

A SCIENCE-FICTION SHOCKER

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THE DAY THEY H-BOMBED LOS ANGELES

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

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THE COMING OF THE ZOMBIES

The bombs that hit Los Angeles on that peaceful day unleashed a terror greater than any calculated by man. Far worse than the instantaneous destruction and mass-deaths was the sudden appearance of human beings transformed into howling zombies who attacked the survivors unmercifully. Even the terrible fall-out could not account for such barbarism.

Tom Watkins and his crew watched hopelessly as men turned into beasts all around them; desperately they tried to defend their tiny hideaway. But even more puzzling was the fact that escape from the devastated area was forbidden under penalty of death. Was it really possible that the onslaught of bombs was sent, not by an enemy nation, but by the government of the United States itself?

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS has been a prolific and highrated author of science-fiction stories for several decades. His tales have appeared in virtually all the magazines in the field and have been reprinted in a great many distinguished anthologies. He accounts for his talents this way:

"Writing seems to be in my blood; it's the only occupation I enjoy. I've been at it ever since I was a kid. If I may parody Mark Twain, who apologized because there was a certain amount of information in *The In*nocents Abroad, and said he was sorry but that "information appeared to stew out of him like the precious ottar of roses out of the ottar," words appear to stew out of me. There is really nothing I can do about this except direct them at a typewriter and hope they will emerge in the form of stories or books."

Other novels by Robert Moore Williams that have appeared in Ace Books editions include: DOOMSDAY EVE (D-215), THE BLUE ATOM (D-332), and WORLD OF THE MASTERMINDS (D-427).

by
ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

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CHAPTER ONE

For the harbor area of Los Angeles, the day was normal enough—or so Tom Watkins thought as he pulled his little sport job into a parking lot and waited for the attendant to give him a ticket. Traffic seemed not quite as heavy as usual; perhaps there were fewer people on the streets. Strange rumors of some deadly danger in the Basin had been in circulation for months, with the result that tens of thousands of frightened people had already left the area. But things looked fairly normal. In the bay, a tug had a bone in its teeth; a great liner was coming in from the depths of the blue Pacific; and just beyond the parking lot, a huge concrete warehouse looked to be quite substantial and real.

"Here's your tick—" So far the attendant got, then stopped speaking as an intolerably bright light flared in the sky. Up toward Pasadena, the light might be over the Rose City, it might be over downtown Los Angeles. Its distance was hard to estimate but its brightness was not. It was brighter than the sun. When it flared in the sky, the sunlight seemed to fade away into a dim glow. Tom Watkins caught only a glimpse of the light out of the corner of his eyes. The parking lot attendant looked straight at it. Dropping the ticket, he clapped his hands over his eyes and began to scream, "I'm blind! I'm

blind!"

No sound accompanied the light. Not yet.

Tom Watkins did not need anyone to tell him what this light was. He knew instantly the source from which it came, knew this better than he knew his own name, knew it with an absolute sureness. He looked toward the street leng enough to locate the round circle, the A, and the pointing arrow, then jerked the door of his car open and leaped out. "Come on, man! There's no time to waste."

"I'm blind!" the attendant screamed. "Call a doctor, fast!"

"There's no time for a doctor." Watkins did not look to see, but he knew the light was still flaring in the sky. Nor did he add that there might never be time for a doctor again. "Here! Let me lead you!" He grabbed the attendant's arms. Watkins did not know the man. He was merely trying to help a fellow human being.

"Get away from me! Don't touch me." Jerking free, the attendant fumbled his way into the shack on the lot. Watkins caught a glimpse of him trying to use the phone. Tom did not wait to see more. Nor did he try to use his car. He knew that in seconds, before he could get it turned around, it might be

so much twisted metallic junk.

Unless he reached the shelter quickly, Tom Watkins knew that he too might be just so much twisted human junk. He

headed for the shelter, running all the way.

On the street, cars were veering toward the curb. Bumpers were crashing and fenders were scraping. A few people who, like the parking lot attendant, had looked at the bright light that was still flaring in the sky, now had their hands over their eyes and were beginning to scream. Others, still able to see, were moving toward the place where the arrow pointed down a flight of steps that led downward from an arcade between two buildings. But most of them had not as yet realized what had happened. Then one, a fat woman with a large shopping bag, understood.

That was an atom bomb!" the fat woman screamed. Dropping the bag, she started toward the downward-pointing arrow. Tom Watkins did not try to tell her that the light still

flaring in the sky did not come from an atom bomb.

It came from a hydrogen warhead.

After the fat woman screamed, and everyone within hearing range of her voice knew what he was dealing with, the street became strangely quiet. The light in the sky was fading now. However, some incredible electric tension seemed to hang in the air. It seemed to muffle sound, but it did not muffle thinking. Tom Watkins wished it had. The thoughts in his mind were not pleasant.

He was thinking that this was the beginning of the last war the human race would ever fight. Those who survived—if any did—would have to go back to the swamps, the jungles, and the forlorn mountain ranges to begin again the slow climb to civilization. Many long generations would be needed to breed out of the children of the survivors of this day, the genewarping effects of the radiation and the fallout. Man's children and his children's children would be changed. Would they be human when they finally began to breed true again?

Watkins reached the top of the steps. On the left was a basement store that handled television and radio sets and did repair work on electrical appliances. Tom noted that it had a display of radiation counters in the window. On the other side was a small shop that had a display of luggage in one

window and perfumes in the other.

BROOOOMMMMM! BOOOOONG! BROOOOOMMMM!

Ringing through the sky like the crack of doom that it was, the air-borne blast wave hit. It shook the earth, the air above the earth, and the stratosphere above that. Tom Watkins felt the pressure wave strike him from behind and shove him down the steps. Tumbling, he managed to grasp the hand rail and maintain his balance. The concrete steps under his feet were shaking. Around him, people were falling like pins in a bowling alley as though some bowler had made a strike. The fat woman went past Tom, a tall man flew past him like leaves blown by the hurricane.

As Tom caught himself on the handrail, a young woman came out of the luggage shop on the first landing below him. He wondered, vaguely, if she had been buying an overnight bag. Who would need an overnight bag tomorrow? As he watched, the perfume displays began falling off their shelves, breaking as they fell. They had been designed to add to woman's glamour. Would they add to the glamour of a corpse?

The young woman did not seem to realize what had happened. She stared, dazedly, at the people falling past her, then tried to force her way up the steps. She was promptly

knocked down. Steadying himself on the handrail, Tom helped her to her feet.

"Sis, we're going the other way," Tom said.

"Why? What? How did you know my name?" Bewildered and confused, she did not seem to know what she was

saying.

"I don't know your name," Tom answered. She was a nice-looking young woman, not beautiful, but with a clear, clean skin and bright blue eyes—the kind of woman men dreamed of. Tom stopped this line of thinking before it got well started. Men had dreamed of women like this one back in the days when dreaming had been worthwhile, when dreaming had a future.

"What happened? Where are all these people going? Why

is the ground shaking?"

"Bomb in the sky," Tom answered. Inside the shop, luggage and bottles of expensive perfume were still falling from the shelves. He watched her face as she took in the meaning of his words. There was something of Humpty-Dumpty in her face now, as if she was wondering how she could ever

possibly be put together again.

"Bomb in the sky?" She repeated his words, said, "Oh . . .," a little, frightened mouse-squeak of a sound, then started up the steps. Tom didn't try to stop her. He didn't have to. The people forcing their way down took care of this, pressing her against him in spite of all her efforts to go upward. Her body was warm and soft, with the hint of a delicate perfume somewhere about it.

"But I have to get out of here," she protested to Tom. Her tone of voice said it was quite reasonable for her to turn to him in this situation. He could do anything. "Dr. Smith will need me. I'm his receptionist, bookkeeper and lab assistant.

With so many hurt, he'll need me."

Tom shook his head, not to indicate that Dr. Smith and all other doctors would not be needed—they would be desperately in demand—but to indicate his wonder at who would doctor the doctors. "Not unless he was real spry on his feet, he won't need you." His voice was grim.

"But I have to go; I have to get back on the job. I just took a little time off, while Dr. Smith was busy in his lab, to buy a gift for a friend. I have to get back on the job." She was a little angry now, angry and confused. The world had fallen in around her. This had disturbed her feelings as a good housekeeper, but she hadn't as yet felt the emotional impact of the fact now facing her.

"Sis, when the hydrogen starts popping, the only job anybody has left is how to stay alive. It's full-time work." Tom's voice was still grim. "Come on and go with the crowd." He

urged her down the steps.

"But . . ."

"This is no time to debate the issue, Sis." Stooping, Watkins picked her up and tossed her over his shoulder. She did not protest. Her attitude seemed to be that since he could do anything, whatever he did was right.

Tom went down the steps quickly. At the bottom were twin metal-faced doors with peepholes in them. The doors opened inward. Beyond them, to the right and left, concrete posts supported the basement floors of the buildings above. The shelter was well-lighted from glowing bulbs in the ceiling.

A sign said that water and first-aid supplies could be found in the cabinets to the right. Another sign explained that this place had once been a huge commercial cellar for ageing stored wine but had been converted into a shelter through the efforts of Civilian Defense.

CD had done a good job. It had even added long wooden benches to sit on. It had not, however, anticipated that this shelter would be in use for longer than twenty-four hours. Aware of this deficiency, it had added signs warning there was no food and no medicines or drugs except those in the

first-aid cabinets.

The humans in the shelter were still so numb that they had not as yet gone into panic. But voices were now beginning to be heard in moaning prayer.

Tom set the young woman on her feet. Anger now was beginning to glint in her eyes and to color her cheeks as she

began to realize that this man had thrown her over his shoulder without asking her permission.

"You can slap me if you want to, Sis," Tom said. "But to-

morrow you will thank me-if there is a tomorrow."

He watched the color go from her cheeks and the anger from her eves.

"I'm sorry," she said. "You did quite right to carry me when I was too foolish not to come of my own will. Was

that actually a hydrogen bomb? Has it come at last?"

"Something has come," Watkins answered. Under his feet he could still feel slight tremors in the concrete, but these seemed to be dying out. In the distance, far away and muffled, a hollow roar rumbled through the sky.

"That's a Commie sub firing missiles off the coast," someone screamed. "That's where the bombs came from. Them damned

dirty Commies!"

"Sorry, but I think that last roar was thunder," Watkins said.
"We never have thunderstorms out here on the coast!"

"We'll probably have one now. The bomb explosion probably put a heavy electrical charge into the atmosphere. This has to dissipate. It will probably discharge as lightning. We'll have thunder and rain, a lot of rain, I hope," Watkins said.

The lights flickered, came on again, died to a dull red glow, then went out. As the shelter was plunged into darkness, the young woman moved closer to Tom. "A generator or a transformer went out somewhere. If it comes on again, I'll be surprised." Tom lifted his voice. "Everybody please keep quiet and calm while I find the candles."

With his cigarette lighter making a wan glow ahead of him, Watkins moved to the cabinets. The young woman followed right behind him. On the top shelf of the first cabinet, candles were stacked in a neat row. Mentally blessing some civilian defense worker, Watkins lit a candle. It made a little better light than his lighter. He set it on a bench.

"Give me one of them," a fat man demanded.

"I think we had better not use more than one at a time," Watkins answered.

"What the hell do you mean? I'm as much entitled to them candles as you are." The fat man bristled.

"You are quite right," Watkins said. "But we may be here a long time. We had better conserve the candles."

"A long time?" The fat man was startled by this thought. Then he bristled again. "They'll have rescue squads here in no time. No need for us to sit around in the dark. I want one of them candles, mister." He moved aggressively toward the cabinet.

Smack! Tom's fist caught him under the jaw. The fat man spun backward and sat down heavily. The crowd gulped at Watkins.

"I said we will burn one candle at a time," Watkins said. "This is all we will burn unless some emergency makes it necessary for us to use more."

The crowd continued to gulp at him but the fat man stayed

sitting down.

"You sound like a drill sergeant," the young woman said.
"I was a marine sergeant once," Watkins answered.
A tall man, a little stooped and a little gray at the temples, came up and held out his hand. "Well done," the tall man said. "Somebody has to be in command here or we'll have panic on our hands. Kissel is my name. Ted Kissel. "We will need all the ex-servicemen we can get, or I miss my guess."

Watkins shook his hand and gave his name. "Who are you

with?" he asked Kissel

"The FBI." The tall man shrugged. "Or I was until that big noise came in the sky."

"Eh?"

"I heard you tell this young woman that the only job any of us have when the hydrogen starts popping is staying alive, and that it's full-time work," Kissel answered.

Outside, thunder rolled again. Through the open doors, they could catch glimpses of the street. Rain was falling. "Good," Watkins said. "This will wash the fallout from the air. Or most of it. I guess nothing will help the poor devils who were too close to the blast. However, with the fallout

washed away, we'll at least have a chance of getting out of the city."

"I hope so," Kissel said, a little wearily.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing." The weariness seemed to deepen in the FBI man.

With the coming of the rain, the stragglers seeking the protection of the shelter began to thin out. Watkins moved to the front and shut the heavy doors, appointing a teen-age youth to stand watch at the peephole and open the doors if anyone came. Outside, a bright light flickered in the sky. Watkins and the youth both ducked, then relaxed when only thunder followed the flash. The rain was coming down even heavier than before.

Outside a woman began to scream. Watkins saw her coming down the steps. He opened the door and she came through

it. She was not screaming from fear, but from anger.

"That damned chauffeur of mine just stopped the car and ran. He left me stranded in the middle of the biggest rainstorm I ever saw. He knows how much I hate thunder and lightning! I'm going to fire him just as soon as I get back to Beverly Hills."

She was still screaming when Tom closed the door. Looking around, he saw how her wet dress clung to her well-padded body. She seemed to pick him out as being the most

important person present.

"Don't just stand there, turn on the lights. We don't have to huddle around here in the dark just because it's raining. And get me some dry clothes." The tone of voice she used indicated she was accustomed to having men leap to obey her when she spoke.

"Calm down, lady," Tom spoke.

"Calm down? Why should I calm down? Who do you

think you are, telling me what to do?"

Though now flushed with anger, her face had once been beautiful. Obviously the greatest of care had been taken to keep it in this condition. Watkins had the impression that he had seen this face, and certainly this figure, before.

"Are you in charge here? I'm Rena Stark." The way she said the words, being Rena Stark was important . . . certainly to her.

At this point, Tom recognized her. "Oh," he said in surprise.

"So you know me now?"

"Of course."

Her voice changed as if being recognized were the most important thing in the world. Once recognition had been achieved, she had time for other, less important things. "Did you see my picture Caught in the Rain? It ran for six months at the pantages."

"I saw it three times, Miss Stark," Tom answered. He was lying, but if being recognized would calm her down, then

he would lie to her as much as was necessary.

"In Caught in the Rain, I played—"
"This isn't rain, Miss Stark." Tom said.

"No?" She glanced at the closed door, then down at the dress clinging to her body. "Then what is it?" A frown came over her face. For the first time she seemed to become fully aware that the mass of people huddling in the shelter, the single candle, the almost electric tension in the air, were not parts of some motion picture set on which she was to play a starring role.

"Rain is not the important thing, Miss Stark," Tom said

quietly. "This is the big bomb!"

Tom could see her turning the meaning of his words over in her mind. "Do you mean one of those horrible, horrible atom bombs like they used in my picture Doomsday Eve? Do you mean those dirty Commies have actually started shooting those things at us? I fought them in every studio in Hollywood but I didn't think they would do this to get even with me." Her voice was becoming more shrill with every word she spoke. Suddenly she was screaming again, this time in fear. "Let me out of here!"

Tom signalled to the youth to open the door. "No one is kept here against his will," Tom said. "Wade out and start

swimming."

If the tone was firm, it was exactly the treatment needed to bring this woman to some semblance of her senses. Thunder pounded in the sky as the youth opened one door. Rena Stark took one look at the water now pouring down the steps and draining away into the flood drains at each side. She backed away from this sight.

"No. No! I guess it would be best to stay here." She backed

away into the crowd.

"Take care of her, will you, Sis?" Tom said to the young

woman who had remained at his elbow.

"She is quite old enough to take care of herself. If she doesn't know how, it's about time she started learning. And my name is Cissie, not Sis. The last name is Jones. Miss Cissie Jones."

"Oh." Tom felt a flicker of embarrassment. "Sorry. I just

didn't think-"

"I know. I haven't been thinking about names, either. I doubt if they will be very important where we are going." Cissie was not bitter. She was merely stating and facing, as an adult, a grim fact.

"I'm Tom Watkins."

A smile lit her face. "You sound almost like a boy." Her eyes scanned his six-foot height, his husky frame, as if to reassure herself on this point. She seemed satisfied. "I suppose you are in a hurry to get out of here to see how the wife and kids have made out?"

"I have no wife, and no children."
"No?" Her voice was a question.

"I guess I just haven't found the right woman. Also, a family these days is terribly expensive. Now . . ." He shrugged.

"I know," Cissie said. "Well, I guess I'll go give our movie star some tender loving care, as you suggested. Or a bust in the snoot, if she doesn't act her age, which is considerably more than she admits."

"Meow!" Tom said, smiling.

"Even if there is no tomorrow, I'm still a woman today," Cissie said. She moved over to Rena Stark, offered the actress a cigarette, and began talking.

"Somebody else coming," the youth at the peephole vol-

unteered. "And if you ask me, this one is really nuts."

The man coming down the steps was hatless, coatless, and apparently nerveless. Hands in his pockets, completely ignoring the water all around him, he was coming down the steps as if he were out for a stroll in the spring air. As Watkins opened the door for him, he heard above the splash of the water the sound of a whistled tune coming from the man's lips.

Water was running down this man's shirt and pants. His shoes squished with it as he walked. Yet he seemed to be unaware of it. He also seemed to be unaware that death was

running loose in the street from which he had just come.

"So here is where everybody is hiding!" he said.

"We thought we'd all come down here to get out of the

rain," Tom said soothingly.

"Ah, the rain. It reminds me of the sea, from which all life came." He looked more closely at Tom and blinked startled eyes. "Don't I know you? Aren't you Tom Watkins?"

"Eric Bloor!" The words almost exploded from Tom's lips as his mind suddenly revealed a host of memories. Though he had not seen this man in years, he remembered him. They

had been in high school together.

Watkins had memories of this man as a shy, furtive, apparently always frightened youth whose brown eyes had blinked out at a world he did not seem to understand at all. Tom's hand went out. Eric Bloor's grip was strong and firm, with no trace of a tremor in it. He wanted to talk about their high school days together; he wanted to know if Tom still played tennis.

"I haven't had a racket in my hands in years."

"Too bad." Bloor's face showed regret. "I had hoped we could get together for a couple of sets when"— He glanced

through the peephole-"when the rain is over."

It took an effort of will on the part of Tom Watkins to keep him from blurting out that they would probably have more important things on their mind than tennis. "Eric!" Tom looked again at this dripping wet but completely calm man. "Eric, don't you know what has happened?"

"Sure. It's raining. It feels good to me too. It reminds me of the sea, from which all life-'

"Eric, don't you realize that a hydrogen bomb went off

over Los Angeles?"

"What? Oh! So that's what caused all the furor! Well!" Bloor shrugged away the meaning of the words. He looked around the shelter. "A nice place you have here, Tom. I hope you don't mind if I wait here until the rain is over."

"Glad to have you, Eric," Tom Watkins said.
Bloor sauntered over to the wall and sat down on the floor. He began to whistle again. In this crowded place, where the odors of sweat and fear were beginning to make the air reek. Bloor's whistling sounded completely out of place.

Tom was aware that Cissie's and Kissel's eves were on him.

He shook his head.

"Your friend seems completely detached from the real situation," the FBI man said. "Poor devil! We'll probably see a lot more in much worse shape."

"We'll be lucky if we are not in much worse shape our-

selves," Tom said.

Outside the rain was ending. Inside, the prayers had stopped. People were planning what to do next. Some would try to return to their homes and their loved ones, collect money, food, clothing, bedding, and decide what evacuation route they would use in leaving the city. They all had their minds made up on one point. They were going to leave the Los Angeles area.

Inside the shelter, they didn't see the flash of light in the

sky. But they heard the shock wave.

BRRROOOOOOOOMMMMMMMM.

Long before the ground began to tremble, they knew that their plans for immediate departure were going to be postponed.

A second bomb had hit.

In the shelter, the prayers began again, louder now.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FIRST bomb had struck about ten in the morning. The second one landed a little after noon. By two o'clock, the stink in the shelter was beginning to approach the nauseous stage.

Part of the stink came from sweat pushed out of human bodies by floods of fear. Most of it came from toilet facilities that had stopped working when the second bomb had knocked out the water mains.

The prayers were going on continuously now. When they stopped, the same people who had been praying could be heard swearing at the Commies, and at the government for letting things like this happen.

The second bomb blast had brought very few additional people to the shelter. Apparently the first bomb had sent

most people to seek refuge in other places.

In the shelter, as Kissel put it, they had all kinds, including one octogenarian who had been very spry in coming down the steps the first time. He wasn't spry any longer. They had a young, smartly-dressed mother with a baby in her arms. The baby was hungry and was crying. The young mother was saying, over and over again, "We'll have some nice warm milk for you pretty soon, darling." She looked up at those near her. "I had my doctor dry up my own milk because I thought it would give me more free time if I raised her on a bottle." Her face was wan and her eyes had traces of tears in them. "Now...now I have no milk for her."

Those nearby hardly listened. They had their own prob-

lems to think about.

Eric Bloor came to talk to Tom. "Real tough things, these bombs."

"Then you do understand we are being bombed," Watkins said. "I was kind of worried about you."

"What's the point in worrying? If your number is up, you'll get it." Bloor's shrug was indifferent.

"Ain't you scared of dying, mister?" the fat woman asked.

"Should I be?" Bloor answered.

"You were pretty scared as a kid, Eric," Tom said. "I know I haven't seen you in several years, but what has brought

about the big change?"

"I didn't even notice there had been a change." For the first time, Bloor looked a little alarmed. "Is there anything I can do to help you, Tom? You always were a take-charge guy who was able to tell others what to do."

"Thank you, Eric. There's nothing to do now except wait."
"We'll probably get plenty of that," Cissie said beside Wat-

kins.

"All right, but remember, I volunteered." Bloor ambled back to the wall and sat down again. Soon his eternal whistle was sounding again in this yast, barren room.

Tom was standing with his back against the wall. Cissie was standing beside him on his right. On his left, Ted Kissel

was talking.

The swearing at the Commies and at the government left off. The prayers began again. "Lord God of Hosts...." Tom listened with a fraction of his mind. These people were on the verge of going crazy. In the days that followed, if any did, many would go crazy.

Outside, the thunderstorm was whooping up again. The drains were still adequate to carry off the flood water pour-

ing down the steps. Thunder was shouting in the sky.

"I'm not anybody important, Cissie," Tom was saying in response to Cissie's questions. "I'm a sales manager of a company that manufactures power pumps. I'm a good salesman. I'm Mr. Average American Guy. I like to watch the Rams play football in the fall and I like to watch the Dodgers play baseball in the summer. I also like the mountains and the high desert. I have a small hunting and fishing cabin up near Bear Lake. That's where I'm going when I get out of here, if this rain carries off enough of the fallout to make it safe to be outside."

Her eyes had a yearning look in them when he mentioned this cabin. He thought of asking her to go with him. Would

she have any other place to go?

Tom was so engrossed in his own thoughts that he hardly realized that Kissel was talking to him, and had been doing this for some time. Catching a word or two of what the FBI man was saying, Tom suddenly fixed his attention on Kissel's voice.

"I never did learn what we were looking for," Kissel was saying. "I don't think any other agent knew. It was top secret. Security was really tight on this. There were thousands of us in this area. Most of us were concentrated in the Los Angeles Basin but others were combing the coast clear down to San Diego and clear up to Santa Barbara. We were looking for . . . something."

"Thousands of FBI agents?" Tom Watkins interrupted. "The

department doesn't have that many men."

"I know," Kissel continued. "We pulled them from every branch of the service—Army, Navy and Air Force. These weren't enough, so we hired men from private detective agencies. It got to the point that almost anybody who could get a security clearance was put on the job out here."

"What job?" Tom realized he should have been listening

more to this man and talking less about himself.

