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SCIENCE FICTION

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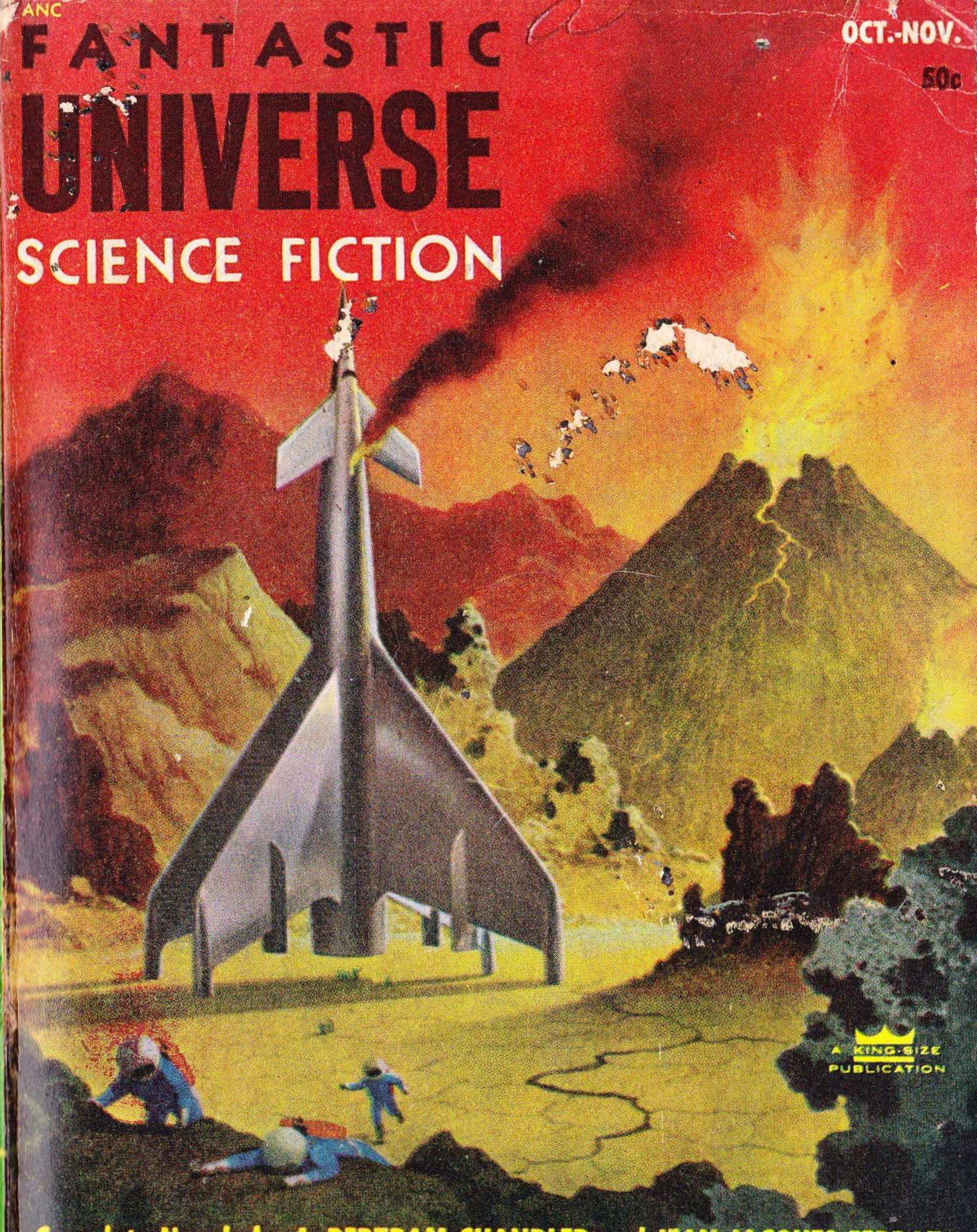

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION

Complete Novels by A. BERTRAM CHANDLER *and* JEAN JACQUES FERRAT
***Short Stories by* WILLIAM F. TEMPLE • WALLACE WEST • C. M. KORNBLUTH**
WILLIAM MORRISON • PHILIP K. DICK • EVELYN E. SMITH *and many others*

ALL STORIES IN THIS ISSUE BRAND-NEW

THE ALIENS

It is an odd but illuminating fact that, to anyone associated with science fiction, be he or she reader, writer or editor, no human being is an alien. In science fiction an alien is a creature from another planet, perhaps a planet of another star. Speculation upon such creatures has always been, is and always will be a major element in the imaginative thinking that is the spinal cord of stf.

Certainly such speculation upon non-Tellurian life is one of the most fascinating factors in the entire field. It ranges all the way from the lowly BEM (bug-eyed monster) with its polychromatic appendages, once favored almost exclusively by writers and readers alike, to such macrocosmic life-forms as entire planets themselves.

However, to date all forms of alien life in science fiction are limited by the fact that they are conceived by humans for humans. Hence, even if it were possible for an author to cook up a truly non-human life-form, it would be impossible for him to express it in words so that a human reader could understand it. For words themselves are intensely human.

Even the BEM, in its most horrendous form, is derived directly from such familiar non-alien creatures as Earthly crustaceans, insects, reptiles or some combination thereof. And to be effective such creatures must be human just as Lassie and Black Beauty were effective because they touched the springs of human emotions in human readers.

The ingenuity of science fiction authors in surmounting this problem of the alien is unending—as indeed it should be. One school of writers insists that humanity is not Earth-born but was imported from the alien planet of some distant star or stars—thus permitting all sorts of interstellar romance and melodrama. This theory has led to some of the finest science fiction stories ever written.

But in cold fact we doubt its truth. Actually, if our scientists are to be credited with a germ of truth, it seems unlikely that the exact and delicate set of planetary conditions responsible for humanity is likely to be reproduced on any other planet of our galaxy. Which may or may not be a good thing.

—The Editor.

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the sane men of satan

by . . . Jacques Jean Ferrat

Does the past still live and not in dreams alone? Justin thought not till a strange decision took him back to days he knew as dead.

CHARLES JUSTIN paused briefly in the encroaching darkness to look at the north front of the Old State House in Boston. He was engaged in the process of walking home from his office on State Street to his house in Louisburg Square.

The ancient building, he thought, with its palladian windows and gilded lion and unicorn, still looked much as it must have when Paul Revere engraved his crude but effective print of the Boston Massacre, back in 1773.

One of the things Justin loved most about Boston was the fact that so much of the old town still breathed. Faneuil Hall, a few blocks behind him, where James Otis and Sam Adams had roused the Commonwealth against the crown, still did duty as a major market. Worshippers still paraded on Sunday mornings to King's Chapel, Christ Church, the Old North Church. Scores, perhaps hundreds, of twentieth-century Bostonians still lived and worked upon the same broad planks of old T-Wharf that had felt the measured tread of Gage's grenadiers.

Justin, born and bred in rawer if no more bustling Midwestern surroundings, had felt a powerful tie

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Until recent times the Devil, to give him his due, was a figure of fear rather than of Hallowe'en fun. Nowadays, to most of our enlightened citizenry, Satan is a device used by the clergy to keep folk in line, or by a Goethe to create Faust. Consider then the plight of a thoroughly sophisticated man of today who discovers Old Nick to be not only real but deadlier by far than the horned brimstone-breather of legend.

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with the old thus standing alongside the new, a strong *déjà vu,* from his first glimpse, more than twenty years before as a Harvard freshman. This, he had known instinctively, was home for him. He had made it his home ever since.

The sense of the past was strong upon him this evening—perhaps, he thought wryly, more strong than was proper for an executive vice-president of the Ninth National Bank. As he scaled the slope of Park Street on Beacon Hill he felt like a man born out of his proper time.

Life and color and revolt had been strong in the little city of two centuries ago. Men had thought and dreamed—and then had talked and acted. Unlike their descendents, who seemed to have relapsed into an everlasting featherbed of trust-fundism.

Passing the gold-domed balustraded beauty of Bullfinch's classic New State House, he wondered how the crest of the hill had looked when John Hancock had lived there, in his magnificent Georgian mansion, with its landscaped gardens and carriage house containing the merchant-governor's gilded English coach.

Old Boston held Justin tightly in its grip even after he turned the key in his own lock and entered his house on Louisburg Square. For the house, if not quite Federalist, dated back to the early era of Clipper Ship affluence. Fine white paneling, graceful mahogany banisters, blue-and-gold silk wall covering of heavy Chinese silk, Sheraton furniture, Revere silverware—all combined to retain illusion of a past still alive.

Not until he walked upstairs was the illusion shattered. And again it was not the room that shattered it—for graceful mantel above gently roaring fire, fine old furniture and a pair of glowing Copley portraits on the west wall maintained the dream.

It was the two persons awaiting him there that spoiled Justin's vision of time past relived. Jack Fellowes joggled cubed ice in a broad-beamed highball glass in front of the fire—as modern in his midnight-blue dinner jacket and soft white shirt as the post-Freudian psychiatry he practiced.

He said, "Ah, there, Charley, have a drink on you." Then, with a rueful half-smile at Justin's wife, Marie, "You seem to have married the only banker in history who works overtime."

In an ice-blue satin dinner gown Marie Chandler Justin was as brilliant as a candle's white flame—and even less warm. She stirred faintly in greeting to her husband, said, "You're late, Charles—you'll barely have time to dress."

Justin reached for a drink that stood ready atop the red-lacquer Chinese cabinet some ancestor of his wife's had brought from Canton. He said, "Sorry, I forgot about the Iveson party. I don't think I'm up to it tonight. You two will have more fun without me."

Marie pouted prettily, said, "But, darling, I'll have to explain to every-

body—and they'll all think the most horrible things."

"Let 'em," said Justin bluntly. He turned to Fellowes, added, "By the way, how are you coming along with Marie's psychoanalysis?"

"These things take time," said Fellowes.

"So I understand," said Justin. Some devil prompted him to add, "I've heard that some women wear out two or three psychoanalysts in a single lifetime."

"Charles!" Marie looked warningly up from the pleats in her skirt.

"Really, Charles." Fellowes sounded hurt.

"Sorry," said Justin. He decided to jump the conversational track before there was a wreck. "Henri Dubois visited me this afternoon."

"You mean the Golden Rule fellow?" the psychiatrist inquired. "Interesting phenomenon of our times. What sort of chap is he."

Justin thought back to the soft-spoken man who had sat in the white leather armchair on the far side of his desk, the man who had asked him for two million dollars to support his Missionist movement. He thought back to the meeting in the Garden he had attended the night before—a meeting attended by twenty thousand quiet intent hopeful people, by many thousands more who had listened via loudspeakers outside in the streets.

Henri Dubois did preach the Golden Rule, the ideals of cooperation and humanity toward one's fellows, as the world's only salvation. It wasn't quite that simple, of course—but the Golden Rule was its essence, a Golden Rule to be practiced not merely in church on Sundays but seven days a week.

And Missionism, as preached by Henri Dubois, was sweeping the country. Dubois had received more than fifty thousand dollars in spontaneous gifts from the lecture the night before—and before noon that day. Yet he felt unable to spend it in support of his movement lest such spending should lend aid to possible smears of fraud and graft later. And Dubois needed two millions. He wanted the bank to use his huge backlog of contributions as collateral on a loan.

"It will save you many times that sum," he had said, leaning forward and resting a forearm on Justin's desk. "Consider—Missionism's widespread adoption will mean cooperation rather than competition. It will mean that, instead of wasteful conflict between selfishly warring groups—say of contractors versus unions—you'll have voluntary union. It will mean, to take a specific instance . . ."

Justin had been, was still, of more than half a mind to grant the evangelist what he asked. For Missionism was catching on, would soon be sweeping not the country but the world. Yet Corinne Forrester, Dubois' woman, had come back later to ask Justin to refuse the loan.

Dark, slimly flamboyant, a smoker of dark Cuban cigarettes, Mrs. Forrester was a factor to be reckoned

with. She had left her gloves—deliberately, he suspected—had returned for them and said, "Mr. Justin, I have loved Henri Dubois for more years than I intend to admit. Until recently he has loved me as well.

"Now, thanks to Missionism, I am losing him. I gave up a perfectly good family and home and husband for Henri—but I cannot compete with millions of rivals. I'm not an ingenue any longer and I am not the sort of woman who can exist for long without a man."

"This hardly seems to concern—" he had begun.

And, dark eyes disturbingly fixed on his, she had said, "Mr. Justin—you're not the sort of man who should live long without a woman. There are a hundred little signs—restlessness, too-rigid control, vast energy uncompensated." Then, rising, "I shall call you tomorrow at five. And perhaps . . ."

Justin had been in a foul mood since. He came out of abstraction to realise that Jack Fellowes had repeated his question about the evangelist, said, "What sort of fellow is he? I'd say the oddest thing about him is his very lack of oddities."

"Hmmm." Fellowes was definitely interested. "Did you get much impression of repressive influences, Charley?"

"I'm no psychiatrist, Jack," said Justin, "but I'd say no. He was quiet—yes. But he didn't have any trouble expressing himself. More intellect than emotion-dominated."

"And you say you're no psychiatrist," said Fellowes. "Charley, if you weren't a damned good one you'd never be able to hold down the job you do at the bank."

"Can't you two talk anything but shop?" Marie asked irritably. She stood up, added, "This dreadful Dubois man—I don't see why we have to have reformers anyway. The world would be all right if some people weren't always trying to change it."

"Change is the natural order," Justin said mildly.

"Only because men like this Dubois make it so," said Marie sharply. And, to Jack Fellowes, "I'll be ready in five minutes."

Justin waited till she had left, then said, "You know, Jack, this is charmingly old-fashioned. You and I having a drink together while the woman who has us both in her clutches prepares for the evening."

The psychiatrist winced. "You know, Charley, you can be alarmingly frank at times," he said. "That wasn't funny."

"I know it wasn't," Justin told him. "Nothing about Marie is ever funny. She considers a sense of humor practically subversive. How *are* you getting along with her—professionally?"

Fellowes shrugged, said, "Nowhere, professionally *or* personally. What's more I suspect you know it, Charley."

"Let's just say I guessed." Justin reached for the bottle to refill his glass, added, "I know Marie. Since she has no intention of facing facts you'll never get out of the batter's

box professionally. Personally? Well, she has no intention of giving me any grounds for divorce. Not that I wouldn't appreciate some, Jack."

The psychiatrist said, "Charley, there's just one sort of human that absolutely baffles a man in my profession—that's an absolutely sane man."

"Oh, come, Jack," said Justin. "All sanity is relative."

"That's why it's so damned baffling when we find it." Fellowes lifted his glass. "Here's to the one and only sane man I ever met."

Marie, coldly magnificent in ermine, with bits of silver-leaf glittering in her blond hair, appeared in the doorway. She said, "Jack, I'm ready." She didn't seem to mind at all that Justin wasn't going.

II

Charles dined alone on a pickup meal and went to bed early. Undressed, in his third-floor bedroom, he scratched a naked stomach that, at forty-one, was beginning to show a faint bulge, noted a more marked bulge in a side pocket of the jacket he had just removed and hung up.

He dug out its source—an odd little gadget, nicknamed the "spider," which he had shown to Henri Dubois and Corinne Forrester that afternoon when they were in his office. It had happened to be on his desk. Supposed to spray a transparent waterproof film over any surface, its backers were seeking money to promote it as a substitute for raincoats and umbrellas.

There was a hitch, of course—it clung abominably to human hair and for this reason, since it was chiefly intended for women, its financing was still highly problematical. But it had certain other uses, according to the testing laboratories, which its inventor seemed to have missed. Justin must, he decided, have stuck it into his pocket instead of back on his desk. He wondered what it would be like to plaster himself with a form-fitting suit of invisible pajamas.

Then, regretfully, he laid it on the bedside table and got into orthodox nightwear. After settling himself with twin pillows, he reached for a well-worn copy of Esther Forbes' *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In,* began to browse through its vivid pages.

Again Old Boston came to life. Church bells pealed, small colored sweeps carried their brooms through the cobbled streets, fish vendors shouted the merits of their wares.

Contrary to the bowdlerizations of nineteenth century historians, there was little of the Puritan in Boston life two centuries ago. Chaperons were unheard of north of Spanish territory and the powerful rum of Medford and Newburyport was the staple festive drink of a generation which would have considered cola depraved.

According to a young rhymester of the period, describing a party "where kisses and drams set the virgins aflame"—

The chairs in wild order flew
quite round the room,

Some threatened with fire brands,
some with a broom,
While others, resolved to increase the uproar,
Lay tussling the girls in wide heaps on the floor.

Eighteenth century Boston, Justin decided, would hardly have been a happy home for inhibitions. He tried to conjure up a vision of one of the merry maids of the period, a girl as warm and charmingly devilish as his Marie was chill and repressed.

She would not, he decided, have been beautiful according to Hollywood standards. But her features would be the more intriguing for their very irregularity. Her simple grey or blue dress, no matter how modestly cut, would have failed utterly to hide the vibrant young figure beneath. Her lips and eyes and complexion . . .

The telephone rang on his bedside table. Justin came out of a wild dream in which Corinne Forrester, wearing a Navajo Indian blanket adorned with Puritan cap, collar and cuffs, was seated firmly on his lap and refusing to get up. It was odd, he thought fragmentarily, how Dubois' woman seemed to have moved into his subconscious. And with her vibrant, almost tangible allure . . .

Devereux Chandler's urbane tones greeted him. "Hope I didn't wake you up, Charles."

"Not at all," Justin croaked. By the banjo clock on the wall opposite the wardrobe he saw that it was still twenty minutes short of midnight.

"I hoped I'd run into you here at the Ivesons'," Chandler explained. "Marie tells me you were too tired to come."

"That's one word for it," Justin told him. Despite the fact that Chandler, as his wife's uncle and a member of the board of the Ninth National Corporation, held complete power not only over his job but, at least indirectly, over his domestic life, Justin had always been frank, even blunt with him. He had long nursed an idea that this outspokenness with a man used to subservience was one of the reasons he had been able to hold his favor.

But the Bostonian merely grunted and said, "I understand Henri Dubois has been after you for backing."

"That's right," Justin replied.

"Hmmm." Chandler sounded thoughtful. "I suppose a decision now might make or break the man. How do you feel about it, Charles?"

"I'm going to sleep on it," Justin told him.

"That's sound," said Chandler. "I must say I'm beginning to be interested myself. Marie's been talking to me."

"She's dead against him. Oddly enough, for quite different reasons, so is Dubois' own woman, the Forrester female."

"A point to consider, perhaps. I hope I haven't disturbed you, Charles, but I wanted some inkling of how you felt about this matter."

Justin put the phone back on its cradle, picked up the spider half unconsciously. Devereux Chandler, cheerfully sardonic, polite, urbane, was the most difficult human being to interpret correctly the younger man had encountered in his not inconsiderable experience. Why was Chandler seeking preliminary knowledge of the decision?

Until then Justin had thought of it as no more than another job to be handled to the best of his ability, one of a long series of decisions that had brought him to his present position.

Now other considerations began to crowd this basis for judgment. It occurred to him that quite literally the fate of a goodly portion of the world might well depend upon his answer. There seemed little question but that Henri Dubois could not get the money he wanted elsewhere.

Or, if the evangelist should obtain such financing, it might not come in time—or in sufficient quantity. And if Dubois were forced to use the contributions sent by his followers to promote his own cause he might be laying himself open to sordid subsequent court actions that, however unjustified, would inevitably soil his character and reputation in the public mind.

Justin became aware of an ominous physical sensitivity that caused him to feel every thread of the nylon pajamas which encompassed his body, every bit of linen in the fine sheet that covered his bare feet.

Twice before he had felt such heightened awareness—once on the eve of his marriage to Marie, again on the night before he had made his first important decision at the bank. On each occasion it had been the prelude to an event that had shaped inexorably the life that followed.

Now it was sharper than ever before—and he wondered if perhaps it meant that the decision he would have to make on the morrow might shape not only his own life but that of the world. He discovered that he was sweating lightly and that the sweat was cold.

This, he told himself, was nonsense. No matter how far-reaching its results a decision was a decision, to be decided one way or the other, according to the best available facts, thereafter to be abided by whatever happened.

He tossed the whole mess out of his mind, turned off the light, pushed one of the two pillows from beneath his head and rolled over on his right side. He had just remembered how to lick it.

The device dated back to his childhood and adolescence in the Midwest, to his years at college, to the early years of his job. It involved a mixture of all three elements—the small town within commuting distance of a medium-sized city, Harvard and Boston—connected by an odd Toonerville-ish single-track railroad on which ran just two passenger trains a day.

The railroad had been real enough during his childhood—it was, he had recently learned, long extinct,

its rusted rails torn up for sorely-needed scrap metal during World War Two. Yet, fifteen years and almost fifteen hundred miles away, Justin could still hear distinctly the asthmatic beep of its steam whistle as it pounded along behind its stubby black engine across the cornfield.

Even in his boyhood the railroad had been dying, its three cars never more than half-full. It had run miraculously through a deep cut in the one hill the countryside boasted, then through woodland clumps and across the river on a wooden trestle, into the larger woods.

Thereafter it had run straight and true to the city—but it no longer ran there in his visualization. Instead, by some strange twist of Justin's geography, it deviated from its straight path to become briefly a part of the subway running beneath Harvard Square.

Thereafter it crossed under the Charles to plunge beneath Boston's Back Bay, never quite becoming a part of the city's subway system. Finally it wound up in a maze of circles between Washington and Devonshire Streets, whence it turned easily for the return journey.

Now, faced with the most important decision of his career, Justin summoned the odd little train to his rescue. To his relief he was easily able to take it through the cornfield to the cut.

But thereafter, it traveled a different path. Midway through the cut Justin realised two things. One, he was the only passenger on the entire train. Two, he was able to see over the sides of the cut, down the fallaway of the hill to the flat countryside beyond.

His range of vision grew and, as he peered through the soot-grimed panes of the windows, he felt a sudden jolt of fear. The train was no longer following the familiar track of his barbiturant fantasy. It was, instead, flying through the air.

Fear became panic as clouds became woolly lambs, far below, then mere streaks and patches of white. He had sudden memory of a movie, taken from a V-2 rocket above White Sands, in which the world twisted and grew small and curved in a matter of seconds.

Then, with a rush of sound never heard on that one-track spur, the train rumbled into a tunnel of darkness, its wheels clacking a samba-beat on rails that could not possibly exist. Coal smoke from the funnel invaded the car and Justin found himself blinking his eyes and coughing. He had to breathe now and the gas was invading his lungs.

His last thought was that it had not been such a happy way to go to sleep after all . . .

III

Justin awoke with a slight headache. He seemed to be resting on some sort of hospital cot. Even as he sat up he could feel it move slightly beneath him. It was obviously portable. And, while the mattress was comfortable enough, it lacked pad, pillow or covering of any kind. He was, he noted flick-

eringly, still wearing the blue-piped grey nylon pajamas in which he had gone to bed.

Nor was he in the old house on Louisburg Square. Walls, floor and ceiling of the windowless cubicle around him were all of a neutral composition. Such light as there was was indirect. Evidently, he decided, some sudden sickness had landed him in a hospital room.

At first glance the man who stepped forward from a corner added to the hospital illusion. In knee-length Prince Albert and with grave bewhiskered countenance he looked the picture of a conservative man of medicine. In accents only a little too British to be Bostonian he said, "I was beginning to fear you weren't going to awaken at all."

But as he moved forward it became quickly apparent that this was no twentieth century Boston physician. His hair and whiskers were of much too full and luxurious a cut, the octagonal steel-rimmed spectacles upon his nose much too archaic—as was the upright stiff collar that held his black ascot tie, and his Prince Albert itself.

Justin's eyes ranged downward and froze. For his dignified companion wore neither trousers nor shoes. Below the skirts of his long coat thin shanks protruded, clad only in tight-fitting long drawers, to end in blue morocco slippers with up-pointed Turkish toes. Justin said, not wanting to be too obvious, "How long have I been asleep?"

"It is difficult to tell," said the bewhiskered one. He fumbled beneath his Prince Albert, produced a parsnip of a silver stem-winder, looked at it and shook his head sadly. "My timepiece seems to have stopped utterly since my arrival here."

"All right then," said Justin, running a hand through his close-cut hair, "Where in hell am I anyway?"

"That too is difficult. I believe it is called Belvoir. By the way, I am Dr. Ian Phillips, at your service."

"Then you *are* a doctor!" Justin exclaimed. "Would you mind explaining what's happened to me?"

"A doctor of philosophy," was the gentle reply. "I was rather hoping that *you,* sir, were a physician."

"Charles Justin, alleged banker, at your service." Justin swung his legs over the side of his cot, tested the floor, stood up. He discovered he was holding the spider clutched in his right hand, dropped it unobtrusively into his pocket. He must have taken it while falling asleep.

"You must be an American, Mr. Justin," said Dr. Phillips.

Justin, slightly bemused, said, "What? Oh—yes, Boston."

"Remarkable," Dr. Phillips said unexpectedly, "that we should have *two* Bostonians with us."

"Let's count ten and start over again," Justin told him. "Isn't this Boston?"

"Hardly!" Dr. Phillips' laugh was dry and sharp. "This is Belvoir. As to myself, I was in my diggings in London, taking a doze after tea be-

fore marking some tests, when I made the trip here."

Justin made his way to a chair in the corner and sat down heavily. Dr. Phillips said, "Perhaps I'd better get your fellow Bostonian. I don't seem to be doing you much good."

"Perhaps you'd better, doctor—thanks," murmured Justin. He put his head in his hands and tried not to think of what was happening.

A minute or two passed. Then quick soft footsteps sounded and a pleasant voice said in utterly indefinable accents, "Ye mustn't feel so upset, Master Justin—we're all in the same boat."

The girl had heavy brown hair that fell in neat slow ripples well below her shoulders. Like himself she was barefoot and her figure looked enormous in a tentlike white nightgown that covered her from shoulder to ankle. She had fine healthy pink-and-white skin, made intriguing rather than marred by an occasional pockmark, and her eyes were as blue as the waters of Cohasset Bay.

Instinctively, despite a growing conviction that he was utterly mad, Justin scrambled to his feet. He said, "It does take a bit of getting used to—but perhaps you can help."

"That's why I'm here, Master Justin," she said. "Poor Dr. Phillips tells me ye too are from Boston. I must say I do not find ye'r countenance familiar."

Her accent, her phraseology—both were alien. As, come to think of it, was the nightgown she was wearing. Yet it was of a piece with his own pajamas and the dignified Dr. Phillips' lack of trousers. And those pockmarks—Justin studied them, then felt a surge of excitement. He said, "Pardon me for not knowing your name but—"

"Deborah Wilkins, spinster, of Prince Street," she cut in.

"—but," he went on, "would you mind telling me, Miss Wilkins, just *when* it was that you were brought here?"

"To Belvoir? Why, I retired to my bed on a February evening in seventeen sixty-one, to dream of the great white ship that would carry me far from prosaic Boston to some fine city overseas, instead of which the ship brought me here to Belvoir."

"I'll be damned!" said Justin, stunned not only by the date of Deborah's transfer to Belvoir but by the similarity of her experience to his own.

"Methinks we are all damned," said Deborah Wilkins. "Certes we are not in heaven unless our good pastors have been led sorely astray. And if they have been led astray they must indeed be tools of the devil, which leaves us small chance of salvation."

There was a neat syllogistic logic to her reasoning that brought Justin up short. This girl, who or whatever she might be, possessed both fearlessness and intellect. He said, "You don't seem to be afraid of hell, Deborah."

An unexpected dimple appeared in one smooth cheek. She said, "Thus far there seems little to be

afeard of, Master Charles." Then, eying him with frank curiosity, "What sort of attire are ye clad in? I have seen nought like it."

"I might say the same of yours," he replied as frankly.

She blushed. "And ye'r accent—surely 'tis not Boston."

"It has a Midwestern base," he told her. Then, "But yours too is strange, Deborah. You see, I come from a time almost two centuries after yours. And as for my 'attire'—like you I was snatched from sleep to come here. These are what is known as pajamas."

She came forward, fingered the material, said, "They are as fine as silk—yet they are not silk."

"If I told you what they were made of you wouldn't believe me," he said. "It is called nylon, Deborah."

"A strange term," she said thoughtfully. Then with a sudden flash of blue eyes, "Methinks ye make free of my name for a man so young and so recently acquainted."

"I'm not so young," he told her, "I'm forty-one. As for calling you by your first name, if you object..."

"Nay, to what avail?" she countered, blushed again, added, "Surely ye must be an agent of the devil himself, Master Charles—ye look no older than twenty-five or six."

"In two hundred years we have learned to take rather better care of ourselves," he added gently. "We don't age quite so fast."

"And ye'r women?" The question was blunt.

Justin said, "And our women too. Few of them show much age until they are in their forties—some not even then."

"Methinks I would appreciate ye'r time—if indeed it *is* ye'r time," she told him. "But come—ye must be hungry."

Her remark made Justin conscious of the headache that was plucking at his temples. He said, "Come to think of it I'm starved."

"Then follow me, Master Charles," she said, moving toward the doorway. There she paused, turned to study him again, added, "But surely ye cannot be forty-one. Ye look such a *young* man."

"I'll see what I can do," he replied. "Lead on, MacDuff."

He followed her down a long corridor, off which other cubicles opened, similar to that in which he had so recently awakened. And he noted that her walk was light and graceful, that her ridiculous tent of a nightgown swayed as she moved to suggest her figure filled only a fraction of ti.

He said, "Why did you starch that ghastly gown, Deborah?"

Without turning she replied, "Mother made me do it—she is much afeard of my worldiness."

A couple strolled out of one of the cubicles ahead of them. The man wore the brief belted tunic of an Ancient Roman. His hair was short, his broken-nosed Latin features bordered by what looked like gigantic spit-curls.

With him was a dark-skinned woman, veiled to her liquid black eyes, her figure hidden more ef-

fectively than Deborah's by a voluminous bright silk sarong. Both of them waited while Deborah and Justin walked past them, regarding Justin with curious dark eyes. The Roman said, "*Ave.*"

Culling a forgotten scrap of Latin from his schoolday memories, Justin replied, "*Pax vobiscum,*" saw the Roman start with surprise. "Who are they?" he asked in an undertone of the strangers who had let them go ahead.

"Belvoir is full of their like—and even odder," was the girl's reply. "But ye will soon see for ye'rself."

"Have you been here long, Deborah?" Justin asked her.

"'Tis hard to say," was her reply. "Longer than Dr. Phillips or yourself—not as long as most of the others. Dr. Phillips says we have been waiting for ye, Master Charles—that soon we shall go home."

Curious, thought Justin, when she frowned slightly at mention of returning home. It seemed unlikely that any girl could be happy in this strange place.

They came to a large chamber filled with long tables. Running down the center of each was a sort of wall. Seated at perhaps half of the hundreds of modernistic comfortable-looking chairs was the oddest collection of humans Justin had ever seen.

He noted one hirsute low-browed male, clad in a mangy looking hide, who seemed scarcely more than a giant ape. This specimen, with fierce concentration, was gnawing greedily on the scarcely-charred thighbone of a medium-sized animal without benefit of tableware. Beside him sat a squat mocha-skinned female whose skinny pendulous-breasted body was entirely innocent of clothing.

He saw a gentleman in ruffled shirt and magnificently brocaded waistcoat of the period of Louis XIV, who was methodically eviscerating a small roasted bird. Beside him, clad in what Justin could only conceive of as a shift, a lady in a towering headdress sipped champagne from a crystal goblet.

There were others, including an apparent Egyptian, clad in the briefest of loin-cloths with a marcelled spade-beard that recalled the statues of the Pharoahs—a cluster of Orientals of various shapes and skin colors and degrees of disarray, busy with chopsticks—a Hindu temple dancer whose modest demeanor denied her professional carnality.

Justin said, "It must be quite a job supplying each of these people with the food they want."

"'Tis truly remarkable, Master Charles," the girl told him. "Faith, never in my wildest dreams have I conceived of such a miracle."

"I wish you wouldn't call me 'Master Charles'," Justin said.

"And how else should I call thee?" she inquired.

"It's that 'Master' business," he explained. "In my time it means a boy, not a man. Just as 'Mistress', in my era, implies a kept woman rather than a wife."

"Mast—Charles, ye abash me!"

she murmured demurely although twin blue devils danced in her eyes. "Here we are."

She had led him to the far end of one of the long tables, at which a small cluster of oddly assorted folk were seated. One of them, a rough-looking little specimen, who seemed to be wearing nothing but a shirt of slightly rusted chain mail, was slashing a large chunk of half-raw meat.

A plump motherly-looking grey-haired lady, clad in a petticoat from the waist down and nothing at all above, smiled at Deborah over her suet pudding and said in English even odder and quainter than Deborah's own, "Good day, Mistress Wilkins, be this the other guest?" And, when the girl nodded, "Truly a comely cod!"—to which Justin, quite aware of the phallic meaning of the word, felt himself blush.

"Ye must not mind her," Deborah whispered, directing him to a chair. Then, mischievously, "'Tis no more than truth—and she means it well."

"It's okay," said Justin. "Just a bit unexpected. *Hello!*"

At the base of the barrier, opposite his chair, his name was printed in gilt letters. He glanced to his left, saw that in front of Deborah's chair, in slightly more antique-looking script, her name was inscribed. She caught his glance, nodded toward the barrier, told him in a whisper, "'Tis but a trick. Ye speak ye'r wish into the hole and then lift it from the wall. Like this, see . . . ?"

She leaned forward, said softly, "Prithee, fetch me a plate of turkey with brown sauce and wild chestnuts—white meat only. And a large tankard of ale."

Justin blinked, saw Dr. Phillips waving a friendly fork at him from a half-dozen places further along, decided to do things up right. He said, "One double Gibson, extra dry."

As he spoke a light went on in front of Deborah, disclosing the apparently solid barrier to be transparent. A window, reminiscent of similar windows in a New York City automat, opened and from a compartment behind it the girl took out her food and put it on the table in front of her. She had been given a savory-smelling well-heaped plate of turkey, gravy and chestnuts, a fine pewter tankard of ale, along with antique-appearing knife, fork, spoon and ringed napkin.

She picked up her fork, gestured toward his own section of the barrier. He followed her motion, saw an enticingly pale dry Gibson awaiting his disposal. Taking it out he toasted Deborah, who lifted her tankard, then asked, "Prithee, what is that?"

"A cocktail," he told her. He pushed it toward her, ordered another for himself. Deborah sipped it, made a face, then sipped again.

"Why!" she exclaimed. "'Tis like strong rum! I must tread warily or my poor head will spin like a windmill."

"Right," he told her. Finishing his drink he ordered himself a small

steak, medium rare, with mushrooms, soufflé potatoes and a tossed green chef's salad. They arrived in seconds, perfectly done and equipped with the finest sort of silverware, bearing his initials.

He had just about decided that Belvoir, real or otherwise, was a promisingly pleasant if bizarre place, when a rasping voice filled the hall, saying, to Justin's ears at any rate, "Now hear this—now hear this. Your final briefing will follow immediately. Please return to your chambers and await further orders!"

IV

Alone in his cubicle Justin longed for a cigarette. Fortunately he did not have long to wait. The man who entered with brisk graceful steps wore soft grey flannels, a comfortable blue shirt and gay but not loud figured silk tie. He glanced quizzically at Justin, drew a silver cigarette case from a jacket pocket, offered one to Justin, took one himself, lit both with a silver lighter.

He sat down on the chair in the corner, said, "I'm Ortine—I run Belvoir. I suppose you're wondering what this is all about, Mr. Justin."

"That," said Justin, "is understatement, Mr. Ortine. *I* suppose I must have lost my mind."

"On the contrary," said Ortine with the trace of a smile, "you have been brought here because you are absolutely sane."

"That's a relief—or is it?" Justin countered. There was, he thought, something epicene, almost effeminate, in his host's gestures, in his voice. Furthermore, there was something familiar in his handsome, rather delicate cast of feature—a familiarity that played elusive hide and seek with Justin's memory.

"I shall try to make my explanation brief as possible," said Ortine. "However, Mr. Justin, you *are* sane—and you are *not* dreaming. You have been brought to Belvoir in thoroughly material fashion."

"Just what and where is this Belvoir of yours?" Justin asked bluntly.

"This is not going to be easy to explain to you, Mr. Justin. To most of the others I merely call it heaven or fairyland—and that suffices. But you and your era are a little too informed for such credulity.

"Belvoir, of course, it not its real name—and actually it isn't a place at all—at least not in your terrestrial meaning of the word. I suppose you'd call it a ship."

"A *ship!*" Justin exploded. Then, to humor his host, "I suppose you mean some sort of space-ship."

"After a fashion it's a space-ship—but *my* vessel doesn't actually inhabit your concept of space." Ortine still looked troubled. "Some of your science fiction authors have come closest to it with something they call sub-space."

"I'm afraid I can't follow you there," said Justin.

"Try to think of the vast areas of so-called empty void between the galaxies," Ortine went on patiently. "Try to consider that these areas are no more empty than the areas

between the stars visible to you in your telescopes. My universe might be called the other side of the universe—if you can think of the universe as a coin."

"I understand—a little," Justin told him. "Now tell me—why are you here? And why do you want *me?*"

Ortine flicked ashes on the floor, which immediately absorbed them. He said, "I have been sent here to prevent your planet from destroying itself and probably forcing your sun into nova.

"For while your sun is not a great star it lies in an area correspondent to one of the most congested and thickly settled areas of my universe. It is not supposed to go into the nova stage for some billions of your years. Should it happen in the near future—as it will if my mission is unsuccessful—something like catastrophe will result on the opposite side of the coin."

"How can you be sure it will happen?" Justin asked quietly.

"Because, thanks to certain differences of structure between our universe and yours, we can follow the whole stream of your time," Ortine replied matter-of-factly. "Your past, of course, is not dead—you have already seen proof of that here on Belvoir—nor is your future yet unborn. In short, the past still exists, the future does exist."

"In that case," said Justin, "Why don't you give up and go home?"

"Because"—Ortine's sincerity was self evident—"neither your past nor your future is immutable. Needless to say, we do not believe in altering history on any world unless it must be done to avert needless disaster. It is my mission to alter both Earth's past and its future by effecting the course of the key events of your history."

"It sounds like rather a large order," said Justin.

"It is," Ortine replied simply. "While our time-span is far different from yours—I suppose I have existed for several thousand of your years—it is the first such assignment in my memory or that of my mentors."

"Then you cannot follow your own past and future," said Justin.

"Unfortunately not." Ortine looked unhappy. "No species has ever been able to do that reliably. We are all trapped within the span of our own time. But yours is so infinitesimal to us that we are able to read it easily—just as your scientists can read and to some extent predict the lives of fruit-flies."

"Not a very happy simile," Justin put in.

"My apologies," said Ortine. "In the matter of size between us there are no such discrepancies. It is wholly a matter of temporal maladjustment. And it is my theory that the shortness of your life-span is responsible for the self-inflicted doom that threatens not only your world and your sun but a number of ours."

"You might have something there," said Justin. "But what in hell do you want us to do about it? Live forever?"

"It is precisely because you cannot," Ortine told him, "that I have been sent to rescue you from your predicament—with the help of each of you summoned here, of course."

"And just how do *I* figure in this mission of yours, Mr. Ortine?" Justin inquired.

"You have been brought here because a fanatic named Dubois appealed to you for financial backing during what seems to you to be yesterday afternoon," Ortine informed him.

"So . . ." said Justin thoughtfully. "He's that important?"

"He will be," replied the other, "if you give him the money he is seeking—and I have received information that you intend definitely to come to some sort of arrangement with him."

Justin said, "I must say, everyone seems to know more about my intentions than I do myself. But let's say I do arrange to let him have some money—just how is that going to drive the sun into nova?"

"Henri Dubois," Ortine stated, "is perhaps the most dangerous type of madman that exists. His madness takes the form of a fanatical oversimplification of the virtues through which mankind can hope to attain happiness."

"I have already considered that angle," said Justin.

"I feel certain you have," said Ortine. "However, it is not Dubois' oversimplification that represents peril to your world and mine—it is his persuasive ability to bring others to act as he would have them act, without thought of the consequences."

"Then you think," Justin said curiously, "that if mankind follows the Golden Rule it will destroy the world—how?"

"Because," Ortine replied patiently, "neither Dubois nor any other man will be able to get *enough* people to do as he wishes. Yet if he obtains backing from you he will be able to spread his doctrine to enough people so that the natural enemies of the Golden Rule will be forced to take action against them.

"Consider then the results of a Missionist success, Mr. Justin. It would mean that your world would be torn asunder by a hot war—a war in which biological techniques and fission weapons must inevitably, within a five-year period, send a blasted planet spinning into the sun. Result—nova and catastrophe in my own universe."

"You seem to have it all figured out," said Justin.

"That is what will happen if you give Henri Dubois the backing he asks," Ortine continued. "Now consider what will happen if you do not. Take my word for it, other banks will be slow to give him credit once the Ninth of Boston has turned him down. He will be forced to use the contributions sent in by his followers to maintain himself. Consequently, before he has become too dangerous to the Marxist leaders, they will be able to whittle down his prestige

through a carefully planned series of smears and exposés."

"And this will be good for the world?" Justin asked.

"It will prevent its destruction," Ortine told him. "It will give sane men, men of reason rather than emotion, men like yourself, Mr. Justin, opportunity to get the reins of power more firmly into their hands."

"Has it occurred to you, Mr. Ortine," said Justin, "that without an occasional 'madman' like Dubois humanity might still be picking its teeth with pieces of flint in a cave?"

"My dear Justin," came the urbane reply, "your question is perfectly logical—however, to one who has viewed the entire panorama of human history, the answer is all too simple. The history of humanity has always been a bloody and stupid one. Men are always struggling because of some shibboleth, killing others who disagree with their pathetic beliefs."

"Not a pretty picture," mused Justin. Then, rallying, "But it is only part of the story. Men have done great things as well."

"True," replied Ortine easily, "and they would have been free for greater accomplishments if they hadn't been oppressed down the ages by a series of influential madmen. Some of them, of course, were foiled by the sane men around them. Consider Napoleon, Charles the Twelfth, Julius Caesar, Aaron Burr, Bolivar, Joan of Arc, Adolph Hitler.

"Each was mad, each came close to altering the world to his own pattern of lunacy at tremendous cost—yet each, at some critical point in his career, was checked by a man of sanity."

"All of them were insane?" Justin asked, surprised.

"Certainly—by what you would term modern psychiatric standards," said Ortine. "Napoleon, Caesar, Bolivar, Joan of Arc and Hitler were all epileptics with paranoiac complications, Burr and Charles straight megalomaniacs.

"Save for the sanity of Talleyrand Napoleon must have united Europe under his imperial sway. Peter the Great wrecked Charles the Twelfth when he apparently had the western world at his feet. A sane Cassius brought about Caesar's death, Jefferson smashed Burr, businessmen of Peru foiled Bolivar, an English bishop saw through Joan, Winston Churchill foiled Hitler. In each instance it was a close thing."

"I'll go along with that," said Justin. "But if the madmen have been foiled, why try to foil them them again?"

"I," said Ortine, "am concerned with the madmen who were *not* foiled—or not foiled in time. Such maniacs include, among alas too many others, Alexander, Mohammed, Peter the Hermit, Pizarro, Martin Luther, your friend Dubois as well . . ."

"Alexander was killed by peritonitis in his thirties," said Justin doubtfully.

"He did not die in time," replied Ortine firmly. "Not before the ter-

ror of his name was so implanted in the Near and Middle East that for centuries it caused Asiatics to be overwhelmed by a shadow of fear they could not hope to overcome with reason."

"You've certainly been taking a dive into our history," said Justin uneasily. "I don't suppose you'd tell me how *that* is done."

Ortine said, "Gladly—but I fear my explanation would do you little good. The process involves an alteration of atomic structure that can be achieved only in the subspace that is my native universe."

Then, abruptly, "I hope, however, that the explanation I have given you, along with the fact that I consider your current problem sufficiently important to bring you to Belvoir, has revealed to you how vital it is that you refuse Henri Dubois any important funds."

"It has raised another factor worth consideration," said Justin equivocally. "I have noticed that you bring people to Belvoir only in their sleep. Would you object to telling me why?"

"Hardly." There was a rueful twist to Ortine's half-smile. "I am not, in any real way, possessed of what you would term supernatural equipment. What may look like magic to you is nothing more than a demonstration of the realities of my own universe."

"But . . . ?" said Justin.

"*But*" — Ortine grimaced — "I have no actual control over the minds or bodies of human beings. Not on their own world at any rate. Incidentally I have no control over your mind here on Belvoir, though actually, while here, you are in my type of space rather than your own.

"However I *can* attain control over you when you are in the process of drifting into sleep—and then only when the distraction of some impending judgment has lowered your normal psychological defenses. In your instance, as in all others, I was forced to enter your mind through a dream—but surely you remember . . ."

"It scared hell out of me."

Ortine looked regretful. "Unfortunately, there is a slight narcosis necessary to effect a transfer from your atmosphere to that of Belvoir," he said. "It usually takes the form of unconsciousness, as far as the subject is concerned, most easily connected with the dream involved. A number of more primitive folk seem to have imagined themselves drowned or consumed by wild beasts or fire, poor devils."

"And you say all of this—of this odd assortment you have brought here—is made up of sane men and women?" Justin asked.

"My dear Justin"—Ortine looked pained—"you must be more tolerant. Mind you, these people have been culled from all of human history. You must have seen quite a variety at mealtime."

"Quite," replied Justin. "Incidentally, your feeding arrangement is ingenious to put it mildly. How do you know I shan't take advan-

tage of it to get drunk and foul up the assignment."

Ortine laughed openly. "My dear Justin," he repeated, "you are a sane man."

"Mr. Ortine," said Justin, "from what one or two of the others have said since I got here I am the last one they are waiting for."

"That," said Ortine, rising from the chair, "is entirely true."

Justin gulped as the implication sank home. If he were the last it meant, as his host had already implied, that the sands of Earth, or at least of human existence on Earth, had about run out. It implied that his was the ultimate decision upon which the final fate of the planet hung.

"Naturally," said Ortine pleasantly, "I shall give you time to become used to following the course you must take. You are perfectly free to roam Belvoir for the next few hours . . ."

V

With Ortine gone Justin paced his cubicle, trying to digest what he had been told and wishing he had asked his host to provide him with a supply of smokes.

His dream was getting seriously out of hand. Or was it a dream? It occurred to him that if not a dream it must be madness. And then, for the first time, he began to wonder if the journey by train through space, if Belvoir and its inhabitants, especially Ortine and the assignment he had outlined, might not be real after all.

Even before the gates of fantasy closed behind him, Justin had recognized that his decision to back Henri Dubois could well be the key to the entire future of Missionism. As such it was entirely possible that upon that decision might depend the immediate future of humanity—if humanity still had a future.

Perhaps some of these others had played similar roles in their otherwise inconspicuous lifetimes. He made up his mind to find out, walked toward the door of his cubicle, almost bumped into the trouserless Dr. Phillips, who chose that moment to enter.

"I was about to go looking for you," Justin told him. "Come in."

Phillips entered. He said, "I take you have been visited by our host —like the rest of us."

"You mean he visited you at the same time he was talking to me?" Justin asked, surprised.

"He is a gentlemen of remarkable abilities," Dr. Phillips told Justin, sitting down as he spoke on the chair. "Of course it is some form of mass-mesmerism."

"Possibly," Justin replied cautiously.

"It can scarcely be anything else," Dr. Phillips informed him. "Until my enforced visit to Belvoir I have been inclined to regard all such marginal devices as fraudulent. Now . . ."

"It could have been something in the food," Justin suggested. "But that's a technicality, doctor. What interests me is the nature of your

assignment—if you don't mind telling me about it."

Dr. Phillips laughed—a shrill bark of embarrassment. He said, "Not at all, Justin, not at all. I'm a university don, you know." He sighed. "Fusty sort of work but it maintains me. At the moment I've been serving as temporary dean of admissions. When I retired for my nap"—he looked with more puzzlement than abashment at his trouserless shanks—"I was on the eve of tackling a batch of applications for the new semester. Beastly repetitious sort of work." He sighed again.

"And Ortine has asked you to grade some student's paper in a certain way for the good of the world?" Justin asked eagerly.

Dr. Phillips blinked behind his spectacles. "My word!" he exclaimed. "How'd you know that?"

"I didn't," Justin told him drily. "I merely surmised it from the nature of my own assignment. Could you give the details?"

"Certainly, Justin, certainly." Dr. Phillips paused to check his memory. Then, "It was a black chap—a Hindustani, a most repulsive little fop. His record and paper were excellent of course—but there's more than marks to a university, what?"

"Oh quite," said Justin. "Would you care to tell me his name?"

"Not quite proper, is it?" Dr. Phillips looked distressed. "But I suppose there's small point in discretion. Chap's name was an odd one." He looked distressed, added a trifle uncertainly, "Believe it was Mohammed or something like that. Last name was like that river in India where the Hindus all take their annual bath."

Justin said, "Mohammed Ganges? It would be Mohandas K. Ghandi, wouldn't it?"

Dr. Phillips regarded him with admiration, said, "Bless my soul—that was *it!* Though how on earth you ever knew it . . .

"He made quite a mark for himself in the world during the first half of my century," Justin told him. Then, "One more question, doctor—what does Ortine want you to do about him—flunk him?"

"My dear fellow, how can I flunk a chap who isn't even a student?" Dr. Phillips' tone was mildly reproachful. "No, all he wants me to do is refuse him admission to the university. I was already of half a mind to do so anyway. Can't think why Ortine should go to all this trouble."

"Probably he just likes to be sure," said Justin. Within him a glow of fresh exultation was forming. Each of them had been brought here because, at some time or other, he had made a decision favorable to one of the so-called madmen.

But Phillips was asking him about his own mission. Justin told him as briefly as politeness allowed, was pleased when Dr. Phillips seemed to consider it unimportant compared to his own task. His visitor rose, evidently prepared to leave, and Justin said, "Doctor, where can I find our mutual friend

Miss Wilkins? I'd like to know what her problem is?"

"A very sad case indeed, poor young woman," replied Dr. Phillips, shaking his head mournfully. "Perhaps the company of a young man like yourself will cheer her. Three doors down to your left. You can hardly miss it."

Justin found Deborah lying on the movable cot in her cubicle. Her head was resting on her hands, her blue eyes staring frankly at the ceiling. Her bare feet were crossed and, starch or no, her absurd nightgown had hiked up sufficiently to reveal a pair of lower legs both shapely and attractive.

He stood in the doorway, staring at her, and wondering at the nature of an assignment that could reduce her native gaiety to what was evidently a mood of deep misery. Some small sound made her aware of his presence. She turned her head to look at him, gasped, sat up quickly and pulled her gown down over her ankles with an automatic gesture.

"Nice legs," he told her with a smile. "It's a shame to hide them."

For a moment he thought she was going to be angry. Then humor danced in her eyes and the dimple reappeared in her cheek. But she said quite gravely, "I've often thought so myself. But mother would birch me for the very thought." Then, regarding him with interest, "Now I know ye lied when ye told me your age."

"Since when has age been any stop to a man's admiring a pretty leg—or a pretty girl?" Justin countered.

She giggled at that, then without warning became intensely serious once more. Somberly she said, "To my misfortune age in a man is no such barrier. Would that it were!"

"I gather your assignment has to do with an older man then," said Justin, unexpectedly seized with a pang of jealousy.

She said, "I have no wish to discuss it."

"My apologies," he told her. Then, "I've been granted permission to see a few sights. I wish you'd appoint yourself my guide."

"Gladly," she replied, shedding her gravity once more as she stepped down to the floor. "Strange though it be, Belvoir is a place of surpassing marvels."

"That I'll believe," Justin told her.

* * * * *

They emerged at the foot of a gently sloping ramp upon an immense mall that reminded Justin of one of the carefully tended semi-tropical gardens outside of Charleston, South Carolina.

Resisting the tug of Deborah's hand, Justin paused to study the colorful vista carefully. At first the soundlessness troubled him—till he noted that no bird sang upon any of the branches or floated upon the lagoons. He looked upward, saw that fluffy clouds crossed endlessly a pale blue sky—as against a theatrical backdrop.

