

# THE LOCUST DESCENDING BY GORDON EKLUND

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## fantastic

Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy Stories

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# Fantastic

Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy Stories

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**TED  
WHITE**

## **editorial**



LAST ISSUE, in this space, I discussed the growing hold which modern technology exercises over our lives, creating new esotericisms before which we find ourselves humbled—the esotericisms of mechanics and repair which lead us to pay outrageous amounts of money to technicians who in turn advise us to get rid of our expensive appliances because, after a few years of use, they are “too old” for repair and should be replaced with new newer and even less comprehensible models.

I should note, more or less parenthetically to the course of this editorial, that I don't expect this situation to continue unchanged. The rising costs of energy and the rampant inflation we are experiencing will, I think, bring an end to this kind of consumer-wastefulness. The trend is starting to turn toward greater simplicity in machines, greater durability, and greater economy of both operation and maintenance—if not of purchase price. Community colleges are offering courses in appliance and automotive maintenance and the classes are full. We simply can't afford to continue on the course which followed World War Two—bigger, “better,” more costly and less comprehensible machines as adjuncts to our daily life are simply too wasteful and expensive in these times. But the

change I am forecasting will not occur overnight and its effects will not be fully felt for ten or twenty years to come.

In the meantime, one of several responses to the present situation on the part of our populace is to retreat into fantasy.

I don't think it surprising that the Gor novels, which I criticized here three issues ago (the controversy continues in our letters column), are quite popular and a publishing success. They represent—as do the success of most heroic fantasy published today—a reaction to the present-day technological madness on the part of both their authors and their readership.

But acknowledged fantasy—fantasy in fiction—is only the tip of the iceberg of public reaction. Fantasy fiction, after all, represents simply an entertainment, an opportunity to forget for the duration in which one is reading it, the cares of the ‘real world.’

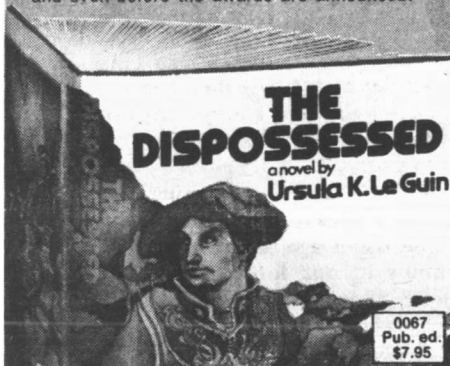
It is my theory that most fantasy readers are and have been readers of fantasy since childhood days. As children we were told fairytales; we read or were read the Oz books, perhaps Lang's different-colored fairystory books, some Grimm, some Anderson. Children's stories are permeated with fantasy: Goldilocks and the Three

(cont. on page 124)

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# THE LOCUST DESCENDING

GORDON EKLUND

THAT LONG WINTER I chose to spend with my sister in Denver, Colorado, a full five thousand feet above the level of the sea and yet peopled by minds no less lowly than those I had known upon the several sea-coasts. Waiting for Esther to pry her husband loose from a barstool, I stood upon a shadowy city corner and regarded the midnight drunks parading forlornly forth from that block of shining neon. A few passed close by and so, bored, I paused and stared and entered their minds, exposing the usual banality: *Should I try to drive? I ain't drunk. I'm tougher than him. Tomorrow I got to work, oh Christ. My God, where is that woman? Some bastard steal her? Goddamn it, my wife has been stolen.*

And so on. The dreary sodden thoughts of these drunken minds, representatives at random from their race to mine. The ground lay covered by rotting slush and a fierce wind cut through my thin jacket and yet these sub-secret Colorado thoughts were enough to warm me. So familiar—so lovely. Of course, I laughed, though inwardly. What else?

Then something hard and round poked me in the back. I said, "Hey," thinking it was my sister's husband (a wry sort of practical joker) and turned

partially to confront him. I stopped. It wasn't him. The man was hunched and squat and wore a dark overcoat with the collar drawn up. A second man stood slightly behind him, this one as thin as the first was stout, with dark, chiseled features that seemed to shine whenever a certain revolving sign splashed his face with red and green light.

The squat man ordered: "Don't you move, partner."

Most obediently, I froze. "I'm broke. But if you want to wait for my sister, she's loaded." I stopped, not only because the joke was weak, but also because—at that instant—I paused and stared and darted a probe into the gunman's mind.

And I ran smack into a single powerful thought: he was aware of what I was doing—he knew I was reading his mind.

Which meant that he had to know exactly what I was.

And nobody knew that. Nobody.

"Your name Burton?"

I said, "Tom Burton—yes." My mouth ran dry with fear. I left his mind quickly, afraid to linger. "What do you want—?"

"Shut up." Not unkindly. "Dave." He meant the other man. I heard footsteps approaching on my other

ILLUSTRATED by STEPHEN E. FABIAN

side but dared not turn and peek.

"This him?"

"Yeah."

"No doubt?"

"I said yeah."

I was about to risk a probe—anything—I would fight back. Then I heard a noise, a hissing sound like air escaping a punctured balloon. A cold blast of wind swept across my face. It didn't smell like wind.

I AWAKENED upright in the back seat of a car. My wrists and ankles were bound and my mouth was gagged. The sun was shining through a side window, blinding my eyes, so I leaned over and laid my face against the glass. But all I could see was an ocean of tremendous whiteness dwindling endlessly away. It was like gazing down the end of an infinite cone of white. I shuddered at the sight and jerked myself upright.

The car was climbing uphill. In the front seat were two men. The driver was thin and his companion huge. I chose to stare at the big man, intending to probe. He wheeled suddenly and thrust a gun in my face. It seemed the size of a cannon.

"None of that crap. On the floor."

I withdrew my probe and hastily complied. Between the seats I could see nothing.

"What are you afraid of, Harry? I didn't know you had any secrets."

"Everybody's got some, Dave."

"Not me."

"Okay. Everybody but you."

I soon slept again.

When I awoke the second time, I was again seated upright. The car was driving level. I looked past the two men in the front seat and on out the front windshield. What I saw made me think I must still be asleep and dreaming. There ahead in the middle

of the road stood a thing from a fairy tale.

It was a palace. Not a castle—a genuine palace, made of glass. High sparkling turrets thrust majestically into the sky, while, dazzled by the sun, a rainbow of colors danced upon the jagged surfaces of the walls. I imagined I could see right through the palace but beyond lay only a succession of identical but smaller duplicates, like the reflections in two mirrors laid face-to-face. Abruptly, the car entered a great shadow and darkness descended. For the first time I admitted to myself that this vision might be real and not a mystical mirage born of the cold and ice.

The car stopped. A door slammed. The two men came back for me. One knelt down and untied my ropes while the other removed my gag. Desperately cold, I shook and shivered. My teeth chattered violently. I attempted no probes.

"Where are we?"

The big man laughed. He pointed to the palace.

"But where's that?"

"It's here," he said. "Right here. Where the hell you think?"

Then he led me forward.

Alas, within, the palace seemed little more majestic than any millionaire's mansion. Once past the front door the odor of fairy tale magic fled to be replaced by the too familiar odor of too much money found too easily and too soon.

The two men—Harry and Dave—led me up a high, twisting staircase. The bright mahogany bannister gleamed with inlaid silver stars, while the steps themselves were polished to the point of mirror sharpness. Above in the upper corridor a succession of magnificent oils lined both walls—I recognized some of the artists, though



the work was unfamiliar, and some were totally new to me.

We paused in front of a door.

"You watch yourself in there," Harry told me. He was the big man—the one with the gun. "You try any tricks on the Major's mind and I swear I'll kick ever ounce of shit out of your brains."

"Who's the Major?"

Harry laughed deeply. "Who you think? He owns this house."

"And he knows I read minds?"

"Sure, he does."

"How?"

"Hell," said Harry, derisively. "There's nothing Major McNaughton don't know."

Inside the tiny room, as neat and frugal as a monk's chamber, Harry and I paused beside a narrow bed. The man who occupied it—flat on his back—struck me as impossibly old: a hundred years, a thousand, perhaps even more. I admit I shivered at the sight of him. The smell of death ran keenly through the air. From a shriveled, shrunken skull, fierce blue eyes glared at me. The white hair was neatly combed and parted. Above the upper lip, a trace of gray moustache showed. The man did not move—not a muscle—not a fraction of an inch.

Another man—this one no older than me—stood stiffly beside the bed. He was the one who spoke:

"I'm Neil McNaughton and can speak for my father."

I started to approach this man, intending to get close enough to toss a probe, but halted, unsure if Harry's proscription remained with the blood.

"He cannot talk?"

"He may communicate. Every word spoken here will be completely understood by him. Furthermore, he retains the ability to blink his right eye. Hence, we have established a code.

One blink no—two blinks yes. I assure you, when my father wishes to make his desires known, he is fully able."

Feeling the old man's steady gaze upon me, I could not doubt that. "I gather he—or you—wished to see me." I was trying to be sarcastic.

"Exactly," said Neil. "I'll strive to be as brief as possible. The fact is that Major McNaughton has two children. I am one and the other, his daughter, my younger sister, is not well. She suffers from what various doctors have described as a form of traumatic shock. She has withdrawn rather completely from the everyday world of reality. It is Major McNaughton's wish that she be cured."

"I'm no a psychiatrist."

"Major McNaughton has previously employed a vast succession of psychiatrists who have universally failed to meet our needs."

"And you think I can do better?"

"Jane's difficulty is lodged somewhere in her memories. Find it—and cure her."

I shook my head. "Then you misunderstand my talent. The only thoughts I normally read are those present at the very top of the mind—the so-called conscious mind. I am sometimes aware of the rest of it but can rarely decipher its meaning. I'm not a mental archaeologist. I can't go digging with a spade through people's minds in search of buried memories."

"We expect you to do your best."

"May I refuse?"

Neil grinned coldly, looking past me to Harry. "Of course you may." I was suddenly very much aware of Harry's gun.

So I faced the bed, meeting the old man's steady gaze and wishing his mind had not been forbidden to me. What was he trying to say? Was he

genuinely pleading? Did it mean that much to him? Or was this merely a dying man's whim? Two healthy children to survive him.

I sighed and looked at Neil. "I can't guarantee a thing."

"Who can?"

"How long do I have?"

"Any reasonable period. After that, if you are not successful, you will be returned unharmed to your sister's home."

Any reasonable length of time? Or until Major McNaughton died? I began to understand that Neil McNaughton, if not his father, preferred his sister exactly as she was.

"Then I'm your doctor," I said.

Neil nodded stiffly and faced the bed. In a voice unlike that he had used so far, he said, "Burton says he will do it. Do you understand me, Father? He says he will help Jane."

The old man blinked his right eye—twice.

Neil said to me, "I'll take you to see Jane now."

I shrugged. "You're the boss."

"No, he ain't," said Harry, huffing after me. He held open the door. "Major McNaughton is the boss."

Neil glared but there was really nothing he could say. What Harry had stated was, after all, only the plain and unvarnished truth.

**J**ANE MCNAUGHTON wore an ingenuous expression of innocent wonder and childish delight that I had seen before only upon the transient features of twelve and thirteen year old girls. Her blue eyes burned with the marvels of a strange and novel world, but with Jane it was different, for while the innocence was genuine it was also static, as though she had been seeing these same wonders and hearing these same marvels for much

too long a time.

But Jane was not twelve: she was twenty-three.

Physically, she was not adolescent. She was tall—nearly my height—and thin, boney, angular. Blonde, with her hair trimmed very close to her skull. I found myself wishing she wore it long—wishing this very much and very strongly. She wore a puffy gray sweater, saggy green jeans, red-and-white sneakers and blue ankle-length socks. If she used make-up, I failed to uncover its presence.

She sat on the floor of her room amid miniature painted statues molded from plaster. Her attention seemed wholly riveted here and she glanced up only briefly when Harry, Neil, and I entered. I waited to fix her physically before moving to probe her mind, but when I did find nothing of any use. Her thoughts were rigidly set upon the objects nearest to hand—her toys—and there seemed no room for anything else, no reflections or memories, no dreams of tomorrow, nothing but the very instant moment of now.

She was playing with one of the statues—a dog, I thought, or maybe a wolf—even her thoughts were inconclusive. She held it tenderly in both hands and made it bounce up and down upon the floor. She uttered a series of harsh woofing sounds deep in her throat.

I vacated her mind.

"Is she usually like this?" I asked Neil.

He nodded. "Most of the time she's pretty good."

"But a lot of times, at night, she screams and cries," Harry said. He was smoking a corncob pipe clenched tightly between his teeth. "She'll wake up with a bad dream and the nurses have to sit on her chest. One

time she tried to jump out that window—" I followed his finger to a barred rectangle of glass "—and another time she cut up a nurse pretty bad with a knife."

"Most often Jane is quite well," Neil said.

"When she's working with her play stuff, she's pretty happy," Harry admitted.

"She makes these herself?"

"From molds. You bet. Damned good at it, too."

I crouched down, moving with particular caution, jumping in and out of her thoughts, watching alertly for any hint of gathering fear. Carefully, I touched one of the statues. Besides the dog, there were four others: two horses, a cow, and a cat. I lifted one of the horses and turned it in my hands. The detail work of the painting was truly amazing. Each separate hair seemed individually molded. A sprinkling of white sand had been added to the hide, giving the statue a peculiarly lifelike sheen.

In her thoughts, I now glimpsed a dim reflection of my own face. I said, "Did you make all these yourself, Jane?"

She continued playing with the dog but my face loomed larger in her thoughts.

I repeated my question.

She didn't look my way: "Nobody helps me."

"You don't need help. These are all very nice."

She shrugged. The dog barked furiously in my direction.

"Jane," I said, touching her hand very gently, "my name is Tom Burton and I'm going to be staying here. Your father has asked me to help you."

"Yeah, I know. You're a nut doctor." She was incredibly sure of her-

self, like a twelve year old.

"Not me. I'm just a man. Your friend, I hope."

"He—" she nodded her head behind "—he's my friend." I knew she didn't mean Neil.

Harry crouched down beside us. The aroma of his pipe tickled my senses. "Burton here is my friend too, Jane, so it's okay if he's your friend too."

"Why should he be?" she said.

"Some other time," I said, "I'd very much like to see the rest of your statues. Harry told me you've made lots more. What other kinds do you make?"

"All kinds." For the first time, she faced me. "What I like best is people. Real people like nut doctors and dumb nurses. I paint them to look just like they really do, then I toss them up in the air and watch them smash down on the floor in little bitty pieces."

Was she deliberately trying to shock me? I probed her thoughts to see. "I guess that must be fun."

She laughed and I received a powerful burst of recollected pleasure and delight. "Oh, yes—lots of fun."

Neil was tapping my shoulder, shifting nervously on his feet. I stood up. "We have to go now, Jane, but I'll try to come back soon. From now on, you and I will be seeing each other almost every day."

"Does that mean you've got to ask me all those stupid questions? About when I was a kid and what I did?"

"A few. Not many. I promise."

"Good. Because I hate them." She went back to her dog, woofing and bouncing. I took a last look at her thoughts, found them meager and shallow, and stepped back.

Harry opened the door for Neil and I to pass through.

Suddenly, Jane whirled. My mind rocked with a savage blast of utter hate and rage that sent me reeling. She sprang to her feet, threw back her hand, and hurled the dog. The heavy statue struck Neil square on the chest and bounced off to the floor, shattering into a dozen pieces.

Jane screamed: "You fuckers! Why did you bring him here? I said never bring him! I hate him! If you bring him, I'll kill him! I'll kill me! I'll kill you! Fuckers, fuckers—every one of you fuckers!"

**T**HE FIRST THING every morning the moment I crawled from bed, I stumbled over to the window and threw it boldly open and leaned way out into the freezing air. Beneath me, the flat glass wall of the palace plunged steeply away until it touched the sheer rock face of the lower canyon and then continued on another hundred yards before finally disappearing in a confusing swirl of dank gray and bright white, fog and mist and ice and snow.

After a few deep breaths of bracing mountain air, I slammed the window shut.

Most often that served as a signal. Harry unlocked the door and stepped inside. A maid usually came with him, pushing a cart piled high with breakfast.

Harry and I ate together at a small wooden table beside my bed.

Harry said, "Any luck yet, Burton?"

"No, I don't think so."

He lit his pipe. "But you see her everyday. What more do you want? Read her mind and get it over with. This ain't a big joke, you know."

"I don't think it is a joke, Harry. You don't believe me, let me in your mind and I'll prove it to you." Actually I had managed to probe Harry's

mind on a couple of occasions when his back was turned but I wasn't about to tell him so. I pointed to the maid, who had poked her head into the room. "Want to know what she's thinking right now?"

"Oh, screw her," Harry said. "Burton, I never said I doubted you can do it. It's just that I can't figure out how."

"It's because I'm a freak, Harry, that's why."

"You mean you just woke up one morning and could do it."

"It wasn't that simple." Harry, I realized, was now doing to me what I had been doing to Jane these past weeks: forcing the mind back into a darker past best forgotten or ignored. "When I was a small child, I may have possessed the talent in a weaker form, but I was never really aware of it. I might pick up a stray thought or two but nothing more. Then, the older I got, the stronger it grew till by the time I was in my middle teens I knew who and what I was and how for the rest of my life I would be a freak."

Harry chuckled. "Burton, you're dumb. You talk like you got a burden."

"Harry, if I could trade brains with you I would."

"That's because you lack imagination. Now take women. Walk into a roomful of broads and know right away which ones are willing, which ones are hot."

"Women don't like me, Harry."

"That's because you're shy. And poor. Go to Vegas, peek inside some of those minds down there, come home with a million in a satchel. Then check out the broads."

"The last thing I ever want is to call attention to myself. I couldn't win a million dollars without doing that. If

they ever found out about me, they'd kill me. Then I'd be nothing."

"Hell, I thought that's what you wanted."

"I don't know what I want. You tell me, Harry."

"Sure." Misunderstanding, he then proceeded to tell me exactly what it was he wanted from life in the purest, richest, ripest, most ribald detail. I could only listen in humbled awe.

THEY KEPT pressuring me. It got so bad I didn't want to budge from bed till noon or later, knowing the moment I did here came Harry bounding through the door, and I was tired of feeling I ought to apologize to him. How was it my fault I couldn't perform the impossible? Why should I feel guilty?

Harry would've been okay. Harry I could have stood. But it was the rest, too. The maid. The cook. Both butlers. The Doctors Harrison and Owlney. Somebody named Peter Ketzbaum who was maybe a lawyer. Everyone in the whole damn palace seemed eager to explain exactly how much they were depending on me to perform. I had been delegated by them not only to cure Jane but also to save the whole world from Neil McNaughton's grimy hands. It was the same as a petty renaissance principality with the old monarch on his deathbed and the crown up for grabs. Which would it be? Prince Neil or Princess Jane?

I did not seek that responsibility. I was here in their palace, I wanted to help Jane, but that did not mean I gave a damn who or what assumed the throne.

Princess Jane? The thought disturbed me. I had seen enough of her in the past weeks so that I couldn't help feeling the usual compassion one

feels for any wounded bird. As far as I was concerned, Neil could have it. Jane deserved better.

HARRY left me at the door to her room.

When I entered, Jane turned from her place on the floor and pushed stray hair back from her forehead. "I was afraid you weren't coming."

"Harry and I got to talking—that's all."

She came over and caught hold of my hand. "But I am glad."

"I know." Shyly, I touched her hair. "It's getting longer."

"Is it?"

"I like it that way."

"I know you do."

"How?"

"Oh, I just know." She shrugged. "But I've got something to show you." She tugged at my hand. "It took me forever and now you have to see." Her thoughts were filled with great joy, so much in fact that I could not uncover her real purpose.

"Another dog?" I asked.

"Oh, damn dogs. This is much better."

Her workshop was a big converted closet in the left wall of the bedroom. Immediately, she clicked off the light and shut the door behind us. The darkness was thick and I was afraid to move for fear of bumping one of the many tables and benches.

Jane walked boldly forward. I heard her hands moving along a workbench at the farthest end of the room. Her thoughts were barely more distinct than before. I chose to desert her mind, preferring mystery.

"Okay. Turn on the light."

I did.

She held up a foot-high painted statue. It was a man. I had seen the mold before but this model had a thick black moustache under its nose.

"It's you, Tom."

"But I don't have a moustache."

"Oh, that's just so you don't look like everyone else. Do come and see."

I turned the statue around and around in my hands. "When did you ever see me without my clothes on?"

"I've seen myself."

"We're not exactly the same, you know."

"But close?"

I smiled reassuringly. "Close enough."

"Well, I'm going to take you to bed with me every night. That way when it's late and I can't sleep you'll always be there so I can talk to you. I used to just imagine your face and pretend you were really there, but this will be much better."

Back in the bedroom, Jane carefully laid the statue upon her pillow. I looked at it severely but saw that my miniature self appeared to be quite comfortable and at ease.

Jane sat on the edge of the bed and folded her hands in her lap. "I guess we have to talk now."

I took a chair across from her. "We should."

"NOW THAT LAST YEAR at school, did anything happen, something that made you afraid, that made you scream or cry, something you haven't told me before?"

"You always ask me that, Tom."

"Yes, but sometimes we remember things better the second or third time. That's why I want you to try and think. Think really, really hard and see if you don't remember."

"I'll try, Tom."

"Then do." I leaned forward, immediately probing her mind, but an instant later, she drew back and cried out sharply:

"No! I don't want. . . I can't—"

"Jane, do you want me to leave?"

"No, Tom, please—"

"Then lower your voice."

"Yes, Tom."

"I'm trying to help you, Jane. Can't you understand that?"

"I do understand. Really, I do."

"And you want me to help you?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then never yell at me. Always remember that whatever I do is for you. I want to help you, but what can I do if you won't cooperate? Now, let's talk about the fight with that girl." I had shifted disarmingly from the general to the specific. This fight was a very significant event in Jane's progression down the path to eventual breakdown.

"But I've told you everything."

"Then you must tell me again."

"I have to?"

"Yes."

While her voice sounded haltingly—it embarrassed her to talk about the fight—I probed the more articulate flow of images in her mind. I saw two young girls dressed in loose-fitting, school-uniform skirts and sweaters sprawled together on the floor of a dim corridor. They scratched and screamed and clawed and struck. Suddenly, one girl sprang to her feet, howling as a stream of blood rushed down her face. A nun appeared, pale circle of flesh against black robes. The other girl—Jane—leaped up, laughing deliriously in triumph. Stepping forward, the nun slapped her hard on the face.

I withdrew. There was nothing here I hadn't seen before. I asked, "What caused the fight?"

"I told you. What she called me."

"And what was that?"

"I told you. Whore."

"What's a whore, Jane?"

"A bad woman." Her mental image was that of a Western dancehall girl.

I sighed. "And that's what made you angry?"

"It wasn't what she said—it was the way she said it."

"Then when did she say it to you? We've never established that point."

"At school."

"But when exactly?"

"I—I don't remember."

"It was before the fight because, remember, you were walking down the hall and saw the girl and suddenly jumped on her. What she said must have happened first."

"I never told you that—about how I jumped her."

"You told me before."

"No, I didn't. I know I didn't—not ever."

"Well, I assumed—I mean, because you never said anything different." I treaded with particular caution. The last thing I wanted was for Jane to learn how I was using her, the deception.

"Well, it was that way. But she must have said it sometime or I wouldn't have been mad."

"Then try to remember when. Try."

This was one of our stumbling places but not the only one. Jane's memory, especially for that one year, when she was thirteen, the year of her breakdown, seemed as porous as fine lace, filled with many holes. Sometimes these blanks were not total, for she could often tell me what had occurred on a particular occasion but possessed no images to accompany and confirm her words. She said the girl had called her a whore, but where was the proof, the mental evidence?

Jane did try, but her thoughts soon drifted into the more positive terrain

of the fight and from there into the aftermath, the public beating, the humiliation of expulsion, the return home.

She started crying. I managed to ignore her sobs, thinking that this might prove helpful in opening her mind, but still there was nothing.

I drew back, sighing. "Then forget that. Let's talk about something else. What about the sleigh ride? Do you remember anything more about that?"

"No."

"Then tell me everything and I'll decide."

She was still crying but went bravely on: "It was Christmas day. Warm, not snowing, so Father said we should go sleigh riding like regular people. He wanted me to be happy because he knew how sad I was because the sisters said I couldn't go to school any more. There was a big horse. Father drove and Neil rode in the back with me. I remember being afraid but Father said don't worry because I'm old enough to know when a horse was all we had."

The images matched her words. I followed them carefully.

"So where did you go?"

"Way up, up into the snow."

"And what happened?"

"I—nothing happened."

"Jane, that's not true."

"Yes, it is."

"No."

"I—I got sick."

*You went nuts*, I felt like saying. The psychiatric records I had been permitted to read all said that Jane had been very quiet throughout the trip. At the end of the ride she had seemed asleep. Major McNaughton told Neil to wake her. When he touched her, Jane attacked. They fell together into a deep snowdrift. It had taken the Major and three other men

to pull her off. Then she had tried to attack her father. Finally subdued, she had been carried to her room. After that she wouldn't speak, eat, or respond to any stimuli. The catatonia lasted only three weeks but afterward Jane was not the same.

So the sleigh ride had been the very end for Jane. Yet she said she remembered nothing.

And maybe she was telling the truth.

I stood up.

She gazed at me desparately and grabbed at my leg. "Isn't there something else you want to ask me about?"

"Not now," I said. She was crying so hard it was difficult to understand a word she was trying to say. "Maybe tomorrow."

But why then? Everyday it was the same. Jane remained Jane.

**H**ARRY followed me into the room, standing silently, my shadow. Upon the narrow bed, Major McNaughton was the same as before.

Neil, from his place beside the bed, gazed at me through hooded, suspicious eyes. A pity he could not read my mind. I had asked for this meeting not to bury poor Neil but rather—like Gabriel—to resurrect him.

I spoke directly to the Major: "I can't do it."

Neil answered flatly, no emotion: "You've tried everything?"

"Of course."

"You can't read her mind?"

"There's nothing there." I continued to speak to the Major, wishing I could somehow penetrate his said, frozen features to discover the real man who lay beneath. But I had been warned again to stay clear of his mind. "If you even lean forward," Harry said. "I'll have to kill you."

"Nothing?" said Neil.

"She remembers nothing. Her memory is like a film with the key frames painted black."

"But you're sure you've tried?"

He was taunting me. "Yes, damn it. I've been here three months. Do you expect miracles?"

"Simply success. Since you have failed, you have also failed us."

"I just want to go home. You promised me. Now ask him. Tell him what I said."

Neil turned to his father and expressed my wish. The old man's right eyelid fell once, then rose, then fell.

Yes.

Neil turned to us, brisk as business: "Harry, take Burton down the mountain. See that he reaches his sister's home. If he ever mentions a word of this to anyone, kill him."

We left immediately. Since I had brought nothing into this world with me, it was not expected that I should bring anything out.

Harry didn't want to talk. Nobody did. I had failed them all. Their vindictive thoughts, like pollutant fumes, seemed to fill and choke the air.

Just as we were about to enter the car, I grabbed Harry's arm and said, "Wait. Harry, over there—what is it?"

"That?" He squinted into the deep shadows at the back of the garage. A strange, twisted object could vaguely be seen, sitting within a stack of broken and discarded things. "It's an old horse sleigh."

"It's not the same one?" I tugged imploringly at his arm. "You know—the one they rode that Christmas day?"

He thought, then said. "I suppose it's got to be. I don't think they would have got another."

"And the horse—is the horse here, too?"

"No. They got rid of the horses



years and years ago.”

“Well, we don’t really need him. We won’t have to actually go somewhere. Harry, I need your help.” I hurried toward the back. “Help me push it into the snow.”

“I thought you were going home,” he said.

“Not now. Christ, why didn’t I think of this before? Harry, it might work. It really might.”

He was beginning to catch on. He looked at me, at the sleigh, then back at me. He shook his head. “Burton, you’re crazy. Neil will kill you.”

“Are you afraid of Neil, Harry?”

“Who me?” He laughed. “Hell, no. So long as the Major keeps blinking that eye of his I ain’t afraid of nobody.”

“Then help me, Harry. Please.”

I ASSISTED Jane into the narrow back seat of the sleigh, then slid in beside her. Through the thin cushion a twisted spring poked me and I jumped. Jane seemed totally different away from the familiar surroundings of her room—a new and somehow alien person. She wore a huge, sagging overcoat—Harry’s—and was bundled beneath a heavy quilt. In her closets I had failed to find a stitch of outdoor clothing and couldn’t help wondering when was the last time Jane had sat beneath the afternoon sun. Harry had hidden the sleigh behind the garage. From here only the three high turrets of the palace could be seen, glittering like rainbow jewels against the pale firmament of the sky.

“Don’t look,” I said, turning her chin sharply away.

“But I think it’s pretty.”

“Not now. Now we’re going to play a game. Won’t that be more fun?”

“I suppose so, but what game, Tom?”

“A pretend game. We’re going to pretend it’s Christmas day again—just like the other time. We’re driving through the high snow in our sleigh. The horse is there, pulling. You can be Jane and I—I’ll be Neil. We’ll have to pretend that’s your father up front.”

She shook her head. “No, I don’t want to do that. I want to play another game.” She started to move away.

“Damn you, no.” I grabbed her arm. “You’ve got to do this, Jane.”

“But I hate them. I don’t want—”

“You’ve got to. Just pretend. That’s all I’m asking.”

“I have to?”

I nodded firmly. “Yes.”

“Then—” she relaxed in my grip “—I guess I will. But, when we’re done with this game, can’t we play something else? A better game?”

“Yes, of course we can. But this has to be first. Now just close your eyes. All right? And let’s pretend.”

For Jane, like any child, the worlds of pretense and reality were so closely and intricately interwoven that passage from one realm to the other was the work of but a moment. Soon I was able to pause and stare and enter her mind. In a flash, I could taste the bitter wind and feel the sway of the sleigh as it bumped across the white land. I was Neil. His face burned clearly in Jane’s mind. Major McNaughton was there, too, younger and heavier and filled with a bursting sense of life. The heavy, harsh hoofbeats of the trotting horse slapped rhythmically in all our ears.

Moving more deeply into Jane’s mind, I forgot the others. I saw the world reflected through here eyes, smelled the myriad wilderness odors. Neil leaned over and told me what a beautiful day it was. Father cracked

his whip against the horse's sweating rear. A stand of evergreens swept past. Overhead, the sky was dull and gray, yet the sun managed to shine through and the snow picked up these faint rays and sent them glimmering back into my eyes.

Yes, I saw Neil. He leaned over. And I saw Father. Turning back. The horses kicked, neighed, swayed, snorted. Sleigh rocked. I didn't notice. Couldn't see. Father and Thompson. Oh, God, it was happening again! No, no! When the girl said whore. Tear her apart. The noise, the noise, can't stand the noise. Neil. He hates me. Sees me as a . . . Neil and Father, horses and girl, hating. . . hating. . . *me*. No! Why me? No, not me. Oh, yes. *Stop*. Please. *Get out*. This noise. Can't think. *No! Leave me alone! No!*

I felt my panic building, then out of this confusing swirl, a single face emerged to dominate my thoughts. I was Neil. No, it was Father. No, it was Neil and Father combined, merged, their faces fused into a single mask containing both their features, a monstrous and distorted face, with flames burning at the edges as though the skull itself were on fire with its hatred of me.

Then I screamed.

No—I mean she screamed.

And I pulled back, rose out of my trance, and saw her turned around in the sleigh, her quilt tossed aside.

I grabbed her arm and jerked her back down. She spun, her hands lashed out, and both fists struck my unprotected face. I slapped her back. She went limp, though I hadn't hit her hard. I said, "Jane," and shook her. "Jane, are you all right?"

I probed her mind. Nothing. Inside, only a gaping abyss of silence and darkness.

I feared that she might have died.

Holding her, I called Harry.

"I'm here, Burton."

That wasn't Harry. I looked up. It was Neil.

"You," I whispered bitterly. "So that was why it happened." I could not conceal my anger. "Damn it, how could you do such a thing?"

Neil came forward and stared coldly down at his sister. "I thought you'd given up, Burton."

I laughed in his face. "I'll never give up."

He shook his head sadly. "You should—you truly should."

"I cured her," I said.

"You mean you killed her."

"I said cured. I will cure her."

He turned and jerked a hand. "Harry, go up to the palace. Get one of the doctors to come down here."

"Yes, sir."

I told Neil, "Jane doesn't need a doctor. She has me. I'll make her well again. Just you watch and see. Just you wait."

"Burton," he said, "Major McNaughton has very little time to wait for anything."

NEIL told his father, "Burton violated every instruction we gave him. He could very easily have driven Jane so far beyond the edge that we might never have been able to recover her. If you ask my opinion, I'd say that Burton deserves to die. Surely we owe him nothing for failing."

I saw no choice but to ignore Neil as if he was not present and speak directly to the Major. "I swear, sir, I was this close." I held up a hand and showed him two fingers pressed snugly together. "In another moment I know I would've broken through. Don't you see? Because I was making Jane relive a traumatic encounter, the

effect on her was the same as the original event. That was why she had to withdraw. If Neil hadn't come along when he did, I really believe she might have been cured right then and there."

"Even Burton knows that is a lie," Neil said.

"No, it isn't. I'm not trying to blame Neil." That was a lie. "I'm only trying to tell the whole truth. What I'm asking is for another chance. If I can make Jane stronger so she can bear the strain, I really think we'll succeed. I can't promise anything. But I do think it's worth a try. Why not, when everything else has failed?"

"Three hours ago," Neil said, "Burton was ready to leave our services for good. All he wanted then was to go home and to heck with Jane."

"I was wrong then. I thought it was hopeless but I was wrong. Now that Jane has seen the past, it will be so much easier. She has glimpsed the truth even if she may not remember it. The next time it will be easier for both of us to find it and the time after that, too, until finally we will learn exactly what it is we have been seeking and then Jane will be cured. Major McNaughton, I am offering you the chance to have your daughter back—cured and well and whole again."

"We've been offered that before," Neil said.

"But I'm telling you how I'm going to do it. We won't be able to stay here. I'm convinced Jane will never recover as long as she's imprisoned in this palace. I want her to be strong so that she can bear the strain of those horrible memories—whatever they are—and for that she must leave here."

"I'm afraid Major McNaughton cannot permit that."

"Then Jane will not be cured."

"We have nothing but your vague guesses to tell us that."

"I'm not guessing, damn it. What I'm saying is only common sense. Do you cure a typhoid victim by forcing him to drink contaminated water?"

"Jane does not have typhoid."

"She might as well, for all the help you're willing to give her." I turned as I spoke these last words and faced Major McNaughton directly. I wanted to meet his eyes, wanted to make some powerful plea through the medium of my own gaze, adopting the voiceless tone of his own silent language. "The fact is I've learned this much. Whatever happened to Jane is involved with you and your son. I read her thoughts and both of you are there. I don't know what it means. Whether something happened right then, or if something happened before, or if—"

"Nothing happened anytime." Neil spoke with more passion than I'd known he possessed.

"Then let me discover the truth."

This time even Neil didn't dare speak. The silence in the little room lingered, drifting toward seeming eternity, while the odd man appeared to consider the question. We watched his eye, waiting.

At last, with unexpected abruptness, Major McNaughton blinked. Just once.

Then—slowly, painfully—a second time.

He had said, *yes*.

I let out my breath, thought to thank him, decided I'd rather not, turned on a heel, marched past Harry, and left them, father and son and bodyguard, alone in that shuttered silent room of theirs.

**F**AR FROM US at the edge of the

shore Jane crouched down, her bare feet soaked by the surf, her slender hands buried in the wet sand. Harry, beside me on the blanket, rolled over, glared at me, and grunted. "Now what's she doing, Burton?"

"She's spotted a crab." My eyes were turned toward the book in front of me but of course I wasn't reading.

"What's she thinking about?"

"You know I can't tell you that."

"You can but you won't."

"Why should I? Jane has a right to some privacy, too." I intended the remark to be pointed but the sharp tip appeared to soar easily past Harry's dense head. On both sides of us a half-mile down the straight beach a pair of matching cyclone fences rose like interwoven sentries, stretching downward until both disappeared intact beneath the waves. One thing we certainly had here—apart from ourselves—was privacy. The bleached adobe house squatted in the middle of the dunes fifty yards behind. The location was someplace on the Pacific coast of Mexico. Harry would not tell me exactly where. The nearest settlement—a rotting village of perhaps five hundred—belonged to Major McNaughton; it was his property, the same as this beach. Nothing was what I had wanted when I demanded a vacation. Even here, far from the Rockies, the aura of the glass palace clung to us like flakes of wet snow. Those high transparent turrets gleamed in mirage from the tops of the nearby dunes.

"I heard her screaming again this morning," Harry said. "What was it this time? Still that sleigh ride stuff?"

"No, it was the school fight." I didn't want Harry listening to my sessions with Jane—a fact he clearly knew—but how could I prevent him in a four-room hut? "I've given up on

the sleigh ride for now."

"You should give up on the other thing, too. I was here when Jane came home from school. It meant nothing to her."

I shook my head to indicate he wasn't expected to understand. "On the inside it mattered."

That struck him as funny. He started laughing. Above the tight waistline of his trunks, the flesh visibly twitched and danced. Rolling over, he sat up, stuck the cold stem of his pipe between his teeth, and told me, "Burton, you're getting to be snappish like an old maid. I seen it occur with men in prison. It gets so you can't see the end any more. You wake up in the morning and think you've got an extra day instead of one less. How in the hell can a guy tell time when every day is just like every other one? That's your problem, Burton. You got to have a change in your daily ritual."

"Sure, Harry. What do you suggest? Should I go away for a week and be by myself?"

"Not enough. No, sir. Your best bet is to come with me now." He waved at the adobe house. "I told you it's the same as prison. You can't be a monk, Burton. Come with me and get relaxed."

"No thanks, Harry."

"You'll make yourself sick."

"That's not it, Harry." I was watching Jane. She waded tentatively forward into the water, ankle-deep. Leaning ahead, tilting, I probed her mind, a gentle tickle, and felt the splash of warm water on her legs.

Harry stood up. "Never say I didn't try to warn you."

"I won't."

