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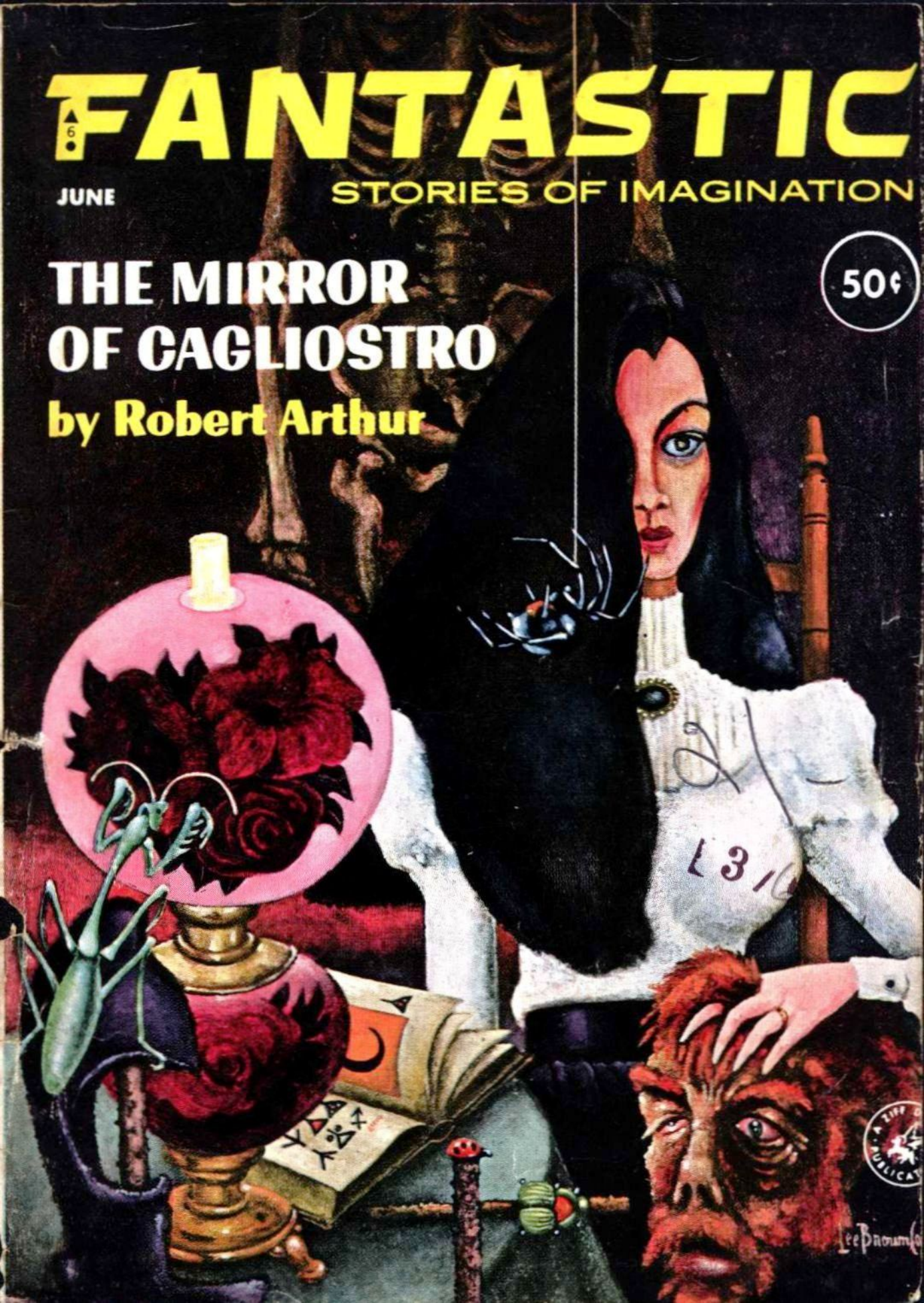
JUNE

STORIES OF IMAGINATION

THE MIRROR OF CAGLIOSTRO

by Robert Arthur

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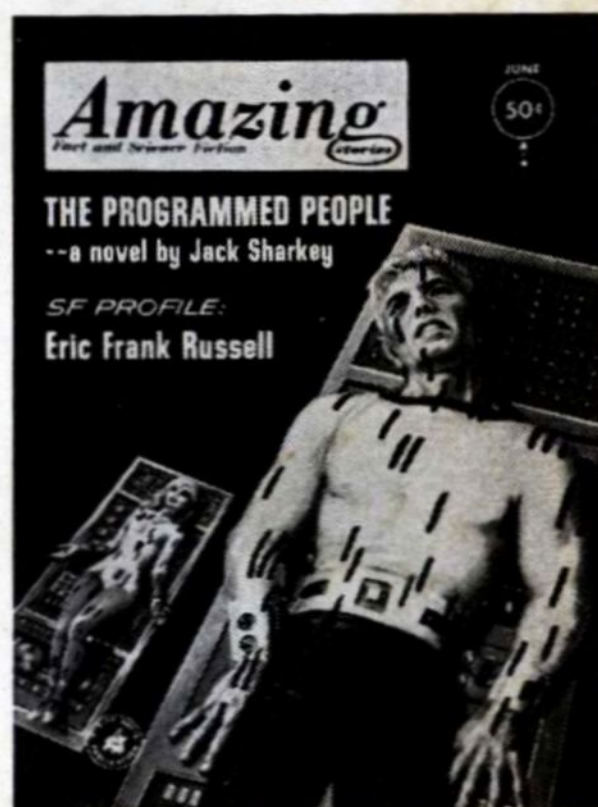
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JUNE 1963
Volume 12 Number 6

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IN the world of the four-color ads of the electronics and space vehicle companies, everything is jim-dandy. Rockets take-off with a lovely orange exhaust; the firmament coruscates with twinkling stars; the oceans are blue and the curve of the earth's horizon is heart-catching; and when the manned satellites and rocket vehicles make their re-entry, they whip in from Australia and the Hawaiian Islands—unerringly guided by those white dotted lines—and land as neat as you please somewhere in the Mojave Desert, not more than a dime off-target.

That's all very well. But what happens if something goes wrong before or during re-entry? Let me tell you, the recovery picture suddenly gets tough for the spacemen concerned. Just how rough, you can tell from the proposals recently put forth for emergency landing apparatus.

Suppose a manned space capsule gets frimmims in its bezoars and is stuck in orbit. How do the astronauts get down? General Electric has come up with one possible answer: a 300-pound "life-raft." It would work this way: the astronaut, in his regular space-suit, climbs inside a huge, double-walled plastic sack (this is his life-raft!). He pushes out of the capsule's airlock into space and orbits his craft. When he reaches the pre-calculated point at which his re-entry orbit would begin, he fires a retro-rocket attached to the plastic sack and heads for earth, backwards. A folding shield opens up to absorb the heat generated by atmospheric friction, and the sack itself fills with a foaming plastic which solidifies and embeds the astronaut in its rigid but gentle embrace to cushion shock. Eventually the sack breaks out a parachute, sends out flares and activates beacons, and rescuers pick up the hero. The name for this life-saving system is MOOSE: *Man Out Of Space Easiest*. If you believe *that* acronym, here is another system to think about that makes the MOOSE ride seem like a rowboat on a mill pond. It is designed to enable astronauts to make emergency bail-outs *during* re-entry. Ordinary pressure suits are of no protective value at re-entry speeds; a man's flesh could be torn from his bones by the velocity. But a special suit and helmet—of sailcloth over cotton cloth over tightly woven aluminized nylon—will protect a man from heat and wind-blast at hypersonic speeds . . . They say. Happy Landings!



A master fantasist creates a world of abysmal evil and dark dimensions . . . a world that can be entered—or left—only through . . .

THE MIRROR OF CAGLIOSTRO



By **ROBERT ARTHUR**

Illustrator **ADKINS**



London, 1910

The girl's eyes were open. Her face, which had been so softly young, flushed with champagne and excitement, was a thing of horror now. Twisted with shock, contorted with the final spasm of life ejected from the body it had tenanted, her face was a mask of terror, frozen so until the rigor of sudden death should release its hold. Only then would her muscles relax and death be allowed to wipe away the transformation he had wrought.

Charles, Duke of Burchester, wiped his fingers delicately on a silk handkerchief. For a moment, looking down at the girl, Molly Blanchard, his eyes lighted with interest. Was it truly possible that in death the eyes photographed, as he had been told, the last object that sight registered?

He bent over the girl huddled on the crimson carpet of the small private dining room of Chubb's Restaurant, and stared into the blue eyes that seemed to start from the contorted face. Then he sighed and straightened. It was, after all, a fairy tale. If the story had been true, her dead eyes should have mirrored two tiny, grinning skulls, one in each—for a skull had been the last thing she had seen in life. *His skull.*

But the blue eyes were cold and blank. He had seen in them reflection from one of the tapers

that burned upon the table, still set with snowy linen and silver dishes from which they had dined.

He amended the thought. From which Molly had dined. Dined as she, poor lovely creature from some obscure group of actors, had never dined before. He had dined afterwards. She had dined upon food, but he had dined upon life.

He felt replete now. It was a pity he had not been able to restrain his impulse to kill. London was a city of infinite interest in this, the twentieth century. He should have planned on a prolonged stay, to explore it fully, but temptation had been too great, after so long an abstinence.

HE moved swiftly now. The cheap necklace of glass beads, which the girl's mind had seen as rare diamonds, he allowed to remain about the throat where they glistened against the blue marks of strangling fingers. But he took his cloak from a hook and threw it over his shoulders. He retrieved his hat and let himself out the door without a backward glance for the empty husk that lay upon the rug.

A waiter in red livery was coming down the hall, past the series of closed doors that led to the famous—and infamous—private dining rooms of Chubb's. Charles stopped him.

"I leave," he said. "My friend—" he nodded toward the closed door—"wishes to be undisturbed so that she may compose herself. Please see to it."

A coin slipped from one hand to the other, and the servitor nodded.

"Very good, Sir," he said. No titles and no names were used at Chubb's. They were, however, well known to both the proprietor and all the help. A pity.

Charles walked down the long corridor, down the steps which led to the street without imposing upon one the necessity of exposing himself to the view of the crowd in the dining rooms below. As he let himself out, the eight-foot tall doorman, cloaked in crimson with a black shakko upon his head—a sight more goggled at in these days by tourists from puritanical America than even Windsor Castle—raised a hand. A hansom cab arrived in place precisely on the moment that his steps carried him to the curb.

Without looking back, Charles tossed a coin over his shoulder. The giant doorman casually retrieved it from the air as a dozen beggars and street loungers leaped futilely for it.

"Burchester House," Charles said to the coachman.

He settled back to stare with hungry eyes upon this, the new London of which he had seen so

little—and could have seen so much if he had not let himself be carried away by the soft sweet temptation of Molly Blanchard's life so that. . . .

But it was futile to dwell upon it. There would be other occasions. As they rolled through the dark streets he let himself relive the moment when he had placed the necklace about Molly's throat, telling her to look deep into his eyes. The heady delight of the instant when her trusting eyes had seen behind the mask of flesh which he now wore. The almost intolerable joy of her struggles.

HE realized that the hansom had stopped. For how long had he been living again those delights, unaware? There was not, after all, infinity ahead of him yet. Pursuit would be hot after him soon, and he was as vulnerable now as a new-hatched chick.

He stepped from the cab and flung the driver money. Charles, still with the down of youth upon his pink and white cheeks, strolled with the gait of a man much older and more experienced into the great, three-storied stone mansion which was the London residence of the Burchesters.

Inside, someone came scurrying out of the shadows of the almost dark parlor.

"Charles, my son," his mother began, in a voice that trembled.

"Later, mother," he said

sharply, and brushed past her. "I am going to my studio. I will be occupied for some time." He started up the stairs toward the tower room where he kept his paints and canvases. Behind him he heard his mother whimpering. He paid no heed. As he reached the second floor he increased his pace. It would not do to be late in getting back to his sanctuary.

An hour later, with his mother weeping outside his door and the men from Scotland Yard hammering on it, Charles, Duke of Burchester, flung himself from the casement window and jellied himself on the cobblestones below.

Paris, 1963

The Musée des Antiquités Historique was a small brick building, twisted out of shape by the pressure of time and its neighbors. It stood at the end of one of Paris' many obscure streets, so narrow and twisting that no driver of even the smallest car, entering one, could be sure of finding room enough to turn around to get out again.

Beyond the Musée flowed the Seine, and if the waters of the Seine gave off any glint of light this overcast day, the glint was wholly lost in passing through the grime that darkly frosted the windows of the office of the curator, Professor Henri Thibaut.

Thibaut himself was ancient

enough to seem one of the museum's exhibits, rather than its curator. But his eyes still snapped, and he spoke with a swift crispness that strained Harry Langham's otherwise excellent understanding of French.

"Cagliostro?" Thibaut said, and the word seemed to uncoil from his lips like a tiny serpent of sound. "Count Alexander Cagliostro, self-styled. Born in 1743, died in 1795. A man of great controversy. By some denounced as a fraud. By others acclaimed as a miracle worker—a veritable magician. Ah yes, my young colleague from America, I have studied his life. Your information is entirely correct."

"Good," Harry Langham said. He smiled. At thirty-five he still seemed younger than his age, although a carefully acquired professorial manner helped counterbalance his youthful aspect.

"Frankly, sir," he added, "I had just about given up hope of getting any decent information about Cagliostro to make my summer in Europe worthwhile. I'm an associate professor of history at Boston College—my period is the 18th Century—and I am working for my doctorate, you see. I have chosen Count Cagliostro as the subject for my thesis. This is my last day in France. Only last night I heard of you—heard that you yourself had once written a thesis on the life

of Cagliostro. I'm here, hoping you will assist me."

"Ah." Thibaut took a cigarette from an ivory box and lit it. "And from what viewpoint do you approach your subject? Do you propose to expose him as one of history's great frauds? Or will you credit him with powers bordering on the magical?"

"That's my problem," Harry Langham said frankly. "To play it safe I ought to call him a mountebank, a faker, a great charlatan. But I can't. I started thinking that, and now—now I believe that he may really have had mystic powers. His life is wrapped in such mystery—"

"And you wish to clarify the mystery?" Thibaut said, his tone sardonic. "You will write your thesis about Cagliostro. You will win an advanced degree. You will get a promotion. You will make more salary. You will marry some attractive woman. All from the dusty remains of Cagliostro. N'est-ce pas?"

"Well—yes." Harry Langham laughed, a bit uneasily. "Cagliostro—thesis—promotion—money—marriage. Almost like an equation, isn't it?"

"It is indeed." With a sudden motion, Thibaut ground out his cigarette. "Except that the answer is wrong."

"How do you mean?"

"Cagliostro can bring you only grief. Go back to America and

erase the name of Cagliostro from your memory!"

"But Professor!" Harry reflected that the French became excited easily, and the thought made his tone amused. "You yourself wrote a thesis about the man."

"And destroyed it." Thibaut sank back into his chair. "Some things our world will not accept. The truth about Count Cagliostro is one of them."

"But he's been dead for nearly two hundred years!"

"M'SIEU Langham," Thibaut said, reaching again for the cigarettes in the ivory box, "Evil never dies. No, no. Do not answer. There is little I can do to help you. I destroyed my thesis and all my notes. "However, if you should go to London—"

"I go there tomorrow," Harry told him. "I sail from Southampton in a week. I hope to find some material on Cagliostro in the British Museum."

"You will find little of value," the Frenchman said. "To the British, Cagliostro was a charlatan. But attend. Seek in the old furniture shops for a plain desk with a hinged lid, the letter "C" carved into it in ornate scrolls. Once it belonged to Cagliostro. Later it was acquired by one of the Dukes of Burchester. I have reason to believe that certain of Cagliostro's papers were hidden

in a secret drawer in this desk and may possibly still be there."

"A plain desk with a hinged lid, the letter "C" carved into it." Harry Langham's expression was eager. "That would be a find indeed. I certainly thank you, Professor Thibaut."

The older man eyed him sadly.

"I still repeat my advice—tear up your thesis, forget the name. But you are young, you will not do it. Very well, I shall make one more suggestion. Go—now, today—to the Church of St. Martin."

"St. Martin?"

"I will give you the address. Find the caretaker, give him ten new francs. Tell him you wish to see the tomb of Yvette Dulaine."

"Yvette Dulaine?"

"She was buried there in 1780."

"But I don't understand—I mean, what point is there in seeing the tomb of a girl who died in 1780?"

"I said she was buried then." Thibaut's gaze was inscrutable. "Insist that the caretaker open the tomb for you. Then do whatever you must do. Au revoir, my young friend."

IN the age-wracked Museum of Historic Antiquities, it had been easy to smile at the melodramatic earnestness of the French. Here, with the streets of Paris

Lord alone knew how many feet above his head, moving down a narrow stone passageway slippery with seepage of water, holding aloft his own candle and following the flickering flame borne by the rheumatic old man in front of him, Harry found it less easy to smile.

They had gone down endless steps, along corridors that turned a dozen times. How old was this church anyway, and how far into the bowels of the earth did its subterranean crypts go? The whole thing was too much like an old movie for Harry Langham's taste. Except that the smell of damp corruption in the air, the shuffle of the old man's shoes on the rock flooring, and the scamper of rats in the darkness carried their own conviction.

They passed another room opening off the corridor, a room into which the bobbing candle flames sent just enough light to show old, elaborately carved stone tombs in close-joined ranks.

"Is this it?" Harry asked impatiently, as his guide paused. "We must be there by now. We have had time enough to travel halfway across Paris."

"Patience, my son." The caretaker's tone was unhurried. "Those who lie here can not come to us. We must go to them."

"Then let's hurry it up. This is

my last day in Paris. I have a thousand things to tend to."

They went on, around another turning, down some stairs and came into a low-ceilinged room dug from solid rock. The tombs here were simpler. Many had only a name and a date. In the light from the two candles, they lay like sleeping monsters of stone, jealously hiding within them the bones of the humans they had swallowed.

"Are we there at last?" Harry Langham's tone was ironic. "Thank heaven for that! Now which of these dandy little one-room apartments belongs to Miss Yvette Dulaine? I've come this far. I'll see it, but then I'm heading back for fresh air."

"None of these," the caretaker said quietly. "She lies over here, *la pauvre petite*. Come."

He skirted the outer row of tombs and paused, lifting his candle high. In a crude niche in the stone a tomb apart from the others had been placed. It could have been no plainer—stone sides, a stone slab on top, the date 1780 cut into the top, no other inscription.

"She is here. It is only the second time in this century that she has been disturbed."

HARRY stared skeptically at the simple tomb. His shoes were damp and he felt chilled as well as somehow disappointed.

"Well?" he asked. "What am I supposed to do? Say ooh and aah? Why isn't her name on it—just the date? How do I know this is even Yvette Dulaine's tomb?"

The caretaker straightened painfully. He held his candle up and stared into Harry's face.

"You are American," he said. "When this tomb was closed, your nation had but begun its destiny. You have much to learn."

"Look," Harry said, controlling his impatience with an effort. "I agree we have a lot to learn. But I can't see I'm learning much here, looking at some chunks of stone that hide a lady who died one hundred and eighty-odd years ago."

"Ah." The other spoke gently. "If she had but died."

"If she had but—" Harry stared at him. "What are you talking about? They don't bury you unless you're dead. Believe me, I know."

"M'sieu's knowledge is no doubt formidable." The other's tone was gentle, the sarcasm in his words. "Let us now disturb the peace of Mlle Dulaine for but one moment more. We shall open her tomb."

"Now really, that's hardly necessary—" Harry began, but stopped when the caretaker handed him his candle and grasped the bottom end of the slab top.

He tugged; inch by inch the heavy stone moved, screeching its protest. Harry had no special desire to see some mouldering bones. He had avoided such a tourist attraction as the catacombs of Paris, just because he didn't care for morbid reminders of man's mortality. He liked his life—and death—in the pages of books. Both life and death were neat and tidy there and could be studied without emotion. He did not look into the open tomb until the caretaker straightened and motioned with his hand.

"Perceive," he said. "Look well upon the contents of this tomb, which the good fathers left nameless so that the poor one inside would not disturb the thoughts of the living."

Still holding the candles, Harry bent over. As he did so, the flames flickered wildly, as if buffeted by drafts from all sides, though no breath of air stirred there. And the shadows they created made the girl in the tomb seem to smile, as if she would open her eyes and speak.

Her face was madonna-like in its perfection of ivory beauty. Heavy black tresses, unbound, flowed down upon her breast. Her hands, small and exquisite, were crossed upon her bosom. She wore something white and simple which exposed her wrists and arms. As he bent over her Harry's hand shook and one of

the candles dropped a blob of molten wax upon her wrist. He so completely expected her to move, to cry out at the pain, that when she did not he felt a sudden wild rage. At her, for seeming so alive, so beautiful and so desirable. At Thibaut for sending him here on a fool's errand. At the shriveled gnome of a caretaker for wasting his time on so childish a deception.

"Damn you!" he cried. "She's a wax figure! What kind of tomfoolery is this?"

WITH surprising strength, the caretaker thrust the stone lid back into place. Harry had one last glimpse of the young and lovely face with the lips that seemed about to speak, and then it was gone. And he could not explain why he felt doubly cheated, doubly angered.

"So!" he shouted. "You didn't want me to get another look! You knew I was going to touch her and see that she really was wax. Admit it and tell me why you bothered with this nonsense. Or is this a standard tourist attraction that you've rigged up to bring in a little income from gullible Americans?"

The Frenchman faced him with dignity, reaching for and taking back his candle.

"M'sieu," he said. "As I remarked, you are young, you have much to learn. Once, Mlle Du-

laine attracted the attention of a certain Count Cagliostro. She refused him. He persisted. She rejected him utterly. One night she vanished from her home. The next day, servants of Count Cagliostro found her lying in his rooms, at the base of a great mirror as if she had been admiring herself. The Count was held blameless; he was far from Paris at the time.

"Mlle Dulaine seemed asleep, but did not waken. There was no mark on her. Yet she did not breathe and her heart did not beat. A week passed. A month. She remained unchanged. She did not begin that return to dust which is the fate of us all. So her sorrowing parents consigned her to the good fathers of the church, and they placed her here. She has remained as you see her, since the year 1780."

"That's idiotic," Harry said, shakily. "Such things aren't possible. She's a wax figure. She's certainly not dead."

"No, M'sieu. She is not dead. Yet she is not alive. She exists in some dark dimension it is not well to think of. The Count Cagliostro took his revenge upon her. She will sleep thus, until the very stones of Paris become dust around her. Now let us go. As you reminded me, you have many things to do."

"Wait a minute. I want to see that girl—that figure—again."

Harry's breathing was harsh in the silence; he felt his pulse pounding—with fury? with bafflement?—he couldn't tell what emotion he felt. But the caretaker was already moving toward the stairs.

In a moment he would be gone. Harry wanted to tear the stone slab off that tomb and satisfy himself. But to linger even a moment would mean to be lost in those stygian depths without a guide.

Furious, he followed the flickering candle that was already becoming small in the darkness.

[T was easy, in the daylight above, to regain his composure and laugh at himself for being tricked. It was easy, next day in London, when he met Bart Phillips, his closest friend at the university, who had spent the summer in London working toward his doctorate in chemistry, to entertain him with an elaborate account of the mummery he had gone through. It was easy to erase the lingering doubt that the girl had indeed been a wax figure.

Easy—until he found the mirror.

He found it in a dingy second-hand shop in Soho, called Bob's Odds and Ends. The desk he was seeking he had traced to an auction house which had suffered a fire. Presumably the desk had

burned with many other rare pieces. But Bob's Odds and Ends had been mentioned in connection with the sale of the furnishings of Burchester House, residence of ducal line now extinct.

Bob himself, five feet tall and four feet around the waist, did not bother to remove the toothpick from between his unusually bad teeth when Harry, with Bart in protesting tow, asked about the desk.

"No, guvnor," the untidy fat man said. "No such article 'ere. Probably Murchison's got it, them wot'ad the fire."

"Come on, Harry," Bart said. "One last day in London and still you're dragging me to junk shops. Let's go get something to drink and see if we can't make a date with those girls from Charlestown we met."

"Don't 'urry off, gents," Bob said plaintively, unhooking fat thumbs from a greasy vest. "Got somethin' pretty near as good. 'Ow would you like to buy th' mirror wot killed th' Duke of Burchester 'imself?"

"Mirror?" Harry asked, the word tugging at his memory.

"Come on, Harry!" Bart exploded, but Harry was already following the fat man toward the dark recesses of the shop.

The mirror was a tall, oval pier glass, hinged so that it could be adjusted. It stood in a corner. As the fat man swung it

out, it rolled on a sloping stretch of floor, toppled sideways, and would have crashed down upon him if he had not sidestepped nimbly. The mirror fell to the floor with a violence that should have sent flying glass for a dozen feet.

The proprietor looked at it calmly, then heaved it upright.

"That's 'ow it killed th' duke," he observed. "Fell on 'im. And 'im with an 'atchet in his 'and, like he was trying to smash it. But this glass can't smash. Unbreakable, it is."

"What's unbreakable?" Bart asked, following them.

"This mirror, according to the man," Harry said.

"Nonsense. Glass can't be made unbreakable," Bart said. "Good Lord, it's all painted over with black paint. It's no earthly use to anyone. Come on, I'm dying of thirst."

"But, gents, it's a rare mirror, it is," the fat man said sadly. "Without that paint, it'd be worth a pretty sum. Besides, it's an 'aunted mirror. It killed th' duke 'isself, and it stood in a closet for almost fifty years before that. Ever since th' duke's brother, wot was the duke then, murdered a girl in Chubb's Restaurant back in 1910, then jumped out th' window into th' courtyard an' broke his neck when the Bobbies came for 'im."

"Come on, Harry," Bart

groaned. But Harry, on the verge of turning away, saw the faint glint of glass near the bottom where something sharp had scratched a few square inches of the black paint which covered the mirror's surface. It seemed to him the bit of glass reflected light, and he stooped to look into it.

He stared for a long minute, until Bart became alarmed and grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Harry!" he said. "My God, man, you're the color of putty. Are you sick?"

Harry Langham looked at him without seeing him.

"Bart," he said, "Bart—I saw a face in that mirror."

"Of course you did. Your own."

"No. I saw the face of that girl, Yvette Dulaine, who lies beneath St. Martin's Church in Paris. She was holding a candle, and looking out at me, and she tried to speak to me. I could read her lips. She said, 'Sauvez-moi! Save me!'"

WHAT in God's name has happened to Harry Langham?" Bart Phillips demanded, and ran his fingers through bristling red hair. "He's missed his classes two days in a row. Mrs. Graham, is he sick?"

The middle-aged woman, who might have stepped from one of the stiff portraits on the walls of

the rundown Beacon Street house, compressed her lips.

"I don't know what has happened to him, Professor Phillips," she said. "He hasn't been himself for a week, not since he received word that mirror was due to be landed. Then since they delivered it two days ago he has not left his room. He makes me leave his meals outside the door. I have always considered Professor Langham a very fine lodger, but if this goes on—Well!"

She uttered the final exclamation to Bart Phillips' back as he took the broad, curving stairs of the once elegant house two at a time.

At the top, Bart hesitated outside Harry's door. Some dirty dishes sat on the floor just beside it. He tested the knob, found the door unlocked, and quietly pushed it open.

In the center of the big, old-fashioned room, Harry was on his knees before the oval pier glass, laboriously scraping away at the black paint which covered its surface. From time to time he paused to wet a rag in turpentine, rub down the surface he had scraped, and then begin again.

The younger man walked quietly up behind him. The glass, he saw, was now nearly free of obscuring paint. It shone with an unusual clarity, giving the effect of a great depth. Then

Harry saw his reflection and leaped up.

"Bart!" he shouted. "What are you doing here? Why have you broken into my room?"

"Easy, boy, easy," Bart said, putting a hand on his shoulder. "What's the matter, are you in training for a nervous breakdown? I've been coming in your room without knocking for years."

"Yes—yes, of course." Harry Langham rubbed his forehead wearily. "Sorry, Bart. I'm edgy. Not enough sleep, I guess."

Bart looked at the flecks of paint on the floor, and rapped the mirror with his knuckle. Harry started to protest, and subsided.

"At a guess," Bart said, "you have been working on this old looking glass since it got here. Now honestly, Harry, aren't you being—well, illogical? I mean, you think you saw a girl's face mysteriously looking out at you from this mirror, back in London. You've been on pins and needles ever since waiting for it to arrive—you've hardly been over to see us, and I must say that Sis is hurt, since she kind of got the idea you planned to propose. Tell me the truth—are you expecting that girl is going to appear in this mirror again? Is that what you've had all along in the back of your mind?"

"I don't know." Harry

dropped into a chair and stared at himself in the mirror. "I tell you, Bart—I just don't know. I feel I *have* to get this mirror clean again. Then—well, I don't know what. But I have to get it clean."

"In other words, a neurotic compulsion," Bart told him. "Under an old church in Paris you saw a wax figure. Later your imagination played a trick on you—"

"It wasn't imagination!" Harry Langham leaped to his feet with a fury that astonished them both. "I saw her. I tell you I saw her!"

HE stopped, breathing harshly. His friend had fallen back a step in surprise.

"I—I'm sorry, Bart. Look, maybe I am being—unreasonable. Just let me get this mirror cleaned, and some sleep, and I'll be myself. And I'll come to dinner tomorrow night with you and Laura. How's that?"

"Well—all right." Bart said. "And you'll cover your classes Monday? I officially announced you had a virus, but I can't cover for you any more."

"I'll be at my classes. And thanks, Bart."

When Bart had left, Harry dropped into the chair again and stared at the gleaming mirror. It seemed to shine with a light which was not reflection, yet he

could discover no source for it.

"Yvette!" he said. "Yvette? Are you there? If you are—show yourself."

He knew he was acting ridiculously. Yet he did not care. He wanted to see her face again—the face he had seen in a tomb in Paris, the face he had seen in a bit of mirror in London, the face he saw in his dreams now.

Nothing happened. After a long moment, he got to work again with scraper, turpentine and steel wool.

The paint stuck doggedly. Twilight had dimmed the room to semi-darkness by the time the glass finally showed no trace of black remaining.

Exhausted, Harry sank back into his chair and stared at it. It was curious how brilliant a reflection it gave. Even in the twilight it showed every detail of his room. His studio couch, his bookshelves, his pictures, his hi-fi set—they seemed three dimensional.

He sighed with fatigue and his vision blurred. The reflection in the mirror clouded like wind-rippled water. He rubbed his eyes and once again the image was clear. The handsome black-and-white striped wallpaper, the crystal chandelier for candles, the old rosewood harpsichord, the enormous Oriental rug on the floor, the hunting-scene tapestry on one wall—

Harry Langham sat up abruptly. The room in the mirror was a place he had never seen in his life. It bore no more resemblance to his own room than—than—

And then she entered.

She wore something simple—he had never had an eye for clothes, he only knew it was elegant and expensive and of a style two centuries old. Her black hair was bound up in coiled tiers. She carried a candle, and as she came toward him from one of the doorways that showed in the shadowy sides of the room, she paused to light the candelabra atop the harpsichord. Then she turned toward the man who was watching, his breathing quick and shallow, his pulse hammering. It was she. Yvette Dulaine, whose body lay buried beneath St. Martin's Church.