His sophisticated gaze found little trouble in discovering them

to be mere aspects of a moving picture sky—and now and again, behind the illusion of space they created, he was able to discern the shadow of immense mechanical installations, whose hugeness and intricateness quite took his breath away. Evidently Ortine had spoken no less than the truth when he said that Belvoir was in truth a ship.

"Charles—*Charles!*" He realized abruptly that a worried Deborah was calling to him.

He told her, smiling reassurance, "I was just trying to figure something out. I'm sorry."

"Ye need not be," she replied. "Faith, I too was struck dumb when first I beheld the splendor of this garden. Come, let us explore its reaches."

They walked on soft warm turf that gave gently beneath their bare soles through what Justin decided must be a fair approximation of the average man's conception of paradise.

However, the inmates of this artificial Eden were, to Justin at any rate, more Rabellaisian than Godly. They watched a panting satyr chase a giggling nymph around and around the bole of a giant tree—but the satyr was a plump balding gentleman half-clad in red and yellow motley, while his quarry was a plumper if less bald damsel whose complex and tight-drawn corset and shift promised that while the chase would be brief, its consummation would prove to be appallingly difficult.

"'Twill offer poor Wilmot more woe than a chastity girdle," Deborah said, laughing. "Milady of Warwick is the only one of us he can catch."

"You mean that old goat has actually chased *you?*" Justin asked.

"And prithee, why not?" she countered cooly.

Justin grinned ruefully. He said, "Well, I hope you didn't let him *catch* you."

"That I have ne'er allowed any man," she replied quietly and a shadow of sadness returned to haunt her fascinating face.

They saw other bizarre sights in the Belvoir garden and Justin was amazed, not to say appalled, by the casual sophistication with which Deborah either ignored or found amusement in what were to him appalling spectacles. He kept reminding himself, *other times—other customs,* but he was relieved when she drew him into a secluded arbor at the far end of the half-mile garden.

There, without warning, she turned to him, put her arms about his neck and lifted her soft full lips to his. As he kissed her and his arms and body discovered to the full what the starched deceptiveness of her ridiculous nightgown concealed, Justin felt a sudden surge of desire such as had not assailed him in years.

He recalled, unbidden, what Corinne Forrester had said about his need for a woman, thought briefly of the purgatory in which his wife's frigidity had held him, then stopped thinking about any-

thing but the sweetness of this unexpected and utterly welcome moment.

Later, when some degree of sanity had returned to both of them, Deborah said softly, "Prithee do not think me a light maid, Darling Charles, but I fear we have little time and it was vital to me that I give myself to a man of my choice."

"Debby dear," he replied, ignoring for the moment the implications of her remark, "I think you're unbelievable. Being with you, holding you like this, is utterly fantastic—for in my own mind I have long been in love with a girl of your own time and city."

"Tell me her name," Deborah said fiercely, "and I'll scratch out her eyes when I get back."

He laughed gently, replied, "She had no name, Debby dear—I made her up myself. And now she is Deborah Wilkins."

For that she kissed him and said, "But why, Darling Charles, should ye dream of a girl of my time—and my Boston? In truth, 'tis a horrid dirty town."

"You may not realise it, dear," he told her, "but you live in one of the most fascinating towns, in one of the most fascinating times of history."

"Ye speak madness!" she cried.

"I speak truth—what in *my* time is history," he replied. "Hasn't Dr. Phillips told you something of what happened?"

"In truth he sought to but I failed to credit him," she replied. "Ye mean, that in ye'r time, Darling Charles, our colonies will have their own king?"

"They'll have no king at all," he told her. He tried to explain something of the Revolution but so ingrained in her was the idea of monarchy that he finally gave it up and asked her to tell him what it was like to live in eighteenth century Boston.

"'Tis mostly cold and heat and discomfort compared to life here in Belvoir," she said slowly. "Always is something lacking for our ease. When the river and harbors freeze so that we may glide over the ice, then never is there sufficient wood for our hearths.

"Come summer and we suffer the heat of hell—save for the governor, with his apartment on Castle Island, where he can enjoy the cool harbor breezes, and the rich with their estates in Milton and Dorchester and even beyond."

"But surely," he protested, "you have your good times. How about Guy Fawkes day, or Cambridge during Commencement Week? How about bundling parties and vaccination parties and all the rest?"

She turned her head away briefly and her eyes were full. "Aye," she replied, "there have been good times and I've had my share. But for me they are over upon my return."

"Is it this assignment Ortine has given you?" he asked her gently.

"Mayhap 'tis a part of my misery," she said.

Justin may have lived a life of

enforced semi-celibacy for some years but he was neither a fool nor inexperienced where women were concerned. He thought—*Hello*—and suddenly a new and warm excitement flared up within him. Despite the suddenness of their passion, despite the fact that she had claimed an ulterior motive in flinging herself into his arms, this girl loved him.

Equally important, he was in love with her.

VI

At their places before the magical barrier on the long table they had two daiquiris apiece, followed with melon and prosciutto, chicken marengo with white wine and grapes, avacado salad and spumoni.

"Indeed," Deborah said dimpling, "if this be the food of thy age, Darling Charles, then Belvoir can be but a small miracle to thee."

He shook his head and replied, "We do have what must seem miracles of living to thee—to you, Debby—but Belvoir is years, perhaps centuries, and billions of miles beyond our reach. So marvelous is it, in fact, that I'm becoming once more persuaded this is all a dream.

"Certainly," he went on softly, "I've dreamed for years of having a girl like you, dear—and you're here and seem to show a certain fondness for me."

"Charles," she said simply, "don't jest about that." She regarded him gravely, then said, "Prithee, Charles, if I be thy dream, then how is it that thou art mine? For surely, never in my deepest sleep, have I e'er dreamed of a man like thyself."

He reached out and touched her and the softness of her flesh, beneath the now-limp nightgown, was as real as the touch of his own. Sudden terror struck him as he accepted emotionally for the first time the fact that Belvoir might not be a substance created by his own subconscious. If Belvoir were real, then he would never see her again.

"Charles darling, are you ill?"

He looked down, discovered that he was gripping the dessert spoon in his fingers as if it were a weapon. He unlocked clamped jaws and said, "Sorry, Debby, I'm okay. Now—I'd like to take a look at the arrangements Ortine has made for our return."

She rose quickly and he followed her out.

The gates to and from Belvoir, she showed him, were directly opposite the cubicles, one to each cubicle. Deborah entered the one opposite her own chamber, revealing a featureless room, just large enough to contain her portable bed. At its far end was an opaque wall.

She shivered, said softly, "I like not this place, Charles. Yet it is through these chambers that all of us were brought to Belvoir, through them that we must make our return journeys. Charles, I am afeard."

"You and me both," he told her. "Come on to my place and let's see

if we cannot dope something out."

She looked puzzled by his twentieth-century phrases but went with him dutifully. Before entering he tested the portal opposite his own cubicle, found it exactly similar to hers.

Deborah had to pluck at his sleeve to remind him she was there. She said, "Verily thee are far from me much of the time."

"Not so far," he replied, leading her into his cubicle. At once her soft strong young arms went around him, her lips sought hungrily for his. He summoned the strength to thrust her from him, said, "Not now, honey—we've got a lot of thinking to do and we may not have much time to do it in."

She subsided meekly and sat down beside him on the portable cot. She said, "I too have the same feeling, Darling Charles."

"Listen, honey," he told her after a minute. "You say you have never dreamed of a man like me?"

"How could I?" she countered simply. "In my time no man such as thee exists. Perhaps the king in London Town, or the Crown Prince . . ."

"Listen, honey—the only chance we have to stay together is to go out of here together on the same bed." He gave the couch beneath them a slap.

"Durst we?" Her voice was tiny but there was a compensating blaze of sudden hope in her blue eyes.

"We'll dare anything," Justin retorted, "because the worst thing that could happen to either of us right now is to be separated. We durst—now the question is, who goes back into whose time?"

"I should love to visit thine era, Darling Charles."

"I'd love to have you," he replied. "But for ten years now I've been wanting to see yours. We're going back to your life together."

"But Charles!" Her eyes grew round with fright. "Ye can't! Think on it—we might awaken in bed together and—"

"Would that be bad?" he asked.

"Nay—but there is my mother. She well might—"

"And what about my wife?" he countered quietly.

She seemed to leap a full foot away from him, her eyes blazing. She whispered, "Charles—you never told me you were married!"

"I'd be a pretty poor man if some woman hadn't picked me out," he replied. "Furthermore, I have not been in love with my wife for a good many years—nor she in love with me."

"But this is horrible!" the girl moaned.

Justin scowled at her, utterly taken aback by her reaction. Other hints she had dropped came back to him, Dr. Phillips' pitying words about her problem. He said, "I take it then that you are involved with a married man in your time."

She flared at him, "Nay, I am *not* involved—though all about me, even my father, aye, even my mother, seem to wish me on my backside with this horrid old man.

They say 'tis for the good of this or the welfare of that that I should give myself to him—*me,* who cannot stand the stench of his very breath!"

Justin had slipped from the cot. Facing her he said softly, "All the more reason that I should go with you. *I* can take care of this unwelcome suitor and at least I shall not have a wife in your time for almost two hundred years to come—unless of course I marry you."

"That would be highly improper, not to say felonious," she retorted but he could sense the softening in her voice.

He said, "No more improper than coming to my world and having my wife catch us in bed together. How would you explain that to your sweet New England conscience?" Or perhaps we'd better call off the whole thing."

"Nay, Charles," she said simply and stood up and was briefly in his embrace. After a little, her face puckered with worry, "But Darling Charles, how *am* I to explain thee? And how will ye survive? Ye'll arrive in midwinter in ye'r outlandish costume without a groat to ye'r name."

"Wait a minute." He thrust her from him again and pondered the problems that would face him should he and Deborah actually be successful in their effort to flee Belvoir together.

"Yes, Charles?" she asked him after awhile.

"It'll be all right," he told her, "if we can just get over the hurdle of your parents. I'll need a little money, some clothes."

"Those I can get ye," she replied promptly. "I have a small savings in my cupboard—'tis not much—just what I've saved from dressmaking these two years past. And I can get ye some of father's castoff garments. But what will ye do then, Darling Charles?"

"I'll have my problems, never fear," he told her. "But you seem to have forgotten one thing in my favor—I have lived two centuries in the future, Debby."

"And prithee, how will't avail thee in my time?" she asked him.

"Just this way," he stated confidently. "I know what the course of great events will be in thy—in your time, honey. Once I have obtained the ear and trust of someone with money to speculate I'll be able to take care of myself, never fear."

"And that is work for a man like yourself?" Deborah looked at him doubtfully. "Somehow it seems to me dishonest," she told him. "Ye'r taking unfair advantage."

"And what is fair in love and war?" he countered.

"'Tis a wicked and foolish saying—or so my mother has told me," the girl replied.

"But you'll do it—you darling!" He pulled her close to him and she made no resistance. They were still locked together when a throat was cleared in the doorway.

Dr. Phillips regarded them benignly. "I must say," he remarked, "that compared to some of the

lewd sights I have witnessed here in Belvoir, it is refreshing to see a couple as well-favored as yourselves embracing. But that was not the purpose of my visit. I have come to say farewell."

"Then it's coming soon?" Justin asked him quickly.

"Perhaps you two have been too —er—occupied to hear but the five-minute signal sounded a brief while ago. I wish you both good luck."

Deborah broke from Charles, ran to the elderly don and planted a buss on his cheek. He fluttered like a moth, visibly touched, said, "Thank you, my dear," and added quite irrelevantly, " 'Twill be a great relief to return once more to my breeches."

"Come quickly!" Deborah whispered when they were once more alone.

He needed no urging, raced on tiptoe behind her to her cubicle. Hurriedly she scrambled onto her portable bed, reaching for Justin as he climbed on from the other side. There was scarcely room for both of them.

She whispered, "Charles, I'm afeard."

"We're together, darling," he whispered back.

She was silent for a brief while. Then she whispered, "Have ye no children?"

"None," he replied. "Marie has no wish to spoil her figure."

For some reason this seemed to dispel both Deborah's jealousy and guilt. She held him closer still and murmured, "Poor Darling Charles. No wonder ye dreamt of other women."

"No wonder . . ." he replied, scarcely knowing what he said. For at that moment sleep crept over him irresistibly.

Once again he was in the extinct odd little train, emerging from the choking tunnel. Miraculously, rumpled nightgown and all, Deborah was with him. Her blue eyes were red with smoke and she was coughing and frightened. She managed to gasp, "What is it—what is this horrid thing?"

He held her close and said, "It's a part of my dream, darling."

Even as he spoke and wondered how and why his dream should be dominant it changed. The rectangular windows of the old wooden coach grew indistinct. The car roof seemed to grow dimmer, finally to vanish altogether.

Against the starlit black of space were outlined the spars and ropes and masts and sails of a full-rigged sailing ship. They stood on its gently rocking poop and forward and below Justin could make out the waist and, beyond, the rise of the forecastle and the sharp lift of the sprit from the bow.

He looked at Deborah, saw how the breeze caught her hair and whipped it like some magnificent pennant of brownish gold and saw that she was speaking to him, crying, "This is *my* dream, Darling Charles—and I like it far better than thine."

"So do I," he replied, over-

whelmed utterly by the miracle.

They floated slowly down until the sky once more was blue above them, first a dark unlikely blue, then lighter and increasingly familiar in hue. Once more Justin saw the earth flatten out and the first white woolly clouds appear.

But from then on all trace of similarity with his own dream ended.

They were entering Boston Harbor and in his excitement Justin held Deborah's hand so tightly that she cried out and he relaxed his grip with a murmur of apology.

"Castle William!" he murmured as they swept past the chief harbor fortification, from which an English ensign flapped gaily in the breeze.

Where the South End now rests was only water and, beyond it, the highlands of Dorchester and Nantasket rose in wooded splendor, innocent of the grime of industrial tenements and factories. They rounded a headland and, slowly, Boston itself swam into view.

Justin let out a cry of sheer delight. There was the old city—little more than a large town by twentieth-century standards with its fewer than twenty thousand inhabitants—its numerous spires and church steeples topping its hills, its houses and buildings crowding the wharves to which were moored fishermen, coasters and ocean ships, their masts making an intricate and fantastic pattern against the sky.

Then darkness whirled briefly about them and they seemed to be plucked from the deck of the white ship by a sort of whirlpool. Justin cried out, involuntarily, again felt the firm softness of Deborah's hand pressed against his lips. He was lying on the edge of a bed whose bottom seemed to be spilling over the side.

"Deborah?" sounded a shrill matronly voice from somewhere beyond a door, closed and invisible in the darkness. "Deborah, are ye all right? I thought I heard ye cry out."

"Just a dream, mama. I'm quite all right," the girl called back. There was a nervous silent wait, the sound of scuffling footsteps growing fainter, then the slam of another door.

"I thought surely ye'r outcry would have them all about us," said the girl reprovingly. "Ye'r really here with me after all and methinks ye'll be a great problem, if not my ruination forever."

VII

The long winter night was unrelieved by any hint of dawn when Justin scrambled through a hurriedly-opened window, dropped to the gently slanting roof of a one-storey shed attached to the Wilkins house and slid safely into a deep pile of snow.

Working his way clear to the rutted icy alley that passed for a street, Justin's chief impression was not wonder at the miracle that had actually transported him backward through time into the Old Boston of his dreams. It was a combination

of uncertainty, befuddlement and utter physical discomfort.

In the first place the cast-off clothing of her father that Deborah had managed to procure for him from an upstairs hall closet was extremely uncomfortable. Made of coarse homespun it felt like steel wool against his skin. There was no underwear to ease the contact, nor had Deborah thought of any.

A chill east wind from the Bay knifed up the alley and chilled the marrow in his bones. Bitterly he recalled that the climate of north-eastern America had been growing steadily warmer for more than a century in his own time. He had returned to the very depths of the cold era.

Nor was he used to strange and narrow streets, slippery with ice, littered with refuse and utterly without lights. Holding with one hand to the cocked hat Deborah had loaned him, he groped his way with the other stretched out before him.

From the Wilkins house he was to proceed east on Mills Street, past Arch Street, until he came to Long Lane. There he was to turn right until he reached, on the corner to his left, a house, a full storey higher than the structures around it. He was to rap the knocker until a Mrs. Cooper answered and tell her that Sam Wilkins had sent him.

The small "hoard" Deborah had given him clinked in the cloth pouch she had tied round his waist. In spite of his discomfort he felt his thoughts soften at her generosity, as well as at its pitiful smallness. She was, in truth, a lovely thing to happen to any man.

He found the house and banged the heavy brass doorknocker with congealing fingers. After awhile a faint light glimmered through the fan-glass above the door, to be followed by the metallic sounds of a bolt being thrust back. The door opened a crotch and, above a wavering candle, a long-chinned toothless crone peered out at him and said, "What devil's business brings *ye* to my door at this heathen hour?"

"Mrs. Cooper?" Justin asked, his teeth chattering.

"Aye, that I be," was the wary reply. "And who might *ye* be?"

"The name is Justin," he replied. "Sam Wilkins sent me here in the hope of obtaining lodging for the night."

"Hmmp—there's little enough left of it," came the sharp reply. "Ye needn't think 'twill gain thee a short fee. That'll be a shilling and tuppence extra for rousing me at such an hour."

Justin willingly disgorged the required sum with rapidly numbing fingers and was led by the grumbling old crone to a small but unexpectedly clean second-floor chamber overlooking the street. With its white-washed walls, small mullioned window, wood fireplace, bureau, bed, table and chair—all these of hard dark maple—and knitted sampler on the wall, it might have been any of thousands of "Colonial" restorations in suburban homes of his own epoch.

Since there was no wood in the fireplace, Justin undressed quickly, glad to be out of his raspy clothing, and crawled naked between sheets almost as rough. But fatigue quickly overcame him and he fell into a dreamless sleep of sheer exhaustion.

He was awakened by a pock-marked mulatto girl who was apparently in the process of changing his chamberpot. She informed him as he rubbed sleepy eyes, "Ye slept through breakfast, Master. Mistress Cooper ast me to tell ye there's a young leddy downstairs to see ye."

Justin got out of bed in a hurry as soon as the slave had left. He let out a gasp as his bare feet struck the icy floorboards, crawled hastily into his ill-fitting clothing. He had to break ice in the basin.

Deborah was awaiting him downstairs in the parlor. Wearing a full-skirted tight-bodiced gown of light blue wool that matched her eyes, with blue-and-white bonnet, she looked to Justin delightfully quaint and breathtakingly lovely. She rose from the settee on which she had been waiting and came eagerly to him.

But when, after a warm kiss of greeting, he sought to embrace her further she danced away, laughing and saying, "Not now, Charles. Ye'll have Mistress Cooper saying dreadful things about me. 'Tis a fine winter's morning outdoors. I came to show ye the sights."

He went upstairs for his own borrowed cloak and by the time he got down she had already donned hers, a warm-looking grey wool wrap with grey woolen mittens to match. Outside the sun was bright and the night chill was off the air. Deborah said, watching her own breath congeal and mingle with his, "I had to come and see that ye made Mistress Cooper's safely. I lay abed and fretted for ye all night long."

"You don't look it," he told her.

Then he looked at the snow-covered city about him. There it stood, the Boston of his studies, of his dreams, the quaint old shops and houses and taverns, many with overhanging eaves and gables, the ancient signs, some fresh, some weathered, the innumerable and oddly-designed weather vanes and chimney pots.

Yet his next impression was one of dinginess. The snow, piled high on either side of the street, looked almost as dirty as snow that had lain for awhile in the side-streets of his own Boston. A narrow passage-way had been dug out and even as he and Deborah watched a horse-drawn cart, laden with night-soil, and an ox-cart, evidently proceeding north to market, stood motionless, facing one another, while their drivers indulged in the mutual invective city and countrymen have invoked in like dilemmas since the invention of the wheel.

"What horrid words!" said Deborah, feigning shock. Justin took her arm and they edged past the incipient combatants, about whom a crowd of rough-looking customers was beginning to collect.

A gust of wind caused Deborah's cloak to billow about her and she

tugged him away to the half-shelter of the rope-walk, where despite the weather a few hardy souls were engaged in splicing and reeving and other intricate arts of rigging and sailmaking.

A gong rang in Justin's memory. He said, "Where does Sam Adams live?"

"Ye know of him?" she countered, added, "That big run-down house at the next corner. What would ye of Master Adams, Charles?"

"Never mind, honey," he told her but his thoughts were humming. Sam Adams, of course—here was his opportunity, not only to survive in Old Boston, but to do it creditably in Deborah's eyes. Surely the so-called father of the Revolution would not be able to refuse the aid of a man who knew the course of the future.

Anxiety struck him. He said, "You aren't a supporter of the Court Party are you, Debby?"

Her eyes widened in surprise. Then she said, "Nay, not yet—but unless certain folk cease plaguing me in the name of the Colony I shall become so in self-defence."

"Don't switch," he assured her, relieved.

They walked the streets of the Old Town, down Belcher's Lane and the Battery March, whence they could see scarlet-coated soldiers at frigid sentry duty atop the Fort ramparts. They warmed chilling bodies with boiled beef and bacon and steaming buttered Medford rum at Stratton's tavern just off King Street, then on to the Province House toward Beacon Hill.

Look at the palladian gable of that small but stately structure, at the gilded lion and unicorn that adorned its cornices, Justin reflected it looked scarcely younger than when he had paused on his way home in the dusk to survey it a scant sixteen hours—or rather a hundred and ninety-two years—away. If anything, in his own era, it was rather better kept up.

Then they rambled back along Rawson's Lane to Milk Street and Deborah's house, which by daylight proved to be a stoutly comfortable dwelling in obvious good repair. To his surprise Deborah bade him enter. He followed her inside, said, "How are you going to explain me, honey?"

"I'm not," she replied with a flicker of dimple. "There's no soul here but ourselves."

He pulled her close and for a few blissful moments they embraced. Then, again, Deborah pushed him away. He looked at her, said, "What's wrong?"

"Ye must leave quickly," she replied. "I have something to attend to and with ye around I cannot."

"Is it your mission from Ortine?" he asked her.

"If that were all," she replied, "I'd willingly defy Ortine and all the de'ils in hell for ye, Darling Charles—but there is far too much involved."

He argued but to no avail, reluctantly took his leave. By a steeple clock he saw that the afternoon was

still young. He might as well, he thought, put his time along to good use. So he made his way directly to the ramshackle doorway of Sam Adams' ramshackled old house.

An immense shaggy Irishman, his face pitted by the universal pockmarks of the era, opened the door to his knock. His free fist was clenched about the handle of a large pewter mug and his accents were slurred as he said, "What have we here?"

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Adams," Justin said.

The giant roared, "*Sam!* A peasant to see ye—with the voice of a man fro' the moon!"

There was a murmur from within and Justin entered a house whose interior looked as threadbare and ramshackled as its facade. He was taken to a disorderly looking study where a tall red-faced genial-looking man, whose coat was glossy with gravy stains, regarded Justin not unpleasantly and said, "Ye wish to see me?"

"I do," replied Justin, his knees weak. Glancing at the glowering Irishman behind him, he added, "On a matter of some confidence, Mr. Adams."

Adams glanced at his companion and said, "I doubt me much that this honest-looking stranger wishes me ill. Outside, Will."

Memory rang another gong within Justin's head. Will—that could mean only Will Molineux, tough rugged South End mob leader and soon-to-be captain of the town's Liberty Boys, a vital lower-bracket cog in the machinery that ultimately set up revolt against the Crown in Boston.

"Now, Master . . . ?" said Adams inquiringly.

"Justin—Charles Justin," he said. "I must ask you to accept some of my story on its face—otherwise I fear you will find it incredible. However, I think I may be of use to you."

"I'll be glad to hear ye out—if ye take not too long," said Adams, indicating the papers on his desk.

Justin decided to plunge directly into his proposition. He said, "To what use would you be able to put a man who could foretell the future in your behalf?"

Adams' face became hard as flint. He said, "I know not who ye be or whence ye come—but I ha' not the time to sit and listen to such childish prattle."

"Please, Mr. Adams—I shan't take long," Justin put in desperately. "I'm a Bostonian like yourself but I come from a different time—from two centuries in the future to be exact."

Something in the sincerity of his plea won Justin a reprieve. "Very well, Master—Justin—if that be ye'r name. Ye'r accent is odd enough to account for such a story—not that I credit ye with truth for a moment. Since ye know so much of what ye term *ye'r* past, mayhap ye can tell me something of mine own."

Justin said, "You and your father made the first open attacks on the Crown, following the return of Louisburg to France in seventeen

forty-six after its capture by Massachusetts men. You have run through a fine inheritance and are incapable of conducting any sort of business because your interest lies in politics. You graduated several notches higher in your class in Harvard than your young cousin John of Braintree.

"At the moment you are seeking some means of renewing the fight against the Crown. You are in the process of organizing the North and South End mobs of Boston to that purpose, uniting them into a controlable body that will obey your commands. Will Molineux, in the next room, is one of your chief aides . . ."

"Thus far ye have told me nothing that is not common knowledge." But Adams frowned slightly as he spoke.

"Is it generally known how well you have organized the mobs, Mr. Adams?" said Justin. "Is it generally known that you are counting, perhaps at this very moment, upon the enforcement of Writs of Assistance to re-rouse the opposition to the Crown that has lain dormant so long?

"Is it generally known that your opposition to the mother country is based upon a snubbing you received from a British officer in an ale-house fifteen years ago?"

"Enough, young man," said Adams. "Ye are either what ye say ye are—in which case ye'r a wizard —or ye'r a spy sent here by my enemies to muddle me with poor advice. Ye know too much about me and I know too little about ye. Now get out!"

There was no mistaking the anger in those genial brown eyes as Adams rose to his feet. All at once Justin realised he was going to call Molineux, have him chased out of town, perhaps beaten. After all, there was no police force in the Boston of 1761.

Moving quickly he picked up a heavy paperweight, evidently once an Indian axe-head, that lay atop a stack of foolscap on the desk, and struck Adams on the head with it before he could call for help. The oft-called Father of the Revolution fell forward across his desk. Justin bolted.

Molineux, who had been facing a front window in the other room turned and made a menacing move. "In there!" cried Justin. "Mr. Adams has fainted. I'll get help."

Feeling like an errant coward, Justin fled.

VIII

Behind Justin, moments later, Will Molineux, brandishing his pewter tankard, emerged from Sam Adams' house, roaring his rage and anger. Even as he cut for Long Lane, Justin once again felt a curious undefinable flicker of memory—the same that had troubled him while listening to Ortine—and once before recently on an occasion he could not recall.

For a few brief moments, while Justin slithered up the uneven icy surface of Long Lane, Molineux's shouts were blanketed by the corner

buildings. But before Justin had proceeded more than fifty yards past his lodging place of the night before, a rising outcry struck his ears —ominous not only because of its closeness but because it no longer issued from one throat. Evidently Molineux's gang was joining the chase.

To his right the uninviting walls of close-set shops and houses offered no refuge. But to his left the houses were larger and fewer, with stretches of solid wooden fence between. If he could only get through into the inner-block area of yards and gardens, he might be able to cut across them to Arch Street and thence to the Wilkins house.

The hue and cry was growing louder by the moment—his pursuers would emerge in sight of him and the chase would be as good as over unless he did something and did it quickly.

Providentially he stumbled, stretched out a hand, struck a small door in the fence which gave under his weight. With a sobbing gasp of relief Justin lunged through it, shut it behind him, leaned against it, panting, while the sounds of pursuit swept past.

Getting through the various yards and gardens was not easy because of the deep snow. It took him a good fifteen minutes but he finally worked his way through a manure-hole—mercifully the cold weather kept it from reeking—into a barn.

Horses, well wrapped but chilly, stamped in their stalls as he made his way to the front of the building. Justin found a small door, slipped through it and made his way to the snowpile against the Wilkins shed.

Luckily there was no lock on the window of Deborah's room. Justin crawled through it, sick with relief, closed it after him—and promptly skidded on the hardwood floor with a snow-covered heel and crashed into a small table by the bed.

Before he had time to put the table back up Justin heard heavy masculine footsteps on the stairs, heard Deborah protesting, "But I promise ye—there's no one there. It must ha' been the old house creaking."

The bedroom door was wide open. Justin stood there, unable to think of a thing to do. He wondered what sort of man Deborah's sire would be like.

While he waited helplessly, Justin irrelevantly saw the spider lying on the floor, half beneath the bed. He must have left it in his pajama pocket, Debby must have found it and put it on the table he had overturned. Out of sheer reflex action Justin stooped to put it in his pocket.

He rose reluctantly, his eyes first noting a pair of large black shoes with silver buckles, then heavy white hose covering long sturdy legs, grey kneebreeches and waistcoat and a maroon broadcloth coat with silver buttons.

Atop this tall stocky body was a square not-unhandsome face, distinguished by a rather flat nose, a low broad forehead, angry hazel eyes and some of the fieriest red

hair Justin had ever seen. The hazel eyes were regarding him even balefully.

"And who in hell be *ye?*" the newcomer inquired. He swung about as Deborah appeared behind him in the doorway, the back of one hand to her mouth. He said, "Is this some scurvy trick to put me further still in the thrall of my wretched wife?"

"Charles!" Deborah whispered reproachfully. "Ye promised . . ."

"I know it," Justin replied desperately, "but I had to hide somewhere. There's a mob chasing me through the streets."

"But e'en so . . ." the girl began, then hesitated as the faint sound of the hue and cry could be heard from the streets outside.

The red-headed man's voice was sharp as the crack of an Australian bullwhip. He said, "That's Will Molineux!" Then, fiercely, to Justin, "What have ye done to bring Will and his cutthroats on ye'r tail?"

"I had a little trouble with Mr. Adams," Justin murmured.

"So!" The big man took a menacing step toward him. He glanced at Deborah, who appeared stricken, then said, " 'Twould appear there is more in this entire episode than meets the eye. Mayhap ye'r one with my wretched wife and her wretched Tory friends."

He took another step toward Justin, obviously measuring him for a blow. Deborah gave a little cry and leapt forward, seizing his right arm and dragging upon it with all of her weight.

"Please!" she cried. "*Please,* Master Otis . . ."

Otis! Justin was stunned. The resemblance to his well-known portrait was unmistakable. Here was James Otis, the brilliant and powerful young Boston lawyer who first, in that very month of February, in that very year of 1761, stood up for four hours in the Province House and defied the right of the Crown to issue the unlimited search warrants known as "Writs of Assistance" in order to check smuggling.

Here was the man who resigned his lucrative position as King's Advocate for Massachusetts, defied his wealthy Tory wife and all his wife's friends to make the first open plea for Colonial freedom.

Here was the man who gave heart to the Adamses, to Hancock and, in a vastly widening circle, to the Virginians Patrick Henry and, later, Thomas Jefferson. Here was the man who led Boston toward freedom until the tensions of his own career and domestic life drove him at length to madness.

Worse, as Justin quickly realised, here was the man to whom Debborah's friends and family were asking her to give herself. Justin understood their motives all too well. Apparently, unless he found some outlet away from his strife-torn home, Otis' friends already feared for his sanity. Employing an age-old therapy they had selected Deborah to supply that outlet.

Even in the misery of the moment, Justin found his mind ranging back to Ortine and his motives in having

the girl go through with her assignment. In untampered-with history the girl must have turned Otis down. Perhaps in that turn-down Ortine read the outraged pride that had led Otis to stand up and make his revolutionary speech. By having the girl acquiesce Ortine figured, probably correctly, that the attorney would never be so inspired. The chain reaction that led to Independence Hall, to Saratoga, to Yorktown, would not have been touched off.

Justin saw, as if in slow-motion, Otis fling back his arm to clear it of the girl's desperate grip—saw her tossed against the wall. Her head struck with a sickening thud and she dropped to the floor in a pathetic unconscious heap.

Justin forgot about his near-worship for James Otis and sprang forward to do battle. He landed a hard right high on the lawyer's cheek, then felt the snow on a heel again betray him into slipping. Out of the corner of an eye he caught a quick glimpse of a large fist emerging from a ruffled cuff and arching directly toward his own jaw. He felt a jarring impact . . .

Justin found himself once more lying on a portable bed in one of the cubicles of Ortine's Belvoir dormitory. His jaw hurt and there was a tender spot over his right ribs that would, he knew, grow sorer with time.

He sat up, rubbing his chin, discovered he was still wearing the ill-fitting clothing with which Deborah had fitted him out. He glanced around—and his heart did a ground-loop. Alongside his own cot was another—and on it lay the girl.

Justin forgot his own sorenesses and went to her, put a hand on her face, felt his knees turn to oil as he discovered her face was warm, felt the rhythmic softness of her breath against his fingers.

She opened her eyes and smiled—and Justin felt his insides melt at the trustful happiness of her expression. He said, "It's all right, Debby dear—Ortine's brought us back to Belvoir."

"As long as we're still together," she whispered. Then, frowning, "My head hurts in back—a little."

A familiar sardonic voice spoke from the doorway. "I am glad," said Ortine, "that you find your return here so pleasant. I don't suppose you have the slightest inkling of what this unexpected insanity of yours has cost."

Justin considered for the first time the possible consequences of what he and Deborah had just managed to accomplish. He said, "We fouled up the works?"

Ortine stared at him for a long moment. Only by rigidity of manner did he give indication of the anger he must have felt. He said, "You show rather more discernment than I had expected, Justin—but I fear you still fail to realise the enormity of your sabotage.

"Time, as you conceive it, has no meaning for me, of course—yet I have had to spend vast amounts of it, searching, searching the en-

tire course of human history, to select the exact men and women for my purpose, the exact moments in which they could be effective.

"The essence of my entire plan was simultaneous alteration of the historic line," Ortine went on. "Only thus could the salvation of humanity be effected without dislocation amounting to chaos. By your insane romantic abberation you two have disrupted the entire process."

Justin thought it improbable that Deborah could understand much of what their host was saying, yet the impact of his tone upon her was dynamic. She slipped from her bed, skirts whirling, marched up to Ortine and said, "I care not what ye think, Master Ortine. Neither Charles nor I asked to be brought here. Aye, and furthermore I'll not have ye using that tone to Charles."

Ortine said to Justin, "Perhaps we'd better talk this over in private."

"So ye can soft-talk Charles into doing ye'r bidding—and leave me to face Master Otis alone?" Deborah's defiance was magnificent and Justin put an arm around her.

He said to Ortine, "Since time is of no account to you, perhaps you'll give us a little of it together."

"As you wish." Ortine shrugged and turned to leave. "I shall await your summons."

"What did he mean?" Deborah asked Justin, when he had gone.

Justin studied her briefly, kissed her, then said, "Debby, just how did our friend explain himself to *you?*"

"Oh . . ." The girl looked vague for a moment. "He told me that if I failed to heed Master Otis' plea the redcoats would come to Boston and burn my home and kill my father and mother and brothers—aye, and ruin me."

Suddenly Deborah's arms were around him tightly, her worried face peering searchingly into his. She said, "Through my wilfullness will all these dreadful things come to pass, Charles darling?"

"Debby," he told her gently, "I don't know. But I'm going to find out."

"Ye'll not desert me?" she pleaded.

He smiled down at her. "Debby, I don't think I could desert you if it meant the end of the world—and it may yet."

"Ye'r jesting," she said. "Kiss me."

He did—and again they were interrupted by a throat-clearing in the cubicle doorway. Dr. Phillips said in his old-fashioned London accents, "I don't quite ken why our friend has brought us back—but I see things are the same betwixt the two of *you.*"

"Why, Dr. Phillips!" exclaimed the girl. "Ye'r clad in ye'r breeks now."

"I thought it might be a wise precaution before returning to my nap," said the professor mildly.

Justin said, "Come in, Doctor." He set Deborah on her cot, swung onto his own, while Dr. Phillips accepted the one chair in the cubicle. He seemed not at all surprised to

find two beds where one had stood before.

"Dr. Phillips," said Justin, "I've been hoping you'd turn up here again. On our first visit I saw a Roman soldier down the hall toward the dining saloon. He was with a Mohammedan-looking female. Do you have any idea of who he is—or what his assignment is?"

Dr. Phillips nodded. "Aye," he said. "I forget his name—it is of no moment in history. He is—or was—a mere field officer in the suite of a Judaean sub-Praetor during the reign of Augustus."

"And his assignment?" Justin asked quietly.

"I believe to the best of my memory—" Dr. Phillips frowned as he delved into his own mind—"that this chap was supposed to arrest a fellow named John Something-or-other outside of Jerusalem and hold him on a trumped-up charge."

"I take it," said Justin, "that Roman Judaea has not been one of your fields of study."

"Gracious no!" replied the don. "My only knowledge of Latin is derived from an effort to study its imprint, if any, on the pre-Christian tongues of Northern Europe—including Scandinavia."

"Thank you, Dr. Phillips," said Justin, slipping off his couch again. "By the way, how do you summon Ortine when you want him?"

"Just press this button," said Dr. Phillips, indicating a circular buzzer almost invisible against the wall near the corridor door. "Well, in that case I'll be going."

IX

Ortine sauntered in. He nodded pleasantly, said, "That was quicker than I'd dared hope. Thanks, Justin —and you too, Deborah Wilkins. You have reached your decision together?"

Deborah spoke quietly, firmly, said, "Charles is my master. What he decides, I shall obey."

"Remarkable—this strange emotional fusion," Ortine remarked to the banker. He sat down, added, "Of all human madness love is the most difficult to understand."

"You should be used to it by now," Justin told him.

Ortine sighed and said, "Some things one cannot get used to. But come, Justin, I trust you are going to be reasonable."

"I'm going to ask you a few questions before coming to a definite decision," said Justin.

"Sane enough," Ortine replied amiably.

Justin began, "On my first visit here I noticed a Roman legionary a few doors down the corridor."

Ortine nodded. "Right—Marcus Rutilius Catanio. A very well-balanced young man."

Justin said, "When you first discussed with me the madmen of history who have succeeded—you'll pardon an apparent digression—it occurred to me afterward that you failed to mention the Christ."

Ortine made a deprecatory gesture. "My dear fellow, I can never be certain how deep such spiritual beliefs go in any of you humans. I thought it more tactful . . ."

"This Marcus Rutilius What's-his-name," Justin went on. "From what Dr. Phillips just told me, it is his job to prevent the Christ from going to Jerusalem."

There was a gasp from Deborah but Ortine ignored the interruption. He said, "Of course, Justin. It is my intention to remove much of the world's sense of guilt by preventing your Christ from dying on the Cross."

"I thought as much," Justin nodded. "I have also considered what such a removal of guilt, as you call it, would do to our world. It would not only mean the end of Christianity—it would mean it never had a beginning. For a Christ without his martyrdom would no longer be a Christ."

"I had no idea you'd be shocked," said Ortine, puzzled.

"I'm not shocked," replied Justin. "What has me baffled, Ortine, is your true purpose. You say that the salvation of our world rests upon elimination of all but those you choose to call sane men—the dull plodding fellows who never upset applecarts. Are you sure that these human vegetables are the ones to make a world worth living in?"

"Possibly not," said Ortine, unabashed. "But they will at least make a world in which people can live. Consider, Justin, you are one of them—a prime example. Or you were until very recently."

"I'm well aware of that." Justin shot a quick tender glance at Deborah. He added, "As a matter of fact I'm just beginning to understand what a living death I've been enduring."

"A pity you've changed," Ortine told him. He sighed.

"Ortine," said Justin, "you say you cannot control humans. Yet I feel certain that I have recently seen you twice in human guise—once as Will Molineux in Sam Adams' house, the other as Corinne Forrester in my own office." He looked at Ortine's cigarette, recalled Corinne's Cuban cigarettes, added, "You're quite a smoker, aren't you?"

Ortine hesitated, then said, "It's a pity I couldn't put this experiment into work with a finish date about fifty years before your time, Justin. Dr. Phillips would have been ideal. Unfortunately I must use all of the lapsed time of human history or the whole procedure is worthless—it must be complete and simultaneous. Which is why you and"—with a polite nod—"Deborah were able to make such a botch of it.

"You're quite right about my appearances, of course," Ortine went on. "There are a few people, in whom my strain is especially strong, folk I can actually control to some degree. Naturally I have tried to put such persons in positions close to my probable subjects."

"How did you happen to take up the role of Satan?" Justin asked him quietly. Behind him Deborah gasped again and Justin reached out a hand for her to hold. A faint

stirring of her fingers suggested she must be crossing herself.

Ortine looked distressed. He said, "Really, there was nothing deliberate about it. It's something that—well, it just happened." He dropped his cigarette into the floor, pulled out his case, offered a smoke to Justin.

"Consider my mission. To perform it successfully it was vital that I should become intimately acquainted with humanity not merely on the surface but inside, where fears and motives dwell. How better could I conduct such a delicate test than by testing people? And how better test them than by trying the strength of their so-called decent impulses?"

"You might have something there," said Justin. "But you mention your strain being strong in some of us. Just how does that fit in with what you've told me of your mission?"

Ortine actually appeared embarrassed. He said, his eyes not meeting Justin's, "Of course, you must by this time have surmised that I am polymorphous . . ."

"Who's she?" Deborah asked.

It stopped both men. Ortine looked puzzled—Justin was unable to suppress a chuckle. Seeing hurt overlaying the worry in her eyes, he said, "It merely means he is a lot of people at once, honey. I didn't mean to laugh."

"Oh," she said, a trifle vaguely.

Ortine said, "I don't suppose it could happen on another planet in your entire galaxy—it's rather embarrassing. Having quickly surveyed the entire course of your history until now I decided to go all the way back to the beginning."

"You must have found yourself dealing with some rather rough customers," Justin suggested.

"To a visitor like myself there is little choice between you and the Neanderthal," replied Ortine.

"I'm not sure the analogy is a happy one," said Justin.

"Perhaps not—but it should give you some idea, Justin." Ortine did not appear to relish criticism any more than a human. "As a matter of fact I didn't go back quite that far. The Sumerians were quite early enough for my purposes.

"In various parts of the world I became a creature analogous to the woman your Judeo-Christian legend calls Lilith. Since only females actually spawn in your world it appeared logical to me that they were the more important. But something was missing. Merely playing goddess to these alien creatures told me little about them. So, in a dozen carefully screened and selected human settlements around your world, I stepped down from my pedestal and became—Eve."

"Good Lord!" said Justin. "You mean that you, an alien . . ."

"Yes." Ortine's expression was sour. "In at least a half-dozen bodies I conceived! Furthermore, once it had happened, there was no escaping or altering those particular bodies until the child was born.

"I don't quite see how it could happen," said Justin.

"Neither did I at first," said Ortine unhappily. "Mind you, I am in my own universe what could be very roughly compared to a roving social analyst in yours. And here I was, alone, in this situation.

"It took me some time to find the answer. Ultimately, of course, I discovered the reason for my disaster. Despite the vast distortion differences that must occur in any creature or thing that makes a voyage from sub-space to your space, I discovered that I was—in polymorphic form, of course—a highly developed member of a highly developed species corresponding in my universe to yours.

"If I brought a Piltdown woman to Belvoir and induced you to mate with her—don't shudder, I have no intention of doing so—she would ultimately conceive. I could not accept this resemblance at first, any more than you could accept similarity to a Piltdown female. But there I was, mortally chained to beings on your planet through a most elementary process."

Deborah said, her voice shaking, "Charles, he's joking, isn't he?"

Justin shook his head, said to Ortine, "So your strain became inextricably intermixed with ours. But how does that account for your playing Satan?"

"My dear Justin!" Ortine spread his hands wide. "Consider my position. What had originally been a most impersonal mission had become a matter of the deepest personal concern. Confidentially, I have never since—or at least within the past few hundred generations—been able to materialize on Earth itself."

"Why not?" Justin asked him.

"Because of the risk," replied Ortine. "Suppose, as a man, I were killed accidentally or murdered. Suppose, as a woman, I conceived again—I can assure you my desires in such matters are perhaps even stronger than those of your species.

"Each such accident—and in the early days I had my share—is weakening. I have only so much life force and no means of replenishing that which is spent—not in this universe. Hence I have had to indulge in what you might term economy of forces."

"Playing the devil . . ." Justin reminded him.

"Dammit, don't interrupt. I am quite capable of image projections—hallucinations to you. These I have indulged in frequently when I thought such appearances needful or considered them diverting. In some of them, for various reasons, I have assumed some remarkable shapes."

"How about these folk you can influence directly?"

Ortine regarded Justin irritably, said, "Surely you know enough of Mendel's Law to be aware that dominant strains will pop up again and again, even in a recessive capacity. When mine recurs, as it does in every generation, I am able to exercise over them more control than I can over others."

"How much control can you exercise over someone else—say over

me?" Justin asked Ortine quietly.

"I think you can answer that for yourself," said Ortine.

Justine thought it out quickly. If Ortine could actually control him, save when he was unconscious or on the rim of sleep, there would have been no need to bring him to Belvoir at all.

Ortine met his gaze frankly—and Justin, from his long experience of judging living beings, some of whom were perhaps as devious as Ortine himself, decided the other was lying—or at any rate revealing but an expedient fraction of the truth.

Why, he wondered, didn't Ortine simply kill Deborah or himself. The answer to that was obvious. If he could have done so he certainly would have—especially after Justin and Deborah had balluxed up his whole scheme.

Which meant that he couldn't, for all the miracle of his ship and his polymorphism and his ability to span time at will. Justin wondered why his host was so helpless, decided he might as well accept the fact.

"All right," he said, "so it's a stalemate—correct?"

"I wouldn't be too sure," said Ortine. His eyes turned toward Deborah but he spoke to Justin. "The matter of inbred belief is or can be a vital factor. I believe you have heard, in your own enlightened era"—there was a trace of irony in the phrase—"of primitive Haitians and Africans who have succumbed to voodoo for no other reason than that they believed in it and thought someone had put a death-curse on them."

"I have heard of them," said Justin. "But I've been thinking of another factor in our first discussion. We discussed your so-called madmen—but what of sane men?"

"What of them?" Ortine looked troubled.

"Let's look at some of the most successful," Justin offered. "For instance, Ghengis Khan. Now there was a sane man—he fought only for self preservation. And each time he won a victory he was forced to preserve it and himself by winning more. So he destroyed a continent and caused the deaths of, say, fifty million innocent people. He left marks on the world that are still with us—the deserts of Central Asia, the fear-psychology of Russia under Czar or Commissar. Do you call him insane?"

Ortine made an impatient gesture, said, "Of course he was sane. It was his time and environment, not himself, that were at fault."

"You're rationalizing," said Justin. "I could name some other sane men of prominence—Timur the Great, Attila, Metternich, Stalin. Find me any saner men."

"Who are these strangers of whom ye speak?" asked Deborah.

The men ignored her. Ortine said, "In the case of each there were extenuating circumstances . . ."

"And," said Justin, "I can name you some sane men who, for one reason or another, failed—which can only be called a blessing to

mankind. Rokh-ud-Din, the last emir of the Assassins, for instance —or Lucullus or Louis Fourteenth or Bismarck or Robespierre. Now certainly no saner, less imaginative, more honorable man than Robspierre ever lived. Yet he virtually destroyed a great revolution by his very sanity."

For the first time Ortine looked seriously annoyed. He said, "On what range of experience do you base your judgment of what is beneficial for humanity or not, my dear Justin? This is ridiculous—why should I argue with you?"

"Because you've got to persuade me to do your will or your entire scheme will collapse," Justin told him calmly.

"You're risking the person you love most," said Ortine.

"Not yet," replied Justin. "And here's something else that has me stopped—if you're so anxious to save our planet from its so-called ruin, why are you taking the very steps that will lead to its speedy destruction?"

"Consider," said Ortine, regaining his self control, "if my plan is followed your planet will suffer a certain retrogression, of course. Now think what such a retrogression will mean—it will mean no A-bomb, no airplanes, none of the modern destructive machinery. In that way your planet will be aeons from self-destruction."

"You'll force us back to the caves!" cried Justin.

"Not quite." Ortine smiled. "Not quite, my dear Justin. Why not enjoy a good dinner before we resume our little chat?"

X

There were a number of small changes in the clothing of the diners in Ortine's incredible restaurant. The eighteenth-century lady had removed her towering headdress to reveal a closely shaved round pate, the white-haired woman from mediaeval England had managed to don a shift—and of course Dr. Phillips had his trousers. But most of the diners appeared the same.

There was a general air of festivity about the repast. Apparently the bulk of the visitors had expected no return to the paradise of Belvoir and were resolved to enjoy its luxuries to the hilt. But Justin and Deborah said little, barely toyed with their food.

"Darling Charles," said the girl softly, "what d'ye think is going to happen now?"

"I don't know," said Justin honestly. He captured her near hand, added, "Dear Debby, will you go with me no matter what?"

She answered him with her eyes.

When they returned to their cubicle, after a brief walk in the garden, Ortine was awaiting them. He said, "Well?"

Justin studied him. Finally he said, "Ortine, we've made up our minds. We're going back—together. But this time we're going back into *my* era."

Deborah gave vent to a little cry of joy. Ortine flicked ashes on the

floor. "You still don't seem to understand, my dear Justin," he said. "I *can't* allow that. I might, of course, be willing to make some concessions. I could arrange things for Deborah so that she will succeed without having actually to give herself to James Otis.

"I might even be able to rig some sort of happiness for you, Justin—say a liaison with Corinne Forrester." Reading Justin's expression correctly he added quickly, "No, of course, that would not do now. But I could influence some very likely facsimile of your young lady here and perhaps get you clear of your present unhappy domestic arrangements."

"That I don't doubt," said Justin. "But what guarantee can you give us that you will?" And, as Ortine colored slightly, "We go together or we don't go at all. In either case you're cooked."

"An odd expression to use toward me," said Ortine thoughtfully, "I assure you I can make things extremely unpleasant for Deborah."

"I don't doubt that either," Justin told him. "But to what avail?" He hesitated, then plunged into a statement he had been considering through dinner. "Ortine, I don't think you give a damn what happens to our world. I don't believe you give a damn about our sun going nova."

Ortine said silkily, "Very well, Justin, what *do* you believe—where I am concerned?"

"I think you'd have taken off from here like a shot if it weren't for your becoming inextricably entangled with the human race through your multiple-Eve disaster. I have no idea of the effect of plural birth upon a polymorphous being but I have a hunch it is serious. I think you've got to destroy all of us to get away. Otherwise none of this makes sense."

"Then why shouldn't I simply stay on?" Ortine inquired caustically.

"I'll tell you why," replied Justin. "You've got to get away because we're beginning to learn too much. Sooner or later the existence of this ship of yours is going to be discovered—*you* are going to be discovered. And when that happens, you're in the wrong galaxy and your physical weapons will be as useless as your psychological weapons are useless against an educated mind and spirit."

Ortine said, "You have reared quite a structure upon a few involuntary hints, a smidgin of knowledge and a long train of intuition." He smiled ruefully, added, "I might as well confess you are remarkably close to the truth—not a bullseye but close."

"Thank you for that," said Justin ironically.

"You needn't feel too proud of yourself," Ortine told him. "I suppose the indications are there for anyone to read who is able to. You're right about my mission. Mine is merely an experimental flight to crash the barrier between your space and mine—incidentally,

I believe, the first to do so successfully.

"Unfortunately my ship emerged into this galaxy on a collision course for a planet of your system, shattering it into what you know as the asteroids. As a result of the damage it caused I was forced to moor to Earth in an effort to effect repairs.

"I could not make such repairs alone—hence I was forced to develop the dominant species to a point where its members could actually do some of the heavy work. The construction needed, while minescular in comparison to my ship, was immense in relation to men—immense and generally senseless."

"The Tower of Babel," mused Justin, "and the pyramids . . ."

"And the basalt water city of Ponape and scores of other structures whose size has always seemed to exceed the needs of their purpose," Ortine affirmed. "Call them jacks if you wish—that was their primary function. At any rate, thanks to the labor of humans, my ship has at last been readied for its return flight."

"And if you should return successfully what will happen?"

Ortine shrugged. "I belong to an aggressive race," he said simply. "We have already conquered one universe. Need I say more?"

"And your communications are ineffective?" Justin asked.

"Yes, thanks to the crash. But don't let your hopes rise too high, Justin. When my plans are complete human science and knowledge will be irreparably set back."

"So you *are* afraid of what we're beginning to learn."

