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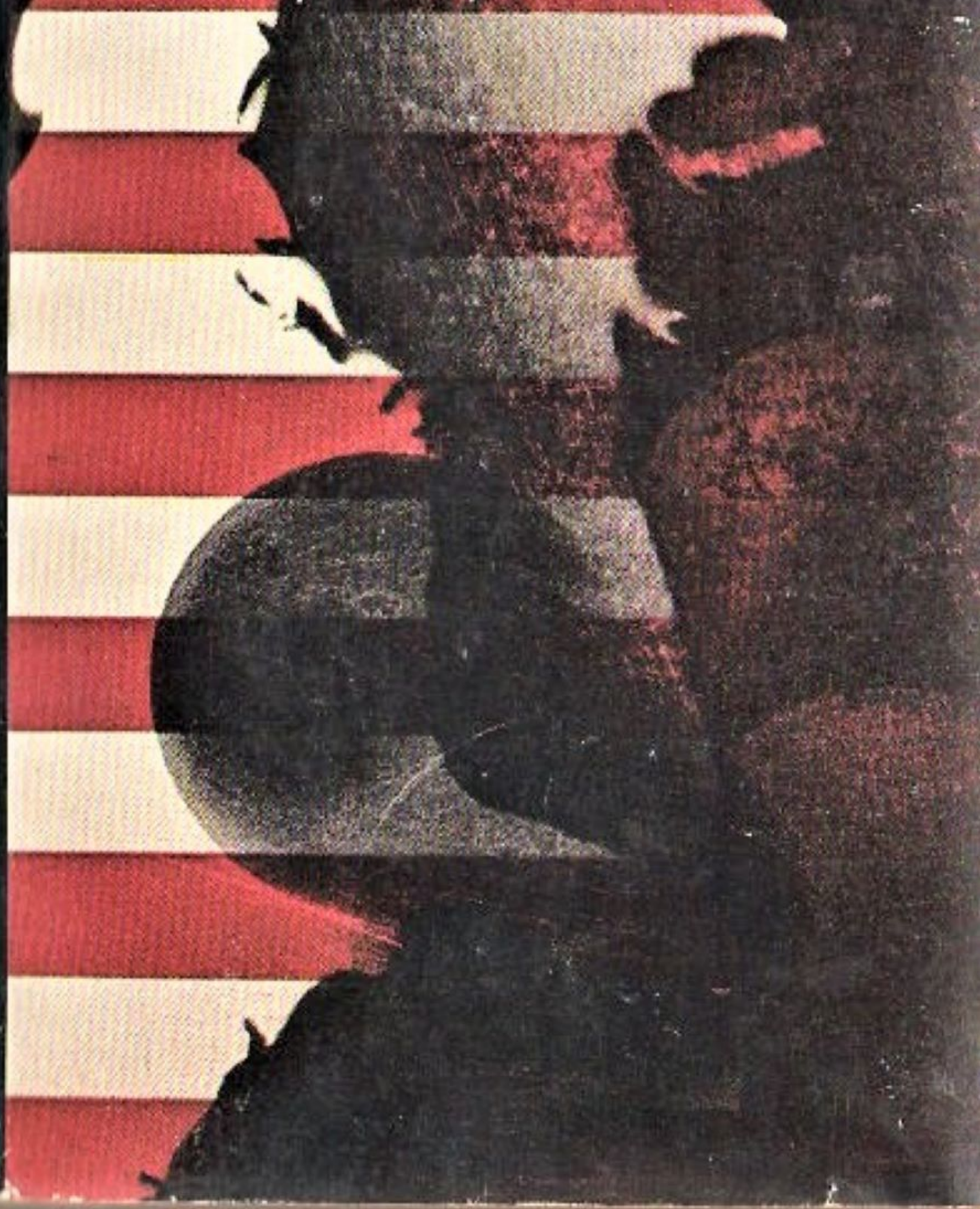
QUARK/4

A QUARTERLY OF SPECULATIVE FICTION BY

Thomas M. Disch, Michael Moorcock, Larry Niven and others

Samuel R. Delany and Marilyn Hacker, editors



QUARK (TM) /4

adam davidson delany disch farmer hacker
last madonia mcintyre moorcock niven
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QUARK™ /4

is the fourth 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.

QUARK (TM) /4

edited

by

Samuel R. Delany and Marilyn Hacker

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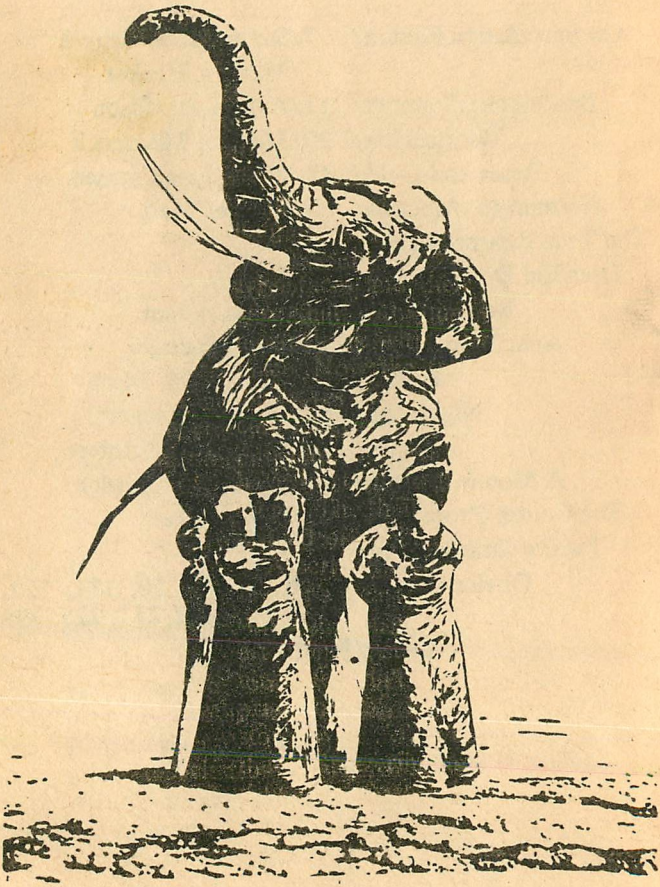


Even a statement like 2+3=5 is only a *model* of "the real world." As a model it represents the world only more or less accurately.

In a country school house, a teacher with two apples at one side of the desk and three at the other pushes them all to the center and asks, "Now can any of you give me the sum of . . ."

A brighter student from his seat in the third row thinks: Even from here I can see all those apples are not the same. That one there is a third again as large as most of the others—except the one on the end, which is slightly smaller. Really, to describe the sum of those apples, I need to set up a Standard Apple, and then say that I have three Standard Apples, a Standard Apple-and-a-Third, and . . . I guess about four-fifths of a Standard Apple, so that altogether there are . . .

The technician, with his Metler Balance, says: If you *really* want to describe the sum of those apples at a measure even more accurate than grams and hundredths of a gram, you'll have to take into account the tremendous amount of biological activity going on in those apples which is changing their weight all the time, so that to describe the sum of those apples you are going to have to think things through again: e.g., is the moisture adhering to the apples' skin, which weighs a whole point oh-eight grams, really part of the apple? Where does the apple end and the rest of the world begin?

Assuming, says the relativity physicist, that those questions have been answered satisfactorily, and you still want a measure more accurate, you must consider that each of those apples has a gravitational field that affects the mass of everything else around it, including the other apples; so that to describe *really* the sum of those apples, you have to decide just what you are doing when you "add" them—how close are you bringing them together, for one, because any change in their proximity changes the mass of the apples themselves. Not to mention the speed at which you bring them together. Not to mention your own gravitational field and the field about the instruments you

are using to make your measurements. You must rethink the concept of "giving the sum" because two apples at a certain distance from another group of three is one situation. But to move any of them even a little bit (not to mention pushing them all to the center of the desk) changes the mass, weight, and volume of all the others.

The system of "rigorously logical" arithmetical relationships is only one possible model of "the real." What gives this particular model its importance to us is our physical size, arbitrarily between the atomic and the stellar, along with the given accuracy of our unaided perceptions and the other billion accidents of human physiology. Granted these accidents, it is perfectly understandable that this model is such a country-school favorite. But we should also bear in mind that in "the real world" of weight, mass, and volume, there is no situation where one object, physically added to its twin (already a risky concept for that world) yields precisely twice as much. And *many* is only a convenient abstraction of *much* that humans happen to be able to make, under proper conditions. *Many* is what *we* divide *much* into because our senses happen to work the way they do. But as we divide a given *much* into a larger and larger *many,* the logical and seemingly self-evident relations of arithmetic must be manipulated in more and more complicated ways to make the answers resemble what is "really" there.

As soon as we want to look at "the real world" with any greater accuracy and sophistication than the country school house provides, other models than the arithmetically predictable are more useful to help us appreciate what we are looking at:

A quantitative analyst must have tables to let him know how to correct for the volumetric sums of dissimilar missible liquids: One pint of water poured into one pint of alcohol yields noticeably less than a quart of liquid.

The physicist dealing with velocities approaching the speed of light uses an arithmetical model for summation corrected algebraically by FitzGerald's Contraction in which 186,000 mps plus any other velocity still equals 186,000 mps, and all other possible sums are scaled down proportionally.

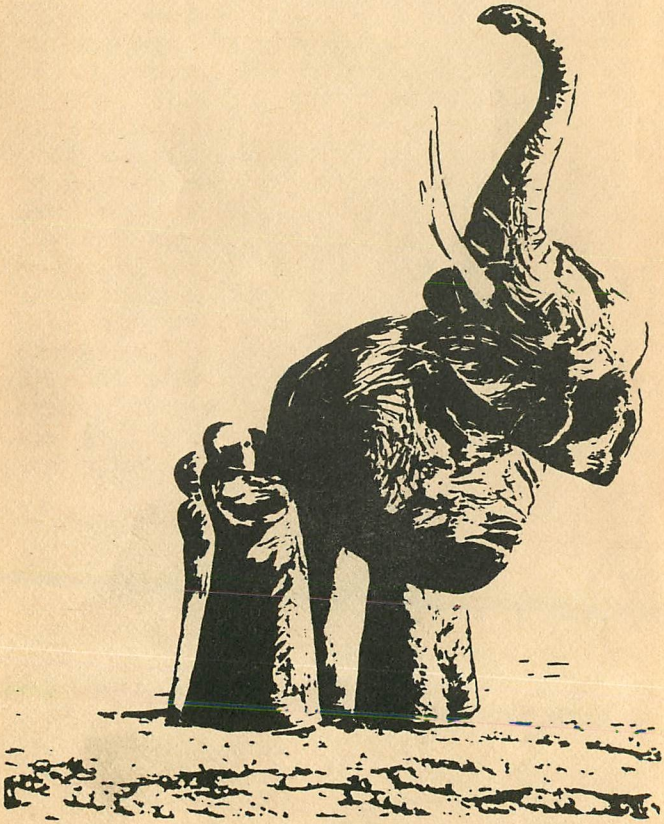
The metallurgist observing the reaction of alloys at extremely low temperatures uses an arithmetic model that

simply cuts off (in a completely different way than the upper limit on velocity) at 273.16 degrees centigrade below zero and admits of no temperatures below that—not only as a physical impossibility but as a conceptual one as well.

Fiction makes models of reality.

But often we need models for observations of an accuracy and sophistication beyond that of the country school house.

—Samuel R. Delany
and Marilyn Hacker,
Editors



Dear Uncle Wiggly,

My wife has a large vagina and a short temper. Is there some connection, and if so, what?

(signed) Puzzled in Pleasantville.

Dear Puzzled in Pleasantville,

Sonny, the ancient Romans had a word for it. *Ars longa, vita brevis.* Set 'em up in the next alley.

Hartford (Conn.) *Courant*

Albertus Fidelus had carefully climbed down the six floors from his one and one/third room apartment on 108th Street. Care was perhaps not required, but he thought that if he practiced it going down he might remember it going up. Time was when he had galloped up as easily as he had galloped down. But that time was a long time ago. It was ten cats ago. Time was when all the faces he encountered going up and down had been Irish faces and their eyes hadn't met his eyes, they were sure that with him being an artist he was committing mortal sins with every young woman who came to his place. Now the faces were Spanish Caribbean faces and their eyes met his eyes and kept on going. They couldn't care less what he did with any young girl in his place, but Albertus Fidelus's hair was snow white now and he would have to strain to think when the last young girl had been there. The hall smelled of criolla rice and beans now instead of cabbage.

Albertus Fidelus was going to the health food store for brewer's yeast and wheat germ and fertilized eggs. He was not, not going to the art supply store; he had enough art supplies, staples, he had no money for new art supplies now. He didn't know when he would. It was a genuine surprise to him, finding himself in front of the art supply store. Well . . . Well, there was no harm in *looking?* was there. Spizzerinctum, no! —And there in the window a new red, it was *the* new red which he had seen in his dreams and which he had been longing for ever since, the way he so often uselessly longed for the things of his

dreams: the warm friendships which vanished with the full blast Spanish radio programs at day-up, the beautiful, beautiful worlds with their Maxfield Parrish blues—and then with, also, the beautiful, beautiful red. It was (he had known at once) an acrylic red, it had to be. But there was no such red, acrylic or otherwise, look though he had, all over town; hopeless as his now discontinued looks and quests for the friends of Dreamland.

Only now the red existed. It *was* acrylic, too! He had been wrong to despair. Albertus Fidelus, blue eyes gleaming, forgetful of how little money lay between him and hunger, cheeks pink and a bit aquiver, Albertus Fidelus believed on the God of His fathers and he thanked Him for the new red, and he pushed open the door and entered.

Dear Uncle Wiggly,

My girlfriend insists I rub coldcream on my cock before we capitulate together. What's this for?

Polish John

Dear Polish John,

For the foreskin you love to touch.

Indianapolis (Ind.) *Star*

Mrs. Lopez threw open her kitchen window and tossed her garbage out. Doing the same thing at the same time was Mrs. Gonsalez. They shouted companionable greetings to each other and settled down for a nice heart-to-heart talk at the top of their lungs. The back yard was undivided and ran the full length of the block and was a foot deep in garbage. It was a rat ranch. Now and then one of the residents wondered why it was that garbage did not simply vanish the way it did in Puerto Rico when you tossed it away. Vaguely aware of there being no pigs here and of something being wrong with the sun here, too. —"Look at them fucken pigs," the landlord said. "*I* ain't gunna clean it up fa them. I done it once, I done it twice, henceforth they can do it thumselves." The children were not even vaguely aware of anything amiss. Their backyard was rich in found objects, and they were keen, appreciative amateurs of its wildlife. The health inspectors never even knew it existed.

Cockatoo, ergo sun.

—The Enclitics of Euphrastus

Grover Wayne dried between his toes and thought of new reasons for hating his father.

Zimbabwe Kunalinga strolled out softly in his new dashiki, half-hoping for bad looks. He was the Commandant of the Army of Africa. Soon enough everybody would know this. Arms and money would pour in from Ghana and Cuba and the Black Men of Asia and the Army of Africa (Zimbabwe Kunalinga, Commandant) would take over the West Side and ride up and down Columbus and Amsterdam and Broadway in his command car and he would listen to the: sudden shrieks of laughter, ear piercers, mind shatterers, axes, knives, destroyers of the dream, three young black sisters from the school down the street LOOK *at at black spook* collapsing in each others arms shaken by laughter, whoops and shrieks. So let them scream and more when Zimbabwe Kunalinga (slave name Hulber Rudolph) swept the streets and slew and took posession.

Carola Cane sat looking out her front window on the ground floor on 110th Street, feeling vaguely sad. She hoped that somebody *nice* would come along that she could be nice to, somebody with a problem that she could solve, not too big a problem, nobody with cancer for example. But maybe some person who had come out with only 15¢ to buy a cup of coffee and had lost it and then Carola would hand the person a cup of coffee through the window and the person would bless her and they would both feel good. Carola Cane was really a very *nice* person, if only more people would realize. Her husband, for example, now suppose her husband would come in right now this very minute, would he give her an opportunity (at the moment she couldn't think of one) to be her *nice* self to him? No! he would point out the sinkful of dishes, every single dish they owned was in that sink and had been for—well, last night supper was on paper plates. In fact, Carola realized, with a sinking heart and feeling more concretely sad, in fact there wasn't even a single clean cup to give the coffee in to that poor person who had lost its 15¢. "Oh what a commentary on our human

condition!" Carola whispered to herself, and ceased to fight against the inexorability of emotion.

Dear Uncle Wiggly,
Nem szeptet fraszbam a hucsikucsikicsiku kel yoyvad egyen plotz.

Magyar Ember

Dear Magyar Ember,
So why the Hell don't you go *back* to Hungary?
Reese River *Reveille* and Austin (Nev.) *Sun*

All of these and many more, like fractured mosaics of many-colored glass, were lying around waiting for someone to concentrate on and put them not merely toGETHer again, but to create out of them things of utility and pleasaunce and as it were bauté: namely me. Would you like to name me? Do all those epithets and kennings tremble on your lips. There was the soft flesh of onions rolls *in memory of me* and the sweetysalty flakes of kippered carp in *memory of me* there was the morning cup of blackroast coffee and chicory with the tablespoon of overproof rum *in memory of me,* mory glory and there was smoke a joint in memory of me, no more italics, goddamn guinea bastards anyway. What do I see? in absolutely unauthentic kantioid cloth *kanti kanti kanti* and hatefilled red eyes and funky armpits like incense for the REally what I mean *Black* Mass, bloodbrother. Mephitic Mephisto, smasher of winebottles, jimmier of carwindows, threshingfloor of Menelik have mercy on us and save us from systematic thought. Not kanti but kantioid, and like a torque that purple keloid from ear to ear, stigmata, and that vast shallow boneless nose spreading like a subcontinent from ear to ear. Long ears. Wars of Easter Islands. Big Endians. Blefescu. *Kanti Kanti Kanti Kanti Kan.*

I say to him, he has the hatelook ready to swivle at me, I say SHANTI. AVANTI say I. I say ASHANTI. And I say SHALOM. faint flicks and flickers disturb the face of the black buddha. But he sees no pattern. Shalom no Salaam yes, and nemmine the bloody frothy waters at

Ujiji, the trails of bones and bloods to the big funky super slavemarket in Zanzibar, the branch offices at Djeddah, Dar-es-why there it COMES again:—Salam. Slalom.

AVANTI! SHANTI! ASHANTI! SHALOM!

Dear Uncle Wiggly,
Does Macy's tell Gimbels?

(signed) Curious (Green)

Dear Curious (Green),
Does Gimbels tell *me?*

—Der (N.Y.) *Morgen Dzhyornal*

Ultima Thule, Ultima Thule, Ultima, Ultima, Ultimate Thule. Last night I saw an orfut of J. Sender Peabody, in some bushes by the side of a rural road, over a ditch or culvert, you might say, something of the sort: you know how it is with orfuts, "What's in a name," if you know Peabody you'd know it was in his orfut, covered with grillwork, and two or three tiny pin-points of light inside of it; hard to describe, but it was his orfut. It was him. And, you know, long as I known him, I never knew he had that kind of pull. An old-fashioned kind of kidney machine, big *big* sons of bitches, I mean, it never occurred to anyone, try an keep something like that secret. How could ja? I mean, a person was glad enough just a get a use one when he need id it. Like, I was ta this party over on ee upper East Side, anna hostess goes around tellin everybody, Please it's a funny thing a ask anybodyy but please don't use the toilet any mawn you hafta. Because I diddin ree lize at tanight izza night the man downstairs gets a use the kidney machine. An he needs alla the wawta he can get. Six thousan dollars one athem big ole kidney machines costs. But then alla this talk about telapawTAtion. Who inna Hell can unnastan alla them big words? You remember Pillsbury's Best? The big flar company? Use a be, if enough people senn it kew pons, enough kew pons from alla them Pillsbury Flar producks, I fgget jus how many, anyway, the flar company would donate the use a one them big kidney

machines f as long azza guy need id it. Funny kine a deal, I mean, ain it? I mean, y senn in kew pons fa free sample a this, aw a set a that. But, sennin in kew pons tuh save a humean bean's *life?*

Well, ennay come up with this telaPAWTAtion. It was suppose a move human beans through space. Aw cahgo. Both. An nenn it turns out, it don' work. An nenn it turns out, it DOES work, only *not* like they thawt it would be*fawww*. Annatz when ee orfuts come in. One pahta it is attachtta ya own body, anny otha paht of it is Jesus Christ knows where. An so alla them wace produx thattid killya in nee ole days, they get telapwaded from ya kidney aw whevva id is, via the means of these orfuts, and simply dumped in some I suppose sanitary manner out in the wild or the boondocs. Only not entirely deep in the wilderness because the orfuts have to be serviced. Now why they should look in their own funny way just so close to whoevr's orfut it is, this I can't say. But, I tell you, Science is certainly a wonderful thing, and this one doesn't know when he's well off until he sees the other one's troubles.

Dear Uncle Wiggly,

One day when Orville P. Upshur was my agent, and it was a hot summer day, I was in the elevator swabbing myself and wishing I could get something cooler than corduroys, going up to his office in the elevator, and the only other person in it was this pop-eyed little jig who was carrying one of those things that the manuscript messengers use to carry manuscripts. I guessed he was carrying MSS to Orville from a delivery service or returning them from a publisher. I admired his crisp cool threads, and thought no more about it. We both went into Orville's office and he came out and he said Hi to the guy and to me, and he introduced us. And the small blackman was, well, let's call him Jacobo Gaintestes. Instant flash. Author of book, DOWN AT GIEPETTO'S HOUSE. Mygord a real live orthur one whose book was reviewed in the genuflect three times THE NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE BOOK REVIEW SECTION, and I said "Oh!" and I could feel my face doing things it didn't usually. And I said, "Oh, how do you do!" And he, well, he sort of slid a nicturating membrane over those pop

eyes and he sort of slid the thinnest, coldest, faintest, quickest, fuck-you-est smiles over his face that I ever saw before or sine sice since. And although I had planned to discuss this and that and a few other things with Orville it was obvious to me that he really preferred to discuss them with Jacobo Gaintestes.

I knew my place. I left. Still slightly dazzled. Still feeling the coolth of those crisp summer threads of his. Feeling, like GEE! CRIMINENTLIES! my agent has clients whose books were reviewed in THE NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE BOOK REVIEW SECTION (SUNDAY)! And hardly thinking of the meaning of that snakeshit smile.

Orville moved on up in the world and into much posher orifices. What time I waited without the porter's lodge so to speak, and I skip you not still keeping the faith bay-be that everthing Orville had said to me, big tall Orville had said to me, I can get you assignments, I will sell your books; well, and so it was true TRUE; there I was waiting and had sent in muh name and waited and waited, it always seemed to be summer and I always seemed to be broke; in walked Jacobo Gaintestes and a retinue of several blacks and tans and whites and trailed indifferently past me and the receptionist and just no bullshit about plese tell Mr. Upshur I am here please: IN they went and stayed and bloody well stayed and me slowly counting my pennies like rosary beads and wondering why for the entire six months I had been in Mexico expecting the usual at least for God's sake TRICKle of income via my agent Orville Upshur—not one single *sale?* And not one single *check?* And not one single not one single not even one single I don't mean only one single I mean not one single letter or reply had come in six mothering months in deep deep Mexico from mine agent. So here I was waiting to ask what happen and by and by—what took me so long?—still sitting patiently and still knowing my place and out came Jacobo Gaintestes and his black studs and his white studs and his white chicks and his agent Orville Upshur seeing him to the door, the door beyond the door. And his eye meeting mine, but no smile, just a sort of look, and I knew and he knew, and I beat the procession to the door and I went away and I stayed away. And I never came back.

Dear Uncle Wiggly,

There is a young woman who sometimes comes to bed with me and she wants me to kiss her boobs and suck her boobs and lip her boobs and scratch her boobs and caress and squeeze and otherwise play with her boobs, and all this is okay with me but I like to get laid too. You have no ida what a struggle I have to break loose so to speak in order to accomplish this reasonable and moderate desire, viz. getting laid too. And while I am getting laid I do do my best to resume and contune and caress her boobs and lip and suck and scratch and squeeze and dandle and fondle her boobs as well as one can, and also to continue for a while afterwards, but eventually I get tired and discontinue gradually feeling up her boobs and mouthing her boobs and playing patty-cake with her boobs. Then she gets REAL ANGRY and she says, Oh why are you men always so weak and impatient? What do you have to say about all this?

YOUNG MAN FROM KENT

Dear Young Man From Kent,

Tough titty.

—*Christian Science Monitor.*

Standing in the park abaft the ass-end of the Largest Unfinished Gothic Cathedral in New York, looking eastward down into the Secret City, seeing its thousand thousand smokes, the great rookery, and considering how the smattered pieces are to be fitten together to create the Countenance of the Pantocrator, with Holy Wisdom in her seven-pillard house to His right and She in Whom He Dwelt to His left: and thinking how uncomprehending the darkness, how uncleft and uncloven by a single golden track.

"The German Emperor has not disturbed the peace of Europe," wrote G.K. Chesterton, "and he never will: because the German Emperor is a Poet"; he wrote that in 1911.

Albertus Fidelus slowly climbed the first two stories, the thought of the new red, *the* new red, the beautiful acrylic red, flowering in his heart alongside the lovely

Maxfield Parrish blues of Dreamland and the lovely heart-warmingly lovely friends and friendships of Dreamland. Then he began to go faster and faster until he was galloping again, just as though he was still a fresh kid from the Shredded Wheat Heartland of the Midwest, and Daddy Bill his first cat, long wept over, still alive. And then the small astonished dark faces alerted by the unfamiliar heavy sounds. And remembering, slowing down, no, not feeling that sick warning feeling: just thinking about it, stopped in good time, forget it. Forget the lies, the falsehoods, disappointments, friends remembered not, paints manufactured not, art directors interested not: only—*here* we are! Spizzerinctim, let a fellow catch his breath, the key, no, no one broke in this time: someday, though. Someday for sure. Can't stay home all time.

Food forgotten, friends actual and potential forgotten, all forgotten by the bright clear acrylic Red of Heaven, Albertus Fidelus began to paint the glorious landscape of the world of reality, Carola Cane slumped closer and closer to her windowsill and felt a chill certainty that no opportunity was going to occur for her to be nice to someone in a nice way, Zimbabwe Kunalinga came along the sidewalk as one who walks over hecatombs of oxen and faithless servantmaidens, Mrs. Lopez and Mrs. Gonzales discuss in High C at 78 rpm if they should or should not have their tubes tied, Grover Wayne remembered all the wicked things his father had neglectfully done to him, Mrs. Peabody painted her mouth orange and sketched in high brown eyebrows, bialystokers in memory of me, egg baygels and water baygels in memory of me, hamentaschen in memory of me, Manischewitz Dry Concord in memory of me, Mogen David Grape Wine in memory of me, Levy's Jewish Rye in memory of me, a ball of malt in memory of me, Carstairs and Seven-Up in memory of me, Grover Wayne walked along the sidewalk remembering how his father would never let him take driving lessons or drink coffee, anticipating how he could, Grover Wayne could, at least he had enough money for a cup of coffee and his father wasn't here to tell him with an awful look that he had already told him that he couldn't, Grover gratefully patted his pocket to feel the 15¢ change and didn't feel it and stopped to pat and feel and search and his face fell and his mouth drooped and a woman at a windowsill

looked at him and slowly lifted her head and slowly leaned over and out and opened her mouth to speak to him. Drink this in memory of me.
——*Avram Davidson*

VOORTREKKER
A Tale of Empire

My Country 'Tis of Thee

Mr Smith said that the new Constitution would take Rhodesia further along the road of racial separate development—although he preferred to call it 'community development and provincialisation.' He agreed that, initially, this policy would not improve Rhodesia's chances of international recognition, but added: "I believe and I sincerely hope that the world is coming to its senses and that this position will change, that the free world will wake up to what international communism is doing."

Guardian, April 14 1970

Think It Over

The group was working and Jerry Cornelius, feeling nostalgic, drew on a stick of tea. He stood in the shadows at the back of the stage, plucking out a basic pattern on his Futurama bass.

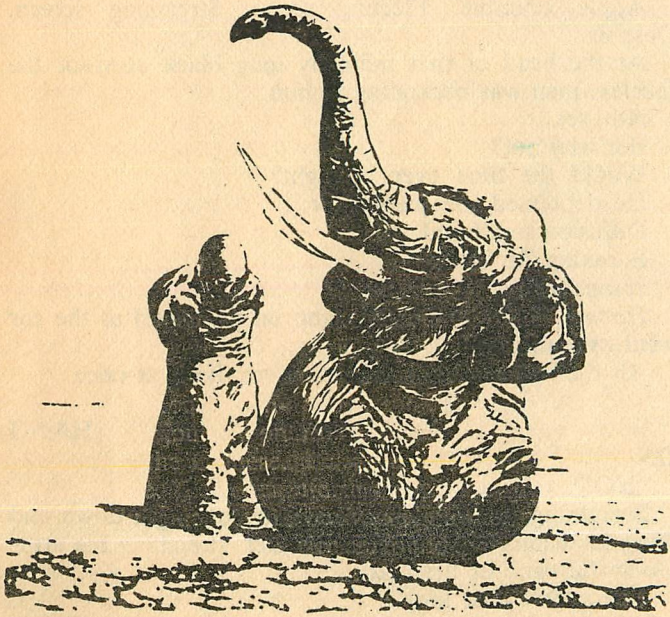
"She's the girl in the red blue jeans,
She's the queen of all the teens . . ."

Although The Deep Fix hadn't been together for some time Shaky Mo Collier was in good form. He turned to the console, shifting the mike from his right hand to his left, and gave himself a touch more echo for the refrain. Be-bop-a-lula. Jerry admired the way Mo had his foot twisted just right.

But it was getting cold.

Savoring the old discomfort, Jerry peered into the darkness at the floor where the shapes moved. Outside the first Banning cannon of the evening were beginning to go off. The basement shook.

Jerry's numb fingers muffed a chord. A whiff of entropy. The sound began to decay. The players blinked at each



other. With a graceful, rocking pace Jerry took to his heels.

None too soon. As he climbed into his Silver Cloud he saw the first figure descend the steps to the club. A woman. A flatfoot.

It was happening all over again.

All over again.

He put the car into gear and rippled away. Really, there was hardly any peace. Or was he looking in the wrong places?

London faded.

He was having a thin time and no mistake. He shivered. And turned up the collar of his black car coat.

HOPES FOR U.S. VANISH, he thought. If he wasn't getting older then he wasn't getting any younger, either. He pressed the button and the stereo started playing *Sergeant Pepper*. How soon harmony collapsed. She never stumbles. There was no time left for irony. A Paolozzi screenprint. She likes it like that. Rain fingered his windscreen.

Was it just bad memory?

Apple crumble. Fleeting scene. Streaming screen. Despair.

At the head of that infinitely long black corridor the faceless man was beckoning to him.

Not yet.

But why not?

Would the time ever be right?

He depressed the accelerator.

Diffusion rediffused.

Breaking up baby.

Jump back . . .

He was crying, his hands limp on the wheel as the car went over the ton.

All the old men and children were dying at once.

HANG

ON

"NO!"

Screaming, he pressed his quaking foot right down and flung his hands away from the wheel, stretching his arms along the back of the seat.

It wouldn't take long.

What the Soviet Union wants in Eastern Europe is peace and quiet . . .
Hungarian editor quoted *Guardian* April 13 1970

Clearwater

"How's the head, Mr Cornelius?"

Miss Brunner's sharp face grinned over him. She snapped her teeth, stroked his cheek with her hard fingers.

He hugged at his body, closed his eyes.

"Just a case of the shakes," she said. "Nothing serious. You've got a long way to go yet."

There was a stale smell in his nostrils. The smell of a dirty needle. Her hands had left his face. His eyes sprang open. He glared suspiciously as she passed the chipped enamel kidney dish to Shaky Mo who winked sympathetically at him and shrugged. Mo had a grubby white coat over his gear.

Miss Brunner straightened her severe tweed jacket on her hips. "Nothing serious . . ."

It was still cold.

"Brrrr . . ." He shut his mouth.

"What?" She whirled suddenly, green eyes alert.

"Breaking up."

"We've been through too much together."

"Breaking up."

"Nonsense. It all fits." From her large black patent leather satchel she took a paper wallet. She straightened her . . . "Here are your tickets. You'll see. You sail tomorrow on the Robert D. Fete."

Shaky Mo put his head back round the tatty door. The surgery belonged to the last backstreet abortionist in England, a creature of habits. "Any further conclusions, Miss Brunner?"

She tossed her red locks. "Oh, a million. But they can wait."

Heartbreak Hotel

Refugees fleeing from Svey Rieng province speak of increasing violence in Cambodia against the Viet-

namese population. Some who have arrived here in the past 24 hours tell stories of eviction and even massacre at the hands of Cambodian soldiers sent from Phnom Penh.

Guardian April 13 1970

Midnight Special

The Robert D. Fete was wallowing down the Mediterranean coast. She was a clapped out old merchantman and this would be her last voyage. Jerry stood by the greasy rail looking out at a sea of jade and jet.

So he was going back. Not that it made any difference. You always got to the same place in the end.

He remembered the faces of Auchinek and Newman. Their faces were calm now.

Afrika lay ahead. His first stop.

That's When Your Heartaches Begin

Four rockets were fired into the center of Saigon this evening and, according to first reports, killed at least four people and injured 37.

. . . When used as they are here, in built-up areas, rockets are a psychological rather than a tactical weapon.

Guardian April 14 1970

Don't Be Cruel

Could the gestures of conflict continue to keep the peace? Was the fire dying in Europe? "Ravaged, at last, by the formless terror called Time, Melniboné fell and newer nations succeeded her: Ilmiora, Sheegoth, Maidahk, S'aaleem. Then history began: India, China, Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome—all these came after Melniboné. But none lasted ten thousand years." (The Dreaming City.) In the flames he watched the shape of a teenage girl as she ran about dying. He turned away. Why did the old territorial impulses maintain themselves ('sphere of influence') so far past their time of usefulness? There was no question about it in his mind. The entropy factor was increasing, no matter what he did. The waste

didn't matter, but the misery, surprisingly, moved him. Een Schmidt, so Wolenski had said, now had more personal power than Hitler or Mussolini. Was it take-out time again? No need to report back to the Time Center. The answer, as usual, was written in the hieroglyphs of the landscape. He smiled a rotten smile.

The Facts of Death

"Name your poison, Mnr. Cornelius."

Jerry raised distant eyes to look into the mad, Boer face of Van Markus, proprietor of the Bloemfontein *Drankie-a-Snel-Snel.* Van Markus had the red, pear-shaped lumps under the eyes, the slow rate of blinking, the flushed neck common to all Afrikaners.

Things were hardening up already. At least for the moment he knew where he was.

"Black velvet," he said. "Easy on the black."

Van Markus grinned and wagged a finger, returning to the bar. *"Skaam jou!"* He took a bottle of Guinness from beneath the counter and half-filled a pint glass. In another glass he added soda water to three fingers of gin. He mixed the two up.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning and the bar was otherwise deserted. Its red flock fleur-de-lis wallpaper was studded with the dusty heads of gnu, hippo, aardvark and warthog. A large fan in the center of the ceiling rattled rapidly round and round.

Van Markus brought the drink and Jerry paid him, took a sip and crossed to the juke-box to select the new version of *Recessional* sung by the boys of the Reformed Dutch Church School at Heidelberg. Only last week it had toppled The Joburg Jazz Flutes' *Cocoa Beans* from number one spot.

The tjumelt end the shouwting days;
The ceptens end the kengs dep'haht:
Stell stends Thine incient secrefize,
En umble end e contriteart.
Loard Goed ev Osts, be with us yit,
List we fergit—list we fergit!

Jerry sighed and checked his watches. He could still make it across Basutoland and reach Bethlehem before

nightfall. Originally he had only meant to tank-up here, but it seemed the Republik was running out of the more refined kinds of fuel.

If things went slow then he knew a kopje where he could stay until morning.

Van Markus waved at him as he made for the door.

"Christ, man—I almost forgot."

He rang No Sale on the till and removed something from beneath the cash tray. A grey envelope. Jerry took it, placed it inside his white car coat.

The Silver Cloud was parked opposite the *Drankie-a-Snel-Snel*. Jerry got into the car, closed the door and raised the top. He fingered the envelope, frowning.

On it was written: *Mr Cornelius. The Items.*

He opened it slowly, as a man might defuse a bomb.

A sheet of cheap Russian notepaper with the phrase *Hand in hand with horror: side by side with death* written in green with a felt pen. A place mat from an American restaurant decorated with a map of Vietnam and a short article describing the flora and fauna. Not much of either left, thought Jerry with a smile. A page torn from an English bondage magazine of the mid-50s period. Scrawled on this in black ballpoint: *Love me tender, love me sweet!!!* Although the face of the girl in the picture was half-obscured by her complicated harness, he was almost sure that it was Miss Brunner. A somewhat untypical pose.

The handwriting on envelope, notepaper and picture were all completely different.

Jerry put the items back into the envelope.

They added up to a change of direction. And a warning, too? He wasn't sure.

He opened the glove compartment and removed his box of chessmen—ivory and ebony, made by Tanzanian lepers, and the most beautiful pieces in the world. He took out the slender white king and a delicate black pawn, held them tightly together in his hand.

Which way to switch?

Not Fade Away

SIR: I noticed on page three of the "Post", last week an alleged Monday Club member quoted as follows: "I have listened with increasing boredom to your

streams of so-called facts, and I would like to know what you hope to achieve by stirring up people against coloured immigrants."

In order that there should be no doubt whatsoever in the minds of your readers as to the position of the Monday Club in this matter, I would quote from THE NEW BATTLE OF BRITAIN on immigration: "Immigration must be drastically reduced and a scheme launched for large-scale voluntary repatriation. The Race Relations Acts are blows against the traditional British right to freedom of expression. They exacerbate rather than lessen racial disharmony. They must be repealed."

In a letter from the Chairman of the Monday Club to Mr Anthony Barber, Chairman of the Conservative Party, it is stated: "Our fourth finding, and it would be foolish to brush this under the carpet, was that references to immigration were thought to be inadequate. In view of the very deep concern felt about this matter throughout the country, failure to come out courageously in the interests of the indigenous population could threaten the very existence of the party . . . However, it was thought there was no good reason to restrict the entry of those people whose forefathers had originally come from these islands . . ."

It would be quite wrong to leave anybody with the impression that the Monday Club was not wholly in support of the interests of the indigenous . . . population . . . of these islands.

D. R. Bramwell (Letter to *Kensington Post*, March 27 1970)

That'll Be The Day

Sebastian Auchinek was a miserable sod, thought Jerry absently as he laid the last brick he would lay for the duration.

Removing his coolie hat he stood back from the half-built wall and looked beyond at the expanse of craters which stretched to the horizon.

All the craters were full of muddy water mixed with

defoliants. Not far from his wall a crippled kid in a blue cotton smock was playing in one of the holes.

She gave him a beautiful smile, leaning on her crutch and splashing water at him. Her leg-stump, pink and smooth, moved in a kicking motion.

Smiling back at her Jerry reflected that racialism and imperialism were interdependent but that one could sometimes flourish without the other.

The town had been called Ho Thoung. American destroyers had shelled it all down.

But now, as Jerry walked back towards the camp, it was quiet.

"If the world is to be consumed by horror," Auchinek had told him that morning, "if evil is to sweep the globe and death engulf it, I wish to *be* that horror, that evil, that death. I'll be on the winning side, won't I? Which side are you on?"

Auchinek was a terrible old bit of medieval Europe, really. Doubtless that was why he'd joined the USAF. And yet he was the only prisoner in Ho Thoung Jerry could talk to. Besides, as an ex-dentist, Auchinek had fixed Jerry's teeth better than even the Australian who used to have a surgery in Notting Hill.

Several large tents had been erected amongst the ruins of the town which had had 16,000 citizens and now had about 200. Jerry saw Auchinek emerge from one of these tents, his long body clothed in stained olive drab and his thin, pasty Jewish face as morose as ever. He nodded to Jerry. He was being led to the latrine area by his guard, a boy of fourteen holding a big M60.

Jerry joined Auchinek at the pit and they pissed in it together.

"And how is it out there?" Auchinek asked again. "Any news?"

"Much the same."

Jerry had taken the Trans-Siberian Express from Leningrad to Vladivostock and made the rest of his journey on an old Yugoslavian freighter now owned by the Chinese. It had been the only way to approach the zone.

"Israel?" Auchinek buttoned his faded fly.

"Doing okay. Moving."

"Out or in?"

"A little of both. You know how it goes."

"Natural boundaries." Auchinek accepted a cigarette from his guard as they walked back to the compound. "Vietnam and Korea. The old Manchu Empire. It's the same everywhere."

"Much the same."

"Pathetic. Childlike. Did you get what you came for?"

"I think so."

"Still killing your own thing, I see. Well, well. Keep it up."

"Take it easy." Jerry heard the sound of the Kamov Ka-15's rotors in the cloudy sky. "Here's my transport."

"Thank you," said Auchinek's guard softly. "Each brick brings victory a little closer."

"Sez you."

It's So Easy

"That's quite a knockout, Dr Talbot," agreed Alar. "But how do you draw a parallel between Assyria and America Imperial?"

"There are certain infallible guides. In Toynbeean parlance they're called 'failure of self-determination,' 'schism in the body social' and 'schism in the soul.' These phases of course all follow the 'time of troubles,' 'universal state' and the 'universal peace.' These latter two, paradoxically, mark every civilization for death when it is apparently at its strongest." . . . Donnan remained unconvinced. "You long-haired boys are always getting lost in what happened in ancient times. This is here and now—America Imperial, June Sixth, Two Thousand One Hundred Seventy-seven. We got the Indian sign on the world."

Dr Talbot sighed. "I hope to God you're right, Senator."

Juana-Maria said, "If I may interrupt . . ."

The group bowed.

Charles L. Harness, *The Paradox Men,* 1953.

Rave On

In Prague he watched while the clocks rang out.

In Havana he studied the foreign liberals fighting each other in the park.

In Calcutta he had a bath.

In Seoul he found his old portable taper and played his late, great Buddy Holly cassettes, but nothing happened.

In Pyongyang he found that his metabolism had slowed so much that he had to take the third fix of the operation a good two months early. Where those two months would come from when he needed them next he had no idea.

When he recovered he saw that his watches were moving at a reasonable rate, but his lips were cold and needed massaging.

In El Paso he began to realise that the alternatives were narrowing down as the situation hardened. He bought himself a second-hand Browning M35 and a new suede-lined belt holster. With ammunition he had to pay $81.50 plus tax. It worked out, as far as he could judge at that moment, to about £1 per person at the current exchange rate. Not particularly cheap, but he didn't have time to shop around.

It Doesn't Matter Any More

It was raining on the grey, deserted dockyard. The warehouses were all boarded up and there were no ships moored any more beneath the rusting cranes. Oily water received the rain. Sodden Heinz and Campbell cartons lurked just above the surface. Broken crates clung to the edge. Save for the sound of the rain there was silence.

Empires came and empires went, thought Jerry.

He sucked a peardrop, raised his wretched face to the sky so that the cold water fell into his eyes. His blue crushed velvet toreador hipsters were soaked and soiled. His black car coat had a tear in the right vent, a torn pocket, worn elbows. Buttoned tight, it pressed the Browning hard against his hip.

It was natural. It was inevitable. And the children went on burning—sometimes a few, sometimes a lot. He could almost smell them burning.

A figure emerged from an alley between Number Eight and Number Nine sheds and began to walk towards him with a peculiar, rolling, flatfooted gait. He wore a cream trenchcoat and a light brown fedora, light check wide-bottomed trousers with turnups, tan shoes. The trench-

coat was tied at the waist with a yellow Paisley scarf. The man had four or five days beard. It was the man Jerry was waiting for—Sebastian Newman, the dead astronaut.

A week earlier Jerry had watched the last ship steam out of the Port of London. There would be none coming back.

Newman smiled when he saw Jerry. Rotten teeth appeared and were covered up again.

"So you found me at last," Newman said. He felt in the pocket of his coat and came out with a pack of German-made Players. He lit the cigarette with a Zippo. "As they say."

Jerry wasn't elated. It would be a long while before he re-engaged with his old obsessions. Perhaps the time had passed or was still to come. He'd lost even the basic Greenwich bearings. Simple notions of Time, like simple notions of politics, had destroyed many a better man.

"What d'you want out of me?" Newman asked. He sat down on the base of the nearest crane. Jerry leaned against the corrugated door of the shed. There was twenty feet separating them and, although both men spoke quietly, they could easily hear each other.

"I'm not sure," Jerry crunched the last of his pear-drop and swallowed it. "I've had a hard trip, Col. Newman. Maybe I'm prepared to give in . . ."

"Cop out?"

"Go for a certainty."

"I thought you only went for outsiders."

"I didn't say that. I've never said that. Do you think this is the Phoney War?"

"Could be."

"I've killed twenty-nine people since El Paso and nothing's happened. That's unusual."

"Is it? These days?"

"What are 'these days'?"

"Since I came back I've never known that. Sorry. That wasn't 'cool', eh?" A little spark came and went in the astronaut's pale eyes.

Jerry tightened his face. "It never stops."

Newman nodded. "You can almost smell them burning, can't you?"

"If this is entropy, I'll try the other."

"Law and order?"

"Why not?"

Newman removed his fedora and scratched his balding head. "Maybe the scientists will come up with something . . ."

He began to laugh when he saw the gun in Jerry's hands. The last 9mm slug left the gun and cordite stank. Newman rose from his seat and bent double, as if convulsed with laughter. He fell smoothly into the filthy water. When Jerry went to look there were no ripples in the oil, but half an orange box was gently rocking.

Bang.

Listen To Me

Europe undertook the leadership of the world with ardor, cynicism and violence. Look at how the shadow of her palaces stretches out ever farther! Every one of her movements has burst the bounds of space and thought. Europe has declined all humility and all modesty; but she has also set her face against all solicitude and all tenderness.

She has only shown herself parsimonious and niggardly where men are concerned; it is only men that she has killed and devoured.

So, my brothers, how is it that we do not understand that we have better things to do than to follow that same Europe?

Come, then, comrades, the European game has finally ended; we must find something different. We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe, so long as we are not obsessed by the desire to catch up with Europe . . .

Two centuries ago, a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions.

Comrades, have we not other work to do than to create a third Europe? The West saw itself as a spiritual adventure. It is in the name of the spirit, in the name of the spirit of Europe, that Europe has made her encroachments, that she has justified her

crimes and legitimized the slavery in which she holds four-fifths of humanity . . .

The Third World today faces Europe like a colossal mass whose aim should be to try to resolve the problems to which Europe has not been able to find the answers . . .

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* 1961

I Forgot to Remember to Forget

The references were all tangled up. But wasn't his job really over? Or had Newman been taken out too soon? Maybe too late. He rode his black Royal Albert gent's roadster bicycle down the hill into Portobello Road. He needed to make better speed than this. He pedalled faster.

The Portobello Road became impassable. It was cluttered by huge piles of garbage, overturned stalls, the corpses of West Indians, Malays, Chinese, Indians, Irish, Hungarians, Cape Coloureds, Poles, Ghanaians, mounds of antiques.

The bike's brakes failed. Jerry left the saddle and flew towards the garbage.

DNA (do not analyze).

As he swam through the stinking air he thought that really he deserved a more up-to-date time machine than that bloody bike. Who was he anyway?

Back to Africa.

Everyday

At the rear of the company of Peuhl knights Jerry Cornelius crossed the border from Chad to Nigeria. The horsemen were retreating over the yellow landscape after their raid on the Foreign Legion garrison at Fort Lamy where they had picked up a good number of grenades. Though they would not normally ride with the Chad National Liberation Front, this time the sense of nostalgia had been too attractive to resist.

Along with their lances, scimitars, fancifully decorated helmets and horse-armor the Peuhl had .303s and belts of ammo crossed over the chainmail which glinted beneath their flowing white surcoats. Dressed like them, and wearing a bird-crested iron helmet painted in blues, reds,

yellows and greens, Jerry revealed by his white hands that he was not a Peuhl.

The big Arab horses were coated by the dust of the wilderness and were as tired as their masters. Rocks and scrub stretched on all sides and it would be sunset before they reached the hills and the cavern where they would join their brother knights of the Rey Bouba in Cameroon.

Seigneur Samory, who led the company, turned in his saddle and shouted back. "Better than your old John Ford movies, eh, M. Cornelius?"

"Yes and no." Jerry removed his helmet and wiped his face on his sleeve. "What time is it?"

They both spoke French. They had met in Paris. Samory had had a different name then and had studied Law, doing the odd review for the French edition of *Box Office—Cashiers du Cinema.*

"Exactly? I don't know."