"I told you, I didn't know what the job was, what we were actually looking for. The big wheels in Washington knew, but they weren't talking." Kissel paused and seemed to think. "Maybe even the big wheels didn't know what the real problem was. Maybe all they knew was that something was wrong, dead serious wrong! Maybe the reason they shipped so many of us out here was because they were trying to find out!" Kissel slapped his fist in his open palm. "That's it! They didn't know the answer either. They were trying to solve the puzzle from the bits and pieces we gathered in the field and sent along to them."

Tom stopped listening again. Rena Stark had found a blanket in the first-aid cabinet and was behind a pillar changing clothes. The pillar was in a dark part of the shelter where the

light of the one candle did not penetrate. She was causing some craning of necks among the men who were praying. Even the octogenarian was trying to peek.

"Men are such horrible creatures!" Cissie said beside Tom. "The race has to survive," he answered absently. "Pardon

me, Ted. I wasn't listening to what you were saying."
"I wasn't saying anything," Kissel answered. "I was watching too. I'm wondering now if what we were looking for were those two bombs that went off today."

"Do you think they had been planted in the city?" Tom

asked.

"We had the best radiation detection equipment in existence and trained men to use it," Kissel said. "You may have seen trucks with special aerials on them during the last four or five months. They poked into every alley in this town. But you can't locate an H-bomb by its radiation before it explodes, because there isn't any. Our men knew this perfectly well. So they were looking for something other than a bomb."

"What?" Tom questioned.

"Do you think she is going to wear just that blanket and nothing else?" Kissel asked, craning to look at Rena Stark.

"She's probably going to give us a behind-the-scenes version of another picture she made-Night of a Savage," Cissie com-

mented. "That is, if the blanket is small enough."

"Some of us had the craziest assignments," Kissel continued. "One agent had to bring a crate of homing pigeons into town every morning and turn them loose. A special courier brought them to him. All he did was turn them loose. He never knew where they went."

The FBI agent frowned. "Down at the level of the working agent, we only see our own assignments. We don't see enough to fit the bits together. My most recent bit . . ." He looked a little shamefaced. "Well, it wasn't like any assignment ever given to any other agent I ever heard of, but I had it just the same. Each morning I had to go to a different beach along the sea and get samples of the water in special test tubes, seal the tubes, mark where I had gotten them, and turn them over to

a courier. I imagine he took them to a testing laboratory, but what they were tested for, I don't know."

"Was anything visible in this sea water?"

"Nothing that I could see. Some of that gray film that the papers were talking about last summer was visible in patches here and there, on the surface of the sea, but. . . . Ahl"

Rena had come out from behind the pillar. She strolled up to them, apparently oblivious that she had broken up the prayer meeting completely.

"How do I look?" Her voice was a sultry thing with over-

tones of tropical nights in it.

"Wonderful," Tom said. "Blankets become you. They're

going to be in style this season, too."

"A blanket is a lot better than those sticky wet things I was wearing," Rena said. "It's more healthful."

Cissie sniffed.

The fat woman had been active in the prayer group. Now

she was coming purposefully toward Tom Watkins.

"Young man, make this woman put some clothes on," the fat woman said to Tom. "She ain't got a stitch on under that blanket, not a stitch."

"Go back and pray for her," Tom said.
"But she's breaking up the meeting."

"Rena, sit down here against the wall," Tom said. Surprisingly, the actress obeyed him. "Cissie, give her another cigarette and find out about her picture, Night of a Savage."

"Well, of all the—" Cissie began.
"Go on," Tom said. Cissie obeyed.

Tom looked at the fat woman. "Now get back to your prayers, lady. We need them."

He watched the fat woman waddle back to her group. Be-

side him, Kissel was talking again.

"There's something in this Los Angeles area, Watkins. It's been here for months. I don't know what it is or what it's doing or what it wants. It's what we were all looking for. Maybe somebody found it; I don't know about that. I'm only voicing a hunch now, I have no evidence to support it, but my hunch is that this thing is not human."

Tom heard the words clearly. He stored them in his mind. But before he could ask questions about them, other matters had to be handled. "Please go sit down, granny," he said to an elderly woman who was trying to ask him for the fourth time if it was safe to leave now. "I know your grandson is in school and that you have to get home in time to prepare his supper and hear his lessons. I know your daughter is not doing her duty by him. But it's still raining very hard outside. No, don't worry about him. The teachers will keep the children under cover until the storm stops."

The grandmother was not satisfied but she turned and went back to her bench. She had the fixed idea that all that

was happening was a rather severe thunderstorm.

Tom turned to the sallow-faced man who was trying to get his attention from the other side. "I know that static is all the pocket transistor radios are getting here. I know you have a powerful ham transmitter in your home several blocks from here and that you are willing to put the disaster news on the air. The question is: Do you still have a home?"

When the sallow-faced youth had sat down, Tom turned his attention back to Ted Kissel. "What was that you were saying about something that is not human being in Los Angeles?" He must have lifted his voice a notch without

realizing he was doing it.

"Keep it down," the FBI man urged him. "We don't want to start a real scare. Anyhow I was just talking to myself to keep from remembering that death, my own and that of a great city, is waiting right up at the top of those steps." Kissel's voice went into silence for a time, then came again. "But there must be some correlation between the hunt I know that has been in progress and those two bombs. There just has to be." He was very emphatic about this.

From the floor, Cissie looked up at Tom. "Rena says she is going to take off the blanket," Cissie said. "She says it is all right for her to do this because she is a member in good

standing in a nudist colony."

"What is wrong with the body beautiful?" Rena spoke for herself. "It's much better to be in the beautiful nude than to

be wearing this heavy, sticky thing." She shrugged in the blanket so that it fell halfway down across her shoulders.

"You keep that blanket on!" Tom said.

"But in the nudist colony-" "This is not a nudist colony."

"And if I do not choose to obey your orders?"

"Then I will turn you across my knee and spank your bare bottom," Tom said. Looking shocked, Rena pulled the blanket

up over her shoulders.

"Your friend Eric Bloor does not seem to be the only one who is psychologically detached from the real situation. That movie actress doesn't seem to know what is going on either," Kissel commented.

"You were talking about something not human," Tom Watkins said. "What would this 'thing' look like? I mean, how

would we know it when we saw it?

"I don't know that we could see it. It might be invisible." Kissel seemed to think for a few seconds. Apparently his own thinking irritated him. "I don't know that this invisible menace idea is true. All I know is that at the highest policy and command levels in our government, there are some badly scared men. They're scared enough to do anything."

Kissel shook his head. "I haven't seen them so scared since the polar scare of 1965, when they thought that space invaders were digging in under the ice cap at the south pole."
"This is 1970," Tom said.

"I know. But it seems to me to be 1970 plus an eon of time. Only yesterday, only this morning, we had orders to be ready to shoot at all times." He lifted back his coat and showed his gun in a shoulder holster. "As a background for our orders, we had several dozen dead investigators. We probably had an equal number in psychopathic clinics for observation. This seemed very important to us. It made us wary: it made us ready to shoot; it made us hard. All this was an eon ago. Now there are tens of thousands of dead people in Los Angeles, possibly hundreds of thousands."

"Do you mean this invisible menace has been killing secret service agents?" Tom blurted out. He thought he was beyond

shock. The bomb blasts had numbed him deeply. But the

story Kissel was telling him now did shock him.

"We don't know what killed them. All we know is that we found them dead. Others, suddenly deserting their duties, are now in psychopathic wards.

"What? How?"

"The cause of death? It's harder than anything else to understand. If they had been killed by death rays. . . ." Kissel shrugged again. "But the cause of death was always some common, simple thing: a bullet in the heart, a knife in the back, or their brains knocked out with a club, the kind of weapon the lowest criminal would use. Only we were never able to catch one of these low-type criminals who used such crude weapons. The weapons were crude; the killers must have been stupid; but we could not catch these stupid criminals." Exasperation came into the voice of the FBI agent. "Some of us eventually began to wonder if we were really dealing with supercriminals who were so intelligent that they used crude weapons just to throw us off the trail, the kind of criminals who had enough brains to look and act stupid." The exasperation grew stronger in his voice.

Tom Watkins was silent. Flesh was crawling along his back. Outside, the thunder was still roaring. Inside, the prayers were continuing. Against the wall, Eric Bloor was whistling.

"Maybe what we were looking for were superspies who were here in the Basin disguised as humans," Kissel continued. He shook his head at this thought. "The trouble is, nothing makes sense. Nothing! However, it is a fact that two bombs have landed here." He hesitated as retreating thunder rolled through the sky. "Superhuman or subhuman? Superhuman in some ways, subhuman in others? Subhuman enough to be utterly indifferent to human life. I grew up in New England, in a land of hills and swamps and bogs. When I was a boy, I used to watch the men occasionally clear out these swamps and bogs in order to cultivate them.

"When it was cleared and drained, the land in these swamps was good. However, to millions of creatures, frogs, insects, turtles, and fish, these swamps were home. In digging

the drainage ditches, the men often used dynamite. This killed the fish, the frogs, the insects, and the turtles. The men did not care about the lower forms of life they were destroying. Their purpose was to create a field they could use to

grow crops.

Kissel's voice faltered and fell away, then came on again much weaker. "I wonder if we are a kind of frog living in a swamp that we call a great city? I wonder if this swamp is being drained, if the rubble of buildings and streets and freeways are being cleared away to create fields which will be tilled by a higher form of life?"

"You think of the damnedest things!" Tom Watkins said.

Inside, he was grumpy and scared and sick.

The FBI man sighed. "I know this is only fantasy. What if some of the frogs back in the swamp I was talking about got

wind that their bog was going to be drained?

"What if they went hopping through their swamp looking for the cause of the disaster they sensed was coming? What if they talked to each other about it? Most of them would say it was nonsense, that the swamp had been there forever, and would remain always. These common-sense frogs would demand to be shown the danger? What if some smart frog actually succeeded in showing them a man with a stick of dynamite in his hands? Would they know what a man was? Would they know what dynamite was?"
"But . . ." Tom tried to protest.

"Your eyes are sticking out like those of a frog right now." Cissie said beside him.

"Did you hear what he said?"

"I was eavesdropping," she admitted. Her face had lost all of its color again and her eyes were dull. "These supercreatures that may be blasting out our swamp, what do they look like?"

"Everybody will ask that question," Kissel answered. "As I said earlier, when you weren't listening, I don't know what they might look like. I don't know if they can even be seen through frog-eves that are adjusted to see flies and other frogs and not much else."

"Where does this leave us?"

"It leaves us right here in this shelter," Tom answered. "Now both of you shut up."

Kissel retired into hurt silence.

"The rain's stopped," the teen-age youth called from his

peephole.

The announcement stopped the prayers and roused a stir among the crowd. The grandmother was the first one to the door.

"Young man, get out of my way," she said to Tom. "I

must go see about my grandson.'

"Me too," the fat woman said. She sniffed at Rena, sitting on the floor with the blanket at least partly around her. "This is no place for a decent woman."

"Ladies, I advise against leaving yet," Tom said.

"As I said before, get out of my way," the grandmother

repeated.

"That goes double for me," the fat woman said, sniffling at Rena, who was being very careless about the way she handled the blanket as she got to her feet.

Tom shrugged. The teen-age youth opened the door. They

watched the two women go up the steps.

"I wonder where my chauffeur is," Rena said, behind Tom.
"You were going to fire him as soon as you got back to

Beverly Hills," Tom said.

"I'm not there yet but that's where I'm going," Rena answered. "I'm not going to stay in the same shelter with people who do not appreciate the body beautiful."

Tom sighed. "I won't try to stop you. This is, or was until a few hours ago, a Republic in which even those who possess the body beautiful can die as unhappily as fat women."

At his words, Rena stopped moving. He looked at Cissie. "You too?"

"I really ought to go see about Dr. Smith," Cissie said, doubtfully. "He needs me. His office is not very far away."

"You can go if you want to but I don't advise it," Tom said.
"I'm guessing, of course, but my guess is that there is still too

much radioactivity around outside to be healthy." He glanced upward at the fat woman and the grandmother.

BRRRRROOOOOOOOOMMMMMM!
BRRRROOOOOOOOMMMMMM!

Of the three explosions, this third one was by far the heaviest.

A gigantic hand seemed to reach into the top of the passage leading upward to the street. It caught the grandmother and the fat woman and flung them in a flurry of flying heels and skirts back to the bottom of the steps. They hit like rag dolls. Neither moved after hitting the concrete.

A wind of hurricane force howled down the steps. It banged both doors open. It caught the crowd gathered around the doors and blew them across the shelter like dry leaves in front of the wind. It snuffed out the candle and

left the shelter in darkness.

Tom Watkins knew that a big bomb had hit. Beneath him, the concrete floor seemed to jump six inches upward. Grinding and groaning sounds followed as one wall, several pillars and the roof overhead collapsed. Murky dust filled the air in lung-choking quantities.

Tom heard the screams of the injured and the swiftly ending groans of the dying. Then, as a piece of concrete hit him on the side of the head, these sounds faded swiftly into

silence and into blackness.

CHAPTER THREE

Tom Watkins was on the floor. He did not know how he had gotten here but he knew where he was because he could feel the concrete trembling under him. It had stopped jumping up and down.

In the darkness, Tom knew that someone was lying on top

of him. He could feel a blanket, which made him think this person was probably Rena Stark.

She was moaning to God to come and save.

Someone was at his left. He thought this was Cissie, but he wasn't sure. She wasn't doing any moaning. Crumbling and grinding sounds were still coming from the walls and from the ceiling above, but the large chunks of concrete had stopped falling. Somewhere a woman was whispering, "Ave Maria . . Ave Maria . . . Ave Maria . . . " This whisper faded slowly into silence.

Tom heard another woman exclaim, like a surprised and delighted child, "Daddyl I haven't seen you in such a long time, not since . . . not since you died." Alarm grew in the voice. "What are you doing here, Daddy? Didn't you die?" The alarm in the voice changed to a happy wonder. Then the wonder was gone. So was the voice.

"Rena?" "Yes."

"You're on top of me. Get off."

Rena did not want to move. Tom slid out from under her and lifted himself to a sitting position. "Cissie?"

"I'm all right, I think." Her voice was doubtful.

"Take it easy, girl." Tom's head had a lump on it, his right

knee was throbbing.

Choking at the dust, he fumbled in his pocket for his cigarette lighter, then wondered if he dared use it. There might be gas in the air and the open flame might set off an explosion. He decided the risk of this was less than the risk of not having a light.

He spun the wheel on the lighter and its little flame came on. The dust was so thick he could barely see it. He got to his feet. He could see enough to make out Ted Kissel rising and Eric Bloor, still sitting with his back against the wall.

"Big noise around here," Bloor said casually.
Tom Watkins was already sicker than he had ever been in his life. Bloor's casual comment made him even sicker. As he fumbled through the dust and stumbled against blocks of fallen concrete, he glimpsed things that made him truly ill.

The young mother who had not learned to nurse her baby would never learn now. A chunk of concrete had struck both of them.

At the cabinets, Watkins stuffed his pockets with candles. He lit one from the lighter and swore at himself because he

had forgotten to bring the flashlight from his car.

He made his way back to the entrance of the shelter and passed out candles to all able to take them. Outside, the storm had whooped up again. Kissel, Rena, and Cissie took candles. Bloor made no move to get one. He had begun to whistle again. The sound of groans was loud in the shelter.

"Everyone who is able, please do everything he can to help others less able," Tom called out. He, with Kissel and Cissie, went through the shelter. One man had a broken leg,

a woman had a broken arm.

"If we had morphine, I could give shots," Cissie said.

Tom shook his head in despair at the thought of obtaining hypodermic needles and drugs. It was Eric Bloor who rose from the floor.

"I heard what you said, Cissie," Bloor spoke. "I'll go out and

raid a few drugstores and see what I can find."

Turning, he shoved one of the doors open. As he went up the steps, the sound of his whistle came back over the roar of the rain.

"I've seen a miracle," Tom whispered. "I didn't think he

had a human feeling in him."

"Sometimes disaster brings out the best in us frogs," Kissel said.

When Bloor returned, he was soaking wet again. But he was still whistling. He had his pockets full and a full sack over his back. He handed hypodermic syringes and ampoules of demerol to Cissie.

"There wasn't anybody around the drugstore to fill my prescription," he said, grinning at what he thought was a joke, "so I helped myself."

Swinging the sack from his shoulder, he poured its contents on the floor. Canned soups, canned meats, bread, cheese,

milk, and a small stove that operated on canned heat poured from it.

"I got the stove and the canned heat from a hardware store," Bloor said. He reached for a small box and opened it. "Also, the hardware store had several of these radiation counters."

He snapped the switch on the little instrument, shook it, and studied the dial. The needle moved slowly, the counter burped softly, as if it had a minor case of indigestion. "The count's not bad down here in this shelter, not bad at all," Bloor said happily. "We're safe here. If the rain outside washes most of the fallout from the air—it is actually washing away parts of the pavement here and there, so I guess it will also wash particles out of the air—and if no more bombs go off, it may be safe tomorrow to leave our happy home here."

He grinned, then frowned as some thought crossed his mind. "We're on a little rise here. I could look down and see the harbor area. The ships down there are sure in a mess. I could see one freighter and several smaller ships sunk in the harbor. A liner is lying on its side. A tug is clear up in the middle of the street. I could hear someone screaming." He

looked up at them and smiled again.

"Lend me that counter, Eric, and come with me," Tom said. They went up the steps together. Water and mud had made these steps slippery. As they climbed, the counter seemed to take on a heavier and heavier case of indigestion. At the street, the needle was well over into the zone of dangerous radiation. "I feel sorry for those poor devils directly under the bomb blast," Tom said. "But right now, we could stay in this street for an hour or longer without exposing ourselves too much."

As they went back down the steps, the counter lost its case of indigestion. At the bottom, the grandmother and the fat woman were both lying in the drain to the right side. They had not noticed them on the way out. Tom stopped long enough to make an examination he already knew was useless.

By the time, he had finished and was standing up, Cissie had come out of the door looking for him. Her lips set in a

grimmer line when she saw what was in the drain. "There are several others inside."

Jerry, the teen-age youth who had guarded the peephole in the door, was on his feet. Tom got him to help too. They carried the bodies up to the luggage shop at the first landing and left them there. No prayers were said. The fat woman had been the prayer leader.

Back in the shelter, it was Eric Bloor who got the stove going with a big pan of soup on one burner and a big pot of coffee on the other. He found very few people willing or able to eat, though everyone seemed to consider that the coffee was a helpful brew. Because one man had a broken leg, Bloor went back to the street again, to return with splints, bandages, and a pair of crutches.

With the coming of darkness, the lightning and the thunder

began to abate.

I wonder if we frogs are going to be dynamited again

during the night?" Ted Kissel said aloud.

No one seemed to hear what he said. But all during the night, those in the shelter waited for the coming of another bomb. There was no panic, no hysteria. They were past the point where these things could bother them. Even Rena, huddled in her blanket at the foot of a pillar, with a candle burning on the floor beside her, had nothing to say.

Cissie spent most of the night making the rounds of those who had been injured. Aided by demerol to stop the pain, the man with the broken leg was trying out his crutches. By midnight, the thunder was finished, but the rain continued as a slowing drizzle until Tom's watch said it ought to be daylight. Taking the counter, he went up to the top of the steps.

The sun had probably risen but its rays did not penetrate the black, swirling, murky fog that lay over the Basin. Only a dim gray light revealed that the day had come. Even in the dim light, Tom could see that the buildings on both sides of

the street had been devastated.

Shop windows bulged outward. They had spewed their contents into the street. Down at the harbor area. Tom could

catch glimpses through the drifting fog of the liner lying on its side; he could see the tug that had been washed from the sea. In the middle of the street, directly in front of the entrance to the shelter, a big limousine was sitting apparently undamaged.

The counter said the street was safe for a human being for about twenty-four hours. The particles with their dangerous secondary radiations had been washed or blown away. There was lingering radioactivity but the area was far safer than Tom had thought it would be. He went back into the shelter to tell the others the good news.

"We can stay outside for about twenty-four hours. If the count has dropped still more by that time, we can stay

longer."

"Give me that long and I'll be out of this damned city

forever," somebody yelled.

Like furtive rats they went up the steps. Someone was assisting the man with the crutch. Shocked and shaken by the scene that lay before their eyes, they turned to the right and to the left along the street. They were agreed on one point—to get out of town as quickly as possible. They went even faster as they realized that the object lying on the sidewalk across the street was a corpse.

"There's my car," Rena said, pointing to the limousine

"There's my car," Rena said, pointing to the limousine standing in the middle of the street. "That's right where my damned chauffeur stopped it, jumped out and started run-

ning."

Tom Watkins restrained the impulse to say that the chauffeur had not run far. The corpse on the sidewalk across the street was in uniform. An advertising sign had collapsed, killing him.

"My car is in a parking lot up the street, if anything is left of it," Tom said. "But it's a sport job. It will only hold three at the most."

"Then we'll go in my car," Rena said. "There's plenty of room for just us." She trailed the end of her blanket into the street. "That is, if somebody can drive. I never learned how

to shift the gears on this foreign thing my publicity man made me buy."

"I can drive it if it will run," Tom said. He followed Rena, then stopped as he realized that Cissie was not coming

dong.

"Dr. Smith's office is just a couple of blocks away." She pointed toward the huge concrete warehouse. The windows were all broken but otherwise it was intact. "He will need me."

"If he is as loyal to you as you are to him, he'll tell you to get out of town as quickly as possible," Tom said. He went back to the curb and took her hands and led her to the car. He put her into the front seat. Eric Bloor climbed in beside her. Rena, careless with the blanket again, got into the rear seat, where she had Kissel and Jerry for company. Tom stepped on the starter. The motor grunted and coughed, and to his surprise, started.

"I'm dodging the freeways because they will probably be filled with traffic jams. I'm also heading south, which the quickest way I know to get out of town from this spot."

Southward the devastation continued. Buildings had crumpled into the streets. High lines lay in broken wires. Water poured from broken mains. The heavy rain had turned many streets into canals. Wrecked cars were everywhere. Apparently, with the explosion of the first bomb, automobile drivers had simply gone crazy. The heavy rain had put out the fires that would have started otherwise, but as they passed Signal Hill, great columns of black smoke were rising to the sky from the burning oil refineries there. On their right, Long Beach was a ruin. Corpses were a common sight. The stench that would come to the Basin within the next few days would be unendurable.

"Dead frogs are all over hell," Ted Kissel commented from the back seat.

"We'll soon be out of it," Tom answered. Traffic was beginning to appear. Cars pulling trailers, cars with bedding piled on top and pots and pans tied on the sides, light trucks, heavy trucks, compacts, limousines, their drivers had one aim

in life—to get out of this area as quickly as possible. Casoline would soon be a problem with many. Most service stations were intact but the electric power needed to operate the

pumps was off. The attendants had fled.

Tom found a four-lane highway leading south. "We'll be out of the whole area in half an hour," he promised. Relief was rising in him. He knew the others were also feeling better. The shelter had been an ordeal. They were lucky to be alive. Many had not been so lucky.

They reached an area of vegetable farms where the land was flat for miles. They also found a traffic jam that looked to be miles long. Off to the right, helicopters could be seen hovering in the air. On their left, cars were returning. Far ahead, others could be seen trying to turn around. People from the cars were milling in the fields. From somewhere far ahead came a burst of sound.

"Machine gun firel" Kissel said, startled. "There is no other

sound like it.

"Who are they shooting at?" Rena asked. "In my picture A Marine Returns they were always shooting machine guns at somebody."

Far in the distance, a voice was shouting over a loudspeaker. They were too far away to understand what was being said.

The driver of a car coming from the opposite direction

was leaning out the window.

"Barricades up ahead. They'll shoot you up there, Turn around and go back. You can't escape this way!"

His voice was a hoarse scream in a day already haunted with horror.

"Who's doing the shooting?" Tom Watkins shouted.

"Federal troops!" the hoarse voice roared back. "They've got barbed wire erected. They have helicopers up to spot you if you try to sneak through the barbed wire."

His hoarse voice could be heard shouting to the drivers of

the cars that now had stopped behind them.

