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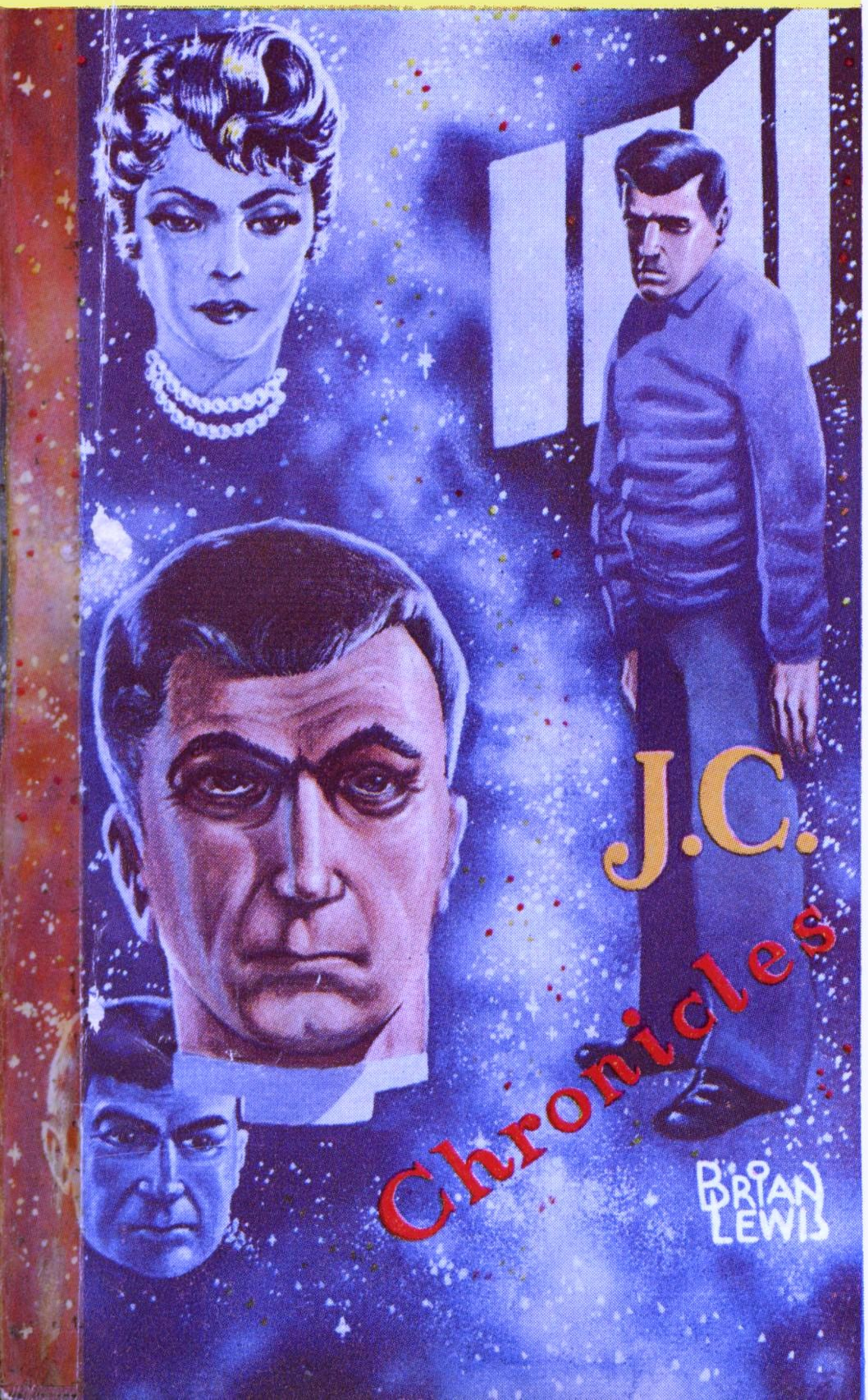

Science Fantasy

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EDITOR : JOHN CARNELL

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TWO SHILLINGS

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Scottish author J. T. McIntosh makes a very welcome return to science fiction and fantasy after an absence of more than two years, and in this long-voyage story of a closed-cycle environment brilliantly depicts the effects of public thinking on the mores of a group of people who are confined in a spaceship halfway to their destination.

200 YEARS TO CHRISTMAS

BY J. T. McINTOSH

I

Year 187

S12 was barer than a hospital corridor. There was nothing to see but naked metal floor, walls and ceiling—except for the trail of red, sticky stuff which started in the middle of the passage and ran under the half-open door of a room to the right.

Ted Benzil stopped and bent down to examine it. It looked more like tomato sauce than blood, but he didn't care to taste it to find out. He pushed the door wide open and went in. The door swung silently shut behind him.

" Boo, goose !" said a voice, and two hands went round him from behind, covering his eyes. He felt warm, bare, feminine arms.

" Freddy," he exclaimed.

He was released abruptly. " Must every girl on the ship be Freddy Steel ?" the girl said crossly. He turned and saw a small, pert blonde, hardly more than a schoolgirl but too pretty to be treated as a schoolgirl for a moment longer than was necessary. She wore a dark blue cape, yet even in such a shapeless garment she looked startlingly nubile.

" Lila !" he exclaimed, surprised.

" Your conversation isn't very bright tonight, Ted," she said acidly.

He grinned. " Who said you could call me Ted ?"

Her head came up defiantly. " You call me Lila. Why shouldn't I call you Ted ?"

Ted's smile broadened. " Well, I've been calling you Lila for nearly ten years, and all that time you called me ' Mr. Benzil ' or ' sir '—why should I suddenly become Ted ?"

" I'm not a child any more." Still defiantly.

" No, Lila," Ted agreed. " You're fifteen, aren't you ?"

" I've left school !" Lila retorted, as if Ted were arguing with her.

" I know. All right, Lila, since you're grown-up now and since we've known each other such a long time—you can call me Ted."

" It's not fair," she exclaimed, half protesting, half laughing," to take advantage of the fact that you used to be my teacher in school. You're not so very much cleverer than me —you just know more. And you're not even much older, either. Yet you . . ."

" I what, Lila ?" Ted asked mildly.

" You treat me as if I were still in your class in school. You don't . . . you never give any sign of . . . you don't even . . ."

Her eyes shifted focus, and Ted turned to see what she was looking at. He saw it, hanging over the door, and laughed.

"You think not taking the appropriate action is a gratuitous insult ? No insult intended, Lila."

He drew her under the plastic mistletoe and kissed her. She flung her arms round him and responded fiercely—so fiercely and passionately that when he released himself he was startled and showed it.

" Maybe you should be back in school again for one more lesson, Lila," he protested. " You're just old enough to kiss a man like that—and not old enough to know better. Don't do that again unless you mean to follow through."

" I'm quite ready to follow through," she said breathlessly.

He frowned. " Lila, you're far too nice a girl to act like this. You've been led astray by the times we live in. Girls like you just don't entice men twice their age into empty rooms to make passionate love to them."

" You're not nearly twice my age and I didn't entice you in to make passionate love to you. Look."

She drew the string of her cloak and flung it open to show her dress. Ted's eyes widened involuntarily. It was light blue, what there was of it. It left no doubt whatever that Lila had an exceedingly provocative little body.

" Like my dress ?" Lila asked.

" Why don't you put it on sometime ?" Ted inquired. " Anyway, where do you think you're going in that ?"

" To the Christmas Ball. You're going to take me."

" No, I'm not," said Ted definitely. " Certainly not in that dress."

" If I go and change it, will you take me ?"

He shook his head. " I can't. You're . . ."

" Don't say I'm too young ! If *you* take me, it'll be all right."

" If I took you, you wouldn't be thrown out, but that doesn't mean it'd be all right. It really isn't a place for a fifteen-year-old girl, Lila. Wait three years, or four, or five. In fact, maybe a nice girl like you shouldn't ever go to a Christmas Ball at all."

" Please, Ted !" Lila begged. " Don't think I'm going to hang around you all night. I know you'll be with Freddy Steel. Just get me in, and then forget I'm there if you like."

" Sorry, Lila." He shook his head again.

" Oh, you . . ." Lila began, recognizing defeat. Between disappointed fury and tears, she snatched the parcel he was carrying, a small packet wrapped in Christmas-gift paper. Ted made a grab for it, but Lila tore the door open and slammed it behind her.

Ted didn't waste any breath in shouting. He opened the door and raced after Lila.

S12 was one of the minor corridors. At the next junction Lila pivoted neatly and flashed along J1. It was a mistake. Ted rapidly closed the gap and stretched forward to catch her. He grasped her cape, but with a breathless laugh she pulled the string and left him holding it. Recognizing her error in

sticking to a main avenue, where Ted could work up full speed, she darted down T14, and was halfway along K3 before Ted could negotiate the corner behind her.

So long as she kept to a zigzag course through a maze of minor passages, she kept leaving Ted further and further behind. It was like a launch being chased by a battleship. But presently, reaching a section with which she wasn't entirely familiar, she found herself unexpectedly on M1.

M1 was the longest avenue on the *Arc-en-ciel*. It ran right from the storerooms in the rear to the observation rooms in the the nose. And the whole middle third of it was blank, a tunnel through engine rooms, water-tanks, air purifying plant, temperature-control pumps and hydroponics departments. There were inspection hatches, but not a single door.

There was only one thing to do. Lila let Ted overtake her and just as he was about to grab her dived under his arm and raced back the way they had come. She got such a start on him that by the time she had traversed a few more minor corridors she was able to try doors in search of a refuge.

During the chase they had seen hardly a soul. Everyone who wasn't at the ball or at a private party was too young or too old, apparently, and asleep.

The third door Lila tried, in B4, was an unoccupied single room. Inside, with the door shut, she leaned back against it for half a minute, getting her breath back and listening for Ted's steps pounding past the room. She didn't hear them. Perhaps he had lost the trail altogether.

While she was getting her breath back, Lila looked round the room she found herself in. Getting her breath back didn't take long, though she had run nearly a mile at top speed. Gravity on the *Arc-en-ciel* was artificial, and only two-thirds of what Lila's ancestors had had to cope with. Exertion was correspondingly less.

It was like all unoccupied single rooms, a fixed plastic bed, a foldaway washstand, a bedlight, a recessed wardrobe with a full-length mirror in front of it, two chairs meantime clipped securely to the wall, and nothing else. Since there was nothing unusual about the room, Lila's attention turned to the packet she still held in her hand.

It was Ted's Christmas gift to Freddy, of course. Lila felt it with her fingers. She couldn't make out what it was.

She hadn't meant to steal it. She hadn't really meant anything—she had run off with the packet merely from pique when she saw that Ted wasn't going to take her to the ball. But her curiosity became unbearable. While she was still telling herself that she had no right to open the parcel, her fingers were doing it—carefully, so that she would be able to close it again.

It was a pearl necklace—artificial pearls, but Lila knew of no other kind. Instantly Lila decided that a pearl necklace was exactly what was needed to set off her blue dress to perfection. She put it on and looked at herself in the mirror.

A soft gasp of delight escaped her. The necklace broke up the exceedingly bare expanse between her face and the top of her dress. Then she frowned, envying Freddy because the necklace was going to belong to her and because Ted gave her such things. She frowned still more darkly, having a clear enough idea of what Ted and Freddy's relations must be.

She wasn't a child of course, and she knew that nearly everybody who wasn't married had a lover. But she had always admired Ted enormously, and she hated the thought of her shining knight in armour being involved in anything furtive, or cheap, or sordid.

Even the enchanting picture in the mirror lost its enchantment when honesty compelled her to admit that she was only pretty while Freddy was beautiful—utterly, incredibly, heart-rendingly lovely. It was frustrating even to think of Freddy, who so obviously had *everything*. Including, apparently, Ted Benzil.

" You know what I ought to do ?" demanded Ted from the doorway.

Lila jumped convulsively. Startled, for a moment she was terrified.

" Never mind," said Ted. " Keep the necklace. Merry Christmas !"

He shut the door behind him.

When Ted reached the ballroom, Gil Cordiner was playing the clarinet.

Ted postponed looking for Freddy. He leaned back against the plastic-covered wall, shut his eyes, and gave himself up to the music.

There was plenty of musicians on the ship. Although thousands of recordings of all kinds of music had been brought

from Earth, the recordings never changed, and live music had an appeal which the very greatest canned music lacked.

Gil very seldom played now. He didn't belong to the orchestra or the chamber music group or the swing band. Nevertheless, Gil was perhaps the only musician who could hold his own with the best of the recordings brought from Earth. Ted listened to him with delight, marvelling once again at Gil's glorious invention, the charm of the melodic phrases, the calculated perfection of even the rests. It seemed a pity that the best most of the people in the hall could do with music like that was dance to it. True, it was dance music, glorious dance music—but there was so much in it, Ted felt, that it deserved undivided attention.

All too soon Gil gave the clarinet back to the band's clarinettist and stepped off the stand. He waved his arm in modest acknowledgement of the applause, caught Ted's eye and grinned at him deprecatingly.

"I believe you'd rather listen to Gil than dance with me," Freddy said challengingly. She had come up behind Ted unnoticed. It was rather unusual for Freddy to join anyone unnoticed. She was the kind of girl who made all the other girls at a ball wish they hadn't come.

She was wearing the latest short-skirt evening fashion. It was so late that only she and four other women on the floor wore it. But since those were the five who really counted as far as fashion was concerned, the style was in all right and at the next big social occasion ever woman would be wearing short skirts, except the extremists who would cling to the old style from obstinacy.

Freddy looked as every girl always wanted to look.

"Of course I would," Ted declared. "You're only a woman, but Gil is Art."

"Don't I make a good job of being a woman?" Freddy demanded.

Ted grinned. "That's Useful Arts versus Fine Arts. Anyway, you don't make a particularly good job of being a woman, Freddy—only one small part of it."

Freddy made a derisive noise. But Ted, who knew her, knew she was hurt. He hadn't meant to hurt her. It wasn't easy to hurt Freddy.

He sighed and abandoned the subject. Freddy was spoiled—she could hurt if she liked, but no one was supposed to hurt her.

That was one of the things which Friday's children came to expect.

"Sorry I haven't a present for you, Freddy," he said. "I had one up to a few minutes ago."

"What happened to it?" Freddy asked, her smouldering eyes lighting with interest.

"Since a lady is involved," said Ted lightly, "I can't tell you."

Freddy's interest grew. "A lady? Am I losing my grip, then?"

"No, nothing like that. The lady concerned is too young to concern you."

"Is she over twelve?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then she isn't too young to concern me."

"Merry Christmas, anyway, Freddy."

"Christmas!" Freddy sneered, like a glamorous Scrooge. "What's that to us? We won't see it."

"Not *that* Christmas," Ted agreed. "Not the ultimate Christmas. But that doesn't prevent us from having fun now, does it?"

"Oh, no. If that's what you mean."

He was glad she was prepared to leave it at that. Occasionally she was in a mood so foul that the only thing to do with her was leave her alone and hope that time would mellow her.

She was thirty-one, five years older than Ted, and could refer, when she liked, back to incidents when those five years had been really significant. When she was an experienced, sophisticated woman of twenty-three and he a callow youngster of eighteen. When she was a very grown-up nineteen and he a mere oversized child of fourteen. When she was nine and rather a bully, he little more than a baby.

There had been many different Freddys, while there had really been only one Ted. It was for that reason, among other, that their paths had run together only briefly and spasmodically during the last twenty years. One of the reasons why they were together now, at the biggest ball of the year, was that they were the two best dancers on the ship.

Freddy had always got what she wanted. And it hadn't been entirely good for her.

Nearly everyone at the ball was drinking hard. Ted wasn't because as a teacher in a small, utterly closed community he

didn't think he should. Gil wasn't because he didn't like alcohol. Harold Phimister wasn't because (so people said) he disapproved of everything which meant pleasure to anyone, and only came to entertainments of any kind to disapprove of them.

But almost everyone else, including Freddy, was drinking, and drinking, and drinking—because it was the thing to do. And drinking was only part of it. All the usual things went with it. There was giggling, and petting, and kissing, and horseplay, and people snoozing in odd corners. A great deal of what went on was harmless. But not all.

Two men fought without warning, fiercely, the motive already forgotten. The people round them cleared a space, cheered on one or the other, laughed excitedly. No one except those in the immediate vicinity paid any particular attention, until suddenly the fight became insanely savage. One fighter lost control of himself utterly. His face went red with maniacal rage, and his purpose became nothing less than slaughter. His fists flailed and thudded brutally into his opponent, who fought back desperately, no longer concerned about anything beyond defence.

Some of the onlookers surged forward, then back, irresolutely. Somebody would have to do something, clearly, but the somebody was taking his time over emerging from anonymity. Meantime the man who had gone into a killing fury snorted like a bull, chopped savagely at face, shoulders, ribs, neck, and his victim, a bigger man, blocked as much as he could and howled in sheer fright, shocked and terrified to find that people would stand by while a man tried to kill him.

Eventually Jim Baker became, reluctantly, Lieutenant Baker of the police, stepped behind the man who was trying to become a killer and hit him neatly behind the ear with the butt of a small but quite hard revolver. The unconscious man was dragged away, and that was that. The incident and his disappearance had no effect on the merrymaking.

A dark-haired girl who couldn't have been much older than Lila Johns cried out : " No, Peter, I don't want to. Please, Peter." But Peter, breathing noisily, had picked her up and was carrying her, weeping, from the ballroom. Nobody paid the slightest attention.

In one corner about twenty people were standing in a ring, clapping their hands on the off beat, and in the cleared space Suzette Norris did a wild solo dance. Her long black hair and

her long black skirt streamed first one way, then the other ; her long thin legs flashed in and out of sight, twinkling deceptively: the V to her waist opened and closed coyly as she strained back and came upright again. She was laughing delightedly, her white teeth dazzling against the background of black evening coats, dark walls and the shadows under the balconies. She wasn't an outstandingly good dancer, but what she lacked in talent she made up in sensuality. Barks of laughter burst from the group at each frankly coarse gesture she made.

Ted was neither shocked nor surprised by anything he saw. He had seen wilder balls, and very much wilder parties. Nevertheless, he was glad Lila wasn't present.

This was the Gay Phase, the carefree, careless, irresponsible time which must inevitably follow a period like the Know-More Phase. It was a time when nothing mattered except fun, amusement, pleasure of all kinds, without concern over the future. It was a time when even the most fleeting pleasure was grasped without thought of the most universal principles of morality.

Lila Johns could hardly be blamed for offering herself so casually to Ted Benzil when most of her friends had lovers, when a couple of boys who had been in her class at school were already alcoholics, when the chief woman probation officer was known to be the mistress of both the High Court judge and the chief of police.

" You don't think I ought to drink so much," said Freddy. It wasn't a question, it was a challenge.

" Don't I ?" said Ted. " Perhaps you're right."

Swaying a little, Freddy demanded : " Why do you always make it so difficult to quarrel with you ?"

" I don't like quarrelling."

" Well, I do. Which brings us back to an earlier topic. Who was the girl who was too young to concern me ? Is she here?"

Ted shook his head. " If I answered that, I'd have to answer the next question, and the next, and soon you'd know all you wanted to know."

" You'd tell me if she didn't matter to you."

" I didn't say she didn't matter to me. But I'm not in love with her—any more than you're in love with Gil."

She stared at him. " What brought that up ?"

" Or are you in love with Gil ?"

" Suppose I were, what would it be to you ?"

" Nothing."

" Nothing ? You wouldn't care ?"

" No, why should I ?"

" Well, there's such a thing as jealousy, and it would be only decent for you to show some."

Ted laughed. " It's funny to hear you talk of decency. Don't you claim to be a diabolist ?"

Freddy frowned. She had drunk too much synthetic whisky to be at her brightest, and Ted was doing his best to confuse her. For the moment she wasn't a match for him.

II

There was a roll on the drums, and everyone looked towards the door. It was time for the Christmas ceremony, and the drum-roll announced the entrance of Dr. Eric Martin and the Rev. Drummond Smith Johns.

There were shouts of protest at the interruption of the celebrations. However, gradually the company sobered. The petting couples disentangled themselves and patted their clothes into some semblance of order. Some of the people who had been sleeping it off in odd corners, impervious to the noise, were disturbed by the silence, opened an eye and came unsteadily to their feet.

By the time Martin and Johns reached the rostrum, unused so far, it was an almost sober, almost silent crowd who waited for them to speak.

Martin was young to be going bald. He was tall, broad-shouldered and narrow-hipped, with bushy hair on the left and on the right but a bare patch across the top. He had a pleasant strong face, the face of a scholar, almost the face of an ascetic. There was a certain strangeness in his face, a hint that this man could be dangerous, as fanatic, traitor, or saint.

Johns by contrast, was an ordinary, straightforward, matter-of-fact man. He was small, like his daughter Lila, but that was the only thing they had in common—in appearance, at any rate. Johns was average, insignificant. The only notable thing about him was his deep, resonant voice.

" You know what I'm going to say," Martin said pleasantly, " but by tradition someone always says it. So will you be patient while I tell the story again, in my own way, and Mr. Johns says a few words, and then you can go back to your—celebration ? Thank you."

He had a pleasant public-speaking manner. He was disapproving, yet not unfriendly. Obviously he didn't think much of the ball and the things that were going on there. His manner was that of a reformer—never haughty, distant or unfriendly, but always with that shade of disapproval.

"This is the hundred and eighty-seventh Christmas since this ship left Earth," he said quietly but not unimpressively. "That means it's about two hundred years now to that greatest, grandest Christmas of all—the Christmas we celebrate in advance, look forward to and pray for every year—the Christmas when we land on Lorraine. The Christmas eighteen or nineteen generations will have lived and died for. The Christmas when human beings begin to live, on a big, free, open, almost limitless world instead of a tiny prison like this ship. The Christmas when we can end birth control for ever, when every couple can have as many children as they like. The Christmas we won't see, but our children's children's children *will* see . . ."

It was ritual. Ted had enough imagination for the words to mean something to him. Besides, the words had added significance for him because some day he would be speaking them himself, or other words to the same effect. He would be Martin's successor as rector of the school, and unless the Committee made a new law the rector would continue to speak at the Christmas ceremony.

Beside him, Freddy stirred restlessly. He knew her point of view. As Martin said, *she* wasn't going to be alive when the *Arc-en-ciel's* tremendous four-hundred-year trip was over. All that concerned her were the circumstances as they were now. What had happened two hundred years ago, to someone else, and what was going to happen in two hundred years, also to someone else, was nothing to her. Her world was the ship. She would never know any other.

Martin cut it short, and at the end of his little piece of history and prediction introduced Johns.

Johns said jovially: "Don't see many of you at church these days, and I suppose some of you feel this is taking an unfair advantage of you. Well, I'm not going to preach. All I want to say is this. Remember what Christmas used to be, what Christmas used to mean, back on earth. If you don't know, find out. It's worth while knowing. A time will come . . ."

"Why don't those two learn their job?" Freddy muttered impatiently. "They're trying to sell something, and who would buy when that's the best line in sales talk they can scrape up?"

"They think people *ought* to be interested," said Ted. "After all . . ."

Freddy said a short vulgar word. "You could even make sex boring if you were dull enough," she retorted.

Ted and she weren't the only people who were whispering or moving restlessly. Very few people were much interested in what Martin and Johns had to say. The trouble was, Ted thought, that unless one had a pretty strong imagination one couldn't very well be much concerned about any way of life violently different from one's own. People did long for life on an open, free, virtually limitless world, but it was the kind of longing which human beings had once had for heaven.

That was just it—living on a planet had replaced heaven, for the people on the *Arc-en-ciel.* Some people believed in heaven, some didn't. The unimaginative couldn't picture life on a world at all. There could be no fear of being shut up in a spaceship for anyone born and brought up in one. Instead of that, many became ill at the very idea of living in the open, without a roof over their heads, with nothing between them and the distant stars.

And Christmas, just as inevitably, ceased to stand for the birth of a messiah whose life and times belonged to dead Earth, and became a different kind of day of hope.

The end of the brief ceremony was the only really effective part of it. The dancers stood and sang a hymn. It was a queer choice, but the Rev. Johns had to choose one of the few hymns which were still known to everybody, and for some reason this was one of them :

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
From whence doth come mine aid :
My safety cometh from the Lord
Who heaven and earth hath made."

It was a queer, clumsy, inconsequential sort of hymn and quite inapplicable to the present circumstances. There were no hills to which to lift one's eyes—there hadn't been for nearly two hundred years. And a Lord who had made heaven and earth meant very little to the present audience. If it had been a Lord who had made the stars, that might have been much more impressive. Most impressive of all would have been a Lord who made the *Arc-en-ciel.*

But nevertheless, the people who stood and sang were much more affected by "I to the hills" than they had been by Martin's history and John's simplified Scripture.

The ball went on for quite a while after that but the celebrations had become sleepy, bitty and forced. Instead of collecting together, people were splitting off into groups and pairs, going to friends' rooms for a last drink, even going home.

Freddy and Ted went to Freddy's room. And there, before doing anything else, Freddy prised Lila's name out of Ted.

"One of your pupils only a matter of months ago," she taunted. "Must you rob cradles, Ted?"

"I haven't been robbing any cradles," Ted replied, unperturbed. "In fact I refused to get her into the ballroom tonight."

"Why?"

"Because it's no place for her. I don't want to corrupt the girl before her time."

"Then I will," said Freddy with sudden enthusiasm. "It's a long time since I corrupted anyone. I don't want to get out of practice. How long do you think it'll take me to make her thoroughly vile?"

"Behave yourself, Freddy," said Ted sharply.

"I mean it. It'll be fun to . . ."

"I know you mean it. And I mean it too when I say that if you try anything of that sort I'll make you sorry you were ever born."

"Ted!" exclaimed Freddy, amused. "Such uncivilised violence!"

"Such uncivilised violence," Ted agreed grimly. "You interfere with Lila and I'll beat you black and blue."

"There's not much finesse about that," said Freddy reprovingly.

"Finesse is for cases where you're concerned less with what you do than how you do it," Ted retorted. "All I'm concerned about is that you leave Lila alone."

Freddy wasn't displeased. She had shaken Ted out of his usual phlegmatic attitude. That wasn't easy to do. She was satisfied. She dropped the subject.

A little earlier Lila had slipped into the bedroom of her friend, Robina Phimister. "You awake, Robina?" she said.

"Yes. Put on the light, Lila, or you'll trip over something."

Lila put on the light. Robina blinked at her sleepily for a moment, then gasped.

"You haven't been walking in the corridors like that? And where did you get that necklace?"

"A friend gave it to me," said Lila complacently. "Like it?"

"You look wonderful, Lila. But if your father finds out—"

"My father isn't like yours. I can do what I like," said Lila smugly, parading about the room to let Robina have a good look at her. She knew how easy it was to make Robina jealous, but could never resist doing it.

"My father would kill me if I wore a dress like that."

"Why, for goodness sake?"

"My father says that sort of thing is wickedness and licenceness."

"Licentiousness," Lila corrected.

"Did you get to the ball?" Robina asked eagerly.

"No, I didn't go."

Robina recovered a little from her envy. "I thought nothing was going to stop you getting to the ball. I thought you were going to get in if you had to—"

Lila yawned elaborately. "I had other things to do," she said.

"What things?" asked Robina suspiciously—jealous again.

"Oh, just things." Actually Lila had spent the last few hours trying to sleep, but too excited by the faint sounds reaching her from the direction of the ballroom to close her eyes. Exactly as Robina had been spending them, in fact—but Lila wasn't going to admit that.

She yawned again. "I'm tired—I'm going back to bed. Goodnight, Robina."

She blew a kiss towards her friend and went out.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, finding herself face to face with Harold Phimister, out in the corridor.

"Have you been with my daughter, Miss Johns?" asked Phimister coldly.

"Yes, I—"

She stopped, feeling Phimister's eyes on her. Phimister's eyes, burning, deepset, black, were the sort of eyes one could *feel*. Lila was suddenly conscious that after all, a dress expressly designed to show that she wasn't wearing anything

underneath it wasn't what she would choose if she knew she was going to be closely examined by someone like Harold Phimister.

" Frankly, Miss Johns," Phimister said in the same cold tone, " if you were the daughter of anyone else I should seriously consider forbidding you to see Robina at all."

