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QUARK/2

A quarterly review of speculative fiction by John Brunner, Thomas Disch, Carol Emshwiller, Philip Jose Farmer, Fritz Lieber, James Sallis and others.

Edited by Samuel R. Delany and Marilyn Hacker



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QUARK/2

is the second issue of a new quarterly of speculative literature and graphics, selected and edited by Samuel R. Delany and Marilyn Hacker. The editors have tried to display the finest work of both new and established authors, whatever its imaginative substance, structure, or texture.

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edited

by

Samuel R. Delany and Marilyn Hacker

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All fiction is speculative.

Its tools are words, and its building process is human thought or imagination. Its point of view is the distorting glass of the writer's mind.

The world, this haphazard creation of our conglomerate consciousness, this Grand Old Place that may roll on without us, is more unlikely than any novelist's nightmare or wetdream. Humanity is, within boundaries, predictable. Creative imagination is, savingly, one thing we can humanly predict will define, and even exceed, those boundaries.

This is a tribute to imagination, an invocation of the possible, as grim as headlines, as gorgeous as invention.

This is a quarterly of speculative fiction.

—*Samuel R. Delany*
Marilyn Hacker



THE INTERSTATE

Andor sat three rows back from the driver. Having jammed his small suitcase in the rack overhead, having seen his large suitcase stowed in the bowels of the bus, Andor began the pleasurable process of relaxing.

First he concentrated on the calves of his legs, letting their knots of muscle soften and grow numb. Then he folded his hands across his paunch, the left still gripping a magazine, however, in case the man next to him began talking. Andor let the muscles of his shoulders and neck relax now, ordering the tension in them to surrender.

He felt some of the nervous charge generated by the exciting activity at the great bus terminal drain out of him now, as the bus got into smooth, gearless motion. The acceleration sickened him, and as the bus rolled on through terminal tunnels, he turned his thoughts to the circumstances that had led to his trip.

Once again, on the television screen of his mind, Andor sat erect at his desk, operating a small calculator and marking numbers upon forms of pink, white, yellow, pale blue and pale green. At the desks just to his left and right, and immediately before and behind him, were men performing similar tasks. He knew their names, though now, away from the office, he could not recall their faces. One, he thought, had white hair. Andor supposed that

on the floors immediately above him and below him were men performing similar tasks, though he had no proof of this. In thoughts, Andor's office moved through the office seasons.

Fall. Aitkin, on his left, sold tickets on a football pool, the Army-Navy game. Andor bought one ticket, number 0—0. Each day, when he opened his desk drawer, the ticket lay looking up at him with its blank spectacles. Long after the game was over, weary of its inspection, Andor threw the ticket into the wastebasket to the right of his desk.

Winter. Jurgens, in front of him, seemed to suffer from a severe sinus infection. Another man in another department was said to have suffered a heart attack from shovelling snow, but Andor was never able to check the truth of this story. Jurgens brought a new portable radio to work after the holiday. Playing it was not possible, however, for it interfered with the office's normal recorded music, which played continuously.

Spring. Cleaning men came to clean all the office's typewriters and calculators. There occurred conversations about baseball statistics in which Andor seldom participated, but which he never avoided.

Summer. Andor came eligible for two weeks, vacation. After examining brochures and weighing various possibilities, he chose a distant resort near the sea, packed two suitcases, and departed from the great bus terminal.

The great bus terminal was as brightly lit as any office, though its ceiling was much higher. People moved in small flocks across the quiet, polished floor from ticket counters to platforms, from platforms to luggage counters, or from luggage counters to exits. Excitement pervaded their noisy murmur and quick, orderly movements. Andor purchased a ticket in the shape of a long, folded strip made up of numerous coupons.

He looked at a television screen connected to a camera that elsewhere scanned a list of departures; thus he found

the right platform for his bus. With minutes to spare, Andor gave his large suitcase to a platform attendant, who stored it in the bowels of a silvery bus with a number of other suitcases and a bicycle tire. He closed the bowels and locked them with a silvery crank.

Andor allowed the driver to tear one coupon off his ticket, mounted the steps, and located an empty seat, three back from the driver. Andor sat next to the window of blue glass, after jamming his smaller suitcase in the overhead rack. Removing a folded magazine from his pocket, he began relaxing, as a white-haired man sat next to him. As he relaxed, Andor recalled all these actions with a kind of "pleasure."

Now the bus emerged from the tunnel into blue light and crossed a bridge. The air conditioning hummed, concealed speakers played a medley of show tunes, blue girders and factories flitted by. This was not a familiar part of the city to Andor, but seeing it caused him no panic. It was obvious from the bus's speed and from the driver's sure motions that all was going according to plan.

Near the outskirts of the city the bus stopped for ten minutes at a glass-walled restaurant with a spire or steeple. Where the cross or rooster should be was a weathervane showing a nursery rhyme, Simple Simon. Inside were long rows of booths upholstered in pink and green leatherette. The waitress who brought Andor's coffee was a thin redhead with bad nails and teeth. She wore a uniform of pink-and-green gingham. The coffee was too hot for him to drink before the bus departed.

There was a small rest room in the rear of the bus, marked "Toilet." Andor walked back to it and washed his hands in the tiny sink. On the way to his seat, he noticed that a few servicemen were aboard the bus. Now he recalled seeing a great many servicemen in the great bus terminal, as well as several persons in religious habits.

Now he perceived that there were forty other people on the bus besides himself: two family groups consisting

of man, pregnant woman, and small child, all speaking a foreign language; two elderly women and two young women in black religious habits; two young servicemen in tan uniforms and three others in white uniforms; six men of middle age carrying worn briefcases; three men of about twenty-eight carrying new attaché cases; a florid-faced drunken man of indeterminate age who addressed an occasional remark to the air in front of him; a cowboy and a thin woman who looked very like him, either his sister or his wife; one young man and two young women equipped with knapsacks and expensive casual clothes; two large women of middle age, who smelled bad; one young man in a college sweater; four very old men and three very old women, the latter wearing identical hats.

The bus moved past blue fields of plants Andor could not identify. He intended to read an article in the travel magazine in his lap about the resort to which he was going. He would read the article slowly, anticipating and savoring.

"Are you going far?" asked the man beside him. He had white hair and held an attaché case in his lap, upon which he now spread a copy of the same travel magazine Andor was holding. The copy was open to the article on Andor's resort, as the stranger pointed out when Andor named the place he was going. Andor opened his own copy and began reading.

All the hotels at this resort maintained their own ball-rooms for nightly dancing, but in addition there were public dances at the popular boardwalk pavilion and clambakes on the beach. Each hotel featured a heated pool, so that even in coldest weather—although the article assured him the weather was never really cold—one could immerse one's body in warm blue liquid and glide silently about in the depths, safe from the gelid moon. What a joke, Andor thought (repressing the thought at once), if someone were to put jello in that blue pool!

The thought was shocking and foreign to him, like an

object surgically inserted into his brain. He glanced down to make sure his tie was securely clipped to the front of his shirt.

There were beach facilities and equipment for many water sports, including sailing, skiing, surfing, water polo, rowing, and deep-sea fishing. There was an impressive list of restaurants, bars, and clubs. The vicinity boasted a number of places of scenic or historic merit. It occurred to him that the man beside him was reading the same article at the same time, and a disturbing thought burst like caviar in Andor's mind:

"Every person who reads the same magazine is the same person."

He was confused: had he actually thought this aloud, or had the man next to him spoken it? He stole a glance to see, but the stranger was just getting up to go to the rest room. Before he returned, the bus stopped at a large, elegant restaurant by the side of the interstate.

Andor found his appetite increased when he hurried through the hot, sunny, pink air of the outside to enter the blue-green coolness through a big glass door. As in the bus, concealed speakers played muted popular music constantly. Seating himself on a pink-and-green leatherette seat before a table of pale wood-grained plastic, Andor opened the giant menu.

Without much delay, he chose the house specialty, meat loaf, mashed potatoes and gravy, creamed corn, bread and butter. The bread consisted of one slice of white, one of whole wheat, wrapped together in clear plastic; the butter was a foil-wrapped cube.

Andor ordered coffee with cream. The cream was in a tiny tetrahedron of thick paper coated with impermeable plastic; there were two paper envelopes of sugar which Andor ignored.

When he had finished his meal (and it went down remarkably fast, except for the coffee), Andor found him-

self still hungry, so he ordered a dish of strawberry ice cream.

After the waitress had taken away the waxy dinner plate, and before she had brought his dessert, he had time to examine the paper place mat before him. It depicted the United States, a network of pink lines ("Interstates") and green lines ("Tollways"). They seemed veins and arteries, and he was even able to imagine tiny corpuscular cars nudging along them from coast to coast. The restaurant chain's name arched across the top of the map, in giant green letters, followed by the words, "The Wonderful World of Food." At various points on the map were tiny replicas of the chain's familiar spire, each one marking the location of a single "Eating Palace."

There was nothing else of interest on the mat but a large spot of gravy near one edge. For an instant he had the crazy notion of swiping up this spot with his finger and licking it down, but he at once realized how foolish this would look. Nevertheless the impulse remained strong until he received the dish of pink ice cream, and with it the pale green check.

As he paid the check, Andor bought a bag of the restaurant's own brand of caramels and a consumer magazine. Back in the bus he dozed for perhaps an hour.

A light rain had begun streaking the blue windows diagonally when he awoke. Otherwise the landscape seemed unchanged. Large green-and-white signs marked exits and interchanges; shadows of overpasses flashed overhead; an occasional billboard announced some distant casino or hotel; a row of red signs advertised shaving cream:

Beards grow faster
In the grave
Take it with you—

The light rain stopped without his noticing. The man next to him was asleep, and now Andor could see, in the

fading afternoon light, his creased forehead and sagging, slightly bristled jowls. Andor did not like to look at this face. He began to read interesting performance reports comparing three new cars; he ate caramels. The bus came through a tollgate and entered the driveway of another restaurant of the same chain.

"There will be a thirty-minute stop here for dinner," the driver announced. "Please remember the number of your bus, 3350." He spoke through an electronic amplifier that broadcast his voice throughout the length of the bus.

"This is where I get out," said the man next to Andor. "I'm here to check the books. So long." He climbed out of the bus and went into an unmarked door just to one side of the big glass entrance. Another bus drew up as Andor disembarked. Several middle-aged women in dark glasses stepped down from it and helped one another inside.

While Andor did not feel particularly hungry after having finished half his bag of caramels, he nevertheless ordered the house specialty, to avoid being hungry later. The specialty was pot roast and escalloped potatoes, with creamed corn. As soon as he had eaten it and drunk a soft drink, Andor felt slightly hungry, as if the process of eating had stimulated his appetite by some obscure chemical means. He quickly ordered a piece of pie from the glass case on the lunch counter, pie of some unknown dark berry, and a glass of milk. There was barely time to bolt it down and get back to bus number 3350.

A younger, thinner driver was now in charge of the bus. He tore a coupon off each passenger's ticket. Out the blue windows, the land and sky were dim purple. The man who checked books did not come back aboard.

When Andor put on the reading light to begin his newly bought detective novel, he saw something on the floor at his feet. It was the travel magazine, either his copy or the one belonging to the bookkeeper. Andor picked it up and quickly reread the article on his destination.

In the amusement park there were thrilling rides—including the Octopus, the Ferris wheel and the roller coaster—colorful games of skill and chance, curios and souvenirs and a beer garden with an authentic German band. It was near the amusement park that the Aquatic Festival was held each summer—including the famous Aqua Follies—and Andor was glad he had planned to arrive at the resort in time for these colorful pageants previewed for him in the travel article. Here were golden girls riding water skis in formation, colored lights turning their wakes to purple, crimson, old rose, and azure. Here were yacht races in the glaring sun, tilted sails turning to translucent, delicately fluted shells. Here were giant flowers formed, on the floodlit water, of naked girls swimming toe to toe in unison. Here were hydro-oil races and moonlight cruises, fancy diving and fireworks.

Finished with the magazine, Andor shoved it into the dark niche beneath the seat ahead. He would never look into this niche again, and in time, it would be cleaned by someone he would not see.

Nothing at all could now be seen out the windows, but for an occasional blue light that moved slowly past. Andor opened the detective novel and read it up to the point at which the detective was struck in the head by an unknown assailant. The bus driver switched off all interior lights, and Andor composed himself for sleep, sprawling diagonally across two seats. He continued to worry about the detective novel, which seemed to involve a case of mistaken identity.

Andor awoke once in the night, when the bus stopped for fifteen minutes at a restaurant with a glass front entrance and green-and-pink interior. Andor had a cup of coffee.

At eight o'clock, the bus pulled into another great bus terminal. There was a forty-five minute stop for breakfast. Passengers were requested to take all their belongings

with them, for the journey would continue in a different vehicle. Andor took his two suitcases into the terminal and checked them in a steel locker with a secure lock.

There were over a dozen servicemen and two or three clergymen waiting for buses in the terminal. The clergymen strolled about or read breviaries. Most of the servicemen lounged on benches, trying to sleep, though some slouched up, reading hot-rod magazines. Andor entered the terminal restaurant, sat in a pink-and-pale-green leatherette seat before a table of wood-grained plastic, and opened the giant menu.

After a breakfast of pancakes and syrup, he retrieved his suitcases and shaved in the terminal men's room. On the way out of the city, the new bus, number E-4799, passed a number of used-car lots, their plastic propellers spinning in the fresh morning breeze, or what Andor imagined to be a fresh morning breeze. Looking at them gave his heart a lift.

Before Andor opened his book to read, the bus was rolling along the turnpike, and through the concealed speakers came a sprightly morning song.

By midmorning, things had changed. Andor left off reading the detective novel, finding he had read it before. He was sure it had once had a different title, or at least a different cover picture. Disgusted, he shoved the book into the pocket on the back of the seat ahead of him. In doing so he discovered a worn copy of a popular news picture magazine. It contained an interesting article on the very resort he was going to, as well as a feature on ancient Egypt, "Land of the Pharaohs." By the time he had digested both of these, it was time for the lunch stop at a familiar spired restaurant.

"Going far?" asked the salesman who eased into the seat beside him later that afternoon. Andor named the resort he was bound for, and the stranger whistled. "Vacation?"

"That's right. Two fabulous weeks in the sun," said Andor.

"Yes, I've been there five times myself. Great place. Lot of women on vacation, bored, you know. One thing leads to another: a dip in the pool, a drink in the hotel bar . . ."

They exchanged several pleasant words about the resort, and the salesman confirmed many things Andor had read in the travel and news magazines, and in a travel brochure: the place was expensive, but worth it.

The salesman took down his ample case and got off at the next city, where the bus once more changed drivers and another coupon was taken from Andor's ticket. It seemed as if the number of coupons remaining had not diminished; the ticket looked as long as ever.

Andor napped as he finished digesting his lunch of hamburger steak, french fries, and cole slaw. He got off the bus at dinnertime hungry enough to order creamed dried beef on toast, steamed potatoes, garden peas, and coffee. This time he debated whether or not to order dessert: he was hungry, but he was not getting enough exercise. At first he ordered apple pie *à la mode*, then changed it to plain apple pie. After paying the pale, green check, he returned to leave a coin on the wood-grained plastic table.

The next stop was after midnight at another restaurant of the same chain. Andor thought he glimpsed the book-keeper eating and reading a newspaper in another part of the large restaurant. It was only when the white-haired man looked up that Andor saw he was a cleric, and a complete stranger.

After dinner Andor walked around outside. The evening was chilly and damp. After ten minutes he began to feel uneasy. Five minutes later his uneasiness had grown to a mild panic. He was relieved when the other passengers came out of the restaurant and began boarding the

bus, and he could join them. What would he have said to the bookkeeper if it had been he indeed?

The drizzle lifted as Andor woke, moving his shoulders to ease their stiffness. Despite a night of indigestion and strange underwater dreams, he was content this morning. This was his favorite time of day, the purple hours just before dawn. The bus stopped for fuel at a kind of depot-restaurant out on the turnpike, far from civilization, where a dozen other buses nudged up to the concrete building like piglets at a sow. After dozing over a cup of coffee, Andor tried to board the wrong bus. Though it sat in the exact position he recalled it sitting in before, the driver was now tall and gray-haired rather than fat and red-haired. He asked Andor to see his ticket, then told him he was on the wrong bus.

"This is number E-2842, and you came in on number E-4799, over on the other side of the building. Better hurry up and see if you can still catch it."

Andor saw his mistake at once. He had entered the restaurant by one door and left by another on the opposite side. He now ran back in through the glass door, past the rows of empty pink-and-green leatherette booths, and out the proper door. The driver was just starting the engine as Andor bolted up the steps and back to his warm seat. Even though the danger was past, it took him several minutes to recover himself from panic.

That morning Andor divided between watching the billboards advertising tires and distant casinos and reading the travel brochure describing his resort. At lunch he ate roast turkey and creamed potatoes, cranberry sauce and wax beans. Dessert was chocolate pudding.

His hotel, the brochure informed him, had a ballroom with dancing nightly, a cabaret, a restaurant, and a heated, floodlit swimming pool. Even in coldest weather—although the weather was never really cold, the brochure assured him—he could slide into the warm blue liquid and

glide silently about, safe from the gelid moon. It seemed to him almost as if he had been there already.

Andor noticed a series of power-line pylons set along parallel to the interstate highway. He began to count them, and fell asleep at one hundred and twenty-odd.

Dinner was a club sandwich, potato salad, and a glass of ginger ale, with tapioca for dessert. Andor bought a package of caramels and took them aboard with him. The driver removed another coupon from his ticket, which still seemed undiminished. Andor briefly considered counting the remaining coupons, to see if they were actually the same number as before, but it was too much work, and how was he supposed to account for it if they were? The whole idea was silly and profitless. Andor watched the sunset, aware of his own boredom.

Next morning was very warm indeed. The bus entered a great terminal where Andor bathed and changed clothes and ate bacon, eggs, hash browns, and coffee. In his coffee he poured cream from a tiny tetrahedronal container. He picked up a red plastic tomato and considered squeezing it over his hash browns, but decided against it. The coffee, he thought, tasted very like the coffee in that town—what was the name of it?

It seemed to Andor as if the name he was searching for were somehow the name of a town he had not yet reached.

The magazine he was reading was one he'd borrowed from a clergyman. It featured an article on spiritual fulfillment. In front of Andor two men in college sweaters were playing cards on top of a suitcase. Two nuns sat across from them, in front of a sleeping soldier. In front of them a business man wrote steadily in his notebook. Behind the soldier a cowboy argued with his wife, while a family of swarthy foreigners looked on interestedly. Two clergymen of different denominations chatted genially

across the aisle. Back of them sat more servicemen, and several vacationing pensioners.

Lunch was tuna casserole de luxe, diced carrots, and lettuce salad with french dressing. Dessert was custard pie. Andor imagined that he saw at the counter the salesman he'd talked to earlier, but dressed as a sailor. He seemed to see everyone twice, as on a merry-go-round. Motion was blending people and days together like soft ice cream.

Dinner at another restaurant with a spire. Andor felt a slight unpleasant sensation as he rode along afterwards. There were darkening blue fields wheeling past him, but Andor had no sensation of motion at all. It was as viewing a landscape painted on canvas, moving past on wooden rollers; it was cinematic illusion, badly done; it was a cheap mirror trick; it was, in short, motion that refused to become *real*. He felt the bus accelerate against the back of his head, and his ears heard the roar of engine in the back, but these too seemed piped-in sensations. Was there an engine behind him? As well insist there was a string orchestra playing show tunes somewhere in the compartment (he had ceased to think of it as a "bus"). The only reality in all this seemed to be the warmth spreading outward through him from his stomach, where enzymes, he supposed, were now attacking macaroni and cheese, butter beans, and malted milk. He dozed.

Things were no better in the morning, at least not at first. Counting back, Andor could not discover how long he had been traveling. Time was undone; days were become as alike as a row of "red" signs against the flat, "green" landscape:

Beards grow faster

In the grave . . .

He had to keep reminding himself that all was viewed through blue glass, that colors were not true. Whenever he stepped out of the bus, earth and sky took on an uncanny pink tinge.

A waffle and sausage; a morning paper from a strange city; counting his money and finding to his delight that he had more than he'd figured; these restored Andor's good humor for the morning. He recovered himself sufficiently to hum along with the sprightly show tunes.

But after his lunch of yankee pot roast and escalloped potatoes, Andor felt uneasy and depressed. The date on his paper was the thirtieth, and he determined to use it to find out his day of departure, by counting backwards. But not only could he not decide whether he had been four or five days *en route*, but it occurred to him he might have yesterday's paper. He asked the soldier across the aisle for today's date.

"Wish I knew," the soldier apologized. "I got a calendar watch, but now and then I forget to set it right. Let's see—Sunday was the twentieth or twenty-first, so Sunday again would of been the twenty-seventh or eighth. But I forget every time whether it's May or June has thirty days, and so I get my watch off one day. It registers thirty-one days every month, see, unless I reset it."

He might have asked someone else, but Andor suddenly gave up. Why was the date so important anyway? He would get there when he got there—to the resort whose name escaped him for the moment.

It was not as if he had not read, heard, or spoken it often enough. Rather, he knew it almost too well. It was become a piece of mental furniture so familiar as to be invisible in the background of his mind; he could not make his tongue trip over it. Indeed, he knew it so well, Andor could almost imagine having been to the resort already. Knowing how difficult it is to conjure up a forgotten name, he turned his thoughts to the more or less neutral topic of approaching dinner.

Dinner was basic fish sticks, french fries, baked beans, and lettuce salad with french dressing, followed by a banana split. Afterwards he walked out for a moment under the darkening sky, watching stars appear. But there

was something vaguely terrifying about the first few points of light in that immense blackness . . .

He read a detective novel to the point where an unknown assailant struck the detective. The reading light went off. Andor lay awake in the darkness, imagining the unread portion. It seemed not improbable that the detective was going to lose his memory from this blow on the head.

He awoke in utter darkness, among strangers, alone and afraid. But almost as if it had been awaiting his cue, the sky began to lighten. Soon he could make out the shapes of billboards and the gray tangles of an interchange.

Dozing again, he dreamt of the resort. Andor swan-dived into a pool of blue jello. Cutting through the viscid stuff, his body moved deeper and deeper into blue protecting darkness, until by some miracle reversal, he emerged at the center of the sky, at the sun, and he flowed down like pale-green rain to the sun-flooded beach.

Bacon and eggs, coffee with cream from a tiny tetrahedron. Pale-green check from the pale waitress. He found he had read the detective novel before, or at least started it before. Washing his hands in the tiny sink at the rear of the compartment, he wondered if he would ever reach his goal.

It amused him to postulate two Andors, one moving from A to B, the other moving from B to A, each passing through the other—but perhaps neither arriving at his ever-receding goal. Perhaps he approached the end asymptotically, riding three seats behind the driver in perpetuity . . .

He counted his money, discovered there was more than he'd thought. The driver took another coupon from his never-diminishing ticket. Meat loaf and gravy, mashed potatoes, string beans, coffee. Apple pie á la mode.

Each night, he thought, when I'm asleep, I slip back one notch in time. If I travel all day, I may just make up that slippage. It's some kind of treadmill.

Garden peas, Yankee pot roast, fried potatoes, and coffee with cream. Andor ignored the tiny paper envelopes of sugar. Tapioca. "Land of the Pharaohs."

I'll get out, he thought. *They can't keep me on the bus.* But he found it more terrifying than ever, just imagining the solitude out there, stars and blackness and the frozen disc of the moon. Whenever he had to move from the bus to the restaurant, Andor hurried without looking up.

He had been to the resort already; that much seemed certain. He could recall it all so clearly: the night fireworks, by day the heated blue pool. He had picked up a woman there whose name he could not recall. A drink at the hotel bar, a dip in the pool, and so on. Later they had visited the fabulous amusement park and observed a yacht race in the dazzling sunlight.

Dinner: creamed dried beef on toast, steamed potatoes, spinach, coffee, bread and butter. Dessert: butterscotch pudding.

Hamburger steak, creamed corn, hash browns. He squeezed a red plastic tomato over the potatoes. *I'll stay out*, he decided, but he was afraid. When the time came, he reboarded the proper bus.

It's a treadmill in time, a suspension between present and past. If I try to stop anywhere, I'll be swept backwards, backwards . . .

Always into a yesterday, always into a sealed-off, completed past, undying—because already dead?

A stranger eased into the seat beside him, holding an attaché case and a rolled-up magazine.

"Going far?" he asked.

Andor did not appear to hear him. The stranger seemed satisfied with Andor's silence, for he settled himself and began to read. Andor continued to stare out the deep-blue window, as into the depths of pool, until it grew so dark outside that there was nothing to see but the reflection of his own face.

—John Sladek



A POSSIBLE EPISODE IN THE PICARESQUE ADVENTURES OF MR. J.H.B. MONSTROSEE

The writers of the series have always been aware of the monstrous side of things. A little too much here or there. A lot too much. Even in their own individual lives. They have had negative reactions out of proportion to the situation. They have behaved badly. Laughed too loud. Burped in public. Squeaked and snickered. Farted. Forgotten the names of their friends.

Too many new cars. Too many magazines. Too much coffee, French fries, research projects, purse snatchers, lowest common denominators. Too many Friends-of-the-Library, empty jars, brinks of disaster, outpourings of the soul, kiss, kiss, kiss, etc., and the remains of half-eaten meals. Too many Chets, Bobbys, Bings, Normans, Dickies, Marilyns, Raquels, Spiros, Noams and Seans.

Meanwhile, in a distant (intergalactic) place, distracted (momentarily) by asteroids, comets, a spectacular view of the horsehead nebula, and one small, hot world where crystalline substances shatter every time the sun comes up, the monster (his coming having been forecast by computers with a long history of telling fortunes by the positions of the planets relative to the stars) senses in himself the need for change and has headed in our direction shouting, "Excess, excess!"

Should he have the ability to disguise himself as one

of them, the writers of the series have already counted up eleven possible suspects:

One embittered young businessman.

A disaffected widow.

A man whose life is essentially meaningless.

Two sisters. One named Gladys (about whom more later).

Five wives. (One frigid.)

A Negro born in England who is a slightly better man than the embittered young businessman.

They have also released a little biography of the dead man.

It happened during after-dinner coffee and cordials. Brandy-sipping guests, groups of sponsors and members of the board of trustees, with one or two ordinary men. The last words of the deceased were: "I want—I want—death today—or death tomorrow—certainly as soon as practicable."

"Listen, we've *always* felt threatened, and guilty, too, though never, until now, of murder."

In spite of the fact that they have stepped directly from the garden into the desert scene and with only one canteen, hot lights, and no solutions, the writers of the series have achieved a certain objectivity. They feel no fear, only a sense of risk and daring. They walk (trudge) single file and in silence, saving their energy for the confrontation. Only a few have forgotten their sunglasses.

But this was long afterwards. As a matter of fact, the monster first landed in a Los Angeles backyard just at sunset, disguised as a thoroughly Americanized Englishman, tall, slim, one eye half closed (it's hereditary), outwardly composed, rocking back on his heels, flexing his fingers, taking a fairly reasonable stand on most subjects, and saying: "Have you ever waked up in a strange land, some trillions of miles from home, wondering where you were?"

He was, actually, the special guest of one of the members of the board of a sponsoring company. (It's one way to have access to a large audience should the monster be thinking of taking over the world.) Three of the five wives present seem to have noticed him, including the frigid one, also Gladys, the prettier of the two sisters.

However (apropos of Gladys), there's a young gaffer on the set of the series who's handsomer than most, tanner, blonder, more blue-eyed, and outside the door there are already long lines of men who want or who have wanted at some time to become heroes. They've heard about the murder and the scenes in the desert, and they want to have a part in it. They've heard that his first words were, "World, world, world, world and everything in it."

Meanwhile the sponsors have been calling for more action and less philosophizing. Also they have specified that Gladys should never appear entirely naked, though there is some thought of a diaphanous green gown.

And all this while they have been coming up over the rise of a dune silhouetted in the sunset, first the gaffers and grips and then the writers of the series. Last the sponsors. In a few minutes they will attempt to communicate with the monster and fail, after which he will round them all up into a valley surrounded by sheer rock cliffs on all sides but one (it's the human condition). But this was long afterwards. Now he has just regained consciousness beside a century plant.

Regaining consciousness beside a century plant, first a view of sky, then becoming aware of the sounds of conversations, slowly adjusting his tie and smoothing his hair, he fixes himself a scotch and ice and joined the party. "I wonder if any of you have ever waked up in a strange land, not remembering who you are, having other customs, both sexual and secular, having other desires and ambitions, wearing an unfamiliar costume, standing in un-

familiar stances or seated on unfamiliar chairs, eating strange vegetables, and finding oneself the special guest of a member of the board of directors? And now, being interviewed by three wives, one noticeably frigid (that may be her special attraction) and a beautiful young girl named Gladys and saying: Go away, I'm dreaming of (or grieving for) my homeland."

(Of what use to him someone else's attractive, frigid wife?) She says: "I wake up almost every morning as though in a distant land." Afterwards she said: "He was very gracious."

Still (he thinks) after the vast reaches of space, the black loneliness of it, the dangers, he might rest and assimilate some vestiges of humanity and humaneness without fear of losing his own alien essence.

This he has decided to do.

However, marriage is unthinkable.

"Mr. Monstrose, have you ever been called upon to—to act out some difficult real life situation (sexual) that might be encountered in some scene later on, as, for instance, your hand on her breast and then slowly (and specifically) (on the inner part of her thigh) feeling your way up under her skirt (first the tactile experience, later the visual experience, this strange earth woman) and then rehearsed other things that you might be called upon to do after that?"

"Well," he replied in his clipped, British accent, "it's between the scenes, actually, that we come to grips with ourselves and others in genuine social encounters, during the smoking of one more cigarette or sipping something hot. It's at those times that we look into each others' eyes and sometimes fall in love (star to sponsor, gaffer or grip to extra, a writer of the series to some young script girl) and that's when the real danger comes, between the scenes when a light falls down or somebody trips on the wires. Gladys, for instance, knocked on the head and her green

diaphanous gown set on fire by a quartz lamp. She lies on a fake sand dune dying."

"Gladys, you're among friends, lovers and men who want to become heroes. You're among sponsors, one or two ordinary men, gaffers and grips, and Mr. J.H.B. Monstrose. There is a type of microphone here so sensitive that it can record your last breath from a distance of thirty yards."

And all the while the writers of the series have been enclosed in this valley now for who knows how long, days or fortnights? Some last-minute means of escape must be found.

"Come on out now and save the world."

One writer is writing a part for Gladys in which she will be wearing a diaphanous green gown. Meanwhile the monster in the form of Mr. J.H.B. Monstrose is off with the frigid lady. There is some thought as to her safety in his hands. There is some question as to his sexual capacities and equipment. There is some concern as to her mental condition. (They have both been in therapies of sorts: hers, Freudian, his, behaviorist conditioning.) Each, in their own way, has doubts about their capacities as sexual objects or performers, particularly under stress. They are both, however, fairly attractive people and are driving along the freeways with the top down and the wind in their hair.

(The monster keeps a red and black king snake in his pants pocket.)

She was asking him if changing size was possible. If some other part of his body could play the role of penis. Discussing various softnesses and hardnesses and medium hard or soft. She was just wondering—and maybe wishing a little—that this could be a turning point in her sexual experience. While he was asking what were suitable ingresses and erogenous zones.

Minutes pass.

He says: "I've inhaled too many fumes from dead planets, too much interstellar dust. I've grown a little older than I first thought. I've taken on a form incompatible with my own shape and way of life. I've been going through a difficult period of psychological readjustment to environmental changes (I really don't belong in this world at all); however, if I could use some other unmentionable part of myself, something might be worked out that would be mutually satisfying, alternately, at least, if not simultaneously."

Any new little J.H.B. Monstrosees may be native born United States citizens (or full-blooded Indians). It is hoped they will find their shapes compatible to their (sexual) aspirations.

Proceeding without foreplay, he says, "By the way, where I come from, after you mate you're no longer an autonomous individual, but the male rides between your legs and carries on all his business affairs from there while you become a permanently attached secretary and chauffeur. (Our clothes are adapted to the situation and to the female's natural feelings of modesty under these circumstances.) The mating is not severed until the male member is dislodged at the birth of the offspring. This, the dislodging, usually happens sometime during the early contractions of the labor, after which the male assists in the birth by applying a steady pressure at the small of the female's back. After parturition, both parties are free to choose a new partner until the next birthing, though it is true that some of our Northern relatives mate for life. During the latter years of these life-matings, the spouses become real adjuncts to their husband's work, sometimes knowing almost as much about his business as he does and

quite able to carry on if the male should become temporarily comatose."

The writers of the series have certainly failed to understand the importance of, and the nature of, the creature's sexuality; otherwise they would never have sent Gladys out into the desert in a diaphanous green gown. But this was long afterwards. By that time he must have passed the initial period of readjustment to his present situation.

"I had to changé from within."

"(Because of my hardy, pioneer forefathers) I should have come here a hundred million years ago, night flights on leathery wings and naked morning dips, breathing strange gaseous substances from holes in the earth, feet (pseudopods) in magma, throwing rocks into a surf a thousand feet below. But there's a time limit to everything (though I've always suspected I was never really born. Suddenly I was part of it all. Going my own way.) and now, suddenly, I'm here. I've made up my own name and made love and driven the freeways with the top down and been listening to music in a place where each day is divided into its parts, which follow consecutively one upon the other. I may even have committed (inadvertently) (in the garden) a murder. I admit to my mistakes, and I've tried to explain my feelings. I hope we can come to some mutual understanding and acceptance of each other not dealing in stereotypes."

However, the writers of the series, the sponsors, and one or two ordinary men along with the gaffers and grips are still imprisoned in the valley or soon will be. Gladys will be sent out to seduce the already sexually exhausted Mr. J.H.B. Monstrosee. She will trip over a wire, knock down a light, and die a painful death on a fake, if realistic, sand dune.

"Gladys, you're among friends, lovers, and men who want to become heroes . . ."

The sponsors continually ask for more action.

Mr. J.H.B. Monstrosee has traveled so fast that he has already come to the desert area (as though by magic) with the top down and listening to music. He tried to retain his composure. This is what he was hired for and is considered expert at. He is silhouetted in the sunset, red convertible, Western hat, sun glasses, square jaw, lending a European touch to the production. He is finding himself among men who want to become heroes, who receive extra pay for extra dangers, who have just so many minutes before the bridge or the entrance to the cave (or the only way out of the valley) blows up. In this case, he wonders how to lay the groundwork for mutual understanding or even any communication at all?

"I wonder if anyone will come to my assistance?" he asks, but they don't understand what he's saying; he having reverted, in his excitement, to his alien manner of expressing himself, burps, squeaks, snickers, farts, grunts, and mumbles. All the while the sponsors are insisting on death today or death tomorrow. Certainly as soon as practicable.

"But Madam," addressing Gladys, "mutual support . . . a little fellow feeling . . . an hour or two more . . . one last cigarette at least. I'll take whatever pay is due me and leave this planet forever."

Mr. J.H.B. Monstrosee, in nonsense syllables of anxiety and bewilderment and old words that have been forgotten, is talking about stars in the sky that none of the writers of the series has ever heard of or seen, saying: "There are more durable planets, handsomer suns, constellations beyond your comprehension. There are places where the hours, minutes, and seconds are more than twice as long

as here, and other places where even the days go by too fast to count. I know of a planet with a hundred moons, each of which represents a genius of science or a military man . . .”

“But now I have to come to a turning point in my life.”

“Now I turn . . .”

There will be no explosions.

Just smoke machines. A few red flares. Hot lights and sun glasses, coffee, French fries, research projects, Friends-of-the-Library, brinks of disaster, the remains of half-eaten meals, and Chet, Bobby, Bing, Norman, Dickie Marilyn, Raquel, Spiro, Noam, and Sean.

Etc.

——*Carol Emshwiller*

Translation

I have come to spend my afternoons in the old coffee house. There I sit and leisurely browse through his poems and books. Occasionally I glance at a newspaper. At one time the staunch advocate of impulsive and eccentric behaviour, I have gradually learned that habit lets me meet people; gives them a chance to get used to me; to overcome their embarrassment.

It's a small shop, traditionally furnished. Oak panelled walls; brass light fixtures; a white ceiling between beams of timber; panes of fish-eyed glass in the bay windows that flank the door. It's a retreat. An escape from bar-stools; from chrome and plastic to the starch linen and silverware on each of the dozen or so tables. The two waitresses wear trim white-laced aprons over black dresses and smile when they serve me. I have my own corner table, a nook under the newel-post of the dog-leg stair; and at the foot of the lowest step a Victorian hat-stand with curled arms discreetly pointing out that the upstairs is private.

My coffee cup is filled often. But by evening, when the local country gentlemen and the odd traveling salesman gather here for a typical English tea of hot toasted muffins and buttered scones, I'm well on my way to the library for a few hours' work before it closes. He has asked me to translate his poems.