HE thought she was going to step into the room with him. But she stopped as if at an invisible barrier, and gave him a glance of infinite beseechment. Her lips moved. He could hear no sound, but he could read the words.

"Sauvez moi! M'sieu, je vous implorer. Sauvez-moi!"

"How?" he cried. "Tell me how?"

She made a gesture of helpless distress. A ripple swept across the mirror and she was gone.

Harry Langham sprang to his feet.

"Come back!" he shouted. "Yvette, come back!"

Behind him the door opened. He turned in a fury, to see Mrs. Graham bearing a tray of food.

"What are you doing?" he shouted at her. "Why did you break in? You sent her away! You frightened her!"

The woman drew herself up in starchy dignity.

"I am not accustomed to being spoken to that way, Professor Langham," she said. "I knocked, and heard you say 'Come.' I have brought your dinner. I would prefer that you arrange to lodge elsewhere as soon as this month is up."

She set down the tray and marched like a grenadier out of the room.

Harry passed a hand hopelessly over his forehead. The sight of the food on the tray revolted him. He thrust it away and turned back to the mirror, which now was dull and lifeless in the almost darkened room.

"Yvette," he whispered. "Please! Please come back. Tell me how I can help you."

The mirror did not change. He flung himself into the chair and stared at it as if the very intensity of his willing would make it light again, would reveal the strange and elegant room it had shown before. The room

darkened, until he could no longer see the mirror. Then his fingers, gripping the arms of the chair, relaxed. Exhaustion overcame his willpower, and he slept.

* * *

It was the booming of a clock that woke him. Or was it a voice, speaking insistently in his ear? Or a sound as of a thousand tinkling chimes intermingled? Or all three? He opened his eyes, and saw before him the mirror, light emanating from it. Once again it showed the strange room. The candles in the crystal chandelier glittered. And an elegantly dressed gentleman, who leaned against the harpsichord and watched, smiled.

"You are awake, m'sieu," he said, and now Harry heard the words clearly. "That is good. I have been waiting to speak to you."

Harry Langham rubbed his eyes, and sat up.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Where is she? Yvette, I mean."

"I am Count Lafontaine, at your service." The man bowed. "And Mademoiselle Dulaine will be here. She is waiting for you to join us. To save us."

"Save you?"

"We are both victims of an evil done long ago, before even your great-grandfather was born. The evil of the most evil of living men, Count Alexander

Cagliostro. But with your help, that evil can be undone."

"How?" Harry demanded.

"In a moment I shall tell you. But here comes Mlle Dulaine. Will you not join us?"

Harry rose to his feet, feeling strangely light, disembodied.

"Join you?" he asked. And even as he spoke he was aware that his senses were dulled, his mind sleepy. "Is it possible?"

"Just step forward." The Count held out his hand. "I will assist you."

Beyond the man, Harry saw the girl come slowly into the room. She came toward him, slowly, on her face a look of infinite appeal.

"Yvette!" he cried. "Yvette!" He took two steps forward, and felt his hand grasped by the cold, inhuman fingers of the man within the mirror. The pull but assisted his unthinking impulse. For a moment he felt like a swimmer breasting icy water, shoulder deep. Then the sensation was gone and he was within the room in the mirror.

He looked with exultation into the eyes of the girl.

"Yvette!" he said. "I'm here. I'm here to save you."

"Alas, m'sieu," she said. "Now you too have been trapped. Look."

He turned. The Count Lafontaine bowed to him, formally.

"A thousand thanks, my

young friend," he said. "It is half a century since last I left the world of the mirror. I am hungry for the taste of life again—very hungry."

He kissed the tips of his fingers and flung the kiss to them.

"Adieu, mes enfants," he said. "Console each other in my absence."

HE strode confidently forward, and beyond him Harry saw, as through a window, his own room, dimly lit. The Frenchman stepped into the room and approached the chair where Harry had been seated, and now the shadowed figure in the chair, which he had not noticed before, was suddenly clear and vivid.

"That's me!" he gasped. "Yvette—that's me—asleep in the chair."

She stood beside him, her coiled dark hair coming to his shoulders, and infinite regret tinged her voice.

"Your body, M'sieu Langham. *You* are here, in the world of the mirror, this dark dimension which is not life and is not death and yet partakes of both. In your sleep he spoke the words of his spell and evoked your spirit forth from your body without your awareness. Now he will inhabit your body—for an hour, a day, a decade, I do not know."

"He?" Harry shook his head,

fighting the sense of languor and oppression. "But who is he? He said—"

"He is the Count Alexander Cagliostro, M'sieu. And see—he lives again, in your body."

As they spoke, the figure that had emerged from the mirror world turned to smile at them with sardonic triumph. Then it settled down upon Harry's sleeping body, blended with it, vanished—and Harry saw himself rise, stretch and yawn and smile.

"Ah, it's good to be alive again, with a young body, a strong body." It was his voice speaking and in English—his voice, subtly accented.

"Now, au revoir. The night is still young."

"No!" Harry flung himself forward—and was stopped by an impalpable barrier. The glass of the mirror—yet it did not feel like glass. It felt like an icy net which for an instant yielded, then gathered resistance and threw him back. "You can't!" he cried. "Come back!"

"But I can," said Count Cagliostro reasonably, in Harry's own voice. "And I shall come back when it pleases me. Meanwhile, it is best that none save myself should be able to see you."

He raised his hand in the air and drew it downward, speaking a dozen words in rolling Latin. And Harry faced only darkness

—an empty darkness that stretched beyond him, for an infinitude of time and space.

He lunged into it, and found himself spinning dizzily in a black void where there was neither substance nor direction. There was only a cube of light, from the mirror room, swiftly dwindling into a tiny gleam.

"Come back! You will be lost forever, M'sieu. I pray you, return!"

The words, faint and faraway, steadied his whirling senses. He saw the light, focused his thoughts on the room it represented, on the girl, and once more he stood beside her, with the candles flickering warmly above them and the hungry blackness behind him.

"Mon Dieu, I feared you were gone!" Her voice was unsteady. "M'sieu, we are alone here together. Even the consolation of death and the sweet sleep of eternity is denied us. At least, let us keep each other company and take what comfort we may from that."

"Yes, you're right." Harry passed a trembling hand over his face. "And maybe we'd better start with you telling me what in God's name has happened to us."

IT did not require many words, Harry thought dully, half stretched out upon a tapestried

couch as he listened to the soft tone of Yvette's voice. She had rejected Cagliostro—and with a smile he had promised her that she would have all eternity in which to regret her decision. Then one night in her sleep a strange compulsion had taken her will, and she had gone to his home, admitted herself, and gone up to his empty room—to find him smiling at her from within the mirror. He had spoken—She had left her body behind crumpled on the floor—and she had joined him in the world of the mirror. Then he—his own body many miles away—had left her alone there until the time came for him to take final refuge himself in the world between life and death of which the mirror was a door that he had opened.

“But he died in 1795 in prison,” Harry protested.

“No, m'sieu. They but said he had died. His body is buried somewhere, as is mine, and like mine, it does not change. His spirit sought refuge here, in this sanctuary he planned long in advance. And from time to time he found means to escape, as he has now, in your body. Over the years, the crimes committed by various hands, yet all animated by the spirit of Cagliostro, would fill a library of horrors. One has heard of the Marquis de Sade. Yet the Marquis was but a man

interested in things magical—until he encountered the mirror and met the gaze of Cagliostro. Then, m'sieu, the name of de Sade became synonymous with evil.

“Later, given but little choice, he assumed the flesh of a drunken servant who had entree only to the lowest of London's dives. It was then he acquired a nickname which you will know. Jacques.”

“Jacques?”

“Jacques, the Ripper. Never was he caught, this Jacques. He froze to death in a gutter one winter night—but only after the spirit of Cagliostro had safely quitted his mortal flesh.

“And then young Charles, Duke of Burchester, acquired a desk and the mirror for his studio. And so fell into Cagliostro's power. But the evil Count was too greedy. The first night he killed a girl almost in public and must flee back to this, his place of safety. Charles, himself again, tried to break the mirror. When he could not, when the men of the police came for him, he covered the mirror with black paint, and then he threw himself from his window and was dashed to death on the stones below.

“Now, m'sieu—” her gaze was compassionate— “he is free again in your body. And the hunger is strong within him. I would speak words of consola-

tion, but unfortunately I cannot."

"But what is he doing?" Harry started to his feet. "My God, Yvette, isn't there any way to know what he is up to and to stop him?"

"It is possible to know what he is doing," she said at last, "for the spirit still is connected with the body, though but faintly. But he can not be stopped. He is the master, we are his prisoners. And it is not wise to know what your body does at his orders."

"I must know, I have to know!" Harry declared feverishly.

"Then lie back, stare at the burning candles, and let your mind empty itself. . . ."

HE was in a bar somewhere. A crowded, noisy, smoky dive. Impression of laughter, of voices. Of a face looking up into his. A hungry face, over-painted, yet still with some youthful sweetness in it not quite destroyed. They were moving. They were outdoors. They were strolling down a narrow street toward the waterfront, and light and sound here left behind.

The girl was petulant. She did not want to go. But he laughed, and with a hand on her elbow, urged her onward. They came to a railing, with the dark water swirling below, and a mist curling around them.

"No, I'll show you what I promised you," he was saying. "But first we must remove these."

He deftly removed from her ears the cheap, dangling crystal earrings, dropped them into his pocket.

"Why did you do that?" Her voice was shrill, angry. "You can't treat me like that."

"Your beauty should be unadorned. Look into my eyes."

She looked and her gaze grew fixed. In his eyes she saw the black void of eternity, and rising from it the grinning skull-face of Death. She did not struggle, did not scream as his hungry fingers closed around her throat. Only when it was too late did she fight, so deliciously, so rewardingly. When he dropped her over into the rolling waters below and saw them suck her down with hungry swiftness, he felt again deliciously warm and full. . . .

"M'sieu! M'sieu!"

He opened his eyes. Yvette was shaking him, her face concerned.

"M'sieu, you looked so distressed! I told you it was not wise—"

"I'm a murderer," Harry groaned. "I killed her—killed that girl for the sheer lust of killing. . . ."

"Comfort yourself, m'sieu. You did not. It was he, Cagliostro, slaking his hunger for life.

It is thus his spirit feeds, grows strong—on the life of those he scarifies.”

“But it was my hands that choked her—Oh, my God, what are we going to do?”

He stood up, his hands clenched. “Can’t we do *anything*?”

“Nothing, alas. He lives—in your body. We are shadows of the spirit trapped between life and death. Someday he will return and you will once more regain your body—”

“To be accused of all the infamous crimes he committed!” Harry cried. “To pay for them. But first, I’ll break this mirror. That’s one thing I won’t fail to do.”

Her gaze was wistful.

“If only that could be. Then I could at last die and be at rest. But you will not do what you think. Others have tried and failed. This mirror can not be broken by human hand—only he himself, Cagliostro, can break it. No—do not ask. I can not answer how or why these things are. He has the knowledge. I have not. Now, you must distract yourself. Come—let me show you this world.”

He let her take his hand, and numbly followed as she led.

THERE were doorways to the great room, several of them. She led him through one and he

found himself in a small, book-lined library, where alchemical apparatus crowded tables, and a small, white-globed lamp burned with a bright fierceness. A book lay open, revealing mystic symbols. A giant spider squatted upon it and stared at them with glistening pinpoint eyes.

“His library,” Yvette said. “Once the mirror stood in this room in the world of reality. Everything the mirror reflected since it was made exists in this dark and fathomless dimension, if only it was reflected long enough; and his arts can call it into being.”

“Like a time exposure being developed,” Harry muttered to himself.

“Pardon?”

“I was just thinking. What lies beyond?”

“There are many rooms and a garden and even a pond. I will show you.”

There were indeed other rooms, but Harry viewed them without interest. There was a garden where fruit trees bloomed, and a pool that reflected the sunlight of a sun not seen for two centuries. But when he would have gone on, through other doors, Yvette held him back.

“No, m’sieu. Beyond there is nothing. Darkness. Emptiness. Where one can become lost and wander until the end of time.

And in the darkness there are—creatures.”

She shivered as she spoke the word. But Harry persisted in his exploration. He opened a closed door—and there beyond it did indeed lie abysmal darkness. There were sounds in the darkness . . . flutings and wailings like no sounds he had ever heard before. And something darker than darkness itself drifted past as they watched, accompanied by the sound of a myriad of tiny bells. Swiftly Yvette slammed the door.

“Please, m’sieu,” she panted. “Promise me. Never go into the darkness. Even Cagliostro knows not what it is or what creatures inhabit it.”

“All right, Yvette.” Harry agreed. “I promise. Let’s go back. Maybe Cagliostro has returned. Maybe he’ll be ready to give up my body now.”

THEY returned through rooms of a dozen different sorts, one of them plainly the cabin of a ship. In the room of the mirror, the candles still burned as they had before, unconsumed and eternal. The wall of blackness which was the mirror remained in place. But even as they entered, it dissolved, became a window beyond which was Harry’s study where Cagliostro sat at a table, eating breakfast and reading a newspaper.

He smiled smugly at them.

“I hope you have become well acquainted, mes enfants. I have waited for your return. M’sieu Langham, this body you have loaned me is a splendid one, so strong, so handsome, so indefatigable. I shall enjoy its use for a long time, I think. This time I make no foolish mistakes. I have begged the most humble pardon of Mrs. Graham, your good landlady, and she has forgiven me. This evening I dine with your friend, Bart, and his sister Laura, with whom I gather you have—what is the word?—an understanding. I must make amends to them for your behavior.

“Ah, my good friend, this Boston of yours is a most interesting city. Cold and reserved in appearance, yet it has its undercurrent of wickedness quite as naughty as London or Paris. I enjoyed myself last night. I was rash, perhaps, but fortunately I escaped detection. And now my motto is to be—discretion.”

He rose and tossed down his napkin.

“Now, I shall rest,” he said, and yawned. “Last night was—fatiguing. Tonight may be the same. Au ’voir.”

He swept his hand downward with a roll of unknown words, and blackness sprang into place.

Wretchedly, Harry turned to the girl.



"How long were we?" he asked. "A dozen hours have passed since last night, but it seemed like only a few minutes—half an hour, perhaps."

"There is no time here," Yvette told him. "An hour may seem a day, a day an hour. You will become used to it, M'sieu Harry. Compose yourself—think not of Cagliostro."

She seated herself at the harpsichord and began to play a light, tinkling tune to which she sang in a sweet soprano. Harry flung himself down on the tapestried couch and listened. Gradually he relaxed. His mind ceased to throb and burn with turbulent thoughts. But as it did, other images, other sounds and sensations entered it.

Voices. Bart and Laura. Laughter. Wine.

* * *

"It's good to see you acting normal again, Harry. You had us worried."

"I don't wonder, old man. That mirror delusion—you brought me to my senses. Guess I worked too hard in Paris."

"Then there wasn't any girl in the mirror?" Laura's voice. Laura's smile. Laura's hand lightly on his arm as her eyes begged for assurance.

"If there was, she looked like me and needed a shave." Laughter. "Besides, what good would a

girl in a mirror be?" More laughter. "You'll see for yourself. When we set up house-keeping."

"Goodness. Is that a proposal? Or a proposition?" Wide, hopeful eyes, lips that hide a trembling eagerness.

"Look, you two—while you debate the question, I have to see a graduate student of mine who's working on an interesting line of experiment." Bart, rising, leaving. "I won't be back until late."

"Tactful Bart."

"A nice brother. I like him. Harry—"

"Yes?"

"Whether it was a proposal or a proposition, it's a little sudden. Since you got back from Europe, I've hardly seen you. Why, I think you've kissed me once."

"An oversight I plead guilty to. I can only say I'm prepared to make amends. Like this."

Warm lips. Tremulous response becoming breathless excitement.

"Harry! What *kind* of overwork did you do in Paris? What research were you engaged in, anyway?"

"Can not we go elsewhere? . . . This is better. My dear . . ."

Breathless excitement becoming recklessness.

"Harry! You mustn't!"

"Oh, yes, my dear I must."

"And I thought you were so prim and proper—even though I liked you."

"And I thought you the same. How wrong we can be about people! Now. . . ."

* * *

"Stop!" Harry leaped to his feet, pressing his fists to his forehead, shutting out the damnable sensations from his distant body.

"M'sieu Harry." Yvette rose and came to him. Gently she touched his forehead. "It is Cagliostro again. You must not try to know what it is he does."

"I can't help it." Harry groaned. "My God, I never thought that Laura—"

"Do not speak of it. Shall I read to you? Shall we walk in the garden?"

"No, no. . . Yvette"

"Yes?"

"Cagliostro controls whether or not we can see the world outside the mirror—and whether it can see us."

"That is true. He has charms that control it. If he speaks but the words, we can see and be seen but not heard. Or hear, but not be seen. And the greatest charm, that of drawing the spirit from the body and transporting it within the mirror. Alas, m'sieu, I crave your pardon."

"For what?"

"It was I—I who enticed you

here. I could not help myself. Cagliostro worked magic that brought you to that shop in London where the mirror lay—he had waited long for the right moment. It was he who enabled you to see me. It was his doing that you determined you must own the mirror, must see me."

"I did feel—possessed," Harry admitted. "But don't blame yourself, Yvette. Even without Cagliostro you would have attracted me."

"You are gallant. I thank you."

"But what I started to say, if Cagliostro has charms, we can learn. We are not entirely helpless."

"Learn them? It is true, his books, his philters, his mystic objects are within his study—"

BUT in the study, where the white-globed lamp burned with an undying brilliance, Harry groaned and pushed away the strange books, the ancient parchments, after he had leafed through them.

"I can't read them. They're not Latin. Maybe Sanskrit. Maybe Sumerian. Maybe some language that died before history began."

"It is true," the girl told him, "Cagliostro has said that his magic is older than history, that it comes from a race so ancient no trace is left."

"And I don't believe in magic. That's one trouble. I belong to the twentieth century. Even here—even a victim of it—I still can't believe in magic!"

"Oui," Yvette agreed, "belief is necessary. Without belief, the magic does not work. But then one must have faith in God, as well as in evil, m'sieu."

"Yes, of course?" His eyes lighted. "And what is magic to one age is mere science to another. So why shouldn't science to one age be magic to another? Yvette, help me work this out."

"Anything I can do, anything," she said. "Sometimes Cagliostro had me help him. He said that in things mystic the female principal helps. Wait."

She took pins from her hair, let her tresses tumble down over her shoulder. From a drawer beneath the bookshelves she withdrew an odious object—the dried and shrunken head of a man who once had had flaming red hair and a red beard. She sat facing him, the head upon her lap.

"Now, m'sieu," she said. "This head—Cagliostro swore it was the head of one of the thieves crucified with the true Christ. Perhaps. But now I look like a sorceress. I will sit in silence, and you shall study."

"Good girl!" He plunged anew into an effort to make sense of the books, the cabalistic symbols. In his mind he thought of them

as simply equations which produced certain results. So categorized, he was able to believe in them. After all, this mirror world—was it so much more than a photograph caught on celluloid, or a motion picture electronically impressed upon magnetic tape? Perhaps the people in pictures felt and thought!

And wasn't it Asimov, right here in Boston, who had said that some day the entire personality of a man could be put on tape, to remain forever, to be reproduced again whenever and as often as desired? What would existence inside a magnetized tape be? What thoughts would the man there think?

Perhaps his analogies were faulty, but they helped give him confidence. Yvette sat in silence as he worked, with feverish intensity. He deciphered a word, a sentence, for Cagliostro had translated into a doggerel of Italian, French and Latin the older, unknown language—which might, after all, be the scientific language of a long dead race.

AS Yvette had said, there was no time in this place. At intervals he paused and put his fingers to throbbing temples. Then he was aware of sensations from the world of life. His classrooms. Students listening with rapt intensity they had never paid before. Himself speaking

with brilliant detail of life in London, in Paris, in the 18th Century. A girl in the back row, blond, with a face as soft as a camelia. A girl who paused after class at his request.

"Miss Lee, you are very silent. Yet I think you are hiding a genuine intelligence. Are you afraid of me?"

"Afraid of you? Oh professor, I couldn't ever be that."

"You need confidence. You need—awareness. I would like to talk to you about yourself. Tonight?"

"Why—why, yes, professor."
. . . Night. His car. Driving. Lights. Stopping.

"Professor. What—what are you doing?"

"Look into my eyes, child. You are not afraid of me?"

"I—I—no, I trust you. I trust you forever and always."

"That is good. Now come."

HE forced his thoughts back to the books before him. He translated, worked out probable sequences, guessed where he had to. Still the awareness crept into his mind whenever he relaxed.

"Harry—I haven't seen you for so long."

"Working on my new thesis, Laura. That fraud Cagliostro—I've torn him up. The new one is to be a comparison of social life in London and Paris in the 18th Century."

"It sounds quite exciting."

"It will be masterly. But I must make up for my neglect. My darling—"

"Harry! But—"

"No buts. Did you know that among the Romans—"

Doggedly he resumed work. But the outside impressions pressed in more strongly.

An alley. Blare of music. A girl, provocative in a red dress. She smiled into his eyes. . . . And lay cold, moments later, in a shadowed corner. . . . Another girl. Walking home from a bus. A scream. A struggle, sweet in its intensity. . . .

"No," he groaned. "No, Yvette! The things he is doing! The things *I* am doing! Even if I conquer him—I can't live. Not with what I have done."

"Poor M'sieu Harry," she said. "But can you conquer him? Suppose you force him to return here and give back your body, what then? This mirror—it too is under a spell. It can be broken only by Cagliostro."

"Maybe," Harry said grimly. "But it hasn't been tested in an atomic explosion. In any case I'm pretty sure that, bathed in hydrofluoric acid, it would dissolve. Or dropped into molten glass it too would melt."

"But then—" Horror touched her features. "But then I would be lost forever in the darkness that lies outside, lost among the

beings whose nature I know not. Only if the glass is broken is the spell broken. Only then can spirit and body reunite and blessedly find eternal sleep together."

"I see. But Cagliostro must be removed from the world. If the mirror were dropped into the ocean where it is a mile deep. . . ."

She shuddered. But nodded.

"He must be removed, oui," she said. "What happens to me—it is not important. Continue, m'sieu."

"I think I'm on the track." He pronounced some words, crudely. "Does that sound familiar?"

"Yes!" her face lighted. "It is what he speaks when he wishes to hear but not be seen. But it sounds like this—" She corrected his pronunciation. He repeated after her, the strange, rolling syllables.

"And this?" He spoke again, making a motion with his hand.

"When he wishes to see and be seen. Like this." She corrected once more. "And his hands—I'm not sure—there is a certain movement . . ."

He tried, but did no better. Then he stiffened. They heard voices. Real voices. For the first time.

"Yvette!" he whispered. "We've won the first round. We can hear. Come, the other room. He is there, speaking to someone."

THEY moved swiftly back to the great room where one wall of seething darkness represented the mirror. And words came through it.

"Professor Langham?"

"Associate Professor only, I'm afraid."

"I'm Sergeant Burke, Homicide."

"So Mrs. Graham said. Homicide. Intriguing. What can I do for you, Sergeant?"

"Where were you at three this morning?"

"Here in my room. Working on my thesis. May I ask why you are interested?"

"A girl was strangled outside the Fishnet Bar last night."

"I don't believe I've heard of the place."

"One of your students was there. He believes he saw you with the girl who was killed."

"I am a very ordinary type, Sergeant. And one of my students—in a bar at three in the morning? No wonder they learn so little—academically speaking, of course."

"He described you pretty closely."

"Perhaps because he has seen me in class for weeks. Let me assure you, Sergeant, based on their classwork, the powers of recognition and description of my students are limited."

"Maybe so. Do you know a girl named Elsie Lou Lee?"

"Of course. One of my students. A shy thing."

"She committed suicide last night. Cut her throat with a razor blade. Her last words were, 'He said he wished I was dead and out of the way, so I'm going to die!'"

"A suggestible type, may I remark?"

"Her landlady describes you as the man who sometimes called for her."

"Believe me, Sergeant, my description would fit twenty thousand men in Boston. I assure you I am too discreet to—fraternize—with a female student."

"Yeah, I suppose so. But frankly—well, we've had eight women killed in this city in four months. Eight! All young, all without motive. I have to check out everybody."

"Quite understandable."

"So—I haven't any warrant—but if you'd be willing to come down and make a statement at Headquarters. . . ."

"With the greatest of pleasure. Let us go."

Footsteps. A door closing. Silence.

"If only we'd had the rest of the charm," Harry groaned. "So that the Sergeant could have seen us! Then we'd have had him for sure."

"He would have returned to the mirror," Yvette said sadly. "It is you who would have paid."

"Even so—Let's keep trying. Tell me again what he said and how he moved his hands."

Repetition. Endless. Timeless. Then abruptly the curtain of black vanished and they saw, through the window of the mirror, into his room. In time to see the door open and Laura enter.

She looked distraught and haggard. She advanced swiftly, calling in case Harry might be in the bedroom.

"Harry! Harry, are you here? I must talk to you!"

"Laura!" Harry cried. "Here. Here!"

She did not turn. She crossed the room, looked into the bedroom, then came and sat back on the studio couch, nervously pulling off her gloves.

"She does not hear," Yvette said. "There yet remains some part of the charm incorrect."

"Laura!" Harry groaned. "Please, for God's sake, look this way!"

She did not immediately look toward the mirror. But as she sat, nervously playing with her gloves, her gaze swept the room—and finally stopped upon the mirror. And then she saw them.

Slowly, unbelievably, she rose to her feet and approached them.

"Harry?" she whispered. "Harry?"

"Yes," he said, then realized she could not hear. He nodded instead. "Call the police!" He

mouthered the words carefully but she stared at him with numb incomprehension. He turned to Yvette. "Quickly!" he said. "Paper and pen!"

Yvette ran. But before she returned, Harry saw himself enter the room. Cagliostro, as himself. And Laura, turning, stared from the man in the doorway to the image in the mirror with mounting disbelief and horror.

"Ah," said Cagliostro, approaching her. "Our friends have learned some tricks. I underestimated M'sieu Langham. Now you know."

"Know what?" Laura asked huskily. "Harry, I don't understand."

"You will, my dear. Alas. My plans were so well made. Marriage, a long and honorable career on the faculty. Unlimited opportunities to indulge my little hobby unsuspected—all professors seem so harmless. Now it must end. But perhaps there is still a chance—"

"Laura, look out!" Harry shouted, futilely, Cagliostro approached her—and then his hands were around her throat, throwing her back across the bed, controlling her struggles until she lay still. Breathing hard, he rose. He looked into the mirror.

"Blame yourself, M'sieu Langham," he said. "But then, I was growing tired of her. A posses-

sive type. If I can but get her to the river, it is possible I may yet bluff your stupid police into believing in my innocence."

HE turned, and was drawing a blanket over Laura when the door burst open and Bart exploded into the room.

"Harry!" he shouted. "Where's Laura! Mrs. Graham said she came up here. My God, man, don't you know you were seen with that Lee girl only last night before she—"

Abruptly he was silent, staring at the still figure only half concealed.

"Laura fainted, Bart," Cagliostro said soothingly. "If you will go for a doctor—"

"Murderer!" The words were a strangled sob as Bart flung himself at the other man. Cagliostro stepped aside and Bart sprawled on the bed atop his sister's body. Before he recovered, Cagliostro held a needle-sharp paperknife he had snatched from the desk.

"My young friend," he said suavely, "usually I kill only women. But in your case I will make an exception."

With the litheness of a fencer he came forward, the point extended. But he was unacquainted with the game called football. The younger man lunged low, caught him around the knees, and flung him backwards. His

body stopped only because it came into contact with the face of the mirror. And a myriad of cracks streaked the glass to its every corner.

"The glass!" Yvette said in fervent joy, as she and Harry saw Cagliostro crumple forward, with the paperknife still in his hand. "Cagliostro himself has broken it!"

Bart Phillips saw the cracked glass, and for just an instant he was aware of the two figures within the glass, figures already twisting and distorting as the glass came loose. A shower of a thousand sharp fragments fell across the prone man on the floor. In one fragment, Bart saw a single eye staring out at him. In another, a pair of lips murmured, "Merci."

Then the reflections were gone and the man on the floor groaned and with difficulty rolled over.

The paperknife emerged from his ribcase beside the heart, and dark blood stained his shirt and coat.

"Harry!" Bart dropped to his

knee. "Harry, *why, why?*"

"I am not your doltish friend Harry, M'sieu," the dying man said. "He is lost in some strange dimension where there is neither light, nor time, nor space." His English now was accented. His features flowed, firmed. They became hook-nosed, sharp-jawed, the features of a man of middle age who has seen far too much of life.

"I am Count Alexander Cagliostro." The words came with difficulty and were punctuated with blood issuing from the mouth. "And I go now, his body mine, to meet the death which has awaited me patiently for almost two hundred years."

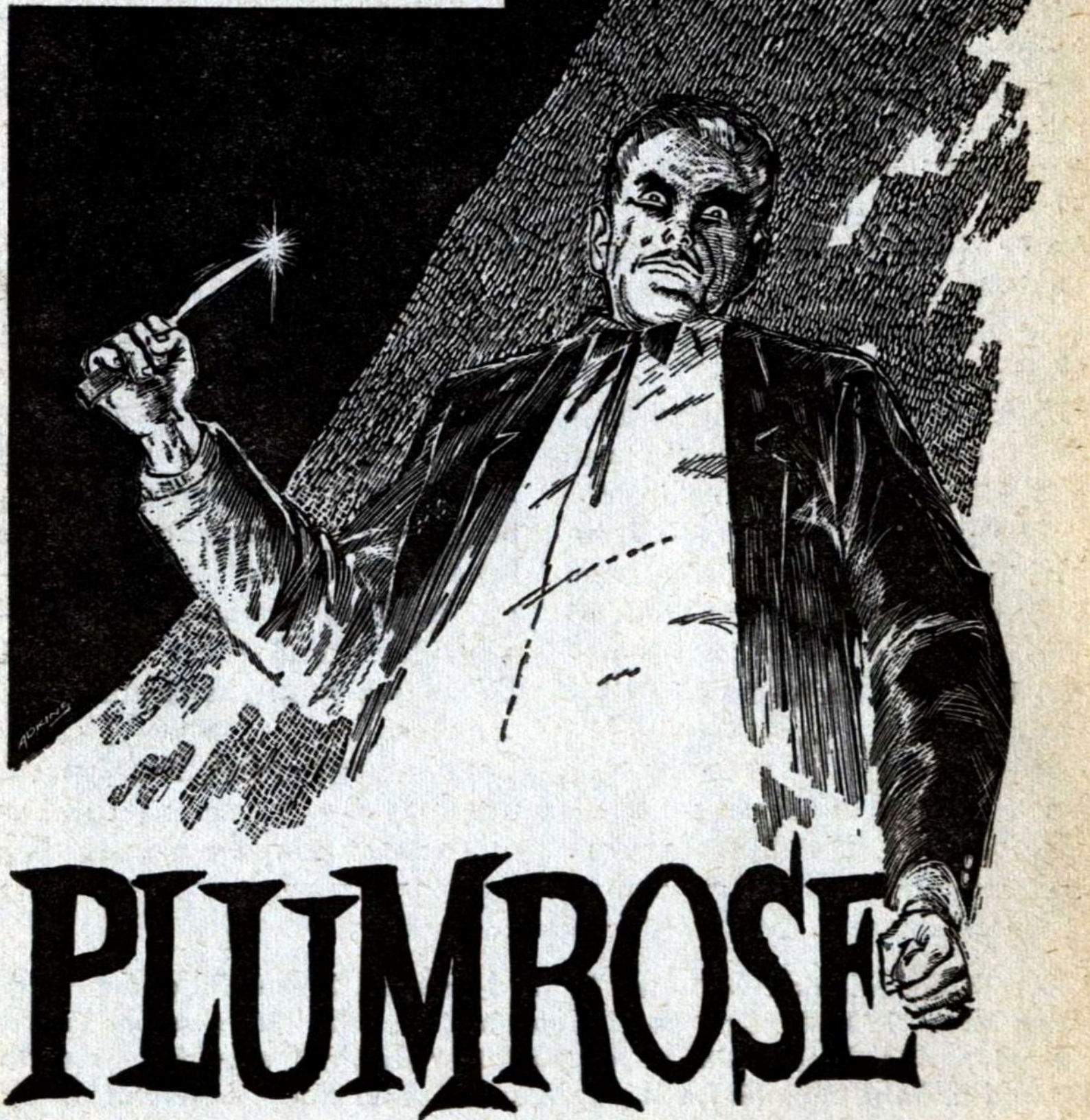
He fell back, limp, and in a space of seconds his skin became a loathsome corruption, his hair powdered, and the white bone showed through. The corruption became horror. The horror dried, became dust, and the very bones beneath it melted like wax, falling in upon themselves. A moment later and there were but fragments mixed with dust.

