

YOUNG WOLFE

A collection of early stories by
GENE WOLFE



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Illustrations by
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As a college freshman, I lived on an abandoned Air Force base inhabited only by other freshmen. We slept in barracks, in double-tiered cots, wore slide rules in long black sheaths that dangled from our belts, escaped at every opportunity, and played brutal practical jokes. (Placing a lit cigarette between the toes of a sleeper was considered pretty mild.)

As a sophomore I got to live on the real campus, in a dormitory room big enough to hold two desks. My first and only roommate was a morose Chemical Engineering student named Louis Hampton. He made pen-and-ink sketches and was able to persuade the only student produced magazine that used such things to use his. He also persuaded me to write stories for him to illustrate - we would be, as we in some sense became, a writer-illustrator team. The result is before you.

- Gene Wolfe

The Case of the Vanishing Ghost

Written with the sincerest apologies to S. Holmes and none whatsoever to his ten thousand shadows.

The characters of this mystery have become so familiar to the reader that I shall neglect to add the last formalized touch of naming the principal ones. Instead, they shall be referred to by the names every reader uses in his own mind. To call The Great Detective "Philo Queen" for example, would be a needless waste of time.

OUR STORY opens when The Poor Stooge returns from an afternoon's walk to find The Great Detective wrapped in his old green dressing gown. (Which he himself made from a horse blanket, and which has remained uncleared since.)* His right hand grips a coke in which floats a benzedrine inhaler. He is playing the xylophone with his toes. These symptoms, as The Poor Stooge knows from long experience, mean that The Great Detective has a case which is baffling the police throughout the world, and has the newspapers of a continent reduced to wild conjectures. All his cases fall into this category, of course, except for those which are so secret and of such vital importance to the national welfare that they are brought to him by the president or king of a foreign power, or the prime minister himself. On such occasions

* This is one of many eccentricities intended to establish him so firmly in the readers mind that he cannot be disturbed by the onrushing battalions of similar characters.

he is found wearing his horse disguise, and impatiently waiting for The Poor Stooge to act as his rear guard, the one thing that gentleman does to perfection.

After several minutes of rapt xylophone playing The Great Detective looks up at The Poor Stooge, who has been waiting with dog-like devotion for the great man's words.

"On your walk," intones The Great Detective, "you paused to pat the head of a small boy who was eating a lime popsyple."

"Astounding!" Gasps The Poor Stooge, "How do--"

"I noted the marks on your hand, where he bit you as small boys always do when you pat their heads. Not that I blame them."

"But the--"

"The popsyple was an easy inference. Your right arm is covered from wrist to elbow with a sticky green smear which could only come from such a confection.

"Furthermore, you aided some such moppet in getting a drink from the park fountain."

"Ho--" says The Poor Stooge, who by this time is reduced to gibbering incoherence despite the fact that this has happened to him in all the other stories by the same author.

"He squirted you, and you are still dripping wet. Also, you went to the Swineherds Midtown Bank and withdrew an amount less than six and a half crowns, five shillings, tuppence."

The Poor Stooge stands mute. He is too numb for further amazement. The reader is simply numb.

"I deduced this from the fact that you stuck the bank's pen in your pocket and your shirt-front is saturated with the vile black ink peculiar to the Swineherd's. Had the amount exceeded that sum you would have been more thoroughly disturbed and would have put the pen in your mouth so that your lips, rather than your haberdashery, would have been black. But enough of this idle chitchat. I have just received a missive concerning a case which promises to be of some interest.

The Great Detective's statement is followed instantly by the entry of an old apple-woman.

"Greetings, Sir Humphrey Blassington-Smyth of Little Slopshire on the Gimlet," drawls The Great Detective.

"Gad, sir!" exclaims Sir Humphrey. (For, as the reader may have guessed, it was really he.) "I believed my disguise to be impenetrable. After I was expelled from the grounds of Blassington Hall by my own butler and bitten by my own dog, Black Herbert of Slopshire XVII, whose ancestors served with mine at the battle of Hastings, I would never have believed that a perfect stranger would recognize me. How did you manage it?"

"Your disguise, Sir Humphrey, is that of a brilliant amateur, and suffers from the common defect of its kind. While painstaking in some respects-I did not fail to notice the genuine lice bites on your wrist-"

"It was nothing, I simply put my arm around the cook for a few minutes," mumbled the peer modestly.

"As I was saying, like most amateurs you overlooked one major point. As you entered I perceived that the apples in your basket were not actually apples, but cannon balls, door knobs, and a few darning eggs, painted scarlet. Once I was assured of your fraudulency, identification was not difficult. Your picture, you may recall, appeared on the third page of the Times a fortnight ago come Martinsmas in connection with a charity foxhunt. By the way, what was the result of that hunt?"

"Little blighter got away."

"My question, sir, was in reference to the proceeds of the hunt. Did the Hurbut Gelding Fund For the Prosecution of Immorality fatten its purse as expected?"

"Dash it all! I thought it was for The Unwed Mothers Home!"

"I believe not. But what was this matter on which you wished to consult me?"

"As a man with your knowledge of London affairs is no doubt aware, my family, while one of the oldest in England, was up to a few years ago, totally impoverished."

"This was due to the attempts of your grandfather, a felineophobiatic, to construct a clockwork mouse which would rid England of cats, was it not?"

"Yes. The family fortune could have stood it were it not for his passion for jeweled bearings; those bearings beat us. Are you also familiar with the way in which those fortunes he spent have been regained?"

"No." (The Great Detective was always inclined to be a little rude when he was unable to answer a question.)

"I recall it as though it were yesterday," said Blassington-Smyth. "The family was gathered about the fire in old Castle Blassington, the last habitable building left to us. Upon the fire we had just thrown the last piece of good furniture left in the castle, a Louis XIV commode. Then came a knock at the door."

"Who was it?" gasps The Poor Stooge, grabbing The Great Detective's hand for assurance.

"As a matter of fact, it was a rather pretty young man with curly blond hair, pink cheeks, very red lips, and beautiful blue eyes. He spoke with an American accent which was almost smothered by a pronounced lisp, as I recall."

"How was he dressed?" inquires The Great Detective.

"Strange that you should ask that, for he was oddly dressed indeed. He wore a bright orange sweater, an orange bow tie with white polka-dots, and pink knickers. There were letters of some sort on his sweater - UT I believe. From a few polite questions we learned that he was an American college student vacationing in England. He had been cycling to Slopshire when darkness overtook him and he had tumbled into the moat, having mistaken our garden path for the Slopshire-Digby highway. Fortunately for our self respect china is unflammable and we still had a pinch of orange pekoe left, so that we were able to offer him a cup of tea. When he lifted it to his lips a remarkable thing happened. He took on a sip, screamed a few words, and dropped dead."

"What did he say?"

"I can still hear that agonized shriek. He said, 'They make it better than we do at Shu Fli Pi!' Then he fell. It was terrible."

"Go on," urged The Great Detective.

"Well, it was only a few days later that we learned that this strange incident had been the salvation of the family. Castle Blassington, which had been barren for eight hundred years, was now haunted!"

"You opened it to the public at once, no doubt."

"Dashed right we did. We charged two shillings, sixpence a head and got it too. Imagine, gentlemen, the only haunted castle in England with an American ghost. We couldn't keep those tourists away."

"It must have been a gold mine, but now-?"

"I see," mused The Great Detective.

"It was always regular as clockwork, before, Morning, noon and night it might be seen from the battlements to the dungeon, sometimes screaming, sometimes giggling, sometimes shrieking imprecations in Greek, but always there. Now it is there no longer."

"Sir Humphrey, is it not correct that your closest neighbour at the castle is Mr. G. Ruesom?"

"It is."

"And is it not also correct that Mr. Ruesom is an expert on supernatural matters?"

"He is, but I consulted him, and he declares himself helpless."

"Is it not also true that Mr. Ruesom did not take part in the foxhunt?"

"Right-ho"

"Then Sir Humphrey, I will undertake to aid you in regaining your ghost for 5000 pounds sterling."

"Done, and God Bless you!"

"Your ghost, Sir Humphrey, was lured from the castle by means of some bait, probably a package of Parliament cigarettes or a bottle of creme de menth, by Ruesome who

wished to study it at closer quarters than those provided by the castle.

"If you will wait here a moment--"

The Great Detective left the room for a few moments and returned carrying a package wrapped in brown paper.

"If you will be so good as to throw this through Ruesom's window some night, I feel sure your ghost will be frightened into returning to your castle where he has found safety for so many years."

Sir Humphrey left without a word, but with a smile of thanks on his face.

"But-but what is in the package?" gasps The Poor Stooge.

"A military shoulder patch, a pair of boots, the severed horn of a steer, and--"

"And what, for God's sake!"

"And a copy of a magazine called the Commentator," replies The Great Detective with a mysterious smile.

The End.

It was by writing little stories like the one which follows that I encountered my first editor, the student editor of the Commentator, in which this story originally appeared. His name is the only thing about him that I have forgotten. I remember quite vividly that he was short and dark and stocky, with smoldering eyes. Like a policeman of that era, he never removed his uniform cap. Most important, he was a junior at a school in which sophomores (like me) were endlessly hazed and harassed by juniors. When I tip-toed into his office, a dorm room much like my own, I expected to be bullied without mercy and quite possibly beaten. What he actually did was more painful. He read my little story twice, then lined out all the most telling passages with a blue pencil. From that day forward, I strove to defeat him by writing only stories so tightly and intricately structured that not a single word could be removed without fatal consequences.

I failed, as I am failing still. But he had driven me to a beneficial madness.

- Gene Wolfe

The Grave Secret

James Gordon Atwood III was cold. The freezing wind which was rapidly whipping away the ground-mist which rose from the Greenwood Memorial Cemetery seemed to blow through his flesh as easily as it penetrated his overcoat, and he could have sworn his viscera was as cold as his skin. But James was far from unhappy. He ranged through the cemetery like a dog ranges through a piece of wasteland, and no beagle ever sniffed every bush with the perseverance James used in inspecting the grave stones. James Atwood was looking for a fresh grave, or as he put it to himself, "a good fresh grave" and he intended to find one.

You must not think from this that James Gordon Atwood III was a common grave-robber in search of watches, rings, and gold teeth. As every well informed person should know, the degeneration of morals among undertakers has made that profession nearly extinct anyway. Nor was James a medical student. That gruesome duty is no longer a part of every medical man's training.

James Gordon Atwood was a necromancer.* A necromancer with a long series of failures and near successes who at last thought that he had mastered the craft. He had bought ancient manuscripts of papyrus, vellum, and leather (sometimes leather whose texture suggested a decidedly sinister source) and by means of chemistry and ultra-violet light had pushed aside the writing of hands long dead to disclose writing older still, and not always human.

* One who revives the dead by black magic or sorcery. Each corpse owes the necromancer one service before going to its final rest.

Writing which disclosed secrets so terrible that more than half of their contents was devoted to telling the reader how to receive them and remain sane. He had sent an agent at enormous expense to procure photostatic copies of the Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazad. A major portion of the expense, he recalled with a wry touch of humor, had been incurred in bribing the curator of the museum in which it was kept. For, despite the rarity of Arabic scholars in this country, the Necronomicon was kept in a locked cabinet of special design and opened to a page which disclosed a fine example of ancient Arabic penmanship and Nothing more. From the size of the bribe needed to move the curator James deduced that he had read a part of that extraordinary book and from the fact that he could be moved at all it seemed probable that he had not read all of it.

James snickered when he thought of the squeamish curator and the plodding monks who had bleached out the ancient formulas to inscribe their religious tales on pages older than their religion. The Church, John remembered, had burnt around 130,000 "witches" until someone exclaimed "Behold! There are no witches." And since the few remaining were very well concealed everyone thought that he was right.

James awakened from his reverie at the sight of a new grave. A grave so new, in fact, that no tombstone had been erected over it.

He extracted a package from his coat pocket and produced a flask containing a fine gray powder whose composition would have shocked the average hyena. With his cigarette lighter he lit thirteen greasy, malformed candles whose tortured twistings seemed to suggest that their very wax shrunk away in horror from the foulness in their wicks.

Sprinkling the powder in the form of a six pointed star, he placed the candles at its points and at the intercessions of its lines. The sole remaining candle he placed with mathematical exactness at the center of the star. Raising his hands to the night sky he began an incantation in a tongue the earth had forgotten before Babylon first raised towers of sun dried brick.

For a few moments nothing stirred. Could he have made a mistake? Hastily he reviewed in his mind the formula, incantation, and the theory behind this particular bit of sorcery. A human being, of course, is divided in two parts, the body and the soul. In the final analysis, according to the ancient works of sorcery he had read, death was only the splitting of these two components and the means used to do this was incidental. Since death was no more than this division,

it followed that if a soul might be injected once more into a corpse, then that corpse would once more have life of a sort. The ritual he had performed was designed to create an artificial soul in the corpse, since it would be impractical to snatch back the dead man's soul from one of the higher planes, or even to locate it if it had become a wandering ghost.

Suddenly the earth above the grave began to boil and smoke as though the planet itself were eager to be rid of the abomination his sorcery had created. A hand as white as a maggot appeared above the turbulent earth clutching futilely as though it wished to pull its owner from the imprisoning earth which bound it.

When the rest of the corpse appeared it raised itself stiffly to its feet, its muscles still frozen from the clutch of death. James had planned to tell it of the task he required of it, but looking into the creature's emptily staring eyes, he knew that it needed no instructions from him in its duties. Then without warning the creature turned on its heel and stalked off through the graveyard intent on the purpose of its new life. James followed it at a more leisurely pace.

Half an hour later James stood at the bottom of the hill on which he lived and watched the corpse enter his home. He could visualize the scene taking place within. The corpse would take the German officer's dagger from its place on the study wall and stalk up the stairs to the bedroom where Mary lay reading. He could almost hear her scream as the rotting corpse, its burial suit clotted with grave-earth and its sunken cheeks smeared with undertakers rouge, attacked her.

