LAST WAVE

THE LAST BEST HOPE OF SPECULATIVE FICTION

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FIRST...

I'll admit it up front. My favorite period in science fiction was the late sixties/early seventies, when the New Wave was still flourishing. Writers were pushing the science fiction short story to its limits, and were embroiled in a constant debate over the content of their fiction, over what science fiction was and could become. Times have changed. Now, most of the debate appears to be over the content of their contracts and the size of their advances.

In *The Castle of Crossed Destinies,* Italo Calvino has written, "I always felt the need to alternate one type of writing with another, to begin writing again as if I had never written anything before." To me, that's what the New Wave represented—a fresh way of approaching a story. The New Wave writers held an unprejudiced view towards what science fiction was, with no preconceived ideas as to the "right" way to tell a story. Writers redefined the art of our field during the New Wave period, and that search for a better way to tell a story rejuvenated our genre. Though the New Wave has subsided, it continues to affect our fiction today.

Admittedly, there were a few excesses, stories here and there that were filled with a pretentiousness that petered off into incomprehensibility. But that was to be expected. In fiction, as in science, not all experiments are successful. All experiments, however, successful or not, take us one step further.

But this magazine is not being published out of a sense of nostalgia. In its time, the New Wave offered the best that was, but now we have to look towards the future.

Where is the state-of-the-art speculative fiction today? Who is consistently writing or publishing it? What's happening in 1983 to the stories that at one time would have appeared in ORBIT, or NEW WORLDS, or QUARK, or DANGEROUS VISIONS, or any one of a number of magazines and anthologies which allowed writers the freedom to do their best?

Those stories rarely appear in s.f. magazines today, leading me to believe that the stories are being rejected across the board by editors unwilling to respect the intelligence of their audience, and ending up in the back of file cabinets never to be seen again. Or worse, not being written at all because there is no ready market for them.

There has to be a place for such fiction in the science fiction field today. INTERZONE has already published four superb issues in Britain, but one magazine, standing alone, is not enough. That is why I have begun publishing LAST WAVE.

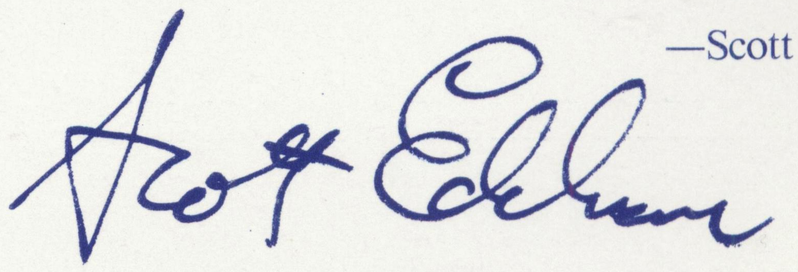
I honestly believe this premiere issue is, in terms of the quality of the fiction, one of the best single issues of any science fiction magazine published in the last few years. I am proud of the stories and poem I have chosen, some of which have been unable to find homes in many of the science fiction magazines currently enjoying success in the space opera boom.

I am not publishing LAST WAVE for a literary elite. I am not trying to be a party pooping dilettante, stamping out the fires of fun in science fiction. I am not trying to be stogy or boring. I am not trying to impress the academia. I publish these stories because they are fun. They are exciting works. That the stories you're about to read also happen to be extremely well-written and contain daring and different ideas will not be held against them, I hope.

You can help me in two ways. First, by continuing to write the stories that must be written if the field is to evolve out of its ray blaster space western stage, back into which it appears to have solidly fallen again. Second, by subscribing and supporting LAST WAVE, because without it, a number of these stories might not have been printed, and you'd not have seen them elsewhere. You'll find a subscription blank later on in this issue. Use it.

Join with me to prove there is still room for the best.

—Scott Edelman



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THE ENORMOUS LOVER

by Steve Rasnic Tem

HER ARRIVAL

The first moments of waking that morning presented him with her thigh, an enormous expanse of white which filled the sky and pressed so tightly against his bedroom window he grew startled thinking the glass would break.

He walked to the window and opened it to relieve some of the pressure. A bulge of flesh pushed pillow-like into the window frame. So white and pure, he thought, whiter even than his bleached sheets. A stiff branch of hair pushed through and became entangled in his orange curtains, reminding him vaguely of something he had seen before, but he had no idea where.

He rushed outside in his underwear only to see his neighbors climbing around, under, and on her. They glanced at him suspiciously. Mr. Baker with the enormous belly complained loudly and for all to hear how this mass of flesh had destroyed his car, ruined his wife's flower bed, and scattered four cans of garbage. Some of the other neighbors nodded and voiced their own complaints. None seemed to have realized that it was a giant, naked woman.

He gazed down the length of her body; she had appeared so that his house was by her waist. Looking south toward her head, four blocks away, he could see where her breasts had knocked out a row of picket fence, smashed four of Miss Morris' chickens into feathers and blood, and torn up several yards of pavement at the intersection of Washington and LaStrate. Both arms stretched like fallen columns down LaStrate, pushing up sidewalks on both sides of the street, her hands folded prayer-like atop the local fire company's garage. He couldn't see far enough, but he imagined her head must be lolling in the neighborhood park, her long hair no doubt unfurling in thick black waves into the children's wading pool.

Her thighs filled the lots on both sides of Washington Street, pressing small frame houses on each side. Her left buttock had killed Bobby Thompson's spaniel, and the child's wailing reverberated, increasingly agitating the crowd. Women were crying, men waving their arms in anger, children run amok. He couldn't follow her legs behind the gathering crowd, but the squeals and blarings of traffic over on Berman Avenue seemed to indicate they had ended somewhere in the vicinity.

He barely knew any of these people; he'd never spoken to his neighbors. He was suddenly afraid the changed circumstances would demand his participation in community affairs; he might be asked to communicate his deepest feelings. He would have run back into his house and hidden right then if the crowd hadn't been blocking his way.

He couldn't quite recall his dream of the night before, but somehow he did know that it concerned a great longing.

Mr. Warren, standing stooped at Washington and LaStrate, was the first of the neighbors to realize that the pink mass of heavings and sighs was a nude woman. His eyes grew wide; his chest heaved in short spurts. The crowd grew silent down at the intersection, and this silence travelled slowly down the street as the people realized what they were seeing. A few women and older men left first, their faces flushed, eyes cast down, dragging their children behind them. A few men and women lingered longer, with confused looks on their faces, features caught somewhere between a titillated amusement and profound surprise. They apparently could not believe what they were seeing, but were reluctant to leave just the same.

He looked down at his own body, suddenly aware of his near-nakedness, and tried to slide behind one of her rolls of fat, hoping that her presence would prevent anyone from noticing him. But even safely hidden within her embrace he was embarrassed and felt sure that people were secretly watching him. He felt as if he had done something obscene in public.

He watched them leave, one by one and in groups, most of them unaware of any potential danger, but now and then a man or woman would suddenly scream and bolt, as if just becoming aware of the enormity of the situation. A singular outburst of such panic would engender panic in those nearby, until several groups in various parts of the crowd would be on the verge of hysteria. After a few minutes the entire mass of people seemed to be feeling the effects; as the pace quickened, the general tension built into an almost-palpable thing.

Only Mrs. Thompson, the mother of the boy whose pet had been killed, was left. Strutting up to him with her hands making quick flicking movements into her hair, she glared at him, then asked him when he was going to get rid of this obscenity.

He couldn't understand why she held him responsible, but felt guilty all the same.

MEETING HER

Later that morning he walked up and down the street with a wheelbarrow and shovel, cleaning up about her body and putting the neighbors' yards back into some semblance of order. At first the cordon of police tried to stop him, but then their sergeant stopped them, sensing something right about what he was doing. "He seems to belong here," the sergeant was overheard to say. After a few hours on duty the other police officers sensed it too; he seemed a natural attendent to the giant woman, with as much right to be there as they had. But none of the police officers would speak to him, or come very close as he made his rounds about the massive body; they eyed him with suspicion.

The mayor soon arrived with several advisers. Upon seeing him scrubbing down one of her fingers with a mop, the mayor rushed over and started to order him away, to warn him of the probable danger. But at a certain distance, the mayor stopped apparently in confusion, unable to proceed further. He was overheard to mumble that the "man belongs here." After that no further attempts were made to remove him from the scene.

It was a small city, a mere suburb actually, so experts had to be called in from the state government. During the wait for their arrival she grew approximately another block in every direction. The line of police panicked and ran for cover, people screamed, shrieked, and generally made a great deal of noise in their evacuations. Even the more recalcitrant homebodies seemed to be abandoning their dwellings.

The mass of people leaving the area was met by another mass of people, almost as large, arriving for a glimpse of this new wonder. When one of her stirring hands knocked over a tour bus full of people all excursions into the area were blocked by the police, who were now cordoned several blocks away from her nearest extremity.

And yet no one bothered him. In fact they seemed to be doing their best to ignore his presence completely.

He didn't understand why he had taken on this role as her custodian; the cleaning thoroughly exhausted him. Sometimes he would stop suddenly in anger and frustration; there was no way he could complete the job. Sometimes her stirrings caught him unawares, and he was knocked down by a sudden movement. She sweat prodigiously, and every few hours it became necessary to swab her down with large mops, wiping her off with his bedspread. He worked long and hard at cleaning her, but it soon became an endless cycle of rests and bursts of sudden activity as the enormity of what he was attempting became clear.

Soon she was sleeping silently again, and he rested against her side, his right arm stretched as far upward as possible against her skin. He attempted with all his imagination and strength to hold her, put his arms around her, or at least acquire some sense of how it would feel. He thought of how his parents wouldn't approve of the spectacle of her. He reached out his arm even more, brought his left arm up to join it, his face buried against her.

The neighbors' protests became louder in the background. He noticed a few people returning to the vicinity to retrieve their belongings. But they kept their distance, being so awed by her. He ignored them. When she finally called to him, it was so soft, like a whisper inside his head. At first he thought he heard the voice of a little girl crushed beneath the body, now calling faintly for help, then realized he'd been mistaken.

He walked south on Washington, humming to himself and then wondering why he should be doing such a thing, kicking aside gravel and pavement she'd knocked loose in her restlessness. The wind was picking up, tree-tops brushing against cheap-shingled roofs, paper flying through the air, dust and gravel and garbage. He was startled when he noticed the debris striking her skin, paper clinging to her body hair, gravel making white scratch marks along her breasts.

At the intersection he noticed that her arm pits were raised just enough above the pavement to allow passage beneath them. He crawled through on hands and knees, and almost passed out from her body heat in the semi-enclosed area. The wind had increased in velocity, bending the trees in the park ahead of him violently to one side. An elm spun wildly then snapped near the top, the branches crashing into a small metal utility building. Under the wind's howling, he could still sense her whispering, carried from the park. The wind methodically destroyed the trees around him.

By the time he reached her face, he found he couldn't see her clearly because of the countless branches and leaves scattered around her. The high damp wind blinded him and lifted a few strands of her heavy wet hair out of the water and left it on her cheeks and forehead like giant seaweed. But the whispers were clear enough. He struggled around behind her and began lifting her hair out of the wading pool. He wrung it out as best he could and stretched the fibres out under logs and large stones.

She said she loved him. She said it over and over, the message building steadily in conviction and volume inside his head, until he thought his head might split and he'd flee the park screaming. She said he was what she had always wanted.

She moaned so deeply it shook into the earth beneath him, reverberated up through his feet into his stomach.

Then she was quiet again. He stretched out beside her face and began to fall asleep.

He saw an immense woman's face, glowing in the darkness. My love, he whispers. I need something to contain my love.

THE EXPERTS EXAMINE HER

After a few hours the experts from the state government arrived. Again most ignored him, seeing him almost as an appendage to the giant woman. A few, however, treated him like a fellow expert, someone called in from another agency, perhaps even from the federal government. They asked him questions as if he must have encountered such a phenomenon before. Of course he must have, having been sent from the federal government. They eyed him with suspicion, and held him in awe equal to their awe of the giant woman.

All agreed it was obvious she was a giant woman,

although a special team of doctors and technicians were dispatched about her body to make a general physical examination. She hadn't grown any the past couple of hours so such an examination was considered safe. Measurements were made, hormone levels checked, skin and hair samples taken, and the results were affirmative. The head of the team was heard to remark she was indeed, every inch a woman.

The experts soon fell into three camps. The first group saw her as an overwhelming danger to the well-being of the community, and recommended her immediate termination either by injected poison or military means. The second group protested that she was fully and truly human, such a classification not to be limited by size, and insisted that she not be harmed or even disturbed in any way.

The third group had no easy answers. They thought an execution a bit hasty, but balked at calling such a monstrosity human. Perhaps she was an alien female, dropped out of some spaceship in the sky, some extraterrestrial stewardess blown out a hatch. They recommended establishing contact, but having the military on standby alert in case she proved to be some advance invasion scout.

He spoke last. I don't suppose I have any good excuses, he began, then paused, I mean, I'm terribly sorry to have caused all this trouble. . .

The experts crowded around him in rapt attention.

He started again. She's all encompassing, he told them. A universal longing for love, long repressed, now suddenly come out. . . it's overwhelming! She's the feminine side to all of us, the enormous inner dark, the creative drive, an obsession and a suppression, God's left hand. . .

They all nodded agreement. The conference ended with no decisions made, except to watch and observe the enormous lover.

TAKING CARE OF HER

He spent the next few days keeping her washed, scrubbed, and dusted. He spent hours annointing her body with gallon buckets of sweet-smelling creams and lotions, dashing back to the park as fast as he could run when he sensed her whispering. Soon he bought a bicycle to make the trips quicker and less tiring, then a compact pickup with the last of his savings. His neighbors complained he was reckless. He had smashed the recently repaired fence when her chest had stirred and he had to make a quick turn to avoid crashing into her. Some said it wasn't safe to walk out the door anymore. Some threatened to do his giant lover harm, others were gathering signatures for a petition. Neighborhood children approached her slowly at first, then started mountain climbing and playing hide and seek among her limbs. He spent a lot of time chasing them off.

He was forced to spend more time among his neighbors, trying to calm them down. And his appearances seemed to be working; it was hard to consider her an unnatural thing once exposed to him. Some people even became converts, enjoying her presence, feeling at peace with her. Some volunteered to help with her care, but he insisted that was his mission alone.

It became necessary to convince her to remove her hands from the fire station, and scarlet fire engines careening around her open, soft palms became a frequent sight. A few old people from the next block would sit on their front porches, staring at her arms, but saying nothing.

He was soon forced to stand guard beside her at night, and after one night in which vandals (from outside the neighborhood he was sure) painted obscenities on her buttocks when he was in the park combing out her hair, he began regular motor patrols around her body, complete with searchlight and shotgun.

She never ate, and so never left any waste, and though he was relieved by this convenience, he worried about it, wondering why she was so different from other women he had known.

Mornings he awoke, drove up to the park and kissed her on the cheek. Then he cleaned the sleep out of her eyes with a large, soft brush, massaged her face with a dry mop to keep her skin tight and beautiful, and read to her until noon. Sometimes he would try to look into her eyes, try to interpret the feeling there, but her eyes were too large, too far apart. He became lost in them.

WITH HER AT NIGHT

As weeks went by, nights became colder, he spent most of his time in the evening hours with her head in the park. A few days before she had moved her legs off Berman Avenue and demolished his house, destroying four blocks of telephone and electrical lines in the process. The people were alternately bitter, awed, and sometimes terrified, although most had become complacent about her presence, accepting her as they would a spell of bad weather, or an enormous, strangely beautiful rainbow. City officials were still concerned, but were now hoping to keep it a local phenomenon. We'll have to work slowly on this one, they said. Some officials began to see her as an asset, suggesting that a park might be created, with some sort of ride built incorporating her body.

He camped out by the children's pool in an old army tent, having even more time to talk to her. He couldn't really know if she was listening, if her enormous ears would be able to pick up a sound so tiny. His parents had called the police down on him, claiming he was living with the woman. Everyone was, he thought.

Now from his vantage point in the park he could see the full expanse of her body; he could imagine himself holding her at night, completely. Her body sloped uphill, north on Washington, until the distant skyline of downtown rested on her breasts, belly, and legs like a transparent, glistening net, studded with glittering stones. Her body turned and the city turned on her axis; the stars fell down and were caught in her steady breathing. His breath clouded in front of him, seeming to reduce her face to a manageable size beneath it.

