

WORLDS BEYOND

*Science-
Fantasy
Fiction*

DECEMBER
25 CENTS



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SIX-LEGGED SVENGALI BY MACK REYNOLDS
& FREDRIC BROWN

GRAHAM GREENE • PHILIP WYLIE • JACK VANCE • C. M. KORNBLUTH

Contributors . . .

Mack Reynolds is the pen name of a social scientist who is better known in the field of political economy than in that of fiction. A 32-year-old Californian now residing in Taos, N. M., he has been writing science-fantasy for a little more than a year. **Fredric Brown**, also a resident of Taos, was born in Cincinnati 43 years ago. He is the author of eight mystery novels, the first of which, *The Fabulous Clipjoint*, won the Edgar Allan Poe Award of the Mystery Writers of America in 1947; one science-fiction novel, *What Mad Universe*; one serious novel, *Here Comes a Candle*; and innumerable short detective and science-fiction stories. A collection of the latter, *Space on My Hands*, is being published this fall.

Philip Wylie's *Epistle to the Thessalonians* is an excerpt from his 1934 novel, *Finnley Wren*—Wren being a character very much like Wylie himself, who writes the *Epistle* and others like it for the good of his soul. The original edition is now out of print, and the *Epistles* were not included in a recent condensed pocket edition.

Graham Greene is known to few as a fantasy writer, since his brilliant reputation rests on his novels of suspense and adventure; but his collection, *19 Stories*, contains two expert fantasies in addition to *The End of the Party*.

John D. MacDonald, tall, bifocaled, 34, lives winters in Clearwater, Fla., summers at Piseco Lake, N. Y., with wife and boy, 11. His background of Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration and the wartime O. S. S. has not contributed much to the whodunits, science-fiction and adventure yarns which have enabled him to keep eating since 1946. He can't save money, lay off smoking or stop falling hair. He has a detective novel soon to be published.

C. M. Kornbluth, now in his late twenties, began writing science fiction and fantasy ten years ago, and for a time produced so copiously, under a dozen or more pen names, that at least two then-extant science-fantasy magazines would have collapsed had he ceased to supply them. He lives in Chicago, where he heads the local bureau of a national news service.

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Cover by Paul Calle; illustrations by Calle and Harrison
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WORLDS BEYOND is published monthly by Hillman Periodicals, Inc., at 4600 Diversey Ave., Chicago, Ill. Editorial office, 535 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Application for entry as second-class matter is pending at the post office at Chicago, Ill. Price, 25c a copy; subscriptions \$3.00 a year in the United States and Canada. Copyright 1950 by Hillman Periodicals, Inc. The publishers assume no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, which should be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelopes. All characters in stories are fictional, and any resemblance to a real person is coincidental. Printed in the United States of America.



by Mack Reynolds
and Fredric Brown

SIX-LEGGED SVENGALI

All the explorer had to do was prove he was smarter than a mud turtle—but on Venus that's not so easy!

BASE CAMP certainly looked good to me after hours of wandering alone through the eternal thick fog and thin drizzle that is Venus. You can never see more than a few yards ahead of you, but that's all right; there's nothing worth seeing on Venus anyway.

Except, while our expedition was there, Dixie Everton. It was strictly on account of Dixie that I'd joined the Everton Zoölogical Expedition, led by her father, Dr. Everton of the Extra-Terrestrial Zoo at New Albuquerque. I was paying my own expenses, too; Dr. Everton didn't think I'd be a worth-while addition to the party. What was worse, he didn't think I'd be a worth-while husband for Dixie. And there I disagreed with him, but definitely.

Somehow or other it was up to me, on this small expedition, to prove to him that I wasn't quite as *non compos mentos* as he thought. Maybe that sounds kind of corny, but that's the way it was. And judging by my luck thus far, I had about the chance of a popsicle on the sunward side of Mercury of convincing him.

Actually, I had little real sympathy for the expedition. I've never thought much of people penning animals in cages to be gawked at. Already, of the sparse animal life on Venus, two species had become extinct: the beautiful Venusian egret, to supply plumes for hats in a ridiculous revival of the millinery styles of the 19th century, and the kieter, whose meat was delicious beyond belief, to adorn the tables of wealthy gourmets.

Dixie heard me come into camp. She stuck her beautiful head through the flaps of her tent and smiled at me. That helped considerably. She asked, "Get anything, Rod?"

I said, "Only this. Is it any good?" I opened the moss-lined box I used as a game carrier and took out the only animal I'd caught, if it was an animal. It had gills like a fish, eight legs, a comb like a rooster's, only larger, and blue fur.

Dixie looked it over: "It's a weezen, Rod. We have two back at the zoo, so it's not a new variety." She must have seen the disappointment on my face because she added quickly, "But this is a good specimen, Rod. Don't let it go yet; Daddy will probably want to study it when he has time."

That's my Dixie.

Dr. Everton came out of the main tent and looked at me distastefully. "Hello, Spenser. I'll shut off the signal now. Crane's back, too."

He walked over and shut off the radio-like gadget that had been broadcasting a directional click signal to enable Crane and me to get back to camp. On Venus without that transmitter and a matching pocket receiver, you'd be hopelessly lost a few dozen yards from your base.

"Crane get anything?" I asked.

"No specimens," Dr. Everton said, "but something well worth eating. He got a swamp-hen, and he's cooking it for us now."

"Wouldn't let me touch it," Dixie said. "Says women can't cook. It must be about ready; he's been working an hour. Hungry, Rod?"

"Almost hungry enough to eat *this*," I told her, looking at the weezen I was still holding. Dixie laughed and took it from me to put in one of the hold boxes.

We went into the main tent. The swamp-hen was ready and Crane served it proudly. He'd done a good job on it and had a right to be proud. A Venusian swamp-hen, properly cooked, is as much better than fried chicken as fried chicken is better than boiled buzzard. It's out of this world, or any world.

And it has four legs instead of two, so there was a drumstick for each of us.

There wasn't much talk while we ate. But over coffee, Dixie said

something to me that didn't make any sense at all—something about a turtle.

"Huh?" I said. "What turtle?"

Dixie looked at me as though to see whether I was kidding or not and then she looked from her father to John Crane, and then there was an awkward silence.

I frowned and asked what went.

Crane sighed. He said, "A Venusian mud turtle, Rod. What this expedition came for, primarily. And apparently you found one this morning."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said patiently. "I not only didn't find one, but I never even *heard* of one. What kind of a gag is this?"

Dr. Everton shook his head sadly. "Spenser, we let you come along only because you swore you knew how to capture one."

"I said that?" I looked at Dixie pleadingly. "Is this a conspiracy to kid me, or what?"

Dixie looked down at her plate unhappily.

Dr. Everton said, "Yes, definitely you found one of the turtles, or were near one. I'll explain.

"You see, Spenser, many creatures have amazing protective mechanisms for use against their enemies. There are the insects that survive by resembling twigs—the harmless snakes that have the markings of deadly vipers—the small fish that can puff itself up so large that it cannot be swallowed—the chameleon that—"

I interrupted him. "I'll concede protective mechanisms, Dr. Everton. But what's that got to do with whatever we're talking about?"

He wagged a finger at me. "All right, you concede protective mechanisms. Now we come to the protective mechanism of the Venusian mud turtle. Like all other forms of life on Venus, it has limited telepathic powers. In its case, a special adaptation of telepathy. It can induce temporary amnesia concerning itself—its very existence—in the mind of any creature coming within a certain range of it.

"In other words, if anyone goes out hunting a Venusian mud turtle and finds one—he not only forgets he was hunting it but that he saw it or ever heard of it!"

Probably my mouth dropped open a little. I said, "You mean that *I was out hunting a—*"

"Exactly," said Dr. Everton, a bit smugly.

I looked at Dixie and this time her eyes met mine. She said, "That's right, Rod. Finding a way to capture one of the turtles was the main purpose of this expedition. And part of the reason Dad let you come along was the fact that you swore you knew how to do it."

"I did?"

"Just a minute, Rod; I'll show you. I know you're finding it hard to believe, when you don't remember." She left the tent a minute and came back with a letter; I could see that it was in my handwriting. She gave it to me and I read it and my ears began to burn.

I handed it back to Dixie and there was a long silence.

Finally I broke it. "And I didn't even give any of you a clue," I asked, "as to how I was going to go about being smarter than a mud turtle?"

Dr. Everton spread his hands. "You wouldn't tell us."

"How long will this amnesia last? Is it permanent?"

"No, it will run its course in a few hours—five or six, perhaps. But after that, if you encounter another of the beasts, it'll happen all over again."

I thought that over and it didn't help any way that I could see. But I suddenly wondered about something. I asked, "If everyone who sees one forgets about it, how is it known to exist?"

"It's been photographed several times—but by explorers who didn't remember taking the photographs until after they were developed hours later. It looks considerably like a terrestrial turtle; has six legs instead of four and is round rather than oval. You studied pictures of it quite closely."

Crane had arisen from the table and secured half a dozen photographs from a small portable desk that sat in one corner. "Here's your object of search, Rod." There was amusement in his eyes.

I stared at them, still unbelievably. "They're cute little fellows," I muttered. "Big eyes. Look kind of wistful."

"Rather rare, even as Venusian life forms go," Crane told me. "This area of twenty or thirty square miles is the only spot they've been reported."

"Rare is correct," Dr. Everton grunted. "And at the rate things are going they'll be extinct before we ever secure a specimen."

I frowned at that. "What do you mean?"

Crane shrugged. "Some of the attempts to catch them have been rather disastrous to the mud turtles. One biological expedition tried a poison gas, thinking to kill a few and at least have some dead specimens. However, what obviously happened was that upon death they sank deep into the mud. Another expedition used a narcotic in hopes of rendering some unconscious. They—"

Dr. Everton put in, "Well, be that as it may, if this expedition fails, it will probably be the last. The attempts to capture the mud turtle are proving much too expensive."

I rubbed a hand across my face. This was like having a hangover after a six-day binge. If it hadn't been for that letter in my own handwriting I might still have suspected that they'd conspired to play a joke on me.

I said ruefully, "Whatever idea I had, it must have been wrong. I have met the enemy and I am its. If you'll excuse me—"

"What are you going to do, Rod?" Dixie asked.

"Going off to think awhile." I turned to Dr. Everton. "Unless you want me for something."

"No, go ahead, Spenser. We're going out hunting again, possibly our last trip before we leave. But—" He didn't exactly say that I wasn't going to be a very valuable addition to the hunting party, but he meant it all right. And I didn't blame him.

I went back to my own tent—each of the four of us had a small private tent outside the big one—and sat down on the cot. I tried to remember something, anything, about turtles or a turtle. But aside from what they'd just told me, I couldn't dredge up a thing.

What idea had I had? Well, whatever it was, it hadn't been very good. I felt like ripping my hair out.

There was a cough at the tent entrance. "May I come in?" It was Dr. Everton's voice.

"Sure," I said.

He came in and I motioned him to sit down, but he shook his head. He said, "I'm sorry I have to remind you of this, Spenser—while

you're down, as it were—but it wouldn't be fair to me if I didn't. And you've indubitably forgotten it along with everything else concerning the turtle."

I looked up at him, puzzled.

He said, "You don't remember our agreement?"

I shook my head.

"It was simply this: I told you that if you could do what you said you could, I'd withdraw my objections to your marrying Dixie. In return, you agreed that if you failed—"

"Oh, no."

"You did, Spenser. You were so sure of yourself that you seemed to think you weren't taking any chance at all. But you *did* promise that if you failed, you'd accept my verdict and not continue to see Dixie."

It seemed impossible that I'd have said that—but I knew Dr. Everton was an honest man. I had to believe him.

He said, "I'm sorry to have to remind you of it. And frankly, I've come to rather like you somewhat, personally. But I still don't think you'd be a good husband for my daughter. She is a brilliant girl. She is entitled to someone who—uh—"

"Who's smarter than a mud turtle," I supplied glumly.

He said, "Well—" and went on kindly to try to make me feel a bit better about it, but it didn't help. Pretty soon he left and I sat there. And sat there.

I must have had an idea that I'd been pretty confident of, I knew, if I'd made a deal like that with Dr. Everton. But *what* had the idea been? What good is an idea if you don't remember? Or could I possibly have been smart enough to have left a message for myself?

I went quickly to the foot locker that held my clothes and equipment and lifted the lid. There was a message chalked on the inside of the lid, all right, and it was in my own lettering. Three sentences. I stared at them. "TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY. CAN A PERSON WITH AMNESIA GET AMNESIA? PHASE IS THE ANSWER."

I stared at the message and groaned. I'd had to be cryptic, yet. I couldn't have put it in plain English so I'd know what I was talking about. Probably I'd figured that if I put it plainly Crane or Everton might see it and steal my idea. But what had I *meant*?

TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY. CAN A PERSON WITH AMNESIA GET AMNESIA? PHASE IS THE ANSWER.

Nuts. It must have meant something to me when I chalked it there, but it meant absolutely nothing now.

TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY. Did that mean that I'd deliberately let myself get caught by a turtle first *so I could turn the tables and then catch it*? Can a person with amnesia get amnesia? Wasn't I immune now? Maybe, but what did I mean by *phase* being the answer?

I heard sounds of the others leaving camp and I grabbed my equipment quickly, including the moss-lined specimen box, and hurried out. They were out of sight—from the sound of their voices, about twenty yards away—but they answered when I called out, and waited while I slogged through the mud after them.

Dr. Everton was last, and I fell in beside him. I said, "Listen, Doctor, I'm almost getting a glimmer of what my idea was. I think I let that turtle get me on purpose. I think I went out alone on purpose so I'd come near one."

"Yes? Why?" He sounded interested.

"Because you see that, having been caught, I'm going to be subject to that amnesia for another four hours or so. And while I am, I think I'm immune. I think that if I see a turtle *now*, I won't forget what it is and that I want to capture it."

He turned and stared at me. "Spenser, maybe you've got something there. But it's a slim chance."

"Why?"

"This visibility—or lack of it. According to those pictures it blends in pretty well with the mud. It crawls along on top of the mud, but it's the same color. You wouldn't find one unless you happened almost to step on it."

I looked around and mentally agreed with him.

I thought, *phase is the answer*, and then tried to figure out what I meant. It made nuts.

We slogged along, with me concentrating so hard that I was afraid of spraining a convolution. What had I meant by *phase*? Why had I had to be so cryptic? And this was going to be my last chance. . . .

I strained my eyes into the fog as I walked.

"How large would you say the turtles were, Doctor?"

"About six inches in diameter, I'd say from the photographs."

Not that it mattered much. At six yards, in this fog, you couldn't have seen an elephant. Dixie and Crane were only two steps ahead of us and I could barely see them.

"And it's exactly the color of mud?"

"Beg pardon?"

"The turtles," I said. "Are they the same color as this mud?"

He turned and looked at me. "Turtles? Are you crazy, Spenser? There aren't any turtles on Venus."

I stopped walking so suddenly I skidded in the mud and almost fell. Dr. Everton looked back at me. "Something wrong, Spenser?"

"Go on," I said. "I'll catch up with you in a minute. I'll explain later."

He hesitated, as though he wanted to ask me more questions, and then, obviously realizing he'd lose sight of Crane and Dixie unless he hurried, he said, "All right, see you at the camp if we get separated."

The minute he vanished into the mists, I put down my specimen box as a landmark on the exact spot where I stood. I started walking in a spiral around it.

Phase is the answer! It wasn't cryptic after all. I'd merely let myself get caught—alone—by one of the turtles so I'd be out of phase with the others. I was immune, for this short period, and they weren't. So the turtle had "got" Everton and that was my clue.

I was making my fifth circle of the specimen box, about six or seven feet away from it, when I almost stepped on something that was motionless and almost invisible on top of the mud. It was a six-legged turtle. I picked it up and said, "Aha, my beauty. Turnabout is fair play, and phase was the answer!"

It looked at me with a pair of big, soulful eyes and said sorrowfully, "Yeep?" I felt a twinge of conscience. I knew good and well that now a method had been found, other zoos, other museums, would want specimens and—

I suppressed that line of thought and put the turtle firmly into my box. This meant Dixie, and Dixie meant everything. Using the directional click signal as a guide, I slopped back to camp.

I was chuckling to myself when they got back a few hours later.

It was turnabout again, but I was ready to convince them. I'd dug into my foot locker and found all the ammunition I needed—scientific periodicals with articles about the Venusian mud turtle, newspaper accounts of the departure of the zoölogical expedition and its primary purpose. And, of course, Exhibit A, one Venusian mud turtle in excellent condition and alive.

I got Dr. Everton aside and, as diplomatically as he had reminded me of the deal between us, I reminded him.

He sighed. "All right, Rod," he said. "I don't remember it but I'll take your word. I think that—right now—I'd say yes anyway, regardless of whether there's a wager covering the matter."

We shook hands, and he smiled suddenly. "Have you and Dixie set the date?"

"I'll have to check with Dixie," I told him, "but I know what day I'd choose. And you're technically captain of a spaceship and can perform the ceremony before we leave." I grinned at him. "In fact, I'd better cash in before I get amnesia again and forget what the deal was."

"Get amnesia again? You think you will?"

"Unless this is the same turtle I came near the first time, I think I will, yes. As soon as the period of immunity from the first turtle wears off, this one will get me and I'll forget things again for a few hours. And that's about due to happen, if it's going to."

I found Dixie in the main tent and the exact words of what I said and what she said are none of your business. Half an hour later, Dr. Everton married us and then, because we wanted to do our packing and take off before the approaching end of the Venusian day, we pitched in.

I did most of the work inside the ship, getting it ready, so I was the last to pack my own duffle and bring it abroad. Naturally I threw away everything I didn't need—one always does before a trip in space—including emptying the moss out of my specimen box and releasing an odd turtle-like creature that couldn't have any value as a specimen; it must have got the catch open and crawled in by itself because it was nothing I'd ever caught. An appealing little creature, somehow; I was glad I didn't have any reason to keep it a prisoner.

Maybe I should have asked Dr. Everton about it, but I was in a hurry to start the trip back to earth—and my honeymoon.

by Philip Wylie

An Epistle To The Thessalonians

He was incredible; ominous; indubitable: a giant one thousand miles high!



COMRADE Nikolai Dimitri Eisenstein, the renowned Leninist incendiary and pickpocket, having heisted the keister of Mrs. Benjamin Bissel, housewife, of 1594 East Orchid Street, the Bronx, reviewed its meager interior as he stood beneath the elevated on Sixth Avenue. He was quite unaware of the lacy pattern described on the trolley track by the sun in conjunction with the elevated ties until the phenomenon was blotted out, some say rudely, some say politely and gradually.

We will now drop Comrade Nikolai Dimitri Eisenstein.

The cause of the shadow which fell over the whole city of New York and many other cities besides on that halcyon July morning was an obstruction of Old Sol in the form of a giant 1,000 miles high.

The giant, appearing from no one knows where and unannounced by the world's observatories which, at the time, were jammed with hawk-eyed astronomers whose data tabulated in light years about matters of less consequence than the visitor to our planet was always available while on this pertinent matter their information was nil, dropped rapidly from a strategic position behind the moon. As he entered the gravitational sphere of earth's influence he picked up our rotary motion so that his descent upon the sea was not accompanied by embarrassing tidal waves. Indeed, he stepped onto the waters of the Atlantic so circumspectly that the lay notion he had jumped through space was absurd.

The lower two hundred miles of him penetrated our atmosphere be-

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tween eleven-six and eleven-twenty A.M., Eastern Standard Time, and came to rest on the sea about an hour later, as he manifestly appreciated the danger of stamping upon the water.

However, his advent caused trouble enough, in spite of his elaborate caution. The sea rose in a slow surge which drenched the populous fringes of New York Bay and the lower portion of the Hudson River. His descending feet set in motion currents of air that roared and twisted over New York, Long Island, New Jersey and Connecticut, causing property damage later totaled by the Associated Press at one hundred and seventeen millions, loss of life to eighty-three persons and accidents of varying seriousness to two hundred and twelve.

These geological eccentricities, however, were mere twaddle and fluff in comparison to the effect of the giant and his appearance upon mankind in general. No complete record will ever be made. Witness, for example, the following: at a time as recently removed from the incident as the present, no less than seven hundred and three volumes have been published relating to the monstrous man and ranging in scope from Glover's authoritative *Economic Consequences of the Giant's Visitation to Love in Giant Land*, by Jacqueline Chiffon, an opus from the typewriter of a young Cleveland woman so saturated with sentimentality, so saccharine, and so illiterate that one Amos Golf, after reading it, went stark mad (to his infinite glory) and assassinated not only Miss Chiffon but the eleven other most famous American lady authors.

Twenty-six religions were founded during the stay of the giant or are now identified with his sojourn. Bouncerism, originating in Georgia, attempted to drive away the giant, claimed sole credit for his departure (which is widely believed to have been voluntary) and now holds as its major tenet the prevention of further visits. The devotees of Bouncerism pray in pig Latin while jumping up and down in each other's arms. The Arrivalists, now segregated in Toledo, live in metal shacks, wear only garments woven of human beard hair, and celebrate July 19th as Giantmas. The Church of the Holy Nut, venerating a brown seed thirty-seven feet long which fell from the giant's person and is assumed to be a spore from the stranger's world, believe that their deity was Christ in his Second Coming. Legal process was necessary to keep the members of the Church of the Holy Nut

from worshipping Him by blowing up mountains—a form of veneration doubtless appropriate, but unduly hazardous to the skeptical, of whom there were luckily hundreds of millions.

And so it went. While a draft blew over the cities of New Jersey—cities named by persons with minds as poisoned as the imagination of their architects (Belcher has listed them in his "Inverse Lyrics": Hackensack, Trenton, Newark, Hoboken, Red Bank, Jersey City, Weehawken, Nutley, Ten Eyck, New Brunswick, Paterson, Camden, Perth Amboy, Boonton, Elizabeth, etc., ad naus.) and while the waters rose in the shipping focus of the world—the necks of the western hemisphere bent upward to behold the wonder in the sky. Millions were frightened. Millions sought for methods of turning the phenomenon into cash. Millions ignored the giant.

Fields and housetops were at a premium.

Telescopes swung from their patient routines.

Scientists hopped to long distance telephones.

The War Department drew in a lungful of air and bleated it out in its usual vain ignorance.

The President's lunch was spoiled.

But one fact—or perhaps it was a condition—dominated all others. Nobody—nobody in Hoboken and nobody in New York, nobody in Washington and nobody in Europe knew what in hell to do.

Standing in the Atlantic Ocean, southeast of New York, was a giant one thousand miles high.

Incredible.

Ominous.

Unprecedented.

Indubitable.

There he was.

The sun beat upon him.

The sea laved the soles of his shoes.

His trouser cuffs, seen longitudinally through the earth's atmosphere, disappeared in haze. But the higher portions of him reëmerged. His head, a thousand miles out in space, was boldly visible. Through telescopes mounted on the loftier summits, even his expression could be observed. It was speculative, absorbed, and yet bland. He had gray eyes (which shone like moons in the late afternoon sun) and

chestnut-colored hair which revealed a distinct tendency to curl. Lowell Wertzberg, of Ohio Wesleyan, located at Delaware, Ohio, was the first to report the mole on his left cheek. His age was promptly put at thirty-five—although when an editor of an evening paper asked, "Thirty-five what?" no answer was forthcoming.

During the afternoon following his arrival the giant was seen to blink seven times. The process required about fifteen minutes (15 min. 36.9006 sec. average for 24 winks—Ed.). His head turned downward sixteen degrees between noon and four P.M. His arms swung forward eighty miles (Westcliffe and Leadbecker) and his eyebrows lifted seven thousand six hundred and five meters (Finch). The most proximate position of the sole of his left shoe was accurately determined by the United States Coast Guard and afterward substantiated by the Geodetic Survey at one hundred and eleven miles east southeast of Sandy Hook.

Photographs taken by Binnel at seven-fifty show that the sun had set on his lower extremities, but his face was vividly illuminated and, in fact, it became clearer as terrestrial darkness increased. Equally interesting are Gukel's lens studies of the moon partially eclipsed by the giant's buttocks, Gukel's credit being shared by the enterprising University of Southern Illinois.

Before nightfall on that memorable First Day, Lieutenant Charles Windbuck had returned from his epochal flight to the giant's toe. Although subsequent observations demonstrated that the monster moved with a slowness which suggested either consideration of the human beings below or, more probably, a desire to avoid setting fire to his clothing by atmospheric friction, Windbuck's flight was regarded at the time as a heroic venture.

"I discovered," Windbuck said that night over the radio to an audience of millions, "that the material of the giant's shoe is granular and resembles at close range a rough, conglomerate cliff. The sole of the shoe itself, although submerged in the Atlantic, rises to such a height from the water that its upper edge was above the ceiling of my airplane. A few dead fish floated around the shoe, which appeared to be motionless. I cannot describe the feeling I had staring at the precipice which had dropped into the sea, or looking eastward where the giant's shadow stretched over the broad ocean."

On the night of July nineteenth to twentieth the uproar caused by the strange visit had spread over the globe. Hindus and Brahmins were praying as shriekingly as Presbyterians, and only remote Australian Bushmen shared tranquility with a few Senegalese, Eskimos, and the like.

The morning of the twentieth, hot and cloudless in Eastern U. S., was marked by a partial evacuation of the seaboard, a Stock Exchange panic, the declaration of martial law, and innumerable other mass reactions.

Professor Grover Rigg, with a corps of university volunteers, endeavored to communicate with the giant by laying out thousands of yards of white muslin on the fields south of Princeton in varying mathematical configurations. Nothing happened. A fighting fleet consisting of six battleships, four submarines, three cruisers, twelve destroyers, four blimps and the dirigible *Akron* moved out to the toe, stripped for action. Nothing happened. A Gloucester fisherman approached the right shoe and detached some of its material with axes and an acetylene torch brought for the purpose. Still nothing happened.

General Trumpley Clutt made before the House of Congress his celebrated "survival of the fittest" address, parts of which were published on the front pages of every American daily. "The man," said the general, "is human, obviously hostile, patently an enemy scout. We must declare war on him, gentlemen. We must annihilate him. Otherwise he will return whence he came and carry the news that we are a defenseless rabble. He will bring back a host of his fellows and we shall be doomed."

His speech was greeted by a tumult. When Representative Smith of Connecticut stood up afterward and said, briefly, "How are we to annihilate him? What shall we do with a carcass weighing billions of tons?" he was booed down by the members of the House, who make it a rule to prefer any idiocy, so long as it is noisome, to the most obvious common sense.

The result of Clutt's bombast was the immediate formation of eighteen committees and commissions.

On the morning of the twenty-first it was perceived that the giant was bending at the waist, knees, and hips. His shadow slipped side-

wise across eastern U. S., moving out of Ohio entirely. The afternoon newspapers carried the banner, "GIANT SQUATTING."

And squat he did, all during the hectic night that followed. At dawn he was within seventy-four miles of the surface of the sea at certain hitherto unapproached points. Otherwise his behavior was innocuous.