Lila lost her nervousness in indignation. " You can't just *forbid* like that !" she declared. "People pick their own friends. Fathers haven't got any rights over their children. You—"

" Perhaps not—not now. But things may change, Miss Johns. Change for the better."

And with that he went into his suite, not by Robina's entrance but by the main door to the family apartment, leaving Lila staring.

However, Lila wasn't the one to puzzle over things like that. She went back to her room, wondering why Phimister went to balls at all, where Mrs. Phimister was, what it must be like to put up with two of them all the time as poor Robina had to do, and how Phimister had ever come to be married at all and have a daughter.

Lila had one last look at herself in the mirror before getting ready for bed, and giggled half nervously, half delightedly at what Phimister must have thought of her like that.

He would certainly think her pale blue dress was licentious.

Lila thought it was cute. But then, perhaps that came to the same thing she admitted.

The *Arc-en-ciel* ran herself, which was a pity. Routine jobs like cleaning, growing fruit and vegetables, checking the electrical wiring, reclaiming waste, regulating the temperature and humidity control pumps, preparing synthetic food, making clothes, printing books, distilling whisky and so on were too few and too simple to occupy the hundreds of people on board for long enough to keep them out of mischief.

It would have been better if the planners who had built the ship had left out a few refinements—then more people would have had to work longer. Hard-working people are happy people. They have no time to be discontented.

But the planners, in their infinite wisdom, had built a ship which needed little or no attention in really important matters. Distrustful of fifth-generation and seventh-generation navigators, they had made the actual control of the ship automatic.

Indeed, so much was automatic that if the entire population of the *Arc-en-ciel* fell in a drunken stupor, she would carry on much the same as if everyone was hard-working and conscientious. Only their personal comfort would suffer.

There had been a possibility, when the ship had been built in space (in orbit round Venus) that the survival of the human race depended on the Lorraine project. The solar system had been sliding then into a vast cloud of gas almost dense enough to burn, certainly dense enough to have effects beyond the imagination of a race which had hitherto lived a charmed life in a savage, dangerous universe.

Nobody on the *Arc-en-ciel* knew what had happened in the solar system. The ship had a velocity too near the speed of light for any changes to be visible from her yet. A hundred and eighty-seven years after leaving Earth, the people on the ship, looking back still saw a Sun only a few years older than it had been when their ancestors left it. The disaster, if it happened, had been expected thirty years after the *Arc-en-ciel* left the solar system. Earth might have been destroyed a hundred and fifty years since—yet the telescopes still showed the system unharmed.

Since it had been known that the future of the race might depend on this ship, the planners had left nothing to chance—or human error. Life on board the ship had been set from the beginning in an inescapable pattern.

Live and go on living. Laugh, dance, kill each other, copulate, eat and drink till you burst. But leave the ship alone. She will take care of you, so long as you don't tamper with her. Live like kings or like swine so long as you go on living—and leave the ship alone.

And left to their own devices, with little or no responsibility for the guiding of their vast home among the stars, there had been nothing for the hundreds of people on board to do except make social experiments, not even knowing that was what they were doing.

They didn't matter, these thousands of people who would live and die inside the metal walls of a vast coffin. Only the last generation mattered, the generation which would reach Lorraine and build a settlement there. All the others, those who lived and died on the way, were merely fertilizer for that last shining race of humans who would be alive when Christmas came.

III

Year 189

Anyone who had seen Lila wandering around her bedroom, picking up things and laying them down, would have been able to guess she had a date later and didn't know what to do with herself until it was time to start getting ready.

Two years hadn't been enough to turn her from an attractive adolescent into a woman, but they had made her an even more attractive adolescent. Though she would never be a Freddy Steel, she was intelligent and pretty and adorable, and many young men were ready and willing to adore her.

She had picked up her little gold watch for the fourth time from its place on her dressing-table and put it down with increased impatience, as if certain it was hardly bothering to move its arms at all, when a light tap sounded on her door. She knew it was her father. He always treated her with a certain mild formality, as if she were a ward and not his daughter.

Her mother had died long since, and bringing Lila up had devolved entirely on him. The Rev. Johns was a very modest man. He realized all his responsibilities and invariably devoted careful thought to them.

In the matter of Lila he had decided that the way to bring her up was to develop her, not try to mould her. He had always allowed her complete freedom in everything except certain matters of principle. He never forced her to be a Christian, but he had always taught her that certain things were generally wrong and certain things generally right.

He let her dress as she liked, act as she liked, think as she liked ; but he made sure she respected and venerated and loved some things, no matter what. He had told her :

If nothing really matters to you, you'll never really matter to other people.

He wasn't quite sure how he had succeeded. Sometimes in his modest, self-deprecatory way he thought he had made a frightful mess of the job of bringing up a daughter. At other times it seemed that whether he was due any credit or not, there was nothing much wrong with Lila and a great deal which was very much right.

" Come in, Daddy," Lila called. She loved him, and she made no effort to hide it. On the other hand, she often went

her way, knowing it wasn't his. She tried not to bring the things she knew he would disapprove of to his attention, not because she had the slightest fear of what he would do, but because she didn't want to hurt him. Occasionally, not often, she refrained from doing something just because she knew he would have to know about it and that it would hurt him.

The little minister came in and stood a little hesitantly on the threshold. He had always carefully respected Lila's privacy, and only on invitation did he ever enter her room.

" Are you going to the service tonight, Lila ?" he asked.

Lila hesitated. She hadn't had the slightest intention of doing so. " Why ?" she asked.

" It would be better if you did."

She knew he never threatened and would never on his own account interfere with her freedom of choice. So she asked curiously : " Why, Daddy ? Is there something special about tonight ?"

" Yes, Lila. I think it'll be carefully noted who's at church. And more so who isn't. You know I don't object if you never come to services, but . . . I think you should come tonight."

" You mean this Revival business ?"

Johns nodded. Lila frowned. " I don't quite understand, Daddy. You say yourself—you've always said you'd never force people to go to Church. But this Revival—it's forcing people, isn't it ?"

" I'm not running Revival, Lila."

" Do you disapprove of it, then ?"

" Oh no, not in the least. It's a great thing. The church a living, dynamic force again, after all these years when . . . Disapprove of it !" he exclaimed, as if the enormity of disapproving of Revival had only just occurred to him. " It's the greatest thing that's happened since the ship left Earth. Perhaps there are a few extremists, but that's only to be expected."

" If you want it, Daddy," said Lila without enthusiasm, " of course I'll come."

Ted called on Freddy with much the same message. "We'd better both be at church tonight, Freddy—separately," he said.

" Very funny," Freddy sneered.

" I mean it."

" Can't. I'm going to the Blue Room party, even if you won't."

" You can go there afterwards, if you must. But you've got to be at the service, Freddy."

" Why ?"

" Public opinion."

" You may care for that, but you know I don't. Never did."

" Oh yes, you do. You don't want to be sent to Coventry, do you ? Because that's quite liable to happen these days. If it can do that to you, you do care for public opinion, Freddy. Everybody cares."

Freddy didn't argue. On a ship, in a small community, being sent to Coventry wasn't the mild punishment it would have been on Earth. It could be absolutely watertight. No one, but *no one*, dared to speak to the victim, because that meant joining him.

It was solitary confinement without the compensating privilege of privacy.

So Freddy didn't say anything so ridiculous as that being sent to Coventry was nothing to her.

" What is it, *Salvation, By Order* now ?" she demanded.

Ted nodded. " Something like that."

" Ted, this Revival business can't go much further, can it ?"

" Oh yes. Sure to."

" Jesus !" said Freddy fervently, but not in prayer.

" Isn't it obvious ? The lesson of history. After the Militarist Age came the Freedom Phase. The Golden Age of Art, then the Dark Age. Then Know-More, and the Gay Phase—the swing of the pendulum, Freddy. Revival isn't a surprise, it's inevitable."

" But the Gay Phase isn't over."

Ted gave her one of his very faint smiles. " Merely holding a party like the one in the Blue Room doesn't change anything. Don't fool yourself, Freddy. The Gay Phase is in its last death-throes. *Exactly* what's coming I don't know—it certainly looks like a religious revival, but it's too early yet to be sure. Anyway, tonight's affair is about five years too late."

" I'm going all the same. With or without you. Why aren't you going, anyway ?"

" There's a meeting in the Small Hall after the service, and I'll have to go to it. A rather important meeting, I think."

" A revival meeting ?"

" Yes. It's all right—nobody's asking you to go."

" Just as well. Hell, it was bad enough when fashions went sad and sober and respectable, without people trying to interfere in your private life . . ."

" Another thing, Freddy—we'll have to start being very careful ourselves."

" You mean . . .?"

" Well, people are beginning to look oddly at me already, especially when your name is mentioned. Three years ago nobody cared who slept with who, but now—"

" Are you telling me we're through?" demanded Freddy incredulously.

" No, but I think we'd better pretend to be. I think we should quarrel, and tell everybody we've quarrelled, and be very careful where and how we meet."

Freddy frowned. " Surely you're taking this too seriously. This Revival could be over next week."

Ted grinned without much humour. " Listen, Freddy. A spaceship, no matter how huge, is a closed world. Everything that happens inside its blank hull is confined with it. Every action has its reaction within the boundaries of its vast shell. Every change, every movement, every act, every event bounces back off the multiply-insulated steel walls and becomes part of every new change, movement, act and event. Nothing is lost. Nothing can be lost."

" What's this you're giving me?" demanded Freddy suspiciously.

" On a big world, an open world, actions and changes are instantly blown to the four corners of the world, diluted to almost nothing and mingled with other actions and changes. But in a little world, a closed world, every swing of the pendulum means a swing the other way. True, the complexities of even a small world mean that the pendulum never quite goes back over its tracks. Yet it always swings. It can't stop, not unless an external force stops it. It can't go on and on in the same direction, for the further it goes one way, the more force there is building up to force it in another."

" That makes sense," Freddy admitted. " And the Gay Phase was quite a swing from Know-More. That means, I suppose, that this new age will be quite a swing from the Gay Phase. I hope you're all wrong about this, Ted."

Ted laughed. " Why? You wouldn't want the Gay Times to go on for ever, would you?"

"Of course. Wouldn't you?" She was genuinely surprised.

" No, I'm prepared to welcome Revival. Vice is all very well, but you can have more than enough of it."

The church was any room where the services happened to be held, and the services were held in various rooms and halls which fitted the congregation at the time. Ten years ago the Small Hall, holding a hundred and fifty, had been used. Five years ago, at the height of the Gay Phase, the services had usually been held in one of the recreation rooms, holding up to forty people.

Since then the services had gone back to the Small Hall, then the Big Hall, and finally they had to go to the ballroom, the biggest hall on the *Arc-en-ciel*. It could take nearly six hundred, seated. Although there hadn't been a capacity congregation yet, that night's was very close.

Ted sat in the front row with all the others who had some sort of official position in the community : the doctors, police officers, chroniclers, chief technicians, ship masters, nursery matrons, labour officers and all the rest of them. Behind sat the next-in-command — rank-and-file technicians, police, carpenters, joiners and so on. Round the middle block and pulpit and reading-desk sat everybody else, the people who merely existed without any particular purpose.

Lila and Robina sat together, Robina rather surprised to find herself with company. Her father, as a labour officer, sat in the central block. Her mother was in the choir. No one ever heard much out of Mrs. Phimister, except when she was in the choir. Being married to a man like Phimister was not conducive to self-expression.

" I always sit here," Robina whispered. " Can you guess why ?"

Lila looked round, wondering if there was a quick way out, but couldn't see any reason for sitting in the front seat of the back block unless it was to be seen. That was certainly a good enough reason. She crossed her legs, arranged her skirt exactly as she wanted it and pointed her toe gracefully. However, she didn't think that was Robina's reason.

" No," she whispered back. " Why ?"

" Look," said Robina, and went pink. Lila looked, and saw Gil Cordiner. As a chronicler he sat in the central block, just opposite them.

" Haven't you got over that yet ?" asked Lila. " Why, he must be twenty years older than you."

" Only fifteen !" exclaimed Robina, forgetting where she was. People turned to stare, for though the service hadn't started yet the organist was playing a voluntary, and everyone was settling down.

"Has he ever noticed you?" asked Lila mischieviously, when the heads had turned back again.

Robina turned her face away and didn't answer, which Lila took to mean he hadn't. It was not unnatural that Robina had fallen in love with Gil—so had a hundred other young girls in the last ten years, not to mention a couple of hundred older women.

Gil was the handsomest man on the ship. Nobody disputed it. Probably quite a lot of people would have done if his temperament had been different. But he was so patient, so modest that nobody could be jealous of him, no matter how handsome he was or how many women were in love with him.

A little along from Gil was Ted. And a little along from Robina and Lila was Freddy. People had stared when they saw Freddy. It was only now, after fully ten minutes, that heads had ceased turning to verify the startling fact that Freddy Steel was attending a church service.

Ted wouldn't have chosen to be staring straight at Freddy if he had any choice in the matter, but he hadn't. His place was more or less fixed. Freddy's wasn't, and she had chosen to be stared at by the whole front row—reasonably enough. Being there to be seen, she had apparently decided to make a good job of it.

So Ted had to look at Freddy and realize that he still loved her. He didn't respect her, admire her, or like her. He simply found it impossible to face the fact that it might be a good idea to break with her. He loved the dainty set of her head, the way she wriggled her left shoulder occasionally, as if she had an itch, the secret half-smiles which danced across her face when she didn't know she was being watched, the unexpectedly naive pride with which she often glanced at her own beautiful ankles. He loved her voice, and when she was silent he wanted to do something, anything, to make her speak.

He realized perfectly well that he didn't love Freddy's soul, in fact doubted very much that she had such a thing. That didn't seem to make much difference.

The voluntary on the small electric organ came to an end, and the Rev. Drummond Smith Johns came in quietly and climbed into the pulpit. He made his appearance modestly and hurriedly, as if trying to be in his pulpit before anyone noticed him. He should, perhaps, have expanded with Revival, become an important, imposing figure, but he wasn't the sort of man who could regard himself as important or try to make

himself imposing. He was far too modest to believe he was in any way responsible for Revival.

All he could do was try not to be too unworthy of it.

During the service, the Rev. Johns mentioned the meeting to take place afterwards. He merely said the Revival meeting would take place an hour after the service in the Small Hall. Those who were to attend knew about it already.

But when the meeting assembled, Ted knew very soon that his guess had been right and that this was going to be a very important meeting. There was an air of business about it. It hung in the air almost visibly.

Dr. Martin presided at the start, but almost at once there was a motion that a new council be formed, to be known as the Revival Council. There was no opposition, no debate. In less than half an hour the officials of the new council had been elected.

The Rev. Johns was honorary president. Phimister was president, Martin secretary. Almost everyone who was present was elected to the Council, together with about half a dozen who were not.

Only half a dozen. This was a meeting of Revivalists, and almost all the leading Revivalists were there. The new Council was a hundred strong, and there were twenty-three members of committee, including Ted and Gil Cordiner.

Almost before anyone knew it there was a complete new organization ready and willing to do anything.

And long before the newborn Revival Council expected to be called upon to do anything, it had its first job.

Ted, like most of those present, found things happening so fast that it was all he could do to keep up with them, let alone protest. It was like a well-arranged sports meeting, with each event following the last so closely that there was no time to reflect on the last before the present one claimed everybody's attention.

Yet it wasn't true to say that Phimister or Martin or anyone else was rushing them into anything. It was like some other meetings about which Ted had read, back in history—Earth's history. Revolutionary meetings, political meetings, religious meetings, last-stand meetings. Everybody happened to feel the same way at the same time in the same place. And that was that : the thing was done.

" It's all very well talking," somebody said, " but there's been plenty of talk and it's time something was done."

" Vice is still rampant," said someone else.

" Why, this very night," someone else remarked, his voice trembling with indignation, " I happen to know there is an orgy taking place in the Blue Room . . ."

" An orgy ?"

" Hardly that," remarked Gil. " Just a party."

" A drunken orgy," said the first someone else, in tones of considerable satisfaction.

" If I may say something . . ." said the chief electrician. " At Mr. Phimister's suggestion—at the President's suggestion, I—"

He was stuttering and his voice wasn't very clear at the best of times. Phimister took it up.

" I, too, had heard of this . . . entertainment," he said coldly. " In view of the nature of the thing—a blatant attack on the sanctity of the Sabbath, and not merely that, as I understand the matter, but an orgy which is a deliberate insult to Revival—I have taken certain steps . . ."

Ted wondered who else would be at the Blue Room, as well as Freddy. Gil ? No, Gil was here. Gil didn't quite fit either in the Gay Phase or in Revival, but apparently he had cast his lot with Revival.

At the Blue Room would be almost everybody of any importance who wasn't here, Ted decided. It was a natural dichotomy.

Revival was on the way up, with startling rapidity. The Gay Phase was on the way down, with equally startling rapidity. Apparently the Gaytimers couldn't quite believe they were being left behind so thoroughly, so quickly. Here was a powerful new Council militating against an orgy which, only two or three years ago, would have been just another party.

". . . and if someone at the back will kindly turn off the lights we'll see just how these people are spending their Sunday evening," Phimister said, with icy disapproval.

" Just a moment," said Gil sharply. It was like an icy douche to hear Gil use that tone, and Ted, who had been dreaming, came right up-to-date and realized what Phimister had been telling them.

Phimister had suggested to the electrician that the meeting should see what went on at the party. Tiny spy-eyes planted there were to be used to show the new Council, on the giant screen behind Phimister, exactly what was going on in the Blue Room. Phimister had told them that and nobody had raised any objection or made any protest, until Gil spoke.

" That's a filthy business," Gil said, reverting to his usual gentle tone, " spying without warning on a private party. It's immoral."

Everybody was looking at him, but Gil wasn't in the least selfconscious. He stood and waited. Ted started to get up to support him.

Martin spoke first, however. " We could only consent to this," he said, " on the basis that no retributive action will be taken no matter what we see. Does that satisfy you, Mr. Cordiner ? In effect, we are merely making an inspection."

" In effect, you are spying," Gil declared, with conviction but without heat.

" Perhaps there is something in what Mr. Cordiner says," the Rev. Johns observed. " I wonder if we should wait until—"

" Until," Phimister said sharply, " everyone is warned ? I merely suggest this so that we can see what we're up against. We are fighting evil—"

" With evil ?" Gil demanded. " I'm not going to argue. I never have believed in argument. I'm simply saying if you go ahead with this, I want no part of the Revival Council."

" In fighting evil," said Phimister, " we must sometimes—"

Gil walked out of the hall.

Ted wondered whether to follow him or not. He hesitated.

Martin stood up. And Martin was Ted's boss, so to speak. Ted waited. " I see Cordiner's point," Martin said, " but I think he greatly exaggerates its importance. He referred to the Blue Room affair as a private party. As I understand the matter, anyone who cares to go along can go. All we are doing is going there, as observers, a hundred of us instead of one. What's immoral about that ?"

" Naturally," Phimister took it up, " if we sent a messenger along to the Blue Room to warn the . . . the *persons* there that there was going to be an inspection, there would only be a respectable, sedate private gathering when we switched on the viewer—"

He stopped. Taking consent for granted, or unbearably impatient, the electrician, who had done a big job and wasn't going to have it wasted, switched on to put an end to the argument, someone at the back put out the hall lights—and the first person who came into focus at the Blue Room party was Robina Phimister.

After that there was no question of switching off again.

IV

No one at the dimmed-out Revival meeting knew what to say. Nobody said anything and nobody did anything for a long time. Everybody was watching the bright screen.

Ted had been attending parties like this one with Freddy until quite recently. Not for quite a while did he see anything to startle him at all. But he realized that many of the people round him had been leading sheltered, model lives for long enough to forget that they themselves had ever been as abandoned as this. And some, of course, had never been abandoned at all.

Abruptly he realized how different company put a different complexion on things. He found his face getting hot as he watched the screen, and was glad of the darkness.

There was no dancing going on when the first pictures appeared. There were three spy-eyes, apparently—one at each end of the Blue Room, a little above eye-level, and one about the middle, fairly high up, so that people seen from that viewpoint were clearly recognizable, but foreshortened. Distance was no object ; the electrician who was picking up sight and sound was switching at will from one viewpoint to another and adjusting magnification to fill the screen with whatever he wanted.

Robina wasn't doing anything reprehensible, but she was there, and she was wearing a dress which Phimister could not possibly know anything about. Before the Revivalists had recovered from the shock, Lila Johns appeared, laughing, with a glass in her hand.

And after that none of the watchers dared speak.

The wife of the chief electrician was in the arms of the husband of the woman on Phimister's left. She wasn't merely in his arms, she had obviously been there for a long time, intended to stay there, and liked it. Involved in a kissing game in one corner were daughters, cousins, husbands, wives, nephews and nieces of almost everyone watching at the Revival meeting. Suzette Norris, the black-haired dancer had about twenty spectators : she was doing a sinuous belly-dance to a gramophone record. Everyone else was drinking, necking or both.

Three years ago a party like that would have been considered slow. But what people think of a thing depends on the people not the thing, and Ted knew very well what the people round him were thinking.

The chief electrician, not unnaturally, turned the scanners back on his wife for another incredulous look. She was not merely being kissed, she was sitting on her Lothario's knee and kicking her legs up in delight. She was winding herself about him as if she were trying to win a prize for the closest possible contact, and kissing him as if drinking champagne.

Then, again rather incredulously, perhaps, the operator turned the scanners back on Suzette, and the magnification increased until she filled the screen. There was no doubt about it, Ted reflected uncomfortably—all those dances which had originated in warm countries back on Earth, in which a girl writhed her hips and made waving motions with her wrists bent, could mean only one thing.

Nevertheless, what was going on at the party, in general, was more harmless than Ted, rather on the side of the revellers, expected—until Freddy took a hand.

The operator picked her up as she emerged from the women's room. Alcoholically happy, she obviously intended to liven up the party. There was nobody with her, apparently ; Ted was surprised but gratified to see that she didn't automatically replace him with some other escort when he didn't happen to be available.

" Hold it," she shouted. " Hold it."

The music stopped and silence took over gradually. Freddy made a gesture, and abruptly all the lights went out.

There were squeals, scuffles, rustlings, semi-hysterical giggling and laughing. Still nobody in the Small Hall spoke, afraid of missing something.

When the lights came on again there were more shrieks and hasty readjustments of position and clothing. Freddy tried to climb on a table but was stopped by her tight skirt. She unfastened it, to loud cheers, and let it drop on the floor. In a couple of lithe movements she was on the table.

" No wallflowers at this party," she announced. Her forefinger stabbed the air, pointed at Robina Phimister, who blushed scarlet. Freddy's finger moved again. A tall, thin young man, finding all eyes on him blushed too.

Freddy pointed at Robina and the youth with her two index fingers, and then moved them together. As if on strings, Robina and the thin youth stumbled together, amid laughter.

" Kiss her," Freddy ordered. The young man gulped and did so. " Put your arm round her waist." He obeyed. Robina was selfconscious but game. " Take his other hand." She did so.

" Surely I don't have to tell you any more ?" said Freddy. " I will if you like."

They shook their heads quickly. Freddy made another gesture and the lights went out again.

" We've got to stop this !" Phimister shouted, his icy calm broken for once. " Put on those lights, I tell you !"

Nobody in the darkened Blue Room paid any attention, because though the people in the Small Hall could see and hear what went on in the Blue Room, there was no communication the other way.

The lights did come on again at last. Freddy was still standing on the table. Robina and her swain were flushed and breathless, half sitting, half lying on the floor. One of Robina's shoulderstraps hung loose over her arm, and her hair was dishevelled.

The camera swooped again on Suzette, who was dancing again, this time nude above the waist. Almost instantly the camera swung back as Robina screamed in protest. Her new friend was pouring a glass of whisky down inside her dress.

" Take it off," Freddy advised. " You don't want to catch cold, do you ? Help her to get it off, somebody."

This was too much for Phimister.

The whole Blue Room party was before the new Council.

It was a mad scene. Sitting in judgment in the ballroom where the church service had been held only a few hours since were the whole Council, a hundred strong. In the middle, surrounded, like human sacrifices in an arena, were the revellers, still in their party clothes, exactly as they had been when a detachment from the council meeting in the Small Hall, armed, froze the party in an instant, chipped it into so many nervous units, shovelled the whole lot up and dumped it on the half-cleared floor of the ballroom.

" You can't do this," a little fat man in evening dress shouted angrily.

" We've done it," said Martin drily.

Some of the revellers were frightened, some angry, but most were merely puzzled. The man who had been kissing the electrician's wife was one of the puzzled ones. Like the fat man in evening dress, he couldn't comprehend that a new force in social affairs had emerged in the last few hours. He knew about Revival, about a loose, ill-organized committee with a vague constitution and vaguer aims. He didn't realize that the

new Revival Council was not merely a fact but also a strong, confident, retributive body.

Suzette Norris was doing her best to brazen it out. They hadn't let her wrap herself up, and she made no attempt to cover herself. She stood defiantly with hands on hips, smiling when any member of the council caught her eye.

In contrast, Robina was terrified. She knew she had sinned. She knew retribution was at hand. She wished she were dead.

Freddy was calmly waiting to see what happened. If the members of the council stared at her, she stared right back at them.

"This is ridiculous," the little fat man said with decreasing assurance as the whispering around him subsided and he was the only one left protesting.

When his voice died away there was silence.

"You miserable sinners," said Phimister with biting contempt.

The protest broke out again—sterile and empty protest, however, for it presently collapsed, defeated, before the patient stare of Phimister and the Revival Council.

"You have chosen to break almost every commandment there is," said Phimister, "and would no doubt have broken all the rest, among you, if you had been left alone to do so. You—"

"So we are charged," said Freddy with irony as biting as his contempt, "not only with what we did, but with what we were going to do. This is a new conception of justice."

Such noise as there was stopped. The conflict crystallized. Each side had a leader.

And how just it was, Ted thought, that they should be Phimister, always a Revivalist, and Freddy, for ever and ever a Gaytimer. One didn't even have to hear what they said to understand the conflict—one merely had to look at them.

Phimister, black-coated, broad-shouldered, cold, disapproving. A man of stone. A man who stood for virtue, but not virtue which was going to bring sensual delight in heaven. *Virtue is its own reward.* That kind of virtue.

Freddy, beautiful, gleaming, vital and warm, her long, slim legs bare, her full breasts straining at the soft material of her bodice. A woman of the half-world. A girl who stood for vice and the pleasure in vice. *The sweetest fruit is forbidden fruit.*

" You are not charged with anything," said Phimister frigidly, " but what we saw with our own eyes."

" What you saw by spying," retorted Freddy. " By stealth, by prurience. By the high moral principles of a Peeping Tom. Your evidence is what you saw through a keyhole."

Her gaze swept the ranks of the Revival Council scornfully. It passed over Ted without stopping. He didn't know whether she was angry with him for being there among her enemies, for not doing anything to help her, or was merely pretending, as he had suggested, that they were nothing to each other.

" There's no suggestion," someone behind Phimister said, " of taking any—"

" Quiet !" Phimister snapped.

It was obvious that Phimister had no intention of letting the people before the Council know that no action would be taken against them until he had given them a good fright.

" Are you a new dictator, Phimister ?" Freddy demanded.

" There are no dictators," said Martin disapprovingly. " Neither here nor—"

" Then why are we here, before a new council which can't have any authority until someone gives it authority ? What right have you people to break up a private party and bring us here by force of arms ? If you are a dictator, Phimister, set up in the last couple of hours, give your orders and tell us who is to be shot. If you're not, I spit in your eye."

She had been turning the tables since she first spoke up to oppose Phimister.

" I'm the president of the new Revival Council," said Phimister. " But that isn't the point. My daughter—"

Freddy laughed ironically. " I suppose we took her to the Blue Room in chains ?"

" This is getting out of hand," said Martin. He was only stating the obvious.

" Very true," said Freddy. " I think it's gone on long enough. Too long."

" This is ridiculous !" said the little fat man. Freddy had given him back his confidence. He could speak again now.

" I think—" said the Rev. Drummond Smith Johns.

" Wouldn't it be better if—" said Martin.