"Afraid? That is an emotional word but I suppose in a parallel way I am." Ortine paused, added, "Your species is aggressive too. As I have already told you, we are very similar."

"Why not simply cut and run and then come back in force and destroy us?" countered Justin.

"Time is much less simple that you people seem to think," said Ortine. "The few months it would require us to organize such an expedition in my universe would be the equivalent of several centuries in this one. And by that time, if you have not destroyed yourselves, you may know as much as we."

"So you plan to destroy us," said Justin.

Ortine replied, "You should know better than that, Justin. Why should I trouble to bring all of you here, why should I have spent the time and labor I have on this experiment—when I could blast your planet out of hand?"

Justin studied him for a moment, then said, "I can think of a pair of possible reasons, Ortine. One—your extra-space weapons might not be effective in this universe. Two—from some of the things you have dropped about polymorphous conception and birth, you may not be able to dis-ally yourself from humanity so easily."

Ortine studied Justin in turn, then said, "You're wrong about my

weapons—they have long since been adjusted to operate in your space. But I *am* saddled with you—*all* of you. I am like a man with a diseased appendix—save that in this instance my appendix numbers three to four billion."

"You mean you are actually part of us—and we of you?" asked Justin, appalled at the thought.

"Unfortunately, yes—in what you would call a physiological sense but one which is painfully physical to me," Ortine replied. "Now consider my plight in terms of your own appendicitis. Such major disasters as battles and natural catastrophes are like recurring attacks. An atomic war might well rupture my very fabric.

"Naturally deaths in smaller quantities or lesser disasters do not noticeably affect me—but the destruction for which your world may be heading is more than I can risk. Therefore I have had to take steps, first to obviate the possibility of atomic war, secondly to lower the population. These are the twin purposes toward which I have conducted my experiment. If I were to wipe out humanity, as I easily could, I should myself die."

"I think I understand," Justin told him, frowning. "By removing human imagination—you call it madness—you plan not only to reduce human population to a nubbin but to rig things so that the remnants will eliminate themselves in a manner practically painless to yourself. Am I right?"

Ortine hesitated, then said, "Consider again the man with appendicitis. If it bursts and he has no proper medical care he will die. But if it withers away, then he is free of the diseased organ."

"And for that purpose you expect me to go through with your assignment?" asked Justin. "*You're* the one who's mad!"

"I think not," said Ortine, rising. "I happen to know how all-powerful the peculiar form of insanity you humans call love can be. For instance . . ."

He extended a hand casually toward Deborah. At once a wall of flame sprang up around the cot on which she was sitting. She screamed and shrank back, cowering and covering her eyes. Justin sprang toward her, stood in the midst of the fire.

"Come," he told her but she refused to believe the fire was illusiory. She screamed again, said, "Ye'r a de'il too, Charles!"

"*Stop* it!" cried Justin to Ortine.

"Certainly." At once the flames vanished. Deborah looked at Charles piteously. "Charles, he's going to burn us alive. He *is* Satan!"

"You want to go back to your own time alone, my dear?" Ortine had strolled casually to the other side of the bed.

Deborah gave him a long look, replied, "Nay, I'll take my chances wi' ye'r hellfire, Master Devil."

"I can ensure that the importunities of Master Otis will meet with no success," offered Ortine. "I can see that you wed a fine young man

of family with a mansion near North Square."

"Ye cannot give me Charles," Deborah said fiercely.

Ortine lifted a sardonic eyebrow at Justin. He said, "I'll give you a few minutes alone with her, my dear fellow. For her own sake and yours I hope you can talk some sense into her."

He strolled out and Deborah flung herself on Charles, sobbing her fear. He said when she had calmed a little, "Dear Deborah, you've *got* to understand. Ortine's fire is real only if you believe it. You saw me standing in it unsinged."

"I know!" she sobbed. "My eyes saw and my poor brain understood but the rest of me couldn't believe."

"You can thank your preachers for that," said Justin. "They've been playing right into the hands of Ortine all along. Now that you've seen I can't be hurt you've got to believe yourself. Otherwise I'm afraid . . ."

"Else what?" she asked tremulously.

"Otherwise there's no hope for us, honey. If we can't stand together against him we might as well both be dead. It will mean the death of the world as we know it." He looked close into the depths of her blue eyes. "Do you think you're strong enough—with me at your side?"

"I—don't—know," she replied. "Darling Charles, can't ye see how much I *want* to be strong? But can't ye understand how little it will avail us if, after I promise, I fail?"

He sighed, automatically patted his pockets for a cigarette.

The spider! It was still there. Justin pulled it out, looked at it. When Corinne Forrester had questioned him about its uses other than as a waterproofer, he had not given her an answer.

Deborah touched the odd little sprayer with a forefinger, said, "I found this in ye'r nightdress when I put it away. What is it, Charles?"

He hesitated, made up his mind, said, "It's an invention from my own time, honey. It shelters against cold—and against heat. Providence must be with us."

"Against heat? How does it work, Charles?"

"Here — I'll show you." He pressed a tiny button, spraying some of the transparent plastic across the palm of his left hand.

"'Tis as magical as Master Ortine's devices," cried the girl.

"Perhaps," replied Justin. "Now stand very still, honey—I'm going to give you a coat of this stuff. Then you'll have nothing to fear from Ortine's flame illusions."

"Ye'r a very wonderful man, Charles," she told him proudly.

"We'll soon know," he replied, then got busy and sprayed her with it all over, not sparing even her hair and lashes.

Finished, he returned the spider to his pocket, said, "Now let him do his worst. Are ye—are you *sure* you want to come back with me, honey? There's going to be one hell of a row over you."

"I'll be with *ye,*" she said simply.

Ortine returned. He bowed to his guests, said, "Well, I hope this is our last session."

"We've reached an agreement," Justin told him.

"An intelligent agreement?"

"Quite. We're going back together—to my time."

Ortine's smile was not pleasant. He said, "This may sound a trifle trite but don't say I didn't warn you." Then, to Deborah, "For your information this may be quite painful while it lasts—or while *you* last."

"Don't be afraid, honey," Justin told her.

"I'm not." The countenance she lifted to his was radiantly assured. "Not any more."

Ortine hesitated, his hand half outstretched, and said, "I truly hate to disillusion you, Justin."

"We'll see how your tricks prevail against love," said Justin.

"*Love!*" The word seemed to infuriate Ortine. He gestured at them and the room became a cubicle of fire. For a fraction of a second Justin flinched involuntarily and during that time he could actually feel the heat. Then, once more in control of himself, he stood quietly amid flames that neither seared nor burned.

Deborah looked up at him and smiled, the blaze flickering against her face. Her hand found his, pressed it tightly, and she smiled.

The flames vanished. A weary Ortine shook his head in bafflement. He said, "All right, you two —you win. I'll do anything you wish. Anything to get you out of here."

XI

When Justin came to he felt as if he had been wrapped in several layers of flour sacking. Then, with returning consciousness, he discovered himself to be lying in his own bed in the house on Louisburg Square, wearing the coarse heavy clothes Deborah had given him.

Deborah! A quick glance to his left revealed her lying beside him. He put out a reassuring hand to stroke her face, felt its plastic coating, got out of bed in a hurry.

"Come on," he said, "let's get that stuff off of you."

She moved like a girl in a trance. Her eyes ranged from the bed itself to the electric light on the bedside table, to the telephone, to the carpet, to the walls—then at last to Justin.

"Don't let it throw you, honey," he told her. "Think how I felt when I woke up in *your* bed."

She said in a near-whisper, "But *this*—this is more wonderful than Belvoir itself!"

"Prepare yourself for another shock, honey—a twentieth-century bathroom. We're going to get you cleaned up."

It was like showing a child its first Christmas tree. It took Justin a full fifteen minutes to get Deborah safely ensconced in a hot tub. He emerged, perspiring, carrying her clothes, and deposited them on

a chair, then began to strip off his own ill-fitting garments.

He stopped in the process of disrobing, picked up the phone, dialed the Ritz and reserved a suite. He had no intention of having Marie walk in to find Deborah there with him.

He found the spider again in his pocket, sat down on the bed to examine it once more. On impulse he squirted some of the remaining plastic on his hand, picked up a lighter, ran the flame beneath it. The stuff flamed up like benzine, blistering his palm before he could extinguish it. Justin shook his head and tossed it onto the table, feeling more sweat bead his forehead.

This, he decided, was one invention he was definitely going to turn down—if he still had his job with the Ninth of Boston, come the morning. He got out of his absurd clothes, scratched his flanks with relief, rummaged in the wardrobe for an extra robe.

Deborah called for help. She was having difficulty getting the plastic out of her hair. Justin stood her under the shower, soaped her head and turned on the warm water. "We'll get you a decent shampoo at a beautician's tomorrow, honey," he told her.

It was at that moment that Marie appeared in the doorway. She looked at Justin, then at Deborah incredulously. She was carrying the blue-and-white dress of the girl from Old Boston in her hand. She said, "I was going to ask you what this was, Justin—but I see there's no need."

Justin turned off the water, tossed the girl a towel, escorted his wife to the bedroom, shutting the bathroom door behind them. He glanced for the first time at the clock beside the telephone, discovered it was past two A.M. Ortine had had his little joke—instead of returning them to the banker's house at the moment of his first summons, he had allowed a few hours to elapse.

"What are you smiling about?" Marie asked him sharply. "I was coming in to tell you I met a rather fascinating friend of yours—a Mrs. Forrester—tonight. She suggested I drop in to give you her regards before I turned in. And here I find you . . ."

"Did she give you a Cuban cigarette?" Justin asked mildly.

"Don't joke—your taste is sufficiently bad as it is."

"Well," said Justin, feeling almost grateful to Ortine for forcing the issue into the open, "I suppose it had to happen sometime. We haven't been of much use to each other lately."

"I wouldn't exactly say that," replied Marie, sitting down and tilting a cigarette for him to light. "After all, I wonder just how far you'd have got without me, Charles."

"And that makes a marriage?" Justin asked sharply.

Marie shrugged disinterestedly. "There are all kinds of marriages." She yawned, added, "Where'd you

pick her up? At a servants' costume ball?"

"Not exactly," Justin told her. "Actually it's been a rather remarkable evening."

"I bet it has!" Marie's tone was sharp. "Well, what are you going to do about it, Charles?"

"I've already made reservations at the Ritz," he told her. "We'll both be out of here in a few minutes. By the way, could you loan Debby something to wear?"

She regarded him with amusement. "Do you really think I should?" she countered. "Perhaps the maid has something. I'll go and see. The Ritz—hmmm. Well, gather ye rosebuds and all that, sweetheart. You know I'll have your hide for this, don't you?"

"I never for a moment doubted it," he replied.

She rose, looked as puzzled as had Ortine. Love, pure love between man and woman, was apparently as implausible to Marie as it was to the master of Belvoir. She said, "Charles, you know that's rather sweet. I'll see what I can do for your little friend. Better let me have a look at her though—just for size."

Obeying an unexpected impulse, Justin kissed his wife on the forehead and told her, "You know, Marie, that's the nicest thing you've said since we've been married."

"Don't crowd your luck, Charles," Marie warned. "Call out the concubine."

Deborah emerged hesitantly, her brown hair an uncontrolled mess, Justin's robe flopping about her. She looked at Marie, then at Justin, said, "Is this Mistress Justin, Charles?"

One of Marie's pale eyebrows shot up toward her hairline. She looked at Justin, shocked, then blinked groggily and managed to say, "I don't know who's whose mistress around here but I think I have an outfit that will fit her fairly well. And, Charles, I don't know what she's done to her hair but I'll bring along a snood."

Justin was late in reaching the office the following morning. Devereux Chandler was there ahead of him, practicing chip shots on the carpet with his cane.

Steeled for the worst, Justin was surprised at the half-mocking grin with which Chandler greeted him. "I don't know what you did to my niece last night, Charles," he said, "but you've been the devil of a long time getting to it. She was on the phone this morning, demanding I have you fired."

"I rather expected that, Dev," said Justin. "Drink?"

"Not now," said Chandler. He sank into an armchair, looked at Justin quizzically. "I don't know what got into you, but then I don't know how you could stand Marie this long. She's used you for all you were worth."

"That's not quite her story," said Justin, sitting on a corner of his desk. "She seems to think that without you and her connection with you I'd be counting change

in a teller's cage out in Melrose."

"Possibly—but we'd be the losers, Charles," Chandler told him. "I don't like to crowd your business hours but I thought it only proper to set your mind at rest."

"Thanks—I appreciate it," said Justin.

There was a long, rather awkward pause. Then Chandler cleared his throat and said, "I suppose Marie will trap Jack Fellowes next. Too bad—he's not a bad apple."

"There are worse around."

Chandler stood up, cut at the carpet with his cane. He remarked without looking up, "From what Marie tells me you seem to have come up with a rather remarkable young woman. You wouldn't mind telling me how it happened?"

"If I hadn't decided to turn in early," said Justin, "and if I hadn't used a certain mental device to go back to sleep after you woke me up with your call from the party . . ." He stopped and shook his head helplessly. "You wouldn't believe me if I did explain it."

"Eh? Well, probably not—but I hope you'll ask me around for a drink when you get settled."

"You'll be the very first," Justin assured him warmly.

Henri Dubois was ushered in shortly after Devereux Chandler left. This time he came alone. Justin asked him where Miss Forrester was as he got his visitor seated. Dubois replied, "She had to go away this morning on a long trip."

"A very fascinating woman," said Justin, lighting a smoke. Then, "Mr. Dubois, I can't offer any assurance that we'll be able to give you and your movement the backing you want. But I can tell you this—I shall do everything in my power to see that you get it."

Henri Dubois extended a warm hand across the desk, said, "Mr. Justin, that's good enough for me."

Justin left early that afternoon. With his job safe and Dubois taken care of there was nothing to keep him at his desk. He paused briefly by the entrance to the Park Street Subway station to eye the vast expanse of the modern city and compare it with the snowbound panorama he had viewed from almost the same spot a few hours—or was it two centuries?—earlier.

It seemed strangely like the dream he had, for awhile, believed it to be. But Deborah was awaiting him at the Ritz. He began to walk faster.

So it hadn't been a dream at all. And, perhaps, he really had saved the world from a savage and sudden retrogression from which it could scarcely have recovered. He had had to lose his sanity to do it—for no man in love is sane, he told himself.

But Deborah was awaiting him at the Ritz.

He crossed Charles Street, entered the Public Gardens. And it occurred to him that perhaps he hadn't outwitted Ortine. Perhaps his behavior was carefully plotted as part of some far subtler scheme. He wondered.

But Deborah was awaiting him at the Ritz.

nightmare on the nose

by . . . Evelyn E. Smith

Incubus won every race but one. Yet though in this respect she matched Man o' War's record she wasn't actually a horse at all.

EVERY TIME he lost money at the track Phil Watson had a nightmare. They grew increasingly frequent as his bankroll dwindled and his hopes of getting rich dwindled accordingly.

The night after he had dropped two hundred dollars at Jamaica, the nightmare grew particularly oppressive. In the darkness he could see her red eyes glowing at him as she sat on his chest.

"Would you mind not turning over so much?" she asked, seeing that he was awake. "It makes me uncomfortable."

"It makes *you* uncomfortable!" he moaned. "How would you like to have a couple of tons of horse sitting on you?"

"I do not weigh a couple of tons!" she snapped. "And furthermore I assure you I'm sitting on your chest out of duty, certainly not out of pleasure. If you don't think I have lots better things to do with my nights than go around sitting on people . . ." Her large white teeth gleamed in a significant leer.

He sighed and squirmed again. A sharp hoof kicked him in the side. "That'll learn you not to wiggle, Watson. Since you're not sleeping," she added, "how about a couple of games of Canasta?"

The gifting of animals with human speech is scarcely an unique idea—see Dal Stivens' THE UNDOING OF CARNEY JIMMY in this issue should you have doubts—the idea of a talking horse goes back at least to the siege of Troy, for certainly there must have been some dialogue amongst the Greek warriors enclosed in the wooden horse's belly. But we think you'll agree that Miss Smith's filly has something special.

"I've been losing enough on the races—I'm not going to start gambling with a supernatural card shark."

"Listen here." The nightmare bristled. "I can beat you at any game without the use of supernatural powers. You're known as the number-one sucker at all the tracks."

"That's right. That's right. Kick a man when he's down."

"I'm sorry," she apologized. "I didn't mean to be unsporting. But you get me so mad!"

"Unsporting . . ." he mused—then sat up as a terrific idea hit him.

"Watch your step, Watson," the nightmare warned when the sudden movement nearly threw her off the bed. "I've been standing for a lot from you but—"

"Listen, can you run?"

"Run? Whaddya mean run?"

"How fast can you go?"

"Well, I'll be honest with you. Down—where I come from I'm known as 'Old Slow Poke.' I can't move much faster than speed of sound while all the other girls have the velocity of light. But that's the way it is—some are born with brains and some with speed."

"The velocity of sound is good enough," Watson decided. "Look here, Nightmare, how'd you like to run in a race?"

"A race?" Then the nightmare chuckled evilly to herself. "Oho, I see what you mean! But that wouldn't be cricket, would it?"

"Cricket and horse-racing are two distinct sports!" Watson stated. Then, alluringly, "How'd you like to run down the track five lengths ahead of all the other horses, with the band playing and the crowd cheering? You'd be led into the winner's circle and they'd drape flowers all over you. People would yell 'Nightmare, Nightmare!' You'd be a popular figure, a celebrity. This way nobody knows you. You work at night, alone—unappreciated and unsung . . ."

"That's so *true,*" the nightmare murmured. "I really haven't received the adulation I deserve. Here I've done my job faithfully for years, scared thousands of people into fits—and what thanks do I get? *None!*" She sobbed. "Other people get all the credit and glory. I just work, work, work like a horse."

"If you work for me," Watson said, "you'll only run a mile or so two or three times a week, get the finest of care *and*"—he pointed out significantly—"your nights will be your own."

"Watson," the nightmare assured him, "I'm sold. When do we start?"

"It isn't as easy as all that." Watson rose and paced up and down the room. "First of all you're not in the stud book. We'll have to forge some papers and pass you off as an Argentinian horse."

"Si, si, señor," said the nightmare, wriggling with pleasure. *"Hablo muy bien el español. El estrivo de mi padre es en el establo de mi madre. Yo soy del Rancho Grande. Olé!"*

"It isn't necessary for you to speak Spanish. As a matter of fact

you won't get to do any talking at all. Horses don't talk."

"But *I* do," she said, wounded. "Where I come from I am known as a witty and distinguished raconteur. You know the one about the two geldings?"

"Never you mind," he told her. "From now on you don't talk—except to me. Get it?"

"Yeah," the nightmare agreed. "All right, Watson, I'll give it a whirl. I've always wanted to be in the public eye."

For the sake of expediency Watson decided to give the nightmare, now officially registered as Incubus, her preliminary workouts himself—although he was no trainer. But then Incubus really needed no workouts. It merely looked well to take her around the track a few times.

"Remember, Inky," he whispered, "not too fast. We want to give 'em a big surprise at the meet."

"I dig you," she whispered back.

Reuben Goldlove, the well-known trainer, sauntered past and looked at Incubus. "My God," he told Watson, "what kind of a monster are you running! She's got a face like a gargoyle and a rear like a hippopotamus."

"You want I should clout him in the crupper?" Incubus whispered.

"No, no!" he whispered back. "I'm glad he doesn't take to you, because if he thought you were any good he might claim you."

"Claim me? Whaddya mean?"

"Well, you see," he explained, "since you're unknown and have no record I've had to enter you in a claiming race. That means anybody who's running another horse in the same race can put in a claim for you before the race, for the price I set on you, and become your owner."

"What's the price you set on me?"

Watson hemmed and hawed. "Three thousand dollars," he admitted.

Incubus cocked an eye at him. "You selling me down the river for a mess of pottage, Watson?"

"No, no," he assured her, "I can't help it—this is some goddam silly racing rule. You have no reputation so I've got to enter you in a maiden claimer."

Incubus raised an eyebrow. "A maiden claimer?"

"A maiden horse," he explained austerely, "is one which has never won a race."

"Oh-h-h-h," she said. "Sorry."

"Now, if the worst comes to the worst and you do get claimed we can figure out ways and means of getting you back. Can't we, Inky?"

Incubus laughed richly. "Clout him in the crupper!" she chortled. "Oh, man!"

The day dawned when Incubus was to make her debut at Belmont. The odds on her were a hundred to one. Laughing softly to himself, Watson put five hundred dollars on her nose.

"You crazy, fella?" the seller said to him. "The horse to bet on is Godlove's Pamplemousse. He's a natural to win."

"Incubus is my own horse," Watson explained patiently.

"Oh, I guess it's like my kid. He plays the pianner and stinks but I gotta clap for him all the same."

"Why didn't you give her some hip reducing exercises," Godlove sneered as the jockey led Incubus out into the paddock. "She'll never get through the starting gate with that spread."

"Take it easy," Watson told her, as she reared. "Now, listen," he said to the jockey, a sullen young apprentice—all he could get—"she responds to direction very well. Talk to her. She practically understands."

"Oh, sure," the jockey jeered. "Is snookums gonna win the race for daddykins?"

"Ess," replied Incubus.

The jockey stared at her and at Watson. Watson laughed, a trifle too hard. "I'm a great ventriloquist," he explained. "Can't break myself of the habit."

"Well, you better begin now," the jockey said, "because I'm temperamental and when I'm emotionally disturbed the horse senses it."

"The horses," the announcer declaimed through the loudspeaker, "are at the post. . . . They're off! . . . All of them, that is, except Incubus. She can't get through the starting gate. She's stuck."

"Yah, wear a girdle!" the crowd called derisively.

With a wrench of sheer rage Incubus pulled herself through the gate and dashed after the other horses. "In the backstretch it's Pamplemousse in the lead with Disestablishmentarianism and Epigram running half a length behind and... But who's this coming up from the rear? It's Incubus! She's ahead by a length . . . By two lengths . . . By three lengths! What a horse! What a jockey! He's giving her the whip! . . . Oh, oh, something's wrong. Incubus has lost her rider! Too bad, Incubus."

The horses raced up the stretch, with Incubus keeping five lengths ahead of Pamplemousse as per direction. She was much annoyed to discover that he had won the race.

"But *I* won it!" she kept whispering to Watson as he led her off. "I was first. This is a frame-up. I'm going right to the judges and raise an objection."

"It doesn't count if you don't have the jockey on you," he told her. "That's the rule."

"Flap the rules!" she said. "You mean without that pee-wee it doesn't count? A fine thing! I hate the rules, I hate the rules, I hate the rules!" She stamped her foot. "He hit me with a whip, the little bastard, so I gave him the old heave-ho."

"Aw, come on now, Incubus, we'll get another jockey who won't whip you. You see how easy you can win a race?"

She tossed her head. "I'm not so sure I want to run again."

"You know you want to run, Incubus. You've made a big impression, I could see that."

"Who cares what people think?"

"I saw Pamplemousse giving you the eye," Watson murmured. "Good-looking horse, isn't he? Any filly'd

be glad to have him interested in her."

"Oh, I dunno," Incubus said. "He's all right, I guess, if you like them tall and dark. But, okay, I'll try it again for you, Watson."

Godlove accosted them again as Watson led Incubus into her stall. "I take back what I said about your horse, Watson," he apologized. "She looks like a fiend, but she runs like one too. With the proper handling, she might be a stake horse." He looked speculatively at Incubus. "Give you five thousand for her, big rump and all."

"Not on your life."

Godlove shrugged. "Suit yourself. But she'll have to run in another claimer, you know." He left, laughing softly.

After two weeks of steady diet and vigorous massage, during which her hip measurements were considerably reduced, Incubus was entered in a four-thousand-dollar claimer. Even though she was still a maiden she was favored next to Pamplemousse by the players, for her unusual first start had not passed unnoticed. Watson bet another five hundred, to obtain which he had mortgaged the old homestead. But this time he could get only even money.

"Remember, Incubus," he instructed her as he buckled her saddle, "if Godlove claims you you know what to do."

"Sure do. Shall I let him live afterward?"

"Yeah, let him live. Just make it uncomfortable for him . . . Now look here, sonny." This to the new jockey. "She doesn't like the whip. You saw what she did to her last boy?"

The jockey nodded and gulped.

"All you have to do is sit on her and let her go where she wants. Then you'll be all right."

"I wooden even get near her," the boy said, "if I didn't have an aged mother to support."

The starter waved the yellow flag and the horses were off. Incubus raced neck and neck with Pamplemousse until they were a furlong from the finish line. Then she surged ahead to win by five lengths. When she rode into the winner's circle the crowd booed, as is their pleasant custom with winning horses and jockeys.

"A popular figure, eh?" Incubus sneered. *"Tcha!"*

"Y'know, Mr. Watson," the jockey said as he was assisted from the horse with a dazed but beatific smile on his face, "I'm so steamed up over this win I even thought Incubus was talking to me."

The men standing around laughed. "You've let excitement go to your head," Godlove remarked. "Personally I would never hire a jockey who has no emotional equilibrium."

The jockey reached a tentative finger toward Incubus' nose. "Good horse," he said. "Good Incubus."

"I think you're pretty nice yourself," Incubus murmured out of the side of her mouth. There was a stricken silence.

Reuben Godlove's eyes narrowed.

"That jockey who rode her the other day told me about your ventriloquism," he informed Watson. "Seems like a pretty cheap trick if you ask me." The others murmured agreement, color flowing back into their faces.

"Anyhow, now that she's my horse," Godlove went on, taking possession of Incubus' bridle. "She's going to be trained serious."

"Now?" Incubus asked Watson.

"Later," he whispered back.

"That ain't funny, Watson," Godlove assured him. As he led Incubus off she looked back over her shoulder and winked.

"Mr. Watson," the jockey said, following him off the field, "you're not really a ventriloquist, are you? That horse talks, doesn't she?"

Watson nodded.

"You gonna let Godlove get away with her?" The boy's voice rose to a shrill squeak.

"I'll claim her back in the next race."

"Yeah, but you can't claim her back less'n you've entered another horse in the same race and you don't have another horse, do you, Mr. Watson?"

Watson's jaw dropped. "I never thought of that! What'll I do?"

"You've got to get another horse, Mr. Watson. Do you have enough money?"

"Well, the purse from this race is almost two thousand, and I made another thousand betting on Incubus. And, of course, Godlove gave me four thousand for her. But that won't be enough to buy a decent horse and maintain him—expenses are terrific."

The jockey chewed his lower lip thoughtfully. "I know what you can do," he said at length, "you can buy Prunella. She's set at a price of five thousand dollars but her owner's pretty disgusted with her—she has good lines but she finished last in twenty-seven starts—and I think you could have her for four thousand in cash."

Prunella, a meek-looking chestnut filly with big brown eyes and a vicious temper, was enthusiastically disposed of for four thousand and installed in Incubus' vacant stall. Watson shed a silent tear to see Incubus' second-best saddle hanging there on the wall.

In the dead of night he slipped into Godlove's stable. Incubus was awake, reading the *Morning Telegraph*. "Look at the picture they have of me," she snapped. "Obviously taken by an enemy. Next time Watson, remember—my right profile is the best."

"I'll remember," he promised and told her what had happened.

"You're sure this Prunella isn't taking my place in your affections?" she demanded severely. "That all this isn't a subterfuge?"

"My God, no! She quits before she starts."

"All right," Incubus said. "Now, I am reliably informed by the stable grapevine that Godlove's entering me in a six-thousand-dollar claimer. You spent almost all your money on Prunella—how're you going to claim me?"

There was dead silence in the stable.

"These men," she sighed. "Without us females to think for them they'd be lost. The answer is simple. Prunella's got to win that race. Then you'll have the purse, plus whatever you can bet on her, and you'll get good odds."

"Prunella win the race! She couldn't beat a speedy snail."

"She'll win the race." Incubus grinned happily.

The weather was clear and the track fast. Incubus was running at three to five—Prunella ninety-eight to one. Reuben Godlove appeared with his arm in a sling and a bandage on his forehead and glowered at Watson. "A fine trainer you are," he snarled.

"Let's see how well you've done with her," Watson suggested, smiling amiably.

The starting gate opened and all the horses dashed out—all except Prunella, who sauntered forth and stood admiring the view. Incubus turned, ran back and nipped Prunella viciously in the forequarters. With a whinny of rage Prunella proceeded to chase Incubus, who was showing a fleet pair of heels along the track. But there were six horses between Prunella and her attacker.

With a thrust of her powerful shoulders, Incubus sent Dernier Cri staggering into the geraniums that bordered the field. She thrust a hoof into the path of Kropotkin and sent him and his rider sprawling on the track. She murmured something into Epigram's ear and that black colt turned light grey and refused to budge another step.

There were now three horses between Incubus and Prunella. Polyhymnia suddenly started to run backward. Sir Bleoberis buried his head in the sand and pretended he didn't notice the race was still going on. Cachucha—who had hitherto not been known as a jumper—hurdled the rail and dashed into the crowd of astonished players.

Still Incubus ran lightly before Prunella, half a length ahead, kicking dust in her face and making irritating remarks, while the enraged filly laid her ears back and bared white teeth to snap at her rival. One length before the finish line Incubus suddenly stopped short, leaving momentum to carry Prunella over the line to victory!

Prunella had won the race. Incubus was second but was disqualified for conduct unbecoming a horse and a lady. It was never determined who had run third.

"Together again at last, Watson," Incubus said during the joyful reunion in the paddock. "Ah, but it's been a long, long time . . ."

"Two weeks," commented the jockey, who had ridden Prunella.

"Listen, pipsqueak," Incubus told him irately. "I've spent the whole two weeks cooking up this speech and I don't want a half-pint like you spoiling it. It's been a long, long time, Watson . . ."

Prunella nickered.

"None of *your* lip, either,"

Incubus said. "Where would you have been if I hadn't won your race for you? Oh, you can run if you want to, can you? *Ha! Ha! Plater!*"

Prunella neighed angrily.

"Okay, Watson'll enter you in a claimer without me and we'll see what you can do." She turned toward her owner. "And now, Watson, I trust you have a hot tub prepared. I'm so-o-o-o tired . . ."

The racing secretary entered Incubus for an allowance with some misgivings. "But if she behaves again this time the way she did last she's out, Watson. Suspended—disqualified! Can't have that sort of thing going on, you know."

"She's actually the most tractable of horses, sir," Watson assured him. "It's merely that Mr. Godlove didn't know how to handle her."

"Oh—ah," the racing secretary said.

"And I'd like to enter Prunella in the five-thousand-dollar claimer."

The racing secretary smiled. "Well, Mr. Watson, you don't have to be afraid that anybody'll claim *her*. Godlove has spread the word around. Now everybody's afraid to claim a Watson horse."

Prunella won handily in her claimer and Incubus breezed to victory in her allowance. "Bet on Watson horses," the word went round the tracks. Incubus won a Class C, Class B and Class A handicap in swift progression. Prunella came in first in two seven-thousand-dollar claimers and second in a ten-thousand-dollar one.

And then Incubus came in last in a stake race at Aqueduct.

"What's the matter with you, Incubus?" Watson demanded. "You can run ten times around the track before any of these nags could reach the quarter-mile pole."

Incubus lay on her back in the hay and chewed reflectively on a straw. "You know, Watson," she said, "there are finer things in life than racing."

"What, for instance?"

She simpered. "I've been talking to Pamplemousse—you know, Godlove's horse—and he says it isn't ethical what I'm doing, that I'm competing with horses way below my class, that it isn't fair."

"But there aren't any horses in your class."

"I know," she sighed. "Sometimes superiority can have its disadvantages. That's what Pamplemousse says—he says it isn't fair for me to run at all. Says woman's place is in the home. Do you think woman's place is in the home, Watson?"

Prunella neighed in the adjoining stall.

"That's a dirty lie!" Incubus shrieked, getting up. "I double dare you to say it once more." Prunella kept silence.

"You're in love, Incubus?" Watson asked gently.

She bowed her head. "I didn't know I could be—I thought I was too tough. But you're never too tough. Oh, I know I'm a stake horse and he's still only a claimer but I love him just the same."

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it, Inky, I guess you have a right to. Only"—he gulped—"I'd entered you in the Belmont Futurity and it means . . . so much to me."

Incubus wiped away a tear with a wisp of hay. "All right, Watson, I'll win the Futurity for you. After all you have first claim on my loyalty. Who brought me out of obscurity? You! Who recognized my potentialities? You! Who made a horse out of me? You!"

Incubus won the Belmont Futurity and was carried off the track on the shoulders of a cheering crowd. Retouched photographs of the big black horse hit not only the sport pages but the front page of every newspaper in the country.

But the question of her racing again was shelved for the nonce. Shortly after the Futurity, Watson discovered that Incubus was pregrant. "Pamplemousse?" he asked.

She nodded shyly.

"But how could you do it? You two were in separate stalls."

Incubus snickered. "I have my methods, Watson."

"He's a low cad," said Watson.

"I knew what I was doing. I went into it with my eyes open."

He wondered just how he was going to enter the foal in the stud book. Although it would be of impeccable ancestry its escutcheon would be married by a bend sinister.

Some months later, Incubus called Watson to her stall.

"What is it, Inky?"

"I don't know how to tell you this, Watson. I've got to go back."

"Back! Back where, Inky girl?"

"Back where I came from. Oh, I might have known it was never to be, that you can't wipe out the past. Still I'd hoped that somehow—some way . . . But the Big Bookie says no. I've got to go back where I came from—I don't belong here. He says I was sent as a punishment, not as a reward."

She extended a hoof toward Watson's hand. "I had my baby tonight, Watson. Take good care of her—she's half equine, so she can stay here—and she'll be the fastest thing on earth when she grows up. Prunella'll help you raise her and support the family."

Watson wiped his streaming eyes. "I'll take care of your baby, Incubus," he vowed. "I'll call her Incubus Two and I'll treat her as if she were my own daughter."

"I knew I could count on you, Watson. Well—this is goodbye."

Incubus slowly vanished.

It was hard losing Incubus. He'd grown attached to her, looking on her not only as a horse but a friend. Still, at least he had the colt. In two years she would take up where her mother had left off and again the Watson name would reverberate through the racetracks.

He went inside the stall, looked down at Incubus' daughter, who reposed on the hay looking up at him with big blue eyes. He gasped.

He had forgotten. Incubus was not a real horse, she was merely a demon in the shape of a horse.

Incubus Two was not in the shape of a horse.

planet for transients

by . . . Philip K. Dick

Earth was bursting with new life, well along the road back from the last and most ruinous of all wars. But—was it still a home for man?

THE LATE AFTERNOON sun shone down blinding and hot, a great shimmering orb in the sky. Trent halted a moment to get his breath. Inside his lead-lined helmet his face dripped sweat, drop after drop of sticky moisture that steamed his viewplate and clogged his throat.

He slid his emergency pack over to the other side and hitched up his gun-belt. From his oxygen tank he pulled a couple of exhausted tubes and tossed them away in the brush. The tubes rolled and disappeared, lost in the endless heaps of red-green leaves and vines.

Trent checked his counter, found the reading low enough, slid back his helmet for a precious moment.

Fresh air rushed into his nose and mouth. He took a deep breath, filling his lungs. The air smelled good—thick and moist and rich with the odor of growing plants. He exhaled and took another breath.

To his right a towering column of orange shrubbery rose, wrapped around a sagging concrete pillar. Spread out over the rolling countryside was a vast expanse of grass and trees. In the distance a mass of growth loomed like a wall, a jungle of creepers and insects and flowers and underbrush that would have to

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Way back in 1913 the late great Herbert George Wells considered, in "A World Set Free," the possibility and consequences of atomic warfare. But not even Wells' cosmic imagination was able to cope with the realities that have overwhelmed our existence since the summer of 1945. It is a grisly commentary on current progress (?) that Mr. Dick's story seems less fantastic today than did Wells' a mere 40 years ago.

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be blasted as he advanced slowly.

Two immense butterflies danced past him. Great fragile shapes, multi-colored, racing erratically around him and then away. Life everywhere—bugs and plants and the rustling small animals in the shrubbery, a buzzing jungle of life in every direction. Trent sighed and snapped his helmet back in place. Two breathfuls was all he dared.

He increased the flow of his oxygen tank and then raised his transmitter to his lips. He clicked it briefly on. "Trent. Checking with the Mine Monitor. Hear me?"

A moment of static and silence. Then, a faint, ghostly voice. "Come in, Trent. Where the hell are you?"

"Still going North. Ruins ahead. I may have to bypass. Looks thick."

"Ruins?"

"New York, probably. I'll check with the map."

The voice was eager. "Anything yet?"

"Nothing. Not so far, at least. I'll circle and report in about an hour." Trent examined his wristwatch. "It's half-past three. I'll raise you before evening."

The voice hesitated. "Good luck. I hope you find something. How's your oxygen holding out?"

"All right."

"Food?"

"Plenty left. I may find some edible plants."

"Don't take any chances!"

"I won't." Trent clicked off the transmitter and returned it to his belt. "I won't," he repeated. He gathered up his blast gun and hoisted his pack and started forward, his heavy lead-lined boots sinking deep into the lush foliage and compost underfoot.

It was just past four o'clock when he saw them. They stepped out of the jungle around him. Two of them, young males—tall and thin and horny blue-gray like ashes. One raised his hand in greeting. Six or seven fingers—extra joints. "Afternoon," he piped.

Trent stopped instantly. His heart thudded. "Good afternoon."

The two youths came slowly around him. One had an axe—a foliage axe. The other carried only his pants and the remains of a canvas shirt. They were nearly eight feet tall. No flesh—bones and hard angles and large, curious eyes, heavily lidded. There were internal changes, radically different metabolism and cell structure, ability to utilize hot salts, altered digestive system. They were both looking at Trent with interest—growing interest.

"Say," one said. "You're a human being."

"That's right," Trent said.

"My name's Jackson." The youth extended his thin blue horny hand and Trent shook it awkwardly. The hand was fragile under his lead-lined glove. Its owner added, "My friend here is Earl Potter."

Trent shook hands with Potter. "Greetings," Potter said. His rough lips twitched. "Can we have a look at your rig?"

"My rig?" Trent countered.

"Your gun and equipment. What's that on your belt? And that tank?"

"Transmitter—oxygen." Trent showed them the transmitter. "Battery operated. Hundred mile range."

"You're from a camp?" Jackson asked quickly.

"Yes. Down in Pennsylvania."

"How many?"

Trent shrugged. "Couple of dozen."

The blue-skinned giants were fascinated. "How have you survived? Penn was hard hit, wasn't it? The pools must be deep around there."

"Mines," Trent explained. "Our ancestors moved down deep in the coal mines when the War began. So the records have it. We're fairly well set up. Grow our own food in tanks. A few machines, pumps and compressors and electrical generators. Some hand lathes. Looms."

He didn't mention that generators now had to be cranked by hand, that only about half of the tanks were still operative. After three hundred years metal and plastic weren't much good—in spite of endless patching and repairing. Everything was wearing out, breaking down.

"Say," Potter said. "This sure makes a fool of Dave Hunter."

"Dave Hunter?"

"Dave says there aren't any true humans left," Jackson explained. He poked at Trent's helmet curiously. "Why don't you come back with us? We've got a settlement near here—only an hour or so away on the tractor—our hunting tractor. Earl and I were out hunting flap-rabbits."

"Flap-rabbits?"

"Flying rabbits. Good meat but hard to bring down—weigh about thirty pounds."

"What do you use? Not the axe surely."

Potter and Jackson laughed. "Look at this here." Potter slid a long brass rod from his trousers. It fitted down inside his pants along his pipe-stem leg.

Trent examined the rod. It was tooled by hand. Soft brass, carefully bored and straightened. One end was shaped into a nozzle. He peered down it. A tiny metal pin was lodged in a cake of transparent material. "How does it work?" he asked.

"Launched by hand—like a blow gun. But once the b-dart is in the air it follows its target forever. The initial thrust has to be provided." Potter laughed. "I supply that. A big puff of air."

"Interesting." Trent returned the rod. With elaborate casualness, studying the two blue-gray faces, he asked, "I'm the first human you've seen?"

"That's right," Jackson said. "The Old Man will be pleased to welcome you." There was eagerness in his reedy voice. "What do you say? We'll take care of you. Feed you, bring you cold plants and animals. For a week, maybe?"

"Sorry," Trent said. "Other business. If I come through here on the way back . . . "

The horny faces fell with disap-

pointment. "Not for a little while? Overnight? We'll pump you plenty of cold food. We have a fine cooler the Old Man fixed up."

Trent tapped his tank. "Short on oxygen. You don't have a compressor?"

"No. We don't have any use. But maybe the Old Man could—"

"Sorry." Trent moved off. "Have to keep going. You're sure there are no humans in this region?"

"We thought there weren't any left anywhere. A rumor once in awhile. But you're the first we've seen." Potter pointed West. "There's a tribe of rollers off that way." He pointed vaguely South. "A couple of tribes of bugs."

"And some runners."

"You've seen them?"

"I came that way."

"And North there's some of the underground ones—the blind digging kind." Potter made a face. "I can't see them and their bores and scoops. But what the hell." He grinned. "Everybody has his own way."

"And to the East," Jackson added, "where the ocean begins, there's a lot of the porpoise kind—the undersea type. They swim around—use those big underwater air-domes and tanks—come up sometimes at night. A lot of types come out at night. We're still daylight-oriented." He rubbed his horny blue-gray skin. "This cuts radiation fine."

"I know," Trent said. "So long."

"Good luck." They watched him go, heavy-lidded eyes still big with astonishment, as the human being pushed slowly off through the lush green jungle, his metal and plastic suit glinting faintly in the afternoon sun.

Earth was alive, thriving with activity. Plants and animals and insects in boundless confusion. Night forms, day forms, land and water types, incredible kinds and numbers that had never been catalogued, probably never would be.

By the end of the War every surface inch was radioactive. A whole planet sprayed and bombarded by hard radiation. All life subjected to beta and gamma rays. Most life died—but not all. Hard radiation brought mutation—at all levels, insect, plant and animal. The normal mutation and selection process was accelerated millions of years in seconds.

These altered progeny littered the Earth. A crawling teeming glowing horde of radiation-saturated beings. In this world, only those forms which could use hot soil and breathe particle-laden air survived. Insects and animals and men who could live in a world with a surface so alive that it glowed at night.

Trent considered this moodily, as he made his way through the steaming jungle, expertly burning creepers and vines with his blaster. Most of the oceans had been vaporized. Water descended still, drenching the land with torrents of hot moisture. This jungle was wet—wet and hot and full of life. Around him creatures scuttled and rustled. He held his blaster tight and pushed on.

The sun was setting. It was getting to be night. A range of ragged hills jutted ahead in the violet gloom. The sunset was going to be beautiful—compounded of particles in suspension, particles that still drifted from the initial blast, centuries ago.

He stopped for a moment to watch. He had come a long way. He was tired—and discouraged.

The horny blue-skinned giants were a typical mutant tribe. *Toads,* they were called. Because of their skin — like desert horned-toads. With their radical internal organs, geared to hot plants and air, they lived easily in a world where he survived only in a lead-lined suit, polarized viewplate, oxygen tank, special cold food pellets grown underground in the Mine.

The Mine—time to call again. Trent lifted his transmitter. "Trent checking again," he muttered. He licked his dry lips. He was hungry and thirsty. Maybe he could find some relatively cool spot, free of radiation. Take off his suit for a quarter of an hour and wash himself. Get the sweat and grime off.

Two weeks he had been walking, cooped up in a hot sticky lead-lined suit, like a diver's suit. While all around him countless life-forms scrambled and leaped, unbothered by the lethal pools of radiation.

"Mine," the faint tinny voice answered.

"I'm about washed up for today. I'm stopping to rest and eat. No more until tomorrow."

"No luck?" Heavy disappointment.

"None."

Silence. Then, "Well, maybe tomorrow."

"Maybe. Met a tribe of toads. Nice young bucks, eight feet high." Trent's voice was bitter. "Wandering around with nothing on but shirts and pants. Bare feet."

The Mine Monitor was uninterested. "I know. The lucky stiffs. Well, get some sleep and raise me tomorrow A.M. A report came in from Lawrence."

"Where is he?"

"Due West. Near Ohio. Making good progress."

"Any results?"

"Tribes of rollers, bugs and the digging kind that come up at night —the blind white things."

"Worms."

"Yes, worms. Nothing else. When will you report again?"

"Tomorrow," Trent said. He cut the switch and dropped his transmitter to his belt.

Tomorrow. He peered into the gathering gloom at the distant range of hills. Five years. And always—tomorrow. He was the last of a great procession of men to be sent out. Lugging precious oxygen tanks and food pellets and a blast pistol. Exhausting their last stores in a useless sortie into the jungles.

Tomorrow? Some tomorrow, not far off, there wouldn't be any more oxygen tanks and food pellets. The compressors and pumps would have stopped completely. Broken down for good. The Mine would be dead

and silent. Unless they made contact pretty damn soon.

He squatted down and began to pass his counter over the surface, looking for a cool spot to undress. He passed out.

"Look at him," a faint faraway voice said.

Consciousness returned with a rush. Trent pulled himself violently awake, groping for his blaster. It was morning. Gray sunlight filtered down through the trees. Around him shapes moved.

The blaster . . . gone!

Trent sat up, fully awake. The shapes were vaguely human—but not very. Bugs.

"Where's my gun?" Trent demanded.

"Take it easy." A bug advanced, the others behind. It was chilly. Trent shivered. He got awkwardly to his feet as the bugs formed a circle around him. "We'll give it back."

"Let's have it now." He was stiff and cold. He snapped his helmet in place and tightened his belt. He was shivering, shaking all over. The leaves and vines dripped wet slimy drops. The ground was soft underfoot.

The bugs conferred. There were ten or twelve of them. Strange creatures, more like insects than men. They were shelled—thick shiny chiten. Multi-lensed eyes. Nervous, vibrating antennae by which they detected radiation.

Their protection wasn't perfect. A strong dose and they were finished. They survived by detection and avoidance and partial immunity. Their food was taken indirectly, first digested by smaller warm-blooded animals and then taken as fecal matter, minus radioactive particles.

"You're a human," a bug said. Its voice was shrill and metallic. The bugs were asexual—these, at least. Two other types existed, male drones and a Mother. These were neuter warriors, armed with pistols and foliage axes.

"That's right," Trent said.

"What are you doing here? Are there more of you?"

"Quite a few."

The bugs conferred again, antennae waving wildly. Trent waited. The jungle was stirring into life. He watched a gelatin-like mass flow up the side of a tree and into the branches, a half-digested mammal visible within. Some drab day moths fluttered past. The leaves stirred as underground creatures burrowed sullenly away from the light.

"Come along with us," a bug said. It motioned Trent forward. "Let's get going."

Trent fell in reluctantly. They marched along a narrow path, cut by axes sometime recently. The thick feelers and probes of the jungle were already coming back. "Where are we going?" Trent demanded.

"To the Hill."

"Why?"

"Never mind."

Watching the shiny bugs stride along, Trent had trouble believing

they had once been human beings. Their ancestors, at least. In spite of their incredible altered physiology the bugs were mentally about the same as he. Their tribal arrangement approximated the human organic states, communism and fascism.

"May I ask you something?" Trent said.

"What?"

"I'm the first human you've seen? There aren't any more around here?"

"No more."

"Are there reports of human settlements anywhere?"

"Why?"

"Just curious," Trent said tightly.

"You're the only one." The bug was pleased. "We'll get a bonus for this—for capturing you. There's a standing reward. Nobody's ever claimed it before."

A human was wanted here too. A human brought with him valuable *gnosis,* odds and ends of tradition the mutants needed to incorporate into their shaky social structures. Mutant cultures were still unsteady. They needed contact with the past. A human being was a shaman, a Wise Man to teach and instruct. To teach the mutants how life had been, how their ancestors had lived and acted and looked.

A valuable possession for any tribe—especially if no other humans existed in the region.

Trent cursed savagely. *None?* No others? There *had* to be other humans—someplace. If not North, then East. Europe, Asia, Australia. Someplace, somewhere on the globe. Humans with tools and machines and equipment. The Mine couldn't be the only settlement, the last fragment of true man. Prized curiosities—doomed when their compressors burned out and their food tanks dried up.

If he didn't have any luck pretty soon . . .

The bugs halted, listening. Their antennae twitched suspiciously.

"What is it?" Trent asked.

"Nothing." They started on. "For a moment—"

A flash. The bugs ahead on the trail winked out of existence. A dull roar of light rolled over them.

Trent sprawled. He struggled, caught in the vines and sappy weeds. Around him bugs twisted and fought wildly. Tangling with small furry creatures that fired rapidly and efficiently with hand weapons and, when they got close, kicked and gouged with immense hind legs.

Runners.

The bugs were losing. They retreated back down the trail, scattering into the jungle. The runners hopped after them, springing on their powerful hind legs like kangaroos. The last bug departed. The noise died down.

"Okay," a runner ordered. He gasped for breath, straightening up. "Where's the human?"

Trent got slowly to his feet. "Here."

The runners helped him up. They were small, not over four feet high. Fat and round, covered with

thick pelts. Little good-natured faces peered up at him with concern. Beady eyes, quivering noses and great kangaroo legs.

"You all right?" one asked. He offered Trent his water canteen.

"I'm all right." Trent pushed the canteen away. "They got my blaster."

The runners searched around. The blaster was nowhere to be seen.

"Let it go." Trent shook his head dully, trying to collect himself. "What happened? The light."

"A grenade." The runners puffed up with pride. "We stretched a wire across the trail, attached to the pin."

"The bugs control most of this area," another said. "We have to fight our way through." Around his neck hung a pair of binoculars. The runners were armed with slug-pistols and knives.

"Are you really a human being?" a runner asked. "The original stock?"

"That's right," Trent muttered in unsteady tones.

The runners were awed. Their beady eyes grew wide. They touched his metal suit, his viewplate. His oxygen tank and pack. One squatted down and expertly traced the circuit of his transmitter apparatus.

"Where are you from?" the leader asked in his deep purr-like voice. "You're the first human we've seen in months."

Trent spun, choking. "*Months?* Then . . ."

"None around here. We're from Canada. Up around Montreal. There's a human settlement up there."

Trent's breath came fast. "Walking distance?"

"Well, we made it in a couple of days. But we go fairly fast." The runner eyed Trent's metal-clad legs doubtfully. "I don't know. For you it would take longer."

Humans. A human settlement. "How many? A big settlement? Advanced?"

"It's hard to remember. I saw their settlement once. Down underground—levels, cells. We traded some cold plants for salt. That was a long time ago."

"They're operating successfully? They have tools—machinery—compressors? Food tanks to keep going?"

The runner twisted uneasily. "As a matter of fact they may not be there any more."

Trent froze. Fear cut through him like a knife. "Not there? What do you mean?"

"They may be gone."

"Gone where?" Trent's voice was bleak. "What happened to them?"

"I don't know," the runner said. "I don't know what happened to them. Nobody knows."

He pushed on, hurrying frantically North. The jungle gave way to a bitterly cold fern-like forest. Great silent trees on all sides. The air was thin and brittle.

He was exhausted. And only one tube of oxygen remained in the tank. After that he would have to open his helmet. How long would

he last? The first rain cloud would bring lethal particles sweeping into his lungs. Or the first strong wind, blowing from the ocean.

He halted, gasping for breath. He had reached the top of a long slope. At the bottom a plain stretched out—tree-covered—a dark green expanse, almost brown. Here and there a spot of white gleamed. Ruins of some kind. A human city had been here three centuries ago.

Nothing stirred—no sign of life. No sign anywhere.

Trent made his way down the slope. Around him the forest was silent. A dismal oppression hung over everything. Even the usual rustling of small animals was lacking. Animals, insects, men—all were gone. Most of the runners had moved South. The small things probably had died. And the men?

He came out among the ruins. This had been a great city once. The men had probably gone down in air-raid shelters and mines and subways. Later on they had enlarged their underground chambers. For three centuries men—true men—had held on, living below the surface. Wearing lead-lined suits when they came up, growing food in tanks, filtering their water, compressing particle-free air. Shielding their eyes against the glare of the bright sun.

And now—nothing at all.

He lifted his transmitter. "Mine," he snapped. "This is Trent."

The transmitter sputtered feebly. It was a long time before it responded. The voice was faint, distant. Almost lost in the static. "Well? Did you find them?"