War was declared on him twelve hours later, as his hands swung forward. Clutt and an expeditionary force spent the night mining his shoe with eighty tons of high explosives. It was detonated at daybreak on the twenty-third.

With the explosion, vast chunks of the giant's shoe were ripped away, but when an animated drawing showing the relative amount of damage done was displayed in New York newsreel theaters later in the day, public confidence in our military strength and resourcefulness diminished. The damage to the shoe was equivalent to the bite of a very small ant on a number twelve hiking boot. There was a brief wave of ridicule launched against Clutt. Editors pointed out that the giant could scarcely be called a military scout, as he wore not a uniform, but tweeds of the most informal sort. Clutt retorted that he would shoot any puppy who wrote a line about him and asked what scouts were presumed to wear in the giant's homeland.

Thus the whole controversy was soon at loggerheads.

During the night of the twenty-fourth, the giant put his fingertips down in New Jersey and New York and leaned forward on them.

Small cities and towns were wiped out. Thousands upon thousands were slain. Hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of property damage was done.

Higgle's report that the material resembling pudding or cobble stone retrieved by the Gloucester fisherman was cell tissue, interested few. His assertion that the possession of those vastly magnified, dry leather cells would advance the study of biology, physics, and chemistry farther than all the research in those subjects hitherto conducted, fell on deaf ears. Byelin's amazing "Initial Remarks" referring to his inspection of material taken from one of the mighty, inverted canyons which were the whorls and patterns in the skin of the giant's fingers appeared in but two or three newspapers.

On the twenty-fifth, the giant stood up again. Nearly every cabinet

in the world had collapsed. Half the people on the eastern coast of the United States had fled to the interior. Crime and lawlessness had surpassed the powers of the military authorities and there had been several mutinies among the troops closest to the giant.

General Trumpley Clutt had committed suicide.

It rained, generally, on the twenty-sixth and the blotting out of the shape in the sky had a salubrious effect on the population of the eastern states. This effect was lost, however, when it was observed as soon as the storm cleared that the giant was standing on his right foot and had drawn back his left.

What happened after that appalls the most sanguine and capacious imagination. The giant stood for three hours like a football player about to kick a goal. Then his majestic toe descended in a slow arc. It connected with the earth at Fire Island. It rushed northward at a speed of forty-three miles an hour and scuffed out of existence the five Boroughs of New York, the cities of New Jersey, the Hudson River Valley and much of the region between it and the Connecticut River, leaving behind a smooth channel of polished rock and stacking up in a line between the Adirondack Mountains and Augusta, Maine, the surface material thus collected which included not only the forests, fields, farms, slums and skyscrapers of the region, but the corpses of eighteen million persons and which made a range of loosely integrated mountains rising at their highest elevation to fifty-six thousand four hundred and eight feet. By some absurd mischance the steel steeple of the Empire State Building protruded from the highest escarpment of the unnatural range.

After that devastating act, the giant departed. He seemed to float away into space, gathering speed as he went. He wore on his face a faintly annoyed expression, such as might be found on the countenance of a man who had come upon an anthill and kicked it out of existence.

Daçoit, however, and other Europeans, agree that the scientific knowledge of molecular and atomic structure and of cell function derived from a consideration of the skin and leather snippings are worth more than the lives lost and the property destroyed.

Who knows?



by Larry Shaw

Simworthy's Circus

It was the genuine article—the real, 100-proof, universal elixir of love. Just the same, applied to the ugliest human in the universe, it produced some pretty dubious results. . . .

EVERYBODY has heard of Simworthy's Circus. Comparatively few have actually seen it, especially since, oddly enough, Simworthy has refused fabulous offers to present it on vaudeo or in the reelies. But the population of the galaxy being huge as it is, those "comparatively few" are several million in number. And every single being, human and otherwise, among them has come away busting to tell his friends and relations what a wonderful show it is.

The funny part is, when described, Simworthy's Circus merely sounds like an anachronism, and one that wouldn't logically be very entertaining to the enlightened citizenry of a world whose horizons are the edges of the galaxy. Bluntly, it sounds dull. But all those customers, and Simworthy's bank account, testify to the contrary.

Almost nobody knows the explanation of the paradox, and the strange story behind Simworthy's Circus. This is it.

To begin with, Jared Simworthy was—and is—about the ugliest human ever to blast off from Earth. Wormy Ed, they called him be-

hind his back—and he looked the part. Real nightmare type, subclass child-scaring. He looked as if his component parts came from a surrealistic junkyard and had been assembled in the dark by a bunch of idiot bricklayers. Mirrors turned green and curled up at the edges when he stepped into the room. In brief, a mess.

His appearance, naturally, conditioned his entire life and outlook. He acquired a monstrous hatred for the universe at an age when most kids are playing with isotope-blocks in kindergarten. Only contempt kept him from going around putting Venusian stinkworms in little old ladies' teacups.

As he grew—a process which appeared for a dismayingly long time to be endless—he conceived, however, a limited number of affections. Not for people, of course. But things and creatures which were abysmally unsightly, by terrestrial standards, became the objects of his love. In his early teens, for instance, he resurrected and rebuilt an ancient ground vehicle. It was called a carriageless horse, or some such term, and it was not only an eyesore but a sin against logic besides. The first time Simworthy tried it out, the sight, noise and smell of it caused three women to faint, and scared the wits out of nobody knows how many flitter-drivers. After that, the police wouldn't let him run the contraption on the gravways, so he hated people more than ever.

Then there was the satcat, one of the vicious little beasts the first Saturnian expedition brought back. It was so hideous that the horror-reelies wouldn't touch it after the zoos had turned it down cold. Even so, it cost Simworthy a month's salary. It also cost him his job, when he tried to take it to work with him. He never went back to crossing a clockbeam again.

The Satcat didn't last long; Earth climate didn't agree with it. But Simworthy got plenty of publicity out of the incident, and people who had formerly ducked around corners when they saw him coming began to leave the neighborhood altogether. He didn't mind that, but it did make it rather hard for him to earn a living. So, predictably, he followed the "misfit trail" into space.

It surprises some people that he became a trader, since his hatred of all the beings he'd have to deal with was so monumental. It calcs,

though, when you know his real intentions. During moments of over-lubrication, he was heard to brag that he would swindle at least one member of every race in the galaxy before he quit. Then too, his ugliness simply didn't exist, in extra-terrestrial eyes. That is, to most e-t's, he was no uglier than any *other* Earthman.

Simworthy worked damned hard, if it's any credit to him. No transaction was too petty, and no alien too truculent; he'd wheedle or browbeat for hours on end, if necessary, to put over a deal. He was one of the few Earthmen who ever had a strong enough stomach to sit in on the moulting ceremonies of the Vipherians. It was worth it; he gained their confidence, and left behind a shipload of coil springs—which of course rusted solid after a week on Viphesta. The profit was tidy.

Gradually, Simworthy prospered. It made no difference in his way of life. He stuck to the ship he'd started out in, a horribly functional monstrosity, one of the first models to use the warp principle that made interstellar travel possible. In Simworthy's hands the *Barnum* became battered, pocked, and rusty. He loved it. The name he had given his ship, incidentally, turned out to be prophetic; Barnum was a big circus owner a few centuries ago. Reason Simworthy chose it, though, was a proverb the guy was supposed to have originated: "A sucker in every pot," or was it "port"?

Somewhere along the line, he acquired a successor to the Satcat. It was a Nimoon, a biological insult considered unspeakable even on its home world of Mreyob—a downright stomach-twister anywhere else. Simworthy lavished a share of his misguided affection on it, and called it Walter.

Somewhere else along the line, he got the Space Police on his tail. The charges, individually, were minor, but there were several of them, mostly misrepresentation and the lack of various licenses. Together, they could have iced Simworthy for quite a few years.

He was not many jumps ahead of the cops when, one day, he flipped out of hyperdrive in a lonely sector of space, with a single-planet system dead ahead. The sun wasn't important enough to rate a name on the charts, and the planet was classified as uninhabited. But once Simworthy got a look at the planet—overgrown moon would describe it better—he smiled a lopsided smile.

Black rocks and raging grey oceans, plus a lot of snow and ice, were all that could be seen at first. Closer in, some stunted and poisonous-looking vegetation became apparent. There was no practical reason for anyone to visit the forbidding place. Simworthy keyed his stern-jets and prepared for a landing.

He considered it as a hideout, but mostly he just wanted a look at that beautiful ugliness. The *Barnum* slid into an atmosphere which tested breathable, if you didn't mind the fishy smell, and was full of odd gusts and currents. The delicate jetwork was making Simworthy sweat when—blooey!

There was a flash from below. The *Barnum* gave a lurch that scrambled Simworthy's breakfast, and then started to imitate a pin-wheel. The jets developed an ominous foreign accent. Simworthy thought about the Space Police and swore.

He also acted—fast. He'd developed skill and deftness, coaxing the cranky crate along in its normal state, and he used it all now. The *Barnum* plummeted, bounced, slid into a steep glide, spun some more on its vertical axis, and finally dropped to a belly-landing going backwards—an incredible feat of piloting, even under favorable conditions.

As it was, about the best that could be said for Simworthy was: no bones were broken.

Needle-rayed! Simworthy rose from the pilot's armchair, still cursing with an energy that, tight-beamed, would have burned a hole in the planet's heavside layer. He spat, and stainless steel sizzled.

Calmly, Walter peered at him from the top of a refrigerator and scratched a flea. The peering was done with four unblinking, blood-shot eyes; suction cups on the Nimoon's bloated belly held it firmly to the porcelain; the scratching was accomplished not with the eerily weaving tentacles, as might have been expected, but with a bony tail that tapered to a wicked claw.

The flea was snugly ensconced in Walter's mane of greasy, greenish hair; the scratching continued monotonously, mechanically.

Simworthy's first concern was to estimate the damage to the *Barnum*. He stomped through the airlock and jumped down, stirring up puffs of pumice. Ignoring dust in his hair and stink in his nostrils,

he gazed angrily at the fused jets. The inspection finished, he ground his teeth and shook a fist at nothing in particular.

"Ugh," said a wheezy voice behind him. "Cool off. Lend ya my robot to fix it. Complete machine-shop. Easy."

The last word was ambiguous, and Simworthy was in no mood to be told to take it easy. He whirled.

The other Earthman looked like a rag, a bone, and several hanks of hair. Most of the latter was an undisciplined beard, but there was also a wavering halo around the chalky face, and tufts of fuzz growing out of the ears. At best, the stranger looked antique and brittle. He teetered. But he was definitely not a cop, which was something.

Simworthy expanded his chest, raised his arms, thrust out his already protruding jaw and fixed the stranger with a baleful eye.

He said: "It's kind of you to offer. I hope it won't be too much trouble."

He said it softly and politely, and seconds later tried to swallow the words and his tongue with them. There was no sensible reason not to break this specimen's jaw, if any. By rights . . . But something wasn't right.

The feeling was totally inexplicable. Simworthy *liked* this creature. He respected him, and desired to treat him with the utmost deference, as long as he could remain in his infinitely pleasant presence. At the same time, he wondered if he were going nuts.

The stranger drew a gasping breath and spoke again. "Shot yuh down! Beats all! Heh. Marksmanship. Just tryin' to warn yuh off. Tried to hit yuh, I'd of missed a mile. Gah."

It was anything but an apology. Disregard for Simworthy was plain as the stranger's beard. But he said: "Don't mention it. Could have happened to anybody. I wanted to land anyway."

The beard semaphored. "Yah. You wanted. I didn't. I want yuh outa here. Pronto. So I'll help. Hermit. Mrmph."

Inhospitable as he was, he did not leave Simworthy out in the cold and the icy rain that was starting. He invited the puzzled trader to his dome for coffee and over the coffee he continued his grumpy monologue.

As Simworthy pieced his story together, the Hermit—who ignored all hints designed to ferret out his proper name—had once been a

biologist with the Galactic Exploratory Service, a member of one of the highly specialized crews that went about the endless job of charting suns and planets and collecting data on their inhabitants. His methods had always been a trifle unorthodox, but he had done his work well, making his more off-trail experiments on his own time, keeping their results to himself. Which was fortunate, in the case in point.

"I found a love potion," growled the Hermit.

Simworthy gawked.

The Hermit poured more coffee, a brew as black as outer space. He raised his lumoplast cup with a sardonic grin. "Like me, huh?" he asked.

By this time, Simworthy had regained partial control of himself. But he had to admit it. "Yeah, I like you. Like, hell! I feel almost like kissing your feet. At the same time, I can imagine how long it is since you've washed them. I'm damned if I can calc it."

The Hermit opened a closet. Containers of assorted sizes and shapes clattered on the floor. The Hermit found a tiny vial, which he placed on the table. "That!" He waved a scrawny arm and cackled violently. The cackle broke off, to be followed by a cough and an infinitely bitter "Damn it!"

Simworthy gawked some more.

The vial was made of ordinary glass, and contained a brownish liquid. "Love potion," the Hermit sputtered. "Universal. Glandular. Little animals. Planet I prob'ly couldn't find again—glad of it. Brrph. Cave. Alone. Tiny beasts. Must of lived on rock. Albino. Fell for 'em. Hypnotism or something, thought at first. Loved 'em. Didn't want to leave. Wanted to take 'em all with me. Urf!"

Gradually, Simworthy learned, the Hermit had subdued his strange infatuation somewhat. He'd smuggled one of the creatures back to his ship and taken it apart to see what made it tick. The ship had blasted off before he'd discovered a gland unlike anything he'd seen before. From it, he'd taken a minute quantity of fluid. He'd fed a drop of it to a guinea pig. The guinea pig, superficially like dozens of others, had become the ship's mascot. Hardened spacemen went crazy over it.

Back on Earth, the Hermit had drunk a few drops of the stuff himself.

There was more after that, and it got harder to follow. The Hermit mumbled about brain waves and glands and personality indices and hypnogogics and telepathy and grumble gurgles foompf. He kept repeating something about ego-feedback, which Simworthy didn't get at all. What he did dredge out of the mess was what had happened to the Hermit—but a little imagination would have told him that.

In brief, people had loved him to distraction. He found it impossible to live in the close quarters of a spaceship with other men. Women—of various races and biological traits—fought over him. On Earth, dogs followed him around the streets. On Mars, yeesties did the same. And so on. Until, in desperation, the Hermit had become the Hermit.

"And—" he pounded the table with renewed vigor—"the infernal stuff doesn't wear off! Ever!"

Yes, Simworthy believed him. He found himself wanting to believe everything the old man said, anyway—but that in itself was a form of proof, wasn't it? Simworthy started to envision possibilities. *Love!* Not for love's sake, naturally, but for the things people would be willing to do for him. Power . . .

Anyway, when Simworthy blasted off again, the Hermit was richer by a portable windmill (government surplus, reconditioned), two dozen bottles of cheap perfume, six quarts of Rigellian Bhuiilyordz (92 proof), and a pair of hair clippers. Simworthy, on the other hand, had the vial of—for want of a better name—universal love potion. The Hermit was happy; he wondered why he'd kept the stuff so long in the first place. Simworthy had wanted to drink it before leaving, but the Hermit had been adamant. "Uh," he'd grunted. "Work on me. Might try to keep you here. Oog!"

So, with the stuff safely cradled in his first-aid locker, Simworthy pointed the *Barnum's* nose towards Agrab-Grob, and yanked into hyperspace again.

That left him, of course, with nothing much to do for the 17.4 minutes it takes any ship, in hyperspace, to reach any destination. He gazed at the grey nothingness outside the forward port, bit off a

chaw of cardroot, and dreamed hazy dreams of future success. They began with his conquest of Agrab-Grob, the salesman's nightmare. The inhabitants should have been good customers, since their own economy was so primitive. However, they were also warlike and excessively suspicious of outsiders. With monotonous regularity, they chased all visitors off the planet as soon as they landed. For Simworthy, though, things were going to be different.

Imagination proved unsatisfactory. Simworthy got up and shuffled towards the medical locker. He was about to open it when a noise like a staticky wristphone speaking Mercurian drew his attention. He looked around, startled.

Walter hung from the ceiling and squealed at him again. Hungry, Simworthy reflected. The beast usually was. Simworthy took a container of sour cream from the refrigerator, flipped off the top, and placed it on the deck. Then he reached up and plucked the Nimoon from the ceiling.

Let us not dwell on the picture of Simworthy cradling Walter in his arms, fondling his mane, and crooning to him in a rust-clogged voice. It is by no stretch of the imagination a pretty picture, and is in its way a bit sad. Dial, then, the next scene: the Nimoon happily lapping cream and his master standing, bowed legs spread, running his fingers through his mop of red hair, rubbing his half-inch forehead, and wondering what it was that he had been about to do when interrupted.

Dawn broke; Simworthy remembered the Hermit's vial. Stepping over the Nimoon, he opened the first-aid locker and removed the thing. It looked even more insignificant now than when he had first seen it, and—the Hermit's influence was fading somewhat—Simworthy began to wonder if he had been had. There was only one way to find out.

He removed the cork.

Then he realized that there would be no way to test the stuff's powers until he made port. Walter loved him already, so on him it wouldn't show. Simworthy gazed moodily at the vial and tortured his scalp with his stubby fingers again.

Oh, well. He had nothing to lose, and might as well drink it anyway. The aura the stuff created, as he had made the Hermit repeat

several times, apparently remained until death. Simworthy raised the vial.

The control panel burped. The *Barnum* was re-entering normal space, and being an old crate with many manual controls, was calling for the pilot's guiding hand. Simworthy stuck the vial back in the locker, slammed the door, and scrambled into his armchair.

It was lucky he was a good pilot. Just as things solidified outside the viewports, a flashy Buick sportsjet, with "tourist" written all over it, flashed across his nose. The *Barnum's* detector-circuit must have blown a fuse—but Simworthy didn't have time to wonder about that. He yanked, and the *Barnum* zoomed wildly. It cleared the Buick with scant feet to spare, and the tourists had their britches warmed by the blast from the older rig's tail.

Pale, Simworthy flicked the *Barnum* into the simplest orbital course available, punched the autopilot, and stomped away from the panel. If only he'd gotten their license number! The knowledge that it was undoubtedly his own fault, that he couldn't haul anyone into court with the cops hot after him, and that the *Barnum's* insurance had lapsed several months before to cap it all, was submerged beneath his anger. Damn people anyway!

Simworthy reached the first-aid locker, clutched a bottle of his best alcoholic medicine, took several healthy swigs, choked, and came up gasping for air. His horrible suspicion was confirmed immediately. The perspiration on his neck turned into drops of ice that snowballed down his spine. The door of the locker was swinging open—*had been* swinging open throughout the action—and the vial was no longer in its place. Simworthy tore his long-suffering hair and groaned a mighty groan.

It didn't take him long to find the vial. He almost stepped on it. It was lying on its side on the floor.

Under stress, Simworthy's brain clicked with unusual clarity. He became deductive. The vial, he saw, was empty. There was a brownish spot on the deck beneath it. But it was a very small spot indeed. Not nearly big enough to account for the entire contents. The stuff couldn't have soaked in, and it obviously hadn't run off, or splashed elsewhere.

"Walter!" bellowed Simworthy.

The Nimoon raised its snoot, uncoiled itself from an air vent, and shrieked at Simworthy chummily. When Simworthy dove, Walter made a belated effort to climb up the bulkhead. Simworthy's huge hands closed on the frightened beastly, and in Simworthy's eyes gleamed a lust for blood.

Came a fairly exact repetition of the business gone through in Simworthy's meeting with the Hermit. All anger drained out of the big trader, and he relaxed his grip on the Nimoon. Walter chirped at him, managing to sound puzzled.

"Walter," said Simworthy, "Walter. You shouldn't have drunk that stuff. You shouldn't have, Walter. But it's all right—as long as it didn't hurt you, Walter."

He deposited his charge on the deck and retired, with the whisky bottle, to his chair. He loved Walter, but disappointment was great. Practically sobbing, he was in no mood to figure whether he actually loved Walter any more than he had before. Indeed, Simworthy's emotions did not run to fine shadings; they were big and awkward like the man himself. All Simworthy knew was, he loved the con-founded pest too much to wring its ridiculous head from its neckless shoulders. Drat it! The bottle dove rapidly towards emptiness.

The liquor may not have been entirely responsible for the idea, but it certainly helped. Simworthy suddenly saw that all of his plans were not ruined after all. He couldn't make himself lovable—hence irresistible to customers—now. But with Walter as a tool, he'd be almost as well off. In fact, with Walter perched on his shoulder as he gave his sales talk, the aura might cover them both, with the same effect. Love my Nimoon, love me! All was not lost.

Simworthy landed on Agrab-Grob.

He landed in the central square of a city that was, while puny by practically any standards, the major one on the planet. Simworthy looked out at the crowd of natives that gathered around him, and almost took off again immediately. The Agrab-Grobians were roughly humanoid, eight feet tall, pure blue, and had big teeth. They carried crude weapons, and they obviously didn't want company.

Simworthy made sure that Walter was nestled snugly under his arm as he opened the outer hatch. This would be the acid test. If it failed,

he'd have to go on trading on his own skill and luck. That is, he shuddered, if the natives let him go at all. They weren't supposed to be cannibalistic, but how did he know just where they drew the line? And they looked . . . Brr.

The crowd pressed in. Simworthy raised his left hand in a peaceful, though shaky, gesture, and clutched Walter tighter. There was a murmuring from the crowd, which told him nothing.

Little was known of the Agrab-Grobian language, but it had been established that it was a variation of Lower Jogamish, Jogam being a more advanced, and friendlier, planet of the same system. Thus, with the aid of the Spaceman's Conversational Guide, Simworthy knew he could get his ideas across. "Peace!" he bellowed. "Friendship! Advantage to you! Gifts!" The last was a distortion of the truth, but it seemed like a good idea.

Slowly, the trembling in Simworthy's knees ended. The blue giants were making no move to chase him out. They waited, shuffling their feet. And gradually, it dawned on Simworthy that they were smiling. For the first time, he realized the true power of the love potion, and the wide radius of its effects.

An Agrab-Grobian in a fancy headdress shouldered his way through the mob. Planting himself before Simworthy, he made a perfunctory gesture in imitation of the trader's, and began a long speech. Out of it, Simworthy got something like: "Wonderful small animal. You master wonderful small animal. You wonderful. Friend."

It was such an exact statement of what Simworthy had expected that he almost keeled over. But the businessman in him came to the fore. He handed the chief a cheap plastic necklace. "Gift," he said. "Peace. Barter, maybe?"

The chief studied the beads with a pleased expression, but only briefly. He returned his gaze to Simworthy and Walter, and made an even longer speech. Out of it, Simworthy got: "Yes."

The city's central square was also its marketplace. Simworthy saw that he could expect a fine haul of valuable metals and gems. The fact that it was all carved into small, oddly-shaped trinkets bothered him not at all. He set up shop.

Hours passed, during which business boomed. Simworthy unloaded various cheap junk from the *Barnum's* hold. The natives

showered him with gimmicks, and every resident worked his way to the front of the crowd at least once to stand beaming at Simworthy with unabashed awe and amour.

He was demonstrating the advantages of a trick canopener, hampered somewhat by the fact that the Agrab-Grobians had no cans to open, when the tragedy happened. The chief, who had not been in evidence for some time, returned and leaned against the *Barnum's* hull in a typical "holding up the building" pose. Out of his speech, Simworthy got: "Friend. Barter. Barter good. You take chief's pet. I take little animal."

Simworthy looked, thunderstruck, at the chief. He looked at another native, obviously a servant, who had followed, hauling along a reluctant something on a leash. The something appeared to be a ferocious, six-legged razorback hog. Getting more horrified by the second, Simworthy looked at the chief again.

He started to protest, but could think of nothing to say except for the one word, no. He said "No." He kept on saying it.

The chief, still beaming, reached down and plucked the Nimoon from Simworthy's shoulder.

Simworthy made a desperate grab. The chief, seeing it coming, lifted the Nimoon high over his head. Walter woke up enough to take part in the action himself. He screamed, and bit the chief on the wrist.

The chief yelled and grabbed his wrist with his other hand. Walter somersaulted to the ground, where he began to make frantic scrambling motions with all his tentacles. As if fired by the same trigger, Simworthy, the chief, the servant, and the six-legged horror pounced upon Walter all at the same time.

Dust rose. Everybody shouted. Simworthy got an elbow in his nose, which began to spurt blood. The Nimoon caterwauled, and the bigger beast growled and snuffled fiercely. As Simworthy's vision cleared, he realized with a shock that the chief's servant was waving a long knife with utter disregard for the life and limb of anyone concerned.

Panting, the frightened trader dug in his heels and rolled out from under. The scuffle quieted down. Simworthy shook his head, but could not eliminate a roaring noise in his ears.

The chief stood, striving mightily to repair his injured dignity. The servant stood, and pulled the six-legged thing, which was yipping and snapping furiously, a few yards away.

On the ground where the battle had taken place, the mangled corpse of Walter lay in dust and blood.

The roaring in Simworthy's ears got louder. He was, he knew, a goner. Instinct took over.

He ran.

The hatchway of the *Barnum* was blocked by a knot of jabbering Agrab-Grobians. Simworthy about-faced, pumping hard. He hadn't the slightest idea of his ultimate destination, but the middle of the square was suddenly, mysteriously, empty. The battered trader started to charge across it.

The roaring noise grew louder still, but it was not until Simworthy saw the source that he identified it as the sternblast of a spaceship. Realization came swiftly as the ship itself settled into the square directly in front of Simworthy. The ship was fast, new, and bristled with weapons. The letters "S. P." loomed large and red on its gleaming nose.

The Space Police!

Simworthy was caught between two fires. It was only a matter of choosing the one that burned least merrily. He headed for the police cruiser, waving his arms wildly.

The cruiser's hatch opened, and three uniformed men—obviously tough men, ready for anything—stepped out. Hands poised near blaster holsters, they waited expectantly.

"Jared Simworthy?" snapped the one with the lieutenant's bars on his collar. "You're under arrest! We've been trailing you, and we're going to take you in. Will you come peaceably?"

Simworthy was peaceable enough, all right. His nose wouldn't stop bleeding, he had a throbbing headache, and he felt generally sick all over. This was the end, and he might as well face it. He raised his arms and walked slowly forward. . . .

Strangely, the lieutenant was rubbing his jaw, and smiling a hesitant smile, which made him look boyish. "Er, that is," he said, "you are Jared Simworthy, aren't you? But, shucks, maybe there's been a

mistake. You're obviously not a crook. And as far as I know, the charges against you haven't anything behind them but the word of some screwball e-t's. Ten to one, they're phony."

He made his decision, and his smile broadened. "Aw hell, you're a good joe. Let's have a drink and talk this over. We can renew *your* licenses for you, while we're at it. Then we can convoy you out of here, if you're leaving."

Astounded, Simworthy realized that the other two policemen were smiling too, and holding out *their* hands. For the first time since he had made his break, he risked a look behind him.