The ex-revellers behind Freddy realized vaguely that while earlier on they had been promptly silenced when they attempted to protest, now was the time to confuse the issue. The noise in the hall swelled as if a volume-control knob had been slowly turned up.

The trial ended in complete confusion. As an admonition, a threat, a declaration, it might have been very successful if the bluff hadn't been called. Once Freddy stood up to Phimister, however, it soon became clear that only if a dictatorship had been set up, as Freddy suggested, could any action be taken against people who had merely been holding a rather reckless private party.

Nevertheless, the trial did serve as a warning. If nearly a hundred people could be hailed before another hundred people—involving a quarter of the total population of the ship—and made to give an account of themselves, things had changed, a new phase had been entered, and the Revival was very strong indeed.

The Blue Room orgy would be remembered as the last of its kind.

And, of course, the part of quite a few people in it would be remembered. Particularly four women.

Robina, Phimister's daughter, who would be watched like a dangerous criminal for the rest of her life.

Lila, not because she had played a major part but because she was the minister's daughter.

Suzette, who had shown herself to be without shame, without modesty, without decency.

Freddy, because both at the orgy and at the trial she had taken command and responsibility for the whole thing. Freddy because all the others might change, but one somehow knew that Freddy would never pretend to change. Freddy, because she represented everyone else at the party, because she had set herself up as an enemy of Revival.

V

Year 191

Ted reached P17 without seeing anyone, had one last cautious look round, opened a door, entered the room without switching on the light and shut the door.

When he turned, Freddy was in his arms. She found him unerringly in the dark from knowledge of his habits. She knew exactly how he turned after closing a door, exactly where he would be, how he would be holding his arms, where his lips would be.

She knew him so well that even before he spoke she read something of what he was going to say through contact with his body. She released herself and asked sharply : " What's wrong, Ted ?"

Ted switched on the light. Often when they met they never did switch on the light. There was always a danger that it would show under the door or through a ventilator, or even that someone was checking on the power supply.

" Everything's wrong, Freddy," he said. " We can't go on meeting like this."

She drew in her breath sharply.

" Sooner or later we're bound to be caught," Ted said. " And you don't want to spend forty-eight hours in the stocks as a fornicator, do you ?"

" If it were only that—"

" Yes. If it were only that, who would care ? But I'd never be allowed to teach again, in case I infected the children with my own corruption. And you—well, you're still Freddy Steel of the Blue Room orgy, and you can't afford to add anything to that."

" Ted," said Freddy bitterly, " how long is this madness going to go on ?"

Ted shrugged. " Not being a prophet, I can't tell you. Anyway, Freddy, I'm still not convinced that it's all madness."

" Not madness ? Why—"

" Oh, I admit morality's being overdone. There isn't much doubt that Revival is going a little too far in many ways."

" In *every* way," Freddy exclaimed. " Think of it—no alcohol for human consumption, any lie punishable, attendance at church compulsory, and the stocks for me if I wore last year's clothes . . . Stocks, a punishment from ancient history, at a junction of two main avenues, as if this were seventeenth century England—"

" So it is, in a way. We may be on a huge spaceship in the middle of a four-hundred-year trip to a new world, Freddy, but Phimister is another Cromwell and Revival is Puritanism reincarnated."

It was the truth. Revival had been a purely religious renaissance at first. Perhaps one of the things which had turned it slightly was the fact that the Rev. Johns, so kindly, modest, and matter-of-fact, would never be a leader in any extremist movement. So the movement carried on without him—or at least, by-passing him and what he stood for.

Gradually Revival had become Puritan rather than religious, a strict, severe, super-moral way of life with religion merely an adjunct.

It was overdoing morality, as Ted said, to spy on people to make sure no law was broken, to ostracize anyone who told a lie or took the name of the Lord in vain or spoke obscenely, to throw in the stocks anyone taken in adultery, to publish all discovered and proved sins so that everyone knew every sinner and his sin, for all time.

Yet on the other hand, people who didn't do these things were safe. Ted might have been a little lax in his own behaviour at times, but he didn't approve of swearing, lying, obscenity, blasphemy, and all the other things which were punished in a way they had never been before.

" There's too much stress on rectitude," Ted remarked, " and there used to be too little. But to come back to the point, Freddy—I don't think the game's worth the candle any more."

" *You* don't think !" exclaimed Freddy. " What about me?"

" Well, we each have to decide for ourselves, Freddy."

" I don't get a chance, apparently. You decide for me."

" Only for myself."

" That's right. You thought only of yourself, didn't you?"

" As a matter of fact," said Ted quietly, " I've delayed this moment as long as possible because I was thinking of you."

She flared up at that. " You think you're the only man on the ship ? You think I couldn't have anyone I liked ?"

" Once you could, Freddy. Not now."

She threw herself at him, claws unsheathed. He spun her round pinioning her arms. She tried to bite his hands, his wrists.

" This doesn't prove anything, Freddy," he panted.

She was beyond reason. She kicked and struggled until she was weak with her efforts and Ted was in little better state.

At last he released her. She threw herself on the bed, leaning back on her elbows and looking at him broodingly. She was dressed in the current fashion, the fashion of Revival. Instead of the short, crisp, frivolous frocks which had characterised the Gay Phase, she wore a dark, sober dress buttoned to her neck and reaching below her knees. Although unattractive in itself, on Freddy it was very attractive indeed. However Ted sometimes sighed for the gay Freddy, in light, bright colours instead of the drab hues of Revival, a frankly

painted Freddy, a Freddy showing her magnificent legs and her smooth, creamy arms and shoulders.

Soon after the Blue Room Orgy he and Freddy had quarrelled, by agreement, and built up a facade of indifference to each other. Since then they had been civil to each other in public, no more, and had met only in secret, in unoccupied rooms like the one in P17. They had to be more and more careful as time went on, not only because the check on public morals became more and more stringent, but also because the consequences of discovery kept getting more serious.

After all, Ted had thought time and again during those months when they kept up the furtive, ultra-cautious meetings, Freddy had been true to him in the Gay Phase, when she could have had anyone she liked ; it was only fair that he should stick to her now. Besides, she wasn't getting any younger. True, she was only thirty-five and as beautiful as ever. But she was no longer a young girl, able to start her life anew if necessary.

" So this is the end ?" she said bitterly. " Quarrelling—fighting—afraid—and no mention of the one way we could stay together."

" Marriage ?" said Ted. " Would you marry me, Freddy ?"

" The way you put it shows you hope I won't."

" No, I thought *you* didn't want it. That's why I—"

" That's right, make up my mind for me—again."

" Will you marry me, Freddy ?"

She continued to stare resentfully at him for about half a minute. Then as his smile broadened, she began to mirror it.

" No, I never did want you to marry me, Ted," she said. " I've got one phobia—fear of being tied to one man. Particularly now, when the only way to get away from him is death."

Divorce of course, had become practically impossible under Revival.

She smiled. " Last time," she said, and held out her arms.

It was very sweet. Freddy cried, the only time Ted had ever known her to cry. Ted felt like crying, too. But through it all he was aware that this was uncharacteristic, misleading : it was only because it was the last time that it was so sweet, so tenderly delightful.

The *Arc-en-ciel* was in free fall, had been in free fall for nearly two centuries, and would be in free fall for another two centuries. Most of the maintenance which had to be done

could be regarded as housekeeping. The men who had planned the ship had seen to that.

Nearer Christmas—*the* Christmas—a lot of people would have to train themselves and be trained for the jobs which would exist again then. While the ship was merely in free fall, it hardly had to be checked at all, for every part of it and everything in it was going in the same direction, without the slightest strain on it. It wouldn't have mattered if the ship had merely been tied together with string. But when the time approached when the *Arc-en-ciel* would have to be put in orbit round a planet, problems which hadn't existed for four centuries would exist again, and strains which hadn't existed for the same time would have to be allowed for again.

Men and women would have to learn once more about stresses and strains and gravity, problems which had not concerned their ancestors for quite a few generations back. And there would be many other subjects—spatial mathematics, some aspects of astronomy, physiology, chemistry and physics—which would require experts before the tenders from the *Arc-en-ciel* could touch down safely on Lorraine.

Then, the landing over, the task of colonizing Lorraine would need another set of experts. The subjects which would be important then were agriculture, market gardening, dairy farming, engineering, architecture, surveying, town planning . .

That was the importance of Ted Benzil's job.

From some points of view the most important job on the ship was the rector's—teaching in general. It was the job of the teachers to see that generation passed on to generation what must be passed on, what couldn't be trusted to the books alone. Not learning, but how to learn.

There was no money on the *Arc-en-ciel.* People didn't do things for the money they would bring, but for the satisfaction of doing them and the prestige attached to them.

Teaching was an important job with a lot of prestige attached to it. Since teachers constructed the link between generation and generation, they started in their job early and did it all their lives.

There were the rector, the deputy head and the class and subject teachers. The rector appointed everybody on his staff ; he could have all the advice he wanted, but no one could dictate to him. The deputy head was appointed from among the class and subject teachers, and almost invariably became the rector in due course.

Thus Dr. Eric Martin had been class teacher, deputy head and finally rector. Ted had been a class teacher and still was, but he was also the deputy head now.

Every rector naturally imposed his personality on his school to a certain extent. The school under Eric Martin was a very different thing from what it had been under Benjamin Wilson, the previous rector. And it would be different again, under Edward Benzil. There was not only the difference for which the rector himself was responsible, there was also the difference due to the times. Benjamin Wilson had seen the Dark Age turn to Know-More—had helped to turn it. Martin, though he had only been rector for a short time, had guided the children on the ship through the Gay Phase and part of Revival.

Ted wouldn't be rector until after Revival, probably. He had often wondered what was in store for him. Something very different from Revival, certainly. And something else as different again.

Part of the rector's great responsibility—as Ted saw it, at any rate—was to cut down to reasonable proportions the effect of the periodic trends. Thus Wilson's children, who had been brought through the Dark Age, when all learning and talent were suspect, were capable of climbing to Know-More. The children of Know-More had been adaptable enough to live and thrive in the Gay Phase. And the children who had been at school in the Gay Phase had not been unfitted for Revival.

You can't stop the pendulum swinging, Ted had told Freddy once. *Every swing means a swing the other way.*

Some rectors had tried (mistakenly, Ted thought) to stop the pendulum swinging. It was natural enough that Jonathan Andrews, seeing the Golden Age dissolving into the Dark Age, should try to stop the change. It was even more natural that he had failed.

No, the rectors and teachers had to pay lip-service to the trends, the inevitable and inevitably extremist trends that changed the face of life itself on the *Arc-en-ciel* every five to fifteen years, but they shouldn't pay much more than that. In the turmoil of trends, there were at least two classes who should be neutral—the teachers and the chroniclers. Ted and Gil both believed that.

Martin and Ted had to be on the Revival Council, of course —that went without saying. But sometimes, though Ted liked and respected the rector, though there was no question of

jealousy—sometimes Ted wondered if Martin was neutral enough.

Freddy and Ted passed within two yards of each other and merely nodded. There was nothing new in that. That was how they had been treating each other, in public, for months. The only difference was that this time they meant it.

Freddy went quite openly to Gil's room, tapped on the door and went in.

" Hallo, Freddy," said Gil, with his patient smile, and no hint of the surprise he must be feeling at Freddy's visit. There had been no warning.

" I'll speak plainly, Gil," said Freddy, leaning back against the door, arms behind her, looking like a memory of the Gay Phase. "I don't think much of Revival and I don't believe you do either. Right ?"

" I don't talk about Revival," said Gil, smiling again.

" Very wise, I suppose. But you walked out of the Revival Council once, and you've never been back," said Freddy tartly.

" True."

" Even apart from that, I'd know you didn't think much of Revival. Because of something you said long, long ago. Something I knew you meant. Something I remembered."

" What was that ?"

" You said you could force people to be bad, but not to be good. It struck me that believing that, you couldn't think much of Revival."

Gil turned his calm, patient gaze on her. " I underestimated you, Freddy," he said.

" Well, that gives us one thing in common, a dislike of Revival," said Freddy.

" Only we dislike it for very different reasons. I because I don't believe you can force people to be good. You because you would like to force people to be bad."

It was a harsh judgment for Gil to make of anyone. But it was justified nevertheless. " I came to give you something, if you'll have it," said Freddy abruptly.

" What ?"

" Me."

" No." Gil wasn't surprised. On the contrary, he now seemed to understand what hadn't been clear before. " Go back to Ted and marry him, Freddy. You won't do it, of course, but it's what you should do. Otherwise . . ."

" Otherwise what ?"

" You'll be a Revival martyr," said Gil simply.

Freddy shuddered at the simple frankness of it.

" I don't see how you can avoid it," Gil went on, " now that Ted's broken with you."

" How do you know that Ted and I—"

Gil shrugged. Feddy remembered that Gil was brilliant—remembered it, for he never showed off, so that one was inclined to forget his intelligence. He had not been deceived, apparently, by the manoeuvres of Ted and herself.

" Ted was careful," said Gil. " You won't be. You'll do something which, added to the Blue Room Orgy episode, will mean . . ."

He shrugged again.

" You don't mean Revival will ever come to the stage of . . . execution ?" Freddy demanded.

" What else ? The Puritans executed people."

Freddy pushed herself away from the door and strode about the little cabin, frowning. " I think you're going round the bend, Gil."

" Oh, no," said Gil, gently. " Not me."

She had given up the idea which had brought her to Gil's room. When he said no, he meant it.

" But how can it be right to kill—how can people in a movement like Revival justify killing ?"

" The Puritans executed people," Gil repeated. " They found no difficulty in justifying it. You execute people for the good of the community. For the good of their souls. For any reason you like, only you must find a phrase which suggests the execution has been personally ratified by God. It's quite easy."

" That sounds more like Ted than you."

Gil smiled. " I don't mind. Ted will live through Revival and be the next rector. He'll be one of the best rectors we ever had."

" But I . . . you really mean what you're saying about my being a martyr ?"

" Unless you change."

" I can't change."

Gil shrugged his shoulders again and smiled.

Freddy left him rather abruptly and not at all as she had intended. She was frightened by his warning, chiefly because the way he gave it showed it was quite unemotional.

He didn't seem to *care*.

When she came to think of it, walking out of that meeting as Gil had done, though it sounded fine and high-principled and noble, was not the sort of thing an ordinary man would do. Ted hadn't done it. Nobody else had done it.

Perhaps Gil was *too* high-principled. Too noble. Too far above the ordinary people. Too impartial.

She left the room rather precipitately, and only pulled herself together when she almost ran into a girl at the end of the passage.

Robina Phimister. Freddy became herself in a flash. She mustn't let the younger generation think she was slipping.

When Freddy hurried past Robina she wasn't particularly pleased with herself, or proud of herself, or happy.

But she was still the loveliest, smartest, most dashing woman on the ship. And if she didn't see why she should be envied, Robina did. Robina didn't see how she could be anything but an object of envy.

Robina had been jealous of many things and people in her short life. It always seemed that what everyone else had was better than what she had, and everybody else's life always seemed a better life than hers.

There was a certain amount of truth in this. Particularly in the case of her friend Lila there was a bitter contrast. Lila was prettier, there was no doubt of that. Even Robina had almost always admitted it. But the main contrast lay in the fact that Lila had been utterly free all her life—even after that Blue Room Orgy that still made Robina shudder when she thought of its consequences—while Robina had been checked, restricted, supervised and repressed, most particularly after the Blue Room Orgy.

But Lila wasn't the only person Robina habitually envied, not by a long chalk. Lila alternated with Freddy Steel as Robina's Person I Should Most Like To Be.

Robina might have hated Freddy. Freddy had been responsible for much of the trouble which had arisen out of the Blue Room Affair. Instead she admired her for the way she had taken the lead at the party and at the trial, the way she always looked, the way she always seemed to feel, her taste, her intelligence, her freedom, the fact that so many men desired her, everything about her . . .

Freddy coming from Gil's room was another matter.

Robina had been in love with Gil for a long time, though she had scarcely ever spoken to him. She sat in church where she could watch him, went to meetings which he might attend, and stood about where she might see him—always very unobtrusively so that he wouldn't see her.

But Freddy coming from Gil's room was too much. A switch in Robina's mind which had always been at " maybe " or " no " slammed over to " yes," and Robina dashed along the corridor, rapped sharply on Gil's door, and went in.

She was so jealous of Freddy that her momentum was tremendous. In less than a minute she was telling Gil breathlessly how much she loved him.

VI

The school was a self-contained unit above the ballroom. It had a hall off which all the other doors opened—six classrooms, a music-room, a library and three private rooms, one for Martin, one for Ted, and one for the other teachers. When other accomodation was needed—a large hall, theatre or gymnasium—the pupils had to march to a suitable hall elsewhere in the ship.

Martin was waiting for Ted when he arrived in the morning. " Sorry, Mr. Benzil," he said. " I'll have to leave you in charge today. And there's a Council committee coming to inspect the school library."

Ted didn't have to ask which Council. It could only be the Revival Council.

" Coming to inspect the school library ? What do you mean, rector ? Seeing how the books are arranged or if they're in good condition, or what ?"

" I don't know. There was a meeting on the subject, but I couldn't go, and it was too late to get you to take my place. I know that this same committee had been inspecting the main library for a week. This is part of the same inspection."

Ted was frowning. Martin noticed it and put a hand lightly on his shoulder. " You're still not too sure of the Council and the President, are you, Mr. Benzil ?"

Again, he didn't have to say which Council or which President. Not now.

" I do think they've been casting their net rather wide," Ted remarked. " This, for example—the school is entirely

your affair, rector. Even the inspectors have to ask your permission before they can come through that door."

Martin shrugged and smiled, clearly not inclined to exert his authority. " The truth is," he said, " you're not a hundred per cent behind Revival, Mr. Benzil, and I am."

Ted felt like saying : " You're a hermit, Martin. You don't go around much, and when you do, most of the time your eyes are shut. Otherwise you'd realize that Revival isn't quite perfect."

He didn't, however, and Martin left him to deal with the problems of the school for the day. Martin had been doing that a lot lately, concerning himself more and more with paperwork and less and less with teaching or the actual running of the school.

The committee, Phimister and eleven other members of the Council arrived just after the children. Ted left his class in Marge Smith's charge and attended to the committee.

" Dr. Martin hasn't told me much about your visit," he said, shaking hands with Phimister, " so I suppose all I can do is show you the library and leave you to it."

" That will suit us excellently," said Phimister in his usual frigid way. He didn't mean to be unfriendly. He just couldn't help it.

He was the same cold, precise, disapproving character he had always been. That was one thing he and Martin had in common, Ted reflected—they disapproved of such a lot. Martin, true, approved of quite a few things. All the same, between them Martin and Phimister could always muster enough disapproval for five ordinary people.

Ted left them in the library and went back to his class. Outside the door, however, he paused. What *were* they doing in the library ? Were they going to report that certain books were unsuitable, and should be removed ?

Very likely. And if so, Ted was going to oppose them strongly. He didn't approve of castrating literature, or refusing to let children read the complete *Gulliver's Travels* because it mentioned excretion and urination, or replacing the bloodthirsty tales they loved with moralistic, milk-and-water fables.

It occurred to him that if this committee had been operating in the main library for a week, some idea of their ends and

means might be gained there. He left his class in Marge's charge and went to the library.

The librarian wasn't there, but Gil was, writing his reports.

It had been decided long ago that reports, both the news and the history of the ship, should be written by independent people, men and women who had no other job. These people were called chroniclers.

When anything happened, Gil and his colleagues wrote two reports of it. One, a racy detailed account, went into the journal *Yesterday*, the ship's newspaper, printed six days a week and available to everybody. *Yesterday* was filed, of course. In addition, however, the chroniclers wrote more critical reports, trying to probe the significance of the events involved, for *Chroniclers*, the ship's official history.

Ted sat down opposite Gil. "Say, Gil," he said. "I've got a library committee along investigating the school's collection. Apparently they've been here already. Do you know what's going on?"

Gil nodded. "I've been told not to report on it for *Yesterday*," he said.

Ted stared at him. "You've been what? That's—"

Gil smiled. "Exactly. Suppression of the truth. But that's not at all surprising, really, when you know what the report which has been suppressed would be. Here's my report for the *Chronicles*."

Ted took the sheet covered with Gil's tiny, neat handwriting and read :

> October 17, 191—the Revivalist's first overt fanaticism was the censorship of all books. Last Monday *A Midsummer Night's Dream* lost 79 lines, *Hamlet* 61, and *Othello* 94. Some 21,000 words were delated from *Grapes of Wrath* and *Moll Flanders* appears to have disappeared entirely. A hitherto unmentioned marriage takes place in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Joyce's *Ulysses* still exists, but it is now a relatively slim volume—little more than a short story. Flaubert, Lawrence Sterne, de Gautier, Rabelias (of course !), Maugham, Joyce, Defoe, Hemingway and Swift are among the Terran authors who most particularly . . .

Ted looked up angrily. "The fools !" he exclaimed. "The bloody fools !"

"Read on," said Gil.

Ted dropped his eyes to the next paragraph :

This might have passed almost without comment in Revival. There would certainly have been no need to try to conceal what was being done . . .

" Are they mad ?" Ted exclaimed. " How can they hope to conceal—"

" Read the next bit."

While they were at it, however, the so-called library committee decided that as well as improving literature by deleting anything in it which they didn't like, they might as well improve history in the same way. They started by censoring the issues of *Yesterday* covering the Gay Phase . . .

" Good God !" Ted breathed. " Gil—*you* haven't gone mad, have you ?"

Gil waved his arm at the shelves. " Look for yourself. The offending passages have simply been snipped from the micro-films, which have been so carefully spliced that only a very close examination shows where a section has been deleted."

" But what's been taken out ?"

" Everything offensive. All the grim details. The facts are left, generally, but anything the Revivalists thought shouldn't have been mentioned—isn't mentioned any more. Generally the censorship is mere deletion, but sometimes when the thing itself is nasty enough, the facts are changed slightly. And there's usually a moral."

" You mean—history reads as if nobody ever did anything evil ?"

" Not at all. History reads as if crime never paid, and that retribution always follows wrong-doing. Plenty of crimes, without the grim detail to give people ideas, and always the vengeance of the Lord close behind, like Time's winged chariot . . . Of course, this modern Burning of the Books isn't final, yet. The master copies of all the books exist in bond, in the master stores. But I've no doubt that later—"

" We've got to stop this, Gil. Don't they realize what they're doing ? Do they think a lie can ever be better than the truth ?"

" Obviously," said Gil gently, " they do."

" But—"

" No, that's wrong. They have a phrase—' the essential truth.' Everything they've edited is *essentially* true. A criminal transgresses—he dies. The fact that he dies fifty

years later is inessential truth. According to the records now, he dies for his crime—immediately."

"I don't know which is worse," said Ted angrily. "The rape of literature or the rape of truth. Maybe history doesn't matter. But don't they see that our microfilm copies may be the last record of Shakespeare, Defoe, Swift in existence? Don't they understand what a crime it is to murder them?"

"That must be a rhetorical question," Gil murmured, "for you know the answer. Another illustration of how their minds are working—look up *Arc-en-ciel.* Instead of finding that that's French for 'rainbow,' with a description of a rainbow and some colour pictures to illustrate the phenomenon, you find that '*Arc-en-ciel*' means 'Way to Heaven.' We're the chosen, Ted. We're God's children. If Earth did die, it was because Earth was wicked. We lived because we aren't wicked."

"But they're always telling us how wicked we all are!"

"Relative, Ted. The wicked are destroyed. God's vengeance is swift. If you're not destroyed, you're not wicked. Simple."

"Don't you care about this?"

"I think the tone of my story has made my sympathies clear. Strictly I shouldn't have written it that way. I should have been impartial. But since it isn't really for the *Chronicles* anyway but only for Phimister—"

He stopped at Ted's expression and explained patiently: "I've been told not to comment on this in *Yesterday.* The offensive matter which has been deleted is to be quietly forgotten. It never existed. Phimister, our worthy moral leader, didn't mention the *Chronicles*, but naturally I'm not supposed to write anything like this. When it's discovered, it'll be deleted like the rest."

"Then why write it?"

"In much the same spirit as I once walked out of a Revival meeting."

Ted gazed steadily at him. That was like Gil, His protests were liable to be like that—strong, in a way, but empty. He would make it clear what he thought, but he wouldn't fight.

Ted was going to fight. This time Revival had gone too far.

Martin didn't explode as Ted had thought he would. He listened with interest rather than the expected feeling of outrage, and said at the end:

"What a grand conception! You don't understand, Mr.

Benzil. I realize how you feel about bowdlerizing Shakespeare, but what a grand idea it is to change history to what it should have been ! No, I wasn't concerned in this, but I think a remark I dropped to Mr. Phimister must have given him the idea—"

" You mean you condone this ?" Ted asked incredulously.

" Don't you see, Mr. Benzil—this is the whole essence of Revival !" said Martin enthusiastically. " Revival is based on the theory—which may, of course, be mistaken—that moral virtue may be achieved by assuming it. Phimister wouldn't agree with that statement. You will, I think."

" Yes, but—"

" Then you must give the idea a chance. It has never been done. You pretend that everyone is virtuous, and soon everyone is. That's the theory, and you can see it already operating. But it's impossible to achieve perfection so long as people have access to history, and to the literature of the past. They see—"

" Either I am mad," said Ted, " or everyone else is."

Martin smiled. " I leave it to you to decide which is more likely."

Ted went to Johns. Johns saw his point of view, and went some way toward agreeing with it.

" But you're exaggerating, Ted," he said. " Frankly, I don't think it's as serious as you make out that some of the . . . questionable passages in literature have been removed. I never liked them much anyway."

" Don't you see," Ted almost pleaded, " that no good can ever come of denying the truth ? And that is what this is—denying the truth in human relations and truth in history."

" Oh, I agree that this is going a little too far. But I don't see what can be done—"

Ted swore and went back to Gil, still patiently finishing and polishing his report. Gil looked up and smiled.

" You seem to have discovered what I discovered when I tried to interest people in this," he said. " Nobody sees what the fuss is about."

" But if you and I do," Ted exclaimed, " others must feel the same about it, surely ?"

Gil shook his head. " I've had a little longer to think abou t it than you, Ted. This is another case of what can be done in a closed world. This isn't the first Burning of the Books, for one reason or another, but this is the first time the despoilers

could know they had done something final, that what they had destroyed could never be restored. It gives them a pleasant feeling of power—they really feel they have torn out something evil and trampled on it."

"But it's madness to destroy a few evidences of evil in the hope that it will destroy evil."

"Not at all," said Gil mildly.

Ted jumped. "You too ?"

"I don't believe it should be done. But it's not madness, Ted. Bring people up in an atmosphere of realism, knowing all there is to be known about sex and crime and intrigue and violence, and their behaviour will echo it. I don't mean they'll be sadists, perverts, criminals and all the rest of it, but the chances are they'll be as lax morally as they believe everyone else is. On the other hand, if you set up the myth that everyone else is highly moral, and that crime and even evil thoughts are rare, you'll get a society which at least *looks* pious and virtuous. Isn't that so ?"

Ted gazed at him and recognized the truth of what Gil was saying. Four years ago Lila Johns, then fifteen, had offered herself to him quite innocently, thinking the fact that she liked him was more than enough justification for sleeping with him. That had been in the Gay Phase, when the fact that you liked anybody *was* more than enough justification for sleeping with him or her. Lila's offer had been as innocent *then* as a photograph of a three-month-old baby with no clothes on. *Now* if Lila merely showed her pretty legs in public it would be a moral crime more severe than becoming his mistress four years ago would have been.

What Gil said could be taken further : a society which prized virtue highly, in which there was no evidence of vice, had a chance of becoming in the end as virtuous as it pretended to be. It was a society of good example, all the time and in every way.

"But the price is too high !" Ted exclaimed. "It's surrendering freedom, truth, justice and artistic integrity in the hope of producing—"

"*I* know all that," said Gil, waving the paper he had been writing. "I've been saying all that, for the *Chronicles*. But if we can only find about twenty people who think as we do, what's going to happen ?"

Ted looked round the library wonderingly, with bitterness and anger and helplessness, and saw it, in imagination, despoiled, ruined, falsified, by people who believed that cold virtue was better than art, truth, honesty and warmth.

