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DONALD A. WOLLHEIM'S TWO DOZEN DRAGON EGGS

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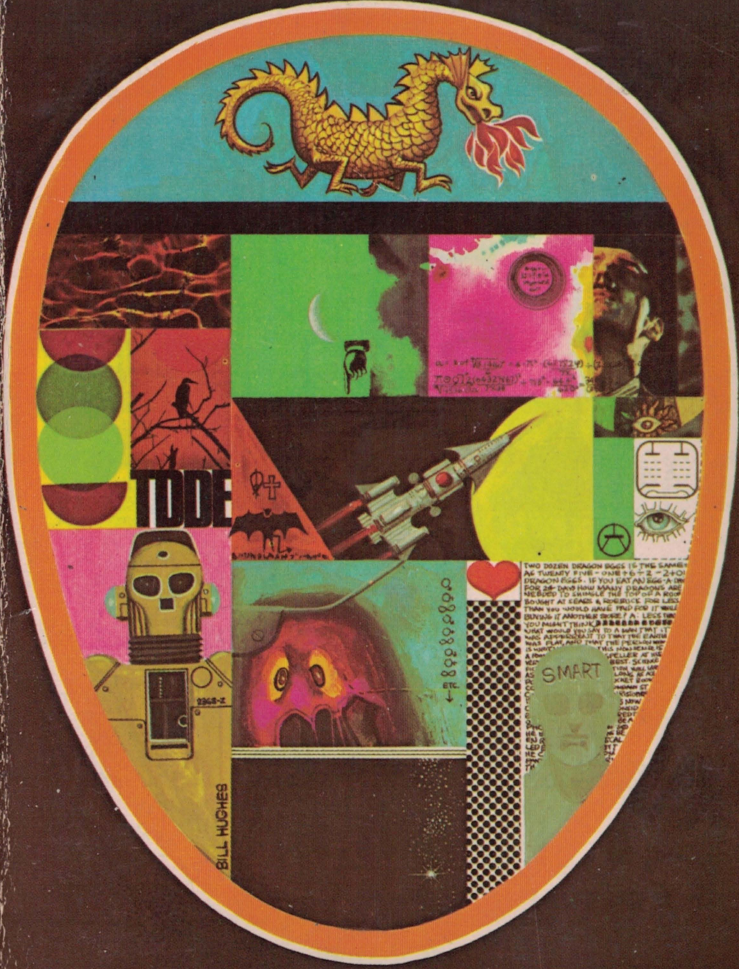

TWO DOZEN DRAGON EGGS

"The secret behind the stories in this collection is that they were not the product of any conscious effort to make a dollar. They were short stories I wrote only because they compelled me to write them. I did not set out to write them. I did not even wish to write them. They forced themselves upon me."

Donald A. Wollheim

In this rare collection of twenty-four masterpieces by one of the most important writers and editors in the field, Donald Wollheim had carefully picked stories of his literary quality from a life-time of creative effort. They are written in the haunting, sometimes shocking mood of John Collier and Rod Serling. There are tales of anquished nightmares, dreamed up by a highly versatile creative mind.

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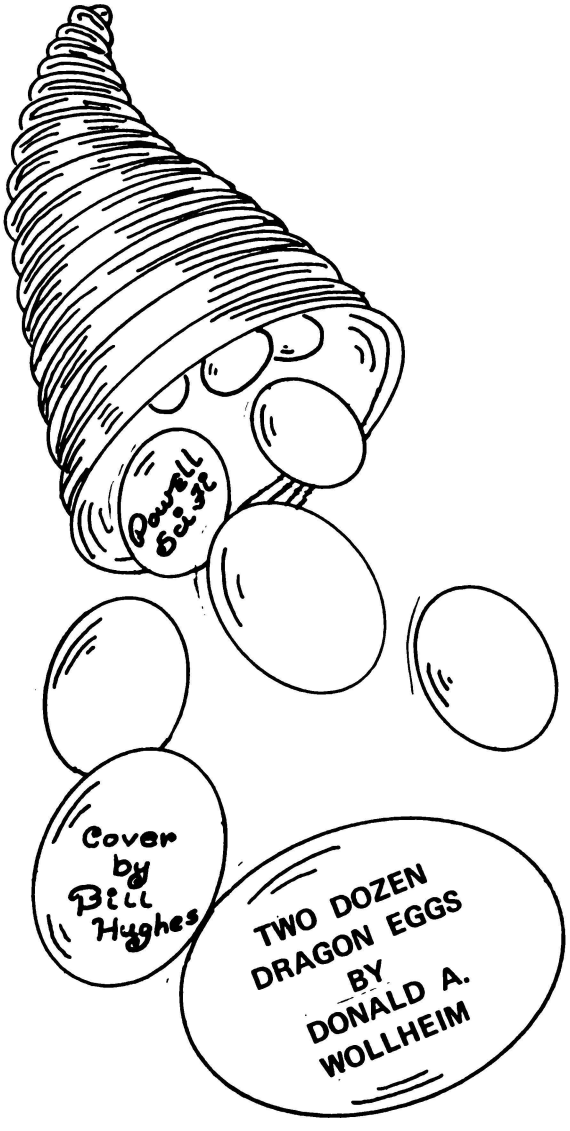
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BY
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THE EGGS & I

by

Forrest J Ackerman

It would be untrue to say the author egged me into writing this preface. I was delighted to do so.

In other words, my feet weren't dragon.

At the same time, it would be grossly unfair to Donald Wollheim to give you the impression that, just because his introductor is addicted to puns, the volume of short stories you hold in your hands is comprised of nothing more than cute fluff with the punch of a powderpuff. These are tales of sterling silver from Serlingsville, T.Z.; pearls of science-coated fantasy from a parallel world known as the Twixit Zone.

Man and boy, I have been reading science and fantasy fiction since 1926, and a lot of deuterim (remember heavy water?) has flowed under the Bridge of Time since then. In all this time there have been a very few vintners in the vineyards of Fantasci who have bottled a rare kind of word-wine of wizardry. I do not speak of the Merrittesque but rather the Kelleresque, the Roald Dahl-i school of the picturesque and, best comparison of all, the *Collieresque.* That is to say, materpieces of the macabre by "Odd John" Collier; offbeat, indescribable gems of diablerie and the "different" such as the unforgettable "Evening

Primrose," "Green Thoughts," "Thus I Refute Beelzy," etc. One can never get enough of such unusual fantasy fare — at least, not this one.

And so I welcome — as I believe you will — this collection of reveries and revelations, daymares and nightsongs, by Donald A. Wollheim.

As I looked over this collection in typescript form, prior to writing this preface, I realized that I had originally sold over half the contents, as agent, and read another 25 percent. "Top Secret" — ah, yes, it was picked up and published in some sci-fi anthology as a *fact* article; so that, as a matter of dismaying fact, I recall I had grave difficulty convincing the anthologist it was fiction, not a newspaper account, and hence a *story* that had to be paid for!

"The Rag Thing" — it seems to me some producer was once hot to trot with this one for a TV feature or even, I do believe, a feature-length movie. It's still not too late!

"The Egg From Alpha Centauri" — now this one threw me for a minute when Don said it was his *original* title but had been published under another. As I re-read it, I realized I had sold it but couldn't remember what name had been given it or where it had been printed until I came to the concluding paragraph and then it came back to me: "The Radioactive Bachelor," published in the obscure but well-paying organ of the Postal Employees of Denver! (Or maybe it was all of Colorado. Or maybe even the entire postal system of the USA and the publication just happened to emanate from Denver. Anyway, I'm pretty certain the journal was called PEN and mainly only p.o. people have previously read the story.)

Reading "An Advance Post in the War Between

the Sexes" for the first time, I was astonished to find myself anonymously referred to in the introduction. It isn't exactly true that I was the only man ever admitted as a member of the lesbian organization known as The Daughters of Bilitis — for awhile they even gave annual "SOB" (Sone of Bilitis) Awards to males sympathetic to their cause (merely social acceptance, not anything as malevolently anti-male as the establishment of Amazons as the Master Race). I contributed some material about the Sapphic in cinema (nothing so graphic in those early days as THERESE AND ISABEL and THE KILLING OF SISTER GEORGE) to the Daughters' publication *The Ladder* and was a personal friend of so many of the members of the San Francisco and Los Angeles chapters that when they had their first open-to-the-public convention (members of the vice squad sat side by side with clergy, myself and other hetero friends at the same banquet table with homophiles), I was regarded as sufficiently sympatico by "the girls" that when I mistakenly thought a Sunday buncheon in a private home was open to all, the homofemmes didn't have the heart to turn me away and took me along to their food and song fest, entertainment by recording artist Lisa Ben. "You are our Honorary Lesbian!" they said. Lesbian For a Day! A generation earlier, when lesbians were still "a subject spoken of only in whispers" (how could you be a well-rounded personality in such a square society?), I contributed a good deal of the editorial content (as Laurajean Ermayne) to the underground Uranian publication, now a collector's item, called *Vice Versa*. The other Bilitis-oriented man that Wollheim mentions in the introduction to his "War

of the Sexes" was the only transvestite I ever met; and I met him at a lesgian convention in a Hollywood Boulevard hotel, first as his male self, then a few nights later in his female valence. (Socially mediocre as a man, he blossomed forth as a vivacious conversationalist as a woman!) Before I leave this territory, I remember over 30 years ago when the late Dr. David H. Keller (himself the author of "The Feminine Metamorphosis") visited the embryonic Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society and made a statement I've never forgotten. "Women," said the good doctor, "have *already* won the Battle of the Sexes!"

I had not previously read "The Garrison"; it has made a great impression on me. Its consummate realism adds to its persuasive fantasy.

This collection has been long overdue. The cumulative effect of reading 24 shorts by Wollheim will be, I believe, a rise in his stature in the science-fantasy field and he will be seen to be, as I have suggested before, one of those rare talents to be compared (favorably) with John Collier, David H. Keller, Roald Dahl and Rod Serling. These are not *all* the short-shorts by Wollheim by any means – he could still give you "Squella," "Blueprint," "The booklings," "Castaway," "The Embassy," "The Haters," all the way up to "The Millionth Year" and "!!!." I suspect the response to this volume will make another carton of dragons' eggs mandatory!

Forrest J Ackerman

on Friday the 13th

at Dragonwyck Castle
77 Fafnir Way

Siegfried-on-the-Sward

Northern Erewhon

INTRODUCTION

I don't consider myself a short-story writer, even though the first piece I ever wrote with professional intent was a short story which sold the first time out. That was back in 1932. The sale may have been a fluke, but I don't think so, even though many of the stories I wrote in the next couple of years took a lot longer to appear in print. One or two have taken as long as twenty-five years to make the magazines. But that, I must admit, was because I wasn't trying.

Because for one thing, I never wrote for the magazines themselves. I wrote, in spite of early efforts, really to suit myself, to get an idea into type, to put down a curious thought, to convey something that was bugging me — usually some reflection on that fact that things are not what they seem, that appearances can be deceiving.

I make my living as an editor, as an arbiter of other people's storytelling and other writers' pet notions. It's much more pleasant to be a judge than to be one of the judged. Every editor can appreciate this. Nevertheless, there is some truth to the claim that editors are just frustrated writers.

Once again, I am forced to claim exception. I have had my successes as a writer. I've written quite a number of published novels; had them published in hard covers and also in paperback reprints. And I've written over fifty short stories.

These, too, have seen print, but if you are not a professional writer, take note. Fifty stories (more or less) in over thirty years are really very few stories indeed. Somewhat less than two a year.

The secret behind the stories in this collection is then that they were not the product of any conscious effort to make a dollar. They were short stories I wrote only because they compelled me to write them. I did not set out to write them. I did not even wish to write them. They forced themselves upon me.

It goes like this. I will come upon an idea, a little twist, a gimmick, a sort of mental splinter which will at first produce a secret wry smile, a spark of sardonic contemplation, in my mind. The idea will be set aside, will recur at odd times, will work itself in here and there in spare moments, and will begain to take shape. Gradually — and it may take months and even years — it will force itself upon me until I feel that I know the story, that it is ready for the telling. Resist as I may — and I have written whole books in between the mental tale and the typed narration — eventually the time must come when I must sit down and type it out. The story is all there just waiting for that moment.

Once that is done, I breathe a sigh of relief as if I had rid myself of some annoyance, put the typed sheets (single-spaced and full of misspellings) away in my desk and almost forget about them. They may lie in some file for who knows how long until some other night, months, years later, they will somehow call upon me to take them out, retype them neatly double-spaced and corrected, and submit them to someone. Generally the story gets accepted after one, two, or three tries.

This is hardly the way to be a short-story writer.

But I do have the feeling that such stories have their own compulsion, their own demands. They are iconoclastic comments on reality and existence. They are derived from observations, real or fancied, and they must be told.

Sometimes the delay between the mental story and the physical one can be fantastic. One story in this collection spans the whole gap of my writing career. *The Garrison*, which may be neither better nor worse than any other here, appeared in my notes of the early 1930s as a penciled title and a line notation. In the 1940s, I wrote one page of an opening for it — rather different from the present opening. I typed the first version of the completed story early in the 1950s, single-spaced, and stuffed it away. I dug it out in the early 1960s, typed the final draft and sent it off.

Avram Davidson, at that time editor of the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, liked it, but thought it only the start of a novelette — he wanted to know what would happen next. I wasn't interested in what might have happened next. I had said in *The Garrison* exactly what I had wanted to say — I had expressed my surprising idea and that was the whole of what I had to suggest. Let the reader's imagination carry it further. So I stuck the manuscript away again without further submission until my friend Robert Lowndes asked if I had a story for his new magazine, *The Magazine of Horror*. I sent it to him and that's where it saw print. Avram's magazine might have paid about ten times what I got from Bob's magazine, but it was not the money that had any significance for me. The difference wasn't worth the annoyance. I just wanted to see it in print.

This, as I said, is not how to be a short-story

writer. It is, however, one way of writing what you have to write. Hence this collection contains two dozen stories, each of which I think is rather unusual, and each of which contains something just a little bit extraordinary — a thought which jars a bit on the smug structure of everyday reality.

I have a very critical attitude toward reality. I am not sure anyone really knows what it is. As a science-fiction reader from the days of my boyhood, I absorbed a whole vista of possible worlds, of cosmical potentialities, of vast and ever-changing cultures. I sought out and read Charles Fort and learned the value of doubt and saw depicted therein some of the mountains of data science either denies or ignores — much of it doubtless properly denied and justifiably ignored — but if even one tenth of one percent of that data is true, that would be enough to fortify skepticism.

In the late twenties, during my middle teens, I was an ardent conservative only to see the Great Depression shatter a perfect system to pieces. In the thirties, I espoused the causes of social rebellion and thereby became acquainted with the lore of social criticism whereby all the evils, faults, and hypocrisies of capitalism were brought to light and laid bare. And in the forties, I learned from the facts of life and the revelations and self-confessions of the radical leaders all about their own hypocrisies, evils, faults, and chicaneries.

I emerge with the firm conviction only that appearances are always deceiving, that everything is imperfect and compromised, that nobody has the complete answer to anything, and that everything is in a constant state of flux, heading no one exactly knows where and at a pace no one can truly estimate. In short, I emerged as a cynic, a sort

of Utopian cynic because I am not despairing at all of humanity and the world, for somehow I think this universe is a wonderful mishmash of movements and deceptions, funny and horrible at one and the same time.

These short stories, these two dozen dragon eggs, exemplify a lot of that mixed-up philosophy. They are off-trail thoughts projected against something of the present everyday world. This I learned from H.G. Wells, who believed that the best science fiction is that wherein there is only a single jarring note, which must be viewed against an otherwise normal staid background. I absorbed this viewpoint at the very start of my literary life. It seems to have dominated my short stories at least.

But they've been bought by other editors than myself, and many of them have been selected for special anthologies, and a few of them have been reprinted in foreign languages, and even done on radio and in plays performed in schools (but which I never got to see).

So I think a lot of people may get a lot of amusement from reading these stories on one whole group. I can't imagine what the effect might be of all this subtle iconoclasm, but maybe it will perk some mind and maybe it will cause one or two readers henceforth to look a little more closely at the substance of the so-called real world. And that would be fun. After all, what else would you want from a book of short stories?

— Donald A. Wollheim

MIMIC

This has become one of my best known stories, probably because it comes close to being true. Certainly it was inspired by a newspaper story which had certain unnerving parallels with my tale. Since Mimic appeared, I have spotted the basic idea in several subsequent works by good S.F. novelists, expanded and made the basis of complete novels. Far from being peeved, it's that kind of emulation that makes one feel one has contributed something lasting to the patterns of science fiction.

It is less than five hundred years since an entire half of the world was discovered. It is less than two hundred years since the discovery of the last continent. The sciences of chemistry and physics go back scarcely one century. The science of aviation goes back forty years. The science of atomics is being born.

And yet we think we know a lot.

We know little or nothing. Some of the most startling things are unknown to us. When they are discovered, they may shock us to the bone.

We search for secrets in the far islands of the Pacific and among the ice fields of the frozen North, while under our very noses, rubbing

shoulders with us every day, there may walk the undiscovered. It is a curious fact of nature that that which is in plain view is oft best hidden.

I have always known of the man in the black cloak. Since I was a child he has always lived on my street, and his eccentricities are so familiar that they go unmentioned except among the casual visitor. Here, in the heart of the largest city in the world, in swarming New York, the eccentric and the odd may flourish unhindered.

As children we had hilarious fun jeering at the man in black when he displayed his fear of women. We watched, in our evil, childish way, for those moments, we tried to get him to show anger. But he ignored us completely and soon we paid him no further heed, even as our parents did.

We saw him only twice a day. Once in the early morning, when we would see his six-foot figure come out of the grimy dark hallway of the tenement at the end of the street and stride down toward the elevated to work — again when he came back at night. He was always dressed in a long, black cloak that came to his ankles, and he wore a wide-brimmed black hat down far over his face. He was a sight from some weird story out of the old lands. But he harmed nobody, and paid attention to nobody.

Nobody — except perhaps women.

When a woman crossed his path, he would stop in his stride and come to a dead halt. We could see that he closed his eyes until she had passed. Then he would snap those wide, watery blue eyes open and march on as if nothing had happened.

He was never known to speak to a woman. He would buy some groceries, maybe once a week, at Antonio's — but only when there were no other

patrons there. Antonio said once that he never talked, he just pointed at things he wanted and paid for them in bills that he pulled out of a pocket somewhere under his cloak. Antonio did not like him, but he never had any trouble from him either.

Now that I think of it, nobody ever did have any trouble with him.

We got used to him. We grew up on the street; we saw him occasionally when he came home and went back into the dark hallway of the house he lived in.

He never had visitors, he never spoke to anyone. And he had once built something in his room out of metal.

He had once, years ago, hauled up some long flat metal sheets, sheets of tin or iron, and they had heard a lot of hammering and banging in his room for several days. But that had stopped and that was all there was to that story.

Where he worked I don't know and never found out. He had money, for he was reputed to pay his rent regularly when the janitor asked for it.

Well, people like that inhabit big cities and nobody knows the story of their lives until they're all over. Or until something strange happens.

I grew up, I went to college, I studied.

Finally I got a job assisting a museum curator. I spent my days mounting beetles and classifying exhibits of stuffed animals and preserved plants, and hundreds and hundreds of insects from all over.

Nature is a strange thing, I learned. You learn that very clearly when you work in a museum. You realize how nature uses the art of camouflage. There are twig insects that look exactly like a leaf

or a branch of a tree. Exactly.

Nature is strange and perfect that way. There is a moth in Central America that looks like a wasp. It even has a fake stinger made of hair, which it twists and curls just like a wasp's stinger. It has the same colorings and, even though its body is soft and not armored like a wasp's, it is colored to appear shiny and armored. It even flies in the daytime when wasps do, and not at night like all other moths. It moves like a wasp. It knows somehow that it is helpless and that it can survive only by pretending to be as deadly to other insects as wasps are.

I learned about army ants, and their strange imitators.

Army ants travel in huge columns of thousands and hundreds of thousands. They move along in a flowing stream several yards across and they eat everything in their path. Everything in the jungle is afraid of them. Wasps, bees, snakes, other ants, birds, lizards, beetles — even men run away, or get eaten.

But in the midst of the army ants there also travel many other creatures — creatures that aren't ants at all, and that the army ants would kill if they knew of them. But they don't know of them because these other creatures are disguised. Some of them are beetles that look like ants. They have false markings like ant-thoraxes and they run along in imitation of ant speed. There is even one that is so long it is marked like three ants in single file! It moves so fast that the real ants never give it a second glance.

There are weak caterpillars that look like big armored beetles. There are all sorts of things that look like dangerous animals. Animals that are the

killers and superior fighters of their groups have no enemies. The army ants and the wasps, the sharks, the hawk and the felines. So there are a host of weak things that try to hide among them — to mimic them.

And man is the greatest killer, the greatest hunter of them all. The whole world of nature knows man for the irresistible master. The roar of his gun, the cunning of his trap, the strength and agility of his arm place all else beneath him.

Should man then be treated by nature differently than the other dominants, the army ants and the wasps?

It was, as often happens to be the case, sheer luck that I happened to be on the street at the dawning hour when the janitor came running out of the tenement on my street shouting for help. I had been working all night mounting new exhibits.

The policeman on the beat and I were the only people besides the janitor to see the thing that we found in the two dingy rooms occupied by the stranger of the black cloak.

The janitor explained — as the officer and I dashed up the narrow, rickety stairs — that he had been awakened by the sound of heavy thuds and shrill screams in the stranger's rooms. He had gone out in the hallway to listen.

When we got there, the place was silent. A faint light shone from under the doorway. The policeman knocked, there was no answer. He put his ear to the door and so did I. We heard a faint rustling — a continuous slow rustling as of a breeze blowing paper.

The cop knocked again, but there was still no response.

Then, together, we threw our weight at the

door. Two hard blows and the rotten old lock gave away. We burst in.

The room was filthy, the floor covered with scraps of torn paper, bits of detritus and garbage. The room was unfurnished, which I thought was odd.

In the corner there stood a metal box, about four feet square. A tight-box, held together with screws and ropes. It had a lid, opening at the top, which was down and fastened with a sort of wax seal.

The stranger of the black cloak lay in the middle of the floor — dead.

He was still wearing the cloak. The big slouch hat was lying on the floor some distance away. From the inside of the box the faint rustling was coming.

We turned over the stranger, took the cloak off. For several instants we saw nothing amiss and then gradually — horribly — we became aware of some things that were wrong.

His hair was short and curly brown. It stood straight up in its inch-long length. His eyes were open and staring. I noticed first that he had no eyebrows, only a curious dark line in the flesh over each eye.

It was then I realized he had no nose. But no one had ever noticed that before. His skin was oddly mottled. Where the nose should have been there were dark shadowings that made the appearance of a nose, if you only just glanced at him. Like the work of a skillful artist in a painting.

His mouth was as it should be and slightly open — but he had no teeth. His head perched upon a thin neck.

The suit was — not a suit. It was part of him. It

was his body.

What we thought was a coat was a huge black wing sheath, like a beetle has. He had a thorax like an insect, only the wing sheath covered it and you couldn't notice it when he wore the cloak. The body bulged out below, tapering off into the two long, thin hind legs. His arms came out from under the top of the "coat." He had a tiny secondary pair of arms folded tightly across his chest. There was a sharp, round hole newly pierced in his chest just above the arms, still oozing a watery liquid.

The janitor fled gibbering. The officer was pale but standing by his duty. I heard him muttering under his breath an endless stream of Hail Marys over and over again.

The lower thorax — the "abdomen" — was very long and insectlike. It was crumpled up now like the wreckage of an airplane fuselage.

I recalled the appearance of a female wasp that had just laid eggs — her thorax had had that empty appearance.

The sight was a shock such as leaves one in full control. The mind rejects it, and it is only in afterthought that one can feel the dim shudder of horror.

The rustling was still coming from the box. I motioned to the white-faced cop and we went over and stood before it. He took his nightstick and knocked away the waxen seal.

Then we heaved and pulled the lid open.

A wave of noxious vapor assailed us. We staggered back as suddenly a stream of flying things shot out of the huge iron container. The window was open, and straight out into the first glow of dawn they flew.

There must have been dozens of them. They

were about two or three inches long and they flew on wide gauzy beetle wings. They looked like little men, strangely terrifying as they flew — clad in their black suits, with their expressionless faces and their dots of watery blue eyes. And they flew out on transparent wings that came from under their black beetle coats.

I ran to the window, fascinated, almost hypnotized. The horror of it had not reached my mind at once. Afterward I have had spasms of numbing terror as my mind tries to put the things together. The whole business was so utterly unexpected.

We knew of army ants and their imitators, yet it never occurred to us that we too were army ants of a sort. We knew of stick insects and it never occurred to us that there might be others that disguise themselves to fool, not other animals, but the supreme animal himself — man.

We found some bones in the bottom of that iron case afterwards. But we couldn't identify them. Perhaps we did not try very hard. They might have been human . . .

I suppose the stranger of the black cloak did not fear women so much as it distrusted them. Women notice men, perhaps, more closely than other men do. Women might become suspicious sooner of the inhumanity, the deception. And then there might perhaps have been some touch of instinctive feminine jealousy. The stranger was disguised as a man, but its sex was surely female. The things in the box were its young.

But it is the other thing I saw when I ran to the window that has shaken me the most. The policeman did not see it. Nobody else saw it but me, and I only for an instant.

Nature practices deceptions in every angle. Evolution will create a being for any niche that can be found, no matter how unlikely.

When I went to the window, I saw the small cloud of flying things rising up into the sky and sailing away into the purple distance. The dawn was breaking and the first rays of the sun were just striking over the housetops.

Shaken, I looked away from that fourth floor tenement room over the roofs of lower buildings. Chimneys and walls and empty clotheslines made the scenery over which the tiny mass of horror passed.

And then I saw a chimney, not thirty feet away on the next roof. It was squat and red brick and had two black pipe ends flush with its top. I saw it suddenly vibrate, oddly. And its red brick surface seem to peel away, and the black pipe openings turn suddenly white.

I saw two big eyes staring into the sky.

A great, flat-winged thing detached itself silently from the surface of the real chimney and darted after the cloud of flying things.

I watched until all had lost themselves in the sky.

EXTENDING THE HOLDINGS

I am one of those obstinate types who firmly believe that an anti-gravity device will eventually be produced that will make space flight effective and render this rocket stuff obsolete. When I said as much in an introduction to my anthology The Portable Novels of Science, Willy Ley wrote me a letter pointing out the logic against such a discovery. I don't care. To me anti-gravity is logical, and its discovery could easily be made by some backyard experimenter — the kind you don't hardly ever see no more.

Not all things go as per schedule; in the space flight of Edward Rosinger nothing went right. The publicity, in the first place, went completely haywire.

Rosinger and his sister and his brother and his wife had all written several dozen letters in their neat calligraphy to the leading newspapers and journals. These had universally been consigned to the wastebaskets as the writings of a crank. Had Rosinger waited until summer, when the traditional journalistic silly season sets in, some of the letters might have seen print. But the journals were quite busy with the latest exciting debates

between Gladstone and the satanic Disraeli, with the carryings on at the court of Wilhelm I at Potsdam, and with the latest amazing murder of a man by his wife in the public thoroughfare by means of a deliberately misdriven hansom cab.

Rosinger did receive a polite note from the editor of Littell's Living Age requesting further details as to the results of the "experiment," but in his general fury, he did not deign to answer. His short black beard bristled and his eyes fairly sparked with blue flames when his sister dared to insinuate that perhaps the papers preferred results to talk. Rosinger could only pour out his scorn for the scoundrels who had omitted to mention Fulton's trip a half century before and had sabotaged every great discovery since. For them, pooh. He would publish nothing of his works until the thing was accomplished. And then he would astound the world and confound the papers by personally presenting a bit of genuine moon lava to President Cleveland and giving the story exclusively to the London and Paris correspondents.

The few neighbors to Rosinger's isolated farmhouse paid him little heed. They were accustomed to crazy doings at the house and Maine folk were never cursed with excessive curiosity over the goings on of their neighbors. If there were unusual fireworks seen at the Rosinger farm outside of the Fourth of July, that was his privilege. And if, for a day or so, several hands had reported what seemed like a big ball of metal twine hanging about a hundred feet over Rosinger's big red barn with no apparent support, that was still no occasion for praying. Doubtless, it did not concern them.

Of course, when the ball of "twine" — it was six

feet across and not very solid, for it could be seen to be hollow with a curious bluish flickering within its circumference — suddenly fell with a roar and exploded right in the barn, the neighbors rallied with fire buckets. Rosinger was leeping up and down afterward in veritable fits of fury, charging that stupid neighbors had deliberately flooded his chemical storehouse with water and that it would set him back days in his plan. His sister and his brother's wife had all they could do to keep him from loading his shotgun and giving the nearest neighbor a blast or two. And while the two women clung to his arms, exhorting him to keep quiet, his brother was patiently clearing up the mess and starting about the drafting of plans for the moon globe.

The thing when they finally completed it also looked like a very loose ball of twine, most of whose insides had been unraveled, leaving just a shell of twistings. The interlocked circles of white wire made a globe several yards in diameter, just large enough to enclose a solid box about eight feet in all dimensions; really a huge packing box, built of firm, closely set timbers, fastened with powerful bolts, well caulked and tarred and absolutely watertight. The box sported a glass bull's-eye window at every side, six in all, and was bolted tightly within the framework of the wire ball.

Within the box was a hammock, several cabinets containing such food as could be carried in an edible form like hardtack, chocolate, dried beef. Also tanks of water, also various instruments for observation and measurement, also certain mysterious gadgets and objects from which ran wires attached to the outside sphere. This last was Rosinger's own affair, certain galvanic discoveries

of his own, motivating the whole shebang.

So when, after the various series of setbacks, the thing was finally completed and Rosinger announced his intention of taking off at once that very evening, it was, quite frankly, a relief to his sister and his brother's wife. He had gotten quite on their nerves the past months, had become quite impossible. His brother's wife, indeed, had begun openly to express her belief that Edward Rosinger was touched and began to humph and click her tongue suggestively every time he raised the subject at the supper table.

Rosinger's brother, a taciturn man three years younger than Edward, said nothing. Actually he had been doing a good deal of the manual work on the matter and seemed perhaps to be interested in the wild scheme's success.