None of the huge Agrab-Grobians were chasing him. They hadn't been chasing him, apparently. A few of them were looking at the chief, hiding grins behind their hairy paws. But most of them were gazing in Simworthy's direction, and their eyes were still filled with the rawest form of respect and devotion . . .

And that was that, just about. Later, as Simworthy jockeyed a richly-laden *Barnum* back towards more civilized planets—planets that would pay a big price for his cargo—he figured it out. It was lucky for him that he did. It was lucky, that is, that he plucked one of the fleas out of his hair alive and looked at it, before he had scratched them all into oblivion.

The vial, he realized then, must have landed smack on Walter's neck, the fluid soaking into Walter's receptive mane. And the fleas had drunk their fill. And at some point in the proceedings, some of those fleas . . .

Simworthy scratched again, but gently now, delicately, probing carefully to capture alive as many of the insects as he could. He hadn't guessed, then, how profitable they might be. At the moment, he was simply, suddenly, completely crazy about the lovable little things!

And that's how Simworthy's Flea Circus started. So you'll know, if you ever get a chance to see it, exactly why you can't help going overboard about the antics of the normally uninteresting little pests. But even forewarned, and with full knowledge about them, you won't be able to help yourself.

You'll love 'em!

by Graham
Greene



THE END OF THE PARTY

*The adult world is a tissue of lies, as any child knows.
But what adult knows the dark truths of a child's world?*

PETER MORTON woke with a start to face the first light. Through the window he could see a bare bough dropping across a frame of silver. Rain tapped against the glass. It was January the fifth.

He looked across a table, on which a night-light had guttered into a pool of water, at the other bed. Francis Morton was still asleep, and Peter lay down again with his eyes on his brother. It amused him to imagine that it was himself whom he watched, the same hair, the same eyes, the same lips and line of cheek. But the thought soon palled, and the mind went back to the fact which lent the day importance. It was the fifth of January. He could hardly believe that a year had passed since Mrs. Henne-Falcon had given her last children's party.

Francis turned suddenly upon his back and threw an arm across his face, blocking his mouth. Peter's heart began to beat fast, not with pleasure now but with uneasiness. He sat up and called across the table, "Wake up." Francis's shoulders shook and he waved a clenched fist in the air, but his eyes remained closed. To Peter Morton the whole room seemed suddenly to darken, and he had the impression of a great bird swooping. He cried again, "Wake up," and once more there was silver light and the touch of rain on the windows.

*From 19 STORIES by Graham Greene. Copyright 1947 by Graham Greene.
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Francis rubbed his eyes. "Did you call out?" he asked.

"You are having a bad dream," Peter said with confidence. Already experience had taught him how far their minds reflected each other. But he was the elder, by a matter of minutes, and that brief extra interval of light, while his brother still struggled in pain and darkness, had given him self-reliance and an instinct of protection towards the other who was afraid of so many things.

"I dreamed that I was dead," Francis said.

"What was it like?" Peter asked with curiosity.

"I can't remember," Francis said, and his eyes turned with relief to the silver of day, as he allowed the fragmentary memories to fade.

"You dreamed of a big bird."

"Did I?" Francis accepted his brother's knowledge without question, and for a little the two lay silent in bed facing each other, the same green eyes, the same nose tilting at the tip, the same firm lips parted, and the same premature modeling of the chin. The fifth of January, Peter thought again, his mind drifting idly from the image of cakes to the prizes which might be won. Egg-and-spoon races, spear-
ing apples in basins of water, blindman's buff.

"I don't want to go," Francis said suddenly. "I suppose Joyce will be there . . . Mabel Warren." Hateful to him, the thought of a party shared with those two. They were older than he. Joyce was eleven and Mabel Warren thirteen. Their long pigtailed swung superciliously to a masculine stride. Their sex humiliated him, as they watched him fumble with his egg, from under lowered scornful lids. And last year . . . he turned his face away from Peter, his cheeks scarlet.

"What's the matter?" Peter asked.

"Oh, nothing. I don't think I'm well. I've got a cold. I oughtn't to go to the party."

Peter was puzzled. "But, Francis, is it a bad cold?"

"It will be a bad cold if I go to the party. Perhaps I shall die."

"Then you mustn't go," Peter said with decision, prepared to solve all difficulties with one plain sentence, and Francis let his nerves relax in a delicious relief, ready to leave everything to Peter. But though he was grateful he did not turn his face towards his brother. His cheeks still bore the badge of a shameful memory, of the game of hide-and-seek last year in the darkened house, and of how he had

screamed when Mabel Warren put her hand suddenly upon his arm. He had not heard her coming. Girls were like that. Their shoes never squeaked. No boards whined under their tread. They slunk like cats on padded claws. When the nurse came in with hot water Francis lay tranquil, leaving everything to Peter. Peter said, "Nurse, Francis has got a cold."

The tall starched woman laid the towels across the cans and said, without turning, "The washing won't be back till tomorrow. You must lend him some of your handkerchiefs."

"But, Nurse," Peter asked, "hadn't he better stay in bed?"

"We'll take him for a good walk this morning," the nurse said. "Wind'll blow away the germs. Get up now, both of you," and she closed the door behind her.

"I'm sorry," Peter said, and then, worried at the sight of a face creased again by misery and foreboding, "Why don't you just stay in bed? I'll tell mother you felt too ill to get up." But such a rebellion against destiny was not in Francis's power. Besides, if he stayed in bed they would come up and tap his chest and put a thermometer in his mouth and look at his tongue, and they would discover that he was malingering. It was true that he felt ill, a sick empty sensation in his stomach and a rapidly beating heart, but he knew that the cause was only fear, fear of the party, fear of being made to hide by himself in the dark, unaccompanied by Peter and with no night-light to make a blessed breach.

"No, I'll get up," he said, and then with sudden desperation, "But I won't go to Mrs. Henne-Falcon's party. I swear on the Bible I won't." Now surely all would be well, he thought. God would not allow him to break so solemn an oath. He would show him a way. There was all the morning before him and all the afternoon until four o'clock. No need to worry now when the grass was still crisp with the early frost. Anything might happen. He might cut himself or break his leg or really catch a bad cold. God would manage somehow.

He had such confidence in God that when at breakfast his mother said, "I hear you have a cold, Francis," he made light of it. "We should have heard more about it," his mother said with irony, "if there was not a party this evening," and Francis smiled uneasily, amazed and daunted by her ignorance of him. His happiness would

have lasted longer if, out for a walk that morning, he had not met Joyce. He was alone with his nurse, for Peter had leave to finish a rabbit-hutch in the woodshed. If Peter had been there he would have cared less; the nurse was Peter's nurse also, but now it was as though she were employed only for his sake, because he could not be trusted to go for a walk alone. Joyce was only two years older and she was by herself.

She came striding towards them, pigtailed flapping. She glanced scornfully at Francis and spoke with ostentation to the nurse. "Hello, Nurse. Are you bringing Francis to the party this evening? Mabel and I are coming." And she was off again down the street in the direction of Mabel Warren's home, consciously alone and self-sufficient in the long empty road. "Such a nice girl," the nurse said. But Francis was silent, feeling again the jump-jump of his heart, realizing how soon the hour of the party would arrive. God had done nothing for him, and the minutes flew.

They flew too quickly to plan any evasion, or even to prepare his heart for the coming ordeal. Panic nearly overcame him when, all unready, he found himself standing on the door-step, with coat-collar turned up against a cold wind, and the nurse's electric torch making a short luminous trail through the darkness. Behind him were the lights of the hall and the sound of a servant laying the table for dinner, which his mother and father would eat alone. He was nearly overcome by a desire to run back into the house and call out to his mother that he would not go to the party, that he dared not go. They could not make him go. He could almost hear himself saying those final words, breaking down for ever, as he knew instinctively, the barrier of ignorance that saved his mind from his parents' knowledge. "I'm afraid of going. I won't go. I daren't go. They'll make me hide in the dark, and I'm afraid of the dark. I'll scream and scream and scream." He could see the expression of amazement on his mother's face, and then the cold confidence of a grown-up's retort. "Don't be silly. You must go. We've accepted Mrs. Henne-Falcon's invitation."

But they couldn't make him go; hesitating on the doorstep while the nurse's feet crunched across the frost-covered grass to the gate, he knew that. He would answer, "You can say I'm ill. I won't go.

I'm afraid of the dark." And his mother, "Don't be silly. You know there's nothing to be afraid of in the dark." But he knew the falsity of that reasoning; he knew how they taught also that there was nothing to fear in death, and how fearfully they avoided the idea of it. But they couldn't make him go to the party. "I'll scream. I'll scream."

"Francis, come along." He heard the nurse's voice across the dimly phosphorescent lawn and saw the small yellow circle of her torch wheel from tree to shrub and back to tree again. "I'm coming," he called with despair, leaving the lighted doorway of the house; he couldn't bring himself to lay bare his last secrets and end reserve between his mother and himself, for there was still in the last resort a further appeal possible to Mrs. Henne-Falcon. He comforted himself with that, as he advanced steadily across the hall, very small, towards her enormous bulk. His heart beat unevenly, but he had control now over his voice, as he said with meticulous accent, "Good evening, Mrs. Henne-Falcon. It was very good of you to ask me to your party." With his strained face lifted towards the curve of her breasts, and his polite set speech, he was like an old withered man. For Francis mixed very little with other children. As a twin he was in many ways an only child. To address Peter was to speak to his own image in a mirror, an image a little altered by a flaw in the glass, so as to throw back less a likeness of what he was than of what he wished to be, what he would be without his unreasoning fear of darkness, footsteps of strangers, the flight of bats in dusk-filled gardens.

"Sweet child," said Mrs. Henne-Falcon absent-mindedly, before, with a wave of her arms, as though the children were a flock of chickens, she whirled them into her set programme of entertainments: egg-and-spoon races, three-legged races, the spearing of apples, games which held for Francis nothing worse than humiliation. And in the frequent intervals when nothing was required of him and he could stand alone in corners as far removed as possible from Mabel Warren's scornful gaze, he was able to plan how he might avoid the approaching terror of the dark. He knew there was nothing to fear until after tea, and not until he was sitting down in a pool of yellow radiance cast by the ten candles on Colin Henne-Falcon's birthday cake did he become fully conscious of the imminence of what he feared. Through the confusion of his brain, now assailed suddenly

by a dozen contradictory plans, he heard Joyce's high voice down the table. "After tea we are going to play hide-and-seek in the dark."

"Oh, no," Peter said, watching Francis's troubled face with pity and an imperfect understanding, "don't let's. We play that every year."

"But it's on the programme," cried Mabel Warren. "I saw it myself. I looked over Mrs. Henne-Falcon's shoulder. Five o'clock, tea. A quarter to six to half-past, hide-and-seek in the dark. It's all written down in the programme."

Peter did not argue, for if hide-and-seek had been inserted in Mrs. Henne-Falcon's programme, nothing which he could say could avert it. He asked for another piece of birthday cake and sipped his tea slowly. Perhaps it might be possible to delay the game for a quarter of an hour, allow Francis at least a few extra minutes to form a plan, but even in that Peter failed, for children were already leaving the table in twos and threes. It was his third failure, and again, the reflection of an image in another's mind, he saw a great bird darken his brother's face with its wings. But he upbraided himself silently for his folly, and finished his cake encouraged by the memory of that adult refrain, "There's nothing to fear in the dark." The last to leave the table, the brothers came together to the hall to meet the mustering and impatient eyes of Mrs. Henne-Falcon.

"And now," she said, "we will play hide-and-seek in the dark."

Peter watched his brother and saw, as he had expected, the lips tighten. Francis, he knew, had feared this moment from the beginning of the party, had tried to meet it with courage and had abandoned the attempt. He must have prayed desperately for cunning to evade the game, which was now welcomed with cries of excitement by all the other children. "Oh, do let's." "We must pick sides." "Is any of the house out of bounds?" "Where shall home be?"

"I think," said Francis Morton, approaching Mrs. Henne-Falcon, his eyes unwaveringly on her exuberant breasts, "it will be no use my playing. My nurse will be calling for me very soon."

"Oh, but your nurse can wait, Francis," said Mrs. Henne-Falcon absent-mindedly, while she clapped her hands together to summon to her side a few children who were already straying up the wide staircase to upper floors. "Your mother will never mind."

That had been the limit of Francis's cunning. He had refused to believe that so well prepared an excuse could fail. All that he could say now, still in the precise tone which other children hated, thinking it a symbol of conceit, was, "I think I had better not play." He stood motionless, retaining, though afraid, unmoved features. But the knowledge of his terror, or the reflection of the terror itself, reached his brother's brain. For the moment, Peter Morton could have cried aloud with the fear of bright lights going out, leaving him alone in an island of dark surrounded by the gentle lapping of strange footsteps. Then he remembered that the fear was not his own, but his brother's. He said impulsively to Mrs. Henne-Falcon, "Please. I don't think Francis should play. The dark makes him jump so." They were the wrong words. Six children began to sing, "Cowardy, cowardy custard," turning torturing faces with the vacancy of wide sunflowers towards Francis Morton.

Without looking at his brother, Francis said, "Of course I will play. I am not afraid. I only thought . . ." But he was already forgotten by his human tormentors and was able in loneliness to contemplate the approach of the spiritual, the more unbounded, torture. The children scrambled round Mrs. Henne-Falcon, their shrill voices pecking at her with questions and suggestions. "Yes, anywhere in the house. We will turn out all the lights. Yes, you can hide in the cupboards. You must stay hidden as long as you can. There will be no home."

Peter, too, stood apart, ashamed of the clumsy manner in which he had tried to help his brother. Now he could feel, creeping in at the corners of his brain, all Francis's resentment of his championing. Several children ran upstairs, and the lights on the top floor went out. Then darkness came down like the wings of a bat and settled on the landing. Others began to put out the lights at the edge of the hall, till the children were all gathered in the central radiance of the chandelier, while the bats squatted round on hooded wings and waited for that, too, to be extinguished.

"You and Francis are on the hiding side," a tall girl said, and then the light was gone, and the carpet wavered under his feet with the sibilance of footfalls, like small cold draughts, creeping away into corners.

"Where's Francis?" he wondered. "If I join him he'll be less frightened of all these sounds." "These sounds" were the casing of silence. The squeak of a loose board, the cautious closing of a cupboard door, the whine of a finger drawn along polished wood.

Peter stood in the center of the dark deserted floor, not listening but waiting for the idea of his brother's whereabouts to enter his brain. But Francis crouched with fingers on his ears, eyes uselessly closed, mind numbed against impressions, and only a sense of strain could cross the gap of dark. Then a voice called "Coming," and as though his brother's self-possession had been shattered by the sudden cry, Peter Morton jumped with fear. But it was not his own fear. What in his brother was a burning panic, admitting no ideas except those which added to the flame, was in him an altruistic emotion that left the reason unimpaired. "Where, if I were Francis, should I hide?" Such, roughly, was his thought. And because he was, if not Francis himself, at least a mirror to him, the answer was immediate. "Between the oak bookcase on the left of the study door and the leather settee." Peter Morton was unsurprised by the swiftness of the response. Between the twins there could be no jargon of telepathy. They had been together in the womb, and they could not be parted.

Peter Morton tiptoed towards Francis's hiding place. Occasionally a board rattled, and because he feared to be caught by one of the soft questers through the dark, he bent and untied his laces. A tag struck the floor and the metallic sound set a host of cautious feet moving in his direction. But by that time he was in his stockings and would have laughed inwardly at the pursuit had not the noise of someone stumbling on his abandoned shoes made his heart trip in the reflection of another's surprise. No more boards revealed Peter Morton's progress. On stockinged feet he moved silently and unerringly towards his object. Instinct told him that he was near the wall, and, extending a hand, he laid the fingers across his brother's face.

Francis did not cry out, but the leap of his own heart revealed to Peter a proportion of Francis's terror. "It's all right," he whispered, feeling down the squatting figure until he captured a clenched hand. "It's only me. I'll stay with you." And grasping the other tightly, he listened to the cascade of whispers his utterance had caused to fall.

A hand touched the bookcase close to Peter's head and he was aware of how Francis's fear continued in spite of his presence. It was less intense, more bearable, he hoped, but it remained. He knew that it was his brother's fear and not his own that he experienced. The dark to him was only an absence of light; the groping hand that of a familiar child. Patiently he waited to be found.

He did not speak again, for between Francis and himself touch was the most intimate communion. By way of joined hands thought could flow more swiftly than lips could shape themselves round words. He could experience the whole progress of his brother's emotion, from the leap of panic at the unexpected contact to the steady pulse of fear, which now went on and on with the regularity of a heart-beat. Peter Morton thought with intensity, "I am here. You needn't be afraid. The lights will go on again soon. That rustle, that movement is nothing to fear. Only Joyce, only Mabel Warren." He bombarded the drooping form with thoughts of safety, but he was conscious that the fear continued. "They are beginning to whisper together. They are tired of looking for us. The lights will go on soon. We shall have won. Don't be afraid. That was only someone on the stairs. I believe it's Mrs. Henne-Falcon. Listen. They are feeling for the lights." Feet moving on a carpet, hands brushing a wall, a curtain pulled apart, a clicking handle, the opening of a cupboard door. In the case above their heads a loose book shifted under a touch. "Only Joyce, only Mabel Warren, only Mrs. Henne-Falcon," a crescendo of reassuring thought before the chandelier burst, like a fruit tree, into bloom.

The voices of the children rose shrilly into the radiance. "Where's Peter?" "Have you looked upstairs?" "Where's Francis?" but they were silenced again by Mrs. Henne-Falcon's scream. But she was not the first to notice Francis Morton's stillness, where he had collapsed against the wall at the touch of his brother's hand. Peter continued to hold the clenched fingers in an arid and puzzled grief. It was not merely that his brother was dead. His brain, too young to realize the full paradox, yet wondered with an obscure self-pity why it was that the pulse of his brother's fear went on and on, when Francis was now where he had been always told there was no more terror and no more darkness.



by
John D. MacDonald

THE BIG CONTEST

Now, forty years after the contest, we can figure out a few things about the little guy who won it. He had a terrible task here on this Earth; he must have been very lonely. . . .

THERE WAS a blueness in the sharp-edged shadow cast by the Fire House, a blueness that hinted of dusk. There had been a piece in the *Cardon Gazette* about the man over in Chamber County who claimed to have seen a flying saucer. Through the heat of the long Saturday afternoon the front of the Fire House had been the focal point for the saucer discussion. Men came and went all afternoon and the talk at times grew as hot as the sun against the pavement and store fronts across the way.

Hobe Traik had been in the same faded blue kitchen chair all afternoon, tipped back against the weathered wood, his belly resting comfortably against his beer-keg thighs, his store teeth clamped into the deep grooves of the pipestem, a mist of sweat gleaming on his bald head. He had taken no part in the discussion, a fact which was so unusual as to be remarked upon many times that Saturday. But each time Hobe merely smiled with enigmatic amusement.

Now the group was down to five, if you don't count the small boy. There are always small boys around fire houses. This one had a brown face, pale blue eyes, taffy hair and a pair of jeans so big for him the cuffs were rolled up. The five were Hobe Traik, Stu Ganser—the only other oldtimer in the group, a grizzled, indestructible man

much given to belching—young Harry Darian from the bank, prissy Arthur LeBlanc trying hard, as usual, to be one of the boys, and Brad Sedwell, the cattle buyer.

Brad and Harry were hunkered down against the wall. Hobe Traik, Stu Ganser and Arthur LeBlanc were tipped back in the three kitchen chairs from the card room and bunk room over the Fire House.

Harry's argument with Brad Sedwell about the saucers being mass hypnosis had petered out, as arguments will, when dusk began to spread layers of stillness over the town.

Hobe took his pipe out of his mouth and spat toward the road. It was a very respectable effort, carrying across the sidewalk and curb out onto the pavement. He cleared his throat. "Now I've heard a lot of fool talk today about these here saucers. Might be I'm a little tired of it. Me, I've been a-waitin' on them for just about forty years. Ever since Woolmutt left town. You remember Woolmutt, Stu?"

"Can't say as I do," Stu Ganser said, applying the usual terminal belch.

"That spitter."

"Oh! *That* Woolmutt."

"You're a damned old fool, Stu Ganser. There was only the one Woolmutt in this town, ever. You're gettin' so damn old, that head of yours . . ."

"What's a spitter got to do with saucers?" Arthur LeBlanc demanded in that voice of his, just a little bit lispy.

"Now you just settle back there," Hobe said, "and listen to it the way I want to tell it. It was nineteen eleven, the year we built this here Fire House so we wouldn't have to keep the pumper over in Holly's barn. Good thing we got it built when we did. The next week that barn burned to the ground. I was a sprout then. Full of sass. Seems like every minute I wasn't courtin' them Loomis sisters, I was right here at the Fire House. Both of 'em finally said no to me. Mary Alice married Clarence French from over Dellville way. Had nine kids afore Clarence fell the hell off the silo, but that's neither here nor there.

"That was the year we had the spittin'. Crown Street wasn't paved then, of course, and in a dry spell it was just plain dust. Yalla dust.

Choke you to death when somebody stirred it up. Now I don't rightly remember just who it was started it. You could say we all started it one hot day when there wasn't a breath of wind. Somebody just up and spit and in that dust you could see where they hit and just how much roll they got. So somebody else, he spits a little further. First thing you know we got us a line drawn and rules made and we're takin' turns.

"You take a town like this in the summer forty years ago, there wasn't so much for people to do. Surprisin' how spittin' contests caught on that year. I've always been a right fair spitter myself, but there was a couple boys I just couldn't beat. Fred Tunnison was one. Fred got killed in the first war. Luke Amery was the other one. Luke later went over to Youngstown and got in the banking business. Built a big house and sired four kids off that junior leaguer he married and then jumped the hell out of his office window in nineteen thirty.

"Well, Fred would win one contest and the next one Luke would win. The way we had it set up, each contestant got three spits. Took turns to give each man time to work up something to spit in between. Why, we had boys coming over from Lake Valley and far away as Dunstan to try against Fred and Luke. Sort of swept the county you might say.

"It must have been after the spittin' had been going on for a month that this Woolmutter fella started comin' around to watch. One of those fellas, he was, you don't even think once about. You don't see him come and you don't notice him leave. Little chunky fella with washed-out eyes, sort of a stupid look, and a big mouth. He was workin' as hired man over to old Cable Fisher's place on the east side of Perry Woods.

"Now you know how these contests go. Some of the boys Luke and Fred out-spit went back and practiced up and the first thing you know we got ourselves a big Fourth of July contest all lined up. I kind of took charge of it, me havin' no urge to do any spittin' against Luke and Fred. Those boys could stand right at the near edge of that walk right there and let one go that would carry out as far as that white line down the middle of the road. Everybody that wanted to get in the contest had to put twenty-five cents in the hat for every

time they tried a string of three spits. We roped off the street to keep traffic off it, and I made up some blocks of wood painted bright colors so we could get 'em out to mark the best spits.

"In those days Marty Loofer's Saloon was right around the corner on Chestnut and it being so handy to bring the buckets of beer around, we figured that nobody'd get too dry to spit, anyway. Well, the start-off time was two o'clock and I collected six dollars and a quarter in the hat. You got to remember, you young fellows, that six dollars was a good week's pay in this town in nineteen eleven. Those boys had something to spit for.

"Just as we were gettin' started, this Woolmutt fella comes up to me, shy like, and drops a quarter in the hat. I knew he'd been watching a lot, but I knew, too, how tight old Cable Fisher was with money, so I tried to talk Woolmutt out of entering. No sir, he wouldn't have a chance, I told him. He had a funny accent and he didn't talk much, but he sure was stubborn. So I kept his quarter and told him that because he was the last one to enter, he could spit last.

"With so much at stake, everybody was taking their time, believe me. Old Fred, he strutted up to the line and got himself balanced nice on the balls of his feet, his mouth working. There wasn't a breath of wind. Sure was a hot day. When he was all ready and everybody quieted down, Fred sort of hunched back and then shot his head up and out like a blacksnake hitting a horse fly. He got a good explosion and a nice arc on that first spit. It was one of the best he ever did. A big cheer went up, because Fred was a pretty popular fella around this town in those days. He swaggered back from the line trying to look meek, but you could see he was pretty proud of that effort. The next few boys did pretty well, as far as spittin's concerned, but the best of them was a good four foot eight inches back of the red block we set out to mark where Fred hit. Then Luke came up. His style was a little different, but just as good as Fred's I'd say. Luke made himself just as high on his toes as he could get, and he stuck his head up just as far as he could get it, balanced there and let fly. You should have heard the yell when he got a good inch beyond Fred's mark. Fred turned red and then white. You could see him setting his jaw for the next effort.

"One fella from out of town got within six inches of Fred, but the

rest of them were almost pitiful. Woolmutt was the last one up to toe the mark. All those people standing around seemed to scare him. I was off to the side because it was part of my job to see that nobody fouled by stepping across the line. So from there I could see how Woolmutt worked himself up to it.

"First thing I see, he sticks his tongue out. Now I tell you, boys, that was the biggest tongue I ever did see on anybody. He sticks it straight out, flat like, and then he curls it up from the sides to make a sort of tube. That tube is a good four inches out beyond the end of his stubby little nose. I see him take a breath. Big chest on the little fella.

"He goes whih-THOO! And something goes bang across the street. Now afterward there were some claimed they could see that line of flight, right from the tip of his tongue over to the hole in the plate glass in the front of Winkelhauer's Merchandise Mart. Wilbur Winkelhauer is a spectator, and when he sees what happens to his front window, he lets out a scream of mortal agony. Then the yell of the crowd drowns out Wilbur. Fred and Luke, they look badly shaken. Little Woolmutt is sort of dazed by all the commotion.

"Fred and Luke, they try to get me to rule Woolmutt out of the competition. First they say he isn't spittin' at all and that he's got a friend hid somewhere with a gun. Then Woolmutt has to prove that he is spitting. He does so. Next Fred and Luke say that the little fella has some sort of a thing in his mouth like a blow gun. They make him stick out his tongue. It sure is big. Fred even reaches out slow like and pinches the end of it. He yanks his hand back quick and wipes it on his shirt and says, 'Yep, it sure is a tongue.' Then they say he didn't hit the road.

"Fred and Luke don't do so well the next turn around. A lot of the others have dropped out. Woolmutt steps up and hits the road. Where he hits there is a long line in the dust and a big cloud of dust comes up. It ricochets up and smacks the front of Winkelhauer's again, this time just under the busted window.

"On the third try, Fred and Luke are weaker than ever. The heart is gone out of them. Woolmutt takes a long time aiming. He hits that red block that marks Fred's best shot and knocks it clean over onto the walk on the other side of the road. I kept that block

around for years. Soft pine. Had a half-inch dent in the side of it. Never did know where it disappeared to finally.

"Well, I'm here to tell you that the rest of that Fourth of July was one of the gol-damnedest days I ever did see. How about it, Stu?"