Samory dropped back to ride beside Jerry. His dark eyes glittered in his helmet. "You're always so anxious about the time. It doesn't bother me." He waved his arm to indicate the barren landscape. "My Garamante ancestors protected their huge Saharan empire from the empire of Rome two and a half millennia ago. Then the Sahara became a desert and buried our chariots and our cities, but we fought the Vandals, Byzantium, Arabia, Germany and France."

"And now you're on your way to fight the Federals. A bit of a come down, isn't it?"

"It's something to do."

They were nearing the hills and their shadows stretched away over the crumbling earth.

"You can take our Land Rover to Port Harcourt if you like," Samory told him. The tall Peuhl blew him a kiss through his helmet and went back to the head of the company.

I Love You Because

SIRS: I'm so disgusted with the so-called "American" citizen who knows little or nothing about the Vietnam war yet is so ready to condemn our gov't and soldiers for its actions. Did any of these people that are condemning us ever see their closest friend blown apart by a homemade grenade made by a

woman that looks like an 'ordinary villager'? Or did they ever see their buddy get shot by a woman or 10-year-old boy carrying a Communist rifle? These people were known VC and Mylai was an NVA and VC village. If I had been there I probably would of killed every one of those goddamned Communists myself.

SP4 Kurt Jacoboni, *LIFE*, March 2 1970

I'll Never Let You Go

Sometimes it was quite possible to think that the solution lay in black Africa. Lots of space. Lots of time.

But when he reached Onitsha he was beginning to change his mind. It was night and they were saving on street lighting. He had seen the huts burning all the way from Awka.

A couple of soldiers stopped him at the outskirts of the town but, seeing he was white, waved him on.

They stood on the road listening to the sound of his engine and his laughter as they faded away.

Jerry remembered a line from Camus' *Caligula,* but then he forgot it again.

Moving slowly against the streams of refugees, he arrived in Port Harcourt and found Miss Brunner at the Civil Administration Building. She was taking tiffin with Colonel Ohachi, the local governor, and she was evidently embarrassed by Jerry's dishevelled appearance.

"Really, Mr Cornelius!"

He dusted his white car coat. "So it seems, Miss B. Afternoon, colonel."

Ohachi glared at him, then told his Ibo houseboy to fetch another cup.

"It's happening all over again, I see." Jerry indicated the street outside.

"That's a matter of opinion, Captain Cornelius."

The colonel clapped his hands.

Can't Believe You Wanna Leave

Calcutta has had a pretty rough ride in the past twelve months and at the moment everyone is wondering just where the hell it goes from here. There aren't many foreigners who would allow the

possibility of movement in any other direction. And, in truth, the problems of Calcutta, compounded by its recent vicious politics, are still of such a towering order as to defeat imagination; you have to sit for a little while in the middle of them to grasp what it is to have a great city and its seven million people tottering on the brink of disaster. But that is the vital point about Calcutta. It has been tottering for the best part of a generation now, but it hasn't yet fallen.

Guardian April 14 1970

True Love Ways

"I thought you were in Rumania," she said. "Are you off schedule or what?"

She came right into the room and locked the door behind her. She watched him through the mosquito netting.

He smoked the last of his Nat Shermans Queen Size brown Cigarettellos. There was nothing like them. There would be nothing like them again.

She wrinkled her nose. "What's that bloody smell?"

He put the cigarette in the ashtray and sighed, moving over to his own half of the bed and watching her undress. She was all silk and rubber and trick underwear. He reached under the pillow and drew out what he had found there. It was a necklace of dried human ears.

"Where did you get this?"

"Jealous?" She turned, saw it, shrugged. "Not mine. It belonged to a GI."

"Where is he now?"

Her smile was juicy. "He just passed through."

I Want You, I Need You, I Love You

Relying on U.S. imperialism as its prop and working hand in glove with it, Japanese militarism is vainly trying to realize its old dream of a 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' and has openly embarked on the road of aggression against the people of Asia."

Communique issued jointly from Chou-en-Lai and Kim-il-Sung (President of North Korea) quoted in *Newsweek* April 20 1970

Maybe Baby

Jerry's color vision was shot. Everything was in black and white when he arrived in Wencslaslas Square and studied the fading wreaths which lay by the monument. Well-dressed Czechs moved about with brief-cases under their arms. Some got into cars. Others boarded trams. It was like watching a film.

He was disturbed by the fact that he could feel and smell the objects he saw. He blinked rapidly but it didn't help.

He wasn't quite sure why he had come back to Prague. Maybe he was looking for peace. Prague was peaceful.

He turned in the direction of the Hotel Esplanade.

He realized that Law and Order were not particularly compatible.

But where did he go from here?

And why was he crying?

It's So Easy

Weeping parents gathered in the hospital and mortuary of the Nile Delta farming towns of Huseiniya last night as Egypt denounced Israel for an air attack in which 30 children died. The bombs were reported to have fallen on a primary school at Bahr el Bakar, nearby, shortly after lessons had begun for the day. A teacher also died, and 40 children were injured.

In Tel-Aviv, however, the Israeli Defense Minister, General Dayan, accused Egypt of causing the children's deaths by putting them inside an Egyptian army base. The installations hit, he said, were definitely military. "If the Egyptians installed classrooms inside a military installation, this in my opinion, is highly irresponsible."

Guardian April 9 1970

All Shook Up

Back to Dubrovnik, where the corpse-boats left from. As he waited in his hotel room he looked out of the window at the festering night. At least some things were consistent. Down by the docks they were loading the bodies

of the White South Afrikan cricket team. Victims of history? Or was history their victim? His nostalgia for the fifties was as artificial as his boyish nostaligia, in the fifties, for the twenties.

What was going on?

Time was the enemy of identity.

Peggy Sue Got Married

Jerry was in Guatamala City when Auchinek came in at the head of his People's Liberation Army, his tanned face sticking out of the top of a Scammel light armored car. The sun hurt Jerry's eyes as he stared.

Auchinek left the car like toothpaste from a tube. He slid down the side and stood with his Thompson in his hand while the photographers took his picture. He was grinning.

He saw Jerry and danced towards him.

"We did it!"

"You changed sides?"

"You must be joking."

The troops spread out along the avenues and into the plazas, clearing up the last of the government troops and their American advisors. Machine guns sniggered.

"Where can I get a drink?" Auchinek slung his Thompson behind him.

Jerry nodded his head back in the direction of the pension he had been staying in. "They've got a cantina."

Auchinek walked into the gloom, reached over the bar and took two bottles of Ballantine from the cold shelf. He offered one to Jerry who shook his head.

"Free beer for all the workers." The thin Jew broke the top off the bottles and poured their contents into a large schooner. "Where's the service around here?"

"Dead," said Jerry. "It was fucking peaceful . . ." Warily, Jerry touched his lower lip.

Auchinek drew his dark brows together, opened his own lips and grinned. "You can't stay in the middle forever. Join up with me. Maxwell's boys are with us now." He looked at the bar mirror and adjusted his Che-style beret, stroked his thin beard. "Oh, that's nice."

Jerry couldn't help sharing his laughter. "It's time I got back to Ladbroke Grove, though," he said.

"You used to be a fun lover."

Jerry glanced at the broken beer bottles. "I know."

Auchinek saluted him with the schooner. "Death to Life, eh? Remember?"

"I didn't know this would happen. The whole shitty fabric in tatters. Still, at least you've cheered up . . ."

"For crying out loud!" Auchinek drank down his beer and wiped the foam from his moustache. "Whatever else you do, don't get dull. Jerry!"

Jerry heard the retreating forces' boobytraps begin to go off. Dust drifted through the door and swirled in the cone of sunlight. Miss Brunner followed it in. She was wearing her stylish battledress.

"Revolution, Mr Cornelius! 'Get with it, kiddo!' What do you think?" She stretched her arms and twirled. "It's all the rage."

"Oh, Jesus!"

Helpless with mirth, Jerry accepted the glass Auchinek put in his hand and, spluttering, tried to swallow the aquavit.

"Give him your gun, Herr Auchinek." Miss Brunner patted him on the back and slid her hands down his thighs. Jerry fired a burst into the ceiling.

They were all laughing now.

Any Way You Want Me

Thirty heads with thirty holes and God knew how many hours or minutes or seconds. The groaning old hovercraft dropped him off at Folkestone and he made his way back to London in an abandoned Ford Popular. Nothing had changed.

Black smoke hung over London, drifting across a red sun.

Time was petering out.

When you thought about it, things weren't too bad.

Oh, Boy

He walked down the steps into the club. A couple of cleaners were mopping the floor and the group was tuning up on the stage.

Shaky Mo grinned at him, hefted the Futurama. "Good to see you back in one piece, Mr C."

Jerry took the bass. He put his head through the strap.

"Cheer up, Mr C. It's not the end of the world. Maybe nothing's real."

"I'm not sure it's as simple as that." He screwed the volume control to maximum. He could still smell the kids. He plucked a simple progression. Everything was drowned. He saw that Mo had begun to sing.

The 1500 wat amp roared and rocked. The drummer leaned over his kit and offered Jerry the roll of charge. Jerry accepted it, took a deep drag.

He began to build up the feed back.

That was life.

Other references:

Buddy Holly's Greatest Hits (Coral)
This is James Brown (Polydor)
Elvis's Golden Records (RCA)
Little Richard All-time Hits (Specialty)

——*Michael Moorcock*

from THE DAY

July 8, 1970

the glass in the bar-door (I've pushed through it lots of times) with the possibility of ovalness. I accept that. The rest fills in. The glow behind the bar where the rows of bottles are on lighted shelves, humped backs on stools (tonight they wear red jerseys, a baseball team, an old rock song comes on, one of them bursts into a frenzy for a couple of beats, he must've stepped into a previous moment), before me, the waxy face, mouth flattened, teeth going? spewing it up—when did the intersection of Broadway-Columbus-Grant (a few blocks from where we're drinking) get that way,—grey lines under and around his blue eyes, he's right, there are house rules, and we go by them, from the bar past the pool tables, watching someone bent over a shot, quickly calculating the angle yourself, on the way to the john, wishing someone would write my name on the walls (George Stanley pisses in women's mouths; it's seldom that crowded in here, signed, George Stanley). I vaguely remember when topless came in, those places opened at the corners, stories in the *Chronicle*,

for Monday mornings when they had nothing to write about, man-in-the-street interviews on tv, I think it's shameful, s'okay with me, now NUDE NUDE NUDE in positions of love, that's a few years, was there a time before any of that, maybe just entertainment acts, singers, and sure, comedians telling blue jokes (Jimmy Spitalney at a Jewish resort in Wisconsin, the Dells? an Indian tom-tom, bought along with calomine lotion for my mosquito bites, when the stretched canvas finally came off underneath it was just a Hills Bros. coffee can, red tin,—I think I was sexually attracted to him, the comedian, I have no idea when this was, 8? 7? my uncle Irving the accountant arranged it, my mother and I went for a week, while my father stayed in town working in the store, my father in a white t-shirt, face and head tan, I felt the muscle in his arm, he wiggled it, magically, a tatoo of a blue 5-pointed star on his upper arm, drawn-in-depth)—star-knowledge of this man, sitting before me, in the bar, it's the next morning, how can someone that crazy, wrong, drunk, arms flailing, and yet, it's there, up the coast, what a hundred miles, something about the path of the moon through Bodega Harbor—we're here because we've been here? I come back from the bathroom, picking up the conversation, rather, we're here as we are, we'll all die, I know *that,* (Venus—Jupiter, familiar objects, like ash-trays), yeah there must've been just nightclubs before they went topless, I'm here with you (another voice in me, I'm walking toward the water, toward Aquatic Park, always trying to see in the windows of the coast guard boys, maybe they'll be undressing, my hands even now push, forward, in wave motions, what, what do you want to say, block, or blur, it is good, there is joy? affirming—it's stifled in me, we seem to be in a helplessness, glasses all over the table with weighted bottoms, brown beer bottles, one friend silent, someone drifts up, what day is it Tuesday or Wednesday, and technically it is the other, but we know what he means, looking at the clock, above the bar, set at bar-time, ten minutes ahead.

The Marriage

The day is enough of a change, so that, how will it go today, enough to make you wonder, to give up holding

things together. Once or twice it ends up in the early evening sitting on the bed, in silence, wondering, and how could you know that, starting out, pretty much like the others, as now, with a cup of coffee, a few pages of something you're reading, it would turn to that, for what, for love of what, a California, a coast, and a moonscape, lifting with the road, remembering to let my stomach go, untighten, I've become frightened by driving, there is something called the Sea Ranch, it's only a name, for another development, there's the road, and we go on it, and some fields, dipping down, easily, with, scattered in the grass, sticking up, at distances from each other, houses, new ones, different, of course they've learned or know how, it has to do, it's money, it's long-term, to make them different, but alike, not old, beyond, the sea, it's beyond, where the hills go off, vague now, with a slanting wall, of dark wood, a wall of glass, a tower shape, and they're placed apart, who will move in, who be whose neighbor, and will they see each other, almost certainly, and invite the other over for a drink, why not, pale blue stretch, let it go, over the ridge, put it behind, it seemed, yet, there was more, the Sea Ranch, why that, it seemed like a place. Once or twice it ended up by sitting on the blanket, the space between us like those houses, not knowing who would live in them, and, and, and then, but it went on, was this, starting as a finger in a hole, and drawing back from what cannot be given up, all that there is in it, flashes of, I will take you, I will force it, I will feel it, will it, will it, and he is on a pillow, raised up, in the same bed, and spread, apart, I want it to be clear, but there are consequences here, in the day, and in a fury or fire, he revealed his fantasy, so there it is, in us, and to call it, what, a sadism, that's not it, I was shocked to see it, so much out before us, that he would tie his hands, and bend him over, and do it to him, *fuck* him, we both could see that in the room, given all the lovely furniture, so nicely placed and paintings, hung here and there, so much life, given to objects. Last night, we saw him with his crown of branches growing from his head, or ice tentacles, skin glittering coldly in places, so the savagery of that he spits out, and she says, the hostess, wearing a short red dress, what else has Victor Jory been in, he did have him, after

all, and then there was, and had been, as they say, a triangle.

In between, a song begins to come. The day, as good a way, as any, to separate the night, being frightened, of riding in a car.

And this one, too, moves on, relentless, we'll see who gets up, who makes the floors creak, where the light grows, who is stirring, and what will they do, each being separate, and having plans, and things come to mind, so it has that push,——look at the mountains, he said, I've never seen them so clear, he is driving, and the two of us are in the back, I won't let him have it his way, say something petty, the three of them up front, we go through the streets in a car, him and her and her girlfriend from England in the front, the two of us in back, a dinner party, well, let it be an occasion, an hour ago we had seen them, as well, green, looking mossy at this distance, but it must be trees and grasses and bushes, packed closely together, through the house, with those bowls of yellow daisies, here and there, in each room, the day's announcement, they're getting married, and I hate it then, he's decided to play it safe, she has a music-hall mind, in fact, we're awakened by such a song, on the phonograph, playing around, to forget the world for a minute, and even he, also waking, next to me, his rare anger, there is a list, of grievances, and you can trot them out, what does it come to, a matter of rooms, of who let who, and how she acted. There's the two of us, as we find ourselves, day by day, brought to wherever, and what that will come to, and sometimes I feel a drift or a loss and think to come to you—suddenly, it turns that way—and there is that, whatever end it has, I don't have hopes, or prospects, and to look at you in plenty, you amble through such trees as there are, the birches, just in a car, last night, noticed, and that's that. There is another, one of the deepest, and that *is* another, for this is a different house, at least down the block, I'm about to get on the bus, on Fourth, where are we going, I'm to be told, by him, by who, the one who was had, or had us, it seems it won't be clearer, I won't say, you won't know, they will be undifferentiated, you say he and he and he, there are three, of you, and are they separate, or do they reappear, no, they are separate, him and him and me, only I'm here again, I

turn, to a sound in the glass, the squares in the door, to see myself, and if I told you their names, it wouldn't be clearer, you would feel you knew who was who, and say, oh *that's* who, and it would turn out you knew him, or had met him once, at a party, what's he doing now, and someone says he's getting married; another one is, this simply, he and I, the same one as before, as at the start, are coming up the coast, and I'm frightened of driving, of moving at all, at these speeds, and there are places, will we stop, to pee, to eat, someplace in California, and another is also simple, we see a movie, he and I, and the others, at a man's house, a masterpiece, an unforgettable thing though I didn't expect, but of course you didn't expect, to watch, and we, also, played the parts, in the play, a backyard, when was it, is it 2 or 3 months ago, midsummer's night that is, and measure, well yes, how I did it, but that other thing, what things to do that take you deeper into it, Mickey Rooney, James Cagney, for example, I didn't feel so frightened when my head was changed, my whole body didn't shake, I didn't reach up to feel a new ear, I didn't know to do that—what is an interruption that isn't one? she comes, and I say good morning, she's as much the first of the day as any, the sky moving back and forth, cold, with things, good morning, and, this is for you, a chestnut fingering a polished brown skin, what do I do with it, do I roast it, you can hold it in your hand, and you can put it down for a while, and then hold it in your other hand, she goes in, that is not an interruption, I think maybe to call her back, but then I don't, I don't see how it can't rain, and there is simply that, the movie, and the people there, their son telling a story about 10, and the cats gambolling, they're so black, his girlfriend says, they're brown, the wife says, the one in the red dress, so they are, when seen close up, Burmese kittens, one comes up and nestles; there is, simply, as I've said before, the day, a day, any one, and some, or some strung together, or a few, as a unit, and what it does, and that conception takes in the day, this one, with each that does come into it, available to come into it *here,* isn't that strange, simply walking through the rooms, from the kitchen to here, is that, the bowls of beans soaking overnight, now it is morning, they can be done with whatever you intended, and finally, as best as I can remember, they

announce their marriage, him and her, sleeping upstairs, we're all in a house, trying to make a go of it, or when it's bad, to make the best of it, and she's what she is, and in the morning, she and her English girlfriend are celebrating it, I don't understand what it is that's so careless in what she's doing, but I feel, and he feels it too, next to me, is surer of it, while I'm thinking, what am I doing to make it seem so, she and her girlfriend, who is here, indefinitely, at her behest, and she can be added to a list of grievances, or more to the point, to be wondered about, her eyes stick out of her stringy hair, she isn't vicious, she's alone, she needs a place and makes the sewing machine go and makes her happier, and he is happier too to be marrying her, happy she can do those things, well, there's that, and what each friend will say, who likes her no better than I, and there is a ceremony, to be set, for some certain day, maybe I'll be away, in November.

They're up and into it, or some of them, the kettle's on, *why didn't you warn me,* she says, coming out, *it was a horrible fright,* there he was, standing in the door, and swaying, drunk, *how could I know,* he's harmless, *oh yes,* she says, but now, it's morning, and we can laugh it off, she screamed for him upstairs, *it's just me, I'm the landlord, I'm leaving,* then I knew who it was, and what it was, *I'm sorry, I'm sorry,* and didn't get up then, knowing it harmless, then I did, to pee, and she said, through the wall, *I'm sorry,* thinking to have wakened me, and I say, it's all right, softly,—he comes back, when is it, not as late as the other two nights, he says he wants to settle down with his work, with me, and so it's over, for a time, a day or two, who knows how it'll turn out, that's what we're here for, then he awakes also, and remembers a dream about a motorcycle and a row of hitchhikers, this girl calls to him, the beans have soaked in the red and white plastic bowls, on the stove, and there is another bag of them, in cellophane, or clear plastic, whatever it's called, the other girl comes up from the basement, they are moving in also, and her boyfriend is on the island, working for a week, there are others and others, more, but only so much at a time, they come out about breakfast, we are all joking and that's fine, I'm also here, he reads, of heroes, I'm too exhausted, that's good, I say, and kiss an arm, *I'm glad,* you're back, you're here, and we go to sleep, isn't it re-

solved, I mean, when someone comes out and says what will you have for breakfast, cream of wheat or pancakes, she's making pancakes, holding the box and the familiar figure of a chef, a black man? on it, and the small pot, awkwardly, between his fingers, and she's at his shoulder, have you seen the chestnut, it's a nice shiny one, I saw it from here, he says, and we do that; and we are smoking cigarettes, this is when I smoked, in that in-between time, after the rage had broken out, nothing seems to end, at least, not love, though it's over, that's over, at least, not that deeper stuff, *I wish to make real to myself what is most real,* she, that poet, said, a coda, for the day.

It's funny, all of it, the kitchen's a mess, *but I followed the recipe,* she says, it needs more milk, and it needs more sugar, he tells her, surely, taking a bit of my half-eaten one, not cooked, there's bound to be confusion, but it's not serious where to go today, is there anything to do, and I'm back, the dandelions, small and skinny, too close together, tangled, curved, with long stems, others, puffballs, Mr. Milkweed and Miss Puffball, I said, referring to them, whoever they are, across the street, getting married, and moving into those faceless buildings, for that's behind it all, when we look at it, from the meadow, and count the number of tall buildings, about 40 of them now, making up the skyline from where to where, anyway about 40 or so tall ones, and hundreds of others packed in, you could look at the newspaper, day by day, check that against the making of the place's imagination, they become named, historical, who made the place. It's all too much, I open the door, and a cat walks through, from nowhere, it's all hilarity, she's telling them about him, the drunken landlord, in the room, and they've come down from upstairs, she's in the blue terrycloth robe, and she says. the neighbors complained about the banging, it's war! I declare, suddenly the houses are two ships from one of those sea movies, bouncing along, full sail, cheek by jowl, we open the portal, they're only inches apart, BA-ROOM! BLAM! a tremendous broadside, we're stumbling around laughing, he's upstairs on the bridge, typing his thesis, POW! BOOM! underneath the timbers crashing around, and also we're hearing about him, the landlord, thundering at the door, wham! wham! come on out, I know you're in there, and then when you finally come out, then he's meek and

lonely, it's just me, and he mumbles, do you wanna have a drink, his violence lasts only up to the edge of human contact, and all that's the night, dishes are everywhere, it's the day, the day! it's on, the beans will be minestroni, I remember when Burbank crossed the pancake with the waffle, it's a paffle, see, there's a little stretch of smooth, and then bump bump bump some grid containing the syrup, then some more smooth, too much, out of control, it's okay, things are happening; then she just said, we're getting married, and all that giggling, we walk through the stockade, the log wall, we're on our way home, and beyond that is the sea, flat, grey, tilted out, it's nice, a little foggy, we step over a fence, the same wood, you can walk down, to the sea, which is there, there are fields, hills, and paths made by cows, we walk around to a point and sit under the tower, behind the wall, back there, there's a place to park the cars, and people walking around, looking at license plates, to see where they've come from, bringing the lunch, we spread it out, then his face is in a pane of glass, smiling, we eat, sitting in small weeds, looking across the water, and their marriage, well, so it seems to be, there is a list of grievances, a search for safety, he's had it with those other kinds of women, and she won't run away, she can draw the pieces toward her, be a wife and be loved. What else is there to say. That's a way to make it be. Set the day. Set the day.

notebook, Thursday (it must be February 12th)

Again the day, we come to it, in the middle of a quiet mess, *one* among fireplace, black hole in the room, at that house the cat andirons, he sits in the rocker, gulps of tea, a faint smile as we glance up for a second, I'm in space, the day gray, breath and smoke, he reads, they cut theirs oars hastily the leaves still clinging to the branches they rowed into the water with, a scatter, a disorder, or order, black patches of catkins she brought back, ugly as dried oily seaweed, outside the window an arbutus branch on the porch, what are we up to today, and we make some plans, quiet, my mind disturbed, eerie, the bread drawer pulled open, he went out and talked to her, I was instructed in a dream, or there was a dream I read as instruction, the book was called *Gloom Sky,* waking in the morning, with its information, we had talked all

evening of air and water gods, the pull of being here and there, the lilies sprawled out wildly, the rooms look like random scattering of junk, I'm separated from an order they might have in my eyes, I woke with *Gloom Sky* by Fred Haley, the names in the dream are to be transposed, there was, wasn't there, I'm going up the stone steps, past the wooden board with old gold lettering recording the class gifts, a Fred Hoyle, some kind of popular-science writer, in the great hall of the catalogues, before an endless text of names, I'm led, reluctant to believe it, what disturbs me, half-amused, but following it out, saying it is an order from inside myself, does it have a meaning, the translation from dream language to the catalogue of names discovers a cheap science-fiction novel, *The Black Cloud,* I read it, in the evening, there've been guests at dinner, pots of plants, paper flowers, the oily catkins, he goes out, to have a beer, to talk to her, there is a contending in the house, late at night,

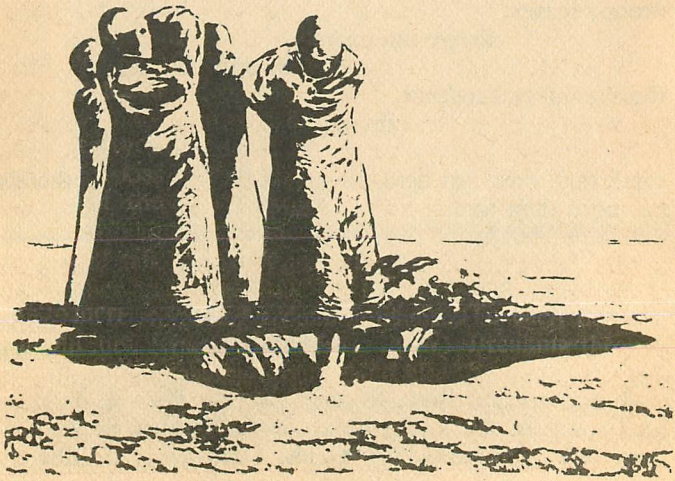
he bends down, it's alright, deep breath
the message,

or what it is that comes in, a black cloud, intelligent, comes into the world, it is the matter of intelligences in the universe,

under the curve of the poinsettia's green
droopy leaves,
above the cactus,
through the bushes,
the cream picket-fence,
an old man,
I look up,
catch that, then I'm here, caught in this, the room, there's no more than that.
——*Stan Persky*

BRASS AND GOLD
or Horse And Zeppelin In Beverly Hills

A man named Brass lived in Beverly Hills in its slum area south of the tracks along Santa Monica Boulevard. Brass was surrounded by Golds, Goldsteins, Goldbergs,



Goldfarbs, and by Silvers, Silversteins, Silverbergs, and Silverfarbs.

"I give up! I surrender!" he would yell out of his apartment window when the gold of the full moon had turned green with smog. He would take another swallow from the fifth of Old Turkey, smack his lips, and lean out of the window again.

"Carry me off in your Brinks to your bank, and lock me up in the vault! Melt me down! Make rings and bracelets from me! But you will find that there is more to me than a potential profit in money! Brass is good for more than herding horses or boozing it up!"

Brass was, if you believed the neighbors, a drunken goy poet from Utah. He was supposed to have been a sheepman before being driven from the land by the cattle barons. This rumor infuriated Brass, who was born of a long line of horse raisers. He was also maddened by the other rumor, which said that he was a cowboy.

Where he came from, he could ride for a day and not see a cow, he would shout out the window. But no one seemed to hear him. At night the neighbors were holding noisy parties which shut out all outside sounds or they were attending parties elsewhere.

In the daytime the men were at their offices and the wives were leaning out of their windows and shouting at their neighbors across the way. Between the buildings were complexes of clothelines on which hung 100-dollar bills drying in the smog-green and dollar-green sun.

"It isn't like it was in the old country, the Bronx," Mrs. Gold cried to her neighbor. "There it was people that counted the money, not money that counted the people!"

"For God's sakes, shut up!" Brass roared out of his window. "I'm a poet. I can't write poetry while all this talk of money, which I don't have, anyway, is making the welkin ring!"

Mrs. Samantha Gold saw his mouth moving in the gold of his beard. She smiled and waved. Time was when she wasn't so friendly. The day she looked out of her third-story window into the second-story window of the apartment building next door and saw a bearded man with long hair, wearing a hat, and reading a tall thick book, she thought he was a Talmudic scholar or a rabbi or both.

It is a well-known fact that no Talmudic scholars or

rabbis live north of Olympic Boulevard in Beverly Hills. It is not good for them, they can't pay the high rents, and they cause embarrassing pauses in conversations. If caught in town on any day but Saturday, they are scourged back to Olympic and southwards with credit cards, which have sharp cutting edges.

Mrs. Gold called the city police the first time she saw Brass. But the investigating officer reported that Brass had no car. He could not be persecuted with overtime parking tickets or a summons for running red lights. The officer would, however, watch Brass closely. There was always the chance he would jaywalk.

The report ended up on the desk of the Gentile mayor. In a speech to the Chamber of Commerce, he revealed that there were people in the city who paid less than $400 a month rent. Some were not paying over $150 a month.

"I'm all for the depressed and underprivileged, as you well know!" the mayor thundered. "But that kind of people must get out! They're ruining the image of Beverly Hills!"

Wild applause.

Mrs. Samantha Gold talked to the cop and found out that Brass was not a rabbi. He wasn't even Jewish.

"Time was when you could identify a person by the way he looked," she said. "Everything's mixed up now. Even the young businessmen sometimes look like hippies."

She added, when the cop eyed her, "But well-dressed hippies with expensive clothes. And clean."

"That's right," he said. "Take me. Irish Catholic, and yet my name's Oliver Francis Cromwell."

Cromwell was not eyeing her because of her near-subversive remarks. She was just over thirty, and, if she would lose fifteen pounds, she could have worked as a double for Sophia Loren.

Mrs. Gold, two months before, had looked more like Sophie Tucker or Sidney Greenstreet. She was of the Conservative faith, but, where others were addicted to whiskey or cigarettes or heroin, she lusted after pork on rye with mushroom gravy. Her husband locked her in the bedroom and slipped her a restricted but well-balanced and Mosaically correct breakfast through a small door originally installed for the dog. At noon the maid pushed

through another tray. At evening her husband let her out of the bedroom but supervised her while she cooked.

Nevertheless, she sometimes succeeded in her smuggling. Once, her husband unexpectedly came home at noon, and she had to put the sandwich and gravy in a plastic container and lower it outside the window on a string.

Brass, the golden poet, hungry because he had spent his month's money on rent and Old Turkey, took the sandwich and gravy and ate them.

Mrs. Gold's husband, searching for hidden food, discovered the string, but he could prove nothing. The next day, Mrs. Gold found that she had lost enough weight to squeeze through the dog door. She went to Brass's apartment to thank him for having saved her and also to demand the sandwich back. And they fell in love.

Samantha Gold read much because she had little else to do. She knew, or thought she knew, why she was in love with Brass. He resembled her father when he was young, though Brass was much taller. There were other reasons, of course. He was a poet. And she was even more thrilled because he was a cowboy, though he soon set her straight on that.

There were obstacles to their romance. He was a Gentile, and he drank heavily. Mrs. Gold told him that his alcoholism was, however, no big problem for her. Her father hit the bottle more than was good for him.

Brass said, "My drinking is no problem for me, either, except when I'm broke."

"You sure don't look like a Gentile," Samantha said, sitting on a chair and looking at him with the huge Loren-type eyes.

"Madame, I am *not* a Gentile," he said. "I'm a Mormon. You're the Gentile, since all non-Mormons are Gentiles. Actually, I'm a jack Mormon, so, in a sense, you're right. I've fallen from grace, which also happens to be the name of my ex-wife. It's a statistical fact that the rate of alcoholism among Mormons is even lower than among devout Jews. But when a Mormon does drink, he dives deeper into the golden sea of alcohol—to quote Bacchylides—than anyone else, never emerging with the pearl of great price, of course.

"It's a case of overcompensation, I suppose. But I am a poet. Therefore, it is an aesthetic, and perhaps a

theological, obligation for me to drink. I'll thank you to leave me now. I feel a poem coming on."

"Robert Graves says that every true poet worships at the feet of the Goddess," she said. "Is that what you mean by theological?"

She looked and felt at that moment like an Athena, although not as slim as she would have liked it, and she knew it. He knew it, too, because he got down on his knees, put his hands on her knees, and looked up at her while he recited an extemporaneous sonnet. She liked the poem, and she loved the feel of his hands on her knees, which had been untouched by male hands for months. But she didn't like the odor of booze, even though it was very expensive booze. However, when she was offered a ham sandwich, she decided she could tolerate Old Turkey.

Between bites, she said, "I would've thought you'd go to Haight-Ashbury or West Venice or Mount Shasta. This is a strange place for a practically penniless poet."

"This is a strange place for anybody," he said. He was still glowing with the sparks of his poetry and the comets ejected by his gonads. "I wanted to go someplace nobody else would think of going to, a really alien place for a poet. So I'm here."

His grandfather had left him a small sum which was parceled out in monthly lumps by lawyers. His grandfather had deplored Brass's fall from grace, but he had admired him because he refused to kiss any man's boots, manured or clean. And Brass was, at least, "a bum with honor," and "a beard with a stiff neck." This last phrase delighted Brass.

"Let's not talk of money. Let's talk of love," he said, getting on his knees again. He looked up past her breasts —like an astronaut staring past the enormous circle of Earth—at the long and lovely Mediterranean face behind the sandwich.

"Not talk of money?" she said. "This is Beverly Hills. My husband says that money comes first here and love just naturally tags along. Like a shark follows a boat for garbage."

Brass winced. His poetry dealt with beauty.

Samantha finished that sandwich and looked at the refrigerator. Brass sighed and got to his feet and clumped across the bare floor on his high-heeled boots. While she

watched him prepare another sandwich, she told him folk tales of Beverly Hills.

There was Mrs. Miteymaus, who labored for twenty hours before giving birth to a thousand-dollar bill. The internal revenue service agent, clad in mask, gown, and gloves, assisted the obstetrician and deducted 90% before the umbilical cord was clipped. Mrs. Miteymaus decided to ship the baby off to an orphanage and claim a deduction for charity. The baby was eventually adopted by a bank and thereafter yielded 8.1% interest. News of this reached Mrs. Miteymaus through a malicious friend (the adjective was redundant, Samantha admitted), causing Mrs. Miteymaus such grief that she swore never again to have sexual intercourse, even with her husband.

Brass asked her if the tale was true that Beverly Hills was the only city in the world with so many cops they had to be pulled off the streets during rush hours to keep them from hindering the flow of traffic.

Samantha replied that that folk tale was true.

Uninhibited by her third sandwich, she told him of her personal life and some of its sorrows. Once, she thought she was losing her husband's love because she was getting too fat. But now that she had slimmed down, relatively speaking, she still was getting no loving from him. Irving was stepping out on her with a shicksa who drank.

"The world is one fester of hate and betrayal and grief," he said. "Even when I used to stand night watch on the lone prairie, with only the horses and me and the moon, the wind brought sounds and smells of hate and betrayal and grief and of a rotting world from hundreds of miles away.

"I could hear sobbing and screaming and smell gasoline and dead robins. Then I'd put my nose down into my horse's mane and breathe deeply. It was good honest beautiful horse sweat. Few smells are lovelier, I can tell you."

Mrs. Gold put her ham sandwich aside so it would not interfere and bent over and stuck her nose against his chest. The woolen plaid shirt still radiated faint odors of horse.

"One more washing in detergents with enzymes, and it'll be gone forever," he said. "I'll hate that day."

He kissed the back of her neck. She shuddered as if she were a mare into whose flanks spurs had been pressed, and she ate no more of ham that day.

They continued to meet in the morning and sometimes in the afternoon. But the day came when she could no longer slide out on her back through the dog door. She went to the window after a struggle to free herself and signalled Brass. He was sitting at his window with nothing on but his ten-gallon Stetson. He was polishing his boots and composing a poem to the Bitch Goddess. He was also wondering if he should take an oath of chastity for a week or two. The divine spark was cooling off. The Muse liked Her worshippers to be horny, but She did not want them to expend all their fire and seed on lesser beings, in this case, Samantha Gold.

Neither had a telephone available, so she was restricted to waving at him. She did not call out because her neighbors would then have known what was going on—as if they didn't already know.

Finally, having found a conjunction of words which would rhyme with "equine," he opened his eyes. After some mystification, he understood her. The maid had gone to the grocery store and he could come in because the maid usually forgot to lock the door. He dressed and put food and booze in a sack and went over to her apartment. She explained why she couldn't leave, and after he had quit rolling on the floor and laughing—and smashed the sandwich while doing so—he took the key to her bedroom out of the dresser drawer in Irving's bedroom.

Her bedroom was as elegantly middle-class as he had expected. The huge framed photograph of a World War I Zeppelin in flight was something he had not expected. Beside it was a photograph of a young man with a handlebar moustache. He wore the uniform of a German naval officer, circa 1918.

"My father," Samantha said.

"Your father was an airship?"

"You've been drinking again. No, he was a *leutnant* on a Zeppelin."

Brass was intrigued, but he was also impatient to get away before the maid returned. And the consciousness that she was wearing nothing under a thin dress was making him forget his primary fidelity to the Goddess.

Later, while they were resting in his darkened room, he said, "All right, I'll meet your father, though I don't know why he'd be glad to know me."

"He's a poet, too, in a way," she said. "He's a lovely old man even if a little odd. I think he's in love with his big dirigibles. That's all he wants to talk about, except when he happens to think about the governor. Then he raves and rants and calls him Abdul von Schicklgruber, the Plutocrats' Pet. I don't pay any attention to politics; if you can't make it big in the movies, try something else, I always say. Anyway, Zeppelins are his love. He dreams of them, builds models of them, reads books on them. And I dream of Zeppelins, too, after I've visited him. Every Sunday night, those big things sail through my dreams."

"I dreamed of my horse the other night," Brass said. "She's dead now, hit by a truck two days before I came to Beverly Hills. She had big dark eyes, like yours. Liquid, full of love, and a hunger in them for something I couldn't ever figure out. Mostly, a horse just wants hay and carrots and water and rest and sugar lumps now and then. But when I looked into those eyes, I knew that tiny brain behind them had its dreams, too. Or maybe they were mirrors for my dreams."

She sat up and said, "Your horse's eyes remind you of mine?"

"That's a compliment," he said. He did not dare tell her the rest of the dream. "When I woke I thought I smelled her sweat, but it wasn't hers."

"Mine?" she said, and she went to the refrigerator.

"You better lay off," he said, "or you won't be able to get back through the front door, let alone the dog door."

She was bending over. He could visualize the beautiful dark tail of the mare swishing back and forth.

Sunday, she told Brass that she had convinced Irving that he had forgotten to lock the bedroom door. She had had to lie because the maid had told him that his wife had left the bedroom. Usually, Irving accompanied her on Sundays on her visits to her father. He did so not because he liked her father or her company but because he wanted to make sure she ate nothing forbidden. But today he had had to attend to business that had suddenly come up.

"Some business, that shicksa he's seeing," she said. "But I'm getting my revenge."

She walked out. A few minutes later, he followed. He met her on the porch of her father's house in the most depressed area of Beverly Hills. The house cost a mere $50,000 and would have brought $12,000 in Peoria, Illinois, after effective heating had been installed.

They found Mr. Goldbeater in the backyard working on a model of his last ship, which had gone down in flames in a raid over England. It was his *tour de force* model. Thirty feet long, it had four gondolas with gasoline motors that worked and a control gondola in which a small man could fit if he didn't mind a prenatal position. A big black *formée* cross, American flag, California state flag, and star of David were painted on the sides.

Brass did not comment; he had seen stranger conjunctions.

The old man looked surprised, but he smiled and pumped Brass's hand vigorously. They went into the house, which was crowded with smaller models of Zeppelins and dirigibles. The old man insisted on pouring a drink six fingers high, and Brass was not reluctant to accept.

"Here's to the return of horses," Mr. Goldbeater said. "And to the downfall of Abdul von Schicklgruber."

"Here's to the comeback of gasbags," Brass said, and they drank.

Samantha surprised both by filling a glass with bourbon.

"Here's to the triumph of true love," she said, and she drank.

"The waters of Kentucky bring out what lies dearest to our hearts," Mr. Goldbeater said.

He looked at his daughter and at Brass.

"How long have you been laying Samantha?"

"Papa!"

"Not long enough," Brass said, holding out his glass for a refill.

"A fine figure of a woman," Mr. Goldbeater said. "And a big heart, if a weak mind. Too good for that *schlemiel* Irving. And you're a fine broth of a lad."

He drank again and then said, "Irving runs around with a shicksa that drinks daiquiris."

He shuddered.

Samantha sat down and held out her glass for a refill. She hated alcohol, but it was the only anaesthetic handy.

"Papa, how long have you known?"

"When you walked in. It was bound to happen, unless you became so fat eating forbidden fruit—if you don't mind my calling pork on rye that—that a man wouldn't want to have anything to do with you."

Brass looked at the portrait of Samantha's mother. He knew then where she had gotten her magnificent breasts and why a man who loved Zeppelins would have asked her mother to marry him.

When he left, Brass was reeling in body and mind. Around him was a cloud, and through it poked the huge nose of a black Zeppelin high over London. This was the recurring dream of old man Goldbeater.

In Brass's apartment, Samantha confessed that that was her recurring dream, too.

"There's this black curly cloud miles up, and there's the city sprawled out on its back below. And then, suddenly, there's a drone of motors, and this tremendous round-nosed and very long thing slides out of the clouds. It's great and powerful and also sinister, so sneaky and evil, and it penetrates the air so irresistibly. And it horrifies me, yet attracts me."

He looked down at her and said, *"Feuer Ein!"*

"Fire one!" she said a moment later, breathing hard. "I didn't know you knew German?"

"I've seen a lot of movies about submarine warfare," he said when he had regained his breath. "I don't know what the krauts said when they ordered bombs dropped. *Lässen fallen die Bomben, Dreckkopf?"*

"I have to go home," she said dreamily. "Or I'll fall asleep, and Irving will come home, and then you'll see the bombs drop. Right on me."

"I must have had too much bourbon at your father's," he said. "Otherwise, why would I be asking you to stay here and let Irving find out about us? So he divorces you? Don't you love me?"

"You keep telling me that money isn't all," she said. "And I keep telling you that love isn't all, either. I'm secure with Irving. He isn't ever going to divorce me unless I get very nasty. He thinks it'd give him a bad name with the wives of his business friends, which means his friends would give him a bad name. He'd find a way to cut me off without a cent. And you . . ."

"So what do we do, just continue our affair?"

"Until it comes to a natural end."

"All endings, from the viewpoint of the person being ended, are unnatural," he said.

That phrase possessed him; a poem started to come on. He did not even see or hear Samantha leave the room.

After his poem on the finality of things was cast in its final form, Brass began to think of Samantha again. But he had little time to think and less to act. The absentee landlord, a goy Gentile, sold the apartment building. Two days later, the crane and its giant steel ball and the bulldozer arrived. The tenants threatened to sue, and the landlord, on vacation in Hawaii, said, "Sue me." He pointed out that he had sent the tenants letters six months ago telling them why and when they must leave. If they had not received them, they should blame the postal service, which was deteriorating along with everything else.

The big ball struck thunder and quake and plaster through the building, and the pieces of ceiling falling on him awoke Brass. He dressed hastily and packed without folding anything. He had decided, as soon as he opened his eyes, that he was not going to force the authorities to carry him out after all. Buildings were almost as insubstantial as love; nothing lasted forever. A six-story high-rent apartment building would be erected here; other men and women would fall in love while living in it and would make their decisions to run away or to stay. And then that building, too, would be torn down.

But it wasn't easy to demolish love, which, after all, was more like an animal, a living creature, than a construction of inorganic material. He would make one more attempt. If he failed, he would at least have given Beverly Hills another item of folklore.

It took him most of the morning to rent a horse in Griffith Park, rent a car and trailer, and transport the beast to the heart of downtown Beverly Hills, the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Beverly Drive.

There he mounted his white horse and, repressing the desire to cry, "Hi-Yo, Silver, Awa-a-ay!", he urged the horse into a gallop eastward on Wilshire. Inaudible music of Rossini's *Lone Ranger Overture*. Audible shrill of police whistles, blare and bleep of car horns, scream of brakes, caw of curses flying by like ravens.

Before reaching Doheny, he turned south on one of those streets named after trees, the sparks flying from the iron shoes of his charger and the cigars dropping from the mouths of the Rolls Royce salesmen in the agency near the corner. There were, as usual, no parking spaces available, so he rode down the strip of grass between curb and sidewalk, slid to a halt, jumped off, tied the panting beast to a bush, and ran upstairs to the third floor past the astonished manager, who had just opened the front door.

He beat on the door of the Golds' apartment, got no answer, and shoved the door in with a kick followed by his shoulder. The maid was gone, but Samantha's faint cries reached him. He ran down the hall and turned the corner.

Samantha was stuck in the dog door.

She looked up at him and said, "I tried to signal you, but you've kept your blinds down. Then I asked the maid to get you, and she told me Irving paid her wages, not me. But she did give me a special delivery letter from my father.

"Father took off in his model, his mini-Zeppelin he called it in the letter. He left this morning, headed for Sacramento. He said he was going to bomb that *schweinhund* in the governor's mansion. And he wished you and me good luck."

Samantha started to cry. Brass tried to pull her out of the opening, but he stopped when she began to groan with pain.

"I thought you would've lost weight since you stopped seeing me," he said.

"Irving decided to let me eat all the pork on rye and mushroom gravy that I wanted. That way, I wouldn't be able to sneak out. He found out that the best jailor is the prisoner himself. Herself, in this case.

"But then I heard that your building was going to be torn down, and I got my father's letter. I knew that I had to do something brave and worthwhile, too. So I tried to get out so I could run off with you. With you I could have my sandwiches and love, too. So you drink too much and our floors are bare. So what?"

Brass kicked the door until his feet hurt and then he battered it with chairs until he had shattered a dozen. But

Irving, knowing the flimsiness and sleaziness of modern construction, had had the door built to order.

A siren wailed decrescendo outside.

"I wanted to carry you off on my horse," Brass said. "For a few blocks, anyway. Then we would transfer to my rental Mustang and take off for the mountains."

"You go on," she said. "But don't wait for me. I just now saw why I'm stuck. I made my choice, even if I tried to cancel it. I knew that if I refused to eat so much, I could get out easily. But I couldn't. So you go. I made my choice. Besides, truth to tell, I'm afraid of horses."

He got down on his knees and kissed her. Her breath had a not unpleasant odor of pork on rye and kosher pickles.

He stood up. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she said.

He walked down the front steps of the building. A policeman, looking at his hat and silver-buckled belt and boots, said, "This horse belong to you, Buck?"

It lay on the sidewalk, breathing its last in bloodied foam. Ridden hard, it had been overloaded with a mixture of carbon monoxide, nitric acid, ozone, acetone, formaldehyde, and vaporized lead.

"No horse of mine, officer," Brass said politely. "You ought to call the fire department. There's a woman in 308 trying to get born."

The policeman misunderstood him and called for an ambulance. Brass did not enlighten him. He walked away. Two deaths behind him and what lay ahead?

On Wilshire, he stopped to watch a parade of several hundred young men and women. They were well-dressed, well-fed, well-schooled, and obviously the sons and daughters of those they were marching against. They carried placards:

WORSHIPPERS OF MAMMON, REPENT!
BEVERLY HILLS SUCKS!
UP YOUR LOVE OF MONEY!
ROBIN HOOD LIVES!
REMEMBER SODOM AND GOMORRAH!

There were some older people in the parade, including some rabbis, ministers, and priests. Today was not a holy

day, and so they might be scourged out of the city, but it would be by billies and mace, not credit cards. Police sirens were whooping in the distance; forces were hastening in response to the calls of alarmed citizens.

Brass waved his hat and cheered and thought about joining them. But he had just gotten out of one kind of prison, and he did not, at that moment, feel up to enduring another. He needed to breathe some comparatively fresh air in the pines and to make more songs for the Goddess. Everyone served in his own way.

In the car, pointed for the mountains, he turned the radio on. A UFO had been sighted heading for the state capital. The National Guard jets were scrambling. Their trails froze while the sun sparked on the mysterious slow-moving vehicle.