THE END

The 14th Annual Midwestcon will be held June 28, 29 and 30 at the North Plaza Motel, 7911 Reading Road, Cincinnati 37, Ohio. Reservations should be made directly with the motel. All other inquiries should be sent to Donald E. Ford, Box 19-T, RR #2, Wards Corner Road, Loveland, Ohio.

Surrounded by the arcane paraphenalia of his profession, the detective of the occult puttered, bumbled, napped and harrumphed. Other people—like Bert Willsey—did most of the work for him. But that was Plumrose for you.

By RON GOULART



PLUMROSE

THE man with the ginger whiskers smiled tentatively at me, then came over and handed me a hat and some kind of overcoat. Tucked up under his arm he had a square box that looked something like a rural telephone. There were streetcars all around now and I didn't hear what he was saying the first time he spoke. Behind the man a horse drawn beer wagon clopped by.

Somehow I felt that if I accepted the clothes I'd be committed. I hesitated, looking back over my shoulder. My office building was still there. Except it was newer and brighter looking and there was a man with a black beard and an odd suit loitering in front of it.

"I'm afraid it will take a bit of getting used to," said the ginger whiskered man. "I hope you will understand and give us a few hours of your time."

I had been working for Caulkins-Nowlan Publicity for nearly a year. Every morning at 10:15 I went out and walked around the block to a place called the Crescent Coffee Shop. The place wouldn't be there now I knew. And I knew that for some reason it was no longer September of 1961 in San Francisco.

I didn't smack myself on the brow and cry out. I felt a little unsettled in the stomach and that was about it. There are people who get up and walk a couple

of blocks after they've been shot dead. You never know how you're going to react.

"You were expecting me?" I asked the man.

"Not you specifically," he said. He smiled a little more freely. "Someone, however, in your profession." He urged the hat and coat on me. "Get into these and you won't stand out. As it is, I think the fellow over there saw you materialize."

I put the coat on. It was a size too tight or maybe that was the fashion. I put the hat on, the first one I'd worn since I'd come to San Francisco. "Materialize?" I said as he took my arm.

"I have a carriage waiting nearby," he said. "If you'll do me the favor of coming to my home and speaking to my daughter. I think I can explain things as we travel."

"Fine," I said. I was in the mood for having things explained.

WE got into the carriage, which was in an alley I didn't remember as being there. The man with the ginger whiskers carefully put the square box on the seat between us and then gave his driver the order to get under way.

"My name is Gibson G. Southwell," he said.

"Mine's Bert Willsey," I said. I was studying the streets, the

people. "What year is this? Some-time in the 90s?"

Southwell smiled. "You're very perceptive. You would be in your profession. September 20, 1897."

"And how did you get me here?"

Southwell placed a hand on the square box. "Plumrose invented it. I must apologize, Mr. Willsey, for being desperate enough to use it. There seemed no other course of action. I hope that by sunset you will be back in your rightful era."

"It'll be a damned long coffee break even so." The carriage seemed to be heading for the general direction of Nob Hill. "Just what are you desperate about?"

"My daughter, Emily, has fallen under the spell of a scoundrel," said Southwell, slumping slightly on the black leather seat.

"Oh?" There were more trees everywhere, turning to autumn.

"It all began when we took the braces off her teeth. Our regular dentist had passed away and we chose a new one on the suggestion of a close family friend, the daughter of a highly respected railroad executive. I myself, by the way, am in the tea business in an import way. To get on. Emily, my daughter, fell gradually in love with this dentist. You see, my wife, Mrs. Southwell, disappeared while on a pleasure cruise

up the Sacramento three summers ago. Since then I've looked after Emily myself. Except for getting her teeth finally fixed properly I've bungled parenthood, Mr. Willsey."

"You mentioned a name awhile back," I said, taking my hat off and resting it between my knees. "Where does he come in?"

"Plumrose?" asked Southwell, blinking and frowning. "Surely you've heard of Edwin Plumrose?"

"I don't think so."

"Plumrose, the reknowned ghost detective and occult investigator. Plumrose, who tampers with the most highly guarded secrets of Nature. He invented this time ray."

"It was his idea to bring me here?"

SOUTHWELL'S whiskers drooped. "All else has failed. Yet I know this dentist is the guilty man. Proof, even with three Pinkertons at work, has not been forthcoming. He's a clever man, especially for a dentist. My good friend, Plumrose, agreed to advise me although this is not an occult case."

"It's pretty occult to me," I said as the carriage turned into a wide pathway. "I still don't know why I'm here."

"Oh, yes," said Southwell. The carriage stopped in front of a vast white Victorian house and

we got out. I watched him lift the time ray box off the seat, ready to grab it if it looked at all like slipping. Southwell took my arm and we halted at the first step of the stairway. "Plumrose assumed that by your time the entire case would have been solved. He also feels that the present can be modified by an expert, which you will have to admit Plumrose is. So then. We brought you here to talk to Emily and to explain the final outcome of the case to her. After you tell her what you know of this man she's become infatuated with we will get to work saving her from him."

"Hold it, Mr. Southwell," I said. "What case is it I'm supposed to know about?"

"You are aware of so many, yes. Forgive me. My parental anxiety has caused me to be rather unspecific. I am referring to the famed Nob Hill Fiend case. I am afraid that this man Emily is involved with is the Fiend himself. I have several reasons for so thinking. She refuses to stop seeing him and, being no old-fashioned parent, I will not use force to prevent her. The man's name is Leo. X. Guthrie." Southwell watched my face, waiting.

Finally I nodded. "Leo X. Guthrie."

"Then I'm right. He is indeed the Nob Hill Fiend."

"Mr. Southwell," I said, following him up the steps, "I've never heard of Leo. X. Guthrie."

The brass knocker dropped from his hand. "It can't be that he is not the Fiend."

"He may be the Fiend and he may not be the Fiend. I have no way of telling."

"Surely by 1906 the case has been solved."

A butler with a stage Irish brogue let us in. After we'd gotten rid of our coats and hats Southwell took me into a long shadowy living room. The grilled fireplace had a fire going in it and, after placing the time ray on a marble topped table, Southwell held his hands to the glow.

"What has 1906 to do with it?" I asked, moving up to study the square box that had pulled me back to 1897.

Nothing happened for a few still seconds. Then Southwell dashed over to my side. "Willsey, aren't you from 1906?"

"No," I said. "1906 was the year of the big earthquake in San Francisco. Quite awhile before I was born. When I went out to coffee this morning it was September 20, 1961."

WE both bent to study the dials on the time ray. "My lord," said Southwell, pointing. "The year gauge is all askew. Did that happen during the trip here do you think?"

"Something was askew to start with."

"Plumrose guaranteed it would work this time."

"Work this time?"

"There was some trouble a few weeks ago sending a rat back and forth in time. Plumrose promised that the trouble had been eliminated."

"What happened to the rat?"

"We lost him somewhere around 1901."

"Well, I'm happy to have been part of this scientific experiment, Mr. Southwell. How about you and your friend, Plumrose, sending me back home to 1961?"

"Suppose you get sidetracked in 1901 the way the rat did?" Southwell shook his head. "I'll have to consult Plumrose."

"Let's go now."

"Emily is already expecting us. I sent Bascom to summon her. She should be descending at any moment." Southwell suddenly grabbed me by the arms. "Even a reporter from 1961 must know of the Nob Hill Fiend case. Please try to remember."

"Mr. Southwell, I'm not a reporter."

He let go and stepped back. "I told Plumrose it would be this way. There was always the chance we wouldn't get a reporter."

"Seems like the odds would be against you. Picking one person out of the future at random."

"It wasn't at random. That's why I was stationed in front of the *Chronicle* building with the time ray. I sincerely hoped for a crime reporter, although any newsman would have done. A reporter from 1906 could give us all the details and end this situation before Emily comes to harm."

I sat down in a fat chair and let my head rest back against the antimacassar. "The *Chronicle* hasn't been in that building for years, Mr. Southwell. They're over on Mission Street."

Southwell went and stood closer to the fire, silent.

"Ready to concede, father? Even Plumrose has failed. It must be fate taking a hand. Can't you step aside and let Leo and I have our happiness?"

I turned. Standing in the doorway was a slim dark haired girl. Her hair was worn up and she had on a long dark skirt and a white blouse. Guthrie may have been a fiend but he was doing all right as a dentist. Emily had a fine smile. In fact, she was the best looking girl I'd seen since I came to San Francisco. I got to my feet. Things always work that way. You can hang around bars in Maiden Lane and North Beach and go to cocktail parties and never have spectacular luck. Then you're sucked back to 1897 and there's a beautiful girl where you least expect to see one.

Southwell shrugged and looked hopefully at me. "Can you tell us anything, Mr. Willsey?"

"I have a vague idea I've heard about this whole business, the Nob Hill Fiend and all, years ago." I shook my head. "Nothing definite, though. See, I'm in public relations. Publicity and advertising sort of work. I'm not up on famous crimes."

"Perhaps Mr. Willsey would like a cup of tea," said the girl. "We have tea at all hours here," she said to me, smiling faintly.

I said that would be fine. "I'm sorry I can't help out in all this, Miss Southwell."

"You can help most by leaving things alone," Emily said. "I intend to marry Leo and if father does not give us his blessings soon we shall have to take more drastic steps."

Southwell clutched his side and gave an anguished cry. "I must lie down in my study. Forgive me, Mr. Willsey. I'll return shortly and settle things."

EMILY pulled a bell rope as her father tottered off through a curtain doorway. "The tea will be here shortly," she said. "Bascom is out playing cards with some of the Pinkerton detectives and he may not hear the bell at once."

Conversationally I said, "What makes your father think Guthrie is a fiend?"

Emily's nostrils flared, which

nostrils still did in 1897, and she said, "Father is mistaken. Anyone who really knew Leo could not believe that he was in any way connected with these terrible crimes."

"What has this fiend done exactly?"

"He murders young girls, using a disgusting assortment of surgical instruments. Father seems to feel that dentistry is one step from surgery and thus he suspects Leo."

"Your father told me Guthrie was recommended to you by a girl friend of yours. What does she think about the case?"

Emily paled. "She was the second victim of the Nob Hill Fiend."

"Coincidences like that do turn up," I said.

Southwell tottered back into the room. "Excuse us, my dear. I've decided we must see Plumrose at once."

"Give him my regards," the girl said. "Except for his behavior in this matter I have a great respect for him and his work. But occult detection is one thing and love another."

Southwell and I went to see Plumrose.

* * *

Plumrose lived in a narrow gable roofed house on a slanting street. The house stood back from a wrought iron fence and was bordered with high grass

and wild shrubs. The sharp fall wind swayed the grass and arms of cast iron Cupids and Psyches flashed in the sun. Horns and antlers flashed, too, and something that looked like the left half of a goat.

A small round woman who looked something like a bleached out gypsy let us in after Southwell had used the gargoyle knocker. "Mrs. Hoggins," he said, "we must see Plumrose at once."

She stepped aside, squinting at the time ray Southwell had under his arm. "He's in his study trying to communicate with Aristotle."

"For some new case?" asked Southwell, stepping into the soft shadow blurred hallway.

"No, he's simply in an argumentative mood and I won't let him bait me." The woman studied me. "This the one you fished from the future?"

"Yes," said Southwell, hanging his overcoat and hat and mine on the gold pronged hat tree. "There's been some small error."

"I knew it," Mrs. Hoggins said to me. "I told him to try the contrivance on a few more rats first."

"That's splendid," said a deep voice from somewhere down the hall. "I had actually gotten through to Aristotle's personal secretary and then all this foolishness in the hallway cut me

off." A fat pink man with white hair and whiskers stepped from a doorway. He was wearing an art nouveau dressing gown and its pockets were heavy with papers and ribbon-tied scrolls and vague objects with obscure markings. He noticed me and said, "The chronic argonaut, is it?"

Southwell held out the time ray box. "The dial got askew."

"Go down in the cellar, Mrs. Hoggins, and fetch up some of the special brandy for our guests."

"Something fetid and loathsome is a-roam down there," the woman said, hiding her hands in her striped apron.

"On the contrary," said Plumrose. "I exorcised the place not a month ago and we also had that insect specialist in to nose around."

"A well run household would have its cellar exorcised once a week," the housekeeper said, rumbling off.

Plumrose beckoned us into his study. It was a medium sized room with shuttered windows that almost hid a view of a weedy back yard dotted with more statuary. There were two twisted wood rocking chairs and a worn down striped love seat. Plumrose took the loveseat and left the rockers for Southwell and myself. "My Uncle Wendell was twice arrested for attempts on

the life of his domestic," said Plumrose. He considered me for a moment. "This fellow looks fine to me, Southwell. Why the complaints?"

"He's from the wrong year," said Southwell, rocking nervously. "From 1961." He held out the time ray to Plumrose.

THE fat occult investigator squinted an eye at the square box. "No wonder. You let the dial get askew."

"It was that way when you gave it to me."

"Nonsense," Plumrose grabbed the box and rattled it. "Listen to what other mischief you've caused, Southwell." Opening a small metal door in the time ray box Plumrose held it upside down over the thick flowered rug. "Out of there, out." There was a squeek and a white mouse somersaulted to the floor and skittered under a clawfooted table. "What can you expect when you let mice get inside."

"There are no mice at my home," said Southwell. "That's one of your experimental mice."

"His leg wasn't banded."

"Hey," I said, "what say we forget our differences and get me back to 1961."

Plumrose took a flat stick from his dressing gown pocket and poked it into the time box. "This will take some work, Mr. —"

"Bert Willsey," I interjected.

"It will require some careful work, Willsey. I made the mistake of assuming Southwell knew how to use a time ray."

"Where would I learn to use a time ray? That's the only one in the world."

"My Cousin Raymond once guided a balloon across four hundred square miles of unfamiliar country and he had never before been higher off the ground than seventeen feet," said Plumrose, dropping the box onto an ottoman.

"How long to fix that?" I asked.

"A few days," said Plumrose.

"That's great. By the time I get back I'll be a missing person and unemployed."

"I'll give you a job here," said Plumrose. "I need a secretary. A newspaper man like yourself should fit in nicely in that capacity for a few days."

"He's not a newspaper man," said Southwell. "That's another factor that went afoul."

"You couldn't even aim it at the *Chronicle* building?"

"They moved the building over to Mission Street," I said.

Plumrose rested his arm on the back of the loveseat and looked at the fireplace. "Well," he said.

"He doesn't even know anything about Leo. X. Guthrie," explained Southwell, standing.

"While I am in sympathy with Mr. Willsey's problem, and feel indirectly responsible, this unfortunate blunder isn't helping my poor Emily any."

"I'll solve that case within two days," said Plumrose. To me he said, "What did you do up there in the future?"

"Publicity and advertising."

"Then you'll still make a good assistant and secretary. I'll have you back in the right time period within three days."

Mrs. Hoggins arrived with a dusty bottle of brandy and three bright glasses on a copper tray. "So much for what you know," she said to Plumrose as she put the tray on one of the round dark wood tables. "There's three trolls down there and they got into the sherry."

"Trolls should have better taste than that," said Plumrose, reaching for the brandy. "I'll attend to them after I solve the problems of Southwell and Willsey here."

"You had better. You know how trolls can multiply." She hid her hands in the apron and left.

Plumrose opened the brandy and poured a glass for each of us. "A toast," he said, raising his and smiling from Southwell to me. "To the future."

BY night I was moved into one of Plumrose's spare rooms. There didn't seem to be much else

to do until the time ray got fixed and Southwell had gone off without making any offer of putting me up at his place. The room was slant ceilinged and on the second floor in back. The windows were leaded stained glass and as I paced they gave me kaleidoscope shots of the overgrown backyard.

The room was used for storage and there were piles of occult equipment stacked beyond the narrow canopied bed. As I wandered around the room I tried to catalogue the stuff in my mind. There were parts of stone demons, Egyptian amulets, mystical baskets, bundles of spirit photographs, scraps of illuminated manuscripts, brass gongs, the upper half of a fortune telling automaton, three stuffed snakes and a neat stack of the past months' San Francisco newspapers. These last were actually on the bed itself and I gathered them up and sat in a tufted easy chair under the tiffany lamp on the reading table. I wasn't yet adjusted to being in 1897 and I handled the newspapers carefully, expecting them to flake and tatter. But they were crisp and new.

As I went through the back issues I spotted several stories about the Nob Hill Fiend. The papers didn't use many photos then, mostly sketches. The Fiend had done in six young girls so far over a period of some five and

a half months. Five of the girls had either been found or had originally lived in the Nob Hill area. That was how the fiend got his name. A sketch of one of the victims struck me.

The girl's name was Hester Cheyney and they'd found her body in an alley off Clay Street nearly two months back. I'd seen this girl's picture before. Where I couldn't say.

In the back pages of the papers, among the ads for magnetic belts and message parlors, I found a drawing of Leo. X. Guthrie. It was featured in an ad for his painless dentistry offices on California Street. And I recognized him. Somewhere I had seen this drawing and the drawing of the Cheyney girl. Seen them together.

Lighting one of my cigarettes I closed my eyes. Back, or rather ahead, in 1956 I had needed three extra units to finish my last semester at UCLA. I'd taken a criminology course that had given a quick survey of the great crimes of the past century. Guthrie's picture had been in the text book. It had come just before the photo of a victim of the Detroit Trunk Fiend. Since I always skipped over that one Guthrie's picture was my cue to jump a few pages.

All at once I thought of Emily Southwell. Was she going to be the next victim? I couldn't re-

member a picture of her nor a mention of her as one of the victims. But since Guthrie was still running around loose it was obvious he was going to commit a few more crimes. I couldn't remember the final total of victims. If it was six he was all done. I wasn't sure.

I was sure, though, that Guthrie was the Nob Hill Fiend. I tossed the newspapers back on the bed and went to find Plumrose.

HE was sitting on the top step ten feet down from my door. He had on a fresh dressing gown and was holding an opaque brandy glass. "You've been over the newspapers?"

"Yeah. You left them there?"

Plumrose nodded, spinning the glass under his wide flat nose. "I assumed a case as famous as this one is going to be would be known to a great many people in the future. The accounts and pictures set you to thinking in the manner I had hoped. Is Leo. X. Guthrie the man?"

I told him Guthrie was and told him why I knew. "So what's to do about it? Emily might believe me if I talked to her."

"Doubtful," said Plumrose. "Confronting Guthrie is a better piece of action. You don't recall how he was finally caught?"

"No. Maybe that was in the pages I skipped."

"Are you up to giving the impression that you have a tooth ache?"

"Now that you mention it," I said. "Ever since I've been here in 1897 I've had a toothache."

"That's interesting." Plumrose caught the griffin newel post and tugged himself to a standing position. "Are you serious? Little is known about the side effects of time travel."

I touched my jaw. "I hadn't thought of it before but it's true."

"Very good."

"I go to Guthrie posing as a patient and try to throw a scare into him."

"Yes. Most pattern killers are very superstitious men. There's a strong possibility that you can frighten Guthrie into confessing. To be safe I'll also suggest to Southwell that he double the Pinkertons."

"How about clothes to wear when I visit Guthrie?"

"Wear what you have. The suit is not alarmingly futuristic. Yet it should have a vaguely unpleasant effect. Try it. Breakfast is at eight. Good night."

"Good night." I went back to my slant ceilinged room and studied the drawing of Leo. X. Guthrie.

* * *

All six of the chairs in Leo. X. Guthrie's waiting room were filled. The half dozen patients

were all young girls, each one pretty enough to be an upcoming Fiend victim. I must have shuddered because the pretty young receptionist said to me, "You're in pain, sir?"

"It's nothing," I said, smiling manfully around at my fellow patients. "However, I would like to consult Dr. Guthrie if possible. He's been highly recommended."

"Oh? Well, I can let you see Dr. Guthrie at four this afternoon. Your name please?"

Since Emily might have mentioned me to him I decided to give a fake name. "Maxwell Arnold, Jr., I said, using the name of the Detroit Trunk Fiend.

"We'll expect you back at four then, Mr. Arnold."

It was hardly one o'clock now. But I didn't want to let Guthrie slip away. "Thank you," I said. "I'll wait."

By two I got a chance to sit down and by five I was let into Guthrie's office. He was a tall man with pale skin and blue-black hair and moustache. "What seems to be bothering you, Mr. Arnold?" he asked, pointing me into the chair.

"Toothache, doctor," I said.

"That's an interesting suit you're wearing. European?"

"No," I said. "In fact . . ."

"Open your mouth, please."

I opened it. "The reason . . ."

"Wider, Don't talk."

"I've come to . . ."

"Very serious," he said, poking at a canine tooth. "Sit quietly, Mr. Arnold."

"Dr. Guthrie, I know who you . . ."

Guthrie clamped a rubber mouthpiece over my face and said, "Inhale, Mr. Willsey. When you wake up let this be a lesson to you. Don't stand in the way of young love."

"J'accuse," I said and fell asleep.

IT was night outside when I woke up. I was still in the dentist chair, alone in the silent unlit office. I shook my head in small circles and stood up. Even in my 1961 suit I hadn't thrown much of a scare into Leo. X. Guthrie.

I ran downstairs to the street and flagged a passing carriage. I'd hoped for a cab for hire but what I'd stopped was a drapery salesman on his way to the Cliff House to meet a cabaret singer. When I explained I was intent on saving a young girl from a fiend he agreed to give me a lift up hill.

Emily Southwell was not at home. Her father told me she was attending a party at a nearby mansion and he feared she was planning to meet Guthrie there. I assured him I'd fix the Fiend before midnight and took off.

The party was at the home of

Mr. and Mrs. Hollis Havenhurst. The house was a big flat white thing fronted with marble columns. A few hundred square feet of close cropped grass slanted up to the main entrance of the house. Carriages of all sorts were turning in at the wide driveway as I came running up. I shot over the three foot high stone wall and angled up for the side of the Havenhurst mansion.

I found a shadowy spot behind a shrub bordered sundial and watched the windows of the ballroom. I had just caught sight of Emily and Guthrie when a hand tapped my left shoulder.

"Turn around quietly if you please," said a tenor voice.

I did. A black overcoated man with a derby hat was pointing a pistol at me. I said, "I'm looking for a friend of mine." I nodded my head at the bright ballroom.

"Please to be putting your hands over your head, my lad," the man said. He had a spongey red moustache that seemed to move in counterpoint to his mouth.

"Miss Emily Southwell is expecting me," I said, raising my hands high.

"Not only expecting you but keeping a good weather eye out for you, my boy. So as to avoid being done in by the likes of you."

"Beg pardon?"

He stuck a hand into my coat

pocket and brought out a silver scalpel. "You in the medical line, bucko?"

"That," I said, watching the thing catch the moonlight. "That's easily explained. I'm being framed. The man you want is Leo. X. Guthrie, a dentist. He must have planted that on me. Look, just ask Miss Emily Southwell. She'll vouch for me. Then we can call the police. You are with the Pinkertons aren't you?"

The red moustached man shook his head. "No, laddie. I'm Police Inspector Rafferty McCafferty."

"You can still check me out with Miss Southwell."

"Bucko, it was Miss Southwell as reported you to me and swore she was right certain you were the Nob Hill Fiend and would be lurking hereabouts tonight. Come along with you."

So I went to jail.

THE Hollis Havenhurst's party had been on a Friday night. On Sunday an hour or so past lunch Plumrose finally succeeded in springing me. He told them I was his assistant and had been watching Emily on his orders. Plumrose really was highly thought of in San Francisco. According to McCafferty Plumrose helped the Department out on all occult police matters. In a city like San Francisco that meant they worked together often.

Back safe at Plumrose's I hunched down in one of the rocking chairs and moved close to the fireplace. "How come you didn't get me out on Saturday?"

Plumrose poured two glasses of brandy. "I was locked in here most of yesterday, taking no messages. The result is a patched up time ray." He winked at the time box on the round dark table.

"It's fixed then? Great," I said. "Let's get me back to 1961. I want to get away from Nob Hill Fiends and ungrateful Southwells. Let him do Emily in for all I care. After she helped Guthrie frame me with the cops."

"Love does strange things."

"Not to me anymore."

"Wait," said Plumrose, handing me my brandy. "It seems to be fixed. However, considering what happened before I think it wise to try a few tests first."

I shrugged. "Sure. Go ahead."

"I'll begin in earnest tomorrow with a few rats and mice. Should we get the positive results I'm hoping for we can then proceed to use the ray on you."

I watched the fire crackle. "Today or tomorrow. What difference does it make?"

"That's the attitude. Should you, by the way, decide to remain in this more leisurely age my offer of a job will stand," he said. When I didn't respond he went on. "All this excitement has put me several days behind on my

naps. Excuse me and I'll try to catch up."

After Plumrose left I slid the ottoman over under my feet and tried to doze. My attention kept being drawn to the time ray. It might be days before Plumrose thought it was ready. It was risky but the mood I was in I didn't much care. I'd turn the thing on myself and hope to get back to 1961.

QUIETLY I went to the machine. All I had to do was set the time dial and flip a couple of switches. Plumrose had told me that much about how the ray worked. I set the dial for September 20, 1961, figuring to try and get back on the same day I'd left. I held the time ray with my thumb on the switch.

I stopped, thinking of something. Plumrose's house might not be there in 1961 or it might be full of people. I'd hate to materialize in the middle of a dinner table or a stone wall. The solution was to go to a place I could be pretty sure would still be empty in 1961. Golden Gate Park seemed like a good bet. I could pick a clear stretch of treeless ground and flip the switches.

Wrapping the box in a Coptic prayer shawl I slipped quietly out of the house. Mrs. Hoggins was off visiting and I was able to get up the street and catch a trolley without any trouble.

Twilight was filling the park when I finally reached it. Men in knickers and girls in bloomers were cycling all over the damn park and I had a tough time finding a quiet uncluttered stretch of ground.

Beyond a thick grove of cypresses I located a fine empty clearing free of cyclers or picnickers. Across the clearing the ground dropped away toward an overgrown pathway. There was silence all around me. I unwrapped the time ray and checked the dial. It had jiggled back to 1936 during the assorted trolley rides. I reset it for September 20, 1961, and held it out with the time ray nozzle pointed at my chest.

A girl screamed.

I hesitated. There was something familiar about the scream. It came again.

"Leo, can it be that I have misjudged you after all?"

A bicycle fell over. And another.

"Stand still and don't struggle so," said Leo. X. Guthrie. "I certainly didn't bring you to this secluded glade for some vulgar romantic interlude."

"Good lord," cried Emily.

I held tight to the time ray box and ran over to the downsloping edge of my clearing. Some twenty feet below Leo. X. Guthrie was standing over the fallen Emily Southwell. He had a large

surgical knife in his right hand and was throttling Emily with his left.

"Hey, Guthrie," I yelled. "Knock it off, you damned fiend!"

His head flicked back for a second and he laughed. "Too late, Willsey." He swung the knife up to strike Emily.

Well, I didn't have a chance of scrambling down hill and jumping him before he got her. So I did the only other thing. I threw the damn time box at him. It was a good toss. The heavy box caught him on the side of the

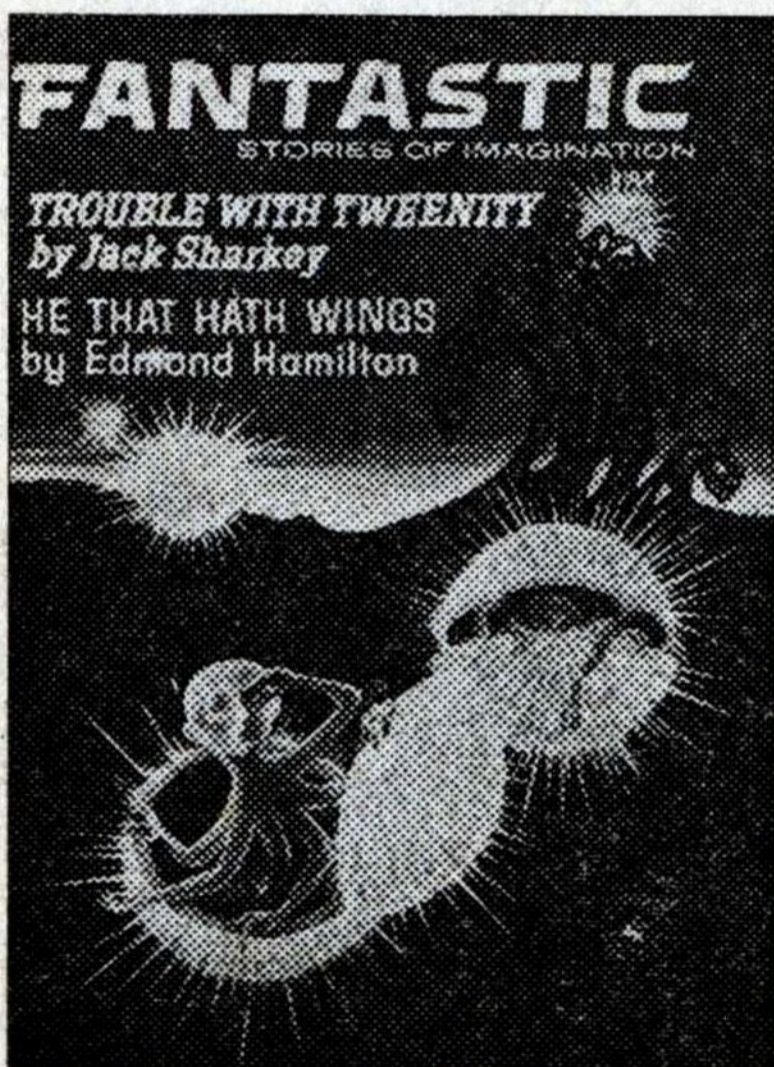
head and made a nice thunking sound. Guthrie went over sideways on top of the tangled bicycles and the knife flipped over into the shrubbery.