"Because if you don't—" A braying voice cut him off. We both turned back to the house and saw a large

brown-skinned woman standing on the porch. She wore a white cotton dress and was waving wildly. She called out again—in Spanish. “Sure you don’t want to change your mind?” Harry asked me.

“No, Harry.”

“Then give me an hour.”

“I’ll make it two.”

“One will be plenty.”

I shrugged. Harry, turning, shouted to the woman in her own language. Whatever he said appeared to satisfy her. After a final wave, she fled into the house.

“One hour, Burton,” he said, moving away.

“Sure, Harry.”

“HOW’S THE WATER?” I asked Jane, who stood in the surf a few feet distant from the shoreline. The water ran up past her knees now.

“Oh, just cold.”

“Cold? Are you sure?” I dipped a tentative toe. “It seems warm enough to me.”

“But can’t I come in? I don’t think I like it here any more. I think—” she managed a bleak smile “—I think I’m getting afraid.”

I tried to smile reassuringly. “Sure, you can.” Stepping into the warm water, I waded forward, reaching out with a hand. “Here, I’ll catch you.”

I drew Jane toward the shore, but suddenly she was shaking. I lifted her quickly in my arms and, in a moment, we were treading on solid sand. Her own hands circled my neck as I carried her up the beach to the blanket Harry and I had shared. Laying her down near the center, I took a corner of the blanket and drew the fold over so that she was snugly covered.

Then I sat down beside her.

Her teeth chattered. “Where’s Harry?” she asked, struggling with the

words.

I tried to answer calmly. “Up at the house. He wanted to rest. That gives us an hour alone.”

“Was he tired?”

I shrugged. “Just bored.”

Between shivers, she effected a sharp giggle. “Tom, I am really cold. I think I’m going to shake myself to death.”

I laughed, too, and trying to provide some comfort, lay down beside her and drew the remaining segment of the blanket over me. We lay side-by-side with our bodies touching. Slowly, in jerking motions like a mechanism, she slid her arms around my waist and pulled me even nearer.

Curious, I peeped into her mind. What I found astonished me. Had I been younger, I could have blushed. I had never guessed Jane knew such things. “You’ve seen them. Harry and his girl.” It wasn’t a question.

“Only once.” She showed no surprise at the fact that I knew. By this time, I had let so many things slip that Jane seemed accustomed to my extraordinary powers of perception, but her voice was dull and her eyes were closed.

“Jane, is something wrong?” She seemed painfully lost and faraway. She had stopped shivering.

“I will,” she said, flatly. Then she stripped. Her dry swimsuit peeled off much too easily and she threw the fragments high and away from the blanket.

Naked, she pressed close to me.

“Jane,” I said, struggling to hesitate. “Are you sure this is what you want to do? It can hurt, you know.”

“No, I want to.”

“But you’re sure?”

“Damn it, yes. I have to be.”

AFTERWARD she drew away from me,

murmuring, "*Bueno.*"

"What was that?" I asked.

"I said *bueno.*"

"Why did you say that?"

She giggled sharply. "Because it is—it was."

"But I didn't know you knew Spanish."

"Do I?" She seemed confused.

I took hold of her chin, forcing her eyes to meet mine. "Did you hear them, too? Harry and the girl? Did you hear her say it and that's why you did?"

She twisted in my grasp. "Tom, what's wrong? What did I do wrong?"

"Answer me," I said. Now, perhaps more than ever, I needed to probe her mind but, trying, all I found was a chaotic and impenetrable maelstrom of thoughts, images, feelings, and fantasies. "I want to know."

"Yes," she said. "Yes, that must have been it." With a great heave, she broke my grip.

"I'm sorry," I said, pulling my hand away.

She shook her head and answered softly, "No, it's all right."

"It isn't all right," I said. "I was mean. I shouldn't have been. I'm sorry."

Then we just lay together. I threw the blanket away and allowed the sun to heat our bodies.

Soon, a door slammed. Glancing up, I saw Harry's girl leaving the hut. I told Jane.

Calmly, without undue haste, she rolled away from the blanket and, gaining her feet, drifted slowly across the sand in search of her suit.

Mine had remained closer at hand.

"YOU'RE SCREWING HER, aren't you?" asked Harry.

"What if I told you I wasn't?"

"Hell, I'd call you a liar."

"Then I don't think I'll answer your question at all." We moved through the darkness, with the pale sand running barely visible beneath our feet. The moon was only half-full tonight and barely bright enough to illuminate the highest angles of the nearby waves. Harry, who had asked me to come out, pulled on his pipe, a gleam of pink fire in the darkness. I shoved my hands deep in my pockets and followed him across the beach. We went in silence as far as the northern fence and, since this was the edge of Major McNaughton's private domain, here we paused.

"Careful not to touch," Harry warned, indicating the fence. "It's hot, you know."

"Yes, I saw a dog roast himself on it."

"That's a weird thing to watch, isn't it?"

"I don't suppose you could shut it off."

He said, "No, orders," as if that explained it all.

"Harry," I said, "do you always follow orders?"

That sparked his anger. "You know better than that, Burton, I'm my own man."

"Then why, back at the palace, did you rush to tell Neil about Jane and me? That was wrong, Harry. I trusted you then and yet you spoiled everything at the worst possible moment."

"Oh, crap, Burton." He chuckled softly, as if recalling some warm remembrance, and I smelled the fragrant odor of his pipe. "I've been wondering when you'd get around to that." There was a crunching noise, then I spotted him crouched at my feet. Knowing it was necessary, I dropped down beside him. Straight ahead, the world seemed limited to sand and sea, wind and darkness. It

might have been some distorted landscape of Mars. The faint light in the beachhouse window burned distantly, reaching our eyes like a star of the sixth magnitude. "I'm on to you, Burton," Harry suddenly said. "What happened back there happened because I wasn't wise. Now I've been enlightened and I can figure you out accordingly."

"I doubt that," I said. "Nothing's that simple."

"I know what you're after. Is that simple enough for you?"

"I've never tried to conceal that."

"You're after Jane," he said.

I laughed. "Don't draw conclusions, Harry. You weren't there. It was Jane's idea. It was her who wanted to screw, not me."

He started and I saw I had stung him. Jane was Harry's little girl, as pure and perfect as New England maple syrup; she was also mad as the hatter. Still, when he spoke, his voice came as flatly as ever. "What I want to know is whose idea it was to break off the sessions."

"They haven't been broken off."

"Don't say that, Burton. It's a fucking lie and you know it. I've got a sharp nose. It sniffs out crap. You can hide in the back bedroom all morning but I know damn well there's nothing doing in there. It doesn't take a mindreader to figure that one out."

I moved with especial caution now, like a head scout probing an enemy mindfield. With Harry, it was never possible to estimate where the explosives might be hidden. The pattern was too random, anarchic. "Jane needed a rest," I said. "I didn't want to push her. I don't think either one of us can risk a breakdown, Harry."

"Did she scare you?"

"I was scared. For her."

"Ah, horseshit. For yourself."

"Harry, you've said that twice and I didn't like it either time. What motive would I have for staying here if I was as selfish as you imply? I'm here because of Jane—only because of Jane."

He groaned. There was a pause, then finally he spoke slowly: "I may be stupid, Burton, but I'm no fool. I know what makes people tick, what makes them do what they do. The Major's going to die any damn day now, and when he goes somebody else is going to inherit the empire. One of exactly two people. One of these is Neil, who happens to hate my guts. If he takes over, I figure I'm dead in six months. The other choice is Jane. You can figure out where that makes me stand. I love the hell out of being alive and I don't believe in any heaven. Figure it, Burton. The only question is, if I want Jane, do I want her bad enough to take you, too?"

I tried to meet his eyes. Tilting maliciously forward, I openly probed his mind, but what I found was nothing I hadn't known before. "There's no other way, Harry."

"Then you won't try to leave? Never?"

"I can guarantee that."

"And you'll cure her?"

"If there's any way, I will."

"Then I guess we're partners." With a grunt, he stood up and moved suddenly away.

**A** WEEK LATER, it was Jane's birthday. She would be twenty-four.

We decided to wait for evening and, after a day on the beach, fled to the house at dusk and told Harry to turn the lights down low. Dinner was ready to be eaten and, after Harry cleared the plates, we remained clustered around the dining room table. Harry lit his pipe and used the same

match to ignite the lone candle I had placed on top of the white cake.

"Now you've got to make yourself a wish," he told Jane, leaning back. "That way, when you blow the candle out, whatever you want to happen will come true."

Jane opened her mouth and turned to me, wide-eyed. I nodded to show her it was all right. This painful childhood ritual seemed capable of exposing the child in all of us. "Does it always come true, Tom?" she asked. "When? Right away?"

"Soon enough. Very soon."

"And it always works," Harry added, with such sincerity I damn near believed him myself for the flash of a second. "You got to believe that, Jane."

"Oh, I do, Harry." Reassured, she smiled, then rocked back and shut her eyes. Briefly, her lips moved, whispering words to match the images I observed in her mind. She said, "Here goes," and let out a sudden, loud whosh. Harry cried out as the shockwave of her breath swept across the rippling surface of the cake and extinguished the candle with a pop.

Harry and I cheered and applauded.

But Jane was frowning. I asked her what was wrong. "It's not true yet. You said it always did."

"But not right away."

"But soon?"

"Sure, but we're not even done yet. You haven't opened your present."

"A present? For me?" This was a surprise even for Harry.

"Well, it's your birthday, isn't it?" I said.

"Yes, but—but this never happened before."

"It will now. Wait right here." I scurried to the bedroom we shared

and reached toward a high closet shelf. My fingers closed around the crinkly wrapping of the package. Removing it, I hurried to the dining room and set the gift on the table beside the cake.

"This is mine?" asked Jane, gazing at the gift as if it might be expected to move away.

"All yours."

Beaming with eager anticipation, she took the package in her hands and tore at the paper, snapping the thick ribbon easily between her fingers. Harry stood up, circled the table, and stood beyond her shoulder, peering down.

"Oh, no." Jane cried, when she was done. "Oh, Tom, you shouldn't have." She held up my gift so that everyone could see: a foot-high wax statue of a nude woman. The features, carefully and delicately molded and painted, were from my point of view the perfect physical resemblance of Jane.

"What the hell is that supposed to be?" said Harry.

"That is Jane." I said.

"Yes, it is." She nodded, convinced. Turning the statue in her hands, she inspected the most esoteric areas. "This is me the same as the other one is you, Tom."

"Now we can be together," I said.

"I think so, too." She agreed. "Yes, you're right." Drawing the statue close to her breast, she hugged it there. Then she began rocking, moving back and forth in her chair with the demeanor more of a child and its doll rather than a true mother and daughter.

I OPENED MY EYES to the distant light of the morning sun spreading through the bedroom window. Beside me in bed, Jane breathed evenly, her



turned-up features creased by a beatific smile.

Harry stood in the doorway, glowing fiercely. He held one hand on his chest, as if swearing a vow, and the other turned past his shoulder, as if he were pointing into the corridor behind. He said, "Burton," very softly and staggered forward. "Burton, god-damn it, look what you've done to me." I stayed deliberately out of his mind. He took two additional steps into the room.

Then he fell over on his face. When his hand dropped away from his chest, the blood spilled across the carpet.

A moment later Neil followed Harry into the room. Then Dave, his eyes darting suspiciously toward the corners, entered as well. He trained the revolver on me.

Neil pointed at his sister. "Wake her up."

"I won't," I said.

"Damn it, wake her!"

"What for? So she can see what you did to Harry?"

"Then get out of the bed," he said, coming forward, stepping carefully around poor Harry. "I'll wake her myself."

I held up a hand. "Stay where you are. I'll do it, you bastard. Jane," I said softly. "Jane, wake up. There's somebody here to see us."

**P**RECEDING DAVE into the small, dark bedroom, I discovered that nothing had changed in the months we had been away. But what, in this cloistered corner of the universe, ever could? Upon his narrow bed, Major McNaughton lay, stiffly coiled shrunken husk of once omnipotent imperial power. Even now, it seemed miraculous to me that his eyes retained such a spark of brightness, and for a mo-

ment I considered the possibility that some malevolent demon had invaded the old man's soul and taken possession of his optic nerves, so that it was this creature who caused the eye to blink with such certainty while plunging the rest of us mortals downward into the abyss of our suffering.

But I was simply being romantic. As rich and powerful as he was, Major McNaughton remained but a man.

High on his toes, Neil towered beside the bed, his lips pursed in eager anticipation of my incipient ruin.

"I assume you've already told him," I said, wanting to be the one who spoke first.

Neil nodded coldly. "Burton, it's my duty to inform you that my father feels your services are no longer needed here. In his opinion, you have served as a Judas in his own home. You have violated his daughter in her weakness and tempted his most trusted servant into willful treachery. My personal recommendation was that you should die in turn. My father demurred, but his refusal to approve my recommendation should not be interpreted to mean that you do not deserve death, only that the risk involved in stamping out such a petty form of life as yourself is greater than the actual reward involved. Consider yourself very fortunate. You will be returned unharmed to Denver. You are cautioned, however, never to disclose the facts of your visit here, for if you do, we will learn of it and the death sentence will be carried out."

"Is that all?" I asked.

He smiled smugly. "Do you wish more?"

"No," I said, and sprang forward. Reaching the head of the bed, I stood there, facing Neil, and looked down at the Major. "I've got something to say myself and I want to say it so that

the Major can hear. I want to tell him the whole truth before I leave here and I don't want any interference."

Behind me, I heard a dull click. The safety of Dave's revolver being released.

I stiffened. "Do you want me killed, Major? Tell them no or they'll do it."

The Major blinked once: *No*.

"All right, Dave, let him alone," Neil said, obedient to his father's wish. "He can talk. There's nothing he knows that can hurt us."

They seemed so incapable of understanding. I wasn't concerned with hurting or helping anyone. All I wanted was a chance to speak the truth as I felt it. So I tried: "Major, there are really only two things I have to tell you and neither will take much of your time." I spoke directly to the dying man, peering deeply into those bright demon eyes of his. "First, I have not cured your daughter in the way you asked me to and, second, I feel I have succeeded in ways far deeper than that. I feel I have accomplished exactly what I set out to do and I'm proud of that fact."

"What was it you set out to do?" Neil asked. "Rape my sister?"

"Major—" I ignored Neil "—if your daughter and I slept together—and we did—I'm not denying that—it was because we both wanted to. Not just me. Or her. But both of us. Nor does what we did together have much real bearing on what I have just told you. I succeeded with Jane because I helped her and the way I helped her was really very simple: I treated her like an equal human being. And maybe, by the end, we actually fell in love and if that's what strikes you as so dreadful, then I think you and your son ought to be the patients—not Jane or me—because you're the ones

who are sick and diseased. It wouldn't surprise me to find out that Jane was the healthiest person in this whole damn family."

Had I touched him with that? There was really no way of knowing, nothing short of probing his mind, and with Neil and Dave so close I couldn't get up the nerve to dare that.

I went on: "So I suppose what I'm saying is this, Major: your daughter is better now. I may not have cured her but I believe I've helped her and if the rest of you will just let her alone and stop prying and give her some sort of life of her own to lead I think she will be able to stay as she is now."

Then came the silence. I didn't want to quit, but what else was there to say? Meeting the Major's eyes, I continued to seek some reaction there. I was on the verge of gambling the works and risking a probe, when Neil said,

"All right, Burton. You can get out of here now."

I looked imploringly at Major McNaughton, but his eyes were focused quite unforgivingly at an empty portion of space beyond my shoulder. "All right," I said. "I shouldn't have expected anything more. If you people wanted Jane to be better, you wouldn't have hurt her in the first place. I'll go."

On my way out, with Neil's attention diverted toward his father. I finally threw that probe. What I found in the Major's mind both depressed and satisfied me.

The depression came from the fact that he wasn't even thinking about Jane. That hurt the most. He was simply seeing his son—seeing Neil hovering above him like a protective mother—but what satisfied me, what

struck me as most fitting, was that the poor Major was damn well aware of exactly what it was Neil represented.

Neil was all that truly remained to Major McNaughton in the whole blessed world.

This shapeless, spineless, soulless man—his only son—the totality of his imperial inheritance.

I could feel his horror at this fact.

I came very close to feeling sorry for him.

But it was too damn late for that. What point could be served by my pity? It was too late for that, and for everything.

In the corridor, I asked Dave a question: "If I was to try to go to Jane's room now to see her, would you kill me first?"

"Major McNaughton says he doesn't want you shot."

"But would you do it if I tried that? Tried what I said?"

"You wouldn't try that, would you?"

"Yes, I would. In fact, I'm going to do it right now—whether you shoot or not."

I let him consider the question. At last, nodding decisively, he said, "Okay, I won't shoot. Not unless you do something stupid that gives me no choice. Don't try reading my mind, either, because Harry told me all about that. The way I see it, nobody told me not to let you see Jane and somebody did say I shouldn't kill you. So go."

"Thanks, Dave."

"Oh, shit on that. Harry was the best friend I ever had and you got him killed. I pulled the goddamn trigger but you were the guy who did the real killing. I never liked you, Burton. In the beginning I didn't like you and now I like you even less than I did then."

"That's your privilege, Dave." I was already moving down the corridor, wishing to reach Jane's room before Neil left his father.

"What you are is nothing but a fucking freak of nature," Dave said.

I wasted several more moments convincing Dave to stay outside and let me see Jane alone. Finally, knocking twice and receiving no reply, I hurried into the room.

Jane lay upon the bed, dressed in casual shirt and slacks, with her spine and long hair turned toward me.

"Jane," I said softly. "I'm here—it's Tom."

"Oh, Tom." She turned with a gorgeous smile, revealing a tear-stained face. "I didn't think—I never thought you'd come."

"I had to."

"But they—they let you?"

"The hell with them. From now on, Jane, it's just you. Remember that."

"And you, too, Tom?"

I shook my head. "No, I have to go."

"But look!" She thrust out both hands, showing me what she held tightly clenched within them. It was our dolls—mine and hers—molded together with a torch, fused so that the two had become a single entity. Her legs extended from my torso, and her face was part of mine, and her breasts rose from my chest, and my legs were her legs, and our arms were the same.

I stepped back, horrified by the sight. "No, Jane," I said weakly. "Please—don't."

Naturally, my reaction puzzled her, so she looked at me. Then she looked at the fused dolls. Then at me. The dolls again.

Me: the dolls: me.

Then a new expression spread across her face. The smile was swal-

lowed up and what appeared instead reflected a fusion of fear and horror, confusion and dread, and—what was far worse—enlightenment.

I must have looked very much the same, for all at once, in spite of all precautions, conscious and unconscious, I knew the truth.

And so did Jane.

"No," I said. "No, Jane, it's not like that at all."

She screamed and as she did her mind seemed to rush forward, clasp- ing mine in a cold embrace. Memories—her memories—spread through my mind like locusts de- scending upon a ripe field. I saw the fight in the school, the sleigh ride, my own arrival at the palace, and much, much more.

I saw these events through Jane's eyes and through the minds of those others present.

Not only was I reading her mind— she was reading theirs.

When I saw this, I shouted at her. I told her to stop what she was doing, to go away, run away, to get out of this room.

But if she heard me, I never knew. Jane swept through the once dark corridors of her own memory, bearing true illumination, coming finally to understand the real significance of each separate event, not only what she had seen and smelled and heard at the time, but also what she had thought—and what everyone else had thought as well.

In other words, Jane came to see that she had never been less than sane: wonderfully and fully and totally normal.

It was just that she could read minds—all minds.

Her thoughts, in fact, rose so pow- erfully that I was drowned beneath them. I lost all conscious association

with the outside world and Jane's thoughts became my own. Tom Bur- ton, as an individual, ceased for a moment to exist.

Finally finished, she let me go. I sagged to the floor and held my head. At last, I was able to lift my eyes. Jane stood over me, gazing re- lentlessly down. I knew where her thoughts must lie.

"Don't," I murmured.

She drew back and laughed. "It never meant anything to you."

"I didn't want. . . never wanted this to be—"

"You liar. You knew all the time. You must have."

"No, I never did—"

"I saw it." Even her voice had changed. *Jane? Was this you?* "It was there in your mind. You knew what was wrong with me, Tom, what I had seen, but you wouldn't tell."

"No, Jane I swear. I wasn't that way at all."

"So you stopped the sessions. When you knew, the cure was out the window. You never wanted that. As long as I lived in ignorance, I posed no threat to your control. You ma- nipulated me, Tom, for your own pur- poses. You pried and spied and peeped and told me nothing. And —" her laugh was terrible "—you must have realized something else: I'm stronger than you, Tom. Next to me, your talent is just a kid's game. I can hear them all." She tilted for- ward, hooding her eyes. "Dave—I can hear him in the corridor. He's hungry and horny but not much else. Neil is probing around, thinking you're gone. And father—well, he's a special case, an odd case. He's still thinking the same thing he was in the sleigh that day. He's wondering if there's some way he can—"

"Stop!" I stood up. "Jane, I didn't

know any of that." Moving cautiously forward, I reached out for her hands. She let me have them. "Yes, I knew. But never consciously—I swear that—never. I must have guessed long before but that day on the beach when you imitated Harry's mistress, then I knew for sure. I knew but I couldn't bring myself to tell you, not even tell myself. I wasn't deliberately concealing it. I would have told you later."

"Liar. Harry knew about you. He guessed what you were up to."

"No. Harry was wrong—you're wrong. Listen, I would have told you, but you have no idea what it is like. It should bring people closer. You can see inside them, know who they really are, but, Jane, it's ugly. It's terrible. You don't want to know what people are like inside. They—they're awful."

"I already know that—I've seen you." She jerked her hands away and turned her back.

I reached for her shoulders. "Jane, listen, please—"

Then something seemed to hit me on the back of the neck and I reeled. It was the last memory I was permitted until I woke in the back seat of the car. We were going downhill. Bright green summer trees rocked and swayed by the roadside.

Dave, in the front, turned at my stirring: "So Jane got cured."

"Yes."

"Poor fucking Harry." He laughed philosophically. "He played his cards too fast."

"I guess so."

"How the hell did you ever do it?"

"It wasn't me. Jane did it herself."

"When she told me," he said, "I ran and got the Major. He would have let you stay and screw her all week but Jane came down herself and said she wanted you out. What the

hell happened? I always liked that girl but that's lousy gratitude."

"Well, I suppose it depends."

"On what?"

"On your point of view, I guess."

THAT WASN'T the end of it, though, for the truth, no matter how submerged, continued to endure in my head and heart. The way I saw it, I loved Jane and, once she was made to understand, she would love me, too, and then everything would be perfect. Nothing could deflect me from this view, for it had to be right and proper. We were the only ones—how else could we survive?

So I spent my summers cruising the back dirt country roads, seeking in the secluded byways of the high Rockies a vanished memory which grew fainter and fainter as it receded into the past.

I paused in front of isolate ranch-houses. I confronted solitary shepherders. I spoke with lone miners and dared to approach isolated hermits.

In all cases. I spoke the same rote phrases: "Do you know of a family named McNaughton? I believe they live somewhere nearby. If you've seen their house, you will not have forgotten it. It's big—huge as an emperor's palace—and made all of glass."

But they all said the same, no, never, and shook their heads sadly at this apparition of a crazy man.

Their thoughts merely confirmed their words.

And so I drove on. On and on and on. Beating wearily against the current, battling its inexorable and natural strength. Sisyphus in a late model Ford.

Till, at last, surrendering briefly, I returned home. There I sat and stared at the smooth round pink ball of wax I had found in my coat pocket the day of

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my exile.

What did it mean? Round and smooth as a ripe apple. Was this Jane and I? All that was left? Fully and finally fused so that nothing remained?

Why, oh why, did she send me away?

Her powers were so vast. When I read minds, I must stop and stare and focus. But not Jane. Throughout her life, the stray thoughts of passing strangers invaded her person quite unaware.

No wonder, since adolescence, she had thought herself mad. No wonder, seeing her father and brother truly for the first time, she had screamed and raved and ranted.

But now this power was consciously hers. What would she do with it? What monstrous force had I let loose on the world? There was no way of telling that, either.

Do I love Jane? Or is it merely that I have need of her strength?

And so, to discover this fact, I must continue my quest. I stop my car at the end of narrow dirt roads and march across the blighted land. I seek

Jane in the forests and streams, the rocks and the caves, I climb the highest mountains and cross the deepest deserts.

Eventually, autumn falls across the land as surely as the Earth does turn. Then my time of seeking is ended and it is back to the city—bright lights and glistening towers—back to the faces ceaselessly passing me by.

And the times still come when I feel I must peek and enter their hollow cores.

And each time, when I am done; I must face their sacred secrets head-on and meet their eyes. When I do, something happens. Their faces melt. They merge and flow and fuse. They become as one.

Yet I am not afraid. I willingly stand and meet my fate. Spring will come, freeing the land, and then I will seek.

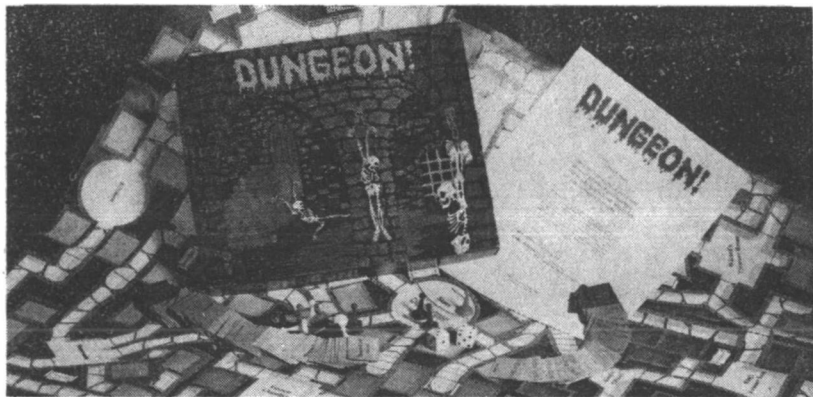
Only one thing really bothers me. Jane. How does she feel? I must know.

What if she feels about me the way I feel about you?

—GORDON EKLUND  
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# IT'S HARD TO GET INTO COLLEGE, NOWADAYS

GRANIA DAVIS

*Grania Davis made her debut in these pages with "To Whom It May Concern . . ." (October, 1975). This time she has a future-fable about ethnic roots, salvation, illumination and education, not necessarily in that order . . .*

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

**T**HE JUICE SUPERVISOR hooked up the electrodes and pulled the switch.

*And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with the fire and the bush was not consumed.*

Joel stretched his arms upward in ecstasy. Here was the sign he had been praying for ever since he had been driven out of Egypt. Joel, found in the bullrushes by the sister of Pharoah, Joel, conqueror of Ethiopia, and priest of the One God.

But now *the one* was despised. The squabbling, animal-headed idols had regained their power. And Joel was living in exile among the volcano worshipping shepherds of Midian. He spat on the hard, sandy earth.

But here was the sign! The sign that The One was still powerful and had chosen *him* to spread the true faith.

Joel fell down on his knees and worshipped the burning bush.

"YOUR TIME IS UP! Your time is up! Please detach the Juicer. Your time is up!"

Joel came to with a start. The beeper in his pocket was issuing shrill orders, "Your time is up! Please detach the Juicer. Your time is up!"

The vision of the burning bush faded, but the ecstatic feeling remained. Languidly he detached the wires from the seven hook-up points of the Juicer—scalp, forehead, throat, chest, abdomen, groin, and the base of his spine.

Blissfully, he wandered down the stairs and hallways, back to his dorm. It had been a great explore. A beautifully clear evocation of his collective unconscious.

Joel was lucky. His coll-unc was clearly Mosaic. People with mixed backgrounds had a more difficult time finding their proper coll-unc. His friend John, for example, *insisted* that his ancestors were purely Nordic. Every week he prayed for a vision of Valhalla, but with no luck. Finally he gave up and let the Juicer give him a vision. Afterward, he confided some confused gibberish to Joel, about a Laplandish Shaman, divining fortunes from reindeer dung. John had never been the same after that.



Joel lay down on his bunk to relax and meditate, as the Juice-Supervisor always recommended after an explore.

Gradually his mind wandered. To Yoko, the most beautiful girl in his class, with her long, thick black hair, large slanted eyes and flower-like body. Her coll-unc was pure Shinto, and she was somewhat affected about it, always bowing and giggling. But when he thought about that velvety skin, those tiny breasts. . . Joel looked up at the timer. Today was his Sabbath so he didn't have to work. He could visit the Squeezer before supper!

"*US-CAN SEXUAL SIMULATOR*," said the sign on the doorway. But everyone called it the Squeezer, for short. There was a long line, as usual. Joel hoped that his desire for Yoko wouldn't fade before he got his turn.

There was no hope that he would ever be allowed to mate with her, no, their coll-uncs were too different. Their offspring might be too confusing for the Juicer.

The Family-Supervisors would probably try to mate him to Naomi, a large, hairy girl, with an endless series of complaints and a Mosaic coll-unc. What bad luck!

But he'd better stop thinking about Naomi. It was Yoko's image that he wanted to see and feel when he entered the moist, gripping Squeezer.

He wondered if any of the other guys were meditating on Yoko. There were five fellows ahead of him now. They'd better hurry or he'd be late for supper.

The guy inside the squeezer had been taking an awful long time and was bellowing as though he was having a cosmic orgasm. He must be really enjoying himself; he was actually shrieking!

Suddenly the Squeeze Supervisor



came running in with a frightened look.

"Help me get him out!" he cried to the guys in the line, "something has shorted in there!"

They opened the curtains. It was an ugly sight. The Squeezer had squeezed *much* too hard. The Supervisor turned off the mechanism, and they managed to extricate most of him. He was still alive.

The orderlies carried him away, and the Squeezer was Closed For Repairs. Feeling disturbed and frustrated, Joel took the elevator to the diner.

There was a long line, as usual. The beepers in everyone's pockets were giving the evening announcements.

*"Will the workers in squad 5m please report to room 6j, directly after morning meditation, to receive your new assignments. At the flicker this week, there will be a musical program on the life of Mary Baker Eddy. Will those who wish to sign up for the annual initiation trials please report to the clinic lobby directly after class."*

Joel perked up his ears. The annual initiation trials! His only hope of getting out of the dreary world of the dorms, with its work-squads, long lines, arranged matings and killing monotony.

His only hope of rising above his dorm-class origins and going to *college*, where a clever, hard-working guy could learn to be a Supervisor, a Manager or a Guide.

Or even one of the Juice-Elders, those invisible figures who know the blessed secret of the Juicer. Joel had never seen a Juice-Elder. Nobody he knew had ever seen one, but he'd heard about them in Religious History Class. His teacher had repeated the story often enough.

After the hideous upheavals that

followed the great flu epidemic of 2047, humanity seemed ready to fall into the abyss of anarchy and despair.

Yet even during this period of violence, hunger and mob-rule, a loose, underground network of people who were versed in both the sciences and the occult lore of the past, continued the search for enlightenment.

A search which culminated in the discovery of the Juicer, that mysterious rearrangement of living, pulsing tissue.

Housed in a giant dome in the center of the former city of Newark, the Juicer, through its myriad outlets, could give a profound experience of mystical ecstasy to the dullest member of the most monotonous work-squad. An experience which was so desirable in this post-flu age, that society was rebuilt, to provide maximum juice to the citizens of US-Can.

A visit to the Juicer once a week, during the Sabbath, might satisfy most dorm-class youths, but not Joel! He wanted more out of life.

He straightened his bony back, as 5,000 years of determined Mosaic ancestry shone in the dark eyes that peered near-sightedly over his high, thin, acne-covered nose.

Joel was going to pass the Initiation Trials. Joel was going to go to college!

His stomach growled as the line crawled slowly towards the steamer.

Of course, it wasn't going to be easy. The children of the private classes always won most of the initiation trials. Why not? With their superior schooling, more frequent access to the Juicer, and well-matched guides, they had a much better chance.

If you came from the dorm-class, you are assigned to a guide from the clinic. No attempt was ever made to match guide and student. You just

had to hope for the best.

His poor mother, when she was a girl, had a very rough time. Her guide was a master of Yoga. He tried to teach her to stand on her head and cleanse her intestines by sucking rags up her anus. With her hemorrhoids, she failed, of course. And spent the rest of her life in the Woman's Dorm of Baltimore, slicing carrots, turnips and other root vegetables.

He shifted his feet restlessly as he became aware of an uncomfortable engorgement in his groin. Squeeze! He thought he had outgrown that Oedipus business years ago. The dreadfully frustrating experience today at the Squeezer must have evoked the childish response. He hoped they'd fix it soon; self-gratification was so ungratifying!

He finally reached the steamer, and a good thing, too. It was almost time for evening meditation. He paid for his tray of mashed beans and vegetable soup, and sat down near the viewer which had a program on the life of St. John Kennedius.

Rufus, a red-headed guy with a Celtic coll-unc, was grumbling to everyone about the broken Squeezer and the unfair initiations. He was trying to organize a stop-work but no one would listen. If you didn't work, you didn't get your turn at the Juicer. Everyone in the dorm knew that.

Evening meditation was dull, as usual, and Joel was glad to take off his coveralls and crawl into his bunk. An explore always exhausted him, and he wanted to be in good shape tomorrow, when the trials began.

The next day, at class, everything was in an uproar. The teacher, an aloof, private-class woman, droned on dully about initiation rites in Patagonia, but no one listened. Not one of the 84 students had a Patago-

nian coll-unc, and they were all wrapped up in their own, forthcoming trial.

Yoko giggled and blushed, each time the teacher said the magic word, "initiation." Rufus was trying to organize a protest gang-rape of the teacher, if they didn't fix the Squeezer soon. Naomi, sitting near Joel, perspired and complained to a girl-friend about menstrual cramps.

After class, they marched apprehensively over to the clinic. The first stage of the trial was the qualifying exam, which would occur this afternoon.

Those few who passed would receive a guide. If you came from the private-class, your parents would pay for a guide, carefully matched to your coll-unc. If you had a dorm-class background, one of the left-over guides would be assigned to you, at random, by the Clinic Supervisor.

*Please take a seat and remain silent. Please take a seat and remain silent. Please take a seat and remain silent,* said the speaker in the wall.

Joel and his classmates all took seats at one end of the cavernous, re-cyc tiled room. Naomi pushed her way in and sat down next to him.

"I nearly broke my ankle on that crack in the sidewalk," she said. "Did you notice how I nearly fell? I was feeling dizzy from today's lunch." She belched. "It gave me terrible indigestion."

"Shhh," replied Joel, primly indicating the speaker on the wall.

"Oh squeeze that speaker! I want to tell you about the fight I had with my dorm-supervisor . . ."

The room was filling up with kids from other dorms, all dressed in the same blue coveralls. The seats along one wall were reserved for the private-class kids and their tutors.

Naomi was leaning heavily against him, whispering wetly, "Us Mosaics *always* stick together. I'll show you my paper if you'll show me yours."

Squeeze, that was tempting. Naomi was easily the smartest kid in the class. But what if they got caught?

The Exam Supervisor was passing out the US-Can testing units now. Small machines with earplugs, and a sheaf of re-cyc paper to punch out the answers.

They all settled down and got to work as the tester began:

I. The founder of Christianity was,  
A. Julius Caesar B. Madame Blavatsky  
C. Jesus of Nazareth D. Bisop Pike.

That was pretty easy.

II. The Buddha's real name was, A. Mahatma Gandhi  
B. *Will the workers in squad 6j please report to room 63h for your new assignment*  
D. Bishop Pike

Squeeze! The tester was getting interference from his beeper!

The Test Supervisor was gone and the tester was already going on to the next question.

With a helpless feeling, he glanced over at Naomi's paper. There, now he had done it. Now he owed her an obligation. When the mate-request forms were filled out, he'd *have* to include her name.

IV. The unusual thing about Patagonian initiation rites is . . .

Squeeze! He should have listened to today's lecture. Well, no use, better copy that one from Naomi, too.

Four hours later, exhausted and drained, they left the testing area. They wouldn't know for a week who had qualified and who had not. In the meantime, life continued as usual. The only excitement was that they fixed the Squeezer, but the lines were so long that Joel had to resort to self-

gratification, after all.

Seven days later, Joel awoke with a surge of energy. Today the test list would be posted on the Clinic wall. Joel pulled on his coveralls and raced over. There was an enormous crowd of students milling around, but he shoved his way through.

There was Naomi's name. Way up near the top of the list, and Yes, Yes! There was his name, down near the bottom. He had passed the qualifying exam!

Yoko's name was not on the list, neither was Rufus'. They had failed and would spend the rest of their lives in the dorm.

Now Joel's life changed. He no longer studied and worked with his dorm mates. He was a candidate for initiation, ready to be assigned to his guide.

"I'LL *never* make it," wailed Naomi. She had just learned that her guide was the Mother Superior in a silent order of Carmelite Nuns. The object of her trial was to develop stigmata, with little advertisements for US-Can tomato soup.

Poor Naomi. Joel gloated sympathetically. With her big mouth, she'd *never* make it in a silent order of nuns. If he passed his trial and she failed, they could never be mated. Too bad.

*If* he passed his trial.

Later that day, he was told to report to clinic room 7h. He took the elevator to the 7th floor, found room h, and went inside.

It looked spooky. The walls were covered with re-cyc ply, to resemble an old shack. Dark, dirty, with a simulated moldy odor. Strings of drying herbs and meat were hanging from the rafters. There was a low cot, some crude clay vessels and a large

drum.

In the dim, smoky light, he saw a small wizened man, sitting in a corner chopping vegetables.

"I'm Don Alejandro," cackled the old man. "What do you want?"

"Please, sir," stammered Joel, "you've been assigned as my guide."

"So you want to learn the Indian ways?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

The old man hummed a little tune and worked on his vegetables for a while as though he had forgotten Joel's presence.

Suddenly he looked up and his eyes glowed strangely. "Find your carrot!" he barked.

"My what?"

"Your carrot. Out of all of these vegetables that I'm preparing for my supper, one is destined to be yours. It is a carrot. If you can find the carrot which is yours, then you will be ready to learn the Indian way."

"But I already passed the qualifying exam."

The old man ignored him and continued slicing.

