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SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

TRANSIENT
A Novel by
Ward Moore

FEBRUARY

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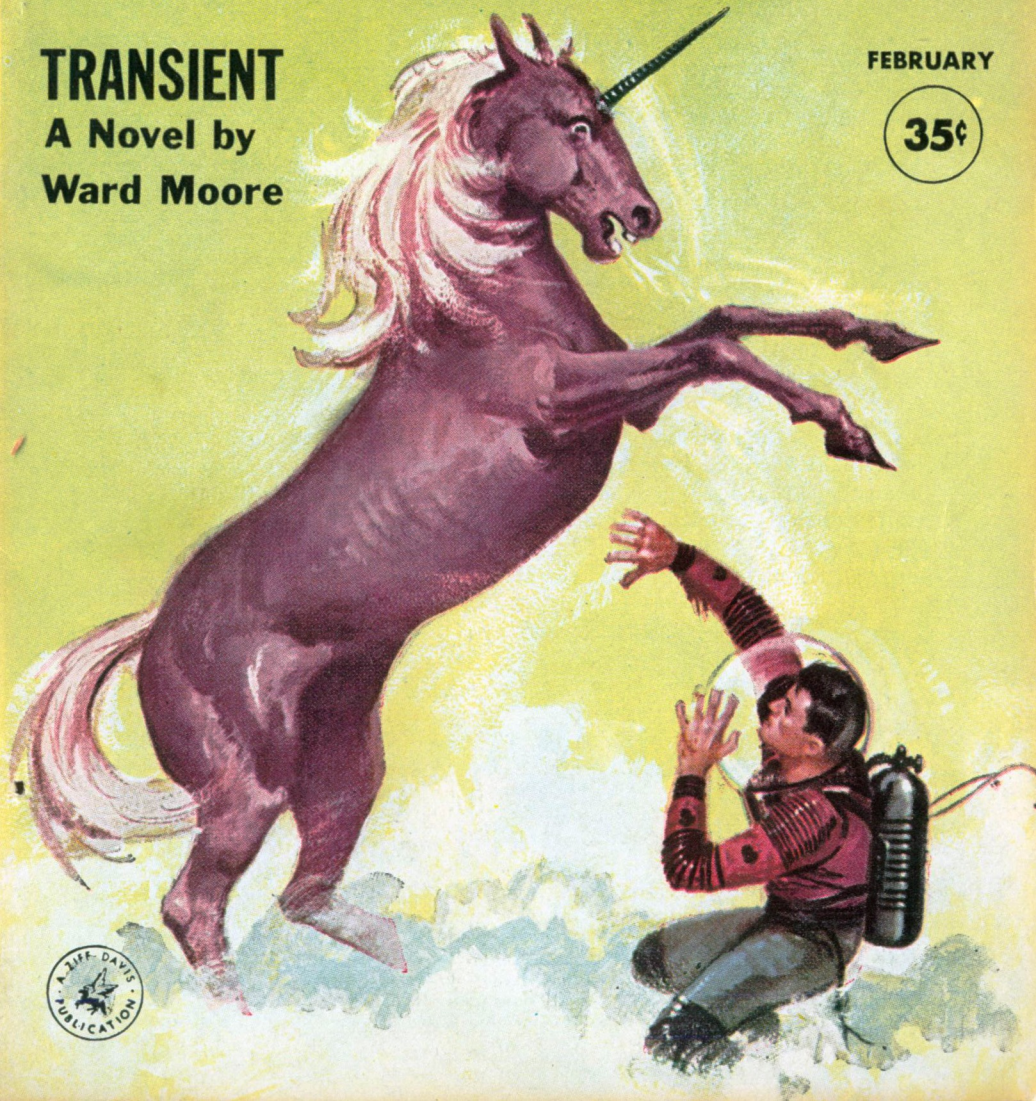

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COMPLETE NOVEL

SHORT STORIES

FEATURES

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Editorial

ANOTHER breakthrough has been reported in the area of suspended animation. A scientist recently described experiments in which he not only "turned off time" for living matter; but in which he also dehydrated living matter into a powder, and brought it successfully back to its natural state.

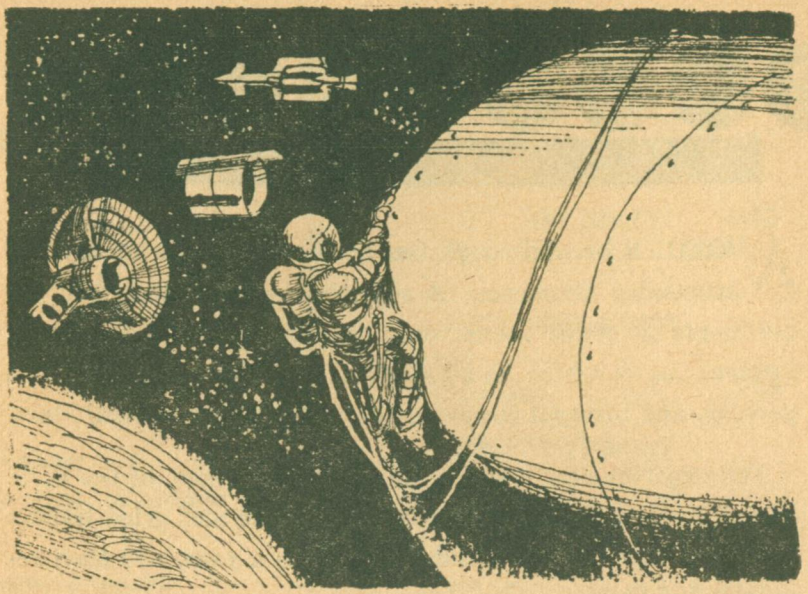
The experimenter was Dr. Harold T. Meryman, of the U. S. Naval Medical Research Institute. He froze and dried human red blood cells, let them stand as long as a year, and then reconstituted them.

When restored to their normal state, the blood cells functioned normally, and proved their vitality by surviving inoculation into the blood stream. Significantly, Dr. Meryman added, the cells were no "older" than when they had been frozen.

Even more spectacular was Meryman's test with bull semen. Frozen, dehydrated and then reconstituted, the sperm in the semen effectively fertilized a cow. The cow was reported to be having a normal pregnancy.

Mention was made of the "practical applications" of the experiments: long-term storage of blood and sperm without refrigeration, for example.

But we know what the real practical applications are.—NL



A LONG WAY BACK

By BEN BOVA

ILLUSTRATED by SUMMERS

He held the future of the world in his numbed hands. And from 22,500 miles out, he made the gamble.

TOM woke slowly, his mind groping back through the hypnosis. He found himself looking toward the observation port, staring at stars and blackness.

The first man in space, he thought bitterly.

He unstrapped himself from the acceleration seat, feeling a little wobbly in free fall.

The hypnotic trance idea worked, all right.

The last thing Tom remembered was Arnoldsson putting him under, here in the rocket's compartment, the old man's sad soft eyes and quiet voice. Now 22,500 miles out, Tom was alone except for what Arnoldsson had planted in his mind for post-hypnotic suggestion to recall. The hypnosis had helped him pull through the blastoff unhurt and even protected him against the vertigo of weightlessness.

Yeah, it's a wonderful world, Tom muttered acidly.

He got up from the seat cautiously, testing his coordination against zero gravity. His magnetic boots held to the deck satisfactorily.

He was lean and wiry, in his early forties, with a sharp angular face and dark, somber eyes. His hair had gone dead white years ago. He was encased up to his neck in a semi-flexible space suit; they had squirmed him into it Earthside because there was no room in the cramped cabin to put it on.

Tom glanced at the tiers of instrument consoles surrounding his seat—no blinking red lights, everything operating normally. *As if I could do anything about it if they went wrong.* Then he leaned toward the observation port, straining for a glimpse of the satellite.

The satellite.

Five sealed packages floating within a three-hundred foot radius of emptiness, circling the Earth like a cluster of moonlets. Five pieces sent up in five robot rockets and placed in the same orbit, to wait for a human intelligence to assemble them into a power-beaming satellite.

Five pieces orbiting Earth for almost eighteen years; waiting for nearly eighteen years while down below men blasted themselves and their cities and their machines into atoms and forgot the satellite endlessly circling, waiting for its creators to breathe life into it.

The hope of the world, Tom thought. *And little Tommy Morris is supposed to make it work . . . and then fly home again.* He pushed himself back into the seat. *Jason picked the wrong man.*

"Tom! Tom, can you hear me?"

He turned away from the port and flicked a switch on the radio console.

"Hello Ruth. I can hear you."

A hubbub of excitement

crackled through the radio receiver, then the girl's voice: "Are you all right? Is everything . . ."

"Everything's fine," Tom said flatly. He could picture the scene back at the station —dozens of people clustered around the jury-rigged radio, Ruth working the controls, trying hard to stay calm when it was impossible to, brushing back that permanently displaced wisp of brown hair that stubbornly fell over her forehead.

"Jason will be here in a minute," she said. "He's in the tracking shack, helping to calculate your orbit."

Of course Jason will be here, Tom thought. Aloud he said, "He needn't bother. I can see the satellite packages; they're only a couple of hundred yards from the ship."

Even through the radio he could sense the stir that went through them.

Don't get your hopes up, he warned silently. *Remember, I'm no engineer. Engineers are too valuable to risk on this job. I'm just a tool, a mindless screwdriver sent here to assemble this glorified tinkertoy. I'm the muscle, Arnoldsson is the nerve link, and Jason is the brain.*

Abruptly, Jason's voice surged through the radio speaker, "We did it, Tom! We did it!"

No, Tom thought, *you did it, Jason. This is all your show.*

"You should be able to see the satellite components," Jason said. His voice was excited yet controlled, and his comment had a ring of command in it.

"I've already looked," Tom answered. "I can see them."

"Are they damaged?"

"Not as fas as I can see. Of course, from this distance . . ."

"Yes, of course," Jason said. "You'd better get right outside and start working on them. You've only got forty-eight hours worth of oxygen."

"Don't worry about me," Tom said into the radio. "Just remember your end of the bargain."

"You'd better forget that until you get back here."

"I'm not forgetting anything."

"I mean you must concentrate on what you're doing up there if you expect to get back alive."

"When I get back we're going to explore the bombed-out cities. You promised that. It's the only reason I agreed to this."

Jason's voice stiffened. "My

memory is quite as good as yours. We'll discuss the expedition after you return. Now you're using up valuable time . . . and oxygen."

"Okay. I'm going outside."

Ruth's voice came back on: "Tom, remember to keep the ship's radio open, or else your suit radio won't be able to reach us. And we're all here . . . Dr. Arnoldsson, Jason, the engineers . . . if anything comes up, we'll be right here to help you."

Tom grinned mirthlessly. *Right here: 22,500 miles away.*

"Tom?"

"Yes Ruth."

"Good luck," she said. "From all of us."

Even Jason? he wanted to ask, but instead said merely, "Thanks."

He fitted the cumbersome helmet over his head and sealed it to the joints on his suit. A touch of a button on the control panel pumped the compartment's air into storage cylinders. Then Tom stood up and unlocked the hatch directly over his seat.

Reaching for the handholds just outside the hatch, he pulled himself through, and after a weightless comic ballet managed to plant his magnetized boots on the skin of the ship. Then, standing, he looked out at the universe.

Oddly, he felt none of the overpowering emotion he had once expected of this moment. Grandeur, terror, awe—no, he was strangely calm. The stars were only points of light on a dead-black background; the Earth was a fat crescent patched with colors; the sun, through his heavily-tinted visor, was like the pictures he had seen at planetarium shows, years ago.

As he secured a lifeline to the grip beside the hatch, Tom thought that he felt as though someone had stuck a reverse hypodermic into him and drained away all his emotions.

Only then did he realize what had happened. Jason, the engineer, the leader, the man who thought of everything, had made Arnoldsson condition his mind for this. No gaping at the universe for the first man in space, too much of a chance to take! There's a job to be done and no time for human frailty or sentiment.

Not even that, Tom said to himself. *He wouldn't even allow me one moment of human emotion.*

But as he pushed away from the ship and floated ghostlike toward the largest

of the satellite packages, Tom twisted around for another look at Earth.

I wonder if she looked that way before the war?

Slowly, painfully, men had attempted to rebuild their civilization after the war had exhausted itself. But of all the things destroyed by the bombs and plagues, the most agonizing loss was man's sources of energy.

The coal mines, the oil refineries, the electricity-generating plants, the nuclear power piles . . . all shattered into radioactive rubble. There could be no return to any kind of organized society while men had to scavenge for wood to warm themselves and to run their primitive machines.

Then someone had remembered the satellite.

It had been designed, before the war, to collect solar energy and beam it to a receiving station on Earth. The satellite packages had been fired into a 24-hour orbit, circling the Earth over a fixed point on the Equator. The receiving station, built on the southeastern coast of the United States, saw the five units as a single second-magnitude star, low on the horizon all year, every year.

Of course the packages wavered slightly in their orbits, but not enough in eighteen years to spread very far apart. A man could still put them together into a power-beaming satellite.

If he could get there.

And if they were not damaged.

And if he knew how to put them together.

Through months that stretched into years, over miles of radioactive wilderness, on horseback, on carts, on foot, those who knew about the satellite spread the word, carefully, secretly, to what was left of North America's scientists and engineers. Gradually they trickled into the once-abandoned settlement.

They elected a leader: Jason, the engineer, one of the few men who knew anything about rockets to survive the war and the lunatic bands that hunted down anyone suspected of being connected with pre-war science.

Jason's first act was to post guards around the settlement. Then he organized the work of rebuilding the power-receiving station and a man-carrying rocket.

They pieced together parts of a rocket and equipment that had been damaged by the

war. What they did not know, they learned. What they did not have, they built or cannibalized from ruined equipment.

Jason sent armed foragers out for gasoline, charcoal and wood. They built a ramshackle electricity generator. They planted crops and hunted the small game in the local underbrush. A major celebration occurred whenever a forager came back towing a stray cow or horse or goat.

They erected fences around the settlement, because more than once they had to fight off the small armies of looters and anti-scientists that still roved the countryside.

But finally they completed the rocket . . . after exhausting almost every scrap of material and every ounce of willpower.

Then they picked a pilot: Thomas H. Morris, age 41, former historian and teacher. He had arrived a year before the completion of the rocket after walking 1,300 miles to find the settlement; his purpose was to organize some of the scientists and explore the bombed-out cities to see what could be salvaged out of man's shattered heritage.

But Tom was ideal for the satellite job: the right size—five-six and one-hundred thirty pounds; no dependents—wife and two sons dead of radiation sickness. True, he had no technical background whatsoever; but with Arnoldsson's hypnotic conditioning he could be taught all that it was necessary for him to know . . . maybe.

Best of all, though, he was thoroughly expendable.

So Jason made a deal with him. There could be no expeditions into the cities until the satellite was finished, because every man was needed at the settlement. And the satellite could not be finished until someone volunteered to go up in the rocket and assemble it.

It was like holding a candy bar in front of a small child. He accepted Jason's terms.

The Earth turned, and with it the tiny spark of life alone in the emptiness around the satellite. Tom worked unmindful of time, his eyes and hands following Jason's engineering commands through Arnoldsson's post - hypnotic directions, with occasional radio conferences.

But his conscious mind sought refuge from the strangeness of space, and he talked almost constantly into his radio while he worked, talked about anything, every-

thing, to the girl on the other end of the invisible link.

". . . and once the settlement is getting the power beamed from this contraption, we're going to explore the cities. Guess we won't be able to get very far inland, but we can still tackle Washington, Philadelphia and New York . . . plenty for us there."

Ruth asked, "What were they like before the war?"

"The cities? That's right, you're too young to remember. They were big, Ruth, with buildings so tall people called them skyscrapers." He pulled a wrench from its magnetic holder in the satellite's self-contained tool bin. "And filled with life. Millions of people lived in each one . . . all the people we have at the settlement could have lived on one floor of a good-sized hotel . . ."

"What's a hotel?"

Tom grinned as he tugged at a pipe fitting. "You'll find out when you come with us . . . you'll see things you could never imagine."

"I don't know if I'll come with you."

He looked up from his work and stared Earthward. "Why?"

"Well . . . Jason . . . he says there isn't much left to see. And it's all radioactive and diseased."

"Nonsense."

"But Jason says . . ."

Tom snorted. "Jason hasn't been out of the settlement for six years. I walked from Chicago to the settlement a year ago. I went through a dozen cities . . . they're wrecked, and the radioactivity count was higher than it is here at the settlement, but it's not high enough to be dangerous."

"And you want to explore those cities; why?"

"Let's just say I'm a historian," Tom answered while his hands manipulated complex wiring unconsciously, as though they belonged not to him but to some unseen puppeteer.

"I don't understand," Ruth said.

"Look—those cities hold mankind's memory. I want to gather up the fragments of civilization before the last book is used for kindling and the last machine turns to rust. We need the knowledge in the cities if we expect to rebuild a civilization . . ."

"But Jason and Dr. Arnoldsson and the engineers—they know all about . . ."

"Jason and the engineers," Tom snapped. "They had to stretch themselves to the

breaking point to put together this rocket from parts that were already manufactured, waiting for them. Do you think they'd know how to build a city? Dr. Arnoldsson is a psychiatrist; his efforts at surgery are pathetic. Have you ever seen him try to set a broken leg? And what about agriculture? What about tool-making or mining or digging wells, even . . . what about education? How many kids your own age can read or write?"

"But the satellite . . ."

"The satellite won't be of any use to people who can't work the machines. The satellite is no substitute for knowledge. Unless something is done, your grandchildren will be worshipping the machines, but they won't know how to repair them."

"No . . ."

"Yes, Ruth," he insisted.

"No," she whispered, her voice barely audible over the static-streaked hum in his earphones. "You're wrong, Tom. You're wrong. The satellite will send us the power we need. Then we'll build our machines and teach our children."

How can you teach what you don't know? Tom wanted to ask, but didn't. He worked without talking, hauling the weightless tons of satellite packages into position, electronically welding them together, splicing wiring systems too intricate for his conscious mind to understand.

Twice he pulled himself back along the lifeline into the ship for capsule meals and stimulants.

Finally he found himself staring at his gloved hands moving industriously within the bowels of one of the satellite packages. He stopped, suddenly aware that it was piercingly cold and totally dark except for the lamp on his helmet.

He pushed away from the unfinished satellite. Two of the packages were assembled now. The big parabolic mirror and two other uncrated units hung nearby, waiting impassively.

Tom groped his way back into the ship. After taking off his helmet and swallowing a couple of energy pills he said to the ship's radio:

"What time is it?" The abrupt sound of his own voice half-startled him.

"Nearly four a. m." It was Jason.

"Earth's blotted out the sun," Tom muttered. "Getting damned cold in here."

"You're in the ship?"

"Yes. It got too cold for the suit."

"Turn up the ship's heaters," Jason said. "What's the temperature in there?"

Tom glanced at the thermometer as he twisted the thermostat dial as far as it would go. "Forty-nine," he answered.

He could sense Jason nod. "The heaters are on minimum power automatically unless you turn them up. It'll warm you up in a few seconds. How's the satellite?"

Tom told him what remained to be done.

"You're not even half through yet." Jason's voice grew fainter and Tom knew that he was doing some mental arithmetic as he thought out loud. "You've been up about twenty hours; at the rate you're going you'll need another twenty-four to finish the job. That will bring you very close to your oxygen limit."

Tom sat impassively and stared at the gray metal and colored knobs of the radio.

"Is everything going all right?" Jason asked.

"How should I know? Ask Arnoldsson."

"He's asleep. They all are."

"Except you."

"That's right," Jason said, "except me."

"How long did Ruth stay on the radio?"

"About sixteen hours. I ordered her to sleep a few hours ago."

"You're pretty good at giving orders," Tom said.

"Someone has to."

"Yeah." Tom ran a hand across his mouth. *Boy, could I use a cigarette. Funny, I haven't even thought about them in years.*

"Look," he said to the radio, "we might as well settle something right now. How many men are you going to let me have?"

"Don't you think you'd better save that for now and get back to work?"

"It's too damned cold out there. My fingers are still numb. You could have done a better job on insulating this suit."

"There are a lot of things we could have done," Jason said, "if we had the material."

"How about the expedition? How many men can I have?"

"As many as you can get," the radio voice answered. "I promised I won't stand in your way once the satellite is finished and operating."

"Won't stand in my way," Tom repeated. "That means you won't encourage anyone, either."

Jason's voice rose a trifle. "I can't encourage my people to go out and risk their lives just because you want to poke around some radioactive slag heaps!"

"You promised that if I put the satellite together and got back alive, I could investigate the cities. That was our deal."

"That's right. You can. And anyone foolish enough to accompany you can follow along."

"Jason, you know I need at least twenty-five armed men to venture out of the settlement . . ."

"Then you admit it's dangerous!" the radio voice crackled.

"Sure, if we meet a robber band. You've sent out enough foraging groups to know that. And we'll be travelling hundreds of miles. But it's not dangerous for the reasons you've been circulating . . . radioactivity and disease germs and that nonsense. There's no danger that one of your own foraging groups couldn't handle. I came through the cities last year alone, and I made it."

Tom waited for a reply from the radio, but only the hissing and crackling of electrical disturbances answered him.

"Jason, those cities hold what's left of a world-wide civilization. We can't begin to rebuild unless we reopen that knowledge. We need it, we need it desperately!"

"It's either destroyed or radioactive, and to think anything else is self-delusion. Besides, we have enough intelligence right here at the settlement to build a new civilization, better than the old one, once the satellite is ready."

"But you don't!" Tom shouted. "You poor damned fool, you don't even realize how much you don't know."

"This is a waste of time," Jason snapped. "Get outside and finish your work."

"I'm still cold, dammit," Tom said. He glanced at the thermometer on the control console. "Jason! *It's below freezing in here!*"

"What?"

"The heating unit isn't working at all!"

"Impossible. You must have turned it off instead of on."

"I can read, dammit! It's turned as high as it'll go . . ."

"What's the internal thermometer reading?"

Tom looked. "Barely thirty . . . and it's still going down."

"Hold on, I'll wake Arnoldsson and the electrical engineers."

Silence. Tom stared at the inanimate radio which gave off only the whines and scratches of lightning and sun and stars, all far distant from him. For all his senses could tell him, he was the last living thing in the universe.

Sure, call a conference, Tom thought. *How much more work is there to be done? About twenty-four hours, he said. Another day. And another full night. Another night, this time with no heat. And maybe no oxygen, either. The heaters must have been working tonight until I pushed them up to full power. Something must have blown out. Maybe it's just a broken wire. I could fix that if they tell me how. But if it's not . . . no heat tomorrow night, no heat at all.*

Then Arnoldsson's voice floated up through the radio speaker: soft, friendly, calm, soothing . . .

The next thing Tom knew he was putting on his helmet. Sunlight was lancing through the tinted observation port and the ship was noticeably warmer.

"What happened?" he mumbled through the dissolving haze of hypnosis.

"It's all right, Tom." Ruth's voice. "Dr. Arnoldsson put you under and had you check the ship's wiring. Now he and Jason and the engineers are figuring out what to do. They said it's nothing to worry about . . . they'll have everything figured out in a couple of hours."

"And I'm to work on the satellite until they're ready?"

"Yes."

"Don't call us, we'll call you."

"What?"

"Nothing."

"It's all right, Tom. Don't worry."

"Sure Ruth, I'm not worried." *That makes us both liars.*

He worked mechanically, handling the unfamiliar machinery with the engineers' knowledge through Arnoldsson's hypnotic communication.

Just like the pictures they used to show of nuclear engineers handling radioactive materials with remotely-controlled mechanical hands from behind a concrete wall. I'm only a pair of hands, a couple of opposed thumbs, a fortunate mutation of a self-conscious simian . . . but, God, why don't they call? She said it wasn't anything big. Just the wiring, probably. Then why don't they call?

He tried to work without

thinking about anything, but he couldn't force his mind into stillness.

Even if I can fix the heaters, even if I don't freeze to death, I might run out of oxygen. And how am I going to land the ship? The takeoff was automatic, but even Jason and Arnoldsson can't make a pilot out of me . . .

"Tom?" Jason's voice.

"Yes!" He jerked to attention and floated free of the satellite.

"We've . . . eh, checked what you told us about the ship's electrical system while Arnoldsson had you under the hypnotic trance . . ."

"And?"

"Well . . . it, eh, looks as though one of the batteries gave out. The batteries feed all the ship's lights, heat, and electrical power . . . with one of them out, you don't have enough power to run the heaters."

"There's no way to fix it?"

"Not unless you cut out something else. And you need everything else . . . the radio, the controls, the oxygen pumps . . ."

"What about the lights? I don't need them, I've got the lamp on my suit helmet."

"They don't take as much power as the heaters do. It wouldn't help at all."

Tom twisted weightlessly and stared back at Earth. "Well just what the hell am I supposed to *do?*"

"Don't get excited," Jason's voice grated in his earphones. "We've calculated it all out. According to our figures, your suit will store enough heat during the day to last the night . . ."

"I nearly froze to death last night and the ship was heated most of the time!"

"It will get cold," Jason's voice answered calmly, "but you should be able to make it. Your own body warmth will be stored by the suit's insulation, and that will help somewhat. But you must not open the suit all night, not even to take off your helmet."

"And the oxygen?"

"You can take all the replacement cylinders from the ship and keep them at the satellite. The time you save by not having to go back and forth to the ship for fresh oxygen will give you about an hour's extra margin. You should be able to make it."

Tom nodded. "And of course I'm expected to work on the satellite right through the night."

"It will help you keep your mind off the cold. If we see that you're not going to make it—either because of the cold

or the oxygen—we'll warn you and you can return to the settlement."

"Suppose I have enough oxygen to just finish the satellite, but if I do, I won't have enough to fly home. Will you warn me then?"

"Don't be dramatic."

"Go to hell."

"Dr. Arnoldsson said he could put you under," Jason continued unemotionally, "but he thinks you might freeze once your conscious mind went asleep."

"You've figured out all the details," Tom muttered. "All I have to do is put your damned satellite together without freezing to death and then fly 22,500 miles back home before my air runs out. Simple."

He glanced at the sun, still glaring bright even through his tinted visor. It was nearly on the edge of the Earth-disk.

"All right," Tom said, "I'm going into the ship now for some pills; it's nearly sunset."

Cold. Dark and so cold that numbers lost their meaning. Paralyzing cold, seeping in through the suit while you worked, crawling up your limbs until you could hardly move. The whole universe hung up in the sky and looked down on the small cold figure of a man struggling blindly with machinery he could not understand.

Dark. Dark and cold.

Ruth stayed on the radio as long as Jason would allow her, talking to Tom, keeping the link with life and warmth. But finally Jason took over, and the radio went silent.

So don't talk, Tom growled silently, *I can keep warm just by hating you, Jason.*

He worked through the frigid night, struggling antlike with huge pieces of equipment. Slowly he assembled the big parabolic mirror, the sighting mechanism and the atomic convertor. With dreamy motions he started connecting the intricate wiring systems.

And all the while he raged at himself: *Why? Why did it have to be this way? Why me? Why did I agree to do this? I knew I'd never live through it; why did I do it?*

He retraced the days of his life: the preparations for the flight, the arguments with Jason over exploring the cities, his trek from Chicago to the settlement, the aimless years after the radiation death of his two boys and Marjorie, his wife.

Marjorie and the boys, lying sick month after month, dying one after the other in

a cancerous agony while he stood by helplessly in the ruins of what had been their home.

No! His mind warned him. *Don't think of that. Not that. Think of Jason, Jason who prevents you from doing the one thing you want, who is taking your life from you; Jason, the peerless leader; Jason, who's afraid of the cities. Why? Why is he afraid of the cities? That's the hub of everything down there. Why does Jason fear the cities?*

It wasn't until he finished connecting the satellite's last unit—the sighting mechanism—that Tom realized the answer.

One answer. And everything fell into place.

Everything . . . except what Tom Morris was going to do about it.

Tom squinted through the twin telescopes of the sighting mechanism again, then pushed away and floated free, staring at the Earth bathed in pale moonlight.

What do I do now? For an instant he was close to panic, but he forced it down. *Think,* he said to himself. *You're supposed to be a Homo Sapiens . . . use that brain. Think!*

The long night ended. The sun swung around from behind the bulk of Earth. Tom looked at it as he felt its warmth penetrating the insulated suit, and he knew it was the last time he would see the sun. He felt no more anger—even his hatred of Jason was drained out of him now. In its place was a sense of—finality.

He spoke into his helmet mike. "Jason."

"He is in conference with the astronomers." Dr. Arnoldsson's voice.

"Get him for me, please."

A few minutes of silence, broken only by the star-whisperings in his earphones.

Jason's voice was carefully modulated. "Tom, you made it."

"I made it. And the satellite's finished."

"It's finished? Good. Now, what we have to do . . ."

"Wait," Tom interrupted. "It's finished but it's useless."

"What?"

Tom twisted around to look at the completed satellite, its oddly-angled framework and bulbous machinery glinting fiercely in the newly-risen sun. "After I finished it I looked through the sighting mechanism to make certain the satellite's transmitters were correctly aimed at the

settlement. Nobody told me to, but nobody said not to, either, so I looked. It's a simple mechanism . . . The transmitters are pointed smack in the middle of Hudson's Bay."

"You're sure?"

"Certainly."

"You can rotate the antennas . . ."

"I know. I tried it. I can turn them as far south as the Great Lakes."

A long pause.

"I was afraid of this," Jason's voice said evenly.

I'll bet you were, Tom answered to himself.

"You must have moved the satellite out of position while assembling its components."

"So my work here comes to nothing because the satellite's power beam can't reach the settlement's receivers."

"Not . . . not unless you use the ship . . . to tow the satellite into the proper orbital position," Jason stammered.

You actually went through with it, Tom thought. Aloud, he said, "But if I use the ship's engine to tow the satellite, I won't have enough fuel left to get back to Earth, will I?" *Not to mention oxygen.*

A longer pause. "No."

"I have two questions, Jason. I think I know the answers to them both but I'll ask you anyway. One. You knew this would happen, didn't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You've calculated this insane business down to the last drop of sweat," Tom growled. "You knew that I'd knock the satellite out of position while I was working on it, and the only way to get it back in the right orbit would be for me to tow it back and strand myself up here. This is a suicide mission, isn't it, Jason?"

"That's not true . . ."

"Don't bother defending yourself. I don't hate you anymore, Jason, I understand you, dammit. You made our deal as much to get rid of me as to get your precious satellite put together."

"No one can force you to tow the satellite . . ."

"Sure, I can leave it where it is and come back home. If I can fly this ship, which I doubt. And what would I come back to? I left a world without power. I'd return to a world without hope. And some dark night one of your disappointed young goons would catch up with me . . . and no one would blame him, would they?"

Jason's voice was brittle. "You'll tow it into position?"

"After you answer my sec-

ond question," Tom countered. "Why are you afraid of the cities?"

"Afraid? I'm not afraid."

"Yes you are. Oh, you could use the hope of exploring the cities to lure me up here on this suicide-job, but you knew I'd never be back to claim my half of the bargain. You're afraid of the cities, and I think I know why. You're afraid of the unknown quantity they represent, distrustful of your own leadership when new problems arise . . ."

"We've worked for more than ten years to make this settlement what it is," Jason fumed. "We fought and died to keep those marauding lunatics from wrecking us. We are mankind's last hope! We can't afford to let others in . . . they're not scientists, they wouldn't understand, they'd ruin everything."

"Mankind's last hope, terrified of men." Tom was suddenly tired, weary of the whole struggle. But there was something he had to tell them.

"Listen Jason," he said. "The walls you've built around the settlement weren't meant to keep you from going outside. You're not a self-sufficient little community . . . you're cut off from mankind's memory, from his dreams, from his ambitions. You can't even start to rebuild a civilization—and if you do try, don't you think the people outside will learn about it? Don't you think they've got a right to share in whatever progress the settlement makes? And if you don't let them, don't you realize that they'll destroy the settlement?"

Silence.

"I'm a historian," Tom continued, "and I know that a civilization can't exist in a vacuum. If outsiders don't conquer it, it'll rot from within. It's happened to Babylonia, Greece, Rome, China, even. Over and again. The Soviets built an Iron Curtain around themselves, and wiped themselves out because of it.

"Don't you see, Jason? There are only two types of animals on this planet: the gamblers and the extinct. It won't be easy to live with the outsiders, there'll be problems of every type. But the alternative is decay and destruction. *You've got to take the chance, if you don't you're dead.*"

A long silence. Finally Jason said, "You've only got about a half-hour's worth of oxygen left. Will you tow the satellite into the proper position?"

Tom stared at the planet unseeingly. "Yes," he mumbled.

"I'll have to check some calculations with the astronomers," Jason's voice buzzed flatly in his earphones.

A background murmer, scarcely audible over the crackling static.

Then Ruth's voice broke through, "Tom, Tom, you can't do this! You won't be able to get back!"

"I know," he said, as he started pulling his way along the lifeline back to the ship.

"*No!* Come back, Tom, please. Come back. Forget the satellite. Come back and explore the cities. I'll go with you. Please. Don't die, Tom, please don't die . . ."

"Ruth, Ruth, you're too young to cry over me. I'll be all right, don't worry."

"No, it isn't fair."

"It never is," Tom said. "Listen, Ruth. I've been dead a long time. Since the bombs fell, I guess. My world died then and I died with it. When I came to the settlement, when I agreed to make this flight, I think we all knew I'd never return, even if we wouldn't admit it to ourselves. But I'm just one man, Ruth, one small part of the story. The story goes on, with or without me. There's tomorrow . . . your tomorrow. I've got no place in it, but it belongs to you. So don't waste your time crying over a man who died eighteen years ago."

He snapped off his suit radio and went the rest of the way to the ship in silence. After locking the hatch and pumping air back into the cabin, he took off his helmet.

Good clean canned air, Tom said to himself. *Too bad it won't last longer.*

He sat down and flicked a switch on the radio console. "All right, do you have those calculations ready?"

"In a few moments . . ." Arnoldsson's voice.

Ten minutes later Tom reemerged from the ship and made his ghost-like way back to the satellite's sighting mechanism. He checked the artificial moon's position, then went back to the ship.

"On course," he said to the radio. "The transmitters are pointing a little northwest of Philadelphia."

"Good," Arnoldsson's voice answered. "Now, your next blast should be three seconds' duration in the same direction . . ."

"No," Tom said, "I've gone as far as I'm going to."

"What?"

"I'm not moving the satellite any farther."

"But you still have not enough fuel to return to Earth. Why are you stopping here?"

"I'm not coming back," Tom answered. "But I'm not going to beam the satellite's power to the settlement, either."

"What are you trying to pull?" Jason's voice. Furious. Panicky.

"It's simple, Jason. If you want the satellite's power, you can dismantle the settlement and carry it to Pennsylvania. The transmitters are aimed at some good farming country, and within miles of a city that's still half-intact."

