to her. She was a pro. And there were ways a pro could overcome the fright. There were ways to get control. Breathe deeply, she told herself, reflexively, if not willfully. Let the oxygen go in, quell the nausea, the numbness.

She opened her mouth in a gasp, a panicked plea for air. She was sure she looked a fool. The whole thing was going to be another fiasco. If time had stopped, then it was all for the good.

The show should not have to be a chance to repeat her humiliation before the cameras.

The crew could go on to other jobs, she rationalized. They did not depend on her. Apologies could be made. The audience would only benefit.

Upon that thought, taut, nerve-tightened muscles began to lose some of their tension. The warm air from the lights penetrated the cold she had felt. The breath came in and rationed to parts of her body the oxygen it craved. There was a momentary victory over the fear, and an accompanying internal elation at the thought that none of it really mattered. It was all so trivial, almost . . . childish.

And as if some sound barrier had fallen, she heard someone say, "Sorry, Miss Connors," and she realized suddenly that she was still the center, the focus of all the attention. She was the talent, the star.

She had to compose herself, she thought, even if it was all an act, a put-on, she had to regain composure.

But then some independent part of her had already seen to that. Some unfeeling instinctiveness within her had grasped the situation without conscious control. She was as if split in two. There was somebody else in front of the cameras, an alter ego, her professional self. It was the self that did not care whether people watched, whether she was popular. The person in the monitor was a front, an animated mannikin going through the motions of putting together an act, a culinary specialty which would not, in the end, matter much to anybody.

It was all right now. She was playing the jocular kitchenmaid. Later she would collect her money and go home to her own kitchenmaids. That was the beginning and end of it. Childsplay.

The director said, "Ten!"

It was the crew's turn to jump. She was in control. She picked up a spatula which became her scepter, regal and commanding. A good touch, she thought, authoritative. She could use it to point to the ingredients, naming them one by one to make sure her housewives had everything for this special dish.

And it was going to be a special dish today. Something out of the ordinary for her audience. Possibly even a candidate for her "Best of" series.

The countdown took the slide from nine to one in just a sliver of a moment. All was poised, and then rolling with the fall of the director's hand. Transmission was in progress. She was no longer concerned with failure.

If something had gone wrong the first take, then that was so much water under the bridge. The recipe was faultless, unchangeable, though she often said that one could fudge here and there, and still approximate the end result. Husbands never wrote letters to her.

With one more deep breath, and a tongue flick to moisturize her lips, she was into it. It was like stepping over a low fence into the kitchens of the universe.

Now she was at home with her audience. She was fulfilled with its due attention. She was ready to speak to her subjects, the housewives.

In her confidence, her excitement, she cooly skipped over her usual introductory speech without falter to say, "And now, ladies, as I promised, we are going to go ahead with today's special preparations. I trust you will pay close attention, we do not want to make any mistakes along the way with this one. Our main ingredient is very, very special."

At the mention of the lacking ingredient her confidence took time out for an involuntary shudder. It was stoically repressed as she continued, "Yes, ladies, today on the Universal Chef, I will show you the preparations for . . . Deep Dish Earthling!" She paused again before setting up the commercial break, very pleased with herself.

And, as if her supreme confidence had willed it so, the main ingredient arrived under the transmitter dome. Very plump, very tender. Very surprised.

***Robert Crais** scored very low in the strangeness ratings. (This was a scale from one to ten, with ratings given for strangeness, spin and charm, devised by the students and applied to everyone, students and lecturers alike.) Robert Crais, as I said, rated low, but that is because no one could see inside him. He speaks with a charming New Orleans accent and has a gentle smile and a wondrous imagination. The tone and mood of this story are perfect for the content, no small achievement.*

With Crooked Hands

Robert Crais

Mayeaux, the brokeback, felt safe at night when the New Orleans throng deserted the town's old section for the lure of the French Quarter. There were no corner lights; deep slabs of black lay in the alleys and streets. His foot made scraping sounds as he dragged it on the brick streets. Mayeaux's right arm, permanently locked at the elbow, swung at his side; his left, bent but still movable, clutched small, brown sacks to his chest.

Dark leaves brushed his head and shoulders, raked like fingers across his back as he walked through an alley which opened into a courtyard bordered with tropical plants. Circular flower gardens dotted the inner area, and wrought-iron railings ringed the balcony. The scent of honeysuckle hung in the air.

The brokeback shuffled beneath the shadows to a rough, wooden door in a corner of the courtyard. Trying to unlock the door, he dropped four of the sacks, then dropped the remaining two when he jerked the key from the lock. His square face pulled down from pain as he bent to retrieve the sacks.

Behind the door was a large room with faded yellow walls and irregular stains on the ceiling. Sheets of old, watermarked newspaper were scattered about the floor. In the center of the room was a worktable covered with pails, jars, and odd-shaped metal tools; beside the table, on a wooden platform, rested a large sculpture.

Pausing several seconds for the pain to pass, Mayeaux allowed his eyes to drift over the lines of the sculpture, and doing so, relaxed, his face growing softer and smoother.

The statue was of a man and a woman. She: seated, sleek and supple, right knee touching a mound of stone, left knee raised, her back curved delicately to allow her to gaze downward to the man. He: slim and athletic, face upturned, shoulders blanketing her left thigh, arms laced about her, his right knee down, left angled forward.

Mayeaux brought the sacks to the worktable, placed them carefully beside some mixing bowls. He drew water from a wall faucet, filled several jars. He unlaced the sacks, and poured the brown-grey powder into the largest of the bowls, then added water—some of which dripped onto the table and floor—until the powder had become saturated. He watched the statue as he worked the clay, his right arm pinning the bowl to his chest, while his left hand weakly pressed the mixture between his bent fingers.

Perhaps her calves could use a bit more definition, he thought, maybe the muscles in his back. Mayeaux's hand squeezed the mixture with the rhythm of a machine, yet each time, liquid fire burned through his arm.

By the time the bowl was heavy and dark with clay, he had lowered himself to the floor, and was weeping. The pain of his creation increased with every study, always sharper as the price he paid went higher. But it didn't matter, for the statue was almost finished, almost complete.

After a moment he rose, lifted the bowl from the table, and limped to the sculpture. Mayeaux gently touched a small palm of clay to the woman's right calf, delicately sloping it along the existing curves, but cupping his hand more, rounding the curve. His breath was shallow, rapid.

The statue moaned.

Mayeaux's eyes glittered; the corners of his mouth drew back.

"Again?" It was the statue, the woman.

"Yes." Mayeaux's voice was a whisper. He paused in spreading the clay, said again, "Yes."

The man-figure spoke, his face turning a fraction of an inch on his stiff neck, his shoulders barely shifting. "Mayeaux, are you still changing us?" His voice was a smooth baritone, distorted by the inflexibility of his lips.

The brokeback stopped molding the clay, groaned—lines deepening around his eyes—as he bent toward the two figures. "Just a small bit more. That's all. A small bit." Mayeaux traced muscle lines along the calf, first with dry fingers, then wet. The clay was speckled by reflections of the floor lamps.

The two figures silently held their misery, their brows knotting as tightly as their stiff skin would permit. Mayeaux continued shaping the woman-figure's calves, perspiration falling from his nose and chin to make dark spots on the floor.

Her voice betrayed the pain of his kneading and molding her calf. "So, you sold more of yourself to the Madame."

"Only way," he said. "She has what I need. She makes me the clay."

The man-figure spoke, contempt in his voice. "She takes pieces of you."

Mayeaux coughed short bursts of air. "Only way," he said, nodding. The muscles of his left forearm spasmed, causing his hand to indent the tendon of the woman-figure's calf. Small sounds came from her. He quickly smoothed the area.

"Sorry," he said, his voice shaking. "Sometimes . . . sometimes the pain is bad."

She ignored her own hurt, made comforting sounds.

The man-figure had managed to tilt his head to see Mayeaux. Mayeaux glanced up, met his eyes. "And what will you have for your pain?"

"Beauty."

"For selling pieces of yourself? That's not beauty."

Carefully shaping the last bits of clay into the woman's left calf, he finished; he pushed himself away from the sculpture, his back aching between the shoulder blades. He nodded, his head moving stiffly. "Beauty."

He touched the woman's leg, rested his hand there. The man-figure's voice sifted over him, settling on his skin like cold powder. "You don't have enough clay. That means the Madame again. Is it worth it?" Mayeaux searched the bowl with his eyes, his face drawing in fear. The man-figure's words came again. "Could it really be worth it?"

Mayeaux worked his swollen shoulders, trying to ease their ache, thoughts of his payments to the Madame blurring his mind.

"Yes," he whispered harshly. Then louder, "yes."

"Sit." The Madame motioned to a chair concealed from the front sections of her shop. The smock she wore drifted and floated as she gestured, the material's frantic, dark patterns matching the insanity of walls covered with charms, dolls, and talismans.

Mayeaux lowered himself into the chair, squinting as blunt needles seemed to spear his joints. He swabbed sweat from his face.

She sat before him, her tawny face creased with concern. "Last time should have been enough," she stated. "You said it would be the last session."

Glancing over the wall from charm to charm, straw doll to alligator's tooth, he felt a rush of fear that she would refuse him. "So I misjudged. It couldn't be helped. I—"

Waving her arm, she cut him off. "No more. You can't take any more. You couldn't stand it and you'd never finish the sculpture."

"I'd finish." He extended each leg to test its stiffness.

"Too much. The final extraction would ruin you. Believe me. There's not enough of you left."

Through swollen eyes he stared at her. His voice low, he said, "You can't refuse me, Madame. The voodoo won't let you."

Studying his face, she relented. "You're right. I can't refuse. And if you continue to insist, I'll perform the extraction. I'll make the clay you need. But, please, listen, you've paid too much already. Live with the statue as it is. *Please*."

The emotion in her voice touched him, made him feel easier in the knowledge that someone cared. But he shook his head, thinking of the statue, of its fine lines and perfect form. He had paid so much for it. The cost, Jesus, the cost. He sighed, "I need more clay."

She stood, then, towering over his small, misshapen form. "As you wish."

They moved farther into the shop, through curtains of beads to the hot, humid room he had been in so many times before. There, he lay on the floor, straightening himself as best he could, feeling a light layer of dust rub onto his skin.

She arranged pails and candles around him, drew symbols and lit incense. With strips of uncured leather, she tied the heads of chickens to his feet. Blood from the freshly slit necks ran down his soles.

Standing over him, a monstrous giant, she asked once more, "Will you please give this up? Will you set me free from my obligations?"

His voice was small and frightened. "No. Just make it quick. Please, do it as fast as you can."

She rested her eyes on him, shaking her head, then began to chant.

The floor grew soft beneath him, slowly melting to thick liquid in which he sank. He gasped for breath, but only liquid came, filling his mouth and nose, running slowly down his throat, muffling his screams. The pulling began at once. The sucking vacuum of something drawing from his bone, muscle, and blood. The enveloping substance grew warmer, finally boiling, singeing his hair, covering his skin with blisters. Soon, all was white and hot and pain and pulling, and there were only his screams.

He awoke with tears in his eyes.

"How do you feel?" Madame's hands drifted across his face on lightly touching paths.

He drew ragged breaths.

The voodoo queen touched his shoulders. He winced. She placed four small sacks where he could see them. "That was all," she said. "I told you. You've given too much of yourself already."

He tried to roll to his side; a sharp cry escaped his lips.

"Rest. Let your body feel it."

"What happened?" His voice was low and broken; pieces of sound joined to form the two words.

She slowly shook her head. "What I told you would happen. There's . . . There's just nothing left to you. You won't even be able to finish your work."

Past the pain, he smiled. "I'll finish." He started to rise. She took his arm to help him, pulling him up like a small child.

"I can help you there," she said.

He shook his head *no*. "I'll finish."

He knelt before the bowl as if it were an altar to his god. His fingers nearly useless, he used the palms of his hands to lift and move the small pouches, his knuckles to clumsily untie the drawstrings. There was pain with every movement as if chipped glass had been packed into his joints. He mixed the powder and water by pressing and revolving his knuckles like a pestle.

Such a small amount of clay, he thought. It seemed hardly enough.

Afraid his ankles would no longer support his weight, he sank to one knee, then had to shove the bowl for the rest of the distance to the sculpture. He rested at the foot of the statue. Again, as always, he traced the surfaces and curves of the figures with his eyes, this time stopping on the male figure's back. It would only require, he thought, small touches where it seemed not to slope as he liked.

Touching a finger of clay to the statue, Mayeaux felt the figures become animated, heard their nearly silent moans of pain.

"This is the last time," said Mayeaux. "You're almost finished. Just this last shaping." His hands and arms and shoulders were sliced by fire as he delicately placed and formed bits of clay on the man's back. The man-figure seemed to choke; he trembled with Mayeaux's every touch.

Turning her head, the woman-figure said, "Isn't that enough? Do you have to keep on?"

"Almost finished," Mayeaux said, his words rising and falling with his change in breath. He smiled. "More of me in you than in me." He wet and smoothed a small area of clay.

"Mayeaux," the woman-figure said, "do you know what you're doing? What you're really doing?"

"I know." His left leg cramped, muscles knotted in hard lumps. He pressed and molded the final ridge of muscle in the man-figure's back. Then, finished, he lowered himself to the floor, trying to save what little strength remained to fight the pain.

Mayeaux dragged himself to his work table. There, resting his bent and disfigured back against one of its legs, he watched the figures in the statue until they were still. The pain grew worse, bending his limbs farther out of shape, but he didn't care. The statue was too beautiful.

***Alan Brennert** has sold stories to almost every magazine and many of the anthologies since he attended Clarion. He was nominated this year for the John W. Campbell Award for the Best New Writer. It is hard to realize that he has been around writing for only two years (as this is written). Most of his work has been in science fiction, but he is reaching out into other areas and since he is now in his very early twenties, I predict he'll find his way into them.*

Brian in the Dreaming Seat

Alan Brennert

Araneae. Hypnotic trigger whispering him awake, Brian Haskell lay back against the padded headrest, too suddenly alert, too quickly thrust from the shelter of dreams. Motionless, pulse slowing he felt the touch of a soft, unfamiliar hand to his face, something cool above his closed eyes, something wet trickling down the bridge of his nose. Still asleep?—but no. Araneae. All was wakefulness. He opened his eyes.

A new medical attendant gently applied a cold compress to his forehead—a quiet young woman with short auburn hair, a soft smile, deep green eyes. She smiled politely at him as she wiped beads of sweat from beneath his deep-set eyes. He would have to remember that face, so lovely, so right for a film; yes, she would make a fine character for a dreamscript, her beauty perhaps not of a commercial sort, but. . . . He smiled back at her, climbed stiffly from the Seat, and looked around for Markessen.

The production coordinator was nowhere to be seen. Brian turned to one of the technicians shutting down the computer console beside the encephalotape. "Hey, Jess, where's Mark?"

"Screening room nine," Jess said without turning. "Said for you to come up as soon as you got done taping."

"Ah, Christ, can't it wait?"

"Don't think so, Bri. One of the film editors came down, showed him a snippet of tape and he turned twelve shades of purple. Better get up there before he has a hemorrhage."

Brian sighed and left the taping studio in shirtsleeves, keeping to lightly-traveled corridors out of long habit; even so, he had to field too many sharp, jealous glances from actors who saw in him the death of their art and the cessation of their salaries. You'd think they'd have caught on sooner, twenty years ago and more, when dreamscripting first began to make its tentative inroads into the industry. It was only now—now that the dream-flicks were grossing more than conventional films, now that the costs of encephalotaping were spiraling downward— it was only this late that they had recognized Brian and others like him as a threat to their careers. But especially Brian, whom even they were forced to recognize as the *best* of the special dreamers.

But the glances, the icy stares and the cool voices, they were something Brian could never quite get used to, they hurt and embarrassed him . . . and somewhere beneath the skin of that embarrassment was a quiet anger, an ugly pride in the fact that long after those stares had vanished, *he* would remain, his *craft* would remain.

The pride shamed him all the more.

He entered the darkened screening room. Jared Markessen sat unmoving in the fourth row, staring up at the dailies sweeping quickly past—colorful, inflated, looking good, looking very good. Brian walked softly down to the third row, sat, and watched his dreams unreel across the screen. A vague annoyance tugged at him: he hated the sound of his own voice, taped and booming from the speakers; it seemed so young, somehow, so like a child's, even after ten years of dreaming. What was the song, something dim from a lost adolescence? *Dream away, child . . .*

The film showed darkness, stars, ships tumbling from the void at speeds disproportionate to one another; one cruiser momentarily eclipsed a fat red sun and was bathed regally in a crimson corona. Brian smiled at the effect.

Cut to interior of ship: Brian Haskell, captain or commander or somesuch thing, shouting orders, counting casualities, doing insane things that no captain of any real ship would do, certainly not a star ship, certainly not *him*.

Cut to jade-green laser beams crisscrossing one another as the battle began, a web of light that quivered slightly as offscreen something seemed to move—and then that something slowly entered the picture. Brian blinked once as a spider, as huge and as green as the laser bursts, stalked across the screen.

"*Cut*. Lights up." Markessen's voice broke the nervous silence following the scene. Brian frowned. He was in no mood for lectures.

"I would say that is interesting," Markessen said from behind. "A great green spider in interstellar space. Imaginative, Brian. I'll grant you that: imaginative."

He was using Brian's full name, always a bad sign. "Spare me, will you, Mark? We'll reshoot it, okay?"