In the back seat, Ted Kissel sighed and settled down. He sat so quietly that he seemed to have died.

"Why would Army troops be shooting our own citizens as they try to flee from disaster?" Cissie asked. Her voice was taut and brittle. It had in it the sound of a violin string that has been stretched too tight.

Ahead the loudspeaker was shouting again. People were moving in the fields. In the far distance, perhaps a hundred of them ran toward a line of trees that marked the line of barbed wire. A machine gun began to spit at them. Many of them went down like rag dolls that had suddenly come unstuffed.

The loudspeaker lifted a notch in volume. "Don't try to force the barricades. You will be killed if you make such attempts."

"Come on, Eric. We're going up and check this thing out.

No, Cissie. You and everyone else stay here."

Tom Watkins and Eric Bloor did not have to go far. The

loudspeaker came on again, telling the story.

"The whole Basin has been declared a contaminated area. The only way out of it is through the examining stations that are being set up. Everyone must submit to medical examination before leaving. Anyone who attempts to sneak out, or to force his way out, will be shot!"

Tom and Eric looked at each other. The fields were filled with a vast throng of people who were also looking at each other. Despair, horror, terror, were on every face. They had been bombed. They had tried to flee, those who had survived the bombing. Now machine gun fire faced them.

What possible explanation could be given for this horror

that walked the earth?

Apparently somebody shouted a question at the man at the loudspeaker. He attempted an answer.

"It will be days, weeks, perhaps many weeks before all of you can be examined. No one will be permitted to enter the area. Everyone must be examined before leaving. Everyone! No exceptions!"

The loudspeaker went into silence, then came on again. "We do not know why this is being done. We are soldiers. We take

orders. These are our orders. No one will be permitted to leave this area until he has been examined. No one!"

The speaker clicked off, then came on again. "These barricades extend around the whole area. Anyone attempting to leave by air will be forced down or will be shot down. Naval patrols are covering the sea. There is no way out of this area except through these examining stations."

"I was thinking about borrowing a light plane," Tom said.

"I was thinking about a power boat," Eric said. "Escape by sea! But I doubt if there is a boat left that will float." He shrugged.

Far away to the left another machine gun began to stutter. They went back to the car. "Please don't ask questions now. I don't know the answers," Tom said. "All I know is that we are stuck here. If anyone knows a good place to hole up..."

"Dr. Smith's laboratory," Cissie said. "He rents the whole basement under that concrete warehouse, as a laboratory."

Tom turned the car around and started back. No one spoke. They were dazed, stunned, bewildered. Bombs had struck at them from the sky. Now, for some reason unknown to them, their own people were preventing them from escaping. Tom Watkins wondered what the word "contaminated" meant in this case. He kept his thoughts to himself. In the back seat, Ted Kissel stirred himself enough to speak. "Not even the frogs in the swamps ever kept the other frogs from escaping," he muttered, then sank back into the silence of his own thoughts.

They went back past the wrecked cars at the intersections, back past the corpses, back past the tumbled buildings that had strewn their guts into the streets, back past the tangle of wires that had once been overhead power lines, back into the area where the fog was black and dense, back into the doomed city, back to the spot from which they had started.

At Cissie's direction, Tom stopped the car in front of the concrete warehouse. Beside it was a one-story stucco building that had contained two offices. A dentist had occupied

one of these. On the other a shingle hanging askew had recognizable words on it.

HOMER SMITH, M.D.

Below the sign was a clock face which showed whether or not the doctor was in. The sign was stuck in the *out* position. The arrow that was supposed to tell at what time the doctor would return was missing.

"With an office like this, he can't be much of a doctor,"

Rena said, from the back seat.

"Dr. Smith only sees a few patients who have been with him for many years," Cissie explained. "His major interest is . . .

is not in medical practice."

The glass of the front door was gone. Cissie was trying to find the key in her purse when Tom reached through and opened the door from the inside. Cissie went inside as if this was homecoming to her.

She vanished through a rear door while the others entered the waiting room. Tom looked at Rena. "The first chance you get, you trade that blanket for some slacks and a sweater,"

he said to the actress. "Also, get some shoes."

"But my dressmaker is in Beverly Hills and my shoemaker

is in Hollywood," Rena protested.

"Down in the dock area, where you are likely to be for a while, the girls are wearing just any old thing this season," Tom told her.

"Dr. Smith isn't here," Cissie said, returning from the rear.
"He is probably in his lab. He has practically lived there for weeks, with all of those mysterious men coming and going."

Going through the back office, with the others following, Cissie found the back door was jammed shut, a result of the twisting of the building in the earth tremors. They forced it for her. She made a beeline for the back end of the huge concrete warehouse. There, what had once been a concrete loading platform had partly collapsed, half blocking the door that, at the bottom of a flight of steps, led inward to the basement of the warehouse.

"He's trapped in there!" Cissie was becoming frantic. She began trying to move chunks of concrete with her bare hands.

"Jerry," Tom said to the teen-age youth. "Run to the hard-ware store and borrow some picks, some shovels, and a couple of iron bars."

"Yes, Mr. Watkins."

"Cissie, take Rena to that clothing shop I saw in the next block. See that she trades in her blanket for a new outfit, one that hides her a little," Tom continued.

"But I do not need-" Rena began.

"Looting, murder, and rape will be walking these streets by tomorrow. Get going, both of you. Cissie, get some slacks, sweaters, a heavy rainproof jacket, and some heavy shoes for yourself."

The two women went without protest.

"Eric, what does that counter say?" Tom said to Bloor.

"The radioactivity is still dropping off," Bloor answered, turning on the instrument and watching the needle. When Jerry returned with his loot from the hardware store, they began digging away the broken concrete in front of the basement door.

"Are we doing all this work just to find another corpse?"

Eric Bloor asked.

"We're doing it for several reasons," Tom answered. "One being that we may not find a corpse, second being that this building is concrete and steel. It will make as good a fortress as any I have ever seen."

"We'll need it when the mobs start roaming these streets," Ted Kissel said, approvingly. He patted his shoulder holster.

"I have a gun here, but . . .

"We'll borrow others from the nearest sporting goods store,"

Tom said.

Cissie and Rena returned, each wearing slacks, a sweater, and heavy shoes. They had their arms full of other clothing. Cissie came scrambling down the steps just as they forced the door open.

Just inside, a small, bald-headed little man blinked at them from behind thick-lensed spectacles. He was wearing a long white laboratory apron. Behind him, a much bigger man with the look of frustrated eagles in his eyes also peered outward.

"Hello, hello!" the small birdlike man said gratefully. "Thanks for digging us out. There seems to have been a series of rather bad earthquakes." The weak eyes caught sight of the person running to him. The lined face broke into a happy smile. "Cissie, my dear! I'm so glad you are all right. I was worried about you." His attitude toward her was that of a fond and indulgent father.

Tom Watkins and the others found themselves shaking hands with the little birdlike man and being introduced to Dr. Homer Smith. He, in turn, introduced them to the man with the look of frustrated eagles in his eyes. "Meet Dr. Randall Murk. Dr. Murk is a specialist in marine biology who has been sent on from . . . ah . . . Washington to . . . ah

... double-check certain ideas of mine."

Murk was tall, his face was lean. Like Smith, he was dressed in a white lab apron.

"I hope the death toll has not been too heavy in these

earthquakes," Smith continued.

"Those weren't earthquakes," Cissie blurted out.

She, all of them, gave him the story. The lines in his face

grew appreciably deeper as he listened.

"Bombs! A cordon has been established around the whole area! To prevent the spread of contamination?" Smith's eyes went to Murk.

The tall biologist remained calm. The only change about him was a slight increase in the look of eagles in his eyes. "Come in, all of you. Radiation must still be present. My base-

ment, I think, is safe," Smith said.

They entered an anteroom made of wood paneling and passed through it into a big room that took up most of the basement lab. The windows around the basement had been painted, then boarded shut. Far to the right, were several small rooms. Here stairs led upward to a trapdoor that opened on the main floor of the warehouse. There was also a large elevator but it was in the basement and apparently had not been used in some time.

The place smelled of formaldehyde and other chemicals. Numerous plastic-topped workbenches were scattered through

the lab. Pipes ran to gas tanks sitting against the wall. Each bench had racks of test tubes above it. There were many notebooks to record the result of experiments. Powerful gasoline lanterns on two workbenches cast a brilliant light over the laboratory.

"It smells like a morgue," Rena said, wrinkling her nose.
"This is my private research laboratory," Dr. Smith said, a
little apologetically. "I have been engaged in . . . a . . . but
that is not important. Tell me from what source these bombs
came? What nation is daring retaliation by attacking the
United States? What leader of what nation went stark raving
mad?"

It was Ted Kissel who spoke. "I can tell you, I think," the

FBI man said. "No foreign nation bombed us."

Listening, Tom Watkins wondered what meaning Kissel's words could possibly have. A stir ran through the others. Smith's face showed signs of intense strain.

"Those were our own bombs," Kissel continued. "They were

dropped from our own bombers."

In the big basement laboratory, the only sound was the hiss

of gas moving through the jets of the lanterns.

"I know that none of you realize what has happened," Kissel continued. "I did not realize it until we found the barricades around the city, the examining stations being set up. This was the missing clue that explained what I had not dared guess before."

He paused and took a deep breath. "Our own government has ordered the destruction of this great city. It has done this in a desperate effort to destroy something that is here in this place, some menace so insidious that it can hardly be detected, so subtle that, so far as I know, it has eluded the efforts of our best brains to uncover it. This 'something' is so dangerous and so deadly, with so much potential menace to the whole nation that our own government has been forced to take the horrible decision to destroy a whole city to eliminate this menace from our nation and from the world."

Kissel's voice had deepened as he spoke. Now it had the tones of a bell in it. The bell was tolling doom. His listeners

seemed frozen. Shades of doubt and disbelief played over their faces. Could such a story as this be true?

It was Dr. Homer Smith who sighed and spoke. "I was

afraid of that. I was very much afraid of it."

At his words, Cissie shivered and moved closer to Tom Watkins. He put his arm around her protectingly. It was Rena who spoke first, speaking to Dr. Smith but pointing to Ted Kissel.

"What kind of a doctor are you to believe such a wild

story as this man is telling?"

Dr. Smith coughed and seemed embarrassed. It was Cissie who spoke, her voice hot with anger. "Perhaps you do not know that Dr. Smith, as a physician, is very obscure, but as a bio-chemist, he is one of the world's great authorities."

"Now, Cissie," Smith protested, his embarrassment growing. He looked at Rena. "I am very much afraid Mr. Kissel's story

is true," he said. "Ah, Mr. Kissel, what are you doing?"

Kissel seemed not to hear the question. He had walked over to the racks of test tubes and was examining them. Pulling one from the rack, he held the hand-lettered label on it up to the light. "This is my handwriting," the FBI man said slowly. "This is one of the samples of sea water that I took from the ocean and gave to a courier. Would you mind telling me where you got it, Dr. Smith?" Ever so slightly, the agent's hand moved inside his coat.

"No, I wouldn't mind," the old doctor stammered. "I assume you have the right to know. I got it from a courier who delivered many of them to me. I assume this was the same

courier to which you gave them."

Kissel's hand stayed inside his coat. "In what capacity did

you receive this test tube, Dr. Smith?"

"In the capacity of an employee of the government," the old doctor answered. "I have been assigned to do research on this particular sea water."

"Um," Kissel said. His hand did not move in either direction. "If this is true, then you must have proper identification." "Naturally," the old physician said. His hand went to his

"Naturally," the old physician said. His hand went to his hip pocket. Swiftly Kissel drew his gun. When Dr. Smith took

an old, battered billfold from his pocket and looked up, he found himself facing a gun. He blinked at the weapon.

"My ID card, Mr. Kissel. You are quite right to check my

credentials."

Kissel took the proffered card, studied it carefully, then slipped his gun back into its holster. "My apologies, Dr. Smith."

"You were quite right to check." Smith answered.

Kissel cleared his throat. "This puts another light on the matter. If you have been assigned to do special testing..." His manner was that of a man who was hoping he had found another piece for a very bewildering picture puzzle. "Then perhaps you know something of the nature of this menace that confronts us?"

Slowly, Dr. Smith shook his head. "I'm afraid I don't. I knew something was wrong. I knew a great many very important scientists were badly shaken and were investigating. I knew there was utter turmoil in high political circles, including the cabinet and I knew that great secrecy was being imposed, but I was only informed of the nature of my own tests. I did not know how they fitted into the general picture."

"Then you have not solved it?"

"I don't as yet even know what I am supposed to solve,"
Dr. Smith answered.

Kissel sighed, his shoulders sagged! He seemed to grow old in a moment.

It was Rena who spoke. "I've got a question." Her voice was near hysteria. "Is this menace still here?"

"Unless the bombs destroyed it, it probably is," Kissel an-

swered.

"Probably is not good enough!" The note of hysteria grew stronger in her voice. "How are we going to know if the bombs got it?"

"We'll know it if we manage to stay alive," Kissel an-

swered.

"And if we don't manage that?" She screamed the words. "Then we won't care, Miss Stark," Kissel answered.

From far away, coming seemingly from some subterranean

hell that lay below, from outside the lab, came the faint sound of a scream.

"I guess it's still here," Kissel said.
Standing beside Tom Watkins, Cissie shivered again and moved even closer to him.

CHAPTER FOUR

During the days that followed, when no sea breeze came to blow away the black pall of smoke that was constantly fed from buildings that were still burning, particularly during the nights, when the darkness outside the great concrete warehouse was as thick as the murk that covers the road to hell, they learned that the menace did indeed still exist. They did not learn what it was, only that it was,

The screams that came in the darkness reminded them that it existed.

It was unseen. It was unheard. It was intangible. No one knew how it worked.

Tom Watkins accepted as fact all that Ted Kissel had said and what Dr. Homer Smith had confirmed. Harden, the palefaced ham radio operator, seemed to sense in his bones that death was here in the city with them. Jerry, the teen-age youth who had stood at the peephole in the shelter, seemed to think that whatever Tom Watkins thought was good enough for him to think too. Eric Bloor simply accepted the menace without comment and apparently without emotional reaction. To Bloor, the presence of the menace was a cosmic event. Like the rain and the sun-and hydrogen warheads-it was something fate had sent. All a man could do was shrug his shoulders and perhaps whistle an aimless tune. Ted Kissel, however, still wrestled in his mind as to whether or not the menace really existed. Years of training had given him a mind

that wanted tangible evidence; facts like a battered bullet and the gun that had fired it, facts that could be taken into court, shown to a judge and a jury as concrete proof.

There wasn't any concrete proof. Because of this, lines

deepened in Ted Kissel's face.

The small rooms on the top floor of the warehouse were converted into bedrooms. The beds were sleeping bags over air mattresses, all looted from sporting goods stores. Many times in the night Tom Watkins was awakened by either Cissie or Rena entering the room where he slept. Always in terror, Cissie would insist that he go to the window and look and listen for something in the darkness that lay below.

With no lights and no moon and no stars, the street was always invisible. Possibly the bright and starry heavens toward which the human race was groping still existed above the bank of black fog that lay over the ruined city but there was no proof of it. In the darkness, Cissie was only a whisper

and a presence of something warm and human.

"There's something down in the street," she whispered.

The bomb blasts had knocked all the glass out of the windows of the warehouse. These had been covered with plaster-board. Getting to his feet, Tom removed the board and stood beside Cissie, looking down and listening. Cold and wet, stirred by some vagrant wind coming in from the sea, he could feel the black fog on his face. Dull sounds came from down below

"It's trying to climb up the wall," Cissie whispered.

Tom reached in the darkness for the powerful sporting rifle leaning against the wall at the head of his sleeping bag. Under his pillow, in a holster, was a .45 caliber revolver. They had found dozens of such rifles and revolvers in another sporting goods store and had carried them to the warehouse, together with thousands of rounds of ammunition. The rifle barrel was cold and damp in his hands. Tom could see nothing. A powerful sealed-beam flashlight was on the floor but he did not attempt to use it. Experience had taught him that even its powerful beam would not penetrate the black fog.

Feet ran along the pavement below them.

"Hear that!" Cissie whispered.

"I hear it," Tom answered. "Probably it's just some poor devil out hunting for a meal. You must remember we are not the only ones who survived."

The feet ran harder, as if fleeing from something, or chasing something. A second pair of feet could now be heard running. Suddenly both pairs of feet stopped running.

A scream, half strangled with the sound of a gasping sob

in it, reached up through the darkness.

"That was a woman who screamed!" Cissie said sharply.

"She tried to run. Something grabbed her."

Tom picked up the flashlight. Through some vagary of the night wind, the fog was thinner now. The bright beam of the flashlight bored down to the asphalt pavement.

The street was empty.

Tom turned off the light. Something down there had fled in the time it had taken him to pick up the flashlight and turn it on. Cissie crept closer to him. He put one arm around her, patting and comforting her. When she had stopped trembling, she went quietly back to her own room.

After she had gone, Tom tried to go back to sleep. The big pistol under his pillow was a disquieting thing. In another way, it was a comforting thing. It would stop a human being with one slug. But would it stop something that seemed to

drift with the black fog through the dark night?

He turned to his right side, with his hand under the pillow, supporting his head, in such a position that his fingers always touched the metal of the gun. Just as he was dozing into sleep, he was again awakened by comeone coming into his room.

This time it was Rena.

Her purpose was not the same as Cissie's had been. Rena did not want to call his attention to some danger in the night. She wanted to get into his sleeping bag with him. As an excuse for her presence, she insisted something was in her room.

This brought Tom Watkins out of his sleeping bag, fast. With the revolver in one hand and the powerful flashlight in the other, with Rena following him, he went to her room.

Her makeup kit, taken from a drug store, had fallen off the box beside her sleeping bag. No intruder was in the room.

"I know something was here, I just know it. I heard it make a noise," she protested.

"Get some sleep," Tom told her gruffly.

When he returned to his room, she followed him. "I'll sleep better with you," she said. "I just don't like sleeping alone. I get scared."

"You'll sleep alone and like it," Tom told her.

Anger flared in the actress. "Are you afraid of a woman?

What kind of a man are you-if you are a man?"

He had to be firm with her. She simply could not understand that a man, any man, could exist who would not instantly welcome her into bed with him. It had never happened before. Not even H-bombs could produce this change in human nature, she apparently thought.

"I only want to sleep," Tom told her. "I'm utterly ex-

hausted.'

Muttering to herself, she finally went away in the darkness. Tom crawled into his sleeping bag again, curled his fingers

loosely around the butt of the big revolver.

He awakened with the gray light that indicated dawn seeping through the crack between the plaster board and the frame of the window. Again someone was in the room. His fingers clamped around the butt of the pistol before he saw that this was Ted Kissel. The FBI man was removing the plasterboard from the window. A rifle was on a sling over his shoulder and he had a pair of binoculars in his hands. He spoke to Tom, then lifted the binoculars to his eyes and studied something out the window.

"Come and look," Kissel said. His voice was grim. "In the

alley."

The room fronted on the main street. In the alley was what looked to be a pile of clothes. With the glasses, it looked to be something else. Tom choked.

"We had better go down and make sure," Kissel said,

Unbarring the front door from the inside, they went out.

The pile of clothes had been a woman. Tom Watkins shook his head at the sight and fought down the impulse to vomit.

"It's too early for cannibalism," Ted Kissel said. "The grocery stores are still full of food. Nobody would have to do this." He averted his eyes from the pile of clothes that had been a woman.

"Early or not, it's here," Tom said. "I... I heard part of this last night. I... I guess I should have come down. Maybe I could have helped."

"You would have been a fool to come down here unless you knew definitely what you were getting into," Kissel an-

swered.

"Does this thing, this menace, whatever it is, does it eat humans?" Tom asked.

"Frogs don't eat other frogs," Kissel answered.

"Who knows what a frog does when it is in shock as a result of dynamite exploding too close to it?" Tom answered. "Among those who lived through the shock effect of three bombs, the incidence of insanity is going to be very high. Luckily, none of us..." His voice caught as he looked across the street.

Eric Bloor had just come out of the front door. Hatless, unshaven, his hands in his pockets, whistling the same eternal tune, he was strolling toward them.

"What have you found, boys?" Bloor greeted them. He saw the body on the ground. His shoulders lifted in a shrug but no trace of emotion appeared on his face.

"Do you want her buried, Tom?" Bloor asked.

"Yes."

"I'll take care of the job if I can find a shovel." He moved past the body and began poking in a tool shed at the rear of what had once been a store. "Here's a shovel," he called out.

They carried what was left of the woman into the vacant lot behind the store. Bloor began to dig. As they walked back through the alley, they heard his toneless whistle starting up again.

"I wonder who she was?" Kissel asked.

"Only God knows," Tom answered.

They went in the front door, leaving it open so Bloor could enter when he had finished his task. From the steps leading down to the basement came the smell of coffee. They went down the steps.

Cissie was already up. She had a huge coffeepot bubbling on the biggest camper's stove they had been able to find. The stove used canned gas. If the supply ever failed, they

would be reduced to cooking over open fires.

Greeting them wanly, Cissie poured mugs of coffee for

Dr. Murk, freshly shaven and alert, was sitting on a stool at the improvised table that had been made from one of the big lab benches.

"Any luck in finding anything?" Kissel asked him.

Murk shook his head. "We worked until two o'clock last night. The old man is on the trail of something but he keeps a close mouth." He nodded toward the closed door of the private cubbyhole where Dr. Smith had long since set up a bedroom. No one else was ever admitted to this place, which was kept locked.

"Dr. Smith not up yet?" Tom asked Cissie.

"No. And I'm not going to wake him. He needs all the rest he can get. I'm going to make hot cakes. I suppose all of you are interested," she answered.

"I'm not, Ted Kissel said. "Just coffee, and I'm not sure

about it."

"Coffee is enough for me, too," Tom said.
"Lost your appetite?" Dr. Murk asked.

"It was something they saw," Cissie answered for them. "Something they took out of the alley and hid behind the building across the street."

"How did you know?" Tom asked.

"I watched," she answered. "Was . . . was it a woman?"
"Yes."

Cissie became very busy stirring batter in a big bowl. "Isn't this Rena's day to do the cooking?" Kissel asked.

"Y ... yes. But she's busy fixing her face," Cissie answered.
"I came down to get things started. It's . . . it's better if I

keep myself busy. Oh, good morning, Dr. Smith." Her face brightened as the bedroom door opened and the old physician came out. He was blinking his eyes like an owl that has been awakened in the daytime.

Cissie promptly poured coffee for him. He seated himself

at the improvised table and sipped at the black brew.

"Dr. Murk thinks you are on the trail of something," Tom said.

The old physician looked quickly at Murk, then turned his attention to Tom. "Being on the trail doesn't mean you are going to find anything. And if you do find something, it may not be what you are looking for." He rose suddenly and moved across the room to examine the radiation counter hanging on the wall, then came back and sat down. "At least the count is down. That heavy rain must have swept all the fallout from the air in this section. But, I wonder how it is uptown, where the bombs hit?"

"It's too hot to go there to find out," Ted Kissel answered. "Has anybody got a radio working yet?" Dr. Smith asked.

"Harden was hunting for a battery-powered transistor receiver yesterday," Tom answered. "He said the big stores up town would be certain to have had them. I discouraged him from going."

"I'd like to know what the news is," Dr. Smith said, frowning. "How are they explaining this bombing to the rest of the country? They won't dare say an enemy did it. That would start an atom war. Have they dared to tell the truth—that we have something on our hands that is worse than atomic

destruction?"

Kissel grunted doubtfully. "What politician is going to admit he bombed a city and killed hundreds of thousands of his own people? The government that made such an admission would face revolution. If we had a radio, we'd hear a lot of stories, but the truth wouldn't be in any of them. I wonder if anybody in Washington knows the truth."

"I don't think so," Murk answered. "But they're sure digging for it. They'll find it . . . too late." An expression of un-

easiness crossed his face. "I'm surprised they haven't sent rescue teams in here before this."

"They don't dare enter the area; they think it's hot," Kissel

said.

"I don't mean real rescue teams, I mean spies disguised as

rescue workers," Dr. Murk explained.

"It's too hot for that too, they think," Kissel said. "Maybe they hope it's that way. They're trying to burn this invisible menace out of here."