Stu belched softly, reminiscently. "Sure was," he sighed.

"You see," said Hobe, "the crowd sort of took Woolmutt to its heart. He was a kind of likable little guy. And we knew that in him we had the best spitter in the state, if not the world at large. I announced him the winner and he shoved the money in his pants and they carried him on their shoulders around to Loofer's. I guess the little guy wasn't used to drinking. They loaded him up, and I do mean that they loaded him up. The better element went home. Along about midafternoon, Woolmutt, sort of loosened up at every joint, led what you might call a triumphant procession through town.

"You could hear him coming a block away. First all you'd hear would be the bang, bang, bang, as he hit the wooden buildings. After each bang all those fellas following him would let out a yell, Fred and Luke yelling louder than anybody. When he got closer you could hear the whole works. 'Whih-THOO BANG YELL. Whih-THOO BANG YELL.' It was something terrible. I was with him when Mrs. Thomas' cat, big yella devil named Wheedlekins, made the mistake of runnin' across the road in front of Woolmutt. Little Woolmutt really threw up the dust around that cat. Wheedlekins run up a tree, panting and yelling, and made the mistake of leaving a little bit exposed around the edge of the top limb. Woolmutt nailed Wheedlekins again and that cat dropped out of the tree and raced across town like its tail was afire.

"Judge Proctor's bay team caught it next. You might say Woolmutt sort of encouraged those horses. It's said that the Judge got them stopped just short of the county line. The good citizens who wanted no part of all this locked their doors and they didn't get in line with the windows either. Woolmutt proved himself a gentleman, though, even when he was the most carried away with it all. You gentlemen know Mrs. Iverson. Well, she was about eighteen then, and the way she dressed there were some ready and willing to say she'd come to no good end. A handsome filly always looking as though she'd bust right out of her clothes.

"When they came around the corner of Market and Crown, there was Hazel fifty feet away, bent over tying her shoe. They all pleaded, but Woolmutter refused. He said it wasn't right and proper. And . . ."

"I don't see what this has got to do with flying saucers," Brad Sedwell complained.

"You young folks are always too damn impatient," Hobe said. "You're hurrying me. Well, on that day Harry Chase's son, John, was in town, taking a vacation from the hospital down east where he was doing his interning. Smart boy, John Chase. Of course, he's no boy now. It surprised me to find him following around after Woolmutter and then I noticed that he wasn't yelling the way the others were. He just kept his eyes glued to Woolmutter as though he couldn't look away.

"When the whole mob stopped back here in front of the Fire House, John got right up next to Woolmutter, staring at him hard. The first thing we knew, he grabbed one of Woolmutter's hands and looked at it close, front and back. Woolmutter tried to pull away. Then John got his fingers on Woolmutter's pulse. He looked deep into Woolmutter's eyes and I could see him turn white. Woolmutter yanked free, plunged through the crowd and ran out of town. Nobody ever saw him again. And John Chase wouldn't say a word about what he saw—but he didn't seem too surprised when he found out that Woolmutter had left the county for good. That's how it ties in with them saucers, Brad."

Brad snorted. "Oh, sure. Woolmutter came in a flying saucer."

"Use the brains God gave squirrels, Brad," Hobe said angrily. "It stands to reason that whoever flies around in them saucers has been watching us for a long time, maybe hundreds of years. I say they're making a study of us mortals. You ever read Charles Fort's stuff? He says right out that we're nothing but property. The more I pondered on Woolmutter and his accent and the funny way he looked, the more I began to think that Woolmutter was a spy from someplace. Someplace off this earth. They made him look like a man and they stuck him here on us to make out his reports.

"But the little bugger got lonesome. You know how it is. Here he was among strangers, maybe for most of his life, getting lonelier every day. They didn't do a good job of making him look like a man maybe because they didn't know enough about us, forty years ago.

But when he saw the spittin' he knew that it was something he could do, something he could get in on. Just like the time that drummer told Nancy Carrwell she had a good singing voice. She like to drove the whole town crazy for three years until she got over it.

"Now John Chase was a trained doctor and he could see things about Woolmutt that we wouldn't notice. Woolmutt, with his spit-tin', attracted too much attention and he knew it when John started examining him. So Woolmutt had to go back where he came from. Now they've had spies here long enough so that they know about the fix this world's gettin' into and they're coming around in their saucers and keep us from killing each other off—the same way you divide up a chicken run when they start peckin' each other to death."

The street lights came on with startling suddenness, turning the blue dusk to night. Stu sighed and shuffled off into the darkness. Arthur LeBlanc stood up and laughed nervously and said, "Well, this has all been very interesting." His lisp seemed more pronounced. Hobe's closing comments had seemed to put some restraint on the group. Brad and Harry mumbled something about getting home and went off together.

Only the boy was left. "You better be gettin' on home to your Ma," Hobe suggested gently.

The boy sighed as though awakening from a dream. "Sure, mister. Sure. G'night, mister."

He went off up the street. He walked down Crown to the tracks and turned east. When he got beyond the street lights the countryside seemed brighter, as though there were a last legitimate bit of the day left.

He cut across lots toward Perry's woods. When he neared the tangle of impenetrable brush he took a small iridescent cube out of the pocket of the jeans and held it to his ear. He spoke, listened a few moments, and then spoke again, his tone firm and brisk.

He put the cube back in his pocket. A small tawny rabbit, barely visible in the dusk, stood atop a knoll sixty yards away.

The rabbit suddenly tumbled over and over, jumped up and scurried away. The small boy flattened the long tongue out again, smiled almost sadly, and rose straight up, with increasing speed, toward the navy blue sky of night.

by Franz Kafka

"Even if all the people were commanded to help me, every door would remain shut, everybody would take to bed and draw the bedclothes over his head, the whole earth would become an inn for the night."



The HUNTER GRACCHUS

TWO BOYS were sitting on the harbor wall playing with dice. A man was reading a newspaper on the steps of the monument, resting in the shadow of a hero who was flourishing his sword on high. A girl was filling her bucket at the fountain. A fruit-seller was lying beside his scales, staring out to sea. Through the vacant window and door openings of a café one could see two men quite at the back drinking their wine. The proprietor was sitting at a table in front and dozing. A bark was silently making for the little harbor, as if borne by invisible means over the water. A man in a blue blouse climbed ashore and drew the rope through a ring. Behind the boatman two other men in dark coats with silver buttons carried a bier, on which, beneath a great flower-patterned tasseled silk cloth, a man was apparently lying.

Nobody on the quay troubled about the newcomers; even when they lowered the bier to wait for the boatman, who was still occupied with his rope, nobody went nearer, nobody asked them a question, nobody accorded them an inquisitive glance.

The pilot was still further detained by a woman who, a child at her breast, now appeared with loosened hair on the deck of the boat. Then he advanced and indicated a yellowish two-storied house that rose abruptly on the left beside the sea; the bearers took up their burden and bore it to the low but gracefully pillared door. A little

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boy opened a window just in time to see the party vanishing into the house, then hastily shut the window again. The door too was now shut; it was of black oak, and very strongly made. A flock of doves which had been flying round the belfry alighted in the street before the house. As if their food were stored within, they assembled in front of the door. One of them flew up to the first story and pecked at the window-pane. They were bright-hued, well-tended, beautiful birds. The woman on the boat flung grain to them in a wide sweep; they ate it up and flew across to the woman.

A man in a top hat tied with a band of crêpe now descended one of the narrow and very steep lanes that led to the harbor. He glanced round vigilantly, everything seemed to displease him, his mouth twisted at the sight of some offal in a corner. Fruit skins were lying on the steps of the monument; he swept them off in passing with his stick. He rapped at the house door, at the same time taking his top hat from his head with his black-gloved hand. The door was opened at once, and some fifty little boys appeared in two rows in the long entry-hall, and bowed to him.

The boatman descended the stairs, greeted the gentleman in black, conducted him up to the first story, led him round the bright and elegant loggia which encircled the courtyard, and both of them entered, while the boys pressed after them at a respectful distance, a cool spacious room looking towards the back, from whose window no habitation, but only a bare, blackish grey rocky wall was to be seen. The bearers were busied in setting up and lighting several long candles at the head of the bier, yet these did not give light, but only scared away the shadows which had been immobile till then, and made them flicker over the walls. The cloth covering the bier had been thrown back. Lying on it was a man with wildly matted hair, who looked somewhat like a hunter. He lay without motion and, it seemed, without breathing, his eyes closed; yet only his trappings indicated that this man was probably dead.

The gentleman stepped up to the bier, laid his hand on the brow of the man lying upon it, then kneeled down and prayed. The boatman made a sign to the bearers to leave the room; they went out, drove away the boys who had gathered outside, and shut the door. But even that did not seem to satisfy the gentleman, he glanced at the

boatman; the boatman understood, and vanished through a side door into the next room. At once the man on the bier opened his eyes, turned his face painfully towards the gentleman, and said: "Who are you?" Without any mark of surprise the gentleman rose from his kneeling posture and answered: "The Burgomaster of Riva."

The man on the bier nodded, indicated a chair with a feeble movement of his arm, and said, after the Burgomaster had accepted his invitation: "I knew that, of course, Burgomaster, but in the first moments of returning consciousness I always forget, everything goes round before my eyes, and it is best to ask about anything even if I know. You too probably know that I am the hunter Gracchus."

"Certainly," said the Burgomaster. "Your arrival was announced to me during the night. We had been asleep for a good while. Then towards midnight my wife cried: 'Salvatore'—that's my name—'look at that dove at the window.' It was really a dove, but as big as a cock. It flew over me and said in my ear: 'Tomorrow the dead hunter Gracchus is coming; receive him in the name of the city.'"

The hunter nodded and licked his lips with the tip of his tongue: "Yes, the doves flew here before me. But do you believe, Burgomaster, that I shall remain in Riva?"

"I cannot say that yet," replied the Burgomaster. "Are you dead?"

"Yes," said the hunter, "as you see. Many years ago, yes, it must be a great many years ago, I fell from a precipice in the Black Forest—that is in Germany—when I was hunting a chamois. Since then I have been dead."

"But you are alive too," said the Burgomaster.

"In a certain sense," said the hunter, "in a certain sense I am alive too. My death ship lost its way; a wrong turn of the wheel, a moment's absence of mind on the pilot's part, a longing to turn aside towards my lovely native country, I cannot tell what it was; I only know this, that I remained on earth and that ever since my ship has sailed earthly waters. So I, who asked for nothing better than to live among my mountains, travel after my death through all the lands of the earth."

"And you have no part in the other world?" asked the Burgomaster, knitting his brow.

"I am for ever," replied the hunter, "on the great stair that leads

up to it. On that infinitely wide and spacious stair I clamber about, sometimes up, sometimes down, sometimes on the right, sometimes on the left, always in motion. The hunter has been turned into a butterfly. Do not laugh."

"I am not laughing," said the Burgomaster in self-defense.

"That is very good of you," said the hunter. "I am always in motion. But when I make a supreme flight and see the gate actually shining before me I awaken presently on my old ship, still stranded forlornly in some earthly sea or other. The fundamental error of my one-time death grins at me as I lie in my cabin. Julia, the wife of the pilot, knocks at the door and brings me on my bier the morning drink of the land whose coasts we chance to be passing. I lie on a wooden pallet, I wear—it cannot be a pleasure to look at me—a filthy winding sheet, my hair and beard, black tinged with grey, have grown together inextricably, my limbs are covered with a great flower-patterned woman's shawl with long fringes. A sacramental candle stands at my head and lights me. On the wall opposite me is a little picture, evidently of a Bushman who is aiming his spear at me and taking cover as best he can behind a beautifully painted shield. On shipboard one is often a prey to stupid imaginations, but that is the stupidest of them all. Otherwise my wooden case is quite empty. Through a hole in the side wall come in the warm airs of the southern night, and I hear the water slapping against the old boat.

"I have lain here ever since the time when, as the hunter Gracchus living in the Black Forest, I followed a chamois and fell from a precipice. Everything happened in good order. I pursued, I fell, bled to death in a ravine, died, and this ship should have conveyed me to the next world. I can still remember how gladly I stretched myself out on this pallet for the first time. Never did the mountains listen to such songs from me as these shadowy walls did then.

"I had been glad to live and I was glad to die. Before I stepped aboard, I joyfully flung away my wretched load of ammunition, my knapsack, my hunting rifle that I had always been proud to carry, and I slipped into my winding sheet like a girl into her marriage dress. I lay and waited. Then came the mishap."

"A terrible fate," said the Burgomaster, raising his hand defensively. "And you bear no blame for it?"

"None," said the hunter. "I was a hunter; was there any sin in that? I followed my calling as a hunter in the Black Forest, where there were still wolves in those days. I lay in ambush, shot, hit my mark, flayed the skins from my victims: was there any sin in that? My labors were blessed. 'The great hunter of the Black Forest' was the name I was given. Was there any sin in that?"

"I am not called upon to decide that," said the Burgomaster, "but to me also there seems to be no sin in such things. But, then whose is the guilt?"

"The boatman's," said the hunter. "Nobody will read what I say here, no one will come to help me; even if all the people were commanded to help me, every door would remain shut, everybody would take to bed and draw the bedclothes over his head, the whole earth would become an inn for the night. And there is sense in that, for nobody knows of me, and if anyone knew he would not know where I could be found, and if he knew where I could be found, he would not know how to deal with me, he would not know how to help me. The thought of helping me is an illness that has to be cured by taking to one's bed.

"I know that, and so I do not shout to summon help, even though at moments—when I lose control over myself, as I have done just now, for instance—I think seriously of it. But to drive out such thoughts I need only look around me and verify where I am, and—I can safely assert—have been for hundreds of years."

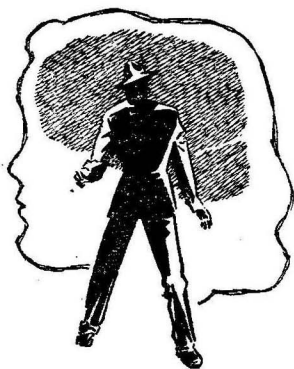
"Extraordinary," said the Burgomaster, "extraordinary.—And now do you think of staying here in Riva with us?"

"I think not," said the hunter with a smile, and, to excuse himself, he laid his hand on the Burgomaster's knee. "I am here, more than that I do not know, further than that I cannot go. My ship has no rudder, and it is driven by the wind that blows in the undermost regions of death."

WANTED:

Any information as to the present whereabouts of Venard McLaughlin, author of "The Silence," "The Hands," and "With the Greatest of Ease."

by C. M. Kornbluth



THE MINDWORM

You might think of him as an ascetic, for he lived on nothing more substantial than human emotion. Or you might call him a sadist, for the deaths of other men were his life. The coal-town Slavs he despised had another, simpler name for him; and a very simple, very ancient remedy for the terror he brought.

THE HANDSOME j. g. and the pretty nurse held out against it as long as they reasonably could, but blue Pacific water, languid tropical nights and the low atoll dreaming on the horizon—and the complete absence of any other nice young people for company on the small, uncomfortable parts boat—did their work. On June 30th they watched through dark glasses as the dazzling thing burst over the fleet and the atoll. Her manicured hand gripped his arm in excitement and terror. Unfelt radiation sleeted through their loins.

A storekeeper-third-class named Bielaski watched the young couple with more interest than he showed in Test Able. After all, he had twenty-five dollars riding on the nurse. That night he lost it to a chief bosun's mate who had backed the j. g.

In the course of time, the careless nurse was discharged under conditions other than honorable. The j.g., who didn't like to put things in writing, phoned her all the way from Manila to say it was a damned shame. When her gratitude gave way to specific inquiry, their overseas connection went bad and he had to hang up.

She had a child, a boy, turned it over to a well-run foundling home

which she personally inspected beforehand, and vanished from his life into a series of good jobs and finally marriage.

The boy grew up stupid, puny and stubborn, greedy and miserable. To the home's hilarious young athletics director he suddenly said: "You hate me. You think I make the rest of the boys look bad."

The athletics director blustered and laughed, and later told the doctor over coffee: "I watch myself around the kids. They're sharp—they catch a look or a gesture and it's like a blow in the face to them, I know that, so I watch myself. So how did he know?"

The doctor told the boy: "Three pounds more this month isn't bad, but how about you pitch in and clean up your plate *every* day? Can't live on meat and water; those vegetables make you big and strong."

The boy said: "What's 'neurasthenic' mean?"

The doctor later said to the director: "It made my flesh creep. I was looking at his little spindling body and dishing out the old pep-talk about growing big and strong, and inside my head I was thinking 'we'd call him neurasthenic in the old days' and then out he popped with it. What should we do? Should we do anything? Maybe it'll go away. I don't know anything about these things. I don't know whether anybody does."

"Reads minds, does he?" asked the director. *Be damned if he's going to read my mind about Schultz Meat Market's ten per cent.* "Doctor, I think I'm going to take my vacation a little early this year. Has anybody shown any interest in adopting the child?"

"Not him. He wasn't a baby-doll when we got him, and at present he's an exceptionally unattractive-looking kid. You know how people don't give a damn about anything but their looks."

"Some couples would take anything, or so they tell me."

"Unapproved for foster-parenthood, you mean?"

"Red tape and arbitrary classifications sometimes limit us too severely in our adoptions, don't you think?"

"If you're going to wish him on some screwball couple that the courts turned down as unfit, I want no part of it."

"You don't have to have any part of it, doctor. By the way, which dorm does he sleep in?"

"West," grunted the doctor, leaving the office.

The doctor called a few friends—a judge, a couple the judge referred him to, a court clerk. Then he left by way of the east wing of the building.

The boy survived three months with the Berrymans. Hard-drinking Mimi alternately caressed and shrieked at him; Edward W. tried to be a good scout and just gradually lost interest, looking clean through him. He hit the road in June and got by with it for a while. He wore a Boy Scout uniform, and Boy Scouts can turn up anywhere, any time. The money he had taken with him lasted a month. When the last penny of the last dollar was three days spent, he was adrift on a Nebraska prairie. He had walked out of the last small town because the constable was beginning to wonder what on earth he was hanging around for and who he belonged to. The town was miles behind on the two-lane highway; the infrequent cars did not stop.

One of Nebraska's "rivers", a dry bed at this time of year, lay ahead, spanned by a railroad culvert. There were some men in its shade, and he was hungry.

They were ugly, dirty men, and their thoughts were muddled and stupid. They called him "Shorty" and gave him a little dirty bread and some stinking sardines from a can. The thoughts of one of them became less muddled and uglier. He talked to the rest out of the boy's hearing, and they whooped with laughter. The boy got ready to run, but his legs wouldn't hold him up.

He could read the thoughts of the men quite clearly as they headed for him. Outrage, fear and disgust blended in him and somehow turned inside-out and one of the men was dead on the dry ground, grasshoppers vaulting onto his flannel shirt, the others backing away, frightened now, not frightening.

He wasn't hungry any more; he felt quite comfortable and satisfied. He got up and headed for the other men, who ran. The rearmost of them was thinking *Jeez he folded up the evil eye we was only gonna—*

Again the boy let the thoughts flow into his head and again he flipped his own thoughts around them; it was quite easy to do. It was different—this man's terror from the other's lustful anticipation. But both had their points. . . .

At his leisure, he robbed the bodies of three dollars and twenty-four cents.

Thereafter his fame preceded him like a death-wind. Two years on the road and he had his growth, and his fill of the dull and stupid minds he met there. He moved to northern cities, a year here, a year there, quiet, unobtrusive, prudent, an epicure.

Sebastian Long woke suddenly, with something on his mind. As night-fog cleared away he remembered, happily. Today he started the Demeter Bowl! At last there was time, at last there was money—six hundred and twenty-three dollars in the bank. He had packed and shipped the three dozen cocktail glasses last night, engraved with Mrs. Klausman's initials—his last commercial order for as many months as the Bowl would take.

He shifted from nightshirt to denims, gulped coffee, boiled an egg but was too excited to eat it. He went to the front of his shop-workroom-apartment, checked the lock, waved at neighbors' children on their way to school, and ceremoniously set a sign in the cluttered window.

It said: "NO COMMERCIAL ORDERS TAKEN UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE."

From a closet he tenderly carried a shrouded object that made a double armful and laid it on his workbench. Unshrouded, it was a glass bowl—*what* a glass bowl! The clearest Swedish lead glass, the purest lines he had ever seen, his secret treasure since the crazy day he had bought it, long ago, for six months' earnings. His wife had given him hell for that until the day she died. From the closet he brought a portfolio filled with sketches and designs dating back to the day he had bought the bowl. He smiled over the first, excitedly scrawled—a florid, rococo conception, unsuited to the classicism of the lines and the serenity of the perfect glass.

Through many years and hundreds of sketches he had refined his conception to the point where it was, he humbly felt, not unsuited to the medium. A strongly-molded Demeter was to dominate the piece, a matron as serene as the glass, and all the fruits of the earth would flow from her gravely outstretched arms.

Suddenly and surely, he began to work. With a candle he thinly

smoked an oval area on the outside of the bowl. Two steady fingers clipped the Demeter drawing against the carbon black; a hair-fine needle in his other hand traced her lines. When the transfer of the design was done, Sebastian Long readied his lathe. He fitted a small copper wheel, slightly worn as he liked them, into the chuck and with his fingers charged it with the finest rouge from Rouen. He took an ashtray cracked in delivery and held it against the spinning disk. It bit in smoothly, with the *wiping* feel to it that was exactly right.

Holding out his hands, seeing that the fingers did not tremble with excitement, he eased the great bowl to the lathe and was about to make the first tiny cut of the millions that would go into the masterpiece.

Somebody knocked on his door and rattled the doorknob.

Sebastian Long did not move or look toward the door. Soon the busybody would read the sign and go away. But the pounding and the rattling of the knob went on. He eased down the bowl and angrily went to the window, picked up the sign and shook it at whoever it was—he couldn't make out the face very well. But the idiot wouldn't go away.

The engraver unlocked the door, opened it a bit and snapped: "The shop is closed. I shall not be taking any orders for several months. Please don't bother me now."

"It's about the Demeter Bowl," said the intruder.

Sebastian Long stared at him. "What the devil do you know about my Demeter Bowl?" He saw the man was a stranger, undersized by a little, middle-aged. . . .

"Just let me in please," urged the man. "It's important. Please!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the engraver. "But what do you know about my Demeter Bowl?" He hooked his thumbs pugnaciously over the waistband of his denims and glowered at the stranger. The stranger promptly took advantage of his hand being removed from the door and glided in.

Sebastian Long thought briefly that it might be a nightmare as the man darted quickly about his shop, picking up a graver and throwing it down, picking up a wire scratch-wheel and throwing it down. "Here, you!" he roared, as the stranger picked up a crescent wrench which he did not throw down.

As Long started for him, the stranger darted to the workbench and brought the crescent wrench down shatteringly on the bowl.

Sebastian Long's heart was bursting with sorrow and rage; such a storm of emotions as he never had known thundered through him. Paralyzed, he saw the stranger smile with anticipation.

The engraver's legs folded under him and he fell to the floor, drained and dead.

The Mindworm, locked in the bedroom of his brownstone front, smiled again, reminiscently.

Smiling, he checked the day on a wall calendar.

"Dolores!" yelled her mother in Spanish. "Are you going to pass the whole day in there?"

She had been practicing low-lidded, sexy half-smiles like Lauren Bacall in the bathroom mirror. She stormed out and yelled in English: "I don't know how many times I tell you not to call me that Spick name no more!"

"Dolly!" sneered her mother. "Dah-lee! When was there a Saint Dah-lee that you call yourself after, eh?"

The girl snarled a Spanish obscenity at her mother and ran down the tenement stairs. Jeez, she was gonna be late for sure!

Held up by a stream of traffic between her and her streetcar, she danced with impatience. Then the miracle happened. Just like in the movies, a big convertible pulled up before her and its lounging driver said, opening the door: "You seem to be in a hurry. Could I drop you somewhere?"

Dazed at the sudden realization of a hundred daydreams, she did not fail to give the driver a low-lidded, sexy smile as she said: "Why, *thanks!*" and climbed in. He wasn't no Cary Grant, but he had all his hair . . . kind of small, but so was she . . . and jeez, the convertible had *leopard-skin seat covers!*

The car was in the stream of traffic, purring down the avenue. "It's a lovely day," she said. "Really too nice to work."

The driver smiled shyly, kind of like Jimmy Stewart but of course not so tall, and said: "I feel like playing hooky myself. How would you like a spin down Long Island?"

"Be wonderful!" The convertible cut left on an odd-numbered street.

"Play hooky, you said. What do you do?"

"Advertising."

"*Advertising!*" Dolly wanted to kick herself for ever having doubted, for ever having thought in low, self-loathing moments that it wouldn't work out, that she'd marry a grocer or a mechanic and live forever after in a smelly tenement and grow old and sick and stooped. She felt vaguely in her happy daze that it might have been cuter, she might have accidentally pushed him into a pond or something, but this was cute enough. An advertising man, leopard-skin seat covers . . . what more could a girl with a sexy smile and a nice little figure want?

Speeding down the South Shore she learned that his name was Michael Brent, exactly as it ought to be. She wished she could tell him she was Jennifer Brown or one of those real cute names they had nowadays, but was reassured when he told her he thought Dolly Gonzalez was a beautiful name. He didn't, and she noticed the omission, add: "It's the most beautiful name I ever heard!" That, she comfortably thought as she settled herself against the cushions, would come later.

They stopped at Medford for lunch, a wonderful lunch in a little restaurant where you went down some steps and there were candles on the table. She called him "Michael" and he called her "Dolly." She learned that he liked dark girls and thought the stories in *True Story* really were true, and that he thought she was just tall enough, and that Greer Garson was wonderful, but not the way she was, and that he thought her dress was just wonderful.

They drove slowly after Medford, and Michael Brent did most of the talking. He had traveled all over the world. He had been in the war and wounded—just a flesh wound. He was 38, and had been married once, but she died. There were no children. He was alone in the world. He had nobody to share his town house in the 50's, his country place in Westchester, his lodge in the Maine woods. Every word sent the girl floating higher and higher on a tide of happiness; the signs were unmistakable.

When they reached Montauk Point, the last sandy bit of the continent before blue water and Europe, it was sunset, with a great

wrinkled sheet of purple and rose stretching half across the sky and the first stars appearing above the dark horizon of the water.

The two of them walked from the parked car out onto the sand, alone, bathed in glorious Technicolor. Her heart was nearly bursting with joy as she heard Michael Brent say, his arms tightening around her: "Darling, will you marry me?"

"Oh, yes Michael!" she breathed, dying.

The Mindworm, drowsing, suddenly felt the sharp sting of danger. He cast out through the great city, dragging tentacles of thought:

"... die if she don't let me ..."

"... six an' six is twelve an' carry one an' three is four ..."

"... gobblegobble madre de dios pero soy gobblegobble ..."

"... parlay Domino an' Missab and shoot the roll on Duchess Peg in the feature ..."