"Not okay. How did it get there in the first place, I'd like to know."

"What the hell does it matter? The trigger word has something to do with spiders; subconscious seepage, maybe. Come on, we'll reshoot."

"I told you, no. It'd take too much time and we can always work around that scene." Markessen leaned over the edge of his seat, looked at Brian with a narrow, penetrating gaze. "Really, no catastrophe, Bri," he said, less sharply. "Not in itself, at least. But you know, we've found this sort of thing in your work before—sometimes just a few frames of unrelated action, and we cut it and chalk it up to subconscious seepage, as you said. This was the first time the anomaly was actually integrated into the action itself."

What the hell did Mark expect him to say? Brian rubbed at his eyes, feigning weariness. "End-of-the-week jitters, I guess. Hypnocue became suggestive and so we wound up with that. Sorry. Auctorial negligence, what can I say?"

Markessen nodded, apparently satisfied at this admission of culpability. "Sure. Like I said, we can work around it. Just as long as you're aware of the problem." He straightened and tossed Brian a clipped, friendly salute. "See you Monday, Bri."

"Right," Brian said. Markessen disappeared up the aisle, leaving Brian alone in the dimly-lit room. Araneae. More to it than that, he suspected, but whatever it was it could wait. He got up and headed for studio three to pick up the jacket he had left there earlier.

He entered the wide, high-ceilinged studio once more, now night-lit in deep red, paused a moment in front of the dreaming seat and wondered why, damn it, why a spider? He thought of

the young girl who had stroked his forehead with a compress, vaguely wishing that he had asked her to dinner or a show. Idly he fingered the cranial electrodes, debating silently, then suddenly went over and activated the computer console. He tapped out his own identification code, keeping the lights dim red to avoid the notice of whoever might be left in the building. He lay back in the dreaming seat, fitting the skullcap to his head.

All around him, machines tugged on skeins to his soul: electro-oculargraph that measured every blink of his eyes, EEG tracing a dull steady alpha pattern, and the encephalotape, waiting for a dream and a word . . .

Araneae, whispered from the headrest, singing him asleep—stages 1 through 4 over in a matter of seconds, and then his eyes opened blankly as he entered Waking REM. The screen flickered into life above him.

The girl with the auburn hair and the deep green eyes began stroking his forehead once again, her hands working their way down the naked curve of his body, her mouth suddenly on his, tongue probing . . .

They lay in the bow of a sailboat, the sun washing away the distinction between sky and sea, no horizon left to them, warm waves lapping at their thighs as the boat bobbed across the calm Pacific . . .

She was blonde, now, her hair long and blowing freely in the sea breezes, soft smile turned sly and sultry. Her eyes remained green, green flecked with blue as she moved below him . . .

The blue-green earth hung above them in the blackness, a touch away as they laughed, safe in their orbiting cruiser, adjusting the rhythm of their lovemaking to the giddy weightlessness of space . . .

Blackness, yes, she was black now, skin of polished obsidian, hungrier, somehow, quicker, fresher, sharper. He thrust deeper, feeling himself climbing, peaking, coming,

heard his uncle ask him, "What do you want to be when you grow up, Brian?"

and him answer, "A dreamer. Can I do that? A dreamer?"

He fell tumbling back to earth, dreams shattered, love splintering around him, all lost, all lost, all gone. . . . He woke sharply, lurching forward in the Seat, the wires of the skullcap yanking painfully at his hair.

Jesus, he thought, breathing hard, fumbling with the electrodes; Jesus, Jesus, what the hell . . . ? He experienced a brief moment of mental parallax, future-then and future-now trans-

posed on one another. He heard the whine of the encephalotape, staggered over to the console and wiped it clean. He stood there for some minutes—drained, puzzled, and angry. Most of all, angry.

"Watch," Markessen said.

Brian didn't want to watch. He shut his eyes against the dimming lights. He heard the hum of the projector above and behind him, then reluctantly opened his eyes and looked at the screen—a screen that showed an older man, balding with a thatch of gray hair, sitting in a flotation chair, beside him on its arm a small boy. A very familiar ten-year-old.

"What do you want to be when you grow up, Brian?" the man asked the boy.

"A doctor," he replied. "That's all—a doctor."

The image faded.

"There's more," Markessen said impassively.

Image: Brian Haskell, clad in doctor's white, performing surgery in the hot glare of an operating theater, med students above him watching every move with attention and admiration . . .

Seated, staring, Brian felt a pang of satisfaction which faded quickly and left an emptiness.

Image: Brian, shuffling papers for a U.S. Senator who never was or would be, secretarial shitwork in a cramped office in Washington . . .

. . . and again the watching Brian felt a surge of pleasure, of contentment, surely absurd in this context . . .

The scenes shifted quickly now:

Brian, involved in social work in the LA ghetto, sweating and swearing over bureaucracy, trying to get things done;

Brian, pacing back and forth in front of a blackboard, speaking, really communicating to the children who sat before him;

Brian, smiling in the night at something unseen and just beyond reach . . .

Brian stood, found himself unaccountably shaking. "All right, Mark, I get the picture." The images continued to assault him. "Mark . . ."

The screen dimmed and went blank. The lights remained low.

Markessen stared at him from his seat in the third row of the screening room. "What does it mean, Brian?" he said quietly.

Brian stared at the empty screen. "I—I don't know." Unspo-

ken was the gnawing familiarity of those images, the sense of déjà vu that haunted him. "So help me, Mark, I don't. Christ, I'm sorry, I—I've never fucked up this badly, I know—I can't—"

Markessen stood, putting a hand on Brian's shoulder. His tone was a peculiar mixture of anger and concern. "Bri, will you for God's sake look at what's happening? You're overwrought and the proof of it is up there on that screen. Three features one after the other; I like speed, yes, but not at the cost of coherency. That's no way to produce movies."

Brian nodded, somehow feeling that Mark was wrong, that it was more than just film losing coherency, but nodding anyway to avoid argument.

"Look," Markessen said. "We'll scratch the flick. I mean it, forget the whole damned thing. We could always pick it up in a couple of weeks if you want. Right now the important thing is for you to get back into shape; stay away from the dreaming seat for a good long while, and in the meantime you're still on salary in an advisory capacity."

Brian looked up. "Advisory?"

"On the training program. We've got a couple of youngsters, high potential, but they need a guiding hand. And they all respect the hell out of you, Bri, they really do."

Brian wasn't sure he liked the sound of this—it smacked of retirement at best and a pink slip at worst, a slow easy transition from active creator to technical advisor to unemployed dreamer. Still, something *was* happening, something that some part of Brian had suspected, anticipated, feared would happen.

Markessen started up the aisle. "We've got a kid under trial contract right now, two years with option. His name is Carl Dennison—only about twenty-two, twenty-three, but he's tested high on inner consistency and coherency. Come on; he's down in studio four, trying to work up a plot for a holo special we're going to have him do."

Brian sighed and followed.

Carl Dennison, it turned out, was a tall, gangling, awkward young man with a manner that fluctuated between stammering reticence and manic enthusiasm. When the conversation centered on topical concerns and business matters, he became quiet, withdrawn, hesitant to voice opinion and somewhat inarticulate in what opinions he did offer; but when the talk drifted to the abstract, to dreaming in particular, his tone carried confidence and a kind of depth.

Brian liked him at once.

"Not many people dream these days," Brian said to him, he wasn't sure why.

Carl nodded soberly. "I know. God, you wouldn't believe what my friends—some of them—what they're obsessed with. Business, politics, grabassing whatever they can as quickly as they can . . . It—it frightens me a little, to see them like that." Brian noted a familiar tone to the young man's voice—déjà vu, again?—felt also something rise to the surface of his mind, bobbing there like a sailboat on a placid sea, but still out of reach, no horizon in sight.

Markessen had been leaning back against a dreaming seat, listening with detached interest, at least as far as Brian could see; now he straightened up and put a hand on Brian's shoulder. "I'll leave you two to get acquainted some more—maybe fool around with the encephalotape, if you want. I'll be down in studio eight if you need me." He patted Carl on the back and left.

Carl looked embarrassed by the attention he was receiving. "Hell of a nice guy," he said, nodding after Markessen.

"Oh, a prince," Brian said. Silence. He felt a bit off-balance with someone so much younger than himself. (Only ten years, damn it!) He looked around the studio. "Well, why *don't* we fool around with the taping equipment. How many hours of REM supression have you had this week?"

"Ten or twelve."

"Good enough. Come on."

Carl went and lay back in the dreaming seat as Brian fitted the skullcap to his head, the wires slipping subcutaneously into Carl's scalp. Brian's own neck hairs seemed to bristle as he did so.

He tapped out Carl's identification code on the computer console next to the Seat and watched as the boy relaxed visibly, his own hypnotic trigger whispering him asleep. Was the holo-screen engaged? Yes. Brian punched out the word-cues that sent Carl quickly through the four stages of sleep, and finally into the modified D-State of Waking REM.

Carl's muscles relaxed; the EEG switched from the steady pulse of the alpha pattern to the large, slow arcs of the delta wave; and the EOG began chattering in imitation of Carl's rapid eye movements.

The screen lit up, colors changing hue and shape. The patterns took on a more definite form, and in a few seconds the screen turned dark and a galaxy of glittering stars appeared, superim-

posed over which was the dark outline of the Horsehead Nebula in Orion.

Brian smiled as Carl fought to dissolve that image and succeeded only in causing the "horse" to whinny and neigh like a cartoon animal. At last the image flickered and faded, replaced by a placid starscape.

Brian snapped on the console's microphone input and spoke to Carl through the speaker in the dreaming seat. "Why did you dissolve the image, Carl?"

Carl's voice echoed from the screen's speakers, but his lips did not move and his "voice" was oddly different, the vocal intonations being as Carl heard them conducted by the bones of his head:

—Didn't want the horse.

"Why?"

—*You* know.

He was not completely alert; that was one of the things they would have to work on. "No I don't. What does the horse mean?"

Carl wouldn't answer. This is classic, Brian thought with amusement; this is really classic. Horse images usually represented sensuality, animal passion, and yet surely Carl was not so shy as to be embarrassed by his own sexuality?

When Carl refused to respond to further prodding, Brian changed the subject.

On impulse he asked, "Carl, what is a dream?"

—A succession of thoughts, images, and sensations passing through a sleeper's mind.

Textbook response. "No, I mean, what *else* is a dream?"

Hesitation. —An ambition. An aspiration.

"Such as what?"

Without pause:

—Dreaming. Like dreaming.

Brian felt suddenly as though he were looking into a mirror of the past. The painful naiveté of Carl's words was as familiar as that tone in his voice had been—a tone which Brian now recognized (there was no way to deny it) as a secret pride in a poetry that Brian too had once embraced as if it were all the world . . . and which he now embraced because it *was* all the world.

He thought of the girl with the auburn hair and felt a childish guilt, a ten-year-old's bathroom shame. "No—God, no," he said to Carl, hearing himself as if from afar. "Dreaming isn't a—a life's goal, only a means of reaching that goal . . ." What

was he saying? Shut up, shut up . . . "What is your *dream*, Carl?"

Carl persisted: —Dreaming.

"No!" Brian snapped, more vehemently than he had intended, as Carl's EEG pattern bounced momentarily. "Answer me, dammit: why do you want to be a dreamer?"

Carl relented, but not in words. The starscape faded and was replaced by Carl himself, not the Carl who sat dreaming in the room with Brian but another, older Carl: a self-image that was larger than life, Carl Dennison grown out of his awkwardness and stammering manner—confident, direct, at ease with himself and with his world.

Brian stared. "Is that who you hope to be, Carl?" he said softly.

The image grew clearer, sharper. Brian felt a mute horror rise within him, a panic at the revelations being made, a fear that somehow he had known it all before, had known it for the past ten years . . . Numbly: "What—what makes you think, Carl, that dreaming is a place to grow?"

Textbook words again:

—Non-REM sleep secretes a growth hormone for the body while REM sleep performs a similar function for the brain. In the early 1960's Dr. Ian Oswald of Edinburgh University . . .

"No. No," Brian said, shaken and confused and he did not know why; "I—I'd like to believe that, Carl, but it's only theory . . . there's no proof . . ."

Carl showed him proof. The boy's someday-self vanished, and in its place appeared his image of—Brian.

But it was another Brian, one with hard, alert eyes devoid of the sadness they really held, an aura of inflated intelligence and strength about him, an inner resource that had actually drained away years ago and left behind only a thin shell of caring.

Brian blinked; the man on the screen was someone he had once known, someone he had once wanted to be even as Carl wished to be that *other* Carl. Looking at this stillborn Brian Haskell, Brian Haskell felt a sudden snapping anger, at himself and at Carl, *damn* the young snot for doing this, for making him remember lost dreams.

"That's enough, Carl." The words were flat and very cold. The image of Brian-who-never-was remained on the screen; Carl needed it as proof of the power of dreaming, and he would not let go of it.

"That's *enough*, I said." His hand gripped the edge of the

console, knuckles turning slowly white, parallax of a thousand dreams blurring his reason.

Carl would not yield the image. "Goddammit!" Brian shouted and broke away from the console, not seeing the thin needle of the EEG arc wildly; he grabbed Carl by the collar, shook him violently, trying to force those rapidly shifting eyes into rest. He glanced over his shoulder at the screen and saw his dream-self intact, became enraged and slammed the flat of his hand across Carl's face, and then he could not *stop* hitting him, and he *did* not stop until he could see Carl's eyes blink from the pain.

"Bastard," Brian whispered, striking him one final blow; Carl shut his eyes, the EEG scrawled a manic pattern across its surface and then fell limp, and then the screen, thank God, the screen went mercifully blank.

Brian stood there, dumb with the horror of what he had done, and felt his hands twitch spasmodically as he watched Carl shake off his daze and, slowly, look up at his attacker.

He stared at Brian a long minute with a lost, uncomprehending gaze, and Brian knew that he still saw that *other* Brian Haskell, an idol turned angry but not weak, never weak, and Brian wanted to vomit.

Instead he ran blindly out of the studio, feeling his renegade hands tremble and shake, trying to ignore that part of him that felt briefly purged.

The night blurred past, shivering neon lights in a weed-blue haze, the sour breath and shriveled faces of drunks, the close press of limp bodies in bars. Even so, the afternoon's horrors would not fade. He had left his car at the studio, caught a bus to anywhere-but, and had spent much of the evening in hot pursuit of unconsciousness.

It had not worked. Brian stumbled all too soberly out of a bar on Silverlake Boulevard; he leaned against the cold brick of the alley wall and tried to focus his night vision. *Christ Almighty, I can't even get properly stoned.*

To hell with it, he thought, and ran to catch the #83 night-hover heading for Hollywood.

He arrived back at his apartment near midnight, fumbled with his keys only to find that the door was already unlocked. Burglars? Wonderful.

Alarm overshadowing fear, he entered quickly, snapped on a

light, and found Markessen waiting for him, seated casually on the couch.

Brian put the keys back in his pocket. "Would it be gauche of me to ask just how in hell you got in here?" he said.

Markessen held up a key. "Duplicate. We had it made during one of your taping sessions. Don't worry, you've got the only other copy."

"You really know how to put my mind at ease, don't you, Mark?" He moved over to an easy chair opposite Markessen and held tightly onto its back to support himself. All sarcasm left his tone. "What the hell gives you the right to break into my goddamn apartment? Into anybody's goddamn apartment?"

"Not anybody's apartment," Markessen said. "Just yours. You're under contract to New Paramount and that gives us the right to look after our properties."

Contract? Properties? This was positively Faustian. "I suppose you're going to repossess Helen of Troy next," Brian said.

"What?"

"Never mind." The absurdity of it waned, and the humor of it died completely; he *was* Faust, damn it, and he had sold his soul in a very real way, and should have expected this. "What do you want, Mark?" he said tiredly.

"What do I ever want from you? I want you to explain. Why did you terrorize Carl Dennison?"

"I didn't terrorize him."

"You beat the hell out of him while he was in Waking REM and that isn't terrorism?"

"I was—I was trying to help him, Mark. Tried to show him that I was no model for his life . . . no model for *any*one's life."

"And did you think of that at the time?"

Brian hesitated. "No," he admitted. "But I'd . . . I'd like to think that part of me did, at least."

Markessen was frowning. "Bullshit. You were afraid—scared that we were going to ease you out, and have this kid take over for you. So *you* tried to scare *him*. Beat the living crap out of him."

"No," Brian whispered.

"Just went and beat the *hell* out of him. My God, Brian, you are an *evil* son of a bitch—"

"No!" Brian shouted, his voice breaking. He felt horror-striken at the characterization, as if . . .

"Oh God, no, Mark," he said in a whisper. "Please. That's

—that's all I have left, you know? Knowing that I care. That I don't hurt people if I don't have to. That's . . . very *important* to me.''

He heard his own voice, the way it cracked when he said *important*, and could hardly believe it was him speaking. Markessen seemed to sense that he was on sensitive ground and quickly backed off.

"Okay, Bri, take it easy," he said. "Maybe you had your reasons. I'm not saying they're right. But the kid doesn't know that.''

Brian didn't reply. He sank into a chair and shut his eyes. He seemed to be doing a lot of that lately. He heard Markessen get up, walk out of the living room in the direction of the bathroom, and a minute later heard him return.

"Brian.'' Brian opened his eyes: Markessen was holding two empty bottles that had once contained capsules of REM suppressant. "How many of these have you taken this month?''