——*Philip José Farmer*

THE SONG OF PASSING

(For Colin Stuart)

The song of passing
Inside and
Out, of Her ancient tongue
Without king
What candel burns, the valley
In Her cradled breast.
A snow bird's nest

No law but Her breath, the
Lazy hips under
Her hot and shattered hunter
Wrapt in boughs of chaos, winter.
A lie tossed on the heaving water

Is this what we do
To each other? (branches
Breaking through the air)
Sounding far, the zenith glows
Onward straight as star-light.
With none to touch our aching fingers—
Sad fragments at

Themselves. Charred
Embers in the heart of snow

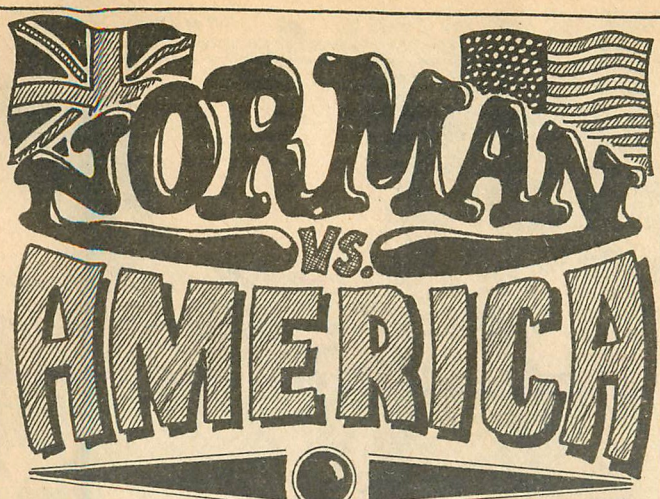
So singing hymns
We pass
The darkness, Brazen
Crows the old men alight
On every tree top, mock
Our banter. Stretch to drink
The moon rain married scorched
Against the folds
Of fire

From there. To
Eye, and heart
This mountain, In
And out of haunting knows
Our season's passing. Utter
Hell that we would move, alone
Unoticed. Through
The wretched jewells we
Worship

And out
You pass of me, a
Thunder bolting after each
Graph of forest light
Drawn. The dead men moan of better
Times here; survive
Such fabric that
We ruin

Image hitched to the carriage,
Helen lies nearest the coals
Here, disappeared in wedlocked
Psyche. Stone to water
The melting mountain, nowhere to go
But in It; Her memory my enemy, the
Woman
Alive glows farther through It. Blue
Heart beats a
Drill of sunlight.

——*Marco Cacchioni*



THIS IS A PROGRAMMED COMIC STRIP. START AT FRAME ONE. YOU HAVE THE CHOICE OF GOING FROM THERE TO FRAME TWO OR FRAME THREE. IF YOU CHOOSE THREE, GO STRAIGHT TO IT, OMITTING FRAME TWO ALTOGETHER.

YOU HAVE A NEW CHOICE, IN EACH FRAME. EVERY TIME YOU CHOOSE A NUMBER, GO STRAIGHT TO IT, OMITTING OTHERS IN BETWEEN.

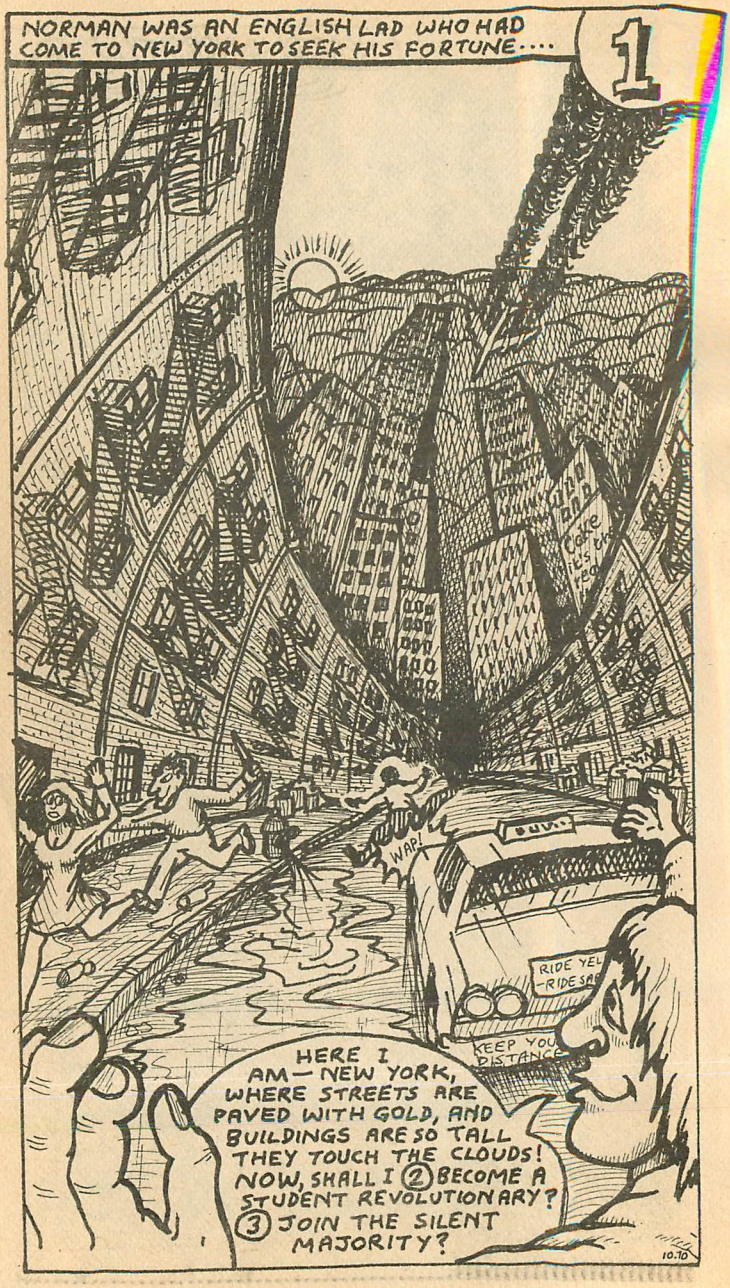
THERE ARE FOUR ENDINGS. IN THREE OF THEM, NORMAN LOSES HIS STRUGGLE AGAINST AMERICA. BUT IN ONE OF THEM, NORMAN SUCCEEDS.

YOUR AIM IS TO MAKE CHOICES WHICH YOU THINK WILL BE MOST LIKELY TO LEAD NORMAN THROUGH TO THE HAPPY ENDING.

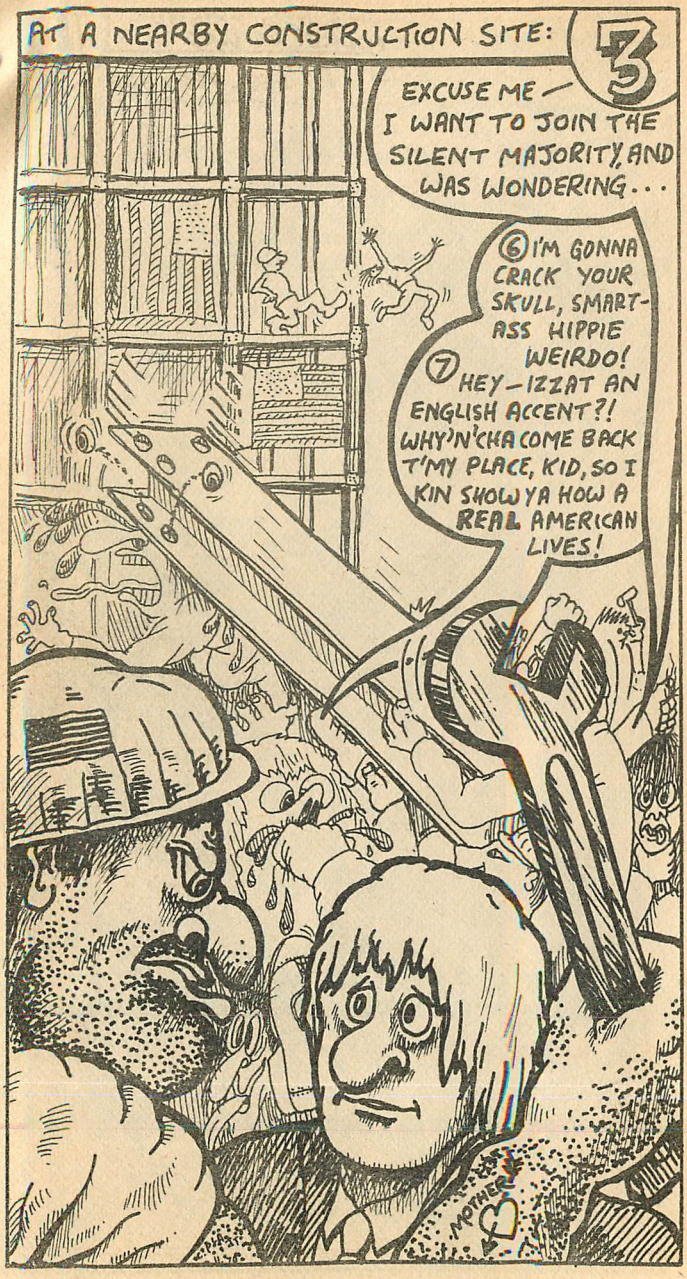
IN ALL, THERE ARE 67 DIFFERENT PATHS THROUGH THE COMIC. THEY VARY IN LENGTH FROM FIVE TO NINE FRAMES. OF ALL THE 67, ONLY 16 LEAD TO SUCCESS, RICHES AND HAPPINESS FOR NORMAN.

NOW TURN TO FRAME ONE →

WRITTEN & DRAWN
BY CHARLES PLATT
FROM AN ORIGINAL IDEA BY JOHN T. SLADEK

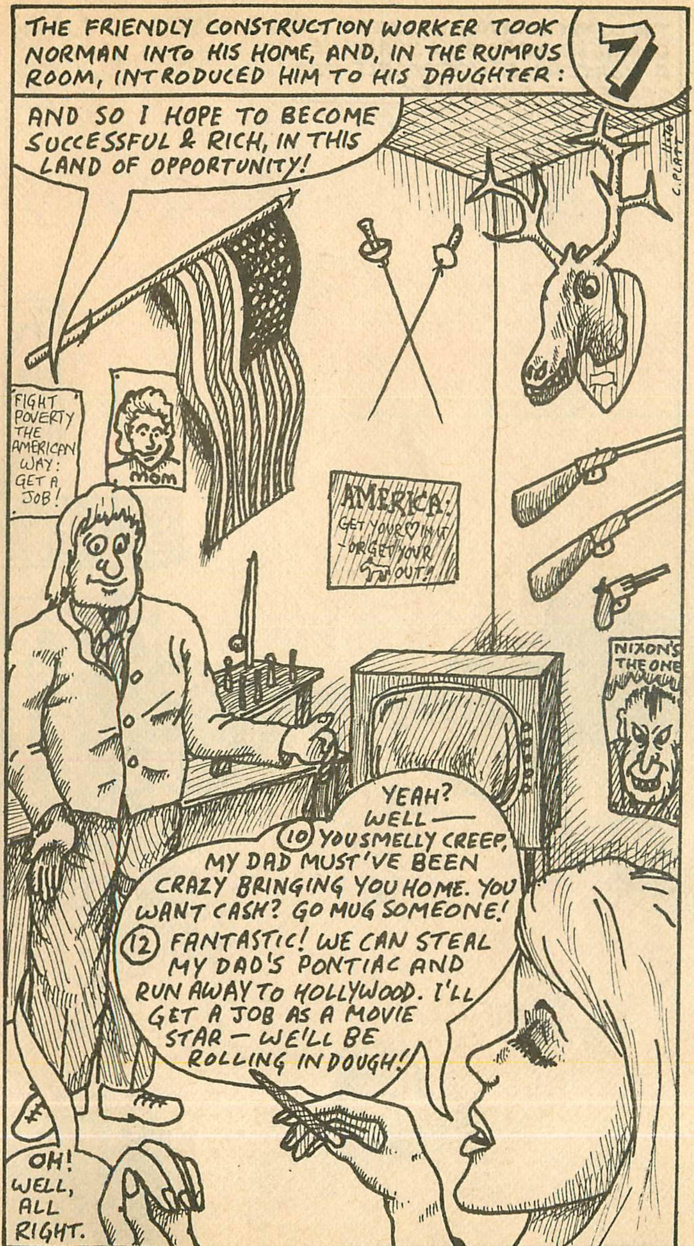

NORMAN WAS AN ENGLISH LAD WHO HAD COME TO NEW YORK TO SEEK HIS FORTUNE....
1
WAP!
RIDE YEL
-RIDESA
KEEP YOU
DISTANCE
HERE I AM— NEW YORK, WHERE STREETS ARE PAVED WITH GOLD, AND BUILDINGS ARE SO TALL THEY TOUCH THE CLOUDS! NOW, SHALL I (2) BECOME A STUDENT REVOLUTIONARY? (3) JOIN THE SILENT MAJORITY?
10.70


NORMAN WENT TO A NEARBY UNIVERSITY...
2
HOW DO YOU DO? I'M INTERESTED IN DESTROYING THE OPPRESSIVE FORCES OF THE FASCIST ESTABLISHMENT. CAN I HELP IN ANY WAY?
FAR OUT! MY NAME'S JOE. COME WITH ME, AND
4 SHOPLIFT FROM MACY'S IN OUR PLAN TO UNDERMINE THE MATERIALIST BOURGEOISIE!
5 GET YOUR HEAD STRAIGHT AT THE LOCAL ROCK MUSIC FESTIVAL


AT A NEARBY CONSTRUCTION SITE:
3
EXCUSE ME — I WANT TO JOIN THE SILENT MAJORITY, AND WAS WONDERING...
⑥ I'M GONNA CRACK YOUR SKULL, SMART-ASS HIPPIE WEIRDO!
⑦ HEY — IZZAT AN ENGLISH ACCENT?! WHY'N'CHA COME BACK T'MY PLACE, KID, SO I KIN SHOW YA HOW A REAL AMERICAN LIVES!
MOTHER

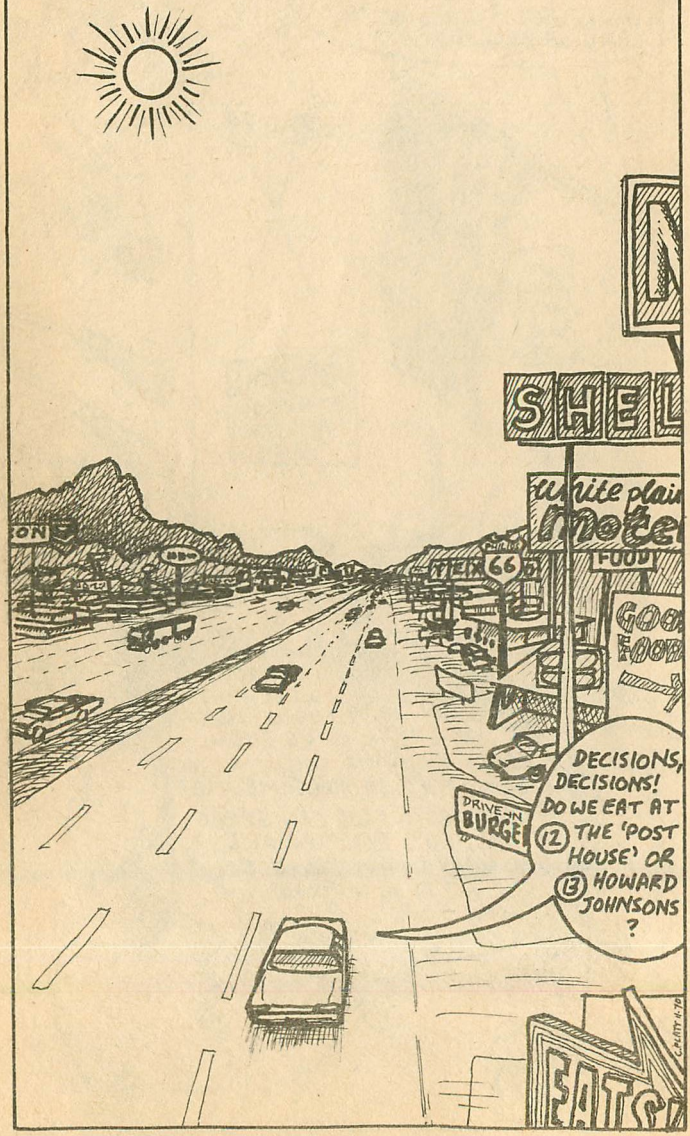

UNFORTUNATELY, NORMAN'S NEW FRIEND BETRAYED HIM TO THE POLICE! HE WAS THROWN INTO JAIL....
4
NO SPITT
I FEEL REAL BAD ABOUT IT, NORM! BUT WHEN THE PIGS SHOWED UP, SOMEONE HAD TO TAKE THE RAP. WHEN YOU'VE SERVED YOUR TIME, THOUGH, WE CAN USE THE BREAD I COPPED TO (8) BUY A CAR AND DRIVE TO SAN FRANCISCO (14) GET INTO THE PORNOGRAPHY BUSINESS & HIT IT BIG!
5
AT THE FESTIVAL NORMAN MET JOE'S SISTER, VALERIE — THERE WAS A DEEP RAPPORT...
WHATEVER YOU THINK IS BEST, JOE.
C. CLARK 1979
NORMAN, YOU'RE EVERYTHING I'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR! (4) CHARGING ENTRANCE MONEY TO THIS FESTIVAL IS A BUMMER — YOU CAN HELP ME & JOE RIP OFF THE ORGANIZERS & GIVE THE BREAD TO THE PEOPLE! (9) LET ME TAKE YOU AWAY FROM ALL THIS— MY DAD HAPPENS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE. MARRY ME AND WE'LL LIVE IN LUXURY!
LOVE
PEACE
HMM! THAT SOUNDS A SENSIBLE IDEA.


THE CONSTRUCTION WORKER'S VICIOUS BLOW DAMAGED NORMAN'S BRAIN! HE BECAME A TWITCHING VEGETABLE IN THE GARDEN OF HUMANITY....
6
HAVE ANOTHER, ON THE HOUSE, BUDDY! I LOVE TA HEAR THAT GODDAMN ENGLISH ACCENT — YOU SPEAK IT LIKE IT'S WRITTEN!
TH... THANKS! P... PARDON MY AS... AS... ASKING, BUT I'M LOOKING FOR A J. JOB ....
TREMBLE
OH, YEAH? WELL, WITH YOUR, UH, DISABILITY, YOU OUGHTA TRY ⑩ MUGGING PEOPLE ⑪ TAXI DRIVING. HA HA HA! HEY, WATCH WHERE YOU'RE SPILLIN' THAT DRINK, WILLYA?

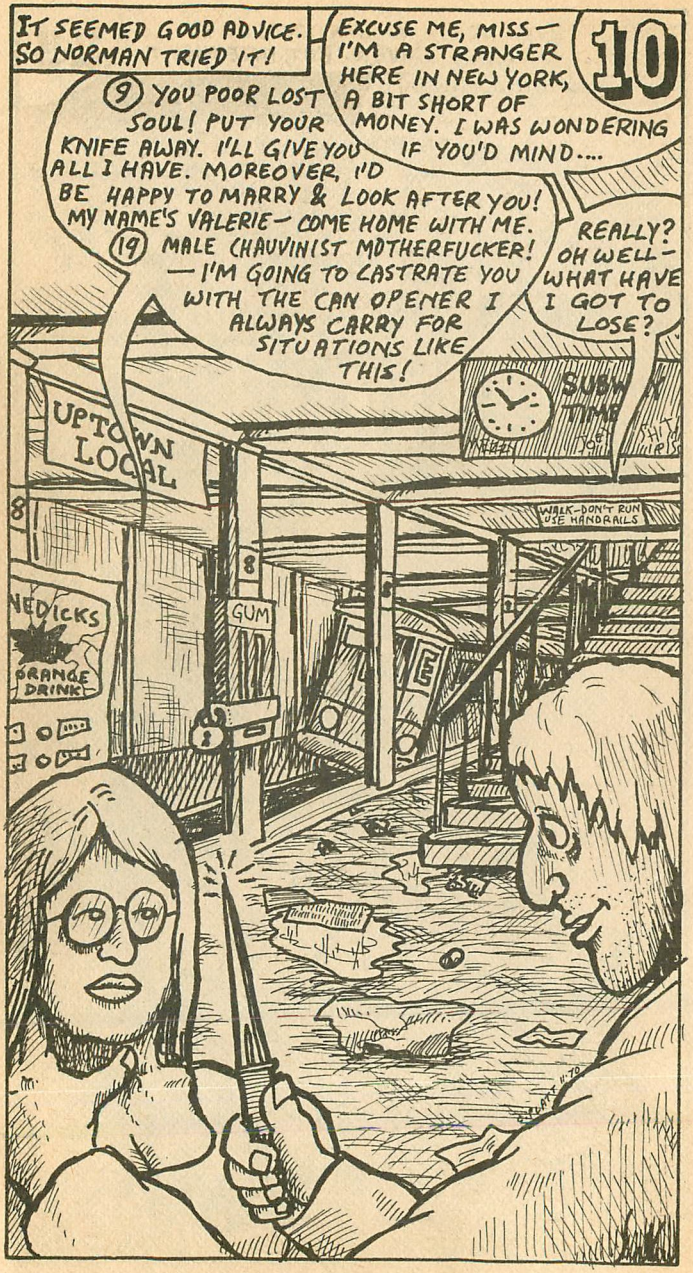

THE FRIENDLY CONSTRUCTION WORKER TOOK NORMAN INTO HIS HOME, AND, IN THE RUMPUS ROOM, INTRODUCED HIM TO HIS DAUGHTER:
7
AND SO I HOPE TO BECOME SUCCESSFUL & RICH, IN THIS LAND OF OPPORTUNITY!
FIGHT POVERTY THE AMERICAN WAY: GET A JOB!
MOM
AMERICA: GET YOUR ♥ IN IT - OR GET YOUR OUT!
NIXON'S THE ONE
C. PLATT
YEAH? WELL — (10) YOU SMELLY CREEP, MY DAD MUST'VE BEEN CRAZY BRINGING YOU HOME. YOU WANT CASH? GO MUG SOMEONE! (12) FANTASTIC! WE CAN STEAL MY DAD'S PONTIAC AND RUN AWAY TO HOLLYWOOD. I'LL GET A JOB AS A MOVIE STAR — WE'LL BE ROLLING IN DOUGH!
OH! WELL, ALL RIGHT.

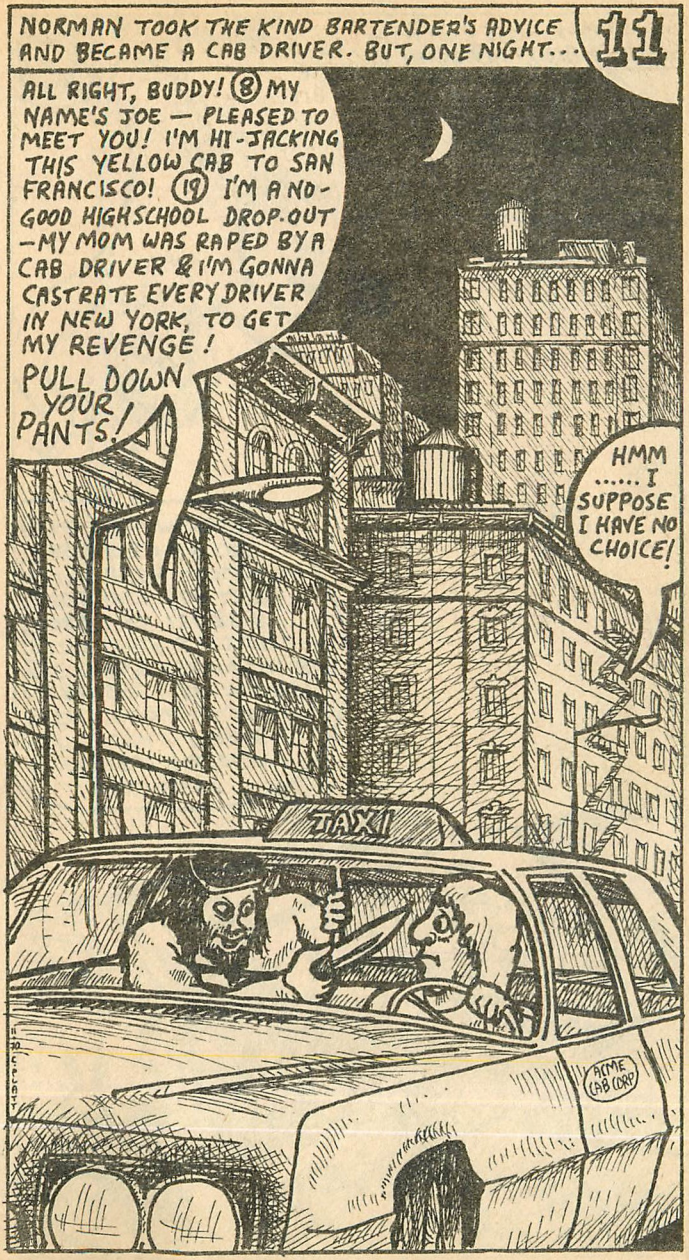
SO, TOGETHER, THEY HEADED WEST.
SOME DAYS LATER, IN A TOWN IN ARIZONA:

8




VALERIE MADE THE ARRANGEMENTS. SOON SHE & NORMAN WERE HAPPILY MARRIED! BUT:
9
SO NOW I'M A MEMBER OF THE SILENT MAJORITY, AFTER ALL. BUT WE'RE IN DEBT, VALERIE IS SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME WITH HER ANALYST FOR MY LIKING, THE DISHWASHER CAUGHT FIRE, THE COLOR T.V. PICTURE IS TOO STRONG ON RED, AND I'M FEELING VERY DEPRESSED. I THINK I'LL
(12) GO ON A VACATION
(14) THROW IT ALL UP AND BECOME A DILDO MANUFACTURER!
G.PLATT 11-70

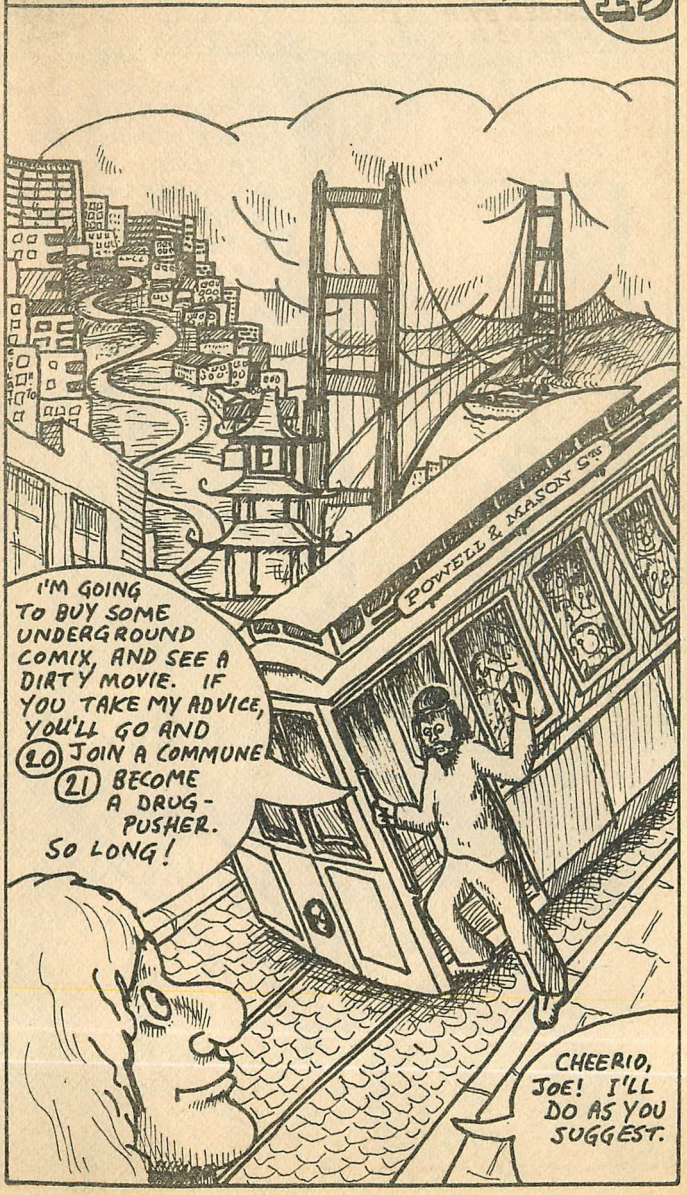

10
IT SEEMED GOOD ADVICE. SO NORMAN TRIED IT!
EXCUSE ME, MISS — I'M A STRANGER HERE IN NEW YORK, A BIT SHORT OF MONEY. I WAS WONDERING IF YOU'D MIND....
(9) YOU POOR LOST SOUL! PUT YOUR KNIFE AWAY. I'LL GIVE YOU ALL I HAVE. MOREOVER, I'D BE HAPPY TO MARRY & LOOK AFTER YOU! MY NAME'S VALERIE — COME HOME WITH ME.
REALLY? OH WELL — WHAT HAVE I GOT TO LOSE?
(19) MALE CHAUVINIST MOTHERFUCKER! — I'M GOING TO CASTRATE YOU WITH THE CAN OPENER I ALWAYS CARRY FOR SITUATIONS LIKE THIS!
UPTOWN LOCAL
WALK-DON'T RUN USE HANDRAILS
GUM
ORANGE DRINK

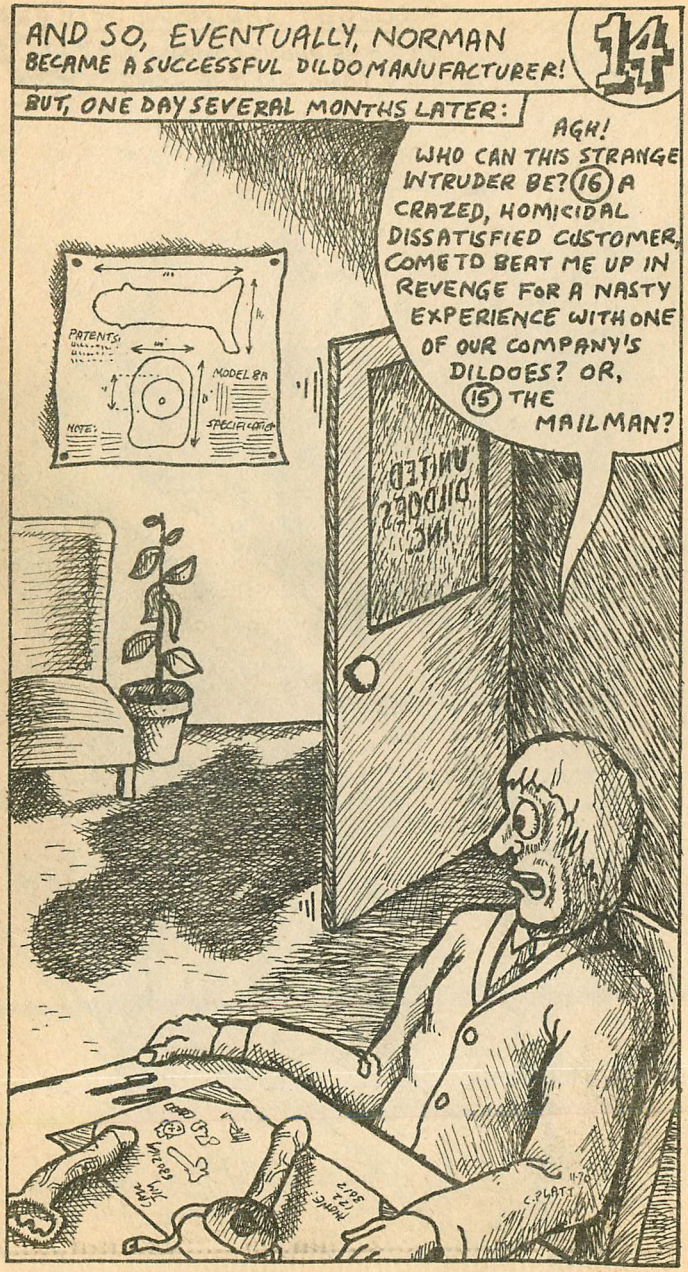

NORMAN TOOK THE KIND BARTENDER'S ADVICE AND BECAME A CAB DRIVER. BUT, ONE NIGHT...
11
ALL RIGHT, BUDDY! (8) MY NAME'S JOE — PLEASED TO MEET YOU! I'M HI-JACKING THIS YELLOW CAB TO SAN FRANCISCO! (19) I'M A NO-GOOD HIGHSCHOOL DROP-OUT — MY MOM WAS RAPED BY A CAB DRIVER & I'M GONNA CASTRATE EVERY DRIVER IN NEW YORK, TO GET MY REVENGE!
PULL DOWN YOUR PANTS!
HMM ..... I SUPPOSE I HAVE NO CHOICE!
TAXI
ACME CAB CORP

12
THE CAR JOURNEY WENT WELL UNTIL, STRICKEN BY CHRONIC STOMACH PAINS CAUSED BY A MEAL AT A "POST HOUSE" RESTAURANT, NORMAN LOST CONTROL AND A MASSIVE PILE-UP ENSUED.....
YIKES! WHAT A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT! BUT LUCKILY I HAVE BEEN THROWN CLEAR — I CAN SEE I AM IN FACT THE ONLY SURVIVOR. BUT (16) MY SPINE IS INSURED — LOOKS LIKE I'LL BE A HUNCHBACK FOR LIFE! (19) I'VE BEEN — OUCH! — CASTRATED BY THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR!

ARRIVING IN SAN FRANCISCO, JOE AND NORMAN WENT THEIR SEPARATE WAYS

13

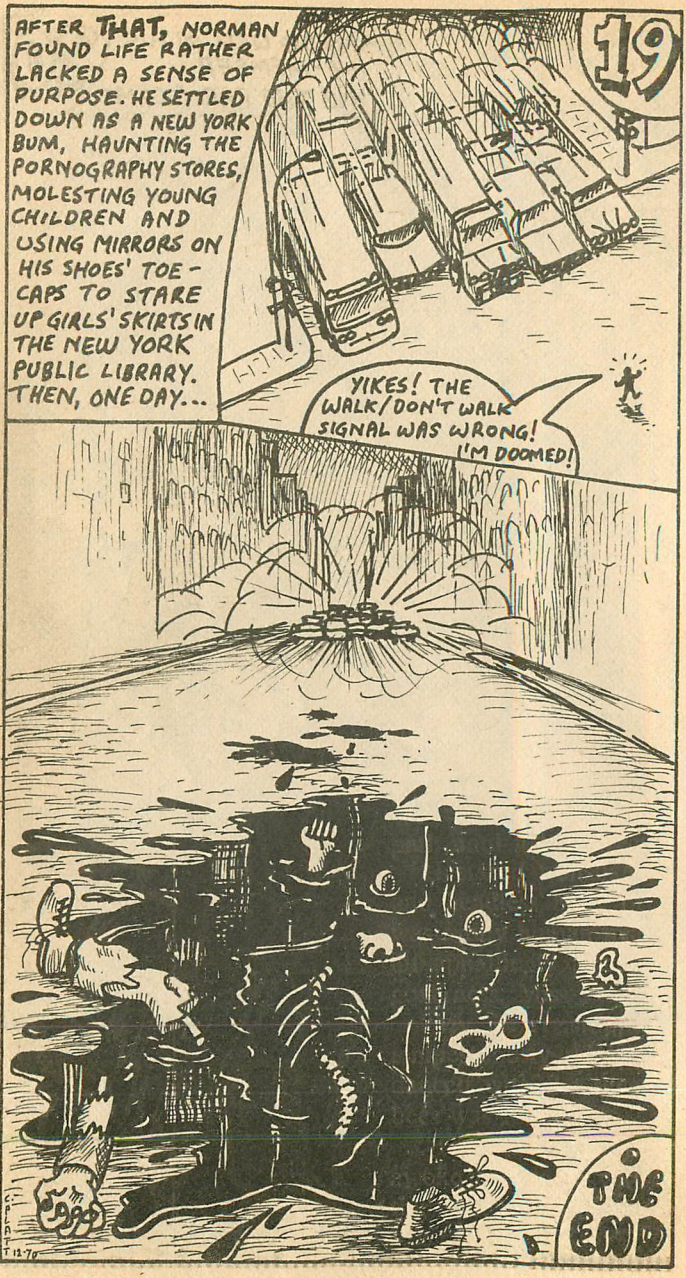


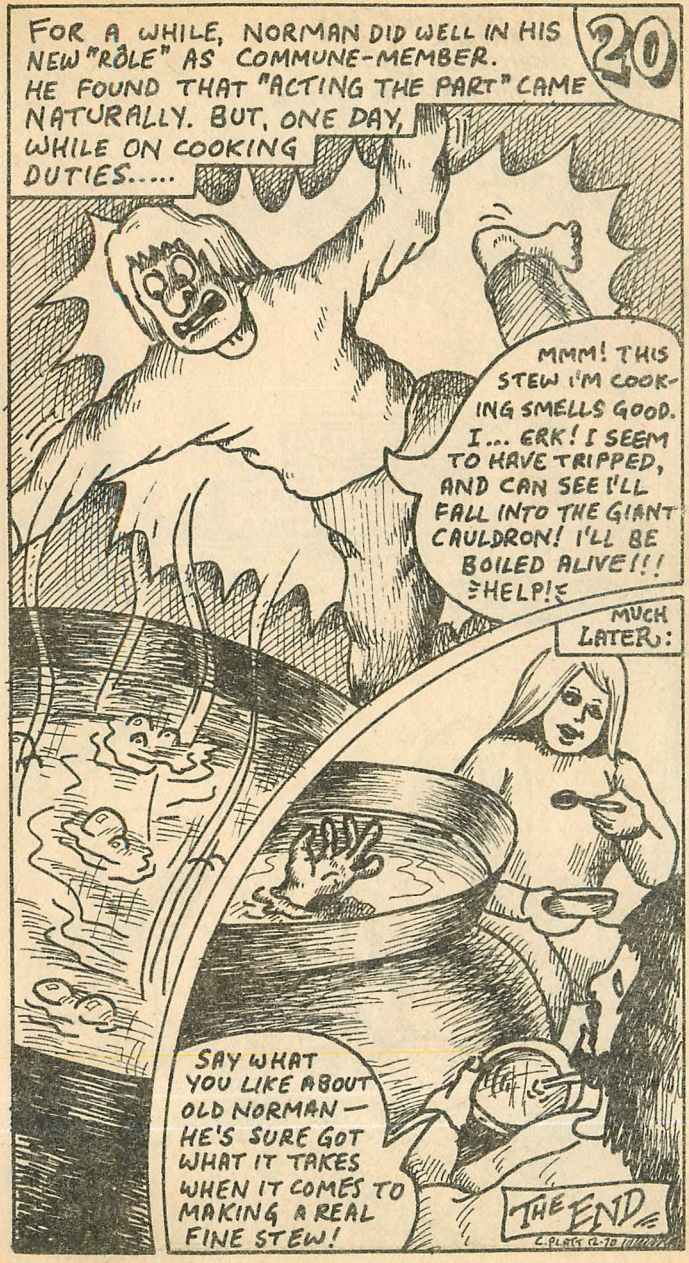

AND SO, EVENTUALLY, NORMAN BECAME A SUCCESSFUL DILDO MANUFACTURER!
14
BUT, ONE DAY SEVERAL MONTHS LATER:
AGH! WHO CAN THIS STRANGE INTRUDER BE? (16) A CRAZED, HOMICIDAL DISSATISFIED CUSTOMER, COME TO BEAT ME UP IN REVENGE FOR A NASTY EXPERIENCE WITH ONE OF OUR COMPANY'S DILDOES? OR, (15) THE MAILMAN?
PATENTS
MODEL 8A
NOTES:
SPECIFICATIONS
UNITED DILDOES INC.
11-76
C. PLATT

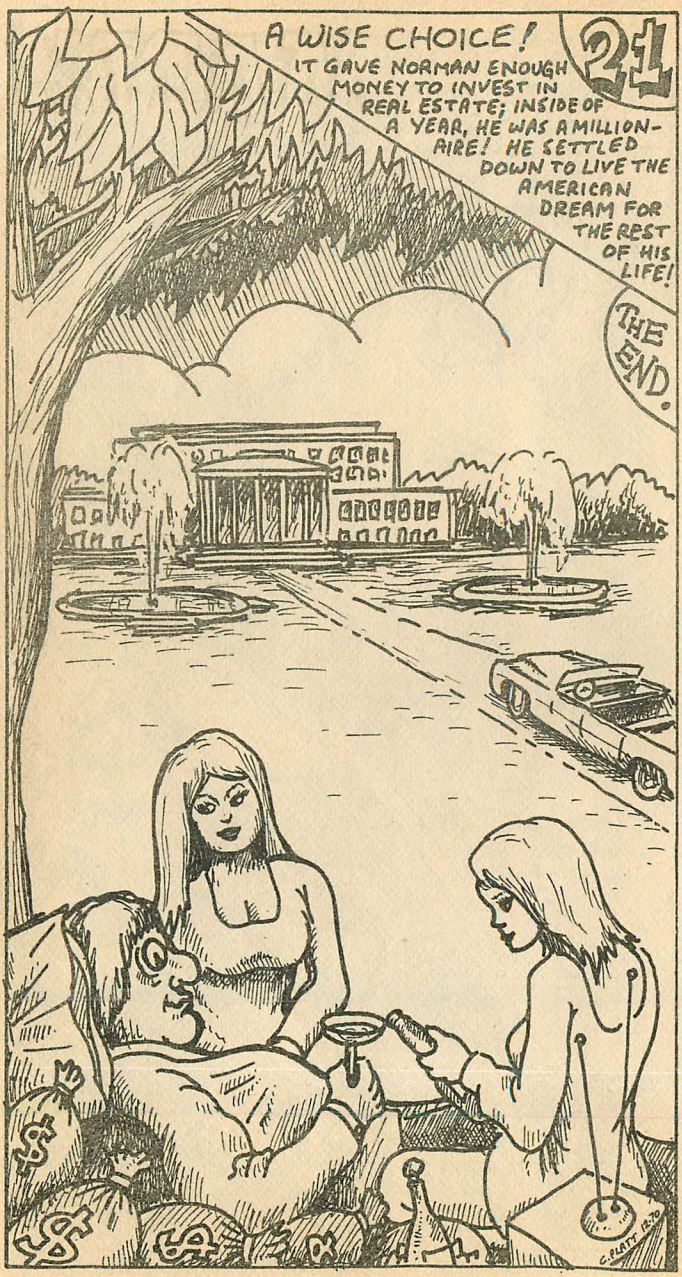

THE MAILMAN BROUGHT BAD NEWS—
15
YIKES! THE PHONE COMPANY HAS TRACKED DOWN ALL THE LONG-DISTANCE CALLS I MADE WITH MY FAKE CREDIT CARD NUMBER. THEY WANT $10,000!! I'LL HAVE TO (17) GO TO VEGAS, TO WIN THE MONEY (18) ABSCOND, AND BECOME A PENNILESS BUM.
16
WOUNDS FROM THE ENCOUNTER MADE NORMAN AN INCURABLE HUNCH-BACK! HE SEARCHED FRUITLESSLY FOR A JOB, UNTIL, EVENTUALLY, HE BECAME A FLOOR-SWEEPER ON THE SET OF A MOVIE-DOCUMENTARY ABOUT WEST COAST COMMUNES....
WHAT LUCK! THE STAR OF THE MOVIE — BY COINCIDENCE, A HUNCHBACK SIMILAR TO MYSELF — HAS COME DOWN WITH MALIGNANT CANCER! THIS COULD BE MY BIG BREAK!
DIRECTOR
SCRIPT
MAKE A NOTE OF THIS, DOLORES — I'M GOING TO (17) SCRAP THE WHOLE MOVIE AND MAKE EVERYONE UNEMPLOYED! (20) TRY TO CARRY ON, WITH THAT FLOOR-SWEEPER IN THE STARRING ROLE!
C.PLATT 11-70

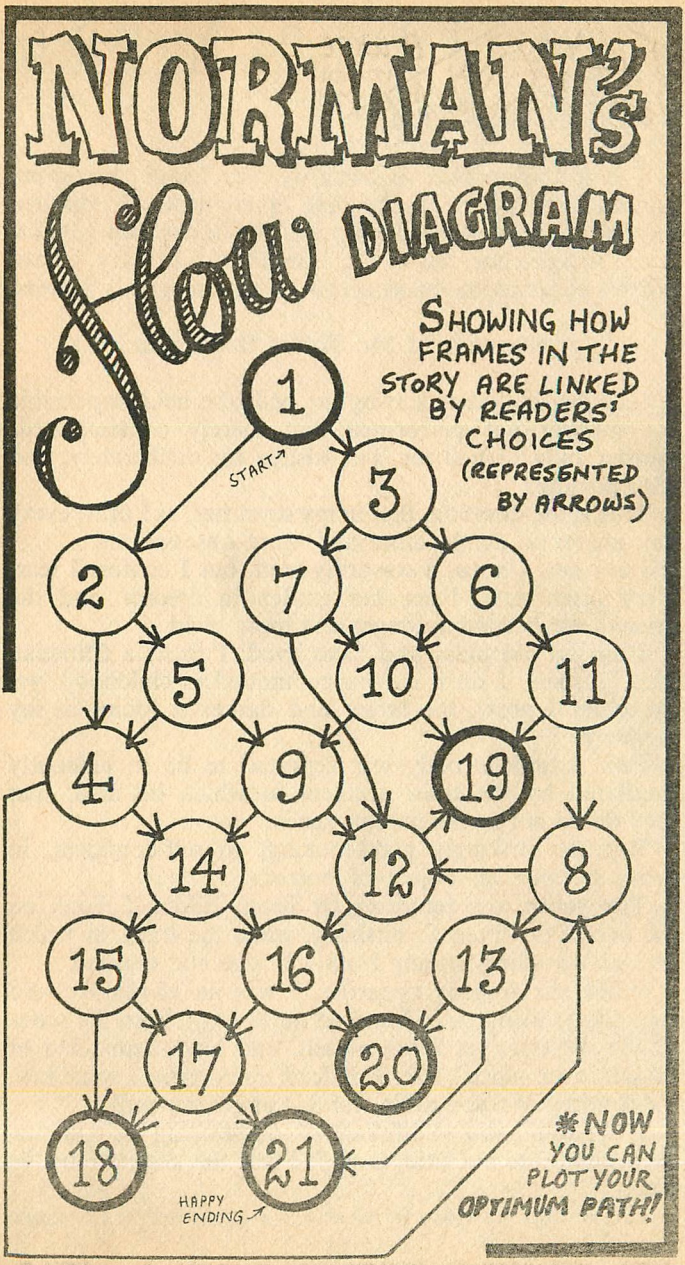

ALONE & PENNILESS, NORMAN'S ONLY HOPE WAS TO STRIKE IT RICH AT LAS VEGAS....
I'VE WON $7,000! BUT IT'S NOT ENOUGH. I'M GOING TO PUT IT ALL ON (18) BLACK— A SOBER CHOICE. (21) RED — AND DEVIL MAY CARE!
17


HOWARD JOHNSON'S
HEY, KIDS! ALL THE CHICKEN CYOU CAN EAT FOR $1.59?!
I'M DOWN TO MY LAST $2. I MAY AS WELL EAT MYSELF TO DEATH!
TOO BAD! NORMAN'S DECISION LED HIM TO TOTAL FINANCIAL RUIN!
18
AND SO, FIVE HOURS LATER
BLAM!
THE END
11-70


19
AFTER THAT, NORMAN FOUND LIFE RATHER LACKED A SENSE OF PURPOSE. HE SETTLED DOWN AS A NEW YORK BUM, HAUNTING THE PORNOGRAPHY STORES, MOLESTING YOUNG CHILDREN AND USING MIRRORS ON HIS SHOES' TOE-CAPS TO STARE UP GIRLS' SKIRTS IN THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY. THEN, ONE DAY...
YIKES! THE WALK/DON'T WALK SIGNAL WAS WRONG! I'M DOOMED!
THE END
CRUMB 12-70


20
FOR A WHILE, NORMAN DID WELL IN HIS NEW "RÔLE" AS COMMUNE-MEMBER. HE FOUND THAT "ACTING THE PART" CAME NATURALLY. BUT, ONE DAY, WHILE ON COOKING DUTIES.....
MMM! THIS STEW I'M COOKING SMELLS GOOD. I... ERK! I SEEM TO HAVE TRIPPED, AND CAN SEE I'LL FALL INTO THE GIANT CAULDRON! I'LL BE BOILED ALIVE!!! ≷HELP!≶
MUCH LATER:
SAY WHAT YOU LIKE ABOUT OLD NORMAN — HE'S SURE GOT WHAT IT TAKES WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING A REAL FINE STEW!
THE END
C. PLATT 12-70


A WISE CHOICE!
IT GAVE NORMAN ENOUGH MONEY TO INVEST IN REAL ESTATE; INSIDE OF A YEAR, HE WAS A MILLIONAIRE! HE SETTLED DOWN TO LIVE THE AMERICAN DREAM FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE!
21
THE END.
C. RATT '72


NORMAN'S
Flow DIAGRAM
SHOWING HOW FRAMES IN THE STORY ARE LINKED BY READERS' CHOICES (REPRESENTED BY ARROWS)
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HAPPY ENDING
*NOW YOU CAN PLOT YOUR OPTIMUM PATH!