VII

Year 192

On January 1, 192, the Judgment Council met for the first time.

It was regrettable, but punishment was necessary to keep daily life in the *Arc-en-ciel* (" Way to Heaven ") virtuous and godly. Phimister said so, Martin said so (from his highly theoretical plane), and all the other leading Revivalists said so.

When it had merely been a matter of sending people to Coventry, JC hadn't been needed. JC, however, arrived complete with power to inflict any punishment " as necessary," up to and including execution.

" Remember what I told you, Freddy ?" Gil asked her half-seriously when he met her one day. " You don't *want* to be the first martyr, do you ?"

Freddy pretended he hadn't said anything.

She hated Revival with a hate that crawled in her guts. It represented everything she loathed and permitted virtually nothing she could enjoy. Revival had taken Ted from her, and she couldn't get him back or find anyone else to take his place. She was choosy, after all, and people were scared. Only about a dozen men on the ship could have taken Ted's place in her affections, and none of them would. Gil and a couple of others really didn't want to, the rest were scared.

If she had been younger, she might have been able to wait for Revival to die. But she was thirty-six. Revival might not last for ever, but it would outlast her attractiveness.

Once she said : " Look, Ted. Everybody knows there's nothing between us now. It would be safe—"

Already Ted was shaking his head.

" Don't you miss me at all ?" she asked. She could control her voice, but not her tears. They welled up and ran down her cheeks. She wouldn't sob. With an enormous effort she kept her breathing steady so that no sobs could escape.

" Of course I miss you. I've been missing you for months and I'm only just beginning to get over it. I'm not going to start over again."

Ted spoke more harshly than he had ever spoken to anyone except Freddy, once before.

" You never asked me to marry you, except that one time, grudgingly," said Freddy.

" I'm not like some men," Ted retorted, " who seem able to propose a dozen times to the same girl, or two or three different girls. It takes me a long time to work up to proposing to a girl, and when I have, I expect the thing to be considered seriously, and answered once and for all. But since it's you, Freddy—since I miss you, since it's the only way we can be together, since you still want me—will you marry me ?"

There was a long silence while they stood like two robots who had their power cut off.

Then at last Freddy sighed and said : " No, I still don't want you that way, Ted. Maybe you're right and I'm a Gaytimer through and through—I want you as a lover, not as a husband. If we were held together by anything but just love, half the pleasure would be gone."

They were in a reading-room off the library, as private as anywhere was. She threw back her head and put her hand to her throat, her purpose obvious.

" Don't be a fool," he said quickly. " It would be insane to start again—to start a series of last times, each more binding than the one before. If you can't marry me, Freddy, find someone you can marry—or live alone and learn to like it."

Two days after that Freddy spent the night in the stocks.

The details were unimportant. Freddy misjudged the man concerned. Instead of being delighted at her advances, as most men would have been six years since, he reported her to JC and automatically she was sentenced to a night in the stocks followed by a week's Silence.

Being imprisoned in the stocks was rather different from the same punishment in Puritan England. The stocks were the same—holes for wrists and ankles, a lock, a hard seat—but in these days of civilization and culture and high morality there was no question of people throwing rubbish at the victim. No, people merely came along and gazed, perhaps looking sorrowful, perhaps laughing, perhaps merely looking curious and glad not to be in the stocks themselves.

Everybody went along and looked at Freddy, one way or another. It was such an incredible idea, Freddy Steel being locked in the stocks all night, that there was only one notable defection, one person who was able to resist the temptation to go along and gloat or grin or at least see how the fashionable Freddy Steel looked in the stocks.

That person was Gil.

Ted went, several times during the night, in case Freddy wanted to ask or say something, and so that she would see at least one person whom she knew was friendly. The first time she refused to acknowledge his existence. The second time she swore at him, but that might have been because there were others about at the time. The third time she cried, and he hurried away in case anyone else saw her like that, which he knew she would hate. The fourth time was in the still of the night, and Ted stopped for a few words.

" Don't dare speak to me," said Freddy bitterly. " If you're caught it's the same for you, remember."

" If it weren't for the school," said Ted, " I'd *be* caught, in the hope that people could see the injustice of punishing anyone for a friendly word."

Freddy sniffed. It might have been from disbelief, or because she was on the way to crying again.

" Frankly," Ted remarked, " I'm not sure you don't deserve to be in the stocks, Freddy. And me too. The trouble is, so long as these Revivalists have some justice on their side, they get away with things like this. But if someone was put in the stocks for merely speaking to you—"

Freddy burst into tears again.

" Revival must be a sad business for you, Freddy," Ted said. " I never knew you to cry before, but now it's becoming almost a habit. Here, since you can't dry your tears, I'll do it."

He wiped her face with his handkerchief.

" I hate *everybody*," she sobbed.

" I suppose that's natural."

" Including you for putting me here, and not being here with me."

" That's natural, too."

She called him a dirty name. He went on wiping her face.

There was a JC announcement when Freddy was sentenced that while the special death penalty of Revival had never been imposed, sinners shouldn't go on relying on it.

" The death penalty will only be imposed when it is felt the person concerned has failed to be influenced by good example, and is himself a bad example making evil thoughts or desires inevitable in others," the announcement stated.

" That could be made fit to you," Ted warned Freddy, while she was still in Silence and he shouldn't have been speaking to her at all.

The next stocks victim was Lila Johns, for " irreverence, profanity and blasphemy."

" This is the second act of madness," Ted said to Gil, the only person left he could safely talk to. It wasn't safe to talk to Freddy any more. " The censorship, then this—what next?"

" Is it madness ?" asked Gil cautiously. " What did she say ?"

" I don't know. But I'm prepared to swear, knowing Lila, she could only have spoken freely, not foully. She couldn't possibly have said anything really bad. She isn't capable of it."

Gil's report on the censorship of literature and history was still untouched in the *Chronicles*. Perhaps no one had read it. Certainly for anything so recent it was so natural to look up *Yesterday* and not the *Chronicles* that that was perfectly possible. Ted's various protests had come to nothing. He was treated with an easy forbearance which he found frustrating, forbearance being uncharacteristic of Revival and only applied in his case, apparently, because he was regarded with favour by all the leaders of Revival. He felt like a hypocrite. He *was* a hypocrite, still a member of the Revival Council committee although he was coming to hate Revival almost as much as Freddy did, and on the best of terms with Martin, Johns and even Phimister. Yet it wasn't in him to be boorish simply because he thought differently from people.

Anyway, Lila spent a night in the stocks. Perhaps Johns refused to say anything in case it seemed he expected special treatment for his daughter. Perhaps it was a sort of test case, to show that even Lila Johns could and would be punished for no more than speaking. Perhaps she asked for it, daring JC to punish her.

They didn't impose a week's Silence afterwards, as they had on Freddy, but otherwise it was the same. Everybody came, in a constant procession past the stocks, where Lila sat staring grimly in front of her, her chin set firmly.

There wasn't much laughing this time. Lila had never pretended to be somebody, or done anyone a bad turn, or got herself disliked. And even people who had meant to laugh, friends of hers who had decided to treat the affair as a joke, suddenly realized when they saw her that this was no joke, and that Lila had enough to bear without their adding to it.

Others who thought she deserved much worse than she was getting, and came along to give her some of it, saw the determination and courage in every line of her and walked quietly past without speaking.

Robina said : " I don't care what happens to me, Lila, I'm going to speak to you all the same."

Since she didn't really have anything to say and was very melodramatic about saying it, Lila would rather she hadn't bothered. It was easier to sit still and be resolute if nobody bothered her. Ted realized that when he came along, and didn't distract her.

He came six times during the night, however, when there was hardly anyone about, and talked to her.

" I never realized the night was so long," Lila murmured wistfully the first time.

" It can't be only four o'clock !" she exclaimed the second time.

The third time she was sleeping, despite the discomfort of her position, and he didn't waken her.

" Is this still the same night ?" she asked incredulously, the fourth time.

The fifth time she was sleeping again.

The last time, she had been thinking, apparently. " You must have stayed up all night," she said, " just to come and help me."

Ted didn't deny it. Instead, he leaned forward and kissed her. " Isn't that utterly vile ?" he said. " To kiss a girl when she's held so that she can't do anything about it."

There was a pause. Then : " Do it again, if you mean it," Lila whispered. " Well . . . do it again, anyway."

There was the censorship, then Lila's night in the stocks, then Ted's removal from the school.

When it came it was utterly unexpected, for Ted had spoken his mind often enough before, with no effect. However, after a speech before the whole Council against the palimpsest, he found himself being asked to resign from his position at the school. He wasn't asked to stand down from the Council committee, curiously enough.

" Some of us feel," Martin told him sympathetically, " that believing what you do you shouldn't be allowed to pass on your attitude to the children. We hope your attitude will change, of course, and if it ever does we'll be only too glad to restore you

to your former position—myself most particularly, Mr. Benzil. As for your membership of the Council committee—this isn't a dictatorship, and we feel you should remain on the committee and have an opportunity of airing your views."

" Thanks very much," said Ted.

There were still good things about Revival, and he wasn't blind to them. Nevertheless he was looking for every tiny sign of the next phase, wondering what it would be and thinking the sooner it came along to reduce the extremes of Revival the better.

He had seen no sign of it yet.

Ted had never realized quite how he felt about his job until he didn't have it any more. He found himself seriously considering doing all he would have to do to get it back. But the thought of all he would have to do and say and promise prevented him from actually doing it.

The fourth thing was the case of Gil and Robina.

Ultimately it was of less importance than the censorship, but it was the climax of Revival and made the names of Gil and Robina proverbial.

Phimister and a friend, calling on Gil with another appeal to join Revival, found Robina with him. She and Gil were—at least in the opinion of Phimister and his friend—only half dressed. And they drew at once what they regarded as the only possible conclusion.

Gil shook his head patiently. " We're not lovers and never have been," he declared.

But in subsequent interrogation Robina confused the issue by declaring defiantly that she loved Gil and had loved him for a long time.

Phimister, who gave no sign of emotion throughout the whole affair—in public, at any rate—remembered how seldom recently he had been able to find Robina, and how often he had wondered what new interest was occupying her. Gil, interrogated, admitted frankly that Robina had been spending a lot of time in his company, alone with him in his room.

Gil admitted everything except liaison, which he patiently denied over and over again.

Robina admitted everything and didn't seem very sure about liaison. It seemed to occur only to Ted Benzil that, raised as she had been and in such an epoch, she possibly had no very clear idea of what she was supposed to have done. She

admitted happily that Gil had kissed her, and was very vague about anything else.

" This is a shocking story," said the Rev. Johns severely, at the first hearing of the trial which followed. " By your own admission, you have sinned, Gil Cordiner, in—"

" I don't admit sinning at all."

" But you admit having done things which *we* regard as sinning."

" Oh, yes. But shouldn't every man's conscience be his own guide ?"

" If we recognized that," said the Rev. Johns rather sadly, " we should have to allow murder, if the murderer said it wasn't against his conscience. You've done wrong, Cordiner, and the worst thing about it is that you led a girl fifteen years younger than yourself, a girl who trusted you completely, into evil ways. She isn't responsible. She's too young to know how sinful she has been."

But later Phimister took up that point and said : " It can't be said on the girl's behalf that she wasn't responsible. She was fully aware that what she was doing was evil, and must bear her full share in the responsibility for this . . . crime."

When Ted had his chance to speak he strove desperately to make the most of it, aware as he did so that his hearers knew he was prejudiced in favour of Gil and against Revival, and would therefore be prejudiced against him. But there didn't seem to be much to say except that he believed Gil and that they were making a mountain out of a molehill. He sensed that he was having no effect at all.

Very little attention was paid to Gil's patient insistence that they had been no more than friends, possibly because Gil was so mild about it and Robina obviously unsure whether to say yes or no, yet declaring over and over again that she was in love with Gil. The only time that point was seriously mentioned, one of the counsels asked Gil pointedly :

" If there was never any intercourse, why did you and Miss Phimister meet so often, so privately and so secretly, and why, on the occasion when you were apprehended, were you both undressed ?"

" We met secretly and privately for this reason," said Gil, waving his arm at the court. " I, at least, knew what was liable to happen. Why meet at all ? Robina has been repressed all her life. We've both been lonely—we met, and

continued to meet, because we liked each other's company. And I think Robina has been developing lately, knowing someone liked her, into a more likeable, less repressed, less jealous and much happier human being . . . As for why we were undressed—the question is ridiculous."

But he wasn't allowed to dismiss the matter like that. Forced to comment in more detail, he said, still as patiently as ever :

"I hadn't been expecting Robina. I was wearing my dressing-gown—that seemed adequate. Robina, for most of the time she was with me, was dressed exactly as she'd have been out in the avenue."

" But not when you were discovered together."

" No. Some coffee was spilled on her skirt. She took it off to dry it."

" That sounds rather thin, Mr. Cordiner."

" The truth very often does. Some people still have difficulty in accepting the fact of the Immaculate Conception."

" Please don't be irreverent."

Robina, questioned about the skirt, said : " It was just as Gil said. You can see it if you like. There's a huge coffee stain on it."

" That's hardly the point, Miss Phimister."

" Well, I was soaking. I had to take it off."

" You had to take it off in a man's bedroom ?"

" Yes . . . no . . . Gil isn't just any man. I feel at home with him. I love him."

" Surely, if you did actually spill coffee over yourself, the natural thing would have been to go to your room and change ?"

" Well, maybe, but why should I ? It would have been dry before I had to go."

So it went on. Sometimes it was farcical, sometimes grimly serious.

Inopportunely for Gil, his months-old report on the rape of the books in the *Chronicles* was discovered when JC investigated him and his work. It was quoted as proof that he hated Revival and its ideals. His walk-out from the first Council was recalled too.

Then the court went back to the case in hand, dwelling with the painstaking thoroughness of all vice committees, censors and watch committees on Robina's state of undress when

discovered. No one wallows more sensuously in the details of sensuality than people who publicly disapprove of it.

And Gil made one big mistake.

He may have made others before, lost opportunities for puncturing the whole thing, but his last one was the important one.

He didn't offer to marry Robina until it was too late.

If he had said earlier on in his usual quixotic way that they were engaged and would be married soon, the Revivalists would still not have approved by any means, but little would have come of the affair—except that Gil and Robina would have had to get married.

But when at last he said he was prepared to marry Robina, it looked as if he was merely trying to avoid the punishment that was coming to them both.

" It's no use saying, after being caught trying to kill someone," counsel declared, " ' It's all right, I won't kill him now.' No doubt you would marry this woman to avoid the consequences of your joint misdemeanour. The important point is that you hadn't done so, and had no intention of doing so, when you were caught *in flagrante delicto*."

Suddenly, incredibly, the death sentence was passed.

Ted was struck dumb. So, apparently, was Robina. Gil merely nodded as if that was what he had been expecting. Johns seemed startled, Martin a little dazed. Phimister nodded impassively. All through he had acted as if Robina was a complete stranger to him.

It couldn't happen. But as that thought occurred to Ted, he remembered how he had thought the same about the censorship, how he had been sure that whenever people realized what was happening, they would stop it.

Before he knew it he was on his feet and shouting at Phimister : " Are you going to let your daughter be executed for a minor fault which hasn't even been proved, Phimister ? Executed, do you understand what that means ? Can you imagine Robina dead, at eighteen, not from any illness or accident, but from your own fanaticism—dead, Phimister, when you could have kept her alive ?"

" I couldn't do anything of the sort—" Phimister began.

" You're still running Revival. Do you want Revival to kill your daughter, or do you still have some feelings left ?"

It was useless. Phimister acted as if he were a mere instrument, incapable of doing anything to save Robina, so that the question of whether he would if he could didn't arise.

VIII

The next few days were mad days.

Some Revivalists talked with the old, fanatic, savage, Puritan satisfaction of the execution to come. *The Lord's will be done. The wages of sin is death.*

Some Revivalists said killing was always wrong, and that though Robina and Gil had sinned they should be forgiven, yea, an hundred times. *The Lord is merciful indeed.*

Ted ran a campaign on his own, refusing help from people like Freddy, Lila and his ex-colleagues at the school in case the campaign should be ruled anti-God and its members executed too. He cut his aims down so that, he thought, all reasonable people would be on his side. He merely pointed out how irrevocable execution was, and that there wasn't a man or woman alive who hadn't sinned in some way, who dared execute Gil and Robina.

But the reasonable people shrugged and asked what they could do against so many.

There was fear about. There were people who didn't dare give any opinion on the Gil-Robina affair simply because they realized how easily they could find themselves on the same or a similar charge.

Some people backed Revival because they believed in it, some because they were afraid to oppose it, some because all their friends were doing it, some merely because they couldn't see any reason why they shouldn't.

Some people who didn't back Revival, but didn't dare oppose it, believed, as Ted had done once before, that it couldn't happen—that without their having to do anything, Gil and Robina would be reprieved.

And the days passed, with Ted working, and failing.

Gil and Robina weren't imprisoned. Their punishment was death, not imprisonment, and there was no risk of their being able to hide or escape. So they lived their normal life, free though with two policemen each seeing that in their despair they didn't try to destroy or damage the ship.

Lila often begged Ted to let her help in his campaign. She hadn't been called at the trial because unfortunately her evidence wouldn't do Robina any good unless she perjured herself. All Lila could say was that Robina had always been in love with Gil, and that recently she had changed enormously for the better—as if her love, at last, was returned.

But Ted went on working on his own, without letting Lila come into it. " The next thing," he observed bitterly, " would be you and me being sentenced to death for working together without being married. And when I asked you to marry me they'd say I was only doing it to save the two of us."

Lila was caught between delight and disappointment. " Is that a proposal, Ted ? Or am I merely grabbing at straws like any other frustrated female ?"

" No, I'll reopen the subject later, when I really have my mind on it. That's why I don't want to get you tangled up in this, Lila. I want Gil and Robina reprieved first."

" I've been thinking about that. Robina's a little innocent —she wouldn't even think of it—but I'm pretty sure that a medical examination would show she and Gil could never have been lovers."

She went pink, but didn't drop her eyes.

" We'll try it," Ted said, " but I don't expect anything will come of it. It's been decided that Gil and Robina are guilty in spirit. Whether they're guilty according to medical science is liable to be considered an irrelevance."

And so it was. The best Ted could get out of JC was a promise that if Gil and Robina asked for this medical examination, it would be made.

It never was made.

Lila visited Robina to try to keep her spirits up. Robina wasn't in her bedroom, but the presence of the guard outside meant that she hadn't gone out.

" Robina !" she called, and tapped on the bathroom door.

Lila went in.

She didn't scream. She didn't have enough air in her lungs at the time to do more than gasp. One more breath and she was promptly sick, but even in such circumstances she had the presence of mind to turn and vomit into the sink.

Robina was lying in the bath, her throat slashed. The razor was still in her hand. Blood made a bright red blanket over one shoulder and breast and hip, then swirled in the few inches of warm water in the bath.

Lila recovered herself very quickly, and did the cruellest thing she had ever done in her life, the cruellest thing she could think of. She went and found Phimister, and without the slightest hint of what he was to see, brought him to look at his ex-daughter.

He didn't speak. He went white and swayed on his feet, that was all.

No one ever knew why Robina chose to do it like that. The razor had always been in the bathroom. Perhaps the thought, action and her death had all taken place within a few seconds.

Ted was sure, for some reason, that Robina's suicide would shock people into sanity and that Gil would be reprieved. On the contrary, he was executed the next morning, three days early—electrocuted. Most people heard of it as a *fait accompli.* The date was brought forward from some idea that it would be as well to get the whole unpleasant business over as soon as possible.

Gil didn't object. Apparently he felt the same way.

There was no doubt that the sentence of death on Robina and Gil was an effective check on irregular sexual relations. In fact, Revival itself was marvellously effective in that immorality, crime, even mild misdemeanour, virtually ceased.

" But it's only rule by fear," Ted told Johns. " Of what value is a child's generosity in sharing his sweets when he knows that if he doesn't he'll be smacked afterwards ? Is that what God wants ?"

Ted had almost ceased to care what he said, and to whom. He realized now that Gil had been fatalistic, refusing to act or be a hypocrite or keep his mouth shut when he felt he had to speak. Ted felt much the same : he'd do anything Revival wanted him to do, rather than be punished, provided it was a single thing. He wasn't going to change his whole way of life.

" Quite a lot of value," said Johns quietly. " You have to *make* a child do things long before he understands why he has to do them. Later he begins to understand."

" So it was right to drive Robina to suicide and execute Gil ?"

Johns shook his head. " It's never right to execute anyone, even a murderer. It can only be expedient."

Ted forgot he was talking to his prospective father-in-law and a leading Revivalist, and was very rude indeed.

Two night's after Gil's execution, Freddy burst into Ted's room wilder than he had ever seen her.

" Where did you get the whisky ?" he demanded.

" I haven't been drinking—just thinking. One man made Revival—right ?"

" More or less."

" Then one woman can break it."

Ted answered cautiously : " One man at the right time—comes the hour, comes the man. Phimister was nothing during the Gay Phase, remember."

" And I was nothing during Revival. This is the right time again, Ted ! Naturally Revival goes from strength to strength so long as nobody opposes it."

She wasn't drunk, but she was fresher, more vital, more determined than she had been for years.

" You'll end up like Gil," Ted warned.

" Fool !" she exclaimed fiercely. " I'll end up like Gil if I do nothing. He told me that himself, long ago. Know what's needed for Revival, or dictatorship, or any such herd madness to succeed ? People have to let it. People have to stand around and let themselves be bent this way and that, dressed and undressed, turned to face the front or the back or the side, like so many dummies. That's exactly what people have been doing for years—sinking themselves in the herd. Looking to see what everyone else was doing, and doing the same."

" But people won't change just because you tell them to, Freddy."

Freddy turned away impatiently. " You don't understand."

" No, I don't."

" You will. I just don't care any more, Ted. I'll either end up like Gil, as you say, or I'll break Revival. Will you help me ?"

" It's not enough just to fight Revival. You must have something else, some reason, purpose, goal. Something for people to believe in. Something to oppose Revival."

" We'll find something. You're in, Ted ? You won't back out ?"

" I won't back out," Ted promised. " After all, I can easily get another life."

Lila was thoughtful when she heard about it. " I think I've been growing up lately," she told Ted seriously, " and though I used to think a lot of Freddy Steel, I'm not at all sure now that she's the right person to lead an anti-Revival campaign. It's not much use tearing something down if you've got nothing to put in its place, is it ?"

Ted grinned. "And she hasn't, you mean ? Don't worry about that, Lila. If she accomplishes anything, there'll be something to replace Revival all right. But she won't."

The grin died. " She's never been careful," he went on. " She'll be before JC, like Gil, and with the same result. God, Lila, I'm beginning to feel like Freddy—will this madness never end ?"

" I'm not so sure that Freddy is going to fail," said Lila, still thoughtful.

Ted stared at her.

At a Revivalist meeting Phimister rose to speak and silence fell.

Into the silence dropped one quietly-spoken word : "*Murderer* !"

Phimister started—perhaps if he hadn't admitted hearing it, and shown it affected him, nothing further would have happened. But as he jumped convulsively, someone else said " *Murderer* !" more loudly. People stood up, people who were angrily looking for the accusers.

" *Murderer* !" someone shouted, and there was localized commotion in the hall. Presently someone called : " We've got him, Mr. Phimister !"

The programme went on.

Ted and Lila attended a performance of *Twelfth Night* by the senior pupils of the school, and Lila proudly, not to say ostentatiously, wore an engagement ring.

She also wore a white dress. That wasn't unheard-of, only unusual. Heads turned ; everyone noticed Lila's white dress, consequently Lila and Ted, consequently the engagement ring.

Martin came up to congratulate the couple. There was no mistaking the warmth of his congratulations.

" I've seldom been able to say as sincerely to any young couple," he said, holding them both by the hand, " that I not only wished they'd be happy, but knew they would be. Ted, you couldn't be getting a prettier, more sensible, better-natured girl. Miss Johns, if you could choose from every man on the ship, you couldn't do better for yourself."

People seemed to have forgotten that Lila had once been in the stocks and that Ted had lost his job. In general, Ted and Lila were treated with such warmth that they almost forgot they had ever disliked anyone or anything.

Later, when the lights went up to show them sitting too close together in public, there was a hum of disapproval and they

moved hastily apart. Then defiantly, Lila moved back against Ted and almost laid her head on his shoulder.

Some smiled, some frowned. But gradually the people about them came to a tacit agreement to leave them alone to do as they liked.

And at last, quite openly, Lila did lay her head on Ted's shoulder, and Ted put his arm round behind her.

A former colleague of Gil's, a woman, wrote in *Yesterday* :

> At least one feature of this execution is disturbing to every human being on the *Arc-en-ciel*, which does *not* mean Way to Heaven. Quite apart from all considerations of being spied upon, tried and sentenced to death for a crime which never brought the death penalty before, one now has to take into account the possibility of having one's execution date brought forward from Friday to Tuesday, preventing an appeal and forestalling a possible petition.
>
> Gil Cordiner was found guilty and therefore, for all time, he *was* guilty. It is too late to argue the rights and wrongs of the case itself. But the premature execution is another matter.
>
> The fact that Cordiner gave his consent to the earlier date does not justify it. Many people, facing certain death, would rather have it immediately than in a week's time. That was precisely the case of Robina Phimister. Knowing she was to die, she couldn't bear the waiting.
>
> Is it not possible that Cordiner was executed early because it was suspected that if he wasn't executed at once, he wouldn't be executed at all ?
>
> Public opinion was never behind this execution. Public opinion created Revival—and public opinion, some leading members of Revival would do well to remember, could destroy it . . .

The woman who wrote that was summoned before JC. Some editions of the paper contained her story, some didn't. In all, fifty copies of that item were circulated.

A concert of Gil's recordings was arranged.

Gil hadn't systematically recorded his clarinet-playing. In fact, his own collection of tapes was small, consisting only of items which couldn't be easily repeated—unusual instrumental

combinations, numbers recorded with musicians who had since died, examples from his earliest playing days, fifteen years ago.

But many other tapes had been made, and the other musicians concerned could generally supply copies.

There was no reason given for the concert. It was just a Gil Cordiner night, open to anyone who cared to come.

It was arranged for one of the recreation rooms. But half an hour before the start, the room chosen was packed. The concert was switched to the Blue Room, and finally to the Small Hall.

"Isn't it marvellous?" said Freddy joyfully, finding Ted in the gloom at the back of the hall just after the start. "I never hoped for this. I thought—oh, hullo, Lila."

Freddy and Lila could hardly be expected to treat each other with any great cordiality.

"This is your idea, this concert, Freddy?" asked Lila politely.

"Yes—I thought Gil the musician should be called in to reinforce Gil the martyr. But it's a complete surprise to find—"

"Quiet, both of you!" Ted whispered. "I want to hear this."

It was easy enough to be wise after the event. Three out of four people at the concert were women—of course. Nearly every woman on the ship had been in love with Gil at some time in her life.

Perhaps it had been through jealousy, because of Robina, that all these women had done nothing, had left Gil to die, when their number and their weight could have saved him.

Or perhaps they had been waiting, saving their efforts for a last-minute appeal, and were frustrated by the early execution.

Many women wept as the music reminded them of Gil's physical presence. Even Lila sniffed once or twice, and thrust a small hand into Ted's. Ted had a lump in his throat himself, but it was the musical loss he was thinking of. He was resolving to collect all the tapes of Gil he could get his hands on. Some of these were entirely new to him.

The concert was in every way a magnificent success. Freddy didn't appear herself—she got Ted and a few others to say a little about Gil, and left the rest to the tapes and the memory of Gil.

There wasn't a word against Revival.

Martin had told Ted about his removal from the school, and he told him about his restoration.

"We hope you won't resent what was done then, Mr. Benzil," Martin said. "Perhaps we were right, perhaps we made a mistake—at any rate, you'll remember I always made it clear that it was only your attitude we objected to, not your capacities or personality—"

"But I haven't changed my attitude, Dr. Martin," said Ted.

"No, but we don't think it as dangerous as we once did. You remember I said at the time that you should be able to air your views on the Council committee . . ."