Brian sensed a way out of this, a lying devious way out of it, but a way in which no one else would be hurt. "What does it look like?'' he said warily.

"It *looks* like you've been eating them for breakfast. What did you do with them all, Bri?''

(I haven't re-filled the prescription for weeks, he wanted to admit, I've been needing them less and less, don't you see, slipping into Waking REM so easily, so easily—I'm—I'm the *best* of the special dreamers, you see.)

"I took them all,'' he lied.

Markessen leapt at the bait. "I thought so. Of all the . . . Bri, you know better than this. Some people need REMs. You do, or you wouldn't be a dreamer. Suppress them too long and—well, psychotic isn't really an accurate word, but . . .'' He sighed. "No wonder you've been all bent out of shape. All for the sake of a lousy picture?''

When Brian didn't answer he took that for agreement and nodded in affirmation. "Yeah, for the sake of a lousy picture. Dumb, Brian, really dumb.''

"I know,'' Brian said.

"Okay. This ends right now, you hear me? Catch up on your REM sleep. Take a month off to do it. Without pay,'' he added, "since it's going to be hard enough to clear your ass with the studio execs without demanding that they pay you for screwing up.''

Brian kept his gaze away from Markessen, he stared out the

window at the city cloaked in night and neon, the glare of advertising hiding people who so very much wished to be hidden, and he thought how right and proper it was that he should be dying in this city.

"I'd like the chance to explain. To Carl," he said.

"Of course. He'll be there when you get back." Brian turned in time to see Markessen slip the duplicate key back into his pocket. "Take it easy, Bri. You're a hell of an asset to us, you know. We need you."

Brian barely heard the words. Markessen turned and left, locking the front door as if it were his own, leaving Brian alone with his deceit. He shut his eyes and lay back in the chair. *Isn't it grand,* he thought, *how very adept I've become at lying?* It had been but a short step from the almost-lies he'd told all his life, the things he'd left unsaid for so long—his beliefs, his aspirations, his fears and his loves. *I've never shared a thing, not my caring, not really my dreams.* Was it any wonder his subconscious now rebelled at all the years of closeting himself off in a world of tinseled fantasy? He was finally sharing his dreams with others, but it was an autonomic function and nothing of which Brian himself could be proud.

And dammit, he so much wanted to be proud of *something*.

Now there was only one course of action left to him, and he had a whole month to prepare himself for it. This time he did load up on REM suppressant, suppressant bootlegged from the studio pharmacy, and there were nights when he would wake screaming for lack of dreams; he would get up, listen to music, to holovision, pacing away the hours till dawn. Some nights he imagined that he *had* dreamt after all, but this was only an illusion, yet another facet of deceit for his mind to play with.

Most nights he simply thought about dreaming, about one special vision he must have clear in his mind—and finally, when at last he felt like a watchspring coiled as far as it would tense, he returned to the studio.

Studio three was empty for the day. It would do. He punched out Markessen's call number on the intercom, asking to see him, he was in number three, he was fine now, and could he please bring Carl with him?

"I don't see why—"

Brian cut him off. "I wanted to explain to him, remember? You promised me that, Mark. It'll only take a minute."

Markessen shrugged. "Okay. Down in a few minutes. Good

to see you back, Bri.'' He punched off.

Brian hung up. He looked up at the holoscreen above him, feeling vaguely alarmed by its whiteness, for some reason, by its width and lack of depth. He shook off the unease and set about readying the dreaming seat, punching out his own code and then, strangely without hesitation, lying back in the Seat.

Araneae.

Eyes open and staring, muscle tone slack, blood pressure rising slowly. He heard a thin scratching of needles on paper, EEG and EOG, and then the screen before him became lost in a kaleidoscope of images.

and his uncle saying, ''What do you want to be?''

and the boy insisting, ''Dreaming. Dreaming.''

and Markessen saying, ''Brian, can you hear me?''

Mark's voice filtered through the veil of phantasms, sharp-edged through the microphone system of the Seat. Brian marshalled his awareness and cut through the haze, replying without voice.

—I hear you, Mark.

''Brian, what in hell . . .?''

—Is Carl there with you?

Crackling, like plastic crinkling. ''I'm here.'' Words cool but curious.

—I . . . I just wanted to explain.

''I've already told him about the suppressant snafu,'' Markessen said.

—That's no explanation. Carl, do you remember what you showed me when you were in this Seat?

Hesitation. ''Yes.''

—Your dream, Carl. You showed me your dream. Don't be embarrassed by it, my God, no, don't ever be embarrassed by your dreams. And don't hide them, either.

''Hide them?'' Carl said with a trace of irritation. ''How can I hide them if I'm going to be a dreamer?''

The smugness and self-assurance in his voice angered Brian and his mind-tone became harder, firmer.

—This is how, damn it. You want to see what your dreams will be, years from now?

He didn't wait for an answer. Bluntly, forcefully, Brian summoned up images of a time he knew would come, Carl sitting in the dreaming seat, the screen alive with the sounds of mock-battle, soldiers, screaming, and in the thick of it fought Carl the Hero, Carl the Barbarian, a caricature of savage

nobility—but in the Seat lay Carl the Dreamer, older, weaker but no wiser, never grown out of his awkwardness and stammering, still a child . . .

"*Stop it!*" Carl screamed into the mike, causing the dream-world to slip away and shatter. "It's not so!"

—But it is.

"You're not!" the boy accused, and Brian felt a weight of leaden inevitability press down on him, a point having been passed, a nerve having been touched, and there was no backing away, not any more . . .

Brian answered not in words but in dreams, real dreams now, no longer the lucrative fantasies of Hollywood but the core of longing that was Brian Haskell.

Image: Century City as it was ten years ago, bright and shining with promise, Brian standing with neck craned, looking up, always up, never doubting that there was a tomorrow . . .

—Me. You. The images blur, I can't tell us apart; in ten years, neither will you, and you'll wonder why you've built your life on foundations of waste, why you've put a veil of dreaming between yourself and the world . . .

Image: Brian Haskell many times over, teacher, social worker, doctor, lover, friend, filling a need, having a plan and a purpose not proscribed by his own ego . . .

—And you'll take comfort in the fact that you're only hurting yourself, until you hurt someone else, and then it all falls apart and you think, my God, maybe I *am* an evil son of a . . .

Image:

(Something stopped him from seeing and he forced himself to look and didn't notice he was crying.)

Brian Haskell, thirty-five years young, contorted out of normal shape and looking taller, thinner, more gangly, awkward of step and word, a truer picture than was ever taken—a hollow man in a land of empty dreaming . . .

But Carl was not listening.

"You—you just go to *hell*," Carl shouted, his voice torn with anguish. "Go straight to fucking hell! You're, you're trying to scare me—afraid I'll become a better dreamer than you . . ."

He moved into Brian's field of vision, stood tall above the reclining Brian, his eyes red with tears, his face flushed and angry. "And I will," he said hotly, naiveté replaced by a burning determination. "You're a fool, Brian. You don't even know what the public wants any more. Heroes, barbarians . . . no one cares about heroes any longer!"

With an effort, Brian forced his eyes shut. The corresponding change in brainwave patterns, modified delta to sudden alpha, caused the console to shut itself off. Araneae; araneae; araneae.

"I was wrong—wasn't I," Brian said hoarsely. "You won't prostitute your dreams. Not like me. You'll whore away something more—substantial—won't you? You'll whore away your life."

But when he opened his eyes, only Markessen remained—Markessen, who would never understand, infinitely luckier than Carl, who would understand only too late.

I sound like a child, Brian thought, and finally knew why.

-END RUN-

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"THE DREAMING KIND"

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ANY RESEMBLANCE TO ACTUAL PERSONS,

LIVING OR DEAD,

OR TO ACTUAL FIRMS AND EVENTS

IS PURELY COINCIDENTAL.

***Damon Knight** established himself as the foremost critic in science fiction with his book IN SEARCH OF WONDER. He started the Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference with Judith Merril and James Blish in 1958 and the Clarion Workshop is a direct spinoff from that. He scored a very high strangeness rating.*

Something That Works

Damon Knight

We get the best part. People who teach for one week often have to go away without knowing whether they've accomplished anything or not. During the last two weeks, we see it all come together. Every year.

We have taught the last two weeks of Clarion since the beginning, never the first, never the second, third or fourth, and all we know about that is from hearsay, but we are intensely curious about it and we speculate a lot. (''We'' is Kate and I; at Clarion we have always worked as a team.)

We know that Clarion works. The way we *think* it works is this: During the first week, the students get a massive shock when they find out that the stuff they've been getting A's for in high school and college ''creative writing'' classes is not good enough here. The next three weeks are a period of confusion—three more instructors in a row, each one saying different things. Finally, in the last two weeks, they get a second shock—because our standards are tougher than anybody's and our expectations higher—and a reordering of values. They come out the other end writing better.

In *The Crack in the Cosmic Egg*, Joseph Chilton Pearce

maintains that this same process is "the way by which all genuine education takes place. Michael Polanyi points out that a 'conversion' shapes the mind of the student into [that of] the physicist. *Metanoia* ["conversion"] is a seizure by the discipline given total attention, and a restructuring of the attending mind."

Does the system work on everybody? No, but if a student has three things I think it will work every time. They are talent, determination, and commitment. The students ordinarily bring the first two; sometimes we supply the third.

Having Kate and me do the last two weeks was an accident. When Robin Wilson started the Workshop in 1968, he invited us for the fifth week, intending to do the sixth week himself; but when our stint was over we couldn't bear to leave, and we asked Robin to let us stay on without pay. We have often asked ourselves how much else that works at Clarion was accidental. What we think is that nothing else was: Robin knew exactly what he was doing.

Whoever does the first week has to lay out the ground rules and start the students writing. This was Robin's job for the first three years; this year it was magnificently done by Chip Delany, who told the students he wanted three stories from each of them by the end of the week. He didn't get that many, of course, but he got a lot, and he got them started. By the end of the course, the twenty-five students had written a total of about half a million words.

Those who teach the next three weeks have a hard way to go, especially if they are new to Clarion—it takes three or four days just to find out what's happening. Nearly everybody who has taught at Clarion has contributed something valuable to the mix. Only two things are deadly: the teacher who has no affection for the students, and the teacher who, perhaps because he has too much, will not use or permit the hard honest criticism which is the basis of the workshop system.

The criticism in the workshop has improved steadily over the years. By the time we get there, the students are using a sophisticated critical vocabulary; they can't be bluffed; their criticism is honest, direct and supportive—they have worked out their destructive impulses during the first few weeks and put them aside; they want to help each other. A good deal of mutual aid goes on outside the workshop as well—they show each other beginnings and first drafts, talk over ideas, get technical help. (No matter what comes up in a story, whether it's what a suicidal

person feels like or whether a bottle breaks when you hit somebody over the head with it, somebody in that group knows about it at first hand.)

They are remarkable, admirable, loveable people, and their sense of themselves as a group is very strong. This year one of the students, a little older than the rest, told us, "The morale down there is fantastic." ("Down there" is the basement of the dorm; the instructors are housed on the first floor, the students down below.) They keep in touch after Clarion; a lot of firm friendships have been made there, and at least three marriages.

One of our best students this year wrote us that he is now sharing a remodeled chicken house with a Clarion graduate of four years ago. He says that when his friend used to try to tell him about Clarion, he didn't understand a word of it. Now he understands, and they can talk.

Something else that we have noticed lately is that the level of maturity of the students has been rising. That may be partly due to the tougher admission policy in recent years, but we think it is also a result of the increasing attraction of science fiction for people of mature ability—we see the same thing in young librarians and in high school and college teachers.

The hardest thing to find out is what the students don't know. Several years ago Kate introduced an exercise in point of view; she has repeated it every year since, and it is amazing how many people never have realized there is such a thing. This year I tried an exercise in "what if" background building. More amazement. Some of the students said they had never known a story could be built that way, from the bottom up.

Our job every year is to try to figure out where each student is weakest and help him there. This means that we have to read everything written at Clarion. If we were there for only a week, that would be impossible; as it is, it is nearly so. The only way we manage it is by getting manuscripts in advance. (This year we got them but I couldn't read them all because of other commitments, and it was rough.) We ask ourselves about each student, "What is he missing that would make him a professional writer?" and try to crank him up there. We don't always succeed, but we try every time.

Can writing be taught? We wondered about this for years before we finally concluded that it can, and that we do it every year at Clarion. But Robin Wilson, the man who started all this—he knew it all the time.

***Lois Metzger** studied under Chip Delany in Buffalo last year and will have a class with Leslie Fiedler this year. These two classes, along with her Clarion experience, will qualify her to write endless articles about writing courses. I hope she will be able to resist the temptation and concentrate instead on her fiction which is sensitive and perceptive far beyond her years.*

No Specific Time Mentioned

Lois Metzger

Mosaic puzzles: tiny blotches, fragments, all in a confused mass of geometric shapes, allowing themselves to be placed into a coherent whole. This one will be an owl. The claws are only sticks now, but soon this wide eyed bird will have something to grab that tree branch with.

Art has its place, I realize that. And I'm careful not to engross myself in it too completely, or let it take up too much time. My brother claims I am so involved with these puzzles I ignore the nuclear sirens, the telescreen, the telephone; but that is nonsense.

My father seems to approve of my interests outside the field of medicine. He thinks I'm overworked. To him I am the eternal child, and whether I am ninety or nineteen (which I am) I doubt this will change. The situation in the house these past two months has not strained our relationship. Not like with my brother Laban, who criticizes everything I do. We argued constantly this past week, he passing judgments on me: "She's too withdrawn, too introverted, too obsessed." He gave me a criti-

cal look, his eyebrows wrinkling down, his mouth curved to an angry line. The first time he gave me that look was when I borrowed a book of his and dropped it in a puddle. And denied it. He asked me why the pages were all crisp and crinkled and I still denied it, with what must have been a silly look of innocence. And he said, "Marlene, don't lie to me. Lying hurts you, drains you of energy. You'll feel guilty and that is one of the most unnecessary energy-consuming emotions."

Laban's going to be an educator. I can see the technique he's learning already taking effect. He stands straighter. His dark brown eyes fix themselves onto yours and never lose that contact. He used to let his curly hair fall where it pleased, but now he flattens it back. When S first saw that, she laughed.

S is the reason for all the arguments lately.

S is why we sat in the living room all evening, waiting. We sat on couches, the three of us, facing each other. The couches are old, very worn; the buttons are off or hanging by threads, the sides shredded by our four cats.

I stared at the photograph of my mother, on the shelf over the telescreen. My father noticed and looked at me as if expecting some sort of comment. (He had just put it up that day, for S's benefit, no doubt.) I was at a loss. I couldn't say, "Wasn't she pretty!" because she wasn't. Instead, absently, I asked, "When was that taken?"

"When she was twenty-three," my father said.

I computed: three years before the suicide. She killed herself during that mass panic when everyone thought there was going to be a nuclear war. I suppose the fears were justified, everyone was getting drafted: men, women, adolescents. But there was no war.

Now Laban is tense because he thinks I will become like S.

My father asked us if we wanted something to eat or drink. The long pendulum of the clock reminded me that external time was a lot shorter than internal time; those past few minutes had felt like an hour. Laban wanted coffee. My father is just starting to get grey hair, and I've noticed brown circles under his eyes, the kind that won't fade no matter how much sleep he gets.

Ever since he was declared untrainable for career programming (he was too old—it was not like what happened with S) he's worked at the factory, with long hours. S once told me that career programming was not decided until age eighteen, or later. I cannot remember a time when I wasn't supposed to be a doctor.

S was going to be an architect.

"When did she say she was coming back?" Laban asked, when my father left the room.

"You don't have to talk about her behind his back," I said.

"Marlene, what time did she say she was coming back!" This was whispered and shouted, at the same time, and if you are not familiar with that tone I will simply say it is vicious. Laban had often lectured me on how useless and draining anger was, but this was not the time to remind him of it.

"The specific time was not mentioned."

Most of her letters were addressed to me. They became less frequent as the weeks passed ("They're getting rougher on her now!" Laban said), and the content shorter. Her last letter said, simply, "It's over. I'm coming home Sunday night." Instead of the initial, she had signed her full name.

My father brought in Laban's coffee.

"We were discussing when she was coming home," I said. "And I told Laban that S didn't mention a specific time."

"You mean Seena," my father said.

"Her name is S," said Laban.

"Her name is Seena," my father said, firmly but in a soft voice. It was not an important point to push.

"Legally it's S now," said Laban. "She's been forcibly taken out of a career program and put into a psychiatric center. Any law book will tell you her name is S."

My father had two possible reactions to this, depending on his mood and energies at the moment. He could have gotten red in the face, very defensive about his daughter, and said, "I don't give a damn about the law books!" or he could have sat back, defeated, and said, as he did:

"Yes, unfortunately that is the law now."

S knew a great deal about the times before the nuclear war scare. She said there were both good and bad points concerning that era, and this one. She wanted to see a blending of the two. Unfortunately she had strange ways of making her politics known, such as yelling at a professor in the middle of a lecture. And writing that newspaper article concerning the evil of Selective Literature. And striking that man for insulting her philosophy, and her explanation: "It's the only language he could understand. No doubt he's a different person for it." But do not get the wrong impression about her. She does not find all literature evil nor does she condone violence. She is a great

believer in the individual circumstance. She trusts no statistic or norm, for she believes too much in change and inconsistency.