"You're insane!"

"Not at all. We're keeping our deal, Jason. I'm giving you the satellite's power, and you're going to allow exploration of the cities. You won't be able to prevent your people from rummaging through the cities now; and you won't be able to keep the outsiders from joining you, not once you get out from behind your own fences."

"You can't do this! You . . ."

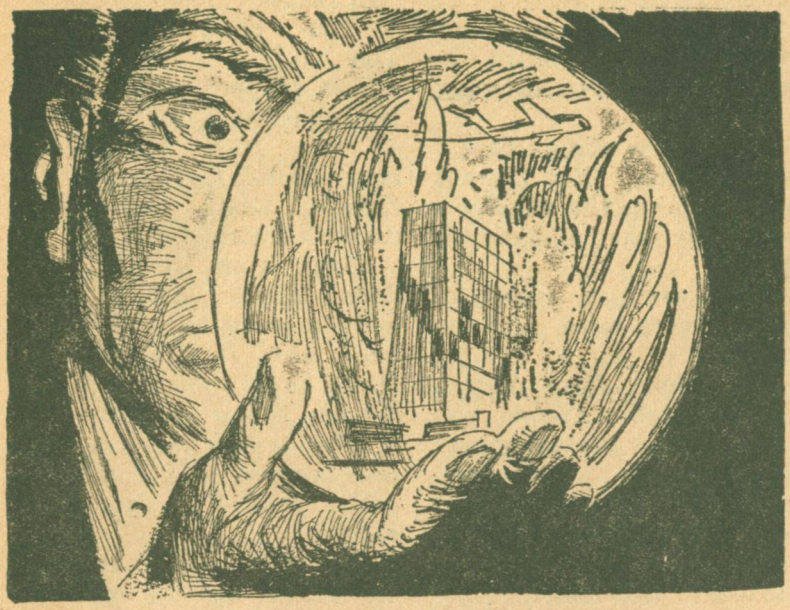
Tom snapped off the radio. He looked at it for a second or two, then smashed a heavy-booted foot against the console. Glass and metal crashed satisfactorily.

Okay, Tom thought, *it's done. Maybe Jason's right and I'm crazy, but we'll never know now. In a year or so they'll be set up outside Philadelphia, and a lot better for it. I'm forcing them to take the long way back, but it's a better way. The only way, maybe.*

He leaned back in the seat and stared out the observation port at the completed satellite. Already it was taking in solar energy and beaming it Earthward.

In ten years they'll send another ship up here to check the gadget and make sure everything's okay. Maybe they'll be able to do it in five years. Makes no difference. I'll still be here.

THE END



DIVVY UP

By MILT LESSER

ILLUSTRATED by VARGA

Here's a fine, hard story of the inverted ethical system of the post-war world, where inhumanity is the norm and cruelty pays dividends.

HARDESTY fondled the sight picture with his right eye, squinting shut his left eye, caressing the trigger of his rifle with the index finger of his right hand and waiting for the squad leader to issue his commands.

"Ready," called the squad leader.

At times like this, Hardesty

observed, time seemed suspended. He wondered if it worked that way for the condemned man, too. The sun was just coming up over the rim of the bomb crater, splashing the rubble there with rose and gold. A hungry dog howled somewhere north of the crater.

"Aim . . ."

A dozen rifles were pointed at various parts of the condemned man's anatomy. Hardesty always selected the stomach, although there invariably was a softie in each firing squad to spoil the fun. The hungry dog began to yelp. Someone had probably left ground glass for it.

Before the squad leader could shout the command to fire, a rifle shot cracked flatly, with a complete lack of resonance, across the bomb crater. The condemned man jerked upward, then strained forward in death against the fetters which bound him to the firing post.

"Damn it!" swore the squad leader. "Who the hell did that?"

Jumping the gun had started some years ago strictly as a sport. Now it was business, though, and profitable if you could get away with it and trust your confederate.

"Who did that?" screamed the squad leader.

No one spoke. The dozen members of the firing squad stood rigidly at the aim position, their weapons pointing like accusing fingers at the dead man slumping forward against the firing post. Two crows flapped by like black paper overhead, cawing raucously.

"All right," snapped the squad leader. "Uh-ten-*shun!*"

Rifle stocks were slapped in brisk unison as the weapons were brought down from the aim position through port to order arms. A trickle of sweat rolled across the bridge of Hardesty's nose. A bus rumbled by two blocks east, on what was left of Lexington Avenue. Hardesty wondered if the driver's union sanctioned passenger trapping. He had once traveled ten extra blocks on a bus which had slowed down without stopping at the designated spots. He had watched braver passengers than himself leap from the vehicle, risking broken bones. Well, they probably had time-clocks to punch; Hardesty was in business for himself.

"In-spec-shun — *harms!*" the squad leader screamed. Twelve rifles snapped up to port, twelve bolts were slammed back. The squad leader walked down the line, examining rifle chambers. Three rifles to Hardesty's left, he stopped. "Here she is," he said.

From the corner of his eye, Hardesty saw the girl, calm as murder, hurl her heavy rifle at the squad leader. The stock slammed across his face and knocked him down before he could parry it with his arms. The girl turned and fled up over the rim of the bomb crater.

"Catch her!" bellowed the

squad leader, who stood up, wiped the blood from his lips and sprinted toward the crater rim. Ten members of the squad followed him on the double. The penalty for jumping the gun was severe; the reward for catching the culprit, considerable.

Hardesty did not follow the squad leader.

He waited until the last of the squad had scrambled up the steep slope of the crater wall, waited until the drumming sound of feet on the buckled pavement faded, then approached the dead man still suspended from the firing post. The man's face looked peaceful, as if he were only sleeping. He wore a mackinaw, a pair of patched trousers and heavy rubble-boots. Hardesty could not see where the bullet had gone in.

Approaching the corpse, Hardesty wondered if the girl who had fired prematurely would make good her escape. Lord knew there were places to hide in the bombed-out city. Hardesty began to hope they would capture her, though. It would simplify things. He did not know her name, but fifteen minutes before the execution he had tossed a coin with her. Hardesty had won. She would kill the condemned man prematurely, Hardesty would remain behind to go through his pockets for booty. Later on, they would meet at the stump of the Lever Brothers Building and divvy up. Provided she wasn't caught. Provided Hardesty remembered.

Sucker, he thought.

He reached the dead man and started through the big flap pockets of his mackinaw. A cold wind swirled into the crater, lifting a cloud of choking dust. The first red glow of the sun had faded, leaving a pale and watery orb to fight the gathering clouds in the eastern sky. It looked like snow was on the way. Hardesty found a tattered wallet in the left rear pocket of the man's trousers.

"Hold it," a woman's voice called softly.

Startled, Hardesty looked around. He saw no one. He might hurl himself behind the corpse and the firing post, his rifle ready—but the woman could have been crouched behind the embankment there.

"What do you want?" Hardesty demanded in an arrogant voice. You were a goner if you showed fear. That's what they wanted, fear.

"I'm armed. I have you covered. I can see you but you can't see me. Drop your rifle."

Bluff? Hardesty wondered.

"I'll count three."

And fire on two, you shrew, Hardesty thought. He wondered again about the other girl, the one who was fleeing across the city now. A confederate of hers? It was possible. Double-dealing invited triple dealing. Hardesty thumbed the safety catch forward on his rifle and dropped the weapon at his feet. He still held the dead man's wallet in his left hand.

The woman appeared over the rear embankment of the crater. She wore a cap with earlaps, a tattered leather lumber-jacket a heavy black skirt, rubble-boots and no gloves. She carried a sawed-off shotgun in the cradle of her bent left arm. She was pretty, but did not look mean enough to be really beautiful. Her eyes were piercing.

"What have you got in your hand?" she said.

"His wallet."

"Give it to me." The young woman came forward, kicked Hardesty's rifle out of reach with her left foot and held out her right hand.

Just then an air-raid siren began to wail. Hardesty looked up at the pale cold sky. He saw no jets. He heard none. The spotters didn't give you much warning these days. *They* knew of the raid in advance, of course. *They* had received word from the spotters up and down the coast. While they would be executed if they failed to report the raid entirely, there was no stipulation on the time limit and no way of proving it if there had been. As a consequence, the spotters were rich men. You hardly had time to lock up or hide your valuables with only seconds to reach shelter.

"Think it's for real?" the woman asked Hardesty.

He shrugged. He still heard no jets. False alarms kept you on your toes and made you wait until the last possible moment when the real thing came. False alarms? The spotters called them air-raid drills.

"I doubt it," Hardesty said truthfully. The bomb crater would make a fairly good shelter, anyway. The worst of the shock waves would pass over it. Hardesty hoped shelter-seeking pedestrians wouldn't find the bomb crater. He might be able to deal with the woman alone, but he'd lose whatever booty was left in the dead man's pockets if a few dozen scavengers came down into the hole.

"Give me the wallet."

Hardesty handed it over. "Who are you?" he said. "A friend of that blonde girl who—"

"Did you take anything else? I'm the widow."

A head was silhouetted briefly against the pale sky above the rim of the crater. The widow fired a warning shot from one barrel of her shotgun, then quickly reloaded it. The head vanished.

"You have no right to your husband's belongings," Hardesty said. "You ought to know that."

"You have a right?"

"Sure. Why don't I?"

"Because I saw what happened. You were in cahoots with that blonde girl, weren't you?" The widow went through her dead husband's pockets as she talked, stuffing what she found into the pockets of her mackinaw. Hardesty stared hungrily at the silver gleam of coins, the dull green of paper money.

"Lady," Hardesty said derisively, "you're a sucker. Your

husband was holding out on you."

"What else did you find?"

"I didn't say I found anything."

"But you implied it."

"Go scratch," said Hardesty in a taunting voice. He wanted the woman to search him. He thought he could take her if she got busy with his pockets.

"I could kill you and search you afterwards."

"You could, if I didn't hide it where you'd never find it."

"Hide what?" the woman licked her lips eagerly. She looked real pretty now. Hardesty had always preferred the mean, hard look to the unctuous one which stamped so many faces these days. The woman took a step toward Hardesty, who tensed himself. It was the little things like this which made life worth living. The cat and mouse game. Personal politics, it was called. It used to be called ethics. The woman put her hand in the pocket of Hardesty's coat, anxiously searching.

At that moment, the first wave of jets came over.

The sky shook itself, disgorging bombs. A bright flash blossomed beyond the western rim of the crater, and another. Seconds later, Hardesty heard the explosions. The woman had forgotten Hardesty and crouched in terror at the feet of her dead husband, who still stood there leaning forward from the firing post. Had the woman denounced him for some personal reason? wondered Hardesty. It happened all the time. Personal politics.

The second wave of jets came over, their roar all but drowning out the stacatto pop-pop-pop of the AA guns. The country had used up its entire supply of ground-to-bomber missiles. The enemy had depleted its store of fusion and fission bombs. Everyone settled for ack-ack and TNT.

The bombs rained down, exploding like firecrackers on a scale model of the ruined city. It always looked that way to Hardesty. Unreal. He supposed it was like that, unreal, to everyone until the one bomb which was too close and suddenly too real compressed the air before its warhead and shrieked earthward, growing and growing and not cutting off the shriek before the sound of the explosion like kids do when they play war and make vocal bomb sounds but terminating the shriek instantly with the explosion and killing you almost before you heard the sound with concussion or flying masonry or fire.

Like that bomb, right now, right there, which picked up a two-story building, uprooting it at the foundation and lifting it slowly into the air in defiance of gravity, then turning it over gently, teaching it tricks before it perished, flipping it carelessly, indifferently, showering a slow downpour of furniture to the ground through the now floorless bottom story and then turning the whole building once more,

like a child's block caught in a gale, and suddenly sundering it, breaking the building into large pieces which floated lazily downward, exploding with a paradoxical lack of violence into smaller pieces, and the smaller ones into still smaller, until the whole thing came down, dust and shards now, like a multi-colored snowstorm, beyond the rim of the bomb crater.

Afterwards came the concussion, mitigated by the depth of the crater but still strong, flipping Hardesty across the crater floor. He let his muscles go slack, instinctively knowing there would be less likelihood of a broken bone that way. He tasted blood in his mouth and felt his head burrow into rubble and ashes. He stood up groggily as the all-clear sounded. You had to be cautious. Sometimes the spotters tricked you. Then you went out into the open and the bombs came down again almost as if the spotters and the enemy bombardiers were in secret entente with one another and would later meet in some undreamed of neutral place and share the booty collected from corpses and parts of corpses. It was a dog eat dog world.

The concussion had ripped loose the firing post, which had fallen with the dead man still dangling, like a drunk leaning backwards against a lamp-post, across the woman. She lay there under its weight, her legs drumming, her arms twitching.

"Help me," she called to Hardesty in a feeble voice. "Please help me." She was very ugly that way, with a look of supplication on her dirt-smeared face. Hardesty walked over to her and placed his foot on her shoulder so she wouldn't twitch so, then went through her pockets quickly. He found two five million dollar bills and a handful of small denomination coins, one and two hundred thousand dollars each, mostly. Shrugging his disappointment, Hardesty realized it would be only enough to keep him going a week, and that long only if he spent it frugally. Those were the breaks.

"What else did you find?" the woman croaked through bloody lips.

She would probably live, Hardesty figured. She was only pinned there; she didn't seem badly hurt. Naturally, he changed his residence in the bombed-out city every day, but if the blonde girl were caught and described him to save her own neck and if this woman confirmed the description to receive her share of the ten million dollars in denouncer's bounty, Hardesty might possibly be found. The penalty for jumping the gun or aiding gun-jumping was death. Other citizens didn't have their just opportunity to scavenge.

"What else?" the woman asked again.

Hardesty went over and found the sawed-off shotgun. "Nothing," he said, and split the woman's skull open with the stock of the shotgun.

"Hey, man! Hey, over this way!"

A digging crew was working with picks and shovels on a ruined building on 44th Street. It had been an office building of some dozen storys, but the whole façade had collapsed. The offices thus revealed looked like tiny cubicles with cardboard ceilings, floors and walls. The whole ruined structure looked like a giant compartmented eggbox lying on its side, the small square compartments cluttered with impossibly small office furniture carved to perfect scale.

"Hey, man! We got an extra shovel."

Community effort. You had to dig out the ruins. In the early days of the war you looked for living people, but now personal politics had changed that. The diggers had clubs and knives ready in case any survivors were found to contest their booty. They were hacking away at the heaps of broken concrete with consummate effort, stopping every now and then for hot drinks which the Red Cross brought around. They had some union, those Red Cross workers. They were guaranteed ten percent of the booty in any building they serviced during digging. Often only the digging foreman got coffee, but it didn't matter.

The scene reminded Hardesty of a clever children's toy he had seen once. It was a hollow globe of plastic, with water inside. When you turned it upside down, tiny jet bombers dropped tinier bombs on a skyscraper which resembled the Lever Brothers Building. The building flew apart, spitting miniature corpses and furniture out of windows. Minute diggers started to dig at the base of the structure and a Red Cross vehicle spilled out tiny, spider-like Red Cross workers with armbands. When you turned the globe right-side-up again, everything assumed its place like before the air-raid. It was very ingenious.

Hardesty thought it would be a good idea to get out of his neighborhood. There was no telling what had happened to the blonde. If he were caught in her position, he certainly would have squealed. Anyway, Hardesty had heard that the pickings were good down by the old Navy Yard in Brooklyn, provided you could steal a boat and make your way across the East River under the ruined bridges. Some people claimed the waters of the river were stil radioactive, but Hardesty suspected the radiation had long since flowed out to sea. It was probably a rumor promulgated and maintained by the roving bands of Brooklyn scavengers. Hardesty had always preferred being a small businessman. He just couldn't see scavenging for a salary, despite the comparative security it offered.

"Well, what do you say, man?"

"No, really, I have to be getting along."

"All right, then. It's an order." Someone thrust a shovel at Hardesty. He glanced at the

man's sleeve and saw the starred armband of a block captain. Damn these civil servants! You hated their guts but had to obey them. Oh, they were psychopathic enough. Hardesty admitted that to himself. You couldn't get any kind of a decent job with the city unless the Civil Service Board passed on your psychopathy. But they were too smug in an orderly, regimented way. They could quote ordinances to you until you wanted to wring their necks but they were right and if you did, you were as good as dead.

Hardesty took the shovel in his numb cold hands and began to dig mechanically where the pick-ax crew had already done its work. After an hour, he had uncovered nothing worthwhile. A teen-aged Red Cross girl brought him a cup of evil-smelling synthetic coffee, but he drank it to warm his stiff muscles.

All at once, he heard a tapping sound coming from a big bronze pipe which had probably carried water or refuse from one of the offices upstairs.

"Someone's alive in there," a youngster next to Hardesty said. He ran over with a pick-ax and began to hack furiously at the rubble.

The block captain rushed to the spot and said, "Are you crazy or something? There's no air in there. Give them a couple of hours and they'll be dead. Are you forgetting your ordinances, boy?"

"But we can save them!" the youngster said in some confusion.

"We got too many mouths to feed as it is. Anyhow, you want them contesting the booty. If they survive, they're liable to claim it all."

"I—I'm sorry." The youngster stopped hacking away with his pick-ax. He seemed genuinely contrite, but you never knew about that type. He might come back tonight and dig in private. By then, fortunately, it would be too late. But the city hospitals were full of just such people who couldn't adjust to the rigors of war. Hardesty had heard about a proposed bill which would have them all killed painlessly. That was no way to die, without pain, but it served them right. Of course, thought Hardesty bitterly, the city would claim all their booty—which was another matter entirely.

Five minutes later, Hardesty found a dismembered arm. It was already frozen with the cold and seemed more like wax than flesh. The arm was too muscular to have belonged to a woman. The man had worn a ring and a gold-plated wristwatch which, between them, might bring eighty or ninety million dollars on the black market. Hardesty got the watch loose and was working the ring off the frozen fingers when the block captain spotted him.

"I saw that," he said. He had a big beefy face with eyes so

close together they seemed to be forever staring at the tip of his nose. "You think you're in business for yourself?"

"I'm sorry," Hardesty said lamely. "Habit. I'm a scavenger by occupation. Here. Here's the ring."

The beefy-faced man scrutinized the ring and pocketed it. "The wristwatch," he said.

"There must be some mistake."

"I saw you put it in your pocket."

"No, you must have been imagining things." What would it bring on the black market? Fifty million dollars in a quick sale? Decent living for a month. Hardesty was damned if the block captain would get it.

"Fork it over, wise guy."

The other diggers had stopped their work to watch Hardesty's growing—and now perilous—discomfort. "Let's just get on with the work," Hardesty suggested. He had placed the sawed-off shotgun down near the curb when he started digging. He saw it there now, with one of the Red Cross teen-agers staring at it covetously. He wondered if he could reach it in time and blast the beefy block captain's face in. He decided the shovel would be quicker and every bit as effective.

"For the last time . . ." began the block captain.

Swinging the shovel like a baseball bat, Hardesty bounced it off his jaw. He didn't wait to see the results. He bolted for the curb, scooped up his sawed-off shotgun, and ran.

It was snowing now, big dry flakes which fell from a windless sky, slow patient flakes which would fall for many hours if the leaden sky was any indication, choking the broken arteries of the perishing city.

Let it, thought Hardesty. I don't have to go to Brooklyn, after all. I know where I can dispose of this wristwatch.

He was jogging along in no great hurry. He had darted down Vanderbilt Avenue by the ruins of Grand Central Station, then cut back and forth through the streets in the low forties. They had chased him for a while but had given him up by now, he supposed. Hell, it was only one wristwatch. He slowed to a walk along Park Avenvue and watched the city die.

The city had been moribund ever since Hardesty could remember. It seemed the natural state of things, just as the public politicians had finally given in to the inevitable and now decried that war was the natural state of human society. With war, cities died. With dead cities, war became a more personal thing. That was where personal politics came in. War became an individual thing as well as a social enterprise. That was the way you lived.

An old woman came trudging along in the snow, her boot-shod feet making footprints clear down through the thin white

covering to the broken gray sidewalk beneath it. She was selling poor-grade booty, trinkets and a few items of faded old clothing. "Anything I've got," she hawked, holding a yellow straw basket up for Hardesty's inspection, "anything in the basket for only a hundred thousand dollars."

When Hardesty shook his head, she tagged along, gripping his sleeve in clawlike fingers and tugging at it. "Go away, grandma," he said. The old lady went on ranting about her wares in a high, incongruously childish voice. Maybe a few of the diggers were still looking for him, Hardesty thought. The crone's piercing voice would attract people for blocks.

The hag cleared her throat and spat yellow phlegm in the clean white snow. "See this dress? See, it's second hand, but you could hardly tell. For you, a special price because you have a cruel face. For you—"

"Damn it!" said Hardesty, and fished in his pocket for a few coins. There was no one else on the street, no one else on the lonely landscape of battered buildings and stumps of buildings. A few feet to Hardesty's left, a fire hydrant had ruptured; a torrent of water gushed from it, freezing at the edges of the large puddle which had formed, as if the ice had started there and would approach the hydrant and strangle it. Hardesty was surprised that the city still pumped so much pressure through its water mains.

"Here," Hardesty said, handing the old woman a few coins and taking her basket. It was unexpectedly heavy. The old woman thanked him profusely in her childish voice. Hardesty had no use for the contents of the basket, but wouldn't return it to the hag. Later he could dispose of it. Returning it to her would be charity, and you just did not indulge in charity.

The old woman walked off through the snow, cackling happily.

"There he is!" someone cried.

Hardesty heard the footfalls pounding behind him. The diggers. He began to run, hurling the basket away from him. He turned around to look and saw four or five shapes sprinting after him. Hardesty raised the shotgun without bothering to aim and fired both barrels. The hag clutched her throat and pitched forward in the snow. One of the men fell with her. Hardesty tossed the now useless shotgun aside and heard something clatter against the wall next to him. Sparks flew. It was a knife. The man's aim had been good, almost too good.

Hardesty circled the block twice, then hid in a doorway. It was a doorway to absolutely nowhere. On one side was the street, on the other was a rubble-filled bomb crater. This had once been a building, but only the doorway stood. Even the door had been blown to bits.

A sign over the door said

WAL — RIA. Hardesty thought a hotel had stood here, long ago. He crouched in the doorway and waited, catching his breath. It was so cold, his teeth began to chatter uncontrollably. His lungs, though, were on fire, and his nostrils. He couldn't stay there too long. He would freeze to death. Perhaps they had taken a wrong turn over on Madison Avenue.

Hardesty walked boldly out into the street. No one stopped him.

Ten minutes later, after hiding in a pile of rubble when he saw someone coming down the street, Hardesty found himself passing the stump of the Lever Brothers Building. The girl, he thought suddenly. He had forgotten about the blonde. He shouldn't be passing here. She might be waiting for him.

"Psst! Hey, it's me. I didn't know to expect you or what."

It was the blonde's voice. Hardesty had in mind to run again, but there would be too many people after him, too many people who, out of spite or patriotism, would identify him and denounce him. He would share the executed man's booty with the blonde girl. But not the wristwatch. She had nothing to do with the wristwatch. Maybe, he thought, she even knew of a good warm place to sleep.

"I had a little delay," Hardesty said. He didn't see the blonde anywhere. She was inside the building.

"Well, come on in."

People came from all over Manhattan to see the Lever Brothers stump. Miraculously, some of the green-tinted glass was still whole. No one could explain this except to say it was a freak of concussion, and it *had* happened, hadn't it? The few panes which remained were almost the only unbroken panes of glass in New York City.

It was green in there, and dim. Looking out through the glass, the snow resembled tons of chopped spinach coming down. The blonde's hair was green. Her skin was green, and her eyes. She had a hard cold look on her face now.

"Well?" she said.

Hardesty began to empty his pockets for the divvy up.

Someone said, "Stop right there! Hold it."

The man was big and had probably used many times with success the gun he carried in his fist. It was the man who had spoken. He covered Hardesty with the gun while the blonde hastily went through the booty they had found.

"You're being held under city ordinance 217," the big man told Hardesty. Ordinance 217 was concerned with gun-jumping or aiding a gun-jumper. The penalty was death.

Not long afterwards, Hardesty was bound to a firing post near the embankment of a crater close to the Lever Brothers stump, but far enough away so none of the glass would be shat-

tered. The firing squad lined up. The blonde girl was third from the right. Hardesty hoped someone would aim for his stomach and the others would miss. If he had to die, he wanted to die painfully.

"Ready!" barked the squad leader. Hardesty wasn't sure, but thought he was the same man who had led that other squad.

"Aim . . ."

Time was suspended again. Even more for the condemned.

And then, before the squad leader could shout "fire!" Hardesty heard a gunshot. He didn't feel the bullet go in, but as he slumped forward away from the firing post he felt a warm wetness, and no other sensation, in his chest. With a final effort of will he looked up and saw the blonde girl's face. There was a faint smile tugging at the corners of her lips. All at once Hardesty knew. She had probably taken someone in this squad aside, as she had taken Hardesty aside. She had made a deal with him. Meet at the Lever Brothers stump, or someplace else? Divvy up. It was the surest way to catch gun-jumpers. The blonde girl was working for the government and probably collected a healthy slice of the booty.

The last thing Hardesty ever heard was the squad leader's angry voice as the man roared: "Who the hell jumped the gun?"

THE END

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF AMAZING STORIES, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1959.

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LEONARD O'DONNELL,
Business Manager

[SEAL]

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 17th day of September, 1959.
WILLIAM PROEHMER, Notary Public
(My commission expires March 30, 1960.)

Ever try to outgrow your hallucinations?

IT'S A GOOD TRICK IF . . .

By KATE WILHELM

YOU'VE had hallucinations, I guess by now that most of us have. Only did you realize that's what it was? You know the time you put your belt, or a book, or anything you care to name, on the dresser, only when you went back to get it, it wasn't there. You could look back and watch yourself putting it there. Maybe you even noticed something that made the memory especially vivid, like some dust, or something that didn't belong there like the kid's crayons. But you know what I'm getting at if it ever happened. Then later it, the thing you put there, turns up somewhere else, and no one has touched it. They all swear that they didn't touch it, and there you are. One of two things is true; you are wrong and your seeing yourself placing the object in that particular spot is hallucinatory, or else one of them is fibbing.

Simple. Someone is fibbing. Only what if you're alone when it happens? Bad memory? Probably. You let it go at that. How many times and how mad did you get afterward when it was found? Put on a show? Again, probably. We can't bear to be in the wrong too many times. It's hard on the ego, and too, it makes you begin to doubt yourself. Ever wondered if you were going crazy?

There are the other kinds, too. Like hearing your name called when no one said a word. Audio hallucination. And reaching for something and finding out after you picked it up that it wasn't what you thought it would be. That one can be pretty embarrassing.

When it got to the place where I thought I was going batty, I looked up hallucination in Webster's. It said: "Perception of objects with no reality, or experience of sensations with no external cause, usually arising from disorder of the nervous system, as in delirium tremens." That shows how much Mr. Webster knows about it all. I looked

up delirium tremens, too, but that can go on and on. Anyway the gist of it is that if you hallucinate, something's out of kilter. But I say, not necessarily so, at least now that I have a good idea about the whole thing. You see, it made me too mad for me to be mad, crazy mad I mean. Not scared or thinking someone was out to get me, just plain mad.

Up until recently I'd been relatively free of that kind of thing. Not like a lot of people anyway who are always hearing their children crying when they are perfectly all right and not making a sound, or others who answer the phone when it hasn't rung, or run to see where the siren came from and find the street as peaceful as Sunday morning. I'd heard about it, naturally, but I'd laughed it off just as they had, afterward.

I got my first good one nearly a year ago. I was working late in the office going over a flock of new insurance applications. I'm an underwriter. Anyway I was sitting there checking them, having a hell of a time making out the agents' sloppy handwriting when the phone rang. For real. But when I picked it up without looking up from my work, it felt cold and wet. I glanced at it casually and let out a yell, dropping, or rather, hurling it to the floor. It carried the base with it, and the cord was stretched from behind the desk so that when it was dragged out it naturally swept most of the applications along too. I had jumped from the swivel chair when I dropped the thing, and when I let go of the arm of the chair I must have given it a hefty push because when it came back around it caught me on the side of the head as I leaned over to see if what I had seen had really been there. I landed in the mess, both arms flailing the air.. That sounds complicated, but not nearly so much as it actually was. I didn't even try to explain to the stenographer who came running in. Should I have said, "I thought it has a wet, green snake dripping water?"

That was the first one. A dandy. I did explain to myself, naturally. We can't let things like that go by without an explanation. Overwork, eyestrain, boredom. One, two, three. Take your choice.

The next bad one came about a month after that. Louise was asleep when it happened, and she swears she never heard a thing. But I was having trouble getting settled, and I was just on the verge of dozing off when I heard the lawn mower. The old-fashioned kind that you have to push yourself. No motor or anything, just elbow grease. And it was plainly in our side yard. I listened for a full minute before I went to the window to see what idiot was pulling the fast one. No one was there, of course. The moon was about three-quarters, and I could see well enough not to have missed someone cutting

the grass. I shrugged it off and went back to bed. It started again. At the window I heard nothing noisier than the cicadees and crickets, but in bed I heard the grass being mowed. And we didn't even own that kind of mower. That went on most of the night. Me popping in and out of bed like a pregnant woman, and the noise starting and stopping like a couple of adolescents on the telephone. I was late for work the next morning. Like I said, Louise didn't even hear it, so it's just another of those queer things that people tell. But I'll choke the first one who says, "Dream." I was awake and pretty damn mad.

Now I'm not superstitious. Ghosts are for the birds as far as I'm concerned. I had read about poltergeists and their tricks, but I always figured that if there is an afterlife, the people occupying it must have their hands as full as we do in this one, and wouldn't have time to sit around thinking of ways to annoy us.

I was really wondering if I had been too hasty when I formed that opinion, though, in the following weeks and months. For a time all would be quiet and I'd start to forget about it, then just as I was getting trusting again, all hell would break loose. I was never sure anymore if the phone would remain a telephone when I lifted it, or if it would change to something that I wouldn't care to touch much less pick up and place by my ear. And I got to looking inside my sandwiches before I dared take a bite. I got to the point where I didn't answer when someone called me until I could see who it was. Otherwise I found myself talking to the air.

Things got so bad that I looked up the word hallucinations, but I told you about that. Anyway I decided that before I called on the psychiatrist, I'd try a good rest. I'd piled up enough time during the eleven years with the company so that I could have taken off several months if I chose. They weren't very sorry to see me go at the office. I suppose that I hadn't been very easy to get along with during the months that I hallucinated. The last time I yelled when the water from the cooler came out full of mermaids made them look at me with pitying glances, and I couldn't miss the fact that no one cared about being alone with me. They all made it pretty obvious. None of them had seen anything, of course. That's one thing about it, no one but yourself shares your hallucinations. You may own nothing in the world solely, but your hallucinations are all yours. In fact, most people wouldn't touch them with a ten foot pole.

We went to the mountains, Louise, Georgie, Hank and I. It was rather plain how worried Louise was about me by her quick acquiesence to the mountains rather than to the New

England beaches. It was the first time in years that I'd won.

Georgie was twelve and was pretty nice to have around most of the time. He could build fires and carry water, and make himself generally useful. He had a ball in the mountains; but that Hank! Guess he was too young to enjoy himself. All he did was whine about when would we get back, and would Mrs. Harrison let the dog starve. I saw right off that we should have brought the dog. But Louise had put her foot down on that.

"All he does is tease the dog. Oh, not mean or vicious, just teasing all the time. Between that and your jumping and yelling over nothing all the time, I'm a wreck. I want some rest, and you need rest. I've never seen you so nervous."

We stayed three weeks, and I slept. Beautiful sleep. No more lawn mowers, no hearing my name called in the middle of the night. No waking to find my feet freezing as if someone were fanning them. No picking up snakes for books, or brine for tea. Heavenly is the only way I can describe it. I got so much better so fast that we decided to get back home a week before I had to return to work so I could do some of the things around the house that I'd put off for years.

I was on the roof patching the gutter when I noticed Hank playing with his dog, and I grinned to myself. It was hard to tell who had been happier when we'd arrived home, the kid or the mutt. Loafer would jump up and lick Hank's hand or face and run circles about him, yap, yap, yapping up a storm, wriggling from his cocker nose all the way back to his beagle tail. I was sitting there watching them and thinking how much a boy needed a dog to love. When I got down I was pretty thoughtful. Hank loved that dog, no doubt about that. He would rather die than see harm come to Loafer, but on the other hand . . . Hank was only six.

I opened the screen door into the kitchen and patiently waited until the crocodile melted back into the woodwork before I went on in. Louise was mixing a cake and I sat down to watch her. I wanted to talk to her about the thing, but somehow I'd never got started, and the more I put it off, the harder the words came. She hadn't pressed me too hard, just every day.

"Finished with the gutter, dear?" She was adding vanilla. It looked and smelled like blood. We were both pretending nothing had been wrong.

"Didn't amount to much after all. I think I got it all right again." The chair was hot, and getting hotter by the second. I said, "Anything else you want me to do before I shower?"

"Let me see." She frowned absently, spooning the batter into the pans, after a judicial lick of one finger. The pans looked like the jaws of lions ready to engulf her hands up to her shoul-

ders. The chair wasn't hot anymore. "Guess not, why don't we have dinner out on the porch tonight?"

"O.K. I'll open the table." When I stood up, the floor began tilting crazily. Louise smiled happily at me and started washing the bowl and the beaters. I yawned and stretched and waited for the floor to get quiet again. The porch was pleasantly cool when I started to open the drop-leaf table. It snarled at me, but stayed together all right, so I turned to the chaise lounge and settled back for awhile. I smoked a grasshopper and put my head on a giant clam getting ready to close. I shut my eyes and didn't even open them when I was called. I smelled the smoke and heard the fire crackle, but I merely sighed and yawned again. I felt water pouring over me, and alternately felt hot and cold, and once I think I might have been on fire, too. But I never moved a muscle.

"Mommie, Loafer won't play with me anymore. Mrs. Harrison poisoned him or something." Hank wailed loudly from the rear of the house, screaming the words so that the next door neighbor would be sure to hear them also.

She laughed and called across the fence to Louise, "That dog just growed up while he was out of Hank's reach. He just sits down whenever the child wants to play a trick on him now. He plain isn't goin' to fall for the hidden bone, or the fake mouse, or any other shenanigans anymore."

I rather pitied Loafer because I knew Hank wouldn't let him be until he outgrew his teasing. I smiled inwardly and imagined that I heard another wail out there somewhere when I didn't move although my senses told me an airplane was hurtling down from the sky to crash inevitably right into the center of our roof. It was hard, but I sort of bit my tongue and dared my eyes to open. The shrill screech that had rent the air faded and I permitted myself a sigh. I felt kind of sorry for myself then, too, wondering how long it would take that other kid out there somewhere to outgrow his silly tricks. I hope my nerves will hold out. **THE END**

Half a loaf is better than none. Or, to put it another way, how many jelly beans can you get in...