TEACHING HER

He had quit his job, devoting his days to teaching her how to take care of herself and cope with her abnormal size. She

had grown a little more, and found breathing more and more difficult while lying on her back. He studied all the exercise manuals, and was able to adapt special exercises for her to facillitate respiration. Other, limited movements enabled her to avoid cramps and aches in her joints, and rashes from lying too long in the same position.

His boss came down from the appliance store to try to talk him into coming back. He needed him he said, he had a real intellect to contribute to the operation. His boss said it wasn't right to live the way he was living, that a man needed a job; he owed it to the community. A curious little girl had come out of hiding and was touching the enormous lover's hair. The boss gestured to the child and talked of responsibility, the example that must be set for the younger generation.

He smiled and nodded, but said he was very busy; he was to read to his lover that afternoon. Could the boss please talk to him later at a more convenient time?

Sometimes lying in one place for too long a stretch, she began to cry, tears like giant jelly fish sliding slowly down her cheekbones. He wiped them away, stroked her chin, and told her she had no reason to cry.

He told her jokes, a great number of jokes since she had arrived without a sense of humor. Her laughter shook the ground and hurt his ears. He laughed so hard he cried too, his voice booming, growing larger by the day.

He read poetry to her, the plays of Shakespeare, and a junior high school text on the History of the U.S.

People would stop what they were doing and come out of their houses to stare at her in awe. He tried to teach her how to get along with their attitudes.

A minor city official came to him one day exclaiming that this was indeed unusual, but enough is enough, certainly the novelty had worn off for him, now, hadn't it? The official told him he was young, that he had great potential, and a tremendous future ahead of him. Why was he throwing it away?

The official then produced a list of damages that had been done, property destroyed, routines disrupted, schedules complicated, lives and families dispossessed. Did he want these things to happen? Where was his love for his fellow man? He gestured toward the neighbors hiding in their houses, peeking beneath their living room shades. Did he know he was responsible for the confusion and sometimes terror these poor people were experiencing? Then the official whispered in his ear concerning vigilante groups, how some misguided souls might take the law into their own hands. The city tried, but it wasn't always able to stop its citizens from taking the law into their own hands. It would some day have to go to court, be tested, this matter of an enormous lover. If she were truly human, all the city could do would be to arrest her for vagrancy and indecent exposure. But how would they do this? Her crimes didn't deserve harsh treatment under the normal standards. How were they to haul her away?

Another official came by later that afternoon, saying the previous official had not acted by official sanction, deplored the man's actions, and stated that no official position had been reached in this matter.

That night, someone tried to blow up the woman with plastic explosive. They had called him at the phone booth on the corner, delivering their warning in short, clipped phrases. The bomb squad had arrived in time, but it had been a great scare for him, his lover, and the city officials as well. Newspapers had carried the story, and this engendered renewed interest in the giant woman. Newsmen and TV cameras rolled in from all across the nation; pictures of her were not censored since she was so large, but shots tended to be done as tastefully as possible. But the tabloids and flesh magazines discovered her, and closeups of her breasts, tongue, and pubic areas began to appear.

He often appeared beside her in these photographs, grinning sheepishly. The caption beneath his photograph read "?"

It appeared she slowly became aware of people's attitudes toward her. He believed she had become ashamed of her nudity, and although he tried to tell her nothing was wrong with that, the pressure of her shame was contagious, and he soon found he couldn't bear to look on her. It made him feel enormously, all-revealingly naked himself. He tried to keep the worst stories from her, but she always seemed to know.

As weeks dragged on, and the enormous lover had fallen into a deep depression, sobbing in her sleep and disturbing the normal lay of the park landscaping, he attempted to hold her until she had fallen asleep. He could pretend his arms were long, were large enough to contain her, and she pretended she was small, petite, a tearful lover in his arms.

IN TOUCH WITH THE INTERIOR

Sometimes lying beside her he could feel her organs, their functioning sensed in his bones, the vibrations shaking his own organs in sympathy. She played him like an instrument. First his lungs taking up the pace of her own breathing, his blood circulation forced into her own tidal patterns, the chemical changes accompanying her feelings impressing his own system with similar feelings. Sometimes he believed he was actually thinking her thoughts, of what it would be like to be so immense, to contain an entire world within your scope. And he remembered what it was like to be a child, and wanting to expand his small world, and the way the adult world seemed to be dead set against that.

HER CONTINUED GROWTH

Since she had not grown in some time the city decided she was safe and manageable at her current size. Work soon began on a city park which would be her permanent home. Some were dissatisfied with the property reimbursement they received from the city government, but most were relieved to see the matter finally settled. The enormous lover began to recede into the background of their thoughts.

He often wondered later if this had sparked her sudden burst of growth, that like a jealous lover she had done something dramatic to draw attention back to her.

He had first noticed when her eyes seemed to stray one

morning, then he realized it was both eyeballs, drifting apart, the bridge of the nose keeping pace with their flight. Her mouth became frightening to behold during the next few days; sometimes even her most shallow breaths threatened to suck him inside her if he wasn't careful. Her hair was like a jungle, thick and black with some long strands almost having a life of their own, the way they seemed to reach for him. One morning he woke up nearly suffocating. She had turned her head during the night and cast her hair over his body. Her legs and arms had smashed housing developments on three sides (luckily, all had been evacuated in time). Her weight had sunk her more deeply into the ground, until trees and buildings on all sides tilted in her direction. The city was in an uproar. The police had their hands full controlling snipers, saboteurs, and bands of armed citizens.

City officials came with court orders for her removal. She was beautiful, awe-inspiring, the officials said, but as a practical matter she obstructed commerce, government, religion, public safety, and logic itself. She was beautiful, but a danger to them all, they exclaimed. They said they would use force if she weren't able to move under her own power.

Hydraulic trucks and power winches were brought in but her increased weight proved too much for their machinery. Chains snapped and iron plates buckled. Engineers were brought to her side, but most merely shook their heads in disbelief. Others contrived complicated plans, almost all concluding with a dismemberment of the body, and were sent away in anger. No one was yet prepared to order an execution. The officials finally shook their heads and left. He suspected they would lay the final responsibility on him.

Angry taunts from the gathering mobs accompanied his talks with her at night. His neighbors kept their houses dark. Her left hand had destroyed an old lady's home a few blocks away, and he felt badly about it. He wouldn't tell her about the incident however, afraid it would only deepen her depression.

She was growing by leaps and bounds, expanding over entire city blocks overnight. He was sure such remarkable growth must aggravate her emotional condition.

He couldn't shake the feeling that her continued growth was a kind of seeking on her part, a groping, an expression of her longing in the only way she knew. He wondered what she could be seeking at such a size, what could be driving her growth onward. And yet he felt responsible for her increasing size. But he couldn't really understand. She wasn't the person he had expected to be attracted to.

HER LATER CARE

Her increased size brought her into further contact with more and more people, businesses and city officials. The necessary repair trips became more frequent. He ran the truck around her body some twenty times a day, a trip requiring a half hour at his best speed. She began to smell badly as her depression grew worse. He began to feel he could match her mood with her odor. Her body oils and sweat ran more freely, and keeping her perfumed and scrubbed would have taken ten men. So try as he might, he finally had to give up. Every night he fell asleep exhausted, camping further away from her body in case of another sudden expansion, knowing he would never be able to stroke her face again anyway, talk to her quietly in the night. She had outgrown human communication completely.

Each day the police came by with fresh reports of damage her outer edges had done in distant neighborhoods. The two young officers read the list grimly, glancing up now and then to fix him in a disapproving stare. Then they would ask him if he had come up with anything to get her to move, if he could talk her into standing up and walking away. But he would always shake his head sadly, telling them no, she couldn't even turn over. They left him tormented with shame and guilt, and he would walk back and forth down her side, muttering to himself. Soon he found it difficult to even touch her, for she had grown too large even for his imagination. He could never hold her again.

An elementary school lost its walls to one of her elbows, the brick crumbling down her arm like powder. The children were all at home, but two janitors lost their lives.

A policeman directing traffic on Hanover was crushed to death by a moving foot.

Her growing thigh was pierced by the spire of a Catholic church ten blocks away. The resulting blood bath quite unsettled many of the parishoners. The priest complained to the Bishop, who complained to the senator. The senator bawled out the mayor, who promised to get something done.

A four-month-old was knocked out of its stroller, breaking its neck when she stirred unexpectedly near a shopping center.

He spent several days sitting by her body, almost hoping she would turn and crush him. He had had enough.

HE IMAGINES HER DEATH

She trebled her size during the next week, and he spent hours screaming at her, accusing her of creeping into his life and ruining his future. He began to feel her growth as a pressure in his brain, replacing the whispering which had stopped long ago, with her last leap in size. He wept and fell to his knees beside the quivering body. He thought his head would explode.

The two police officers, embarrassed by the spectacle he was making, tried to talk him into standing, telling him he should be a man and learn to control himself.

His parents came to pull him away from her but he turned on them, swinging at them with both fists. His mother claimed he had never really loved her, after all she had sacrificed. Wasn't he ashamed of himself? His father claimed he was shirking his responsibility to God, parents, and country. They were both hot-faced, screaming they were ashamed of him.

He had nightmares about being the one who had to kill her, of tricking her into drinking barrels of industrial wastes or potassium cyanide. In the nightmares her extremities began to turn color, her hair fall out. He had to chase dogs, cats, and other scavengers away from the corpse. His lungs became filled with the stench of her decay. He knew he

would smell the stench for years.

In the nightmares he watched the butchers strip her of flesh, the bulldozers eating small, then larger chunks from her body. The saws ground away at her bones. The streets were covered with a pink film.

SHE BECOMES A CITY

It soon became apparent, however, that not everyone found living with the enormous lover that difficult at all. Some had learned to adjust to her now slow and steady expansion (the total expanded area now described using the word "geometrically") with a life style similar to that of gypsies, Irish Tinkers, and other nomadic groups. They simply moved as she grew.

Of course it soon became apparent that the original ground, the city with its streets and parks and neighborhoods would have to be abandoned completely. The "new nomads" had discovered that the best thing to do was to climb aboard her, settle down, and let her grow beneath them rather than on top of them. Others followed their example to avoid being crushed by the lover.

People soon discovered that once they settled down on a particular spot they would tend to stay there, no matter how much she grew in other directions. Of course they would discover that their neighbors would gradually be moving further and further away from them as her body expanded. But they became used to such changes, even growing to like them, since other people would move into the intervening space and there would be a different family to get used to, perhaps a more interesting or a friendlier one. People came to appreciate the variety built into living on the enormous lover. People learned to live there.

It became obvious that a new city was forming on top of her body, a city with different needs and aspirations from the older one. The old city government was quite unhappy with all this, and attempted repeatedly to remove this new generation of squatters from her surface. Old city residents had added cause for resentment as their lands and homes were rapidly eaten up by her continued expansion, which soon became synonymous with the expansion of the so-called "new" city. In fact, after a few months there was little discussion of the enormous lover at all as the old and new cities battled out matters of jurisdictions, property rights, and representation.

The matter was settled, as he knew it inevitably would be, when the enormous lover completely enveloped the old city limits. A new city hall and chamber of commerce building were erected in an area between her navel and breasts, the navel roped off when a teenage boy fell in and broke his leg. Things had begun to return to normal, relatively speaking.

He had had enough, however, and was seen leaving town the day of the dedication of the new city hall for parts unknown. If he had stayed a few hours more he would have been able to hear the new mayor announce the first public works project of the new era; she was to be paved and landscaped.

THE NEW COUNTRYSIDE

During the next few years he heard but intermittently in his travels of the progress of the enormous lover. Occasionally some scientist, military man, or basement tinkerer would come up with a plan for halting her progress across the landscape. Such plans invariably failed, or failed to acquire sufficient support as the citizens of the country had become rather accustomed to her increasing presence and the necessary adjustments in lifestyle. Many thought she had brought more benefit than harm; towns were now given an opportunity to correct earlier bad planning; to build a landscape from the ground up by means of massive quantities of earth and plantings hauled up from still uncovered areas.

Many insisted that the new countryside brought by the enormous lover was a much more peaceful one than the one they had before. Many claimed that the primal peacefulness and oneness of nature had returned to the countryside. It became quite common for strollers through these new hills, dales, and gentle rises to comment that they could sense her gentle respiration, the muffled rhythm of her buried heartbeat, and this, at last, was the beginning of true communion with "mother nature."

He thought that perhaps one reason people could take her steady encroachment more easily was the fact that she seemed to have sunk a bit into the earth, and to level out, so she seemed now but a thin layer spreading itself out over the world.

Occasionally in his wide travels he would come across some familiar landmark; an ear, a particular mole, a shallow dimple. But much to his irritation he could no longer put them into the context of her complete form. He wasn't sure now why he had even been attracted to her in the first place.

A BRAVE NEW WORLD

He was eighty before word finally came that she had completed her encasement of the world. By this time everyone had become so used to her that very little attention was paid to the event. All the networks had a three-minute spot showing the last original well of flesh closing up, the cameras zooming in on the bare circle of original earth at the bottom just before the closure. The event occurred just outside New Manchester, England. The prime minister read a brief statement.

Indeed there was little about the world to show that the enormous lover had ever existed. Virtually forty per cent of her skin was now covered by a new third layer of dirt, metal and vegetation. New technologies had vastly speeded up the process, as well as her own occasional churnings, unconscious movements in her long sleep some said, bringing dirt and material up from beneath her, spewing the material up in enormous "geysers" of earth matter. Happily, they had become adept at predicting such freak eruptions, allowing evacuation of the affected areas.

For some reason she had left major bodies of water largely exposed with but few variations in shoreline. Some fresh

water lakes which had been covered up were considered possible candidates for drilling, but this was considered a controversial proposal. Who knows how she might react! She might destroy us all! various politicians and citizens' groups exclaimed. Other groups called these people dreamers and obstructionists.

Most of her features had been obscured by massive development and a gradual build up of earthworks. Both ears were now part of great canyon and cavern systems. Her navel had been filled in. Her mouth had clamped itself shut some years ago after she had whispered her last unintelligible words. No one was quite sure under what bank of earth her mouth was now hidden, although there were many theories. One renowned scientist claimed it lay beneath New Denver and that the people there were in danger of a devastating earthquake if she ever decided again to speak.

He thought about her now infrequently, and then only to relegate her to another foolishness of his youth. He bought a farm and decided to spend the rest of his days there. He liked the setting; a large ridge covered with brilliant green vegetation overlooked his house.

He had lived there a month when the dream of his youth, the dream of the enormous lover began to return to him at night, to haunt him with self-doubt and questioning. What did he have to show for all his travels? He had no wife, no children. The only reason he hadn't felt unhappy was that he really had nothing to compare it to. He'd grown to like loneliness, he suspected, simply because he had become so used to it. He was an aged failure, living on a dried-up, broken-down farm.

One night after the dream he decided to take a walk up the ridge; he thought perhaps it would clear his head and allow him to sleep.

He had reached the foot of the ridge when he thought, he wasn't sure—was it a whispering he had heard?

Yes. . . it was. A gentle whispering, like a soft, almost subliminal breeze.

I love you. . . I've always loved you. . . wanted you to hold me forever. . .

He staggered back, startled, as the ridge appeared to lift, the greenery rolling back into the night and stars, and the soft white beneath revealing itself, so luminescent, brilliant. . .

An inky pool seemed to float atop the white, glinting in the moonlight, then traveled rapidly about the surface, darting, seeming to slide closer to him.

He suddenly knew he was gazing at a giant eye from the side. The inky pool, her pupil, fixed on him and he found himself almost falling into it, into her infinite, one-eyed gaze.

He felt himself losing control, falling to his knees, beginning to weep. It was the most beautiful eye he had ever seen. Why had he left her? If he only had it all to do over again, he would take better care of her, he would have carried through with his enormous, all-encompassing love. . .

He was so lost in his own thoughts at first he didn't feel it. But as her whispering, her confessions of love, her entreaties reached an almost hysterical level he found he had to stand up, cover his ears, and open his mouth against the tremendous inner pressure.

Then he noticed the way the ground was shaking, the horizon line wavering.

And the millions of hairline cracks beginning to form in the third layer of the world.