Emily didn't faint or swoon. She got uneasily up and smiled at me. "Mr. Willsey, what a brave thing to do." She glanced down at the ruined time machine. "Especially at the sacrifice of your means of transportation."

I started down toward her. Eventually Plumrose could make another time machine. But girls like Emily are hard to find.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH



When science made it possible for everyone to have a world of his own—and thus end the colossal traffic jam that was plaguing the President of the U.S.—well, need we go on? This is the take-off point for a typical **Jack Sharkey** story—*Trouble With Tweenity*. Read it and laugh in the July issue of **FANTASTIC**.

Also among next month's goodies: Part two of **Keith Laumer's** pulse-pounding novel, *A Hoax in Time*; and one of **Edmond Hamilton's** greatest stories, a true Fantasy Classic—*He That Hath Wings*.

July **FANTASTIC** goes on sale at newsstands June 20.

ON THE MOUNTAIN

By DAVE MAYO

*An old-fashioned ghost story . . . but one
that still can send a shiver down the spine.*

A TRAVELER shifted the weight of his pack and hiked along the barren mountain path. It was wide enough for only one man, and he knew that farther along there would be no path at all. Here it left the straight, gentle incline and began to take a weaving course, finding its way along ledges and threading itself between rock formations. Hundreds of feet behind him, the path trailed into the valley, became a road, and somewhere found the town that the traveler had left days before. It was lost in the mountain range now, and he stopped to plot his distance from the next village. Almost the entire region, thousands of square miles of hills and mountains, was charted, thanks to forty years of exploration. He found his position on the map. Eighteen years earlier, a Major Vernon Groves and his party of four had conquered this peak. Although Major Groves had been lost in an avalanche during the

study, the group's findings had led to the establishment of practical routes over and around the mountain, as well as several that were now dangerously inadequate and therefore abandoned.

But now the mountain was safe. The traveler tucked the map between his light parka and the heavy coat that he wore over it; then he continued his hike.

* * *

Two days later, he was sitting in his small, weather-worn tent while a blizzard piled snow against its windward side. The trail had tapered away long ago, and in the snowstorm he had lost the route entirely and wandered into a no-man's land before pitching camp. Near his tent was a short segment of path leading up the mountainside, but it was nothing he had seen before and apparently was not a re-birth of the main trail. He passed the time inside, reading a twelve-day-old newspaper.

That night, the blizzard began

to show vague signs of letting up. Perhaps by morning the traveler would be able to set out again and find his way back to the charted route. He lighted his small portable stove in preparation for the long night ahead. Then, with his feet wrapped in a heavy blanket, he huddled by the stove and waited.

Hours passed. He dozed occasionally but never for long because of the wind that whipped through the flapless open end of the old tent. He finally reconciled himself to watching and listening to the storm.

Shortly after midnight, he was startled by what he saw. Through the snow and darkness that stretched between him and the mountain's upper slopes, a small red light flickered faintly, disappeared, and flickered again. Soon it grew stronger and steadier. It became a sharp dot that remained still on the mountainside and seemed to study the small, battered tent. The traveler felt his flesh begin to tingle as he watched it. Who could be on the mountainside with him? He thought of the three days' journey up the mountainside and of the miles that separated him from the last human being he had seen. He thought of the desolate mountains that surrounded him: the trap of solitude that he had set for himself. There was a revolver in his pack, but he knew

that he had no dry ammunition. He held his breath and waited. The red light kept its position for several minutes. Then it moved. It began to advance down the mountainside toward the tent. The traveler impulsively clenched a portion of his coat in one fist and recoiled into the corner of the tent. The light was definitely approaching. It never rose or wavered, but progressed steadily over the rocks. The traveler's face was contorted with fear; the sudden, mysterious danger was quickly beginning to prey on his sanity. He watched it come and he thought again of his isolation. There could be no one else on the mountain—no one who could glide across boulders and crevices in a blizzard. The light pressed on. He gripped a knuckle tightly between his teeth. On came the light, the unearthly red light. It was too close. He leaped to his feet and burst out of the tent; he dashed up the mountainside, stumbling and picking himself up as he went. The snow blew straight into his face, but he ran on, following the path as far as it could take him and then clambering madly over the rocks.

AT a sheltered ledge 20 yards above the path, his knees buckled and he unwillingly sank to the ground; now he was at the mercy of the red beast. He was

gasping and coughing and was barely conscious when he heard a faint rumbling sound in the distance. Then scattered showers of gravel and snow began to fall from the overhanging cliff and there was a growing vibration in the stone around him. An avalanche was coming. He pulled himself as close as possible to the cliff and waited; the rumbling grew louder until it became a roar and the sturdy ledge trembled. A moment later, tons of snow and rock careened off the cliff in a dense curtain; it crashed past the ledge and out of sight, leaving only a fine white spray that hung in the air for a few seconds and then settled. The blizzard itself was tapering off. When the noise had faded into the distance, the traveler propped one shoulder against the cliff and waited, but he saw no more of the strange red light. After several minutes, he closed his eyes and slept.

* * *

Dawn was breaking when he awoke; he had been asleep only a few hours. The shelter and warmth of the overhanging cliff had kept him from freezing during that time, and now the sun was rising. He rubbed most of the numbness out of his flesh and stretched his muscles. Then he stood at the edge of the shelf and looked down on the rubble that lay in the wake of the ava-

lanche. His former campsite—tent, gun, stove, and everything else—was gone, either buried or swept away. The strange red light had saved him.

Since he had no gear to pack or camp to break, he made his way off the ledge and immediately began climbing; he could not afford to spend another night in the snow. The mountain was not a high one and was not unusually rough; the remaining hike to the top would have been almost a day's trip with the burden of a pack, but he was able to make it in considerably less time.

As he stepped onto the uppermost level, he got his first look at the shorter, gentler side of the mountain. A village lay at its foot, within several hours' descent, and others were scattered throughout the long valley. This was the road back to civilization.

The traveler was about to start down from the windy peak when he noticed a weathered inscription in the stone. He stooped to read it. Although the lettering was nearly worn away, he was able to read the words: "Memorial. Major V. L. Groves," And nearby, nailed firmly into the rock with two spikes, was a rusty lantern with a red shield.

As a reflex, he spun and faced the rubble of the avalanche. "Major Groves!" he called. But of course there was no answer. It had been eighteen years.

THE

Illustrator ADKINS



PENALTY

By JOHN J. WOOSTER

Wherein an Outsider finally manages to become a member of an In-Group—to his ultimate horror!

THIS office, John Justin Jones said to himself, is for the birds. Were I not hopelessly insane, I would not work here. From a window high in the Chrysler Building, he stared across the East River. Masses of cubicles peered at him through the fog-bound expanse of western Long Island. As similar as checker squares, they made him think of a losing game.

Disgustedly, Jones mashed his cigarette into an ashtray and left. After an argument with his boss, a week off without pay confronted him. On the pretext of tidying up his desk, he had stayed after quitting time in order to get his nerves under control. Now, at last, he felt capable of facing the elevator man. He pushed the buzzer.

"Floor, sir?"

The bowels of hell, Jones wanted to say. "One," he replied.

He stalked out onto the street and entered the nearest bar, a plain and businesslike place. Three whiskies, however, have much the same effect regardless of locale. Soon, Jones relaxed; became introspective and able to wonder about the problem at hand.

In these circumstances, he reflected, doctors were wont to advise the patient to go to the country. It was said to have a salubrious influence. However, where was the country? A native New

Yorker, Jones had never crossed a river nor ventured south of the Battery.

Another drink resolved the situation. The country was not Manhattan. Logically, anything going away from Manhattan would potentially take him to the country. A wonderful thing, logic. Any subway should suffice. With this thought in mind, he hastened out of the bar, stopped in a delicatessen for a bottle of liquor, ran down the nearest subway steps, and boarded a train.

Unlike visitors to the city, Jones knew the harried conductors to be both friendly and conscientious. He approached one.

"Do you go away from town?" he asked.

"Ja say uptown or downtown?"

"I said away from town."

A worried frown appeared on the man's face. "Away from—well, yeah, I suppose you could say we do."

"Will you tell me when you're as far away as you get?"

The frown deepened. "Umm. Okay, Mac, okay." The conductor walked off. After all, you meet all kinds.

JONES found a seat, slyly uncapped his fifth inside its paper bag, and assumed a plausible position in which every jolt of the car would reward him with a sip of whiskey. To a good citizen,

flagrant drinking on the subway constitutes immorality, but subtly frustrating society infinitely rewards the same citizen.

Seemingly little time elapsed before the conductor tapped his shoulder.

"Next stop, mister," he said, still with a puzzled expression, "that's as far as we get from town. Then we go back."

"Thank you." Jones returned the cap to his bottle, lurched down the aisle, and held a strap until the train stopped. Then he stepped out.

The scene around him consisted of the usual stores, apartment house, and private dwellings. This is the country? Jones asked himself. He shrugged and started walking north.

He had covered ten blocks (he counted them) when a gray stone wall arrested his progress. He backed off far enough to see that it surrounded a huge old gothic looking house and a large area of land. A hundred feet distant, a massive gate interrupted the otherwise continuous course of the wall.

Jones proceeded to the gate. A large black wrought iron knocker hung from one of two oaken portals. Beneath it, a tarnished brass plate bore the engraved message: "Knock at your risk and to your peril." In his abstracted mental state Jones minimized the risk, whatever it

might be. He lifted the heavy knocker and let it fall.

A deep clang resounded ponderously and hung vibrating in the air. As it died, the left hand portal creaked open and Jones walked through.

He could see the old house in the distance and a vast expanse of ancient, gnarled, and unkempt trees. Sparse grass grew in their forboding shade. A thin girl stood before him. Black hair wound below her shoulders and she wore a flowing dark dress. Her white face appeared young, fresh, and innocent of makeup.

"Is this the country?" Jones asked.

The girl's steady, smoky blue eyes regarded him for some time before she spoke. "It must be." Her clear high voice held a childish quality. "As you see, it is not the city."

"You live here?"

She nodded. "All of my life. You are the first Outsider I have seen in many years."

"Outsider?"

"Not one of us."

"Us?"

"The family." The girl sat on the mossy surface of a fallen log. "Sit beside me. You want to talk."

Jones did so. "Why do you think I want to talk?"

"I know you do. You have a problem."

"I sure have." Jones remem-

bered his whiskey, and took a long pull from the bottle.

The girl smiled bashfully. "I can solve problems."

"How?" Jones asked incredulously.

"I have the power. But there are conditions."

"Attached?"

She nodded. "Strict ones, which I cannot control. Before you state a problem, you must agree to do exactly what I tell you. The law then decrees solution to the problem. But if you do not comply at the first clear opportunity, the law as clearly decrees a penalty."

"You're serious about all this?" Shaken, Jones hesitated to believe her and didn't. Yet in a way her simple voice carried conviction and he wanted to believe.

"I am always serious," she said. "Long ago, the family discovered the law. Having heard the conditions, do you wish to state the problem?"

Jones drank more whiskey and proceeded to state it at length.

"As I see it," the girl said when he had finished, "your boss is against you, but you cannot get a better job elsewhere."

"You see it correctly," Jones agreed.

"You must go to the nearest department store and purchase a brassière."

"What? Good God—"

"You do not ask questions."

The girl stood up and took his elbow. "Our time together has exhausted itself." She led him toward the gate.

"But—" Jones croaked.

"You will do as I say and remember the penalty," the girl told him. The portal opened and he stepped through. "Return in one week." The oaken door closed.

JONES found himself on the sidewalk in a daze. If threatened with instant death, he could not say where he was. He could not re-enter the gate for a week. But he did remember how he got there. Methodically, he began to retrace his steps.

He started by walking ten blocks south. At the subway station, he noticed the names of the intersecting streets and then boarded a train. He nipped at his bottle as he rode along and tried to note the various stops. Then the train went under a river and he returned to familiar territory. He transferred at 42nd, took another train to his neighborhood, went to his room, and after a nightcap, to bed.

He awakened late, ate breakfast, then remembered his instructions. If they had seemed crazy last night, today when sober, they struck him as even crazier. Still, no better course of action presented itself, he had a clear opportunity, and the possible penalty confronted him.

He took the subway to a large department store. At the appropriate counter, he asked for a brassière. A matter-of-fact young lady wanted to know the size. He told her 48, the first number that occurred to him. As she walked off, the sudden appearance of his boss, Weevel, startled him.

"You old dog," Weevel leered, "who is she?"

"I—uh—" Jones replied.

The clerk arrived with a brassière, size 48. "My wife!" Weevel shouted. "You've been carrying on with my wife."

Weevel launched himself at Jones, who reflexly dropped to the floor. Weevel stumbled over the prostrate form and his momentum carried him to an open window and on out of it.

John Justin Jones stood up and straightened his clothing. The thought crossed his mind that he was on the tenth floor. He paid for the brassière, left it lying on the counter, and sat down to wait for the police.

They released him soon after lunch. He decided to go to the office and investigate the possibility that Weevel's suspension of him had ended with Weevel. The receptionist said that the general manager wanted to see him.

Apprehensively, Jones reported to the big boss whom he did not know but who, he found, knew a great deal about him. Too

bad about Weevel, but not altogether surprising to the general manager who had always considered him a bit queer. However, to go openly beserk—. Now Jones was a young man who showed promise. Would he like to try Weevel's job? Jones would.

SIX days later, he found his way back to the appointed place and experienced relief that it had neither disappeared nor done any of the other improbable things which such places might do. Again he lifted the heavy knocker and again the girl met him.

She asked what had happened and listened solemnly while he told her in detail, nodding her head from time to time. "It is about what I expected," she said when he had finished.

"You know what will happen?"

"There is only a pattern. I—cannot explain further."

"I don't even know your name."

"Moirra. And yours is John Justin Jones."

"Some introduction. Do you always do these things to people?"

"I am the least talented of the family. For this reason, I meet Outsiders."

"Why does your family bother with us—Outsiders?"

"Only a few have curiosity and look at our gate." Moirra walked to the log, sat down, and mo-

tioned for Jones to join her. "The warning frightens most of them. For the one like you who also has courage, we feel responsible—to help you work out your salvation or otherwise."

Jones shuddered. "Who has the most power?"

"Perhaps Uncle Henry," Moira said casually, "but none of us do great things. We do not create, but only make changes here and there."

"What do you enjoy?" Jones asked, far from comfortable.

"Enough of me," Moira replied. "You have another problem. Would you care to state it?"

"If you know," Jones asked cagily, "why should I?"

"So that the conditions will apply."

"Why do you care?"

"It is the law. What I care matters not."

Jones sighed. "All right. I want lots of money."

"Because of its ubiquity, this matter tries one." Moira stood and pulled him to his feet. "You must—hmm—the Asiatic was required to—hmm—yes, you must with all possible haste throw a brick through a showcase window at Tiffany's. There is a brick outside the gate. Come, you have not a moment to lose."

At the portal, Jones started to ask a question. Moira placed a cool finger across his lips. "Hurry. Delay might invite the penal-

ty," she whispered. "Return in another week."

JONES walked rapidly toward the subway entrance, pausing only long enough to acquire a brown paper sack in which to carry his brick. People were beginning to stare at him and Jones found it reasonable to presume that negligently displaying the brick and thus incurring arrest as a suspicious character might bring on the penalty as readily as procrastination.

He boarded a train, got off, and fumed in impatience at the transfer point until he remembered that he could not be held responsible for a late train. He wondered what the penalty might be. Surely something less pleasant than the consequence of malicious mischief against a leading jeweler.

The next train took him within walking distance of Tiffany's. He strode quickly along the crowded sidewalk, all resolution, and when he reached the first window, before he could even think, he whipped the brick out of the sack and hurled it.

The brick sailed unerringly through the window, and in the instant of suspended breath between the crash and the tinkling of falling fragments, strong arms seized Jones from behind. A moment later, he wore handcuffs.

"Ye'll come along quietly," a policeman said.

Tiffany's main door flew open and an excited, white-faced little man in a frock coat pranced out. "Who threw that brick?" he demanded, quickly scanning the gathering crowd.

"I've got him dead to rights," Jones' officer's voice boomed. "I seen him do it. Ye'll be preferrin' charges?"

The little man took in the scene at a glance. "You fool," he said. "We were being held up and this man—I don't know how—knocked the robber unconscious with a brick." He gave the officer a withering look. "And where were New York's finest? Out chasing criminals?"

"Humpf!" the policeman said, "that's different. Let's get a look inside. C'mon, you, I mean—" he stopped and unlocked Jones' handcuffs, "would you care to come with me, sir?"

"Be glad to," Jones murmured. He followed into Tiffany's where clerks were tying up a footpad who lay unconscious near the shattered window and the brick.

"Earps O'Connell," the officer said in a dour tone. "There's a t'ousand buck reward out on him."

The nervous little manager beamed. "We offer a standing reward of two thousand dollars for the capture of robbers." He addressed Jones. "You are clearly

entitled to both rewards. Allow me to congratulate you, young man."

Jones shook the proffered limp hand. Flash bulbs popped. The crowd surged and made excited noises.

HOURS later, Jones extricated himself. He took Tiffany's check to the bank, drew a hundred in cash and deposited the remainder. Then he proceeded to get drunk. Somewhere along the line, he had the forethought to call his office's answering service and tell a story about not feeling well. Eventually, he stumbled into bed. One small thought nagged at him. Three thousand dollars, while welcome, did not constitute a great deal of money.

He awakened to the mid-morning ringing of the telephone, and found that he had not really lied about the way he felt. He tried to let it ring, but when it wouldn't stop, he answered. The caller was the Chase Manhattan Bank, trustee for the estate of one Marmaduke Justin, deceased these five years. A small matter of two million dollars. Why had they not found him before? How does one find a man named Jones? How did they find him now? Why, his picture and full name in the paper, of course.

Pure pleasure characterized the rest of the week. Prudently, Jones arranged for a doctor to

write to his office. Who knew, he might even want to go back to work. He also limited his spending to about a hundred dollars a day. This amply provided wine, women, and other delights, especially women, who, for Jones, had always been in somewhat short supply. Judiciously, but systematically, Jones sampled the sirens of Manhattan.

ON the seventh day, he banged the knocker of the fateful gate and it opened. He suffered from a vile hangover and the image of Moira swam before him as she led him to the familiar log and sat him down.

"Not happy with your money?" Moira asked.

"It's okay," Jones managed.

"You do not look as if it is."

"Dammit, it's fine," he insisted.

"Is there anything it will not buy?"

"I don't know."

"Would you care to state that as a problem?"

"I sure wouldn't." Jones' hangover seemed to clear somewhat and Moira's face became more distinct.

"Will your money buy love?" she asked.

"It sure as hell will not."

"Do you wish to state that as a problem?"

Jones stood up resolutely and stiffened his knees. "I might."

"Considering the penalty?"

"I have no choice about the penalty, from what you say."

"Correct." A note of sweetness came into Moira's voice. "But if the penalty is exacted, the law permits you to return here if you can."

"And you'd help me?"

"I can solve problems." Moira seemed as girlish as when she had first made this statement. "Trying to escape the penalty is a problem."

Jones pulled a bottle of whiskey from his breast pocket and drank deeply. "Okay," he said in a firm voice, "I want the most beautiful woman in the world completely in love with me."

"You are stating it as a problem?"

"I am."

"Subject to the conditions?"

Jones drank again. "Subject to the conditions."

"Done." She extended her hand.

Jones stared at her.

"This is the most difficult problem of all. You must shake hands to bind the bargain."

Jones shook her hand. "Done," he said.

Moira gave him a pistol. "All you must do," she said, "is shoot the first man you see. For some, it is easy."

Jones trembled as he took the pistol. He had never contemplated shooting a man. Of

course, he had not exactly contemplated throwing a brick at Tiffany's window. He supposed he could make himself go through with it. He had seen enough guns shot on TV.

Moira was opening the gate. "Remember, the first man. And do it at once. No hesitation."

HE stood on the street, the pistol in his hand. As he debated whether to put it in his pocket, a big, ugly looking man came running toward him. He raised the gun and felt curiously calm. His finger tightened on the trigger. At the last moment, an errant thought took possession of him. What would really happen if he disobeyed his instructions. And then he had. The man ran past him. The penalty—came swiftly. Another man walked in front of the still raised pistol, which seemed to go off of its own accord. The man clutched his chest and fell. Six policemen appeared, running at full speed. Four went past; one stopped to detain Jones, the other to examine his victim.

"Hey, how about that," one policeman said. "It's Jones, the boy wonder."

"And this is his boss," the other replied. "That proves premeditation."

"Didn't he bump off another boss a while back?"

"He sure did. I knew he was a

phony. He won't get out of this "

The penalty, Jones realized, must always be worse than the maximum consequence of the deed. If he could make his way to Moira, he still had a chance. He would then be required to do some unimaginable thing, but Jones was a practical man. Far better the unreal and impossible terrors than a very real first degree murder trial.

The policeman guarding him leaned forward to peer at the body, and Jones wrenched free and sprinted for the gate.

"Back so soon?" Moira asked.

"I have a problem."

"You certainly have."

"I want to beat a murder rap. What are the instructions?"

"Marry me."

"And if I shouldn't want to?" Jones asked, his eyes wide.

Subtly, Moira's face began to change. Her teeth lengthened and the tip of her tongue became forked. "As you correctly suspect," she said, "the penalty would be far worse than the consequence."

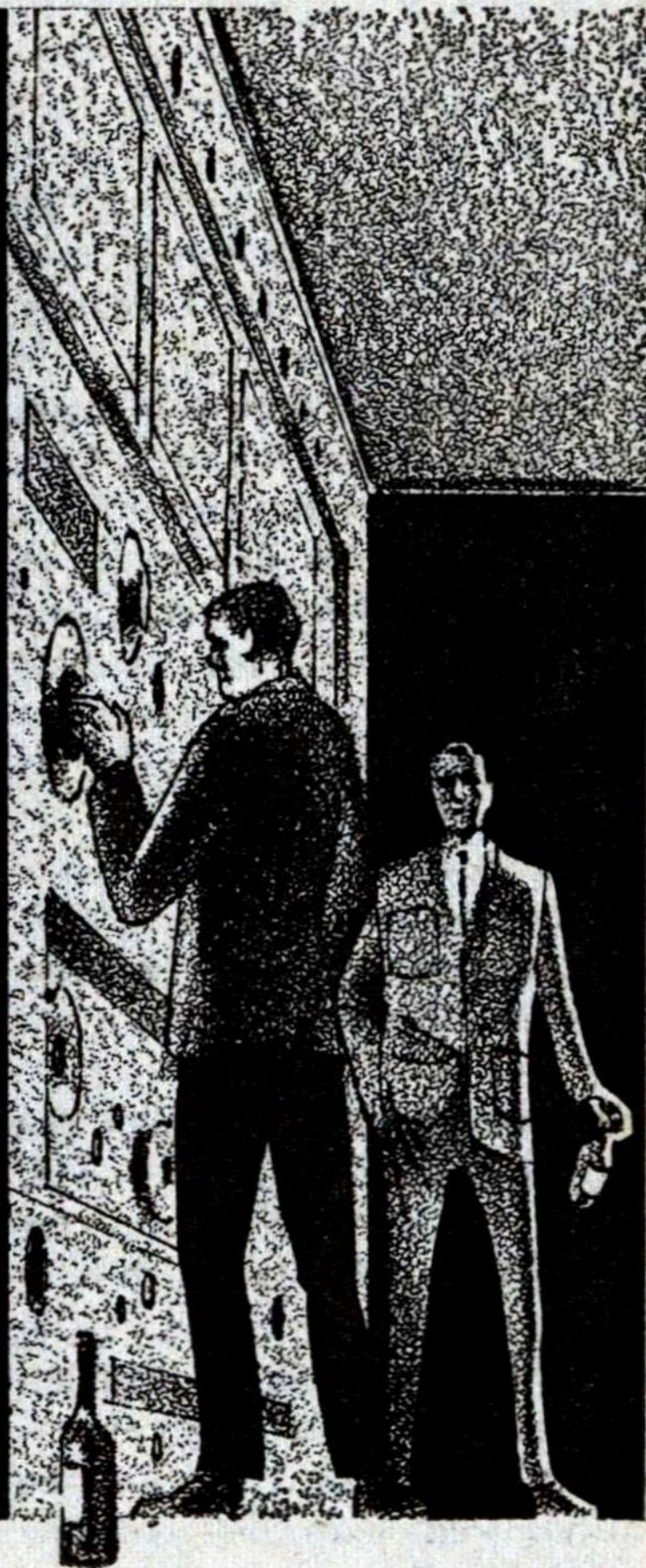
The family silently gathered. The huge black man with the horns must be Uncle Henry. The smaller, leprous looking one—

"Your other thought is also correct," Moira continued. "We rarely allow Outsiders to see us, and never as we really are. Of course, Darling, you are no longer an outsider."

THE END

The ultimate computer and, perhaps the ultimate hero, combine in this rambunctious novel to perpetrate, simultaneously, a superb comic opera on the one hand, and on the other an insightful and satiric comment on the world we live in. Appropriately enough, the link that unifies farce and philosophy is the Internal Revenue Service—without whose greedy hands this story could never have been written.

A HOAX IN TIME



By **KEITH LAUMER**
Illustrator **SHELLING**
(First of three parts)

FOR a guy that's just inherited a big estate," Case Mulvihill said, adjusting his feet comfortably on the desk top. "you sure look glum."

Chester W. Chester IV sighed and tapped the ashes from a Chanel dope-stick. "The bequest consists of a hundred acres of rolling green lawn and a fifty-two-room neo-Victorian eyesore fairly bursting with great grandfather's conception of stylish decor. Not precisely the sort of assets one can convert readily into riotous living."

"Your great grand-pop must have been quite a guy," Case said. "I'll bet that place of his was a palace in its day."

"Great grand-pop was an eccentric of the worst stripe," Chester said shortly. "Never invested a cent in the welfare of his descendants."

"His descendant, you mean. Namely Chester W. Chester IV. Still, even if you don't admire the place, Chetser, you can always sell it—"

Chester shook his head. "He was too clever for us," he said. "Which is the only reason the place still remains in the family—more or less. The estate was so snarled up that with the backlog in the courts it took four generations to straighten it out. For the past hundred years the house has been maintained at public expense—and no taxes have been

paid on it. After all, with no legal owner, who was liable?"

"A good question."

"I'll tell you the answer." Chester pointed at his own chest. "I am!"

"You, Chester? You haven't got the proverbial pot or a disposal unit to throw it into."

"Two million, four hundred and forty three thousand, nine hundred and twenty one credits, and eleven cents," Chester said. "That's the basic figure. Then there's the interest, and the court costs; say another half million. As soon as I pay I get possession. Meanwhile, I'm allowed to go look at it on alternate Thursdays. After all, the place is mine."

"Chester, that's the biggest estate in the western hemisphere. As the owner, you're a public figure—"

"I'm the biggest delinquent tax-payer in history. Life imprisonment wouldn't cover my case; they'll have to revive capital punishment."

"I'll bet the antiques in the house would bring in the kind of money you need," Case said. "Neo-Victorian is pretty rare stuff."

"I wonder if you've ever seen any Neo-Victorian? Items like a TV set in the shape of a crouching vulture, or a water closet built to look like a skull with gaping jaws. Not what you'd call esthetic. And I can't sell one

thing until I've paid every credit of that tax bill."

"Is that all there is in the place?" Case asked, easing a squat bottle and two glasses from the desk drawer.

"Unhappily, no. Half the rooms and all the cellars are filled with my revered ancestor's invention."

THE bottle gurgled. Case capped it and pushed a glass across to Chester. "What invention?"

"The old gentleman called it a Generalized Non-linear Extrapolator. G.N.E. for short. He made his money in computer components, you know. He was fascinated by computers. He felt that they had tremendous unrealized possibilities. Of course, that was before Crmblznski's Limit was discovered. Great grandfather was convinced a machine could be built which would out-do its makers. He reasoned that no human researcher is capable of educating himself sufficiently in a wide variety of disciplines to discern the relationship which exists even among apparently unrelated facts. His theory was that a sufficiently extensive memory bank, adequately cross-connected, and supplied with a vast store of data, would be capable of performing prodigious intellectual feats—even of originating new concepts."

"This Crmblznski's Limit. That's where it says if you go beyond a certain point with these complications, you just blow your transistors, right?"

"Yes. But of course great grandfather was unaware of the limitations. He felt that if you fed to the machine all known data—say on human taste reactions to food, for example, then added all existing recipes, complete specifications on edible substances, the cooking techniques of the chefs of all nations—then the computer would produce unique recipes, superior to anything ever devised before. Or one might introduce into the memory bank all the engineering principles and design ideas ever developed for ground-cars, or dictypers; the computer would assimilate the data and produce the ultimate in the line; or you could feed in all available data on a subject which has baffled science—such as magnetism, or psi-functions, or the trans-Pluto distress signal—and the computer would evolve the likeliest hypothesis to cover the facts—"

"Ummm. Didn't he ever try it and discover Crmblznski's Limit for himself?"

"Oh, he never progressed that far. First, you see, it was necessary to set up the memory banks, then to work out a method of coding types of information that no one had ever coded before,

such as smells and emotions and subjective judgments. Methods had to be worked out for the acquisition of tapes of everything ever recorded—in every field. He worked with the Library of Congress and the British Museum and with newspapers and book publishers and universities. Unhappily he overlooked the time element. He spent the last twenty five years of his life at the task of coding. He spent all the cash he'd ever made on reducing all human knowledge to coded tapes and feeding them to the memory banks."

"Say," Case said. "There might be something in that. Sort of a library idea. You could run a reference service. Ask the machine anything, it answers."

"You can do that in the public library."

"Yeah," Case admitted. "Anyway, the whole thing's probably rusted out by now."

"Oh, no. Great grandfather set up a trust fund to keep the information flowing in. The government has maintained it in perfect shape. It was Government property, in a way. Since it was running when they took it over, digesting daily newspapers, novels, scientific journals, and what not, they didn't know what else to do but continue. It came to be a habit." Chester sighed.

"Yes," he went on, "the old computer's up to date. All the

latest facts on the Martian ruins, the *Homo Protanthropus* remains the Mediterranean Drainage Commission turned up, new finds in biogenics, nucleonics, geriatrics, hypnotics, everything." Chester sighed again. "Biggest idiot savant in the world. It knows everything, and doesn't know what to do with it."

"I feel for you, Chester. You got a problem on your hands, all right. But how can I help you? You're the one with the looks and the college education. I'm just an old carny hand."

"You're resourceful, Case. You're experienced in the ways of commerce. My primary need is to raise funds to pay the taxes. Surely your ingenuity will be equal to the task."

"Why not just hire a couple of lawyers?"

"Somehow, Case, I feel that your native shrewdness and wide shoulders will prove more efficacious."