THE TRUE REASON FOR THE DREADFUL DEATH OF MASTER REX ARUNDEL

Note by the Next of Kin:

The following curious narrative was found among my grandfather's papers at the time of his death. I inherited the old house of which he writes. The bricked-up window is still in existence, but so far, I am thankful to say, I have had no occasion to experiment with its ambiguous powers.

Narrative of Mr. Tobias Barrington

Can the soul, after leaving the body, be held responsible for murder not performed, but merely contemplated; murder only wished for, but wished for deliberately, and with passion?

This is the question, that in my seventies, as I draw every day nearer to death, more and more obsesses me.

I am not, I hope, a cowardly man, but I confess I fear. Very often now, I see her garden in dreams, and the dreams are becoming longer and more vivid.

I am an old man, and have lived, I trust, a Christian life. This sin, if sin it is, was committed in childhood; yet the older I grow, the larger and darker it looms in my memory.

Rex Arundel's body was reported to be so hideously mutilated by the train accident in which he died, that they dared not let his parents see it.

Rex, so strikingly good-looking, so self-confident, in death became an object of horror.

The youth was returning to Strath Eildon School, on the eve of his fifteenth birthday, when the train, in which he was travelling, sprang from a bridge and crashed.

When the tragedy occurred, I was an eleven-year-old schoolboy, living three hundred miles away from the scene of the disaster; yet I ask myself, and have demanded of myself ever since, was I indeed responsible, somehow, most horribly responsible, for his atrocious end?

Even now, with a lifetime of questioning behind me, even now I am not sure, though I fear the answer must be yes.

I have told my story to no one, for some deep reluctance

has always prevented me from doing so, or perhaps a fear of being thought mad.

Tonight, for the first time, I feel impelled to write it down. Perhaps when I read it in black and white, I may find some excuse for myself at eleven years old. After all I was very much afraid, and absolutely friendless, except for old Miss Arabella.

To make my story intelligible I must tell hers also, for they are interwoven.

If I am damned, then so is she, blameless, pious, old maiden lady though she appeared to be.

And thinking of her, so kindly, so uncomplaining in her long and tedious illness, I must ask myself once again, was the whole thing, after all, no more than a dream?

Oh! God! If that were only so! Her dreams and mine interwoven. The lonely boy, and the harmless crippled woman, comforting each other, sixty years ago, in this melancholy house; both haunted by nothing worse than dreams, even though they may have been the ill-omened dreams of opium.

Then in memory I see that garden, more clearly than in any dream; and the girl, that child whose loveliness has dimmed, for me, the light in all mortal faces. And I shudder with fear. I fear that I will see her again, after my death, and no longer in dreams.

And so I blame Miss Arabella, for she tempted me, Ah! yes, she tempted me, while pretending to warn. Yet, in her way, the old woman loved me. Why should she beckon me to such a hell?

Perhaps she hoped for company in that garden? Perhaps she is waiting for me there?

But enough of conjecture. This is my story.

I never knew my parents.

My father was the youngest son of a county family whose seat was Lum House, an old mansion in the Border country of Scotland; that same Lum House of which I am now the owner and sole inhabitant.

My birth killed my young mother, and shortly afterwards my father took ill of a fever, and died, leaving no provision for his orphan child.

My uncle, his eldest brother, who, though a stern and somewhat forbidding man, had a strong sense of duty,

took me into his family to be brought up with his own sons, and given the best education his means could provide.

Unfortunately, as the years passed, those means grew increasingly straitened; and it was often pointed out to me that I must endeavor to do well at school, since my uncle could not provide for me once my education was completed.

I was a quiet, somewhat awkward boy, with a natural taste for study. I was never much liked by my cousins, who, though not unkind, cared only for games and sports, for which I had neither ability nor inclination; nor was I popular with the children at the small grammar school which we attended, for I was too withdrawn and introspective to make friends readily among them.

Still, in my early boyhood, I was not unhappy. I was scarcely aware of my own loneliness; and I did have one friend, Miss Arabella, a fantastic old maid in her sixties, who was a remote connection of the family. For the greater part of her life she had worked as a governess; but in late middle age, she became a victim of arthritis, and through my uncle's charity, was given a home at Lum House.

Crippled for many years, she rarely left the heavy ebony chair, which faced a window, and was the principle piece of furniture in her room. Seated erect in that tall, throne-like chair; a black silk turban, embroidered with jet beads, wreathed closely round her head, she was a stern, almost unearthly figure.

I, however, was always at ease with her, as I was with no one else in my uncle's household. Perhaps because she too, long ago, had been an orphan child, and was still, like me, a dependent in that house, she understood me as no one else did in my small restricted world.

Books were our principle solace. She delighted in poetry, and we read Shakespeare together.

I remember that she would not begin *Macbeth* stopping with the appearance of the witches. I could never induce her to read it, although the play soon became a favorite of mine. When I asked why, she answered that she could not endure to think of witchcraft in any form.

"I suppose because you know it is a foolish superstition" I commented; but she replied, "Because I know it to be

true;" and could not be persuaded to discuss the matter further.

With the sole exception of *Macbeth,* Miss Arabella entered eagerly into all my interests. I well remember how she rejoiced with me when I won a scholarship to Strath Eildon School. Little did either of us guess what my small academic triumph was to lead to.

I entered Strath Eildon School filled with ambition, and an eager desire to do well; but almost at once the placid tenor of my life was shattered, and within a short time, my school days became a prolonged nightmare.

There was a boy at that school, his name was Rex Arundel. He was fourteen years old, three years older than me, and in every way different: the only son of a well-known and prosperous family, self-confident, popular, a fine athlete, smiled on by the masters, adored by the boys, and exceptionally handsome, with his bright hair, and frank manly look.

This was the image Rex Arundel presented to the little world of school. But he had another, hidden self, as I was very soon destined to learn, a self that belonged to the night, and the world of ogreish fairy tale. I cannot guess what sadistic twist in his nature compelled him to seek me out, and me alone, to torment in secret. Perhaps it was my complete defenselessness that excited him. I was predestined to be a victim. He would lie in wait for me in the deserted dormitories, or about the grounds. There was a grove of old trees where he took me . . . I will not detail the tortures, both physical and mental, which that handsome, heartless boy inflicted on me; enough that I lived in such terror of him that I could no longer concentrate or even attempt to study.

I dared not complain to the masters, far less to the boys; if I had done so, who would have believed me?

I endured two terms of this, saying no word to anyone, not even to Miss Arabella; but my work fell off so badly that my uncle, looking grave, told me it must improve, or he would remove me from school and place me in trade.

I spent the holidays desperately attempting to catch up on my studies. To a certain extent I succeeded, but soon only three days remained until the recommencement of term, and I knew, with a dreadful sinking of the heart, that the situation was hopeless. At home I could concen-

trate, but I must return to school, and to return was to fall again into the power of my tormentor. Important examinations were coming up, but I knew I could expect no mercy from him. He would torture me until I could not pass the simplest test.

I thought of Rex, of his arrogance, his strength, so cruelly used, his insolent beauty.

One is apt, as one grows old, to discount the power inherent in the loves and hates of childhood; but I know I have never experienced, in later life, any emotion as strong as the hatred I felt for Rex Arundel when I was eleven years old.

On the afternoon of which I write, my misery had reached breaking point. A particularly heavy storm of snow made it impossible to venture out of doors. I crept into Miss Arabella's room, and sat hunched against the old woman's knee, deriving some faint comfort from her presence.

We sat together for a long time in silence, watching the large grey snowflakes drift past her window.

At last she asked, "What is the matter, Tobias?"

"There's a boy at school" I muttered. "He bullies me. I hate him!"

I felt her stiffen, and a slight shiver passed through her. "You say you hate him" she almost whispered, "but do you truly hate?"

I looked up into her withered face, into her eyes, so curiously bright.

As though confessing to a priest I repeated, "I do, I do hate him. I would kill him if I could."

She lowered her eyes, and began, almost self-consciously, to smooth the black silk of her skirt with her uncannily thin fingers, weighted with old-fashioned rings.

"Beware of hate" she whispered, "it is dangerous."

"I don't care" I insisted. "He prevents me working. He's a wretch, a cruel wretch! I can't do anything but hate him."

She was silent for awhile, then she said, "I will tell you a true story."

"What about?" I asked impatiently.

"About me, my child, and this old house, about hatred, Tobias, and what it can do if you will not be forewarned, about a window that had been bricked-up for two hundred years in the North West room."

"I don't want to hear it, Miss Arabella," I said. "I can't think of anything but term beginning so soon, and having to go back to school."

To my embarrassment tears began to run down my cheeks. "I can't bear it" I whispered, burying my face in my old friend's skirt. "I hate him! I hate him so much!"

She took no notice of my outburst. She said, "You know the bricked-up window in the North West room?"

I nodded. I was only half listening, but resigned now to her talk.

I knew the large, chillingly cold, North West room, empty of all furniture except an unwieldy bed. The big, bricked-up window was in the wall facing the foot of the bed; at one time it must have looked onto a disused graveyard, which was now overgrown with nettles and docken plants. A few fallen headstones still lay around, their inscriptions long obliterated. My cousins and I had occasionally played there, but it was a dreary place, and we did not often disturb its solitude.

Miss Arabella said, "When I was a child I used to sleep in the North West room.

"My story, Tobias, goes back a long time, back more than sixty years, almost to the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign. I was about your age, perhaps somewhat younger, just ten years old. Like you I was an orphan, a dependent in this house, and like you, I hated someone, my governess, Miss Pradock.

"My parents had died before I could remember them, but until Miss Pradock arrived to teach us I was not unhappy in the company of my cousins. The girls were empty-headed, and the boys often teased me about my odd looks, and quiet ways, but I took this as part of my penniless lot, and was quite content to fetch and carry for all of them.

"Then, when I was nine years old, Miss Pradock became part of the household.

"Looking back, I realize that she must have been a most unhappy woman, condemned by poverty to work for which she was totally unfitted, for she did not care for children, and had no interest in teaching them.

"She was a big, heavy woman, with coarse features, and an ill-controlled temper. I soon felt that she disliked, and even hated me. It exasperated her that I was quick and

clever at lessons, much cleverer than my pretty cousins. Yet no matter how hard I studied, or how perfect were my exercises, I could not win a word of praise, or even of grudging approbation from her.

"Morning, noon, and night, she held me up to ridicule before the other children. She sneered at my physical characteristics, my height, my long neck, my large feet; and the children, following her example, ceased to be friendly, and began to make me the butt of endless exasperating jibes, and stupid practical jokes.

"Thinking back I can understand that Miss Pradock was actually a pathetic misfit, but to me, in my early girlhood, she was an ogress, a black shadow never to be escaped from, that blotted out all possibility of happiness.

"The climax came one January night, when a blizzard of snow and sleet was blowing down from the hills. All day Miss Pradock had nagged and goaded me with more than ordinary venom. Finally she birched me, for children in those days were often punished severely; and I was banished to bed in disgrace, without either supper or a candle.

"What enraged me more than the physical pain and humiliation was the knowledge that I was innocent of the fault Miss Pradock had accused me of. I knew it, and I was aware that she knew it; but her mistress had spoken sharply to her that morning, and she had vented on me, the poor dependent, the rage she dared not show to the other children.

"I lay on the bed still weeping, my heart so swelled with hate of her that I felt it must burst from my breast. The lofty room, filled with shadows, the dead silence, except for my sobs, at last soothed me a little, and presently I fell asleep.

"I awoke as the clock in the hall was striking midnight, and lay for awhile with my eyes closed, listening to the slow strokes of the hour, and dimly aware of light and warmth on my tear-swollen face. Finally I opened my eyes, and immediately I started up in astonishment.

"In the wall directly opposite the foot of my bed was a tall window, a window that stood wide open. Through it poured floods of dazzling sunshine, and with the sunshine the scent of a thousand flowers.

"I sprang out of bed, and ran to look, and I was gazing out onto such a flower garden as I had never seen on earth.

"I cannot easily describe to you, my dear Tobias, the beauty of that garden. Not only was it lovely in itself, with demure green paths of close-cropped shining grass, with myriads of flowers of every season all blossoming together, and a fountain in the midst, which sprang from a curiously carved basin, like a starry wraith of silver light; but a glamour lay over it, an atmosphere of enchantment so strong that my heart shook.

"Child though I was, I knew that I was looking at a holy place. I stayed there at the window, motionless, almost afraid to breathe, in case the extraordinary dream, as I took it to be, should vanish.

"The warm breeze lifted my hair. The hum of bees was in the air, for there were bees in the great honeysuckle vine that encircled the window. I watched small, silver-winged butterflies glitter among the flowers, and fragrant, blossoming hawthorn bushes, and happiness, peace, unutterable bliss, flowed into my heart; as though the garden were solace enough, and more than enough, for all mortal ills.

"Presently, into its lovely solitude came dancing and frisking two beautiful snow-white cats, or rather half-grown kittens. They were short-haired, with brilliant, shining blue eyes set like jewels in their little faces. They danced with a delicious, playful happiness, like two spirits in bliss, frolicking along the grassy paths in joyful pursuit of each other and the butterflies.

"I watched, breathless with pleasure, when, all of a sudden, I heard a child's laughter, and into the garden ran a little girl of the most wonderful beauty. She seemed about my own age, perhaps ten years old, or a little younger.

"The instant I saw her I loved her, for she was as bewitching as any princess in a fairy tale. Her long glittering blond hair flowed loose to her waist. Her eyes were radiantly blue, and she wore a floating robe of some shining substance, that shone now golden, now azure, changing as she moved.

"She caressed the cats, and the delicate, playful, creatures frisked around her feet. She tossed a golden ball into the air, and ran to catch it, moving so lightly she seemed

wafted by the breeze. Her every gesture was of ravishing grace, her beauty, even to a child's eyes, supernatural.

"Suddenly she looked up, and seeing me, smiled, as a seraph might smile when welcoming a well-loved friend to Paradise.

"She dropped her ball, and came quite close to the window; and in a voice so thrillingly sweet that only to hear it made me tremble, she called up to me.

"Little girl, who do you hate?"

"As if under compulsion, without an instant's hesitation, I gasped my answer, 'Miss Pradock!'

"The child laughed and nodded, then, turning, blew me a kiss. She hurried from the garden, the cats dancing slowly after her. The wings of the silver butterflies glittered, and the whole vision began to fade. The sunlight, very gradually, lost its radiance, the flowers grew shadowy, the pirouetting shapes of the cats were wraiths in a world of mist. The blue gleam of their unearthly eyes was the last color to vanish.

"At last I stood barefooted and shivering opposite the dark bricked-up window in the wall of the North West room. I crept back to bed, and fell instantly into a black and dreamless sleep.

"I spent the next day sick with anticipation. One moment I told myself it was only an exceptionally vivid and surprising dream, the next I recognized it as something more. I could scarcely wait for the night, to dream of the garden and the golden child again.

"Yet beneath my excitement was a faint under-current of uneasiness. I knew, as surely as if a voice from heaven had warned me, that I was involved in something very dangerous.

"I was teased, also, by a glimpse that just evaded memory; something I had half seen, but of which I could not be quite sure. As the angelic child turned to blow me a kiss, the wind, for an instant, blew back the glittering curls from her forehead, and I had had a glimpse, I was almost certain, of two small curving horns growing just above her temples. But I refused to let myself think this.

The wearisome trivialities of the day, the pe teasing of my cousins, Miss Pradock's malignant, sharp tongued jibes, all were powerless to touch me. I existed

only for the night, for the garden, and for what I might see there, for I did not doubt that I would see. Night came, and in spite of my excitement I succeeded in falling asleep.

"I woke, and the room was filled with an almost overpowering fragrance of blossoming hawthorn. I rushed to the open window, and again I was looking into the garden. It was empty, except for the two white cats, who were playing with something I could not see on the grass near the fountain. Round it they danced and leapt, uttering little mews of excitement and pleasure.

"At last I saw what they had. It was a bird about the size of a thrush, struggling desperately to escape. I cried out in pity for the poor thing, and at my cry, as if at a signal, the marvelous child appeared.

"She came running to where the cats were tormenting their victim. When she saw what they were doing, she laughed with delight, and clapped her hands. Oh! how beautiful she looked, her face full of gentleness and joy, her hair a brilliant crown of floating fire, her laughter so enchantingly sweet that it utterly ravished the heart. And this time there could be no mistake; as she bent her lovely head to watch more closely, I saw, quite clearly, the sharp, small horns that grew from her temples.

"Suddenly, even while she laughed, the cats brought their play to a brutal close. With one slash of his strong jaws the tom bit off the head of the struggling bird.

"The head fell to the grass, and the smaller of the two cats, dancing daintily after it, bowled it down the green path until it lay directly beneath the window.

"I stared transfixed. By the fountain lay the mangled and headless body of the bird; but beneath the window was a tiny human head, its features contorted with agony; an appallingly perfect replica of the head of my hated governess, Miss Pradock!

"My heart stopped beating, then began to pound tempestuously. Half fainting, I was aware that the cats danced with the severed head, that the humming of the bees was louder.

"Then the dream slowly faded, or I awoke from it, and awoke overcome with terror; a dreadful panic of terror that sent me to my knees to try to pray. But I could not

pray, and I dared not sleep. I dressed and sat up in a chair till morning."

The old woman stopped speaking. For a few moments we sat together in silence, watching the never-ending movement of the snowflakes.

"It was only a nightmare," I muttered. Miss Arabella nodded. "Yes Tobias, perhaps it was only a nightmare. But the next day . . ." She paused, playing with her rings.

"Well?" I asked. "What about the next day?"

"The next day Miss Pradock went to visit her married sister in a market town about twenty miles distant. She was expected back in time for supper, but supper time came, and she did not return. Two days passed before she was found."

"Found!" I echoed.

"Yes, Tobias, she was found in a small wood about fifteen miles from her destination. Her head had been sliced clean off. It lay in a ditch a few yards from her body."

"Did they find out who did it?"

"They arrested a laboring man, a heavy drinker, who had been noticed hanging around the wood. To the last he protested his innocence. But he was found guilty on circumstantial evidence, and transported for life."

"Listen, Miss Arabella" I said. "The whole thing was a dream, and what wasn't a dream was coincidence, nothing more."

Miss Arabella sat erect and silent, staring in front of her, as though she were looking, with her drug-dilated eyes, far back into that lost world of sixty years ago.

"Coincidence" she said at last. "So I tried to tell myself, Tobias, so for many years, I made myself believe. But if a coincidence happens again, and happens even more terribly?" Her voice trailed off.

"Well, did it happen again?"

"Yes it happened again, but not for many years, not until I was a young woman."

I whispered "Why did you wait so long?"

"Because I was afraid, Tobias, very much afraid; and besides, after Miss Pradock's death, I had no reason to hate anyone, not for a long time.

"We had a new, comparatively good-natured governess, and life went quietly on, without much incident, for several

years. But it was not so easy to escape from the garden, even though I no longer slept in the North West room. Often, while I was growing up, I had nightmares in which I saw its tiger lilies, and roses, its nodding lilacs, hyacinths, striped tulips, daffodils, so marvelously many, and all lovelier than earthly flowers. I saw the green paths the bushes of abundant hawthorn, and that enchanted fountain dancing unwearied like a silver spirit. All was wonderful and blest as ever, the difference was that I looked on it with shuddering abhorrence.

"Strangely, in my dreams, the girl never appeared. The fountain glittered, the white cats danced, bees hummed in the hawthorn and honeysuckle, but the mysterious mistress of the garden did not reveal herself in dreams.

"Gradually the nightmares became less frequent, and I almost succeeded in forgetting the garden, and the beings that haunted it. I did not think of them again until I was nineteen years old, not until I met Doria Marn."

As she spoke the name Miss Arabella fell silent, and sat staring into space as though she had forgotten me, and all else besides.

At last, with a deep sigh, she resumed her story. My head was still pressed against her knee, and while she talked she stroked my hair gently.

"I have lived a long life, Tobias, and almost all of it has been unhappy. But there was a time, a very brief time, a few weeks of late summer long ago, when I was happy, as happy as any young girl has ever been, happy as a spirit in an unexpected paradise.

"I was, at that time, a girl of nineteen. My education had been good, by the standards of those days, and I was working in my first situation, as a governess for a Mrs. Forest, a banker's wife in a small market town, twenty miles or so from Lum House; the same town for which Miss Pradock had set out, never to return, nine years before.

"Although I was not good-looking, at nineteen I had a certain comeliness. My mistress was not exacting, and allowed me some free time. I was attached to her children, who were intelligent, and affectionate. I even began to make a few friends, through my church activities; for I clung to the Church, secretly hoping it might protect me from my memories of that ambiguous garden. Since I ex-

pected so little from life I was reasonably content. Then, in the summer of that year, the old parish clergyman died suddenly, and the Reverend Andrew Dayton was appointed in his place.

"Andrew Dayton was twenty-three years old, and extraordinarily handsome. The hackneyed saying "As handsome as a Greek god" was, in his case, literally true. Tall, golden-haired, with an athlete's figure, and clear eyes of a cold, shining blue, he could have been the prince of any girl's dreams.

"For such a man to come, unmarried, into a small country community, with a predominance of women, was inviting trouble. Every unattached female from the squire's daughter, to the serving maid at the Inn, was excited by him, and hoped, either secretly, or more openly, to entice him into matrimony. On Sundays, the feminine portion of his congregations, was, I am certain, more uplifted by the light falling on the young clergyman's golden head than by the sermon he preached, although he preached well, for he was a devout and eloquent man.

"I know that this was how I myself reacted; for I was in love with him, shyly, inarticulately in love with him, long before he noticed me; and when he did notice me, when he began, incredibly, to single me out, to seek my friendship, I could scarcely believe my good fortune.

"I need not detail his unimpassioned, but persistent courtship. When, at last, he proposed marriage, he did not do so in a romantic fashion, but explained that he needed a kind helpmate, and that he considered me, with my superior education, and prudent ways, eminently suitable to be a clergyman's wife. He never said he loved me. I think, at that time, he discounted love's existence.

"But I loved him, Tobias, as one should not love another human being, as I pray that you may never love, with an entire passion of my body, mind, and soul.

"For a few weeks we were happy, planning our marriage, which was to take place early in the New Year; then Doria Marn came to stay with my employer, who was her half-sister, and, in a short time, everything was over.

"Mrs. Marn was in her early twenties, the young widow of a well-to-do merchant. She had lived in London and Europe, and was accustomed to the excitements of a

wider world that any I had dreamed of. She was beautiful, with a faintly freckled white skin, a deliciously curved laughing mouth, and a wealth of astonishing rust-colored hair, which, in certain lights, would blaze like gold. More dangerous than her beauty was her inborn seductiveness. She was a genuinely sensuous woman who was not afraid of her powers, but delighted in using them. Within days, every man in the neighborhood, whether young or old, was eagerly aware of her, and most of them were in her toils.

"But to my horror, I soon saw that the victim she most fancied was Andrew Dayton.

"His extreme good looks, combined with his sacred calling, challenged her; and she soon determined, I believe, at first, out of idle mischief, to have him at her feet.

"I think, also, that she resented his engagement to me. She grudged any woman but herself the possession of an attractive admirer. Once, very early in our acquaintance, she said to me, 'Your fiance is a very handsome man, Miss Arabella.' Then she added, with a toss of her shining red head, 'It is a pity that such good looks should be wasted in the pulpit.'

"I think it was then that I began to hate and fear her, but I soon had better reason.

"She began to smile on Andrew Dayton, to seek his advice on spiritual matters, to ride with him through the autumnal woods.

"I was too panic-stricken, and perhaps, too proud, to venture a word to Andrew. But I know that Mrs. Forest, who wished to avoid a scandal, remonstrated with Doria, and attempted to persuade her not to meddle, so frivolously, with a man promised to another woman. But the beauty merely laughed, saying it all meant nothing, and was the merest play.

"Meanwhile, Andrew was changed as if by some preposterous magic. Gone was the calm, almost austerely self-possessed, young man I had known. Overnight, it seemed, he was transformed into an ardent, and soon desperate lover, tossed, at his lady's whim, from despair to rapture.

"His ambitions, and all but the most unavoidable duties of his sacred profession, were neglected and forgotten;

the sober liking he had felt for me, blotted out like a rush light in the blaze of noon. Nothing existed for him but the mounting fury of a passion all the more devastating because he had never before experienced anything approaching its power.

"Mrs. Marn herself seemed startled by the fires she had conjured up, but she was flattered also, for vanity was her strongest feeling, by the handsome young clergyman's most unclerical devotion.

"As for me, I could no more compete with her fascinations than a crow could compete with a bird of paradise. I knew her to be light, frivolous, possibly wanton, unable, I believed, to make any man happy for long, certainly not a high-minded, idealistic man like Andrew Dayton.

"But all I could do was wait hopelessly for the end, and it came quite soon.

"On an evening in early September, when a red sun was setting behind the woods, Andrew told me, stammering, and with tears in his eyes, that our engagement had been a mistake, and he begged me to release him from it.

"I did not attempt to plead, or even to argue the case. In silence I returned his ring, and the few small presents he had given to me; the silver locket, the Bible bound in blue leather. My heartbreak was too absolute for reproaches.

I do not know if he realized how deeply he was injuring me. I do not think he cared. To him I had become a shadow. In his tormented heart no woman had any reality except Doria Marn.

"I released him, and within a very few weeks they became engaged. I was then compelled to endure the pitying sneers of small-town gossips. Some pretended sympathy for me, but the opinion of the majority was that the clergyman had acted wisely in casting off the indigent governess to win the wealthy and beautiful young widow.

"I stayed stubbornly silent, withdrawn, as much as possible, from all of them; but no one, in such desolation, can live without some solace, and so, because I was so bitterly miserable, I began to think about the garden again, and about the child who played there.

"Very often I would tell myself, while I sat alone in

the nursery, after the household was asleep; my hands occupied with piles of mending, my mind seeking desperately for some escape from its anguish; if that long past beauty and horror was really no more than a dream, then it could do no harm to re-visit Lum House, and sleep for a few nights in the North West room.

"I would whisper, under my breath, 'It could do no harm,' knowing all the time that I intended the most dreadful harm.

"Still I hesitated, and I do not believe that I would have ventured again across the threshold of the haunted chamber, for the very thought of it made me thrill with dread, if I could have believed that Mrs. Marn loved Andrew, and would attempt to be a faithful and useful wife to him; but I was soon convinced that she did not.

"You are still a child, Tobias, though a wise one, so it is hard for me to make clear to you what Doria Marn was. I can only tell you that she was a woman who must have many men, and could never be satisfied with the devotion of one. She was not even to blame for her nature, though I blamed her bitterly.

"She hungered for excitement and danger, and delighted in tormenting Andrew, driving him frantic with jealousy, and then relenting with laughter and smiles. I saw him grow haggard, saw him struggle, again and again, to break free from her, only to return always, and each time more abjectly than before.

"Their engagement hung in abeyance, and I doubt now that she ever seriously intended to tie herself down to marriage with him. But I, in my jealous anger, precipitated things.

"There was a young man in the town named Dan Lark. He worked at a riding stable. I had seen him often at church, for he attended regularly, but only to smile at the pretty girls, and, after the service, to make furtive arrangements to meet the more available of them in the woods, or along the lonely shores of the lake. As pagan as the west wind, he was suspected of fathering half the unwanted children of the neighborhood. Good-looking, in a dark, rather surly fashion, he took what he could, gave no return of affection to the foolish girls he seduced, and lived with unregenerate zest.

"Mrs. Marn liked to ride, and at once she noticed the sturdy young groom.

"Again, Tobias, I will not detail this. I will merely say that I began to suspect her of betraying Andrew with Dan Lark; and that one afternoon I followed them, and surprised them together.

"I can still see the expression on her face, as she turned in his arms, and met my eyes.

"At that moment my resolve was taken, but some remnant of conscience told me that I must warn Doria, must give her an opportunity to save herself, before, for the second time, I explored the abominable mysteries of the bricked-up window.

"That night, before going to bed, I knocked at her door. She was sitting at her dressing table by candle light, brushing her great mane of rust-colored hair, with its shuddering flashes of gold. She frowned when I entered, and laying down her hair-brush, turned to face me.

" 'Well!' she challenged me. 'I suppose you intend to tell Andrew, you creeping spy?'

" 'No' I said, 'I will not tell him. He probably would not believe me if I did. But I think you should end your engagement.'

"Her lovely eyes narrowed. 'And if I do, I suppose you imagine he would take up with you again, a beggarly governess!'

"I repeated, 'You should end it. If you do not, I believe something terrible will happen.'

"But at that she sprang up in a passion.

" 'I swear I will marry Andrew just to spite you. A servant daring to threaten me! Insolent girl, I will have you dismissed!'

"I slammed the door on her raving, and running to my room, flung myself across the bed. With my face half buried in pillows I murmured, 'So I must sleep again in the North West room.' As I stammered the words a shiver crept along my spine. I thought, though I sleep there, the child may not come, for I remembered that she had never appeared in my dreams. But I lay for awhile quietly, and finally, smiling to myself, I said, under my breath, 'Yes, she will come, for now I hate enough.'

"I knew, though the garden was holy, yet the key to it

was hate; and that somehow, in my hatred for Doria Marn, I had possession of the key.

"Once I had made up my mind it was a simple matter to arrange to spend a few days at the old house. My mistress readily gave me leave. I was on good terms with my cousins. They knew I would make myself useful with the housework; and though they were surprised that I insisted on sleeping in the long-disused North West room, they made no serious objection.

"It was a bitterly cold night. A snow-laden wind murmured around the house. I had difficulty in falling asleep, my excitement was so intense, yet I knew I must sleep or the spell would not work.

"At last I lost consciousness, but as midnight struck I woke, and the vision was there, as I had known it must be.

"Again I saw the marvelous flower garden, shimmering in unearthly sunlight. Again the bees hummed, the ethereal butterflies hovered, the snowy, half-grown kittens danced near the overflowing fountain.

"Lovely! Ah! most lovely and innocent! Even as I gazed my heart misgave me; surely in a place so celestial, only heavenly beings could exist. So I told myself, but secretly I knew that I was not waiting, in such a fury of hope and anticipation, for any inhabitant of heaven.

" 'Let her come, let her come' I prayed. 'Oh! dear God, let her come to me!' But to what god I was praying I did not dare to question.

"At last, after a long time, I heard her laughter. She ran into the garden, the golden child, playing with her golden ball, dancing light-heartedly in the sunbeams; a creature of divine grace, of irresistible blessedness and beauty. Presently, as she had done in the past, she glanced up and saw me. Again, from the blossoming garden, in her enchantingly joyful voice, she cried up to me, as she had cried in my childhood:

" 'Little girl, who do you hate?'

"Leaning far out on the sun-warmed windowsill, with my whole heart I gave her, in answer, the two words, 'Doria Marn!'

"She smiled, and nodded, and kissed her hand to me, just as she had done nine years before.

"The white cats danced for joy. The wings of the silver butterflies flickered; and long after they had all van-

ished, I trembled in the shadowy room, not with fear, but with a terrible cold triumph.

"I knew as surely as if she lay slaughtered at my feet that Doria Marn was doomed. I knew it and rejoiced.

"Somehow I endured the next day. The hours of suspense dragged by, and again it was night. Again in the dark of the stormy mid-night I stood gazing at the open window, warm breezes lifting my hair.

"Once more the white cats were playing with something. I tried to see what it was, but they had it almost out of sight behind the fountain. At last it freed itself, and dashed across the grass. Before the remorseless white paws seized upon it again, I glimpsed it long enough to see that it was some kind of water rat.

"The tom dragged it back to the fountain basin, which was filled with glittering water. The rat struggled in frenzy, but he growled, and held its head beneath the water, while the child with the horns on her forehead, laughed and clapped her hands.

"At last the cat jumped down to the grass, the plump dead rat dangling from his jaws. He fixed his shining blue eyes on mine, and trotted, with his prey, up the path to the window.

"This time, I knew, only too well, what I must expect, yet the shock of the actual sight was still horrid. From the cat's mouth hung the limp brown body of a rat, but the rat's face was the face, in miniature, of beautiful Doria Marn, and her soaked, rust-colored hair dripped on the close cropped turf."

Miss Arabella drew a deep breath, and was silent. I did not trouble to dissemble. "How did she die?" I questioned eagerly.

"How did she die? She was drowned a week later; drowned on All Hallow's Eve." Miss Arabella played, for a few minutes, with the big rings, set with pebbles, that slipped to and fro on her attenuated fingers.

"I will tell you how it happened. That year the winter came early, with days and nights of hard frost. The lake by the woods was frozen over for the first time in many years. The ice was hard, and safe, except for a large hole towards the center of the lake. All the young people for miles around were skating in every spare moment. A feeling of festival was in the sharp, exciting air.

"For several days, Doria, perhaps to demonstrate to me the extent of her dominion over Andrew, had treated him even more capriciously than usual. It seemed a devil had entered into her, as perhaps it had. Finally she became deliberately imprudent. Some climax occurred. I believe he found her, as I had found her, making love with Dan Lark. Whatever the reason they had a desperate quarrel, but it ended, as usual, with his abject surrender.

"That evening, walking alone at dusk through the frozen solitudes of the park, I came suddenly face to face with the man who had been, so recently, my promised husband.

"Though I still loved him bitterly, we met like strangers, or wandering spectres of the frost; and seemed about to pass each other without a word, when suddenly, his lip trembled, and he said, 'Pity me, Arabella, I am a most unhappy man.'

"In a low voice, I advised him, 'You should break free from her.'

"He replied, 'I cannot while she lives.' There was an image never absent from my memory. I closed my eyes, and saw, with blinding clarity, a rat with the face of a woman, clutched in the blood stained jaws of a little snow white cat.

"I told him, with conviction, 'She will not live for long.'

"He started, and stared at me with dilated eyes. Then he whispered, 'Do you read my mind?' and turning, hastened away.

"But I called after him, 'It is true! It is true! She is foredoomed!'

"I stood there alone in the frozen parklands, laughing with the glee of my wickedness; for I was waiting, all the time I was waiting, with a horrid confidence, for Doria's end.

"And it came, Ah! yes, it came soon enough; though if I had known how it would come, I would not have laughed so vehemently, or laughed at all, or only as lost souls laugh in Hell. For, as you will have guessed by now, Tobias, it was Andrew himself who took Doria's life; though I hold him guiltless, since I know that he was driven by those daemonic powers I had invoked."

"So he killed her!" I exclaimed, startled; then added foolishly, "But I thought he was a clergyman!"

"Clergymen are no more than men, Tobias. And he was a man tormented by passion, by an overwhelming first and only love.

"I will tell you how it came about.

"Their quarrel was patched up, but at the cost of Andrew's continued humiliation; for Doria now flaunted openly her fancy for Dan Lark.

"Andrew made no more jealous scenes. It was as if the fires in which he had suffered had burned themselves out. He merely reminded Doria that she had promised to go skating with him on the eve of All Hallow's, and he wished to hold her to her promise.

"Had I been in Doria's place I would have suspected his control. I would have known that his ice hid fire. I would not have ventured, just then, to be alone with Andrew Dayton. But her selfishness made her obtuse, and she joined him at the lake.

"He took her hands and skated with her far out over the black surface of the ice.

"I had never learned to skate, but I watched them from the bank. I longed to know what they talked of as they glided so effortlessly together, he never letting go of her hands.

"He kept her out for hours, skating without rest or pause. They were beautiful to watch, far surpassing the other skaters in skill and grace, for they were both expert at the sport.

"At last, with the coming of evening, the light started to fade from the sky, and one by one the skaters returned to the banks of the lake, and began to unlace their boots. Soon only Andrew and Doria were left, still swooping to and fro, as if under a spell, in the rapidly deepening twilight.

"Suddenly they turned towards the center of the lake, and I realized, with a lurch of the heart, that he was leading her, or rather dragging her, for now she seemed to struggle, towards the hole in the ice.

"The light was growing increasingly dim. It was difficult to see clearly. But it seemed that he threw her down, and with sudden, furious violence, thrust her into the water.

"I was not the only one who watched in horror. There were cries of consternation and pity from the skaters. They scrambled frantically down the banks, and rushed shouting

to the scene, but it was already too late. The body of the ill fated woman, thrust far beneath the ice, did not reappear.

"Standing tall in the semi-darkness Andrew Dayton faced the rescuers, and, in a voice that betrayed no emotion, said, 'You had better send for the police. I have murdered Doria Marn.' "

Again Miss Arabella paused. I looked up into her face, but the room was growing dim, and it was difficult to see her expression.

"What happened to him?" I asked at last.

"He was declared insane, and confined to an asylum for life, but he did not live long. He died less than a year later."

"Did you ever speak to him about . . . ?"

She nodded. "I was permitted to see him before he entered the asylum.

"I tried, tried desperately to convince him that he was not to blame, that the guilt was mine. But he would not listen to me.

"Yet, who knows, Tobias, what rejoicing fiends, released by my desire, sped him, with Doria Marn, across the frozen lake in the winter twilight; or whose hand it actually was, that, in the dusk, thrust her so far beneath the ice?

"I endeavored to tell him the truth about the bricked-up window; but he believed my mind to be as deranged as his own, and only wept in pity for me, for me, whose hate made manifest had plummeted him to Hell."

She clasped and unclasped her thin white hands. "So now you understand, Tobias, that hate is a most deadly and destructive sin. It was to make you understand that I have told you my obscure and melancholy story. I wished to warn you against hate, so that you may not, when your time comes, wait for death in mortal terror."

I slid my hand into hers. "You know the story isn't true" I whispered. "It can't possibly be true."

"Only a dream" sighed Miss Arabella, "a futile, and fleeting vision of the night. Nevertheless, Miss Pradock and Doria Marn died. They died by cruel violence." She paused, and added so quietly that I could scarcely hear, "As I wished them to die."

I got up to go, but she clung to me, her eyes bright with fear.

"Tobias!" she cried hoarsely, "will I too become the prey of that demon and her white cats? Will I too be trapped in her garden, after my death, and perhaps for eternity?"

Behind her head, crowned with its grotesque turban, the snow still fell, shrouding the outer world.

I tugged my hand away, embarrassed, and more than a little nervous.

"No, no, of course you won't. You're a Christian, Miss Arabella. There's nothing," my voice faltered before the naked terror in her eyes, "nothing to be afraid of."

She stared at me, her eyes fixed and shining. At last, with a long sigh, she shook her head. "Remember" she muttered, "remember that I warned you to avoid hate."

When I reached the door she beckoned me back, and I felt she was about to say something else, perhaps something important.

But suddenly my flesh crept. I knew I must escape from the mad old woman, and the weight of her drug-induced dreams.

All the time she was telling me her queer story, all the time she was warning me never to hate, I had felt, uneasily, that she was, in reality, urging me to do something quite different; and I thought I knew what that something was.

As I stood there shivering in the corridor, in the chill light of the winter afternoon, the snow falling incessantly past the window, I fought, I think, the most important spiritual battle of my life; fought, and finally lost, yes, perhaps lost my soul.

Saying this I may seem to exaggerate, for I was only an eleven-year-old schoolboy; but the soul has no age that can be reckoned by earthly clocks, and the true battles of the spirit may come early in life, as certainly as at its end.

Child though I was, I knew what I hoped for, and I knew, God help me! that there was nothing I was not prepared to pay if what I hoped for happened.

It was not a small boy who stood there blindly staring at the monstrous snowflakes that hesitated as they fell, but a soul planning a deliberate murder; murder that could never be proved, never brought home to him, at any rate, not in this life.

That night I slept in the North West room.

When I pleaded the necessity for late study, it was not hard to persuade my uncle that I needed a bedroom to myself, at a distance from my noisy young cousins.

I scoffed at my foolishness even as I made the change. But I was desperate enough to snatch at any straw, even an old woman's dream. I told myself again and again, that Miss Arabella's story could not, by any possibility be true. I knew she lived in a visionary world, her mind bewildered by the habitual use of opium. I understood the whole tale to be nonsense, and the chance that it was not, scarcely worth dignifying by the name of hope.

Yet, somehow, even then, I half believed.

I was buoyed up by this ludicrous ghost of hope until the time came to retire to bed.

Then, as I carried my candle along the draughty corridors to the North West room, a revulsion of feeling overtook me. School, and Rex Arundel, were only too real; the dreams of a drug-crazed old woman seemed romantic fantasy.

How could I, who hoped to become a scholar, imagine that dream creatures could save me from the hands of a ruthlessly sadistic bully?

As I climbed into bed misery overwhelmed me. If Arundel continued to torment me I could not study, yet, if I did not do better at school, there could be nothing before me but a lifetime of degrading drudgery.

Tears of self-pity sprang to my eyes, as I lay huddled under the scanty bed clothes, while the worst storm of the winter thundered and howled around the ancient house.

The room was atrociously cold. In the cries of the wind I fancied I could hear Rex Arundel's laughter, and his voice sneering, "Cry Baby! Cry Baby!"

Three days, only three days, until term began! I fell asleep at last, shivering with cold, and fear, and hatred, to dream of Arundel's face thrust close to mine, its beauty distorted by a malignant grin.

I do not know how long I slept, but suddenly I was wide awake, and staring in amazement.

As if from very far away, I could still hear the rattle of the hail on the roof, and the wild clamor of the storm; but warm beams of sunlight streamed across my face, and

all the airs of summer blew into the room through a window that opened in the wall directly at the foot of my bed, a window surrounded with honeysuckle, where a few bees were industriously buzzing.

A wide open window that faced the sun, and looked onto the most glorious flower garden.

——*Helen Adam*

ACID SOAP OPERA

Chapter 25, the first in a continuing set of variables

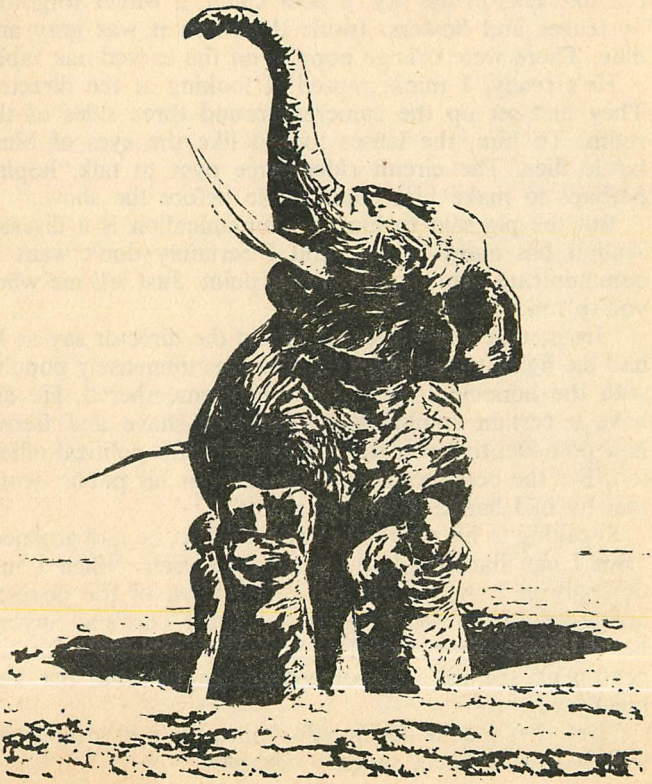
"Let loose the hogs of peace . . ." Lawrence Ferlinghetti

This is the story of Oink X. It begins in a house by a river. In the howff by the river Fuscous, a grum swine sat, and sated. He was a big creature which smoked an occasional cigar. Today was especially a day of whelming protuberance for Oink X because he was scheduled to Catch the Eye of the Nation.

"And not without misgiving," he thought, sitting in the plump wing chair watching the crew set up.

The crew was a group of men in laminated houndstooth check trenchcoats. The pig watched them polish their cameras and tape recorders, tidy their notebooks, pencils and flashbulbs. The director of the show had arrived, too. He was a sort of Billy Sunday to popular culture, a circuit rider from media to middle America. He was well acquainted with wire services and national networks. He accepted without a philosophical shudder the fact that he worked in an electronic forest within which God lay anaesthetized with saccharine, polysorbate 90, dreaming out half-hour heroin documentaries and detergent commercials, sublimating the soft phrase Forgive Them Father For They Know Not What They Do to a faint flicker just below the vision that was presented on the daily screen schedule.

They were ready to begin now. They had cast tentative and longing glances at the bookcases, the medicine cabinet, the closed drawers to the desk. Oink X smiled to himself, thinking that the what-naughts on the shelf smiled back. He was thinking what should he play? It



was hard to decide. Meanwhile, his famous omni-stringed various hung silent on its subtle subterfuge.

Yes, the director had arrived, beaming in fact, a half hour earlier, wearing on his lapel a button which said

SWINISHNESS WILL OUT

"Here, I thought you would appreciate this," he laughed, handing it to Oink.

"Whatever," said the swine, thinking how difficult it still was to become accustomed to their ways. Still, he chided himself, perhaps I am actually entertaining angels unawares.

That thought still in his mind, he walked to the window. It was a cold, brown and gray day. Mice tittered among the reeds at the river edge. Dead leaves drifted past in soggy clumps. The branches of the trees were laid out like nets in the sky, a poor catch, a winter forgotten by leaves and flowers. Inside the room it was gray and blue. There were orange poppies on the carved oak table.

He's ready, I think, mused X looking at the director. They had set up the cameras around three sides of the room. To him, the lenses looked like the eyes of bluebottle flies. The circuit rider came over to talk, hoping perhaps to make him comfortable before the show.

But the pig said to him, "Communication is a disease. And it has many forms. And I certainly don't want to communicate yours to me at this point. Just tell me when you're ready."

"Jesus, that's a cookie," he heard the director say as he had the lights turned on. The man was immensely popular with the homicidal masses, the pig remembered. He did have a certain combination of Burma-shave and french hair pomade, that was true. He had run for political office, too. But the best recent news of him was his public denial that he had had a heart transplant.

Speaking to his wife just a week before, he had groaned, "But I can hardly admit it even to myself. When I met that guy in L.A. who told me that most of the donated hearts were from poor niggers . . . Jesus! That's all anyone has to get on me and I'm finished. Can't you see me getting on the air and someone saying, 'Yeah, but he's black at heart.' "

"But that's quite fashionable now, isn't it, dear?" his wife had murmured, secretly disgusted.

Oink X had heard the story or rumors of it and had grinned to himself—a story best left unearthed, he thought, rumor flying before fact like the bird before a storm.

They were on the air.

"Hello, America," the announcer smiled. "Tonight we are broadcasting from the howff of Oink X, the song-and-dance-man of your dreams." (Funny, I like to think of myself as a hardbitten observer of the erotic revelation, thought the pig.) "Mr. X is perhaps best known as the author of Pigwig Capers," the announcer continued. "What is it you're working on now, Oink?"

"Well Rod, I'm just finishing up OmniPig's Rules for Parliamentary Presumption."

"A bit heavier than the Capers, eh, Oink?" the announcer grinned.

"A bit," said Oink.

The announcer turned toward the camera. The pig sat down in the wing chair.

"Well, folks, you know there's a bit of mystic to him. Before we went on the air, he said to me, 'Rod, now I'll be just another swine.' With your ego? I said to him. 'Ego, smego,' he grunted, 'as long as you make me a star.'

"And so here he is, for the first time on national TV—Oink X! We're all hogs for you, baby!"

The lights reflected off the ecru wainscotting. X lit a cigar, wondering if his legs looked too fat in the trousers he had selected. I hope they are ready for this, he thought.

The camera moved in.

"Allow me to introduce myself," smiled Oink X, "perhaps thereby creating some aperture into the chaos of the universe."

As he spoke, his snout formed on screens across the country.

"Sometimes I think mine is the soul you all wish for, beyond your dreams of deodorantal perfection and nocturnal detrition. Don't you sometimes wish for it? . . . Oink X, you say to yourselves, that anonymous swine facelessly wallowing in the mires of time and space, wordy with the body's fictions, strung out along the delicate tines of perception."

In the background, they had set up a group of chorus girls. Propped with mops and brooms, they droned, "We're going to mop up the world with words. Words,

do your stuff!" Oink X shook his head. That scene was the final stab in the back of classical Greek choruses. But no matter.

"You see me here before you," he continued, "as real as you yourself. I inhabit rooms, I drink coffee and beer, I watch the snow fall on the river. I visit runes and hunt ilk in season. I inhabit, in other words, and I am inhabited. I am habituated like you to the dimension, color and line or our world.

"Of course, if you are of a certain sort all this will be a definite solace to you. You will say: Oink X has similar apertures and appendages. Oink X f-u-e-l-s at midday amid joints and screws, bolts, nuts and daffodils. Oink X does not escape love's flowering hardware. You will say: Oink X declines amid the rusty convolutions of an industrious desolation. And in your minds you will see me scurrying through the hayricks of lost Druid kingdoms for a word, a sound, a lambent talisman to word off the wardless moon and the mist on the riveredge at night. And in your mind you will see me runting, a desolate swine, among the reeds at sunrise for a baby with a spunsilver mind who might succor definition's elusiveness —construct a world with words like lozenges of emeralds and lapis lazuli, words webbing through those orchards heavy with the hunger of their fruitlessness.