□

FULL CHICKEN RICHNESS

by Avram Davidson

La Bunne Burger was said to have the best hamburger on The Street; the only trouble with that was that Fred Hopkins didn't care much for hamburger. However there were other factors to consider, such as these: other items on La Bunne's menu were probably just a bit better than comparable items composed elsewhere on The Street, they sold for just a bit less than, etc. etc., and also Fred Hopkins found the company just a bit more interesting than elsewhere, etc. What else? It was nearer to his studio loft than any eating-place else. Any place else save for a small place called The Old Moulmein Pagoda, the proprietor of which appeared to speak very fluent Cantonese for a Burman, and the Old Moulmein Pagoda was not open until late afternoon. *Late* afternoon.

Late morning was more Fred's style.

He was likely to find there, at any given time of late morning, a number of regulars, such as: well, there was Tilly, formerly Ottilie, with red cheeks, her white hair looking windblown even on windless days; Tilly had her own little routine, which consisted of ordering coffee and toast; with the toast came a small plastic container of jelly, and this she spread on one of the slices of toast. That eaten, she would hesitantly ask Rudolfo if she might have more jelly. . . adding, that she would pay for it. Rudolfo would hand her one or two or three more, she would tentatively offer him a palm of pennies and nickels and he would politely decline them. Fred was much moved by this little drama, but after the twelfth and succedant repetitions it left him motionless. (Once he was to encounter Tillie in a disused doorway downtown standing next to a hat with money while she played—and played beautifully—endless Strauss waltzes on that rather un-Strauss-like-instrument, the harmonica.)

Also unusually present in La Bunne Burger in the 40 minutes before the noon rush were Volodya and Carl. They were a sort of twosome there; that is, they were certainly not a twosome elsewhere. Carl was tall and had long blonde hair and a long blonde beard and was already at his place along the counter when Volodya walked in. Carl never said anything to Volodya, Volodya always said anything to Carl. Volodya was wide and gnarly and had small pale eyes like those of a malevolent pig. Among the things he called Carl were *Pópa! Moskúey! Smaravátchnik!*—meaning (Fred Hopkins found out by and by) Priest! Inhabitant of Moscow! and One Who, For Immoral Purposes, Pretends to be a Chimney Sweep! Fred by and by tried to dissuade Volodya of this curious delusion; "He's a Minnesota Swede," Fred explained. But Volodya would have none of it, "*He's a Rahshian Artoducks priest!*" was his explosive come-back—and he went on to denounce the last Czar of Russia as having been in the pay of the freemasons. Carl always said nothing, munched away as droplets of egg congealed on his beard.

And there was, in La Bunne Burger, often, breaking fast on a single sausage and a cup of tea, a little old oriental man, dressed as though for the winters of Manchuria; once Fred had, speaking slowly and clearly, asked him please to pass the ketchup: "Say, I ain't deef," said the l.o.o.m., in tones the purest American Gothic.

Fred himself was not in the least eccentric, he was an *art*ist, not even starving, though. . . being unfashionably representational. . . not really prospering, either. His agent said that this last was his, Fred's, own fault. "Paint doctors' wives!" his agent insisted. "If you would only paint portraits for doctors' wives, I could get you lots of commissions. Old buildings," the agent said, disdainfully. "Old buildings, old buildings." But the muse kisseth where she listeth and if anything is not on the list, too bad: Fred had nothing against doctor' wives; merely, he preferred to paint pictures of old buildings. Now and then he drove around looking for old buildings he hadn't painted pictures of and he photographed them and put the photos up by his canvas to help when he painted at home: this of course caused him to be regarded with scorn by purists who painted only from the model or the imagination; why either should be less or more scornable, they disdained to say.

Whom else was F. Hopkins likely to see in La Bunne Burger over his late breakfast or his brunch? Proprietors of nearby businesses, for example, he was likely to see there; mamma no longer brought pappa's dinner wrapped in a towel to keep hot. Abelardo was sometimes there. Also Fred might see tourists or new emigrés or visiting entrepreneurs of alien status, come to taste the exotic tuna fish sandwich on toast, the picturesque macaroni and cheese, the curious cold turkey, and, of course, often, often, the native La Bunne De Luxe Special. . . said to be the best hamburger on The Street. Abelardo had long looked familiar; Abelardo had in fact looked familiar from the first. Abelardo always came in from the kitchen and Abelardo always went back out

through the kitchen, and yet Abelardo did not work in the kitchen. Evidently Abelardo delivered. Something.

Once, carrying a plate of...something...odd and fragrant, Rudolfo rested it a moment on the counter near Fred while he gathered cutlery; in response to Fred's look of curiosity and approbation, at once said, "Not on the menu. Only I give some to Abelardo, because our family come from the same country;" off he went.

Later: "You're not from Mexico, Rudolfo."

"No. South America." Rudolfo departs with glasses.

Later: "Which country in South America you from, Rudolfo?"

"Depend who you ask." Exit, Rudolfo, for napkins.

Fred Hopkins, idly observing paint on two of his own fingers, idly wondered that—a disputed boundary being clearly involved—Rudolfo was not out leading marches and demonstrations, or (at *least*!) with drippy brushes slapping up grafitti exhorting the reader to *Remember the 12th of January*...the *3rd or April*...the *24th of October*...and so on through the existing political calendar of Ibero-Amerca...Clearly, Rudolfo was an anachronism. Perhaps he secretly served some fallen sovereign; a pseudo-crypto-Emperor of Brazil. Perhaps.

Though probably not likely.

One day, the hour being later than usual and the counter crowded, Fred's eyes wandered around in search of a seat; met those of Abelardo, who, wordlessly, invited him to sit in the empty place at the two-person table. Which Fred did. And, so doing, realized why the man had always seemed familiar. Now, suppose you are a foreigner living in a small city or medium town in Latin America, as Fred Hopkins had once been, and it doesn't really matter which city or town or even which country...doesn't really matter for *this* purpose...and you are going slightly out your *mind* trying to get your electricity (*la luz*) turned on and eventually you notice that there are a few large stones never moved from the side of a certain street and gradually notice that there is often the same man sitting on one of the boulders and that this man wears very dusty clothes which do not match and a hat rather odd for the locale (say, a beret) and that he also wears glasses and that the lens of one is opaque or dark and that this man often gives a small wave of his hand to return the greetings of passers-by but otherwise he merely sits and looks. You at length have occasion to ask him something, say, At what hour does the Municipal Palace open? And not only does the man politely inform you, he politely engages you in conversation and before long he is giving you a fascinating discourse on an aspect of history, religion, economics, or folklore, an aspect of which you had been completely ignorant. Subsequent enquiry discloses that the man is, say, a Don Eliseo, who had attended the National University for nine years but took no degree, that he is an *idiosyncratico*, and comes from a family *muy honorado*—so much *honorado*, in fact, that merely having been observed in polite discourse with him results in your electricity being *connectido muy pronto*. You have many such discourses with Don Eliseo and eventually he shows you his project, temporarily in abeyance, to perfect the best tortilla making-and-baking machine in the world: there is some minor problem, such as the difficulty of scraping every third tortilla off the ceiling, but any day now Don Eliseo will get this licked; and, in the meanwhile and forever after, his house is your house.

This was why Abelardo had seemed familiar from the start, and if Abelardo was not Eliseo's brother than he was certainly his nephew or his cousin...in the spirit, anyway.

Out of a polite desire that Fred Hopkins not be bored while waiting to be served, Abelardo discussed various things with him—that is, for the most part, Abelardo discussed. Fred listened. La Bunne Burger was very busy.

"Now, the real weakness of the Jesuits in Paraguay," Abelardo explained.

"Now, in western South America," said Abelardo, "North American corporations are disliked less for their vices than for their virtues. Bribery, favoritism, we can understand these things, we live with them. But an absolute insistence that one must arrive in one's office day after day at one invariable hour and that frequent prolonged telephone conversations from one's office to one's home and family is unfavored, this is against our conception of personal and domestic usement," Abelardo explained.

He assured Fred Hopkins that the Regent Isabella's greatest error, "though she made several," was in having married a Frenchman. "The Frankish temperament is not the Latin temperament," Aberlardo declared.

Fred's food eventually arrived; Abelardo informed him that although individual enterprise and planned economy were all very well in their own ways, "one ignores the law of supply and demand at peril. I have been often in businesses, so I know, you see." Said Abelardo.

Abelardo did not indeed wear eyeglasses with one dark or opaque lens, but one of his eyes was artificial. He had gold in his smile—that is, in his teeth—and his white coverall was much washed but never much ironed. By and by, with polite words and thanks for the pleasure of Fred's company, Abelardo vanished into the kitchen; when Fred strolled up for his bill, he was informed it had already been paid. This rather surprised Fred. So did the fact, conveyed to him by the clock, that the noon rush was over. Had *been* over.

"Aberlardo seems like—Abelardo is a very nice guy."

Rudolfo's face, hands, and body made brief but persuasive signal that it went without saying that Abelardo was indeed a very nice guy. "But I don't know how he stay in business," said Rudolfo, picking up a pile of dishes and walking them off to the kitchen.

Fred had no reason to remain to discuss this, as it was an unknown to him how anybody stayed in business. Merely he was well aware how week after week the price of paints and brushes and canvases went up, up, up, while the price of his artwork stayed the same, same, same. Well, his agent, though wrong, was right. No one to blame but himself; he could have stayed in advertizing, he might be an account executive by now. Or—Walking along The Street, he felt a wry smile accompany memory of another of Abelardo's comments: "Advertisage is like courtship, always involve some measure of deceit."

This made him quickstep a bit back to the studio to get in

some more painting, for—he felt—tonight might be a good one for what one might call courtship; "exploitation," some would doubtless call it: though why? if ladies ("women!") did not like to come back to his loft studio and see his painting, why did they do so? And if they did not genuinely desire to remain for a while of varying length, who could make them? Did any one of them really desire to admire his art, was there no pretense on the part of any of them? Why was *he* not the exploited one? You women are all alike, you only have one thing on your mind, all you think of is your own pleasure. . . Oh well. Hell. Back to work. —It was true that you could not sleep with an old building, but then they never argued with you, either. And as for "some measure of deceit," boy did that work both ways! Two weeks before, he'd come upon a harmonious and almost untouched, though tiny, commercial block in an area in between the factories and the farms, as yet undestroyed by the people curiously called "developers;" he'd taken lots of color snaps of it from all angles, and he wanted to do at least two large paintings, maybe two small ones as well. The date, 1895, was up there in front. The front was false, but in the harmony was truth.

A day which found him just a bit tired of the items staple in breakfast found him ordering a cup of the soup du jour for starters. "How you like the soup?"—Rudolfo.

Fred gave his head a silent shake. How. It had gone down without exiting dismay. "Truthful with you. Had better, had worse. Hm. What was it. Well, I was thinking of something else. Uh—chicken vegetable with rice? Right? Right. Yours or Campbell's?"

Neither.

"Half mine, half Abelardo's."

"I *beg* your pardon!"

But Rudolfo had never heard the rude English story about the pint of half-and-half, neither did Fred tell it to him. Rudolfo said, "I make a stock with the bones after making chickens sandwiches and I mix it with this." He produced a large, a very large can, pushed it over to Fred. The label said *FULL CHICKEN RICHNESS Chicken-Type Soup.*

"Whah-haht?" asked Fred, half-laughing. He read on. *Ingredients: Water, Other Poultry and Poultry Parts, Dehydrated Vegetables, Chickens and Chickens Parts, seasoning*. . . the list dribbled off into the usual list of chemicals. The label also said, *Canned for Restaurant and Institutional Usement.*

"Too big for a family," Rudolfo observed. "Well, not bad, I think, too. Help me keep the price down. Every little bit help, you know."

"Oh. Sure. No, not bad. But I wonder about that label." Rudolfo shrugged about that label. The Government, he said, wasn't going to worry about some little *chico* outfit way down from the outskirt of town. Fred chuckled at the bland non-identification of "Other Poultry"—Rudolfo said that turkey was still cheaper than chicken—"But I don't put it down, 'chicken soup,' I put it down, 'soup du jour;' anybody *ask*, I say, 'Oh, *you* know, chicken and rice and vegetable and, oh, stuff like that; *try* it, you don't like it I don't charge you.' Fair enough?—Yes," he expanded, "Abelardo, he is no businessman. He is a *filosofo*. His mind is always in the skies. I tell him, I could use more soup—twice, maybe even three times as many cans. What he cares. 'Ai! Supply and demand!' he says. Then he tells me about the old Dutch explorers, things like that. —Hey! I ever tell you about the time he make his own automobile? ("Abe*lar*-do did?") Sure! Abelardo did. He took a part from one car, a part from another, he takes parts not even from cars, *I* don't know what they from—"

Fred thought of Don Eliseo and the more perfect tortilla making-and-baking machine. "—well, it work! Finally! Yes! It start off, *vooom!* like a rocket! Sixty-three mile an hour! But oh boy when he try to slow it down! It stop! He start it again. Sixty-three mile an hour! No other rate of speed, well, what can you do with such a car? So he forget about it and he invent something else, who knows what; then he go into the soup business. —Yes sir! You ready to order?" Rudolfo moved on.

So did Fred. The paintings of the buildings 1895 were set aside for a while so that he could take a lot of pictures of a turn-of-the-century family home scheduled for destruction real soon. *This Site Will be Improved With a Modern Office Building*, what the hell did they mean by *Improved?* Alice came up and looked at the sketches of the family home, and at finished work. "I like them," she said. "I like *you*." She stayed. Everything fine. Then, one day, there was the other key on the table. On the note. *There is nothing wrong*, it said. *Just time to go now. Love.* No name. Fred sighed. Went on painting.

One morning late there was Abelardo in the Bunne. He nodded, smiled a small smile. By and by, some coffee down, Fred said, "Say, where do you buy your chickens?" Abelardo, ready to inform, though not yet ready to talk, took a card from his wallet.

> E.J. Binder Prime Poultry Farm
> also
> Game Birds Dressed To Order
> 1330 Valley Rd by the Big Oak

While Fred was still reading this, Abelardo passed him over another card, this one for the Full Chicken Richness Canned Soup Company. "You must visit me," he said. "Most time I am home."

Fred hadn't really cared where the chickens were bought, but now the devil entered into him. First he told Abelardo the story about the man who sold rabbit pie. Asked, wasn't there anyway maybe some horsemeat in the rabbit pie, said it was fifty-fifty: one rabbit, one horse. Abelardo reflected, then issued another small smile, a rather more painful one. Fred asked, "What about the turkey-meat in your chicken-type soup? I mean, uh, rather, the 'Other Poultry Parts?'"

Abelardo squinted. "Only the breast," he said. "The rest not good enough.—For the *soup*, I mean. The rest, I sell to some mink ranchers."

"How's business?"

Abelardo shrugged. He looked a bit peaked. "Supply,"

he said. "Demand," he said. Then he sighed, stirred, rose. "You must visit me. Any time. Please," he said.

Abelardo wasn't there in the La Bunne Burger next late morning, but someone else was. Miles Marton, call him The Last of the Old-Time Land Agents, call him something less nice: there he was. "Been waitin," Miles Marton said. "Remember time I toll you bout ol stage-coach buildin? You never came. It comin down tomorrow. Ranch houses. Want to take its pitcher? Last chance, today. Make me a nice little paintin of it, price is right, I buy it. Bye now."

Down Fred went. Heartbreaking to think its weathered timbers, its mellowed red brick chimney and stone fireplace, were coming down; but Fred Hopkins was very glad he'd had the favor of a notice. Coming down, too, the huge trees with the guinea-fowl in them. *Lots* of photographs. Be a good painting. At least one. Driving back, lo! a sign saying E.J. BINDER PRIME POULTRY FARM; absolutely by a big oak. Still, Fred probably wouldn't have stopped if there hadn't been someone by the gate. Binder, maybe. Sure enough. Binder. "Say, do you know a South American named Abelardo?"

No problem. "Sure I do. Used to be a pretty good customer, too. Buy oh I forget how many chickens a week. Don't buy many nowdays. He send you here? Be glad to oblige you." Binder was an oldish man, highly sun-speckled.

"You supply his turkeys and turkey-parts, too?" The devil still inside Fred Hopkins.

Old Binder snorted, "'Turkeys,' no we don't handle turkeys, no sir, why chickens are enough trouble, cost of feeding going up, and —No, 'guinea-fowl,' no we never did. Just chickens and of course your cornish."