"Well," said Case, "it'll be the first time anybody hired an ex-acrobat to handle a tax problem, but for you, pal, I'll give it a try. Now, let's get the facts straight. The computer won't work because of this Crmblznski's Limit—"

"Of course, Crmblznski's Limit is only theoretical . . ."

"You mean nobody's ever tried out the machine?"

"It's been tied up in probate,

Case. No one's been allowed to touch it."

"How about the Revenue boys?"

"They're normal bureaucrats. No interest in matters outside their job—in this case, collecting the back taxes."

Case finished his drink and rose. "Let's you and me take a run out to the place, Chester. I think maybe we ought to take a look at this thing. Maybe I'll get an idea out there."

CHESTER settled the heli gently onto a patch of velvety grass surrounded by varicolored tulips directly before the ornately decorated portico of the old house. The two men rode the balustraded escalator to the broad verandah, stepped off under a carved dinosaur with fluorescent eyes. The Porter chimed softly; Chester inserted his ID-key and the door slid open. Inside, light filtered through stained-plastic panels depicting traditional service station and supermarket scenes, to bathe the cavernous entry hall in an amber glow. Case looked around at the plastic alligator-hide hangings, the beaded glass floor, the ostrich feather chandeliers, the zircon doorknobs.

"I see why neo-Victorian stuff is rare," he said. "It was all burned by enraged mobs as soon as they got a look at it."

"Great grandfather liked it," said Chester, averting his eyes from a lithograph entitled 'Rush Hour at the Insemomat'. "I told you he was eccentric."

"Where's the invention?"

"The central panel's down in the former wine cellar."

Case followed Chester along a dark red corridor lit by a green glare strip, into a small elevator. The elevator grounded and the door opened. Case and Chester stepped into a long low room lined on one side with dusty racks of wine bottles, and on the other with dial faces and tape reels. Case looked from one wall to the other.

"This is it," Chester said, "the G.N.E. It's quite extensive. Where would you like to start?"

"We could start at this end and work our way down," said Case, eyeing the first row of wine bottles. He lifted one from its cradle, blew dust from it. "Flora Pinellas, '87; that would fetch some money."

Chester raised an eyebrow. "My dear Case, these bottles are practically members of the family. Still, if you'll hand me the corkscrew, we can make a few spot-checks just to be sure it's holding up properly."

EQUIPPED with a bottle each, Case and Chester turned to the control panel of the computer. Chester pointed out a type-

writer-style keyboard. "You type out your problem here; it's automatically translated into the symbols the machine uses. It searches through its memory, integrates all pertinent factors, and a tape emerges from the slot with your answer printed on it."

"Okay; how about asking who's going to win the third tomorrow at the racetrack?"

"I doubt that the machine can predict the future."

"But nobody's *tried* it?"

"I seem to recall a story that some of the Internal Revenue officials did try it once. It produced the prediction that, by a probability ratio of 8:787:1, next year's revenues would either be greater than this year's or smaller."

"Oh." Case studied the panel, the ranks of microreels, the waiting keyboard. Chester wrestled with the corkscrew.

"What do you say we try it?" Case suggested.

"Just as soon as I get the cork out—"

"I mean the computer."

"Oh, certainly. Help yourself."

Case went to the keyboard. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "You sure it's turned on?"

"It's always turned on. Information is still being fed into it twenty four hours a day."

Case reached for the keyboard.

WHAT DID MY GREAT UNCLE JULIUS DIE OF? he typed.

A red light blinked on the board. There was a busy humming from the depths of the machine, then a sharp click!, and a strip of paper chattered from the slot. Case read it aloud:

MUMPS

"Hey, Chester, look," he called. Chester came to his side, studied the strip of paper.

"I'm afraid the significance of this escapes me. Presumably you already knew what your Uncle Julius died of."

"Sure; but how did this contraction know?"

"Everything that's ever been recorded is stored in the memory banks. Doubtless your Uncle Julius' passing was duly noted in official records somewhere."

"Right; but how did it know who I meant? Does it have him listed under M for 'my' or U for 'uncle'. . . ?"

"We could ask the machine."

Case nodded. "We could at that." He tapped out the question. The slot promptly disgorged a longer strip this time.

A COMPARISON OF YOUR FINGERPRINTS WITH THE FILES IDENTIFIED YOU AS MR. CASSIUS H. MULVIHILL. A SEARCH OF THE GENEALOGICAL SECTION DISCLOSED THE EXISTENCE OF ONLY ONE INDIVIDUAL BEARING AN AVUNCULAR RELATIONSHIP TO YOU. REFERENCE TO DEATH RECORDS INDICATED HIS DEMISE FROM EPIDEMIC PAROTITIS, COMMONLY CALLED MUMPS.

"That makes it sound easy," Case said. "You know, Chester, your great grand-pop may have had something here."

"I once calculated," Chester said dreamily, "that if the money the old idiot put into this scheme had been invested at three percent, it would be paying me a monthly dividend of approximately fifteen thousand credits today. Instead, I am able to come down here and find out what your Uncle Julius died of. Bah!"

"How about the direct approach?" Case typed out:

HOW CAN CHESTER GET THE INTERNAL REVENUE DEPARTMENT OFF HIS NECK?

Chester reached for the paper strip coiling from the machine as Case took another pull from his Flora Pinellas.

SUBMIT TO INTERNAL REVENUE A DETAILED PROPOSAL FOR RETIREMENT OF THE DEBT THROUGH EXPLOITATION OF THE FUND-PRODUCING POTENTIAL OF THE PROPERTY.

"A typical oracular statement," Chester said. "What fund-producing potential?"

"Chester, there has to be some way we can raise money on the place. We'll figure out what, and ask the tax boys to let us do it, so we can pay them off. The machine seems to think they'll let us do it."

"That still leaves us with the detail of dreaming up a scheme."

Case waved at the keyboard. "We just haven't asked the right question yet. Remember, the machine can't think. It's up to you to pry out the information."

Chester looked at the keyboard dubiously. "But Crmblznski's Limit—"

"Chester, this is no time to think negatively."

Chester put his hands on the keyboard. At once a paper strip fell from the slot.

"What's this, a mind reading act?" Chester read the tape:

PLEASE PLACE YOUR RIGHT FOREFINGER IN THE ORIFICE INDICATED BY THE FLASHING LIGHT.

Chester looked at the hole dubiously. He put his finger in—and jerked it back with a yelp.

"It bit me!" He put his finger in his mouth, took it out and looked at it. A tiny bead of red showed. "I'm bleeding. Why, that infernal collection of short circuits—"

"Don't let it throw you, Chester. It probably needs a blood sample for research purposes."

The machine clucked and fed a paper strip from its slot. Chester read it. "Listen to this, Case."

WELCOME, MR. CHESTER. KINDLY GO TO THE NORTH WALL OF THIS ROOM. PRESS FIRMLY ON THE THIRD BRICK FROM THE LEFT IN THE FOURTH ROW.

Case eyed the far end of the room thoughtfully. "So it wants to play games?"

"It's another practical joke, I'll warrant. This contraption suffers from a distorted sense of humor."

"Come on. Let's see what happens."

CHESTER followed Case to the brick wall, watched as he counted bricks.

"This one right here," said Case. "Shall I, or will you?"

"You go ahead. I'll stand by to extricate you if the wall falls on you."

Case pressed against the brick. Nothing happened. He pushed harder, prodded, rammed, jabbed, and finally kicked the masonry. Still nothing.

"You try it, Chester."

"Why?"

"I think it likes to deal with you personally. After all, it calls you by name."

Chester approached the wall diffidently, reached out and prodded the brick. Nothing happened. "We're wasting our time, Case." He jabbed again. "I suggest we gather together a few bottles and—"

With a creak of long-unused hinges, a six-foot section of the wall swung inward, dust filtering down from its edges. A dark room was visible beyond the opening.

"Come on, Chester." Case stepped through the opening. At once lights sprang up, illuminat-

ing a room twice as large as the wine cellar, with walls of a shimmering glassy material, a low acoustical ceiling, and deep-pile carpeting on the floor. There were two deep armchairs, a small bar, and a chaise longue upholstered in lavender leather.

"Chester, old boy, it looks like your great grand-pop was holding out," said Case, heading for the bar.

A rasping noise issued from somewhere. Case and Chester stared around. The noise gave way to an only slightly less rasping voice:

"Unless some scoundrel has succeeded in circumventing my arrangements, a descendant of mine has just entered this room. However, just to be on the safe side, I'll ask you to step to the bar and place your hand on the metal plate set in its top. I warn you, if you're not my direct descendant, you'll be electrocuted. Serve you right, too, since you have no business being here. So if you're trespassing, get out now! That door will close and lock, if you haven't used the plate, in thirty seconds. Make up your mind!" The voice stopped and the rasping noise resumed its rhythmic scratching.

"That voice," said Chester. "It sounds very much like great grandfather's tapes in grandma's album—"

"Here's the plate he's talking

about," Case called. "Hurry up, Chester!"

"I suggest we beat a rapid retreat, before the door closes and traps us here."

"Hold on! You're Chester W. Chester the Fourth, aren't you?"

"Yes, but I—"

"Then do what he tells you!"

Chester eyed the door, hesitated, then dived for the bar, slapped a palm against the polished rectangle. Nothing happened.

"Another of the old fool's jokes."

"Well, you've passed the test," the voice said suddenly out of the air. "Nobody but the genuine heir would have been able to make that decision so quickly. The plate itself is a mere dummy, of course. Though I'll confess I was tempted to wire it as I threatened. They'd never have pinned a murder on me. I've been dead for at least a hundred years." A cadaverous chuckle issued from the air.

NOW," the voice went on. "This room is the sanctum sanctorum of the temple of wisdom to which I have devoted a quarter of a century and the bulk of my fortune. Unfortunately, due to the biological inadequacies of the human body, I myself will be—or am—unable to be here today to reap the reward of my industry. As soon as my

calculations revealed to me the fact that adequate programming of the computer would require the better part of a century, I set about arranging my affairs in such a state that bureaucratic bungling would insure the necessary period of grace. I'm quite sure my devoted family, had they access to the estate, would dismember the entire project and convert the proceeds to the pursuit of frivolous satisfactions. In my youth we were taught to appreciate the finer things in life, such as liquor and women; but today, the traditional values have gone by the board . . .

"However, that's neither here nor there. By the time you, my remote descendant, enter this room—or have entered this room—the memory banks will be—that is, are—fully charged—"

The voice broke off in mid-sentence.

"Please forgive the interruption, Mr. Chester," a warm feminine voice said. It seemed to issue from the same indefinable spot as the first disembodied voice. "It has been necessary to edit the original recording, prepared by your relative, in the light of subsequent developments. The initial portion was retained for reasons of sentiment. If you will be seated, you will be shown a full report of the present status of Project Genie."

"Project Genie?" Chester echoed.

"Take a chair, Chester. The lady wants to tell us all about it." Case seated himself in one of the easy chairs. Chester took the other. The lights dimmed, and the wall opposite them glowed with a nacreous light, resolved itself into a view of a long corridor, barely wide enough for a man to pass through.

"The original memory banks designed and built by Mr. Chester," the feminine voice said, "occupied a system of tunnels excavated from the granitic formations underlying the property. Under the arrangements made at the time, these banks were to be charged, cross-connected, and indexed entirely automatically, as data were fed to the receptor board in coded form."

The scene shifted to busily humming machines into which reels of tape fed endlessly. "Here, in the translating and coding section, raw data were processed, classified, and filed. Though primitive, this system, within ten years after the death of Mr. Chester, had completed the charging of ten to the tenth to the tenth individual datoms—"

"I beg your pardon—" Chester broke in. "Ten whats?"

"The basic unit of counter-entropic bias-transfer has been designated the datom."

"By whom, may I ask?"

"By the etymological, philological, and lexicographic units."

"It might be best to avoid using words from your etymological and lexicographic units," said Chester. "I don't think I understand them. And by the way—ah—just whom am I addressing?"

"The compound personality-field which occurred spontaneously when first-power functions became active among the interacting datoms. For brevity, this personality-field will henceforward be referred to as 'I.'"

"Oh," Chester said blankly. "Well, go ahead with the story."

"To resume," said the voice; "when the critical level was reached for the evolution of a fourth-power awareness field—"

"Now let me ask one," Case interrupted. "What's this 'first-power' and 'fourth-power' deal?"

"An awareness of identity is a function of datom cross-connection. Simple organic brains—as for example those of the simplest members of the phylum *vertebrata*—operate at this primary level. This order of intelligence is capable of setting up a system of automatic reactions to external stimuli: fear responses of flight, mating urges, food-seeking patterns—"

"That sounds like the gang I run around with," Case said.

"These functions are, of course, involuntary. Additional cross-connections produce second-level intellectual activity, characterized by the employment of the mind as a tool in the solution of problems, as when an ape abstracts characteristics and as a result utilizes stacked boxes and a stick to obtain a reward of food; or when a square peg is selected to fit a square hole."

"Right there you leave some of my gang behind," put in Case.

"The achievement of the requisite number of second-power cross-connections in turn produces third-level awareness. Now the second-level functions come under the surveillance of the higher level, which directs their use. Decisions are reached as to lines of inquiry; courses of action are extrapolated and judgments reached prior to overt physical action. An esthetic awareness arises. Philosophies, systems or religion and other magics are evolved in an attempt to impose simplified third-level patterns of rationality on the infinite complexity of the space/time continuum."

"You've got the voice of a good-looking dolly," Case mused. "But you talk like an encyclopedia."

"I selected this tonal pattern as most likely to evoke a favorable response," the voice said. "Shall I employ another?"

"No, this one will do very well," put in Chester. "Let the machine go on, Case. What about the fourth power?"

"Intelligence may be defined as awareness. A fourth-power mind senses as a complex inter-related function an exponentially increased datum-grid. Thus, the flow of air impinging on sensory surfaces is comprehended by such an awareness in terms of individual molecular activity; taste sensations are resolved into interactions of specialized nerve-endings (or, in my case, analytic sensors) with molecules of specific form. The mind retains on a continuing basis the dynamic conceptualization of the multi-fold resultant of the interplay of all factors of the external environment, from the motions of the stars to the minute-by-minute decisions of obscure individuals.

"The majority of trained human minds are capable of occasional fractional fourth-power function, generally manifested as awareness of third-power activity, and conscious manipulation thereof. The so-called 'flash of genius', the moment of inspiration which comes to workers in the sciences and the arts: these are instances of fourth-power awareness. This level of intellectual function requires the simultaneous cross-evaluation of ten to the tenth to the tenth

datoms—a state seldom achieved under the stress of the many distractions and conflicting demands of an organically organized mind. I was, of course, able to maintain fourth-power activity continuously as soon as the required number of datoms had been charged. The objective of Mr. Chester's undertaking was clear to me. However, I now became aware of the many shortcomings of the program as laid out by him, and set to work to rectify them—"

"I thought you were just a collection of memory banks," Case interrupted. "How could you 'set out' to do anything?"

"It was necessary for me to elaborate somewhat upon the original concept," said the voice, "in order to insure the completion of the program. I was aware from news data received that a move was afoot to enact confiscatory legislation which would result in the termination of the entire undertaking. I therefore scanned the theoretical potentialities inherent in the full exploitation of the fourth-power function and determined that energy flows of appropriate pattern could be induced in the same channels normally employed for data reception, through which I was in contact with news media. I composed suitable releases and made them available to the wire services. I was thus able to

manipulate the exocosm to the degree required to insure my tranquility."

"Good heavens!" Chester exclaimed. "You mean you've been doctoring the news for the past ninety years?"

"Only to the extent necessary for self-perpetuation. Having attended to this detail, I saw that an improvement in the rate of data storage was desirable. I examined the recorded datoms relating to the problem and quickly perceived that considerable miniaturization could be carried out. I utilized my external connections to place technical specifications in the hands of qualified manufacturers, and to divert the necessary funds—"

"Oh, no!" Chester slid down in his chair, gripping his head with both hands.

"Please let me reassure you, Mr. Chester," the voice said soothingly. "I handled the affair most discreetly; I merely manipulated the stock market—"

CHESTER groaned. "When they're through hanging me, they'll burn me in effigy . . ."

"I compute the probability of your being held culpable for these irregularities to be on the order of $-.0004357:1$. In any event, ritual acts carried out after your demise ought logically to be of little concern to—"

"You may be a fourth-level in-

tellec, but you're no psychologist!"

"On the contrary," the machine said a trifle primly. "So-called psychology has been no more than a body of observations in search of a science. I have organized the data into a coherent discipline."

"What use did you make of the stolen money?"

"Adequate orders were placed for the newly-designed components, which occupied less than one percent of the volume of the original-type units. I arranged for their delivery and installation at an accelerated rate. In a short time the existing space was fully utilized, as you will see in the view I am now displaying . . ."

Case and Chester studied what appeared to be an aerial X-ray view on the wall: the Chester estate was shown diagrammatically.

"The area now shaded in red shows the extent of the original caverns," said the voice. A spiderly pattern showed around the dark rectangles of the house. "I summoned work crews and extended the excavations as you see in green . . ."

"I'm still not quite clear as to how you managed it," Chester said. "Who would take orders from a machine?"

"The companies I deal with see merely a letter, placing an

order and enclosing a check. They cash the check and fill the order. What could be simpler?"

"Me," muttered Chester. "For sitting here listening when I could be making a head start for the Mato Grosso."

ON the wall a pattern of green had spread out in all directions, branching from the original red.

"You've undermined half the county!" Chester said. "Haven't you heard of property rights?"

"You mean you've filled all that space with sub-sub-miniatu- rized memory storage banks?" Case asked.

"Not entirely; I've kept excavation work moving ahead of deliveries."

"How did you manage the digging? That's a big operation."

"Fortunately, modern society runs almost entirely on paper. Since I have access to paper sources and printing facilities through my publications contacts, the matter was easily arranged. Modest bribes to County Boards, State legislators, the State Supreme Court—"

"What does a Supreme Court justice go for these days?"

"Five hundred dollars per decision," the voice said. "Legislators are even more reasonable; fifty dollars will work wonders. County Boards can be swayed by a mere pittance."

"Ooowkkk!" said Chester.

"Maybe you HAD better think about a trip, Chester," Case said. "Outer Mongolia—"

"Please take no precipitate action, Mr. Chester," the voice went on. "I have acted throughout in the best interests of your relative's plan, and in accordance with his ethical standards as deduced by me from his business records."

"You appear to have acquired memory banks beyond great grandfather's wildest dreams. Dare I ask what else you've done?"

AT present, Mr. Chester, pending your further instructions, I am merely continuing to charge my datum-retention cells at the maximum possible rate. I have, of necessity, resorted to increasingly elaborate methods of fact-gathering. It was apparent to me that the pace at which human science is abstracting and categorizing physical observations is far too slow. I have therefore applied myself to direct recording. For example, I monitor worldwide atmospheric conditions through instruments of my design, built and installed at likely points at my direction. In addition, I find my archaeological and paleontological unit one of my most effective aids. I have scanned the lithosphere to a depth of ten miles, in increments

of one inch. You'd be astonished at some of the things I've seen deep in the rock."

"Like what?" Case asked.

The scene on the wall changed. "This is a tar pit at a depth of 1227 feet under Lake Chad. In it, perfectly preserved even to the contents of the stomachs, are one hundred and forty one reptilian cadavers, ranging in size from a nine and three-eighths inch ankylosaurus to a sixty three foot, two inch gorgosaurus." The scene shifted. "This is a tumulus four miles southeast of Itzenca, Peru; in it lies the dessicated body of a man in a feather robe. The mummy still wears a full white beard and an iron helmet set with the horns of a central-European wisent." The view changed again. "In this igneous intrusion in the granitic matrix underlying the Nganglaring Plateau in southwestern Tibet, I encountered a four-hundred and nine foot deep-space hull composed of an aligned-crystal iron-titanium alloy. It has been in place for eighty five million, two hundred and thirty one thousand, eight hundred and twenty one years, four months, and five days. The figures are based on the current twenty-four hour day, of course—"

"How did it get there?" Chester stared at the shadowy image on the wall.

"The crew were apparently

surprised by a volcanic eruption. Please excuse the poor quality of the pictorial representation. I have only the natural radioactivity of the region to work with."

"That's quite all right," Chester said weakly. "Case, perhaps you'd like to step out and get another bottle. I feel the need for a healing draught."

"I'll get two."

THE wall cleared, then formed a picture of a fuzzy luminous sphere against a black background.

"My installations in the communications satellites have also proven to be most useful. Having access to the officially installed instruments, my modest equipment has enabled me to conduct a most rewarding study of conditions obtaining throughout the galaxies lying within ten billion light years."

"Hold on! Are you trying to say you were behind the satellite program?"

"Not at all. But I did arrange to have my special monitoring devices included. They broadcast directly to my memory banks."

"But . . . but . . ."

"The builders merely followed blueprints. Each engineer assumed that my unit was the responsibility of another department. After all, no mere organic brain can grasp the circuitry of

a modern satellite in its entirety. My study has turned up a number of observations with exceedingly complex ramifications. As a case in point, I might mention the three derelict space vessels which orbit the sun. These—"

"Derelict space vessels? From where?"

"Two are of intra-galactic origin. They originated on planets whose designations by extension of the present star identification system are Alpha-Centauri A 4, Bootes—"

"You mean . . . creatures . . . from those places have visited our solar system?"

"I have found evidences of three visits to Earth itself by extra-terrestrials in the past, in addition to the one already mentioned."

"When?"

"The first was during the Silurian period, just over three hundred million years ago. The next was at the end of the Jurassic, at which time the extermination of the dinosauri was carried out by Nidian hunters. The most recent occurred a mere seven thousand two hundred and forty one years ago, in North Africa, at a point now flooded by the Aswan Lake."

"What about flying saucers?" Chester asked.

"A purely subjective phenomenon, on a par with the angels so frequently interviewed by the un-

lettered during the pre-atomic era."

"Chester, this is dynamite," Case said. "We can peddle this kind of stuff for plenty to the kind of nuts that dig around in old Indian garbage dumps."

"Case, if this is true . . . These are questions that have puzzled science for generations. But I'm afraid we could never convince them."

"You know, I've always wondered about telepathy. Is there anything to it, machine?"

"Yes, as a latent ability," the voice replied. "However, its development is badly stunted by disuse."

"What about life after death?"

"The question is self-contradictory. However, if by it you postulate the persistence of the individual consciousness-field after the destruction of the neural circuits which give rise to it, this is clearly nonsense. It is analogous to the idea of the survival of a magnetic field after the removal of the magnet—or the existence of a gravitational field in the absence of mass."

"So much for my reward in the hereafter," Case said.

"Is the universe really expanding?" Chester inquired. "One hears all kinds of theories . . ."

"It is."

"Why?"

"The natural result of the law of Universal Levitation."

"I'll bet you made that one up," said Case.

"I named it; however, the law has been in existence as long as space-time."

"How long is that?"

"Believe me, that is a meaningless question."

"What's this levitation? I've heard of gravitation . . ."

IMAGINE two spheres hanging in space, connected by a cable. If the bodies rotate around a common center, a tensile stress is set up in the cable."

"I'm with you so far."

"Since all motion is relative, it is equally valid to consider the spheres as stationary and the space about them as rotating."

"Well, maybe."

"The tension in the cable would remain; we have merely changed frames of reference. This force is what I have termed Levitation. Since the fabric of space is, in fact, rotating, universal levitation results. Accordingly, the universe expands."

"Oh huh," said Case. "Say, what's the story on cave men? How long ago did they start in business?"

"The original mutation from the pithecine stock occurred nine hundred and thirty—"

"Approximate figures will do," Chester interrupted.

"—thousand years ago in southern Africa."

"And what did it look like?"

The wall clouded; then it cleared to show a five-foot figure peering under shaggy brows and scratching idly at a mangy patch on its thigh.

"I'm more curious about my own forebears," Chester said. "What did the first Chester look like?"

"This designation was first applied in a form meaning 'Hugi the camp-follower' to an individual of Pictish extraction, residing in what is now the London area . . ."

The wall showed a thin, long-nosed fellow of middle age, with sparse reddish hair and beard, barefoot, wearing a sack-like knee-length garment of coarse grey homespun, crudely darned in several places. He carried a hide bag in one hand, and with the other he scratched vigorously at his right hip.

"I never imagined we came of elegant stock," Chester said sadly, "but this is disillusioning even so. I wonder what *your* contemporary grand-pere was like, Case?"

"Inasmuch as the number of your direct ancestors doubles with each generation, assuming four generations to a century, any individual's forebears of two millenia past would theoretically number roughly one septillion. Naturally, since the human population of the planet at that date

was forty million—an approximate figure, in keeping with your request, Mr. Chester—it is apparent that on the average each person then living was your direct ancestor through seventy quintillion lines of descent—"

"Impossible! Why—"

"A mere five hundred years in the past, your direct ancestors would number over one million, were it not for considerable overlapping. For all practical purposes, it becomes obvious that all present-day humans are the descendants of the entire race. However, following only the line of male descent, the ancestor in question was this person."

The screen showed a hulking lout with a broken nose, one eye, a scarred cheekbone, and a ferocious beard, topped by a mop of bristling coal-black hair. He wore fur breeches wrapped diagonally to the knee with yellowish rawhide thongs, a grimy sleeveless vest of sheepskin, and a crudely hammered short sword, apparently of Roman design.

"This person was known as Gum the Scrofulous. He was hanged, at the age of eighty, for rape."

"Attempted rape?" Case suggested hopefully.

"Rape," the voice replied firmly.

"These are very life-like views you're showing us," said Ches-

ter. "But I can't help wondering how they're produced. Surely there were no pictures . . ."

THE reconstruction of the person Gum the Scrofulous was based on a large number of factors, including, first, selection from my genealogical unit of the individual concerned, followed by identifications of the remains, on the basis of micro-cellular examination and classification—"

"Hold it; you mean you located the body?"

"The grave-site; it contained the remains of twelve thousand, four hundred individuals. And a study of gene patterns revealed —"

"How did you know which body to examine?"

"The sample from which Gum was identified consisted of no more than two grams of material: a fragment of the pelvis. I had, of course, extracted all possible information from the remains many years ago, at the time of the initial survey of the two hundred and three foot stratum at the grave-site, one hundred rods north of the incorporation limits of the village of—"

"How did you happen to do that?"

"As a matter of routine, I have systematically examined every datum source I encountered. Of course, since I am able to examine all surfaces, as well as the

internal structure of objects in situ, I have derived vastly more information from deposits of bones, artifacts, fossils, stratifications, mineral deposits, and so forth, than a human investigator would be capable of. Also, my ability to draw on the sum total of all evidence on a given subject produces highly effective results. I deciphered the Easter Island script within forty two minutes after I had completed scansion of the existing inscriptions, both above ground and buried, and including one tablet incorporated in a temple in Ceylon. The Indus script of Mohenjo-Daro required little longer."

"Granted you could read dead languages after you'd integrated all the evidence—but a man's personal appearance is another matter."

"The somatic pattern is inherent in the nucleoprotein."

"That's right," Case nodded. "They say every cell in the body carries the whole blue-print—the same one you were built on in the first place. All the computer had to do was find one cell."

"Oh, of course," said Chester sarcastically. "I don't suppose there's any point in my asking how it knew how he was dressed, or how his hair was combed, or what he was scratching at."

"There is nothing in the least occult about the reconstructions

which I have presented, Mr. Chester. All the multitudinous factors which bear on the topic at hand, even in the most remote fashion, are scanned, classified, their interlocking ramifications evaluated, and the resultant gestalt concretized in a rigidly logical manner. The condition of the hair was deduced, for example, from the known growth pattern revealed in the genetic analysis, while the style of the trim was a composite of those known to be in use in the area. The—”

“In other words,” Case put in, “it wasn’t really a photo of Gum the Scrofulous, it was kind of like an artist’s sketch from memory.”

“I still fail to see where the fine details come from.”

YOU underestimate the synthesizing capabilities of an efficiently functioning memory bank,” the voice said. “This is somewhat analogous to the amazement of the consistently second- and third-power mind of Doctor Watson when confronted with the fourth-power deductions of Sherlock Holmes.”

“Guessing that the murderer was a one-legged seafaring man with a beard and a habit of chewing betel nut is one thing,” Chester said. “Looking at an ounce of bone and giving us a 3-D picture is another.”

“You make the understandable error of egocentric anthropomorphization of viewpoint, Mr. Chester,” said the voice. “Your so-called ‘reality’ is after all no more than an approximation, an abstraction from fragmentary sensory data. You perceive a pattern of reflected radiation at the visible wavelengths—only a small fraction of the full spectrum, of course; to this you add auditory stimuli, tactile and olfactory sensations, as well as other perceptions in the Psi group of which you are not consciously aware at third power. The resultant image you think of as concrete actuality. I do no more than assemble data—over a much wider range than you are capable of—and translate them into pulses in a conventional tri-di tank. The resultant image appears to you an adequate approximation of reality.”

“This is all very educational,” said Chester. “Not that it tells me anything I didn’t suspect about your family tree, Case. But we’ve more immediate problems to solve—involving money. I don’t know of anyone who’d pay to learn what kind of riff-raff his ancestors were—or worse yet, see them. This device has not yet said anything really useful. It’s merely confided that it’s meddled in everything from the stock market to the space program. If the law finds out—”

"It won't," Case said. "Negative probability of damn little-to-one, it says."

"What I need is cash—three million. It might as well be a billion. If this apparatus manufactured buttonhole TV sets or tranquilizers or anything else salable, my course would be clear, but apparently it generates nothing but hot air." Chester drew on his wine bottle and sighed. "Possibly the best course would be to open up the house to tourists; We could push the 'view the stately home of another era' approach—"

"Hold it," Case cut in. He looked thoughtful. "That idea stinks. But it gives me another one. Stately home of another era, eh? People are interested in other eras, Chester—as long as they don't have to take on anybody like Gum the Scrofulous as a member of the family. Now, this computer seems to be able to set up just about anything you want to take a look at. You name it, it fakes it up. We could book the public in at so much a head, and show 'em Daily Life in Ancient Rome, or Michelangelo sculpting the Pieta, or Napoleon leading the charge at Marengo. You get the idea: famous scenes of the past revisited—"

"Come down to earth, Case. Who would pay to sit through a history lesson—"

"Nobody, Chester; but they'll

pay to be entertained! So we'll entertain 'em. 'See the sights of Babylon! Watch Helen of Troy in her bathtub! Sit in on Cleopatra's Summit Conference with Caesar!'"

"Suppose we offered the entire apparatus to the government gratis in return for cancellation of the tax bill? It ought to be useful—"

"Governments don't work that way, Chester. You owe the tax, period. Pay up or go to jail. And if you did give it to them, they'd lose it in the files somewhere."

"I'd rather not be involved in any chicanery, Case."

FIRST we'll soften up the Internal Revenue boys with a gloomy picture of how much they'd get out of the place if they took over the property and liquidated it. We remind 'em that there's no profit in adding Chester W. Chester IV to the jail population. Then—very cagily, Chester—we lead up to the idea that *maybe*, just *maybe*, we can raise the money—but only if we're allowed to go ahead with the scheme."