She was not meant to be an architect. She said she was not meant for work, for any regular routine. Some called it laziness, and still do.

Some say the psychiatric center is used to treating people like her and does a very thorough job on them.

I can't even imagine one other person like her.

Laban claims to have heard from reliable sources that those centers start by erasing your personality and then add a new one. When I said that sounded severe, too severe, he said, "Oh, yes. But not severe enough for those deviants!"

That was before S was brought to a center. He probably regrets saying that, but his mind is extremely well-disciplined and he rarely feels regret. He has protected himself against that emotion since he was fairly young. I have, too, for that matter.

"But that's not to say the law shouldn't be changed!" my father broke in, a little of the old fire coming out. "It's dehumanizing."

"I don't think it's important to her what she is called," I said. "She never paid attention to labels of any sort."

"This is different," Laban said. "This label is on her. She was always so liberal when it concerned other people, spoke so eloquently about how superficial a title was. But then again, that's interpreting S as she used to be."

I always thought of S as having her own predictable personality, traits that were easily recognized. What to expect now? Would she be meek, submissive? Would she be happy? Would she recognize us—or greet us blankly holding a sheet of paper with our names and address on it?

What to expect now.

Laban bounced his leg up and down, on the ball of his foot, in the rhythm of a heartbeat. His eyes stared ahead, unblinking, and occasionally widened with a glint of excitement, as if seeing where a needed puzzle piece would fit; then quickly faded, as if getting to work on the next one.

Four quick short knocks, and our bodies jerked. I glanced over to the clock; it was early, nine-thirty. My father stood up to answer the door. The cats slept quietly, undreaming. Laban looked startled.

"Seena!" my father said, and all I could see was his back, his curved shoulders, his arms around something.

She came into the living room and put her small suitcase down. (Didn't she leave with two?) Her light red hair was carefully combed away from her face and her many freckles were gone (Impossible! How can freckles disappear?) and she smiled in a queer way. This was a calm, peaceful smile, as if she were looking at babies or puppies; a benevolent smile, as if looking at a lower, dumber species, not at her family.

Her smile used to be more a smirk, with a sneaky gleam to her eyes, letting you know right away if you were in league with her or whether she thought you unworthy of trust.

I was always in league with her.

She looked at us and laughed.

"Marlene! Laban! Both of you look great." She was still smiling. Laban was all tension, and I had the feeling if someone yelled "Hey!" behind him he would shriek.

I told her to sit down and make herself comfortable, after all, long ride, etc.

She sat, hands clasped and knees together, looking like an obedient schoolgirl. Her blue eyes looked huge, her pupils small, like pinpoints. I noticed she had a wide, metal band on her left wrist, partially hidden by a long sleeve. She laughed again.

"I suppose you want to hear all about it, am I right?"

My father protested, "No, you're tired . . ."

"Well," she said. "I can be tired and right at the same time, can't I?" My father laughed. She continued, "And I know all of you too well not to know how curious you are. Especially you!

"Me?"

"Marlene, you would've hated the library. All they had was SL, nothing written any earlier than ten years ago. But there were other interesting things to do besides read."

My father leaned forward anxiously. "Seena, you don't sound as if it was all that bad."

"No!" she said. "Not bad."

"No drugs?"

"No drugs."

"No hypnosis?"

She laughed loudly. "Of course not! It wasn't bad at all." She talked with her hands. They emphasized the words for her, underlined them. She never had done that before.

"I was so worried about you," my father said. "I was so afraid."

"No need to be," she said lightly.

"Laban's heard stories," I began. I waited for her to interrupt

me. I didn't feel like continuing the sentence.

"I can imagine," she said. "Well, don't forget, some of them might be true. I wasn't one of the chronics."

Seena—qualifying herself? Identifying with titles?

"Hey, I thought you didn't have any nervous habits." She placed her hand on top of Laban's leg to stop its shaking. He was pale. Her touch seemed to chill him. His eyes looked glassy, vacant.

"What is that for?" My father pointed to her bracelet.

She blushed. "Nothing, really," she said. "It doesn't do anything."

"Can you take it off?"

"No," she said. "But it doesn't matter."

He sat back and frowned. "It's insulting." Then he smiled. "But I'm relieved," he said. "It's good to have you home—safe—the same."

"The same," she said.

"We didn't know how you were," Laban said, stiffly, his back tight against the chair.

"I always said I was fine." Then she paused. "Oh. I see your point. Well. Now you know I was in a perfectly coherent state of mind when I wrote those letters."

"Yes," I said.

"And you must be very tired," my father said.

"Tired, yes," she said. "I can see your curiosities are not as I remembered them. And I can use some sleep. Goodnight, Laban, Marlene."

My father got up, hugged her, and she went upstairs. To my room. No one had bothered to tell her she would be sleeping in the attic from now on. My father seemed to forget our presence and went downstairs, without a word.

"It's terrible!" Laban said to me. "The whole thing is so unfortunate. I've never seen such a complete transformation. It's enough to give you nightmares." Laban demonstrated his genuine horror by closing his eyes and shuddering. "Did you see the bracelet?" he said. "That'll help them keep her in line." He muttered something about going out, and grabbed a jacket and left.

Strange, having her unpack, prepare herself for sleep in my room. When she was gone it felt as if she had never been here, and now that she was back, it still felt as if she had never been here.

One of the cats awoke and looked at me with milky, tired eyes. "You missed it," I said, and she stretched her small body.

I went back to the mosaic. A temporary withdrawal into the tiny details surrounded by thin, black lines. This owl, for instance, has no eyes, but my efficiency has often been praised, and in a short while he'll be able to stare back at me.

***Vic Webb** was a paratrooper in Germany and is currently living in a remodeled chicken coop in Pennsylvania. For the next six months, until he is forced to enter the labor market, he plans to live frugally and devote himself to developing as a writer. (One whole day at Clarion should be set aside for lessons in how to starve without doing irreversible damage to the human body. As a start in this direction compassionate editors could have their rejections printed with catsup on edible rice paper.) Vic will make it, and six months could be time enough for him to jam the door open at least part way. I hope so.*

Two People Within the Design

Vic Webb

Behind the house was a pine forest stretching down a slope to the Rhine. He had a perch in the thick branches of a tree that gave a complete prospect of the grounds, and there he would sit for hours staring through the binoculars he had bought from a soldier at the post, watching the people inside the house.

He saw a man who was middle-aged, heavy-set (fat, really; his belly thrust out in front of him as if he were hiding a pillow beneath the gray or light brown suits he wore) and, except for a half-circle of black hair, bald. Whenever something was bothering him, which was often, he would run his hands across the top of his head over and over again, as if he were smoothing back the hair he no longer had. Even though he did not know anything about the man, then, he had the feeling he either loved or hated him.

The woman looked to be in her thirties. Dark blonde hair, like

the color sunlight makes on brown leaves, the same shade as his own, hung to her shoulders. Her body was slim and except for the swellings of her breasts she was shaped much the same as he was. He felt a vague kinship for her, as if she were a sister he had not seen for years. She often carried a hand mirror around the house with her and was constantly pausing to direct its reflection at various parts of her body, especially her breasts, hips and face. She would also stand before walls in the house where he knew there were larger mirrors.

He noticed that the man and the woman avoided each other; they seldom occupied the same room when they were in the house together. Sometimes, when they were having supper and he could see them through the large dining room window facing the pines, they would gesture violently at each other. Sometimes he could hear the echoes of their shouts.

One night, after he had seen them leave, he went to the rear wall of the grounds (jagged pieces of glass were cemented into its top) and climbed carefully over it. The woman had left the dining room window open and he entered the house through it. Everything, even the shadows, was exactly as he had imagined it would be. He ascended the stairs in the middle of the house to the third floor where he found quilts and a pillow in a trunk under the conical roof of the north tower. Carrying these under one arm he took the last flight of stairs to the cupola which jutted from the center of the roof. Neither the man nor the woman ever came up into this tiny room and he knew that he would be safe there. He spread out the quilts on one of the benches ringing the walls and went to sleep.

He had grown up in a city orphanage. The first dozen or so years that he could remember were made up of days in small square rooms with about fifty other boys like himself and one adult supervising them. They wrapped boots in white tissue paper, put them into cardboard boxes and then taped the boxes closed. They were fed three times a day in a larger square room which held several hundred of them. The nights they spent in long, corridor-like bays with bunkbeds.

One morning a supervisor came to his bunk and told him that he was now a teen-ager. The supervisor asked him if he wanted to go into some type of schooling, work in the boot factory next door, or stay on in the orphanage and do the things they told him to do. He said he wanted to stay. The orphanage had a library, a

swimming pool, televisions, and movies once a week. It was the only world he knew.

He stayed the next eight or nine years at the orphanage and was moved out of the boot rooms into the cafeteria where he was taught to scrub floors, sinks, ovens, pots, pans and dishes. It was in the kitchens of this cafeteria that he developed the ability to live in the places he made up in his mind. But in the United States this became increasingly hard to accomplish as he grew older. Solitude more and more became a state of being he could only reach by totally withdrawing from the influences of other people. In August of his twenty-first year he left America and emigrated to West Germany, a country whose language built no more worlds in his thoughts than did the talk of birds. By the beginning of September he had found a job washing pots and pans in a small German Army post's mess hall on the edge of the city of Mainz. His fellow workers were Turkish emigrants who could speak snatches of German and, fortunately, no English at all, and since none of the soldiers ever said anything to them his isolation was more complete than it had been even in his childhood. And for him that was the beginning of happiness.

He rented a room above a gas station about a half hour's walk from the mess hall. This was in Gonsenheim (the universe in which his world was to float), a much esplanaded suburb of Mainz where many of the city's modern aristocracy had their homes. But during September he did not spend any time exploring the town, and discovered these things about it later in the autumn.

That first month he spent scouring out the things other people had filled his head with, even as he cleaned away the food remaining on the bowls and platters of the mess hall. While he scrubbed with his hands he sank his thoughts into the mechanical actions of his body, and gradually, as his memories seemed to disappear down the drain with the scraps of food, the old worlds slipped away too. At least this was how he saw it, and he believed in it as a purging method, and finally, after he had rubbed and wiped and rinsed enough, the pot he was working on was empty and cleansed. And ready to be filled again.

Filling the pot was what he used his evenings in the room learning how to do. The walls and ceiling were dull yellow and the floor was unpainted, gray concrete. There was a bed with a pillow and green blankets against the wall opposite the door. A card table and a folding metal chair stood beside the wall to the

left of the door and across from them was an old, blue, easy chair. The only light was a naked yellow bulb in the middle of the ceiling and there were no windows. What he liked about this very plain, dull room was that it was so easy to hate it. The first few evenings he spent sitting on the chairs or lying on the bed, looking around and thinking what a small, uninspired place it was. Finally it bored him to the point of closing his eyes and visualizing a larger, more beautiful world; a mansion with rooms as varied as nations, with furniture the colors and textures of plants: some soft and warm like summer, some hard and cold as winter, others as colorful as autumn trees, still others sweet and bright as spring flowers. He pictured several bathrooms with deep tubs like inland seas.

Sometime in the beginning of October he went into the streets of Gonsenheim to search for this world. The gas station where he lived was situated on the main thoroughfare of the town. This four-lane highway divided the stores, banks and municipal buildings on one side of the street from the residential section on the other. He started his search in the residential area which, near the gas station, was made up of long rows of houses close together and four-story apartment buildings. But a few blocks from where he lived the houses became more separated and even had small lawns or rock gardens around them. He noticed the smell of coal smoke mixed with the scent of trees and for some reason out of his childhood (the boot factory had burned coal) he found the odor comforting. He grew used to this smell, however, in the days of wandering that followed. It soon escaped his awareness in the same way that so much of his past had already disappeared.

But on that night he inhaled the melange of smoke, trees and evening meals, and he felt the universe expanding as the gaps between the houses widened. The further he went from the commercial district the larger the houses became until many were three-storied, some four, and as there were more and more of them, trees grew up in the narrow strip of ground between the sidewalk and the street. Joy and excitement made him walk faster, as if some inanimate being were drawing his spirit to itself, as if one of those great houses was calling him to become its soul so that it could become a world. Even as he felt himself nearing the source of the pull, the houses began to fade back behind high stone fences and surrounded themselves with tiny forests of many different trees.

Still, he knew that the house, the one special house, was there

somewhere; he could feel its presence within his body just as he could feel its desire to have him inside itself. But the darkness, the walls and the trees hid most of the houses, and he could not find it that night.

Late the next day, when half the sun was below the horizon, he noticed the pine forest as he walked along a street at the edge of town. He went into the forest and wandered down the ridge to the Rhine where he watched barges, long, black and low in the water, sliding through the river they would never leave no matter how far north or south they travelled. When he climbed back up the hill he saw the tops of the house's four turrets against the silver glow of the sky.

The orphanage he had grown up in had had many such towers, six-sided and with spiral stairways inside them. Those against the corners of the house had windows and inside, he knew, were rooms.

The following morning he bought a pair of binoculars from a soldier who peddled on the black market. Then he hid in the forest behind the house and watched. And waited.

He woke up in the cupola. He crept downstairs, listening, afraid they might discover him. He slipped through the hallways of the second floor and explored the bedrooms; all were empty. The last one he looked into was the woman's, which appealed to him as a land of garden-sculpted hills in the springtime. The gold bedspread with the rosebush printed on its middle, the dark varnish of the bureaus and dressing table, the mirror across the wall to the left of the glass doors leading to the front balcony; they were all as familiar to him as the long rows of beds at the orphanage had been. He glanced at the clock on the wall above the bed. It was close to ten and he recalled that they usually left for work about eight, so the house would be his until sundown when they returned. He left the bedroom and went to investigate the rooms in the towers.

Both the south and west turrets contained large bathrooms. They were more beautiful than he had imagined them, for they were not the inland seas he had imagined but small pools in forest dells. The one in the west tower had wallpaper of bright orange and purple leaves, a deep, brown, circular bathtub with sharply angular spigots like the rocks around a spring, and a commode of brown enamel which reminded him of an old and rotten tree stump. The one in the south tower was shaped the same way but was done in the green shades of a summer forest.

The room in the east tower he concluded to be the man's study. Gray, metal filing cabinets lined one wall and were encased by a dark wooden frame next to a closet full of gray and light brown suits. There were bookcases against the wall next to the filing cabinets and a long desk facing the door, with an oval, leather-padded chair beneath the windows. The desk was covered by papers, thick folders, a typewriter and a tape recorder. All the millions of words in the room were written in German and he could not read any of them, but he thought that the man was probably a bureaucrat, or perhaps a lawyer. The walls were painted white and there were three bright rectangles where he guessed there had once been pictures or paintings. He went through the desk drawers. He was not looking for the pictures, but he found them.

The first showed him laughing and pointing over his shoulder at one of the orphanage's towers. The second was of him standing beside a table with blueprints scattered across it and familiar windows in the background. He looked up from the photograph and stared at the windows behind the chair, and thought of the ones in the north tower which he had not seen yet. He was confused and was becoming afraid; he had never posed for the pictures, but in both of them his eyes had been directed at the camera's lens. In the last picture he and the man in whose office he stood were splashing each other and laughing in the green pond of the south bathroom. It was a colorphoto and his wet hair was plastered to his head like melted gold. Beneath his image was written *"Liebling Dieter"* and under the man, *"Nichol, Ich liebe dich."* The phrases had been written by different hands.

At first he thought the man knew he was in the house and that he was playing some kind of game with him. But where did the pictures come from and what did the words on the last one mean? Or were they pictures of someone who looked like him, *exactly* like him? He began to think he was trapped in a nightmare of the man's, Nichol's, devising; that Nichol had lured him to the house with the world it offered and was going to keep him in it as a specter with which to act out his fantasies. He sensed this from the picture of them together in the bathtub and in the hidden meaning of the words scrawled beneath their images. In this state of mind he left Nichol's study and went to the room in the north tower.

There was the table with the blueprints lying on it, the win-

dows letting in the morning light. Two large lamps with wide shades hung from the ceiling above the table. There was a semicircular desk against the walls beneath the windows. Trays of pens and pencils, a hand calculator and a pile of scrolls were all arranged neatly on the desktop. He knew it was the woman's workroom and thought that she must be an architect. There were bookcases along the remaining walls and on top of them were models of several buildings. One model was of the house and beside it, scaled down so that they were the same size, was a model of the orphanage (but he remembered the orphanage as being many times larger than the house). He wondered if the woman had designed them and the other buildings. He felt as if he had come to Gonsenheim, to the house, seeking the creator of the worlds he thought he had created himself and now that he had found her he was trapped.

On the desk, beside the scrolls, was a German-English dictionary and a photograph album. He looked down at his hands and saw that he had brought the pictures from Nichol's study with him. Spreading them out on the desk he examined the words written on the one of himself and Nichol. He picked up the dictionary and a pen from one of the trays and looked up the words, writing their translations on the photograph beneath the German phrases. *Liebling Dieter:* "Darling Dieter", and *Nichol, Ich liebe dich:* "Nichol, I love you".

He stared out the window at the bright spots of sunlight reflecting from the glass along the top of the wall, He concentrated on the spots as he reached for the album and then leafed through it until he came to a picture of Nichol and himself standing before the front door of the house with their arms around each other's shoulders. In the margin beneath the picture (in the hand which had written the words below Nichol) was written, in English, "Nichol and you". He was horrified. And suddenly he lost all sense of himself; lost the memory of his life up to the moment he had entered the house, as if he had not existed before then.