"What is this menace?" Tom asked, exasperation and

mounting despair in his voice.

Rena, wearing a bikini, with her face as carefully made up as if she expected to step in front of a camera, came down the steps.

"I think the spacemen have landed," Rena spoke. "I think

they are the menace."

Her words produced little effect but the men eyed her costume.

"I think you can finish with breakfast and do the washing up," Cissie said, smoldering at the bikini. "I see you have worn your work clothes."

Pouring herself a cup of coffee, Cissie came to the table and sat down beside Tom. "I heard her go into your room last night," she said.

"But, my dear-" Tom protested.

"I also heard you throw her out," Cissie answered. While Tom gulped, she smoldered for a few more moments more at the bikini, then turned again to him, this time to tell him that they were almost out of coffee.

"Ted and I will raid a grocery store today," Tom promised.

"I'll go with you," Cissie said.

Harden, carrying a long-range portable radio in his hands, came running down the steps. "I finally got it working," he said. "If the steel beams in this warehouse don't cast too much radio shadow, we'll have some news."

In this basement, they were hungry for news. Surely the world outside had not completely forgotten them! Surely some

help would be sent them! This was a hope each person treasured in his secret heart.

Between bursts of static, a voice came over the radio, then faded away. Harden, his sallow face showing signs of sweat, muttered. "I've never heard static like this. Either this is a result of the bomb blasts or the air waves are being deliberately jammed."

"Why would anyone jam the waves?" Dr. Smith asked.

"Maybe to keep hams like me from reporting what is actually happening here," Harden answered.

Then the radio voice came in clearly:

"... high official quarters promise that the men responsible for this horrible accident which has devastated one of our greatest cities will be punished. That it was an accident, and not enemy action, the president himself has clearly stated. All possible aid is being rushed to the devastated city, including doctors. Red Cross workers and the specialized rescue teams of all the armed forces. However, to prevent the spread of radiation sickness, barricades have been established around the whole area. This is unfortunate but public health authorities agree that it is of the utmost importance to protect the rest of the nation. Examination stations have been established and are being manned twenty-four hours a day. No one will be permitted to leave the stricken area who has not been properly examined. Weeks, possibly months, may be required before everyone still alive in the Basin can be examined and evaculated. . . . In this time of national disaster, in this period of world-wide mourning, everyone is urgently requested to exercise the utmost patience. . . .

Static came on again and the voice faded to a grating sound that added its touch of horror to the silence in the

basement.

"Patience!" Ted Kissel's fist came down on the table top. "Patience while they tell the country and the world the biggest lie in human history. This city was deliberately bombed. It was no accident!"

Somewhere in the distance, muted but clearly recognizable,

was the sound of a scream.

Kissel winced. "Well," he said slowly, "I guess they have to claim it was an accident. The truth would be too horrible to give to the country. I just saw the body of a woman in an alley. I'd hate to have what I saw go on TV screens around the world. They're fighting for time up in Washington, time in which to discover what they're really fighting, time to find a way to meet the real danger. A general sometimes has to sacrifice a division to save an army. Sometimes it has been necessary to sacrifice a whole army, to save a country. Here a great city has been sacrificed in an effort to save a nation."

Kissel rose and walked across the room, then came back and sat down. "I'm glad I didn't have to make the decision to bomb this city," he said, speaking slowly. "I'm glad I'm far below the policy-making levels where the decisions are sometimes tough." He laid his arms on the table and dropped his

head on them.

Harden shut off the now static-saturated radio. The only sound in the basement was the bubbling of the big coffeepot.

Dr. Smith wiped his glasses. "I think I had better get to work." he said.

"But you haven't had breakfast yet," Cissie protested.

"I...I don't..." He tried to smile at her but the effort failed. "Coffee is enough for me. My dear, please remember to see me today. I have a little medication for you?"

"I'm not sick," Cissie said.

"Just some little pills," Dr. Smith continued.

"But what for?"

"So you can get some sleep tonight, my dear," Dr. Smith said, rising. He and Dr. Murk went around the partition into the farther depths of the big basement.

A tuneless whistle came from the steps. Eric Bloor entered. "What's for breakfast?" he called out. "Rena, you're a dream wiggling. Make me six hot cakes."

He poured himself a cup of coffee and sat down at the big table. Rena swiftly prepared the hot cakes. As Bloor poured syrup over them, dirt from the grave he had just dug was still visible under his fingernails.

"You and Ted and I are going after coffee," Tom said to Cissie.

Each took a sack. Cissie, refusing either a rifle or a pistol, carried a radiation counter instead. The big front door was open as they went out. Tom paused and looked at it.

"We're going to have to recruit more men," Tom said to

Kissel.

"Why?"

"Because we can't leave any door of this warehouse unguarded. Because we may be here for months. Because we may have to fight for our very existence," Tom answered.

"Those are all good reasons," the FBI man admitted. "But what do you think we will be fighting? So far as I know the

menace here is invisible."

"Gangs, looters, human beings who have gone crazy and don't know what they're doing," Tom answered. "No law enforcement is left in this whole area. The police force is gone. The sheriff's office is not functioning. If we are to stay alive, we'll have to provide our own law." He nodded in the direction of down-town Los Angeles. "I don't know what is happening down there. Howling mobs may be pouring through the streets for all I know."

"I have to agree with you," Ted Kissel said. "But how are we going to know what kind of people we recruit, if we can

recruit anybody?"

The two men were walking down the middle of the street.

Cissie was following behind them.

"We won't know what we are getting," Tom answered. "We'll have to take what we can get; then we will have to watch them. I want guards on the roofs and at the doors of the warehouse all night long. Otherwise we may wake up some morning and find inside the warehouse what we found in the alley across the street from it this morning."

Whangl

The rifle bullet came from inside a partly wrecked grocery store they were passing. It passed a foot above their heads. Both hit the pavement and crawled to the curb. Cissie, startled, quickly followed their example.

"Git the hell out of here, you danged looters!" a voice with a nasal twang yelled at them from the grocery store. "The next one won't miss."

"Are you the store owner?" Tom yelled.

"Yes. And I ain't going to have nobody helping themselves to my groceries," the answer came.

"Hold your fire!" Tom shouted. "I want to talk to you."

"I don't want to talk to you!" the voice yelled back at them. Tom put his rifle down and unhooked his pistol belt. "I'm coming in with my hands up," he shouted. To the wide-eyed Ted Kissel, he said, "I'm going after our first recruit. A man who fights for his own property is a man I want fighting beside me."

Lifting his hands, he got to his feet. The door was gone from the store, the plate glass window shattered. Inside, the stock of canned goods had tumbled from the shelves. Hands elevated, Tom stepped through the doorway.

At the rear of the store, a tall, bearded man lifted himself above the meat counter. He laid a Winchester across the top of the counter.

"Any man who's got the guts to walk in here with his hands up, I'm willing to talk to," the man said. His voice had the nasal twang of the mountains of Tennessee in it. Beside him, a second person rose, a tall woman dressed in black.

"We've got a group holed up in a warehouse down the street," Tom said. "We're looking for people to join us, people who can shoot straight and who know when to shoot."

The mountain man grunted tonelessly. Neither his eyes nor

his face revealed his thoughts.

"We're getting thirty to forty people together," Tom continued. "With that many people, we can defend ourselves; we can be comparatively safe. Here in your store, it's only the two of you against things that roam in the night."

"I've heard 'em," the mountain man said. He looked Tom straight in the eye. "Mister, you've got yourself a couple of

people who just joined up with you.

"Good," Tom said. He gave his name, moved forward and shook hands. The two people were Eph and Effie Moffat.

"But Mr. Watkins," Eph said plaintively. "Can you tell us what the hell has been going on around here? Have the Com-

mies started shooting at us with atom bombs? Have-?"

His wife jogged him sharply in the side with her elbow. "Eph, you stop that swearing," she said. Turning to Tom, she continued talking. "Are we apt to be bombed again? What are these things that are squalling around here in the night? I keep telling Eph the thing for us to do is to go back to Tennessee."

"Mrs. Moffat, all of us would like to go back to Tennessee, only we can't get there. Now I want to bring in my friends.

We're looking for coffee, among other things."

Cissie and Effie made friends instantly. Immediately they began to fill her sack with cans of coffee and to look around for other sacks for the men to carry. From the street, Tom retrieved his rifle and his pistol.

Trudging back to the warehouse, each carrying all he could lift, Cissie stopped at some sound coming from a

wrecked cottage at the rear of a larger building.

"I hear a child crying back there," she said. Dropping her sack, she ran toward the wrecked cottage. She was already

through the door before Tom could catch up with her.

He found her down on her knees beside a child huddled against the opposite wall, one that had remained standing. A girl about six years old, clad in a torn, dirty dress, looked over her shoulder at Tom from enormous dark eyes.

"You have canned milk in your sack," Cissie said to Tom. "Also some cookies. Get some for me please, right away." She turned her attention back to the child. "There, there, darling.

Everything is going to be all right."

The child refused the canned milk but she reached eagerly for the cookies.

"What's your name, honey?" Cissie asked.

"Teeny," the answer came, between bites. "And I'm so hungry."

"I imagine you are, Teeny. How long has it been since you

had something to eat?"

"I don't know. A long time."

"Where's your mommy and daddy?"

"I never had any daddy," the child answered. "Mommy she went away."

"Tom, you don't suppose her mother was the woman in

the alley?" Cissie whispered.

"I'm not supposing anything," Tom answered. "Bring her

with you. I'll carry your sack while you carry her."

Before they reached the warehouse, they heard the rifle fire begin ahead of them.

CHAPTER FIVE

REACHING a rise in the street, they could see the warehouse. Jerry was on the roof. He was shooting straight down at a group of eight to ten men who were attacking the front door. A concrete porch extended about six feet from the wall above the door. His bullets were striking this.

Under this overhang, the men below had a part of a telephone pole which they were using as a battering ram against the front door. The heavy thuds of the end of the pole hitting

the door were clearly audible.

"The utter fools!" Ted Kissel said, lifting his rifle.

"Shoot to warn them first," Tom said.

Kissel's rifle spat flame. The bullet hit directly above the heads of the attackers and whined on down the street.

They ignored it.

In surprise, Kissel lowered his rifle, "Do you suppose they're

deaf?" he asked.

"Maybe they're making so much noise with that battering ram that they didn't hear it," Tom said. "Eph, get up here with your Winchester, please. Ted, fire another shot. Knock one of them down this time."

Kissel raised his rifle again. A shot roared out. The man directing the battering ram went down.

The man behind him stepped forward and took the place

of the fallen man.

"He's stepping on the man who fell!" Eph Moffat whispered. "He's walking right on one of his own dead friends!" Horror was in the voice of the lanky mountain man.

The thud of the battering ram against the door continued. From the roof, Jerry waved at them, pointing down toward

the attackers.

"What in the devil have we run into?" Ted Kissel asked.

"Maybe the devil himself," Tom answered. He looked at Eph and raised his own rifle. "Shoot to kill!"

Three rifles roared.

Two men sagged against the telephone pole. A third spun in a circle and went down. With four men gone now, the pole was too heavy for those remaining to support. They dropped it. Now for the first time it seemed to dawn on them that they were in danger. Like startled animals, they lifted their heads and looked up and down the street.

"They act like zombies!" Tom whispered. "I never saw

anything like this in my life. Hold your fire."

The men who had been using the telephone pole as a battering ram caught sight of the three men with the rifle. They began to run. Stooped, their gait was a lumbering trot. They did not run like men, erect, they ran like animals who had forgotten how to use their forepaws to touch the ground.

"Zombies or not, they're coming toward us," Ted Kissel

said. "I don't think we should let 'em get too close."

"Stand back!" Tom yelled, waving his rifle.

The zombie creatures howled at him and kept coming.

Tom lifted his rifle to his shoulder. As he pulled the trigger, he heard Kissel's high powered sporter go off on his right. On his left, Eph's Winchester barked. When the rifles had finished, two of the zombie-men were sprawled in the street, and the others, finally discovering that they were running headfirst into certain death, had turned up an alley.

From the top of the warehouse, Jerry continued to fire futile shots at them.

Kissel took his rifle from his shoulder and looked at Tom. "I don't like this," the FBI man said. "Those creatures just looked like men. They were not human!"

Tom glanced over his shoulder at Cissie, Effie, and the child. All were lying flat in the gutter. He motioned for them to follow and went cautiously toward the warehouse. They passed two bodies lying in the street. This was the spot where the charge of the zombie-men had broken. Cissie averted her face and held her hand over Teenv's eyes, so the child would not see this horror. Effie, her face like granite, looked straight ahead.

Bodies were sprawled on the steps of the warehouse. Cissie took Effie and Teeny around to the basement door to avoid looking too closely at death. The door itself showed signs of heavy battering but it was made of steel plate over wood and had stood up under the blows from the battering ram. Inside were pounding sounds as someone tried to dislodge the heavy bar, which had apparently become stuck in place as a result

of the blows on the door.

When the door opened, it was Eric Bloor who looked out. "I heard shooting," Bloor said. He looked down and became aware of the bodies and of the telephone pole. "I ... well ... what happened? Did they just die there?" He seemed surprised but not startled in the least.

"They had help in dying," Tom said grimly.

Jerry, clutching a rifle, came running down the steps and out the door. He looked sick at the sight of the bodies.

"What happened?" Tom asked.

"When I first saw them, they were walking along the street. Each one was bent over holding his middle, like . . . like maybe he was sick. They didn't seem to know where they were going or what they were doing. Something seemed to be wrong with their vision. I saw one of them walk right into a parked car without seeing it. One of them saw the front door. He pointed to it and said something to the others. When they all started toward the door, I velled at them to stav

away. They didn't act as if they heard me. Picking up the pole, they began to ram it against the door. Even when I shot down as close to them as I could, they didn't seem to hear the sound of the rifle."

The two physicians came hurrying out of the door as Jerry was speaking. Both listened attentively to what the youth was saying. Behind his thick spectacles, Dr. Homer Smith looked sick. He made a quick examination of the bodies. "They acted like zombies," Ted Kissel repeated. "When

they charged us, they didn't seem to know the meaning of

death."

"Probably they were still in shock from the bomb blasts." Dr. Murk commented.

"They acted together in using the pole to try try to batter down the door," Dr. Smith pointed out. "Men in shock can't work together. If they can act at all, it is only as individuals." Frowning, still looking sick, he finished his examination of the bodies

"Besides, we may be dealing with some freak effect of the radiation," Dr. Murk continued. "Nobody really knows the mass effect of saturation radiation on human beings. Some queer tales have come out of Hiroshima and out of the tests blasts in the Pacific years ago. Of course, none of these have been scientifically confirmed but the impact of hard radiation on the human nervous system has produced effects unpredictable in advance."

"I know, I know." Dr. Smith's eyes were fretful.

"I guess I'm the burial detail again," Eric Bloor said calmly.

"We'll all help you," Tom spoke.
"Before you bury them. . . ." Dr. Smith spoke, then changed his mind about what he was going to say. "Go ahead and get them buried. There is already too much danger from mass infection, as bad as the Bubonic plague, resulting from unburied bodies."

"You had something on your mind," Ted Kissel said.

"I was . . . ah . . . thinking of a post-mortem examination. Also I guess I am acting as if the law which requires a coroner's jury in cases such as these still existed. However,

that all went with the bombs. Go ahead and bury them." Turning, Dr. Smith entered the warehouse. Dr. Murk followed him.

"Jerry, you go back to the roof and stand guard," Tom said.

"Yes, Mr. Watkins," the youth answered.

Carrying the bodies across the street, they began to dig a common grave. They were just finishing with this, when Dr. Smith appeared in the alley. He was carrying a big hypodermic syringe and a rack of test tubes.

"I want blood samples," the old physician said.

"Help yourself, if you have the stomach for it," Tom said.
"I've had . . . ah . . . a little experience in such matters,"
Dr. Smith said. "While I can't say that I like to do it, the job doesn't upset me emotionally." He bent to his task.

"Did they act the way they did because they were in

shock?" Ted Kissel asked.

"Under normal circumstances, we can to some degree predict the behavior of an average human being. We know the drives that motivate him," the old physician answered. "But these are not normal circumstances. There was blast effect and there was heavy radiation for a time. Also people have had their whole lives uprooted. The total effect is that of the heaviest possible emotional trauma. Actually, the trauma is much too heavy for the average person to bear, with the result that we may expect any reaction. Also, there is something else."

"Yeah," Kissel grunted. "It's that something else that's bug-

ging us. What is it?"

"When I know, and if I know, I'll tell you—if I'm still alive to tell you. And if you are still alive to listen," the old physician answered.

Finishing his task, Dr. Smith trotted back through the alley

and across the street to the warehouse.

The burial detail resumed its work.

"I don't seem to grasp this zombie thing," Eph said. The tall mountain man kept his Winchester within instant reach at all times. "I don't rightly know what a zombie is."

"It's an old story, coming out of Haiti, I think, of men and women who had been bewitched and who had lost their minds and their wills as a result," Ted Kissel explained. "Zombies don't seem to know what they're doing; they lack direction of their own efforts; they are oblivious to danger. At least that is the way the legends go. Nobody knows whether or not there is any truth in them anywhere. I would have been willing to bet they were a pack of lies until I saw what I just saw."

"I see," Eph said. Obviously, he was greatly confused. But when the burial mound was filled in, it was Eph who suggested prayers. "Somehow it just don't seem right to leave them like this without saying a little something over them.

They're human. Or they were human."

"If you know any prayers, you're welcome to say them,"

Tom said.

"Well, I'll try." The tall man hesitated. "When I was young, back in Tennessee, I used to listen to an old preacher some. I'll see if I can remember what he said."

He took his position by the common grave. His hat was off, his head was bowed, his hands nervously clasped the barrel of the rifle, the butt of which rested on the ground. His lips moved.

In the night, Tom was again awakened, this time by sound coming drifting through the dark fog. It was a weird ululation, a howl that was also a wail, and the sound sent shivers up his spine. He strapped his pistol around him, picked up his rifle and flashlight, and went up to the roof.

Ted Kissel was standing a lonely guard there.

"It's the strangest noise," the FBI man said. "Either it is coming from the throat of a zombie-man or wolves. Or something worse than wolves are loose down there. It sounds completely unhuman."

"Perhaps 'not-human' would be a better word," Tom said. Listening, they leaned against the iron railing that circled the roof of the warehouse. From the darkness, the howls continued. Now near, now far, the sounds had an animal quality about them, a loneliness that was like that of the gray wolves

howling in the Arctic night during the long winter that seemed to have no end.

"They've got to be zombies," Kissel said. "They've got to be. There isn't any other possible source for those howls."

"Maybe the menace is howling," Tom suggested.

"You don't believe that." Kissel answered. "You know that the menace, whatever it is, doesn't go around howling. These are zombies. The menace has made men into zombies.

"You may be right," Tom said.
"Listening to them howl, I don't blame our high command for trying to blast this city out of existence," Kissel said. "What if men should start howling all over the country?"

"You mean this menace may spread?"

"You saw the barricades outside the city. There could be only one reason for setting them up-to stop the spread of

something," Kissel answered.

Tom could not keep his eyes from trying to search through the fog that made the night black for the invisible something that was turning men into howling wolves. His eyes found nothing. He felt the little feet of the fog creep over his face. Almost directly below, a zombie-man howled.

Far in the distance, another howled in answer, then another and another until the dark night was filled with the tumult of the sound. All of the howlers were not males. Shrill. high-pitched notes that could only come from the throats of women were a part of the chorus. Wolf voice answered wolf voice in a great wailing, protesting tumult that rose through the murky darkness to the tortured sky overhead.

"These are the same kind of zombies that were using that telephone pole as a battering ram this afternoon," Kissel said. "There must be thousands of them. What if they should get

together and come at us at the same time?"

Tom Watkins tried not to think about this possibility. He tried to remember that Dr. Smith had said that men in shock could not act together. Yet the great chorus ringing in his ears told him that these wolf creatures were beginning to form packs.

The great chorus became silent. Now, in the near distance,

a single voice lifted in a wild yell. It was a woman's voice. As if this were a signal, other howls rose in answer until the night was alive with their hideous sound.

"These were once men!" Ted Kissel whispered. "They were once human beings like you and mel" His voice had horror in it. "Can . . . can it . . .?" He could not say the words he had in his mind.

"Can it happen to you and me, can it happen to others here?" So far Tom Watkins got and then the words choked him. He could not bring himself to wonder if this could happen to Cissie.

"One thing is certain," Tom said. "Tomorrow we have to find more recruits. We've got to have them if we are going to

hold this warehouse against hundreds of zombies!"

"How are we going to know a human from a zombie?" Kissel auestioned.

"We'll ask Dr. Smith to examine them before we admit

them to the warehouse," Tom answered.
"I'll do my best," Dr. Smith's voice answered from the darkness. "But I can't guarantee that I can distinguish a potential zombie from a human being."

He moved up and rested one foot on the rail beside them. "I heard some of the howling and came up here to find out

what is going on."

Again the female voice shrilled its call. Again the great chorus of male voices rose in response. The old physician listened. "This sort of thing goes back to prehistoric days on this planet," he said slowly. "I see at least a little that is happening. The intelligence, the feeling for his own kind, the very qualities that make a person a human being, are being eradicated. The result is that humans regress to a more primitive state; they become animals, return to a lower order of intelligence. It is not wrong for the wolf to howl in the night, it is not wrong for the wolf to kill. He doesn't know any better. But how in heaven is this regression being accomplished?"

"It's not being done in heaven; it's being done in hell," Kis-

sel said.

A shiver passed through the old physician. "I'm glad my life

insurance is paid up, only I doubt if it's any good. Considering the number of claims that will be made, no company can pay off and remain solvent. So the company will argue this is an act of God and will try to evade payment. Also, if the company pays off, I doubt if they will be able to find the beneficiary."

"Who is the beneficiary?" Kissel asked.

"Cissie," Dr. Smith answered.

It seemed to Tom Watkins that the night had suddenly grown very cold.

Off in the swirling darkness, a weird wail lifted from a

once-human throat.

"I just don't see how it is possible for the human vocal chords to produce a sound like that," Dr. Smith said.

"Did the blood samples reveal anything?" Tom asked.

"I'm still working with them," the answer came. "The chemistry of the human blood has always fascinated me. Did you know that it has many close correlations, in its chemical content, with sea water. Actually, one way to describe a human being is to say that he is a few gallons of sea water contained within a pumping system and a network of veins and arteries. This is not the whole picture, by any means. I have always assumed this pointed to an incredibly remote ancestor who came from the sea and who brought with him, for his great adventure on the land, a little bit of Old Ocean."

Footsteps sounded on the roof. As they turned, a flashlight showed at the top of the steps rising from the interior of the

warehouse.

"Hello," Dr. Murk called. "Is Dr. Smith—? Oh, there you are," he said, catching sight of the man he sought. "I realized you were missing and came looking for you."

"The noise awakened me," Dr. Smith answered.

The two physicians stood listening as the great wailed chorus rose again in the night.

"There's something wonderful about that sound," Dr. Murk said. "Something down there in the dark is challenging man and the whole universe. You can hear the challenge in that

ringing chorus of defiance." Sudden enthusiasm sounded in his voice.

"It might be well to remember that you are a man," Tom Watkins said. "You are a member of the species that is being challenged."

"So what?" Murk answered. "The law of survival says that the weak shall give way to the strong. If the human race is not strong enough to meet this challenge, then it must give way."

"It hasn't given way yet," Tom Watkins answered.

Far off in the night, a zombie howled his defiant challenge.

CHAPTER SIX

Tom took Eph with him as he hunted recruits. He always took Kissel too, leaving Jerry and Harden as roof guards, with Eric Bloor making himself useful where needed. Harden was a reluctant guard. He had just found a radio parts store and was busy salvaging parts from it. He had no hope of getting his own transmitter back into operation. There was no electric current in the lines. However, Harden hoped to find a hand-powered signal corps generator in some surplus store and use this as a power source. Eventually he hoped to get on the air with the story of the events in the Basin, certain that listening radio amateurs around the world would pick it up. Reception remained difficult because of the persistent static that saturated the atmosphere.