At last he could stand the suspense no longer. The door seemed abnormally heavy; he had to throw his entire weight against it. The knife, he noted with satisfaction, was missing. He hesitated a moment, savoring his triumph before he entered Mary's bedroom. How fitting that she should be killed by the studies to which she objected so strongly! Smiling slightly he entered the room.

Mary lay on the floor. The dagger was buried in the soft pink flesh just below her right breast. Her eyes were fixed on the corpse who stood placidly now waiting for instructions. She seemed unaware of James as he entered. "Jimmy," she gasped, her eyes still riveted to the corpse's face, "Jimmy, you're dead. You died three days ago!"

James Gordon Atwood III whirled and stared at the corpse in the bright light of the bedroom. The rotting corpse he had raised from the grave was his own.

The End



This was my first professional sale. Six months before it appeared, I had read an article about crocodiles in Reader's Digest while waiting for somebody in the lobby of an office building, and I combined it with a little half-remembered Kipling. (There may be a writer someplace who owes nothing to Kipling, but I'm not the one.)

When Weird Tales, which I had read at about the same age as THE JUNGLE BOOKS, returned from the grave yet again under the kindly auspices of Bob Weinberg and George Scithers, it reprinted this story, and at Boskone in 1992 (held under the kindly auspices of the New England Science Fiction Assn.) a reader told me it was his favorite.

- Gene Wolfe

The Dead Man

When the peasant came out of his house in the morning, the Brahman was sitting cross-legged in the sunshine before his own door. The Brahman was old, and emaciated by fasting in the way often seen in wandering fakirs but seldom in settled members of the highest caste. And although the peasant was early abroad to escape the banter of the women (water-carrying being unfit for a man), the Brahman had been about before him, for when he neared the ford he could see floating in the slack water the marigold wreaths the Brahman had cast in to propitiate the river and the magar and the other powers of the waters.

The magar was a crocodile. Nine days ago it had taken the wife of the peasant's half-brother as she waded across the ford, so notifying the villagers that the crossing was unsafe again, as it was said to have been in their grandfather's time but had not been within living memory.

That same day, his own wife had been bitten on the foot when she kicked a jackal snuffing too near the spot where their son was playing. She had cursed, then laughed at the bloody scratch left by the frightened jackal's teeth; but next morning her foot was hot to the touch and twice its healthy size. Now, after prayers and poultices of dung, it was better. She could hobble on it, though not far, and cook and care for the child; but it would be long yet before she could bring water, and his mother—who had cried, and shrieked that the gods intended the destruction of the wives of all her sons—was too old.

With a pad on his shoulder, he could carry their

largest jar easily, for he was a strong man, brown and lean from hard work in the fields of millet and upland rice. Stepping with care so as not to stir the mud, he bent slowly; and where the depth was great enough to take the jar, he filled it with the morning-cool, nearly stagnant water. There was nothing at the ford to disturb the peace of daybreak, though a hundred feet away, where the village stood just above the flood mark, many were stirring into wakefulness.

The magar was not to be seen. The peasant knew well how cleverly a crocodile assumes the very angle and position most natural to a stranded log on a sandbar, and how softly shadow-like it slips through still water without rippling the surface, but it was not there. He shouldered the jar again and began the walk uphill.

He and his fellow villagers, ignorant of the comparative religion of the schools, would cheerfully have killed the magar if they could. Indeed, one of the boatmen had been fishing for it with an iron hook as thick as a man's thumb hidden in the well-rotted haunch of a goat. Still, until the boatman caught it or they found it far enough from water to be slain with axes and spears, they would have been fools not to try to persuade it to be content with homage from their village and, especially, to move on up or downstream. Possibly in the dry season, when the river would dwindle to a trickle, something might be done. The peasant set down the water jar carefully so as not to waken his family. He heard his mother's rasping breath; as the jar made a soft chunk on the earthen floor, his wife moaned and moved her arm.

The second jar was smaller and older than the first, with a chipped place at the lip. He took it up and left the dimness of his home again for the brilliance of the street. The house had smelled of smoke; outside a breeze brought the rank, indescribable early-morning smell of second-growth jungle, a jungle cut fifty years before for timber, now growing up again in hardwoods. By the water, the river-odor of rotten vegetation returned, and the gray warmth of dust under his bare feet changed once more to the cold slipperiness of mud.

This time he was not quite so careful, and one of his feet slid a trifle, sending out a slow cloud of fine black sediment. He took two more steps in the direction of the barely perceptible current before bending to fill his jar.

Without warning, his left calf was struck by steel bars, simultaneously from front and rear. A hip-dislocating wrench sent him sprawling in the shallows while the half-filled jar rocked in the waves of his struggle. Because he was a strong man, taller and

bigger of bone than most of his people, he had time for one full-throated scream, and time to draw the breath for another, before the water closed over his nose and mouth.

For a few seconds he resisted before instinct, or reason, or the passivity of India and the East made him swallow, hug his chest with his arms, and submit, feeling the dark, cold fingers of the river loose his rag of turban and tangle his long, black hair. Then, as his heart pounded and his ears swelled and the trapped breath tried to burst past his closed throat and locked lips, he fought again, ignoring the pain already creeping into his numbed leg.

When next he came to know our world - maya, that which is not God - it was a small circle of pale blue far above his eyes. He tried to blink and discovered that he could not, and that his mouth was filled with water and mud (or perhaps with blood) which he could not expel. Even the muscles that controlled the motions of his eyes had forgotten their function, so that he could not direct his gaze to right or left; but he found, in the absence of this ability, that he could treat his field of vision as a window and shift his attention to one side or the other, so as to peer slantwise across his own eyes and examine the edges, where the ghosts of the newly dead and the more material demons flutter away from a man's view.

He was lying in a dark abscess in the earth, on mud, as his shoulders told him. Toward his feet was the carcass of a young blackbuck, its belly stretched by the rapid decomposition that attacks dead ruminants.

To his left (he strained to see, and in straining felt the vertebrae of his neck move ever so slightly, grating one upon another) nearly hidden in shadow, rose the familiar, undulating curves of a young and not unslender woman lying on her side - the roundness of the head, the concavity of the neck, the rise of the shoulder declining to the waist, and the strong domination of the childbearing hips tapering to thighs and knees lost in darkness. A drugged and whirling concourse of surmises rushed through his mind, until simultaneously and without consciousness of contradiction he felt that he lay in the palace of a scaled river-spirit and asleep beside his wife.

His attention was drawn from the woman by an alteration in the light, the passage of some dark object across the disk of blue. It came again, hesitated, and returned by the path it had come. This it did three times in what could have been a hundred breaths; and while he watched it, he became aware of a stench indescribably fetid in the air that stirred sluggishly

through his nostrils.

The dark object crossed the light for the fourth time, and he saw it to be a leaf at the tip of a twig. Then he understood that his shadowy vault was the den of the magar, hollowed in the mud of the river bank, where he lay with his face beneath the "chimney" providing the minute ventilation necessary to prevent the den from filling with the gases of putrefaction. When the sun rose higher, it would become an oven in which decay would luxuriate and dead flesh rise like dough until the bodies were soft enough to be dismembered easily. He did not connect this with the crocodile's teeth, which were of piercing shape only, unable to grind or cut; nor with its short front legs, which were unable to reach what its jaws held, although he knew these things.

He knew all these things and the habits of the magar—the rotting-den and the sudden grab at the ford or the rush up from the water—but he was unafraid, though he knew without looking a second time the identity of the woman beside him. After a long while he rose and began working his way out through the chimney, uncertain even as he did whether he laboriously pushed the earth aside to enlarge the hole or merely drifted through, and up like smoke.

The village was quiet now with the emptiness of noon, when the men were in the fields. He heard sobbing from his house as he dragged his injured leg along the village street, and the softer sound of changed prayers. Sunlight shone brighter than he could recall having seen it ever before, the dazzle from the dust and the sides of the mud houses so great that he scarcely cast a shadow as he stood in the doorway of his home; neither the young women, nor the old, nor the Brahman saw him until he entered the gloom of the interior where they sat, though his son ceased his gurgling and stared with wide brown eyes.

When they saw him at last, he could not speak, but looked from face to face, beginning and ending with his wife, conscious of having come to the close of something. After a moment the Brahman muttered, "Do not address it. It is seldom good to hear what they will say." He took up a handful of saffron powder from the brass bowl beside him and flung it into the air, calling upon a Name that brought dissolution and release.

The End

For my sin, I've tried to teach a fair number of unpublished writers; and all of them seem to think that their first sale will make an enormous difference. For some writers that may be so, but I'm inclined to believe them few. My first sale got me eighty dollars, and nothing more at all. It was this one, my second professional sale, that changed my whole life for the better: first, by convincing me (rightly or wrongly) that I could in fact write, that the first sale had not been a freak; and second, by bringing me into contact with Damon Knight, who had then just begun to edit the Orbit series of original anthologies, and for years was to be my mentor and principal market.

- Gene Wolfe

Mountains Like Mice

"Hold still, my lord," the sly looking man said softly to the young scholar he was dying purple. "This won't take but a moment. Not too hot is it, my lord?"

"No," Dirk said, "it's not too hot." Stripped to his breech clout in the center of the courtyard, he was watching with awe as the warmth of the sun dried the liquid Otho the Captive dipped up with his rag and stick. Black when it came dripping out of Otho's pot, it turned the smoothly tanned skin of Dirk's barrel chest and long legs the colour of wild grapes.

They were alone in the court. The west wall, the only one not lined with mud-brick buildings, threw a shadow like the edge of a blade across the flagstones. Over the top of the wall, distant and misled and shadow-side to, Dirk could see the distant lift of the mountains. For the thousandth time a phrase he had heard once from old Theophilus ran through his head: "The mountains are mice."

It was a comforting thought, but he felt sure Master Theophilus had not meant it to comfort. He had been thinking of stealth and disease and perhaps of other things as well.

"The soles of your feet, please," said Otho.

Obediently Dirk held them up in turn for the fat man to splash his dye on.

"I well remember, my lord," Otho said chattily, "how unnecessary I thought this when it was done to me. I supposed it would be the first place to wear clean. But I found out, my lord, that when the feet are calloused-as mine were then and yours are now, my lord-they are one of the very last places. The magistrate found it

between my toes and in the crevices of the thick skin when I was drug before him. I believe I've told you, my lord, that I was nearly clean when I was taken?"

From the wall, a raven which had been perched with its back arrogantly toward them as it stared out over the desert suddenly launched itself thrashing into the air. Outlined for a moment like a heraldic figure, black against the blaze of the afternoon sky, it brought to the young man a sudden personal realization of the frighteningly complex linkage between cause and effect, stimulus and response, which guides every living creature.

Above all others this was the concept his instructors had droned at him daily until he had almost learned to ignore it. Now, on the verge of the Great Retreat, he was beginning at last to understand the idea he had so often parroted.

The raven croaked twice over their heads and then, with a desperate flapping of wings, settled on Otho's shoulder. In astonishment Dirk searched the Captive's plump face for a hint of the understanding he would have seen, he knew, on that of Theophilus or any other Master at such a moment. There was only wonder and a kind of sheepishness.

"He's a pet, my lord," Otho explained hurriedly. "I took him from the nest two weeks ago, and I've kept him in my rooms almost ever since. This is only the second time he's been out." He stroked the bird under its ruffled bill with a pudgy finger. "What ought I call him, do you think?"

"Corvus Corvax," Dirk suggested drily. "I wish I knew what unsettled him like that."

"Oh, you will, my lord. When you come back to us you'll be a Master yourself, and no one would believe some of the things I've seen my Master, Theophilus, do. Control all sorts of animals; summon the hawks from the sky, if you can credit it."

And so, Dirk thought, you steal fledglings to tame in imitation of him. Never mind, I'm closer to the fledgling stealing level myself. Aloud he said, "Nothing magical happens on the Retreat, Otho. If you almost completed it yourself you ought to know that."

"Ah, but I didn't finish. That makes the difference."

The gate in the west wall, which was the rear entrance to the academy, opened unexpectedly, contrary to the very explicit regulation that no freeman should observe a scholar who had undergone this degradation until he was actually in Retreat and subject to capture. For a few seconds Dirk and Otho saw an impressively tall man with a full beard and long, bound hair who sat a

shaggy wild horse without saddle or bridle. His glance swept the courtyard like a scythe. Then the horse wheeled, revealing the slender barreled automatic rifle slung reversed over its master's shoulders, and they were gone.

Otho exclaimed, "It's Master Aleksandr, come in! My lord, I must get something cooked for you-you are finished already, and you know where to wait. Heavens bless you, my lord!"

The fat man was running toward the kitchen already with his tame bird fluttering after him. At least, Dirk reflected, he knew now what had disturbed it.

The waiting place was a small room at the base of the round tower at the northwest corner of the academy. It possessed a tiny door, a sort of sally-port, which opened directly to the outside. In order to reach it Dirk was forced to walk through several of the other academy buildings. As he expected, the halls were deserted. Every door he did not need to use was tightly shut.

The few possessions he would be allowed to take with him were already in the room, packed in his shoulder-strapped specimen bag: a plainly made knife with a blade not much larger than the width of his hand, but of excellent steel; a leather water flask; bandages and a bottle of disinfectant; a small magnifying glass; a clasped handbook of meditations with tables of useful information, formulas and recipes at the end. The whole collection, bag included, weighed less than two kilograms.

There was no light in the room save what entered from a narrow firing slit in the wall; but he seated himself crosslegged on the floor anyway, intending to read. Instead, he found himself turning the book endlessly over and over in his hands while he thought of the mountains.

He planned to go to the mountains as soon as his Retreat began, and he wondered if gray old Master Theophilus, who could read volumes in a breath of wind, knew it and would try to prevent him. The mountains were dangerous for anyone, but for a Retreatant they were, paradoxically, almost perfectly "safe." And he could not endure the thought of ending his life like Otho, fetching water and sweeping floors for another man; turning glutton and petty thief because he had no longer any self respect to uphold.