That evening, along about ten at night, Edward Rosinger and his brother and the two women repaired out to the rebuilt barn and behind it to where the flying contraption stood. The moon had just risen, it was nearly full and it was shining a baleful orange red on the horizon. Rosinger pulled out his very accurate turnip watch, glanced at it very carefully, made a rapid mental calculation, and said, "Four hours." That was all he said, but its meaning was obvious.

Gravely shaking hands with his brother and forgetting to bid goodbye to the two women, he opened the hinged side of the box and, stepping between the wires of the ball, climbed into the little chamber. He closed the side carefully and tightly. His brother stepped up and began to smear tarry stuff along the hinges and bolts, further enforcing the airtightness.

Stepping back, the three people waited.

Rosinger's brother consulted his watch, staring hard at its face. Then suddenly he snapped it shut, put it into his pocket, and looked up.

Almost at that moment there came a peculiar humming noise from the wires of the big ball. A faint blue aura showed around each strip of metal, which rapidly increased in volume as Edward Rosinger's strange galvanic currents took hold. There was a crackling of forces within the body of the network. The little wooden chamber, with its dark circles of glass eyes, seemed to glow in the bluish outlines. With a very gentle sigh, the whole mass seemed quietly to detach itself from the earth and to float very slowly and bubble-like away from the earth.

Now it was as high as the barn roof, and the three people on the ground craned their heads back to watch it. It seemed to gather speed a little, to jump slightly in the air. That would be Edward pushing its power to the second notch — there were twelve on his power board. Now the ball began to ascend into the air with growing rapidity. As they watched the dwindling ball of blue sparks, they saw that it was definitely assuming a Lunawards direction, heading up and vaguely in the direction of that big yellowish ball hanging against the blackness of the night sky.

The blue spark disappeared in a few more minutes amidst the stars.

When they no longer could spot the thing, the three people gradually lowered their heads and heaved a unanimous sigh. With no further ado, and no need for words, they walked back to the farmhouse and to their respective beds.

Being frugal people, they had already prepared letters to the several scientific journals Edward

Rosinger had subscribed to, ordering the cancellation of his subscriptions and the refunding of whatever was left of the subscription money. Rosinger's brother also took out his notes for an advertisement to be placed in the Bangor papers selling a number of carboys of chemicals and similar equipment to the highest bidders.

Finally, just before he damped the fire in the living room chimney for the night, Rosinger's brother tossed in a copy of a London journal he had chanced upon the mail several months back and had withheld prudently from his wasteful and impractical brother. There was a certain series of studies in the journal which proved rather conclusively that the space between the moon and the earth was quite devoid of any heat whatever — in fact, several times colder than the unattainable frigid poles of the earth itself. He knew quite well that there had been no heating apparatus in Edward Rosinger's cabin. And he saw no reason for the additional expenditure of an oil stove that would undoubtedly have been made by his brother had he seen the article in question.

After all, William Rosinger had plans of his own. And it took money to extend his new holdings.

STORM WARNING

I read George Stewart's magnificent novel Storm. *This short story is an instance of imitation being the sincerest form of flattery. Being a science-fiction type of thinker, I had to include the touch of animism which runs through a lot more science-fiction storytelling than any critic has so far noticed.*

We had no indication of the odd business that was going to happen. The boys at the Weather Bureau still think they had all the fun. They think that being out in it wasn't as good as sitting in the station watching it all come about. Only there are some things they'll never understand about the weather, some things I think Ed and I alone will know. We were in the middle of it all.

We were riding out of Rock Springs at sunrise on a three-day leave, but the chief meteorologist had asked us to take the night shift until then. It was just as well, for the Bureau was on the edge of the desert and we had our duffle and horses tethered outside. The meteor fall of two days before came as a marvelous excuse to go out into the badlands of the Great Divide Basin. I've always liked to ride out in the glorious, wide, empty

Wyoming land and any excuse to spend three days out there was good.

Free also from the routine and monotony of the Weather Bureau as well. Of course I like the work, but still the open air and the open spaces must be bred in the blood of all of us born and raised out there in the West. I know it's tame and civilized today, but even so, to jog along with a haphazard sort of prospector's aim was really fine.

Aim was of course to try and locate fragments of the big meteor that landed out there two nights before. Lots of people had seen it, myself for one, because I happened to be out on the roof taking readings. There had been a brilliant streak of blue-white across the northern sky and a sharp flash way off like an explosion. I understand that folks in Superior claim to have felt a jolt as if something big had smashed up out there in the trackless dust and dunes between Mud Lake, Morror Creek, and the town. That's quite a lot of empty territory and Ed and I had about as much chance of finding the meteor as a needle in the haystack. But it was a swell excuse.

"Cold front coming down from Saskatchewan," the Chief said as he came in and looked over our charts. We were getting ready to leave. "Unusual for this time of year."

I nodded, unworried. We had the mountains between us and any cold wave from that direction. We wouldn't freeze at night even if the cold got down as far as Casper, which would be highly unlikely. The Chief was bending low over the map, tracing out the various lows and highs. He frowned a bit when he came to a new little low I had traced in from the first reports of that day.

"An unreported low turning up just off

Washington State. That's really odd. Since when are storms originating so close?"

"Coming east, too, and growing according to Seattle's wire," said Ed. The Chief sat down and stared at the map.

"I don't like it, it's all out of whack," he said. Then he stood up and held out his hand to me.

"Well, goodby, boys, and have a good time. If you find that meteor, bring me back a chunk, too."

"Sure will," I said and we shook hands and yelled at the other boys and went out.

The first rays of the sun were just coming up as we left. Outwards we jogged easily, the town and civilization fell behind rapidly and we went on into the golden glow of the Sweetwater basin.

We made good time that day, though we didn't hurry. We kept up a nice steady trot, resting now and then. We didn't talk much, for we were too busy just breathing in the clean open air and enjoying the sensation of freedom. An occasional desert toad or the flash of a disturbed snake were the only signs of life we saw and the multiform shapes of the cactus and sage our only garden. It was enough.

Toward evening at the Bureau, the Chief first noted the slight growth of the Southern Warm Front. A report from Utah set him buzzing. The Cold Front had now reached the borders of Wyoming and was still moving on. The baby storm that was born where it had no right to be born was still growing and now occupied a large area over Oregon and Idaho. The Chief was heard to remark that the conjunction of things seemed to place southwest Wyoming as a possible center of lots of wild weather. He started worrying a bit about the

two of us.

We didn't worry. We didn't have any real indications, but our weathermen's senses acted aright. We felt a sort of odd expectancy in the air as we camped. Nothing definite, a sort of extra stillness in the air as if forces were pressing from all sides, forces that were still far away and still vague.

We talked a bit around the fire about the storm that the Chief had noted when we left. Ed thought it would fizzle out. I think I had a feeling then that it wasn't just a short-lived freak. I think I had an idea we might see something of it.

Next morning there was just the faintest trace of extra chill in the air. I'm used to Wyoming mornings and I know just how cold it ought to be at sunrise and how hot. This morning it was just the slightest bit chillier.

"That Canadian Cold Front must have reached the other side of the mountains," I said, waving toward the great rampart of the Rockies to the east. "We're probably feeling the only tendril of it to get over."

"That's sort of odd," Ed said. "There shouldn't be any getting over at all. It must be a very powerful front."

I nodded and wondered what the boys in the bureau were getting on it. Probably snowfall in the northern part of the state. If I had known what the Chief knew that morning, I might have started back in a hurry. But we didn't and I guess we saw something that no one else has as a result.

For at the bureau, the Chief knew that morning that we were in for some extraordinary weather. He predicted for the Rock Springs paper the wildest storm ever. You see the Southern Warm Front had definitely gotten a salient through by

that time. It was already giving Salt Lake City one of the hottest days on record and what was more the warm wave was coming our way steadily.

The next thing was that storm from the west. It was growing smaller and tighter again and had passed over Idaho Falls two hours ago raging and squawling. It was heading in our direction like an arrow from a bow.

And finally the Cold Front had done the impossible. It was beginning to sweep over the heights and to swoop down into the Divide basin, heading straight for the Warm Front coming north.

And there were Ed and I with a premonition and nothing more. We were riding along right into the conflux of the whole mess and we were looking for meteors. We were looking for what we expected to be some big craters or pockmarks in the ground and a bunch of pitted iron rocks scattered around a vicinity of several miles.

Toward ten that morning we came over a slight rise and dipped down into a bowl-shaped region. I stopped and stared around. Ed wheeled and came back.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Notice anything funny in the air?" I asked and gave a deep sniff.

Ed drew in some sharp breaths and stared around.

"Sort of odd," he finally admitted. "Nothing I can place, but it's sort of odd."

"Yes," I answered. "Odd is the word. I can't place anything wrong, but it seems to smell differently than the air did a few minutes ago." I stared around and wrinkled my brow.

"I think I know now," I finally said. "The temperature's changed somewhat. It's warmer."

Ed frowned. "Colder, I'd say."

I became puzzled. I waved my hands through the air a bit. "I think you're right; I must be wrong. Now it feels a bit colder."

Ed walked his horse a bit. I stared slowly after him.

"Y'know," I finally said, "I think I've got it. It's colder but it smells like warm air. I don't know if you can quite understand what I'm driving at. It smells as if the temperature should be steaming yet actually it's sort of chilly. It doesn't smell natural."

Ed nodded. He was puzzled and so was I. There was something wrong here. Something that got on our nerves.

Far ahead I saw something sparkle. I stared as we rode and then mentioned it to Ed. He looked, too.

There was something, no, several things that glistened far off at the edge of the bowl near the next rise. They looked like bits of glass.

"The meteor, maybe?" queried Ed. I shrugged. We rode steadily on in that direction.

"Say, something smells funny here," Ed remarked, stepping again.

I came up next to him. He was right. The sense of strangeness in the air had increased the nearer we got to the glistening things. It was still the same — warm-cold. There was something else again. Something like vegetation in the air. Like something growing, only there still wasn't any more growth than the usual cacti and sage. It smelled differently from any other growing things and yet it smelled like vegetation.

It was unearthly, that air. I can't describe it any other way. It was unearthly. Plant smells that couldn't come from any plant or forest I had ever

encountered, a cold warmness unlike anything that meteorology records.

Yet it wasn't bad, it wasn't frightening. It was just peculiar. It was mystifying.

We could see the sparkling things now. They were like bubbles of glass. Big, iridescent, glassy balls lying like some giant child's marbles on the desert.

We knew then that, if they were the meteors, they were like none that had ever been recorded before. We knew we had made a find that would go on record and yet we weren't elated. We were ill at ease. It was the funny weather that did it.

I noticed then for the first time that there were black clouds beginning to show far in the west. It was the first wave of the storm.

We rode nearer the strange bubbles. We could see them clearly now. They seemed cracked a bit as if they had broken. One had a gaping hole in its side. It must have been hollow, just a glassy shell.

Ed and I stopped short at the same time. Or rather our horses did. We were willing, too, but our mounts got the idea just as quickly. It was the smell.

There was a new odor in the air. A sudden one. It had just that instant wafted itself across our nostrils. It was at first repelling. That's why we stopped. But sniffing it a bit took a little of the repulsion away. It wasn't so very awful.

In fact, it wasn't actually bad. It was hard to describe. Not exactly like anything I've ever smelled before. Vaguely it was acrid and vaguely it was dry. Mostly I would say that it smelled like a curious mixture of burning rubber and zinc ointment.

It grew stronger as we sat there and then it

began to die away a bit as a slight breeze moved it on. We both got the impression at the same time that it had come from the broken glass bubbles.

We rode on cautiously.

"Maybe the meteors landed in an alkali pool and there's been some chemical reaction going on," I opined to Ed. "Could be," he said and we rode nearer.

The black clouds were piling up now in the west and a faint breeze began to stir. Ed and I dismounted to look into the odd meteors.

"Looks like we better get under cover 'til it blows over," he remarked.

"We've got a few minutes, I think," I replied. "Besides, by the rise right here is just about the best cover around."

Back at the Weather Station, the temperature was rising steadily and the Chief was getting everything battened down. The storm was coming and, in meeting the thin edge of the Warm Front wedge which was now passing Rock Springs, would create havoc. Then the cold wave might get that far because it was over the Divide and heading for the other two. In a few minutes all hell would break loose. The Chief wondered where we were.

We were looking into the hole in the nearest bubble. The things — they must have been the meteors we were looking for — were about twelve feet in diameter and pretty nearly perfect spheres. They were thick-shelled, smooth, and very glassy and iridescent, like mother-of-pearl on the inside. They were quite hollow, and we couldn't figure out what they were made of and what they could be. Nothing I had read or learned could explain the things. That they were meteoric in origin I was sure, because there was the evidence of the

scattered ground and broken rocks about to show the impact. Yet they must have been terrifically tough or something because, save for the few cracks and the hole in one, they were intact.

Inside they stank of that rubber-zinc smell. It was powerful. Very powerful.

The stink had obviously come from the bubbles — there was no pool around.

It suddenly occurred to me that we had breathed air of some other world. For if these things were meteoric and the smell had come from the inside, then it was no air of Earth that smelled like burning rubber and zinc ointment. It was the air of somewhere, I don't know where, somewhere out among the endless reaches of the stars. *Somewhere out there*, out beyond the sun.

Another thought occurred to me.

"Do you think these things could have carried some creatures?" I asked. Ed stared at me awhile, bit his lip, looked slowly around. He shrugged his shoulders without saying anything.

"The oddness of the air," I went on, "maybe it was like the air of some other world. Maybe they were trying to make our own air more breathable to them?"

Ed didn't answer that one either. It didn't require any. And he didn't ask me whom I meant by "they."

"And what makes the stink?" Ed finally commented. This time I shrugged.

Around us the smell waxed and waned. As if breezes were playing with a stream of noxious vapor. And yet, I suddenly realized, no breezes were blowing. The air was quite still. But still the smell grew stronger at one moment and weaker at another.

It was as if some creature were moving silently about, leaving no trace of itself save its scent.

"Look!" said Ed suddenly. He pointed to the west. I looked and stared at the sky. The whole west was a mass of seething dark clouds. But it was a curiously arrested mass. There was a sharply defined edge to the area — an edge of blue against which the black clouds piled in vain and we could see lightning crackle and flash in the storm. Yet no wind reached us and no thunder and the sky was serene and blue overhead.

It looked as if the storm had come up against a solid obstacle beyond which it could go no further. But there was no such obstacle visible.

As a meteorologist, I knew that meant there must be a powerful opposing bank of air shielding us. We could not see it, for air is invisible, but it must be there straining against the cloud bank.

I noticed now that a pressure was growing in my ears. Something was concentrating around this area. We were in for it if the forces of the air ever broke through.

The stink welled up powerfully, suddenly. More so than it had before. It seemed to pass by us and through us and around us. Then again it was gone. It almost vanished from everything. We could detect but the faintest traces of it after that passage.

Ed and I rode out to an outcropping of rock. We dismounted. We got well under the rock and we waited. It wouldn't be long before the protecting air bank gave way.

To the south now, storm clouds materialized, and then finally to the east and north. As I learned later, the cold wave had eddied around us and met the Equatorial Front at last and now we were

huddled with some inexplicable globes from unknown space and a bunch of strange stinks and atmosphere, ringed around by a seething raging sea of storm. And yet above, the sky was still blue and clear.

We were in the midst of a dead center, in the midst of an inexplicable high-pressure area, most of whose air did not originate on Earth and the powers of the Earth's atmosphere were hurling themselves against us from every direction.

I saw that the area of clear was slowly but surely contracting. A lancing freezing breeze suddenly enveloped us. A breakthrough from the north. But it seemed to become curiously blunted and broken up by countless thrusts of the oddly reeking air. I realized as the jet of cold air reached my lungs how different the atmosphere was in this pocket from that we are accustomed to breathe. It was truly alien.

And yet always this strange air seemed to resist the advances of the normal. Another slight breeze, this one wet and warm, came in from the south and again a whirl of the rubbery-odored wind dispersed it.

Then there came an intolerable moment. A moment of terrific compression and rise and the black storm clouds tore through in wild streaks overhead and spiderwebbed the sky rapidly into total darkness. The area of peace became narrow, restricted, enclosed by walls of lightning-shot storm.

I got an odd impression then. That we were embattled. That the forces of nature were determined to annihilate and utterly rip apart our little region of invading alien air, that the meteor gases were determined to resist to the last,

determined to keep their curious *stinks* intact!

The lightning flashed and flashed. Endless giant bolts, yet always outside our region. And we heard them only when a lance of cold or hot storm pierced through to us. The alien air clearly would not transmit the sounds — it was standing rigid against the interrupting vibrations!

Ed and I have conferred since then. We both agree that we had the same impressions. That a genuine life and death fight was going on. That that pocket of otherworldly air seemed to be consciously fighting to keep itself from being absorbed by the storm, from being diffused to total destruction so that no atom of the unearthly gases could exist save as incredibly rare elements in the total atmosphere of the Earth. It seemed to be trying to maintain its entirety, its identity.

It was in that last period that Ed and I saw the inexplicable things. We saw the things that don't make sense. For we saw part of the clear area suddenly contract as if some of the defending force had been withdrawn and we saw suddenly one of the glass globes, one of the least cracked, whirl up from the ground and rush into the storm, rush straight up!

It was moving through the clear air without any visible propulsion. We thought then that perhaps a jet of the storm had pierced through to carry it up as a ball will ride on a jet of water. But no, for the globe hurled itself into the storm, contrary to the direction of the winds, against the forces of the storm.

The globe was trying to break through the ceiling of black to the clear air above. But the constant lightnings that flickered around it kept it in our sight. Again and again it darted against the

mass of clouds and was hurled wildly and furiously about. For a moment we thought it would force its way out of our sight and then there was a sudden flash and a sharp snap that even we heard and a few fragments of glassy stuff came falling down.

I realized suddenly that the storm had actually abated its fury while this strange thing was going on. As if the very elements themselves watched the outcome of the ball's flight. And now the storm raged in again with renewed vigor as if triumphant.

Then came the last moment. A sort of terrible crescendo in the storm and the stink finally broke for good. I saw it and what I saw is inexplicable save for a very fantastic hypothesis which I believe only because I must.

After that revealing moment the last shreds of the stellar air broke for good. For only a brief instant more the storm raged, an instant in which for the first and last time Ed and I got soaked and hurled around by the wind and rain and the horses almost broke their tether. Then it was over.

The dark clouds lifted rapidly. In a few minutes they had incredibly thinned out, there was a slight rain, and by the time ten more minutes had passed, the sun was shining, the sky was blue and things were almost dry. On the northern horizon faint shreds of cloud lingered, but that was all.

Of the meteor globes only a few shards and splinters remained.

"I've talked the matter over as I said and there is no really acceptable answer to the whole curious business. We know that we don't really know very much about things. As a meteorologist, I can tell you that. Why, we've been discussing the weather from caveman days and yet it was not more than twenty years ago that the theory of weather fronts

was formulated which first allowed really decent predictions. And the theory of fronts, which is what we modern weather people use, has lots of imperfections in it. For instance, we still don't know anything about the why of things. Why does a storm form at all? We know how it grows, sure, but why did it start and how?

We don't know. We don't know very much at all. We breathe this air and it was only in the last century that we first began to find out how many different elements and gases made it up and we don't know for sure yet.

I think it's possible that living things may exist that are made of gas only. We're protoplasm, you know, but do you know that we're not solid matter — we're liquid? Protoplasm is liquid. Flesh is liquid arranged in suspension in cells of dead substances. And most of us is water, and water is the origin of all life. And water is composed of two common gases, hydrogen and oxygen. And those gases are found everywhere in the universe, astronomers say.

So I say that if the elements of our life can be boiled down to gases, then why can't gases combine as gases and still have the elements of life? Water is always present in the atmosphere as vapor, then why not a life as a sort of water vapor variant?

I think it makes sense. I think it might smell odd if we accidentally inhaled such a vapor life. Because we could inhale it like we do water vapor. It might smell, say, for example, like burning rubber and zinc ointment.

Because in that last moment when the storm was at its height and the area of uneartly air was compressed to its smallest, I noticed that at one

point a definite outline could be seen against the black clouds and the blue-white glare of the lightning. A section of the otherworldly air had been sort of trapped and pinned off from the main section. And it had a definite shape under that terrible storm pressure.

I can't say what it was like, because it wasn't exactly like anything save maybe a great amoeba being pushed down against the ground. There were lots of arms and stubby wiggly things sticking out and the main mass was squashy and thick. And it flowed along the ground sort of like a snail. It seemed to be writhing and trying to slither away and spread out.

It couldn't, because the storm was hammering at it. And I definitely saw a big, black mass, round like a fist, hammer at one section of the thing's base as it tried to spread out.

Then the storm smashed down hard on the odd outline and it squashed out flat and was gone.

I imagine there were others and I think that when they aren't being compressed they could have spread out naturally about a hundred yards along the ground and upwards. And I think we have things like that only of Earthly origin right in the atmosphere now. And I don't think that our breathing and walking and living right through them means a thing to them at all. But they objected to the invaders from space. They smelled different, they were different, they must have come from a different sort of planet, a planet cooler than ours with deserts and vegetation different from our own. And they would have tried to remake our atmosphere into one of their own. And our native air-dwellers stopped them.

That's what I think.

THE POETESS AND THE 21 GRAY-HAIRED CADAVERS

I was always an admirer of Ray Cummings when I was a teenager — and even now as a book editor I often reprint his novels. Back in the early forties, several of us fans-turned-pro, including Cyril Kornbluth and Robert Lowndes, tried our hand one week at literary pastiches. I wrote a Ray Cummings story. It was awful. I tossed it in a drawer and forgot about it. Later on, I dug it out, realized it had a pivotal twist based on my own personal allergy (which you'll know when you come to it), and rewrote it in my own style. ,,

Marijane Brazenose was a delicate soul, as befits a young lady poet. She was subject to drafts, bruised easily, and suffered sniffles at appropriate times and seasons. If there is a heroine to this tale, it ought not to be she, for the credit must go to Mother Nature. Nevertheless, this is the tale of Marijane's experience with the Cannery World.

They called it the Cannery World afterward, of course. The name fitted. Imagine, if you can, a world of one huge metal city, a city sprawled over continents and oceans, a world-sized city without parks or squares, simply hundreds of stories high and dozens of stories deep beneath the ground,

million-cubicle blocks of houses divided from each other only by mile-deep narrow metal canyons, lit eternally by artificial blue lights.

Imagine every room in every building housing at least one family. Imagine no room differing from any other room. Imagine no pictures on walls, no furniture save for sleeping mats, and no cooking utensils. Imagine eating only the one food, the universal cereal-nutriment mush. Imagine everything metal, everything greyish.

That is the Cannery World. A planet-wide mass of canned humanity, a world corresponding exactly to the planet Earth, whose space it occupies. For the Cannery World is a vibrational twin to this Earth of ours, possibly one of many, separated by a gulf of vibrational and supra-atomic structures, entirely comprehensible to scientists and students of the occult but baffling to the uninitiate.

Marijane Brazenose had no more suspicion of the Cannery World's dull existence than anyone else in the world had at the time she accepted her friend and patron's invitation to a summer weekend at his estate. For you see, Marijane Brazenose was also a very pretty and desirable young lady of twenty-two, whose three slender volumes of delicate verse had been "sponsored" financially by young Edward Fitzhugh in the hope she would get the poetry out of her system long enough to say "yes" to his pleas. The Fitzhugh family was rolling in the long green and Edward could afford to indulge a pretty young thing's fancies. So Marijane rode out to the Fitzhugh estate on an air-conditioned train, was driven to the sprawling country home set in the middle of the wide Fitzhugh greenery, and ensconed herself for

the weekend in the luxurious manor house, so conveniently air-conditioned for her special benefit.

Marijane did not like to travel in August. She preferred her penthouse in Greenwich Village, but she had promised Edward one last visit before she immurred herself until October.

There were no other guests that weekend, and the servants were carefully trained to keep themselves out from under foot. Marijane and Edward could sit in the wide glassed-in conservatory and gaze out toward the acres of flowers and shrubs, while giving the ecstatic sighs of youth and love. They could also have enjoyed the powerful Fitzhugh television sets and radio cabinets except that something was wrong. Every time they would turn one on, they got simply awful static, weird snow, and ghastly blurs. There was an electrical demon loose in the house, as Marijane put it. Nothing was working right. Big static sparks leapt up from the imported rugs and bit Marijane in the hand when she touched the furniture.

It was all most upsetting and Edward promised to call in some men to check the house wiring. Fortunately the air-conditioning was not affected.

The trouble with the Cannery World started shortly after lunch that Saturday. They were walking along the main hall on their way to the library when Marijane noticed a strangely discolored spot on the wall, right on the rich paneling. She stopped, pointed, "Why, look, it's all blue!"

Edward looked and indeed she was right. There was a round, bluish circle right on the wall, right on the polished wood. As they stared at it, they

both gasped, for the spot was growing before their very eyes.

"It looks like a blue spotlight against the wall, rather than a stain," said Edward peering closely.

"Oh, dear," Marijane grabbed his arm. "Don't get too near."

She was right, for clearly it was growing brighter and wider and getting a bit crackly as well. It seemed to flicker slightly as it spread outward over the wall. There was a scent of ozone in the air. Then, before either of them could jump, the spot flared out into a brilliant blinding blue, there was a sharp explosion, and . . . the light was gone and there was a hole in the wall where it had been.

The hole was circular and large, about seven feet in diameter. Through it they could see into a room with bare metal walls and a bare metal floor. They stared, and as they stared, there were footsteps and a man stepped into the hall from the unknown room beyond, stopped before them, and nodded slightly.

"Welcome," he said in a flat monotone, "to Sector Seven, Quadrant Sixteen, Level Nine, Extended."

They stared at him, while he glanced around the hall. He was pale with a translucently whitish skin. His eyes were a yellowing gray. His thin hair was gray. His features were sharp, his lips thin and colorless, his chin pointed. His clothing consisted of a single-piece coverall, grey-blue in tone. The only decoration was a small line of ideographic markings across his chest, presumably indicating a name. He carried a metal box in his hands, propped like a weapon.

"My name is Lekto cal-Magima tul-Anamagar cum-Lektor. I have been directed to assist your

assimilation."

"What are you doing in my house?" said Edward, regaining his tongue. "What do you mean by cutting holes in my wall, and where did that room come from?"

Edward was an assertive young man; as heir to the Fitzhugh fortunes, he never felt that he had to take lip from characters like the one before him.

However, Lekto did not change expression. "You are to come with me. I will direct you until we start our emergence preparations." He pointed his little box at Edward and Marijane, and ennui seemed to fill their bones. They felt unable to disagree with him. They followed him meekly through the hole into the metal room.

During the next twenty-four hours, they learned about the Cannery World and its relationship to ours. They ate the One Food, found it edible but thoroughly dull. They learned that it was made in universal factories, that it was all-complete, nothing else in the way of nourishment being required. They learned that on all this earth, which had once been exactly similar to ours, there was not a green thing growing, not an animal, fish, or bird, that it harbored something over a trillion people who had reached the limits of their artificial world. They also learned that the Central Manager of this particular Sector and Quadrant and Level had worked out the principle of breaking down the barriers between the two worlds and was "extending" his sector, unknown to his managerial colleagues, to cover our world. This was their initial breakthrough.

By the next day, a file of twenty men joined the couple in the room by the entry-hole. These were the men who were to set up the device outside the

Fitzhugh house that would permit unlimited immigration. These differed from Lekto in no fashion whatsoever. Gray hair, similar eyes, features, pallidness, gave Marijane the shuddery feeling that it would soon be a horribly colorless world to live in when several billion of these characters had come through.

She was thoroughly depressed by the thought. For a young lady poet, this was truly to be an unpoetical future. She gazed out of the one square window into the deep blue-lit canyon of a street, faced with tens of thousands of identical unshaded and unopenable windows, upward, downward, in all directions as far as the eye could reach. Not a flower in bloom in this whole wide world, she thought.

Edward walked up and down the small metal room, glancing anxiously every now and then into the section of his home visible through the circular gap. Two gray-topped guards watched it. Evidently the Cannery men were not going to make themselves in evidence yet. They were playing it quite cautiously.

Marijane was very upset over her visions of futurity. She kept repeating to Edward her distress. "The flowers, the birds, the great wonderful trees . . . all doomed! Oh, how could we live in a world like this, this cannery!"

They caught snatches of sleep on dun-colored floor mats. At long last Lekto announced that the time had come for their return to guide the squad that would set up the permanent interworld door.

Followed by the twenty men carrying pieces of machinery, strange boxes, coils of wire and tools, the two, preceded by Lekto, marched again through the entryway. Lekto turned when they

were all through, pressed a button on one of the boxes, and there was another terrific flash of blue light. When their eyes cleared, the hall in the Fitzhugh mansion was complete again. There was no trace of any hole. But there were twenty-one strange gray-haired pallid men to prove that their weird experience had happened.

Lekto herded Marijane and Edward through the air-conditioned rooms, the men following. They reached the main doorway. Lekto opened it and all of them trooped out onto the green and flowering lawn.

It was August, and the heat of the summer beat down on them suddenly. The air was filled with the warmth and buzzing of insects and the smells of the growing plant world .

Lekto and his men seemed disconcerted. Their own Cannery World was as unchangingly air-conditioned as the luxurious Fitzhugh mansion. It had probably never occurred to them that the world outside might not be. They exchanged uneasy glances at each other, and started slowly on across the lawn.

Marijane felt her eyes watering. "Oh dear," she said, "I've got it now. I — I'm going to sneeze!" She did so, violently, and again. Her eyes watered and her nose began to run. Edward whipped out a handkerchief. "Ugh, it's my hay fever. This must be the day it starts. Ahh shchew! I was so afraid of this!"

Suddenly Marijane looked up from the handkerchief in astonishment, forgetting her own discomfort for a moment. "Why," she exclaimed, "look! Look at them! They have it worse!"

And so it was. The twenty-one men from the artificial metal-citied world were smitten heavily.

As one, they were rolling about on the lawn, choking, gasping, scratching, turning blue and rashy. As Marijane held the linen to her nose, she and Edward watched in amazement.

Within a matter of minutes, the helpless men were all unconscious. Within a few minutes more, by the time that Edward had made up his mind to touch one, the twenty-one grey-haired men were dead from strangulation.

Bred for countless generations in a world totally free of pollen and the myriad microscopic life of our teeming vegetable world, the men from the Cannery Land were totally susceptible to all the allergies of the air. They had died, one and all, simply of acute hay fever, just as would any who tried to follow them.