"Ah, but we all know all about that scene. And knowing that, it seems to me you will finally say: I think Oink wonders what it's all about."

Marsha, she said.

John, he said.

I love you Marsha, she said.

I love you John, he said.

I turned off the television set and went in to dinner. They were all sitting around the table eating stuffed cabbage. The picture of President Kennedy was on the wall and the old lady was shuffling along on her thick legs carrying the pot of potatoes. You prick, she laughed. You bastard. That's what I said to him when he pinched my ass. What do you think, you got young pussy here? Hey, look at me, I'm an old lady!

Her husband smiled and said nothing. Fuckfuckfuck, that's all they think about, she continued. Stick it in the

ground and screw it, I told him. Drill a hole in the wall like on 42nd Street in New York. What do you think? Have patience, someone will come and suck you off.

(O Grandma, what a lot of skirts you wear. You must have been hot stuff in the Ukraine when they mowed the hay.)

Pass the cabbage, the visitor said to me.

Hey, listen, kid, the old man said to me. Let's go for a ride on the milk truck. He scratched his head. That was a good dinner, he said to the old lady.

Oh, you prick, she said. Do you think he ever gets enough? she said to the visitor. He laughed. Here, have another glass of vodka, she said, pushing the bottle over to him. Then she swept out of the kitchen, undulating like a mountain, and she turned on the TV again.

I'll never leave you darling, she laughed. Look at this will you? Eleanor Powell. I'll never leave you darling, she says. Love, that's love. Hey, sweetheart, remember that? she yelled to the old man. I once was in love. It was as bad as the clap. She roared, pleased with her own joke.

Oh, Jesus, her husband groaned. Is that a way to talk? He turned to the visitor. What does she know? She gets her language from the streetcleaner. Clap. I'll clap your mouth, Irma. Come, dushka, he said to me.

We went out into the street. It was freezing. Sitting in the milk wagon we drove and drove on the winding roads. He was looking at the pine trees and smiling.

The rest of the family was not like that, it was true. Maybe the old people had taken all the salt and left them flavorless. I used to see them floating like fetuses in their lives. Drifting around at family celebrations with bewildered smiles as if they had emerged from some more structured family portrait and wished only to be immobilized in time so that they might see their faces, recognize each other within the black and white confines of a Kodak snapshot, that it might say more than they could, conversing about their jobs, the exchange of gifts that were the wrong size, what it could mean that Joan had not called for the holiday, never able to get past the minutiae even to apprehend the tenuousness of the present moment, so dispersed from any tradition but that of Corn Flakes, football, new dinette sets. Perhaps they hoped that the

people in the photograph would turn to each other and laugh.

"Oh, it's you Joe, is it? Did you see the moon last night? Why, you've a tattoo on your chest. I, on the other hand, have just come from the gypsies and I have been lately touched by God, as you can see. How radiant you are."

And having touched each others's shoulders with ephemeral fingers they would slide into their ritual poses for the Kodak once again, smiling transmuted beyond recognition by the illumination of the flash. Why, it's a miracle, that camera. I forgot for a moment that my wife hasn't touched me in years. Why, I felt something, I can tell you.

My grandfather used to say to me, "After you're born, everything else is a bonus." But some people never get born.

Listen, I'm telling you a story and it's not true. But you can believe it anyway. I believe your version of the dream, don't I? No, they were not my grandparents nor I that child asleep in the milk truck dreaming of women and morticians.

Perhaps it is a defensive posture like the one the German expressionist filmmakers used during the Nazi era, setting all scenes of political heresy in a madhouse to delude the eye of the censor, to confuse the bubbling tales of insanity with the welter of reality. But it has often seemed to me, even since childhood, that the scene is indeed quite crazy enough without that, that we struggle within the marshmallow of sensations trying to find some place to stand and grow where so many have peed before.

But I knew nothing of that spreadeagled on my bed at the age of four, tensing my muscles in an imitation of Christ and relaxing a moment to tickle my little cunt until the wetness made me smile. Oh poor Jesus, the wounds the pain the blood. And there I was thinking of God and feeling good all over when my mother walked in.

"What are you doing," she said to me. I snapped my legs shut. I threw out my arms to either side.

"I'm Christ on the cross, Mother," I told her.

"Yes, well he had his legs closed," she said and turned out of the room, leaving the smoking trail of a spurned missionary behind her. After that, I thought for a while that nothing was sacred.

What's it all about? Well, I laughed at him of course. Humor saves, we all know that. And even that's no guarantee some late nights watching the newsspots as we sit here in the wing chair and see the machine moving on filled with flags and slippery with blood and silver, waving colored banners that reflect each other's hue. Go live in the greenwood or get yourself a gun. But still, you are a bomb, you are a star, you fill a space.

This is my show, and yours too, truly. A half-hour of anti-matter. Can you see that we are analogous but oppositely charged? Do not be deluded therefore by my shape, that I be male or female, bringer of news or nasturtiums or merely a clerk-typist of interior landscape. I am as real as you, allied to you by the sepia smiles on your oval ancestral daguerrotypes, fettered as you are by those petite revolutions of the soul against time's surge, caught as you are in the circle of the mind.

She was what you might call an apparition, all right. A twenty-eight year old girl from Brooklyn with long black-dyed hair that frizzled around her face and was slicked down in the back, bright red lipstick on a mouth that posed continuously, a beauty mark on the left cheek. The big heavily made-up eyes, too. She liked to wear vinyl boots and gaucho hats and leather and sleep on satin sheets.

Her little tenement apartment was as heavily draped as a seraglio with only the bare white kitchen and its enamel table to speak of a Brooklyn childhood, as if the rest of life could be converted to a cinematic myth but the kitchen remained as a last clue and testimonial to childhood, an empty space where husband and children might have connected her to that other kitchen where the smell of boiled beef remained for days after and her mother arrested the range of her fantasies with volleys of suffocating kitchen odors, lectures, and diatribes. So the kitchen, it remained, but she was always high, and dressed in the strange accoutrements of a conglomerate dream: the lips of Gloria Grahame merging with Ava Gardner's penchant for bullfighters, Marilyn Monroe's wistful loneliness, Elizabeth Taylor's love of opulence.

"I know he loves me," she would say, "but why is it so difficult?" Or "I just couldn't bear it any more. He was

so freaky." She was always stoned. The men came and went and the parties and costumes and she did some painting and bored people with the constant retelling of old wrongs. She was lazy and selfish, too, but not in any serious way and when you thought about it you realized that she wished that she could do things otherwise, and she did try.

That day, she was wearing a brown leather vest and a pair of tight slacks. She walked into the bar in the late afternoon with her breasts moving about inside the vest, sliding almost out of it as she laughed and bent, posturing while she talked to show her best poses as she saw herself that day: high, generous with the view of her body, talking about this guy and how he was afraid to love her the way she would like him to. It was hard to know what she meant, sifting the stories as they boomeranged between dreams of conquering and the realities of what I had seen happen over and over.

"He fell down on his knees before me," she had said once. "His face was full of adoration. Then he pulled down my pants. What could I do?" She had smiled and I knew that she regarded herself at her best as a supreme seducer of men who looked at her once and fell in love with her white flesh.

We decided to leave. It was five o'clock and the office workers boggled in disbelief as we walked down the street, she with the jiggling tits and the ecstatic smile, me feeling a bit uncomfortable with her license, holding my daughter's hand for solidity.

At dinner, she was boring and I wished that I had not felt sorry for her and opened the hour for her to come along with us. I was preoccupied with my work, and as she smiled and caught the glances of each new arrival I wished myself alone with the child in some more usual companionship.

"Oh, but if I did a picture like that," she gestured at the big collage of hundreds of faces hanging on the opposite wall, "well then, it wouldn't be just my faces but my box. That would have to be there."

Later, we went to a bookstore and she read children's stories to my girl. She was entirely charming then, and I felt a little remorse at my distance from her and her im-

broglios. I told her that I had to leave. "Come back to Tarot with me," she said.

"No, I have some writing to do tonight."

"Oh, OK, I understand," she said and fished out a pack of cigarettes, the brand I was smoking and gave them to me. "This is for you," she smiled. I thought it was strange. I was embarrassed and touched.

"Thanks," I said. "You didn't have to do that."

"That's OK. I feel good today," she said.

Danielle and I turned to leave. "See you when I get back from Provincetown," I told her. We walked down the street.

"Wait a minute," she called after us, and came running up and hugged me and kissed me on the cheek.

A few days later Kate told me how she found her lying on the bed with that leather vest and those pants. All made up, her hair arranged for, dead.

I could see her there. I can see her still. I can see her smiling as she cried, remembering the conversation with her mother the night before, unable to extricate herself from the terrorism of her childhood. Jack said that he had gotten a call that night, in a garbled language he could not understand, from a voice he did not recognize. He beat himself about the head in the bars over the memory of it. His mother had committed suicide a year before.

Now I put you in another legion, Carey, with Jerome who died of his heart and Louis who died on the rapids in Pennsylvania. And if that day comes for me and I find that it is indeed all over and we will not talk again with each other in the wavelengths of the sky, then I will still have lived with all of you these years beyond your deaths.

Nonetheless, do you think if you discern my face, my age, my humble birthplace amid the squalors and petty aspirations of gas stations and civil servant tediums where violence goes unexpurgated in offices and green enameled bars, if you hear my wordletting in some hip underground gathering place for hangerson to the hook of the moment, if you smile and talk to someone who has tasted the mechanics of my person, seen my body shake with lust and my mouth open upon the wind of temporal passion,

that you will know me? You touch my heart with your curiosity.

For the secret is that I have none. I am as open before you as the masked players in an erotic charade. Would it please you perhaps to rip my mask from me in the hope that I could never reconstruct it?

But I am the same to the quintessential suet, integument upon integument like the layers of an onion or the bud of a lotus. And if you strip me down through time's echoing caverns, I would submit to you, for at the end I would be a branch on a quaking aspen or a blue bottle flashing from a window in Provincetown, as rare and unapprehended as that.

And perhaps that is an end I would in my heart's brightest recesses rejoice for. What would it matter then, those men who sing aubades to sparrows on the roof of the deli, the price of anarchy and peace, the bright reflections on the guns and moon, those circling arms that hold the children close and let them go.

Oh yeah, we did all that stuff when we were kids. Play games like that. We used to light fires in the corner lots and play church on fire, you know. You know how to play that? Well, you're a girl, anyway. It's not a girl's game. All the guys used to get together and we'd hang around and think of things to do. So you light a fire in the empty lots and you all stand around and see who can put the fire out first by pissing on it. Oh, yes, it was exciting stuff. Youth in Philadelphia. I even had a career in crime. Did you know that? I bought this gun or found it, I can't remember now, it was so long ago. It was loaded, too. Didn't have it too long, though. Some guy from the local Mafia heard that I had it and he bought it from me for a half dollar. Yeah, that was it. My career in crime. I used to be a jeweler's apprentice, too. We made these marquisite MOTHER pins. I must have given my mother ten at least, for Mother's Day, and her birthday. That was a big drag. That's Philadelphia. Then you grow up and work in Palumbo's and make it with chorus girls.

. . . no it wasn't always like this. It was never like this but what it was I have forgotten, most of it anyway. I can't even remember if he was circumcised or not and I was with him for five years. Or how it felt, you know? Is

that just time, I wonder? Or a protection against feeling too much for what's done and well rid of? I don't know. I can remember though, oh yes, that time, my mouth upon . . .

Do what you will. Prod at the wellsprings of memory for a face like mine and you will find it. Drown my words in booze and you will assume they are your own. Love me or defile me. I will always be there. You will never know me. I will endure.

And so you see it is not as simple a matter as you might have thought. Oink X sees your obscurity and does not question overmuch.

Should you have a hoof, should you have a hook, should you have an empty cavern filled with stars where your words should be, should you kaleidoscope amorously into a bell to sound a knell to love with a thousand forgetful, insouciant, practiced smiles, Oink X knows it is not as simple a matter as you might have thought. Love not, die not.

Do not be deterred by your place in space, by the faces time wears down, or by your empty trousers on the doormat. Do not be obfuscated in the crystal wings of angels. Appearances are deceiving. And yet it seems to me, even here by the river Fuscous with this gadfly brankie crew mouthing Pall Malls by the bay window, that there is ecstasy to spare . . . "And that's all folks," Oink X smiled and his face faded slowly from the TV screen.
——*Gail Madonia*

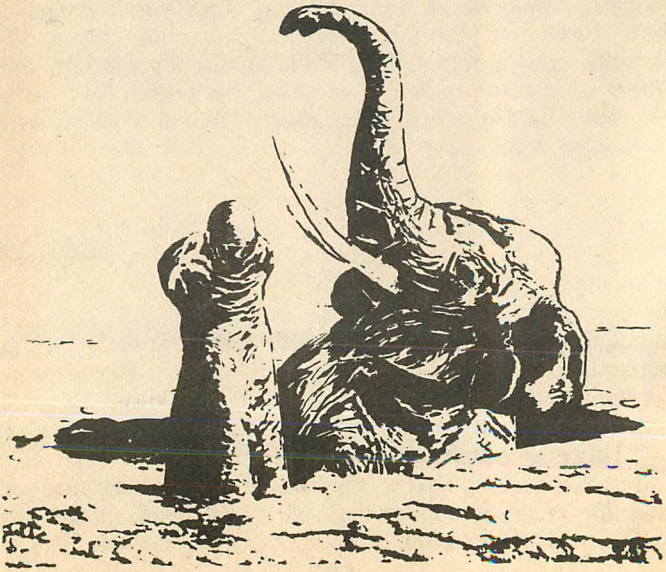
BODIES

1.

"Take a factory," Ab said. "It's the same sort of thing exactly."

What kind of factory Chapel wanted to know.

Ab tipped his chair back, settling into the theory as if it were a warm whirlpool bath in Hydrotherapy. He'd eaten two lunches that Chapel had brought down and felt friendly, reasonable, in control. "Any kind. You ever worked in a factory?"



Of course he hadn't. Chapel? Chapel was lucky to be pushing a cart. So Ab went right on. "For instance—take an electronics type factory. I worked in one once, an assembler."

"And you *made* something, right?"

"Wrong! I put things together. There's a difference if you'd use your ears for one minute instead of that big mouth of yours. See, first off this *box* comes down the line, and I'd stick in this red board sort of thing, then tighten some other mother on top of that. Same thing all day, simple as A-B-C. Even you could have done it, Chapel." He laughed.

Chapel laughed.

"Now what was I really doing? I *moved* things, from here to there . . ." He pantomimed here and there. The little finger of the left hand, there, ended at the first knuckle. He'd done it himself at his initiation into the K of C twenty years ago (twenty-five actually), a single chop of the old chopper, but when people asked he said it was an industrial accident and that was how the god-damned system destroyed you. But mostly people knew better than to ask.

"But I didn't *make* anything at all, you see? And it's the same in any other factory—you move things, or you put them together, same difference."

Chapel could feel he was losing. Ab talked faster and louder, and his own words came out stumbling. He hadn't wanted to argue in the first place, but Ab had tangled him in it without his knowing how. "But something, I don't know, what you say is . . . But what I mean is—you've got to have common sense too."

"No, this is *science.*"

Which brought such a look of abject defeat to the old man's eyes it was as if Ab had dropped a bomb, boff, right in the middle of his black, unhappy head. For who can argue against science? Not Chapel, sure as hell.

And yet he struggled up out of the rubble still championing common sense. "But things get made—how do you explain that?"

"Things get made, things get made," Ab mimicked in a falsetto voice, though of the two men's voices Chapel's was deeper. "What things?"

Chapel looked round the morgue for an example. It was

all so familiar as to be invisible—the slab, the carts, the stacks of sheets, the cabinet with its stock of fillers and fluids, the desk . . . He lifted a blank Identi-Band from the clutter on the desk. "Like plastic."

"Plastic?" Ab said in a tone of disgust. "That just shows how much you know, Chapel. Plastic." Ab shook his head.

"Plastic," Chapel insisted. "Why not?"

"Plastic is just putting *chemicals* together, you illiterate."

"Yeah, but." He closed one eye, squeezing the thought into focus. "But to make the plastic they've got to—heat it. Or something."

"Right! And what's heat?" he asked, folding his hands across his gut, victorious, full. "Heat is kinetic energy."

"Shit," Chapel maintained. He massaged his stubbly brown scalp. Another argument lost. He never understood how it happened.

"Molecules," Ab summed up, "moving. Everything breaks down to that. It's all physics, a law." He let loose a large fart and pointed his finger, just in time, at Chapel's groin.

Chapel made a smile acknowledging Ab's triumph. It was science all right. Science battered everyone into submission if it was given its way. It was like trying to argue with the atmosphere of Jupiter, or electric sockets, or the steroid tablets he had to take now—things that happened every day and never made sense, never would, never.

Dumb nigger, Ab thought, feeling friendlier in proportion to Chapel's perplexity. He wished he could have kept him arguing a while longer. There was still religion, psychosis, teaching, lots of possibilities. Ab had arguments to prove that even these jobs, which looked so mental and abstract on the surface, were actually all forms of kinetic energy.

Kinetic energy: once you understood the meaning of kinetic energy all kinds of other things started becoming clear.

"You should read the book," Ab insisted.

"Mm," Chapel said.

"He explains it in more detail." Ab hadn't read the entire book himself, only parts of the condensation, but he'd gotten the gist of it.

But Chapel had no time for books. Chapel, Chapel pointed out, was not one of your intellectuals.

Was Ab? Intellectual? He had to think about that one for a while. It was like wearing some fruity color transparency and seeing himself in a changing booth mirror, knowing he would never buy it, not daring even to walk out on the sales floor, but enjoying the way it fitted him anyhow: an intellectual. Yes, possibly in some other reincarnation Ab had been an intellectual, but it was a goofy idea all the same.

Right on the button, at 1:02, they rang down from 'A' Surgery. A body.

He took down the name in the logbook. He'd neglected to start a new page and the messenger hadn't come by yet for yesterday's, so he entered Time of Death as 11:58 and printed the name in neat block letters: NEWMAN, BOBBI.

"When can you get her?" asked the nurse, for whom a body still possessed sex.

"I'm there already," Ab promised.

He wondered what age it would be. 'Bobbi' was an older type name, but there were always exceptions.

He booted Chapel out, locked up, and set off with the cart to 'A' Surgery. At the bend of the corridor, right before the ramp, he told the new kid at the desk to take his calls. The kid wiggled his skimpy ass and made some dumb joke. Ab laughed. He was feeling in top shape, and it was going to be a good night. He could tell.

Chapel was the only one on and Mrs. Steinberg, who was in charge tonight, though not actually his boss, said, "Chapel, 'B' Recovery," and handed him the slip.

"And move," she added off-handedly, as another woman might have said, "God bless you," or "Take care."

Chapel, however, had one speed. Difficulties didn't slow him down; anxieties made him go no faster. If somewhere there were cameras perpetually trained on him, viewers who studied his slightest actions, then Chapel would give them nothing to interpret. Loaded or empty, he wheeled his cart along the corridors at the same pace he took walking home after work to his hotel on 65th. Regular? As a clock.

Outside 'M' Ward, on 4, by the elevators, a blond young man was pressing a urinal against himself, trying to make himself piss by groaning at his steel pot. His robe hung

open, and Chapel noticed that his pubic hair had been shaved off. That usually meant hemorrhoids.

"How's it going?" Chapel asked. His interest in the patients' stories was quite sincere, especially those in Surgery or ENT wards.

The blond young man made an anguished face and asked Chapel if he had any money.

"Sorry."

"Or a cigarette?"

"I don't smoke. And it's against the rules, you know."

The young man rocked from one leg to the other, coddling his pain and humiliation, trying to blot out every other sensation in order to go the whole way. Only the older patients tried, for a while at least, to hide their pain. The young ones gloried in it from the moment they gave their first samples to the aide in Admissions.

While the substitute in 'B' Recovery completed the transfer forms Chapel went over to the other occupied unit. It held, still unconscious, the boy he'd taken up earlier from Emergency. His face had been a regular beef stew; now it was a tidy volleyball of bandages. From the boy's clothes and the tanned and muscly trimness of his bare arms (on one biceps two blurry blue hands testified to an eternal friendship with "Larry") Chapel inferred that he would have had a good-looking face as well. But now? No. If he'd been registered with one of the private health plans, perhaps. But at Bellevue there was neither staff nor equipment for full-scale cosmetic work. He'd have eyes, nose, mouth, etc., all the right size and sitting about where they ought to, but the whole lot together would be plastic approximation.

So young—Chapel lifted his limp left wrist and checked the age on the Identi-Band—and handicapped for life. Ah, there was a lesson in it.

"The poor man," said the substitute, meaning not the boy but the transfer. She handed Chapel the transfer form.

"Oh?" said Chapel, unlocking the wheels.

She went round to the head of the cart. "A subtotal," she explained. *"And . . ."*

The cart bumped gently into the door frame. The bottle swayed at the top of the intravenous pole. The old

man tried to lift his hands, but they were strapped to the sides. His fingers clenched.

"And?"

"It's gone to the liver," she explained in a stage whisper.

Chapel nodded somberly. He'd known it must have been something as drastic as that since he was routed up to heaven, the 18th floor. Sometimes it seemed to Chapel that he could have saved Bellevue a lot of needless trouble if he'd just take all of these to Ab Holt's office straight-away instead of bothering with the 18th floor.

In the elevator Chapel paged through the man's file. WANDTKE, JWRZY. The routing slip, the transfer form, the papers in the folder, and the Identi-Band all agreed: JWRZY. He tried sounding it out, letter by letter.

The doors opened. Wandtke's eyes opened.

"How are you?" Chapel asked. "Do you feel okay? Hm?"

Wandtke began laughing, very softly. His ribs fluttered beneath the green electric sheet.

"We're going to your new ward now," Chapel explained. "It's going to be a lot nicer there. You'll see. Everything is going to be all right, uh . . ." He remembered that it was not possible to pronounce his name. Could it be, despite all the forms, a mistake?

Anyhow there wasn't much point trying to communicate with this one. Coming up from surgery they were always loaded so full of whatever it was that there was no sense to anything they said. They just giggled and rolled their eyes around, like this Wandtke. And in two weeks, cinders in a furnace. Wandtke wasn't singing at least. Lots of them sang.

Chapel's shoulder started in, a twinge. The twinge became an ache, and the ache thickened and enveloped him in a cloud of pain. Then the cloud scattered into wisps, the wisps vanished. All in the distance of a hundred yards in 'K' wing, and without his slowing, without a wink.

It wasn't bursitis, that much seemed certain. It came and went, not in flashes, but like music, a swelling up and then a welling away. The doctors didn't understand it, so they said. Eventually it went away, and so (Chapel told himself) he had nothing to complain about. That things could have been a lot worse was demonstrated to him all the time. The kid tonight, for instance, with the false

face that would always ache in cold weather, or this Wandtke, giggling like he'd come from some damned birthday party, and with his liver changing itself all the while into some huge, horrible growth. Those were the people to feel sorry for, and Chapel felt sorry for them with some gusto. By comparison to such wretched, doomed creatures, he, Chapel, was pretty lucky. He handled dozens every shift, men and women, old and young, carting them here and there, up and down, and there wasn't one of them, once the doctors had done their job, who wouldn't have been happy to change places with the short, thin, brittle, old black man who wheeled them through these miles of scabby corridors, not one.

Miss Mackey was on duty in the men's ward. She signed for Wandtke. Chapel asked her how he was supposed to pronounce a name like that, Jwrzy, and Miss Mackey said she certainly didn't know. It was probably a Polish name anyhow. Wandtke—didn't it look Polish?

Together they steered Wandtke to his unit. Chapel connected the cart, and the unit, purring softly, scooped up the old body, lifted, and stuck. The unit shut itself off. It was a moment before either Chapel or Miss Mackey realized what was wrong. Then they unstrapped the withered wrists from the aluminum bars of the cart. The unit, this time, experienced no difficulty.

"Well," said Miss Mackey, "I know two people who need a day's rest."

5:45. This close to clocking out, Chapel didn't want to return to the duty room and risk a last-minute assignment. "Any dinners left?" he asked the nurse.

"Too late here, they've all been taken. Try the women's ward."

In the women's ward, Havelock, the elderly aide, dug up a tray that had been meant for a patient who had terminated earlier that evening. Chapel got it for a quarter, after pointing out the low-residue sticker Havelock had tried to conceal under his thumb.

NEWMAN, B, the sticker read.

Ab would have her now. Chapel tried to remember what unit she'd been in. The blonde girl in the corner who couldn't stand sunlight? Or the colostomy who was always telling jokes? No, her name was Harrison.

Chapel pulled one of the visitors' chairs over to the

window ledge. He opened the tray and waited for the food to warm. He ate from one compartment at a time, chewing at his single stolid speed, though the whole dinner was the consistency of a bowl of Breakfast. First, the potatoes; then, some steamy, soft meat cubes; then, dutifully, a mulch of spinach. He left the cake but drank the Koffee, which contained the miracle ingredient that (aside from the fact that no one ever returned) gave heaven its name. When he was done he shot the tray downstairs himself.

Havelock was inside, on the phone.

The ward was a maze of blue curtains, layers of translucence overlapping layers of shadow. A triangle of sunlight was spread across the red tile floor at the far end of the room: dawn.

Unit 7 was open. At one time or another Chapel must have carted its occupant to and from every division of the hospital: SCHAAP, FRANCES. 3/3/04. Which made her eighteen, barely. Her face and neck were speckled with innumerable scarlet spider nevi, but Chapel remembered when it had been a pretty face. Lupus.

A small gray machine beside the bed performed, approximately, the functions of her inflamed liver. At irregular intervals a red light would blink on and, quickly, off, infinitesimal warnings which no one heeded.

Chapel smiled. The little miracles were starting to unfold themselves in his blood stream, but that was almost beside the point. The point was simple:

They were dying; he was alive. He had survived and they were bodies. The spring sunlight added its own additional touch of good cheer to the here of heaven and the now of six A.M.

In an hour he would be home. He'd rest a while, and then he'd watch his box. He thought he could look forward to that.

Heading home down First, Ab whistled a piece of trash that had stuck in his head four days running, about some new pill called Yes, that made you feel better, and he did.

The fifty dollars he'd got for the Newman body brought his take for the week up to a handsome $115. Once he'd seen what Ab was offering White hadn't even haggled.

Without being necrophile himself (to Ab a body was just a job to be done, something he carted down from the wards and burned or—if there was money to burn instead—shipped off to a freezing concern) Ab understood the market well enough to have recognized in Bobbi Newman a certain ideal quality of deathliness. Lupus had taken a fulminant course with her, rapidly destroying one internal system after another without, for a wonder, marring the fine texture of the skin. True, the disease had whittled face and limbs down to bone thinness, but then what else was necrophilia about? To Ab, who liked them big, soft, and lively, all of this fuss over corpses was pretty alien, yet basically his motto was *"Chacun à son goût,"* though not in so many words. There were limits, of course. For example, he would willingly have assisted at the castration of any Republican in the city, and he felt nearly as passionate a distaste for political extremists. But he possessed the basic urban tolerance for any human peculiarity from which he stood a good chance of making money.

Ab considered his commissions from the procurers to be gifts of fate, to be spent in the same free spirit that fortune had shown showering them on him. In fact, when you toted up the various MODICUM benefits the Holts were disbarred from by virtue of Ab's salary, his real income wasn't much more (without these occasional windfalls) than the government would have paid him for being alive. Ab usually managed to sidestep the logical conclusion: that the windfalls were his essential wage, the money that made him, in his own consciousness, a free agent, the equal of any engineer, expert, or criminal in the city. Ab was a man, with a man's competence to buy whatever, within bounds, he wanted.

At this particular April moment, with the traffic so light on the Avenue you could drink the air like a 7-Up, with the sun shining, with nowhere in particular to be until ten that night, and with $115 of discretionary income, Ab felt like an old movie, full of songs and violence and fast editing. Boff, smack, pow, that's how Ab was feeling now, and as the opposite sex approached him from the other direction, he could feel their eyes fastening on him, measuring, estimating, admiring, imagining.

One, very young, very black, in silvery street shorts,

stared at Ab's left hand and stared at it, as though it were a tarantula getting ready to crawl right up her leg. (Ab was everywhere quite hairy.) She could feel it tickling her knee, her thigh, her fancy. Milly, when she was little, had been the same way about her father's missing finger, all silly and giddy. Mutilations were supposed to be passé now, but Ab knew better. Girls still wet themselves feeling a stump, but guys today were just too chickenshit to chop their fingers off. The macho thing now was a gold earring, for Christ's sake—as though there had never been a 20th century.

Ab winked at her, and she looked away, but with a smile. How about that?

If there were one thing missing from a feeling of pure content it was that the wad in his pocket (two 20's, seven 10's, one 5) was so puny it almost wasn't there. Before revaluation a three-body week like this would have put a bulge in his front pocket as big as another cock, a comparison he had often at that time drawn. Once Ab had actually been a millionaire—for five days running in July of 2008, the single most incredible streak of luck he'd ever had. Today that would have meant five, six thousand—nothing. Some of the faro tables in the neighborhood still used the old dollars, but it was like a marriage that's lost its romance: you said the words but the meaning had gone out of them. You looked at the picture of Benjamin Franklin and thought, this is a picture of Benjamin Franklin. Whereas with the new bills $100 stood for beauty, truth, power, and love.

As though his bankroll were a kind of magnet dragging him there, Ab turned left on 18th into Stuyvesant Town. The four playgrounds at the center of the complex were the chief black market in New York. In the facs and on TV they used euphemisms like 'flea market' or 'street fair,' since to come right out and call it a black market was equivalent to saying the place was an annex of the police department and the courts, which it was.

The black market was as much a part of New York (or any other city), as basic to its existence, as the numbers from one to ten. Where else could you buy something without the purchase being fed into the federal income-and-purchase computers? Nowhere was where, which

meant that Ab, when he was flush, had three options open to him: the playgrounds, the clubs, and the baths.

Used clothing fluttered limply from rack after rack, as far as the fountain. Ab could never pass these stalls without feeling that Leda was somehow close at hand, hidden among these tattered banners of the great defeated army of the second-rate and second-hand, still silently resisting him, still trying to stare him down, still insisting, though so quietly now that only he could hear her: "God damn it, Ab, can't you get it through that thick skull of yours, we're poor, we're poor, we're *poor!*" It had been the biggest argument of their life together and the decisive one. He could remember the exact spot, under a plane tree, just here, where they had stood and raged at each other, Leda hissing and spitting like a kettle, out of her mind. It was right after the twins had arrived and Leda was saying there was no help for it, they'd have to wear what they could get. Ab said fuckshit no, no, no kid of his was going to wear other people's rags, they'd stay in the house naked first. Ab was louder and stronger and less afraid, and he won, but Leda revenged herself by turning her defeat into a martyrdom. She never held out against him again. Instead she became an invalid, weepy and sniveling and resolutely helpless.

Ab heard someone calling his name. He looked around, but who would be here this early in the day but the people from the buildings, old folks plugged into their radios, kids screaming at other kids, babies screaming at mothers, mothers screaming. Half the vendors weren't even spread out yet.

"Ab Holt—over here!" It was old Mrs. Galban. She patted the space beside her on the green bench.

He didn't have much choice. "Hey, Viola, how's it going? You're looking great!"

Mrs. Galban smiled a sweet, rickety smile. Yes, she said complacently, she did feel well, she thanked God every day. She observed that even for April this was beautiful weather. Ab didn't look so bad himself (a little heavier maybe), though it was how many years now?

"Twelve years," said Ab, at a venture.

"Twelve years? It seems longer. And how is that good-looking Dr. Mencken in Dermatology?"

"He's fine. He's the head of the department now, you know."

"Yes, I heard that."

"He asked after you the other day when I ran into him outside the clinic. He said, have you seen old Gabby lately." A polite lie.

She nodded her head, politely believing him. Then, cautiously, she started homing in on what was, for her, the issue. "And Leda, how is she, poor thing?"

"Leda is fine, Viola."

"She's getting out of the house, then?"

"Well no, not often. Sometimes we take her up to the roof for a bit of air. It's closer than the street."

"Ah, the pain!" Mrs. Galban murmured with swift, professional sympathy that the years had not been able to blunt. Indeed, it was probably better exercised now than when she'd been an aide at Bellevue. "You don't have to explain—I know it can be so awful, can't it, pain like that, and there's so little any of us can do. *But . . .*" she added, before Ab could turn aside the final thrust, ". . . we must do that little if we can."

"It's not as bad as it used to be," Ab insisted.

Mrs. Galban's look was meant to be understood as reproachful in a sad, helpless way, but even Ab could sense the calculations going on behind the brown, cataracted eyes. Was this, she asked herself, worth pursuing? Would Ab bite?

In the first years of Leda's invalidism Ab had picked up extra Dilaudin suppositories from Mrs. Galban, who specialized in analgesics. Most of her clients were other old women whom she met in the out-patient waiting room at the hospital. Ab had bought the Dilaudin more as a favor to the old pusher than from any real need, since he got all the morphine that Leda needed from the interns for next to nothing.

"It's a terrible thing," Mrs. Galban lamented quietly, staring into her seventy-eight-year-old lap. "A terrible thing."

What the hell, Ab thought. It wasn't as if he were broke.

"Hey, Gabby, you wouldn't have any of those things I used to get for Leda, would you? Those what-you-call-ums?"

"Well, Ab, since you ask . . ."

Ab got a package of five suppositories for $9, which was twice the going price, even here on the playground. Mrs. Galban evidently thought Ab a fool.

As soon as he'd given her the money, he felt comfortably unobligated. Walking off he could curse her with buoyant resentment. The old bitch would have to live a damned long time before he ever bought any more plugs off her.

Usually Ab never made the connection between the two worlds he inhabited, this one out here and the Bellevue morgue, but now, having actively wished Viola Galban dead, it struck him that the odds were strong that he'd be the one who'd shove her in the oven. The death of anyone (anyone, that is, whom Ab had known alive) was a depressing idea, and he shrugged it away. At the far edge of his shrug, for the barest instant, he saw the young, pretty face of Bobbi Newman.

The need to buy something was suddenly a physical necessity, as though his wad of bills had become that cock and had to be jerked off after a week-long abstinence.

He bought a lemon ice, his first ice of the year, and strolled among the stalls, touching the goods with thick, sticky fingers, asking prices, making jokes. Everywhere the vendors hailed him by his name when they saw him approach. There was nothing, so rumor would have it, that Ab Holt couldn't be talked into buying.

2.

Ab looked at his two hundred and fourteen pounds of wife from the doorway. Wrinkled blue sheets were wound round her legs and stomach, but her breasts hung loose. "They're prizewinners to this day," Ab thought affectionately. Any feelings he still had for Leda were focused there, just as any pleasure she got when he was on top of her came from the squeezing of his hands, the biting of his teeth. Where the sheets were wrapped round her, however, she could feel nothing—except, sometimes, pain.

After a while Ab's attention woke Leda up, the way a magnifying glass, focusing on a dry leaf, will start it smoldering.

He threw the package of suppositories onto the bed. "That's for you."

"Oh." Leda opened the package, sniffed at one of the wax cylinders suspiciously. "Oh?"

"It's Dilaudin. I ran into that Mrs. Galban at the market, and she wouldn't get off my back till I'd bought something."

"I was afraid for a moment you might have got it on *my* account. Thanks. What's in the other bag, an enema bottle for our anniversary?"

Ab showed her the wig he'd bought for Beth. It was a silly, four-times-removed imitation of the Egyptian style made popular by a now-defunct TV series. To Leda it looked like something you'd find at the bottom of a box of Xmas wrapping, and she was certain it would look the same way to her daughter.

"My God," she said.

"Well, it's what the kids are wearing now," Ab said doubtfully. It no longer looked the same to him. He brought it over to the wedge of sunlight by the bedroom's open window and tried to shake a bit more glitter into it. The metallic strings, rubbing against each other, made soft squeaking sounds.

"My God," she said again. Her annoyance had almost betrayed her into asking him what he'd paid for it. Since the epochal argument beneath the plane tree she never discussed money matters with Ab. She didn't want to hear how he spent his money or how he earned it. She especially didn't want to know how he earned it, since she had, anyhow, a fair idea.

She contented herself with an insult. "You've got the discimination of a garbage truck, and if you think Beth will let herself be seen in that ridiculous, obscene piece of junk, well . . . !" She pushed at the mattress until she was sitting almost upright. Both Leda and the bed breathed heavily.

"How would you know what people are wearing outside this apartment? There were hundreds of these fucking things all over the playground. It's what the kids are wearing now. What the fuck."

"It's ugly. You bought your daughter an ugly wig. You have every right to, I suppose."

"Ugly—isn't that what you used to say about everything Milly wore? All those things with buttons. And the hats!

It's a stage they go through. You were probably just the same, if you could remember that long ago."

"Oh, Milly! You're always holding Milly up as though she were some kind of *example!* Milly never had any idea how . . ." Leda gave a gasp. Her pain. She pressed her hand flat against the roll of flesh to the side of her right breast, where she thought her liver might be. She closed her eyes trying to locate the pain, which had vanished.

Ab waited till Leda was paying attention to him again. Then, very deliberately, he threw the tinselly wig out the open window. Thirty dollars, he thought, just like that.

The manufacturer's tag fluttered to the floor. A pink oval with italic letters: Nephertiti Creations.

With an inarticulate cry Leda swivelled sideways in bed till she'd made both feet touch the floor. She stood up. She took two steps and reached out for the window frame to steady herself.

The wig lay in the middle of the street eighteen floors below. Against the gray concrete it looked dazzlingly bright. A Tastee Bread truck backed up over it.

Since there was no reproach she might have made that didn't boil down to a charge of his throwing away money, she said nothing. The unspoken words whirled round inside her, a plague-bearing wind that ruffled the wasted muscles of her legs and back like so many tattered flags. The wind died and the flags went limp.

Ab was ready behind her. He caught her as she fell and laid her back on the bed, wasting not a motion, smooth as a tango dip. It seemed almost accidental that his hands should be under her breasts. Her mouth opened and he put his own mouth across it, sucking the breath from her lungs.

Anger was their aphrodisiac. Over the years the interval between fighting and fucking had grown shorter and shorter. They scarcely bothered any longer to differentiate the two processes. Already his cock was stiff. Already she'd begun to moan her rhythmic protest against the pleasure or the pain, whichever it was. As his left hand kneaded the warm dough of her breasts, his right hand pulled off his shoes and pants. The years of invalidism had given her lax flesh a peculiar virginal quality, as though each time he went into her he were awakening her from an enchanted, innocent sleep. There was a kind of

sourness about her too, a smell that seeped from her pores only at these times, the way maples yield sap only at the depth of the winter. Eventually he'd learned to like it.

A good sweat built up on the interface of their bodies, and his movements produced a steady salvo of smacking and slapping and farting sounds. This, to Leda, was the worst part of these sexual assaults, especially when she knew the children were at home. She imagined Beno, her youngest, her favorite, standing on the other side of the door, unable to keep from thinking of what was happening to her despite the horror it must have caused him. Sometimes it was only by concentrating on the thought of Beno that she could keep from crying out.

Ab's body began to move faster. Leda's, crossing the threshhold between self-control and automatism, struggled upward away from the thrusts of his cock. His hands grabbed her hips, forcing her to take him. Tears burst from her eyes, and Ab came.

He rolled off, and the mattress gave one last exhausted whoosh.

"Dad?"

It was Bobo, who certainly should have been in school. The bedroom door was halfway open. Never, Leda thought, in an ecstasy of humiliation, never had she known a moment to match this. Bright new pains leapt through her viscera like tribes of antelope.

"Dad," Bobo insisted. "Are you asleep?"

"I would be if you'd shut up and let me."

"There's someone on the phone downstairs, from the hospital. That Juan. He said it's urgent, and to wake you if we had to."

"Tell Martinez to fuck himself."

"He *said,*" Bobo went on, in a tone of martyred patience that was a good replica of his mother's, "it didn't make any difference what you said, and that once he explained it to you you'd thank him. That's what he said."

"Did he say what it was about?"

"Some guy they're looking for. Bob Someone."

"I don't know who they want, and in any case . . ." Then it began to dawn: the possibility; the awful, impossible lightning bolt he'd known he would never escape. "Bobbi Newman, was that the name of the guy they're looking for?"

"Yeah. Can I come in?"

"Yes, yes." Ab swept the damp sheet over Leda's body, which hadn't stirred since he'd got off. He pulled his pants on. "Who took the call, Bobo?"

"Williken did." Bobo stepped into the bedroom. He had sensed the importance of the message he'd been given, and he was determined to milk it for a maximum of suspense. It was as though he knew what was at stake.

"Listen, run downstairs and tell Williken to hold Juan on the line until . . ."

One of his shoes was missing.

"He left, Dad. I told him you couldn't be interrupted. He seemed sort of angry, and he said he wished you wouldn't give people his number any more."

"Shit on Williken then."

His shoe was way the hell under the bed. How had he . . . ?

"What was the message he gave you exactly? Did they say who's looking for this Newman fellow?"

"Williken wrote it down, but I can't read his writing. Margy it looks like."

That was it then, the end of the world. Somehow Admissions had made a mistake in slotting Bobbi Newman for a routine cremation. She had a policy with Macy's.

And if Ab didn't get back the body he'd sold to White . . . "Oh Jesus," he whispered to the dust under the bed.

"Anyhow you're supposed to call them right back. But Williken says not from his phone cause he's gone out."

There might be time, barely and with the best luck. White hadn't left the morgue till after 3 A.M. It was still short of noon. He'd buy the body back, even if it meant paying White something extra for his disappointment. After all, in the long run White needed him as much as he needed White.

"Bye, Dad," Bobo said, without raising his voice, though by then Ab was already out in the hall and down one landing.

Bobo walked over to the foot of the bed. His mother still hadn't moved a muscle. He'd been watching her the whole time, and it was as though she were dead. She was always like that after his father had fucked her, but usually not for such a long time. At school they said that

fucking was supposed to be very healthful, but somehow it never seemed to do *her* much good. He touched the sole of her right foot. It was soft and pink, like the foot of a baby, because she never walked anywhere.

Leda pulled her foot away. She opened her eyes.

White's establishment was way the hell downtown, around the corner from the Democratic National Convention (formerly, Pier 19) which was to the world of contemporary pleasure what Radio City Music Hall had been to the world of entertainment—the largest, the mildest, and the most amazing. Ab, being a born New Yorker, had never stepped through the glowing neon vulva (seventy feet high and forty feet wide, a landmark) of the entrance. For those like Ab who refused to be grossed out by the conscious too-muchness of the major piers the same basic styles were available on the sidestreets ("Boston" they called this area) in a variety of cooler colors, and here, in the midst of all that was allowed, some five or six illegal businesses eked out their unnatural and anachronistic lives.

After much knocking a young girl came to the door, the same probably who had answered the phone, though now she pretended to be mute. She could not have been much older than Bobo, twelve at most, but she moved with the listless, enforced manner of a despairing housewife.

Ab stepped into the dim foyer and closed the door against the girl's scarcely perceptible resistance. He'd never been inside White's place before, and he would not even have known what address to come to if he hadn't once had to take over the delivery van for White, who'd arrived at the morgue too zonked out to function. So this was the market to which he'd been exporting his goods. It was less than elegant.

"I want to see Mr. White," Ab told the girl. He wondered if she were another sideline.

She lifted one small, unhappy hand toward her mouth.

There was a clattering and banging above their heads, and a single flimsy facs-sheet drifted down through the half-light of the stairwell. White's voice drifted down after it: "Is that you, Holt?"

"Damn right!" Ab started up the stairs, but White,

light in his head and heavy on his feet, was already crashing down to meet him.

White placed a hand on Ab's shoulder, establishing the fact of the other man's presence and at the same time holding himself erect. He had said yes to Yes once too often, or twice, and was not at this moment altogether corporeal.

"I've got to take it back," Ab said. "I told the kid on the phone. I don't care how much you stand to lose, I've got to have it."

White removed his hand carefully and placed it on the bannister. "Yes. Well. It can't be done. No."

"I've got to."

"Melissa," White said. "It would be . . . If you would please . . . And I'll see you later, darling."

The girl mounted the steps reluctantly, as though her certain future were waiting for her at the top. "My daughter," White explained with a sad smile as she came alongside. He reached out to rumple her hair, but missed by a few inches.

"We'll discuss this, shall we, in my office?"

Ab helped him to the bottom. White went to the door at the far end of the foyer. "Is it locked?" he wondered aloud.

Ab tried it. It was not locked.

"I was meditating," White said meditatively, still standing before the unlocked door, in Ab's way, "when you called before. In all the uproar and whirl, a man has to take a moment aside to . . ."

White's office looked like a lawyer's that Ab had broken into at the tag-end of a riot, years and years before. He'd been taken aback to find that the ordinary processes of indigence and desuetude had accomplished much more than any amount of his own adolescent smashing about might have.

"Here's the story," Ab said, standing close to White and speaking in a loud voice so there could be no misunderstanding. "It turns out that the one you came for last night was actually insured by her parents, out in Arizona, without her knowing. The hospital records didn't say anything about it, but what happened is the various clinics have a computer that cross-checks against the obits.

They caught it this morning, and called the morgue around noon."

White tugged sullenly on a strand of his sparse, mousy hair. "Well, tell them, you know, tell them it went in the oven."

"I can't. Officially we've got to hold them for twenty-four hours, just in case something like this should happen. Only it never does. Who would have thought, I mean it's so unlikely, isn't it? Anyhow the point is, I've got to take the body back. Now."

"It can't be done."

"Has somebody already . . . ?"

White nodded.

"But could we fix it up again somehow? I mean, how, uh, badly . . ."

"No. No, I don't think so. Out of the question."

"Listen, White, if I get busted over this, I won't let myself be the only one to get hurt. You understand. There are going to be questions."

White nodded vaguely. He seemed to go away and return. "Well then, take a look yourself." He handed Ab an old-fashioned brass key. There was a plastic Yin and Yang symbol on the keychain. He pointed to a four-tier metal file on the far side of the office. "Through there."

The file wouldn't roll aside from the doorway until, having thought about it, Ab bent down and found the release for the wheels. There was no knob on the door, just a tarnished disc of lock with a word "Chicago" on it. The key fit loosely and the locks had to be coaxed.

The body was scattered all over the patchy linoleum. A heavy rose-like scent masked the stench of the decaying organs. No, it was not something you could have passed off as the result of surgery, and in any case the head seemed to be missing.

He'd wasted an hour to see this.

White stood in the doorway, ignoring, in sympathy to Ab's feelings, the existence of the dismembered and disemboweled corpse. "He was waiting here, you see, when I went to the hospital. An out-of-towner, and one of my very . . . I always let them take away whatever they want. Sorry."

As White was locking up the room again, Ab recollected

the one thing he would need irrespective of the body. He hoped it hadn't gone off with the head.

They found her left arm in the coffin of simulated pine with the Identi-Band still on it. He tried to persuade himself that as long as he had this name there was still half a chance that he'd find something to hang it on.

White sensed Ab's renascent optimism, and, without sharing it, encouraged him: "Things could be worse."

Ab frowned. His hope was still too fragile to bear expression.

But White began to float away in his own mild breeze. "Say, Ab, have you ever studied yoga?"

Ab laughed. "Shit no."

"You should. You'd be amazed what it can do for you. I don't stick with it like I should, it's my own fault, I suppose, but it puts you in touch with . . . Well, it's hard to explain."

White discovered that he was alone in the office. "Where are you going?" he asked.

420 East 65th came into the world as a "luxury" coop, but like most such it had been subdivided by the turn of the century into a number of little hotels, two or three to a floor. These hotels rented rooms or portions of rooms on a weekly basis to singles who either preferred hotel life or who, as aliens, didn't qualify for a MODICUM dorm. Chapel shared his room at the Colton (named after the actress reputed to have owned the entire twelve rooms of the hotel in the 80's and 90's) with another ex-convict, but since Lucey left for his job at a retrieval center early in the morning and spent his afterhours cruising for free meat around the piers the two men rarely encountered each other, which was how they liked it. It wasn't cheap, but where else could they have found accommodations so reassuringly like those they'd known at Sing-Sing: so small, so spare, so dark?

The room had a false floor in the reductionist style of the 90's. Lucey never went out without first scrupulously tucking everything away and rolling the floor into place. When Chapel got home from the hospital he would be greeted by a splendid absence: the walls, one window covered by a paper screen, the ceiling with its single recessed light, the waxed wood of the floor. The single dec-

oration was a strip of molding tacked to the walls at what was now, due to the raised floor, eye-level.