He didn't admit that he was making excuses. He kept trying to show that what had been said and thought and done when Ted was removed from his position wasn't so very different from what was being said and thought and done now.

Ted was so glad to be restored that he would have said almost anything that Martin wanted him to say. He stopped pointing out that his attitude hadn't changed, and merely said truthfully and diplomatically that he would be very glad to be back.

And presently Martin found an excuse or reason he might have thought of before, but hadn't. "Besides, you're to be married soon—you won't be such a firebrand as some of us used to think you were. You'll be settling down . . ."

JC met and considered several cases—among them the case of the man who shouted "Murderer !" and the woman who had said public opinion had never been behind Gil's execution.

The man who had shouted "Murderer !" was admonished. The woman Chronicler was dismissed. Her article had been a legitimate expression of opinion, JC decided. And it took all sorts to make a world.

The people on the *Arc-en-ciel* were two hundred years each way from a world, but the cliche remained.

Freddy started advertising a Christmas Ball, though it was only March. There hadn't been a Christmas Ball during Revival, so her notices were tantamount to a declaration of war on Revival.

"You've got your nerve," Ted told her. "A Christmas ball—in the Blue Room—arranged openly by Blue Room Orgy Freddy Steel. I know the wind's blowing your way now, but are you sure you aren't twisting Revival's tail a couple of years too soon ?"

Freddy wasn't at all sure. She was nervous and didn't hide it, not from Ted. But she went on putting out her notices about the Christmas ball, making it clearer and clearer that the ball was going to be a free-for-all, a ball at which anything would go.

And as she expected, she was summoned before JC. She was given two days' warning.

Ted was worried by her lack of organization. " All the anti-Revival forces are working in different directions," he pointed out. " You're not co-ordinated at all. It's every man for himself. And that's no way to fight a battle—any battle."

Those two days before the trial of Freddy Steel were about the quietest ever on the ship. Was this to be another Gil Cordiner case ? Was the power of Revival to be confirmed ? Nobody dared do, say or think anything.

They were quite right, too. For if Revival won, finally and completely, half the people on the ship had put themselves in line for what had happened to Gil Cordiner. And if Revival collapsed . . . but that was unthinkable.

The two days passed like two barrels of molasses.

On the day of her trial, Ted and Lila accompanied Freddy to the courtroom. " Do I look all right ?" she asked Lila outside the doors. She had dressed as attractively as she could, short of being charged with contempt of court.

" They're not going to charge you with untidiness," Ted told her. " Pity it isn't your appearance that's on trial, but it isn't."

" I know," said Freddy. " I want to look my best, though. Don't you know anything about women, even yet ?"

Together the three of them entered the courtroom . . . and stared about them in surprise.

The public part of the court was packed. And the court itself was all but empty. Phimister was there, of course, and Martin . . . five, six, seven . . . fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, that was all.

Ted and Lila moved towards the public part, though there was no room for them. Freddy stood alone for a moment.

Then the significance of what they had seen struck Freddy and Ted, and they stared at each other, between delight and incredulity.

All the other members of JC had stayed away, for one reason or another.

And seventeen people couldn't try Freddy. It wasn't a quorum.

Freddy made the most of the situation. Ted knew she would be wishing she'd had a few drinks—but she hadn't had a few drinks for years, and would have to get by without them.

She turned to the public gallery and bowed gracefully. Then, as if feeling that wasn't enough, wasn't doing her audience justice, she went down in a full curtsey.

" Thank you, ladies and gentlemen," she said, "for your interest. You came to see what would happen in this test case. You see what has happened—the enemy has left the field uncontested."

She strutted like a chorus girl, looking a very attractive eighteen. Ted wondered whether to applaud, but decided to wait for a better opportunity.

" I don't pretend *I've* won my case," said Freddy modestly. " All I claim is that Revival has lost—and we're going to have some sanity for a change."

There was an immediate protest from Phimister, behind her, and from some of the members of her audience in front of her. Ted decided the time was ripe to create a diversion, and applauded vigorously. Half a second after him came Lila, and then everybody, apparently, was applauding wildly.

" I think we'll agree now," said Freddy soberly, when she could be heard, " that the execution of Gil Cordiner and Robina Phimister was no execution, but murder. And it was the maddest thing that even Revival ever did, for it killed Revival."

There was a confused babble behind Freddy, as the seventeen Revivalists protested inarticulately.

" No one could continue to support Revival after that," Freddy declared. " No one except the men whose fortunes are so bound up in it that—"

Some anonymous Revivalist hurled a heavy metal box savagely at her back. A shouted warning was too late ; the box struck her between the shoulderblades and sent her pitching forward. She struck her head heavily and didn't get up.

Even as he and Lila ran forward to attend to Freddy, Ted felt exultant rather than sorry for Freddy, and he knew that Freddy would be grateful for the blow later. For the petty, cowardly brutality of it had dealt the final blow to Revival and the seventeen Revivalists behind her.

The roar of anger from the packed gallery who had seen it meant that Phimister and his interstellar Puritans would never again call the tune.

Things wouldn't, and didn't, change in a night ; the pendulum swings didn't work like that. But Revival had passed top dead centre and it was swinging down on the other side into . . .

" Funny how it takes so long to see what's happening, sometimes," Ted said to his new wife. " You don't see it until it punches you on the nose. Know what's going to follow Revival, honey ?"

" I think I do, now," said Lila.

" Do you ?" He sounded doubtful. One of the things about Lila he had not yet come to admire particularly was her brain.

" Let's say it together," she suggested.

" Free-for-all," said Lila.

" Individualism," said Ted.

They laughed. They were still at the stage of being amused by things that didn't seem at all funny to anyone else.

" Well, we know what we mean," said Ted, " and I think it's the same thing. Instead of the herd madness we've been going through, we're going to have everybody considered entitled to his own ideas, developing his own personality, trying to be different from everybody else—something like that. We'll see."

" Free-for-all, just as I said." She chuckled. " It should suit me. I've been brought up that way all my life. What are you going to develop into, Ted ? I hope it's something better, now that I'm Mrs. Benzil."

She had come a long way since she had begged Ted to take her to the last Christmas ball. She was sure of herself now, and of Ted ; in fact she was assured enough to be a little sorry for Freddy even a Freddy who had won her battle at last and could begin again to live the gay life which was the only life for her.

The ship glided on silently through space on its 400-year trip, and on the outside of its vast shape, nothing moved, nothing changed.

Inside, where there was life, it was all change. Every change meant more change. No one ever said : " It was good enough for my father, and it's good enough for me." That sort of thinking had no place on the ship.

The people in it were compressing five thousand years of change into four hundred years. They couldn't help it.

A reactionary was a man who was five years out of date.

There could be no end to the swinging of the pendulum. Not until the *Arc-en-en-ciel*—no longer the Way to Heaven—reached Lorraine.

Not until Christmas. —**J. T. McIntosh**

American author Fritz Leiber makes his debut in our pages with the following delightful "cat" fantasy. He is, however, well known to most of our readers, being the author of many a number of outstanding fantasy and science fiction books, serials and short stories.

SPACE-TIME FOR SPRINGERS

BY FRITZ LEIBER

Gummitch was a superkitten, as he knew very well, with an I. Q. of about 160. Of course, he didn't talk. But everybody knows that I. Q. tests based on language ability are very one-sided. Besides, he would talk as soon as they started setting a place for him at table and pouring him coffee. Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra ate horsemeat from pans on the floor and they didn't talk. Baby dined in his crib on milk from a bottle and he didn't talk. Sissy sat at table but they didn't pour her coffee and she didn't talk—not one word. Father and Mother (whom Gummitch had nicknamed Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here) sat at table and poured each other coffee and they *did* talk. Q.E.D.

Meanwhile, he would get by very well on thought projection and intuitive understanding of all human speech—not even to mention cat patois, which almost any civilized animal could play by ear. The dramatic monologues and

Socratic dialogues, the quiz and panel-show appearances, the felidological expedition to darkest Africa (where he would uncover the real truth behind lions and tigers), the exploration of the outer planets—all these could wait. The same went for the books for which he was ceaselessly accumulating material : *The Encyclopedia of Odours*, *Anthropofeline Psychology*, *Invisible Signs and Secret Wonders*, *Space-Time for Springers*, *Slit Eyes Look at Life*, et cetera. For the present it was enough to live existence to the hilt and soak up knowledge, missing no experience proper to his age level—to rush about with tail aflame.

So to all outward appearances Gummitch was just a vividly normal kitten, as shown by the succession of nicknames he bore along the magic path that led from blue-eyed infancy toward puberty : Little One, Squawker, Portly, Bumble (for purring not clumsiness), Old Starved-to-Death, Fierso, Loverboy (affection not sex), Spook and Catnik. Of these only the last perhaps requires further explanation : the Russians had just sent Muttnik up after Sputnik, so that when one evening Gummitch streaked three times across the firmament of the living room floor in the same direction, past the fixed stars of the humans and the comparatively slow-moving heavenly bodies of the two older cats, and Kitty-Come-Here quoted the line from Keats :

> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken ;

it was inevitable that Old Horsemeat would say, "Ah—Catnik !"

The new name lasted all of three days, to be replaced by Gummitch, which showed signs of becoming permanent.

The little cat was on the verge of truly growing up, at least so Gummitch overheard Old Horsemeat comment to Kitty-Come-Here. A few short weeks, Old Horsemeat said, and Gummitch's fiery flesh would harden, his slim neck thicken, the electricity vanish from everything but his fur, and all his delightful kittenish qualities rapidly give way to the earth-bound singlemindness of a tom. They'd be lucky, Old Horsemeat concluded, if he didn't turn completely surly like Ashurbanipal.

Gummitch listened to these predictions with gay unconcern and with secret amusement from his vantage point of superior

knowledge, in the same spirit that he accepted so many phases of his outwardly conventional existence : the murderous sidelong looks he got from Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra as he devoured his own horsemeat from his own little tin pan, because they sometimes were given canned cat-food but he never ; the stark idiocy of Baby, who didn't know the difference between a live cat and a stuffed teddy bear and who tried to cover up his ignorance by making goo-goo noises and poking indiscriminately at all eyes ; the far more serious—because cleverly hidden—maliciousness of Sissy, who had to be watched out for warily—especially when you were alone—and whose retarded—even warped—development, Gummitch knew, was Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here's deepest, most secret, worry (more of Sissy and her evil ways soon) ; the limited intellect of Kitty-Come-Here, who despite the amounts of coffee she drank was quite as featherbrained as kittens are supposed to be and who firmly believed, for example, that kittens operated in the same space-time as other beings—that to get from *here* to *there* they had to cross the space *between*—and similar fallacies ; the mental stodginess of even Old Horsemeat, who although he understood quite a bit of the secret doctrine and talked intelligently to Gummitch when they were alone, nevertheless suffered from the limitations of his status—a rather nice old god but a maddeningly slow-witted one.

But Gummitch could easily forgive all this massed inadequacy and downright brutishness in his felino-human household, because he was aware that he alone knew the real truth about himself and about other kittens and babies as well, the truth which was hidden from weaker minds, the truth that was as intrinsically incredible as the germ theory of disease or the origin of the whole great universe in the explosion of a single atom.

As a baby kitten, Gummitch had believed that Old Horsemeat's two hands were hairless kittens permanently attached to the ends of Old Horsemeat's arms but having an independent life of their own. How he had hated and loved those two five-legged sallow monsters, his first playmates, comforters and battle-opponents !

Well, even that fantastic discarded notion was but a trifling fancy compared to the real truth about himself !

The forehead of Zeus split open to give birth to Minerva. Gummitch had been born from the waist-fold of a dirty old terrycloth bathrobe, Old Horsemeat's basic garment. The kitten was intuitively certain of it and had proved it to himself as well as any Descartes or Aristotle. In a kitten-size tuck of that ancient bathrobe the atoms of his body had gathered and quickened into life. His earliest memories were of snoozing wrapped in terrycloth, warmed by Old Horsemeat's heat. Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here were his true parents. The other theory of his origin, the one he heard Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here recount from time to time—that he had been the only surviving kitten of a litter abandoned next door, that he had had the shakes from vitamin deficiency and lost the tip of his tail and the hair on his paws and had to be nursed back to life and health with warm yellowish milk-and-vitamins fed from an eyedropper—that other theory was just one of those rationalizations with which mysterious nature cloaks the birth of heroes, perhaps wisely veiling the truth from minds unable to bear it, a rationalization as false as Kitty-Come-Here and Old Horsemeat's touching belief that Sissy and Baby were their children rather than the cubs of Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra.

The day that Gummitch had discovered by pure intuition the secret of his birth he had been filled with a wild instant excitement. He had only kept it from tearing him to pieces by rushing out to the kitchen and striking and devouring a fried scallop, torturing it fiendishly first for twenty minutes.

And the secret of his birth was only the beginning. His intellectual faculties aroused, Gummitch had two days later intuited a further and greater secret : since he was the child of humans he would, upon reaching this maturation date of which Old Horsemeat had spoken, turn not into a sullen tom but into a godlike human youth with reddish golden hair the colour of his present fur. He would be poured coffee ; and he would instantly be able to talk, probably in all languages. While Sissy (how clear it was now !) would at approximately the same time shrink and fur out into a sharp-clawed and vicious she-cat dark as her hair, sex and self-love her only concerns, fit harem-mate for Cleopatra, concubine to Ashurbanipal.

Exactly the same was true, Gummitch realized at once, for all kittens and babies, all humans and cats, wherever they

might dwell. Metamorphoses was as much a part of the fabric of their lives as it was of the insects'. It was also the basic fact underlying all legends of werewolves, vampires and witches' familiars.

If you just rid your mind of preconceived notions, Gummitch told himself, it was all very logical. Babies were stupid, fumbling, vindictive creatures without reason or speech. What more natural than that they should grow up into mute sullen selfish beasts bent only on rapine and reproduction? While kittens were quick, sensitive, subtle, supremely alive. What other destiny were they possibly fitted for except to become the deft, word-speaking, book-writing, music-making, meat-getting-and-dispensing masters of the world? To dwell on the physical differences, to point out that kittens and men, babies and cats are rather unlike in appearance and size would be to miss the forest for the trees—very much as if an entomologist should proclaim metamorphosis a myth because his microscope failed to discover the wings of a butterfly in a caterpillar's slime or a golden beetle in a grub.

Nevertheless it was such a mind-staggering truth, Gummitch realized at the same time, that it was easy to understand why humans, cats, babies and perhaps most kittens were quite unaware of it. How safely explain to a butterfly that he was once a hairy crawler, or to a dull larva that he will one day be a walking jewel? No, in such situations the delicate minds of man- and feline-kind are guarded by a merciful mass amnesia, such as Velikovsky has explained prevents us from recalling that in historical times the Earth was catastrophically bumped by the planet Venus operating in the manner of a comet before settling down (with a cosmic sigh of relief, surely !) into its present orbit.

This conclusion was confirmed when Gummitch in the first fever of illumination tried to communicate his great insight to others. He told it in cat patois, as well as that limited jargon permitted, to Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra and even, on the off chance, to Sissy and Baby. They showed no interest whatever, except that Sissy took advantage of his unguarded preoccupation to stab him with a fork.

Later, alone with Old Horsemeat, he projected the great new thoughts, staring with solemn yellow eyes at the old god, but the latter grew markedly nervous and even showed signs of real fear, so Gummitch desisted. (" You'd have sworn he

was trying to put across something as deep as the Einstein theory or the doctrine of original sin," Old Horsemeat later told Kitty-Come-Here.)

But Gummitch was a man now in all but form, the kitten reminded himself after these failures and it was part of his destiny to shoulder secrets alone when necessary. He wondered if the general amnesia would affect him when he metamorphosed. There was no sure answer to this question, but he hoped not—and sometimes felt that there was reason for his hopes. Perhaps he would be the first true kitten-man, speaking from a wisdom that had no locked doors in it.

Once he was tempted to speed up the process by the use of drugs. Left alone in the kitchen, he sprang onto the table and started to lap up the black puddle in the bottom of Old Horsemeat's coffee cup. It tasted foul and poisonous and he withdrew with a little snarl, frightened as well as revolted. The dark beverage would not work its tongue-loosening magic, he realized, except at the proper time and with the proper ceremonies. Incantations might be necessary as well. Certainly unlawful tasting was highly dangerous.

The futility of expecting coffee to work any wonders by itself was further demonstrated to Gummitch when Kitty-Come-Here, wordlessly badgered by Sissy, gave a few spoonfuls to the little girl, liberally lacing it first with milk and sugar. Of course Gummitch knew by know that Sissy was destined shortly to turn into a cat and that no amount of coffee would ever make her talk, but it was nevertheless instructive to see how she spat out the first mouthful, drooling a lot of saliva after it, and dashed the cup and its contents at the chest of Kitty-Come-Here.

Gummitch continued to feel a great deal of sympathy for his parents in their worries about Sissy and he longed for the day when he would metamorphose and be able as an acknowledged man-child truly to console them. It was heartbreaking to see how they each tried to coax the little girl to talk, always attempting it while the other was absent, how they seized on each accidentally wordlike note in the few sounds she uttered and repeated it back to her hopefully, how they were more and more possessed by fears not so much of her retarded (they thought) development as of her increasingly obvious maliciousness, which was directed chiefly at Baby . . . though the two cats and Gummitch bore their share.

Once she had caught Baby alone in his crib and used the sharp corner of a block to dot Baby's large-domed lightly downed head with triangular red marks. Kitty-Come-Here had discovered her doing it, but the woman's first action had been to rub Baby's head to obliterate the marks so that Old Horsemeat wouldn't see them. That was the night Kitty-Come-Here hid the abnormal psychology books.

Gummitch understood very well that Kitty-Come-Here and Old Horsemeat, honestly believing themselves to be Sissy's parents, felt just as deeply about her as if they actually were and he did what little he could under the present circumstances to help them. He had recently come to feel a quite independent affection for Baby—the miserable little proto-cat was so completely stupid and defenceless—and so he unofficially constituted himself the creature's guardian, taking his naps behind the door of the nursery and dashing about noisily whenever Sissy showed up. In any case he realized that as a potentially adult member of a felino-human household he had his natural responsibilities.

Accepting responsibilities was as much a part of a kitten's life, Gummitch told himself, as shouldering unsharable intuitions and secrets, the number of which continued to grow from day to day.

There was, for instance, the Affair of the Squirrel Mirror.

Gummitch had early solved the mystery of ordinary mirrors and of the creatures that appeared in them. A little observation and sniffing and one attempt to get behind the heavy wall-job in the living room had convinced him that mirror beings were insubstantial or at least hermetically sealed into their other world, probably creatures of pure spirit, harmless imitative ghosts—including the silent Gummitch Double who touched paws with him so softly yet so coldly.

Just the same, Gummitch had let his imagination play with what would happen if one day, while looking into the mirror world, he should let loose his grip on his spirit and let it slip into the Gummitch Double while the other's spirit slipped into his body—if, in short, he should change places with the scentless ghost kitten. Being doomed to a life consisting wholly of imitation and completely lacking in opportunities to show initiative—except for the behind-the-scenes judgment and speed needed in rushing from one mirror to another to keep

up with the real Gummitch—would be sickeningly dull, Gummitch decided, and he resolved to keep a tight hold on his spirit at all times in the vicinity of mirrors.

But that isn't telling about the Squirrel Mirror. One morning Gummitch was peering out the front bedroom window that overlooked the roof of the porch. Gummitch had already classified windows as semi-mirrors having two kinds of space on the other side : the mirror world and that harsh region filled with mysterious and dangerously organized-sounding noises called the outer world, into which grownup humans reluctantly ventured at intervals, donning special garments for the purpose and shouting loud farewells that were meant to be reassuring but achieved just the opposite effect. The co-existence of two kinds of space presented no paradox to the kitten who carried in his mind the 27-chapter outline of *Space-Time for Springers*—indeed, it constituted one of the minor themes of the book.

This morning the bedroom was dark and the outer world was dull and sunless, so the mirror world was unusually difficult to see. Gummitch was just lifting his face toward it, nose twitching, his front paws on the sill, when what should rear up on the other side, exactly in the space that the Gummitch Double normally occupied, but a dirty brown, narrow-visaged image with savagely low forehead, dark evil walleyes, and a huge jaw filled with shovel-like teeth.

Gummitch was enormously startled and hideously frightened He felt his grip on his spirit go limp, and without volition he teleported himself three yards to the rear, making use of that faculty for cutting corners in space-time, travelling by space-warp in fact, which was one of his powers that Kitty-Come-Here refused to believe in and that even Old Horsemeat accepted only on faith.

Then, not losing a moment, he picked himself up by his furry seat, swung himself around, dashed downstairs at top speed, sprang to the top of the sofa, and stared for several seconds at the Gummitch Double in the wall-mirror—not relaxing a muscle strand until he was completely convinced that he was still himself and had not been transformed into the nasty brown apparition that had confronted him in the bedroom window.

" Now what do you suppose brought that on ?" Old Horsemeat asked Kitty-Come-Here.

Later Gummitch learned that what he had seen had been a squirrel, a savage, nut-hunting being belonging wholly to the outer world (except for forays into attics) and not at all to the mirror one. Nevertheless he kept a vivid memory of his profound momentary conviction that the squirrel had taken the Gummitch Double's place and been about to take his own. He shuddered to think what would have happened if the squirrel had been actively interested in trading spirits with him. Apparently mirrors and mirror-situations, just as he had always feared, were highly conducive to spirit transfers. He filed the information away in the memory cabinet reserved for dangerous, exciting and possibly useful information, such as plans for climbing straight up glass (diamond-tipped claws !) and flying higher than the trees.

These days his thought cabinets were beginning to feel filled to bursting and he could hardly wait for the moment when the true rich taste of coffee, lawfully drunk, would permit him to speak.

He pictured the scene in detail : the family gathered in conclave at the kitchen table, Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra respectfully watching from floor level, himself sitting erect on chair with paws (or would they be hands ?) lightly touching his cup of thin china, while Old Horsemeat poured the thin black steaming stream. He knew the Great Transformation must be close at hand.

At the same time he knew that the other critical situation in the household was worsening swiftly. Sissy, he realized now, was far older than Baby and should long ago have undergone her own somewhat less glamorous though equally necessary transformation (the first tin of raw horsemeat could hardly be as exciting as the first cup of coffee). Her time was long overdue. Gummitch found increasing horror in this mute vampirish being inhabiting the body of a rapidly growing girl, though inwardly equipped to be nothing but a most bloodthirsty she-cat. How dreadful to think of Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here having to care all their lives for such a monster ! Gummitch told himself that if any opportunity for alleviating his parents' misery should ever present itself to him, he would not hesitate for an instant.

Then one night, when the sense of Change was so burstingly strong in him that he knew tomorrow must be the Day, but

when the house was also exceptionally unquiet with boards creaking and snapping, taps adrip, and curtains mysteriously rustling at closed windows (so that it was clear that the many spirit worlds including the mirror one must be pressing very close), the opportunity came to Gummitch.

Kitty-Come-Here and Old Horsemeat had fallen into especially sound, drugged sleeps, the former with a bad cold, the latter with one unhappy highball too many (Gummitch knew he had been brooding about Sissy). Baby slept too, though with uneasy whimperings and joggings—moonlight shone full on his crib past a window shade which had whirringly rolled itself up without human or feline agency. Gummitch kept vigil under the crib, with eyes closed but with wildly excited mind pressing outward to every boundary of the house and even stretching here and there into the outer world. On this night of all nights sleep was unthinkable.

Then suddenly he became aware of footsteps, footsteps so soft they must, he thought, be Cleopatra's.

No, softer than that, so soft they might be those of the Gummitch Double escaped from the mirror world at last and padding up toward him through the darkened halls. A ribbon of fur rose along his spine.

Then into the nursery Sissy came prowling. She looked slim as an Egyptian princess in her long thin yellow nightgown and as sure of herself, but the cat was very strong in her tonight, from the flat intent eyes to the dainty canine teeth slightly bared—one look at her now would have sent Kitty-Come-Here running for the telephone number she kept hidden, the telephone number of the special doctor—and Gummitch realized he was witnessing a monstrous suspension of natural law in that this being should be able to exist for a moment without growing fur and changing round pupils for slit eyes.

He retreated to the darkest corner of the room, suppressing a snarl.

Sissy approached the crib and leaned over Baby in the moonlight, keeping her shadow off him. For a while she gloated. Then she began softly to scratch his cheek with a long hatpin she carried, keeping away from his eye, but just barely. Baby awoke and saw her and Baby didn't cry. Sissy continued to scratch, always a little more deeply. The moonlight glittered on the jewelled end of the pin.

Gummitch knew he faced a horror that could not be countered by running about or even spitting and screeching. Only magic could fight so obviously supernatural a manifestation. And this was also no time to think of consequences, no matter how clearly and bitterly etched they might appear to a mind intensely awake.

He sprang up onto the other side of the crib, not uttering a sound, and fixed his golden eyes on Sissy's in the moonlight. Then he moved forward straight at her evil face, stepping slowly, not swiftly, using his extraordinary knowledge of the properties of space *to walk straight through her hand and arm as they flailed the hatpin at him.* When his nose-tip finally paused a fraction of an inch from hers his eyes had not blinked once, and she could not look away. Then he unhesitatingly flung his spirit into her like a fistful of flaming arrows and he worked the Mirror Magic.

Sissy's moonlit face, feline and terrified, was in a sense the last thing that Gummitch, the real Gummitch-kitten, ever saw in this world. For the next instant he felt himself enfolded by the foul black blinding cloud of Sissy's spirit, which his own had displaced. At the same time he heard the little girl scream, very loudly but even more distinctly, " *Mummy* !"

That cry might have brought Kitty-Come-Here out of her grave, let alone from sleep merely deep or drugged. Within seconds she was in the nursery, closely followed by Old Horsemeat, and she had caught up Sissy in her arms and the little girl was articulating the wonderful word again and again, and miraculously following it with the command—there could be no doubt, Old Horsemeat heard it too—" Hold me tight !"

Then Baby finally dared to cry. The scratches on his cheek came to attention and Gummitch, as he had known must happen, was banished to the basement amid cries of horror and loathing chiefly from Kitty-Come-Here.

The little cat did not mind. No basement would be one-tenth as dark as Sissy's spirit that now enshrouded him for always, hiding all the file drawers and the labels on all the folders, blotting out forever even the imagining of the scene of first coffee-drinking and first speech.

In a last intuition, before the animal blackness closed in utterly, Gummitch realized that the spirit, alas, is not the same thing as the consciousness and that one may lose—sacrifice—the first and still be burdened with the second.

Old Horsemeat had seen the hatpin (and hid it quickly from Kitty-Come-Here) and so he knew that the situation was not what it seemed and that Gummitch was at the very least being made into a sort of scapegoat. He was quite apologetic when he brought the tin pans of food to the basement during the period of the little cat's exile. It was a comfort to Gummitch, albeit a small one. Gummitch told himself, in his new black halting manner of thinking, that after all a cat's best friend is his man.

From that night Sissy never turned back in her development. Within two months she had made three years' progress in speaking. She became an outstandingly bright, light-footed, high-spirited little girl. Although she never told anyone this, the moonlit nursery and Gummitch's magnified face were her first memories. Everything before that was inky blackness. She was always very nice to Gummitch in a careful sort of way. She could never stand to play the game "Owl Eyes."

After a few weeks Kitty-Come-Here forgot her fears and Gummitch once again had the run of the house. But by then the transformation Old Horsemeat had always warned about had fully taken place. Gummitch was a kitten no longer but an almost burly tom. In him it took the psychological form not of sullenness or surliness but an extreme dignity. He seemed at times rather like an old pirate brooding on treasures he would never live to dig up, shores of adventure he would never reach. And sometimes when you looked into his yellow eyes you felt that he had in him all the materials for the book *Slit Eyes Look at Life*—three or four volumes at least—although he would never write it. And that was natural when you come to think of it, for as Gummitch knew very well, bitterly well indeed, his fate was to be the only kitten in the world that did not grow up to be a man.

—Fritz Leiber

Here is another lightly whimsical Aldiss piece—we nearly said 'of nonsense'—but perhaps you may have different thoughts when you reach the end of the story. Maybe the laws of chance aren't laws at all!