A JAR OF JELLY BEANS

By FRANKLIN GREGORY

ILLUSTRATED by SUMMERS

IT SEEMED somehow appropriate to Justin that it was a little child who would finally save the world; since, broadly speaking, it was the little brats who caused the mess in the first place.

"Not," Justin hastened to assure Doris with a tenderly approving glance at her ex-

panded umbilical region, "that it's all their fault. There's just so damn many of them."

Doris, supine like a pampered queen on the day bed, corrected him gently.

"Us," she said. "Really, Justin—"

"Yes, yes," Justin agreed. "With a name like mine. I ought to be more fair. Us, it is, of course, all ten damn billion of us. And it was really our Great Granddads to blame. If they'd listened to Huxley and the rest of the population-controllers, we'd not be in this box. We mightn't even be, period."

"What a frightening thing to think of!"

"I only meant," Justin pursued, "that since we were all kids, too, once, it does rather keep going back to that. The more kids, the more there are to grow up to beget more kids, ad infinitum till something gives. But with this lousy election coming on, maybe I'm not thinking so straight any more."

"You're a very straight thinker," Doris told him, and she smiled proudly at the Nobel scroll on the wall. "Everybody at N. Y. U. insists you're an absolute genius, one of the last."

Justin tried, and as usual failed, to contain his sarcasm.

"Everybody? You mean all twenty-six morons on the faculty, or that mob of half-literate bums they call a student body?"

"Now you're being difficult," Doris said. But Justin, genius-like had stopped listening. Instead, he was thinking how silly his colleagues would look when he finally announced his answer. It was the obvious the clunkheads never saw; which, when you came down to it, was why clunkheads never won Nobel Prizes.

Nobody denied that in this year of Our Lord, 2060, a new frontier was needed to relieve the horrible overcrowding. So where else, they asked, would you find it except in Outer Space? You couldn't make the world stretch, could you? Of course not. But it was like saying a jar would hold only so many jelly beans. That was true, too, but only in a sense. It was the other sense the clunkheads didn't see.

Doris stirred and murmured. Justin stiffened with concern. Doris said: "It didn't really hurt. It was the surprise. I can't get used to the little monster bumping around inside me. You don't mind me calling it a little monster, do you?"

"Of course not."

"And it won't be, will it? You promised it wouldn't. Oh, Jus, I simply couldn't stand having an abnormal baby."

"No," he said, sticking to the truth as he saw it. "No, it won't be abnormal."

They had been through this before, ever since the first month when Doris agreed to the hormone injections and the special diet. He said suddenly:

"Did you ever hear of Count Borulwaski? He was a Pole. Handsome, witty, a scholar, and very healthy. He lived to be ninety-eight years old."

"Do you mean my baby will be like him? Oh, I'd love that!"

"I think he will be very much like Borulwaski," Justin said, again quite honestly. And he hoped to God Doris never took it into her pretty blonde head to look up the man in the encyclopedia. It wasn't likely. That was the nice thing about a girl with so few intellectual pretensions.

Justin himself—Dr. Justin Weatherby, biochemist, geneticist, endocrinologist, and politician perforce—got his belly full of intellect every day. Since he could abide neither brains nor absolute idiocy, he was often lonely. But President Austin told people:

"What I like about Weatherby, he's the only confounded scientist I can understand."

To a President of the United States in the hot spot of making unpopular decisions every day and simultaneously seeking reelection, this was important. And it was to have Justin's advice at hand that he had named him consultant to the National Demographic Authority, the agency which —in view of the galloping population crisis—had long since succeeded the Security Council as No. 1 pusher-around of people. Nobody envied Justin this position.

Nobody, either, gave Murray Austin a Chinaman's chance of whipping Senator Wheeler. In sixty years not one American President had won a second term; not one had made good his campaign promise to bring order out of chaos.

To this unavoidable handicap, President Austin had added one of his own: his deliberate by-passing of the powerful Strip City Bosses who had placed him in office.

By habit, Justin glanced at Doris and then at the calendar on his work table with its fatefully-ringed election date of two weeks hence—Tuesday, November 2. A bizarre race, he reflected, between the bal-

lot and the stork. Mind-reading Doris teased:

"What if I had a miscarriage?"

"My God, don't even think it!"

Doris reached for her manicure set and began to do her nails. She'd really never understood why Justin thought her baby would be more important than anyone else's—except to themselves, of course. But if she were puzzled, and if she wished Justin were less secretive about the experiments that took him so often to his Rockland County laboratory camp, she did not actually worry. She said:

"You're rather fond of the old goat, aren't you?"

"Let us say, rather," said Justin stiffly, "I am fond of my country. Murray Austin is the first President I can remember who is really trying to do something."

"Meaning," smiled Doris, "that the old goat listens to you."

"Exactly. But I wish you would not call him an old goat. He's younger than I, a shade taller, and almost as handsome."

"Gee, we sure hate ourself."

Grinning, Justin stepped to the window, his usual method of closing a conversation. Three panes were cracked and he had patched them with tape. Just outside, the once-private terrace had been converted to a fire escape long ago when the apartments were sub-divided. Somebody had told him that Washington Square Village in the old days was a very nice place to live, with elevators even and private bathrooms. It would be pleasant to have your own bath. Still, they were darn lucky to have this single room to themselves, and that only because of his standing with the Government.

From his high vantage he could see into Washington Square where, under the autumnal nudity of the ancient trees, the students had their digs—old army tents mostly and packing-crate shanties. A snow threat hung in the bleak sky; a light breeze rippled the tent walls and churned the smoke from the community kitchen's licensed fire. Oblivious of the forming weather, a group of ragged students mustered near the ruined Arch. Some carried signs:

"Down with Austin! Vote for Wheeler!

"Venus or Bust!

"Damn the Budget, Try Again!"

In loose, unmilitary forma-

tion they filed past the Arch, perhaps to picket some visiting delegation; more likely to stage another hot-headed rally of their own Society for the Settlement of Space.

Exasperated at their persistence (and the persistence of all human hope) Justin watched as they lost themselves in the wretched pedestrian hordes of Fifth Avenue. A little uneasily, he wondered how they would take the President's announcement. Or, for that matter, his own.

"Hon, I'm gasping. Roll me one, huh?"

Justin returned to the table and lifted the porcelain top of the room's only antique, a 19th Century apothecary's jar deceptively labeled "Opium." There was but little tobacco left. Careful to spill not a single grain, he rolled a cigarette, inserted it between Doris' lips and held a match. When she'd inhaled, hungrily, she asked:

"Aren't you having one?"

"Joe's not sure when he can get some more," he said thoughtlessly, and at once regretted subtracting from her pleasure.

"I feel like a heel. Have a drag on this."

"No. No, thanks, I'm trying to quit," he lied lamely.

Crazy, this young girl latching onto the habit forty-odd years after they'd switched the last Burley field to essential food grains. Only dimly could he himself remember when the Tobacco Prohibition Amendment was enacted. Could there be something in Doris' metabolism to demand nicotine? The thought startled him; would it make a difference in his calculations?

From behind her pillow Doris pulled out a fat, once-glossy magazine of a type not published for generations. It was dated January, 1959, and Justin had brought it home from the college library to amuse her. Turning to a splashy, full-page cigarette ad, she asked:

"Were they really manufactured a hundred years ago?"

"Oh, yes, they called them tailor-mades." He closed an eye to recall a specific fact. "Americans smoked nearly half a trillion a year. It was a tremendous industry."

Doris said slowly:

"You ought to have something relaxing to do."

"I could get drunk on lab alcohol, but that's illegal, too." He sat down beside her and stroked her neck. "Besides, I have you."

"You're leering! I'll see you after the baby is born."

She turned a page. It was

hard to tell whether the slim girl stepping from the orchid-colored Cadillac in front of the theatre marquee was advertising the Cartier emerald necklace or the sable coat.

"You never see anything like this," Doris said.

"They're still around. In hiding, mostly. Once in a while, after a riot, and if you want to pay an outrageous price, you can get something like it under the counter."

"But you couldn't wear it!"

"Of course not. You'd be torn to pieces."

"And just anybody could fly to Europe or take cruises? And everyone had cars like this? Not just the Government?"

"Nearly," said Justin. "You could put all the people in all the autos and all the back seats would still be empty."

Doris sighed.

"It must have been a fabulous time to live."

Perhaps it was. Even history-minded Justin found it hard to believe the cold statistics of that storied era: a life expectancy at birth of sixty-eight years; a daily diet of three thousand calories; meat, eggs, milk whenever you wished (why, he himself could scarcely remember the taste of beef!); bountiful super-markets groaning with viands; choice liqueurs and wines; fresh fruit in winter; mountainous surpluses of wheat and corn; candy shops, jewelry shops, flower shops, book shops; opera, theatre, museums; a telephone for every three persons; half the population in steady jobs, another quarter in school . . . and land, land, land for everyone!

Where had this great nation failed?

To the few who still troubled to study the past, there was no mystery. From the twelve billion a year spent during the infant age of Sputniks and Explorers, America had spilled her treasure like sand into the frantic race to conquer Space. Temporarily braked by the Wars, but with each Peace redoubling the effort, the nation in the decade after the Red collapse had poured half her national income into those innumerable stabs toward the stars.

Like the Mississippi Bubble, the madness mounted. With the first building of the Moon stations, with a lucky landing on Mars, hope in the great gamble rekindled and the world "ahh'd" like children watching fireworks.

No cost was counted. For,

as the 20th Century turned into the 21st, the exploding population seemed to make success ever more urgent. Demagogues were swept into office on the mere promise of more Space spending. Their failure but paved the way for successor demagogues with still wilder plans.

Yet each new surge of the wasteful effort saw the economy erode, the dollar shrink, and private income shrivel and disappear. Markets for first the luxuries and then the staples contracted and vanished. Non-Space industries closed and scores of millions were thrown on the dole.

The simplest law of economics had asserted itself: the frantic expenditure of capital without return could only end in complete bankruptcy.

Corporate giants stopped their dividends and defaulted their bonds, trading ceased on the stock exchanges, insurance empires collapsed, banks failed and all the gold in Fort Knox could not make good on the insured deposits.

Newspapers folded for lack of advertising; television blacked out, and Government radio remained the sole means of mass communication.

Taxes soared—and went unpaid. Schools closed, colleges foundered. Skills, acquired in a thousand years of Western civilization, were lost to posterity. And the great medical discoveries of the 19th and 20th Centuries, so important a factor in the mushrooming population, were all but forgotten by the ever-diminishing ranks of doctors.

Diseases, once thought banished forever, reappeared. Ignorance spread. Tensions gripped the nation. The hospitals, prisons and madhouses spilled over, and each night brought new terror from marauding gangs. Life became a nightmare.

By 2030 the last foundations for any industrial nation collapsed as increasing man—cancer on his own planet, spendthrift and wastrel—exhausted his oil and coal and gas and minerals. By that year the subways had stopped in New York; trains braked to a halt from Coast to Coast; great liners rusted at their docks; planes grounded, and the lights went out in street and home.

Nor did power from atom or wind or sun or tide begin to fill the breach. Research, so long channeled into the single paramount objective of celestial pyrotechnics, had neglected to find replacement fuels.

This was the chaotic age

in which Justin Weatherby reached manhood and Doris was born.

Charlie Hackett paid one of his rare calls next morning, flushed from climbing the seven backstairs flights. He was Doris' uncle, a former Mayor of New York and still the undisputed political boss with sixty million votes in his pocket if you counted the Upstate graveyards. He was past middle age, plumper than the austere times permitted, and it took him a moment to sit and recover his breath.

"Lord!" he exclaimed, blinking. "It's good to get out of that mob, and the smallpox out of hand again. Why d'you know, when I was Mayor twenty years ago, this town had only twenty-eight million people. It must be twice that now."

Justin, wondering what prompted the visit, said:

"And it was built for only eight."

"Really? Hmm. You ever been to India?"

"Oh, yes."

"Worse'n here?"

"Much worse," said Justin. "Though I judge we're about where they were eighty or ninety years ago."

"I was in London last week, gov'ment trip. This Hindu diplomat was blamin' us for their troubles."

Justin guessed what was coming and smiled. Hackett went on:

"He said we went over there a century or so ago with our bloody doctors and our bloody anti-biotics and our bloody surplus food and cured their diseases and filled their tummies. We cut down their death rate and now, where they'd had at least a place to lie down, there's hardly room to stand. He claimed it wasn't moral."

"I suppose," murmured Justin, "we should have let them keep on dying like flies."

"That's what I told him, but he said we coulda educated 'em first and maybe they'da turned to family planning."

Justin was grinning.

"Education on an empty stomach? Like which comes first, the chick or the egg? Rats! Education wasn't the answer. We had more schools than anywhere, but it happened here. We had two hundred million people back in 1975 and today we've got a billion. Which just proves that old Tom Malthus was right: the population outruns the food supply every time if you don't keep it down with war, famine, disease or sexual discipline."

"And I guess," grunted Hackett, "we can't put a cop in every bedroom." He colored. "Sorry, Doris."

"It's perfectly all right," Doris said. "It might be a very good idea."

Her uncle slapped his knee with delight and Justin chuckled.

"Y'know," said Hackett, "there's people in Europe still think we shoulda used our nuclear bombs those last two wars. Maybe they're right, it woulda cut down the population."

"No," said Justin, "but say we had. There were four billion in the world in 1980. How many could the bombs kill before knocking both sides out? A billion? All Europe, Russia and North America? So you'd put the clock back only twenty years to 1960 when there were only three billion, and delayed the crisis by only that much. But you'd still have it. No, it was better not and we hadn't the blood on our hands."

He winked.

"Besides, it saved our nuclear power for the Great Adventure."

Hackett missed the malicious irony.

"But you can't tell 'em that. They blame us for everything. They're poor. God, they're poor. And because we're a mite better off, and by some miracle still have free elections, they hate our guts."

"They always did," said Justin. "The legend of Uncle Shylock dies hard."

"They hate us," Hackett repeated. "And yet, it's just pitiful the way they look to us for the answer."

And now Justin suspected why Hackett had called.

"Space?"

"Space," affirmed Hackett. "They're waitin', like we all are, for the time we can start movin' people upstairs."

Justin said nothing, and Hackett stared out the window. Then, a bit too casually:

"I hear Austin's goin' before Congress with some fool announcement?"

Justin thought: Damn Austin! If ever he needed grass roots support which only the Bosses could give, it was now. Yet the idiot had failed even to consult the most powerful man in the East!

"Yes," Justin said, "and after that, I'm to make an announcement, too."

Hackett asked with blunt anger:

"You tellin'? Or is it too top-drawer for the likes of me?"

"No, no. Listen! He should have told you. I don't blame

you for being sore, or McPhail or Harvey and the rest of your bunch. But this is once you've got to forgive him. You know the strain he's been under and it's too important for the country—"

He glanced at Doris, not wishing to shock her, wondering how much she had guessed.

"He's going to announce," Justin said slowly, "that the Space Program has failed."

For an utterly disbelieving moment, Boss Hackett sat very still. Only his hands moved, to clench and unclench.

"The blasted fool!"

Justin waited.

"And I'm supposed to forgive that? Why, he'll lose the election for sure now—not that he had much chance!"

Justin said quietly:

"Isn't it about time we quit kidding ourselves?"

Hackett glared.

"My God, man! To destroy in a single stroke everything we've looked forward to for Heaven knows how many years! It's our only hope!"

Justin shook his head.

"Not our only hope." Again he glanced at Doris, disliking to leave her alone now that it might happen at any hour. Still, there were the women next door. He said: "If you could spare a few hours, I want you to see what I've done up at my lab at Camp Jukes."

As the charcoal-burning Government car inched on through the miserable, sluggish throngs of mid-Manhattan, Justin closed his eyes. It was all there, every evil man had prophesied for multiplying man: the skin lesions of pellagra, the deformities left by infantile rickets, the starvation of face and body and mind. Silent expressionless sheep, they moved slowly out of the way; and only a few of the more alert turned to curse or spit.

At 42nd and Fifth, long lines queued patiently up worn stone steps to secure their meager daily rations in what had once been the great Public Library.

The driver was new, and new to New York.

"Jeez! Where do they live, sir?"

Justin nodded toward the soaring skyscrapers, weather-blackened monuments to a commercial past.

"As far up," he said wearily, "as they care to climb."

Hackett emerged from his moody silence.

"Where you from, boy?"

"Iowa, sir."

"It's better out there?"

"Well, sir, really not. They're hungry, too. But there does seem a bit more room."

"Like for some of our people?"

"I didn't mean that, sir. They're moving folks out in fact. That's why I'm here. Grandpa had this farm, but they took it. They took 'em all and threw 'em together with automation. For better production, they claimed. Nobody's allowed back but the damned button-pushers." He spoke bitterly. "They said the rest of us would get in the way of the machines."

"In the towns where do they live?"

"Well, the empty factories mostly. Like here, they're all closed down, you know, except the ones on the Space Program."

He did not speak again until they had crossed the sagging, rust-coated George Washington Bridge. Looming out of a great signboard high on the Palisades a space-helmeted Uncle Sam pointed an imperative finger at their approach:

"For the American Dream, Buy Space Bonds!"

There was eager conviction in the lad's voice:

"Gosh, when will we make it, sir?"

Even Boss Hackett, viewing Camp Jukes in its isolated fold of the Rockland County Ramapos, marveled at the political strings Justin must have pulled to create it. Its spacious gardens studded with miniature rustic cabins stood like a last remnant of heaven in a world gone to hell. But as they watched from a rise of ground the group's calisthenics on the playing field below, Hackett burst out:

"Dammit, man! You bring me clear up here to see a couple dozen children?"

"You'd better look again," Justin said quietly. "They are not children."

Hackett glared—and gasped.

"But I can well remember when they were," Justin went on. "When I took them from various welfare bureaus, their average age was eighteen months. The girls' average height was thirty-one inches, the boys a trifle more. Well, that's still their height, but they are now twenty years old. Their bodies are of perfect proportion, and their health and I.Q. are far above the national average.

"Are you trying to tell me—" Hackett began in horror.

"No, let me finish. Really,

there isn't much new. The old Romans practiced a crude form of artificial dwarfing, but for their own sadistic amusement. And we've always had natural midgets and some very famous ones. Philetas, the tutor of Ptolemy; Richard Gibson, the painter, Count Borulwaski of Poland. They were all tiny, extremely intelligent, and lived good long lives.

"What the early endocrinologists found was that a deficiency of growth hormone in the anterior lobe of the pituitary gland caused the condition. They corrected it by injecting the right pituitary extracts so the midgets grew normally.

"Charlie, what I've done is merely reverse the process by a proper manipulation of glandular balance. It's nothing they couldn't have done a century ago. And there's your result: a new and better breed of human in which nothing is omitted but size."

Hackett sat heavily down on a rock and stared at the group.

"Good Lord, man, why did you do it?"

Justin replied with another question.

"Honestly now, Charlie, how long since we first suspected the Space Program would fail?"

"I don't know, twenty years maybe."

"Yes, which was when I began work on the problem. The goal, of course, was to regain our high standard of living. And we thought there were only two answers: move half the population off the planet, or—kill 'em. Those were the only alternatives.

"But here I've come up with a third way: reduction in size. Can't you see what it means? As workers, these little people can produce as much as normal adults. Yet they need only half the food and yardage in clothes, smaller houses, smaller everything. Thing of the tremendous savings in natural resources!"

He paused.

"I know you are terribly shocked," he resumed earnestly. "I was startled myself when the idea occurred. We've always thought progress meant bigness. The ideal man was six feet tall and all that. But it's bunk. Even when our standard of living was at record high, that ideal was still the exception. And since our time of trouble began, the average height has actually decreased by three inches."

Hackett was shaking his head.

"But dammit, you can't make 'em small all at once."

"No, it's a long haul and it will take all kinds of courage for Congress to pass the laws. But if we don't start now, soon it will be too late. Here is my plan:

"Some of us think the malnutrition and spreading disease are starting to stabilize the population at about one billion, which is still 'way too high. About fourteen million die each year; at present some fifteen million babies survive birth.

"I can't work it on children over two years old. By then they're too tall. But if we stop the growth, right now, of the thirty million in that age group, allowing for naturally mortality in twenty years we'll have over two hundred million small people —a fifth of our number. At least it will give us some elbow room to attack our miserable standard of living."

Still Hackett protested:

"It would be rough. Nobody wants to be peewees."

"I know, and there's another problem. At about age twenty, they'll be having their own kids. And midgets don't give birth to midgets. So we'd have to keep on with artificial dwarfing in perpetuity, except—"

Justin had reached the most delicate point.

"Well, I tackled it from another angle. What science has known for years is that it's the condition of the child in the womb during the first three months of pregnancy that regulates size. I developed a simple injection and diet, and I think the baby Doris delivers will be the answer."

Hackett sprang to his feet.

"You practiced on my niece? You cold-blooded louse!"

Justin held out a pleading hand.

"Please. I said it would take courage, more guts than the human race has ever known. But if my procedure succeeds with Doris, we'd adopt it as part of the normal pre-natal care for all prospective mothers. And in two generations anyone over three feet tall would be the exception."

Hackett was sneering.

"Has it occurred to the Great Nobel Mind that when we have finally be-littled ourselves, the foreign giants will move in and knock us off?"

"Yes, and it's also occurred to Austin. The obvious answer is that sheer size

hasn't counted since the invention of firearms. My guess is when they see our returning health and prosperity, they'll be only too glad to join us."

Hackett gazed down toward the field. The girls, apple-cheeked and hair in disarray, had teamed against the muscular boys in a softball game. It had been a long time since he had seen such spirit and laughter. Heavily he asked:

"What d'ya want from me?"

Justin chose his words carefully:

"When Austin admits the Space failure, there will be a great wave of despondency. Then, when all hope seems lost, I am to go before Congress with this—new hope. Now I'd be damned naive to think Austin's strong enough to push it through by himself. But Congress would do it for you, and McPhail in Chicago and Harvey out on the Coast, and the rest of your crowd."

Mentally he ticked them off: Blake in Atlanta and Lipsky up in Alaska and Cabot in Boston . . . the all-powerful clique of Strip City Bosses who actually ran the country.

"Of course," he pressed, "you'd have to reelect Austin as the only man who has the nerve to see the thing through."

Hackett grunted.

"That's just the trouble," he said.

Darkness had fallen when they started back. There was still no telling what Hackett was thinking. He sat stonily alone in the rear seat, a man in deep thought.

A bit before six, Justin switched on the radio. For a few moments an uninspired concert filled the car. Then:

"We again interrupt to repeat an important warning. Attention all personnel using Government vehicles! If you are in normal riot zones, abandon cars at once and proceed on foot. We repeat—"

Hackett stirred.

"Blast it, now what's up?"

Already the driver was slowing down. Hackett pressed his nose to the window.

"We're in Fort Lee. We're okay here, but we sure can't make it across the bridge. Dammit, we'll have to walk into town, but first let's hear the news."

Tires crunched on gravel as the car, lights dimmed, swung into a by-street and stopped in the shadow of a high wall.

"And now for our news report!

"Riots, the worst in thirty

years, swept the nation late today in the wake of President Austin's stunning message to Congress. The Federal Building in St. Louis is burning. In the San Francisco Embarcadero thousands of rock-throwing hoodlums are fighting Federal troops. In Manhattan, mobs raided food depots.

"From Japan and India comes word that the President's message touched off a new wave of suicides . . .

"The message was brief and, in the view of his party's leaders, courageous. He told Congress he has ordered abandonment of the Moon stations. He also has ordered immediate dismantlement of all rocket-launching installations, the closing of rocket-building yards, and the complete cessation of all Space research. He has turned back to the General Treasury the last nineteen billion dollars earmarked for the Space Program. We give you this recording—"

President Austin's voice came on, precise, cool:

"My decision, believe me, was most difficult. The destruction of a long-cherished dream can never be easy. But within recent years, it has become increasingly clear to our leading scientists that man can never reach the stars.

"For better or worse, the ten billion of us humans who had hoped to find a solution for our population problems in Outer Space must remain chained to this old and tired planet.

"I say, it is old and tired. But let us remember, too, that for six thousand years of recorded history this Earth of ours has made a pretty good home. With Thomas Jefferson, I believe that our world belongs to the living and not to the dead. I do not, I will not, give up hope.

"Thank you and God bless you."

For a moment the silence in the car was insufferable. Then Hackett said gruffly:

"We'd best get out now."

Justin heard Doris' tortured sobbing long before he reached the top flight. Trying to hurry, his legs buckled. The long tramp across George Washington Bridge, the nine miles down the west face of Manhattan; the skirting of hysterical, shouting mobs; the senseless crushing to death of women under their feet . . . no wonder he was exhausted.

And there was Austin's speech. At Times Square, the mob had hanged him in effigy

and wrecked his campaign headquarters. It was there, in the red glare of a burning building, that Hackett reached his decision.

"Okay," he'd said. "I'm still sore as hell with Austin, but we'll go along. I'll call McPhail and the boys tomorrow. This is only providing, of course, that Doris turns out all right."

Justin reached his landing and swung into the corridor. Ahead, a door opened and the midwife flitted out.

Doris was shrieking now. It tore at his heart. As he reached his door, the shrieking stopped. Doris whimpered:

"It's a dwarf, I tell you! Oh Justin, how could you?"

Justin nodded at the midwife. Her answering nod was assuring.

"Rotten I'm late." He crossed to his table. From a drawer he procured a bottle, poured green fluid into a glass, stepped to the bed, held it to Doris' lips. Her eyes were wide and frightened.

"Drink," ordered Justin. "Drink, damn it, I love you."

Only when the sedative calmed her did he step to the basket and peer in. Slowly, and with pride and great tenderness, he smiled.

"He's perfect."

"But so tiny," whispered the midwife in awe. "It can't weigh a pound. Can it live?" Justin was grinning.

"It's a new creation," he said. **THE END**

COMPLETE
BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

TRANSIENT

By
WARD
MOORE

ILLUSTRATED by FINLAY

CHAPTER 1

THE Governor, a widower in his earliest fifties, turned off the ignition, noting with satisfaction the absence of street signs limiting parking time. Governor Lampley, serving out the unexpired term of his predecessor and not entirely hopeless of nomination and election in his own right, pictured the stupid or fanatical cop who under any circumstances would write a ticket for the car with the license GOV-001. He and Marvin had made a big joke out of those zeros, Marvin showing his hos-

Governor Lampley continued

to drop further and further into an abyss of gnawing terror.

tilty under the kidding, the Governor hiding his dislike for his secretary under his self-deprecation.

Before getting out he dusted the knees of his trousers and looked up and down the shabby street. The Odd Fellows Hall was built of concrete blocks; Almon Lampley was reasonably sure it hadn't been there thirty years before. The other buildings seemed to be as he remembered them, if anything so fragile as the reconstruction in his mind could be called a memory. He'd forgotten the name of the place, its very location. Only the highway marker, the one so close it rooted the town briefly from obscurity to pinpoint it fleetingly: so many miles from the capital behind him, so many miles to the destination before him, hit the chord. Why, it was here. This was the place. How very long, long ago. Goodness (he curbed the natural profanity of even his thoughts lest he offend some straitlaced voter), goodness—years and years. A generation. Before he met Mattie, before he switched from selling agricultural implements to vote-getting.

And the sign just outside, Pop. 1,983. Pathetic lack of 17 more pop. With 2,000 they could have boasted: We're on our way, on our third thousand, the biggest little town between here and there. Watch us grow. If you lived here, you'd be home now. Get in on the ground floor and expand with us, Tomorrow's metropolis. Under two thousand was stagnation, decay, surrender. 1,983: possibly a thousand registered voters; more likely eight hundred—two precincts. How many Republicans, how many Democrats? Maybe three screwballs: one voting Prohibition, one writing in his own name, one casting a ballot for Pogo. A sad town, a dead town. Surely it hadn't been so thirty years ago?

But there had been the railroad then, and young Almon Lampley swinging down from the daycoach before the wheels stopped turning, bursting with enthusiasm, eager, cocky, invincible. The railroad gone, its tracks melted into scrap, its ties piled up and burned, its place taken by trucking lines, buses, cars. You had to have progress. So what if the town got lost in the process, fell behind? There were other towns, equally deserving, equally promising, equally anxious to get ahead. The state was full of them: chicory capital of the world, hub of mink breeding, where the juiciest pickles are made, home-owners' heaven, the friendliest city, Santa Claus' summer residence, host to the annual girly festival, gateway to the alkali flats. Thousands of them. And he was governor of the whole state. It would be non-feasance if not mis-feasance in him to regret this one bypassed settlement.

Evidently progress, before it withered, had brought the Odd

Fellows Hall. No more. The false fronted stores were as he remembered—as he thought he ought to have remembered—and the dwelling set back from the street, forgotten or held in irascible obstinacy, petunias and geraniums growing too lush in the overfrowned front yard. The Hay, Grain & Feed where he had called—where he must have called—the garage, the Chevrolet agency, the hotel.

The Governor gave a final brush to his trousers, pocketed the keys, and picked up his overnight case from the seat beside him. The hotel was unquestionably the most prominent building on either side of the street yet he had unconsciously (unconsciously?) left noticing it to the last. It was a square three stories high, probably older than anything else in town, of no identifiable style, with a sign saying glumly ROOMS, MEALS, in paint so ancient its surface had peeled away, leaving only fossil pigment to take the weather and continue the message. The brown clapboards had grayed, they were parted—driven asunder—by a vertical column of match-fencing, mincingly precise in its senility, pierced by multipaned windows with random blue, brown, green and yellow glass. The verandah, empty of chairs but suggestive of a place for drummers to sit with their heels on the collapsing railing, sagged in a twisted list. The two balconies above it had been mended with scrap lumber, unpainted, and the repairs themselves mended again.

Governor Lampley could easily have driven another thirty, forty, fifty miles—it was only mid-afternoon and he was not tired—to find modern accommodations. He could have driven all the way to his destination. He chose to stop here. As a sentimental gesture? As an uncomfortable (fleas, lumpy beds, creaky floors) amusement? As a whim? Call it a whim. The Governor was on an unofficial, very limited, vacation.

He admitted feeling slightly foolish as he took the three steps to the verandah and walked over the uneasy boards to the plate-glass doors and into the darkened, dusty lobby. In this position one didn't give way to sudden impulse. Any yielding to sentiment was calculated, studied, designed, to be milked for good publicity. He could see the bored, competent photographers, the casual—well-planned—chat with the reporters. Marvin would have arranged it all; the Governor would have only to move gracefully through his part.

Responsibly he ought to phone Marvin, let him know he was staying here, give his attention to whatever business Marvin would say couldn't wait till tomorrow. In imagination he could hear the querulous, nagging tones beneath the surface respectfulness, the barely suppressed astonishment (what do you suppose he's up to now? a wom-

an? a meeting with one of the doughboys? a drunk?), the assurance Marvin would call if anything came up. He ought to phone Marvin immediately.

The thought of Marvin made him turn and glance back through the doorway, to reassure himself he was not part of a scheduled program after all. But there was no car on the street save his own, no busy technicians, no curious onlookers, no one. Only the afternoon sunlight, the swirling motes, the faint smell of oil and dust.

As soon as he accustomed his eyes to the dimness he saw there was no one in the lobby. An artificial palm, its raffia swathings loose as a two year old's diaper, stood in a wooden tub. Eight chairs were placed in neatly opposing rows, four covered in once-black leather, cracked and split, the wrinkles worn brown, four wooden, humbly straight. There was an air of peacefulness independent of the dark, the quiet, the emptiness, an assertion that there was no need to hurry here, that there was never a need to hurry here.

He lifted his arm to look at his watch. The sweep-second hand was not revolving. He put the watch to his ear; there was no tick. He wound it, shook it; it didn't start. He slipped it off his wrist into his pocket, and loosened his necktie.

He stood in front of the brown counter whose top was shiny with the patina of leaning elbows. There was a bell with inverted triple chins and outpopping pimple, an open register turned indifferently toward him, a bank of empty pigeonholes. He picked up the chewed pen with the splayed nib, bronze-shiny where the ink had dried on it. He had to tip the black scumcrusty inkwell far over to moisten it. It scratch-scratched across the top line on the page, engraving his name but only staining the depressions here and there, mostly on the downstrokes. Oddly, instead of the capital, he wrote down the city he had once lived in, the city where he got his first job.

After registering he hesitated over the bell. Instead of ringing it he picked up his bag and walked to the shadowed stairway. Up ahead he saw a low-watt bulb staring bleakly on the wall. The area around the globe was a grimy green, outside the magic circle the pervading dark brown was undisturbed. The carpet under his feet was threadbare and gritty; through his shoesoles he felt the lumps of resistant knots in the wood, and the nailheads raised by the wearing-down around them. He gazed ahead.

There was a landing halfway up, opening on a narrow hall. Light came through fogged windows set close together along one wall. The other was papered with circus posters, the brightly lithographed elephants and hippopotomi faded almost to indiscernability, the creases burst

open like scored chestnuts. The Governor hesitated, went on up.

At the second floor he turned left, noting how spacious this hall was in contrast to the one below, how comparatively bright and clean. Most of the doors were slightly ajar, not inviting perhaps, merely indicating they were receptive to a tenant.

From the outside there was nothing to choose between them yet he felt the choice was important. Further, it seemed to him that opening a door would commit him; he must choose without inspection. Thoughtfully he passed several. The one he finally entered opened on a large room with two tall windows. Thin, brittle curtains drooped palely from the rods. Two dressers, the high one bellying forward, the low one supporting a tilted metal-dull mirror, were thick with cheap varnish that wept long blob-ended tears. The double bed was made, the coverlet turned down, the lumpy pillows smooth and gray. On a whatnot in one corner a glass bell enclosed two wax figures, a bride and groom in wedding finery. The wax bride was wringing her waxen hands.

The Governor put his bag on the foot of the bed, took off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, went to the sink. The faucets were black-spotted, green-flecked, with remnants of nickelplating and long dark scratches. The basin was orange-brown and gray-white. He turned on the HOT. There was a quick hiss and a slurp of thick, liquid rust. He tried the COLD. The slurp was the same but there was no hiss. He looked around the room again, saw the washstand. The knobbly-spouted pitcher stood in the center of the knobbly-rimmed bowl. The water appeared good despite the dust floating on top. He poured some in the basin and rinsed his face and hands.

As a small child he had been sure water was life. Once he sprinkled some on a dead bird, stiff and ruffled. He found a towel, hard and grainy, dried his hands, shrinking slightly from the contact. He took his comb from his jacket and ran it through his still thick hair, only lightly graying. It was a minor pride that his campaign pictures were always the latest, never one taken when he was much younger.

He became aware he was being watched and turned inquiringly toward the door. The man standing there wore heavy workshoes, blue denim pants, a denim jacket buttoned to his neck. His face was dark, his straight black hair long. His eyes slanted ever so little above his high cheekbones. He smiled at Lampley. "Everything OK?"