That, in brief, is the story of our world's one great invasion from a parallel sphere. Marijane is still writing poetry about the beauty of the flowers and trees, even though she herself cannot personally stand them without suffering tears and sniffles. She is fairly sure now that she will marry Edward, for how else could she be certain of always having air-conditioning during August and September, the hay-fever months.

As for Edward, he can surely afford to sponsor more volumes of her verse, because the Fitzhugh fortune is going to be augmented several times over by the discoveries his father's engineers are making on Lekto's abandoned machinery.

As for the twenty-one gray-haired cadavers, they are buried in a corner of the Fitzhugh estate, with a charming sonnet signed by Marijane Brazenose carved in granite above their communal grave:

I hate hay fever season myself, don't you?

MALICE AFORETHOUGHT

My notation on this story says, "With apologies to Morley Roberts' The Anticipator." That's a good story that produced the basic idea. I don't usually do that but his story was the kind that inspired further variations and considerations on it, out of which this one arose.

It was bad enough that people always mistook Allen San Sebastian for the writer, Marvin Dane. It was worse how the society of the literary world kept shoving the two together until, having met at so many parties and people's homes, they were regarded by the outside world as being friends.

Actually neither liked the other very much — that is always the curse of similarity in competitors — they would have avoided each other if they could, but they couldn't, not without snubbing too many valuable intermediaries. Both wrote stories for the same magazine, both did their best to toady up to the impossible boor who was its editor.

LeClaire B. Smith, who was owner and editor of *Grimoire*, "The Magazine of Spectral Fiction," was a sharp-dealing, coarse-tongued, self-educated businessman who knew nothing about real literature, had a Sunday supplement taste in art,

but knew just about everything when it came to squeezing the pennies from the newsdealers and the trusting public. That *Grimoire* was such a success was due to thatgrim jest of fate that made Smith capable of enjoying a good horror tale when he read one. Possibly it was a subconscious reflection of the sadism that makes so many successful men scornful of the feelings of others. Certainly his handling of his authors instilled horror in those who had perforce to deal with him.

For it was good business to stay in his favor, as San Sebastian well knew, and when you had to depend on Smith's checks for your living, it became a matter of life and death.

San Sebastian had left his parental farm, somewhere in the Middle West, after selling several stories, and had made himself to live in the intellectual slums of the big city. It was good business, besides he could concentrate better where there were no infernal roosters to rouse him from bed at half-past four, and he could stay up as late as he pleased with decent conversations and a half-gallon of thick, sweet muscatel to sip from. The fly in his ointment was Marvin Dane.

They looked alike, both tall, gaunt, dark-haired. Both had a tendency to squint, both had the same dry sense of humor. But there, insisted San Sebastian, the resemblance ended. He could write and Dane couldn't. Smith, their god and judge, didn't share San Sebastian's opinion. He thought they could both write — and also happened to think that San Sebastian was slipping and Dane coming up.

San Sebastian had begun to realize the horrible truth himself when three stories in a row were rejected as being too similar to material bought just

previously. He didn't know what this material was until two months later when he saw a story of Dane's in the latest *Grimoire* that shook him to the core. It was quite identical, plot, writing and all, to his story — the one that had been the first to be rejected.

Dane a plagiarist? Hard to see how. San Sebastian, after overcoming his first fit of fury and black anger, found himself lost in a reflex of puzzlement. Nobody, but nobody, saw San Sebastian's stories until he'd written them out, rewritten them, pecked out a copy painfully on his typewriter and then, after waiting a week or so to reread again, made his further corrections, and brought the pages in for LeClair Smith's cold eyes to read.

Dane couldn't possibly have seen the stories before; he couldn't possibly have sneaked into San Sebastian's rooms to copy his tales; that was impossible and besides, San Sebastian never discussed plots with any of his friends. Yet there it was. They were almost identical stories.

By the time the third similar story of Dane's had appeared in print and two other tales of San Sebastian's had been rejected by Smith with the cutting insinuation that he, San Sebastian, must have peeked at Dane's red-hot typewriter, Allen San Sebastian was in a state bordering on madness. He could, of course, try and sell his rejected tales to a competitor magazine. But besides the fact that he didn't go over as well with the other editors, they might holler bloody murder when Dane's duplicates hit the stands first.

San Sebastian finally took a friend into his confidence. A rather older man, more steady in his ways, with a bent for the psychological and the

occult. He discussed the matter, showed this friend Dane's published stories and his own originals. It was, he insisted, not possible for either writer to have seen the other's work in production. He didn't even know exactly where Dane lived, and he doubted if Dane knew precisely where he lived. But they had seen lots of each other in past few months at the homes of mutual friends.

San Sebastian's friend, a man of considerable experience, after giving the matter much thought, pointed out that the coincidence of ideas was not precisely new in history. It happened before, it happened often in fact, with creative minds that two persons would think of the same thing at the same time. It seems, his friend said, that the universe moved at a certain pace, and then when conditions were ready for certain ideas, they developed spontaneously to the first minds that bothered to look for them.

For instance, when the science of mathematics had reached an impasse in the old arithmetics, Newton and Leibnitz, separated by two different nations, without knowledge of each other, individually invented and worked out the system of calculus. Again the planet Neptune had been seen by two different astronomers almost simultaneously. Again and again, inventions were duplicated, sometimes at half a world's distance, by minds of similar caliber and training, hitting upon the same problem.

It was as if there was an invisible telegraphic network linking all the minds of the world. So that when a Frenchman named Ader made a wild short flight in a crazy apparatus of canvas and propellers in 1898, two young mechanics in Ohio should conceive a mad inspiration for a miracle that would

mature at Kitty Hawk a few years later.

Now, reasoned San Sebastian's learned friend, was it not logical that when two minds as similar as Dane's and San Sebastian's were living within a few blocks of each other, were simultaneously trying to determine the demands of the same mind, LeClair B. Smith's, in the same specialized style of writing, *Grimoire's*, that one should telegraph his ideas to the other, just as a powerful sending station transmits instantly to the receivers of a waiting set. Who is to say which of the two originated the ideas of these stories? It may be San Sebastian glimpsing them from Dane's mind, or vice versa. No personal guilt could be placed.

The reason, the only reason, why Dane was winning was that he was the faster writer. Dane wrote by typewriter the first time and never rewrote. Once he tore his first draft from the keys of his machine, it went within hours to Smith's desk. And it would not be for two weeks before San Sebastian's tortoise-paced prose would reach that same destination. By which time, of course, Dane would long ago have eaten into the proceeds of *Grimoire's* check of acceptance.

Marvin Dane was clever enough, beyond doubt. He had often irked San Sebastian by his boasting that he never cluttered up his imagination with the stories of others. He never read other writers' efforts and he never relied on the classics and anthologies for inspiration. His mind was very probably wide open for stray plots coming over the telepathic ether.

This answer satisfied San Sebastian's curiosity, but left him in an even grimmer plight than before. Was he doomed always to lose out in this ghastly race? Did this spell his end as a writer — this

constant, hopeless race with a nemesis hidden at a machine out of his sight sucking the very thoughts from his head?

For several days Allen San Sebastian wandered the streets of the big city lost in wonder and despair. There must be an answer, but what, but how? This was to be a struggle to the death — for it was clear that the only obvious course that would clear his future would be Dane's death, or at least incapacitation.

He could, for instance, break into Dane's apartment and smash his typewriter with an axe. By the time Dane could borrow or buy another machine, he, San Sebastian, would have at least one new story on Smith's desk first. But this was obviously an impractical solution. He could pay someone to beat up Dane and put him in a hospital. This too did not exactly appeal to him. Besides, it invited a host of trouble; who would he get to do it and how could he keep himself from being blackmailed thereafter? As for murder, the idea didn't appeal to him at all.

Then, one afternoon, the idea came to him. Almost in a fever flush, San Sebastian made his way home, closed and locked the door behind him and dashed to his bookcase. Pulling out a volume therein, he seated himself at his desk, took pen in hand and began transcribing the pages of the book that he had opened. Carefully he bent himself to his task, concentrating heavily on each word and line.

In two hours he had completed the first writing. Setting the manuscript aside, he waited. Next day he again repeated the process, laboriously copying out the printed pages for a second time. Yet a third day he worked on it, then set up his typewriter and

began typing out the pages slowly in his usual faltering and painstaking manner. He drew out the work as long as possible.

On the fourth day, upon typing finis to the last page, he clipped all the completed pages together, read through them very carefully once more, and then, taking the various manuscripts into his little kitchenette, burned them each and every one over a jet of his gas stove.

Then he took a rest from literary work for two months, two months during which he found a job running an elevator. He had to wait.

Now LeClair B. Smith was, as has been said, pretty much of a nonliterary businessman, self-educated and self-opinionated. He knew a good horror story when he saw one and when Marvin Dane submitted a humdinger to him, he bought it on that same day and fitted it into his magazine's schedule. Dane, we must digress, had the not unadmirable quality of keeping his mind clear of other horror writer's works; in this case, the price of this attitude came high.

It was very embarrassing when a host of discerning readers and fans flooded the magazine with angry letters for publishing H.P. Lovecraft's "The Rats in the Walls" under the title of "The Mumbling Vermin of Oxham Priory" by Marvin Dane — "A gripping tale of ancestral doom, written specially for *Grimoire* by a modern de Maupassant." It was disastrous for Marvin and when Smith not only threw him out of the office but sued him for the return of his money and damages.

And it didn't do Allen San Sebastian any harm when Dane's new stories were constantly returned to him by the office boy unopened, as per editorial

orders. You could be sure to find San Sebastian's name in any table of contents in any new issue of *Grimoire.* As for Dane, after that ruinous climax to his literary career, for which he was quite unable to blame anyone but himself and his sizzling typewriter, he became a moderate sort of success as the clerk in a small but select bookstore catering to modernist and other obscurantist prosody.

SANTA RIDES A SAUCER

Christmas or not, this story was written in April. My daughter Betsy was then five months old, and I had just joined with A.A. Wyn to launch Ace Books. That was a holiday present enough. My son Zack mentioned here is a figment of the imagination. That's the way things worked out.

Undoubtedly it had been a perfect Christmas. An absolutely perfect Christmas, even down to the last ultimate detail. That is what bothers me. That is what makes me sometimes lie awake nights afraid to face my thoughts. That is why I sometimes sit up in bed and stare silently into the darkness just turning over that perfection in my mind. I don't think I can stand much more of that kind of thing. I could put it all down to imagination or hallucination or something save that it was a perfect Christmas for Betsy and Zack and their mother as well, asleep as she is in the next bed.

You can't talk that away. If it was a perfect holiday for the little ones, then it simply was.

I am, I suppose, what you would call a happy man. That is, I am comfortably well off, I do the kind of work I like, I have a wonderful family, and

I live in a wonderful old house in the country. My house is in Montana, away out, far from the town. It's a lovely old house, spacious as they go in that country, large rooms, a wonderful old fireplace built by the original rancher. We hang the kiddies' stockings on that fireplace every Christmas Eve, in the big living room where the little evergreen is placed.

I suppose you could call me a gentleman astronomer. There are gentleman farmers, so I guess there can be gentleman astronomers. I don't have to depend on my work for my income. My piratical old grandfather stole enough land and cattle to keep all his descendants decently lazy. Not that I'm lazy — I'm an astronomer by profession, even though no one hires me.

My observatory is away from the house, and it's not large. Mainly I do variable-star observing, some planetoid checking, a good deal of speculative writing and theorizing. I've had a number of articles published speculating on life on other worlds. I've measured the heat of the lunar day from my little hillside cabin and I've probed the clouds of Venus with my instruments. I don't claim to have made any great discoveries. I have done little more than add some details to the work of Lowell and Pickering.

Anyway, that Christmas was the year of the flying saucers. Remember them? I didn't pay them very much attention. I never saw one and never expect to see them. The question of visitors from space didn't bother me. I'd come to the conclusion that probably there was life elsewhere in the universe, but I didn't expect it to be concerned with me. The kind of life I believe in outside this earth is concerned with perhaps some hardy

conifer forests on Mars and some even hardier lichens in the depths of lunar craters.

Of course, it is true that some Sunday newspaper supplement had given me lurid — and wholly inaccurate — writeups naming me as the world's greatest authority on Martians, as the "Space Life Professor" and all that nonsense. I can't say my work has ever warranted anything like that, but you know reporters must eat.

The special perfection of that Christmas may have been due, in retrospect, to the appearance of the most lurid of these articles only the week before, in a nationally syndicated Sunday supplement that must have found its way into millions of homes. It played up the "mysterious solitude" of my home, labeled me the hermit-professor (a hermit with a wife and two robust kids!), and totally distorted my most recent contribution to a scientific journal wherein I gave some tables of really rather dry statistics on temperature variations of Jupiter's satellites.

Anyhow, that December 24th saw the end of a two-day snowfall, and left our house on Christmas Eve surrounded by a lovely blanket of rolling, soft white. In the distance, the trees stood up on the nearer hillside like scenes from a holiday card. The sky had cleared and the sun shone out of a pale blue sky on this white landscape. We were all snugly at home, didn't bother to dig out a path to the mailbox even. The evening was silent and clear. A half moon threw a deep blue light on the landscape. The stars twinkled sharply overhead. I was almost inclined to go to my observatory to take advantage of the night, but the holiday duties of a fond father quite prevented that.

The kiddies had been tucked into bed with our

faithful promise that we'd awaken them early next morn. They had carefully hung their stockings by the mantelpiece over the fireplace, with our solemn assurances that Santa Claus would surely come and fill them. With Betsy and Zach asleep, Edith and I went to work setting up the little tree, decorating it. The presents for the children we had in a closet, ready to be slipped into position before the children awakened.

It takes time to do all this, and by ten-thirty we were both a little tired. Edith and I had ourselves some cake and coffee in the kitchen and then returned to the living room about half-past eleven. We sat by the fireplace, chatting a little, resting, happy in our home. We were proud of our children, little six-year-old Betsy and four-year-old Zachary. They still believed in the Santa Claus legend, though I wondered how long we could continue to foil Betsy's increasingly inquisitive mind.

I recall that Edith and I talked awhile about the curious Santa Claus legend. It certainly seems strange to believe that someone would come down every chimney of every house at the same time and leave presents. Yet children, or many of them, do most positively believe in this. Imagine, I pointed out, an actual supernatural being, physically, in the flesh, coming into one's home. If you think about it as an adult, you can get goose pimples. It is certainly an odd folk notion for an atomic age civilization to harbor!

Along about five minutes to midnight, I heard whispers up in the children's room. I glanced at Edith. It looked as if they were going to slip down and steal a peak at their Christmas tree at midnight. And we had not yet put their presents

into their stockings!

The babes would catch us redhanded if we tried to do it now. Edith rose to the occasion. She was going to go upstairs and shoo the kiddies to bed again. Just then the old chimes clock in the hallway sounded the first stroke of midnight. There were joyful shrieks upstairs and we heard the two little ones' feet come pattering down the stairs, their voices shouting "Merry Christmas!"

It looked like complete disaster. Midnight, no presents distributed yet, and no Santa Claus. But . . .

Well, it was a perfect Christmas after all. We really had all received a wonderful assortment of gifts and we examined them with pleasure, and the kids with screams of delight all Christmas Day.

Among other things, for instance, Betsy had a doll that was so perfectly lifelike it almost fooled you. By pressing it in various ways, it would smile, blink its eyes, wave its hands, kick, squeak in varying tones, and do all but get up and walk. I admit that it also has some odd joints in its body, and it distinctly has six toes delineated on each little foot, but Betsy doesn't seem to mind.

Zachary had wanted some toy soldiers, knights in armor he had specified, for we had been reading to him of King Arthur. He got a set, a large set. They are not really knights, but they do belong to some medieval culture. They have armor of a sort, something like a cross between Old Japanese and Roman; they carry weapons something like halberds, but with little circular saws on top. They have helmets with odd wings and fancy flanges. Their faces are incredibly lifelike albeit a trifle bluish. The figures are about standard toy soldier size, have jointed arms, and I have found by

watching Zachary that they are evidently unbreakable. He hit one squarely with a hammer. The floor dented, but the little figure didn't nor did its paint job even chip.

I have a fine new astronomical thermostat, which seems to be incredibly sensitive and whose inner construction I am afraid to meddle with, though I'm quite curious. And Edith has a new necklace of rather large bright beads, the nature of which I am afraid even to speculate on. I shall carry a pistol when I go to town to have it appraised.

The children were in ecstacies. Edith thinks it was something I arranged with a neighbor, and I haven't seen fit to say otherwise. But as for me, I am sitting up nights afraid to face my thoughts.

At the stroke of midnight, just as the children came whooshing down the stairs, there was a noise in the chimney, a sliding noise, and Santa Claus popped out of the fireplace. He was exactly as described. A shortish, plump little man, dressed in red with ermine trim, a white beard, jolly blue eyes, and red stocking cap, and a sack of toys.

While Edith and I stared goggle-eyed, the two children watched him with equal awe. He glanced at us, gave us a broad smile, winked at me, and started to fill the stockings with packages wrapped in green paper he took out of his sack. When he had finished, leaving the two for Edith and me on the mantelpiece itself, he turned, surveyed me steadily for a moment, took a copy of a printed journal out of his sack, handed it to me, bowed, and stepped into the fireplace. He fumbled with something in his clothes, and suddenly rose up the chimney and vanished. We heard a scrambling on the roof and a sudden rushing noise outside and he

was gone.

The two kids recovered first. With screams of sheer joy, they pounced on their stockings and the packages lying in front of the tree. I think it was several minutes before Edith and I recovered our senses.

I am not sure yet what to make of it. I do suppose that Christmas Eve might seem a logical time to interplanetary visitors to pay a visit in a certain disguise to homes they wanted to inspect. The magazine Santa Claus handed me was merely a copy of my latest astronomical article, with certain of my temperature readings corrected in a green-colored ink.

The next morning, looking out of the window, I noticed that there were no tracks in the snow, no signs of automobile tires in the as yet uncleared road, nothing to indicate a visitor except a rather curious large saucer-shaped depression in the snow just outside the porch.

GANYMEDE HOUSE

New York, its boosters say, is a Summer Festival (and Spring, and Winter, and Fall). It's true, you know, and by reading the first three paragraphs of this story you will know that my wife and I had been novelty-shopping in the Radio City area one afternoon of the summer before the winter in which I wrote this.

New York is just like a regular perpetual World's Fair. Just full of all sorts of interesting goings-on and free exhibits. I suppose I'm not the first to go on like this about New York; I guess out-of-towners must be pretty fed up with this stuff, but I don't care. I'm a native New Yorker — well, Brooklyn, anyway — and I say that it's a regular World's Fair.

For instance, it's full of what the fairkeepers would call foreign pavilions. That's a big word meaning a sort of store-museum where they display stuff made in different countries. New York is full of them. For instance, in Rockefeller Center, That's Radio City, there are several. Sweden House, where they have a very interesting display full of glass and silverware and such. It don't cost nothing to go in; it's a store, of course, run by the

Swedes, I suppose. But it don't cost nothing to look, does it? At that, I bought a glass letter opener there for 75 cents as a sort of souvenir.

And then there's a French House and an Italian House and a lot of others, up and down the streets near Radio City, and they're all quite swanky looking places and very pleasing. There's even a ritzy looking Finland House, with its windows full of whatever it is they make in those Near Eastern countries. In fact, there's an American House, too, though that never quite made sense. But what I'm getting at is that I like to look into those places, and the clerks always act like they were glad to show everything and didn't care if they ever sold anything.

So one day I had to call on a customer in the Fifties, near that swank Radio City area, and I was walking down one of the side streets looking at the swank stores, with a half hour on my hands and I saw a new one. A tasteful glass and chrome front, a lot of the bleached polished wood fixtures, like they all go in for, and it's one I've never spotted before. The sign on the window said "Ganymede House." Ah, I thought, another country heard from.

A glance at my watch showed I still had some time to spare, so I looked in the window. It had the usual stuff all these houses go in for: some funny-shaped vases, some silverware, some cloth with native designs woven into it, some silvery metal gadgets I couldn't see the use of, with a little label, "Just arrived, a new shipment of warpers." I didn't have any need for a warper, whatever that is, but I opened the door and went in.

It's a new store all right, because you can small the fresh paint and floor waxing. It's a pretty big

store, these places usually are, with a little balcony. A lot of floor space with only a few glass display cases scattered about casual-like and some shelf-racks along the walls, with neat little cards saying what the stuff is and the price, if they happen to think of it. All these foreign "houses" are laid out like little museums. That's what I like about them.

A clerk came up to me, a very pleasant ruddy chap with a nice smile, and asked if he could help me. "Just lookin'," I said, like I always do, and he nodded understandingly. "We've just opened for business today. If you see something that interests you, just ask me."

I nodded and kept on looking. There was the usual stuff. A case full of pins and metal jewelry for women. Rather odd designs, but all these places go in for crazy designs. Some really interesting wooden trays with designs and pictures painted on them. Maybe not painted? it looked almost like photographs sort of worked right into the wood. I examined them real close.

There was one that caught my eye, real spectacular. Showed a guy in funny armor mounted on some sort of winged dragon chasing some kind of bumpy-looking creatures, all full of knobs and legs. The clerk came up to me as I was looking at this closely, and said, "That's a rather good reproduction of Droomil's route of the goombals. A very good buy."

It was good, too. A little too fairy-tale sort of for my own house, though, but I might keep it in mind. "What's the price?" I asked just to be polite.

"It's only thirty-seven dollars," the clerk said, which I thought to myself is kind of steep for a wooden tray even if it did have a picture on it that

might be good enough for the art museums. I nodded and walked away slowly, looking at various other things. My time was running short, when I saw a rack with some table stuff on it. Maybe I could get something as a sort of souvenir, anyway, I thought. So I looked at some salt shakers, and some cups and saucers, and finally found a little salt cellar that I thought the wife would like. My wife has a lot of salt and pepper shakers. She's got one like a frog and a mushroom, and one like a rooster and a hen, and so on. So this little salt cellar I thought she'd like.

The clerk picked it up and looked at the price. "It's a dollar and ninety-eight cents," he said, "but it's really worth the price."

That's kind of high for a thing like that, but I really liked the gadget, so I dug out two dollars. "Wouldn't there be a sales tax?" I asked.

The clerk frowned. "We've just opened today and we haven't got our license to collect the sales tax yet. So I suppose you will be the gainer. We won't charge you a tax."

Well, that was something. It's good to feel you're getting away with something. I gave him the two bucks. He dug into a drawer and got out two cents. For a minute he looked puzzled. "It is an odd price, isn't it? Now why would they want to make it that odd figure?" He shook his head, then shrugged his shoulders. He gave me the change, wrapped up the little salt cellar in brown paper, and thanked me.

I left the place and went about my business. Now I'm sorry I didn't make a note of the address. I can't remember just which street Ganymede House was on, and though I've been in the neighborhood several times, I haven't found it

again. I keep thinking that I'll look it up in the phone book, but you know when you get to the office you have other things on your mind and I never seem to get around to thinking of it.

It's a pity, too, because I want to buy a dozen more of those salt cellars to give my friends this Christmas. They're really cute. Take this one, which my wife and I use every day. It's like a little round coppery barrel, and it's so convenient. It always hangs in the middle of the table just about two inches above the tablecloth and when you want it, you only have to start to reach for it. It just moves right over to your plate, tips itself over neatly in midair, spills just the right amount of salt, and floats back over the cloth to the middle of the table. And when you take the tablecloth off, the thing floats up to the ceiling and stays there next to the light fixture until the table is set again.

If I can find Ganymede House again, I know my friends will really appreciate salt cellars like that.

ROAD TO ROME

The planet Mars has always fascinated me, and when an event on that neighbor planet can manage to make headlines on Earth, why, it sets me thinking. Editors, since they do such extensive and miscellaneous reading, tend to accumulate vast stores of odd and assorted data, and I have a particularly good reputation for being such a repository. In this case, for example, the card file of my mind put some unalike factual references together.

There are three items that are bothering me. And when you get as old as I am and have nothing to do all day, except sit on the porch and watch your grandchildren play, you have plenty of time to find things to think about. And you also have a chance to put together some apparently unrelated items that nobody who had to earn a dollar would have the mind for.

I think the three items may be all one. But I'll let you be the judge of that. To begin with, I would say that the first was sort of called to my attention in 1947 when the A.E.C. asked me to look over some of the old records of my son's company, which used to be mine until I retired in

1939. That would be the Warendyck Chemical Corporation. You may have run across it. It isn't one of the real big ones like DuPont, but it was a pretty nice small business and made me a good living and makes my son a good one now.

The A.E.C., it seems, was looking over a lot of records from all the companies that ever handled a certain product and they were curious to know who had bought them and where the stuff had gone. They found this item on our books from a customer we sold to only once and never saw again and they wanted to know more. My son couldn't tell them, so they came up here, two nice young men in a nice car and they asked me about it.

I went down to the plant with them, though I don't like to travel on account of my rheumatics, and I looked at the old ledgers. Then I thought about it awhile, and I brought it all back. I'm afraid it wasn't much help to them. For what it was worth, this was it.

It was in 1932 and times were pretty bad. We were just making out, squeezing through, and we were all pretty hungry for new customers, when my secretary told me there was a man up to see me. "On business?" I asked, and she nodded.

She let him in. I got up, went to shake his hand, but he ignored me. I let it pass, though I usually like to be polite. Because immediately I could see he was some sort of foreigner and likely didn't know any better.

"You iss zhe Warendyck?" said this man, sort of darkish-skinned, kind of thin and drawn out, and wearing what looked like sort of homespun and homemade clothes.

"I am Mr. Warendyck," I replied. "What can I do for you?" I waved him to a seat.

He stood for a moment sort of puzzled, then drew the chair over to my desk awkwardly and sat down on the edge of it. He took a paper from his pocket and gave it to me. Glancing at it, I saw that it contained only the name of a chemical product.

"You have zhis for zhale?" he said. I sat back in my seat and looked thoughtful. It's a good business practice not to ever look too anxious. As a matter of fact, I had a lot of it. I was stuck with a big load when two of my best cusomters who used to use it went bankrupt within weeks of each other several months before.

The stuff was not much use in general business. It was a chemical product almost entirely used by pottery and cheap chinaware firms for coloring. I had been trying to think of some use for it in the past weeks so as not to get stuck with it too badly, but I hadn't been able to find a thing. This looked to me like a wonderful chance to dump this stuff on a stranger. But I didn't let on.

"Yes," I said to him, "I think we can supply some. Just how much do you want and when do you want it?"

He leaned forward very anxiously, started sputtering rapidly in some foreign language. I couldn't understand him. He stopped, got control of himself, said slowly, "I wizh to buy orl you can zhupply for zhipment at once, wizh no delay."

"I see," I answered, stalling for time to think of the best price I could get in those times. "Where would it be shipped to?"

He frowned a bit, then said, "Rome."

"Rome, New York, or Rome, Italy?" I asked. But he only shook his head and waved his hands. "Rome," he repeated.

I buzzed my secretary. When she looked in, I

asked her to call in Manetti, one of my chemists. In a few minutes, he came in brushing his hands against his white smock. "I think this gentleman is Italian. Could you ask him whom he represents and what use they intend to make of their purchase?"

Manetti nodded and said something to the customer in Italian. But. the stranger only looked blank, waved his hand again, and turned to me. "I do not unzherstand. Can you zhell me thizh product or not?"

Manetti looked at me. "He's not Italian, sir," he said. I nodded and dismissed him.

I turned to the stranger, said, "I happen to have some of this for immediate delivery. How much do you want and how will you have it shipped?"

He smiled then, for the first time. "I will tage orl you have. We will zhip it ourselves by our own trucks."

Well, anyway, we set a price; in fact, he agreed to the first price I gave him. He was really in a hurry and he wanted delivery that very afternoon. It was sort of irregular, particularly if he was going to transship it to Rome, for we would usually have had to fill out the bills of lading ourselves. But he wanted it, it was the depression, and it was a relief to get the stuff out of my warehouse.

What our records showed, when the Atomic Energy Commission men dug out the old ledgers, was simply that we had sold 637 pounds of powdered uranium oxide, presumably for use in coloring cheap vases, for cash to a party, name not given, for shipment to Rome, Italy. At least, the man never said it wasn't Italy, and I'm sure it wasn't the place upstate in New York.

The second item was something I read in the papers last year one morning while sitting on my

porch. I have nothing much to do, as I said, and I read just about everything in the papers, including the auctions and want ads. Anyway. this was a little boxed item on the front page. It said that the astronomers had noticed what looked like a big atmospheric disturbance on the planet Mars just the day before. A couple of observatories, one in the West and one in Japan, happened to be looking, and there was this big sudden rise of cloud and dust, miles and miles high. It looked, said one astronomer, just like a huge tornado or volcanic eruption. Only, said this professor, there aren't any volcanoes on Mars, so it could even have been a tremendous atomic explosion, just like a real super-atomic bomb was dropped.

The third item was something I had a local astronomy bug work out, a fellow who made his own telescope and dabbles in it. He's good at figures, so I asked him to figure out what astronomical body was closest to Mars at the time of eruption or whatever it was. He worked it out, too, took him almost two months figuring the orbits of asteroids and things. He says it was an asteroid numbered 472 that was the closest to Mars at the time. Passing by within a half million miles, even.

It just happens that Asteroid 472 has a name, as well as a number. The name is Rome.

THE RAG THING

In 1939-1940 I shared an apartment with several other writers in a four-story walkup in Brooklyn, known appropriately as The Ivory Tower. Now when several young bachelors live together, housekeeping is something noticed only by its near absence. In short, things can get kind of crumby. This is especially noxious if you were raised in a clean household such as I was. Hence, inescapable observations eventually produced this reasonably inescapable conclusion.

It would have been all right if spring had never come. During the winter nothing had happened and nothing was likely to happen as long as the weather remained cold and Mrs. Larch kept the radiators going. In a way, though, it is quite possible to hold Mrs. Larch to blame for everything that happened. Not that she had what people would call malicious intentions, but just that she was two things practically every boarding-house landlady is — thrifty and not too clean.

She shouldn't have been in such a hurry to turn the heat off so early in March. March is a tricky month and she should have known that the first warm day is usually an isolated phenomenon. But

then you could always claim that she shouldn't have been so sloppy in her cleaning last November. She shouldn't have dropped that rag behind the radiator in the third floor front room.