"They're gone."

"But . . ."

"Nothing. No one. Completely abandoned." Trent sat down on a broken stump of concrete. His body was dead. Drained of life. "They were here recently. The ruins aren't covered. They must have left in the last few weeks."

"It doesn't make sense. Mason and Douglas are on their way. Douglas has the tractor car. He should be there in a couple of days. How long will your oxygen last?"

"Twenty-four hours."

"We'll tell him to make time."

"I'm sorry I don't have more to report. Something better." Bitterness welled up in his voice. "After all these years. They were here all this time. And now that we've finally got to them . . ."

"Any clues? Can you tell what became of them?"

"I'll look." Trent got heavily to his feet. "If I find anything I'll report."

"Good luck." The faint voice faded off into static. "We'll be waiting."

Trent returned the transmitter to his belt. He peered up at the gray sky. Evening—almost night. The forest was bleak and ominous. A faint blanket of snow was falling silently over the brown growth, hiding it under a layer of grimy white. Snow mixed with particles. Lethal dust—still falling, after three hundred years.

He switched on his helmet-

beam. The beam cut a pale swath ahead of him through the trees, among the ruined columns of concrete, the occasional heaps of rusted slag. He entered the ruins.

In their center he found the towers and installations. Great pillars laced with mesh scaffolding—still bright. Open tunnels from underground lay like black pools. Silent deserted tunnels. He peered down one, flashing his helmet beam into it. The tunnel went straight down, deep into the heart of the Earth. But it was empty.

Where had they gone? What had happened to them? Trent wandered around dully. Human beings had lived here, worked here, survived. They had come up to the surface. He could see the bore-nosed cars parked among the towers, now gray with the night snow. They had come up and then—gone.

Where?

He sat down in the shelter of a ruined column and flicked on his heater. His suit warmed up, a slow red glow that made him feel better. He examined his counter. The area was hot. If he intended to eat and drink he'd have to move on.

He was tired. Too damn tired to move on. He sat resting, hunched over in a heap, his helmet-beam lighting up a circle of gray snow ahead of him. Over him the snow fell silently. Presently he was covered, a gray lump sitting among the ruined concrete. As silent and unmoving as the towers and scaffolding around him.

He dozed. His heater hummed gently. Around him a wind came up, swirling the snow, blowing it up against him. He slid forward a little until his metal and plastic helmet came to rest against the concrete.

Toward midnight he woke up. He straightened, suddenly alert. Something—a noise. He listened.

Far off, a dull roaring.

Douglas in the car? No, not yet—not for another two days. He stood up, snow pouring off him. The roar was growing, getting louder. His heart began to hammer wildly. He peered around, his beam flashing through the night.

The ground shook, vibrating through him, rattling his almost empty oxygen tank. He gazed up at the sky—and gasped.

A glowing trail slashed across the sky, igniting the early morning darkness. A deep red, swelling each second. He watched it, open-mouthed.

Something was coming down—landing.

A rocket.

The long metal hull glittered in the morning sun. Men were working busily, loading supplies and equipment. Tunnel cars raced up and down, hauling material from the undersurface levels to the waiting ship. The men worked carefully and efficiently, each in his metal-and-plastic suit, in his carefully sealed lead-lined protection shield.

"How many back at your Mine?" Norris asked quietly.

"About thirty." Trent's eyes were on the ship. "Thirty-three, including all those out."

"Out?"

"Looking. Like me. A couple are on their way here. They should arrive soon. Late today or tomorrow."

Norris made some notes on his chart. "We can handle about fifteen with this load. We'll catch the rest next time. They can hold out another week?"

"Yes."

Norris eyed him curiously. "How did you find us? This is a long way from Pennsylvania. We're making our last stop. If you had come a couple days later . . ."

"Some runners sent me this way. They said you had gone. But they didn't know where."

Norris laughed. "We didn't know where either."

"You must be taking all this stuff someplace. This ship. It's old, isn't it? Fixed up."

"Originally it was some kind of bomb. We located it and repaired it—worked on it from time to time. We weren't sure what we wanted to do. We're not sure yet. But we know we have to leave."

"Leave? Leave Earth?"

"Of course." Norris motioned him toward the ship. They made their way up the ramp to one of the hatches. Norris pointed back down. "Look down there—at the men loading."

The men were almost finished. The last cars were half-empty, bringing up the final remains from underground. Books, records, pictures, artifacts—the remains of a culture. A multitude of representative objects, shot into the hold of the ship to be carried off, away from Earth.

"Where?" Trent asked.

"To Mars for the time being. But we're not staying there. We'll probably go on out, toward the moons of Jupiter and Saturn. Ganymede may turn out to be something. If not Ganymede, one of the others. If worst comes to worst we can stay on Mars. It's pretty dry and barren but it's not radioactive."

"There's no chance here—no possibility of reclaiming the radioactive areas? If we could cool off Earth, neutralize the hot clouds and . . ."

"If we did that," Norris said, "They'd all die."

"They?"

"Rollers, runners, worms, toads, bugs, all the rest. The endless varieties of life. Countless forms adopted to *this* Earth—this hot Earth. These plants and animals use the radioactive metals. Essentially the new basis of life here is an assimilation of hot metallic salts. Salts which are utterly lethal to us."

"But even so . . ."

"Even so, it's not really our world."

"We're the true humans," Trent said.

"Not anymore. Earth is alive, teeming with life. Growing wildly—in all directions. We're one form,

an old form. To live here, we'd have to restore the old conditions, the old factors, the balance as it was three hundred and fifty years ago. A colossal job. And if we succeeded, if we managed to cool Earth, none of this would remain."

Norris pointed at the great brown forest. And beyond it, toward the South, at the beginning of the steaming jungle that continued all the way to the Straits of Magellan.

"In a way it's what we deserve. *We* brought the War. *We* changed Earth. Not destroyed — *changed.* Made it so different we can't live here any longer."

Norris indicated the lines of helmeted men. Men sheathed in lead, in heavy protection suits, covered with layers of metal and wiring, counters, oxygen tanks, shields, food pellets, filtered water. The men worked, sweating in their heavy suits. "See them? What do they resemble?"

A worker came up, gasping and panting. For a brief second he lifted his viewplate and took a hasty breath of air. He slammed his plate and nervously locked it in place. "Ready to go, sir. All loaded."

"Change of plan," Norris said. "We're going to wait until this man's companions get here. Their camp is breaking up. Another day won't make any difference."

"All right, sir." The worker pushed off, climbing back down to the surface, a weird figure in his heavy lead-lined suit and bulging helmet and intricate gear.

"We're visitors," Norris told him.

Trent flinched violently. "*What?*"

"Visitors on a strange planet. Look at us. Shielded suits and helmets, space suits—for exploring. We're a rocket-ship stopping at an alien world on which we can't survive. Stopping for a brief period to load up—and then take off again."

"Closed helmets," Trent said, in a strange voice.

"Closed helmets. Lead shields. Counters and special food and water. Look over there."

A small group of runners were standing together, gazing up in awe at the great gleaming ship. Off to the right, visible among the trees, was a runner village. Checker-board crops and animal pens and board houses.

"The natives," Norris said. "The inhabitants of the planet. They can breathe the air, drink the water, eat the plant-life. We can't. This is their planet—not ours. They can live here, build up a society."

"I hope we can come back."

"Back?"

"To visit—sometime."

Norris smiled ruefully. "I hope so too. But we'll have to get permission from the inhabitants—permission to land." His eyes were bright with amusement — and, abruptly, pain. A sudden agony that gleamed out over everything else. "We'll have to ask them if it's all right. And they may say *no*. They may not want us."

moonflowers and mary

by . . . George Whitley

The man with a green thumb is always valuable—especially on the moon. But at times, like our Adam, he can be just a little too green.

HIS NAME WAS Adam Ormandy and he was a gardener. He was a big man, a fraction of an inch over six feet tall, and broad to match. His hair was yellow and he usually had at least one day's stubble softening the strong lines of his not unhandsome jaw. His eyes were of that mild blue so often, in this case so erroneously, associated with men who work in the open air. His face and his hands were deeply tanned—he, as well as his plants, derived benefit from the ultra-violet lamps so essential to vegetable well-being.

When his shift was over he liked nothing so much as a long walk. After his walk he would make for the Colony's bar—the one reserved for the use of minor technicians—and there drink two, never more nor less, glasses of fruit squash undiluted by any form of alcohol. He did not approve of drinking but he liked occasional company. He would play one game of darts with Delchev and Gruen, both tractor drivers, and Dombey, one of the junior cartographers.

Ormandy would then retire to his little room in the single men's quarters and, before sleeping, browse through the pages of the latest seed catalogues and dream

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The age-long speculation as to whether there is or ever was life on Earth's single satellite seems in a fair way to be answered shortly. But until the drab truths, whatever they may be, are actually recorded, science fiction writers like George Whitley can continue to concoct such delightful Luny fantasies as this little gem.

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wistfully of the plants that he would grow if only Ferson, Head Gardener and Air Conditioning Engineer, would allow him lights and tanks for his own use and just a few ounces of personal mass in the next ship.

His meals he ate in the tank rooms during his shift—packets of thick sandwiches cut and wrapped by Mary Blair, one of the waitresses in the canteen. He was sorry he was no longer able to repay her kindness—but Ferson, that hard practical man, more engineer than gardener, had been so unpleasant when Miss Hume, the Stewardess, had reported to him that one of her staff had been seen wearing a tiny spray of tomato and pumpkin flowers, presumably given her by one of Ferson's men, that Adam had never dared to repeat the gesture. And Ferson, he was sure, kept a personal tally of every fruit grown in the tanks.

Once or twice, when her free hours coincided with his, Mary Blair had accompanied him on his walks. But she had not really enjoyed them. Adam saw the plains and craters as they must have been eons ago, before air and water had broken the weak hold of gravity and escaped into empty space, during the pitifully brief efflorescence of Lunar life.

Mary saw only harsh sunlight and black shadow and the death that must, sooner or later, overtake all the worlds. And at night, in spite of the heating unit in her spacesuit, she shivered—with fear of the stars and the cold and the darkness, even of the great globe of Earth, hanging high in the Southern sky, that seemed to her always about to fall and to crush its satellite.

Had Adam been able to take her into his arms and comfort her, as she wished to be comforted, she would have found the walks at least bearable. But it is hard to comfort a girl properly when both you and she are attired in thick rubberized asbestos-and-metal-mesh fabric, when a metal-and-plastic helmet prevents even the most innocent kiss.

So it was that she preferred the life inside the domes. Adam would see her, as he paused briefly outside the recreation-room door on his way from the bar to his own room, playing table tennis, perhaps, with some junior technician or gliding around the floor to the strains of the Colony's own dance band.

He would wonder then why she ever bothered with such a dull fellow as himself, would feel a vague surprise that she should still trouble to make up his sandwiches for him. And he would be sorry, he knew, when, in six months' time, her contract having expired, she would return to Earth.

His own contract still had two years to run and, conscious that he was doing useful and important work, he had every intention of renewing it. He wished that a shift to the married quarters were possible—but, Mary having announced her intention of returning to Earth

as soon as possible, he had never asked her to marry him.

He was thinking of Mary as he trudged at a steady pace over the surface of the crater floor. He was wishing he were capable of entering more into the social life of the colony or, conversely, that she could take a greater interest in hydroponics.

"But it's not the same," she had told him once. "It's not the same as a garden with good black earth, smelling sweet after the rain, where you can grow what you want to grow, not what old Ferson tells you."

"But this is the only way that we can do it here," he had said.

"Who's talking about doing it *here?*" she had flared in reply.

He thought, *After all, there's still a market for dirt-grown stuff on Earth. But will she wait for me until my contract runs out?*

He tripped, and almost fell, as the toe of his heavy boot crashed into an obstruction. It was a small mound, almost a tiny dome, made apparently of some cement-like substance. These formations, he knew, were fairly common—freaks of the Moon's long-past-and-finished volcanic activity.

But this one was somehow different. He was on the point of walking on when he realized wherein the difference lay. On the floor of the tiny dome, jet black and glistening in the strong sunlight, was a scattering of what could have been beads—or *seeds.*

Adam fell to his knees, staring at his discovery. He saw then that the broken shards of the dome were covered with markings of a regular character which could have been, might have been, written characters in some unknown language. And the more he looked at the tiny black spheroids the more he was sure they were seeds.

He should, he knew well, report this find on his return to the dome. And yet . . . Too often he had seen departmental seniors taking the credit for work done or discoveries made by members of their staffs. Stirring vaguely in his mind was the thought that if he, Adam Ormandy, could claim the honor of having grown the first Moonflowers —for so he already thought of them —he would be a person of some consequence in the Colony and Mary Blair might even reconsider her decision to return to Earth.

Too—he could name the flower after Mary. But if he did things according to regulations and if the seeds survived Ferson's bungling, the plant would inevitably be named after the Head Gardener.

"I wouldn't wish that on to a *cabbage,*" he muttered. Then, *"Flora Lunaris Blairensis . . ."*

He scooped up the seeds with his clumsy, gloved hands, managed to drop them into the pouch on the front of his suit designed for such purposes. Somehow he was quite sure that they would grow.

He acted then with the cunning of the simple. He walked on until the elapsed time was that usually taken for his outward walk, then

turned as always and started his trudge back to the gaily-colored scarlet-and-blue dome. He was halfway back when one of the big tractors, returning from some errand, drew up alongside and the driver, grinning within his airtight cabin, indicated that Adam should climb on board and ride for the rest of the way. Adam wanted to accept the offer—but to have done so would have been out of character.

He managed, after he had stripped off his spacesuit in the locker room, to transfer the seeds from his pouch to the pocket of his shorts. Then, still acting cautiously, he went to the bar for his usual drinks—two glasses of squash, no more and no less—and his usual game of darts.

When the ritual that marked the closing of his day was over he walked slowly as usual to his own cabin, pausing, again according to routine, at the door of the recreation room to watch Mary playing table tennis. She waved to him briefly, then went on with her game. For a few seconds he watched her slight, graceful form, her mane of straw-colored hair, then continued on his way.

For the first time since he had come to the Moon his seed catalogues remained undisturbed in their drawer.

This was Adam Ormandy's first exercise in duplicity and he was surprised and more than a little worried by the ease with which his scheme progressed. True, luck was with him. Ferson had cracked an ankle during one of his walks outside and was making of his semi-immobilization an opportunity to catch up with his paper work. Grant, his First Assistant, was easy-going and did not worry much about methods used as long as results were satisfactory.

Adam was able to slip a half dozen of his seeds into a new tank of pineapples, reasoning that any Lunar plant must have been used to a somewhat larger ration of ultra-violet radiation than most Terrain organisms. He did not dare alter the chemical make-up of the nutrient solution—but in any case he could not say with any certainty what it should be in the case of the Moonflowers.

At the end of two days—Earth-time—he was surprised and delighted to find that the round black seeds had split and were sending tiny rootlets down into the water and fragile feathery shoots stretching up towards the U-V lamps. At the end of four days the six Moonflowers were making themselves conspicuous, their fragile stems towering high above the prosaic pineapples.

Praying that Grant would not notice anything amiss—he rarely came into the tank room in which tropical fruits were grown—Adam shifted his lights so that most of them were to the side of rather than above the tank. The Moonflowers adjusted themselves to the new conditions and, after a lapse of only two hours, assumed an incon-

spicuous and horizontal position.

At the end of six days the first buds had appeared.

At the end of six days, too, the men of the other two shifts discovered the intruders in the pineapple tank. Howell, whom Adam relieved, was first to broach the subject. "Look at this!" he said. "Whoever made up this shipment of seeds wants his backside kicked! A tank full of weeds!" Then, "But this is funny. These were our own seeds."

"It's an experiment," replied Adam truthfully. Then, less truthfully, "The Old Man wants it kept a secret."

"But what *are* they? Nasturtiums? No—hardly . . ."

"Some fancy plant from South America, I *think*. He said something about some new drug . . ."

"He might have told us. *You* might have told us."

"I meant to," lied Adam. The way to keep Howell quiet was suddenly obvious. "But you'd better say nothing about it. He'll go off the deep end if he finds out that you've only just noticed them."

The same tactics served to silence Potter on the other shift.

But, Adam realized, he could not maintain his deception much longer. At any moment Ferson—his ankle mended, the back of his clerical work broken—might take it into his head to indulge in one of his whirlwind tours of the tank rooms. And on these occasions, as all the gardeners well knew, he saw everything and approved of nothing.

If only those buds would open! With a bouquet of Moonflowers in his hand Adam would march straight into the office of Dr. Welton, Head of Research, and blurt out his story. The doctor was a fair man, and would see that credit went where credit was due. There would be no risk that the name *Flora Lunaris Fersonis* would ever appear in any standard work on botany.

On the tenth day the buds opened.

It was Adam's shift and he was working on a tank of lemons, inspecting the leaves and stems of the dwarf bushes carefully for any signs of malnutrition or disease. He became aware that he was being watched. He sighed and thought, *Ferson!* Now I'm for it. Deliberately he did not straighten his back, did not turn around until every one of the plants had been examined. Then, slowly, he stood erect and turned round.

The tank room was empty.

"I could have sworn . . ."

A flicker of movement caught his eye, a flash of color. It, whatever *it* was, was in the pineapple tank. But there seemed nothing amiss. Then, as he stared, incredulous, he saw one of the Moonflowers slowly raise itself erect. There were four blossoms on the stalk, facing him, and they were all of six inches across. The single circular petal was brown and in the centre of it was a smaller disc, shining with the disconcerting blueness

of the eyes of a large Siamese cat.

In his haste Adam forgot the weak Lunar gravity and his dash to the tank brought him into painful contact with the metal side of it. When he recovered his breath he saw that the plant was still staring at him.

Staring? *Plants don't stare,* he told himself. *Plant can't stare.* He looked closer, saw that the structure of the blossoms was utterly unfamiliar. There was a faint suggestion of stamen and pistils—yet the impression he received was of organs of sense rather than of sex.

He put out a hand to touch one of the flowers. The stem bent back away from him, with a motion that was animal rather than vegetable. Adam persisted, and the stem of the Moonflower writhed beneath his touch almost like the tentacle of some marine monster.

Adam was afraid—afraid of damaging the plant. He was not altogether surprised by its powers of movement—after all there are plants on Earth, with its relatively heavy gravity, such as the Venus Fly Trap, capable of far from sluggish motion.

He was excited—too excited, he realized, to deal with the situation. He knew that it would not be long before one of the other gardeners or Grant or even Ferson himself would visit the tropical fruits tank room, and then his secret would be out for fair.

But he had been the first to see a living Moonflower, the first man to see a life-form indigenous to any world but his own. It was very important to him that Mary Blair should be the first woman to share his experience.

He released the writhing stem and walked reluctantly away from the tank to the telephone in the corner of the room. He picked up the instrument and dialed the number of the Canteen. To the woman who answered he said, "Is Miss Blair in? May I speak to her?"

"Personal calls are not allowed."

"But please, this is urgent."

"I'm sorry, but Miss Blair has just gone off duty. Oh, hang on, will you? There she is! *Mary!*" he heard faintly. "Mary! Somebody here wants to talk to you. Says it's urgent!"

"Yes?" said Mary into the instrument.

"Mary, this is Adam here. Will you come to the tank rooms? At once?"

"But, Adam, it's not allowed."

"I know it's not. But come!"

"But how will—"

"That's all right. I'll meet you at the door. Hurry, please!"

"All right," she said.

He slammed the instrument back into its rest, looked once more at the Moonflower, saw that whilst he had been talking the other five plants had bloomed. Like the eyes of Siamese cats the great flowers stared back at him.

He left the tank room, carefully shutting the door behind him. He hung a DO NOT OPEN notice on it. He hurried along the alleyway between the rooms, arrived at the

gate in time to hear the watchman explaining, very slowly and carefully, that visitors were not, repeat, not allowed in the Hydroponics Department.

"That's all right, Sam," he said. "Miss Blair is a friend of mine."

"I don't care if she's a friend of Adam the first gardener, she's not coming in here."

He saw Mary standing behind the burly form of the watchman. She looked hostile.

"I told you so, Adam," she said, "but you wouldn't listen!"

"I'm sorry, Sam," said Adam. He brought his huge right fist up from knee level and Sam saw it coming, but not in time. The force of the blow lifted him a foot from the floor and he drifted slowly down like some ungainly puppet, collapsing in an untidy heap.

"Adam!" screamed Mary. "Have you gone mad?"

"No!" He grabbed her arm, pulled her through the open door. "I want to show you something, something that will make you famous! Something that will make us both famous!"

"Let *go*, Adam! *Please!*"

He ignored her protests, dragged her along the alleyways. By the time he got to the door, the door marked DO NOT OPEN, a crowd of gardeners had gathered, among them Grant. The First Assistant strode forward angrily.

Ormandy! What is the meaning of this?" he asked.

"The first public showing of the Moonflowers, sir! Of *Flora Lunaris Blairensis!*"

"He's off his head. Grab him, you men!"

In the short fight that followed Adam found, to his pleased surprise, that Mary was with him. She kicked the First Assistant's shins, clawed the faces of the two gardeners who were trying to hold Adam. Thanks to her intervention he was able to break free, was able to floor three of his assailants before the arrival of Ferson.

The Head Gardener was furious. He said, his voice icy but with a slight quiver. "This is the finish for you, Ormandy. You return to Earth by the next rocket. And this woman with you."

"Let me open the door, Mr. Ferson. That's all. Let me show Miss Blair my Moonflowers."

"Moonflowers? What *is* this?

"It's some queer plant he's got in there, sir—along with the pineapples," volunteered one of the men.

"Why was I not informed?"

"I thought . . ."

"*You* thought? I'm the only one round here that's paid for thinking. What *is* this, Ormandy?"

"Some seeds, sir, that I found Outside. I planted them."

"You planted them?"

A man came running along the alleyway. He skidded to a halt as he approached the group outside the tropical fruits tank room, the leaden soles of his boots leaving bright smears on the floor.

"Mr. Ferson!" he gasped. "The

pumps! We've had to stop the pumps!"

"What pumps?" demanded Ferson.

"The air pumps. The dome's infested with flying insects and they come from in here!"

Grant swore suddenly, beat with his hand at something that had settled on the back of his neck. It was too fast for him and drifted up and away—a long thin spindle of a body supported by gauzy purple wings. The First Assistant stared after the creature and muttered in a thick voice, "They sting. They . . ." His voice trailed away. He sat down with elaborate caution and announced, "I shall now shing you a comic shong . . .

"It wash the good ship Venush,
You really should have sheen ush,
The figurehead wash a shtrawberry bed . . .

"Fooled you that time, Fershon, you old sho an' sho . . .

"And the masht a . . ."

Adam did not see Ferson kick Grant contemptuously with his heavy boot, did not hear him say, "You're drunk!" He had caught Mary by the arm, half-dragged, half-led her to the door. He flung it open. Before he could shut it a cloud of the flying things surged out—and after the first sharp cries of pain had subsided the voice of Ferson could be heard leading the company in "The Ball of Kerriemuir" . . .

"Both male and female gametes are motile," said Dr. Welton. He took one of his hands from his brow, used it to shake two little tablets from a small bottle on to the surface of his desk. He picked them up, swallowed them, washed them down with a hasty gulp from his water bottle.

"Both male and female gametes are motile," he said again.

Adam reached out for the bottle of tablets. "Doctor," he asked pleadingly, "may I . . .?"

"*No.* That effort of yours has just about exhausted the Colony's supplies." He continued, "It is doubtful if such motility would be possible on Earth, with its heavier gravity. However, possibly the denser atmosphere would compensate for that.

"But we will leave the resolution of such problems to the experts on aerodynamics, who doubtless will be able to determine from this evidence the density of the Lunar atmosphere in the days when life flourished here.

"In time, too, the archaeologists might be able to read the inscriptions on the dome under which you found the seeds. The Selenites, whoever and whatever they were, went to a lot of trouble to save the things from the wreck of their world."

"The Moonflowers themselves, perhaps, were the Selenites," suggested Adam.

"No. Dr. Kretz has been investigating that possibility, and assures me that the plants have about as much intelligence as a rather dumb dog. But let me continue.

"Whether or not the sting was fatal to the inhabitants of the Moon we do not know. This we do know —ordinary aspirin, not these newfangled drugs, prevents any symptoms of—er—hangover.

"However, you realize, of course, Mr. Ormandy, that you cannot stay here. You were guilty of grave breach of contract and by the unwisdom of your actions jeopardized the success of the entire Lunar Project. I do not profess to know what Miss Blair was doing in the tank rooms—but she, with you, will be returned to Earth by the next rocket. And I hope," he muttered, "that the ship brings a full cargo of aspirin."

"May I ask one thing, sir?"

"You may *ask.*"

"Well, Dr. Welton—I should hate to think that my Moonflower is going to be named after Mr. Ferson. I thought perhaps Miss Blair . . ."

"Don't worry about that, Mr. Ormandy. Mr. Ferson may have been drunk—but I have not yet forgiven him for starting the orange fight. And now—*Get out!*"

It was eight months later.

Mary Ormandy stood outside her little cottage, waiting for Adam to return from the United Temperance League meeting. A full moon rode high in the clear sky. As the girl watched she saw the distant streak of fire that was the weekly rocket climb high and higher, become a fast-fading star among the stars.

She did not hear Adam's heavy step, started when she heard him say, "Another load of their so-called holiday makers. Another cargo of fools and louts to desecrate what could have been another Eden . . ."

"But the money," she said. "I was reading that at last the Colony's on a paying basis, that they're even considering opening new pleasure domes."

"Pleasure domes," he grunted. "Pleasure domes! And did you read that somebody else wants to stick a dirty big sign all over the face of the Moon—THE MOONFLOWER BAR?"

"You can't complain, Adam Ormandy," she told him. "You've got your wife and your garden and a generous pension. You've more outside interests than you had"—she pointed—"there."

"Ay," he said slowly. "And it may interest you to know that that interfering swine Murchison found out who I am and has had me expelled from the local branch."

"Adam!"

"Yes. You should have heard him." He pointed aloft. "The new Eden, he said. You know the way he talks—the new Eden. But there was a serpent . . ."

"Adam! How silly! How could he call a *plant* a serpent? Even"—and she sounded a little bitter—"a plant called *Flora Lunaris Bacchusis?*

"It wasn't the plant he called the serpent," said Adam. "It was me."

listen, children ... listen!

by . . . Wallace West

The old man was long dead—but his widow still awaited his return. And one night she heard . . .

MY GRANDMOTHER was fey. At least that's what the neighbors said. She could predict the weather by the way her left heel "eetched." She always knew by some sixth sense when any of her blood was coming down from Indianapolis to visit our tumbledown farm. She insisted she heard angels singing (or sounds considerably more terrifying) during funerals at the New Harmony Church over the hill.

In the eyes of myself and my sister Annette Maw was as old as the gullies which cut up our clay fields. Probably she was about sixty when I first remember her. She still carried her lean body proudly though her back was bowed. She had a gift for mimicry and a merry smile marred by the fact that she had been salivated by taking too much calomel to fight off fever'n'aiger. This misfortune had caused her gums to recede and gave her a snaggle-toothed look. Some of her fangs moved when she ate but, to our eternal wonder, they never fell out.

She had the untiring wreck of a fine alto voice and regaled us with renditions of bloody old hymns or ballads like "The Ship's Carpenter" (*And three times 'round went our gallant ship e'er she sank to the bottom of the sea*) or an endless

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The elements of horror are as many and varied as the threads in a Gobelin tapestry—with special stimuli for each of us. Perhaps terror lies in the howl of a coyote, in the noises of an old house, in a blaze of fire. Or perhaps it responds to the mournful creak of wheels on a gravel road, to moonlight reflected from a huge old mirror.

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garbled song about a girl who masqueraded as a soldier to join her sweetheart in the wars between "Tors and Highlanzer."

I still have nightmares about those childhood years. The Brown murder was a recent memory—Patriarch Brown and his blind wife had been slaughtered by "persons unknown" in a hemlock-shrouded farmhouse half a mile from our cabin. Repercussions of the trial had hardly died away.

There was talk of another investigation and the *persons*—well known to everyone but the law—were prowling the countryside, flashing dark lanterns under doors and shouting threats of what would happen to neighbors who dared tell what they knew. Paw woke one night and fired his squirrel rifle at what he thought was a lantern but which was only a suddenly-flaming fireplace ember. The bullet knocked a newel post off my bed.

Despite the campaign of terror Paw just had to drive to the county seat once a month for supplies. Always he promised to be back by sundown. Always he met some old Butternut cronies—comrades-at-arms in the Knights of the Golden Circle during Civil War days. And in talking about how they had outfoxed and outfought the National Guard sent to punish them for desertion from the Union Army he usually would be delayed until the night closed in.

Then, as Annette and I lay in our bed beside the fireplace, refusing to go to sleep because we knew Paw would bring us presents, Maw would open the front door, hook her bare foot around it and listen, tense with a fear which communicated itself to us.

The katydids might be quarreling. Or the baying of Mr. Morningstar's coon dogs might drift through the fall or winter air. A screechowl's sobbing might cause us to cling together in a shiver.

Finally we'd start whimpering. Then Maw would twist her wrinkled head back through the crack in the door and whisper, "Shhh! Listen, children . . . Listen! I think I hear Josiah's wagon. They hain't got him this time."

Often the belated team turned down some side road. And she would murmur, hardly louder than the katydids, as she resumed her vigil, "Shhh! Listen, children . . . Listen!"

When the hours of tension had set my whole body aching with what folks who don't know call "growing pains" and when the half-opened door had made the room almost as chill as the night, we would actually hear the faraway mournful creak of wheels on the gravel road, the jingle of trace chains, the rumble of a half-empty jolt-wagon bed.

"Thank you, dear just God!" Maw would breathe at last. Then she would follow her bare foot through the door and bustle about reheating the supper coffee and fixing a snack for Paw.

We would hear the wagon rumble into the yard. Next Paw would cuss Old Nell for her contrariness as he

unhitched and led her to the stable. And at last a great grey-bearded man, his arms laden with bundles, would stumble through the front door to be greeted by two elves in long underwear, dancing about him and screaming, "Whatcha got for me, Paw? Whatcha got this time?"

Usually it was jawbreakers or peppermint sticks. Once, when we sold the hogs, it was a store doll for Annette and a marvelous steamboat for me that you wound up with a key and sank the first time I tried it in the branch.

He always brought something pretty and useless for Maw too. And she always scolded and loved him for buying it. Then he'd go over to the creaky chair where Aunt Ellen rocked slowly, pat her plump shoulder and hold out a shell comb, a cheap ring or a handkerchief. And Aunt Ellen would look away from the mirror—for the first time that day, perhaps—take the thing in her plump white hand, and smile.

I should have mentioned Aunt Ellen before but I forgot. In fact, everybody forgot Aunt Ellen. She wanted it so. She had been deeply in love when she was a girl, they said. But her young man had had to see the world before he settled down. So he set out for that strange half-mythical land called Europe. And he never returned.

After she was sure he would not come back Aunt Ellen stopped speaking to people. She took her seat and just looked into the mirror. I remember the rockers of that chair were worn almost through from constant use.

The mirror fascinated Annette and me. It was big—big as our front door and placed against the wall directly across from the entrance, so that if you didn't look closely you thought it *was* another door. And it had a great deeply-polished frame carved with intricate lacelike patterns that hurt your eyes if you looked at them too long.

I now know that it was the only thing of real value in the draughty log cabin. Maw said it was a "heirloom," brought from Virginia by her parents, the Whites, who had been "quality" in the Old Dominion before they migrated after the war of 1812, were stampeded by land agents into "locating" in the wrong part of the state and rapidly dissipated their means on an unproductive wilderness.

Maw had made up a song about that mirror. "The Whites, 'tis said, were privateers when England ruled the waves . . ." was the way it started. And it went on to tell how the mirror was part of their loot when they sacked and scuttled some tall merchantman.

To corroborate this story we had another relic, a "treasure chest" of the same dark wood, iron-bound and strong, which was used as a hens' nest beneath the house. Annette and I crawled under the floor from time to time to see if we could find any treasure still in it. But all we ever found were eggs.

After Paw had taken off his overcoat and Maw had put his packages

in the leanto kitchen he would sit before the fire, suck coffee through his beard and regale us with news from the outside—how Uncle Joe Cannon's control of Congress was about to be broken, what the Young Turks were up to, how T.R.'s trust-busting would boost farm prices and make us all rich again and how They had just found a rusted and bloody monkey wrench in Brown's well.

At last, tired and happy, with our mouths puckered from too many jawbreakers, we'd go back to bed. And we'd wake to a humdrum world which included school, collecting wood, milking our cow, riding Old Nell when she would let us and maybe going to an ice cream social at New Harmony, until it was time for Paw to make another epic trip to Martinsville.

But life was never completely humdrum when Paw was around. He knew every bird by its call, could lead us unerringly to the best raspberry patches and made marvelous popguns, slingshots and "fly killers" out of elder bushes and bits of string. When he tired of such things as the sun went down his tales about Napoleon and Hannibal crossing the Alps would hold us spellbound.

Openhanded to a fault Paw had lost most of his farm through the years by going on neighbors' worthless notes or lending them money and not having the heart to ask for its return. Yet he was the materialist of the family and never tired of poking fun at Maw's voices and premonitions.

Dressed in overalls, shaggy, massive and not always clean, he looked like a poor white. Nevertheless he had had a good education and once confessed to me, when Maw's back was turned, that in his youth he had made a tour of the state lecturing on atheism. And he had an endless fund of slightly bawdy sacrilegious stories which made May click her teeth at him and mourn that he would never go to heaven when he died.

Years slip past like water when one is young. We hardly noticed, Annette and I, that the bend in Maw's back was growing more pronounced and that Paw stopped oftener for breath when he plowed our stubby fields or sawed the endless cords of wood which still could not keep the living room warm when wintry winds swept down from some place that he called Medicine Hat. (Annette and I used to pretend we were on a ship as we walked across the rag carpet in the living room while it billowed upward as air blew under it through cracks in the floor.)

And then one night, after the usual period of listening, when Maw finally had heard the wagon creaking, closed the door and put on the bitter coffee, Old Nell jogtrotted into the yard and stopped without the usual accompaniment of curses. For a while Maw noticed nothing wrong. Then she slowly faced the door, lips firmly drawn over those wobbly teeth.

Annette and I, all ready for our jump out of the warm bed onto the

icy floor, watched her uncomprehendingly until we saw that Aunt Ellen had given over her unending vigil at the mirror and turned her head questioningly. Then we too knew that something was very strange.

As though moved by strings, placing one foot before the other with obvious effort, Maw started toward the door. After an eternity she reached it, opened it, closed it against her bare shank in the old accustomed gesture.

"Josiah!" we heard her scream as the foot disappeared.

With a sigh Aunt Ellen rose and waddled after her.

Maw—she was still strong as an ox and could swing an axe like a man—backed through the door after awhile, holding Paw under the armpits. Aunt Ellen carried his feet as they brought him in.

"The old fool!" Maw was whimpering. "I knew they'd get him. The old fool! I told him not to stay so danged late."

Her eyes were dry and glittering.

After the funeral—Annette and I boasted at school that the Brown murderers had done for Paw although a stroke undoubtedly was responsible—the old cabin never felt quite like home again. First a deluge of uncles, aunts and cousins descended upon us and insisted we sell the farm and move to town.

"Josiah would not have it so," Maw told them while Aunt Ellen nodded corroboration. So they compromised by having a hired hand in to do the plowing and heavier work.

At the start nothing seemed vitally wrong except the absence of Paw's explosive laughter and endless stories, plus a growing dearth of first-class popguns and slingshots. Then, one rainy day when I had been brooding over one of his dog-eared books—"Vanity Fair," I think it was—I looked up, caught sight of Maw, her potato peeling forgotten, sitting tense beside the kitchen table.

I knew what it was that had been bothering me. Maw was still listening . . . always listening now. What I did not realize was that, without Paw's quizzical common sense to balance her, she was slipping imperceptibly into that never-never land which had so often beckoned.

Not long after this discovery I awakened, chilled, as the decrepit Seth Thomas clock clinked midnight. The door was open a crack and I could glimpse, by the last flickering embers, Maw's foot in its accustomed place.

"Maw," I called.

"Shhh! Listen! I think I hear a wagon."

"Maw," I screamed. *"Maw!"*

"What is it, honey?" she asked in her normal voice as she came inside, crossed the room and placed a horny hand on my forehead in one of her rare caresses.

"You'll catch cold," I mumbled, somehow ashamed.

"I was just listening to the katydids. They sound—fresh, like spring-water," she lied.

"Don't listen any more."

"All right, honey, I'll go to bed. Don't worrit yourself."

But she did not keep her promise.

Several months later I came home from school ahead of Annette, who was dusting erasers for the teacher. At the front door I stopped as I heard animated conversation inside. Thinking it was one of the neighbor women, who called occasionally to gossip, I rushed in, eager not to miss anything, then stopped, heart in mouth, terrified.

Aunt Ellen was out of the house on one of the chores to which she now condescended to put her white hands and Maw was occupying the old rocker before the mirror. But what frightened me was the chatter in two distinct voices which still continued.

"Maw," I gulped. "Who—who you talking to?"

"Why, with Mrs.—Mrs. Jones here, of course." She laughed although her eyes refused to meet mine. "Mrs. Jones, this is my grandson I was telling you about. Take off your cap, son, and say—"

"But Maw," I gulped. "There's no one there. It's just your reflection in the looking glass."

"Why—why so it is," she stammered, brushing one brown hand across her eyes. "I was just fooling." She jumped to her feet and started bustling about like her old indefatigable self. "Now run along and fill the wood box. Then wash your hands and help me peel these 'taters. I'm way late with supper, what with having to stop to talk—I mean I must have set down to rest and went to sleep."

Then began one of the strangest battles in the history of fairie—two children against a mirror, for of course I enlisted poor Annette on my side. I tried to explain to Aunt Ellen but she merely smiled understandingly and patted me with one fat hand while her prominent eyes fluttered back to the glass.

I wrote a scrawl to Uncle Bill, my favorite, and he left his hardware store the next weekend and came down from the city with a little chinwhiskered doctor. Since psychiatry was almost unknown in those days the physician looked at Maw's tongue, thumped her chest, asked her a few questions, which she answered with sly humor, and pronounced her sound.

"I think it's you that's imagining things, boy," said Uncle Bill when he took me for a walk in the woods after one of Maw's wonderful chicken dinners. "We're all upset by Paw's going. Just don't worry about things."

"But Uncle Bill," I protested. "I heard what I saw."

"'I know—I know." His lean shrewd face had a worried look, I noticed with an upward glance. "You're a highstrung youngstet. Write me often, though. And I'll come down every time I can. Say—look!" I could almost hear him sigh with relief at an opportunity to change the subject. "There's a patch of violets already. Let's pick some and take them back to Maw and Ellen. It'll make them happy."

After that, of course, I had to carry on the fight with only Annette to help.

We tried everything—went right home when we could have been playing with the other kids after school—got Maw to sing for us by the hour—read out loud to her—inveigled her into the spring woods to pick flowers and look for birds' nests. Oh, it was a brave battle put up by a twelve and a ten-year-old against something alien and, somehow, far wiser than we.

At first Maw managed to banish her visions when she heard us come into the yard. Then we had to strive hard and harder to break the spell.

And one day we both became twins!

It happened when Annette and I came home one time the teacher took sick. It was much earlier than usual and we caught Maw rocking happily before the mirror, gossiping with her reflection.

"I'm so glad you brought your own children to visit me today, Mrs. Jones," she exclaimed the moment our images appeared in the glass behind hers. "My Tommy and Annette don't have many playmates, we live so far from any neighbors. I'm sure they'll be much happier now."

"Aw, Maw," Annette protested as we instinctively ducked out of range. "Those ain't real children. You're just looking at us in the looking glass."

But the damage had been done. For once in my life I saw grandmother grow really angry.

"I'll have none of your sass, Annette," she stormed, rising and straightening her back until it cracked. "Mrs. Jones, I don't know what has come over my younguns. Now, will you two say you're sorry or must I whip you right before company?"

Shamefaced and shaken, we apologized to the empty air. And from that hour Mrs. Jones and her ghostly brats became our constant companions.

At first we hated and resented them, then, childlike, accepted the inevitable and even made the best of it. Sometimes, so real did Maw make the delusion become, we almost believed with her that the shadows were real. On rainy weekends we found ourselves inventing games to play with them. Perhaps, in time, we might have gone to inhabit her world of dreams.

But Maw's health was failing rapidly. We tried to ignore the fact as she did, though it soon became pitifully obvious that Paw's loss had broken the iron will which had sustained her through so many adversities. Aunt Ellen more and more ceded her place before the mirror as she helped Annette and me do the lighter chores and even some of the cooking.

Bill Pailey came over every day now—Maw never paraded her shadows when *he* was around, knowing that the bluff farmer was somehow not to be trusted with such dream stuff. And the money which

aunts and uncles contributed, willingly or grudgingly, was more and more needed to fill the gaps in our finances.

"Tommy," Annette said to me one afternoon as we were plodding home from school along the muddy dogwood-bordered road. "What happens to people when they die?"

"Aw, I don't know," I muttered, kicking a loose stone with my copper-toed shoe. "Maw says the angels come and get 'em and take 'em to heaven."

"But the angels didn't come and get Dickie." Dickie was a wry-necked pin-feathered rooster that Paw had taught to come when we called, dig fishing worms for us and jump through a barrel hoop. "I went to look at Dickie's grave the other day. A dog had dug him up. There were just feathers—and bones."

"Aw," I said. "Chickens don't have souls. But Maw says that when Miz Pailey died last year she was there and she saw—"

"We're going to be awful lonesome, though," my sister sighed. "And you'll have to get up and make the fire every morning."

"What you mean?" I challenged.

"Nothing. Let's run. I'm cold." And she was off in a flutter of long legs, gingham and pale yellow braids.

After such a conversation I hardly dared enter the house that day. When I did go in, after fooling around at the barn as long as possible, I found Maw singing lustily about some man who had gone to the gallows with a white dove riding on his shoulder to prove him innocent of the murder of his sweetheart.

"Where's Mrs. Jones and her kids?" I asked, flabbergasted.

"They went home," said Maw. "I told them to. Can't spend all my time gassing with a ugly old woman like that when I've got housecleaning to do."

And until long after sunset she made the feathers fly from the old pillows, beat up the crackling cornshuck mattresses, sprinkled and swept the floors and polished the meager kitchen utensils till they shone. Annette and I, feeling as if we had been released from jail, helped with a will. Aunt Ellen, reinstated in her rocking chair, frowned and sneezed by turns and said nothing as always.

"There," said Maw at last as she hung the home-made broom behind the kitchen range and sank into a chair, looking suddenly more worn and old than I had ever seen her. "There. It's all swept and garnished for when the bridegroom cometh."

"The bridegroom?" I glanced at her sharply.

"I was just fooling again, son." She stared down at her big-veined hands as they lay clasped in her lap. "Must be getting old, I guess. I just meant that I have a feeling your Uncle Bill will come tomorrow. And you know how fussy he is about everything being neat and clean." She rose reluctantly with a sigh, half of weariness, half of content. "Come. You and Annette get

undressed and get to bed. I'll sing you to sleep like I used to when you were little."

"You look just like my daughter, sir,
Who from me ran away . . ."

Her old cracked voice still had its hypnotic quality and I felt my eyelids drooping despite my certain knowledge that this night, of all nights, I should stay awake.

"Maw," I mumbled. "I wanna drink."

Her bare feet padded into the kitchen. I heard the rattle of tin cup against galvanized bucket. Then she was back at my side again and the springwater was fresh on my dry lips and gums.

"Maw," I rambled on. "I don't wanna sleep. Tell me about when you were a little girl back in Virginia —and the big white horse and the black people . . ."

"Not tonight, honey. You're all tuckered out," she crooned, stroking my forehead and picking up the thread of that interminable song.

"I a-am not your daughter, sir,
And neither do I know.
I a-am from Highlanzer
And they call me Jack Monroe . . ."

I woke with a start, those last lugubrious lines still ringing in my ears.

"She dre-ew out her broadsword.
She bid this world adieu.
Saying 'Goodbye to Jack Highlanzer'
And 'Goodbye to Jack Monroe.'"

Have you ever awakened in a strange place—a hotel room perhaps —tried to locate a familiar lamp, the dim outlines of your own bedchamber, the tick of a friendly clock? Or have you, perhaps, sought frantically for a door with your hands sliding vainly along black and forbidding walls?

This was the same room in which I had gone to sleep. The fire was almost out. By my side Annette breathed deep and slow. I could hear Aunt Ellen snoring not far away. Through the open door a full moon stretched its carpet almost to my bed. Yet, despite these comforting sights and sounds, everything about me seemed topsy turvy and utterly horribly wrong.

My bare toes curled with terror as I realized what it was. Our front door was in the south wall of the cabin. The moonshine was pouring in through a wide opening in the north wall—through the place where the mirror stood! And a cold wind was pouring in with it.

"Maw," I whispered, sitting up and rubbing my eyes.

Only the chorus of katydids answered.

But this was spring! Katydids sang only in the fall!

At the same moment I saw a bare foot and ankle etched in moonlight as it hooked around the age-darkened frame of the opening.

"Please, Maw." I still struggled

between dream and waking. "You'll catch cold out there."

She came partially inside the "door" then and smiled at me. And I noticed, with the lack of surprise which accompanies nightmares, that her teeth were white and firm in the moonglow.

"Shhh!" she admonished. "I think I hear a wagon."

"But Paw is . . ." I began, then stopped spellbound.

Far in the distance, across rolling hills which lay bathed in beauty and above the fresh staccato mutter of katydids, I too caught the creak of wheels on a gravel road, the jingle of trace chains and the rumble of a half-empty jolt-wagon bed.

I crouched, hardly breathing, until I heard the wagon stop briefly at our sagging gate—we always kept it closed now—heard the rusty hinges squeak and then the friendly thump, thumptey, thump of the wagon as it resumed its progress into the yard.

"It's Uncle Bill, ain't it, Maw?" I pleaded.

"Bill's not due till tomorrow, honey," she answered softly as she shaded her eyes against the moonlight. "No, it's . . ."

"But it can't be," I sobbed. "He —the angels took him."

"Not Josiah! Angels wouldn't touch him with a ten-foot pole, thank the dear just God," she chuckled. "He'll have a whole raft of packages after all this while." She started forward briskly. "I'll go help pack them in."

"No, Maw! Don't leave—wait for me!" I screamed, plunging from bed and racing wildly after her receding back.

I regained consciousness to find Aunt Ellen bathing my forehead with hot vinegar. Annette was sobbing. My face was badly cut—I still wear the scar—and the mirror was shattered in its frame.

"Maw!" I struggled to get up. "She . . ."

"I know," said Aunt Ellen in just the thread of a voice unused for years as her plump white hands continued to apply the compress. "I understand."

When Uncle Bill arrived next morning there was a great to-do and the neighbors organized a search of the surrounding woods and the creek bottom. Of course they found nothing. I knew they wouldn't. Annette and Aunt Ellen knew they wouldn't. And I think Uncle Bill knew it too after he heard my story, although of course he wouldn't let on.

The rest of them patted my head and said, "Too bad, poor boy. He's under an awful strain," when I tried to tell them.

Several months later a woman's body was found in White River, full fifteen miles away. People said it must be grandmother, that she must have wandered that far before she died of exposure. Our aunts, uncles, cousins and nephews had a big funeral at the New Harmony Church over the hill.

But Annette and I wouldn't go.

the vertigo hook

by . . . Richard Ashby

Anyone still in doubt as to who won the Civil War ought to read this story. It gives a definite if entirely unsuspected answer.

IT WAS A LONG WAY in time and dimension from his friendly home seas and the Irritant was hungry and ill-humored. The voids about him looked cold, unrelieved by any twinkling of tasty intellect. Not even the flicker of an edible consciousness for eons around. Crossly the Irritant baited a line and cast it in all directions. The bait was a tangled skein of thoughts about Conflict. The hook, a hard and slender curve of sharpened Vertigo.

He began trolling through the blankness of Time . . .

The Major in Air Corps blues pulled a bound sheaf of papers from his smart brief and slid them across the table. "Of course, Ed, my say-so can get pretty damn lost between here and the Pentagon but I think you're a cinch for the job."

He plucked the short cigarette from between his thin lips and snubbed it out in the overflowing petri-dish that served as an ashtray. "And"—Major Hall cocked a speculative eye at his friend—"I can't think of a better way for you to get this joint out of the red."

"Quicker, you mean—not better." Ed Wilkes riffled through the specification booklet. "Lump this for me, huh?"

Even among those who accept time travel as at least a theoretical possibility, there exists a tendency to regard this unseen fourth dimension as something which moves back and forth along a single track. However, now and again some ingenious soul arises with a suggestion that time may move in other directions as well. Not since Murray Leinster's memorable "Sidewise in Time" have we met such a scramble as this.

"Right. But first you tell me something, chum. Why should you, an M.I.T. honor grad—a laddie with more degrees than the Kremlin has Reds—bury yourself down here in the mouldering South, presiding angel over the destiny of an insignificant little college?"

He waved his hand in an encompassing gesture that pointed up the stained lab table, the cracks in the wall and ceiling, the general air of save and make do that characterized the entire campus. "Insignificant and crumbling even when Lincoln was president."

"I like Virginia," Wilkes replied. "I am not buried, I am not presiding angel but just Chair of Higher Math—and this place was new in Lincoln's time. I have no intention of fighting the Civil War with you just now but allow me to say—as a Northerner, mind you—that the South has done pretty good. Now sum up this sheaf of High Brass doubletalk." He tossed the papers back to Major Hall. "First, though, let me call in Mosby."

"Who and why?"

Ed swiveled around and flicked a switch on an office-to-office phone. "Worked with me before the war on the argon-valve gimmick."

"The what?"

"A widget to help stabilize thiotimoline," he obliged with bland level gaze.

"Oh."

Wilkes jiggled the switch again. "Hello, Doc Mosby? Wilkes, Got something that might interest you. Wouldst cross the hall and look in? Swell." He hung up. "You'll like Mosby, Pete. Smart as hell. Awful nice to work with too. We've both got classes this summer."

The door opened and a handsome woman came in, an expectant questioning tilt to the dark wings of her brows. She was in her middle thirties, her bright blond hair tucked into a trim bun, and wore a severly tailored linen suit that almost managed to hide an interesting body.

"Julie, this is Major Peter Hall. He sat out part of the war with me at Wright Field. Pete, Doctor Julie Mosby. Chair of Physics, builder of vigorous martinis and good guy."

The Major scrambled to his feet and took the cool hand she offered him. "Well, he*llo!* I can see why Ed left Northwestern."

"You drafting him? I hope not." She looked from Major Hall to Wilkes to the booklet before them. "What gives?"

"Pete here," said Wilkes as they seated themselves, "bears gifts and assorted tidings. I want you to hear his yarn."

"Well . . ." Major Hall picked up the document and ahemed. "Special Testing and Materials needs a job done. I thought Ed was the man for it, so they sent me down to talk things over.

The prize is a calculator we'll install and leave here and—"

Julie's dark eyes sparkled. "Lawd, Ed! Sign up quick. A calculator! I can see next fall's catalogue now. It'll jump enrollment thirty percent at the very least."

"Yeah," said Wilkes cautiously. "That it might. But hear the soldier man out."

"We want him and his team to come up with a nozzle lining. My guess is that the work would be about nine-tenths sheer math and then a little field work in New Mexico."

"Nozzle, eh." Julie put her elbows on the table, her chin on her folded hands. "Flame thrower? Garden hose?" she asked brightly.

"Rockets, Julie. Seems that V One and Two and the rest of their hive aren't mean enough."

Major Hall opened the booklet and hurried on. "We need a nozzle or nozzle lining that will stand the two or three second change from near zero to full blast temperatures. Frankly the long-range missile business is up a creek. It seems there's a limit to the range."

"Incandescence," Julie offered.

The major looked at her with new respect. "How'd you know? They go too far—they come down too fast. They burn up on reentering lower and denser air. We've got to slow up their approach somehow—anyhow."

"And I'll bet you're going to try using nose rockets to brake with," she mused. "Tried carborundum with pre-heating units?"