He crossed the room to the firing slit and stared out across the level desert, estimating that another four hours remained before dark.

Seeing the uneven line of the mountains at the horizon he admitted to himself for the first time that

he would not be going only to escape a lifetime of Captivity. The mountains themselves drew him. Looming mightiness across the desert-the promise of a world alien to all he had known from geological formations to climate, peopled with the odds and ends, the hangers-on and survivors, who had somehow endured there when the old order fell to bits. The original owners of the ground, he thought to himself. Still nosing about in the dark corners and plotting ways to stick the torn leaves back on the calendar.

He shivered, though the mud-walled room was hot.

II

They came for him when the last sunlight had left the sky. He heard them long before the door opened, the steady, careful tread of Theophilus's bare feet contrasting with the uneven shuffle of Otho's rope-soled sandals.

Standing in the doorway with his back to what light there was. Theophilus delivered the ritual explanation of the purpose and conditions of the Retreat, half speaking, half chanting. Dirk could make out only his beard and white hair in the dimness.

When the ritual was over and Dirk had made the proper response, Theophilus said in his normal voice, "Otho will take you to a place from which even in full daylight the walls of the academy cannot be seen. The Retreat proper begins at sunup." Dirk picked up his bag and followed Otho out into the desert.

The sand and stones were still warm under his feet, though he knew that warmth would not last long. The high-pitched howl of one of the little desert wolves, a sound he had heard often while stretched on his cot in the dormitory, seemed friendly and familiar.

"My lord," Otho said softly, "this is the place."

Unexpectedly, the Captive thrust a stoppered bottle into his hands. Without the slightly obsequious note Dirk had always heard in his voice before, he said, "I've liked you ever since you came, boy, even though you were more severe with me than any of the others. Take this. As soon as it's light spread it all over yourself. In half an hour it will have neutralized the dye and you can wipe off the whole mess with clean sand." Before Dirk could recover from his astonishment the Captive had turned to go, calling over his shoulder, "My own discovery. I had the dye formula, you know, and plenty of time for research. I'll never tell anyone."

With the uncanny skill of a Master, like a puma suddenly disappearing behind some fold of ground hardly

large enough to shelter a cactus wren, he was gone.

Dirk called in astonishment, then anger, and finally in an agony of frustration. There was no reply.

The desert was lit with the silvery gossamer radiance of the stars, and silent with an almost unbearable hush. He would have freely sworn that if a grasshopper mouse were to dart from a hole a hundred meters away he would both see and hear it. There was nothing. Heavy and infinitely dishonorable. Otho's bottle weighed in his hand.

If he were to use the preparation, he reflected, he would be safe from capture for the length of his Retreat. He would need only to stay away from the Academy for the two months or so the dye normally required to wear off completely. If he were to meet a freshman he would undoubtedly be taken for a young Master on a field trip. He might even go east to where the sleepy farms and agricultural towns nestled in their irrigated valley and steal or beg food and clothing.

It was impossible, of course.

It would mean living a lie for the remainder of his life-feeling inferior to every Captive failure of a slave who had at least tried to play by the rules.

Stooping to bring his gaze closer to the sand, he thought he could detect those slight dislocations of the wind-blown pattern which marked Otho's trail. To keep the dye-remover...or pour it out, was as unthinkable as using it. Otho, whose actions Dirk felt he could predict well from his knowledge of the man, would believe he had used it. Otho would wink slyly when no one was watching, would make little secret jokes and be just a shadow more than an equal when they were alone. Dirk hated the Captivity system which punished failure so brutally, but he realized that to become the captive of a Captive would solve nothing.

Surprisingly, Otho had apparently not headed directly back toward the academy. The trail slanted off to the northeast in a series of convolutions that threw it behind every speck of cover. To follow it by starlight was slow work even for an academically trained and field-experienced tracker. For anyone else it would have been hopeless.

Slipping across the desert with his eyes on the spoor, he failed to notice the minute pantomime being performed two hundred meters to his left until his attention was called to it by a sound-a gasping release of breath as though a man had been struck violently in the stomach. A figure which had been moving silently on a course parallel to his own had suddenly found itself surrounded by four smaller figures. There had been a brief flourish of action, the large figure moving with

pantherish speed and power but the smaller ones with the incredible swiftness of humming birds - seeming almost to disappear in one spot and reappear without lapse of time in another. Then the larger figure slumped, emitting the gasp Dirk had heard. By the time he looked up there was no motion.

The symmetrical smoothness of four heads might easily at such a distance have been that of four rounded stones, but he turned as surely as a compass needle and began to trot straight toward them. There was a sound like a strip of cloth being torn, and a muzzle blast like a scarlet star sparkling before the third head. With a violent tug at the shoulder strap his bag leaped away from his side as he threw himself face down on the sand. The four rounded "stones" vanished like soap bubbles. The long wait began.

He drew his bag toward him, got out his knife, and discovered with relief that the bullet had not broken Otho's bottle. With the knife in his hand he watched with unwinking intensity his whole perimeter, listening for the scrape of one red sand grain on another, knowing as he did so that the flitting forms who might be circling to approach him from behind would be more difficult to see or hear than any Master.

At the academy he had been taught to call them by their scientific name of Homo Gyrda, the latter word being (he knew) a Latin-Anglo-Saxon mongrel for an obsolete unit of measure a little less than half the height of a man. Supposedly it was the average stature of those his parents had called the Poor People or the Pretty People when they told stories in the farmhouse kitchen.

Daylight came without an attack. A hawk, enormous-winged, sailed the updrafts the rising sun fathered when it struck the desert floor. Dick stood up stiffly, rubbing his limbs.

The gyrda would not stay this close to the academy by day, he felt certain. Trotting ahead, he found the scene of the struggle and read in the sand (by the lack of blurring where the four figures had lain) that they had left almost immediately after shooting at him. The depth of the tracks and the fact that they formed two columns side by side showed that they were carrying off their prisoner; wise desert fighters kept to a single line in order to better conceal their numbers.

He followed them all that day, spending the next night under a stone outcrop where his almost naked body was prevented from radiating its precious heat to the sky.

By noon the second day of his Retreat he was in the

foothills and had lost the trail in the rocks. He was hungry too, and knew that he should not risk another night without food. A straggling mesquite tree offered him some shelter from the sun while he read what information he could from it: the direction of the prevailing winds, that there was iron in the soil, the length of the growing season and so on-reflecting that Theophilus or, he supposed, Master Aleksandr would have understood much more.

Then he noticed that no mesquite beans lay under it.

A pile of rocks about thirty meters off had a spot which appeared more pounded and compacted than usual in front of every good sized crevice. . . marmots. Occasionally the little animals could be dug out, but a stroll around the rock pile convinced him that this fortress was too extensive and composed of stones too large for one man to handle. A glance overhead confirmed that the inevitable hawk was circling almost too high to be seen. Resuming his seat under the tree, he remained motionless for about twenty minutes, and then began to imitate the shrill whistle of an infant marmot in distress.

For several long breaths nothing stirred. He closed the hand out of sight of the rock pile on a stone. The nose of a small creature appeared in one of the crevices, then vanished again. He whistled weakly. The marmot made a rush that took it not more than fifty centimeters from the rock pile, then scurried back. After another three minutes it came out again. Two meters, then three, from safety.

Then he threw his stone. Not at the marmot, which would have been almost certainly futile at that range, but at the hole from which the little animal had come, to frighten it yet further away.

The hawk came down like a bullet seeming to split the thin air in his descent, yet the marmot was within two jumps of its hole when the talons seized it. It squealed piercingly once before it went limp. Dick yelled and pelted the hawk with a handful of gravel, at which the bird of prey wheeled to face him, hissing and clacking its curved beak. With a stick wrenched from the mesquite he was finally able to drive it off, flopping furiously along the ground. Like all birds it had great difficulty in rising unless it could climb to a tree limb or a high point of rock for its take-off.

Dirk skinned the marmot and roasted it over a very economical fire of mesquite, considering his situation as he did so. He knew very little, really, about the gyrda, and neither where they lived nor what they lived on. Their reasons for capturing Otho he could only

guess at.

For the time being it seemed reasonable to assume that he had merely blundered into a party of scouts who had welcomed the opportunity to take a prisoner. The problem now was to discover the trail again.

Although the four Poor People had probably been carrying water bottles of some sort when they captured Otho, he reflected, the supply could hardly be ample. Before he had lost the trail he had seen signs that indicated the Captive - who appeared to have lost his sandal in the scuffle - was slowing the party down. If water consumption were proportional to body weight he would need as much as three of his captors. Yet if they wanted to keep him alive in the desert they would have to supply him. Somewhere near here, then, they had almost certainly replenished their canteens at some source known to them. He set out to discover the place and find Otho, knowing that it would be a very difficult task.

III

It took him three days. To discover surface water in these arid lands required a knowledge of geology and a sensitive eye for slight growth and frequency in occurrence of the common desert plants.

Dirk possessed both. But both had to be honed considerably before he found the spot where a hole scooped in the sand had produced a seepage of water for the gyrda and their prisoner. He filled his own flask and took up the now fading trail.

He strode up long, slanted gullies filled with stones. In the desert and the flat plowlands the country had lain out wide around him with a feeling of spaciousness and natural or man-created orderliness. Because he had himself been taller than most of the objects surrounding him it had not prepared him for the high places, where fields a thousand hectares in extent stretched up on either side of the V-point in which he walked. Long after night came, the light played on the raw rack at the peaks of the mountains.

He did not suffer under the disadvantages of those who have been taught that a human being must eat every day, much less three times daily. His parents had regularly done without food one day a week during the winter, and at the academy his instructors had routinely taught their students the benefits of fasting. He knew how little and how much, a man needed to live.

When they presented themselves he ate the roots of certain plants and used his knife to cut away the spine-studded skins of others to eat the pulp. Twice he was

able to find and raze the little storehouses of kangaroo rats, masticating the tough, dry seeds they contained until they were a sweetish paste before he swallowed.

The trail ended at last in a sunken bowl wedged between three great peaks. Fifteen domed huts of flat stones surrounded that rarest of natural wonders, a deep pool of standing water. Outside of the little circle ranged "gardens" where most of the desert plants capable of furnishing some article of food to gatherers were being grown under cultivation.

From a sheltered spot high up the slope of one of the enclosing mountains he watched the life of the village all the remainder of the day, but he could get no clue to the prisoner's whereabouts until it was nearly dark. Then a lone individual appeared, carrying one of the long rods he knew were weapons, and a small jug and hide bag.

He left one of the huts and began flitting up an almost invisible path nearly opposite from his position. After perhaps a minute two others followed him, unarmed and - so it seemed to Dirk - with the negligent air of gawkers everywhere. The mountainside on which he was hidden was already in shadow although the three climbing gyrda were still sunlit, so he wasted no time in beginning the long trek around to where the path lay fine as cobweb against the mountain. As he had anticipated the gyrda were back in their village and only starlight lit the path long before he reached it.

In many places it consisted of no more than a series of hand and foot holds, and his few days in the high country had by no means given him the true mountaineer's immunity to acrophobia. Hours elapsed between the time he reached the path and his last scramble to the summit.

He had naively imagined that the peak of one of the mountains which appeared so pointed when seen from below would actually be sharp, a column or pyramid of rock. In truth it was nearly flat, a table-top of red sandstone about fifty meters by a hundred with a barely perceptible tilt. In the center of this barren little plateau a single verticle stratum of rock rose to about the height of a man, as though a coin on edge had been embedded deeply in the stone. Only when the upper edge of this moved slightly did he realize that a living being was lying along it. He walked silently, crouching, but he had taken only a few steps when a calm voice said, "Walk wide of the pile of stones to your left."

He straightened up. The voice continued. "I am chained here. Who are you? I've been listening to your climbing half the night."

"The retreatant you saw being stained when you came to our academy six days ago, Master Aleksandr. I had thought to find Otho, Master Theophilus's Captive, here." He was close enough now to see the bearded, intense face well with the starlight full on it. Master Aleksandr was chained on his back, so that his face-when his neck was not craned to watch Dirk - was to the sky.

"You needn't worry about Otho; he is safe in his bed back at the academy, I trust. I was worried about you two though, when Master Theophilus told me you would be starting the Great Retreat that night. And so I followed you."

There was a faint clinking of iron as the Master shifted in what Dirk knew must be a torturously uncomfortable position before he continued.

"I had learned the gyrda were sending patrols closer than ever before to the academy. That was what I had come to tell Theophilus, but I wandered into one myself. Your name is Dirk, is it not? Theophilus mentioned it over dinner that night. Do you see how I am bound, Dirk?"

Dirk paused before answering uncertain of his vision in the dim light. "I believe a hole had been drilled through that outcrop and a chain connecting your wrists run through it. May I touch them?"

Master Aleksandr nodded.

"They are welded, sir."

"I know. Can you think of any way to cut them?"

"No, sir."

"Neither can I, and I've been trying for two days- ever since they put me up here. We'll have to part the stone instead. I assume you have the usual Retreat Knife. Try it on the stone."

For some minutes there was no sound save the gritty rasp of the steel edge on sandstone. At length Dirk reported, "It will cut a bit, but I think it would take a month to wear through from the edge to where the chain goes through; it must be sixty or seventy centimeters."

"Look there," the chained man exclaimed suddenly, "just on the horizon. Can you follow my line of sight, Dirk?"

Dirk asked doubtfully, "The blue star?"

Master Aleksandr laughed softly. "It's a planet, and it's what they've stuck me up here to see, so you can't blame me for getting a little excited when it rises. Technically I shouldn't even point it out to you until you finish Retreat."

"Now," his voice hardened, "feel the stone under me just above my waist. You may want to use the point of your knife. Feel a little crack?"

After a moment Dirk nodded.

"Good. I only saw it as a dark line when they were chaining me up here. Now I want you to go about ten centimeters up, under the small of my back, and try to gouge out a deep, narrow hole with your knife. I'll pull myself away from the rock as far as I can."

After Dirk had worked for about ten minutes, the Master asked almost casually, "Making any progress?"