FORTUNE'S FOOL

BY BRIAN W. ALDISS

From where he stood, telephone in hand, Dr. Norman Weaver could see down into the Inner Quad. Marlborough College, being a research college for post-graduate work, was one of Oxford's more peaceful institutions. There were few people crossing the Inner Quad—which made the figure of Carroll Breakbane, noticeable at all times, even more noticeable now.

Breakbane in this happy year 1982, when the Treaty of Everlasting Peace was finally signed by all the world's nations, was twenty-five—an aged and gnarled twenty-five. With his squint eye and shock of hair (and one felt the shock even after one's first meeting) Breakbane was proceeding across the Inner Quad with the curious retrograde movement of a confirmed dwarf.

Observing this, Dr. Weaver, even though he conferred telephonically with the Chancellor of the University, muttered under his breath to that figure through his window, "For heaven's sake, do not come bothering me today of all days!"

His plea went as unregarded as it went unheard. Breakbane came stamping up Staircase VI and irregular plonking noises

filtering through Dr. Weaver's door told of his progress towards it.

The Usher of Marlborough set down his phone and turned to the two people, the man and the woman, who had been waiting for him to complete his conversation.

" Miss Crisping," he said to his secretary, " the Chancellor says that the Hebdomadal Council will meet at 5.30." He glanced at his watch. " An hour and a half till then. You may make me a pot of tea if you will. And please find Professor Price and ask him to see me directly his parapsychology lecture finishes."

As Miss Crisping left, the Usher turned to the man who stood smoking by his desk.

" Martin, I don't know what we can do about your problem. Would you be kind enough to go to the police station and tell them what you told me ? Give them a statement. Ask for Detective Inspector Parkinson—I've lunched with him once or twice. He's a nice, sympathetic man."

" But in this case—"

" Please, Martin. You know I'm overloaded today."

" Of course, Dr. Weaver," Graham Martin said, brushing up his little moustache like a cat washing its whiskers. As he moved to the door, his superior added, " And Martin—you will, I suspect, meet Mr. Carroll Breakbane outside my rooms. If you possibly can, head him off. Explain how busy I am."

" Certainly."

As Martin left, the Usher sat down at his desk and phoned his wife. He had scarcely terminated that call when the door opened and, with a fascinating and noisy display of silence, Breakbane entered.

" I shouldn't have come in, I know I shouldn't," he said, rushing forward, arms extended. " I met that nice cybernetics man outside and he said you were frightfully busy, but I thought that if you could just listen for five minutes . . ."

His voice died away, he looked wretched. His lower lip trembled. This was a typical Breakbane ploy. This was one fool the Usher had to suffer gladly : Breakbane's grandfather, Edwin Breakbane, the inventor of Breakbane's Slotted Corners had endowed several chairs at Marlborough ; Breakbane's father, head of what was now a tidy little industry with four factories and an annual sales sheet of something like six million pounds, was expected to lash out with a new wing for Marl-

borough at any moment. In the circumstances, Carroll Breakbane had to be tolerated.

Although these strategic factors undoubtedly weighed with the Usher of Marlborough, it was a small thing that prompted him to ask Breakbane to sit down : Breakbane's hands were shaking. That at least was no artifice.

" I can certainly listen for no more than five minutes, Carroll," Dr. Weaver said. " My affairs are extremely congested today."

" You'll never believe me when I tell you," Breakbane said, totally unaware of what a poor preface this made to his remarks, as he plunged his face into his hands with an extravagant gesture more suited to one taking the first bathe of the season.

" I am prepared to reserve judgment until you finish, if you are not too long. Please proceed."

This remark seemed to be all Breakbane needed by way of encouragement. Leaping from the chair as if gravity meant nothing to him, he burst round the desk, seized his startled head of college by the wrists, and exclaimed as he sank onto one knee, " Dr. Weaver, sir, I have reason to fear for my own sanity, very grave reason."

To that, Dr. Weaver felt, there were several witty answers, but he said merely, " I must ask you to relate the facts to me, my boy."

" Facts ! Are they facts or hallucinations ? !" exclaimed Breakbane, clutching his head and wrenching it distractedly this way and that. After many more such perplexed and perplexing exclamations, Breakbane embarked upon the stormy seas of his narrative.

My elder brother Everard returned from South Africa last week (Breakbane said in a strangled voice). As he is now taking charge of our Northampton branch, I drove over there yesterday to see him and fetch him down here for a little reunion—it's a year since we met. I have a particular affection for Everard ; in him, I always say, all the most loveable Breakbane qualities combine to the best advantage.

He was rather tight when I met him—this would be about three o'clockish, so I took him down to the canteen to sober up. I did say we met at the factory, didn't I ? Of course at that time the canteen was absolutely deserted. In one corner stood a pin table that my father had imported cheap from

Venezuela during the trouble with President What's-his-name —the firm has interests out there.

Anyhow, I don't want to take up your time and that's beside the point. The point is, I explained to Everard how I was up here working for this thesis on the Subsidiary Functions of a Non-Functioning Complex variable, so that naturally things like games of chance interested me. The pin table was the customary type : five balls bouncing off springs, as they descend the board lights up numbers which have to reach 100,000 before you win a prize. I estimated by following the course of the balls as Everard played, that one would be unlikely to win more than once in two thousand games. Then I looked up and saw that he had notched up 100,000 and won.

Of course I know this doesn't sound much now. I can tell the incident bores you, sir. I'm sorry, sir ; I do realise there is no type of narrative more tedious than the faintly unlikely. All the same, the anecdote is necessary. If I am mad, then that is the point at which I began to go mad, because it was because of that that something far more extraordinary happened. Oh Lord, Dr. Weaver, life is hell !

Everard by now was sliding back into the realms of sobriety. All he needed to be absolutely right was a breath of fresh air. Behind the factory is a field of knee-high grass ; there I took him and walked him about despite his protests.

Ignoring him, I discussed the coincidence of his winning the pin table prize.

" It reminds me," I said, as we pushed through the grass, " of an odd coincidence which happened to Father when he was a boy. I don't know if you remember this, Everard, but one day he was walking with his Uncle Spindexter in a field that must have been much like this. Uncle Spindexter was a nature man and happened to be discoursing at the time on some of the less embarrassing habits of rabbits. He was saying how these creatures if surprised will often squat down in the grass where they are, so that a man may almost tread on them before they run away."

Everard indicated to me that the topic had no interest for him, but I continued.

" Father was surprised at this, apparently," I said. " As a child he must have been somewhat naive. His Uncle Spindexter assured him it was true, adding, ' In fact, if you knew where the rabbits were, you could just put your hand down

into the grass as you passed '—and he demonstrated to Father as he spoke—' and pull up a fine fat specimen by the ears.'

" And listen, Everard !—as Great-uncle Spindexter spoke, he suited the action to the words and pulled from the grass—to *his* astonishment as much as to Father's—a fine fat specimen of a rabbit up by the ears."

You may imagine, sir, and I have not forgotten how precious your time is, that while I related this somewhat complex little anecdote to brother Everard I had been illustrating it myself with suitable actions. As I demonstrated my Great-uncle's surprise at lifting up a rabbit just where the climax of his story demanded it, I too raised my hand from the grass—and lo and behold ! I too had in my grasp a fine fat specimen of a rabbit. Wordlessly, Everard and I carried it kicking back to the factory.

From the look on your face, Dr. Weaver, I see I strain your credulity. What can I do but swear by the honour of the Breakbanes that I think—think, ha !—myself to be telling the truth of what happened ? Even as I reassure you, I know I must immediately strain your credulity even further.

We took, as I say, the rabbit back into the factory, and proceeded slowly up to Everard's office, he leaning somewhat heavily on my shoulder. I have already explained that he had been inebriated. As a consequence, he had not visited his office since the previous day. All that time an unfortunate monkey he had smuggled back with him from South Africa had been confined to the room. Happily it had ample food and water there, and thus lacked nothing but company.

Producing a key, Everard opened the door and we stepped in. His office was in total disorder. The contents of every file had been distributed in casual fashion over the room. Such furniture as was moveable had been moved. The curtains and blinds had been torn from the windows. The monkey itself sat nonchalantly on top of a wall fan. I thought it looked pleased with itself.

While Everard contented himself by standing there hurling imprecations and, almost, the rabbit at it, I attempted a hasty tidy-up before ringing for my brother's secretary. Thus it was I who made the terrible discovery.

No doubt you are familiar, sir, with that intriguing pronouncement of Sir Arthur Eddington's that if twenty-five apes —was it twenty-five ?—were set to pound away randomly on

typewriters, they would eventually type out the entire works of Shakespeare by accident. My reason accepted this as true if hardly demonstrable, although I knew that the time element would have to be very long, even if you had a billion apes on a billion typewriters.

Imagine then my utter surprise when I picked up Everard's discarded typewriter from the floor and looked at the pile of paper lying beside it. The monkey, who had been provisionally christened Silvanus, had passed its time by randomly typing, and had produced, after some preliminary doodles, Shakespeare's play *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* even down to the stage directions.

Here, sir, let me allay a conjecture that must at once arise in your mind. Silvanus had absolutely no education at all. Only two months ago he was sporting happily in the forests of Basutoland among his friends.

He had achieved something against which the odds were astronomically incomputable.

With trembling hands I took the manuscript to the window and studied it. Here and there, I admit, a misprint had crept in. By and large it was word perfect ; Silvanus, banging the keys in blind indifference, had by chance copied the letter order of one of Shakespeare's plays. I knew that if every electron in the world were a randomly typing monkey, the chances of them pulling off this particular feat made it unlikely the job would get done in the next billion years.

Let me pass lightly—for I see you glance at your watch, sir —over the next few hours. Suffice it to say that my brother was far less impressed with the miraculous typescript than I was, although he agreed that no one but Silvanus could have typed it. His mind, I supposed at the time, was clouded by the fading of his inebriation and the dawn of his hangover. As for me, my mind was clouded by the shock of this incident. I drove him back here in the Healey—did I tell you he was staying with me last night ?—and neither of us spoke a word all the way.

We had been proposing to dine at the Mitre with Everard's old tutor, Obadiah Smith. Everard decided to call this off— Obadiah can be very tiresome if one is feeling under the weather —so I sent a note round to Corpus excusing us and we spent a quiet evening in my flat. I will not go into details except to say that at about nine o'clock we decided to have a game of cards—Everard dealt. When I picked up my hand, I found

I had all the diamonds and clubs—and they fanned out in order, ace, two, three, right up to the king.

By a yet stranger coincidence, Everard's hand had fallen the same way for hearts and spades. Chance had arranged them in numerical order ! We abandoned the game, and shortly thereafter my brother retired to bed.

And so, Dr. Weaver, I come to this morning and the strangest incident of all. My brother had expressed a wish to meet you. Knowing that you have some affection for our family, I brought him along. In the Broad, he asked me to stop the car for a moment. Of course I complied ; he got out and walked back to the nearest tobacconist's to purchase some of those little cigars he favours.

Leaning back in my seat, I saw him come out of the shop a moment later. Then I noticed that a Healey just like mine happened to be stopped behind me.

My brother, making a very natural mistake, strolled across the pavement, cigars in hand, and climbed into the other car. Almost at once, to my consternation, it began moving. As it came out from the curb and passed me, I had a clear glimpse of the driver. He was my double ! Absolutely my double, even down to a cast in his eye.

Now I have never believed in doppelgangers before, perhaps because Everard and I and our other brothers Edmond and Desmond, are all so dissimilar in appearance. But now it seems feasible that a face might well be duplicated now and again. What is less likely is that the owner of such a face should have a car similar to—no, identical with !—one's own, and that he and it should happen to be so close in time and space.

Such reflections naturally took only a moment to cross my mind. Then I had my foot down and was pursuing the other car. As luck would have it, it slid across the traffic lights as they changed ; I jammed on my brakes in order to spare the life of a particularly courageous cyclist, and had the grief of watching the other car whizz up the Corn and disappear.

In my brain, mounting confusion almost overcame me. I realised something else that makes the situation yet more horribly unlikely. Why did my doppleganger not immediately inform Everard of his mistake and make him get out of the car ? To my mind, for only one reason : because my doppleganger has a brother who looks just like Everard and who

happened to be in that tobacconist's or an adjacent shop at the same time. In other words, he thought Everard was his brother . . .

The whole prospect completely unnerved me. I came straight on here to you, Dr. Weaver. You see before you a creature almost out of his senses, his mind distraught, his reason shattered.

At the end of this pitiful recitation, a silence fell. Carroll Breakbane sat dismally with his chin cupped in his hand staring across the desk at the Usher of Marlborough ; the Usher, his chin cupped in his hand, stared dismally back.

In an uncertain voice, Dr. Weaver asked at last, " And why exactly do you believe yourself out of your senses ?"

Breakbane spread his hands wide.

" Consider the five incidents I have related, the incidents concerning the pin table, the rabbits, the monkey's typescript the arrangement of the cards, the appearance of my doppleganger. I believe them to have happened.

" Yet each one of them is in itself almost so unlikely that the chances of them happening at all in the whole universe is abyssmally remote. My field, you remember, lies in the mathematics of likelihood. So I *know* these incidents cannot all have happened within twenty-four hours. I am suffering from hallucinations. I am insane !"

He rose. He began pacing the room, muttering to himself. Ineffectually, his authority gone, Dr. Weaver also rose.

" Another explanation exists," he said tentatively, " though I admit it strains credence to the uttermost. Ask yourself how much we know about the laws of the universe. Some of the laws we regard as immutable are only so-called because they have remained the same for at most ten thousand years. How long is that ? Obviously, no time at all on a cosmic scale. Supposing once in a while the framework shifts—you come down in the morning to find a new value for pi, shall we say ?"

" This is all theory," Breakbane protested.

" Ask yourself, my dear Breakbane, how much is understood about the laws of chance. Say those laws are themselves subject to chance ? We have only negative definitions of chance : an absence of design, etc. We have formulae to cover its workings, but there are no formulae to cover *why* it works as it does. The coincidences you experienced may be evidence that chance as we know it—or knew it—collapsed

yesterday afternoon, like a coal fire settling into a new position! Its effect might not be immediately evident to everyone; eventually our entire notion of possibility will have to be revised."

For a moment hope gleamed on Breakbane's unprepossessing features. Then slowly he shook his shaggy head.

"Not plausible," he said, "though ingenious, I grant you that. No, why should the universal laws change and affect just me? I cannot accept that. The more obvious explanation is that I murdered my brother Everard in the field of long grass yesterday. All that I think has happened to me since is merely the product of a guilty deranged mind in full retreat from its own guilt."

He was talking rapidly now, his words hardly intelligible. He shook off Dr. Weaver's outstretched hand, shouting him down. "Guilty of murder, don't you see? I murder my elder brother so as to inherit most of the family fortune, and then I seek refuge in insanity. Everard's disappeared, hasn't he? And I have imagined up a crazy explanation to cover his disappearance. I'm mad, Dr. Weaver, sir, stark, staring, mad, and so take your dirty hands off me. Ah, that such a brilliant intellect as mine should be lost for ever to the world!"

Before Dr. Weaver could stop him, he turned towards the open window overlooking the Inner Quad. Breaking into a shambling canter, he dived through it head first. The sound of his hitting the paving stones a moment later was clearly audible in the Usher's office.

Scarcely had Breakbane disappeared before Miss Crisping entered with a pot of tea on a tray.

"Miss Crisping, get onto Detective Inspector Parkinson and the Chancellor of the University again, will you," Dr. Weaver said faintly. "Tell them that poor young Breakbane —" he gestured in despair towards the open window.

"The fourth today!" she exclaimed, slopping tea. "Dr. Weaver! Whatever did the poor boy say?"

"He told me an incredible tissue of coincidences. No wonder he momentarily lost control of his reason. Unfortunately—he would not listen to what I had to say. I tried to tell him I had already heard almost the identical story from three other people today!"

"I'd better shut that window before anyone else comes in to see you," Miss Crisping said firmly.

—Brian W. Aldiss

Recent research in such seemingly unconnected fields as geology and ancient Greek manuscripts has thrown new light on the Atlantis legend, making it much less incredible

ATLANTIS— A NEW THEORY

BY ARTHUR R. WEIR, D.Sc.

ATLANTIS has played a distinguished part in both science fiction and fantasy fiction, having made its first appearance therein—very appropriately—in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, perhaps the most famous of all the works of the " Father of Science Fiction," Jules Verne. Captain Nemo conducts Professor Arronax upon an undersea excursion, leading to the slopes of a submerged volcano, in violent eruption the glow of the lava from its crater lighting up a large area of the sea bottom ; according to the worthy Professor :

> " There, indeed, under my eyes, ruined, destroyed, lay a town—its roof open to the sky, its temples fallen, its arches dislocated, its columns lying on the ground . . . here the high base of an Acropolis, with the floating outline of a Parthenon ; there traces of a quay, as if an ancient port had formerly abutted on the borders of the ocean, and disappeared with its merchant-vessels and its war-galleys . . .

> Where was I? I must know at any cost. I tried to speak, but Captain Nemo stopped me by a gesture, and picking up a piece of chalk stone, advanced to a rock of black basalt, and traced the one word—
>
> *ATLANTIS.*"

Since that time Atlantis has figured in many short stories, while several longer books have used its destruction or its re-discovery as a theme, the best known being probably Stanton A. Coblentz' *The Sunken World* and Conan Doyle's *The Maracot Deep*, as well as Dennis Wheatley's more recent *They Found Atlantis.*

Since our only authority for the very existence of Atlantis is an account at third hand of a tradition several thousand years old, the professional historians have, very properly, relegated it to the category of unproven legend, and refused to waste further time on it. It has, however, been a favourite playground with the writers of off-trail "historical reconstruction," i.e. of history-as-it-might-possibly-have-been, which is all too often a euphemism for history-as-I-say-it-ought-to-have-been-anyhow !

In the hands of these worthies, ranging from the mildly wacky to the monomaniac crackpot, Atlantis has appeared as the alleged homeland and country of origin of the Egyptians, Minoans, Mycenians, Phoenicians, Maya, Aztecs, Toltecs, Incas, pre-Incas, Irish and the builders of Zimbabwe ! One enthusiast has even claimed it as the home of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel, overlooking the fact that if the legend is even approximately true Atlantis must have sunk beneath the sea long before Abraham set out from Ur of the Chaldees ; the genuine god-given crank remains undeterred by such merely practical considerations.

The only evidence for the existence of Atlantis is found in the writings of two Greek historians. The first is Plato, who, in the *Timaeus* relates how Solon, returning from a journey to Egypt, told the legend of Atlantis as he had heard it from the lips of the priests of Sais, during the sixth century B.C. Plato and Solon were both famous philosophers, hard-headed sceptics of the school of Socrates, and thus not at all likely to give much weight to mere travellers' tales, so that their account lends the tradition a certain authority. The other source of the legend is a very much less known Greek historian, Theopompus, whose works only exist in fragmentary form ;

he gives a substantially identical account to that of Plato, but calls the country Meropis " which some call Atlantis."

It is, perhaps, worth mentioning that a notoriously hard-headed sceptic, Voltaire, who reserved some of the bitterest shafts of his tongue and pen for historians who substituted wishful thinking for ascertained truth, has gone on record as a believer in the truth of the Atlantis legend.

Both the Greek historians describe Atlantis as " a land lying West of the Pillars of Hercules," and its inhabitants as a highly civilized people, travellers and traders, " great magicians," and very fine fighters, warriors indeed of such calibre that they had fought and subdued all the peoples of Western Europe and North Africa. The primitive Greeks had come into collision with them several times, and had been heavily defeated, many Greeks having been captured and enslaved.

The capital city, also called Atlantis, is described as being of impressive size and architecture, built—walls and houses alike—entirely of stone, the buildings much ornamented with elaborate metalwork of gold, silver, "electrum" (gold-silver alloy) and "orichalcum, that hath a fiery resplendence" (probably brass). A rather difficult and obscure passage in Plato describes it as built in concentric terraces of increasing height ; in the outermost and lowest dwelt the slaves, next above them the craftsmen, above them the merchants, above them the warriors, above whom in their turn were the nobles, the priests and philosophers occupying the highest portion of the city of all. Many students, however, read "higher" in this passage as referring merely to social altitude, and take the whole as a description of the Atlantean social organization. It is certain that in his much more difficult work, the *Critias*, Plato deliberately uses Atlantis as Sir Thomas More used his entirely imaginary *Utopia*, i.e., as a parable-picture of the ideal social commonwealth.

The people of the land, the Atlantides, are described as very proud and arrogant, cruel and unscrupulous in their dealings with their neighbours and as practising sexual customs that were anathema to other peoples of the time.

This last statement, however, requires to be regarded against a suitable background. Robert Graves has made it clear in his *Greek Myths*, as also in his novel *The Golden Fleece*, that the social and religious customs of the primitive Greeks even as recently as the Trojan War (1184 B.C. according to the

Roman historian Diodorus Siculus) were those that are practised today only by the most backward and primitive of the New Guinea or South Sea Island natives ; they practised a grossly phallic fertility worship, were sexually entirely promiscuous, and accordingly reckoned genealogy in the matriarchal line only, while they regarded sexual continence or patriarchal social organization as revoltingly unnatural ! Accordingly it might even be that the Atlantean social customs were such as Queen Victoria might have approved, though this is distinctly unlikely.

In any case, the deeds and customs of the Atlantides are supposed to have become unendurably offensive to the Gods, so that, as we are told : " the land split in sunder, and the waters moved in upon it, and it was hidden beneath the waters, and was not."

So much for the old legend, and we have now to consider what new light has been thrown upon it by modern knowledge. The first point that calls for consideration is the actual position of Atlantis. At the beginning of the Christian era the "Pillars of Hercules" meant quite definitely the projecting mountain headlands of Gibraltar and Ceuta ; Hercules had visited this locality in his search for the "Golden Apples of the Hesperides" —the tangerine oranges of our own more prosaic day !

This placed Atlantis somewhere under the ocean that now bears its name ; Conan Doyle, in *The Maracot Deep* placed it not far from the Canary Isles ; Dennis Wheatley in *They Found Atlantis* put it south-west of the Azores ; others have preferred the flat-bottomed shallow stretch of the Atlantic further north, in the region now unromantically christened Telegraph Plateau, while others again have placed Atlantis as far west as the West Indies.

An entirely new light has, however, been shed upon this point by the research work done during the last quarter of a century in the examination of very early copies of Greek histories, geographies and peripluses (pilots' navigational handbooks). While the later copies of these, like the Roman documents, place the Pillars of Hercules at the Straits of Gibraltar, the earlier show a variation, seemingly unimportant, but actually of the greatest weight. The further we go back in time, the more of these documents state that Scylla and Charybdis lie between the Pillars of Hercules.

Those of us who, in our youth, read either Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* or Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes* may remember that Scylla was a man-eating sea-monster with Kraken-like arms that lived in a cave in a cliff at one side of a narrow strait ; at the other side of the strait was Charybdis, a devouring whirlpool ; the navigator who kept his head might just, by accurate steering, manage to skim unharmed between these two perils, but the man who lost his nerve and tried to dodge out of reach of one of them was almost certain to run himself into the grip of the other.

Now most of us would class these dangers with the tales of the Basilisk and the Phoenix, and dismiss them with a smile. Indeed, the Mediterranean, in ancient times, seems to have had a great deal more than its share of such perilous monsters : the Sirens, whose singing lured the incautious mariner into a maze of sharp-edged reefs that would take the bottom out of any vessel, the Lotus-Eaters, whose drugged food destroyed the voyager's memory of his home and family, the man-eating, iron-beaked Stymphalian birds, the Cimmerians and their country of eternal night and cold, and many another tale of terror. It is only recently that students, rather to their amusement, have been able to find the reason for this extraordinary wealth of horrific tales.

Herodotus, writing in the fifth century before Christ, makes it quite clear that the Greeks of that time were very poor sailors; the Greek coastal kinglet who could number among his fleet a " penteconter " or fifty-oared galley, thought himself no small beer. If, however, we compare such craft with the Viking longships of thirteen centuries later, they are seen as of no more than the size of a very ordinary Viking vessel ; such famous Viking ships as Olaf Trygvasson's "Long Serpent" or the equally famous "Jarnbard" with her steel-shod ram, or the " great ships " that King Alfred built to fight off the Norse raiders were of almost double this size. Moreover the Norse ships, built with a projecting keel, were well able to beat to windward under sail, whereas the Greek galley, built like her present-day descendant, the caique, with a flat bottom for easy beaching (the Greek was far too painfully familiar with the damage wrought by the slashing " prester " nor'-easterly squall, that tore down out of a blue sky with no more than a couple of minutes' notice, to leave his craft afloat in shallow water !) could sail only before the wind.

But while these small Greek craft were cautiously clawing their way along the coast from headland to headland, never venturing out of sight of land if they could help it, the Phoenician merchants of Tyre and Sidon, and, later of Carthage, were building stout seagoing ships of four and five hundred tons burden ; these traded to Britain, for tin-ore, pig-lead, furs and hunting-dogs—to the Guinea coast for gold-dust, scented gums and negro slaves—via the Red Sea (Rameses II, who knew a good thing when he saw it, cut a canal from the Nile Delta to the Gulf of Suez, and encouraged the Punic merchants to use it, while charging customs duties on the cargoes taken through) to Arabia for incense and camel colts —to the Persian Gulf for silk, pearls and gemstones. We, who are used to universal seaborne trade, can hardly imagine the profits that could be made by a monopoly thereof ; Chinese silk, bought in the Persian Gulf for three times its weight in silver, could, after the cunning Tyrian dyers had had their way with it, be sold at the Egyptian or Minoan court for twice its weight in gold—a profit of over a thousand per cent.

Naturally the wily Phoenician did everything he could to see that no interlopers came into his chosen field ; at need a stranger might be misdirected onto a hidden reef, rammed and sunk in deep water, or boarded and her crew massacred with axe and sword, but cunning propaganda was quite equally efficient, and the hard-bitten Punic deep-waterman in the wineshops of Corinth, Piraeus, Ephesus, Antioch or Naucratis, recounted to an open-mouthed and pop-eyed audience the most horrific tales of the dangers of the deep, and of his mates who had lost their lives thereby—and afterwards, in the privacy of his own fo'c'sle, laughed himself sore at the way the greenies had swallowed his tales. And the Greek chroniclers recorded them !

Charybdis, however, was no travellers' tale, but a very real navigational hazard, and, as such, may be found to this day between the matter-of-fact covers of the British Admiralty Sailing Directions, being neither more nor less than the furious tide-race and offshore whirlpools of the Straits of Messina, which resemble, on a smaller scale, the famous Norwegian Maelstrom. Even now, sailing vessels of under 500 tons burden and mechanically propelled craft not capable of speeds of at least fifteen knots are advised to avoid the passage of the Straits except at or near the period of slack tide.

Now this makes it quite clear that while to a Roman of the time of Julius Caesar the " Pillars of Hercules " meant the Straits of Gibraltar, to a Greek of six centuries or more earlier they meant the Straits of Messina, and this immediately suggests a very different location for Atlantis.

Geologists are agreed that the Straits of Gibraltar, like those of Dover, are a late geological development ; both these gaps were filled by land bridges which were cut through by the sea when the melting of the glaciers, at the end of the last ice-age, raised the sea-level by some hundreds of feet. Geological maps of Europe at this time (the two-volume edition of H. G. Wells' *Outline of History* had a beauty by Horrabin) show the Mediterranean as a great fertile valley with two lakes within it at its deepest parts.

Atlantis, lying " West of the Pillars of Hercules " would thus be in the basin south of Sardinia and east of the Balearic Isles. Once the sea had started to trickle over the Gibraltar barrier it would very rapidly cut an increasingly large channel for itself, so that while the complete filling of the whole Mediterranean may have taken many years, or even centuries, the flooding of the Western valley bottom may have been a matter of no more than a few weeks. The Atlantides would have had to flee with little time for preparation, with no more than they could hurriedly carry with them, and the surrounding tribes over whom they had lorded it would promptly combine to attack them, rejoicing at the chance to pay back old scores.

Geologists are not inclined to commit themselves to any definite date for this catastrophe, but agree in placing it at some time within the last twelve thousand years ; this agrees astonishingly well with the date given by the Egyptian priests who told Solon that Atlantis was engulfed " nine thousand years before you were born," the date of Solon's birth being, as near as we can ascertain, 638 B.C.