Tom's first thought, in hunting recruits, was to use Rena's car. However, the gas tank was almost empty. Filling stations still existed but electricity to run the pumps was no longer being generated and there was no way to lift the fuel from

the underground storage tanks.

They walked.

Ted Kissel tried to hold his nose. "It seems to me the stink gets worse every day," he said.

"Nothing smells worse than a dead human body," Eph said.

"There must be a lot of 'em around here."

"There are," Tom said. "The stink of all the battlefields on Earth is rolled into one evil smell here."

"How are we going to know these zombies from regular

people?" Eph asked.

"If they run bent over, like they have a pain in the guts, shoot them," Ted Kissel said. "If they how, shoot them. If you have any doubt, shoot first and wonder afterwards."

"Supposing they start shooting at us?" the tall mountain

man asked.

"If Dr. Smith is right, these zombies have regressed to a very primitive state," Tom said. "They have gone back to a point on the race memory which is long before the invention of rifles. They haven't yet remembered how to use guns."

"You reckon they'll think of that?" Eph asked.

"I reckon I don't want to be around when they start remembering guns," Ted Kissel said. "Here comes one now out of the alley!" He lifted his rifle.

"Hold it," Tom said.

The man coming out of the alley was walking bent over. They were in the middle of the street. He did not seem to see them.

"Cover him and see what happens," Tom said.

Three rifles covered the zombie-man. Studying the littered pavement, he walked within ten feet of the muzzles of the guns, and did not seem to see them.

"Hello," Tom said.

The zombie man heard the sound and turned his face toward them. For a second, recognition of them as being human showed in his eyes. With the recognition came wild hope.

Then both recognition and hope were gone. Snarling like a

wolf, the zombie leaped toward them.

Three rifle bullets knocked him down. Three rifle bullets killed the animal that this man had become.

"They're using something other than dynamite to clean out us frogs," Ted Kissel said.
"They? Who are they?" Eph asked.

"That's what all of us frogs want to know," the FBI man answered.

They walked around the corpse and continued along the street. The harbor, with its wrecked shipping, was to their left. As the fog lifted for a moment, a destroyer was visible far out.

"They've got the fleet out, to make certain none of us injured frogs escape by sea." Kissel said, pointing to the de-

strover.

"I wonder what they've got in the sky?" Tom said.

"Blimps and helicopters way up above the smog bank," Kissel guessed. "Jets armed with sidewinders on the ready line at the airfields, to make certain us frogs stay here and get killed."

"What if these zombies should find them some helicopters

and land on top of our warehouse?" Eph asked.

"I've been afraid even to think of that, for fear my thinking of it would make it happen," Tom said. "There must be zombies who were pilots but I'm hoping none of them will ever remember they know how to fly.'

"Do you suppose this menace is turning us frogs into a mindless race of croakers to use as its servants when it

chooses to show itself?" Ted Kissel asked.

"I don't think so," Tom answered. "I think we are just being eliminated ruthlessly, being turned into animals who will kill each other off. Conquest is easy if you can turn half the population into zombies who will kill off the regular humans and in their turn will be killed by those who do not become zombies."

A man with a sailor hat on his head and a cigarette drooping from his lips was leaning against the front of a building. He made no effort to run as they approached.

"Are you looking for converts, too?" the sailor asked.

"We're looking for men who are willing to fight for their

own lives," Tom answered. "We're recruiting normal human beings, or as normal as anybody is these days."

"That's not very normal, mister," the sailor said.
"What did you mean by that 'too'?" Tom asked.

"Another bunch passed here a while ago," the sailor said. "They said they had a cure for everything. Just join their blood brotherhood and you are sure to be saved." He spat into the street.

"A blood brotherhood? What the hell are you talking

about?" Kissel interrupted.

The sailor flipped away his cigarette. He reached into his jacket pocket for another. His hand stayed in the pocket. He looked at the rifles of the three men.

"You boys are all gunned up," he said.
"Do you blame us for this?" Tom asked.

"No," the sailor answered. He eyed them closely, then spoke again. "You don't look like stoopies to me," he said.

"Stoopies?" Tom asked.

"They walk around all bent over," the sailor said. "I call

'em stoopies."

"Oh," Tom said, in understanding. "We call them zombies. We're not zombies. In fact, we have had some nasty moments with them. We're looking for men to fight zombies." He explained their purpose.

"I'll sign articles on that," the sailor said. "My name is Crail." He took his hand out of his pocket, dropped the heavy automatic back into place, and came into the street, hand

outstretched.

"We've had some rough seas around here," Crail said. He

looked at Tom. "Are you the captain of this crew?"

Tom nodded. Crail's handclasp was firm and friendly. "If Dr. Smith passes you, you're one of us," Tom said. "In the

meantime, we need a lot more just like you."

By the time the murky fog moving sluggishly in from the sea was threatening to turn into full darkness, they had recruited fourteen men who walked erect. No women. They had seen no women. Two of the men had been mechanics, several had been store clerks, others had been salesmen. They

were a scared, ragged, unshaven bunch, but none of them walked with a stoop. They had shot two men who did walk with a stoop and they had heard two women screaming in the distance. Or perhaps it had been the same woman screaming twice.

Dr. Smith, assisted by Dr. Murk, gave each new recruit a fast examination. All passed. When Dr. Smith wanted blood

samples, the sailor protested.

"For all I know, this may be just a way to get me into a blood brotherhood," the sailor explained. "You may be going to inject something into my body instead of withdrawing blood." He kept his hand in his jacket as he talked.

"You can watch me sterilize the needle and the syringe,"

Dr. Smith said.

Crail took his hand out of his pocket. "In that case, it's okay," he said. He watched the sterilization with great care. Dr. Smith questioned him about the blood brotherhoods. The sailor explained as best he could. Dr. Smith blinked bewildered eyes as he listened to the explanation.

Inside, the problem of assigning places to sleep to the new recruits, of setting up work details, of establishing times for guard duty, of telling each man bluntly to keep his hands off Cissie and Rena, with Eph adding, "And that means Effic

too!" took until almost midnight.

Though bone-weary, Tom and Ted went to the roof for a final inspection. The nervous Harden was still on duty here.

"Women have been screaming," Harden said.

"Don't go down from the roof to try to help anybody," Tom said.

"That hardly seems human," Harden protested.

"We can't be human when we're dealing with something that is not human," Tom answered. "Screaming down below might be for the purpose of luring the guard into a trap. The instant the guard stepped outside, he might find his brains knocked out with a club."

"I hadn't thought of that!" Harden gasped. Shivering, he

followed Tom and Ted to the edge of the roof.

Far off in the night a shrill wail rose.

"That's a woman," Ted Kissel said.

A wolf wail coming from a male throat answered her. Then came another and another and another, until the night was hideous with the roar of the great chorus.

"I'm going down and turn in. I'll send Jerry up to relieve

you," Tom said.

In his room, he found his sleeping bag already had an occupant-Rena.

"Let me stay with you," she pleaded in the darkness. "I'm

so scared, so very scared, Tom."

"Please, Rena. I'm scared too. And I'm dog-tired," he answered.

She screamed her way out of the room.

He had hardly got into his sleeping bag before he was

asleep.

The next morning, when Tom went down to breakfast, Rena was talking to Crail. Trust her to find a sailor, Tom thought, and a sailor to find her! Eric Bloor was listening to the mild argument they were having, and was trying to get into the conversation, but Rena was not paying Bloor any attention. She did not seem to be able to see Tom Watkins, which did not surprise him. He went over and sat down beside Cissie, who was encouraging Teeny to eat. The great dark eyes of the child looked longingly up at Tom as if in the depths of her heart she was wondering about some secret matter. She stopped eating to stare at Tom.

"Please eat some more, darling," Cissie urged. But Teeny would not take her eyes off Tom.

"Darling-" Cissie began.

Teeny ignored her to stare at Tom.

"Will you be my daddy?" Teeny said to Tom.

"Darling!" Cissie said hastily.

"My daddy is gone," Teeny said, continuing to bring to light the secret deep within her heart. "I think you would make a nice daddy."

Tom Watkins choked.

"Pleasel" Cissie wailed to the child.

Teeny still ignored her. "Do you have any little girls of your own already?" Teeny said.

Tom fought off the choking in his throat. "No," he said

huskily.

The child slid off of her stool and came around and took his hand.

"Then you need me as much as I need you," she said.

He picked her up and hugged her and buried the bristle of his beard in her hair, keeping his eyes down and away so that no one could see what was in them.

"Hand . . . hand me her cereal and her spoon," he whis-

pered to Cissie.

Sitting in his lap, the child began to eat contentedly.

"Tom . . ." Cissie whispered.

"Of course I'll be her daddy," he answered huskily.

Dr. Smith came out of his quarters. He smiled at Cissie and said, "You seem very happy, my dear." His eyes went on to Tom's face, then to Teeny sitting on Tom's lap, but before he could speak, Eric Bloor had called to him. He went on and joined the group that included Bloor, Rena and Crail. To keep from thinking, Tom listened to the talk.

"Couldn't this rite of the blood brother be a way of sort of vaccinating people to keep them from becoming zombies?"

Bloor asked.

Behind his thick-lensed spectacles, Dr. Smith's eyes popped open.

"I . . . ah" he said.

"Didn't they wipe out smallpox by vaccination?" Bloor continued.

"Y . . . yes."

"And didn't they discover the smallpox vaccine by accident?"

"Yes. It was noticed that people milking cows often contracted a mild disease called smallpox and never thereafter caught smallpox," Dr. Smith admitted. "But—"

"Maybe people who have had this disease which makes people into zombies have discovered a way to give a mild

form of it to others, saving them from the real thing?" Eric Bloor persisted.

"That's possible," Dr. Smith admitted. "But what makes you think a disease is turning normal people into zombies?"

"Well . . ." Bloor blinked startled eyes at the old physician.

"I don't know. It just seemed that it might be true."

"Would they have bombed a whole city out of existence just to wipe out a disease?" Dr. Smith asked. "I admit this thing acts like a disease in some ways, with this exception: intelligence, great intelligence, is in operation. For months, this thing defied the efforts of the best secret service agents. If they ever found out what it was the information is still top-secret in Washington. I . . ." He broke off speaking as Dr. Murk entered the big basement room. "Would you listen to this. Dr. Murk?"

Briefly, he outlined what Bloor had said.

Murk's face was a frown. "There was much speculation about a new form of disease, this I know."

"There!" Bloor said, in triumph. "They were speculating

about it."

"Every research lab speculates!" Dr. Smith answered. "That's their job. They have to develop a working hypothesis. This is pure speculation. After that comes the often extremely difficult task of setting up experiments to prove, disprove, or emend, the working hypothesis. To test this idea of yours, we would have to have a guinea pig."

"I'll be your guinea pig," Eric Bloor spoke.

There was no false heroism in his manner, there was no

swagger in the way he rose to his feet.

"I will find this blood brotherhood that Mr. Crail has told us about," Bloor continued. "I'll go through their ritual. Then I will return here and you can examine me and find out if there is any chance that this blood rite is a way to save humans from becoming zombies."

"I can't countenance such a thing," Dr. Smith exploded. "You will be almost certain to lose your life. I admit it's a heroic gesture but—"

"I'm no hero," Eric Bloor answered. "I'm just offering to do

a nasty job that has to be done."

He turned and walked across the basement. Every eye in the place was focused upon him. Before he had reached the steps that led upward to the street level, he had begun to whistle the same endless tune.

"Where is the man going?" Teeny's voice could be heard

in the silence.

"Hush, honey, hush," Cissie could be heard replying.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ERIC BLOOR did not return that day. The roof guards that night were instructed to be alert for him. Checking the guards at dawn, Tom and Ted found they had nothing to report. They had heard many howls during the night but Eric Bloor had not called to them to be admitted to the warehouse. They went to the basement. Kissel walked over to the racks of test tubes and looked closely at them. He had a frown on his face when he came back and sat down opposite Tom Watkins but he said nothing.

"I just don't understand Eric Bloor," Tom spoke. "He was one of the most scared kids I ever knew. Wouldn't even pass a graveyard at night without whistling. Now he seems to be

completely without fear. All he has left is the whistle."

"Sometimes, in battle, cowards became brave, and brave men become cowards," Kissel said. He glowered at the racks which held the test tubes.

"Something wrong there?" Tom asked.

"Yes," the FBI man answered. "One of the samples of sea water that I collected and turned over to a courier is gone. I've checked every day, simply because there had to be something important about those samples. I wanted to know

why they were sent here and how they were to be used. Oh, good morning, Dr. Murk," he said, as the man from Washington entered the main room of the basement. "Do you know who has been using those samples of sea water in the test tubes?"

Murk glanced toward the racks and shrugged. "Perhaps the old man has been running some private tests of his own," he answered. "Has that fellow Bloor returned yet?"

"No," Tom said.

Dr. Smith came out of his private laboratory and sleeping quarters. Kissel asked him about the missing test tube.

"Yes," the old physician answered, without hesitation. "I

have been running a few tests."

His answer seemed to irritate Murk. "At a time like this, you are running tests on sea water!" he exploded. "Surely you have something more important to do. You could help me in my research." The tone was as cold as the depths of the sea where no sunlight ever penetrates.

"It's hard to know in advance what is important and what

is not," Dr. Smith answered.

"What did you find out?" Murk continued.

"Nothing, as yet," the old physician said. He turned to Tom and Ted. "There is something I would like both of you to check for me."

"Glad to," Tom answered.

"When you are out on the streets, I want you to keep very close watch and see if the number of people running or walking bent over is not diminishing," Dr. Smith said.

"What's the purpose of that?" Murk asked.

"I have an idea that this stooping, bent-over posture, is only a phase of short duration. I suspect it may be the result of a violent emotional upheaval at the solar plexus, really a tremendous battle between the human and the invading not-human elements. When it passes, the person walks erect."

"What the devil makes you think that?" Murk asked.

"Really, I think you have wandered into schizophrenial"

"In this situation, most of us will exhibit schizoid tendencies," the old physician answered.

"I wish you would keep me informed of your activities," Murk said.

"I'll do my best," the old physician said humbly. Again he turned to Tom and Ted. "What's on the schedule for today?"

"More looting of grocery stores," Tom answered.

"Good. While you are doing this, please check the number of people who are walking in a bent-over posture," Dr. Smith said.

As they moved to the exit, Harden came rushing down the stairs. His pale face was flushed. "I just remembered a surplus store that had an old signal corps hand-powered generator and voice transmitter," he said, excitement in his voice. "One man turns the crank with one hand and operates the wave change coils and condensers with the other. It was originally designed to be dropped along with paratroopers. If that store is still in existence. . . . May I go look, Mr. Watkins? May I?"

"Sure," Tom said. "Keep your rifle ready."

"I'll do that, sir, I'll sure do that," Harden promised. He had already unbarred the front door and was outside and out of sight before they had assembled a detail for food foraging.

When Tom and Ted came down from the second floor with their detail, they heard excited feminine voices from the

basement.

"That fellow Bloor came back," the guard at the door said. "He's down in the basement now. The women are all excited about him."

"I have to see this," Tom said. Kissel followed him to the basement.

Standing, Eric was drinking coffee. Rena was hovering around him. Cissie, with some reserve on her face, was standing at a little distance. Bloor's face was slightly flushed. The faintest glitter was visible in his eyes, but his manner was calm.

"Did you do it?" Tom Watkins asked.

Bloor nodded. "It really wasn't any trouble. I just asked the first man I saw."

"Did he walk with a stoop?"

"Oh, he was past that. He was really very decent," Bloor answered. "He said he would be very glad to recruit me."

"Do they call this blood brother thing recruiting?" Kissel

asked.

"I believe they regard it in that way," Bloor answered. "Although nothing definite was said, this was the impression I got. They firmly believe these inoculations will save the human race."

"Zombies trying to save humans?" Kissel said, his voice

sharp. "Does that make any sense?"

"Perhaps not all of the zombies are as bad as you think," Bloor suggested. "This chap I met was really a quite decent fellow."

"I don't like the sound of this," Kissel said.

"What I don't like is being asked to believe that you actually went through such a ritual," Tom said to Bloor. "When you were a kid, you didn't have the courage to walk past a yard that had a pet poodle in it."

"Sorry that you doubt my word, Tom," Bloor said. He pulled off his jacket and rolled up the sleeve of his left arm.

The gash had sharp edges. A little blood had dried around the edges.

"They used a straight razor," Bloor explained. "It didn't

really hurt."

"Come in here, young man. I want to examine you," Dr. Smith called.

Eric Bloor walked across the room and entered the door of the old physician's private laboratory.

The eyes of Rena and Cissie followed him.

"Tom, could it be possible?" Cissie whispered. Her eyes had sudden hope in them.

"He is absolutely wonderfull" Rena said. "Just wonderfull Wasn't it marvelous the way he showed that cut on his arm, to prove he had been through the blood brotherhood ritual?"

"We've still got food-looting to do." Ted Kissel's voice was

harsh in the silent basement.

He and Tom turned away. At the door, the guard asked, "Did he do it, did he really do it?"

"He did," Tom answered. "But where he got this kind of

courage, I guess I'll never know."

As the detail of six armed men moved away with them, Eph Moffat waved his Winchester at them from the roof.

"Bring home the bacon, boys!" he yelled.

Grocery stores in the neighborhood of the warehouse were empty from previous looting. They had to move farther away, into a strange neighborhood where they had not been before.

"What we need is a warehouse full of groceries," Crail, the

sailor, said. "Hello, look at that!"

A woman had just come out of a wrecked saloon immediately behind them. Keeping to the sidewalk, stepping over the wreckage strewed there, coming behind them, she walked with a sinuous stride that caught the eye of every man in the detail. They stopped to wait for her. She remained on the sidewalk.

"Hi, boys," she said, as she walked past them. "Looking

for something to eat?" Her voice had a throaty purr in it.

"We sure are," Crail answered promptly. "We're likely to

eat you up right now."

She smiled in reply and jerked her thumb toward an alley. "There's a big chain store warehouse down that way. It's full of canned goods."

She continued down the sidewalk.

"Wait a minute," Tom called to her.

She turned and waited. A coat was thrown across one arm. Her right hand was out of sight in the coat. Her features were even; she was obviously in her twenties, and her smile was bold.

"Do you want something?" she said to Tom. The tone of her voice was an invitation.

"Do you have something?" Tom asked.

Her smile grew bolder. He was a man and she knew how to handle men. "I'll say I have," she answered. She glanced over her shoulder at the sagging door of the wrecked building just behind her, then turned her attention back to Tom.

"A few days ago," Tom began, "were you walking bent over?"

This was not the question she had anticipated. The smile vanished from her face. As she answered, the snarl of a tigress was suddenly in her voice.

"What difference does that make?"

Turning, she slid like a vanishing shadow through the broken door of the building. As she disappeared, the sinuous hip motion had turned into the quick, lithe movements of a great jungle cat.

"You asked her the wrong question," Ted Kissel said, be-

hind Tom. "You made her mad."

"Lady, I didn't mean to insult you!" Tom called out. There

was no answer from the wrecked building.

"If she was telling the truth about that warehouse . . ." Crail said.

"We'll go see," Tom decided.

The warehouse was exactly where the tiger woman had said it would be. Made of concrete, a series of loading platforms where a whole fleet of trucks could have loaded at the same time lay along the alley. Across from the docks, was a long wooden building that was obviously a storage shed of some kind. Railroad tracks ran between the building and the shed.

Entering by a sagging door, they found, piled ceiling-high, case after case of canned goods on loading platforms. The fork lifts that had once handled these loading platforms

were lined up in a row off to one side.

"We can get groceries by the case here," Crail said. "All we have to do is lug it away. And if I can get one of those fork lift started, we'll take a whole loading platform full of canned goods right off the ramp and up the street." Slipping his rifle on its sling over his shoulder, he moved to the fork lifts.

"They're full of gas," he called out. "This warehouse wasn't

being used when the bombs hit."

A starter ground. A motor sputtered, caught, and throbbed with life. Crail spun the fork lift under a loading platform.

The hydraulic system functioned perfectly and the whole platform went up into the air.

"Where's the down ramp that leads to the street?" the

sailor yelled.

"At the other side, I think," one of the detail answered. He moved quickly along the broad aisle that led to the other side of the warehouse.

A dark shadow came out of one of the side aisles between the piles of groceries stacked on loading platforms and darted at his back. The knife went into his shoulder. Striking the bone, the point veered toward the outside of his body. This saved his life. Turning, he yelled, jerked up his rifle, and fired.

In this enclosed space, the roar of the rifle was cannon loud.

Tom Watkins turned at the sound of the yell. Men armed with knives and clubs were pouring out of the hidden corners of the warehouse. Tom jerked up his rifle in time to shoot the one who had knifed the man from the detail.

The howling began.

As fierce as a chorus of Indian war whoops, as shrill as Tartar cavalry in full charge, the howling was a wild tumult of animal sound. The warehouse roared with it. Then the rifles began and the warehouse seemed to shake.

The rifle in Tom's hand grew hot. When it was empty, he pulled the pistol from its holster at his hip. The instant he started to draw the pistol, a zombie-man darted at him with club uplifted. Somebody shooting over Tom's shoulder saved his life. The face of the zombie-man suddenly had three eyes, the third coming from a bullet hole that appeared in his forehead.

The fight ended as quickly as it had begun. It ended when the howling stopped. The howling stopped when there were no more zombies left alive.

Suddenly the only sound in the warehouse was the rasped breathing of dying creatures that had once been men. Groans sounded, and grunts like animals in pain. The groans and the grunts went into silence.

The man from the detail who had been knifed was dead. A club had struck him. Crail, the sailor, was still on the fork lift, with his rifle in his hands. The motor of the lift was still running. The sailor had a wild expression on his face.

"This was a trap," Tom heard Ted Kissel whisper behind

him. "That damned tiger woman set us up for this."

"But she didn't walk with a stoop." Tom heard his voice fade into silence as he remembered what Dr. Smith had said. "No wonder she got so mad when I asked her that question?"

"Remember, at night, we heard a woman howling, and a pack answering her?" Kissel continued. "Could she be that

woman? If she is....

Tom checked the detail. One man dead. One man wounded by a thrown knife. One man slightly stunned by a thrown club.

One man, he had been a store clerk in normal life, was

backing out of the door of the warehouse.

The bullet caught him in the middle of the back and ripped straight up his spine. He never knew what hit him. His rifle clattering on the concrete floor, he lay without even a tremor in his body after he fell.

"That one came from outside!" Kissel said.

A second bullet followed the first through the door of the warehouse. The high velocity slug passed within inches of Tom's head, drilled through a case of canned goods, went through them, struck the far wall of the building, and howled its way upward among the steel beams that supported the roof.

As Tom dropped to the floor, he saw men armed with knives and clubs pour out of the green shed across from the warehouse. Protected by the rifle that was spitting high speed

slugs through the open door, they were charging.

As they charged, they howled.

Before they reached the door, the rifle fire from the shed stopped.

They charged through the door.

Tom did not have to give any order to take cover. His men instantly took protection behind the loading platforms piled

high with canned goods. From these hidden spots, they poured a stream of deadly rifle fire at the zombies surging through the door.

The result was slaughter. Bodies of zombies who had once

been men piled high in the doorway.

Suddenly the charge stopped. Some remnant of good sense must have appeared in the brain of one of the maddened creatures. Several turned back and tried to regain the protection of the shed.

Instantly, the rifle fire from the shed began again. Now it was aimed at those who tried to flee. Without compunction, the rifleman in the shed was shooting his own men as they turned back from the charge.

"That fellow with the rifle in the shed is shooting his own men!" Kissel shouted. "This hasn't been done since the days

of the Nazisl"

Some of the zombies were only wounded. They were trying to crawl back to the protection of the green shed. The rifle fire from the shed hit the crawlers.

"He's shooting wounded men!" Kissel said.

Tom heard the FBI man swear. Looking up, he saw Kissel climbing over the stacks of canned goods toward a row of small windows just under the roof of the building. Before he reached the windows, another wave of attackers came from the green shed.

Behind them, shooting over them now, the rifle fire from

the shed was urging them on in their charge.

Rifle fire from the men inside the warehouse knocked them down.

It stopped the charge at the door.

When the shooting had stopped, Tom heard Kissel calling urgently to him from up above. He climbed to the top of the cases of groceries and stood beside the FBI agent. Kissel pointed through the window toward a window in the green shed.