"A little, Sir. Would it be impertinent to ask what it is we're trying to do?"

"Not at all. Have you ever read about Hannibal splitting stones with vinegar to clear the passes when he crossed the Alps? No, I forgot, you would never have heard of Hannibal. Anyway, he split the rocks with vinegar, according to Livy, and it's puzzled a lot of historians since that time."

Master Aleksandr fell silent; Dirk had already come to realize that his mind was beginning to wander under the strain of the past six days. He said softly, "Vinegar, sir?"

"Not surprising when you once come to understand that vinegar is a frequent mistranslation of the word used to designate the sour red wine that was the usual drink of soldiers - of all the common people in those days, in fact. The liquid an army would have in plenty. Handy, in other words." Holding himself tautly away from the stone and Dirk's hands, he was no longer looking at Dirk. His eyes seemed to be following the blue planet as it rose slowly above the horizon. "It's an old trick, much older than explosives as I've said. Drill a hole vertically or nearly so; a line of holes if the stone is thick. Drive in a peg of hard, dry wood - a tight wringing fit. Cut away the top of the peg until it's below the level of the stone. Do you understand so far?"

Dirk nodded.

"Pour in wine, vinegar, water, whatever you have. It will penetrate the cells of the wood and cause them to swell. The pressure is enormous: hundreds of kilos per square centimeter, depending on the wood. Stone has great compressive strength but not much tensile and it's brittle. It cracks."

IV

Dirk could not get the hole deep enough that night.

He went over the far side of the plateau (the descent was actually easier on that side) when a gyrdra from the village below came up with Master Aleksandr's morning

food and water. The sun stood squarely overhead when he finished pounding in the stake he had whittled from a limb of a dead tree half way down the mountain's slope.

"Near that little cairn of stones," Master Aleksandr directed him weakly, "you'll find a shallow dish with a little water in it. I saw the gyrda refill it this morning from the bottle he carried. Use that to pour on the peg. We'll need what's in the flask for ourselves. But be careful about getting it. Keep you eyes open.

Masters, as Dirk had learned at the academy, did not usually bother to warn mere scholars unless the dangers or discomforts at hand were very great. Every nerve was alert as he approached the cairn. "I see the dish, Master Aleksandr, and an egg-a rock pigeon's."

"The sun's high now. Look in shade."

Not until the third time Dirk ran his eyes over the ground did he see it, and then he was astonished that he had not seen it at once. It was a lizard, legless or nearly so, whose black body was nearly two meters long though no thicker than a man's wrist. Its absolute motionlessness as it lay in the shadow of a small ledge of rock had made him pass over it repeatedly.

"I've had it under control ever since they put me up here, but I doubt if I could hold it if you were to step on it or kick a stone at it. With the simpler animals reflex action is hard to stop.

"I know," Dirk said shortly. He was, after all, a Retreatant and not a freshman scholar. "Is it so dangerous then? I've never seen one like it before."

"It's a hamadryad. At least that's the best identification we've been able to make from the archives. It wouldn't be in your texts at the academy because it isn't one of our animals; this is one of the few the gyrda seem to be responsible for."

"I don't understand this," Dirk said slowly as he trickled water from the hamadryad's dish into the hole above the peg top. "It seems to be the sort of thing we were always told would be explained when we had made our Great Retreat. Weren't all the animals from the Motherworld brought in the arcship? I've sometimes wondered if the instructors weren't holding something back."

"There's no secret. Its just that there are so many things for an undergraduate to learn about our own world-Mars-that we try to discourage you from getting started on the endless succession of inquiries about the Motherworld until we're certain we're not wasting our time on someone who'll spend the rest of his life planting maguey. You know at least that mankind did not originate on this planet, judging from what you've just said. Some of the boys who come to the academy from

farms don't even seem to realize that."

With sudden insight Dirk realized that Master Aleksandr was trying to spare them both at least part of the agony of suspense they must suffer during the hours of waiting for the moisture to penetrate the dense wood of the peg, but he did not care. The chance to hear a Master speak at length about the tangled paths of the lost race of Man had never before come to him. And if he failed his retreat by capture or death, it would never come again.

"I have heard it," he said cautiously. "My father used to say too that if you looked into the sky at night you could see the Motherworld, but I thought it was just a fable, like saying you could hear the bees of summer when you put a hollowed out gourd to your ear on a winter evening."

"Could your father read, Dirk?"

"He used to say he could, a little. I don't really think so."

"Well, your great-grandfathers-all of them-were among the best educated men on the Motherworld. I can say that without knowing your family at all, because its true of every human being on Mars. Besides the language and literature they knew a good deal about every science and each of them was expert in at least two. Or they wouldn't have been allowed to come. When the Mars stations were abandoned by the Motherworld they found themselves at the edge of starvation on a world where the maximum exertions of every member of the community were barely able to support life.

"But if they knew all those things..." Dirk began weakly.

"Most of it wasn't worth a handful of sand then. They couldn't afford mathematics or astronomy or a lot of the other sciences that were of no immediate value in the production of food. Then there were a lot of disciplines that lost their utility when their equipment wore out, because there was no material for replacements except native iron and what could be salvaged from the things previously junked. And there was precious little energy to smelt and work either of them. They had nuclear physicists, but what good were they when Mars's fissionables had turned to lead eons ago?" Master Aleksandr shook his head as though to clear it. "Dirk, can you give me a drink from your flask? I'm getting very dry."

Dirk tilted the flask up, noticing as he did it how drawn the older man's face looked and the way he took only one swallow of water.

Master Aleksandr began again, "That's the

Motherworld, that you saw last night. That blue star. The gyrda chained me up so I would have to watch it all night. I imagine they've done this to quite a few people who didn't have the least idea of what it was they were supposed to be seeing."

"I still don't understand," Dirk said.

"The life sciences remained. In fact, that's us. Metallurgy sunk back to blacksmithing, but botany and zoology and biology--the whole study of the biosphere--were needed as never before, as well as geology for the location of water and what minerals there were. Fortunately, before the Motherworld abandoned us an attempt had been made to transfer a viable desert ecology from there. That's how we got most of the plants we have, as well as the birds and mammals. But not all the Motherworld's fauna were transferred as you seem to believe. A great many could not possibly have lived here, and a great many others, like the hamadryad, were just not wanted.

"You said the hamadryad was one of the gyrda's animals. I don't follow that; and why did they put it up here with you?"

"As a watchdog. And for most of their prisoners--probably everyone they had before myself--he made an ideal guard. Both frightening and genuinely dangerous. He needs very little water and food, and he couldn't leave the plateau even if he wanted to; he couldn't make some of the climbs. Of course he has to crawl into a crevice shortly after the sun sets to keep from freezing, but I doubt if the other prisoners ever realized that."

"I didn't find it very frightening," Dirk remarked.

"If you had been a prisoner they'd have let you see him kill a wolf before they chained you up. Now look behind you."

Turning, Dirk saw the hamadryad some three meters behind him with half its body lifted from the ground and erect as a candle. Its neck had spread and flattened into a shape undescribably sinister. Its gaze was fixed not upon himself but Master Aleksandr with an expression both attentive and, in an utterly alien fashion, intelligent.

"They call them cobra de capello on the Motherworld," Aleksandr said. 'Snakes of the cape.' The gyrda studied the old records and then rearranged the DNA of some harmless reptile to produce it. Clever of them, wasn't it?

"Now see if there's a new crack in this rock. I think I just heard something."

V

"The mountains are mice," old Theophilus said ruminatively. "Yes, I believe I did tell your class something like that once. I meant to allude to mice as experimental animals, of course; the mountains have been injected with all the viruses and vaccines."

Dirk was scratching the spot his on his arm which he had, on Master Theophilus's explicit order, swabbed with Otho's dye remover. It was beginning to itch.

"Like the gyrda?" he asked.

"Yes. The gyrda were devised on the Motherworld to be the permanent settlers of Mars while our forefathers were serving as investigators and observers. Couples who desperately needed money, as well as a few who felt they were advancing the human race, submitted to having their reproductive cells mutated. It seems strange to us who think only of the richness of the old Motherworld, Dirk, but there were many families there as poor as your own."

They were perhaps two kilometers from the academy, where Aleksandr (in defiance of the normal rule of Retreat) had arranged a night meeting between Dirk and Master Theophilus. To Dirk's surprise his old teacher had brought an unrepentant Otho with him.

"But they got along so well they want to force us to go back to the Motherworld, Sir? That's what Master Aleksandr says. Don't they know we'd do it anyway if we could?"

"They want us to try a little harder." Otho put in.

"The wise men who composed the gyrda left out the heart," Theophilus said slowly. "They are quick and clever with tools and more fit for Mars than men are, but they have no hearts. Did you know, Dirk, that Aleksandr's name means 'Defender of Men?' And mine is 'Dear to God;' we are descended from the Russian and the Greek contingents originally, I suppose. That was the sort of thing that was forgotten the first time."

"This spot on my arm is burning." Dirk complained suddenly.

Otho said bluntly. "That liquid is a contact poison, my lord. We give it to every retreatant. If you'd smeared yourself all over as I told you, it would have killed you."

"Our society is too poor to afford cheating in its upper ranks," Theophilus said gently. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, but I'm not sure I can accept as easily the idea of another attempt to fit humanity to Mars. You implied that in what you said a moment ago, you know, Sir."

"Would you accept it if the changed men were to be no less human than you are, Dirk?"

As the two of them were walking back to the academy Otho chuckled. "No less human than he is himself!" Master Theophilus reminded him tartly that a fool should not speak.

The End



For reasons that I have never understood, this appeared in New Worlds, a radical and arty -- almost an underground -- SF magazine that Michael Moorcock was editing in London. I subscribed, and found it (like other such magazines) hugely confident of what it hated and quite unable to describe what it liked and was willing to support. It may very well be that Moorcock accepted "The Green Wall Said" simply as a personal favor, the instincts of nihilists being infinitely superior to their opinions.

- Gene Wolfe

The Green Wall Said

The room was half a dome, the sides sloping gently around the floor until they were cut off sharply by a vertical, luminous wall of iridescent green. The wall said

THIS IS A MEETING

while the five people in the five free-form, off-white seats looked at it blankly.

A SYMPOSIUM

The man on the left (he wore a threadbare suit with wide lapels) stood half up, and then feeling the weakness of his legs and the whirling in his skull sank back into his chair. The chair was cool and smooth and soft, like the hide of a snake who has just changed his skin under a derelict refrigerator.

CALL THIS A COUNCIL

Next to him a man in dull armour took off his helmet and laid it carefully between his knees as though he were afraid it might break. It was of steel, drably painted and slightly dented. The wall said in large, white, block capitals

YOU WILL NOT BE HARMED

and in the centre of the group a woman in flowing robes straightened in her seat and then bent, eyes closed, over her folded hands.

ARE YOU AFRAID

Beside her a man in filthy khaki shorts looked at his neighbour in un-ironed grey. He said, "My clinic...Jesus Christ...What's happened? Where's the bleeding clinic?"

NOTHING WILL HARM YOU

The man in grey: "I go in th' new wing, over the

dinin' hall." He did not seem to realize yet that he was away from his accustomed surroundings. A tape sewn to his shapeless blouse read 223-850-14 Wilson.

LET US EXPLAIN

On the other side of the robed woman the man in armour swore vilely. "This is a flyin' saucer! That's what it is, a ...flyin' saucer." He jumped to his feet, reeled, but managed to stay upright. The red cross on his arm seemed brilliant against the textile-enclosed helicopter armour he wore.

WE ARE AN ANCIENT RACE

The man in the business suit said to the wall, "I've got six kids; won't you let me out of here? Who'll take care of them? Oh God!" He fumbled a cheap cotton handkerchief out of his pocket and blew his nose.

OUR LAWS ARE JUST

The man in shorts said, half to the robed woman and half to himself, "I wonder if the abos will miss me...I'll miss them, all right. You're a sister, aren't you? I suppose I'm C. of E..."

The woman answered stiffly, "I am Sister Mary Nathaniel of Sacred Heart Orphanage." The wooden beads dangling from her waist rattled faintly as she moved.

YOU MAY DEPEND UPON US

"It is! It's a flying saucer!" the helicopter rescue man shouted. He was still standing. "I'm telling you, I remember it all now. We was over Dak Pek..." The steel-backed ceramic plates rustled heavily.

TO ALWAYS FUNCTION RATIONALLY

"I wonder what they want with us," the man in shorts said. "Biological specimens, I suppose. Flamin' well pickle us in formaldehyde or whatever they use. Perhaps stick us on cards with pins, eh?"

WE HAD BEGUN OUR

From the left, beyond the soldier's empty chair: "They must be a great deal more advanced than we are. You don't think they might want us for slaves, do you?"

EVOLUTION AS

The man in shorts said, "I doubt it. We probably can't even breathe the same mixture of gases they do. Come to think of it, we're a poor lot for specimens too. Not diverse."

INTELLIGENT BEINGS

The soldier asked, "Whadaya mean?"

DURING YOUR PLANET'S

"Well, we haven't any children among us, or any old people, and we just missed by one individual being all the same sex. Come to think of it..."

CARBONIFEROUS AGE

"We all speak English," the nun said in her dry voice. "Are you yourself British, by the way?"

WE NEED

"No. Aussie."

INFORMATION A TECHNIQUE

"It could be a linguistic grouping then, or possibly racial, could it not?" The printing on the wall pulsed brighter than before.

WE NEED YOUR SECRET

The man in grey said, as though he had made a profound deduction, "I bet it's for a zoo." He stood up and joined the soldier, and after a moment the man in the suit rose as well, the three of them forming a group in front of the nun and the man in shorts.

IF WE ARE TO

"Could it be technological? I'm a physician after all. You said you were attached to an orphanage?"

SURVIVE LONGER

"I teach first and second grades there, doctor. I've a Master's in Education, if that makes any difference. Couldn't it be religious groupings? Are any of us Jewish, for example?"

AS A RACE

The man in the suit said, "I am, and I'm an accountant."