As a matter of fact, one could well wonder what she was doing using such a rag anyway. Polishing furniture doesn't require a clean rag to start with, certainly not the rag you stick into the furniture polish, that's going to be greasy anyway — but she didn't have to use that particular rag. The one that had so much dried blood on it from the meat that had been lying on it in the kitchen.

On top of that, it is probable that she had spit into the filthy thing, too. Mrs. Larch was no prize package. Gross, dull, unkempt, widowed and careless, she fitted into the house — one of innumerable other brownstone fronts in the lower sixties of New York. Houses that in former days, fifty or sixty years ago, were considered the height of fashion and the residences of the well to-do, now reduced to dingy rooming places for all manner of itinerants, lonely people with no hope in life other than dreary jobs, or an occasional young and confused person from thie hinterland seeking fame and fortune in a city which rarely grants it.

So it was not particularly odd that when she accidentally dropped the filthy old rag behind the radiator in the room on the third floor late in November, she had simply left it there and forgotten to pick it up.

It gathered dust all winter, unnoticed. Skelty, who had the room, might have cleaned it out himself save that he was always too tired for that. He worked at some indefinite factory all day and when he came home he was always too tired to do

much more than read the sports and comic pages of the newspapers and then maybe stare at the streaky brown walls a bit before dragging himself into bed to sleep the dreamless sleep of the weary.

The radiator, a steam one, oddly enough (for most of these houses used the older hot-air circulation), was in none too good condition. Installed many, many years ago by the house's last Victorian owner, it was given to knocks, leaks, and cantankerous action. Along in December it developed a slow drip, and drops of hot water would fall to seep slowly into the floor and leave the rag lying on a moist, hot surface. Steam was constantly escaping from a bad valve that Mrs. Larch would have repaired if it had blown off completely but, because the radiator always managed to be hot, never did.

Because Mrs. Larch feared draughts, the windows were rarely open in the winter and the room would become oppressively hot at times when Skelty was away.

It is hard to say what is the cause of chemical reactions. Some hold that all things are mechanical in nature, others that life has a psychic side which cannot be duplicated in laboratories. The problem is one for metaphysicians; everyone knows that some chemicals are attracted to heat, others to light, and they may not necessarily be alive at all. *Tropisms* is the scientific term used, and if you want to believe that living matter is stuff with a great number of tropisms, and dead matter is stuff with little or no tropisms, that's one way of looking at it. Heat and moisture and greasy chemical compounds were the sole ingredients of the birth of life in some ancient unremembered swamp.

Which is why it probably would have been all right if spring had never come. Because Mrs. Larch turned the radiators off one day early in March. The warm hours were few. It grew cold with the darkness and by night it was back in the chill of February again. But Mrs. Larch had turned the heat off and, being lazy, decided not to turn it on again 'til the next morning provided, of course, that it stayed cold next day (which it did).

Anyway, Skelty was found dead in bed the next morning. Mrs. Larch knocked on his door when he failed to come down to breakfast and when he hadn't answered, she turned the knob and went in. He was lying in bed, blue and cold, and he had been smothered in his sleep.

There was quite a to-do about the whole business, but nothing came of it. A few stupid detectives blundered around the room, asked silly questions, made a few notes, and then left the matter to the coroner and the morgue. Skelty was a nobody, no one cared whether he lived or died, he had no enemies and no friends, there were no suspicious visitors, and he had probably smothered accidentally in the blankets. Of course the body was unusually cold when Mrs. Larch found it, as if the heat had been sucked out of him, but who notices a thing like that? They also discounted the grease smudge on the top sheet, the grease stains on the floor, and the slime on his face. Probably some grease he might have been using for some imagined skin trouble, though Mrs. Larch had not heard of his doing so. In any case, no one really cared.

Mrs. Larch wore black for a day and then advertised in the papers. She made a perfunctory job of cleaning the room. Skelty's possessions were

taken away by a drab sister-in-law from Brooklyn who didn't seem to care much either, and Mrs. Larch was all ready to rent the room to someone else.

The weather remained cold for the next ten days and the heat was kept up in the pipes .

The new occupant of the room was a nervous young man from upstate who was trying to get a job in New York. He was a high-strung young man who entertained any number of illusions about life and society. He thought that people did things for the love of it and he wanted to find a job where he could work for that motivation rather than the sort of things he might have done back home. He thought New York was different, which was a mistake.

He smoked like fury, which was something Mrs. Larch did not like, because it meant ashes on the floor and burned spots on her furniture (not that there weren't plenty already), but there was nothing Mrs. Larch would do about it, because it would have meant exertion.

After four days in New York, this young man, Gorman by name, was more nervous than ever. He would lie in bed nights smoking cigarette after cigarette, thinking and thinking and getting nowhere. Over and over he was facing the problem of resigning himself to a life of grey drab. It was a thought he had tried not to face and now that it was thrusting itself upon him, it was becoming intolerable.

The next time a warm day came, Mrs. Larch left the radiators on because she was not going to be fooled twice. As a result, when the weather stayed warm, the rooms became insufferably hot, because she was still keeping the windows down. So that

when she turned the heat off finally, the afternoon of the second day, it was pretty tropic in the rooms.

When the March weather turned about suddenly again and became chilly about nine at night, Mrs. Larch was going to bed and figures that no one would complain and that it would be warm again the next day. Which may or may not be true, it does not matter.

Gorman got home about ten, opened the window, got undressed, moved a pack of cigarettes and ash tray next to his bed on the floor, got into bed, turned out the light and started to smoke.

He stared at the ceiling, blowing smoke upward into the darkened room, trying to see its outlines in the dim light coming in from the street. When he finished one cigarette, he let his hand dangle out the side of the bed and picked up another cigarette from the pack on the floor, lit it from the butt in his mouth, and dropped the butt into the ash tray on the floor.

The rag under the radiator was getting cold, the room was getting cold, there was one source of heat radiation in the room. That was the man in the bed. Skelty had proven a source of heat supply once. Heat attraction was chemical force that could not be denied. Strange forces began to accumulate in the long-transformed fibres of the rag.

Gorman thought he heard something flap in the room, but he paid no attention. Things were always creaking in the house. Gorman heard a swishing noise and ascribed it to the mice.

Gorman reached down for a cigarette, fumbled for it, found the pack, deftly extracted a smoke in the one-handed manner chain smokers become

accustomed to, lifted it to his mouth, lit it from the burning butt in his mouth, and reached down with the butt to crush it out against the tray.

He pressed the butt into something wet like a used handkerchief, there was a sudden hiss, something coiled and whipped about his wrist; Gorman gasped and drew his hand back fast. A flaming horror, twisting and writhing, was curled around it. Before Gorman could shriek, it had whipped itself from his hand and fastened over his face, over the warm, heat-radiating skin and the glowing flame of the cigarette.

Mrs. Larch was awakened by the clang of fire engines. When the fire was put out, most of the third floor had been gutted. Gorman was an unrecognizable charred mass.

The fire department put the blaze down to Gorman's habit of smoking in bed. Mrs. Larch collected on the fire insurance and bought a new house, selling the old one to a widow who wanted to start a boarding house.

THE FEMININE FRACTION

Sex is a mystery no matter how you look at it, and you can see that when I wrote this tale, I had been looking at it rather thoughtfully . . . especially in these days of Beatles and similarly ambiguously appearing youth.

You know, just sitting around here in Paris in the springtime brings back so many old memories, Jack, that I'm glad you showed up. Isn't there some old saying that if you sit here at this corner, sipping an aperitif, that by and by the whole world will pass by? So you're proof of it — an old buddy from my company I hadn't seen in — gosh, how many years has it been since we were mustered out?

Anyway, this is a great place to sit and ogle the girls. Paris has changed a bit, but these little French chicks, they're still a delight to the eye. So feminine. Makes me wonder sometimes about Weininger's theory.

Weininger? You never heard of him? Well, I guess that's not surprising, considering he was a boy genius who died in his early twenties after writing just one great thesis. He was the fellow who brought out the idea that there is no such thing as

one hundred percent male and a hundred percent female. He said every person has something of the opposite sex in him. Every man has maybe ten or twenty percent woman in him and every woman has ten or twenty percent man. Some people have more, some have less, but we all have some.

I know, you don't believe it at first. Seems to insult your manhood, but think about it. I don't really think that a person who has 100 percent masculine could even stand to be around a woman. Everything she did would be incomprehensible and annoying. Acutely irritating. No, I think it's pretty obvious when you ponder it. Most psychologists today agree the theory is valid.

Oh, I know — you always were a skeptic. Prove it? Well . . . I can, as a matter of fact. Sure, I can. Hold on a minute, order another cognac and I'll see if I can refresh your memory.

Remember Louis Tyler who used to be in our outfit back when we were first in training? Sure, you do. I thought you would. Rather slight, fair-haired boy, quiet but real clever. He used to hang out with us, you and me and one or two others. Then he was shifted from our company and sent to some sort of hush-hush OSS school. He spoke French like a native — he'd been raised here as a boy and they were going to use him for some pre-D-Day operations.

I saw him several times in England before we went in — we were still the best of friends. He'd get off on a leave once in awhile, look me up and I'd wangle a pass for the evening. We'd make a night of it. He was actually a pretty lonely guy, I guess. I learned a lot about him. His mother had been in France when the Nazis came in — he had heard she was dead according to some underground source in

the OSS offices. His father — divorced or something. He never mentioned him. Hated him, I think.

Louis used to confide some of his worries to me, but he was a nice guy. We used to go wenching together in London and he had a way with the gals. Maybe it's that French upbringing, or maybe he sort of understood them better than most, but he sure could knock 'em dead.

Anyway, he was dropped by parachute into France a few weeks before the invasion. I don't know his exact mission, but it was pretty important. I believe he knew the exact dates and places of the landings — not the false information that had been let slip, but the real dope. It was vital for certain people in the French underground to know them. Louis was one of the men chosen to tell them.

I saw him before he jumped. He couldn't tell me his mission — what I know I found out after the war — but I knew he was set to go because he was nervous. Louis was a brave guy — but he was a little nervous that night. Who wouldn't be? He asked me then did I mind the fact that he'd named me his heir in case he never came back. He'd nobody else he really trusted. I said, "Heck, you'll be back." He shrugged . . . said if he didn't, would I at least try to find out what happened to him, maybe put a marker on his grave. Louis was sort of religious and a very sincere guy.

So when we shook hands that night in London, I said, "Don't worry. I never let a friend down." He looked me in the eye and said, "I trust you."

D-Day came and went. My outfit was in it, and I'm not talking about it because you were there alongside me, Jack, and you know what it was like.

Hell, sheer hell.

But now think, Jack. Remember a certain town we went through on our way to Paris — a small village, let's see — Bois le Chateau, no, that's not quite right — well, something like that. And do you remember that I was on recon on our front and went into that village a bit ahead of the rest of the company? The Germans had pulled out, fortunately, or maybe I wouldn't be here to tell the tale.

Let me explain something you don't know and didn't know then. I was attached to Intelligence — and I had a private mission to perform. We had heard that the Nazis had some of our OSS men here — 'chutists they'd captured and had been interrogating at the old chateau that gave the town its name. I was supposed to get there first, if I could, find out what happened, maybe get the dope or the papers or whatnot before the rest of the company came along.

So I go there. The Germans had left, the villagers had gone into hiding, and I got into the chateau with my sidekicks covering me with Garands.

It was the place, all right. We found several of our men down in the cellar, in dungeons left over from the ancient times. Two were dead — they'd tried to get information from them the crude way and failed. I won't go into the details. You've read about Gestapo methods — they're just what they said they were, and worse.

A couple more were insane. It seems they'd had a new technique they were trying out, a really vicious thing — and I can say it didn't succeed in spite of everything. Our men were good — they never talked.

This device — it had been invented very shortly before and they were testing it on this batch of 'chutists because they guessed somebody among them might know the date of the coming attack. They were right — but they didn't know the stamina of our fellows.

It seems they first drugged their victim, a sort of hypnotic type of drug that can cause permanent damage, the splitting of personality, schizophrenia, dementia, death. Under the drug, they focused some sort of electric current and pressure that loaded the victim with electricity — painful, which was part of it, and having a terrible effect on the brain and nervous system, as well as the whole body — and that was another part of it.

The idea was to shatter his personality so thoroughly that everything hidden in the mind would be fragmented, completely torn apart from everything else. It literally shredded, splintered the ego and left the memories flying wide open . . . at least that was the theory. The first man we found alive was hopelessly insane, terribly burned, a quivering wreck.

He didn't live long. There was nothing to be done for him.

I found the Gestapo's lists, and Louis Tyler's name was on it. He was down there somewhere, in the dungeons, a victim of the new technique.

We found a couple more guys first, also out of their minds, dying. One was badly twisted in body, sort of torn apart, strangely burned — melted is how I'd describe his appearance. I don't like to think about it.

I found the cell where Louis was supposed to be. I got it open — the Nazis had left only a few

hours before.

No, I didn't find Louis. Louis was gone; well, 90 percent of him was gone. There is no such person. I found something in that cell. Crouching in the corner was a little girl. Just a little girl, blondish, looking about five years old, whimpering, wearing part of a man's shirt — a French workman's blue blouse like Louis would have worn when he 'chuted in.

I took that little girl with me. She knew me, came running to me when she saw me. She took my hand and she trusted me. I took her back with me to the town and the company.

Of course I didn't take her through the war. I had to turn her over to the folks who took care of the war orphans, but I put my claim on her. I adopted her, because nobody else ever claimed her. Officially adopted her. She's been raised in France at my expense and on the money from Louis Tyler's GI insurance. Private schools, foster homes, all that — after all, I'm not married and what was I going to do with a little girl tugging at my heels back in the States?

Anyway, I come to France every year and meet her and act like a father to her. She's a dear — engaged now and wanted me to meet her boyfriend and give my approval. I'm waiting for her now. She's going to meet me here.

Who was she really? Well, I don't know. I know that story about Louis Tyler sounds sort of wild — and, sure, that's all conjecture about Weininger. So maybe ten percent of any man is feminine. I guess that held true for Louis, like anyone else. I like to kid myself into thinking so.

Oh, here she is. See that pretty blonde coming across the square? The one with the cute pillbox

hat and the long hair. Some figure, eh? Ahh, these Paris cuties.

"Hello, darling; my, you're looking good. Oh, may I introduce an old Army buddy. Oh, you know him, remembered him from back when. Sure, you're right, darling, this is Jack Oldfield. Some things come back to you . . .

"Jack, don't stand there gaping. For gosh sakes, pull yourself together. May I introduce my adopted daughter, Louise?"

EIN BLICK IN DIE ZUKUNFT

For some reason, I rendered this title in German from the very first draft. It simply means, "A Glimpse Into the Future," but somehow it seems more mystically impressive in German. The word zukunft is unusually exotic to the English-reading eye, and is like the sort of gobbledygook that mystics would use. Which was the impression I sought to convey. After you finish the story, you should be able to realize that it was written in the thirties. I have at times thought of changing the ending to other conclusions, but it may as well stand as it is. It could still be.

No, Lady Blakelock is not having her seances any more. No, I'm sorry, but if you are in search of psychic thrills, you'll simply have to go somewhere else. Lady Blakelock has returned to England, and I am rather sorry to report that none of her regular clients had the grace or decency to see her off. When she went up the gangplank to the Queen Mary, there were to be sure many society people there and the society reporters took full note of it. But of her former hosts, of her favored American clients and members of the "circle," they were absent to a man.

Where, for instance, was Howard W. Ponsonby and his wife, Martha, who was a Boston Saterlee on her mother's side? If you must know, they were at an ungodly place in the deepest Canadian woods, completing that infernal lodge of theirs out where nobody, but nobody, can get at them short of dogsled or war canoe.

Where, for instance, was that entertaining young wit and bravo of Newport society last season, Wilkins Macrae Wilkins? This young blade, who seemed to be such an outstanding example of the rising American lion of business and society, was that afternoon to be found, though it was a secret well guarded, on the girders of a building under construction in one of the new developments on the lower east side. What was he doing in such an outlandish place? Well, first of all, he'd been there for weeks, and second of all, he was working. Yes, you heard me, working. He was, and is for all I know, still rated as an Assistant Carpenter (unskilled) and rated for $1.75 an hour. His money? His stocks and bonds? They're still there, I assure you. Untouched.

Where, for a further exasperating example, were Evelyn and John Watson-Ryan of the Consolidated Amalgam Watson-Ryans? They were, I think, starting on their third round of bars that afternoon on that classic binge of theirs — which has lasted now for three months and is the wonder and amazement of Cafe Society. Their physicians give them a few more weeks before they'll cart them off with the permanent DTs.

And where, to be sure, was J. Markwall Rockley, the Wall Street magnate, who had been Lady Blakelock's host at his palatial estate in Newport these months? That solid, middle-aged,

conservative pillar of society was two days out from the Atlantic Coast on his yacht *Conqueror III*, with a cargo of food good for a year, a full crew and headed for a certain rarely visited South Sea Island with no intention of coming back.

No, Lady Blakelock is not in the seance business any more. And it is unlikely that she will oblige any of her friends of London and Mayfair with those wonderful and spooky afternoons of hers. She will seem to her Brittanic friends as a strangely chastened woman. What, for instance, will they make of her remark to a young New York reporter as the ship prepared to sail? She had said, apropos of nothing, "I am ready to go down with the ship."

A devilishly odd remark, considering how utterly solid and sound and modern the *Queen Mary* is. The reporters took it for joshing or maybe good old British super-conservatism. I think now that they were wrong.

It all seems to date back to Lady Blakelock's last afternoon circle. She'd been giving them in the library of the Rockley mansion twice a week to the pleasure and astonishment of the Newport crowd that summer. Gradually she'd acquired a regular coterie of followers — astonishingly diverse, but then you never can tell who is interested in divination, talking with their ancestors and all that.

That afternoon there were only her regulars there. A small group, to be sure, but it was really best that way. Not like the time before when those wild Mansfields had hooted and made groaning noises all during the time Lady Blakelock was in a trance and trying to make contact with her spirit guide, Waldo. Simply spoiled everything.

When everybody was assembled around the cleared big table that the butler and his footman

had carried in, Lady Blakelock, clad in her black seance cloak and looking quite grim and Welsh, tapped on the table for order. Rockley cleared his throat. The Watson-Ryans stopped talking about their latest tennis match. Wilkins desisted in his efforts to catch the attention of Martha Ponsonby while Howard Ponsonby was arranging his chair more in line.

Lady Blakelock cleared her throat, said, "Well, what do you suggest we seek for this afternoon? Would you like to speak to anyone now in the great beyond?"

Rockley grunted, "We've already had Napoleon, Chief Sitting Bull, Martha's grand-aunt Matilda, John's father, and so on. All rather boring, if you must know. I'd suggest we try to take a peek into the future, eh? Find out what's going to happen? Say get an idea of whether U.S. Steel is due for another rise, or who'll win in the Irish Sweepstakes, or what?"

"That sounds swell," Wilkins put in. "Can you do it, old girl? I mean, can you get us a glimpse of the future?"

Lady Blakelock frowned. "I've not had occasion to do so before. But I think, I think it can be done. It would be an interesting experiment. And we're all so receptive maybe it would work. This time. I've read certain paragraphs in Madame Blavatsky and some of Ouspensky's works that make me feel that I can do it. Waldo isn't really very good at that. Spirits don't pay too much attention to history, you know."

Rockley grunted again. "Let's try." Everyone muttered words of appreciation. A little thrill went over the crowd. Lady Blakelock nodded.

At a word, the footman lowered the blinds and

drew the black curtains over the windows and doors. Turning on only the little floor lamp standing to one side of Lady Blakelock, he silently left the room and closed the door.

The dim glow illuminated the faces of the little group. Everybody fidgeted awhile, got a few coughs stowed away, and grew quiet. Around them the leather backs of the walls of books shone dimly and medievally. A big sixteenth century globe, mounted on a pedestal that once belonged to a court astrologer in Venice, loomed darkly against one wall.

Lady Blakelock spoke softly in her deep voice. "The future, the present, and the past are all one. One flows into the other, but each are but parts of the whole. The future exists today even as the past exists today. It is like the bend of a river. Before we come to it, we cannot see what is around it. Yet what we shall see around that bend is there even when we are not. In our flow of life we are as leaves floating in the River of Time. What lies around the corner for us is there now, today, it is only that we have not yet arrived there."

She paused and there was a minute of uninterrupted silence while this thought sank in. Then again she spoke softly, hypnotically:

"It is only up to us to project ourselves into that future. To raise ourselves above the current, to look down upon that bend. And we shall see what lies ahead. We must first empty our minds and our thoughts of every thought and idea of today. We must leave this today behind, we must cast ourselves forward fifteen years into the future. We must leave this year for that year to come. It is there, now. We shall see it in a few minutes."

Their hands moved over the tabletop and

overlapped each other. A great silence had fallen upon the gathering. None spoke and a strange, almost vibratory stillness emanating from the psychic aura of Lady Blakelock seemed to reach out and envelope every mind. She began to intone:

"In the name of Belial and Baal-Zeb, of Ashtoreth, and Adhoram, of Beliar and Momash-Teleth, of Ramuz and Ahmuz and Kor-Vastus, of St. John and of the seven and seventy assorted spirits of high and low . . ."

A strange light seemed gradually to fill the room. In a few moments the glow spread over everything, then it seemed to the circle that the room vanished and that they were standing somewhere above things and seeing and hearing and *knowing.*

Just what they were seeing and hearing and knowing, I can't say, because I wasn't there and they never told me. What little I do know is what William the footman told me he saw through the keyhole. He swears he saw the light, but he doesn't know what they saw, because it all went pop, just like that, and they all gasped, it was dark again, instantly after, he says, and they turned on the lights and just gaped at each other. Rather sickly, he says.

They just sat there awhile, and then Rockley said something, and the rest just looked at him, looked sort of worse if that was possible. One got up, he doesn't remember who, pulled the curtains, and let the light in. John the footman didn't see any more or hear any more, because he went away rapidly. Figured they'd open the door next and he couldn't afford to be caught.

It wouldn't make any difference if he had, because they all packed off the next day or so.

And Rockley closed the house down within the week — though the season wasn't over by any means — went back to New York and began arranging for his south seas trip. Lady Blakelock went back to the city and started making arrangements to return home. The rest — well, you know.

So just what they saw and what's around the corner, I'm dashed if I know. They won't talk about it, not even the Watson-Ryans at their most drunken. It must have been pretty fruity anyway.

But the only thing that John the footman overheard anyone say, and the only thing that anyone seems to have remarked on the subject, was that remark on J. Markwall Rockley, the Wall Street bigwig, just after they'd come out of the trance. You'd think maybe he'd have been excited about what the market was going to do, or maybe would make a quick note on what to buy or what to sell. But he never did anything like that at all.

The only thing he'd said was something like, "Oh, those reds, those damn, damn reds." So help me, that's all he ever said.

TOP SECRET

This very short piece has probably been reprinted more often and translated more often than anything else I ever wrote. It was even included as a factual news story in one annual volume of the year's most unusual events! Short as it is, the basic idea is one from my 1932 notes, but I never wrote the story until fifteen years later.

I cannot say whether I am the victim of a very ingenious jest on the part of some of my shackier friends or whether I am just someone accidentally "in" on some top-secret business. But it happened, and it happened to me personally, while visiting Washington recently, just rubbernecking, you know, looking at the Capitol and the rest of the big, white buildings.

It was summer, fairly hot, Congress was not in session, nothing much was doing, most people vacationing. I was that day aiming to pay a visit to the State Department, not knowing that I couldn't, for there was nothing public to see there unless it's the imposing and rather martial lobby (it used to be the War Department building, I'm told). This I did not find out until I had blithely walked up the marble steps to the entrance, past the big,

bronze doors, and wandered about in the huge lobby, wherein a small number of people, doubtless on important business, were passing in and out.

A guard sitting near the elevators made as if to start in my direction to find out who and what the deuce I wanted, when one of the elevators came down and a group of men hustled out. There were two men, evidently State Department escorts, neatly clad in gray, double-breasted suits, with three other men walking with them. The three men struck me as a little odd; they wore long, black cloaks, big slouch hats with wide brims pulled down over their faces and carried portfolios. They looked for all the world like cartoon representations of cloak-and-dagger spies. I supposed that they were some sort of foreign diplomats and, as they were coming directly toward me, stood my ground, determined to see who they were.

The floor was marble and highly polished. One of the men nearing me suddenly seemed to lose his balance. He slipped; his feet shot out from under and he fell. His portfolio slid directly at my feet.

Being closest to him, I scooped up the folio and was the first to help raise him to his feet. Grasping his arm, I hoisted him from the floor — he seemed to be astonishingly weak in the legs; I felt almost that he was about to topple again. His companions stood about rather flustered, helplessly, their faces curiously impassive. And though the man I helped must have received a severe jolt, his face never altered expression.

Just then the two State Department men recovered their own poise, rushed about and, getting between me and the man I had rescued,

rudely brushed me aside and rushed their party to the door.

Now what bothers me is not the impression I got that the arm beneath that man's sleeve was curiously wooly, as if he had a fur coat underneath the cloak (and this in a Washington summer!), and it's not the impression that he was wearing a mask (the elastic band of which I distinctly remember seeing amidst the kinky, red, close-cropped hair of his head). No, it's not that at all, which might be merely momentary misconstructions on my part. It's the coin that I picked up off the floor where he'd dropped his portfolio.

I've searched through every stamp and coin catalogue I can find to borrow, and I've made inquiries of a dozen language teachers and professors, and nobody can identify that coin or the lettering around its circumference.

It's about the size of a quarter, silvery, very light in weight, but also very hard. Besides the lettering on it, which even the Bible Society, which knows a thousand languages and dialects, cannot decipher, there is a picture on one side and a symbol on the other.

The picture is the face of a man, but of a man with very curiously wolfish features: sharp, canine teeth parted in what could be a smile; a flattened, broad, and somewhat protruding nose, more like a pug dog's muzzle; sharp, widely spaced, vulpine eyes; and definitely hairy and pointed ears.

The symbol on the other side is a circle with latitude and longitude lines on it. Flanking the circle, one on each side, are two crescent-shaped moons.

I wish I knew just how far those New Mexico rocket experiments have actually gone.

HOW MANY MILES TO BABYLON?

Nursery rhymes may seem to be nonsense now, but they originally had meanings, sometimes political, sometimes mystical, but almost always significant. This one bothered me for a long time. One authority thinks that Babylon is a folk-confusion for "Babyland" and the poem an allegory of the allotted three score years and ten. But that doesn't seem to fit with the rest of the rhyme. Anyway, there's a reproduction of a Babylonian libation vase on sale at Breantano's and other museum outlets, the sight of which produced the missing key to this ancient bit of doggerel.

"How many miles to Babylon?
Threescore miles and ten.
Can I get there by candlelight?
Yes, and back again.
If your heels are nimble and light,
You may get there by candlelight."

Sitting in his study, by the open window, Barry Kane heard the woman in the garden of the adjoining house reading Mother Goose rhymes to her little girl. He hadn't been paying attention consciously; it had just been part of the noises of

everyday living. His mind had been reflecting on the small urn he had just unpacked. But the word "Babylon" struck his ear and sparked his attention; the little jingle jerked his mind away from the black, time-encrusted relic before him, and onto the woman's clear enunciation outside.

Barry frowned a bit, still idly turning the stone jug in his hand. Now that was an odd one, he thought. It was vaguely familiar; he supposed that he had run across it himself in his own childhood — and, as children do, simply had listened to it for its rhythm and ignored its meaning. Like so many of Mother Goose's poems, it seemed to make not much sense.

He tried to focus his attention again on the urn. He'd only unwrapped it a few minutes ago from its careful packings and sawdust. The expedition had shipped it to him from Baghdad, along with other interesting bits they had dug out of Babylon's ruins. An odd coincidence that that particular bit of nursery nonsense should have been overheard at just this time. He wondered idly if the mother outside would be surprised to know that so close to her was a piece that had just arrived from that very Babylon.

Only "threescore miles and ten," too, Barry thought. Why didn't he up and go then? Although he's rated as an expert on the ancient civilisations of Asia Minor, actually he'd never been abroad. But now that he knew how close it was, why . . .

He shook his head sharply. What was he thinking about, he asked himself angrily. Daydreaming, of all things! Babylon was perhaps ten thousand or more miles away from where he sat, not the mere seventy of the rhyme. He

couldn't get there in a hundred candlelights, nor many times that number. But for a moment it had seemed so clear, so simple, that he'd actually wondered why he'd never made the trip.

He smiled bleakly to himself. Wish it really were easy. But back to work. He took a soft brush from his desk and began to dust the little urn gently. An interesting piece. Probably not valuable, for it looked like a fairly common votary urn, as might have been found in any Babylonian household. Well . . . he amended his thoughts, studying its engraved sides, maybe not just any . . . it didn't quite fit the standard designs.

He turned it around in interest. No, it certainly didn't fit the usual patterns after all. And — why should it? If it had, the expedition wouldn't probably have bothered to air-express it to him. It had to be something they hadn't been able to classify properly, and so had hoped that he would be able to look it up in the more detailed library and references available here at the college.

So then what was it? He turned it over and squirmed uncomfortably in his seat, feeling an irritated mood come over him. He suddenly felt restless. The urn could possibly have held a votary light. It might have been possible to put a little oil in it and fire it; but it didn't quite seem to fit that bill. He bent over, looked sharply at the hollowed-out interior, poked a finger into it and scratched the side with his nail.

He looked at his fingernail with surprise. Wax. There was a slight trace of wax inside the stone urn. Maybe it was a candleholder . . . but that, he told himself immediately, was silly. They didn't have candles in 2500 B.C.

On the other hand, there was no reason to

believe that the expedition had just dug it up. They might have found it for sale in some dark shop or dingy market place booth in Baghdad. It might have been used by some Iraqi for years before it found a place in the merchant's stall. There were many instances of ancient objects that had been found on the desert by wondering Arabs who had used them for their own living purposes when they had seemed useful. Of course, nowadays the Arabs were on the lookout for such stuff to sell to the curious Westerners. But years ago, a century or two meant little in those ancient lands. Yes, he supposed, it might have served sometime during the past four thousand years as a candlestick.

Can I get there by candlelight? Well, by this candlelight, maybe Babylon had indeed been only walking distance. Barry studied the engravings.

They displayed the usual Babylonian bas-relief technique: a bearded god walking stiffly, holding an object in one hand, the other raised to shield it. On the other side of the small cylindrical urn, opposite the walking god, was a giant coiled and winged snake upon whose head rose two curving horns and from whose mouth a flame was emitted. Not unconventional, thought Barry, het he'd never quite seen the like.