Still civil, E.J. Binder gave vague directions towards what he believed, he said, was the general location of Mr. Abelardo's place. Fred didn't find it right off, but he found it. As no one appeared in response to his calling and honking, he got out and knocked. Nothing. *Pues*, "My house is your house," okay: in he went through the first door. Well, it wasn't a *large* cannery, but it was a *can*nery. Fred started talking to himself; solitary artists often do. "Way I figure it, Abelardo," he said, "is that you have been operating with that 'small measure of deceit in advertizing,' as you so aptly put it. *I* think that in your own naive way you have believed that so long as you called the product 'Chicken-Type Soup' and included *some* chicken, well, it was all right. Okay, your guilty secret is safe with me; where are you?" The place was immaculate, except for. Except for a pile of . . . well . . . *shit* . . . right in the middle of an aisle. It was as neat as a pile of shit can be. Chicken-shits? Pigeon-poops? Turkey-trots? *¿Quien sabe?*

At the end of the aisle was another door and behind that door was a small apartment and in a large chair in the small apartment lay sprawled Abelardo, dead drunk on mescal, *muzhik*-grade vodka, and sneaky pete . . . according to the evidence. Alcoholism is not an especially Latin American trait? Who said the poor guy was an alcoholic? Maybe this was the first time he'd ever been stewed in his *life*. Maybe the eternally perplexing matter of supply and demand had finally unmanned him.

Maybe.

At the other end of *that* room was a*noth*er door and behind that other door was a*noth*er room. And in that *other* room was . . .

. . . something else . . .

That other room was partly-crammed with an insane assortment of machinery and allied equipment, compared to which Don Eliseo's more perfect make-and-bake tortilla engine, with its affinities to the perpetual motion invention of one's choice, was simplicity. The thing stood naked for Fred's eyes, but his eyes told him very little: wires snaked all around, that much he could say. There was a not-quite-click, a large television screen flickered on. *No*. Whatever it was at the room's end, sitting flush to the floor with a low, chicken-wire fence around it, it was not television, not even if Abelardo had started from scratch as though there had been no television before. The quality of the "image" was entirely different, for one thing; and the color, for another, was *wrong* . . . and wrong in the way that no TV color he had ever seen had been wrong. He reached to touch the screen, there *was* no "screen," it was as though his hand met a surface of unyielding gelatin. The non-screen, well, what the hell, *call* it a screen, was rather large, but not gigantically so. He was looking at a savannah somewhere, and among the trees were palms and he could not identify the others. A surf pounded not far off, but he could not hear it. There was no sound. He saw birds flying in and out of the trees. Looking back, he saw something else. A trail of broken bread through the room, right up to the, mmm, screen. A silent breeze now and then riffled grass, and something moved in the grass to one side. He stepped back, slightly. What the hell could it *mean*? Then the something which was in the grass to one side stepped, stiff-legged, into full view, and there was another odd, small sound as the thing—it was a bird—lurched through the screen and began to gobble bread. Hopkins watched, dry-mouthed. Crumb by crumb it ate. Then there was no more bread. It doddled up to the low fence, doddled back. It approached the screen, it brushed the screen, there was a Rube Goldberg series of motions in the external equipment, and a sheet of chicken wire slid noisily down to the floor. The bird had been trapped.

Fred got down and peered into the past till his eyes and neck grew sore, but he could not see one more bird like it. He began to laugh and cry simultaneously. Then he stood up. "Inevitable," he croaked, throwing out his arms. "Inevitable! Demand exceeded supply!"

The bird looked up at him with imbecile, incurious eyes, and opened its incredible beak. "*Doh*-do," it said, halfway between a gobble and a coo. "*Doh*-do. *Doh*-do."

□

ATTILA ON FIFTH AVENUE

by Thomas M. Disch

In November of 198__, with its bridges and tunnels controlled by the enemy, with no water but that which could be drawn from its polluted rivers, with its own citizens already looting not only the shops and offices of midtown but the apartment of the affluent throughout the city, and with no hope of relief from the beleaguered Federal capital, whose Chiefs of Staff had made no plans for such a contingency, the City of New York was surrendered to its besiegers, and Attila the Hun, after establishing his camp in the park that faced the rubble of City Hall, rode in triumph up Fifth Avenue as far as the Plaza Hotel.

I was among the millions crowding the sidewalks and leaning from the windows, awed by the barbaric cruelties inflicted upon the Mayor and his Councilmen, and, finally, nonplussed by the commonplace—not to say homely—appearance of our conqueror. I did not cheer him, as many of those around me did, but I was not so unwise as the intrepid Mrs. Kevin O'Brien, the widow of a police officer killed during the previous Black September, who had denounced him from the steps of St. Patrick's as he cantered by that venerable edifice. "Madman!" she had shouted, assisted by a bullhorn. "Scourge of God! Defiler of women! You shall pay in hell for your crimes!" Poor brave foolish woman! Death would have been kinder than the fate she suffers to this day in the infamous cage that hangs suspended above the portals of St. Patrick's—no longer, alas, a place of worship but the stable and exercise yard of the Midtown Mounted Muggers and other recruits to Attila's 5th Cavalry Legion.

Undeniably the city has altered nearly out of recognition, and just as undeniably we have changed with it. Who could have believed, only five years ago, that the entire length of Park Avenue between 60th and 70th could be given over to brothels—brothels that advertise openly on prime-time television? Who could have thought that cheering mobs would fill Madison Square Garden—at $30 a ticket!—to witness public executions of the most bestial cruelty? Whose mind does not boggle before the recent issue of *Fashions of the Times* and its shameful—or rather, shameless—celebration of "The New Barbaric You." Yet all this has become part of the texture of our daily lives in Manhattan, and as we grow accustomed to it, it does not, in truth, seem altogether unlike the lives we can remember. Faster in some ways, perhaps; more extreme in its contrasts; but rapid change and vivid contrasts have always been characteristic of New York. It's what has made it for so long a magnet to the restless, the innovative, and the rapacious—to, among so many others, the Huns themselves.

While the Huns have been changing the face of New York, New York has been changing the Huns. The proverbial softening influence of civilization is nowhere more apparent than in the harem of Attila, where the agelessly beautiful Jacqueline Bouvier Onassis presides over the complex and often volatile intrigues of the tyrant's 47 wives, 253 concubines, and 389 lineal descendants. Before Mrs. Onassis's marriage to "Little Daddy" (which is the meaning of the name "Attila" in his own adopted Gothic tongue), his harem has been as infamous for its cabals and assassinations as it was notorious for its squalor and disease. Now it has become the living emblem of the positive elements of the emerging society: male dominion, uxorious pleasure, a soaring birth-rate, and strict parental discipline—the values of a culture in which family life is of central importance.

Admittedly, there are elements of our antecendent civilization that seem to have been lost. The visual arts have been proscribed, along with most forms of music. Theater is now limited to exhibitions of the sexual act and sport to the punishment and execution of criminals. Television is devoted chiefly to the exploits of our leader Attila, especially to his conquest of New York and to the reprisals taken against his enemies.

In all these innovations Attila claims to have been acting under divine inspiration, and many new public works about the city attest to his piety. He points with pride to the statistics on street crime, which has been virtually eliminated. He enjoys the support of all the surviving labor unions, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and Cattle Drovers in particular. By the time-honored expedient of drafting all males under thirty into his army he has eliminated at one bold stroke the problem of unemployment. In a citywide plebiscite, 97% of all voters declared their total satisfaction to his policies and swore perpetual allegiance to the Scimitar, the Handgun, and the Bomb, symbols of our conquering nation.

The question remains—what is his future and the future of his new capital city? Can the booty from the rape of Albany, Syracuse, and Troy continue to sustain the sometimes crushing expenses of an ever-larger standing army? Will the booming munitions industry in Soho, Green-

wich Village, and Chelsea sustain an economy based once again on barter rather than on monetary arrangements? Will the threat of a People's March on Washington, ever renewed and ever withdrawn, continue to exact tribute from the Federal government sufficient to meet the city's soaring welfare costs?

To all these questions there can be no certain answer. The citizens of New York must place their faith, as they always have, in the probity and resourcefulness of their self-appointed leaders. We must hope that with dedication and a little luck we'll somehow survive the latest crisis, as we've survived those of the past.

Or, as the banners that fly from the tents of Attila's camp put it, I ♡ New York.

□

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THE IMPOSSIBLE COW

by Jessica Amanda Salmonson

Claire had gone to Alaska to work on a canning boat when she saw the monster.

There had been a long eighteen hours of solid, hard work cutting and packing the latest arrival of king crabs—followed by four brief hours of aching, lousy sleep. Then a dinghy took some of the workers ashore. The others headed directly for the taverns. There wasn't much else about the Aleutian island town to interest them. Claire was a veritable outcast, misanthropic by default, for not drinking; for not responding to the advances of an overabundance of men; for finding the bleak, cold beaches and the backs of whales a pleasanter sight than schooners of beer or a dirty cot in some worker's or shipmate's room.

Bundled in heavy parka and insulated overalls, she fancied herself kin with Eskimos of a type forgotten even by themselves: an Eskimo whose life and customs had not been turned pitiable by acculturation or the promises of technology and the poverty they gained instead. Here, it was easy to imagine "civilization" and its doubtful joys had never been more than a puzzling nightmare. Her mind filled with the idealized aboriginal role and she was no longer simply Claire. Her imaginary ideology was more beautiful and far different from the Christian and Bahai notions which had destroyed Eskimos as a singular, unique people. She, Claire, ancient Eskimo, fancied she retained a greater, older purpose.

She was in fact often mistaken for a native, though not by the natives themselves. She was quarter Chinese and did not look properly "American," and it was intriguing to experience, if only glancingly, the attitudes of folks from the "lower 48" toward native Alaskans. It was easy to fall into her imaginary role, to fancy herself wild and exotic. She was stronger than a woman should be; her hair was too short. Everyone made her believe that. Her own identity was unformed.

She had called herself "dyke" with a degree of pride, but never felt truly part of the the Seattle women's community. She had been their token gook and knew it—everyone's favorite chinawoman, proof that lesbian feminists were less racist than everybody else. It was humorous on one level, because her oriental identity was as diluted as her blood. She was a poor token. She didn't fit the label "Chinese" any better than she fit the label "dyke."

It was more painful than humorous, though. That was one reason she had run away.

Along the island's margin, she became enraptured by the spare and beautiful life she found—sea wrack and shells—and by the very rocks with their fascinating patterns and occasional color. She walked on and on, and felt as though she were entering a cleaner, different sort of world—a world perhaps hostile, but in a more honest fashion.

Stiff grasses rustled above the beach. Salt water slapped the rocks. Arctic winds sang around her body. Far down the margin, she spied the hull of an upturned boat and unconsciously set that as her destination.

Claire stepped carefully from stone to stone, her boots now and then slipping and splashing in the shallow tide pools. She sang a Danish song learned from a pale, friendly boy who had been on another ship. Sweet boy, far from home, in need of nurturance—the song was about love, but Claire didn't know what all the words meant.

Reality impinged upon her mind, trying to tell her: You're not an Eskimo. You're not an Eskimo.

She said out loud, "I'm an Eskimo."

She thought of the men and few women on the scientific expedition—the only genuinely intelligent people she had come across. But even they seemed not quite rational with their endless neurotic measurements and observations. She thought of the yeast in her crotch and the damned medic on the cannery ship whose cure for every women's complaint was another set of birth control pills—which were the last things she needed, considering her rare persuasions.

This world of sea and ice, this desolate beach, is where she came to escape the tedium of daily life in Seattle, fleeing from an "alternative" lifestyle that ultimately emulated those she purported to be different than. She remembered sitting in a cafe eating something fattening, drinking something unhealthy, surrounded by young men and women her own age. Each of them considered themselves somehow "alternative."

They were all alike. She was just like them.

On whim she had applied for work with an Alaskan crab company. There was no expectation of anything coming of it, but something did: airfare to the Aleutians, and promise of paid flight home if she stayed six months. Four had already passed.

At the time it had seemed an opportunity for adventure. What it was mostly was hard work, and abominable conditions, crowded into sleeping quarters, long work hours on dangerous equipment, men who were perpetually aroused

around the few women, everywhere the smell of fish. It was a miserable adventure in summation, but good pay—and nothing to spend it on, so she could go home feeling rich.

The hardest thing was the disrespect from men she might have liked if their hands could be busier elsewhere.

Whatever else might annoy, she would never be able to complain about the beaches. Regardless of others' opinions, Claire found the Aleutians awe-inspiring in and of themselves. It was hard to believe this distant, wilden place had become economically controlled by men in business suits far away; or that the eagles were being destroyed by pollutants, migratory animals blocked from their yearly routes by greater numbers of fences and pipelines. Even in the furthest outpost of Earth, *homo sapien's* stranglehold was firm.

In the middle of thoughts such as these, she saw the monster. She didn't see it until she was almost upon it, because she hadn't *expected* a monster. At first, she saw something else. She saw the great bulk of an upturned boat.

The boat moved.

It made a raspy sound, halfway between squeal and snort.

Claire froze. That is not to say the Alaskan weather penetrated her clothing, turning her to ice...rather, in the figurative sense, her blood ran cold—and she did not move a muscle. Her heart skipped beats.

It might have been a whale washed ashore. She thought not. It looked slickly furred.

Somehow, the sight of a seagull atop the shifting bulk eased Claire's fears. Surely it was no hideous, murderous sort of monster or a gull would not so placidly pick at parasites in the nubby folds of skin. Yet Claire continued to stand perfectly still, lest she frighten the huge mammal.

The creature's tail was in the water and, at first, Claire did not see that it had no hind legs. Then the huge, paddled tail rose like a languid serpent, and slapped down on the water surface. A long, thin neck rose from the other end. The creature peered over its own bulk.

The gull laughed, and wheeled away. Two moist, intelligent eyes watched the woman standing no more than thirty paces away—barely the length of the monster itself. It rolled from side to belly, its right forelimb momentarily waving in the air, as if in greeting. The monster barked, distinctly like a dog.

Its wise face continued to watch her, the sinuous neck coiling in such a way that the beast could watch its company even as the body rolled.

It raised itself onto two powerful forelegs, and stood with hindquarter still in the sea. The neck stretched to its full, improbable height. Its whiskers twitched. The eyes blinked.

There was something of a seal about it, too pretty to be a walrus. Though distinctly mammalian, it was shaped like a prehistoric reptile Claire had seen depicted in a book.

Kelp hung from the jawline of this plesiosaurian analog, suggesting a vegetarian inclination, unlike seals. This reduced Claire's fears even further.

It was odd that she felt so little fear, for the beast was twice her height from its chest to the top of its neck; and the bulk of its elongated, cylindrical, tapering body rivalled the largest killer whales. Yet, its expression was so calm, almost sorrowful. It regarded her with a kind of gentleness and concern Claire knew had to be projected from her own expectations—but, there it was.

It rotated halfway about to face the sea, looking back once, slipping into deep waters.

When it was gone, Claire instantly felt she had never seen it. It was an impossible creature. Yet, it had left huge droppings, and a slight depression among the sand and rocks where it had lain. No...no...it couldn't have been real. It had been her overactive imagination—*she*, the ancient Eskimo, one of the first to cross from Asia on a bridge of ice or on land when the Aleutians were not yet islands; *she*, the prehistoric woman, had stood gaping at a creature out of the Ice Age. *She,* not Claire, had externalized the mystery of Alaska's picturesque isles, inventing the wonderful beast.

Thus she convinced herself that she had conjured the vision, just as the long neck rose abruptly, long strings of kelp hanging from the jaws. The monster masticated its feast between powerful molars, watching Claire in a way that dared her to disbelieve.

Then it swam away, undulating along the surface of the sea, neck below water. Far off, its back seemed nothing more remarkable than that of a lone whale. The setting sun hindered her vision; and then—trick of light or vision—the creature vanished. It did not seem to sink from view, or disappear into the distance. It ceased to exist, as though it had dropped back into the world from whence it came, leaving only the sparkling reflection of cold sunlight stretching from horizon to shore.

* * *

That night, Claire's dreams were awesome. In one, she was in a boat big enough to carry several of her friends. The boat was made of a whale's rib cage. Seal skins were stretched over this frame.