BECAUSE WE CANNOT AS ALL OF

The soldier shrugged. "I'm a Baptist, I guess, but I don't think that's it. And I'm just an aid man and couldn't tell them anything the doc here couldn't." He looked at the man in grey. "What're you? A safecracker?"

YOU DO SACRIFICE

The prisoner did not seem to resent his remark, "I'm a Seventh Day Adventist," he said. "But only since I been in. I mean, not on the outside. What I was put away for, I used to stick up gas stations."

AS INDIVIDUALS ALL

"Maybe it's just anyone and there's no plan at all—just whoever was loose and handy." It was the man in the suit.

OUR LIVES FOR THE KIND

The half-hemisphere rocked five degrees, then straightened. They gripped the seats to steady themselves, too engrossed to give it further attention.

AND NOW OUR SPRINGS

"There must be a pattern," the doctor said. He pointed towards the accountant. "Where are you from?"

OF BEING FAIL

"Chicago." The nun said, "Pittsburgh"; the prisoner, "Omaha"; the soldier, "Chicago too, flyin' out of Da Nang."

HOW DO YOU DO IT

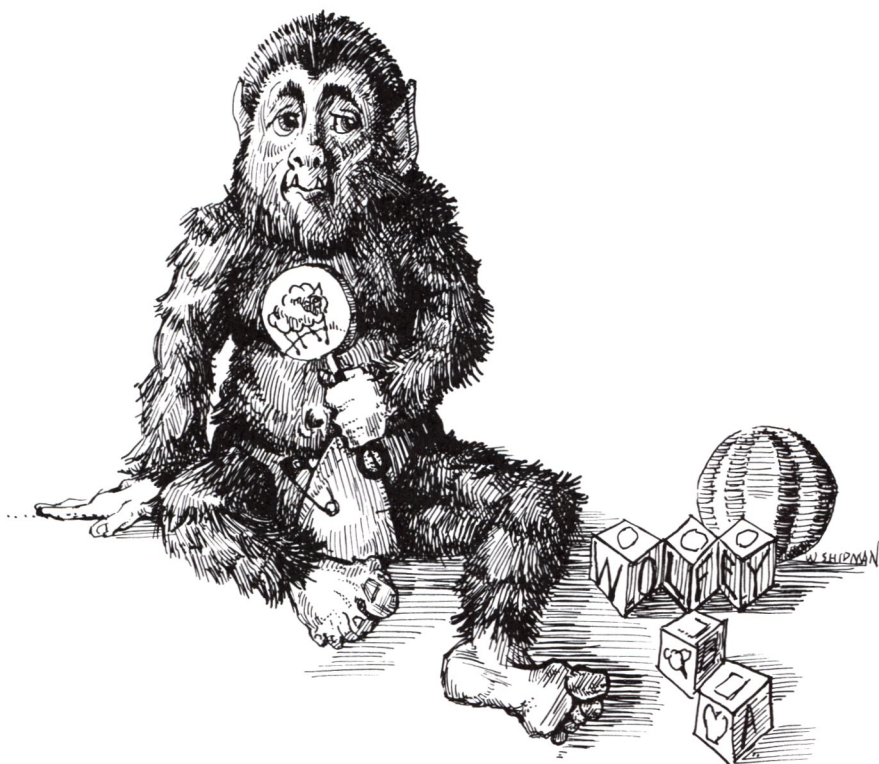
The lettering blinked on and off rapidly now, like an

advertising sign:

HOW DO YOU DO IT - DO YOU DO IT

"I wonder if they got cancer research here too," the prisoner said.

The End



I was a reader of mysteries and crime stories before I ever heard of Science Fiction, and I've continued to read them -- anyone who reads only one kind of fiction is making a mistake, I think. From time to time I can't resist the impulse to write them as well. If you enjoy this little story, I hope you'll try my mystery, Pandora by Holly Hollander.

- Gene Wolfe

Screen Test

A mist of rain covered everything, dripped from the beards of the two pedestrian sages and from the horns and muzzle of the ox ridden by the third. At either side gorgeously irregular cliffs sprouted flat-topped pine trees. A stag with fantastic antlers sprang from a thicket near the road.

"If you stand well back from the screen and look carefully," the old woman said in her stiff, yellowed whisper, "you may be able to see the rain dragon in the clouds. The dragon was a water symbol to the ancient Chinese, of course.

"Before I had my eye operation I used to hope that afterward I would be able, in a good light, to see the dragon again."

The dark lenses of her spectacles were directed seven inches to the left of the face of the man she addressed.

"It certainly looks to be genuine T'ang," he said. "Don't you think so Emile?"

The expert on Far Eastern art nodded. He had gone to his knees on the thick carpet in order to inspect the screen inch by inch with his huge, brass-framed magnifying glass.

"Clara," the old woman demanded petulantly, "did you hang up the gentlemen's coats?"

From the back of the room, where the pretty, awkward maid had been fidgeting in her uniform, came a subdued, "Yes'm! When they first come in I did, Miss Ambrose."

"Then get out of here. This is none of your affair. Make us some tea."

The maid hurried out. Miss Ambrose's buyer, heavily prosperous and middle-aged, said, "Attractive girl."

"Impossible!" The old woman fairly spat the word. "They're all of them impossible these days, Mr. Sawyer. Decent help is simply not to be had. They came out of the tenements, where no one does anything but cash welfare checks and beat the children. This is the third girl I've had this year. At least this one doesn't bring those oily, impudent young loungers into my kitchen."

Mr. Sawyer was looking back at the T'ang screen again. "You said it was called--"

"Peregrination of Three Philosophers. It is supposed to be by Kou Yuan-liang - at least that's what a committee of experts my father had in decided in 1938. Being unfinished, it is unsigned, of course."

"I noticed the unpainted spot."

"The lower left corner," the old woman's tone was momentarily vague. "Underneath the little waterfall, isn't it? I haven't seen it for eight years now, Mr. Sawyer, so you can understand how much good it is to me."

"Tea," the maid said, placing a tray in the old woman's lap. Liver-spotted fingers groped for the cup.

"Thank you. Mr. Sawyer, you must excuse me if I have Clara serve you. In times past I would have poured for you myself. Anyway, that corner is unfinished. Also there is no design on the reverse, as is customary with these screens."

The story is that it was Kou Yuan-liang's last piece. He died before finishing it, and the prince for whom it was intended thought so highly of him that he ordered it to be left exactly as it was when Kou died. The back designs were often done by an inferior hand, you know. An apprentice."

The man called Emile stood up. "It's authentic T'ang, Mr. Sawyer," he said in a soft, clotting voice. "Whether or not it's Kou Yuan-liang's is a matter of opinion. Certainly the style is his and the period's right."

Mr. Sawyer said, "You think three thousand--" letting it hang in the air.

Emile shrugged. "I've seen worse in the Louvre. A piece like this is worth what someone will pay."

"I'll take it." Mr. Sawyer was suddenly businesslike. "You will want a certified check, I believe you said, Miss Ambrose. You'll keep the screen for me while I obtain one?"

"There was another buyer who wanted to see it." The old woman sounded unhappy.

"I'll give you a ten percent deposit, of course. Cash." Mr. Sawyer took a long leather billfold from the

breast pocket of his coat and began counting out the money.

"You'll want to mark the screen," the old woman said, "so you can be certain you're getting what you've paid for." Mr. Sawyer started to protest but she dismissed his objections with a gesture. "Lay your money there on the end table by the telephone and put your signature on the back of the screen somewhere. Then you'll be sure. Clara, hold the screen for Mr. Sawyer and let him write his name."

For a few seconds the room was quiet except for the stiff rustle of the buyer's pen point on silk.

"There!" Miss Ambrose chaffed her hands together, making a similar shuffling sound. "Certainty's better than trust, Mr. Sawyer. When will I see you tomorrow?"

"After the banks open. Say about eleven?"

"That will be convenient. Get the gentlemen their coats, Clara."

The old woman rose unsteadily as the men left, and by the time the maid returned from seeing them to the hall she was fingering the pile of bills on the end table. Her dark glasses had been laid aside; the eyes she turned toward Clara were bright blue and snapping as she rifled the crisp paper.

"Because I told you I couldn't stand having people think I was selling because I needed the money, did you think I'd really be blind, young woman? Where is it?"

The maid took a nervous step backward. "Where is what, Miss Ambrose?"

"The fifty dollars. There's only two hundred and fifty here. Five fifty dollar bills. Where is the other? To be more precise, where did you hide the top bill you slipped off the stack?"

"Ma'am, I didn't!"

"Of course you did." The old woman's hand was poised over the telephone receiver. "You picked it up when you went to assist Mr. Sawyer with the screen, and used the screen to cover yourself while you hid the money."

"Mr. Sawyer might have made a mistake," the girl said weakly.

"Oh, nonsense. Next you'll be telling me that this was the first thing you ever stole; do you think I've never had a thieving servant before? Now listen to me: fifty dollars is grand larceny. I fully intend to call the police in five minutes, unless--"

"Unless, ma'am?" The maid was white.

"Unless you can examine that screen and in five minutes see something that fellow Emile didn't in forty-five. That business you do with your lips is good, by the way. Very artistic. You have five minutes exactly, by my lapel watch."

The girl stooped and bobbed her head, examining the central silk panel with her eyes no more than an inch from the fabric, then rose and ducked behind the screen to stare at the reverse with equal care.

"You have thirty-five more seconds."

"Miss Ambrose, it's double."

"Yes?"

"There's two pieces of silk. But the design, the picture, shows so well through the back that it must be on that piece too. Looking at the front you can't notice it, because it's just behind the other and everything's all misty with the rain anyway."

"You take the frame apart by pulling out those little pegs at the corners. Do it, but be careful of the silk."

The girl separated the two panels reverently, then stared. "They're just alike!"

"That Emile wouldn't think so. The one in back with Mr. Sawyer's name on it was done by a talented Italian gentleman. It's the third he's made for me and I must say he gets better each time."

The girl's eyes shone with admiration. "You don't think Mr. Sawyer will notice?"

"With his signature on the back? Not in a thousand years. And if that tame expert of his should see it again he'll think he was fooled the first time and keep his peace. Now give me back the fifty dollar bill you took and I'll explain to you how you can make a great deal more than that working for me."

Clara twitched up the hem of her skirt absently. "You know, that really was the first thing I ever took, not counting things from stores. The first money."

"Well, give it back," Miss Ambrose said, "and it won't be the last. As I told Mr. Sawyer good help is hard to find these days."

The End

My father taught me to shoot when I was twelve; I still have the gun he bought me, a High Standard HD Military. Somewhat later, as those of you who have read my previous book from United Mythologies know, I served in the infantry in Korea. Most writer's, including most mystery writers, seem never to have fired a shot. (There are moments when I'm tempted to believe that most have never been in a fistfight, either.) This is one of a small group of stories in which I tried to treat guns realistically -- the only one that sold.

- Gene Wolfe

Volksweapon

Centered in the light of his electric torch, the girl lay among last year's leaves with her skirt hiked past plump, white thighs.

Wilt Smythe, game warden, had run down the road to her, leaving the moon-faced young man who had apparently been her escort as soon as he had examined his wound, fearing that the girl might be more seriously hurt—perhaps dying. But she was dead.

Three small, powder-rimmed bullet holes were almost lost in her blond hair.

None had bled much, and none of the bullets had forced its way through her skull to make a messy exit wound, but they had penetrated the brain, and been as deadly to her as big game slugs or artillery shells might have been.

"Who are you?" the boy said behind him.

"I'm a game warden. What went on here?"

The boy seemed in better control of himself now than he had been a few minutes ago, although he still clutched his bleeding side and his breath came in gasps.

"Judy and I came out here to park - you know. Then all of the sudden there was this fellow at Judy's window with a gun. It's her car, so she was driving. He said something, and she kind of screamed and tramped on the accelerator. I guess she was trying to turn the car around, but she dropped one wheel off into the ditch. You can't get it out, I just tried."

"I know. I heard the motor roaring as I came up. Take it easy now, son, and talk slow."

"Anyway, I jumped out of the door on my side and ran around the front of the car at him and he shot me. It

was just like somebody had kicked the legs out from under me. I must have passed out, because when I woke up Judy was like this and he was gone."

"Did you get a look at him? Could you describe him at all?"

Although he was obviously in pain, the boy shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't get a good look. About my age, I guess. Maybe a little shorter than I am."

"Have you any idea of how long you were unconscious?" A puff of warm night wind touched the game warden's cheek, somehow hinting of a summer thunder storm to come.

"I don't think for long. Maybe five or ten minutes."

"Stay here."

Before the wounded boy could protest, Wilt Smythe had brushed past him, running with long smooth strides down the little used road until he reached the lake and the cluster of weekend cottages which were the reason for the road's existence. The moonlit expanse of the lake was unmarked by the wake of any boat.

Hurriedly he shook the doors of the cottages, but all were closed and he saw no signs of violent entry. Running again, he returned to the boy, having been gone no more than five minutes in all.

"Nobody down there to rouse," he said, "You'll have to wait here while I hike to the highway and flag down a motorist. You're not likely to go into shock this late, but just to be safe I want you to get into the car. Sit in back, or if you can, lie down on the seat and cover yourself up."

Like a hound loath to leave a fresh scent, Smythe made a last cast around the girl's body before he left.

The fallen leaves and dry soil held no footprints, not even the girl's or his own.

He was accustomed to traveling swiftly on his own legs and he did so now, trotting easily and almost silently as he played his light over the road before him. He was a good three-quarters of a mile from the little car and the boy who held a sodden handkerchief to his side, when the lane made an abrupt turn and he saw the glimmer of lights through the trees. Acting instinctively, he switched off his electric torch.

The men with the lights were making no effort to conceal themselves and carried no rifles. Even before he could see their faces the murmur of their voices told him that one was young and the other older, and a moment later he recognized them.

Both were enthusiastic hunters, and he had recently come to suspect that neither was letting the game laws interfere too much with his sport. Now they were so deep in some discussion that he was able to come almost

within touching distance before either noticed him.