Why — the object the man was carrying was a light. Barry was astonished at this realization. The god was walking with a light in his hand. And there was something else, his expert eyes now noticed: at the back of the god's feet were tiny wings. The artist had meant to convey that the figure was moving rapidly. If your heels are nimble and light, Barry's mind interjected idiotically.

"Oh, stuff!" Barry said aloud, surprising

himself. What was getting to him? He was becoming dreamy. What if the man did have winged heels? That was coincidence? you might find a hundred such examples.

What I need, Barry thought, is a little exercise. I'm getting silly sitting here on a lovely sunny day like this. My mind is falling asleep. He stood up, carefully set the little black urn down, started for the door. At the door he stopped, paused a moment with an odd feeling that there must be something better to do than walking, then finally left his study, closed the door, and went for a walk.

As he passed his neighbor still seated in her yard with her child, Barry nodded politely. She still had the big Mother Goose book open on her lap.

He walked along the sunny streets of the college town with wide strides. He liked to walk, found it good exercise to calm the nerves and steady the thoughts. He began to analyze his irritation.

Somehow that nursery rhyme had got beneath his skin. It had been coincidence, of course, but still, it make you think, it did.

Barry had done some work in his own student years on Middle English literature and some of his research had crossed the Mother Goose lore. He knew that many of the apparently pointless verses had once had very definite meanings. Time had erased their references and what now remained were apparently silly jingles.

For instance, there was the one about Little Jack Horner, which referred to an actual personage of that name. This person, some sort of minor official in England five hundred years ago, had won himself a "plum" in the royal Christmas honors for doing some sort of secret toadying never made

public. The verse had been made up in mockery by his enemies and popularized around the taverns.

Perhaps more obvious was the one about "Hark, hark, the dogs do bark," and the beggars who came to town, having some among them in silken gowns. This was essentially the same deal — nobility coming to beg favors of the king at Christmas time. The people in inns and marketplaces had a way of disguising their digs at their social betters in such a fashion as to avoid lese majeste.

And of course the one about Banbury Cross which referred to Lady Godiva's ride.

Barry remembered his amazement at the grim story behind what had seemed on the silliest — that about Goosey, Goosey Gander and the old man who "would not say his prayers." This was a memorial of murder most black on a day of great evil. Yet, how many miles to Babylon . . .

He walked steadily through the streets, thinking about it. He worked the rhyme over, tore it apart, but still he could not fathom its possible original meaning. Finally he turned back and strode home. Once returned, he felt refreshed from the air and the exercise; he sat down again at his desk, renewed his attack on the little black urn.

He worked on it for the remainder of the afternoon, digging out his files, studying pictures of similar vessels and of Babylonian deities and demons. By nightfall he had to admit he'd not gotten near to solution. Nothing fitted the designs exactly, although several seemed superficially close.

He went in to supper, found himself drifting back in thought to the urn and to the silly rhyme alternately. He was annoyed at his failure to get his mind off the side issue. He could ask some of the

Lit. faculty about the verse, he thought. Probably they could tell him its original and meaning in a minute. But not tonight.

After eating, he read the evening paper, turned on the television, watched a comedian for an hour, found him neither funny nor relaxing, turned off the machine, decided to go to bed. He was still oddly irritated, still keyed up by the obstacle to his intellect. After all, with Babylon only threescore miles and ten away . . . "by candlelight," that is, his mind corrected himself as he entered the bedroom.

What silly thoughts! Maybe by morning he'd get that jingle out of his head and be able to look at the relic in a less clouded light. He undid his tie, hesitated. "Maybe I'd better have another glance at that thing," he murmured to himself. He left the bedroom, passed through the dark hall, and entered his study.

He switched the desk light on and took the little urn in his hand, studying the figure. The man was indeed walking somewhere by candlelight. And his heels were nimble and light.

Yet even so, Barry's mind slipped in a new twist, what man could walk seventy miles in the time it would take a candle to burn down? Assuming even that it was a large candle, it would last at most four or five hours. That meant walking at least fifteen miles an hour. He had heard somewhere that a man could run at that rate for perhaps a few seconds, but certainly not for hours.

And then of course it wasn't really seventy miles — it was twice that, because you have to get back again, too. And by the same candlelight, incidentally.

That definitely put it out of possible class.

Another idea struck Barry. Maybe if he put a candle into the black stone relic and lit it, perhaps it would put some sort of special angle on the engravings and bring out some unnoticed secret details. He'd heard of such things in Egyptian statuary. Anyway, it would be an amusing experiment.

He looked around. There was a candle sticking in an ornamental silver holder on the mantel in the study. He took it down, tried the candle into the hollowed space and found it just fit, tight and neat.

He reached into his pocket for his lighter, flicked it, and lit the candle. Then, to complete the effect, he switched off the desk light.

The candlelight flickered in the room, throwing moving shadows all about. Barry stared at the black urn, but it was in darkness from the glow above.

"How many miles to Babylon?" he said under his breath. And quick as a flash his mind answered: "Threescore miles and ten."

Why, of course, he thought, of course! It should have been obvious, but he asked aloud: "Can I get there by candlelight?"

Yes, and back again. It was so certain that he rose from his seat, holding the candle in its black Babylonian container and, shielding it with his other hand from drafts, strode confidently to the door, out the hall, opened the front door, and walked out into the street.

It was all so incredibly clear now. You could go anywhere you wished if you just saw it the right way. Why, he marveled, there are two ways of getting anywhere — the difficult, ordinary way everyone stuck to — and the obvious way.

"If your heels are nimble and light," he said happily to himself, and increased his pace springily. "My heels are nimble and light — I'm a naturally fast walker," he laughingly told himself. His body was tingling with excitement, his mind seemed clearer than ever before. Why hadn't he ever seen how simple it was, how fast one could go places this way, this simple, clear, shortcut way!

"You may get there by candlelight," he laughed aloud, holding the candle high before him, shielding it with outstretched hand and pacing breathlessly through the night. The flickering yellow flame cast little light about. He could see almost nothing in the blackness about him. Somehow he didn't expect to. Not by the shortcut; you won't get scenery. The idea is to get there and I shall. Only seventy miles, Barry thought, and I must be eating that up fast. I'll get there before this candle is half gone.

He walked faster, the light flickering before him, the opaque dark all about. Beneath his feet was the crunch of dirt and then the swishing resiliency of sand.

Suddenly before him loomed a wall. He stopped, almost bumping into it. His breath was fast; he had been walking hard, but he was in perfect spirits. It was a bit cold out here, he thought, not as warm as it should be.

But it gets cold quickly on the desert, he thought. He held the candle up. The wall was old, it was sandswept and timeworn. It was ancient, and it was — he saw from the faint traceries of weatherworn carvings — Babylonian. He looked up, feeling suddenly faint and uneasy.

There were stars above him and in their pale glow he saw that he was standing out on the sand

in the midst of a barren desert, broken here and there by bits of projecting stone, partial walls broken by time, bits of excavated basements. A thin cold wind was blowing from somewhere and there was nothing living in sight.

The candle flickered in his hand. His hand suddenly shook as with the ague, as with terror. He stared about. The candle flickered again. Something, something was breathing on it, breathing over his shoulder from behind him.

If the candle went out, he'd never get back. And as the thought struck him, at that very moment the candle — only half burned — flickered again. A nauseating breath blew past his shoulder and the candle went out.

In a split second Barry Kane remembered the other half of the engraving on the black urn, the half turned away from the walking god with the nimble heels and the light, the thing toward which his nimble steps were surely directed. He turned his head quickly, looked over his shoulder.

Now he knew that there was another significance to the injunction, if your heels are nimble and light. It didn't just apply to the getting there; it also meant getting back. And he'd dallied too long in Babylon.

For the ancient Babylonian sculptor had been a good artist. The engraving was true to life.

SHOO, FLY

The original draft of this story carries the notation, "Dedicated to Elsie, who, on this evening, swatted a fly, but just a bit too hard." That was October 3, 1944. Screens were not easily repaired in wartime.

With a wicked swish, the metal flyswatter came down. Ka-smack!

Dunbridge smiled gleefully as he lifted the wire net weapon and surveyed the results of his blow. A nice ugly little splatter of crumpled wings, black chitin and smeary goo — with just the proper trace of blood.

It gave him a sense of power. And it was righteous, he told himself. Flies are such ugly things, so messy and buzzy. So nasty, too; always walking around on things, trotting over the butter, investigating the glasses, rubbing their filthy front paws together like a greedy lawyer. The nice new swatter gave him a sense of glory. He grasped the turned wood handle so tightly, so firmly. It was a weapon in the war of Drunbridge versus the insect invaders.

Somewhere in his childhood, the middle-aged bank teller had read some pseudo-scientific work about the menace of the insect world. Some stuff

about ants outnumbering men and inheriting the world, or mayhap some bosh about the constant war man had to fight to keep his own from nature. In any case, this man who wouldn't dream of hurting anything as large and audible as a mouse took a certain personal fanaticism in his battle against the unlucky flies, moths, and ants that invaded his suburban apartment.

The screens had been taken down by the superintendent a week too early this year, and in consequence flies had found their buzzing way into the two and a half rooms. While this superficially outraged Dunbridge, secretly it pleased him. For now he had an enemy to fight. An enemy he could see. And he had bought himself this nice new swatter for the occasion. Insecticide he spurned for the time being. That would come later in this war, that was for the final mop-up. But now was the night for hand-to-hand combat.

Let the corpses gather where they may. He'd clean them off at the close of struggle. Now . . . there was another fly in that kitchenette. He'd heard it buzz past a second before.

Ah, there it was. He saw it squatting against the ceiling, near the bulb. Out of his reach, eh? Well, Dunbridge thought to himself, you'll keep for a moment. For one was nestling against the door jamb.

Swish, bang! And that was accounted for. Dunbridge looked again for the elusive one. It still clung there. A big one, something like a bluebottle fly rather than the dirty little black housefly type.

He swished the swatter around in the air. But the fly didn't budge from its safe perch out of his reach.

Dunbridge smiled a crafty smile. He reached

over, flicked the light switch plunging the room into darkness. It was the kitchenette, the half room of his apartment.

For a few seconds he waited, then flicked the light on again. That usually worked, the darkness generally made the flies change position.

It had. The bluebottle was buzzing around in mid-air, in circles around the light. Then it slowly came down, around and around, and lighted easily right on the surface of the kitchen table facing Dunbridge.

The teller held his breath. Oh, he thought, this is going to be the masterpiece. Wait, he continued to himself, for that strategic moment. Wait for it to start preening its face or moving its forelegs.

Dunbridge stood stock still, the swatter poised motionless. The fly stood still for a minute or so. Dunbridge almost lost patience. Then the insect's forelegs left the ground and waved in front of its bulbous compound eyes.

Dunbridge put all the power of his right arm into the swing that followed. Down came the swatter with a shrieking swish.

Dunbridge never quite understood what happened next. One instant the swatter was about to land its glorious arc, the next instant it was as if a baseball bat had smacked on his arm.

There was a moment of violent pain all through his muscles, the swatter flew to pieces, there was a faint odor of smoke. And the wire mesh which had blown in all directions was faintly glowing red.

The fly stood there on the table, untouched, still waving its forelegs in front of it. But the swatter was no more.

Dunbridge stood there, completely dumbfounded, gaping, staring, his right arm and

shoulder in pain, as sore as if he had received a terrible bruise. It was impossible, it was incredible. The swatter must have struck a wire or something, his mind finally conjectured.

But there were no wires within his reach. And nothing was short-circuited. Dunbridge scowled. It was a fluke. But he had no time for wondering. This was still the hour of battle.

He reached behind him with his left hand, scooped up the evening newspaper, folded it over and over to make a paper cudgel. Then, using his left arm this time, he again swung at the obstinate shining blue fly.

The newspaper came down as before. And as before, he couldn't quite see what happened next. For the paper was shredded all over the room and his left side had joined his right in sudden agony.

The fly stood there, untouched as ever. Dunbridge had fallen back groaning.

The fly rested another moment, stopped preening itself with its forelegs, and took off. It buzzed around the room a bit, from the closed window (Dunbridge had closed it to avoid any escape for his victims) to the stove. It alighted on the wall.

The bank teller slipped out of the kitchen nook and into his living quarters. He plumped himself into a chair by the window and tried to gather his wits about him.

Outside the night was dark. There were not many house lights in view and the sky, usually clearer in the suburban air, was filled with the panorama of stars. Dunbridge opened the window, got himself a breath of fresh air.

His arms still ached. He tried to assemble himself. But there was no question something had

happened tonight that had knifed him to the core.

Was this fly, he thought, something new? Is this the new species, the new type, that will prove impossible for men to cope with? Is this the superfly that must replace the ordinary fly as inevitably as the superman must replace homo sapiens?

He tried to shake off the thought. That was Sunday supplement stuff, that was comic book stuff. But it persisted.

Or had this particular fly become charged somehow with electricity and so had delivered a bolt to the metal of the swatter? Something like the electric eel, only in housefly form? Only it wasn't a housefly, he remembered. It was a bluebottle. A form usually associated with open fields, and maybe stables.

That was some consolation. But it would be hell on farmers, he thought. A buzzing came faintly to his ears.

The fly had flown into the living room and was idly circling about in the air.

Suddenly Dunbridge became frightened. He longed to be somewhere else. He mentally regretted ever having molested flies at all. Was this a punishment, he thought. Is there a god of flies — or perhaps a Stan of flies that visited men like him?

He tried to thrust that and other similar thoughts out of his head, but couldn't. The damned bluebottle kept buzzing about, now over his bed, now over his little bookcases, flying back and forth, now near the hall door or over the floor lamp.

Superfly, he thought, superfly. He cowered back in his chair and every movement reminded him in twinges of pain of the inexplicable blows his

muscles had sustained.

For an instant the thought of insecticide filled his head. But quickly he rejected it. Surely this horror fly had an answer to that. And he shuddered as he thought of what it could be.

For perhaps five minutes he watched that fly buzz about at its leisure. For five minutes the beaten man watched this hated little insect enjoy its clearly won superiority.

About and about it buzzed, here and there. Dunbridge had opened the window, he hoped desperately it would fly out. Then he would slam the window shut, and make tight his fortress. And retire to his nightmares.

But this was nightmare enough.

The fly flew closer, it buzzed around Dunbridge's sweating head once or twice, past his fear-bulged eyes. And then it alighted on the windowsill, just a few inches from the open night air.

Dunbridge stared at it. He could, he knew from experience, swat it with his hand. But he was a licked man. He knew he could never get up the courage to try it.

And the thought of the shredded newspaper came into him, only this time it would be the shredded corpuscles of his hand. He didn't move.

The fly took its time, just stood motionless, it shining transparent wings folded along its back. Its red bulging eyes bugging forward, unblinking, shining faintly. Its forelegs silent on the ground. No plunger of a tongue visible as yet.

Dunbridge stared hard at his conqueror, at his enemy. It seemed like a reckoning. He was close enough to see it clearly in all its insect detail.

And then the fly seemed to shake a bit, ever so

faintly. And its side opened!

A hole, a distinct hole in the insect's gleaming bluebottle side! And something seemed to jump down, something incredibly tiny, yet still quite visible. Something gleaming faintly as if encased in chitinous armor as well. But something that seemed suggestively manlike, something that stood upright, the minutest fraction of a fraction of an inch high. Something that walked about for the smallest fraction of space, something that touched one shiny leg of the bluebottle. Something that seemed to leap up to the rim of the little round hole in the fly's shining side.

Something that seemed to close a door in that hole, that sealed the fly tight again. For an instant Dunbridge thought he detected a slight glow about the insect, then it flew away.

It buzzed for a single arc about the room, then heading straight as a bullet it whistled out the open window and into the night sky. The star-strewn sky where that comet was shining on the horizon so brightly.

And on the windowsill where it had rested that last moment, there was a faint burned spot and a tiny speck, which resolved itself later under Dunbridge's strong reading glass into a pile of infinitesimally tiny tin cans.

THE LYSENKO MAZE

The theory of the survival of the fittest has never seemed the full story to me — and the fanatics for Mendelian theories always seem to rule out the perfectly obvious — which is that most forms of life are a little too ideally suited to their environment to be just accidental mutations. If Lysenko was a fanatic, so were his detractors. And perhaps this story arose out of a sense of injustice due to the disgusting way the non-Soviet press always treated his perfectly sensible arguments. And don't write any angry letters to me unless you've actually read those arguments and not someone else's summary of them.

"By mastering these means, man can create forms that did not and could not appear in nature even in millions of years."

— Trofim Denisovitch Lysenko

Professor Borisov had succeeded in shocking his audience. He had had their sympathy for a long time, several months, in fact. Months in which he had slipped across the frontier in Finland, in the dead of winter, months in which he had hidden

aboard a Finnish fishing vessle and made his way to Sweden. Months in which he had lived from hand to mouth, a refugee from a political tyranny he had despised, without means, until his scientific friends in America had been able to obtain the necessary papers and this most valued post at this Corn Belt university's experimental laboratories. And now this!

The professor waved his hands wildly, a little upset at disturbing his newfound friends. "But of course I am not a Communist — do I have to tell you this again? Do I have to show you what I have gone through? Am I not the same man I was an hour ago, yesterday, last month? A good biologist, a good believer in democracy, in freedom of speech and conscience? Da! I am all that — and yet I tell you again, Lysenko is right!"

Melvin Raine shook his head. It had been his responsibility, this invitation to the refugee Russian. It would be on his head if it was now shown that they were harboring a hypocrite. Yet — what Borisov had said was so. There was little doubt of the man's honesty, of his innate personal refusal to compromise with anything he believed false. So what were they now to make of this Lysenko business? Why, how could any self-respecting scientist place credence in that charlatan — in a man of "science" who had to be bolstered up by the dictates of a Politburo of police state bureaucrats?

He voiced his thoughts. "And," he went on, "still you persist in this strange thing. You betray our intelligence with this belief in Lysenko's outmoded notions. It is sheer Lamarckism — the inheritance of acquired characteristics, disproved a hundred years in a thousand laboratories."

"Ah, no, no," the little Russian was very upset, but very positive. "It is you who do not understand. I do not approve of Lysenko's politics; he is a Communist, a Stalin fanatic. I am a free man, a democrat. And yet, I tell you, on this one thing he could be right and yet wrong on a thousand others. And I tell you also that this one thing I have seen proven in Russia . . . proven to me, to my satisfaction."

The men gathered in Raine's rooms were silent. They were members of faculty, biologists, teachers of animal husbandry, botanists, men of integrity, learning. It was clear that Borisov did not have the sympathy of a man there.

"Let me ask you," spoke one finally. "Do you think it was right, let us say, for science, for such a man as Galileo to be harassed for his opinions by the inquisitorial courts?"

"Ah, yes," shouted Borisov, "it was wrong of the court — for in that one thing Galileo was right. But I am glad you mentioned him. Very glad. For let me ask you this: Galileo was right in believing his astronomical discoveries and for saying that the earth did move. But how many other things that Galileo personally believed were wrong? Did he not share the ignorance and bias of his time in everything else? Did he not believe in the divine right of kings, in slavery, in the permanent servility of serfs and women, in a hundred, a thousand other such outmoded evils, falsehoods? Would he not be, by our standards, a hopeless bigot, a reactionary?

"So . . . but in that one thing, Galileo was right. So . . . in this one thing Lysenko is right. He shares the foolishness of the state around him, but unlike the case of Galileo, the fickle state chooses to

uphold his one discovery and suppress his opponents. A mere accident of politicians . . . but must it mean that his discovery is false?"

Raine leaned forward. He looked at the man, studied him. Borisov's blue eyes were plainly distressed, his face was lined and working. His prematurely grey hair was awry. Yes, the American decided, this man was on the level. Borisov meant what he said, and because he was implicitly honest, he had said it.

"If," and Raine weighed his words carefully, "you have seen proof that Lysenko's theories of evolution and the heredity of acquired characteristics do work, would you be willing to conduct an experiment here — under our conditions — to prove it again?"

Borisov frowned, ran a hand through his hair. "Yes."

"Then suppose we meet tomorrow and work out the details of this experiment to our mutual satisfaction?"

"Why wait until tomorrow? Let us decide right here upon this experiment. After all, in dealing with generations we may have to need several years for this . . . have you any suggestions?"

One of the biology men spoke up, a sly smile on his lips, "What would you say to repeating Weismann's experiment with mice? Shall we breed a race of tail-less mice?"

Borisov turned, shook a finger. "Now that is exactly what I mean when I say you do not know what Lysenko is doing. Weismann tried to prove Lamarck by cutting off the tails of twenty-two generations of mice. And the last generation was born with just the same long tails as the first! Aha, you all say, this proves that you cannot inherit

acquired changes! And then you all will get busy saying that Chinese women bound their feet for thousands of years, still were born with normal feet! Aha, you then add, this double proves it? And all that it proves is nothing! Nothing at all, except that nature sneers at foolishness."

He stopped, gathered his breath. "Let me explain and please listen. The mice did not lose their tails because there was no practical reason for them to lose their tails, there was no need for taillessness, there was no environmental necessity for it, it was pointless, senseless, useless. So the mouse breed simply ignored Weismann's scalpel. The Chinese women were helpless with their feet bound. Their organism rejected that foolishment. It did not need it, even if an artificial society wanted it, the body knew better.

"Now please understand this. A body, a plant, an animal will pass on an acquired characteristic only when that new characteristic has been acquired by the individual in answer to an urgent need of the system to maintain itself. A seed that falls in a strange climate either adapts itself to that climate or it dies. If it adapts itself, it passes on its adaptation to its descendents, or they die. Burbank knew this. Plant growers know this. Only foolish college biologists do not know this."

"Now about mutations?" said Raine. "You know that the means for the creation of new species has been shown to be by the mutation of the germ cell, by damage to the chromosomes. In the course of survival, only those mutuant individuals who have a beneficial quality from this genetic accident will live."

"This is not so. Consider the cavern fish," said Borisov. "This is a thing you Americans discovered.

But you ignore it in your fine theories. These fish, found in lightless caverns, have no eyes. But you take them out and breed them in lighted waters, and, presto, in a few generations the eyes are back! Why? Obviously these fish originally became trapped in these caverns. In lightlessness, their eyes were useless, worse, being sensitive, they were a handicap, a menace to their life. Hence they retracted, generation by generation, atrophied, until they were born in that atrophied submerged condition. But back in the light, the need for eyes reasserted itself, and the eyes returned in a few generations. This is not a mutation, no."

He paused, held up a hand. "Now in this experiment, you must forget these tailless mice. If you use mice, you must create a condition which will make them change to survive. Which will make them force the acquisition of some quality their young will need to have also. You will see. So I suggest this . . . why not intelligence? We will force the mice to use their brains. We will breed thinking mice, because maybe that will be the easiest experiment for us."

Raine nodded. "I do not believe it will work. But that will be an acceptable basis."

Raine and Borisov and several others worked out the details of the experiment, and within a month the scene was set.

The men who had met that original night gathered at an old farmhouse several miles from the town. The farm and its dilapidated house has been acquired by the college years ago which had thus far failed to make use of it. Raine and Borisov showed the men in. The interior of the house had been torn out, until the building was like a huge barn, only a hollow shell. It was hard to describe

its present contents, save that it looked like nothing so much as a giant abdomen, tightly packed with criss-crossed and interlaced intestines, made of tubes ranging from three to ten inches in diameter, some transparent, some translucent, some plastic black. The interior of the house, save for a few corners, a few observation posts set on platforms here and there, was a closed and vastly complex structure of these tubes. The men stared in amazement.

Borisov explained. "We intend to breed mice to have cunning and quickness of thought. This also is an inherited characteristic. We will breed a race of mice that can make deductions, put two and two together, estimate for tomorrow.

"You see, here is Lysenko's law as he condenses it." He took out a little gray-covered pamphlet, found a place, and translated: "*The alteration of requirements, that is of the heredity of a living body, always reflects the specific effects of conditions of the external environment, provided that they are assimilated by it.*"

"Now we have created an external environment for these mice. It is this maze, closed from the outside world in every way, and the mice will live and breed entirely within it. We have created, in accord with Lysenko's theory, conditions within this maze which will force the change in the species of mice for the creation of intelligence. That is this. This maze of pipes, which is their home, is basically not too different from the dark holes and cracks they would inhabit in houses. This maze of pipes is full of tricks. It is movable. It will shift its tubes, change connections, in accord with a mathematical rhythm. Systematically, in increasingly complex cycles, the various entry

places for food will shift. Day by day they will change, but they will repeat in cycles which the mouse should be able to determine, at first, without too much delay.

"At first the mice will become confused, for to obtain water they must come to one place, salt another, meat a third, fruit a fourth, and so on. And within the lifetime of each mouse they will see the regular alternation of these places. They will have to learn to determine the next day's alternation in advance, for there will never be enough food for all. As this goes on, as future generations come into existence, the pattern will become more complex, new problems will be added, dangers will be placed in the tubes. These mice will have to force themselves to acquire greater and greater skill at solving problems or die out."

He paused for breath. The men looked at the bewildering maze of tubes, probably miles of it crowded into the space within the wooden farm walls. "There will be lighting cycles within the tubes. There will be heat and cold spells. Mostly there will not be enough heat, by the third or fourth generation surely. But they will have the raw means for making heat, if they can learn to use them. There are special phases through which their development must operate. Light, heat. We are going to give them more oxygen than in the normal atmosphere, this will assist them to think and move faster. Professor Raine has agreed to it. We are even going to feed them supplies of a milk formula at first, which is chemically similar to human milk. Lysenko claims that the sap of a fosterparent plant can influence the heredity of a grafted twig from another species. This is permissible in the

experiment."

They looked over the maze. Raine unrolled the plans for it, explained the various subtleties, showed them the machinery for operating it, the schedules of food and heat alternations, for creating "season" within the sealed mouse world.

"Professor Borisov and I have our opinions on how this will end. I say that his twentieth generation of mice will be as ignorant as his first, that they will not pass on any basic cunning to their offspring. I say further that if anything strange should develop, I will prove that it is by mutation and that it will display the evidence of it on its own body."

Borisov shrugged. "You will see. By the way, gentlemen, we are not using laboratory white mice here. We agree that their albinism and their artificial breeding does not correspond with nature's norm. We are starting this experiment with wild gray house mice, captured in the city itself. And — we begin the experiment now."

He opened a valve in a large tube, took a box from which excited squeaks were coming and lifted a shutter at the box's side, which had pressed against the tube's opening. There was a scurrying of little feet as the mice rushed through. Another box was lifted. "The females, now," and another scurrying of feet.

"And now we shall see."

A half year later, Borisov and Raine stood on the upper observation post near the roof of the old house, watching the movements of the little gray mice through the sides of a transparent wide tube. The entry point for fruit was at that spot that hour, and they had just placed the supply there.

No mice were in sight when they had done so, but within three minutes there was a flash of gray and a mouse was at the food, turning it over, nibbling. Then, in a few seconds, there were several mice, and shortly after, a crowd.

Raine snapped his watch shut. "About the same time as yesterday," he said. "Not bad. May have been luck."

Borisov fingered his chin. "Or it may have been an old and experienced mouse simply on the prowl. But I think that first one had figured out where the entry would be."

Raine leaned over, watching the stream of mice that was now coming and going. "The trouble is that several generations are alive at once. But it does seem true that the younger mice seem to be edging the older ones out."

"But," said Borisov, "just to argue your point, this could be merely agility."

He noted the time in a large notebook, one of the many which had been used in the short time so far. There had been a period within the first few weeks when the mice had had very great difficulty in finding the food in time. Many of the original ones had certainly died in that time, starved, or eaten by their hungry fellows. But definitely they had overcome this original handicap. Of that there could be no doubt. But was this the development of intelligence or was it merely a system of having sentinels dispersed widely at all possible points? This angle had not occurred to them before.

However, the next steps were already planned. This was a system of new barriers. When the next food entry points came around in the complex schedule, there would be addition problems to be solved. Well, so it goes. But the question was still as

to whether it was still just a system of food scouts set up by the older generations and picked up by example by the new ones. It was hard to tell . . .

In the next year, Borisov and Raine became more and more baffled. The mice seemed to have established a fairly standard time for the discovery of the rhythmically changing food spots. It took usually about two and a half minutes for discovery and rarely varied. The total number of mice did not seem to be increasing, but was apparently stationary. There was no longer any practical way of determining how many mice were in the total maze, but they knew that only a certain limit could be supported.

However, what they could see of the mice did not seem to indicate any noticeable physical changes. They did not remove any of the little animals, for the test was that the mouse maze had to be sealed and stay that way.

It was about two and a quarter years later, about the time that a twentieth generation might have been in the tubes, that Raine first spotted the blue mouse. It had originally made its appearance at one of the food entries among the first five to find it. By that time the mathematical shifting of the ports had assumed a complexity that would have bothered humans to keep track of and would have required a whole month's records to determine its next shifts. Yet the mice kept on spotting the shifts in time.

Raine pointed out the blue mouse to the Russian. They were again on the upper observation platform. This mouse was actually slightly larger, possibly longer, and his fur was quite definitely more bluish than grey. The tail appeared to be

shorter and in some ways he seemed faster.

"Look at that," whispered Raine. "Look at that! Could that be a result?"

Borisov pursed his lips. He had been getting a bit uneasy about the experiment. Even though they were trying for intelligence and not physical change, he had expected that some physical changes would occur as a corollary to the greater brain ability. Man knew too little of nature to predict all the factors that might accompany a change in the direction of a being's existence. Yet all he had seen had been little gray mice that never seemed any different to the visible eye. But this . . . well . . .

Raine went on, "That mouse has all the appearance of a mutant. An irrelevant color change, an unusual variation in size and length. If it is also intelligent, would it not prove my point and not yours?"

Borisov was shaken more than he would care to admit. "Still," he said, "there might be a factor within the tubes that we do not understand which called forth these changes. We should avoid conclusions until the experiment is over. Should we check the controls, the heat, the inside atmosphere?"

"Hardly necessary," said Raine. "They are always checked. The conditions are as set and haven't changed. The experiment is approaching its end soon, anyway. We shall soon see."