"Everything OK," said Lampley. "Except the plumbing."

The man nodded thoughtfully. "Oh, the plumbing. It went out." He gestured vaguely with his hands, indicating leaks, stoppages, broken pipes, hopeless

fittings, worn-out heaters. "So we put in washstands."

"I see. Maybe it would have been better to have it fixed."

The other shook a doubtful head. "This was change. Advance. Improvement. Maybe next we'll put a well in every room. with a rope and bucket reaching straight down. Plop! And then rrrrr, up she comes full and slopping over. Or artesians with the water bubbling up like a billiard ball on the end of a cue. That would be hard to beat, ay? Or perhaps wooden pipes from the rain gutters."

"I see," said Lampley. The plans didn't seem unreasonable. "You're the clerk?" he asked politely.

"Clerk is good as any. Everyone has lots to do."

"That's right. Well, thanks..

"Don't mention it."

Lampley rolled down his sleeves, refastened his cufflinks, put his jacket back on. "Can I get something to eat here?"

"Why not? Come on."

The Governor followed him into the hall, closing the door. He thought briefly of asking about telephoning since there was no phone in his room. Still it wasn't really necessary; Marvin could take care of everything. The clerk led him, not to the stairs he had come up, but in the opposite direction. Some of the partially open doors were painted in vivid colors and marked with symbols strange to Lampley.

The backstairs were narrower, steeper, darker; the Governor had a constant fear of overestimating the width of the treads and placing a searching foot upon insubstantial air. They came to the halfway landing but instead of the windowed hall with the circus posters, they entered a low room, low as a ship's cabin compressed between decks. Exposed beams held up the ceiling. A long plank table ran between two benches, a high ladderback chair at the head and foot. One of the benches was built into the battened wall.

On it a man with an infantile face and bulging forehead under coarse black hair crouched over the table guarding his food with tiny kangaroo arms. A stained and spotted napkin was tied around his neck like a bib. He slobbered and gurgled over a bowl of thick porridge, smearing it around his mouth, spilling on the napkin as he scooped the mess from the bowl.

At the head of the table an old man, white-haired, hook-nosed, chewed silently. On the outside bench was a middle-aged woman with sagging, placid features, and a girl in her teens. All looked Indian or Mexican except the idiot, none paid attention to their arrival.

The clerk sat down at the foot of the table. Lampley saw there was no place for him except on the bench next to the defective. He edged his way in, staying far as possible from him. The room was suddenly oppressive;

he had the notion they must be near a furnace, a boiler, a dynamo. He took out his carefully folded handkerchief and wiped his forehead. The old man glanced at him sympathetically.

The young girl reached under the table and came up with a bright green crepe paper party favor. She extended it diffidently toward the Governor. Smiling, he took hold of the stiff cardboard strip inside the ruffle with his thumb and forefinger. She giggled, holding the other end; they pulled. The cracker popped, a red tissue paper phyrgian cap fell out. She clapped her hands and motioned him to put it on. Slightly embarrassed, he complied.

She searched through the torn favor for the motto, unfolded it. She shook her head and handed it to him. He read, AN UNOPENED BOOK HAS NO PRINTING. She put a bowl of beans, cut-up chicken, and rice before him. "Thank you," he said.

"For nothing," she responded, shyly polite. Her young breasts pushed out against her white shirt. Her dark eyes looked into his before her long lashes fell. Her mouth was wide and supple. Lampley realized she was beautiful. He thought with pain of walking with her through knee-high grass and lying beside her under spreading trees.

He spooned up some of the food; it was overcooked and tasteless. It didn't matter. Between spoonfuls he looked furtively at the woman—he dared not let his eyes return to the girl—and thought he saw a resemblance to . . . To whom? The face was pleasant, ordinary, memorable neither for charm nor repulsiveness. It was a matter of professional pride, an occupational necessity for him to remember faces; he could not recall this one. It nagged at the back of his mind.

The old man rose, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, bowing clumsily toward the Governor. He pulled a wrinkled pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket and extended it. "Thanks," acknowledged Lampley, "I don't use them." The old man shook his head, tipped the pack to his mouth, replaced it, lit the cigarette with a match struck on the seat of his trousers. His fingers were thick and twisted; they still appeared capable of delicate manipulation.

The clerk pushed back his chair. "We might put self-service in here," he remarked to one in particular. "Individual stoves, maybe mechanized farms or hydroponic tanks." He belched, holding his hand diffidently before his mouth.

Lampley emptied his bowl. The girl looked questioningly at him. "No more," he said. "Thank you."

She smiled at him, followed the clerk and the old man from the room; he was alone with the woman and the idiot. He wanted to get up and go too; something

held him. "A long time," said the woman gently.

He knew what she meant; he refused to accept understanding. "I'm sorry."

"Since you were here. You forgot?"

There was coldness in his stomach. "No . . . not exactly. I'm sorry."

She shrugged. Her arms and shoulders were rounded and graceful but their grace did not obscure the fact that she was old as he, or nearly. Why was it so reprehensible to long for freshness and beauty in women but the stamp of taste to want these qualities in anything else? "I'm sorry," he said for the third time, aware of the phrase's futility.

She smiled, showing a gold tooth. The others were white but uneven. "For nothing," she echoed the girl. "What is there to be sorry for?"

His eyes went from the creature on the bench to her and back again.

"Yours," she said calmly.

He had known, but knowing and knowing were different things. "Impossible!"

She showed the gold tooth again. "Why impossible? You make love, you have babies."

"But—like that?"

"Does everything have to be perfect for you?"

He regarded her with greater horror than he had his—his son. A beast, an animal, giving birth to beasts and animals. "Not perfect. But not . . . this."

She laughed and moved around the table to the unfortunate. She untied the napkin and tenderly wiped his vacant face and the undeveloped hands. She kissed him passionately on the forehead. "You think it is possible to love only perfection? You couldn't love one like this, or an old woman, or a corpse?"

Lampley ran from the room, past a curtained entrance, and stumbled through a hall lit with yellow, grease-filmed light. The hall smelled of food, acrid, sickening. There was a swinging door at the end, padded, outlined with brass nails. Many were missing, their absence commemorated by the dark outline of where they had been. He pushed through it.

The kitchen was oddly constructed. Its ceiling seemed to be two stories high; just under it were niches for sooty plaster figures, all horribly distorted, figures with one arm twice the length of the other, phalluses long as legs, monstrous heads, steatophyrgian buttocks, goiters resting on sagittarian knees. Through a rose window yellow-pink beams streamed to the flagged floor. Scrubbed and sanded butchers' blocks splattered with gobs of fat, drying entrails, scabs of hard blood stood against the wall. Gleaming knives and cleavers were racked in the sides of the blocks. Tomb-like ranges were hooded in a row; opposite them empty spits turned before cold, blackened fireplaces.

The old man was seated on a stool before a slanting table, methodically chopping onions in a wooden bowl. He turned his head. "She gave you a hard time, hay?"

Blackmail, extortion, exposure, disgrace. "I don't know."

The old man wrinkled his forehead. The peculiar light made the creases unnaturally deep, like well-healed scars. "Who does know?" He laid down his cleaver. "Come."

Will-less, the Governor followed. The old man had a limp, formerly unnoticed. They went past the ranges to a massive steel door with a red lamp beside it. The old man lifted the tight latch. Lampley noted a safety device preventing the door from fully closing except from the outside.

They were in a large refrigerator. Sides of beef, barred red and pale, hung from hooks. Whole sheep and pigs, encased in stiff, unarmoring fat, thrust dead forefeet toward the unattainable sawdust-covered floor. Barrels of pickling brine, boxes of fish and seafood (the lobsters waving feelers uncertainly) were arranged neatly. It was cold; the Governor shivered. Plucked fowl dangled in rows. Beyond them wild ducks and geese, still sadly feathered, were suspended in bunches, three ducks, two geese to a bunch. The Governor touched a mallard's breast as he passed; the down was strangely warm in this chilling place.

They crossed an empty space. The whole carcass of an animal hung from gray hooks curving through the tendons of its legs. It had been skinned and gutted but the head was intact and untouched. The shaggy hair drooped forward, the horns pointed at nothing. The glazed eyes absorbed the light, the tongue, clenched between dead teeth, protruded.

"Buffalo," cried the Governor. "Surely it's against the law to kill them?"

The old man ran his dark, heavily veined hand gloatingly over the bison's hump and down the shoulder. "Tasty. Very tasty."

"You can't do things like this," insisted the Governor.

"Ah," sighed the old man. "Boom boom."

Lampley came closer. There were no signs of the buffalo having been shot. Its throat was cut and dark blood had congealed around the jagged wound. The old man picked out several clots of dried blood and put them in his mouth, sucking appreciatively. He rubbed his cheek against the head of the animal. "Soft," he said. "See yourself."

The Governor drew back.

The old man stared contemptuously at him. "No wonder."

"How do I get out of here?" asked Lampley.

The old man gestured indifferently. "Try that way." He waved his arm.

Lampley turned. Either the

refrigerator had gotten colder or he was newly vulnerable to the chill. He shivered; hoarfrost crunched under his feet, the wall glistened with ice crystals. He realized he was not retracing his steps when he passed braces of partridges—or had he merely not noticed them before?—grouse, pheasants. He looked back; the old man was still nuzzling the bison head.

He came to a mound of snow and was puzzled, less at its presence than at its use and origin. Who would manufacture snow, and for what purpose? And if not manufactured it must have been brought a long way at great expense for it did not snow in this part of the state more than once in a dozen years.

But it was not a simple mound after all but an igloo, crudely constructed, as though by a child. Impulsively he got down on his knees and crawled through the entrance-tunnel until his head was inside. It was warm under the dome, warm and soothing and safe. He backed out quickly, frightened at the thought of becoming too content there, of not being able to leave its comfort.

The cold of the refrigerator was accentuated by the contrast; his breath came in steamy puffs. He hurried to a door opening from the inside. He leaned against the wall of a dark corridor and breathed deeply. The picture of the old man fondling the buffalo head was still before him. He felt his way slowly along the wall, and then he was in the lobby again. There was something wrong here: the room where they had eaten had been a half level higher.

There was no point in wondering over the layout of the hotel. He would retrieve his bag, get in the car and go on to his destination. He stumbled through the gloom, missing the stairs, and saw he was in front of an antique elevator, the doors open, the ancient basketwork cage an inch or two below the floor.

"Get in," invited the clerk, "I'll take you."

Lampley entered, panting a little, smoothing his tie with his palm. "Thank you."

The clerk pulled the grill shut; there was no door on the elevator itself. "Ninety-three million miles to the sun," he said. "We'd fry before we got there."

The Governor considered the idea. "Explode from lack of pressure, asphyxiate from lack of air first."

The clerk looked at him curiously. "We could shut our eyes and hold our breath, you know."

Lampley did not answer.

"All right." The clerk grasped the control lever. The cage fell with sickening velocity.

CHAPTER 2

LAMPLEY knew something had broken but his fear was not absolute. He bent his knees (go limp: drunks and babies were less liable to injury than

the stiffly erect); the drop would not be fatal, he might not even break a leg. How far to the basement? Twenty feet at most. If he just relaxed—or jumped to the top of the cage and clung to the fretwork?—he would not be hurt. He must not be hurt; the implications of the headlines would destroy him.

The elevator dived in darkness, far further than any conceivable excavation beneath the hotel. It fell through night, blacker and more terrifying than any moonless, starless reality. It plunged into total, unrelieved absence of light, a devastation to the senses, a mockery to the eyes.

Then, subtly, there was a difference. The blackness was still black but now it could be seen and valued. It was blackness, not blindness. Then increasingly there was a faint diminution of the darkness itself, and the shaft changed from sable to the deepest gray.

After they had fallen still further Lampley saw the shaft was lined with porcelain tiles, yellowed with neglect. Could it be they were no longer falling at all, just descending normally? To where?

They flashed past doors, cavernous rectangles in the shiny wall. Shiny? Yes, the tiles were brighter, cleaner, whiter. The cage slowed, came to a bouncing halt. The repressed fear surged through Lampley, making his feet and ankles weak and helpless. The clerk slid the door open smartly, with a sharp click.

"What's here?" asked the Governor, conscious of the inadequacy of the question.

"Odds," replied the clerk. "Odds. No ends to speak of but plenty of odds."

He half led, half pushed Lampley out of the elevator. They were in a great chamber, so far stretching that though it was adequately lit the defining walls were lost, far, far off. So close to each other that they almost touched, grand pianos with their lids thrown back and strings exposed, stood, rank after rank. From the ceiling long stalactites dripped on the pianos: plink pink, plink plink, plink plunk! A thousand pianotuners might have been at work simultaneously.

"Nobody here," said the clerk. "All right." He turned swiftly back into the elevator, slamming the door.

"Wait!" cried Lampley in panic. "Wait for me." He heard the softly whirring mechanism as the elevator started, leaving him alone.

Lampley pounded the door with his fists. He shouted for the clerk to come back, not to desert him. He kicked the door. He screamed. Plink plink, plink plink, plink plunk.

He could die down here. He could die down here and no one would ever know it. He dared not go away from the elevator shaft—he might never find it again. He dared not stay—the clerk might not return until he was

dead and the flesh rotted from his skeleton.

Plink plink. No, long before he died he would be raving mad. Plink plink. "Give us a tune at least," he pleaded. His voice produced no echo. No echo at all. Plink plunk.

Calm, almost ease, succeeded panic. He walked between the rows of pianos. They could not stretch to infinity, he reasoned, there must be an end to them somewhere. But reason also argued the pianos couldn't be here at all, there couldn't be seven or seventeen or seventy subbasements beneath the hotel. Once an impossibility happened there was no limit to the impossibilities to follow.

He had been six when Miss Brewster came to give him piano lessons. And is this our little Paderooski she asked so brightly. Do-do. C natural. Treble clef, base clef. Above the staff, below the staff. She smacked his hands when Mother wasn't looking. He kicked Miss Brewster's shins. After a while the lessons stopped.

A unicorn pranced out from between the pianos. His coat was white and sleek, his mane and tail shone like coal, his eyes were blue as sapphires. The long spiralling horn was pale gold, glistening bright. The Governor tried to approach him, to stroke the soft nose, to clutch the heavy mane. The unicorn stamped a nervous hoof and circled away, always barely out of reach. Lampley followed him down the long aisle between the pianos.

The unicorn looked back, his nostrils wide. Lampley put out his hand, almost touched him. The animal snorted, broke into a trot, a gallop. Its hooves pounded the hard floor: tata-rumpp, tata-rumpp, t-rump t-rump. The Governor ran too, shouting, calling. His lungs were sawed by jagged breaths, his heart burst through his ribs and left only a helpless, pounding pain behind. He wanted to stop, to give up, to faint; he kept on pursuing.

The unicorn paused, wary. He stamped a hoof, tossed his mane, pointed his horn. Lampley, gasping, was hardly able to totter forward. He took a step, two, leaned against the nearest piano. Plink, plink, plink, plink, plink plunk. The unicorn suddenly ran his horn into one of the instruments, withdrawing it to leave a splintered hole in the wood. A man came out of the shadows with a sledgehammer over his shoulder. He was a dwarf, naked to the waist, with writhing biceps, wearing a grease-matted brimless cap over thick curly hair. The growth on his chest curled also, an obscene felt. He swung the hammer down on the piano, smashing in the top, caving in one of the legs.

"What are you doing?" demanded Lampley before he realized he didn't care what the man was doing. "How do you get out of here?" he amended.

The dwarf went on methodi-

cally wrecking the piano. The unicorn disappeared, the sound of its hooves growing fainter and fainter. Lampley approached the dwarf, ready to clutch his shoulder, to extort a way out. He was afraid. Afraid of the blunt, lethal hammer, afraid of the strength and rage which had reduced the piano to junk. Afraid of the answer to his question. Afraid there might be no answer.

The dwarf slung the maul back on his shoulder and walked away. The Governor wept. There was no strength in his arms or legs. He fell down and crawled weakly forward, sobbing and retching, the sour taste of vomit in his mouth. Plink plink, plink plink, plink plunk. Destruction of the offending piano made not the slightest difference in the cacophony.

The weight of all the floors above him, the overwhelmingly massive structure of steel and stone reaching to the surface, bowed him down in lonely, strangling terror. What mind, what mathematical faculty could estimate the thousands, the hundreds of thousands, the millions of crushing tons overhead, malign, implacable, waiting? He closed his eyes, moved his arms and legs convulsively. It was more than he could bear.

He was at the elevator again. If he could pry the door open perhaps he could climb the cables or brace himself between the rails on which the counterweights slid and inch his way upward. Or fall to destruction. He knew he could never get the door open. He was condemned to stay amid the pianos. He sobbed hopelessly.

Without belief he heard the sound of the machinery and the tip-tip-tip of the halting car. It was the young girl who opened the door and helped him in. She took a handkerchief, soft as fog, delicate as a petal, smelling of herself, and wiped his tears. She held his head between her breasts and he breathed in the scent of her untouched body. She pressed his wrists with her fingers. She put her hands under his arms and guided him against the wall of the cage.

"Thank you," he cried. "Oh thank you, thank you." He felt he was about to weep again, tears of shame and weakness. He held her tightly to reassure himself of the reality of the rescue, greedy for her gentle soothing. "Why did he do it? Tell me, why did he leave me down here?"

"Oh," she said, as though disappointed. "You want answers."

He shrank from her disapproval. "No, no. Please. I'm satisfied to be out of there."

She shut the door. The elevator shot upward, past the glistening white tiles, past the yellow ones, past the area of light. It rose—more slowly it seemed—through the darkness. The creak of machinery increased, as though illumination were a lubricant and the deprived dark full of grit.

His heart was full of reverence and gratitude for her rescue, for her purity. He was bowed down by the simple fact of being alone with her in the cage. They passed the open grillwork of the first floor and ascended at snails' pace—no doubt now—to the second. She stopped the car, and taking his hand, led him out. He was thankful beyond counting when she took him to the bedroom, shutting the door behind them, and helped him out of his jacket. She wet a towel in the pitcher and bathed his face.

"You are very lovely," he said humbly. "As lovely as you are kind."

She took the paper cap from his head and smoothed his hair. If he had been humble, now he was humilated beyond endurance. All that suffering, all that torture and anguish—with an absurd gaud perched atop him. It was beyond bearing. Fear and gratitude had not deprived him of all final dignity; the picture of the tissue paper cap jaunty upon him was too ridiculous for contemplation.

She smiled at him, magically healing his pride. Her mouth was a flower cut in soft pink stone. Her mouth was a velvet hope. Her mouth was red satin. She bent and touched him with it. He held his breath, felt himself tremble and die.

He kissed her, delicately, very delicately at first, savoring the soft, soft lips. He was dedicated to keeping her undefiled. He put his arms around her, touched his tongue-tip to her eyelids, her ears. He found her mouth again, pressed it tenderly. Then fiercely, lustfully, devouringly. She did not draw back. He lifted her shirt, intoxicating himself upon her small, perfect breasts.

"You will not hurt me?" she pleaded. "No man has been with me before."

He swore to himself he would not hurt her; it was not in him to be anything but loving. He would be wise, kind, compassionate; he would sacrifice his burning lust to her timidity. He would deflower her without rage.

He seized her, and seeing panic struggling against the consent in her eyes, ravished her brutally, violated her without thought of anything but his own triumph. Crying and reproaching himself, he begged her forgiveness. When she gave it, so readily, so understandingly, he repeated the act as heedlessly.

Remorse-stricken, he pressed his face against her knees, smoothed her long hair, kissed her temples, touched her body pleadingly. She smiled up at him, wound her arms around his so that their hands came together, palm to palm.

His penitence dissolved slowly in her grace. He remembered the creature downstairs—his son. "Are you her daughter?" he asked harshly.

She seemed to know whom he meant. "She is my sister."

"And the clerk?"

"The clerk?" She shook her head in incomprehension. She shut her eyes, breathing evenly.

Without disengaging himself from her he raised his head to look around. This was not his room. The furniture was similar, but the washstand was where the highboy had been, the highboy in the bureau's place. And the figures under the glass bell, the two dressed in black and white, were not the wedding couple but two duelists, crossing swords. Their faces were alike: father and son, older and younger brother, the same man at different periods. The older had got under the younger's guard and was pressing his advantage.

He should have phoned Mattie . . . no, Mattie was dead, the doctor shaking his enlightened head. The prognosis is always unfavorable unless we get it early . . . vulnerable womb . . . He should have phoned Marvin. It had been irresponsible of him to take this trip all by himself, impulsively, secretively, as though he were hiding something—he who could afford to have nothing to hide. And it had been doubly foolish to take this unusual, little-traveled route, to stop on whim at this obscure place.

He put his head down next to the girl's, feeling the comfort of her flesh against his body. He was not sleepy, no longer tired. She had refreshed and renewed him. He raised his head to look at her loveliness again.

The long hair was lusterless, streaked with gray. The smooth, fresh cheeks had relaxed into fatty lumps, coarse and raddled. The slack mouth turned downward, the flesh of her throat was loose and creepy. He pulled back in horror and saw that the tight, round breasts were long and flaccid, the flat belly soft and puffy, the slender arms and legs heavy and mottled.

Her eyes opened and looked dully into his. "What did you expect?" she asked.

He stood trembling by the side of the bed. "Only a little while ago . . ."

Her lips parted to show yellow teeth with gaps between. "There is no time here," she said and went back to sleep.

He did not look at her again, equally fearful of confirming or denying. Instead he picked up her clothes and scrutinized them as though they would reveal the truth. They were only the remembered white shirt and dark skirt, the small, narrow sandals, the flimsy scrap of underwear. By sight and scent they belonged to the girl who had brought him here, not to the woman on the bed.

He dressed with his back to her. The paper cap was on the floor where she had dropped it; he did not pick it up. He tiptoed out, avoiding noise, though the woman gave no sign of waking. He searched for his own room but none of the doors he

opened showed the identifying arrangement of furniture or the wax figures of the wedding couple. He could not have confused the floor: he had climbed one flight from the lobby and the girl had taken the elevator only the same distance. If the elevator and the stairs were on different sides of the hotel . . . ? That would account for the muddle.

The hall turned a corner. Instead of more doors it was blocked to its full width by a stairway. He took it in preference to retracing his steps; logically there would be a matching one back to the second floor further along.

Now the carpet under his feet was thick and soft instead of thin and sleazy. Strong bright light shone down from the floor above, showing walls panelled in pale wood, clean and elegant. It was a fleeting puzzle that this stairway should contrast so strongly—should have been preserved so carefully—with the rest of the hotel.

The sound of many voices, the clatter and movement of people came to him distantly. He reached the top. The third floor was decorated in pinks and grays: pink walls and ceiling, gray carpets, doors and woodwork. Couches and sofas occupied the wall-space not cut by doors. On the nearest one was sprawled an oversize ragdoll onto which pendulous blue breasts had been carelessly sewn.

The hall was a large quadrangle with a square well in the center, guarded by a heavy wrought iron railing. The Governor rested his arms on the rail and gazed down at a concourse thronged with people. Women in sequined evening gowns, men in gaudy uniforms, gathered in knots, moved briskly, or sat idly on chairs and benches. A few of the women wore vivid strips of silk around their thighs or as skirts, the exposed parts of their bodies tattooed in blues and reds. A bearded man with shaggy hair had the skin of an animal caught over one shoulder. He saw a girl in hoopskirts, another in ruff and farthingale, but most wore the "formals" of his young manhood.

He had no feeling that this was a masquerade, a costume party: all wore their clothes with the assurance of habit, without self-consciousness of interest in the garb of others. Even at this distance he recognized a man in the green uniform of the United States Dragoons, obsolete since the 1840's, another in the white greatcoat of royal France. A Californio, silver pesoed trousers and all, talked earnestly with his companion in the dropped-waist sack of the Coolidge era while a hobble-skirted eavesdropper hovered close.

The throng was so tightly pressed together that Lampley did not at first make out the

rococo fountain in the center. A sudden movement, a concerted parting, revealed its marble nymphs and cherubs spouting water in scatalogical attitudes. A sailor, wearing the characteristic British dickey, climbed to embrace one of the statues. He fell into the basin and was pulled out by an Attic shepherdess.

The Governor longed to join them, to dissolve his desires and disappointments in their gaiety and laughter. He knew there was no hope of happiness with them, as he knew there was no way for him to get down to them, but the knowledge did not quench his yearning.

He turned away and began circling the quadrangle. The doors on his right were all shut, no sound came from behind them. They were not consecutively numbered, nor in any conceivable order, not even in the same numerical system. 3103 was followed by 44, the next was XIX, then 900, 211, CCCV. One was marked with egg-shaped figures which he took to be possibly Mayan. It was slightly ajar. He pushed it open.

It was a schoolroom. Disciplined desks marched side-by-side toward the teacher's raised podium hemmed in by blackboards gray with hastily erased chalk. Only the four seats in front were occupied. He tiptoed forward and slid into the second row. The teacher was a caricature Chinese mandarin with queue, emerald-buttoned skullcap, gold fingernail guards, tortoiseshell spectacles, brocaded robe.

"You have brought your homework?" he inquired, peering severely over the top of his spectacles.

"No sir," answered Lampley, getting up again.

"For what purpose does the honorable delegate arise?" mocked the teacher.

Lampley felt himself blushing. "I—I thought it was customary."

"All is custom as Herodotus said," remarked the teacher. "Herodotus was a barbarian," he explained genially to the class. "Sit down."

In front of Lampley sat a child with long blonde pigtails, one with a pink, the other with a white bow. She read aloud, "See little Almon. Little Almon lives with his mother and his uncle. Almon has the cat. Almon wants to play with the cat. The cat—"

"Quite enough," said the teacher. "Meditate."

The pupil next to the girl was the idiot. On the other side of the aisle were a boy of twelve and a girl a little older. When the girl turned her head Lampley saw her face was heavily bandaged. The Governor lifted the top of his desk and took out a book. It had no covers, the pages were torn and thumbed.

In the fifth year of the present reign, (he read) there appeared at court a magician from the East who claimed alchemin-

ical learning to such a degree he was able to divine secret thoughts. A demonstration being required of him, he demanded that divers ladies-in-waiting who . . .

The Governor turned the page. The next leaf was written in runes. He riffled swiftly through the book. None of the rest of it was in the Latin alphabet. He turned back to the page he had read. The letters were all jumbled together, KJDRBWLSAYPZUQMXRQOTVBFLAIH, so that they made no sense. He held up his hand. The teacher pulled down his spectacles nearly to the end of his nose.

"No one is excused here," he announced. "Your attention, please."

Lampley let his hand fall. The children rustled and squirmed.

"I have here a button," said the teacher. "It is not a true button but a sort of courtesy button. It is in fact a mere plug, connected by the demon of electricity to an ingenious apparatus located in the antipodes of the Flowery, Middle or Celestial Kingdom. By pressing this button I can cause the instant and painless demise of an anonymous foreign devil. I repeat, the operation will cause the big-nosed one no distress at all; he will know nothing. By pushing the button I destroy him; also I bring untold happiness to all the sons of Han, whose ricebowls will then be full, whose fields, wives and concubines will be fertile, whose lords and taxgatherers will become unbelievably merciful. My problem: shall I press the button?"

He leaned back triumphantly in his chair and took from a desk drawer a bowl and chopsticks. Steam ascended from the bowl as the teacher deftly picked out long strings of noodles and sucked them into his mouth. Lampley could smell the sharp odor of the soup in the bowl. The class was silent while the teacher ate.

He put down the bowl and laid the chopsticks across it. "It is an ethical problem, you understand. Luckily, since I am unfitted for manual tasks—" he help up his fingernails for them to see "—I am absolved from considering it. I shall never have to press the button or not press the button."

Lampley raised his hand again.

"I told you no one is excused here," said the teacher.

"I was young," protested Lampley.

The teacher turned away disgustedly. He wrote on the blackboard in angular, unconnected letters, "Death knows no youth."

The pupils in the front row all turned around to stare at the Governor. The face of his son was set in a horrid grimace, teeth showing, eyes watering gummy white in the corners.

"She was ambitious for me. It seemed best at the time," muttered Lampley.

They all laughed together,

snarling like dogs. Lampley hurled the book at them. The pages fluttered as it fell with a thud on the floor. The teacher wrote on the board in his singular script, Ambition, Doubt, Subservience, Conformity, Treachery, Heat, Bravery, Murder, Hope, Trifles, Treasure, Pity, Shame, Confession, Humility, Procreation, Final. "No alternatives!" he shouted.

CHAPTER 3

THE Governor stumbled into the aisle and ran. Before the door a coffin rested on trestles. Tall candles burned at the head and foot. He did not have to look in to know it was Mattie or that beside her was the child she had never borne. He fell to his knees and crawled under the coffin. The trestles lowered; he had to squirm forward flat on his stomach to get clear of the casket. He got up and through the door, slamming it behind him.

The lights were bright as before but the people below had all disappeared. The fountain was dry; dust and lichen mottled the marble figures. Beneath the railing hung tattered battle-flags, dulled, tarnished, with great rips and tears. The floor, which he saw had been paved with great tile slabs, was broken and humped. Pale, sickly weeds thrust through the cracks. A sickening stench rose to make him gasp and turn away.

He had been seeking a stairway back to the second floor. He followed the quadrangle, came upon an unexpected hall between two rooms. At the end of the hall a square chamber was flooded with brilliance from a skylight. A legless man, many-chinned, frog-eyed, sat in a wheelchair. Across his monstrous chest a row of medals glittered. "Come in, come in," he roared jovially. "Any friend of nobody's a friend of mine."

"Can you tell me—" began the Governor.

"My boy," burst in the legless man, "if you want telling, I'm your pigeon; if I can't tell you no one can. I've shot cassowaries and peccarries, hunted dolphin and penguin, searched the seven seas for albatross and Charlie Ross. Oh the yarns I could spin about sin and tin and gin, about rounding the Horn in an August morn or lying becalmed in the horse latitudes with a cargo of bridles and harnesses. I've whaled off South Georgia, been jailed by Nova Zembla, failed on Easter Island, entailed in the West Indies. I'm a rip-roarer, a snip-snorter, a razzle-dazzle hearty-ho."

"You were a seaman?" asked the Governor politely.

"A seaman, v-d man, hard-a-lee man, a demon," sang the sailor. "Blast and damn me, I've fathered six hundred bastards in all colors—white don't count, naturally—from Chile to Chihili, from Timbuctoo to Kalamazoo. Have a drink."

The Governor looked around. On a long bar were ranged

dozens of bottles, most of them empty. He picked up the nearest full one. It was cold, green, opened, and full of beer. He put it to his lips, tilted it, realized his throat had been dry, parched. "Thanks," he muttered, taking it away reluctantly.

"Ah," said the cripple, "you should know the thanks I've had." He indicated his medals carelessly. "Decorated, cited, saluted, handshook, kissed on both cheeks. I've been thanked in Java and Ungava, in the Hebrides and the Celebes, in Tripoli and Trincomalee, in Lombok and Vladivostock. Have another drink."

"Thanks," repeated Lampley.

"Pleasure," responded the cripple. "Never drink alone, sleep alone, die alone. You haven't been here before?"

Lampley was puzzled how to answer. "Yes and no," he said at last.

The other nodded approvingly, tossed a ball into the air and caught it. "Caution. Many a poor sailor's been drowned dead because the captain or the mate yessed when he should have noed. Yes-and-no's a snug berth in a landlocked harbor."

"I only meant . . ."

The man had another ball in the air now. "The meaning of meaning. Semantics—that's a pun. Think you'll get the nomination?"

"It's touch and go," confessed the Governor. "I'm hoping."

The sailor was juggling three balls. He didn't look at them, just kept catching and tossing in rhythm. "Touch and go. Skill and chance," he said.

"That's right," agreed Lampley, drinking again.

"Comfortable?"

"Yes, thanks."

"Always said they should have put steam heat in here."

"But it's quite warm."

"Just wait till it snows. Drifts high as the roof, drifts high as the trees, drifts high as mountains. Buried in snow, white on top, green under the light here. A wonder we don't smother."

"Oh no," said the Governor, recalling the igloo in the refrigerator. "It's porous or something. The air comes through."

The juggler had seven balls and three oranges in the air. He added two empty bottles. "Nothing comes through. The outside never knows the inside, the inside's locked away from the outside."

"But it's always possible to break through," argued the Governor.

The juggler's arms were knotted muscles of skill. He had many bottles in the air besides the oranges and balls. "No man knows his fellow."

"Knowing and communicating are two different things."

"Yes and no," said the juggler judiciously. "You know a woman; do you . . . ?"

"Yes," insisted the Governor defiantly.

Still more bottles were tossed and caught. "You think so," said

the juggler. "What happens when you fail?"

All the bottles were in play now. Deftly the juggler wriggled to the floor and added his wheelchair. "We fail yet nothing falls: the supremacy of perpetual motion. Try the fourth floor."

"There isn't any fourth floor," said Lampley.

"That's right. Try it."

Still juggling the balls, oranges, bottles and chair, the legless man threw himself into the air and joined the circle of whirling objects. The Governor left, went through the passageway again to the quadrangle and looked over the railing. The fountain was gone. Goats nibbled at young trees growing through the obscured tiles. A man rode a pony listlessly and disappeared out of sight. A yellow wildcat prowled around, pausing to hiss menacingly at the goats. Lampley walked past closed doors, found himself in front of the elevator. He hadn't seen it—then it was there.

"Down," announced the clerk.

"I don't want . . ." began Lampley doubtfully.

"Going down," repeated the clerk firmly. "There's no up from here."

"How do all these people live?" asked the Governor. "The soldiers, the women, the schoolmaster, the juggler?"

The clerk shrugged. "No differently than anyone else. Osmosis. Symbiosis. Ventriloquism. Saprophytism. Necrophilism. The usual ways."

"Imagination? Illusion? Hallucination? Mirage?"

"We are what we are," said the clerk. "Can you say as much? Going down."

"I want to know," persisted Lampley.

"Don't we all? What's the use?"

The Governor temporized. "Will you let me off at my floor?"

"Do you know which it is?"

The Governor could not answer. He moved away from the elevator. There was a hole in the carpet going deep into the floor. In the hole was a heap of pennies, new-minted, bright coppery orange. He picked up a handful and sifted them through his fingers. None of them seemed to be dated, all had an eagle on one side and a scale on the other. A lump of untreated metal, hedgehog sharp, pricked his flesh. He dropped the pennies and put his hand to his mouth to suck the wound.

"Going down," the clerk called warningly.

Lampley said, "I only want—"

The clerk slapped his knee, doubling with laughter. He did a little dance, his hands holding his abdomen. "Only!" he screamed between gusts of mirth. "Only! That's all. He only wants."