Feeling foolish, Joel went over and began to poke through a small bunch of carrots. They all seemed the same to him. Long, orange, with a US-Can label near the tip.

He sniffed, handled and looked at them. This was crazy! After all his work, all his hopes, they had assigned him to a senile old man!

He began to sweat and to paw feverishly among the carrots, hoping to find some distinguishing mark that would set his carrot apart.

It was no use. Time passed. Don Alejandro had cooked and eaten his supper, and gave some of the leftovers to Joel who was sat staring numbly at the bunch of carrots before him.

Absently, Joel spooned up the veg-

etable stew. It tasted pretty good. He had never eaten home-cooked food before. That was for the private-classes.

Suddenly, one of the carrots rose slowly off the ground and began to move towards him. It puffed and swelled and began to do a stately, rhythmic dance. Back and forth, back and forth. In and out, in and out. Joel wondered if the stew had been drugged.

The carrot was turning into a giant penis!

Joel grabbed it as two thoughts leaped into his mind. One, he *had* to visit the Squeezer soon, and two, he had found *his* carrot!

Joyously he showed it to Don Alejandro, who was sorting herbs. The old man smiled and pinched his cheek. "You're a good boy," he said. "That carrot is now your carrot of power. You must eat it and grow strong."

"Eat it? Eat *that* carrot?" Joel was filled with anxiety. But Don Alejandro insisted, so he did. It was delicious.

"That old man is nuts," fumed Joel as he left for the day. He wished he had someone to talk to, even Naomi, but she had taken a vow of silence, and when he saw her leave the clinic, her mouth was taped shut. It wouldn't be fair to tempt her.

Some of the private-class kids were also leaving for the day. Joel watched them enviously as they walked, arm in arm with their well-matched guides, having interesting, learned discussions. How easy it must be for them.

He hurried back to his dorm and fell into a restless sleep, and had a wet-dream about his mother eating carrots.

When he woke up, he was upset to find that his beeper wasn't working.

He was required, by law, to carry a functioning beeper at all times, so he'd have to get it repaired. That would cost a fortune, probably use all of the credits that he had managed to save this year.

He was still in a lousy mood about the beeper when he reached the clinic building, and had no desire to spend the day with a drunken Indian.

Room 7h was the same mildewed mess as before. If only he could have a Mosaic guide who would teach him Torah, and Bar Mitzvah him in a clean, lofty synagogue. But no such luck if you came from the dorms.

Don Alejandro was quietly fingering his drum. "Ah," he smiled, "so you have returned to learn the Indian way."

Joel shrugged his shoulders peevishly.

Suddenly the old man whooped with energy and somersaulted out the door. Reluctantly, Joel followed.

The old man continued somersaulting out the building and across the mall to Us-Can park. Joel walked behind, feeling embarrassed. What if someone saw them together? A man his age should *walk!*

Joel realized that he was expected to pay the park admission for both of them from his meager pocket credits.

US-Can park was a small enclave of organic trees, grasses and shrubs. Live birds sometimes visited there. It was intended to provide the residents of the overbuilt sector with refreshing contact with nature. It was not much patronized.

When they reached the center of the park, Don Alejandro stood up. The exertion seemed not to affect him, at all. He began burbling happily to the trees and shrubs.

"This little flower wishes to speak to you," he told Joel.

"Huh?"

"Yes, the little flower has a secret to tell you. Come and talk to her. Compliment her and perhaps she will reveal her secret."

Joel snorted and stayed put.

"Ah," sighed Don Alejandro, "perhaps I should return to my drum."

It was a thinly veiled threat. If Joel didn't cooperate with the guide, provided by the state, then he could go back to his dorm and rot.

Reluctantly he walked over to the flower and knelt down. "Hello, flower," he grunted.

The flower didn't reply.

"You must speak to her with sincerity. You must compliment her!" called Don Alejandro, who had retired to a bench and was engaged in heated discussion with a pigeon.

"Hello, flower. What's new?" said Joel.

The flower was silent.

"You're looking real nice today, flower," said Joel. "I like your petals. Nice and yellow. Nice green leaves. What do you do all day? I live over in the dorm. I hate it. That's why I have to pass my initiation. But, to tell you the truth, I think the old man is kind of crazy . . ."

Joel was really getting into it now, pouring all of his troubles into the sympathetic ears of the flower. Don Alejandro and the pigeon were flying around in some nearby trees.

"Say," continued Joel, "you remind me of a friend of mine. Her name is Yoko."

Suddenly the flower smiled. Joel wasn't sure how, with no mouth or anything, but it was a real nice smile and she began to speak, in a windy, whispering voice.

"Go into the desert. Find the rock with the navel in the center. Inside

you will find something green, shiny and good, that is the goal of your initiation . . .”

The flower's smile and voice faded and she became, once more, a flower.

“Don Alejandro! Don Alejandro!” cried Joel to the old man who was perched with the pigeon in the branches of a tall pine tree.

Don Alejandro came sailing down and landed beside him. The pigeon, angered by the interruption, flew down and defecated on Joel's coveralls.

Excitedly, Joel repeated the flower's message.

“So,” cackled the old man, “you must go to the desert to learn the Indian ways. Return to me, tomorrow.”

BEHIND THE CLINIC BUILDING, several simul-environments were set up for the initiation trials. There was a high mountain peak environment, a tropical island, underground caves, a dark forest and others.

Joel walked and Don Alejandro bounced to simul-environment 4B, The Desert Experience. It was well done. Like another world, hot, sandy and dry with a blazing sun. Low hills flanked the horizon and there were scrubby grasses and countless rocks.

He wondered how the feeling of vast distance had been achieved and how he would ever find the rock with the navel. He turned to ask Don Alejandro some questions, but the old man had disappeared. Joel was alone in a huge, hot desert with no food or water.

He was lost. The exit sign had completely disappeared.

His coveralls felt stifling and he already felt thirsty. He hoped Don Alejandro would return soon. In the meantime, he decided to check a few nearby rocks to see if he could find

the one with the navel.

But he had no luck. Squeeze, it was hot! He stumbled around in the soft sand, examining rock after rock, but they were all smooth.

When he had desert experiences with the Juicer, the air was always balmy and there were oases, and pebbles didn't keep getting into his shoes.

With great anxiety, he suddenly realized that this desert *did* resemble the Mosaic vision that he often saw with the Juicer. What if he ran into a burning bush? What if someone tried to hand him the Ten Commandments?

Then he would fail his trial for sure! The rules explicitly stated that if you accepted the wrong vision during your trial, you'd get an automatic *F*.

If the Ten Commandments appeared, he'd pretend he didn't notice.

He continued to lurch around, hot and thirsty, examining rocks. Behind one, he found a pair of clean, white human skeletons. Probably dorm-class kids who had failed their trials the hard way. There were vultures perched nearby. My god, the place was dangerous!

Joel wondered if he'd ever see his dorm again.

He heard a crunching sound. Something was sneaking up behind him. Maybe a mountain lion. He whirled around and saw a very blond, very naked, very suntanned youth, with a skirt of rotting lizards covering his genitals.

“Do you have any water?” the youth croaked, feverishly.

“No, sorry. Are you doing your trial?” asked Joel.

“Yeah,” gasped the other, sitting weakly in the sand. “I've been out in this bloody desert for days now. My guide is an Australian Aborigine, and

he's making me do some bloody, primitive endurance trial."

"Are you having any luck?"

"No. None. I'm supposed to find a magic lizard with a pitcher of orange juice between its jaws, but my collunc is so strongly Episcopalian that all I see is Bishop Pike. He pops up, behind rocks and bushes, tempting me to take a sip of holy water. But if I do, then I'll fail the initiation."

"Squeeze, that's too bad," replied Joel, sympathetically.

"You haven't seen a lizard with a pitcher of orange juice?" he asked, pathetically.

"No, have you seen a rock with a navel?"

"No."

The two boys fell silent. They were too thirsty for chit-chat.

They wished each other luck and parted. Joel was feeling a lot of anxiety. How long would Don Alejandro leave him in this juice-forsaken place? How would he ever find that rock?

What if the Mosaic god appeared with the Ten Commandments *and* a glass of ice-water? Would he have the strength to refuse?

There was a big rock up ahead. He went to examine it. There seemed to be a cave in the side. A cave! Was this the magic navel?

He started to crawl inside, but to his horror, he saw that it was crawling with scorpions. Hundreds of them. Blech!

He started to stomp on them, step on them, kill them. Praying that none would get in his shoes. Hoping he wouldn't miss any of them. They scuttled around and flicked their tails, angrily.

Scorpion corpses littered the entrance to the cave. The last one twitched and died. Joel shuddered with sun-blinded horror, and fearfully

entered the cave.

The narrow tunnel was short and opened into a small chamber. A man was sitting quietly with a candle and a book. Was it Don Alejandro? No, he was wearing the robes of an Episcopalian minister.

"Hello," the man smiled, "I'm Bishop Pike. Can I offer you a sip of Holy Water?"

"You've got the wrong guy," said Joel, his head swimming with disappointment.

"I see," said Pike in a kindly voice. "Say, have you seen a sunburned lad with a lizard shirt?"

"Yes," called Joel, backing out of the tunnel, "but I don't know which way he went."

He was back out in the blazing sun. What an unpleasant incident. He hoped he hadn't been rude to the Bishop.

Three days later, he could no longer walk. He could only crawl from rock to rock, hoping in vain to find the right one. Was Don Alejandro going to leave him out here to die?

Joel's mind whirled. He didn't know.

A hawk flew down close to his head. "Die!" it screamed, shrilly, "Die!"

Joel curled up into a foetal ball and moaned. The hawk laughed and turned into a pigeon and defecated on his head.

Without any hesitation, Joel scooped up the slimy stuff and ate it. It didn't taste too bad. That pigeon sure could hold a grudge.

It had showed up in every conceivable form over the last three days. As a rattle-snake, a coyote, a mirage. Actually, it was probably the bird-do that was keeping him alive.

Joel crawled painfully over to the



next rock.

"Hello, young man," said the kindly Episcopalian minister, sitting in the narrow band of shade, "can I offer you a sip of Holy Water?"

"Bishop Pike, sir," murmured Joel through cracked, swollen lips, "I'm the wrong guy."

The Bishop apologized in his usual, sympathetic manner.

Joel crawled on. His coveralls were worn into shreds and tatters. Painful cuts and scratches covered his hands and knees. There was a huge blister over his nose. But his Judaic coll-unc urged him on.

"Young man," said the Bishop, popping up from behind a cactus, "can I offer you a sip of . . ."

"Please, sir, you've got the wrong man."

Suddenly the sky darkened and the earth trembled. A fierce wind whistled over the desert. Lightning flashed and enormous flocks of pigeons wheeled overhead.

Joel had passed his initiation. He had stopped thinking of himself as a boy and had become a man!

Before Joel's eyes, a rock appeared. Not an ordinary chunk of desert granite, but a luminous object, shining and glowing with jewel-tones.

Choking with thirst and excitement, Joel pulled himself together for one final effort, and staggered toward the rock as the pigeons all circled overhead, chanting an eerie, cosmic chorus.

Yes, this was the rock. And there was the navel in the center, just big enough to reach his arm in and find the promised boon. Gingerly, he poked his hand in, fearing scorpions and snakes, but there were none. His grasping hand encountered something very hard and cold.

Carefully he pulled the object out

of the rock. It was a bottle of US-Can cola, and it was frosty and *full*.

With a great sigh of contentment, Joel sat down against the rock for a long, cool drink.

Suddenly one of the pigeons landed nearby and turned into Don Alejandro.

"So," he cackled, "you have learned the Indian way."

The burning expanse of desert began to fade and to resume its original appearance as a simul-environment with the *exit* sign clearly marked.

Still sipping his coke, Joel followed the old Indian to the clinic building. His hunger, thirst and exhaustion were forgotten. He had passed his initiation trial!

Don Alejandro gave him food and fresh coveralls and told him to eat and rest and refresh himself. Joel did so and he felt great, absolutely great.

The old man patted him on the cheek and told him to report to clinic room G8. Joel raced over there.

It was a largish room, covered with re-cyc tile. In one corner was the largest Juicer Outlet he had ever seen.

There were several rows of folding chairs, partly filled with glowing-faced adolescents. They had probably passed their trials, too. The boy with the lizards was not among them.

Someone was grunting and gesturing at him from the back row. It was Naomi with US-Can tomato soup advertisements on her hands. Squeeze, she *had* passed her trial. He hoped she wouldn't keep pestering him. But she had saved a seat for him, and rather than make a fuss, he sat down.

A few other successful candidates arrived and took seats and then a friendly-looking man entered, wearing the coveralls of a Manager.

"Young men and women," he

beamed, "you are the elite. The cream of the crop. The twenty-six of you are the only dorm-class students in all of Eastern US-Can who have passed your initiation trials.

"Do you know what that means? When a private-class student undergoes initiation, it is a simple matter. He has been carefully trained and carefully matched to his guide. Afterward, he goes on to college and a good job with US-Can.

"But when a child of the dorm-class overcomes incredible obstacles to pass his trial, it is worthy of special notice. And for you, young men and women, the highest honor has been reserved."

He paused significantly, while they greedily inhaled his words. "You young men and women are the only ones who will be given the secret of the Juicer. *You* are qualified to become Juice Elders."

They gasped. Naomi farted with excitement and threw her hairy arm around Joel's neck.

"Becoming a Juice Elder is not a simple thing," the Manager continued. "It requires far more dedication than college. You must be willing to leave your old lives in the dorm forever. Is anyone unwilling to do that?"

They were all quite willing.

"Fine," beamed the Manager. "I'd like you to pick a partner. Someone of the opposite gender. And line up in front of the Juice Outlet."

Naomi grabbed Joel's hand and hauled him to the front of the line. He was too excited to object. He was an adult now. A candidate for *Elder!*

The Manager was connecting the familiar electrodes, now, and Joel's heart thudded with excitement. He and Naomi leaned back and relaxed, as they had always been taught. The Manager pulled the switch.

He saw a brilliant flash of white light and felt an unfamiliar wrenching, tearing sensation. Demons, angels, titans, and hungry ghosts flashed through his mind. Joel mind merging with Naomi mind. Joel/Naomi mind merging with Juicer mind. Merging with all the minds that had merged with Juicer mind, and that kept Juicer mind growing and alive.

Joel mind. Naomi mind. Joel/Naomi mind. Joel/Naomi/Juicer mind. No more Joel body. No more Naomi body. No more Joel mind. No more Naomi mind. Only US-Can Juicer mind, forever.

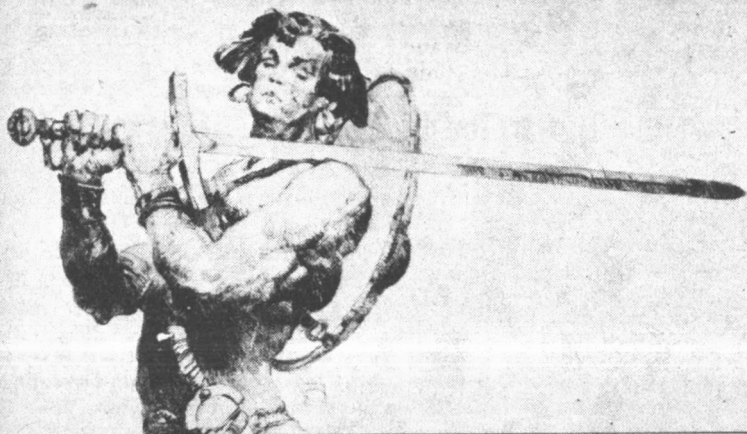
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# GROUPS

## ROBERT THURSTON

*After the lighter mood the "The Haunted Writing Manual" (October, 1975) Robert Thurston returns with a biting story about relationships after the revolution . . .*

### Illustrated by JOE STATON

**I** TOUCH YOU accidentally and you remind me, in memorized cadence, that you would not be here if you had some place else to go; and that, when my lawyers stop screwing up the settlement, and your lawyers stop screwing up the screwing up of the settlement, you will turn in all your keys and clear out fast. What would happen if I touched you on purpose?

I am strung out. Your fault. I will not beg you to open the medicine cabinet for me. You see that, don't you, which is why you finger that particular key on your crowded keychain.

We are like the characters I watch on my TV set. The westerners. Lyla, this room ain't big enough for both of us. I'm getting out. I am abdicating the luxury of space for the impersonality of crowds. Look at me, I flip open the slide-lock arrogantly, undo the chain with a sneer, twist the combination with carefree abandon, turn the two opposing keys with self-confident precision, release the knob-lock with determination, and slip bravely out to the hallway. Outside, breathless, I listen to you rapidly re-locking everything.

**H**arry slipped the words in between

pummelings from people going to and from the Autobar drink dispensers. He spoke quickly and surely, never letting a thought become interrupted by mere physical interference. He held his Scotch and soda close to his chest, to alleviate splashing.

"My God Len I can't . . . escape there is no loophole I can find because Chad's got . . . all the angles worked out he's . . . got me coming and going with all his manipulations and government . . . cooperation don't tell *me* that our past isn't catching up with . . . us you must feel it in some area of your life Len in somebody's attitude some . . . body you know who remembers oh God so many of . . . them remember and so they should damn it God remember those days me and you Lyla and Penny what a fantastic quar . . . tet we were I mean don't you remember it that way I know you're pretty bit . . . ter about Lyla just now and heaven . . . knows Penny and I deplore your breaking up more than any of your . . . other friends could but at least we have the memories you know the time when we were all together and freaking out daily I wonder where . . . Chad was in those days

probably stealing petty cash from the Rip . . . on Society the son of a bitch I'm better rid of him even . . . though he's taking all I've got with him but I'll work it out I've been all over it with my . . . group and some of them have been shafted worse than . . . me which is small consolation but consolation neverthe . . . less we can work it out please remember that hell me and Chad you and . . . Lyla no relationship of any kind is worth the personal agony and . . . terror we go through trying to maintain it that's one thing I have learned from . . . my groups no failed interpersonal relationship is worth the shit of trying to make it suc . . . ceed after it has failed *please* believe that Len hell let's get off this morbid track let's talk about something else I haven't seen your mother . . . lately how's she been has she been well?"

**O**NLY YOUR FINGERTIPS stick out from under the mass of machinery, tubing, electronic measuring equipment, and plastic cover that has become part of your personality these past few months. I can only touch your fingertips with mine, a grazing gesture that has nothing to do with love. I love the image I see in place of you, the healthy, vigorous, loving person I can still see blurrily if I squint and look out the corner of my eye. But you now—the heavy breathing, the moaning, the irrelevant choked requests, how can I love that? My feeling is all mixed up with the machinery and tubing. I do not want to be here, but they tell me that, if I don't show up, you revive and scream bloody hell at them. They beg me to forestall the bloody hell (what do they call what they see every day?) by religiously keeping an appointment. So I'm here and we graze fingertips and



that is love, Mother. I smile at you, nod to your requests, and wholeheartedly wish you dead. My suffering is no longer your death, I have adjusted to that with outside help, my suffering is that you will not die. You are doing this, perhaps, to pay me back for something I don't remember doing. Perhaps for not following the family policy of benevolent passivity. But you have not previously chastized me for that. No, there is no revenge motive in your hanging onto life. You cling to life no worse than I do.

**“YOU LOOK LIKE** you could use a bluesy, mister. I can tell, I hang around here every day. I seen enough agitation to recognize right away when a guy needs a downer. Bluesies are cheap, mister. I believe in Co-op with all my heart.”

Shelves-full of downers protected by her key. The key that she tantalizingly dangled in front of him every day, to test his vow that he could get along without any of the contents of that medicine cabinet. But, did buying on the street constitute a breaking of the vow? He had only said that he did not need the stuff in the cabinet.

“The real thing, mister. I only deal Co-op approved. Nothing fake. I hang around here every day, I can't afford to cheat. You're gonna fall apart right here if you don't buy right now.”

Self-resolve acted like a straitjacket. He knew that he was going to buy, but he had to make himself squirm first. The dealer could detect the wriggling.

“That's right, mister. You see through the truth. What are street-dealers for, anyway? Gotta be some way to counteract those fascist Possession in the Street Laws. So God invented dealers, right? Remember, I don't make you sign, like one of the damn government dispensers. This is

as good as a freebie. That's right, mister. Exactly. You won't regret, mister, no sir.”

IT WAS a Social Day for his About-to-be-Divorced Group. No speakers, no discussions, no encounters. Just a skimpy meal and a few drinks. But *served*. They all sat around and enjoyed the novelty of direct service. Moreso than the meal, whose fakery was the dominant flavor.

Conversation, too, was skimpy. They had been together too long. All of them were on the verge of a decision in their respective cases, they were growing tired of each other. They had analyzed, psychiatrized, lobotomized each other. They knew so much about each other that most statements became predictable and, therefore, unsaid. A fight between two of the members developed this way:

“The old goddamned pudding with a sag in the middle. Just the way my wife used to make it in the early days of our marriage.”

“You make your past with her deliberately unromantic so that you may allow yourself to linger over the memories.”

“Yeah? You can't shake the rigid line, can you? You're not satisfied till we all kowtow to your judgments.”

“I don't judge. I make objective observations.”

“Objective my ass. You are trying in some egomaniacal way to win out over all the rest of us poor slobs.”

“How could I possibly—”

“You want your divorce to be better than ours. More delicate, more well-arranged, more prosperous, more—”

“You sad bastard, nothing good ever comes out of your mouth.”

“Little wop fairy, no wonder your wife is repulsed by—”

"That's it bastard."

"Okay by me."

Their battle was ineffective and ungraceful, a lot of slipping and sliding over spilled pudding. But it picked up the Social part of the Day, and the group became a little more animated as a result.

THE FEW dinner drinks, combined with the booze he'd downed earlier with Harry, made him want to talk to somebody. Well, when a member felt like talking, especially on an intimate level, he must do so without reflection or any anxiety-producing hesitations—that was a rule, perhaps the most important one. He picked out a shy younger man, with whom he had not had much direct contact at any meetings.

"My Lyla was a real champion in the old days," he said. The younger man cringed at the phrase *old days*, as younger were prone to do. Older men always knew the advantage the phrase gave them. "Lyla would block a doorway all by herself, stand up to a covey of the brawniest, meanest-looking fuzz. She was a tough little bitch. I always admired toughness. I had to fall in love with her."

The younger man despised self-pitying irony. But the rules stated that, in all unsupervised group get-togethers, each member was required to act the role of willing listener when any other member needed to release sorrow. At this point of the conversation, his cultivated sense of ritual demanded that he provide an objectively-sympathetic interjection.

"Well, sir, we are all seduced by some quality or other in our—"

"Yes, yes, of course. I know that. It's just that it's difficult not to remember. If only Lyla or I had some place to go, to hide out, until it's all over."

**GROUPS**

The younger man nodded at all the refrain words, but could not listen attentively in spite of the rules. So many of these old men, incapable of breaking old ties gracefully, had the same old complaints.

"Lyla stood in those doorways and scared off fuzz. It was all so beautiful, fighting for shared beliefs and all that, especially when it was working, especially when we were liberating—"

"One thing I never understood about you types. You were all out, like you say, liberating, yet most of you wound up married."

He couldn't answer for a moment. He couldn't remember.

"It was . . . it seemed the beautiful thing to do. Not all of us got married, but those who wanted to, did. And it *was* beautiful, man, it was. You've got to understand how Lyla and I came to decide to marry—how we sat up nights and talked about it. How we clung to each other and cried and . . . and . . . and laughed and danced and . . . I wish I could explain that."

"Don't bother."

"That's not fair."

"Right, right. I apologize. A slip. I—"

"No, listen, we—"

An attendant handed him a note which instructed him to call the hospital immediately.

**Y**OU INSIST, like a rude guest, on hanging on. I can barely stand up, my head aches, my vision is impaired, and I have to stay here like this until somebody with medical authority says it's all right, the crisis has again passed, and gives me permission to go. Do you cause these emergencies just to draw extra visits, to drain more of my time and energy? Do you have absolute control over your body which allows you to send out messages to it,

ordering it to have relapses, attacks, apparent heart stoppages? Your agitated fingertips mean you must be touched. I have to touch you. You don't know how much I hate that. You don't know how much I hate the touch of each shrunken fingertip, the hard abrasive ridges of a stale prune. But your face is not prunelike. Why do you so fiercely continue to resist the stereotype? Why is your skin so smooth even though your face has lost weight? Is it some bizarre and beneficial residue of all those facelifts? Have all those stretchings somehow educated your skin to stay taut? Your skin must be like rawhide now. It has been so long since I touched your face. Just your fingertips. The god-damned attendant stares at you, at meters and dials, at sharp-pointed graph writing, but never at me. I am merely a lawful obstruction. He has been staring for so long now, he must know whether this particular crisis, hundredth in a long line, has passed. Or whether you have finally died. All those measuring devices linked to so much of you and he can't make any decision.

Which sadness is in your eyes now? Why do you try to lift your head? They must let me leave now. I will faint if I stand here much longer. Don't look at me. Don't notice me. I cannot interpret, symbolize. Your movements are movements, gestures and gestures. I must leave.

**T**HE WALLS of the corridor leading to the dispensing agency were painted a soft blue. To soothe, no doubt. If the color did anything to alleviate his sense of panic, he could not feel it. Testing the dryness of his mouth with his tongue and trying to swallow hard, he halted briefly before turning the corner into the dispensing agency. He would be able to predict success or

failure by who stood behind the desk. Two men, both glasses-wearers, invariably turned him down, pointing out that he was overdrawn and would not be due for a month. When they were especially efficient, they checked the contract and found he was no longer eligible to receive anything from the agency. Lyla had long ago won that right.

Fortunately it was the girl, the attractive young one who dispensed pills as if they represented her favors. If the order was small enough she never checked. Young people these days hated to deny. It would pain her to have to check the records.

She made him sign the register and then handed him the packet with obvious pleasure. Later it would be found out, but Lyla always bailed him out in some way.

**Y**OU TAKE YOUR TIME working through the locks, and you back up against the wall to avoid any accidental brushing against your body. I don't care. I am smooth. You crouch into your corner, as far from me as possible, and stare at your TV set. It is turned away from me, its flickering creating lovely elusive patterns of shadow in your face. What are you watching? Do you watch what we used to watch together? Or have you deliberately changed your tastes so that they are my opposites? You are probably watching bedroom comedies or those ridiculous sententious documentaries that pretend we accomplished something back in the days when your ample body beautified doorways. (I could not explain to that boorish young bastard in my Divorcing Group why we got married. How could I expect him to understand? For a *Jugender* like him, we are just sequences from old TV tapes. His kind stare blankly at us,



unaware of the elusive flickering shadows we send across his immobile face.) You finger your keyring as you look at the set. A masturbatory gesture or a deliberate reminder? Knowing you, it's just a reminder. I don't care. I am smooth.

In the old days when you pouted I could end it by luring you into bed. I would like to do that now. I would like to hear you scream as I tried. But of course that would be ridiculous. However it went, you'd have it all on tape and out to your lawyer immediately. And another delay.

I should castrate you by snipping off your key chain. I would if there was anything sharp-edged around here. Where have all the sharp edges gone? Screw, Lyla baby, I will just rest here on the floor, on the luxurious thick green carpet you insisted on because, you said, it would give life to the place. I remember us standing together in the middle of the room on our first day here and you saying, how could one living unit suggest mass production, computerization, bureaucratization, fascism, socialism, and the mobile American middle class all at once? Then you turned to me and said, a good carpet is our first line of defense. And we waited until the carpet was installed before making love for the first time in our new place.

I will just rest here and sleep here until I have to leave again.

**H**E HAD FORGOTTEN that he was to be victim at Dying Group. But he didn't mind; in some ways it was the easiest role. Bertram the Sadist was chairman for the evening and he chose the witch trial technique, in which the group arranged themselves in a moving circle around the victim, while shouting their questions, insults, and accusations at him.

**GROUPS**

It would be a quick session. They all knew his hangups in this matter. Their ritualistic utterances could be delivered by rote. They had really gotten to him only once in previous meetings, so they strived to reenact that breakdown. But tonight he was clever. He felt he could fend off anything.

"I don't hate her. I never meant it when I said that. Because I was merely playing the game, and I wanted to restore the proper atmosphere to the group by pretending to hate her. Well, if you think I'm lying now, you'll just have to prove it. I am not smug, I am self-confident. Because I've learned I can be melted down by nothing. No, I will not explain that, it has nothing to do with the purposes of the group—not this particular group, anyway. Of course you make me nervous, you especially because you look like a pansy whale. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to fight back, I know the rules—I just don't always follow them, you all know my background. No, I think the revolution was successful in many ways, it just shouldn't have stopped. It'll start again when today's young people wake up. Yes, of course I believe in Co-op. What has all this got to do with her death? Yes, twice. She looked as terrible as usual. She may die any time now, then I'll be free of all you ball-less Oedipalites. I'm sorry, I do know the rules. It does not show I'm overly argumentative tonight. I am my usual self, baby, that's what pisses you off. I hope she dies soon, for her sake. Yes, of course, mine, too. Give up. I will not say I hate her. Hate is too simple. I hate the moldering piece of garbage in that bed, but I don't hate her."

After the session, they all had cocktails together. They treated him with special deference, a ritual which

meant they did not expect to see much more of him. A jealous ritual.

HE KNEW the minute the door swung open at his touch. The first thing he saw was the key chain, dangling from a string she had hooked to the ceiling. Air currents stirred by the opening of the door had started the key chain swinging erratically. For a moment it seemed as if she had just now hung it and backed away. But, no, she was long gone.

All her possessions had been removed in her usual neat way. His stuff was piled evenly on the right side of the room. Everything was packaged and bound correctly. On top of his pile she had left a note:

"Dear Len,

It came thru right after you left. I floated around the room ecstatically of course. I hope, when you finally think things thru, you will do the same. This is best. Good luck in your new place and in your Divorced Hubby Group, or whatever it'll be called. The change'll do you good, you'll see. You should also try an Ex-Revolutionary Group, if you can ever admit your ex-ness. The keys should obvious. Perhaps you've been to the cabinet already, in which case this note'll be less strenuous to read. I realized the purpose in your hoarding, in your not asking me for your fair share. I hope I haven't been too greedy, and have left you enough for the time that you'll need it. I wish we could have talked about your needs, then perhaps we could have cancelled all the icy stares. I still remember you running nude through that shopping mall,

Regrets and all that,  
Lyla."

At the bottom of the page, in a hurried scribble, was an added note:

"Right after I signed my name, the

hospital called. They said for you to call them post haste. They tried to get you at Dy. Grp. but you'd just left. Darling, I am sorry. So much, perhaps, all at once. I wanted to stay, if it would've helped, but I would have cracked under both scenes. Again, sorry."

He backed against the keys and sent them, rattling, in a long arc. He took them off the heavy string and, in a reflex action, counted them. All there, all eighteen of them. He walked to the window, the room's single grimy window. Pushing the window key into its lock, he turned it one revolution to unlock and a second to activate the raising mechanism. The window rose to full opening. A blast of warm air came into the room.

He strolled around the room, tossing the keys gently into the air. Standing in the bathroom doorway, he stared at the medicine cabinet, then stared at himself staring into the cabinet's mirror.

Turning his back on the bathroom, he walked to the door. He shut it and, in a few seconds, slid, attached, dialed, turnkeyed, and pushed all its locks. He returned to his pile of possessions and sat down in front of them on the hard floor (she'd taken the carpet), facing her side of the room. He tossed the ring of keys gently into the air. They jangled against each other as they fell. He caught them and tossed them up again. The phone began to ring. On its surface, the button which said "urgent" lit up and began flashing.

"Not now," he said. "Not now, Lyla, Mother." The ringing ended, the button stopped flashing. "For now, for at least this minute, me and my group have to have a discussion." He continued to toss and catch the keys. Their jangling became rhythmic.

—ROBERT THURSTON

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*Michael Milhaus (who tells us his family is "totally unrelated" to any former president with a similar name) presents a refreshingly old-fashioned story (accompanied upon submission by a letter published last issue) about a young man and—*

# **A PERSONAL DEMON**

**MICHAEL F. X. MILHAUS**

**Illustrated by DAN STEFFAN**

**P**UT ON your disbelief suspenders, dear Reader, as Coleridge might invite, and welcome to Powhattan University, an arcade of academia tucked away in ivy-covered ivory-white pseudo-Greek buildings in the heartland of New England. Powhattan—"old P.U." to its friends and enemies alike—was a yawningly normal institute of higher education until the fateful night of Professor Willis Baxter's faculty party . . .

Come. Let's look at how it all began.

**F**IVE IRISH WHISKEYS and the encouraging voices of the somewhat bored party-goers behind him, Willis Baxter, professor of Medieval Lit, arose from his near-drunken slouch on the couch and repaired to his study for the elements he needed to conjure up a demon.

"What's all the hub-bub about?" demanded Dean Cromwell Smith as he squirmed the party's wealthy guest-of-honor, Norman Rockhurst, into the crowded dining room.

"Baxter always tries it when he's sloshed," explained Larry Hawthorne,

professor of Renaissance Lit, as he lumbered to his size 14 feet and rubbed his damp, pudgy palms together in anticipation.

"Tries what?" Rockhurst wanted to know.

Hawthorne relit his evening's cigar for the fifth time and blew out a stream of acrid smoke. "With some people it's lampshades," he said, bellying up to the Dean and the industrialist. "They down a few drinks over their limit—with Baxter, it's two—then don a lampshade and prance about goosing the ladies. Baxter is a little more original. He tries to summon up demons from the netherworld."

"Ridiculous!" Pooh-poohed Rockhurst.

"Demons? Balderdash!" echoed the Dean—who was precisely the sort of person who would say Balderdash!, even in this day and age. Hot to trot with the rich man's tax-deductable charity allocations, the Dean had devoted the entire evening to toadying the man—with no apparent success as yet.

"Of course, it's all in fun," put in Gertrude Twill, the Lit Department

secretary.

Gertrude had worn, against Willis' wishes, a very short dress—the kind to draw male attention to nyloned legs. Although her legs were not drawing much attention, it must be admitted that they were indeed her best feature.

It could be said—usually with accompanying snickers—that Gertrude was Willis' girlfriend; they had dated for eight years. At times he wondered what he saw in her: He would think briefly of her soft lips; then, involuntarily rubbing his mouth, less briefly of her braces. Most of the time, favoring a martyr-like disposition drilled into him by the Catholic catechism of his youth, he accepted that inconvenience, not questioning the therapeutic value of perpetually wired teeth that made kissing reminiscent of the Spanish Inquisition.

"Hmmm. It might prove interesting," said Rockhurst.

"It just might," echoed the Dean.

It was at this moment that Willis returned with a purple-and-red striped bag with 'Macy's' emblazoned on its side. He dropped it to the floor and, with a certain uncharacteristic flair, requested another Irish whiskey to fortify himself.

Gertrude eagerly supplied the sacred potion, which he slurped down in one gulp. He rubbed a hand over his plain, long-nosed features and, for show, muttered the *Desiderata* in Latin over the cleared floor space.

"Hey, Baxter—what demon are you going to call?" Hawthorne asked.

"What the *devil* difference does it make?" asked Rockhurst, smiling broadly at his witticism. Dean Smith laughed uproariously.

"It's supposed to," said Hawthorne. "I don't believe in the hogswill—but I've read some magical lore. One of



the most respected scholars in the field, Raymond de la Farte, theorized in a recent book that the reason it's hard to invoke a demon these days is because most of them have been confined to Hell forever. You see, whenever a human summons a demon and fails, the ritual requires that he consign it to Hell forever—to keep it from slipping into our world at some later time and wreaking havoc.”

“Makes sense,” Rockhurst said.

“If you believe in it,” Hawthorne said, then continued: “De la Farte suggests that demons, although endowed with myraid magical powers, might not be able to be in two places at the same time. He demonstrated that statistically the chances were quite high that most of the popular demons would eventually be called by two humans at the same time—so they would be stuck in Hell by virtue of the unsuccessful magician’s ritual.”

Willis, busily working with his tools—drawing a pentagram with Silly String, laying out a star within the pentagram with drink straws and swizzle sticks—smiled at Hawthorne’s words. You see, dear Reader, although Willis Baxter’s most daring feat to date had been to fondle Gertrude’s elbow at a local drive-in movie, he also lead something of a secret life. He *was* Raymond de la Farte, and revelled in his confidential study much as a pastor might in a private pornography collection.

Hawthorne, turning to indicate Willis, went on: “So Baxter here, if he hopes to be successful, will have to find some lesser-known demon.”

Willis started to say, *What’s your mother’s name?* but reconsidered as he remembered Hawthorne’s short temper and long reach. He substituted, “Shall I consult the Yellow Pages, under ‘Demons, Unlisted?’”

“Well,” suggested Hawthorne, “there’s the new Wilhelm, *Minor Demons of Egypt*.”

“Haven’t seen it yet,” Willis admitted, trying to overcome his drunkenness.

“There are a few obscure names, I think. How about Ptenagh? A sort of Pan, I think.”

“Hardly new,” Willis scoffed. “Pembroke. *Solomon in Egypt*. 1934.”

“How about his daughter, Anath-ea?”

“Daughter?”

Hawthorne brightened. “Yes. Half demon, half human.”

“Ok,” Willis said.

“I know what comes next,” Rockhurst said with a grin. “Virgin’s blood, right? Any volunteers?”

Willis glanced at Gertrude but decided it was better not to ask. Instead, he said, “We’ll have to make do with mine,” and pricked his finger with a pin. Then he raised his hands for silence, determined to try his best to make the ritual look impressive—since, no matter what the name of the demon he called or how drunk he was, he never expected to get results anyway.

As he lowered his hands in curving gestures and a hush settled over the company, Willis’ fingers began to twitch like a squid’s tentacles and he started to incant the appropriate phrases in guttural Franconian—to both capture the soul of the meaning and the mask the obscene content.

A fevered zeal that could have been the alcohol suffused his face with a red tint and the party guests began to murmur uneasily, like a crowd watching a trapeze artist working without a net. He stooped to light candles and the circus air seemed to dissipate; the room darkened as he became stationary at the north tip of the penta-

gram.

The silence around Willis' words was somehow ominous; it was too quiet. His discourse slipped into old Bavarian—"Guelich lande cumer ger . . ."—and his arms wriggled like drunken snakes, snapped together with a flourish: ". . . Anathae!"