A burst of loud, hysterical laughter came from the walls of the room and he jumped back, banging his hip against the table; there was another peal of laughter. He ran from the room but the laughter followed him down the hall to the bathroom in the west turret where he slammed the door behind his back, but not soon enough, for the laughter still echoed from the walls. He looked to the window for escape and saw bars between him and the pines

behind the house. In desperation he looked around at the bathtub, the sink, saw himself in the mirror on the door: laughing, laughing.

The laughter stopped.

He stood before the mirror and watched his reflection move its hands up across its stomach and then grasp the mounds of its breasts. His reflection's hair was longer than his but its eyes had the same cloudy, desperate look. It was almost as if he were seeing a photograph that would be taken of himself sometime in the future, perhaps in a year, but somehow it was already there in his present, hanging on the door and staring at him. He stood there a long time and memorized the curves of his reflection's body. Eventually his image blurred and its face lost its features, its body's curves lost the distinction of their lines. When the reflection came back into focus he was staring at the woman.

She was alone. Water dripped from the rock-shaped spigot into the empty, brown pool of the bathtub. She thought of inland seas and went down the hall to her workroom, laughing as she walked.

All afternoon she worked, designing a hotel surrounding a courtyard. In the courtyard she put a swimming pool with sand around its edges, like a beach. She drew trees between the pool and the hotel whose three stories were sloped like steep mountainsides. By sunset she had completed the first sketches and was surprised when she looked out the window and saw bright orange streaks in the sky. Engrossed in her work she had not noticed the passing hours and she wondered where the day had gone. She could not remember what she had done in the morning. Perhaps she had gone up into the cupola, as she sometimes did, where she could gaze down over the tops of the pines and watch the barges moving up and down the Rhine. Maybe there she had fallen asleep, then had awakened with the idea of the inland sea and come down to work on it.

She glanced over the rough, overall sketch she had made of the hotel, courtyard and swimming pool. There was a figure of a man by the poolside and she wondered why she had put him there. Then she wondered who he was. Was he a guest, or an employee? She decided that he worked at the hotel, had worked there most of his life, in the kitchen. What was he doing by the pool?

She heard a car coming up the driveway. She went to the window and watched Nichol get out of his white Mercedes. He

was fat. Although they had lived together for years she had never been able to decide whether she loved or hated him. She left the room and went downstairs to make their supper.

On her way to the kitchen she passed through the dining room and noticed that the window was open. She went over to close it but she stood there for a few moments and sniffed the sweet breeze coming from the pines. In the fading twilight she thought she could see the dark shape of a man in one of the trees. She left the window open.

Kathleen M. Sidney *teaches retarded children in the Harrison, New Jersey area. She says she has never been anywhere, but that's in the body only; her mind wanders as free as a cloud, unhindered by space or time. This is her third sale, and each story has been beautifully realized, lovingly wrought. It took months for her to complete this very long story because her time is so limited. A true writer, she found the time and didn't permit herself to be rushed or sidetracked or discouraged. Stories like this make all of us who have been associated with Clarion very proud.*

The Traders

Kathleen M. Sidney

Something had changed. It struck Promisedchild like a cold draft from the valley, making her pause and then climb higher for a clear view. The shapes of Eastriver Village were barely visible. The log homes, craft cabins, and even the large community barns blended into the hill on the eastern shore at the other end of the valley. She looked for their temple on the small island in the river but couldn't find it. Had it been a little earlier in the evening, its twin spires would have stood out white against the mountain wall. Now only the course of the river was clearly distinguishable, a faint line of twilight winding through the center of the shadow.

It was a warm night for this early in the spring and when she reached the valley road she removed her boots. To save leather, she told herself, but also because she wanted to feel home beneath her feet. "Earth is our Mother and our Father," she had explained to Anthen when she had finally begun to understand

how differently he saw the world. He had looked up at the clear, noon sky and asked, "Who is the sun?"

At first the road was only a line of stars between dark trees, and the cool earth beneath her feet. Then Lostson rose above the mountain on his journey through Soulhome, and his light enabled her to walk more quickly. She could hear the river running beside her. It used to be a comforting sound but seemed, now, somehow too loud. A mask for the voices of the night.

In her twelfth winter, Promisedchild had gone alone into the mountains, never saying how frightened she was when she left nor how proud when she returned. Everyone knew, because each had gone or would go. She had hurried as she neared her valley, entering exhausted in the night, seeing at first only the darkness and then a few sparks of light, windows lit by late burning candles. Coming home that spring, she had felt more than ever a part of her valley, Earth, and the people whose eager welcome she had anticipated. It was then that she had understood. The Journey was not taken as a test of adulthood, but rather as a realization of belonging.

This time her pace slowed as she passed the first homes, and when she reached her door she paused. Waiting, she told herself, for the right words to give the explanation that couldn't help, or make any difference, but would have to be given anyway. Waiting, she knew, for some sense of homecoming to reassure her. The full moon was higher now. She thought she caught the faint, sweet smell of baking bread; a damp, river breeze brushed it away. For the first time in her life, Promisedchild knocked at the door of her own home.

Her father stood for a moment, blinking into the darkness. It reminded her that her hair was short now, like a Trader's. Then he grasped her so tightly that she thought she might really be home. Her mother waited by the fireplace, a pot holder in one hand. Hers had always been the harsher, less emotional judg0ents, the clear, reasonable voice that led them at the village meetings. Now it was she who seemed at a loss, and when she finally spoke, it was barely a whisper, "Promisedchild."

They heated some milk and ate most of the breakfast bread that night, while their conversation moved awkwardly across trivialities. The hurt was still there, an alien stiffness beneath their love.

The darkness of her room was close around her. She opened the shutters, letting in the cold, and slipped beneath the blankets

on her bed. From here she could see a few stars.

Great-Granduncle Intheirsight asked, "Shall we lose ourselves today?" When they got home he would smile politely at the worn out joke. He was still called Woodsteacher and he told Promisedchild that she was his last student. Dancer leaped about them in tight circles and barked joyfully.

One night Dancer wandered away and the next day there was a blizzard. Intheirsight said the dog had seemed ill and might have been feverish. Two days later it was still snowing hard. The old man forgot woodswisdom and went out looking for his friend.

Even after she saw the frozen bodies, Promisedchild refused to believe they were dead. Then Intheirsight appeared to her in a dream and told her which light was his. After that she would open her shutters at night and speak to his spirit as he passed her window with the slow, invisible motion of the dead. And she would remember to call a greeting to Dancer, knowing he was nearby, even though, as a dog, his light was too dim to be seen from Lifehome.

When she told her parents, they listened quietly. Then her father took her to see Morninglight. The priest said it was usually all right for children to believe in such fantasies, buy they should take no chances with the promised one. "Every living thing reaches for Sun, the soul of our Parents. And so too we each strive to touch our own dim reflections of Their light." As he spoke to her, his voice took on the singsong rhythm that he used on Templeday mornings. "Promisedchild, before you were born you knew many wonderful things that you could not begin to understand now, but you didn't know what it was to be alive. When you return to Soulhome you'll know again what you knew before, and it will mean more to you for having lived. Your great-granduncle loves you and I'm sure he would speak to you if he could, but his words would be on a level that you couldn't comprehend. So he waits, keeping his secret place among spirits, confident that when Sun tells you it's time, you'll find him."

After that, Promisedchild dutifully refrained from talking with Intheirsight and Dancer. And she was careful not to tell anyone that she also knew which light was her own.

Sun slanted in through the open window and touched her eyes. She awoke. It must be near noon. The village seemed unnaturally quiet. Then she remembered that it was newgrowth, the season for planting. Everyone would be in the fields.

An old pair of pants and a shirt hung on her door, fresher than anything that she had brought back with her. A ceramic pot filled with water stood near the glowing wood coals in the hearth. Some lye soap and a towel waited on the cabinet. She smiled, wondering if they thought she might have forgotten where to find these things. There was bread and cheese on the table, but Promisedchild decided to wait and lunch with her family. After she washed and dressed, she pulled a chair up to the back window and opened the shutters. Their temple was gone.

The river was too wide and almost in Brookchild's backyard. The dock had been torn away and all that was left of the long bridge to Temple Island was its entrance arch, well away from the land now, and skewed at an odd angle. The water slammed against it, foaming back before it parted. The river appeared deceptively calm along the limestone channel, so high was it now above the rocks. Where it overflowed its old course, it looked white and angry as it carved out rough banks and fought its way through the debris at the edge of the ruins. Only the center of the island remained above water. One of the fine, tapering spires lay crumbled across the ground. The other had fallen somewhere behind the rubble.

Three people waved to her and she waved back absently before she realized that it was her mother and father and her brother. Riverfriend had been two when she left and would be six now. They were coming up from the fields along the path that wound beside the river. The wind rippled the yellow-green field grass. Her family seemed so bright in the noon light, with the blue river and the dark, early spring mountains behind them. Their hair was braided against the wind. Promisedchild waved again.

"There was an earthquake three years ago." Her mother poured the milk. "Up by Twin Rivers. Very bad." She sat down, shaking her head. "Hillborn visited her brother at Beaver Village last summer. She said Beaver's people had thought Earth planned to shake them loose into Soulhome. She saw the rubble of three houses half buried in an avalanche, and there was a deep gap in the ground, like a knife slit left in butter."

"At least they kept their temple." Her father glanced toward the window and looked quickly back at the bread he was slicing.

"The Drifters told us that West River now runs into East, and that's what flooded us."

"Was anyone killed?"

Her father put down the knife and spoke six names slowly—the village was a family. Among the dead were the parents of Hillborn, Promisedchild's best friend. They had been working in the low rice field.

It might not have been so bad if Narrow Canyon Hill hadn't funneled the water down upon them in a wave. It struck Temple Island first, and for a while it was completely inundated. After the river settled back to its present height, only the center of the island was left, with the water treacherous around it. Both of the priest's sons drowned while trying to get a boat out there to see if their father was still alive. And the best swimmer in the village got only ten feet from shore before his boat capsized. He barely made it back. When others volunteered to try, the Villagers voted against it.

"Now we must go to Sandlake Village on Newgrowth Day, like Drifters without a home of our own." Her father sounded bitter.

"Eastriver Village is our home." Her mother seemed impatient; this was probably an old argument. "And the temples belong to everyone."

Promisedchild wanted to ask who was priest now, but the question lay too close to her crime. "Where did you build the new dock?"

"We can't fish up this way any more," her father answered. "The boats are tied down by the blueberry field."

"Without a dock?"

"There hasn't been time. Most of the low fields are under water and we've had to clear new land."

"But in three years. . ."

"Maybe this fall we'll be able to get to it."

She knew that her people weren't always in a hurry like the Traders, but neither were they unindustrious. For a moment she remembered the view from the pass, and the twilight line of the river.

As they left the table, Promisedchild stood up to join them.

"Not today," her mother said. "Rest. You've come a long way."

And haven't arrived yet? She wondered. Perhaps her mother wanted to give the villagers time to get used to her return.

After they left, Promisedchild stayed in the house, waiting, as she had waited at the door. And gradually the quiet seeped into her. A quiet almost as dead as the quiet that she had known those

first days in the wilderness after Anthen had gone.

Someone knocked at the door, the soft, polite tap of a Villager. She rose and answered it. Hillborn smiled, and Promisedchild returned the greeting of her closest friend.

They sat across from each other and there was a brief, awkward silence while each tried to recall what she once would have said.

"I'm sorry about your parents."

Hillborn's eyes closed a fraction longer than a blink. "You know all about the flood?"

Promisedchild nodded and then waited because it seemed as if Hillborn was about to say more. Instead she looked away, as if fascinated by the faded tapestry that hung above the couch on the other side of the room. Promisedchild's father had made it and her mother bragged that a Trader had once offered them a hurricane lamp and a metal pot for it. Promisedchild knew now that a real trader would have offered less. Most of those the Villagers called Traders were archeologists, scientists or missionaries. It took more than a capitalistic bent to bring people out to so poor and distant a planet as Earth, especially as the margin of safety diminished.

Bargaining was a Trader concept and seemed selfish and rude to Promisedchild's people. They thought it made more sense to simply ask a Trader for some of his wonderful metal goods. When a Villager was lured into bartering, he later referred to it with embarrassment as an exchange of gifts.

"We are without a priest." It was almost a whisper and lacked any note of accusation. Still Promisedchild was surprised by her friend's bluntness.

"For three years?"

Hillborn nodded. "Morninglight had many dreams before deciding who would replace you as his apprentice. Finally I was chosen."

"But you aren't our priest?"

"Morninglight drowned before I learned the holy symbols."

"Hillborn, I don't want to be priest."

Her friend looked at her, a long unwavering stare that Anthen's people would have found uncomfortable. "I see you wear your hair short now." Promisedchild was relieved that it was a statement of fact. An acceptance.

"Why haven't you gone to another priest to learn how to read?"

"Read?"

She had forgotten that it was a Trader word. "To sing the holy symbols."

"No one would teach me."

"Why?"

"Morninglight predicted a disaster for our village; he said we would be saved. Then you left and he died."

Twenty-one years ago, during his fast before Newgrowth Day, Morninglight had had a vision that Earth spoke to him through the two large oaks on Temple Island. He had been told that their village would suffer a catastrophe, but the first child born to Ofland and Valleyman would lead their people through it safely. That was a little over a year before the birth of Promisedchild.

"The Green Mountain Priests gathered at Altarmountain to talk and dream together. We've had some minor earthquakes since the flood, and there was one while they were up there. They decided it was a sign that Morninglight had been a false prophet and it would be unwise to honor his selection of a successor."

"What do the people of our village believe?"

"No one talks about it anymore. But this much I know, they want a priest. And some proof that they deserve one."

"And you?"

"I believe in the promised child."

"But how can you? We grew up together. You've seen me sometimes a coward and sometimes a fool. When we were sixteen I deserted a people who I thought would need me simply because I fell in love with a Trader. Do I seem like a holy person to you?"

Hillborn smiled. "The prophecy made no mention of holiness. Morninglight merely said that you would lead us to safety."

"But I didn't, and the flood is past. So what am I supposed to do now?"

"Last night I dreamt that Earth spoke to you through the oaks on Temple Island, and told you how our people could regain their altar. This morning I found out that you had returned."

"What are you saying, that I should go out there?"

"You will go out there."

"Of course, easy, tomorrow morning I'll grow wings."

"Look to your dreams." Wasn't that what Morninglight would have said?

"Even if I somehow got there alive and was told how our people could cross back and forth, what good would it do them? The temple is destroyed."

"It can be rebuilt."

"Not out of marble."

"Marble?"

"The holy stone."

"All right, then out of wood. What does that matter? Only the altar is irreplaceable and that's under ground. It could easily have survived the force of the water."

"It would be flooded."

"No."

"It has to be."

"It wasn't. I saw it."

"When?"

"In my dream."

They stared at each other across time. Promisedchild got up and stoked the fire. When she sat down again, her friend was still watching her.

"Teach me to sing the holy symbols," Hillborn said tensely. Their religion wasn't crowded with taboos, but only sacred words were written, and they should not be read by laymen.

"You still intend to be priest?"

"Someone must be, and Morninglight chose me. I honor his dreams."

"If no one else does, how will reading help you?"

"When you show us the way back to Temple Island, the people will know that Morninglight was a true prophet."

"Hillborn, I'll teach you to read if you want, but that's all I can do."

Her friend smiled. "Thank you, Promisedchild."

She spent the rest of the day walking old, familiar paths. There was a comfort in motion. It was almost dark when she turned back, cutting through the orchard above the village. As she came down the hill, she saw a flicker of white lights on the other side of the river. It must be Traders; she had thought they would all be gone by now.

"Has the promised child returned to save us from the flood?" If she had seen Nearearth sitting quietly on his porch, she would have taken a different path. He was her cousin and they had grown up together. Most people found him charming, but he had often used his wit against her.

"How are you, Nearearth?"

They turned at the sound of steps. "Promisedchild, where have you been?" Hillborn joined them. "I've just come from your house."

"I was walking. Who's on the other side of the river?"

"It's a Trader camp near the clay field," Hillborn said. "They came a little after the flood. I recognized some of them from the group that used to be up by Sandlake."

"You mean the missionaries?"

"Mishnares?"

"The ones who preach about other gods and saving our souls before the end of the world."

Hillborn laughed. "Yes, that's them. They've even offered us a ride to Soulhome when it's time for our spirits to go. Somehow I think we'll each make it there without their help."

"They say they come from so far away, a different light crosses their sky." It was unlike Nearearth to speak so quietly.

"You don't take them seriously, do you?" Hillborn asked.

"No, but I've often wondered where they do come from." He was looking at Promisedchild.

"The northern mountains," Hillborn replied. "Even the Drifters know little of that area."

"That's what they say. Or at least, that's what everyone except the Traders say." He was waiting.

"I must get back now," Promisedchild told them. "I haven't eaten yet."

She knew her escape from him was temporary, he would ask again. Nearearth was afraid.

They had kept her dinner warm for her. String beans, apple muffins and roast chicken from their portion of the flock. A special treat, a welcome home meal with the guest of honor missing. She should have realized what they would do, but hadn't stopped to think about it, wandering through the hills, looking for something that had been waiting here. Yet even now, as her mother poured milk for both of them and sat across from her at the table, and as the fire lit the room with an orange glow so much warmer than the still, white lights of the Traders, even now she knew that she dared not accept more than she could bear to lose again.