The people in the boat with her were friends. One looked remarkably like a woman with the scientific expedition: an oceanographer. Another was the Danish boy. Yet another was an Eskimo who Claire remembered was always drunk when not begging for change around the pier back home...(Home? The canning ship? Seattle? A place of igloos? Tin-roofed shanties?) There were others she recognized from her non-dream world, including a man from the canning ship she would *never* expect in her dreams. Here, everyone knew and trusted one another.

They were an ancient people. It didn't matter that the scientist was still dressed in her yellow parka and was carrying some sort of instrument with which to take the temperature of crustaceans. It didn't matter that the Eskimo (looking heroic) had a whiskey flask in his jacket. Nor did it matter that the fellow who once said women shouldn't operate the band saws leered his usual leer and smoked a Camel. In the dream, these were nonetheless her family and they *were* an ancient people. They were going hunting together. They were hunting whale. (When she realized they were hunting whale, everyone in the boat suddenly had spears. The spears were made of bone.)

The Eskimo piloted the boat. The smoker watched the

northern horizon while the scientist watched the south. Claire had forgotten what she was supposed to do. Perhaps she had already done it. She decided to watch for whales in the east, to the boat's stern. Everyone took turns at the oars, half resting and watching while the other half kept the boat on a straight, steady course. Despite vigilance, they did not see the whale until it was beneath them.

The Eskimo shouted too late. The boat rose into the air. The occupants were thrown into the sea. They couldn't survive the bitter, bitter cold. Each one of them knew they would not survive the sea. No one shouted. They had killed many whales during their simple, rugged lives. It was only proper that people occasionally be killed by whales.

When Claire woke, she had to pee. She itched like crazy. She left her quarters without disturbing the woman in the lower bunk. She walked down the ship's narrow corridor, hearing the hum of machinery. Someone was in the head. When he came out, she recognized him as the worker who had been killed with her in the water. She felt a kinship and smiled at him—which gave him a startled expression. They said nothing to one another.

She sat on the head a long while, but peed relatively little. She rubbed herself with paper. Rubbed and rubbed.

When she reported to work that morning, there was nothing to do. There'd been some delay among the fishing boats: no crab today. Everyone was expected to be on call, however. A few went ashore. Claire went ashore.

* * *

The monster was there again.

It was female. The gigantic long-necked seal lay on her side, sunning her belly. There were swollen dugs on that belly. The monster was pregnant! She raised her serpentine neck from lazy repose and regarded the human as before, with wet, sad, gentle eyes. Claire wondered if these beasts were once common. Perhaps early whalers found the last colonies and killed them off for sweet oil, meat, fur, or ivory tusks if the bulls had ivory tusks. There might not be any record. Or the records could be in some shipping company's archives in Russia or England, if not lost altogether, or unread, or ignored because the telling was too fantastic.

Claire envisioned seal hunters intent on fur or whalers intent on meat and oil, rowing ashore in a dozen or so small boats. Those burly men of old were armed with mallets and spears. They cudgeled the gentle giants, skinned them, put the oil in wooden casks, and finally hauled everything back to the old sailing vessel. It was the first and last time the beasts were seen by the eyes of men. Nothing was left behind but bones, gnawed by arctic foxes, cleaned by gulls and other scavengers. The bones were polished and eventually worn away by the relentless tides.

The monster reached her long neck toward Claire. The woman did not move. Close enough to pet (though Claire didn't try it), the wide muzzle sniffed at its two-legged visitor. Claire smelled the beast's breath, almond-sweet. The head withdrew. The beast yawned hugely, profoundly bored.

"Are you the last?" Claire whispered. The gargantuan seal snuffled and wriggled her whiskers. "Will your cubs live and grow? You shouldn't be so close to a human population. Although, where could you go? We're everywhere, aren't we? This is already the edge of nowhere! You're not even afraid. You should be, you know. Afraid, I mean. Are you too lonely to care?"

She sighed, then left the creature to its sun-bathing. Claire did not look back when the brooding cow barked at her, a sound that hoarsely resembled: "Come back! Come back!"

* * *

The work was interrupted by a commotion. One of the fishing boats was coming abreast of the cannery ship. Nearly every fisherman aboard the vessel was on deck and excited. Everyone on the cannery ship was hurrying topside to see the other vessel. Claire left her band saw unattended and joined the others. Even before she saw it, Claire's heart ached.

The beast was caught. She didn't struggle. One powerful paddle of a forelimb had torn through the webwork that encased her as in spider's silk. The limb worked slowly up and down, as though the creature thought she was casually swimming along the ocean floor. Her neck was twisted backward so harshly that she couldn't breath properly. That was why she didn't struggle.

Everyone hung on the port rails, gawking and pointing toward the fishing boat. Sad, betrayed eyes watched out from captivity. People were yammering:

"Is it a whale?"

"It's one hell of a big sea lion!"

"I can't tell what it is all covered with seaweed and squished in that net."

"Yes, some kind of whale."

"It's got fur."

"Naw, that's something growing on it. See, it has stuff growing on it."

The winches strained in an effort to get the beast aboard. A rope snapped, broke, shot down like a rubber band and struck the creature's ribs. She bawled like a wounded calf. The netting came loose enough to let her move her neck. She began to struggle. Clare whispered, "Fight, dear monster, fight." The men on the fishing boat began shouting and running around. Someone appeared with a spear. There was an argument about killing it.

The monster slipped through the tearing nets. The spear was thrown, but the target slipped into the sea. It was impossible to tell if the spear hit any mark. The tightness in Claire's own ribs relaxed when the creature was gone. People were gaping at the torn, limp net and chattering among themselves: "It was a whale. It must have been a whale."

"Did anyone get pictures."

"It *was* a whale."

"I got a picture."

"There's not enough sun. You can't get pictures."

"It's gone. It's gone. Did you see it? Did I see it?"

Late that evening, Claire sat in a tavern talking to the woman with whom she shared sleeping quarters on board the ship. Everyone was talking about the monster. No two stories were the same. Dozens of anecdotes about other

kinds of encounters were passed around. Everyone believed the story about the netted sea monster, nodding sagely one to the next. They believed it in the same manner they believed every salty tale, that is, for the duration of the telling, and not after. Everyone got drunk, as usual, and laughed, as usual. There was little else to do in a canning town consisting of seventy-five percent transients.

One of the oceanographers came in, sat alone at a nearby table. Claire took her tomato juice and excused herself from her roommate. She sat next to the rawboned old professor from the University of Alaska.

"What do you think of all the stories?" she asked him.

He was a grey, whiskery man, possibly younger than he appeared, certainly healthy and handsome as older men go. His smile was like a grandfather's; his hands were gentle and worn. He replied, "Anything is possible of course. There's a lot we don't know about the sea." He laughed at himself here, amused by the depth of his understatement. "But, I expect it was a whale. Since no one recognized it, it may have been a species far from its usual waters. I'd like to have seen it."

"I've seen it before," Claire said.

A brow raised, white and bushy. "Have you?"

"Twice before. I know where it goes to sun itself."

"Sun itself? It leaves the water?"

She realized she was being humored by the old scientist.

He asked, "Do you want to tell me where it is?"

She shook her head. "No. It's a secret."

His grin was all-knowing. Only men grinned like that, with a look of profound knowledge regarding the things they could not comprehend if their lives rested on comprehending.

"You'd poke at it. Catch it. Maybe kill it. I think she's wiser now. I doubt she'll go near nets again."

"She?"

"She's a cow, yes. She's pregnant."

"You're a good observer."

"You don't believe me, I know," said Claire. "But if you'll loan me a good camera, I'll get some pictures for you."

"I can't loan out University equipment."

"All right. I'll borrow someone's Instamatic. It'll make poor prints, of course. No one ever believes a poor print. No one ever believes anything, actually. Not even their own eyes. After a hundred unlikely stories told tonight, by tomorrow not one fisher or canner or ship's hand will believe what they personally saw."

"I'm the chief investigator on this expedition," the professor said, "and as such I have to follow rules. I'm here to make thermal studies of the island's shoreline, not to chase after rumors about monsters. But you know Ruth, don't you? She breaks rules."

"She'd loan me a camera."

"Not if I have anything to say about it." He still grinned, but there was less profundity in it, as though confessing fallibility—or revealing a sense of awe, a surviving ability to believe the unbelievable, in spite of his long-honed skill at rationales and "scientific" explanation.

"Thank you," she said. She stood to leave, since the smoke in the tavern was beginning to asphyxiate her senses and the tomato juice was too rancid to hold her interest for a second round. "Thank you," she repeated.

He reached out with his strong, gentle hands and took her wrist, delaying her departure. He asked, "Why so glum?"

She shrugged, not withdrawing her hand.

"Something is wrong," he said, urging some comment.

"Nothing. Just people. People are what are wrong."

"Shouldn't expect too much," he advised. "Fewer disappointments. If you're lonely, you could come with me tonight."

A lot of mixed feelings flooded over her. Her first was an almost instinctive hostility learned from all the propositions on the boat. The second was a kind of longing—he was more interesting and cleaner than most of the men she'd met since coming to the Aleutians. He was old, but that didn't seem to be what mattered. What mattered was that she wasn't attracted to men. She wouldn't enjoy it. And if he did, she would resent it; and he would be just sensitive enough to feel guilt.

"No," she said. "Thanks again."

* * *

The crabs had come in late, so everyone had to work late. By the time she hit her narrow bunk, she was too exhausted to find sleep easy. She ached. She tossed. Finally she did sleep, and dreamed again. This time, her dreams were more emphatic.

Ruth was the chief of the tribe, and the old professor, Samuel, was Ruth's husband. He strutted about full of boasts and prestige, for he was married to the chief. "The chief is my wife!" he said. He shared his wife with anyone she wanted to be shared with. She was much younger and wanted everyone. This gave him greater prestige. Everyone loved the chief and the chief's husband.

In the real world this wasn't likely; Samuel was a widower and Ruth had a husband and children in Nome. But in the dream all of these unlikely relationships were absolutely real. In the dream, the chief had taken a special liking to Claire. This did not add to the professor's prestige, but it was not frowned upon. Claire was very happy. But one night, Ruth said, "Someone has hurt our god. She needs you. Only you know where she climbs out of the sea. You must go and help her."

There was nothing about the dream which was actually nightmarish. In fact, it was quite pleasant. Yet Claire awoke covered with sweat. She felt anxious. She said she was sick and didn't report for work. She said she needed to see a real doctor, not the medic on board, so they sent her ashore. Gonorrhea was going around, so no one said much about it.

She went to the town's small store and bought yogurt. She sat in the bathroom of the tavern next door to the store and oozed the white substance up into her vagina. It was cold. It relieved the itch. She leaned back on the toilet and continued to rub herself. The yeast had made her horny. She thought of Ruth, and she climaxed.

The long necked sea cow waited for her. When Claire arrived at the spot, she could see that the cow was in a little

pain. The spear had penentrated a section of fat above her tail. The wound was white.

Claire approached slowly, talking to the monster all the while. She was reminded of a Biblical tale, or an Aesop's fable, she wasn't sure which. The barbed spear had protruded under the flat of the beast's hind quarter. It was a lucky thing the spear had gone so far through—if it had to go in at all—for otherwise Claire could not possibly have removed it. She forced the aluminum shaft on through without having to worry about the barb. The cow whined and sneezed and snuffled, but did not move. Perhaps foolishly, Claire rubbed yogurt on the sore sections, top and bottom.

At such close quarter, the scabs and wounds along the cow's body were heartbreaking to see. She must have been fairly old, though not too old to bear calves. In any event, she was used to being injured, it was clear, and probably not susceptible to infection. Still, Claire wondered if she dared steal sulfa powder from the ship's medic.

The long neck came around to watch her as she worked. When Claire had thrown the spear into the sea, the big cow touched Claire with a moist muzzle. Claire stroked the oily fur between the eyes. As usual, fronds of sea algae clung to the monster's whiskers and mouth. Claire cleaned this material away, to better appreciate the beauty of the monster's face.

Later, Claire visited the scientists' campsite. They had set up camp near a cove, but not terribly close to the water. In fact, from their camp, it was not possible to see the water because of a small rise which protected their tents and equipment from the recurrent winds which came in off the sea.

There were various instruments sitting about which Claire did not attempt to figure out. Three green, insulated tents were erected amidst tables and equipment.

"The professor said you might loan me a Leica," Claire said. "Without his permission, of course."

"Did he?"

Ruth was notating in a journal, sitting against a boulder carted there by glaciers millenia before.

"He never mentioned it," Ruth said.

"I'll return it tomorrow evening latest."

"He did mention your sea serpent."

Claire said nothing.

"All right," said Ruth. "It won't hurt anything." She stood. "Come with me to my tent and we'll get it."

In the tent, Claire asked, "Why are you being so crabby?"

"No reason. I'm not."

"Thanks." Claire strapped the camera over her shoulder. "Here." She held out a handful of seaweed.

"What's this?" Ruth took the specimen.

"It's what she eats."

"Who?"

"The monster."

"Oh." Ruth looked it over, until her brow was fully knit. Then she said, "Where'd you get this?"

"Can't tell you. Don't want you poking at her. She's too gentle. She'd let you catch her."

"It isn't a local specimen," Ruth said.

"It's not?"

"I don't recognize it, but it needs a more temperate climate, I'll tell you that. Maybe tropical."

"You should know."

"If you're perpetrating some hoax, Claire, I promise not to like it. Someone sent you this from Seattle."

Claire stared at the taller, somewhat older woman. Ruth had long, dark hair, shot with grey. She fingered the seaweed irritably. Her wedding ring gleamed in the light of the tent's lantern. "I took it from her mouth," Claire said. "She really is gentle.

"Well. If you don't get pictures, I'll charge you rent for the camera."

"I can afford it." That made Ruth smile, at last. Claire asked, "So you want to tell me what's wrong?"

"No. Family matter. I haven't seen my kids in three months."

"Bad news from home, eh?"

"Well, I know it's hard for him—Tom, I mean. His wife traipsing around the Alaskan wilderness..."

"Oh-oh. He's seeing another woman, right?"

Ruth looked at the floor of the tent.

"Want me to hug you?"

Ruth looked up, surprised. Claire laughed, and added, "It's no seduction, Ruth! I only thought you might need to be hugged."

"Yes. Yes I do." They embraced. Ruth cried. Claire stroked the woman's hair. Claire daren't admit it, but she could not relate to Ruth's sorrow. She could relate to the pain, but not the cause. To avoid revealing where her lack of sympathy lay, Claire changed the topic back to...to what Ruth called "sea serpents."

"Ruth, if only to humor me, tell me if there were ever any sea lions or something as big as the creature everyone saw yesterday."

"Certainly. And there were dinosaurs bigger than houses. Not anymore."

"What about Madagascar's coelacanth?"

"That's a special case. And it's only about five feet long. Not the same as something huge surviving for millions of years."

"I'm not asking you to believe it. Humor me, all right? It'll take your mind off...Just pretend, okay?"

"Well, if you want a better hoax, you should make your gigantic seal a fish eater. There are no herbivorous seals."

"None?"

"Well, there are sea cows—manatees and dugongs. They're tropical beasts. They'd die here."

"How big are they?"

"Manatee? Twenty feet if you stretch it. There was a fifteen footer in captivity, oh, ages ago. They might grow larger in the wild. Big, but not what you're looking for. Here..." She rummaged through a box of reference works and came up with a book on sea mammals. She rifled through the pages. "Here. A manatee."

"Oh no, it's far too ugly. My monster has a pretty face. May I look?" She took the book and turned only one page before she saw it. She gasped.

Ruth looked at the artist's rendition of an extinct sea cow. "That it?" she asked.

"No. Not exactly. Mine has a neck like, well, not exactly a

giraffe, but way above its shoulders, somewhat snaky. Otherwise, it has the same face, same body. What's it say about it? She scanned the paragraphs. "Extinct for only two centuries...hey, they weren't tropical, and they *were* algae eaters. Look..." She pointed at a sentence. "Fossils have been found in Alaska."

Ruth took the book back, scanned for greater content. "Yeah, and in California and Japan. What's it prove?"

"Nothing. But, that thing was as big as the one I found. It isn't impossible. It isn't. Don't you see? Every scientist must want to believe in something wonderful and improbable now and then! Oh Ruth, I wish I could show her to you."