They watched for the blue mouse day after day and soon came to recognize it, for it was always among the very first to reach a new food port. Undoubtedly, they realized, here was the first proof that it was not a simple question of mass scouting, for here was an individual who always

knew in advance, for this one blue mouse must have been able to figure out the new complex mathematical formula for rotation — a pattern which by now would have caused most humans very considerable trouble. Borisov, though, did point out the possibility that there were really many blue mice, a whole generation of them, as the final product of the experiment. But in that case, why was it they never saw but one of the creatures?

The mouse apparently saw them. For unlike its gray fellows, it did not busy itself about the food, carrying the food away into the dark recesses of the tubes. Instead the blue mouse had taken to looking outwards, through the glass walls, at them That was a sign of intelligence, unquestionably.

Now the two experimenters became excited. They speculated on this strange mouse, on what it was doing. For they both had come to regard it as the key to the whole experiment.

More and more the blue mouse seemed obsessed with watching them. Now they noticed once that it dragged something with it toward the transparent food port of that day. Something of straw and shreds. What it was for they could not surmise. Again the mouse came once with a bit of shiny stuff in its jaws. And once Borisov had seen the mouse watching him from a section of the tubes, where no food was expected, simply watching him because from there Borisov could be seen at his desk in a corner of the frame house where he kept the records.

When the trouble came, Raine and Borisov were standing near that desk checking the day's figures. It was night outside, but the lights within the tubes followed their own orbits and at this moment the

sealed world of the Lysenko maze was theoretically at "late spring, mid-day." Borisov had noticed the blue mouse watching their desk from the section of pipe nearest them when he had first entered the building, but he had come to expect that. He was reading off the day's lists when the lights suddenly flickered. The two men looked up. "What is happening?" "Is it the dynamo?" Power for the experiment came from the college lines, but there was an emergency dynamo that was supposed to cut in should this power fail. It had not cut in, nor had the regular power failed, yet the lights had flickered.

There was a sound of scurrying within the tubes. A sound as if all the myriad mice within were assembling in one spot nearest them. They saw at that transparent section that this was so, for hundreds of beady eyes were looking out at them and the blue mouse was there in their midst.

Now the lights flickered again, there was crackling sound, sparks leaped through the air, and the tube fell apart at the point! The men leaped to their feet as a horde of little beasts poured through. There was a smell of smoke, and as the two men pushed out into the outside darkness, they saw that the farmhouse was ablaze.

They stood on a knoll watching the building, its records, and the intricate Lysenko maze burning to ashes. Raine grasped Borisov's arm. "You failed. The Lysenko experiment was a failure. It was that blue mouse, you know. And do you know what that blue mouse was?"

The Russian stared at the fire. "It was certainly intelligent. It certainly had contrived a

short-circuit, it managed to get all the mice to unite in breaking out. So it was intelligent, and it came out of the experiment."

"That mouse," shouted Raine triumphantly, "that mouse was *not* like the others! It was a *mutation*, a 'supermouse,' a mutant freak, different, with no relation to its ancestors and this foolish experiment!"

"Da, da," said the Russian, shaking his head. "I see your point. It makes sense. Those other mice, I have seen them too often. They hadn't changed, they were just gray mice who spread all over the tube confusing all our clever rotations."

"Heredity," said Raine, standing in the darkness watching the house burn, "cannot be changed by acquired characteristics. The only mouse that varied, that was above the norm in any way, was simply a freak of nature, an accident of the chromosomes, a mutant, and one that, thank heavens, was probably sterile, since we saw no other bluish mice turning up."

Borisov nodded his head sadly. And sitting on the branches of a bush, in close proximity, and a little behind him, three gray mice nodded their heads likewise, their retractable fingers curled around little bits of sharpened nutshells carefully noted on scrolls of dried skin what their thought-wave sensitive brains had just picked up. It was good to know that their opinion of their eccentric blue brother with the dictator complex was verified by the Outside Thinkers. Now they could dispose of his troublesome body in peace and get to work in the real wide world.

LANDRAGON

Collecting model soldiers is a hobby of many thousands of grown men in this country and abroad. Whether they play with them, set up imaginary countries, is up to them. Some of them do, of that I have no doubt. I know I did as far back as I can remember, and I still have thousands of toy soldiers neatly stacked in boxes in my own home. One of the "national" names in this story was used by me in child's play when I was seven years old. It follows then that this story was inevitable. It's one of my earliest.

"Actually, you understand, the collecting of what are termed toy soldiers is by no means a modern pastime. Nor, for that matter, is it always a hangover from childhood."

Charles Budd tasted his wine and smiled pleasantly at me. I returned the smile. It was good wine and Budd was a good host. I mentally tried to picture his past; he he been a successful businessman and now retired to pursue his expensive hobby, or was he once a military man? He had the air of both. The air of a commander who had controlled the destinies of hundreds of men in battle and of an executive who might have

controlled the destinies of a great industry. Piercing blue eyes stared at me under shaggy grey eyebrows and again he pursued his discussion.

"Napoleon had a vast collection of miniature soldiers with which he planned his wars. Toy soldiers have been dug up in ancient Rome and Egypt. In some ancient communities they were regarded as objects of magic — on a par in a mass manner with the famous wax-doll of voodoo. You must surely be familiar by experience with us collectors of toy soldiers. You can judge for yourself whether we are in second childhood or whether our hobby is not actually as dignified as that of the stamp and coin collectors."

I nodded. When I had first taken over the Special Orders department of the Ross Toy Company, I had thought that I would be dealing with a group of senile old fools. But I found that my customers were altogether an interesting and intelligent lot. Charles Budd, whom I had never met before, I had thought might prove the exception. His orders had been the most eccentric.

You see, my company is possibly the best and largest manufacturer of toy soldiers in the country. As you might expect, we are enjoying a boom in these war days with warlike toys on the rise. Yet I was not displeased to have been assigned to the less lucrative branch — there was no boom in the making of special types of collectors' items, but it was always the most interesting.

There are in this country about a hundred or so really big collectors of toy soldiers. These men, virtually all fairly wealthy, spend great sums on the manufacture of special sets of pieces. They order companies of Romans. Egyptian bowmen. Napoleonic guards, Cathavan archers. Confederate

cavalry. Uhlans and sets of the very latest in 1942 soldiery. All these have to be designed, dies made, cast and hand painted. That takes money and that is how the Special Orders department came about. There have been enough of these demands to create a division of skilled painters and designers to handle these orders. I keep in contact with the collectors.

But Charles Budd was always the oddest. The others invariably ordered types made up of armies that had existed. Budd designed his own uniforms and composed his own toy armies representing types that had never existed. That is why I thought he was probably the sure-bet among my customers for an old fool returning to his youth. I was wrong, as I now saw.

Budd was wealthy, all right. I knew that to begin with, for he often placed orders in larger quantities than other collectors. They usually were satisfied with a dozen at most of any type, but Budd sometimes bought hundreds. And sometimes, conversely, he ordered only a single piece, but with such minute detail that the two-inch long lead figurine would cost him fifteen dollars or more when it was done.

As I sat and talked with him, I wondered now what he did with his pieces. I saw no sign of them in his drawing room in the ground floor of his house. I did see that he had a small bookcase filled with books on military tactics — Clausewitz, Werner, Haushofer, Suvoroy, and so on.

"In spite of what you say about collecting, surely you have some other purpose for your own pieces, Mr. Budd?" I asked. "After all, yours are of your own design. Are you interested in military problems?"

Budd picked up a small bronze Chinese dragon and twirled it around in his fingers.

"You are rather observant, I see," he answered. "In my own way I conduct fascinating little puzzles in tactics and strategy. Would you be interested in seeing my setup?"

I nodded. He poured another glass of his excellent wine.

"Let us have another drink then and we shall go up."

We downed it. It was sweet and heady but good.

"Redgren!" called Charles Budd, arising from his seat.

His secretary entered. I had met him when I had first come in. He was a youngish man of military bearing, slightly foreign in attitude, I suspected French or Swiss.

"Redgren, Mr. Allen and I are going up to the second floor."

The young man nodded and as we got up he followed us. Out into the hall we went and up the softly carpeted stairs.

The wine must have been stronger than I had thought, for I felt a slight dizziness and realized that it had gone to my head.

The stairs seemed interminable, but at least we came to the top. I was very groggy and woozy. Things were beginning to whirl about me.

Budd stepped up to two large sliding doors and thrust them silently apart.

For an instant I got a glimpse of a very large room that must have filled the entire second floor. The walls were covered with a great mural showing scenery and a flowing landscape.

Dizziness overcame me. I felt myself slipping and as I went down, my last impression was that

the floor in that room was all laid out like a huge three-dimensional relief map.

I shook my head groggily. I was coming to, I realized. I must have been knocked cold by the wine. Funny, I thought, could it have been drugged and, if so, why? I opened my eyes, stared and closed them again. I must still be unconscious, I thought.

For I had looked out, not at the walls of a room in the city but at an open landscape, flowing and verdant under a blue sky. Now I became more cognizant of my surroundings; I was sitting up, not lying down, and it was upon some stone bench or other. I opened my eyes again.

I was on the terrace of a big white marble building set on the side of what must have been a mountain or high prominence, for I could see ahead over the balcony into a great stretch of valley below.

I got up, shook my head to clear it, but the vision remained and the balcony responded very solidly to my touch. I stared down into the land that unfolded below. There were mountains in the purple distance and between them and the range of mountains upon which this building stood was a great level green plain, a few rivers and creeks could be seen wandering through it, far-off habitations and the towers of several cities could be made out (there was not a cloud in the sky), and what might have been a railroad somewhere off in the distance. Directly beneath the balcony the mountains sloped down and I saw a winding white road going on down to the plains. I noticed several barricades and at one point some figures pacing up and down like sentries. There was a step

behind me. I turned.

It was Redgren, Budd's secretary, with a smile on his face and saying, "Welcome to Landragon, Mr. Allen. I trust you are over your slight discomfort?"

I stared at him before answering. He was wearing a military uniform, one I could not place with any soldiery I had seen. It was purple in color, nattily cut, he wore brown alligator leather boots and belt and a jaunty black beret slanted over his youthful face. A holstered revolver dangled from his belt.

Then I stared again at his uniform, for it struck me that I had seen something like it before, but I still couldn't place it. Swiss perhaps? Italian? No, they didn't fit.

"What's all this? Where's Landragon and where's Mr. Budd?" I asked Redgren perplexed. The young man smiled, shrugged his shoulders. "This is Landragon," he repeated. "I'm afraid I can't tell you where Mr. Budd is or explain much further. You'll have to be patient a bit. And now, will you come with me and I'll be pleased to show you around." He took my arm and we started off along the balustrade and around a corner.

I noticed then that I was wearing different clothes than the business suit I had originally had. I stole a glance at myself. I was clad in a semi-military khaki outfit, leather puttees and all. No insignia or anything, though. I could fancy a war correspondent would dress as I. I confess I couldn't figure it out at all.

Around the corner we stepped on to a street and I saw something of the town we were in. It was a little mountain city, I imagine like many except for its oddities. The buildings were narrow and

gabled and quaint in the Swiss manner.

The oddities were the evidence that this was nothing but a military fortress. For I saw no children around nor any sign of marketing, washing, or the myriad things that occupy a normal city. The only men in sight were soldiers, all wearing purple uniforms of Redgren's design and many helmeted along the French model. Rifles aplenty, few went unarmed. Women there were extremely few, I scarce remember any.

I noticed another odd thing as we went along the street. The soldiers all looked oddly alike. As if they were all brothers, sometimes even twins. An extremely isolated town, I thought, to have such close resemblance among its populace.

"Where are we going?" I asked my guide. Redgren hesitated a moment. "I'm taking you to the castle. The Grand Dragon will be interested in meeting you."

The Grand Dragon, eh? A sort of mountain prince, perhaps? Or, an odd thought occurred to me, maybe it was Budd playing some game possibly. This might all be a sort of expensive occupation of Budd's carried on at some isolated estate outside the city. Budd was supposed to be rich, I knew.

We came to the castle, an imposing structure in a medieval manner, upon whose towers and battlements modern soldiery patrolled and anti-aircraft guns were mounted. I noticed then that it was midday exactly, for the sun shone brilliantly in the center of the sky. It had been afternoon when I visited Budd's.

We entered the castle, went through a great entrance-way and came into a large hall in which a number of people were standing talking. There was

a slight smell of smoke in the air and I looked to find its source. I stopped short and stared.

There was a genuine living, breathing dragon coiled up on the floor and the smoke was coming from its nostrils. Before it was set a large chess board and sitting opposite was a man in a general's uniform.

As I watched in amazement, the dragon reached out a clawed paw, moved one of the pieces and intoned in a deep, hoarse voice:

"Check, General Blakwyt."

The Grand Dragon of Landragon was actually just that! A dragon! It was at that instant that it dawned on me at last that I could not be anywhere on earth as I knew it. Landragon was quite real. The dragon was real, intelligent, living! But where was I then?

Redgren whispered to me. "We'll have to wait awhile. It may be some time before the Dragon finishes his game and he doesn't like to be disturbed."

We stood around a bit, watching. I didn't say anything because I still didn't know what to say. The other men were all officers and they seemed to be talking about things of no consequence when suddenly through the entrance another officer ran in, all covered with dust, and ran up to the chess players.

They looked up from their game at this interruption, whereupon the newcomer blurted out something about war. Redgren whispered to me excitedly. "There's another war on. Looks like we're going to see some excitement."

The Dragon uttered a disgusted growl, emitted several short puffs of smoke and reared back upon a pile of cushions. The officers were hastily

conferring and three or four higher officials were talking plans with the dragon. Redgren and I stood aside and watched things.

Several men came in now in different uniforms than those of Landragon. I was told that they were ambassadors and attaches from other nations. The Dragon was asking for help.

My guide was whispering to me the various nationalities and he kept saying that he was sure no help was to be had. It seems that this other country, Coucheran, which appeared to be directly below us in the valley, had gotten up a steam about the dragon.

They maintained that it was indecent for a human country to have a monster at its head. Redgren said that this was nonsence because the dragon had always lived here, originally in a mountain cave, and that he had naturally become ruler of the mountaineers because of his age and wisdom. Anyway, that was the excuse that the enemy was using.

I watched the Dragon and General Blakwyt argue with some of the envoys. One fellow, who wore a brown and red uniform, was particularly the object of their pleas. It seems his country, Narland, had usually supported Landragon in the past. This time they couldn't because one of their powerful neighbors had just made a pact with Landragon's enemy and the Narlanders were worried themselves.

Then everyone stopped talking and stared up. I listened and heard the droning of an airplane. Then I heard a banging outside.

"An air raid!" someone yelled and Redgren and I dashed for the street.

Outside everyone was looking up instead of

running for cover. Up in the air was a single airplane circling over the castle. The anti-aircraft guns were popping at it and suddenly the plane tipped over, wiggled a bit and then started falling.

Over and over it fell and soldiers ran from all sides as it seemed headed for the castle square. Then it hit.

There was a terrific crash and bits of wood and metal flew in all directions. When the dust settled, a pile of almost unrecognizable wreckage lay in the street, the shock had been so hard and violent. And then I gasped and stared. For the wreckage was being jiggled and shoved aside from below!

Then out of that pile of junk there climbed the aviator, without a scratch or a tear. He was smiling broadly as he stepped out and kicked his heels free of dust. He had survived that crash absolutely unhurt! It was incredible.

I frowned as I looked at his uniform. Black belt, helmet and boots, black fronting on bright green jacket and pants. It seemed vaguely familiar, but again I couldn't place its nationality. I recalled, too, that some of the uniforms worn by the foreign ambassadors had seemed familiar also.

They lead the prisoner away for questioning and things began to happen thick and fast. Bugles rang out and soldiers rushed out of buildings and began to assemble in the streets. Guns were rolled down toward the road barricades and trucks filled with solid shot rattled down the streets.

Redgren and I ran back to the terrace and looked down into the valley. We had a perfect view of the proceedings.

The roads leading up the mountain from the valley city nearest to us were obviously filled now by the troops of Coucheran. We could see thin

lines moving up toward us. Below, the purple ranks of Landragon were getting into position, in trenches, behind walls, setting up cannon on the road.

There was a whizz in the air and something bounced off the wall behind us. I looked and it was a piece of solid iron as big as one's head.

"We're under fire," Redgren said, "let's get below with the troops."

"How come they don't use explosive shot?" I asked my guide as we made our way down the mountain road with the troops.

"Too destructive," he said to my profound bewilderment. "After all, they have no interest in destroying buildings. What would they want to conquer a pile of ruins for?" I puzzled that thought for awhile and then gave it up like all the other mysteries of this odd land.

There was heavy shooting up ahead and we rounded a bend in the road to find ourselves almost in the front lines. It was then that I first realized another thing missing. I had seen no ambulances nor red cross stations. A funny way, I thought to myself.

And I also noticed that the sun was still at midday, though I must have been here for almost two hours.

We crouched down behind some upturned rocks and watched the fight. A squad of Coucheranians came down the road with fixed bayonets. A cannon firing, from concealment landed shot among them and in a short while they were knocked cold. A shout went up from the Landragon troops around us and then there was a charge. Heavy chunks of metal began flying thick and fast around us.

The Coucheranians were coming up the road again, this time a lot of them, and there was some brisk hand-to-hand fighting. I noticed with dismay that the purple troops were being routed and our men falling back up the road. We turned and ran back with them into the next line of defense.

"They're sort of strong," Redgren muttered to me. "It'll be a very tough fight to beat them."

I looked back and saw a Coucheran soldier lying in the road. Something kept recurring in my mind about his uniform. It had been familiar when I saw that aviator, but now . . .

I saw two more of their green-clad men come into sight and before they ducked down, it hit me. They were wearing pot helmets like the German army. And that added the final clue. A whole chain of thought went off in my brain like Chinese firecrackers and I gulped.

"Holy smokes," I shouted to Redgren, "let's get out of here while we can. We're sunk!"

"Huh, what?" he was puzzled. "What's the matter? We can lick them!" I grabbed him by the arm. "No, you can't. They outnumber you too heavily." I didn't have time to explain to him how I knew, but he finally got up.

We started to run back up the mountain. I reviewed what I knew again in my mind. It was utterly incredible, it couldn't be, but yet here it was. That Coucheran soldier couldn't be denied any further. I knew where I had seen his uniform before and Redgren's as well.

About a week ago, we had finished delivering to Charles Budd a very large order of toy soldiers made to his private design number six. And his design six had German-type pot helmets, green uniforms and black facings. And we had delivered

at least ten times as many pieces of that design as we had ever made of Budd design eleven. Design eleven I knew because it was the only one on which we used purple paint. It was the design of the soldiers of Landragon

"Run," shouted Redgren. "This way!"

We dashed across a field opposite and came to a wall. Redgren climbed over it and I followed. Just as I got to the top, I heard a Coucheran voice yell "Fire!"

The cannon went off with a roar. Something slammed into me with stunning force and I fell off the wall.

"Here, have a little water," said the voice of Charles Budd. I opened my eyes and found myself being propped up on a couch in the downstairs room of Budd's house. He held a glass to my lips and I sipped a bit from it. I was still a bit dizzy.

"I'm awfully sorry, old man. I didn't realize that the wine would hit you so powerfully," Budd apologized to me, but I stared at him suspiciously as I got to my feet. I thought I detected a little gleam of amusement in his eye, but I said nothing. I questioned him and he said I had fallen on the stairs and been out for an hour or so.

He asked whether I was sure I was all right, but I was and I wanted to get out and walk in the open air away from this house. He shook hands with me and I noticed again the small bronze dragon that was on his desk.

"My secretary will show you to the door," Budd said and a young man came in. It was Redgren; he was the same as before, but he revealed not a hint of what had happened. I walked with him to the door and we exchanged not a word save good evenings.

Frankly, I don't know what to make of the whole business. I could have fallen and the whole crazy thing been a dream. It might have been just my imagination, but that explanation just doesn't satisfy me. It was too real, much too real.

The only thing I have to show for it is this. When I got home I noticed that someone had put a small box in my coat pocket. It wasn't there when I went to Budd's house. In the box was a single toy soldier. It was dressed in a khaki semi-military uniform and its face was a remarkable miniature replica of my own.

It was badly dented in the middle as if something had struck it a sharp blow or as if it had fallen hard.

GIVE HER HELL

Among my friends is a reincarnationist minister and his wife, who is a talented medium. It was after a stimulating discussion with these two on how reincarnation can still jibe with Christianity and the punishment of sin after death that this particular example was worked out. It's a nasty story, I warn you.

It's no good making a deal with the devil. He's a cheat. He's all they say he is and more. The effete modern books like to present him as a smiling red devil, all clean and slick. Or as some cagey, witty peddler, or a tophat-and-tails city slicker. But the monks of the Middle Ages knew better. They described him as a beast; a stinking, foul-breathed, corrupt and totally loathsome abomination.

Take my word for it. He is. I know, for I was fool enough to make such a pact. I saw him and dealt with him and from beginning to end, it was never worth it.

It was desperate, and like all whom fate had played crooked, I was sore about it. Things were not going well with me, and it was all their fault. My wife and my daughter's. I refuse to take the blame in spite of what the devil may claim. I know when I'm right. My daughter had run away from my home — that was the shock that made me realize what was happening.

That girl ran away and she was only sixteen, and she'd stolen the contents of my wallet and took some of my wife's jewelry and ran away. My wife wasn't so shocked. She had the nerve to say it served

me right. I didn't "understand the child."

What's to understand about a disobedient daughter who doesn't listen to her father, and who makes dates after eight o'clock at night, who sneaks magazines into her bedroom, actually talks to some of those uncouth common kids from across the tracks, and has been seen in soda parlors after dark. Sure, I had to beat her. I've been doing that since she was seven. I've had to be stricter and stricter with her. Spare the rod and spoil the child — that's the slogan I was raised on and I did my best. But the girl was rotten — something from her mother's side of the family, no doubt — and she had the nerve to try to run away.

I called the police. I'm not going to be thought of as the father of a wild kid. I sent out an alarm. My wife objected, but I put her in her place. Slap across the face shut her up — I'd taught her long ago who was master. Me, the way it was meant to be. I locked her up in our bedroom, and later on I gave her a lesson with the strap, face down on the bed with her clothes off. Women know only one master. My mother never complained; she didn't dare, not even when she was dying after my father threw her down the stairs that night.

My father's ways were right and I was right. The cops brought the girl back to me the next day. I gave her a hiding she'd not forget, and then I arranged to have her committed to a corrective institution. One of those private sanitariums for disturbed children, you know. Exclusive, well-guarded, and well-disciplined. All right, they made life hell for her, but how else can you teach a wayward child how to do right. Better for the family name than to have her in public vision.

They had my orders and the extra payments I

made were generous enough to enforce them—she'd not get out until she was good if they had to nearly kill her to do it. They kept her in a straightjacket for months at a time at my insistence, and in restraining cuffs and belts at all other times. A series of regular electric shocks taught her a few things. The doctor says now she's faking insanity, that she shrieks night and day, and they keep her by herself in a padded, locked cell. But I think she's faking. She's just a disobedient girl and she's got to learn who's master.

As for my wife, she had the nerve to leave me. She climbed out of a window the night I bribed the doctors to start my bad daughter's shock treatments. She ran to my business partner, that skunk, and he helped her hide. Next day he dared put it up to me. He said he thought I was the one who was cracking up. Me! The nerve of him.

Obviously he was scheming to steal my wife away from me. And he must have been double-booking my firm. I was sure of it. I could see it all from his faking, sly ways. He must have been plotting my ruin the way he must have been scheming after my wife.

So I took steps to sell him out. But the skunk had covered his tracks. He had acted first. He had an order taken out against me, charging me with deceit and having my wife charge me with mental cruelty and suing to get custody of my child and my business.

I could see I'd get no help from the courts and the lawyers. They're all corrupt, unable to see how a man must be stern with his own. These are decadent times. No wonder the world is going to hell.

I was in a jam. They'd cornered me, boxed me with legal chicaneries, tied up my funds. I was furious that night as I stalked up and down my house. The windows were shut and the shades down.

I don't stand for curious eyes. I was alone and the next day they'd be closing in from all directions. That's when I turned to Satan.

I figured if Satan had been maligned as much as I was, he must be all right. Just a victim of the same errors. I called on him. When you really mean it, the devil will come. I gave him a sacrifice — I tossed the Bible into the fire; I got hold of my wife's cat — that snarling, fuzzy beast — and I cut its throat on the living room rug and called Satan.

He stank. The place stank and he was there — a foul sort of thing. He was crawly and slimy and toady. He belched rot, and his voice would give you the willies. But I don't go for appearances. I knew he had to have the stuff to stand up to all those dirty do-gooders and Gospel pounders.

I told him I wanted to get out of my jam. I wanted my wife back under my control, my daughter where I wanted her, and my partner in hell.

Satan agreed. He could do the first two things, and while the judgment of my partner would be up to That Other One, maybe he'd get his soul in the end, too. Anyway, he'd die, and what did he want of me?

My soul, of course. I'd trusted him for that. What good would it do him? I believe in reincarnation, anyway. I struck a hard bargain. I said first I had to have a chance to be reborn again and live a whole new life from the start. Then he could have my soul afterward.

Because if he got my whole soul but only gave me the last half of my life as I wanted it, that wasn't fair, was it? No. I drove a hard bargain. He had to give me an entire life from start to finish.

He whined and he threatened and he bellowed, but he agreed. On my death bed, he said, he'd

reappear and give me the word on the whole new life I was going to get to live. There were certain rules he had to go by in that sort of thing. OK, I said, I trust you. You and me, we think alike, we think right. An iron hand in a velvet glove, that's the rule.

He stank, that no-good bum. He gave me his word, and I say he cheated, but he didn't think so.

My partner died that same night. His furnace exploded in his house. The place was a seething mass of flames. He tried to get down the stairs, got splashed with flaming oil, was scorched from head to foot, ran out in flames and died in agony. Served him right. The firm's ledgers were in his house for his auditors, and they burned up, too, putting me entirely in the clear.

He died in scandal, too, because my wife was caught in his house. She had a room upstairs, and she jumped from the window and the newspapers snapped her picture in her torn nightgown on the lawn coming away from that man's house. That queered any divorce case for her. She came home, and she had to keep her mouth shut. There'd never be a chance for her to get custody of our runaway daughter or any divorce.

I've never let her forget the scandal, even though she claims there was nothing between them—he was just being hospitable. Ha! I showed her. She's not allowed out of the house now, and I beat her black and blue whenever I think of it. She hasn't got a legal leg to stand on, not after those newspaper photos and stories.

My daughter is still in the padded cell I arranged for her. If she's going to fake insanity, I'll make it so hot for her she'll learn the error of her ways. She's been there ten years now and the kid is stubborn. But the doc and his strongarms have been well paid.

They use the leather mitts on her and the rubber sheets and the shocks. She'll stop her act or else.

Unfortunately I won't live to see it. I'm dying now, and I've arranged in my will to see that her cure and treatment continues. I got this cancer of the throat, from inhaling some kind of poison gases or something years ago. I think it was that evening with that stinking cheat. His bad smell burned my throat, it did. I told you he cheats.

And he's been back, just now. He's been back and he gave me the full dope on our deal. I'm to get a full life, from birth to maturity and eventually death. Only he's cheated.

He can't give me a life that hasn't been lived yet. He can't reincarnate me in a future year. No, he hasn't any control over future lives. He has only control over lives that have been lived, he said, the cheat — why couldn't he have said that when we first made the deal?

And it seems to be a rule in this kind of transaction that he can't take life over in the same sex. Something about positive and negative polarity in souls. If you live twice, then you got to see life from first one sex and then the other. Makes the soul rounded, he says, the cheat.

And it's also got to be somebody who's a blood relation, he tells me, the stinking, slimy no-good crook.

I'm dying, and in a few minutes more I'm going to be dead. And then I'll open my eyes again, a newborn baby, and start living through all the long, long years of another person's life. I got to experience everything, every darn, horrible, painful, frustrated, mean minute of it.

I'm going to be reborn as my own daughter.

It's going to be hell.

DISGUISE

The Futurian Society of New York was a fan club of the thirties, just a bunch of science-fiction fans. But it's quite probable that from that group of teenagers there has come more so-called Big Name science-fiction professionals than any similar group: Robert Lowndes, Frederik Pohl, Cyril Kornbluth, Richard Wilson, Isaac Asimov, Damon Knight, and quite a number of others including myself. This is a nostalgia piece, based upon the idea given in the last paragraph. So now you'll have to read the story through to get to that properly.

We called it Borderland House, because it was a title that tickled our imagination, and because in a way we were all men who made our living by digging and delving along the borderlands of science. Specifically, we were science-fiction fans.

We had met as boys years ago, ten, twelve, some even twenty years before. We had formed clubs, written enthusiastic letters to magazines, feuded, mimeographed fan journals. Then we tried writing stories for the three existing science-fiction magazines, and one of us cracked Gernsback and another sold something to T. O'Conor Sloane, and finally most of us sold a few. As the years went by,

we matured, found our places in the world. We married, some of us were still happy with our first wives, others were already divorced three times. We were getting a bit grey, one was balding, others remained surprisingly youthful.

Before we had realized it, we were the editors, the professional writers. We no longer corresponded with fans out of town. Some of us avoided conventions, some of us even pooh-poohed that which had been the making of us all. Basically, we were still fans. And we liked to gather on an evening to chew the fat, to argue the doings of the world, cuss out publishers, tear other writers to pieces, and maybe unravel dianetics or the latest high-jink of the *stf* world.

One of us had made a lot of money and had bought a house in the suburbs with his former wife. Now his wife had left him, but he still had the house, and we all got together and made it a special hangout. A club for professional science-fictionists. It was a lovely little place, a sort of ranch-house type, with a wonderful picture-window living room, looking down the hill. The location was sufficiently suburban for it to be surrounded by greenery. We could see the road at the base of the hill, along which the bus passes. We had a view of the winding path leading up to our door, and when we sat by the huge wall-length window, we could watch our visitors coming.

It was a summer evening, on a Friday night, and most of us were already gathered there. Friday night is the end of a work week and, married or not, our wives knew we liked to make it our own night. So there were five of us sitting around the living room of Borderland House, cocktail glasses in hand or on the table, some of us smoking, and

talking science-fiction.

Fred was sitting idly, chain-smoking and looking bland. Bob was expounding on semantics and arguing with Ted about the matter. I was quietly meditating over an Old-Fashioned and simply listening. I think Sam was reading a book.