"It's that damned tiger woman who lured us into the

trap!" Kissel said. "She's the one with the rifle!"

"A woman?"

"Yes, a woman!" Kissel answered. "There she is now!" He

pointed to the window in the shed and lifted his rifle.

Tom saw a shadow move across the window in the green building. It was gone in an instant but he clearly recognized the woman who had spoken to him on the street. A rifle was in her hands. He turned in time to see Kissel lower the rifle from his shoulder.

"I didn't get a chance for a shot," Kissel said.

Choked words of protest formed in Tom's throat. Women,

at least in his dreams, were to be treasured.

"They're not all like Cissie," Kissel said, bitterly. "Some are cats, all claws and teeth. When they become zombies, all they want to do is use their claws. Just as soon as I can get this one in my sights, I'm going to put a bullet through her."

Outside, the attack had stopped. One man, wounded, was

trying to crawl back to the protection of the shed.

The bullet coming from the shed struck him in the head.

"See that!" Kissel said.

Silence held the warehouse. Down below, the men of the detail were calling. Tom answered, giving them courage.

"We can fight them off all day, as long as clubs are all they have," Kissel called out. "But that woman has a rifle," he said privately, to Tom. "Sooner or later, she will find rifles for her men unless she's afraid they will shoot her."

The silence continued. There was no sound from the

green shed. In the distance a rifle barked.

"Has she slipped away?" Kissel wondered. "Or has she gone out to round up more zombies to send against us?" He leaned against the wall and looked down the alley toward the street.

"Look that way," he said, grimly, to Tom. "More on the way!"

At the street, men were moving.

Inside the shed, a rifle cracked. From the doors of the shed, perhaps a dozen zombies darted toward the door of the warehouse.

Rifle fire from the shed forced them on. Rifle fire from the warehouse met them.

Rifle fire spurting from the street knocked them sprawling. "By God, the zombies are fighting each other!" Kissel gasped.

Tom glanced out the window. "Those are not zombies!" he said. "Those are our men. I recognize Eph Moffat"— his

voice caught for an instant- "and Eric Bloor."

Bloor had a pistol in each hand. Like the hero of a western movie, he was coming down the center of the alley, shooting at anything that moved. The fire from his pistols was accurate and deadly.

The bandage that made a bulge on his arm under his

jacket was hardly noticeable.

Movement showed in the window of the green shed across the alley. A woman there lifted herself up and raised a rifle to aim at Bloor.

Kissel's gun leaped to his shoulder. He fired a quick shot. The bullet knocked splinters from the window sill. Startled, the woman with the rifle ducked out of sight.

"By God, I missed!" Kissel raged.

In the alley, zombies were running. Now no fire came from the green shed to drive them to their task.

The detail had to clear bodies from the door before Eric

and Eph could enter.

"I heard the rifle shooting," Eph said. "Figure you were in trouble. Mr. Bloor here got everybody together and came to help you out."

"Thanks, Eric," Tom said.

"Don't mention it, Tom; you would have done the same for me," Bloor answered.

He had slipped the pistols back into the pockets of his jacket and was smoking a cigarette. Absently, as if an itch had developed there, he scratched his coat over the bandage on his arm.

"Do you want another burial detail, Tom?" he asked.

"Some day maybe I am going to understand you, Eric," Tom Watkins answered. He shook his head. "No burial detail. We don't dare take the risk of waiting here if we are going to stay alive ourselves." He shook his head again, this

time at the memory of the woman with the rifle, and explained what he wanted done.

The motors of the truck lifts sputtered to life. With their lifts holding loading platforms of canned goods, the little vehicles slid down the ramp and into the street, where they formed a caravan that moved its slow way back to the warehouse. The fork lifts had not been designed for this operation. They were not as good as trucks. But in an emergency, they

could be used on the streets.
This was an emergency.

Black fog swirled around them. The stink of dead men fouled the black fog. When the little caravan reached the warehouse, Tom Watkins went promptly to the basement to report his findings to Dr. Smith.

"Not one of the men who attacked us ran in a bent-over

posture," he said.

Behind his thick spectacles, the eyes of the old physician

looked tired and forlorn.

"I was afraid the stooping was only the phase that marked the onset of this condition," Dr. Smith said, regret in his voice. "In the next phase, I doubt if it will be possible to tell them from normal humans until they strike to kill."

Cissie's voice was heard on the steps, calling sharply, "Toml

Tom!"

As Tom rose and turned toward the sound, Cissie herself came down the steps. She was holding Teeny in her arms. The child was struggling to be free.

As Cissie reached the bottom of the steps, she stumbled and

almost fell. The child instantly jerked free of her arms.

Like an outraged kitten, Teeny spat at Cissie. Then, grabbing her stomach, she bent almost double. As Tom started toward her, she fled from him.

She howled as she ran.

It was a childish wail but there was no mistaking its resemblance to the howls that echoed through the black fog during the night.

Tom stared at her. Cissie ran to him. Her voice was frantic. "She began to spit at me upstairs. Then she grabbed her

little tummy—" she broke off to move appealingly toward Teeny. Pointing to Tom, she whispered, "Here's your daddy, darling. Here's your daddy."

The howl came in answer, louder and shriller than before.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THEY put the child in a small room in the basement. Pounding at the walls with her fists, she howled defiance at them. She had forgotten toilet training. When Cissie entered the room, she screamed louder than ever. She was willing to eat, but she gobbled the food given her like an animal. Both Dr. Murk and Dr. Smith ran every conceivable test on her. They used such medication as they had. Dr. Smith wished for some of the newer drugs to try.

Cissie took on the appearance of a ghost walking in a gray

mist.

Always in the background, Eric Bloor's eternal, tuneless whistle could be heard. Bloor worked tirelessly. He risked his life hunting for any food that Cissie thought might be tempting to Teeny.

"I tell you this is a disease," Dr. Murk said, over and over

again.

"If it is, it is a very strange one," Dr. Smith answered.
"There is no rise in body temperature, no nausea, none of the usual symptoms that are associated with illness."

Harden reported enthusiastically that he had found the surplus, hand-powered generator and had set it up in his

old radio shack.

"It's all ready to go, Mr. Watkins!"

Tom had forgotten all about Harden and his radio transmitter. He had to be reminded of it. Then he had no enthusiasm.

Cissie seemed to grow more frail with each passing hour. "If only I could find some way to help Teeny," she said, over

and over again.

Each night when the darkness became black, the howls began. Now, more than ever before, one fierce scream that could only come from the throat of a woman seemed to set off the great chorus.

"It's that tiger woman," Kissel said. "I should not have

missed when I had the chance."

Rifle shots in the night became more and more frequent. "She's teaching them how to use guns," Kissel said.

Occasionally the throb of helicopter motors could be

heard in the murky sky above.

Always, in the background, Eric Bloor's whistle could be

heard.

"Maybe all of us should become blood brothers," Rena suggested, listening to this whistle. "Then maybe we could stop wondering who will be the next one to start howling."

"Please, don't talk like that," Cissie begged: "Teeny couldn't

help what happened to her."

"I'm not blaming Teeny," Rena said quickly. "I'm just

worrying about me, wondering when I'll start howling."

"I guess everyone of us has the same secret fear," Tom said quickly. "The best way I know to keep from worrying is to keep busy."

He knew that everyone in the group was watching everyone else. All of the men had rifles, many of the women had

pistols.

"I would like to speak to you privately," Dr. Smith said, behind Tom. "And to you too, Mr. Kissel."

As they rose and followed the old physician into his private laboratory, Cissie and Rena went up the steps together.

"Dr. Smith mentioned a new drug yesterday that he thought

might help Teeny," Cissie said.

"Then get it," Rena said. As time had passed, some of the glamor of the movie queen seemed to have rubbed off of her and she had almost become a human being. "Call up-I

keep forgetting. We don't just call up for what we want any more." Rena's eyes lighted. "Maybe we could go find it!"
"I... I wouldn't dare," Cissie whispered. "Tom doesn't want me... any of us... to go out alone."

"We'll go together," Rena said.

"But!"

"You love that kid, don't you?" Rena's voice was harsh but somewhere in the depths of her a softness was showing.

"Of course I do," Ĉissie answered.

"Then get what the kid needs," Rena said. Longing suddenly showed in her voice. "I never had one of my own but I always thought it would be kind of . . . nice."

"I know how you feel," Cissie said quickly. "We'll go. But

it would be better if we had someone with us, a man."

A tuneless whistle was coming down the steps toward them.

"Of course I'll go with you," Eric Bloor said, when they had explained what was needed. "I'm perfectly safe from becoming a zombie, thanks to this." He nodded toward the bandage barely visible on his arm. "No, don't bother Tom. He's got too much on his mind already. We'll leave word with him where we're going."

They left a message for Tom with the guard at the door.

Dr. Smith's private laboratory was simply furnished. An Army type steel cot, a big, comfortable swivel chair, and a big desk were the major items of furniture. A long lab work bench took up the wall opposite the cot. Book shelves took up the rest of the room. Books were everywhere, big books, little books, pamphlets, many of them in French or German.

"I am sorry I cannot offer you a chair," the old physician

apologized.

Tom and Ted sat on the cot. The partition that separated this room from the rest of the big basement was made of plywood. It did not reach the ceiling. About two feet separated the top of the partition from the gray concrete ceiling above it.

Dr. Smith glanced up, and dropped his voice as if he was

afraid of eavesdroppers.

"I think I have solved the problem," he said.

"What?!" Kissel began.

"Shhhh!" the old physician whispered, glancing up toward the open space above the partition. He shook his head at his own thoughts. "Sometimes I am sure I am entertaining groundless fears. At other times, I don't know...."

A touch of added chill seemed to come into the little room

with his words.

"But what have you solved?" Kissel repeated.

The old physician dropped his voice to a still lower whisper.

"The whole thing, I think. This whole vast problem is the

result of a protein molecule going mad."

Kissel's face reflected his feelings. "Look, Dr. Smith, we didn't come in here to listen to jokes. Protein is the stuff you

get from meat and eggs."

"Protein is the structural basis for all living tissue," the old physician said. "The protein molecule enters into life forms in an incredibly complex number of ways. For all we know to the contrary, the protein molecule may serve as the building block for all forms of life on this planet; it may mark the point at which inert matter becomes, by some incredibly alchemy, living substance; it may be the bridge between non-life and life. There is a bridge somewhere. If the protein molecule is not the whole bridge, it at least forms the supports for that bridge. It lies at the heart of the primitive protoplasm that in the seas of long ago first began the slow groping upward toward light and life."

For an instant, a gleam showed in the eyes of the old physician. The story of life, any form of life, fascinated him. Where had life come from? Where was it going? What was it? What was the human part of the great life stream that emerged from the protoplasm of shallow seas and looked for-

ward to some destiny beyond the stars?

Then the gleam faded. The human part of the stream might have no destiny beyond the stars. Its grave might be the planet where it had been born—Earth. A molecule had gone mad.

"I don't know what drove this molecule mad. Perhaps neither I nor anyone else will ever know the truth." Fretfulness crept into the old doctor's voice. "Perhaps a cosmic ray plunged deep into the ocean and struck the heart of this molecule. A far more likely probability, however, is that the old atom bomb tests far out over the Pacific provided the hard radiation that brought about this change in the core of this protein molecule."

"In the Pacific?" Kissel spoke. "Do you mean this thing

came from the sea?"

"Precisely," Dr. Smith answered. "The gray film that was on the beaches months ago was made up of billions of these molecules. Some swimmer with a slight cut in his skin must have picked it up. Once it was in the human blood stream, it had found a far better breeding place than even the Pacific Ocean."

"Then those test tubes full of sea water that I collected—" Were a vitally important clue," Dr. Smith answered. "You probably thought you had been sent on a senseless task. It was actually the most important assignment you ever had in your life. Without those samples of sea water, without the blood from the zombies you buried across the street, both of which revealed the same film of molecules, I would never have even come close to solving the problem."

"My God!" Ted Kissel said. "If I ever kick again because my assignment looks silly!" Then his voice lifted in protest. "But even if this molecule has gone mad, it's still only a

molecule. It produces a disease."

"The molecule produces some of the effects of an infection, but these are very slight," the old doctor corrected. "There is perhaps a very slight rise in the temperature, so small that it would be unnoticed. This is followed by the violent spasm at the solar plexus as the molecule takes over the human element in a person. This generally coincides with the howling and stooping phase. The next phase, I believe, is characterized by great calm and by a complete indifference to danger. This protein molecule does not care what happens to its human host."

"I've noticed that," Ted Kissel said. His voice was grim

again.

"This molecule has one quality which distinguishes it from all disease-causing bacteria," the old doctor said. He broke off to listen to the sound of feet coming down the steps into the basement. A stool squeaked as someone sat down at the table in the main room. Dr. Smith seemed relieved. "It links itself to others of its kind. The gray film on the beaches was this kind of linkage. An identical linkage takes place through and over the whole nervous system, including the brain and the spinal cord, of a human being. This, however, is a very special linkage. Nothing else like it exists anywhere in nature, so far as I know. This is the crux of the situation, this is what makes this mad molecule really dangerous. With each linkage, each molecule has the strength and the intelligence of two molecules. When these linked molecules take over the human brain and spinal cord, the molecules acquire not only their own massed intelligence, but also the intelligence of the human being they have taken over! Some time is apparently required for the mass molecule, and in a human being, it has become a gigantic thing, to grasp not only the emotional structure of a man but also to understand and control the symbolical system that expresses itself in the form of words. Once this mad massed molecule has taken over the brain and the nervous system of a first class scientist, it will have all of his knowledge. If he is a physicist, working with reactors, it will know all about reactors and atomic power. If he is an engineer designing spaceships, it will know all about spaceships. If he is a chemist, with a knowledge of explosives, it will know how to make nitroglycerin and dynamite and gunpowder. If the scientist knows how to make a hydrogen bomb, it will know how to make a hydrogen bomb. Considering that it has no morals of any kind, no regard for any other form of life, the prospect is truly appalling.

The little secluded room was silent. Tom Watkins lit a cigarette and sat on the cot and looked at the wall opposite him. He was trying not to think but in spite of his efforts, thoughts were slipping into his mind. These were grim things.

Beside him on the cot, Ted Kissel shifted and squirmed as his own grim thoughts went through him.

"I suppose I do not need to tell either of you how truly

dangerous this mad molecule is," Dr. Smith continued.

"You don't need to tell us," Kissel said. "We've both seen its effects. That tiger woman—" A shudder went through him. "But what good is knowing this? We're trapped here. Even if we could get out of the Basin, we would have to produce proof of every word you have said."

"I know," the old physician said. Unlocking the drawer of

the desk, he took sets of folded papers from it.

Outside in the main room, steps whispered again. He stopped to listen to them.

"What are you worrying about?" Kissel asked.

Dr. Smith dropped his voice to a still lower whisper. "I suspect, but do not know, that we already have several zombies here in the warehouse who are in the last and almost indetectable phase of the molecular infestation. I don't want one of them to know what has been discovered."

The steps whispered away.

"I guess it's safe to talk now," the old doctor said. He tapped the sets of folded papers. "I have written out three sets of equations describing not only the chemical composition of the molecule but also giving the formula for what I hope but have not as yet proved will be a vaccine which will protect those who have not been infested and may also give some hope to those who are already victims."

Hope showed in the old doctor's eyes.

From the far side of the partition, muted by the intervening walls, came a shrill howl. Each of the three knew its source—Teeny.

"She is receiving the vaccine but as yet there has been no evidence of its effectiveness." The hope faded from Dr. Smith eyes. "I will keep a copy for myself and give each of you a copy of these chemical equations. Included is a list of names, this country's great biochemists, who will understand what I have written here and who must receive at least one of these copies."

He passed the folded papers to them. Kissel glanced at his copy. Tom took the set offered him and stuffed them inside his jacket. He was still staring at the wall and trying not to think.

"Gentlemen, I do not need to tell you how important these

papers are," Dr. Smith said.

The chemical retort came over the wall of the partition. About six inches long, it had a narrow neck and an enlarged, rounded bottom that was about as big as a baseball.

The flask was filled with a murky, brownish liquid.

It sailed silently over the top of the partition, following the

arc of a pop fly into the infield.

Feet in rubber-soled shoes whispered in the basement. Out there, someone was running but it was impossible to tell in

which direction he was going.

Tom Watkins reached up and caught the flask. It was as easy as catching a slow, lazy, infield fly. He did it without thinking. If he had thought about the flask and about what might be in it, his automatic reaction would have been to jerk his hand out from under it. It would have smashed on the floor.

"What the hell is that?" Kissel gasped.

"Don't movel" Dr. Smith whispered. "Don't even think of

moving."

Holding the flask, Tom sat on the cot. The flask and its contents were not heavy, but it suddenly seemed to him that they weighed a ton. The brownish liquid which filled the flask was right before his eyes. He could see little swirls and eddies in it. As he thought of what it might be, and of what it might do if he dropped the flask, sweat poured out all over his body.

Kissel, swearing, got to his feet and leaped to the door,

which he jerked open.

His movement upset the balance on the cot. The springs

jumped up and down.

Tom Watkins moved a little with the movement of the springs. His hands, spurting sweat at the palms, were suddenly so slippery that he almost dropped the flask.

"Don't drop it!" Dr. Smith whispered. "Whatever you do, don't drop it. It looks like nitroglycerin. If it is that, there is

enough in that flask to blow up the warehouse!"

Tom steadied his body. The cigarette was still in his mouth. He could not remove it from his lips. Carefully, slowly, he reached out his second hand and added it to the support given the flask. Even with both hands, it felt like the heaviest object he had ever held.

Outside, Kissel could be heard yelling at the guard at the top of the flight of steps which led upward to the main door,

asking if anyone had passed this way.

"No," the guard's answer came floating back.

"W . . . what . . . what are we going to do with that?" Dr. Smith whispered.

"Take the cigarette out of my mouth," Tom said. "Don't

burn your fingers and joggle me.'

"You don't need to tell me that," the old doctor snapped back. Carefully, he removed the burning cigarette. "Now what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to stand up and walk out of here." Tom an-

swered.

He got slowly to his feet and called sharply to Kissel, who stuck his head in the door.

"I'm walking up the steps and out the front door," Tom

said. "You cover my back. Both of you follow me."

"Right," Kissel said.

Tom nodded down toward his rifle leaning against the cot. "Dr. Smith, you bring my gun. But unless you have to, I don't advise either of you to fire any shots as long as I have this flask in my hands.'

"D... don't worry, I won't," Dr. Smith said, picking up the rifle very carefully. "A shot might set that stuff off!"

To Tom Watkins, the distance across the basement was miles in length. It got longer when he reached the stairs leading up. He could hear Ted Kissel and Dr. Smith breathing heavily behind him. Before he reached the top, the eyes of the guard were on him.

"Don't ask any questions," Tom said. "Just open the door."

"Y . . . yes, Mr. Watkins."

The guard hastily lifted the heavy bar from the door and

swung it open.

Tom walked down the steps, across the street, and through the alley. A dog was digging at the mounds of fresh dirt. He growled at them and backed away a few steps.

Tom carefully set the flask on top of the first grave.

"Back into the alley," he said.

At this point, the reaction hit him. His nerves, kept at too great a tension for too long a time, revolted in outraged protest. All through his body, muscles began to shake. He had to hold on to Kissel to stand erect.

"I know how it is," the FBI man said sympathetically.

"I've been through it. It'll pass in a few minutes."

When the attack was finished, Tom took his rifle from

Dr. Smith.

"You two get out of sight," he said. At the corner of the building at the end of the alley, he dropped to his knees and slid the muzzle of the rifle around the stout concrete.

The dog had returned and was continuing to dig at the

graves. He was a dirty, savage creature.

The bullet struck the flask.

There was no violent explosion. There was a soft puff outward of a burst of what looked like black smoke.

"That . . . that wasn't nitroglycerin," Kissel said. "I've heard

nitro explode. It raises hell."

"Look at the dog," Tom said. Inside, his stomach retched.

The puff of black smoke had hidden the beast for an instant. Now it came into sight. It howled once, tried to run, and collapsed. The dog was dead.

"That's a gas, a new kind of gas," Dr. Smith whispered.

"Back away from here."

Before they were out of the alley, they could smell the stuff. The odor was foul beyond belief.

The gas spread upward into the black fog, adding its note of

nauseating horror.

"If that flask had broken in the basement, we'd all be dead," Kissel said. "Who threw it?"

"We're going to find out," Tom said.

At the door, he asked the guard if anyone had gone into the basement just before they had come up. "Two or three

people," the guard answered.

They went to the basement. Behind Dr. Smith's private quarters, Teeny howled. Dr. Murk came around the end of the partition.

"What's going on?" he asked.

He was wearing rubber-soled shoes.

"Nothing," Tom answered. He walked up to the man from Washington. "Let me see your hands."

"My hands?" Murk appeared puzzled. He held them out.

Tom caught them and lifted them to his nose.

A trace of the same foul odor that had been the gas was on Murk's hands.

"When did you go through the stooping phase?" Tom asked. Hot lights glowed in the man's eyes. He took a quick step backward, his hand grabbing in the pocket of his lab jacket.

Tom, following, slugged him in the stomach. The gun in the jacket pocket flew out and landed on the floor. Murk staggered backward against the partition. A fire axe was held in hooks on this wall. Murk reached for the fire axe.

Over Tom's shoulder, Ted Kissel shot the doctor in the leg. With the fire axe clutched in his hands, Murk went down.

"I asked you when you went through the stooping phase?" Tom repeated.

"Before I left Washington, damn you!" Murk answered.

Tom was aware of a grunt from Dr. Smith which had no surprise in it. "It took a good chemist to make that gas," he said.

"I am a good chemist," Murk answered. "I'm the best chemist who ever lived. I know things about chemistry that you humans haven't even thought of yet!"

"That is not a human being talking," Dr. Smith said.

"That's the molecule."

Sprawled on the floor with a broken leg, Murk tried to reach for the axe. Tom kicked it out of his reach.

An ordinary human would have been in agony from the

wound he had received. Murk was not in agony. He was furiously angry, but only because his plans had miscarried. An ordinary human would have been growing weak from loss of blood. Murk had lost a little blood but soon the red stream, as if controlled from within, stopped flowing.

"I feel sorry for the human element in him," Dr. Smith

said. "It is lost in the tide flowing through him."

"Don't feel sorry for me, you old fool!" Murk answered. "Only blind luck has kept you alive. In the long run, we'll get you. You will come out of the stooping phase to be a zombie too."

He tried to laugh. It was a ghastly sound in the basement. "His face is changing," Kissel said. "He doesn't even look like a human being any longer."

Murk's face was becoming a distorted thing that dimly

resembled some monster out of the sea.

Steps and nervous voices sounded on the stairs, attracting Tom's eyes in that direction. Several of the group had gathered and were watching what was happening. He harshly ordered them back, then his attention came back to the man from Washington.

Murk's face now resembled the snout of a shark.

"I wonder if I could give him my vaccine," Dr. Smith said.

"If you do, I'll kill you!" Murk answered.

His face now had a superficial resemblance to that of a

sea cow with a thick, pendulous lower lip.

"The molecule doesn't want to be anything except a molecule," Dr. Smith said. "It will fight the vaccine as he fights us!" The old doctor's voice was wretched. "None of this horror need have come about if man had not prodded nature."

"At least we know who our zombie is," Kissel said. "And

that's a help."

Murk's face had some resemblance to the face of a squid. "Apparently this molecule has memories of the sea. It is trying to make him into some sea creature that it remembers," Dr. Smith said.

Steps and voice sounded again on the stairs, calling Tom's attention in this direction. Rena, Cissie, and Eric Bloor were

coming down into the basement. Cissie's face was flushed. They stopped moving when they saw Dr. Murk on the floor.
"What's going on?" Bloor asked.
"Dr. Smith has discovered the cause of the zombies," Tom

answered. He motioned for the three to approach. Bloor moved calmly forward. The two women, strained expressions on their faces, came more slowly.

"So Dr. Smith had discovered the cause of all of this

trouble?" Bloor said, "What is it?"

"A molecule that has gone mad is in the bloodstream and has taken over the entire nervous system of a human being." Tom answered.