"No, we haven't, but . . . How the hell—pardon me—did you guess about braking rockets?" The officer glowered suspiciously. "You doing work for the *Navy?*" He made a mild oath of the word.

Chuckling, Ed Wilkes put a soothing hand on the other's arm. "Hang on, Pete—simmer down. I told you we could use Julie. You see, weapons are her hobby. Check the library lists sometime. You'll find a sweet work there of hers dealing with every persuader from crossbow to tommy gun."

"To say nothing of shillelagh, arbalest and stylet," she added modestly. "Nor of whinyard, hague-but and assagai."

"Well, break me to sergeant!" The Major shook his head wonderingly. "How come a sweet little Southern thing like you got such a bloody mind?"

Wilkes tilted back against the wall. "Runs in her family, Pete. Ever heard of her great-uncle—John Singleton Mosby?"

"Let's see . . ." Hall squinted, pursed his lips reflectively. "Something about mobility . . . Got it—Mosby's raiders. Couple of hundred cutthroats who operated behind Northern lines in the Civil War. Each man carried four or five pistols. Mobility plus firepower. As I recall from a rather dull West Point course—and that was years ago, my children—he raised merry hell with the Union war effort for a time. Even captured a General, didn't he, Ed?"

"General Stoughton," Julie supplied. "And he would have snatched Grant but peace broke out. My father used to insist that he could have won the war for us."

"If?" Hall favored her with a rather indulgent smile. "If he'd just been somewhere at the right time

with the right weapon. A couple of P-thirty-eights, perhaps?"

Julie Mosby studied him calmly. "Hardly—a few-score Garands would have done it. A light submachine-gun like the Thompson or the crude grease-gun."

"Grease-gun?" Wilkes slumped further back in his chair. "That's a new one on me."

"It was quite a weapon," Hall told him. "A few pieces of pipe, some springs and other scraps. They made them in garages during the war. Crude, like Julie says, but damn mean gadgets. Light and rugged. The underground in Europe loved them. Would have been just the thing for your great-uncle Mosby and his crew. But as for his winning the war . . ."

He glanced at his watch, then jumped up. "Judas! I've got to catch a plane out of here in an hour. Enjoyed talking with you, Doctor Mosby. We'll get together again." He nodded his thanks. "And you, Ed? Are you in on this nozzle project?"

"Don't know." Ed Wilkes regarded Julie's eagerness. "Let's leave it up to you, Julie. It'll be a big thing for the school. You see, Pete, the place is only partly State supported—Julie's family has been making up most of the balance for years—and they must be weary of it. I don't like the idea of bigger and better weapons—you both know me that well—but I guess I hate what's with Europe and Asia even worse."

"Then us ole Rebels," Julie said, "we all'd be proud to help y'all Nawthners."

"Fine." The officer stepped aside to let Julie pass first through the door.

"Let's have a couple of beers with the Major, Ed. Is there time?"

Hall frowned at his watch. "I suppose. And we can settle a couple of the whens and wherefores of the project."

They left the Science building together, walked down the worn stone steps and out onto the rather neglected-looking June campus.

"There's a student beer hell about a block from here," said Julie. "Will that do, Major?"

"Umm?" Hall was eyeing the rolling black sky. "Oh, yes—fine. Hope it's not going to storm. My flight'll be scratched and I've got to be in Washington by five at the latest." The first big drops came spattering down. "Damn! Left my raincoat in the staff car."

The three hurried past a blighted, moss-grown statue of a wounded Confederate soldier saluting General Lee in full uniform.

When the first tug of intelligence registered, the Irritant was sleeping restlessly. The second brought him out of troubled dreams. At the third he hauled in. Nothing —nothing but a jumbled scattering of low-order babble and memories and impressions. Not enough for a meal.

Angrily, he examined the trashy catch—three minor intelligence——mental pictures of a crude some-

thing that stored, then propelled bits of metal forward—and . . . The Irritant took more careful note —A weave of thoughts about some other intelligence called johnsingle-tonmosby. And close at hand too. Just a few moves to the side, then around.

The Irritant patiently fashioned a new bait—a summary of the concepts concerning the metallic object—the tube attached so to the middle attached so to the rest, then filled with that which coiled and slid and turned. Might be just the lure.

Done! Now . . . the quarry should be about . . . here!

Out went the bait into space-time.

The ordnance sergeant, Jake Lavender, looked up from the Sharps carbine he was repairing. "Huh?"

There was no reply.

Frowning he took an oily rag and began wiping the bolt he had filed into a better fit. Sure as thunder someone had called out the captain's name. Or whispered it, more like. His gaze darted about the littered barn loft—boxes of ammunition, two saddles, piles of stolen rifles and an empty bunk. No room for anyone to hide.

Sergeant Lavender vigorously renewed his wiping.

. . . johnsingletonmosby . . .

"By God!" He snatched up a loaded pistol and rose. That voice had been as close as his skin. "Show yourself," he bawled.

At the far end of the loft a door creaked open and a short slender man, pistol in each hand, came out blinking sleepily. "What in blazes is the matter with you, Jake?"

"Somebody called you, Captain. I could'a sworn it! Somebody right here." He indicated the room with a nervous wave of his pistol. "Used all three of your names too. Like whisperin', it was. Captain, sir—you all right? Sir? *There!*—you hear 'em? A woman and a man, whisperin' something about a daft sorta gun. Who is it, Captain? How are we hearin' 'em?"

When the hackles rose just so high on Jake Lavender's neck he fainted.

His captain followed suit a few moments later.

. . . glanced at his watch, climbed respectfully to his feet. "Madam, my pardons but my visitor's visa is up tomorrow noon. I'll have to ride till night to catch the Shenandoah stage or I'll never make my morning steamboat connections to New York."

The artillery major, Peter Hall, bowed gravely to his hostess. "It's extremely kind of such an important personage as yourself, Miss Mosby, to spend a while with a poor foreigner."

He straightened, studied his friend. "Well, Ed, are you in on this project? Our Government needs your help if we are ever to perfect an electric cannon. And you are, remember, still a Union citizen."

"I haven't forgotten, Pete." He regarded Julie Mae's placid face. "It's sort of up to you, Miss Julie.

I don't like the idea of bigger and better weapons—you both know me that well, but I guess I hate what the French are doing in Mexico even worse."

"Our Governments now stand together, Major. Ed has my leave to do the research."

"Fine." The officer stepped aside to let Julie Mae pass first through the door.

"Have y'all time for refreshments before leaving, sir? There's a very proper tavern on the campus."

Hall frowned at his watch. "I'll make the time, Ma'am."

Julie Mae Mosby, heir to her family's huge grants and honorary president of the culturally important Mosby University, patted a long curl into perfection with her folded fan. "I've learned one thing from y'all. Not all Northernahs are the uncouth messes your Erskine Caldwell says y'all are."

The officer managed a bleak smile. You refer to his 'Marijuana Road'?"

Julie Mae nodded, allowed herself to be helped down a short flight of lustrous tiled steps. "That's the very book. I should think y'all'd be mighty unhappy with that scamp."

"He's not too well received in polite Union circles, I assure you, Ma'am."

Professor Wilkes decided his friend had taken enough. "Miss Julie's just teasin' you, Pete. She's traveled quite extensively in Union."

"That's where I met Ed here, major. Three or four years ago—nineteen forty-eight, I believe. He was slavin' his little ole brains away at dinky little Northwestern U." The woman nodded graciously to a bowing negro slave, trilled her charming laugh. "Why, Major, I do believe it's storming up to rain. If I'm going to walk with y'all to the tavern someone's going to have to give me his coat. Professor?"

"Certainly, Miss Julie. Here."

They paused at the end of the wide and gleaming hallway, staring out across the splendid campus at the rolling black sky.

"Rain," grumbled the Major. "And my horse is a bad mudder. I've got to be in Fredericksburg by nine to make connections."

The first big drops came sailing down. "Heck! Hope my cape is in the saddlebag."

The three hurried past a magnificent group of marble statuary that depicted Grant surrendering to Lee. Beside them stood General Mosby with his once incredible home-made grease-gun.

When his leisurely feast was done the Irritant launched himself in the direction of home and before he had coasted a single thousand years or so was fast asleep.

date of publication 2083 A.D.

by . . . William Morrison

Lending libraries have been known to make mistakes—but never one so potentially explosive as the time they sent Carrie the wrong volume.

IT SEEMED INCREDIBLE, thought Carrie Samason, that a simple postcard like that could have involved her in so much trouble. If it had been something important, like her getting a new hairdo, or rearranging the living room, or buying a new evening gown, she might have expected all sorts of perfectly amazing results to follow. But from the postcard and the fact that she had sent James instead of going herself, she expected nothing at all.

It had come, she remembered, that morning when she was so busy getting Barbara ready to go back to college. All those clothes to try on, and hems to let out and shoes to fit, and right in the middle of everything, "Dear Madam," she was informed, "*The Perfect Hostess* by Wilhelmina Hoskins, which you reserved, is now being held for you. Please call for it within the next 48 hours."

At first Mrs. Samason was annoyed. She had reserved the book three months before and her feeling of need for it had long since died away. Nevertheless, it occurred to her, a book which was in such demand that you had to wait three months for it must be pretty good. It wouldn't hurt to take a look at it. She spoke to

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Hypnotism, as anyone who has ever watched a snake charm a bird knows, is far older than homo sapiens. Yet only since the eighteenth century days of Dr. Mesmer has it emerged from priestly mumbo-jumbo into the realm of science. Even today, despite its wide medical usage, hypnotism is not wholly accepted. But in a hundred years . . .

James about it, but he was only eleven and there was a baseball game in which he had to pitch and he didn't have any time, and honest, Mom—

"Either you get that book for me or you don't receive your allowance for next week," she said firmly.

James got the book for her. But on the way home he stopped off to play baseball and when he finally arrived, she recalled, she hadn't asked him about it.

The next morning she remembered it just as he was leaving for school. "I put it in the parlor, Mom," said James and departed.

But she couldn't find it in the parlor and there were so many things to do, like cleaning up the mess Barbara had left in her room and fixing the rips in James' pants —she wondered if any other eleven-year-old on earth could rip so much so often—that she forgot all about it for a while.

It was as if there had been no postcard, no book. At least that was the way it was for a time.

Two days later, when Bill came home from work, he dumped himself into an easy chair and said, "Saw a funny thing today."

"I had a letter at last from Barbara," said Carrie absently, patting her hair into place and wondering what her husband would think of her if now, at the age of forty, she dyed her hair red.

Bill always told her that as a brunette she was both young-looking and pretty. The question was, would he tell her the same thing if she were a redhead? Probably not. Men were foolishly conservative about such things.

"Barbara said school supplies are very expensive this year," she went on. "She wants more money."

"It was really funny." If she could ignore his conversation he could ignore hers right back. That was one of the unfortunate things, she realized, that marriage taught a man. "You know that vacant lot with the broken fence, where the kids play? Know who I saw playing baseball there today?"

"James, of course. But, Bill, Barbara said—"

"James was pitching. But you'll never guess who was catching."

Bill was being silly, just like the big baby he was. At his age, to think that a children's baseball game was important! But she didn't mind humoring him. She guessed, "That big puffy-faced boy from down the street, with the hair so blond it's almost invisible?"

"No." He leaned back, waiting for her to guess again.

"I'm sure I haven't any idea who it was," she said. "But does it matter? According to Barbara—"

"It was Reardon, the cop. You know, the one with the stomach."

"Reardon?" She stared at him. "Why, he's been chasing them off that lot every day. He *hates* kids. You must be mistaken."

"I'm not mistaken. He was catching there, acting like a kid himself, when who should come along out of a police car but Lieutenant Puffinger from the local precinct.

Well, you should have heard him when he saw what Reardon was doing. I'll bet those kids learned a few words they didn't know before. It seems that Reardon hadn't made his call from the street box and the cars were scouting around trying to find out what had become of him. And here he was playing baseball!"

"Imagine that!" said Carrie. But her heart was still elsewhere. She said, "Barbara says . . ."

So they talked of how much money to send Barbara. And Carrie thought that nobody could tell *her* how to manage a husband. You pretended to listen to him and whatever he said you let go in one ear and out the other, while you kept your mind on the really important thing. But she was to remember Reardon later.

The next day there was a rumpus at the school. What happened there was even more incredible than the doings of Reardon. The local Superintendent was proud of his neatly operated educational system, and had set that date for showing around a group of distinguished visitors.

Neither the newspapers nor Carrie ever managed to get straight at exactly what point things had begun to go wrong. When they tried to trace the events of that day practically all the distinguished visitors, including two college presidents, the president of the Board of Education, a Professor of Educational Psychology and two heads of Normal Schools gave different and conflicting stories.

What did come out, however, was that all six visitors had distinguished themselves in a quite unexpected way. They had run around the school madly waving torches and yelling, "Down with school! Down with school! Burn the place down!"

The firemen had arrived in time to prevent much damage but the incendiaries had been rounded up only with great difficulty after school had been dismissed. The President of the Board of Education had beaten up the Superintendent and the two college presidents had ganged up on one of the hastily summoned policemen. Later on they could give no reason for why they had done so.

"It's a crazy world," thought Carrie wisely. "You never know what sort of lunatic you'll run into next." And then she put it out of her mind and turned to a more important problem. What could she have for dinner that night that would please Bill and not make him say, "You *know* I never eat spinach,"—or broccoli or her new sauce or whatever it was he was never eating that week?

All the same it didn't surprise her greatly when Bill came home the day after and said, "You'll never guess what happened at the office."

"Somebody else went crazy."

"Nobody went crazy. We all slept."

"What?"

"We all slept. At ten o'clock

Mr. Elvergard came in and said, 'All right, boys and girls, we've been working too hard, all of us. Let's take a nice long rest today, shall we? Put your pretty little heads on your pretty little desks. One, two, three, snooze!'"

"You're joking!"

"Cross my heart and hope to die. We all fell asleep and we stayed asleep till four-thirty and then he woke us up and sent us home early so we wouldn't get caught in the worst of the subway rush."

Carrie looked at him and said absolutely nothing. What had happened at school had been bad enough. But this was absolutely incredible. There were times when Bill was a great kidder and she wasn't sure whether to take him seriously or not. This appeared to be one of the times when he was not to be taken seriously. Even if there were the faintest chance that he was telling the truth she thought it best not to encourage him by pretending to believe a story like *that.*

It was harder, however, to take things as a joke when something just as silly happened to her. In this case she could remember almost every word exactly, without having the slightest idea of what had caused the whole conversation to take so unexpected a turn.

The usual group was in for bridge. They had been playing for about half an hour—that skinny Mrs. Cayley munching away daintily at all the richest cakes as if she thought they might put some decent flesh on her, Mrs. Munro making a great fuss about the fact that the special candies she was eating were non-nutritive and therefore non-fattening, the others just eating normally and too much as the mood struck them. Mrs. Munro was dummy, and by some shrewdly ill-timed advice managed to make her partner go down three.

Her partner was furious but Mrs. Munro just giggled. "You'll never guess whom I saw with somebody else's wife," she said in her loud whisper.

"Really?" said Mrs. Cayley. "Janet's husband?"

"Not in a million years. It was *my* husband!"

Carrie sat up as if she had received an electric shock. This was a new sort of gossip.

"Well, at least your Bruce has good taste in women," said Mrs. Cayley generously. "Now, when *my* husband steps out—well, really, I'm ashamed of him. Of course, I suppose he does the best he can, poor dear."

That was the way it went the rest of that afternoon. When Carrie thought back to it later she shuddered. She had never before taken part in such a gossip session and she hoped that she never would again. Each of them had chatted, not about some absent individual but about herself and her own relations. What skeletons had popped out of the closets!

It was the morning after that Barbara's letter came. "We had the funniest basketball game last night," wrote Barbara. "Our team was play-

ing the girls from State College and right in the middle of the game, when it was so exciting and we were all yelling like mad, our captain, instead of shooting at the basket, suddenly stopped and said, 'This is no fun, girls. Let's aim for something big.'

"And she turned right around and threw the ball as hard as she could at Professor Hazlehurst's head, the one who teaches chemistry. You know—I've told you about him. And then all the players began to throw the ball at people in the crowd.

"You can imagine the uproar! The referees were blowing their whistles and all the girls were yelling and rushing to get out and I was afraid some of them would get hurt. But at last President Newsom managed to quiet things down and they stopped the game.

"They've called in Professor Griggs, who teaches Psychology, but she admits that she hasn't the slightest idea why it happened. Some of the girls say it was gamblers and they bribed the players but that's *so* silly. Nobody ever bets on *our* games.

"It's just one of those mysteries that it looks as if they'll never solve."

Carrie read with amazement, going back again and again to make sure that she hadn't misinterpreted Barbara's straggly script. She hadn't. Toward the end of the letter Barbara added something that surprised her almost as much as the account of the basketball game.

"You'll never guess who wrote to me—*your dear son, James!* It's the first time in his life he ever had anything to say to his sister. It must have been quite a sacrifice for him to spare the three cents for the stamp. But seriously, Mother, I was *touched.* He's *really* a very good kid at heart. He didn't say much but from him the very idea of writing means a lot. I've misplaced the letter now but I'll let you see it later. It was so very amusing."

She would have to say something nice to James, thought Carrie. He was, she agreed with Barbara, a most thoughtful boy. He had changed of late. Not that he behaved very differently about hanging up his coat or leaving his shoes in the middle of the floor at night but there was something about him, she couldn't tell what, that made her feel he was a treasure among sons, a joy and a comfort.

She was aware of a feeling of pride in him that night when she and Bill left him staring at the television set. He had promised faithfully to go to bed at 9:30 and as she kissed him she said, "Don't forget to have a glass of milk and some jam and bread."

"And don't forget to go to bed at nine-thirty," growled Bill.

"He won't forget," said Carrie. "He promised. Goodnight, dear."

As he closed the door behind them Bill said, "Bet he stays up till ten at least."

"You don't appreciate him," re-

plied Carrie. "He's an extraordinary boy."

"No different from any other kid —except that he's ours."

"He's very much different. I'm afraid you're not very perceptive about these things."

Bill growled again, something unintelligible this time, and the conversation died down. *The romance is out of our marriage,* thought Carrie. *A husband like Bill is never very polite. Except, of course, to other men's wives. He takes me for granted, just as he takes his children.*

Bet he won't behave to the others tonight as casually as he behaves to me. I remember that time Mrs. Gamber was over at the Munros'. You would have thought that woman was a poor delicate fragile little flower who had to be tenderly cared for. Whereas we all know she has the strength of a horse. Looks a little like one too. What any man can see in her . . .

"Why, hello, Mrs. Gamber," she said as they entered the Munro house. "I was hoping so much that we'd find you and your husband here again this evening. Clara said that you were afraid you wouldn't be able to get out. How is little Elsie?"

"Much better, thank you."

So much for formal politeness. Bill, of course, was all set to treat her with his usual tenderness when Clara Munro said, "They have the most wonderful program on tonight. Let's look at it for a while."

Carrie didn't mind at all. At least looking at the screen would keep Bill from worrying too much about Mrs. Gamber. Although, goodness knows, if they had meant to watch television they might just as well have stayed home with their own son.

But Clara was right about one thing. The program was wonderful —unexpectedly wonderful.

The master of ceremonies came out and announced the famous personalities he was going to display within the next few minutes, and then there were the usual commercials and after that the first dramatic sketch. It was a love scene between the current great lover and a very famous leading lady. It would have brought tears to the most callous viewer's eyes. Only . . .

Only, the great lover suddenly became an exact duplicate of Bill, and the leading lady was Mrs. Gamber. Carrie rubbed her eyes but that was how they looked. Then she stared around at Bill and Mrs. Gamber then in the room with her, then at Clara Munro and the others. No one seemed to see anything strange.

She felt that she couldn't stand it. At the most tender moment her fists clenched and she found herself standing up. "*Stop* it!" she shouted.

The great lover, who looked like Bill, seemed to turn and look right at her. And then the telephone rang and he no longer looked like Bill at all. He wore a six-shooter and a ten-gallon hat and chaps and

spurs. He answered the phone, and said, "Them diamond-backed owl-hoots are raiding the Bar-B spread, pardner, down in Red-Eye Gulch. Gotta act fast to stop them, pardner."

Carrie's eyes opened wide. The tone was caressing, full of tender passion. But the words . . .

The leading lady had changed too. She no longer looked like Mrs. Gamber. She replied happily, "If we spur our hosses, pardner, we can ambush them galoots at Baldeagle Pass. Shake a leg, pardner, and we'll larn them rattlers a lesson they'll never furgit."

The scene blacked out. After a second or two a perspiring master of ceremonies appeared and stammered, "Ladies and gentlemen, due to technical difficulties beyond our control we—er—cannot bring you the rest of this touching love scene. However, I know you'll just love our next attraction, a juggling act by that famous foursome, the Juggling Jugheads."

Everything that the Juggling Jugheads touched seemed to be under a curse. It dropped—dropped and shattered. Carrie had never been part of such an embarrassed audience. It was the most painful thing, outside of seeing Bill and Mrs. Gamber, that she had ever witnessed.

Next came a comedy act. This was even worse. A famed star of slick sophisticated comedy told jokes and made puns of which James would have been ashamed. Carrie hid her head in her hands.

She said suddenly, "This is just *too* awful. Clara, please turn it off."

Clara Munro was looking dazed herself. She turned off the set and said, "What on earth happened to them? In that first scene the hero and heroine looked like you, Carrie, and Mr. Gamber."

"Like *me?*"

"Like *you,* Clara," said Mr. Munro.

Carrie said, "I think we must all be seeing things. Anyway, they're usually so *good.* And tonight they were terrible."

"There seems to be some sort of insanity abroad," said Bill. "And it almost looks as if it's catching."

That was it, she thought. It *was* catching. She wondered where it would strike next.

When they got home that night they found James peacefully asleep. The glass from which he had drunk his milk was in the kitchen sink, along with the knife he had used to spread his jam. He had been a very obedient boy, thought Carrie, and once more her heart warmed to him.

But he had his weaknesses. She realized that the next day when she was once more reminded of the book. It happened in the afternoon, after she had read another of Barbara's letters. Barbara was writing with a frequency little short of amazing. The basketball incident in the college was still the subject of discussion and she just *had* to tell her mother how exciting things were. But behind that, felt Carrie, there was something else. Barbara

was developing a sense of responsibility. She was growing up at last.

Why, it was just a little while ago, the thought, that Barbara was a tiny infant. And now she'll be graduating from college and getting married—and . . .

It was thus the most natural thing in the world for her to begin planning the details of Barbara's wedding. Maybe it would be a morning wedding, she thought. How many people should they invite? What sort of food should they serve and what arrangements should they make about a reception?

It was these questions that reminded her of the book. *The Perfect Hostess* would have all the answers if anything would. But where was *The Perfect Hostess* hiding?

She began to make another search for it. But *The Perfect Hostess* seemed to be a canny book. It was nowhere she looked, not in the parlor nor in the hallway nor in the bookcases, which she explored in the vain hope that some spasm of neatness had struck her son.

"The little silly must have put it in his own room," she muttered finally. She climbed the stairs to look there.

It was not on any of the shelves with his games or his other books. But when she lifted his pillow, she saw it at last. She opened the cover, and her library card stared her in the face. Then the book opened to the middle, apparently of its own accord, and a dirty thumbprint looked up at her. Obviously, James had been reading *The Perfect Hostess.* What on earth had got into him to do it?

At that moment she heard the front door slam, and the next moment he was bouncing up the stairs. She turned around and faced him sternly. "James, what do you mean by hiding this book? You told me you put it in the parlor."

He said hoarsely, "Look, Mother," and made a sudden motion with his right hand. Carrie felt her eyes glazing when suddenly the front door bell rang. That roused her. She closed her eyes and shook her head. For a moment she had had the queerest feeling.

James said, "Mother — please, mother," and made the same motion again.

This time it was a bellowing voice that saved her. *"Vegetables!"* it called. The voice's owner had grown impatient of waiting and had opened the front door. *"Vegetable order!"*

James was about to make the motion a third time when Carrie acted. Whatever possessed her to do such a thing she didn't know. It was as if some hidden person had given her a command and she had misunderstood it. She slapped his face as hard as she could, and James fell back on the bed. She stood there, horrified at herself, when for a third time the voice called, *"Vegetables! Say, lady, I can't stand here waitin' all day!"*

She ran down the stairs and said breathlessly, "Put them down. I'll pay you tomorrow. I have no time now. Please come back tomorrow.

No, wait. Stay here for just another minute, and yell 'Vegetables' again after I go back upstairs."

Then she ran upstairs again, leaving him scratching his head in bewilderment.

James was picking himself off the bed, looking more frightened than angry. He made a motion with his hand once more, but uncertainly this time and Carrie did not let him finish it. She didn't even need the cry of, *"Vegetables!"* to save her. She leaped at him and held his hands down to his sides. Then she tried to tie him down with a pillow case. James was strong for his age and he struggled hard but she was more desperate than he and she won.

"Stay there," she ordered. Then she picked up the book again.

The Perfect Hypnotist," she read. "By William Haskins. 2083. U. S. Govt. Press."

Why—*2083* was the date of publication, wasn't it? Impossible! The book had been handed out by mistake, of course, for *The Perfect Hostess,* but *2083*—incredible. It wasn't due to be written and published for another hundred years. You just couldn't confuse a book with something so far from coming into existence.

In a trance, she turned the page. "Hypnotism is no subject for the uninitiated," she read. "It is a useful but at the same time a most dangerous weapon in the arsenal of psychological treatment. The enormous advances made in the past century, especially from 1978 on . . ." The past century—the more than a century yet to come, she thought.

Impossible, she told herself again. This was *not* published in 2083. Or rather, it *wouldn't* be published until 2083. Why, the important discoveries wouldn't begin to be made until 1978. Then, what was it doing here?

"This book is therefore not meant for general circulation and should be kept out of the hands of all but qualified medical men . . ."

It should, should it? She looked at the last of chapters. *Hypnotism, General — Hypnotism, Direct — Hypnotism at One Remove—Hypnotism at Second Remove—Specifically Directed Hypnotic Acts—Generally Directed Hypnotic Conduct — Hypnotism as Therapy — Mass Hypnosis — Hypnotism via Electromagnetic Waves — Reverse Electromagnetic Effect . . .*

The list was incredible. The book looked thin enough, but there were over a thousand pages in it. It was full of information. Too full.

She still didn't understand how it had got to the library shelves but at least one thing was clear. James must have started reading it that very first day when he had got it for her. He must have realized what it was and hidden it so that he might have a chance to study it. *Hypnotism Direct*—that had been Reardon. *Hypnotism at Second and Third Removes*—that had been Bill acting on his office, her-

self on her bridge group, Barbara on her college mates. The *Reverse Electromagnetic Effect*—that had been all those weird happenings over television.

She stared at her bound and gagged son. If it hadn't been for that postcard and if she had gone for the book herself instead of sending James, this wouldn't have happened. As it was the book had turned him into a little monster.

Her own child! And she had thought that he was becoming such a fine upstanding young man of late! Had he hypnotized her into thinking that? Probably. Just as he had tried to hypnotize her again before. Let her untie his hands and he'd snap his fingers and in a moment her eyes would glaze . . .

She shuddered. She couldn't let him loose. But she couldn't leave him there like that either. You can't keep a child bound and gagged for the rest of his or your natural life. You can't do it for more than a few hours. Sooner or later, even if it were only to permit him to eat, she'd have to untie him and then . . .

She stared down at the book in her hands. How *had* it got here? Had some irresponsible person in the year 2083 or so read it, just as James had done, and then gone around hypnotizing people at random? Perhaps he had hypnotized someone who could operate a time machine and the bewildered scientist had sent it backward in time.

She caught herself up short. Such speculations, to a practical woman like Carrie, were silly. The important thing was that here, before her, were a thousand pages of useful but dangerous information—how dangerous she could only guess. So far James had done little actual harm but let his resentment be aroused, let him want really to revenge himself on some one, and he'd be the most dangerous human being alive.

Her eyes ran down the list of chapters again. They seemed endless. *Hypnotism by Gesture—Hypnotism by Mechanical Means—Hypnotism by Autosuggestion—Posthypnotic Suggestion* — and finally a whose series on *Erasure.*

Erasure—that sounded interesting. What were you supposed to erase? There were different subheadings—*Erasure of Susceptibility Erasure of Specific Directives—General Erasure.*

She sat down and read with a concentration she had not shown in years.

Two hours later she thought she knew what to do. First she did what the book said was necessary to protect herself. Then she said, "James, look at me."

James looked and she began to erase. An hour later she decided he was safe and untied him.

Then she sat down and wrote Barbara a letter. She knew that after Barbara had read it through a few times, the first time in bewilderment, the second and third times with a feeling of obedience, she would follow her mother's instructions perfectly and end by

burning the letter, just as she had burned the one James sent her.

Of those most directly affected that left only Bill. Reardon? He was all right, she thought. James had victimized him after reading no more than the first chapter or two. He hadn't yet read enough then to be really dangerous. But Bill . . .

She had a little talk with her husband directly after supper. It was short, it was simple, it was sweet. When she had ended Bill remembered nothing and felt fine. He *was* fine.

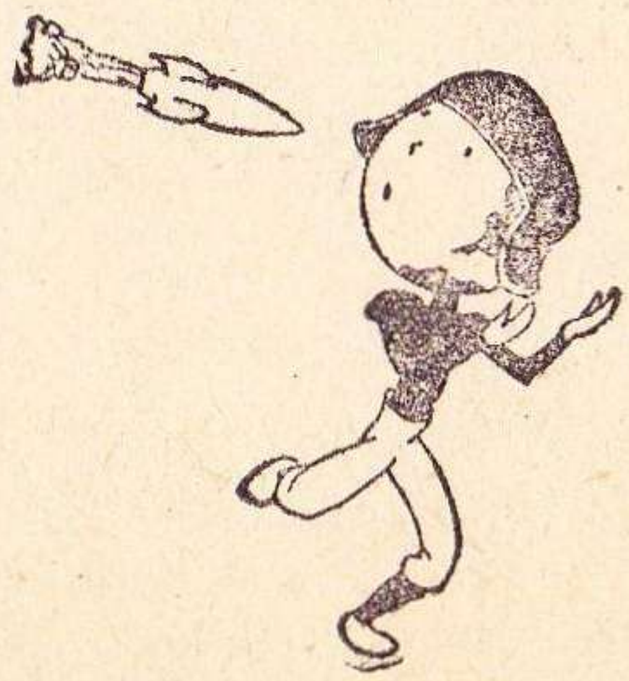
There was one more chapter to apply, the one on *Autoerasure.* That required careful planning, carefully thought-out suggestions. When she had completed all she had ordered herself to do she threw the book into the furnace and watched it burn, stirring the fragments to make sure that it was completely consumed.

All was forgotten. *All* was fine. Nothing had ever happened.

A few weeks later there came a postcard. "Dear Madam," it read. "The book, *The Perfect Hostess,* by Wilhelmina Hoskins, which is charged to your card, is now two weeks overdue. Please return it at your earliest convenience. There is a charge of one cent for each day overdue."

What on earth were they talking about? Carrie wondered vaguely. She hadn't been to the library in months. "James," she called, "Did you ever get me a library book called *The Perfect Hostess?*"

"Gosh, no, Mom," said James.



Two big ones coming up in the next issue of FU—short novels by Poul Anderson and Margaret St. Clair, along of course with the largest and most varied menu of shorter stories and novelets currently to be found in the entire field.

Anderson's novel, "The Sensitive Man," is a swift, ingenious and hair-raising tale of intrigue set in the near future. While Mrs. St. Clair looks at time ahead from virtually a diametrically opposite speculation, in her exciting "The Rations of Tantalus." These two big stories lend themselves not only to speculation but to the finest science fiction entertainment.

the undoing of carney jimmy

by . . . Dal Stivens

Diet can be a problem at times in the remote Australian bush—especially when the main course begins to talk about the food.

ONE DAY WHEN Carney Jimmy, the hatter—which means a lonely prospector in the Australian bush—was tethering a lizard to a sapling with a piece of string, it cocked its head over its shoulder and asked, "Why pick on me? Why not on one of my mates?"

"I assure you it ain't anything personal," said Carney Jimmy when he'd thought it out. "I have to make sure of my Sunday dinner and you happened to be the easiest carney to catch." Jimmy had won his nickname by the number of carney lizards he had devoured.

"Well, leaving me out of it," said the carney, trying another line. "Ain't you making it a bit solid on us carneys? As far as I can make out you've lived on nothing but carneys for the last four years. You know what they call you around these parts—Carney Jimmy. You know that?"

"Five years," said Carney Jimmy. "You know about sticks and stones."

"Five years then," said the carney, squinting an eye. "Five years at, say, four hundred carneys a year is an awful lot of carneys. You're feeling all right?"

"Fit to kick the backside off an

Until very recently Australia, rather than Africa, has been the Dark Continent, at least literarily speaking. Its people have been too busy pioneering and getting settled to take time out for art. But in very recent years things have been happening Down Under which indicate that something new is about to be added to the world's cultural pattern. If Carney Jimmy is a tipoff we hope it's a flood.

emu!" said Carney Jimmy. "Why do you ask?"

"I just wondered," said the carney. "Do you really mean you could kick the backside off an emu?"

"I reckon I could," said Carney Jimmy. "No trouble at all."

"I'd like to make a bet you wouldn't be game," said the lizard. "I could bet my grandfather—he's the big one."

"Too tough," said Carney Jimmy. "I could have caught him any time in the last five years."

"My wife then."

"Now you're talking," said Carney Jimmy. "I've been trying to catch her for three years. And with Christmas coming along . . ."

"It's a bargain then," said the carney. "I'll bet my wife that you can't kick the backside off—"

"Not so fast," said Carney Jimmy. "I ain't falling for it. Emus can kick like Clydesdales and maybe I did talk a bit big and maybe I ain't as well as I used to be."

"It's clear you need a change of diet," said the lizard. "It stands to reason if you eat too much of the same thing."

"You might have something there," said Carney.

"Of course I have. Now, how about a course of rabbits?"

"It's an idea," said Carney Jimmy, scratching his head. "But they're damned hard to run down and I'm not as young as I used to be."

"You're still quite fast on your feet if I'm any judge," said the carney. "You'd be a match for most rabbits in these parts."

"Nice of you to say that," said Carney, "but I ain't falling for it."

"Well, all I can appeal to now is your patriotism," said the carney. "You and I are Australians but the rabbits ain't—they're pommies, you know."

"By hang, you're right!" said Carney Jimmy, after he'd thought it out, and he untied the carney and set him free . . .

Running down the rabbits gave Carney Jimmy a lot of trouble but after a couple of years he could catch all but the young bucks and instead of half a dozen carneys tethered to saplings there were half a dozen rabbits tied up outside the bag humpy.

One day when Carney was tethering his two-thousandth rabbit to a sapling it twisted its head round and asked, "You feeling all right?"

"Fit to eat a tiger-snake alive!" said Carney. "Why do you ask?"

"I just wondered," said the rabbit. "Do you really mean you could eat a tiger-snake alive? I'd like to make a bet with you."

"I ain't falling for it," said Carney Jimmy. "Tiger-snakes are dangerous and maybe I did talk a bit big and maybe I ain't as well as I used to be and what's more you ain't half as smart as the carney. He worked on me a bit longer and what's more appealing to my patriotism won't work because you're a pommy."

"Pommy nothing!" said the rabbit indignantly. "I was born here and so was my great - great - great - great - great - great - great - great -

great - great - great - grandfather and that's more than you can claim unless you want to tell me you're an abo."

"Maybe you're an Australian after all," said Carney Jimmy, tipping back his old felt hat. "But so are the carneys. So patriotism's out. And what's more I don't like the crack about me being an abo."

"I never said any such thing," said the rabbit. "But come to think of it you have been going a bit black in the face but that's because you need a change of diet. Such as snakes—they're white meat."

"Maybe you've got something there," said Carney, after he'd thought it out, and he let the rabbit go . . .

Catching tiger-snakes gave Carney Jimmy a lot of trouble but after a couple of years he could pounce on all but the nimble young ones and instead of half a dozen rabbits there were always six tiger-snakes tied up outside the humpy.

It was not until Carney was tethering his two-thousandth snake that one talked back at him and said, "How are feeling?"

"Fit to kick the backside off an emu!" said Carney Jimmy. "But that's only a figure of speech so it's no good trying to catch me that way. I was wondering when one of you was going to start magging at me. It had better be good. Patriotism's used up and—"

"I can see it's going to be a bit hard," said the snake. "You're sure you are all right?"

"Never felt better," said Carney Jimmy. "I could eat a live tiger-snake!"

"Do you really mean you could eat a live tiger-snake—one like me?" said the snake. "I'd like to make a bet with you that you wouldn't be game."

"Not so fast," said Carney. "It's just a figure of speech and I ain't falling for it and anyway I ain't as well as I used to be."

"It's clear you need a change of diet," said the snake. "It stands to reason if you eat too much of the same thing."

"You might have something there," said Carney Jimmy, tugging at the ends of his wandering moustache. "But I'm getting too old to change my habits. I've changed from carneys to rabbits and from rabbits to snakes and I ain't up to changing again. If it's all the same to you I'll stick to snakes."

"I wasn't going to suggest much of a change," said the snake. "I've observed you usually cook us over the coals. What I was about to suggest—particularly as you look a little off-color—was that you eat us raw for a change."

"Now you've got something," said Carney Jimmy, after he'd thought it out. "I was scared for a moment you were going to suggest I try running down kangaroos or emus." And he picked up the snake and started to swallow him.

"Now *you've* got something," said the snake as he went down and then he dug his fangs in hard.

the french way

by . . . Curtis W. Casewit

When a skier starts to fly after kissing a girl there can be but one answer—love. However getting him down again is another matter.

IT HAPPENED ON A spring morning in the Rockies.

There was no wind. The sun shone on the snow. A very young skier looked at the peaks that surrounded him and at the girl with pigtails that stood by his side. He wondered why her lips and her eyes were constantly open. After enough wondering he leaned over them, feeling an urge to change this condition, whereupon the lips closed instantly and the eyes shortly thereafter.

At the same time the young man seemed to lose all earthly contact. His feet did not exist, his head had gone, his heart became a zigzagging bubble. He was seized by delight. Then suddenly he felt his face afire and his body drifting, drifting skyward. Before he knew what had happened he sat atop a fir tree.

"Upon my word, Doris!" he called down to the girl, for even in such odd circumstances he took pride in his language.

At first she was much too bewildered to reply. She merely gazed at the bottoms of his skis and at the top of his head. After awhile she said somewhat throatlessly, "Oh *darling!*"

At this, young Howie Stucker

One of the great pleasures in editing a magazine like this one, which spans the entire field of science fiction and fantasy, is the legitimate inclusion of stories such as "The French Way." It is too short to cause more than a faint rumble of discontent from those who demand logic with their portions of the improbable and packed with sheer joy for those who don't give a durn as to whys and wherefores.

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felt impelled to a quick descent. The branches of the tree prevented his climbing down and he had to throw his skis and poles to the ground. When he followed them he was astonished to discover that, instead of falling rapidly past the branches, he was floating down gradually, as though a jumbo-sized parachute were holding him back.

A moment later Howie had his skis on. Anxiously he looked at sky, tree and girl. This had been his first encounter with the God of Love. He said, "Eros! Be gone!" and Doris looked up dreamily, thinking that Howie meant her.

As she heaved a desperate sigh the young man drew nearer once more and began an immediate and thorough study of her lovely features. But he was still frightened and he had earnest intentions of saying, "Let us go!"

Yet for a very good reason he said nothing. One hand was around her waist firmly, the other on his pole, not so firmly.

When, after sixty delicious seconds he finally said, "Let us go!"—it was too late. Unleashed like a kite Howie soared up. Soon he was way above the trees.

Doris remained below, clapping her hands and uttering little squeaks of happiness.

After a discreet while she heard a, "*tsk, tsk, tsk,*" behind her. Turning, she saw an instructor named Julien Dendeloup, French Method.

"Ah!" this worthy exclaimed "Deez eez vonderfool!"—and he grinned and shook his massive head. Doris happened to feel very little interest in Julien, whom she knew, and very much for Howie's Icarian maneuvers, which she knew not. So she told Julien to be quiet.

Presently Howie began banking slowly, his body in an almost rigid position. The wind at this altitude tugged at his long hair and made ripping noises at his pants. He was flying with perfect control. He seemed happy.

Before very long clusters of people began to form around Doris and the Frenchman—and as their commotion and cheering grew, the ski patrol came.

"*Hey, Howie!*" they shouted. "Get the hell out of the air!"

But the youngster was then zooming thirty feet above ground, at a rate of thirty miles per hour. Though generally obedient he saw no reason to comply. Doris was proud of him anyway and the patrolmen were merely envious of his accomplishment of a feat they could not match.

Howie's intransigeance brought the head patrolman, who asked Doris what had happened. When she didn't answer he addressed Julien Dendeloup, who shrugged his wide shoulders and gave a wide grin. Accordingly the headpatrolman called into the sky "Hey *kid!* Come on down!"

Howie took no heed.

At this point Doris' feet were getting cold and the Frenchman was making passes at her. So in her tiny voice she cried "Howie—*Howie!* Please come down."

Her wish was an order. The Flyer immediately tried to nose his skis downward and by bending his knees attempted a slow landing. He saw Doris' hand waving, her pigtails bobbing—he saw the saplings, the fir-trees, the people. Fear suddenly gripped him because he *knew* that he could not land. His body was now feather light, his heart beat quickly. He had become perfectly and unalterably airborne.

In the meantime the mayor had joined the head patrolman and the other fellows. The mayor was motivated by laws and regulations and though he could call a gelandesprung when he saw one he knew very little about skiing.

"Do you have a jumping license?" he asked.

"No!" cried Howie. "I wish I did." And then thinly, "I cannot come down anymore!"

The mayor reported these weird circumstances to the newspaper of the little mountain town. By the time the newsmen arrived from the surrounding counties it was noon and Howie still circled over the crowds. At this stage, the mayor went to the Chamber of Commerce.

They were more pleased than alarmed and they decided, though silently, to keep this attraction in the sky as long as possible. The mayor of course agreed but he enjoyed the art of public speaking and organizing generally, so he had a loudspeaker connected and ordered everyone onto the slopes, ". . . especially those with a college education or a high-school diploma."

His request was immediately followed by the two horse-and-buggy doctors, the room clerks and a number of other people, including a science fiction writer and the director of the ski school. The latter was the first to think of a rescue.

He had brought a megaphone, through which he told Howie to try a landing on the upper slope. This was good advice. He reasoned that if Howie would just fly horizontally until he collided with the mountainside, he would be saved. Howie tried hard but as soon as he approached the ground he bounced up again.

Thereafter there was much frantic talk.

Telegraph machines began to hammer and telephone lines were jammed. Advertising was cut on the radio programs and sponsors began to complain. The Chamber of Commerce doubled its collective activity.

By three p.m., Mountain Standard Time, Sports Authorities had arrived from Sun Valley by automobile—others followed by air and rail, including a number of "specialists" and members of the Press.

The New York Times had sent Frank Elkins in a specially chartered plane. John Jay Pictures, Incorporated, dispatched none other than the great John Jay himself. Some malicious tongues claimed at a later time that it had all been a projection of his new cameras. A number of noted reporters appeared on the hill, then disappeared in the bars.

But all the same the chairlifts were now grinding incessantly and cars crawled along the only highway, bumper to bumper, like legless beetles. The slopes were completely awash with people. Swarms of photographers ran about, using the last afternoon sun. Above the melee flew Howie and over their heads danced the Stucker shadow.

At five p.m. (M.S.T.) a group physicians, cosmopologists and astrochemists arrived. There were immense difficulties in getting these notables to the slopes because they had never seen nor used skis. After much fussing the mayor found several pairs of snow-shoes for them and painstakingly they were guided up to the spot where Doris sat.

She hadn't moved—nor for that matter had Howie's rival. The Frenchman felt at home with the disconsolate girl. At intervals she began to cry, which he found particularly delightful. He then whispered sweet words into her ears. When the sun gave her a headache he rushed off for a slab of virgin snow.

He watched her spreading it on her round forehead and on her cheeks and because he was a *gourmet,* he immediately thought of peaches and *Crême Chantilly.* When she sat still he watched the classic curve of her neck and the distinction of her profile. "Payshawng," he murmured, payshawng. Zey are discassing now!"

There was indeed much debate. The scientists had brought a number of instruments, with which they fumbled tirelessly. An aircraft engineer, speaking from a tree, requested a motor-testing machine—or possibly a canning suction machine. But there were of course none available.

Some cowboys, all frills and gay satins, wanted to use a lasso but the idea was discarded due to the danger of strangling Howie. The science fiction man wove some excellent plots including one about *space police,* which didn't materialize either.

Meanwhile, Howie seemed to resemble his shadow, which swam back and forth over the spectators. His eyes had sunk into their sockets, his nose was running, his hair disheveled. He looked very pitiful. Occasionally he was heard mumbling, "Eros—be gone!"

But no one understood this, least of all Doris, who would not leave.

Finally the Military Authorities appeared. A colonel declared that they had a helicopter at the base only forty miles away. The idea was unanimously accepted, even by the Chamber of Commerce. Shortly afterwards the plane put in an appearance over the mountain tops.

There was a general feeling of relief. A hush fell over the crowds and even Doris, who had been sobbing for a good many hours, dried her tears. They all rose, holding their breath. Howie automatically straightened himself in the air.

Julien took one last daring fling. He worshipped peaks and girls, especially Doris. And he was very

much occupied with her sun-bleached hair and the golden fluffiness of her neck, where a bit of rosy skin shimmered through here and there.

At last the helicopter came down in the vicinity of Howie. The pilot asked for the immediate removal of Howie's skis and when they tumbled to the slope hope swept over the masses.

But the Flyer's movements were so erratic, that the machine, though pursuing each of his many turns and loops and involuntary *ruades,* had no power to catch up with him. Moreover there was much danger of the blades shearing him to fricassée.

After an heroic half hour it became clear that it was impossible to get him into the cabin. Even the Military admitted that the notorious Captain Skorzeny, who in 1945 recaptured one Benito Mussolini from the Allies, couldn't have done any better.

The pilot tried a last resort—the dropping of a rope-ladder. But this didn't work either and the maneuvers were at length given up.

As Doris entered a stage of delirium Julien Dandeloup, the skier of the French Method rose. He touched her arm and said at the top of his voice, "Ladeez and shentlemaan! Leessan to *me!*"

He took the girl by one hand and dragged her to the center of the slope. "*I can,*" he said loudly, "*save ze 'Owie!*"

There was a mumbling and murmuring. When it ceased he shouted, "Ze ski patrol! Bring forr sledzes!"

The men came with the sledges. They were placed on top of one another, and upon this improvised platform Julian now stepped. Doris stood beside him, an agonized expression on her face. The Flyer was above them, listening and watching as best as he could.

"You know why it eez impos*sible* for 'eem to come down?"

No one knew.

"I tell you—*eh?*"

Silence fell over the throng—only the trees whispered.

"Becoze ze man up zere *kissed 'er gorjuss leeps.*"

The scientists shook their heads. The younger set giggled.

"And becoze," Julien went on, "Ze heart now is light." The Frenchman's hand flew into the air, demonstrating the weight of the Flyer's heart.

"Eet eez very simple to let 'eem daysawnd!"

Excitement grew. Questions rose. How—how—why? Laughter was wedged amid cries of indigation. There was much shuffling around Julien and Doris.

Howie kept circling above, his shoulders and arms drooping.

"I show *you!*" Julien said. "*Voici la methode Francaise!*"

He placed the girl in front of him. She turned. "What are you doing with me?" Her face was the essence of fright.

Julien pointed to the sky. "You want 'eem down—*no?*"

She kept quiet then and the Frenchman placed his hands on her shoulders. Then he leaned close over

the golden neck. Brushing the pig-tails aside he pressed a delicate kiss behind her left ear.

Before very long the Flyer began to make jerking motions, then to fall. Gravity seemed to pull at him —but still in midair he gained a tentative control. Gently, persuasively, Julien repeated his perfomance behind Doris right ear.

Howie cried, "My heart—*my heart!*" But he came down slowly, as if drawn by invisible wires. Soon afterwards he was over the trees and then—in a cloud of snow dust —back on the ground.

A rash of applause broke out and the patrol stumbled upward with more sledges and a horse and buggy doctor hurried with his little black bag. He found no bones broken, for it is medically proved that there are no bones in the heart. The hero was immediately rejoined by Doris.

There was no embrace—not even in the French way.

You will notice in several stories of FU, especailly in A. Bertram Chandler's "The Forest of Knives," that the author refers to this rather mildewed old world of ours as Terra and its inhabitants as Terrans. Which is a practice so long accepted among fanciers and practitioners of science fiction that it no longer draws comment.

Yet the word terra is all wrong, a near-comic malapropism in this application. For while terra actually does mean earth in Latin, it means earth in the sense of soil or dirt, not in any planetary sense. The word for our poor old world in Latin is Tellus and its creatures Tellurians. Yet so deeply has this quasi-literate convention become bred into science fiction that we have reluctantly given up combatting it. So our authors will probably continue to call our planet dirt, its people dirts or dirty ones. At that, perhaps they are a good deal closer to the truth than they ever dreamed.

some kinds of life

by . . . Richard Phillipps

Gadgets are great things. They offer civilization without any slaves. But what if they offer a civilization without people?

"JOAN, for heaven's sake!"

Joan Clarke caught the irritation in her husband's voice, even through the wall-speaker. She left her chair by the vidscreen and hurried into the bedroom. Bob was rooting furiously around in the closet, pulling down coats and suits and tossing them on the bed. His face was flushed with exasperation.

"What are you looking for?"

"My uniform. Where is it? Isn't it here?"

"Of course. Let me look."

Bob got sullenly out of the way. Joan pushed past him and clicked on the automatic sorter. Suits bobbed by in quick succession, parading for her inspection.

It was early morning, about nine o'clock. The sky was bright blue. Not a single cloud was visible. A warm spring day, late in April. The ground outside the house was damp and black from the rains of the day before. Green shoots were already beginning to poke their way up through the steaming earth. The sidewalk was dark with moisture. Wide lawns glittered in the sparkling sunlight.

"Here it is." Joan turned off the sorter. The uniform dropped into her arms and she carried it over to

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The widespread idea of a culture in which all services are machine-supplied does not seem impossible of attainment today. The effect of such a society upon its human members is being seriously considered by all sorts of people, ranging from our juvenile-delinquent experts to mappers of increased mass leisure time. But certain possibilities, such as what happens in this story, ought to get more consideration.

her husband. "Now next time don't get so upset."

"Thanks." Bob grinned, embarrassed. He patted the coat. "But look, it's all creased. I thought you were going to have the darn thing cleaned."

"It'll be all right." Joan started up the bed-maker. The bed-maker smoothed out the sheets and blankets, folding them in place. The spread settled carefully around the pillows. "After you've had it on awhile it'll look just lovely. Bob, you're the fussiest man I know."

"Sorry, honey," Bob murmured.

"What's wrong?" Joan came up to him and put her hand on his broad shoulder. "Are you worried about something?"

"No."

"Tell me."

Bob began to unfasten his uniform. "It's nothing important. I didn't want to bother you. Erickson called me at work yesterday to tell me my group is up again. Seems they're calling two groups at once now. I thought I wouldn't get jerked out for another six months."

"Oh, Bob! Why didn't you *tell* me?"

"Erickson and I talked a long time. 'For God's sake!' I told him. 'I was just up.' 'I know that, Bob,' he said. 'I'm sorry as hell about it but there's nothing I can do. We're all in the same boat. Anyhow, it won't last long. Might as well get it over with. It's the Martian situation. They're all hot and bothered about it.' That's what he said. He was nice about it. Erickson's a pretty good guy for a Sector Organizer."

"When—when do you have to go?"

Bob looked at his watch. "I have to get down to the field by noon. Gives me three hours."

"When will you be back?"

"Oh, I should be back in a couple days—if everything goes all right. You know how these things are. It varies. Remember last October when I was gone a whole week? But that's unusual. They rotate the groups so fast now you're practically back before you start."

Tommy came strolling in from the kitchen. "What's up, Dad?" He noticed the uniform. "Say, your group up again?"

"That's right."