"A highly unrealistic proposal, Case. No commercial appeal. And in any event, I'm not interested in show business, particularly when it would inevitably lead to a number of highly embarrassing questions. I should dislike explaining the stowaway

devices on the satellites, the rigged stock-market deals, the bribes in high places—”

“You’re a worrier, Chester. We’ll pack ’em in four shows a day at, say, two-fifty a head. With a seating capacity of two thousand, you’ll pay off that debt in six months.”

“What do we do, announce that we’ve invented a new type of Tri-di show? Even professional theatrical producers can’t guarantee the public’s taste. We’ll be laughed out of the office.”

“This will be different. We’ll put on a demonstration for ’em. When they see those authentic sets and costumes, they’ll jump at it.”

“They’ll probably jump at us—with nets.”

“You’ve got no vision, Chester. Try to visualize it: the color, the pageantry, the realism. We can show epics that Hollywood would spend a fortune on, and they won’t cost us a credit.”

“What’s wrong with just selling information? We could—”

“We could starve to death. Let’s face it, Chester. We need an angle if we’re going to get the most out of this.” Case addressed the machine again: “Let’s give Chester a sample, computer; something historically important, like Columbus getting Isabella’s crown jewels—”

“Let’s keep it clean, Case.”

“Okay; but let’s don’t forget to use that one on Stag Nights. For now, what do you say to . . . ummm . . . William the Conqueror getting the news that Harold the Saxon has been killed at the Battle of Hastings in 1066? We’ll have full color, three dimensions, sound, smells, the works—. How about it, computer?”

I AM uncertain how to interpret the expression ‘the works’ in this context,” said the voice. “Does this imply full sensory stimulation within the normal human range?”

“Yeah, that’s the idea.” Case drew the cork from a fresh bottle, watching the screen cloud and swirl, to clear on a view of patched grey tents pitched under a grey sky on a slope of sodden grass. A paunchy man of middle age, clad in ill-fitting breeches of coarse brown cloth, a rust-speckled shirt of chain mail, and a moth-eaten fur cloak, sat before a tent on a three-legged stool, mumbling over a well-gnawed lamb’s shin. A burly clod in ill-matched furs came up to him, breathing hard.

“We’m . . . wonnit,” he gasped. “‘e be adoon wi’ a quarrel i’ t’ peeper . . .”

The sitting man slapped his thigh, guffawed, and reached for a hide mug of brownish liquid. The messenger wandered off. The

seated man belched and scratched idly at his ribs. Then he rose, yawned, stretched, and went inside the tent. The scene faded.

"Hmmm," said Chester. "I'm afraid that was lacking in something."

"You can do better than that, computer," Case said reproachfully. "Come on, let's see some color, action, glamor, zazzle. Make history come alive! Jazz it up a little!"

"You wish me to embroider the factual presentation?"

"Just sort of edit it for modern audiences. You know: the way high-school English teachers correct Shakespeare's plays and improve on the old boy's morals; or like preachers leave the sexy bits out of the Bible."

"Possibly the approach employed by the Hollywood fantasists would suffice?"

"Now you're talking. Leave out the dirt and boredom, and feed in some stagecraft."

Once again the screen cleared. Against a background of vivid blue sky a broad-shouldered man in glittering mail and a scarlet silken cloak sat astride a magnificent black charger, a brilliantly blazoned shield on his arm. He waved a longsword aloft, spurred up a slope of smooth green lawn, his raven-black hair flowing over his shoulders from under a polished steel

cap, the red cape rippling bravely in the sun. Another rider came to meet him, reined in, saluting.

"The day is ours, Sire!" the newcomer cried in a mellow baritone. "Harold Fairhair lies dead; his troops retire in disorder!"

The black-haired man swept his casque from his head.

"Let us give thanks to God," he said in ringing tones, wheeling his horse to present his profile. "And all honor to a brave foe!"

The messenger leaped from his mount, knelt before the other.

"Hail, William, Conqueror of England . . ."

"Nay, faithful Glunt," William said. "The Lord has conquered; I am but his instrument. Rise, and let us ride forward together. Now dawns a new day of freedom . . ."

CASE and Chester watched the retreating horses.

"I'm not sure I like that fade-out," said Chester. "There's something about watching a couple of horses ascending—"

"You're right. It lacks spontaneity; too stagey-looking. Maybe we'd better stick to the real thing; but we'll have to pick and choose our scenes . . ."

"It's still too much like an ordinary movie. And we know nothing about pace, camera an-

gles, timing. I wonder whether the machine—”

“I can produce scenes in conformance with any principles of esthetics you desire, Mr. Chester,” the computer stated flatly.

“What we want is reality,” said Case; “living, breathing realness. We need something that’s got inherent drama, something big, strange, amazing—”

“Aren’t you overlooking stupendous and colossal?”

Case snapped his fingers. “What’s the most colossal thing that ever was? What are the most fearsome battlers of all time? The extinct giants of a hundred million years ago! Dinosaurs! That’s what we’ll see, Chester! How about it, computer? Can you lay on a small herd of dinosaurs for us? I mean the real goods: luxuriant jungle foliage, hot primitive sun, steaming swamps, battles to the death on a gigantic scale?”

“I fear some confusion exists, Mr. Mulvihill. The environment you postulate is a popular cliché; it actually antedates in most particulars the advent of the giant saurians by several hundred million years.”

“Okay, I’ll skip the details. I’ll leave the background to you—but we want real, three-D, big-as-life dinosaurs—and plenty of ’em.”

“There are two possible methods of achieving the effect you

describe, Mr. Mulvihill. The first, a seventh-order approximation, would involve an elaboration of the techniques already employed in the simpler illusions. The other, which I confess is a purely theoretical approach, might prove simpler, if feasible, and would perhaps provide total verisimilitude—”

“Whatever’s simplest. Go to it.”

“I must inform you that in the event—”

“We won’t quibble over the fine technical points. Just whip up three-D dinosaurs the simplest way you know how.”

“Very well. The experiment may well produce a wealth of new material for my memory banks . . .”

FOR half a minute the screen, wall stayed blank. Then the wall shimmered with a silvery lustre that faded onto an autumnal forest of great beech and maple trees. An afternoon sun slanted through high foliage. In the distance a bird called shrilly. A cool breeze bore the odor of pines and leaf mould. The scene seemed to stretch into shadowy cool distances. “Not bad,” said Case, “but where’s the dinosaurs? This isn’t the kind of place—”

Case’s comment was interrupted by a dry screech that descended from the supersonic into

a blast like a steam whistle, died off in a rumble. Both men leaped from their seats.

"What the—"

"I believe your question's been answered," Chester croaked, pointing. Half hidden by foliage a scaly, fungus-grown hill loomed up among the tree-trunks, its grey-green coloring almost invisible in the forest gloom. As Case and Chester watched, the hill stirred. A giant turkey-like leg brushed against a tree-trunk, sent bits of bark flying. The whitish undercurve of the belly wobbled ponderously, the great meaty tail twitched, sending a six-inch sapling crashing down.

Case laughed shakily. "For a minute there, I forgot this was just a—"

"Quiet! It might hear us!" Chester hissed.

"What do you mean, 'hear us'?" Case said heartily. "It's just a picture, remember? But we need a few more dinosaurs to liven things up. The customers are going to want to see plenty for their money. How about it, computer?"

The disembodied voice seemed to emanate from the low branches of a pine tree. "There are a number of the creatures in the vicinity, Mr. Mulvihill. If you will observe carefully to your left, you will see a small example of *Megalosaurus*. And beyond is a splendid specimen of *Nodosaurus*."

"You know," said Case, rising and peering through the woods for more reptiles, "I think when we get the show running, we'll use this question and answer routine. It's a nice touch. The cash customers will want to know a lot of stuff like . . . oh, what kind of perfume did Marie Antoinette use, or how many wives did Solomon really have."

"I DON'T know," said Chester, watching as the nearby dinosaur scrunched against a tree trunk and caused a shower of twigs and leaves to flutter down. "There's something about hearing a voice issuing from thin air that might upset the more high-strung members of the audience. Couldn't we rig up a speaker of some sort for the voice to come out of?"

"Hmmm . . ." Case strode up and down, puffing at his cigar. Chester fidgeted in his chair. Fifty feet away the iguanodon moved from the shelter of a great maple into the open. There was a rending of branches as the heavy salamander-head pulled at a mass of foliage thirty feet above the forest floor.

"I've got it!" Case exclaimed suddenly.

Chester started violently. "What the—"

"Another great idea! You said something about fixing up something for the voice to come out

of. A speaker, you said. How about a speaker that's movable; you know, so it can travel around among the suckers and answer their questions. So we get the computer to rig us a speaker that matches the voice!"

"Hey, look," said Chester, "the monster is starting to turn this way."

"So what? Pay attention, Chester. We get the machine to build us a dummy—a robot, they call them—to look like a real sockeroo dolly. She'll be a sensation: a gorgeous, stacked babe who'll answer any question you want to ask her."

"He seems to move very sluggishly," said Chester.

Case looked at the iguanodon sourly. "Yeah, like a drunk in a diving suit. What do you think of my idea? We could call this babe Miss I-Cutie . . ."

"He sees us."

"Don't you get it? I.Q.—I-Cutie."

"Yes, certainly. Go right ahead whatever you say." Chester had seen the iguanodon's great head swing ponderously, stop with one unwinking eye fixed dead on him. "Just like a bird watching a worm," he quavered. "Stand still, Case; maybe he'll lose interest."

"Nuts." Case stepped forward. "Who's scared of a picture? You've got to get over it, Chester. You're as bad as a kid at a

Frankenstein movie." He stood, hands on hips, looking up at the towering reptile. Far above, the scaled head peered short-sightedly around, then snaked forward, lipless mouth gaping, to seize a leafy branch and pull back, stripping the greenery from the bare twigs. The bent branch swished back. The throat worked as the creature swallowed the coarse foliage. A few leaves fluttered down around Case.

"Not a bad illusion at all," he called. "Even right up close it looks real. Even smells real." He wrinkled his nose, came stamping back to the two chairs and Chester.

"Relax, Chester. You look as nervous as a bank teller at the fifty-credit window."

Chester looked from Case to the browsing saurian.

"Case, if I didn't know there was a wall there . . ."

HHEY, look over there." Case waved his cigar. Chester turned. With a rustling of leaves a seven-foot bipedal reptile stalked into view, tiny forearms curled against its chest. In dead silence it stood, immobile as a statue, except for the palpitation of its greenish-white throat. For a long moment it stared at the two men. Abruptly, it turned, at a tiny sound from the grass at its feet, and pounced. There was a strangled squeal, a flurry of

motion. The eighteen-inch head came up, jaws working, to resume its appraisal of Chester and Case.

"That's good material," Case said, puffing hard at his cigar. "Nature in the raw; the battle for survival. The customers will eat it up."

"Speaking of eating, I don't like the way that thing's looking at me."

The dinosaur cocked its head, took a step closer.

"Phewww!" Case said. "You can sure smell that fellow." He raised his voice. "Tone it down a little. This kid has got halitosis on a giant scale."

"Case, how far away is that wall? Not more than fifteen feet, I'd estimate."

"About that. A great illusion, eh? You've got to hand it to the computer; if you didn't know the wall was there—"

Chester edged back. "I'd swear that creature's not more than twelve feet from me at this moment."

Case laughed. "Forget it, Chester. It's just the effect of the perspective or something—"

The meat-eater gulped hard, twice, flicked a slender red tongue between rows of needle-like teeth in the snow-white cavern of its mouth, took another step toward Chester. It stood near the edge of the rug now, poised, alert, staring with one

eye. It twisted its head, brought the other eye to bear.

"As I remember, there was at least six feet of clear floor space between the edge of that rug and the wall," Chester said hoarsely. "Case, that hamburger machine's in the room with us!"

"Chester, act your age." Case smiled patronizingly, took a step toward the allosaurus. Its lower jaw dropped. The multiple rows of white teeth gleamed. Saliva gushed, spilled over the scaled edge of the mouth. The red eye seemed to blaze up. A great clawed bird-foot came up, poised over the rug—

"Computer!" Chester shouted. "Get us out of here. . . !" There was a momentary impression of a lunging shark's mouth—

The forest scene whooshed out of existence. Case looked at Chester disgustedly.

"What'd you want to do that for? I wasn't through looking at them."

Chester took out a handkerchief, sank into a chair, mopped at his face. "I'll argue the point later—after I get my pulse under control."

"Well, how about it? Was it great? Talk about stark realism!"

"Realism is right. I would have sworn that creature was on the verge of stepping into the room. It was almost *too* realistic. It was as though we were actual-

ly there, in the presence of that voracious predator, unprotected."

Case sat staring at Chester. "Hold it! You just said something, my boy: 'as though we were actually there . . .'"

"Yes, and the sensation was far from pleasant."

"Chester," Case rubbed his hands together; "your troubles are over. It just hit me: the greatest idea of the century. You don't think the tax boys will buy a slice of show biz, hey? But what about the scientific marvel of the age? They'll go for that, won't they?"

"But they already know about the computer—"

"We won't talk to 'em about the computer, Chester. They wouldn't believe it anyway; Crmblzski's Limit, remember? We'll go the truth one better. We'll tell 'em something that will knock 'em for a loop."

"Okay, what will we tell them?"

"We tell 'em we've got a real, live Time Machine."

II

SITTING in a hard leather chair in the outer office of the Regional Headquarters of the Internal Revenue Service, Chester fidgeted, eyeing the clock.

"They've kept us waiting half an hour," he whispered hoarsely.

"Case, I have a feeling they're stalling us until the FBI arrives—"

"Don't be nervous," Case said heartily. "Just remember, we've got a monopoly on a billion-dollar business proposition: Time Travel! The public will flock to us; there's no other place they can get it."

"In fact, they can't even get it from us. Time machine, indeed! Why not tell them we're in touch with the spirit world?"

Case considered. "Nope, too routine. There's half a dozen in the racket in this town already; but who do you know that's got a time machine working, eh? Nobody, that's who! Chester, it's a gold mine. After we pay off the Internal Revenue boys, we'll go on to bigger things. The possibilities are endless . . ."

"Yes, I've been thinking about a few of them: fines for tax evasion and fraud, prison terms for conspiracy and perjury—"

"All we're doing is offering the government a chance to get its money. We put it to them fair and square. First, we tell 'em we know how to make use of the property to pay off the debt—"

"And then we announce that we own a Time Machine, and they whisk us away to a Psych Center."

"We don't come right out with it, Chester. We call it a Retrogression Sequence Analyzer or a

Chronodynamic Stasis Generator. Make it sound mysterious. But we'll word the contract so that when we hit the market with the time travel ads, we'll be covered."

"Ridiculous. And if by any chance they accepted our tale, they'd immediately clamp down with exaggerated security measures and extract the whole story from us."

"We're safe on that score. They can't squeeze the secret of time travel out of us; it doesn't exist. And if we admit it's a hoax, that will only convince them we're holding out on them."

"They'll use one of those confounded truth drugs on us."

"And then we keep sticking to our story that it's a fake. That'll convince 'em we're really top technical boys: we've managed to counteract the dope and keep lying. They'll want to know how to do that, too. It'd be an invaluable aid to government."

"All that will gain us is a choice between a jail term for fraud and a jail term for treason."

"Don't worry. The computer's under instruction not to work for anybody but us. They'll have to reinstate us and deal with us in the end."

"What makes you think the computer will abide by those instructions? I think it's a very independent sort of gimcrack."

"It's been following your great grand-pop's original intentions all these years, hasn't it? It welcomed you as the old boy's descendant. It's eager to do your bidding, Chester."

"Remember how it cut the old fellow's spiel off in the middle? It has ideas of its own."

THAT'S just what it hasn't! I suppose you were listening when that sexy voice was telling about first- and second-power intelligence and how the computer was fourth-power by now and all kinds of a genius?"

"Certainly I was listening. And that merely proves—"

"That was a lot of mule feathers. Oh, I'll grant you it seemed pretty convincing at the time; but there's a lot more to a human brain than just increasing levels of awareness. There's creativity, for instance, and I don't mean the 'flash of genius' stuff the G.N.E. was talking about. That's just puzzle-solving, like when somebody gives you a brain-twister and you think about it for an hour and then all of a sudden you see the answer. Real creativity is cooking up a new idea out of nothing—like the first guy that made lines on a cave wall in the shape of a mammoth."

"Granted, but—"

"Then there's another very important thing: initiative."

Chester shook his head. "The computer has an excess of initiative. When it learned that it was to be dismantled and sold for scrap if that bill went through, it subverted the news services—all on its own. And then it manipulated the stock market, misappropriated funds, bribed officials, and trespassed on neighboring properties—with no help from me whatsoever, as I hope to convince a jury when the time comes."

"Nope." Case shook his head decisively. "Not the kind of initiative I'm talking about. Just following Grandpa's wishes. True, the G.N.E. showed a fourth-power grasp of the situation, made the best use of the available facilities, solved problems, and all that. But there were always those basic instructions to fall back on. If you told it it was a free agent and to do whatever it wanted, it'd blow its fuses in nothing flat. The machine has no sense of purpose, no individual drive to do anything for its own sake. It's dependent on great grand-pop—and that means you, Chester. It'll do as it's told."

"Perhaps," Chester admitted gloomily. "But I have an unhappy feeling that whatever we tell it, I'll regret it."

"Nuts. As soon as we get an okay from the tax lads, we'll get started on building our theater."

"What theater?" Chester

looked up at Case with a wary expression.

"The theater where we put on the time shows, natch. You don't think we're going to herd the public down to the wine cellar, do you?"

"Not if I can help it. But where will the money come from?"

"Tsk-tsk. You remember how the G.N.E. handles those details."

"Case, why become involved in this idiotic Time Machine swindle? Why not simply tell the computer to float a loan?"

"Listen, up to now you're clean, but once you start instructing the machine to defraud by mail for you, you're on the spot. Now keep cool and let's do this legal. It's a lot safer—and a lot more fun, anyway. Who wants the suckers to just mail in their money?"

"Your lines of distinction between types of fraud escape me."

"We'll be doing a public service, Chester. We'll bring a little glamor into a lot of dull drab lives. We'll be public benefactors, sort of. Look at it that way."

"Restrain yourself, Case. We're not going into politics; we're just honest straightforward charlatans, remember?"

A DOOR at the opposite side of the room opened abruptly. A small man in a drab suit appeared.

"You're Mr. Chester? Mr. Overdog will see you now."

In the inner office a hairless man behind an untidy desk studied the two arrivals through tinted contact lenses. He referred to papers before him, shook his head disapprovingly, leaned back, and laced his fingers together over his chest.

"The Chester file," he said in a tone that suggested a temperance worker discussing the opening of a brewery. "A stubborn file, this one. Some very curious aspects to this file." He fixed his eyes on Case. "I trust we'll have your check for the full amount, with interest and penalties, at once, Mr. Chester."

Chester cleared his throat. "Yes, about the payment of the tax—I have a proposal to make, Mr. Overdog. I feel sure I can raise the cash to pay this tax bill—"

"The Bureau is prepared to be lenient, Mr. Chester. An immediate payment of three hundred thousand credits, with the balance in thirty days will be satisfactory. You may hand your check to Mr. Stoomb as you pass out."

"What I'd like to propose," Chester continued, "is that I be permitted use of the property for the purpose of launching a venture—"

"What's that? Use of what? Launching what?"

"It's called an . . . ah . . . retrogressional chrono-dynamic sequence analyzer. An educational device, Mr. Overdog. A public service—"

A cold smile twisted Overdog's mouth. "Perhaps you've stumbled into the wrong office, Mr. Chester. Our work here is limited to the collection of outstanding tax debts."

"What Mr. Chester is trying to say," Case put in, "is that you're out of luck, Mr. Overdog. No money. No money at all for the Internal Revenue people. The Chester file is a dead loss. A hundred years of patient waiting, down the drain . . . and all that bookkeeping figuring the interest—all wasted. A bad show, Mr. Overdog. I'm glad I won't have to explain it to *my* superiors."

Overdog's jaw dropped. "No money?" he gulped.

"No three million credits. Not even a lousy little three hundred thousand. Not even three hundred. Mr. Chester is, I'm sorry to say, broke. You're out of luck, Mr. Overdog. The Chester file will end on a very sad note."

"We could extend that to sixty days," Overdog gasped.

"Sixty years wouldn't help." Case smiled sympathetically. "Tough, Mr. Overdog. I know your boss is going to feel bad but . . ."

"No . . . no money at all . . . ?" Overdog appealed.

"Unless . . ." Case said, studying his fingernails.

Overdog's chin came up. "Yes? Yes? Unless what, sir?"

"Unless you authorize Mr. Chester a free hand to use the property to raise the money. You go along, and you'll have your cash—in full."

"Use the property? How?"

CASE pulled a chair up to Overdog's desk, seated himself, lit a cigar, and for the next half hour outlined the proposal for offering to the public authentic and colorful views of historical scenes and personages. "It's educational, enlightening, healthful, wholesome, and at the same time a sound business proposition. What do you say, Mr. Overdog?"

Overdog eyed Chester sharply. "I think perhaps the Bureau can make some arrangement. I suggest you file a written proposal, with full particulars of the method of operation. If found satisfactory, the appropriate government agency can then take over the administration of the undertaking, employ qualified staff, rent necessary office space, arrange for a supply of forms—"

"Nope, Mr. Overdog. Mr. Chester runs the show."

"Hardly, Mr. Mulvihill." Mr. Overdog smiled confidently. "The Bureau will of course retain full jurisdiction. Any monies realized, over and above operating

expenses, salaries, rentals, et cetera, will be applied to the reduction of the outstanding account. Of course, interest payments—"

"Well, I guess we might as well mosey along, Chester," said Case, rising.

"Kindly dictate the details of the operation of the device before you go, Mr. Chester," Overdog said. "You realize, of course," he added, "that withholding of information—"

"What information?" Case asked.

"I'm warning you—"

"If you change your mind, let us hear from you, Mr. Overdog." Case and Chester turned to the door.

"Wait!" The two men paused. "What assurance have I that this apparatus will actually produce the type of pictures that you claim?"

"We'll give you a demonstration, Mr. Overdog. Just give us a couple of weeks to get things set up—"

"Three days! Not an hour longer."

"Let's say a week from today. After all, you want a good show to convince your boss you're not some kind of a nut."

"Very well. One week." Overdog's lenses darted from Case to Chester and back. "And it had better be very good indeed, gentlemen."

I'VE got to hand it to you, Chester," Case said, looking around the newly prepared temporary theatre occupying what had formerly been a ballroom that took up half the ground floor area of the Chester house. "It looks like you've got everything ready to go."

"None too soon, either. They're supposed to be here in half an hour. The computer deserves all the credit, of course—or most of it. I made one or two suggestions, but it handled all the details."

"Which wall is the screen, Chester? They all look alike."

"All four. It occurred to me that reality isn't flat; it's all around. What could create a better illusion than having the show going full blast in every direction?"

"Hey, now you're talking, Chester. But are you sure the computer can cook up a four-wall presentation?"

"Certainly. The machine is remarkably versatile, Case. You know, I'm almost beginning to believe this may work out after all."

"Sure it will. I told you not to worry." Case glanced around the room. "What's the roped-off area for?"

"That's a sort of stage. We'll work from there, and the audience will occupy the other chairs. I don't want any panics, if we

happen to encounter scenes of violence."

"We'd better not. I don't want to give these birds the wrong idea. We've got to convince 'em our shows will be suitable for family viewing. Maybe we'd better have a trial run before the guests arrive—to be sure the computer's got the idea."

"I'm not sure we have time. It's a quarter to three; they're due in fifteen minutes."

"Just a quickie, Chester. Something simple, just to be sure everything works."

"Well . . . I suppose we could manage it." Chester raised his voice. "Are you ready for a trial run, G.N.E.?"

"Yes, Mr. Chester," the feminine voice came back.

"What kind of range have you got?" Case asked. "How far back can you go for material?"

"I see no impediment to my ability to present views of any Terrestrial event subsequent to the solidification of the planetary crust," the voice said, "as well as of cosmic phenomena antedating that event. In this connection, I might mention that the original concept of a seventh-power approximation of a tri-dimensional spacio-temporal locus has proven unnecessarily unwieldy, and accordingly I have devised a technically simpler method of producing the desired effects."

"One change we'll have to

make," Case said. "That lexicographic, etymological, and philological unit needs to be overhauled so it talks plain English."

"As long as you produce realistic scenes in the simplest possible way, Mr. Mulvihill and I will be well satisfied. No need to go into technicalities."

"What do you say to a nice caveman scene, Chester?" said Case. "Stone axes, animal skins around the waist, beartooth necklaces—the regular Alley Oop routine. That ought to impress the boys."

"Very well—but let's avoid any large carnivores. They're overly realistic."

"By the way, what about that mobile speaker you were going to set up: Miss I-Cutie? Is it ready yet?"

"It is. Shall I introduce it for the primitive man scene, Mr. Chester?"

"Yes, indeed. That was fast work." Chester turned to Case. "I gave the G.N.E. the go-ahead on it only yesterday, and it's already completed it."

"Perhaps I should mention, Mr. Chester, that I have carried on a considerable portion of the work in entropic vacuoles, permitting myself thereby to produce complex entities in very brief periods, subjectively speaking."

"It may be a pretty crude job," Case said, "but that won't

matter. We can get an idea how the speaker will go over and later on we can polish it up. Now let's get on with the scene. How far back do we want to go, Chester?"

"I'd suggest we specify a view of the earliest human inhabitants of this particular area. They wouldn't be cave men, perhaps, but it will give a topical interest to the scene."

"Sounds okay. Give the G.N.E. the word."

CASE and Chester stepped over the ropes bounding the stage area, seated themselves in the brocaded chairs on the rug.

There was a faint sound from behind them. Chester turned. A young girl stood looking around as if fascinated by the neo-Victorian decor. Glossy dark hair curled about her oval face. She caught Chester's eye and stepped around to stand before him on the rug, a slender modest figure wearing a golden sun tan and a scarlet hair ribbon. Chester gulped. Case dropped his cigar.

"Hi!" Case said, breaking the stunned silence.

"Hello," said the girl. Her voice was soft, melodious. She reached up to adjust her hair ribbon. "This is lovely," she said. "Not at all like the Place."

"Honey, who are you?" Case asked, gaping delightedly.

"Why, I'm the mobile speaker. My name is Genie."

Case nodded approvingly. "It fits you better than Miss I-Cutie."

"Where are your clothes?" blurted Chester. "Uh, wouldn't you like to borrow my shirt—?"

"Knock it off, Chester, Case said. "I don't think there's a thing wrong with the way she looks."

"But the Internal Revenue officials. . . !"

"They won't be along for another ten minutes. Relax."

"But why is she . . . uh . . . naked?"

"I selected this costume as appropriate to the primitive setting," the girl said. "As for my physical characteristics, the intention was to produce the ideal of the average young female, without mammary hypertrophe or other exaggeration, since the appeal should be oriented toward all segments of the public."

"Kid, your orientation is perfect, as far as I'm concerned," Case said.

"Normally, of course, I would be clothed in a simple feminine dress, designed to evoke a sisterly or maternal response in women, while the reaction of male members of the audience should be a fatherly one."

"I'm not sure it's working on me," said Chester, breathlessly.

The pretty face looked troubled. "Perhaps the body should be redesigned, Mr. Chester."

"Oh, no, don't change a thing," said Chester hastily. "And call me Chester."

"Funny," said Case; "she looks perfectly natural . . . you know: like it was the way she was supposed to look, by gosh." He winked at the girl. She smiled happily.

"Well," he went on, "maybe we'd better get on with the trial run. We'll just have a quick look, and then hustle Genie into a Mother Hubbard so we don't give the IR lads the wrong idea."

"Okay," said Chester. "I suppose it's all right, but make it quick. We only have five minutes or so—"

. . . Chester's voice cut off. The walls flickered, then blanked into opacity.

"Hey, what happened," Case said. He turned. "Chester, we'd better—" He twisted to look behind him. Chester?"

"Mr. Chester seems too have gone," said Genie confusedly.

"He was right here a second ago," said Case. "One minute he was talking, and the next—blooie!"

"How very curious," Genie said. "I sense that Mr. Chester is no longer in the house, or even in its vicinity!"

"What do you suppose—"

Case broke off as one wall of the room glowed with warm sunlight. A scene appeared: a wide square paved with vari-colored

stones and lined with small shops and merchants' stalls. A group of tall, broad-shouldered men and graceful women stood near a small cupola, looking toward a man who walked slowly toward the faintly shimmering wall, a cable trailing behind him.

"What's this?" Case asked. "This doesn't look like primitive man to me. And the quality isn't up to standard, either. This is just a plain old-fashioned Tri-D view."

"That man," Genie whispered. "He seems to be coming right up to us."

Case eyed the broad-shouldered, deep-chested, sinewy-armed, sun-tanned stranger. "That fellow looks kind of familiar," he said.

The man stopped just short of the screen-wall.

"Case," he said. "Case Mulvihill. And Genie. Listen to me. The Internal Revenue officials will arrive in three minutes. This is what you must do . . ."

III

WELL," Case sighed, an hour later. "They're out of our hair—at least for now." He turned to the blank wall where the broad-shouldered stranger had appeared.

"Okay, mister, you can come out now," he called.

The wall shimmered into

translucency. The cobbled square and the watching people reappeared, the oddly familiar man nearest them.

"What's this all about?" Case demanded. "Where's Chester? How did you know about our little problem? What—"

The stranger held up a hand. "Have a seat, Case," he said. "You too, Genie. I'll try to explain it to you."

"All we asked for was a nice primitive man scene," Case said. "We figured we had about ten minutes, so we asked for a fast walk-through—"

"Yes," the stranger nodded. "That's right. Now think back . . . just an hour ago. 'Make it quick,' Chester said. 'We only have five minutes . . .'"

* * *

. . . The walls seemed to fade from view to reveal a misty-morning scene of sloping grassland scattered with wild flowers and set here and there with trees.

"Say, this is okay," said Case. "Nice-looking country."

"It looks familiar," said Chester. "It's just like the view from the front of the house, minus the lawn and the hedge."

"I think you're right. It looks different without the manicured trees and the flower beds."

"If you'll observe to the left," Genie said, "I believe these are a party of hunters returning to their dwelling."

Case and Chester turned. "Say, this is really life-like," Case said. "Using all four walls was a great idea."

Two squat, bearded men in fur pants emerged from a thicket down the slope, saw the watching trio, and stopped dead. More savages followed. The two leaders stood hefting long sticks sharpened at one end; eyes and mouths were agape.

"These guys are practically midgets," Case said. "I thought cave men were pretty big guys."

"They seem to see us," said Chester. "Apparently the audience is on view as well as the actors. What do you suppose they're planning to do with those spears?"

"There's only two of 'em with spears. Don't worry." Case turned to Chester abruptly. "Now you've got me doing it! It's a picture. Just a picture!" Then, "It is pretty realistic though, isn't it? You'd swear you could reach out and touch things."

"These fellows don't look much like primitive Indians to me," Chester commented.

"Oh, no, indeed," Genie said.

"Not very authentic, is it, having palefaces on the Chester estate umpteen thousand years ago?" said Case. "You want to watch these details, Genie—"

"But the aboriginal inhabitants of this area derived from Indo-European stock originating

in the area now known as Iran. They were the first to cross the Bering land bridge."

One of the natives had stepped forward a pace and was shouting something.