"Some of our friends came over tonight."

"I'm sorry, I didn't realize how late it was getting."

"Traders seem to live haphazard lives. You'll have to get

used to a healthy routine again.''

''Well, I'll see them tomorrow.''

''You're coming to plant with us?''

''Shouldn't I?''

''Yes, you'll have to sometime.''

And then, because there was no way to put it off, Promisedchild asked, ''Are they angry?''

''They were, but a lot has happened.'' Her mother looked past her, trying to see tomorrow. ''I don't know.''

''I met Hillborn and Nearearth tonight.''

''Did you know that he's Coordinator now?''

''Nearearth?'' It had been her mother's job for almost ten years.

''He even requested it.'' They laughed. ''I couldn't believe my good fortune when he was voted in.'' It was a thankless task, a necessary responsibility such as Host, Nurse, or Barn Cleaner, and won more disagreement than prestige. Very few Villagers had a talent for it.

''Is he any good?''

''Good enough.''

As they got up to clear off the table, her mother put her hand on Promisedchild's arm. ''We're glad you're home.''

They poured hot water in the tub and started the dishes.

''You know, don't you, that I'm not the promised child?''

''Your father has searched our dreams. We still haven't found the answer.'' He was a lay dreamwatcher.

''Then you think I could have saved our temple from the flood?''

''I don't know.''

Her father came in with Riverfriend and smiled when he saw her. ''Have you been back long?''

''No.''

''Where did you two go?'' Her mother asked him.

''We walked down to Brookchild's house.''

''And then we went down to the rice field and I got my boots wet.'' Riverfriend pointed at them proudly.

Valleyman picked up his son. ''Come now, it's time for bed.''

''You shouldn't have gone down there alone,'' Ofland told her husband. ''There's been quickmud since the flood.''

Promisedchild wondered if they had been looking for her.

As in most village homes, the first floor was one room

dominated by a fireplace, and the upstairs was divided into two rooms. Her parents had the larger one, and she shared the one in the back with Riverfriend. Promisedchild tiptoed in and set the lamp on the shelf. She sat down to take off her boots, and paused to look at the light on her brother's hair. His crib had been replaced by a bed, crowding the small space. It would have been easier for them to let him use hers until she returned.

There was a low murmur of conversation from downstairs. She had tried to talk with them that evening, while they sat together by the fire. Her mind had kept wandering from their gossip, and when they wanted to know about her travels, every answer had seemed to take too long. They didn't ask why she had left.

Promisedchild thought of the book and wanted to get it out of her pack, then hesitated. Once on the way home she had reached for it, and left it where it was.

When had she first seen Anthen as more than a stranger passing through? They put him in the village guest house and he embarrassed them by trying to pay for it. She remembered how he struggled with their accent, thinking it was they who misunderstood. Too tall and thin, he walked awkwardly among them. Once she had seen him standing very still at the edge of the woods, his strange, grey eyes intense. As a fawn looks out, he looked in.

On Newgrowth Eve, Morninglight had sent her to invite their guest to the ceremony. It was Brookchild's turn to act as village Host and Promisedchild stopped by his place to get the Trader's meal. When she reached the guest house, she knocked at the door. There was no answer. He was probably out in the woods again, carrying that odd, bulky side pack. She went in—privacy wasn't a Village concept. Most of his gear was in the cabin; he evidently didn't plan to camp out for the night. She started the fire going and set the plate down where it would stay warm. When she turned to go, she saw something lying on the floor next to the bed. At first her mind's eye tried to tell her that she was looking at something familiar, a small, wooden case, perhaps. She picked it up out of the shadow and it felt strange. As she carried it close to the fire, she turned it in her hands and saw the symbols: EARTH followed by two meaningless words and the letter V. The inside was composed of thin, stiff sheets of cloth covered with more of the holy symbols, smaller than any she had seen in the temples, and simpler, with squared off shapes. Most

of the words were familiar, but the sentences seemed to lose their meaning.

The door opened and she looked up, startled. He stood there frowning with what she assumed was surprise since it never occurred to her that he might be annoyed.

"What is this holy thing?" she asked.

"This what?"

"Are you a priest?"

He had laughed.

Riverfriend turned in his sleep. She had left the book in her pack beneath the bed. The pack was on the shelf now, empty. And the few possessions she had brought back with her were arranged neatly in one of the dresser drawers. The book wasn't there. She searched the room quickly and then went downstairs.

Her mother was sitting by the fire and had the book open on her lap. She didn't hear Promisedchild's approach until Valleyman spoke.

"We thought you were asleep."

"What are you doing with that?"

Ofland was baffled by her daughter's tone of voice. "I was just . . ."

Promisedchild grabbed the book from her and turned to leave; her mother's expression stopped her.

"Have the Traders taught you to act this way?" her father asked. And she saw herself a stranger in their house.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"It's all right," her mother said, "I think I understand. That is a holy thing and not for my eyes. I wasn't looking at the songs, just the pictures. Especially the one of the sky. I was wondering if it was night or day. The souls are passing, but so is Sun."

"Sun?"

"Yes, look." She reached for the book; Promisedchild drew it away.

"I know the one you mean." She spoke quickly. "It's a picture of Soulhome after the death of Earth."

Her mother nodded. "Afterhome, I should have guessed." When everyone had lived, and even their Parents had returned to Their soul.

It occurred to Promisedchild that lie was a Trader word.

It was a warm day for this time of the year, and although most of the buds were still closed, the people responded to spring. As they walked to the fields, the adults seemed to move and talk and

laugh with the energy of children. And the children ran in circles, unable to contain themselves. It was as if the sun fed the Villagers, as Anthen had said it fed green plants.

"In the winter we work with dead things," her father said. "This is better."

"You love weaving," Promisedchild reminded him.

"Yes, but planting is the work of life." As he talked, he walked more slowly, and her brother and mother hurried on ahead of them. She was just as glad to keep her father's pace.

"Promisedchild . . ." He hesitated. "Hillborn has asked me to watch your dreams."

"She hopes to find the impossible."

Valleyman said no more for a while, but it was the quiet of concentration. He was never as good as her mother at arguing. "Would it do us any harm to look?"

"I really don't think I've dreamt anything worth remembering in a long time." Her dreams seemed more or less alike. Nights were a time for wandering in dark forests, while during the day she had the sun to guide her. Earth's spirit. The traitor, Sun.

"You must ask our Parents to speak to you."

"Why? Do you think if I remind them that I'm the promised child, they'll rebuild our bridge to the island?"

He was amazed and hurt that she spoke in a mocking tone. "If I were you, I might ask the way to be forgiven."

The tilling was much more tiring than she had remembered. Despite her exhausting travels, she was out of condition as a farmer. Even working together, it took them a long time to cultivate a field using wooden tools. Anthen had told her that their food plants had been developed on a planet whose star was too distant to appear in their sky. The yield per acre compensated for their primitive implements. If they had had to depend on the native vegetation, they often would have gone hungry.

By the first break, Promisedchild was more than ready to rest. When they arrived at the field that morning, most of the Villagers had waved at her or smiled. Now they came to greet her more properly, although with too much politeness and formality. Nearearth broke the tension by joking with them. It was good to have his wit on her side for a change. Although she suspected he was trying to win her over to him so that she might be more willing to answer his questions.

On their way home for lunch they saw Drifter wagons parked near the barns and walked over to see who had come. It was

Windschildren, a familiar group, returning north to their summer hunting grounds. Promisedchild's parents looked for Giftson and asked him and his wife to have lunch with them. They loved his stories of faraway places. He had traveled from the ocean to the wastelands that surrounded the world.

Giftson told them that he had a granddaughter now, and they took the hint and invited his entire family. Although the cabin seemed crowded to Promisedchild, the wagon people were used to moving in much closer quarters and managed it gracefully.

Soulbright, the father of the new baby, said they had come to Eastriver Village especially for the naming of their child.

"But we have no priest," Promisedchild said, then wished that she hadn't mentioned it when she saw her father's expression.

"A namer need not be a priest," Soulbright reminded her.

"But who . . .?"

"Promisedchild has been away for a long time," her mother said.

"Then you haven't heard Hillborn laysing?" Soulbright asked.

"Hillborn?" She knew that her friend had a good voice, but laysingers had to make up their own words and music. And since it was holy, one was either very good at it or firmly discouraged.

"We honor her dreams," Soulbright said solemnly. For five springs he and his wife, Willbewise, had asked for a child at the temples, but it was never given them. Last spring they had stopped at Eastriver on their way to Sandlake, and Hillborn had told them of a dream that she had had the night before their arrival. She had seen them coming down from Altarmountain, and Willbewise was holding a baby in her arms. Windschildren didn't stop at Eastriver every spring, and even if Hillborn had guessed that they were coming, there was no way that she could have known the exact day of their arrival. They took her dream seriously, and after Newgrowth Day, Soulbright and Willbewise traveled alone to Altarmountain where they made love. Nine months later, their child was born.

Hillborn was not a dreamwatcher, an interpreter of other people's dreams, but Soulbright was convinced that she had prophetic abilities concerning her own dreams. "Morninglight was wise. Hillborn should be priest."

That afternoon the Drifters helped in the fields, and in the evening they dined with the Villagers in the community hall. Sometimes their visit lasted for weeks, especially in the spring

and fall when there was work to be done. This time they would travel to Sandlake Village with Promisedchild's people for New-growth Day, and then continue their journey northward. The Drifters were valued as field workers, and much more as entertainers and newsbringers. When they left it would be with a fair share of village goods. A trade, even if no one thought of it that way.

Hillborn was absent from the community supper. She had gone to some private place in the woods to dream. They didn't expect her to be back before the following evening when, if the sky was clear and their souls could see them, they would have the naming.

It was snowing—fine, dry flakes, but it didn't seem cold. Perhaps because there was no wind. Promisedchild walked up the hill looking for a place to rest. The squat orchard trees were spaced far apart, making it easy to avoid their branches in the night. She thought that she heard the rapids beneath Temple Bridge and stopped to listen, but there was only the quiet.

At first Anthen was hard to see, so far away and standing as still as the trees. She wanted to hurry and make sure that he was really there, but was careful not to. This time she would go to him with dignity. He brushed the snow from a rock and they sat together; they didn't touch, or share their warmth against the hill.

After a while, Promisedchild remembered that he was waiting. She opened her jacket to let him see their son where she held him snugly beneath her breasts. Anthen reached out and took their child from her arms, holding him close as she had. Watching them, Promisedchild realized that their eyes were exactly the same, and studying their infant, she could find no feature that resembled her own. Anthen made a soft, crooning sound for his son and smiled.

Later he got up, still holding his child, and she knew they were leaving her, and knew that she had always known but had somehow forgotten. A path of fading footprints wound upward and disappeared on the other side of the snow. She thought she heard the faint murmur of a breeze beginning low on the hill, and buttoned her coat again.

Promisedchild left the house before her family. As she closed the door, her parents were still hunting for Riverfriend's right boot. The evening sky was clear, Soulhome would seem close

tonight. It was cold and most of the Villagers were wearing jackets over the heavy, quilted dresses that reached almost to their ankles. In the summer they would put on knee length skirts for special occasions.

She had taken a few steps down the path that led to the beach before she remembered that their gathering place would be under water now. She looked around to see if anyone had noticed her mistake.

Nearearth waved, there were several people with him. "Promisedchild, we meet outside the community hall now."

She turned and followed them. As they walked, Nearearth used her presence as an excuse to give a running monologue on recent village events. And as usual, he managed to hold everyone's attention and made even the trivial seem amusing. When they neared the hall, his expression soured.

"He would come tonight. Does he think we've gathered here just to listen to his mad fantasies?"

The Villagers were collecting outside the building, clustered in small groups of conversation. A few were facing a tall man who stood by the door and spoke with the practiced volume of a priest. Long before she was close enough to see his features, Promisedchild knew he was a stranger. He wore village clothes, but the coat seemed somehow constricting to his wide, expansive gestures. And although he had mastered their accent, his voice changed pitch, rising and falling in a slow motion wave. She had heard it before. The man was from Newhamilden. Anthen once said that the planet's principal export was missionaries. He felt only contempt for them and had never stayed to listen. At first Promisedchild had been curious and it wasn't until she realized that even those who claimed to be from different sects were all saying essentially the same thing that she stopped paying attention. Now she knew what was coming, and the missionary didn't disappoint her. ". . . because of His love and mercy, a love and mercy that is as infinite as space and as endless as time itself, God will save you."

The Villagers went on talking with each other while paying their uninvited guest only a vague, intermittent attention between topics.

Someone whispered, "Here comes Hillborn," and Nearearth hurried to intercept her before she reached the hall. Promisedchild turned to follow him, then stopped. Hillborn wore a yellow linen robe in the long, straight folds of a priest; it lacked only the blue fringe. And instead of a veil, she went bareheaded, her

straight hair parted in the middle and hanging loose to her waist, so that it blew with the robe in the wind. Walking down the path with a slow, easy grace, she somehow managed to project a dignity and status that any priest would envy. Giftson and his family were following her. They stopped as Nearearth approached them; Hillborn continued to stare straight ahead.

"What can we do?" Soulbright was saying as Promisedchild reached them. "We'll just have to start when we're ready." His daughter gave a little cry and he rocked her gently. She was wrapped snugly in a brightly patterned quilt.

"Anyway, it's not dark yet," Giftson said. He seemed in a good mood and not at all bothered by the presence of the missionary. "We'll set up the crib and as he sees us drape the naming cloth he'll catch on and leave."

Promisedchild suggested that where the missionary came from they might not have namings. They looked speculatively at the stranger.

"Oh they must," Giftson said.

Promisedchild offered to go over and explain it to him.

The missionary was telling them some of the rituals and prayers that must be offered to God in return for the salvation of their souls. "Come to him only with yourselves, God has no love for your worldly goods. His sky-carriage will arrive before your doom. He has promised that you shall be saved. You have only to ask and He will . . ."

"Why are you waiting, Promisedchild?" Nearearth's whisper startled her and she realized that she had stopped to listen a few feet from the missionary. She stepped up and put her hand on his arm. He seemed surprised. Probably no Villager had ever interrupted him before. "I'm sorry, but we're having a ceremony here. It's called a naming. Would you like to join us?"

He looked past her. The Villagers were gathering around Hillborn and the crib. "Thank you," he said dryly, "but I must be going."

"Wait. Please, there's something I wanted to ask you."

He turned back to her.

"I've heard missionaries before, but none of them ever mentioned a sky-carriage. What do you mean by it?"

"It's a large carriage that can carry you to a new home. Only you must come to God of yourselves, you must choose salvation."

"Yes, but when you say it will carry us, do you mean our bodies or our souls?"

He smiled. "Both, I should hope."

It was almost dark now and they had the large bonfire going. Its light reflected dimly from the pale skin of the stranger. "You mean a ship? A space ship?"

He looked at her closely. "You're not a Villager?"

"I've lived with Leaguers."

"Are you the one called Promisedchild?"

"Yes."

He smiled again. Sometimes her name amused Traders.

"Can you really take us before . . .?"

"What team were you with?"

"Botany survey," she answered impatiently. "NEAC 12. Can you get us off before the nova?"

"Yes."

"But Anthen said, I heard it was impossible. There're too many of us. How can you?"

"Not all of you. Just one village."

There were many questions that she must ask; instead she merely looked at him, unable to speak as she tried to absorb the implications of what he had said. It grew quiet around them, Hillborn was about to begin. Promisedchild's father was watching her reproachfully. When he saw her look back, he waved for her to join them. The missionary caught his gesture.

"My name is Len." He glanced back at the white lights on the other side of the river. "Any time you want to come, we'll be happy to talk with you."

She watched him walk toward his air car at the edge of the water. Hillborn was beginning a low hum, an eerie monotone that gradually lifted into the notes of a chant. Promisedchild returned to her family. Suddenly she wanted very much to hug them, to be held like a baby in her father's arms, to cry on her mother's lap, and to tell them that hope was more terrifying than despair. She heard Len's air car take off. Hillborn looked soulward and her notes became words.

Promisedchild hadn't planned to listen. She would rather have worked through the problem that Len had posed. Hillborn's song wove through her thoughts and gathered her into the pattern of the village, the design that had always been and always would be. It was a joyous, confident song, a song of thanks and a song of celebration. As one they rode upward on it, reaching closer, and then still closer to their spirits.

Later she let them go, descending into the ritual chant for naming. And only then did Promisedchild have the time to wonder. Who was her old friend now?

"From our Mother, whose life is Earth, from our Father, whose life is Earth, through Soulbright, through Willbewise, another soul comes to Lifehome. We call her Sungiven. Live full, Earth's child."

It was a cold night and the celebration soon moved into the hall. The Drifters entertained their hosts with music, dancing and skits. Later, the Villagers asked Willbewise to sing the Legend of Lostson.

Hillborn sat down next to Promisedchild and whispered, "This is my favorite." She had changed into a quilted dress and seemed once again to be the friend whom Promisedchild remembered. "She's very good, isn't she?"

"So are you."