Tommy grinned from ear to ear, a delighted teenage grin. "You going to get in on the Martian business? I was following it over the vidscreen. Those Martians look like a bunch of dry weeds tied together in a bundle. You guys sure ought to be able to blow *them* apart."

Bob laughed, whacking his son on the back. "You tell 'em, Tommy."

"I sure wish I was coming."

Bob's expression changed. His eyes became hard like grey flint. "No you don't, kid. Don't say that."

There was an uncomfortable silence.

"I didn't mean anything," Tommy muttered.

Bob laughed easily. "Forget it. Now all of you clear out so I can change."

Joan and Tommy left the room. The door slid shut. Bob dressed swiftly, tossing his robe and pajamas on the bed and pulling his dark green uniform around him. He laced his boots up and then opened the door.

Joan had got his suitcase from the hall closet. "You'll want this, won't you?" she asked.

"Thanks." Bob picked up the suitcase. "Let's go out to the car." Tommy was already absorbed at the vidscreen, beginning his schoolwork for the day. A biology lesson moved slowly across the screen.

Bob and Joan walked down the front steps and along the path to their surface car, parked at the edge of the road. The door opened as they approached. Bob threw his suitcase inside and sat down behind the wheel.

"Why do we have to fight the Martians?" Joan asked suddenly. "Tell me, Bob. Tell me why."

Bob lit a cigarette. He let the grey smoke drift around the cabin of the car. "Why? You know as well as I do." He reached out a big hand and thumped the handsome control board of the car. "Because of this."

"What do you mean?"

"The control mechanism needs rexeroid. And the only rexeroid deposits in the whole system are on Mars. If we lose Mars we lose this." He ran his hand over the gleaming control board. "And if we lose this how are we going to get around? Answer me that."

"Can't we go back to manual steering?"

"We could ten years ago. But ten years ago we were driving less than a hundred miles per hour. No human being could steer at the speeds these days. We couldn't go back to manual steering without slowing down our pace."

"Can't we do that?"

Bob laughed. "Sweetheart, it's ninety miles from here to town. You really think I could keep my job if I had to drive the whole way at thirty-five miles an hour? I'd be on the road all my life."

Joan was silent.

"You see, we must have the darn stuff—the rexeroid. It makes our control equipment possible. We depend on it. We need it. We must keep mining operations going on Mars. We can't afford to let the Martians get the rexeroid deposits away from us. See?"

"I see. And last year it was kryon ore from Venus. We had to have that. So you went and fought on Venus."

"Darling, the walls of our houses wouldn't maintain an even temperature without kryon. Kryon is the only non-living substance in the system that adjusts itself to temperature changes. Why, we'd—we'd all have to go back to floor furnaces again. Like my grandfather had."

"And the year before it was lonolite from Pluto."

"Lonolite is the only substance known that can be used in constructing the memory banks of the calculators. It's the only metal with

true retentive ability. Without lonolite we'd lose all our big computing machines. And you know how far we'd get without them."

"All right."

"Sweetheart, you know I don't *want* to go. But I have to. We all have to." Bob waved toward the house. "Do you want to give that up? You want to go back to the old days?"

"No." Joan moved away from the car. "All right, Bob. I'll see you in a day or two then?"

"I hope so. This trouble should be over soon. Most of the New York groups are being called. The Berlin and Oslo groups are already there. It shouldn't take long."

"Good luck."

"Thanks." Bob closed the door. The motor started up automatically. "Say gooybye to Tommy for me."

The car drove off, gaining speed, the automatic control board guiding it expertly into the main stream of traffic flowing down the highway. Joan watched until the car blended with the endless tide of flashing metal hulls, racing across the countryside in a bright ribbon toward the distant city. Then she went slowly back inside the house.

Bob never came back from Mars, so in a manner of speaking, Tommy became the man of the house. Joan got a release from school for him and after awhile he began work as a lab technician at the Government Research Project a few miles down the road.

Bryan Erickson, the Sector Organizer, stopped one evening to see how they were getting along. "Nice little place you have here," Erickson said, wandering around.

Tommy swelled with pride. "Sure is, isn't it? Sit down and make yourself comfortable."

"Thanks." Erickson peered into the kitchen. The kitchen was in the process of putting out a meal for the evening dinner. "Quite a kitchen."

Tommy came up beside him. "See that unit there on top of the stove?"

"What's it do?"

"It's a selector on the kitchen. It sets up a new combination every day. We don't have to figure out what to eat."

"Amazing." Erickson glanced at Tommy. "You seem to be doing all right."

Joan looked up from the vidscreen. "As well as could be expected." Her voice was toneless, flat.

Erickson grunted. He walked back into the living-room. "Well, I guess I'll be running along."

"What did you come over for?" Joan asked.

"Nothing in particular, Mrs. Clarke." Erickson hesitated by the door, a big man, red-faced, in his late thirties. "Oh, there was one thing."

"What is it?" Her voice was emotionless.

"Tom, have you made out your Sector Unit card?"

"My Sector Unit card?"

"According to law you're supposed to be registered as part of this

sector—*my* sector." He reached in his pocket. "I have a few blank cards with me."

"Gee!" Tommy said, a little frightened. "So soon? I thought it wasn't until I got to be eighteen."

"They've changed the ruling. We took quite a beating on Mars. Some of the sectors can't fill their quotas. Have to dig deeper from now on." Erickson grinned good-naturedly. "This is a good sector, you know. We have a lot of fun drilling and trying out the new equipment. I finally got Washington to consign us a whole squadron of the new double-jet small fighters. Each man in my sector gets the use of a fighter."

Tommy's eyes lit up. "Really?"

"In fact the user gets to bring the fighter home over the weekend. You can park it on your lawn."

"No kidding?" Tommy sat down at the desk. He filled the Unit card out happily.

"Yes, we have a pretty good time," Erickson murmured.

"Between wars," Joan said quietly.

"What's that, Mrs. Clarke?"

"Nothing."

Erickson accepted the filled-out card. He put it away in his wallet. "By the way," he said.

Tommy and Joan turned toward him.

"I guess you've been seeing the gleco-war on the vidscreen. I guess you know all about that."

"The gleco-war?"

"We get all our gleco from Callisto. It's made from the hides of some kind of animal. Well, there's been a little trouble with the natives. They claim—"

"What is gleco?" Joan said tightly.

"That's the stuff that makes your front door open for you only. It's sensitive to your pressure pattern. Gleco is made from these animals."

There was silence, the kind you can cut with a knife.

"I guess I'll be going." Erickson moved toward the door. "We'll see you the next training session, Tom. Right?" He opened the door.

"Right," Tommy murmured.

"Goodnight." Erickson left, closing the door after him.

"But I *have* to go!" Tommy exclaimed.

"Why?"

"The whole sector is going. It's required."

Joan stared out the window. "It isn't right."

"But if I don't go we'll lose Callisto. And if we lose Callisto . . ."

"I know. Then we'll have to go back to carrying door keys. Like our grandfathers did."

"That's right." Tommy stuck out his chest, turning from side to side. "How do I look?"

Joan said nothing.

"How do I look? Do I look all right?"

Tommy looked fine in his deep green uniform. He was slim and straight, much better looking than Bob. Bob had been gaining weight. His hair had been thinning. Tommy's hair was thick and black. His cheeks were flushed with excitement, his blue eyes flashing. He

pulled his helmet in place, snapping the strap.

"Okay?" he demanded.

Joan nodded. "Fine."

"Kiss me goodbye. I'm off to Callisto. I'll be back in a couple of days."

"Goodbye."

"You don't sound very happy."

"I'm not," Joan said. "I'm not very happy."

Tommy came back from Callisto all right but during the trektone-war on Europa something went wrong with his double-jet small fight and the Sector Unit came back without him.

"Trektone," Bryan Erickson explained, "is used in vidscreen tubes. It's very important, Joan."

"I see."

"You know what the vidscreen means. Our whole education and information come over it. The kids learn from it. They get their schooling. And in the evening we use the pleasure-channels for entertainment. You don't want us to have to go back to—

"No, no—of course not. I'm sorry." Joan waved a signal and the coffee table slid into the living-room, bearing a pot of steaming coffee. "Cream? Sugar?"

"Just sugar, thanks." Erickson took his cup and sat silently on the couch, sipping and stirring. The house was quiet. It was late evening, about eleven o'clock. The shades were down. The vidscreen played softly in the corner. Outside the house the world was dark and unmoving except for a faint wind stirring among the cedar trees at the end of the grounds.

"Any news from the various fronts?" Joan asked after awhile, leaning back and smoothing down her skirt.

"The fronts?" Erickson considered. "Well, some new developments in the iderium-war."

"Where is that?"

"Neptune. We get our iderium from Neptune."

"What is iderium used for?" Joan's voice was thin and remote as if she were a long way off. Her face had a pinched look, a kind of strained whiteness. As if a mask had settled into place and remained, a mask through which she looked from a great distance.

"All the newspaper machines require iderium," Erickson explained. "Iderium lining makes it possible for them to detect events as they occur and flash them over the vidscreen. Without iderium we'd have to go back to reporting news and writing it up by hand. That would introduce the personal bias. Slanted news. The iderium news machines are impartial."

Joan nodded. "Any other news?"

"Not much more. They say some trouble might be going to break out on Mercury."

"What do we get from Mercury?"

"That's where our ambroline comes from. We use ambroline in all kinds of selector units. In your kitchen—the selector you have in there. The meal selector that sets up the food combinations. That's an ambroline unit."

Joan gazed vacantly into her coffee cup. "The natives on Mercury —they're attacking us?"

"There's been some riots, agitation, that sort of thing. Some Sector Units have been called out already. The Paris unit and the Moscow unit. Big units, I believe."

After a time Joan said, "You know, Bryan, I can tell you came here with something on your mind."

"Oh, no. Why do you say that?"

"I can tell. What is it?"

Erickson flushed, his good-natured face red. "You're pretty acute, Joan. As a matter of fact I did come for something."

"What is it?"

Erickson reached into his coat and brought out a folded mimeographed paper. He passed it to Joan. "It isn't my idea, understand. I'm just a cog in a big machine." He chewed his lip nervously. "It's because of heavy losses in the trek-tone-war. They need to close ranks. They're up against it, so I hear."

"What does all this mean?" Joan passed the paper back. "I can't make out all this legal wording."

"Well, it means women are going to be admitted into Sector Units in the—in the absence of male members of the family."

"Oh. I see."

Erickson got up quickly, relieved that his duty had been done. "I guess I'll have to run along now. I wanted to bring this over and show it to you. They're handing them out all along the line." He stuck the paper away in his coat again. He looked very tired.

"It doesn't leave very many people, does it?"

"How do you mean?"

"Men first. Then children. Now women. It seems to take in everybody, just about."

"Kind of does, I guess. Well, there must be a reason. We have to hold these fronts. The stuff must be kept coming in. We've got to have it."

"I suppose so." Joan rose slowly. "I'll see you later on, Bryan."

"Yes, I should be around later in the week. I'll see you then."

Bryan Erickson came back just as the nymphite-war was breaking out on Saturn. He grinned apologetically at Mrs. Clarke as she let him in.

"Sorry to bother you so early in the morning," Erickson said. "I'm in a big rush, running around all over the sector."

"What is it?" Joan closed the door after him. He was in his Organizer's uniform, pale green with silver bands across his shoulders. Joan was still in her dressing robe.

"Nice and warm in here," Erickson said, warming his hands against the wall. Outside, the day was bright and cold. It was late November. Snow lay over everything, a cold blanket of white. A few stark trees jutted up, their branches barren and frozen. Far off along the highway the bright ribbon of surface cars had diminished to a trickle. There were few people going to the city, anymore. Most surface cars were in storage.

"I guess you know about the trouble on Saturn," Erickson murmured. "You've heard."

"I saw some shots, I think. Over the vidscreen."

"Quite a ruckus. Those Saturn natives are sure big. My golly, they must be fifty feet high."

Joan nodded absently, rubbing her eyes. "It's a shame we need anything from Saturn. Have you had breakfast, Bryan?"

"Oh, yes, thanks—I've eaten." Erickson turned his back to the wall. "Sure is good to get in out of the cold. You certainly keep your house nice and neat. I wish my wife kept our place this neat."

Joan crossed to the windows and let up the shades. "What do we use from Saturn?"

"It would have to be nymphite, of all things. Anything else we could give up. But not nymphite."

"What is nymphite used for?"

"All aptitude testing equipment. Without nymphite we wouldn't be able to tell who was fit for what occupation, including President of the World Council."

"I see."

"With nymphite testers we can determine what each person is good for and what kind of work he should be doing. Nymphite is the basic tool of modern society. With it we classify and grade ourselves. If anything should happen to the supply . . ."

"And it all comes from Saturn?"

"I'm afraid so. Now the natives are rioting, trying to take over the nymphite mines. It's going to be a tough struggle. They're big. The government is having to call up everyone it can get."

Suddenly Joan gasped. "Everyone?" Her hand flew to her mouth. "Even women?"

"I'm afraid so. Sorry, Joan. You know it isn't my idea. Nobody wants to do it. But if we're going to save all these things we have—"

"But whom will that leave?"

Erickson did not answer. He was sitting down at the desk, making out a card. He passed it to her. Joan took it automatically. "Your unit card."

"But who will be left?" Joan asked again. "Can't you tell me? Will anyone be left?"

The rocketship from Orion landed with a great crashing roar. Exhaust valves poured out clouds of waste material, as the jet compressors cooled into silence.

There was no sound for a time. Then the hatch was unscrewed carefully and swung inward. Cautiously N'tgari-3 stepped out, waving an atmosphere-testing cone ahead of him.

"Results?" his companion queried, his thoughts crossing to N'tgari-3.

"Too thin to breathe. For us. But enough for some kinds of life." N'tgari-3 gazed around him, across the hills and plans, off in the distance. "Certainly is quiet."

"Not a sound. Or any sign of life." His companion emerged. "What's that over there?"

"Where?" N'tgari-3 asked.

"Over that way." Luci'n-6 pointed with his polar antenna. "See?"

"Looks like some kind of building units. Some sort of massed structures."

The two Orionians raised their launch to hatch-level and slid it out onto the ground. With N'tgari-3 at the wheel they set off across the plain toward the raised spot visible on the horizon. Plants grew on all sides, some tall and sturdy, some fragile and small with multi-colored blossoms.

"Plenty of immobile forms," Luci'n-6 observed.

They passed through a field of grey-orange plants, thousands of stalks growing uniformly, endless plants all exactly the same.

"They look as if they were artificially sowed," N'tgari-3 murmured.

"Slow the launch down. We're coming to some sort of structure."

N'tgari-3 slowed down the launch almost to a stop. The two Orionians leaned out the port, gazing in interest.

A lovely structure rose up, surrounded by plants of all kinds, tall plants, carpets of low plants, beds of plants with astonishing blossoms. The structure itself was neat and attractive, obviously the artifact of an advanced culture.

N'tgari-3 leaped out of the launch. "Maybe we're about to encounter the legendary Beings from Terra." He hurried across the carpet of plants, a long uniform ground-covering, up to the front porch of the structure.

Luci'n-6 followed him. They examined the door. "How does it open?" Luci'n-6 asked.

They burned a neat hole in the lock and the door slid back. Lights came on automatically. The house was warm, heated by the walls.

"How — how developed! How very advanced."

They wandered from room to room, gazing around them at the vidscreen, at the elaborate kitchen, at the furniture in the bedroom, at the drapes, the chairs, the bed.

"But where are the Terrans?" N'tgari-3 said at last.

"They'll be right back."

N'tgari-3 paced back and forth. "This gives me an odd feeling. I can't put my antenna on it. A sort of uncomfortable feeling." He hesitated. "It isn't possible they're *not* coming back, is it?"

"Why not?"

Luci'n-6 began to fiddle with the vidscreen. "Hardly likely. We'll wait for them. They'll be back."

N'tgari-3 peered out the window nervously. "I don't see them. But they *must* be around. They couldn't just walk off and leave all this behind. Where would they go. Why?"

"They'll be back." Luci'n-6 got some static on the vidscreen. "This isn't very impressive."

"I have a feeling they won't."

"If the Terrans don't return," Luci'n-6 said thoughtfully, fooling with the vidscreen controls, "it will be one of the greatest puzzles known to archaelogy."

"I'll keep watching for them," N'tgari-3 said impassively.

the whispering gallery

by . . . William F. Temple

Frederic sought only the golden apple atop the catherdal's dome. He had no forewarning that the grim shadow was lying in ambush.

NOW, IF YOU WILL just come this way . . ."

The voice was sibilant and insinuating. It hinted at wonders which would make all you had seen so far become thin and flat and forgotten. Marvels unmatched lay just around the corner and the voice knew the way.

But Frederic was five years old and therefore he knew what voices really said and it wasn't always what the words would have you believe. This voice said, really, "I hate you all, especially the boy, and this is the way out and I shall be glad to see the last of you."

The voice had no intention after all of leading the way up the secret staircase to the golden ball.

This guide was a tall lean fellow, with yellow sunken cheeks and eye-sockets so deep and shadowed you could not be sure whether there were eyes in their recesses or not. Not unless you looked hard into them, that was, and so far Frederic had not found the courage to do so and make sure.

He peeped up at the guide's face only now and again from the corners of his own eyes and the sight of the strangely small nose—(as if the original had been pared down to the bone)—and the almost lip-

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It is with true pleasure, which we trust will be shared by most of you, that we welcome the first appearance of William F. Temple in the pages of FANTASTIC UNIVERSE. For he is one of the very best of that exceedingly able little group of British writers who have done so much for stf of late. And his story speaks for itself.

less mouth, with the big white teeth that seemed set in a sort of sardonic grin that would always be there whatever the outward facial mask expressed, had frightened his timid glance away every time.

If only this man had been like the jolly Beefeater in the fancy dress who had shown him the room in the Tower of London where the little Princes had been murdered. The Beefeater would have taken him up to the golden ball and perhaps given it to him. Especially if he had known that Frederic had wanted it for years. Since yesterday morning.

Yesterday was the magic morning when Jim was driving him around London in the open tourer. Just him and Jim. They were caught for a few minutes in a traffic jam in Fleet Street and their car was facing east.

"Gosh," said Frederic, pointing over the bonnet, "that must be the biggest building in the world!"

The chauffeur looked tolerantly up at the Cathedral.

He said, "It looks big from here because it's standing on top of a hill—Ludgate Hill. But it's not so big really. It's hardly knee-high to the Empire State and you've been up that."

Frederic craned his neck. The great gray dome swelled up like an enormous bubble above the twin flanking towers and on top of the dome stood another high tower with a golden gallery around its base. And right at the top of this tower was a golden ball with a golden cross planted on it like a tree. All the golden things glittered in the sunlight but the ball gleamed brightest of all. It seemed to give a light of its own rather than reflect.

"Don't be stupid, Jim," said Frederic, scornfully. "Anybody can see it's higher than the Empire State. It's the biggest thing I've ever seen. What a lovely golden ball that is! I wish I had it to play with. I wonder if it—comes off?"

"Would you like me to climb up there and unscrew it for you?" Jim asked quizzically.

"Would you?" said Frederic eagerly. "*Would* you?"

Jim laughed. There was a time when he would have sighed and muttered under his breath, "These rich folk are all alike—big kids and little kids. But all kids. Get me this, get me that—look, the moon shines pretty—get me that."

But he had served them for a long time now and he had grown philosophical. They weren't happy, these people—they were poor. They were always wanting something—not only to have something but to go somewhere, see something new, have someone praise them, reassure them, do things for them. When they were little kids the world was too big for them and they tore around it in deadly fear of missing any of it before they died.

And when they were big kids, with dulled eyes and desensitized palates, the world was too small.

It was a pile of cinders which they prodded wearily, hoping against hope that one day they might uncover something that gleamed bright and new and fascinated the attention. Like the dimly-remembered silver ring hanging from the hood of the baby carriage. Like the golden ball atop St. Paul's Cathedral on a sunny day in your fifth year.

"*Jim!* You're not listening."

"Yes I am, Freddy. See here, son, when you're small you get all balled up over sizes and heights and distances. I remember when I was a kid telling my Ma that telegraph posts were just the tallest things in the world, higher than any old church steeple. But when I grew up I saw I hadn't been talking sense."

"Get me the ball, Jim," said Frederic gravely.

"I'm trying to tell you, son—it's too big. Why, half a dozen grown-up men could get inside it."

"Why, it's no bigger than an apple! Perhaps it *is* an apple—a golden apple. The golden apple in the story."

"What story?"

"Oh," — impatiently — "the one Mr. George told me about Paris giving Aphro — Aphrodotty" —he hadn't got the name right but it didn't matter—Jim wouldn't know —"a golden apple for a prize. I've always wanted a golden apple. I wonder if it *is*, Jim? Do you think it is?"

Jim Bates opened his mouth, then closed it again. He had often done that in the service of the Staggs. Mrs. Staggs frequently found the truth unpleasant. Her son also obstinately believed what he wanted to believe. There wasn't much use fighting against it. The rich were always right—if you wanted to keep your job.

"I don't know, Freddy. I don't suppose I shall ever know."

"Why not climb . . . ?"

"Chauffeurs aren't allowed in churches," said Jim hastily but firmly, as though it were a thing everybody knew. And Frederic, who knew that there were many holy sanctums in his native Boston where chauffeurs weren't allowed entry, said "Oh," disappointedly as the jam broke and the car rolled forward.

"Jim, perhaps *I*—"

More haste and firmness. "We must go back to the hotel now. Your mother said you're to be back at one for lunch."

And the tourer swung sharply left at Ludgate Circus and angled back through side-streets to Holborn and the straight run to the hotel at Marble Arch, and though he kept looking back Frederic could not see St. Paul's again for the shops and office buildings. He couldn't understand how such little buildings could block out such a towering magnificence as St. Paul's.

Perhaps they're jealous, he thought. *They're getting together and trying to stop anyone from seeing St. Paul's because it makes them look so unimportant beside it.*

"But I *can't,* Frederic—not this afternoon. We're having tea with Lady Cornford."

"Can we go tomorrow then, Mom?"

"No. We're going home tomorrow."

The corners of Frederic's mouth turned down. His eyes began to water.

"Oh, my!" said Mrs. Stagg and her self-harassed mind darted about seeking to forestall the shrieks which would have drowned the orchestra in the hotel restaurant.

She consulted the clock-face which was always in that mind's eye by which she lived, by which she moved, always aiming to fit the social events and the sightseeing in so that there would be no awful gaps in which she might be left to reflect upon herself.

"Well, look, I could just spare half an hour—no more. We should have to come away right after that."

Frederic smiled. "Thanks, Mom." Half an hour was an enormously long time—easily long enough to reach the golden apple. For by now he was almost sure that it was an apple.

It was a long time but Skeleton-face, as Frederic silently named the lank guide, wasted it. When he had taken the little party around the various chapels and the choir and shown them the Grinling Gibbons carvings and the altar, Frederic hoped that now they would go up to the golden ball.

But the quiet cold sibilant voice said, "Now, if you will just come this way . . ."

And it lured them downstairs among the vast piers of the crypt and it seemed reluctant to leave this place. It kept them staring at the huge and horrible iron funeral carriage that had brought Wellington's body here, while it gave them endless precise details about the manufacture of this ugly thing. It hissed over the tomb of Nelson, and of Wren himself, and over the resting places of the silent multitude of bishops, and artists, and military and naval men.

This cold gloom was the natural habitat of the voice and Frederic felt that it wanted none of them to leave, it wanted them all to stay here. It would talk smoothly and quietly until they were lulled to sleep and then, somehow, it would get them lying stiff and dead with the others under the hard heavy stone floor.

So just as the voice was saying, "This is the sepulchre of Archdeacon—" Frederic cut in with a wail.

"I wanna go upstairs!"

That was where the voice began to hate him.

""Now, if you will just come this way . . ."

They went upstairs, past a notice saying *To the Golden Gallery and Ball* and up some more stairs, up and up and up.

As they mounted behind the steady-paced guide all the party began to lose their breath and make little sighs and smiling grimaces at

each other. Except Frederic, who was tense with excitement and anticipation.

Maybe this guide wouldn't *give* him the ball—(which, of course, was really an apple)—but if Mom saw how much he wanted it she would buy it for him. It didn't matter how much it cost—Mom was the richest lady in the world. She could buy him the whole Cathedral if she wanted to. But he only wanted the apple.

The richest lady in the world gasped, "Oh dear! I didn't know it was going to take as long as this."

They got to the top of the winding staircase and with his heart throbbing in his breast Frederic followed the guide through the only doorway there.

"Ooh!" they all said as they found they were all insects perched precariously on a narrow rim immediately beneath the arching interior of the great dome, that only an iron railing stood between them and the spreading gulf beneath. Far, far below other insects crawled over the black-and-white checkerboard of the floor. They were in a vast but bounded universe.

Frederic peered up to where the browning murals curved together and met around a spider's gallery and realized that although he was very high up the golden apple was at least as high again above him still. There must be another staircase somewhere that led up through the dome. Perhaps a hidden secret staircase.

He hesitated and tried to go back but the heavy grown-ups pressed all about him and carried him forward. And then they stopped, because the guide had stopped.

Skeleton-face said, "This is the famous Whispering Gallery. It has peculiar acoustic properties which I shall now demonstrate to you. If you would kindly move around to the opposite side of the Gallery and stand listening against the wall . . ."

"I don't want—" began Frederic. But Mrs. Stagg grabbed his hand and said in a low irritated whisper, "Oh, come *on!*"

The group moved slowly along the curving ledge with the fearful drop on its right-hand side, at which some of them dared not look and others only vouchsafed fleeting sidelong glances. There was a hush over everything.

Frederic was impatient and wanted to run. But this was a place where you neither ran nor shouted. The great Cathedral stood impassive and suffered these insects to crawl over it so long as they moved slowly and reverentially. Frederic felt that if he shouted the Cathedral would start angrily and shake all these invading creatures out of its crevices.

At last they reached the side of the Gallery opposite the doorway, beside which the guide had remained standing, dwarfed by distance. They arranged themselves in a line, kneeling with one knee on the seat, putting one ear close to the wall.

Frederic did not put his ear very close. He had no wish to hear that

voice again. Nevertheless he heard it, distinct and loud, as if the guide were standing beside him—yet he could see him, a thin little shape a long way off, with all the width of the dome between them.

"I am speaking only in a whisper, yet you hear me clearly. The inward diameter of this dome is one hundred eight feet and the outer diameter one hundred forty-five feet. The eight murals which you see on the inner surface of the dome were painted by Sir James Thornhill and represent episodes in the life of St. Paul . . ."

The voice went on about St. Paul and Frederic sensed that its owner had no great liking for the saint—there was a new sneering undertone. The voice wanted to have done. So did Frederic. On an impulse, Frederic put his mouth close to the wall and said shrilly, "We don't want to stay here. We want to go up to the golden apple."

"Frederic!" exclaimed his mother, shocked and alarmed. Her voice became amplified to that of an angry giantess and boomed hollowly all about them.

The guide's voice had stopped. There was a moment's awful silence, which Mrs. Stagg spent with a guilty flush spreading over her cheeks.

Then—"Now, if you will just come this way . . ."

The voice was sibilant and insinuating. It hinted at wonders which could make all you had seen so far become thin and flat.

But Frederic was five years old and therefore he knew that the voice really said, "I hate you all, especially the boy, and this is the way out and I shall be glad to see the last of you."

The voice had no intention after all of leading the way up the secret staircase to the golden ball.

The party shuffled round the great semi-circle back to the door—and Skeleton-face, who stood awaiting them like Charon. Frederic kept his eyes on his own feet and would not look up. For he knew that deep in those dark eye-sockets somewhere above his head animosity burned like a flame and if the other people hadn't been there . . . He was glad now that he was in the middle of a bunch of grownups. They were his unconscious protectors.

Huddling close he watched his feet and his mother's feet descending the stairs. And presently they were crossing the black-and-white floor, then the dirty black steps outside the Cathedral, and then—hurriedly—the sidewalk.

Then he saw the running-board of the car and looked up and there was Jim grinning at him and the fear in him unfroze.

"Get in, Frederic, don't just stand there," said his mother, pushing him. "Go as fast as you dare, Bates—we're ten minutes late now. What *will* Lady Cornford think?"

Frederic had not shone before the Lady. He had been silent and, when pressed, sulky. And, when pressed again, rude—very rude.

When they got back to the hotel Mrs. Stagg decided on disciplinary measures. "You will go straight to bed now, Frederic. And you are *not* to look at your picture-books in bed. I've had more than enough of you today."

The boy who had caused his mother to shout in a cathedral and look small, who had been rude to an English Lady and again made his mother look small, was left alone in the bedroom with his guilt.

He felt no remorse, only an intense aching regret that tomorrow they would be leaving London and the golden apple behind. Forever, probably. Someone else would come along and take the golden apple away while he was on the silly ship or back at silly school in Boston.

He got out of bed and went to the window. The buses swung dizzily in and out of Park Lane and for awhile he watched them and the little people down there who dodged them and took sanctuary in green Hyde Park. It was summer and there was still an hour or two of daylight left.

He decided nothing. It was as if someone else had taken over his body suddenly and made it act with purpose. He found himself putting on his street clothes, buttoning them up.

Then he was opening the door quietly, surveying the passage, and then he was at the open window at the rear of the building, scrambling through it, and then he was watching his feet descending the webby iron steps of the fire-escape just as they had descended the staircase in St. Paul's.

The feet seemed to know the way though it was easy enough. It was almost a straight road back to St. Paul's. But it was a very long road and the feet were very tired when they got there and climbed the dirty steps in the pale rose light coming up the hill from the sinking sun.

He entered to the sound of far-off singing. There, down at the end of the great nave, candles burned on the altar and before them two lines of people in white surplices sang sweetly together and the organ made quiet thunder over their heads. There were other people too, watching them, in the dim pink light reflected from the windows below the dome.

In fact they were so intent on their watching and the choir was so intent on its song that no one noticed him stealing down a side aisle, between the chairs and up the stairs which led to the Whispering Gallery.

The old verger who took the entrance money was no longer there and this gave Frederic heart. All the guides would have gone home by now, Skeleton-face among them. Now all he had to do was to find a place to hide for just a little while until the choir and the congregation had gone home too, leaving St. Paul's—and the golden apple —to him alone.

Up the stairs there was a corridor leading to the library and in that corridor he had noticed a cer-

tain secluded alcove. He hoped he could reach it soon for his legs were aching and very tired . . .

When he awakened, his shoulders and legs were painful with cramp for the alcove was small even for him. Rubbing them he went exploring in the dark. Soon he had other places to rub, for there seemed to be a lot of things to bump into and they were all hard. What chance had he of finding the secret staircase to the apple? It must be well hidden and hard to detect even in the daytime. He wished he had thought to bring his torch. But then he hadn't intended to fall asleep and stay here until after dark.

He was not afraid for the ball shining in the sunlight shone still in his memory and he felt that it was even now shining there in actuality somewhere above him. When he reached it and unscrewed it—(but it was an apple, really, and he would just pick it)—it would continue to glow and light his way back down the stairs and along the streets to the hotel. He bumped and blundered along the wall like a blow-fly on a window-pane and all at once fell through a doorway. As he lay there his foot, extended behind him, discovered the top of a stairway.

And then, quite distinctly, he heard slow steady footsteps coming up that dark stairway.

He caught his breath and picked himself up. He must not be discovered now. He went on through the doorway and so emerged into a very dim yellow light. He was in the Whispering Gallery, uncertainly lit by a moon striving first to pierce a veil of nimbus cloud and then the dusty window-panes of the Cathedral.

He hesitated. There was only this one door, which was the sole entrance and exit to the Gallery. The footsteps were louder now and began to echo. He fled from them, keeping close to the seat along the curving wall in a stumbling yet stealthy sort of run, trying to make no noise in a place which he knew magnified sound in a terrifying way.

Yet he was still not really frightened—only excited.

It was a long way around to the place diametrically opposite the door, the place where they had all stood listening in the afternoon, but it did not seem quite so far this time because he could run. There he sat on the seat, hunched up against the wall, trying to make himself so small as to be invisible and holding his breath lest the same treacherous wall caught the small sound of his presence and flung it around in revealment.

A threadbare patch in the flat cloud passed under the moon and the spacious murals on the dome overhead suddenly stood out distinctly with an odd stereoscopic effect. And the dark little oblong of the doorway on the far side of the Gallery became visible.

Below, in the immense well of the Cathedral, he saw now that here and there an electric candelabra glowed, each casting its little circle

of light, frayed and thin at the edges—a few tiny wide-scattered oases in a black desert.

But now he watched the distant doorway opposite—and waited.

His vision became a little blurred with the intensity of his gaze. Presnetly it seemed that a small vertical strip of the dark rectangle had detached itself and floated away from the main body. And then this little black stroke became still. He rubbed his watering eyes and looked again. There was no doubt about it. The thin black shadow was quite separate from the frame of the doorway.

Then the cloud thickened under the moon again, the murals became blurs, the doorway and the shadow merged into common blackness and only the small glints of electric light far below retained their clarity and shape.

He hoped the shadow would go back through the doorway. He sat, still hunched, gripping the edge of the seat. He was trembling a little but was not really afraid.

Then his heart leapt into his throat as a voice spoke right beside him. A sibilant chill voice, cloaking malice with a surface politeness—*"Now, if you will just come this way . . ."*

He shrank and cowered. His trembling became a violent shaking as fear passed through him like a series of electric shocks. A pain gripped his stomach and he pressed both hands against the place, doubled up. He could not control his breathing now—it came in loud rapid gasps, as if he had just been plunged into cold water.

For ages, it seemed, he sat tied in a knot of pain, gazing terror-struck through the railing at the points of light below—remote as stars—dreading to look up at Skeleton-face standing over him, unable to face the cavernous eye-sockets and the white fixed grin, shrinking from the imagined touch of a thin hand.

But no hand touched him.

Then the smothered moon broke free to throw a wealth of silvery light about him and it was apparent that there was no one standing over him. He peeped under his eyelids—over there. The shadow remained small and distant by the door. It was so perfectly still that a hope suddenly struck him it was not a man at all but just the shadow of some ordinary thing he had not noticed before. Yet it had seemed to move . . .

He watched it, relaxing gradually as the thin shadow remained stiff and stationary as a gatepost.

He told himself, not in so many words but with the rough apprehension of the imperfectly articulate, that he had been frightening himself with an imagined bogeyman.

But he had not imagined that voice. That had been real enough. Still, there was probably an explanation any grownup could make clear to him. He supposed that everything you said in a Whispering Gallery went echoing around the Gallery for ever and ever be-

cause there was no way for the sound to get out—it was like a fly caught under an upturned bowl. He expected that the echoes became rarer and rarer as time went on until you hardly heard them at all.

All he had heard was a belated echo of the words Skeleton-face had kept using in the afternoon.

Then he jumped again, as the same freezing voice said right alongside him, *"If you will just come this way . . ."*

The palms of his hands became sticky with sweat, and his scalp prickled. But he told himself that it was all right. The shadow hadn't moved. It was only that old echo again.

He noticed it had dropped a word this time. How could the sound of that word, *"Now,"* have escaped? Why, of course, it would have slipped out through the doorway as the echo went past on its travels. That was how echoes died, losing a piece every time they went slowly round. It would have to be something like that, otherwise everything everybody ever said would have gone on sounding for ever and it would be like a great crowd shouting all the time.

Well, it wasn't any good just sitting there. He'd have to start looking for the staircase to the golden apple. His mother might already have discovered he had left the hotel and she would guess where he had gone and come after him.

He stood up slowly, not taking his eyes off the shadow by the door. It remained still. If he went to the left he would approach the doorway from the side away from the shadow and wouldn't have to go past it at all. *Well,* he thought, *I must go now.* He took a deep breath.

And then the clouds made a sudden rush at the moon and all but extinguished it. The silvery light ceased abruptly as if it had been switched off. It was darker than ever.

He paused, irresolute, his courage evaporating. He could not go around the Gallery in this darkness. He might not be able to distinguish the doorway when he came to it and he might go past it to where the shadow was. But that was silly—if there was no light there could be no shadow.

Nevertheless fear was stronger than reason. He stood there, clutching the iron railing and looking down at the little lights below. Suddenly he wished he were down there in the safe steady light that did not go out and leave you trapped on a high shelf and at the mercy of unseen shadows.

But if he were down there, he would be further away from the shining golden apple. If he were to attain that prize he must be courageous and bear the nervous ordeals that lay on the path to it. To deserve the apple you must be brave.

His fingers tightened on the railing as the mouthless voice said near at hand in the dark, *"You will just come this way . . ."*

This time it sounded less like a request than a command. "*You* will *come this way* . . ." It was as if the voice knew that it was losing some of the words it could use and was trying to counterbalance the loss with greater persuasion.

Frederic thought, *It's quite all right, really. If I stay here long enough the echo will have no more words left, it will die out altogether. Perhaps the shadow will go with it. Perhaps the shadow has nothing to do with it.*

However he was glad when the bright moonlight suddenly flooded the dome again. At least he was glad until—

He screamed as he saw that the shadow had moved in the darkness, had advanced nearly halfway towards him around the Gallery and was still coming on steadily.

He turned and fled in the opposite direction. As he blundered along the curving path, sometimes banging a knee against the endless seat, sometimes slipping and grabbing the railing for support, he cast a terrified glance across the moonlit spaces to see where the shadow had got to.

It had ceased to pursue its original course around the Gallery. It had turned back, was moving swiftly the other way to head him off before he could reach the door. And it was moving faster than he could.

He spun around, choking with terror, little thin screams coming from him as he ran. This time he did not blunder or slip. Self-preservation told him that he could afford no mistakes and the sheer desperate will to live made his feet fly with speed and precision.

For now he knew—he did not know how he knew but he knew—that the shadow was the shadow of Death. And Death wanted to take him and put him with the other dead people under the cold floor of the crypt.

He was back to where he had been, diametrically opposite to the doorway. And the shadow too was back to where it had been, by that doorway. He collapsed on the seat, whooping for breath but keeping his staring eyes on the shadow. It seemed to have returned to complete immobility.

Then the voice came again, quietly this time, almost coaxingly, "*Just come this way . . .*"

It seemed to imply that if he were just to go along to it everything would be all right and there would be nothing to worry about.

But he knew it was a trap. He would not go. He would hang onto life as long as he could because there was still hope. The voice had lost two of its words this time. Perhaps it had called after him as he ran from it and haste and terror had deafened him to it.

The great dome overhead was almost radiant now with light from the unshielded moon and the human figures crowded in the arches of the murals were a tense silent audience looking down on the narrow circular track where Frederic had to run for his life.

He believed they were watching

him and he wondered whether they were on his side. St. Paul seemed to be. He stood up there, one hand pointing upwards towards the spider's gallery at the apex of the dome, towards the golden apple. "That's the way you want to go, Frederic," said his expression.

"I know, I know," whispered the boy. "But how do I get up there?"

And the voice of Death spoke again, calling, *"Come this way . . ."*

"No!" cried Frederic, starting to his feet and going a few paces. The shadow glided in the same direction too, coming around to meet him. He ran back and the shadow stopped as if it were watching him, weighing his intention, then moved back to cover the doorway.

And so Frederic stopped again. It was plain that he could never reach the doorway safely whichever way he went, for the shadow had the advantages of position and speed of movement and could always get there first. Was there to be no end to this horrible game?

Yes, he thought desperately, *there must be an end when the echo dies. And that must be soon now.*

He pressed his hot brow against the cool iron railing. There were, he noticed now, mosaics just under the Gallery itself, between the arches which fell away from beneath them into bottomless gloom, and they all pictured angels flying confidently. What mattered it to them that they were at a fearful height. They were borne by their trusted wings.

He thought, *If only I had wings! I could escape Death. More than that—I could fly up there and pick the golden apple.*

His forehead burned and droplets of sweat trickled slowly down the iron bars. His head ached as though a fever had come upon him and the angels seemed to advance and recede before his blurring gaze as if they had come quite away from the wall and were indeed flying over the back wall.

He watched them for some time, feeling dull and heavy-headed, and they seemed to be aware of him and smile at him and indicate by their slow weaving motions that it was quite easy to fly. Anyone could do it. *He* could do it if he only tried.

Then suddenly he remembered the shadow and looked up at the opposite side of the Gallery. And it was gone!

Then he caught a movement away to the right and there was the shadow, much taller, well past the crucial halfway mark on its way to him. It had taken advantage of his preoccupation with the angels to chance leaving the doorway to come around after him.

It had won the awful game. Even if Frederic ran his hardest for the door the shadow had gained enough ground to overtake him easily before he reached it.

It was too near. It was Skeleton-face, all right. He could see the dark eye-cavities turned steadfastly upon him, the gleam of teeth, as the tall thin figure approached.

He scrambled up onto the rim

of the railing before him, which was not easy for the rim was turned back inwards. But he mounted to the top of it and balanced there like a wire-walker. He looked up. Somewhere up there, beyond the dome, was the glittering prize he would never now reach.

But St. Paul still pointed upwards like an inspiration. "Have faith!" he seemed to say. "Have faith!"

And the angels seemed to be calling in chorus, "Have faith, Frederic, and you can fly like us. Have faith and you can fly up to the apple."

Frederic teetered, arms outstretched, on the edge of cavernous space below and above. He took a quick peep sideways. Skeleton-face was almost upon him, lipless mouth open to speak.

"This way . . ."

"You can fly. You can fly. Have faith," called the angels together.

"I have faith. I'm coming," said Frederic with a new strength and began to extend a foot quite steadily and calmly.

"Frederic!" It was his mother's voice, loud with alarm.

A warm relief flooded right over him. Mom had found him, had got here just in time. She would save him from Skeleton-face—she would pay him to go away. She could pay anything, she was so rich.

He looked eagerly around but he couldn't see her. There was only Skeleton-face reaching for him.

And then he realized with a sudden horrible sinking of all his energies that the cry was only the echo of his mother's exclamation of the afternoon. It must have been slowly circling the Gallery ever since. He was sick with disappointment.

And then bony hands reached for his ankles and he leapt outwards into space.

It wasn't a leap of faith. It was merely a leap to avoid Death.

In confusion and wretchedness he fell past the angels, fell into darkness. The lights of the candelabras grew bigger as he fell and they illumined something that lay below them.

A golden disk.

He was turning as he fell and couldn't obtain more than fleeting glimpses of it but he could see that he was heading straight for it.

Could it be that somehow, in a way he couldn't understand, he was succeeding after all? That he was to reach—

The golden disk flashed up hugely now and dazzled his eyes.

The verger on the night watch had happened just by chance to glance up and catch what looked like a tiny figure balanced on the rail of the Whispering Gallery. He tried to shield his eyes from the immediate light of the candelabra over his head and see past it more clearly up into the moonlit dome.

It *was* a figure and even as he watched it jumped out into space.

"My God!" he said, and rushed forward.

A thin shout came from above—*"Way . . .!"*

He stopped, uncertain.

The figure fell down past the mosaics, past the golden organ pipes, past the red canopy over the high pulpit, arching ever outwards to the center of the floor as it came.

He saw it hit the large circular brass plate let into the floor, immediately over Nelson's tomb, immediately under the ball and cross 365 feet above. And he hid his eyes.

When he looked again a delta of red rivulets was spreading from the crumpled little shape that lay on the brass plate in the center of the star with the long black and faded pink points—bright red trickles which matched the scarlet of the altar screen.

It was a small child, a boy. Dead—naturally.

He sought his fellow verger on the watch and brought him to the scene. Only it wasn't quite the same. The brass ring shone clean and bright—and clear. There was no body. There was no blood.

The second verger put his arm about the other, who had suddenly begun to shake, and led him to the chairs by the lectern.

"Sit down and rest, Alex," he said. "Don't worry. It's all right. It once happened to me."

Alex looked at him in slow surprise, his lower lip quivering, his hands shaking like those of a very old man.

"Nor are we the only ones," said the second verger. "It happens—every so often."

"When did it first—*really*—happen? Don't tell me it didn't."

"Over twenty years ago. It was a boy named Stagg—an American boy. He had strayed from his hotel, somehow found his way here and got up—there. His mother was distracted when she found him gone. But he had been here in the afternoon and for some reason wanted very much to return. And he was due to go home the next day. So she guessed he might have come here. But she got here just too late—he was already on the rail, just as you and I saw him. She shouted his name. But he fell."

"Do you think she startled him? He was performing some idiotic balancing trick and—"

"Did it look like that to you?"

Alex looked unseeingly at the golden lectern with the big golden eagle bearing the Bible on its back and wings outstretched and eyes staring keenly up at the dome.

"He jumped," he said in a low voice.

"Nobody knows why."

"But he saw me," Alex said. "He must have seen me and thought he was going to hit me. He shouted *'Way!'*"

"*Someone* shouted 'Way!' I heard it too when the thing happened to me. But it didn't sound like a boy's voice. He was only five, you know."

"If it wasn't he who was it?"

The second verger shrugged his shoulders and became absorbed in removing a few hairs that clung to his black cassock.

Without looking up he said, "There have been many temples on this site. Before this was Old St.

Paul's and before that a Saxon church stood on this spot for nearly five hundred years, and long before that the Romans had a temple here —a Roman altar of stone was uncovered here in eighteen-thirty.

"I remember reading about that in the chronicles. There was a carved representation of Diana on it, was there not?"

"Yes. Diana, Goddess of the Hunt."

Alex looked at the other sharply. "Was it a—a sacrificial temple?"

The second verger pursed his lips, picked up a long brown hair carefully by the ends, held it up to the light of the candelabra and regarded it without answering.

"What did you say the name of the boy was?" pursued Alex.

"Stagg," said the other, letting the hair drift gently down—it floated away under a chair. Then he looked straight at Alex and said firmly, "Which may be a coincidence or it may not. We shall never know. The one thought that really terrifies me about this affair, the thought I don't want to face, is this —does that poor child have to suffer his frightful experience over and over again, every time it happens? Is he caught in some vicious circle of time and unable to escape?"

"I don't think so," said Alex. "What's past is past. We have merely, by some trick of time, been given a glimpse of that past. Like looking at an old film in which the characters go through the motions but are only unfeeling shadows."

"For our souls' ease," said the other, soberly, "we must believe that."

They sat brooding, two tiny figures side by side under the great dome in the little pool of light from the candelabra. Each was grateful for the other's company. For all around them black shadows filled the enormous arches and the silent chapels and the long, empty passages. Under their feet, spreading beneath the thick walls into the ancient churchyard besieging them in the night and into the burial grounds below that, were the bones of the innumerable dead. The great and the small. The famous and the forgotten. The human and the—possibly non-human.

Before them the golden eagle of the lectern, rising on its claws with excitement, gazed eagerly and unwaveringly up at the Whispering Gallery as if it were absorbed in watching a tense and perpetual drama . . .

"Now, if you will just come this way . . ."

The voice was sibilant and insinuating. It hinted at wonders which would make all you had seen so far become thin and flat and forgotten. Marvels unmatched lay just around the corner and the voice knew the way . . .

everybody knows joe

by . . . C. M. Kornbluth

At least two persons live in each of us. At least one of them is Joe.

JOE HAD QUITE A DAY for himself Thursday and as usual I had to tag along. If I had a right arm to give I'd give it for a day off now and then. Like on Thursday. On Thursday he really outdid himself.

He woke up in the hotel room and had a shower. He wasn't going to shave until I told him he looked like a bum. So he shaved and then he stood for a whole minute admiring his beauty in the mirror, forgetting whose idea it was in the first place.

So down to the coffee shop for breakfast. A hard-working man needs a good breakfast. So getting ready for a backbreaking day of copying references at the library, he had tomato juice, two fried eggs, three sausages, a sugared doughnut and coffee—with cream and sugar.

He couldn't work that off his pot in a week of ditch-digging under a July sun, but a hard-working man needs a good breakfast. I was too disgusted to argue with him. He's hopeless when he smells that short-order smell of smoking grease, frying bacon and coffee.

He wanted to take a taxi to the library—eight blocks!

"Walk, you jerk!" I told him. He started to mumble about pulling

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For a young man Cyril Kornbluth has been around a long time—at least in the upper reaches of science fiction and fantasy writing. His "Little Black Gag" is already accepted as a classic, his collaborations with Judith Merril "Mars Child" and Frederik Pohl "The Space Merchants," novels of high entertainment and worth. We are delighted to present him in a little story that should scare the pants off everybody.

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down six hundred bucks for this week's work and then he must have thought I was going to mention the high-calory breakfast. To him that's hitting below the belt. He thinks he's an unfortunate man with an affliction—about twenty pounds of it. He walked and arrived at the library glowing with virtue.

Making out his slip at the newspaper room he blandly put down next to *firm—The Griffin Press, Inc.*—when he knew as well as I did that he was a free lance and hadn't even got a definite assignment from Griffin.

There's a line on the slip where you put down *reason for consulting files (please be specific).* It's a shame to cramp Joe's style to just one line after you pitch him an essay-type question like that. He squeezed in, *Preparation of article on year in biochemistry for Griffin Pr. Encyc. 1952 Yrbk.,* and handed it with a flourish to the librarian.

The librarian, a nice old man, was polite to him, which is usually a mistake with Joe. After he finished telling the librarian how his microfilm files ought to be organized and how they ought to switch from microfilm to microcard and how in spite of everything the New York Public Library wasn't such a bad place to research, he got down to work.

He's pretty harmless when he's working—it's one of the things that keeps me from cutting his throat. With a noon break for apple pie and coffee he transcribed about a hundred entries onto his cards, mopping up the year in biochemistry nicely. He swaggered down the library steps, feeling like Herman Melville after finishing Moby Dick.

"Don't be so smug," I told him. "You still have to write the piece. And they still have to buy it."

"A detail," he said grandly. "Just journalism. I can do it with my eyes shut."

Just journalism. Somehow his three months of running copy for the A.P. before the war has made him an Ed Leahy.

"*When* are you going to do it with your eyes . . . ?" I began but it wasn't any use. He began telling me about how Gautama Buddha didn't break with the world until he was 29 and Mohammed didn't announce that he was a prophet until he was 30, so why couldn't *he* one of these days suddenly bust loose with a new revelation or something and set the world on its ear? What it boiled down to was he didn't think he'd write the article tonight.

He postponed his break with the world long enough to have a ham and cheese on rye and more coffee at an automat and then phoned Maggie. She was available as usual. She said as usual, "Well then, why don't you just drop by and we'll spend a quiet evening with some records?"

As usual he thought that would be fine since he was so beat after a hard day. As usual I told him, "You're a louse, Joe. You know all

she wants is a husband and you know it isn't going to be you, so why don't you let go of the girl so she can find somebody who means business?"

The usual answers rolled out automatically and we got that out of the way.

Maybe Maggie isn't very bright but she seemed glad to see him. She's shooting for her Doctorate in sociology at N.Y.U., she does part-time case work for the city, she has one of those three-room Greenwich Village apartments with dyed burlap drapes and studio couches and home-made mobiles. She thinks writing is something holy and Joe's careful not to tell her different.

They drank some rhine wine and seltzer while Joe talked about the day's work as though he'd won the Nobel prize for biochemistry. He got downright brutal about Maggie being mixed up in such an approximate unquantitative excuse for a science as sociology and she apologized humbly and eventually he forgave her. Big-hearted Joe.

But he wasn't so fried that he *had* to start talking about a man wanting to settle down—"not this year but maybe next. Thirty's a dividing point that makes you stop and wonder what you really want and what you've really got out of life, Maggie darlin'." It was as good as telling her that she should be a good girl and continue to keep open house for him and maybe some day . . . maybe.

As I said, maybe Maggie isn't very bright. But as I also said, Thursday was the day Joe picked to outdo himself.

"Joe," she said with this look on her face, "I got a new LP of the Brahms Serenade Number One. It's on top of the stack. Would you tell me what you think of it?"

So he put it on and they sat sipping rhine wine and seltzer and he turned it over and they sat sipping rhine wine and seltzer until both sides were played. And she kept watching him. Not adoringly.

"Well," she asked with this new look, "what did you think of it?"

He told her, of course. There was some comment on Brahms' architectonics and his resurrection of the contrapuntal style. Because he'd sneaked a look at the record's envelope he was able to spend a couple of minutes on Brahms' debt to Haydn and the young Beethoven in the fifth movement (*allegro,* D Major) and the gay *rondo* of the—

"Joe," she said, not looking at him. "Joe," she said, "I got that record at one hell of a discount down the street. It's a wrong pressing. Somehow the first side is the first half of the Serenade but the second half is Schumann's Symphonic Studies Opus Thirteen. Somebody noticed it when they played it in a booth. But I guess you didn't notice it."