The silence which had hovered around his chant like a voiceless swallow gave way to the sound of wind.

Wind?

In an apartment?

A breeze seemed to ruffle through Willis' ruffled hair and the candle-thrown shadows began to dance slowly.

Then he heard a whisper. A feminine voice, as soft as a butterfly's wing: "*In francie fui.*"

*Frankish*, thought Willis. *Quite frankly Frankish.*

His breathing hastened. He felt very alone with that voice which, he knew instinctively, was no joke.

"*Guaes ge dar daden?*" he whispered tremulously.

And the voice, young-girl sweet, responded: "*Dias nauime ibi.*"

The wind blew full and strong and whooshed to a mighty crescendo.

There was a blinding flash of light, like a tiny nuclear explosion. Then suddenly the room was normal again.

Only . . . not quite.

For there, south of the pentagram, facing Willis Baxter, professor of MedLit at P.U. and secretly demonological scholar Raymond de la Farte, stood a girl—not more than 15, by her features—clad only in long, tawny red hair.

Two tiny horns sprouted from her forehead and a long barbed tail curled from the base of her spine just above her smooth, absolutely bare, undeniably perfectly formed fanny.

Her breasts were firm, her nipples

were large and creamy pink.

Her lithesome legs tapered down to a pair of dainty hooves; a sprinkling of curly red hair grew up to her knees.

Her waist seemed almost too thin when, suddenly, it curved deliciously out to meet her well-formed hips.

She angled her angelic<sup>1</sup> and faultlessly freckled face about, surveying the group with curiosity, her eyes darting like captive birds; they lighted on Willis, turned mischevously green.

She fluttered long, dark eyelashes at him.

"So it was you who called," she breathed huskily, her voice the coo of a nightingale in heat. "Anything special in mind? Or do you want me to be . . . inventive?"

Willis swallowed hard, his disbelieving eyes abulge. "You," he gasped, his tongue taking on the texture of a potato chip, "are Anathae?"

"Yours for so long as you shall desire," she said. She curtsied, hands out holding an entirely non-existent dress. "Do you desire me now?"

Her voice was the epitome of the seductive—Marilyn Monroe rising from a foaming sea, disdaining a towel, yet with young-girl innocence glowing off her in cool, stunning waves. Her fiery gestures, however, seemed at the same time to beg for frantic, clutching debauchery.

She wiggled excitingly toward Willis, her bare breasts bobbing only slightly and her long red hair flowing behind her as though her head were aflame.

With nimble hands, she plucked at the top button of his shirt.

She had the shirt half off, and was licking her ruby lips in moist anticipation, before the stunned silence of the group of the party-goers erupted into an excited babble.

Willis heard a squeal and noticed, peripherally, that Gertrude had fainted dead away.

"What is the meaning of this outrageous spectacle?" demanded the Dean.

"Quiet!" Rockhurst said. "This is better than Vegas!"

Willis turned to offer the Dean an explanation—in the drunken belief that one might occur to him before he opened his mouth—when he felt a small hand give his pants zipper a frenzied tug.

Aghast, he looked down.

Sure enough, Anathae had his trousers halfway down, exposing his purple polka-dot underwear for the assembled multitude to see.

He yelled the first words that came to his mind: "Get out of here!"

Anathae pulled her hands away from their mad disrobing chore and pouted prettily up at him. "Later," she said, then winked naughtily and vanished.

Willis, given his choice, would have preferred to believe that she had never been there at all.

But then his trousers, freed of her hands, fell all the way down to his gartered socks.

Several of the ladies present gasped and clutched at their husbands or their dates for support.

Willis' face quivered at the redder levels of the spectrum as he made a violent attempt to resheathe his bare, pale legs. But his frenzied actions set him off balance; he teetered in the middle of the floor, wavered, stumbled forward a few wobbly steps, tripped on his trousers and fell head-first into the ample lap of Mrs. Hilda Boothbuthle, who began to yelp in the contralto that was the pride of the Powhattan University Glee Club.

"Mmmph . . . mmmph . . . 'msorry,"

mumbled poor Willis, his mouth full of hairy thigh.

But Mrs. Boothbuthle shrieked again and heaved him onto the carpet.

From this vantage point, he managed to work his trousers back up over his knees by holding his legs straight up off the floor before Larry Hawthorne waddled over and squatted by him.

"That little lady got you panting, Baxter? Ha! Ha! That was quite a magic trick. What topless joint did you pick her up at?"

Willis regained his feet, pulled his pants back up over his hips and re-zippeded his fly before he turned to Hawthorne to explain that Anathae was not a magic trick.

But the words he intended to mouth were silent.

Instead, in their place, he found himself saying in Anathae's breathy soprano, "Eat camel dung, eunuch! Copulate with syphaletic lepers! Suck the rotting eggs of a vulture! French kiss a Nile crocodile!"

Hawthorne's eyes grew wide—but no wider than those of the distraught Willis. *Good grief*, he thought, *she's possessed me! Well, at least it's limited to my tongue.*

*Not so, lover boy*, rejoined a voice in his mind. To his horror, he found his right hand was folding into a fist against his will. "No!" he screamed, stepping back just in time to prevent the blow from connecting with Hawthorne's jaw.

*Ah, Willis, you're no fun*, he heard her pouty voice eclaim in his mind. Before she could do further harm, Willis turned and scampered to the hall closet where he threw on his long, woolen coat, and made for the front door. amidst a veritable storm of screams from the group.



*Wait a sec, Anathae said. At least let's bring a bottle*

He found his legs directed toward the kitchen, where his trembling arm reached out and snared a half-full bottle of Teacher's Scotch.

*There. Now we can go, if you like . . .*

Waving away all inquiries, he slipped the bottle into a coat pocket and burst out of his apartment into the chill January air.

Rockhurst raised a window and leaned out. "Hey, Baxter! Will there be a second show to your act tonight?"

"I'll be back!"

"Good man!" Satisfied, the rich man rejoined the party.

Slipping and sliding on the icy sidewalk, Willis negotiated his way to his dented green Volkswagen in the parking lot. Leaning against it, he shook his head breathlessly, half in disbelief and half trying to clear the alcohol from his befeebled brain.

"Okay. You've had your fun, and probably ruined me," he said at last in a weak, tired voice. "You want to get out of my head?"

*But it's so nice and comfy in here! I'm just leafing through piles of pleasant childhood memories, and it's quite nice.*

"Out!" he screamed. "Or would you care to hear me recite an exorcism?"

"Oh, Willy, you're so manly when you're sloshed," she cooed. He found himself staring at the nude, shivering Anathae perched on the trunk of the car. Almost instinctively, he drew off his coat and put it over her shoulders.

"Thank you." She smiled at him contritely. "I'm really not used to this sort of climate, you know. You're a really kind man, Willis Baxter. Really screwed up. But a kind man."

"Am I, now?" Willis growled, pull-

ing the Scotch from her coat pocket for warmth. "And just what university of Hell gave you your psychiatry degree?"

"Dear, *dear* Willy," she said and fondled his cheek with her hot hand—which he pushed away moodily to take a long gulp of the amber liquid from the bottle, "I was inside you, remember darling? I *saw* all those nasty hang-ups and repressed guilts cluttering up your psyche. Especially in the psycho-sexual area. What you need, baby, is a little couch therapy."

She hopped down to the pavement and embraced him. "Let's go behind those bushes."

He grabbed her arm, opened the door and thrust her into the passenger seat. "Don't move!" he told her in an angry voice.

"Yes, Willy. But isn't this little car a little too small for—"

He slammed the door and ran to the driver's side.

"—couch therapy? But I suppose we could try." She was busy slithering out of his coat, her eyes glowing like fiery coals.

"Look," he breathed in a voice that cracked at the edges. "You either behave yourself or back you go to Hell."

"Willy! You wouldn't do that?"

"You bet I would!"

"But you've no idea what it's like for me, down there." A tear began to form on the edge of her eye and it was all Willis could do to resist the urge to wipe it away, tenderly. *Poor child*, he thought as he slurped more Scotch.

"Look," he said, "do you think you could use your magical powers to whip up something to wear? I'm *cold*. I need my *coat*."

She proceeded to doff the coat again.

"No! No! For God's sake! If a cop should pull up and find me with a naked teenage girl, I've had it! Get your clothes on first, *then* give me my coat."

"You wouldn't really send me back, would you?" she murmured, her hands busy with something under the coat. "You've no idea how tormented I am down there. Thousands and thousands of well-hung men all around me—"

"You poor girl," sighed Willis, quite sincerely. "No wonder—"

She banged the dashboard in frustration. "And there's a damned glass barrier all around me so I can't get at them!" The Volkswagen rocked with her fury.

"Lord protect me," muttered Willis, taking another long lesson from his Teacher's. "Have you got some clothes on yet?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Give me the coat."

"You really could be a lot of fun, Willy, if you gave yourself half a chance," she said, removing the coat. She was wearing a quite attractive red silk dress with a modest neckline and matching boots to cover her hooves. Her hair had assembled itself to conceal her pert little horns. She winked at him, "No horns but still horny, sweetheart."

Willis had to admit, through the uncomfortable ember which began glowing in him, that she looked quite beautiful.

"You like?"

"Yes."

"Hell of a lot nicer than that dog you've got for a girlfriend."

"Just a minute," he said, slipping into the coat with difficulty in the cramped space, "I'll not have that sort of talk about Gertrude."

"You can't even get into her pants!

For all you know, she might be a walking, talking manequin!" She smiled slyly. "At least you know what I've got is real!"

"Can't we change the subject?"

"All right. Let's talk about you." She held up a hand and suddenly there was a long thick cigarette in it. "Want one?"

"Uh-uh," he said.

"As I see it, you've got a lot of potential, fellow, but no guts." She flicked a finger and it sprouted flame, which she used to light her cigarette. "That's like a Mack truck without wheels." She blew it out. "Lot of horsepower, but it's sure as Hell not going anywhere." She sucked hungrily at her weed, held the smoke in her lungs a long moment, then blew it out in square shapes. "Nice trick, huh? You learn things like that when you've got a few thousand years on your hands."

The headlights of a car on the road flashed by, catching the first few flakes of a snow flurry in its beams.

"Not much chance for stuff like that in my neck of the woods," she commented, then continued: "Like I was saying, you need some guts. Some self-assertion. I know your problems; I can sympathize. But it takes action to clean out your skull—"

"Who says I want to clean out my skull?"

"You want to be head of the Literature Department, don't you?"

"I didn't give you permission to poke around inside my brain."

"You didn't tell me not to, either. If you want to succeed, stick with me. I'll help you. Now listen—"

"Hold it!" Willis objected. "Let me get things straight. I call up a demon, and suddenly she wants to control my life. Well *you* listen, Ana—Ana—" The alcohol was slurring his voice.

"Anny. I am fully capable of messing up my life on my own without your help."

"That's my point."

"I mean—"

"Yeah." She smiled at him. "You can be saved. I like you, Willy. You did me a favor getting me out of Hell." She drew at her cigarette. "I'm going to do you a few favors. As the pug said to the belly dancer, 'Stick with me, baby, and I'll wrap your ass in silk.' The first is to get you this job you want so much—though Satan knows why you want it. Wouldn't you rather have a few million bucks? Maybe a yacht and—"

"I want to be head of the department. I have ideas on teaching I want to implement and—"

"Okay. Okay. The money you'll want later. Right now we'll settle for this rather petty ambition." She blew a triangle of smoke in his face, causing him to cough. *Funny kind of smell*, he thought, twitching his nose. "So let's get the lay of the land," she continued, brushing back a stray lock of hair. "The man in your way is Larry Hawthorne, right?"

"That's right. He's been making passes at Gertrude lately, too."

"Demented," muttered Anathae. "So—seems to me, you get rid of Hawthorne and the way is clear. I don't suppose you'd condone pushing him out the window of his highrise apartment, would you?"

"Heavens, no!"

"I didn't think so. We'll have to do it the hard way. Hey—you want a drag?" She proffered the half-smoked cigarette. "I'd like a little of that Scotch—after all, I was the one who dragged it out."

He handed her the bottle but waved away the cigarette. "Uh-uh. I don't smoke tobacco."

"Who said it was tobacco?"

"You mean—"

"Hell, yes. This is all we smoke where I come from."

"Gaahh!" said Willis—for as Fate would have it, a police car was just then patrolling the parking lot, causing his paranoia to boil over, the alcohol having removed his lid of reason. "Let's get out of here!"

"Anything you command, lover."

There was a faint hissing sound, like a lizard licking his earlobe, and Willis found himself lying on his own bed, on top of a heap of coats. He blinked both eyes in surprise. On the other side of the brief darkness was Anathae, standing by the bed.

"What happened?" he asked her.

"You wanted to leave. I assumed you wanted to come back here."

"And you—"

"Fly me, I'm Anathae." She had the whiskey bottle in her hand and took a sip. "That's part of Hell, too—watching American television." She set the bottle aside and hopped onto the bed to snuggle up to Willis. "So, lover. Time for Project Man-maker. I'm your instructor, Miss Bliss, and I *love* to make men! First lesson is self confidence. If you don't love yourself, and show that you do, people will assume that you're not even worth liking. You got to go in there and tell the Dean about your ideas. Believe in them and in yourself. I'll help you."

Just then Larry Hawthorne barged in. "Oh, sorry," he blustered, but then upon seeing who it was exclaimed, "Baxter! And your magic trick lady—in clothes, yet! So introduce your colleague to the stunning girl. It's the least you can do after trying to slug me—"

"Miss Anny Bliss, Mr. Hawthorne," purred Anathae, slithering off the bed

and offering him her lithe hand.

Hawthorne beamed; rather than shake her hand, he leaned over and slobbered on it in what was supposed to be a kiss. "Mighty nice to meet you," he said in a notably deepened voice as he smoothed back the tangly black forest of his hair. "Can I get you a drink?"

"Only if you let me come with you." She let the double entendre hang there and slipped the length of her arm under his flabby biceps. "Oh, I can just feel those muscles," she oozed. Her mouth made a cute little O, and Willis could see Hawthorne beginning to melt under her warm, admiring gaze.

Willis found his voice: "Hey, Anny, what's happening? I thought—"

"You're just hopeless, Willis," she said, waving him away without ever taking her eyes off Hawthorne.

"Yeah, Baxter. You stay here while we get a drink."

When they left together, Willis grabbed the deserted bottle and started drinking—and thinking. He would have continued both, but the whiskey ran out.

*She's right, he thought. I'm a nobody. Gutless. Can't cut it as a teacher, much less a department head. Can't even keep the attention of a demon nymphomaniac.*

When he found himself thinking how beautiful she was—how much more she offered than Gertrude—he got up and threw the bottle away in disgust.

"She's right!" he proclaimed to himself in the mirror, wobbling not a little bit. He wagged a finger under his image's nose. "Assert yourself! Let 'em know that Willis Baxter has a brain and some instrumental fortified . . . intemperate . . . guts!" He pushed himself away from his dresser

and tilted himself toward the door.

Outside, Dean Smith had finally succeeded in buttonholing Rockhurst and was filling his ears with plans for the new gymnasium the college could build if the rich industrialist would donate the quarter-million he said he was considering. Rockhurst wore the expression only the truly bored can properly assume; his eyes brightened considerably as he saw Willis wobbling in their direction.

"Baxter! There's the man of the evening, Dean," Rockhurst beamed, extending a welcoming arm to Willis.

"As I was saying, Mr. R, we've got some great plans for a swimming pool, stocked with waterwings, not to mention a superb—"

"Willis, old boy," said Rockhurst, patting him on the back in a fatherly fashion—which still almost sent Willis nose first to the ground. "Where's your little lady?"

"You mean Gertrude? I—"

"No! I mean your cute little red-haired piece, boy! Where's she?"

"Oh. She's around. In the kitchen with Professor Hawthorne, I think—"

"Larry Hawthorne—a fine example of our faculty," the Dean broke in, eyeing Willis sternly. "But even the best staffs have exceptions in quality."

"I want to go congratulate her," Rockhurst said. "Fine show. Fine, fine show. I might want your act for a stag party I'm hosting next month. Catch you guys later." He bounded away for the kitchen.

Dean Smith made to follow him, but Willis grabbed him by the collar. The Dean looked back at the hand holding him, then glared up at its owner. "What's the meaning of this, Baxter?"

"I want to talk to you, Smith!" Willis tried his best to glare back, but had to settle for a frown. Dimly, in

the back of his mind, he realized that the conversation was getting off on the wrong foot.

"Have you been drinking, man?"

"I shert . . . certainly haf . . . have, Dean," Willis muttered.

"Take your hands off me."

"Not til you hear. What I got. To say. Dean. I been at this lousy college ten whole years—don't you think I deserve a break? You know I'm a brilliant scholar. You pale pedagogue!"

"Baxter, go away. You don't know what you're saying."

"I'm saying the truth. God. Dammit! I'm saying what I feel for the first time. You miserable . . . little . . . miscreant. I desh . . . deserve to head the Literature Department. I want to head the Litra-sure Department." By some astonishing exercise of heretofore dormant muscle power, Willis lifted the Dean an inch off the floor. "And you'll give me the post, won't you, Dean?"

The Dean was blustering so badly that only snippets of phrases squeaked through his whitening lips: ". . . never . . . you'll pay . . . you're drunk . . . doesn't excuse . . . gurgle. . . . Hawthorne . . . got the job already . . . I'll get you . . . blurrgh!!!"

Where Willis had once seen nothing but white-hot anger in his mind, suddenly a dark, moist mist began to form.

He let the Dean down.

Flapping his arms in agitation, the Dean shouted, "I'm calling the police, Baxter! They'll charge you with assault. I'll fix your boat. You're through, do you hear? Through!"

But to Willis, the voice was a tiny whisper coming from miles away—and through thick, congealed lime jello, at that.

He felt himself sway back and

forth—

(Or was that the room? Truth to tell, he *seemed* quite stationary.)

—and began to count, to himself, how many drink he must have put away.

. . . about six before the summoning . . . (forward sway, with just a bit of wobble) . . . "Baxter!" . . . about four or five in the car . . . (sidewise tilt) . . . *Oh, but she's a gorgeous thing!* . . . "Baxter! Stay awake so I can have you arrested!" . . . the rest of the bottle in the bedroom . . . (at right angles to all the right angles) . . . *That hair! Those liquid fire lips! Those deep dark mysterious eyes!* . . . "Baxter! I've called the cops. They'll be here in a minute. Stay awake, man!" . . . ("Tack her to the starboard side, Mr. First Mate."—"Aye, aye, Cap'n.") . . . "Here, Baxter. Drink this coffee. Stand up straight or you'll fall on your face."

Swirls and pieces of the cloud-room seemed to coalesce into Dean Smith's grinning face.

"Dean, Dean, Dean—you're a better man than I am, Gungā Dean!" Willis hiccupped with pride at his mastery of English poetry.

*That young, oh!-so-embraceable body!*

"Anathae!" he sighed, and suddenly she seemed to be before him, her clothes tight against her lithesome figure. He reached out for her—and hugged the Dean. "Oh, dearest, can you ever forgive me?" Willis crooned.

"Baxter! Get away! What do you think . . . There are people watching! You're drunk, man!"

"No, Anathae. Only high. With my love. For you."

The ding-dong of the doorbell cut through his reverie.

As he realized who he had been holding, Willis muttered, "Only high,

Dean," and tottered away.

Suddenly there was a commotion from the direction of the bedroom. A feminine shriek; a roaring yell.

Anathae rushed into the living room, her dress half torn off and her eyes glazed with what could be taken for fear; bearing down on her, in hot pursuit was Larry Hawthorne, grunting and groaning, eyes wide with primitive lust.

A very important detail, dear Reader: He was as naked as a *Playgirl* pin-up. A very improper *Playgirl* pin-up.

"Rape!" Anathae screeched. "Oh, help, help! Rape!" She tripped and fell flat on her back—followed by an eager if unhearing Hawthorne.

It was at this precise instant that the two policemen rushed in.

Willis looked down at the poor girl yelling Rape!" at the top of her lungs; she winked at him merrily.

He turned to Dean Smith slowly.

"You're quite right, Gunga. I'm drunk," he said. He turned, kicked Larry Hawthorne in the head, threw up on the Dean, and passed out.

**T**HE GREEN BAY PACKERS, equipped with special six-inch knife-sharp cleats, were digging into his skull aided by jack-hammers and bull dozers. Mr. Clean had used his stomach to scrub down the Queen Mary, had wrung it out with a steamroller and was drying it in a kiln. The Arabian Army, in dirty sweat socks, had spread their dusty mats on his tongue and were now facing Mecca while their waiting camels expectorated and defecated in the desert that was his mouth.

Tread softly as you read this page, considerate Reader—our hero has a hangover.

The door bell thundered; the insis-

tant jangling provided the lightning bolt which speared his head.

Groaning, Willis Baxter stumbled out of bed.

"Coming! I'm coming! Please stop!" he pleaded. "God in Heaven, make it stop!"

He jumped with fright as he caught sight of a wicked-looking creature all wrinkles and mussed hair. Then he realized that it was only his reflection in the mirror.

Slowly, Willis plodded out to the front door. He spent a good minute trying to get a grip on the knob.

It was Gertrude.

"Gertrude," he said.

"You really ought to be ashamed of yourself, Willis Baxter," she said, pushing past him and letting the morning sunlight stream in behind her. Willis gasped from the painful brightness and quickly closed the door. "I really don't know if I should put up with this sort of business anymore."

"But dear—" breathed Willis, groping his way into the kitchen for the glass of water he was certain would save his life—although he was not sure, at that moment, if he really wanted to save it.

Gertrude dogged his steps, trying to get him to turn around so she could put her finger under his nose—a favorite pecking position for her.

"But nothing! You were disgraceful last night! And that nude hussy!" She peered around and got a good look at his condition. "Oh, merciful heavens, Willis! You look *sick*. Now you lay down on the couch like a good boy and I'll make you well with some of my nice brocolli soup."

Willis spit the water he'd been drinking back into the glass at the thought of her brocolli soup—which

he could barely force himself to swallow under normal conditions.

"No, no," he whispered. "Aspirin."

"Where, dearest?"

He settled himself slowly, carefully, in a kitchen chair and rasped, "Bedroom."

"Yes, dear. I'll get it. Right away."

She left the kitchen, but continued talking: "I suppose I can forgive you, though it's not easy after all the embarrassment you caused. Fortunately, It's nothing compared to what poor Professor—"

There was a moment of total silence followed by the squeak of Gertrude's tennis shoes coming toward him on the tile floor at a rapid clip. She stamped into the kitchen, her face beet-red.

"Oh, Willis! How could you?"

"Huh?" Willis looked up from his intense study of his water glass just in time to catch her fist in his face; the blow knocked him off his chair.

He stared up in bewilderment as Gertrude, gnashing her teeth like an angry steamshovel, picked up his water glass, dumped it on his head, swiveled around and stalked out.

Willis grimaced at the explosion of the door slamming.

He gave the house a few minutes to stop twirling, then allowed a few more for the tweeting birds to fly out of his head. Then he crawled into the bedroom for the aspirin—only to discover the cause of Gertrude's outrage.

Birthday-suited Anathae was all asprawl on his bed, feet tangled in the sheets, half-opened eyes drowsy—as though looking back into the recent past, pleasuring themselves in the memory of a particularly decadent orgy.

"Oh, no," sighed Willis, slumping on the end of the bed. "Oh, no," he said, truly pathetically. "I couldn't

have . . ."

Anathae's scarlet-crowned head craned up, bright eyes focusing on Willis. "Willy!" she said, squirming over to wrap her arms around his neck.

"Did I?" he mumbled, agonizing through his dim memory of the previous night. "Did I?"

"What? Oh. Did you!" She played with a strand of his hair. "Well, now, if you don't remember, I don't know if I should—"

"That's it!" screeched Willis, bolting upright over the startled demon-girl. "That's all I'm going to take! All!"

"Oh, Willy," she panted, "if you could only see yourself! You're wonderful! What a specimen of a man! I've done it!"

"You've done it, all right," he growled.

He would never head the Lit Department—because of her.

He had, almost certainly, lost his job—because of her.

He would, most likely, never find another teaching job—because of her.

Finally, because of her, he had lost Gertrude. Gertrude, who may not have been pretty, who may not have been attractive, who may not have been many things—but who *had* been the closest thing he'd ever had to a girlfriend.

Grasping Anathae's arm, he pulled her off the bed and through the living room into the dining room, without giving her a chance to stand up. He dumped her into the center of the pentagram which still remained from the previous evening's party.

"Willy!"

"Ubele . . ." he chanted, eyes wide with fury.

"Don't you remember—"

". . . *Canet Minen* . . ." He tried to

drown out her voice with his volume.

"—what happened last night?"

Had he bothered to look down, he would have seen that she looked more like a frightened young girl than a demon. "... *Teryae* ..." he continued.

"I helped you Willy."

"*Exconae chanet!*"

"Don't send me back—"

"*Isnel* . . ."

"—I'll never see you again!"

"*Canet!!*"

"I love you, Will—" she whimpered, and her voice was suddenly drowned in a crack of thunder.

Willis looked down. A whisp of smoke curled up from the center of the design made of Silly String, drink straws and swizzle sticks. He scattered them with his foot.

The phone rang.

"Hello!" he yelled into the receiver.

"Willis?"

"Yeah."

"Dean Smith."

"Yeah, well I don't want your stinking—"

"How would you like to be chairman of the Arts and Sciences Division?"

"Huh?"

"I know you only wanted to be head of Lit—but let's face it, that's small potatoes, Willis. You deserve

more."

"But what about Hawthorne?"

"Hawthorne's in jail. For attempted rape. Don't you remember?"

"No . . . wait. Yes! But I thought I was imagining—I was drunk . . ."

"Think nothing of it, m'boy. We all lose our heads, sometimes . . . stomachs too, for that matter. I'll forget last night if you'll take the position."

"Sure. Of course. I mean—"

"There's just one condition."

"Oh?"

"Rockhurst suggested that you be placed in the position. He likes you—he sees potential. He wants someone like you helping to run the college he's donating his money to."

"Dean! That's wonderful!"

"But he wants that girl for his stag party. Seems the governor's going to be there, and he's sure she'll please him. You get the girl, we get the quarter million, you get the job. Sound fair?"

Willis couldn't answer.

"Baxter? You there, boy? Willis? Answer me! Baxter!!"

"Yes sir," Willis croaked.

"You'll get the girl?"

"Yes sir."

"Good man." The Dean hung up.

After a lengthy visit to the bathroom, Willis Baxter began to reassemble the pentagram.

—MICHAEL F. X. MILHAUS

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**DON'T MISS JACK WILLIAMSON'S GREAT NEW NOVELLA, THE DARK DESTROYER in the JANUARY AMAZING. NOW ON SALE AT ALL NEWSTANDS.**



*Lin Carter tells us this is the first story in a new series in which a tribe of Stone Age savages learn gradually and painfully the arts of civilization, encountering along the way uncanny forces, eldritch survivals of a lost age of primal sorcery. The gap between each story is about a generation, sometimes two—the heroes in one story will be the parents or grandparents of those in the next. Herewith, our introduction to the—*

# **PEOPLE OF THE DRAGON**

**LIN CARTER**



**Illustrated by MARCUS BOAS**

### 1. *Out of the North*

**M**Y NAME is Junga. I am the youngest of the three sons of Gomar, the mighty hunter; and my people are the People of the Dragon. Or so, at least, we call ourselves, after that red, bearded star that burns like a signal torch down the southern skies, ever leading us onwards, who ever follow. In the time of my grandfather, Zorm the Wise, it first shone in the wintry skies above our lost homeland which now lies buried deep beneath the eternal snows. It was in the time of the White Winter that it first appeared and blazed in those forgotten skies, calling my fathers forth from the valley wherein my people had dwelt from Time's forgotten dawn.

The snows had fallen thick and yet lay deeply piled, and still unmelted, from the winter before. The herds our hunters sought for meat were thinned by the unending winter, and the foliage whereon the beasts fed were scrawny and frost-bitten. The people of my tribe went hungry then, and the cold winds blew ever at the mouths of the caves, and the old folk died of the coughing sickness, one by one, and many the newborn babe was exposed to the elements on the hill-slopes because there was not enough meat for the strong and living, much less the newly-born.

Those were harsh times; cruel times; for oft have I heard my grandsire tell of them, he that lives yet but is lean and hardy for all his length of years. Men starved and women wept, or sat dry-eyed and stony-hearted, crooning to the dead babes they clasped against their shrunken breasts. Children fought, naked and snarling, like starving curs over scraps of meat. Ever the snows fell, blocking the ways between the mountains. Ever the winds blew cold as a whet-

ted knife, freezing the blood in our veins, chilling the very marrow in our bones. And then the wolves came down from the windy heights, to slink among the caves—and never in the memory of a living man (my grandsire, Zorm, would say) had this occurred before.

Grim and terrible were the battles my fathers fought, knee-deep in the numb, red-splattered snow, defending the women and the children, the old and the sick, against the ravening wolves, who grew ever bolder, maddened by starvation, until they strove to enter the very caves of my people, to rend and tear hot flesh from the living.

And then one night when a howling gale had torn the snow-heavy clouds away to bare the merciless stars, the Red Star blazed above, that no man's eye had looked upon in all the generations of men. Burning bright it was, like scarlet fire, with a long writhing streamer of flame behind it, for all the world like a dragon's serpent-length and serpent-tail. And it was Zorm, my grandsire, who heard it hissing to him in his troubled dreams: *Arise! the Dragon Star whispered, Take thy people, and go forth into the south, for the Great Ice cometh down upon the valley of thy fathers, that shall never lift for an thousand years of time. Go forth, I bid thee, south and ever south, and I shall fly ever down the skies before thee, and I shall bring thee at last to a warm and golden land of eternal summer that fronts upon a blue and smiling sea . . . a sweet and verdant country, like a garden, where the ripe fruit droppeth from the heavy-laden branch, and none need ever suffer from the gnawings of hunger, nor the pangs of thirst, nor shiver to the chilly kiss of the wintry wind.*

Whether it was but a dream or a true vision sent from the Gods of the North, Zorm my grandsire spake thus to the people, and they rose up and took their furs and skins, their stony axes and flint-bladed spears, and all that they possessed, and departed from the place of their fathers, and wended their long way south and ever south, down from the mountains of the wintry north, following the visions of Zorm the Wise, and the Red Star that flew down the skies before them, leading them on like a streaming torch borne in the invisible hands of a friendly god. My father, Gomar, was but a boy in the day of the rising-up and the going-forth of my people, the People of the Dragon; and I, his son, was born on the great march and have never seen the lost land of my fathers. Nor shall I ever, while the world lasts.

## 2. *The Plains of Thune*

**B**UT I WOULD SPEAK of what befell me in my fourteenth year, when the People had come down at last out of the great mountains, and were crossing the measureless plains we called the Land of Thune for that there were flat and level as the Stone Table in the old myth, wherein Thune, the sun lord, was slain by the Demon of Winter, only to rise again, reborn with spring.

The People had waxed in number since the time of our going-forth: then we had been but three-and-twenty, and Thom the Strong, firstborn of the sons of Zorm, had been our chief. Now were we near fifty in number, and Thom-Ra, the brother of Thom, led us on the march. Gray of mane and beard was Thom-Ra, with tall sons went ever at his right hand, but still a mighty warrior for all that he was in his prime. At his left hand went mine

own father, Gomar, for they were brothers, albeit my sire was the youngest of the sons of Zorm, who lived yet, and was now known as Zorm the Wise.

The thick furs of cave-bear and snow-wolf we had put by, once we were come down from the mountains with their ice-choked passes and their wintry winds. It was Tuma the Limping, the clever, the Lame One, had bethought him of scraping the fur from the hides so that we went clothed now but in the hides of beasts. For the Plains of Thune were milder and not so cold as had been the windswept and snowy heights. And the warriors and the hunters wore still the necklace of fangs that were the mark of manhood to the men of my tribe, and had ever been.

I, a mere youth, was not yet attained to an age whereat I might strive for the mark of manhood, but my brothers, Jord and Karth, wore about their strong throats the coveted necklace of the fangs of the great cave bear. Youth though I was, I had the strong thews of my father, gliding over the heavy bones of our kind, and the clear tanned hide and raw yellow hair and cold blue eyes of my blood from time immemorial. We were mighty then, tireless in the hunt, and powerful in war.

But the level plains of long sere grass, they were strange and new to us and we knew not the ways thereof. At the time whereof I speak, we had marched south for seven days and had found no game and little water, and hunger gnawed at us and made tempers short and men take risks they might otherwise have been too wary to attempt. For we knew nothing of this land nor of the dangers peculiar to it, as I shall shortly show.

When the last of the dried meat

was gone, and the water low in the leather bottles, our huntsmen ranged far and ever farther afield, searching for game. What beasts might dwell here amidst the endless plains we could not guess, but beasts somewhere there must surely be, for else the Dragon Star and the visions of Zorm would not have led us thither.

By night we lay huddled together for warmth, body close to body, trying to ignore the emptiness of our bellies and the dryness in our mouths. None complained and none whimpered, for we were a hardy people; only the babes cried a little against their mothers' breasts. Fire we had brought with us at the beginning of the great march south, fire from the Undying Flame that the women tended ever and that was never allowed to die out. It had been Zar, the great-great-grandsire of Zorm—Zar, the first chief of our tribe—had first learned the secret of making fire. For that reason was the sacred fire of the tribes watched over and guarded thereafter down through the generations, called the Flame of Zar. But his secret, which had to do with the striking together of certain rocks, had perished with him under the trampling feet of the hairy mammoth. And, within my own time, the flame we had brought with us in a bowl of hollowed stone, had been drowned in a sudden rainstorm. No longer did any, even Zorm the Wise, who was the descendant of Zar in the fourth generation, remember the secret of fire. Therefore did we huddle for warmth together under the thick grasses amidst the windy plains, naked and shivering in our hides. And more than a few of the people had cause of nights to grumble against the cleverness of Tuma the Limping for that, at his behest, we had scraped

the thick, warm fur from the hides we wore.

Foremost of the hunters of the tribe was my mighty father, Gomar. He and my brothers had gone forth a dawn earlier to seek for game. But with the setting of the sun they had not returned, though all else, including mine uncle, Thom-Ra the chief, had come back from the hunt, and empty-handed.

### 3. *The Vision of Zorm*

**F**OR WORRY after my father and my brothers, I, Junga, could not sleep that night. And neither did my grandsire, Zorm, find easeful slumber. The sleep of the aged is thin as the blood in their veins, I knew, but as my grandsire lay curled against me, his bony frame gaunt in my arms, which I wrapped about him so that he might take warmth from my young flesh and hot blood, I felt him tremble betimes and betimes cry out.

Towards the mid of night, he spake suddenly in a voice clear and strong, and I startled from my half-doze at his cry.

"Gomar, my son! Venture not into the marshy places! Turn back therefrom, and thy sons with thee! Beware the Oozy Thing—the ghastly stench of it, and the bottomless hunger! Turn thy steps away from the deep places, or the Father of Slime will drink thy strong blood and suck the flesh from thy bones—*Aiiee!*"

With this last, he shrieked and woke trembling and staring about into the dark with eyes filled with fear. But when I asked of him the meaning of his words, it was as if they had been spake by another, for he remembered them not. He knew only that a black and doom-fraught dream had seized upon him as he drowsed. When I told him the words he had

uttered in the dream, he grew agitated and distraught. Mayhap it had been a vision of warning, sent him by the Gods of the North, who ever and anon spake to him in his slumbers. The thought that my father and my brothers were in danger roused me and I rose from my bed and took up my flint spear and stone knife and the great axe that was used only in war. Nor did my grandsire seek to stay me.

"East-away, child, in a marshy place, the danger lurks," he quavered, pointing with one frail arm. "Nor know I how the knowledge cometh to me—but fly like the very wind, young Junga, if ever thou wouldst see thy kin alive!"

I passed through the huddled sleepers to where Thom-Ra, the chief, lay amidst his sons and his women. At my approach the younger of the sons of Thom-Ra roused. Taller than I, and older by two years, and mightier of thew than I, was Charn, the chief's son. But ever was I fleeter of foot than he, and keener of eye, wherefore he admired me for those things wherein I was more skillful than he, as I admired him for those skills of his, and we had ever been friends.

"Whither at this dark hour, Junga?" he asked me, and I told him of the vision of Zorm and of my fears. He tugged at the few tufts of yellow hair that, as yet, sparsely adorned his chin.

"Ever from our fathers' time have the things seen in his dreams by Zorm the Wise proven true and sent by the Gods," he mused. "If peril lurks amidst the plains, we must know of it. And my uncle and thy father are the boldest of all our huntsmen, and must not perish. Come, I will go with thee." And Charn took up his weapons and came

to my side.

"Whatever danger the Plains of Thune conceal, we shall face it together, Junga, thou and I!" he said stoutly; and my heart warmed to him then and there; and for all the rest of our lives did we cleave together, Charn and I, as we had been brothers born out of the same womb.

We left the camp and struck due east, in the direction from which the sun would rise. Nor did we loiter on the way, but like the wind we ran; nor did I ease my pace so that he could keep abreast of me, but flew on ever before him while he strove manfully to attain my speed.

Black was the sky in that doomful hour, and thick with clouds, and thunder growled like a surly beast upon the heights. Ever and anon, lightning flashed amidst the high-piled clouds, and we knew a storm was brewing. All the more reason, then, to speed my pace, before the winds grew and the rains came down to obliterate my father's spoor upon the long grasses.

In the days of my youth I could run all day, swift as a bird, tireless as the invisible wind. We were mighty men in the days of my youth, iron of arm, and with an unyielding and an untiring strength like the stone of the mountains that had cradled the birthplace of my race. Such men dwell not upon the earth now, as strode the wide ways of the world when Charn and I were in the fulness of our youth.

Fleet though we were, we were too late.