It was a long ballad and began with the birth of Lostson. As the first human, he came into Lifehome a full grown man. Although he could speak with Earth through the trees, he was lonely, and being able to remember Soulhome, he yearned to rejoin his spirit. Finally he could bear it no longer and committed suicide by walking into the ocean. Never having lived fully, he was not ready to return to Soulhome, and his spirit stayed close to Earth while he awaited rebirth. Earth then brought forth many adults to keep each other company, and had them forget what it was like to be spirits so they would not long to return. In forgetting Soulhome, they also forgot how to speak with their Parents, and Earth could only teach them through dreams and the sacred symbols. So that Their children would experience life more fully, Earth gave them farming and children of their own. And so that each would remember that life was a cycle to be lived completely until it was time to return, Lostson rose each night from the ocean and crossed beneath Their spirits, a light that grew and waned and grew again. One day Lostson would be reincarnated and given another chance to live fully. When he died this time, it would signal the end of Lifehome.

Promisedchild used to enjoy the ballad; now she felt too restless to sit still any longer and finally slipped outside. The air was brisk and dryer than usual, reminding her of winter. She looked out at the river and felt the emptiness on Temple Island, the absence of something large and reassuring, a silhouette that used to stand against the stars.

Hillborn still wore a nightgown and blinked sleepy-eyed at her friend.

"I've come for our first lesson," Promisedchild said.

They ate breakfast and then Hillborn got dressed.

"There's no need for your jacket."

"I'll get some paint and wood from the craft cabins."

Promisedchild put her book on the table and opened it. "This is better."

Lansing's EARTH HISTORY, volume V, chapter 34, The Logictheologians.

> . . . Taking their elements from almost ten thousand years of human history, the Logictheologians applied Torcasso's formula of Selective Extraction and developed the framework for a utopia. It was based on the theory that human emotional needs such as love, belonging, challenge and mystery are universal, and no previous culture was successful at meeting all of them. . . .
>
> . . . Such an ideology would probably not survive exposure to a technological society. Its ideal habitat would be an unsettled planet far from Federation traffic. Unfortunately the Logictheologians hadn't the funds to purchase and terraform a frontier world. At its height, the movement had no more than fifty thousand members who were both willing and qualified to raise their children within a cultural reality so different from their own. . . . Earth might not have been the perfect choice, but it was probably the best they could afford, and it did have advantages. It was stripped of economically valuable resources, had a small, post-war population living in primitive conditions, and was already far from the center of the Federation. The Logictheologians bought the Noninterference Rights to approximately two hundred thousand square miles of land on the north eastern American continent. The area was uninhabitable as a result of chemical warfare but its restoration required a relatively inexpensive terraforming technique. And the ocean and deadly wastelands that surrounded it created a natural boundary. . . .
>
> . . . With the rigelium-powered medical computer they were able to create a nontechnological society while maintaining current health standards. Five hundred of these

computers were constructed and programmed to allow the population to double within the next three generations and then fix itself at the level that could best be served by the temples. . . .

. . . They combined scattered communal villages, the religious obligation to farm, and a high value on nonaggressiveness in order to create a static culture.

Today Logictheologianism is a forgotten movement, and their static, primitive culture conflicts with many of our values. Whatever one thinks of their plan, they must at least be credited with having accomplished it.

There were so many words, so many ideas to explain and reexplain. Promisedchild had had four years. Hillborn had a day. The light grew dim. Hillborn went down to the supply house to get them some food. While she was gone, Promisedchild lit the lamps and stretched out in one of the large hearth chairs. She felt exhausted but satisfied. Hillborn had put up a good deal less resistance than Promisedchild had expected. She closed her eyes and began to drift. The book woke her as it fell to the floor. She bent over and picked it up out of the shadow. Hillborn came in carrying a stew pie.

"Your mother sent Riverfriend chasing after me with this. Did she think I wouldn't feed you?"

As they ate, Hillborn leafed through the book, pausing at a diagram of the solar system. "Then they don't say exactly when Sun will," she hunted for the word, "explode?"

"It probably won't happen right away, but it could be any time within the next ten years."

Hillborn gave her friend a long, concerned look. "And you really believe them?"

Promisedchild tried to master her disappointment, tried to speak softly, patiently, "It's true."

"This man you were with, he left you?"

"Yes, why, what's that got to do with it?"

"When my parents died," her voice caught. She closed the book and stared beyond the fire. "I was confused for a while. Once it seemed to me that I was looking out my window. A skeleton lay on the path, its clothes loose and flapping in the wind. The trees, the field grass, everything was withered brown. And I knew with a terrible certainty that our Parents had returned to Sun." She put her hand on Promisedchild's arm. "It passed. You only have to wait. It will pass."

"Hillborn, don't you believe anything I've said? Anything at all?"

"That those we love are nameless lights?"

"Some have names, some have numbers."

"That you went beyond the endless wastelands that border the world?"

"They aren't endless."

"No one can live there."

"We flew over them in an air car, like the one the missionaries use."

"And you found a people who lived like animals and had even forgotten their Parents?"

"I found the past. Theirs and ours. Listen, I saw ruins, with my own eyes I saw . . ."

"Ruins of what?"

Were those walls red naturally or so white that they took on the color of the late afternoon sun? She had asked if this was a city and he had laughed. Size, she had no conception of size. Besides, cities were made of force fields and vanished with their power. Metal was rare on Earth by then, but a few people had built with stone and brick, perhaps craving something that would last. Here in the desert some of the structures remained, crumbling around their vacant shadows. She had wanted to go in for a closer look, but Anthen was always in a hurry.

"Promisedchild, don't bring these stories to the meeting."

She pushed her chair back, trying not to cry. If her closest friend couldn't even consider the possibility that she was telling the truth . . . "I have to."

They looked at each other, finally Hillborn nodded. "If I believed as you do, I would have to try too."

Promisedchild waited nervously through the discussions, the endless trivialities that had once mattered. Nearearth was a decider and a glib pacifier; the meeting seemed to go more smoothly than it used to. As everyone got up to leave, he called for their attention and announced that Promisedchild had something to say.

They sat down again without complaining. And standing before them, Promisedchild sensed a hunger in their waiting. She wondered if her parents were hurt that she hadn't warned them. Hillborn was the only one there who had any idea of what was to come.

"The missionaries who live across the river have spoken of

impending doom and a strange, grim god who would love us only if we worshipped him. Yet I think they mean well and will help us if they can. Let me tell you how a different group of Traders sees Earth. They call themselves scientists.''

She spoke slowly, carefully, as clearly as she could, knowing that they would try to hear her, and that they would fail. When she was finished they remained quiet, as if still waiting for something else. She tried to think of what it was that she had to give them. ''Maybe, maybe Earth is not a place.'' She must keep calm, she must not plead. ''Maybe our Parents and our souls occupy an infinite universe.'' A soft, omnipresent murmur began in the audience. ''It could be that the Logictheologians hit upon the truth when they thought that they were creating a lie.'' It grew louder. ''Perhaps our interpretation is just too literal. Or it could be that,'' no one was listening now and she was surprised to hear herself shouting, ''it could be that we simply have no conception of size.''

Nearearth got up and asked for quiet; no one seemed to hear him. Then Hillborn took the podium and waited. Gradually they became aware of her presence and grew silent. She paused a moment longer, as if to prove that she need not hurry, and then began to sing. ''Earth whispers to us in dreams of sleep and dreams of madness . . .'' She carried them with her back into the dream that she had had the night before Promisedchild returned. Her voice, her eyes, her stance, no one thing seemed to do it, yet Promisedchild felt captivated by her strength.

''My friend is grief stricken and confused.'' Now she spoke softly, yet no less powerfully than she had sung. ''It will pass for her as it passed for me. And she'll find our way, just as Morninglight promised. Remember the prophecy.'' It was a command. ''She will stand before our temple and listen through the trees.''

They watched the fire, waiting for the milk to warm. She had hurried from the meeting, wanting to avoid everyone, and wandered by herself along the river. When she returned, she had gone to Nearearth's house.

He poured their drinks. ''It used to be rare that we saw a Trader. Their way of speaking was hard to understand and they didn't talk with us much. But these people who live across the river speak clearly and are never quiet.'' He sat down in the hearth chair near hers. ''I had hoped that they were mad.''

''They may be. There's only one thing I'm certain of.''

''That Sun will nova?'' He had learned the word quickly.

"Yes."

"Then we're all going to burn, Promisedchild. No one will leave with you."

"Not even you?"

"Without my people? No."

"Will you help me try to convince them?"

"It's useless."

"Not if we could win Hillborn to our side. I think they'd follow her anywhere."

"Hillborn," he spoke her name with contempt. "She hasn't been sane since the flood."

"They would listen to her."

"That doesn't make her a good leader."

She looked at him. When they were children, she had never understood Nearearth. And even now, even after she had lived among Traders, she found it hard to believe that a Villager would crave power and be so jealous of it.

"Promisedchild, you must go to Temple Island."

"What for?"

"Discredit the prophecy, listen through the trees. When you hear nothing, Hillborn will no longer be able to hold out the hope of regaining our temple. She would never join us, but at least we won't have to fight her."

"How would I get out there?"

"The Traders, these missionaries, have a wagon that flies."

Promisedchild shook her head no. But he had given her an idea. One that would never have occurred to a Villager, not even to Nearearth.

"Up so early?" Ofland whispered. It was still dark out.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to wake you."

"Where are you going?" She sounded afraid.

"I'll be back."

"Let me make you some breakfast."

"No, I'm not hungry."

"Promisedchild, you are coming to Sandlake with us, aren't you?"

"Yes." She put down the towel. Her mother followed her back upstairs and watched her dress.

"You'll feel better after you've been to temple." But Ofland knew that insanity was rarely cured at an altar. If those madmen really believe this nonsense about Sun exploding, why haven't they tried to help us?"

"They didn't have enough time."

"Yet they had time to take what they thought might be of value to them. Your man sounds like a vulture to me."

She shrugged, and then realized that she had acquired the gesture from Anthen.

Promisedchild could have crossed by boat, down where the river was calmer; she chose to go on horseback through the hills. It felt good to ride again. The Traders considered it a sport and would have no time for that sort of thing until they got safely home.

A young man came out of one of the long, narrow houses and held her horse for her as she dismounted. She had rarely seen women in the missionary camps.

"Good afternoon. Is Len here?"

He nodded toward another cabin. "I'm sure he'll be happy to see you."

Her knock sounded strange and she felt the material of the door. Prefab ranstac, easy to mold, carry and fit together. It was cheap and had an almost infinite durability when fully enclosed. But exposed to the rain and snow like this, it wouldn't last more than a hundred years or so. The scientists often built with it, but never in the image of logs, as this was.

Another man came to the door and led her through a series of almost identical rooms. Each had two small windows, made of transparent ranstac, that let in a little of the late afternoon light. Anthen's people preferred larger windows. She wondered if the missionaries came from a dimmer sun. The rooms were pleasantly warm, but stuffy. There was no hearth. As she entered, Len looked up and smiled. He was sitting with his legs crossed, before a faintly glowing statue of a golden man. "I knew you would come."

They talked well into the night, pausing only once to eat supper with the others at a long, communal table. Len apologized for the synthetic portion of their meal. They hadn't the opportunity to do much farming here.

For every piece of useful information, Promisedchild had to sit through diatribes of doctrine. They called themselves the Holy Guardians of His Way and seemed to feel that most Federation cultures were morally degenerate. "They love comfort and take pride in ownership. Only through humility can we free ourselves to feel a greater joy. When Guardian San told us he had found a truly good and innocent people, we came all this

way to save as many as we could. But pride thwarted us, Promisedchild. The Villagers scorned His Way. Tell them that they can come and live with us on Newhamilden. But they must learn to bow their heads when they pray.'' He looked over at his golden man. ''Innocence isn't enough. Only the truth can save you.''

There would be one more ship, with room for the population of a village. Time and money weren't on their side. Passage cost more as the safety margin diminished. This was the best they could afford now. ''Most of us will stay behind. Those of you we can't save in body, we'll try to save in soul.'' The ship had already made the expensive interstellar crossing and would orbit Earth in a couple of weeks.

''We too have fields to plow. We aren't too proud for manual labor. Like you, we know that work is holy.''

No, not work, she thought, Earth, and the tending of life.

''It won't take your people long to learn His Way.''

Not her people, but what of their children born on another planet and surrounded by a new truth?

''They will follow you, won't they?'' His concern for them was real. And Sun would nova. ''Once I heard them speak of a promised child and I knew God would send her back to help us.''

''You don't understand. They believe I was supposed to have saved them from the flood, that I deserted them in their time of need. There's only one way I can hope to regain their faith, and that's if I return to our temple and seem to speak with Earth. I can tell them that our Parents have said that we should accept your offer and in that way accompany Them to a new Lifehome.''

He looked at her, horrified. ''You mean you would lie?''

''Len,'' her voice cracked. She must not humiliate herself further with tears. ''I've tried the truth. No one will listen. They're going to die, don't you see? They're all going to die.''

''Those who accept Him, will be saved.''

''You could take me out to the island in your air car.''

He shook his head no. ''We couldn't help you lie.''

''If you really cared about them.''

''I'm sorry.''

As they stepped outside, the half moon was setting. ''Lost-son,'' he whispered, and smiled as if at a child's fairytale.

She looked up. Once a young girl had dreamed that the moon was her soul.

''Why don't you get some sleep before you leave?''

''No, it will be light soon.''

He stayed with her while she saddled her horse and mounted. "Len, if they come to you believing a lie, would you save them anyway?"

He looked past her for a long time, seeming to study the stars. Finally he sighed. "If they come of their own accord, we'll take them with us and try to teach them the truth. But don't ask us to help you lie."

It was midmorning when she reached the land bridge above the cavern. Hillborn had a small fire going and appeared to have spent the night there. "Care for some breakfast?"

The air was still cool; after they ate they lay down in the field grass and let the spring sun soak into them. The water used to fall from the cavern mouth down the steps of a cliff to the valley floor. Now it gushed out as if from the spout of a giant pump and was halfway to the bottom before it hit the rocks. She listened to its power, a constant, unwavering roar, and closed her eyes against the glare of the sun.

Their area was riddled with caverns and underground streams, but none as spectacular as this. Most of them were small, muddy caves. She and Hillborn had often risked the wrath of their parents to explore them; they had never gotten far. The damp would always put out their torches, forcing them to feel their way back out again, slithering like snakes through the darkness.

Sun was at noon when she awoke. Hillborn was sitting near the edge of the cliff, staring out toward Temple Island. Promisedchild sat down next to her. There was a faint scent of green in the air. East River was narrow in the chasm beneath them; it widened out to almost half a mile by the time it passed their village. There had always been some white water between here and the bridge, but most of the way the river overflowed its limestone banks and after only three years, it had cut a short, muddy decline on both sides. The water churned with a new strength.

From here the island looked oddly off center and Promisedchild realized that its highest section, the part that had remained above water, was actually a little east of what used to be the middle. The two oak trees were still standing, and one of the spires was visible, where its fine, funnelled line lay broken across the east side of the island. "Hillborn, I think the altar must be under water."

"No."

"But the other spire . . ."

"The wave forced it over. Look, see the oaks? Remember, we used to walk between them to enter the temple, and the stairs to the altar were on a direct line with the outer door."

Promisedchild stared at the island. It seemed so small from here. Her eyes blurred and stung. When she opened them again, Hillborn was pointing at a deceptively calm line of water running down the center of the river and breaking into white only when it struck the rubble at the edge of the island.

"It's probably very fast, but deep enough to give us a chance."

Promisedchild agreed. "We might be able to get out to it if we start by those twin pines, it looks rough but not as bad as in the chasm, and the river is still pretty narrow there."

They spent the afternoon making and discarding plans, always coming back to the obvious, dangerous one. The canoe, for all its instability, was still the most maneuverable boat they had. It would require both of them, Hillborn to steer, because she was stronger, and Promisechild to ride in front and pole them away from the rocks. If they could get out to the old channel, and then back into the island, they might be able to use its muddy, northwest shore as a brake. From here it looked relatively smooth and at a good angle.

On their way home, they paused by the twin pines to locate their launching site. "After the Newgrowth celebration," Promisedchild said, remembering her promise to her mother. Hillborn nodded.

At Sandlake, the guest houses and the small village homes were overcrowded, and it rained most of the week. In the holiday atmosphere no one seemed to mind. The Drifters' house wagons were built to withstand midwinter weather, but even they spent most of their time in the community hall and visiting with old, village friends.

On Newgrowth Day, the people took turns visiting the altar. When it was time, Promisedchild and her family walked over to the temple with their hosts. It was built on a small hill next to the lake. The white holy stone blended into a low, limestone cliff and created the illusion that the temple was carved out of the hill. All the temples were near the water. Anthen had said something about rigelium and water as a near infinite power source, but he hadn't understood the process very well himself.

Over the temple door there was a simple, stylized engraving of a tree with two larger limbs reaching toward a circle. Those

who were waiting stayed in the sermon room, while each person went down alone to the altar of their Parents. A young man from another village waited with his betrothed. All marriages were performed on Newgrowth Day. The couple waited till last, to show their Parents that they had patience.

On her way to the stairs, Promisedchild was stopped by the Sandlake priest. "I told Hillborn that when she was in the arms of our Parents, she might ask for a dream. I make the same suggestion to you."

"Then you think it's wrong of us to try to reach Temple Island?"

"I don't know. The flood occurred, therefore Earth meant it to occur. But what people do, they must choose to do." He returned to his own stairs. She remembered from her training that they led down into a small control room. He would know all the chants by heart. There was one for body repair, but none for dream.