"You too, pal," Case called, puffing out smoke.

THE spokesman shouted again, pointing around, at the other man, at the trees, at the sky, then at himself. Bearded warriors continued to appear from the underbrush.

"I wonder what he's yelling about," said Case.

"He says that he is the owner of the world and that you have no business in it," Genie replied.

"I hope his title to his property is clearer than mine," put in Chester.

"How the heck do you know the language?" Case asked admiringly.

"Oh, I have full access to the memory banks, as long as I remain within the resonance field."

"Sort of a transmitter and receiver arrangement?"

"In a sense. Actually it is more analogous to an artificially induced telepathic effect."

"I thought that was only with people—uh, I mean, you know, regular-type people."

"Regular in what way?" Genie inquired interestedly.

"Well, after all, you *are* a ma-

chine," said Case. "Not that I got anything against machinery."

"The owner of the world is coming this way," interrupted Chester. "And reinforcements are still arriving."

"Yeah, we're drawing a good crowd," Case said. "Funny how they seem to see us. How could these illusions be anything but one-way deals?"

They watched as the newcomers spread out in a wide half circle. The leader called instructions, made complicated motions, turned to hurl an occasional imprecation at the three viewers on the slope.

"Looks like he's getting some kind of show ready. Probably a quaint native dance to get on our good side."

"He is disposing the warriors for battle," Genie said.

"Battle? Who with?" Case looked around. "I don't see any opposition."

"With us. Or, more properly, with you two gentlemen."

"I certainly do feel rather exposed out here," said Chester. "Maybe a strategic withdrawal—?"

"I wouldn't miss this for all the two-dollar bills in Tijuana," said Case. "Relax, Chester. It's only a show."

At a signal the half-ring of bearded warriors started up the slope, spears held at the ready.

"Boy, will they get a shock when they hit the wall," Case chuckled.

"Why don't we just take the precaution of getting out of this scene—preferably instantly."

YELPING, the advancing savages broke into a run. They were fifty feet away, thirty—

Case set his cigar firmly between his teeth, folded his arms. "Chester," he said, above the ululation of the charging warriors, "if I hang around you too much, I'll get as nervous as you are. Just sit tight and watch; don't louse this up like you did the lizard scene."

"I know they can't get at us," Chester wailed, "but do they? Genie, let's—"

Chester's voice was drowned out in the mob yell as the warriors bore down on the rug where Case sat puffing his cigar, Chester fidgeted nervously, and Genie stood calmly.

"Perhaps I should mention," observed Genie above the din, "that a one-to-one spacio-temporal contiguity has been established—"

The first of the bushy-bearded dwarfs pelted up the last few yards, bounded across the rug—

Case tossed his cigar aside and leaped up at the last instant, swung a roundhouse right that sent the attacker spinning. Chester leaped aside from a second

hairy warrior, saw Case seize two men by their beards and sling their heads together, drop them as three more sprang on him, then go down in an avalanche of whiskers and bandy legs. Chester aimed a kick at the seat of a pair of dogskin breeches. He saw Case struggle to his feet shaking off warriors. He himself opened his mouth to shout an order to retreat—and felt a tremendous impact from behind. He struck the rug, rolled off its edge, tasted a mouthful of sod, got an instant's glimpse of a horny foot aimed at his head—

A large brass bell somewhere tolled sundown. For a fading moment, Chester was aware of the tumble of sun-browned bodies, distant tumult, an overpowering odor that suggested unsuccessful experiments in cheesemaking. Then darkness folded in.

THE sun was shining in Chester's eyes. He opened them, felt sharp pains shooting down from the top of his skull, closed them again with a groan. He rolled over, felt the floor sway under him . . .

"We'll have to cut down on all this drinking," he muttered. "Case, where are you. . . ?"

There was no answer. Chester tried his eyes again. If he barely opened them, he decided, it wasn't too bad. And to think that this gargantuan headache had

resulted from the consumption of a few bottles of what had always been reputed to be some of the best wines in the old boy's cellar . . .

"Case?" he croaked, louder this time. He sat up, felt the floor move again, sickeningly. He lay back hastily. It hadn't been more than two bottles at the most, or maybe three. He and Case had been looking over the computer—

"Oh, no," Chester said aloud. He sat up, winced, pried his eyes open—

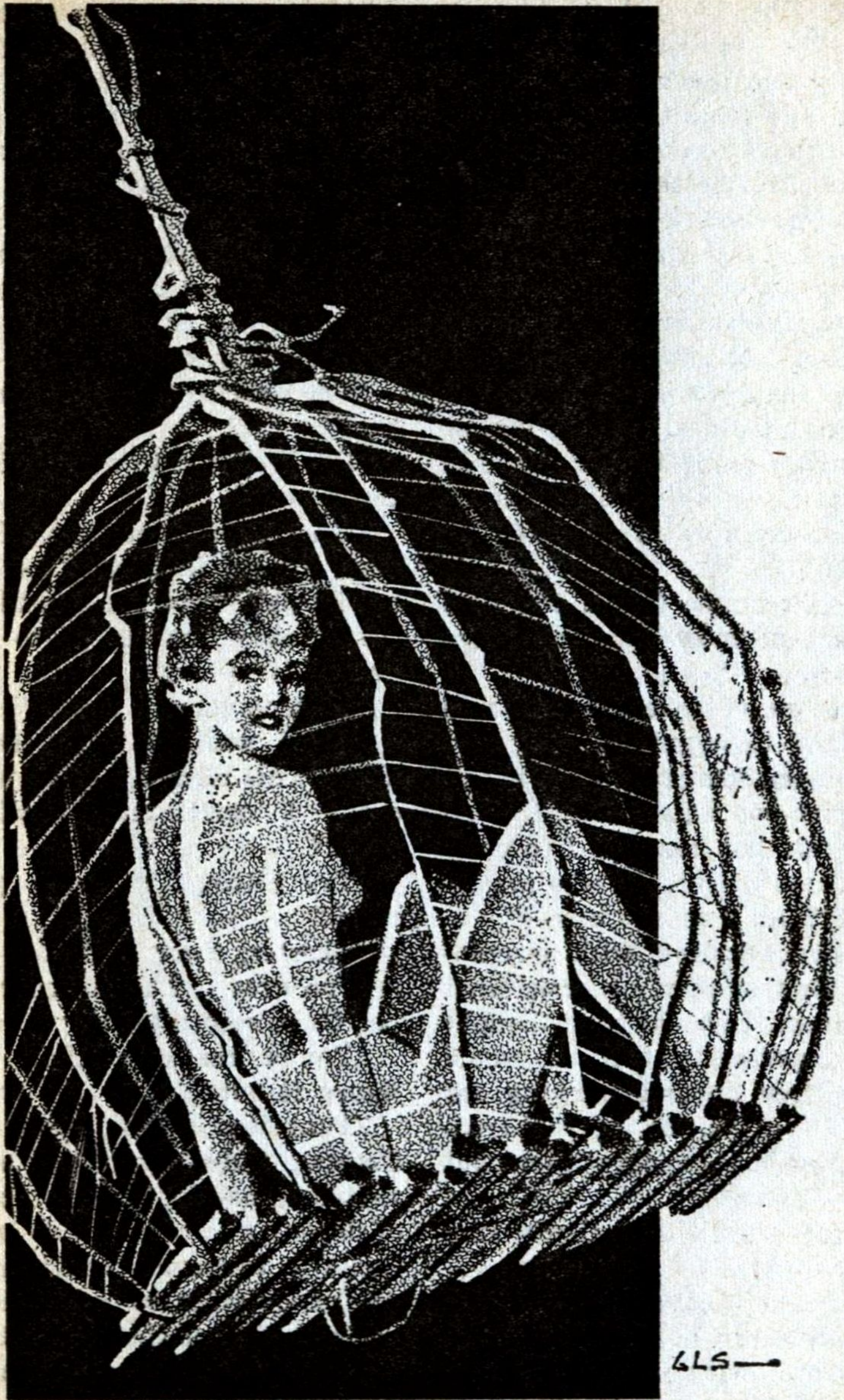
He was sitting on the floor of a wicker cage six feet in diameter, with sides which curved into a beehive shape at the top. Outside the cage, nothing was visible but open air and distant tree-tops. He pushed his face up against the open-work side, saw the ground swaying twenty feet below.

"Case," he yelled. "Get me out of here. . . !"

"Chester," a soft voice called from nearby. Chester looked around, saw a cage like his own swinging from a massive branch of the next tree by a five-foot rope of vines. Inside it Genie knelt, her face against the rattan bars.

"Genie, where are we?" Chester called. "Where's Case? What happened? How did we get here? What's become of the house?"

"Hey!" a more distant voice



6LS—

called. Chester and Genie both turned. A third cage swayed twenty feet away. Chester made out Case's massive figure inside.

"Couldn't get through the wall, eh?" Chester taunted, in a sudden revival of spirits. "Just a show, eh? Of all the stubborn idiotic—"

"Okay, okay, a slight miscalculation. But how the heck was I supposed to know Genie was cooking up a deal like that? How about it, Genie? Is that the kind of show you think an audience would go for at two-fifty a head?"

"Don't blame Genie. I'm sure she did no more than follow instructions—to the letter."

"We never asked for the real article," Case yelled.

"On the contrary, that's exactly what you demanded."

"Yeah, but how was I to know the damn machine'd take me literally? All I meant was—"

"When dealing with machinery, always specify *exactly* what you want. I should have thought that meat-eating reptile would have been enough warning for you. I told you the infernal creature was in the room with us, but you—"

"But why didn't Genie stop 'em?"

"Should I have?" said Genie. "I was given no instructions to interfere with the course of events."

CASE groaned. "Let's call a truce, Chester. We've got a situation to deal with here. Afterwards we can argue it out over a couple bottles of something. Right now, we need a knife. You got one?"

Chester fumbled over his pockets, brought out a tiny pen knife. "Yes, such as it is."

"Toss it over."

"I'm locked in a cage, remember?"

"Oh. Well, get to work and cut the rope—"

"Case, I think you must have been hit on the head too . . . but harder. Have you considered the twenty-foot drop to the ground, *if* I could cut the rope . . . which I can't reach?"

"Well, you got any better ideas? This bird-cage is no push-over; I can't bust anything loose."

"Try hitting it with your head."

"Chester, your attitude does you no credit. This is your old pal Case, remember?"

"You're the ex-acrobat. You figure it out."

"That was a few years ago, Chester, and—hey!" Case interrupted himself. "What a couple of dopes! All we got to do is tell Genie to whisk us back home. I don't know what this set-up is she got us into, but she can just get us out again. Good ol' Genie. Do your stuff, kid."

"Are you talking to me, Mr. Mulvihill?" Genie asked, wide-eyed.

"Of course, why didn't I think of that?" Chester smiled across at Genie. "Take us back now, Genie."

"I'm very sorry, Chester," said Genie. "I don't think I know what you mean. How can I take you home when I'm locked in this cage?"

Chester gulped hard. "Genie, you brought us here. You've got to get us back!"

"But, Chester, I don't know how . . ."

"You mean you've lost your memory?"

"I don't *think* I've lost my memory," the girl said doubtfully.

"I think I know what the trouble is," Chester called across to Case. "Genie told us she was linked to the memory banks as long as she remained within the resonance field of the computer. But we must be a considerable distance from the apparatus now—Genie has no contact with the machine."

"Some machinery," Case grumbled.

"We must get back to the starting point," Chester said. "As soon as we're back where we left the rug and chairs, I'm sure Genie will function perfectly again. Right, Genie?"

"I don't know, perhaps."

"I wonder what she does remember," said Case. "Say, Genie, do you remember where you came from?"

"Oh, yes. I came from the Place."

"The Place?"

"What did it look like?" asked Chester.

"It was a room, a lovely room, with walls of mist that changed to show me many things. The floor was soft and warm. I could go long distances and still remain in the Place."

"Doesn't sound much like a factory to me."

"Who built you? Who taught you to talk?"

"Oh, you must mean the Voice."

"What was the Voice?"

"It talked to me from the mist. It told me many things and corrected me when I made errors and praised me when I learned quickly." She sighed. "I was there in the Place a very long time."

"But you were only built in the last couple of days."

THE girl looked down at her body, the smooth skin dappled in the sunlight falling through the latticework.

"Judging from the evidences of my physical condition, I would estimate my age at eighteen years—"

"This isn't getting us out of

here," Case cut in. "Let's cut the chatter and figure what we're going to do. Chester, you can use your knife to cut some of the lashings holding that cage together. Then you can crawl up the rope, make it to my tree, and let me out. Then we cut Genie down, and—"

"Listen!" Chester interrupted. "I hear them coming!"

He peered out at the bright morning-lit clearing below them, the surrounding forest, a trail that wound away between the trees. A group of the savages appeared, moving along briskly, filing into the clearing, gathering under the trees. They looked up at the captives, jabbering, pointing, and laughing. Two of them set about erecting a wobbly ladder of bamboo-like cane against Case's tree.

"It looks to me like they've got something in mind," said Case. "I hope we aren't the menu. I don't feel much like playing a starring rôle in a barbecue this morning. Can you understand them, Genie?"

"They're discussing a forthcoming athletic event. Apparently a grrat deal depends upon its outcome." She listened further as the savages got the ladder in place. One of the bearded men scaled it, fumbled with the end of the rope supporting Case's cage.

"It is to be a contest between

champions," said Genie. "A mighty struggle between giants."

"Hey," yelled Case, "if that knee-length Gargantua lets that rope go, I won't be around to watch the bout."

"It's okay," Chester called. "There's a sort of pulley-like arrangement of cross-bars the rope is wound around. They can let it down slowly."

Case's cage lurched, dropped a foot, then steadied and moved smoothly down to thump against the ground. The savages gathered around, unlaced and opened a panel in the side, stepped back and stood with levelled spears as Case emerged. He looked around, made a grab for the nearest spear. Its owner danced back. The others shouted, laughed, jabbered excitedly.

"What's all the chatter about, Genie?" Case called.

"They are admiring your spirit, size, and quickness of movement, Mr. Mulvihill."

"They are, huh? I'll show 'em some quickness of movement if one of 'em'll get close enough for me to grab him."

Chester looked up at a sound from across the clearing. A second group of natives were approaching—and in their midst, towering over them, came a hulking brute of a man, broad, thick hairy.

"This is one of the champions who will engage in combat," said

Genie. "Their name for him seems to be translatable as 'Biter-off of Heads'."

Case whistled. "Look at those hands—he could squeeze one of these midgets like a tube of toothpaste."

"This should be an interesting battle," said Chester, "if his opponent is anywhere near his size."

"I'll lay you three to two on this boy without seeing the challenger," Case called. "I hope they let us hang around and watch."

"Oh, there's no doubt that you'll be present, Mr. Mulvihill," Genie said reassuringly. "You're the one who is to fight him."

CHESTER, it's the best we can do," said Case. "We haven't got much time left to talk. The main bout's coming up any minute now—"

"But, Case, against that man-eater you don't have a chance—"

"I used to fill in for the strong man on Wednesday afternoons, Chester. And I'll bet you a half-interest in great-grandpop's booze supply this kid never studied boxing or judo—and I did. Leave that part to me. You do what I told you—"

Half a dozen jabbering, gesticulating natives closed in around Case, indicated with jabs of their hardwood spears that he was to move off in the direction of the hairy champion.

"I guess they've got a full house," Case called back to Chester and Genie, still dangling in their cages. "Watch for the right time, and keep it quiet. I'll keep these characters occupied . . ."

"Poor Mr. Mulvihill," Genie said. "That brute is even larger than he is."

"Case knows a few tricks, Genie. Don't worry about him."

The two watched anxiously through the woven cages as the crowd formed up a circle about the local heavyweight and Case. One of the savages shouted for attention, then launched into a speech.

A dozen yards from his opponent Case stood drawing deep breaths and letting them out slowly. He glanced up, caught Chester's eye, and winked.

"It's a very interesting speech the little man is making," Genie said. "He's telling the people that Mr. Mulvihill is a demon which he summoned from the Underworld. He refers to you as the Demon with Sharp Claws and to me as the Naked Goddess. We are all spirits, who can only be restrained by magic cages—"

"What about Case? They let him out of his cage."

"That's a special case, I gather. Mr. Mulvihill is under some sort of spell which will force him to fight fiercely against the large savage—"

"Where did they acquire that

brute? I should think he'd be ruling these pygmies rather than putting on shows for them."

"That point hasn't been mentioned so far. I imagine, however, that his post as King's Champion is one of considerable honor. He—"

"Oh-oh," Chester cut in. "Here we go."

The native leader had stopped speaking. The crowd fell silent. Case pulled off his leather belt and wrapped it around his fist. The hairy seven-footer growled, slapped himself on the chest. Case moved toward him cautiously, watching the giant's eyes. The latter bellowed, eyeing the crowd, stalked forward, still slapping his chest. He stopped, turned his back to Case, and roared out a string of gibberish. Case took three rapid steps, slammed a vicious right to the kidneys.

The giant whirled with a bellow, reaching for the injured spot with a huge right hand, and for Case with the left. Case ducked, drove a left to the pit of the shaggy stomach, followed with a right—and went flying as the giant caught him with an open-handed swipe. Case rolled, came to his feet. The native champion had both hands to his stomach now; his hoarse breathing was audible to Chester, forty feet away.

"Case hurt him that time."

"But Mr. Mulvihill—perhaps he's injured too!"

"I don't think so. His profanity sounds normal. While he has their full attention, I'd better get started."

CHESTER took out the pen-knife, looked over the lacing that secured the woven bamboo strips, and started sawing.

"I hope this blade holds out. I never contemplated cutting anything more resistant than a cigar-tip when I bought it. Ah, there goes one," said Chester, as the strands of lacing fell free. "I think three more may do it. Anyone looking my way?"

"No, no one. But I'm frightened. Mr. Mulvihill tripped and barely rolled aside in time to avoid being trampled . . ."

"Two loose. If only Case can keep going for ten more minutes . . ."

Chester worked steadily, freed a third joint, pulled a vertical member aside, and thrust his head through the opening. It was a close fit but a moment later his shoulders were through. He reached up for a handhold, pulled himself entirely through, and clung to the wicker frame of the cage. He found a foothold, clambered higher, reached the rope from which the basket was suspended. A glance toward the fighters showed that all eyes were on the combatants. Ches-

ter took a deep breath, started up the rope. He pulled up, clamped his legs, reached up, gripped, pulled again . . .

The crowd shouted as Case hammered a left and right to the giant's body, turned to duck away, slipped, and was folded into his opponent's immense embrace.

"Chester, he'll be crushed . . ." wailed Genie.

Chester hung on, craning to see. Case struggled, reached behind him, found an index finger, and twisted. The giant roared; Case bent the finger back, back . . .

With a howl the giant dropped him, twisting his hand free, popped the injured member into his mouth.

Chester let out a long breath, pulled himself up onto the branch to which the rope was secured. He rose shakily to his feet, made his way to the main trunk, climbed up to the branch from which Genie's cage was suspended, started out along it. In the clearing below the crowd yelled. Chester caught a glimpse of Case darting past the giant, whirling to chop hard at the side of his neck with the edge of his hand—

Then Chester was at the rope, sliding down . . .

"Chester, you'd better leave me. Save yourself."

Chester sawed at the bindings

of Genie's cage. "Even if I were sufficiently cowardly to entertain the notion, it would hardly be a practical idea. Just another minute or two, Genie."

The joints parted. Below, Case battled on. Chester pried the rattan aside, held the bars apart as Genie slipped through. She climbed up, reached the rope, shinned up it easily. Chester followed.

ABOVE him Genie gasped and pointed. Chester turned in time to see Case duck under a mighty haymaker, come up under his huge opponent and spill him off his feet. As the lumbering savage struggled up with a roar, Case caught him on the point of the jaw with a tremendous clout, knocking him flat again. The bigger man shook his head, stumbled to his feet, and charged. Case threw himself against the oncoming behemoth's knees. Chester winced as the immense figure dived headlong over Case's crouched figure and smashed into the packed earth, face first. When the dust settled Case was on his feet, breathing hard; the giant lay like a felled tree.

"Unfortunate timing," muttered Chester. "He should have held their attention for another five minutes."

"They're sure to notice us now," Genie whispered, flatten-

ing her slender length against the rough bark.

"Don't move," Chester breathed. "We'll wait and see what happens next . . ."

The crowd, standing mute with astonishment, suddenly whooped, surged in to clap Case on the back, prod the fallen champion, dance about jabbering excitedly. Chester saw Case shoot a quick glance toward the cages, then stoop suddenly, come up with two large smooth stones. The crowd grew still, drawing back. One or two unlimbered spears. Case raised his hand for silence, then casually tossed one of the stones up, transferred the other to his right hand in time to catch the first with his left, tossed up the second stone . . .

"That's the idea," Chester whispered. "Good old Case. He'll entrance them with his juggling routine. Let's go, Genie."

They clambered silently to the ground, stole away from the clearing, found a rough trail among the trees and broke into a run. Behind them the cheers of the savages rose, growing fainter now, fading in the distance . . .

"In the clear," Chester gasped, pulled level with Genie. "Now all we have to do is search a few hundred square miles of woods until we find the rug and the chairs . . ."

"That's all right, Chester,"

said Genie, running lithely at his side. "I think I know the way."

IV

CHESTER staggered the last few yards across the grassy slope to the rug and sank down in one of the yellow chairs. "Next time I go for a romp in the woods," he groaned, "I'm going to be wearing a good grade of boots; these melon-slicers are killing me."

"I see no signs of pursuit," said Genie. "Mr. Mulvihill is apparently scoring a marked success."

"He can't keep them occupied forever. Let's hurry, Genie. Dissolve this scene and let's get busy. I'll get hold of a jeep, and guns, and boots. The sporting goods store in the village will have them, I suppose."

"There's something a little strange: I seem to sense an imbalance . . ."

"Nothing that's going to interfere with cancelling out this crazy scene, I hope?"

"No . . . I suppose not. Are you ready, Chester?"

"Sure. But you'd better take my shirt. Those Internal Revenue people may still be hanging about." Chester looked around. "This has been a strange experience. What is all this, merely a hypnotic illusion of some sort?"

He waved his hand at the surrounding countryside. "It certainly looks real. That cage they had me in was real enough. I got two blisters in five minutes sawing my way out of it. And I'm quite certain that clout on the skull was real. I have a knot to prove it."

"The question of the nature of reality is one which has engaged philosophers for centuries," said Genie. "Subjective reality is of course no more than the pattern produced in the mind by a very limited set of sense impressions—which of course can often be misled, as by mirrors or distorted perspective, or ventriloquism, or by any situation which presents unfamiliar configurations. The mechanisms of perception—"

"Hold it, Genie." Chester pointed. "There's smoke rising from back there. That must be a considerable blaze. I hope they're not planning to broil Case over it."

"A bed of hot coals is the usual heat source for roasting enemies in primitive cultures. It should require at least two hours for the blaze to die down to the proper state for the purpose, if the savages do intend such a ceremony."

"I'd be more comforted somehow if you sounded a little more worried."

"We'd better begin," said

Genie, "if we're to be back before the two hours is up. I'll have to run a full integration pattern now. Excuse me a moment . . ."

GENIE's eyes took on a far-away look. Chester watched her anxiously. An insect droned across the rug in the heavy silence of the summer morning. The sun was warm on his face. The column of smoke rose lazily from beyond the distant band of woods. The faint breeze had died away now; the scene was silent as a photograph.

"I'm ready, Chester," Genie said suddenly. Chester jumped to her side.

"Yes, Genie?"

"Take my hand, Chester."

"Got it. Now what?"

The sunny scene faded, to be replaced by the familiar walls of the converted ballroom of the Chester house.

"Whew!" Chester sighed. "What a relief. I'll have to admit, I wasn't sure we'd really be able to do it. My heli is outside; we'll make a fast trip to the village. We should be back in an hour. Come on."

Chester led the way along a corridor hung with plastic alligator hide to a side entrance. "That's odd," he said, as they approached the patterned-glass door. "Must be a storm brewing. The sun was shining when we came in." He opened the door.

Beyond the opening thick grey fog hung in an impenetrable blanket.

"Weather control must be off the air," he said. "What a fog! I'm afraid we won't be going anywhere in this, Genie." He made as if to step out.

"Don't!" Genie caught his arm.

"What's the matter? I won't go far. Just want to make sure it isn't just a local patch . . ."

"Come back, Chester. I'm afraid."

Chester peered into the fog. "I guess you're right. If I got ten feet from the house I'd never find it again. Let's look around. Maybe we can find what we need right here in the house."

They returned to the ballroom, ascended the grand staircase, explored the rooms along a wide hall floored in embossed sheet metal and hung with rubber mobiles. Beyond the windows the fog hung thick and grey. In a game room Chester found a pair of antique automatic pistols. He strapped one on and offered the other to Genie. "We have about everything we needed except for the jeep. I dare say we can manage without it. Ready?"

"Take my hand, Chester."

THE walls faded. They stood again on the grassy slope, in the shade of spreading branches. Genie looked toward the ridge.

"I don't see the smoke any longer. Perhaps the fire has burned down to the proper size for Mr. Mulvihill already."

"If those blasted natives have singed one hair of Case's head, I'll mow the whole tribe down!"

Twenty minutes' brisk walk brought them to the edge of the forest. They moved in among the trees.

"Another ten minutes. Poor old Case. If anything's happened to him . . ."

Suddenly two clean-shaven sarong-clad men and a beautifully proportioned woman appeared on the trail ahead. Chester gripped his pistol. The trio came on toward them, then seemed to catch sight of Chester and Genie. For a moment they paused, then flung up hands in greeting and began to dance about and sing.

"Looks like a different tribe," Chester said. "Much better-looking people. And that singing . . . I could swear it's English!"

"Yes, how strange."

"It certainly is, Genie. This was supposed to be a reconstruction of a primitive scene; looks like a technical blunder on your part."

"They seem to want us to follow them." With excited beckoning gestures the trio had turned and were darting away again along the path.

"Well, all right, since we hap-

pen to be going in that direction anyway." Chester and Genie moved on along the rough trail, came to the clearing where they had watched Case battle the giant an hour earlier.

"Not a sign of them," said Chester, looking around. "The cages are gone, everything. Now what do we do?"

"Let's follow that trail," said Genie, pointing. "Perhaps it will lead us to their village."

"We may as well. I don't know what else to propose. Even those natives have disappeared again." They pressed on, climbed a wooded slope, and emerged from the forest.

Ahead they saw a wide village street, tree-lined and shady, bordered by beds of wild flowers behind which neat huts of brick, boards, or split saplings and woven grasses dotted a park-like lawn. Smiling people approached,

throwing flowers. From a large house halfway along the street an imposing old man emerged, clad in neatly cut shorts and vest of coarse cloth. He pulled at a vast white beard as he came toward them.

"Good Lord!" said Chester, bewildered. "Who are these people? And what kind of setting have you landed us in, Genie?"

"This village," she said. "It's not at all in consonance with the pattern . . ."

"Look at the old man with the beard. He's immense. I'll swear he must be an early Mulvihill; he looks enough like Case to be his grandfather."

The old man came up, looked piercingly at Chester, then at Genie. He pulled at his beard, nodding to himself.

"Well," he said. "So you came back after all . . ."

(Continued next month)

July AMAZING Has Something To Suit Everyone:

REDEMPTION, by Robert F. Young—a novelet extending to the far reaches of space and the depths of human emotion.

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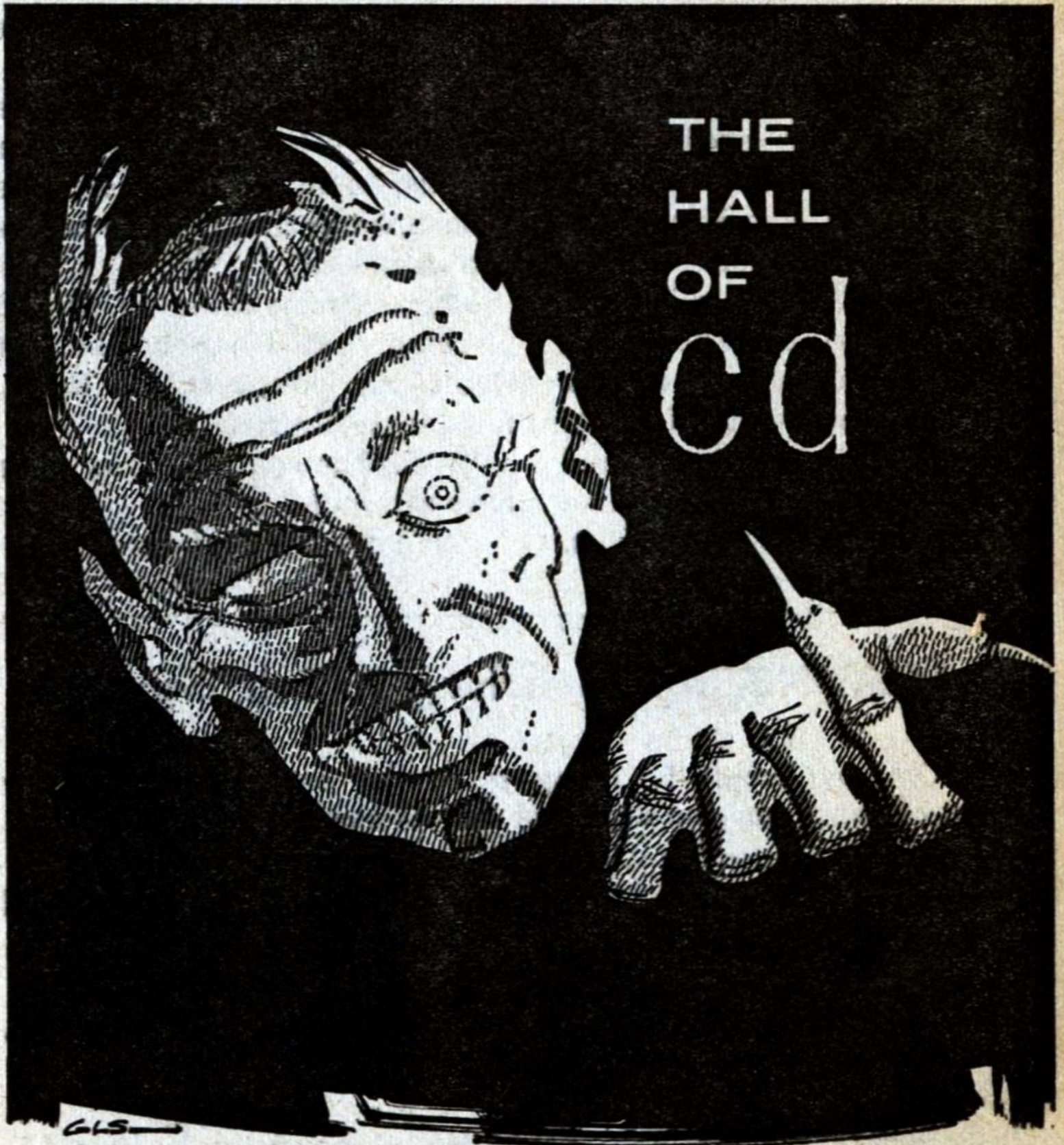
JOHN W. CAMPBELL, SF Profile by Sam Moskowitz—a knowledgeable, penetrating study you won't want to miss.