*4. The Horror in the Pit*  
**E**RE EVER WE had found the marshy place, the storm broke above us. Wind tore with shrieking voice through our yellow hair, which not

yet was woven into the long braid of manliness, and tugged at the strip of hide we wore about our naked loins. Cold rain lashed our backs and shoulders like icy whips and blinded us so that we stumbled and could not see our footing. But the flames of heaven blazed on the hearths of the Gods, and by its intermittent flaring we saw boggy ground ahead, and low hummocks of scabrous grass, and black pools in betwixt, and recognized this as the place dreamt of in the vision of Zorm.

Here we went slowly and on cautious feet, Charn and I, not knowing what peril might lurk herein. We avoided the black pools and inky rivulets, leaping from hummock to hummock, ever wary and holding our weapons at the ready. And I called aloud my father's name and the names of my tall brothers, in my clear young voice. But no answering call came out of the pouring dark.

We came at last to the brink of a great shallow pit, like the bed of a vanished lake. But it was empty of water, that lake, though a slick coating of black mud, or something very like unto mud, lay along the bottom of the depression. I peered over the brink and gazed therein . . . and my heart froze within my breast at what I saw pitifully tumbled about upon the floor of the pit.

They were the bones of men, *three* men, and one larger of size and older than the other twain: and still clasped about the bones of its neck was the triple-stranded necklace of bear's fangs that oft I had seen hung about the throat of my father, that mighty hunter. Now he would hunt no more, would Gomar, nor would his tall sons go ever at his side . . .

At my shoulder, Charn the chief's son sucked in the breath between his

teeth. The whites of his eyes shone wide with terror in the flicker of the storm-fires.

"The bones are stripped bare!" he whispered. "Not a morsel of flesh remains upon them! What manner of beast could have done this to strong men, well armed and brave? It was no beast did this grisly thing, but a night-devil!"

For a moment I did not reply, for the tears I would not permit to flow from my eyes choked my throat. Then I growled in a low tone that, beast or devil, I would slay the thing had done this, or be slain by it. Mayhap the Gods heard my vow, for thunder crashed and lightning struck to fire a dead tree that stood not far off amidst the marshes, and it burned like a torch held in a gaint's hand.

"Vengeance I will pursue later," I said. "First I must care for my dead." And this we did, side by side, after the few and simple rites of our tribe. The raw and naked bones of my brethren and my sire we fetched up out of that black and slimy pit, piled them on a pyre made of dry grasses, and touched the pyre to flame with a bough torn from the burning tree. They flared up like dry twigs in a conflagration, the bones of my father and his sons, and that was a strange thing to see, for new bones burn poorly. Perchance it was the black slime wherewith they were bedrabbled that made them flare like dry tinder.

The smoke of the funeral pyre rose to heaven, bearing with it the ghosts of my father and my brothers on their long journey to the second life. They would join the ghosts of their ancestors in the country beyond the clouds, and dwell in bliss forever, purged of all crimes done in this life by their passage through the purifying flames. I made my farewells in silence, and

Charn, my friend, stood at my side, his hand upon my shoulder. Above us, the storm died away and the stars stared down, coldly curious. Then I took up my weapons and prepared for the hunt.

"We part here, my friend," I said. "Bear word back to Zorm of how his son and his grandsons perished; say to him also that the last of his blood goes forth to seek vengeance or to die."

"If Zorm shall hear the tale of it, it shall be from your own lips, Junga, my brother," said Charn quietly. "For I shall go with you to face what cometh."

"This is not your fight, but mine," I said.

"I have made it mine," he spake. And then tears that I had held back rose to blur my vision and for some little time I could not speak, but only clasped his shoulder blindly, with a pressure that said what I could not.

And we went forward together, bearing a burning branch to light the way before us while we tracked the beast to its lair.

### 5. *Father of Slime*

**I**N TRUTH it was not hard to follow, that trail. For when the beast had heaved itself up out of the pit the black ooze had clung to it, or so it seemed, so that it left a track of be-drabbled slime whereby we tracked it swiftly. Strange they were, those tracks. I, who have hunted the white tiger of the heights and cave-bear and the ghost-gray wolves of the snow country have never seen a trail more oddly marked.

Charn saw the strangeness of it, too. "It seems to squirm along upon its belly as if it had no legs," he grunted. "See, Junga, my brother, there are no marks of pads or claws or hoofs in this soft mud! Naught but the

trail of wriggling slime . . . is it some monster worm we follow, do you think, or some great serpent?"

"It was no serpent sucked the bones of my father clean," I growled. But his words sent a thrill of uncanny horror through me like a sudden chill. We were little more than savages in those days, and had seen little of the mighty world, its wonders and its mysteries, and our heads were full of the tales of night demons and monsters, whereof the old women whisper round the cave fires on stormy nights. Thinking of these unwholesome things made the flesh creep upon my arms and my nape-hairs prickle and lift. But I went on, bearing ever in mind that whatever can kill a man is solid and real, and can itself be killed.

Or so I thought at the time.

We came upon it quite suddenly, not long thereafter.

We had come to the edge of another bowl-like depression in the marshy ground, but this one was full to the brim with black water, or with some other fluid black as ink and stinking like the breath from an open grave.

Charn wrinkled his nose at this stench. "Foul water must it be, to smell so bad as this," he murmured, bending curiously over the motionless surface of the black fluid.

I know not what it was made me put my hand out suddenly to stay him. But I caught his arm and thrust him back, and in so doing, saved him from a death more terrible than ever a man of our tribe has dreamed in his grisliest nightmare.

For the black fluid rippled—stirred—and rose in a slow, horrible wave that shaped itself into a ropy arm of glistening, quivering black jelly. And this black tentacle of living

slime groped at the space where Charn had been a heartbeat before.

"Gods of my fathers!" he cried. "It is a thing of *slime*—slime that lives, and moves, and—*kills!*"

In truth, it was the father of all slime, a living mass of quivering obscenity, vast enough to mire and swallow down a wooly mammoth in his prime. We shrank before it, retreating to a grassy hummock, and the heaving mass slopped up and over the brink of the hollow and flowed towards us like a living wave.

I flung my spear directly into the mass, but it passed through the stinking jelly without dealing it hurt nor harm. A tentacle shaped itself and whipped out towards me, but I hewed through it with my stone axe, and, severed clean, it fell to twitch and wriggle upon the lank grass like a great worm. But only for a moment did it hold its shape. In the next instant it had burst into a black puddle that trickled back to the parent mass, joined into it and was instantly absorbed.

We had thrown both our spears by now, and Charn had flung his axe into the heaving shape of slime, wherein it sunk without a trace. Save for my axe, and the flint knives twisted into the thongs that bound our strips of hide about our loins, we were defenseless.

So we retreated further, our knees trembling, our faces livid with terror. A droplet of the slime-stuff had touched my bare breast, where it clung, burning like liquid fire. I bent and caught up cold wet mud and smeared it on the burnt place with shaking hands. Now I knew what it was had stripped bare the bones of my father, for the stinking ooze of the slime-thing seared the flesh of men like some unholy acid.

Charn yowled and struck out sud-

denly with his stone dagger as a ropy extrusion of slime whipped out at him. The member withdrew, his blade still in it. And then a tentacle came slithering out at me and I struck with my axe, and howled like a singed cur as the slime stung my fingers.

"What black hell is this country the Dragon Star has led us into," cried Charn, "where even the slime can rise up against a man?" I had no answer to make.

"Save your breath," I said, "for running."

### 6. *Junga the Light-Bringer*

**B**UT we did not run very far, after all. For swiftness far than our feet the living wave of black ooze flowed over the ground, and before the white moon broke free from her tangle of clouds we had gained the top of a hummock and found ourselves ringed in. The slime-beast, like a living river, had flowed around the base of the hummock, to join and melt into itself in one circle of slithering death.

And now we were unarmed, for all we had to defend ourselves with was the stone knife at my waist.

"This is the end of it, my brother," I panted. "I told you to go back to the camp, but you would not listen."

"I regret nothing," he said stoutly (though naked terror was in his eyes). "No man should face a death like this alone, without a comrade at his side. Our ghosts shall wander forever, side by side . . ."

*But not in the country beyond the clouds,* I thought to myself as the slime came lapping up the slope to suck us down, *for our spirits have not been purged of crime in the purifying flames of the pyre.* The thought of the flaming funeral pyre reminded me of the burning branch I still bore in my hand and which, in my haste and in



the extremity of my terror, I had not thought to cast away. Staring into the red flames I thought, for one mad moment, to turn the torch upon Charn and myself, that we might die a clean death by fire and that our ghosts, cleansed in that fire, might journey beyond the clouds to join our ancestors in the second life. But it was for a moment only that the madness clamored within my brain.

For Charn screamed, a raw-throated yell of unreasoning horror, as a black and glistening wave rose up before him and I sickened at the putrid breath of the thing that oozed up to engulf him and to suck him down in horror. And in that instant a single thought crashed through my fear-crazed mind.

*For I remembered how the beslimed bones of my father had flared up like tinder in the funeral pyre—!*

Howling the war-cry of the People, I sprang forward and shoved Charn behind me with a powerful sweep of my arm.

And in the same moment I thrust the burning bough directly into the Father of Slime.

Then it was that we twain gazed into the naked heart of hell . . . for flames ran crazily over the heaving, glistening tide of putrid jelly . . . and the thing blazed up like an inferno!

In a heartbeat we were walled about with living flame. It writhed and wriggled like a maddened tangle of worms, sheathed in that web of burning flame. And as it burned, it died: and as it died, it—*screamed!*

Never, while the world lasts, do I wish to hear such a cry again! A high-pitched squeal—a piping sound, like a newborn babe, mewling and whimpering in fear as it dies, not understanding what is happening to it, not having felt the sting and bite of

pain before . . . ah, Gods, that innocent, baby-cry goes whimpering through my darkest dreams to this very hour!

We leaped over the burning slime to the safe ground beyond, and stood, clutching each other, gaping like madmen upon the horror of its death-throes. By the time dawn paled the east, naught was left of the hideous thing but a rubbery, burnt scum and flames that smouldered amongst the scruffy grass. And I was numb with awe and with the wonder of it.

Perchance it was that in Time's gray dawn some accident of nature had touched life within a droplet of slime within the depths of the steaming fens or oozy seas. And the slime fed upon wriggling life, absorbed that which it fed upon, and grew in bulk thereby. Grew vast and vaster still, over ages, till the lake or fen or marsh wherein it had been born was too small to contain it, so it had heaved itself ashore, to feed on beasts and men, growing ever greater and greater, until at length it had become the monstrous enormity that we had stumbled upon in our ignorance and folly.

World-old and world-evil, perhaps, was the Father of Slime . . . older by unthinkable ages than the race of men . . . mayhap it was even the first-begotten of all living things on this earth—and a naked savage with a burning branch had brought it to its doom! Irony of ironies, a thing older perchance than the very mountains of the north, and slain by a boy scarce fourteen.

TOGETHER, wearily, we trudged back across the plains, Charn my brother, and I. To where the People of the Dragon huddled together on the unknown plain, fearful of what the day

(cont. on page 117)

# **THE INCREDIBLE UMBRELLA MARVIN KAYE**

*Not since Pratt & deCamp's Harold Shea stories of the forties—The Incomplete Enchanter, et al—have we encountered a more delightful fantasy adventure. Marvin Kaye is the author of the The Stein & Day Handbook of Magic; editor of the Popular Library anthology, Fiends and Creatures; and has done three mysteries for the Saturday Review Press.*



**Illustrated by STEPHEN E. FABIAN**

## Epilogue

“WE’VE a first-rate assortment of magic,” said the dapper little merchant. He swept his manicured hand in a vague gesture, indicating the cabalistic paraphernalia cluttering the room’s niches and nooks. “Some of my stock, in fact, is so odd that even *I* haven’t begun to explore its possibilities. You have no idea, therefore, how happy I am to make your acquaintance, Mr. . . .?” he twirled his finger in an embarrassed gesture. “Forgive my absent-mindedness. When you’ve got one foot in this world and the other in the next, it’s difficult to remember where one’s head is!”

“Perhaps,” said his companion, “I’d better give you my card.”

“Ah, quite,” said the merchant, “and I must let you have one of mine. Bit of a commercial puff, you know, but you’ll find all the necessaries thereon . . .”

The two rummaged in their pockets, withdrew billfolds, extracted and proffered to one another neat white identificatory pasteboards.

The little merchant examined his visitor’s calling-card with unexpressed disapproval. It *was* so dry, so lacking in showmanship . . .

J. ADRIAN FILLMORE  
38 C Pugh Street  
College Hills, Penna.  
377-0725

“I presume this is the seat of some institution of higher learning?” he asked.

Fillmore nodded. “My alma mater, as well as my current . . . or, rather, recent locus of employment is Parker College. I teach—taught?—English literature, American drama, Shakespeare. You’ve heard of him?”

“Yes, yes,” the other said. “He is often quoted, or at least paraphrased. In fact, we have a court of Elsinore, don’t you know?”

The pedagogue puzzled for a moment, leaning his stocky frame back in the overstuffed morris-chair that occupied a corner of the magician’s back-room. Then his brows unknitted. “Of course,” he ventured, “there was a one-act play, was there not? *Rosencrantz*—”

“Don’t tell me!” The magician interrupted. “I had rather not inquire too deeply into the literature of your time; I might grow curious as to my own fate, and you, no doubt, would be rash enough to tell me! However, if I may venture to alter the topic—?”

Fillmore nodded.

“I am rather curious to hear your tale.”

“But I thought—” began the other, pointing in the direction of the fireplace.

The magician rose, walked to the side of the grate where he had propped the umbrella. He picked it up and examined it. It was a curiously large instrument and had evidently seen much usage; the handle was tarnished and the grip was frayed; the once-vibrant colors, though still startling, had faded and the material itself was worn. Holding it, he twirled it in his hands.

“Yes, yes,” he said to Fillmore, “I know perfectly well your mode of passage. This instrument is one of mine, without doubt—one of my earliest models, in fact. It also happens to be the very first to make its way back to me, and the circumstance fills me with delight! I’ve wondered how effective some of my spells are. This makes me so happy I’m rather inclined to sing about it—”

“No, no!” his guest protested. “I’ve

had quite enough of that sort of thing for some time, thank you. I should prefer my arias confined within the context of a recital or operatic production."

"As you will," the magician replied, somewhat vexed. "However, if you insist on prose, let me prevail on you to supply it. For I really cannot restrain myself in these climes . . ." With that, he began clearing his throat in a sort of intoned warning which might have become a full-fledged *arpeggio* if Fillmore hadn't hastened to speak.

"Very well, then. I suppose you would like the details of my trip?"

"Oh, quite," said the magician. "Begin if you will with finding of this trinket. And, for heaven's sake, catch me up to date on your adventures here: the mixture of customs must be most amusing."

Fillmore frowned. "*That* is certainly relative to one's vantage-point. However—"

Holding up his hand, the magician kept the resultant silence long enough to replace the umbrella by the fireside. Then he scurried back to his seat. But on the way, he passed the piano; pausing briefly there, he struck up a pompous fanfare, then plumped himself back down on the sofa.

"I couldn't resist," he giggled, wiggling into a comfortable listening posture.

Fillmore cleared his throat.

### Chapter One

**T**HE FIRST semester following a seventh-year sabbatical is bound to be a let-down, but in Fillmore's case, it was disastrous. To begin with, the research grant had not come through, so he'd been forced to venture to London on his own meager nest-egg. Once there, he learned, to his dismay, that no amount of pleading,

cajoling or upbraiding would enable him to study the original promptscript for *The Yeomen of the Guard*. Thus, the entire excursion had no point at all; even the opportunity to see, in person, the locality of the Boar's-Head Tavern and the monetary establishment that occupied the portion of Baker Street once tenanted by more illustrious men could not assuage the young man's bitter disappointment.

There was so little time left, and he had postponed the dissertation so long that he stood in danger of losing his position. To make matters infinitely worse, Dover had been promoted, in his absence, to dean of the arts and letters college, and that meant Fillmore would have to work with a new thesis adviser: either Cable, a total incompetent, or Quintana, with whom he simply could not get along.

The worst of it was that Fillmore couldn't care less. The planning of his sabbatical research had been so long in the formulation, and the initial correspondence had been so encouraging that the ultimate result was all the more crushing. If the trustees hadn't been sick or on vacation, he might have been successful; but the only one he'd gotten to see was a business manager who'd dismissed the quest—and his letters of introduction—with the sort of offhand rudeness that one might seek in vain to find a twin to in any other business but the theatre.

So he really didn't care if this meant the loss of his teaching position or not. He was in one of those moods in which nothing suited him—neither his name, which he'd always more or less detested; his too-stocky frame, too short to impress anyone but a Welshman; his native reticence, which consigned him to dateless nights and losing debates. He hated

his job, his insufficient salary, his cramped apartment and his equally unspacious vw, which stood in its usual disrepair in the back of the apartment building . . . unwashed, untuned, uncomfortable.

IT WAS an autumn afternoon when he walked across the leafy mall past the administration building and into the cheerless concrete shell that housed the literature college. The sun slanted obliquely through shedding treetops and flickered off the glassy particles embedded in the walkway that branched out of the mall. A girl in slacks, hair tied in a ponytail, brushed past Fillmore, teasing his nose with the overdose of perfume she'd doused upon her wrists. Somewhere a bell chimed the hour of three. As he mounted the steps to the side-door of Mallin Hall, he could just catch the reflection of his unsmiling face in the glass of the door: his penetrating eyes looked past his too-familiar features and studied the departing contours of the scented coed on the path behind him.

Sighing, Fillmore opened the door and entered the gloom of the stairwell.

"WELL, WELL, young man, it looks like we'll be working together," rumbled Quintana without the least hint of pleasure at the idea. "We'll have to shape up, now won't we? *Won't we?*"

Standing by the triple bank of windows giving on the flank of classroom seats, Fillmore had already allowed his attention to wander. The autumn sun was shedding a cozy glow over the rolling landscape, and he would give much to be anywhere else than in the predictable world of the Parker department of English literature, listening to the predictable admonitions

of the gross department head, Quintana.

"You know, of course, that you have one scant semester to polish off that dissertation, do you not? And that means beginning all over again, choosing an entirely new topic . . . which *I* must approve. If not—well, you certainly must be aware that I will have no recourse—Damn it, Fillmore, *are* you listening?"

Turning abruptly around, Fillmore had to waste a second refocusing his eyes to the unlighted interior of the classroom. Quintana was sitting up straight in the wooden seat behind the nicked old desk, his jowly face hard to discern in the gloom. Behind him, the green slateboard helped further weary the eyes; it was a mass of notes and diagrams pertaining to the birthdates of various Victorian writers.

"When," Quintana rasped, "will you stop wool-gathering? *When?*"

"Can't say," Fillmore yawned, with no attempt to cover his mouth. "Perhaps never."

And he walked out, paying no attention to the other's raving.

OF COURSE, it was an immature action; he was well aware how childish it must appear, how strongly it must reinforce Quintana's prejudices against him. But the oppressive midday demon of apathy had taken possession of Fillmore, buffering him from any consideration of his action's probable aftermath. At worst, he would be let go, and what matter whether that transpired now or thirteen weeks hence?

Outside, Fillmore drew in a revitalizing breath of September air. It was the kind of day when, if he were still an undergraduate, he would have gone wandering in the russet-and-

green hills, writing sonnets to dark ladies he had yet to meet. Undergraduates sat about upon the campus lawns, some with books cracked, others merely enjoying one another's company. The steps of the library beckoned upward to the selfless pleasures within, but Fillmore resisted, preferring the expansiveness of the unbounded afternoon.

Walking towards the town's main street (some hundred yards down the sloping mall), he loitered here and there, watching birds pecking residues of bread from sidewalk-cracks, gazing at squirrels seeking acorns in the autumn grass. Out on the front lawn facing Old Main a company of ROTC students waited out the cadences of a military march performed by a student band. An airplane droned above; had Fillmore cared to look up and risk scorching his corneas, he would have seen the ship's silhouette partially blotting out the sun's shining round.

On such an afternoon, Fillmore decided, there was only one thing he could possibly enjoy doing. So he passed through the vaulting gate that arched the lower end of the mall and walked down Allen Avenue to the spot where he'd parked the vw. Climbing in, he nosed into the sparse traffic, made a U-turn and drove off to Interstate. 15A-S.

LIKE A GHOST keeping a vigil, Fillmore haunted all the book-and-curio shops in every burg and village within a fifty-mile radius of College Heights. Almost any Saturday, after eating a modest breakfast, he would hop into the vw and pick some likely direction: for the next several hours, he would lose himself in myriads of junk shops, antique stores, Salvation Army rescue mission centers—

anywhere he could snuffle around like a foraging animal rummaging for tidbits.

Old books, antiques, 78rpm recordings, side-tables, stereopticons, Edison thick-discs, comic books and calendars: all were interesting to him; it was Fillmore's principal amusement and (fortunately for his reduced post-sabbatical budget) still remained within the reach of his pocketbook.

His favorite browsing spot was a converted garage halfway up an unpaved driveway in Bellavista Falls, ten miles south of Parker College. Nameless, it was a linoleumed place run by a woman named Rose. A perimeter of bookshelves (unfinished pine nailed together in random fashion) around the shop-walls enclosed a few tables of oddities.

The selection, though limited, was frequently renewed, and the white-haired proprietress kept her prices modest . . . not that she was unaware of the value of every treasure in her stock, far from it. But Rose plain refused to profiteer, as she put it, from a pastime of her "dotage."

"Besides," she once told Fillmore, "the prices I charge keeps *my* suppliers from getting suspicious. And sometimes that means I can get my hands on a goodie that *I* want!"

He had never been able to figure out what the specializations of the skinny little shopkeeper were, but neither did he care, since they never seemed to conflict with his greatest interests.

A third reason for being partial to Rose's place was the fact that few fellow-collectors knew of it. It was just out of the way enough to prevent hordes of knowledgeable antiquarians and scholars from stripping it bare of its treasures . . . which would have equally displeased Rose and J. Adrian

Fillmore. (God, how he hated that name!)

That afternoon he made a delightful haul—as he was wont to call the results of any particularly weighty collectorial trip. First, there was the Benziger edition of Benson's *A Mirror of Shalot*—only the second copy he had ever seen and the first he could afford. (Rose, in her paradoxical fashion, had penciled “weird tales—very scarce” in the flyleaf, then charged him \$4.00 for it). Then, he also found a hardback edition of Carr's *The Nine Wrong Answers*: though less illustrious than the Benson unearthing, it was a scarce title nonetheless, especially since the paperback editions were all abridged; at any rate, it was a bargain at 19¢. (Where did she come up with her figures?)

From the record rack, he actually plucked a mint condition of “Dipper Mouth Blues,” which he'd long decided was apocryphal, and—though he rarely bought second-hand LPs—took a chance on the venerable “Mikado” which had Robert Rounseville in the role of Nanki-Poo; it was the last remaining album of that brilliant but woefully under-recorded tenor that Fillmore lacked to make his Rounseville collection complete . . .

“Is that all, young man?” Rose asked, as she tallied up the tab.

“I think so, Rose. I seem to have gotten something—uh—interesting from most of the tables and racks today.”

“Curios,” she sniffed, resettling the rimless glasses on her thin-bridged nose. “You hardly looked at them.”

“Yes,” said Fillmore, “but I can hardly afford everything in the shop and—”

“Now,” she interrupted, taking him by the sleeve and pulling him back to the centre of the shop, where the an-

tique table stood, “if you don't like what's here, you don't have to buy. But I'd think, if I were going to drive all the way in from College Heights, I'd take a bare minute to inspect every last little goodie.”

With a resigned shrug—but with a perfectly good will—Fillmore examined with greater care the table of odds and ends he'd casually noted earlier on his path to the books.

As he browsed, Rose stood looking off into space, no particular expression—or, at least, no interpretable one—on her puckered face. Leaning against a bookcase, she kept her hands dug deep in the large pocket of her rose-print cotton dress. (“Don't care how cold it is,” she would say. “I don't change to wool until the calendar tells me it's winter!”)

The only sound disturbing the late autumn afternoon was the muted ticking of the ship's-clock upon the reinforced soapbox where Rose kept her cigarbox of change and bills. Several minutes passed by, but—save for Fillmore's gently sentient inspection—nothing stirred in the garage-shop.

But at last, the collector looked up from the table and sought the businesswoman's attention. He had an odd object in his hand: a long, heavy pole that ended in a large flounce of some silky material emblazoned with orange-and-yellow stripes on which various cabalistic symbols seemed to dance in pastel figurations.

It was clearly an umbrella, but its size was rather impractical: too large for everyday use, too small for beach-basking. The grip, made of blackest leather, was somewhat worn away; it seemed to turn slightly. The cloth shade was frayed, and the colors, though startling enough, were yet

faded from what must have been their initial brilliance.

Fillmore couldn't place the period or design: it seemed too ludicrous for serious commercial distribution. And yet, if it were a toy, it could not possibly be lifted by even the most sinewy urchin. Perhaps it was a theatrical prop of some sort?

"Oh, that," sneered Rose. "Pretty, ain't it? It's no good—don't work worth a damn."

"How doesn't it work?"

"Won't open."

"Oh." Fillmore, disappointed, started to lay the instrument back down. As he did, he spied some inscription on the inside; pushing up the cloth a little ways, he peered to make out the words half-obliterated by frequent handling.

Along the length of the pole were three letters: NGT. Opposite them, halfway around the circumference was another line, but time also had worn it down to near-illegibility. The only thing discernible was a number and the beginnings of another word: SIM—Fillmore replaced the umbrella on the table.

"Oh, I really thought you might be interested in that one," Rose sighed.

"Well," said Fillmore, "I *might* fancy it, if I only knew a little more about it. Where it comes from, for instance. But not only is it nondescript . . . according to you, it doesn't even function. How much did you want for it, anyway?"

"It's cluttering up perfectly good table space," the woman grumbled, then waved her hand in disgust. "Give me a quarter and take it away."

"A pittance for my masterpiece?" raged the magician. "And my latest models fetch seven-and-six! And that's without those tatty astrologic symbols

*runed all over the cloth!" Popping a pill in his mouth, he held his pulse and waited until it slowed. "Well, never mind, lad," he said, "I pray you please resume." He delivered the latter request in recitative.*

## Chapter Two

IT WAS RAINING the following morning, and Fillmore watched the streaks of water trace interminable tears down the cold faces of his bedroom windows. He had no classes to teach that day, and he was so lethargic that he might have been content to stay in bed and stare at the patterns upon the panes.

But at length he forced himself to rise, wash his face and teeth, and shave. His attention kept wandering during the latter process, but the tiny wounds he kept inflicting on himself called him back repeatedly. When he'd finished with the ritual, Fillmore ruefully surveyed his face: the skin, once he'd daubed it with styptic, was clear and it showed few wrinkles; of course there was the merest trace of crow's-feet about the eyes, but that was not entirely due to age. There was once a time when Fillmore had toyed with the notion of becoming an actor: daily he would emote before mirrors, working with grimace and greasepaint to cultivate a pair of Byronic eyes . . . like a "demon's that is dreaming"; brooding; introspective. The result, now that Fillmore had abandoned histrionic presumptions and now that he was a staid teacher-cum-doctoral candidate, was that his eyes always felt strained and pained: tired mirrors of a weary spirit.

He dressed slowly, choosing one of the lusterless gray wool suits that served as unofficial uniforms for Parker College pedants. His only flight of personal taste was reserved



for the neckwear he looped about his throat: a loud silk ascot. Many were the stuffy afternoons when he'd throttled his 16½ neck with a sober Windsor-knot tie. At last, he protested the fitless shirts at his clothiers'—only to find that there was no way short of customizing to fit his broad-shouldered frame and thick throat into the same garment. Having no choice but to buy medium shirts with collars too small for him, he elected to breathe freely: leaving the top shirt-button always open, he affected the ascot, much to the tacit horror of the hidebound Quintana.

Fillmore supposed he ought to do his best to avoid offending the department head on this of all days, yet he could not bring himself to choke off his windpipe with a tie, even under the present desperate circumstances.

He had already decided he would have to kowtow to Quintana. Upon waking that morning with the damp chill of autumn thunderstorm penetrating the bedroom, Fillmore immediately recalled his rude exit from the previous day's session. There would be no alternative, he realized: he must humble himself, beg forgiveness on the grounds, perhaps, that his sour sabbatical had left him temporarily witless.

Yet he took plenty of time getting ready for the distasteful ceremony. After dressing, he spent the better part of an hour idling through the morning papers while dawdling over a glass of reconstituted orange juice, a half-burned piece of toast with margarine, and instant coffee with powdered cream substitute—none of which, fortunately, he bothered to taste. The postman shoved a few letters under the door; he perused them without interest . . . a subscription

renewal form for the *Journal of Aesthetics*, an envelope full of discount coupons for popular-brand cereals and detergents, and the telephone bill.

After washing the dishes, and after he'd doused them with boiling water, Fillmore entered the living-room, where he began to fleck the dust from the tops of the furniture. But, as usual when there were books about, his attention wandered within five minutes.

At first he leafed through his new acquisitions of the day before. Then, noting one of the stories in the Benson volume, he rooted about among his anthologies trying to find where he'd first come across the tale. Successful in that quest, he went to something else; so, by further tangencies too convoluted to record, Fillmore lost himself for the better part of an hour in the solacing solitude of his library.

Just before he remembered his obligatory ordeal-to-come, he was browsing through *Studies of Literature* when he came across an article on Gilbert and Sullivan by Arthur Quiller-Couch. One passage in particular caught Fillmore's eye:

"What disgusts one in Gilbert from the beginning to the end, is his insistence on the physical odiousness of any woman growing old. As though, Great Heaven! themselves did not find it tragic enough—the very and necessary tragedy of their lives! Gilbert shouts it, mocks it, apes with it, spits upon it. He opens with his dirty trump card in *Trial by Jury* . . ."

"What in all good hell is he talking about?" Fillmore asked aloud. "There aren't any old ladies in *Trial By Jury*."

Except for the elderly, ugly daughter of the rich attorney in *The Judge's Song*. How does that go? . . .

' . . . But I soon got tired of  
third-class journeys,  
And dinners of bread and wa-  
ter;  
So I fell in love with a rich at-  
torney's  
Elderly, ugly daughter.'

"And the judge becomes rich be-  
cause of all the business the grateful  
attorney sends his way and—

'At length I became as rich as  
the Gurneys—  
An incubus then I thought  
her,  
So I threw over that rich attor-  
ney's  
Elderly, ugly daughter . . .'

"Good God, is that what Quiller-  
Couch was complaining about? The  
only person the song mocks is the cad  
of a judge himself. Hmm! I'll have to  
nickname him Quiller-Grouch from  
now on . . ."

Just then, Fillmore spied the  
kitchen clock through the living-room  
portal. It was just after eleven; he  
simply couldn't postpone the distaste-  
ful appointment with Quintana any  
longer. He must seek him out and, if  
needs be, grovel.

AS HE WRAPPED his scarf about his  
throat and struggled with the heavy  
rubber rain-slicker, Fillmore con-  
tinued to wrestle with the problem of  
W. S. Gilbert's old ladies.

It was a cliché of Gilbertian scho-  
larship that the librettist-playwright  
treated his old women cavalierly. Yet,  
thought Fillmore, I can hardly call  
any cogent examples to mind: Kati-  
sha, I suppose, in *The Mikado*, and  
Ruth in *The Pirates of Penzance* . . .

The thought was abruptly cut off as  
he opened the apartment-house door

and was nearly drenched. In his  
preoccupation with the scholastic  
problem, he'd neglected to don over-  
shoes or take an umbrella out of the  
coat-closet.

Like Shelley's Frankenstein,  
Fillmore loved to slosh through a wild  
thundershower, untrammelled natural  
forces singeing his gray-tinged locks;  
but there were limits to transcenden-  
tal pleasures, and this downpour, he  
told himself, was one of them. If it  
meant this hairline would be plas-  
tered upon his brow in strings, and if  
it meant the sacrifice of his trousers-  
crease, then it was high time to con-  
sider prudent covering from the  
storm.

Nodding absently to a neighbor,  
Fillmore returned to his apartment to  
fetch overshoes and bumbershoot.

WHILE LABORING to pull the recalci-  
trant galoshes over his black Bosto-  
nians, Fillmore had two thoughts,  
only one of which was laudable.

"Why not pursue this problem of  
the old ladies?" he asked himself.  
"The research I've done won't be  
wasted: I can find a good basis here, I  
should imagine, for a new dissertation  
topic."

Having at last stretched the rubbers  
over his shoes, he reached into the  
closet again for his austere black um-  
brella. Then he had his second  
thought, and he withdrew his hand.

"Well, of course she said it  
wouldn't work, but let's see, all the  
same . . ." Entering his bedroom, he  
opened up the extra closet where he  
kept his curios and took out the  
peculiar object of his musings. It  
looked larger than he remembered,  
and its garish colors and devices,  
faded though they were, practically  
glowed in the drab, chilly bedroom.

Was there a catch along the pole to

release the hood? Yes, there was and Fillmore pressed it. But nothing happened.

"Rose must have been right," he sighed. "The button's stuck. How Quintana's eyes would have popped!" Now that the decision was out of his hands, Fillmore told himself he never would have *really* walked into the department head's office carrying the outlandish rainguard. Yet it would have been a noble gesture, a vestigial symbol of dignity.

Even as he thought it, Fillmore laughed. Imagine this gaudy oddment being construed as dignified! Staring at himself in the mirror, he made a comical face and twirled the umbrella once around by the handle in Chaplinesque fashion.

There was a sudden snap. The release button popped out an eighth of an inch further from the pole.

*"Precisely so," said the magician. "The handle was never loose; it's a safety catch. Prevents the fool thing from slipping open by accident. Of course, it's not necessary on the later models. We've worked out all the bugs by now—"*

Fillmore pressed the release and the umbrella snapped open. My God, he thought, it's bigger than I imagined, even considering how bulky it is . . .

The hood stretched out to the furthest corners of the room, blocking off the ceiling. It grew and grew, blotting from sight the entire room, the street below, the town. It hid the world.

Yet through the translucent material, Fillmore could still see the pale sunlight creeping through the rain-laved windowpane. But even as he watched, he saw the sunbeams grow stronger, and commence to beat and

glow as if the pulse of the universe were behind and the umbrella-hood was the heart-wall of the cosmos.

The perimeter of the cloth was a single, seamless circle. But Fillmore, astonished, suddenly realized that, like a wing, it was fluctuating in the wind.

*Wind?!*

Gravity shifted: his stomach executed an Immelman turn. The umbrella was no longer above him. He was streaming head-first after its downward flight, and the wind plucked fiercely at him, trying to rip him away from the incredible instrument.

Then it reversed once more, and he soared into cacophonous night, alive with vague glints of color. Whether he was hurtling over some plane or through some void, he did not know, for he dared not look down. He clung with both hands to the umbrella-grip, and his arms began to ache. Fillmore fastened his gaze upon the bizarre shapes and colors emblazoned on the hood above, but he suddenly closed his eyes tight.

"I'm going mad," he thought, "or else the whole world's turned topsy-turvy!"

For the suddenly-sinister cabalistic symbols seemed as possessed by the elemental fury of flight as the umbrella itself.

To his vast surprise, all sensation of rising and falling ceased as soon as he closed his eyes. Above him, the umbrella folded up. His feet touched grass, and summer sun shone upon his wind-chapped cheeks.

Fillmore opened his eyes. As he did, a fanfare sounded from somewhere nearby. It was like the beginning of an overture.

### Chapter Three

**I**T was an overture.

The merry strains of some sprightly gigue or hornpipe seemed to shimmer on the sunny air: as Fillmore listened, amazed, entranced, the music passed through a transitory passage into a sweetly doleful refrain. Then, before his spirit could be more than minimally mellowed by the gentle melancholy of the subject, the music was off again in a sprightly run of violins and violas, overlarded with scampering trills of piccolo, flute and clarinet.

The only trouble with the delightful serenade was that it seemed to have no point of origin. It pervaded the air, rang about the teacher's ears, swelled up from the ground . . . but proceeded from no discernible source. Yet it was so gracious and pleasing to his ears that, for the first time in many dreary, disappointing months, Fillmore felt refreshed, at rest. The fact that he had just undergone some undefinable transference did not, for the moment, disturb him; he enjoyed the cool breezes and warm sun bathing his upturned face. He remained still until the last melodic strains died away into the whispered sibilance of the nearby zephyr and a not-too-distant seaside.

Fillmore was standing on a grassy knoll overlooking a rocky seacoast. In the distance, a calm sea bore up an anchored schooner. Along the horizon, a network of rockfaces, wattled with caves, described a jagged skyline; from some point directly in front of the nether cave-mouth, smoke ascended, but the roll of the grassy mound on which he stood cut off the source of the haze from his vision.

In the other direction, as far as Fillmore could see, a gentle meadowland rolled parallel to the stony abut-

ments of the coast. The landscape was deserted, and the only movement was the bending of the grass-field under the caress of the breeze that carried warm summer smells to his nose. Overhead, a seagull wheeled lazily a moment, then dove towards the sea, his food-source—like a fighter plane that had been gunned down in a dog-fight. At the perimeter of the water, the surf broke smoothly in places, while in others, the rocks sticking out into the sea kicked up spume that glinted like a shower of gems in the sunlight. The sky was pastel blue, noon-bright and cloudless.

Lowering the now-shut umbrella so that its point rested against the ground, Fillmore found himself surprisingly apathetic to the fact that he had just undergone an impossible polarity of physical circumstance: where he had been indoors, he was now in an unpopulated expanse; where it was raining, it was now sunny; where it had been autumn, it was now late spring or early summer. And Parker College was landlocked and hemmed in by the ancient Appalachians; but this unfamiliar seascape thrilled with the tang and promises of ocean voyages and far lands. He had always loved the sea, detested the claustrophobic mountains that enclosed him in with the petty systems and niggling tyrannies of his parochial life.

Thus, he experienced a curious emotional tranquility in the face of a circumstance that would have thoroughly disoriented another mortal. But Fillmore, nurtured on the fantasies and utopias of the imaginative fiction that he loved, was well prepared for magical transposition: unconsciously, he had longed for it so long that it rather seemed tardy, having come.