"... melt resin add the silver chloride and dissolve in oil of lavender stand and decant and fire to cone 012 give you shimmering streaks of luster down the walls ..."

"... moiderin' square-headed gobblegobble tried ta poke his eye out wassamatta witta ref ..."

"... O God I am most heartily sorry I have offended thee in ..."

"... talk like a commie ..."

"... gobblegobblegobble two dolla twenny-fi' sense gobble ..."

"... just a nip and fill it up with water and brush my teeth ..."

"... really know I'm God but fear to confess their sins ..."

"... dirty lousy rock-headed claw-handed paddle-footed goggle-eyed snot-nosed hunch-backed feeble-minded pot-bellied son of ..."

"... write on the wall alfie is a stunkur and then ..."

"... thinks I believe it's a television set but I know he's got a bomb in there but who can I tell who can help so alone ..."

"... gabble was ich weiss nicht gabble geh bei Broadway gabble ..."

"... habt mein daughter Rosie such a fella gobblegobble ..."

"... wonder if that's one didn't look back ..."

"... seen with her in the Medford restaurant ..."

The Mindworm struck into that thought.

"... not a mark on her but the M. E.'s have been wrong before

and heart failure don't mean a thing anyway try to talk to her old lady authorize an autopsy get Pancho little guy talks Spanish be best . . ."

The Mindworm knew he would have to be moving again—soon. He was sorry; some of the thoughts he had tapped indicated good . . . hunting?

Regretfully, he again dragged his net:

"... with chartreuse drinks I mean drapes could use a drink come to think of it . . ."

"... reep-beep-reep-beep reepiddy-beepiddy-beep bop man wadda beat . . ."

$\dots f(x_1, x_2) \frac{\partial}{\partial x_1} a_2(S) x_1^{n-1} x_2^j$ WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?"

The Mindworm withdrew, in frantic haste. The intelligence was massive, its overtones those of a vigorous adult. He had learned from certain dangerous children that there was peril of a leveling flow. Shaken and scared, he contemplated traveling. He would need more than that wretched girl had supplied, and it would not be epicurean. There would be no time to find individuals at a ripe emotional crisis, or goad them to one. It would be plain—munching. The Mindworm drank a glass of water, also necessary to his metabolism.

EIGHT FOUND DEAD

IN UPTOWN MOVIE;

"MOLESTER" SOUGHT

New York (CP)—Eight persons, including three women, were found dead Wednesday night of unknown causes in widely-separated seats in the balcony of the Odeon Theater at 117th St. and Broadway. Police are seeking a man described by the balcony usher, Michael Fenelly, 18, as "acting like a woman-molester."

Fenelly discovered the first of the fatalities after seeing the man "moving from one empty seat to another several times." He went to ask a woman in a seat next to one the man had just vacated whether he had annoyed her. She was dead.

Almost at once, a scream rang out. In another part of the balcony Mrs. Sadie Rabinowitz, 40, uttered the cry when another victim toppled from his seat next to her.

Theater manager I. J. Marcusohn stopped the show and turned on the house lights. He tried to instruct his staff to keep the audience from leaving before the police arrived. He failed to get word to them in time, however, and most of the audience was gone when a detail from the 24th Pct. and an ambulance from Harlem hospital took over at the scene of the tragedy.

The Medical Examiner's office has not yet made a report as to the causes of death. A spokesman said the victims showed no signs of poisoning or violence. He added that it "was inconceivable that it could be a coincidence."

Lt. John Braidwood of the 24th Pct. said of the alleged molester: "We got a fair description of him and naturally we will try to bring him in for questioning."

Clickety-click, clickety-click, clickety-click sang the rails as the Mindworm drowsed in his coach seat.

Some people were walking forward from the diner. One was thinking: "Different-looking fellow. (a) he's aberrant. (b) he's nonaberrant and ill. Cancel (b)—respiration normal, skin smooth and healthy, no tremor of limbs, well-groomed. Is aberrant (1) trivially. (2) significantly. Cancel (1)—displayed no involuntary interest when . . . odd! *Running* for the washroom! Unexpected because (a) neat grooming indicates amour propre inconsistent with amusing others; (b) evident health inconsistent with . . ." It had taken one second, was fully detailed.

The Mindworm, locked in the toilet of the coach, wondered what the next stop was. He was getting off at it—not frightened, just careful. Dodge them, keep dodging them and everything would be all right. Send out no mental taps until the train was far away and everything would be all right.

He got off at a West Virginia coal and iron town surrounded by ruined mountains and filled with the offscourings of Eastern Europe. Serbs, Albanians, Croats, Hungarians, Slovenes, Bulgarians and all

possible combinations and permutations thereof. He walked slowly from the smoke-stained, brownstone passenger station. The train had roared on its way.

"... ain' no gemmum tha's fo sho', fi-cen' tip fo' a good shine lak ah give um ..."

"... dumb bassar don't know how to make out a billa lading yet he ain't never gonna know so fire him get it over with ..."

"... gabblegabblegabble ..."

"... gobblegobble dat tam vooman I brek she nack ..."

"... gobble trink visky chin glassabeer gobblegobblegobble ..."

"... gabblegabblegabble ..."

"... makes me so gobblegobble mad little no-good tramp no she ain' but I don' like no standup from no dame ..."

A blond, square-headed boy fuming under a street light.

"... out wit' Casey Oswiak I could kill that dumb bohunk alla time trin' ta paw her ..."

It was a possibility. The Mindworm drew near.

"... stand me up for that gobblegobble bohunk I oughtta slap her inna mush like my ole man says ..."

"Hello," said the Mindworm.

"Waddaya wan'?"

"Casey Oswiak told me to tell you not to wait up for your girl. He's taking her out tonight."

The blond boy's rage boiled into his face and shot from his eyes. He was about to swing when the Mindworm began to feed. It was like pheasant after chicken, venison after beef. The coarseness of the environment, or the ancient strain? The Mindworm wondered as he strolled down the street. A girl passed him:

"... oh but he's gonna be mad like last time wish I came right away so jealous kinda nice but he might bust me one some day be nice to him tonight there he is lam'post leaning on it looks kinda funny gawd I hope he ain't drunk looks kinda funny sleeping sick or bozhe moi gabblegabblegabble ..."

Her thoughts trailed into a foreign language of which the Mindworm knew not a word. After hysteria had gone she recalled, in the foreign language, that she had passed him.

The Mindworm, stimulated by the unfamiliar quality of the last

feeding, determined to stay for some days. He checked in at a Main Street hotel.

Musing, he dragged his net:

"... gobblegobblewhompyeargobblecheskygobblegabblechyesh..."

"... take him down cellar beat the can off the damn chesky thief put the fear of god into him teach him can't bust into no boxcars in mah parta the caounty..."

"... gabblegabble..."

"... phone ole Mister Ryan in She-cawgo and he'll tell them three-card monte grifters who got the horse-room rights in this necka the woods by damn don't pay no protection money for no protection..."

The Mindworm followed that one further; it sounded as though it could lead to some money if he wanted to stay in the town long enough.

The Eastern Europeans of the town, he mistakenly thought, were like the tramps and bums he had known and fed on during his years on the road—stupid and safe, safe and stupid, quite the same thing.

In the morning he found no mention of the square-headed boy's death in the town's paper and thought it had gone practically unnoticed. It had—by the paper, which was of, by and for the coal and iron company and its native-American bosses and straw bosses. The other town, the one without a charter or police force, with only an imported weekly newspaper or two from the nearest city, noticed it. The other town had roots more than two thousand years deep, which are hard to pull up. But the Mindworm didn't know it was there.

He fed again that night, on a giddy young streetwalker in her room. He had astounded and delighted her with a fistful of ten-dollar bills before he began to gorge. Again the delightful difference from city-bred folk was there....

Again in the morning he had been unnoticed, he thought. The chartered town, unwilling to admit that there were streetwalkers or that they were found dead, wiped the slate clean; its only member who really cared was the native-American cop on the beat who had collected weekly from the dead girl.

The other town, unknown to the Mindworm, buzzed with it. A

delegation went to the other town's only public officer. Unfortunately he was young, American-trained, perhaps even ignorant about some important things. For what he told them was: "My children, that is foolish superstition. Go home."

The Mindworm, through the day, roiled the surface of the town proper by allowing himself to be roped into a poker game in a parlor of the hotel. He wasn't good at it, he didn't like it, and he quit with relief when he had cleaned six shifty-eyed, hard-drinking loafers out of about three hundred dollars. One of them went straight to the police station and accused the unknown of being a sharper. A humorous sergeant, the Mindworm was pleased to note, joshed the loafer out of his temper.

Nightfall again, hunger again. . . .

He walked the streets of the town and found them empty. It was strange. The native-American citizens were out, tending bar, walking their beats, locking up their newspaper on the stones, collecting their rents, managing their movies—but where were the others? He cast his net:

"... gobblegobblegobble whomp year gobble . . ."

"... crazy old pollack mama of mine try to lock me in with Errol Flynn at the Majestic never know the difference if I sneak out the back . . ."

That was near. He crossed the street and it was nearer. He homed on the thought:

"... jeez he's a hunka man like Stanley but he never looks at me that Vera Kowalik I'd like to kick her just once in the gobblegobblegobble crazy old mama won't be American so ashamed . . ."

It was half a block, no more, down a side street. Brick houses, two stories, with back yards on an alley. She was going out the back way.

How strangely quiet it was in the alley.

"... ea-sy down them steps fix that damn board that's how she caught me last time what the hell are they all so scared of went to see Father Drugas won't talk bet somebody got it again that Vera Kowalik and her big . . ."

"... gobble bozhe gobble whomp year gobble . . ."

She was closer; she was closer.

"All think I'm a kid show them who's a kid bet if Stanley caught

me all alone out here in the alley dark and all he wouldn't think I was a kid that damn Vera Kowalik her folks don't think she's a kid . . ."

For all her bravado she was stark terrified when he said: "Hello."

"Who—who—who—?" she stammered.

Quick, before she screamed. Her terror was delightful.

Not too replete to be alert, he cast about, questing.

". . . gobblegobblegobble whomp year."

The countless eyes of the other town, with more than two thousand years of experience in such things, had been following him. What he had sensed as a meaningless hash of noise was actually an impassioned outburst in a nearby darkened house.

"Fools! fools! Now he has taken a virgin! I said not to wait. What will we say to her mother?"

An old man with handlebar mustache and, in spite of the heat, his shirt sleeves decently rolled down and buttoned at the cuffs, evenly replied: "My heart in me died with hers, Casimir, but one must be sure. It would be a terrible thing to make a mistake in such an affair."

The weight of conservative elder opinion was with him. Other old men with mustaches, some perhaps remembering mistakes long ago, nodded and said: "A terrible thing. A terrible thing."

The Mindworm strolled back to his hotel and napped on the made bed briefly. A tingle of danger awakened him. Instantly he cast out:

". . . gobblegobble whompyear."

". . . whampyir."

"WAMPYIR!"

Close! Close and deadly!

The door of his room burst open, and mustached old men with their shirt sleeves rolled down and decently buttoned at the cuffs unhesitatingly marched in, their thoughts a turmoil of alien noises, foreign gibberish that he could not wrap his mind around, disconcerting, from every direction.

The sharpened stake was through his heart and the scythe blade through his throat before he could realize that he had not been the first of his kind; and that what clever people have not yet learned, some quite ordinary people have not yet entirely forgotten.

*What do cats do with their spare time? . . .
Rule the world, perhaps?*



by William F. Temple

THE SMILE OF THE SPHINX

THE SPHINX

*I gaze across the Nile; flamelike and red
The sun goes down, and all the western sky
Is drowned in sombre crimson; wearily
A great bird flaps along with wings of lead,
Black on the rose-red river. Over my head
The sky is hard green bronze, beneath me lie
The sleeping ships; there is no sound, or sigh
Of the wind's breath,—a stillness of the dead.*

*Over a palm tree's top I see the peaks
Of the tall pyramids; and though my eyes
Are barred from it, I know that on the sand
Crouches a thing of stone that in some wise
Broods on my heart; and from the darkening land
Creeps Fear and to my soul in whispers speaks.*

—Lord Alfred Douglas

I

IT WAS past midnight when I went tearing along the Dover Road in my two-seater, at fifty miles an hour, to meet the strangest adventure of my life on the summit of Shooter's Hill. But that lay twenty minutes ahead in the future, and I was as unsuspecting of it as a traveler in the Dover Coach, a century and a half ago, was unaware of the highwayman lying in ambush somewhere on this same road.

Personally, I had no business to be on that road that night, for it

is hardly the direct route to Salisbury. I was returning from an East Coast holiday, and had gone a good deal out of my way to cover Shooter's Hill. But I had been reading *A Tale of Two Cities* on my vacation, and the opening scene was so vivid in my memory that my confounded romanticism—I write historical novels for a living—had to be satisfied.

The road, no longer mire, but hard and darkly shining under the eerie blue mercury-vapor lamps (I wondered: what would Dickens have thought of those lamps?), led me up past the massive water-tower that looks like a tall Norman castle, up to the very summit of the hill. I braked then, and pulled the car into the curb a few yards down.

An hour's driving had brought on stiffness, and here was the time and place to stretch my legs. There was not a soul in sight, and the road ran emptily away into a string of blue lights, towards the horizon and London. I extricated myself, and lit a cigarette, meditatively eyeing the dark woods that fringed this side of the road.

Although the moon was high in a cloudless sky, the woods looked too thick and gloomy for a pleasant stroll. So I sauntered across the road, and came to the head of a narrow lane that sloped down towards Woolwich. Constitution Hill, it was called.

There was an old mansion on the right; the windows behind its portico were shattered. Farther down was a railed-in, grassy space, containing a few trees. It had once been part of the mansion's grounds, and was now the only part not built upon. The rest of the grounds was covered with a vast housing estate that stretched all down the hill. I stood on a corner and surveyed the view.

Two miles away, and below, an arm of the Thames lay across the middle distance like a strip of dull metal. Street lamps pricked the darkness in Woolwich, but the familiar neon signs were out—the cinemas and public-houses had long shut their doors for the night. The low buildings of the great Arsenal, which ran for miles along the river bank, were indistinguishable from the rest of the shadowy blur of Woolwich. Across the river, an immense derrick showed its head above the dockyards and the grey vagueness of Essex, and from this distance it looked like a very small toy.

Of all the houses of the estate before me, I could not see one with

a lighted window. All the town was asleep and dreaming, and I stood there on the corner like the last living inhabitant of this world. It occurred to me how awful a fate that would be, were it true—the loneliness, the intimidating silence, the absence of any response or hope of it. And then, to spoil the illusion, came a distant shout from somewhere down the hill.

I looked down the steep road, but could see nobody. The faint shout came again. "Woe!" it sounded like. "Woe!"

I looked more narrowly, and then it seemed that the inky shadow of one of the houses down there had detached itself, and was advancing up the moonlit street towards me. Yes, it was moving! A strange black shadow on the ground, steadily approaching. . . .

It gave me something of a qualm. I turned to retreat to my car, then hesitated out of sheer curiosity. On sudden impulse, I clambered up the base of the nearest lamp-standard, and waited, hanging there uneasily. Now I could discern some little human figures far down the hill, behind the long, black shadow. They were shouting and laughing. I felt relieved. It could not be so bad.

The dark mass on the ground approached swiftly and silently, and resolved itself into a herd of little bodies. Green eyes began to glint amongst them. A plague of large rats? I leaned over, peering intently, as the leaders of the herd came into the light cast by the lamp above my head.

They were *cats*! Hundreds of them, of all shapes and sizes. Led by three big, black toms—one had white paws—they swept past me in a slinky, undulating wave, covering every inch of the road and footpath, parting to pass my lamp-standard, and joining again into a compact mass.

Tabbies there were, Siamese and tailless Manx, fat, bushy Persians and hosts of the common breed, some with kittens in their mouths. They ignored me completely, and casting never a glance aside, pressed forward with an apparently common and urgent purpose, up the hill, past the decrepit mansion, towards the Dover Road. Their small, padded feet made no sound on the tarmac, and not a kitten so much as mewed.

"S'truth!" I murmured, rather inelegantly for a literary man, while the feline multitude thronged past like a Chinese army. At last

the rear came in sight, together with a dozen or so human beings, who had happened upon this strange phenomenon and were following it with eager curiosity.

There were some lively town lads amongst them, who kept trying to grab the tails of the last few cats—there were no actual stragglers—and pull them back. “Whoa!” they shouted boisterously. “Whoa!” But I noticed that the cats always eluded their clutches, and hastened on.

The end of the procession swept rapidly past, and had vanished over the brow of the hill before I had lowered myself from my perch. I almost trod on the toes of an old man in a slouch cap who had dropped out of the chase. He leaned against the standard, panting.

“In a ’ell of a ’urry, ain’t they?” he gasped, jerking his thumb up the hill. “Cor!”

“Yes,” I said. “What’s it all about?”

“Damdifino. All the ruddy cats in Woolwich seem to ’ave taken it into their ’eads to leave ’ome. My Lizzie’s there—somewhere. Jumped aht the bedroom winder.”

“Have you any idea as to where they’re going?”

“To the woods, I bet. Yus; to the woods, o’ course.” He chuckled, and winked at me.

“Beats me,” I said, shaking my head and turning away. “I think I’ll go and see what’s left of my car.”

“Hi!”

I turned again. It was not the cockney but a uniformed constable, mounting the hill in lengthy strides. He came up to us. “Seen anything out of the ordinary along here?” he questioned abruptly.

“Not ’arf we ain’t,” chuckled the cockney. “’Bout fifty fousand cats gorn up there, mate.”

The constable looked sharply at me. I nodded. “He’s right, strange as it sounds: They’re probably all over in the woods by now.”

“I was told something like that by a man down the road,” said the policeman. “Well, I suppose I’ll have to go and dig out whatever’s at the bottom of it all.” He walked quickly on.

“Promises to be interesting,” I remarked. “I think—”

I stopped, as a tremendous flash of white light leapt into the sky over Woolwich. For a split second, the landscape for miles around

stood out clearly, weirdly lit by a pale, quivering glare. And then the night plunged down again, darker than before.

For a moment, my confused mind struggled with this new phenomenon. Then a fierce, orange plume of flame suddenly spurted up from somewhere in the same direction, cleaving the night sky in twain. Silently it jumped and flickered over the Arsenal buildings, while thick, black smoke boiled up from its base, and a reflection of it danced redly in the waters of the Thames. It seemed tall from this distance: down there in Woolwich it must have looked a fearful height.

"Gor' blimey, the Arsenal's on fire!" croaked the cockney excitedly. And at that moment the noise of the first explosion reached us; a battering crash of sound that smashed half the windows in the estate, shook the ground so that I bit my tongue with the concussion, and knocked me deaf, sick, and dizzy.

I remember that I reeled about for a space, with my hands over my ears, in a state of blind confusion, and recovered to see that the flame over the Arsenal now had eight companions, twisted towers of fire spanning its entire length. Some high cloud-mist in the heavens glared in sympathy with the flames, and reflected them, so that the whole northern hemisphere was an awesome sight, like a tremendous bowl-fire glowing down on Earth. And reaching vertically up into the heart of it was a mighty column of dense black smoke, a pillar of hell.

The heavy rumble of explosions was continuous, and periodic, sharper detonations almost split our eardrums. They had been heaping up the shells down there, and now the fireworks had started in earnest. Electric-blue flashes played like lightning around the bases of the great flames, and the debris which they threw up rose in showers of black dots against the throbbing, furnace light.

Some of these flying fragments began to hum about us, and slash their way through the leafy branches of the few trees. I became aware that the constable had returned, and was standing beside the cockney; and both their faces were florid with the glare. Suddenly there was an almighty crash up the road: a hurtling mass of machinery had caught the water-tower squarely and piled it into rubble across the ancient highway.

The constable shouted something that I could not catch above the din. He pointed down the hill, and I saw a wall of smoke billowing up towards us. It came swiftly, and there was no escape. In a second it was over us, and we were in a dense, sulphurous fog that made us cough and choke and run at the eyes.

Our surroundings were now veiled in a murky obscurity, and even the eruption in Woolwich was but a diffused glow in the mist ahead. I think I would have made my way back to my car then, had it not been for the action of the constable. He obviously entertained no thought of retiring, but clasped his handkerchief over his mouth and nose, and set off through the smoke-wreaths down Constitution Hill. His duty lay in Woolwich, and he would get there somehow.

The cockney, stifling a paroxysm of coughing, jerked his thumb after the policeman and looked at me inquiringly. Feeling suddenly ashamed of my lack of spirit, I nodded vigorously, and caught his arm.

We started off through the whirling smoke-screen after the dim figure ahead, and came up with him in a clear patch of air. If it hadn't been for those occasional rifts in the smoke, we should have suffocated. The three of us gulped fresh air for a few moments, then plunged on again, until at last we descended into the stricken town.

II

The next act of this strange and swift drama came on the following evening. From where I reclined in a deck-chair beside my lonely cottage—it was three miles to the nearest dwelling—the tremendous expanse of Salisbury Plain rolled out to meet a red-gold sunset. The sky was a darkening blue above, and smeared in the east with salmon-pink cloud-wisps.

I lay and stared at the slowly changing shapes and colors of the clouds tumbled around the departing sun, and gently stroked the grey, furry body of my cat, Peter, who was curled up and dozing on my lap. He had spent the last fortnight in a home in Salisbury, and hadn't left my side since I picked him up on the way back from Woolwich.

I looked down at him, and noticed my hands again. Scratched and

bruised they were, with skinned knuckles and torn fingernails, and now and then they trembled uncontrollably.

Visions of last night kept floating between me and the sunset, and I could not put them out of my mind. Things had happened so much in a rush that I'd had little time to ponder on them; but now, spoiling my attempt to rest, it was all coming back.

The streets of houses shattered and burning, looking far worse than many bombing raids I had seen, and the moans of the poor souls imprisoned in and under them. The frantic tearing with bare hands to extricate the tortured victims before the arrival of the eager, untamable flames, and the sickening horror of failure, when one rushed madly away from a scene too appalling to witness. The clanging fire-engines and ambulances, and the tear-stained faces of lost children and bereaved mothers.

All this in a choking, dust-laden atmosphere, every particle of which jumped and quivered with the detonations of the unceasing barrage in the Arsenal, and seen only in the blood-red light of flames. For the whole town had lain under the shadow of a pall of black smoke, which blotted out the sky like an immense raven's wing, so that none could tell when morning came. Ever and again, shapeless things of steel and concrete dropped like thunderbolts out of the jet heavens, and sometimes molten metal, and sometimes parts of once-living creatures. . . .

A faint breeze came rippling over the grass of the plain, and stirred the newspapers at my feet. They were late morning editions, black with headlines describing the scenes in Woolwich. There was a brief interview in one of them with myself—a few sentences I had jerked out to a reporter while bandaging the broken shoulder of a little boy:

"Mr. Eric Williams, the well-known novelist, who saw the whole thing from Shooter's Hill and immediately rushed down to help in the rescue work, mentions a queer sight which he witnessed just before the first explosion in the Arsenal. A procession of hundreds of cats. . . ."

In the stop press columns were hints of perhaps even stranger news. Munition factories had been, and still were, blowing up all over the world. Springfield, Illinois, was a smoldering wreck. Ammunition dumps left over from the war were going off like jumping

crackers all over Europe. There were rumors of such things happening in Russia—the Soviet government would release no definite information, but it seemed that there was consternation beyond the Urals.

The most significant item was one smudged sentence, stamped in crookedly and hastily at the foot of the column: "The U. S. atomic research center at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, has been almost totally destroyed by fire."

Sabotage, I reflected. But sabotage on such a large and indiscriminate scale that it must be the work of a tremendously powerful and marvelously organized international secret society of militant pacifists, seeking to save man from himself.

Deep in speculation, I raised my eyes from the paper and gazed again at the glorious painting of the sunset. And there, black against it, far out on the plain, was the little figure of someone cycling steadily in my direction. The person was approaching along a hardly discernible track over the grass, and presently I saw that it was a middle-aged man in a sports jacket.

He dismounted at the rough palings of my fence, regarded me for a moment, then called: "Excuse me, but does your name happen to be Williams—Mr. Eric Williams?" I nodded, and he said he wished to speak to me for a few minutes.

"Certainly, but it's no use trying to sell me anything," I replied, eyeing with suspicion a brown attaché case strapped to the carrier of his cycle.

"Oh, I'm not a salesman," he said, propping his cycle against the gatepost and advancing up the short path. "I would just—" He broke off as he noticed Peter on my lap. He had brown, very tired-looking eyes, and there was an odd, irresolute expression in them at the moment. "I would just like some information," he went on, recovering, and seating himself rather gingerly on the lawn beside me.

"Go ahead," I said, curiously.

He removed his old hat, revealing a large, bald head, fringed with greying hair. He jerked a couple of newspapers from his pocket, and indicating one, said:

"This interview with you. About what you saw on Shooter's Hill . . ." He breathed deeply and paused.

"Yes?" I asked.

He rounded on me suddenly. His brown eyes were agonized. "For God's sake!" he blurted. "Please take that cat away! I—I can't bear them near me. I know it's silly; but, really, the sight of them upsets my nerves."

I arose quietly and carried Peter to the front door of the cottage, dropped him inside and shut the door. The stranger apologized incoherently as I sat down again.

"It's quite all right," I said. "I know several people who share your phobia. Why, the old Duke of Wellington, although he conquered Napoleon, was scared stiff of cats—wouldn't go into a room where there was one."

"Yes, subconsciously, he was aware of the incredible truth," muttered the stranger. "How fortunate for him he didn't realize it more fully."

I didn't get the drift of this, and he saw that I didn't, and went on in a more matter-of-fact tone, gaining confidence now that Peter had gone.

"I should introduce myself. My name is Clarke, and I live in Salisbury. I'm a retired schoolmaster. Lately, I have evolved an unusual theory, and those cats you saw leaving Woolwich last night form a real, corroborative link in my chain of evidence. So I should be glad if you would be good enough to describe the scene in a little more detail than this newspaper paragraph gives."

I obliged, to the best of my ability, describing the silent and purposeful way in which the cats had passed, and mentioning the leaders.

He pondered over this, and remarked: "Doesn't it seem odd to you that they should all leave the town just before the calamity struck it? And that they put the protecting bulwark of a high hill between Woolwich and themselves?"

"You mean that they somehow sensed what was going to happen?" I asked. "I admit that cats, like dogs, are sometimes credited with a sixth sense, but I can't imagine how they could possibly foresee something so—well, so unprecedented as that."

"I am going to say something rather startling, so please don't think I'm out of my wits," he said, slowly. "I say those animals knew the catastrophe in the Arsenal was coming, *because they planned it!*"

I gaped. Then, perceiving that I had a psychological case to deal with after all, passed it off with a mild remark: "Really, do you think so?"

He grasped my reaction immediately, and flushed.