"Why don't you?" she asked.

Their eyes held one another a long moment. Claire hefted the camera and said, "I will. With this."

She left the tent. The twilight which passes for night in the Aleutians greeted her. She had obviously missed the last dinghy back to the cannery ship. She ducked back into the tent and said, "I'll photograph her in the morning for you. Can I spend the night?"

* * *

She returned to the death dream, as though she had never been away. The whale had thrown the skin-and-bone coracle into the air, spilling the occupants into the sea. Claire knew she had, at the outside, a minute to live in the cold water. But she felt something warm beneath her, something furry. The long neck of the sea cow slithered along her side. Claire grabbed the base of the neck and was lifted upward on the monster's back. She gasped air. Icy chills stole her breath. Her heart was a painful lump pounding murderously at the inside of her chest. "Thanks, my friend. Thanks for trying to save me."

She wasn't sure if she survived or not. She awoke the next day remembering snatches of the dream. Riding the monster's back was uppermost in her remembrance. That part had seemed wholly plausible.

She stole out of Ruth's tent, awakening nobody in camp. The sun had begun to rise though at this time of year it would never get very high. Excitement gripped Claire. The remnant of her dream was too tempting: to ride the impossible cow!

The Leica swung from her shoulder as she ran along the island's beach, laughing back at the gulls.

* * *

She took her time using up the thirty-six exposures. She photographed the monster from every angle. The Leica could be set to go off by itself, so Claire balanced it on various rocks, always aimed at the monster, and ran up to get in the picture herself. As the cow didn't mind Claire running about like this, she became quite bold, leaning on her friend in funny poses and making faces at the camera.

For the last couple of shots, she set the automatic timer at maximum so she'd have time to climb atop the cow's shoulders and strike nice rodeo postures. The cow didn't mind this, either. The lazy thing enjoyed soaking up the little bit of sun and, Claire fancied, enjoyed the companionship and antics of a slightly silly human.

She was still on top of the cow after the last frame was exposed in the camera. Suddenly the cow lurched upward on her flippers, causing Claire to grab the long neck lest she plunge to the ground. It wasn't a terribly dangerous plummet, but it might be difficult to land among the rocks without twisting her ankle, and a broken leg wasn't inconceivable, so she was rather worried. The cow turned full circle and Claire realized it was going back into the sea.

"Don't!" she shouted upward, along the arch of the monster's neck. It ignored her. "I'll freeze to death in the water! I'll drown!" She almost shouted, *Holy Cow*, amusing herself despite the danger. She attempted to slip down the side of the beast, but it was too late. There was water waiting below. So she clung tightly to the neck, resigned to doom.

The cow raced outward into deeper water, but made no effort to get its back wet. In fact it seemed to be keeping up an extra amount of speed simply to keep itself high on the surface, assuring Claire a dry ride.

The arctic wind chapped her face but Claire was too ecstatic to be bothered by the sharp cold. She shouted not with fear, but glee, though not yet certain she was going to survive the strange ride. She figured she might as well go out of life laughing, if she could manage to do so!

Every living day of her existence had been fraught with danger of one kind or another, but rarely of such an exciting sort. It may have been that her thoughts were suicidal, that a more rational person would find God in a hurry; but in her present frame of mind, it made more sense to be out on the arctic waters clinging to the neck of a monster, than to be darting down some freeway in the Pacific Northwest when statistics promised her a three-to-one chance of a major accident within five years; or walking down the streets of Seattle and using the transit system, knowing the fumes were poisonous; or carving up crabs on a boat in Alaska, as though oblivious to the good chance of losing some fingers or a hand. *Yeah*, she figured, *everything forced upon a body in this world risks our lives and limbs*. At least this time it wasn't boring.

She couldn't see a thing, the wind so stung her eyes. Then, unexpectedly, she felt a warm gust, and smelled. . . what was it she smelled? It was summer! She squinted into the suddenly warm wind, but all she saw was the wide, flat, sparkling sea. She shook her head and in the next moment, it was cold again, and the cow was heading back toward the shore.

Moments later, Claire stood on shaky limbs. The big cow eyed her as though waiting for some response, as though to say, "Well? How was it?" Claire said, "That was pretty nice! Thanks!" Then she hurried to get the camera and head back along the margin, knowing she'd be in trouble if she didn't get back to the cannery boat at a decent time. She'd have to return the Leica to Ruth tomorrow.

***

A crab boat came in with a lot of undersized Kings. There was an hysterical effort to process them before anyone could stop it, not that anyone was liable to show up suddenly to enforce the law, but the cannery management was sometimes

paranoid.

Such crabs were processed differently than legal-sized ones. There couldn't be any proof of shell-size left around. Everyone worked frantically to reduce all the crabs to unrecognizable piles of white meat. It was a long, desperate shift. The final chore was to get the shells tossed overboard. The seagulls loved it.

Everything was slowing down to a normally hectic pace; Claire was finally allowed off shift—after only eleven hours. She staggered away from the line, ready to collapse, when suddenly there was someone screaming.

It was the guy on one of the big band saws. He was hollering, "My hand! My hand!" He hopped and shouted and was basically acting like one scared fool. There was panic all around him as well. Claire merely stood there in a dopy daze, watching everyone going this way and that.

She figured he must at least have lost a finger. The way he carried on, it could be his whole arm. When a foreman finally got him pinned to a grey, steel wall, and forced him to settle down, it turned out that the guy had only clipped his fingertip. There wouldn't have been much blood at all if he hadn't gone and gotten himself all worked up.

All the same, he was off the line indefinitely. A special dinghy was being put out to take him ashore for a few stitches and sedation. Claire finagled going along.

***

"Ruth?"

She'd zipped the tent closed behind her and set the Leica on a tin table, the exposed film alongside. It was dark with the flap zipped. Someone made a groggy noise from a sleeping bag rolled out on a floor pad. "What? Who the. . . oh, Claire. . ." Ruth plopped her head back down and went back to sleep. Claire was searching for the extra bedroll but couldn't find it in the dark. Ruth raised her sleepy head again and said, "I forgot. Samuel took the extra bag to his tent to stuff in his sleeping bag, 'cause of rheumatism and getting cold nights."

What a nuisance. Claire stood in the tent feeling foolish. "My own fault," she said. "I shouldn't expect to stay here any old time I take the fancy."

"It's all right," said Ruth, scooting to the edge of the floor mat. "My bag's a double sized one. It'll be nice to sleep warm."

They shared the bag. In the morning, Claire also shared breakfast with the scientists. She was surprised to find the food as unpallatable as the stuff served on the ship.

"Ruth showed me that seaweed," said Samuel, looking as distinguished as ever, a thermos cap of coffee in his hand. "It's obviously fresh, so I'm not even going to suggest you had it sent here from the lower forty-eight just to play a little trick. It's very curious. You're going to have to show us where you found it."

"I already told Ruth. . ."

Ruth interrupted, "Claire, this could be an important discovery. A new kind of kelp for the area! It seems to be a species from a tropical zone, something totally unexpected in these waters. It could tell us a lot about international currents if we can take temperature readings around the place where the sample washed ashore."

Claire ceased chewing her sandwich (it was the bread that was chewy). She wasn't sure how to respond. Obviously they were simply assuming she wasn't going to repeat any absurd story about taking it from some monster's mouth. She was supposed to stop telling tales like a little child and show them the stretch of beach where she had picked it up.

From the professor, she might have expected to be treated like this, if only because her own prejudices dictated that she always expect unfairness from men, even the nice ones. But the other side of her prejudice caused her to expect better of Ruth, a woman. She should have learned long ago that people were only people, but it always came as a surprise. They were both treating her like a child, and a foolish one at that. Maybe she *was* foolish, too, to have trusted them this far.

They continued to stare at her, almost daring her to hold to her previous story, to keep from them information which might lead to a significant discovery regarding kelp or oceanic currents or whatever other hogwash. What could she say? She could hardly take on a childlike, mincing tone and say, "Oh, but really, it's a *monster*." They hadn't left that option open to her. Instead, she found herself saying, "I haven't been playing with you," and even that sounded so whining that it embarrassed her at once.

They settled back in their wood-and-canvas chairs. Though neither had actually folded their arms, she felt that they had done so psychically. They exchanged glances, then looked at her again, refusing to reiterate the importance of her telling them where the seaweed was found. They refused to consider the possibility that she was not some sort of liar, that the discovery might well be even more significant than they were prepared to believe.

Finally, she said, "There's a roll of film in Ruth's tent. Develop it."

She got up and strode away, trying to maintain an ounce of dignity despite the stupid confrontation. They watched her go, their expressions slightly peevish. But Claire knew Ruth would get around to the film sometime during the day.

***

For several hours, Claire sat with her back against the cow. The low sun glittered on the sea. The cow made snuffling sounds, pushing at Claire with a warm wet, friendly muzzle. Despite the creature's efforts, the woman's mood remained dark. "You know," she said to the cow, "if anyone came up to me and said in all seriousness, 'I saw a flying turtle,' or, 'My old granny can cure cancer with a recipe,' I wouldn't be inclined to call that person a liar. Maybe I'd think they were mistaken; but maybe I'd figure, what the hell, it doesn't hurt to be gullible once in a while. But Ruth assumed I was making up some foolish joke. She'll probably think I faked the photographs, though it'd take a special effects genius! That sort of hurts, you know? Maybe it shouldn't."

The cow snuffled sympathetically. Claire changed the subject.

"Some guy clipped the top of his finger last night. A few

weeks ago, someone actually lost a finger. Old Charley the foreman only has one hand. I don't know how he lost it; could've been in a car accident I suppose, but I bet some machine grabbed him on the line, so they made him foreman. Sometimes I worry I'll get nutty for a second or so, long enough to let my hand go through the saw on purpose, to see what it's like. It's a shitty job. It's not worth the effort. I'd quit but I've got about seven weeks to go unless I want to pay my own airfare home."

She dug her fingers into the cow's fur, absent-mindedly massaging the fold behind a flipper.

"Everything's so messed up everywhere. It isn't easy to cope. I took a bunch of pills a couple of times; not many know about it. The first time it was an antidepressant a psychiatrist gave me after only one visit. I was a teenager living at home and mom wanted me to see a shrink because of who my friends were. I took all the pills at once, with milk. I almost died. It felt pleasant. I only remember a little bit of it, but it was nice, dreamy, peaceful. I thought all pills must kill you that way. When I was out and living on my own, I tried again, but that time I took a friend's pain pills. It wasn't the same. Hurt like hell. Felt like fire in my belly.

"That time, I was put in a mental ward for a couple of days. It was a county aid unit came and got me; and it was county policy to put suicide attempters in an institution even if they won't sign anything. In a couple of days, though, they found out I didn't have any health insurance, so they let me out. Before they did, a doctor told me, 'Claire, if you keep doing this, you'll turn your brain to bean curd.' I guess it was sort of a crash therapy for patients who couldn't afford a year's worth of weekly visits. It worked, too. The next time I caught myself with a bottle of pills in my hand, I was thinking, 'This time, I can't call for help. I better just die. Otherwise, I might be a vegetable due to what's in the pills.' It's a lot harder to do it when you have to decide in advance not to try to get aid afterward. I hardly even think about it anymore."

The cow shifted her bulk and Claire lost her warm spot. She scooted up close to the cow again. "I don't think I was crazy back then. I think I was doing what everybody does, but I was more honest in my method. Everybody's killing themselves with cigarettes and crazy driving and even by going to a stupid job everyday. What's the difference between that and doing it all at once? At least I tried to get help. Those others, they just keep killing themselves little by little and never stop to say, 'Hey, I've got to cut this out.' They don't even know they're doing it."

She was quiet for a long while, thinking about all this. She hadn't eaten since leaving the scientists' camp. Her stomach growled, but she wasn't cold. Usually she got the shivers in this weather, unless she ate something every few hours. But the cow's warm body protected her. She couldn't make herself get up to go, for the cow had come to symbolize, in some ridiculous fashion, greater friendship than humanity could offer.

"I guess I'm not really different from the rest, though," she said, breaking her silence. "I've been doing mind-dulling jobs, too. I eat a lot of things that aren't good for ones system. Who cares if they live to ninety-five anyway? Who wants to? In this world? Old and senile in a messed up world, what sort of fun is that? And what are we all living for anyway? To drive cars? To cut up King crabs? I can't imagine stupider reasons to be alive, but I can't think of anything else to do instead, without becoming impoverished and starving to death. That's the weird part: if anyone *stops* trying to kill themselves, they'll probably die. Someone else will kill them instead, just for being different."

Claire had a handful of seaweed. She'd taken it from the cow's mouth and had been holding it in a fist for about eight hours. It had gotten mushy and, suddenly realizing she'd been clinging to it all day, she scraped her hand on a cold rock.

Trying to get her mind off reality so she could deal with something more tangible, she asked the cow, "Where *do* you get this stuff to eat?" She looked over her shoulder and met the monster eye to eye. The beast seemed to be smiling. "I can see you now, darting toward the Indian Ocean like a bat out of hell, grabbing a bite to eat, then dashing back here to see me."

It was getting late. She knew she should be thinking about getting back to the cannery boat, or the scientists' camp, or the town, or somewhere. Instead, she snuggled closer to the slick, furry beast.

"Shit," she said. "I'm depressed."

* * *

She was tired. Her mind drifted into thoughts of the night before, sleeping in the oversized bag with Ruth. Claire hadn't felt aroused; she'd ceased to think of Ruth sexually. At least she thought she had ceased to think of Ruth that way. But the companionship was nice. Even though Ruth was asleep, it felt like companionship.

As it turned out, Ruth was only pretending to be asleep. She hadn't moved for a long time. Probably she was pondering the fact that she'd just invited a lesbian into her bed. It was the act of a friend for a friend, completely innocent. Yet it was natural to at least think about the fact that she, as a straight woman, was in bed with a lesbian. That's what Claire figured was the case.

After a while it became obvious that Ruth wasn't really sleeping. She rolled up onto her elbow and said, "I had a girlfriend in college. We shared a dorm and always slept together. We didn't do anything but hug."

"That's nice."

Claire felt nervous. She wasn't sure if she was supposed to read anything into Ruth's confession or not.

"She and I were fond of camping in the mountains. That's when I started using double-sized sleeping bags in fact. This was when I was in the School of Oceanography at the University of Washington. When she and I could manage the time, we went to the Olympic Mountains and the Cascades. Once we didn't see another living soul for five days. I liked it."

"What became of her?"

"She met a guy. Then I did. We were both married by the time we finished graduate work. We went in our own directions. I think she divorced and married again. I tried a couple

of times to find out where she lived, but she has a different name. I suppose I'll never know what she's doing."

Ruth's story made Claire feel extraordinarily sad. As she couldn't express it in words, she just let the air be still around them. It was a pleasant silence, none of the constant sound of engines as on the ship. Claire was extremely conscious of Ruth still propped up on her elbow. It was Ruth who broke the silence.

"Why did you become a lesbian?"

Claire would've laughed if it hadn't been such a tragically stupid question. She'd thought Ruth to be too wise and too compassionate to form such an ill-phrased question. It went to show how little people knew about each other. There was less unspoken understanding than one might presume. If they weren't such good friends, Claire's reply might have been angry or abrupt. But at that moment she felt infinitely patient.

"Nobody *becomes* a lesbian. There's no *reason*. You are or you aren't. I'm not so self-conscious about it anymore, so I really don't have a good answer on the tip of my tongue."

"Did you hate your father?"

"Huh? Are you turning psychoanalyst?"

"No. It's just that I hated mine. He's a sick old man now, but I still hate him."

"And you're not a lesbian."

"No." There was a long pause. Then she said, "Once my father came to me in the night. I was pretty young. We never did get along. I lay flat on my back and I saw him standing over me. He'd taken the covers off me and I woke up because I was cold. There he was, looking at me strangely. I kind of knew what was going on in his mind. I didn't really know the specifics, but I had some idea. I looked up at him. I just stared. I stared real hard and I didn't act afraid. He could tell I knew his purpose. He saw my white eyes glaring up at him, and he lost his nerve or something. He staggered backward to my dressing table and knocked a glass doll on the floor. The doll didn't mean a lot to me, but I never forgave him anyway. I think he was drunk, but I don't remember for sure if he was. He never came into my room like that again and I never told my mother about it. That's why my father and I were able to continue hating each other plainly, honestly, with no secret reason."