As he stood upon the bluff taking in

unpolluted ocean air, he was aware, rationally at least, that he may have lost his faculties. But even in thought, he scoffed at the possibility of experiencing sensory impressions while simultaneously doubting their very existence. He was too much of a post-Nietzschean to negate himself in an Oriental wash of cosmic solipsism. "No," he told himself, "I've actually been propelled elsewhere." The umbrella clearly was the mode of transit . . . but what sort of propulsion might it represent? Spatial, temporal or dimensional?

He examined the device once more, seeking evidence of some recognizable mechanical principal employed in the intricacies of the instrument. But his scrutiny was unsuccessful. Fillmore decided to try it again, this time studying the mode of operation. He turned the handle, watched the catch pop out once more. He pressed it with his finger.

Nothing happened. Fillmore fiddled with the release, shoved the movable shaft forward up the pole, plucked at the folds of the hood. But the umbrella would not open again.

*"I didn't engineer it that way," the magician remarked. "But apparently there are physical laws governing it. I've seen it myself. You've got to finish a sequence . . ."*

Just as a graduate student pigeonholes interesting bits of information that crop up on tangents to the main thrust of his research, so Fillmore set aside for later musings the murky issue of his transposition and whether it was the product of superior technology, sinister sorcery or a deranged mentality.

The day was too lovely to let gloomy thoughts dominate him. Slip-

ping off rubbers, slicker and scarf, he carelessly dropped them on the ground and began walking in the direction of the cave-pocked cliffside, swinging his umbrella as he spryly sprang over the resilient earth of the green knoll. Overhead, the seagull, sated, circled lazily. The surf plashed with the predictability of a preclassical passacaglia.

Walking, Fillmore began to hum light-heartedly to himself . . . a rare practice for the pedant. After some minutes, the hum grew into a kind of wordless caroling. He stopped, amazed, delighted; the corners of his mouth crinkled up. How long had it been since he'd sung to himself out loud?

Imagine what one of his sober-faced colleagues would think of such unorthodox behaviour! He laughed, considering the notion, and resolved what he might do should he come on some dour-visaged professorial type upon this balmy seafront.

Fitting notion to action, he warbled in improvised recitative: "Good gentleman, I pray you tell me what clime this is? I prithee speak, oh speak, I pray you!"

"Why?" intoned a basso nearby. "Who are you who asks this question?"

Fillmore started. All blithe resolve collapsed miserably with the knowledge that he'd been heard, and evidently mocked. He blushed mightily.

By that time, Fillmore was standing on a sandy plain at the foot of the low bluff. The seaside was directly off and to his right. In the distance, he could see the fire that produced the smoke wafting above the cliff-wall. A group of people were huddled about it, but they were too far away to distinguish.

The person who'd spoken—or rather chanted—was much nearer,

some twenty-five feet away and just rounding a small outcropping between the spot where Fillmore stood and the sea.

The scholar gaped at the newcomer's outlandish appearance. A tall, portly man in his middle ages, he walked in a curious swaggering manner that was almost a dance-step. He had flaming red hair, an immense bristling mustache jutting out several inches on either side of his face and a Mephistophelean goatee just above the rugged jawline. But his garb was what astounded Fillmore: treading in calf-high hard-leather black boots, the stranger wore purple, satiny slacks partially obscured by a yellow vest, over which had been draped a long purple coat (of a different shade than the trousers) with huge brass buttons and reinforced cuffs. A lace ruffle encircled the bull-neck and on the man's head was perched a flat black hat with the lateral curve of a boomerang. Above his waist, there was a leather belt fully four inches wide, buckled in front; in it was thrust a pair of single-shot pistols of so antique a design that Fillmore recognized them at once. Yet they gleamed, both barrel and wood, as if new-purchased.

When the other had approached near enough for normal converse, Fillmore spoke. "I beg your pardon, but I seem to be lost. Where am I?"

"Cornwall," the other tilted, still chanting. "And who are you?"

Fillmore was mildly annoyed. He'd gotten the point: was there any necessity for the stranger to further mock his recent outburst of musical high spirits? However, choosing to ignore the affront, he satisfied the stranger's curiosity by briefly identifying himself by name and occupation.

"If you will come with me," the other said, still intoning, "I will deem

it a pleasure. Permit me to introduce myself: Samuel is my name." His voice fell on the last phrase, and the invisible strings described a two-note cadence.

Fillmore wasn't certain he wanted to accompany the odd stranger, but before he could express any objection, the fantastical Samuel had a pistol in each hand. With the merriest of smiles, he repeated his request. The scholar tried to put up his hands, but only succeeded with one, the umbrella being too heavy to loft single-limbed.

Stepping off in the direction Samuel indicated, they walked in silence. As they slogged along, Fillmore took occasional glances back at the bizarre figure. He certainly knew little enough about the customs of the Cornish (somewhere on the south coast of Britain, wasn't it?), but he doubted that they included the flamboyant costuming of his captor.

Before long, they came to a small precipice of rock just landward of the ring of people earlier spied. The various stone mounds had cut them off from sight during the latter portion of his enforced walk.

At the foot of the precipice, Samuel bowed in courtly fashion, told Fillmore to be patient a moment, and—to the scholar's astonishment—rounded the rock and disappeared from view, leaving his captive unguarded.

Fillmore's initial impulse was to run. But not being an athlete, he doubted his chances in protracted pursuit across the havenless lea. So he did the next best thing: he hid. Climbing halfway up the face of the rock, he pressed himself as deep as he could into a shallow niche and awaited the development of events.

He hadn't long to wait. Presently,

Samuel returned, followed by a small group of men dressed in similar fashion. One young man, obviously a person of some rank, was beardless and hatless; he wore a long face, and walked arm-in-arm with a stout woman in her mid-forties. She was wearing long skirts, impractical for the country and time of year, and had an ample corseted bodice and puffed shoulders.

"Well, Samuel?" the sad-faced youth asked. "Where is your prisoner?"

"Well, I left him here and requested that he wait," the other replied in a hurt voice. For once, he did not sing.

"Samuel," the woman asked, "did you ask him politely enough?"

"I was the embodiment of gentility!"

"But *did* you ask politely?" she persisted.

"Indeed, I did! Am I to blame because the chap hadn't the manners to wait? I took him most fair by the rocks below the bluff. You'd think he would have realized he was honor-bound to stay our coming." Shaking his head dolefully, Samuel looked away, scanning the skies with a vacant expression. He had the air of one grievously wronged. As his gaze passed near Fillmore's eyrie, the scholar squirmed as far back into the depression as the ungainly umbrella would permit. He had it behind his back, for fear its gaudiness would serve as telltale.

"I ask ye, Master Frederic," Samuel said, "is there aught for which I can be faulted?"

Frederic, the sad-faced youth, shook his head, and in a rich tenor voice, intoned, unaccompanied: "By your lights, there is no crime. Nor should I have wished any other out-

come to the happenstance adventure. But, Samuel I fear I must tell you . . ."

"Aye?"

The young man hesitated. In the brief silence, Fillmore, upon his perch, heard the strains of a rum-tiddly-tum kind of music strike up from some invisible source.

"No," said Frederic, "I cannot fail in my duty to tell you, Samuel. Though it hurt your sensibilities, I must point out that no truly professional buccaneer would be as trusting or as kindhearted as you or the rest of our band appear to be!"

With that, the music swelled and Frederic continued his discourse in song:

"The man who would a pirate  
be,  
And ply his craft upon the sea  
Must learn to play a villainous  
part,  
With stiff upper lip and an os-  
sified heart.  
Though lasses crave quarter  
with wailing and sighs,  
And maidens assail you with  
tears in their eyes,  
No mercy afford them—for oft  
I've heard say  
That women are pirates, and  
steal hearts away."

He broke into the refrain:

"To be a buccaneer—"

which the rest of the group echoed with "—'aneer—"

Frederic continued the chorus.

"To be a buccaneer—

You must plunder and thunder  
And send some ships under  
And fill all your messmates with  
fear!"

The other pirates—for it was by now apparent the kind of peril Fillmore faced—joined in with Fre-

deric to repeat the chorus. Then the long-faced young man sang a second verse to Samuel.

"The Man who would a pirate  
be,

And quest for gold upon the sea  
Must wear a scowl instead of a  
grin,

And never wait by till his prey  
ask him in.

And once you've elected to fol-  
low our trade—

Be cunning and daring and  
never afraid;

But should you be lacking in  
ruthless éclat,

Just pick some attorney and  
pattern on that.

To be a buccaneer—"

CHORUS: "—'aneer."

FREDERIC: "To be a buccaneer—

You must plunder and thunder

And send some ships under

And fill all your messmates with  
fear!"

Joining in on the repeat of the chorus, the entire band copied Samuel's rolling gait and hornpiped their way around the rock and off to their camp, voices fading in the distance. The last *pizzicatti* plunked invisibly after them, and the seaside again was silent and deserted.

Fillmore climbed down with some difficulty, the umbrella hindering the likelihood of a safe descent. When he reached the ground at last, he slumped against the pile panting, as much winded as he was nonplussed.

For what he had just seen, there was nothing in Fillmore's philosophy to offer up a sensible explanation. Lacking the objective proof for determining whether he had gone mad, he had to content himself with the supposition that the things he'd seen and heard really existed.

Could the whole group be mad?

But then, where did the music come from? A loudspeaker? Yet the perfect accord with which the pirates had echoed Frederic's ostensibly spontaneous song was uncanny!

Fillmore laughed suddenly. Could it be that there was nothing more peculiar about the business than that he'd stumbled on some vacationing repertory company rehearsing at seaside, staying in character and, in true ensemble fashion, expanding and improvising on the dramatic material in which they were professionally involved?

If so, Fillmore was well aware of the show they were rehearsing. But he set the thought aside, not wishing to be reminded of a personally depressing subject.

He determined on a course of action: he would creep carefully round the stone and seek some safe vantage-point where he could study at greater leisure the comings and goings of this odd company.

FIVE MINUTES LATER, he lay in a v-notched cut in the loam overhanging the pirate's camp. Below, Samuel was standing in front of the assemblage of thieves, telling his story to the leader of the band: a large, shovel-hatted individual seated on an ornate throne in the middle of the clearing. Over one eye, he wore a black patch, and a skull-and-crossbones grinned gauntly from the standard clutched in his knuckly right hand.

As Samuel unfolded his tale, Fillmore noted once again the pistols thrust into the buccaneer's belt; he began to question his theatrical-company theory.

Looking over the group, one by one, Fillmore noted that the sad-faced young man was absent. No sooner



had be thought it than someone tapped him on the shoulder and he almost jumped out of the niche where he lay.

Whirling around and pushing himself to his feet with the aid of the umbrella-staff, Fillmore edged away from the ledge until he was out of sight of the pirates. He stared directly into the mournful eyes of young Frederic.

"Wh-what do you want?" he asked, clutching the umbrella for possible use as a weapon.

"Quick," Frederic replied, "there is no time! You must hurry away from here. Men who stick at no offenses—"

Scarcely had he uttered "offenses" than *he* jumped and whirled. Behind him was the stout woman Fillmore had seen upon the path.

"Ruth! What are you doing here?"

"I followed you, master," said the formidable woman. "I see you've caught the scamp our dunderheaded Samuel let go."

"Ruth, I intend to let him fly from here."

"Indeed?" Ruth asked, then stepped in front of Frederic and scrutinized Fillmore with calculating feminine eyes. "Are you married, man?" she asked.

"No."

"Frederic," Ruth told her companion, "I feel I am required to point out that you are a pirate until next week, and have a duty to serve the band to whom you are indentured."

"Thanks to you!" Frederic said bitterly. "You were supposed to apprentice me to a pilot, not a pirate!"

"Well," she whined, "I did not catch the word aright—"

"Through being hard of hearing," he finished, bored. "I note your affliction was remarkably short-lived. And pray do not sing me *that* song again of

how you made the mistake! I've heard it more times than my stomach can take!" He emphasized the rhyme.

"Oh, is that so?" Ruth snarled. "Well, it just so happens that my deafness cleared up in the sea-air, Mr. Smarty! And as for my singing—"

"Please, please," Fillmore interrupted, clearing his throat, "haven't you forgotten about me?" He was beginning to enjoy his ridiculous predicament. A new theory had occurred to him, hardly original: but what if the entire experience really were a dream? In that case, he would just as soon have as much of it as possible before waking.

"Oh, terribly sorry," Frederic said. "Well, I suppose I *must* take you back down with us. Sorry for the inconvenience and all that—"

But I really must plunder  
And thunder and blunder  
And act like a true buccaneer."

He sang it unaccompanied, reaching high A on "true," after which he sniffed disdainfully at Ruth. Then, pointing to the descending path, he waited for Fillmore to begin downwards, before following with Ruth upon his arm.

#### Chapter Four

**T**HE PIRATE KING, who introduced himself as Richard, demanded that Fillmore give over all his money. The aftermath of that action turned the teacher's suspicion concerning the buccaneers into absolute certainty in his mind.

Placing the contents of his pocket upon the flat stone directly in front of the chief pirate's throne, Fillmore leaned against his umbrella-shaft and shrugged.

"That's the lot of it: \$34.00 and a few odd coins. You might have picked

some more prosperous prey."

"Here, here," the pirate king rumbled, pulling at the waxy black mustache that curled up impressively almost to his hair-line. "What kind of trumpery do ye seek to foist off on us, young man?" He reached out and wadded up a chunk of bills in his fist, surveying it with suspicion. "I've never seen the likes of such currency!"

"Why, it's solid American legal tender," Fillmore protested.

The other stood up and glowered down on him from his one good eye. But Fillmore stared back, suppressing a smile. It was certainly a *vivid* dream! "Hear me, stranger," the pirate commanded, "I spent me earliest maiden voyage in the New World, and I remember naught like this counterfeit ye've flaunted! Surely—"

"Here, here, Dick," Samuel rumbled, standing to the right of Fillmore, "the lad's right enough, even if he did insult me mightily. There's nothing else resembling money in his pockets."

"Indeed?" the king asked. "I should like to know how, then, he intended to get about in Cornwall? Or anyplace else in England for that matter!"

Fillmore held up a finger tentatively. "Your majesty, if you will permit me, I think I can explain my peculiar predicament." The scholar had, in fact, been doing some quick thinking and had come up with an idea which he proposed to put to the rest: a method for gaining sympathy.

"Well," said the pirate, "we *are* a bit short for entertainment. Perhaps you might begin at the beginning and tell us your entire story."

"Very well," said Fillmore, "I am a professor—"

"No, no!" the king protested, "Begin when you were born and work

forward!"

"I *was* going to allude to my birth," Fillmore said, "but if you wish it the long way around . . ."

"We do!" the pirates chorused in one voice.

"All right, then . . . I was born . . ." And Fillmore was off, covering all the chief details of his life: his boyhood in Philadelphia, the early demise of both parents in an accident, his eventual supervision by a disinterested aunt whose only redeeming feature was the immense library she kept and let him roam in. He passed on to his friendless, though scholastically distinguished adolescence, touched upon his cheerless college days, followed by graduate work and his most recent position—he already regarded it as a closed epoch of his life—as doctoral candidate and literary instructor. Finally, he described the purchase of the umbrella and his strange journey to the Cornish coast.

When he was done, Fillmore noted with satisfaction that, except for Ruth and Frederic, there wasn't a dry eye among the pirates. He asked innocently what had touched them about his tale.

The pirate king, sniffing, answered in an andante baritonic passage, "Although our dark career sometimes involves the crime of stealing, We rather think that we're not altogether void of feeling."

"The story that you've told," Samuel sang in the continuation, "has robbed our hearts of joy—"

ALL: We pity you, poor fellow—

KING: For you are an o-o-orphan boy!"

"Yes," said Fillmore, nodding gleefully, "I *am* an orphan boy."

The king looked at him oddly. The music ceased. "Well, I know you are, lad—but why didn't you sing it!"

Fillmore shrugged, chuckling to himself. He was right: these *were* physical embodiments of W. S. Gilbert's "Pirates of Penzance!" In the operetta, all the pirates, being orphans, were merciful to fellow unfortunates—and this outlandish throng had followed suit, even to the extent of using a similar melodic response.

"Here, lad," said the king, waving a hand at Fillmore's pocket contents on the stone shelf, "take back your goods. And, as an orphan, you are automatically elected—"

"An honorary member of the band?" Fillmore asked smugly.

"That's right! How d'ye know?"

"Fey quality, I suppose," he replied, refraining from exposing a full rehearsal of the plot of "*The Pirates of Penzance*." Cassandras, he recalled, are rarely believed and certainly never popular . . .

"Look here, Richard," Frederic addressed the chief of pirates from the door of an adjacent hut, "we can't allow the poor bloke to roam about without money, now can we?"

The other was vigorously shaking his head. "No, no, Frederic, I was coming to that. What do ye say, men, to staking this unfortunate fellow from our coffers?"

The rest of the pirates cheered the suggestion mightily, and within a matter of moments, Fillmore found himself laden down with gems and trinkets, rolls of pounds sterling and clinking handfuls of crowns and shillings.

The untypical piratical business attended to, the dazed scholar found himself the centre of attention. On all sides, pirates young and old, tender and toothless, vied for his autograph. They deafened him with questions, shook his hand, bent his ear with

sea-tales, made him tipsy with bottles of grog passed hand to hand.

The day wore on, and someone scared up meat for a stew-pot. The scholar, finding himself curiosity-of-the-day, was easily pressed into staying for dinner, which promised to be a feast.

THE FIRELIGHT was flickering gently, and the sounds of a guitar clung upon the evening air like clusters of musical grapes. This time, the source of music was apparent: an elderly pirate in golden pantaloons, gypsy bandana and wine-scarlet coat serenaded the drowsy company ringed about the slow-dying flames. Along the circle of faces the alternating lights and darks of fire and night played hide-and-seek. Here a crew member tipped a bottle up to his mouth, the glass catching the glint of reflected light. There a chubby buccaneer snored off a tipsy sleep, his many chins pillowed on his capacious breast as he leaned against a pile of stolen carpeting. Everywhere the celebrants talked to one another in whispering groups of twos and threes.

Fillmore was on the pirate chieftain's left hand and, at the moment, held earnest converse with the maid-of-all-work, Ruth. Frederic was on her extreme side, brooding in his cups.

"But why did you do it?" the scholar asked with great intensity.

Ruth shrugged, clasping her hands in front of her broad midriff. "I was a member of this band myself for many years. It was Samuel's idea—he's my uncle—to seek employ in town where I could snatch some little cherub. But it . . . well, it didn't quite work out like that. Frederic was going to be apprenticed, anyway. I missed the carefree life of a pirate's helder. So I

simply combined the two projects. Alas . . . it slipped my mind that we wanted to ransom off the youth." She sighed profoundly, then swallowed half-a-tankered of ale. Wiping her lips, she cast a wary eye on Frederic, to see whether he was paying attention. But he seemed to be off in some world of his own.

Fillmore could not resist pursuing the line of his contention. Lowering his voice and bending his head closer to Ruth's ear, he asked whether she were truly in love with her charge, young Frederick.

"Hardly," she shrugged. "He's a child, for heaven's sake! I like maturer men," Ruth explained, pinching Fillmore playfully on the cheek.

Hardly noticing, he persisted: "Yet I understand the two of you are betrothed?"

"So you may have heard. But the truth is, I've at last wearied of this hardy existence. I'm fully 47 years old, though you wouldn't believe it to look at me." She paused, waiting for corroboration. Getting none, she proceeded, a little testy. "Anyway, this stripling by my side is the sole ticket I've got back to town, to a life of idle leisure. I'll tolerate him, I will, if I can get what I want."

"Exactly what I suspected!" Fillmore exclaimed happily. "I *knew* your affection for him disappeared much too swiftly at the end of Act One—"

"What the deuce are you talking about?" Ruth asked, mystified.

"Never mind!" the scholar happily replied. "The important thing is that you don't love *him* at all!"

Ruth studied him shrewdly. "Does it mean all that much to you, then?"

"Why, you cannot imagine how that news pleases me! It's uplifted my spirits tremendously!" Perhaps

Fillmore would have been a trifle less enthusiastic had he been a trifle more sober. But he was and he wasn't—so he opened the way for what was to follow.

Which was Ruth: without warning, the massive woman flung herself into his arms, knocking the wind from his chest like a pair of bellows squashed by a falling rock.

"Adrian, my love!" she exclaimed. "Say no more! I am yours!"

Sputtering, the professor would have protested the hasty dedication Ruth had made of herself . . . but the matter was wrested from his control with alarming rapidity.

"Friends!" Frederic shouted lustily, waking even the chubby pirate. "Good news!" The young man, in a flash, had come out of his introspective trance; he leaped to his feet and called out in a heartier manner than he'd displayed up to that time. "Good news, messmates! Our honorary brother has become betrothed!"

Pirates rushed upon the pair—Fillmore and Ruth—pummeling them on the back, shaking hands, expressing vociferous good wishes. So great was the din, that two sounds were entirely drowned out.

The first was Fillmore's thin, protesting voice. "No!" he cried, "this is a dreadful mistake! I don't want to marry anybody!"

The second sound lost in the bustle and brouhaha was the whine of a bullet ricocheting off the surrounding cliff-face.

### Chapter Five

**I**T WAS a most peculiar fight.

The assailants, concealed behind every looming precipice and stone-pile, opened fire without warning (though they seemed to take pains not to injure anyone). The noise was

deafening, as each bullet echoed amongst the crags and crevices.

The pirates, taken unawares, were panic-stricken—facing, as they were, unseen foes protected by the night and a superior position. The brigands, forgetting all about Fillmore and Ruth, streamed off, dove, ran in circles, all the while grabbing loot and weapons. Everyone shouted imprecations, warnings, instructions; no-one heeded the pirate-king standing in the center of the clearing waving his arms wildly and shouting for obedience.

Over the whole confused scene roared the *prestissimo* clamor of brass and galloping strings, shrieking woodwinds and pulse-quickenning tympani—a blustering tone-poem to the spirit of strife. It tore at Fillmore's eardrums.

At his sleeve, Ruth—a knife in her left hand and a pistol in the other—plucked insistently. She pointed at the largest tent across the clearing from the spot where she and Fillmore were standing. "Quick! Over there!" she cried. "The tent behind the throne—quick, beloved! There is additional weaponry inside. Get yourself firearms, dirks and life-preservers . . . you may want to hit!" She howled the command with the delirious joy of one long deprived of a favorite sport. Pushing him with all her might, the bloodthirsty Ruth nearly sent her hapless prey sprawling.

Fillmore wasted no time in following her orders—inasmuch as they provided him an opportunity to escape her proprietary grasp. He ran across the clearing, keeping far away from the illuminating flames. Confusing shapes loomed up out of darkness and were swallowed up again; someone bumped into his shoulder with a sharp instrument and scratched him

slightly. Samuel, somewhere behind him, bellowed out disregarded commands.

The music's din suddenly paused on a tense tremolo just as Fillmore reached the tent. Looking back, he saw the pirate-king standing erect by his throne, the Jolly Roger defiantly aloft in his fist-grasp. Samuel stood next to him, broadsword in one hand, a pistol in the other. Across the nearly extinguished fire stood Frederic, arms akimbo, looking very bored. Ruth, next to him and armed to the teeth, was chiding the lad for his indifference. No one else was in the clearing—but in the shadows and behind each tent-flap, Fillmore could espy the terrified gaze of the cowed band of brigands.

The bullets ceased. Except for the anxious sawing of the invisible strings, all was silent. Fillmore held his breath.

Then a supercilious voice sneered at them from some elevated, night-cloaked vantage-point. "Lay down your arms, pirates! We charge you yield in the name of Her Majesty's Navy!"

"Who are you?" the pirate shouted.

"Sir Joseph Porter, K. C. B.!" the other sneered. "And if you do not do as you are told, I have a crewful of man-o'-war's-men available to enforce my will! Surrender, pirates!"

His words produced an extraordinary effect. Throwing down their arms, the pirate chieftain and Samuel shouted to their men to scatter; then the pair rushed pellmell off to the safety of the hillside. The concealed pirates followed suit, swarming like ants into the many cave-mouths riddling the rock-face. Frederic followed at a lope, still rather bored by the entire proceedings. The only animation he showed, even momentarily, was a

brief, longing glance that he cast back in the direction of the unseen naval company. Bullets began to fly once more.

Ruth rounded the fireside and confronted Fillmore. "Well, aren't you coming?"

"Why is everyone running? Isn't anyone going to fight?"

"Bah!" she sneered. "They're cowards all! Afraid to be captured by Sir Joseph."

"Why?"

"Don't you know?" she asked, eyebrows raised. "No, I suppose you wouldn't, being a stranger. Sir Joseph's got the longest and dullest tale of how he got to be ruler of the queen's navy, and he sings it at every possible opportunity. Besides, he never goes anywhere without his entire family—the distaff portion, at any rate! One's own relatives are quite boring enough: someone else's are positively intolerable!"

The situation was more complicated than Fillmore imagined possible, and he had little leisure to reflect on it. The important thing at the moment was to escape from the domineering Ruth.

"Well?" she barked at him, oblivious to the bullets whizzing about her head. "Are you coming with me lad?" Her tone left little doubt about his fate if he refused.

"Yes, certainly . . . ah . . . love," he replied. "But I haven't had an opportunity to arm myself as you suggested."

"Well, then, be quick about it!" she snapped, pistol raised in his direction. Around them, the cacophonous battle-music was raging once more.

"I'll be just a second," said Fillmore, entering the weapons-tent. Moving with great rapidity, he snatched up the sharpest-looking dag-

ger and made a long, noiseless lateral cut in the back wall of the canvas enclosure. Withdrawing the point, he thrust again some inches above the center of the slit and cut downward, stopping by necessity at the juncture. Next he jabbed the dagger-point into the bottom of the flap.

"What's taking you so long?" Ruth yelled. "Don't pick and choose—grab the first thing you can lay your hands on?"

"I . . . I'm loading up!" he retorted. "I'll just be another ten seconds!"

"We'll see!" she snarled. "One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . ."

Fillmore sliced upward along the canvas, until the blade met the lateral cut.

"Five . . . six . . . seven . . . eight . . ."

"No fair!" he thought, plunging through the opening. She should be adding "a-thousand" after each number to make them equivalent to a full sec—

"Nine . . . *ten!*" shouted Ruth, storming into the tent—just in time to see the scholar withdraw his right leg and light out for the hillside.

With a bellow of rage, she fired at his silhouette, etched dark against a blacker night. But the shot went wild.

Fillmore ran faster than he'd done in years. Even when he was sure that Ruth no longer pursued him, he continued to flee, paying no attention whatsoever to direction. Suddenly, he collided into something hard and rebounded backwards; the dagger went flying off into the night. Groaning, he rubbed his injured nose and inched forward.

The obstruction he'd encountered was a tree-trunk. Fillmore slumped down on the grass and leaned against the bole, waiting for the pain to subside. Once the ache in his head

abated to the level of a dull throb, he began to assess his situation. It wasn't *too* bad, all things considered: the pirates were concealed and perhaps by now Ruth had joined them. As for the navy, they wouldn't even be aware of his exis—

A thought hit him like a slap across the face: where was the umbrella?! He leapt to his feet, horrified; it was gone.

With an awful pang, he realized it must still be on the ground by the fire where he'd put it down. He'd forgotten all about it ever since the business with Ruth began.

It was a desperate idea to return for it, but the fugitive had no alternative. The umbrella was the only conceivable chance he had to escape from this rapidly-palling world, the only possible bridge back to his own place and time.

Creeping back the way he came, Fillmore attempted to retrace his steps. The music had stopped, and the only sound was the distant sussuration of the waves. He ran into another tree, gently enough this time. He had become thoroughly disoriented. Which way should he go? Was the camp in *that* direction? Or was it the other way?

Why couldn't he see the glowing embers of the fire? How far could he have run, anyway . . . ?

Then, a disconcerting thought occurred to him. All that afternoon, he'd noticed no hint of woodland on the open meadow. Yet he was now hiding behind a tree-bole, one of many in the immediate vicinity. His frantic run in the dark must have taken him further landward than he'd calculated. How would he find his way back without a light?

As if in answer to his thoughts, the blinding spill of an open lantern cut

across the night, dazzling him momentarily. A familiar tenor voice rang out.

"Hold, rascal! Just put those hands high in the air, if you will!"

Fillmore complied, waiting for the newcomer to advance. The lantern swung in a slow arc and the other drew near enough for the scholar to make out his face . . . as well as the firearm leveled at his own breast.

"Frederic," he said, surprised, "what are you doing in that outfit?"

"I beg your pardon, sir!" said the other affronted. "My name ain't Fred, and this is my proper uniform as an able-bodied seaman!"

In the lantern-glow, Fillmore studied the other. It was impossible: he looked exactly like the young pirate and spoke in the same light upper register. But the sailor was clad in the simple shirt and bell-bottoms of a humble foremast hand; on his head was stuck a white cap with blue horizontal stripe and a tongue of ribbon protruding from in back.

Around the base of the cap, superimposed in white upon the lateral stripe was a neat legend: H. M. S. PINAFORE.

"What's your name, sailor?" Fillmore asked.

"Rackstraw's the name. Ralph Rackstraw." but he pronounced it 'Rafe.' "A. B. S., her majesty's navy. Now identify yourself!"

Fillmore calculated his chances quickly. This seaman, evidently part of a search-party, must have been told off to round up the pirates: it was likely he believed Fillmore to be part of the brigand-band.

How could he discourage that notion?

Fillmore briefly told his story, but Rackstraw listened with obvious disbelief. He looked especially dubious

when the scholar asserted that he'd been captured by the pirates. "And they've stolen a valuable piece of my property which I simply have to get back!"

"Pray tell," Rackstraw said, a little too politely. "Now if you'll just come with me, I'll take you to my captain who is, even now, at the pirate's lair. You can tell *him* your story. This way—here, I'll just take your wrist and guide you . . ."

It was clear the seaman didn't credit a word he'd said. Following unwillingly, Fillmore desperately tried to think of a way to gain the sailor's confidence. Rackstraw . . . Rafe Rackstraw . . . what was he like in *H. M. S. PINAFORE*?

Of course! the scholar thought, snapping his fingers. In the operetta, Rafe is in love with the captain's daughter. But he's afraid to court her because of the disparity in their social stations . . .

"I can give you good advice," he told the sailor abruptly.

"About what?" Rackstraw asked unenthusiastically.

"About love."

"What *are* you talking about?"

"About you," Fillmore winked, though it went unnoticed in the darkness. "I know a secret concerning you and a certain young lady."

The sailor stopped, eyed his captive suspiciously. "Indeed? And how d'ye know *anything* about me, since we're strangers?"

"Bit of a fey quality, I fancy."

"Well, well," the sailor grumbled, "and just *what* do you know?"

"Let's say this much," Fillmore told Rackstraw. "You are in love with a lovely young girl of high rank and position."

"Ay? What else?" the other asked suspiciously.

"Have no fear, I won't divulge your secret." Privately, Fillmore wondered what would happen if he *did* tip off Rafe's love for his captain's daughter too soon? Would the very underpinnings of this mad universe crumble? "What I want to do is advise you to keep up your hopes. Things are not so black as they seem."

"They're not?" Rackstraw asked ardently. "These are the first encouraging words I've heard since this affair grew too hot for me to bear! But how can you prophesy thus? The lady doesn't even know that I exist."

"You're wrong there," Fillmore answered. "She loves you with a passion equal to your own for her."

The sailor whirled around in a merry figure, the lantern flickering in a sudden flare-up as he did. Fillmore felt obliged to warn him about it, simultaneously requesting that he moderate his whoopings.

Checking his enthusiasm, Rafe began walking briskly forward once more, practically dragging Fillmore by the wrist.

In the distance, the scholar could see the newly-lit fire of the campsite; in its glow, he made out blue-coated and white-shirted officers and tars. The battle music had long since climaxed and died.

At his side, Rafe mumbled happily to himself. "Ah, if I might only believe these tidings, how glad I would be! But what could I do to advance my case?"

"Take my advice," Fillmore answered, unsolicited. "Speak to her at your earliest opportunity."

"But if she spurns me?"

"Well," said Fillmore, smiling at the notion of putting words into Rackstraw's mouth, "all I can say is that your love is as good as any other's! Is not your heart as true as



another's? Have you not hands and eyes and ears and limbs like another?" He got the little speech from *Pinafore* almost letter-perfect, having himself played the part of Rafe—woeful miscasting!—once many years before in junior high school.

"Aye, aye!" the sailor shouted. "What you say is true friend! I'll speak to her at the first opportunity! Friend, your hand." He held out his weather-tanned right arm, sinewy and bare to the elbow, and shook Fillmore's heartily.

There, that's done! thought the scholar. No more nonsense about my status with this Rackstraw . . .

The two drew up short, having reached the campsite. Stepping forward briskly, Rackstraw smartly saluted a gold-epauletted figure in captain's hat and dress blues.

"Captain Corcoran, sir?"

"Aye, Rafe?"

"Rackstraw reporting!"

"So I see," said the captain, peering over the seaman's shoulder at the oddly-depressed personage just behind. "Have you captured one of the blighters?"

"Aye, aye, sir! The queer-looking pirate we saw grappling with the fat woman."

The captin strode up to the dumbfounded Fillmore. "Sir," he said, "I arrest you in the name of Queen Victoria! Clap him in irons!"

Several sailors appeared and grabbed the scholar firmly by the arms.

The captive protested volubly, glancing about wildly for his umbrella. It was nowhere in sight.

"Here, here, my good fellow," Corcoran admonished. "It's quite obvious that you are a pirate, don't try to deny it!"

"Prove it!" Fillmore challenged.

"Very well," said the captain, stick-

ing his hand inside the other's jacket pocket and withdrawing a large quantity of notes and gems. "Why, man, your pockets all are fair bulging with loot! If you want to pass for innocent, you *must* do better than this."

Fillmore looked down at the riches, horrified: he'd forgotten the probably-stolen goods and monies pressed upon him earlier by the tender-hearted pirates. The evidence was most incriminating.

His guards pulled at him roughly, impelling him in the direction of the seaside, where several dinghies were beached.

As he passed Rackstraw, Fillmore glowered. The sailor shrugged, holding up his hands in a "what-can-I-tell-you" attitude.

"Duty's duty," the sailor said. "But thanks for the advice, all the same."

## Chapter Six

**I**T WAS a rare morning, even for July. The sea-breeze gently fanned the sailor's cheeks. The sun, already bright, shed just enough warmth to take the chill out of the early air. The sea was calm and the surface of the water rippled gently in a wind strong enough to waft the ship on her homeward journey, yet sufficiently mild to caress, rather than buffet the crewmen working on deck.

The *Pinafore* was a-bustle with activity, as Captain Corcoran plotted out the trip back to Portsmouth and the sailors hurried to meet the tide. As they went about their nautical duties, they sang a slow but lusty *a cappella* oceanic hymn:

"Up merry mates, the anchor weigh!

Unfurl the sheets and spare no toil.

This is the sailor's happiest

day—

‘Homeward we turn from  
foreign soil!’

Down below, one of the ship’s passengers failed to appreciate the musicale.

“Foreign soil, indeed!” Fillmore sniffed, sitting on his hard bunk in the brig. “These insular British . . . they’ve only sailed from Portsmouth to Penzance, hardly an ocean voyage! Bah!”

Oblivious to their enforced guest’s displeasure, the sailors took up the refrain again:

“Back to the homes so far  
away—

Back to the girls who for us  
sighed—

Homeward we sail, and home  
we’ll stay

. Until the turning of the  
tide!”

“Blah-blah blah blah-blah blah blah blah!” yelled Fillmore through the one porthole. But his mockery went unheeded.

Any thought of enjoying his adventure had left him during the night: he was sore and stiff from trying to rest on the unyielding cot chained to the brig’s bulkhead. The rocking of the ship did not sit well on his stomach, either, and the provender afforded him was fit only to dump through the porthole—causing, no doubt, the demise of any hapless fish near enough to partake of the slop.

As near as Fillmore could tell, the captain of the *Pinafore* intended sailing back to Portsmouth, where the captive would be handed over to the authorities to be transported to London. There, he would be tried for piracy.

It was apparent by the contiguity—within the space of one day—of characters both from *Pinafore*

and *Pirates of Penzance* that he’d gotten himself stuck in a Gilbert & Sullivan world. All ideas of madness or dreaming had been scuttled: his joints ached too powerfully to question the objective reality of his whereabouts. *Why* he should be in such a world was another issue entirely; he could easily accept a dimensional transfer via the missing umbrella into many sorcerous, idyllic or even familiarly mechanistic societies. But a musical world patterned on fourteen theatrical operettas? It was absurd to the *nth*!

Under other conditions, the opportunity to investigate the Gilbertian cosmos might be charming enough. But Fillmore was finding himself too put-upon a figure in the melodramatic churning of the plot he’d gotten stuck inside: first threatened by pirates, then by marriage; now confined to horrendously filthy quarters with no future prospects but trial for piracy and likely enough, subsequent hanging.

Any inclination to regard the entire business as too silly for notice was fast quelled whenever the ship rode an occasional swell and the brig lurched sickently. Too, Fillmore remembered an admonition that had been given to the hero of a science-fiction book he’d once read. In it, the protagonist found himself unexplainably in an alien world; asking a super-computer to assist him, the metal brain warned, “Do not underestimate the danger of your position. If you die here, you will stay dead!”

HE MUST get off the ship somehow, that much he knew. How to do it was another matter. Afterwards? Well, *that* he *had* figured out . . . wasn’t the inscription on the umbrella SIM—? During the night, Fillmore had deciphered what it probably

meant.

He must reach London and seek professional advice. But first, he had to work his way out of the present predicament. And that meant some serious thought.

The key must lie in the workings of this topsy-turvy universe, the scholar told himself for the fiftieth time in the past hour. If music can start up from no determinate source, and if individuals can blend their thoughts in perfect harmony, then there must be other peculiarities that, once grasped, could be wrested to his purpose.