"Get out of *this one,* braino," I told him.

He got up and said in a strangled voice, "And I thought you were my friend. I suppose I'll never learn." He walked out.

I suppose he never will.

God help me, I ought to know.

the forest of knives

by . . . A. Bertram Chandler

A blonde, a hunch, a madman's song spell danger on Mars—and uncover an alien cabal that may banish Man from the red planet.

EVEN MY BEING a stretcher case did not save me from the Customs and Immigration routine at Port Gregory. The Old Man was furious and tried to swing the weight of his rank to get me priority—but if anything it made things worse. With anybody obliging the name of Basset-Wills — with a hyphen — would have secured me a place among the B's. As it was I had to take my place at the tail end of the queue with the W's.

"And that's what you get for airing a double-barreled moniker!" growled Captain Brown. "If you had a sensible name like mine you'd be in the hospital by now."

I pointed out that as plain Peter Wills I should be just where I was now—and that with the preceding Basset I had stood a sporting chance of a quick release. I would have liked to add that if he hadn't rubbed the Immigration officials the wrong way it would have been better for everybody concerned—but one likes to leave a ship on friendly terms with all and sundry.

Jane, in those days, ranked as an M. Jane Meredith—and if the name isn't familiar you've never looked at a television screen. But she got permission to stick by me

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What is Christmas without a goose—and what is Mars without canals? Though astronomers are still arguing, after three centuries, not only what the odd markings are but whether they actually exist, the public has accepted them as canals and would scarcely enjoy a Martian story without them. Well, Mr. Chandler has come up with a veritable humdinger of a Martian story and don't worry—the canals are in it too.

and hold my hand and smooth my fevered brow. She didn't do it by shouting that she was the great Jane Meredith, the Princess of the Press.

She got it by working on the assumption that gold hair piles on more G's than gold braid. As for her identity—she did her best to keep it quiet by wearing faintly tinted spectacles, a severe hair-do and a very plain costume. The ladies and gentlemen of the news dissemination services have never been over-popular on Mars.

I suppose she stuck by me because she felt a certain sense of responsibility for my condition. She says to this day that it was all her fault. I think that it was mine—after all, one expects passengers to do asinine things and one of the items we're paid for is to see that they don't.

It was when we had reached the Corner, that point in Space where the Navigator tells the Old Man it's time to turn around and start deceleration. My job while this was going on was to make the rounds of the decks and to see that nobody was taking advantage of the brief period of free fall to play pixies.

The routine is the same for all ships. You start right for'ard and work your way aft. When you begin you have about half a dozen cadets with you. In each space you press a button that indicates to Control that all hands are strapped into chairs or bunks, then you leave a cadet on guard to see that nobody slips his safety belt and starts floating around.

By the time you get to the last compartment—which in *Martian Queen* was the main lounge—there's only yourself and you act as your own policeman after you've given the all clear.

Well, I finally finished up in the main lounge. Everything had gone remarkably smoothly on this occasion—usually there are at least a dozen people to whom you have to explain in words of one syllable why they should be strapped down. This, perhaps, had made me careless.

I took a hasty glance around, unlocked the cover of the signal button and gave the all clear, then pulled myself to the nearest vacant chair and started to strap myself in. The red warning light on the bulkhead had begun to flash and we could hear the noise of the gyroscopes starting up as Control began to swing the ship.

Then some old hen sitting next to me gave me a prod in the ribs with a knitting needle.

"Officer!" she cackled. "Why should *she* be allowed to run around loose?"

I dislike being called "officer," especially in that tone of voice, but my neighbor was now using her weapon as a pointer. I looked in the direction she indicated—and at once decided that if I didn't act quick this was where I got emptied out.

There, hanging against the deckhead, was Jane Meredith. I didn't

know her then—but I found time to think that she looked like a leggy blond angel, floating there above our heads. Perhaps a recording angel—assuming that such beings have gone all modern and use ciné-cameras.

"Come down!" I shouted, unsnapping the last buckle.

"Not until I've got this shot!" she replied.

By then the warning bell had started—and I had to make my choice between giving Control a Stop Signal and pulling Jane to a place of safety. To reach the push-button meant negotiating one or two corners. To pull Jane to a position of safety meant straight up and then straight down to my chair. I still think that it was the wiser choice.

My kick carried me up at such speed that I had to put out my hands to fend myself off from the deckhead. Then I grabbed the girl around the waist and tried to maneuver into a position suitable for shoving off back to the deck.

If she hadn't put up a struggle I might have done it in time. When the warning bell stopped I was still trying but with a scant split second to go it was hopeless. And when the main drive opened up I knew it was useless to try any more —although I did manage to get in one last kick at the deckhead that would bring us down on the dance floor instead of among the chairs around the perimeter of the lounge.

Fortuitously I was underneath. Apart from a few bruises Jane was unhurt. But when I tried to get up I found that I had a fractured femur. And that was the last thing I knew until I came around in the ship's hospital a few hours later.

So here I was in the main lounge once more—this compartment having been taken over by the port officials as their office. Many was the time that I had watched the formalities of landing being gone through on other worlds but this was my first trip to Mars. And I had never seen anything as thorough as these Martians.

"You haven't anything in your baggage that you shouldn't?" whispered Jane, pitching her voice low so that it would not be overheard by the two shore stretcher-bearers.

"No," I began and then it was my turn.

They carried me up to the lie detector and while grasping its handles I had to state that I had neither livestock nor radioactives. But a mere statement wasn't good enough—even when backed up by the machine. One of the Customs officers went over every piece of baggage with an electroscope and when *he* had finished another one, armed with a stopwatch, put the articles into what looked like a domestic refrigerator.

"We give 'em all a cooking with HF," the senior man condescended to explain to Jane. "You might have something in your cases and not know about it—the eggs of some insect, for example.

"Had a case not so long ago—dame had half a dozen parrot's eggs,

suspended development jobs, tucked away in her undies. As far as the lie detector went she'd been able to kid herself that they weren't livestock—but she nearly threw a fit when she twigged what we were doing to 'em in the oven."

The Immigration wasn't such a tough hurdle. They sent for the surgeon to make him swear everything he had put on my certificate of discharge was correct, and that was all. They gave each of us a respirator—this they said was for use either outside the dome or inside if the power supply to the compressors should fail. We had to sign a receipt for these.

Jane came with me as far as the hospital. There was ample room in the monowheeled ambulance that bore us swiftly and silently through the gleaming corridors of Port Gregory and her charm worked on the driver and the two attendants as it had done on the port officials.

It was at the hospital door, however, that she met her first setback. She had a woman to deal with there. It was not visiting hours. And it was no use her coming outside visiting hours. No, not even if she had a dozen press cards to flash, not even if a Second Pilot with a broken leg was the world's hottest news. Which he wasn't. And he didn't feel like it, either.

I was not sorry when they put me in my bed and I was able to fall into a deep and dreamless sleep.

II

While waiting for Jane the next morning it occurred to me that I had never asked her what she was doing on Mars. I knew her reputation and it occurred to me that Port Gregory might not be too healthy a city in which to spend a convalescence.

Where Jane Meredith was things happened. The riot and bloodshed were due to begin at any moment. She had, and still has, a keen nose for news. Some even go so far as to say that she herself is a sort of catalyst, that things just naturally happen around her.

I mentioned this to Captain Brown, who was my first visitor.

"H'm!" he grunted. "Never thought of that. Suppose you'll be wanting to come home in the old wagon now, broken leg and all. Had enough red tape to cut through to get you ashore—but that old woman Parks swore that with the continual vibration of the drive the bone was not knitting properly. If you want to take the risk I'll contact whoever is in charge of this hospital and see if I can get you out by sailing day."

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way, sir. Just mentioned it as a point of interest. I suppose that at bottom it's no more than a pressman's yarn. We all know that they can spin some tall ones."

"Perhaps you're right, Basset. But if you do feel that you'd rather be homeward bound with us, just let me know. I don't like leaving one of my officers in this dump—never have had any time for Martians and never will. And . . ."

And then Jane came breezing in.

I liked the way everybody in the ward followed her with his eyes as she swung down the aisle between the rows of beds. I liked the way that the Sister on duty and the few women who were there visiting their menfolk looked at her. There was envy, cattish dislike and reluctant admiration. And she was coming to see *me.*

Gone was the intentional severe plainness of arrival day. I'm no hand at describing women's clothes and such—but this Jane Meredith was the Jane who had charmed the worlds over the television networks. Everything was just right from the top of her hatless head to the toes of her little shoes.

I was dimly aware that the Old Man had eased his bulky form out of the chair beside the bed. I have a vague memory of his saying, "Well, Basset, I must be running along now. Have to see the agent and the consul. And I think it might be as well if I did try to get you out and back aboard the ship."

I hoped that last sentence was in jest.

"Hiya, Peter," said Jane. "How's the corpse?"

"Could be worse. They tell me they're going to start some kind of ray therapy and they're feeding me some goo that they get from one of the local plants. Supposed to be an absolute cure-all."

"And when do they plan to throw you out?"

"In about two weeks."

"And *Martian Queen* is here for about six days more. H'm."

I didn't like that *h'm.* It seemed to bode ill for somebody—probably me. I vaguely remembered that this same Jane Meredith was *persona non grata* on more than one inhabited world of the system and didn't see that it would help my career as an astronaut any if I became involved in any of her escapades.

As it was she had already done my prospects of promotion a bit of no good. But it was unfair to blame her for that—I had slipped up badly and if it had been her leg that was broken and not mine it would have spelled O-U-T.

"Tell me," I said to switch my train of thought to more pleasant tracks, "what are you doing here? What's due to happen?"

"Wish I knew. But something's cooking, Peter, something big. The home office got a tip that the rabbits are mixed up in it, and the crabs. And I have a feeling that *Collinsia Utilensis* may be involved."

"What *is* this—*Alice in Wonderland?*"

"Damn nearly. How's your Martian history?"

"Lousy. If I'd been on this run before I might know something—but up to now I've been ferrying passengers and freight to and from Venus. Liked the run too—but the Big White Chiefs decided it was time I had a transfer."

"Oh, well. I'll give you a brief run-through—it'll help me to get

my own theories straightened out.

"Mars, of course, has run through the same pattern of social evolution as the other colonized planets. First of all a collection of settlements—American, British, Russian, Dutch and so on—each little colony owing allegiance to the mother country on Earth.

"Then at last the day when they all began to regard themselves as Martians rather than American, British or what have you. And the inevitable inferiority complex that seems unavoidable with young nations—taking its usual form, the conviction that the Terran Central Government was out to do them dirt, was just waiting for an excuse to send a fleet and invade.

"Now—exports and imports.

"Collins was the biologist with Gregory on the first expedition to Mars. He found the plant that bears his name, the plant that is the only native living thing on Mars. There *were* animals once—but judging by their remains they weren't intelligent.

"It must have taken considerable skill and knowledge on somebody's part to cut the canals—but whoever it was didn't leave so much as a mud hut with four walls and a roof. Not a trace has ever been found of either architecture or artifact of any kind.

"But—to get back to old Collins' super-vegetable—it was early recognized that, in its various forms, it would supply every need of man. Food, clothing, medicines——all growing from the one root. They get industrial alcohol from it—and the muck that they sell in bottles with an Imported Scotch label. And there are certain scents and drugs which, until they could be synthesized, fetched high prices in the Terran market.

"But man doesn't thrive on a vegetarian diet. Some fool repeated the early Australian experiment and had a few pairs of rabbits shipped out. In spite of the climate and the impossibly thin atmosphere, one or two survived of those that were turned loose in the open. And they bred—*and* bred—and began to make serious inroads into the supplies of *Collinsia Utilensis.*

"But there were mental giants in those days as always. It finally dawned on the other colonies that a nice little war with those responsible for the introduction of the innocent bunnies wasn't getting anybody anywhere. So hostilities were concluded and everybody went into a huddle about ways and means of controlling the pest. Biological control was all the rage in those days—but people were chary about introducing any very small life form to prey on our furry friends lest it get completely out of hand.

"It was a laddie called Carruthers —who now has the best-hated memory on this cock-eyed world—upon whom the great light finally dawned. He remembered reading somewhere that, way back in Pre-Atomic days rabbits had been introduced to certain islands of Earth's Pacific Ocean.

"These islands carried visual bea-

cons of some kind that were used by the surface ships of that time and people had to live on the islands and look after these lights. The idea was the rabbits would provide both a welcome dietary change and sport. They did—for the land crabs. The same little beasts that had overrun Australia couldn't stand up to an armor-plated enemy that followed them down into their burrows.

"Surprisingly enough the crabs did well on Mars and Carruthers was the hero of the hour. It is only a year ago that they demolished his statue."

"Yes, I remember seeing a recording of it. Carmichael of Extra-Terran News covered it."

"He would. He's a Martian citizen, you know, and has considerable pull with the censor. Very little leaks out before he's scooped it. But if he'd had any sense he wouldn't have made that newscast of the crabs surrounding a mob of rabbits. Do you know what it reminded me of? Sheepdogs and a herd of sheep.

"There were at least three hundred bunnies—and all the time Carmichael had the scene in the lens of his camera only two were pulled down and eaten. It looked for all the world as though somebody—or *something*—was having the rest herded North along Casartelli's Canal.

"But the crabs—and the rabbits. It finally dawned on somebody that the rabbits were doing *Collinsia* more good than harm. They went mainly for the fruit—and they dropped the seeds all along the canals. Dropped them *and* fertilized them. And remember that these same seeds had resisted all attempts made by the colonists to plant them.

"The rabbits too had changed. Man, when he colonizes an alien world, brings his own conditions with him. The rabbits outside the domes had to adapt themselves to alien conditions. They did. They're big now and have a lung capacity large enough to handle the thin atmosphere. There may quite probably be not a few mutants in their Martian genealogy—but that I wouldn't know. I do know that every woman on Earth would sell her soul for a coat of Martian Bunny."

"Snob appeal!" I said.

"It's not! It's the loveliest fur you ever saw, ever felt. It makes mink look like alley cat. But where was I?

"Oh, yes. The rabbits are valuable now. And the land crabs, which have developed into something like boilers on stilts, are playing hell with the Martian economy. Of course when they kill a rabbit they don't eat the fur—but the pelt looks as though it had been put through a mincing machine. And they seem to herd the rabbits away from the traps as though they were doing it on purpose. They have even been known to attack hunters. They—"

"Miss Meredith! Miss Meredith! Your time was up ten minutes ago."

"Sorry, Sister. I had no idea how the time was flying."

"Will you be in this evening, Jane?" I asked.

"No, Peter. I'd better not. There's bound to be a crowd from the ship. I really must start making some contacts. After all, it's what I.P.N.S. pays me for."

III

The crowd from the ship was along that night and every night until she shoved off. They looked after me well, smuggling ashore all kinds of little luxuries on which a very stiff duty should have been paid. The Old Man came in every morning, as part of his ship's business routine, and Jane came too.

I heard him talking to her the day before *Martian Queen* was to blast off. "Look after him, Miss Meredith," I heard him say. "Don't let him get into mischief."

"Of course, Captain Brown," said Jane, doing her best to look like a blond Sunday schoolbook angel. "I'll see that he keeps away from the more sordid dives. After all, I feel responsible for him as it was really my fault."

"We all make mistakes, Miss Meredith. I'm glad that you're here to keep him out of trouble."

Of that I had my doubts—but I kept my big mouth shut.

Actually there was no reason why I should not have rejoined before sailing. No reason at all—except that the surgeon who was handling my case insisted on finishing the job. There was a little professional jealousy there. He hated the idea that poor old Parks—who, in any case, was an Earthman—should get the credit.

Jane Meredith was with me when *Martian Queen* blasted off. We heard the muffled thunder of her jets as she warmed them up and then came the peculiar screaming roar of a big rocket in flight. I followed her in my imagination—up through the thin air, up past the orbits of Phobos and Deimos, out and away toward the Sun and Earth.

I felt very lost and lonely here on this arid world, where one's Earth citizenship counts for less than nothing. On the other runs you don't get that kind of thing. The mere fact that you're from Home makes you a little tin god.

"You'll be out in a week," said Jane.

"So they tell me."

"And there's nothing homeward bound for another five weeks."

"No."

"Would you like a job?"

"That depends."

"Quite a nice job. It's like this, Peter. I.P.N.S. allows me practically unlimited funds—more than enough to buy a nice little rocket plane. It's essential, really, for getting around on this world—the public transport services are vile.

"But here's the snag—I have no pilot's license. Had one once, but . . . Anyhow, skip it. Your license, they tell me, covers handling any kind of rocket-propelled craft inside atmospheric limits as well as

in deep space. As your qualifications are international and interplanetary they'll hold good on Mars. Right?"

"Yes, but . . ." I knew what was coming.

"And I can't hire me a pilot for love or money. I can get the ship —but someone has tipped off the Aviators' Guild that I'm not, repeat, *not* to hire any help. That Carmichael knows I'm here—and knows I'm onto something. But he can't stop me from hiring you."

"Provided I want to be hired. But if I were you I'd keep it quiet —Carmichael might have enough pull to have me kept in my virtuous couch until the next homeward bound ship."

On the whole I wasn't sorry when they threw me out of the hospital. Not that they were a bad crowd—they certainly looked after me well. And their continual harping on the theme of how vastly superior Martian medical science was to that of Earth failed to bother me—all that I knew was that they had done a remarkably good job on my leg.

I didn't even mind when they told me all about their marvellous *Collinsia*—and was amused rather than otherwise at the impression they gave that they personally had created the beastly thing out of nothing.

It was quite a plant—from the same root could grow a dozen different specialized forms, so unlike as to seem different species. The difference went far deeper than externals—the actual chemistry of leaves and stem were of an extreme diversity.

Nor was that all—it seemed that the chemistry was liable to change. Certain leaves of *Collinsia* had long been used as a sort of smoking tobacco—and very palatable it was too. But lately a subtle difference had crept in—very hard to detect unless one knew it was there. What had been a harmless pleasant narcotic was now a dangerous habit-forming drug.

The seeds of the apple-like fruit —which alone was standard—were largely used for spices. And those spices had of late developed poisonous characteristics. But the chemists in the various processing plants were on the alert and there was no longer any real danger.

To get back to the hospital—it was amusing to listen to the nurses at one moment running down Earth and all things Earthly, the next avid for information about the planet they affected so to despise.

It was the consul who took care of me the day that I left. Jane was out of the city, I learned later, taking a run in a hired launch along the main canal running north and south from Port Gregory. But she had hinted at her intentions the previous day so I was not unduly disappointed.

The consul wasn't a bad old boy, although a trifle pompous, and insisted on supporting me to the monotaxi waiting outside the hospital doors. And he had certainly done me well in the matter of ac-

commodation—although it would be I.C.C. that was paying.

He had found me a three-room service apartment on the very periphery of the city, an apartment whose transparent side walls overlooked the desert landing fields of the spaceport. Not that there were any deep space-ships in just then to make me homesick—although there was an abundance of little rockets—both planes for use inside atmospheric limits and larger vessels capable of making the run to Phobos or Deimos.

But it was a mistaken kindness. The average spaceman always remembers what happened when *King Charles' Wain* sat down hard in the middle of Manchester and prefers the Terran practice, subsequent to that spectacularly unpleasant incident, of keeping the ports as far as possible from large centers of population.

There were flowers on the table of the living room—a large vase of tastefully arranged gorgeous blossoms. I guessed that this would be my first visual introduction to the fabulous *Collinsia.* There was a note too, propped against the side of the vase. The writing was unfamiliar—but I guessed whom it was from.

"Miss Meredith sent the blossoms," said the Consul needlessly. He made an harumphing sound and caressed the ends of his long moustache. "A very charming young lady."

I agreed absently while opening the envelope. Apologizing, I read the note. It was short and to the point.

Sorry I wasn't on hand to meet you out but I heard reports that a large covey(??) of crabs had been sighted advancing upon the city along the bank of Casartelli's Canal. Everything I take will have to go through the censor—but it may be worthwhile. Have told the Walrus to look after you. Give him my love and a couple or so drinks. You'll find the bottles in the cabinet by the teleaudio. Will call for you, if back, at nineteen thirty.

J.

So I found the bottles and gave the Walrus his drinks.

We chatted awhile of this and that—and having learned what Jane's very apt name for him was I found it hard to keep a straight face. It was all getting to be too too Lewis Carroll. Crabs and rabbits and now the Walrus. It was a pity that my name wasn't Carpenter. But after the third drink I began to feel like the Dormouse.

"You'll have to excuse me," I said, yawning, "but I find this local brew a trifle strong."

The Walrus looked at his watch.

"And I must be running along, Mr. Basset-Wills. Remember me to Miss Meredith when you see her again. You must both of you come to the Consulate some night for dinner. And don't forget—I'm here to be of service."

He left and I decided to see if the settee along one wall was as

soft as it looked. The next thing I knew was Jane Meredith shaking me and telling me to look lively and get my boozing suit on.

My number ones would certainly have been out of place in the dives to which I was taken that night. Jane must have explored the city very thoroughly during my spell in the hospital—explored it with an eye to local color of the more meretricious variety. It wasn't to the East Gate she took me—that was the doorway through which traffic from the air and spaceport entered.

Nor was it the North or the South Gate—the taverns in their vicinity were patronized by the crews of the powered lighters that plied their trade along the canals. The West Gate was the obvious place to look for information of the kind she was seeking. Through it came the land traffic—the big tractors called "sand-cats" or "desert schooners," the prospectors, the trappers and hunters.

It wasn't too savory a locality. It was clean and well lit—but over all hung an indefinable air of raffishness. Jane managed to blend well with the background. It occurred to me later that she must have had long and educational experience of this kind of thing—but at the time I felt more than a little hurt that she should cheapen her appearance as she had done.

It was done cleverly enough. Just a little too much make-up, a very slight discord in the color scheme of blouse and skirt. The rest was a matter of bearing, of speech and accent. It was enough. Even her hair seemed to take on a brassy tint.

The handbag too—it was larger and more ornate than sanctioned by good taste. But it had to be—even a miniature camera when packed with a few spare spools is quite bulky. And the glittering decorations helped to conceal the lens.

As for me—Jane gave me up as hopeless.

"You're like just like what you are," she said, "a mug of a spaceman taken in tow by a designing blonde. But it doesn't really matter."

From my apartment we walked to the nearest corridor through which the westbound moving way ran. Jane seemed to know the city like a native, transfered from level way to ramp and again to level way until we reached what she called the ground floor.

In a short space of time we came to the end of the run, stepped out into a vast domed hall. At one side of it were the doors of the airlocks—big for vehicular traffic, small for the rare pedestrians. It was noisy too on this level—the air compressors can't have been too far distant.

Three big tractors had just come in and were discharging bales of furs onto an endless belt running into the heart of the city. The polished deck was gritty underfoot—in spite of all measures taken to prevent it some of the fine Martian sand was certain to seep in.

Not far from where we were standing was a flickering sign.

EDDY'S BAR & GRILL, it proclaimed, FINEST IMPORTED EATS & DRINX. Somebody came out as we watched, staggering slightly, and through the open door poured a wave of sound and scent —the latter composed of cheap liquor, hot cooked meats and tobacco smoke.

"This'll do for a start," said Jane.

She put up her hand, ruffled her hair a little more and dragged me towards the entrance.

Inside it was typical of such places on all the worlds. I knew, without sampling its wares, that the imported drinks would be merely the local brew with synthetic flavoring and a fancy bottle label added.

The imported food would be the ubiquitous crab and rabbit and *Collinsia* camouflaged by a cook whose ambition must inevitably be far in excess of his ability. Music and entertainment were provided by juke boxes, on the screens of which the same old scantily clad lovelies went through the same old gyrations to the same old strains of last year's swing.

Not that I minded particularly—I rather like such places. But I was ashamed to bring Jane there. Of course—she was bringing me but I had forgotten that.

We chose a table near the bar and when the slatternly waitress came, to clear the deck of the debris left by the last diners and to take our orders, Jane put on her act. It was wasted, I thought, since there were only the girl and a couple of barflies to hear her impersonation of a spaceport blonde fleecing a poor innocent spaceman.

But in a voice that she deliberately coarsened just the right amount she ordered everything that was most expensive. Oysters she wanted—they were imported—and champagne at an imported wine price.

I must have winced. After all, the only cash I had was such money as had been due when I paid off from the *Queen.* It would have to last me until the next homeward bound ship.

"Cheer up, duckie," whispered Jane. "The I.P.N.S. is paying for this. You're on our payroll now anyhow."

Some of the loungers must have heard the lavish order being given —as they were intended to. There was one gentleman who apparently figured he had as much right to a share of my wad as Jane. He left the bar to stand up by itself and sauntered across to our table. He pulled a chair up, sat down facing us both.

"Thought you was a stranger here, Jack," he said. "Just out from Home?"

"Yes."

"Hope I'm not talkin' out o' turn —but I don't like ter see a nice young fella like yerself gettin' with the wrong sort o' people from the very start."

"Meanin' me?" demanded Jane.

"Since you're askin', sister, yes. Come ter think of it—haven't seen yer around here before. Who's yer patron? If yer got one."

Jane's voice was sullen as she replied, "Haven't got one yet. Just come in from Tamaragrad—couldn't stand them Russians at any price. But what's it to you?"

"Oh, nothin', nothin'. Just that I don't want ter see the young fella skinned. An' what's it worth for me not ter pass the word around ter the girls that there's a freelance operatin' in their territory? If I do it won't be pleasant."

IV

The situation looked ugly. I shot Jane Meredith a worried glance—but she was enjoying herself. I began considering ways and means of getting her out of EDDY'S BAR & GRILL and at the same time shaking off this gentleman who had taken my moral welfare so much to heart.

By this time the champagne and the oysters had arrived. The bottle was in a regulation ice bucket and, if the label was to be believed, was good. When I saw the bill—the girl insisted on payment on delivery—I thought they must have brought us bottled radium by mistake.

The oysters were real imported oysters—fresh from the can. And the price started me doing sums in my head involving the number of cans and the amount of freight payable per case. Unasked the waitress set out three glasses. I was going to protest but Jane kicked me hard under the table.

Then she started treading on my foot. It was some little time before I had a rush of brains to the head and decoded, *Go and powder your nose.*

Well, orders were orders. I got up and asked my guide, philosopher and friend where to go. He insisted on coming with me and kept up a running fire of admonition and advice. His greatest ambition in life was to take me to a place kept by a friend of his where the drinks were so much better and so much cheaper, where one could have a friendly game of cards and where one could meet some really respectable girls.

I was half listening and wondering whether Jane had intended that I should knock him out when I got him alone. It didn't seem a very good idea—apart from the fact that he probably carried arms of some kind he was bigger than me. And I was ready to be convinced he knew far more about rough-and-tumble fighting than I ever dreamed of on the darkest night.

So we wandered back to our table—and from the way he looked at Jane I was sorry that I hadn't taken a poke at him. But that crazy girl actually gave him a smile of welcome and began pouring out his glass of wine before he sat down. Having an innocent mind I should not have expected any deception. But our friend did not have an innocent mind.

Jane, having murmured the conventional, "Happy days," had her own glass to her lips when he reached across and took it.

"Pardon me," he said, "but your mug is chipped, sister. Take mine!"

If he had been a man of normal sensibilities the glare from Jane's blue eyes would have withered him. But he just leered and passed his own glass to the girl.

"Happy days!" he said, drained the wine and went out like a light.

"It always works," said Jane happily. "At least, with that type. Here's to Mickey. All right, you can drink yours. It's quite safe." Then, "What's *that?*"

The door to the outside was open, a group of men were standing just inside it on the verge of departure, talking. The two juke boxes were momentarily silent and over the loud coarse voices the noises of the city drifted in.

Mainly mechanical they were—the murmur of wheeled transport, the whine of compressor fans and the faint rhythmic clatter of the nearest moving way. There was someone outside singing, singing singing and slowly approaching, and slowly approaching, singing an old old song in a cracked voice.

". . . come a-waltzing Matilda with me!"

"Up came the squatter, mounted on his thoroughbred,
Down came the troopers—one, two, three;
'Where's that jolly jumbuk you've got in your tucker bag?
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me!"
"Waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda,
"You'll . . ."

The singer drew abreast of the doorway—and passed on.

". . . come a-waltzing Matilda with me!"

"Come *on!*" cried Jane. "I smell news, *news!*"

As she jumped to her feet the remains of the bottle of synthetic champagne were upset, running over the table, cascading into the lap of the receiver of knockout drops. But nobody worried—except the slatternly waitress.

"Here!" she demanded. What have yer done to Whitey Snow?"

"He'll be all right," I said hopefully. "Just let him sleep it off!"

"Give the wench a ten spot to keep quiet!" An intense whisper from the pride of the I.P.N.S. "And ask her . . ."

The note changed hands.

"Who was that singing outside?" I said casually.

"Singing? Oh, *him.* That was Mad Mullins, the Australian. Last of the Swagmen he calls himself. But what do you want with the likes of him?"

"Nothing, nothing—just curious."

I elbowed my way through the crowd with a certain haste. Jane was already streaking out of the door.

It wasn't hard to track the self-styled Last of the Swagmen. He knew only one song, and he liked it. We followed him out of the main corridor along a smaller one, that ran off from it at an angle. It was little more than a tunnel.

We couldn't see far ahead—the lighting was sparse and the reflections from the curved polished walls were confusing. But there floated back to us snatches of the misadventures of the immortal swagman—and in accompaniment to the ballad came the subdued whirring noise of the camera in Jane's handbag. Evidently this seemed to her worth recording.

We were gaining on him. We could see his tall thin figure, fantastic in the confused lighting, with the bag swinging on his back. The bag—the "swag"—Waltzing Matilda herself. I was still wondering what it was all about as Mad Mullins led us down, down and down.

Then the noise of machinery—faint at first but rapidly becoming louder—added its repetitious throbbing to the monotony of the song from ahead. We lost sight of Mullins as he turned a bend of the tunnel—then, as we rounded the angle, we saw before us a platform past which was running a moving way.

The gaunt old man stood poised for a moment on the brink of this fast-flowing mechanical river, then jumped. We saw him stagger as he fought to retain his balance and then he was gone, carried into obscurity through the tunnel mouth into which the moving way ran.

We hurried down to the platform. Jane, clutching her precious handbag, was the first to jump. She misjudged the speed of the way and fell heavily, holding the bag up and away from her so that whatever else befell it would not be damaged. I was luckier when I followed—and hurried along the rocking vibrating surface to Jane's side.

"Are you hurt?"

"Not permanently. There's a portion of the human anatomy designed to be sat on hard—and I sat on it hard—*very!* But now I'm down I'm staying down until we get to wherever we're going. This tunnel is high enough here—but what it will be like later on I don't know."

I sat down too. We knew that Mullins was still with us—from somewhere ahead came a mournful voice informing us that somebody's ghost can be heard as you pass by that billabong and that Matilda was still in the dance marathon.

We looked around. There was nothing to see. Just bare rough walls that flashed by at high speed, just an occasional dim light that did little beyond making the darkness tangible. More than once we were tempted to crawl forward along the moving way, to see the old madman at close quarters, to find out on what errand he was bound.

Had it been up to me I think we would have done so. But Jane, after careful consideration, refused to budge. If we made the acquaintance of Mad Mullins now we might find out where he was going and what he intended to do—and we might feel impelled to stop him. It might be public spirited—but would it be news? Jane didn't think so.

"Why are we following this crazy

old coot anyway?" I wanted to know.

"Because I've discovered something while you were laid up," she told me. "Mullins has been coming down from the Pole—and trouble has been coming down with him. I want to find out why."

Two hours after the start of our dark journey we saw the glimmer of brighter light ahead. Then we were abruptly swept out of the tunnel into a large artificial cavern. The moving track curved back upon itself gently, ran back in the direction of Port Gregory through another tunnel which must have been roughly parallel with that through which we had come.

But the actual recurvature was hidden under a platform—a platform designed to scoop any object off the incoming moving way and send it sliding down a chute. We had no desire to be scooped and chuted, especially since the mad Australian had already left the moving way and was walking, slowly yet purposefully, towards a doorway in the rock opening upon the outgoing track.

There were men working about the doorway, loading crates and boxes upon the conveyor that would bear them to the city. We saw guards as well—and the gleaming of the light on their automatic weapons.

Mullins approached the door in the rock, slouching forward with the peculiar gait of the hobo, his swag wobbling on his shoulders like a thing alive. Jane had her camera-handbag unlimbered, and I could hear the faint whirr of its mechanism over the clatter of the moving way. She was peering into the viewfinder.

"Damn!" she ejaculated, "What *is* the matter with the man's head? It's coming in fuzzy." Then, "He's wearing his respirator!"

Luckily we had not been long enough on Mars to become careless about carrying the little haversacks with us. The idea that our lives depended upon a series of pumps and fans was still sufficiently novel even to me—after all, in a ship only a breach of the hull can reduce the pressure—to breed caution. It was the work of seconds to pull out the transparent headpieces, to connect them with the oxygen cylinders carried in the same haversacks.

The men loading crates and packages on the moving way stopped working. The guards challenged Mullins. He was advancing more slowly now, his hands raised above his head. We approached within twenty yards or so, then edged behind a stout pillar running from roof to floor to watch developments.

We saw Mullins stop, saw him back against the rock wall with the muzzle of a gun in his belly. Whatever was in his swag, I remember thinking, would be crushed against the stone. And whatever was in his bag must have been remarkably quick acting.

There was a clatter as the guards dropped their weapons, a concert of thuds as guards and workers fell like ninepins. Mullins stepped over the body of the man who had prodded him in the belly, vanished through

the doorway with the air of one hurrying to keep an appointment.

V

They weren't dead. Whatever had hit the guards and the workers was not lethal—at least not immediately. But we couldn't revive them—and not knowing what gas had been used there was not much we could do about it. Our best chance of finding help for the unconscious men lay in following Mullins into what was obviously an industrial establishment of some kind.

We saw what it was when we passed through the doorway. The leaves of the door were thick and so made that when the door was closed they would form an airtight seal. In structure they were like a sandwich. The ten feet between outer and inner surfaces was composed of layers of steel and concrete and lead.

Hurrying after Mullins we passed rooms in which machinery of all kinds was operating, rooms whose occupants lay in attitudes of careless sleep. The bag was still giving out its gas, still securing a free passage for the man who carried it. The fact that a draught was setting in from the outer door meant that the cloud of sleep would precede him.

"To hell with this!" I said at last. "This is an atomic power station. News or no news I'm going to stop that crazy old coot from doing whatever he wants to do!"

I broke into a run. And then Mullins turned round, saw that he was being followed. And he too started running. He was an old man but he was used to moving in the feeble gravitational field of Mars. We were hopelessly outdistanced.

There was little time to lose when we burst into the generator room. The power station was of the old outdated uranium-pile type, long since superseded by the Flackmann Converter, to which all matter is an energy source. But those old uranium-pile stations hang on and hang on. Enormous amounts of capital went into their construction —and they are still paying handsome dividends.

Mullins was already at work when we burst into the generator room. Before the control board lay the engineers of the watch—and Mullins, working with skillful deliberation, was striving to demolish the plant.

We could not see what was happening in the pile itself—that was behind feet of lead and concrete. But we could read the labels on the remote control switches—although we hadn't time for that just then. We knew, without reading any labels, that Mullins was withdrawing screens, inserting additional slugs of uranium, draining the heavy water that was both a moderator and a source of steam for the turbo-generators.

The old man snarled as I flung myself upon him. It was hard to get a grip on his body—he was still wearing his outdoor clothing, heavy drill with a fur lining, and it was foul and slippery with years of

grease and dirt. But I got my fingers in his collar, tried hard to rip the breathing mask from his head. I had to forfeit my hard-won advantage as he all but tore off my own respirator.

Out of the corner of an eye I could see Jane. She was frantically manipulating controls—replacing screens and withdrawing uranium slugs. It was impossible that she should hit the right combination—the only men who could do that lay unconscious at our feet.

But she erred on the side of safety. The whine of the generators, of which we had not been conscious until its cessation, faded and died. There was momentary, confusing darkness as the power failed—and when the emergency batteries took over the lamps were sparse and dim.

But before this happened Mullins and I were on the floor. He was an old man and weak—he should have been weak anyway—but he had what I lacked, co-ordination with local gravitational conditions. He may, too, have had the desperate consuming surge of strength that comes to the insane.

At any rate he was sitting astride my body and had both hands at my throat, tearing at the neckband of my mask. Both of mine were on his skinny wrists—but struggle as I might I knew that it was only a matter of seconds before the mask would be off.

The supreme irony of it all was hearing, faintly but unmistakably, the penetrating whirr of Jane's little camera. It would make a good picture, I told myself, a swell picture. But neither of us would live to see it.

Jane was still at the control panel. How . . . ?

When the lights went out Mullins whipped one of his hands away from my throat. When they came on again that hand was holding a gun—an ugly long-barreled pistol of point-five caliber. I saw his thin gnarled finger tighten on the trigger.

And then Jane was on him, both hands on his gun wrist, wrenching and twisting. The gun went off, its report thunderous at such close quarters. The heavy slug from his own weapon took Mullins in the side. The fight was over.

We knelt by the body of the old man.

The thin plastic of his breathing mask was rising and falling ever so gently. Had it not been for this we would have thought him dead—it was impossible to detect any heartbeat through the thick clothing. He wasn't dead—which meant he would be able to talk.

"Get the clothes off him!" ordered Jane.

While I was busy with this unsavory task—it must have been the first time in years it had been done—Jane turned her back to me and I heard the sound of something ripping. Whatever garment she was wearing under her skirt was being pressed into service for a bandage. She didn't know until later that her camera, perched on the bench from which it had recorded the fight, had

not failed to function on this occasion.

I got Mullins' fur-lined jacket off and two or three shirts which, when new, might have been any color, then a layer of thick, woolen underwear. There wasn't as much blood as I had anticipated. The bullet had caught him just below the ribs on the right side, had gone right through without penetrating deeply on its way.

"He'll live," said Jane. With deft fingers she began to bandage the wound to staunch the flow of blood. "But it's a pity that we have no germicide handy. I don't see how that mess can possibly fail to turn septic."

The next thing was to return the Last of the Swagmen to consciousness. There was a valve on the oxygen cylinder in his haversack, a valve whereby the oxygen supply could be regulated. This we opened to its fullest extent, then sat back and awaited developments.

While we sat and waited we marveled that this dirty unkempt creature should have held briefly in his hands the power of a god. For we now had time to work out what *would* have happened had the pile got out of control.

The power station would, of course, have ceased to exist—but there was another more modern station handling the bulk of the Martian energy demands. A few square miles of desert would have been fused and vaporized—but that would not have caused serious inconvenience except to the few who happened to be in the immediate vicinity.

However the door to the tunnel leading to Port Gregory had been left open—we found afterwards that Mullins had sabotaged the controls that should have slammed it shut seconds before the blast. And along the tunnel would have rushed a wave of searing gas—a projectile along the bore of a sixty-mile-long gun-barrel.

The dome of the capital city would have burst like a soap bubble—and any who were lucky enough to survive the actual explosion would have died far more unpleasantly as the lethal radiations burned out eyes and lungs. It wasn't nice to think about it.

And this—*this*—had held the power of life and death over half a million fellow beings!

Mullins stirred and muttered—a tall thin dirty old man. His beard and sparse hair should have been white—but they were so encrusted and stained as to be green instead. I looked more closely, interested in spite of myself. That green could hardly be the resut of even years of neglect—it looked for all the world as though some tiny plant were growing on his scalp.

"It thinks I'm dead," came a cracked voice from behind the swagman's breathing mask. "It's left me alone. But 'oo are you?"

"Never mind," said Jane crisply. "*You* tell us what *you* were doing—and who told you to do it."

"A sheila—yair. You're the one wot shot me, ain't yer? Yer 'ad ter

save yer boy friend. But yer ain't Johns, are yer?"

"No. We're not police."

"Then I'll tell yer. It was way up north, past Paris du Ciel, past Tamaragrad even. Right up where the ice and snow march down to the edge o' the thirsty red desert. An' there's forests up there—forests of this 'ere *Collinsia.*

"It ain't any good to the chemists the way it grows there—like trees it is, like trees with spiky leaves and big spikes growin' out o' the trunks like knives. An' there's rabbit there—thousands of 'em, all colors. An' them bastards 'ide in the forest an' come out now an' again for an 'op over the desert. When they see me they all bolted back among the trees an' 'id.

"But I waited an' watched an' saw that there was paths runnin' into the woods. Paths big enough an' wide enough so that yer can just squeeze along 'em without them knives rippin' yer ter shreds. An' I thought as I'd set my traps along them paths.

"But first of all I wanted to see where them paths led to—for all I know there might be anything be'ind all them spikes an' spines. An' when *Collinsia* puts up that sort o' barricade you can bet yer boots that there's somethin' worth-while be'ind it.

"I must 'a' gone miles an' miles an' miles—an' still nothin' but them damn' livin' bayonets. Just them an' now an' again a sort o' clearin' where there was *Collinsia* of another sort—but the rabbits 'ad 'ad all that.

"It was in one o' them clearin's that I bedded down for the night. I 'ad some rabbit meat in my tucker bag an' I made a little fire an' boiled a billy o' tea. An' I got out my little airtight tent an' I was all set fer a good night's kip. I could 'ear them rabbits thumpin' around under me—the ground must 'a' been like an 'oneycomb.

"And then, just as I was droppin' off, I 'eard the noise of somethin' crashin' around in the bush. It should 'a' made me careful—but I'd left the fire burnin' outside the tent an' that'd keep anything off.

"When the tent was ripped away in the night it was pitch dark. An' there I was, gaspin' an' chokin'—an' when that sort o' thing 'appens to yer the first thing yer reaches for is yer mask.

"They let me put it on—an' then they grabbed me by the arms an' legs so I couldn't move. I couldn't see 'oo *they* was—but I could 'ear that chitterin' sound they makes wi' them funny sideways mouths o' theirs an' I could feel their claws grippin' me.

"Then they got me to me feet an' started shovin' me down the path. An' when I was trippin' every second step they lifted me up an' carried me. Phobos was just beginnin' to show over the tops o' the trees when they dived down into a tunnel. 'Mullins,' says I to meself, 'this is where you makes a meal for Baby Crab an' all 'is little brothers an' sisters an' cousins an' aunts."

"It was a long tunnel—an' though we'd lost sight o' the sky long since there was still light—a sort o' glow like wot yer gets from the 'ands of yer watch. I noticed that the air was pressin' me mask against me face—an' that meant that it must be thick enough ter breath.

"But when I tried to reach up to take it off them crabs just dug their claws in all the 'arder. And then damme if one of 'em didn't do it 'imself—careful like so as not to tear the plastic—as we was passin' through part o' the tunnel wot was all overgrown wi' creepers an' such.

"An' then we came to where *It* was. Don't ask me about *It,* I just can't remember that part. But *It* told me what to do—an' one o' the crabs took most o' the gear out o' my tucker bag an' filled it up wi' things like kids' toy balloons. An' *It* told me that they was full of a gas or somethin', and that once they was bust anyone 'oo wasn't wearin' a mask'd pass out.

"Then the crabs took me back to the surface, bein' careful ter see that I 'ad me respirator back on. I remember that my 'ead was itchin' worse than usual but I couldn't scratch it wi' me 'eadpiece in the way.

"An' there was somethin' inside my brain that kep' me goin' without food an' without sleep—although it let me drink from the canals as I 'eaded south. I wanted to tell the guards on the gate at Port Gregory wot I 'ad ter do but *It* wouldn't let me.

"I thought that perhaps if I sung to meself, loud-like, it might break the spell, but it didn't do no good. An' all the time that I was fightin' your man 'ere, Missus, I was a-tryin' to make meself lose. *It* made me pull the gun—I've never used it on anything but crabs . . ."

Then, in a pleading voice, "You won't turn me over to the Johns, will yer? They'll *make* me talk, they'll make me say wotever they want me to."

"No," said Jane.

Abruptly there were sounds of voices from the corridor outside, a clatter of booted feet running over the stone floor. Men were all around us, uniformed, armed. Jane and I raised our hands high before the menace of their leveled guns. Mullins—lying supine with a blood-stained bandage about his torso—they ignored.

"Shoot the rats now!" yelped somebody. "They'd have blown Port Gregory clear to Pluto if we hadn't got here in time!"

"It wasn't them," came a thin, cracked voice from the floor. "It was me—Mullins." The voice took on a note of pride. "The Last o' the Swagmen. They stopped me."

"Mullins!" said one of the troopers. "Who'd 'a' thought the old creep had it in him? Pick him up, men. We'll take 'em all back for questioning."

"You'll never take *me* alive!" cried Mullins.

With surprising agility he sprang to his feet, pushed through the ring of men surrounding us. Shots were fired—but the light was bad and

the Australian was weaving as he ran. Briefly he bent over a metal manhole cover in the stone floor, sent it in a clattering trajectory that swept the first of his pursuers off his feet. He stood briefly poised over the black hole—then he was gone. A long time afterwards we heard the splash.

There were technicians with the troopers and they busied themselves getting things running once more. We heard one of them say, "D'ye remember when poor old Malcolm fell into the boiler feed? We got his bones next time we cleaned out —absolutely clean and white they were."

Somewhere something was starting up. Its rhythmic chatter seemed to match the meter of a song, an old song—

"Up jumped the swagman, sprang into the billabong,
'You'll never catch me alive!' said he;
And his ghost may be heard as you pass by that billabong—
'You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me!'"

I've often wondered since if the generator room of that power station *is* haunted now.

VI

Explanations were in order when we got back to Port Gregory. Luckily for us those who had been on duty at the power station door were able to confirm our story in part, as soon as they recovered from the effects of the anaesthetic gas.

There was Mullins' swag with some twisted and dried shreds of vegetable matter in it—shreds that might well have been all that remained of bladders that once had held something of a gaseous nature.

And there were Jane's films—these gave a complete sound and visual record of the events of that night from EDDY'S BAR & GRILL onwards. The last part, that dealing with Mullins' story, Jane managed to remove and hide. If it had occurred to anybody that anything was being suppressed the missing portion would have had to be produced. But the shots, inadvertently recorded, of Jane tearing up her slip to make bandages were proof positive of her candor.

Nevertheless we had a sticky time. It was only our Terran citizenship, plus the fact that we were both employees of powerful corporations, that saved us from a stickier one. The most galling part of it was to have Carmichael—Jane pointed him out to me, one of those little dark clever looking characters —sitting in on the interrogation we were put through.

But he wouldn't use the story—it showed Interplanetarly News Services and its gallant news hounds in far too good a light. He could use his influence with the censor to have it killed if Jane wanted to broadcast it from any of the Martian stations. But Jane didn't want to broadcast it until she had the full story. Carmichael wanted that story too, for his Extra-Terran News.

Then there was the Walrus bumbling around, very distressed about it all. "You shouldn't do these things," he kept on saying. "You shouldn't do these things."

"Look, Mr. Consul," I said at last, "if we hadn't done these things, as you put it, there'd be none of us alive to talk about it."

"But the police, Mr. Basset-Wills. It's what they're paid for."

"Fat chance a mere Terran has of getting a Martian cop interested in anything," said Jane.

The Walrus made no verbal reply. He just glared.

I looked about me and felt, not for the first time, that I was getting rather tired of the environment. We were in a room in the Port Gregory Police Headquarters. It was plain but comfortable enough—if one ignored the fact that the best easy chair was firmly occupied by Carmichael of the E.T.N.

I met Carmichael's eyes, then, annoyed by the look of tolerant amusement that was all too evident in them, shifted my regard to the old Consul. He had gone to the faucet in one corner beneath which was a container of paper cups.

He took a cup from the container, held it beneath the tap and pressed the spring lever. Instead of the anticipated steam of clear ice water only a thin muddy trickle emerged. He muttered something under his breath and threw the cup from him.

"Didn't you know, Mr. Consul?" asked the E.T.N. man lazily. "The water's been off since zero seven hundred this morning."

"Why?" demanded Jane.

"Because, Meredith, we are at war. While you and Mr. Basset Hyphen Wills were cavorting around the Old Power Plant every city on Mars went to Action Stations."

"Action Stations?" I gasped. My dread, the feeling of sick fear that made my stomach drop a helluva long way into nothingness, must have been written large on my face for any observer to read. We had had the beginnings of an atomic war once—and every sane person knew that such a conflict on a large scale can but have only one finish.

"You needn't get alarmed, Wills. We're still on speaking terms with the Terran Central Government," Carmichael added.

"But who *are* you fighting?" This was Jane and even then I had an idea that she was demanding confirmation rather than information. "Who *are* you fighting?"

"Of course," put in the Walrus, "all Terran nationals must take shelter in the Consulate."

Nobody paid any attention. Carmichael took out his cigarette case, selected a cigarette with much care. Then, "I don't know," he admitted. "Do you, Meredith?"

"I don't *know* either," said Jane. The verb was ever so subtly accented. "But what's the dope?"

"You were with us when we went out to get shots of the crabs headed towards Port Gregory along Casartelli's Canal. You saw the way

that they seemed ot be marching almost in military formation. And you saw the way that they broke and scattered when our plane came low and its jets started to cook them.

"There was no intelligence there—it was just a mob of mindless animals bolting for cover—and the bulk of 'em didn't even have the savvy to go for the cover that was nearest and most obvious, the canal itself.

"Nobody worried much about the things until the water went off this morning. Everybody knew what the cause was—just a dust storm that had passed a few miles north of the city and had not been observed or reported. The usual crews went out in their usual *sandcats* with their usual tools. They did not come back. And the water did not come on at all.

"The Department of Water Transport and Irrigation finally got tired of calling the gang boss on the radio telephone and decided to send a plane. It had a crew of two. One man, the pilot, came back.

"It appears that he reached the place where the canal was blocked by what looked like a sand dune. The sluggishly flowing water from the north was just spreading out on each side of the obstruction—spreading out and soaking into the sand. Not far from the dry bed of the canal, just south of the obstruction, he saw the *sandcats* of the working gang. All three machines were standing idle and there was no sign of life in or around them. He came lower—and saw that the dune had a peculiarly mottled appearance. And he saw something white littered on the sand beside one of the *sandcats*.

"Well, he came down on his jets, landed and the co-pilot put on his respirator and went out to see what was what. The pilot didn't like the looks of things and decided he'd better stay put and keep his jets warm for a quick getaway.

"The co-pilot went first of all to the litter of white rubbish beside the stranded *sandcats*. The pilot saw him bend down to examine it—then he straightened up in a hurry and started running back to the plane. And then the desert simply vomited crabs—thousands of them there must have been.

"The co-pilot had his gun out and was letting fly right and left—but he had to stop to reload. And that was the end of him. The pilot was shooting too—but there were so many of 'em that he made no impression. He kept the door open as long as he dared, hoping that his mate would make it.

"When he saw nothing but a heap of crabs with shreds of cloth and pieces of red meat in their claws he knew it was useless. He slammed the door in a hurry—there were a few hundred of the beasts headed his way from what was left of the co-pilot—and gave her the gun. And nearly went crashing over on to his side.

"While he had been firing at the crabs attacking his mate others had come up on his blind side, had

crawled over his wings and fuselage. Luckily he was able to get his jets balanced—and after a few minutes in the air he had most of 'em shaken off.

"Then he came down again. He saw then, what had caused the mottled appearance of the dune choking the canal—it was the bodies of myriads of crabs. When he saw what was left of his co-pilot he tried to come low over the desert and blast the beasts with his jets—but they burrowed down into the sand before he could get near them."

"And so?" asked Jane softly.

"The crabs have declared war on us. Reports have been coming in from all the cities. Canals have been choked, isolated hunters and trappers and prospectors ambushed and massacred. A caravan between Paris du Ciel and Nieu Arnhem has been attacked—the crabs stopped the *desert schooners* by sheer weight of numbers, jammed the caterpillar tracks with their bodies.

"The only way to get the passengers and crews out is by air—and that's not as easy as you might think. One plane landed a little way from the *sandcats*—and as soon as its doors were open the crabs were all over it and into it.