"Is that right?" Bloor seemed startled. "And Murk is a zombie?"

"Yes."

"And you've caught him with the goods and wounded him?" Bloor continued. He dropped his hands into the pockets of his jacket.

"Yes." Tom said.

"Too bad," Bloor said, shaking his head. "Too, too bad." His hands, each holding a pistol, came out of his pockets. One pistol he tossed to Murk on the floor.

The second gun he jerked up to point at Tom Watkins.

As the second gun went off, Tom hit Eric Bloor on the chin.

CHAPTER NINE

THE BULLET from the gun in Bloor's hand tugged at Tom's clothing like the hand of a child reaching out and grasping at him. Before Bloor could shoot again, Tom's fist had rocked his head backward and had sent him sprawling backward on the floor.

Another pistol exploded. Out of the corner of his eyes,

Tom saw that Murk had grabbed the gun that Bloor had tossed him and had fired one shot at Dr. Homer Smith. He also heard Kissel's rifle explode and saw the slug knock splinters out of the plywood partition as the FBI man missed. Murk turned his pistol toward Kissel.

Tom also saw Cissie and Rena standing paralyzed and ir-

resolute, neither one knowing what to do.

"Get behind a pillar!" he shouted.

The floors above were supported by concrete-encased steel columns. The two women dropped behind the nearest pillar.

When Tom had slugged Eric, he had forgotten the rifle held loosely in the crook of his right arm. He had struck the blow with his left fist. At this short range, a fist was quicker than a rifle. As Bloor went down, he caught the rifle in his hands and brought it up.

He heard guns roar behind him and he knew that Murk and Kissel were shooting at each other. The basement thundered with the sound of the guns, it reeked of powder smoke. He did not know what Dr. Smith was doing and he

had no time to look and see.

On the floor, Bloor was reaching for the pistol he had

dropped when Tom had hit him on the chin.

"Don't touch it, Eric!" Tom shouted. In his mind was the memory that he had known this man since both had been kids. He had no wish to kill the scared kid he remembered. He also had no wish to accept the horrible truth that Bloor's actions had made obvious.

Bloor grabbed the gun and started to lift it.

Tom dropped his body to the floor.

The bullet from Bloor's gun went over his head.

Then and then only did Tom pull the trigger of the rifle in his hands. He saw Bloor jerk as the bullet struck him in the chest and ranged downward and inward. Bloor dropped the pistol. Sighing as if he had reached the end of some long and torturous road, he lay his head on the floor.

Behind him, Tom was aware of silence. Now no guns were shouting. He turned his head. Dr. Smith had fled into his private laboratory and was just now looking out. Ted Kis-

sel, his face as grim as death itself, had a smoking gun in his hands.

Against the partition, Murk had stopped moving. He had pulled himself up so that his back was against the wooden wall. His head had dropped forward on his chest. From the corner of his mouth, a small stream of blood was trickling.

Kissel methodically began to reload his gun. He stopped to stare at his right hand, then he became aware that Tom was

looking at him.

"He nicked me on a knuckle," Kissel said. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah. At least I think so."

"That sonovagun was a zombie, too," Kissel said, nodding at Bloor.

"So I know, now," Tom answered.

"They must be able to recognize each other intuitively," the FBI man went on. "When Bloor came in and found Murk cornered; well, one zombie helps another, regardless of the risk. If humans did this, we'd call it bravery. When they do it, we call it lack of sensitivity, indifference to danger."

Tom grunted tonelessly. He looked in the other direction. Cissie and Rena were flat on the floor behind the pillar. He saw them moving. Now he got to his feet. He went over to

the two women.

"Are you all right, kitten?" he said to Cissie.

"I... I think so, Tom," she answered.

"Rena?" Tom questioned.

Unable to speak, the actress nodded.

The guard at the door, with his rifle ready, was coming

down the steps.

"Everything is under control down here," Tom told him. "You go back and guard the door. Keep everybody out of here."

"Yes, Mr. Watkins." The guard moved cautiously back up

the steps.

Tom saw that Bloor was making weak gestures to come to him. Walking over to him, Tom leaned over the man.

"T . . . T . . . " It was hard for Bloor to talk.

Tom leaned closer.

"Thanks, Tom," Bloor whispered.

"I killed vou and vet vou're thanking me?" Tom gasped. He turned startled eves toward Dr. Smith and beckoned to the old physician, who came at his gesture.

Tom nodded toward Eric Bloor, "He's dying and he's

thanking me for killing him!"

"This is the human part of me talking," Eric Bloor's whisper came again. "This is the kid you once knew; the kid who was scared of a pet poodle, the kid who had to whistle to find the courage to pass a cemetery at night."

"Your bullet knocked the molecule out of control," Dr. Smith said. "He's dying, but he's dying as a human being,

not as a zombiel"

Bloor tried to nod.

"I did a lot of things that people said were brave," his whisper came again. "But it wasn't me doing those things. It was a horror inside me that made me do them. I . . . I wasn't brave. Even when I was doing the things that . . . that made me look like a hero . . . the real me was hiding in a hole somewhere inside . . . scared to death."

Rena got to her feet and came and listened. "You poor kid," she whispered. She dropped to the floor and took Bloor's

head in her lap. "You were a hero, a real hero."

"T . . . thanks, Rena," Bloor whispered. "But I wasn't doing them, it was doing them. It doesn't know the meaning of death-or of fear."

"He means the molecule doesn't know the meaning of death," Tom whispered to Dr. Smith, The old physician nodded.

"It's . . . it's getting dark," Bloor whispered. "Turn . . . turn on a light, please, Tom. It's dark and . . . and cold in here "

Tom took a flashlight from his pocket and shined it in Eric's eyes.

"Th . . . thanks, Tom. You . . . you were always a good guy." Eric said gratefully.

He tried to nod toward Cissie and Rena but the effort was too much. His head sagged into Rena's arms.

The little boy who had been afraid of the dark all of his

life at last went into the dark.

Tom Watkins straightened up. He walked around the room that was Dr. Smith's private laboratory and into the far end of the basement. The door of another room here was open but the screen door inside was closed. Behind the screen door, a child was playing—Teeny. All of the shooting, all of the noise in the basement, had not disturbed her play. Somebody had given her a doll. Quite happy at her play, she was pulling the legs and the arms off of the doll.

Tom barely had time to reach the toilet before the vomit-

ing began.

When he stumbled out of the toilet, Cissie was waiting for him.

"I know how you feel, Tom, dear," she said. "Try not to let

it bother you too much."

She tried to comfort him with soft words, the way women have helped unhappy men since the world began, fulfilling their role of bringing ease to the tortured mind and the twisted heart. Cissie was wearing a light sweater and a pair of slacks. The slight bulge on her left forearm was hardly noticeable. Tom did not notice it for some time. When he did realize he was seeing it, his mind refused to accept the meaning of it.

Suddenly, he had to accept its meaning. With an oath, he grabbed her arm and jerked up the sleeve of the sweater. A

white bandage showed there.

"Tom, you're hurting me!" Cissie wailed. "Don't, please! The arm is a little sore."

He jerked the bandage off.

The cut revealed there was clean and sharp. It had been made by a razor or a very sharp knife, then had been sealed over with a piece of clear tape.

"How'd you get that cut?" Tom Watkins did not know his

own voice at this moment.

"Tom, you're hurting!"

"How did you get that cut!"

"Please!"

"Speak up! Did you go through the ritual of the blood brother with someone?"

She nodded. "Yes. With Eric. He said this would make us immune too. Wasn't it wonderful of him to help us?"

She did not as yet realize what had happened to her.

Tom dropped her arm and turned away. He was sick at his stomach again but he fought off the impulse to vomit. Behind the screen door, he could see Teeny. She had pulled the arms and legs off of her doll and her sharp litle fingernails were digging into its belly, exploring it as if she wanted to know the inward secrets of dolls. Tom felt Cissie's hand on his arm.

"Tom, don't be angry with me," she said. "The inoculation

did wonders for Eric-

Now, for the first time, she realized the meaning of what Eric Bloor had said as he died. She also realized what had actually happened to her, that she was now infected with the same mad molecule that created the zombies.

Her face lost all trace of color.

Tom caught her as she fell.

He knew she had only fainted, but as she lay in his arms, pale and fragile and soft, he felt a touch of panic. Cissie, by being what she was, had caught his heart as no other woman he had ever known. But now. . . .

Teeny left off tearing at the doll and began to howl at him. Now had more horror in it than Tom Watkins, or any man, could face.

Carrying Cissie, he returned to the main room of the basement, hunting for Dr. Smith. There, under the grim supervision of Ted Kissel, three men were busy spreading lye on the blood stains on the floor, lye that would destroy any mad molecules that by some miracle had remained in the dark red blood. The two bodies were already gone. Kissel looked sharply at him and Tom pointed to the cut on Cissie's arm.

"She, and Rena, went through the blood rite with Eric,"

Tom said.

"That son-!" Ted Kissel said.

"I am trying hard to remember him only as he died, a badly scared kid but a decent human being," Tom said.

"Where's Dr. Smith?" Tom continued.

"In there." Kissel jerked his head toward the closed door of the private lab. "About Rena-"

"I'm not really sure that she went through the rite, too,"

Tom said. "You find her and check her arms for a cut."

"I'll do it," Kissel said. "I ran her out of here. She's upstairs somewhere but I'll find her."

As Tom carried Cissie to the door of the private lab, Kissel was moving toward the steps.

"Come in," Dr. Smith said, responding to Tom's knock.

The old physician had been sitting at his desk with his head resting on his hands on top of the desk. Exhaustion, utter and complete, seemed indelibly etched in his face as he looked up.

"What do you have, Tom?" the old physician said, reaching

for his glasses.

"Oh, I see," he said, when he had found the glasses. "Cissie? Fainted? Lay her on my cot. She'll be all right." Concern was in the voice of the old doctor but it was minimal.

When Tom pointed to the cut on her arm, the old physician blinked eves suddenly full of horror. "No! No! Not Cissie!" The concern in his voice threatened to overwhelm him.

"Yes," Tom said. "Get ready to try your vaccine."

"Perhaps the cut was an accident."

"No," Tom said. "Get ready to try your vaccine. It had better work."

"On Cissie? It-it's not tested yet."

"We'll test it now," Tom said.
On the cot, Cissie moaned softly as if she was having a bad dream.

The door was pushed open. Rena, protesting, entered. Kis-

sel had one arm in a firm grip.

"What the hell is this?" Rena shouted, "Who in the hell do you think you are to be shoving me around?" She glared at Kissel, who seemed unimpressed.

"Did you trade blood with Eric?" Tom asked.

"Yes." She glared at Tom, who was also unimpressed. Though what the hell business it is of yours, I don't see. You vourself admitted how much that blood ritual bit had helped him."

"He probably didn't go through the ritual," Tom answered. "He didn't need to do it, nor would it have changed anything if he had. He just went out and gashed his arm.

"But-" Rena was trying to shout now.

"He was already a zombie before he pretended to go through the blood ritual," Tom answered. "He was in the final stage of the development of the molecule-the calm, fearless stage-when the bombs hit, only none of us knew it. Even at that point, he might have been one of those who had been using clubs and knives to kill FBI agents in this area. That was zombie work! He was one of those that thousands of FBI agents were hunting, only they didn't know what they were after."

Rena's face lost its color. The shout went out of her. "He

... he was a zombie, wasn't he? I... I didn't realize it."

"You know it now," Tom said. "You also know that the blood brotherhood ritual was only a trick to infect you, to get the molecule into your bloodstream."

"Then I . . . then I. . . . "

"Yes," Tom said.

Her face went dead white. Instantly she turned to Dr. Smith. The shout had become a scream.

"You're a doctor! You've got to save me! You've got to!"

Dr. Smith looked at Tom Watkins and Ted Kissel. "If you will take out the bookshelves and bring in another cot, we'll turn my lab into a private ward."

"We'll do it," Tom said.

"And one other thing," the old doctor said. "When the crisis comes for Cissie, I want you to be here with her. Your love for her may help her far more than all the vaccines I can inject into her."

"I'll be here." Tom said.

By the time, the bookshelves were out and the extra cot

was in, Eph Moffat, a bleak look on his lean, whiskered face, had come down from his guard position on the roof.

"Night's coming on," he said to Tom. "And there are things

outside I don't like."

"There are things inside I don't like," Tom answered.

"I've heard about 'em," the tall mountain man said. "I'm mighty sorry, Tom, about Miss Cissie. Me and Effie are both mighty sorry. But there are things outside—" His gaunt face showed lines of worry.

"We'll come and look at them," Tom said.

He and Ted Kissel followed Eph to the roof.

Night, and the drifting black fog, were running a race to see which could first blot out the view. Wreckage in the streets, strewn there by the bomb blasts, was still visible. Overhead, an infinite distance away, helicopter vanes beat a sluggish, doleful note.

"There's an awful lot of zombies gathering around here," Eph said. "I've seen 'em now and then, skipping from one hiding place to another, but always coming close to us.

They've got rifles."

"Um," Tom said. He heard Kissel draw in his breath.

A shadow moved far down the street, darting from the

back end of a building.

Kissel jerked his rifle to his shoulder and fired. The bullet knocked splinters of wood from the back end of the building. The shadow vanished.

"It was that tiger woman," Kissel said, dropping the rifle from his shoulder. "I'd recognize her motion anywhere. She's coming after us."

The bullet, coming from the spot where the shadow had disappeared, knocked the hat from Kissel's head and sent all three of them sprawling flat on the roof.

A fierce scream went up in the gathering darkness. There was no question but that it came from the throat of a woman.

As if the scream had been a signal, from all sides of the warehouse, a vast tumult of sound, the chorus of the zombiemen boomed through the drifting fog and the coming night.

When this roar of sound went into silence, the rifle fire began.

Protected by the rifle fire, a horde of massed zombies charged the warehouse.

CHAPTER TEN

MEN SHOOTING down from the top of the warehouse and from the windows of the lower floors beat off the first assault of the zombies. With rifles pouring a deadly fire down, with targets so plentiful, there was little chance of missing. The result was slaughter.

The attack was pressed home with the complete disregard for safety that was characteristic of the zombies. The molecule that had gone mad either had no knowledge of death or no fear of it. The attack did not stop because the courage of the zombies failed; it stopped because the massed rifle fire coming down from above was producing so many casualties that whoever was in command—presumably the female whom Kissel called the tiger woman—decided to halt it.

At her wild scream, the zombies pulled back like well-

disciplined troops.

Not until then did Tom Watkins remember the papers Dr. Smith had given him.

"A fat chance we have of getting those out of the city!"

Kissel said.

"I was thinking about asking Harden to put them on the air with that signal corps hand rig he found," Tom answered.

"It's worth trying," the FBI man said.

Tom found Harden at a window on the second floor. The floor around him was covered with empty cartridge cases which crunched under Tom's feet. Harden took the papers and examined them under a flashlight.

"I can put words or numbers on the air," the radio amateur said. "But these are equations. I don't have any facsimile rig."

"We'll have Dr. Smith put them into words," Tom said.

In the dark basement, when the situation was explained to him, Dr. Smith spent a laborious hour rewriting his equations. "If they reach any of the men whose names I have written here, they will understand them," the old doctor said. "Good luck, young man."

Tom cautiously opened a back basement window that had been closed with heavy boards. Outside was fog and stink and silence. Neither could see the face of the other but each

could see the luminous dial of his wrist watch.

"Check the time," Tom said. "In five minutes, I will stop all rifle fire from inside the warehouse. You go out this window. In another five minutes, the rifle fire will start again. You had better be at least a block away before the second five minutes end. Do you understand?"

"I . . . I think so."

"Got your rifle and your flashlight?"

"Y. . . Yes."

"Good luck. I'll come back and close the window."

When Tom returned ten minutes later, Harden was gone. As he put the boards back into place, a sudden glow burst out on his left. There he saw that a bottle of lighted gasoline had been thrown against the warehouse. It was burning itself out against the concrete.

On the roof, Eph was nervous. "If they ever get one of those hot bottles through a window—" the tall mountain man said.

If the shadow that was Harden was slipping away into the darkness, Tom could not see it. He wondered if the hopes of millions of people were truly riding on the sheets of paper that Harden was carrying.

As for himself, and for all the defenders of the warehouse, he had no hope. They could hold out behind these concrete walls for a short time. But food, water, and ammunition

would eventually run low. Accurate rifle fire through the window would pick off the defenders one by one.

Then the zombie-men would come in. All they really wanted was to inject the molecule into the blood stream of

those who were as yet uninfected.

Tom went below. In the basement, Effie challenged him. He identified himself and found his way to the door of Dr. Smith's private lab. The old physician admitted him. Inside, a tiny light was burning.

"I've just given both of them their third shot," Dr. Smith

whispered.

"What are the results?"

"I can't say."

"I can," Cissie spoke from her cot.

Tom moved to her side and sat down on the cot beside her. She caught his hand and held it. Her flesh was ice cold.

"How's it going, kitten?" he whispered.

"Rotten," Cissie answered. "That's the way I feel insiderotten. I can feel the molecule grabbing my nerves. It nips at them with tiny little teeth. Now and then it nips at my solar plexus."

Tom looked up at Dr. Smith.

"She can't possibly be feeling that," the old doctor said.

"I know what I'm feeling," Rena spoke from the other cot.
"I feel like I'm just ready to go in front of a camera. There's a kind of aliveness that comes over me then. I've got that aliveness now."

"The early symptoms vary in each individual," Dr. Smith

said. His cheeks were cavernous, his face haggard.

"Have you run tests to make certain the molecule is actually present?" Tom asked.

"Yes. It is present in both cases. It multiplies very rapidly."

"Me, with a shelf full of Oscars, dying in a hole like this!" Rena said.

"You are in no danger of dying," Dr. Smith said.

"Not from the bug, maybe, but I know what's outside. When those zombies come in here, they won't be nice." As

panic rose in her, the actress sat up on the cot. "Let me out of this place. I want to go home."

"Please be quiet," Dr. Smith said.

"Quiet, hell! I'll make as much noise as I want!"

Dr. Smith picked up a hypodermic from the top of his desk. "If I have to use sedation to keep you quiet, I will," he said.

"Keep that damned needle away from me!" Rena shouted. "Then lie down, pease."

Rena reluctantly obeyed the old physician.

Tom was aware that Cissie's hand was cold, like the sea in winter. He rubbed it gently, trying to bring a little of the warmth of the land into it. Cissie smiled wanly up at him.

"Thanks, Tom. You're a swell guy."

"When you get well, Cissie, when this is all over, I want you to marry me," Tom said.

"Marry you!" Cissie gasped. "Tom!"

"We already have a family started," Tom continued.

"What?" Rena gasped.

"I mean Teeny," Tom said hastily.
"Oh," Rena said. She was silent.

"When you and Teeny get well, we'll all have a place up in the mountains," Tom continued, to Cissie. "In the winter, we'll throw snowballs at each other. In the spring, we'll hunt wild flowers together."

"Tom, dear . . ." Cissie's voice was only a whisper. "I did

not know you felt that way about Teeny and me."

He stroked her hand. Warmth was returning to it. He bent over and kissed her.

"You know it now," he said.

He got to his feet.

"Look in on Teeny, please, Tom," Cissie said, in a much stronger voice. "I'm worried about her."

"Of course," Tom answered.

Dr. Smith followed him out of the door.

"That was a fine thing you did for Cissie," he said. His voice was gentle, choked with tenderness. "If . . . if I

thought there was any chance of any of us living to see any dream come true . . .

"Let's go look at Teeny," Tom said gruffly.

Teeny was sleeping in her bed. The doll, which she had

nearly torn to pieces, was now clutched to her breast.

"That's the first time I have ever seen her sleep in her bed!" Dr. Smith said. "She has usually crawled under it. And that doll! She is holding it the way a child usually holds a beloved toyl" Amazement was in his voice.

"Do . . . do you suppose my vaccine is working on her? Tom,

if you know any prayers, say them now."

"I used them all up long ago," Tom Watkins answered. He turned and found his way out of the basement. Moving upward, he called out his name so that those on guard would not shoot at the sound of movement.

Harden was a shadow among shadows in a night as black as the tunnel to hell. Wearing crepe-rubber soles, he was as silent as a ghost. He had the impression that other, equally silent shadows were also moving in the night. From the warehouse, he heard occasional rifle shots. Behind another concrete building, a fire flickered. A woman with a rifle slung over her shoulders was sitting with her back to the wall, watching the fire. As Harden watched, a man came from the darkness to her, saluted, and was given orders. Saluting again, the man slid away.

Remembering Kissel, Harden lifted his rifle to his shoulder and caught the woman in his sights, then, without firing, lowered the gun. If he shot her, the chances were he would never reach his radio shack.

Harden slipped on into the dark night.

When he reached his radio shack on the back end of the lot where he had once lived, Harden felt completely at home. Here he could find his way in the dark. This shack, filled wall to wall with parts removed from surplus receivers and transmitters, had always been a kind of haven to him. When the world pressed too strongly on him, here he could always find relief and a sort of peace. From this shack, he

could send out signals to the ends of the earth. One wall of the little building was completely covered with postcards from ham radio operators confirming the fact that his transmitter had bounced waves to the antipodes. He did not know how far the surplus transmitter would reach, or even

that it would get out of the Basin at all.

He found his way to the transmitter and, in the darkness, ran his fingers over the crank of the generator. He set his rifle against the bench, slipped the mike cord around his neck, and put the message he had to transmit and his flashlight, turned off, on the box of the generator. Then he began to turn the crank. When the whine of the generator had built up, he knew that enough current was flowing to operate the transmitter. Still without using a light, he began to talk into the mike.

"Mayday-Mayday!" Harden began. At first his voice was taut and choked as he gave the international distress call. "Mayday! QRR! Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! QRR. QRR. QRR. All ops please copy and forward! Mayday! May-

day! Mayday!"

In his mind, Harden thought: "If there are ears to hear

me, let them listen now."

Smoothing out the papers, he turned on the flashlight so he could read what was written there.

A zombie with an ice pick in his hand was looking in at

the open window on the opposite side of the shack.

Harden snatched his rifle and fired a single shot. The roar of the gun in the shack almost split his ear drums. To fire the gun, he had had to drop the flashlight. Finding it again, he turned it on. The face had disappeared from the window. He turned off the flashlight. As he sat in the darkness, hardly daring to breathe, the whine of the generator began to go down the scale. Getting to his feet, he made certain the door of the shack was locked on the inside. Then he went back to turning the crank of the generator again. When it was up to speed, he gave the international distress call again.

This time the flashlight revealed no face at the window. He put the message on the air. If the waves were getting out,

both the Mayday and the QRR signal would catch every listening ear. Directional antennae would take a fix on this transmitter and determine its approximate location, but only if the signals were getting out.

"If there are ears to hear, let them listen now!"

Harden put the complete message, including the names of the doctors to whom it was to be forwarded, on the air again.

A scratching sound came from outside.

"Help!" a weak voice whispered, outside the door. "I'm shot."

Harden was a human being. He experienced a pang of conscience at the knowledge that he had wounded even a zombie. He forgot his rifle. Flashlight in hand, he unlocked the door. Outside, to the left of the door, the flashlight beam revealed a wounded man lying on the ground.

Harden went to him, bent over him.

The second zombie came around the shack from the other direction.

The ice pick went into Harden's body between the shoulder blades. Slanting down, it went through his heart. Harden hardly knew what had hit him. His heart gave one mad leap, then stopped. He would have fallen on the wounded zombie except the fellow rolled quickly out of his way, leaped to his feet, and struck Harden in the stomach with the ice pick he had had concealed in his right hand.

As if they had perpetrated some great joke which only they could understand, the two zombies slapped each other on the back and laughed.

Inside the shack, the whine of the gears of the generator dropped down, down, down and soon became silent.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WITH the coming of dawn, the attack on the warehouse ceased. There was something about the gray light that passed for daylight in this black town that the zombies did not like. They went into hiding. But they left sentries behind them. Movement at a door or a window brought the sharp crack of a rifle from some hidden marksman.

"There are landing fields in the Basin," Tom Watkins said to Ted Kissel. "If they ever find helicopters and start drop-

ping down on this flat roof . . . "

"Don't borrow trouble," Kissel answered. "Though I'll bet that damned tiger woman will think of it sooner or later."