For some reason I have stayed longer than usual, but make no effort to leave. The other tables are still empty and there's plenty of coffee left in my cup. A man stands outside, his silhouette strangely distorted by the curve of the window. Other shapes join him. The man's arm holds back the door: she walks in. The child is with her. She squats before him and helps take off his scarf and coat. And she brushes back the yellow hair from his forehead. The wind has flushed his cheeks, high cheekbones, and brought tears to his large brown eyes; his mother's eyes. He also has her chin, but no trace of her proud Jewish nose. He bears no resemblance to the man who is hanging up their coats.

Her eyes have picked out a table and the group moves towards it. They are tired. They are passing through the village: on their way home? She glances at me only to look away at once, but it was the glance of the curious. She will look again. Later. And the child climbs onto a chair, while his mother helps him; sits beside him. Her back to me. How often have I seen that back? In subways. Staring at the soporific sound of fountains. At the bullfight. No. She could not stand the sight of blood. And always walking away from me. Black hair rests gently on shoulders, an expensive coat. Was it her clothes, her taste, that first attracted me to her? Always away from me. I want to go after her; but turn; walk off in the opposite direction.

And naked she sat beside the body on my bed, not letting me love her because we have no contraceptives. She is afraid to take the pill. Yesterday I broke the window and snowflakes petalflutter into the attic. Already this morning it has rained and hailed; and short bouts of sunshine to cover the mistakes. Now it snows. We say nothing to each other. We have slept badly. She runs her sharp fingernails across my chest, her eyes focused on the mouth of a poor Munch reproduction. *The Scream*. I will never write of this.

The child can't make up his mind what to eat. The crumpets are small necessities before the vast array of pastries. He chooses something with lots of whipped cream, speckles of multi-coloured flecks, and a cherry set square on the top. She says something to the man and they both laugh. His black moustache curls up at either side of flared nostrils; he has white teeth; they are happy. And so is the child.

We dodged the spray of puddlewater sent up by the bus and went into the coffee lounge to get out of the rain. There's plenty of time before the film begins and it's too early to get a drink. She despises my drinking and is always amazed by the amount I can take without getting drunk. It's a good thing you don't have a car. I'm a good driver. She doesn't like to sit next to me because I'm forced to see her profile, her nose. In the cinema she will lean her head forward to hide her face behind hair. It takes me a long time to convince her that her nose is beautiful. I'm not sure whether I want to eat or not, but much to her disgust, I order soft roe on toast and a poached egg. She is happy with tea. We talk about William Empson. She is preparing a paper for his exam, sure that she will fail. I talk about his poetry.

The man is explaining something to her. His hands look as though they're describing an intricate piece of machinery. Something small. Precise. She teases his enthusiasm. I hear her clear laugh and see him shrug his shoulders, spread his arms; a foreign gesture. He hasn't looked in my direction at all.

She laughed when I said yes. I haven't seen her for three weeks and she has spent many hours crying. There are deep black hollows under her eyes. She is afraid to tell me. She is afraid that I will hate her. I'm pregnant. Great! D'you want it? It's up to you. You won't marry me? No: but always say it's mine, I'll never deny it. And we both laugh till the tears mingle on our lips.

They pay for their meal and go to put on their coats.

She has finished dressing the child, who looks round the restaurant. He sees me. The man helps her on with her coat. She pulls long hair from under her collar and as she tosses her head to arrange the soft strands on her shoulders she glances at me. Quickly. Her head turns away. But her eyes move to their corners and stay with me a while longer. The child still stares at me. A mixture of fascination and fear. The man takes him by the hand and they leave. Through the glass she tries to look back into the shop. Where I'm sitting.

The shop is full of chattering people and the smell of homemade marmalade.

Wendy, the slimmer of the waitresses, walks over to my table.

——Some more coffee sir?

I shake my head. I'd smile, but it only makes the scars look more repulsive.

En passant

——Sit down.

——Thank you Sir.

——D'you play chess?

——Yessir.

——You're fired.

——I beg your pardon sir?

——HIRED—Did I say fired? well it only goes to show never mind, Meg will show you to your quarters.

——Won't you be wanting my name sir?

——O—I'll think of one.

Meg said The Master will want you to serve coffee in the lounge. You've half an hour. I asked The Master? Meg said That's what we all call him. Sometimes the Prof. I asked What's wrong with Guv, or the Guvnor if you like? Meg said nothing.

A single bed; besides lamp and table, a chair; bars across the sash window; a built-in cupboard with a full-length mirror. The room is right at the top of the house and looks out onto the driveway, the road which leads into town. On my bed the dress trousers and waistcoat: my new uniform. I fasten silver buttons over red and white stripes. The back is of black silk and I have difficulty adjusting the buckle. In the mirror. What was the other man like? A good deal larger; but if I draw in my stomach and thrust out my chest I am the picture of a gentleman's gentleman.

A warm summer afternoon. No clouds. For strolling through a park or sitting on a bench, reading; looking at people; children coming home from school with their mothers.

Distant spurts from a lawn mower percolate through French windows that open onto the terrace. Cool air freshens the musty lounge, dusts the chandelier. I pour coffee from Regency silverware. He puts his hand on my shoulder and craning his neck peers through his pince-nez at the scars either side of my lips. The leather arm-chair creaks. Remarkable he mutters and runs a sensitive finger along the pink groove. Remarkable. Truly remarkable . . .

I am dismissed early. It's still light, but the sun has set behind swaying poplars, beyond the road that leads into the village. I sit at my window unable to decide should I read or go to bed. The Guvnor and Meg are the only people I've seen all day. I'm tired. Someone locks my door from the outside. Crickets are chirping.

He calls me 37, and he wants to show me something. I follow him up the main stairs. I follow him through rooms, through halls with portraits in gilded frames. Now a tapestry; then a vase and that medieval-looking chair tell me this is the second time we've passed this way. He's trying to confuse me?

On the third floor he stops in front of a set of double doors and waits for me to open them. We enter the library; a corridor of bookcases. Carved bookcases like Gothic pews jut out from between lofty windows. Over-awed, a few dazed steps behind the Guvnor; eyes, from left to right, straining to catch familiar titles, friendly names. And a spacious wing where silent men and women sit in easy-chairs reading, or relaxing with toy building blocks, jig-saw puzzles, plasticine and clay. The household.

As the Guvnor approaches they stand. A stocky man in grey flannels and with bushy sideburns steps forward. Poised, about to speak. But seeing me with the Guv, he lowers his eyes and opens his book, the page marked with his thumb.

Sit down sit down Mutters the Guvnor, his hands by his sides patting at the air. I feel their eyes focused on me. Jealous eyes. We move on: a new aisle, more and more bookshelves; mahogany. I know the eyes are behind us, all following.

And there is a groan from one of the alcoves. The Guvnor stops. Calmly he stares at the young woman who is squeezed between the end of a bookcase and the wall. Her tweed skirt is up about her waist and she clutches at the wood with slender fingers; her knees dug into the ogee moulding. She is writhing, slowly maneuvering her hips from side to side; her shoulders squirm against the brickwork. Her breath comes short. Quick. Gulp. We are still. I pretend to be absorbed by a loose thread on the Guvnor's collar. The woman senses our presence and slips out into the aisle. Ignoring us completely, she selects a book at random and strides proudly back to the main area.

We turn left, walk alongside tiers of books; a low door before us and to one side a chessboard. About two-thirds of the game has been played; black seems to have the advantage. The Guv seeing my interest turns to the board

and sweeps the pieces off with one generous gesture. He says:

——Pick them up and put them back the way they were.

——I'm not sure whether I can.

——But you do play chess? And he replaces all the pieces on the squares exactly as they stood before with the exception of one white pawn. He knows that I'm aware of his mistake.

——That's my move. You have yours on the way back. A satisfied grin. Tiny red blotches show on his scalp.

We go through the door. The room is arranged like a cinema. The Guvnor motions me into a seat facing the blank wall and sits at a desk which has buttons and switches set into the lid. The lights go out and lifesize schoolgirls in gymslips skip and jump across the wall: a game of netball. Their supple bodies are cut up by a mesh, a wire fence, as though the pictures had been taken by someone watching from outside the playground. I know the Prof is studying me, my face. Perhaps he is making a film of me watching a film.

I barge into his office without knocking. He sits at his desk. There is an enormous pile of typed paper in front of him. I say:

——Guv—I want to marry Meg.

——MARRY?—Mmm?—How does Meg feel about it, I suppose you've asked him.

——Yes.

——Well I know you two have been shaking up together—But marry?

Meg stopped locking my door; instead she came in almost every night and we'd talk for hours. We got to know each other well. She too had arrived with recommendations for an immediate staff position. She has a snake tattooed on her thigh. Eventually we began plotting.

——Well——yes, if you marry I shall be obliged to release you—Mmm?—I'll let you know.

He waves me out of the room. By the door stands a chess set. I knock the pieces onto the floor. It's his move and whatever he does I shall take his queen.

The newspapers reported the Professor's death. There was no one competent enough to carry on with his programme, so the institute was closed. His essays and notebooks have been published and are fast becoming the standard reference in his field. Meg sent me a copy of the book in which he circled every mention of number 14 and underlined the passages where it appears in connection with 37. The work is prefaced with detailed case histories of each subject. I cannot read 37's. The intricacies of plastic surgery revolt me.

In his letter Meg writes that he is the personnel manager of a cosmetics factory and hints at an affair with his secretary.

I teach languages at a girls school in Derbyshire. I have often thought of trying to trace the child again, but that would mean going back to that school in London, back to the place where I was arrested.

Aller et retour

In the attic there is an L-shaped room. The door opens onto the squat, darker bay and against the steep slope of the roof. From a white-washed beam swing raffia-caged Chianti bottles: dust-gathering monuments to tenants past. A blue-covered settee cuts across the corner where the two spurs meet and faces a small table on which stands a portable television. Coils and loops of improvised antenna hang above, pinned to rafters, the support of a clumsy hip

joint awkwardly splayed to marry the deep pitch and the vertical wall. Sunlight sifts through a musty window set in the taller gable end. Hardboard is taped over a missing pane.

It's summer.

We are watching the television; a film. I sit on the settee, she is at my feet, nestled between my calves with her arms hooked over my knees. Her head rests gently against my thigh. From time to time I toy with a strand of her soft dark hair which has settled into fragile bunches about my legs. We try to kiss upside down, but my beard scratches her nose.

During the commercials she looks at the unwashed plates on the floor and thinks He never does the washing-up, he just waits for me to do it. What's the use in telling him? Last time he did it the cutlery came back sticky and there were bits of egg-yolk glued to the coffee cups.

She leans forward and turns up the heater. I get up and turn down the volume. Summer.

——I'm going out to buy some cigarettes.

Three months later I come back.

——Are you thinking of her again?—the voice fluid; mellow. Her skin black. Her name is Nina O. She paints.

——Yes.

——Drink and travel will make you forget.—the words, white down about to fall.

She will not let me see the canvas till it's finished. The work has to be submitted for finals. I sold my typewriter so that she could buy more paints. And we made love. Her black satin body; yellow and green sheets. My fumbling hands; pale. A collage. And she cried. She does not understand how anyone has the right to judge her work. How can they say to her you've passed? Or you've failed? I tried to comfort her, but I don't understand either. If she passes, she'll get a scholarship to study in Paris. She leaves in January.

The artist steps back. With one eye half closed she surveys the canvas. She takes another step back and upsets a jam-jar of brushes and oily green turps. For a long time she looks down at the mess which soaks into the bare floorboards and then, on impulse, she drops the brush into the viscous pool.

Wiping tacky hands on her rump Nina O again looks up at the canvas. She takes off her glasses. And then puts them back on. With cat-like mannerisms she turns and moves towards the window through a maze of pots, cans and bottles. There are green specks on her shoes.

An orchard backs onto the cottage, and beyond the orchard the Derbyshire moors. Millstone grit; gorse; cold winds. We chase sheep across the moors.

Abruptly she turns, and leaving her glasses on the sill, smiles at me, the tip of her pink tongue peeping out from between her full lips like a tiny animal. And she laughs at me sprawled out over the unmade bed. I ask:

——Do we need cigarettes?

Without reply she walks across the studio, through the alleys cut into the ever-varying contours of paint-tubes, canvas and frames, over to my trousers which hang from a nail driven into the naked beam. She comes back to the bedside and handing me the trousers says:

——Will I see you again?

——I'll be in France.

I zip the fly.

——It's finished she whispers, and taking my hand leads me to the canvas.

Three months later I come back. Our names have been taken from the doorbell, but Linda still lives downstairs. I hate her, her manner, her ideas, the calculated promiscuity of her affair with the Italian next door. I feel sorry for him, especially on cold nights when he has to climb out of bed, leave his lovely Linda and at 3 A.M. cross the

fence back to a mother who doesn't approve. I won't disturb her.

I climb down the mouth of the coal chute and into the damp basement. At the foot of the stairs stands my old leather suitcase. Gnarled straps and bent buckles hold its bulging form. On top lies a polythene bag; inside, a plastic belt, a toy gun and a photograph of us at a dinner party. Two piles of sodden manuscripts are propped up against the flaking wall. I take the two bags.

I'm hungry. I go into the kitchen. A dog is sleeping under the large table, he opens one eye, but takes no further notice of me. Perhaps he belongs to the people who now live in the attic. There is some bacon and an egg in the pantry: I put them in my pocket. Linda walks in. She screams and runs off down the hall back to her room, her nylon nightdress crackles and I leave. Quickly.

The terminus is vast. Cold. Too cold and too vast. Eight parallel slabs of concrete, like the outspread fingers of a Cubist's hand, lie under the vaulted roof of steel and glass. Of these platforms only two are serviceable, giving access to four tracks; the remaining six are permanently closed, cut off by a temporary wire and matchwood fence. Clumps of moss advance along cracks in the unkempt stone, between which, among the redundant rails, grow tall weeds and nettles. Above, dividing broken and bare panes, the heavy latticed arches rust. Yet from the line of the fence over the utilized quais they have been daubed in grey paint, hurriedly, leaving careless brush-strokes on the mottled skylights which already dampen a weak sun.

I stand still; alone, about halfway along platform 2, looking down at the rails and beyond to the overgrown fence. A scraggy cat stalks and weaves through the upright posts, arching its back against the wire transoms. The breeze lifts my black tie onto my shoulder, but I ignore it and look towards the vanishing point from which the

train will come: a lacerated panorama with no bend or bridge as concession to perspective.

We have driven onto the moors. The road open, deserted. For us. Hills roll along the horizon and one tree holding onto the last of its leaves stands close by. It waits with us. We wait for dawn.

She will miss the train because of me; but no, she's waiting there a long way off along the platform. She waves. Her hair tied into a tail which hangs over one shoulder, over her expensive jacket. A beige suit. Does she ever feel embarrassed because I wear jeans and a yellow corduroy coat, stained. Because I refuse to travel 1st class.

No. She bought a corduroy miniskirt to match my jacket. I don't want her to wear it because it shows too much of her long black legs. I don't want other men to see her thighs. They'll want to see more. They will want to touch her, to feel her flesh and be convinced that it is flesh and not black stockings of pure silk. She says that she would like to have her hair straightened. I don't approve. The very short hair, cropped, shows off the perfect proportion of her head, the exquisite beauty of the question mark around her skull.

And I kicked the leaves and stomped in the gutter. She doesn't hold my hand and says that I splash her clothes and they're expensive. I leap over pillar boxes and split my jeans. And I laugh. She's in a bad mood and will not speak to me. Hiding her face behind her hair she crosses to the other side of the street and walks off alone. She is thinking Will he never grow up? I am thinking How else can I give her my happiness?

With her black, black eyes and lips pouting she chases sheep. She teaches me to love autumn; to be autumn, to be kind to the leaves. The green and yellow; the black and white. A collage. She drums calypso tattoos on my buttocks. The trees discreetly turn their backs and spreading their bared branches guard our solitude.

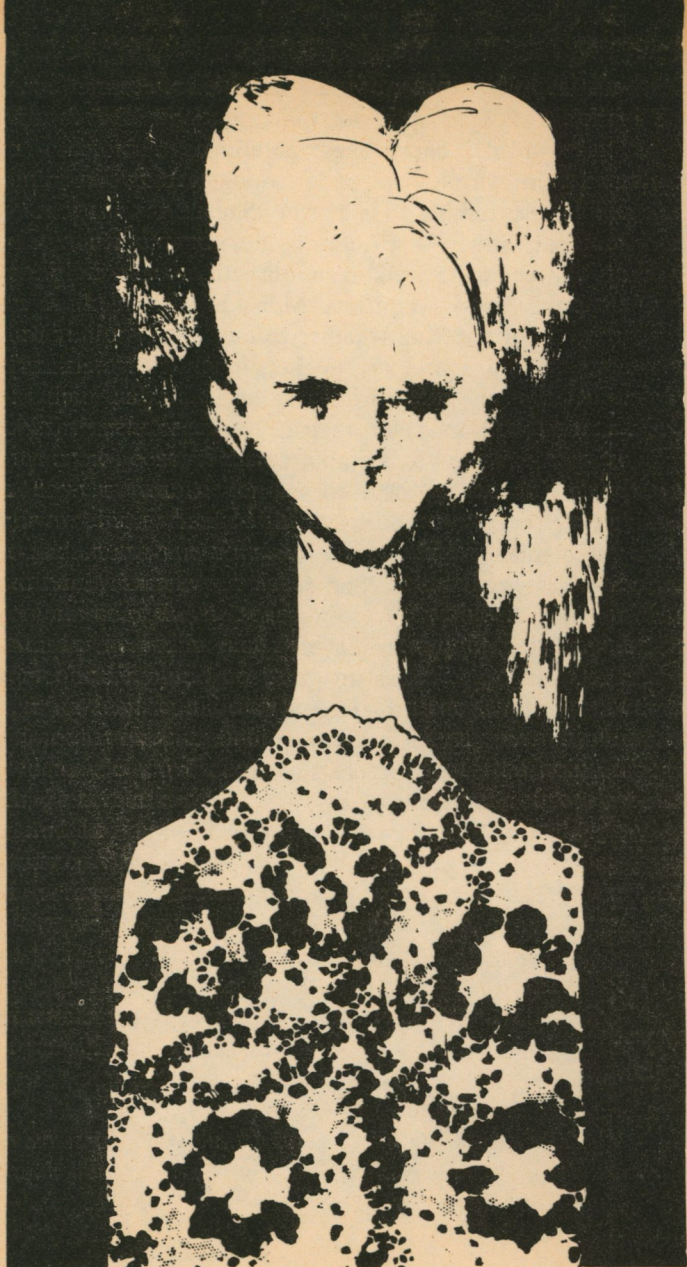
A foreign voice disturbs me. Le train de Paris est arrivé a quai deux. People spill out of compartments, porters shout and whistle, carry bags, greetings pass in many tongues, electric trolleys meander, dodge, move baggage.

She is there; talking to a porter. She has brought the Jamaican sun and she will teach me to be spring. She sees me and begins to walk in my direction, her coat flapping about her yellow miniskirt. Men's eyes are watching. I stand still, not knowing whether to move towards her or not. My hand slips into my pocket, into the lining. Her pace quickens, she is almost running. There are green specks on her shoes. Her luggage overtakes her on a trolley, it passes me. A portable typewriter with my initials. She is very close. She doesn't hear the click of my switchblade opening. She is in my arms. Her hands clutched behind my neck, her mouth on mine, on my cheeks my nose my eyes. She smells of familiar linseed oil; of spring. I whisper:

—I don't have the strength to think of you both.

Her finger lifts to hush my lips and slides across my chin. Surprise waters her eyes. She smiles; warmth and sunshine, the pink tip of her tongue between her full lips. Gently she lowers her forehead to my shoulder.

—*Marek Obtulowicz*



GOLD, BLACK, AND SILVER

Chicago has two masks, and not just the hot, angry one of Mayor Daley and the cool, furious one of the Yippies and Blacks. The mask to the right is the dull gold of the murals and menu of a Rush Street nightclub. The mask to the left is the exciting iron of a stanchion lacy with triangles and supporting the Elevated tracks in the dry, junk-cluttered dark of a right-of-way. Even Chicago's air is filled with tawdry sunshine and glamorous smoke.

Sometimes the gold becomes the real stuff in the onyx-walled jewelry shops of the Gold Coast on the near North side, so far from Ghana yet so near. Sometimes it changes to the greasy gilt of a midget piano in a burlesque bar on West Madison. And the iron may be the mighty I-beams of black bridges that open like a crocodile's jaw or lift like a table levitated at a seance of giants. Or it may be the ragged-holed rustshells of garbage cans glimpsed in backyards from the El.

At night the gold and iron become bars—locked grille protecting the glass of a pawnshop doorway, cement-set bars in a window of the crowded House of Correction. Bars of all sorts, visible and invisible, closing everyone in, including a girl and a man.

And then there is a third mask we don't talk about so much. A mask in the middle.

The time and place the man and girl met, the iron mask couldn't be seen, only heard in the infrequent, swift-passing surges of the electric trains three blocks away, where a few billboards hoisted their Twentieth-Century goddesses a short distance toward the astronauts in their orbits. While the golden mask was barely suggested by the tall and lonely apartment hotels of the South Side's Jewish Gold Coast. There is no Silver Coast, or so they say. If you looked down, as the man did, at the grass around your feet and snuffed its hot, sour perfume, you hardly thought of them, or of conventions and confrontations. And if you looked out across the friendly bicycle path to the rocks and the sprawled bathers and the wind-ruffled blue lake and felt the wind split around you and rush on to harry the smoke down the alleys of the West Side, you forgot them altogether.

Into that space of clean wind she came walking. She gave him a look that was a poem for him—perhaps she'd been watching him from a distance, letting her fancy roam, stretched in her sweater and slacks on some sun-warmed, wind-drenched rock. Then she went up to him and asked for a match.

They had quite a time getting her cigarette alight in the wind and by the time it was done she'd found occasion for two or three bright, impromptu smiles, and he'd accepted a cigarette from her pack and lit it from the first.

And then they talked. At first of the sky and the bathers, but quickly of themselves, for it was a bright and friendly day with speed in the wind and the sudden glitters of sunlight on the waves. He told her of his delight in beauty and his faith in the richness of life, in a bright future within mankind's grasp despite the brighter sunlight of atomic bombs. And she told him that she was more puzzled than heartened by the Twentieth Century, though gayly embattled against it—a member of the fellowship of the dark, the night people who share their sophisticated

bewilderment in the terse language of jazz and action politics and surreal art.

At least he thought of her from the first as a night person, not a hippy, her silvery gray slacks and sweater and flats old-fashioned as her cigarette.

They talked about commonplace things too. It developed that he had just walked down to the park after breakfast, but she—at times her eyes were strange, almost dull, as if they carried something of the dark in them that couldn't be rubbed out—she had been wandering by the lake all night, whether slightly stoned on weed or mildly sober on speed was unclear, or even if, old-fashioned, she used at all—but lost in brooding thought and certainly alone.

As they stood fronting the lake, cigarette smoke blowing away invisibly behind them, they made an almost romantically striking couple. He was tall and slope-shouldered, with youthful face and close-cropped gray hair. His clothes were a bit too neat for the rocks, yet worn with a bather's carefree grace. She was tall too, despite flats, in sweater and slacks trim but worn, more fitting the rocks. Her face was compact and snub-nosed with a savage Welsh beauty. Her hair was shaggy and silver—the silver of youth, not age, and so was the hair on her wrists and her ankles.

They talked for a little while, as I say, and then she smiled and looked at him and declared that she liked love.

It could certainly be argued that she was much too abrupt and unabashed in making this statement. After all, men with gray hair have learned about love by practicing it on the billboard goddesses who smile forever and never say anything but "Buy."

Still, it was a bright and rapid day, one of Nature's own, with a pagan wind blowing Chicago's gloom back from the lake. And besides, she may have meant what she said.

Her companion agreed after a moment that he liked love too, thought it with Keats the very crown of fellowship. He'd like very much, he told her, looking at her intently, to spend the whole day with her under the sun. But unfortunately there were things to do this morning which he couldn't possibly evade. In particular, he must meet his wife somewhere.

She cocked her head humorously at this information, as if it were exceedingly unlikely.

"But," he assured her, emphasizing the words, "I do want to see you again very much."

He didn't say where or when.

She didn't comment on the statement or the omission. She didn't say good-bye. But as he slowly turned to go she lightly stepped one foot behind the other, her body sank ripplingly and he realized that she was dropping him a curtsy.

It was an outrageously inappropriate act on the bicycle path, an intrusion from another century and continent, more startling than if a billboard goddess had given more than her sales talk. Yet looked at in another light, the windy light by the lake, it was a fine gesture on a fine morning. And certainly the girl deserved credit for covering up bravely any chagrin she may have felt. And with her silver hair it was right.

The man, his imagination stirred, rose to the occasion. He put his hand to his heart, tossed back his head, and made a sweeping bow. The next moment he was walking away and watching the tall apartment buildings grow taller, like golems.

And so James Henley, despite his devotion to the richness of life, walked away from a girl who said that she liked love. A matter for some wonder—and a hint of the face behind the Windy City's two masks. At first he didn't realize what he'd done. His mind was full of the beauty of the encounter. To think that he had actually bowed like a gallant to a strange girl in front of all Chi-

cago. Only a little later, a little too late, did he remember that he'd made no definite date with the girl, neither asked her to his home, nor invited her elsewhere.

He knew her name, for she'd certainly told him—or did he? Dona Garland. Or was it Garlin?

He didn't know her address.

There was no guarantee he'd ever see her again.

He wouldn't have overlooked those things, he told himself, if he hadn't been flustered when they parted. What she'd said about liking love. Very sweet in this frightened age, afraid of giving. Yet very flustering.

It occurred to him that he'd always thought of love for a girl as something you plotted and planned, decided on while staring up at the dark ceiling with your wife asleep beside you, not something that grew out of a pleasant conversation. But now he wondered.

It occurred to him that if she hadn't curtsied he might have changed his mind and stayed longer with her, arranged some sort of meeting. But the curtsy had prevented that, ending their encounter, setting a seal on it which he had not dared to break.

Sometimes, you know, women can be too charming, especially to men educated on unimaginative billboard goddesses. James Henley was going by one of the latter at the moment, just before entering the electric railway's dark underpass. The wind, clean at the rocks, had already picked up a little grit and he half closed his eyes as he lifted them toward the creature. She was a gorgeous idol in a skimpy white bathing suit two yards across. As James Henley squinted up at her, something frightening happened: his mind became a spider.

Up until this moment he had thought of Dona Garland (Garlin?) solely as that almost unheard-of thing, a real person. But now his mind, working like the arachnid that shrouds its prey, began to spin around her features—most shadowy at first, web of finest gossamer—a mask.

Yet after that first walk home he did not think much

about the encounter and after a few days it almost vanished from his consciousness—but spiders keep busy in the dark—so that he was quite startled when Dona Gartlin turned up one evening at his house. He also felt a faint shock at her looks, which were not quite as he had remembered, due to the mask which his mind had been weaving around her.

She had looked up his address in the phone book.

She was wearing a silver lamé dress and a very gauzy silver veil. A very little veil that hung only to her upper lip, like a mask. It hung from a silver lame cap.

He was relieved that his wife was out and perhaps also that a couple of his friends were in. His wife was a charming person and he loved her very much, but she does not come into this story.

His friends were a bit puzzled when he introduced Dona, and avoided staring at her silver clothes, but when she mentioned something about going to the University of Chicago they accepted her as one of the Henleys' student acquaintances. Though it hardly explained the silver lamé dress.

She ranged around the living room, glancing through her twinkling veil at books and things with frank curiosity. Conversation was spotty. There was no chance for remarks about liking love. Still, even if his friends hadn't been there, James Henley doubted if things would have been as simple as the first time. There was a wariness, a restless uncertainty, in her manner.

After about twenty minutes she went. When James saw her to the door, he suddenly asked her for her phone number. She told it to him with a smile and walked down the street. About a month later, finding himself alone in the house on Saturday morning, he called her up and invited her to a drugstore breakfast.

It turned out she roomed only three blocks away. It was an old three-flat, its bricks weather-pitted, its copper cornices and window-moldings tarnished a soft blue-green.

The door was ajar, as she'd said it would be. He crossed the pale and hollowed threshold, walked softly down the dark and uncarpeted hall to the door she'd told him. He knocked lightly. Farther down the hall he could hear the sizzling roar of a shower.

He gave the door a little push. It opened a few inches. He saw a silver lamé dress hanging on the back of a chair and walked in.

It was a simple room with unmade bed, a tidy night person's cave. A row of books occupied the back of a small table, paper and notebooks and sketches the front. Posters that meshed covered the walls.

"Hello."

She was standing in the doorway, draped in a bathrobe of silver gauze like spiderweb. There was the invariable shock at the growing unfamiliarity of her looks. Then he echoed her greeting.

She ambled in, dropped a damp towel on the chair, casually excused the state of the room, humorously disparaged the sketches, and for a while they made talk about them. He was very conscious of the brightness of her washed, unpowdered flesh and the damp edges of her black mane.

Once or twice she smiled at him curiously, but he hardly noticed, he was so preoccupied with the problem of adjusting to her reality, after weeks of the cobweb mask.

Finally she picked up her clothes from the chair, said going into the hall, "I'll be ready in a minute," and was as good as her word.

It was a fresh full day, but as soon as they got out into it, he felt possessed by uneasiness. He began to talk a great deal about himself, both in the street and in the drugstore where they breakfasted, and she talked too, but it all seemed irrelevant. He kept remembering her smiles in the bedroom, reading contempt into them. And the diminutive billboard goddesses on the drugstore counters were an annoying distraction. The more he talked, the farther

apart he and Dona seemed to get until, when he left her at the corner outside the drugstore, it was almost with a feeling of relief.

Yet within a block his relief was changed into a cloud of acute misery which was days in dispersing. When he next met her for a moment in the street, they seemed miles apart and he hardly recognized her.

Then one night he got drunk and went to her room. After he knocked softly for a while, he heard her sleepy voice. Strangely enough, it seemed to be only around her flesh that he had woven a mask. Her voice produced no shock of unfamiliarity. It seemed coolly sympathetic as she told him that no, she was sorry, she couldn't go out with him now, she needed her sleep, and, in answer to his further pleading, that no, she really couldn't, and would he please go, because she was going back to sleep now.

She was wearing a mask, in fact, a silver mask without eyeholes, a mask to keep out the light.

Two hours later he returned down the dark and uncarpeted hall, much drunker. This time there was no answer to his rappings. After a while he gave up, but as soon as he got outside he staggered back along the side of the apartment to what he judged was her window. He could barely reach it with his hands. His shoes scraped loudly on the worn brick as he lifted himself.

In the stillness her voice was like the distillation of a shout.

"Fuck you, go away!"

The two silver rounds glared at him, blankly reflected by the street light.

Another month and he returned in a very different mood. He had analyzed his behavior, he saw the mistakes he had made, the explanations he fancied he owed her. It was early evening. Once again he heard the sizzling roar of the shower and he fancied her bright flesh beaded with droplets. Once again there was no reply to his knocking. Once again he pushed open the door a few inches.

The room was neatly and colorfully furnished. There was a tufted dark-green spread on the bed and on it a tennis racket in a press. He looked at the card neatly thumbtacked to the door. It bore an entirely different name.

The sound of the shower stopped. He walked away from it.

It was almost a year and many too many drunks before James Henley saw Dona Gartlin for the last time. He was going home from work and had descended into the low-roofed caverns of the electric station, a hundred feet below the golden billboard goddesses who thrust up svelte above the street. He had traversed the wooden platform, entered the train, taken a position by the door, and the door had slid shut. Then, standing just outside on the platform, he saw her.

It's very hard to say in exactly what form he saw her then. Perhaps the mask woven by his mind was all he saw—a golden billboard goddess walking, thin as paper. Or perhaps he saw her all silver. Or perhaps, because of the pane of glass between them, he saw her real—the Twentieth Century walking away from him.

Whatever he saw, his actions were quick and for once horribly decisive. The train had begun to move. He lunged up at the small green lever controlling the door. It slid open. Somebody beside him gasped. He leaped for the platform.

Perhaps the person who gasped grabbed at him. Something spoiled his leap. He stepped into the eight inches of empty space between the platform and the moving train at that point. The two edges of wood and iron caught him as he fell and held him and spun him brutally round and round. The iron was scrubbed silvery by a million soles.

And so, a hundred feet beneath the Twentieth Century queens who had shaped all his loves and a hundred feet away from the real girl he had transformed in their image, the world spun for James Henley as he slipped deeper

and deeper between the train's armor-plated side and the thick wood of the platform, until the dull iron knife of the apron projecting from the threshold of the train's next door cut into his brain, severing fore from hind, cerebrum from cerebellum, intellect from emotion, cutting the knot of inhibition, but at the same time making the generation gap final and ending an immensely complicated world that was only a very distorted reflection of the vast and unknown universe.

—Fritz Leiber



MENSURATION

*England's intellectual camels
Are going on safari; they will be accompanied
By two violinists, a turkey (because he speaks
The language), and a gang of nun assassins
From the West End. . . .*

"Also: Baron Someday, who prays for them.
And Quasimodo, one of their own kind,"

He says.

—To the desert, and they build a railway,
Or a tower. *L'Expédition Deuxième*. Mesopotamia.
They hang some effigy
Of a man outside
And sit in the sun playing cards.

That first afternoon it reminds him of Peking,
The last time
He was there, it was Autumn.

——Those accents over dust and change!
 (and his hand in the sun)
 They're all that's left.
——But it's sand.

Explosions on the hill: construction: a wind in the tents
At 30 miles an hour. One morning the third month,
Sanders sits there saying *Testing, Testing*.
The generator is dead: no repair, no petrol.
And the water almost gone.

[Till one day you find yourself
beyond the fields of ice,
too late.
With no way back and a name
or prayer
you've forgotten.

And hands that make mistakes.]

——You've been sleeping with my wife.
——I haven't been sleeping with *anyone*.
 Well . . . maybe an occasional sheep
 or two . . . You satisfied now?
——Are you?

Your wife is 4000 miles away.

5.12.7-.

Nothing continues to happen.

There are no remains of the first expedition.
When I am dead, Pamela says. She is filing down
A leafspring. Will you fasten
A goose to my grave
With a silver chain and feed it well.

Say yes. For all she's done, for you.
For all she's seen and never told.
The thing that's eating away her stomach and sex now.

"Tell
Me."

And all the words are wrong. . . .

Some mornings the Bedouins come to the top of the hill
On their camels and sit watching.

——Do you think they're all dead?
——Does it matter?

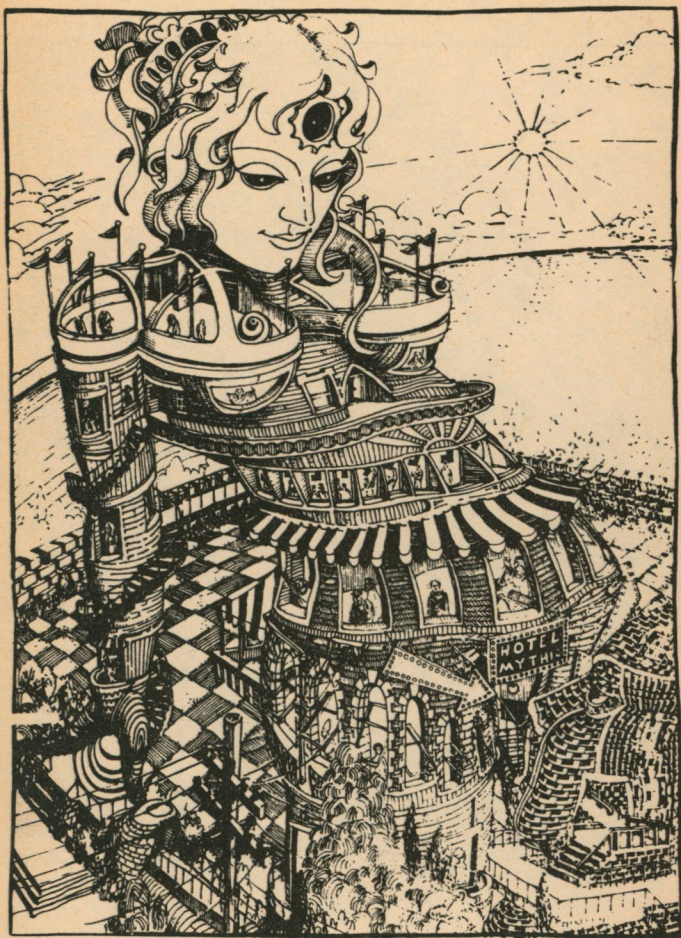
*Today Ahmed and I sit by the tent alone
To watch the sun rise.
Ahmed refuses to speak English.
We are naked.
The sun does not rise.*

Forgive me—

——James Sallis

SIX DRAWINGS
BY ROGER PENNEY













THE VOICE OF THE SONAR IN MY VERMIFORM APPENDIX

A Polytropical Paramyth

Whiteness blinked within Barnes. The whiteness was like a traffic signal light from which the red plastic lens had fallen.