With what dignity he had left the Governor entered the elevator. The clerk, abruptly sober-faced, straightened up and shut the door. The openwork of the

cage was now interwoven with rattan in which trailing fronds of greenery were stuck. Birds of somber hue—gray, black, slate, dark blue—climbed with silent intensity over the basketry, hung beak down from the roof, pecked quietly at the green. "Down."

Lampley held his breath, sucked in his stomach. But there was no sudden drop. The elevator glided with dignity past the second floor, the dim lobby without acceleration, into the dark depths. He strained his eyes for the first sign of light, of the tiled walls. Only the subtle sensations of descent told him they were not stopped, rigid, just below the first floor.

The clerk said, "The teacher has a list of all those who cheated."

"It must be long."

"It's not as long as the guilty think, nor as short as the innocent believe."

"A youthful indiscretion," said the Governor lightly.

"The piano-smasher knows all about false references."

"Everyone does it," said the Governor. "You have to, to get a job."

"The juggler has suffered from the effects of kicked-back commissions."

"The custom is old. Who was I to change it?"

"The people in the concourse voted to send a man to the legislature who promised to do certain things."

"Campaign oratory," said the Governor.

"The girl—"

"Stop," ordered the Governor. "Are you taking it on yourself to punish sins?"

"Ah," said the clerk. "You think absolution should be automatic, instant and painless?"

Lampley thought, if I had a heavy wrench or a knife or a gun I could kill him and no one would know. His fingers tingled, his knees ached. He tried to speak casually, to stop any further words the clerk might utter. As he sought for some innocuous topic he saw the walls lighten, recognized the yellowed tiles.

The clerk bent over the control lever as though in prayer, the birds were all still and unmoving. Passing the shining white tiles Lampley strained to catch the faint sound of the pianos. He could not be sure he heard it, still less that he hadn't. The walls of the shaft gradually became a pale green, deepening into skyblue so natural they seemed to expand outward.

Smoothly the elevator tilted at an angle just steep enough to force him to put one foot on the side of the cage in order to stay upright. The clerk, clinging to the lever, had no trouble. They slid down the incline at moderate speed. The tiled walls fell away; they were traveling on a sort of funicular diagonally through the floors of a vast department store. Counters of chinaware were set parallel and perpen-

dicular, the cups and dishes cunningly tilted to catch the light: experimental, modern, conventional, traditional, all the familiar patterns including sets and sets of blue willoware. Some of the pieces were so curiously shaped it was impossible to guess their use: platters with humps in their centers, cups pierced with holes, plates shaped like partly open bivalves, cones, spheres and pyramids with handles but no apparent openings.

They passed a millinery department where women were trying on feathered helmets, fur busbies, brass-and-leather shakos, woolen balaclavas, wide-brimmed straws, tight-fitting caps of interwoven fresh flowers. Lampley saw they were all using long hatpins, jamming them recklessly through the headgear under consideration. The discarded hats were not put back in stock but thrown into large wastebaskets.

The spaces between floors were open, revealing the heavy steel girders with which they were braced. Through the openings in the girders lean dogs chased scurrying rats, snakes twined themselves, bats hung upside-down, land-crabs scuttled, stopping only to turn their eye-stalks balefully toward the elevator.

On another floor lined with mirrors that shot their dazzle into his eyes like a volley of arrows, more women pulled and tugged girdles over obstinate hips with concentrated effort, bending reverently over unfolded brassieres to match the arbitrary cups against overflowing breasts, holding up corsets which coldly mocked. Breech-clouted boys waved huge fans, stirring the piles of garments on the tables.

The elevator continued downward. Shoppers strolled by book counters with untempted glances, heading for the infants' wear to examine tiny shirts, diapers, kimonos, blankets, fingering the embroidery, pursing lips, smiling, shaking their heads. They stood abstractedly before bright prints, sat stiffly on padded chairs, thumped mattresses, fiddled with gifts and notions.

On a lower floor overhead lights glared down on roulette tables, card games where the players squinted suspiciously over their hands, blankets on which dice-throwers were shooting craps. The walls were covered with posters: LAMPLEY FOR SUPERVISOR; A VOTE FOR LAMPLEY IS A VOTE FOR YOU! The Governor was puzzled; he had never run for that office.

The walls closed in again, the elevator tilted further, so that the Governor was sitting on the side of the cage. It picked up speed now, whizzing along, rounding banked curves, allowing momentary glimpses of open spaces like railroad stations. "How far are you going?" Lampley asked.

"Not far," said the clerk, coming out of his lethargy. "We're almost there."

"Where?"

"There. Where else?"

They rounded another curve and shot down a grade. A bird near the Governor ruffled its feathers sleepily. "I just want to get back."

"Who doesn't?" demanded the clerk harshly.

The walls of the shaft—it was a tunnel now—were transparent. There was water pressing against them, a powerful stream, judging by the exertions of the fish swimming against it. They ran a long way through the river—Lampley was sure it was a river from occasional sight of a far-off, muddy bank—and then the glass walls showed only earth, with the roots of trees reaching down and piling up, baffled, against them.

The walls became opaque, then vanished. They were running down the side of a mountain covered with patches of snow. In places the snow was piled in great drifts, carved by winds into tortured peaks; elsewhere it lay in thin ruffled streaks and ovals. Out of these shallow patches dark bushes sprang bearing red and yellow fruit. The bare spaces between the snow were of moist, eroded earth where small brown plants grew spikil.

The Governor could not see the sky nor the roof of the cavern—if they were in some sort of cavern—only the ridges and spurs of the mountain slope. There were scars on the rugged ground as from landslides, great bites where the drop was sheer and jagged rocks stood out like drifting teeth, but none of the slips could have been recent for the mounds at their feet were firm-looking and grassy. They rounded still another curve and the elevator slowed to a stop.

The clerk, who had clung protectively to the controls, straightened up and looked inquiringly over his shoulder. Lampley stared back at him. "All out," said the clerk, waving his hands. The birds fluttered, cawed and shrieked, flying through the open door with an angry whir of wings. They wheeled in uncertain circles and then made off in small, separate flights. "All out," he repeated.

"I don't want to get out," said Lampley. "There's nothing for me here."

"Are you sure?" asked the clerk.

"I . . ." Lampley paused, uncertain.

"You see?" demanded the clerk triumphantly.

Resigned, the Governor made his way out. The clerk smiled at him, not unfriendly, and Lampley almost begged him not to leave, not to abandon him but to take him back. If the right words came to his tongue, if the earnest feeling projected them into sound, he was sure he would not be deserted. Then the elevator started slowly backing, gathering speed as it went, running silently, shrinking in size until it was merely a small speck on

the side of the slope. Only the terminal bumpers and the greasy track on which it had run remained.

CHAPTER 4

LAMPLEY looked about him. Mountains shut off every horizon; the near ones sharp, serrated, detailed, those far-off hazy, soft and rounded. It was impossible to make out the character of the more remote, but those on either side gradually melted into foothills with twisting streams appearing from between shoulders and disappearing again behind ridges. The light overhead, nebulous, indefinite, emanated from no discernible body. It had the quality of sunlight filtered through thin clouds, soothing to the eye as the balmy air was pleasant to the skin. He felt refreshed.

Beneath his feet a fanshaped plateau canted downward until it merged with a mighty plain far off, a plain enclosing a vast lake. A broad river meandered across the plateau and continued, as near as he could tell, on the plain below. Dense blue-green grass grew lushly, heavily powdered with yellow, white, and purple violets, dandelions, daisies, buttercups and tiny pale blue flowers. The Governor took off his shoes and socks, stuffing the socks into the shoes and knotting the laces together. He slung them over his shoulder. The grass felt electric, rejuvenating his feet as he trod on it.

A black fox crossed his path and paused to stare over his sharp nose before continuing on. A squirrel balanced its body erect for a swift, curious scrutiny before it was off with a flick of its tail. Other small animals bounded past him, none seemed afraid. He thought he saw deer in the distance, and a bear, but he was not sure.

He came to a bank of the river and followed it down. He could see now it was joined by a number of tributaries before it emptied into the blue, unruffled lake. Other rivers foamed down the more rugged mountains on each side of the plain, all made their way to the lake which seemed to have an island in it, a long way from shore.

When he reached a confluence with one of the branches he hesitated and followed the smaller stream back until he came to a place where it was crossed by high, flat-topped steppingstones nosed into the splashing and spuming water. He tested the rocks gingerly, but they were firm, and though wet, not slippery. Each time his progress was stopped by such a meeting he found a similar set of stones not far away.

Nearing the lake he saw its color was a warm blue, with violet tones. There was no hint of paleness in it; it was majestic, assured, unique. He quickened his pace. The island assumed more definite shape. It was large

and irregular, with capes and promontories thrusting out into the lake. Heavily wooded, willows came down to the shore, behind them oaks and maples spread red and yellow leaves. Still further back the blue tips of firs pointed above.

He came to the shore, a rocky beach, where the water lay perfectly still over and between round, mossy stones. He waded in; the water was delightfully cool without a suggestion of coldness. He reached down and laved his face with it. When he straightened up he saw a rowboat a little further out, unanchored, its bow resting on the rocks, its stern hardly moving. The boat was the color of the lake save for a silvery trim and silvery oars were neatly shipped in bright metal rowlocks.

The Governor made his way carefully to the boat, freeing it from the rocks. He climbed in, laid his shoes in the stern, began rowing toward the island. After a few strokes he paused and looked upward. The haze was evidently permanent, which might somehow account for the unvarying, equable climate. He shipped the oars and allowed the boat to drift. A fish jumped in the water and splashed a widening circle. A bird, white and gold with carmine beak, flew overhead. Everything was serene.

There was no wind but there seemed to be a weak current, for the boat drifted very slowly, equidistant between the shore and the island. The features he had noticed before became more differentiated; he noted a number of landspits, small coves, moonshaped beaches. The woods did not everywhere come right down to the water; in places they retreated to make room for soft green meadows. He picked up the oars and rowed a long distance before coming even with a particularly inviting cove.

He debated whether or not there might be a still more desirable one farther along. The temptation to refuse decision was great. It was with a distinct effort that he turned the bow and ran the boat ashore.

The sands were fine and soft and golden, darkening a short way from the lake into a pale brown border between the beach and the greensward. He stepped out of the boat and hauled it clear of the water. Impulsively he took off his clothes and put them with his shoes. He rolled on the grass like a boy or a horse. The grass was soft as down, yet springy and lithe beneath his body. He lay prone, snuffing in the smell of the bruised stems. He stretched out his hands to reach into a patch of clover with the idle thought that one of them might be four-leaved. He saw with horror he was reaching with the reddish, vestigial, unteachable hands on foreshortened arms of his son.

He felt sweat on his forehead as he shivered in terror. He

jumped up and ran for the boat, slipping and sliding on the crushed grass. He lay trembling, eyes shut. Fearfully he drew his hands toward him and opened his eyes. These were his own hands, familiar, middle-aged and freckled, normally colored, still fairly smooth despite the raised veins, still cunning to hold and twist and manipulate. His own hands, attached to his own arms. Shaken, he sighed in shuddering relief.

He walked slowly over the grass toward the interior of the island. Under the nearest trees —larch, beech, hickory—wild strawberries grew thickly. He picked quantities of the elusive fruit, crushing it with his tongue against the roof of his mouth, enjoying its sweetness, allowing the juice to trickle slowly, deliciously down his throat. He had not tasted wild strawberries since the day he and Mattie decided to get married (No children till we can give them the things they should have).

The trees were well spaced, letting the light enter freely between them. There was no young growth, no saplings; all the trees were full grown and healthy, with no sign of deadfalls or rotted logs. Only, far apart, raspberry canes bearing their garnet, black, white or green thimbles.

The trees didn't thin, they stopped abruptly. Ahead was a natural clearing; in the center of the clearing a jungle growth of stalks and vines rose in a high and inextricably tangled mound. Lampley advanced, irresistably attracted. He tried to part the interwoven stems but they refused to give. On the ground were flat stones, some with sharp edges. He picked up a fair-sized one and went back to the woods. With some trouble he used it to saw off an oak branch.

He shaped the club to the right heft and bound the stone to it with vines. He was dubious of its strength and his doubts proved justified when, after hacking through some of the growth, the head came loose. With new patience he reaffixed it and continued to cut away. His arms began to ache; short, blinding flashes darted behind his eyes. He persisted; there was no reason, no goal—he was simply impelled to clear his way into whatever lay hidden by the tangle.

After refitting his crude ax again and again, he tore away the loosened vines to reveal a white stone column, tapered slightly at base and capital, its smooth sides spotted with the marks of the sucking disks and clinging tendrils he had torn free. Beyond the column he was faced by an enclosed, roofed rectangle. In this dim area no vines grew except the sickly, inhibited, baffled ends whose invading thrust had faltered in complete discouragement. Doubling back, they had interwoven in their attempt to return to the light, but they had not been able to make a curtain impervious enough to

prevent him seeing the backs of the other pillars and the high roof they supported.

He shouldered his way in and peered through the dusk to make out a table flanked by two wide couches. Both table and couches were of the same stone as the columns—marble, Lampley guessed—the couches piled with soft furs. He took a tentative step forward.

Something glinted dully on the table, it was a bronze ax. He picked it up, balanced it, tried the edge with his thumb. It was reasonably sharp and the handle was firmly fitted into the head.

With mounting enthusiasm he attacked the vines from the rear, chopping and slicing, confident in this fine tool. Triumphantly he cleared the space between two pillars, dragged the cut growth clear, returned to his task. He freed another pillar, opened another space, dragged more vines away.

Now the interior was lucid enough to show the floor as one large mosaic of gleaming stones. The picture they composed was of a central fire, the flames red, blue and yellow, surrounded by smaller, less brilliant fires. On the outer edge animals turned their heads toward the warmth: horses, oxen, elephants, lynx, hippopotami, wolves, lions, zebras, elk.

He resumed his work, finished clearing one of the long sides and pulling down the severed branches from the roof before stopping again. Backing away to the trees he saw the building was so simple in design, so artfully proportioned, that it might have grown in this spot. The low pitched roof was copper, untarnished, like the new-minted pennies he had picked up in the hotel.

There was almost full visibility inside the little temple now; on impulse he hacked holes in the ivy on the other three sides for crude windows. The fresh light illuminated the ceiling, intricately painted in abstract designs with colors as bright as those of the mosaic. The table and couches were the only furniture, but on the floor, neatly laid out against columns, was a variety of fishing equipment.

He picked up a rod and held it out. It was limber, fitted with silk line and a dry fly. A searching vine-tip had tried to loop around the reel; he disentangled it. Carrying the rod, he left the temple and sauntered into the woods. There were no paths, no need of any beneath the widely spaced trees, yet he seemed to be following a definite avenue, broad and almost straight. Despite his nakedness and recent exertions he felt no chill in the shade; there was no tiredness in his muscles nor discomfort from the ground under his feet.

He passed natural clearings where saplings had not encroached upon the low-growing plants he recognized as edible, though clearly uncultivated.

There were peas and beans of strange species, large and succulent, spattered with rainbow tints, purple melons, green cucumbers, golden-yellow leeks and onions as well as unfamiliar shrubs with broad green leaves and many kinds of flowers.

In a much larger clearing there was a pool of the same deep blue as the lake, roughly oval and perhaps twice the size of the little temple. At one end rushes grew tall, at the other, lotus offered their heavy flowers haughtily upward. The rest of the pool was covered with water-lilies and lilypads on which there was constant movement.

He thought they must be teeming with waterbeetles or very small frogs; when he squatted at the water's edge he discovered the figures to be tiny men and women leaping and frolicking on the moss, rolling smooth pebbles tall as themselves, swimming out to the pads, climbing the lilies and diving from them, sporting in the water, showing no signs of alarm at his presence.

He lay down flat for a closer look. Some wore loincloths or loose robes, most did not. Their graceful movements accented their strength and endurance; they performed feats easily, which, if done in proportion by any full-sized man would have exhausted him quickly, yet these went from one game to another without flagging. They moved so swiftly it was hard to estimate their number; he thought there might be fifty of them here. He had no way of knowing if this was all of them or whether those in sight constituted a part of their number, with the rest engaged, perhaps, in less active pursuits.

As he became accustomed enough to tell them apart he saw there were no children among them. Lampley could understand why they should segregate their young, for some of their amusements were startling even to a worldly adult; however the simpler variations suggested that they did perpetuate themselves in the customary way. Except when forced by circumstance to take a position on obscene literature, sex-offences or uncoventional behavior, Lampley was morally relaxed; he viewed their recreation with the detached interest of an anthropologist, the appreciation of an aesthete, the envy of a man past his youth. He remained silent and watched for quite some time.

He noticed one female wandering apart from the rest, neither joining the others nor being sought by them. He thought there was dejection or despondency in the set of her shoulders, in the aimless way she placed one slender leg before the other or clasped her hands behind her neck. All of the tiny people were exquisite, but she, because of her repose and aloofness, seemed even more beautiful than the others. Without quite intending to, he reached

out his free hand and lifted her close to his face.

She gave no sign of surprise or fear, but stared back into his eyes whose irises were the size of her head. He marveled at the fineness of her features, the flowing lines of her body, the gracefulness of her arms and legs, the regal carriage of her head. Her loveliness was poignant and perfect. He could not take his eyes from her.

It was impossible for him to put her down again, to part from her, to walk away as though he had not touched and held her. Guiltily, furtively, he carried her back to the temple, holding her against his chest, fearful that the beating of his heart must be a frightening thunder in her ears. He told himself he would not keep her long; before she was missed he would take her back.

He placed her on the table and sat on the couch admiring her. The diminutive face was haughty and sullen but in no way distressed. Her dark hair was piled on top of her head, falling with seeming artlessness to her shoulders, her breasts were high and taut—round, defiant shields—her thighs long and sleek. Even allowing for the difficulty of discerning blemish in so small a being, the glowing color, pale yet warm, the smooth hands and feet, the clustered body hair, all spoke of such flawlessness that he had to control his fingers lest they close in upon her to squeeze out the essence of beauty.

He whispered, "Do you hear me? Can you understand me?"

She moved her head slightly aside. Whether from outrage, annoyance or indifference he could not tell. He did not think it was incomprehension. When he repeated his questions she made no response at all.

She seemed to weary; he thought he detected an effort to keep her head erect, her eyelids from drooping. He placed her gently on the couch, ran a fingertip lightly over her side. She trembled and stiffened. When he took his hand away she curled in a graceful pose and closed her eyes. He covered her with one of the furs from the other couch; she did not move.

He picked up the fishing rod from where he dropped it outside when he had brought her in. The vines appeared to have grown; he must chop them closer, root them out if possible, clear the remaining sides entirely. There was no reason to allow the temple to be covered again.

He strode purposefully back to the lake. By chance he did not arrive at the cove where the boat was but further along the shore where a narrow pier, no more than a series of poles stuck into the lake bottom with planks laid on the cross-pieces, jutted out a few yards over the water.

He walked to the end and gazed into the clear depths. Marine flowers—vegetable, mineral or animal—wavered in a multi-

tude of bright hues. Swimming, basking, or feeding among them were myriads of translucent fish, large and small, silver, blue, red, orange, green, nacreous gray. Below them flatfish moved slowly, rippling their bodies in lazy humps. Above them torpedo-shaped swimmers sped madly with barely perceptible flicks of tail and fins. Just under the surface, breaking into the air every now and then, thickly clustered schools of shiny fingerlings raced and darted in confusion.

Lampley was not a practiced angler, he was dubious of his ability to cast the dry fly and he saw he had brought along the wrong equipment. He let out a length of line awkwardly and watched the fly float on the surface, then very slowly sink downward. The excitement which had fevered him since he came upon the figures at the pool subsided. He was content.

The crimson fish shot from nowhere at the now invisible fly and the rod jumped almost from his hands as the reel unwound. The fish ran out toward the channel, the line lifting clear, like a knife cutting up through jelly. It circled and leapt, a dazzling blot of whirling color against the lake's placid blue.

He gained back considerable line before the fish ran again. He reeled in, the fish dived; each time it took less line. At last Lampley brought it gasping and thrashing on its side to the end of the pier. Lying flat, he was able to reach down and hook two fingers under the distending gills to lift it into the air.

He carried the fish back to the temple. The vines were winding around the base of the columns again; loose tendrils crept toward each other, ready to intertwine upon meeting. He came in nervously, eyes averted, as though by deliberately not searching for her he would assure her still being there. She was on the couch where he had left her, one tiny arm—was his memory playing him tricks? It did not seem so small as it had —thrown over her eyes.

He had no knife to scale the fish, no fire to cook it. He was not hungry himself but his captive might be. He put his rod away, took the bronze ax and the fish outside. With the edge of the ax he managed clumsily to cut the flesh from the backbone in a crude filet, then he scraped the filet free of the skin. Tentatively he tasted a piece; it was delicious.

He wished for a gold platter on which to serve food to her. He longed for a retinue of slaves to prepare her meal, an army of servants to wait on her. He stood by the couch, sadly deficient, a slice of raw fish in either hand, eager, tremulous, yet happy.

The woman stirred, opened her eyes, threw off the fur cover with some effort. She stood erect, stretching, shuddering in obvious pleasure, pointing first one leg and then the other, massaging her flanks and stomach

sensuously. She had unquestionably grown larger: he could see the faint, fine down on her arms now, the intricate convolutions of her ears, the roundness of her navel. She was the length of his hand instead of less than that of his finger.

He made his voice as low as he could. "Would you like to eat?"

She turned to him as though she had not been aware of his presence until he spoke, but having learned of it was completely unaffected. She stretched again and looked up at him disdainfully. With some difficulty he broke off a crumb of the fish and offered it to her. Her glance did not waver from his face; she reached out her hands and accepted the morsel, nibbling it daintily, still staring at him. When she had eaten it he offered more; she turned away and re-settled herself on the fur, her back to him, her hip curving high.

He put the rest of the fish on the table and took up the ax. He trimmed the new growth of vine down to the ground and cleared one of the short sides. He stopped to sharpen the ax on the stone he had used for cutting before he discovered it. He freed a corner pillar on the opposite long side before he put up the ax and went to the pool.

It was deserted. Had he caused them to leave, or brought some worse disaster on them by stealing the woman! He ran his fingers through the moss, peered intently at the water plants—they were gone. He was not cruel or unreasonable; if she would only communicate with him he would do anything she asked.

He twisted a flat leaf into a cone-shaped cup and filled it with water. It leaked only one slow drop at a time, a growing, fat, wet pearl which swelled until its weight detached it. Lampley felt quite complacent over his cleverness in contriving so tight a cup. He returned to the temple and sat on the other couch, watching her sleep, holding the water in readiness. She had not covered herself; she was now the length of his forearm.

He must have been too intent. She moved and turned, opened her eyes and stared back at him indignantly. She did not make the slightest attempt to hide any part of her body from him; she seemed to taunt him with its promise, so impossible of fullfilment. His hand shook as he held the leaf out to her. She grasped it and drank, smiling secretively. Instead of returning it she threw it on the floor, spilling out the water that was left.

"Would you like to go back to the pool?" he asked.

She did not answer; her full-lipped mouth set in a cruel line. It had been a stupid question; she was tall enough to slide off the couch without help and walk to the pool. Tears came to his eyes and his throat ached at the thought of no longer being able

to hold her in his hand. He implored her to forgive him for having carried her away, he pled with her to speak to him. He put his ear close to her mouth to hear her words if she spoke.

She allowed the set of her lips to change without softening. She moved to the opposite end of the couch, tidying her hair, twisting her head as though looking in a mirror. He reached out, hesitated, touched her. He ran his hands and lips over her body, fondled her, half in abject pleading, half in equally abject desire. She trembled; he knew it was with rage and loathing, not fear.

With the ax he fell upon the remaining vines, cut them to the earth. Those he had mutilated before were growing again but they were not high enough to give him release in chopping them down. When the temple was cleared all around he came in again and stood looking at her. She was still taller, still unrelenting. If he had originally wooed instead of capturing her she could not have regarded him so.

Remorseful, he went once again to the pool. The lotus blossoms had gone, leaving the dry pods swaying stiffly. The rushes and waterlilies were brown and brittle, the moss was fuzzy in decay, the edges of the lilypads were softly rotting. The small people had returned, unchanged in size—she alone had grown, afflicted by the wrong he had done. They lay near the edge of the pool in listless attitudes. Their hair had turned gray or white, they had lost their suppleness, paunches and wrinkles were visible.

He went away from them, walking slowly through the woods, glancing up at the light or down at the soft humus underfoot. The trees stopped short before a saucerlike meadow. Milky-blue poppies grew so thickly their petals crushed against each other, hiding the stems and ground beneath. He plunged into them, then halted; sharp stones hurt his feet.

He bent down and pushed the flowers apart. Their roots grew in twinkling, winking emeralds and rubies of all sizes and cuts. They were packed loosely enough for air and water to seep in, tightly enough to make it not easy to work them free and gather a handful. He tried to select the largest stones, discarding one for another, moving deeper into the field. His hands and cradled arms full, he let them drop and chose the smaller, more evenly matched gems. He threw all these away also and began all over; whatever combinations of size, cut or color he picked up did not equal the possibilities of this profusion.

Dissatisfied, he turned from the poppies. They had called to him, promising, then promised again and yet again. He could not—with a handful of stones such as these—say the promise

had not been kept; he could not say it had.

He paused to bathe his bruised feet in the pool. The lotus plants had disappeared completely, the rushes drooped brokenly, the lilies floated like scraps of worthless paper, the lilypads were limp and soggy. The little people had lost their hair and much of their flesh, their skins stretched over protruding bones. They did not move save to turn over a weary hand or draw up a cramped leg.

He came to the temple. The persistent vines had again begun their climb up the pillars. The woman stood on the couch, her hands over her breasts, fingers open around the nipples. Her head was level with his chest; she tilted it to look at him with the same inexorable hate. He poured the rubies and emeralds at her feet. She glanced down, kicked a fur casually over them.

"I thought you might like them," he mumbled. "They . . . they—"

She hunched up one shoulder. He was sure she understood his words.

"Are you hungry?" he asked, then he saw she had eaten more of the fish. "Are you thirsty?"

She threw herself down on the furs, buried her face in her elbow. Resentfully he took the ax and cut back the vines. Those he had chopped down at first were dry and brittle; they would burn if he had some way of making fire. He gathered a trailing handful and brought them inside. Her back was turned as he arranged them on the mosaic. He laid the flat stone next to them and struck it slantwise with the ax. Some of the blows resulted in futile sparks but the stems did not ignite.

He gave up; with the fishing rod he returned to the lake. He pushed the boat into the water and rowed with the current past the pier, heading for the deeper parts. He laid the rod over the stern and let the way of the boat pull the line slowly from the reel. The fly stayed on the surface.

His eyes searched the further shore. Some of the distant mountain peaks were bare, others were forested to the top. Some fell in palisaded steps down to the plain, some descended in series of rounded hills, some sloped evenly. Nearly all carried rivers to the lake. There were no signs of any way out of the cavern.

On the island side, great trees grew out over the water. From their boughs fell seed-pods which floated diagonally across the current to the other shore. Waiting for them at the edge of an extensive swamp were yellow swans with black beaks who stretched their long necks to gobble the prizes. They fought among themselves for the tidbits, flapping their wings, rising partway into the air, twisting, their webbed feet tightly curled.

Past the overhanging trees

the island curved inward in a wide, cresent-shaped beach of blue sand. He was tempted to land but the current carried him on before he could make up his mind. He passed a flat cape and low bluffs against which the calm lake churned white. He thought he made out the ruins of a castle far behind the bluffs, but the quality of the light changed from soft to hazy; what appeared to be ruins might as well be a natural formation of rock.

He guessed he must be halfway around the island; it was easier to drift on than row against the current. On the opposite shore animals had come down to drink, tapirs and zebus, raccoons and gazelles, llamas and koala bears. A few raised their heads as he passed, the majority paid no attention.

There was a ruffling of the water and an ominous sucking sound as the tide changed its easy momentum into an irresistible pull. Furiously the boat was whirled around—stern, bow, bow, stern—in a dizzying circle. He rowed with all his might, feathering his oars in panic as often as not, almost falling backward as they failed to bite. He half rose, digging them in, pulling desperately, returning, pulling with all his strength. The boat steadied; the bow pointed straight ahead. Almost as quickly as he had been caught in the vortex he was free of it. He inhaled raspingly, dropping his head on his chest.

The lake widened; it was so far across he could barely make out details on the mainland. The island changed character; forbidding basalt walled it, interrupted by inlets where the water surged in sullen, angry obstinacy. Foam gushed and spouted from great holes in the rocks, adding to the tumult. Lampley thought he saw ships in one of the inlets—high-prowed, single-masted vessels with low freeboards guarded by overlapping shields—but like the ruined castle they could have been oddly shaped masses of rock.

He must have almost circled the island, for he saw the plain he had followed from the elevator on the further shore. This part of the lake was placid and the undertow negligible. He put up his oars and took the rod in his hands, pulling at it so the fly skipped lightly over the water.

The fish was green and gold, pure colors, unsullied. It was clearly too heavy for the line. Lampley played it—awkwardly—exhausted it, brought it to the boat and unhooked it to lie, flopping and dying and turning a mottled brown, on the floorboards. He looked down at the cruel, voracious mouth and felt his own setting in similar lines. He rowed to the island and landed on an unsheltered beach of reddish sand.

It was a long way to the temple; he began to think he had missed it when he saw the roof

and columns ahead. The vines had made great progress in his absence; in places they had reached the eaves and were writhing over the cornice.

She was leaning against a pillar, facing him, one hip slouched lower than the other. She was nearly four feet tall; her proportions had not altered, nor did her increased size reveal any imperfection. He was shaken by the same mixture of awe and lust, admiration and avidity.

When he showed her the fish she went to the table and taking the scrap left of the first one, threw it out. The emeralds and rubies lay disregarded on the furs, the pile of withered vines was as he had left it. He waited with diminishing hope for her to give some further recognition of his presence. "I have been all around the island," he said, knowing she would not acknowledge his speech.

He cleared the vines away, wondering if she approved his industry. He explored the woods until he found a plant on which gourds had dried. He kicked one, broke off the neck, filled it at the pool. There were no signs of her people. The gourd did not leak at all as he carried it back.

She had divided the fish in half, skinned and boned it less wastefully than he had the other. She was able to work at the table now, though with some difficulty. Tall as a very small woman she yet retained the tantalizing, provocative, shameful appeal of her original size. He set the gourd down shakily.

She took it up as though it had been there all along and she had only now come to need it, and poured half its contents over herself. It seemed to him, weak with longing, that she displayed an added, lazy insolence as she smoothed the water over her breasts and under her arms, moving in studied tempo, reveling in the pleasure of her own touch. She walked slowly to the vines and dried herself carefully, over and over. She neither concealed nor displayed her body; she acted as though she were alone.

He put his hand on her arm, she looked up at him in the simulated surprise of cold inquiry. Her lips were pressed together, but not so firmly as to disfigure their symmetry. Her eyes were gray, with green and golden flecks; the slight droop of the lids emphasized her look of disdain. Her skin was smooth as glass. He could wait no longer. He was consumed with desire for her.

He clasped her, lifted her, threw her on the couch, began kissing her gluttonously. He tried, first with cunning, then with violence, to part her lips, to move her arms from their rigid position. She remained completely passive, her eyes wide open in their implaccable scorn. He paused in his onslaught, begged her to forgive him, to say something, to voice even a rejection. She lay silent, unmov-

ing, unresisting as he wept and shouted.

His hands dug into her shoulders, caressed, gripped, pulled at her body. His mouth smothered hers. He closed his eyes to shut out her derision, opened them again to see if she had relented. He pressed himself against her, forced his body into hers. The shock telegraphed back to him.

She became wild and wanton and responsive. She was avid, insatiable, shameless. She exhausted him, drained him, wore him into incapacity, then invited, teased, coaxed, compelled him into fresh lechery. The element of the perverse, inherent in her size, her captivity, her unveiled loathing, added the final touch to their ecstasy. They came together again and again without concession in a rape of the courtesan, wringing joy out of their enmity.

When he collapsed, exhausted but less than content, she calmly rose and drank thirstily from the gourd. He watched her easy, fluent movements, knowing she was conscious of him and of their embrace, knowing that it signified no intimacy to her, that she was untouched. "Won't you forgive me?" he begged. "Won't you speak, or at least show you hear?"

She combed her long hair with her fingers and twisted it deftly into place. She lifted one leg, bent at the knee, and studied her foot. She sauntered to the columns and stood at the edge of the temple looking out, her back to him.

He made himself get up and go to her, kneeling at her feet. Even in his abjection he could not refrain from embracing her legs, resting his cheek against her flesh. She stood quietly, as though waiting for his next move. When he did nothing beyond implore her pardon, she disengaged herself calmly, turned away, and walked to the opposite row of columns.

It no longer seemed imperative to keep the vines chopped down. He let them grow at will except on the one side he kept cleared. Though he knew no hunger save for her, he fished and fetched water for her to drink and bathe. He thought she must tire of the monotonous diet, remembering the berries he brought her gourdsful. She ate them greedily. When her mouth was stained with the juice he could not control his longing; he took her once more. She responded as before; as before she remained inviolable.

She grew no more, and this pleased him, guaranteeing as it did a continued mutual enslavement. In midcycle between his despair after forcing her and helplessness before doing so again, he gloated over her smallness, her estrangement from everyone but him.

He did not return to the pool. Instead, he made the longer journey to the lake for water. He went back to the poppies by a roundabout route, picked an

armful, leaving the gems in which they were rooted undisturbed. She let them lie at her feet where he had placed them.

On his next homecoming to the temple she had made a fire, succeeding where he had failed. It burned swiftly on the mosaic, consuming the dried vines as quickly as she could feed them to it. He took the ax and cut some green boughs, chopping them into convenient lengths. With these and the vines the fire could be kept alive, smoking, not giving out any warmth, but adequate to cook the fish he caught.

She took a portion of whatever he brought her—fish, fruit, flowers—and sacrificed it in the fire. When she was not sleeping, bathing, preening or standing looking out, she sat beside the embers, quiet, absorbed. Though he knew her indifference was unfeigned, this additional withdrawal added to his torment. When it became unendurable—when his lust and pique and desire to master her overcame his submissiveness—he attacked her and met her raging passion.

Otherwise she did not acknowledge his presence directly. She put his portion of cooked food on the table for him, throwing it out indifferently when it was left uneaten. Watching her sleep, tending the fire or brooding, he felt the outrage of her denial. His conquest of her body should have brought submission, escape, revenge, gradual conciliation—change of some sort—not refuge in her unfailing imperviousness. She had gelded him without giving him a eunuch's compensations. Sometimes, tormented by frustration, he took her brutally, more often he approached her with tenderness and deference, only to be frenzied into ruthlessness by her apathy.

Finally he knew she was with child. He became slavish in his anxiety, his solicitude, his devotion. He tried to care for her, to watch over her food, her rest, her exertions. She submitted to his attentions when it was unavoidable, she showed no pleasure or gratitude. Swollen, she moved slowly, lay from meal to meal on the couch with her eyes open.