Before they had time to ask questions of their own, Smythe snapped, "How long have you too been standing here?"

The older, a lanky man whose cheeks had been deeply pitted by some skin disorder, said, "I've been here about a quarter hour, Warden. Marty just come up. You ain't hear two hounds after a coon, have you?"

"Coon's a varmint in this state, Warden. No license and no season. You know that."

The younger man, Martin, put in, "Just runnin' the dogs, really. You can see we haven't got no guns. Only we lost them dogs somewhere around the old timber trail. We each made a big circle, him east and me west, but couldn't either of us get a smell. I think them dogs have gone home."

"In the fifteen minutes you've been here, then," Smythe addressed the older man, "has anyone come down this road?"

"Nope, not a soul. What's the matter, Warden? Something wrong?"

"There's been a rape and a killing. You come with me. I think the three of us ought to be able to lift the front wheel of a Volkswagen out of a ditch."

The wounded boy was jackknifed into the rear seat of the little car when they arrived, and his pale, sweating face told plainly of the further loss of blood he had suffered while the game warden had been away.

They did not try to move him before the three of them by main strength heaved the front end back up onto the road. While the warden was starting the engine and making a U turn in the narrow confines of the road, both hunters hastened over to peer with morbid curiosity at the silent, huddled figure on the leaves.

Rolling down the window, the game warden yelled back to them, "Come on, you two. You're going into town with us."

"Look here, Warden." It was Martin, holding out a shiny object not much bigger than a pack of cigarettes. "This was laying right along side of her. It was mostly under some sticks and trash, but I seen it right away."

He displayed his find proudly, illuminating it with the lantern he held in his other hand. It was a tiny chrome plated automatic of Belgian make.

"I suppose you've ruined any finger-prints that might have been on it." Using the tips of his fingers Smythe picked up the little weapon by the trigger guard and dropped it into one of the pockets of his khaki shirt.

The older hunter asked, "Shouldn't one of us stay here with the girl?"

"No. You sit beside me here in front. Martin, you

get in back and do anything you can for that fellow. You got enough room back there?"

"Sure, I'll just squeeze in on the floor here. Kinda cramped, but I'll make it."

The boy said weakly, "Somebody ought to stay with Judy."

"That's out." Smythe gunned the little car's engine. "And there sure isn't room to take her with us, not even if we could disturb the body." Heavily laden and driven at high speed, the VW jolted abominably on the uneven road.

"You think Marty or me did this, don't you?" the older hunter asked.

"You said no one came down the road, and there wasn't anyone in the summer cabins or out on the lake. The man who did this could have been on foot and cut through the woods without meeting either you or Martin or me—Martin and I both seem to have been wandering around not too far off when this thing happened, but I don't think it's likely. Do you?"

"Well, I feel sorry for the girl."

"She was one of those college girls," Martin put in. "I didn't know her, but I've seen her around town."

"She was wearing engagement and wedding rings," the game warden said. Addressing the wounded boy in back, he asked, "You weren't her husband, were you, son?"

The car swung on to the paved state highway to town and picked up speed as the boy told them the girl's husband had been an Air Force officer stationed in Europe and it was none of their damned business.

Martin guffawed and the men in front told him to shut up.

At the hospital a pair of efficient young men in white pulled the boy out of the car and hustled him on a stretcher to an emergency room for a blood transfusion. The game warden spoke grimly into a telephone and the two hunters leaned against a wall in the uncomfortable positions of men who feel they ought to be doing something without knowing what it is they ought to do.

"The police will be coming for him soon," Wilt Smythe said when he had finished his call. "They'll want to talk to us too, so we'd better wait right here."

Surprisingly, Martin was the first to grasp the implications of what he had said. "You mean he done it?"

The game warden nodded.

"Well, he didn't shoot himself, did he?" the older hunter asked.

"I doubt it. Did you happen by any chance to notice the markings on that gun?"

"Sure," the hunter said. "Some kind of foreign

writing."

"French. Those little automatics are imported into this country by the thousand, but the ones produced to send here are stamped in English. This one," Smythe tapped his pocket, "was intended for sale in Europe. Those Air Force men can always hitch a ride back home on a military plane when they get a leave, and I think we'll find out eventually that the girl's husband bought this gun for her in Europe and gave it to her to protect herself with.

"I suppose that she and that fellow were driving out to one of the summer cottages on the lake - maybe not for the reasons you would think. She dropped that wheel into the ditch some way - maybe he was bothering her. When they got out to look at it he attacked her. When it was over he let her up and let her get back into the car, figuring she'd be too ashamed to tell anybody and that was his big mistake. She had that little gun; probably it was either in her purse or the map compartment of the car.

"And she was mad enough to shoot him with it. Those twenty-five's don't have any punch to speak of, though, and since all the bullet did was rip a furrow in his belly muscles he was able to wrestle the gun away from her and kill her with it.

"The first thing that made me wonder about him was when he told me he'd been knocked cold for five minutes when he was shot. Of course a man might faint with fright, even if the bullet he was hit with didn't have much shock power, but he didn't look that type; and although he was bleeding pretty bad there wasn't any blood where he might have been lying that long."

Martin said wonderingly, "Then you knew all along, huh?" An ambulance came clanging up to the emergency entrance and there was a rush of interns through the corridor.

"No, I straightened out a lot of it on the drive in. Of course the main thing was your finding that gun in the leaves. I had looked all around the girl before, and I knew good and well there wasn't any chrome plated gun there then. He'd had it in his pocket when he talked to me the first time of course, and he got scared that it would be found on him."

"Well," the older, hunter said slowly, "if you knew it wasn't us, I still don't think it was right for you to take us with you like you did. One of us could at least have stayed with the body until the police came."

"In the first place," the game warden said, "the police wouldn't want anybody rooting around after more evidence before they got there. In the second, somebody's been jacklighting deer out there, and I've

got kind of interested in that. You know how it goes, don't you? The jacklighter shines a lamp or the headlights of a car into the woods and kind of hypnotizes the deer. Since the deer's eyes reflect the light, your poacher has a perfect target; the range is short and the deer's not moving. Usually your jacklighter uses a car and you can stop him on the road with the carcass in his trunk.

"Recently, though, there's been two men working together and packing the deer out on foot, and that's a lot harder to catch. Now any hunter'll tell you a rifle gets in a man's way a good deal when he's trying to tote a deer carcass, but a jacklighter doesn't really need one—he can use something a good bit handier."

With a movement almost as deft as that of a magician taking an egg from a child's ear, the game warden thrust his hand into the side pocket of the hunter's coat and came up with a stubby, two-barreled pistol.

"A three-fifty-seven derringer," Smythe commented dryly. "Plenty of punch for head shots on deer at short range, and weighs less than a pound."

The hunter's face flushed, making the pits in his cheeks more apparent than ever. "Listen here, Warden. Just my having that in my pocket ain't proof of killing deer with it. You take me to court with that and they'll laugh at you."

"That's right," Wilt Smythe agreed, "but here in town," he tapped the white hospital wall significantly, "having it in your pocket is carrying a concealed weapon."

"Now I suppose this gun cost you about thirty or forty dollars, which is just about what a judge would fine you for first offence poaching. I think I'll just keep it and drop it in the lake the next time I'm out there. We'll call that square."

Smythe looked at the chunky little gun reflectively. "She'd have let daylight into him with this. I wish I could have given it to her."

The End

But for that last sentence of Gene's introduction to "Volksweapon" this collection would have ended here. 'Could there be unpublished stories lost in Gene's files?', I wondered. That thought followed me around for days until eventually I took up pen and paper and decided to settle the matter once and for all.

Yes, Gene replied, he did have a pair of stories tucked away.

Could I have them for the collection?

To my delight Gene's answer was once again in the affirmative, and a short while later the following arrived in my letter box. I take great pleasure in being able to offer them to you for the first time anywhere.

- Dan Knight

The Largest Luger

Pitney Philips maintained a small office in an old building in San Antonio -- mostly, he said, in order to have a quiet place to read. There were no guns in it, because Philips knew that guns attract burglars like sorghum draws flies; but there were pictures of guns, and of people holding guns, and of factories that make or made them, so thick on all four walls that they were like a black-and-white and sepia wallpaper; and Philips' desk was an oak-topped veteran that knew more of spurred heels and Peacemaker cylinders than of business machines.

"You're not a collector," one of his visitors (who was himself a well-known collector) said. The visitor's name was Harlan Morris, and he was a quiet, scholarly-looking man who wore thick glasses and an expensive suit.

"Nope," Philips admitted affably. "It would get in the way of my ethics."

"And you're not a dealer?" the other visitor asked. "I'd heard you were." He was a dealer himself, Orville Reuben, a big man with a big, pale face and big, soft hands.

Philips, who had just shaken one of them, wiped the palm of his own surreptitiously on his jeans. "I've got a Federal Dealers License for my own convenience," he said in his even voice, "but I don't do a lot of sellin' -- or a lot of buyin', either. That would get in the way of my ethics, too. Let's see the pistol."

Reuben, who was holding a black leather carrying case in his lap, shook his head doubtfully. "This will be one of the largest sales I've ever handled, and Mr.

Morris insists not only that he has to have your opinion, but that I have to pay your fee -- which is ten times what it should be, if you want my opinion. Before I commit myself to it, I'd like to know a lot more about your qualifications."

"Then go away," Philips said, "and come back when you've found out."

"I meant--"

"If you won't trust what your customer's told you, why should you trust what I say, tootin' my own horn?"

Morris took the black case from Reuben's lap and laid it on the desk. "That's enough of that," he said. "Mr. Philips is one of the best -- probably the best -- known experts in the southwest. You've certainly heard of him in Philadelphia, no matter what you say. On a transaction as important as this I want the gun certified by him -- to silence the blowhards who call anything they haven't got themselves faked if for no other reason."

There was a silence, terminated by Philips asking, "We gettin' down to business now? What is it?"

Reuben leaned forward. "It's an eleven millimeter DWM. A new one."

Philip's thin gray eyebrows shot upward and stayed there.

"Right. As you probably know, they were made for the Army tests of nineteen-oh-seven--"

Morris interrupted. "What we call the Luger. The pistol designed--" Philips gestured them both to silence. "Designed by a German named Georg Luger and a man named Hugo Borchardt that everybody thinks was German too but was really a Connecticut yankee. He got the idea for the strongest automatic pistol action anybody'd ever built. Right around the turn of the century, the U.S. Army decided it wanted a new handgun, and it invited all comers to submit, only sayin' that everythin' had to be forty-five caliber. Colt submitted the gun that became the Model Nineteen-eleven, the winner and still the sidearm of the American Army. Savage submitted its own ten shot design, and Deutsche Waffen und Mutionsfabriken, who were already makin' the Borchardt-Luger design in seven point sixty-five millimeter and nine millimeter, scaled up their gun to take the cartridge we call the forty-five ACP, and sent eight of 'em over for the Army's tests."

"If I remember right," Philips tilted back his chair and glanced at the ceiling, "they were serial numbered one through eight. Whether that's right or not, only two, number two and number three, are known to exist. They think the soldiers that did the testin' stole the rest of them."

Reuben leaned forward, smiling; he tapped the top of the black case on the desk. "You're quite correct," he said. "Or at least you were until I found this in an old footlocker in the attic of an old lady who'd been the stepdaughter of one of those soldiers. This is number seven."

"The two known to exist," Philips continued as though he had not heard him, "are both in this country in the hands of different collectors. To the best of my knowledge neither's for sale."

"What would they be worth?" Morris asked.

Philips shrugged. "Nobody can tell you that. When somethin's one or two of a kind--"

"Three," said Reuben.

"It's worth what somebody will pay. I'd say you could pretty easily find a hundred people who'd pay as much for one of those guns as would buy you a real nice house, and a lot, and a couple of good cars to go in the garage. But beyond that, I couldn't say."

"I'm paying more than that," Morris told him, "and from the way Lugers have been appreciating recently I don't think I'll lose money if I ever decide to sell it."

"Well, let's see it," Philips said.

Somewhat reluctantly, Reuben opened the case.

To Philips, long accustomed to standard Lugers, the big blue-black gun seemed oddly proportioned, like a heavyweight climbing into the ring after a middleweight preliminary bout. Yet it possessed a brutal grace.

"Check it over," Reuben exulted. "The Army buried them in the sand to jam the action, but it's still almost like new." He touched one sharply checkered grip panel with a thick white finger. "That checkering's as sharp today as the day it was done, and that wood's Circassian walnut. Look at the finish of the milled parts, the polish; German craftsmanship was the envy of the world in those days."

Philips picked the gun up; it did appear to have the old German hand finish, and the checkering on the grips felt as sharp as file teeth. He took out the magazine and lifted the toggle far enough to make sure there was no cartridge in the chamber.

"Well?" Reuben said.

Philips shrugged. "I can't tell you a thing after just lookin' at it like this. I'll have to have it for several hours so I can fieldstrip it and look it over good with my glass and microscope. Also I'll have to make three or four phone calls. A couple across the Atlantic."

Morris asked, "Do you want us to leave it with you?"

Philips glanced at his watch. "I'd rather not. It's

nine in Germany, and I don't want to keep somethin' like this overnight. Can you bring it back in the mornin'?"

Morris nodded. "I've promised Mr. Reuben dinner at my place before he goes back to his hotel. Perhaps he'll let me keep the gun for him in my safe."

"If you'll take responsibility for it," Reuben said.

"Of course."

Philips pushed the Luger's magazine back into the grip and returned the gun to the black case.

Reuben snapped it shut and rose. "We ought to have it back to you around ten tomorrow morning."

* * * * *

When Philips had closed the door behind them, he sniffed his fingers thoughtfully, shrugged, and locked his desk. The Mexican newsboy smiled at his expression when he bought the Light, and he told the boy solemnly, "About nineteen thirty-five I could pick up half a dozen Lugers in any town in the state for fifteen dollars a head. They'd shove 'em into your hand and thank you for takin' 'em' afterwards. You won't ever see that, son. Plain junk's bringin' a couple hundred dollars today."