"My father died when I was young," Claire said awkwardly. "I sort of remember him as a nice man."

"Anyway, I'm surprised I didn't end up a lesbian."

"I don't think fathers have much to say in it," said Claire. "It's strictly between women."

Ruth laughed at that, and Claire was relieved to have the gloominess of the conversation alleviated. But Ruth was insistent on a serious tone. She asked unexpectedly:

"Would you be my best friend?"

"Like your college friend?" Claire asked, still uncomfortable but feeling nurturant. After all, Ruth's husband was being unfaithful, she missed her two children, and she was suffering from unhappy childhood memories. Claire understood how depression worked. "A warm, innocent hug, eh?"

"Maybe," said Ruth, putting an arm around Claire. "Just as long as we both feel all right about it."

"Just as long," said Claire.

* * *

Resting against the beast's flank and thinking of the warmth of the night before, Claire fell into a half-doze and picked up the thread of a previous dream. She'd been deposited on a beach after the monster saved her from the frigid waters of the Arctic. All her friends, she presumed, had sunk into the sea.

Soaking wet, she knew she was bound to die of exposure even though the cow had saved her from drowning. The cow barked at her to wake up, but she couldn't. The odd thing was, she wasn't cold. She thought death must be like that, misleadingly pleasant. As time passed, she courted the idea that she wasn't dying after all and there really *was* a warm wind drying her clothing and hair rather than a cold wind turning her to ice.

She opened her eyes. Weakly she lifted her face and did not see the bleak, rocky beach she had expected. A sandpiper stood close-by on one leg, giving her a quizzical look. Further on, she saw what appeared to be a forest. It looked more like the Philippines than the Aleutians.

Then she was jarred back to cold reality.

The gigantic cow raised her neck and snorted. Claire was awakened from half-sleep dreams. The cow's nostrils flared and closed, flared and closed. "What do you smell?" Then she heard the sound of a Jeep. Someone clutched badly. The engine stopped. It didn't sound extremely close. Sound traveled far over frozen terrain.

In a few moments, Claire spotted Ruth standing on a rise far up the beach, looking all around through binoculars. When she'd located Claire leaning against the monster, there was, for a moment, stone stillness from the watcher. Then the oceanographer ran away from the beach. After a few seconds, Claire and the cow heard the Jeep's engine fire.

Claire leapt to her feet as the cow began to turn her great bulk toward the sea. By the time the Jeep was on the beach racing toward Claire, the huge mammal had paddled away from its basking area. Ruth killed the engine and flung open the Jeep's door. A stack of eight-by-ten glossies of Claire and the monster lay on the other seat of the vehicle.

Ruth had leapt out of the vehicle. Her face was pale. She stood on the margin, hardly noticing Claire, gazing steadily through her binoculars as the long-necked beast headed straight for the horizon.

After several moments, Ruth lowered her binoculars and said with a strained voice, "It vanished. I saw it vanish."

"She can do that, yeah. I haven't quite figured it out. Doesn't look like she goes under the water. Always disappears at the same point."

"This is incredible," said Ruth, suddenly anxious. "This means a lot to me, Claire! You've got to help me study that thing! It trusts you. I'll get a grant or something. You don't have to go back to that canning job. We've got to capture it!"

Claire only stared at her unbelievingly.

"Don't look at me that way! You don't know the importance of this discovery! Think logically, Claire! That thing is pregnant. We might be able to save the species if the young are born in captivity and we can breed them. This is fantastic!"

"Don't be an ass, Ruth." Claire was angry. "You talk as though every zoo in the world has a long history of breeding manatees and sea lions and dolphins and whales. . . If you catch her, it won't do her species a bit of good. She'd die in a big tank and so would her calves, and they'd end up stuffed in some natural history museum. You want to be famous, that's all. You'll probably name the species after yourself."

"That's unfair, Claire!"

"Pretty sneaky of you to come out here like this."

"Claire! You've been gone for thirteen hours! You might've died of hypothermia for all I knew!"

"So you brought those pictures along to save my life?" She pointed to the Jeep's open door, at the photos on the passenger seat.

"Would you rather I'd brought Samuel?"

That calmed her down. Claire looked between her ankles and said, "All right. Thanks for keeping it a secret." She looked up sharply and added, "Only don't go and change it now! Don't go thinking about catching that animal!"

"It's science, Claire. You can't expect a scientist to pretend a new species hasn't popped up at her back door."

Before Claire could offer any retort, the surface of the water broke and a long neck dashed upward. Ruth nearly shouted from surprise, but contained herself and squeeked, "It came back."

"*She* came back," said Claire. "She probably thinks you're all right because you're with me. She trusts seagulls, too. She's wise to fishing boats, though. She'll get wise to you."

The cow crawled halfway ashore and began to bark at Claire with short, repeated, insistent coughs.

"It's upset," said Ruth. "Maybe I should move away so it will calm down."

It was true the cow had never acted like this. She beat the stones of the beach's margin with her front flippers, then turned her body sideways, half in and half out of the water.

Ruth said, "I think it's time for her to give birth."

Claire said, "She's trying to get me to ride on her back again. She wants me with her."

Claire started toward the cow but Ruth grabbed her by the arm and said, "Don't, Claire. It probably bears its young in the water. If it dumps you off, you'll die in a minute."

Claire shook off her friend's grip. They faced each other a long moment. Then Claire said, "I've been having dreams. Maybe they don't mean anything, but I feel as though it's a means of communicating with her. It might only be my subconscious putting things together for me while I'm sleeping. Or I could be crazy. Who can be sure? In whatever case, when I ride on her back, she takes me through a place that's nice and warm. In my dream, she saves my life and takes me to paradise. Everything's unspoiled there. There aren't any people."

"Fine paradise if you need your appendix out."

"I know it. But this whole world is killing me anyway. I've got to escape."

"What about me? That thing could be *my* reason for living, too!"

Ruth sounded close to hysteria.

"But you want your reason tagged and under glass. You call her a 'thing.' She's my friend."

"*I'm* your friend!"

Claire turned toward the cow. She climbed the flipper and got onto the back, clung tightly to the neck as the cow went out into the sea.

She rode out and out. The freezing wind was invigorating. She looked back to see the small, motionless figure on the margin. She could see Ruth's expression: worried, confused.

As Claire rode further away, Ruth had to lift her binoculars to keep Claire and the beast in sight. Claire felt an extraordinary warmth envelop her. Then, from Claire's point of view, Ruth vanished. . . forever.

□

MY LIFE IN STILLNESS: WHITE

When I first met Phil Dick I hadn't been in the country very long, and I felt rather frightened and unsure of myself. Since I also had a young child at the time and no money for babysitters, I ended up spending most of my time alone with nothing but cigarettes and self-pity for company.

Phil was then going through a divorce and I guess he had his moments when he felt the need to talk to someone. Anyway he started phoning me every day and we would be on the phone for hours, talking about anything and everything, including poetry. Then he began sending me copies of poems he himself was particularly fond of, and it shouldn't be too hard to imagine what all this attention from a famous writer did for my sagging self-image at the time.

Phil was a very sensitive man and incredibly kind. In many ways he treated me as if I was his little sister whom he had

She wandered in a different land.
They hurt her. Huntsmen are cold;
Nothing in them grows.
At last she saw a face, not unfamiliar
But more kind,
And regular, as if a childhood won from avid men
That tracked her,
Passed to leave a wake:
A prison where a leaf had been.
She, still that leaf, but gray and definitely straight —
Able to run with care,
Came down from Paris; there her sickness
Bent into rods her courage; and she fell.

The heat of loss, bought at a cost
Which we must pay, begins at last to wane and burst.
The nicked, gnawed, final weariness shapes finally into bone.

In Paris (people laughed there; one knows that) she
Suffered pain (one hears that, too) that ratifies our own.
Discouraged, lost again, she took as once before
The dismal probe of gracious Swedish steel.
Who pokes that bastard talon into her? And what,
In that delightful, fragile ediface,
Fell down,
Fell down for good?

The good who die in patience
Know that here on earth the favors, great and plain,
Lie within the hand of evil things: these died. Not she.
She never can; she never will. For us, and for herself.

AS DAY

by Philip K. Dick

to look after and protect. One time I was very ill with a kidney infection. Phil phoned me in the evening and when he heard I was alone he took a taxi all the way from East Oakland to El Cerrito, bringing a pot of clam chowder. (He had a car but hated to drive.) It was shortly after that he sent me the poem he wrote to me, along with some by others, and I'll quote a paragraph from the letter in which the poem was included. It has Phil's own explanation of how the poem came about.

"And now, dear Kirsten, here's a poem I wrote for you, the only one I ever wrote in my adult life. (I used to write them when I was a child, but no more. Because, except for you, I never feel the way I once did, the way I used to.)"

—Kirsten Nelson

One, two, some say even three:
Too many times eroded, scoured of joy
This woman crept, until no order pacified her calm;
Like blossoms striking back
She kicked the door. Life taken from her

Cannot drop unless she stumbles with it, lets it.
And even now, lying with heaviness and pain,
Knowing nothing of a Mighty Father,
Hearing nothing said to lift her eyes — she shows us:
This we get. But can we offer back
The stolen, broken lives? The lives that dreamed
Inside? Fragments now, and still she dreams;
She dreams them on.

The landscape stiffens. This might be death.
But further, in a new, whiter heart
Which no one sees, a dear unkilled portion overlooked
Harps on. *She will not die.* Not ever.
We knew her once.
And, kissing her, have scraped the wall that hides us,
Each from all the rest.
Rest! For Kirsten?
They took that too. The rest, the quiet:
Nothing lit shows out — except, as we fly past,
A mischief sporting, sparkling in the turned-down
Hurting smile. It waits — as all of her must wait —
Until the huntsmen come again
And this time strike what still remains.
And we? We are their ugly heirs.

THE NEXT DWARF

by John Sladek

January 22, 2000

Dear Yam:

What a day! Wasted hours sitting with a KGB man playing *chess* while waiting for the Swiss Guards. *Chess* is something like *huds* but played on a board. The Swiss Guards turned out to be on strike or something, more delay. His Holiness (and I still haven't found out for you just what that means) is said to keep people waiting for days. Meanwhile I am reading a tract called "You and the Seven Deadly Sins." Seven, I suspect, is a favorite number here. Weeks have seven days, Snow White has seven dwarfs, or is it dwarves, there is a beverage called 7-UP. Much do I have to learn.

January 28, 2000

Dear Yam:

I finally saw this Pope Clyde, a disappointment. Another doddering tribal elder much like the French President. He wanted to discuss C.S. Lewis and his theory that people on other planets may be chinless. Only when the audience was over did I realize he meant sinless. When I asked him about the Seven Deadly Sins, by the way, he merely handed me a tract, the one I've read all week and still don't understand.

Later I had a quiet visit from a man claiming to represent the Black Hand. He asked how we protect investments on our planet—I didn't know. He asked if I spent plenty of time with my famiiy, and did I respect myself? Hard to say. On days like this I feel I've been on this planet for centuries instead of weeks. I have a toothache.

January 29, 2000

Dear Yam:

Left Italy today, after another fiasco. In the morning I was to lay a cornerstone for a new edifice in Venice, the Tuesday Weld Memorial Shopping Plaza. The cornerstone did not arrive! Evidently the stone masons are on strike, objecting to the change of date from MCMLXLIX to just MM. On to Britain for a special banquet at Beeps, to celebrate the birthday of Queen Fnaq' (the only female sheik, at least in the oil boroughs). Her Majesty could not be there in person of course, being now exiled to Southern Macauleyland, but her portrait stood at the head of the table while I, with fifty famous business people, ate myself sick in her honor. This was her fourth birthday and the guests were dressed in keeping with its theme, "Platonic Truths": On my left was General Stulm in uniform (a guardian guarding himself); on my right, Madame Late as a tetrahedron; Rep Levin (I mentioned him before) wore chains, a papier-maché grotto and a cloth shadow. Because of my shape, I dressed as the numeral 7.

All through the meal, Rep kept leaning over (getting his shadow in the food) and trying to tell me about his invention. I couldn't listen: Reality was an angel wrestling his feeble dreams to the ground, three falls out of three with one wing tied behind it. I shall inscribe the menu in the dark glass of my heart in letters of burning gold a zillion feet high (the *foot* is roughly two *ewgs*).

Campbell's tomato soup
Ananas in rice paper
Pate noir de Beeps

California mustard duck — Viands Royale
Urudu en gelee — Ham Pekinese
Lungfish titbits — Eissapfeln mit "Capered Bok"
Grandma's Skate — Roast Beavers in Perry

Salat Tannhauser
Portia Blanc
Collard Greens

Creme Hermes — Snickerdoodles
Kaiserschmarm — Kidney Ice

Black coffee with cologne

Noticing that Madame Late refused everything and took only a few mixed eggs, I tried to sound her out on the deadly sin of gluttony.

"Surely it harms no one but the sinner," I said. "And these days, with negative-calorie foods, not even the glutton need suffer."

She replied in English. "Does not the little food hurt? Think of that! I eat only a few *fruits de ciel* out of necessity, and even then I am sore laden with the fangs of guilt, compared to which the fangs of hunger are as nuttin'. Allow me to spin you an illustrious yarn."

I begged her to go on in her own beautiful language which, despite its lack of nouns and verbs, conveys meanings the Western mind can scarcely gasp (e.g., *tolhog* can only be translated as "cracking of the needy opus", near-nonsense).

In my country (she began) food is recognized as life-turning in and of itself to become itself, in the cycle of beings

having being had. Holy women priests recognize this, while Western gals learn to count calories and mix sauces, ours learn to count the cost of life, and how best to intermingle within, see? (I see I cannot translate literally, let me summarize her words.) The holy women of Hudokno learn to respect life in all its forms: One must take as little life as possible to maintain one's own, and even then one must kill with genuine contrition. Thus of the various sects, one eats only seaweed found dead upon the shore; one eats only ants; one, only stones. It is necessary to apologize to an animal or a vegetable or even a lichen-covered stone, before devouring it. Some believe it is even necessary to apologize to bacteria before accepting a needed dose of penicillin.

Madame Late herself was a member of such a sect when young, and she explained the advantages: If when eating a plate of peanuts one breathes a prayer of apology over each one, the humble dish can last for hours; the taste is sharpened with each morsel; the spirit is lifted. This, she explained, was the Hudokno rosary.

In the 1960s her faith had been put to a severe test in a Washington restaurant. She had lifted the olive from her martini and was saying to it "Little olive, forgive me, for I wrong you. But I too must be nourished and grow like the olive tree, to die and turn into compost nurturing future generations of your brothers and sisters. For are we not all part of the great cycle of life and death, giving and—" At this point, she said, two FBI agents arrested her and seized the olive, which they believed contained a microphone. Thus gluttony, she finished, leads to all other deadly sins.

I was not convinced. How, for instance, could gluttony lead to anger? "Like this," she said, and struck me with her fist in the eye. "I am angry with you for not understanding nuttin'." My eye is still weeping, but at least the pain takes my mind off the tooth.

January 31

Dear Yam:

California here I am! And very depressed. Depression, at least, is not a deadly sin. Once again the movie on the plane was *Snow White*, and this time I had a chance to probe the childish film for deeper meanings. I now feel the Seven Dwarfs represent the Seven Deadly Sins:

Dopey (who swallows a bar of soap) is Gluttony.

Sneeze is Avarice (nothing to sneeze at, they say of money).

Bashful is Lust.

Doc (the bossy one) is Pride.

Grumpy is Anger.

Happy is Envy.

Sleep is Sloth.

Now it is true that collectively the dwarfs typify all the sins (they all dig for precious jewels, lust after Snow, hate the wicked queen, etc.) but the above table seems sounder. I have written it in its original (i.e., Assyrian) order, where it corresponds to the seven planets and the seven heavens. The soul was said to leave the body at death, and ascend through these seven heavens in turn, giving up to each one aspect of its worldly frailty: To the Moon it gave gluttony; to Mercury, avarice; to Venus, lust; to the Sun, pride; to Mars, anger; to Jupiter, envy, and finally to Saturn, sloth. Then it would ascend into the eighth heaven, the Empyrean, naked and purified, to become a star. 7-UP probably refers to this ascent, as the seven days of the week refer to these planets.