"I'm going down and check the basement," Tom said.
"Good luck," Kissel called sympathetically as Tom crawled away. To show himself on the roof top was to invite a rifle bullet. His muscles were like knotted ropes, alive with pain but alive with little else besides pain.

Before he reached the steps, a wind, stirring in the dawn, lifted the fog to the west. He caught a glimpse of the sea. It lay afar. In the harbor, the ships still lay where the blasts had left them. They looked like the toys that the child of a giant had used. When the giant's child had grown tired of his toys, he had tossed them helter-skelter and had left them where they had fallen.

These were the thoughts of Tom Watkins. He glimpsed the inverted silver-aluminum bowl that was the sea. Then the black fog swirled in again, shutting off his glimpse of Old

Ocean. He went down to the next floor.

Against the wall near a window, Jerry was sitting. A rifle was across his lap. Empty cartridge shells littered the floor around him. Tom's first thought was that Jerry was asleep. Then he saw the trickle of blood running down his neck and he realized that a bullet had come through the window and had caught the youth just under the ear. Tom did not disturb his sleep.

Nor did he disturb the sleep of Crail. The sailor was obviously alive but was simply worn out. Eph Moffat, looking bleary-eyed, was awake, his Winchester ready in his hand.

"I didn't think we'd make it through the night," the tall

mountain man said, shaking his head.

"I didn't either. Is Effie still down below?"

"I reckon. I ain't seen her all night."

Tom had to force himself to go to the basement. Down there, things might not be good at all. When he forced his feet down the steps, Effie, a rifle slung over her shoulder, greeted him wearily. Coffee was steaming in a big pot, cereal was bubbling in another. Effie, and other women, were preparing to take food to the men upstairs.

"Is my man all right?" Effie asked.

"Yes. And asking about you," Tom answered.

Effie smiled at the knowledge that Eph had asked about her.

"How . . .?" Tom said hesitantly. "How . . .?"

Effie nodded toward the private lab. "She had a bad spell on toward morning but the old doc got her quieted down.

Just go on in."

Pushing the door open, Tom saw that Dr. Smith was asleep in his big chair. Teeny, holding her doll, was asleep in his arms. Sometime during the night, he had taken her out of her room. Tom wondered about this, then his eyes went to Cissie. A pillow under head, Cissie was awake. At the sight of Tom, she sat up and swung her legs over the edge of the cot.

"Come in, darling. I'm all ready to go."

Tom took her in his arms and patted her gently.

"All I have to do is get a few things together, then we'll leave," she said. Her eyes glowed at him. "We'll live in a big cabin in the mountains, you and Teeny and me! We'll ski in the winter and in the spring, we'll watch the wild flowers bloom. I can hardly wait to get started!" The glow in her eyes was the color of a mountain lake.

Tom started to speak, then choked as the words refused to form themselves. He patted her again gently. "There...

there may be a little delay, kitten."

"Delay?" Her eyes lost some of their glow. "But I'm ready now. We'll start just as soon as Teeny wakes up. Look at the little darling, asleep in the arms of Dr. Smith!"

At the sound of their voices, both Dr. Smith and Teeny awakened. Teeny climbed down from his lap and promptly came to Cissie, who lifted her up and cuddled her. "I'm hungry, mommy," Teeny said. "I want something to eat."

Dr. Smith reached hastily for his glasses on the top of the desk. When he found them, he looked at Cissie, then at

Teeny, then his eyes took in Tom.

"We're leaving right away, Dr. Smith," Cissie said. "I'm sure you can find another receptionist. I hate to leave you, but you see how it is."

"Yes," Dr. Smith said. "Yes. I . . . I see how it is." His voice was choked. "My dear, you take Teeny out to our kitchen and feed her while I talk to Tom."

"Of course," Cissie answered, "You are hungry, aren't you,

darling?"

Cuddling Teeny in her arms, she went out. Dr. Smith carefully closed the door. He glanced at Rena, but the actress was sound asleep.

"The child is well," Dr. Smith said.

Tom Watkins felt exultation leap up in him. "And Cissie is insane," Dr. Smith continued.

The exaultation went out of Tom Watkins. A weight as great as that of the world seemed to come down on him. He sank down on the cot and looked mutely at Dr. Homer Smith.

"She doesn't remember where she is and what is outside," the old physician continued, wearily. "She thinks she is going with you and Teeny to a home in the mountains. I have tried to bring her back to reality but I have failed. Perhaps this is only a passing thing." He shook his head. "What she has really wanted has been a husband, a home, and some kids. When the world did not give them to her, she began to imagine she had them. The imaginative structure has become real to her."

"Did the molecule cause this?" Tom whispered.

"Perhaps. And perhaps it only released the inhibitions that covered up the world of Cissie's secret dreams."

"Is there any hope for her?"

"There's always hope," the old physician said. "But if I had to choose which way I would rather see her be: living in a world of fantasy or submerged in a molecular tide . . ."

A knock came at the door. Dr. Smith opened it. Effie stood there. "Miss Cissie just fainted," she said. "She was feeding Teeny when she looked up at me and asked where she was. She had the funniest expression on her face."

When they reached the big room, Cissie was already trying to sit up. Teeny, much concerned, was trying to help her.

"Mommy, she fall down," Teeny said.

Effie took charge of Teeny while Tom gathered Cissie in his arms and carried her back to the private lab. He laid her on the cot, then bent over to see what she was trying to say.

"Tom? Tom?" Her voice was weak. "Will you do me a

favor?"

"Anything, kitten," he answered.

"Then kill me!" she asked.

Tom looked helplessly up at Dr. Smith. The old doctor's face was bleak.

"It is better to be dead than to face what is happening inside me," Cissie whispered. She saw the looks on the faces of the two men and correctly interpreted them. "Please! I'm sane now. I know what's outside and I know that I am not going to a cabin in the mountains. All that was a wonderful dream that I pretended to myself was really going to happen." Her whisper went into a moan. She grabbed at her stomach.

"Inside me, it's like a million tiny knives cutting into my nerves. My stomach is tied into knots. I . . . I want to bend

double to ease the pain."

"That's the molecule," Dr. Smith whispered. He began fill-

ing a hypodermic syringe.

Cissie caught Tom's hand. "This . . . this is why I asked you to kill me. It's better to be dead than to endure this torture."

"I'm sorry, kitten," Tom whispered.

"Inside me, everything is beginning to turn black," Cissie whispered. "Me, the human part of me, it being surrounded by blackness. It's . . . it's like the black fog outside, only this fog on the inside will never lift."

Blackness had come in around Eric Bloor as he died. But

Bloor had talked about a different kind of black.

"Whoever gave the order to drop the bombs on this city, he did the right thing," Cissie went on. "Everybody who died in the bomb blasts—if they knew that this molecule was the only other choice they had—would have blessed the men who dropped the bombs. The bomb-death, fast and sure, would have been better than the horror inside me now."

Her face covered with sweat, twitched with rising pain and terror. That Cissie was living in hell, and going deeper into it with every passing moment, Tom Watkins fully realized. All his life he had looked for the right woman. Had he found her only to watch her die like this?

He watched the needle in Dr. Smith's skilled fingers slip into her flesh

After the solution had gone in, there was no sign of improvement.

"Better the bombs than the molecule," she repeated over and over again. "This molecule will take over the earth."

Tom remembered that Murk had screamed practically this same thing. Murk had died a savage. Bloor had suddenly

become human again at his death.

Would Cissie, once the molecule had finally engulfed her, become as savage as Murk had been. Would she become a hunting female, setting traps for men like the tiger woman outside?

On the other cot, Rena awakened. She reached for a cigarette, took one puff, threw the cigarette on the floor, pushed her nose into the pillow and began to cry. Tom looked at her.

"Just hysterical emotion working itself off," Dr. Smith said.
"I would like it much better if Cissie would cry and release some of the tortured feelings inside her."

"Better the bombs than this," Cissie said,

"You go get some rest," Dr. Smith said to Tom.

"And leave Cissie like this?" he protested.

"I can carry on here," the old physician said. He lifted a half-empty bottle from his desk and dropped two capsules into Tom's hand. "Take these, then lie down."

"But-"

"I'm as devoted to Cissie as you are. I'll take the best possible care of her."

Dr. Smith almost pushed Tom through the door, then followed him outside where he asked if Harden had returned. At Tom's answer, he shook his head.

"Better the bombs than this," Tom heard Cissie's voice

coming faintly through the door as he walked away.

He waved food away at the long table. Going up the steps, he found he could barely lift his feet from one riser to another. The muscles in his legs were as stiff as old, tarred ropes. Taking the two capsules, he lay down on his sleeping bag and was sound asleep an instant after his head even touched the pillow. His was the sleep of the utterly exhausted.

He awakened to find Effie shaking him by the shoulder. "I just woke up my man and Mr. Kissel," she said. "Night's

coming on. And they're getting ready to howl outside.'

"How's Cissie?"

Effie shook her head. "You had better ask Dr. Smith."

Tom pulled himself to his feet. A few of the knots had gone out of his muscles but he was still bone-weary. Strapping the pistol belt around him, he picked up his rifle and his flashlight and went down to the basement.

Eph and Ted were seated at the big table, together with others. Their faces were glum. Coffee was bubbling in the big pot and the smell of stew filled the room.

Tom went straight to the closed door of Dr. Smith's lab.

He did not open it.

"Better the bombs than this," he heard from the other side of the door.

Effie took him by the arm and led him to the big table, where she had already poured coffee. She made him drink

the black brew, then almost forced him to eat the stew. The food brought a little strength back into him.

"How are we going to meet the night?" Ted Kissel asked.

"It'll probably be our last one."

Tom looked up at the lean, angular Effie. She still had a rifle on a sling over her shoulder.

"We'll arm the rest of the women," he said.

Kissel nodded. "Women have fought beside men before this. But will they be enough?"

"Enough or not, they are all we have," Tom said.

Outside, in the gathering night, a rifle shot sounded. Up above in the warehouse, the rifles of the men on guard could be heard beginning to answer. Tom went to the door of the private lab and knocked.

"We'll have to leave you alone down here," he said to Dr.

Smith. "Everyone else is needed up above."

The old physician nodded.

"What about Cissie?" Tom asked.

"She has been in the crisis all day. I can't say how it is

going. Come in and say hello to her."

The lab was a place of shadow with no lights burning. Cissie was a sweat-drenched woman wrapped in a blanket. Her hands came eagerly to Tom Watkins.

"I'm going to win this fight down here," she said to Tom.

"I hope so, kitten."

"You wait and see," she said.

Teeny, also in the little lab, came up and kissed him. "Mommy will be all right tomorrow," the child whispered to him.

He hugged her in this place of dark shadows.

"I'll see both of you in the morning," he said, with a firmness he was far from feeling.

"You'll see me, too," Rena said.

Tom went out and up to the roof. The battle of the night was beginning.

In the dark basement a battle of another kind was in progress.

From the roof, the darkness around the warehouse looked

as if it was lighted by exploding firecrackers. The whine of angry bullets from the walls indicated that these firecrackers came from rifle muzzles.

A wave of zombie-men rolled against the warehouse and were beaten back.

"Like the sea, she can send those waves of men against us until we are out of ammunition," Kissel said. "Long ago there was a king who told the sea to stay back."

"King Čanute," Tom said.

"I feel like King Canute," the FBI man said.

Sometime after midnight, a lull came in the attacks. Checking through the floor below, Tom found that two women had died of bullets coming from outside. So had Crail, the sailor.

"We're getting thin down below," he said to Kissel on the

roof.

"We're thinner than we know," the FBI man said, pointing skyward. "Listen."

In the black, starless murk above them helicopter motors

throbbed.

"Mrs. Tiger has found a ship and a pilot," Kissel said. "Maybe she's flying the ship herself! Somewhere among her men is a chemist. He'll be able to make something equivalent to that flask which Murk handed to you."

"Maybe that ship is from outside." Tom suggested.

As they listened, the throb of motors died away in the distance.

"They're trying to locate us," Kissel said. "In this kind of darkness, it's not easy to find a target, even if it is as big as this warehouse."

The throb of the engines became audible again out toward the sea, then went into silence.

"Finding us won't be easy," Kissel said. "But wait until dawn-she'll find us then!"

Whang!

A rifle bullet struck the wall of the warehouse. Again the fireflies began to sparkle in the night. Another wave of zombies splashed against the warehouse, trying to beat down the front door, trying to find a window that was not boarded

tight, trying to find any way to get through those concrete walls.

Rifles from inside and from the roof fought back at them, held back the tide until the first light of dawn brightened the black fog to a dull gray. The attack stopped. But around the warehouse the rifles kept sending bullets through the upper windows.

The answering fire from the warehouse had dropped to

almost nothing.

"I'm going down and see what we have left," Tom said.

"Whatever we have, it isn't enough for another night," Kissel answered. "But go check. And check the basement too and see how the battle went down there."

Again Tom's muscles were taut. The windows of the upper floors told their mute story of men and women dead. Eph was still alive, but with a bandage on his head. Effie was crouched at a window with a rifle at her shoulder. Down at the front door, the guard had opened his last box of cartridges.

"How's the basement?" Tom asked.

"Silent," the guard answered.

Tom had to force his agonizingly painful muscles to carry him to the steps that led downward. He dreaded to learn what had happened down here in the long dark hours of the night. The zombies had not entered. This much he knew—or thought he knew. As he approached the stairway, he stopped and brought up his rifle.

Feet were dragging their way up these steps.

Tom's flashlight beam revealed the thick-lensed spectacles of Dr. Homer Smith. The old physician walked as if he barely had the strength to lift one foot above another, but in spite of his obvious fatigue, his eyes were shining.

"Oh, Tom!" Dr. Smith said. "I was coming up to tell you

the good news."

"What are you talking about?" Tom Watkins asked. In this world of the embattled warehouse, how could there be such a thing as good news?

As this thought crossed Tom's mind, he caught a glimpse of movement behind the old doctor. He turned his flashlight

there. Rena and Cissie were following Dr. Smith. Cissie was

carrying Teeny.

The child blinked startled eyes at the light, then saw or guessed who was holding it. She wiggled free from Cissie and ran lightly up the steps to Tom.

"Pick me up, daddy!" she said.

She was a child asking to be lifted into the arms of someone she loved. There was no trace of a zombie in her. Wonderingly, Tom laid down his flashlight, and keeping his rifle in his right hand, picked her up with his left arm.

"But you already said . . . I know Teeny is all right."

Tom's eyes went on to Cissie.

She was coming up the stairs with steps as light as Teeny's had been. Ignoring the rifle, she went straight into the other arm of Tom Watkins, and kissed him.

"I'm all right, too, Tom, dear," she said. Her voice, her eyes, her manner, had no trace of a zombie in them. She was a woman in love and in arms of the man she loved.

Tom's eyes went past her to Rena, who was silently, per-

haps a little sadly, watching them.

"You two are very lucky to find each other," Rena said. "I looked for the right man all my life. I found many substitutes but I never found the right one. I... I guess I'll just keep on looking."

Rena Stark had changed. Somehow or other she was no longer the movie queen looking for the next man to conquer and acting as if every move she made was before a camera composed of millions of admiring masculine eyes. Some subtle alchemy had worked in her. Now she was a woman. Now she was what she had never been—a truly human woman.

"I'm all right," Rena said.

"For the first time since I met you, I think I believe you," Tom said. He turned wonderingly to Dr. Smith.

The eyes of the old physician were glowing.

"The crisis is over for all three of them, Tom," Dr. Smith said. His voice had tones of wonder in it as if he had seen miracles and the memory of them still lingered in his voice. "We've won the battle of the basement."

In this moment, even if it was for a very short moment, with the weight of Teeny on his left arm and Cissie snuggled in his right arm, Tom Watkins tasted some of the same wonder that was in the voice and the eyes of Dr. Smith. A battle had been won! The wonder rose to exultation, then went down as grim thoughts came back into his mind.

"Inside the battle is won, but outside-" Tom said.

"We know how it is outside," Cissie whispered. "We believe we are going to win that battle too somehow. We're human. Nothing has ever licked the human race yet." She paused and sought for words to express some thought moving through her mind. "Until that battle outside is won, how can you and Teeny and I ever reach that cabin in the mountains?"

She smiled at him.

"We will win it-somehow."

Tom felt her strength and her courage invigorate his own. From upstairs, from another world it seemed, Ted Kissel's hoarse voice could be heard shouting.

"Tom! Get up here! That helicopter had finally found us. It's making landing signals. And the roar of motors in the sky is enough to break your eardrums. This fog is full of helicopters!"

Now Tom heard what had been in the background all along but not noticed, a dull throbbing as of wings in the sky. Many wings!

One thought came into his mind. Zombies landing on the roof.

"You stay here!" he said to Cissie.

If this was the last barricade, if this was the last battle outside, at least he could leave her where she would be safe a few moments longer.

She had no intention of staying below.

"I'm going with you," she stated.

"We're all going," Rena said.
"But you can't!" His voice was harsh and bitter.

"If I can't live with you, I can at least die beside you," Cissie said. She left his arm and moved to a rifle that someone had dropped on the floor. Picking it up, she checked the

chamber for a loaded cartridge. Rena did the same. So did Dr. Homer Smith. Teeny had to be restrained from looking for a gun.

As they went up the stairs that led to the roof, Eph and Effie, and the others who were alive, joined them. They were no more than a handful in number. So many wings were in the sky that the very air around them vibrated with the sound.

Ted Kissel was crouched at the top of the stair well that led to the roof. His rifle was trained over the lip of the roof itself.

In the air above, a big helicopter was dropping slowly and cautiously to the top of the roof.

"I can knock a hole in a rotor," Kissel said.

"Don't do it!" Tom ordered.

"I keep remembering that woman luring us into the ware-house."

"You have an obsession about that woman," Tom answered.
"Let the ship land. If it is full of zombies, we'll do what we can. If it is from outside—"

"Nobody outside the Basin has remembered us yet," Kissel said.

The big ship touched its landing wheels and settled to the roof. A man in full battle uniform, with an automatic rifle in his hands, stepped out. A second man followed him. The second man carried a small instrument.

"That first man has the eagles of a full colonel on his helmet," Tom said. "The second man has a counter. They're checking the radiation."

As they watched, the second man called out sharply. "It's safe sir."

The colonel waved his arm at the ship. From it poured more men in battle uniform.

In the sky above, other ships ringed themselves in a circle around the warehouse.

The rifle fire from the zombies was suddenly silent.

"The colonel hasn't seen us yet," Kissel said.

"He is going to see us right now," Tom answered. Climbing to the top step, with the rifle under his arm, he waved.

The effect was almost electric. Every man, with the ex-

ception of the colonel dropped flat. Tom found himself the center of the sights of many rifles. He did not move. The colonel, alone, began a cautious advance toward him and stopped five paces away.

"Who the hell are you?" the colonel said.

"My name is Thomas Watkins, sir. I'm an ex-sergeant of Marines," Tom answered.

"An ex-sergeant!" The colonel's eyes bulged in his head.

"I'm a colonel of Marines."

"I recognized the uniform, sir," Tom answered. "And if you will pardon the question, what in the hell is the colonel

doing here?"

This was no way for even an ex-sergeant to talk to a colonel. The colonel's face grew grim. "I'm here on orders from the President, sergeant. However, it is not my intention to give offense." His eyes went past Tom to the figures still crouched in the stair well. He became aware of the rifles covering him.

"Who in the hell are they?" he demanded.

"They are what is left of an army, sir," Tom answered. "We've been holed up here in this warehouse, fighting a kind of a delaying action." His voice grew as hard as the colonel's. "I take it the colonel is from outside the Basin?"

"I flew in by jet early last night," the colonel answered. "I commandeered these ships and these men. During most of the night I've been hunting—"

Whang!

A rifle bullet came from a zombie. It touched the colonel's helmet. He and Tom both threw themselves flat on the roof. "I take it vou are under siege," the colonel said.

"You take it right." Tom answered.

"I'll fix that!" He lifted his voice in a shout. "Bring the men down. Set up a defense around this warehouse. Clear the area of all stragglers."

The ship on the roof relayed his orders by radio to the ships in the air. Within seconds, doors were opening and paratroopers were dropping out. The colonel watched the operation with satisfaction. When the rifle fire began, and the

zombies' howls lifted up, his satisfaction vanished and he turned a very worried face toward Tom Watkins.

"Sergeant! What's doing the howling?"

"Zombies," Tom answered. "Men made into zombies by the

action of a protein molecule invading from the sea!"

"You know about that? That's top secret. That protein molecule is absolutely top secret in Washington." the colonel shouted.

"Things that are top secret in Washington may be rather common knowledge around here," Tom answered.

"Then this is the place I was ordered to find," the colonel

said. "You are the men I have been ordered to save."

"Do you mean you are actually looking for us?" Tom gasped. "But this Basin has been sealed off. How does it

happen that now you come looking for us?"

A radio message happened," the colonel answered. "Some amateur here in the Basin put a crazy message on the air. Every ham in the country seemed to pick it up and started calling the men whose names he gave. That message started the biggest flap I've ever seen."

"Harden!" Tom whispered. "Harden got through."
"I don't know his name. He didn't give it. But we got enough fixes on hit transmitter to locate his general area. We've been hunting since then." The colonel wiped sweat from his face. Suddenly his voice had a pleading note in it. "Look, sergeant, vou've been in the service. You'll understand this. I've got orders to come in here into this contaminated area and find one man, to give him full military protection, and to get him back to Washington as fast as a jet can fly. If I don't carry out these orders, they'll have me busted to a buck sergeant within a week. Sergeant, did you ever hear of a Dr. Homer Smith?"

Tom turned. The others were coming out of the stair well now. Dr. Smith, blinking startled eyes behind his thick-lensed spectacles, was among them.

"He's coming toward you right now," Tom said to the colonel.

He watched the colonel greet Dr. Smith. The colonel did

everything but salute.

"Dr. Smith, right now your name is known to everyone in the United States as the man who gave us the vital clue we needed to lick the most dangerous menace that ever appeared on this earth. Perhaps you do not understand, sir, but you are a hero."

"No," Dr. Smith said. "No, I do not understand that. I

don't suppose I ever will understand it."

"Don't you understand that tomorrow regiments of soldiers will be moving into this city with your vaccine?" the colonel continued.

"Have they tested it vet?" Dr. Smith asked.

"As I left Washington, a whole army of biochemists were getting ready to put it into production and to test it," the colonel said.

"Ah," Dr. Smith said. "They're getting ready." If there was a touch of bitterness in his voice, circumstances seemed to justify it. "Here we didn't have time to get ready. We had to do the best we could with what we had."

"You have tested it? With what results?"

The old doctor bent over and picked up Teeny. Rena and Cissie moved to stand beside him. From somewhere below the fatigue on his face, a smile appeared. "They were successful, colonel."

The colonel was suddenly smiling, too.

Around the warehouse, paratroopers were still dropping down. Down the side streets, a few scattered shots were sounding.

"They'll mop up all of these zombies for you," the colonel said.

"If you will pardon me, colonel, I do not want one zombie hurt unnecessarily," Dr. Homer Smith said. "They were human beings once. They will be human beings again, even the one that Ted Kissel calls the tiger woman."

He grinned at Kissel. The FBI man grinned back.

As the group moved toward the waiting helicopter, which would lift them out of this Basin, Teeny wiggled free from

Dr. Smith and came to Tom. He picked her up. Cissie moved again to his other arm.

"I remember some talk about a cabin in the mountains,"

Cissie said, shyly.

"It's there and it's real and all three of us are going to live in it," Tom Watkins answered.

Toward the coast, as the fog lifted for a moment, he caught a glimpse of the sea. It was still out there, the ocean, sending its waves of life-forms against the ramparts of the land.

This wave, this mad molecule, had been defeated.

In his heart, beyond the fatigue, beyond the knotted muscles, beyond the horror that had been his life for what seemed an eternity, Tom Watkins felt a grin trying to form. He relaxed and felt himself grin from ear to ear.

Then, with Cissie ahead of him and Teeny in his arms, he went through the door of the helicopter. As its motors picked up speed, wings began to beat in the sky, wings that carried them all away to a dream that was at last coming true.

24 Frightening Hours

AREAL SHOCKER