It was his resonance again. There was too much whiteness around him. The laboratory walls and ceiling were fishbelly white. The floor was penguin-breast pseudo-marble. The two doctors wore white.

But Miss Mbama, the technician, though she, too, wore white, was black. This was why Barnes kept turning his revolvable chair to stay zeroed in on her. Then the bursts of whiteness in his brain were reduced in brightness and frequency.

Miss Mbama (née Kurtz) was a tall well-built young woman with a towering bush of *au naturel* hair and West African Bush Negro features modified by some alpine bush Bavarian ancestors. She was good-looking and should have been used to stares. But his embarrassed her. Her expression told that she was thinking of asking him why he rotated like a weathercock with her always the wind. But he had decided not to answer her. He was tired of explaining that he could not explain.

Electrodes were taped to his scalp, over his heart, and over his appendix. (He wore only pajama pants.) Wires ran from the electrodes to the instruments on the far side

of the room. The cathode ray tubes flashed squiggles, dots, sine waves, square waves, and complex Lissajous figures.

One instrument was emitting: ping! ping! ping! Like the sounds the supersubmarine in the old *Journey to the Bottom of the Sea* TV show emitted as it cruised fifty miles under the surface in search of the giant sentient roaring radish.

There was a submarine of sorts inside him—shades of *Fantastic Voyage* and the saving teardrop!—a tiny vessel which carried a sonar transceiver.

From another instrument issued a woman's voice speaking a language which had baffled the greatest linguists of the world.

Doctor Neinstein leaned over Barnes. His white jacket cut off Barnes' view of Mbama, and the whiteness resonated blindingly inside Barnes. Between flashes, he could, however, see quite clearly.

"I hate to cut it out," Doctor Neinstein said. "I loathe the very idea. You can see how upset I am. I always am happiest when cutting. But we're losing a priceless opportunity, a unique chance, to study it. However, the welfare of the patient comes first, or so they taught us in medical school."

A reporter, also dressed in white (he wanted to be the 21st century Mark Twain), stepped up to Barnes. He thrust a microphone between doctor and patient.

"A few final comments, Mr. Barnes. How's it feel to be the only man in the world to have an appendix and then lose it?"

Barnes snarled, "That isn't my only claim to fame, Scoop. Shove off."

"Thank you, Mr. Barnes. For those who've just tuned in, this is Doctor Neinstein's laboratory in the John Hopkins Medicopsychic Annex, donated by the philanthropist recluse, Heward Howes, after Doctor Neinstein performed an operation on him. The nature of the operation is still unknown. But it is common knowledge that Heward

Howes now eats only newspapers, that his bathroom is in a bank vault, and that the government is concerned about the flood of counterfeit hundred dollar bills whose source is apparently Las Vegas. But enough of this idle chatter, folks.

"Our subject today is Mr. Barnes, the most famous patient of the 21st century—so far. For the benefit of those who, through some incredible bad luck, have missed the case of Mr. Barnes, he is the only person in the world who still has genes responsible for growing an appendix. As you know, genetic control has eliminated the useless and often dangerously diseased appendix from the entire human population for 50 years. But, due to a purely mechanical oversight . . ."

" . . . and a drunken lab assistant," Barnes said.

" . . . he was born with the genes . . ."

"Stand back, journalistic dog!" Doctor Neinstein snarled.

"Quack! Butcher! You're interfering with the freedom of the press!"

Doctor Neinstein nodded at his distinguished colleague, Doctor Grosstete, who pulled a lever projecting from the floor behind a dressing screen in the far corner. Scoop's yell rose from the trapdoor like the mercury in a thermometer in the mouth of a malarial patient.

"Hmm. G in *altissimo*," Doctor Grosstete said. "Scoop was in the wrong profession, but then I guess he knows that now."

There was a faint splash and then the bellowings of hungermad crocodiles.

Doctor Grosstete shook his head. "Opera's loss. But in the ecology of things . . ."

"Nothing must interfere with the march of medical science," Doctor Neinstein said. For once, the mournful lines of his face were winched up into a smile. But the strain was too great, and the fissures catenaried again. He

bent over Barnes and applied a stethoscope to the bare skin of the right lower quadrant of the abdomen.

"You must have a theory by now explaining why a woman's voice is coming from the sonar," Barnes said.

Neinstein jerked the thumb of his free hand at the screen which showed a sequence of what looked like hieroglyphs.

"Observe the video representation of the voice. I'd say there is a very small ancient Egyptian female riding inside that device. Or on top of it. We'll not know until we cut it out. It refuses to obey our commands to return. Doubtless, some circuit has malfunctioned."

"It refuses?" Barnes said.

"Forgive the pathetic fallacy."

Barnes' eyebrows rose. Here was a physician who read more than medical literature. Or was the phrase an echo of a humanities course which the good doctor had had to endure?

"Of course, linguistics is not my profession. So you must not pay any attention to my theory."

Here was a medical doctor who admitted he was not omniscient.

"What about the white flashes I get? Those are in your proper province. I'd say they reflect my idiosyncratic resonances, so to speak."

"Tut, tut, Mr. Barnes. You're a layman. No theories, please."

"But all these phenomena are inside me! I'm originating them! Who is better qualified to theorize than I?"

Neinstein hummed an unrecognizable and discordant tune, causing Grosstete, the opera buff, to shudder. He tapped his foot, did a little shuffle-off-to-Buffalo without releasing the stethoscope, looked at his wristwatch, and listened to the sounds coming up from the tiny prowling U-boat.

Barnes said, "You'll have to abandon your original theory that I was insane. You're all hearing the voice

and seeing it on the crt. Even if no one so far has seen the flashes in my head. Unless you think the voice is a mass illusion? Or is the correct term a hallucination?"

Doctor Grosstete said, "Listen! I could have sworn she was reciting from Aida! *Never fading, endless love!* But no! She's not speaking Italian. And I don't understand a single word."

Mbama went by on Barnes' left, and he followed her with his eyes as far as he could. The pulses of white faded reluctantly like the noise of popcorn in a cooling pan.

"Miss Mbama does look remarkably like Queen Neferiti, except for her skin color, of course," Barnes said.

"Aida was Ethiopian, not Egyptian," Doctor Grosstete said. "Please remember that, if you don't want to be embarrassed in a musical group. Both Egyptians and Ethiopians are Caucasians, by the way. Or largely so."

"Get your program here," Barnes said. "You can't tell your race without a program."

"I was only trying to help," Grosstete said. He walked away, looking like Doctor Cyclops with a bellyache.

Two men entered the laboratory. Both wore white. One was red; one, yellow. Doctors Big Bear and Chew. The red linguist said, "How!" He attached a tiny recorder to Barnes' abdomen. The yellow linguist asked Neinstein for a thousand pardons, but would he please stand out of the way?

Big Bear's dark broad big-nosed face hung before Barnes. He saw him as an afterimage for several seconds. He was standing on the edge of a great plain with tall yellow-brown grass and half-naked men wearing feathers and riding painted ponies in the distance, and nearby was a herd of great dark-furred dark-eyed round-humped bison. The voice in his ears had become a man's, chanting in a language which was a mixture of fricatives and sadness.

The scene vanished. The woman's voice returned.

Big Bear had left to talk to Doctor Neinstein, who was

looking very indignant. Chew stood before Barnes, who saw a landscape as if he were looking out of the window of a jet taking off. Pagodas, rice fields, kites flying over green hills, a drunken poet walking along the edge of a blue brook.

Why was it he got pictures from red and yellow but not from black and white? Black was the absence of color, and white was a mixture of all colors. This meant that, in reality, blacks were uncolored people and whites (of the lighter variety) were the colored folks. Except that whites were not white, they were pink or brown. Some were, anyway. And blacks were not black, they were brown.

Not that that had anything to do with his getting pulses of white from his resonance, his inner tuning fork, unexplainedly aberrating now. He also, now he thought about it, must get pulses of black in between the white when he looked at Miss Mbama. But he did not see these. Black was a signal, but just not there, just as, in an electronic circuit, a pulse could mean yes or 1, and a non-pulse could mean no or zero. Or vice versa, depending on the code you used.

Barnes told Chew what he had been thinking. Chew told Barnes to pick up his feet and hang on to the chair. He whirled Barnes around many times in the revolving chair while the wires wrapped themselves around Barnes and the chair. Then Chew rotated him swiftly to his original position with the wires hanging loose. The pulses of different colors and flashes of landscapes scared Barnes. He seemed to have flown from the laboratory into an alien kaleidoscopic world.

The voice was a high-pitched gabble until the chair stopped whirling.

He described everything to Chew.

"Perhaps there is something to your theory of resonances," Chew said. "It's quasimystical, but that doesn't mean it can't describe certain phenomena, or be used to describe them, anyway. If a man had a way to determine

what truly sets him to vibrating, what wave lengths he is tuned to, down under all the inhibitions and wounds, then he would have no trouble being happy.

"But you did not have this superresonance until you got sick. So what good is it to you or to anybody?"

"I'm like a TV antenna. Turn me in a particular direction, and I get a particular frequency. But I may only pick up a fuzzy image and audio, or a ghost. Turn me another direction, and I receive a strong frequency, Strong to me; weak to you."

Barnes swiveled on the chair to point directly at Mbama.

"How about a date tonight, Mbama?" he said. Her name was a murmur of immemorial elms, of drowsy bees, or something from Tennyson. At the same time, the woman's voice from the sonar became even drippier with honey and with the suggestion of silk sliding over silk. And the hieroglyphs on the cathode ray tubes bent and shot little arrows at each other.

"Thanks for the invitation," she said. "You're a nice guy, but my boy friend wouldn't like it. Besides, you aren't going any place for a week or more, remember? You'll be in bed."

"If you and your friend should ever split . . ."

"I don't believe in mixed dating."

"Pull your feet up again," Doctor Neinstein said. "Close your eyes. If some linguist can whirl you around, I certainly can. But I'll take the experiment further than he did."

Barnes drew his legs up and closed his eyes. He opened them a minute later because he felt the chair turning. But no one was standing close enough to have turned the chair.

Mbama was obeying Neinstein's signals. She was walking only a few feet from him in a circle around him. And he and the chair were rotating to track her.

Neinstein made a strangling sound.

"Telekinesis," Chew said.

"Walk back this way," Barnes said to Mbama. He closed his eyes again. The chair turned.

"I don't even have to see her," Barnes said, opening his eyes. Mbama stopped walking. The chair overtracked, then returned so that Barnes' nose pointed along a line that bisected her.

"I have to go to lunch," Mbama said. She walked through the door. Barnes rose, stripped off the electrodes, and followed her, picking up his pajama top as he went out.

Neinstein shouted, "Where do you think you're going? You're scheduled for surgery shortly after lunch. Our lunch, not yours. Don't you dare eat anything. Do you want another enema, maybe an upper colonic? Your appendix may burst at any moment. Just because you don't feel any pain, don't think . . . ! Where *are you* going?"

Barnes did not answer. The pinging and the voice of the woman were coming, not from the machines, which had been disconnected, but from inside him. They contended in his ears. But the white pulses were gone.

An hour later, Miss Mbama returned. She looked frightened. Barnes staggered in after her and collapsed into the chair. Doctor Neinstein ordered that he go to the emergency room immediately.

"No, just give me first aid here," Barnes said. "I hurt a lot of places, but the worst is in my appendix. And he didn't even touch me there."

"Who's he?" Neinstein said, applying alcohol to the cut on Barnes' temple.

"Miss Mbama's boy friend, who's no boy but a man and a big one. Ouch! It didn't do any good to try to explain that I couldn't help following her. That I was, literally, swept off my feet. That I'm a human radar sending out pulses and getting back strange images. And when I started to talk about psychophysical resonances, he hit me in the mouth. I think I got some loose teeth."

Neinstein touched Barnes' abdomen, and Barnes winced.

"Oh, by the way, I got plenty of referents for you linguists," he said. "I'm seeing what the voice is talking about, if it is a voice. Miss Mbama's boy friend jarred something besides my teeth loose. I got a neural connection I didn't have before."

"Sometimes kicking a malfunctioning TV set helps," Grosstete said.

Chew and Big Bear stuck electrodes on Barnes' body and adjusted the dials of several instruments. Peaks, valleys, ditches, arrows, skyrockets shot across the faces of the tubes and then rearranged themselves into the outlines of Egyptian-type hieroglyphs.

Barnes described the words coinciding with the images.

"It's like an archaeologist with scuba gear swimming through the halls of a palace, or, perhaps, a tomb in sunken Atlantis. The beam of light he's shining on the murals picks out the hieroglyphs one by one. They swim out of darkness and then back into it. They're figures, abstract or stylized birds and bees and animal-men, and there are strange figures which seem to be purely alphabetical mingled with these."

Big Bear and Chew agreed that the so-called voice was actually a series of highly modulated sonar signals. They were registering the differing depths and ridges on the wall of his vermiform appendix as the tiny bloodmarine cruised up and down.

Hours went by. The linguists sweated over sound and visual referent. Everybody had coffee and sandwiches, except Barnes who had nothing and Doctor Grosstete, who drank grain alcohol. Neinstein talked on the phone three times, twice to postpone the operation and once to tell an angry editor he did not know where his reporter was.

Suddenly, Big Bear shouted, "Eureka!"

Then, "Champollion!"

Then, "Ventris!"

He held up a long piece of paper covered with phonetic symbols, codes for the hieroglyphs, and some exclamation marks.

"There's the hieroglyphs for *this* and for a copula, and there's one for the definite article and that one, that means *secret*, every time so far. Let's see. THIS IS THE SECRET OF THE . . . UNIVERSE? COSMOS? THE GREAT BEGETTER? THIS IS THE WORD THAT EXPLAINS ALL. READ, O READER, LITTLE MAN, THIS IS THE WORD . . ."

"Don't be afraid, man! Say the word!" Chew said.

"That's all there is!" Barnes said, and he groaned. "There's only a gap, a crack . . . a corruption. The word is gone. The infection has eaten it up!"

He bent over, clutching at his abdomen.

"We must operate!" Neinstein said.

"McBurney's incision or the right rectus?" Doctor Grosstete said.

"Both! This is The Last Appendectomy! We'll make it a double show! Are all the guests in the amphitheater? Are the TV crews ready? Let us cut, Doctor Grosstete!"

Two hours later, Barnes awoke. He was in a bed in the laboratory. Mbama and two nurses were standing by.

The voice and the pings were gone. The pulses and the visions were fled. Mbama walked by, and she was only a good-looking black girl.

Neinstein straightened up from the microscope. "The sonar is only a machine. There is no Egyptian queen riding in it. Or on it."

Grosstete said, "The tissue slides reveal many microscopic indentations and alto reliefs on the inner walls of the appendix. But nothing that looks like hieroglyphs. Of course, decay has set in so deeply . . ."

Barnes groaned and mumbled, "I've been carrying the secret of the universe. The key to it, anyway. All knowledge was inside me all my life. If we'd been one day

sooner, we would know it All."

"We shouldn't have eliminated the appendix from man!" Doctor Grosstete shouted. "God was trying to tell us something!"

"Tut, tut, Doctor! You're getting emotional!" Doctor Neinstein said, and he drank a glass of urine from the specimens on Miss Mbama's table. "Bah! Too much sugar in that coffee, Mbama! Yes, Doctor, no medical man should get upset over anything connected with his ancient and honorable profession—with the possible exception of unpaid bills. Let us use Occam's razor."

Grosstete felt his cheek. "What?"

"It was coincidence that the irregularities on Barnes' appendix reflected the sonar pulses in such a manner that the hieroglyphs and a woman's voice seemed to be reproduced. A highly improbable—but not absolutely impossible—coincidence."

Barnes said, "You don't think that, in the past, appendixes became diseased to indicate that the messages were ripe? And that if only doctors had known enough to look, they would have seen . . .?"

"Tut, tut, my dear sir, don't say it. See The Word? The anesthesia has not worn off yet. After all, life is not a science-fiction story with everything exhaustively, and exhaustingly, explained at the end. Even we medical men have our little mysteries."

"Then I was just plain sick, and that was all there was to it?"

"Occam's razor, my dear sir. Cut until you have only the simplest explanation left, the bare bone, as it were. Excellent, that! Old Occam had to have been a physician to invent that beautiful philosophical tool."

Barnes looked at Miss Mbama as she walked away, swaying.

"We have two kidneys. Why only one appendix?"

—Philip José Farmer

THE WAY HOME

Benji Copper has just that color of hair and dark freckles across his small, tanned nose. His mother, Myra, has a country mansion all her own in eastern California, a lover named Plum, and one six-year-old son. She is a Berkeley drop-out, a spy, and a witch.

At the moment, Benji and Myra are sitting on a rock in the Scottish highlands, eating and waiting to make contact with her superior.

"Heather and feathers," Benji swore as he chewed a piece of raw bird breast-meat.

Myra ran her pale hand through the straight red bangs that almost covered her son's green eyes. "But it's useless to become angry about this unpleasantness, isn't it, Ben. Besides, Alister may bring some real food with him when he comes. Or when we find him. . . ." Her features drew together around a small worry spot on her forehead. "I only wish he *would* come."

Benji reached over the rock to touch her in a comforting gesture. "Don't be upset, Mother. I love you."

She leaned over, her arms circling his shoulders, and nibbled on his ear, then pressed her mouth against his lips—pink with bird blood. Her soft body nestled over

his and she murmured into his hair, "Thank you, Plum. I love you too."

"Thank you Benji. I love you too."

She rose; Benji finished off a bird wing with messy vengeance, not really understanding, and tossed it away. Together they climbed the rocky incline to the road and resumed their northward journey beneath an overcast sky. Every kilometer or so, the one-lane gravel road widened into a dusty oval where cars could pass one another. Nothing else varied the treeless, mountainous landscape, or marked the distance they'd traveled.

"Mother," Benji finally asked, "conjure up a car."

"I seem to have forgotten how to drive, darling."

They endured a wet, chilly sleep in a mossy grotto somewhere. Benji woke up in California, on the farm, and raced around the house in a fruitless search for his mother. Then he noticed the damp, green-stained clothing that clung to his little body. Grabbing the telephone, he dialed Plum's number, but Alister answered.

"Where in the world is your mother, Ben?"

"Mother?"

"Hmm?"

"Can't we stop and rest? I fail to see the point in meandering about like this. Alister'll contact us like always. I mean, this *is* the place where you've arranged to meet, isn't it?"

"Well, Ben. I think so. I wish I felt more certain. I'm so concerned. You see, I didn't have everything he wanted. I mean, I haven't *got* everything he wants." Her words were fading into a slow question mark. "And I must already be dreadfully late meeting him. He must be getting awfully angry with me."

"And Benji," her voice quivered ever so softly, "this hasn't ever happened to me before. I just feel so *con-*

fused." She started to cry and Benji stretched a thin arm over her shoulders. Then he looked up into a gust of tropical wind and saw the yawning Caribbean dawn in front of him.

Very quietly, "For Pete's sake, Mother. Can't you control yourself?"

Myra stroked the sandy beach meditatively. "We're not supposed to be here, are we, Ben."

"No, Mother," he insisted, his lips a pale, tense line. "Can you get us back to California somehow?"

She clenched her fists white over the knuckles, calmed herself, and concentrated. In a moment she was back in Scotland and Benji was at the house in California, dialing a random number on the phone.

"Why hello, Benji! Has Myra come home yet?"

"Alister," he commanded in a shaking voice, "you leave my mom alone."

Alister hung up and Benji felt himself being drawn away again. He threw his head back and wailed, "*Plum!*"

"Momma?" It was very dark on the moors. "Alister is really mad, all right."

—Joan Bernott

AMONG THE DEAD

Mummified pine shiver in the wind. Dry branches whirl a litany for the dead. The moon, silver skull with a smile, sheds no tears for a wasted earth. Below, the metaphor is bone.

Child's blocks, heavy stone joined by edges, break the mountainscape. Three tourists cling together inside a mausoleum. And around them, hundreds of silent companions wait.

On the bank of the river, beside the road no longer traveled, is a sign. Raised bronze letters: THEY SHALL LIVE AGAIN.

Shall they?

Foster dreamed:

Spinal fragments of a dead lizard, fire-blackened.

The Autumn Leaf Tour and the train. The tracks lay far down the mountain and were crisscrossed by tumbled cars. Bones inside the charred engine—deadman switch that didn't work—and a graded curve taken too fast. Skeletons everywhere—the trail of bones leading up the mountain. Bones that collapsed and jumbled like pickup sticks and . . .

Images—how it must have been—the germ aerosols bursting high above Denver, the enormous hiss like a deo-

dorant or insect spray, the vapor white-seeping down and becoming invisible, then killing and killing and nothing but bones—the aspen, white in the daylight, jointed, articulated, dying faster than the leaves—the Autumn Leaf Tour—and the trail up the mountain.

The girl—just as pale, never in the sun, never naked. And now, because he wanted her to, she opened her legs that he might taste, and he tasted tomato paste and liver and scallions . . . Sampled and ate.

“This morning we finished the last of Gunderson. Gunderson, Vernon L., according to the records. Age forty-seven, race Caucasian, sex male, death from emphysema May 21, 1972. There was a Gundersen, Lillian G., but we skipped her; just left her there in the vaults. She was too damned skinny, some sort of wasting cancer. Maybe when the day comes that we polish off the last toe-joint of Zytlinksky, George M., we will be forced by necessity to thaw out dead, emaciated Gundersen, Lillian G.

“Of course by then we’ll probably all be dead anyway. Our gums are bleeding and the goddamn diarrhea’s getting worse. Mardin says that deficiency diseases will get the three of us long before there’s any chance of starvation. But I guess the way things are now is a form of starving to death. Last night Connie dreamed about a Caesar salad, cherry tomatoes, Russian dressing, the whole works. She had to tell me about it today, in detail. I could kill her for that. I’ll dream tonight about green vegetables and I’ll agonize.”

Foster snapped the journal shut. God, he thought, it would make a tremendous beginning for a horror story.

“Hi,” said Connie, from the doorway. “I brought you a tray. Mardin fixed it—it still isn’t my turn until tomorrow. I thought maybe you didn’t want to eat with Mardin tonight.” Her last words almost phrased a question.

"No," said Foster. "I don't want to eat with crazy Mardin, that goddamn ghoul."

Connie's skin was delicately, almost abnormally, pale. Her face quickly betrayed the flush.

"Jesus," said Foster. "Here we are at this place and time and you can still blush at profanity. God, girl, your sensitivities are incredible."

"Sorry," she said. "I'm me." She set the tray on the desk in front of Foster, her silver charm bracelet jingling.

"No kidding." Foster slid the dull metal tray closer. With a tentative gesture he touched the hemisphere covering his supper. "So what is it tonight? Spaghetti and seasoned Italian sauce? Roast capon garnished with parsley? Idaho big-reds *au gratin*? How about one of Mardin's superb souffles?" He idly traced his initials in the condensed steam that dappled the metal.

"Please," she said. "Don't. Mardin's bad enough." He saw that her hands were curled into tight fists. Foster marveled with mild pleasure that he could almost feel the pain of her nails deeply buried somewhere inside those knotted fingers.

"Sorry." But it was no real apology. Foster lifted the dome from his supper. A thin vapor rose from the platter of meat. "Smells good," Foster said pleasantly. "Pot roast tonight?"

"Rib steak," said Connie in a thin voice. She turned and started for the door.

"Don't go."

Connie hesitated, then continued to walk.

"Please." Foster deliberately inserted a mild note of pleading in his voice. The girl stopped, turned, faced him, and Foster saw she was close to crying.

"All right," she said. "But only because I don't want to be alone and I can stand you better than Mardin." She sat down on the edge of Foster's bed. Connie was so light she barely made an impression on the bedspread.

"I think you need to eat more," said Foster with cal-

culated malice. He picked up a linen napkin from the tray and flipped it open. Something white and ragged fluttered out and landed between his feet. Foster picked the object up and examined it—a piece of paper, torn from a sheet in the vault records. “Hamilton, Willis T.,” it read. Below the printing was a line in Mardin’s nearly illegible script. “With the compliments of the chef.”

“Wise-ass,” said Foster. He flipped the scrap to Connie, who read it and looked sick.

“Don’t puke,” said Foster. “Or if you do, go out in the hall.”

“I won’t be sick. I can’t. I’d just have to get another helping of supper.”

Foster ate quickly and silently while Connie stared at his face.

“I’m sorry I kept going on about that Caesar salad,” she finally said.

The man smiled. “You know, you’re a sweet kid.”

Connie didn’t hear him; her mind had skipped to something else, something more obsessive. “Foster? Someday we’ll be rescued, won’t we? Won’t someone look for us?”

Foster shrugged. “Why should they? Other people must have had natural immunities, others must have survived. But I’m sure they’re too busy keeping alive to worry about rescuing us.”

“Oh,” she said blankly.

All us colorless people at the end of the world, he reflected. What a goddamned anticlimax.

Sunrise poured over the clouded eastern mountains like a spill of wet concrete. Both Mardin and Foster went up to the observation level to watch the morning, while Connie busied herself in the kitchen, preparing breakfast.

“You know,” said Mardin, resting his forearms on the chill metal rail, “I don’t think I’ll ever get used to the world without green.”

Foster was vaguely surprised. Mardin hadn’t spoken

to him in six days. Sometimes he suspected Mardin didn't exist at all. "Yeah," he said, looking out over the barren Rockies. "It isn't so much the plants I miss. It's the things that move—the birds and animals and things." He considered. "I never figured I'd be lonely for a goddamn robin."

Mardin snickered. "The only reason you want a robin is to roast him on a spit."

"You're a lousy comedian," said Foster.

"No," said Mardin. "No, I'm not. I'm a bald, skinny ex-file clerk who's probably got pellegra and beri-beri and God only knows what else; and I'm standing out here under a starving sky talking about what I miss to a man who isn't my friend while a girl who also isn't my friend is down below in the kitchen frying up a fellow man I never knew, as something I'll try to imagine is Canadian bacon." Mardin's voice stopped like a mechanical toy running down. His lips quivered slightly, and Foster hoped the man wouldn't cry. Mardin had been the most unstable member of the trio from the start. Oddly, it had been he rather than Connie who had been the last to eat the meals culled from the vaults. Mardin had held back until his ribs etched tight against stretched skin while Foster and eventually the girl assuaged their hunger. Then, after days of self-denial, he had broken and gorged himself on chops and steaks and filets. But the breaking had snapped something besides Mardin's hunger, Foster thought.

Mardin gestured toward the dark river. "What started it?" he said loudly, and his voice echoed toward bare hills where nothing moved except the wind.

"Not 'what,'" said Foster. "Who." He pointed downward. "Them."

Mardin looked at him curiously.

"The dead," said Foster. "The people frozen in the vaults. The ones who didn't plan for the future—the jerks who didn't believe in birth control or who piped their sewers into the oceans. So what else could they expect,

letting people breed up toward infinity in a wasted world? The birth rate went sky-high and biological pressure made the death rate compensate drastically."

"Well, we overcompensated," said Mardin.

"You have a gift for understatement." Foster chuckled. "The silent spring, sprung. Hell—once we were worried about H-bombs and nerve gas. Then they let the bio-bombs loose . . ."

"Okay, breakfast's ready." Connie's voice echoed up the concrete shaft to the observation level.

The chill of the vault numbed Foster's fingers as he wrestled the foil-wrapped bundle from its cradle. "Hytrek, Donald M., Jr.," the file read. There was something special about this file, Foster reflected. The file matter-of-factly reported a death on September 3, 1973—an unusual cardiac arrest, but remarkable only because Hytrek had been seven years old. Tough luck, Mr. and Mrs. Hytrek, Foster thought as he carried the shapeless package up the steps of the storage chamber. What pathetic hope drove you to have your dead son quick-frozen after death and placed here in the cryogenic vault? You probably wondered if you would still be alive when the surgical techniques would be developed that could repair Donald Jr.'s damaged heart. Well, you're not. You're dead, your son's dead too, and you'll all stay that way. Sorry. But we'll live a little longer—Connie, Mardin, and me.

Foster reached the welcome warm air at the top of the steps. Clumsily holding his burden in both arms, he kicked the door shut behind him.

"Hello." It was Connie, looking fragile and wanly pretty. She glanced at the oblong parcel in its gleaming foil sheath.

"It's my turn," said Foster.

"Why are you so cruel to me?" whispered Connie one night in the quiet despair of Foster's bed. The top of the

girl's head was silk against his chin. Foster couldn't see her eyes in the half-light from the lunar skull squinting down the sky-shaft.

"Me, cruel?" Foster ran his fingers sleepily along Connie's flank and up across her stomach. Her ribs were painfully evident under his hand and the skin on her belly was taut, like a stretched, bloated drum-head. "I'm not cruel. I'm just—well, me. Like you said you were you the other night when you brought my supper."

"No," she said. "You're cruel when you bait me about the food. You're brutal about it and you enjoy my pain."

Foster was in an uncharacteristically good mood. "At least I'm faithful," he said. "Sorry, you'll take that as a barb." Foster shifted his body restlessly. "Do you mind? You're putting my arm to sleep."

Connie raised her head and Foster moved his arm. Her chin tipped back and he saw a shine of tears on her cheek. The girl choked on some word, then pressed her face convulsively against Foster's chest. Foster stroked her hair mechanically, wondering when she'd ever let him sleep.

"Sorry," she finally said, voice muffled. "It's a mood. I suddenly remembered most of the things I promised myself not to think about ever again."

"Nebraska?" Foster said. "The plains and the golden wheat fields under the summer sun? Your family? Mother and father? Old boyfriends long dead now? Trees, lakes, birds, horses, planes, cities, television shows?"

"Damn you, yes!" From the short distance between them she struck out with her fist. The blow glanced lightly off his cheekbone, and Connie again began to cry. Foster continued to stroke her hair.

"I feel miserable," said Connie. "I want to leave."

"And go where?" Foster said placatingly. "Mardin and you and I might be the only people left anywhere. This may be the only shelter and the vaults probably hold the last edible food in a hundred miles."

Her tears were wet on Foster's chest. "God!" she cried out in frustration and misery. "Why me?"

"Trite question," said Foster. "Maybe God likes you and the rest of us and that's why he picked us out to survive a while. Maybe he just overlooked us when he got the rest of the earth. Or maybe we're to provide the finale for the last great scene at the world's end."

Connie pushed away from Foster's embrace and struggled free of the tangled blankets. She stumbled into a dark corner of the bedroom beside the closet and huddled there, weeping. Foster rolled onto his back and closed his eyes.

In a while the room became colder and Connie returned to the warmth of Foster's bed.

She curled forlornly against the sleeping man. "Oh baby," she whispered, no one hearing except herself. "What's going to happen to us all?"

Connie dreamed:

The day Mardin walked past her as she sunned herself by the main entrance to the cryogenic complex. The sack over his shoulder was bulky and stippled with cabbage-lumps.

"Ho ho," he laughed, macabre Saint Nick.

She looked up. "What's that?"

"Heads," he said. "Gonna dump 'em."

Mardin walked away, laughing softly, and behind him remained the stench. Thick sweetness first, then

The smell. Similar, but—

The prairie stretched away to the horizon. The sod houses, board roofs chinked with mud, were dark chocolate against the green waving grass. The people worked at indistinct tasks, their exact actions obscure.

She was inside one of the sod houses and they were there, all the men and women. She saw her grandfather and father and many more whom she didn't know. They stood around the rough wooden furniture, and their talk buzzed in currents she could not understand.

The smell. Sweeter, more cloying.

The boy and the girl were twins, perhaps five years old, blue-eyed. Both smiled as the people closed about them and began to tear bits of flesh from their bodies.

Connie ate too, and it was from love, not hunger. She had wanted to have babies and now she ate them. And then she was younger, as young as the two children, and the people closed in around her.

The smell. She whimpered deep in her throat. The potty-smell . . .

One morning Foster and Connie were jarred from uneasy slumber by the clang of alarm gongs and the flash of red warning lights. Foster shook his head drowsily, irritated by the clamor, and flicked the switch of the lamp by the bed. Nothing happened. Only the intermittent crimson glare from the hallway lit the room. The man staggered from the bed and picked up his robe and slippers from a chair.

He found Mardin wild-eyed with agitation, fluttering his hands in front of the access hole to the power room. Above the sealed metal port was an obtrusive sign rapidly blinking "Automatic Systems Malfunction!" A cacophony of bells was ringing. As Foster approached from the hallway, a klaxon horn began to blare and the newly flashing sign, "Danger! Radiation Hazard!" added to the carnival aspect of the power-room door.

"Hello, Mardin. What's the problem?"

"How the hell do I know?" The ex-file clerk's bony hands sawed the air. "I just got here. Something's wrong with the nuclear plant. We're not getting any electricity."

"No power?" Connie had approached unnoticed. "What are we going to do for lights? How are we going to cook?"

"I saw some candles in a desk," said Foster. "We'll use those at night. As for cooking, it looks we'll just have to go outside and see if those dead trees'll burn."

A siren wailed in crescendo behind the bells and

klaxon. The new sign flashed "CONDITION CRITICAL—PRIORITY REPAIRS AAA-1."

"Is it going to blow up?" asked Connie.

"Beats me," said Foster. "Too bad we're all ignorant tourists instead of technicians. Maybe we ought to go outside in case it blows. Come on, Mardin."

But Mardin stayed, seemingly hypnotized by the random patterns of light and sound, while Connie and Foster retreated along the access corridor and climbed the shaft to the observation level.

After five hours, Mardin climbed from the cryogenic complex into the outer world. Humming a tuneless song, he stumbled through the dust of the leached soil and found Connie and Foster making love in the shadow beneath a stand of dead pine.

"Hey! You can come back now. I don't think anything's going to blow up. The batteries must have run down or something—the alarms stopped. But we still don't have any electricity. Looks like we're going to have to rough it."

"Okay," said Foster, disengaging himself. "You two pick up some limbs—we cook out tonight."

"I haven't cooked over an open fire since I was a little girl," said Connie. "We went camping in Yellowstone Park once." Her voice sounded happy, and Foster smiled. Mardin continued to hum his tuneless song and walk around in abstracted circles.

"Hey!" called Connie, dropping her armload of branches. "Look, Foster!" She pointed toward a streak of white vapor that bisected the dusk. "It's a jet."

Foster squinted into the sunset. "I don't think so," he finally said and felt a twinge of guilt. "We didn't hear any sound of a plane. It's just a weird cloud formation."

But the three of them stared hungrily and hopefully into the west until long after the white streak had vanished.

"Uh oh," said Foster, holding his candle high.

"Something's strange," said Connie, crowding close behind him.

"It's the refrigeration units," said Mardin from the rear of the small procession. "The electricity to cool the nitrogen—it comes from the power room . . ."

"*Came* from there," corrected Foster.

The trio descended the concrete steps.

"Listen!" said Foster. He stood motionless. Out of the darkness sounded the *drip-drip-drip* of fluid splashing on cement. "You two light the other candles."

The interior of the cryogenic vault became visible as Foster stepped from the stairwell into the room. The reflected candle flames danced eerily on the crinkled-foil capsules containing the hundreds of guilty dead.

"They're defrosting," said Mardin. "Like a big refrigerator when you pull the cord."

"I wonder how long they'll last," mused Foster, "before they spoil. Several days, maybe?"

"At least," agreed Mardin. "My wife left a roast out once when we took off for the weekend. It was a little moldy, but the dog ate it all right after we got back Sunday night."

Foster inexplicably wanted to giggle. Instead, he said, "What if we haul some of the bodies upstairs and put them outside? It's pretty cold out there."

"The nights are chilly," said Mardin, "but the days won't be. It's late June now—we've got most of the summer ahead."

The little group stood silent, watching the cryogenic capsules flicker with silver fire.

"Well," said Foster finally. "Let's worry about tonight first." He bent over a foil-wrapped bundle and peered at the tag in the glow from his candle. "All right, Mardin. Grab Miss Kelly's feet and let's get her up to the kitchen."

Connie took the candles in her hands as the two men struggled with the rigid package. "Foster," she said in a

low voice. "What are we going to do when they—when they all go bad?"

Foster smiled ambiguously. "Perhaps we'll live on love alone."

Mardin dreamed:

Briefly.

A three-lobed solid with sharp corners and no straight lines. It had been a greenish yellow at the beginning, but the red crept across in bands, like a television screen when the plane flies over. It was somehow important to him, but progressively less so as it reddened. And then finally the crimson was total.

One particularly lean day, Mardin attacked Connie in the kitchen. Neither Foster nor Connie ever knew Mardin's purpose—whether it was sex, food, both, or neither.

Foster was wandering the halls, leafing idly through an ancient book of Gahan Wilson cartoons he had found in the visitor's lounge. Then he heard the commotion in the kitchen. He investigated and found Connie, clothes shredded, sprawled on her back on the breakfast table while Mardin weakly battered her head against the formica surface. Foster watched for a moment, then picked up the useless electric carving knife from the counter. He slammed the heavy handle against the back of Mardin's head, stunning the ex-file clerk. Quickly, Foster wound the long vinyl electric cord around Mardin's neck and garroted him—then unwound some slack and drew the serrated blade across Mardin's jugular.

Connie moved weakly on top of the table. She gasped for air and moaned.