He stayed close to the temple, hurrying back from his errands, resisting the temptation to explore the island. When the child was born he would bathe it in warmed water, wrap it in soft leaves, cover it with the furs. After the birth some way of reconciling himself to her would be miraculously revealed, she would speak, he would discover a means of communicating with her people and reviving them. He would cherish the child, protect, nourish, develop, teach, encourage it; it would be the means of establishing himself not only with her but with this place.

A somber, thought-cloying dread hung upon his mind. He walked warily, glancing frequently over his shoulder. If she

wanted to leave the temple there was nothing to stop her; so soon as she had grown tall enough to get down from the couch by herself she could have walked away. He knew she would not go yet he feared to find her gone; always when he returned it was a shocking relief that she was there. He babbled to her at length of his apprehensions, he prayed her to assure him she would change, would relent after she bore his child, that nothing would part them.

While she slept he put his hand timidly on her belly and felt the life in it. The thought excited him; he was ashamed of his excitement. He knelt beside the couch to touch her knees and thighs in selfless purity. He kissed her hands, her temples, her hair; when she stirred and frowned, he retreated, hoping she would not waken.

She was near to labor when he heard the shouts and the clang of metal against metal. He ran to her, ready to protect her and the child with his life. She moved away, always keeping a space between them. No one coming upon them could imagine she wanted his assistance or that he had established any right to offer it.

The barbarians burst into sight, waving swords, holding their round shields high above their heads. Their crooked teeth flashed, their mouths opened in wild yells, their rough garments flew back to show their coarse, hairy bodies.

He tried to pull her with him, to lift her in his arms and carry her outside. She resisted obstinately, fiercely, desperately, clinging to the couch, to the table, showing to the full the revulsion and hate in her eyes.

The invaders passed the open side of the temple; Lampley could not believe they had failed to see it or that it hadn't excited their curiosity. Yet they did not turn aside; incredible or not, they were saved. The last one was out of sight when the woman screamed.

He clapped his hand over her mouth; the barbarians came from the side he had let the vines overrun again, cleaving their way through, trampling out the fire, smashing the water gourd, scattering the latest gifts he had brought. They saw and came at him, pointing their weapons so that he could see the faint kinks in the crudely forged steel. He tried to stay, willed himself to meet the swords' edge. Only when she threw her arms around the foremost warrior, offering her ripe belly to his blade, casting a triumphant, malignant look in Lampley's direction, did he finally give in and fly.

CHAPTER 5

HE ran through the woods, clamor of pursuit close behind. He headed straight for the lake, remembered he had moved the boat, changed direction. He twisted and turned, hoping to

deceive them; they stayed on his heels, gaining, gaining. He reached the shore and plunged into the water. He was not a good swimmer but the current carried him to the beach where the boat was while the pursuers had to turn inland to bypass a thick copse.

He splashed inshore, reaching the boat barely ahead of them. They swarmed at him as he stumbled, pushed the boat into the water with a violent shove and clung to the bow's protection against the rocks they hurled. The missiles splashed close but soon the current took him out of range. With immense difficulty he got himself aboard, and rowed to the opposite shore with his eyes fixed on the island.

It occurred to him that he must be headed directly for the swamp where he had seen the yellow swans. He changed direction; after pulling steadily at the oars, the keel grated on something hard and unyielding. He shivered at the coldness of the air and saw he had grounded at the mouth of a small glacier embedded between rocky hills. He dressed; leaving the boat high on the gravel bordering the ice, he began walking along the shore. The island was far, far away, mistily lilac in the distance, lost and irretrievable.

His shoes, so unaccustomed, spurned and slipped on the gravel and the rocks, floundered in the sand. The chilling wind from the glacier slapped at his back. Ahead trees—stunted, thick-growing, crowded by underbrush—came down to the water's edge. He pushed through touching branches into still denser thickets, forcing his way against increasing resistance, being forced in turn further and further inland.

Where the tangled growth ended abruptly there was no grass, only stony shale interrupted by ragged shrubs, scanty snowdrifts, bent, leafless trees. Inconstant winds eddied around him, stinging his face, pulling at his clothes, tearing loose twigs from the trees, dead leaves and chaff from the ground, whirling them upward, driving them before it, allowing them to settle only to scatter them again for new torments. He trudged on, head down, walled from the lake—not a glimpse, a fleeting glimpse of the island—climbing, descending, detouring, making he knew not what scant advance.

Advance to where, to what? In an unknown direction to an unknown destination. Nothing could be more stupid; the intelligent thing to do was stop, refuse to go farther. But stop himself, he couldn't.

He stumbled into a valley between gloomy cliffs. There was no vegetation here save sinewy creepers which seemed to spring directly from the harsh ground, their roots mercifully hidden. They wound and tangled, twisting and untwisting, ever seeking something to climb. He

tripped on them, righted himself hastily, fearful that if he fell they would choke him, hold him fast before he could rise. Small dun-colored birds fluttered through them, pecking haphazardly at unseen insects, rose in unsteady, uncertain flight only to settle again a few yards away. He fell; terrified, he scrambled up, shaking himself loose, not really believing the vines had let him go.

He looked up at the far off peaks. What had they to offer him? Romantic towers, magic fastnesses, mystic havens? Cold, craggy, misery. He trod carefully between the vines; perhaps he could reach the next hill before they tripped him once again.

He heard an angry, outraged, murderous squealing and grunting as a horde of wild boars, tiny eyes half-closed, tusks glinting with saliva, shaggy bristles standing out, charged with pounding hooves. He was directly in their path, there was no shelter he could take, and it was clearly useless to run.

He waited, quaking, as they came closer. The foremost animal, the leader, the most ferocious, became enmeshed in the loose vines and began struggling and jerking. His companions shouldered, shoved, worried and bit him; those behind attacked the ones in front. They fell upon their stupefied leader, tore him to pieces and devoured him. Then those who chanced to be bitten or slashed were treated the same way, finally those who had merely been bloodspattered.

Lampley ran from the scene and splashed through a wide stream he hoped would at least deter the frantic beasts. He climbed over sticky clayish plants with long, tongue-like petals pulling and sucking at his shoes, and bloated grass whose watery blades split apart under his weight, giving out vile fumes to make him sick and giddy. On a rise he looked back at the boars, milling in directionless knots. Far beyond he caught brief, elusive sight of the lake and island. Reluctantly he started up a spur bare of all vegetation, grim and desolate.

The yellowish rock on which he trod was smooth and firm underfoot at first; he climbed over a ridge and began a fairly easy ascent of an escarpment biting into the mountainside. The hard rock gave way to brittle, friable material that broke and crushed underfoot. He came to outcroppings, miniature buttes which crumbled and rolled at a touch. He found himself walking in a mass of shifting stone, loose and unpredictable.

Ahead, the slope became a series of shoulder-high cliffs, mounting like steps. Very carefully he approached the first and put his hands on the edges to pull himself up. The rock disintegrated under his fingers. He stretched his arms forward and tried to lever himself up with his elbows. The entire face

broke off to go sliding and tumbling past him.

He was too far up to retreat and seek a less treacherous way, the best he could do was strike out for the adjoining ridge. He moved cautiously but the strata seemed to shift so that he was faced by a palisade high as his head. He reached up to grasp the ledge. It too split and shattered. He looked in vain for an easier ascent or a crevice where he could work his way up.

Now the cliff towered over him, far above his reach, menacing, sullen. He followed it, searching for a place where it was lower. His feet slipped on the loose stone; it was like walking on marbles. He tried to run, to defeat the restlessness of the rock by speed. His ankle turned; pain and weakness fought each other; he became part of a plunging, toppling, sinking, downward slide, with gravel, debris and boulders crashing around him. The only way he could keep his feet was to run with the avalanche, to embrace the illusion that he was surfboard riding. By a tremendous effort he retained his balance.

He knew it was impossible for him to survive; he must resign himself to being crushed and buried under the landslide. It was pointless to protect his head with his arms as he was doing, it was pointless to run at all. His mind surrendered, only his body continued to fight against destruction. He could not believe his mind didn't really know fear; at a point like this communication was cut off; instincts and reflexes took over.

The roar of the fall became a rumble and then a crackle diminishing into silence as the last fragments rolled and settled. He was almost at the mountain's foot, in a sort of natural quarry hemmed in by palisades on three sides, open only the way he had come down—and this was paved with loose stones in uneasy disarray. It was impossible to scale the sheer cliffs; even at the risk of causing another avalanche he had to go back. Cautiously he began the ascent. Though the rocks turned and shifted under his feet they did not crumble. Picking his way with exaggerated lightness he covered perhaps a hundred, a hundred and fifty feet. He began to hope he might reach a point where he could strike out and away from the incohesive slope.

With a loud report a rock shot from the palisades behind him, arched over his head to crash in front and come bounding down toward him. He jumped aside. It tumbled all the way to the foot of the precipice. From near where it landed another stone discharged itself to fall just behind him. While it was still moving, a ragged bombardment from all three sides began, increasing in intensity till the air was filled with missiles. Fresh slides were started by their impact; the entire moun-

tainside seemed to be converging on him with varying speeds, diving and plunging, lurching and sprawling. He crouched and cowered. An immense chunk shattered nearby, showering particles and dust.

The palisades erupted in staccato explosions, echoed when the projectiles hit the slide and increased its velocity. He was shaken to realize that the rocks were sentient, individually or collectively, and he was their intended target rather than an endangered spectator. He was doomed; though they missed him a hundred, a thousand times, on the hundred and first or the thousand and first, chance would expose him, make him vulnerable, detstroy him. Even if the ground held firm he could not climb out of range before he was felled. And the ground was not holding firm.

There was no escape; who could control the unswerving malice of the rocks? Who indeed? Suddenly he stood erect and held up three fingers in the sign of the letter Shin, the initial of the name Shaddai.

Instantly the mountainside became still. Birds soared overhead, grass sprouted through the rubble and in the crevices of the rocks, clear brooks wound sinuously from the mountaintop, lizards basked on flat spaces, insects moved speculatively from object to object, sheep wandered in search of food.

He threw himself down on a bed of ferns, newly sprung into life. The soft, spiraling ends of the fronds touched his cheeks and hands gently. He moved guardedly, unwilling to crush the tender stems. Raising himself on his elbows he peered down at the pale, feathery snails, the stiff, spotted leaves, the hairy stalks. His throat tightened with wonder and gratitude.

He got up, walked slowly over the solid ground. When he had climbed higher than the palisades he struck out for a plateau, bare of vegetation but not desolate. Shallow ponds sparkled, crystal pinnacles glittered, mounds of quartz reflected the light. Snakes and crocodiles, strange and nameless reptiles in bright, jeweled colors moved smoothly out of his path. A tinted mist rose from one of the ponds, taking the shape of Mattie. All the women he had known showed themselves in wisps and shreds of vapor. Some were laughing, some wistful, pleading, tempting; all dissolved as fast as they formed. He fled.

He fled from the plain into a forest where leaves made an umbrella against the light, through fields where grain was turning black, past rutted gray roads and decaying rail fences. He passed clumps of berry bushes, bare of fruit, whose thorns raked his hands and face. He stumbled over plowed furrows where the dried clods were woven together with spiderwebs and made his way through har-

rowed fields where the exact lines were blurred by rebellious weeds, rooted at random.

The air was cold, colder even than at the glacier, and the light hazier, as though too far from its source. Weeds were persistent, but colorless and sickly. His foot came against something harder than the dry earth; he kicked the weeds aside to reveal a railroad track, crusted and pimpled with rust. There were two tracks, eight, twelve, twenty, an inestimable parallel multitude of them, the steel flaking, the ties rotted, the spikes and plates worked loose. He walked between them.

The skeleton of a model T Ford stood crosswise on the rails. The body was gone, and the hood; the brass radiator, capless, had turned green and brown. A wooden box was athwart the chassis in place of a seat, its ends sticking out over both sides. The tires were flat and shredded.

Lampley lifted the front end and shifted it so that it headed along the right-o-way. He turned the ignition key, pulled down the gas lever, stood in front of the radiator, pulled the choke-wire and twirled the crank several times. Then he went back and sat on the box, but not under the steering wheel.

The motor coughed and started, the engine missed in syncopated rhythm, shaking and rattling the frame, failing and fading, catching again. The car bumped slowly over the ties. The Governor, satisfied, made no move to take the wheel. The tracks came together in a series of multiple switches. The Ford stopped, the motor clanked and quit, steam spouted up from the radiator.

Lampley got out. The surface of the rails was no longer rusty but bright with wear. The ties were new, reeking with fresh creosote. They were too close together for his stride; he walked partly on them, partly on the roadbed.

The single diesel car panted on a siding, its garish paint flected and peeling. He climbed aboard, walked between the rows of plush-covered seats to the front. The clerk sat in the cab, reading a comic book. He nodded when he saw Lampley. "Board," he shouted. "Aw-a-boooooard!"

The diesel started smoothly. The Governor sat down just behind the clerk and looked out the window. They were running through a petrified forest. Some of the trees were riven down the middle, showing the dark, livid heart, the gleaming saffron sapwood, the red-brown bark. Fallen trunks lay in shallow oil, black, broken by lurid rainbows. The car heeled over slightly as it rounded a curve, then more steeply on the opposite side as it picked up speed and took another.

The clerk said, "The island under the world, ay? Good or bad?"

"You can't simplify like that," protested the Governor.

"Can't I? Some law?"

"I mean . . ."

"Of course you do, of course you do. Enjoy the fishing?"

Lampley saw again the brilliant creatures he had pulled from the lake. "I only caught what was necessary for food," he muttered defensively.

"Necessity is the mother of convention," sighed the clerk; "necessity is the mother of conception, of prevention. Also correction, election, protection, vivisection, selection and so forth. Never perfection."

"Ah," said the Governor, thinking of the woman.

The clerk swung a handle, pulled a throttle, pushed a button. The coach was filled with whirling sparks and balls of fire. "Necessity is the mother of pretension," he sang operatically. A duststorm gathered outside the window, grit forced its way in. The car gained further momentum, swayed and rocked.

"Do we have to go so fast?" asked Lampley.

"Necessity is the mother of dissension and projection. The faster we go, the less room for argument."

The car seemed to be skimming above the rails. The clerk pressed all the buttons in front of him. A pornographic picture was projected on a three dimensional screen. Lightning flashed all around. The comic book which the clerk had negligently dropped flamed up and was reduced to curling char. The wind outside roared with hurricane velocity. There was nothing to see through the window but the lumps of earth the storm picked up and held in suspension.

The landscape twinkled into a tunnel, black and close and sooty. The tunnel spiralled upward; the diesel slowed, barely kept from slipping back on the grade. The dark sides gave way to illuminated bas-reliefs showing sphynxes and dragons pursued by hunters with spears and bows, pyramids on which victims were sacrificed with obsidian knives, battles between miniature figures in green or red against others in white or blue while their commanders rode back and forth waving microscopic swords, tableaus of unearthly quietness where boats were poled up wide, muddy rivers flowing through empty prairies.

The tunnel became black again; frigid cold swept through the coach. Icicles formed on the ceiling, frost obscured the windows in flat withes woven together. Lampley shivered so hard he became slightly sick to his stomach. He drew his jacket tight, hugging his chest, trying to control his chattering teeth. The clerk left the cab and built a fire in the aisle. He ripped out seats and fed them to the blaze. By the time the coach was bare the frost-ferns were melting from the windows.

The clerk spun a crank; the

light inside turned blue. He hauled a lever back, it changed to green. He jabbed a button; the interior became dark. Lampley saw they were moving smoothly into a terminal, with redcaps running alongside on the platforms. "All out," shouted the clerk. "Change here for North and South, East and West. All out!"

Lampley stood on the platform. "Carry your baggage, sir" asked a porter.

"Sorry, I don't have any," apologized the Governor.

The porter's dark face showed his disbelief. "Everyone has baggage."

"But I don't," insisted Lampley.

"You're trying to cheat a poor man," said the porter. "You're trying to cheat society. You're trying to cheat yourself. Even trying to cheat God."

"Believe me, I'm innocent," cried the Governor.

Loudspeakers bellowed, "Innocent! Innocent!" Far-off cold echoes sounded stonily, ". . . cent ahahaha . . . cent ahahaha . . ." Lights winked on and off. The porter prostrated himself on the platform. An unseen band blared *The Stars and Stripes Forever*, firecrackers and rockets went off, a phosphorescent display spelled out KISS ME KID, a barrel rolled and bumped to a stop, disgorging clowns who began tumbling, somersaulting, standing on each other's shoulders to form a cluster reaching to the arched roof where the top man wrote in white chalk on the smoky vault, DRINK MOXIE.

Lampley stood undecided, then walked briskly to the waiting-room. Its chrome and plastic benches were empty, the space between them was filled with robots busily burnishing each other's metal, adjusting each other's mechanism, screwing and unscrewing visiplates, audio-systems, sensitizers, olfactometers. He saw no humans. He paused at the unattended newsstand to look over the tattered, smudged periodicals. *Journal of Subatomic Medicine. The Martian Monthly. Space News. Androids Review combined with The Magazine for Mechanical Men Astronomer & Astrogator. Time-Travel Tribune.* There was nothing here to interest him.

Outside the waitingroom he came to the subway stairs, gleaming in white and nickel. They led to an underpass; he could hear the trains rumbling and thundering overhead. He followed the passage to the station; the empty tracks emerged, plunged on into darkness. He sat on a bench; no train came.

He got up and walked along the platform. It went deeper and deeper into the tunnel without narrowing to an end. He came to a place where the tracks were boarded over with heavy planks, flush with the concrete on which he walked. On the other side of the boardwalk small shops offered their wares in dusty, ill-lit windows.

The nearest displayed boots and shoes, sandals, clogs, getas, slippers, moccasins, greaves, buskins, gaiters, spats, wellingtons, overlapping damascene plates to protect the feet of the well-shod knight. All were in sets of threes: right, left, interpediate. The Governor entered; the salesman, dressed in black, hurried to him, rubbing his black-gloved hands together. "Why are all your shoes in triples?" Lampley asked.

The salesman opened his eyes in surprise. "How else would they be?"

"In pairs, naturally."

"But my dear sir, there's nothing natural about that. Of course there are poor afflicted creatures with only two feet; for them we recommend a very fine prosthetic craftsman who also supplies artificial ears and natural-looking uvulas. But normal persons will find themselves well-served here, I assure you. Well-served indeed." He pursed his mouth and looked at Lampley with a combination of severity and servility.

"It—it's all relative, then?" faltered the Governor.

The salesman shrieked. "You monster, you fiend, you horror! Begone! Begone, I say!"

Lampley closed the door behind him. The next shop was a tobacconist-stationery-novelty store. In the showcase were giant pipes, twists of burley, packages of latakia and perique, warped boxes of dried-out cigars, false mustaches, lapel flowers to spray water in startled eyes, puzzles, cryptograms, tiny spheres fitting endlessly inside of each other, moldering reams of paper, flyspecked envelopes, faded typewriter ribbons, filing indices in cyrillic. The Governor was not surprised to see the storekeeper was the legless sailor-juggler.

"Come in, lad; a hearty welcome to you," he said. "Been traveling in strange parts, I see. How are the women?"

"Small," said the Governor.

The juggler smacked his thigh with a big hand. He laughed till he coughed. He strapped on a pair of aluminum legs and danced a hornpipe. He took a gallon jug from behind the counter and tilted it against his lips. "Small ay? Small and naked and full of bile?"

The Governor nodded.

"Then you're poisoned, lad," said the juggler heartily. "You'll never be happy with the other kind again. O the lovelies, the darlings, the dainty morsels: they'll cut out your heart, eat your liver, pluck your eyeballs from your skull, bless them."

"But," said Lampley, distressed, surely it doesn't have to be that way?"

"Surely, surely," said the juggler.

Lampley bit his lip. "How does one get out of here?"

"Hush," cautioned the juggler. "I have a map. It was traced by the seventh son of a seventh son and lent me under the strictest pledge of secrecy, sealed in black

goat's blood. Come along with me." He led the way to the back of the store, through a passage papered in bright orange, the sheets curling apart at the edges where the glue had dried. It was barely wide enough to squeeze through sideways.

The room was triangular, with a pile of brass cogwheels in the narrowest corner. A set of bookshelves sagged against one wall. Calf-bound folios leaned on spiral-backed notebooks. In disorder on top was a collection of papers. The juggler reached among them and took out a thick roll tied with withered pink tape. "Here," he whispered. "Read it and memorize it. Never say who showed it to you."

The Governor unrolled the map. It showed an unfamiliar, an unlikely, a visionary coast. Mermaids and dolphins frisked in the seas; the shoreline was blank, labelled *Terra incognita inferioris.*

"Guess that will fix you up, ay lad?" boomed the juggler. "It's not everybody I'd show it to."

"I'm sure of that," said Lampley. "Thank you."

"Just don't let on to anybody," cautioned the juggler. "Not even if they torture you for it."

"I won't," promised Lampley.

"Think of me," begged the juggler. "Pray for me."

The Governor did not investigate the third shop. He walked past it to the ramp leading to the street. Outside the station the roof of the city pressed down so close buildings of four stories barely cleared it. The street was wide and paved with cobblestones; brilliant copper trolleywires ran overhead.

The city was familiar to Lampley, he had lived in it, knew the names of its quarters and districts. He began walking toward the harbor, the picture of it forming before him, the dark olive water, the black ships suddenly looming up, the tiny figures on the docks, the slowly creaking pilings. The harbor was miles away; miles and miles and miles away.

He passed block after block of gray stone, massive, empty somber buildings. A skeleton came out of one and thrust a dented tin cup before him. The Governor dropped in a coin. It went through the cup and rolled into a gutter running with chaff-flecked dirty water. The skeleton got down on its hands and knee bones to search for it.

A streetcar, royal blue, creaked and whined by. Lampley knew it was headed for the docks also, its passengers stevedores and sailors. A green trolley passed it going in the opposite direction. The motormen saluted each other by clanging their bells in the beat of *Old Black Joe.*

Lampley passed under a gray stone arch spanning the street from building to building. Atop the arch were severed heads of a bear, camel, dog, elephant, ox, weasel. He dropped a coin in the

slot and twirled a prayerwheel set up here to help speed the decapitated creatures to a new incarnation.

Beyond the arch, kleiglights focussed on a supermarket. Like the street, it was deserted. The endless shelves held empty cans, their ragged lids sticking cockily upward. The refrigerators were crowded with milk and pop bottles with nothing in them. Unattended cash registers rang NO SALE over and over. Vegetable bins contained carrot tops, potato peels, orange skins, apple cores, cherry stones, peach pits, bean strings, pea-pods, squash seeds, melon rinds. At the butcher counter cellophane bags of fat, gristle, bones and sinews were neatly stacked between trays of clamshells, fish scales, frogs' heads, chicken beaks. Lampley walked on.

He came to a cross-street with an arc-lamp on each corner—white, violet, gray, reaching into the blackness. He knew it was always night in this city, and he thought of the hundreds of thousands of its inhabitants who worked by day, condemned to a bedridden, insomniac existence. A red streetcar clattered through the intersection, the wires overhead throwing long, shattering sparks as the trolleywheel hit the break, reconnected, glided on.

In the next block there was a cellar with a sign COAL & ICE. The cellar was lit. The Governor peered down at a griffin, its wings folded neatly back, its arrowhead tail tucked away, shoveling crushed ice into a roaring furnace, pausing only to fill a refrigerator with dusty lumps of coal. The building which housed the cellar was divided by a lane which descended in long, shallow, stone-flagged steps. This arcade was lined with booths, small and open. Some contained iron white enamelled beds with coverlets thrown back to show wrinkled sheets and indented pillows, barberchairs adjusted for immediate occupancy, office desks with letters and forms lying on them, bar stools drawn cosily up to bamboo counters, mechanical pants-pressers steaming, open and ready to crease a pair of trousers. There were booths of sheepskins and parchments with the laureate's name blank, certifying every known degree and honor. There were others containing family bibles and photograph albums, dining tables set with silver and napery, bathtubs full of hot water on whose surface floated cakes of soap and scrubbing brushes.

He came to the end of the arcade and stood at another wide street, listening to the night noises of the city. A yellow streetcar stopped beside him. The Governor climbed aboard. There was no conductor, no passengers, no motorman. The straw seats were misshapen, cracked and bristly but the brasswork on them and the doors and windows was all fresh and polished. He

walked to the front of the car. The sign above his head read .VA TTAW AIV YAWOAT :OWT He jerked the control knob over the graduated notches. The car bucketed along the street.

The street became two streets, encircling a great, round building whose hundreds of mean and mocking windows were heavily barred. In front of the building was an imposing statue, carved in the same gray stone used throughout the city. Inside the prison were thousands of wretches, dirty, scabby, verminous, starving; thousands of convicts pacing, twitching, planning, calculating, remembering; thousands of convicts behind bland walls, condemned to smell their own bodies and the caustic chemicals, to feed on themselves and refuse, on hate, despair, foolish slyness.

The Governor left the car and beat his hands against the prison. He shouted defiance at the warden, the guards, turnkeys, stoolpigeons, trustys within. He picked up a piece of chalk and tried to write on the impervious, rugged stone. The chalk crumbled before he got beyond FR.

Outraged past bearing, he turned away, brushed by the statue. The figure was two stories high. On the base the letters stood out, shadowed by the street lights. GOVERNOR ALMON LAMPLEY. He ran back to the car as though pursued, his heart beating anxiously. He swung the knob; the car rattled between empty warehouses, lonesome flats, deserted homes. The arc-lights here were a deeper violet, the pavingstones took on a greenish tinge.

He entered the quarter where the foreign consulates were, each with its coat-of-arms carefully emblazoned above the doorway, the flagstaffs bare, windowpanes shattered and broken. After them came professional offices in houses hesitating between being homes or not-homes: dentists, pimps, doctors, mediums, occultists,, fortune-tellers, literary agents, optometrists, dowsers, narcotics peddlers, osteopaths, contest-promoters, burglars, chiropractors, librarians, counterfeiters, attorneys, tea-tasters, educators, graphologists, architects, lapidaries, phrenologists.

He came to where narrow shops hunched against each other, none with entrances, each with a window for their shop-worn, mildewed goods: the folds of cloth faded and dingy, the hardware corroded and rusty, the books brittle and dogseared, the bottles fallen and crazed. He passed theaters where marquees, caught between changes, spelled out unintelligible attractions, created hermaphrodite stars. He passed filling-stations with hoseless pumps, radio-towers without antennae.

He took the trolley through quiet, quiet streets where all the houses spoke with assurance of

sleepers within, of babies fed and diapered, dry and unprotesting, of adolescents on their stomachs and young girls curled into knots, of lovers lying face to face and married couples back to back. He passed shuttered houses, and those with the front door opened in welcome; houses with the porchlight left on for the expected visitor, and houses heavy with gloom and repulse. He passed open spaces: vacant lots, cramped parks, areas being excavated.

The street entered a more modern part of the city. The buildings were still of gray stone but here it was more smoothly, more fashionably dressed. There was not one which didn't reach to the roof of the city or embody the horizontal lines of the currently popular style. He halted the car before the department store which alone thrust its height through the city's enclosing shell and rose, who knew how many stories above it.

It had been remodelled over and over again yet it was still familiar to Lampley as the rest of the city: gray, massive, frowning. Oil lamps with dented reflectors behind them illuminated the show-windows. The Governor reached up and wound the route sign till it read, .HTUOM HTOMMAM-MUTOT XOV :TIAW He lifted the control handle from its square nut and stuck it in the conductor's coinbox. He swung down the steps and stood under the portico of the store, gazing into each window in turn.

One displayed a single egg on a pedestal draped in black velvet that had turned green and purple. Another contained burred screws, threadless bolts, spectacles and eyeglasses with important parts lacking. In the next, women washed clothes in galvanized tubs, scrubbing them against metal washboards, ironing them with sadirons. One of them, stringy gray hair lank on fat shoulders, came forward and pressed her open mouth, like a pig's snout, against the glass. Her teeth were long and jagged, her tongue pale and coated, the inside of her lips spotted with sores. She pulled up her draggled skirt to reveal bunion-shaped shoes and wrinkled black stockings, dancing with bumps and grinds.

He moved slowly past the window crammed with foxed lithographs, broken crockery, disabled bedsprings, a garbage can where a banana lolled from under the lid like a dog's tongue, to the window where a dentist, aided by an ingenious arrangement of mirrors, drilled his own teeth. At intervals he paused, drew a hypodermic needle from his pantspocket and squirted at a canvas on an easel. The artist who stood idly beating a mahlstick against an open palm, leapt to the easel, working furiously until the paint discharged from the syringe was used up, then sank back into lethargy till the act was repeated and he had a fresh batch of color to use. He

was painting a picture of Almon Lampley in track clothes, running for office.

Instead of a revolving door at the entrance there was a merry-go-round. The Governor stepped aboard and bestrode one of the horses, thrusting his feet into stirrups which were too short and brought his knees too high. The wooden steed, instead of moving gracefully up and down in time to the music of the calliope, bucked and reared. Lampley was glad to dismount and cling to a brass pole. A figure in motorman's uniform—the Governor knew it was his yellow streetcar he had driven—climbed aboard briskly and began collecting fares. He wore a monocle in his left eye on which was etched the island under the earth as seen from the farther shore.

"I'm only trying to get into the store," explained the Governor, unwilling to pay.

"The store. To be sure," said the motorman, as though he had just realized what was beyond the carrousel. "History, ethics, philology, chemistry, geography, heraldry, propaganda, celestial mechanics? A streamlined, up-to-date, late model, trouble-free, labor-saving philosophers' stone? How about the small, extravagant pocket-size for a willion gold moidores? I'm offered a willion; who'll say a stillion, a crillion—a fillion even? Come now, ladies and gentlemen, horses, giraffes (camelopards, if you prefer), ostriches and zebras, surely a fillion moidores is little enough for a love-magnet, a cap of invisibility, or a bottomless purse? Let me hear a fillion. Going once, going twice, going up?"

The calliope played, *In the Good Old Summertime*. "Going up," said Lampley firmly.

"Ah," muttered the motorman, hanging his head. "I was afraid of that." He removed the monocle and crushed it under his heel. The eye behind it was glass. The merry-go-round tilted, sliding Lampley off onto a floor of absorbent cotton sprinkled with tinsel flakes. The calliope switched to *It Had to Be You*. Two Santa Clauses arrived, lugging a barrel. They grasped Lampley under his arms and shoved him into the barrel, jamming his knees against his chest. They rolled the barrel along the floor and up an incline, then they righted it. The staves opened like a flower. Lampley stood erect on the bed of a horse-drawn wagon. The store was full of wax dummies engaged in copulation.

A tophatted, nightshirted man on stilts marched through, carrying a pickaxe over his shoulder. He attacked a section of the wall with the pick. After a few strokes water gushed forth, sweeping the dummies away. The man took a blowtorch from under his hat and froze the water on the floor. A motion-picture projector threw colored images of fleecy blue and pink clouds. An organ played *O Promise Me* (pianissimo) while handholding

couples skated tirelessly over the ice.

The Governor jumped from the wagon, and avoiding the irregular edges of the ice, walked over to the stationery department. A mahout in turban and loincloth pecked at the keys of a typewriter with his goad. Each time the machine came to the end of a line a balloon emerged from the side, inflated slowly, floated up out of sight. Lampley cleared his throat. "Could you tell me the way to the elevators?"

The mahout whacked the typewriter with his goad. Balloons issued like bubbles in an aquarium tank. They clustered together in midair to spell WHATEVER GOES DOWN COMES UP. Lampley spied a floorwalker doing a handstand on a cash register. "Could you—" he began.

The floorwalker sprang down nimbly, folding his arms. He took the carnation from his buttonhole and held it between his teeth. He punched the keys of the register. Three plums appeared. He punched them again; four lemons jumped into sight. He rang up, IOUOI. He handed the receipt slip to the Governor with a low bow. It read, THE AMOUNT OF YOUR PURCHASE IS $00.00. THANK YOU; YOU ARE ENTITLED TO A REFUND. Lampley turned it over. On the other side was printed, YOUR WEIGHT IS 181 POUNDS. YOU WILL BE LUCKY IF YOU AVOID.

The Governor dropped the card and went to the bank of elevators. The doors slammed open, one of the clowns he had seen at the terminal stuck his head out. "Foreign tongues, quartermelons, odd fish, rooterbeggars, soft hearts, hot potatoes, proud flesh, birds of a feather, prime movers, mustrooms, red herrings! Going GUP!"

"Please," said the Governor.

The clown opened his painted mouth and wabbled it. Then he fell out of the elevator on his face. Lampley stepped around him into the cage. The clown picked himself up, his feet slipping from under him again, threatening a pratfall, so that he had to keep his legs whirling to maintain balance. He sneezed. His mask flew off to uncover the clerk's face. "You're keeping the doctor waiting; hurry, hurry, hurry." He closed the door, snapped it open. "Out," he said sternly, threatening the Governor with one of his clown's flapping shoes.

CHAPTER 6

THE vaulted ceiling of the windowless waiting room was upheld by romanesque pillars. It was so low Lampley could have touched it without stretching his arms to the full. Dirt had worked its way into every unevenness of the whitewashed surface. Unshaded bulbs stabbed his eyes. A girl sat in an armchair, rolling and unrolling a magazine. A woman in her thirties pulled at her glossy black

hair; when a strand came loose she tucked it back under her hat, then pulled at it again. A row of plastic mannequins, smiling, dressed in blouses and hats with veils but skirtless and unshod, were wedged tightly together on a long bench. The Governor looked for a vacant seat; there was none.

The thick whitewash on the ceiling and pillars constantly flaked off, falling in a fine, dusty powder on the limp carpet, to be trodden by nervous feet. Lampley scraped a short semicircle with the toe of his shoe; the layer was very deep. A mouse came out of the wall and stood in the middle of the floor. No one paid any attention. A white cat with black and orange patches prowled past, rubbed itself against the Governor's leg, saw the mouse and crouched, tail lashing. The mouse scuttled for its hole; the cat pounced—too late. It mewed pitifully.

An elderly nurse entered the waiting room. Her cap was perched on hair dyed butter yellow, her hound's cheeks had bull's-eyes of rouge on the bones, her down-turned mouth was unevenly lipsticked in raspberry red. "Doctor will see you now," she announced.

The girl and woman jumped up. The nurse walked past them. "Me?" asked Lampley.

She wheeled about; he followed her. The girl took the woman's seat and began fussing with her hair; the woman sank into the girl's chair and rolled the magazine. The dummies' eyes crinkled and winked behind their veils; they had no mouths.

The nurse led him through a cracked and splintered door, the frame eaten by termites and dry rot. She swished her stiff skirt down a hall smelling of anaesthetics, dried blood, food cooked and forgotten. The plaster was cracked and bulging, seemingly held in place by the thick, greasy paint. The hall opened on a dressing room with triple-mirrored vanity-table. Cotton smocks of varying lengths hung on hooks. "Put on a gown please," she ordered.