Then he went home to dinner and bed.

He did not sleep long, however, although he had retired early. An old friend, Captain Kyle Davis of the San Antonio Police Department, woke him by kicking his door. "I phoned, Pit, but you didn't answer. I would've sent somebody over to fetch you only I knew damned well that they'd come back and tell me you weren't at home because they'd never made enough racket. You know a Orville Reuben?"

"Am I goin' to have to get dressed for this?"

The captain nodded.

"Then you come in here and talk to me while I get my britches on."

The captain followed Philips through two cluttered rooms to his bedroom. The house was small and old, an abode relic in a Mexican neighborhood where most other houses were similar relics. "Why the hell do you live here, Pit?"

Philips took a clean blue shirt from the top drawer of his bureau. "Because these Mexican people are still a lot like what they used to be. The American people have changed out of knowin'. I'm a foreigner myself now, and I'd rather not have it be when I should be in my own place. Reuben was to my office this afternoon. What's happened to him?"

"He showed you a gun worth a couple hundred thousand?"

Philip shook his head. "I wouldn't give you that for

it. Maybe some would."

"Well, I'm going to take charge of that gun for a while and I want you there to identify it when I do, so there's no question when we give it back."

Buttoning up his shirt Philips said slyly, "Not afraid some of the boys might get light-fingered, are you, Kyle?"

The captain shook his head. "I'm afraid he's going to say we scratched it, or we palmed off a ringer on him."

"Havin' a good ringer made would cost a couple thousand easy. Probably more, and you'd have to find the right man to do it first. Who'd the gun kill? Harlan Morris?"

"Yes. Why'd you say that?"

"Just seemed likely." Philips sat on the bed to pull on his jeans. "He brought Reuben to my office today. Goin' to tell me about it?"

The captain told him as they drove, with the siren screaming, through the still-hot, sleeping city. The two men had gone to Morris's home together. They'd eaten dinner and fired a few shots each on Morris's private indoor pistol range, both using a Hi-Standard "Olympic" target pistol that Morris had been particularly fond of. After that --according to Reuben -- they'd had one drink and he, Reuben, had driven back to his hotel.

"And?" Philips inquired.

"Morris's wife, who'd gone out to a D.A.R. meeting after dinner, came home and found him shot through the left eye with the Luger." Davis eased the squad car into the long driveway of the Morris house as he spoke. "Suicides hardly ever shoot themselves in the eye, and there's no note. It could've been an accident."

"Only you don't think it was."

The captain shrugged. "I'm trying to keep an open mind, Pit. The cook and the maid seem to have been there when it happened, in the kitchen cleaning up, but they didn't hear anything and aren't sure what time Reuben left anyway. Lord knows a paraffin test's never much good, but in this case it would be a complete waste of effort since both of them had been firing a pistol just before Morris died."

"I see," Philips said as he got out of the car. "Goin' to arrest Reuben?"

"We're holding him," the captain admitted sourly, "but we can't hold him for long. There's no evidence and no motive. Morris was a customer for high-ticket merchandise. Why would Reuben want to kill him?"

"I'd like to see him," Philips said.

Reuben was sitting with two detectives in a home

office next to Morris's indoor range; and when Philips did see him, he glanced at his hands, then offered his own, hardened and twisted by years of work. "Terrible thing, Mr. Reuben," he said, and Reuben winced under the pressure of his grip. "Hope you get out of this good enough to ride, darned if I don't."

In the big family room, the captain pointed to the Luger, lying on top of its black leather case where it had been left by the fingerprint technicians. "They didn't get anythin'?" Philips asked.

The captain shook his head. "Your prints -- we've still got them on file from that Barker case. Reuben's prints and Morris's. We were hoping that some fourth party'd show up -- one of those outside things. None did. Is this the same gun they showed you?"

"I believe it is."

"Then I'd like you to mark it in some way that won't hurt the value. The city will pay your fee if you want to charge one."

Philips shook his head. "It isn't needed, Kyle. This's a forgery."

The captain darted a glance at him.

"I feel bad," Philips said slowly, "about shakin' his hand. But I meant it when I said that about him not getting hurt too bad. I saw a hangin' once, and I didn't like it."

The captain dropped into an armchair and gestured toward another. "Tell me about it. Did you know it was a fake when they showed it to you today?"

Philips nodded. "There's only a few guns worth enough for it to pay to make a good forgery, Kyle. This is one, and there's some early Colts and so on that might pay out. Only you got to understand that before I can say somethin's faked I have to be certain sure. I could be sued, and if it turned out I was wrong I'd be out of business. I guess Reuben claims Morris loaded the gun for no good reason and shot himself in the eye lookin' at the crown of the barrel?"

"He doesn't claim anything," the captain said, except that Morris was alive when he said good-bye. He did mention that Lugers have a tricky safety."

"It happened pretty fast, I expect. Most likely Morris noticed the same thing I had, and before he'd had time to get set on it -- you know what I mean -- Reuben grabbed a-hold of the gun and jacked a cartridge into the chamber. Where'd it happen?"

"On the range. Reuben says he thinks Morris was going to fire the Luger."

"It wouldn't have hurt the value," Philips said, "since if it'd been the real thing it would've been fired a couple thousand times in the Army tests. Most

likely they both were lookin' to fire it, and when Morris loaded it he caught the smell."

Philips picked up the gun and slipped its magazine out. "The grips here are the part that's wooden on most guns, and the only part. On this one, like Reuben said today, they're Circassian walnut. Well seasoned, just like you'd expect 'em to be, and about as hard as wood ever gets. But on Lugers, the ones made before nineteen thirty, there's another wooden part."

He tossed the loaded magazine to the captain. "It's the base plug. See it?"

The captain nodded.

"Smell it. Smells like wood, don't it?"

The captain nodded again, then smiled. "Like a carpenter shop."

"That's right, and I got a little bit of that smell on my fingers today, just from touchin' it. The smell wouldn't last on a gun that'd been wrapped up in an oily rag and put away for sixty years. It's what they call turpeens, and you smell 'em at the carpenter's because there's a lot of wood there that's just been sawed. Once he's sawed it, though, they evaporate in a couple of months."

"I see. But that doesn't show for certain that Reuben killed Morris. Or give us a motive that will stand up in court."

"Reuben's a big dealer," Philips said. "This afternoon he told me he'd never heard of me, but I've heard of him. He probably does a million or more a year, and his business is only as good as his word. It's the same as if he was a art dealer. Let somethin' like this come out just once and he's finished. Besides, by doin' what he did, he'd cure the main thing that was wrong with his gun. You'd have locked it up down at headquarters, and by the time anybody saw it again the new wood smell'd be gone. Meantime, Reuben'd have a perfect excuse for not showin' it to interested parties."

"That doesn't prove it couldn't have been an accident," the captain muttered.

"Catch," Philips told him, and tossed him the Luger as well. "You said you didn't do a paraffin test because they'd been shootin' a HI-Standard Olympic. You know much about that gun?"

"Just that it's supposed to be good one."

"It's an Olympic-type target pistol, which means that it weighs close to three pounds and shoots the twenty-two short. It has about as much kick as a cap pistol. The fake Luger you're holdin' is a different proposition. A real light gun for a forty-five. It ought to drive that sharp checkerin' on the grips back

into a man's hand real hard, especially if his hand's soft."

The captain stood up. "And Reuben's hands are."

"Reuben's right hand's awful sore," Philips told him, "which I found out when I shook it a minute ago. I'm real sorry about that, but I'd bet if you got some good pictures of the skin before the soreness heals you ought to be able to match it up to the pattern of that checkering."

The End

The Last Casualty of Cambrai

A young woman in culottes said, "Just look at this statue! He was a real German soldier -- you can always tell. They had so much verve in those days."

The young man beside her said, "I wonder what happened to him."

Pitney Philips muttered, "Strangled with a rope, looks like." He had not intended to speak aloud.

"Garroted?" the young woman asked. "Really? You mean by partisans? What a fascinating thought!"

"It's an interesting piece," the young man put in. "The rifle looks real. Do you know why he's holding it up in front of his face like that?" They were looking at a three-quarter sized, spike-helmeted figure of one of the Kaiser's soldiers, mounted on a base covered with green carpet.

Philips, who wore a string necktie and had the scuffed, solid look of an old cattleman, shook his head to clear it of unwanted thoughts. "This thing's not really a statue," he said slowly. "Everythin' they got here today's what they call military miniatures, like it says on the big sign outside. It means toy soldiers. This's the biggest I ever seen, probably the biggest one in the whole show. He's got his rifle like he does 'cause it was the Germany Army drill for bayonet fightin'. Still is, for all I know. There's a little bayonet that goes with the rifle."

"Is this the one?" the young woman inquired, suddenly troubled. "The one that killed that man yesterday?"

Nodding, Philips turned and walked away, examining (or at least pretending to examine) a huge table model of the Battle of Cambrai that filled most of the room.

Behind him, he heard the young woman ask, "Are we going to demonstrate for Chief tonight, if they don't let him go?"

Philips moved down the table until he was out of earshot. Rob March had been a correspondent of his. Yesterday, when he had encountered Captain Kyle Davis of the San Antonio Police in the parking lot, he had happened to mention it.

* * * * *

It had been early in the morning, so early that it was not really hot yet, not for Texas in July. Philips had been paying his cab driver when the captain's unmarked police car stopped at the curb. "What are you doing here, Pit? Isn't this a little out of your line?"

"Fellow I swap letters with is in town for this thing." Philips had straightened up, shoving his wallet into the left hip pocket of his faded jeans. "He says they got some things here I'd be interested to see. Besides, I want to look at his stuff. He gave me a note that's supposed to get me in early. How about you, Kyle?"

The captain shrugged. "There'll be pickets here later. People for Peace, and so on. I want to talk to the exhibitors and make sure they're ready for it."

"They believe they can hold up wars by gettin' rid of toy soldiers?" Philips was a relic of a simpler era, and although he understood the mores of the late Twentieth Century, he did not do so instinctively.

The captain shrugged and trotted up the steps to study, with a strategist's eye, the street and sidewalk from which he had just come. "They need something they can hit at," he said after a moment. "Some kind of symbol, and this is as good as any. Are you here to check out a gun, Pit? Mind if I tag along?"

Rob March, a certified public accountant whose hobby was the history of military detail, had met them in the room in which he was to die; and the captain was as interested in its contents as Philips. March was Philips' age or a little more, an erect man who after nearly twenty years retained a trace of British accent.

"You saw some of the other rooms, didn't you? What did you think?" March's display, a table model battlefield thirty feet long and fifteen wide, dominated this one.

The captain said, "I had no idea people went in for this the way they do."

March nodded complacently.

Philips shared the captain's feelings. Tables and cases were filled with displays of lilliputian armies--

three whole rooms for the Napoleonic period, two rooms for the American Revolution, and enough Crusaders to storm Mount Kaf.

"We take ourselves pretty seriously," March admitted. "We have two magazines devoted entirely to the hobby, and I'm afraid I even edit a little newsletter for Great War buffs." He smiled. "Naturally I see to it that we Brits have the best of it."

"Germans are more interestin' to me right now," Philips told him. Philips was looking at the spike-helmeted figure at the back of the room. "Many of your people make their toys that big?"

March shook his head. "One-twelfth scale, or less, is a lot more common. To be frank, I think Englemann acquired the rifle first, and made the figure to go with it. But don't think I'm going to let you go back there and enjoy Englemann's rifle before you've marveled at my own display, which is--"

"A whole lot more interestin'", Philips finished for him dryly.

"Precisely, Pit. I couldn't have put it better myself. Besides, Englemann wouldn't care for it, and he'll be back in a jiffy to show you his gun. Meantime, you can have a gander at my sand table."

The captain said, "Sand table?"

"It's what we call a table display recreating part of a battle, though they're not really sand often. This room -- no doubt you've realized it already -- is devoted to the Great War, the First World War as they call it now. My little show represents a part of the area between the Canal du Nord and Escaut Canal during the battle of Cambrai."

"In which," said a guttural voice behind them, "Mr. March had the good luck to engage, as he will tell you very soon."

"Here's Englemann now. Englemann, I'd like you to meet Pit Philips and Captain Davis. Mr. Erich Englemann."

The three shook hands. Englemann seemed rather like a military miniature himself; he was scarcely five feet tall, and his upturned black mustache and round-lensed glasses gave him the air of a somewhat old-fashioned European officer in mufti.

"It's that rifle of yours back there I'm wantin' to see," Philips told him. "Is everythin' to scale?"

"You came to see, and you will see. It is a Mauser," he gestured toward March's sand table, "such as was used in this. Exactly. But not so big."

March said, "I was just giving this the final touches when Pit and Captain Davis came in. Cambrai was one of the most fascinating battles of the entire Great War,

and from the standpoint tactical development one of the most important ever fought. It was the first in which tanks were employed as they ought to be, and their correct employment enabled us to give the Huns a thorough dusting, even after the severe casualties we'd suffered at Ypres. The Nazis coined the term blitzkrieg, but if people would only read history they'd discover that the concept was the work of a British officer named J.C. Fuller. His ideas were first tried-- and shown to be correct -- in nineteen seventeen, at Cambrai."

"I see the tanks," the captain said.

"I wish that you could see them as we saw them that day. Today people are accustomed to machines in a way we were not, and those things were huge. There were eight men in a tank crew, and at night you could hear the roar of the engines for miles." March paused, then smiled. "You'll have to excuse my enthusiasm. I was just seventeen at Cambrai, and as I was invalidated out after it, it was the only battle in which I took part. In a way, I suppose it was the high point of my life."

"Our friend," Englemann put in, "was so lucky as to miss the latter part. Then a fundamental disparity in discipline and equipment reasserted itself. If you do not ask, you will not learn from him that his foe regained the ground he helped win. Perhaps you would like to see my display now?"

"Wait a moment," March said. "There's one more thing." He pressed a switch on the side of the table. Nothing happened, and he swore.