Even as early as this there was already a very considerable Neolithic civilization in Egypt, which may well have given shelter to some of the Atlantide refugees, and their account of the event would, of course, be handed down through the priesthood, the repository of historical tradition among all peoples to whom reading and writing are a luxury restricted to the very few.

Are there any remains of the people and civilization of ancient Atlantis ? This historical distance is too great for us to say, but to both the East and the West of the Western

Mediterranean basin there are remains of comparatively highly civilized peoples of whom we know very little : to the East, the Etruscans, mercilessly destroyed by the Romans, and to the West the Celtiberian civilization of Spain, first crushed in war and enslaved by the Carthaginians, and finally robbed of its last treasures at the insatiable hands of the Roman tax-gatherers (all the first three Roman governors of Spain were publicly accused of mercilessly fleecing the people of the province to line their own pockets).

Thus, while we cannot say that the existence of Atlantis has been proved—the evidence is still far too tentative and conjectural for that—we can at least say that Plato's account of its destruction appears distinctly less improbable than it did when Jules Verne made Captain Nemo show its submarine ruins to Professor Pierre Arronax.

And, finally, a private guess of the author's—for which there is really no evidence whatever. Did the Atlantides, savagely harried on all sides by the tribes whom they had subdued and slave-raided for generations, finally take refuge in the mountain country of the Pyrenees, and hold out in that inaccessible natural fortress ? Was this, by any chance, the origin of the Basques, with their unique folklore and customs, and their curious language, apparently unrelated to any other known tongue of Europe or North Africa ?

I wonder !

—Arthur R. Weir

Guiding Hand . . .

For some time now—over five years, in fact, I have felt that *Science Fantasy* without an Editorial is rather like a railway train keeping a schedule. It runs regularly, is comfortably full, the time passes pleasantly, the journey ends—but it is doubtful whether you ever see the driver. Yet his guiding hand is responsible for the entire trip. This magazine has been just as remote to you readers without some occasional comment from myself and whenever space permits I intend to remedy the defect. After all—this is our tenth year of publication !

I never have been able to accurately define the type of contents *Science Fantasy* should be publishing—that word " fantasy " in the title has long been a stumbling block, not only to ourselves but to many American publishers who also had ideas of dividing science fiction into two categories. When one thinks of the overwhelming popularity of *Weird Tales* during its heyday in the middle 1930's and of *Unknown Worlds* in the early 1940's, one is inclined to think that there is still room for a magazine dealing exclusively in the bizarre and unusual. That is not so, as witness the complete failure of such magazines in America ; those still retaining variations of the word " fantastic " in their titles having turned over almost exclusively to science fiction.

Another problem has always been finding sufficient short material for each issue—this difficulty resulted in longer lead stories being used as an experiment, but you have left little doubt in our minds that this is sound policy. The recent *Survey* in *New Worlds* also points up the universal liking for long material but that magazine does not lend itself so readily to complete 30,000 stories as does *Science Fantasy*.

The tendency in this magazine in the near future will be for the stories to lean more towards science fiction than in the past—this particular issue is a good example, with long stories by Jim McIntosh and Arthur Clarke as forerunners. The next issue features a long psychological story by John Brunner, " Echo In The Skull," which by modern standards can easily be classed as science fiction—it deals with a rather macabre form of alien invasion which mainly effects the minds of the central characters.

However, despite these probable changes—and nothing can be guaranteed because I am entirely in the hands of the authors

and the type of stories they present—*Science Fantasy* has become an extremely respected magazine during recent years. There is no doubt that the literary standard is generally higher than that found in *New Worlds* and for four years in succession it has had a story placed in Dell's *S-F : Year's Best* edited by Judith Merril in New York, as well as numerous honorable mentions. This, in itself, is a tremendous achievement when you think of the competition from all the American magazines and the very high literary standards involved. *New Worlds* hasn't averaged better then five honorable mentions each year, although Peter Phillips' "Next Stop The Moon" in the January 1958 issue was placed in the top class but the credit line went to the London *Daily Herald* where the story first appeared. Incidentally, no other British magazine has yet had a story in the top class.

For the past two years I have been looking for suitable articles for *Science Fantasy*—articles which would point up the greatness of many of the earlier fantasy writers. At one time a series had been planned by our book reviewer Leslie Flood but the exigencies of other work prevented him from really getting down to it. Then, quite unexpectedly, the first four articles in a series dealing with the very subject I feel sure you will be interested in, came from New York bibliophile Sam Moskowitz. We have already dealt with Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley in our last issue and the next issue will feature Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. These articles are not, however, prosaic autobiographies, but deeply searching investigations into the works and thoughts of the great Masters.

The series will cover H. G. Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Edgar Allan Poe, Fitz-James O'Brien, Cyrano de Bergerac, A. Merritt, and many others, and form an indispensible guide for everyone who is interested in either reading or collecting those early works.

I hope that you like the sound of what is in store in the months ahead. From the editorial chair it looks very interesting indeed.

—John Carnell

Let us be frank and state that this is also a long-voyage story, but so different to the McIntosh in this same issue that the two cannot be compared. Arthur Clarke tells, in a style reminiscent of his " Against The Fall Of Night," of the effects and repercussions felt on a colony world when a starship touches down for temporary repairs.

THE SONGS OF DISTANT EARTH

BY ARTHUR C. CLARKE

I

Beneath the palm trees Lora waited, watching the sea. Clyde's boat was already visible as a tiny notch on the far horizon—the only flaw in the perfect mating of sea and sky. Minute by minute it grew in size, until it had detached itself from the featureless blue globe that encompassed the world. Now she could see Clyde standing at the prow, one hand twined around the rigging, statue-still as his eyes sought her among the shadows.

" Where are you, Lora ?" his voice asked plaintively from the radio-bracelet he had given her when they became engaged. " Come and help me—we've got a big catch to bring home."

So ! Lora told herself ; *that's* why you asked me to hurry down to the beach. Just to punish Clyde and to reduce him to the right state of anxiety she ignored his call until he had repeated it half a dozen times. Even then she did not press the beautiful golden pearl set in the "Transmit" button, but slowly emerged from the shade of the great trees and walked down the sloping beach.

Clyde looked at her reproachfully, but gave her a satisfactory kiss as soon as he had bounded ashore and secured the boat. Then they started unloading the catch together, scooping fish large and small from both hulls of the catamaran. Lora screwed up her nose but assisted gamely, until the waiting sand-sled was piled high with the victims of Clyde's skill.

It was a good catch ; when she married Clyde, Lora told herself proudly, she'd never starve. The clumsy, armoured creatures of this young planet's sea were not true fish; it would be a hundred million years before Nature invented scales here. But they were good enough eating, and the first colonists had labelled them with names they had brought, with so many other traditions, from unforgotten Earth.

" That's the lot !" grunted Clyde, tossing a fair imitation of a salmon on to the glistening heap. " I'll fix the nets later —let's go !"

Finding a foot-hold with some difficulty, Lora jumped on to the sled behind him. The flexible rollers spun for a moment against the sand, then got a grip. Clyde, Lora and a hundred pounds of assorted fish starting racing up the wave-scalloped beach. They had made half the brief journey when the simple, carefree world they had known all their young lives came suddenly to its end.

The sign of its passing was written there upon the sky, as if a giant hand had drawn a piece of chalk across the blue vault of heaven. Even as Clyde and Lora watched, the gleaming vapour trail began to fray at its edges breaking up into wisps of cloud.

And now they could hear, falling down through the miles above their heads, a sound their world had not known for generations. Instinctively they grasped each other's hands, as they stared at that snow-white furrow across the sky and listened to the thin scream from the borders of space. The descending ship had already vanished beyond the horizon before they turned to each other and breathed, almost with reverence, the same magic word : " Earth ! "

After three hundred years of silence, the mother world had reached out once more to touch Thalassa . . .

Why? Lora asked herself, when the long moment of revelation had passed and the scream of torn air ceased to echo from the sky. What had happened, after all these years, to bring a ship from mighty Earth to this quiet and contented world? There was no room for more colonists here on this one island in a watery planet, and Earth knew that well enough. Its robot survey ships had mapped and probed Thalassa from space five centuries ago, in the early days of interstellar exploration. Long before Man himself had ventured out into the gulfs between the stars, his electronic servants had gone ahead of him, circling the worlds of alien suns and heading homewards with their store of knowledge, as bees bring honey back to the parent hive.

Such a scout had found Thalassa, a freak among worlds with its single large island in a shoreless sea. One day continents would be born here, but this was a new planet, its history still waiting to be written.

The robot had taken a hundred years to make its homeward journey, and for a hundred more its garnered knowledge had slept in the electronic memories of the great computers which stored the wisdom of Earth. The first waves of colonisation had not touched Thalassa; there were more profitable worlds to be developed—worlds which were not nine-tenths water. Yet at last the pioneers had come; only a dozen miles from where she was standing now, Lora's ancestors had first set foot upon this planet and claimed it for Mankind.

They had levelled hills, planted crops, moved rivers, built towns and factories, and multiplied until they reached the natural limits of their land. With its fertile soil, abundant seas and mild, wholly predictable weather Thalassa was not a world which demanded much of its adopted children. The pioneering spirit had lasted perhaps two generations; thereafter the colonists were content to work as much as necessary (but no more), to dream nostalgically of Earth, and to let the future look after itself.

The village was seething with speculation when Clyde and Lora arrived. News had already come from the northern end of the island that the ship had spent its furious speed and was heading back at a low altitude, obviously looking for a place to land. "They'll still have the old maps," someone said.

"Ten to one they'll ground where the First Expedition landed, up in the hills."

It was a shrewd guess, and within minutes all available transport was moving out of the village, along the seldom-used road to the west. As befitted the mayor of so important a cultural centre as Palm Bay (Pop.: 572; occupations: fishing, hydroponics; industries: none) Lora's father led the way in his official car. The fact that its annual coat of paint was just about due was perhaps a little unfortunate; one could only hope that the visitors would overlook the occasional patches of bare metal. After all, the car itself was quite new; Lora could distinctly remember the excitement its arrival had caused, only thirteen years ago.

The little caravan of assorted cars, trucks—and even a couple of straining sand-sleds—rolled over the crest of the hill and ground to a halt beside the weathered sign with its simple but impressive words:

LANDING SITE OF THE FIRST EXPEDITION
TO THALASSA
1 JANUARY, YEAR ZERO
(28 May, 2626 A.D.)

The *First* Expedition, Lora repeated silently. There had never been a second one—*but here it was* . . .

The ship came in so low, and so silently, that it was almost upon them before they were aware of it. There was no sound of engines—only a brief rustling of leaves as the displaced air stirred among the trees. Then all was still once more, but it seemed to Lora that the shining ovoid resting on the turf was a great silver egg, waiting to hatch and to bring something new and strange into the peaceful world of Thalassa.

"It's so small," someone whispered behind her. "They couldn't have come from Earth in *that* thing!"

"Of course not," the inevitable self-appointed expert replied at once. "That's only a life-boat—the real ship's up there in space. Don't you remember that the First Expedition—"

"Sshh!" someone else remonstrated. "They're coming out!"

It happened in the space of a single heart-beat. One second the seamless hull was so smooth and unbroken that the eye looked in vain for any sign of an opening. And then, an instant later, there was an oval doorway with a short ramp leading to the ground. Nothing had moved, but something

had *happened.* How it had been done Lora could not imagine, but she accepted the miracle without surprise. Such things were only to be expected of a ship that came from Earth.

There were figures moving inside the shadowed entrance ; not a sound came from the waiting crowd as the visitors slowly emerged and stood blinking in the fierce light of an unfamiliar sun. There were seven of them—all men—and they did not look in the least like the super-beings she had expected. It was true that they were all somewhat above the average in height and had thin, clear-cut features, but they were so pale that their skins were almost white. They seemed moreover, worried and uncertain, which was something that puzzled Lora very much. For the first time it occurred to her that this landing on Thalassa might be unintentional, and that the visitors were as surprised to be here as the islanders were to greet them.

The Mayor of Palm Bay, confronted with the supreme moment of his career, stepped forward to deliver the speech on which he had been frantically working ever since the car left the village. A second before he opened his mouth, a sudden doubt struck him and sponged his memory clean. Everyone had automatically assumed that this ship came from Earth—but that was pure guesswork. It might just as easily have been sent here from one of the other colonies, of which there were at least a dozen much closer than the parent world. In his panic over protocol, all that Lora's father could manage was : " We welcome you to Thalassa. You're from Earth—I presume ?" That " I presume ?" was to make Mayor Fordyce immortal ; it would be a century before anyone discovered that the phrase was not quite original.

In all that waiting crowd, Lora was the only one who never heard the confirming answer, spoken in English that seemed to have speeded up a trifle during the centuries of separation. For in that moment, she saw Leon for the first time.

He came out of the ship, moving as unobtrusively as possible to join his companions at the foot of the ramp. Perhaps he had remained behind to make some adjustment to the controls; perhaps—and this seemed more likely—he had been reporting the progress of the meeting to the great mother ship which must be hanging up there in space, far beyond the uttermost fringes of the atmosphere. Whatever the reason, from then onwards Lora had eyes for no-one else.

Even in that first instant, she knew that her life could never again be the same. This was something new and beyond all her experience, filling her at the same moment with wonder and fear. Her fear was for the love she felt for Clyde—her wonder for the new and unknown thing that had come into her life.

Leon was not as tall as his companions, but was much more stockily built, giving an impression of power and competence. His eyes, very dark and full of animation, were deep-set in rough-hewn features which no-one could have called handsome, yet which Lora found disturbingly attractive. Here was a man who had looked upon sights she could not imagine—a man who, perhaps, had walked the streets of Earth and seen its fabled cities. What was he doing here on lonely Thalassa, and why were those lines of strain and worry about his ceaselessly searching eyes ?

He had looked at her once already, but his gaze had swept on without faltering. Now it came back, as if prompted by memory, and for the first time he became conscious of Lora, as all along she had been aware of him. Their eyes locked, bridging gulfs of time and space and experience. The anxious furrows faded from Leon's brow, the tense lines slowly relaxed ; and presently he smiled.

II

It was dusk when the speeches, the banquets, the receptions, the interviews were over. Leon was very tired, but his mind was far too active to allow him to sleep. After the strain of the last few weeks, when he awoke to the shrill clamour of alarms and fought with his colleagues to save the wounded ship, it was hard to realise that they had reached safety at last. What incredible good fortune, that this inhabited planet had been so close ! Even if they could not repair the ship and complete the two centuries of flight that still lay before them, here at least they could remain among friends. No shipwrecked mariners, of sea or space, could hope for more than that.

The night was cool and calm, and ablaze with unfamiliar stars. Yet there were still some old friends, even though the ancient patterns of the constellations were hopelessly lost. There was mighty Rigel, no fainter for all the added light-

years that its rays must now cross before they reached his eyes. And that must be giant Canopus, almost in line with their destination, but so much more remote that even when they reached their new home, it would seem no brighter than in the skies of Earth.

Leon shook his head, as if to clear the stupefying, hypnotic image of immensity from his mind. Forget the stars, he told himself ; you will face them again soon enough. Cling to this little world while you are upon it, even though it may be a grain of dust on the road between the Earth you will never see again, and the goal that waits for you at journey's end, two hundred years from now.

His friends were already sleeping, tired and content, as they had a right to be. Soon he would join them—when his restless spirit would allow him. But first he would see something of this world to which chance had brought him, this oasis peopled by his own kinsmen in the deserts of space.

He left the long, single-storied guest-house that had been prepared for them in such obvious haste, and walked out into the single street of Palm Bay. There was no-one about, though sleepy music came from a few houses. It seemed that the villagers believed in going to bed early—or perhaps they too were exhausted by the excitement and hospitality of the day. That suited Leon, who wanted only to be left alone until his racing thoughts had slowed to rest.

Out of the quiet night around him he became aware of the murmuring sea, and the sound drew his footsteps away from the empty street. It was dark among the palms, when the lights of the village had faded behind him, but the smaller of Thalassa's two moons was high in the South and its curious yellow glow gave him all the guidance he required. Presently he was through the narrow belt of trees, and there at the end of the steeply shelving beach lay the ocean that covered almost all this world.

A line of fishing-boats was drawn up at the water's edge, and Leon walked slowly towards them, curious to see how the craftsmen of Thalassa had solved one of man's oldest problems. He looked approvingly at the trim plastic hulls, the narrow outrigger float, the power-operated winch for raising the nets, the compact little motor, the radio with its direction-finding loop. This almost primitive, yet completely adequate, simplicity had a profound appeal to him ; it was hard to think of

a greater contrast to the labyrinthine complexities of the mighty ship hanging up there above his head. For a moment he amused himself with fantasy ; how pleasant to jettison all his years of training and study, and to exchange the life of a star-ship propulsion engineer for the peaceful, undemanding existence of a fisherman ! They must need someone to keep their boats in order, and perhaps he could think of a few improvements . . .

He shrugged away the rosy dreams, without bothering to marshall all its obvious fallacies, and began to walk along the shifting line of foam where the waves had spent their last strength against the land. Underfoot was the debris of this young ocean's new-born life—empty shells and carapaces that might have littered the coasts of Earth a billion years ago. Here, for instance, was a tightly-wound spiral of limestone which he had surely seen before in some museum. It might well be ; any design that had once served her purpose, Nature repeated endlessly on world after world.

A faint yellow glow was spreading swiftly across the eastern sky ; even as Leon watched, Selene, the inner moon, edged itself above the horizon. With astonishing speed, the entire gibbous disc climbed out of the sea, flooding the beach with sudden light.

And in that burst of brilliance, Leon saw that he was not alone.

The girl was sitting on one of the boats, about fifty yards further along the beach. Her back was turned towards him and she was staring out to sea, apparently unaware of his presence. Leon hesitated, not wishing to invade on her solitude, and also being uncertain of the local *mores* in these matters. It seemed highly likely, at such a time and place, that she was waiting for someone ; it might be safest, and most tactful, to turn quietly back to the village.

He had left it too late. As if startled by the flood of new light along the beach, the girl looked up and at once caught sight of him. She rose to her feet with an unhurried grace, showing no signs of alarm or annoyance. Indeed, if Leon could have seen her face clearly in the moonlight, he would have been surprised at the quiet satisfaction it expressed.

Only twelve hours ago, Lora would have been indignant had anyone suggested that she would meet a complete stranger here on this lonely beach when the rest of her world was

slumbering. Even now, she might have tried to rationalise her behaviour, to argue that she felt restless and could not sleep and had therefore decided to go for a walk. But she knew in her heart that this was not the truth ; all day long she had been haunted by the image of that young engineer, whose name and position she had managed to discover without, she hoped, arousing too much curiosity among her friends.

It was not even luck that she had seen him leave the Guest-house ; she had been watching most of the evening from the porch of her father's residence, on the other side of the street. And it was certainly not luck, but deliberate and careful planning, that had taken her to this point on the beach as soon as she was sure of the direction Leon was heading.

He came to a halt a dozen feet away. Did he recognise her ? Did he guess that this was no accident ? For a moment her courage almost failed her, but it was too late now to retreat. Then he gave a curious, twisted smile that seemed to light up his whole face and made him look even younger than he was.

" Hello," he said, " I never expected to meet anyone at this time of night. I hope I haven't disturbed you."

" Of course not," Lora answered, trying to keep her voice as steady and emotionless as she could.

" I'm from the ship, you know. I thought I'd have a look at Thalassa while I'm here."

At those last words, a sudden change of expression crossed Lora's face ; the sadness he saw there puzzled Leon, for it could have no cause. And then, with an instantaneous shock of recognition, he knew that he had seen this girl before and understood what she was doing here. This was the girl who had smiled at him when he came out of the ship—no, that was not right ; *he* had been the one who smiled . . .

There seemed nothing to say. They stared at each other across the wrinkled sand, each wondering at the miracle that had brought them together out of the immensity of time and space. Then, as if in unconscious agreement, they sat facing each other on the gunwale of the boat, still without a word.

This is folly, Leon told himself. What am I doing here ? What right have I, a wanderer passing through this world, to touch the lives of its people ? I should make my apologies and leave this girl to the beach and the sea that are her birthright, not mine.

Yet he did not leave. The bright disc of Selene had risen a full hand's breadth above the sea when he said at last: "What's your name?"

"I'm Lora," she answered, in the soft, lilting accent of the islanders which was so attractive, but not always easy to understand.

"And I'm Leon Carrell, Assistant Propulsion Engineer, Star-ship *Magellan.*"

She gave a little smile as he introduced himself, and at that moment Leon was certain that she already knew his name. At the same time a completely irrelevant and whimsical thought struck him; until a few minutes ago he had been dead-tired, just about to turn back for his overdue sleep. Yet now he was fully awake and alert—poised, as it were, on the brink of a new and unpredictable adventure.

But Lora's next remark was predictable enough: "How do you like Thalassa?"

"Give me time," Leon countered. "I've only seen Palm Bay, and not much of that."

"Will you be here—very long?"

The pause was barely perceptible, but his ear detected it. *This* was the question that really mattered.

"I'm not sure," he replied, truthfully enough. "It depends how long the repairs take."

"What went wrong?"

"Oh, we ran into something too big for our meteor screen to absorb. And—bang!—that was the end of the screen. So we've got to make a new one."

"And you think you can do that here?"

"We hope so. The main problem will be lifting about a million tons of water up to the *Magellan.* Luckily, I think Thalassa can spare it.

"Water? I don't understand."

"Well, you know that a star-ship travels at almost the speed of light; even then it takes years to get anywhere, so that we have to go into suspended animation and let the automatic controls run the ship."

Lora nodded. "Of course—that's how our ancestors got here."

"Well, the speed would be no problem if space was really empty—but it isn't. A star-ship sweeps up thousands of atoms of hydrogen, particles of dust, and sometimes larger fragments, every second of its flight. At nearly the speed of

light, these bits of cosmic junk have enormous energy, and could soon burn up the ship. So we carry a shield about a mile ahead of us, and let *that* get burnt up instead. Do you have umbrellas on this world ?"

" Why—yes," Lora replied, obviously baffled by the incongruous question.

" Then you can compare a star-ship to a man moving head-down through a rain-storm behind the cover of an umbrella. The rain is the cosmic dust between the stars, and our ship was unlucky enough to lose its umbrella."

" And you can make a new one of *water* ?"

" Yes ; it's the cheapest building material in the universe. We freeze it into an iceberg which travels ahead of us. What could be simpler than that ?"

Lora did not answer ; her thoughts seemed to have veered on to a new track. Presently she said, her voice so low and wistful that Leon had to bend forward to hear it against the rolling of the surf : " And you left Earth a hundred years ago."

" A hundred and four. Of course, it seems only a few weeks, since we were deep-sleeping until the auto-pilot revived us. All the colonists are still in suspended animation ; they don't know that anything's happened."

" And presently you'll join them again, and sleep your way on to the stars."

Leon nodded, avoiding her eye. " That's right. Planetfall will be a few months late, but what does that matter on a trip that takes three hundred years ?"

Lora pointed to the island behind them, and then to the shoreless sea at whose edge they stood.

" It's strange to think that your sleeping friends up there will never know anything of all this. I feel sorry for them."

" Yes, only we fifty or so engineers will have any memories of Thalassa. To everyone else in the ship, our stop here will be nothing more than a two-hundred-year-old entry in the log-book."

He glanced at Lora's face, and saw again that sadness in her eyes.

" Why does that make you unhappy ?"

She shook her head, unable to answer. How could one express the sense of loneliness that Leon's words had brought to her ? The lives of men, and all their hopes and fears, were

so little against the inconceivable immensities that they had dared to challenge. The thought of that three-hundred-year journey, not yet half completed, was something from which her mind recoiled in horror. And yet—in her own veins was the blood of those earlier pioneers who had followed the same path to Thalassa, centuries ago.

The night was no longer friendly ; she felt a sudden longing for her home and family, for the little room which held everything she owned and which was all the world she knew or wanted. The cold of space was freezing her heart ; she wished now that she had never come on this mad adventure. It was time—more than time—to leave.

As she rose to her feet, she noticed that they had been sitting on Clyde's boat, and wondered what unconscious prompting of her mind had brought her here to this one vessel out of all the little fleet lined up along the beach. At the thought of Clyde, a spasm of uncertainty, even of guilt, swept over her. Never in her life, except for the most fleeting moments, had she thought of any other man but him. Now she could no longer pretend that this was true.

" What's the matter ?" asked Leon. " Are you cold ?" He held out his hand to her, and for the first time their fingers touched as she automatically responded. But at the instant of contact, she shied like a startled animal and jerked away.

" I'm all right," she answered, almost angrily. " It's late—I must go home. Good-bye."

Her reaction was so abrupt that it took Leon by surprise. Had he said anything to offend her ? he wondered. She was already walking quickly away when he called after her : " Will I see you again ?"

If she answered, the sound of the waves carried away her voice. He watched her go, puzzled and a little hurt, while not for the first time in his life he reflected how hard it was to understand the mind of a woman.

For a moment he thought of following her and repeating the question, but in his heart he knew there was no need. As surely as the sun would rise tomorrow, they would meet again.

* * *

III

And now the life of the island was dominated by the crippled giant a thousand miles out in space. Before dawn and after sunset, when the world was in darkness but the light of the sun still streamed overhead, the *Magellan* was visible as a brilliant star, the brightest object in all the sky except the two moons themselves. But even when it could not be seen—when it was lost in the glare of day or eclipsed by the shadow of Thalassa—it was never far from men's thoughts.

It was hard to believe that only fifty of the star-ship's crew had been awakened, and that not even half of those were on Thalassa at any one time. They seemed to be everywhere, usually in little groups of two or three, walking swiftly on mysterious errands or riding small anti-gravity scooters which floated a few feet from the ground, and moved so silently that they made life in the village rather hazardous. Despite the most pressing invitations, the visitors had still taken no part in the cultural and social activities of the island. They had explained, politely but firmly, that until the safety of their ship was secured, they would have no time for any other interests. Later, certainly, but not now . . .

So Thalassa had to wait with what patience it could muster, while the Earthmen set up their instruments, made their surveys, drilled deep into the rocks of the island, and carried out scores of experiments which seemed to have no possible connexion with their problem. Sometimes they consulted briefly with Thalassa's own scientists, but on the whole they kept to themselves. It was not that they were unfriendly or aloof ; they were working with such a fierce and dedicated intensity that they were scarcely aware of anyone around them.

After their first meeting, it was two days before Lora spoke to Leon again. She saw him from time to time as he hurried about the village, usually with a bulging brief case and an abstracted expression, but they were able to exchange only the briefest of smiles. Yet even this was enough to keep her emotions in turmoil, to banish her peace of mind, and to poison her relationship with Clyde.

As long as she could remember he had been part of her life; they had their quarrels and disagreements, but no-one else had ever challenged his place in her heart. In a few months they would be married—yet now she was not even sure of that, or indeed of anything.

" Infatuation " was an ugly word, which one applied only to other people. But how else could she explain this yearning to be with a man who had come suddenly into her life from nowhere, and who must leave again in a few days or weeks ? No doubt the glamour and romance of his origin was partly responsible, but that alone was not enough to account for it. There were other Earthmen better-looking than Leon, yet she had eyes for him alone and her life now was empty unless she was in his presence.

By the end of the first day only her family knew about her feelings ; by the end of the second everyone she passed gave her a knowing smile. It was impossible to keep a secret in such a tight and talkative a community as Palm Bay, and she knew better than to attempt it.

Her second meeting with Leon was accidental—as far as such things can ever be accidents. She was helping her father deal with some of the correspondence and enquiries which had flooded upon the village since the Earthmen's arrival, and was trying to make some sense out of her notes when the door of the office opened. It had opened so often in the last few days that she had ceased to look up ; her younger sister was acting as receptionist and dealt with all the visitors. Then she heard Leon's voice ; and the paper blurred before her eyes, the notes might have been in an unknown language.

" Can I see the Mayor, please ?"

" Of course, Mr.—?"

" Assistant Engineer Carrell."

" I'll go and fetch him. Won't you sit down ?"