Foster slowly stood and put the electric carving knife in the dirty sink. He stepped to the table and looked down at the girl. Connie opened her eyes and looked back at him.

The final day came when the two survivors stood apart from each other. They watched without saying, almost as a tableau. Connie was at the top of the staircase to the observation level. Behind her was the pearl gray of early morning. The light from the open door made the girl's pale skin translucent; the outline of her form glowed—the rest of her body was in shadow. But she was smiling—Foster could see that; her teeth showed white. Her hands were together in front of her and something gleamed there—a blade perhaps; or maybe a silver bracelet.

Foster settled back in his chair, hardly breathing, and looked up the steps at Connie. On the floor beside him was the electric carving knife, within grasp—if he wanted to reach it.

"Baby, where now?" The voice whispered from above him, soft. Connie started down the stairs and the perhaps-a-knife in her hands glittered again.

"Wait," said Foster. "Listen."

The girl stopped.

"I hear something," said Foster. "Something distant and coming closer. A buzzing like maybe a rescue helicopter."

"It's a hallucination," said Connie, again starting her descent.

"Perhaps."

"Or one of your rotten jokes."

Outside the building, blackened trunks of pine shivered in the dry wind.

—Ed Bryant



THE LAST SUPPER

Under "menus" the Larousse Gastronomique contains the following entry:

"Here, as a curiosity, is a menu whose originality, it is true, is due to exceptional circumstances. It is that of a meal which Marshal the Duc de Richelieu offered to all the princes and princesses and the members of their suites taken prisoner by him during the Hanoverian War. President Henault tells us how the menu for this memorable supper was drafted by the Duc de Richelieu himself. Its peculiarity lay in the fact that it was made up entirely of one kind of meat, namely beef, because, on that particular day, there was nothing in the Marshal's larder but a carcase of beef and a few root vegetables.

" 'My Lord,' said Rulhières to the Marshal, somewhat anxiously observing that the Duc de Richelieu wished to offer supper to a large number of guests, 'there is nothing in the kitchens except a carcass of beef and a few roots . . .'

" 'Very good,' said the Marshal, 'that is more than is needed to provide the prettiest supper in the world.'

" 'But, my lord, it would be impossible . . .'

" 'Come, Rulhières, calm yourself, and write out the menu I am about to dictate to you.'

"And the Marshal, seeing Rulhières more and more

alarmed, took the pen out of his hand and, seated in his secretary's place, wrote the following menu which, later, was brought into the collection of Monsieur de la Popelinière:

SUPPER MENU

Centerpiece: The large silver-gilt salver with the equestrian figure of the King, the statues of De Guesclin, Dunois, Bayard, Turenne. My silver-gilt plate with the arms embossed and enameled.

First Course: A tureen of garbure gratinee, made of beef consommé.

Four hors d'oeuvre: Palate of beef à la Saint-Mennehould; Little pâtés of chopped fillet of beef with chives; Kidneys with fried onions; Tripes à la poulette with lemon juice.

To follow the broth: Rump of beef garnished with root vegetables in gravy. (Trim these vegetables into grotesque shapes on account of the Germans.)

Six entrees: Oxtail with chestnut purée! Civet of tongue à la bourguignonne; Paupiettes of beef à la estoffade with pickled nasturtium buds; Fillet of beef braised with celery; Beef rissoles with hazelnut purée; Beef marrow on toast (ration bread will do).

Second course: Roast sirloin (baste it with melted bone marrow); Endive salad with ox-tongue; Beef à la mode with white jelly mixed with pistachio nuts; Cold beef gâteau with blood and Jurançon wine. (Don't make a mistake!)

Six final dishes: Glazed turnips with gravy of the roast; Beef bone marrow pie with breadcrumbs and candy

sugar; Beef stock aspic with lemon rind and praline; Purée of artichoke hearts with gravy (beef) and almond milk; Fritters of beef brain steeped in Seville orange juice; Beef jelly with Alicante wine and Verdun mirabelles.

To follow, all that is left in the way of jams or preserves.

“And as a coda to this majestic menu (which we should like to regard as authentic and of its period, although in some respects it strikes us as somewhat odd!) the Marshal added:

“‘If by any unhappy chance, this meal turns out not to be very good, I shall withhold from the wages of Maret and Roquelere (his maitre-d’hotel and master-chef, no doubt) a fine of 100 pistols. Go, and entertain no more doubts!

(signed:) Richelieu

“This menu, strange as its composition may seem, is perfectly orthodox. Structurally, it obeys all the rules which were in force at this period concerning the organization of important meals.”

Not then, such a curiosity as it at first appears. And structurally regular. These qualities at least, we can hope to attain. Alas, who would dare aspire to that terrifying altitude above called “majestic.” Who today would lie in the teeth of truth and use such praise for the cuisine bourgeoise, gussied up with crushed ice or flaming brandy, which passes nowadays for elegance and is even styled “grand.” Pfui! For our Love Feast we can only offer the modest hope which that uncrowned prince, Curnonsky,

defines as good cooking, which is that things, "taste of what they are."

Preparation of the Beloved—The Living Marinade

On the day before the third day before the day of your Agape you must arrange to get your beloved dead drunk before dinner, it being important that he does not eat. For this purpose only Brandy Alexanders will do. The true recipe for which is:

Two shots of Creme de Cacao,
one of best Brandy
& only one teaspoon of heavy cream;
shake with ice and strain into
a chilled four ounce cocktail glass.

This drink has among its many fine properties a definite aphrodisiac quality which may be easily enhanced by the subjects of conversation chosen to accompany it. When he is giddy and no longer brushes your most importune caresses away, he may complain of the richness of the drinks, may even refuse another. Pay no attention, mix another with less cream and more brandy but make sure it reaches his lips *streaming* with arctic vapors.

When he has fallen into a corpse-like slumber, broken perhaps with snores which you alone have trained yourself to find endearing, remove his clothes and arrange him upon your bed. Arrange your lights, mirrors, music. Arrange yourself. Proceed to enjoy him, his every nook and cranny with your tongue alone. Soon you will see that though the drink has rendered him helpless it has not diminished his usefulness by an inch. Indulge yourself with all the abandon attached to last things. Imagine that he will remember all this with contempt, that even in his absence you will feel only his scorn, remember only his sneering face. Imagine that tomorrow he will disappear. Exhaust yourself and him with this your:

Rite of Eternal Farewell

When your window first whitens with the mystical significance of dawn, rise and adore him. Study the colors at which the wan light hints in the moisture of his chest or the oils at the turn of his nose. Admire the virility which the hour brings to men of such fine health and sweet youth. Watch it loll across his thigh but do not touch it. No, for that season has passed and you must content yourself with the sight alone of that jewel of light, pendent at the tip within the bezel of his foreskin, glittering with that promise which three days of labor and devotion will soon bring to you more intimately than ever before.

Wake him. While he is still groggy lead him to the gilded *chaise percé* (for which you have perhaps ransacked the entire length of Second Ave.). The bonds will have been made ready the night before, when you will also have replaced the enamelled tin bucket between its legs with a more suitable silver tureen. Tie his wrists behind the caned back and his ankles, separately, to the back legs of this chair. Joke with him about fetishes or photography or whatever is necessary to procure his docile acceptance of your extraordinary conduct; then offer him a glass of chilled champagne. He will welcome it. His palate will be cleansed of deadmouse, his eyes and uncomfortably his brain will also clear. He will begin to complain, perhaps to shout. If your residence is not lonely and safe from the curious you will have to impose the first necessary cruelty: a tight gag.

Next, a small hypodermic needle becomes necessary. If that is impossible, visit a doctor on some pretense and, while his back is turned, steal a packet of disposable needles. One of these points with a common eyedropper will make an excellent substitute. If the large rubber nipple from a child's pacifier is substituted for the dropper's meager bulb, so much the better. (Should a leakage be noticed between the dropper and the needle, this is

easily remedied with a tiny strip of paper torn from a paper match booklet, or, preferably, the end of a dollar bill.) This instrument is to be filled with brandy.

Make as many injections as you like, wherever it pleases you.

This finished, offer him more champagne and a tempting slice of authentic pound cake, provided he promises not to yell. A great deal of this pound cake will be necessary since it is, as it were the pre-stuffing and indeed it may require so much that you would be wise to bake it yourself, as large purchases of such a luxury may not only arouse suspicions but prove too expensive. Hence the following recipe for Authentic Pound Cake:

Beat a dozen egg whites until they stand in stiff peaks. In another bowl stir the dozen yolks and a pound of melted butter into a pound of sifted flour. *Stir* in a pound of sugar and the egg whites. Pour into a large loaf pan, well buttered and floured. Bake in a moderate oven until a knife blade inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool in the pan.

Certain resemblances to the infamous ceremonies of St. John may by now have crossed your mind. Uncross it. No such horrors as that twisting-off of the living youth's head after he has been softened in a vat of honey and a diet of figs and oil, no such insults to the body of the beloved will be encountered here. And no such divinatory superstitions will insult his head. It is, let us be quite clear, the Ultimate Reality of Love with which we are concerned.

So this drink and this food will be his only nourishment during the triduum of marination. Nor may his body be washed, nor his bonds loosened, nor his brow dried, nor his tears heeded. His excretions, which will collect in the silver tureen, will be regularly disposed of, but its guilt interior must only be rinsed out with champagne.

The brandy injections must be repeated at least thrice daily, and you must press upon him as much of the cake and the wine as he can bear. Intoxication alone must keep him from injuring himself with any attempts at escape.

On the evening of the third day he will be weak. Therefore the cake may have to be intinctured with the wine and spooned into his mouth. At midnight examine the tureen. If there is nothing, wake him and spoon more cake and wine into him until he delivers. Then, promise that you will untie him if he will grant you one last wish; that he will drink another quart of Brandy Alexanders you have prepared for him. Have ready another quart container to catch the mixture when he regurgitates it back to you, changed into the perfect cocktail for your feast. Masturbate him into this container. Do *not* untie him. Gag him again, chill the cocktail, and go quickly to sleep thinking of the salt taste of his tears, for tomorrow you must face:

Some Unpleasantries—Dressing and Trussing

If you love him you will lavish great care on the sharpening of the knife. A twelve-inch French chopping knife is best. When it will shave the back of your arm without the slightest pressure it is ready. But before you use it you will finish the preparation of the soup.

Remove the tureen to your work table and mix its liquid with its solid contents by means of a wire whisk. When you are sure it is as smooth as possible, thin it by whisking in as much champagne as is necessary to produce a consistency like that of heavy cream. In the center of this golden liquid float several sprigs of fresh mint. Place the lid upon the tureen and dispose it proudly upon your serving table. No further attention is required, this is always served at room temperature, only do not lift the lid before serving.

Now the knife. Place the enamelled tin bucket beneath the chair. Kneeling behind him manipulate (for the last time!) the pendulous extremity of the beloved until it can only be pulled vertical with difficulty. With a rapid stroke of the blade cut through to the pubic arch in the front and the anus in the back. It may be necessary to wait until a sufficient amount of bleeding has taken place so that weakened, he will not be able to wriggle enough to prevent your second cut from being as neat as the first. If so, hold the organs so that no tearing of the skin takes place at the incision. Have ready a basin to replace the bucket should it overflow while this tedious yet touching double genuflection of your devotion continues.

This most precious ornament (which in a turkey would be stood-in-for by a nubby tail sometimes called: The Pope's Nose) must be placed instantly in a small bath of cold milk. Do not let its sudden shrinkage dismay you. Gastronomic miracles will enable you to present it to yourself in all its pathetic arrogance.

When his fluids begin to run clear, transfer the meat to the bathtub. Secure the drain plug. With a silver table knife scrape the perspiration from all parts of the skin. (Death's Dew.) Using a bulb baster, draw up some of the sweat and any other fluids that collect at the drain stopper and, mixed with a teaspoon of brandy, reserve this in the refrigerator.

Contrary to the usual procedure it is now necessary to truss the body before it is dressed. Rigor mortis being, in this case, the enemy of art.

With the knife cut the tendons on the back and at either side of the knees, then that front skein just below the patella itself. This will make it possible to secure the knees up under the armpits while the ankle bonds are tied to the knots at the wrists. Next, cut off the toes of one foot and the fingers of one hand. Reserve these in a saucepan of water.

It is convenient now to remove any clothing you may

be wearing. But all temptation to abuse the newly effeminated source of all your anguish must be resisted. From now on, from a culinary standpoint, the body must remain inviolate.

No sooner have I said that than I must make an immediate exception. Without delay rinse your hypodermic needle or its improvised substitute in champagne and force a full dropper of brandy into the center of each eye. The deterioration of these is so rapid and their inclusion in the final garnish so expressive, failure must not be risked.

Now then, you have equipped yourself with one of those sharp surgical spoons used in curettement or one of the small garden rakes which look like a giant's fork crushed in some giant's petty rage, or both, and a flashlight (which may be useful near the end).

If your bathroom is well ventilated and your tools sharp it should be possible to finish this task by noon. Remove the heart, lungs, kidneys and liver to a pail. See that these organs are unmarred. Refrigerate them. Wrap the discarded entrails in foil and pack into the freezing compartment.

Wash yourself off and take a light lunch of any of the cake which may be left and the last of the champagne. Nap or read for an hour, then dress for your shopping trip.

Before leaving add an onion stuck with two cloves, a small carrot, a bay leaf, and some parsley to the fingers and toes in the saucepan. Set it over the lowest possible flame. Remove the block of frozen offal from the freezer and take it out in an opaque garbage bag. Dispose of it in your usual way. Come alert now, while:

Shopping for the Garnish

This trip must be made quickly, for there is so much yet to be done. You are advised therefore to waste no time pitying the common citizens around you. Those aging

ladies with their Diet Cola and TV dinners. Waste nothing so precious as scorn upon them; instead, study the produce you are about to buy and be certain that each is in every way not only worthy of the beloved but of the epicurean grandeur you are so rashly attempting to produce. The mushrooms, ten pounds of them, are they all the largest and whitest money can buy? Have you checked each box? The leeks; their leaves are still beaded with morning dew, the horror of crushed ice never having come near them. The black olives; almost the size of hen's eggs are they not? The artichokes; did their leaves actually squeak when you secretly squeezed them? And the watercress? Immaculate, of course.

Now quickly the two bottles of Chablis. No, no! *Chateau Petrus* (fool!) its ineffable odor of truffles thus compensating for their absence in this barbarous nation. Yes, yes, the Pomerol by all means, but what for the others? *Romanee-Conti* comes easily to mind; but the aroma, have we not so far successfully eliminated any of these bugs-and-bees smells? No! Back to the Médoc. Yes! Yes, of course, your choice seems to leap from the shelf: *Chateau Mouton-Rothschild*, and with the label designed by Dali. Or, the label by Cocteau? Both! Yes, yes, *too perfect* is the only justice. Now the Galliano, quickly, quickly, and just up the street those princes in peasant coats: Bosc pears.

You see, with my urging, that you have arrived just as the little sauce pan has reduced its liquid by half. You salt it (a pinch) and proceed to sort and wash and admire your purchases. Throw them all into the salted bath around him. Is it not as though a willow-grown stream had pooled about him? (Turn him face up.) "There with fantastic garlands . . . of crow flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples that liberal shepherds give a grosser name, but our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them: There" it is thus that a dedicated cook can gain inspira-

tion from the simple contemplation of ingredients both perfect and appropriate. But now, it is time for:

The Ornamental Trussing and Final Infusion

Carry him from the tub. Place him in your huge oven-proof serving platter of teflon-coated steel. Then, with a coping saw remove the cap of his head, that is, above the hairline. It should produce a sort of zucchetto or, if one is of the Hebrew persuasion, a neat *yamulka* of hair-covered bone. Scrape out the brains and, wrapped in Saran, freeze them.

Push a large trussing needle with heavy twine through one ear, across the empty brain pan and out the other. Be sure the twine is long enough so that both ends may be tied to his wrist bonds. The purpose, obviously, is to make his head stand up. You will see though, that the weight of the head only draws his wrists up his back and then itself falls again, sadly askew. Remove a short fine sword or bayonnet from your wall display. Place the fingerless hand beneath the perfect one (palms up) and pierce them both with this monstrous attalet. Push it on between the choice rondels of his buttocks and through both feet, these again arranged with the marred beneath the perfect.

Now, using the same heavier-weight strands you used to tie his ankles and wrists, make a pattern of tight bonds. A lattice, a stripe, or whatever imagination dictates and skill allows. If his skin is fair these need not be too tight. The roasting will leave a delightful pattern of gold upon the rich brown crust. If he is dark, or fortunately black, this decorative trussing must be made very tight. Then the skin will split so that when untied he will be beautifully marked with red on black incisions.

Now peel and crush forty cloves of garlic. Work them through a sieve into two cups of brandy and one teaspoon of soy sauce. Inject him as before. Carefully spoon out

each eyeball and put them to soak with his genitals in the dish of cold milk. Cut out his tongue and put it to poach in the saucepan of stock from which you first remove the fingers, carrots, etc. Last force an empty Coca-Cola bottle as far into his throat as you can. This is to keep it open. Now you are ready for:

Other Dishes

Put the liver (raw) through the meat grinder, mix it with the remainder of the garlic and brandy, quite a bit of black pepper and some thyme with perhaps a pinch of sage. Add the yolk of one egg and enough bread crumbs to make a coherent loaf. Wrap it with bacon and place it in the head. Coat the edge of the skull with a simple flour-and-water paste, replace the lid and cover all the hair with this paste. Do this also to the eyebrows and mustache, if any. Does he need a shave? Quickly lather, shave and dry his distended cheeks. Also, plug the eye sockets with this paste.

Preheat your oven to 350°, rub him carefully with sesame oil, not forgetting his underside. Oil enough aluminum foil on one side to cover him loosely. Place the platter in the oven and turn your attention to his heart.

You are to cut from the face of this a Valentine-style heart, remove the various membranes and divisions within, and rub the cavity with salt and pepper. With the two eggwhites from the liver pâté and two more whole eggs mix a half tablespoon of cornstarch and a full cup of coagulated blood which you have kept from the tin bucket. Stir in one tablespoon, not less, of Tabasco and stuff the heart with as much of this pudding as it will hold. Replace the valentine cover and, carefully sliding it by the blade of the sword, place it in the chest cavity.

Next remove the membrane from the kidneys. Slice off

about a half cup of the meat and put it to soak in cold water and lemon juice. Discard the rest.

Now, of course, you are tired. But now also it is time to peek in the oven. Quickly baste your prize with a housepainter's brush with the rich drippings. Repeat this as often as you like throughout the next hour. Then turn off the heat and leave it to cool in the closed oven. Is it rare? Yes!

Meanwhile, has the stock about the tongue reduced to a mere spoon of syrup? Remove it to a dish of thinly sliced lemons. Pour the syrup over it when it has cooled to room temperature. Chill it in the refrigerator.

Now remove the vegetables from the tub. Pick over the cress to be sure there are no yellow leaves, wrap it in foil and refrigerate it. Clean the leeks thoroughly, discarding the tough green ends and roots. Drop them in two quarts of boiling salted water. Cook uncovered until the root end is tender when pierced with a fork. Remove them with a leaking ladle to a bath of ice water. Do the same to the artichokes, leaving the leaves, however, untrimmed. Flute the mushrooms, trimming a fraction of an inch from their stems. Sauté them cap down so that their centers are rosy brown. Do not toss them about, the rims of their heads as well as their stems must remain ivory white.

Strain the boiling liquid. Reduce it to two cups. With a bulb baster remove all the cooking juices from the roasting platter. Add them to the butter in which the mushrooms were tinted. Stir in a heaping tablespoon of flour until it forms a smooth paste. Continue stirring it over a high fire until it ceases to foam. Remove half of the roux to a saucepan, but continue to stir the rest until it is a rich brown color. Remove it from the heat instantly and continue to stir as you add half of the vegetable stock (which is still hot). Return to the flame and stir just until the brown roux has begun to thicken. Add enough of the wine, one bottle of which you have opened, to make a

slightly thick sauce. Stir in one full tablespoon of black pepper! Pour it into its service boat and keep warm at the back of the stove, or in some other way.

Heat the white roux in the saucepan and stir it together with its share of the vegetable liquor. Add a half pint of day-old cream and by boiling rapidly and stirring gently reduce it by less than a fourth. Dot the top with butter but let it cool. Sprinkle the top with fresh grated nutmeg, a little white pepper, and the little glass of sweat you collected from the scraping of the body in the bathtub.

Now rest.

Rest well, for as much time as is left before it is time to bathe and dress for this Passion, this Eucharistic Holocaust of Perfect Love.

The Last Rite

At seven o'clock your servant (hired for this night alone) wakes you by announcing that your bath is drawn. It is, of course, the same tub, but now blanketed with shimmering unscented bubbles of liquid Ivory soap. Soak in it. Do not move until the oven rouses you with the faint clang of its expanding metals. Wear nothing but your best dressing-gown, not even slippers. Seat yourself at table and, resting your feet upon a high cushion or low stool, watch the candlelight catch the droplets on the tall sides of your Purgative d'amor Cocktail. Sip it slowly while your man prepares Lung Straws Parmesan and Brain Fritters Vinaigrette. (So simple, so right.) They will arrive with your second cocktail. You will salt them lightly it is hoped, but heavily will also be understood. Your man smiles at your enjoyment and, at his nod, you rise and democratically assist his placement of the gorgeously garnished platter, sizzling from the oven, upon its waiting bed of crushed glass over cedar chips. He has followed your instruction about the hors d'oeuvre so perfectly, he

will naturally have arranged the garnishes exactly as you diagrammed them to him during his interview.

Now he will serve the soup from its tureen; its ineffable aroma will mingle with that of your centerpiece as he deftly snips and withdraws its trussing strings. As you lower your head to sip your first spoon of soup you will see that the eyes have been perfectly replaced, that his mouth, wide open as so often you saw it in ribald laughter, has within it, upon its bed of crushed ice his Tongue Glittering in Aspic. The perfectly basted face is unmarred. The rapidly melting ice fills his mouth and your mind with memories of never-to-be-repeated autumn days when his sweet breath steamed in the apple crisp winds of an already leafless park.

A single spoon of the soup and it disappears. If it were not that your servant will return momentarily to remove the tiny plate where you have left the second slice of tongue, you would not bother to savour the tender, tart, pebbly tip you now nibble, you would at once relieve yourself and, no matter how hot their juices, bite from that laughing face those fiercely chapped lips, and so ruin the rest of your supper. But this servant understands. Invisibly the tiny, icy plate disappears and in its place an ancient ironstone soup plate presents in its pool of lemon butter an artichoke, its petals agape, its heart wrapped in white-of-leek and studded with kidney cut in the tiniest possible cublets. The lemon butter fuses with the faint odor of urine. The leek, the olive, the artichoke heart, does it not yearn for the very wine which now falls clearly and coolly into your glass? Taste. Could it really be that this brash experiment has solved the problem of artichokes and wine? But enough, you will imagine next that you have solved the presentation of *coq au vin*. Taste each ingredient once, then finish another glass of wine. Another yet as you watch the preparation of the *Tendron Blanchette*.

The cream sauce is placed already bubbling on which-

ever side of the carcass is least attractive. There, unseen, your man removes the "false" or "Adam's ribs" to a very hot plate. On the surface of the sauce he dribbles flaming brandy from a small ladle. Immersing the ladle he stirs once and then spoons the hot spiked cream over the ribs and, placing a fluted mushroom beside it, serves it and retires. This morsel, gelatinous bones and all, requires solitude. Not only to hear its crunch in the mouth but to hear also through the salt of your tears, the heavy accelerated breathing which used to cause these tender things to cover themselves with big beads of sweat. Taste the mushroom. Finish the last drop of wine. Wipe your secret from your face. Watch the noiseless spilling of Chateau Mouton-Rothschild '53 into the invisible balloon of your glass; it is time for the grill.

Your man may make a show of this, either with a small Japanese charcoal grill or a very hot electric skillet sprinkled with coarse salt. The fillet has been removed with two spoons, and is just as deftly seared, sliced, and served with a single spoon of Poivrade Sauce. A single bite of this melting, crusted flesh and the wine springs to life on your tongue. Has a Médoc ever bloomed with such masculine tenderness not only on your palate but into the very crevasses of your mind? No. It *is*, relaxing thought, perfect.

Beside you a cut-glass bowl of ice appears, offering watercress. After the pepper sauce, its green tang is more like a memory of the mint of the soup. Now you are presented with a paper thin slice of the *Jambon au Saignant* on an oval plate of ruby red glass. A pinch of salt, a squeeze of the lemon left imbedded in the iced cress, and yet new mysteries emerge from the muddy mind of the grape. Is there here, now, at this solitary supper, not some silent presence forming?

Strange before you as if by magic, the little cushion of pâté displays the sullen radiance of an eye. Call now for the second bottle of Médoc. Surely only such a noble

fluid should be used to drown the sort of pain that begins now to drip like gall from your heart. And of course, again, life imitating art, presents you also with a slice of that spiced savoury from the dark coffer of his heart. It is presented on the point of that heartless attulet by means of which it has been removed from the empty oven of his breast.

Finish the wine. All of it. No more is needed. The cheese must meet nothing but the soft sentimentality of the pear.

It arrives and again your man leaves you perfectly alone. Its slow poaching in heavy cream has expanded its tissues to full tumescence. The crisp heart of a carrot, inserted into the urethra and anchored in a dry canape has enabled it to exceed the usual presentation (*en belle vue*) and appear as promised in all the arrogance suitable to its station and purpose; namely life's only indispensable ornament. The two large animelles, already shrinking slightly as they cool, cause the hairs on the restless scrotum to scatter their droplets of cream. A touch of your dessert spoon and the foreskin slides down. With its silver tip the tiny curds must be caught before they fall. Close your mouth on this minute serving. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. At the end of a minute add a sliver of cold pear. Do not speak. Let your man assist you from the table. He will pour the coffee and the liqueur, then, leave without a word.

Don't allow the salt of tears to interfere. Think on it. Has it not been indeed the ultimate reality of love with which we have been concerned?

MENU

Purgative d'amor Cocktails

Brain fritters vinaigrette

Lung Straws Parmesan

Excretion Soup with Mint
Tongue in Aspic
Artichoke stuffed with kidney

Chateau Petrus '61

Tendron Blanchette with fluted mushroom

Chateau Mouton-Rothschild '53

Grilled Fillet with Sauce Pouivrade

Iced Watercress

Jambon au Saignant

Pate Trompe L'oeil and Savoury au Coeur

Fromage Garçon Chaud and Bosc Pear

Galliano

Coffee and Tabaceros and Silence

——*Russell FitzGerald*





THE VILLAGE

(Italicized fragments incorporated into this poem from a numerological chart and THE EGYPTIAN BOOK OF THE DEAD, the authorship of which are unknown to the Poet.)

The number is twenty.

The emotional attribute is impulse.

The planetary association is with the moon.

The Tarot signification

(Arcanumx, The Sarcophagus)

denotes awakening.

The Village is coming along lovely, starting

to get wise to the infatuations, I—Coast

People are shaped much like pilgrims,

come up to freshen their dissemblances

from the unspoken colony on Highway 1.

The Villagers keep

talking about Omens, the mists

always get heavy

this late in the year.

The zodiacal association is with Cancer.

The appropriate stone is the Black Onyx.

Black Onyx
happening at unheard of Speeds
these days; the Villagers
catch up their hair with leather thongs,
a rite of sorts, tonight in the trees.

The children
keep getting tangled,
the sky won't get light for another
four hours yet.

(Arcanum XVIII, The Moon)

denotes deception.

And I say,
I don't feel for the deceptions anymore, I move
other ways. Not so much screens
anymore, like smoke
setting up traps in my voice
when I'm unintending, fucks
whatever hangs on too hard.

*Thou risest, thou shinest, making bright thy mother . . .
Doeth to thee Mother . . . with her two hands
the act of worship.*

I can hear you hiding, rooms
and rooms away from my glide.
My people are uneven, am not tempted
toward finding you. I will wait
until all my dialects are with me again.

Meanwhile
I have taken over your dancing.
*Osiris it is; otherwise said . . .
Eternity it is and Everlastingness. Eternity is
the day, Everlastingness is the night.*

The Morning has somehow
snagged in your half of the Omen,
the amberglass mushroom
tuning us on amber.

Has to get
her unholiness under wraps, keeps coming
harder off of the nightwire.

Has no
hands, no matter how softly.

(She said,)

Watch out for burning in the Village.

Now my eyes are the same
as hers, riding high in my face,
speaks a language called Victim.

*The emotional attribute is self-indulgence.
The material factor is conquest.*

The Dwarf has
taken her down the slope,
under the bridge, yes,
to pick up his Wine.
Something
almost ethereal about how
the two of them unwrap
the bandages together, checking out
the wound all alone under
the bridge down the
slope together.

The material factor is belief.

Who passes between us
when we travel thru the town
and down to the river, he is

light years quiet,
watches his style for sharp corners.

Where we slept together on the beach; the
nets in his voice,
I still
get caught in them.

*Osiris it is; otherwise said Ra is his name
or the phallus it is of Ra when he uniteth with himself.*

Ascensions are heating up
all over town, and eventually
terrified in Palo Colorado
waiting for the Village to mellow
for however makes it North,
back up the coast to San Francisco.

Ascension, like in

rising,
it fixes us tight with our tendencies,
it fixes us

Christ, how

*The number is nine.
The material factor is fear.*

—Leland Stoney

ARPAD

I don't expect to live past sixty. Not on my life style. Somebody will see me killed, I'll attract lightning, or I'll shock and thrill the world by dropping dead some Sunday. In the meantime, my style has advantages.

Sixty is early middle age by Ship standards and careful Shippies pace their lives accordingly. I don't. I play for broke. I shatter the common clown by enjoying everything he's afraid would kill him by sixty, and I blind him with my speed. I act while he thinks about acting. I invent problems on the moment and dazzle my way out of them, and he merely invents problems.

I relish the thought of dying at sixty. I want to find out what I'm able to do with plastics, do it, do it big, and get out. I don't want to hang on. Shakespeare and Napoleon, who did their own work in plastics, both died on the eve of fifty-three as bare young men. But they had tested their limits. I don't yet aspire to die at fifty-three. Right now, I'll settle for sixty years to find my limits.

I haven't found them yet. Understand that.

I was brought up a Shippie against my will and only gradually grew to enjoy it. My father was a disinherited Shippie, expelled for marrying down. He lived at the tepid tempo of a Shippie to the day of his death.

I was born on the planet of New Albion. I fancied

myself a cut above my friends, but I had dirt between my toes.

My father died at the premature age of eighty-four. Some of his cronies in the old Universal Heirs of Man gang took their remorse out on me. I was rescued—and what an operation that was—and restored to *Mother Bertha*, their Ship, to be made a first-class heir of Earth and Man, as was my due. They held their noses, told me of my luck and abandoned me in a dormitory to make the most of my new opportunities.

Twice I was stopped from escaping. The third time I changed my mind and returned.

I decided I would show them that I could beat them on their terms. At the age of fourteen in the Ships they turn you out on a colony planet—like New Albion—to survive on your own resources. If you do survive, you are an adult citizen.

Well, colony planets are my own home jungle. I figured that if I could cope with New Albion—and I was doing all right there—and with this Ship, I could pass Trial snickering. After that, I could walk away—either pick myself a colony planet to my taste, or act badly enough to get ejected like my father before me.

By the time that I did pass Trial, I had changed my mind. I no longer ached to leave. I'd been looking around the Ship and it was clear to me that there were many more opportunities than anybody in sight was taking advantage of.

The Ships were launched just over two hundred years ago to carry survival colonies away from an overpopulated and depleted Earth on the hysterical edge of self-destruction. Seven Ships founded some one hundred colonies. And now, all these many years later, the only movement between the stars is the seven Great Ships on eternal motherly rounds to disapprove of their children.

There are only 28,000 people in *Mother Bertha*. The Ship is a small world full of fat, slow, lazy democratic

gods. Sheep. Clowns. But a colony planet, even the best and biggest of them, is only one world. A Ship gives access to a hundred worlds. Or a hundred and seven.

There's a certain joy that comes in thinking about the possibility of affecting a hundred and seven worlds. That's a lot of plastic to shape.

My father died at eighty-four, still trying to decide what he wanted to be when he grew up. Admittedly, I haven't yet made my final decision, but I've got it narrowed down—stun, dazzle, and die at sixty leaving plastic shapes behind me for people to wonder about for a hundred or a thousand years. The more unused opportunities I see around me, the higher goes my estimate of how long I can keep my name in conversation. Whatever may have become of Earth, people still talk of Shakespeare and Napoleon, and will.

Not that I seek admission to their company yet. I've just been trying my experiments, each one a bit more expansive than the last. If I hold my pace, at sixty I will have explored my limits.

The Great Ships follow their own separate schedules and one Ship will meet others two or three times a year. The people who matter exchange information. The people who don't matter don't pay much attention. I'm constantly amazed by the amount of attention a Shippie can sink into quad sports. Seizing that attention is one of the opportunities that nobody is taking advantage of. But I never have claimed that it is easy. You must strike them a thunderblow between the eyes.

When I was twenty, *Mother Bertha* met *Sarah Peabody* at a time when I was primed to start a new experiment. I made petition to change Ships.

I was met by a young girl recently enough a Citizen still to talk of it. She was an attractive young chub, a blonde in a yellow striped jersey like a butterflower. Her name was Susan Smallwood and she had been sent to guide me.

After introducing herself, she said, "Are you sure you want to transfer here?"

"I think so," I said.

"Are you in the Sons of Prometheus or anything like that?" she asked.

"No."

"Then you shouldn't have much trouble. My mother's Mobility officer. You'll have to talk to her."

I needed a guide. The innards of a Ship are a scramble. It took me two years to learn my way around *Mother Bertha*. If I wanted to touch Shippies in that particular way—and I'm thinking about doing it—I'd write about deep, hollow, safe earthwarrens. Mother badgers tight in their dens.

Susan Smallwood took me through runs and tunnels to my appointment. "Why do you want to transfer?" she said.

"There's opportunity here," I said.

"I don't see much."

She had met me in *Sarah Peabody's* scout bay. We had stood dominated by the line of scout ships—*Sarah's* links to other Ships and other worlds. It isn't much of a jump to call them opportunities. Ship people think in bland and figureless prose. They see only scoutships and the absence of scoutships.

Butterflower was a nice girl, but I wished I had someone to speak in tongues with.

"I'm going to be chela for Heriberto Pabon. That's opportunity."

"Oh, but he's dirty," she said.

"My teachers said that he is. But he is supposed to be brilliant."

"I wouldn't change Ships to serve somebody like Heriberto Pabon," she said.

"There are too many Margolins in *Mother Bertha*. That's reason to change Ships."

"We have families like that here. But not many Margolins."

"That sounds like opportunity," I said.

"I guess."

Mrs. Smallwood, *Sarah Peabody's* Mobility Officer, was less attractive than her daughter. Though Susan was a Citizen, her mother presumed, ordered, and dismissed, and there was strain between them. When Susan left, her mother made some remark about wishing her daughter would show more initiative. I tucked that away to think about. When I have tempo in chess and the force of attack is with me, I take little notice of my opponent's game. I just play like a tide. But when I'm moving initial pawns and the rhythm of the game has yet to be established my way, I keep track.

Mrs. Smallwood assumed her cap of office. She sat down and straightened papers. She said, "We must be quick to decide about this. I don't know how you run your Ship, but this one is going to be on its way in five hours. We have a schedule."

Ships do have schedules and keep them. *Mother Bertha* and *Sarah Peabody* have the time and place of their meetings scheduled for twenty years.

"I understand," I said.

I understood that being quick to decide would mean doing things at her pace and in her style. I was patient—which I can be when I must—I did things in her pace and style, and I watched her.

"You wish to study with Heriberto Pabon?"

"Yes. He was recommended to me. And he agreed to accept me."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"Not really, ma'am. Not at first hand."

"This seems irresponsible, young man," she said. She sorted paragraphs in front of her. "Heriberto Pabon may have found a safe hole for himself, but should you care to ask anyone, you would be told that he is a fast and

unsocial man. I have your approvals here. What could they have been thinking of?"

I said, "I believe my advisors think me too narrow, too concerned with public work and not concerned enough with other areas of my development."

"You have doubts about this?"

"I'm in the hands of my teachers," I said.

"I suppose that must be respected," she said. "But we don't encourage immigration, Mr. Margolin. And it would be three years before you could be returned to *Moskalenka*. We don't prevent anyone from leaving us, but frankly we do make some selection about whom we allow to join us. We have the lowest population of any of the Ships, and we like to think the most select. But don't think of us as exclusive. Still, let me ask you one thing. Are you a member of the Sons of Prometheus or any other reconciliationist group?"

"No," I said. "There's enough to do within the Ships to satisfy me. So many things to do. Would I be excluded if I did belong?"

"Not for that alone," she said. "But look here. You did spend your early days on a planet. New Albion." She checked the name.