Philips inquired, "Somethin' wrong, Rob?"

"We had a hippie in here last night. He was painting slogans on the walls."

The captain nodded.

March crouched, thrusting his head beneath his table. "I shouldn't wonder if he sabotaged my equipment as well. Why don't you have a dekko at Englemann's Mauser while I fix it."

As the three of them walked toward the back of the room, Englemann explained, "He has arranged to simulate the firing of the guns and bursting shells with small lights. There is a difficulty with the control box, I am afraid."

Philips said, "I'd like to look at this miniature rifle you've got. Rob wrote me about it."

Englemann pointed. "Touch if you wish. You know such things? Take it out. I will wipe it down after."

A framed card on the wall held a faded photograph of a uniformed man in the position of the large figure; it read: "This nine-to-twelve scale miniature presents a corporal of the First Jager Regiment in the uniform of

nineteen fifteen." A second paragraph in smaller type gave the particulars of clothing and insignia.

Philips was studying the rifle the figure grasped. "How did you get his hands around it like that?"

Englemann swelled with satisfaction. "Like it will not come free. You agree?" He rattled the small bayonet, then pressed hard against the muzzle of the rifle. "So secure. The public, I think they cannot get this out. The miniature is lead. Hollow, ja, but a hundred kilos. They will not hide him under their coat."

The captain had squatted to examine the base on which the soldier stood. "The way he's up on the balls of his feet, it doesn't look like he's fastened down."

"The left only is screwed down. The screw I cast into the figure. The stand is weighed with ingots of lead. We say pigs. He cannot tip. This rifle? Watch, now."

Englemann adjusted the position of the miniature rifle slightly and twisted it. It slipped from the figure's hands as if by magic, and Englemann handed it to Philips. "This you came to see. A complete Gewhr Mauser of Ninety-eight, steel and wood, all parts working. Even stampings to scale."

Philips asked, "Will it shoot?"

"You find the bullets and it will shoot them. But the barrel, everything, all to scale. Who makes such bullets?"

"Nobody, most likely. I been lookin' for proof marks. There ain't any, so I doubt it's ever been fired." With a deft motion, Philips opened the bolt, then held the little rifle up so that the captain could look into its chamber. "Near as I can see it would take a three-quarter-scale eight millimeter cartridge. There's six millimeters, but their cases wouldn't fit."

The captain nodded. "All right, let's go. I want--"

"Not so quick." Englemann took the miniature Mauser from Philips and replaced it. "You looked at the Englishman's sand table. You must look at mine, also."

He led them to an alcove in which a table ten-by-ten feet showed a stretch of tropical coast, choppy blue plaster water, and square-ended boats disgorging turbaned soldiers. "Here the defender of German East Africa, Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, with a thousand men only, defeated the landing force of eight thousand from the British Indian Army. Most of his troops were native askaris with obsolete rifles. You see how difficult? How hopeless? He has two only small field pieces. These British are by a cruiser supported."

The captain nodded appreciatively, and he and Philips studied the developing battle for half a minute or more.

At length Philips asked, "The big soldier back there, does he stand for anybody in this?"

"No, no, no. That is the European front. Never there were--"

A voice from the main room interrupted Englemann. "Is there a Captain Davis in here?"

Philips glanced around and saw someone he had not met previously, a slender woman of perhaps fifty with sharp blue eyes and graying hair.

"My name is Ruth Wharton. Have you been looking for me, Captain? I'm sorry I wasn't in my office earlier."

"You're the president of the society?"

Mrs. Wharton had nodded, and March, emerging from beneath his table, had added, "Of the American Association of Military Miniaturists. What's the trouble, Ruth?"

* * * * *

And now (thought Philips as he hurried through World War Two) Rob's dead. Lookin' at Englemann's soldier isn't about to bring him back.

He found a public telephone nevertheless and dialed the captain's number. "It's me, Kyle. I just figured out what happened to Rob. You get yourself over here pronto. Bring a photographer, or a camera anyhow. You remember how Englemann stayed behind a little when we left?"

Philips stroked his jaw when he had hung up, then with sudden determination retraced his steps to the room in which March had died. From its door, he checked his watch and strode down the hall toward Mrs. Wharton's temporary office, trying to recall how rapidly they had walked, and at what point Englemann had overtaken them.

* * * * *

When they had reached that office, the captain had asked Mrs. Wharton how she, a woman, had become involved in military miniatures.

"I began with doll houses," she told them, "making the houses and furniture, and my own dolls. Then my husband and I built a house for ourselves." She smiled a trifle sadly. "That had been our dream, you see -- to build our own house, just the way we wanted it. Jim retired, and we could do it, after all those years."

The captain nodded sympathetically.

"I want to say that it was half finished when he died, but it wasn't. Not really. We had poured the foundation -- we built the forms for it together, I'll always remember that -- and we had started on the

framing. I was going to finish it alone. That's what I said. But I couldn't. Some of the things were too heavy for me to lift, and I had to hire a man to help me. I did finish it, though. The man I hired worked only eight hours. I worked ten or twelve, sometimes fourteen or fifteen, and I worked seven days a week."

Englemann applauded her, one hand slapping the other almost soundlessly.

"Thank you, Erich. Well, after all that, building doll houses didn't interest me as much as it had. I took a long vacation -- England and Wales. I toured scores of castles on that trip, and when I got home I began building those instead. At first I used little blocks of wood cut and painted to look like stone."

Philips said, "I saw a bunch, comin' in. Castles and knights and so forth, real nice. I guess those are yours?"

Mrs. Wharton smiled, nodding. "I have two sand tables in the exhibit, the Siege of Acre and a tournament. And there's my Tower of London, and three cases of --"

Then had come the crash, shaking the building, and then the scream, a scream Philips would never forget. They had run out, all of them, back toward the exhibition room they had left only a few minutes before. March had been at its other end, behind his table, lying in a tangle of wires from his smashed control box. Englemann's soldier lay across his body, its small bayonet driven into his back. A young man who wore a beaded headband had been bending over him.

* * * * *

When the captain arrived, Philips shook his hand half apologetically. "I said I had somethin' for you, Kyle, and I do. Only maybe not as much as I thought. I was shootin' from the hip a little, 'stead of gettin' my gun out in front where I could see it. You still holdin' that kid with the Indian clothes?"

"Chief? That's what they call him. No, he made bail this morning."

"That's good, 'cause I'm pretty sure now he didn't do it. Most likely he got in through that fire exit like he said, and was just wanderin' around lookin' for a place to make trouble when he heard Rob yell and came runnin' in. Stands to reason a kid like him would outfoot a bunch of old timers like us."

"You may be old, Pit, but I'm not. You got in my way. What is it you want photographed?"

"That'll keep. Tell me what you think happened to Rob."

"An accident. He was working on the wiring of his table model, right in front of Englemann's soldier. He snagged it and pulled it down on himself, or possibly the base happened to fold while he was in the way."

"You looked at that base?"

The captain nodded. "It was nailed up out of two-by-fours and covered with carpet. The janitor made it."

"So flimsy that if somebody gave the soldier a little push it would come down? I wouldn't have thought Englemann would stand for somethin' like that. He don't seem the type. Can we see it?"

"It's been cleared away," the captain said. "The janitor was going to make a new one. He might know what happened to it."

They located the janitor, a husky Negro. He showed them the pieces of the broken base on which the soldier had stood.

"You built this?" Philips inquired. "It looks solid."

"Had to be." The janitor flexed his powerful shoulders. "Took three of us to lift that lead soldier up. That little man got to weigh four hundred pounds. These here," he pointed with a broad, dark finger, "is two by six. They's what he was stood on."

"It wasn't solid enough," the captain commented. "This one's split right through the bolt hole where the foot was fastened."

"Wasn't like that when I made it."

"Of course not. It split when the soldier fell over."

Philips said, "It split when the soldier fell. And he fell 'cause it split? Look here, Kyle. See how this thing was made. He took two four-by-eights and turned them on end. He nailed a two-by-six across one end, leavin' the other one open so they could push the lead ingots inside to weight it. He nailed three more two-by-sixes across the top to hold the soldier, and another three across the bottom to hold the ingots."

The janitor nodded.

"Every one of those two-by-sixes except one is held with four nails, one at each corner. The one in the middle of the top's got six, one at each corner and one in the middle of each end. See how it split? From one of those middle nails to the other."

The janitor said thoughtfully, "Shouldn't never have gone through that hole like it did. Everybody know a split stop when it come to a hole like that."

"Which means this board was already split when you drilled the hole," the captain said.

Philips shook his head. "I b'lieve it means that both nails split, Kyle. The splits started at each end

and met at the hole." He looked at the janitor. "Think you could pull those nails for us? I'd like to look at them."

It took ten minutes or more for the janitor to get his hammer and draw the first nail. The captain took it from the janitor, glanced at it, then held it up for Philips. It had been filed to a dagger-like point, with a long taper and two knife-sharp edges.

The janitor, peering over the captain's shoulder, said emphatically, "Thought I never put them extras in. Know I never used no nail looked like that."

"I've never seen one like it," the captain said. "What would anybody file the point like this?"

Philips sighed. "To get the wood to split. You know how a good carpenter does when he's afraid a board might split on him? He takes wire cutters and nips the points off his nails. You call a bullet like that a wadcutter, 'cause it makes a nice round hole, even in a sheet of paper. A flat-pointed nail like that does the same thing. It's harder to drive, but it don't split the board 'cause it pushes a wad of wood ahead of it instead of shovin' it to the sides. Turn that around and sharpen the nail like a knife, then drive it in with the edges along the grain, and it'll split any board.

"Wouldn't anybody want no board split," the janitor said.

"I saw one split yesterday," Philips told him. "Somebody wanted to do that, I b'lieve. This one, too."

Back in the First World War exhibit, the captain said, "I see they're still showing March's model. I don't suppose they've got the lights working."

"No," Philips told him, "but Englemann's soldier's back up, like you see. He says they weren't goin' to do it, but he put up a fuss."

"I'll bet."

"That's what got me goin', Kyle. I was standin' right here a hour ago, and there was a girl and a fellow lookin' at this soldier, and that picture that shows the real soldier with his rifle up. The fellow said he wondered what happened to him."

"To the real soldier?" The captain shrugged. "I doubt that anybody knows."

"I was daydreamin', thinkin' about Rob when he said it, and I sort of looked over the soldier, and by gosh I could see how he'd died. Strangled with a rope, I told them. You look here." Philips pointed to the flesh-coloured enamel of the figure's neck. "You must have seen people killed like that, Kyle. It leaves a black bruise where the rope was."

Stepping closer, the captain saw that there was indeed a faint dark smear around the soldier's neck.

"That's what I want a picture of," Philips said. "that's where the cord went."

"Cord?" the captain asked sharply.

"Electric cord. The black mark's where rubber slid hard against the paint. Rob's control box used a cord like I've got on my skillet, one with a male connection at the wall and a female at the other end. The board was already split. That had been done the night before, I'd say, after everybody else had gone home. The carpet covered it."

The captain nodded somberly. "I see. When we left with Mrs. Wharton, all Englemann had to do was loop the cord around the soldier's neck. When March checked his control box, he would find it had been unplugged, not at the wall but at the box. When he tried to plug it in again, he pulled that thing over on himself."

Philips shook his head. "That's what I'd figured, too, Kyle, till I got to thinkin' about it. I was timin' how long he'd of had and fool things like that, when a couple seconds would've been plenty."

"Trouble was, nothin' else fit. Why would Englemann have wanted to kill Rob? He liked the Germans in what Rob called the Great War, and Rob liked the English. With Rob gone, he don't have anybody left to fight with. You saw his soldiers from India yesterday, Kyle. Who do you think cared how they looked except Englemann and Rob? I talked to Englemann quite a while today. You know where he got his information on them? What kinds of uniforms and the doodads on their collars and so forth?"

"From March?"

"Bullseye!" Philips fell silent for a moment. "Nobody likes a murder. Or hardly nobody, anyway. But there's only two that's truly sorry Rob's dead. That's Englemann and me. You remember how the janitor said it took three to lift that soldier onto the base? That was Englemann and the janitor and Rob. Englemann's strong, too, for a man no bigger than he is. He bought that little rifle from a dealer in Stuttgart, but he made the figure himself. Shaped it out of wax, you know, then put plaster all around the wax and melted it out, and cast it. Does his own castin'. I asked to see one of those lead ingots he calls pigs, and he got one out of the base and handed it to me easy. It wasn't real big, but it weighed forty pounds or thereabout, I'd say."

"What does that have to do with it?"

"Nothin', Kyle. Nothin' that was done to kill Rob needed much strength at all. That's my point."

Philips paused again. "After I saw that nail, I got to wonderin' why anybody'd bother. It worked good, sure. But why not just takeout those lead pigs instead?"

Englemann's figure would have tipped over real easy then. Only Englemann wouldn't have done it, because it's his figure and his rifle. They might have busted, and he don't think more of them than I do of my right eye."

"I think I've caught up to you," the captain said slowly. "She was in this room while we were in the alcove looking at Englemann's sand table. March was here, too, but he was under his table checking the wiring, and as you say, it would only take a second for her to loop the cord around the soldier's neck. Why did she do it, Pit?"

"I don't know. But I'd have a good man look at the books of this Association or Society or whatever it is. Rob was a C.P.A., and he published a little paper, too. A newsletter he called it. You might want to have another look at how that husband of hers died, while you're doin' it."

The captain nodded. "I'm going to talk to her. You want to come along?"

"This way," Philips pointed. "She's not in her office, or she wasn't. I went lookin' for her while I was waiting for you, and she was workin' on one of her tables. The Siege of Acre, with crusaders fightin' Arabs or whatever you call 'em. Saracens. You remember that? We passed it the day Rob got killed. You'd have passed it again today if you'd have come in the front. It's close to the main door."

"That's right. Castles and so on."

Philips nodded. "The Saracens are breakin' into one, breakin' down a big door with a batterin' ram. You can see where the boards are splittin'. You might want to look and see how she got them to do that."

The End