"I see you *do* think I'm a crank. Perhaps you imagine my dislike of cats is some sort of warped hatred, finding expression in blaming every conceivable mishap onto them. Believe me, it is not so. I was very fond of cats—once."

With an unsteady hand, he picked up his other newspaper.

"Have you seen this evening edition? No? Listen to this bit about the Springfield disaster: 'Inhabitants of neighboring towns report that large numbers of cats have taken up residence there. They apparently fled from Springfield last night. The police stations are crowded with the mewling fugitives.'"

I took the paper from him, and read the item through carefully.

"It certainly is odd," I agreed. "Well, what is *your* theory?"

"This: that all cats are not so innocent as they appear. That they are an ancient and alien race, with intellects far greater than ours. That they are parasites of the human race, and move amongst us as unsuspected spies, hearing, seeing everything we do, yet never betraying themselves in any way. Believe me, they're the world's best actors! They know their role by heart—they've practiced it for thousands of years, and never yet made a slip."

"What could possibly be their motive?" I inquired.

"I do not think there is any evil intent: they are above evil. It just suits their convenience that we should make pets of them and keep their physical bodies alive for them, for their bodies really are only husks—they live their true lives in their minds. But these husks are necessary, for mind must have a living body to keep it supplied with energy.

"The idea of reincarnation actually works for them, too. When a cat's body dies, the mind that inhabited it transfers itself to some newly-born kitten."

"Whoever originated the saying about cats having nine lives must have felt the truth unconsciously," I murmured sarcastically.

"Yes," agreed Clarke. "This process has been going on for many ages. In fact, the race of minds existing in the bodies of cats today is

almost identically the same that landed upon this planet thousands of years ago."

"Landed upon this planet?" I repeated weakly.

Clarke mopped his shining head again.

"Let me give you a brief history of these creatures," he said. "I don't expect you to believe it, but it's true. Firstly, the moon was inhabited much more recently than some astronomers think. It was shared by two races, the feline and the canine. They were incompatible from the start, and finally a terrific war broke out between them.

"Now, the feline mind could detach itself at will from any body—though it could not remain apart from that body long without its store of energy becoming exhausted—and these minds were practically indestructible, even if they happened to be inhabiting a body at the time it was destroyed. But there was an Achilles' heel, and the canine race knew of it. One thing alone could harm a feline mind, and that was a violent explosion adjacent to it. By 'adjacent' I mean within a foot, or two at most, for the feline mind is a tenacious and almost unshakable structure. But a really concentrated effect of disruption slap up against it will somehow upset the balance of forces which holds that incorporeal mind together. It disintegrates, and to all intents and purposes it is finished as an entity forever.

"So the canine race made their first attacks with immense bombs, shells, and land-mines in an effort to blast the cat intelligences out of existence. It was a hit-and-miss business, and it didn't fare very well. Only near-enough direct hits affected the cats, and even with the size of the explosives used these were few and practically negligible in number.

"And then the canines discovered the secret of the atomic bomb. This was a different proposition altogether. You didn't need direct hits with these. I believe the nature of the bomb, as distinct from the mere blast of the cruder explosives, had an added effect, too. Anyway, this meant death from a distance for the cats, and they were nearly wiped out. You can see yourself how thoroughly the canines pounded them—those great craters which pit and scar the face of the moon give some idea of the number and size of the bombs used.

"But the ruling mind of the cats, which was the most powerful intellect in this universe, produced a triumph, just in time. It was a

long-distance ray which, when turned on the canine creatures, caused a corruption in their thyroid glands, so that they rapidly degenerated into a race of dullards.

"Thus the cat race triumphed, and ruled the moon. But the war had made such havoc of that world—almost all vegetation was destroyed by radioactivity—that food of any sort was scarce. They had to give more and more time to searching for nourishment as the moon grew more barren. This was not to their liking, for, as I've said, they live a life of the mind, and they resented having to waste time and energy in mere food-hunting.

"At last the resourceful ruling mind invented a form of spaceship, and in large numbers of these vessels the entire race migrated to Earth. Here they still are—and we are their unconscious servants. . . ."

I have always believed that anything is possible, no matter how improbable, and so I did not immediately scoff at this seemingly wild theory. In fact, I was curious to hear more.

"What became of the mentally weakened canine race?" I asked.

"The larger part of it was left on the moon to perish of starvation. But the cat-people brought some specimens with them, and these flourished and multiplied enormously on this planet, and they still do."

"Do you mean—*dogs* are the descendants of that defeated race?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes. But they have never recovered their original mind-power; beside the cold and vast intellects of the cats, they are just amicable dolts. A remnant of their sixth sense—telepathy—remains, but it is not developed to anything like the intense degree that it has in cats today."

"Perhaps other old habits also linger in the muddled canine minds," I suggested, suddenly carried away on the wings of this fantasy. "For instance, the hitherto inexplicable enmity between dogs and cats. Dogs chase cats because they have a dim memory that they are old enemies. And I suppose cats allow themselves to be chased to keep up the appearance of innocence?"

"Yes; they're devilish subtle actors. Another old problem is explainable, too. Why do dogs bay the moon? Simply because the

sight of it arouses a vague memory of their old home—they howl with homesickness, though they may not realize it.”

Followed a short silence, in which I weighed up possibilities.

“About the cats blowing up all these munition works,” I ventured. “You think—?”

“I know why. It is obvious. As I have said, atomic bombs spell death to the feline minds. Now, very little of the explosives tossed about in the mud of France in the first world war came anywhere near cats, and they ignored that war. But towards the end of the second world war they were preparing to intervene.

“Too many of their number were being killed in the heavy air raids. I mean, their *minds* were being killed—not their bodies, because they don’t care a damn about that: there are always plenty of fresh ones to move into. But once a mind is disintegrated by explosive, it is finished and not replaceable. Also, food supplies were being totally disorganized, and men—their servants—were everywhere leaving them to fend for themselves: a great distraction from the work they were giving their minds to. But, like the canines, man stumbled upon the atomic bomb, and that finished the war, which satisfied the cats in one way but disturbed them in another.

“Suppose these stupid servants of theirs started another war, but this time rocketing atomic bombs about? Then that would mean destruction for everyone, feline minds included.

“They bided their time to see whether man would have the plain common sense to see that war was a practice that had become mass lunacy, and that the only way to end war between nations was to end nations by uniting under one world government. Well, we don’t, to our eternal shame, as you know.

“So they are effectively nipping the third world war in the bud, by destroying the tools necessary for it. Men look upon themselves as minds above animals. I’m afraid the truth is that the cats are the minds, and men are just animals.”

“H’m.” It was certainly an explanation of the strange thing I had seen on Shooter’s Hill. But—

“Look here, this theory is taking a hell of a lot of things for granted,” I objected. “It cannot be anything but supposition. You have no proof?”

He bit his lip, and began nervously to pluck blades of grass from the lawn.

"No," he admitted. "Nothing tangible, beyond the strange behavior of the cats which you yourself saw. But I tell you I *know* all I've said is true. I have an odd feeling of certainty. Call it intuition, call it faith—I just *know*, that's all."

"It's hard to accept such a theory just because one man feels that it's true!"

He flushed a little.

"I know; it's absurd. But haven't you ever had a flash of that insight yourself? I remember when I used to play darts. . . . Sometimes, when I was aiming, I just *knew* that the dart in my hand was going to hit the bull's-eye, and it invariably did. I have that feeling of certainty now, about my story."

He shivered slightly again, and so did I, for a chill breeze swept in from the plain, and I looked up to find with a mild shock that it was nearly dark. The sun had long since gone, and bright Venus was glittering above the somber night rack.

Clarke scrambled to his feet, and apologized for keeping me so long. I said it had been intensely interesting, and would he drop in again sometime to resume our discussion? He promised he would.

I watched him cycling off into the western dusk, and folding my chair, I turned to take it indoors. And immediately I saw Peter, a shadowy outline against the darkening sky, squatting on the roof of the cottage. He gave me quite a qualm, with such weird thoughts still roaming my mind.

It was obvious how he had escaped. I had converted the one upstairs room of my cottage into an amateur observatory, enlarging the skylight all round to give the four-inch telescope latitude. When I shut Peter in, he had simply gone upstairs and out through this wide window onto the tiles. He had done that trick before.

I called to him, and he glanced idly down at me. His eyes were shining greenly in the dark.

"Jump, Peter-boy," I called, extending my arms. I had to repeat it several times before he arose, yawned hugely and stretched lazily, then condescendingly jumped from the gutter into my arms. He commenced to purr softly as I carried him indoors.

All the time I was preparing my supper, I kept shooting surreptitious glances at him as he crouched, half asleep, in the big armchair. What Clarke had said about subtle acting recurred to me. Was Peter really watching me? Peter, whom I had reared from a kitten, and who I flattered myself had some affection for me? Had he come out on that roof behind and above us to eavesdrop—literally?

I rolled him over on his back, and he stretched lazy paws up at me. "Brrr-ow," he said.

"It's no use, Peter, old man," I said deliberately, poking his tummy. "You needn't keep on acting. I can see through you all the time. You're a spy—that's what you are!"

He took not the slightest notice, but lay dreamily accepting my caresses. I gave it up, switched on my battery radio, and sat down to supper. With a mouth full of bread and cheese, I heard the late news coming through as the tubes warmed up.

"... great damage, and martial law has been declared in the city. The President has issued an appeal to the nation to remain calm. The Federal authorities have the matter well in hand, he said, and precautions now taken make it impossible for any further such outrages to occur. From Sweden, Denmark, and Northern Italy come reports of widespread fires in government-controlled laboratories of physical research. Nearer home, three ammunition dumps in the Welsh hills blew up simultaneously this morning. . . ."

There was a good deal more of it, and a late flash that the rocket testing buildings at Peenemunde had been wiped out in a series of explosions apparently begun by a mishap in an experimental petrol and oxygen mixing chamber.

Although sabotage was suspected in many cases, so far no arrests had been made, because in each instance the eruptions had been so sudden and violent that no human beings in the vicinity had survived to be suspected. It was assumed that either the saboteurs were using time bombs or else they were suicidal fanatics.

For my own part, the fact that no evidence of human activity had been found in any one of all those catastrophes was itself evidence that no human agency was at work here. But whether it was cats or . . . Oh, it was all too fantastic!

I switched the radio off, and decided I would refuse to think any more about the whole business this day.

I sought refuge in a book of short stories from my shelves. It was an admirably written collection by C. E. Montague, called *Action*. In its vivid pages I lost myself until, in a story called "Wodjabet," I happened upon a character who "only blinked the way a cat does, letting on that it's sleepy when really its eyes are aglow with some grand private excitement or other. . . ."

Which caused me to peep from under my brows across at Peter again.

He was curled up, really asleep. Or was he? . . .

III

The next morning was bright and fresh, and as I pushed the lawnmower up and down in the sunshine I wondered how I could have been so foolish, on the previous evening, as to consider seriously, even for a moment, the quaint Mr. Clarke's cock-and-bull story. Thus does the normal round reassure us, and melt away the dark underside of our imagination.

Peter was dashing about the lawn like a mad kitten, chasing errant leaves and several times coming near to being churned up by my mower. I paused to watch him, just as a butterfly made its erratic flight into the garden and settled. Peter eyed it eagerly, and approached with stealth. A couple of yards away he stopped, nose down and rear up, quivering all over with the intensity of his purpose.

Suddenly he leapt, and missed the butterfly by an inch. It fluttered drunkenly away, and Peter bounded after it, clawing the air wildly and ineffectively. He wasn't looking where he was going, and smack he went against a water-butt.

I had to laugh. How absurd it was to suspect Peter! Peter, the good-natured—I'm sure that cat had a sense of humor—but Peter, the stupid, who could never learn the simplest of tricks. An amoeba would have beaten him in an intelligence test. All he had ever done was eat, sleep, and play.

I leaned on my mower and ruminated on Peter, who had settled down on a heap of cut grass. Why were cats ever born? What use-

less lives they led! How the devil did they pass the time, when they could do nothing constructive, physically or mentally? They never even had to hunt for their food, which is the chief occupation and reason for existence of the wild animals. Mostly they just sat about—brooding.

Were they really thinking in those long spells of passivity, or were they just bored stiff? I found myself considering, after all, the arguments that Clarke had raised. . . .

And suddenly the man's voice broke into my thoughts: "Er—Good morning, Mr. Williams."

I turned, and beheld him standing rather awkwardly outside the gate, holding his bicycle.

"Ah, good morning," I said, with a heartiness that was not wholly genuine. "I was just thinking about you."

"Er—I was wondering," he began again, with a nervous eye on Peter, "wondering whether you would care to accompany me on a cycle ride this morning, over the plain? There are some new points I'd like to discuss with you. I noticed you had a cycle, and thought perhaps—"

"Yes, by all means," I said. "It's a lovely morning for it. Just come inside for a moment, will you, and have a drink while I clean up?"

He came hesitantly into the cottage parlor, making an arc to avoid Peter. It occurred to me that I never saw a man who looked less in need of a cycle ride and more in need of a drink. He looked haggard and careworn, and his eyes were more tired than ever. I poured him a whisky and soda, and left him to it while I had a wash and brush up.

When I returned from the kitchen, there he was slumped in a chair, staring white-faced at the opposite wall. There were wet spots on his coat where he had spilled some of his drink. I followed his gaze, and saw that the center of his interest was a framed photograph of the Sphinx at Gizeh. It was a souvenir brought back from Cairo, through which city I'd passed on my way to join the war in the desert—only then the Sphinx had had its chin propped up with sandbags, and didn't look nearly so romantic as it did in the commercial photograph.

"Hello—whatever's the matter?" I asked.

"N-nothing," he answered, dropping his gaze. "Coincidences can be unsettling sometimes, that's all."

He gulped the rest of his drink, and got up. But he vouchsafed nothing further until we were miles out on the plain, riding slowly side by side towards the monoliths of Stonehenge on the skyline. Then, suddenly, he said: "Do you know why that picture affected me like that?"

I shook my head.

"Because the Sphinx is an image of the Ruling Mind of the feline race. The body is not that of a lion, *but of a great cat!*"

He lapsed into reverie again.

Stonehenge was deserted. The modern road ran over the plain to a bare horizon, and the remains of far more ancient roads and the faint tracks made by the Bronze Age peoples might never have been trodden since the days of those long-departed civilizations. It was not the tourist season, and if there had been any watchers for the dawn, they had gone.

We wheeled our cycles between the massive obelisks and laid them beside the Altar Stone. I noticed that Clarke's brown bag was still strapped to his carrier. Clarke sat himself on the flat slab, and brooded there like "The Thinker," as silent as the stones around us.

I decided not to press for information, but to let it come in its own way. So, irreverently, I struck a match on the Altar Stone, the death-bed (so the stories go) of countless souls who had been sacrificed by the Druids, and squatted down beside him, striving patiently to get my pipe going.

The tobacco caught just as Clarke broke his silence. "I brought you out here so that we could not possibly be overheard," he said. "That cat of yours—I don't trust it."

He paused again in that irritating way of his, then went on: "You remember what I told you about the Ruling Mind of the feline race? Well, it is still alive, still directing their activities, and it is the power behind all these recent happenings. More than that, *it is somewhere very close to me!*"

His voice shook a little. He took out his handkerchief and mopped his almost hairless head.

"I know it is very close to me, as surely as I know those other things I told you. And as certainly as I know other things which have become plain to me since. All the time, I am aware of it watching me. In my rooms, in the crowded street, in empty lanes and fields, in the cinema—everywhere I go, I can feel that the Mind is somewhere very near. Even now—"

He looked almost apprehensively around at the order and disorder of the big stones, and the sweep of the plain. But apart from some bird in flight away to the east, there was no indication of any living thing.

"I cannot understand," he said, huskily. "It must be occupying a body of some sort. Even that Mind can't exist for long without physical nourishment. But what—or who? I regard every animal I see with suspicious fear. Sometimes I even think it may have taken command of some *human* body. That milkman who spoke to me this morning may have been only a masquerader, and behind his smile—"

"You shouldn't pay any attention to thoughts of that kind," I said. "It will develop into a phobia; you will be afraid of everybody. And this infallible knowledge of yours— What are the other things you mentioned had since been revealed to you?"

"I know some more of the history of the feline race. It is pictured as clearly in my mind as if I had witnessed it all. If you look in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*—and, in fact, if you study all that is known of the origin of the cats—you will find that they suddenly appear in one country, and one alone—Egypt. That is where *felis domestica* first enters into our knowledge. Why? Because that is where the feline spaceships from the moon landed thousands of years ago."

"I know the ancient Egyptians regarded cats as supernatural beings," I mused. "They worshiped them, made statues of them. It was a crime to kill a cat, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Clarke, absently. "The penalty was very severe. In fact, when the King of Persia invaded Egypt, the spearhead of his army was a group of soldiers carrying cats in their arms. The Egyptians were so terrified of harming the animals that they submitted tamely to defeat."

"Usen't they to embalm the bodies of cats and bury them in the holy city of Bubastes?" I asked. "They're still finding them, hun-

dreds of their mummified bodies. Why, only the other day—”

But Clarke was not listening. “The remains of those spaceships are still there in Egypt, covered by the sands of the desert,” he muttered. “I could lead you to them.”

“That would be tangible proof at last,” I said.

“The feline and Egyptian races more or less adopted each other,” went on Clarke. “The Egyptians worshiped the strange invaders as near-gods, and appreciated their high intelligence, even though they understood little of it. They offered up food to the cats, and kept them in their houses and temples. Naturally, after the hardships of the moon, the cats took kindly to this life. At last they could relax from the pressing preoccupation of searching for food, and devote their time to thought.”

“Regarding this life of thought—” I began; but Clarke had got under way now, and he went ahead like a gramophone, perhaps fearful that if he stopped he might not be able to start again.

“One reason immensely increased the reverence of the Egyptians for the cats: the discovery that they were, in reality, deathless spirit-minds inhabiting transient bodies. The Egyptians soon based their whole religion on this—that’s where they got their famous belief in the immortality of the spirit, its life after death, and possible reincarnation.

“The rite of mummifying the worn-out husks of the cats symbolized the eternal life of the feline minds, and the Egyptians extended this to embalming their own dead—and hoping. They took the emblem of the feline race, the *crux ansata*, and regarded it as the symbol of life.

“For a long time the two races lived in this fashion of mutual convenience. The Egyptians knew there was a Ruling Mind of the cats, though its location and appearance was a mystery to them. But they built the Sphinx in its honor, and to represent the harmony of the two races, gave its cat’s body the head of their reigning Pharaoh.

“The Egyptians derived a few ideas from the cats and their old lunar civilization, particularly methods of building, metalwork, and decoration, some of which even our modern scientists have failed to rediscover. Malleable glass, imperishable enamels, the ever-burning lamps so often mentioned in the literary fragments of the time, and

some miraculous way of reducing precious stones to fluid state and remolding them.

"But actually there was little intellectual intercourse. The Egyptians were not equal to grasping even the simplest conceptions of the feline mind, and the cats had no intention of trying to educate a race which they regarded as being hardly above the lower animals.

"The cats, you must remember, have none of the warmth and generosity of humanity: they are, and always have been, coldly logical, and their main interest is self-preservation, whatever guise or ruse they adopt to that end.

"For instance, when Egypt became entangled in wars, a great proportion of the cats migrated to other countries, and left the Egyptian civilization to decay. They thought it wise, too, to let the knowledge of their existence fade from the mind of man with the decline of the Egyptians. For they foresaw that man's intelligence would grow again, and become a keen, questioning probe and a constant interruption in their work. Only in his ignorance would they have peace.

"At first, they suppressed all reference to themselves. The cat is not mentioned once in the Bible, though the dog is many times, and this might be considered strange, for Egypt was next door to the Holy Land. But that is the reason.

"However, they got the idea later that it was better to suppress only the knowledge of their being super-minds, and then they could mix with mankind again and be looked after without being bothered by investigations into their work.

"Britain was one country they came to where their real identity was unknown, but even so they managed to influence men and women to protect them. In A. D. 900—you may look it up—there was a law passed forbidding the wilful murder of any cat. And in the *Ancren Riwle*, the book of rules for nuns written in the 13th century, was the injunction: 'Ye shall not possess any beast, my dear sisters, *except only a cat.*'"

He fell silent again.

"You mention their work," I ventured. "Can you describe this mysterious 'life of the mind'?"

"Well," he answered, "the cats' minds are like a multitude of cells—"

His face, all of a sudden, went ghastly pale. His brown eyes were horror-struck; his mouth opened and shut in silent gasps.

"What's up?" I cried.

"I—I— If I thought—" he gulped, then whispered tremulously: "No, I must not believe that!"

I regarded this enigma of a man with detached curiosity for a moment. I had never come across such a bundle of nerves. It occurred to me that if I had to put up with this proneness to sudden nervous attacks much longer I should become jumpy myself.

He produced a hip-flask, and promptly choked over a mouthful of undiluted spirit. But it took effect, and presently he mopped his head again and resumed, in a slightly thicker voice:

"A multitude of cells all working independently, but in telepathic communication with each other. The Ruling Mind, though, is in constant contact with all of them at once, and sorts and correlates their thoughts and reasonings, fitting them together to get the whole aspect. They have no need of books or pens: their infallible memories are their only records. No need to travel: they can cast their minds over great distances. No need of materials: they balance and control the forces of nature with the unsupported force of their own minds.

"But one force has so far beaten them—they cannot master the activity behind the chemical change of metabolism. It is the major problem they have in hand. You see, they don't like being dependent on energy from food to sustain their bodies, which in turn sustain the brain cells they must use to keep up their life of thought. So they are seeking other ways of getting that energy—so far, without success.

"You know," he went on, "there is much to envy in their mode of living. Many of our own philosophers have come to the conclusion that research workers, engrossed in their work, probably live the happiest and most satisfying life of all. The cats believe that, too. Their life is an infinite adventure into the unknown, solving intriguing problems and puzzles, their interest sustained by the promise of unbounded novelties to come.

"It is a pleasurable and absorbing hunt for fundamental truth. What are our vanities and posings, our squabbles and out-smarting, beside that great search? We are as worthless as a cloud of gnats."

"Do you know any of the other problems receiving their attention?"

"Mostly they are beyond my comprehension," he said. "Especially their stupendously advanced mathematics. But I could mention investigations into the strange fibre life on the second planet of the companion of Sirius, into the minute organisms which infest and corrupt typhoid bacteria, into the structure of individual suns in island universes thousands of light-years beyond the reach of our most powerful telescope, into the newly-discovered Law of the Three Probabilities of the Future, and into the cause—"

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

We jerked our heads round, to see three mushrooms of white smoke standing on a low hill across the plain. Slowly their heads uncoiled and expanded, and they merged into one shapeless cloud.

Then again: **BOOM!** A whole row of fresh mushrooms sprang out of the earth almost simultaneously, running in a line towards us.

We jumped up in alarm, and as if our action had caused it, another row of explosions went streaking across the plain, and this time we glimpsed the red flashes in the heart of them.

"The cats again!" I yelled to Clarke above the uproar. He nodded dazedly, staring at the jumping clouds of smoke and dust. He made an answer which I could not catch.

The thunderous noise grew worse; it was like an intense shell barrage. Were they shells, coming from some unseen guns on the artillery ranges beyond Larkhill? I caught Clarke's eye again.

"Where the hell are they coming from?" I shrieked. He pointed down at the trembling ground, and mouthed: "Below!"

A series of thuds like hammer-blows, from somewhere quite near, jarred us almost physically. It was difficult to locate the explosions that had caused them, for the pallid, whirling wall of a smoke-screen lay across that way, and the thick pillars of the ancient temple stood between it and us like a stockade. I pointed at the open, untouched expanse behind us, and indicated that we must retreat across it.

"We'll have—" I began, and instantaneously a whole acre of the stretch at which my finger pointed squirted itself up like a huge, white oil-gusher—it was almost pure chalk—which balanced there for a split second, then exploded in midair. It was as if someone had burst

a great bag of flour. The air was full of white particles flying before the sound-waves of a concussion which equaled that first mighty explosion in Woolwich Arsenal.

The ground seemed to rise in a wave beneath our feet, and I remember that as I went sprawling backwards I caught a glimpse of one of the pillars of Stonehenge lurching out of the vertical, and the slab that had rested upon it falling corner-wise to the earth. The thump of that block landing was the last shock of the mad tattoo.

Silence descended abruptly, and I became conscious that my ears were tingling almost unbearably. I picked myself up shakily. Clarke was in the act of doing likewise.

"Gosh, look at that!" I said, and my voice sounded faint and far away because of my deafness.

"That" was the immense dust-cloud which hung over and veiled half the plain, drifting and changing and mounting tenuously towards the zenith.

"I'll never be able to get through that," I said. "I think I'd better come back with you to Salisbury and wait until it's settled a bit."

Clarke nodded. He had fallen into one of his periods of taciturnity again, and remained so throughout the ride back. But I managed to get one piece of information from him.

"What did you mean by saying those explosions came from below?" I asked.

"There are subterranean caves running for miles underneath the plain," he said shortly. "Few people know of them. The government did. They used them during the war for storing explosives, for safety in air raids."

"And, of course, the Ruling Mind touched them off?"

He nodded sharply again, and shut up like a clam. By his furrowed brow I could see that he was cogitating deeply, and from his expression I saw that the thoughts were not pleasant.

We had a solemn tea in Salisbury, while the street outside was alive with yelling newsboys and excited, arguing people. "Long range rockets, that's what they were. . . ." I caught, and ". . . knocked Stonehenge down like a row of ninepins."

We had a short walk, pushing our cycles and talking, and we parted by the cathedral. That scene remains in my mind in every

detail. The spire tapering to a fine point four hundred feet above our heads, and Clarke's last words before I went my way, enunciated almost pedantically:

"As long as the cats keep up their acting with such infallible assurance, there will always remain an element of doubt in even the most credulous human mind. That little crumb of self-distrust is what will save them. And, believe me, the cats know it!"

It was late evening when I reached my cottage by a circuitous route. The craters were pretty numerous around my way, and the settling chalk-dust covered the torn earth like a thin layer of snow.

A scared-looking Peter was waiting for me on the doorstep. He was jumpy and nervous, and it looked as though the upheaval had nearly frightened him out of his wits. I let him in with peculiarly mixed feelings.

IV

I found it hard to get to sleep that night. A queer unease possessed me. I felt that something strange and terrible was going to happen soon, and I had no idea what the nature of the thing could be. I lay fidgeting and constantly turning, finding neither bodily nor mental peace.

And then there came a wail, like a sick baby's, outside the window. I sat up, startled.

Silence.

Came another wail, sobbing up the scale to an extremely high pitch. It descended rapidly to a throaty growl, and then a familiar "Mee-ow."

It was only Peter. He had wandered out again after supper. I'd never heard him giving tongue in the night before like this, because other cats rarely strayed out this way. But there was another cat there tonight, for presently she answered. She had a remarkable range: thin shrieks, mournful howls, and an individual, staccato series of noises like an outboard motor.