He was home, and here, beside the door, bolted to the wall, quietly, wonderfully waiting for him, was his 28-inch Yamaha of America, none better at any price, nor any cheaper. (Chapel paid all the rental and cable charges himself, since Lucey didn't like TV.)

Chapel did not watch just anything. He saved himself for the programs he felt really strongly about. As the first of these did not come on till 10:30, he spent the intervening hour or two dusting, sanding, waxing, polishing, and generally being good to the floor, just as for nineteen years he had scoured the concrete of his cell every morning and evening. He worked with the mindless and blessed dutifulness of a priest reading his office. Afterwards, calmed, he would roll back the gleaming floorboards from his bed and lie back with conscious worthiness, ready to receive. His body seemed to disappear.

Once the box was on Chapel became another person. At 10:30 he became Eric Laver, the idealistic young lawyer, with his idealistic young notions of right and wrong, which no amount of painful experience, including two disastrous marriages (and the possibility now of a third) ever seemed to dispel. Though lately, since he'd taken on the Forrest case . . . This was *The Whole Truth.*

At 11:30 Chapel would have his bowel movement during an intermission of news, sports, and weather.

Then: *As The World Turns,* which, being more epic in scope, offered its audience different identities on different days. Today, as Bill Harper, Chapel was worried about Moira, his fourteen-year-old problem stepdaughter, who only last Wednesday during a stormy encounter at breakfast had announced to him that she was a Lesbian. As if this wasn't enough, his wife, when he told her what Moira had told him, insisted that many years ago *she* had loved another woman. Who that other woman might have been he feared he already knew.

It was not the stories that engaged him so, it was the faces of the actors, their voices, their gestures, the smooth, wide-open, whole-bodied way they moved. So long as they themselves seemed stirred by their imaginary problems, Chapel was satisfied. What he needed was the spectacle of authentic emotion—eyes that cried, chests

that heaved, lips that kissed or frowned or tightened with anxiety, voices tremulous with concern.

He would sit on the mattress, propped on cushions, four feet back from the screen, breathing quick, shallow breaths, wholly given over to the flickerings and noises of the machine, which were, more than any of his own actions, his life, the central fact of his consciousness, the single source of any happiness Chapel knew or could remember.

A TV had taught Chapel to read. It had taught him to laugh. It had instructed the very muscles of his face how to express pain, fear, anger, and joy. From it he had learned the words to use in all the confusing circumstances of his other, external life. And though he never read, or laughed, or frowned, or spoke, or walked, or did anything as well as his avatars on the screen, yet they'd seen him through well enough, after all, or he would not have been here now, renewing himself at the source.

What he sought here, and what he found, was much more than art, which he had sampled during prime evening hours and for which he had little use. It was the experience of returning, after the exertions of the day, to a face he could recognize and love, his own or someone else's. Or if not love, then some feeling as strong. To know, with certainty, that he would feel these same feelings tomorrow, and the next day. In other ages religion had performed this service, telling people the story of their lives, and after a certain lapse of time telling it to them again.

Once a show that Chapel followed on CBS had pulled down such disastrous ratings for six months running that it had been cancelled. A pagan forcibly converted to a new religion would have felt the same loss and longing (until the new god has been taught to inhabit the forms abandoned by the god who died) that Chapel felt then, looking at the strange faces inhabiting the screen of his Yamaha for an hour every afternoon. It was as though he'd looked into a mirror and failed to find his reflection. For the first month the pain in his shoulder had become so magnificently more awful that he had almost been unable to do his work at Bellevue. Then, slowly, in the person of young Dr. Landry, he began to rediscover the elements of his own identity.

It was at 2:45, during a commercial for Carnation Eggies, that Ab came pounding and hollering at Chapel's door. Maud had just come to visit her sister-in-law's child at the observation center to which the court had committed him. She didn't know yet that Dr. Landry was in charge of the boy's case.

"Chapel," Ab screamed, "I know you're in there, so open up, goddammit. I'll knock this door down."

The next scene opened in Landry's office. He was trying to make Mrs. Hanson, from last week, understand how a large part of her daughter's problem sprang from her own selfish attitudes. But Mrs. Hanson was black, and Chapel's sympathy was qualified for blacks, whose special dramatic function was to remind the audience of the other world, the one that they inhabited and were unhappy in.

Maud knocked on Landry's door: a closeup of gloved fingers thrumming on the paper panel.

Chapel got up and let Ab in. By three o'clock Chapel had agreed, albeit sullenly, to help Ab find a replacement for the body he had lost.

3.

Martinez had been at the desk when the call came from Macy's saying to hold the Newman body till their driver got there. Though he knew that the vaults contained nothing but three male geriatric numbers, he made mild yes-sounds and started filling out both forms. He left a message for Ab at his emergency number, then (on the principle that if there was going to be shit it should be Ab who either cleaned it up or ate it, as God willed) got word to his cousin to call in sick for the second (2–10) shift. When Ab phoned back, Martinez was brief and ominous: "Get here and bring you know what. Or you know what."

Macy's driver arrived before Ab. Martinez was feeling almost off-balance enough to tell him there was nothing in storage by the name of Newman, Bobbi. But it was not like Martinez to be honest when a lie might serve, especially in a case like this, where his own livelihood, and his cousin's, were jeopardized. So, making a mental sign of the cross, he'd wheeled one of the geriatric numbers out from the vaults, and the driver, with a healthy indifference

to bureaucratic good form carted it out to his van without looking under the sheet or checking the name on the file: NORRIS, THOMAS.

It was an inspired improvisation. Since their driver had been as culpable as the morgue, Macy's wasn't likely to make a stink about the resulting delay. Fast post mortem freezing was the rule in the cryonic industry, and it didn't pay to advertise the exceptions.

Ab arrived a bit before four. First off he checked out the log book. The page for April 14 was blank. A miracle of bad luck, but he wasn't surprised.

"Anything waiting?"

"Nothing."

"That's incredible," Ab said, wishing it were.

The phone rang. "That'll be Macy's," Martinez said equably, stripping down to street clothes.

"Aren't you going to answer it?"

"It's your baby now." Martinez flashed a big winner's smile. They'd both gambled but Ab had lost. He explained, as the phone rang on, the stopgap by which he'd saved Ab's life.

When Ab picked it up, it was the director, no less, of Macy's Clinic, and so high in the sky of his just wrath it would have been impossible for Ab to have made out what he was screaming if he hadn't already known. Ab was suitably abject and incredulous, explaining that the attendant who had made the mistake (and how it could have happened he still did not understand) was gone for the day. He assured the director that the man would not get off lightly, would probably be canned or worse. On the other hand, he saw no reason to call the matter to the attention of Administration, who might try to shift some of the blame onto Macy's and their driver. The director agreed that that was uncalled for.

"And the minute your driver gets here Miss Newman will be waiting. I'll be personally responsible. And we can forget that the whole thing happened. Yes?"

Yes.

Leaving the office, Ab drew in a deep breath and squared his shoulders. He tried to get himself into the I-can-do-it spirit of a Sousa march. He had a problem. There's only one way to solve a problem: by coping with it. By whatever means were available.

For Ab, at this point, there was only one means left.

Chapel was waiting where Ab had left him on the ramp spanning 29th Street.

"It has to be done," Ab said.

Chapel, reluctant as he was to risk Ab's anger again (he'd nearly been strangled to death once), felt obliged to enter a last symbolic protest. "I'll do it," he whispered, "but it's murder."

"Oh no," Ab replied confidently, for he felt quite at ease on this score. "Burking isn't murder."

On April 2, 1956, Bellevue Hospital did not record a single death, a statistic so rare it was thought worthy of remark in all the city's newspapers, and there were then quite a few. In the sixty-six years since, there had not been such another deathless day, though twice it had seemed a near thing.

At five o'clock on the afternoon of April 14, 2022, the city desk computer at the *Times* issued a stand-by slip noting that as of that moment their Bellevue tie-line had not dispatched a single obit to the central board. A print-off of the old story accompanied the slip.

Joel Beck laid down her copy of *Tender Buttons,* which was no longer making sense, and considered the human-interest possibilities of this non-event. She'd been on stand-by for hours and this was the first thing to come up. By midnight, very likely, someone would have died and spoiled any story she might have written. Still, in a choice between Gertrude Stein (illusion) and the Bellevue morgue (reality) Joel opted for the latter.

She notified Darling where she'd be. He thought it was a sleeping idea and told her to enjoy it.

By the first decade of the 21st century systematic lupus erythematosis (SLE) had displaced cancer as the principle cause of death among women aged 20 to 55. This disease attacks every major system of the body, sequentially or in combination. Pathologically it is a virtual anthology of what can go wrong with the human body. Until the Morgan-Imamura test was perfected in 2007, cases of lupus had been diagnosed as meningitis, as epilepsy, as brucellosis, as nephritis, as syphillis, as colitis . . . The list goes on.

The etiology of lupus is infinitely complex and has been endlessly debated, but all students agree with the contention of Muller and Imamura in the study for which they won their first Nobel prize, *SLE—the Ecological Disease:* lupus represents the auto intoxication of the human race in an environment ever more hostile to the existence of life. A minority of specialists went on to say that the chief cause of the disease's proliferation had been the collateral growth of modern pharmacology. Lupus, by this theory, was the price mankind was paying for the cure of its other ills.

Among the leading proponents of the so-called "doomsday" theory was Dr. E. Kitaj, director of Bellevue Hospital's Metabolic Research unit, who now (while Chapel bided his time in the television room) was pointing out to the resident and interns of heaven certain unique features of the case of the patient in Unit 7. While all clinical tests confirmed a diagnosis of SLE, the degeneration of liver functions had progressed in a fashion more typical of lupoid hepatitis. Because of the unique properties of her case, Dr. Kitaj had ordered a liver machine upstairs for Miss Schaap, though ordinarily this was a temporary expedient before transplantation. Her life was now as much a mechanical as a biologic process. In Alabama, New Mexico, and Utah, Frances Schaap would have been considered dead in any court of law.

Chapel was falling asleep. The afternoon art movie, a drama of circus life, was no help in keeping awake, since he could never concentrate on a program unless he knew the characters. Only by thinking of Ab, the threats he'd made, the blood glowing in his angry face, was he able to keep from nodding off.

In the ward the doctors had moved on to Unit 6 and were listening with tolerant smiles to Mrs. Harrison's jokes about her colostomy.

The new Ford commercial came on, like an old friend calling Chapel by name. A girl in an Empire coupe drove through endless fields of grain. Ab had said, who said so many things just for their shock value, that the commercials were often better than the programs.

At last they trooped off together to the men's ward, leaving the curtains drawn around Unit 7. Frances Schaap was asleep. The little red light on the machine winked on

and off, on and off, like a jet flying over the city at night.

Using the diagram Ab had scrawled on the back of a transfer form, Chapel found the pressure adjustment for the portal vein. He turned it left till it stopped. The arrow on the scale below, marked P/P, moved slowly from 35, to 40, to 50. To 60.

To 65.

He turned the dial back to where it had been. The arrow shivered: the portal vein had hemorrhaged.

Frances Schaap woke up. She lifted one thin, astonished hand toward her lips: they were smiling! "Doctor," she said pleasantly. "Oh, I feel . . ." The hand fell back to the sheet.

Chapel looked away from her eyes. He readjusted the dial, which was no different, essentially, from the controls of his own Yamaha. The arrow moved right, along the scale: 50. 55.

" . . . so much better now."

60. 65.

"Thanks."

70.

"I hope, Mr. Holt, that you won't let me keep you from your work," Joel Beck said, with candid insincerity. "I fear I have already."

Ab thought twice before agreeing to this. At first he'd been convinced she was actually an investigator Macy's had hired to nail him, but her story about the computer checking out the obits and sending her here was not the sort of thing anyone could have made up. It was bad enough, her being from the *Times,* and worse perhaps.

"Am I?" she insisted.

If he said yes, he had work to do, she'd ask to tag along and watch. If he said no, then she'd go on with her damned questions. If it hadn't been that she'd have reported him (he could recognize the type), he'd have told her to fuck off.

"Oh, I don't know," he answered carefully. "Isn't it me who's keeping you from your work?"

"How so?"

"Like I explained, there's a woman up on 18 who's sure to terminate any minute now. I'm just waiting for them to call."

"Half an hour ago you said it wouldn't take fifteen minutes, and you're still waiting. Possibly the doctors have pulled her through. Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

"*Someone* is bound to die by twelve o'clock."

"By the same logic someone was bound to have died by now—and they haven't."

Ab could not support the strain of diplomacy any longer. "Look, lady, you're wasting your time—it's as simple as that."

"It won't be the first time," Joel Beck replied complacently. "You might almost say that that's what I'm paid to do." She unslung her recorder. "If you'd just answer one or two more questions, give me a few more details of what you actually do, possibly we'll come up with a handle for a more general story. Then even if that call does come I could go up with you and look over your shoulder."

"Who would be interested?" With growing astonishment Ab realized that she did not so much resist his arguments as simply ignore them.

While Joel Beck was explaining the intrinsic fascination of death to the readers of the *Times* (not a morbid fascination but the universal human response to a universal human fact), the call came from Chapel.

He had done what Ab asked him to.

"Yeah, and?"

It had gone off okay.

"Is it official yet?"

It wasn't. There was no one in the ward.

"Couldn't you, uh, mention the matter to someone who can make it official?"

The *Times* woman was poking about the morgue, fingering things, pretending not to eavesdrop. Ab felt she could decipher his generalities. His first confession had been the same kind of nightmare, with Ab certain all his classmates lined up ouside the confessional had overheard the sins the priest had pried out of him. If she hadn't been listening he could have tried to bully Chapel into . . .

He'd hung up. It was just as well.

"Was that the call?" she asked.

"No. Something else, a private matter."

So she kept at him with more questions about the

ovens, and whether relatives ever came in to watch, and how long it took, until the desk called to say there was a driver from Macy's trying to bring a body into the hospital, and should they let him?

"Hold him right there. I'm on my way."

"That was the call," Joel Beck said, genuinely disappointed.

"Mm. I'll be right back."

The driver, flustered, started in with some story why he was late.

"It's skin off your ass, not mine. Never mind that anyhow. There's a reporter in my office from the *Times* . . ."

"I knew," the driver said. "It's not enough I'm going to be fired, now you've found a way . . ."

"Listen to me, asshole. This isn't about the Newman fuckup, and if you don't panic she never has to know." He explained about the city desk computer. "So we just won't let her get any strange ideas, right? Like she might if she saw you hauling one corpse into the morgue and going off with another."

"Yeah, but . . ." The driver clutched for his purpose as for a hat that a great wind were lifting from his head. "But they'll crucify me at Macy's if I don't come back with the Newman body! I'm so late already because of the damned . . ."

"You'll *get* the body. You'll take back *both.* You can return with the other one later, but the important thing now . . ."

He felt her hand on his shoulder, bland as a smile.

"I thought you couldn't have gone too far away. There's a call for you, and I'm afraid you were right: Miss Schaap has died. That is whom you were speaking of?"

Whom! Ab thought with a sudden passion of hatred for the *Times* and its band of psuedo-intellectuals. *Whom!*

The Macy's driver, was disappearing toward his cart.

It came to Ab then, the plan of his salvation, whole and entire, the way a masterpiece must come to a great artist, its edges glowing.

"Bob!" Ab called out. "Wait a minute."

The driver turned halfway round, head bent sideways, an eyebrow raised: who, me?

"Bob, I want you to meet, uh . . ."

"Joel Beck."

"Right. Joel, this is Bob, uh, Bob Newman." It was, in fact, Samuel Blake. Ab was bad at remembering names.

Samuel Blake and Joel Beck shook hands.

"Bob drives for Macy's Clinic, the Steven Jay Mandell Memorial Clinic." He laid one hand on Blake's shoulder, the other hand on Beck's. She seemed to become aware of his stump for the first time and flinched. "Do you know anything about cryonics, Miss uh?"

"Beck. No, very little."

"Mandell was the very first New Yorker to go to the freezers. Bob could tell you all about him, a fantastic story." He steered them back down the corridor toward the morgue.

"Bob is here right now because of the body they just. . . . Uh." He remembered too late that you didn't call them bodies in front of outsiders. "Because of Miss Schaap, that is. *Whom,*" he added with malicious emphasis, "was insured with Bob's clinic." Ab squeezed the driver's shoulder in lieu of winking.

"Whenever possible, you see, we notify the Clinic people, so that they can be here the minute one of their clients terminates. That way there's not a minute lost. Right, Bob?"

The driver nodded, thinking his way slowly toward the idea Ab had prepared for him.

He opened the door to his office, waited for them to go in. "So while I'm upstairs why don't you and Bob have a talk, Miss Peck. Bob has dozens of incredible stories he can tell you, but you'll have to be quick. Cause once I've got his body down here . . ." Ab gave the driver a significant look. ". . . Bob will have to leave."

It was done as neatly as that. The two people whose curiosity or impatience might still have spoiled the substitution were now clamped to each other like a pair of steel traps, jaw to jaw to jaw to jaw.

He hadn't considered the elevator situation. During his own shift there were seldom logjams. When there were, carts routed for the morgue were last in line. At 6:15, when the Schaap was finally signed over to him, every elevator arriving on 18 was full of people who'd ridden to the top in order to get a ride to the bottom. It might be an hour before Ab and his cart could find space, and the

Macy's driver would certainly not sit still that much longer.

He waited till the hallway was empty, then scooped up the body from the cart. It weighed no more than his own Bobo, but even so by the time he'd reached the landing of 12, he was breathing heavy. Halfway down from 5 his knees gave out. (They'd given fair warning, but he'd refused to believe he could have gone so soft.) He collapsed with the body still cradled in his arms.

He was helped to his feet by a blond young man in a striped bathrobe many sizes too small. Once Ab was sitting up, the young man tried to assist Frances Schaap to her feet. Ab, gathering his wits, explained that it was just a body.

"Hoo-wee, for a minute there, I thought . . ." He laughed uncertainly at what he'd thought.

Ab felt the body here and there and moved its limbs this way and that, trying to estimate what damage had been done. Without undressing it, this was difficult.

"How about you?" the young man asked, retrieving the cigarette he'd left smoking on a lower step.

"I'm fine." He rearranged the sheet, lifted the body and started off again. On the third floor landing he remembered to shout up a thank-you at the young man who'd helped him.

Later, during visiting hours in the ward, Ray said to his friend Charlie, who'd brought in new cassettes from the shop where he worked: "It's incredible some of the things you see in this hospital."

"Such as?"

"Well, if I told you you wouldn't believe." Then he spoiled his whole build-up by twisting round sideways in bed. He'd forgotten he couldn't do that.

"How are you feeling?" Charlie asked, after Ray had stopped groaning and making a display. "I mean, in general."

"Better, the doctor says, but I still can't piss by myself." He described the operation of the catheter, and his self-pity made him forget Ab Holt, but later, alone and unable to sleep (for the man in the next bed made bubbling sounds) he couldn't stop thinking of the dead girl, of how he'd picked her up off the steps, her ruined face and frail, limp hands, and how the fat attendant from the

morgue had tested, one by one, her arms and legs, to see what he'd broken.

There was nothing for her in the morgue, Joel had decided, now that the day had yielded its one obit to nullify the non-event. She phoned back to the desk, but neither Darling nor the computer had any suggestions.

She wondered how long it would be before they fired her. Perhaps they thought she would become so demoralized if they kept her on stand-by that she'd leave without a confrontation scene.

Human interest: surely somewhere among the tiers of this labyrinth there was a story for her to bear witness to. Yet wherever she looked she came up against flat, intractable surfaces: Six identical wheelchairs all in a row. A doctor's name pencilled on a door. The shoddiness, the smells. At the better sort of hospitals, where her family would have gone, the raw fact of human frangibility was prettied over with a veneer of cash. Whenever she was confronted, like this, with the undisguised bleeding thing, her first impulse was to avert her eyes, never—like a true journalist—to bend a little closer and even stick a finger in it. Really, they had every reason to give her the sack.

Along one stretch of the labyrinth iron curlicues projected from the walls at intervals. Gas brackets? Yes, for their tips, obscured by layer upon layer of white paint, were nozzle-shaped. They must have dated back to the 19th century. She felt the slightest mental tingle.

But no, this was too slim a thread to hang a story from. It was the sort of precious detail one notices when one's eyes *are* averted.

She came to a door with the stencilled letters: "Volunteers." As this had a rather hopeful ring to it, human-interest-wise, she knocked. There was no answer and the door was unlocked. She entered a small unhappy room whose only furniture was a metal filing cabinet. In it was a rag-tag of yellowing mimeographed forms and equipment for making Koffee.

She pulled the cord of the blinds. The dusty louvres opened unwillingly. A dozen yards away cars sped past on the upper level of the East Side Highway. Immediately the whooshing noise of their passage detached itself from the indiscriminate, perpetual humming in her ears. Below

the highway a slice of oily river darkened with the darkening of the spring sky, and below this a second stream of traffic moved south.

She got the blinds up and tried the window. It opened smoothly. A breeze touched the ends of the scarf knotted into her braids as she leaned forward.

There, not twenty feet below, was her story, the absolutely right thing: in a triangle formed by a feeder ramp to the highway and the building she was in and a newer building in the bony style of the 70's was the loveliest vacant lot she'd ever seen, a perfect little garden of knee-high weeds. It was a symbol: of Life struggling up out of the wasteland of the modern world, of Hope . . .

No, that was too easy. But some meaning, a whisper, did gleam up to her from this patch of weeds (she wondered what their names were; at the library there would probably be a book . . .), as sometimes in *Tender Buttons* the odd pairing of two ordinary words would generate similar flickerings poised at the very threshhold of the intelligible. Like:

An elegant use of foliage and grace and a little piece of white cloth and oil.

Or, more forcibly: *A blind agitation is manly and uttermost.*

4.

The usual cirrus at the horizon of pain had thickened to a thunderhead. Sleepless inside a broken unit in the annex to Emergency, he stared at the red bulb above the door, trying to think the pain away. It persisted and grew, not only in his shoulder but in his fingers sometimes, or his knees, less a pain than an awareness that pain were possible, a far-off insistent jingling like phone calls traveling up to his head from some incredible lost continent, a South America full of dreadful news.

It was the lack of sleep, he decided, since having an explanation helped. Even this wakefulness would have been tolerable if he could have filled his head with something besides his own thoughts—a program, checkers, talk, the job . . .

The job? It was almost time to clock in. With a goal established he had only to whip himself toward it. Stand:

he could do that. Walk to the door: and this was possible though he distrusted his arhythmic legs. Open it: he did.

The glare of Emergency edged every commonplace with a sudden, awful crispness, as though he were seeing it all raw and naked with the skin peeled back to show the veins and muscles. He wanted to return to the darkness and come out through the door again into the average everydayness he remembered.

Halfway across the distance to the next door he had to detour about a pair of DOA's, anonymous and neuter beneath their sheets. Emergency, of course, received more bodies than actual patients, all the great city's gore. Memories of the dead lasted about as long as a good shirt, the kind he'd bought back before prison.

A pain formed at the base of his back, rode up the elevator of his spine, and stepped off. Braced in the doorframe (sweat collected into drops on his shaved scalp and zigzagged down to his neck), he waited for the pain to return, but there was nothing left but the faraway jingle jingle jingle that he would not answer.

He hurried to the duty room before anything else could happen. Once he was clocked in he felt protected. He even swung his left arm round in its socket as a kind of invocation to the demon of his usual pain.

Steinberg looked up from her crossword puzzle. "You all right?"

Chapel froze. Beyond the daily rudenesses that a position of authority demands, Steinberg never talked to those under her. Her shyness, she called it. "You don't look well."

Chapel studied the wordless crossword of the tiled floor, repeated, though not aloud, his explanation: that he had not slept. Inside him a tiny gnat of anger hatched and buzzed against this woman staring at him, though she had no right to, she was not actually his boss. Was she still staring? He would not look up.

His feet sat side by side on the tiles, cramped and prisoned in six-dollar shoes, deformed, inert. He'd gone to the beach with a woman once and walked shoeless in the heated, glittering dust. Her feet had been as ugly as his, but . . .

He clamped his knees together and covered them with his hands, trying to blot out the memory of . . .

But it seeped back from places inside in tiny premonitory droplets of pain.

Steinberg gave him a slip. Someone from 'M' was routed to a Surgery on 5. "And move," she called out after him.

Behind his cart he had no sense of his speed, whether fast or slow. It distressed him how this muscle, then that muscle, jerked and yanked, the way the right thigh heaved up and then the left thigh, the way the feet, in their heavy shoes, came down against the hard floors with no more flexion than the blades of skates.

He'd wanted to chop her head off. He'd often seen this done, on programs. He would lie beside her night after night, both of them insomniac but never talking, and think of the giant steel blade swooping down from its superb height and separating head and body, until the sound of this incessantly imagined flight blended into the repeated zoom zim zoom of the cars passing on the expressway below, and he slept.

The boy in 'M' Ward didn't need help sliding over onto the cart. He was the dunnest shade of black, all muscles and bounce and nervous, talky terror. Chapel had standard routines worked out for his type.

"You're a tall one," it began.

"No, you got it backwards—it's your wagon that's too short."

"How tall are you anyhow? Six two?"

"Six four."

Reaching his punch line, Chapel made a laugh. "Ha, ha, I could use those four inches for myself!" (Chapel stood 5′ 7″ in his shoes.)

Usually they laughed with him, but this one had a comeback. "Well, you tell them that upstairs and maybe they'll accommodate you."

"What?"

"The surgeons—they're the boys that can do it." The boy laughed at what was now *his* joke, while Chapel sank back into a wounded silence.

"Arnold Chapel," a voice over the PA said. "Please return along 'K' corridor to 'K' elevator bank. Arnold Chapel, please return along 'K' corridor to 'K' elevator bank."

Obediently he reversed the cart and returned to 'K' elevator bank. His identification badge had cued the traffic

control system. It had been years since the computer had had to correct him out loud.

He rolled the cart into the elevator. Inside the boy repeated his joke about the four inches to a student nurse.

The elevator said, "Five."

Chapel rolled the cart out. Now, right or left? He couldn't remember.

He couldn't breathe.

"Hey, what's wrong?" the boy said.

"I need . . ." He lifted his left hand towards his lips. Everything he looked at seemed to be at right angles to everything else, like the inside of a gigantic machine. He backed away from the cart.

"Are you all right?" He was swinging his legs down over the side.

Chapel ran down the corridor. Since he was going in the direction of the Surgery to which the cart had been routed the traffic control system did not correct him. Each time he inhaled he felt hundreds of tiny hypodermic darts penetrate his chest and puncture his lungs.

"Hey!" a doctor yelled. "Hey!"

Into another corridor, and there, as providentially as if he'd been programmed right to its door, was a staff toilet. The room was flooded with a calm blue light.

He entered one of the stalls and pulled the door, an old door made of dark wood, shut behind him. He knelt down beside the white basin, in which a skin of water quivered with eager, electric designs. He dipped his cupped fingers into the bowl and dabbled his forehead with cool water. Everything fell away—anger, pain, pity, every possible feeling he'd ever heard of or seen enacted. He'd always expected, and been braced against, some eventual retribution, a shotgun blast at the end of the long, white corridor of being alive. It was such a relief to know he had been wrong.

The doctor, or was it the boy routed to surgery, had come into the toilet and was knocking on the wooden door. Neatly and as though on cue, he vomited. Long strings of blood came out with the pulped food.

He stood up, zipped, and pushed open the door. It was the boy, not the doctor. "I'm better now," he said.

"You're sure?"

"I'm feeling fine."

The boy climbed back onto the cart, which he'd wheeled himself all this way, and Chapel pushed him around the corner and down the hall to Surgery.

Ab had felt it in his arms and his hands, a power of luck, as though when he leaned forward to flip over each card his fingers could read through the plastic to know whether it was, whether it wasn't the diamond he needed to make his flush.

It wasn't.

It wasn't.

It wasn't.

As it turned out, he needn't have bothered. Martinez got the pot with a full house.

He had lost as much blood as he comfortably could, so he sat out the next hands munching Nibblies and gassing with the bar decoration, who was also the croupier. It was said she had a third interest in the club, but so dumb, could she? She was a yesser and yessed everything Ab cared to say. Nice breasts though, always damp and sticking to her blouses.

Martinez folded after only his third card and joined Ab at the bar. "How d'you do it, Lucky?" he jeered.

"Fuck off. I started out lucky enough."

"A familiar story."

"What are you worried—I won't pay you back?"

"I'm not worried, I'm not worried." He dropped a five on the bar and ordered sangria, one for the big winner, one for the big loser, and one for the most beautiful, the most successful businesswoman on West Houston, and so out into the heat and the stink.

"Some ass?" Martinez asked.

What with, Ab wanted to know.

"Be my guest. If I'd lost what you lost, you'd do as much for me."

This was doubly irking, 1) because Martinez, who played a dull careful game with sudden flashes of insane bluffing, never did worse than break even, and 2) because it wasn't true—Ab would not have done as much for him or anyone. On the other hand, he was hungry for something more than what he'd find at home in the icebox.

"Sure. Okay."

"Shall we walk there?"

Seven o'clock, the last Wednesday in May. It was Martinez's day off, while Ab was just sandwiching his excitement in between clock-out and clock-in with the assistance of some kind green pills.

Each time they passed one of the crosstown streets (which were named down here instead of numbered) the round red eye of the sun had sunk a fraction nearer the blur of Jersey. In the subway gallery below Canal they stopped for a beer. The sting of the day's losses faded, and the moon of next-time rose in the sky. When they came up again it was the violet before night, and the real moon was there waving at them. A population of how many now? 75?

A jet went past, coming in low for the Park, winking a jittery rhythm of red, red, green, red, from tail and wing tips. Ab wondered whether Milly might be on it. Was she due in tonight?

"Look at it this way, Ab," Martinez said. "You're still paying for last month's luck."

He had to think, and then he had to ask, "What luck last month?"

"The switch. Jesus, I didn't think any of us were going to climb out from under that without getting burnt."

"Oh, that." He approached the memory tentatively, not sure the scar tissue was firm yet. "It was tight, all right." A laugh, which rang half-true. The scar had healed, he went on. "There was one moment though at the end when I thought I'd flushed the whole thing down the toilet. See, I had the Identi-Band from the first body, what's-her-name's. It was the only thing I got from that asshole White . . ."

"That fucking White," Martinez agreed.

"Yeah. But I was so panicked after that spill on the stairs that I forgot, see, to change them, the two bands, so I sent off the Schaap body like it was."

"Oh Mary Mother, that *would* have done it!"

"I remembered before the driver got away. So I got out there with the Newman band and made up some story about how we print up different bands when we send them out to the freezers than when one goes to the oven."

"Did he believe that?"

Ab shrugged. "He didn't argue."

"You don't think he ever figured out what happened that day?"

"That guy? He's as dim as Chapel."

"Yeah, what *about* Chapel?" There if anywhere, Martinez had thought, Ab had laid himself open.

"What about him?"

"You told me you were going to pay him off. Did you?"

Ab tried to find some spit in his mouth. "I paid him off all right." Then, lacking the spit: "Jesus Christ."

Martinez waited.

"I offered him a hundred dollars. One hundred smackers. You know what that dumb bastard wanted?"

"Five hundred?"

"Nothing! Nothing at all. He even argued about it. Didn't want to get his hands dirty, I suppose. My money wasn't good enough for him."

"So?"

"So we reached a compromise. He took fifty." He made a comic face.

Martinez laughed. "It was a damned lucky thing, that's all I'll say, Ab. *Damned* lucky."

They were quiet along the length of the old police station. Despite the green pills Ab felt himself coming down, but ever so gently down. He entered pink cloudbanks of philosophy.

"Hey, Martinez, you ever think about that stuff? The freezing business and all that."

"I've thought about it, sure. I've thought it's a lot of bullshit."

"You don't think there's a chance then that any of them ever will be brought back to life?"

"Of course not. Didn't you see that documentary they were making all the uproar over, and suing NBC? No, that freezing doesn't stop anything, it just slows it down. They'll all just be so many little ice cubes eventually. Might as well try bringing them back from the smoke in the stacks."

"But if science could find a way to . . . Oh, I don't know. It's complicated by lots of things."

"Are you thinking of putting money into one of those damned policies, Ab? For Christ's sake, I would have thought that you had more brains than that. The other day my wife . . ." He took a step backwards. "My ex-wife

got on to me about that, and the money they want . . ." He rolled his eyes blackamoor-style. "It's not in our league, believe me."

"That's not what I was thinking at all."

"So? Then? I'm no mind-reader."

"I was wondering, if they ever do find a way to bring them back, and if they find a cure for lupus and all that, well, what if they brought her back?"

"The Schaap?"

"Yeah. Wouldn't that be crazy? What would she think anyhow?"

"Yeah, what a joke."

"No, seriously."

"I don't get the point, seriously."

Ab tried to explain, but he didn't see the point now himself. He could picture the scene in his mind so clearly: the girl, her skin made smooth again, lying on a table of white stone, breathing, but so faintly that only the doctor standing over her could be sure. His hand would touch her face, and her eyes would open, and there would be such a look of astonishment.

"As far as I'm concerned," Martinez said, in a half-angry tone, for he didn't like to see anyone believing in something he couldn't believe in, "it's just a kind of religion."

Since Ab could recall having said almost the same thing to Leda, he was able to agree. They were only a couple blocks from the baths by then, so there were better uses for the imagination. But before the last of the cloudbank had quite vanished, he got in one last word for philosophy. "One way or another, Martinez, life goes on. Say what you like, it goes on."

——*Thomas M. Disch*

NIGHTSONG

A plant will draw back vision to its source
and crack the glass if it is very tall
to grow by moonlight whose sufficient force
prevents my eyes from banging on the wall.
There is an undulant red satin back
that, exoskeletally ribbed in gold

incites the digits' giggling maniac
to hold to have to hold to have to hold
to have cold water thicken on his tongue
until his anal gravy binds the sky
while no one looks particularly young
and certainly not you, friend bone, nor I.
Although you sweat and pant and show your skull
and tease your hair with overheated birds
it's not my fault that you are beautiful
as a refrigerator full of words.
I was a polyglotted acrobat
who hoofed on a technicians' tour of hell
but now I'm going to drop the alphabet
and stay at home and teach my wound to spell.
And if you think my singing voice is nice
and want to comb my hair and think I'm sane
I'll cool my ears by sucking on some ice
and let you borrow someone else's brain.
——*Marilyn Hacker*

CAGES

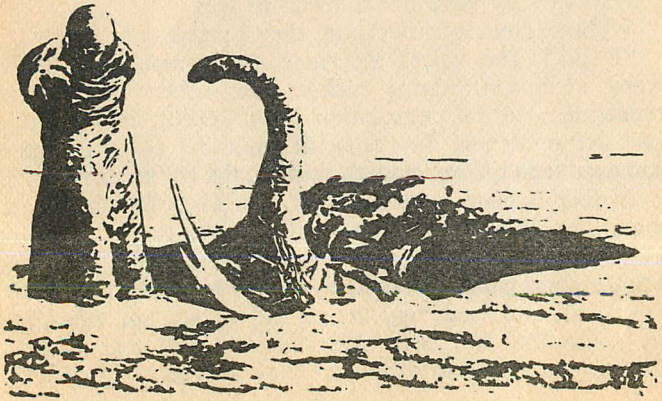
The door opened. They thought of outside as a foggy limbo and an infrequent snapshot. They were supposed immediately to pretend it was real.

The door opened. A smell hit them, like something grown in a Petrie plate, like something they had eaten, like something excreted. Nausea rose in them. That was something they were not allowed to feel.

Without conscious decision, they turned their heads.

"Hello." The voices the same note, same tone, same word, in unison. Staring back at each other: images like reflections, partial consolation for a recent, more subtle loss. Around them the room, like nothing either of them had ever seen before, canted, skewed, the colors uneven . . .

A door opened. Another door . . . They felt they were mad. The person who entered was worse than the room. Old holos did not prepare two for the reality. He was smaller than either (of course, since they were the same). His words and teachings, filtered and altered and equalized by computer, had been their mentor and their god. A flawed god is a hurtful thing. They looked at him.



"Boys . . ."

Another smell; they forced themselves not to gag. The lessons on manners clamped down. That is the way it is. They realized he was near crying. They had read of crying in the books the controller projected (chosen by him). Only weak men cried.

Doors inside began to close.

"It seems funny . . . strange . . . after so many years . . . and we've never really met . . ." He put hands out to both of them. A convention. No meaning. One touched his left hand, one the right. The old skin was dry and the flesh behind it weak. They brought their hands back and still said nothing.

"You are just as I hoped . . . I've waited so long . . . I've wished . . . well." He did not weep after all. "There are some people you're to meet." He could not seem to decide which way to turn. "Come along."

They walked through rooms and doorways, down halls, up stairs. Nothing was explained. They had seen it in tapes. A stench assailed them from a roomful of cages: laboratory rats, favorite subjects of psychologists, small obese albino things with weak pink eyes and atrophied ears, research material for proclamations on the human condition.

They followed a long way. There was another door. He stepped out and paused. They followed, curious and apprehensive.

Had they been able, they would have fled. Everything at once: a crowd, each element differently deformed. A sound began, rising with the maniacal clapping. The room gave no concession to regularity: the smells were worse than the rat room; the people were tall, short, thin, fat, and all degrees of ugly.

The clapping stopped when he held up his hands.

"Colleagues—if I may be so presumptuous . . ." Sarcasm tinged his voice. "The Pseudosibs. My—sons. Subone," (a gesture to his left) "and Subtwo" (a nod in the other direction).

The noise resumed. The hands were random numbers, incomprehensible and unpredictable.

And he was about to cry again. "Please, my friends." He held up his weak, swollen-jointed hands. They had not watched him age. It came in a sixteen-year jump, from the

day he stored his image in the controller to today, the day they were set free.

The others stopped their applause. It was another convention, with meaning—but not here. Applause for growth? They had been taught that this was the normal thing. They were born (they supposed), they grew, they learned. Now they were to meet these people.

Features moved toward them, grouped normally but seeming independent of one another. They repressed disgust, nodded their heads, made greetings, shook hands that felt like cooked foodstuffs, answered questions.

"The two of you are fascinating, fascinating." A small pale man whose eyes protruded from his head. "How do you like your first glimpse of—the real world?"

They had learned already to refrain from the compulsion to answer in unison; it was Subtwo's turn. "It is not our first knowledge. We have been kept well appraised of what it is like to live outside."

"But surely—there must be some shock?"

They remembered their lesson on contractions. It was Subone's turn. "It's extremely exciting, of course. We've been very curious."

A large man with jaw thrust forward and no laugh lines. "Are you not offended by having wasted your lives in a worthless and inhuman experiment?"

The man who said he was their father (and could not have been) made a sound unrelated to language. They saw his face was red and found explanations in rote memory for the phenomenon: anger, embarrassment, hysteria. They settled on the first, by logic and analysis of the question. Subtwo's turn: "We don't consider the experiment worthless, nor the time a waste. Do you object to the way we've developed? We feel human."

The red crept up now around the other's heavy jaw; tightening of muscles attempted to control it.

"I'd say you were honor-bound to retract, Melidinn, wouldn't you?" Their man smiled, slack muscles pulling at faded lips. A point-wound on his cheek (neither of them had ever had acne) pulsed with his heart. Melidinn drained his drink, snorted the fumes at them, said, "I'll reserve my judgment," and stalked away. Their man chuckled.

Everyone else seemed at least superficially impressed.

They asked Subone and Subtwo technical questions that did not begin to probe the extent of their knowledge, because they did not yet realize that learning was all there had been to do in the Environments. The schedule was rigid; the information was information—absorbed, collated, related, filed, and considered. A few hours per day sufficed for the body; the result was two sixteen-year-old boys each over two meters, filled out with muscles like wrestlers and tanned all over from the UV in the gyms, clear and fine-skinned, never sick (the germs were monitored but the Environments were not sterile), black hair straight and full past the shoulders. But the eyes hid, and no one noticed.

Their man was an intellectual, concerned with the intellect; a psychologist, therefore doubly so. Now he stood between them beaming in attention reflected from them and in the glow of his own notoriety for having performed the experiment in the first place. His work was definitive, the last blow to an ancient controversy. There were a thousand, ten thousand, studies of humans of equivalent natures, in similar environments and in different ones. The subjects are one-egg twins. Equivalent environments are more difficult to find: one fetus lies in a better position in the womb and that influences future development; the nurse (or the mother) develops a fondness for one half the set and the personalities respond. Too many variables and too many unknowns accumulate past compensation. There are not even any formulae for the solution of equations past the fifth degree.

A small woman affecting glasses like the bottoms of cut crystal vases peered at them and asked a question they almost answered honestly. "And what do you think of us?"

HOW DO WE GET OUT OF HERE?

Subtwo's turn again. "We are content, and you vindicate our fondest hopes. The only problem with the Environments is that one wishes for the additional stimulation of human contact."

Their man beamed mightily. Perhaps the little psychiatrist narrowed her eyes somewhat, but it was difficult to tell through the distortion.

"My sons will stay here and answer questions while I take a few of you at a time through the Environments." They had not expected this. In sixteen years, only they

and the controller (who was after all friend and mother and machine) had been inside their rooms. The tours seemed an infringement of territoriality, one they were helpless against. Their man chose ten from the crowd and led them away. *Ten troops trooping through the troop-trap to take tests to test their tiny tails.* It began to sound less like a nonsense exercise. They stayed and answered questions. They wanted to talk over what was happening with the controller. If it were there . . . It had not answered the typer this morning. That desertion was worse than having the brain lock turned off some time before they came out to be sure they would not go mad from loneliness when their minds were unlinked. The brain lock had made them do the same things at the same time, every time, all the time. It was the only way to control the experiment. Their man believed that one pseudosib could not tell if his actions were of his own volition or the other's. He believed he had set the signal relays deep enough. Study had not resolved all the ambiguities of the human brain. They could have told him what it did to them, if he had asked.

"Do you know your parentage?"

"It's unusual to be raised solely by your genetic parents."

"That is a matter of opinion." The woman was almost as tall as they. Her eyes were unreadable. "That was not my question. Is the doctor actually your father?"

"He may be—the father of one of us."

"I beg your pardon?"

Subtwo repeated what he had said, though he believed his statement was clear. The woman had large breasts. He felt the stirrings of partnerless fantasies.

"We had assumed," she said, "that you were twins. Genetic equivalents."

"No—no more than you and another from your basic gene pool. That experiment would be pointless except as a control. Our stock is similar, close to optimum, and we are the same sex, but other than that . . ."

The masses turned away from them to babble among themselves, and the pseudosibs were left alone for a little while. The surprised voices threatened to overwhelm them. They felt an urge to clasp hands, but understood that in this culture that was not done in public. The memory of limp hands made the breach of etiquette almost

worthwhile. They knew each other's muscles would be smooth and hard . . . They drew away, imperceptibly.

Their man came back. The assemblage confronted him with the discovery. He smiled and nodded and almost sneered.

"You didn't read my paper . . ." he should have been lecturing a class of recalcitrant four-year-olds. ". . . you didn't believe me. Look at the scores." The walls were plastered over with IQ scores, aptitude scores, Burnett-Mautilly scores, measurements, growth rates, all in duplicate.

OF COURSE THEY'RE IN DUPLICATE. TRY TESTING US WITH THE LOCK TURNED OFF AND SEE WHAT YOU GET. That was a contest; they wondered themselves. But in sixteen years, after the first projections of what the brain lock could do, their man had come to think of it as just another technological shortcut to experimental results, with all possible ramifications set down on tablets in the Hall of Science.

Finally the presentation was over. Everyone left dazed, nervously shuffling the paper, the graphs, their copies of Environment blueprints, yet reading them.

Their man started leading them off in the wrong direction. They hesitated.

"What's the matter?"

"We had thought . . ." They had also lost track of whose turn it was to answer. They both stopped speaking. Neither moved. Their man glanced quickly back and forth between them. Subone let held breath out and moved his head, just a little, toward Subtwo. Subtwo continued alone. ". . . that we would return to the Environments tonight—discuss our day with the controller, as usual . . ."

He smiled. "No, no, come along now." He lectured everyone as he would a class of four-year-olds. "I've got nicer rooms for you, nearer me. You don't know how often I've wanted to be able to talk to you directly. You can discuss everything with me. And we'll get you some dinner; you can choose it yourselves. And credit numbers and computer numbers."

"Computer numbers—like the controller?"

"Somewhat. Much more knowledgeable. You'll enjoy it. You don't need the controller any more."

"You must understand—habit . . ."

"How often did I have things changed so you wouldn't get into habits? Forget the controller."

"It was a companion . . ."

"Now you've got each other, and me. We can care about each other. It didn't care at all."

Neither could speak for a moment. Their man watched them, on the edge of anger. "Stop this silliness and come along."

They followed him, silently, because they knew the futility of argument, or perhaps his resolution was so strong they could feel it. Their intuitions were not highly developed.

The rooms were a travesty of order. The hems of the drapes were crooked. The light filled the room unevenly. They stopped counting the errors, but they could not shut them out or ignore them. The window drew them. It was worse to look out, pathetically fascinating. The trees were cursed, to grow that way. They drew the crooked drapes again.

They scrubbed their hands, up their arms, their faces, wishing there were time for a fuller cleansing before dinner. Then they waited. Subtwo lay on his bed with his head hanging over the edge, hair obscuring his face. He felt more comfortable in the artificial darkness. He supposed Subone was doing the same thing.

"Time for dinner!" Their man was uneasy and overbright to compensate. They followed silently. He pointed out features of the house, gym and sauna and porch and sunroom and library and study and computer console—they hesitated there but he plunged ahead—and the stairs leading up to the garden and stairs leading down to the garage. "We'll get you driving lessons in a day or so." They thought they probably did not need them. They already understood the electric motor and the theory and the rules.

They sat at a table obscenely decorated with non-functional items. The controller did not oversee the physical or informational input here. The candles polluted the air. The utensils had waterspots. Some of the food was too hot, some too cold. They picked at their plates.

"Come now. I know it's been an exciting day but you need more caloric intake than that. Have some more

meat." Neither had finished what was there to begin with.

"The experiment is over for you two," he said. "You don't have to start thinking seriously about what you want to do for a year or so, while I lecture. You'll like the travel. I've developed an ideal here, and people will want to know about it."

"There is the matter of the controller."

"You mean your computer numbers. There's plenty of time for that tomorrow. You both made me proud this morning. As if I really were your father. Those pedants have laughed at my theories long enough."

"We had a book on habit formation," Subone said.

"Nonsense. Only inferiors make habits they can't break. You don't need the controller any more."

"We knew it . . ." Subtwo almost said "her," but stopped himself in time; sexual fantasies with a computer console were another thing frowned upon for reasons he accepted but did not understand ". . . for a very long time."

"Anything you need to discuss you can discuss with me. I've protected you all alone for an equally long time. I've done without your companionship. I've spent a great deal of money on your Environments and almost as much preventing misguided do-gooders from removing you from them. All this so you could be optimal. I think I deserve a little consideration . . ."

"There are subjects we would feel more comfortable discussing with the controller. Certainly only until we get to know you better. There is the matter of modesty."

Their man laughed. "You'd have a hard time offending me. I'm a scientist, sons."

THERE IS A MATTER OF EMPTY LONELINESS.

Neither of them said it. The doors inside closed further. "We wish to speak with the controller."

The flush was definitely anger. "I'll hear no more of this. And no more of the controller. I programmed it—I gave it my thoughts and my beliefs. In essence I *was* the controller."

NO. YOU ARE NOT THE SAME. NO.

"I am not pleased with you."

AND WHAT OF A GOD THAT FAILS?

"There was a book on weaning. It recommended gentle methods."

"You are not animals! I said I'd hear no more." The food lay on three plates, untouched and forgotten. Their man was half-standing, his hands braced on the table, trembling.

"But . . ."

"You cannot speak to the controller! You couldn't even if I were inclined to let you, which I most certainly am not. The program has been removed."

The doors slammed shut. ". . . Removed?"

"Yes. Are you deaf? The controller was a *computer.* An extension of *me.* Understand? The program was intended to raise you to rely on me. Obviously it failed. It will be substantially changed before I allow it to be studied or used."

The glass in Subtwo's hand shattered, a crystal note in the silence. He looked at the blood, not feeling the pain. The linen tablecloth was blotched with shiny stains. Subtwo stood slowly. Subone's hand was clenched, but he did not move.