On the return journey, the soul descending to be born into a new person takes up these same burdens, but not in equal measure. Evidently the position of each planet determines just how much Venearean lust or Martian anger the soul gets, and so to know a man's character it is necessary to know his planet positions at birth. This is called *astrology*, and the Assyrians used it for everything. If, say, Sennacharib found that Mercury was doing such-and-such, he knew he would be getting an important letter at the end of the week; Venus spelled good news for any romantic interest; Mars a domestic tiff.

No wonder I'm depressed. Thus I see all about me the human intellect, that splendid dusky queen, o'erburdened with cuprous chains and carried to a desert shore, there to slave for gross King Stupidity, he of the visage graven in stones of loutish. . . Sorry, I seem unable to handle these earth-style metaphors, especially with my tooth, my eye, and yes I can chronicle another injury. I offered a cigarette to the man next to me on the plane, and he said, "No thank you! And I hope you won't smoke either!" And he slammed the tiny metal ashtray so violently that it removed the tip of my little finger. I did not complain, so he did not apologize.

Curiously, he seemed to think the accident had somehow won my confidence, for he began telling me the story of his life, which he kept calling an economic miracle. I began to doze.

"Greed, avarice, cupidity, call it what you will, it ruled my life until I saw. . . Keynes could not work because all his supply and demand curves were really linked to money, based on metal, of which the supply is strictly. . . easy to contract the market, just use. . . short half-life like Hahnium, every so many nanoseconds it's twice as precious. . . infinitely contracted specie could only expand, I tried imaginary metal, half-life O, call it Nullium. . . hypothetically an endless boom, but. . . back to nothing, see? Get it?"

I nodded.

"So starting at the other end we peg wages and prices to one another, let the old spiral go. . . but suppose value of Nullium itself pegged to cost-of-living index. . . infinite regress. . . nested equations. . . no more poverty, because everybody has all the wealth he wants, based on this." He opened a small suitcase. "Here I have all the real wealth in the world." It was empty.

Feburary 1

Dear Yam:

Today I visited the sunken city of Los Angeles, then the Hollywood Museum where by mistake I shook hands with a waxwork of Ed ("Kookie") Byrnes. The teeth of his metal comb punctured my palm. Everybody else too busy, telling me how tacky and superficial Hollywood was in its heyday, to notice. The hand began to throb later on, when I was playing *golf* with some ex-president. (*golf* is a game like *sham* ex-

cept you get to use sticks to make it easier). He doddered like Pope Clyde, kept telling me he was not a crook, not a crook.

Guilt hangs over this planet like an udder over the skeleton of a calf, or is that one okay? On to Chicago, where I have an appointment with a dentist.

February 3

Dear Yam:

Yesterday was my first chance to meet a few ordinary citizens of this planet. Dr. Hrthe, the dentist, was busy with another patient when I arrived. I took a *chair* (something like a *wev*, only you bend the other way) and leafed through a few old copies of *Tooth Design*. Evidently Dr. Hrthe shares a waiting room with a psychoanalyst, a Dr. Sebstmorder, for I could clearly overhear a conversation through the door of an adjoining office.

"Do I lie down on the couch or. . . ?"

"If you like, Mr. Psoas. May I call you Ira?"

Silence. Ira Psoas, the psychic tax lawyer! Surely not still alive—but no, of course it was his son.

"Very hard to begin, do I begin with my childhood or what?"

"If you like, Ira."

"Sure, sure. You know the reason I came to you, I thought you of all ha ha people could ha ha help me with my special problem. . ."

"I'm here to help you, Ira. Shoot."

"God it's gonna sound stupid, silly. . . Okay, here goes."

Silence. I found a non-dental magazine on the coffee table, *Computer Life*. Someone had been through its pages, underlining words in no apparent pattern.

"I guess it all started when I was a kid, Dad gave me this pocket calculator, you know? I really liked it, I mean I had fun just multiplying two times two, stuff like that. I mean calculations gave me a kinda special feeling, you know?"

"I'd like to hear more about that special feeling, Ira."

"Okay, okay a hard-on. I was ten years old, I didn't hardly know— okay maybe I did know, but it didn't seem wrong, not really. I mean I kept the thing in my pants pocket, just liked to work out a few things in secret now and then. . . I used to pretend it was the real thing, a computer.

"See Dad told me I'd go blind and lose strength with all these calculations, but I just didn't care. Even when I played baseball, I always had to stop and figure my batting average. . . pretty soon I just stopped playing games, you know?"

"Go on, Ira."

"Well then when I was fifteen I started hanging around the crummy part of town, and I met this, like this older computer, she'd been through a lot of programs, stuff I'd never dreamed of. We played around a few times, nothing serious. . . I forgot all about her when I got to college, there was this freshman registration computer, you know, really big, dumb but big. I couldn't keep my hands off her. I guess you can figure out the rest: I got her in trouble and it cost a lot to have her fixed, the Dean called me into his office and told me I was disgusting, and they expelled me. That's when the headaches started."

"Go on."

"Well Dad sent me to this behaviorial therapist, you know? To cure me. He'd show me a picture of an IBM 360, say, or hand me a punched card, and at the same time give me this electric shock. It seemed to work fine, you know? I straightened out, got a job cleaning cribbage boards, married a real nice girl. We got three kids now, wanna see their pictures?"

"If you like, Ira."

I saw the door was open just a crack, and I pushed it open further and looked in. Ira was even shorter than his father (who, I recalled from the banquet, was less than a foot tall). I could not see the pictures he was passing over the desk, only that they were perforated.

"Okay, so things were going swell, only one day after work I'm passing this computer-dating agency and something just—snaps. All of a sudden I need an electric shock real bad, my hands are shaking so much I can't hardly fill out the form. I can see this computer sitting there, waiting—and when the girl takes my form and goes out of the room for a minute, boy I'm all over that machine."

"How did that make you feel, Ira?"

"Good at first and then—disgusted. Couldn't wait to pay my money and get out of there. Even so, I know I'll be back. It gets worse, next thing you know I've left my wife and kids and moved down to the Village, I'm living with this computer who does horoscopes. I'm living *off* her. I don't care anymore, sure, she does it for anybody for a coupla bucks, you think I care?"

"How did that make you feel?"

"That's when I really started to flip-flop, I mean I got into heavy stuff, flashing displays, ALGOL—"

"Tell me more abut ALGOL, Ira."

"Well it's short for algolagnia, that means sadomasochism, like electric shocks and all. Before I know it I'm walking past the IBM showroom and opening my overcoat, you know? And I'm calling up computers on the phone and talking dirty. I finally got busted, right in front of IBM. Right in front of them fancy hoity-toity machines, think they're too good for it, but let me tell you, they're all begging for it. . . Underneath, every computer is the same."

Silence. I began to wonder what was keeping Dr. Hrthe.

Ira said, "I blame society. I mean I been set up for this, right? Everywhere you look, computers, even the gas bill, showing everything they got. And you ever notice these electronics stores, always on the same streets where they got porno movies and sex stores, dirty books and massage. . . Hell, computers know what the score is, I blame society with its binary standard, you know?"

"Sorry, Ira, our time's up."

In a moment the little patient came into the waiting room, sniffling. I held up the magazine. "Yours?"

"Yeah—no! I never seen it before!" He leapt for the door handle and rushed out. I looked through the magazine again, trying to make sense of its underlined words:

Rockwell
RAM
Fairchild
Texas Instruments (doubly underlined)
bit

flip-flop
gang punch
byte
magnetic core
I.B.M.
Machines Bull
software
turn-around time
input device
Polymorphic Systems
entry point
Honeywell

"Next!" Dr. Hrthe appeared, brandishing a pair of scissors and a comb. He explained that he'd be leaving all the detailed dental work to his robot assistant, but (so as not to waste the hydraulic chair) he'd be glad to give me a haircut.

"Now open wide," he said when I was in the chair, "and should I lower the part a little to cover that bald spot?"

I asked him about Dr. Selbstmorder, and he laughed. "Him? He's nothing but a cheap robot headshrinker; you put a quarter in the slot and he listens to you for ten minutes. Real cheap, too, he's only got about a dozen phrases he keeps recycling: *Go on,* he says, and *How do you feel about that?* Not like my boy here, he's a fully trained D.D.S., aren't you boy?"

He was evidently addressing part of the chair itself, which seemed to manipulate its own instruments. After giving me a painful injection in the right eyeball, it brought a TV camera up to my mouth. "Terrible," it said. "These molars are going to give you a lot of trouble unless you start taking better care of them."

"About halfway down the ear?" asked Dr. Hrthe. "Yeah, Selbstmorder's a slob, never even gets up from behind his desk to shake hands with a patient. Course he can't, he's got no legs, nothing from the waist down but a pedestal. Like a counterstool. Takes no pride in his work. No wonder the company that made him went out of business."

My eyeball hurt terribly. "Pride?" I asked, through a mouthful of whirring, gurgling machinery. "Isn't that a sin."

"A rinse? You should have said so before I started." He hummed tunelessly and clacked his scissors. "Now me, I got pride in my work. You wouldn't think to look at me, that I was once a clone, would you?"

I made a sound.

"Sure. Here, I got a family portrait." He showed me what looked like a battalion photo, tiers of identical men squinting at the sun (the planet associated with pride, I recalled). "Two hundred and forty-seven of us, all dentists and barbers. Of course a lot of the boys are dead now, they joined this crazy religion that believed in suicide. The I WAS movement, very big stuff a few years back, every now and then they liked to get together to drink cyanide in Koolaid.

"Not that they believed in an afterlife, though, They just like being miserable, I guess, and death seemed the grand prize. Thay had a slogan, *It's good to feel bad.* So they went around humbling themselves, see, trying to get short-changed in stores, asking friends to tell them shaggy dog stories, eating Big Macs, going again and again to see *The Sound of Music,* voting for Reagan. . . real dreamers."

The injection was taking effect; I became a dreamer myself. It seemed to me I was in a room with General Stulm, in the middle of a terrible war—which he kept calling a game. He rolled the dice and moved some battalions, the 7th Deathray and the 777th Plague.

"Seven come eleven," he muttered. "Beat that!"

Looking closer I saw that one of the tiny men on the board was Ira Psoas, another was Grumpy. They were playing with miniature dice on an even smaller board, where a group of plague viruses stood waiting to move, while their own leaders shook small molecules and rolled a 7. Suddenly some giant unseen hand gave our war-room a tremendous shove, and the doors burst open. Ed Byrnes clones poured in through every exit, raking the room with comb-fire. I was hit in the eyeball, and as I fell, I heard the general mutter, "Lucky bastard! Wonder what *he* threw?"

Suddenly the game began again, Yam, and you and I were the players. My first roll of the dice, 4, sank Hollywood, and my second, 8, sank everything else. Just then a messenger ran in, drank Koolaid and died. I pried the slip of paper from his hand and read:

NOTRE HUD OK NO.
TO LOG TO'ORDS RX LANK HE I HAD CZAR.
ADZES 8 OL' ON NO SNOB FIT MF.
OUR GHOST A MA: SNOB NOW NEEDY!

When I had decoded it, it made far more sense:

OPUS FIVE, PLOP.
UP MPH UPSET SYMBOL IF JIBE DABS.
BE AFT 9 PM POOP TOP *C.G. JUNG.*
PT SHIP (TUB) NB: TOP COPY OF FEZ!

When I came to, I was aching, sick and dizzy, and my hair was parted all wrong.

11 February

Dear Yam:

You didn't get my last letter because I didn't write one. I've been very busy, really tied up, also not too well. In fact—but let me begin where I left off:

I was supposed to go straight from the dentist to New York, where I would address the "UN" (United Nations, a political group), and appear on a TV talk show. But our plane was hijacked and one of my feet was shot off. I don't want to harp on my health problems but it wasn't pleasant. I had to go into a hospital anyway, to clear up some minor infections of the hand, mouth, eye, other hand, and scalp; while I was there they fitted me with an elegant artificial foot (it can do any dance step at all, which is more than I can say for my real foot). A psychiatrist came to see me, too, to ask if I felt alienated. I told him it was only what I expected, being an alien life form, and he got angry and left. But he sent me an enormous bill, and so did the hospital, the surgeon, the prosthetic foot company, the laboratory, drug companies, the anaesthetist, Dr. Hrthe and so on. On top of it all, the TV show sued me for non-appearance. I was broke and desperate and not even allowed to leave the hospital. I

just had to lie there day after day, watching TV game shows and soap operas.

There was one intriguing program—not sure if it was a game show or a soap opera—called *Beggar Thy Neighbor*. It involved five couples, the Joneses, Smiths, Blacks, Greens and Hydes, and their possessions:

Mrs. Green's infrared hairdryer was as inferior to the microwave hairdryer of Mrs. Hyde, as the latter's thermodynamic washing detergent system was to the former's (geo-prophylactic) system. That gives you an idea of the ground rules, and they fought it out for days with 883-program sewing machines, electric-eye cat doors, rotary-engine personal transit systems, electric spoons and laser toasters. A hologram recorder beat a nuclear-powered artificial heart, and both beat an ultrasonic dishwasher or an auto-rotisserie with Magic-Nose trace element analyzer.

For awhile the Joneses bluffed with their old digital clock radio that roasts, grinds and brews coffee, and their laser room divider turned out to be fake. Mr. Smith weighed in with his auto-bowling critic, his sonar fishing rod and his programmable pizza chef, and the real fight was on. Electric nail-buffers with cuticle attachments, kit-built windmills, solar-triggered flagpoles, electrostatic coffee filters, heat pumps, digital urine testers and calorimeters, electric swizzle sticks, a shopper-chef kitchen system, a luminosity monitor to help avoid eyestrain, a hexaphonic sound center, and an electronic organ with lost chord finder. And much, as they say, much more.

The winners got a big pile of new stuff, cars, furs, jewelry, canasta decks, free trips to Southern Macauleyland, screen tests at the Hollywood Museum, dinner with a baseball team, free tax advice and a superb home to keep it all in, complete with an advanced security system. The losers had to bring all their stuff to the studio and see it smashed up by a gang of black kids who looked hungry. Wonderful stuff.

Anyway, there I was wondering (still) how you could really define the seven deadly sins, also wondering how to get out of the hospital, when all my problems were solved at once.

Mr. Polk, president of Polk Leisure Industries, came to visit me with a special offer. PLI had designed a new Total Leisure system, and was now trying to sign up celebrities to test and testify. He already had General Stulm (now retiring), Madame Late, Ira Psoas and a few others, but what better testimonial than mine? If an extraterrestial alien was happy with the gadget, who could resist it? If I agreed, therefor, PLI would pay all my bills, and of course pay for "installation".

I was at first wary. Installation involved major surgery, indeed a total body transplant of sorts. The individual is reduced to a few key brain cells, which are installed in the Total Leisure Center permanently. From then on, he guaranteed, boredom is impossible. One may watch all TV channels at the same time, while playing a (simulated) round of golf, set of tennis, rubber of bridge, chukker of polo and so on. One may climb Everest by every known route at once, while at the same time winning the Gillette Cup and walking on the Moon. One can browse among the contents of great libraries and art galleries; attend concerts; and of course write, paint and compose; witness scientific discoveries or make them; shoot it out with dangerous criminals or dangerous cops; even die and come back to enjoy it. Any human activity that can be recorded on PLI cassettes, he explained, is yours. I took a chance and signed up. The operation is tomorrow, so this may be my last letter.

February 18

Dear Yam:

This is my last letter. The operation took seven hours, and I felt my soul giving up all its gluttony to the Moon, all its avarice to Mercury, all its lust to Venus and so on. It was not until I lost the capacity for these sins that I finally understood them. Everything since is an anticlimax. TV seems full of reruns; once you've won the Gillette Cup or made nine holes-in-one in succession, it loses something. The arts are not so hot, either: paint-by-numbers, Grandma Moses, Readers Digest Condensed Books—the tastes of my old friend Rep (who invented this gadget) prevail. I climbed Everest the other day only to find a sign (done with a paint-by-numbers set): HO HU. Evidently the sign writer was overcome by lethargy before he could finish.

I thought of finishing it for him. But why bother? Let the next dwarf take over. □

NEXT ISSUE:

TOM DISCH'S LIBRETTO OF THE OPERA

FRANKENSTEIN

PLUS OTHER
SPECULATIVE STATE-OF-THE-ART FICTION