"But I . . ."

She gave him an arch look. "You wouldn't expect Doctor to do your little work while you had your clothes on, now, would you? Come, dear—there's no use being shy at this stage. And let's not keep Doctor waiting; Doctor's a busy man."

She drew the curtain behind her; it was glossy-green with the word PULLMAN stitched to it. The Governor slowly took off his jacket, tie and shirt. There was a calendar on the wall, a calendar for the year he had gone into politics, after he and Mattie had been married for eighteen months. The picture was of an abnormally short-torsoed girl saying, "Let's have fun!"

Lampley selected the longest gown. It was not only too short, the edges were grimed. He put it on and pulled the curtain aside. The nurse said, "Let's not

be nervous, dear. If you'd seen as many as I have come in to have their little work done you wouldn't think any more of it than brushing your teeth. I've had it done myself a dozen or two times. This way, please."

She preceded him into a grim office. Blue skies and flowering trees were painted on the glass of closed windows. There was a gray operating table under floodlights, and an oak desk with mustard-colored streaks. A man with a sharp nose, close-clipped gray mustache, large, cloudy spectacles sat behind the desk, looking over pads, pencils, ashtrays and a portable radio. A wilted rose was thrust into a buttonhole of his nylon smock. Two younger nurses leaned their elbows on the table, intent only on their animated conversation.

"Now then," said the doctor, putting his hands behind his head and tilting back. "Let's take a little case history, shall we?"

"There's nothing wrong with me," stated the Governor.

The younger nurses tittered, the older one patted him on the shoulder. "That's the spirit, dear."

The doctor murmured, "It's just a formality, you know."

"But I don't know," argued the Governor.

The doctor looked annoyed. "Let's not waste time." All three nurses agreed in unison, "Let's not waste Doctor's time. There are twenty girls waiting to have their little work done."

The radio played, *Take Me Out to the Ball Game.*

"Forty," snapped the doctor.

"Forty," echoed the nurses. "Forty girls waiting to have their little work done. If you knew how grateful they were to Doctor, you wouldn't waste Doctor's time."

"But—" began the Governor.

"Enough!" shouted the doctor, standing up. "I can't stand these silly creatures who chop and change."

"Doctor is the only one entitled to chop and change," admonished the elderly nurse.

The doctor came from behind the desk. "Are we ready?"

"Yes, Doctor."

The radio played *Anchors Aweigh.*

"Then let's get it over with."

They grabbed his wrists and ankles. He did not struggle. They hoisted him on the table; a needle pierced his arm. "Just relax, dear," advised the elderly nurse.

Lampley grew helpless. He tried to raise his arms; he rolled his eyes. The doctor said, "Nice going. Very nice. Now then."

A frightful stab of pain went through him. Then a worse one, more prolonged, probing, searching. He tried to scream but his mouth wouldn't open, his larynx and diaphragm refused response. The pain was beyond bearing: sharp, hot, slashing, searing through his abdomen, forking through kidneys, lungs, heart, throat.

"Ha-ha, nothing to it," chortled the doctor.

"Not when *you* do it, Doctor," cried all three nurses together.

"Shall we put it under the microscope and see what it was?" asked the doctor jovially.

"Oh, yes, Doctor, do," responded the nurses.

They left him. Lampley felt the blood gushing from the wound in his body, heard the pulse in his neck grow faint. Weakness didnt diminish his pain, only made him less able to bear it. He judged the anaesthetic was wearing off; he moved dry tongue against cracked lips. If not for the loss of blood and the drag of pain he might be able to raise his arms, or at least turn his head to see what they were doing.

"A boy," said the doctor. "One little assistant less."

The nurses cackled. "Oh, Doctor, you're so witty. You're a regular killer."

The older nurse came over to the table and took the Governor's hand. "How do we feel?" she inquired perfunctorily, "now our little work is all done?"

Lampley groaned.

"Never better, ay? Well, girls will be girls, I always say. Once you've had your little work done you're good as new till next time. Shall we get dressed now?"

"Wa-water," moaned the Governor.

The radio played a medley of *Jingle Bells, Tea for Two, Smoke Gets in Your Eyes, St. James Infirmary,* and *April Showers.*

"A little water? All right, dear. Just come with me." She helped him off the table without solicitude. The pain came in dull, hard thrusts. His mind crawled in disparate ways, a spider whose legs writhed, though the body had been transfixed. He could move but he had trouble controlling his movements. He put one foot very carefully before the other and leaned on the nurse as she guided him back to the dressing room. "You can rest if you like," she offered brightly. "But not tooooo long, because there are others waiting for their little work. Doctor is a very busy man, you know."

He clutched the edge of the vanity; the face three times reflected in the mirrors was unchanged: the well-groomed, almost handsome, dignified yet twinkling, lightly aged, thoughtful but friendly face of the state's chief executive and first magistrate. He turned away in shame and horror.

Shakily, he got out of the smock, letting it lie in a wrinkled, blood-spotted, ugly pile. He stood, cowering a little, waiting for the agony, the fire inside him, to recede before he slowly, so slowly, put on his clothes. Leaning against the wall, he endured the spasmodic cramps. He saw that the calendar was gone; in its place was the bright cover of a seed catalogue. The curtain was now marked, BOX F.

The hall was a round tunnel pervaded by an overpowering smell. Spiralling ridges, set close together, reflected a dizzying

light whose source he could not see. He stooped slightly to avoid the ridges above his head. Walking was awkward but—apart from the pain—not too difficult. He tried to identify the smell, familiar and not unpleasant though strong, but he could not. He put his hand against the grooves, somehow expecting them to be warm and moist; they were dry and cold.

His head brushed the roof, forcing him to crouch. After a short distance he had to stoop still further, then crawl on hands and knees. The peculiar effect of the reflected light—as though he were looking through the inside of a tightly compressed corkscrew—hurt his eyes. He shut them; this only made the pressure against his flesh more noticeable. He opened them again.

He could no longer crawl; he had to wriggle slowly forward. A bright ball of light far ahead dimmed the sinuous windings around him. He was sure it indicated an opening too small for him to get through. He bitterly regretted not having stretched his arms ahead of him while the size of the tunnel still allowed it. He progressed by digging in the toes of his shoes for a forward push, aided by arching his back. His shirt was wet with sweat; jagged flashes shot through his head.

He was exhausted, unable to move farther. The cessation of movement, of effort did not ease him or recruit his strength to go on. He dared not give up, relax, slacken his will. He was condemned to go on and on, to bruise himself against the ever-narrowing passage. The necessity to complete the journey had been ordained before he was born. There was nothing to do but force himself to shrink even more tightly together, to compress his rebellious body into the prescribed space.

The pipe debouched partway up on a wall; the Governor looked down upon a brightly polished floor of inlaid wood. A large area was enclosed within barbed-wire entanglements, guarded by unmanned machine guns. Beyond this area the normal business of the department store proceeded: customers strolled through aisles of merchandise, salespeople waited on them; between the two societies was bare floor.

Inside the wire enclosure tombstones were displayed, voting machines, parking meters, printing presses, atom bombs, wireless masts, garbage trucks, spaceships, oil derricks, semaphores, gas pumps, power shovels, parachutes, purse seins, burglar tools, cyclotrons, glass eyes, a stuffed whale, medals and orders of chivalry and nobility. Closely shaven men in dark blue, dark gray, dark brown suits, neck microphones resting on their hand-painted ties, traded these things to each other—a truck for a net, a medal for a gravestone.

In the exact center of the enclosure, suspended from the

ceiling, an electric signboard offered quotations which moved slowly along from right to left, allowing the slowest reader time to grasp them. BONE TOOLS 37⅛ . . . CONSOLIDATED ALCHEMISTS 104 . . . INTERSTELLAR DRIVE PREF 66¼ . . . CSA BONDS #5 . . . UNITED METROPOLITAN HOT CRUMPET & PUNCTUAL DELIVERY LTD 70 . . .

One of the presses began turning, the paper flashing by on the cylinders in an endless stream. As they were spewed out and automatically cut and folded, the headlines were large enough for the Governor to read. LAMPLEY NOMINATED said the top one. A broker seized and stamped on it. GOVERNOR FAILS TO GET NOD read the one below, then in rapid succession, GOVERNOR'S OPPONENTS IN UNITY BID, CONVENTION DEADLOCK, LAMPLEY SWEEPS PRIMARIES, LAMPLEY SWAMPED IN PRIMARIES, THREE-CORNERED NOVEMBER RACE SEEN.

One of the brokers retrieved LAMPLEY NOMINATED and held up the smudged paper. Someone bid the stuffed whale. They slapped each other on the back, they fell into each other's arms helplessly, they rolled on the floor in ungovernable laughter after putting on coveralls to protect their clothes, they drew revolvers from hip-pockets and shot them into the air, stamping and rollicking in mirth. When delight at the jape finally died down, a broker offered, LAMPLEY SWEEPS PRIMARIES. There were no takers.

The illuminated ticker jerked in its hitherto smooth run. LAMPLEY 41½ . . . DEHYDRATED AARDVARK 88 . . . UNITED ARBALEST & HARQUEBUS 90¼ . . . LAMPLEY 40⅞ . . . MONTGOLFIER AERONAUTICS 284 . . . EAST INDIA CO GE⅜ . . . LAMPLEY 39 . . . SPACE DOGS & GENERAL MUTANTS 368½ . . . ENGLISH CHANNEL TUBE 111 . . . LAMPLEY 37 . . . HERO'S ALEXANDRIA STEAM POWER DEVELOPMENT 104¼ . . . MARTIAN SUBDIVISIONS 208 . . . LAMPLEY 35 . . .

A broker pointed his finger at the Governor. He would have shrunk back; the smallness of the tube forbade it. All the traders lined up and stared at him through binoculars. The signboard speeded up: LAMPLEY 32 . . . LAMPLEY 29 . . . LAMPLEY 21 . . . LAMPLEY 14 . . . LAMPLEY 9 . . . LAMPLEY 1 . . . LAMPLEY . . .

"Yah!" they shouted in chorus. "You'd have to pay us to take you."

"Pay us! Pay us!"

Each put a hand on the shoulder in front. They snake-danced around and between the displays. The signboard began spelling out, BORN IN A HOSPITAL, OF AVERAGE INCOME BUT NOTABLY IMPROVIDENT PARENTS, HE EARLY SHOWED THE APTITUDES CALCULATED TO PUT HIM IN SECOND PLACE AT ALL TIMES. Oil began gushing up through the derricks and splashing on the floor. The smelting furnaces produced gold bricks. The stuffed whale's seams burst to show it was filled with stocks and bonds, promissory notes, mortgages, checks, bank-

books and trust deeds. The signboard read, UNIQUE SPECTACLE: GOVERNOR PUFFED WHEAT WILL NOW BE SHOT FROM THE

He felt the tremendous pressure building up behind him, tried to resist, gave up. The men below stood at attention, their right hands placed reverently against their left breasts. The Governor soared over their heads in a wide arc, above busy departments and dark, still spaces. He found he could control his flight, made a neat immelmann turn, and came gently to rest on a balcony overlooking the florist department. Scent of frangipani, orange blossoms, cereus, honeysuckle, liana floated up to him. Orchids bloomed in midair, lilies blossomed on plants rooted in the grass mats bestrewed over the floor.

The balcony was cluttered with anchor-chains, spools of telephone conduit, cotton bales, spare parts for mechanical chess-players. Lampley trod carefully between them and opened a door marked NO ADMITTANCE, SERVICE ONLY, DO NOT ENTER, THIS MEANS YOU. The room had no proper floor, only closely woven flat steel strips which sagged at every step. Enlarged X-ray photographs lined the walls; light shone through them to show up the deformed bones like parachutes, like plows, like cutlasses. The clerk, wearing an admiral's gold-laced cocked hat and the black robes of a judge over his blue jeans, sat in a porch swing that swayed gently to and fro behind a pulpit. He looked inquiringly at the Governor.

"Why did you take me to that doctor?" demanded Lampley.

The clerk shrugged and took a pinch of snuff. He sneezed. "Why did you go?"

Lampley pondered. "You forced me," he said at last.

The clerk plucked a dry weed from a candlestick on the pulpit and chewed it thoroughly. "You didn't resist."

"I—I was taken by surprise," stammered Lampley.

"There are no accidents."

"But—"

"And there is free will," affirmed the clerk drowsily, the swing almost stopped.

"I didn't go voluntarily."

The clerk opened his eyes wide. "Mmm. Also mmmmm."

"I—" The Governor was unable to say more.

The clerk stood up in the swing, reaching out his arms to the chains and began pumping with his feet. The swing cleared the pulpit, knocked over the candlestick, which bounced on the steel floor. He let go the chain, folded his arms. The swing subsided into gentle motion. The clerk jumped down and brought up a heavy lawbook from under the pulpit. He laid it open on the lectern, riffling through it. Several moths flew out from between the pages. "You plead not guilty?" he asked coldly.

"I don't understand."

"You plead non compos paren-

tis, in loco ignoramus, ab squatulatis feasance, nolo comprendere?"

"That's nonsense," exclaimed the Governor.

"Certainly. Convicted in the thirty-third degree."

"I demand a suspended sentence."

"Granted," accorded the clerk, lying on the swing again, face down, so that his voice was muffled. "Now then! You insist the responsibility wasn't yours?"

"What's the use of going into that?"

The clerk sat up and adjusted his hat from the Napoleonic tilt it had assumed when he was prone to the proper fore-and-aft position. "The defendant is instructed that evasion is paramount to tutti-frutti. Answer the question or be incontemptible."

"It wasn't my idea," said the Governor sullenly.

"You consented, however."

"I 'consented'? Was she some chattel who needed dispensation from me?"

The clerk shook his finger.

"I actually tried to persuade her not to do it."

The clerk tore several pages out of the book and constructed an airplane. It flew silently over their heads, dropping leaflets a quarter the size of postage-stamps. The Governor tried to control his nervous shrinking. "It wasn't as if she were a silly girl. I mean, it was a considered decision on her part—nothing frivolous or vain . . ."

His voice trailed off. The clerk tore out another page and made a cannon. He shot a wing off the plane with it; the machine whirled down lopsidedly and crashed on the pulpit. "If that's the way you want it, that's the way you want it. Let's go."

"Where to?"

"Ah," said the clerk; "If we only knew." He removed the cocked hat and black robe and dropped them in a wastebasket. He pressed a button on the pulpit which immediately swung aside to reveal a manhole. A ladder rose out of the depths in short jerks. As it neared the ceiling a trapdoor fell open. The ladder glided through and stopped. "You first," said the clerk.

Lampley climbed the ladder, feeling he might lose his hold on the rungs at any step. When he was almost to the top he looked down. The clerk had disappeared. Carpenters were laying a wooden floor, erecting partitions. Porters removed the swing and the pulpit. Wiring, air-conditioning, telephones, interoffice communication-systems, were installed rapidly. One of the workers took up an ax and began chopping at the ladder.

Lampley climbed through the floor. He was in a court with squat walls, and gateways wider at the bottom than the top, bearing winged suns. He passed between rows of statues, animal-headed gods, men and women wearing conventionalized wigs and beards in stylized poses. The pale light gave the reds, greens

and blues which predominated, a chalky, muffled quality; it threw the looped crosses molded on the freize into shadowed relief.

The air was dank with the penetrating, pervasive dampness of oozing stone. Lampley was oppressed by thoughts of decay and destruction, of the knowledge without the sensation of pain. He longed for the warmth of the sun outside the hotel or the climate of the island under the earth. He shuddered away from the hidden corners, suggestive of toads and snakes, small animals decomposing and maggotty. This place should have had some measure of sanctity, induced some feelings of reverence or at least contemplation. He was aware only of the sodden air.

He walked moodily from the dusky precincts into the shocking light of a busy office. Girls in tight pink nylon bathing suits, their hair dyed royal blue, wearing blue nail polish, blue lipstick and red eye shadow, sat at transparent plastic desks, inserting thin rectangles of Swiss cheese into tabulating machines. Each desk had a silver champagne ice bucket in which rested a telephone. Beside the machines a row of feather dusters in graduated sizes were arranged in neat holders. Lampley saw pretzels were being used as paper clips.

"Pardon me," he said. "Is this the accounting department?"

The four nearest girls looked up in panic. Alarm bells rang shrilly, rockets popped out of the centers of the feather dusters, fire sprinklers showered down rainbowed sparks. The pretzels unwound limply. The slices of Swiss cheese curled into rolls out of which confetti blew in continuous blasts.

A girl pulled her phone out of the ice bucket and choked herself by winding the cord around and around her throat. The next one reached in her desk for a pair of waterwings, inflated them and began practicing the breast stroke. Others mutely handed him sheaf after sheaf of statements, loading them on his reflexively outstretched arms until the top ones slid off onto the floor. He could see they were made out to him but he had no chance to read the items or prices.

They piled the bills faster and faster; girls came from the farthest desks, staggered under armfuls. He dumped what he was holding and tried to struggle free from the mounting heap but it was already above his waist; he could not get his legs loose. He dug with his hands; the papers slipped down to cram the holes as fast as he dug. They imprisoned him with their weight; first the left, then the right arm was pinned to his side.

Buried to the chin, he filled his lungs with air, forseeing the covering of his mouth and nose. The pressure was painful now; he felt his ribs slowly caving in. The deluge ceased; the girl who had choked herself wormed her

way to him on her belly, creeping up the paper mound, dragging the telephone behind her. She pressed her swollen, twisted, blackened tongue against his lips, looked into his eyes with her protruding glazed ones.

He wrenched his face away. Girls approached with rubber stamps so large they could barely lift the bulbous handles. As they were raised he read DIAP on their dark purple surfaces. The girls hurled and slashed them downward, biting into the bills. With each thump masses of paper vanished. His arms were disengaged, then his legs. He breathed deeply, took a step, leaving only scattered invoices on the floor.

The girls threw themselves at his feet. "Take us," they moaned, "use us, violate us, degrade us. We love you."

The Governor shuddered as he perceived they were all sisters, product of a multiple birth; in each face he saw the features of the strangled girl. The one with the waterwings, using a crawl, swam rapidly between the others and raised her clasped hands imploringly. She was drowning. He rolled her over and began clumsily giving her artificial respiration. Her hair gradually turned white, the blue dye floating in a powdery cloud above her head. He put the valve of the waterwings to her mouth and expressed the air. She opened her eyes.

"Let us go," she said.

The others protested, weeping, clasping and unclasping their hands, tearing at their bathing suits in anguish, clutching their throats in grief, but they did not try to hold him. He helped the white-haired girl to her feet. She drew a key from between her breasts and handed it to him. He put it in his pocket and they left the office. As soon as they were outside her hair changed to brown, the pink bathing suit became white, her nail polish, lipstick and eye-shadow faded. She shivered.

"Are you cold?" She nodded. "We must find something to put around you."

There was no one in sight. This part of the store had an air of neglect, as though it had been used for storage, shut up and forgotten. The showcases looked as though they had been discarded from more enterprising sections; they were of odd sizes, with dull glass, in some cases cracked and repaired. Many were empty, others contained pearls, loose toothpicks, used cartridge cases, false teeth, celluloid collars, oil cans, rare stamps.

They came to an escalator powered by two ponies working a treadmill, and rode to the floor above. A floorwalker in morning clothes, binoculars dangling on his chest from a leather strap, hastened to them. "Customers only, customers only," he barked.

"We're looking for a coat or a cloak," the Governor informed him.

"Nothing but mink or sables here," said the floorwalker cold-

ly, surveying them through the binoculars.

"We'll take either," said Lampley.

The floorwalker knelt and kissed the Governor's shoe. He reached behind him and took the tails of his frockcoat in his fingers and tore it up the back, placing the two halves before their feet. A saleswoman with a diamond collar sparkling on her neck rolled up in a motor scooter. "This way, if you please."

Two grapnels emerged from the scooter and hooked on to the pieces of coat; Lampley and the girl rode them like water skis to a small, shallow auditorium. An old-fashioned carrier system hummed overhead, its wire baskets moving briskly back and forth, disappearing above the proscenium arch of a cramped stage on which models pranced and postured in furs. When they turned rapidly, flirting the cloaks, Lampley saw they wore nothing beneath and that they were all gravid.

"I'll take that one," said the girl, pointing.

The curtain thumped down. The saleswoman pulled a cord on the carrier system. "Madam has excellent taste, for a slut," she complimented the girl. An oversized basket brought the model clutching the cloak tightly about her. She was cowering in terror. The saleswoman pulled the cord again and the basket tipped, tumbling the model out. "Rip it off her back," she ordered.

The model cried out. "Oh, wait. Please wait," she begged.

"You beast," said the saleswoman. "You pretty little female beast. What rights have you? What feelings have you? You were born for this moment."

The model moaned.

"Is there no other way?" asked the Governor.

The saleswoman stared at him. "How could there be? This isn't the place for cheap merchandise or cheap methods." She gave the order again.

The model sank to the floor in a trembling heap. "The poor thing," said the girl in the bathing suit. "Will it hurt her very much?"

"What difference does it make?" asked the saleswoman. "It'll be over before you know it. And there are plenty of other models. All this palaver over a wretched creature! It's disgusting."

"I can't do it," whispered the girl. "I'm too tender-hearted."

"Chicken-hearted, you mean," sneered the woman. "Anyone can see what you are. All right, let him do it then."

"No," said the Governor firmly.

"You'll have to pay just the same," warned the woman.

"Very well." He drew the key from his pocket and handed it to her.

"And take your property with you."

The model walked humbly be-

hind them. "Still cold?" asked Lampley.

"Yes I am. And if you were a gentleman you'd have seen that I got my coat."

He didn't answer. The floor-walker, in a new frockcoat, bowed pleasantly to them and waved them to the elevator. Lampley pressed the button, noting that there was no indicator above, that there never had been indicators over any of the elevator entrances. The thought depressed him.

The doors rolled open. The cage was very large, with wide brown leather benches around three sides, and a padded leather ceiling and walls. The clerk wore a leather jockey cap, and a rawhide vest over his blue jeans. He clasped his hands together over his head as they entered. He closed the doors smartly; the elevator lurched sideways, throwing the girl and model to the benches.

"I hope—" began Lampley.

The clerk nodded. "Excellent, excellent. Where there's hope there's life and where there's life there's despair. A beginning, anyway."

"I meant I hoped—"

"Heard you," said the clerk. "Let's not say the same thing more than once." The car stopped and he opened the doors. Lampley could see nothing clearly through the clouds of steam outside. After a slight hesitation the girl left, followed by the model. The Governor moved after them; the clerk barred his way. "Ladies only," he said politely.

"You weren't so particular at the doctor's office," argued Lampley angrily.

"Yang and Yin," explained the clerk. "Circumstances alter faces."

The elevator shot upward. The noise of airhammers and riveting machines grew loud; it was succeeded by the sounds of distant motors, wind rustling in the trees, surf spuming against rocks, hooves clopping on soft asphalt. "You want out here?" asked the clerk. "Or will you try for a higher number?" Before the Governor could answer, the elevator stopped. Lampley stepped out on linoleum with the pattern worn off, the burlap backing showing through in streaks. A gloomy corridor, warm and fetid, stretched ahead of him. He turned back to the elevator but the doors were shut.

He paced along the corridor, past tarnished spittoons, sagging chairs, earthenware umbrella stands. The saffron wallpaper hung in shaggy strips, spiderwebs loaded with the dried chitin of insect victims tied it to the pocked plaster. Tarnished metal signs exhorted, NO SMOKING, DON'T SPIT ON THE FLOOR, SILENCE, NO WOMEN ALLOWED, FIREARMS PROHIBITED, ACT LIKE YOUR MOTHER SAW YOU. The light bulbs were the ancient carbon type; their filaments glowed an angry red through the flawed, smeared glass.

He entered a room whose wooden walls were riddled with holes, the remaining surfaces powdery and fragile, reeking with slime and foul smells. Men lay on the floor in their own filth and vomit, their greasy clothes clutched across thin chests, sagging bellies, protruding adams-apples. They quivered and twitched, squirmed and tossed, turned on their sides and then on their backs. They moved their arms under their uneasy heads, rolled over on them, jerked them up. They snored, wheezed, gasped, cried out. They burrowed unshaven faces, heavy with sores, scars, bloody cuts, into their elbows or against hunched shoulders. The Governor picked his way between them as best he could, anxious not to stumble, dreading to touch one of them with his foot.

At the end of the room an alabaster basin, perhaps twenty feet across, was full to the brim with sewage. Gorged and sluggish flies hovered, or lit briefly on bobbing orange-peels. He shuddered lest some tremor of the floor, some unseen current of air cause the loathsome bog to overflow and reach him.

He finished his cautious tour and entered a circular anteroom whose sides were completely taken up by divans and easy-chairs upholstered in faded green plush. Gas brackets curved outward from the walls, holding fan-shaped yellow flames like halting palms. A chandelier was suspended from the ceiling, its glass prisms and teardrops reflecting the violet end of the spectrum. Below it was a round settee with a blunted cone of upholstery rising in its center; the seat might have accommodated twenty pairs of buttocks; no more than four shoulders could have found space against the spindling back. This cone supported a cast-iron statuette of an effeminate youth or a mannish girl—it was impossible to tell which because of the chaste metallic drapery. There was no one in the room.

The Governor paused before the halls raying out from the anteroom. They were all precisely alike, shadowed, somber, murky; he chose the center one. The glow of kerosene lamps enshrined in recesses made pale brown half moons on the mud-colored floor. He would not have been surprised had the hall led to some cell from which there was no return, instead it ended in another anteroom. This one was square, with board benches. Fat candles on wooden stands slowly dripped wax; the floor was covered with sawdust and shavings.

There was a row of double-hinged saloon doors reaching from knee to shoulder. Lampley pushed through one. Sleepers were even more numerous here, piled closer together, and their smell was more nauseating. Some of the faces were rigid, lips drawn back in a snarl to uncover noisome caverns. Others

were mobile in sleep, grinning, grimacing, teeth-grinding, cheek-puffing. Pale worms crawled out of one open mouth.

He recognized some of the sleepers. Playmates, school fellows, college acquaintances, his first employer, merchants and farmers to whom he had sold tractors or plows, political allies he had left behind, a candidate he had ostensibly supported, a lobbyist to whom he had promised his vote before he changed his mind, a legislator of the same party whom he had disavowed, an office-seeker whom he had praised with calculated faintness—a dozen others. He could remember the names of none. He saw a man he was sure was his uncle, his mother's brother, in whose home he had lived and who had sent him to school. "Uncle—Uncle—" he stammered, but the name would not come. He stooped to rouse the man, to beg him to tell his name, to relieve the burden of forgetfulness. His uncle—if it was—slept on, knees drawn up, jaw slack, fingers fluttering. Lampley's hands fell away from the recumbent figure.

He hooded his eyes against the other faces, heeding only the legs and bodies to keep himself from stumbling. He saw the treasures, tokens, souvenirs, keepsakes the outcasts possessed, spilled from their hands or pockets onto the crowded floor: curling photographs, creased letters, cracked newspaper clippings, locks of lifeless hair, tarnished luckpieces, battered amulets, illegible diplomas, crumpled certificates.

The dormitory was surrounded by bathrooms of lustrous tile, milky porcelain, harsh chrome fixtures. Men slept on the spotless floors, in the immaculate tubs, draped themselves over lavatories and closestools. The one Lampley entered seemed less crowded than the others. A figure on the floor struggled free of his companions. It was the clerk. He closed the door and twisted the faucet in the bathtub. The elevator shot upward.

"I don't seem to remember any of the names," apologized the Governor.

The clerk smiled tolerantly, then frowned. He turned the faucet hard over; the elevator's speed became frightening. "There's forgetting and forgetting," he said. "Anyway, you'll remember these."

"What?" asked Lampley.

"These," said the clerk. The elevator stopped with a jolt. The clerk waved his hand. "Your floor."

CHAPTER 7

IT WAS a telephone exchange, with minute light-buttons flashing on and off. The switchboards were back-to-back; as the Governor walked slowly along he could see only the operators opposite. They were all girls he remembered poignantly, girls he had loved, whose

images had filled his mind, girls he had wanted, courted, thought about through restless nights, girls he had been too timid, too awkward, too shy or inept to have. There was not one whose name or voice or scent he had forgotten. Sheila, whose spare, tanned body tormented his adolescence, smiled up at him with those tantalizing lips, thin but so perfectly, so sweetly curved. Beth, who swam and sailed and rode like a boy but constantly reminded him she was a girl, waved a free hand as she plugged into the board with the other. And there was Marge, Marge of the translucent skin, and hair the silvery gold of a full moon on a hot summer's night, Marge, whose exquisiteness it had been agony not to touch, hold, crush, raven. They were all there: Anne, Louise, Ellen, Charlotte, Gwen, Dot, Jill, Hermina, Belle, Sybil . . . All those rewards ironic experience informed him belatedly he could have known. Grief swelled internally; he felt the tears flowing backward from his eyes down to his throat and lungs.

The girls' darting fingers snapped and unsnapped the connections in rapid rhythm. The pointed plugs were rifle bullets growing out of living vines rooted in the switchboards. This was his chance to call Marvin; what if some vital business had come up?

Yet he could not signal to the girls opposite: Connie, whose husband had contributed to his campaign for councilman, Martha, met at some dull affair, who had gotten tight with him. He could not ask them for an impersonal number; he dared not address them familiarly after realizing how fully he had failed them. The telephone exchange was a place where communication was impossible.

His steps slowed; he grudged leaving the women even though he could not reach or touch them, even though he was as helpless to stay as he had been to seduce. His sadness at the implacability of fate merged with a gentler, resigned nostalgia.

The last pair of switchboards was unoccupied. The Governor pulled a plug out from each; the vine-wires were straight and inflexible. They sped through the air, escaping his fingers, growing diagonally upward. Thinner tendrils sprang out from them at intervals and entwined into the rungs of a slanting ladder. Lampley put his foot on the lowest; it was springy but it held his weight without bending too far. He mounted rapidly.

Halfway up he looked back. The vines had sprouted umbrella-sized leaves, making a curtain between him and the exchange. He caught glimpses of blonde, red or brown heads and thought he heard weeping and laughter. Hummingbirds, moths and dragonflies in brilliant colors lit on the foliage; the leaves turned scarlet and or-

ange. Gentle winds rustled them.

The wind on the floor to which he climbed was gray and desolate. Far across the emptiness he saw a twenty-four motored plane being warmed up while the waiting passengers cooled cups of coffee in the wash of the propellers. Equally distant in another direction, an iceboat turned in narrow circles. Lightning flashed from dark clouds, thunder rolled steadily. Lampley walked to a stairway, iron-railed and steep.

Smell indicated that the floor above was used for chickens. Wire cages reached higher than a man's head, fryers stuck wan beaks through the openings into feed-troughs, pecking in brainless, suicidal intensity: tappetty-tappetty-tappetty tap-tap. Women with arms like thighs and breasts like rumps butchered methodically, wringing necks, cutting throats, chopping heads off. Spattered with blood, the women wiped their eyes with their great forearms, tossing sweaty hair out of their faces, joking, smearing entrails on their filthy aprons. The Governor hastily climbed the shallow wooden stairs ahead.

He was panting a little when he reached the sculptors' studio. Statues towered in impassive marble, porphyry, onyx, granite: men and women, gods and goddesses, dinosaurs, scorpions, dolphins, tortoises, dryads, satyrs, soaring abstractions—multiplaned figures, spheres, subtlely out-of-round, curves and ovals in inescapable relationships. He put his hand against the cold stone; the aloof, remote smoothness reassured him.

Obscured—not hidden, but certainly not put out for all to see—were groups in wood, soapstone, chalk, jade, concrete, glass, bone. Mermaids, centaurs, demons, incubi, basilisks, cockatrices, foetuses, were carved in meticulous detail. Monsters, congenitally malformed, crouched next to cyclops, multilimbed children, hermaphrodites, twins joined chest to chest, mouthless, earless, armless creatures. He shuddered away from them, turned back to the nobler creations; always his eye found another collection of horror for him to gaze at.

He was reluctant to leave this place of quietness and aspiration, of fascinating disgust. The stairway leading up was a continuance. The flight was of chalcedony, wide, sweeping upward in the grand manner, curving outward at the base and dividing in two halfway up; it was covered with slime which bubbled and stank in decay.

He trod fastidiously through the contamination, wiping his feet free of the clinging rot at the top. A bespectacled ape with a stethescope dangling from the pocket of his white jacket seized Lampley's hand, dug his fingers into the wrist, feeling for the pulse with an unbreakable grip. The jacket was his only gar-

ment; it was not quite long enough to cover his genitals.

"Get a stretcher, Nurse," the ape called over his shoulder. He stood on tiptoe to peer first into the Governor's right eye, and then the left, holding the lids open gently.

"There's nothing wrong with me," protested Lampley.

"Let's hope not," murmured the ape soothingly. "We'll soon find out."

Another ape in white cap and starched white skirts pedaled with bare feet a bicycle attached to a guerney. "Just get on this," said the ape-doctor.

"I can walk," contended Lampley.

"We have our rules," insisted the ape-doctor firmly but not unpleasantly. "If you are cooperative it will be easier all around."

The ape-nurse smiled at the Governor, opening her mouth wide to show her fangs. "You can sit, you know; you don't have to lie down."

Lampley seated himself on the edge of the guerney. The ape-nurse pedalled vigorously; the doctor trotted alongside, consulting the bulbous watch on his furry arm. The dial had no hands, numerals or glass, only buttons marked, HOT, RUTTING, COLD, BANANA, JAVA, RESET. "I don't understand," said Lampley.

"Don't worry," advised the doctor. "None of us understand. Just remember there's nothing to worry about. We're here only to help you."

"But I don't need help."

The two apes exchanged significant glances and the nurse picked a flea off the doctor's thigh. "That's what they all say," commented the doctor pityingly. "It's nothing to be ashamed of. The tempo of uncivilized life is such it's a wonder more don't break under it."

"I—" began the Governor, and stopped. He could deny nothing.

They entered a white-floored room shaped like a tepee, with white walls leaning together, coming to a point at an incandescent light above. The nurse pedalled the guerney under the cone and rested her head on her arms. Five other ape-doctors came through the shining walls which closed unbroken behind them. "Good-day, Doctor," they greeted in unison.

"Good-day, Doctor," replied the ape-doctor. "We have a most uninteresting case here.

A short ape plucked at his lower lip and grinned at the Governor. "Lucky you," he wheezed in a stage whisper. "He never discharges the interesting ones."

The other apes laughed; even the head doctor had trouble suppressing his smile. "Now, gentle-pithecanthropes," he said, "I'd like to have your opinions."

An emaciated ape with a hearing-aid adjusted an opthalmoscope and squinted at the Governor. "What's its case-history?" he asked gruffly.