*“Peculiarities?” the sorcerer asked with surprise. “But my good man, our people study music from very baby-hood. It is expected of them. To speak without an occasional chorus or solo is as unthinkable as to imagine that God did not put his Holy Orchestra above to manifest His Will to us! The music is Holy Tone, my lad, showing us the way to interpret His Intentions!” His face took on the fixed expression of one who dare not be contradicted on an axiom of faith.*

The single victory Fillmore had enjoyed—that of the pirates’ good will and ill-sequed generosity—was based upon the artifice of mentioning his orphancy: it was a device that employed the very über-knowledge that the scholar possessed concerning the G&S world he was in. It took advantage of one of its topsy-turvy values: that black-hearted pirates might be emotionally-tender little children within.

Hold on! That concept bore futher examination. If, indeed, the pirates were gentle fellows, what might that mean in terms of the entire complex of laws governing G&S-land?

Fillmore thought of all the villains

he could bring to mind: there was Sir Despard Murgatroyd in *Ruddigore*: a noble, principled gentleman. What about Don Alhambra in *The Gondoliers*? Hardly a villain. Neither was the loutish Wilfred in *The Yeomen of the Guard*. In fact, Fillmore realized with some surprise, there were scarcely any real villains at all in the Gilbert & Sullivan operettas.

Heroes? Ah, that was another matter . . . the lot of them were shallow, vain and spiteful: from the defendant in *Trial By Jury* through the abominable Colonel Fairfax in *The Yeomen*—

Good God! Fillmore mused, I’m beginning to sound like Quiller-Grouch. Yet there was considerable truth in what he’d asserted: look at his own brief experiences on this side of the umbrella—so to speak. The pirates themselves had treated him nicely enough. But the noble Frederic got him into the mess with Ruth by shouting out the nuptial news with suspicious alacrity.

And that two-faced Rafe Rackstraw was responsible for his present predicament. It was pretty obvious, was it not, that Fillmore had made a grave tactical error in trusting the “heroic” seaman?

Better if he’d cast his lot with a villain . . .

And the idea Fillmore had been chasing around inside his brain finally held still long enough to apprehend it.

Dashing over to the barred door of the brig, Fillmore shouted until the watch came back to see what he wanted.

“’ere now,” said the tar, “you’ll do well to keep down the din.”

“I’d like some company,” Fillmore confided.

“Oh, is ’at so? And who, pray tell, would you like me to summon?”

Perhaps Sir Joseph himself? I'll call a special party to row to his yacht and fetch him over straight!"

"Not at all, not at all," the scholar demurred. "But if I'm not mistaken you have a sailor aboard, do you not, who answers to the name of Deadeye?"

The sailor shuddered. "Is it Dick Deadeye ye're wanting? Faith, and you'll be welcome to *him*, right enough! I'll fetch 'im straightaway."

"And see we're not disturbed!" Fillmore shouted.

"That you won't be," the sailor called over his shoulder. "Not with *him* about!"

"IT'S A BEAST of a name, ain't it?" Dick Deadeye said, squinting at Fillmore with his one good eye.

The scholar, bored, repeated the expected response for the third time in half as many hours. "It's not a nice name, no."

"I'm ugly, too, ain't I?" he snarled, wiping his hairy hand across an unshaven chin.

"You *are* certainly plain."

"And I'm three-cornered too, ain't I?"

Fillmore nodded, idly wondering just what it meant to be "three-cornered." Perhaps it alluded to Deadeye's habit of walking in a crouching manner, his elbows and knees presenting sharp angles with the bend of his back.

"I said I'm three-cornered, ain't I?"

"You certainly are triangular."

"Ha-ha," the villain laughed. "That's it. I'm ugly, and you hate me for it, don't you?"

"I do *not* hate you," said the scholar for the umpteenth time. "Where I come from, physical beauty is not a necessary attribute to popularity!" He shuddered as he said it, and kept his

fingers crossed.

"So you did, so you did," the other answered, "but what of it? You want a favor of me, do you not?"

"Now that you mention it—"

The sailor sniffed angrily. "I *thought* as much! I'll say goodbye!" He began to gesture towards the distant guard. Before he could get his attention, Fillmore yanked down his arm.

"See here!" he said, "It's not so awful. Simply find me my umbrella and help me escape!"

"Ha! Ye call that *simple*."

"I have it all planned . . . arrange to take the watch down here in the brig. Do it just outside of Portsmouth. Slip in and take the valuables they confiscated from me. Keep them for your own. All I want is a few odd pound-notes and the umbrella. *Especially* the umbrella."

"How will I explain your disappearance?" Deadeye asked dubiously. "There's no chance you could get the keys and overpower me."

Fillmore shook his head. "Not necessary. Claim you saw me vanish before your very eyes. Impute it to magic. No-one will doubt your word, if you give it with sufficient malevolence . . ."

"Naah, naah," the other said vehemently, pacing from side to side in the narrow brig. "It's too great a risk. And I get nothing from it."

"I said you could keep the money and jewels."

Sneering, the seaman turned a twisted, baleful expression upon Fillmore. "Money!" he spat. "What good would that do me, eh? Would it fix my face, mend my halting walk?"

The questions were unanswerable. Fillmore said nothing for some time; instead, he watched the bitter tar stride back and forth, back and forth,

two paces one way, two paces the other—

“Think of it this way,” Fillmore said at last. “Helping me escape will be a blow against a callous society which scorns you and keeps you type-cast as a blackguard.”

The sailor stopped pacing. Saying nothing, he stared for a long time through the porthole at the face of the afternoon sky. The minutes passed, but Dick Deadeye said nothing. Fillmore became fidgety and, at last, decided he had better break the silence. But just as he cleared his throat to speak, the other finally addressed him, without turning.

“There’s truth in what you say, friend.” Deadeye’s voice was a little higher in pitch than normal, but otherwise he had himself in full control. “I’ve considered your plan, and I’ll help you in it.”

Fillmore caught his breath, rose from the bunk. “How soon will we be in Portsmouth?”

“If we catch the tide,” said Deadeye, turning, “we should weigh anchor there this very evening, or tomorrow morning at the latest.”

“Then it must be tonight,” said Fillmore, expressing the obvious. “Can you get watch?”

“Aye—it’s my regular round this night,” said Deadeye. “Be prepared for my coming, and I’ll be brisk to prepare your going.”

A whining bass-line slithered through the gloom of the brig. My God, Fillmore thought, the damned music even extends down here!

Deadeye sang in a sly, insinuating fashion:

“Good fellow, I’ll assist you in  
your leaving;  
Sing hey, the mystic fellow  
that you are!  
I’ll fetch you your umbrella late

this evening.

Sing hey, the mystic fellow  
and the tar!

The mystic, mystic fellow,  
The mystic, mystic fellow,  
Sing hey, the mystic fellow  
and the tar!”

He looked at Fillmore a little sourly, and the teacher supposed he should have joined in on the chorus. But it had been too many years since he’d been involved in amateur theatricals, and he wasn’t about to start now—

“Well?” Deadeye grunted. “Ain’t you gonna sing your verse?”

Fillmore groaned inwardly. For the love of God, he thought, the song is in response-and-reply form: it takes a minimum of two verses to complete it. Though the scholar was completely unenthusiastic about joining in on the fun-and-games, he worried that 1). Deadeye might refuse after all if Fillmore didn’t return the expected polite answer and 2). His refusal to sing might somehow damage the very fabric of this strange universe into which he’d been tumbled.

Gesturing with resigned good will, he did his best to think up a few appropriate rhymes. It was easier than he imagined possible. But Fillmore held on to some shred of individuality by talking his verse in a kind of *singspiel*:

“Kind sailor, I appreciate your  
daring—

Sing hey, the doughty sailor  
that you are!

Be sure you snatch it when  
there’s no-one staring . . .

Sing hey, the mystic fellow  
and the tar!

The mystic, mystic fellow,  
The mystic, mystic fellow,  
Sing hey, the mystic fellow  
and the tar!”

Dick Deadeye joined him in the chorus this time. At the end, the sinister bass rounded out the musical thought and the duo solemnly shook hands like a pair of soloists at the end of a concert.

"Just out of curiosity," Deadeye asked, "what will you do once you've escaped?"

"Head towards London," Fillmore replied. "There's a sorcerer there, I've heard, who'll help me quit this strange sphere, I hope."

"I see," the sailor said. "Then—"

The bass accompaniment, which had not quite died away, swelled up afresh. Deadeye went into a quick finale, which Fillmore instantly recognized. He had no choice but to join right in.

DEADEYE: This very night

With bated breath—

FILLMORE: —And muffled oar—

DEADEYE: Without a light,

As still as death—

FILLMORE: —I'll steal ashore!

I'll flee from here

And seek to find—

DEADEYE: —The proper one—

FILLMORE: A sorcerer

Who'll ease my mind—

DEADEYE: —And get ye gone!

They repeated it thrice, gathering speed as they sang (or, in Fillmore's case, declaimed) until they reached the final line once more. They uttered it in unison and, in Fillmore's version, it came out "And get *me* gone!" It sounded just like a first-act finale.

The bright flourishes that rushed to a final tonic-dominant alternation were so loud and bombastic that Fillmore feared they would attract the attention of the guard or, for that matter, anyone above them on deck.

"Impossible!" the sorcerer exclaimed. "We value our privacy!"

*Listen in on someone else's musical statements? Not done, my lad! As soon imagine some nightmare society whose police listened in unannounced at a gentleman's own home! You see what I mean? It's simply not done!"* The little merchant-magician shook his head from side to side in utter disbelief. "Simply isn't done," he repeated.

### Chapter Seven

THE DIMINUTIVE EXECUTIONER bowed low and, smiling graciously, indicated a grillwork bench overlooking the placid pool. Satisfied that the stranger with the preposterous parasol was at ease, he picked up his gleaming, untarnished headsman's axe and, toddling back over the delicate arch spanning the pond, nodded to a bevy of pale-skinned, tittering maidens whose lovely faces were hidden by delicate fans. Then, rounding the circular perimeter of a ruby-hued pagoda, the peculiar Japanese disappeared from sight.

Fillmore, heaving a profound sigh, felt comfortable for the first time in days. He rested his eyes on the odd-shaped vegetation that lent a somewhat theatrical aura to the pleasant Oriental hideaway.

His escape from the Pinafore had come off without a hitch. But hiking sixty miles in just under two days—sleeping in fields, keeping out of sight of the constabulary—had sapped his strength and worn holes in his shoes. Only once, though, did he draw a suspicious stare: on a meadow just south of London, his garish umbrella got a squint-eyed glance from a crimson-coated Grenadier who, fortunately, was busy marching with his fellows at the time. They, in turn, were in the van of a magnificent procession of peers busily stomping all over the greensward, singing and

sneering and trampling down the wildflowers. It was the only close shave; otherwise, the flight had been quite uneventful.

Now it was sheerest luxury to rest his aching joints in this quaint reproduction of a Japanese village that he'd found below Hyde Park on Knightsbridge. Some sort of ethnic exposition, it was a nicely secluded place for Fillmore to revitalize himself.

He'd stopped the headsman for directions to St. Mary's Axe, guessing who the little hatchet man must be—surely there could be no more perfect individual to ask. Ko-Ko, the Lord High Executioner of *The Mikado*, was the meekest of men (he'd never beheaded a soul). Furthermore, it would be extremely unlikely for the little Japanese to be the least bit concerned or aware about fugitive Occidental "pirates."

Ko-Ko returned. "So sorry not to be able to assist you personally. I am totally unaware of London geography. However, my wife is coming to answer your question. I think you'd better kneel."

His wife? Fillmore wondered. But Ko-Ko, in the operetta, wasn't married. No . . . wait a minute . . . at the *very end* . . .

Just then, a ferocious Oriental woman of huge proportions stormed across the bridge over the pool, heading in the scholar's direction. The reinforced customs of a lifetime die hard, so he rose to his feet, gaping with dismay at the formidable female. Like her husband, she was dressed primarily in black; her kimono, cinched at the waist with a blood-red belt, was capacious. Black, beetling brows lowered above a thin, cruel mouth and her hair, stuck all over with knitting needles, looked like some infernal

spiky cactus.

Good God! the professor thought, his sense of security instantly evanescent, it's Katisha, the one *real* villainess in all the G&S operettas! *She's* the one that Ko-Ko marries at the very end of the show. But that meant that the two of them here were living *beyond* the final scene that Gilbert wrote! What—

"Down on your knees, swine!" she bellowed, approaching him and Ko-Ko. Quailing, Fillmore instantly complied. "How *dare* you stand in my presence?" she roared. "Do you not know who I am?!"

"I think so," the scholar muttered. "You're Katisha, daughter-in-law elect to the Mikado."

"Not any more," the frightful apparition howled, gnashing her teeth. "Just when I was conditioning the Mikado's son to love me—"

"It's a lengthy process," Ko-Ko remarked.

"Silence, worm!" she snarled, kicking at him. Ko-Ko dodged with practiced agility. "Well," she continued, "just as Nanki-Poo was in my pow—in my arms, a shameless hussy stole him. So I went mad and married this insignificant termite instead!"

Making fun of an old lady in love, indeed! Fillmore shuddered, recalling Quiller-Couch's accusation. As soon make sport of a tornado!

A nervous orchestral figure struck up and Katisha continued her complaint in song:

My life at court  
Has been cut short  
Because I'm wed  
To this dunderhead!  
This conjugal pest  
Has filled my breast  
With flames of hate  
For my marital state.  
So if I'm rude

And tend to brood,  
It would be shrewd  
Not to intrude,  
Not to intrude—  
Ko-Ko attempted to intervene:  
Beloved wife,  
No need for strife  
Or quarrel, dear,  
Is needed here,  
Is needed here!  
This passer-by  
Did catch my eye  
And asked a way  
I could not say:  
He doth entreat  
Of us, my sweet,  
Directions meet  
To find a street.

"*What?!*" shrieked Katisha. "You dared disturb my rest because some vagabond wishes to inquire directions?"

"Yes," Fillmore replied fearfully. "Trying to find 70 St. Mary's Axe. Some of the residents elide it—70 Simmery Axe . . . ?"

The virago glowered at him, but said nothing. Ko-Ko leaned against his official chopper, staring at Fillmore with perplexed anticipation.

Here we go again! the scholar groaned inwardly. The verses they sang are part of a patter *trio*. If I don't respond, they'll just stand there gawping at me.

Then it occurred to him: how many adolescent parties had he spent, tipsy, trying to find a third voice for an impromptu rendition of this very trio? And here was a chance to sing along with one of the original characters . . . how could he resist?

"*I wish you had, all the same,*" said the sorcerer, shaking his head. "*As long as you confined yourself to rhythmic declamation, you were in comparatively little danger. But once*

*you started singing . . . well, well, how could you know?"*

FILLMORE:

If you'll excuse  
The time that you'll lose,  
I'm desperate to know  
Which way to go  
To find the shop  
Where I must stop:  
A store a djinn,  
A djinn

Is said to live in.  
A place of spells  
And witches and knells.  
A man named Wells  
Presides there and sells.

"There! I've finally played their silly game," the scholar thought, mightily pleased with himself.

But his recital had created an unexpected effect on his auditors. Katisha, snatching up the skirts of her kimono, ran along to the main archway of the replicatory village. Clapping her hands, she bellowed out something in Japanese.

"What's wrong?" Fillmore asked Ko-Ko, who was staring at him in great dismay.

"I'm afraid," said the executioner, pale face turning even whiter, "you've run afoul of one of our Mikado's innumerable laws. Anyone who practices magic, or seeks to practice magic, or even *thinks* about practising it is a criminal, according to our ruler's stern decree!" Glancing in Katisha's direction, Ko-Ko continued the patter trio:

Oh, dear,  
I fear  
There's danger near!  
Our emper-or  
Had decreed war  
On magic lore.



I fear, what's more,  
Bad luck's in store  
For you, Fillmore!

This was the worst predicament yet, the scholar realized with horror. The dire threats of torture and death that run beneath the surface gaiety of *The Mikado* give that operetta, joyous though it is, an underlying somberness of tone unique in the series. What might the Mikado's punishment be for seeking to consort with a sorcerer? The penalty, of course, would fit the crime—would it be something lingering, perhaps with a wizard's-kettle filled with boiling oil a necessary ingredient?

"Well," the professor told himself, "I'm not about to find out." Snatching up his umbrella, he raced around the corner of a purple pagoda . . . but the way was cut off by a huge company of fierce samurai who, in answer to Katisha's shouted commands, were running towards him, whirling their giant swords menacingly.

Spinning, Fillmore lit out in another direction. But it was no use: more warriors clad in black togas were coming at him that way as well. He turned this way and that: everywhere, hordes of samurai with hideous expressions on their faces and hair tied in severe back-knots swarmed forth from every nook and alleyway. Their bloodthirsty cries startled women, set children to weeping. Many bystanders hurried indoors, heads ducked low as they dashed for sanctuary.

Fillmore halted in his tracks. It was clearly a case of stand fast, or be snipped by snickernees. Breathing hard, he faced the terrible Katisha who was striding toward him with a mocking smile on her face.

The music, which had mocked his abortive flight with a programmatic

episode depicting pursuit, returned to the familiar strains of the patter trio and Katisha sneered her second refrain.

KATISHA:

And so  
Although  
You're ready to go  
Upon your quest,  
I must protest  
(It is no jest):  
For your crime confessed,  
As you may have guessed,  
I now arrest—

FILLMORE (defiantly):

I'll go  
And show  
Both friend and foe  
How much I dare.  
I'm well aware  
You don't much care—  
—It's my affair—  
Yet I declare  
I'll take my share  
Although ill I'll fare.

He wasn't really feeling all *that* courageous, but the sentiments were easy to express in the obligatory trio part for which he was responsible.

The entire Japanese village immediately joined in for the coda. Samurai, geishas, water-carriers, rickshaw-runners, sushi-shop chefs, Katisha and Ko-Ko all roared out an ominous prediction of Fillmore's potential punishment:

To sit in solemn silence in a  
dull dark dock,  
In a pestilential prison with a  
life-long lock,  
Awaiting the sensation of a  
short, sharp shock  
From a cheap and chippy chop-  
per on a big black block.

The mixed chorus was so loud that the noise could be heard all the way

across the length and breadth of Hyde Park.

### Chapter Eight

SO, for the second time in as many days, J. Adrian Fillmore found himself shut up in a prison cell. \*

The new one, at least, was more comfortable than the space-starved brig, but otherwise the conditions were just as bad and the food equally unpalatable. Being on dry land, of course, was an improvement over the queasy movement of the anchored ship, but the Fleet more than offset the advantage by the uncleanly squalor in which it was allowed to be maintained.

Luckily for him, the Mikado's jurisdiction did not extend to England, a fact which might not have helped much if Katisha's will had prevailed. But the conscientious Ko-Ko brought the matter before Commons, and Fillmore—as a vaguely American citizen (in the eyes of the G&S world's citizenry)—was released from the shrewish woman's custody. However, he was immediately re-arrested for piracy; it was for that alleged crime that he now languished in jail, awaiting the time of his trial.

Several weeks had elapsed in the interim. As near as he could reckon (for no one kept him informed about the time), his day in court should be almost at hand. In the meantime, much must have transpired in the topsy-turvy kingdom on the other side of Fillmore's cell-window. He imagined paragraphs got into all the papers about his supposed crimes, capture and forthcoming trial, but the matter failed to interest him.

What was more intriguing to his scholar's mind was that the familiar plots of at least three Gilbert & Sullivan operettas had run their course

since he'd first "come over" with the umbrella (now one of the prosecutor's exhibits). In fact, in the case of *The Mikado*, the story as Fillmore remembered it had already ended.

What about *H. M. S. Pinafore*? The ship had docked at Portsmouth weeks ago, with Rafe Rackstraw preparing even then to speak to the captain's daughter. Thus, by now, the scholar realized, the couple must be married and Rafe and Captain Corcoran—as in the operetta—would have changed places with each other. But it made little difference which one testified against him: the captain-turned-seaman who honestly believed he was guilty, or the sailor-turned-captain whose personal gratitude towards Fillmore would certainly not stand in the way of Rackstraw condemning the accused.

As for *The Pirates of Penzance*, their destinies would also have been worked out long before Fillmore stood trial. Frederic, out of his indentures, would have led a capture force against his former comrades. Yielding in Queen Victoria's name, the pirates would have gotten off scot-free when it was learned that they were all peers gone wrong.

Evidently, the conclusion of story-lines as Fillmore knew them had no negative effect whatsoever on the world he was stuck in. But there was one plot, if ended, that mightily worried him: what if the story of *The Sorcerer* had terminated? In that case, whether the scholar won his freedom or no, he was still in prison, albeit a larger one . . .

He could not ignore the irony of the notion. Life at Parker College—reclusive, unchallenging, emotionally and physically frustrating—was itself an incarceration for Fillmore. Yet escape, for which he'd so long pined,

was decidedly worse—at least in the Gilbertian cosmos, where he'd been shot at, smothered with unsolicited ardor, forced to turn fugitive and, at the last, threatened with loss of life as well as liberty.

In all those picaresque romances he'd devoured with unexpressed longing, high adventure was supposed to be one exhilarating round of ample bosoms, intrepid treks over enemy territory, duels of wits and swords in which virtue ultimately triumphed. But in fact, he bitterly recalled, there had been few enough wits to challenge, and the distaff opportunities had been non-existent. (For that matter, in the Gilbertian scheme of things, the heroines Fillmore might meet would only turn out to be vain, empty-headed little egotists). As for the cross-country trip, there simply was nothing charming in snatching bits of food on the run and sleeping out-of-doors in the same underwear.

The real disappointment about his plight was the absence of joy in the grotesque world he'd landed in. It was characteristically paradoxical that he'd undergone such turmoil and discomfort in a milieu which had, in his own time, provided such delicious enjoyment during leisure hours. The answer, though, was obvious on reflection (for which he had ample time in his present state). Once, at a faculty supper for a visiting G&S star, Fillmore had heard the thespian vigorously emphasize the secret of playing Gilbert & Sullivan: "You must never, *never* play for laughs! Gilbert's characters are quite serious in what they say, do and sing—that's what makes them so funny. If you 'camp' up Gilbert, you sacrifice the wit and fun for cheap college-frat inanities."

Then what could the scholar expect in a world conforming to the G&S sys-

tem of logic? No doubt some impartial observer might find a degree of drolery in his troubles, just as Fillmore might chuckle at the observer if their positions were reversed. But there was no bright side to being cast as victim.

*Victim* . . . that was the word to hold onto, he mused. Up till now, Fillmore had played too passive a role in events involving himself. Even when engineering the escape from the Pinafore brig, he'd experienced a curious detachment from circumstances . . .

And look where it had gotten him! No, he must review his strategy and plan to react more directly, more emotionally in his future trial. Having broken the singing barrier with Katisha and Ko-Ko, he had no intention of letting up when—

With a croaking groan and muffled clang, the door to his cell suddenly burst open, dispelling a dense dust-fog that made him cough and choke. An elderly, gnarled turn-key stood in the entrance.

"Up, lad," he rasped in a tone harmonically attuned to the protestations of the door-hinges, "it's time to go to trial."

"What? Just like *that*? Without warning—at this hour of the morning, and without breakfast?"

"I'll keep it warm for ye. Shouldn't take long to toss you back."

Sliding off the bunk and into his shoes, the prisoner dryly thanked the jailer for his vote of confidence. Lacing up, Fillmore stood and walked stiffly through the cell-door, blinking at the unaccustomed brightness of the prison corridor.

### Chapter Nine

*On this day of the month, the 25th  
in the year 1875,*

*in the City  
and County  
of London*

*Shall be tried at 10 a.m. in Old Bailey*

*The criminal action  
of  
VICTORIA REGINA  
VS.*

*J. ADRIAN FILLMORE  
on the charges of piracy and eluding  
justice.*

*FOR THE STATE: The Hon. Samuel  
T. Cellier.*

*FOR THE DEFENSE: Defendant  
will be self-represented.*

*THE RT. HON. RICHARD D.  
CARTE PRESIDING.*

*SCENE—A Court of Justice.  
Barristers, Attorneys, and  
Jurymen discovered.*

CHORUS

Hark, the hour of ten is sound-  
ing:

Heart with anxious fear is  
bounding,

Hall of justice crowds surround-  
ing,

Breathing hope and fear—

For today in this arena,

Summoned by a stern subpoe-  
na,

Fillmore, sued by V. Regina,  
Shortly will appear.

**H**E WAS, in fact, already there, but that did not for a moment interfere with their caroling. He looked around with great interest at the bustling courtroom, which had already taken up a modified opening chorus from *Trial By Jury*, Gilbert's only one-act operetta. Studying the assemblage, Fillmore was reminded of the equally-preposterous trial scene in Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*. He recalled a little of one descriptive passage.

"There were already a pretty large sprinkling of spectators in the gallery, and a numerous muster of gentlemen in wigs, in the barrister's seats . . ."

Fillmore's seat was to the left and in front of the judge's bench—as yet unoccupied. He was grateful to be allowed, in his capacity as counsel for the defense, to sit there, avoiding the dock. He was relieved that he would not have to spend the entire morning under the collective scrutiny of the tatty on-lookers who jammed the place.

Counsel for the Crown entered. Fillmore, rising to his feet, gasped when he saw the tall, portly figure in black legal robes stride up to the right-hand anterior table and drop a pile of musty old law-books upon it.

There was no mistaking the flaming red hair and jutting mustache—the prosecutor was Samuel, the lieutenant of the Penzance pirates! Crossing the brief distance between the two tables, the brigand smiled brightly at Fillmore and stretched out his hand.

"Delightful to see you again, my good fellow!" he told the flabbergasted scholar. "Hope you won't take umbrage at anything I say later on, you know. Just doing a job and all that."

"But . . . but . . ." Stammering, Fillmore could not express his thought. He gestured in wild circles with both hands.

Samuel laughed. "Daresay you're wondering what I'm doing here, eh? Long story, my lad! Let the Judge tell it. Here he is now—"

Fillmore turned, following Samuel's pointing finger. A majestic entrance hymn was struck up by the members of the jury, and in came the presiding judge.

*It was the pirate king.* Draped in flowing judicatory attire, he looked

the soul of respectability—although the black patch over his eye still seemed slightly sinister. On his head, instead of his jolly-roger bonnet, the judge wore a frizzy white wig.

“What the devil?” cried Fillmore. “How can they possibly have assigned *you* to judge my case?”

The ex-pirate sat and beamed a paternal smile at the defendant. “Why, lad, it’s a jolly day! Never expected to see ye again!”

“I repeat . . . *how can you be my judge?*”

His honor looked a little hurt at the question. “Why, young man, *someone* had to do it! Why not me? If you’d like to know the manner of my ascendancy, then lend an ear.”

Before the defendant could protest, the invisible orchestra struck up a lively introduction and the pirate-cum-judge commenced to sing:

When Fred’ric turnèd twenty-  
and-one  
He embracèd the tenets of jus-  
tice;  
He swore his piratical doings  
were done  
And he’d seek out our band just  
to bust us—  
So he headed a handful of lad-  
dies in blue,  
And he sent forth these con-  
stabulary  
To the Cornwallish coast and  
the lair of my crew  
Whom they promptly pro-  
ceeded to harry.

The jurors and spectators echoed the last couplet.

We fought strong and hard, but  
scarce did we win,  
When events took a turn  
unexpected—  
For the bobbies cried “Yield!  
To the queen, give in!”

And my men promptly genu-u-  
flected.

But the tide soon turned when  
we told them the news

That once we’d been Peers of  
this Nation—

So our crimes, they said, they’d  
politely excuse,

If we’d only resume our station.

Again, the final couplet was  
energetically chorused.

JUDGE:

So now I’m a judge!

ALL:

And a good judge, too!

JUDGE:

Yes, now I’m a judge!

ALL:

And a good judge, too!

JUDGE: Though homeward as you  
trudge,

My sinecure you grudge—

Yet I’ll live and die a judge!

ALL: And a good judge too!

With no cessation of music, Samuel rose at the close of the song and, in recitative, requested that the jury be sworn. An usher came forward and told the arbiters to kneel and raise their right hands.

While the swearing-in took its course, Fillmore, slumped down in his seat, frantically tried to assess the ridiculous situation. He supposed nothing more truly Gilbertian could have transpired than that he be prosecuted and judged by the very criminals who’d pressed the incriminating money and jewels upon him.

The only encouraging thing he noted was the absence of that same evidence upon the exhibit table just beneath the judge’s elevated bench. Good old Dick Deadeye must have

remained steadfast by getting rid of the gems and specie found on Fillmore. The only object on the prosecutor's table, the scholar saw with some relief, was his umbrella.

Samuel rose. After a few brief remarks concerning the two charges leveled against the defendant, he pointed out 1). the absence of any of the pirated property, save for one peculiar parasol—a filched fashion accessory, no doubt. The loot, of course, must have been hidden away during accused's flight. As for 2)., the red-haired counsel explained that the Pinafore was off at sea once more, but various subpoenas in his possession attested to accused's being taken in Cornwall with the stolen goods.

As he concluded his latter point, a restrained little air sneaked under as he spoke. Without changing rhythm or timbre, he passed from prose to lyric . . .

With a sense of deep emotion,  
I approach this heinous case;  
For I hadn't any notion  
Any thief could be so base!  
He was caught with pockets  
swollen,  
Stuffed with jewelry and cash  
he'd stolen.

ALL:  
He was caught, & c.

COUNSEL:  
Picture now his crime denying,  
Though he's guilty as can be—  
This the charge we now are try-  
ing:  
Fillmore for high piracee!  
Doubly criminal, this raptor,  
For he broke away from capture!  
Doubly criminal, & c.

ALL:  
*(All the jury rise as one man).*  
JURY *(shaking their fists at Fillmore):*  
Monster! Monster! Dread our

ire!  
Quail thou, thief! Thou criminal  
and liar!  
Come! Substantial punishment!  
Substantial pun—

FILLMORE *(leaping up):* Silence in court!

*(The defendant controls himself with great difficulty.)*

### SONG

FILLMORE:

Oh, gentlemen, listen, I pray,  
Though I own that my temper  
is flaming,  
No vestige of truth ever lay  
In what learned counsel is  
claiming.  
And it's every prisoner's right  
When falsely arrested with  
booty  
To do what he can to take  
flight—  
In fact, I would call it a duty!  
Ah! And as for the jewelry and  
pelf  
They claim that they found in  
my pocket—  
They came from our good Judge  
himself:  
'Tis *he* that should be on the  
docket!  
Ah! And as for the—

ALL:

SWEPT UP in the forward thrust of the trial, J. Adrian Fillmore would have plunged ahead into a second verse of his accusatory defense, but just then someone nudged him from behind, recalling him to himself. While the rest of the courtroom parroted his refrain, he turned to see what was wanted.

A big policeman pushed a small

neatly-folded piece of paper at him, and whispered, "Little gentleman in the back insisted I get this to you immediately."

Thanking the policeman, Fillmore took the note and scanned the crowd in vain for its author. He unfolded it hurriedly, since it was almost time for his second verse. But what he saw written thereon stopped him in mid-syllable. The music died away and judge, counsel, jury and the rest of those assembled in the courtroom stared at him in vast puzzlement.

The note was written in a big, flamboyant flourish. It said:

"If you ever want the umbrella  
to operate for you  
again, restrict yourself to  
speech—or, at worst,  
declamation to music!

But, for heaven's sake, *don't  
sing!*"

At the bottom was scrawled the initials: JWW.

SO THE SORCERER himself had sought him out! Hearing of the trial, or reading about in in the papers, the merchant magician must have instantly recognized the umbrella as an instrument of his own manufacture.

What could the note mean? Evidently, Fillmore stood in some kind of danger of which he was unaware. But if it was connected with the operation of the umbrella, then he would do well to heed its' manufacturer's warning . . .

Turning to face the bench, the scholar begged to be excused from continuing his defense in song.

The judge looked genuinely puzzled. "It's your privilege, of course," he explained, "but I can't imagine why you chose to stop. You were doing so well . . ."

There was a murmur of assent from

the jury, and Fillmore noted with satisfaction that even Samuel slyly winked at him. But he stood fast.

"Many thanks for these kind words," he told the judge, "but I feel I will be more in my element if I carry on in prose, Your Honor. Now, the case as I understand it is this: I am accused of piracy, a charge which I flatly deny. Secondly, I am guilty of escaping from the custody of—"

"Oh, I think perhaps we may forget about *that*," the judge said. "Your point is well taken: duty of the captured to try to make a bolt for it, and all that. What d'ye think?" he added, looking in the direction of the jury. They all nodded their heads vigorously.

"But, m'boy," His Honor continued, "I'm afraid we can't forget about this piracy business. The gold and jewels and monies given you were all taken on the High Seas . . . and you *were* an honorary member of our band (pardon, hem!: our *former* band) of pirates."

"Yes," Fillmore protested, "but I didn't take the loot! It was all stolen long before I saw it."

"It was stolen all the same," Samuel remarked.

"Oh, ay," the foreman of the jury grumbled, but the judge held his finger up to his lips. Then, looking down with benevolence at the defendant, the arbiter clasped his hands across his breast and rocked for a moment in meditation.

"The point, you see," he said at last, "is not who stole the goods, but rather, who finally profited by them. We pirates all reformed and would have returned our ill-got gains. But there was a substantial cache that you'd taken with you, and since you never were a peer, there is no legal recourse but to prosecute you for re-

ceiving stolen goods and using them to your ends."

*That*, thought Fillmore is already a different charge than the legal definition of piracy—but the brand of justice meted out in a Gilbertian courtroom is too unorthodox to waste precious time haggling over such a point. What he must do, instead, is confront the court with the same sort of chop-logic it was wielding against him. . . .

"Is it quite certain, then," Fillmore asked slyly, "that you are absolutely resolved that possession of loot is tantamount to piracy?"

"Quite certain," the judge said.

"We are so resolved," Samuel replied, almost simultaneously. The members of the jury vigorously nodded their collective heads.

"Will nothing shake you?" Fillmore inquired.

"Nothing," was the unanimous answer. "We are adamant."

"Very good, then. In that case, I must demand that my accomplices in this offense be apprehended and tried along with me."

A murmur filled the courtroom. The judge rapped for silence, then stared at Fillmore with knitted brows. "How's this, lad, how's this? Are ye confessing?"

"Only within the rigid limits of your definition of the crime."

"Come now, laddie. I know right well ye'd no partners in this mishap."

The scholar, enjoying the confusion he'd implanted, rounded the table and paused to pour himself a glass of water. Taking his time swallowing it, he let his long-dormant theatrical predilection come forward. He sensed the moment when suspense amongst the jurors had built to an optimum level. Setting down the water-glass carefully, Fillmore glowered at the jury, then—suddenly whirling on the

judge—dramatically pointed a finger skyward.

"I put it to the court," he said in ringing tones: "Are not those who take possession of stolen property and bear it off culpable under the very principles of justice which condemns me?!"

"Yes, yes, I suppose so," said the presiding official, leaning so far over his lofty perch that his wig slid down over his eyes. "But who do ye accuse of such conspiracy?"

Drawing in a deep breath, Fillmore said, "The captain and crew of the *Pinafore*!"

A mighty burst of babbling, shouts and exclamations swelled up and rode an angry crest. Samuel, hopping to his feet, protested volubly. The spectators in the gallery above and behind Fillmore were divided between titters and hissers.

His Honor adjusted his top-knot so that he could direct his single-eyed glare full upon the prisoner.

"That is an extremely serious accusation!" he fumed.

"Consider! Where is the remnant of the piratical plunder? Do *I* have it? No! Do you have it any longer? No! But who took it from me? Captain—now able-bodied seaman—Corcoran!"

"The loot vanished when you did!" Samuel snapped.

"That's what *they* tell you! But where am I? In prison! And where is the *Pinafore*? Far off in some foreign sea, that's where!"

"It's true!" shouted a voice from the back of the hall. "Why didn't the blighters show up to testify?"

A chorus of voices hushed the objector, but the point was made. An undertone of murmuring dissent swept the court.

"*Damme*," cried the judge, rapping for order. "I simply cannot arrest the



entire ship! Especially when they ain't even here . . ."

"Nothing simpler," said Fillmore, who'd been waiting for the moment to thrust home. "The subtleties of the legal mind should be equal to the emergency. Here we have established a precedent—"

"*We have?*" the judge asked, perplexed.

"Yes! You pirates, being absolved from your crimes, have resumed your former station, leaving the burden of guilt to rest on my shoulders. Thus, all you have to do is quit me of blame and affix responsibility on the Pinafore company."

"But we cannot promulgate such a scandal!"

"You won't have to," Fillmore explained. "When they come back to Portsmouth, find out what disposition was made of the treasure . . . ask a sailor by the name of Dick Deadeye for the particulars . . . then simply absolve the lot of them and try to convict whoever has the cache by then. You can go on indefinitely!"

"Well, well," the ex-pirate mused, toying with his gavel, "that seems a workable proposition. I don't like it, mind—but . . ." Looking at the jury, he shrugged. "Well, Mr. Foreman, I think we'll have to accept defendant's solution, won't we?"

The twelve good men and true wrangled among themselves for a moment, then the foreman rose and said they could not agree on a decision.

The judge, seized by a sudden fit of pique, ripped off his bothersome wig and flung it in their direction. Glancing at Fillmore, he asked sarcastically whether defendant would mind if the bench sang? Getting no opposition, His Honor swept off the papers and lawbooks from his desk in a rage, and

embarked upon a musical tirade:

All these legal tangles tease me!

His proposal doesn't please me!

Yet I'm stumped for things to say

To explain his point away!

Barristers, and you attorneys,

Set out on your homeward jour-  
neys;

Gentle, simple-minded jury—

Get ye gone, and check your fury.

Put your briefs upon the shelf—

I will free the man myself!

A triumphal chord sounded; the jurors all applauded and came out of the box, thronging Fillmore to shake his hand. Samuel slapped him on the back and exclaimed how glad he was that justice had been done.

Remembering the admonition of the note, Fillmore restricted himself to speaking as the inevitable finale was struck up by the omnipresent invisible orchestra:

Oh, joy unsated!

I'm vindicated.

I'm quite elated

And in the clear!

Suddenly, there was a commotion at the back of the court. The doors burst open and a large, dowdy woman in billowing, multi-pleated dress and an imposing hat rushed up the aisle. Pushing through the milling crowd, she made her way to the newly-freed scholar who was at the exhibit table gathering up his umbrella.

With horror, he saw it was Ruth. She threw her arms around him and crushed him to her breast.