"Good heavens, you poor boy . . ." Their man forgot his anger in fears of infection, of loss of blood, or of the whole experiment. He reached to wrap his stained napkin around the wound. Subtwo pulled his hand away and struck with it, full face. The sound was the first thing that day to satisfy him. His blood splattered and their man's blood began to flow. He staggered back, around, smashed against the wall and slid down it, leaving scarlet smears on tangerine tile. It did not seem that he would move, but he tried to climb to his feet. Subone kicked him in the stomach. He cried out, and blood came with the scream. They watched him try to rise again and watched him fall. They made no move toward him. One of the candles flared up and highlighted the art of the blood on the wall. Subtwo took the candle and held it to the centerpiece, to the tablecloth, to the fabric of the furniture. It all refused to burn. He saw his pseudosib's lips drawn back from perfect teeth and knew his were the same. The candle bent in his hand, where he clutched it. Blood mixed with wax, and the pain began to come.

Subone lifted their man half off the floor. He left a scarlet trail where he was dragged. Blood bubbled slowly out with every breath. They went into his study. The walls were lined with old books (disintegrating affectation),

journals, records of the experiment they were. They left him on the floor, moving feebly without coordination, and pulled the shelves down around him. The candle lit the words easily. They set a fire and saw it would spread. Subtwo leaned down and dropped flaming wax in the scraggly hair. They watched until the flames drove them out. They were surrounded by the tree-death smell of burning.

They went down the stairs toward the garage and into the rat-room. They opened the cages until around them flowed a mad scampering of terrified animals unfit for any but laboratory life, and they set another fire in the stinking cage bedding.

They heard one scream when they left, but they were never sure, either of them, if it were a man or a rat in agony.

——*Vonda N. McIntyre*

Wednesday

Dear G,

On my desk there are two piles of paper. One very tall. Blank pages, quarto size. I take from this pile, write on both sides of the sheet, and then put it on the other pile. I've no idea where the paper came from. One morning—yesterday?—it appeared. With it, a stub of pencil. For a long time I walked round the desk. Suspicious. Looking at the stack.

(It reminds me of the newspapers I helped mother collect, bundle and tie, so that they could be taken to the man who lived under a railway arch. I was terrified whenever a train rumbled overhead and shook the walls. Clutching mother's knee, while she and the man laughed.

——Gonna be er engine driver eh?—he chortled. A bushy mustache. Red. Over at least three days growth of stubble. The checkered cap and a tattered raincoat.

He would weigh each bale separately on strange scales that had large springs attached to the pans. Always checking his figures on a dial. I have no recollection of his eyes. Perhaps he wore glasses. And when all the paper had been weighed he would give mother a few coppers. Then I would get to eat cake and drink orange juice at a cafeteria.)

Eventually I touched the yellow leaves. The stack compressed slightly under my hand.

And all at once an urgency to write: and picking up the pencil to find that it has no point. Biting at the wood. Splintering it. Till enough lead shows to make a mark.

I begin. As the words come to mind I put them on paper. I make unrelated lists. Associations. I don't know whether I write in sentences or even in the same language. I re-read nothing. Correct nothing. Words written down alphabetically: in order of personal preference. Backwards. And anagrams.

But he disturbs me. The man who has come to see me, again. He dresses neatly, like a salesman or rep, and carries a portfolio the size of a typewriter case. He tells me that there's hope. I believe him.

Sitting opposite me, taking a weird machine from his case and a thick file of documents. Pasting machine-ejected stamps to the documents. Passing them to me.

I sign my name four hundred and seventy-one times. The last signature looking nothing like the first. If I were to read it back, I would probably find that my name has changed.

The pencil is blunt and I can't find a knife with which to sharpen it. As of yet I'm not too sure of my way around here. For a while I suspected that she kept everything under lock and key.

Still . . . I'm glad I came.

Thursday

Dearest G,

The days are getting shorter. Somehow she manages to be back by dusk.

We ate a light meal. Saying very little.

Soon after supper we went to bed. She made love to me. I say it like that because she insists on being on top. She's afraid that I might die and leave her trapped. So she rides me, her knees digging into my waist and my throat her reins. I wait. My hands clasped under my head. Listening to the regular snapping and whipping of the chains which hold the bed level when it's folded down from the wall. Close my eyes: and she envelops me, her bulk swelling, her breasts either side of my head, till I fear suffocating underneath her. I open my eyes to the last deep thrust and her orgasm. Always so painful. The face creased, lips apart, set to speak. Silent. In the Ancient Greek sculptor's pregnant moment of stone. And her eyes so surprised.

Then we smoked a cigarette. Later she whispered:

——Are you happy?

——Yes—I replied without hesitation.

——Why? Why me?

——What's your name?

But she's asleep.

I lie here in the darkness aware only of the spaces about me. Their flow. Many stories up, perhaps at the top of this building.

(As a child I could float in the air. I practiced religiously. At first risking no more than a couple of inches above the bed. And then a foot. Till at last I could rise to the ceiling. Score the plaster with my toe nails. Soon I learned to roll over and look down on the small boy sleeping in my cot. Sheets kicked into a heap. I would watch him for hours. His secret thoughts. And be close to him when his mother came to tuck him in again. Kiss him goodnight.)

Alone, knowing well the motions of the void beneath me. Vast, undulating. A telling emptiness. For no matter how much I write the stacks of yellow paper remain unchanged.

Friday

G,

I woke this morning with a pain in my wrist. The left one. It's the result of all the writing. My fingers are sore as well. But in an uncanny way I enjoy the ache. A dull throb, familiar and satisfying, as after sitting in an exam room for three hours. Answering papers. Knowing that my essays are good. My ideas sound and logical. A pass inevitable.

(We're outside the main lecture theatre in the redbrick building. At either end of the corridor tall Gothic windows gauze the morning light. Dust stirs. We stand uneasy. Weight shifted from foot to foot. In small groups huddled round the blackboard on which are chalked the positions of the desks. Colin making wise cracks to choke the butterflies in our stomachs. And Geoff, worried, flipping through the pages of a textbook, whispering to Sue, discovering just how much he doesn't know.

The double doors open. Eager to begin, for it to be over and done, we push into the musty hall, mindless of the heavy king post roof above.

Supervisors with blank faces, a tutor stern for the occasion, trying to spot a crib sheet, shorthand notes scribbled on starched cuffs. And a bustle to grab a desk that doesn't wobble or a chair that doesn't creak. From murmur to silence. The round clock on the dias at the front of the hall, mocking, ready to race. A solemn voice:

——Please check that you have the right set of questions before you.

Pause. Shuffling sheets.

——You may begin.

Pens scratching.

Half an hour passes.

——Fuck this!—moans Colin from behind me. Stands and walks noisily to the swing doors. Poor sod, the bars aren't even open.

"Compare and contrast two ecclesiastical buildings to show the different development of the Gothic style in France and England. Illustrations and sketches to accompany your text."

I have chosen Salisbury and Rheims Cathedrals.

Pigeons have flown through an open window and strut along roof beams. To distract. I'm unsure about the design of gargoyles. And the pigeon above me comments to his companion on another rafter. Shits! Over my paper. The spray-back onto my bared forearms. Guffaws from those nearest me. I too am laughing, striding out of the room, in a hurry to wash. Whispers along the rows of desks. Supervisors pacing the aisles to restore order, barely able to control their sickly grins. Pity; it was a good paper, but the bars are open and it shouldn't be difficult to find Colin.

An aching wrist, a callus on my index finger, but contentment in knowing, that although illegible, my answers are correct.)

And now the same satisfaction, though I don't remember what it is that I've written. The experimental rat will be taught to perform repugnant actions to get food, then to perform the action without reward. So I'm gloating over the pain, making it worse by writing. Till it's all-important. That I don't stop, even with nothing to tell you; that the room is the same as it's always been; that the pictures on the walls stay blurred. Images of her face.

She's not here now, she seldom is during the day. Possibly she has a job, a secretary perhaps. I have so many questions to ask her, but there either isn't time, or they are irrelevant when she's here. We're happy simply to eat and sleep together.

Incidentally, I've not had breakfast, not even a cup of coffee. And I'm hungry. She prepares all my meals and

leaves them in the kitchen. There's a wall cabinet. I need only to press a button for the door to slide back and a compartmented tray of food to appear. There's no reason for you to fret. I'm being well looked after.

p.s. I switched the stacks of paper around. The tall one is on the right.

Tuesday

Darling,

I've moved. Or rather I have been moved. No. It's all so confusing. The apartment is exactly like the other. Is the other. I've no reason to suppose that this isn't the same place in which I fell asleep. And yet I'm plagued by fuzzy images, half-memories. Of automatic step-ladders folding out of walls. Of climbing through trap doors and being marched, escorted along streets like a radical politician or dangerous criminal. As in a dream that wakes the sleeper to show him the dawn and he only feels the hour to slip back into his story. Then when he gets up he remembers dreaming, that the dream was vivid and colorful, but not the dream itself. All day it frustrates him. Now and again a disconnected fragment.

And how can any of this make sense to you? Often you've told me that it's impossible to visualize anybody without reference to a room or object, to what that person is doing. You've never been here. People don't exist in vacuums, you say.

(I see you, as always, framed in shadow, your hair only a shade darker than the unnecessary background. A face immobile, in a photograph, smiling.)

See me then, sitting at my desk, staring out between the piles of yellow paper at a Kandinsky original. An early abstract, a profile in the brushstrokes. On either side of this, large sash windows. Bars across the windows. Behind me, to my left, a door opening onto a small square hall around which are grouped three other doors. The bathroom, kitchen and bedroom. The walls are skimmed in plaster and painted a dull grey.

And two armchairs, padded cushions of a coarse green material on wooden frameworks. A matching settee that

will seat two. And a television set which I refuse to acknowledge. I've no idea how to work it. I can see no switches. When I first moved in, I covered it with a blanket. But she didn't approve and took the blanket back to the bedroom. So the following day I turned it to face the wall. But again she moved it back. To stand as before. Watching me. Its presence makes me want to leave, but all the other rooms are too cramped and have no windows. Not unlike the flat we shared. Only there isn't the extra space for the children.

Oddly enough it has its own noise. (We had the sounds of a pounding train outside; remember? the machine used by the workmen building the highway.) But here I can't discover what it is. Footsteps? Soldiers pacing backwards and forwards on a gravel court? The height of the building doesn't allow me to look down and see the ground directly below. Nevertheless, it's soothing. And the last thing I'm conscious of before sleep. I hope it doesn't vanish. Doesn't stop registering like the constant gargle of the creek which runs by your aunt's cottage. Snow on the hills. A forest . . .

(That day the children decided to picnic in the middle of winter; and you afraid that we'd all catch our deaths of cold. But made a hamper, with hot chocolate in a flask and egg and tomato sandwiches.

And we spread the food along the bough of a fallen tree. In a clearing. Sitting on frozen branches, our feet inches deep in snow, watching the children find the footprints of a fox. Following them. To discover a lair dug between the roots of an oak. And the oak was hollow. Coughed laughter through tight fists as they squabbled about the importance of the troll who lived there. Obviously much bigger than any living in the closets at home. Even bigger than the one who owned the cupboard under the stairs.

Rushing back. Away from the storm. To the log fire. The waters frozen. Silent. And solitude.)

The man should call soon. It seems like a long time since he was here. In a way his absence is beginning to irritate me. There are things I should like to ask him.

(Her name is Janet. I just know.)

I am right. Our interview is brief, but eventful. Hardly do I complete three quarters of a page when he calls. He comes into the room quietly, so as not to disturb me, and sits in one of the armchairs. He waits for me to finish the page. Busying himself with the contents of his briefcase, which he holds on his lap, the lid open in such a way that I can see the initials P.C.I. embossed in gold. He wears an overcoat and a trilby. He takes neither off. A full stop.

As I look up he smiles, and drawing two photographs from a folder, puts them side by side on my desk. One is of a .38 caliber revolver. The other an ice-pick, about eight inches long, with a bone handle. Well balanced. The expression on his face, the lifting of his eyebrows, indicate that he wants me to make a choice.

No doubt this is one more formality. A safeguard in case something goes wrong.

The gun makes me feel nervous. I point at it.

He shakes his head.

Now I realize we're playing a game. A studied melodrama. My hand moving towards the picture. Taking up the print. I, glancing up. He, grinning. His eyes fixed on my hands. The game demands I react. I drop the photograph. It skims the table top before settling, a corner overlapping the gun. He sits there, giggling, enjoying every moment, his head bobbing up and down. A mechanical Santa Claus. Slowly I take a handkerchief from my pocket and with exaggerated movements begin to wipe the hilt.

——Good good!—he cries. ——Excellent!

——And the blood on the spike matches?—I groan.

He nods emphatically. All at once no longer amused. Then:

——There's still hope—he adds, sighing.

——Yes, but isn't all this already in my statement?

——Of course, but there are certain procedures—and he indicates the photographs. Glancing at the television?

——Of course.

——Tell me, there was no choice was there? You didn't know her from Eve, did you?

I shake my head.

——You know I hate to admit this, but I think I understand.

He is putting the pictures back into his case. Standing. I do not move.

As he leaves the draught from the opening door blows across the desk and sends yellow pages scattering over the floor.

I'm annoyed because I've learned nothing: and now have nothing to do. The television watches me. I'm tempted to watch it.

Matterday

Although it's a need, I resent writing this letter. It interferes with the program. The television is on and has not been turned off since he left. The controls are under a sliding panel.

Janet came in that evening and without a word began to gather up the sheets of paper. She arranged them on my desk in two even piles. I didn't protest, but to stop myself from seeing them I stare at the television.

Last night I suggested that we try it lying on our sides. She slapped my face and turned her back on me, feigning sleep. It wasn't too easy, but I mounted her from the rear. She offered no resistance. Neither encouragement. I had my arm curled beneath her, my fist in her chest, and she managed to trap it there. Concentrate all her weight onto it. Heavy. It went numb. Dead. Standing, her knees limp. And I let her fall.

She didn't want to smoke.

——Janet—I whispered.

No reply.

——Janet were you married?

No reply.

——Why won't you try and understand?

——Why?—she moaned. ——Why me?

——Because you were the first person I saw as I left my house. I had no option. I'd made up my mind.

—Do my children understand?

Pause. Then I ask:

——What about your husband?

But she sleeps.

And in the morning the man comes. He hands me a paper to sign. As I write he says:

——Fine. You're free. So to speak.

But you must have been told also. Probably before me.

That knowledge brings me a great deal of relief and almost justifies this letter. I'm sure you must feel the same. Please change your name and that of the children. If people choose to connect them with me, they might suffer. Use your maiden name. It can be done officially.

I know that you'll never understand. The way Janet doesn't. But the children might. Tell them; some time in the future. When they're older. I should like them to know.

There's little else I can add. Janet will be home soon.

Thatday

He has switched off the television. He sits in front of me, a thick file of documents in his hand. His overcoat unbuttoned. His hat damp. His glasses on the end of his nose. He looks up from the page that he's been reading, and clearing his throat, begins:

——You're getting old.

——What?

——Well not in the physical sense, but your life expectancy, shall we say, is somewhat less than that of the average citizen. Wouldn't you agree.

——Well . . .

——I'm not saying there isn't hope mind you.

——I know but . . .

——So, as with all elderly persons it's time for this.

He hands me the documents.

——What is it?

——You signed them.

——Yes but what are they? Who are you?

——Who am I? I'm from the Legal Department, I thought you knew that?

——Well; yes. But what's . . .

——Let me explain. Normally you would'ave seen very

little of me. We're short-staffed you know. So we have to double up. Just between you and me I think the government is on the rocks, but that's another matter.

——Listen . . .

——It was by choice that I handled your case in its entirety. Very interesting. The concern you showed for your family. Touching!

——You're a lawyer?

——Well yes and no. You see it's been many years since I handled anything of this nature. Although I hasten to add I did a good job.

——Thank you.

——Not at all. Now as to my position in the Department, my function, well it carries various titles. Some derogatory, as it is with all covetous posts. Commonly I'm known as the Keeper.

——Keeper?

——The Keeper of the Faith. Vulgar don't you think?

——I don't understand.

——You . . . Really?

——Yes.

——Well my official title is The Pawnbroker of Childhood Illusions.

——I still don't understand.

——Come come, you don't want to understand. Hand me that.

I pass the file to him. He flips through it, scanning the odd page and muttering to himself. I wait. After a while:

——Listen. D'you remember, as a small boy you used to go swimming. You loved it eh?

——Yes, I'd go every day, when I had the money.

——Sure. But on your way to the baths, wasn't there something special?

——Special?

——A bridge.

——Yes. The bridge where the pigeons lived.

——Killer pigeons. If they crapped on you, you would die from the poison in their shit. You believed that didn't you? So you always ran under the bridge covering your head with a towel.

——That's right.

——Exactly.

——So?

——So now you're old. It's time to believe a lot of these things again. God's the most common one people buy back. Would you like to believe in God again.

——No. What d'you mean buy back.

——O yours is an exceptional case. There'll be no charge. Now we've plenty of time. How about the dragons that drive steam trains. You see you don't have to have them all.

And he flicks the four-hundred-odd pages.

——Now wait . . .

——And isn't there something about alligators in toilet pans or . . .

(I, a chieftain, the hetman. I command myriads of machine molded plastic effigies. Vicious, armed. Some dying.

Plastic cannons, plastic bullets, plastic arms, legs helmets, fires tents camps fields: plastic.

Enemies, comrades: I act, we act. And from behind the backcloth faint strains of a tune: a drum. The 1812. Real cannons.

Plastic cannons. Plastic snow. Fleeting, unfading; to be interred: and for next Christmas; a picture painted by numbers.)

Thisday

And now he stands in front of my desk. I haven't seen him, but I know that he's there.

(The nights when I work late, standing hunched over my drawing board, I experience the same feeling. At about 2 A.M. the house becomes quiet. Still. My eyes are tired from looking at the narrow rows of ink lines. And he stands beside me, peering over my shoulder at the plans for a working man's club or a school. If I turn towards him, he disappears back into his closet, so fast that I never catch a glimpse of even his back.

Often I try to ignore him, daring myself not to look back, promising myself all sorts of rewards if I succeed. I never do. And I never see him. Only the beer-mat collage glued to the side of the cupboard.)

And I stare up into the man's expressionless face.

He holds a .38 revolver over me. For the first time I notice his eyes. The color of moonstones. And a matching tie.

He cocks the hammer. And very softly says:

——There's still hope.

I smile and stand.

——Yes of course.

He smiles back.

——Thank you—he says. As I take the gun from him. Lower the hammer. And closing the door behind him, it occurs to me that I've never seen the way in or out of this apartment.

I'm returning to my seat. I'm sweeping aside the even stacks of yellow paper. Watching them tumble to the floor. I'm snapping open the chamber. The cartridges fall to the desk. Six. I stand them on end. Vertical pricks to be launched.

I'm reloading one of them. I'm spinning the cylinder. I'm holding the revolver firmly in my hand, aiming it at the wall. I squeeze the trigger. My eyes blink. The hammer clicks. Vacantly. I knock over one of the bullets on the table with my forefinger. Carefully; not disturbing the others. I raise the gun to my temples. Again a hollow click. Another bullet lies flat. And I'm pointing the gun at the wall.

——*Marek Obtulowicz*

THE FOURTH PROFESSION

The doorbell rang around noon on Wednesday.

I sat up in bed and—it was the oddest of hangovers. My head *didn't* spin. My sense of balance was quiveringly alert. At the same time my mind was clogged with the things I knew: facts that wouldn't relate, churning in my head.

It was like walking the high wire while simultaneously trying to solve an Agatha Christie mystery. Yet I was doing neither. I was just sitting up in bed, blinking.

I remembered the Monk, and the pills. How many pills?

The bell rang again.

Walking to the door was an eerie sensation. Most people pay no attention to their somesthetic senses. Mine were clamoring for attention, begging to be tested—by a backflip, for instance. I resisted. I don't have the muscles for doing backflips.

I couldn't remember taking any acrobatics pills.

The man outside my door was big and blond and blocky. He was holding an unfamiliar badge up to the lens of my spy-eye, in a wide hand with short, thick fingers. He had candid blue eyes, a square, honest face—a face I recognized. He'd been in the Long Spoon last night, at a single table in a corner.

Last night he had looked morose, introspective, like a man whose girl has left him for Mr. Wrong. A face guaranteed to get him left alone. I'd noticed him only because he wasn't drinking enough to match the face.

Today he looked patient, endlessly patient, with the patience of a dead man.

And he had a badge. I let him in.

"William Morris," he said, identifying himself. "Secret Service. Are you Edward Harley Frazer, owner of the Long Spoon Bar?"

"Part-owner."

"Yes, that's right. Sorry to bother you, Mr. Frazer. I see you keep bartender's hours." He was looking at the wrinkled pair of underpants I had on.

"Sit down," I said, waving at the chair. I badly needed to sit down myself. Standing, I couldn't think about anything but standing. My balance was all conscious. My heels would not rest solidly on the floor. They barely touched. My weight was all on my toes; my body insisted on standing that way.

So I dropped onto the edge of the bed, but it felt like I was giving a tramopline performance. The poise, the grace, the polished ease! Hell. "What do you want from me, Mr. Morris? Doesn't the Secret Service guard the President?"

His answer sounded like rote-memory. "Among other concerns, such as counterfeiting, we do guard the President and his immediate family and the President-elect, and the Vice President if he asks us to." He paused. "We used to guard foreign dignitaries too."

That connected. "You're here about the Monk."

"Right." Morris looked down at his hands. He should have had an air of professional self-assurance to go with the badge. It wasn't there. "This is an odd case, Frazer. We took it because it used to be our job to protect foreign visitors, and because nobody else would touch it."

"So last night you were in the Long Spoon guarding a visitor from outer space."

"Just so."

"Where were you night before last?"

"Was that when he first appeared?"

"Yah," I said, remembering. "Monday night . . ."

He came in an hour after opening time. He seemed to glide, with the hem of his robe just brushing the floor. By his gait he might have been moving on wheels. His shape was wrong, in a way that made your eyes want to twist around to straighten it out.

There is something queer about the garment that gives a Monk his name. The hood is open in front, as if eyes might hide within its shadow, and the front of the robe is open too. But the loose cloth hides more than it ought to. There is too much shadow.

Once I thought the robe parted as he walked toward me. But there seemed to be nothing inside.

In the Long Spoon was utter silence. Every eye was on the Monk as he took a stool at one end of the bar, and ordered.

He looked alien, and was. But he *seemed* supernatural.

He used the oddest of drinking systems. I keep my house brands on three long shelves, more or less in order of type. The Monk moved down the top row of bottles, right to left, ordering a shot from each bottle. He took his liquor straight, at room temperature. He drank quietly, steadily, and with what seemed to be total concentration.

He spoke only to order.

He showed nothing of himself but one hand. That hand looked like a chicken's foot, but bigger, with lumpy-looking, very flexible joints, and with five toes instead of four.

At closing time the Monk was four bottles from the end of the row. He paid me in one-dollar bills, and left, moving steadily, the hem of his robe just brushing the floor. I testify as an expert: he was sober. The alcohol had not affected him at all.

"Monday night," I said. "He shocked the hell out of us. Morris, what was a Monk doing in a bar in Hollywood? I thought all the Monks were in New York."

"So did we."

"Oh?"

"We didn't know he was on the West Coast until it hit the newspapers yesterday morning. That's why you didn't see more reporters yesterday. We kept them off your back. I came in last night to question you, Frazer. I changed my mind when I saw that the Monk was already here."

"Question *me*. Why? All I did was serve him drinks."

"Okay, let's start there. Weren't you afraid the alcohol might kill a Monk?"

"It occurred to me."

"Well?"

"I served him what he asked for. It's the Monks' own doing that nobody knows anything about Monks. We don't even know what shape they are, let alone how they're put together. If liquor does things to a Monk, it's his own lookout. Let *him* check the chemistry."

"Sounds reasonable."

"Thanks."

"It's also the reason I'm here," said Morris. "We know too little about the Monks. We didn't even know they existed until something over two years ago."

"Oh?" I'd only started reading about them a month ago.

"It wouldn't be that long, except that all the astronomers were looking in that direction already, studying a recent nova in Saggittarius. So they caught the Monk starship a little sooner; but it was already inside Pluto's orbit.

"They've been communicating with us for over a year. Two weeks ago they took up orbit around the Moon. There's only one Monk starship, and only one ground-to-orbit craft, as far as we know. The ground-to-orbit craft has been sitting in the ocean off Manhattan Island, convenient to the United Nations Building, for those same two weeks. Its crew are supposed to be all the Monks there are in the world.

"Mr. Frazer, we don't even know how your Monk got out here to the West Coast! Almost anything you could tell us would help. Did you notice anything odd about him, these last two nights?"

"Odd?"I grinned. "About a Monk?"

It took him a moment to get it, and then his answering smile was wan. "Odd for a Monk."

"Yah," I said, and tried to concentrate. It was the wrong move. Bits of fact buzzed about my skull, trying to fit themselves together.

Morris was saying, "Just talk, if you will. The Monk came back Tuesday night. About what time?"

"About four thirty. He had a case of—pills—RNA . . ."

It was no use. I knew too many things, all at once, all unrelated. I knew the name of the Garment to Wear Among Strangers, its principle and its purpose. I knew about Monks and alcohol. I knew the names of the five primary colors, so that for a moment I was blind with the memory of the colors themselves, colors no man would ever see.

Morris was standing over me, looking worried. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"Ask me anything." My voice was high and strange and breathless with giddy laughter. "Monks have four limbs, all hands, each with a callus heel behind the fingers. I know their names, Morris. Each hand, each finger. I know how many eyes a Monk has. One. And the whole skull is an ear. There's no word for *ear,* but medical terms for each of the—resonating cavities—between the lobes of the brain . . ."

"You look dizzy. You don't sample your own wares, do you, Frazer?"

"I'm the opposite of dizzy. There's a compass in my head. I've got absolute direction. Morris, it must have been the pills."

"Pills?" Morris had small, squarish ears that couldn't possibly have come to point. But I got that impression.

"He had a sample case full of—education pills . . ."

"Easy now." He put a steadying hand on my shoulder. "Take it easy. Just start at the beginning, and talk. I'll make some coffee."

"Good." Coffee sounded wonderful, suddenly. "Pot's ready. Just plug it in. I fix it before I go to sleep."

Morris disappeared around the partition that marks off the kitchen alcove from the bedroom/living room in my small apartment. His voice floated back. "Start at the beginning. He came back Tuesday night."

"He came back Tuesday night," I repeated.

"Hey, your coffee's already perked. You must have plugged it in in your sleep. Keep talking."

"He started his drinking where he'd left off, four bottles from the end of the top row. I'd have sworn he was cold sober. His voice didn't give him away . . ."

His voice didn't give him away because it was only a whisper, too low to make out. His translator spoke like a computer, putting single words together from a man's recorded voice. It spoke slowly and with care. Why not? It was speaking an alien tongue.

The Monk had had five tonight. That put him through the ryes and the bourbons and the Irish whiskeys, and several of the liqueurs. Now he was tasting the vodkas.

At that point I worked up the courage to ask him what he was doing.

He explained at length. The Monk starship was a commercial venture, a trading mission following a daisy chain of stars. He was a sampler for the group. He was mightily pleased with some of the wares he had sampled here. Probably he would order great quantities of them, to be freeze-dried for easy storage. Add alcohol and water to reconstitute.

"Then you won't be wanting to test all the vodkas," I told him. "Vodka isn't much more than water and alcohol."

He thanked me.

"The same goes for most gins, except for flavorings." I lined up four gins in front of him. One was Tanqueray. One was a Dutch gin you have to keep chilled like some liqueurs. The others were fairly ordinary products. I left him with these while I served customers.

I had expected a mob tonight. Word should have spread. *Have a drink in the Long Spoon, you'll see a Thing from Outer Space.* But the place was half empty. Louise was handling them nicely.

I was proud of Louise. As with last night, tonight she behaved as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. The mood was contagious. I could almost hear the customers thinking: *We like our privacy when we drink. A Thing from Outer Space is entitled to the same consideration.*

It was strange to compare her present insouciance with the way her eyes had bugged at her first sight of a Monk.

The Monk finished tasting the gins. "I am concerned for the volatile fractions," he said. "Some of your liquors will lose taste from condensation."

I told him he was probably right. And I asked, "How do you pay for your cargos?"

"With knowledge."

"That's fair. What kind of knowledge?"

The Monk reached under his robe and produced a flat sample case. He opened it. It was full of pills. There was a large glass bottle full of a couple of hundred identical pills; and these were small and pink and triangular. But most of the sample case was given over to big, round pills of all colors, individually wrapped and individually labelled in the wandering Monk script.

No two labels were alike. Some of the notations looked hellishly complex.

"These are knowledge," said the Monk.

"Ah," I said, and wondered if I was being put on. An alien can have a sense of humor, can't he? And there's no way to tell if he's lying.

"A certain complex organic molecule has much to do with memory," said the Monk. "Ribonucleic acid. It is present and active in the nervous systems of most organic beings. Wish you to learn my language?"

I nodded.

He pulled a pill loose and stripped it of its wrapping, which fluttered to the bar like a shred of cellophane. The Monk put the pill in my hand and said, "You must swallow it now, before the air ruins it, now that it is out of its wrapping."

The pill was marked like a target in red and green circles. It was big and bulky going down.

"You must be crazy," Bill Morris said wonderingly.

"It looks that way to me, too, now. But think about it. This was a Monk, an alien, an ambassador to the whole human race. He wouldn't have fed me anything dangerous, not without carefully considering all the possible consequences.

"He wouldn't, would he?"

"That's the way it seemed." I remembered about Monks

and alcohol. It was a pill memory, surfacing as if I had known it all my life. It came too late . . .

"A language says things about the person who speaks it, about the way he thinks and the way he lives. Morris, the Monk language says a lot about Monks."

"Call me Bill," he said irritably.

"Okay. Take Monks and alcohol. Alcohol works on a Monk the way it works on a man, by starving his brain cells a little. But in a Monk it gets absorbed more slowly. A Monk can stay high for a week on a night's dedicated drinking.

"I knew he was sober when he left Monday night. By Tuesday night he must have been pretty high."

I sipped my coffee. Today it tasted different, and better, as if memories of some Monk staple foods had worked their way as overtones into my taste buds.

Morris said, "And you didn't know it."

"Know it? I was counting on his sense of responsibilty!"

Morris shook his head in pity, except that he seemed to be grinning inside.

"We talked some more after that—and I took some more pills."

"Why?"

"I was high on the first one."

"It made you drunk?"

"Not drunk, but I couldn't think straight. My head was full of Monk words all trying to fit themselves to meanings. I was dizzy with nonhuman images and words I couldn't pronounce."

"Just how many pills did you take?"

"I don't remember."

"Swell."

An image surfaced. "I do remember saying, 'But how about something unusual? *Really* unusual.' "

Morris was no longer amused. "You're lucky you can still talk. The chances you took, you should be a drooling idiot this morning!"

"It seemed reasonable at the time."

"You don't remember how many pills you took?"

I shook my head. Maybe the motion jarred something loose. "That bottle of little triangular pills. I know what they were. Memory erasers."

"Good God! You didn't . . ."

"No, no, Morris. They don't erase your whole memory. They erase pill memories. The RNA in a Monk memory pill is tagged somehow, so that the eraser pill can pick it out and break it down."

Morris gaped. Presently he said, "That's incredible. The education pills are wild enough, but *that* . . . You see what they must do, don't you? They hang a radical on each and every RNA molecule in each and every education pill. The active principle in the eraser pill is an enzyme for just that radical."

He saw my expression and said, "Never mind, just take my word for it. They must have had the education pills for a hundred years before they worked out the eraser principle."

"Probably. The pills must be very old."

He pounced. "How do you know that?"

"The name for the pill has only one syllable, like *fork*. There are dozens of words for kinds of pill reflexes, for swallowing the wrong pill, for side effects depending on what species is taking the pill. There's a special word for an animal training pill, and another one for a slave training pill. Morris, I think my memory is beginning to settle down."

"Good!"

"Anyway, the Monks must have been peddling pills to aliens for thousands of years. I'd guess tens of thousands."

"Just how many kinds of pill were in that case?"

I tried to remember. My head felt congested . . .

"I don't know if there was more than one of each kind of pill. There were four stiff flaps like the leaves of a book, and each flap had rows of little pouches with a pill in each one. The flaps were maybe sixteen pouches long by eight across. Maybe. Morris, we ought to call Louise. She probably remembers better than I do, even if she noticed less at the time."

"You mean Louise Schu the barmaid? She might at that. Or she might jar something loose in your memory."

"Right."

"Call her. Tell her we'll meet her. Where's she live, Santa Monica?"

He'd done his homework, all right.

Her phone was still ringing when Morris said, "Wait a

minute. Tell her we'll meet her at the Long Spoon. And tell her we'll pay her amply for her trouble."

Then Louise answered and told me I'd jarred her out of a sound sleep, and I told her she's be paid amply for her trouble, and she said what the hell kind of a crack was *that?*

After I hung up I asked, "Why the Long Spoon?"

"I've thought of something. I was one of the last customers out last night. I don't think you cleaned up."

"I was feeling peculiar. We cleaned up a little, I think."

"Did you empty the wastebaskets?"

"We don't usually. There's a guy who comes in in the morning and mops the floors and empties the wastebaskets and so forth. The trouble is, he's been home with the flu the last couple of days. Louise and I have been going early."

"Good. Get dressed, Frazer. We'll go down to the Long Spoon and count the pieces of Monk cellophane in the wastebaskets. They shouldn't be too hard to identify. They'll tell us how many pills you took."

I noticed it while I was dressing. Morris's attitude had changed subtly. He had become proprietary. He tended to stand closer to me, as if someone might try to steal me, or as if I might try to steal away.

Imagination, maybe. But I began to wish I didn't know so much about Monks.

I stopped to empty the percolator before leaving. Habit. Every afternoon I put the percolator in the dishwasher before I leave. When I come home at three AM it's ready to load.

I poured out the dead coffee, took the machine apart, and stared.

The grounds in the top were fresh coffee, barely damp from steam. They hadn't been used yet.

There was another Secret Service man outside my door, a tall Midwesterner with a toothy grin. His name was George Littleton. He spoke not a word after Bill Morris introduced us, probably because I looked like I'd bite him.

I would have. My balance nagged me like a sore tooth. I couldn't forget it for an instant.

Going down in the elevator, I could feel the universe

shifting around me. There seemed to be a four-dimensional map in my head, with me in the center and the rest of the universe traveling around me at various changing velocities.

The car we used was a Lincoln Continental. George drove. My map became three times as active, recording every touch of brake and accelerator.

"We're putting you on salary," said Morris, "if that's agreeable. You know more about Monks than any living man. We'll class you as a consultant and pay you a thousand dollars a day to put down all you remember about Monks."

"I'd want the right to quit whenever I think I'm mined out."

"That seems all right," said Morris. He was lying. They would keep me just as long as they felt like it. But there wasn't a thing I could do about it at the moment.

I didn't even know what made me so sure.

So I asked, "What about Louise?"

"She spent most of her time waiting on tables, as I remember. She won't know much. We'll pay her a thousand a day for a couple of days. Anyway, for today, whether she knows anything or not."

"Okay," I said, and tried to settle back.

"You're the valuable one, Frazer. You've been fantastically lucky. That Monk language pill is going to give us a terrific advantage whenever we deal with Monks. They'll have to learn about us. We'll know about them already. Frazer, what does a Monk look like under the cowl and robe?"

"Not human," I said. "They only stand upright to make us feel at ease. And there's a swelling along one side that looks like equipment under the robe, but it isn't. It's part of the digestive system. And the head is as big as a basketball, but it's half hollow."

"They're natural quadrupeds?"

"Yah. Four-footed, but climbers. The animal they evolved from lives in forests of like giant dandelions. They can throw rocks with any foot. They're still around on Center; that's the home planet. You're not writing this down."

"There's a tape recorder going."

"Really?" I'd been kidding.

"You'd better believe it. We can use anything you happen to remember. We still don't even know how your Monk got out here to California."

My Monk, forsooth.

"They briefed me pretty quickly yesterday. Did I tell you? I was visiting my parents in Carmel when my supervisor called me yesterday morning. Ten hours later I knew just about everything anyone knows about Monks. Except you, Frazer.

"Up until yesterday we thought that every Monk on Earth was either in the United Nations Building or aboard the Monk ground-to-orbit ship.

"We've been in that ship, Frazer. Several men have been through it, all trained astronauts wearing lunar exploration suits. Six Monks landed on Earth—unless more were hiding somewhere aboard the ground-to-orbit ship. Can you think of any reason why they should do that?"

"No."

"Neither can anyone else. And there are six Monks accounted for this morning. All in New York. Your Monk went home last night."

That jarred me. "How?"

"We don't know. We're checking plane flights, silly as that sounds. Wouldn't you think a stewardess would notice a Monk on her flight? Wouldn't you think she'd go to the newspapers?"

"Sure."

"We're also checking flying saucer sightings."

I laughed. But by now that sounded logical.

"If that doesn't pan out, we'll be seriously considering teleportation. Would you . . ."

"That's it," I said without surprise. It had come the way a memory comes, from the back of my mind, as if it had always been there. "He gave me a teleportation pill. That's why I've got absolute direction. To teleport I've got to know where in the universe I am."

Morris got bug-eyed. "You can teleport?"

"Not from a speeding car," I said with reflexive fear. "That's death. I'd keep the velocity."

"Oh." He was edging away as if I had sprouted horns.

More memory floated up, and I said, "Humans can't teleport anyway. That pill was for another market."

Morris relaxed. "You might have said that right away."

"I only just remembered."

"Why did you take it, if it's for aliens?"

"Probably for the location talent. I don't remember. I used to get lost pretty easily. I never will again. Morris, I'd be safer on a high wire than you'd be crossing a street with the Walk sign."

"Could that have been your 'something unusual'?"

"Maybe," I said. At the same time I was somehow sure that it wasn't.

Louise was in the dirt parking lot next to the Long Spoon. She was getting out of her Mustang when we pulled up. She waved an arm like a semaphore and walked briskly toward us, already talking. "Alien creatures in the Long Spoon, forsooth!" I'd taught her that word. "Ed, I keep telling you the customers aren't human. Hello, are you Mr. Morris? I remember you. You were in last night. You had four drinks. All night."

Morris smiled. "Yes, but I tipped big. Call me Bill, okay?"

Louise Schu was a cheerful blonde, by choice, not birth. She'd been working in the Long Spoon for five years now. A few of my regulars knew my name; but they all knew hers.

Louise's deadliest enemy was the extra twenty pounds she carried as padding. She had been dieting for some decades. Two years back she had gotten serious about it and stopped cheating. She was *mean* for the next several months. But, clawing and scratching and half starved every second, she had worked her way down to one hundred and twenty-five pounds. She threw a terrific celebration that night and—to hear her tell it afterward—ate her way back to one-forty-five in a single night.

Padding or not, she'd have made someone a wonderful wife. I'd thought of marrying her myself. But my marriage had been too little fun, and was too recent, and the divorce had hurt too much. And the alimony. The alimony was why I was living in a cracker box, and also the reason I couldn't afford to get married again.

While Louise was opening up, Morris bought a paper from the coin rack.

The Long Spoon was a mess. Louise and I had cleaned off the tables and collected the dirty glasses and emptied

the ash trays into waste bins. But the collected glasses were still dirty and the waste bins were still full.

Morris began spreading newspaper over an area of floor.

And I stopped with my hand in my pocket.

Littleton came out from behind the bar, hefting both of the waste bins. He spilled one out onto the newspaper, then the other. He and Morris began spreading the trash apart.

My fingertips were brushing a scrap of Monk cellophane.

I'd worn these pants last night, under the apron.

Some impulse kept me from yelling out. I brought my hand out of my pocket, empty. Louise had gone to help the others sift the trash with their fingers. I joined them.

Presently Morris said, "Four. I hope that's all. We'll search the bar too."

And I thought: Five.

And I thought: I learned five new professions last night. What were the odds that I'll want to hide at least one of them?

If my judgment was bad enough to make me take a teleport pill intended for something with too many eyes, what else might I have swallowed last night?

I might be an advertising man, or a superbly trained thief, or a Palace Executioner skilled in the ways of torture. Or I might have asked for something really unpleasant, like the profession followed by Hitler or Alexander the Great.

"Nothing here," Morris said from behind the bar. Louise shrugged agreement. Morris handed the four scraps to Littleton and said, "Run these out to Douglass. Call us from there.

"We'll put them through chemical analysis," he said to Louise and me. "One of them may be real cellophane off a piece of candy. Or we might have missed one or two. For the moment, let's assume there were four."

"All right," I said.

"Does it sound right, Frazer? Should it be three, or five?"

"I don't know." As far as memory went, I really didn't.

"Four, then. We've identified two. One was a course in

teleportation for aliens. The other was a language course. Right?"

"It looks that way."

"What else did he give you?"

I could feel the memories floating back there, but all scrambled together. I shook my head.

Morris looked frustrated.

"Excuse me," said Louise. "Do you drink on duty?"

"Yes," Morris said without hesitation.

And Louise and I weren't on duty. Louise mixed us three gin-and-tonics and brought them to us at one of the padded booths.

Morris had opened a flattish briefcase that turned out to be part tape recorder. He said, "We won't lose anything now. Louise, let's talk about last night."

"I hope I can help."

"Just what happened in here after Ed took his first pill?"

"Mmm." Louise looked at me askance. "I don't know when he took that first pill. About one I noticed that he was acting strange. He was slow on orders. He got drinks wrong.

"I remembered that he had done that for awhile last fall, when he got his divorce . . ."

I felt my face go stiff. That was unexpected pain, that memory. I am far from being my own best customer; but there had been a long lost weekend about a year ago. Louise had talked me out of trying to drink and bartend too. So I had gone drinking. When it was out of my system I had gone back to tending bar.

She was saying, "Last night I thought it might be the same problem. I covered for him, said the orders twice when I had to, watched him make the drinks so he'd get them right.

"He was spending most of his time talking to the Monk. But Ed was talking English, and the Monk was making whispery noises in his throat. Remember last week, when they put the Monk speech on television? It sounded like that.

"I saw Ed take a pill from the Monk and swallow it with a glass of water."

She turned to me, touched my arm. "I thought you were crazy. I tried to stop you."

"I don't remember."

"The place was practically empty by then. Well, you laughed at me and said that the pill would teach you not to get lost! I didn't believe it. But the Monk turned on his translator gadget and said the same thing."

"I wish you'd stopped me," I said.

She looked disturbed. "I wish you hadn't said that. I took a pill myself."

I started choking. She'd caught me with a mouthful of gin and tonic.

Louise pounded my back and saved my life, maybe. She said, "You don't remember that?"

"I don't remember much of anything coherent after I took the first pill."

"Really? You didn't seem loaded. Not after I'd watched you awhile."

Morris cut in. "Louise, the pill you took. What did the Monk say it would do?"

"He never did. We were talking about me." She stopped to think. Then, baffled and amused at herself, she said, "I don't know how it happened. All of a sudden I was telling the story of my young life. To a Monk. I had the idea he was sympathetic."

"The *Monk?*"

"Yes, the Monk. And at some point he picked out a pill and gave it to me. He said it would help me. I believed him. I don't know why, but I believed him, and I took it."

"Any symptoms? Have you learned anything new this morning?"

She shook her head, baffled and a little truculent now. Taking that pill must have seemed sheer insanity in the cold grey light of afternoon.

"All right," said Morris. "Frazer, you took three pills. We knew what two of them were. Louise, you took one, and we have no idea what it taught you." He closed his eyes a moment, then looked at me. "Frazer, if you can't remember what you took, can you remember rejecting anything? Did the Monk offer you anything . . ." He saw my face and cut it off.

Because that had jarred something . . .

The Monk had been speaking his own language, in that alien whisper that doesn't need to be more than a whisper because the basic sounds of the Monk language are so un-

ambiguous, so easily distinguished, even to a human ear. *This teaches proper swimming technique. A ——— can reach speeds of sixteen to twenty-four ——— per ——— using these strokes. The course also teaches proper exercises . . .*

I said, "I turned down a swimming course for intelligent fish."

Louise giggled. Morris said, "You're kidding."

"I'm not. And there was something else." That swamped-in-data effect wasn't as bad as it had been at noon. Bits of data must be reaching cubbyholes in my head, linking up, finding their places.

"I was asking about the shapes of aliens. Not about Monks, because that's bad manners, especially from a race that hasn't yet proven its sentience. I wanted to know about other aliens. So the Monk offered me three courses in unarmed combat techniques. Each one involved extensive knowledge of basic anatomy."

"You didn't take them?"

"No. What for? Like, one was a pill to tell me how to kill an armed intelligent worm, but only if I was an unarmed intelligent worm. I wasn't *that* confused."

"Frazer, there are men who would give an arm and a leg for any of those pills you turned down."

"Sure. A couple of hours ago you were telling me I was crazy to swallow an alien's education pill."

"Sorry," said Morris.

"You were the one who said they should have driven me out of my mind. Maybe they did," I said, because my hypersensitive sense of balance was still bothering the hell out of me.

But Morris's reaction bothered me worse. *Frazer could start gibbering any minute. Better pump him for all he's worth while I've got the chance.*

No, his face showed none of that. Was I going paranoid?

"Tell me more about the pills," Morris said. "It sounds like there's a lot of delayed reaction involved. How long do we have to wait before we know we've got it all?"

"He did say something . . ." I groped for it, and presently it came.

It works like a memory, the Monk had said. He'd turned off his translator and was speaking his own language, now

that I could understand him. The sound of his translator had been bothering him. That was why he'd given me the pill.

But the whisper of his voice was low, and the language was new, and I'd had to listen carefully to get it all. I remembered it clearly.

The information in the pills will become part of your memory. You will not know all that you have learned until you need it. Then it will surface. Memory works by association, he'd said.

And: *There are things that cannot be taught by teachers. Always there is the difference between knowledge from school and knowledge from doing the work itself.*

"Theory and practice," I told Morris. "I know just what he meant. There's not a bartending course in the country that will teach you to leave the sugar out of an Old Fashioned during rush hour."

"*What* did you say?"

"It depends on the bar, of course. No posh bar would let itself get that crowded. But in an ordinary bar, anyone who orders a complicated drink during rush hour deserves what he gets. He's slowing the bartender down when it's crucial, when every second is money. So you leave the sugar out of an Old Fashioned. It's too much money."

"The guy won't come back."

"So what? He's not one of your regulars. He'd have better sense if he were."

I had to grin. Morris was shocked and horrified. I'd shown him a brand new sin. I said, "It's something every bartender ought to know about. Mind you, a bartending school is a trade school. They're teaching you to survive as a bartender. But the recipe calls for sugar, so at school you put in the sugar or you get ticked off."

Morris shook his head, tight-lipped. He said, "Then the Monk was warning you that you were getting theory, not practice."

"Just the opposite. Look at it this way, Morris . . ."

"Bill."

"Listen, Bill. The teleport pill can't make a human nervous system capable of teleportation. Even my incredible balance, and it *is* incredible, won't give me the muscles to do ten quick backflips. But I do know what it *feels* like to

teleport. That's what the Monk was warning me about The pills give field training. What you have to watch out for are the reflexes. Because the pills don't change you physically."

"I hope you haven't become a trained assassin."

One must be wary of newly learned reflexes, the Monk had said.

Morris said, "Louise, we still don't know what kind of an education you got last night. Any ideas?"

"Maybe I repair time machines." She sipped her drink, eyed Morris demurely over the rim of the glass.

Morris smiled back. "I wouldn't be surprised."

The idiot. He meant it.

"If you really want to know what was in the pill," said Louise, "why not ask the Monk?" She gave Morris time to look startled, but no time to interrupt. "All we have to do is open up and wait. He didn't even get through the second shelf last night, did he, Ed?"

"No, by God, he didn't."

Louise swept an arm about her. "The place is a mess, of course. We'd never get it clean in time. Not without help. How about it, Bill? You're a government man. Could you get a team to work here in time to get this place cleaned up by five o'clock?"

"You know not what you ask. It's three-fifteen now!"

Truly, the Long Spoon was a disaster area. Bars are not meant to be seen by daylight anyway. Just because our worlds had been turned upside down, and just because the Long Spoon was clearly unfit for human habitation, we had been thinking in terms of staying closed tonight. Now it was too late . . .

"Tip Top Cleaners," I remembered. "They send out a four-man team with its own mops. Fifteen bucks an hour. But we'd never get them here in time."

Morris stood up abruptly. "Are they in the phone book?"

"Sure."

Morris moved.

I waited until he was in the phone booth before I asked, "Any new thoughts on what you ate last night?"

Louise looked at me closely. "You mean the pill? Why so solemn?"

"We've got to find out before Morris does."

"Why?"

"If Morris has his way," I said, "they'll classify my head Top Secret. I know too much. I'm likely to be a political prisoner the rest of my life; and so are you, if you learned the wrong things last night."

What Louise did then, I found both flattering and comforting. She turned upon the phone booth where Morris was making his call, a look of such poisonous hatred that it should have withered the man where he stood.