A most painful duet presently began. I lay and listened to it with interest rather than annoyance. How would Clarke have explained it? No doubt he would have said it was a cunning psychological

ruse, to impress the notion in the subconscious mind of man that cats were indeed only animals, having the customary sexual and courting instincts.

If that were true, and it was all acting, then it was indeed finesse! I could not imagine the feline race carrying things so far, but perhaps, as Clarke had said, this acting had become an almost unconscious habit with them, requiring no effort.

My mind played with other explanations. Suppose these outbursts were the more artistic souls of the felines giving expression to their love of music! Were those weird sounds, so discordant to our ears, feline songs of great beauty?

Certainly I had heard Chinese songs that sounded somewhat similar. But I could not accept this explanation, for I could not imagine the cat race having any sort of emotions. All art springs from the emotions, and if Clarke's story were true, those intellects were too cold and logical to waste time on music or any other of the art forms.

In the midst of such speculations, I fell into a doze.

The next day was pure idleness. I could not concentrate on anything, though a half-finished story lay in my drawer. I pottered about, reading snatches of books and papers, listening to the radio, and for the most part just reclining in my deck-chair on the lawn, meditating.

Sunset came—an unusually glorious one. The fine dust thrown up by the explosions of yesterday was still drifting in the upper atmosphere, and producing an effect similar to those after the famous Krakatoa eruption. The western sky abounded in color, in streaks, flames, wedges, and mists. I wished I had a camera that could catch and preserve the beauty of the scene.

I watched it greedily, half-fearful of the dulling that would presently overcome and dissolve it.

And then, just as he had first entered into my life, the tiny black silhouette of Clarke on his cycle appeared out there on the plain. He was winding his way slowly between the dark ovals of the craters which had obliterated parts of the old grass track, and it was some time before he reached my gate.

He dismounted clumsily, and almost fell over. I got up and went

to help him, smiling. But I stopped smiling when I saw his face. It was grey, and moist with sweat, and the dark circles under his eyes had grown more pronounced during the night.

I took the bicycle from his trembling hands, and leaned it against the fence. The strap around the brown case on the carrier was loose. I tightened it automatically, and took Clarke's arm. He leaned on me, drawing little shuddering gasps now and then as I helped him along to the house.

"Take it easy," I said.

"My God!" he muttered. "My God!"

He seemed on the verge of hysteria. The fellow was a constant puzzle to me; he seemed to have so many personalities. The nervous inquirer, the almost rudely terse man, the didactic schoolmaster—and now this shaking wreck. I wondered whether he could possibly be a drug addict.

He lowered himself uncertainly into my armchair and rested his head on his hand. I poured a neat whisky, and had to help him get it down his throat. He lay back.

"Be all right—in a minute," he breathed.

Peter was curled up on the hearthrug. For a few moments he had watched the visitor with faint curiosity, but now his interest had waned and his eyes were closed in sleep again. Apparently. . . I grabbed him up in two handfuls, intending to put him outside, but Clarke stopped me with a weak gesture.

"Doesn't matter now," he murmured. "He knows all about it, anyway."

I sank into the opposite chair, and waited. Until, at length, Clarke began his strangest narrative yet, in broken sentences punctuated with sighs and sometimes uncontrolled invocations to the Almighty.

At first, there was a lot of physiological stuff about the structure of brain-cells, which he rushed through too rapidly for me to grasp properly. But I remember he said that the average person uses only a small percentage of his brain-cells in his lifetime, the larger proportion remaining undeveloped and unused. He made fleeting references to schizophrenia, "split minds," and enlarged upon the question of multiple personalities.

This last was due, he said, to the brain-cells forming in two or

three separate groups, instead of the one whole. Thus, one man's brain could contain two or three totally different minds, each with its own independent memories and reactions, yet each drawing its energy from the same bloodstream.

And something of the sort, only far worse, had happened to him. When he had mentioned the word "cells" yesterday, at Stonehenge, some idea of the terrible truth had dawned upon him. Now, after a sleepless night and day, he was sure that he had found the answer.

No wonder he had felt the strange presence of the Ruling Mind so constantly. *It was occupying the larger part of his own brain!*

At this amazing assertion, I just sat gaping at him. In looking back at the whole affair, I don't think I had taken Mr. Clarke very seriously up to this point. Admittedly, at times his story had carried me away, but only as one is carried away by a good film. When I had parted from him, the impression had faded each time, as the characters in a film cease to be real after one has emerged from the cinema into the solid life of the street.

As an author myself, whose work it was to spend half my life in a fictitious world, I knew how easy it was sometimes to confuse that world with fact. I'm afraid I must have looked upon Clarke as an expert weaver of fantasies all this time. I had taken him for one of those involved psychological cases, full of repressions, complexes, escapism, and all that jargon. In short, a queer fish who had swum into my life to entertain me for a while, and provide an interesting passage in my autobiography, when that amusing volume came to be written.

But now it came to me with quite a shock of realization that the man sitting huddled in the opposite chair was *not* dramatizing himself, but genuinely believed in the astounding things he had said, and was overcome by the horror of them.

I gazed at the top of his bald and shining head, and tried to imagine a complex and utterly foreign brain working beside his in that cranium. My imagination boggled.

Clarke slowly raised his head again, and looked up at me. His eyes were red and bleared from lack of sleep. He spoke in a strained, but steadier voice.

"Maybe that's how I knew the things I did. There must have been

a leakage of knowledge, filtering through from the pirated brain-cells into my own. Perhaps through the bloodstream; perhaps because such a powerful radiating instrument, in close proximity to my own, stimulated my telepathic powers, made my mind more receptive. I was sure the information in my mind was correct, though I couldn't understand where it came from."

"Yes—yes," I stammered. "I suppose that's it."

He went on bitterly: "And the reason for my chronic fatigue—this damned parasite is draining my energy. To think that the thing has always been with me! Why, when we went out to Stonehenge to escape it, it was there all the time with us, overhearing everything. Not that I expect it paid us much heed. . . . And it was simple for it, with its complete control of electrical forces, to create a spark in just the right place in those caves under the plain. Just as all the other places were blown up or set on fire."

A gust of rage seized him. "If I could get my hands on it! If only I could get my hands on it!"

The spasm passed. "It must be overhearing me now," he said, wearily.

I felt it was up to me to say something.

"Well, there it is," I said hesitantly. "What on earth are we to do about it?"

He jumped up so suddenly that I started. His unstable emotions boiled over in another flood of rage. His face was convulsed.

"I'm going to do something," he gritted. "I won't be used like this. What's my life become? Another week—another day—of this, and I'll be insane!"

He snatched up his dingy hat ferociously, and made for the door. He was not too steady on his feet, but the intensity of his passion upheld him.

"Good-by, Williams," he flung at me. "I can't tell you anything more. I mustn't even think about it." And he was out and down the path before I could comprehend his swift words.

I followed hurriedly. "Wait," I called. "What—?" But he had mounted his cycle and was already riding away, the bag on his carrier at the rear bumping up and down in derisive farewell.

I stopped at the gate, looking after him. He was shouting as he

rode, and the words came back more and more faintly as he dwindled into the distance. They were mostly blasphemy. . . .

I hesitated, and cursed my hesitation. But I could never catch him now: I had been cleaning my bike, and it lay in hopeless dismemberment in the tool-shed. The fellow was very ill. He shouldn't be allowed about like that. He should be under observation.

Observation! An idea suddenly occurred to me. I rushed back into the cottage, almost tripping over Peter, who was coming out of the door, and went clattering up the stairs to my cramped observatory. Sliding the skylight window aside, I swung the telescope window down, and directed it out into the dusk after Clarke.

I looked through it. Everything was a blur, and I fiddled impatiently with the focusing screws. The scene would not come clear. Then: "Fool!" I swore at myself, and delved on the floor for the terrestrial eyepiece.

It was under a heap of star maps. I snatched it out, and with hasty fingers screwed it in place of the astronomical lens. I peered through, and the dark little mote out there between the obscure land and the pale green sky fairly leapt at me, and became the figure of Clarke, dismounted now and crouching on the lip of one of the recent craters.

He was unstrapping the brown bag. I could not see his face, for the brim of his hat shadowed it. He produced a bunch of keys, and used one of them to unlock the case.

I watched with interest, waiting to see what was in that mysterious case. Wads of newspapers—evidently packing—came out first, and then Clarke extracted some sticks—yellow sticks, each about ten inches long.

He put them down and stood up. He gazed around at the darkling plain. He seemed to be undergoing some sort of mental struggle. Then, as if in sudden resolution, he bent swiftly, gathered the sticks in his arms and seemed literally to hurl himself over the rim of the crater.

I gasped as he disappeared from view, for those craters were pretty deep—some went right underground. I waited a minute or two hardly daring to breathe, my eye glued to the spot where he had vanished. His bicycle and the abandoned case were still there on the rim.

Then, without warning, a fountain of dirt, smoke, and flame spurted up from the interior of the crater, catching up and tossing the bicycle fifty yards away and spraying out in a tall, grey plume. Quite slowly, the dust and smaller debris rained down from this erection, and seemed to rebound gently as it landed. A lower layer of white smoke appeared, and rolled along the edge of the crater as if it were a steaming cauldron.

I found that I had bitten my lip, and there was the taste of blood on my tongue. . . .

When I reached the scene twenty minutes later, after a breathless run in the gloom, the cloud had settled, and the crater was nearly half-full of loose debris. It was quite obvious that there was nothing I could do.

Those yellow sticks had been dynamite.

That was a fortnight ago. And now here I sit in my parlor, penning this account of the adventure from beginning to end. I suppose it *is* ended.

Yet could an intelligence of the quality of the Ruling Mind of Clarke's story be trapped by such a trick, even though Clarke did his best to conceal his intention to destroy it through its Achilles' heel—an explosive "slap up against it"? I find that hard to accept.

Certainly, there have been no more explosions since, but that is probably because there is nothing left to explode. Funnily enough, poor Clarke's few sticks of dynamite must have been about the last left upon this planet. As a New York paper said the next day: "There just isn't enough gunpowder left in the world to make a two-cent Fourth of July squib."

Nor was a single plant for manufacturing atom bombs anything but completely gutted walls. Nobody could have taught the cats anything about incendiarism.

Throughout this narrative, I have endeavored to confine it to personal experience only, hardly touching upon the broader events of this globular annihilation of the stuff of war. For that is history.

We know now the all-round sense of relief that has come to the peoples of the world. The pact that has been signed to keep the world in its weaponless condition, and to outlaw arms races, may well be the

foundation stone of that common world government, after all. Perhaps now the vicious circle has been broken for us, we shall maintain the good sense not to get caught in another.

In any case, if Clarke's story was true, an atomic war will never be able to get started. The feline race will see to that. *If Clarke's story was true. . . .*

I always come back to that "if." When I try to sum it all up, doubt defeats me. It is so fantastically far-fetched. I cannot make up my mind whether Clarke was a martyr, or an obsessed lunatic who committed suicide in a remarkably complicated way.

And yet, you know, there are Clarke's own words. . . . *"As long as the cats keep up their acting with such infallible assurance, there will always remain an element of doubt in even the most credulous human mind. That little crumb of self-distrust is what will save them. And, believe me, the cats know it!"*

It is sunset again, that seemingly fateful time of day in this story. The mellowing rays steal in through the diamond panes of the windows, and there is a golden patch of light moving gently on the opposite wall. There are spots of shadow in it, giving it the effect of a mask. It seems to grin.

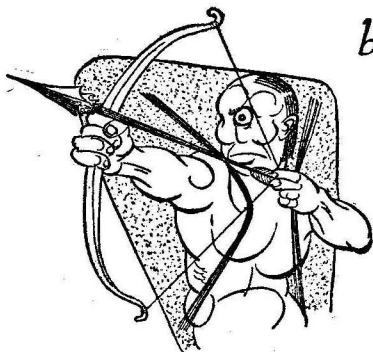
I look across at Peter squatting on the arm of the chair in which Clarke sat on his last visit. He is in a semi-doze; his eyes are almost, but not quite, shut, and he is purring very softly. There is a look of complacent felicity about him. Is that really a smile on his face? I am sure it is—as much as a cat can smile.

He is crouching like a little sphinx, and my gaze lifts to the framed photograph hanging on the wall above him. The Sphinx of Gizeh—maybe a stone image of the Ruling Mind.

The dread thought occurs to me again. If the strange being left Clarke's body in time before he blew himself to smithereens, it must by now be occupying some other body. It could not remain disembodied long. *Where has it gone?*

I look across at a mirror, and study my head uneasily. For the Lord's sake, not that! My gaze returns to the Sphinx. I scrutinize its battered features.

What an enigmatic expression! Is it a smile?



by Battell Loomis

INVASION SQUAD

They were three casual travelers from Somewhere, en route to Somewhere Else. We're lucky to have this brief record of their stop-over, for it's doubtful that they'll ever return. . . .

THREE little men stood gazing up at a tall and gleaming wall. One of them rubbed its strange surface with a forefinger, smelled the finger, tasted it, shook his head and turned to his companions with a puzzled look.

"What is it?" he asked, in a language only a brilliant author can understand, for the trio were not Earthmen.

Each of them, removing gloves, rubbed the wall, sniffed, tasted, spat and looked puzzled; but they were not frustrated by their ignorance of the wall's weird substance.

They stepped back and leaned their heads back to gaze upward along the shining blond surface. Not a foothold was visible.

The three little men were clad somewhat like Alpiners. Each of them was burdened, one would have thought far overburdened, with an outsize pack, very lumpy as if its contents assumed a number of awkward forms, sharp-cornered forms scarce suited to a shoulder pack; but none of them looked inconvenienced by the weight, none was tired, they stepped away from the wall on dancers' feet, with spring and precision. If it had to be climbed, one would say, they were the sort to surmount it or any other assailable obstacle to their progress. But why should they climb it? Any sideline observer could

have told them the wall did not extend too far in either direction to be walked around. They were not silly fellows. They had tried that on their first arrival, one attempting to find means of scaling the wall and one going to either end of it to see what lay beyond. Their surveys had not satisfied them. The two scouts had reported their joint find of a broad tunnel, through which they could dimly see one another and had flashed signals to verify their mutual identification, but the roof of the tunnel was affixed solidly to the wall and to explore what lay above it, the wall must be scaled. Not even by performing a three-man shoulder stand could they make the topper tall enough to get his fingers over the roof of the tunnel.

The three men had curious names, yet to keep them distinct in our minds, this information had best be yielded. The center man was the leader and his name, most easily rendered in French, was *é*, which, if the printer has set it in nonpareil type, as the author hopes, we can readily pronounce as Weeaksenty. The second man's name, he on the leader's right, requires Greek for its neatest printing and is *ò*, said in longhand as Aspirateo, or in the easier shorthand as Ho. The third man's name was less jolly. Taken phonetically it sounded like O Sigh Puss Olens but it was all run together as Osipusolens. He was not in very good odor with his fellows, it seemed. Oddly enough the devil's coach horse, an earthly beetle, has a name of identical sound, though differently spelled, *ocypus olens*, and this contumacious bug never named a perfume for milady. For readers' convenience, let us make a Swede of him and call him simply Ole; but he was not Swedish, remember. The Swedes are a great people.

Their wall-scaling problem duly considered, *é* reached over his left shoulder and withdrew an arrow from his quiver. Then, like a sword from its sheath, he withdrew a bow from under his left arm and proceeded to string it tautly. Tying a cord to his arrow, he set the eye, drew the string and let 'er twang. The arrow sailed up the shining wall, its cord whipping behind it and somewhat retarding its lift. The head made a scratch on the wall and fell short.

"It's a job for our lifeguard," said *é*, unstringing his bow, stooping to recover his arrow, putting bow, arrow and string away in their respective places. With his remark, one of the bulges revealed itself when Ole struggled over his head with both hands and drew out a

portable line-firing gun. He set it up like a trench mortar, its muzzle set back to the bay position of a moonstruck coyote. He busily powdered the touch-hole from a belt-swung powder horn, checked to see that the line-tub was in clear casting order and touched off the charge. The gun was not silenced but its report was mild. Its missile, a triton grapnel, whirled up over the wall, fell from sight beyond it and was dragged back until two of its hooks held firmly.

"All set," said Ole, proudly reloading his weapon and restoring it, not without effort, over his head and into his pack. Neither companion offered him the slightest assistance. Ho grasped the lead line and, without removing his pack, let it hang below him as he walked horizontally up the perpendicular, hands twinkling up the line as his feet pattered up the wall. He was good, but very good. His companions waited, not attempting to emulate him.

"Looks like snow," observed Ho, twisting out of his shoulder straps and bending, out of sight from below, over his pack, from which he extracted a collapsible ladder made of hollow tubing. He leaned over the wall top to extend the ladder downward and hooked its prongs over the strange material of which the wall was built.

"How can you see the weather signs?" asked é. "We're in a roofed city."

"I mean what fell on this plaza. It's coated like a snowfall."

Weeaksenty climbed up first and soon saw what his aide meant.

"Does, doesn't it!" he exclaimed, leaning over to touch the astonishing stuff and adding, "But it isn't cold. How very strange! Truly marvelous the things an explorer encounters! None after him can ever enjoy the same thrills!"

And I was first! thought Ho, tactfully not mentioning it.

Ole followed them up. All now laid aside their packs. They looked northerly across the long expanse of snowy whiteness. They looked east and west. It was a broad but meaningless sort of plaza. Not a monument, not a roof, not a decorative street light bordered it, except that at the extreme north there was a mellow colored lantern of some sort, though without a light showing through its screen. This was less strange for the fact that it was daytime and the city's roof was transparent.

Near them, the only flaw in the lengthy smooth expanse, there

was an unevenness in the pavement, a rise that continued somewhat like a molehill, which does not break but raises the surface of the ground, as far as their vision scanned ahead of them. Leaving their packs, they began to walk on this elevated way, choosing it because, evidently, it would afford them a farther view sooner than the level expanse bordering it. Their minds were in a state of absolute mystification. Never, in all their travels, had they seen any work of men as meaningless as was this to them. A plaza that was not a roof, except of a tunnel, and without approach, save by scaling a difficult and perplexing wall. The mole-track they followed seemed to rise, gradually, until, having surmounted a knoll or mound, they saw it dip to a valley below them and then rise almost precipitately to a craggy crest as snowy as Mt. Everest.

"We shall need the ladder, Ho," said é. Ho turned and ran down the slope to recover it, thinking it had been highly careless of him to leave it depending from the wall, not that their retreat would have been cut off had some straggler stolen it. They still had their Alpine rigs and getting a long line down a steep is easier than getting it up a seamless acclivity too high for arrows. Ho was puffing by the time he caught up with his fellows; but why not? He had thoughtfully brought his leader's pack as well as his own. Let Ole worry about his own lunch—if he ate less, he would smell less. Their chemical warfare equipment was in the leader's pack, perhaps a pressing necessity for how tell what lay beyond the crag?

Suddenly the ground quaked beneath the trio! They were all of them fieldwise enough to know that the perturbation was no earthquake. For one thing, they had left the reassuring and solid earth beyond the city wall. They knew they were within a man-made construct. So they rightly attributed the quake to other causes, though they did not know what causes. Ole drew a derisive laugh from Ho, a smile from é when he suggested, "It's the dragon in this molehill"; but Ole was always their mark for laughs. Still, after é's weight was on the ladder and its feet pressed down into the yielding snowlike substance, Ole's conjecture received some support. A horrible pink serpent, with five heads flopped down, just missing the ladder, and the heads dug vigorously at the plaza's surface, without, however, opening the molehill.

"A Dio!" cried the leader, who, as a linguist with a choice, chose not to employ the harsher O God of the people whose country he was in. He was startled but his courage was good. Instead of retreating, he quickly pedaled on up the rounds until he stood aside on the crag to let Ho follow him with the two packs. Trust Ole not to offer to relieve him of one and trust é, as leader, to keep his hands free for the use of weapons, if need arose. From the top, still looking north, they saw the first patch of color in the entire scene. It appeared to be a large tuft of stringy grass, like the scented Indian grass used in New England for pleasant basketry. It was scented, too; but not pleasantly and as Ole had not yet arrived, they knew they were not smelling him.

"Ah," said the leader. "Bad sewage disposal. For our health's sake, we must attend to that. Give me my diving suit and a couple of spray guns. When Ole gets here, draw the ladder and reset it so I can get to that grass plot." Weeaksenty stood stalwartly gazing about him. Off some distance to the east lay the five-headed snake. Ho saw é inspecting it and said, "Shall we kill Ole's dragon, St. George?"

Smiling faintly, é said, "I prefer to let sleeping serpents lie. It reminds me of the story of Medusa I was translating for our radio audience, only that distant cousin of Dracula, evidently an arachnid, had eight heads. The legend derived from the octopus, an oceanic spider.* Odd how ignorance rebuilds the past and re-peoples it with persons never naturally encountered. These lands' churches are dedicated to a Being developed in the same way, in that case out of lightning and thunder and their own self-induced illnesses. Do you wonder Ole is a fool? He's a person, too."

"If you say so, sir. I've always thought him an ass. Look at his name, for example. 'Osipusolens.' Is that a sane man's name, I ask you?"

"Well, we don't name ourselves and I didn't know his parents."

The subject of their discussion had now joined them and was pulling up the ladder to place it over the hump. In a moment é descended and cautiously approached the area of swaying grasses. As he went, he affixed his helmet, that he might renew his breathing in pure air.

* As a foreigner, é should be excused for his confusion of acalephs with octopi.

He reached a clearing in the sward and called back, "I shall need something to prop up the manhole lid."

"Would my churchwarden pipe do?" asked Ole. "It's long enough."

"Do you think I want it to snap and let the portcullis clamp me down? Come down and collapse the ladder. It will serve."

The two pioneers obeyed and the ladder was used to keep the manhole open while é donned the rest of his suit and descended into the sewer's dark depths. He was very interested in the substance of the piping, which seemed to be a rubber of some kind; but he was astonished at the disclosure of the piece of litmus paper he held before him as he advanced. It revealed a very acid condition and he called back for them to shove him a pipette to lead off gases, which he thought a spark from the metal of his helmet might cause to explode. When the pipette was in his hands, he called again to ask Ho to touch fire to its escaping flow.

"It burns with a blue flame, sir," called the competent Ho.

"A carbohydrate, just as I thought, probably alcohol," said the leader, who was preparing to shoot one of his sprays, hoping to purify the fumes that he knew would have made him faint had he been breathing them.

"Oh, Oh! Master! The snow has caught fire," shouted Ole.

"Put it out, fool," cried é, his voice coming to them by phone from the depths he had reached. He found a sort of curtain, a valve of some kind, he thought, but as he parted it with his hands, an enormous explosion of escaping gases belched him out of the sewer. He struck the ladder in passing and the manhole trap let down. The fire was out; but he saw how it had marred the snowy plaza with a great black scar and a fall of soots.

"Well! That was something!" said é.

"I didn't expect you back so soon," said Ole. "Too bad you missed the fire. It was very pretty until we sprayed it, as you bade us."

"With such an assistant, I'm lucky I didn't come out a cinder. If the fire had still been going when that—holloa! what's become of Ho?"

"Oh, Ho took flight when the gas came in a burst. I saw him spread his parachute before he went over the precipice at the end of the plaza. I guess he's safe."

Reassuringly, Ho's voice now came to them faintly from far away.

"Okay. We'll go back. I've done my duty for the day. I always say, when traveling in far lands, one should use his knowledge to make any necessary repairs he finds needed in the clever equipment of heedless strangers. If I hadn't counteracted that gas-pocket, the entire city might have gone up in smoke."

"Let's kill the pink dragon before we leave, shall we?"

"Ole, will you ever cease being a diodamned fool? Why risk our lives attacking that enormous creature? Let him sleep and let's go."

Next morning, Norman Budthorpe opened his eyes to a shock that made him swear off smoking in bed. Near his neck a nasty hole was burned right through his counterpane. He did not notice the tiny, charry footprints leading away from it toward the polished maple foot of his bed.

"Whatever made it go out?" he asked, sitting up and bewilderedly examining the damage.

As to that, no one was going to be able to inform him; but his resolve was a second benefit derived from the visit of the tiny explorers. Norman felt fine.

Science Briefs

» DURING WORLD WAR II a process was developed for making wire so fine that it cannot be seen save under the electron microscope. Fine platinum wire is "clad" or encased in base metal and the whole is then drawn to a very small diameter. This wire is then cut to the required length and the ends fastened in terminals, when the surrounding base metal is removed by acid. The result is two fine but visible ends already connected to the instrument component, with a length of "invisible" wire between. The diameter of this wire is less than the wave-length of visible light, thus it cannot be seen in an optical microscope.

» Size for size, diamonds are one thousand times more sensitive as atomic radiation counters than any man-made device.

» A motion picture camera developed at the University of Rochester makes five million separate pictures per second. Photographed with this camera and projected at normal speed, a rifle bullet appears to move only one inch per minute.

**IN
THE
NEXT
ISSUE**

★ Ford McCormack, a relative newcomer to science-fantasy writing, leads off next month's issue with a tightly-plotted, dramatic novelette: **MARCH HARE MISSION**. The title refers to the protagonist's chances of coming back alive from the mission in question—approximately zero.

★ Judith Merrill has an intriguing idea in **SURVIVAL SHIP**; and an extremely ingenious method for preventing the reader from finding out, too early in the story, precisely what that idea is. . . .

★ Cleve Cartmill, making a strong comeback after a long absence from the field, contributes the slightly wacky tale of **THE GREEN CAT**.

★ . . . And there's a full roster of other new stories by the most capable craftsmen in the field, plus a generous helping of the masterworks of yesterday.

★ Your comments on this issue, and your suggestions for future issues, are earnestly solicited—especially if you're not an old-time science-fiction reader. This field is expanding rapidly—therefore new readers are important—and we want your reactions.

★ Please address your letters to:

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New York 17, N. Y.



by William Seabrook

WOW

*"Abolish Language,"
said the vizier, "and
man will return to
primal simplicity and
happiness." . . .*

ONE summer evening, a sentinel who stood leaning on his spear at the entrance to the Han Ku Pass—for this was many years before the building of the Great Wall—beheld a white-bearded traveler riding toward him, seated cross-legged upon the shoulders of a black ox.

Said the venerable stranger, when he drew near and halted:

"I am an old man, and wish to die peacefully in the mountains which lie to the westward. Permit me, therefore, to depart."

But the sentinel prostrated himself and said, in awe:

"Are you not that great philosopher?"

For he suspected the wayfarer to be none other than Lao-tze, who was reputed the holiest and wisest man in China.

"That may or may not be," replied the stranger, "but I am an old man, wishing to depart from China and die in peace."

At this, the sentinel perceived that he was indeed in the presence of the great Lao-tze, who had sat for more than a hundred years in the shadow of a plum tree, uttering words of such extreme simplicity that no man in the world was learned enough to understand them.