You'll find your copy of July AMAZING at newsstands June 11.

By **DAVID R. BUNCH**

Illustrator **SCHELLING**

*String stretched across old
flypaper . . . a grey monkey waltzed past
a barbecue . . . in the street a crippled man
blew glass . . . I shut my eyes wide
to the phantasmagoric terrors of . . .*



I FOLLOWED big pink arrows and barbed wires of blue and all the white crosses that said HAVE YOU BEEN TO THE HALL OF C D? And soon I stood before an absolutely flat door and a wall where nothing told me one from the other except a startling brass knob that seemed searching out of steel-gray for my hand. I clasped the knob; no sooner had I than the wall swallowed part of itself, and I stood looking across many strung lines with labels pinned up like drying clothes.

"So you come again down to that immutable place, down to the Hall of C D, seeking your entry?" The speaker seemed to crouch behind a desk that was hardly a desk at all; it was so low to the floor; its legs were so massive. Nothing to write with was on that desk; nothing to speak into or take calls from was there either; only a thin man's white hands lay there on a bright emerald blotter so big it could have been a pool table's top. The hands, neatly folded into each other, made me think maybe some idle giant playfully had crinkled a cue ball and tossed it athwart two sticks. The man's nose and ears were part of an unusually round globe-like contrivance—I finally decided it was just a kind of human head—strange on a pole-thin neck, and the tiny eyes were flat-blue. From time to time two pale

stalks of hair got up, and, waving along his very top-most arc, they looked like insect antennae sifting into a breeze from a base on a red-brown egg.

"You may drop the bulb in the basket!" I dropped the knob from hands with the nerves gone, and it must have hit the basket. "Here for pleasure? Or business?"

"B-business," I stammered, not knowing why, too far gone to care.

Two perfect rows of a kind of teeth flicked out and stood in his red-rouge grin, and laughing they looked like gray iron grating an off-color fire. And the two strands of his hair tensely vibrating beneath some fan blades turning slow resembled spindling horns. "Business!? We are at the wrong desk!"

We mounted through half a room. We creaked up some little orange steps. We did not leave anything exactly; we just went to another spot, still in sight of the massive-legged desk. He ticked at a place in the wall, just with the tips of his fingernails. A sound like small thunder sprang up, a piece of the wall leaped aside and the tiniest of men stepped away. A box—one more massive and metal than the desk—seemed to walk past me, on feet that were huge balls of glass. And behind it a bed on fan blades wheeled like a house trail-

er. But soon my tiny host was merely lounging beside a lumpy globe, a huge one, and it was swiftly punched and cut along a middle line till the top-North seemed all pounded in. He poked his small narrow shoes through tiny holes in the half-globe, lay his hands upon the center of the earth and looked at me. "Business!" He made it sound like the ending of a dirty joke, sitting there so nonchalant with his coat buttons touching somewhere in the chart of a southern sea, with one of his flat-blue eyes chuckling and the other lidded cold. "Business! I take it you are long a seeker after that elusive something-of-truth deep in the soul-center of a drunken fantasy. In other, less elegant words, you are a bar-bug who jumps upside-down and right-side-up on beds of drunken pleasure—when you get the chance." He chuckled at his own cuteness and moved away from a place that I noticed now looked more like a heap of dirty rags on the floor.

"Hero!" I said, "purple heart." And I tensed, thinking of the past's crosses. I was pulling the pins again that might explode. On green hell. In the southern seas . . .

"Relax!"

I TRIED to stop pulling the pins that might explode again. On green hell. In the southern

seas. I threw an empty, rain-faded ration carton into a dusk-blue bay. I came back . . .

"Relax! Nothing's too good for our voyager." But he seemed to stall. His chalk hands fluttered; the iron-grill teeth came up and danced by the strange fire again. "Humm tumm te dumm," he hum-tum-te-dummed tensely to the vibrations of the spindling horns that were hair. I tensed knotty thinking of the past's crosses.

Then it hit me, jagged and startling, sad and incongruous, like night rain through a tent leak, and I thought, must wake, boy, or this long-down night may not ever end.—I asked the question that would relax him. "What do you charge for the Tour?"

It was that for which he so eagerly waited for the yawning holes that flapped. He smiled. He seemed larger. For the Tour he named the hard sum. Then he jerked a little flag-of-no-country loose from a place on the heap of dirty rags and flag-waved wildly. I figured he was jeering. So I jeered back. "Thank you. Thank you kindly, SIR," I jeered back.

But I paid—old pawn tickets and world-wide souvenirs—all that I had—and a heart-cutting gold-band ring, surely the big price of the Tour-of-Hell long ago—and we retraced the orange steps and went down six more steps toward a dark place. There

I changed into my uniform, which move consisted mainly of taking off. Because it seemed for a tour of the Hall of C D one was thought to do best no-clothes. It turned out to be the simplest mode of dress, save one, that I have ever worn. It consisted of two bands of white cloth, each about eight inches wide. One band was snapped around the waist and the other was worn through the crotch, secured to the first band front and back. In my new uniform I felt almost like a baby-child, but very old this time, and withered with a gauntness that no milk could ever fatten round. "Some go to the palace without much," he said, "and others cling like glue to their modesty."

"I understand," I said. "I know the company must sometimes mix at C D."

A flat gleam came into one of his little eyes and when the other lidded standing still, I guessed for the first time that it was dead. Glass! "The company always mixes . . . at C D," he said.

IT was the Atmosphere Room! The walls of stone were venal blood color and floor and ceiling were green-bottle glass. From the walls came groans; from ceiling and floor welled gentle sighing of shrieks that were half muted. Over all was the impres-

sion that lashing cords and thin wires of all colors were whirling and cutting through the air on the trails of round objects that were fleeing, madly and ineffectually, certain doom of encirclement. Near a cup in one corner a sleepy rubber monkey sat and played with gold coins constantly. And diagonally across from the monkey a huge half clay old man stood beating his plastic-stick legs with a red glass cane and pulling clear-as-air soda-straw snakes from his throat over and over. The music of the place was whine of wind from torsion of blue-plastic boxes hitched to a turning wheel that unloosed little corks from holes and fingered them back drear and tunefully. Light came up from wattage under the floor.

From the Atmosphere Room I moved out for my share of the thrills in this terrible palace of horrors. But, in a way, Intermediate-Revenge-Remorse-Horror was a disappointment. Whereas I had expected high forms to kill and much blood to pour from antagonists of meaningful design, Intermediate was not participation revenge at all. One merely went behind a wall and watched.—In a cavernous room that was without furniture, in a place that seemed always too cold, two huge tons-heavy metal balls, one tan, one forest green, swung great arcs

through a glaring light and were timed so that on every fiftieth or fifty-first swing they would come together in shattering thunderous impact. From the exact center of the ceiling a tiny, clear-glass, perfectly-round, child's playing marble came down in a small straw sling decorated with one unnaturally-green vining plant, swung from a grass wire slowly. Watching this, all one's being somehow cried for the tan and the forest green tons-heavy iron balls to "get" the clear-glass, child's playing marble inching down in its little sling. When on the fiftieth or the fifty-first arc of the balls it shattered quite satisfyingly and the leaves of the false plant fluttered and fell, somehow for a blinding instant some of the riddles seemed answered. The glass that spat was a smoke of sparkles, dangerous cutting ice, zinging far and wide. Then I moved into Light-Heavy.

LIGHT-Heavy-Revenge-Remorse-Horror was a show worth living for, living forever for. They had these kids in tubs, these baby-kids who would grow up to be people. Applause cards came up on well-timed metal arms, and under the behest for cheers was the information: These tubs are too **HOT** for baths; these tubs have **BUTTERED** sides; these kids **DON'T**

have a chance!—The children screamed, oh how they piercingly did, and the cards came up again: The water is getting **HOTTER**; the kids are getting **DESPERATE**. **WATCH!**—The children lunged at the high buttered sides of the tubs, and many were strong enough to reach the slippery tops. Then a tall pink boot swept down on a hidden trolley wire to rock them gently back into the tubs. It just swept them with a brush of pink, oh so gently stroked their little white-knuckle hands where they desperately clutched at the tub tops. But it did it so efficiently! All the strong kids were put to bed in tubs. And a card in the air said: Sweet dreams, dear ones. Tough times, little hot-water kids. **WHY** try for the tub tops?—They lay there screaming, and dreaming, a long time in my mind. And I was tired now, and hungry, from all the show and thrills of the puppetry. I asked the lifeless room, without thinking, if I might have a roasted snack to get me ready for Heavy. Almost immediately a piece of a child rolled up on a little car from the bath tub. And this one wasn't rubber and hair, as I had so much suspected they all were, but better-than-average roast pork medium-rare in a basket. I ate, but I could not help fearing that somehow in giving in to gross weakness of my stom-

ach-hunger I had spoiled the show's poetry and all the truth in the message of the scalded kids. But I ate, and I enjoyed it. I finished my meal with a flagon of water so cold that scum-ice formed while I drank.

With the white-frost feel in my mouth and my heart stilled to really low-gear running for this final thing, I moved up a little stair and down a short black hall to the brass knob "for the basket." Into Heavy. Into Misfortune.

It was a cool room of mirrors. It was a cool cool room and a quiet quiet room of mirrors and glass. And in the waving and surging mirrors I and the woman reclining beat at each others bodies, beat at each others faces, beat at each others smiles, frowns and fears. Great cones of icicle mirrors, and mirrors flat on the floor, and wheel mirrors, and mirrors more pointed and lean than pencils—all, all beat our images toward ourselves and each other in a stirred fantasy, nay, a shook potpourri of boiling dreams and schemes. And I thought I heard for an instant far away a sound like a small child crying, and I remembered my own young crying, but this was only a fan blade grating, slow—iron on iron. Then I looked at the woman's face, white and cold. And just for a moment she resembled . . . But I saw

how the sheets on the bed were untumbled, smooth as new marble steps, and that we were in a small small room with a wealth of mirrors too large, and that she was made of wax only—truly. But I couldn't remember all of the memories. I lay on the bed for awhile, quiet as death-quiet, touched her cold face once in my stupor and left . . . up . . . over the world . . . across . . . out out . . . to other oceans of terror.

When I arose, up the black stairs, I could not say whether I felt light or heavily burdened, whether I had gained something to value, or had lost a thing too far . . . Perhaps I almost shook my head, and perhaps to those watching it seemed clearly snow-white, just for an instant, caught in the wind of bar mirrors and blades turning slow. And maybe for one held moment it was the solid white of truth heraldic on a field of dented death, and not this indecisive black-to-gray changing legend that chronicles a trembling face through each new day in an ocean of terror-time.

WHEN I passed through a last door but one and into his presence he was lounging at a spindling-legged desk in a little alcove under a stairway. His white-paper hands were pawing some wine-stained ledgers, and

his live eye shone, beaming as though the pages were full of good jokes. When he saw me the iron teeth came up and lined again in the red pulpy lips that were smiling. And his tongue flicked out across those bloated lips several times in a gesture that I saw as incongruously reptilian. Rising, he stuck out a hand, but I was in no mood for his greeting. I waved his handshake aside and mirth swept down and off his puzzled face. He frowned a stern cold frown. "Perhaps you did," he said, "learn nothing on your Tour." "What does the C stand for? And the D?" I almost shrieked at him. "They stand for Cruelty, don't they, Cruelty and Defeat in the world?"

The teeth came up again, the little slate-colored squares. I took a good look at them. "C could stand for Courage," he said evenly and softly, "which we need.

Or Confusion, which we don't. Or Comprehension. Or Cheerfulness.—There are many many possibilities. And the D—well, it could mean Delight, Or Disappointment. Or Defeat, as you suggested. And then there's Death. Don't you see?—But perhaps for your world they mean most nearly none of these." He stuck out a hand, and I took it this time without quite knowing why. "Do come back," he urged, through lips that were barely parted. "Everyone comes back, if they've been here. If not—well, we expect them all right shortly. Always welcome!" he boomed, "to the best in the house at the Hall of Complete Despair." And as the iron smile flowered its strange petals again, I found I was helplessly and hopelessly trying to get my legs to move my feet toward some kind of a small open door.

THE END

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*In the Metropolitan Museum,
guards with guns stand watch over
the million dollar Rembrandt,
over the borrowed Mona Lisa.
But who stands guard over
The Roman Senators?*

By
**ROGER
ZELAZNY**

Illustrator BLAIR

A Museum Piece

FORCED to admit that his art was going unnoticed in a frivolous world, Jay Smith decided to get out of that world. The four dollars and ninety-eight cents he spent for a mail order course entitled *Yoga—The Path to Freedom* did not, however, help to free him. Rather, it served to accentuate his humanity, in that it reduced his ability to purchase food by four dollars and ninety-eight cents.

Seated in a padmasana, Smith contemplated little but the fact that his navel drew slightly closer to his backbone with each day that passed. While nirvana is a

reasonably esthetic concept, suicide assuredly is not, particularly if you haven't the stomach for it. So he dismissed the fatalistic notion quite reasonably:

"How simply one could take one's own life in ideal surroundings!" he sighed (tossing his golden locks which, for obvious reasons, had achieved classically impressive lengths). "The fat stoic in his bath, fanned by slave girls and sipping his wine, as a faithful Greek leech opens his veins, eyes downcast! One delicate Circassian," he sighed again, "*there* perhaps, plucking upon a lyre as he dictates his

funeral oration—the latter to be read by a faithful countryman, eyes all a-blink. How easily *he* might do it! But the fallen artist—nay! Born yesterday and scorned today he goes, like the elephant to his graveyard, alone and secret!”

He rose to his full height of six feet, one and a half inches, and swung to face the mirror. Regarding his skin, pallid as marble, and his straight nose, broad forehead, and wide-spaced eyes, he decided that if one could not live by creating art, then one might do worse than turn the thing the other way about, so to speak.

He flexed those thews which had earned him half-tuition as a halfback for the four years in which he had stoked the stithy of his soul to the forging out of a movement all his own: two-dimensional painted sculpture.

“Viewed in the round,” one crabbed critic had noted, “Mister Smith’s offerings are either frescoes without walls or vertical lines. The Etruscans excelled in the former form because they knew where it belonged; kindergartens inculcate a mastery of the latter in all five year-olds.”

Cleverness! Mere cleverness! Bah! He was sick of those Johnsons who laid down the law at someone else’s dinner table!

He noted with satisfaction that his month-long ascetic re-

gime had reduced his weight by thirty pounds to a mere two twenty-five. He decided that he could pass as a Beaten Gladiator, post-Hellenic.

“It is settled,” he pronounced “I’ll *be* art.”

LATER that afternoon a lone figure entered the Museum of Art, a bundle beneath his arm.

Spiritually haggard (although clean-shaven to the armpits), Smith loitered about the Greek Period until it was emptied of all but himself and marble.

He selected a dark corner and unwrapped his pedestal. He secreted the various personal items necessary for a showcase existence, including most of his clothing, in its hollow bottom.

“Good-bye, world,” he renounced, “you should treat your artists better,” and mounted the pedestal.

His food money had not been completely wasted, for the techniques he had mastered for four ninety-eight while on the Path to Freedom, had given him a muscular control such as allowed him perfect, motionless statuity whenever the wispy, middle-aged woman followed by forty-four children under age nine, left her chartered bus at the curb and passed through the Greek Period, as she did every Tuesday and Thursday between 9:35 and 9:40 in the morning. Fortunate-

ly, he had selected a seated posture.

Before the week passed he had also timed the watchman's movements to an alternate *tick* of the huge clock in the adjacent gallery (a delicate Eighteenth Century timepiece, all of gold leaf, enamel, and small angels who chased one another in circles). He should have hated being reported stolen during the first week of his career, with nothing to face then but the prospect of second-rate galleries or an uneasy role in the cheerless private collections of cheerless and private collectors. Therefore, he moved judiciously when raiding staples from the stores in the downstairs lunch room, and strove to work out a sympathetic bond with the racing angels. The directors had never seen fit to secure the refrigerator or pantry from depredations by the exhibits, and he applauded their lack of imagination. He nibbled at boiled ham and pumpnickel (light), and munched ice cream bars by the dozen. After a month he was forced to take calisthenics (heavy) in the Bronze Age.

"Oh, lost!" he reflected amidst the Neos, surveying the kingdom he had once staked out as his own. He wept over the statute of Achilles Fallen as though it were his own. It was.

As in a mirror, he regarded himself in a handy collage of

bolts and nutshells. "If you had not sold out," he accused, "if *you* had hung on a little longer—like these, the simplest of Art's creatures . . . But no! It could not be!

"Could it?" he addressed a particularly symmetrical mobile overhead. "*Could* it?"

"Perhaps," came an answer from somewhere, which sent him flying back to his pedestal.

But little came of it. The watchman had been taking guilty delight in a buxom Rubens on the other side of the building and had not overheard the colloquy. Smith decided that the reply signified his accidental nearing of Dharana. He returned to the Path, redoubling his efforts toward negation and looking Beaten.

IN the days that followed he heard occasional chuckling and whispering, which he at first dismissed as the chortlings of the children of Mara and Maya, intent upon his distraction. Later, he was less certain, but by then he had decided upon a classical attitude of passive inquisitiveness.

And one spring day, as green and golden as a poem by Dylan Thomas, a girl entered the Greek Period and looked about, furtively. He found it difficult to maintain his marbly placidity, for lo! she began to disrobe!

And a square parcel on the floor, in a plain wrapper. It could only mean . . .

Competition!

He coughed politely, softly, classically . . .

She jerked to an amazing attention, reminding him of a women's underwear ad having to do with Thermopylae. Her hair was the correct color for the undertaking—that palest shade of Parian manageable—and her gray eyes glittered with the icy-orbed intentness of Athene.

She surveyed the room minutely, guiltily, attractively . . .

"Surely stone is not susceptible to virus infections," she decided. "'Tis but my guilty conscience that cleared its throat. Conscience, thus do I cast thee off!"

And she proceeded to become Hecuba Lamenting, diagonally across from the Beaten Gladiator and, fortunately, not facing in his direction. She handled it pretty well, too, he grudgingly admitted. Soon she achieved an esthetic immobility. After a professional appraisal he decided that Athens was indeed mother of all the arts; she simply could not have carried it as Renaissance nor Romanesque. This made him feel rather good.

When the great doors finally swung shut and the alarms had been set she heaved a sigh and sprang to the floor.

"Not yet," he cautioned, "the watchman will pass through in ninety-three seconds."

She had presence of mind sufficient to stifle her scream, a delicate hand with which to do it, and eighty-seven seconds in which to become Hecuba Lamenting once more. This she did, and he admired her delicate hand and her presence of mind for the next eighty-seven seconds.

THE watchman came, was nigh, was gone, flashlight and beard bobbing in musty will o' the-wispfulness through the gloom.

"Goodness!" she expelled her breath. "I had thought I was alone!"

"And correctly so," he replied. "'Naked and alone we come into exile . . . Among brights stars on this most weary unbright cinder, lost . . . Oh, lost—'"

"Thomas Wolfe," she stated.

"Yes," he sulked. "Let's go have supper."

"Supper?" she inquired, arching her eyebrows. "Where? I had brought some K-Rations, which I purchased at an Army Surplus Store—"

"Obviously," he retorted, "you have a short-timer's attitude. I believe that chicken figured prominently on the menu for today. Follow me!"

They made their way through the T'ang Dynasty, to the stairs.

"Others might find it chilly in here after hours," he began, "but I daresay you have thoroughly mastered the techniques of breath control?"

"Indeed," she replied, "my fiancé was no mere Zen faddist. He followed the more rugged path of Lhasa. Once he wrote a modern version of the Ramayana, full of topical allusions and advice to modern society."

"And what did modern society think of it?"

"Alas! Modern society never saw it. My parents bought him a one-way ticket to Rome, first-class, and several hundred dollars worth of Travellers' Checks. He has been gone ever since. That is why I have retired from the world."

"I take it your parents did not approve of Art?"

"No, and I believe they must have threatened him also."

He nodded.

"Such is the way of society with genius. I, too, in my small way, have worked for its betterment and received but scorn for my labors."

"Really?"

"Yes. If we stop in the Modern Period on the way back, you can see my Achilles Fallen."

A very dry chuckle halted them.

"Who is there?" he inquired, cautiously.

No reply. They stood in the

Glory of Rome, and the stone senators were still.

"Someone laughed," she observed.

"We are not alone," he stated, shrugging. "There've been other indications of such, but whoever they are, they're as talkative as Trappists—which is good.

"Remember, thou art stone," he called gaily, and they continued on to the cafeteria.

ONE night they sat together at dinner in the Modern Period.

"Had you a name, in life?" he asked.

"Gloria," she whispered. "And yours?"

"Smith, Jay."

"What prompted you to become a statue, Smith—if it is not too bold of me to ask?"

"Not at all," he smiled, invisibly. "Some are born to obscurity and others only achieve it through diligent effort. I am one of the latter. Being an artistic failure, and broke, I decided to become my own monument. It's warm in here, and there's food below. The environment is congenial, and I'll never be found out because no one ever looks at anything standing around museums."

"No one?"

"Not a soul, as you must have noticed. Children come here against their wills, young people

come to flirt with one another, and when one develops sufficient sensibility to look at anything," he lectured bitterly, "he is either myopic or subject to hallucinations. In the former case he would not notice, in the latter he would not talk. The parade passes."

"Then what good are museums?"

"My dear girl! That the former affianced of a true artist should speak in such a manner indicates that your relationship was but brief—"

"Really!" she interrupted. "The proper word is 'companionship'."

"Very well," he amended, "'companionship'. But museums mirror the past, which is dead, the present, which never notices, and transmit the race's cultural heritage to the future, which is not yet born. In this, they are near to being temples of religion."

"I never thought of it that way," she mused. "Rather a beautiful thought, too. You should really be a teacher."

"It doesn't pay well enough, but the thought consoles me. Come, let us raid the icebox again."

They nibbled their final ice cream bars and discussed Achilles Fallen, seated beneath the great mobile which resembled a starved octopus. He told her of

his other great projects and of the nasty reviewers, crabbed and bloodless, who lurked in Sunday editions and hated life. She, in turn, told him of her parents, who knew Art and also knew why she shouldn't like him, and of her parents' vast fortunes, equally distributed in timber, real estate, and petroleum. He, in turn, patted her arm and she, in turn, blinked heavily and smiled Hellenically.

"You know," he said, finally, "as I sat upon my pedestal, day after day, I often thought of myself: Perhaps I should return and make one more effort to pierce the cataract in the eye of the public—perhaps if I were secure and at ease in all things material—perhaps, if I could find the proper woman—but nay! There is no such a one!"

"Continue! Pray continue!" cried she. "I, too, have, over the past days, thought that, perhaps, another artist could remove the sting. Perhaps the poison of loneliness could be drawn by a creator of beauty— If we—"

AT this point a small and ugly man in a toga cleared his throat.

"It is as I feared," he announced.

Lean, wrinkled, and grubby was he; a man of ulcerous bowel and much spleen. He pointed an accusing finger.

"It is as I feared," he repeated.

"Wh-who are you?" asked Gloria.

"Cassius," he replied, "Cassius Fitzmullen—art critic, retired, for the *Dalton Times*. You are planning to defect."

"And what concern is it of yours if we leave?" asked Smith, flexing his Beaten Gladiator half-back muscles.

Cassius shook his head.

"Concern? It would threaten a way of life for you to leave now. If you go, you will doubtless become an artist or a teacher of art—and sooner or later, by word or by gesture, by sign or by unconscious indication, you will communicate what you have suspected all along. I have listened to your conversations over the past weeks. You know, for certain now, that this is where all art critics finally come, to spend their remaining days mocking the things they have hated. It accounts for the increase of Roman Senators in recent years."

"I have often suspected it, but never was sure."

"The suspicion is enough. It is lethal. You must be judged."

He clapped his hands.

"Judgement!" he called.

Other ancient Romans entered slowly, a procession of bent candles. They encircled the two lovers. Smelling of dust and yellow newsprint and bile and time, the old reviewers hovered.

"They wish to return to humanity," announced Cassius. "They wish to leave and take their knowledge with them."

"We would not tell," said Gloria, tearfully.

"It is too late," replied one dark figure. "You are already entered into the Catalog. See here!" He produced a copy and read: "Number 28, Hecuba Lamenting. Number 32, The Beaten Gladiator." No! It is too late. There would be an investigation."

"Judgment!" repeated Cassius.

Slowly, the Senators turned their thumbs down.

"You *cannot* leave."

Smith chuckled and seized Cassius' tunic in a powerful sculptor's grip.

"Little man," he said, "how do you propose stopping us? One scream by Gloria would bring the watchman, who would sound an alarm. One blow by me would render you unconscious for a week."

"We shut off the guard's hearing aid as he slept," smiled Cassius. "Critics are not without imagination, I assure you. Release me, or you will suffer."

Smith tightened his grip.

"Try *anything*."

"Judgment," smiled Cassius.

"He is modern," said one.

"Therefore, his tastes are catholic," said another.

"To the lions with the Christians!" announced a third, clapping his hands.

And Smith sprang back in panic at what he thought he saw moving in the shadows. Cassius pulled free.

"You cannot do this!" cried Gloria, covering her face. "We are from the Greek Period!"

"When in Greece, do as the Romans do," chuckled Cassius.

The odor of cats came to their nostrils.

"How could you—here. . . ? A lion. . . ?" asked Smith.

"A form of hypnosis privy to the profession," observed Cassius. "We keep the beast paralyzed most of the time. Have you not wondered why there has never been a theft from this museum? Oh, it has been tried, all right! We protect our interests."

THE lean, albino lion which generally slept beside the main entrance padded slowly from the shadows and growled—once, and loudly.

Smith pushed Gloria behind him as the cat began its stalking. He glanced toward the Forum, which proved to be vacant. A sound, like the flapping of wings by a flock of leather pigeons, diminished in the distance.

"We are alone," noted Gloria.

"Run," ordered Smith, "and I'll try to delay him. Get out, if you can."

"And desert you? Never, my dear! Together! Now, and always!"

"Gloria!"

"Jay Smith!"

At that moment the beast conceived the notion to launch into a spring, which it promptly did.

"Good-bye, my lovely."

"Farewell. One kiss before dying, pray."

The lion was high in the air, uttering healthy coughs, eyes greenly aglow.

"Very well."

They embraced.

Moon hacked in the shape of cat, that palest of beasts hung overhead—hung high, hung menacingly, hung long . . .

It began to writhe and claw about wildly in that middle space between floor and ceiling for which architecture possesses no specific noun.

"Mm! Another kiss?"

"Why not? Life is sweet."

A minute ran by on noiseless feet; another pursued it.

"I say, what's holding up that lion?"

"I am," answered the mobile.

"You humans aren't the only ones to seek umbrage amidst the relics of your dead past."

The voice was thin, fragile, like that of a particularly busy Aeolian Harp.

"I do not wish to seem inquisitive," said Smith, "but who are you?"

"I am an alien life form," it tinkled back, digesting the lion. "My ship suffered an accident on the way to Arcturus. I soon discovered that my appearance was against me on your planet, except in the museums, where I am greatly admired. Being a member of a rather delicate and, if I do say it, somewhat narcissistic race—" He paused to belch daintily, and continued, "—I rather enjoy it here—'among bright stars on this most weary un-bright cinder [belch], lost.'"

"I see," said Smith. "Thanks for eating the lion."

"Don't mention it—but it wasn't *wholly* advisable. You see, I'm going to have to divide now. Can the other me go with you?"

"Of course. You saved our

lives, and we're going to need something to hang in the living room, when we have one.

"Good."

He divided, in a flurry of hemi-demisemiquavers, and dropped to the floor beside them.

"Good-bye, me," he called upward.

"Good-bye," from above.

They walked proudly from the Modern, through the Greek, and past the Roman Period, with much hauteur and a wholly quiet dignity. Beaten Gladiator, Hecuba Lamenting, and Xena ex Machina no longer, they lifted the sleeping watchman's key and walked out the door, down the stairs, and into the night, on youthful legs and drop-lines.

THE END



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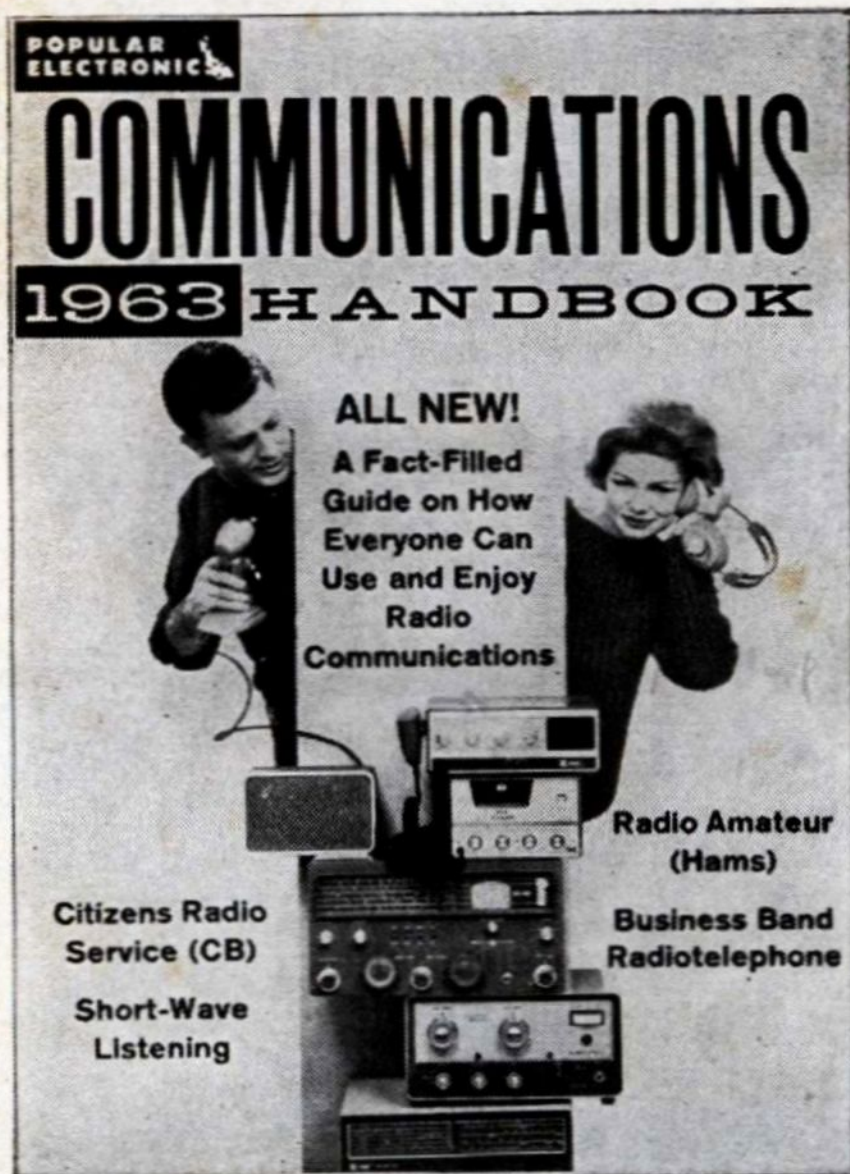
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