Singing, she took up the finale:

RUTH

At last I've found you;

With love I will surround you.

My arms impound you

And clutch you near.

SAMUEL

I wonder whether  
They'll live together  
In marriage tether  
In manner true?

The judge, descending, thoughtfully grasped Fillmore by the arm and yanked him away from the importunate female. Pushing him up the aisle, he offered advice that the other had every intention of heeding:

JUDGE

I would not stay, sir!  
You'll rue the day, sir.  
I'd run away, sir,  
If I were you!

Though I am a judge.

ALL:

And a good judge, too!

JUDGE:

Though I am a judge.

ALL:

And a good judge, too!

JUDGE:

I'll tell you all the truth:  
If I had to marry Ruth—  
I would sooner lose a tooth!  
And a good tooth, too!

ALL:

And a good judge, too!

Dashing into the outside corridor, Fillmore saw the judge push the courtroom door shut behind him—not altogether unlike the closing of a curtain at a play. As the portal slammed tight, the scholar could hear the final dominant chord sustained by the universal accompaniment.

Fillmore spared no time in quitting the building. Outside, a dapper little monocled man in striped trousers, cutaway morning coat and brushed tophat stepped up to him, bowed low, and held out his wallet for inspection.

In it was an ornately-drawn business card:

JOHN WELLINGTON WELLS  
President,

J. W. Wells & Co.,  
*Family Sorcerers.*

If anyone anything lacks,  
he'll find it already in stacks

at

70 ST. MARY'S AXE, LON-  
DON

("SIMMERY AXE")

### *Prologue*

"THE BIGGEST DANGER you faced was subsumption," Wells told his guest. "You were beginning to accept the axioms and tenets upon which my world is formulated. A little more singing and you could have found yourself permanently stuck here."

"But why," Fillmore asked, "did you engineer such a danger into your umbrella?"

"I didn't. The instrument—which I must admit is far beyond my comprehension—operates on principles and universal dictums that I've never been able to completely pin down in the limited uses I've made of the umbrella."

"Oh? So you've been elsewhere? In other dimensions?"

"Whatever you call them," the magician replied, nodding his head sagely. "I've found worlds parallel to this one, but with many intriguing variations in living-style. In point of fact, the umbrella actually comes from one of them—"

"Impossible," the scholar scoffed, rising to stretch after his long sedentary session. "How could you have reached another dimension without the umbrella?"

John Wellington Wells giggled. "You forget I'm a sorcerer, lad! One time I wafted myself into an alien universe, spied upon a master mathematician explaining the principles of this very device to an as-

sociate. But when I heard what purpose the inventor had in mind for his cosmic-travel engine (so to speak), I stole it away. Then it was a relatively simple matter to analyze its working parts and manufacture more of them. Of course, I've been most discreet in seeing that only the *right* people get possession of them . . ."

Fillmore looked thoughtfully at the frayed and faded instrument propped up in a corner of the room. "I wonder how that one found its way to Rose's junk-shop?"

The little man shrugged. "It's anyone's guess. Perhaps its owner allowed himself to be subsumed in your own world."

"Who would do a thing like *that*?"

"Someone tone-deaf, perhaps. Such people are *our* 'handicapped.' But we are digressing, are we not? I was discussing the properties and peculiarities of my traveling-wands. Normally, I furnish customers with adequate printed instructions. Since you have had no such briefing, I had better explain a most important factor in use of the instrument."

"Which is?" asked Fillmore.

"There is a very fine line between participation and subsumption. For some reason, when you make a dimensional hop with the umbrella, you must complete a sequence. You have to participate in some basic block of activity . . ."

The scholar nodded. "My adventures followed the developing logic of an operetta. I had to solve the chief plot dilemma before the finale could be attained, and the umbrella would work again."

"Yes," said Wells, "and you must now hurry in your departure, before a new sequence involving you gets under way." Rising and strolling to the piano, he played a few random notes

while he collected his thoughts. "What I am trying to say," he continued, "is that the participation in other climes will be vastly different from this world. It won't always be so obvious as to what may ensnare you permanently . . ."

"Then how can I protect myself?"

"By doing what you did here: try to figure out the underlying postulates of the world you're in, and manipulate them without accepting them. Do you understand?"

The professor nodded, then walked over to the umbrella and picked it up. "The only thing that bothers me is the degree to which I was put-upon here, even when I wasn't singing."

"Ah, yes," said Wells, nodding sagely. "You yourself sensed the cheat. Man tends to remain stable in whatever dimension he inhabits. You must really try not to allow yourself to be victimized, you know!"

"Buw what can I do about it?"

"Don't know exactly. You'll think of something. It's a matter of identity, more than anything, I believe. If you really accept yourself in a certain kind of role, the chances are you'll *be* it."

Fillmore shrugged. "Well, I'll have to think it over." He held the umbrella aloft, point towards the ceiling. "How do you make this thing go where you want it, anyhow?"

Wells put a finger in the air in an instructory attitude. "It is absolutely essential to fix the kind of place in mind where you want to travel."

"But I wasn't thinking of anything in particular before when I opened it!"

"Then it just picked up whatever you were musing about at the time. Do you recall what it was?"

The scholar slapped his forehead with an open palm. "Of course! Gilbert and Sullivan! The old ladies in

love and all that!"

"What is this Gilbert and Sullivan, anyway?" the sorcerer asked. "You mentioned them many times in your narrative."

"They wrote the operettas which certain events in this world echo. But you mean to tell me you've never even heard of them?"

"No, but why should I? You must remember that in our own world, we have our own objective realities. Your world is the only one I've heard of, up to now, that bears any relationship to mine—but it's so prosaic-sounding, I don't think I shall ever visit it. But . . ." The dapper little merchant paused, a worried frown creasing the corners of his eyes.

"Yes?" Fillmore prompted, putting his umbrella back down.

"Well . . . I said I wouldn't ask this sort of thing, but . . . well, dash it, you so much as hinted to me that my fate is rather dreary, according to the operetta that you know."

Fillmore fidgeted. "Well . . . ah, what happens in *The Sorcerer* is that you sell a love-philtre to a young man who will use it indiscriminately on his entire village. And then, in order to straighten out the mess, you—in the operetta—sacrifice yourself to Ahrimanes to break the spell."

"Oh, is *that* all?" laughed the sorcerer, relieved. "*That* happened to me some time ago. I made up that whole silly business of sacrificing myself! Fact is, it was an easy spell to remove—but I didn't want to get involved in any lawsuits. Looks like your Mr. Gilbert didn't tell the whole story!"

It was the scholar's turn to laugh. "Thank heavens—it is the one really unsatisfactory ending in the whole G&S series . . ."

"WELL," Wells asked, "are you ready to take flight?"

"Ready!" said the other, holding up the umbrella again and releasing the catch.

"Do you know where you want to go?"

"Well, I'm a little torn between home or seeking out the one man who could unriddle the mystery of this umbrella."

"Which mystery are you talking about?" asked the sorcerer.

"Why it takes the user to literary, rather than actual dimensions."

"Well," said Wells, "as I've said, all the places *I've* been to have been actual enough. But what enlightened genius are you referring to?" What man could possibly unravel the enigma of my marvelous umbrella?"

But the little magician never learned the answer. There was a sudden rap at the front door of the shop, which Wells had locked so he could hear his guest's tale undisturbed.

Looking through the entryway to the back room, the two men saw who was knocking. Fillmore paled. Crying out a hurried farewell, he pressed the button of the dimensional-transfer machine . . .

"*Wait!*" the magician shouted. But J. Adrian Fillmore was no longer there. Both he and the umbrella, Wells knew, were sweeping the stars away from some heavenly threshold in the precipitate fury of their flight.

THERE WERE two people at the front door: Ruth, and a small, bald-headed civil servant, dry in manner and parched of spirit.

"Where is he?" the shrew demanded, but the wizened functionary hushed her.

"By law," he said, "you should not even be here while I deliver this

madam."

"Deliver what?" asked Wells.

"Subpoena for one J. Adriam Fillmore."

"On what charge?"

"What else?" Ruth snapped.

"Breach of promise of marriage!"

"Oh, dear," the sorcerer mumbled to himself, "another sequence! I *do* hope he got away in time . . ."

—MARVIN KAYE

People of the Dragon (cont. from page 73)

might bring, strangers in a world of mysteries and terrors.

Like my ancestor, Zar, I bore in my left hand the gift of fire to them who had lost it in the black night of fear.

And in my heart I bore to them another gift, that was like light to the

black night of ignorance. For I brought to my tribe the knowledge that nothing there is in all the world that can slay a man, that men cannot slay.

We went unto them, side by side, under the morning.

—LIN CARTER

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*Letters intended for publication should be typed, doubled-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According To You, Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.*

Dear Teddy,

It was child's play to understand that you (Ted White) anticipated the question asked by Erwin Strauss, but to print Strauss's slothful and ignorant letter was a mistake. Better to merely bring up the matter somewhere in the course of the editorial or letters section by yourself.

"To pay the bills," is a phrase that should never be accepted in the publishing business; why, therefore, does Wollheim print the Gor novels without insisting that they be re-written?

Douglas Justice wrote: "In this unisex society of lady machinists, plumbers, and wrestlers, is it really so terrible to enjoy a fantasy novel about a world where men and women have separate and distinct roles?" A woman's role on Gor is largely to be beaten and raped into submission; this is what you would wish on another human being? Also: "Where there is a machismo similar to that in Latin America today where a male is taught from boyhood to master a female." The Latin American male you speak of must function in a rigid pattern of tradition; he is long on pride and short on accomplishments;

in short, he is a fool. The only women he could master would be sows too ignorant to buck the system, or too scatterbrained to care about who they married. And: "I will continue to prefer the fantasy world of Tarl Cabot and Marlenus to the reality of Hitler and Stalin and the computerized society making punchcards of human beings." I fail to see the difference; all of these things contribute greatly to de-humanization. Finally: "On Gor, a pretty girl may be enslaved, but she is loved, not pushed aside to watch a football game." However, it is equally possible that she is pushed aside to watch a tann race, is it not?

In the final judgment, we must all be human enough, moral enough, to reject such cruel fantasies. To tell Norman face-to-face, "Why degrade you and ourselves with this porn, while you can write worthwhile, entertaining fantasy?" It is the ultimate question each writer must stand trial on.

Ted White: "I can assure you that if a fantasy writer published a novel in which black people were presented as basically inferior to whites, appeared to enjoy their slave status, and were tortured and raped by the narrator (with the author's obvious approval), my reaction would be every bit as strong, and totally unmitigated by the historical occurrence of such situations." This statement reflects in part an

attitude that disturbs me; no sooner do blacks gain freedom when a sub-culture of white Americans springs up with the attitude that "I was for the civil rights movement, which means you owe me a large measure of respect." This is a possessive and oppressive attitude: something like Tarzan showing off in front of the natives or a general on the homefront stating that his boys won the war. I think that blacks are quite capable to protect their own rights these days. They certainly don't need the "Stand back and let the Great White Savior handle the situation," tone that permeates your statement; no matter how well-meaning it was. I can't shake the patronizing air of this sentence away; enough of this!

I have to protest Fritz Leiber's review of *The Burrowers Beneath*, a novel of the Cthulhu Mythos by Brian Lumley. I would have spoken earlier had I read the review. Which was damnably one-sided, and I think Fritz is aware of this.

Firstly to correct the typographical error, however. The third character in the book was Wingate Peaslee of Mis-katonic University head of the Wilmarth Foundation, a global army of telepaths and scientists struggling against the deities of the Mythos.

Fritz's description of the first third of the book is sorely lacking. He oversimplifies the action, neglecting several delicious horrors (and no, I'm not going to try to degrade the book by repeating all the "good stuff", of which there is plenty), and then attempts to dismiss it as talk, correspondence, and dream-sequences. Is your memory failing, Fritz? Most of the *original* Mythos is *also* talk, correspondence, or dream-sequence.

The mythos is present in the book in almost full bloom. The only differ-

ence between it and Lovecraft is that HPL used the scared-rabbit narrator while Lumley's viewpoint derives from Nayland Smith and Dr. Petrie or Holmes and Watson (in the form of Crow and de Marigny) and the super-secret organization and its head, not unlike those in U.N.C.L.E., UFO, even S.H.I.E.L.D. and Nick Fury (in the guise of Peaslee and the Wilmarth Foundation). Lumley has merely followed the logical route: eventually, we would have to stop fearing the Mythos and fight back. He has advanced the concept, instead of adding to its stagnation with repetition of boogey-man stories.

For the rest of the review, Fritz pouts like a baby who has had the sparkles picked off of his rattle, who's been told that Santa Clause was Daddy. You still loved Dad, didn't you? The sense of wonder is still there, give it a chance.

Fritz Leiber: "It (the Mythos) is on stage at all times, so how can the reader be afraid?" The reader is afraid because it *is* there, right over your shoulder. Dracula and Fu Manchu were on the stage all the time, and the certainly don't bestow pleasant dreams upon us.

I hate to be harsh, for I respect Mr. Leiber for his excellent fantasy, but Lumley and his novel deserve a sporting shot. In fact, I would be pleased no end if the implied sequel were to appear in the pages of FANTASTIC (despite his sub-quality story for the new issue of *Fantasy & Science Fiction*). And while I'm clutching at straws: When will the next Primus story appear?

In conclusion, well . . . these are my opinions, no matter how inadequately expressed.

*Where are all the new letterhacks?*

Aw, come on, the address is:

BOB ALLEN  
1620 Fremont St.  
Laredo, Texas 78040

*You missed entirely the point of that quote of mine. I am not part of the "sub-culture" you complain of, nor was my statement relevant to the civil rights movement. I was offering a parallel to Norman's use of women in The Marauders of Gor, in response to the statement that women have, historically, occupied positions in societies not unlike that depicted in his book. My point is that the portrayal of certain human beings—whether differentiated by sex, color, or any other characteristic—as fit only for sub-human existence and exploitation, is objectionable to me when presented in a work of fiction as an attitude of which the author obviously (lip-lickingly) approves. The defense that in fact such situations have occurred in history is inappropriate unless the author is describing the attitudes of a member of such a historical society. Norman was not: he was describing the attitudes of a 20th century Earth-human, "gone native" on Gor. He obviously approved of his hero's attitudes—and the same attitudes can be found in his non-fiction work, Imaginative Sex. By the way, I understand Norman absolutely refuses to allow any changes in his books, even minor ones of copyediting. —TW*

Dear Mr. White—

A few words on the current Gor/John Norman debate.

Having read the entire Gor series, I know what Douglas Justice is speaking of: there *are* moments in the Gor novels that are legitimately exciting, and rank with the best of heroic fantasy; the scene in *Raiders of Gor*

stone of Port Kar is one, and the character of Kamchak in *Nomads* (which I think is the best of the series) is worth the price of admission, and the tarn race in *Assasins* is, as Douglas claims, excellent. Norman, as a writer of heroic fantasy, has his points, which makes his flaws both as an author and a human being all the more infuriating.

One of his flaws as an author is his boring digressions into various minutiae of Gor that have little or nothing to do with the story. They belong in appendixes; putting them in the story is a boring and pendent conceit.

More serious is his flaw as a human being; it is more than annoying. It is poisonous. I'm talking about his attitude towards women and sex. You put your finger on it, Mr. White; it is pornography. The naked human body is not of itself pornographic, nor is sex; it is one's attitude, and Mr. Norman's attitude is like one man applauding while another man rapes a woman, and *that's* porn. Humanity comes in neither race nor creed, nor color nor sex, and to deny another person their humanity cheapens your own. It is significant, I think, that to Norman women are often "magnificent creatures", but rarely people. Nor can he take refuge behind the fact that this is his character's attitudes. Both his *Imaginative* (HAH!) *Sex* and an interview with Norman that I read in a fanzine about a year ago makes it plain that Tarl Cabot speaks with John Norman's voice.

I'll tell you something. I knew a young woman who was raped and I've seen what it's done to her. It'll be a long time before she can recover from the emotional and psychological scars. Mr. Norman is no longer merely approving or advocating his loathsome attitude towards women; he's now



propogandizing for it as the "natural" order. I can't help but think that rapist would agree.

I don't deny that, historically, women were used as chattel at one time, nor that this aspect should be off-limits to the fantasy author. But notice the difference between the Gor novels and "Fugitives in Winter" in the October FANTASTIC! If you can't see it, then there is no more basis for conversation. The word we come back to is *attitude* and that is the difference. As for Erwin Strauss, if he can't tell any difference between Gor and Conan, I suggest he put his mind back in the toilet and flush it.

As I said at the beginning of this letter, I have read all the Gor novels to date. I have also read my last Gor novel. The porn now outweighs the heroics, and the hero/rapist is no longer my idea of good reading. Tell you what, folks; with the next Gor novel you read, picture a woman that you care about, be it wife, lover, friend, or relative, on Gor, and read *her* name for one of the character's, and *then* tell me how delightful it is.

JOHN OSTRANDER  
1957 W. Lunt  
Chicago, Ill. 60626

Ted,

I agree completely with your description of the Gor novels as sexist, perverted, pornographic trash. It depresses me that such sexist fantasies sell as well as they do. With all the talk about male liberation and consciousness raising among former MCP's, things were beginning to look good. But sales on the Gor books indicate that all isn't as well as Tom Snyder would have us believe.

I don't accept your distinction between porno and "erotic realism," tho. In fact, the very phrase "erotic

realism" makes me laff, like so many other gobbledygookish euphemisms that assassins of the English language have been inventing in recent times.

And i also don't accept your statements that Conan and similar novels aren't remotely linked to the Gor novels as regards sexism. The Conan novels of Robert E. Howard *were* sexist. (And the Conan comics written by Roy Thomas are even more so.) But what disturbs me about the s&s in FANTASTIC isn't the sexism as much as the glorification of violence, war, and even sadism.

In "Death from the Sea" and "Fugitives in Winter," the heroes were barbarians who glorified combat and took pleasure in sadistically subduing their enemies. Atilla in the first story takes it upon himself to impose "justice" by completely wrecking the jaw of someone he doesn't like. In the second story someone tears his enemy's throat out with his teeth, and the hero delights in glorifying this barbarous act in song.

To me, fantasy stories should be more upgrading than that.

And in that light i must agree with the comments of R. Pacello on dirt. *Unknown* was the best fantasy mag ever, and it never resorted to the kinds of words Mr. Pacello objects to or to "errotic realism."

I'm saddened by Fred Patten's revelation that super macho fantasy s&s covers sell so many more magazines than *Analog*-type outer space covers. Have American males turned completely from the excitement and wonder of space exploration and so enthusiastically embraced the strength-and-power trip of antiquity? Shudder!

Your comments on limiting worldcon size were interesting. I've never been to a worldcon myself, altho i hope to make the '77 con if it's

held in nearby Orlando. But i agree that the *Star Trek* and comics aspects of a worldcon should be eliminated. All those Trekkies that have been flooding stf fandom in recent years (to the point where Trekkies now make up a *majority* of fans) have only corrupted the movement, polluted it. Down with the Trekkies, fellow stf fans! Let's keep this subculture above the level of normalism and Middle America! (By the way, did you see Don Markstein's con report on Vulcon II? Hilarious! How many Trekkies *does* it take to change a lightbulb?)

I must disagree with Mike Dunn's putdown of Ben Nova. His *Analog* isn't as fannish as your mags. Whose mags could be? But he *does* communicate with the readers. Many of the locs that don't make it into *Brass Tacks* are answered by a comprehensive personal letter from Ben. I read all the stf magazines except *Galaxy* and *Vertex*, the quality of the fiction in the latter two being below acceptable levels of quality.

Regarding Kevin Dolin's comments on s&s on tv, i hope we never do have blood-and-gore Conan-type tv series. All the brutal "tuff cop" shows on the tube now are bad enuff. And you should have told Dolin about that three Solomon Kane paperbacks, *The Moon of Skulls*, *The Hand of Kane*, and *Solomon Kane*.

"Old Halloweens on the Guna Slopes" was okay, for those who can easily stomach black humor. (*The Sirens of Titan* made me sick.) I assume that Lafferty was saying that we all *should* leave behind the insensitive mischief of our youth.

"Transfer" was a very good Malzberg story, with a real gut ending, something rarely seen these days.

I can see why "The Devil His Due" was rejected. Joe should stick to sci-

ence fiction.

"Count Brass" 's conclusion was satisfying, but couldn't you stretch these serials out over *three* issues and thereby give us more short stories? And how about some *Unknown*-type stories?

I agree with your assessment of *Watership Down*. Now watch Roy Thomas make a horrible comic out of it.

Regarding Lovecraft and his life and times, i've heard that he often guested in New Orleans, where he found our crawfish, crabs, and other seafood simply horrible to look at. Maybe they inspired some of his stories?

I really couldn't believe Douglas Justice when he asked, "Is it really so terrible to (have) a world . . . where a male is taught from boyhood to master a female?" Is he serious?

Incidentally, do you have similar objections to the John Carter of Mars novels, in which the slavery on Barsoom transcends sexism and racism and equally has "the author's obvious approval?"

When you referred to "mundane" detective mags like *EQMM*, i'm sure you were only kidding. Detective fiction can be as exciting as stf if handled by a master like Queen, Christie, or Doyle. And *EQMM* remains one of the best magazines on the stands. Its stories average a quality much higher than that of "The Case of the Mother-in-law of Pearl."

"The Wedding of Ova Hamlet" was great, but the letters SFPA already stand for The Southern Fandom Press Alliance, a regional apa.

And i must say that i find no fault with Rupert Linwood's condemnations of four letter words and homosexuality, except that i'd substitute compassion for pity in his discourse on the

latter. And if Linwood prefers "the missionary position" in sex, that's his right. I'm not gonna get into a discussion of the moral rights and wrongs of the various aspects of heterosexual married love-making here.

Actually i don't find that much difference between the anthologies of Roger Elwood and those of Damon Knight, Robert Silverberg, and others. 95% of the stories in all such anthologies are the kind of new wave stf that i dislike. Much of the contents of these anthologies, the Elwood books included, i wouldn't even classify as science fiction.

"The Scroll of Morloc" was good, but aren't people being dishonest if they credit someone as a co-author if their only contribution to the story consisted of a few notes or just some proper names of people and places? To me this is done just to sell stories, and i don't like it.

"The Haunted Writing Manual" was the best story in the October issue, a really engaging mystery-fantasy which kept its surprise twists hidden from view until their time to spring. "To Whom It May Concern" was a good runnerup, and "From Bodeen to Ramur" had its moments. (No double meaning intended!) But "A Shakespearean Incident" was just a formula story. Can't Carrington do better than that?

LESTER BOUTILLIER  
2726 Castiglione Street  
New Orleans, La. 70119

*I define "pornography" as fiction designed to arouse the reader sexually, by catering to his or her sexual fantasies. I define "erotic realism" as fiction in which sexual descriptions exist as a part of a story in order to advance characterization or plot, are realistic in nature, and are not the*

*sole justification for the story. As for "mundane," the word is not a condemnation but a description of all which lies outside the purview of the fantastic—all non-stf or non-fantasy magazines are "mundane" in that they are part of or portray mundane reality.—TW*

Dear Ted,

Oh, boy, Ted, have you set yourself up for a fight! After reading your editorial in the August FANTASTIC, everybody who's even looked cross-eyed at a Gor novel is going to write and tell you they aren't "sick". (My cousin is a big fan of the Gor series, but I don't think she's sexually perverted. But then again, she seems to enjoy the sex issues of *National Lampoon* better than its other themes.)

People will argue that whipping naked women is no more perverted than penises in a jar. I see your argument here; the penis had something to do with the story, while whipping is used merely to get the reader's rocks off.

I doubt, as you stated, that the majority of the Gor novels were sold in "sleezy stores, in cellophane wrappers". The average science fiction or fantasy reader probably discovered one of Norman's novels at a normal bookstore and then, if they liked it, went looking for the rest of the series. (A small aside: A lot of the sf or fantasy readers I know *do* like pornography. Maybe I'm hanging around with the wrong gang.)

The letter you referred to in the letter column was just like every other one you've printed on the subject: I was offended by this-or-that scene and if I want sex, I'll go to *Playboy*. Your editorial will not satisfy these people. Instead of squelching the argument, you've added bras to

(cont. on page 128)

## Editorial (cont. from page 4)

Bears, Winnie the Pooh. Animals which talk and act like people. Quests and fortunes to be followed and had. Many children put these fantasies behind them as they grow into adulthood. Others transfer their sense of wonder from fairylands to futurelands—turning from childhood fantasy to science fiction. And some remain fascinated by fantasy. I include myself in the latter category, for what it's worth.

Thus we fantasy readers are not necessarily motivated by a rejection of technological reality—or at least not as a primary motivation. We idealize the past, when the world was simpler, values more sharply defined in blacks and whites, and virtues were rewarded—a past in which machines did not intrude and science was at worst alchemic and at best an exploration of the arts of magic. We take pleasure in the vicarious swordplay and adventure of the barbarians of old. But we seek only temporary escape from the cares of our modern world—not the permanent rejection of this world.

Others have not found fantasy fiction as an outlet; they have taken another form of fantasy as a way of life.

Serious belief in magic—most commonly Black Magic—in Satanism, in Tarot cards, in astrology and in other forms of superstition, represents a more serious rejection of present-day reality.

In "reality" none of these things work. The worship of Black Magic is sometimes coupled with Satanism, sometimes derived from "pagan" beliefs such as druidism. In the former case it represents another side of the coin of Christianity. And the appeal is to those who still accept the basic tenants of that religion, but who re-

ject, for one reason or another, the worship of God or Christ in favor of Satan or the Anti-Christ. I cannot imagine anyone reared in a non-Christian culture, or by long-term inclination an agnostic, taking Satanism seriously. Satanism is simply the open acceptance of Christianity as a superstition which lies outside the dictates of logic or rationality. Many do accept Christianity this way, at least tacitly; the Roman Catholic dogma encourages this unreasoning view (reason being seen as an enemy of the Church) and it is not surprising that Satanism takes most of its trappings from Roman Catholic practices, suitably inverted (or, to a Catholic, perverted).

Christianity, obviously, does not work and has never worked. It bears only passing resemblance to the original teachings of its unwitting founder and has been a creature of European politics for nearly all its nineteen or eighteen centuries of life. It has brought great misery and unhappiness to the vast majority of the world which accepts it, and it is hardly surprising that those who retain any sensitivity within that religion have been known to question the mercy and kindness (or even sanity) of their deity. If one believes—as I do not—that a God is in fact responsible for everything which occurs on the face of this planet ("It is God's will"), one must be forced to the conclusion that this God is one long since gone mad, one who glories in human (and non-human) suffering and anguish.

But Christianity has always offered two compelling rationales for its existence. First, the surrender of responsibility. If it is God's will that man kill man, then it is clearly not the responsibility of any man to question the need for the death he bestows upon another. Human responsibility for

human problems is absolved, surrendered. The buck is passed upward. We are but pawns in the hands of God.

And, second, Christianity says that while we may live miserable lives here upon this clod of earth, killing, raping, looting and destroying all that lies about us, we have only to acknowledge our sins, accept the fact that this is our natural condition as one "fallen" from the grace of God (as a descendant of Adam) and we will be accepted into an afterlife which will justify the misery of this one.

Christianity flowered in meaner times and still exercises its strongest hold in those cultures which cling to the remnants of those times. The Roman Catholic church has within it, entrenched, the caste system of medieval Europe, and those countries where the Catholic church holds real political power are those in which that system is still perpetuated.

Not too surprisingly, cultures like our own in which technology and individual affluence have gone hand in hand have been the first to reject this hold of superstition. If one's life is not one of misery, the promise of a "better" life in the hereafter is less alluring. Although we live in a far from perfect society, in which many social injustices remain, our life is a far cry from that of a European (or South American) peasant. We have much less need for superstition.

But, as I said, runaway technology is creating the need for new superstitions—or new reasons for a return to old superstitions.

**SUPERSTITION IS BORN** of the need to find meaning in an apparently meaningless world. Superstition is born out of ignorance, and it appeases that ignorance with an apparent Truth. If

the weather turns freakish and destroys one's crops, and one is ignorant of the actual causes of this unusual weather (as, in many cases, we still are), one seeks metaphysical answers—answers which can be found in one's own mind rather than in recourse to investigations which lie beyond one's physical powers. (It has taken the most sophisticated of technology—spaceflight, orbiting weather satellites—to find the basic world-wide patterns to our weather which begin to make sense out of it.) It is easier to say, "I must have angered my god (or gods)." One observes what one did differently than one "should" have done, and one resolves never to do that again. Or, one tries to propitiate one's gods with sacrifices of one sort or another. Thus, superstition.

A child believes itself the center of the universe—and is, in a subjective sense, the center of *its* universe. Nothing occurs which is not in some sense directed at (or against) the child. Coincidence does not exist, nor are the needs and motivations of others taken into account. Maturation leads to a growing realization that one is *not* the center of the universe. It may even bring that form of rational disillusionment called Existentialism: there is *no* center to the universe; all is coincidental to a greater or lesser extent; nothing has any greater meaning than that of its own existence.

Most of us substitute a different realization for our infant awareness: we become centers in our social universes, narrowing our horizons and recognizing their subjectivity.

Primitive man carried his childhood conceptions further into his adult life (which was usually a shorter life as well). It was inconceivable to him that such events as freakish weather

should *not* be directed at him. He took it personally, as he took most of the events of his life. Thus it was necessary that he invent deities which caused these events, and that he would seek to relate directly to those deities in an effort to gain some control over his immediate world. It was a rational impulse, born of irrationality.

The situation we find ourselves in today is overwhelming to some people. They find themselves in an incomprehensible universe of *things* from which all meaning is absent. They can neither control these *things* (many are afraid to learn to drive a car; they are too short of confidence in their ability to master and control a machine as complex as a car) nor escape from them. (The rural life is appealing to them in the abstract, but, city-born, they lack confidence in their ability to deal with the responsibilities entailed.)

So they turn to something which will give their lives and their universe meaning. They turn to superstition—to fantasy, in its broader sense.

Because no coincidence can exist in a universe of meaning, they find Truths in the Rorschach blots of astrological horoscopes—and ignore everything which does not in fact coincide. In Tarot cards they find the Nostradamical prophecies which subsequent events must, in one way or another, confirm. When sceptics confound them, they retreat to an insistence upon the necessity of Belief in the functioning of their particular form of magic.

In the last twenty years, especially in the last ten, the rise of superstition in this country has been so great that even newsweeklies have commented upon its various manifestations, thus lending superstition the cachet of

trendiness.

The counter-culture in particular has been vulnerable to superstition. A rejection of “material values”—usually the technology of waste, which fuels capitalism—and the use of drugs which shatter one’s preconceptions of “reality” are often all it takes to point a person in the direction of one of the many currently popular superstitions.

What I regret in this is that there are other answers than a retreat into superstition. Robert Pursig in his excellent *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* points in one fruitful direction: a reconciliation of the individual and the technology which surrounds him and upon which he is, to a greater or lesser extent, dependant.

It is unfortunate that mysticism has been linked in most western minds with regressive superstition. It is not, of course, at all the same. Mysticism is an awareness of other realities which coexist with that of physical (“objective”) reality, not in conflict but as complements. The realities of relationships, and awareness of transcendental values—of Meaning in which one is neither the center of the universe nor an existential leaf adrift upon the wind. As Pursig puts it, an awareness of the Buddha in a motorcycle engine. A sense of Quality.

But the tools of mysticism, such as they are, are easily subverted to the simpler preoccupations of superstition. One primary concern of the superstitious is to gain control over one’s future by virtue of learning its nature via “fortune-telling” devices. Astrology, cards, crystal balls, palm-reading—all are used primarily for this purpose.

Unfortunately, one tool of mysticism which has been put to this use, particularly by the superstitious in the counter-culture, is the *I-Ching*, the

ancient Chinese book of changes.

The *I-Ching* was evolved to fit a particular need in the Chinese culture many centuries before the birth of Christ. That culture was a fairly stable, and thus fairly rigid one. Social customs were intricate: behavior was prescribed with fair exactitude for nearly all occasions and for all classes of people. Modes of life changed very little from generation to generation. Like all human societies it was not ideal, but it survived as a civilization for far longer than any western societies of which we are aware, primarily because of its fixed nature, its stability.

Yet to fix a culture's patterns of behavior so specifically could be disastrous, since it might relegate the human being to the category of quasi-machine: one with fixed functions, emotional responses and aspirations. Obviously humanity is too diverse, every human too unique for this to be workable. And it would not allow for a spiritual conception of reality, for mysticism.

Mysticism in its various forms was included in the Chinese scheme of things. But here also advice was needed for correct and proper behavior in those events which could not be anticipated in advance and for which no easy guide could be prepared.

Thus, the *I-Ching*. It is a guide, primarily for rulers and those in positions of authority and responsibility. It offers sixty-four possible solutions to unguessed problems. These solutions are arrived at, for the user, by a concept of simultaneity which says that although the rules of cause and effect are not suspended, they are not the entirety of reality either. The opinion is put forth that every act which occurs at a given moment, no

matter how widely separated by physical space, is interrelated by the simultaneity of its occurrence. This is a notion which can easily be used to fuel superstitions—it says, in effect, that there is no coincidence in simultaneous occurrences, if you chose to interpret it that way—but it was not specifically intended to. Rather, it was used as the motive for specifying advice from the *I-Ching*. The act of consulting the *I-Ching* embodied this principle: one throws yarrow stalks (or, more commonly, coins) which arrive at one of sixty-four patterns: a hexagram which coincides with one of the sixty-four possible solutions offered by the *I-Ching*. Thus, the *I-Ching* is not intended to forecast the future; it is supposed to assess one's present circumstances and suggest the proper actions to take in regard to those circumstances.

Yet I have known superstitious people who consult the *I-Ching* as fervently as others consult the daily horoscopes in their paper. They do not use it to assess their present situation, reflecting upon its meaning and applicability, considering its advice (which is all the *I-Ching* is—*advice*, and nothing more) in terms of their immediate problems. They use it to forecast the outcomes of possible actions; to find "good omens" or bad ones; to tell their fortune. Damned few people in western society have used the *I-Ching* with any respect for its real values, nor considered its advice as such. It is, of course, also true that the book of changes was not conceived for use in our society and it is a testament to its value as a work of human creation that it retains *any* value today—here or elsewhere.

In assessing the present situation as I have in this editorial I am not suggesting Patent Panaceas or Instant

Solutions. Such answers must come from within the individual: they can't be administered externally like a dose of medicine. What solutions can be offered generally are those of education in technology—so that it ceases to frighten us with its mystery—which is available now, as noted earlier, and a change in the nature of that technology in terms of its everyday impact upon us, which I believe is also coming. Knowledge and understanding are the only weapons against ignorance and superstition.

OUR COVER this issue is one of which I am particularly proud: I think it marks a new breakthrough for Steve Fabian, its artist.

Recently I received the latest issue of Richard Geis' *Science Fiction Review* (formerly *The Alien Critic*) and its cover was an extraordinary drawing (in black and white) by Fabian—the style quite similar to that of his interior illustration for "The Locust Descending" this issue. I was struck by it and suggested to him that he adapt

the style to color for the painting for this issue's cover. This he did—but before he had a chance to read the story it illustrated. As with his cover for last year's May issue of *AMAZING SF*, he had only my letter of description of the scene I wanted and the style I wanted to see it executed in, to go by. When he received a copy of the story for doing the interior illustration, he read it and phoned me to point out that I'd described *two* horses pulling the sleigh and the story called for only one. Fabian is obviously an artist who cares about getting such details correct, and he was concerned about this discrepancy. It was too late to change the painting—nor would a change in the painting necessarily be an improvement to it, in its own terms. I told him I'd take all responsibility for the extra horse. So if any of you are annoyed by this failure of fidelity on the part of the cover, please direct your annoyance to me. Fabian is blameless; the error was mine.

—TED WHITE

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Letters (cont. from page 123)

the fire.

The whole controversy should be called to an end like the St\*r Tr\*k discussion. (See, I didn't say it!) But now, I doubt it'll happen.

Yours on the whipping post . . .

BERT FURIOLI  
225 Brinker Rd.  
Wellsburg, W. Va. 26070

You've misquoted me. I did not say that "the majority of the Gor novels

were sold in 'sleezy stores, in cellophane wrappers.'" I said, "a large market exists for bondage/discipline material. Most of it, however, is sold in sleezy stores, in cellophane wrappers, for \$5.00 to \$10.00 a throw and does not pretend to be aimed primarily at the fantastic-fiction fan." While I was suggesting that this is where recent Gor novels belong, I did not mean to imply that this is the way they're sold.—TW



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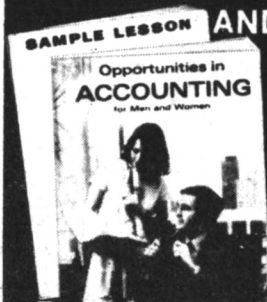
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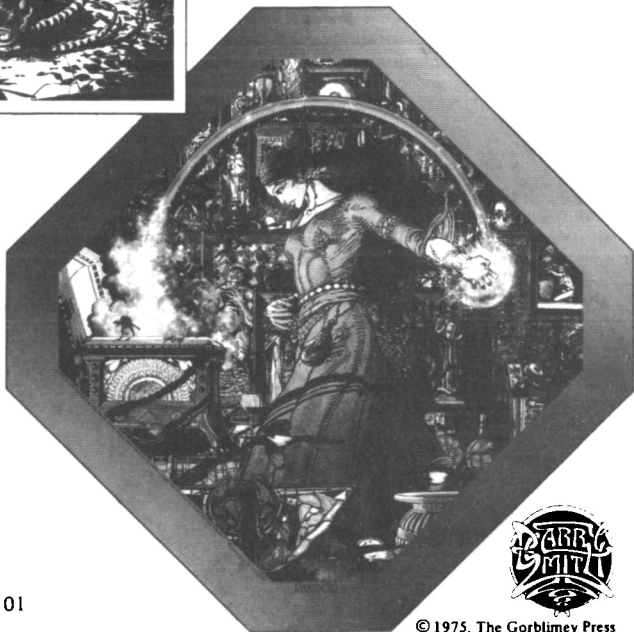
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