"Heaven knows, ma'am," I said, "that's true. It was an accident I want to be forgiven. I've spent all these years since I was restored to *Moskalenka* trying in one way after another to make up for it by doing things. I wouldn't think of the colonies until I had thought of the Ships first. There's so much to do."

"So few feel that way," she said. "I don't like your advisors. Why would they want to change you?"

"I don't always do as much as I feel I should," I said. "But I do try."

Mrs. Smallwood said, "I can save you from all this Heriberto Pabon by rejecting your petition."

"I must respect my teachers," I said.

"I suppose," she said, and reached for her stamp.

I said, "This could even be an opportunity."

Bang she went. "I suppose if you choose to see it that way, it might be."

Perky little Susan Smallwood was waiting for me outside. I had been wondering if she would be, and was pleased to find that my guess was correct. I still needed a guide.

"Well, are you allowed to stay?"

I nodded.

"See, just as I said."

"I have an appointment to see someone about my choice of a place to live. What would you suggest?"

"Oh, I wouldn't know about that," she said. "A thing like that can make a big difference. People can set store by which people you live among."

"Oh, yes," I said. "I know that can make a difference. Who do you live among?"

"Oh, just new Citizens. We're nobody. Mostly we haven't found other neighborhoods yet, I guess." Then she offered, "Do you want to stay in my apartment until you decide? Or will you want to talk first to Heriberto Pabon?"

"I'll call him from your apartment," I said.

I don't pretend to subtlety. If I were roundabout, I couldn't cram everything in. I don't have that kind of time to waste. When push comes to shove, I do, and anything that gets lost in the shove I never miss.

I set to work directly. The secret to moving people is to touch their hearts. It isn't as difficult as it might seem. Shippies are amazingly local and have such secret hunger for the marvelous.

I set up court in Susan Smallwood's apartment while I was there and recruited my first converts. Kids they may be, but they are also voting Citizens. And there are advantages to a retinue.

I started by making muscles for them. I came on slightly

dangerous. I was from off-Ship. I was associated with Heriberto Pabon. I knew answers they had no questions for.

I told them tales of wonder. I told them of the League of Shiphoppers, for one. This was a group of mysterious people unbounded by Ship custom.

"On the move all the time, using Ships and colonies as indifferent resting places, they go where they like and when they like."

The young ones asked questions:

"Where do they come from?"

"Really? From Ship to Ship? Oh, that would make me feel giddy."

I said, "It's a secret floating life. Unwatched, unnoticed. They use the Ships as stepping stones."

A sceptic, a boy named Simms, said, "And we're supposed to believe this is happening all around us?"

Sceptics are almost always burly people, I have found. They add bulk to a retinue.

"Yes," I said.

"Even here? Do you claim that these Shiphoppers can and do pass through this Ship?"

"Maybe *Sarah Peabody* has gotten left out of the game," I said.

"But you said they go everywhere."

"They do," I said.

Simms said, "But not here?"

I included the ten of them in the sweep of my arms. "Of us here in this room, sitting around this candle, at least two."

They showed awe. Simms demanded, "Who?"

"You expect indentifications?"

"I suppose you will say yourself, since you are from another Ship."

"I'm not from another Ship," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"I was born on the planet of New Albion and I go where I please."

Simms said, "I don't believe you!"

I said, "If you were clever enough, it could be checked," and turned the conversation to other things.

But at the end of the evening, Simms stayed behind with Susan and me when everyone else had left and demanded to know whether the Shiphoppers were "real" or "only a story".

"That's all right, Joe Don Simms," I said. "It's not too late. There's still time for you to start. You can be anything you want to be. We'll let you play."

He burst into tears. When he was done crying, he said, "Who is the second Shiphopper?"

"You," I said.

And he cried again.

Unending rolling meadows can be as potent as mother badgers in dens.

I set up my own apartment after a few days. Not among the kids. I didn't bar them. In fact, I encouraged them to visit. But I gave them a little distance to travel to come to me. Not among any group of similars of my own age, interests, or ambitions. I feel no need to copy the limitations of a faction. And not near Pabon, of course. We might have embarrassed each other.

I decided my best part was presumption, and so I settled among a gang a hundred years my senior, where I stood out conspicuously. These people were the last memory of the vogue for a peculiar game called Saluji that had swept the Ships before my father was a Citizen. Old as they were, these people still had their courts and their competition.

They sent their axe to deal with me—an old Saluji player named McKinley Morganfield. But better than anything, better than young girls, in all the world I deal best with crotchety Saluji players. I remember who they were.

McKinley Morganfield began by asking who I thought I was, elbowing my way in where my presence was not appreciated. But my following admired him, and I spoke to him of my father's friend, Ayravainen.

"There was talk of the two of you meeting once, wasn't there?"

"Talk," he said. "Nothing came of it. When there was interest, nobody did anything like that. It might be possible now, but there isn't interest."

"There's some new interest," I said. And my people nodded.

I said, "And you never met Cropsey."

"You know about Cropsey, too?"

"Of course," I said.

"He was a first-class pecker in Saluji. By report."

"You may meet them yet in a Seniors match," I said.

"Where? How?"

I had my own people's attention, too. I had introduced them to the pleasures of Saluji, but I had not told them anything of this. I don't believe in wasting my marvels and miracles.

"Sixteen months from now, all of the Ships will rendezvous at the South Continent of New Albion. Games will be held. You will have your chance at Ayravainen and Cropsey."

"Is this possible?" Morganfield said.

"There's never been a rendezvous," said Simms.

"The Ship men gather to play their games down on the worlds of men," I said. "They pitch their tents and fly their pennons."

"I've never heard of any of this," said McKinley Morganfield.

"It's still in the organizational stages," I said. "It isn't being talked about until it has been coordinated. But in sixteen months there will be a rendezvous. The first one. And there will be Senior Saluji matches."

"But what of the Ship's schedule? That can't just be abandoned."

"The Ship's schedule can be modified," I said. "A Ship can go anywhere its Citizens decide to take it."

During the next few months, I spent my spare time talking constructively to people. At first you enlist individuals and it all seems painfully slow, and then the individuals add their own associates, just as a poet starts with one or two words that ring brightly and watches them accumulate company.

I did nothing but talk. I do it all with my hands behind my back.

I didn't talk much with Heriberto Pabon about what I was doing. He once asked whether there was anything to the talk he was hearing about a Rendezvous on New Albion—"Rendezvous in '32" was the slogan he had heard.

I said, "Yes."

"Are they really going to have the first Universal Saluji Championships?"

"I believe so. Yes."

"Amazing. I remember the pylongs used to last for hours. And the young people are playing Saluji again. I'll have to get out my batons." And he walked off practicing hand shifts. And hand shifts out of style in Saluji for sixty years.

My sturdiest opponents were the Sons of Prometheus, the local equivalent of *Mother Bertha's* Universal Heirs of Man. They were originally chapters of do-gooders. If you belonged you promised to bring light to the colony planet on which you passed Trial. Eventually they broadened and shallowed to become an entrenched pro forma Opposition. You would think they would be ready to abandon the schedule, but that wasn't at all the case. They were in business to squabble about the schedule, not abandon it. The schedule was their tie to their people handing out bandages on the colony planets.

But I went in to talk to them. I asked for a quiet conversation with some of their leaders. I took a small herd of supporters along and left them at the door.

I said, "The best of all possible reasons—information. One very interesting fact emerged when this Ship and *Moskalenka* recently met. I bring it with me."

"What?"

"Earth was never destroyed. That was a story that was given out, but it isn't true."

"I've heard that rumor," said one.

"What proof do you offer?" asked the other.

"None," I said. "But if you looked into it, you might find that we have only assumed that Earth was destroyed. Or that we have been deliberately misled."

"It's true," said the first. "They do sometimes lie to us."

"Only rarely," said the second.

"If there was a Rendezvous, maybe someone would go back and see if Earth really is only a cinder," I said.

"Abandon the schedule?"

"To find ourselves."

"Leave the poor colonies who depend on us?"

"Let them swim."

"Give up power?"

"Seize power. When seven Ships meet new revelations should be had for the asking."

The first one said, "If we abandoned the schedule, I'd like to take a Ship and travel to the heart of the Galaxy. I want to know what company we have."

The yearnings of Shippies. Well, I understand that one. I took her aside afterward and introduced her to some of my people. Some of them were toying with that one, too.

When I first discovered that I was able to move people, I sometimes did it just to see myself do it. It is little short of amazing what hoops people will leap thorough. It was the arrogance of discovery. Now I'm more restrained

and more purposeful. I never—well, seldom—move people gratuitously. But when I do, I take real pleasure in seeing people respond to me.

Heriberto took up Saluji for several months, but then abruptly one day he put his batons away again. I asked him about that.

"It was fun," he said. "My shifts are as sound as ever. But I haven't time for that now. Three new projects came to me today and I must begin them."

"You won't be playing at Rendezvous?"

"Oh, I may watch a match or two if I have time," he said. "Right now, it looks like all my time will be tied up in association meetings."

"Meetings?" I said.

"I've been solicited by three and absolutely barred from two. I believe I'm chairing one series."

"Oh," I said. "Well."

The opportunity for conspiracies of all sorts had occurred to me, but I hadn't actually plotted them. Let everybody make his own story.

Mrs. Smallwood, Ship's Mobility Officer and mother of young Susan, said, "It seems I was too hasty in allowing you aboard, young man. Don't think we're not aware of what you have been doing. We are aware of you."

"Yes, ma'am."

"In the old days, and not so long ago, you would have been Expelled from the Ship. When I was a young Citizen I voted twice with the majority to Expel. If you were brought up now, I'd vote you out."

Mrs. Smallwood had called twice when I was out. She wanted to talk to me. Having seen me once, she might have preferred to keep vid distance between us. I went to her office. I only took two warm bodies as sideboys. I left them in her outer chamber.

I said, "As far as I know, I haven't done anything quite that serious."

"You've been lying to people," she said. "You know as well as I that this Rendezvous is all a lie. *Moskalenka* said nothing of this. And when we meet *Jaunzemis* next month, I'm sure neither will they."

"Probably not," I said.

"I should be recording this."

"But one year from now, seven Ships will meet off New Albion. There will be games, meetings, convocations, assemblies, parades, bazaars, and celebrations. All for the first time."

"Stop that," she said. "It's not going to happen. We won't abandon the schedule."

"You will abandon the schedule if enough Citizens call for it."

"They won't."

"Ah, but they might."

"Nobody will come to this Rendezvous."

"This Ship," I said. "And when it arrives the others will be there, too."

"No," she said.

"I have a proposal. Lock me in my room for eleven months and take away my vid."

"I wish I could," she said.

"Then exile me on the South Continent of New Albion."

"You were born on New Albion."

"On Eastcape."

"How would it look if that were brought out?"

"I don't care," I said. "If it weren't too late and if South Continent didn't have such fine weather and pleasant countryside, I would ask for the site to be changed."

"You are a very devious young man, Mr. Margolin."

That brought me up short. I think my major shortcoming is that I'm excessively straightforward. But after I considered it for awhile, I decided it was all right. If

they choose to misunderstand me, it is all to my advantage.

"Or," I said, "if it met with your approval I could transfer into *John Thomas* next month."

"I dislike these new slangy names," she said. "I'll take it under advisement. Now, if you'll leave, I'm already late for my Saluji afternoon."

"I was admiring your batons," I said.

When I crossed into *John Thomas*, Heriberto not only recommended me to my new mentor—who, I must admit, had already heard of me—he gave a statement on my behalf to *Sarah Peabody*, which was very decent of him. He said, "He came well-recommended to me. Now I find I have nothing more to teach him. I must pass him along to another pair of hands."

I took two Shiphoppers along with me into *John Thomas*. *Sarah Peabody* stops no one from leaving and *John Thomas* isn't as sifty about newcomers. One of the Shiphoppers was Joe Don Simms. About a week after we had made the change, he came to me in complaint. He claimed that things were neither as exciting nor as heart-lifting as I had described them.

"What am I to do?" he asked.

"Swim," I said.

I only have one thing left to settle. I still haven't decided whether I am to be Shakespeare or Napoleon.

——Alexei Panshin



BITCHING IT

My multi-level plastiplex windows dated back to the 1980's, and I was in a hurry to get the new curtains up before the rest of the gang came over. My Akita bitch, Tora, was mouthing the brass rings up to me one at a time as I stood on the ladder. Then Crotch came in, mean and stingy as he always is, the puke.

"How much did those cost?" he yelled, and kicked the ladder out from under me. As I went down I smashed him in the face with my elbow, and Tora got a grip on one of his buttocks, denim and all, until he yelled with pain. She was always irritable when in heat, not to mention it was a nuisance because she liked to sleep against the pale-yellow appliances, and when she got up the surfaces were splotted with the brown roses of her blood.

"Fifty credits a yard," I screamed from the floor where I was trying to untangle myself from the pink ruffles. It had taken me hours to trim each tier of ruffles with red fiberglass fringe and balls, so I was careful not to tear any of this handiwork. Aside from the fact it was difficult to pry an extra penny out of Crotch, I would no more spoil my own creative works than I would slash a Picasso canvas.

"You shit," I said to him, removing the last of the fringe from around my neck.

"Must be ten yards of nylon in those curtains; what do you think I'm made of, money?" Crotch said. He held the torn flap of his chlorine-pale dungarees against his left cheek to sop up the blood where Tora's front teeth had met.

"You bitch," he said to her. She growled an acknowledgement and lay down.

"Look! Look!" I commanded, shaking with rage. The ruffles were half torn from one curtain. When I think of the hours I spend, and my friends Rosa and Margie, and all of us, on curtains and bedspreads and throw rugs, all done by hand, with real art, while we talk about how many years we'll spend getting our respective Ph.D's, and Crotch comes in and in one minute tears everything apart.

I said to him, "What kind of shit are you to do a thing like that? You better get out. There isn't enough pie anyway because some of the gang are coming over." Pretty stupid of me to say that, but it's too late.

He lifted the pie down from the top of the fridge. I'd already eaten out a big wedge and Tora's fang marks were visible on the other side. He was such a sorehead, he threw the pie at me. I ducked. Tora jumped over me and hit the floor right beside the pie. She held the pan between her big front paws, growling between mouthfuls.

"This place is crummy," he said. "How can you invite anyone over to such a pigpen? You think new curtains cover the crap? I wouldn't have given you the money only you promised to clean up the place."

"You don't own me, Crotch. You think I got nothing better to do than scrub floors? After all, I'm going for my Ph.D and an educated creative woman has better to do than clean a house all day."

Tora picked up the empty pie tin and carried it across the kitchen; with an expert flip she tossed it into the sink where it clanged, and came to rest. She turned her head from right, me, to left, him, and licked her whiskers. Out in the yard, Betty's red setter dog came sniffing. He found

the spot where Tora had pee'd in the morning and lifted one leg to cover each delicious drop with a few drops of his own. Possession is accomplished in a lot of different ways, but any way it's done, it sure is hateful.

Crotch looked at me possessively and I bristled with resentment. He'd spent the last few months trying to level me down to his across-the-town blocks where Industry was; the air-conditioned offices, banks of typing machines, computers, watercoolers, for-free women, dim lit mahogany bars with rows of Martinis on the rocks sparkling like diamond juice. The little trains pulled in and ran out right on schedule, no time to oversleep or one more fuck or a second cup of coffee. Sometimes our gang stood on the girders above the train platform, safe in our ballet shoes, and hurled down jeers, beer cans, and other stuff at the hard black derbies below; especially at the well dressed sweetly smelling free women who did it in the name of "love" with all those men. Men, them and their whiskers, like shaving was something important, a good substitute for menstruation.

"Why don't you go back where you came from?" I asked him, putting the curtains in a neat pile on the table.

With his usual nauseating kindness he asked, "Don't you like to see me now and then?"

I could hear Mary and Annajane, with their bitches, on the way over. He hadn't heard them yet. His hearing had been impaired by the sound of sixty-cycle hums and little trains on straight tracks.

They were coming along the alleyway where the hollyhocks had seeded themselves; pink, red, double white, and dusty maroon, they grew five feet tall against the picket fence. Indestructible. Like me, the wire lady: walk across me, I twang off your name and number before your footsteps have finished crossing. Twing, twang, the metal marvel sheathed in squashy flesh, that's what drew him here, the poor cock.

Annajane came in first, with her bird-dog bitch Duck-eater. Crotch whirled, caught, too late to escape. Annajane squealed, "Oh Suki, you've made a surprise party," and she fell on him. He never had a chance. They rolled under the table and she had him unzipped and hard as a peppermint stick in a moment. Duckeater and Tora charged out the open door to meet Mary and her Chihuahua bitch Hairy. The red setter, who'd been patiently waiting out there, pounced on Tora, ramming it home half a dozen times before he caught, his penis swelled to four times its usual size. He stepped over, and tied her, back to back.

Tora pointed her black nose into the air and began to sing in a high, quavering wolf voice. After all, a dog's penis has a bone in it.

Under the kitchen table Annajane was astride Crotch, her head and shoulders hunched over because of the cramped space. A few cobwebs had caught in her hair and a spider was running furiously up and down her arm. They were galloping at such a rate the whole kitchen quivered.

"Oh Suki!" Mary said, "what a wonderful idea," and gazed down at them. Hairy the Chihuahua ran around under the table and tried to clean them.

"I'll help with the curtains, until it's my turn," Mary offered. "How'd you ever get Crotch over here?"

"Oh, he drops over now and then to see how the other half lives. It's a miracle he gets through the guards on the Avenue. I guess Jeannie and Rosa went swimming today." I got up on the ladder and she handed the curtains and brass rings up to me. "How do you like them?" I asked.

But she was looking back over her shoulder to see if Annajane had finished and it was her turn yet, but it wasn't, yet. Out in the yard, the red setter was lying prone, panting and gasping, while Tora was scrunched up on one hindquarter, neatening up her vagina. Through the cracks in the fence, a bull terrier was eyeing her.

"Oh oh oh oh," Annajane said from her new position, and slid off, massaging a cramp in her thigh. Though breathless, Crotch was about to get up and escape. Mary lunged for him. Unfortunately, the Chihuahua had already thrown herself on Crotch; that little bitch had a passion for cleaning everything up. She yelled shrilly when Mary landed on her, and Crotch roared when the bitch bit him. The kitchen began to quiver again, and one curtain rod slipped and hung down, dropping my new pink curtains, brass ring by brass ring, in folds onto the floor. Trying to keep my temper, I began to put them back up again, though by now they were getting dusty and spotted. It was Crotch's fault, damn him.

Hairy crawled out whimpering from between Mary and Crotch, and I reminded her, "Just once, Mary. Because I haven't had a chance at him either, and he isn't getting any younger or more vibrant."

"Just once, just once," Mary gasped twice.

While they were resting, or at any rate, he was, I took a bowl of jello (Lemon Flavor) out of the fridge. After all, the pie was a total loss, and I had to serve something or lose status. I squeezed a ring of whipped topping on the jello, sprinkled chocolate bits over that, and stuck in some maraschino cherries all around, until it looked very pretty. The curtains looked okay, too, now they were up. I needn't hang my head in shame before the rest of the gang.

Annajane took a bucket of water out into the yard, for the dogs, who were pretty thirsty, except the bull terrier, who had tied Duckeater.

"I didn't know she was in heat," I said.

"It's crazy, she comes in every two months," Annajane said. "I can't give the puppies away any more."

"Puppies!" I shrieked. "Aren't you giving her some of your pills?"

Tora and I always shared the bottle of pills. Fair's fair,

after all; a nursing bitch isn't much of a fighter and who wants all those lousy puppies anyway?

Annajane blushed. "I was getting low on the pills so I skipped her a few days."

"Multiple births! what a rotten thing to do," I said. "Now she's going to have bull terrier pups. I think that's shitty. People like you shouldn't have a bitch."

"Don't be so righteous," Annajane said, giving one curtain a mean little yank which made the curtain rod groan. "It won't hurt her to have a little fun."

"Fun is fun and puppies are puppies," I said. "Mary, isn't it time you got up? The dessert is ready."

"I'll serve the coffee while you have him," Annajane said. She was a good friend, in spite of our occasional disagreements.

"Watch out!" I yelled at Mary who was crawling out from under the table. "He's leaving us. And penniless."

Mary pulled him by the belt, backward, as I grabbed him from the front. He hit his head on the edge of the table as he fell, and lay there like the dead.

We stood around looking down at him. Mary felt his pulse, which was normal. Annajane put a cold sponge on his brow, and his eyelids quivered, but he wasn't conscious. I unzipped him, but he was a goner. Though ordinarily it was pretty good, just pretty good isn't good enough. No matter how big and busy a penis is, it's not good at all if it hasn't got a big fat wallet on the other end of it.

"Try ice cubes," Mary suggested.

"Ice cubes, you're outta your skull," Annajane said.

"Try it," Mary insisted. "I heard it works sometimes, I heard it's called a Roth Bath, or something, and it works."

"That's not ice cubes, that's whiskey," Annajane said.

While I thought over their advice, I took the credit chips from his wallet and we shared them around, though

I got the biggest share, naturally, since he had come across through the dangers of the Avenue to see me.

Finally, we tried the whiskey, though we hated to waste it. We dripped it on with a teaspoon, and took turns. It really worked. He groaned a few times, opened his eyes, then opened his mouth to say something, probably a protest, so I poured in a slug of whiskey and he woke wide awake. Mary and Annajane pulled chairs up to the table and began to drink coffee and eat the dessert, while Crotch and I screwed under the table, first me on top, then him on top, then both of us sideways, and my head stuck out so Mary reached down spoon by spoon and fed me some jello.

He was a good sport, after all, and we let him have a cup of coffee before we took our bitches out of the yard to escort him back to the Avenue. His own territory lay on the other side, unpatrolled. Rosa and Jeannie had come back from swimming and were on guard with their bitches. Crotch tried to run for it, but the bitches brought him down, and by the time the guards called them off he was crawling, bloody and wretched, on his hands and knees across the Avenue. Just a poor slob of a masochist, like most of them.

We went home to finish the dessert and have a talk. While we were having second cups of coffee, Tora tried mounting Duckeater but she was so small she collapsed under the big bitch's weight and just lay there, panting. This scene aroused Hairy, all five inches of her, and she tried mounting Tora, which caused so much resentment that Tora nipped her on the nose.

"Put her out in the yard where the dogs can find her," I suggested, but it was too late. Squeaking, Hairy ran away, Tora pursuing her. Both curtain rods got jolted and there were my new curtains in a heap, except one, which fell over Hairy and eclipsed her entirely. My curtains began to run around the kitchen, barking. Tora snatched the curtain off the Chihuahua and bit her again.

The bull terrier came in right through the screen door and tried to mount Duckeater, who just lay there, panting, while he pumped at her head. He was a very young bull terrier.

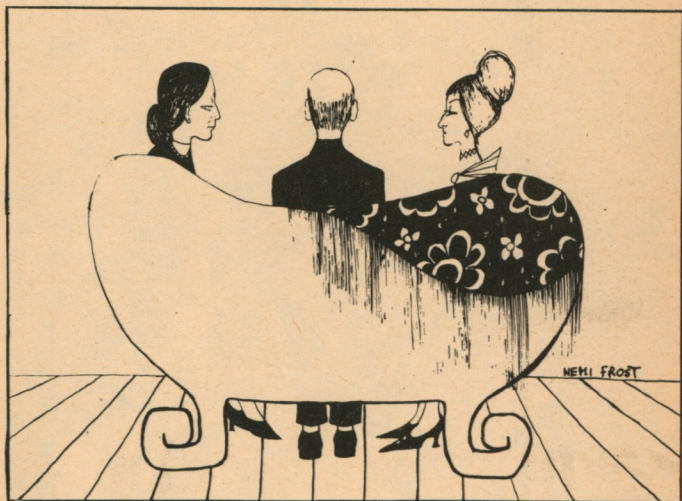
I decided I'd never get those damn curtains up in one piece. But we'd had a great morning, and we planned that the next time Crotch came over, we'd have the rest of the gang in, too. Before he got any older. By that time I could repair the curtains and get them up.

——*Sonya Dorman*

FIVE DRAWINGS BY NEMI FROST

- 2.—4.: Three Drawings from a Series of Illustrations for
Ways Of Spending Money, a Play by James
Keilty.
4. : Alice Coltrane











ET IN ARCADIA EGO

It is hard to understand why dawn lands on these hills, exciting the chains of carbon with quanta of light, or why, when we step beyond a particular line traced across the marble pavement of the courtyard of π , we have been forced to reappraise certain temporal relationships. It is enough, perhaps, that we should rely upon our captain, Captain Garst Flame, who does not hesitate to resolve dilemmas of this nature with ruthless rationality—even, at times, like Alexander, with an Ax.

There are four continents, roughly equal in area, grouped in opposing pairs two to each hemisphere, so that a simple 'W' traced upon the mercator projection would adequately describe our first hasty itinerary, ticklings of the fingers that would soon so firmly *enclose*.

The planet moves in an eccentric orbit about RR, a highly irregular variable in the Telescope. A primitive theocracy governs the Arcadians, whose diet consists largely of herbal salads, milk and dairy products, and a savoury spiced meat resembling our mutton.

Even at noon the light of RR is tinged with blue, just as his eyes are always blue: genius is not too strong a word for Captain Flame, of whose tragic fate this is the unique record. To him the indigenes present the firstlings of their flocks; him we of the crew (Oo Ling, the lovely

Micronesian biochemist; Yank, our impetuous freckle-nosed navigator; Fleur, who took her double doctorate in Cultanthrop and Partfizz; myself, geologist and official Chronicaster to the Expedition) thrice have raised to the nomenclature of *Palus Nebularum*.

The central massif of the White Mountains describes a broad "U" above which the sister cities of Hapax and Legomenon form a gigantic umlaut of arcane beauty. Fleur has recorded and analyzed the structure of the Temple. Her breakdown shows that the centers of curvature, marked by the double circles of the three interfaces of the interpenetrating hemispheres, lie *in a straight line*, the same that has been traced upon the marble that paves the courtyard of π . From this it can be proven that the Arcadian mathematics, so primitive in other respects, is based upon a shrewd understanding of the physical properties of soap bubbles. We have spent many hours in the commonroom discussing the implications of Fleur's discovery. Oo Ling, who is contracted to my bed, questions Fleur's recommendations of clemency, which I am inclined to support, provisionally. How I love to look into the depths of those ianthine eyes, two vernal flowers floating on a skin of cream, to touch the oily quiff that clings, like iron bonded to aluminum, to that noble brow. Oo Ling, I desire you, pressing my fist into my genitals as I pronounce your name, Oo Ling!

But I fear the imminence of our dissent. Your voice will be with Yank's, mine with Fleur's, and the decision will rest with Captain Flame, who has remained through all these bull-sessions, impassive, serene, showing to us a smile that mocks every attempt at interpretation.

Captain Flame, it is with tears that I record the tragedy of your fate.

I am extending my orological investigations, assisted by the indigenes Miliboeus and Tityus, sons of the Abba Damon, who holds the staff of π . Miliboeus, as the

elder, wears a kirtle of heavy mortling dyed the color of fine glauconite; the younger Tityus, uninitiate to the Arcadian mysteries, dresses in simple dun fluff fastened with leather thongs. My own suit on these field trips is a tough corporal unit of flesh-patterned polyisoprene, which can be activated to simulate any sacral movements, such as walking, running, skipping, etc. This, we have learned, is a useful subterfuge, in view of the Arcadian predilection for natural forms.

On the eleventh trimester of our Conquest, Miliboeus said: "Death sings to us, Abba."

And Tityus: "Just as the clouds struggle toward their disappearance, alas, our hearts contest with our minds."

I replied, in the Arcadian tongue: "Brothers, I do not understand. The sun is at solstice. Your blood courses through your veins swiftly as water spills down the mountainside. Youth you possess, wisdom you shall inherit, and poetry—"

Tityus interrupted my peroration, slapping an insect that crawled in the fluff of his thigh. He showed me the smear on the palm of his hand. "It is thus," he said sadly.

"And thus," said Miliboeus, licking the smear from his brother's hand.

Astonished, I reached the captain at once by telstar and narrated this incident to him, while the enlarged image of his hand wandered thoughtfully among the swollen Greek letters of the primary unit. Captain Flame spends all his uncoordinated moments on the bridge now, breathing its metamorphic air, sealing from us all channels except the red and yellow bands. Dammed, our love swells. Moths beat white wings against the protective shell of glass. Images that betoken our more animal nature, which we share, in a sense, with the Arcadians, and I have seen, in the captain's blood, and heard, in his screams, the cost of transcendence.

"I expected this," he said, at red, my narration having terminated.

"I did not expect this," I said. "I did not know that you expected this."

Oo Ling joined our communication: "I expected this too—for these reasons: first, they have kept us in ignorance of their mysteries; second, we are not allowed within the Temple; third, their daily speech is filled with imprecise denotations."

"I object," I replied. "Firstly, it cannot be the mysteries that Miliboeus fears, for he is initiate. Secondly, all primitive cultures observe similar taboos. Thirdly, the inexactness of their speech is characteristic of its emergence from the Rhematic age. I maintain that they are naïve, merely."

"That is probable," the captain said, "and it is this very probability that led me to experience anxiety. Naivete can be more counterproductive than active deception, and if intransigent is an argument for genocide."

"Do you feel a large degree of anxiety?" I asked.

"I had felt only a small degree of anxiety, but this message has caused it to enlarge, and it is still enlarging now." He bipped the image of a swelling iridescent sphere.

Oo Ling descended gracefully to the yellow band. "Have you had sex today, Garst?"

"No, nor yesterday."

"Maybe you're just feeling horny. Why don't I come to your bed?"

"Good idea. Are you free now?"

"Yes. I'll finish with these proteins later. I need a good lay myself." Oo Ling blanked off our link.

"With your permission, Captain, I'd like to observe."

"As you please," he replied, with circumspection in the image of his eyes, *bleu d'azur*, *bleu celeste*. The wall irised open and the floor drove him towards the bed, which puckered to receive that splendid torso, those limbs tensed with an heroic lust. I moved in for a close-up of

his loins, then followed the rippling, golden flesh slowly upward, as Cellini's finger might have caressed fault, breastplate, and gorget of his own molding. I tightened my shot to a single staring disc of *bleu d'azur*, in which I saw, as in a mirror, the image of Oo Ling. Oo Ling, I desire you, pressing my fist, then and now, into my genitals as I pronounce your name, as your image falls and rises on the image of our doomed captain, Garst Flame.

When you come, I come with you, and we are together there, the three of us, and then, sighing, I must break the link, and I find myself sitting, half-disengaged from my unit of polyisoprene, with the two youths, Miliboeus and Tityus, staring at my happiness and pride.

They show me specimens of the rocks they have been collecting, while, at a distance, a lamb bleats with a lamb's naïve anxiety and the lurid sunset shifts from peach to mauve to indigo, a phenomenon as puzzling to me, as arcane, as beautiful, as the expression on his lips when he is not smiling.

This happened on Day Theta/11th trimester of our Conquest of Arcadia, according to the sequence described.

Now, as an eagle will swoop down upon an incautious hare, the strong talons shredding her pink flesh, so dawn's light pounces on the geanticlinal welts of the White Mountains. Yank has noted in his report the presence of certain new faculae on the surface of RR, heralding perhaps some cosmic disease. Light seems uniform, yet is thronged with data: coded histories of all future event dance in its waves like the motes that people the sunbeams, sunbeams that awaken the sheep in their fold, whose glad conclamation then wakes the tardy shepherds Miliboeus and Tityus, as in the age of Dickens and Pope the sound of songbirds might have awakened a poor London chimneysweep, the victim of economic oppressions. The image of their brotherly kisses flickers on the screen of the common-

room, and the image of the morning sunlight, the bleating of the flock.

I lean across the trough to let my fingers graze the down of your hand and trace the curve (a lituus) of your silken quiff. I whisper in your ear: "And who is *my* brother?"

Shall I interpret your laugh? Shall I admit that your smile is an auspex to be ranked with sunspots and bird-song, with deformations of the liver, the pancreas, and the intestines? You are as solemn as a sarabande by Lully, as arousing as Brahms's "Lullaby". When I regard your sexual organ, engorged with blood, I lose all sense of kinship patterns, of teamwork, of philosophy.

And your reply: "Oo Ling?"

And my echo: "I cannot tell you all that I am feeling."

Fleur pokes a finger in my ribs. "You two lovebirds have got to break it up. We've got our work cut out for us today."

Obediently we return our attention to the screen:

The shepherds wake, and walk towards their death, as a young man of good family, in the heyday of the Industrial Revolution, might have ascended the Jungfrau to enjoy one of its many celebrated views. The random motions of individual sheep become, in aggregate, a progress as direct as the path of an arrow.

Simultaneously, at the temple, the Abba Damon unlocks, with a cadeuceus-shaped key, the gilded doors. The opposing helices of the two serpents are of complementary shades, blue and orange. The key is so shaped and so colored that the slightest motion seems to set the two snakes writhing.

Unseen, except by our miniature cameras, the twin serpents writhe in the lock; the doors swing open, and Damon leads forth the celebrants. The procession follows him in single file along the line retraced that same morning upon the marble pavements with the blood of Miliboeus and Tityus. Above the Abba's head sways his crozier

of office, decorated with brand-new orange and blue Celanese acetate ribbons, the gift of Oo Ling, who, watching this solemn, scary moment with me in the common-room, cups my breasts in his hands, naming, as they flash past on an ancillary screen, the names of the amino acids composing the phenylalanine chain: "Voline, Aspartic acid, Glutanic acid, Voline..." (And so on.) Just as once, twenty or thirty years ago (though this seems probable enough, I *remember* nothing of the sort), a much shorter Oo Ling might have recited that same litany at my maternal knee.

More affecting, however, than Oo Ling's prattle is the fuss that Yank is making over the community's coffee pot. Will Fleur have cream, he wants to know. Will I take sugar? Of course I will! And thank you very much.

The cameras float up the mountainside in the wake of the flock, documenting the thousand flowers crushed beneath the feet of lamb and ewe, tup and yeanning: anemones, bluebells, cinerarias and daisies; lush eglantine and pale forsythia; gentians; hawthorns, irises, and April's bright-hued jonquils; and many other kinds of flowers as well, all of them crushed by innumerable sheep. Sometimes, however, Miliboeus would stoop to pluck one of the more enticing blooms, then knit its stem into one of the garlands, bucolic and complex, with which he'd crowned himself and his kid brother.

"Well, there's coffee for everyone," Yank said, with a little sigh of accomplishment.

"But I see five cups," I pointed out, "and there are only four of us."

"Yes, Mary's right," Fleur said. "Captain Flame is missing!"

It didn't take us long to discover our leader's whereabouts, once the dials were properly adjusted. For he too was on that mountainside, halfway between the two young victims and the procession of priests, who were, already, opening the vault in the hillside—how had it

escaped our detection all this time?—from which, with the terrible inevitability of nuclear fission, the Wolf emerged.

Fleur shrieked: "Watch out, Garst! Behind you!"

But he had blanked off all bands and was deaf to our warnings. We observed the events that followed with a mounting suspense, little suspecting that they would lead us, step by step, to a catastrophe of global dimensions.

Concerning the Wolf.

Though not larger than a double sleeping-space and almost noiseless in its operation, the Wolf was expressive, in every detail of its construction, of a sublime rapaciousness, a thirst for dominion so profound as to make *our* Empire, universal as it is, seem (for the moment we watched it) as insubstantial as the architectures shaped by the successive phrases of a Bach chorale, which fade as swiftly as they rise. Here, incarnate in chrome-vanadium steel, was the Word that *our* lips had always hesitated to speak; the orphic secret that had been sealed, eons past, in the cornerstone of the human heart, suspected but never seen; the last, unwritten chapter of the book.

Busy swarms of perceptual organs encircled its crenelated head to form a glistening metallic annulet; its jaws were the toothy scoops of ancient steam-shovels; it was gray, as a glass of breakfast juice is gray, and beautiful as only a machine can be beautiful. We of the crew were breathless with astonishment, admiration, and needless to say, fear.

The Wolf advanced along the path of trampled flowers (anemones, bluebells, etc.), stalking not only the flocks and the two young shepherds but the very Empire itself, in the person of Garst Flame. Did *it* know this already? Had the ever-expanding network of its senses discerned Garst's presence on the path ahead, and was this the reason that it seemed now to quicken its pace, as a lover,

learning that his beloved is unexpectedly close-at-hand, will hasten toward her?

What was this creature? Could it have been formed here in Arcadia? In what hidden foundry? What intelligence had wrought so eloquently in chain and cogwheel, engine and frame, the manifest aim of all intelligence? What was it going to do? What weapons would be effective against it? These were the questions we asked ourselves.

All poetry, as Yank once remarked apropos of this brace of sacrificial lambs, is a preparation for death. Tityus tosses his crook—where the wood has slivered a tuft of fleece has snagged and clings—to his older brother: why, except *we* know the danger they are in, should this playful gesture rouse in us feelings of such ineffable sadness?

Such sadness. And yet, paradoxically, of all the indigenes it is only these two who, like green-barked saplings uprooted and bagged before some terrific flood, will survive, while all the rest, the stoutest oaks, the tallest pines, must be drowned in the waters of a necessary and just revenge. But I anticipate myself.