The stairs ended at a short hall that led to a small cubicle. There were frescoes in the sermon room, and an entire wall was covered with the holy chants in writing. Down here the walls had bare, hard surfaces that reflected like mirrors and glowed softly. The altar was a transparent slab attached to one side of the chamber. Promisedchild took off her clothes and lay down on it. As she touched it, it occurred to her that their altar was made out of ranstac. She closed her eyes but didn't utter the ritual prayer, or ask for a dream, or make a promise. Her body was filled with a vibration that was almost sound and the room pulsed with light. A few minutes later it stopped and she got up and dressed, feeling, as she always did at this time, wonderfully awake and well. Somewhere near this holy place there was a computer and a Rigelium Generator; Promisedchild couldn't see any hint of where the entrance might be.

The overcast sky had a faint green tint. Anthen nodded, "That's how it begins." She ran for her parents' house. It grew darker. The clouds were stagnant pools of algae, and the still air smelled of damp, molding leaves. She grabbed a sapling to keep from sliding down the steep, muddy bank of the river. It was dead and snapped off in her hand. She fell to her knees and scrambled back upward, clutching the dry field grass like hair. This was the wrong path, the old one that led into the river.

A long time later she found their house and knocked, but no one answered. "They've gone to our temple to pray," Hillborn

said. They must have found the way back to the island; Earth began to vibrate. The stars were out now, faint specks of light behind a veil of pulsing colors.

Her room was still in shadow, but soon Sun would rise above the eastern ridge. Promisedchild sat up and looked out her window. There was a shallow depression in the mountain where the first rays would slant across the valley. A faint cresent was barely visible against the morning sky, the last of the old moon. The birds were loud. A barn cat made short, fast leaps across the field and then abruptly froze. As a still, gray stone, it waited. Promisedchild got up and dressed quickly, shivering in the cold, damp air. It would be best not to pause, today.

Most of the Villagers gathered near the shore opposite the island. Giftson and Soulbright had carried the canoe up from the blueberry field yesterday, and they insisted on carrying it the rest of the way to the launching point now. "Save your strength," Giftson told them. He and his family had returned to Eastriver; the rest of the Drifters had gone on.

There was dew on the field grass. The sky was a deep, clear blue. Promisedchild was grateful that the morning had turned a little warmer. Most of the mountain snows had melted now, and the water wouldn't be as cold as it had been.

Halfway there, Ofland stopped. "I'm going back to the house."

Hillborn looked at her. "We need you to believe in us."

It was almost an accusation.

"What you need, Hillborn, may or may not be Sun's will."

As they went on, Promisedchild heard Giftson whisper to her father, "Morninglight foresaw this day."

They set the canoe down, and Hillborn turned to her friends. "Within our Parent's love, we go without fear."

Promisedchild felt sick and wanted to leave before she embarrassed herself. They shoved the canoe into the water and Giftson held on to the rear from the shore while they climbed in. Then he and Soulbright stepped into the water. It was above their waists and fast. There was a large rock nearby and they braced themselves against it as they steered the boat. In this way they made six feet, then the Drifters could only help them angle the canoe a little west of the current and let go.

The river grabbed them. Not of Earth, Promisedchild thought, a separate, living thing gone mad. It billowed around them and

they rode it like a wild horse. For all their speed, their outward progress seemed maddeningly slow. The canoe was filling dangerously with water. Each foot gained from the shore cost them precious time. With a deftness that was faster than conscious thought, Promisedchild poled them away from the rocks while Hillborn paddled frantically to keep the canoe at the correct angle. Still, it was luck that got them across the rapids and into the deep channel of the old river.

They steered near its west side and then lifted their paddles out of the water to ride the last, swift quarter of a mile. Where the channel divided they paddled hard to escape its westward flow. As they crossed into the white water ten feet above the island, Promisedchild saw a mound barely higher than the rest of the churning water. She shouted uselessly and swung her paddle to pole them off. There was a loud crack, she was flung forward over the bow into the cold current. She fought for the surface and finally found it, gasping for air between the hills of water. Then she was dragged under again and her head struck stone. Light faded into dizziness, but in the same moment she grabbed convulsively. Her foot found a toe hold in the cracked stone and she pushed herself upward along the smooth, funnel-shaped spire, until her head was above water. She was holding onto a small section of the spire wedged upright between two rocks. The tip was broken off but she was near the narrow top and able to wrap her arms around it. As she clung there, the dizziness subsided, and she had time to know that she would die.

The island was between her and the Villagers now, and to anyone who had seen her go under in those rapids, it must seem as if she had already drowned. All that had been gained was a choice and the terror of making it. She could try to swim to the island with the faint likelihood of reaching it. Or she could try to make the channel, where she would have to keep afloat for at least a mile before the river calmed, and then would still face the long swim to shore. The water rushed past her and she hung on, unable to make herself let go.

There was a voice, and she knew that it was only the river. Then Hillborn shouted louder and Promisedchild saw her standing on the island. She was pointing down where the water broke evenly over some long piece of rubble. After a moment, Promisedchild realized that it must be the rest of the spire. Hillborn climbed down into the water and slid along it. The land that used to be a part of the island descended less steeply on this side. She was able to make it out to within several yards of Promisedchild.

Here the water was up to Hillborn's shoulders and she had to cling to the spire to keep from being swept under. Slowly, carefully turning at a right angle to the stone, she freed one hand and reached upcurrent for her friend. Every moment that Promisedchild held on endangered both of them. Even with her own arm out there would be almost five feet between them, and against the strength of the current, she knew it wouldn't be enough. There was no other way, she reminded herself, and no time to wait.

In the same moment that Promisedchild moved to push off, Hillborn kicked out from the stone and grabbed her hand. They fell back together and Promisedchild felt herself pulled down as Hillborn was swept part way under the spire. Then her arm was jarred painfully and she held onto Hillborn's hand with a desperate strength while fighting the current helplessly in an effort to get her feet to the bottom. She was pulled farther away from the surface and when it seemed that she couldn't hold her breath any longer, she panicked and tried to let go. Hillborn wouldn't release her. A moment later she felt herself fall back against the spire, and pulling herself upward, she reached above the water.

She lay on the ground and after a long while, she realized that she was cold and stood up. Hillborn was gone. Promisedchild felt weak and couldn't stop shaking. She started forward but then stopped abruptly at the edge of a deep hole. A crumbled staircase spiraled down and ended at a narrow hall.

"Promisedchild," Hillborn's voice echoed upward from somewhere below. She wanted to hurry down but was forced to move cautiously along the broken steps. "Promisedchild, over here."

Hillborn stood in the doorway, behind her there was a faint glow from the altar room. She was grinning. "You see? Didn't I tell you?"

The floor was caked with dirt, and there was a hole near one corner where the flood water must have widened a crack as it escaped down into some underground stream.

"We still don't know if the altar is working properly."

"There's one way to find out." She was looking at the cut on Promisedchild's forehead.

"It won't do any good to chant here."

"I know, it has to be from the priest's room. Why don't I look for it while you listen through the trees?"

Although it seemed more important to find a way back to the

mainland, she knew it would be useless to say that to Hillborn. Her head ached, it was hard to think. "Wasn't there a fallen tree near where we came out of the water? If we could free the roots and drag it to the south end of the island, we might make it back into the channel." But they hadn't any cutting tools and, anyway, it would be too heavy for them.

As they came out into the light, Promisedchild suggested that they go to the east side of the island where the Villagers could see them if anyone was still watching. "They must think we drowned."

"It's better that way. Would you want someone to get killed trying to save us?"

She was right. Promisedchild felt another wave of dizziness and when they reached the oaks, she sat down between them.

"In my dream you were standing."

She closed her eyes and finally heard Hillborn leave. The wind blew across her wet clothes, thoroughly chilling her. The lie that she had planned to tell Hillborn and the others seemed absurd now. She would die here and later all her people would die—needlessly. When the dizziness subsided she got up.

Most of the wall of the holy chants was still standing; she wondered if they gave Hillborn any pleasure, now that she could read. The other walls had collapsed and the entrance to the control room was buried in rubble. Hillborn had squeezed her way in as far as she could. Promisedchild called down to her. "Be careful, some of this stuff is loose."

Sun was near noon now. A ray slanted through and as Hillborn looked up, it caught a strange expression. "Come down, will you?"

There was barely room for the two of them as they crouched on a broken step. The light slipped through a small opening a little further down, where the remains of Morninglight lay white against the darkness. "He was trapped in the priest's room," Promisedchild said. And starved slowly, listening to the muffled power of the river.

"What did you hear through the trees?" Hillborn asked.

"The wind."

Hillborn started back up, then paused before reaching the top. "I think I see something."

"What?"

She angled off to the side and squeezed through a fissure in the wall beside the stairs. As Promisedchild followed, Hillborn called back, "There's a ladder."

It felt like ranstac; protected from the weather until the flood, it should still be sound. Heavy metal bolts held it firmly to the rock wall of the long shaft. They made the descent in total darkness. When they finally reached the bottom, Promisedchild heard Hillborn draw in her breath. "What's wrong?" There was no reply. "Hillborn."

"Feel it." Hillborn reached for her hand and pulled her down so that she could touch the ground. It felt like a fat snake and pulsed with power. "It's a marker to guide us in the dark. We've found the way for our people."

"It's a cable. It only leads to the generator."

Sometime later, as they walked easily through a natural cavern, using their bare feet to follow the cable, Promisedchild allowed herself to hope. Why build a power source so far from the temple? Because with a tunnel already available for their cable, it was easier to build the generator on the mainland? In fact, distance might be a safety factor. But even if the tunnel had once reached land, that section of the shore might be under water now. And in any case, the other entrance wouldn't have been used for almost seven hundred years; there was no reason to assume that it was still open.

When they stopped to rest, she noticed that the walls felt chiseled in that spot. Had they widened the tunnel in some places? It seemed a good sign. She tried not to think about how long ago it had been since those founders walked through these passages, and about the recent quakes.

They sat together with their shoulders touching, a reassurance that each was not alone. It occurred to Promisedchild that there might be a bond between old friends that was deeper and more trustworthy than ideas. For the first time since Anthen left, a small part of her loneliness subsided. "Hillborn, do you remember the caverns?"

"I remember."

And for a moment in that total darkness, each knew the other had smiled.

When they saw the first faint reflection of light, it seemed as if they might have found the entrance. A few moments later they were in a large hollowed-out room, and the light was no brighter. Its source was a dimly glowing cube near the center of the chamber. As they approached the generator, Promisedchild realized that the room was much larger than it had seemed, and the cube was three or four times her own height. A tube arched down from the ceiling and connected with the generator, cover-

ing most of one side. At first she thought it was also glowing, then realized that its light was uneven. It seemed to be made of a mirrored metal, perhaps the same kind that was in the altar room. The pulse they had felt along the cable was echoed here in a low drone. The ground vibrated faintly.

Hillborn stepped before the cube and raised her arms in the holy sign, the sunward reaching of life.

"It's called a Rigelium Generator," Promisedchild said. Having thrown away the opportunity to lie, she had only the truth now. "Don't you remember? I told you about it the day I showed you the book."

Hillborn began to chant. "Within your light, we reach upward."

"Look, see that tube? It brings in the water that mixes with the rigelium and . . ." She didn't really understand how it worked. And Hillborn wasn't listening.

"Within your love . . ."

"Hillborn, you can lead them to safety."

". . . We are your life."

"Whatever way you go, whether you stay on Earth or leave, they'll follow you. Maybe that's what this is all for, couldn't it be?"

"Within your vision . . ."

"Morninglight's prophesy, your dreams, our being here."

". . . We learn to see."

"The power you seem to have to move people's feelings, couldn't it be meant for you to save us?"

Hillborn brought down her arms with a slow, calm grace and turned to Promisedchild. It was a priest's smile. And perhaps that was her uncanny strength, a wonderful confidence. It was a promise and a reassurance. "Earth is my power."

How long had they been climbing? It seemed long. Longer, perhaps, because when they had found the ranstac ladder, Promisedchild had noticed a thin trickle of water coming down the left side of the shaft. She had asked to go first, trusting her own sense of caution over Hillborn's, and tried each rung before putting her full weight on it. The ladder seemed sturdy enough as they climbed back up into the darkness.

She tried to picture the people who had hung the ladder here. The founders. One generation, that was all that they had had. One generation within which to establish another reality. Take a baby for whom everything is new. Take a sixteen-year-old girl in

love with the way a man looks woodsward. What had she to offer Hillborn in return for a world? There was nothing to trade for home. Three people waved to her on their way up from the fields. She felt a terrible, helpless rage at the inevitability of their deaths. And when it passed there was only fear.

The ladder ended in emptiness. She could feel the wall behind it but not on the sides. The shaft must be wider here. Holding on tight, she leaned out as far as she could and reached into the darkness.

Nothing.

They backed down a few rungs and she tried again. This time her hand scraped against stone. She forced herself to move slowly and began a methodical search of the shaft. During her fourth sweep, crouching a little lower on the ladder, she found a trickle of water and followed it back up to the tunnel. It was nearer than she had thought. She swung her arms around and into it, pushing against the ladder with her feet. There was a dull, barely audible crack, followed a few moments later by a clatter at the bottom of the shaft.

"It's a piece of the ladder," Hillborn called.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, but I can't get up to where you were, I'll have to make it from here."

"Wait a minute." Promisedchild lay flat against the tunnel floor, braced her feet over a rock, and stretched out her arms. "All right." As Hillborn felt for the edge of the tunnel, Promisedchild grabbed her wrists. Hillborn swung off the ladder and scraped the side of the shaft with her feet as she began to pull herself upward.

Earth is my power, she had said, and there was nothing to stop her now. They had found the way back to their temple and she would be priest.

Promisedchild let go.

For a moment she thought it wasn't enough, that she would have to pry Hillborn's hands loose. Then, slowly at first, they began to slip. Promisedchild heard breath sucked inward, a grunt like a question, but no scream. It seemed a long time later that the sound of Hillborn's body breaking against stone echoed and re-echoed upward.

The door wouldn't open. She pushed for a long time with a mindless panic, until, falling back in exhaustion, she remembered Anthen's description of an air lock. It was easy.

On the other side she found herself at the bottom of what would have appeared to be a shallow cavern. She and Hillborn might have explored it once, never guessing at the existence of the door. She closed it behind her and carefully patted the clay-like mud back over the top to conceal it. The entrance was just above the new water line, a half mile south of Eastriver.

It was evening and as she reached the road, she saw the first slim crescent of the new moon. The village lights flickered warmly. Her head ache was worse now and she stopped once to vomit in the bushes. Waiting for the nausea to pass, she concentrated on the coolness of the road beneath her feet, and the sound of the river.

As she passed the outer houses, someone saw her and called. She was careful not to look, careful to watch only the road ahead of her. By the time she passed the home of her parents, there was a small group of Villagers following her. She didn't stop until she reached the beach. There she stood with her back to the water and closed her eyes. Hillborn could have focused on some calm point between herself and the world, and waited with her eyes open. She tried not to think of Hillborn, she must concentrate on what she had to say. Her father put his arms around her. Her mother whispered her name. She remained still, as if unaware of their presence, and finally they stepped back and waited with the others. When it seemed to her that they must all be there, she opened her eyes and reached skyward.

"At the beginning of Earth, I was born and died. My Parents called me Lostson." Yes, she had drowned and could remember death, it was beautiful beyond their understanding. But they must be patient because Sun had not one life, but many, and they were the chosen founders of a new home. The missionaries, though they didn't understand the true reason yet, were meant to take them there. She quoted from The Beginning, "Sun, who had always been everything, everywhere, broke into a countless number of spirits, becoming not less, but more, for seeing from separate homes." She stood before them in torn and mud-caked clothes. "Hillborn drowned that you might reach the truth. She waits in Soulhome." Unable to sing with Hillborn's power, she chanted softly. They listened, and this time they heard. "Once at the beginning of Earth, I was born and refused to live. My parents called me Lostson. Once, at the end of Earth, I was reborn. My parents called me Promisedchild."

Into the silence that followed, her mother spoke so quietly it took them a moment to realize she was speaking to them all.

"You know, you must know, that there is only emptiness on the other side of Soulhome."

Even in grief, Ofland maintained an air of dignity and reason. As she left, half of the people followed her.

The shuttle landed at the missionary camp earlier than expected, and the nervous captain insisted that they leave at dawn. Len flew over with the bad news, but Nearearth had his followers well organized and an hour later the wagons were ready to go. Before they left, Promisedchild called them together.

"Sun has spoken to me. I can't go with you."

They stared at her, belief turning to doubt. This time she didn't try to stop her tears. "I am Lostson." And then they understood. "This is where I must die."

"But who will lead us?" Soulbright asked.

"Nearearth." In the last few days she had told him a great deal about Traders and Missionaries.

"And who will be our priest?"

"In the new life, everyone will know how to sing the holy symbols."

The land bridge was visible from the orchard hill, and Promisedchild walked up to join the others. A little less than half the Villagers were leaving with Nearearth. This was the first clear evening since the death of Hillborn, and tonight those who were staying would sing the Song of Passing for her soul.

A line of torches crossed the river and turned down toward the missionary camp. Those who watched waited until the first faint lights of Soulhome faded in above them, and then returned, walking down into the first faint lights of their village. When they reached the river, Promisedchild stepped before them and began the ritual chant.

"Hillborn, we who have loved you, sing for the joy of your passing."

"Hillborn," they replied, "the children of Earth sing for your passing."

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