Leon slumped wearily on the ancient armchair that was the best the reception room could offer its infrequent visitors, and not until then did he notice that Lora was watching him silently from the other side of the room. At once he sloughed off his tiredness and shot to his feet.

" Hello—I didn't know you worked here."

" I live here ; my father's the Mayor."

This portentous news did not seem to impress Leon unduly. He walked over to the desk, and picked up the fat volume through which Lora had been browsing between her secretarial duties.

" ' A Concise History of Earth '," he read " ' from the Dawn of Civilisation to the Beginning of Interstellar Flight.' And all

in a thousand pages ! It's a pity it ends three hundred years ago."

" We hope that you'll soon bring us up to date. Has much happened since that was written ?"

" Enough to fill about fifty libraries, I suppose. But before we go, we'll leave you copies of all our records, so that your history books will only be a hundred years out of date."

They were circling round each other, avoiding the only thing that was important. When can we meet again ? Lora's thoughts kept hammering silently, unable to break through the barrier of speech. And does he really like me, or is he merely making polite conversation ?

The inner door opened, and the Mayor emerged apologetically from his office.

" Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Carrell, but the President was on the line—he's coming over this afternoon. And what can I do for you ?"

Lora pretended to work, but she typed the same sentence eight times while Leon delivered his message from the captain of the *Magellan*. She was not a great deal wiser when he had finished ; it seemed that the star-ship's engineers wished to build some equipment on a headland a mile from the village, and wanted to make sure there would be no objection.

" Of course !" said Mayor Fordyce expansively, in his nothing's-too-good-for-our-guests tone of voice. " Go right ahead—the land doesn't belong to anybody, and no-one lives there. What do you want to do with it ?"

"We're building a gravity inverter, and the generator has to be anchored in solid bedrock. It may be a little noisy when it starts to run, but I don't think it will disturb you here in the village. And of course we'll dismantle the equipment when we've finished."

Lora had to admire her father. She knew perfectly well that Leon's request was as meaningless to him as it was to her, but one would never have guessed it.

" That's perfectly all right—glad to be of any help we can. And will you tell Captain Gold that the President's coming at five this afternoon ? I'll send my car to collect him ; the reception's at five thirty in the village Hall."

When Leon had given his thanks and departed, Mayor Fordyce walked over to his daughter and picked up the slim pile of correspondence she had none-too-accurately typed.

" He seems a pleasant young man," he said, " but is it a good idea to get too fond of him ?"

" I don't know what you mean,"

" Now, Lora ! After all, I am your father, and I'm not *completely* unobservant."

" He's not—" sniff "—a bit interested in me."

" Are you interested in him ?"

" I don't know. Oh, Daddy, I'm so unhappy !"

Mayor Fordyce was not a brave man, so there was only one thing he could do. He donated his handkerchief, and fled back into his office.

It was the most difficult problem that Clyde had ever faced in his life, and there were no precedents that gave any help at all. Lora belonged to him—everyone knew that. If his rival had been another villager, or someone from any other part of Thalassa, he knew exactly what he would have done. But the laws of hospitality, and above all his natural awe for anything of Earth, prevented him from politely asking Leon to take his attentions elsewhere. It would not be the first time *that* had happened, and there had never been the slightest trouble on those earlier occasions. That could have been because Clyde was over six feet tall, proportionally broad, and had no excess fat on his 190 pound frame.

During the long hours at sea, when he had nothing else to do but to brood, Clyde toyed with the idea of a short, sharp bout with Leon. It would be very short ; though Leon was not as skinny as most of the Earthmen, he shared their pale, washed-out look and was obviously no match for anyone who led a life of physical activity. That was the trouble—it wouldn't be fair. Clyde knew that public opinion would be outraged if he had a fight with Leon, however justified he might be.

And how justified was he ? That was the big problem that worried Clyde, as it had worried a good many billion men before him. It seemed that Leon was now practically one of the family ; every time he called at the mayor's house the Earthman seemed to be there on some pretext or other. Jealousy was an emotion which had never afflicted Clyde before, and he did not enjoy the symptoms.

He was still furious about the dance. It had been the biggest social event for years ; indeed, it was not likely that Palm Bay would ever match it again in the whole of its history. To have the President of Thalassa, half the Council, and fifty visitors from Earth in the village at the same moment was not something that could happen again this side of Eternity.

For all his size and strength, Clyde was a good dancer—especially with Lora. But tonight he had little chance of proving it ; Leon was too busy demonstrating the latest steps from Earth (latest, that is, if you overlooked the fact that they must have passed out of fashion a hundred years ago—unless they had come back again and were now the latest thing.) In Clyde's opinion Leon's technique was very poor and the dances were ugly ; the interest that Lora showed in them was perfectly ridiculous.

He had been foolish enough to tell her so when his opportunity came ; and that was the last dance he had had with Lora that evening. From then onwards, he might not have been there as far as she was concerned. Clyde endured the boycott as long as he could, then left for the bar with one objective in mind. He quickly attained it, and not until he came reluctantly to his senses the next morning did he discover what he had missed.

The dancing had ended early ; there had been a short speech from the president—his third that evening—introducing the commander of the starship and promising a little surprise. Captain Gold had been equally brief ; he was obviously a man more accustomed to orders than orations.

" Friends," he began. " You know why we're here, and I've no need to say how much we appreciate your hospitality and kindness. We shall never forget you, and we're only sorry that we have had so little time to see more of your beautiful island and it's people. I hope you will forgive us for any seeming discourtesy, but the repair of our ship, and the safety of our companions, has had to take priority in our minds.

" In the long run, the accident that brought us here may be fortunate for us both. It has given us happy memories, and also inspiration. What we have seen here is a lesson to us. May we make the world that is waiting at the end of our journey as fair a home for mankind as you have made Thalassa.

" And before we resume our voyage, it is both a duty and a pleasure to leave with you all the records we can that will bridge the gap since you last had contact with Earth. Tomorrow we shall invite your scientists and historians up to our ship so that they can copy any of our information tapes they desire. Thus we hope to leave you a legacy which will enrich your world for generations to come. That is the very least we can do.

" But tonight, science and history can wait, for we have other treasures aboard. Earth has not been idle in the centuries since your forefathers left. Listen, now, to some of the heritage we share together, and which we will leave upon Thalassa before we go our way."

The lights dimmed ; the music began. No-one who was present would ever forget this moment ; in a trance of wonder, Lora listened to what men had wrought in sound during the centuries of separation. Time meant nothing ; she was not even conscious of Leon standing by her side, holding her hand, as the music ebbed and flowed around them.

These were the things that she had never known, the things that belonged to Earth, and to Earth alone. The slow beat of mighty bells, climbing like invisible smoke from old cathedral spires ; the chant of patient boatmen, in a thousand tongues now lost forever, rowing home against the tide in the last light of day ; the songs of armies marching into battles that Time had robbed of all their pain and evil ; the merged murmur of ten million voices as Man's greatest cities woke to meet the dawn ; the cold dance of the Aurora over endless seas of ice ; the roar of mighty engines climbing upwards on the highway to the stars. All these she heard in the music and the songs that came out of the night—the songs of distant Earth, carried to her across the light-years . . .

A clear soprano voice, swooping and soaring like a bird at the very edge of hearing, was singing a wordless lament that tore at the heart. It was a dirge for all loves lost in the loneliness of space, for friends and homes that could never again be seen and must fade at last from memory. It was a song for all exiles, and it spoke as clearly to those who were sundered from Earth by a dozen generations as to the voyagers to whom its fields and cities still seemed only weeks away.

The music died into the darkness ; misty-eyed, avoiding words, the people of Thalassa went slowly to their homes. But Lora did not go to hers ; against the loneliness that had pierced her very soul, there was only one defence. And presently she found it, in the warm night of the forest, as Leon's arms tightened around her and their souls and bodies merged. Like wayfarers lost in a hostile wilderness, they sought warmth and comfort beside the fire of love. While that fire burned, they were safe from the shadows that prowled in the night ; and all the universe of stars and planets shrank to a toy that they could hold within their hands.

IV

To Leon, it was never wholly real. Despite all the urgency and peril that had brought them here, he sometimes fancied that at journey's end it would be hard to convince himself that Thalassa was not a dream that had come in his long sleep. This fierce and foredoomed love, for example ; he had not asked for it—it had been thrust upon him. Yet there were few men, he told himself, who would not have taken it, had they too landed, after weeks of grinding anxiety, on this peaceful, pleasant world.

When he could escape from work, he had long walks with Lora in the fields far from the village, where men seldom came and only the robot cultivators disturbed the solitude. For hours Lora would question him about Earth—but she would never speak of the planet which was the *Magellan's* goal. He understood her reasons well enough, and did his best to satisfy her endless curiosity about the world that was already " Home" to more men than had ever seen it with their own eyes.

She was bitterly disappointed to hear that the age of cities had passed. Despite all that Leon could tell her about the completely decentralised culture that now covered the planet from Pole to Pole, she still thought of Earth in terms of such vanished giants as Chandrigar, London, Astrograd, New York, and it was hard for her to realise that they had gone forever, and with them the way of life they represented.

" When we left Earth," Leon explained, " the largest centres of population were university towns like Oxford or Ann Arbor or Canberra ; some of them had fifty thousand students and professors. There are no other cities left of even half that size."

" But what happened to them ?"

" Oh, there was no single cause, but the development of communications started it. As soon as anyone on Earth could see and talk to anyone else by pressing a button, most of the need for cities vanished. Then anti-gravity was invented, and you could move goods or houses or anything else through the sky without bothering about geography. *That* completed the job of wiping out distance that the airplane had begun a couple of centuries earlier. After that, men started to live where they liked, and the cities dwindled away."

For a moment Lora did not answer ; she was lying on a bank of grass, watching the behaviour of a bee whose ancestors, like hers, had been citizens of Earth. It was trying vainly to extract

honey from one of Thalassa'a native flowers ; insect life had not yet arisen on this world, and the few indigenous flowers had not yet invented lures for air-borne visitors.

The frustrated bee gave up the hopeless task and buzzed angrily away ; Lora hoped that it would have enough sense to head back to the orchards where it would find more co-operative flowers. When she spoke again, it was to voice a dream that had now haunted mankind for almost a thousand years.

" Do you suppose," she said wistfully, " that we'll ever break through the speed of light ?"

Leon smiled, knowing where her thoughts were leading. To travel faster than light—to go home to Earth, yet to return to your native world while your friends were still alive—every colonist must, at some time or other, have dreamed of this. There was no problem, in the whole history of the human race, which had called forth so much effort and which still remained so utterly intractable.

" I don't believe so," he said. " If it could be done, someone would have discovered how by this time. No—we have to do it the slow way, because there isn't any other. That's how the Universe is built, and there's nothing we can do about it."

" But surely we could still keep in touch !"

Leon nodded. " That's true," he said, " and we try to. I don't know what's gone wrong, but you should have heard from Earth long before now. We've been sending out robot message-carriers to all the colonies, carrying a full history of everything that's happened up to the time of departure, and asking for a report back. As the news returns to Earth, it's all transcribed and sent out again by the next messenger. So we have a kind of interstellar news service, with the Earth as the central clearing house. It's slow, of course, but there's no other way of doing it. If the last messenger to Thalassa has been lost, there must be another on the way—maybe several, twenty or thirty years apart."

Lora tried to envisage the vast, star-spanning network of message-carriers, shuttling back and forth between Earth and its scattered children, and wondered why Thalassa had been overlooked. But with Leon beside her, it did not seem important. He was here ; Earth and the stars were very far away. And so also, with whatever unhappiness it might bring, was tomorrow . . .

By the end of the week, the visitors had built a squat and heavily-braced pyramid of metal girders, housing some obscure mechanism, on a rocky headland overlooking the sea. Lora, in common with the 571 other inhabitants of Palm Bay and the several thousand sightseers who had descended upon the village, was watching when the first test was made. No one was allowed to go within a quarter of a mile of the machine—a precaution which aroused a good deal of alarm among the more nervous islanders. Did the Earthmen know what they were doing? Suppose that something went wrong? And *what* were they doing, anyway?

Leon was there with his friends inside that metal pyramid, making the final adjustments—the 'coarse focussing,' he had told Lora, leaving her none the wiser. She watched with the same anxious incomprehension as all her fellow islanders until the distant figures emerged from the machine and walked to the edge of the flat-topped rock on which it was built. There they stood, a tiny group of figures silhouetted against the ocean, staring out to sea.

A mile from the shore, something strange was happening to the water. It seemed that a storm was brewing—but a storm that kept within an area only a few hundred yards across. Mountainous waves were building up, smashing against each other and then swiftly subsiding again, within a few minutes the ripples of the disturbance had reached the shore, but the centre of the tiny storm showed no sign of movement. It was as if, Lora told herself, an invisible finger had reached down from the sky and was stirring the sea.

Quite abruptly, the entire pattern changed. Now the waves were no longer battering against each other; they were marching in step, moving more and more swiftly in a tight circle. A cone of water was rising from the sea, becoming taller and thinner with every second. Already it was a hundred feet high, and the sound of its birth was an angry roaring that filled the air and struck terror into the hearts of all who heard it. All, that is, except the little band of men who had summoned this monster from the deep, and who still stood watching it with calm assurance, ignoring the waves that were breaking almost against their feet.

Now the spinning tower of water was climbing swiftly up the sky, piercing the clouds like an arrow as it headed towards space. Its foam-capped summit was already lost beyond sight, and from the sky there began to fall a steady shower of rain, the

drops abnormally large like those which prelude a thunderstorm. Not all the water that was being lifted from Thalassa's single ocean was reaching its distant goal ; some was escaping from the power that controlled it and was falling back from the edge of space.

Slowly the watching crowd drifted away, impressed but not in the least over-awed by what it had seen. Man had been able to control gravity for half a thousand years, and this trick—spectacular though it was—could not be compared with the miracle of hurling a great star-ship from sun to sun at little short of the speed of light.

The Earthmen were now walking back towards their machine, clearly satisfied with what they had done. Even at this distance, one could see that they were happy and relaxed—perhaps for the first time since they had reached Thalassa. The water to rebuild the *Magellan's* shield was on its way out into space, to be shaped and frozen by the other strange forces that these men had made their servants. In a few days, they would be ready to leave, their great interstellar ark as good as new.

Even until this minute, Lora had hoped that they might fail. There was nothing left of that hope now, as she watched the man-made waterspout lift its burden from the sea. Sometimes it wavered slightly, its base shifting back and forth as if at the balance point between immense and invisible forces. But it was fully under control, and it would do the task that had been set for it. That meant only one thing to her ; soon she must say goodbye to Leon.

She walked slowly towards the distant group of Earthmen, marshalling her thoughts and trying to subdue her emotions. Presently Leon broke away from his friends and came to meet her ; relief and happiness were written across his face, but they faded swiftly when he saw Lora's expression.

" Well," he said lamely, almost like a schoolboy caught in some crime, " we've done it."

" And now—how long will you be here ?"

He scuffed nervously at the sand, unable to meet her eye.

" Oh, about three days—perhaps four."

She tried to assimilate the words calmly ; after all, she had expected them — this was nothing new. But she failed completely, and it was as well that there was no one near them.

" You can't leave !" she cried desperately. " Stay here on Thalassa !"

Leon took her hands gently, then murmured : " No, Lora—this isn't my world ; I would never fit into it. Half my life's been spent training for the work I'm doing now ; I could never be happy here, where there aren't any more frontiers. In a month, I should die of boredom."

" Then take me with you !"

" You don't really mean that."

" But I do !"

" You only think so ; you'd be more out of place in my world than I would be in yours."

" I could learn—there would be plenty of things I could do. As long as we could stay together !"

He held her at arm's length, looking into her eyes. They mirrored sorrow, and also sincerity. She really believed what she was saying, Leon told himself. For the first time, his conscience smote him. He had forgotten—or chosen not to remember—how much more serious these things could be to a woman than to a man.

He had never intended to hurt Lora ; he was very fond of her, and would remember her with affection all his life. Now he was discovering, as so many men before him had done, that it was not always easy to say good-bye.

There was only one thing to do. Better a short, sharp pain than a long bitterness.

" Come with me, Lora," he said. " I have something to show you."

They did not speak as Leon led the way to the clearing which the Earthmen used as a landing ground. It was littered with pieces of enigmatic equipment, some of them being repacked while others were left behind for the islanders to use as they pleased. Several of the gravity-scooters were parked in the shade beneath the palms ; even when not in use they spurned contact with the ground, and hovered a couple of feet above the grass.

But it was not these that Leon was interested in ; he walked purposefully towards the gleaming oval that dominated the clearing and spoke a few words to the engineer who was standing beside it. There was a short argument ; then the other capitulated with fairly good grace.

" It's not fully loaded," Leon explained as he helped Lora up the ramp. " But we're going just the same. The other shuttle will be down in half an hour, any way."

Already Lora was in a world she had never known before—a world of technology in which the most brilliant engineer or scientist of Thalassa would be lost. The island possessed all the machines it needed for its life and happiness ; this was something utterly beyond its ken. Lora had once seen the great computer that was the virtual ruler of her people and with whose decisions they disagreed not once in a generation. That giant brain was huge and complex, but there was an awesome simplicity about this machine that impressed even her non-technical mind. When Leon sat down at the absurdly small control board, his hands seemed to do nothing except rest lightly upon it.

Yet the walls were suddenly transparent—and there was Thalassa, already shrinking below them. There had been no sense of movement, no whisper of sound, yet the island was dwindling even as she watched. The misty edge of the world, a great bow dividing the blue of the sea from the velvet blackness of space, was becoming more curved with every pressing second.

" Look," said Leon, pointing to the stars.

The ship was already visible, and Lora felt a sudden sense of disappointment that it was so small. She could see a cluster of portholes around the centre section, but there appeared to be no other breaks anywhere on the vessel's squat and angular hull.

The illusion lasted only for a second. Then, with a shock of incredulity that made her senses reel and brought her to the edge of vertigo, she saw how hopelessly her eyes had been deceived. Those were no port-holes ; the ship was still miles away. What she was seeing were the gaping hatches through which the ferries could shuttle on their journeys between the star-ship and Thalassa.

V

There is no sense of perspective in space, where all objects are still clear and sharp whatever their distance. Even when the hull of the ship was looming up beside them, an endless curving wall of metal eclipsing the stars, there was still no real way of judging its size. She could only guess that it must be at least two miles in length.

The ferry berthed itself, as far as Lora could judge, without any intervention from Leon. She followed him out of the little

control room, and when the airlock opened she was surprised to discover that they could step directly into one of the star-ship's passageways.

They were standing in a long tubular corridor that stretched in either direction as far as the eye could see. The floor was moving beneath their feet, carrying them along swiftly and effortlessly—yet strangely enough Lora had felt no sudden jerk as she stepped on to the conveyer that was now sweeping her through the ship. One more mystery she would never explain ; there would be many others before Leon had finished showing her the *Magellan*.

It was an hour before they met another human being. In that time they must have travelled miles, sometimes being carried along by the moving corridors, sometimes being lifted up long tubes within which gravity had been abolished. It was obvious what Leon was trying to do ; he was attempting to give her some faint impression of the size and complexity of this artificial world which had been built to carry the seeds of a new civilisation to the stars.

The engine room alone with its sleeping, shrouded monsters of metal and crystal, must have been half a mile in length. As they stood on the balcony high above the vast arena of latent power, Leon said proudly, and perhaps not altogether accurately : " These are mine." Lora looked down on the huge and meaningless shapes that had carried Leon to her across the light-years, and did not know whether to bless them for what they had brought, or to curse them for what they might soon take away.

They sped swiftly through cavernous holds, packed with all the machines and instruments and stores needed to mould a virgin planet and to make it a fit home for humanity. There were miles upon miles of storage racks, holding in tape or microfilm or still more compact form the cultural heritage of mankind. Here they met a group of experts from Thalassa, looking rather dazed, trying to decide how much of all this wealth they could loot in the few hours left to them.

Had her own ancestors, Lora wondered, been so well equipped when they crossed space ? She doubted it ; their ship had been far smaller, and Earth must have learned much about the techniques of interstellar colonisation in the centuries since Thalassa was opened up. When the *Magellan's* sleeping travellers reached their new home, their success was assured if their spirit matched their material resources.

Now they had come to a great white door which slid silently open as they approached to reveal—of all incongruous things to find inside a spaceship—a cloakroom in which lines of heavy furs hung from pegs. Leon helped Lora to climb into one of these, then selected another for himself. She followed him uncomprehendingly as he walked towards a circle of frosted glass set in the floor ; then he turned to her and said : " There's no gravity where we're going now, so keep close to me and do exactly as I say."

The crystal trap-door swung upwards like an opening watch-glass, and out of the depths swirled a blast of cold such as Lora had never imagined, still less experienced. Thin wisps of moisture condensed in the freezing air, dancing round her like ghosts. She looked at Leon as if to say " Surely you don't expect me to go down *there* !"

He took her arm reassuringly and said " Don't worry—you won't notice the cold after a few minutes. I'll go first."

The trapdoor swallowed him ; Lora hesitated for a moment, then lowered herself after him. *Lowered* ? No ; that was the wrong word ; up and down no longer existed here. Gravity had been abolished—she was floating without weight in this frigid, snow-white universe. All round her were glittering honeycombs of glass, forming thousands and tens of thousands of hexagonal cells. They were laced together with clusters of pipes and bundles of wiring, and each cell was large enough to hold a human being.

And each cell did. There they were, sleeping all around her, the thousands of colonists to whom Earth was still, in literal truth, a memory of yesterday. What were they dreaming, less than half-way through their three-hundred-year sleep ? Did the brain dream at all, in this dim no-man's-land between Life and Death ?

Narrow, endless belts, fitted with hand-holds every few feet, were strung across the face of the honeycomb. Leon grabbed one of these, and let it tow them swiftly past the great mosaic of hexagons. Twice they changed direction, switching from one belt to another, until at last they must have been a full quarter of a mile from the point where they had started.

Leon released his grip, and they drifted to rest beside one cell no different from all the myriads of others. But as Lora saw the expression on Leon's face, she knew why he had brought her here, and knew that her battle was already lost.

The girl floating in her crystal coffin had a face that was not beautiful, but was full of character and intelligence. Even in this centuries-long repose, it showed determination and resourcefulness. It was the face of a pioneer, of a frontierswoman who could stand beside her mate and help him wield whatever fabulous tools of science might be needed to build a new Earth beyond the stars.

For a long time, unconscious of the cold, Lora stared down at the sleeping rival who would never know of her existence. Had any love, she wondered, in the whole history of the world, ever ended in so strange a place ?

At last she spoke, her voice hushed as if she feared to wake these slumbering legions.

" Is she your wife ?"

Leon nodded.

" I'm sorry, Lora. I never intended to hurt you . . ."

" It doesn't matter now. It was my fault too." She paused, and looked more closely at the sleeping woman. " And your child as well ?"

" Yes ; it will be born in three months after we land."

How strange to think of a gestation that would last nine months and three hundred years ! Yet it was all part of the same pattern ; and that, she knew now, was a pattern that had no place for her.

These patient multitudes would haunt her dreams for the rest of her life ; as the crystal trapdoor closed behind her, and warmth crept back into her body, she wished that the cold that had entered her heart could be so easily dispelled. One day, perhaps, it would be ; but many days and many lonely nights must pass ere that time came.

She remembered nothing of the journey back through the labyrinth of corridors and echoing chambers ; it took her by surprise when she found herself once more in the cabin of the little ferry ship that had brought them up from Thalassa. Leon walked over to the controls, made a few adjustments, but did not sit down.

" Good-bye, Lora," he said. " My work is done. It would be better if I stayed here." He took her hands in his ; and now, in the last moment they would ever have together, there were no words that she could say. She could not even see his face for the tears that blurred her vision.

His hands tightened once, then relaxed. He gave a strangled sob, and when she could see clearly again, the cabin was empty.

A long time later a smooth, synthetic voice announced from the control board "We have landed; please leave by the forward airlock." The pattern of opening doors guided her steps, and presently she was looking out into the busy clearing she had left a lifetime ago.

A small crowd was watching the ship with attentive interest, as if it had not landed a hundred times before. For a moment she did not understand the reason; then Clyde's voice roared "Where is he? I've had enough of this!"

In a couple of bounds he was up the ramp and had gripped her roughly by the arm. "Tell him to come out like a man!"

Lora shook her head listlessly.

"He's not here," she answered. "I've said good-bye to him. I'll never see him again."

Clyde stared at her disbelievingly, then saw that she spoke the truth. In the same moment she crumbled into his arms, sobbing as if her heart would break. As she collapsed, his anger too collapsed within him, and all that he had intended to say to her vanished from his mind. She belonged to him again; there was nothing else that mattered now.

For almost fifty hours the geyser roared off the coast of Thalassa until its work was done. All the island watched, through the lenses of the television cameras, the shaping of the iceberg that would ride ahead of the *Magellan* on her way to the stars. Might the new shield serve her better, prayed all who watched, than the one she had brought from Earth. The great cone of ice was itself protected, during these few hours while it was close to Thalassa's sun, by a paper-thin screen of polished metal that kept it always in shadow. The sun-shade would be left behind as soon as the journey began; it could not be needed in the interstellar wastes.

The last day came and went; Lora's heart was not the only one to feel sadness now as the sun went down and the men from Earth made their final farewells to the world they would never forget—and which their sleeping friends would never remember. In the same swift silence with which it had first landed, the gleaming egg lifted from the clearing, dipped for a moment in salutation above the village, and climbed back into its natural element. Then Thalassa waited.

The night was shattered by a soundless detonation of light. A point of pulsing brilliance no larger than a single star had banished all the hosts of heaven and now dominated the sky, far outshining the pale disc of Selene and casting sharp-edged shadows on the ground—shadows that moved even as one watched. Up there on the borders of space the fires that powered the suns themselves were burning now, preparing to drive the star-ship out into immensity on the last leg of her interrupted journey.

Dry-eyed, Lora watched the silent glory on which half her heart was riding out towards the stars. She was drained of emotion now ; if she had tears, they would come later.

Was Leon already sleeping, or was he looking back upon Thalassa, thinking of what might have been ? Asleep or waking, what did it matter now . . .

She felt Clyde's arms close around her, and welcomed their comfort against the loneliness of space. This was where she belonged ; her heart would not stray again. *Goodbye, Leon—may you be happy on that far world which you and your children will conquer for mankind. But think of me sometimes, two hundred years behind you on the road to Earth.*

She turned her back upon the blazing sky and buried her face in the shelter of Clyde's arms. He stroked her hair with clumsy gentleness, wishing that he had words to comfort her yet knowing that silence was best. He felt no sense of victory ; though Lora was his once more, their old and innocent companionship was gone beyond recall. Leon's memory would fade, but it would never wholly die. All the days of his life, Clyde knew, the ghost of Leon would come between him and Lora—the ghost of a man who would be not one day older when they lay in their graves.

The light was fading from the sky as the fury of the star-drive dwindled along its lonely and unreturning road. Only once did Lora turn away from Clyde to look again at the departing ship. Its journey had scarcely begun, yet already it was moving across the heavens more swiftly than any meteor ; in a few moments it would have fallen below the edge of the horizon as it plunged past the orbit of Thalassa, beyond the barren outer planets, and on into the abyss.

She clung fiercely to the strong arms that enfolded her, and felt against her cheeck the beating of Clyde's heart—the heart that belonged to her and which she would never spurn again Out of the silence of the night there came a sudden, long-drawn

sigh from the watching thousands, and she knew that the *Magellan* had sunk out of sight below the edge of the world. It was all over.

She looked up at the empty sky to which the stars were now returning—the stars which she could never see again without remembering Leon. But he had been right ; that way was not for her. She knew now, with a wisdom beyond her years, that the star-ship *Magellan* was outward bound into History ; and that was something of which Thalassa had no further part. Her world's story had begun and ended with the pioneers three hundred years ago, but the colonists of the *Magellan* would go on to victories and achievements as great as any yet written in the sages of mankind. Leon and his companions would be moving seas, levelling mountains and conquering unknown perils when her descendants eight generations hence would still be dreaming beneath the sun-soaked palms.

And which was better, who could say ?"

—Arthur C. Clarke