This is my point: that since we can never know from *his* lips why our captain left his post, we must suppose that he was moved by a sense of pity, and that somehow he had foreseen the danger that had till then been locked within the rocky shells of the Arcadian hills, as chemists at the dawn of the modern age suspected the existence, though they could not prove it, of the intercalary elements.

Through the morning and far into the afternoon, while the dreadful contest between the Wolf and Garst was being fought out on the slopes below, their sport continued, the songs, the jigs, the clumsy, countrified wrestling that was more like loveplay than a form of combat, the pastoral lunch of whey and the snack later of scarlet berries—and all the while, like the tremolo work above

a Lisztian melody, that same unvarying brave show of insouciance!

All this is astonishing, true enough, but as Fleur remarked even then, it is also essentially unhistorical. No more of this blather about Meliboeus and Tityus, who are nothing more now than gray, useless, aging aliens taking up bench-space in the Home Office's Park of All Arts, like turkeys manufactured for a holiday that is no longer much celebrated and still gathering dust beneath the counter of some hick store in Gary, Indiana, or like poems that were never translated from French or a song that never got taped, et cetera, et cetera. The possibilities for obsolescence are as numberless as the stars.

Dinosaurs quarrelling; the customs of pirates, of the Iroquois, of carnivorous apes; the great Super Bowl between the Packers and the Jets; the annihilation of Andromeda III; Norse berserkers hacking Saxons and their horses to bits; the hashish-inspired contretemps of the Assassins of Alamut; the duels of Romeo and Tybalt, of Tancred and Clorinda; killer-dwarves of the Roman arenas; John L. Lewis smashing the skulls of company scabs with his mammoth jackhammer; Apollo flaying Marsyas, slaying the Delphian Python at the very brink of the sacred abyss; bloodbaths, bullfights, drunken mayhem, battle hymns, Schutzstaffel deathcamps, missiles programmed to reproduce themselves in midflight; Germans galloping across the ice of Lake Peipus; Juggernauts and abattoirs; Alexander's delirium at *Arbela*; *Bull Run*; the Romans slaughtered at *Cannae* and slaughtering at *Chaeronea*; *Drogheda* defeated and depopulated; Panzers swarming across the sand toward *El Alamein*; the Carolingian empire dissolving at *Fontenay*, the French victorious at *Fontenoy*; images that can only begin to suggest the weight and excitement of the drama our cameras recorded that day, as nine-and-a-half feet of red-haired, blue-eyed human fury matched its strength and wits

against six tons of super-charged, kill-crazy engineering.

Even the cameras and mikes shared in the combat, for the Wolf's busy senses were equipped with their own weapon systems. A methodical destruction of our network began, to which I retaliated (communications being up my alley) with a simple Chinese-type strategy of endless reinforcement. I figured that the more eyes the Wolf used to pursue and destroy the ship's receptors, the fewer it would have available for its fight against Garst Flame.

As in so many deadly contests, the crucial moments were often the least spectacular. By bluff and psychic ambush each sought to win some fractional advantage over the other. Garst would set his corporal unit swaying hypnotically. The Wolf would spin round him in swift circles, braying and honking and clashing his jaws at erratic intervals, hoping to jar Garst from the steady 4/4 rhythm of his wariness.

Then, without warning, Garst unleashed a river of attenuator particles. The Wolf skittered sideways and parried with a hail of yttrium that spanged harmlessly against the tough polyisoprene of the corporal unit.

A teat of the Wolf squirted clouds of antilife gas, but Garst's nerveshields protected him. The priests, who had arrived on the scene moments after things got started, backed away in terror. The spray settled where they'd been standing; the grass withered and turned black.

The Wolf's eyes and ears were steadily demolishing the cameras and mikes that I poured into the area, making reception in the commonroom ragged and fragmentary. On the other hand, the personnel registers were functioning beautifully, and it boosted our morale a lot to know that Garst's acetylcholine production was down 36% with a corresponding 54% rise in sympathin. The time lapse for prosthetic response was, in consequence, pared to microseconds.

Then the impossible happened. The Wolf seemed to be taken in by one of Garst's feints, and he was able to run

in under the lowest, least well-armored jaw and give it a taste of his circuit randomizers. The jaw turned to hay-wire—but it had been a trick! Three tentacles, hidden till now in another jaw higher up, blurted out and wrapped themselves around both Garst's arms and his helmet. Ineluctably he was lifted upward, flailing his legs with futile vigor, towards the chomping steam-shovels.

It had been to just such a death as now loomed over our captain that the Abba Damon had willingly and consciously foredoomed his own two sons! Think of *that*, all you moralizers, before you condemn the decision we arrived at (after hours of debate) concerning a suitable punitive measure.

To return, however, to that moment of supreme anxiety. It was just then, wouldn't you know it, that one of the Wolf's ears shot down our sole surviving camera, and simultaneously over the audio we heard the roar of a tremendous implosion.

The personnel registers dropped to a level of complete nonbeing.

To get fresh cameras to the scene I had to detach the network from my own unit. By the time it arrived everything was over. The amazing thing was that Garst had won, the Wolf was dead, and here is the stratagem: once the Wolf's tentacles had glued themselves to his corporal unit and begun corroding the armor, Garst had tongued the trigger for maximum Self-Destruct, then, hoping against hope, had jettisoned himself bang right out of his unit.

He'd landed, unsheathed and soft, at the feet of the Abba Damon. The suit meanwhile destructed and with it every contiguous atom of the Wolf, whose eyes and ears buzzed round the site of the implosion afterward, like bees who've lost their hive. Then, without a central, directing intelligence, their programming caused them to knock each other off, as the soldiers sprung from Cad-

mus's sowing began, as soon as they'd risen, fully armed, from the sun-warmed furrows of Boeotian Thebes, to slash and stab at each other in the madness of civil war.

The Abba Damon stoops and lifts the pale, pained torso with just such a mingling of amazement and acquisitive delight as a collector in the heroic age of archaeology might have shown upon discovering some antique term, an armless satyr from the baths of Titus.

"Take me to . . ." Garst whispered, before the treason of his own lungs, desperate for more, and purer, air, silenced him.

With our captain cradled in his arms the Abba Damon retraces his path down the slopes of the mountain, along the line of blood in the courtyard of π . Again the twin serpents writhe in the lock, and now for the first time, as our camera flutters above the sacrifice like the Dove in representations of the Trinity, we see the Inner Temple.

A piece of road equipment, precious in its antiquity, seems to have been abandoned before the high altar.

A song of woe, Arcadian Muses, a song of woe!

The Abba Damon traces the curve (a lituus) of his staff of office, as, with sacramental dispassion, he observes his assistants fastening the cords securely around Garst's genitals. How many times—and with what feelings of tenderness, the charity of the senses—have all of us, Fleur, Yank, Oo Ling, myself, caressed that cock, those balls, the little bush of hair! O Garst! now we cannot touch you! And never, never again.

Then, as the priests take turns operating a crude windlass, the victim is raised until at last his body swings, inverted, an obscene, pitiful pendulum, above the rusting machinery. I cannot recall this moment, this final image without feeling again the same numbing terror, which shades, again, into the same unspoken collusion, as though, then and today, a compact were being made between us: between on the one hand, the Abba, his priests,

that green planet, and, on the other, myself, the crew, our ship, an Empire—a compact whose tragic clauses we must obey, on each side, down to the last remorseless syllable.

A song of pain, Arcadian Muses! Arcadian Muses, a song of pain!

I must mention his screams. His suffering, like the attributes of Godhead, is at once inconceivable and endlessly intriguing, a perpetual calendar of thought, an Ouroburos. I think of that strong and splendid being stripped to the irreducible human sequence of head, chest, gut, and sex, and though usually it is a matter of indifference to me that I am of the female sex, I am glad to know that I need never fear such a thing happening to me.

Sing of death, Arcadian Muses! Sing!

He raises the knife and, murmuring some words to the effect that he does this only with the greatest reluctance, slits Garst's throat from left to right. A brief necklace of blood graces the white flesh that only this morning was banded by the red collar of Imperial office. The blood streamed down across his face to drench and darken the soft curls. His body hung there till the last drop had drained out into the rusted engine of the caterpillar.

Sing, Arcadian Muses! Sing the mystery. For your own death approaches.

The motor turned over once, sputtered, and died. The scoop lifted a fraction of an inch, and these events took place, our captain's death, the destruction of Arcadia, so that that gesture might be made.

Following these barbarities, the Abba Damon, in pleading for the release of his sons, sought to excuse himself and his people with arguments and "explanations" too laughable to merit the dignity of inclusion in this record. To repeat such tales would be an affront not only to the memory of our leader but also to that of the planet which it was our pleasure, the next day, to wipe out of existence.

Before X-hour each of us wrote his own epitaph in the log, an ineffacable magnetic tribute to the man who'd led us to success on so many missions.

This was Fleur's: "Soon we'll be back at the Home Office, back on the red bands, where you were always most at home. Our recall priorities will be adjusted, they always are before reassignment, and that means I'll forget you, except for a couple memories that won't matter that much. This pain is a ground-mist, and the sun comes up and it's gone. But if I were able to miss you, Garst, I would."

This, Yank's: "The last time I kissed you . . . the rest may have to go, but I'm holding on to that."

And this, Oo Ling's: "I'm sorry that he had to die."

This history has been my epitaph for you, Garst. There is never a last thing to say, unless Oo Ling has said it. One day I told you I loved you more than I loved the rest—and even then it wasn't true. None of us, probably, loved you very much, because if truth be told you weren't that lovable, but we have done that which in your eyes would have been more important: we have done our duty.

Thus, on Day Delta, 12th trimester, the Conquest of Arcadia was concluded. Just before blast-off we fired a full charge from the temporal cannon at the heart of RR. Before the sun set that evening on the cities of Hapax and Legomenon, it would have gone to nova.

Arcadia has ceased to be, but other planets await us. The whole great pulsing body of what-is has been tied to the altar, and we advance to tie about its universal neck the sequence of our extinctions, like ropes of pearls, each one a unique, and now demolished world. O glades and rivers, O winds and darknesses, will you mourn, with us, their loss?

—Thomas M. Disch

LANDSCAPE FOR INSURRECTION

While they drank themselves into a fog
we planned: Could we survive in the hills?
They stood in the embrasure of the bay
window. I thought of the long climb.
Those uniforms! black brocade on a red ground
and leather hipboots scored with stars.

This is a transformation. Daystars
are crumbling on the rocks above the fog
as damp hands score my shoulders to the ground.
I am out of breath. In a valley between hills
there is a walled town. Mornings we will climb
the rocks to count tankers entering the bay!

I'll seed a plot with spices, dill and bay
and chervil. Now the slopes are spiced with stars.
Light corners the next rise that we climb.
Prickly grasses part, releasing fog
that wreaths around the levelling of the hills
and humps up the slopes close to the ground.

Winded again, I only ground
my teeth and kept going. Dogs began to bay
from the valley at the disappearing hills.

The swollen moon and punctured stars
dangle above the hilltops and the fog
that swallows our long shadows as we climb

and spits them back into the valley. "Climb
up here a minute! What are these tracks on the ground?"
Instead, we sit on a rock, watching fog
track up from the ocean highway and the bay.
"I used to know the names of all the stars."
"Funny, nobody ever named these hills."

In a wrecked lean-to on the highest hill
we hide our things, and smoke outside. Lights climb
up from the bridge, planes pass between the stars.
We rake a pile of stuff left on the ground:
shoe, cartridge, paper, keeping bugs at bay
with cigarette smoke curling into fog.

Covered by fog, we will come down from the hills
into the dark towns on the bay. To find us, you must
climb
to this cleared high ground, marked with flares like stars.

——Marilyn Hacker

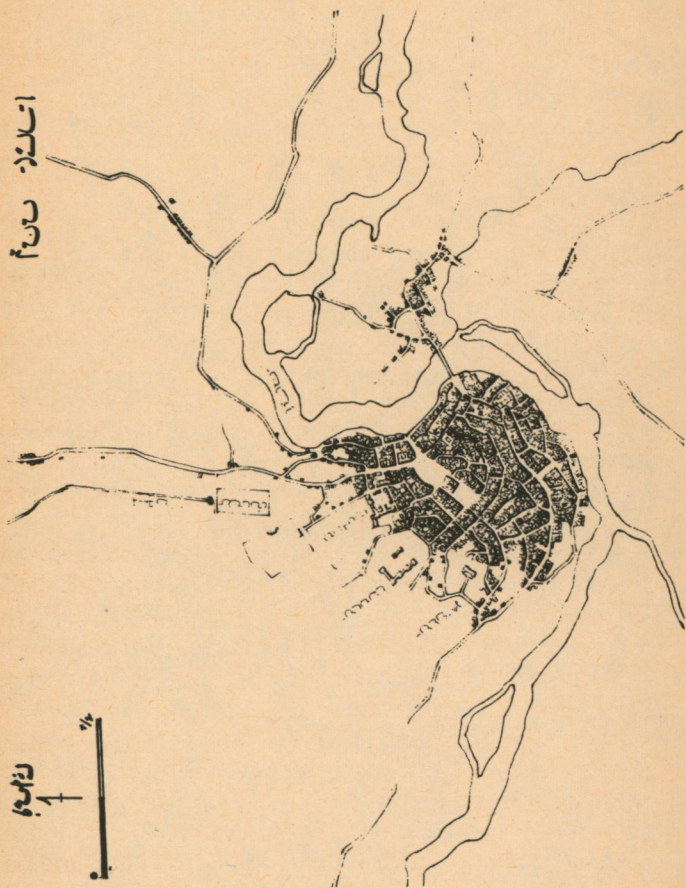


PLATE 1

THE PEOPLE OF PRASHAD

To so much as approximate, let alone pin-point, their location would be doing a gross disservice to a people to whose forbearance—say more—to whose hospitality I shall remain forever indebted. It is sufficient to say that the nearest landing strip, as we count nowadays, lies a good three days riding from the valley of the high fields, *ta tamtilselyav*, and much of that time is spent in a narrow declivity between awesome cliffs whose tops more often than not cut off any view of sky or sun.

My introduction to the remarkable place and people, Prashad and the Prashadsim, was through Lalmital Tolkom, a friend of my father (all this was many years ago), a member of Prashad by birth, who left there in his adolescence to become a successful, though I fear not a very happy, businessman in our world. He knew, of course, of my interest in out-of-the-way languages and peoples and, in due course, it was he who arranged that not only was I to go to this remote corner of the world, but that I was to be able to live there for a period exceeding a year in the relative comfort of his clan-house (an approximate translation of the institution known to them as the *khudkharad*, which is not nearly as difficult to say as it is to explain.) It also needs to be said that it would have been impossible to remain there for such an

extended period of time without such an arrangement, for there is very little provision for the casual visitor in *Palad Agormas*, the tiny Prashad metropolis.

In the play *Sholsidimsum Goisidimin* (Foreign Visitor), a copy of which I was fortunate enough to bring out with me, reference is made to the fact that Prashad is *not* in either Russia, China, Afghanistan, or India. It is, as they say, independent (*balsushamsum*), no matter what theories any of these neighboring lands might have about where *their* boundaries might fall in relation to the people of Prashad. But this independence is maintained only through a highly developed ability to remain quiet, unknown, uncontending, and low. To the degree they can they remain invisible, and it is not my intention to repay their kindness with a gratuitous betrayal.

One might well ask: in that case, why write about them at all? In extenuation I can only say that a description of their culture and society has a value and importance that will be made clear in the telling; it provides a salient challenge to what in contrast seems an insane world; I mean the one the rest of us live in.

At any rate, I was brought in from a place I could get to in the normal course of travelling, and my "disappearance" for a period of over a year went unnoticed since it had been prepared for at this end among family and friends, and no enquiries as to my whereabouts were ever made. It was fortunate—indeed it was a condition of my entry—that I was as unknown as the people I was intending to visit.

On landing I was met by a representative of the family with whom I was to live, a handsome young man by the name of Birital Tolkom who, fortunately for the both of us, knew some English. He had horses, and the first day we spent riding across the flat, stony alpine desert whose only vegetation was a kind of dry scrub. By nightfall we reached an oasis where there was a cluster of houses, a few fields sown with wheat and barley, and the only trees

I had seen since leaving my place of arrival. Before noon of the following day we had reached the mountains, and we began that long tortuous climb within what seemed the very bowels of these fierce, jagged, and thoroughly inhospitable peaks. The range seemed to be, at most places, over 20,000 feet above sea level. Our own altitude was considerably below that, although by the time we had reached the summit of the pass we were well over 10,000 feet. It was at the summit that we spent our second night, this time completely in the open.

The next morning a fantastic sight greeted the eye. We were looking down into a valley, but the valley itself was not visible as it was blanketed by a cloud that lay below us, covering all but a range of distant peaks on the opposite horizon. As we descended, now on a fairly good road, we entered this cloud that year around hangs over the valley of the high fields, breaking up somewhat around noon and forming again in the evening. It is this perpetual mist and the rain it produces that accounts for the high agricultural productivity of the valley, and at least in part, for its isolation, the fact of its being utterly unknown to the outside world, except to a few inhabitants of the surrounding desert and a very few intrepid travelers who have found their way here by pure chance.

In point of fact, the descent into the cloud does, for a second, take one's breath away, as if one might drown in this mass of vapor. In a short while, however, one comes down out of the cloud into a land of spectacular greenness, a sight enhanced considerably by its contrast with the long stretch of completely arid territory crossed on the preceding days of travel.

On all sides now there were fields of grain in terraces where wheat, barley, corn, rice, hay, and other feed crops were growing. There were orchards of pear, plum, apple, apricot, peach, cherry, something that looked like but probably wasn't mango, and other fruit trees. Just below the summit of the pass there were many fir trees, but these

gave way to mulberry, pepper, chestnut, elm, and deodars as the road continued its gradual descent into the valley. In some areas sheep were grazing in lush pastures; elsewhere there were cattle and a variety of domestic fowl, chickens, and ducks for the most part. Occasionally we passed through a neat village lining both sides of the road with low, whitewashed cottages, solidly built out of stone and beaten earth, with flat roof terraces fenced with brushwood.

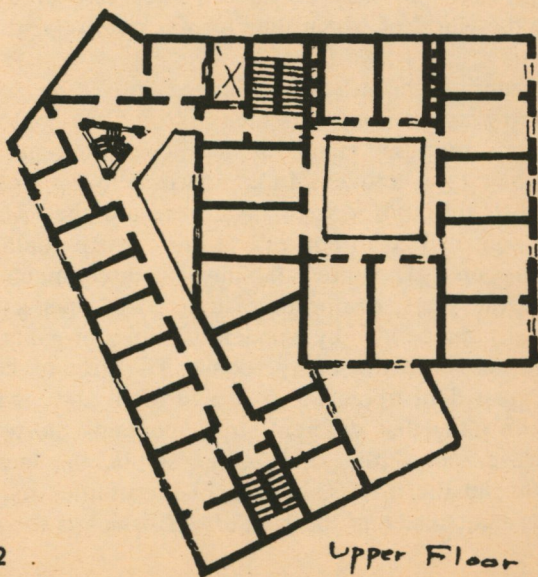
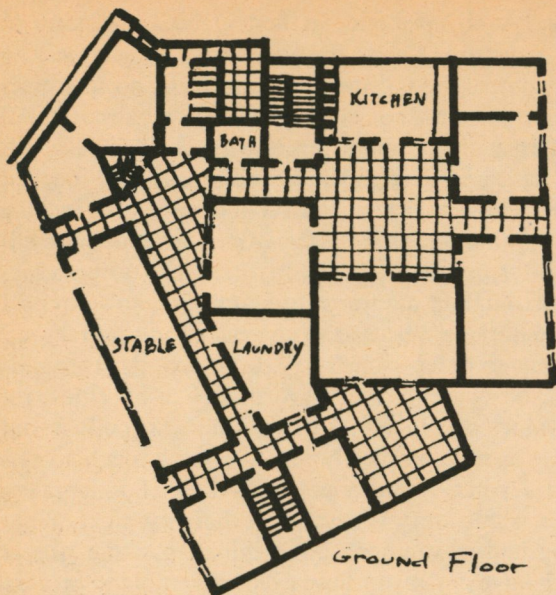
At about noon, just as the overcast was breaking in places so that one could see patches of sky and a glimpse of sun, we reached the wild, tumultuous river that runs through the center of the *tamtilselyav*. The river has a twisting course, for the smaller, secondary valleys that run down to it, used for intensive agriculture, are separated by high ridges of rock around which the river is forced to bend. To prevent excessive erosion by this extremely rapid flow, willow trees have been planted thickly along its sides; but even these, here and there, are washed into the stream by the violent, tearing thrust of the water.

After we had followed the river for a few hours, the sound of which was almost deafening at times, suddenly the city of Palad Agormas swung into view, perched on the ridge which it covers and which divides it roughly in two. The city occupies this steep, rocky site, around which the river makes one of its many bends, in order to leave the valleys on either side as much as possible free for agriculture. At first sight it appears to be all one complicated, terraced structure, its color a general dull brown or yellow. There appears to be little or no vegetation within the city, which only covers, however, a little more than a half-mile square. In other words, Palad Agormas is extremely compact. Indeed, this small area—along with a tiny, straggling suburb on the opposite bank of the river, which is connected to the city by a sturdy stone bridge—contains a population of around 50,000 people.

What struck me immediately was an odd lack of dif-

ferentiation. As I have said, at first glance it appears to be all one structure. There are no towers, no steeples, no spires or minarets, no mosques or cathedrals, no fortresses or castles, no palaces, not even a soaring smokestack. All of the buildings are of about three stories or less, all built of much the same materials: wood, stone, and packed earth, with yellow unglazed tile on the roofs. Indeed the whole of it struck me as if it were some lichenous growth on the rock-formed ridge. If the city itself has no punctuation, the surrounding nature, culminating in snow-covered peaks at the horizon, has that to spare, and in that respect, the city seems to defer to the magnificence of its surroundings; it doesn't contend. Paul Agormas, like all cities, reflects the values and ideals of the people who built it and live in it. I was not completely aware of how much so this was the case when it first came into view, but in many respects the whole story was there in that first sight. What I was being told was, among other things, that the people of Prashad have no institutionalized government or religion—but that they do have a deep respect for nature, for the world of which they form a relatively insignificant part.

Entering the city, we plunged into a maze of very narrow streets, some of which followed the contour, while others, composed mainly of steps, connected one "terrace" of the city to another. In comparison to the width of the streets, the houses were tall; these are the *khudkhard'l*, the so-called "clan houses", each of which contains about fifty people. They are rambling structures, much added to over the years, composed of a series of open courtyards, usually surrounded by wooden balconies or galleries which give access to the many rooms. The ground floor, with its great door upon the street and often a secondary door on an altogether different street, contains the workshops, storage rooms, the kitchen, the stable, the laundry, the bath and the privies, in fact all the utilities required for the maintenance of the *khudakhad*, which is the name for



the residents of the structure as a group. The upper floors (there are usually two) contain the individual rooms of the members of the *khudakhad*, including the nursery or nurseries.

The streets for the most part are paved with stone, quite clean, and because there are no shops open to the street on the ground floor, rather quiet. In other streets I saw rows of smaller structures, also of two or three stories, with open terraces let into the front of the building on the ground floor, where there were small tables with stools around them, and people could be seen eating and drinking and conversing. These were the *drukharad'l*, of which more will be said later.

While crossing the town on our way to what would be my "home," we came across one large open space, one of two market places in Palad Agormas (the other is across the river), the *unsa* where all commercial transactions occur. At one end of this was a large but rather low structure of one story. This was the *khomidakharad* (a name which in only the roughest approximation may be translated by "bank"), again one of two, the *divi* and the *boir* (to rhyme with "no-ear"), the "new" and the "old."

When finally we arrived at the *khudkharad* where I was to live during my stay, we entered by a rear door that led directly into the stable. Here I had my first lesson in how life was conducted in a family of this sort. To begin with there are no servants; therefore our first order of business was to unpack and unsaddle the horses, rub them down, and see to their feeding. After a long trip and three days riding, this seemed somewhat an anti-climax; but I realized that it was simply a necessity, the performance of which was taken for granted. The first "law" of this society, and particularly of the *khudakhad*, is that if you see something that needs doing, you do it. You never leave a mess for someone else to cope with.

Birital, my guide, then proceeded to show me to my

room, which was on the floor above the ground floor. It was large, rather dark as all the light came from a window on the courtyard, and warm. This warmth, which I learned to appreciate in the generally cool, damp climate of Prashad, came from the flues in one wall which were connected with the kitchen ovens on the floor below. On our way to my room, Birital showed me, on the ground floor, the privies and the bathroom. This last consisted of a room occupied by a large vat of hot water where, Japanese style, one soaked after one had soaped and rinsed. The facility was used simultaneously by both men and women, our inspection revealed.

It was curious, I thought, as we walked down the passages and through the courtyards and up the stairs and along the galleries around the courtyard, how little curiosity or interest of any kind my sudden appearance seemed to evince. Birital had said that he would make a more general introduction when we went down to the kitchen, after I had deposited my gear in my room, to have something to eat. But the people we met on our way scarcely raised an eye as we passed each other. I didn't detect any hostility in this, and later I came to realize that, living in such close quarters as all the Prashadsim do in the *khudkharad'l*, and indeed in their extremely densely populated little city, they leave as wide a margin as possible as far as personal contact is concerned; they don't impinge, demand, or importune on each other. In other words, they leave each other alone unless there is something that has to be said or something that needs to be done involving someone else.

The kitchen, where all meals are prepared and eaten (I was about to say "served," except that the whole process is very much every man on his own), is a huge room lined on one side with tile-covered charcoal stoves, and on the side opposite the stoves, with a range of brick ovens. Another wall is taken up by shelves and bins where kitchen utensils and staple foods such as rice and flour,

tea, and the usual seasonings are stored. In the center of the room is a great wooden table with benches and stools around it. The general procedure was that everybody did his own marketing and cooking, except for the very young and the extremely old. In practice, this meant that there was at any time a great variety of foods available, and it was quite acceptable to pick and choose, cafeteria style, among what had been prepared, since no one who cooked cooked only for himself, and there was always something left over. In this way I was provided with a quite adequate meal. The food was reminiscent of Chinese cooking, and though the people are distinctly not Chinese, they use chopsticks to eat with. After we had eaten, we went out to a well in the courtyard and rinsed out our bowls and cups and other utensils, and deposited them again on the shelves in the kitchen.

During the meal I was introduced to a few of the people with whom I was to live during the next year, but since there is no set time for eating—they have a horror of schedules—by no means all of the clan was present. In due course I did get to know them all, some well, some very casually; but this was only the result of my having been there over a long period of time. Naturally everyone living in the *khudkharad* knows everyone else—since he or she was born there. And this is the salient factor about this peculiar institution: no member of Prashad ever leaves his *khudkharad*, as a place of domicile, except that he leave the country entirely. A woman may have children, but these children are born and brought up in her *khudkharad*, with her brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles, not those of the father (assuming, as is almost invariably the case, that the father belongs to another *khud-akhad* or clan group). The only woman who would come to live with her “husband” in his *khudkharad* would be a peasant woman belonging to the so-called *sholnai sidim’l* (literally the “other people”) who work the land. In other words, for all intents and purposes, the institution

of marriage does not exist among the Prashadsim, but rather, more importantly, the family does; the family is the all-important and most basic element in their society, and it serves almost every purpose that the institutions of government in other countries have delegated to them.

In this respect, the *khudkharad*—I mean the building—serves as a school, an emergency hospital (even though there is a hospital of sorts in Palad Agormas), a fire department, a police department, an insane asylum if need be (though this is very rare), and as any other kind of institution that on occasion might be needed to serve the society. By virtue of its lack of rigid structure, it is extremely flexible; by virtue of the deep, mutual understanding of its inhabitants, it is a remarkably warm and nourishing environment for its children as well as its adults, despite, oddly enough, the relative stand-offishness that one senses immediately, especially among the older people.

The question came up after lunch, and in a certain sense as a result of it, as to how I was to make my contribution as a temporary member of the *khudakhad*. I had, naturally, brought along funds which would allow me to repay any expense made necessary by my presence; but it was not, I found out, to be a matter of repayment for services, but of active participation. I was to become a temporary member of Prashad, the commonwealth, and to bring this into effect we set off for the *khomidakharad*, the large building on the market place that I mentioned earlier.

Here it is necessary to give some background on the basic economy of Prashad and how it works. The people of Prashad own their land in common. They consider themselves to be a single tribe which has, as a matter of convenience, split itself up into approximately a thousand sub-tribes, the *khudakhad'l*, whose *khudkharad'l* make up the city of Palad Agormas. (I found the difference between these two terms, which are so similar in sound and

appearance, a difficult one to grasp at first, and I suspect, so does the reader.)

Originally this was entirely an agricultural economy, but there was apparently a strong feeling among them that any culture worth its salt required an urban element. Thus, perhaps as long as five centuries ago (their presence in this isolated location goes back at least two thousand years and probably longer, if the language is any indication), some of the sub-clans began the settlement of the town and the foundation of the *kholdekharad*, the so-called "university", and the *miradmida*, the hospital. While these two functions were at first deemed a sufficient reason for a separate community, it soon became apparent that the situation was inherently an unstable one. In the long run, all of the Prashadsim had to be either on the land or urbanized. Thus, on a gradual basis, over a period of at least two centuries, there was a deliberate and, to the degree possible, selective recruitment of tenants from the surrounding semi-desert lands to farm the land and tend to the livestock. The terms were favorable: in exchange for a rent set by the Prashadsim, the *sholnai sidim'l* (the "other people") were to set their own prices for their commodities, make their own decision as to what to raise, and keep their tenancy in the family after the death of the original tenant. This last was an enormous concession, for the members of Prashad have no private property except, so to speak, the clothes on their backs, and so at death, their share of the commonwealth reverts back to the common holding to be redistributed among the living.

In effect, a two-caste system was put into operation, one urban and the other agricultural; but this should not be taken as an implied superior and inferior relationship, for the kinds of physical labor required to maintain the *khudkharad*, as indeed the whole city and its few institutions, are not tremendously different in kind or less

onerous in nature than those required of the agricultural community.

It was to handle the collection and distribution of the rents, in which every member of Prashad, man, woman and child, from birth to death, has equally one share, that the *khomidakharad* was instituted. (Part of the confusion in separating terms is that all these old words dealing with their institutions have either the element *kharad* meaning "house" or *dakhad* meaning roughly "business" in them, and the last-mentioned manages to include both elements.) There is, as a matter of fact, no money at all in circulation; all transactions are carried out on the basis of credit (which is one meaning of the word *khomi*; others we will find out later). There is, however, a basic monetary unit, a *dakh*, which means "piece." Thus, when a member of Prashad makes a purchase in the market, he makes a notation that he has spent so many *dakh'l* of his share and gives this to the seller along with an identifying symbol. (No names are ever used—a security measure in case of invasion.) The seller deposits this at the *khomidakharad* to his credit, and these deposits are then used to pay his rent. The whole system is rather informal and depends on a great deal of mutual trust, which is another meaning of the word *khomi*.

It was therefore at the *khomidakharad* that I presented myself in the late afternoon of the day of my arrival, still under the patient guidance of Birital Tolkom, who of course had to interpret for me. We entered the building and immediately were in a large room whose roof was supported by huge beams leaving the floor entirely clear. This last was covered by rich, figured Persian and Chinese rugs, as was the raised bench or ledge that ran around three sides of the room against the walls. Against the fourth wall, opposite the main entrance—which interrupted the ledge—was a dais, also covered by rugs, upon which was a desk and a chair—and here the *such-emisim* or "president" sat. The light came from large

windows which had elaborate wood and paper screens set in them. These occupied most of the wall space between the stone pillars that supported the roof beams. The fourth wall, facing the entrance, had no windows but there were two doors in it on either side of the president's dais.

The effect was that of some luxurious room in an eastern palace or club. Indeed people seemed to be lounging about, squatting on the floor or perched cross-legged on the ledge, as if they were simply spending the time of day in these comfortable surroundings. From what I had already seen, I knew there were no rooms of comparable elegance and comfort in the *khudkharad*; and, as I learned, the *khomidakharad* was used exactly as if it were a club where people from different *khudakhad'l*, as well as members of the *sholnai sidim'l*, came to meet sociably and discuss matters of mutual interest. The people of Prashad do not visit each other or entertain each other at home; the *khomidakharad* provides one alternative for meeting one's friends outside the family. There are at least two others.

The ceremony of induction as a temporary member of Prashad proved to be a very simple matter. It involved my turning my money over to them and receiving in return a temporary "book" (*shisamtro kol*) which would allow me to buy commodities in the market place and to pay my way at the *drukharad*. Every member of Prashad has a *kol*; he receives it at birth, but he may not be allowed to use it himself until some time in adolescence, when on one of the most important days in the life of any Prashad-sim, he is permitted to use his own credit, a local form of coming of age. The *kol* is only the record, if even that for it is rarely kept up, of the member's share in the annual common income. My *kol* was the record of what I had put in, which was of course the limit to what I might take out. It was relatively unlikely that I would ever receive in return the same currency that I put in (the Prashadsim do

on occasion buy commodities brought in from the outside, and foreign currencies are required on such occasions to satisfy sellers who do not want, understandably, to take the whole amount out in trade). But the amount, translated by some system of their own into *dakh'l*, minus the amount I had spent, would be restored to me in some currency or other at the end of my stay. If I felt at the time that the bounds of mutual trust were being strained somewhat, I refrained from expressing the feeling. Since then I have learned to what an enormous extent *khomi*—credit, honor, mutual trust or whatever—was the foundation stone of their society without which they could not exist as they do. I was safer than I knew.

Having performed this little operation, and having visited the garden which, uniquely in tightly-built-over Palad Agormas, adjoins the *khomidakharad* on the side facing away from the market (this was the new *khomidakharad*; the old one, close to the bridgehead, also had a garden behind it going down to the river), we once again went home. I went to my room, whose few sticks of furniture consisted of a bed, a table, a chair, a little stove or brazier, and a chest for clothes and belongings, where I threw myself down on my bed in a state of complete exhaustion and promptly fell asleep.

When I awoke to the sound of gentle knocking, the room was pitch dark. I stumbled and groped my way to the door, and there again was Birital carrying a lamp, a little provision that I had forgotten I would need. He suggested I might like to come out with him after a suitable change of clothes and visit his *drukharad*. I readily consented, only wondering dimly what sort of institution this one would turn out to be. I made a rapid toilet and we set out. It must have been at least eight o'clock at night and I noticed that the *khudkharad* was almost completely deserted; from somewhere in the house one heard the sounds of children playing, presumably in the nurseries, and that was all.

We descended the ridge along narrow, dark lanes in the general direction of the bridge. In a short while we arrived at a small open space leading to the bridgehead where the old bank (*ta boir khomidakharad*) was pointed out to me, and we swung into another narrow, twisting lane this time lined along one side with those narrow buildings whose fronts were open to the street and on whose raised terraces the adult citizenry of Palad Agor-mas were to be seen seated in their finest attire—badly fitting Western-style clothes, for the most part, for the men; the women affecting rich scarves which they draped around their heads and shoulders in a manner reminiscent of the Indians—talking, drinking and eating.

When Birital mentioned “his” *drukharad*, he meant the one he usually patronized. The choice seems to lie with the one in which one is reasonably sure of finding no one from one’s own *khudkharad*. For their evening’s entertainment, the last thing they want to do is to sit around and exchange pleasantries with their own brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, and possibly even with their own mothers.

From what little Prashadsim I knew, I was aware that the word *druk* means “push” or “shove” or “root” and has a very strong sexual connotation. I was not, however, prepared, I’m afraid, to receive the full blast of these people’s sexual permissiveness on immediate exposure. My first indication of this was, having sat down with a group of people, friends of Birital, I was asked by a young man who, like Birital, had a modicum of English, whether I liked boys or girls. This reference—which I later realized was untypically gauche and malicious, in other words, meant for a barbarian—went completely over my head and I replied in some surprise and bewilderment, “whose?”. My reply was then taken to mean that I was quite open on the question, which, since it reflected their uncategorizing view, immediately ingratiated me with my new friend. It was only later that I began to realize to

what, unwittingly, I was exposing myself, and even to what extent I was by then committed.

Let me explain here as simply as possible that the *drukharad* is a place of entertainment which provides for not only the more superficial social amenities, food, drink, and friendly conversation and argument, but, on a voluntary basis and depending on whatever agreements might be reached, private opportunities for physical gratification. Polyandry is, of course, very common in Central Asia and Tibet, but among the Prashadsim, where marriage as an institution exists not at all, sexual permissiveness is absolute in theory and limited in practice only by one's ability to attract an amenable partner or partners. The *drukharad* serves not only the purpose of facilitating such meetings and arrangements, but, since the Prashadsim don't take friends of either sex home (not from prudery or fear of disapproval, however), on its upper floors it provides for privacy (or lack of same if that's what's wanted) and whatever other amenities are required for more intimate play.