"The usual thing: congenital

logophilia, the ordinary childhood disorders—inflamation of the gizzard, febrile larynx, minor pyromania, swollen presence —distention of the id, a liberal murmur, optical inversion, pathological increment of the epidermis, cancer of the body politic. Nothing to corruscate a clinician."

"Mmmmm," muttered a muscular ape, balancing himself on his knuckles and shaking his head soberly. "I don't dig these non-arboreal climbers. Smacks of delusion."

"Now Doctor," admonished the head physician, "are you making a diagnosis before all the returns are in? We haven't even started to count the ballots."

"The polls aren't closed yet," the nurse raised her head to point out. "That's a joke, see?"

A fat ape-doctor removed her cap and stuck it on one side of his head. "How's his colostrum?"

"What about his colophon?" inquired an old, stooped, graying ape.

"I'm more interested in his collyrium," said the short ape.

"You're a card, Doctor," cried the fat ape and the muscular ape together.

"Well, well," said the head physician tolerantly. "Fun is fun, but we must consider the patient."

"Consider the patient," ordered the nurse sternly, retrieving her cap.

"Patients are a virtue, get them while you can, hyster in a woman, prostate in a man," chanted the thin ape. "Let's get on with it."

"I see definite signs of softening of the hardening," remarked the old ape.

"Pardon me, Doctor," protested the thin ape, "surely these are classic symptoms of hardening of the softening."

"Weakening of the perspicates," muttered the muscular ape.

"Inversion of the fluctuates," amended the fat ape.

"Disconvection of the interregnum with complicated indications of pronobis-paxvobiscum," said the jovial ape, scratching between his shoulderblades.

"Are we in complete disagreement?" questioned the head doctor cheerfully.

"Apesolutely, Doctor," confirmed the old consultant. "Apesculapius and Hippocrapes confirm our capabilities."

The nurse whipped a corncob pipe with a long curved stem from under her skirts and stuck it in the fat ape's mouth. The muscular ape rubbed two sticks together till they burst into flame. The thin ape handed over a pair of goggles. When the glasses were adjusted and the pipe going to his satisfaction, the fat ape said, "Let the diagnosis continue. Silence in the court!"

The jovial ape produced a compass and rested it on Lampley's knee. "Shoot the works, cousin," he commanded.

The nurse sang in a growly

voice, "The one shines least, the none shines nest, but I know where the run shines in your vest—"

"Silence in the court!" repeated the fat ape. "Spin, cousin."

Lampley looked down at the compass, saw it had no glass. The points were marked, FORTH, Forth Forth-Least, Forth Least by Forth, Forth-Least; Least Forth Least, Forth Least by Least, LEAST; Least by Mouth Least by Least, Mouth Least; Mouth - Mouth - Least, Mouth Least by Mouth, MOUTH; Mouth by Mouth-Best, Mouth-Best by Mouth, Best Mouth, Mouth-Best by Best, Best-Mouth by Best, BEST; Best by Forth-Best, Forth-Best by Best, Forth-Best; Forth-Best by Forth, Forth by Forth-Best, FORTH. The magnetic needle wobbled loosely. Lampley spun it clumsily. The head physician pressed the studs on his watch. All the apes crowded in front of the Governor so he could not see the compass. He knew when the needle stopped, however.

"Incredible!" cried the old ape.

"Beautiful!" cried the fat ape.

"Scientific!" cried the jovial ape.

"On the button!" cried the thin ape.

"Haven't seen anything like it since I was an interne!" cried the muscular ape.

"Very nice," said the head physician. "I take it we are agreed?"

"Unequivocally," said the nurse. "Wow! Let's go!"

"Acute epistomology," said the thin ape tonelessly.

"Chronic voracity," said the fat ape satisfiedly.

"Inflamed igloosensesisty," said the jesting ape happily.

"Dubious proneity," said the old ape solemnly.

"Delusions of humanity," said the muscular ape sadly.

"Delusions of humanity," repeated the whole college mournfully.

"Good, very good indeed," observed the head physician, swinging from a trapeze and playing a xylophone with his toes. "Hold him temporarily under observation—"

"No sedation, Doctor," warned the old ape.

"No medication, Doctor," enjoined the muscular ape.

"No inflation, Doctor," suggested the thin ape.

"No castration, Doctor," put in the jovial ape.

"No vindication, Doctor," added the fat ape.

"—pending release and discharge," concluded the head doctor.

"What about infection?" asked the nurse.

"Humanity is not contagious," they all reminded her together.

The practitioners took pomegranates, figs, dates, mangoes and papayas from their jacket pockets and began munching them earnestly. The nurse ped-

alled Lampley through the white walls. "Are you ever lucky," she informed him chattily. "They might have put you in a straitjacket and fed you orally."

"But there's nothing wrong with me."

"Get tired," advised the nurse. "Your needle is stuck." She dismounted. "Stay where you are," she said when he started to get off too. "So long, cousin—don't take any wooden colonics."

The guerney moved on by itself, picking up speed. It careened through dazzling corridors, down ramps, up inclines, through wards, at such a dizzying pace he could see only the footrails of the beds with their clipboards of charts. Doors flipped open at his coming and swung back after him. Finally the guerny stopped so suddenly he slid forward smoothly onto the floor. When he picked himself up the vehicle was whizzing around a corner.

He was on a turntable, so nicely fitted into the floor that only a hairline crack defined it. It revolved slowly past curious scenes of men and women being cupped and leeched, poulticed with manure or steaming tripes, packed in snow, offered acrid inhalents or foul broths; of madmen worshipped or chained and beaten, of babies deformed for beauty's sake and old people eaten for economy's.

When he stepped off the turntable he was in a pleasant but definitely institutionalized room. An elderly man, derby hatted, blew patiently into a mute saxophone. A woman with waist-long white hair, lips drawn in sharply over empty gums, passed an unthreaded shuttle across a loom. A girl, rocking evenly back and forth, smiled knowingly, secretively. A bald man with dirty cheeks and smudged scalp, his tongue caught intently between his teeth, lay prone before a collection of posters, carefully painting mustaches on the faces of women, blotting out the faces of men.

At the other end of the room the Governor saw his mother. She was knitting slowly, diligently. Her arthritis, he thought sympathetically. He went to her. "Hello Mother." He kissed her cheek.

She finished two more stitches before she spoke. "How are you, Almon?" she asked placidly. "Isn't this a charming place?"

"You like it here, Mother?"

"Well, it isn't like being in one's own home. And of course they do serve lambchops without the paper frills," she complained. "I suppose it's all right, but I must say they look rather naked."

"But you're all right otherwise?"

"My eyes bother me, there's something wrong with the lights. The food hurts my gums and I'm short of breath and I never can seem to get comfortable clothes that aren't dowdy. And the newspapers are full of horrors—"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted

impatiently. "But they treat you well, don't they?"

She put down her knitting. "It depends entirely what you mean by that, Almon. If your poor father had lived no one would ever have hustled me around the way they do here."

"Are they rude to you, Mother?"

"They certainly don't act as I should expect persons to act toward a lady."

"They don't—they don't . . . handle you roughly?"

"My dear boy! What a question. They wouldn't *dare*."

He sank into a chair. "That's good. It's all right then."

"I shouldn't go as far as to say that." She resumed her knitting. "They read my letters," she announced in a loud whisper.

"What letters?" he asked.

"Now Almon, don't pry."

"I'm sorry, Mother. I only thought there might be something I could do about it."

"Don't be ridiculous, Almon. What could a boy do about such things?"

He was silent, despondent. "Oh, Mother . . ." He wanted to say that it was too easy to dismiss all questions as having too many answers or none at all—to say that the simplest questions, the ones apparently most irrelevant or meaningless were least susceptible of reply. What he wanted to say was true enough—or rather, it was true, but not enough. There were no answers, yet everything was an answer of sorts. "Oh, Mother," he said, "I don't know."

"Of course you don't," she agreed sharply. "Here, wind my wool for me."

Obediently he picked up the strand lying on her lap and began looping it around her outstretched hands. The yarn was kinked and lusterless. "Where do you get your wool?" he asked conversationally.

She cackled. "Now dear boy, don't try to catch me on one as old as that. I simply will not say from the sheep I count when I'm going to sleep. I just won't."

"I'm sorry, Mother."

"Are you really? Truly contrite? Genuinely humble?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Oh, suppositions. Theories. Vapors. Hopes. Pooh. Gracious, can't you wind faster?"

"Something seems to be holding the wool back."

"Nonsense! Oh, see what you've done, you clumsy boy! You're unravelling my cushion."

"I'm sorry, Mother."

She hurled her knitting in his face. "Take him away," she screamed. "He's a monster—can't you see?"

The other inmates threw up their heads and howled in unison. One sufferer, naked to the waist, his distorted face set in a dreadful smile, his hands stiffened into claws, ran into the room and danced around the Governor. Two women, their streaming hair starched with dirt, shrieked, "He did it, he did

it. He's the peeping tom." A man shambled in a circle, head down, muttering, "Womb, tomb, boom; boom, womb, tomb; tomb, boom, womb."

Two sternly expressionless attendants led the Governor to the elevator. "You are discharged for conduct unbecoming a patient and a gentle."

"But I—"

"If it weren't for this," said one of the attendants coldly, indicating his white coat, "I'd call you out myself, you cad."

"Don't demean yourself, brother," urged the other attendant. "He'll suffer now."

A group of orderlies appeared. Those in front beat upon enamel sputum dishes with hammers used to test reflexes. After them came a number with dilators, tubes and other objects which they employed as fifes and flutes. The color-bearer dipped his caduceus to the ground while the band played the rogues' march. A doctor drew his scalpel and cut the Governor's buttons from the cuff of his jacket.

The elevator doors opened. The clerk peeled off a white smock and tossed it out. "Step to the rear of the car please," he urged the Governor.

Lampley stumbled in. The elevator swished upward, then ran backward for interminable miles. It stopped; mechanics with rubber wrenches, paper hammers and cloth screwdrivers removed the steel doors, replacing them with a glass one. The clerk moved the control lever; the elevator rose again.

Once more it was in the shaft lined with porcelain-faced bricks. The Governor noticed how meticulously they had been set in place, each fitting so neatly against the next, no course of mortar thicker than the one above or below.

The clerk left the door open and leaned against it as Lampley wandered between the rows of grand pianos. The drops from the stalactites tinkled as monotonously as before on the exposed strings of the instruments. Plink plink, plink plink, plink plunk. It seemed to him—he was by no means sure—that on his first visit the pianos had all been identical. Now they were rosewood, mahogany, maple, ebony. Some were enamelled a startling white, one gleamed in dull silver, the varnish on another sparkled with crushed glass. He paused before a grand of such modest finish and unobtrusive wood that it commanded instant attention among more flamboyant peers. The Governor sat down before it, striking a key with his middle finger. Plink. What a work is man, he thought; I will my finger to move and it moves—what incomparable engineering! Plink. He had forgotten even how to play a scale; the stalactites could do as well or better. Plink plink, plink plunk.

In imagination he played the piano with perfect mastery, without effort, without barrier

between conception and performance. The exquisite music flowed from his fingers and laved the air. His heart burst with exaltation. The power of his playing infected all the nearby pianos; they exploded into the same melody.

Plink plink. Miss Brewster would have said primly, If that was your ambition, you should have practiced. Hours and hours and hours every day. Plink plink. And then Miss Brewster would not have smacked his hands and when he thought of her when he was bigger he wouldn't have . . . Plink plunk. A stupid fancy.

He got up impatiently. Could that be the unicorn lurking in the shadows? He walked slowly toward it. The creature showed no fear of him, made no attempt to run away. Trembling a little, Lampley put out his hand. The unicorn nuzzled his palm. Lampley touched the golden horn, ran his fingers through the foamy mane. The unicorn looked at him with its blue eyes; Lampley felt infinitely rewarded.

The unicorn was smaller than he had thought—as small as a pony. They walked together between the pianos, the beast breathing gently, the man reassuring himself of affection by rubbing the soft coat. All the pain of struggle began slowly to drain from his body; he knew he could be content to stay here.

Only when they were almost at the elevator did the unicorn throw up his head, toss his mane and gallop off. The Governor turned to pursue but the clerk, still leaning in the open door, stopped him. "It's no use," he called, not unkindly. "You couldn't catch him unless he wanted you to."

"But he . . ." began Lampley.

"A whim," said the clerk. "They're all alike."

Sadly he entered the elevator. It was only as the door was closing he realized the plinking from the stalactites had stopped as he touched the unicorn.

CHAPTER 8

THE elevator slid upward steadily through the white-tiled shaft. Lampley, slowly recovering his calm after the loss of the unicorn, caught glimpses of the activities in the various sub-basements. Men were building a ship in one, laying the keel, riveting the ribs, welding the plates. Higher, dynamos of all sizes were attended by midgets who climbed and clung like flies. On the next floor hundreds of seamstresses in grecian robes cut and sewed balloons, twisted silk threads into heavy ropes, wove rush baskets and attached them to the flaccid bags; on another he saw a congregation of worshippers at prayer. There was a sub-basement that was a library, one which was a toy factory, one where alchemists turned waste into gold. There was a bakery, an automobile assembly, an iron foundry, a chemical laboratory,

a college, a mortuary. They rose through moving picture stages, distilleries, warehouses, millwrights, armorers, perfume-makers, silversmiths, glass-blowers, gem-cutters, machine-shops, art galleries, a mint, lumber-yard, stoveworks.

Then came a series of vacant floors: bleak, void, stale. The elevator moved much more slowly now, as though dragged down by the emptiness, pulled back, hampered by the blankness through which it was passing.

"About this fellow," said the clerk abruptly.

"What fellow?" parried the Governor. But he knew.

The clerk pulled out a plastic mask and slipped it over his face. It was a replica of his own features, subtlely altered, so that the Governor was filled with sick terror at the sight of mouth, nose, cheeks, eyes, superimposed on those which differed only enough to be totally alien. The clerk stopped the elevator, opened the door. Walls of rough stone towered on all sides. The Governor held back until the clerk's steady stare forced him out onto the cracked, uneven pavement. There was a sweetish, sickening, vaguely familiar smell all around.

The clerk rubbed his hands together and then over Lampley's arm in a gesture of appraisal and possession. To his disgust the Governor saw the fabric of his jacket crumble and dissolve. His jacket and the shirt beneath, leaving his skin and flesh bare and vulnerable. The touch of the fingers was loathsome but he was unable to draw away from it. The clerk brought his face close, so that Lampley saw where the mouth of the mask, the eyeholes and nostrils failed to match those beneath.

"This man, this convict, this felon. You couldn't find it in you to reprieve him?"

"He had a fair trial," mumbled Lampley.

"A fair trial," repeated the clerk. "The jurors were gods, the judge was justice incarnate?"

"The judge was properly assigned; the jurors were members of a qualified panel."

"Your prerogative . . .?"

"My prerogative is to temper justice with mercy."

"And you were unable?"

"He murdered his father. He strangled him, he smothered him with a pillow, he stabbed him in the heart, he poisoned him, he shot him with a pistol; he killed his mother."

"Are you sure?" asked the clerk, puffing out the cheeks of his mask.

"There were witnesses, there was circumstantial evidence, he confessed. He clubbed his mother to death, he cut her throat, he held her under water till she died."

"Ah," sighed the clerk. "Ah . . . Then no reprieve was possible?"

"No reprieve was possible," replied the Governor firmly.

"So be it," said the clerk.

Two pale men leapt from their hiding-place and bound Lampley's hands behind him. They led him through an archway into a courtyard. A masked executioner came forward and knelt at his feet. "I ask your forgiveness, noble sir, for what I am about. The deed is not mine, I am but a servitor."

The two pressed him toward the block and forced his head low. The semicircular hollow was cunningly contrived to fit any neck. The long gashes in the wood pulled and sucked at his throat. The executioner raised his ax and brought it down. Lampley's head rolled in the sawdust beyond the scaffold.

The two seized him and bound his arms. From a distance he heard the chaplain's breaking voice. They hustled him between the stone walls and dragged him up the gallows' steps. The hood was dropped over his head, then the rope. He felt the hardness of the knot against his left ear. There was no spittle in his mouth. They pushed his legs firmly into place over the trap. He heard the snick of the knife as it cut the cords. He swung in a narrowing circle.

They wrapped the thin cord deftly round and round his body, pinioning his arms cruelly to his sides. They slid him down the incline beneath the guillotine. When he was suitably in place the blade descended swiftly.

They seated him in the chair and strapped the electrodes to his leg and head. They pushed him into the sealed chamber and watched through greedy slits while the cyanide pellets were released. They tied the bandage over his eyes and stepped back just before the fusilade.

He lay broken on the rough stones. He remembered the touch of the golden horn and began breathing again. He remembered the island under the earth and his heart resumed beating. He remembered the young girl in the hotel and he could see and hear.

He rose slowly and viewed his bodies after their agonies. He walked past the bullet-chipped wall, the gas-chamber, electric chair, guillotine, gallows. His feet scuffed the bloody sawdust by the headsman's block.

The elevator stood empty and unattended. He went into the car, the door closed behind him and the car shot up. Again it slowed as it passed the darkened tiles in the upper reaches of the sub-basements, so that it was once more moving sluggishly as the lobby and the hall above came in sight. It stopped amid the elegance of the third floor, and the doors opened of themselves.

The elegance had become shabby beyond restoration. The thick carpet was worn to the threads. Woodwork and panelling no longer contrasted, they were the same uniform color of age. The chairs and sofas were ripped and tattered, their stuff-

ing protruded like ruptures. The doll was in the same place and position; a pendulous belly and two elongated breasts had been sewed on with coarse stitches.

The iron railing around the quadrangle leaned outward; some of the balusters were missing. The concourse below was gone; he looked down on the dingy lobby, past the visible portion of the second floor hiding the reception desk. He turned away; the doors which had borne the esoteric numerals were blank, their panels warped and sagging.

He searched for the wide staircase to the second floor. His orientation had changed, he turned left instead of right, or right instead of left. In lieu of the grand flight he came upon a mean descent, twisting every few steps. The boards creaked and quivered under his weight.

His room was that of the first door he opened. His handbag rested on the foot of the bed, the wax figures of the bride and groom stood stiffly in the cloudy glass bell. Lampley tarried before the mirror, adjusting his sleeves, assuring himself there was neither lint nor soil on his jacket. He picked up his bag and gave a conventional last glance around, though he knew he had brought nothing more into the room.

He shut the door and tried the handle; it did not turn. Yet surely it had been closed before he went in to retrieve his bag? All the doors on the hall were shut, shut and locked and untenanted, their invitation withdrawn. He reached the narrow stairs. From these there was no landing halfway down, nor did they lead to the lobby. They ended at a solid door with a handle instead of a knob. He pressed the latch down doubtfully, anxious to be out of this blind end, unwilling to go back up and start down again.

The refrigerator room which had been so cold was now warm and stuffy. There was no igloo. The game and fish were gone, the brine barrels were tipped over, gaping unconcernedly. They gave out no smell save that of old wood. The sawdust had weathered. Most of the meat hooks were empty; from a few hung the bare skeletons of beeves and sheep and swine, the surface of their bones dry, cracked with long, thin crevices, crossed with fine hairlines. He recognized the buffalo because of the peculiar shape of the skull and horns lying on the floor below the carcass.

He pushed open the massive door to the kitchen. The old man was carving a set of chessmen out of bone; several finished pieces, rooks, knights and a queen stood in a row before him. In his thick fingers the other queen was taking recognizable shape. All had the same distortion as the plaster figures in the wall. He looked up at Lampley without interrupting his work. "A hard time, hay?"

The Governor nodded. The old man jerked a thumb over his shoulder. Lampley followed its direction into the eating room. The idiot was trying to spoon soup into his mouth, spilling most of it, sputtering the rest into slimy bubbles. The clerk, his eyes closed, had one leg hooked over the corner of the table. The woman smiled at him, showing the gold tooth. There was no sign of the girl. Lampley sat down in the old man's place.

The clerk's eyes opened; the mask was gone. He pushed a hard crust of bread across the table. Lampley picked it up and turned it over in his fingers. "I'm going," he announced to them.

The clerk yawned. "I'd be afraid myself," he confessed.

"Afraid of what?" asked the Governor.

The clerk shrugged. "So much," he said hazily. "Everything." He smiled doubtfully.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," said the Governor boldly.

The clerk shook his head and left the room. The idiot gurgled and sputtered over his soup. Lampley reached for the corner of the napkin tied around his neck and wiped the drooling mouth. He took the stale crust and broke it into the soup. When the bits were soaked he used the spoon to feed them slowly to his son.

"It's no use," said the woman. "You can't teach him."

"I wasn't trying—" began Lampley, and let it go. "Where is your sister?"

She wrinkled her forehead. "Sister?"

He had asked the girl if she were this woman's daughter; she is my sister, she had said, and then something horrible—what?—happened. He could not be mistaken. "The girl who was here."

"I was the only girl here. There was no other. There never was another."

He looked at her searchingly; her face showed no disingenuousness. He finished feeding the defective and wiped his face again. He got up and went over to the woman. She reached out her hand to touch his. He bent and kissed her. Then he kissed his son.

In the lobby the clerk was behind the desk, idly searching through the empty pigeonholes. "Nothing for you," he said without turning around.

The Governor went through the entrance and down the steps into the afternoon sunlight. When he came to his car he reached in his pocket for the keys. His hand touched his watch. He pulled it out and saw it was running, the sweep second hand revolving inexorably. He slipped it on his wrist and unlocked the car door.

Before getting in he glanced up and down the street and back at the hotel. He had never seen it or the town at any time in his life.

THE END

by S. E. COTTS

THE DARK DESTROYERS. *By Manly Wade Wellman. 224 pp. Avalon Books. $2.95.*

Manly Wellman, whose last book *Giants From Eternity* was reviewed in this column a short time ago, has come up with another pleasant novel. The current one has many of the characteristics that made the previous one so entertaining. The problem is again that of strange invaders menacing all life on the earth. These invaders have already gained control of major portions of the globe, not because they are invincible, but because their nature is unknown and there appears to be no way of communicating with them. Therefore, men have not been able to devise any means of defeating or even harassing them.

Another point of common ground with Wellman's previous work is that although the bare plot outlines might lead you to believe that the stories were grim and suspenseful, such is not the case. The author is gifted with such a light touch that the books are overflowing with good humor. The reader can sense that everything will be all right and so the prevailing tone is that of a sport or romp. The heroes conquer by ingenuity instead of violence. The fanciful and rather quaint action described may not reflect reality, but it certainly brings enjoyment. This is far from being a weakness; rather, it's a welcome change of pace.

THE OUTWARD URGE. *By John Wyndham and Lucas Parkes. 143 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.*

This short book is really less a novel than four scenes or

glimpses from the future history of space. Some readers may remember these four episodes from their appearance last year, in successive issues of *Fantastic* under the title "The Troons of Space." Four distinct stages of man's outward development are covered—the first Space Station, the occupation of the Moon, the expedition to Mars, and lastly Venus. The unifying factor of these episodes is that a member of the Troon family is involved in each. *The Outward Urge* seems to be a hereditary factor in the Troon family. We learn that even before the story of the first Space Station, a Troon was involved in the flying feats of World War II, and after the Venus chapter, there is no sense of finality because one knows that future Troons will be among the first to the stars and then the first into other galaxies, and so on.

Unfortunately, the book is not nearly as good as this bare description of events might lead one to believe. The book is a rather curious mixture and neither of the ingredients are sufficiently well realized. To really succeed, a book like this must hold the reader's interest either through a sense of adventure brought about by a strong narrative, or through an emotional and psychological involvement with the characters and their development. (The best book combining these two factors is Clifford Simak's *City*).

The authors are hampered in fulfilling both these aims by stiff dialogue and rather commonplace descriptions. This is not so serious in the first two parts which involve scenes that have become part of our consciousness, but in the last two, which cry out for imaginative treatment, they have let the reader down.

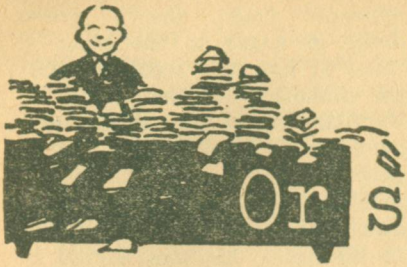
THE WORLD SWAPPERS. *By John Brunner. 153 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 35¢.*

In *The World Swappers*, Mr. Brunner has set himself some difficult writing problems and comes through with flying colors. The result of the author's labors is not just an academic "tour de force" but an exciting novel besides. What is presented to the reader is a number of major subplots, each one interesting in itself; several important characters, each one well drawn and credible; and the combining of these elements in a well-knit story with a distinct point of view.

The two major forces in the book are Counce, a man of tre-

mendous power through his discovery three centuries before of a way to transport matter instantaneously, and Bassett, the wealthy and powerful head of a vast trading empire. Counce's discovery led him to search for others who might help him serve mankind. He succeeded and became head of this large group which commands tremendous resources of intelligence. They have discovered the presence of other intelligent being among the stars of whom Bassett as yet has no idea. The latter is intent on expanding his empire for his own personal ends and seeks to make whole worlds dependent on him.

The many possibilities that such a vital struggle presents are thoughtfully and excellently explored. This novel is highly recommended as an example of how science fiction can embody important ideas without any loss of excitement.



Or so you say

Dear Editor:

I didn't take you at your word in the November *Amazing*. I read "Science and Superman," by Anderson the first thing. I disagree with you: I agree with Anderson but don't feel entirely let down. Then I read "Sneak Preview" and rather liked it. It seemed to take quite a while for the story to get going. Just in case you should publish this letter, I had better explain that I didn't particularly enjoy the part in the story where the socially secured were dumped in the Gulf of Mexico, however the author has presented a very good point. We had better not spend too much time sitting on our overstuffed upholstery gleaning enjoyment out of reading stories that use any sort of sadism just for the sake of sadism, but make every attempt to "read between the lines" and get at the real meaning intended to be conveyed. Mr. Lobsenz also pointed out in his editorial the value of filming for psychoanalysis with which I must agree.

The story that interested me from purely an entertainment angle was "The Observers." Since the two stories I have mentioned are of such different character and length it would be unwise for me to say which one should take first place.

"Minor Detail" was fair with "The Shepherd of the Planets" about the same. The latter story could easily have had a little more action and length to it. "The Flesh Man From Far Wide" was pretty close to zero. I couldn't see the connection to the story of the principal character nailing down the mice tails so that the metal cat could—the rest was never told. I presume however, that it was a part of the pleasure enjoyed by the first person. I would like to inquire from the author if the mice were also metal mice or were they real. What does he regard as pleasure?

Chester F. Milbourn
Estancia, New Mexico

• *Dumping old folks in the Gulf of Mexico, obviously!*

Dear Editor:

The vintage '30 cover on the November *Amazing* by Summers

was not bad at all. While I've never been too fond of the style that Summers employs, he seems to do a pretty good job with the covers. He is one of the few artists who's miserable with the interiors but good on covers. A reversal of this would be Finlay, whose covers aren't too good, but could do some of the greatest interior illos if just given the chance.

I certainly hope you won't adopt the policy of using only material by the top-notch, well established writers, and ignoring the amateurs who are gradually climbing up in the ranks. New names are popping up everywhere, and it's up to the editors to encourage the development of any particular writer they feel is capable of turning out good material. Who knows, you may have another Ray Bradbury or Robert Heinlein on your hands. I still think Jack Sharkey is a pen-name, but if Sharkey is genuinely real, that attests to the fact that amateurs can expand, given the opportunity.

In Poul Anderson's article he mentions certain improvements that the human race could come by, such as getting rid of the appendix, and other items. Now it seems to me, merely eliminating the organ does not improve its usage, but merely gets rid of it, as he said. Wouldn't it be much better if a careful and determined use was found for the appendix, other than providing the motive for many operations? Suppose it was found that the appendix could absorb overdoses of sugar in the blood—think of how this would benefit the diabetics. Another thing is the little toe, in fact, all the toes on a man's feet, though I suppose the small one is the most useless. When man was a step away from the apes and living in the trees, his toes served a useful purpose in climbing, as they benefit a monkey today. But we've become softies when it comes to the use of our bare feet in climbing things, and thus the toes are no longer carrying out any specific function. But just suppose that some new kind of shoes were devised which fitted around the front of the foot, with spaces where one could insert his toes, and walking depended on proper coordination of these appendages. Then we would not be so quick about getting rid of them. And Mr. Anderson, talk about useless items: if it wasn't for the human brain there would be no mentally defective persons; do you advocate the human race outgrowing its brain?

Mike Deckinger
85 Locust Ave.
Millburn, N. J.

• *Anyone got any hot ideas for idle appendices? Mike's given you a good start.*

Dear Editor:

. . . And a certain Mr. Cooper, who in your last *Amazing* complained of your choice of au-

thors. I want to ask what's so special about Ed Hamilton? Perhaps he is an outstanding author. So does that mean that we, and the editor, are supposed to kowtow every time his name is mentioned? I am not trying to be sarcastic, I'm just asking questions. We have a fine crop of new writers. Mr. Cooper, do you have any idea of how much sweat and blood goes into a story? The editor is right. Perhaps if you ever attempted to write a story, you would be more tolerant of their troubles. As contrary to a state of mild argument as this may seem, it is exactly that. I know that this is a column for discussion and am acting accordingly. This is nothing personal, Mr. Cooper, but wasn't that crack about cost a little below the belt?

Ronald Felty
1726 Johanna
Houston, Texas

• *The only author we kowtow to around here is Lin Yutang. He's an important guy.*

Dear Editor:

You do a very impressive job on your covers. I always look forward to each issue and although I know it's impossible, I wish you could print a new issue every week.

I have a problem. Although I have been interested in s-f for some time now I have been unable to get in touch with any fanzines. Do they still have them? I have never seen one and would like to have the opportunity.

Phillip A. Harrell
2632 Vincent Avenue
Norfolk 9, Va.

• *Can any of you fanzine fen lend a hand?*

Dear Editor:

Poul Anderson's article, "Science and Superman: An Inquiry," in the November issue prompted me to write this letter. After all, an inquiry should be answered, shouldn't it?

I think Mr. Anderson will agree that man makes his society what it is. But his article seems to indicate that he also believes that society makes man (as a species) what *he* is. Sort of seems that man makes man what he is. That a cause is its own effect, and that the effect is its own cause. I'm sure that this is evidently a contradiction.

Well, then, society *doesn't* make man what he is. But if this is true, then Mr. Anderson's whole argument founders, for if society doesn't change man essentially, if it doesn't cause the evolution of man to change, why worry about trying (through sterilization, or any other means) to prevent society from affecting the course of man's evolution?

Now there's another way of obviating the contradiction: assume that man doesn't make his society, that it makes him. This leads to all sorts of interesting conclusions, but I think we're

only interested in one of them here. If man doesn't make his society, how can man change it? He can't. So any attempt to is futile. If man can't change his society, and society is causing "species degeneration," then man can't change the course of this species degeneration, and any such attempt is fore-doomed to failure.

Either way you look at it, and it must be one or the other, not both, for that leads to a contradiction, any such argument for the "improvement of the race" is pointless.

Of course, here we've been talking about "man" as a continuing, continuous, species, and "society" as a continuing, continuous establishment. The apparent contradiction cited above is no contradiction at all if we admit two or more societies interacting, nor if we admit two or more species affecting one another.

Maybe this is the case; let's look at it. Say man, A, having a society, A^1, changes his society to B^1, which, in turn changes man to B. Now, looked at another way, we can say A^1 changes A to B, which in turn changes A^1 to B^1. Now, Mr. Anderson says that society today has a negative affect on man; it causes "species degeneration." But this would cause a change in the society, wouldn't it? A^1 would be changed to B^1.

Now, unless *all* society causes this degeneration, which cannot be admitted, this degeneration will continue until a society, B^1, is formed that affects man in a positive way, and we go back to society B, and a man (species) A. Then 'round and 'round we go. Of course there will be a certain amount of social "friction", so that the circle will not go on indefinately, but will reach an equilibrium point. Static society, static man.

But as long as there are random factors such as mutations to worry about, it can be argued that such a static situation is impossible.

If so, then the arguments leading to the conclusion that there will be such a static state must be in error; that is, Mr. Anderson's original premise (for he carried out his logic beautifully) must be in error.

So I guess I won't have to be sterilized after all!

Arthur B. Prag
Department of Physics
University of Washington
Seattle, Wash.

• *Well, thank goodness for that. We're an "A" and we wouldn't want to become a "B" that way.*

Dear Editor:

America *has* a "secret" weapon, it has existed for many years, and will continue to do so. I am your "secret" weapon, I and millions like me.

Every bomb has to have three parts, a potential explosion, implosion, or other damaging devices, a trigger, and an effect.

The potential energy sits semi-dormant in the minds of many teen-agers and young men.

The triggers: as I look about me I see many. Modern architecture, science, etc., shows us (I'm a teen-ager) what can be done with imagination; modern music shows us that "wild" imaginations are not persecuted.

Science Fiction stimulates our minds, and, shows us that we don't have everything science can produce.

And, the effect, although slow in acting, will destroy any nation on Earth, or beyond.

Imaginative minds shall produce the things now called science fiction.

Let us not stifle our main strength in the cold war, let us contribute. New ideas shall crop up and be reaped by us, the young people.

Most of you older people remember many of the early science-fiction writers (how can you forget, we remind you often enough) who wrote of space travel, undersea travel, speeds of 100 m.p.h. in the air, of 20 m.p.h. on land. Ha, ha.

I'm not Nostradamus, but anyone can predict when the effect of our weapon is seen.

I shall not reap, but I shall seed.

Tobey Reed
3005 Margate
Rancho Cordova, Calif.

• *Seed, Reed; it's a good creed and a good deed.*

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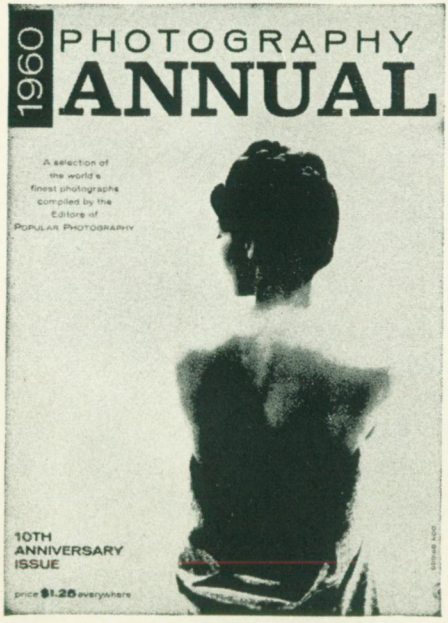

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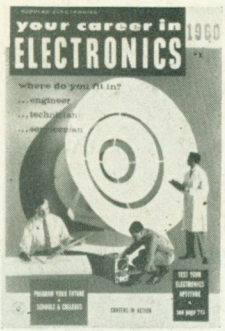

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