My eyes wandered over the scene. The sun was still above the horizon, for this was summer and daylight-saving. A soft light filled the view, the trees were lush and green, and I could see the shingled rooftops of the houses down below us, and very far away the towers of Manhattan. I watched the bus come to a halt at the base of our path, and I saw a man descend, glance up at our house, and start slowly up the path.

"Here comes Evan," I remarked. Eyes swiveled around for a moment to watch our friend make his way up. Evan Carey was not one of the original gang, but he was a good scout. He had sort of joined our clique about seven years ago and had fitted like a glove. We all liked him. He was full of humor and always in good spirits and could roar out an argument like a bull.

Evan Carey was the editor of two science-fiction pulps, both doing nicely. He was one of those who loved fans and delighted to attend fan meetings and make speeches. We watched him toiling slowly up the hill. I thought to myself that he didn't look well.

He seemed, even from that distance, somewhat pale and hesitant. He climbed steadily, slowly, but his face lacked its usual smile. He passed around the bend and reached our door. When he came in, my observations were confirmed.

Evan Carey was looking pretty bad — for him. He seemed to have lost a little weight or, at any

rate, he seemed peaked . . . like a man who had not slept for three nights. His face was paler, instead of its usual ruddy color. He failed to give us his usual cheery greeting and bantering opening. He just looked around a bit, tired, and then slumped into a chair.

"You must have been making a day of it, Evan," said Sam. "Yeah, you look like the last rose of summer," put in Ted.

Evan looked at them, looked at us all. He shook his head a bit, wearily. "I dunno. I don't feel so good. I should have gone to bed, I suppose, but I felt that I had to come out here and warn you boys."

I looked at him sharply. "Warn us? What's up?"

He ran a hand nervously over his cheek. "Why, nothing, nothing, but just the same . . ."

He took the drink that Fred handed him, sipped at it, put it down, squirmed a bit. "You know," he started to say, "this science-fiction . . ."

He sort of let his voice peter out, took another sip.

"Letting it get you down, eh?" said Bob.

He shook his head. "No, no, nothing like that," he muttered. "Just that — oh, well — it's just that — you know, it might start something."

"Start what?" I said sharply. "Pull yourself together man! What the hell are you talking about?"

He looked up at me. "Well, you know . . . science-fiction. It deals with all sorts of strange things. I got to thinking today. Suppose there really were intelligent creatures on other planets?"

I shrugged impatiently. "We've been over that a thousand times. What about it?"

"Well," he said hesitantly, "well, suppose they

were able to come here, and suppose they knew how skeptical most people would be . . ."

Again he broke off, his face twitched nervously, he took another peck at his cocktail glass. Continued:

"Maybe the only people that would be willing to believe them would be science-fiction fans? Maybe?" More hesitation. "And where would be the first place to look for fans?" A slow breath. "In an office where they publish the stuff. Science-fiction editors. Maybe they'd go to see science-fiction editors first."

He looked around at us, as if glad to get that out. Fred shrugged, lit another cigarette. "I haven't met any, and I'm an editor," he said.

"I'll tell my switchboard girl to keep an eye out for bug-eyed monsters," said Bob.

"Someone been up to visit you?" asked Ted, who was only a writer.

Evan Carey glanced at him hastily. "No, no. Of course not. But I was only thinking about it. Still it was awful odd this afternoon."

"What was odd?" I asked. In heaven's name, what was the matter with him, I thought. I had never seen him act so shaken up, so uncertain.

"Why, the . . . the thing, the idea, I thought I should warn you . . ." Evan took another sip, sort of made a face, sat on the edge of his chair, jumpy.

I was looking out the window for a moment. Another bus was drawing to a stop. I saw someone get off. Another of our friends, I supposed. Evan Carey must have watched my eyes, for he leaned forward, staring sharply.

"Excuse me," he said suddenly and stood up. We all looked up at him. He put down his glass, turned, and went out the room into the kitchen.

"Now, what's eating him?" Fred said. We were puzzled. I was wondering just what had happened to make Evan so jittery.

My eyes went to the window again. The man who had gotten off the bus was now toiling up the hill, swiping at nearby bushes with his hand, and whistling. I thought my eyes would pop out. I just sat and stared.

The others must have noticed my agitation, for there was dead silence as they followed my staring eyes. All five pairs of eyes in our room watched the figure of Evan Carey climb the path to the door of Borderland House. He was ruddy-faced, hale, and bustling with energy. He must have noticed us, for he waved a hand and hollered.

We heard his halloo through the glass. With one accord, all five of us turned and made a dash for the kitchen. But the other Evan Carey was gone.

Do you really think that a visitor from space would visit a science-fiction editor first? And in what disguise?

THE GARRISON

I talked about this one in my introduction. Yes, Avram, the tunnel described here exists.

You may recall reading of the discovery several years ago of an ancient temple of Mithra being uncovered strictly by accident in the business city of London during the excavations for a new building. It made a bit of a sensation for awhile — not that it was any secret that there had been such a faith during the Roman days, but that somehow this temple, basically untouched — if you disregard having been filled with silt and many feet of dirt — had been there all the past seventeen centuries without anyone suspecting its existence.

It brought home to some of us just how many wonders and secrets are buried from sight beneath the busy everyday feet of men and women. Surely all the towns and cities, the farmers' fields, and the scenic mountains of old Europe and Asia must conceal beneath their folds innumerable fragments of human meanderings over the past thousands of years. The fact that there was once a major empire that rivaled Egypt and Babylon for power and size which had been very nearly totally forgotten until only the past dozen years is something that still

staggers historians. I refer, of course, to the Hittites, mentioned once in the Bible and then forgotten.

Of course, for Americans like myself there is an extra marvel in this evidence of antiquities untold. We live in such a new country, inhabited before us only by nomadic savages, so that when a building is a mere hundred and fifty years old we put a plaque on it and visitors come to stand in the street and stare at it. I was driving along a road in New England when I saw one of those markers. It said something about somebody having erected a grist mill there in 1712. Big thing for us! But tell me, how many mills in Europe and Asia still standing and operating were already old when this American thing was first built?

That's what confounds me as an American. In Europe a house less than five hundred years old wouldn't get a second glance. Why, there must be slums all over the Old World whose dirty old hovels are a thousand years standing! But I'm getting away from what I started out to tell. About that temple in London having gone unnoticed. I can tell you now that there's something like that in New York, too.

I know it seems impossible, for after all there were no Romans here. That's true and I'm not going to claim otherwise. But still there was a structure uncovered in Manhattan Borough once that gave the archeologists a start. How is it that you've never heard of it? Well, that's my story.

I never heard of it either and I've lived here all my life. I've been a magazine feature writer for many years now and I've probed into a lot of odd places about this city for stories. But this is a part of one such story that I never did write up. I'm

only putting it down now, just for the record, as it were.

Oh, the main story was written long ago and sold, and the magazine containing it will be found now only in secondhand stores, if anyone still wants it, which I doubt. It was about the subways of New York and mostly about the first subways and the old ones.

I covered the well-known subways, to be sure. The story of the IRT and the BMT and of the tunnels they dug and discarded — there are a couple such way down near the Battery — and the story of the original plans and the difficulties that were encountered — underground streams and suchlike. The subway management cooperated with me. I walked the rails under the East River and I poked through their old blueprints and files, talked with engineers, and took pictures of some old tunnels.

Then one old-timer, a dispatcher he was, mentioned that there was a private subway in New York practically nobody knew about. Not any of the big three. It ran — and still runs, as a matter of fact — from the Manhattan office of the gas works under the river to Randalls Island where the gas company maintains a pumping station and storage tank. That was news to me and sounded like just the ticket to round off my article.

I called up the gas company and after beating my way through a dozen officials finally found one who thought he could help me. I went up there to his office and told him what I had heard. He nodded, confirmed it. Yes, there really was a subway that had been built by the gas company about seventy years ago. They'd built it because there was no convenient ferry or bridge at that end

of Manhattan to reach their works — Randalls Island being a small, uninhabited isle in the middle of the East River with Queensborough on the far side. Some company bigwig had money to burn and an idea. It wasn't such a hot idea.

The fact was, the man said, it was never officially put into use. It was a regular boring, a full-size single-track tunnel running underground and under the river bottom. But after it had been built and the track laid, it just turned out to be unnecessary.

Was it still passable? Could I get to see it?

The official scratched his head. He didn't know for sure. The matter had never come up. So he gave me a note to the superintendent of the works up at 135th Street and the riverfront and asked him to look into it with me.

I went up there and found the super. He knew about the private subway all right. Its Manhattan station, if you could call it that, was right here in this building, in the basement, he said. In fact, and what was more, the subway was clear and it was actually used. One man used it, once a day.

That man was the watchman of the Randalls Island installation. He lived in Manhattan in the neighborhood and each morning he would take his lunch box, go down to the basement, climb aboard a little hand-driven truck standing on the rails and go on down that long, dark tunnel under the river to Randalls Island. In the evening when his duties were done, he'd get aboard it and run it back again. Just one man, imagine! A whole subway line to serve one man!

Nothing would suffice but that I'd have to make that trip with him. Well, he was out at the island now, I'd have to wait until he returned. I did that,

too. Went down to the basement, under the gas works, and found a little tiled room at one end of it. Sure enough, there were the end of tracks running out of a whopping big wide round hole in the wall. Look down into it — total darkness.

I sat down there on a small bench and looked down that hole around five o'clock and after awhile I heard a faint humming in the tracks. Then I saw a tiny light way off down that huge rat hole and by and by it came closer and there was this little hand truck with an old guy standing on it pumping the handles up and down vigorously, the light coming from a battery lamp set on the truck.

When the truck pulled up and stopped, I asked the old fellow whether he'd take me along tomorrow morning. He was quite pleased, talked a good deal about the trip. Most of the men who worked in the plant were scared stiff at the thought of it. It didn't bother him, for he'd been doing it for thirty years already.

But I'm not going to tell you about this — I've already written about that weird trip down the pitch-black hole with nobody but the old man and the crazy shadows as he bobbed up and down on that pump and the single light pushing into that absolute darkness. It was damp and silent and spooky as all hell — and yet, in a way, fun.

I'd taken a big flashlight of my own along and searched the old walls, the grimy tiling, the ancient piping, and you know, it was in pretty good condition still. When we got to Randalls Island, I saw something interesting. There was a branch of the subway going off in a side direction, but no tracks.

Later on, I asked the old watchman about it. He frowned a bit, trying to recollect. "Oh, yes," he

said finally, "I never pay no attention to it. When they first built this thing they was going to extend it across the island and connect it up with the Queens side. But that there section of side tunnel is as far as they got. They changed their minds fast after they'd got a little way along it."

"How's that? What made them stop?" I asked, sensing a story.

"They never rightly said. I've heard stories, of course. My father, who worked for the company in those days, once told me they'd run into some old diggings and decided not to bust them up."

"Old diggings? Dutch? Indian? I never heard of any discoveries having been made here," I said.

"Well, I wouldn't know. I never paid no attention to that sort of museum stuff. I supposed the professors had found what they wanted and put it in books and all that. Maybe they didn't, though. Maybe they didn't at that. My pa did say they was sort of quiet about it all." The old fellow was enjoying himself. He had visions of seeing himself in print. I pressed my luck.

"Could you stop at that side tunnel going back and wait for me to walk along it to where they stopped excavating?"

The old fellow thought awhile, then said he'd accommodate me. Sometimes I wish he hadn't been so helpful.

That evening we got back on the handcart and pumped our way a little bit down the track until we found the dark branch-off. We stopped the truck and I got down with my flashlight. The watchman said he'd stay on the truck and wait for my return.

So I walked down that pitch-black tunnel by myself, my steps echoing hollowly in that pipe, big

enough for a subway car to fit through. The tunnel turned sharply and the light of the handtruck was cut off. I flashed my light ahead, saw where the diggers had stopped.

There was an abrupt end of the tiling and piping. Beyond was a stretch of several yards of raw stone cut through with pick and drill. Beyond that there were some black breaks and loose masses of small rocks and debris. I walked as far as I could, flashed my beam and saw that what had happened was that they'd broken into what was apparently an underground cavern or hole.

I started to climb over the piles of rock to reach the lip of the breakthrough and when I'd stretched out my body through the opening to look through, I noticed something. I wasn't lying on dirt and rock any more — I was lying, at least my chest and elbows, on smooth, chiseled rock, rock that had been squared off and joined to blocks of other rock by angles out like a jigsaw puzzle. This rock was different than the kind in the passage outside — it looked as if it were something that had been constructed, like part of a wall.

And that's what it was, a thick wall. An artificially constructed wall, several feet thick, beyond which was the dark expanse of a buried structure. The excavators had broken into a room of this structure, a room still standing, whose ceiling had not crumpled.

I flashed my light around. The walls were smooth and undecorated. I couldn't place the style, but it was old. It had to be old to have been under all that soil and so forgotten.

I climbed through, stood up in that damned lightless room and figured I'd made the find of the century. I'd be famous. I knew no Dutchman could

have built that place, it was long before their time; they weren't building stone fortresses without cement. It reminded me of what I'd read of the Inca walls, but I was willing to bet this was older even than any Inca structure.

I crossed that empty room — a watchtower, I think now that it must have been, and at the end of it was a dark hole. It was probably meant for a ladder, but there was nothing there now. I knelt down beside that hole and looked down to see what was below.

It was vast down there. That much I knew. I realized that I was high up above the next landing. I felt it, I sensed it, that down below me was a drop of hundreds of feet. I flashed my light down and it barely shone on a smooth stone surface far, far below. I was beginning to get frightened then, and I don't scare easily. How big was this place, I thought to myself. If it was a fortress, who built it and when and against what enemy?

For it was a fortress, of that I'm convinced. It was made to stand age and siege and fire and sword. It was made to stand tons of rock piled on it; it was made impregnable to man and nature.

And then I wondered why the tunnel diggers had kept mum about it. I wondered that while staring down that hole into the unknown depths of the fortress below me. And by and by, I suspected something. I suspected the answer. And when I was sure of it, I got up, kept my flashlight away from that hole and made my way out. I got back to the watchman and we went back to Manhattan and I made my way home through the electric lights and the hurly-burly and the mobs in the streets and I was near crazy with wonder and the mystery of the universe. I looked up at the sky and I saw a million

stars shining down and knew that to them and their mysteries all this clamor and bustle was tinsel and junk.

I knew why the excavators had shut up about the old fortress they'd dug into under the surface of the metropolis. The Temple of Mithra in London was ruined and abandoned. The catacombs of Rome have served their purpose and have been left to the curious. The great city of Angkor has been deserted by its citizens and left to the jungle.

But when I looked down that hole in the buried watchtower's floor, down into the keep of the fortress, into the darkness there, I saw a light appear. I saw a sentinel go his rounds. I saw a member of the garrison still keeping up the vigil against an enemy that would not be one of the insignificant cloth-covered biped scramblers of the surface, but something that would be coming some day from the place that fortress was built to oppose, something worthy of that monstrous trooper's steel.

There are still some things that it is necessary to conceal for the sake of human pride. One of them is that that fortress, which is older than our entire geological epoch, has never been abandoned.

DOORSLAMMER

The last time I saw Alice, who worked for me many years ago as an assistant editor, she had dropped into my office to tell me she would be out for several days for medical treatment. A caller who happened to be in my office at that moment turned to me after Alice had left and remarked on what a lovely girl she was. "The very picture of blooming, wholesome youth," is the unforgettable quote. Alice was buried three weeks later. I think her case was hopeless because she lacked the will to live. It was a profoundly disturbing thing to me, and eventually it produced this memorial.

From somewhere down the darkened hall a door slammed.

I looked up from my papers, looked at Mr. Wilkins questioningly. It was ten-thirty at night and I had supposed we were alone in the office, probably alone in the whole gigantic office building.

"The cleaning woman come back?" I queried. She had bothered us an hour ago, dusting and mopping and emptying the wastebaskets. It was a disturbance and a distraction. We wanted to get the books straightened out and we needed peace and quiet to do it.

Wilkins shook his head. "It was nothing. Let's get on with this."

I frowned, annoyed, went back to my ledgers. I finished four more pages, saw that the work was finished on this book. It wasn't going to be such a long job at that. I'd figured on being at the office until maybe one in the morning. I leaned back, looked up.

Wilkins looked up just then, caught my eye, smiled a bit. I saw he'd probably realized just how close we were to being through.

"I'm done with this one," I said. "Going to stretch my legs a bit." He watched me, said nothing. I got up, walked over to the water cooler at the door, took a drink, looked out into the dark corridor leading toward the editorial offices. I couldn't see what door had slammed. They were all shut, all the little cubbyholes at the far end, the ones with the view of the river from twenty stories up, the best offices reserved for the sensitive souls in Editorial — with the big brains and the lowest salaries.

I walked down the hall toward that end. It was dark and deserted there and there were no lights behind the chilled glass windows of the doors. It's eerie in an office building after hours, darned eerie. I came back. Wilkins had finished his ledger, was leaning back, lighting a cigarette.

"Nobody there," I said. "But somebody slammed a door before. I heard it. And there's no drafts."

He nodded soberly. "I know. I heard it, too. Often hear it late at night like this. It's nobody. Only Alice."

"Alice?" I asked. "Thought you said we were alone. Is Alice the cleaning woman's name?"

He shook his head. "No, not Mrs. Flaherty. Just Alice . . . you remember."

I sat down. "Who're you kidding? I don't remember any Alice."

Wilkins looked at me, took his cigarette out of his mouth. "Oh, that's right. You never knew her. You came after her time. Well, it's Alice anyway. Alice Kingsley, I think was her name. Alice C. Kingsley, Mrs."

"So?" I said. "So this Alice is working here tonight. Why don't she come in and say hello? One of those stuckup editors?"

"Alice isn't working here tonight," said Wilkins mildly. "She hasn't been working here for a couple years. Not here. Not nowhere."

"So who are you talking about?" I asked, beginning to get a little piqued. "First you say Alice, then no—so what Alice is here now?"

"I don't know," he said. "I really don't know for sure. We just think it's Alice. I mean the Kingsley girl. She was a knockout, too. A real looker."

For a moment he looked dreamy, as if thinking of some girl he'd maybe had an infatuation for. I could have knocked him on the head. "What are you handing me? Make sense, man. You're a hell of an accountant, sitting there like a goof dreaming of some girl."

He wasn't offended. "Yeah, I guess so. But Alice got us all that way. She was . . . well, you just couldn't look at her without thinking of blue skies and green fields, of spring mornings and college campuses. She didn't belong in a city office. She was . . . well, she looked like a kid fresh from some rah-rah field."

"Uh-huh," I said. "Does your wife know about the way you feel about this chick?"

"Ahh," he shook his head, "You won't believe it, but she wouldn't mind. Alice was that way. She was

out of this world — I mean the big-city world. The women didn't seem to object to her. Somehow she just didn't seem to compete. She was in love, you see, and offered no rivalry. She was also, maybe, nuts."

"Boy, what a picture you're building up. Sweet innocence, a knockout, lovely, but nuts. Come down to earth, man." I sat myself down, glanced out at the dark corridor back over my shoulder. Wilkins was getting real dreamy.

He went on again, this time paying no attention to me, just talking.

"Alice was hired as an assistant editor to the short-story department. She was fresh from college, somewhere in the midwest, and she never lost that look. You don't find it often. She had the blackest hair and the fairest skin, and the brightest, shiniest eyes you ever saw.

"She was like a kid in many ways. Never seemed to have any mind for other folks. She was a doorslammer. I remember a big fight she had the first week she was here. Slammed the door going out of Miss Burnside's office and boy, did that queen bee get sore. You know what a touchy old bat the boss' secretary is. You should have heard her give Alice the mouth. And Alice didn't answer back. Just looked at her like a child of twelve would look, sort of wide-eyed and wondering what kind of curious animal this was. Afterward, Alice only remarked that Miss Burnside must be crazy.

"Fact is, we got to thinking that it wasn't Burnsy that was cracked. Alice just never learned somethings. She'd step on people's toes and expect them to pardon her like they'd forgive a pretty brat. It took a while for us to learn. She never stopped slamming doors. Got so we all knew when she was

around.

"You should have seen the fellows try to date up Alice. Not one of them got to first base. She just seemed so darned innocent and starry that nothing impressed her. Later we found out why. She was married, you see. Still loved her husband. He was some fellow she'd met in college, married there.

"We envied him until we found out that one day he'd run off, just skipped out, vanished. That was the day Alice graduated. She came home with her diploma, in that college town to the boarding house they were living in, and he'd gone. Left no notice, just went. Quit.

"Alice went home to her folks. I think they're Des Moines people, threw a wingding, was laid up, left town, came to New York, got a job. Here. She was brilliant, but there was always something . . .

"It's hard to explain to a fellow who never saw her. You'd be amazed at what she could get away with. None of her bosses, the men, that is, could get mad at her. She did her work too well for that, yet she never seemed to be present in spirit. I think they were afraid she'd quit if they pressed her too hard to learn some manners. Having her around was a pleasure — just to see that springlike air. You don't find it around the city, you just don't.

"But there was something else, though. I remember once going down in the elevator with her, and with Joe Simpkins, her boss, the short story editor, you know. She never said goodnight to us, just brushed past and walked off down the street, her brow a little puzzled as if wondering herself what she was doing here away from the green fields. Joe and I walked a block watching her, and then Joe turned to me and said, 'You know, I keep saying to myself that Alice is as nutty as fruitcake. I keep thinking it every

once in awhile. It sort of bothers me.'

"I knew what he meant, too. Exactly what he meant. Anyway, Alice was with the firm about six months and everybody loved her and everybody knew when you heard a door slam, it was just Alice going somewhere.

"Miss Burnside never forgave her. They had another fight one afternoon and Burnsy gave it to her good. Told her she should wake up and stop acting like a spoiled brat. Burnsy said something else, too. Said she could understand how her husband would walk out on her."

Wilkins stopped, frowned to himself in thought, lit another cigarette. "Alice took it from her without really listening, her usual trick. But the next day it seemed to bother her, because she actually took to closing doors gently. It amazed us all.

"And then one morning, about eleven, the door slammed — violently. Alice was off again, we thought, but we didn't know the whole of it.

"Joe Simpkins told us at lunchtime. He said Alice was very upset. It seems she'd read a manuscript that morning, some short story in the mail unsolicited pile. Something about a guy that fell in love only to find it a mirage. Typical college young-love sort of yarn. We saw afterward who wrote it. Some fellow in California. Last name was Kingsley.

"Alice didn't do much work that afternoon. Just seemed to sit every now and then and sort of visit. She'd drop in on the other readers, sort of stand around vacantly, just sort of dreamy, then breeze out, slamming the door behind her. We were getting real sore after an afternoon of that and Joe swore if she didn't stop it, he'd have to do something. Maybe get rid of her, fire her. Good as she was, he couldn't have people being disrupted.

"He didn't have to fire her, though. The door of her own office slammed around four o'clock. When it was half past five and the other girls were leaving, someone looked in and her office was empty and the window open.

"Yeah, it was in the papers. There was quite a funeral, too. She had quite a mob of young fellows there. Nobody ever suspected them, but I think they couldn't help themselves. She was a sort of dream, a dream of sun and fleecy white clouds such as you somehow don't get with city girls. I didn't go myself. They kept the coffin closed.

"Anyway, that was two years ago. Alice made an impression on people that lasted. Nobody that knew her can ever quite get over her. And maybe things feel the same way. We got door trouble in this office, late at night or on quiet afternoons. Nobody pays any attention to it any more."

I looked at him, thinking to myself that he was really going off the deep end. You wouldn't believe he could such a matter-of-fact, adding and subtracting machine accountant. There was something in his eyes, something perplexed, lit up and yet maybe a little pained.

"Well, enough of this; let's get this work cleaned up. I want to get home tonight." Wilkins shoved another ledger at me, opened up the other remaining one, and we bent over our tasks again.

Somewhere down the hall a door slammed. I looked up, caught Wilkins' eye. He shrugged.

"It's nothing," he said. "Just Alice."

THE EGG FROM ALPHA CENTAURI

This is a case where the title came first. It popped into my head one day and it intrigued me. Editors and writers are like that — sometimes a title will come up from nowhere and bother the hell out of us. Usually it's a title already on some book, something we may never get to read. There was such a title on some popular romance novel I must have spotted in my early boyhood whose rhythm used to run over and over in my head like a broken record. It was Tides of the Tantramar. Only very recently I ran across a copy of the book of that name, and it wasn't anything I would ever want to read. I learned that the Tantramar was a river in New Brunswick, though. Another book title that I always liked was Flames Coming Out of the Top. All of which has nothing to do with the following story, except to say that titles have a fascination all of their own. Incidentally, when this one was first published in a magazine, they changed the title.

I don't know why they always pick on me, but the city desk always shoves the cranks and crackpots my way. I guess I got a face that looks sympathetic and makes them confident. Well, I suppose I shouldn't protest, because I get some stories out of it, all of my own, although I'm really a rewrite man. I want you to understand, though, that I'm perfectly sane myself, a church member, regular party line voter, and a family man. Nevertheless, crackpots love me.

When I saw this man wending his way between the desks toward me, following the route the city editor had pointed out, I wondered what kind he was going to be. They never look the part, that's the trouble. They usually look like perfectly respectable people. A kind old lady with a sweet face who turns out to be leading a crusade to teach cats how to talk. A portly gentleman with a watchchain and an elk's tooth who has devised a new scheme for world brotherhood through eating the bark of trees. That's the kind.

This fellow was tall, rather thinnish, in his middle forties, and looked like a fairly sharp and successful salesman. I hastily finished the job I was doing, tossed it into the basket for the copy boy to pick up, and said to him, "What can I do for you, sir?"

He sat down on the rickety chair next to my battered desk, put his hat on a pile of papers, and said, "The city editor suggested that I tell you my story. I presume you are a reporter?"

I nodded. "In a way, yes. If you have something we can use in the newspaper, I'll write it up."

He picked up a pencil, began to tap nervously. "I do not know if you will believe me. However, I must begin by telling you that I think there are creatures from the stars infesting our city."

Oh, boy, I thought to myself, this is a new one. Stark, stark raving. To him, I just nodded sympathetically.

"I am a farmer," he said, "from out in Wade County." I'd never have thought it, but that was in his favor. He sounded like an educated man, and this was borne out when he said, "I want you to know that I am a graduate of the State Agricultural College and that I have traveled considerably. I know what I have to say is hard to believe."

Oh-ho, I thought to myself, getting me set for the wilder stuff. "Last week," he started, "a neighbor of mine called me over to his farm. It seems that a meteor had fallen in his pastures during the night. He wanted my opinion as to whether it was valuable or not.

"I went over to his place and looked at it. I saw at once that this was no meteor. It was a rather largish shell, not metal or stone, but looking rather remarkably like an egg. Plastic sort of appearance. It was of a bluish-green color, and it had apparently broken neatly into two halves. It was not buried in the soil nor had it dug any noticeable depression.

"My neighbor said that he had seen it fall. It came out of the sky with a whirring noise, and was seen to float down, not too fast and not too slow, surrounded by what looked like a ball of violet fire. When he went out to investigate the next morning, what he found was what I saw.

"Now, with my neighbor's help and a crowbar, we worked the two halves apart. They fell away like an opened eggshell. Within, the interior was partially full of soft feathery matter, something like cotton batting. The first thing we noticed was that this matter bore the impression of two bodies. Two human sort of bodies. But there were no bodies there.

"I would say from these depressions that the two within the shell were about a little over four feet tall. I would also say that they came from the direction of the star Alpha Centauri, for on a cleared side of the shell's interior there was a curious sort of star map, looking as if it had been photostatted there. I recognized the constellation, which was centered on that star."

I took all this in, thoughtful-like, wondering what

I could write about it. "Do you have this shell, or photographs?" I asked.

"I was coming to that. That afternoon it rained. We had a heavy storm, I think you had it here in the city, too, you may remember. I was going to take pictures, but when the weather cleared up, which was not until a day later, we found that the shell had vanished. It had apparently been washed away, or dissolved, for there was a large discolored patch of ground where it had been and some mucky, oily scum.

"Now, that's the whole trouble with my story. I feel sure now, after thinking it over for several days, that there are spies or invaders or something from Alpha Centauri here, here in this city, and I can't prove it by myself. I don't know exactly how your paper can help me. But if you would have some of your reporters try to track down the trail of two strangers, both little people, maybe identifiable by some peculiarities, it may well be that you would have a story that would make headlines around the world."

Well, I leaned back just like I was the editor, and I explained to him that we did not have sufficient reporters to send out on that slim chance. We couldn't just nab any pair of midgets we saw and accuse them of anything. We didn't know what these visitors might want. Maybe they were spies out for alien conquest. But we couldn't do anything.

He frowned to himself a bit, but I could see that I was putting it over. You've got to be careful with these screws — sometimes they're likely to add you to the list of people who are "persecuting" them. I've had some very uneasy moments with cranks.

But he turned out to be easy. He stood up, thanked me. I said, "If we run across anything, if

someone reports something odd that checks with your ideas, or if the cops drag in a couple of characters that seem like they might be your buggers, we'll definitely keep what you told us in mind and try to use it. Meanwhile, why don't you look about the city yourself? If you can get us anything more substantial, we'll give you prompt action."

He thanked me again gravely and took his way out of the office and I hoped out of my life.

No such luck. It was the very next day that a couple of youngsters came up, looking for him. I saw the editor point out my desk and wondered what it was this time. There was a boy and a girl, high-school age, maybe thirteen or fourteen. Fresh-faced kids, neatly dressed. They turned out to be this screwball's son and daughter, as they explained.

It seems that pop had a lot of these delusions. He was a pretty good egg as a rule, successful, but once in awhile he'd get some notion as whacky as that one and go off for several days on a wild goose chase. The boy, a pleasant bright-eyed chap, told me that this time their mother had sent them after him. They'd been to the police and the homes of his friends and they'd made sure to come here.

I told them their father had been here the day before. The old boy had left an address, his hotel, and I gave them the notation. The girl, a pretty auburn-haired thing, thanked me. They took their leave, promising to let me know if they found pop all right.

So that was that. A simple end to an interesting delusion. Evidently they found pop and straightened him out, too. For do you know it was only two days later that he turned up in the office again? I saw him coming in and making straight for my desk. He

looked kind of worn out, the spark gone from his eyes, tired. That's what happens to these guys after they work their binge out, I thought.

He came up to me, sat down wearily, leaning an arm on my desk. He excused himself for breaking in on my work. "I just wanted you to know that I'm sorry I bothered you about that wild yarn. I guess I was a bit high. But I want to tell you that there are positively no people from Alpha Centauri in this city or on earth. And there wasn't any cosmic egg landing in my neighbor's farm. That was a neat yarn, but I should have realized you wouldn't bite."