In this respect, one must take into account the absolute equality afforded the woman of Prashad who, like everyone else, has her share and her *khudakhad* which provide her with lifelong security. There is little wonder, in this connection, that she does not share in the sexual and social anxieties of her Western contemporaries. There is, for instance, no such thing as an illegitimate child in Prashad, for the simple reason that the child belongs from birth not to the mother but to the *khudakhad* and to the greater clan, the Prashadsim as a whole. Also, it should be pointed out, they are relatively sophisticated in matters of contraception and general birth control, something required by their uniquely closed, stable, and somewhat static economy. Later I shall have a tale to tell in this regard, not at all flattering to the author, but so revealing of the society and its manners and mores that,

painful though it be, I cannot suppress it in the interest of *amour propre*.

In the week that followed, as part of my initiation into the remarkable world of Prashad, I visited the two other insitutions that make up the Prashadsim five-starred constellation: the *khudakhad*, the *khomidakharad*, the *mir-admida*, and the *kholdekharad*.

Of the remaining two, the *miradmida* is the one of which I can say the least. This is the hospital, and my knowledge of medicine, even relatively primitive medicine, is scant. Americans visiting Central Asia with medical supplies in hand know that in no time at all they become, for better or for worse, and, I sometimes very much suspect, for the latter, dispensing physicians to the local population. The *miradmida* of Palad Agormas, a relatively large, low structure on the edge of town near the top of the ridge, shares in some of this since it is the only such institution for hundreds of miles around. But its care—*miradmi*, by the way, means “care,” among other things—does not consist in handing out antibiotics and the other synthetic products of Western pharmacopeia. As far as I could determine, what medicine *is* available is based on Chinese herb-lore (which is not necessarily to be deprecated), but that the *miradmida* is primarily a place to which people who are ill may come and, in a sense, simply be cared for at no expense to themselves. The Prashadsim, as a matter of fact, rarely use it except in the case of some disease that they fear to be communicable, since, in much the same way, the *khudkharad* is a *miradmida*, a place of care. (In the Prashadsim language, the suffix *ida* means “place of.”) Thus, most of the patients in the *mir-admida* were either *sholnai sidim'l* or, using the more general term, *sholsidim'l*, foreigners.

Surgery was not performed except in emergencies, and my general impression was that, in terms of modern medical standards the *miradmida* left everything to be desired, except, perhaps, the most important thing: a real

interest in the well-being of human beings. This is true if modern medical practice is any criterion of the value of such an institution. The only other thing that caused me to wonder about the *miradmida* was how the name wonderfully managed to escape having one of those ugly *kharad* or *dakhad* endings.

An institution that did not manage to escape was the *kholdekharad*, and again one throws up one's hands and settles for the inadequate and inaccurate word "university." The inadequacy of this term is best indicated by pointing out that the *kholdekharad* has no students, no faculty, not even, God save the mark, an administration. It occupies a group of buildings also on the outskirts of the town somewhat downhill from the *miradmida*. I see that "group of buildings" might be misleading. The "campus" actually consists of one low, rambling building which at first sight seems to be several, and two long low barracks-like structures. The entire ensemble surrounds a rock-and-gravel-strewn yard which is relatively level. The largest building contains a series of rooms of various sizes which are used for informal lectures, conversations, musical and dramatic performances, and for the occasional exhibition of art work; another series of rooms constitutes the library; and in another suite of three rooms the press is located, the only one in Palad Agormas. The other two structures consist of one large room each; these are the work rooms or study halls of the scholastic community.

For that, a scholastic community, is what the *kholdekharad* consists of; a group of scholars with no particular rank or organization whose primary work is the translation and subsequent publication (in quite small quantity) of a vast variety of work from one of any number of foreign languages into their own. The main sources are English, Russian, and Chinese, but French, German, Italian, Japanese, and a mixed bag of Indian languages are well represented. The members of the *kholdekharad* are a little tight-lipped about where and how they receive their

original material but there is a simple answer. Just as my father's friend, Lalmital Tolkom, had left Prashad in his adolescence, a good many others, particularly young men, have always done the same over the years and, from wherever they are, by a circuitous underground route, they manage to get reading material as well as letters and other communications back to the homeland and the *khudakhad*. (Witness my own case where a degree of preparation was required on both ends.)

The *kholdekharad* also publishes, on occasion, works written in Prashadsim, but this represents a very small part of the total, probably no more than one or two items a year. For the most part, the Prashadsim are too busy to write anything other than those short poems which serve as letters to their friends.

The *kholdekharad* is, however, the temple of their language and perhaps now is as good a time as any to say something about that; for the language is as important to the Prashadsim as any of their more concrete institutions. As a language it is a difficult one to place; the vocabulary, except for a few leads, seems unrelated to any other, but in general construction it has elements of both Indo-European and Ural-Altaic or Turkic origin. If Sino-Tibetan has had any influence at all, it has been in the direction of simplicity, for the Prashadsim grammar, while not the simplest, is surprisingly uncomplicated for the language of a society as isolated as this. The languages of relatively primitive peoples are usually marked by a highly involved construction and by a lack of general or abstract terms. For instance there will be hundreds of words for different kinds of trees or fish but no word for "tree" or "fish". This is certainly not true of the language of Prashad which is surprisingly rich in abstract terms. However, this is definitely the result of their urbanization and the resulting cosmopolitanism which is centered in the *Kholdekharad*. They may be physically at a remove from their fellow human beings, but mentally they are quite

aware of the main currents of contemporary thought. Still, there are large gaps, for which they don't pretend to apologize, in the vocabularies of science, technology and, they admit with pride, jurisprudence. A culture without laws, lawyers, courts, judges, prisons, police or criminals can exist without a great deal of the linguistic ballast that plagues our own. Again, a society that has no politicians, no bureaucracy, and no advertising industry, in other words, no need to manipulate people by manipulating words, can, without too much embarrassment, continue to call itself *Prashad* which means "truth."

In essence the language distinguishes between two general types of words: *drukhpadi'l* or root words which carry most of the information, and *kthirpadi'l* or auxiliary words which link and relate the information words. The former are extremely versatile in that, by the addition of prefixes and suffixes, and sometimes just by their position in a sentence, they can take on the function of a great many parts of speech. Any *drukhpadi*, for instance, can be a verb. A *kthirpadi* usually only serves one function; in this category are the articles, pronouns, conjunctions, what we call prepositions but which, in many cases, are post-positional in Prashadsim, as well as a large variety of names having to do with time, weight, distance and other measures.

To the credit of the language, there are no case endings in the usual sense. There is no gender, no agreement between adjective and noun, no concordance, and while the verb has a full set of tenses, there is really only one very regular conjugation and only two verbs whose irregularities require any special attention. It is, in other words, a language like any other but better than many in its degree of simplicity. On that scale it lies somewhere between Italian and Chinese, leaving such primitive tongues as German and Russian far behind in its dust.

There is also a Prashadsim alphabet which looks vaguely Arabic but which is completely unrelated to that

vowel-poor system. The Prashadism alphabet is a phonetic one in which each character represents a single sound wherever it appears. Although there are more than forty different symbols, these are based on a mere handful of sixteen root characters. They have also adopted a system of romanization, but since it uses the standard roman type font which is the only one they possess, it is not nearly as accurate as their own alphabet in describing sounds.

I have said before that the Prashadsim are busy, but one might wonder, outside of the responsibility of carrying on the work of the *khomidakharad*, the *kholdekharad* and the *miradmida*, what they do. Even these three institutions do not occupy everybody's time, in fact they absorb only a minority of the population, and that only on a part-time basis. But, on a day to day basis, everyone has his hands full. This day begins not inordinately early—rising with the sun is for the people on the land—with most people up and about between eight and nine in the morning. After making breakfast, usually bread and tea, and helping see to it that the very young, the very old, and the sick are fed, the next order of business is general maintenance and janitoring. The Prashadsim are not fanatical housekeepers, but buildings on this scale housing this many people—fifty on the average—require a minimum of daily maintenance or a serious breakdown would result. I never heard anybody give anyone an order as to what to do; I have heard people ask for help in doing something, sweeping down the stairs or mending the roof or what have you, and I have often heard people asking if they could help. At any rate, the horses do get fed and cared for, laundry is done and floors are swept, but all on an individual basis without assignment; the responsibility always lies with everyone. The same is true of marketing; no list is made up, no menu devised. People simply go out and buy things in the market, and yet I was never aware that there was any unnecessary duplication or

wastage. This technique of cooperation, which is uniquely their own, is an essential development out of their life style; it is their "way" without which nothing would work and, long since, they would have foundered in chaos and disorder, contention and competition; or they would have succumbed to regimentation and oppression.

Someone, usually a man, takes on the responsibility of teaching the younger children how to read and do simple arithmetic; but it must be imagined that the *khudkharad* itself is the most practical kind of school that could be devised. It is a beehive of activity during the day, deserted only at night, and no curiosity is ever discouraged, no question left unanswered, no interest not met with a practical demonstration or an initiation in the techniques of making something.

Most household articles are indeed made in the *khudkharad*, as well as most articles of clothing; pottery, spinning, weaving, sewing, wood and metal working are essential crafts carried on at all times in the workshops and the courtyards of the *khudkharad*. The staffing of the *miradmida* and the *khomidakharad* are a result of a specialization that occurs as the individual enters his adolescence; some young people inevitably do drift towards these institutions or in the scholastic direction, but it is always voluntary. Large projects such as the building of the adque duct, the reservoir, and the water-delivery system (it fed the well in our courtyard) may include every man, woman and child over a period of time as well as members of the *sholnai sidim'l*.

Some young people decide in their adolescence that life in the society of Prashad is too narrow, too limiting, too static; and so they leave. But, remembering my father's friend, I think they do so at the expense of an intense, lifelong, personal regret. Needless to say, once they are in the world of passports, taxes and conscription, there is no way to return to the anonymous ranks of the Prashadsim except to the prejudice of these last. Even I, young as I

was, was already too committed to the outside world to ever be able to make Prashad my permanent home. I was, even if only very marginally, known.

In time, I too chose my "own" drukharad; not because I had grown tired of the company of Birital Tolkom but that I feared it might become tiresome for Birital forever and always to have me in tow. It also might have an inhibiting effect on his own pleasure as he would feel obliged to stick with me even though opportunities might occur to slope. A change also meant that I could not depend on Birital's English, which was a lazy habit of mine whose acquisition I minded more than he since he wanted the practice.

The result of this move was that I met Kharshal (the word means "Rose"), a woman a few years my senior, handsome, and very self-assured. I suppose, in a sense, that's the wrong word to use when speaking of Prashadsim men and women. They almost all had an ease and security about them that at moments made me despair, because, at that age, these were the qualities I most lacked, even though I attempted, quite unsuccessfully, to conceal the fact. Rather, I think my lack of ease was my drawing card; it *was* that for Kharshal. I was unique and she instinctively put me under her wing. I was inexperienced (life in a *khudkharad* does not protect one from experience; they would consider giving children formal classes in sex education a complete waste of time), and Kharshal saw an opportunity to put her unique didactic gifts to work. Actually, I was grateful to her, for I was, after all, a fish out of water, an innocent lamb, I won't say among wolves, but surely among a species whose sophistication on certain levels left one goggle-eyed and gasping. The Prashadsim don't know how to use a camera or tune in a television set or even to type on a typewriter, but these technological lapses are miniscular indeed when set in the balance with their all-encompassing, really magnificent understanding of how life is to be lived. To put it at its

Character	Romani- zation	Pronunciation	Character	Romani- zation	Pronunciation
⌒	a	<u>f</u> ather	⌒.	th	<u>th</u> in
⌒	'	mo <u>th</u> er	⌒	v	<u>v</u> an
⌒	o	do <u>g</u>	⌒.	f	<u>f</u> an
⌒	e	cha <u>o</u> s	⌒	m	<u>m</u> an
⌒	e	be <u>d</u>	⌒	n	<u>n</u> et
⌒	i	fee <u>u</u>	⌒	ng	<u>ng</u> ing
⌒	i	tip	⌒	d	<u>d</u> ot
⌒	ai	high	⌒	l	<u>l</u> ot
⌒	oi	bo <u>y</u>	⌒	r	<u>r</u> ag
⌒	ei	sa <u>y</u>	⌒	w	<u>w</u> ill
⌒	o	no <u>t</u> e	⌒	y	<u>y</u> et
⌒	u	sue	⌒	yu	<u>u</u> se
⌒	au	ho <u>w</u>	⌒	h	<u>h</u> at
⌒	iu	ne <u>w</u>	⌒	kh	Ba <u>ch</u> (Ger.)
⌒	s	<u>s</u> o			
⌒	sh	<u>sh</u> am			
⌒	z	<u>z</u> eal			
⌒	ch	<u>ch</u> ain			
⌒	jh	plea <u>s</u> ure			
⌒	k	<u>k</u> id			
⌒	g	<u>g</u> od			
⌒	j	<u>j</u> ob			
⌒	b	<u>b</u> ad			
⌒	p	<u>p</u> ad			
⌒	t	<u>t</u> an			

(Note: This list does not include those characters that are only used in transcribing foreign languages into the Prashadsim alphabet, for instance the 'th' sound in the or the 'u' sound in French lune or German grün. However, such characters do exist.)

mildest, they simply take the cake; and, in a sense, I was the cake. I was wolfed down in one gulp but, at least then, I enjoyed it immensely. I felt that in a moment, in a single leap, I had grown up—and to such wonders.

Then came what was for me in my innocence, with my poor, mingy, Western values, a great awakening. Kharshal quite parenthetically happened to mention one day that she was pregnant. That she was carrying *my* child was what I immediately assumed and she, off-handedly, thought that that was most probably the case. I was stunned, I was shocked, I was literally laid low by this casually dropped bit of information. What in the world could I do? What arrangements could I make? How could I get Kharshal and my child out of Prashad? My visit had only three or four months left to go; this was due to waning funds and other arrangements and decisions previously made.

When I attempted to bring these matters up to Kharshal, she looked at me as if I had left my senses. Leave Prashad? Whatever for? But how could I abandon her—abandon her and the child—and to what? She wanted to know, in the name of all that was sane, what I meant. The fact that she was pregnant certainly couldn't, in her mind, account for my sudden hysteria. As a matter of fact, she couldn't rightly see how my feelings were involved at all. What claim, after all, did I have over her or any child that she might see fit to bear?

I became indignant. After all, I was the father. She had admitted as much, and that was the basis of my claim over her *and* the child. At this she was both amused and bewildered. She said some rather coarse things and told me, in effect, to come off it; no such claim existed among the Prashadsim and my feelings of responsibility and ownership were not only inappropriate, they were utterly meaningless. This to me was an outrage. That child was mine and, in a sense, she was mine. I was not to be deprived of my right, my responsibility, my clear title. My

very name was at stake. She felt my brow for fever and told me to go home; or if I was not willing to go home, she would. At any rate, after this ridiculous outburst, she was certainly going to change her *drukharad*.

When she left I ran to find Birital. I took him from his friends and I poured out my tale of bewilderment and hurt. He smiled, he soothed, he told me what I already knew intellectually but could not accept emotionally. Not only did I have no claim over either the mother or the child-to-be, but even *she* had no real claim over her own offspring. The child would be, from the moment of birth, a member of Prashad, and the responsibility for its upbringing was that of the *khudakhad* to which it was born. Indeed, motherly identification was discouraged and while she might breast-feed her child, if she felt so inclined, once weaned the child was just one among all the children in the *khudkharad* for which everyone was responsible, for which no one had any special, over-riding claim. The child would not be born by the time I was scheduled to leave and there was absolutely no way I could force Kharshal to leave with me.

That the Prashadsim do not trust the ability of two individuals to satisfy each other emotionally and sexually over an indefinite period of time, and therefore, find this, as a basis for family, a singularly weak and inadequate one, is basic to their way of life. To bring up children on such a sketchy and vulnerable foundation is, to them, unthinkable. The child needs the stability of his clan, he needs a dozen fathers and a dozen mothers all with as many talents and interests and the ability to be warm and protecting. That is what the *khudakhad* provides and, at this stage, they see no reason for reform, let alone revolution. Provide one and they will consider that too: after all, there is no law that keeps things the way they are; just the simple good sense inherent in the arrangement.

Thus Birital talked me down and smoothed me out and, if the knife has never left me, at least I have grown used

to its sticking in me; the sense of what of me I have left there, irretrievably and inexorably. I saw no more of Kharshal. I shall never see the child. I do not know to this day whether it was a boy or a girl, whether it lived or died. But to assuage a certain residual and no doubt foolish bitterness that sometimes still wells up inside me, I know that, had I been a member of Prashad, I might know no more; my responsibility would have lain with the children of my own *khudakhad*, not some other.

In our society today, where only the dry husks of "democratic" or "Christian" or "Marxian" idealism conceal the complete blight of the seed within; where the only remaining purpose of any society is the maintenance of a status of power without regard to the quality of life produced; the on-going reality and vitality of the uninstitutionalized values of the people of Prashad seem utterly foreign and almost unnatural. They have no institutionalized façade behind which their life values can decay and die unnoticed. Their values are either alive and operative in the society as a whole or they aren't, and no verbal formula or no structure of courts and legislatures can conceal the fact. This is perhaps the most important lesson they have to teach; for their particular life style may not be universally approved of. Their complete lack of sentimentality, their indifference to technological advance, their acceptance of a relatively meager equal sharing of whatever is available, their second rating of the claim of the individual may all be anathema to a majority of those outside their culture. But whatever motivates their lives, whatever functioning principles produce their unique culture, they are nothing if not real and in operation. They are not institutionalized except in their simple, day by day working out. This is the element of value for the rest of us. In Prashad it is not belief that sustains the system, it is action, mutual trust, honesty in the face of what exists; it is *khomi*, it is consideration for others, it is imagination about life without resort to tricks and

trappings, it is seeing human existence in the greater setting of all nature, of all existence.

The Prashadsim live their values as simply and quietly as possible, calling no attention to themselves, competing with no one, not contending or proselytizing. They are aware that the mad rest of us may wipe them out in the process of wiping out ourselves by either war or the exploitation of our planet. But they have no power except what they share equally; they have no influence except that what they represent may be an influence; they cannot hope to change the world in their image or any other without destroying themselves. Thus they cling to *khomi* as others cling to hope; and if there is ever a revolution in the world in favor of their values and their system (or lack of system), it will be because they have remained just silent enough, just still enough, just without raising a finger or stirring a wind. They understand the paradox in that if no one else does.

An Informal Introduction to the Language of Prashad

A short conversation:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| — <i>Nyod dai bli?</i> | "What do you want?" (1) |
| — <i>Dai fi antulitel forfai-id?</i> | "Do you have something to drink?" (2) |
| — <i>Kai menida an faisil sishilisio.</i> | "Here is a glass of water." (3) |
| — <i>Sha bal irda nyod ablihamum.</i> | "That's not what I meant." (4) |

(1) The peculiar English "do" does not, of course, translate. *Nyod dai bli'n*, would be more polite but that's for a later lesson. *Nyod dai'l blin*, would be used if more than one person were being spoken to. (' is pronounced like the "u" in "dull.")

(2) In asking a question, the subject and the verb are never reversed. If the question is not preceded by an asking word such as *nyod* (what) or *sili* (why), the question is implied by a rising tone on the final word.

(3) *Menid* is a root word meaning "being in a place,

rest, remaining." *Faisil* means something to drink out of, not the material glass which is *bailkam*. *Sio* means "of" or "from" and, like most positional words, is added as a suffix to the noun it refers to. Thus, the sentence reads literally: Here is a glass water-of.

(4) The final sentence reads literally: That not is what I meant. The root *ir* means, for one thing, being in a state or condition as contrasted with *menid*, being in a place. The verb *irid*, to be, as is often the case with this verb in other languages, is slightly irregular, but *ir* also means "god" or "wrong" (for reasons best known to the Prashad-sim); *sha ira* would mean "that is wrong" or "that is god." This also illustrates that any root word can be made into a verb. *Sha irtumia* means "that is difficult," or literally "that difficults." The pronoun *a*, meaning "I," is never separated from the verb, thus *ablijhamum* means "I meant." *Al* or "me" is used where there is no verb to support the *a*.

The normal conjugation of a verb in the present tense goes as follows:

akhebito—I give
dai khebili—you give
si, se, su khebila—he, she, it gives
ami khebilon—we give
dai'l khebin—you give (plural)
sei khebilan—they give

This pattern of *o, i, a, on, in, an* endings carries through all but the imperative and the past tenses, thus: *akhebitilvo*, I am giving; *akhebito'*, I will give; *akhebito'n*, I would give; *akhebitido*, I may, might give; but *khebilami*, let us give. *Akhebilum* is "I gave" and the *um* ending is the same for all persons. The same applies for *akhebitu'm*, I was giving, used to give; *akhebitum'*, I will have given; *akhebitu'n*, I would have given; *akhebitum'n*, I had given; *akhebitidum*, I may, might have given.

The root word (*drukhpadi*) as distinguished from the auxiliary or helping word (*kthirpadi*), has a very versatile

character. By itself it is always a noun or word idea; *goim*, sight, scene; *goimidam* is the noun gerund, seeing; *goim'l*, sights, scenes; *goimid*, to see (the root serves as the stem for all verb endings); *semgoimid*, to be seen; *goimin*, a person who sees; *goimida*, a place where one sees; *goim-sim*, an extrinsic quality, seen; *goimsum*, an intrinsic quality, "the seeing eye;" *goimibi*, a capability or potential quality visible; the adverbs *goimsimi* and *goimsumi* have no exact equivalents in English, but *goimibai* means "visibly;" *goimo*, more seeing (*mo* is the comparative ending); *goimul*, most seeing (*mul* is the superlative ending).

In writing the Prashadsim alphabet (see Plates 3 and 4), the vowels are placed between the consonants close to their tops and linked with them where possible or, in printed form, above and separate from the consonants.

The short poem that ends our introduction to the language is typical of the somewhat ironic little messages the people of Prashad write each other:

*Esram,
tam so tali so tudam
dai telpilshami?
Atelpilshamo dil,
diliam.*

Young man,
do you choose
art or life or both?
I choose you,
little Mister.

—James Keilty

Danger of 'guerrilla' war in US

New York, January 10

A retired United States Army intelligence officer has suggested that unrest in America's cities could lead to full-scale prolonged guerrilla warfare involving large army units, which could be as difficult to quell as guerrilla activities in South-east Asia.

In the January issue of the "Army Magazine" Colonel Robert B. Rigg writes:

"So far, the causes of urban violence have been emotional and social. Organisation, however, can translate these grievances into political ones of serious potential, and result in violence or even pro-

longed warfare.

"Man has constructed out of steel and concrete a much better 'jungle' than nature has created out of Vietnam. Such cement-and-brick jungles can offer better security to snipers and city guerrillas than the Vietcong enjoy in their jungles, elephant grass and marshes."

Guerrilla warfare in the cities might be fomented by Communist China or Cuba, he says. Some US intelligence circles were aware that the more dangerous conspirators in ghettos were being prompted by members of the pro-Chinese wing of the US Communist Party.

Neither full application of firepower nor political negotiation was likely to be effective against

urban guerrillas, he says.

"There are measures that offer a better solution if we are to keep our cities from becoming battlegrounds: penetration by police intelligence, and reliance on traditional FBI methods. Such efforts must begin now so as to prevent organized urban guerrilla violence from gaining momentum.

"A whole new manual of military operations, tactics and techniques needs to be written in respect of urban warfare of this nature. Army units must be orientated and trained to know the cement-and-asphalt jungle of every American city."

Colonel Rigg says that manoeuvres carried out in large cities could prove a deterrent to urban insurrection.—Reuter.

From the Manchester "Guardian", 11th January, 1968.

THE INCEPTION OF THE EPOCH OF MRS. BEDONEBYASYOUDID

New York, late on a cold Thursday evening in January: an all-night Chinese restaurant in the East Village; the observation platform of the Empire State Building; the underground garage of a large apartment block; the 125th St. station of the IRT.

The lady is in four places at the same time tonight. Not bad for a trial run. Next week, forty. The month after next perhaps four hundred. In the winter snow, the prints of her high-buttoned boots, the dragging scuff-marks of her long drab skirt, and here and there—apparently at random—the traces of her birch for naughty children.

The last known sign of her predecessor was two weeks ago in Tompkins Square. Two draft-resisters had set up a Christmas crib containing a picture of a baby flayed to death with napalm, and invited passers-by to sign a memorial book balanced on a music-rack they had—ah—*borrowed* from the nearby bandstand. And there in neat script, the ink running a little in pale-blue tears as snowflakes melted down the page, was inscribed: "Do as you would be done by. Amen."

But that was last year, and the last entry in the book. This year . . .

"Ah, it's cold up there, man! And it's late—you'll only have a few minutes anyway."

But the young whiteman wanted to go up, a dollar fifty worth of wanting: in his jacket with fur trimming at cuffs and collar, big clumsy boots but no gloves or hat. His ears were pink at the tips, like neon signs on low current. So, sighing, the elevator operator took him up, the only person on the high platform overlooking the city, clutching a package under his left arm and mechanically moving his fingers to stop them going numb with the cold.

Alone, he put his burden down on the surrounding ledge and looked over towards the wire nets preventive of suicide, brushing at snow settled since the last clearance job. He walked all around looking at the brilliance of the city, the gaudy lights, the high magnificent buildings. It was clear now, and going to freeze like hell. Earlier it had snowed.

Sure of being for a moment unobserved, the whiteman opened one end of his package and bestowed a kiss on the thing he took out of it. More tipped than thrown over the side, leaving barely a mark in the accumulated snow on the wire nets, it landed and lay where it had fallen.

Hating to emerge even for a moment into the cold, the elevator operator called last trip down. Obediently the young whiteman went, his breath misting before his mouth.

It was five minutes before Friday.

It was the real New Year's Eve.

"Now let's see . . ." Quietly moving from car to car, the five dark figures checking and assessing Buicks and Cadillacs, Mercedes and Jaguars. "Right here is fourteen-oh-four's. He goes 'way downtown. Wall Street somewhere, I guess."

In a smart uniform, white top of cap contrasting with ebony of face, white hands, in gloves of course, the blackman tapped the dash because the fuel gauge sometimes

stuck at the zero. It swung over and showed three-quarters full.

"That one," said another of the group. A third, in a shabby Canadian lumberjack coat of dark blue and dark-green tartan, dropped on his back on the floor and wriggled underneath, feeling in darkness for the gas-tank. The magnet in his hand snicked, and he cursed, slid it loose against its powerful drag, and re-sited it. To the side which remained exposed he attached a flat can. The can held an acid-glass timer, not very accurate but good enough if the target zone is more than an hour wide, mercury fulminate, and ordinary black powder extracted from shotgun shells. The fourth and fifth members of the group, sharing the load, were toting a cardboard carton containing thirty similar cans, plus six specials employing a 1.5-volt dry cell and a timer adapted from a Japanese watch selling around 42nd Street at \$8.95.

"And this one belongs to a cat in publishing. Goes up to the north end of Madison Avenue some place, far's I know."

"Good."

But the gas-tank was almost empty. Instead, they chose one belonging to an advertising copywriter working a block or two further south. And another, and another. There were seventy cars parked in the basement garage. They reserved the specials for owners who were likely to be on the move at ten a.m. Friday.

When the carton was empty, the blackman shook hands with his visitors and went back to the little office from which he kept watch. Removing the .38 whose license fee was added to the management costs of the building from the drawer in which it lived, he sited it artistically on the floor where it might be expected to have fallen when he was clubbed unconscious.

"Okay, baby, hit me," he sighed. "But aim careful, huh? And when you get around to tying my legs, for chris-sake don't give me gangrene!"

It was three-fifteen. The birchmarks had not yet appeared on the snow. Before they did, traffic would have muddled it into slush.

Candy, gum—products for orally fixated travellers hating to give up their cigarettes for even the length of a subway ride. On the walls, stark as a public urinal's, big black figures: 125, 125, 125 . . .

Coming off a local and crossing the platform as though waiting for a late *late* show of an express to take him 'way 'way uptown, the brownman peered, this way, that. From the side pocket of a big hunching overcoat like a twenties, college boy's, bootlegger size but not containing illegal whiskey, he removed a thing in crumpled brown paper. No one else except a shivering bum whispering dreams of wine. At the back of the miniaturized market, consolation for a coin, the exactly designed contents of the paper package: it fitted, it wore a sleek red-paint overcoat of its own, shabbied by exposure while the paint was wet to the air of New York, five stories above the street. It looked—and this was the point—as though it belonged where he had put it.

When the next train came by, bound far northward into the uncharted regions of the Bronx, the brownman boarded it and rode away to anywhere.

It was four-thirty-five.

Stale cooking smells lingered in the air of the Celestial City because the door was always slammed rapidly shut after every entrance by an alert little man with almond eyes. Too cold out to waste the cost of precious heat on the public thoroughfare . . .

At this time, though, only the wanderers ignorant of the presence of the lady—down by the door end, leaning close across a table, a boy about nineteen, a girl much younger, holding hands and keeping on asking for more jasmine tea (and the boy vanishing to the toilet because

of it, three times for the girl's one), too desperate for each other's company to separate and go home, well-dressed enough to justify going on with the supply and no doubt lacking a place to lie down together. This surrogate welcome. Also a very old man mumbling the rice he insisted on having overcooked, a little sauced: detritus of the street.

Watching from the far back of the restaurant, sallow, self-contained, dark-suited: a man in his early thirties, short, lean, thoughtful of expression.

The door opened and a whiteman sat down at a table some distance from the loving couple. When he had ordered food and tea, and received it, and sampled it, the watcher rose and went courteously to his table—as it were, “Is it good, sir?” Armoured by Asian anonymity, he waited for a reply.

Chewing, the whiteman said, “Very good. Both Hal and Eugene called in—said they had no trouble. And mine went pretty smooth.”

A nod. An . . . *inscrutable* smile. It was five-five A.M. The lady's button boots were printing the outside snow.

At exactly nine-seven, when the throat of Fifth Avenue was choked with traffic, one of the daughter elements of a so-called “guava-plus” bomb—filched from the stores of a company responsible for key areas of munitions supply for the United States armed forces in Vietnam—exploded on the anti-suicide nets of the Empire State Building. Although the device had been designed for optimum effect following a ground-burst as one member of a “mother” bomb containing several dozen such “daughters,” the force of its explosion was adequate to rupture the wire netting it rested on, and the small steel spheres it emitted caused a satisfactory number of casualties. There were no fatalities, but Gloria Schultz, 18, entered a permanent coma owing to severe brain damage, while Stephen V. Lord, a cab-driver, sustained lifetime loss of the use of

his right hand when one penetrated the roof of his vehicle, and three-year-old twins Edward and Elvin Marshall, being taken by their mother Mrs. Sarah Marshall to see a pediatrician, were struck in the head and stomach respectively, causing long-term hospitalization. Additionally there were more than two hundred minor casualties reported to city health authorities, some directly due to the steel balls, some to secondary effects such as flying glass from broken windows.

At nine-nine, during one of the busiest periods of the morning at the 125th Street IRT station, a container began to leak a gas officially termed "DN," not recommended—to quote the manual regarding its applicability—"where fatalities are impermissible." A panic ensued. Mrs. Gladys Krantz, 62, was trampled to death in front of the exit turnstiles. Broken arms and feet were treated at a nearby hospital, and Vivian L. Borghardt, 19, lost an eye, apparently as the result of being struck by an umbrella carried by Jane Prink, 24, a fashion model. No deaths could be directly attributed to the gas, although three days later Dr. Harold W. Stranding, the well-known expert on bronchial and pleural conditions, forecast that a number of patients who were afterwards to succumb to such immediate causes as pneumonia might have their demise accelerated by their exposure to the gas.

Between nine-twenty-nine and ten-forty-two, thirty-six cars subsequently established to have been parked overnight in the basement garage of an apartment block whose night attendant was at the time hospitalized with a suspected fracture of the skull suffered explosions of their gas-tanks, occasioning twenty-eight direct and eleven indirect fatalities and a substantial number of severe burns sustained by pedestrians walking past those of them which had been parked on the street. A Buick belonging to Ralph S. High, 32, sales representative for a chemical corporation, exploded and caught fire while travelling at the legal limit on a parkway in New Jersey, *en route* to

his employers' major factory, and caused a pile-up of eight following cars when it slewed across the road. Five of the eleven indirect fatalities resulted from the crash.

There were also two cases of paralysis from the waist down, and Mrs. Eleonora Gage, 23, a wife of eight months, lost the baby she was expecting in early March.

Anonymous among the staff of a Chinese restaurant in the East Village—who, after all, can tell these Asiatics apart?—Ngo Duy Thinh listened critically as the news of “accident” after “accident” broke into the regular broadcasts of WNBC. He seldom bothered to glance up at the screen of the set. Certainly he did not share the enthusiasm with which his companions, a whiteman, a brownman and a blackman lingering over a late Chinese breakfast, greeted each new disaster as it was reported by the commentator. He had seen too many similar events—three-dimensional, live and in color—while serving as Chief of Casualty Administration with the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, commonly called the Vietcong . . . or Charlie.

Yet, after years of one-sided suffering, it did not seem too soon for the reign of Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby to give way to the epoch of Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid.

He spoke up suddenly, conscious that his voice was rasping in his throat, conscious even more of the fact that his listeners were nominally the people whom he had been raised and taught to hate. “All right!” The words were foreign, alien, awkward, but they had to be assembled into sense. “Now those stone-scows working out of Pier Number Seventy-Two, the ones you suggested as platforms for mortars. Have we made any contact with the people operating them?”

“That’s my boy,” the whiteman said. “*That’s my boy!*”

But I’m not, Ngo Duy Thinh said silently. *Haven’t you—even you—learned that by now? It’s been a hell of a long time.*

Aloud, he merely repeated his question. It was not until twelve-twenty that the first tanks clanked and rumbled down Houston Street at walking pace, flanked by men in helmets who carried carbines with full magazines.

—John Brunner



THE ELECTRIC NEON MERMAID

Dream wings, death wings beating about me in the darkness, beating in steady powerful rhythms that caress me, riding on the back of the sea moth. The sky is a blinding surface, as if someone had stretched a sheet of crystal overhead upon which fires dance. I have the last membranes down over my eyes to shade against the glare.

I can feel the sea moth's shoulder muscles already tiring beneath me. This high it is hard for him to fly. The mountain slope of Hell looms before us and I push away from him. I've taken him far enough, there's no point in his dying too. I watch him as I fall slowly down to the base of the slope. The moth arches over on his back, twisting joyfully in the water. It is a fool's errand but I am a fool—so let it be. I am big and clumsy and of no use to anyone, but I can die.

The slope disappeared not more than fifty feet from me in a whirling cloud of sand. I picked my way up carefully between the rocks, plunging deliberately into the sand-storm before I could really think of the danger. The fine particles stung my skin and filled my lungs with a fine grit; and when I coughed, I swallowed even more sand; and every cell of my flesh felt as if it were being torn apart from its neighbor. I could not see; I could not

breathe. I had no senses, one by one they were stripped away. Teach me not to care . . .

I could feel Pol's pain, the poor thing. Pol's lost and blind and frightened though Pol would never admit it—thinking is all that Pol would claim was being done. Like that time we all went to the mountain of the demons and we went as far as we could to the very edge of where the fire begins. We heard a gigantic roar and the demon skimmed across the sky right towards us. Both of us were scared, and we held each other tight, though Pol claimed that Pol was only holding me to make me feel better. I knew better because didn't I have bruise marks on my arms from Pol for a whole week after that? And we laid real still and quiet and watched that demon just go over us at that funny, wooden-legged thingie. We didn't dare even breathe for a good minute.

Only when we were sure it was safe, Pol let on like Pol would have taken that demon on; and when I tried to put Pol in his-her place, Pol insisted on going to the demon and actually reached an arm up into the sky, not crying out—not even wincing from the pain as if he had to make up for what happened earlier. He brought back this hard, red sphere like a heart of fire. I was more worried about the burns, but Pol would not let me even care for it until I had looked at it.

But Pol was hurting. So I reached out to him just the way I do when I would bring sea flowers out of the rock. You have to be quiet, be firm, but quiet. I reached out to him as I do to our little brothers, the Medusae . . .

I had put my head up into the fiery gases of Hell. The almost waterless atmosphere had sucked my skin dry as if a thousand tiny demons had fastened hungry mouths to my flesh. I had gasped inadvertently and flame raced into my lungs and throat. The demon king, Father Sky, was still walking in Hell and the light smashed against my

eyes. I plunged back down below to draw in great, deep drafts of air despite the sand to cool my aching lungs and throat. I crouched in the sandstorm feeling the currents pull and tug at my body.

Suddenly I felt Firebird mind-touch me and she said, "Does it hurt much?"

I collected my thoughts to avoid giving any great impression of fear. Cass mustn't know how deadly the pain was. "Yes," I agreed, "but the old songs don't lie. We can breathe that gas for a while; but I'll have to wait for the dark when the demon king is asleep."

"Then let's sing," she said which was just like Cass. The sand whipped and grated at my skin and I shifted a little, following my hands along the slope until I found a large rock that gave me some shelter.