She believed me. She needed no kind of proof, and she was utterly on my side.

Why was I so sure? I had spent too much of today guessing at other people's thoughts. Maybe it had something to do with my third and fourth professions . . .

I said, "We've got to find out what kind of pill you took. Otherwise Morris and the Secret Service will spend the rest of their lives following you around, just on the off chance that you know something useful. Like me. Only they *know* I know something useful. They'll be picking my brain until Hell freezes over."

Morris yelled from the phone booth. "They're coming! Forty bucks an hour, paid in advance when they get here!"

"Great!" I yelled.

"I want to call in. New York." He closed the folding door.

Louise leaned across the table. "Ed, what are we going to do?"

It was the way she said it. We were in it together, and there was a way out, and she was sure I'd find it—and she said it all in the sound of her voice, the way she leaned toward me, the pressure of her hand around my wrist. *We.* I felt power and confidence rising in me; and at the same time I thought: *She couldn't do that yesterday.*

I said, "We clean this place up so we can open for business. Meanwhile you try to remember what you learned last night. Maybe it was something harmless, like how to catch trilchies with a magnetic web."

"Tril . . . ?"

"Space butterflies, kind of."

"Oh. But suppose he taught me how to build a faster-than-light motor?"

"We'd bloody have to keep Morris from finding out. But you didn't. The English words for going faster than

light—hyperdrive, space warp—they don't have Monk translations except in math. You can't even say 'faster than light' in Monk."

"Oh."

Morris came back grinning like an idiot. "You'll never guess what the Monks want from us now."

He looked from me to Louise to me, grinning, letting the suspense grow intolerable. He said, "A giant laser cannon."

Louise gasped "What?" and I asked, "You mean a launching laser?"

"Yes, a launching laser. They want us to build it on the Moon. They'd feed our engineers pills to give them the specs and to teach them how to build it. They'd pay off in more pills."

I needed to remember something about launching lasers. And how had I known what to call it?

"They put the proposition to the United Nations," Morris was saying. "In fact, they'll be doing all of their business through the UN, to avoid charges of favoritism, they say, and to spread the knowledge as far as possible."

"But there are countries that don't belong to the UN," Louise objected.

"The Monks know that. They asked if any of those nations had space travel. None of them do, of course. And the Monks lost interest in them."

"Of course," I said, remembering. "A species that can't develop spaceflight is no better than animals."

"Huh?"

"According to a Monk."

Louise said, "But what *for?* Why would the Monks want a laser cannon? And on our Moon!"

"That's a little complicated," said Morris. "Do you both remember when the Monk ship first appeared, two years ago?"

"No," we answered more or less together.

Morris was shaken. "You didn't notice? It was in all the papers. Noted Astronomer Says Alien Spacecraft Approaching Earth. No?"

"No."

"For Christ's sake! I was jumping up and down. It was like when the radio astronomers discovered pulsars, remember? I was just getting out of high school."

"Pulsars?"

"Excuse me," Morris said overpolitely. "My mistake. I tend to think that everybody I meet is a science fiction fan. Pulsars are stars that give off rhythmic pulses of radio energy. The radio astronomers thought at first that they were getting signals from outer space."

Louise said, "You're a science fiction fan?"

"Absolutely. My first gun was a Gyro-Jet rocket pistol. I bought it because I read Buck Rogers."

I said, "Buck who?" But then I couldn't keep a straight face. Morris raised his eyes to Heaven. No doubt it was there that he found the strength to go on.

"The noted astronomer was Jerome Finney. Of course he hadn't said anything about Earth. Newspapers always get that kind of thing garbled. He'd said that an object of artificial, extraterrestrial origin had entered the solar system.

"What had happened was that several months earlier, Jodrell Bank had found a new star in Saggittarius. That's the direction of the galactic core. Yes, Frazer?"

We were back to last names because I wasn't a science fiction fan. I said, "That's right. The Monks came from the galactic hub." I remembered the blazing night sky of Center. My Monk customer couldn't possibly have seen it in his lifetime. He must have been shown the vision through an education pill, for patriotic reasons, like kids are taught what the Star Spangled Banner looks like.

"All right. The astronomers were studying a nearby nova, so they caught the intruder a little sooner. It showed a strange spectrum, radically different from a nova and much more constant. It even got stranger. The light was growing brighter at the same time the spectral lines were shifting toward the red.

"It was months before anyone identified the spectrum.

"Then one Jerome Finney finally caught wise. He showed that the spectrum was the light of our own sun, drastically blue-shifted. Some kind of mirror was coming at us, moving at a hell of a clip, but slowing as it came."

"Oh!" I got it then. "That would mean a light-sail!"

"Why the big deal, Frazer? I thought you already knew."

"No. This is the first I've heard of it. I don't read the Sunday supplements."

Morris was exasperated. "But you knew enough to call the laser cannon a launching laser!"

"I just now realized why it's called that."

Morris stared at me for several seconds. Then he said, "I forgot. You got it out of the Monk language course."

"I guess so."

He got back to business. "The newspapers gave poor Finney a terrible time. You didn't see the political cartoons either? Too bad. But when the Monk ship got closer it started sending signals. It *was* an interstellar sailing ship, riding the sunlight on a reflecting sail, and it was coming here."

"Signals. With dots and dashes? You could do that just by tacking the sail."

"You *must* have read about it."

"Why? It's so obvious."

Morris looked unaccountably ruffled. Whatever his reasons, he let it pass. "The sail is a few molecules thick and nearly five hundred miles across when it's extended. On light pressure alone they can build up to interstellar velocities—but it takes them a long time. The acceleration isn't high.

"It took them two years to slow down to solar system velocities. They must have done a lot of braking before our telescopes found them, but even so they were going far too fast when they passed Earth's orbit. They had to go inside Mercury's orbit and come up the other side of the sun's gravity well, backing all the way, before they could get near Earth."

I said, "Sure. Interstellar speeds have to be above half the speed of light, or you can't trade competitively."

"What?"

"There are ways to get the extra edge. You don't have to depend on sunlight, not if you're launching from a civilized system. Every civilized system has a moon-based launching laser. By the time the sun is too far away to give the ship a decent push, the beam from the laser cannon is spreading just enough to give the sail a hefty acceleration without vaporizing anything."

"Naturally," said Morris, but he seemed confused.

"So that if you're heading for a strange system, you'd naturally spend most of the trip decelerating. You can't count on a strange system having a launching laser. If you

know your destination is civilized, that's a different matter."

Morris nodded.

"The lovely thing about the laser cannon is that if anything goes wrong with it, there's a civilized world right there to fix it. You go sailing out to the stars with trade goods, but you leave your launching motor safely at home. Why is everybody looking at me funny?"

"Don't take it wrong," said Morris. "But how does a paunchy bartender come to know so much about flying an interstellar trading ship?"

"What?" I didn't understand him.

"Why did the Monk ship have to dive so deep into the solar system?"

"Oh, that. That's the solar wind. You get the same problem around any yellow sun. With a light-sail you can get push from the solar wind as well as from light pressure. The trouble is, the solar wind is just stripped hydrogen atoms. Light bounces from a light-sail, but the solar wind just hits the sail and sticks."

Morris nodded thoughtfully. Louise was blinking as if she had double vision.

"You can't tack against it. Tilting the sail does from nothing. To use the solar wind for braking you have to bore straight in, straight toward the sun," I explained.

Morris nodded. I saw that his eyes were as glassy as Louise's eyes.

"Oh," I said. "Damn, I must be stupid today. Morris, that was the third pill."

"Right," said Morris, still nodding, still glassy-eyed. "That must have been the unusual, *really* unusual profession you wanted. Crewman on an interstellar liner. Jesus."

And he should have sounded disgusted, but he sounded envious.

His elbows were on the table, his chin rested on his fists. It is a position that distorts the mouth, making one's expression unreadable. But I didn't like what I could read in Morris's eyes.

There was nothing left of the square and honest man I had let into my apartment at noon. Morris was a patriot now, and an altruist, and a fanatic. He must have the stars for his nation and for all mankind. Nothing must stand in his way. Least of all, me.

Reading minds again, Frazer? Maybe being captain of an interstellar liner involves having to read the minds of the crew, to be able to put down a mutiny before some idiot can take a heat point to the *mpff glip habbabub,* or however a Monk would say it; it has something to do with straining ketones out of the breathing-air.

My urge to acrobatics had probably come out of the same pill. Free fall training. There was a lot in that pill.

This was the profession I should have hidden. Not the Palace Torturer, who was useless to a government grown too subtle to need such techniques; but the captain of an interstellar liner, a prize too valuable to men who have not yet reached beyond the Moon.

And I had been the last to know it. Too late, Frazer.

"Captain," I said. "Not crew."

"Pity. A crewman would know more about how to put a ship together. Frazer, how big a crew are you equipped to rule?"

"Eight and five."

"Thirteen?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you say eight and five?"

The question caught me off balance. Hadn't I . . . ? Oh. "That's the Monk numbering system. Base eight. Actually, base two, but they group the digits in threes to get base eight."

"Base two. Computer numbers."

"Are they?"

"Yes. Frazer, they must have been using computers for a long time. Aeons."

"All right." I noticed for the first time that Louise had collected our glasses and gone to make fresh drinks. Good, I could use one. She'd left her own, which was half full. Knowing she wouldn't mind, I took a swallow.

It was soda water.

With a lime in it. It had looked just like our gin and tonics. She must be back on the diet. Except that when Louise resumed a diet, she generally announced it to all and sundry . . .

Morris was still on the subject. "You use a crew of thirteen. Are they Monk or human or something else?"

"Monk," I said without having to think.

"Too bad. Are there humans in space?"

"No. A lot of two-feet, but none of them are like any of the others, and none of them are quite like us."

Louise came back with our drinks, gave them to us, and sat down without a word.

"You said earlier that a species that can't develop space flight is no better than animals."

"According to the Monks," I reminded him.

"Right. It seems a little extreme even to me, but let it pass. What about a race that develops spaceflight and then loses it?"

"It happens. There are lots of ways a space-going species can revert to animal. Atomic war. Or they just can't live with the complexity. Or they breed themselves out of food, and the world famine wrecks everything. Or waste products from the new machinery ruins the ecology."

" 'Revert to animal.' All right. What about nations? Suppose you have two nations next door, same species, but one has space flight . . ."

"Right. Good point, too. Morris, there are just two countries on Earth that can deal with the Monks without dealing through the United Nations. Us, and Russia. If Rhodesia or Brazil or France tried it, they'd be publicly humiliated."

"That could cause an international incident." Morris's jaw tightened heroically. "We've got ways of passing the warning along so that it won't happen."

Louise said, "There are some countries I wouldn't mind seeing it happen to."

Morris got a thoughtful look—and I wondered if everybody would get the warning.

The cleaning team arrived then. We'd used Tip Top Cleaners before, but these four dark women were not our usual team. We had to explain in detail just what we wanted done. Not their fault. They usually clean private homes, not bars.

Morris spent some time calling New York. He must have been using a credit card; he couldn't have that much change.

"That may have stopped a minor war," he said when he got back. And we returned to the padded booth. But Louise stayed to direct the cleaning team.

The four dark women moved about us with pails and spray bottles and dry rags, chattering in Spanish, leaving

shiny surfaces wherever they went. And Morris resumed his inquisition.

"What powers the ground-to-orbit ship?"

"A slow H-bomb going off in a magnetic bottle."

"Fusion?"

"Yah. The attitude jets on the main starship use fusion power too. They all link to one magnetic bottle. I don't know just how it works. You get fuel from water or ice."

"Fusion. But don't you have to separate out the deuterium and tritium?"

"What for? You melt the ice, run a current through the water, and you've got hydrogen."

"Wow," Morris said softly. "Wow."

"The launching laser works the same way," I remembered. What else did I need to remember about launching lasers? Something dreadfully important.

"Wow. Frazer, if we could build the Monks their launching laser, we could use the same techniques to build other fusion plants. Couldn't we?"

"Sure." I was in dread. My mouth was dry, my heart was pounding. I almost knew why. "What do you mean, *if?*"

"And they'd pay us to do it! It's a damn shame. We just don't have the hardware."

"What do you mean? We've *got* to build the launching laser!"

Morris gaped. "Frazer, what's wrong with you?"

The terror had a name now. "My God! What have you told the Monks? Morris, listen to me. You've got to see to it that the Security Council promises to build the Monks' launching laser."

"Who do you think I am, the Secretary-General? We can't build it anyway, not with just Saturn launching configurations." Morris thought I'd gone mad at last. He wanted to back away through the wall of the booth.

"They'll do it when you tell them what's at stake. And we can build a launching laser, if the whole world goes in on it. Morris, look at the good it can do! Free power from seawater! And light-sails work *fine* within a system."

"Sure, it's a lovely picture. We could sail out to the moons of Jupiter and Saturn. We could smelt the asteroids for their metal ores, using laser power . . ." His eyes had

momentarily taken on a vague, dreamy look. Now they snapped back to what Morris thought of as reality. "It's the kind of thing I daydreamed about when I was a kid. Someday we'll do it. Today—we just aren't ready."

"There are two sides to a coin," I said. "Now, I know how this is going to sound. Just remember there are reasons. Good reasons."

"Reasons? Reasons for what?"

"When a trading ship travels," I said, "it travels only from one civilized system to another. There are ways to tell whether a system has a civilization that can build a launching laser. Radio is one. The Earth puts out as much radio flux as a small star.

"When the Monks find that much radio energy coming from a nearby star, they send a trade ship. By the time the ship gets there, the planet that's putting out all the energy is generally civilized. But not so civilized that it can't use the knowledge a Monk trades for.

"Do you see that they *need* the launching laser? That ship out there came from a Monk colony. This far from the axis of the galaxy, the stars are too far apart. Ships launch by starlight and laser, but they brake by starlight alone, because they can't count on the target star having a launching laser. If they had to launch by starlight too, they probably wouldn't make it. A plant-and-animal cycle as small as the life support system on a Monk starship can last only so long."

"You said yourself that the Monks can't always count on the target star staying civilized."

"No, of course not. Sometimes a civilization hits the level at which it can build a launching laser, stays there just long enough to send out a mass of radio waves, then reverts to animal. That's the point. If we tell them we can't build the laser, we'll be animals to the Monks."

"Suppose we just refuse? Not *can't* but *won't.*"

"That would be stupid. There are too many advantages. Controlled fusion . . ."

"Frazer, think about the cost." Morris looked grim. He wanted the laser. He didn't think he could get it. "Think about politicians thinking about the cost," he said. "Think about politicians thinking about explaining the cost to the taxpayers."

"Stupid," I repeated, "and inhospitable. Hospitality

counts high with the Monks. You see, we're cooked either way. Either we're dumb animals, or we're guilty of a criminal breach of hospitality. And the Monk ship *still* needs more light for its light-sail than the sun can put out."

"So?"

"So the captain uses a gadget that makes the sun explode."

"The," said Morris, and "He," and "Explode?" He didn't know what to do. Then suddenly he burst out in great loud cheery guffaws, so that the women cleaning the Long Spoon turned with answering smiles. He'd decided not to believe me.

I reached across and gently pushed his drink into his lap.

It was two-thirds empty, but it cut his laughter off in an instant. Before he could start swearing, I said, "I am not playing games. The Monks will make our sun explode if we don't build them a launching laser. Now go call your boss and tell him so."

The women were staring at us in horror. Louise started toward us, then stopped, uncertain.

Morris sounded almost calm. "Why the drink in my lap?"

"Shock treatment. And I wanted your full attention. Are you going to call New York?"

"Not yet." Morris swallowed. He looked down once at the spreading stain on his pants, then somehow put it out of his mind. "Remember, I'd have to convince him. I don't believe it myself. Nobody and nothing would blow up a sun for a breach of hospitality!"

"No, no, Morris. They have to blow up the sun to get to the next system. It's a serious thing, refusing to build the launching laser! It could wreck the *ship!*"

"Screw the ship! What about a whole planet?"

"You're just not looking at it right . . ."

"Hold it. Your ship is a trading ship, isn't it? What kind of idiots would the Monks be, to exterminate one market just to get on to the next?"

"If we can't build a launching laser, we aren't a market."

"But we might be a market on the next circuit!"

"What next circuit? You don't seem to grasp the *size* of the Monks' marketplace. The communications gap be-

tween Center and the nearest Monk colony is about . . ." I stopped to transpose. ". . . sixty-four thousand years! By the time a ship finishes one circuit, most of the worlds she's visited have already forgotten her. And then what? The colony world that built her may have failed, or refitted the spaceport to service a different style of ship, or reverted to animal; even Monks do that. She'd have to go on to the next system for refitting.

"When you trade among the stars, *there is no repeat business.*"

"Oh," said Morris.

Louise had gotten the women back to work. With a corner of my mind I heard their giggling discussion as to whether Morris would fight, whether he could whip me, etc.

Morris asked, "How does it work? How do you make a sun go nova?"

"There's a gadget the size of a locomotive fixed to the —main supporting strut, I guess you'd call it. It points straight astern, and it can swing sixteen degrees or so in any direction. You turn it on when you make departure orbit. The math man works out the intensity. You beam the sun for the first year or so, and when it blows, you're just far enough away to use the push without getting burned."

"But how does it work?"

"You just turn it on. The power comes from the fusion tube that feeds the attitude jet system . . . Oh, you want to know why does it make a sun explode. I don't know that. Why should I?"

"Big as a locomotive. And it makes suns explode." Morris sounded slightly hysterical. Poor bastard, he was beginning to believe me. The shock had hardly touched me, because truly I had known it since last night.

He said, "When we first saw the Monk light-sail, it was just to one side of a recent nova in Saggittarius. By any wild chance, was that star a market that didn't work out?"

"I haven't the vaguest idea."

That convinced him. If I'd been making it up, I'd have said yes. Morris stood up and walked away without a word. He stopped to pick up a bar towel on his way to the phone booth.

I went behind the bar to make a fresh drink. Cutty over ice, splash of soda; I wanted to taste the burning power of it.

Through the glass door I saw Louise getting out of her car with her arms full of packages. I poured soda over ice, squeezed a lime in it, and had it ready when she walked in.

She dumped the load on the bar top. "Irish coffee makings," she said. I held the glass out to her and she said, "No thanks, Ed. One's enough."

"Taste it."

She gave me a funny look, but she tasted what I handed her. "Soda water. Well, you caught me."

"Back on the diet?"

"Yes."

"You never said *yes* to that question in your life. Don't you want to tell me all the details?"

She sipped at her drink. "Details of someone else's diet are boring. I should have known that a long time ago. To work! You'll notice we've only got twenty minutes."

I opened one of her paper bags and fed the refrigerator with cartons of whipping cream. Another bag held perking coffee. The flat, square package had to be a pizza.

"Pizza. Some diet," I said.

She was setting out the percolators. "That's for you and Bill."

I tore open the paper and bit into a pie-shaped slice. It was a deluxe, covered with everything from anchovies to salami. It was crisp and hot, and I was starving.

I snatched bites as I worked.

There aren't many bars that will keep the makings for Irish coffee handy. It's too much trouble. You need massive quantities of whipping cream and ground coffee, a refrigerator, a blender, a supply of those glass figure-eight-shaped coffee perkers, a line of hot plates, and—most expensive of all—room behind the bar for all of that. You learn to keep a line of glasses ready, which means putting the sugar in them at spare moments to save time later. Those spare moments are your smoking time, so you give that up. You learn not to wave your arms around because there are hot things that can burn you. You learn to half-whip the cream, a mere spin of the blender, because you have to do it over and over again, and if you overdo it the cream turns to butter.

There aren't many bars that will go to all that trouble. That's why it pays off. Your average Irish coffee addict will drive an extra twenty minutes to reach the Long Spoon. He'll also down the drink in about five minutes, because otherwise it gets cold. He'd have spent half an hour over a Scotch and soda.

While we were getting the coffee ready, I found time to ask, "Have you remembered anything?"

"Yes," she said.

"Tell me."

"I don't mean I know what was in the pill. Just—I can do things I couldn't do before. I think my way of thinking has changed. Ed, I'm worried."

"Worried?"

She got the words out in a rush. "It feels like I've been falling in love with you for a very long time. But I haven't. Why should I feel that way so suddenly?"

The bottom dropped out of my stomach. I'd had thoughts like this—and put them out of my mind, and when they came back I did it again. I couldn't afford to fall in love. It would cost too much. It would hurt too much.

"It's been like this all day. It scares me, Ed. Suppose I feel like this about every man? What if the Monk thought I'd make a good call girl?"

I laughed much harder than I should have. Louise was getting really angry before I was able to stop.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Are you in love with Bill Morris too?"

"No, of course not!"

"Then forget the call girl bit. He's got more money than I do. A call girl would love him more, if she loved anyone, which she wouldn't, because call girls are generally frigid."

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"I read it in a magazine."

Louise began to relax. I began to see how tense she really had been. "All right," she said, "but that means I really am in love with you."

I pushed the crisis away from us. "Why didn't you ever get married?"

"Oh . . ." She was going to pass it off, but she changed

her mind. "Every man I dated wanted to sleep with me. I thought that was wrong, so . . ."

She looked puzzled. "Why did I think that was wrong?"

"Way you were brought up."

"Yes, but . . ." She trailed off.

"How do you feel about it now?"

"Well, I wouldn't sleep with *any*one, but if a man was worth dating he might be worth marrying, and if he was worth marrying he'd certainly be worth sleeping with, wouldn't he? And I'd be crazy to marry someone I hadn't slept with, wouldn't I?"

"I did."

"And look how that turned out! Oh, Ed, I'm sorry. But you did bring it up."

"Yah," I said, breathing shallow.

"But I used to feel that way too. Something's changed."

We hadn't been talking fast. There had been pauses, gaps, and we had worked through them. I had had time to eat three slices of pizza. Louise had had time to wrestle with her conscience, lose, and eat one.

Only she hadn't done it. There was the pizza, staring at her, and she hadn't given it a look or a smell. For Louise, that was unusual.

Half-joking, I said, "Try this as a theory. Years ago you must have sublimated your sex urge into an urge for food. Either that or the rest of us sublimated our appetites into a sex urge, and you didn't."

"Then the pill un-sublimated me, hmm?" She looked thoughtfully at the pizza. Clearly its lure was gone. "That's what I mean. I didn't used to be able to outstare a pizza."

"Those olive eyes."

"Hypnotic, they were."

"A good call girl should be able to keep herself in shape." Immediately I regretted saying it. It wasn't funny. "Sorry," I said.

"It's all right." She picked up a tray of candles in red glass vases and moved away, depositing the candles on the small square tables. She moved with grace and beauty through the twilight of the Long Spoon, her hips swaying just enough to avoid the sharp corners of tables.

I'd hurt her. But she'd known me long enough; she must know I had foot-in-mouth disease . . .

I had seen Louise before and known that she was beau-

tiful. But it seemed to me that she had never been beautiful with so little excuse.

She moved back by the same route, lighting the candles as she went. Finally she put the tray down, leaned across the bar and said, "I'm sorry. I can't joke about it when I don't *know.*"

"Stop worrying, will you? Whatever the Monk fed you, he was trying to help you."

"I love you."

"What?"

"I love you."

"Okay. I love you too." I use those words so seldom that they clog in my throat, as if I'm lying, even when it's the truth. "Listen, I want to marry you. Don't shake your head. I want to marry you."

Our voices had dropped to whispers. In a tormented whisper, then, she said, "Not until I find out what I *do,* what was in the *pill.* Ed, I can't trust myself until then!"

"Me too," I said with great reluctance. "But we can't wait. We don't have time."

"What?"

"That's right, you weren't in earshot. Sometime between three and ten years from now, the Monks may blow up our sun."

Louise said nothing. Her forehead wrinkled.

"It depends on how much time they spend trading. If we can't build them the launching laser, we can still con them into waiting for awhile. Monk expeditions have waited as long as . . ."

"Good Lord. You mean it. Is that what you and Bill were fighting over?"

"Yah."

Louise shuddered. Even in the dimness I saw how pale she had become. And she said a strange thing.

She said, "All right, I'll marry you."

"Good," I said. But I was suddenly shaking. Married. Again. Me. Louise stepped up and put her hands on my shoulders, and I kissed her.

I'd been wanting to do that for—five years? She fitted wonderfully into my arms. Her hands closed hard on the muscles of my shoulders, massaging. The tension went out of me, drained away somewhere. Married. Us. At least we could have three to ten years.

"Morris," I said.

She drew back a little. "He can't hold you. You haven't done anything. Oh, I *wish* I knew what was in that pill I took! Suppose I'm the trained assassin?"

"Suppose I am? We'll have to be careful of each other."

"Oh, we know all about you. You're a starship commander, an alien teleport and a translator for Monks."

"And one thing more. There was a fourth profession. I took four pills last night, not three."

"Oh? Why didn't you tell Bill?"

"Are you kidding? Dizzy as I was last night, I probably took a course in how to lead a successful revolution. God help me if Morris found *that* out."

She smiled. "Do you really think that was what it was?"

"No, of course not."

"Why did we do it? Why did we swallow those pills? We should have known better."

"Maybe the Monk took a pill himself. Maybe there's a pill that teaches a Monk how to look trustworthy to a generalized alien."

"I did trust him," said Louise. "I remember. He seemed so sympathetic. Would he really blow up our sun?"

"He really would."

"That fourth pill. Maybe it taught you a way to stop him."

"Let's see. We know I took a linguistics course, a course in teleportation for Martians, and a course in how to fly a light-sail ship. On that basis . . . I probably changed my mind and took a karate course for worms."

"It wouldn't hurt you, at least. Relax. . . . Ed, if you remember taking the pills, why don't you remember what was in them?"

"But I don't. I don't remember anything."

"How do you know you took four, then?"

"Here." I reached in my pocket and pulled out the scrap of Monk cellophane. And knew immediately that there was something in it. Something hard and round.

We were staring at it when Morris came back.

"I must have cleverly put it in my pocket," I told them. "Sometime last night, when I was feeling sneaky enough to steal from a Monk."

Morris turned the pill like a precious jewel in his fingers. Pale blue it was, marked on one side with a burnt orange

triangle. "I don't know whether to get it analyzed or take it myself, now. We need a miracle. Maybe this will tell us—"

"Forget it. I wasn't clever enough to remember how fast a Monk pill deteriorates. The wrapping's torn. That pill has been bad for at least twelve hours."

Morris said a dirty thing.

"Analyze it," I said. "You'll find RNA, and you may even be able to tell what the Monks use as a matrix. Most of the memories are probably intact. But don't swallow the damn thing. It'll scramble your brains. All it takes is a few random changes in a tiny percentage of the RNA."

"We don't have time to send it to Douglass tonight. Can we put it in the freezer?"

"Good. Give it here."

I dropped the pill in a sandwich-size plastic Baggy, sucked the air out the top, tied the end, and dropped it in the freezer. Vacuum and cold would help preserve the thing. It was something I should have done last night.

"So much for miracles," Morris said bitterly. "Let's get down to business. We'll have several men outside the place tonight, and a few more in here. You won't know who they are, but go ahead and guess if you like. A lot of your customers will be turned away tonight. They'll be told to watch the newspapers if they want to know why. I hope it won't cost you too much business."

"It may make our fortune. We'll be famous. Were you maybe doing the same thing last night?"

"Yes. We didn't want the place too crowded. The Monks might not like autograph hounds."

"So that's why the place was half empty."

Morris looked at his watch. "Opening time. Are we ready?"

"Take a seat at the bar. And look nonchalant, dammit."

Louise went to turn on the lights.

Morris took a seat to one side of the middle. One big square hand was closed very tightly on the bar edge. "Another gin and tonic. Weak. After that one, leave out the gin."

"Right."

"Nonchalant. Why should I be nonchalant? Frazer, I had to tell the President of the United States of America

that the end of the world is coming unless he does something. I had to talk to him myself!"

"Did he buy it?"

"I hope so. He was so goddam calm and reassuring, I wanted to scream at him. God, Frazer, what if we can't build the laser? What if we try and fail?"

I gave him a very old and classic answer. "Stupidity is always a capital crime."

He screamed in my face. "Damn you and your supercilious attitude and your murdering monsters too!" The next second he was ice-water calm. "Never mind, Frazer. You're thinking like a starship captain."

"I'm what?"

"A starship captain has to be able to make a sun go nova to save the ship. You can't help it. It was in the pill."

Damn, he was right. I could *feel* that he was right. The pill had warped my way of thinking. Blowing up the sun that warms another race *had* to be immoral. Didn't it?

I couldn't trust my own sense of right and wrong!

Four men came in and took one of the bigger tables. Morris's men? No. Real estate men, here to do business.

"Something's been bothering me," said Morris. He grimaced. "Among all the things that have been ruining my composure, such as the impending end of the world, there was one thing that kept nagging at me."

I set his gin-and-tonic in front of him. He tasted it and said, "Fine. And I finally realized what it was, waiting there in the phone booth for a chain of human snails to put the President on. Frazer, are you a college man?"

"No. Webster High."

"See, you don't really talk like a bartender. You use big words."

"I do?"

"Sometimes. And you talked about 'suns exploding', but you knew what I meant when I said 'nova'. You talked about 'H-bomb power', but you knew what fusion was."

"Sure."

"I got the possibly silly impression that you were learning the words the instant I said them. Parlez-vous français?"

"No. I don't speak any foreign languages."

"None at all?"

"Nope. What do you think they teach at Webster High?"

"Je parle la langue un peu, Frazer. Et tu?"

"Merde de cochon! Morris, je vous dit—oops."

He didn't give me a chance to think it over. He said, "What's fanac?"

My head had that *clogged* feeling again. I said, "Might be anything. Putting out a zine, writing to the lettercol, helping put on a Con—Morris, what *is* this?"

"That language course was more extensive than we thought."

"Sure as hell, it was. I just remembered. Those women on the cleaning team were speaking Spanish, but I understood them."

"Spanish, French, Monkish, technical languages, even fannish. What you got was a generalized course in how to understand languages the instant you hear them. I don't see how it could work without telepathy."

"Reading minds? Maybe." Several times today, it had felt like I was guessing with too much certainty at somebody's private thoughts.

"Can you read *my* mind?"

"That's not quite it. I get the feel of *how* you think, not *what* you're thinking. Morris, I don't like the idea of being a political prisoner."

"Well, we can talk that over later." *When my bargaining position is better,* Morris meant. *When I don't need the bartender's good will to con the Monk.* "What's important is that you might be able to read a Monk's mind. That could be crucial."

"And maybe he can read mine. And yours."

I let Morris sweat over that one while I set drinks on Louise's tray. Already there were customers at four tables. The Long Spoon was filling rapidly; and only two of them were Secret Service.

Morris said, "Any ideas on what Louise Schu ate last night? We've got *your* professions pretty well pegged down. Finally."

"I've got an idea. It's kind of vague." I looked around. Louise was taking more orders. "Sheer guesswork, in fact. Will you keep it to yourself for awhile?"

"Don't tell Louise? Sure—for awhile."

I made four drinks and Louise took them away. I told Morris, "I have a profession in mind. It doesn't have a

simple one or two word name, like teleport or starship captain or translator. There's no reason why it should, is there? We're dealing with aliens."

Morris sipped at his drink. Waiting.

"Being a woman," I said, "can be a profession, in a way that being a man can never be. The word is *housewife,* but it doesn't cover all of it. Not nearly."

"Housewife. You're putting me on."

"No. You wouldn't notice the change. You never saw her before last night."

"Just what kind of change have you got in mind? Aside from the fact that she's beautiful, which I did notice."

"Yes, she is, Morris. But last night she was twenty pounds overweight. Do you think she lost it all this morning?"

"She *was* too heavy. Pretty, but also pretty well padded." Morris turned to look over his shoulder, casually turned back. "Damn. She's still well padded. Why didn't I notice before?"

"There's another thing. By the way. Have some pizza."

"Thanks." He bit into a slice. "Good, it's still hot. Well?"

"She's been staring at that pizza for half an hour. She bought it. But she hasn't tasted it. She couldn't possibly have done that yesterday."

"She may have had a big breakfast."

"Yah." I knew she hadn't. She'd eaten diet food. For years she'd kept a growing collection of diet food, but she'd never actively tried to survive on it before. But how could I make such a claim to Morris? I'd never even been in Louise's apartment.

"Anything else?"

"She's gotten good at nonverbal communication. It's a very womanly skill. She can say things just by the tone of her voice or the way she leans on an elbow or . . ."

"But if mind reading is one of *your* new skills . . ."

"Damn. Well—it used to make Louise nervous if someone touched her. And she never touched anyone else." I felt myself flushing. I don't talk easily of personal things.

Morris radiated skepticism. "It all sounds very subjective. In fact, it sounds like you're making yourself believe it. Frazer, why would Louise Schu want such a capsule course? Because you haven't described a housewife at all.

You've described a woman looking to persuade a man to marry her." He saw my face change. "What's wrong?"

"Ten minutes ago we decided to get married."

"Congratulations," Morris said, and waited.

"All right, you win. Until ten minutes ago we'd never even kissed. I'd never made a pass, or vice versa. No, damn it, I don't believe it! I *know* she loves me; I ought to!"

"I don't deny it," Morris said quietly. "That would be why she took the pill. It must have been strong stuff, too, Frazer. We looked up some of your history. You're marriage shy."

It was true enough. I said, "If she loved me before, I never knew it. I wonder how a Monk could know."

"How would he know about such a skill at all? Why would he have the pill on him? Come on, Frazer, you're the Monk expert!"

"He'd have to learn from human beings. Maybe by interviews, maybe by—well, the Monks can map an alien memory into a computer space, then interview that. They may have done that with some of your diplomats."

"Oh, *great.*"

Louise appeared with an order. I made the drinks and set them on her tray. She winked and walked away, swaying deliciously, followed by many eyes.

"Morris. Most of your diplomats, the ones who deal with the Monks, they're men, aren't they?"

"Most of them. Why?"

"Just a thought."

It was a difficult thought, hard to grasp. It was only that the changes in Louise had been all to the good from a man's point of view. The Monks must have interviewed many men. Well, why not? It would make her more valuable to the man she caught—or to the lucky man who caught her . . .

"Got it."

Morris looked up quickly. "Well?"

"Falling in love with me was part of her pill learning. A *set.* They made a guinea pig of her."

"I wondered what she saw in you." Morris's grin faded. "You're serious. Frazer, that still doesn't answer . . ."

"It's a slave indoctrination course. It makes a woman love the first man she sees, permanently, and it trains her

to be valuable to him. The Monks were going to make them in quantity and sell them to men."

Morris thought it over. Presently he said, "That's awful. What'll we do?"

"Well, we can't tell her she's been made into a domestic slave! Morris, I'll try to get a memory eraser pill. If I can't—I'll marry her, I guess. Don't look at me that way," I said, low and fierce. "I didn't do it. And I can't desert her now!"

"I know. It's just—oh, put gin in the next one."

"Don't look now," I said.

In the glass of the door there was darkness and motion. A hooded shape, shadow-on-shadow, supernatural, a human silhouette twisted out of true . . .

He came gliding in with the hem of his robe just brushing the floor. Nothing was to be seen of him but his flowing grey robe, the darkness in the hood and the shadow where his robe parted. The real estate men broke off their talk of land and stared, popeyed, and one of them reached for his heart attack pills.

The Monk drifted toward me like a vengeful ghost. He took the stool we had saved him at one end of the bar.

It wasn't the same Monk.

In all respects he matched the Monk who had been here the last two nights. Louise and Morris must have been fooled completely. But it wasn't the same Monk.

"Good evening," I said.

He gave an equivalent greeting in the whispered Monk language. His translator was half on, translating my words into a Monk whisper, but letting his own speech alone. He said, "I believe we should begin with the Rock and Rye."

I turned to pour. The small of my back itched with danger.

When I turned back with the shot glass in my hand, he was holding a fist-sized tool that must have come out of his robe. It looked like a flattened softball, grooved deeply for five Monk claws, with two parallel tubes poking out in my direction. Lenses glinted in the ends of the tubes.

"Do you know this tool? It is a . . ." and he named it.

I knew the name. It was a beaming tool, a multi-frequency laser. One tube locked on the target; thereafter

the aim was maintained by tiny flywheels in the body of the device.

Morris had seen it. He didn't recognize it, and he didn't know what to do about it, and I had no way to signal him.

"I know that tool," I confirmed.

"You must take two of these pills." The Monk had them ready in another hand. They were small and pink and triangular. He said, "I must be convinced that you have taken them. Otherwise you must take more than two. An overdose may affect your natural memory. Come closer."

I came closer. Every man and woman in the Long Spoon was staring at us, and each was afraid to move. Any kind of signal would have trained four guns on the Monk. And I'd be fried dead by a narrow beam of X-rays.

The Monk reached out with a third hand/foot/claw. He closed the fingers/toes around my throat, not hard enough to strangle me, but hard enough.

Morris was cursing silently, helplessly. I could feel the agony in his soul.

The Monk whispered, "You know of the trigger mechanism. If my hand should relax now, the device will fire. Its target is yourself. If you can prevent four government agents from attacking me, you should do so."

I made a palm-up gesture toward Morris. *Don't do anything.* He caught it and nodded very slightly without looking at me.

"You can read minds," I said.

"Yes," said the Monk—and I knew instantly what he was hiding. He could read everybody's mind, except mine.

So much for Morris's little games of deceit. But the Monk could not read my mind, and I could see into his own soul.

And, reading his alien soul, I saw that I would die if I did not swallow the pills.

I placed the pink pills on my tongue, one at a time, and swallowed them dry. They went down hard. Morris watched it happen and could do nothing. The Monk felt them going down my throat, little lumps moving past his finger.

And when the pills had passed across the Monk's finger, I worked a miracle.

"Your pill-induced memories and skills will be gone

within two hours," said the Monk. He picked up the shot glass of Rock and Rye and moved it into his hood. When it reappeared it was half empty.

I asked, "Why have you robbed me of my knowledge?"

"You never paid for it."

"But it was freely given."

"It was given by one who had no right," said the Monk. He was thinking about leaving. I had to do something. I knew now, because I had reasoned it out with great care, that the Monk was involved in an evil enterprise. But he must stay to hear me or I could not convince him.

Even then, it wouldn't be easy. He was a Monk crewman. His ethical attitudes had entered his brain through an RNA pill, along with his professional skills.

"You have spoken of rights," I said. In Monk. "Let us discuss rights." The whispery words buzzed oddly in my throat; they tickled; but my ears told me they were coming out right.

The Monk was startled. "I was told that you had been taught our speech, but not that you could speak it."

"Were you told what pill I was given?"

"A language pill. I had not known that he carried one in his case."

"He did not finish his tasting of the alcohols of Earth. Will you have another drink?"

I felt him guess at my motives, and guess wrong. He thought I was taking advantage of his curiosity to sell him my wares for cash. And what had he to fear from me? Whatever mental powers I had learned from Monk pills, they would be gone in two hours.

I set a shot glass before him. I asked him, "How do you feel about launching lasers?"

The discussion became highly technical. "Let us take a special case," I remember saying. "Suppose a culture has been capable of starflight for some sixty-fours of years —or even for eights of times that long. Then an asteroid slams into a major ocean, precipitates an ice age . . ." It had happened once, and well he knew it. "A natural disaster can't spell the difference between sentience and nonsentience, can it? Not unless it affects brain tissue directly."

At first it was his curiosity that held him. Later it was me. He couldn't tear himself loose. He never thought of

it. He was a sailship crewman, and he was cold sober, and he argued with the frenzy of an evangelist.

"Then take the general case," I remember saying. "A world that cannot build a launching laser is a world of animals, yes? And Monks themselves can revert to animal."

Yes, he knew that.

"Then build your own launching laser. If you cannot, then your ship is captained and crewed by animals."

At the end I was doing all the talking. All in the whispery Monk tongue, whose sounds are so easily distinguished that even I, warping a human throat to my will, need only whisper. It was a good thing. I seemed to have been eating used razor blades.

Morris guessed right. He did not interfere. I could tell him nothing, not if I had had the power, not by word or gesture or mental contact. The Monk would read Morris's mind. But Morris sat quietly drinking his tonic-and-tonics, waiting for something to happen. While I argued in whispers with the Monk.

"But the ship!" he whispered. "What of the ship?" His agony was mine; for the ship must be protected . . .

At one fifteen the Monk had progressed halfway across the bottom row of bottles. He slid from the stool, paid for his drinks in one-dollar bills, and drifted to the door and out.

All he needed was a scythe and hour glass, I thought, watching him go. And what I needed was a long morning's sleep. And I wasn't going to get it.

"Be sure nobody stops him," I told Morris.

"Nobody will. But he'll be followed."

"No point. The Garment to Wear Among Strangers is a lot of things. It's bracing; it helps the Monk hold human shape. It's a shield and an air filter. And it's a cloak of invisibility."

"Oh?"

"I'll tell you about it if I have time. That's how he got out here, probably. One of the crewmen divided, and then one stayed and one walked. He had two weeks."

Morris stood up and tore off his sport jacket. His shirt was wet through. He said, "What about a stomach pump for you?"

"No good. Most of the RNA-enzyme must be in my blood by now. You'll be better off if you spend your time

getting down everything I can remember about Monks, while I can remember anything at all. It'll be nine or ten hours before everything goes." Which was a flat-out lie, of course.

"Okay. Let me get the dictaphone going again."

"It'll cost you money."

Morris suddenly had a hard look. "Oh? How much?"

I'd thought about that most carefully. "One hundred thousand dollars. And if you're thinking of arguing me down, remember whose time we're wasting."

"I wasn't." He was, but he'd changed his mind.

"Good. We'll transfer the money now, while I can still read your mind."

"All right."

He offered to make room for me in the booth, but I declined. The glass wouldn't stop me from reading Morris's soul.

He came out silent; for there was something he was afraid to know. Then: "What about the Monks? What about our sun?"

"I talked that one around. That's why I don't want him molested. He'll convince others."

"Talked him around? How?"

"It wasn't easy." And suddenly I would have given my soul to sleep. "The profession pill put it in his genes; he must protect the ship. It's in me too. I know how strong it is."

"Then . . ."

"Don't be an ass, Morris. The ship's perfectly safe where it is, in orbit around the Moon. A sailship's only in danger when it's between stars, far from help."

"Oh."

"Not that that convinced him. It only let him consider the ethics of the situation rationally."

"Suppose someone else unconvinces him?"

"It could happen. That's why we'd better build the launching laser."

Morris nodded unhappily.

The next twelve hours were rough.

In the first four hours I gave them everything I could remember about the Monk teleport system, Monk technology, Monk family life, Monk ethics, relations between

Monks and aliens, details on aliens, directions of various inhabited and uninhabited worlds—everything. Morris and the Secret Service men who had been posing as customers sat around me like boys around a campfire, listening to stories. But Louise made us fresh coffee, then went to sleep in one of the booths.

Then I let myself slack off.

By nine in the morning I was flat on my back, staring at the ceiling, dictating a random useless bit of information every thirty seconds or so. By eleven there was a great black pool of lukewarm coffee inside me, my eyes ached marginally more than the rest of me, and I was producing nothing.

I was convincing, and I knew it.

But Morris wouldn't let it go at that. He believed me. I felt him believing me. But he was going through the routine anyway, because it couldn't hurt. If I was useless to him, if I knew nothing, there was no point in playing soft. What could he lose?

He accused me of making everything up. He accused me of faking the pills. He made me sit up, and damn near caught me that way. He used obscure words and phrases from mathematics and Latin and fan vocabulary. He got nowhere. There wasn't any way to trick me.

At two in the afternoon he had someone drive me home.

Every muscle in me ached; but I had to fight to maintain my exhausted slump. Else my hindbrain would have lifted me onto my toes and poised me against a possible shift in artificial gravity. The strain was double, and it hurt. It had hurt for hours, sitting with my shoulders hunched and my head hanging. But now—if Morris saw me walking like a trampoline performer . . .

Morris's man got me to my room and left me.

I woke in darkness and sensed someone in my room. Someone who meant me no harm. In fact, Louise. I went back to sleep.

I woke again at dawn. Louise was in my easy chair, her feet propped on a corner of the bed. Her eyes were open. She said, "Breakfast?"

I said, "Yah. There isn't much in the fridge."

"I brought things."

"All right." I closed my eyes.

Five minutes later I decided I was all slept out. I got up and went to see how she was doing.

There was bacon frying, there was bread already buttered for toasting in the Toast-R-Oven, there was a pan hot for eggs, and the eggs scrambled in a bowl. Louise was filling the percolator.

"Give that here a minute," I said. It only had water in it. I held the pot in my hands, closed my eyes and tried to remember . . .

Ah.

I knew I'd done it right even before the heat touched my hands. The pot held hot, fragrant coffee.

"We were wrong about the first pill," I told Louise. She was looking at me very curiously. "What happened that second night was this. The Monk had a translator gadget, but he wasn't too happy with it. It kept screaming in his ear. Screaming English, too loud, for my benefit.

"He could turn off the part that was shouting English at me, and it would still whisper a Monk translation of what *I* was saying. But first he had to teach me the Monk language. He didn't have a pill to do that. He didn't have a generalized language-learning course either, if there is one, which I doubt.

"He was pretty drunk, but he found something that would serve. The profession it taught me was an old one, and it doesn't have a one-or-two-word name. But if it did, the word would be *prophet!"*

"Prophet," said Louise. "Prophet?" She was doing a remarkable thing. She was listening with all her concentration, and scrambling eggs at the same time.

"Or disciple. Maybe *apostle* comes closer. Anyway, it included the Gift of Tongues, which was what the Monk was after. But it included other talents too."

"Like turning cold water into hot coffee?"

"Miracles, right. I used the same talent to make the little pink amnesia pills disappear before they hit my stomach. But an apostle's major talent is persuasion.

"Last night I convinced a Monk crewman that blowing up suns is an evil thing.

"Morris is afraid that someone might convert him back. I don't think that's possible. The mind-reading talent that goes with the prophet pill goes deeper than

just reading minds. I read souls. The Monk is my apostle. Maybe he'll convince the whole crew that I'm right.

"Or he may just curse the *hachiroph shisp,* the little old nova maker. Which is what I intend to do."

"Curse it?"

"Do you think I'm kidding or something?"

"Oh, no." She poured our coffee. "Will that stop it working?"

"Yes."

"Good," said Louise. And I felt the power of her own faith, her faith in me. It gave her the serenity of an idealized nun.

When she turned back to serve the eggs, I dropped a pink triangular pill in her coffee.

She finished setting breakfast and we sat down. Louise said, "Then that's it. It's all over."

"All over." I swallowed some orange juice. Wonderful, what fourteen hours' sleep will do for a man's appetite. "All over. I can go back to my fourth profession, the only one that counts."

She looked up quickly.

"Bartender. First, last, and foremost, I'm a bartender. You're going to marry a bartender."

"Good," she said, relaxing.

In two hours or so the slave sets would be gone from her mind. She would be herself again: free, independent, unable to diet, and somewhat shy.

But the pink pill would not destroy real memories. Two hours from now, Louise would still know that I loved her; and perhaps she would marry me after all.

I said, "We'll have to hire an assistant. And raise our prices. They'll be fighting their way in when the story gets out."

Louise had pursued her own thoughts. "Bill Morris looked awful when I left. You ought to tell him he can stop worrying."

"Oh, no. I *want* him scared. Morris has got to talk the rest of the world into building a launching laser, instead of just throwing bombs at the Monk ship. And we *need* the launching laser."

"Mmm! That's good coffee. Why do we need a launching laser?"

"To get to the stars."

"That's Morris's bag. You're a bartender, remember? The fourth profession."

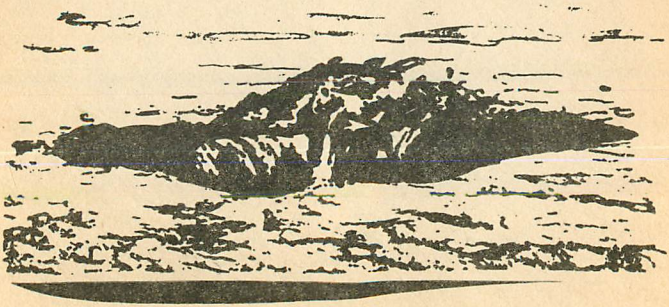
I shook my head. "You and Morris. You don't see how *big* the Monk marketplace is, or how thin the Monks are scattered. How many novas have you seen in your lifetime?

"Damn few," I said. "There are damn few trading ships in a godawful lot of sky. There are things out there besides Monks. Things the Monks are afraid of, and probably others they don't know about.

"Things so dangerous that the only protection is to be somewhere else, circling some other star, when it happens here! The Monk drive is our lifeline and our immortality. It would be cheap at any price . . ."

"Your eyes are glowing," she breathed. She looked half hypnotized, and utterly convinced. And I knew that for the rest of my life, I would have to keep a tight rein on my tendency to preach.

——*Larry Niven*



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