"The next pilot was smarter. He tried to make a really close landing—and incinerated the *desert-schooner* and everybody inside it. They're going to try flame throwers and asbestos suits next. Meanwhile, with bars of metal that they got from somewhere, the crabs have pried open one of the *sandcats*."

"You didn't see the caravan that left here this afternoon for Marsala, did you? No, you wouldn't. But you should have—it wasn't a caravan, it was a convoy. A dozen *desert schooners* armed with flame throwers—*and* an air escort."

"Why don't you use atom bombs?" I asked.

"Use your head, man! The blasted things hide in the sand as soon as they see a rocket plane coming. The only time we see 'em is when they're besieging a stalled caravan—as between Paris du Ciel and Nieu Arnhem—or when there's a mob of 'em too close to a canal or to a city for safety.

"And we've got to make 'em—which takes time, especially with the water supply so uncertain. It's cut off now from the Old Power Station. But if this goes on we shall have to drop some—canals or no canals.

He turned to Jane, "What *do* you know about this, Meredith?"

"I *know* nothing."

Again there was the faint accent on the *know*. Carmichael noticed it this time. "Oh, I see. One of your famous hunches. And if you're allowed to follow it what do you propose to do?"

"There's a Spurling Three at the spaceport—you probably know that I purchased it some few days ago. The local Aviators' Guild won't play—but I have my own pilot here. Mr. Basset-Wills is already on the I.P.N.S. payroll."

"I should have thought of that.

But a Master Astronaut's Certificate isn't as good as local knowledge. You can have your pilot now—you can have your pick of the pilots in the Guild."

"Thank you. But I think I'll stick to Peter. He should be able to read a map. I take it that you're speaking for the big white chiefs, Carmichael? What strings are tied to this lovely proposition?"

"None," replied the E.T.N. man. "At least—not so you'd notice it. Any visual or sound recordings you make will, of course, have to go through the censor—but that's routine. Frankly we want to get to the bottom of this—and fast. You can ferret out the truth if anybody can."

"Thank you, kind sir. When can we go?"

"Any time you like. Your Spurling is stocked up with food and water. There are maps and instruments. There are two automatic rifles with ammunition, two flame throwers and a couple of hand guns each."

"And no strings?"

"No strings."

"Good. But we'll not start till daylight tomorrow morning. There are a few things to check first. To begin with—have you any of these crabs in captivity?"

"Yes. They found two still clinging on to the wings of the Department of Water Transport and Irrigation plane."

"Take us to 'em."

"Really, Miss Meredith," bleated the Walrus plaintively, "in times like these all Earth nationals should . . ."

". . . take refuge in the Consulate," finished Jane. "But whoever or whatever is behind all this doesn't give a damn if you're a Terran or an Alpha Centaurian. All we are is crab fodder. Or," she added under her breath, "fertiliser sounds a lot more like it."

VII

Before we did anything else we saw the first—and only—two prisoners of this strange campaign. We had to go outside the dome to see them and, frankly, it hardly seemed worth the trouble of putting on outdoor clothing and respirators just to look at two such ugly specimens.

They have a half dozen or so in the London Interplanetary Zoo back on Earth—and once you've seen them you've seen all Martian land crabs. True—these, not having to labor against the pull of a heavier gravity, were a little more spry. But they were no more handsome.

I don't know whether you've seen the beasts. They aren't very prepossessing. Their body is about twelve inches in diameter by nine in thickness and is balanced on top of a bunch of spidery stilts fully five feet in length.

The limbs on which the claws are mounted are elongated far beyond the proportions of those of their Terran ancestors. The eyes are on long telescopic stalks, so that when the creature is submerged in the sea of sand it can use them as periscopes. And there are two antennae

which can, in the Martian variety, be used as a sort of lasso.

These two were in a cage of stout wire toward the edge of the landing field. Now and again they would seize the thick strands with their massive claws, shake and strain with uncoordinated fury. There was no concerted action, no evidence of intelligent co-operation. We felt that the two prisoners were dimly aware of us only as food, as enemies larger than themselves.

"I thought so," said Jane softly. "I thought so . . ."

What with the thin air and our masks I barely heard her. Carmichael, who was standing further from her than I was, did not. He was not intended to. I bent towards Jane until the transparent plastic fronts of our helmets were touching and demanded what it was she thought.

"The vegetable gardens on the crabs' backs, you fool. Don't you see the connection between them and poor old Mossy Whiskers?"

"Mossy Whiskers? Oh, you mean Mullins. Frankly, no."

"It's obvious. It—"

Just then a shift of the thin wind brought a great cloud of black oily smoke billowing over us from the trench that had been hastily dug around the city. Masked as we were it made no difference whatsoever to our breathing—but it seemed that it should.

Involuntarily I held my breath. After I had brought up my sleeve to wipe my facepiece clear I saw that Jane was headed in the direction of the trench full of burning oil, the flame throwers and the asbestos-suited figures like demons from some medieval hell.

I followed but there was nothing much to see. Just a ditch packed with lurid fire, just the flame throwers on its nearer edge, standing to the alert like the artillery of a beleagured city. They *were* the artillery of a beleaguered city—and upon them devolved the task of keeping the gates and the landing field clear of the investing hosts.

We watched for awhile. The scene had its fascination—but there was no action to compel the interest. Action there had been—the piles of crustacean corpses with burst carapaces and cindery legs attested to that. But nothing was happening just then.

So Jane went back into Port Gregory to pack whatever gear she required for the morrow's trip and I got Carmichael to show me our Spurling Three. By the time I had assured myself that all was in order the last of the daylight was gone and the cold stars were looking down on the ruddy fires, Man's age-old defense against a hostile Nature.

She was a nice little job, that Spurling Three. I had flown similar turret-drive ships on Gannymede—flying transport is essentially the same on all the worlds with thin or non-existent atmosphere. Carmichael—or the people he was representing—had certainly done us proud in the matter of equipment. Charts for the whole of Mars, cor-

rected almost to the latest second, and a chronometer and a bubble sextant for use in the event—far from impossible these days—of a failure of the Martian Loran stations.

She was commodious too. We could live in her pressure cabin for days at a stretch, if need be, without suffering more than minor discomforts. And whoever had looked after the commissariat must have had a siege of at least a month's duration in mind.

Dawn was just coloring the desert rim when we blasted off that morning. The smoke from the flame defenses hung low and oily and through the dark artificial clouds the sun struggled with a dim ruddiness foreign to Mars with its clear thin atmosphere. But it was a matter of seconds only before our roaring jets lifted us above the smokescreen. Port Gregory looked like an island, like a strangely symmetrical rock lifting its ivory pinnacles above a black swirling sea.

For awhile I busied myself with the turret drive, trying to strike the correct combination of jet angle and power feed that would give me desired forward momentum without loss or gain of altitude.

I could have left it all to the automatic pilot—but one thing we are taught in the Service is never to place too implicit a faith in any machine. Man, with all his shortcomings, is a robust robot who can take over when conditions have caused a breakdown of the often more fragile, invariably more specialized, mechanisms.

"Set the course zero, zero, zero," said Jane. "Speed six hundred knots."

"Terran or Martian?"

"What does it matter? Anyhow you'd better navigate this beast. Follow the canal to Paris du Ciel, then circle the city at low speed. I want some shots. While we're about it we may as well have a look at Marsala—and Nieu Arnhem—and Tamaragrad—and Collisburg—and the others."

"And what time do you plan on getting to the tulgey wood just south of the North Pole?"

"It's not important. Just about dark will do. We'll set the jets to hover, get in a good night's sleep, then we'll have a full day to explore."

"Okay. You're the captain."

So all that day we spent sweeping along the canals, observing the damage wrought by the crustacean armies. We could see that while progress had been made in clearing the worst blockages the work of blocking was still going on.

Hordes of crabs we glimpsed, hordes that melted speedily into the desert sand at our approach. Looking astern we saw them break surface, mottling the rusty expanse with a darker brown, looking for all the world like some fantastically swift-growing form of plant life springing up in our wake.

Other planes were in the air, planes bearing the insignia of the Martian Government. Most of them

ignored us but now and again some officious patrol commander would demand our identity and destination. But they let us go on our lawful occasions without hindrance.

But our observations of the Martian cities between Port Gregory and the northern polar cap taught us nothing new. The domes themselves differed only in minor details from each other—Paris du Ciel could be distinguished by the graceful latticework towers surmounting it, Tamaragrad by the huge statue of Tamara Rynin, commander of the first Soviet expedition and first woman on Mars—but the scene around each was a repetition of that around Port Gregory.

There was the same moat dug deep into the sand, filled with burning oil, the same batteries of improvised flame throwers. We saw only one thing fresh, a convoy of the *desert schooners* fighting its way into Nieu Arnhem. And when the dozen big tractors had forced their way through the myriad armored bodies of the crabs one of their number was left stalled, its caterpillar tracks clogged by the crushed bodies of the enemy.

Its flame throwers spurted viciously but briefly—they must have been in use almost continuously on the run from whatever city the convoy had come. And then the crabs were all around and all over it.

One of the patrolling aircraft swooped low over the scene, trailing a fine, misty spray. When it had passed the crabs were motionless and masked figures emerged from the body of the tractor, worked frantically to clear the tracks before fresh hordes would be upon them.

There was nothing we could do to help and in any case the situation appeared to be well under control. So having obtained our shots we pushed on. The sun was foundering fast below the desert's western rim when a low glare in the sky ahead told of the nearness of the polar icefield. A dark mass short of the glare had to be the forest of which Mullins had talked.

VIII

Dark and forbidding, black against the pale glare to the northward, stretched the forest. Its edge was a seemingly unbroken wall set against the southern sands, a living wall, a wall whose face was set with knives and spines, with yard-long bayonets presented against any possible invader.

To the east the forest was bounded by Casartelli's Canal. We followed the waterway north to the edge of the ice and snow, to the white dead plains that were harshly scintillant in the aching beams of our searchlights. The sun had now set and only Deimos, low in the sky, cast its shifting radiance over the scene.

But in the powerful light of the lamps we could find no break in the wall of greenery. West we flew, along the forest's northern edge, then south down Duval's Canal, its western boundary. Over the forest we flew—and there was no sign of even a small clearing.

Our original scheme had been to hover for the night just south of the wood. No better plan presented itself and so it was that I set the controls to maintain a comfortable five-hundred-foot altitude. I didn't feel too happy about it.

In Space, if your drive should fail, you have plenty of time to do something about it. Here, over a planetary surface, it seemed very risky. Still it was less risky than making a landing and having whatever monsters were harbored by the forest swarm over the Spurling while we slept.

For awhile we sat in the pilots' chairs and smoked and talked. Both moons came up, hurtled eerily across the black sky. The dark mass below and to the north seemed to shift and stir. We knew that it was only a trick of the light—but it seemed to be the enchanted wood of all the less pleasant fairy stories of our childhood.

And then a portion of the shadowy bulk seemed to put out pseudpods, stretched hungry arms out over the desert. Jane reached for her camera fast, and I just sat and stared. It wasn't possible, but . . . There was an evil magic in the night that made anything possible.

Anticlimactically the arms of darkness broke off from the parent body, split each into a hundred black blobs. Over the sand they raced with a peculiarly jerky motion, coalesced and then exploded into a thousand leaping fragments.

The rabbits were making high festival under the light of the moons, were sporting with a care-free abandon unknown to higher life forms weighed down with the cares and troubles brought by intelligence and the responsibilities of civilization.

From the shadowy wood marched other shadows, compactly grouped, military. Moving with fast precision they wheeled over the moonlit sands, encircled the gamboling rabbits with a thin cordon. This drew in towards the edge of the woods, for all the world as though it were a loop of rope, a noose, being drawn tight by somebody within the shadows. Somebody—or some*thing*.

"So the party's over," said Jane at last. "The bunnies have had their fun and frolic, their evening's exercise. The sheepdogs have rounded up the flock for the night. And I think it's time to get some sleep."

She bedded down on the settee in the little living cabin and I made a passable enough couch with the two pilots' chairs. The next thing we knew the time-alarm was shrilling and the sun was just topping the eastern horizon.

There were no signs of life when we grounded gently on the fine sand. We put on our fur-lined coveralls over our indoor clothing and asbestos woven fabric suits on top of everything. We buckled on the belts with the heavy pistols in their holsters, with ammunition pouches for both the hand guns and the automatic rifles.

We assisted each other with the harnesses to which were affixed the

canisters of the portable flame throwers. We put on our respirators. And then we found that we couldn't get out of the cabin door. It was the flame throwers that were the trouble. So we had to take them off and put them on again when we got outside.

The next job was bedding the grapnel. It did't seem possible that any anchoring device could find a grip in the dry pulverized sand of Mars. But whoever had designed these grapnels had done a masterly job. Their many spidery arms, their spatulate extensions, would catch and hold. Whether or not they could have held against a wind with the weight of Earth's atmosphere behind it is a moot point—but on Earth you'd have something a little more solid in which to anchor.

About six feet above the grapnel, attached to the mooring cable, was a remote control device. On its button being depressed the drive would start, the ship would rise vertically and hover at a predetermined altitude, well clear of any inquisitive or hostile animals or humans.

It was necessary, on actuating the remote control mechanism, to step well back to avoid being caught by the backblast of the jets. Then the tiny control panel could be unshipped with a simple anti-clockwise half-turn. It was like a key inasmuch as only this panel would fit into this particular socket.

All very ingenious and all very foolproof—provided one did not want to get away in a tearing hurry. I, for one, hoped this would not be the case.

Walking along the edge of the forest we looked in vain for an opening. It would have been suicidal to attempt to force a way in—this we found with our first tentative experiments. The needle-thin ends of the vegetable bayonets penetrated with ease the thicknesses of asbestos weave and fur-lined drill, inflicted a painful prick on the inquisitive finger.

The cutting edge of the defenses was tried upon the tough plastic leather of a pistol holster—and the ease with which it sheared through the stout synthetic made it plain that it would be far healthier to go for a swim in a sea of broken bottles.

It was perhaps half an hour after we had commenced our exploration that we found the pathway. We would have passed it without seeing it as in all probability we had passed many similar openings, had it not been for the white rabbit. The animal was standing there quite quietly, its snowy fur in startling contrast to the dark foliage. It let us approach within a few feet of it before it turned and loped into the shadows.

It was the first time that I had seen one of the rabbits at close quarters. I was familiar enough with their terrestrial ancestors—and it came as a shock to see for myself what changes had been wrought in the homely stock by an alien environment.

Fully five feet high the animal stood. Had it not been for the absence of tail it could have passed for a kangaroo of sorts. The chest was developed to house the big lungs demanded by the thin atmosphere, making the creature, in spite of its powerful hind legs, look abs urdly topheavy.

It stood—or rather squatted—and regarded us with faintly curious pink eyes. The split upper lip worked over the big projecting incisors. We knew that rabbits, even on Mars, weren't carnivorous but those over-large teeth looked to be capable of inflicting considerable damage at close quarters. So did the claws with which both fore and hind feet were armed.

We stood and looked at the white rabbit and the white rabbit stood and looked at us and it wasn't until we brought our automatic rifles to the ready that the albino decided it didn't care for our company. It turned, dropped to all fours and vanished into the wood. It was all too Alice-in-Wonderland-ish. And so, with unreality strong upon us, we followed—or tried to follow.

It was the flame throwers that got in the way. They were too bulky, much too bulky. It didn't matter whether we tried a frontal approach or sought to sidle in through the opening. They caught and held.

When our protective clothing was shredded by a score of deep slashes, each one barely missing the skin beneath, we decided that we would have to abandon what was, probably, our most effective weapon. It never occurred to us to use these same projectors to clear a path through the undergrowth that cut at us.

It wouldn't have mattered much if we had—it is probable that had we done so their charges would have been exhausted long before we wished to use them for anything else but road clearance.

Her voice muffled by her headpiece, thin in the thin air, Jane was saying something. I strained my ears to catch it.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son,
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch,
Beware the Jub-jub tree and shun
The frumious bandersnatch."

It was all very apposite—and in this forest of spiny growths that stretched their bayonet leaves a hundred or more feet into the thin air it was not very cheering. The light—or lack of it—was all wrong for one to be able to appreciate Lewis Carroll's nonsense as it was meant to be appreciated.

In this green gloom the Jub-jub "tree," with its sharp swords and knives lining the narrow winding path along which we trod, was indeed a thing of which to beware. It had ceased to be *Collinsia Utilensis,* a mere plant existing for the use and convenience of the master race of the known Universe.

It was something older, stronger, something guarding its secrets with a quietly vicious determination.

And all the time I was mentally kicking myself for letting a few lines of absurd doggerel send my mind wandering along such nonsensical tracks.

We saw no more of our friend the white rabbit. Once or twice we thought we glimpsed movement along the trail, figures that vanished behind the next corner just before we could see them properly. It may have been imagination, it may not. But so far we had encountered nothing but the purely passive hostility of the spiky plants.

Then we came to the clearing. It was roughly circular, about twenty feet in diameter. The ground was covered with a short mossy growth, springy under the feet. It may have been only another manifestation of the versatile *Collinsia*—but it was hard to appreciate the fact that it was all part of the same plant whose towering upthrust shut out the very sky. In any case we had more important things than botany on our minds. For there were the remains of a plastic tent strewn over the ground. Something had tried to eat the inedible synthetic, something else had shredded it with sharp claws.

But it was obviously a portable shelter of the type used by the trappers and prospectors, such as had been used by the Last of the Swagmen. And a smoke-blackened cylinder of thin aluminium was proof positive that this was where Mullins had made his last camp. Not that I realized what it was at first, I didn't realize until I heard Jane softly singing—

"And he sang as he watched and
waited while his billy boiled,
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me!"

But the evocation of the ghost of the dead Mullins would get us nowhere. I fought to throw off the mood of doubt, of indecision, that had somehow descended upon us. I tried not to hear the furtive rustlings that came from all around us, where something stirred in the thick undergrowth.

I think these pitiful relics of the Last of the Swagmen had brought it home to us that we were fools rushing in where any angel would fear to tread, that the only advantage we had over the Australian was that we were forewarned. But we were no better armed.

Jane, of course, regarded this, of all moments, as a time suitable for further quotation from Carroll.

"And as in uffish thought he
stood
The Jabberwock, with eyes of
flame,
Came whiffling through the
tulgey wood
And burbled as it came . . ."

It would be incorrect to describe the sound as *whiffling*. That word conveys an impression of speed. This was more the noise of ar-

mored bodies forcing themselves not too rapidly through a natural barbed-wire entanglement. There were plenty of them. And they didn't burble.

The sound that came from their multitudinous mouths was more of a dry rustling, the grating of horny surface on horny surface as the disgustingly complex machinery of crustacean jaws worked avidly and unceasingly.

Had we stayed in the clearing we could have held them off indefinitely—given an inexhaustible supply of ammunition. It was simple—as soon as an armored carapace pushed through the undergrowth a heavy slug from a pistol or a high velocity rifle bullet would smash it. At that range we couldn't miss. The slaughter was great but it was getting us precisely nowhere. Our only hope of escape lay in fighting our way back to the desert and the Spurling Three.

Speaking hastily in broken sentences between bursts from our guns, we arranged a plan of campaign. I was to go first, clearing a way ahead, and Jane was to follow, her back to my back, fighting off pursuit.

For the first few yards it worked. It seemed as if our enemies were discouraged by the accuracy of our fire. We allowed ourselves to feel hopeful. But we had forgotten one thing—the fact that they could climb. And when a shower of heavy bodies—all legs and pincers and flinty armor—dropped on us from above we knew the fight was over. We went on fighting—but we knew the fight was over.

IX

We didn't go on fighting long either. Our rifles were snatched from us. We managed to get off a round or two from our pistols—and then they were gone. There was a brief period of the frenzied snapping off of spidery limbs with our hands—a nightmarish business that even now gives me the cold shudders when I think about it.

They got me down first. There were pincers at my arms and legs, gripping painfully. There was the weight of a dozen or more armored bodies on my chest. And there were sharp-clawed spiny feet scrabbling over my clothing and over my helmet until I feared that the tough transparent plastic would tear, that I would asphyxiate helplessly in the too-thin air of Mars.

Looking back on it all I am rather amused that I should have been so concerned about the manner of my going when I was as good as gone. It may have been that Mullins' story, if it were true, promised us at least a few more hours of life. In those few hours anything could happen.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Jane go down, saw her picked up and carried, still in a supine position, along the narrow path. I felt the pincers on my wrists and arms, ankles and legs, tighten their grip.

Then the crabs lifted me from the ground and I saw the tracery of

dark spikes and fronds, the tiny infrequent patches of distant sky, begin to move. The pain of serrated claws pressing deep had dulled to numbness when the limited overhead view changed abruptly to the brown earth roof of a tunnel. For a little it was dark and then there was a wan greenish phosphorescence.

It was warm down here. Our heavy clothing had been ideal for the near-freezing midday temperature of the surface but now, even though no muscular effort was being made, it was uncomfortably hot. The desire to scratch, to wipe away the little rivulets of perspiration running down my face, was almost more than I could stand. More than anything else in the world I wanted to tear off my mask, to put an end to the intolerable irritation. But steel-hard pincers would not permit the slightest movement.

The air was getting thicker. The outside pressure was approximating that inside our respirators. They no longer stood out from our faces like inflated balloons, they sagged down and rested clammily on our features like an extra skin. They added considerably to our discomfort. We were helpless to do anything.

We came at last to a place of growing things—a cavern where a thin path or tunnel wound tortuously through a tenticular mass of luminescent foliage. It was here that the crabs stopped, that their appendages with amazing dexterity loosed the fastenings of our masks. The masks were lifted from our heads and it was then that I heard Jane.

"Peter," she was calling. "*Peter!* Are you all right?"

"Yes. And you?"

"I'm doin' fine. As well as can be expected, anyhow. I can still breathe—and at last I can talk—*Damn!*"

"What's wrong?"

"A mouthful of some floury stuff. It's coming from these blasted vines. My hair is full of it."

"So is mine. *And* it's itching . . ."

"Then this is it," she said. "Remember poor old Mullins and his mossy hair and whiskers. Remember the crabs and the lichenous growth on their shells."

Things began to add up and make sense.

"But," I objected, "the rabbits. Why can't it do the same to them?"

"I don't know. Maybe their instincts of cleanliness are too strong for it, maybe they go and roll in the sand before this parasitical weed has a chance to catch hold. Perhaps Mullins could have done likewise had his personal hygiene been up to that of the rabbits. It may be strong enough to make me blow up a power station—but it'll have to be stronger still to stop me from washing my hair!"

By this time we were out of the cave of vines, were being carried deeper and deeper still below the surface of Mars. The tunnel was dark again but a dim steady radiance was coming from ahead. There was

light there—and, as we were carried closer to its source, a smell. It was a smell compounded of carrion and of growing things, a smell of life and of death. Of life—but no normal healthy life could smell like this.

The stench was overpowering when at last we were borne into the deepest cavern of all. It came from a pile of animal carcasses that were stacked around what at first sight appeared to be a huge snake. But its black coils were completely motionless, and there was neither head nor tail.

Without tapering, without any dimunition of thickness whatsoever, the lower end vanished into the soil of the cavern floor. The upper portion divided itself into scores of tentacles some of which, scarcely less in diameter than the parent body, seemed to have penetrated the earthern roof and walls of the cave. Others, varying in thickness from a thin whiplash to a half-inch wand, drooped listlessly, not unlike the dejected branches of a Terran weeping willow.

But it was alive—of that there was no doubt. And it was powerful. Almost visible waves of force beat out around it. Little tendrils of thought crept from it, insinuated themselves, questing, into our minds. Insinuated themselves—and recoiled.

There was surprise there—and disappointment. Surprise that here were two specimens of *homo sapiens* far less easy to control than the last specimen, until then the only living one, had been. And disappointment—for the same reason.

"So it didn't catch," Jane said softly. "It didn't catch. I see now —those seeds or spores or whatever they were that were dusted on us in that cave of vines are yet another manifestation of *Collinsia Utilensis.* A very specialized one.

"They are *en rapport,* telepathically, with the parent-root here. Through them this — intelligence controls the organisms on which it has planted its agents. Through them it sees with their eyes. It was easy enough to start them on the crabs—their shells are far from clean. There is dried crusted blood there, all manner of filth, relics of meals ever since the monsters first burst from the egg.

"With rabbits it wouldn't be so easy—they are clean from the word go and keep themselves so. The same applies to us—I hope. But on poor old Mullin's scalp the spores found fertile soil. I hope it can't understand what I'm saying."

I hoped so, too. It had just struck me that while It had Mullins under its control It could have learned English. And the prospects of being rolled in that pile of carrion, of decomposing rabbit carcasses that provided sustenance for the plant intelligence, was not one upon which to dwell with any degree of enthusiasm.

I hoped that it had no organs of hearing.

And when the crabs, still gripping me hard and painfully, carried me to the huge root I feared

that the worst was about to happen. But they halted when still a few feet from the stinking pile, halted and froze into immobility.

The tendrils pendent from the top of the root stirred sluggishly. They writhed into slow, painful movement. I heard Jane gasp with horror behind me. She told me afterwards that she feared this was the vampire plant so beloved of fantasy authors, that I was to be drained of blood to make a meal for the vegetable monster.

From the bunch of tentacles two separated themselves. They were unlike the others inasmuch that each bore on its end what looked like a flat sucking disc. Their appearance was far from reassuring. Down they came with slow deliberation. The first made contact with my left temple. There was a mild tingling shock. Seconds later the other attached itself to my right temple.

It is hard to describe what happened afterward. It is best to say, perhaps, that without volition I found myself remembering *everything*. From my very earliest days right to the present moment the stream of memory flowed through my brain—flowed, I am sure, into whatever alien mind was possessed by our captor. There were things I had forgotten, things that I had often tried to forget. There was all my knowledge, all my experience, all that I was.

And that wasn't the whole of it. Try to imagine a sort of psychological osmosis. It's not the correct term, I know, but that's how it worked out. It wasn't a one way traffic. I don't think for one moment that *Collinsia* intended things to pan out that way—it just happened.

As far as my end was concerned it was like watching two cinema screens at once. One film I had seen before—but the other had never been seen by Man. It was the story of a world, small, barren—a world to which intelligent life had come relatively late.

It was the story of one intelligence which had grown near the north pole of the planet, which was anchored as much by the shortage of water elsewhere as by its own immobility, to the moisture just south of the polar icecap.

There it preyed upon the stems and leaves and fruit which were the laboratories, the observatories, of the intelligence, a little hardy animal not unlike the earthly armadillo. The intelligence developed spiny protections for its above-the-surface growths, for the unintelligent projections of itself that observed and recorded.

And the armadillo-beast ranged over the surface of the red planet until at last there was no more plant life to be found, until it died vainly in its thousands on the specialized, deadly barriers protecting the intelligence from depredation.

But the intelligence was curious. Its tendrils explored the bodies of the dead armadillos, paid special attention to the brain. And it developed yet another form of itself

—a tiny almost fungoid growth that flourished on any not-too-clean surface of living integument.

It was, in ways that were incomprehensible to me, a sort of telepathic receiving and transmitting set. In various places the spiny barrier was let down. The armadillos found the gaps, penetrated the undergrowth and feasted. And, as the microscopic spores fell on to their carapaces, fell and rooted and flourished, they became the slaves of the intelligence.

It was then that the canals were cut. Driving south, driven by the cold brain outside their bodies, the armadillo-beasts excavated their way clear to the South Pole. Along the canals fresh colonies of the intelligence sprang up, colonies whose seeds were carried in the alimentary canals of the little animals, colonies whose seeds had been embedded within the tempting fruits developed by the intelligence.

With excretions from their own bodies the canal builders cemented the beds of the canals—and built strongly, surely, almost permanently. And the whole of Mars was now one vast laboratory for the intelligence as the roots of the new colonies linked up with those of the parent plant at the northern pole.

It was intended then that most of the armadillos should die, that only a small colony should survive as a reservoir of mobile slaves for the intelligence. The unwanted beasts, their work done, were driven by the intelligence to fall upon each other with tooth and claw, to leave their rotting bodies where they would best serve as fertilizer.

The small number of favored animals did not survive for long. Out of the wreckage of the slaughter came a tiny enemy, a micro-organism, a disease that ran through the depleted ranks of the armadillos like a consuming fire.

Given time — the intelligence could have coped with the situation. It did find a cure for the disease—but it was too late. Only males were left and barely a score of those. And they, while they lived spread the plant colonies to the last few corners of the planet as yet unsettled. And died.

Years passed, years during which the canals silted up, years which saw the gradual slackening of the grip with which the intelligence had once firmly held its world. It tried to develop mobile forms of itself, achieved a certain limited success with feathery bundles that drifted before the thin winds.

But true mobility, a mobility that could work, that could delve and build, somehow always eluded it. There is no doubt that, given time, the problem would have been solved. But before it was even well begun Man, on his wings of flame and thunder, came down from the stars to take over the planet.

X

Man was always a mystery to the intelligence. It had no opportunities for a thorough examination, no chance for anything more than superficial observation. At first it

seemed that a mutually profitable relationship, a sort of symbiosis, might be possible. Man cleared the canals, set again in motion the sluggish flow north and south from the melting icecaps. Of this the the intelligence was coldly appreciative.

But it soon became obvious that Man regarded himself as the master, saw the colonies of the intelligence as no more than a humble life form set on Mars for his use and convenience. To him the thorny barriers protecting the plant laboratories and observatories were no barrier.

And man brought with him humbler life forms. One of these, furry, stupid, might make an ideal slave for the intelligence. But for one thing. The seeds of the telepathic organisms would not flourish in its clean pelt. But it didn't matter. The other creature, carnivorous, heavily armed and armored, could be enslaved. With it other less well equipped life forms could be controlled—or exterminated.

There was more, much more. But the point of view was so hopelessly alien that it was impossible more than vaguely to sense its meaning.

During the latter stages of this strange inquisition, this forced exchange of thoughts and memories, the crabs released my arms. I was free to move—but it was an illusory freedom. As long as the tendrils with their discs were in contact I was able to move only as the intelligence directed.

One by one, reluctantly, I emptied my pockets. Item by item I handed their contents up into the nest of writhing tentacles. And as each article was examined I found myself visualizing its use, its application.

Then it was all over. The big pincers clamped down again on my arms, the discs were withdrawn from my forehead. I managed to turn my head as I passed Jane. She was looking white and sick.

"Cheer up," I was able to say. "It's not too bad. You learn as much about It as It learns about you. When we get out of here you'll have the news beat of all time."

"*When* we get out," she said.

During my own inquisition I had found time to wonder briefly, vaguely, why Jane had kept so silent. Now I found out. I tried to say something reassuring, something showing a hope, a confidence, that I was far from feeling. I never got passed the first syllable.

One of those infernal crabs clapped its pincer down on my mouth—and in its pincer it was holding a pad of some spongy vegetable matter. One taste of it decided me that a dignified silence was the best policy.

I could watch. I was amazed. It seemed to me that the whole process had taken hours—though it could not have endured more than minutes at the most. Then came the handing over and examination of the contents of pockets and pouches. I felt a conviction that it

would break Jane's heart to have to lose her camera, the little machine that already held within its body records that would be invaluable should we ever get back to civilization.

But cigarette case, cosmetics container and handkerchiefs were all dealt with.

Then it was the turn of the photographic and sound-recording equipment and accessories. I didn't see what the first item was. I knew it was something important from Jane's strained expression.

I did not know until afterwards the intensity of the effort with which she had snapped the psychic bonds that held her—snapped them for just long enough to move the index finger of her right hand a fraction of an inch.

With shocking suddenness the little object burst into incandescence. I know now that its light was not of sufficient intensity to be actually dangerous—but our eyes by this time were well accustomed to the dimly glowing dusk of the caves.

I saw the tendrils of the great root writhe and recoil from the source of the searing radiance—and even though I now had no physical contact with the intelligence Its wordless screaming beat strongly inside my brain. And for Jane it was worse. The two sucker pads were still touching her forehead—she was receiving all the *thing's* frightened agony.

The pincers of the crabs gripping my legs and arms relaxed, opened. I fell heavily to the ground. The crabs stood motionless in stiff ungainly attitudes—ugly clockwork toys somebody had forgotten to wind. Not sparing them a second glance I scrambled hastily to my feet. With eyes half closed against the light I lurched forward.

Jane was sprawled where she had been dropped. As each wave of pain, of fear, from the plant intelligence struck her she twitched. Her face was a deathly white in the glare of her daylight lamp. Her eyes were shut.

It took only a second's work to snatch the two tendrils away from her head. They came easily, hung limp and lifeless once they were clear. I wanted to hold her, to protect her. This I did—but not for long. She stirred, the eyes flickered open.

"Where's my camera?" were her first words.

So the moment passed. I found myself holding the flaring light while she took shots of the huge root with its writhing tendrils and tentacles, of the crabs frozen in their attitudes of menacing ugliness.

"It's a pity we couldn't get the rest," she murmured. "But this will have to do."

We found our respirators in our pouches—it was obvious that the thing in the cave had intended us to return to the surface, had intended to use us as It had Mullins. But Mullins had returned to the surface with the aid of all the

queer denizens of this odd corner of Mars. We would have had no such aid—and our weapons were gone.

All but one and that the most powerful of all—light, that was to this dweller in the darkness a searing flame. Light, that would immobilize as long as it lasted the power station from which all the living automata of Mars drew their energy. Light, that had by Jane's reckoning but a scant fifteen minutes more to live.

So we left it there. We had a pocket flash, feeble by comparison, that would light us to the surface. We hurried through the tunnels, pausing only to ship our respirators when we came to the cave of the vines.

On our way we passed many of the giant crabs. They were not dead—and they were not as motionless as those in the cavern of the intelligence had been. Their claws twitched hungrily as we hurried past, the spidery legs trembled. The light was dying.

The tunnel seemed unconscionably long. Not until we blundered into the spines and spikes of *Collensia* in its tree-like form did we realize that night had fallen on the upper world during our captivity. Neither Phobos nor Deimos was anywhere near the zenith—all that filtered through the dense canopy was the faint light of such rare stars as were almost directly overhead.

Around us the forest was stirring, was awakening from the sleep into which we had plunged it. And from the tunnel up which we had fled came rustling and scraping noises. Overhead something droned, shone briefly incandescent through the lattice of spiny fronds.

"I hate to do it," Jane was almost sobbing, "but it's our only chance!"

She directed the beam of her pocket flash upwards. It stabbed the darkness in broken rhythm—three dots, three dashes three dots. The droning roar was growing louder and as the flare of jets struck down through the trees Jane sent her SOS again.

Whoever was up there would have to be fast. The darkness around us was alive with crepitating menace. I do not know to this day why the thing in the cave was so slow in throwing all Its forces against us. Weaponless, we stood no chance of survival.

It may be that though the light had died It had still to collect its scattered faculties. Or it may well be that what seemed to us to be long minutes was in reality only short seconds.

The ship in the sky was coming down. She was painfully slow—she had literally to burn her way. And she had to descend in a tight spiral. Otherwise a patch would have been cleared only directly under the jets and her nose and tail assembly would have caught and held in the trees. At the finish we had to retreat into the tunnel to escape being incinerated by the down-stabbing lances of fire.

Jane shone her torch down the

tunnel. Its beam fell on a nightmare jumble of jointed pincers and spidery legs and waving antennae. The crabs were coming up slowly, hesitantly. But they were coming. They were coming up faster than the ship was coming down.

There was something hard and round at my feet—I remembered having stumbled over this same object on my way out. I bent and picked it up. It was a stone, old and rounded. It was a good two feet in diameter.

When I threw it I heard the sound of splintering shells, of spattering body fluids. It was intensely satisfying. But there were no more stones for me to throw.

We felt the unmistakable tremor as the ship grounded and the tunnel mouth flared with multi-colored fire for a second before the drive was cut. As we stumbled out into the open a door in the fuselage gaped suddenly. In it, silhouetted against the light, was a black figure, urgently waving.

We needed no pressing invitation to enter the ship. And even the fact that the waving figure was Carmichael of ETN did little to take the edge off our relief. Frankly, it did nothing to take the edge off mine.

Carmichael was very decent about it all—the discovery of the plant intelligence was an I.P.N.S. scoop and broadcast as such. The rescue of Jane Meredith was an E.T.N. scoop—and neither I.P.N.S. nor Jane herself was inclined to deny the rival firm full credit for what they had done.

The unfortunate part of it all was that Jane's script and films had to go through the censorship. And the editing—for that was what it was—was beautifully done. It seemed at first glance that almost nothing had been deleted.

Almost nothing was. Such few changes as had been made called it the story of a gallant people fighting a desperate battle against a sinister alien intelligence. And somehow the real unflattering issue was obscured, lost.

We can tell the story now—but it has lost its news value. The beat has been made and has gone down in newscasting history and in the memories of the public. The Martians have gained considerable interplanetary prestige in consequence.

They were grateful to us, these same Martians. Jane was presented with no less than three outfits of finest Martian bunny, of a quality that but rarely finds its way onto the open market. Had she desired they would have clothed her in the precious fur from the skin out.

They were grateful to us—but they didn't like having us around. And when *Thunderflame* put in, outward bound for the Jovian system, they booked first class passages for us, notwithstanding the fact that we wanted to return to Earth by the shortest and quickest route. But they didn't like having us around.

"You'd think we were plague carriers," I complained to Jane.

"In a way we are," she replied. "You know what the native intelligence thinks of humans—to It we're all just a parasitical pest, battening off a planet where we don't belong. The worst part of it is people here are just going to have to endure it. For if they destroy It, they destroy the entire life-balance of the planet itself."

"So why does that make them not want us around?" I asked.

"Kiss me, you fool," she said. And, when I had done so to her satisfaction, "Does anyone like having people around who have learned from a vegetable that they are nothing but two-legged lice? People who know they are going to have to play up to this vegetable in spite of what It thinks of them?"

"I begin to see your point," I said. "Come to think of it, Martians being hypersensitive anyway, it couldn't have been fun for them.

Jane looked at me and sighed and shook her beautiful blond head. "It's a good thing I'm going to make an honest man of you as soon as we can get the papers," she informed me. "You're not really bright enough to be wandering around loose, darling."

"Careful," I told her, "or you'll be making me feel the way we make the Martians feel."

"Which," she said loftily, "is entirely fit and proper for husbands."

universe in books

by . . . the Editor

A critical look at current hard-cover fiction in STF and fantasy.

THE SUPERNATURAL READER, edited by Groff & Lucy Conklin, J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia and New York ($3.95).

Groff Conklin, certainly the ablest and most peripatetic anthologizing man science fiction has ever known, here combines tastes and talents with his wife, Lucy, to select a gaggle of twenty-eight stories that deal with just about every branch of fantasy but stf. It is, in many ways, an outstanding assembly job, explained and dignified by the able introduction by the editors.

If you are the sort of reader who likes the Gothic equivalent of sheer roller-coaster terror in your spook reading, you may possibly be disappointed by this volume. Not that the terror isn't there—it's around, all right, but in most of the stories not exactly front, center and adrip with clanking chains. The terror here is more generally that congealing sort which is almost but not quite caught out of the corner of an eye while standing in an empty room or on the edge of a forest at twilight. Or the wait, in fearful silence, for the footfall of doom that never sounds.

You'll find such stfantasy standbys here as Edgar Pangborn, H. F.

It is no accident, we feel certain, that the two best books to pass our critical path during the past two months both belong in the realm of fantasy rather than in that of "pure" science fiction. For STF is very much a matter of trends—once upon a time it was all gadgets, then it was all BEMs, then it was all dictatorship-and-revolt themes, then all mutants and so on—and the current trend is toward fantasy.

Heard, Theodore Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury, David H. Keller (with "The Thing in the Cellar" by David H. Keller), Will Jenkins, Murray Leinster and Harold Lawlor. But you will also find, and find in the great majority, such bylines as F. Marion Crawford, A. E. Coppard, H. H. Munro, Fitz-James O'Brien, May Sinclair, John Collier, Lord Dunsany, Ambrose Bierce and E. M. Forster. A magnificent collection of authors and stories.

Curiously or otherwise, our favorite in this almost all-star group is the opening tale in the book, "The Angel with Purple Hair" by the comparatively unsung Herb Paul. A perfect delight of a story. Second choice from this armchair is Lord Dunsany's "Thirteen at Table," which we found suitably horrifying and of vast interest throughout.

As for the others—well, you pay your $3.95 (or perhaps your 30c at the lending library) and you take your choice. Don't skip John Collier's appalling "Bird of Prey" while leafing your way through, however. Or Sturgeon's "Shottle Bop" or . . . Dammit, we haven't the space to list them all.

THE ABYSS OF WONDERS by Perley Poore Sheehan, Polaris Press, Reading, Pennsylvania ($3.00).

This is the second of the dressy special series ("The Heads of Cerberus" by Francis Stevens was the first) put out by this limited-edition offshoot of Lloyd Eshbach's worthy Fantasy Press. According to a folder included in the volume, which is protected by a case instead of a dust-jacket, the stories chosen for this special treatment are selected by a jury composed of Darrell C. Richardson, Norman F. Stanley, Oswald Train and P. Schuyler Miller, all of whom are personalities of some moment in stf circles.

As in "The Heads of Cerberus," a multiple-Philadelphias rather than a multiple-worlds story, there is, in "The Abyss of Wonders," a curious and rather preachy old-fashioned moral tone which leaves the reader in no possible doubt as to the virtuousness if not the virtuosity of the author. But, since the author in this instance is Perley Poore Sheehan, there is, of course, a powerful mystic element inherent in the tale, a mysticism that hints of deep religious preoccupation on the part of the writer.

The story itself follows the Maeterlinck "Bluebird" (or "Back in Your Own Back Yard") line, with an almost absurdly noble young poor boy from a small town in the American Midwest, inheriting the mantle of an Asiatic shaman and journeying to the hidden desert tomb of Ghengis Khan abetted by the hometown Chinese laundryman and Russian blacksmith, who also turn out to have remarkable powers away from their humble chores. Though the Russian is treated sympathetically we have grave doubts that Senator McCarthy will feel impelled to disinter Mr. Sheehan's bones for Congressional investigation.

While "The Abyss of Wonders" is a pleasant picaresque fantasy, like its predecessor in this series, it leaves us with a small knot of concern. For neither book seems to us to have any outstanding merit which entitles it to this special and expensive treatment. There is a lack of distinction in both thought and writing that puts them in that lamentable almost-but-not-quite category which must forever bar the works of A. Merritt from any real artistic standing or critical attention.

We hope Messrs. Eshbach, Richardson, Stanley, Train, Miller, Fenner & Bean come up with some stf equivalent of E. M. Forster at his best in their next selection.

ICEWORLD by Hal Clement, Gnome Press, New York ($2.50).

Working in his usual careful and thoughtful vein, Mr. Clement has in this volume managed to produce a story about an interstellar dope racket that is about as different from George O. Smith's "Hellflower," which had a similar theme and was reviewed in our last issue, as a jellyfish is different from, say, apple tapioca. Both may have certain similarities in appearance but they don't taste the same.

Mr. Clement, in fact, has produced a sort of Swiss Family Dopinson—pitting a Far Western family against some highly sinister aliens (save for one, who turns out to be a police spy) with an incurable addiction for Earth's tobacco. And while the problems of a scientific nature, notably that of creatures from a gaseous planet making successful contact with a "frozen" world like ours, and vice versa, are enthrallingly worked out, the little matters of character and human interest achieve a hypocritical implausibility that brought this reader to the verge of gooseflesh.

After representing his human family as a virtual symposium of American outdoor virtue, he then reveals that their entire life is an elaborate fiction maintained to enable them to keep control of a highly profitable, entirely fortuitous and completely swinish trading monopoly with the aliens, to whom they pass the cigarettes in return for large chunks of gold that never appear on Father Wing's income tax reports.

Not content with making his human characters monstrous opportunists, the author insists on presenting them as a little group of virtuous prigs—thus achieving an effect that, for sheer distastefulness has seldom been reached in science fiction, even back in the 1920's. This is a true if utterly involuntary horror story.

SECOND FOUNDATION by Isaac Asimov, Gnome Press, New York ($2.75).

Why this volume, which is six pages shorter than "Iceworld," should cost twenty-five cents more is something of a puzzle—unless merit of contents is the measure of price. For in this third of his supragalactic "Foundation" series the ubiquitous Mr. Asimov has not fallen prey to

the strange weaknesses that seem to have assailed Mr. Clement's characterization.

In fact, it is a question whether "Second Foundation" contains any characters at all. Certainly none of them stayed with this reader as did the remarkable "Mule" of the preceding volume in the series. This time human mutation challenges the predictions of the Foundation founders and their psychohistory, and the author's preoccupation with parapsychological intrigue, telepathy and long-range mental control seems to have pretty well overwhelmed his individuals. The scope of the many and varied ideas spawned by the author forbids the use of the word "gadget"—but the effect is similar.

However, when Mr. Asimov is turned loose with a theory he fancies he is like a dog with a bone. He buries it, digs it up again, chews at it, licks it and occasionally bats it back and forth from paw to paw, thus affording the onlooker much innocent amusement. So, if you want to read Mr. Asimov in full theoretical and highly ingenious cry, you'd better latch onto a copy of this one. You'll derive considerable intellectual if virtually no emotional diversion out of it.

THE ROBOT AND THE MAN, edited by Martin Greenberg, Gnome Press, New York ($2.95).

In this, his fifth anthology, Editor-Publisher Greenberg has assembled a distinguished ball team (they number nine) of authors whose batting order reads, John D. MacDonald, Bernard Wolfe, John S. Browning, A. E. van Vogt, H. H. Holmes, Lewis Padgett, Joseph E. Kelleam, Lester del Rey and Robert Moore Williams. Which is quite an impressive line-up in any science fiction league.

Needless to say, all the stories are about robots. They follow a simple pattern, from the first story by MacDonald, in which the first real robot is invented, to del Rey's finale in which, having become heirs to a world in which mankind has destroyed itself, a rusty old robot plays midwife for the birth of a new Adam and Eve.

A very good collection—if you like robot stories.

SECOND STAGE LENSMEN by Edward E. Smith, Ph.D., Fantasy Press, Reading, Pennsylvania ($3.00).

Well, Kinnison rides again—as usual hopping blithely among all sorts of galaxies (one galaxy has never been enough to hold *him*) and routing incredible alien menaces which come at him from all directions and almost but never quite manage to polish him off.

This time, we regret to report, Boskonia loses again—but not before it gets in a few good licks. We suspect the contest of having been fixed beforehand by the author. Better keep this under your hat lest some paragalactic sanity code outfit gets word of a contest that is so obviously fixed. We wouldn't want Dr. Smith barred—or would we?

A number of people, especially in those exalted circles which regard themselves as guides and critics of American cultural development, seem to regard science fiction, its practitioners and its readers, as something strictly apart from the main stream. When the subject is mentioned they lift two or more eyebrows and say, "Science fiction? Space-ships!"—as if that disposed of the matter once and forever.

Actually, of course, space-ships are but a tiny facet of stf. Furthermore they comprise a very temporary one. For when space-ships come, and they are certainly on the way, they will produce their own Herman Melvilles and Joseph Conrads.

Probably the attitude of contempt will remain, however—disguised by some new symbol. And this despite the fact that decrying science fiction as an inferior something apart from literature is as false as a BEM on the Moon. For the sort of speculative and extrapolative fantasy that has become known as science fiction has been a part of Western literature at least since Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley produced the first android in *Frankenstein.*

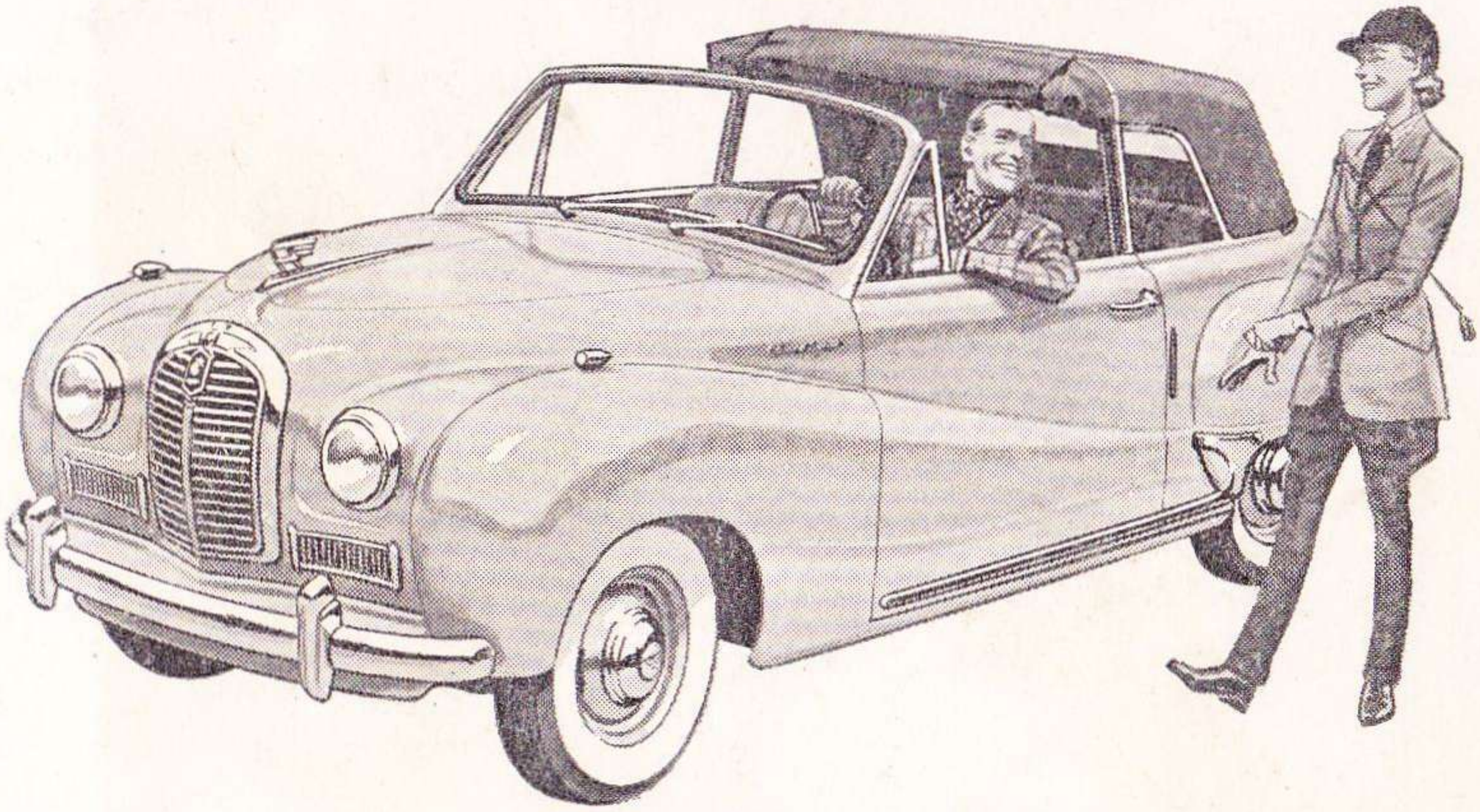
How long has this sort of thing been going on? Let's take a look through Everett F. Bleiler's invaluable *Checklist of Fantastic Literature* and, disregarding such obvious names as Edward Bellamy, Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, let's see for ourselves.

What have we here? Well, picking out stars in our rapid run-through we find Gabriel d'Annunzio, Michael Arlen, Gertrude Atherton, Henri Barbusse, Max Beerbohm, Hilaire Belloc, Stephen Vincent Benet, Ambrose Bierce, Elizabeth Bowen, John Buchan, Thomas Burke—and we're only through the B's.

Want more? Then how about James Branch Cabell, Karel Capek, Lewis Carroll, G. K. Chesterton, John Collier, Walter de la Mare, Conan Doyle, Lord Dunsany, Henry Fielding, Anatole France, John Galsworthy, Bret Harte, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ben Hecht, Aldous Huxley and so on to Edith Wharton, Oscar Wilde and Virginia Woolf. All of these and thousands of less eminent authors have at one or more times in their careers found science fiction the best vehicle for expressing their ideas. All of them have written it. Has science fiction a place in our literature? For Pete's sake, it's already there!

—The Publisher.

Austin announces a new convertible



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