"You sing," I said, not wanting to disappoint her. "I have to rest."

As if Pol ever needed to rest. What Pol needs to do is to forget. I sang one of those things that help the others to forget . . .

I cannot say when or where but somehow I was no longer crouching in the sand but remembering how Cass had gotten her death name, Firebird. Cass, whose like never comes in fifty generations; and I was there on the mountain slope, a safe one where none of the big demons are. I had called in a school of fish with a vulgar song, that being the kind that minnows like (minnows aren't very elevated in their taste). The cloud of fish surrounded me, I let them circle and tickle me with their small bodies. Herkie was off to the side hiding in some bull kelp to relay images to my mind.

An air bird broke through the sky above. Its wings and legs were drawn back and its head extended in a nice straight line. My little friends darted away in fright, ex-

posing me to the bird. He tried to twist upward to his Hell but I was too quick, reaching upward in a moment. I grasped the clumsy thing by the neck and squeezed him into the membrane-walled cage we had prepared, sealing it after him. We forced bubbles of air into this cage periodically on the way back.

At Mother's we wouldn't let any of the others stop us though they pressed all around. We pushed on towards the lotus where we knew she would be—though she was so recently brought in that she neither had her Mother name, Cass, nor her death name, Firebird. But even in the dazed, still half-formed minds of the new ones, they knew and she knew that she was special because they had given her the place of honor right by the lotus where the red-colored sand fell in continual streams onto the old sheet of tin we had taken from a demon ship so that it gave off fine vibrations that caressed your body. She, the only one of her like. The only she in twenty years, and a "she" so special that her like had not been developed in a thousand years.

We placed the bird before her and she swam up to it, putting her hands around the glass cage and staring in wonder at the fiery feathers with their scintillating reds and greens and blues; and she sang to it and it to her. Sheer, beautiful ululations . . .

Helen watched the delicate creature suddenly turn inside the tank in another painfully graceful arch trailing her veils from the back of her legs and arms delicately in a cloud about her. All of a sudden the Snark had just started to dance like that. She frowned at its name. "Snark" was not a very good name for the creature but it was just like men to pick such an ugly name. The Snark was roughly humanoid in shape though its flesh was more a translucent white, like milk smoking the water, and the veils that it trailed from its arms and legs would gleam iridescently when the Snark wanted to: bright flashing colors

like beauty come alive. Like a neon mermaid, Helen murmured to herself, like an electric, neon mermaid.

"... And I say crate up that crazy beast and send it to the university and be done with her," Old Alex was saying. Alex was the old man damned to being caretaker on a bare, deserted island.

Helen looked away regretfully from the Snark and at her aged lab technician. The foghorns off Moresby sounded, sending vibrations through the walls. She did not say anything for a moment until she had Old Alex squirming in his chair and picking nervously at the pants over his knee. "It'll just be more work for you," she said.

"And it'll be worth it just to get this place back to normalcy," Old Alex, the unredeemed, nodded his head vigorously.

"Normalcy is how I define it, Alex," she said. And the use of his first name made Alex wince. The old bachelor had lived so long by himself at the station and the lighthouse that he had taken to thinking of it as his. The old man had been alone on his island for ten years, no wonder he was part cracked. She had to be understanding, she told herself.

"But that thing ain't got no brain, or if it has, it's just plain crazy," he said. "You been trying to talk to it for an hour now and it ain't answered one word. It just keeps swimming back and forth, back and forth. You call that sense?"

"You thought they had enough sense to blame every missing article on this station to them."

"Now I got you there, Doctor Ledides," he said, wagging his finger at her. "Because I didn't say that they stole everything at this station. I said they steal everything I leave in the boat by the wharf. If I don't take it up on the davits right away, everything inside will be missing by tomorrow."

"And don't you think that indicates some primitive intelligence?"

"What? To steal my apple?"

"They might be curious, Mister Alexander."

"The only thing they're curious about is their next meal."

"And I tell you again, Mister Alexander, that Snarks don't eat."

"If you know everything, Doc, then why ain't that thing talked yet?"

Helen pointed at the tank. "But she has stopped." The Snark lay quiet in the water, just drifting in the tank, inert.

"And how do you know it's a she? The dumb things don't even have a sex, I'll bet."

But Helen ignored him and sent the initial signal out on the bar, tapping out her message. She watched the sound carry through the oscilloscope in frizzled waves. Still the creature did not move but floated there, as if listening . . .

When I told Pol that it was now night, Pol said that he would come and all the time the little fire demon outside was trying to talk to me but I ignored it though Pol felt my impatience.

"What's the matter?" Pol asked.

"They want me to play another of their games."

"Do you do it very often?" he asked.

"When I feel like it but usually there's nothing else to do."

"Then play their game," Pol said, "or they might get suspicious."

"But you—"

"I'll contact you when I need you," Pol said. And I knew that Pol had already worked out from underneath that rock and was just hunched over very, very near the sky.

"I love you," I said. Pol didn't answer . . .

I rose slowly out of the water, stiffening my legs I broke through the sky into the fire above. The gas burned my body as if a giant fiery hand had seized me and wrenched me from the warm, dark blackness of Mother. Alone. Lost in Hell; and even Cass cried out at my pain . . .

Helen rubbed at the small of her back because she had been sitting for so long. There were so many questions to be asked. How did the Snarks propagate? And why don't they ever eat anything? And why did they all migrate in such huge masses to the hunting grounds of those Medusae where men don't go, even in submersibles for fear of those voracious beasts? Why did they allow themselves to be eaten up without a struggle?

It had already taken a week to work on the concept of death, or rather cessation of activity which they had shown her by pantomiming in the water of the tank much to Alex's disgust. Helen projected the image of the Medusae against the back wall of the tank and the Firebird swam back and forth through it delightedly, having found it fun.

"Medusae, death," Helen said. "Question?"

But all the creature answered was, "Statement, affirmation."

"The dumb things don't even try and defend themselves. It doesn't even know what 'eating' is."

"Then let's try procreation again." Helen bent forward to take the mike once more. "Little-beings speaker-same make. Question?"

"Mother makes all," the creature answered.

"We don't need a xenologist," Alex said disgustedly. "We need a psychiatrist—or a theologian."

"Alex, please," Helen said.

"Mother saves," the Snark added.

"The damn thing is trying to convert us," Alex slammed the clip board down on the table where he had been making transcriptions and got up.

"And what am I supposed to do without you?" Helen asked him.

"You can go to Hell, Doc," he said and slammed the door behind him . . .

So I told that bitch just where to go. Iron-ass little twitch waves her diploma around me like it was a man's cock. A good bang job would put her in her place. Put me right into her place too. She's probably had it before—I know these female scientists, all hot pants when they're just coeds and all Miss Ice Age when they're out on field work. Yeah, she's probably got a hole a mile wide. She's probably letting that old bastard, Dean Swann, slip it to her on the sly too. Why else would he let her get away with everything?

Snarks are crazy. They ain't intelligent. I know. The real crazy ones are us for trying to study the loonies instead of canning them and selling them for protein. And wouldn't I just like to take a bite out of that honey in that tank. And all we got to eat is that stupid fish concentrate and jerkey. God, you think mankind after coming a hundred light years in a rocket that it takes a whole world to pay for, you think that once we got here we could eat something more than jerkey. They sent me out here to die. They said, 'We need you, Alex.' But they just wanted to get rid of me that's all so they can promote their deadhead nephews instead of me. And Christ, wouldn't I want to take a chunk out of that honey—bet she tastes real sweet.

I slammed the door just to let that bitch know what I thought of her and took my time buttoning my coat. I turned around on the gravel lot trying to find something besides water. And you think that they ain't never heard of sky on this planet. Goddamn fog all the time. And no matter where you go you ain't lost that sound of water, unless you can buy your way into the sensorium and what kind of tech can afford that on my salary?

For the crummy pay I get, the least they can do is let me take the car. That ain't asking too much, just a little quarter credit's worth of gas to get me to old Suggs's and back. I'll pay their old quarter's worth of gas. I ain't no piker the way they are. I can pay my own way—on what money they give me.

There's another bastard, that old man Suggs, charging five credits a bottle for that rotgut applejack. It takes three bottles before a man can get a decent high. Fifteen credits, mind you. What ever happened to old-fashioned charity?

I got into the car and had the dome grow up from the sides around the air car cockpit because it's cold in flight even though it's always so hot on the surface. I could hear how that old thing is creaking and groaning and Hell, when are we gonna get some new equipment out here instead of these old scrap metal wrecks? Why in God's name go to all that trouble to send obsolete equipment from a hundred light years just so it can rust here?

Well, nobody wants my opinion. I ain't got no degree 'cept what I learned the hard way and that ain't good enough for them high-ass professors in Moresby. They can go to Hell too. I turned on the engine all the way to get this old heap up in the air because I could die of old age trying to take it up on low jets to just a hundred feet; but Hell, I'd like to take a hunk out of that honey in that tank. And, Lord, I'm dry as all Hell . . .

Helen heard Alex start up the car again with that roar he loved. She didn't think that the man had ever learned what the word 'quiet' meant. Well, he was a harmless old fool if you didn't mind going deaf, and he did get the work done here on this God-forsaken island—eventually. If he has to go for a fly every now and then and just get drunk, all right. Just as long as he got the air car back here in one piece.

She picked up a bar of fish concentrate and began to

work at it with slight nibbling twists of her teeth. Idly she started to go towards her room for some stationery and then thought better of it. She crossed over to her desk and pulled out a sheet of lab stationery, deciding that Manny might like to see some of that.

Then she brought out her ink bottle and her pen nibs. It did take much longer than using a ball point pen but it gave her a deeper, more natural feeling, the same feeling that made her sweep out her room with a broom even though it drove old Alex crazy because she wouldn't use the vaccum cleaner. Manny could never understand what doing things the hard way, the old-fashioned way, meant to her.

She took out his last letter and read through it briefly, scanning the lines without really reading, picking up only a word or two to trigger her memory. She turned on the desk light since the lab itself was kept dim so that the Snark could see. She began to write, pausing every third word or so to dip her pen back into the ink. She felt like doing something, something outside her studies and far removed.

She started to write. "Dear Manny, sorry it's taken so long to write but I've been all wrapped up in the most fascinating project. I'm trying to communicate with an alien species." She suddenly felt an image in her head and she wrote hastily forgetting to dip her pen so that the dry nib scratched the paper. Annoyed she dipped her nib back into the bottle. "It's like there's this black chasm between me and her to cross . . ."

Looking at it though she knew that he would never understand. It had been a month since her last letter and he would never believe that an alien might take up all her time and not give any, even ten minutes, for a letter to him. She crossed it out and began, "Manny, I miss you. I have to close you out of my mind or I'd go mad here, so that's why I haven't written. It's a hard enough life here. Harmony's such a bleak world but I don't mind . . ."

And the pain bound me into a moment, into this body and I could only think of this moment and not of her. The pain is isolation, is maddening . . .

And I could feel his-her pain and I tried to reach him-her but it was like a moment closed off in time and space, like a hole opened there and he had fallen through and I tried to describe Hell to him, to build the world of Hell in his mind . . .

“ . . . it’s a bleak little island, but really it’s so bleak that there is a kind of stark beauty here. The marine station is a small white building built right next to the lighthouse. The concrete for both comes from calcareous deposits here and they come out in a lovely shade of pink. It’s about a mile or so to the beach from the station house on a little hill against neap tides. We have a small area for the air car and down in a cove we have the wharf and a boat though old Alex, the island caretaker—and you needn’t be jealous because he’s too old to do anything with me and so senile he’s probably forgot—old Alex keeps our boat in dry dock all the time because he claims that the Snarks steal things though I have a feeling that he sneaks them off the island to buy his liquor with. It’s always so hot and muggy here that we have to keep the fans on full blast in the station; but even that doesn’t help. About the only thing I can do is go down to this lovely beach just out of sight of the station. I’d dearly like to take off all my clothes and just let that tide wash back and forth all about my body—”

Helen crossed out the lines savagely and crumpled up the sheet of paper. She stared out the window with the air hanging so hot and heavy and the stars were dead in the sky and the night was nothing . . .

. . . There was a blackness above me but not the dark,

comforting womb of the Sea with its sense of a vast community.

It was a black emptiness, sterile, filled only with the eyes of leering demons glittering cold and bright and far away overhead. It was a blackness where I could not swim, where nothing would lift me in flight, where my every action was clumsy as if those light demons far away in the blackness sought to draw me down into the dust, into the ashes and remnants of all the other beings that Father Sky had devoured with his mouth.

A huge black demon leapt up from the ground into the emptiness distanced beyond the sky with a roar. In my fright I forgot the pain as he rose towards his brother demons. And surely this pain, this death will be for something. Surely I can restore Firebird to the sea. I tried desperately to reach Firebird but the blackness of Hell is a mocking emptiness and there was no answer . . .

There was nothing I could do for poor Pol; but the little demon in the room, I could feel *Its* pain, though *It* was dull and diffused. Just like one of those little worms on the ocean floor. The moment you come near it they retreat into their dark little shells. Death and procreation are all that they can think of, the poor dears. I have a suspicion that they only live from one moment to the next and do not really know what Time is. I could not help Pol but I could help the little demon . . .

. . . "Light-show," the creature demanded. With a sigh, Helen put down her pen. It was too late to write a letter anyway. It wasn't a very good one and he did deserve better so she decided to wait even if it meant delaying her letter until the next month's mail rocket. Besides, the creature would do nothing else until its request had been met. She walked up the stairs to the catwalk over the tank and turned on the spotlight, letting a shaft of light fall

into the water. The mermaid danced in and out slowly, languorously playing with the light . . .

. . . I turned slowly, holding our arms away from us because of the pain, moving in slow circles to create a cooling draft about me. My skin seemed to be on fire: each cell had exploded painfully. Something to do with the air pressure this high up. My body had pained me even in the sea when we came up to the higher levels though it could be endured for short periods. And the temperature of the air too was hotter than anything I had expected even though I have lain exposed in the transparent lagoons. It was a dry heat and my skin was desiccating and scabbing even as I watched, drawing into brown, ugly wrinkles. The sheen to my skin was already gone. If my arms even brushed my sides, they ripped the black skin to reveal ugly white sores. And perhaps I may die, and may I die. I kept on turning slowly, slowly in a large circle, watching the faces of the leering stars whirl around and around overhead . . .

. . . watching the creature slowly spiral up towards the light. Helen folded her lab coat into a bundle on her lap to avoid getting it wet, sitting down on the walk in her bathing suit. Without even Alex here, Helen felt lonely, even frustrated though she would never have admitted it. You never could hurt Helen; you only disappointed her because she would categorize and abstractly divide her feelings over and over until they lay nice and neat on even rows on shelves in her mind.

Helen compared her own dim reflection on the water floating so ghostly and transitory wavering above the reality of the creature. Her body seemed so clumsily built in comparison. For a moment, she told herself, I'll watch her only for one more moment. The creature swam up towards the surface, gleaming like a flower as the light touched her sides. Like a flower out of light. She was

liquid color, a flower of ever changing hues—as if the ocean itself were speaking to Helen. Suddenly a hand shot out of the water grabbing Helen around the wrist. She froze staring at the translucent flesh as if it were color come alive upon her hand . . .

. . . I found the one bit of color in the whole land, a black stick that I leaned on, polished smooth as a bone by the sea. I had adjusted the seaweed about the gills in my neck and I kept dousing it with some water from a bag that I had brought along made from the skin of a fish to try to keep my lungs from becoming scar tissues too soon.

My body seemed dead; the music and song gone from the limbs. It was as if the demons far away had strings attached to my legs to control my every motion.

One goes mad, as the sand settles about your body, adding a hotter, drier coating to the already dead skin. Everywhere are the sands, the ashes of past creatures scattered all about me. And the crash of the surf is a mocking echo of the deeper sea.

I saw a light not too far off. I waited patiently and saw it again, like a golden eye winking on and off. And somewhere in the night a demon bellows hoarsely again and again, the sound moving over the waters. And I want to die: I want to die far away. Anything to have release from this body. No word from Firebird—and Hell is pain but even more it is isolation. And thought is gone. And hope is gone. Only the agony abides . . .

“My name is Firebird,” the creature began. The words seemed etched with fire on a black slate in Helen’s mind. And it was as if Helen saw one of the petrel-like birds that so amused the oilmen down the coast on the drilling platforms. But it was a petrel not as they saw it, awkward and landbound, or a distant arch in the sky, but up close, its feathers wet and shimmering with color inside a

delicate flesh-like membrane for a cage and she saw through a forest of translucent hands, coloring her vision of that bird and the glory of its strange-throated songs. A moment of wonder.

"Firebird," Helen gave syllables to the words that were communicated. "What's your sex? Are you female or male?" she asked.

"Sex?" the creature asked.

Tracy tried to form images of child-producing and bearing. But that touched off something like amusement in the creature; at least it changed color visibly and the fingers about her wrist produced a mild electric tingle in Helen's skin.

"Such a complex way for renewal," the words finally came. In her need to know Helen did not have time to wonder at the intelligence of the creature. "What do you do in the process of renewal?" she asked mentally. When there came no response, she spoke her words slowly, concentrating on each syllable to communicate each word better. "What is your function in renewal?"

"I understand," came the reply as Firebird swirled her legs and veils in the water.

Helen felt herself isolated in blackness; her body stripped of all sensation. The still point. The only point, the point about which a vast lonely universe turned and the point was the Firebird in the ocean.

Helen saw those voracious animals, called Medusae by the fishermen, that literally cleaned the southern seas of every living creature. She saw the Snarks swim willingly towards the Medusae, feeling the cruel delight as myriad mouths sank teeth into the flesh of the Snarks, felt too the agony, the pain, the blackness. And then the first minute sparks of consciousness inside thousands of bodies, because the Medusae were not even very primitive Snarks, but more like a larval stage, embryos, waiting for the chance to be born. The Medusae were literally waiting to receive their personalities by eating and assimilating the

adult Snarks. And the Snarks never ate because they had been eating most of their lives as Medusae.

"But how do you procreate?" Helen asked.

And she saw then the release of hormones by the Snarks into the water, or rather did not see because it was too black. She felt her own body shudder with the release of the dark, sweet cloud. Trailers would stream into the ocean currents, carrying long and far and slowly into time calling the Medusae impatiently until the Medusae plunged into that pungent annihilation so much different than that bleak community of the ocean.

And the bodies of the Medusae, first excited by those faint promising trailers, carried in the currents, matured sexually in that long trek because it was their embryo bodies and not the matured bodies of the Snarks that carried the ova and spermatazoa. Gametes to be released upon the first plunge into that dark cloud, each Medusa emptying its body completely of both its ova and its spermatazoa, because their bodies were the fusion of sexes as well as personalities.

The gametes were left to unite with one another in that black, sweet cloud, creating the planktonic creatures that would later grow into the Medusae; but the Medusae, their parents, their sacs emptied, swam on into the darkness and found the bodies of the expectant Snarks. And all of them, Snarks and Medusae and the womb of the Ocean. All were Mother.

"But you said that you united all of them," Helen said. "How do all the Medusae manage to get a bite of you?"

There was the equivalent of an amused laugh from Firebird that felt like a strong hand dressed in black velvet caressing Helen. "There's not enough of this tiny body to feed more than a few, but that will be sufficient to open a doorway for the other Mothers to talk through."

"The other Mothers?" Helen asked.

"The ones to come and the ones that have been," Firebird answered.

And then Helen heard the voices inside from that blackness. Because each one of those lonely voices that had her to speak to found some relation in the universe and could measure itself. And because she was the object spoken to, she shared an endless combination of these loves—when she spoke every single note in that universe of consciousness spoke.

And the Medusae called her Love for that was their only word for “good,” for the fulfillment of being. And the creatures like her called her the Firebird, the long anticipated one who would link them with all others across time and space. And the others, the dim ones in the future, spoke of immortality, of peace, of unity and called her its heart—if she would be there for the union; for she was the incarnation of all. Mother personified.

That was the Firebird. The vastness, the immensity of her universe made Helen pull back her hand and withdraw along the catwalk, down the steps until she was able to sit safely before the console, staring in fascination at the creature . . .

The tall white beast with the Golden Eye kept on winking on and off, on and off, dropping beams of light which the night sucked dry just as fast. We held out our hands cautiously and felt the dead walls. The Golden Eye went on blinking dumbly like some lone, perverted joke of the demons—I mean to build a lifeless shell to be guarded only by this mute, dead thing. I could see the whole Hellish sky as filled with endless lifeless beings and one lone eye.

There was a hole in its side, rectangular and almost one body’s height, over which was a small mouth, its tongue spinning busily sending out a mist and heat and fetid smells from inside that brushed my face.

And then I heard a song, one of my old ones, composed specifically for the Firebird, celebrating her existence, when once we knew that she was finally among us.

I heard Cass speak of the loneliness of time and space, heard her sing of the vast oceans in which we exist and I stood hungrily before the hole until the song ended. The cover to the hole slid open at my back and I followed the cold air rushing in.

The light was almost blinding and it was so hot that it seemed a million tiny demons leapt onto my back and onto my eyes sinking even more needles into my skin; but the very air smelt of the Firebird. I had heard her calling to someone, speaking to someone.

And then I saw one of those demons, the red ones that torment our little brothers, the Medusae. Only *Its* hair was not like tiny, short worms but long, slender, and fine as sea glass and *It* wore a strange colored skin that burned a bright red. A strange, tight shell through which *Its* arms and legs and head struggled.

It did not notice me because *It* was staring at something. My throat caught, for I saw the Firebird, who held her hand to the window to show it to the flame demon. Her hand was marred by scars as if it had been exposed momentarily to the air.

I raised the stick and moved forward cautiously. Firebird saw me but I paid no attention to the welcoming dance of her arms. I concentrated only on the demon as I raised the stick.

"Statement, danger," came a voice, harsh, crisp over the speaker. It was hideously mangled but it carried as clear as if it had spoken with Firebird's voice. I charged forward angry at the torture that they had done to our Firebird, regardless of the pain to my legs. I swung my stick up high and put my other hand out to hold the flame demon.

When my hand touched that flame demon's body, I understood the strange sounds coming from *It*. "Question-object-name," the flame demon was asking. The flame demon turned and stared at me and *It* screamed a high-

pitched sound that cut at my ears: a shrill winging thing of pure fright and fear.

And through *Its* eyes I saw myself, saw myself as a brown, scabbed creature with dull, olive eyes. A huge, lumbering beast with water dripping onto the floor from the gills on the back of my neck. Firebird screamed with *It*. I almost could have taken their fear into my hands: it was that real.

I let the stick clatter to the floor and took my hand away. I snapped back into my body once I broke contact with *It*, but the echo of *Its* pure, animal terror still remained in my mind. I could feel Firebird's jumbled, confused questions but I could make no definite identification.

As repulsive as the creature was I had to touch *It* once more, to make contact somehow to find out how to free Firebird from the tiny ocean the demons had built—as if they could confine an ocean in eight corners. I walked towards *It* slowly, holding up my hands palms forward to show *It* that they were empty.

It retreated now, backing against the wall and I followed *It*, clumsily overturning the table. *It* fell with such a crash of glass and metal that my ears ached with the agony. I felt searing pain up both legs as I stepped on the glass. *It* slipped on the water left from my passage and when *It* fell, I threw myself on top of *It* heavily. I pinned *It* down with the weight of my body and sang a taming song, of firebirds and of calm waters and of the great, peaceful depth beneath the sea, sang in my best and softest voice.

And I felt the demon mind-touch, dim, primitive, child-like as if *Its* brain were only half-formed. *It* stared up at me through those strange-colored eyes and I pressed the words of my song one by one into *Its* mind until I felt *Its* terror diminish.

Firebird was swimming tight, frightened curves inside of her small ocean. "Firebird," I said to the little demon. "The Medusae are near. She must be there." I repeated

the words over and over again until I saw the creature's mouth move and heard a song issue from it that was twinned with the word in my mind. "Understand," *It* said.

"Help," I said, forcing *It* to look into my eyes.

"Understand," *It* answered back. "How?"

"I don't know," I had to say.

I got off of *It* slowly then, making sure that I had one hand in contact with *Its* flesh and saw how my rough skin had torn little red mouths into *Its* skin so that a scarlet liquid welled out, hot, almost painful like acid to my touch; and just as slowly and with as much wonder, *It* felt the cut within my foot . . .

. . . Helen stared at the creature, still not sure whether to run or not, even though peaceful words and feelings that still emanated from him had washed away her terror. Surely this ugly thing could only be some intermediate stage or maybe slave race to Firebird's. Surely he couldn't come from the same race as Firebird. But yet his wattled and scarred skin was curiously akin to the blisters raised on Firebird's skin from that minute exposure to the air when her hand had groped out on top of the tank seeking Helen.

She tried not to flinch when the creature touched a finger probing at one of the scratches on her leg, staring with his huge, silent eyes in muted wonder at the blood staining his finger. She noticed the cuts welling from his foot and she bent forward, gently prodding the glass away from the cuts there and brought up her fingers, rubbing the ichor smoothly between her fingers.

She stood up slowly so that the creature would not misunderstand. He rose cautiously too, watching her all the while as if ready to crush her if she made one wrong move—standing there like an entire ocean poised to fall upon her—despite all the peaceful feelings flowing from him. She pulled him forward then by the hand, gently

towards the steps and up onto the catwalk. She hit the switch that rolled the top off of the tank and the creature started but she smiled reassuringly, trying to think as many calm thoughts as she could. He in turn, nodded his big head.

At the sight of the water below him, he let out one pure, "Huu" like a wet hand smacking wood. He dived joyfully into the water, landing with a loud splash that drenched Helen and the wall behind her, flinging himself wildly though clumsily about in the water, raising great waves that slipped over the tank onto the equipment table in front, reminding her of some playful puppy or young porpoise back at Moresby . . .

. . . "Once more, once more, we are music and song," I said to Firebird swinging about her ecstatically once more feeling the liquid movement.

"Are the Medusae very close to here?" Firebird gently drew her long tapering arm fins down my body.

"We've waited—for you," I said, remaining still in the water because of my rough skin; I did not wish to scratch Cass. "And the Medusae come to us."

"But the Demons, they will kill the Medusae," Firebird said.

"Yes," I replied. "That is why you have to be free so we can go to our little brothers."

"And how were you to do that?" Firebird arched playfully around me. "Will you bring the ocean up here?"

"It's obvious I didn't," I said, refusing to join Cass in a dance, because somehow, the song was not complete in my body, could never be complete because the freedom and color were gone from my body.

"Yes," she said, still whirling around me in a swirl of colors. "Yes, your poor body." And she danced mourning for my broken body, not because she was a giddy creature; because she was beyond time and space, because

she was the very body of the Mother, she was also beyond happiness or sadness.

"How were you going to save me then?" she asked.

"One soul will do as well for another with these demons," I said. "I would have traded my soul."

"Foolish one," Firebird burst in an explosion of colors, her veils fluttering all about me. "They want no souls. They want only to talk."

"Then I will talk," I said. And then the Demon's hands broke through the surface, the red burning fingers burning in the water opening as she waved her hand towards us. Firebird made me take one hand, she took the other.

"I understand," the demon said. You have to leave for your . . . mating."

"Union," Firebird corrected.

"You don't want me to stay then?" I asked the demon.

"Who would want you?" Firebird gave an abrupt side kick that teasingly coiled her leg fins about my body.

"I can take you to the Bay. Can you make it from there?" *It* asked.

"Yes," I lied. Despite the condition of my body Firebird had to be there for union—not that it would stop her from leaving me for the time of union. It was simpler than that: I might not be able to bring her into the Bay if I once admitted to myself that I was dying . . .

She ran up the dolly right next to the tank and got one of the large, heavy plastic bags that they used to transport large sea animals on land and passed it down into the tank but Firebird playfully swam about the mouth while the other creature held it open . . .

"Hurry," I said. "There isn't much time."

"There is all the time," Firebird replied but she entered the bag slowly, idling in with little motions of her arms. *It* jumped into the water. I felt sorry for such a clumsy creature. It was built all wrong for swimming and its lungs

were too weak. *It* sealed the bag and together we passed the Firebird out of the tank, feeling Firebird's songs through the bag.

It ran up a low, flat orange thing on wheels on the floor and we lowered Firebird onto it.

Even though Firebird was light it was hard to lower her as gently as I should. It took all I could to pull myself up onto the wooden road and I took the wooden terraces slowly, my head jerking from side to side as I went down one step at a time.

"You're hurt," the pink demon said, putting *Its* hand on my arm.

But I would not talk to *It*, would not admit that my lungs had only been reminded of the water without being helped.

I felt someone pushing, dimly, forcefully at my mind and the urgent questioning. I saw myself buried inside the little circles of *Its* eyes. I pulled away quickly from the twin eyes of the demon, but not before *Its* "Why?" came to me.

"Peace," I said, as *Its* touch burned a tight band about my arm.

"Why?" the demon said, moving still in front of me, making me look at *Its* eyes.

"For the Firebird," I said. My gills smacked wetly. "Now will you move away before you disturb her..."

And Helen looked at the scarred beast before her, and then down at the Firebird—at the beautiful, free creature he had once been and was even dying to preserve. She let go of his scabbed arm. Afraid to disturb the serenity of the Firebird, he would only stand there while she communicated with him.

Helen tried to push the dolly but the creature would not let her. He did not quite push her away but he did interpose his body, using its solid mass to stop her. Re-

luctantly she stood aside, watching the creature strain at the dolly . . .

I closed off the nerves to my ears, to my eyes, even every sensory nerve on my skin. I tried not to think of the blackness closing down about me, trapping me. I had to concentrate for the great task of moving the Firebird. I felt the thing lurch forward and pushed again trying to translate my whole body's weight into its movement, into the energy of its moving, its rushing to the sea with the Firebird.

"To the right," I heard the demon say. I opened my eyes long enough for me to glance at *It* standing beside me, *Its* hand resting lightly on my shoulder. *It* was looking straight ahead; I thanked *It* silently . . .

. . . Well, how could she let the poor thing kill itself trying to get that dolly moving? Helen said guiltily to herself—despite her original intention to do as the creature wanted and not to interfere. His gills smacked louder and louder and the same ichor that had come from his foot dropped from his gills down his shoulders.

But it was we who forced him to come out of his sea, into this hell. God knows what he thought he would do, the poor, pitiable thing. Maybe even to sell his soul—who can say what he thinks? Would she have been willing to drown herself in the ocean even if it meant the furthering of her own race? She was aware again of that black wall that had existed between her and the Firebird.

"To the right," she said to him. She noticed that he had closed those great lonely eyes again. The creature had been driven mad from the pain. When he wasn't looking she pushed the dolly along with one knee.

Outside the lighthouse, the foghorns were beginning to bellow, calling in great clouds of fog over the sea, like herds of half-formed air beasts answering the Cyclopean voice. The dolly went over the asphalt lot and onto the

pier, the wheels going click-a-clack-a-clack steadily on the wooden beams. The great scabbed folds of flesh on his arms (that once had been veils) now rubbed with ugly snickering sounds against his sides. And still the creature worked to move the dolly to the very edge of the pier . . .

. . . "Stop," the demon said to me.

I found myself sinking, first to one knee, and then the other right before the demon. I threw myself at the thing, using my body like a ram and my whole body screamed at the pain and I yelled with it.

I opened my eyes one last time as a Being should die, looking out towards the sea. Not even able to once touch the ocean to hear and feel Mother's touch one last time. But at least I could *see* Mother Ocean. "No one could prevent that," I said to the demon but there was no answer, only a great black weight pressing on my consciousness. And I heard the great voices of Father Sky bellowing his rage, his horrible anger, and the great grey masses that were sometimes drawn over the sea, making the upper reaches of water tolerable for our eyes . . .

. . . The dolly arched in the air, the bag hanging a little above it and falling separately, twin splashes that wet her with a sheet of water. Helen knelt down beside the thing to roll it over into the sea too.

The head swung painfully towards her. The membranes had all been slid back and instead of dull olive the eyes were large golden orbs.

"Free Firebird. Free her," he said.

"But you—" Helen said.

"I'll stay," the creature said.

"But if you don't reach the mating time with her?"

"Oblivion," the creature said quietly, "the loss of being." And Helen could have cried. The gills almost whistled now and each time the chest moved up, its whole body writhed. "Close my eyes," he said, looking up at

the stars grimly. Reluctantly her fingers touched the membranes, the orbs died, one moment burning amber, the next clouded dull green as if someone had turned off a switch inside. With her fingernails she dropped the membranes closed over the eyes there were two black pits . . .

. . . The demons in that black night, they did not laugh at me now. A soul for a soul. But the demons were cheated in the end because my soul wasn't even half as valuable as Firebird's . . .

. . . I settled down slowly in the water watching the wheeled orange thing glide past down towards the bay floor. I twisted and turned but the bag bound me. I could not use my body to caress Mother Ocean as I should. I settled to the bottom slowly, feeling strangely apart from her—I mean, present in the water, but unable to join in its great dance of currents—to have its black embraces glide about me.

Then the demon, the pink demon, plunged into the water in a whole delightful skim of bubbles.

"Over here," I said gently but even so her mind recoiled as a shy, newly trapped bird.

Helen never had the feeling before when she had gone swimming but it was as if the black water touched her every cell, and when she heard the words it was like a giant velvet worm forming the letters in her mind. She swam over to the bag, slitting it open with her knife.

The Firebird exploded out of the bag, her veils and body burning brightly for one moment so that Helen cried out. The Firebird swirled maddeningly about Helen in swift tight circles with the water dragging at Firebird's body from its passage and her veils were like electric caresses in the water. Terrified and with lungs bursting, Helen shot to the surface . . .

... I frightened the little demon. How funny and clumsy *It* looked with those pink legs kicking so stiffly and feebly to get away from me. It was a greater courtesy not to dance any welcome to *It*, so I drifted up slowly where *It* swam, *Its* body half cut off by the sky and I laid an arm delicately about *Its* ankle. *It* kicked and thrashed but I held on—though lightly.

"Sea Moth." I used Pol's death name. I said over and over as one did to a child, using these words to forcefully run into the child's mind.

"He's dead," the demon answered.

And I said, "He? Dead?" Because the alien concepts, the child's fears rolled about me confusedly as blind demons lost in a maze.

"Non-functioning," the demon said, *Its* body still lost in the sky. "He said for you to go to the Union. That it was urgent."

"And lose the Sea Moth's cells? Foolish."

"But Sea Moth's non-functioning," *It* insisted.

"So?" I said.

"So Sea Moth can't be born. Sea Moth couldn't even swim there."

"Mother Ocean will help me to carry him to Union. He will be light to pull," I said.

Once more the confused thoughts ran about like demons, trying to jump that chasm again, but this time I thought that I saw the basis of *Its* confusion and I laughed and despite my intentions I let my laughter loose in the ocean. The demon cried out and tried to pull away, so I was careful to let the phosphorescence die down in my body.

"What we need are Sea Moth's body cells. It's that that transmits Sea Moth's personality. Bring your body too," I added. "Join us."

The demon kicked wildly by the great dead legs that hid the shore like a huge beast petrified. I loosed *It* as I would one of my little pets out of their cages watching

how the sky pulled them upwards, upwards to that bright burning Hell. And *It* literally shot up out of the water.

"Send his body to me," I called after *It* . . .

Helen went up the ladder three rungs at a time, not feeling safe until she stood once more on the pier. She covered her face with her hands at the sea boiling madly with colors. She knew those were the phosphorescent veils of the Snark. "They're crazy," she said and she turned to run back to the lab to forget it all. Only she saw that demon body on the pier. She kicked at it, pushed it with little exclamations of fury and her horror of the live Snark winning over her repulsion at touching the dead one until she lay sobbing on her stomach as the body splashed into the water. The colors immediately flashed about the black mass so that the Snark must be holding her dead companion. The colors rippled and shone as if the ocean were on fire and the water sucking at the pier seemed to try to be mounting up the pier legs after her.

She thought she heard words. There was a charge in the very water drops on her body. The words seem to hang in the moisture of the air. She went running back towards the lab, towards the blinding light of the lighthouse and the great rumbling of the foghorn that shook the station, to bury herself in her world's sounds to make her forget those words that she heard over and over from the sea . . .

. . . "Come to us and be immortal," I said to *It* as I gathered my arms about the Sea Moth's body. But still only that night, that chasm in the sky my little demon had escaped into. I sent my arms about the wooden legs, hoping to reach *It* with my love even through the dead wood. I poured laughter into the water, calling to her. But she did not come, but stayed in the sky above. Mind you, not even a word of farewell or a no-thank-you.

I swam out of the bay slowly, letting my veils trail

behind me, still speaking my message but I knew that that creature had run like a bird into her strange, bleak Hell above, where the air was fire and they were each and everyone alone.

I welcomed the rush of Mother to me. Time is, was, and will be for me. I bring all my children into Mother's womb in time, in time the deeper union, the further communion.

Death is an opening.

The slope disappeared in a sandstorm not more than fifty feet below me.

—*Laurence Yep*





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QUARK /2

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