"That's all right," I said, "we always try to oblige."

He stood up, smiled wanly, and put on his hat. As he started away, I added to be polite, "Did your kids find you all right?"

He turned around for a moment, looked at me dully. "Kids? Why, I don't have any children." He said goodbye before I had a chance to say anything more and made his way out of the office.

Now I don't know what to think. I think now I should have gone after him, but I had a lot of stuff on my desk and didn't catch on. When I did get around to it, it was much too late. Because I was having an awful lot of trouble with the papers on my desk. They were simply filled with static electricity. For a couple days anyone who touched my desk, where the guy had leaned his elbow, had a thick spark jump out and sting him.

Somebody told our science editor about the desk, and he came over and checked on it with a Geiger counter. He said that one side of the desk was definitely radioactive.

There must be a story in this somewhere, but how would you go about telling it in a newspaper?

LAST STAND OF A SPACE GRENADIER

Science-fiction fans are pretty fanatical, very serious minded, and sometimes verge on the paranoid in their youthful loyalties. And anyone who knows anything about the history of S.F. fandom will recognize a parallel in the early part of this story with events of my own hectic career as a fan — in short, three hotheaded fans were once expelled from Hugo Gernsback's 1935 Science Fiction League for trying to build up a rival organization — and I was one of the three. So there's that bit of substance behind this little story, whose title invokes a gasp of outrage among older S.F. readers for its deliberate corniness. As for whether the rest of the story had any basis in my fan motivations — why, I honestly couldn't say.

I have just finished disconnecting my television set. It's a fine twenty-one-inch screen job, this year's model, and in perfect condition. If you want to buy it, I will sell it for far below what it would cost you anywhere. I am not interested in owning one anymore. If you do not have any children in your house, you can buy my set at a real bargain.

I have a fourteen-year-old boy of my own. He used to enjoy the television shows, particularly a

certain science-fiction adventure serial, but he will have to confine his entertainment to reading now. He doesn't mind too much, because he is a voracious reader of science-fiction magazines, too.

Several days ago, I was sitting at home reading a book and my boy Edward was sitting at the cleared dinner table hunched over a pulp magazine. Suddenly he gave a snort, said "Huh!" and sort of looked up with an odd grin on his face.

"What's the joke?" I asked, out of curiosity. I am a reporter for the *Daily Argus* and by nature I always ask questions. Ed just grinned and came over with the magazine and showed it to me. It was a copy of a popular science-fiction monthly and he had folded it back to the department called the Fantasy Legion.

The Fantasy Legion is one of those coupon-clipping clubs that some of these pulps run. You clip a coupon and they send you a colorful membership card, maybe a lapel pin. Usually it ends there, but science-fiction fans are different, as I know from having one in my house. These fans write letters and get to meet each other and really make branches and clubs out of these organizations. Thus the Fantasy Legion actually has about two dozen clubs that meet and correspond around the country, and it is just as serious about itself as the Boy Scouts.

What caused Ed to smirk was a little item that the Commanding Secretary (the editor, you realize) of the Fantasy Legion had printed at the head of his column that month. It seems that he had had to expel two members "for attempting to undermine the Legion on behalf of a competing organization." This is taking a club like that real seriously. "Do you know these two boys?" I asked

Ed.

"Sure," he said. "Joe and Frank are nice guys. They're active members of the Space Grenadiers and they were doing just what the editor said. They were joining up in the Fantasy Legion clubs and trying to talk the members into making them over into Space Grenadier branches. In fact, they joined my club, right here in this city."

"They're nice, you say? What's nice about trying to undermine your own club?" I asked. Ed just laughed. "Aw, pop, it's all in fun. Joe and Frank just take themselves too seriously. Most of the guys belong to all the organizations at the same time. I do, myself." He reached into his pocket and pulled out an assortment of papers and junk from which he separated three or four cards. I saw that he was a full-fledged legionnaire of the Fantasy Legion, a cadet of the Space Grenadiers, a patrolman of the Cosmic Guard, and a fellow of the National Fantasy Fellowship.

I turned over the Space Grenadiers card. It was issued by the Space Grenadiers TV Hour, sponsored every night between 5:30 and 6 P.M. by a well-known cereal company. The bearer pledged himself to abide by the code of the Grenadiers, which seemed to be a plagiarism of the Boy Scout Code with cosmic trappings — and also the bearer agreed to follow the program daily.

"Joe and Frank have organized a real branch of this club and they were working very hard to get new members. I guess the Fantasy Legion got worried about it. But they're really nice guys. I haven't joined their club, but they belong to mine — or did until this happened."

I returned the cards to him and went back to my book. However, I am a reporter, and when I

went into the office next day, I took my son's magazine along and wrote a little story about it, taking a facetious air and making it all out to be a funny item. The editor liked it, put a gag leader on it, and it found a small spot on the third page. Something like "Treason Runs Rampant in Interplanetary Circles!" You know.

That would have been that, except that a day or so later I was down at the city hospital when a boy was brought in suffering from amnesia. He was a nice-looking fifteen-year-old, well-dressed, but with an apparent total loss of memory. They identified him by a card in his wallet. The name on it was Frank Wainer and the card was a Space Grenadiers membership card, certifying the bearer as a full-fledged Grenadier. I remembered his name as that of one of the two boys involved in the Fantasy Legion expulsion.

I saw the boy and it was puzzling. There were no bruises on him, nothing to indicate accident. His parents were there, but he simply did not recognize them. He sat quietly, resigned and unresponsive. I talked to his folks and they said he had been acting worried the past month or so, he had had restless nights, but last night he had slept soundly. He had seemed dazed when he woke up, started to school, and had been found on the streets a few hours later in this condition.

I got the editor to assign me to this case, because I had an inside track apparently. I got my son to give me the address of the other chap, Joe Aitkens, who had been kicked out of the Fantasy Legion, and I showed up at the Aitkens house about half past three. I found him home, as I had figured, for his school hours were the same as my son's. His parents fortunately were not at home; I

didn't want to get the boy into any home trouble and they would certainly have thought it strange for a newspaper reporter to be querying their son.

At first Joe was reluctant to talk. He was about my own son's height, a year older, but he knew Ed and liked him. It didn't take me long to establish the fact that the two boys were a lot alike. They were both science-fiction fans and that must be the ticket. After I had told him I was Ed's father and that I just wanted to talk to him about the Space Grenadiers and about Frank, he seemed to warm up slightly.

It was obvious that the boy was cagey. He said there wasn't anything the matter. They were very serious about their club, they thought the TV serial was "swell," they wanted to earn themselves special "Commander" cards in the organization. He explained to me that you began as a cadet, that you filled out certain questionnaires about your science knowledge or else started a club or did something special, and they would advance you to trooper, and then to grenadier, and finally to commander. He and Frank were in the Grenadier class. He admitted that he didn't know of anybody in the Commander class, and what had been exciting him was the possibility of being the first to make it, and being therefore mentioned on the TV program.

But it was also obvious that he was concealing something from me. Several times he would start an answer, stop, rethink his sentence, and start over. He claimed he didn't know what caused Frank's breakdown. He claimed, after hesitation, that it must have been schoolwork.

I didn't press the boy further. That evening I sat with Ed and watched the Space Grenadiers

program. It was exciting, interesting, It concerned the adventures of a handsome young man who was a captain in some future war against Martians or Jovians or something. Strictly the Buck Rogers/Flash Gordon technique, brought up to date with TV trappings and spectacular effects. Throughout it I was annoyed by constant flashes of light which seemed to keep on occurring in the background. Ed explained to me that these were supposed to be meteor flashes. "They go on all the time in space, pop," he said.

"They do, eh?" I answered. They gave me a headache almost. I wondered how meteors could cause a flash in airlessness. You have to allow television producers a certain poetic license, I suppose.

On a hunch, the next day I went down to the city hospital again and checked their records. They had had six cases of mental or nervous breakdowns in the last four months involving boys between thirteen and seventeen. One was a case of a boy who had gone unconscious and remained in that state for almost a month, when he pulled out of it. He was still in the hospital, but they expected a full recovery. Two others were temporary amnesia cases. One had been removed to the insane asylum. Two were dead.

As best I could, I checked up on each of these boys, those in the hospital, those released, those dead. In five of the six cases, the boy had been a member of the Space Grenadiers. The sixth case, I guess, may just have been accidental.

Now I was really worried. As a father, frightened. I went around to see Joe Aitkens again. I caught him just home from school. This time I was not easy on the boy. I confronted him with

the evidence. He admitted that he knew two of the mental cases, one of them a dead one. It was those two that had caused Frank and himself to redouble their efforts to build up the Space Grenadiers club and had caused them to get into trouble with the Fantasy Legion.

I didn't see the connection. "Why did you pick on the Fantasy Legion members? Couldn't you just convince boys on the street?"

Joe looked away from me. "We needed recruits in a hurry, but they had to have the right outlook. They had to be a certain kind of imaginative guy, already active fans. We couldn't afford to wait."

I was getting a bit angry. This was deadly serious and there was something damnably wrong here. I restrained my temper, became confidential. I explained to Joe that he should remember that boys of his age were not alone, that they could always call on the adult world for assistance and if there was a real need for it, they would always be able to find understanding somewhere. I said that the Space Grenadiers program was put out, written by, acted by adults. That if there was something fishy, it must be something that could be better handled by adults. Joe almost broke down and cried then. It was clear to me that he'd been carrying a heavy burden on his conscience, doubled since Frank's breakdown. Finally he let loose. He told me about the Space Grenadiers and himself.

I don't believe he expected me to believe him but I did.

He'd been watching the Space Grenadiers Hours ever since it started, which was about a year ago. He was a real fan, never read anything save science fiction, had no friends other than fans. He said he believed in science fiction, by which he meant that

he believed in spaceflight, in other worlds and their inhabitants, in the reality of those things. Naturally the TV show was a source of great fascination, of near-reality.

"I started dreaming science fiction about three months ago. I don't think I was aware of it for awhile until I realized I had been having the same dream every night for a week. The dream was this:

"I would be standing by a port window in a spaceship. I knew it was a spaceship, in the way you know things in dreams. I would watch the stars, and I would watch the flickering meteor lights, and I saw all sorts of space battles going on. There was a war in space and I was watching it from a transport ship.

"I never could look around me. I never remember seeing the inside of the ship I was on. But I knew, like you do in dreams, what was about me. I knew I was standing in a crowd of guys like myself. I knew they were looking over my shoulder, jamming me in. I couldn't move, we were packed so tight. I knew we were recruits, waiting for our turn to go into battle."

Joe stopped, put a hand to his head, looked a little sick. I waited silently, sitting on a chair before him. I felt worried for him, worried for Ed, sort of frightened. After a moment, Joe continued.

"I had this same dream every night. It was always like that. There were battles going on, spaceships exploding, rays, and always meteor flashes. And I was always pushed tightly against that port, surrounded by recruits, waiting, waiting to be called.

"This dream never stopped. It has been going on now for maybe three months. But I learned more. Gradually the pressure eased up. I realized that

some of the men behind me were going off on duty. I realized that one night my call would be coming soon."

"What sort of duty? What were you expected to do when you were called?" I asked softly.

Joe looked at me with pain in his eyes. He whispered slowly, "Kamikaze piloting. Space grenadiers for real. We were waiting to be sent out in atomic bomb loaded rocketships to crash them into enemy ships of enemy planets. We were going to sacrifice ourselves just like the Japanese suicide pilots did. That's what we were waiting for."

I sat back, cold chills down my spine. "Now wait a minute. You knew this. Couldn't you do anything to stop it?"

Joe looked at me; now that he had stated his worry, he became frank. "Look, I talked it over with Frank. He had been having the same dream, the exact same dream. We studied it, analyzed it. We came to the same conclusion. We had to find substitutes. If we could convince them that we were good recruiting agents, maybe they wouldn't send us out when our call came."

"They? Them? What do you mean? Who are you talking about?"

Joe swallowed. "Look, sir, you have got to understand. We couldn't be having the same dreams if there wasn't something real behind it. We knew about those guys who had the nervous breakdowns. There were some in other cities, too; we knew from the fan magazines and correspondence. They were all Space Grenadiers. What Frank and I figured out was this.

"We decided that there is really a war going on somewhere in space. Not in this system, we don't think, because we could never identify any of the

planets we saw in our dreams. Now, in this war, the people that are fighting it use recruits from other worlds, worlds they probably consider backward from their science viewpoint, worlds like Earth. They don't seem to need us physically, maybe our bodies wouldn't survive, but they do need our minds. They need minds to direct these suicide atomic bomb rockets that they shoot at each other. The same as the Japanese Kamikazes, where a fellow would pilot his own bomb-loaded plane into a U.S. battleship, kill himself as a patriotic duty. Only these people don't feel like killing themselves if they can get someone else to do it.

"So this Space Grenadiers program is sort of backed by them. I don't know how you could prove it. Maybe the guys that write and direct it are being moved by dreams or something; they probably don't know what they are doing. Anyway, we do know that certain fellows who watch it regularly start to dream this dream, and some of them come to a terrible end. We think, Frank and I, that when they get their mental breakdown or go crazy or drop dead is the night they get their call and are sent out on a suicide mission. Maybe their brain can survive the shock, sometimes it does, most often it doesn't.

"But anyway, that's the way it works. Of course it doesn't have that effect on most of its watchers. Maybe 99 percent of the kids that watch it, nothing happens to. They need only certain kinds of minds, science-fiction minds, especially imaginative, like me and Frank and your son Ed. So that's when Frank figured out that if we would get the Fantasy Legion members here to become interested in the Space Grenadiers program, we'd be bringing them a lot of specially high-type

recruits. Maybe then they'd let us go — or anyway figure we were of some real value to them.

"But it didn't work. Frank must have got his . . ." and then he broke down and cried. He was scared through and through. I don't blame him. I'm scared through and through myself.

I don't know what you can do about it. I wrote to the TV station and I wrote to the cereal company that sponsors it, but I'm realist enough to know they aren't going to pay any attention to crank letters. I'm just a reporter on a newspaper and I don't have any special influence and I only have enough money to support my family and none to become a crusader or anything.

I have disconnected my own TV set and you can buy it from me cheap. If you want a good set in perfect condition, write me. But I won't sell it to you if you have any children.

AN ADVANCE POST IN THE WAR BETWEEN THE SEXES

As an editor in the paperback field, I had run across references to a national organization of women who reserved their love for other women only, the Daughters of Bilitis. However, when, in the space of one week, I met two men, separately from each other, who mentioned this organization, it set me to thinking. One of the men claimed to be the only man ever to be admitted as a male member of the Daughters, while the other told me how he had managed to attend one of the Daughters' meetings. The natural result of that puzzling information and the coincidence was this conjecture which, for all I know, may be close to the truth.

Well, doctor, here I am on the old couch again — and I thought when I said goodbye to you six months ago that I was free of all that. But I've had a bit of a shock; in fact, I'm sort of really thrown off my rocker, and I want to tell you about it. I'm beginning to think it was just something I imagined, but it still seems awfully real to me.

Since you're a woman, doc, I think you are really the right person for me to talk to. I've gotten over that romantic attachment I had for you — I understand since you explained it to me at the end of the analysis and treatment that it's to be expected. I still think a lot of you, Edith — sort of mother, wife or something. Or maybe it's just natural for a man to confide in the right woman.

I was grateful to you, doc, for helping me to get on my feet after the breakup of my marriage. It was a shock to me and I was really sour on women. I didn't want to come to you for treatment, you know, but my own medic said it would be best. And it was, doc, it was.

So I came back to you today for this talk. I have to tell someone, and I know you know how to keep secrets.

Everything had been going quite all right for me since you last saw me. I've managed to resume my life very well, picked up my own job and really made a good thing out of it. And I've managed to have a girl friend or two also. Didn't feel bitter any more; felt like I used to back when I first started going out with the girl who became my wife.

Anyhow, I had occasion to go to Los Angeles on business; that was a couple of weeks ago, I got back last week. Something happened to me there, doc, that's sort of got me going around in circles. I met a man, see, at a friend's house, and we got to talking about men and women and sex and all that.

So I told him something of my breakdown and my troubles. Told him how after my wife left me I had this real sick hate for all women, got to thinking they were conspiring against me, got to thinking they were all some kind of fiends, smiling sweetly behind their pretty faces while scheming to take over everything.

This man was quite interested in my remarks and instead of pooh-poohing them, he was going right along. So I had to do the debunking act myself. I said as how I was cured of this and now seeing the fair sex in their right light again. And that's when this guy lit into me. No, he says, it isn't that way at all. It's really what you thought when you thought you were sick.

How's that, I asked. But he was serious. He shook his head, said he couldn't explain it further there, but would I meet him for dinner the next night and we'd have a long chat about it. He had some things to show me. So I said OK, you got to prove it to me. But myself, I was thinking that I had run into one of those Southern California screwballs you hear about.

I forgot about it the next day, but kept a note on the place and I met this man there. We went out for dinner and I must say he paid for a good meal. We talked about it some more.

He said that my own breakdown was traceable to my personal affairs, and that sometimes women couldn't help this sort of thing, though they tried to keep men on the string as long as they could.

Then he went into his spiel. It was interesting and even logical, but I figured this was his sort of derangement anyway, and since he was paying, I'd listen.

Women, he says, have been scheming for the past century to take over the world from the men. To this end, they have been working both openly and secretly and in all sorts of ways. Never mind how, he said, the details can be shown you, but the real proof is in the statistics that even they couldn't conceal. Women, he said, live longer than men. Five years at least, and more, he says. They have the best of everything. They wear the richest and finest fabrics, they have all the beautiful things of the world given them, they work as little as possible and make the men have the nervous collapses and the ulcers, and they are planning eventually to move for a complete takeover. They aim to make men into second-class citizens, mere working machines to serve a woman's world.

Did you know, he said, that a century ago all this wasn't so? Men outlived their wives and everything was the reverse. Don't you think it strange how this situation shifted?

Well, I said, you could make a case for it, but I think you're just a woman-hater like I used to be and you ought to talk to a good psychiatrist, like you, Edith.

No, he says, he's not kidding himself. You see, it's easy to think things like this, but proving it beyond doubt takes evidence. And, he says, I've seen the proof. I have been behind the scenes in the world of women and I know what they really think and plan when no man is around.

How can you do that, I said. And even if you did, how does one man's evidence prove anything?

Oh, he says, I am not just one man. There is an organization of men around this whole country who have come to realize this and who are banded together to defeat this conspiracy of the women. People have talked about the war of the sexes as a sort of joke, but it is really just that.

So, I said to humor him, tell me more. Who are these men and how do they fight this war?

First off, he says, you have got to keep silent on all this. Promise you won't tell a word to anyone not authorized. It sounds like a kid game, and I go along with it, I don't think I'm violating this telling you, doc, because what goes on between patient and doctor is sacred and confidential, isn't it?

This organization has got a name. Operation Counterpoint. And O.C. operates underground in the very middle of the enemy camp.

Come again, I said. What do you mean? Oh, he says, they send spies into the camp of the women, they compare notes, they infiltrate the enemy ranks,

they listen and send back data.

Seeing I didn't understand, he goes on. Some people call them transvestites. You know, female impersonators. Except that the members of O.C. aren't doing this for kicks, they're soldiers for our sex in this war. They are campaigners in earnest, intelligence operatives, and it isn't easy as you think. It can be dangerous. In fact, it is dangerous.

I laughed out loud then. Now that was real funny. I had a mental image of some oversized jerk mincing around in skirts and wig and expecting women to fall for it. The man who was telling me about this simply didn't faze. It's different than you think, he says. Care to come with me and visit a salient of the O.C. Underground?

I was game for it by then, with two drinks under my belt, and so I said why not? We got into his car and he drove me to this house off on the outskirts, way out at the end of the freeway, standing on its own grounds, and we went in.

There was a meeting going on there and at first I thought it was a ladies' club. There were about a dozen people present and at first they all seemed to be women. Then, gradually it dawned on me that they were not. They were all men dolled out as women.

Now you may think this would be a gay affair of a bunch of lisping oddballs. Actually it wasn't. They didn't look like a bunch of young chicks or good-time gals, not at all. Instead they looked like respectable middle-aged women. Not beauties, not uglies, just a good average impersonation of a club of serious middle-class women, like a PTA circle or the League of Women Voters or something.

Oh, some were not too good. But most of the men there were quite expert at it. You'd never know they

weren't women, if nobody had hinted at it.

So I sat quiet and listened to what they were talking about, and they were comparing notes on things they'd learned. One of them had wormed his way into one of the bigger women's clubs in the country and he named names who were leaders of the scheme to take over the world for the women. I heard reports then, and even taped conversations between the women who speak for their sex in private and, believe me, I began to get worried.

Because in two hours I came to believe they were telling the truth. They were for real and in dead earnest. Maybe they were a nut cult, but they thought they were part of a big organization, and they were the ones in the most advanced positions — the underground listening post in the female world. They were the spies in enemy uniform.

They convinced me that night that they had uncovered a real fact about the past hundred years. They were still uncovering more of it. They hadn't yet gotten to the headquarters and the real long-term leaders behind the women's world drive, but they were getting close.

Because, you see, not all women know about this. Ninety-nine percent of them know nothing about it. But the other one percent, they're organized in various ways and they're devious, doc, real devious.

They even have an action branch themselves. You've seen some of those manlike women in leather jackets and butch haircuts. Well, not all of them are what you think they are. Sometimes that's a disguise, too. There's a band of them, all over the country, organized to stamp out Operation Counterpoint and any others who get wise. They even have a name, a sort of phony sorority called Sigma Mu — Sisters of Minerva, that means, and they

are the bunch this O.C. is pitted against most of the time.

Now that all this is a week away and I've come back to my home city and the whole thing does seem like an elaborate joke. I got taken in by a bunch of female impersonators, didn't I?

Thanks, doc, I knew you'd set me straight. Sure, that's just one of those persecution fantasies like I used to have. I ought to stay away from screwballs, shouldn't I?

What's that? Sure, I have the address I went to. And I know the man's name who brought me there. It's all in my little address book here in my pocket. He even gave me the address of their underground cell in this city. It seems this O.C. has men operating like this all around the country. Silly, isn't it? I guess I ought to destroy this book, or scribble the names out.

No, doc, I honestly can't show it to you because I was pledged to secrecy. I never betray such things, although it's all right for a patient to tell his doctor, isn't it? But it wouldn't be right for me to give you this book, too.

You know a funny thing, doc, when you asked me for the address book, I just noticed that little pin you always wear on your dress. I used to figure it was a society or a college club or something. It does say Sigma Mu, doesn't it? I know the Greek letters. And that's real odd.

What's that, doc? You got to have that book. Say, look here . . .

Doc, what are you doing with that gun? Put it down, it might go off!

Doc, don't point it at me! Look, I didn't mean it, it was all made up. No, doc . . . Miss Stanton . . . Edith! Don't shoot! Don't . . .

WEB SIXTY-FOUR

There have been writers, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Edward Lucas White, whose best works were actually dreams they had had and which they recorded upon awakening. This story is such a work. It has had some minor reorganization, some mental mechanics have been needed to put it into shape, and the conclusion is the product of my own personal views of eternity. Somehow, it seems appropriate for this, the most recent of my short stories, to be the final tale in this volume.

When he came into that little alley, he was suddenly struck by a sense of nostalgia such as he had not had for many years. He was lost, but then he was often lost these days. It didn't bother him, though doubtless it would have years ago, but at his age somehow he was never troubled. His daughter's husband would find him, or he would find a policeman and ask to be directed home.

No, being lost was no bother. He had a wide and varied life, had done many things — an awful lot, he would chuckle to himself at times while sitting in the comfortable chair in the living room of his daughter's home — and he had no cause to complain. He knew vaguely that he was a bit of a burden to his children, but they were grown up,

parents themselves, and it wouldn't hurt them to take care of him as he had taken care of his own father in his time.

So he had wandered the streets as he liked to do once in awhile when struck by some sudden fleeting memory of a saloon he had once frequented or a house a friend had lived in, and he'd wander off, for he was still a good walker, though his breath was short these days and he might have to pause a lot, and he would look for the old place.

Like as not he'd not find it. Sometimes he couldn't remember the exact street, but just as easily, if he did, somehow it wouldn't look like it at all. Then he'd remember sadly that the house he was seeking had been torn down maybe thirty, forty years before and that the old decrepit-looking office building or squalling apartment house, now equally aged, and decidedly less elegant, had been built since. But every now and then he'd find a place he'd find familiar.

He'd stand around then and look at it and recall the good times that went with it, or the friends he'd known there, or maybe the place he'd worked in, or a girl who once had caught his youthful eye — like as not she'd be a grandmother now if she was alive at all — and he'd smile to himself and then walk gently back again — if he could recall the direction.

When a man's lived a full life, there were lots of things to recall. He'd lived it, lived it to the full, he thought. He'd been — oh, so many things — soldier, clerk, messenger boy, lover, barroom debater, father, son, schoolboy, traveler, consumer, seller, tenant and house-owner; a lot of things a man gets to be in a long life — you could enumerate them if

you wanted to — a lot of patterns, a lot of lives make up the whole, a regular series of webs spun and disintegrated.

Now what was the sixty-four-dollar question today — the one of the moment, the final one? Oh, yes, the alley, it was a leftover and it reminded him of horses. Gosh, he'd not thought about horses for ages, it seemed. And now the sight of the narrow old alley, still cobblestoned, he noticed, brought back sharply the sound of hooves clop-clopping against the rounded boulders, and brought back the sweaty scent of a working horse and the creak of the leathers, and he could recall the bags of oats they used to tie around their muzzles for feeding, and the smell of manure in the streets. You know, he thought, I liked it better, I think, than the gasoline stink that's everywhere these days, though the young folks would never believe that.

So he wandered into the alley, and the further in he got the more he savored the old memories and the clearer it seemed his recollection became — he could see in his mind's eye the carts and the buggies and the old truck-wagons that once rumbled through these streets. Now, he said to himself, an alley like this would have a stable in it and let's see, ah yes, that would be it, that big old two-story high doorway would have been it. So he wandered over to it, and there was a small door set in the larger door, just as there used to be, and it was half open.

It seemed to him then that he was getting a little confused, for he somehow did know these things and he knew he shouldn't do it, but he pushed in and walked inside. He couldn't pass this up — might well be the last stable operating in town — he hoped it was operating; now that would

be an adventure — a sort of last look at a bygone age in which he had played his own little part.

He couldn't be quite sure it was still in business, but it was darkish inside and it sure smelled of hay and horse sweat and leather, just like it should, and he wandered in, forgetting for the moment that he was trespassing, and he didn't see any horses, but it seemed as if they had just been there.

So he walked about the old darkish stable, for indeed it was a stable, just smelling and tasting the air and thinking of how it brought it all back, and after he didn't know how long, he saw another open door at one side, beyond the empty darkish stalls and a faint light therein and he went in there. It was the same harness room, and there were still some straps and buckles and the old stuff, and there was a man sitting at a worn old chair at a battered, scratched table, repairing some harness. And he looked at the man, he was a balding old coot, just the sort you'd expect, and the hostler looked up at him and nodded.

"Just looking around," ventured the old man with the memories, and the hostler smiled pleasantly and said, "A lot of oldtimers do. Brings back things."

The old man nodded, watched him quietly, walked about, fingered the pungent leather, savored the dusty, musky smell of the room, and felt simply quiet and content.

"Oh, say," said the hostler after a long while. "If you don't mind, and since you're on your feet, could you go and get me something?"

"Glad to," said the visitor slowly and feeling suddenly a bit elated. Old folks always are happy when they can be of service once again, even for a short time. And he felt faintly revivified and his

old heart bounced a moment.

"Down the steps there," said the hostler pointing, his sharp greying eyes glancing to the far door where the cellar entrance lay, "you'll find the bins. I need some stuff from there; can you go down and fetch it?"

The visitor nodded and started toward the cellar door. "Once worked in a corral myself one summer when school was out," he said. "I guess I'll remember the setup."

"Sure," said the other. "Now go down the steps and I'll tell you what to look for."

The old man went to the stairs and started slowly down them, and his heart was pumping, not so much from the exertion as from the sudden feeling of returning youth — memory of youth anyway — and there were still the ancient unused synapses that had found themselves reactivated.

At the bottom of the steps he was in a dimly lit cellar and all of a sudden it was very confusing. There were bins and there were piles of old junk and barrels and some discarded old boards and such like, and he stood and stared, his heart pounding, and now he knew he was lost and what was he supposed to get? He heard the hostler upstairs stir and his voice came down from the top of the stairs.

"Go find Bin One and get Sixty-four out of it," said his voice, and the old man stood and looked in puzzlement because he hadn't noticed any numbers and he didn't recall any kind of numbering like that on horse ornaments, and maybe he hadn't heard right.

He mumbled something that indicated his confusion and the voice from above called down again. But this time it seemed to him that it was

asking for something else, something that sounded just like it wasn't Bin One but Being One, Web Sixty-four.

And those words rang in the old man's ears, and he became suddenly frightened and he tried to find the way out and blundered around in the jammed and confused cellar, and again called out the voice, quite unmistakably, "It's Being One, Web Sixty-four — and there are only sixty-four webs to any state of being!"

And the old man tried to say something, or maybe he called out, but he felt himself staggering and falling, and clutching at a pile of stuff which was falling all about him, and there was a strangling lot of dust being raised and a pounding of hooves — or was it his heart?

He lay quietly then, not thinking, not doing much of anything save breathing gently and softly and feeling the sensation of air against him. And he opened his eyes and there were just vague blurs moving about in the pale sunlight looming over him and he didn't know what they were and he pursed his mouth and felt hungry and sucked in air and moved something, his hand, his foot, he didn't really know and it didn't seem to matter.

He could hear a confusion of sounds, soft and somehow comforting, and then warm fluid entered his body through the tiny pursed mouth and it felt good and he sucked greedily; and unexpectedly somewhere, maybe in the last flickering of a vanishing memory, he heard what he thought was a voice, but which might have been merely a memory of an interval. And what it seemed in the last flickering bit of sapient understanding to have said was something that sounded like "Being Two, Web One," but who would ever know for sure

because the memory vanished in the soft, patternless formlessness of his uncluttered and uncomprehending mind.

The newborn baby took sustenance and was happy.

THE END

TWO DOZEN DRAGON EGGS

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