So the sentinel threw himself in the ox's path, and cried out:

"I am a poor and ignorant man, but I have heard it said that wisdom is a thing of priceless worth. Spare me, I beg you, ere you depart from China, one word of your great wisdom, which may, perchance, enrich my poverty or make it easier to bear."

Whereupon Lao-tze opened his mouth, and said gravely: "Wow!"

After which he ambled westward in the twilight and disappeared forever from the sight of men.

As for the poor sentinel, he sat dumbly scratching his head, say-

ing over and over to himself in puzzled, uncertain tones, "Wow. Wow! Wow?"

For this absurd monosyllable had precisely the same meaning in ancient Chinese that it has in modern English, which is another way of telling you that it had no meaning at all.

But the sentinel, who imagined himself the possessor of some mighty incantation, went about his affairs as one demented, secretly repeating the strange word twenty thousand times a day, expecting with each breath that his wife would suddenly become young and beautiful, or that his hut would be transformed into a palace, or his spear into the ivory baton of a mandarin; until finally the exasperated captain of the guard took note of his strange mooning and muttering and had him beaten on the soles of his feet until he confessed all.

And that was the end of the unhappy sentinel, for he died from the beating, but in due time the captain reported the saying of Lao-tze to the governor of the province, and eventually it reached the ears of the emperor.

Now the emperor cared more for the happiness of his subjects than for his own ease, and was accustomed to seek wisdom that he might apply it to better the condition of his people; so when he learned that the great Lao-tze's valedictory to humanity had been "Wow," he called his vizier and bade him consider the mystery.

The vizier engaged in a holy meditation on "Wow" for forty days and nights, after which he returned to the emperor and spoke.

"O Son of Heaven, doubtless it has often chanced that while engaged in the hunt, you have seen two vast companies of lions, arrayed in martial order, maiming and slaying each other in mighty battle."

"Never in my whole life," replied the astonished emperor.

"But surely, then, O Son of Heaven, you have noticed when coursing wolves, how certain of the pack are accustomed to act as slaves and burden bearers for the others."

"You know very well that I have never seen such a sight," answered the emperor, "but what I do see plainly is that my vizier has taken leave of his wits."

"I beg forgiveness, O Son of Heaven," persisted the vizier, "but I am at least convinced that you have observed how certain animals imprison others of their kind in chains and dungeons; how certain

ones starve amid plenty; and how all the beasts of the forest, save a divinely favored few, are compelled to engage in life-long toil."

"It is with the deepest pain," interjected the emperor in a tone of exquisite politeness, "that I shall now call in the executioner to cut off your honorable head, but I am comforted by the reflection that this will probably cause you only a slight inconvenience, as you seem already to have lost the use of it."

"My poor unworthy head will be too highly honored, O Son of Heaven, but harken yet once again ere you decree my death. You have never seen such things as I have described, because the animals, whose communication is limited to 'Wow,' or 'Baa,' according to their kind, live naturally and simply as God intended; while man, who alone among God's creatures has invented speech to his confusion, is the only being afflicted with wars, prisons, slavery, poverty and sorrow.

"This is the hidden meaning concealed in the mystic utterance of the wise and holy Lao-tze:

"Abolish Language, and man will return to primal simplicity and happiness."

"A most excellent idea, and I forgive you," replied the emperor, "for while the abolition of Language may not accomplish all you say, it will at least put a stop to the incessant chatter of my wives."

So presently heralds were sent throughout all China, with an imperial decree that Language was to be abolished in the empire, beginning with the first day after the Festival of the Full Moon, and that thereafter none might say aught but "Wow," on pain of death.

The people obeyed.

And so there dawned on China an era of simplicity and peace—a Golden Age, in which wars ceased, and industrial bondage and exploitation disappeared, for without spoken or written language they could no longer exist. Desires grew fewer. Each family tilled the soil just sufficiently to supply its own simple wants. Husband and wife, father and son, neighbor and neighbor, dwelt together in harmony and peace, for none said aught but "Wow," and hence all were agreed.

Laws were no longer necessary. Though there were armor and weapons, there was no occasion for donning them. People no longer roved about, for they were everywhere content. Though there were ships and carriages, there was no occasion to use them. Where two

villages lay close together, separated only by a little hill, the voices of their cocks and dogs were mutually heard, yet people came to old age and died with no desire to go from one village to the other.

And the emperor, who had grown very old, lived as simply in his palace as his people in their villages, for his empire was no longer a burden on his shoulders, and was governed perfectly because it was not governed at all.

But in the meantime there had been born in a distant village a child with an impediment in his speech, who, as he grew to manhood, endeavored to say "Wow," but could only say "Wo." At first he was ashamed and envious, but later he persuaded himself that his incompetence was a virtue and that his blemish was a mark of superiority, and whenever he heard people saying "Wow," in the contented, old-fashioned way, he would puff out his chest and ostentatiously cry, "Wo," at the top of his voice, until finally he made himself such a nuisance that he was driven out of the village with sticks and stones.

When he arrived in the next village, where they knew nothing of the impediment in his speech, and stood in the market place saying, "Wo, wo, wo," the people arose and would have slain him, when suddenly one of their number, who like the rest had been content to say "Wow" all his life, suddenly took his stand beside the stranger and began to shout vehemently, "Wo! Wo! Wo!" And presently, strange to relate, half the village was imitating him.

Strangest of all, they immediately became discontented, and driven by an irresistible restlessness, abandoned their tranquil firesides and began to wander about the country, as in the old days, traveling in ones and twos and companies, arrogantly clamoring, "Wo, wo," spreading amazement, quarrel and dissension.

All this began in a far-off province, and did not come to the ears of the emperor, who continued to live peacefully year after year in his palace, until one day the door burst open and his ancient vizier appeared, bent with age and exhaustion, covered with dust and sweat.

The emperor was greatly astonished, and uttered an amazed "Wow," for the vizier had departed to his native village nearly a century before, and the emperor had never expected to see him again.

"O Son of Heaven," cried the old man in a trembling and unaccustomed voice, "the time for saying 'Wow' has reached an end, for a

marvelous thing has come to pass. On the great plain which lies not far beyond the palace walls are two vast armies, armed with scythes and clubs and stones—and they of one army are furiously screaming ‘Wow! Wow! Wow!’ as if they had gone mad, while they of the other army, with equal fury, are replying ‘Wo! Wo! Wo!’ Each army is trying to outshout the other, and if they come together in battle the rivers will run red with blood, for their numbers are constantly increasing, and town is arrayed against town, village against village, family against family, brother against brother.”

At these strange tidings, the emperor raised himself with difficulty from his couch, and with trembling hands lifted the lid of a massive chest from which he drew the sacred imperial robe of yellow and gold, embroidered with the emblem of the Great Dragon. His vizier’s robe of state he also drew forth, and when the two old men had vested themselves in the panoply of power and wisdom, supporting each other, arm in arm, they tottered out of the palace.

When they came to the Yang Shi Bridge, outside the wall, they saw that the waters of the river were running red.

As they stood sorrowing, they heard a confused shouting, and beheld two remnants of the battling armies, the one in pursuit of the other. And it appeared that there would be fresh slaughter at the river’s edge. But when the two onrushing bands espied the emperor and his vizier, they gave over flight and pursuit, stopped stock-still, and ceased their shouting.

The aged emperor stepped forward, raising his arms in a gesture that was at once paternal and majestic, and would have spoken. But straightway he was greeted with an angry chorus of “Wow’s” and “Wos” which were so mingled in the din that they sounded precisely alike to his astonished ears. And shouting thus together, for the moment, at least, in perfect harmony, they seized the emperor and his vizier, tied them together with a huge stone around their necks, and threw them headlong into the crimsoned river. After which, they remembered their former quarrel, and resumed their mutual slaughter.

And when the yellow moon rose, it shone, as of old, upon human strife and fields strewn with the dead, while naught remained of the emperor and the vizier and Lao-tze’s holy wisdom save a few empty bubbles floating on a river of blood.

THE DISSECTING TABLE

Criticism of current science-fantasy books

THE GREEN MAN OF GRAYPEC, by Festus Pragnell; Greenberg, Publisher, \$2.50.

This pseudoscientific romance, first published in *Wonder Stories* in the '30s, has weathered nearly twenty years remarkably well. The story concerns the adventures of an Earthman among the inhabitants of an electron, and although no theme could be less compatible with modern atomic theory, the story is told with great charm and vivid imagination. Highly recommended.

THE DREAMING JEWELS, by Theodore Sturgeon; Greenberg, Publisher, \$2.50.

Here is a curiously uneven work from a major science-fantasy artist. It begins with one of the most ingenious and impudent narrative hooks ever written: "They caught the kid doing something disgusting out under the bleachers at the high-school stadium, and he was sent home from the grammar school across the street. He was eight years old then. He'd been doing it for years." From there until about the midpoint, this novel is Sturgeon at his brilliant best: the warm insight, the compellingly real background, the exciting narrative. You will long remember, if you read this half of the story, Monetre, the scientist turned carnival-master whose soul was pure hate; Horty, the kid with the mutilated hand who found human companionship for the first time among freaks; Zee, who was a midget and a beautiful woman and an honest, sensitive person.

And after that, somebody turns out the light: the characters become insipid and lifeless, the writing flat, and the action a humorless copy of Victorian melodrama, not even excluding the lustful villain with the mortgage.

THE INCOMPLETE ENCHANTER, by Fletcher Pratt and L. Sprague de Camp; Prime Press; \$2.50. **THE CASTLE OF IRON**, by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt; Gnome Press, \$2.50.

There is magic in the teamwork of de Camp and Pratt that is approached by no other collaboration in the short history of science-fantasy: that rare, happy spark that fuses two talents into a third more richly productive than either alone.

The de Camp-Pratt system, as explained by themselves, works like this: the general outline of the story is roughed out in conference; the irrepressible de Camp does a first draft, and the analytical Pratt corrects it for form and structure; the last two steps are then repeated until both writers are satisfied.

However produced, these stories of relaxed, ribald adventure in alternate time-streams—each with its own wacky “natural laws” of magic—are priceless and no fantasy reader should be without them. *The Incomplete Enchanter* takes place in the worlds of Scandinavian myth and Spenser’s *Faerie Queen*; *The Castle of Iron* in that of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*.

THE HOUSE THAT STOOD STILL, by A. E. van Vogt; Greenberg, Publisher, \$2.50.

In his first novel written especially for hard-cover publication, Alfred van Vogt has produced a detective story according to standard formula: the series of murders, the innocent bystander forced into the role of sleuth, the false trails, the multiple suspects, and that hoariest device of all, the “showdown” at the end of the story, wherein the hero gathers all the suspects together and exposes the murderer. A science-fiction element is present, but occupies the position of the secondary, “buried” story in detective-novel structure; nearly all the characters except the hero are members of a group of immortals, and the murders are by-products of their internal struggles for power.

This book might have been written to oblige critics of van Vogt’s work, for an analysis of it clears up several puzzling aspects of his previous stories. For example, the characters in this book have little if any more depth than those in previous van Vogt novels, but here the lack is not felt as acutely, for this sort of superficial characterization is exactly what is expected in a not-quite-first-rate detective story. More is expected from a science-fiction writer of the first rank; but it seems to me at least an illuminating hypothesis that van Vogt

is not, strictly speaking, a science-fiction writer—that he has been writing crime-suspense novels, with a dollop each of science-fantasy background, ever since *Slan*; though never before as explicitly as in *The House That Stood Still*.

Uncharacteristically, all the threads in this story have been satisfactorily tied up; and the suspense is kept at a high level. Recommended.

MINIONS OF THE MOON, by William Gray Beyer; Gnome Press, \$2.50.

Another old-style romance, somewhat the worse for wear. This one is a light-hearted short novel about a young man who's put to sleep for 6,000 years by a new anaesthetic. He wakes up in a world of post-Armageddon barbarians to find himself the protégé of an ancient free-floating intelligence named Omega—a pun-loving, prankish iconoclast who proposes to found a new and improved race of humans, using the hero and a contemporary blonde as stock. If the writer had taken this and the following nonsense seriously it would have been intolerably dull, and if he had had artistic pretensions as well it would probably have been unreadable. The alternate pitfalls, which Beyer has not completely avoided, are overcuteness and excessive simplicity; but if you are looking for an evening's passive entertainment rather than for cosmic concepts, this is it.

DIANETICS, The Modern Science of Mental Health, by L. Ron Hubbard; Hermitage House, \$4.00.

"The creation of dianetics is a milestone for Man comparable to his discovery of fire and superior to his inventions of the wheel and arch."

This is the first sentence of Mr. Hubbard's book and sums up his own opinion of his work. At the other pole, dianetics has been called a half-baked theory and a parlor game.

Briefly, the theory and practice of dianetics are as follows: Mental aberrations, and psychosomatic illnesses, are caused by engrams. Engrams are fragments of speech heard by the aberrant person during moments of pain and unconsciousness or partial consciousness, recorded by the "reactive" or unconscious mind and interpreted as

commands, *e. g.* "You don't feel a thing" prevents the subject from feeling either pain or emotion; "Come back here" makes him try to return to the period of the engram. Cure is accomplished by persuading the subject mentally to relive the experiences which contain engrams, forcing recall of the buried material, and repeating this process until the emotion attached to the incident "discharges" and loses its power to aberrate.

This is a closely reasoned, carefully composed and extremely persuasive book, certainly the best job of writing Hubbard has done since the war. The status of dianetics as a science is another question, and one which would have been much easier to resolve had the author included any clinical evidence to support his claims.

Throughout the book the assumption is implicit that the reader will accept each statement as true for the time being until the argument is complete and the validity of the whole can be tested. The force of these reiterated confident statements, coupled with the suggestion of acceptance-on-faith, is very strong. But the matter of proof, when you have finished the book, is still deferred to the author's integrity and to your own experiments with dianetic technique.

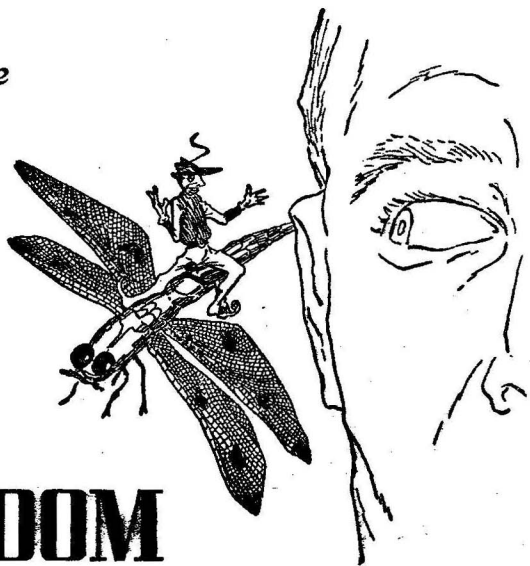
New therapies are ordinarily not publicized or put into general practice without prolonged checking by qualified independent experimenters. Since dianetics has by-passed this procedure, the reader experiments at his own grave risk.

LANCELOT BIGGS: SPACEMAN, by Nelson Bond; Doubleday, \$2.50.

Neither good science nor good fiction. The following is a random sample of the "science": "You see, in the course of my experiments I discovered that uranium has a most peculiar property. Being highly radioactive, it has the strange ability to delay almost indefinitely, the passage of electrical impulses traveling through it." As fiction, this is the painfully moronic kind of comedy which many editors regard as just the ticket for the great unwashed American public. Perhaps it is, but I have hopes that the people who support the current era's most imaginative writing will prove to have more imagination and taste than those who support radio comedy.

D. K.

by Jack Vance



THE LOOM OF DARKNESS

*An old, an ageless tale: the story of a golden woman
and a golden tapestry, and of the slender threads of
darkness that bound them eternally together. . . .*

THROUGH the dim forest came Liane the Wayfarer, passing along the shadowed glades with a prancing light-footed gait. He whistled, he caroled, he was plainly in high spirits. Around his finger he twirled a bit of wrought bronze—a circlet graved with angular crabbed characters, now stained black.

By excellent chance he had found it, banded around the root of an ancient yew. Hacking it free, he had seen the characters on the inner surface—rude forceful symbols, doubtless the cast of a powerful antique rune . . . Best take it to a magician and have it tested for sorcery.

Liane made a wry mouth. There were objections to the course. Sometimes it seemed as if all living creatures conspired to exasperate him. Only this morning, the spice merchant—what a tumult he had made dying! How carelessly he had spewed blood on Liane's cockscomb sandals! Still, thought Liane, every unpleasantness carried with it compensation. While digging the grave he had found the bronze ring.

And Liane's spirits soared; he laughed in pure joy. He bounded, he leapt. His green cape flapped behind him, the red feather in his cap winked and blinked . . . But still—Liane slowed his step—he was no whit closer to the mystery of the magic, if magic the ring possessed.

Experiment, that was the word!

He stopped where the ruby sunlight slanted down without hindrance from the high foliage, examined the ring, traced the glyphs with his fingernail. He peered through. A faint film, a flicker? He held it at arm's length. It was clearly a coronet. He whipped off his cap, set the band on his brow, rolled his great golden eyes, preened himself . . . Odd. It slipped down on his ears. It tipped across his eyes. Darkness. Frantically Liane clawed it off . . . A bronze ring, a hand's-breadth in diameter. Queer.

He tried again. It slipped down over his head, his shoulders. His head was in the darkness of a strange separate space. Looking down, he saw the level of the outside light dropping slowly as he dropped the ring.

Slowly down . . . Now it was around his ankles—and in sudden panic, Liane snatched the ring up over his body, emerged blinking into the maroon light of the forest.

He saw a blue-white, green-white flicker against the foliage. It was a Twk-man, mounted on a dragon-fly, and light glinted from the dragon-fly's wings.

Liane called sharply, "Here, sir! Here, sir!"

The Twk-man perched his mount on a twig. "Well, Liane, what do you wish?"

"Watch now, and remember what you see." Liane pulled the ring over his head, dropped it to his feet, lifted it back. He looked up to the Twk-man, who was chewing a leaf. "And what did you see?"

"I saw Liane vanish from mortal sight—except for the red curled toes of his sandals. All else was as air."

"Ha!" cried Liane. "Think of it! Have you ever seen the like?"

The Twk-man asked carelessly, "Do you have salt? I would have salt."

Liane cut his exultations short, eyed the Twk-man closely.

"What news do you bring me?"

"Three erbs killed Florejin the Dream-builder, and burst all his bubbles. The air above the manse was colored for many minutes with the flitting fragments."

"A gram."

"Lord Kandive the Golden has built a barge of carven mo-wood ten lengths high, and it floats on the River Scaum for the Regatta, full of treasure."

"Two grams."

"A golden witch named Lith has come to live on Thamber Meadow. She is quiet and very beautiful."

"Three grams."

"Enough," said the Twk-man, and leaned forward to watch while Liane weighed out the salt in a tiny balance. He packed it in small panniers hanging on each side of the ribbed thorax, then twitched the insect into the air and flicked off through the forest vaults.

Once more Liane tried his bronze ring, and this time brought it entirely past his feet, stepped out of it and brought the ring up into the darkness beside him. What a wonderful sanctuary! A hole whose opening could be hidden inside the hole itself! Down with the ring to his feet, step through, bring it up his slender frame and over his shoulders, out into the forest with a small bronze ring in his hand.

Ho! and off to Thamber Meadow to see the beautiful golden witch.

Her hut was a simple affair of woven reeds—a low dome with two round windows and a low door. He saw Lith at the pond bare-legged among the water shoots, catching frogs for her supper. A white kirtle was gathered up tight around her thighs; stock-still she stood and the dark water rippled rings away from her slender knees.

She was more beautiful than Liane could have imagined, as if one of Florejin's wasted bubbles had burst here on the water. Her skin was pale creamed stirred gold, her hair a denser, wetter gold. Her

eyes were like Liane's own, great golden orbs, and hers were wide apart, tilted slightly.

Liane strode forward and planted himself on the bank. She looked up startled, her ripe mouth half-open.

"Behold, golden witch, here is Liane. He has come to welcome you to Thamber; and he offers you his friendship, his love . . ."

Lith bent, scooped a handful of slime from the bank and flung it into his face.

Shouting the most violent curses, Liane wiped his eyes free, but the door to the hut had slammed shut.

Liane strode to the door and pounded it with his fist.

"Open and show your witch's face, or I burn the hut!"

The door opened, and the girl looked forth, smiling. "What now?"

Liane entered the hut and lunged for the girl, but twenty thin shafts darted out, twenty points pricking his chest. He halted, eyebrows raised, mouth twitching.

"Down, steel," said Lith. The blades snapped from view. "So easily could I seek your vitality," said Lith, "had I willed."

Liane frowned and rubbed his chin as if pondering. "You understand," he said earnestly, "what a witless thing you do. Liane is feared by those who fear fear, loved by those who love love. And you—" his eyes swam the golden glory of her body—"you are ripe as a sweet fruit, you are eager, you glisten and tremble with love. You please Liane, and he will spend much warmth on you."

"No, no," said Lith, with a slow smile. "You are too hasty."

Liane looked at her in surprise. "Indeed?"

"I am Lith," said she. "I am what you say I am. I ferment, I burn, I seethe. Yet I may have no lover but him who has served me. He must be brave, swift, cunning."

"I am he," said Liane. He chewed at his lip. "It is not usually thus. I detest this indecision." He took a step forward. "Come, let us—"

She backed away. "No, no. You forget. How have you served me, how have you gained the right to my love?"

"Absurdity!" stormed Liane. "Look at me! Note my perfect grace, the beauty of my form and feature, my great eyes, as golden as your own, my manifest will and power . . . It is you who should

serve me. That is how I will have it." He sank upon a low divan. "Woman, give me wine."

She shook her head. "In my small domed hut I cannot be forced. Perhaps outside on Thamber Meadow—but in here, among my blue and red tassels, with twenty blades of steel at my call, you must obey me. . . . So choose. Either arise and go, never to return, or else agree to serve me on one small mission, and then have me and all my ardor."

Liane sat straight and stiff. An odd creature, the golden witch. But, indeed, she was worth some exertion, and he would make her pay for her impudence.

"Very well, then," he said blandly. "I will serve you. What do you wish? Jewels? I can suffocate you in pearls, blind you with diamonds. I have two emeralds the size of your fist, and they are green oceans, where the gaze is trapped and wanders forever among vertical green prisms . . ."

"No, no jewels—"

"An enemy, perhaps. Ah, so simple. Liane will kill you ten men. Two steps forward, thrust—*thus!*" He lunged. "And souls go thrilling up like bubbles in a beaker of mead."

"No. I want no killing."

He sat back, frowning. "What, then?"

She stepped to the back of the room and pulled at a drape. It swung aside, displaying a golden tapestry. The scene was a valley bounded by two steep mountains, a broad valley where a placid river ran, past a quiet village and so into a grove of trees. Golden was the river, golden the mountains, golden the trees—golds so various, so rich, so subtle that the effect was like a many-colored landscape. But the tapestry had been rudely hacked in half.

Liane was entranced. "Exquisite, exquisite . . ."

Lith said, "It is the Magic Valley of Ariventa so depicted. The other half has been stolen from me, and its recovery is the service I wish of you."

"Where is the other half?" demanded Liane. "Who is the dastard?"

Now she watched him closely. "Have you ever heard of Chun? Chun the Unavoidable?"

Liane considered. "No."

"He stole the half to my tapestry, and hung it in a marble hall, and this hall is in the ruins to the north of Kaiin."

"Ha!" muttered Liane.

"The hall is by the Place of Whispers, and is marked by a leaning column with a black medallion of a phoenix and a two-headed lizard."

"I go," said Liane. He rose. "One day to Kaiin, one day to steal, one day to return. Three days."

Lith followed him to the door. "Beware of Chun the Unavoidable," she whispered.

And Liane strode away whistling, the red feather bobbing in his green cap. Lith watched him, then turned and slowly approached the golden tapestry. "Golden Ariventa," she whispered, "my heart cries and hurts with longing for you . . ."

The Derna is a swifter, thinner river than the Scaum, its bosomy sister to the south. And where the Scaum wallows through a broad dale, purple with horse-blossom, pocked white and grey with crumbling castles, the Derna has sheered a steep canyon, overhung by forested bluffs.

An ancient flint road long ago followed the course of the Derna, but now the exaggeration of the meandering has cut into the pavement, so that Liane, treading the road to Kaiin, was occasionally forced to leave the road and make a detour through banks of thorn and the tube-grass which whistled in the breeze.

The red sun, drifting across the universe like an old man creeping to his death-bed, hung low to the horizon when Liane breasted Porphiron Scar, looked across white-walled Kaiin and the blue bay of Sanreale beyond.

Directly below was the market-place, a medley of stalls selling fruit, slabs of pale meat, molluscs from the slime banks, dull flagons of wine. And the quiet people of Kaiin moved among the stalls, buying their sustenance, carrying it loosely to their stone chambers.

Beyond the market-place rose a bank of ruined columns, like broken teeth—legs to the arena built two hundred feet from the ground by Mad King Shin; beyond, in a grove of bay trees, the

glossy dome of the palace was visible, where Kandive the Golden ruled Kaiin and as much of Ascolais as one could see from a vantage on Porphiron Scar.

The Derna, no longer a flow of clear water, poured through a network of dank canals and subterranean tubes, and finally seeped past rotting wharves into the Bay of Sanreale.

A bed for the night, thought Liane; then to his business in the morning.

He leapt down the zig-zag steps—back, forth, back, forth—and came out into the market-place. And now he put on a grave demeanor. Liane the Wayfarer was not unknown in Kaiin, and many were ill-minded enough to do him harm.

He moved sedately in the shade of the Pannone Wall, turned through a narrow cobbled street, bordered by old wooden houses glowing the rich brown of old stump-water in the rays of the setting sun, and so came to a small square and the high stone of the Magician's Inn.

The host, a small fat man, sad of eye, with a small fat nose the identical shape of his body, was scraping ashes from the hearth. He straightened his back and hurried behind the counter of his little alcove.

Liane said, "A chamber, well-aired, and a supper of mushrooms, wine and oysters."

The innkeeper bowed humbly.

"Indeed, sir—and how will you pay?"

Liane flung down a leather sack, taken this very morning. The innkeeper raised his eyebrows in pleasure at the fragrance.

"The ground buds of the spase-bush, brought from a far land," said Liane.

"Excellent, excellent . . . Your chamber, sir, and your supper at once."

As Liane ate, several other guests of the house appeared and sat before the fire with wine, and the talk grew large, and dwelt on wizards of the past and the great days of magic.

"Great Phandaal knew a lore now forgot," said one old man with hair dyed orange. "He tied white and black strings to the legs of sparrows and sent them veering to his direction. And where they

wove their magic woof, great trees appeared, laden with flowers, fruit, nuts, or bulbs of rare liqueurs. It is said that thus he wove Great Da Foreat on the shores of Sanra Water."

"Ha," said a dour man in a garment of dark blue, brown and black, "this I can do." He brought forth a bit of string, flicked it, whirled it, spoke a quiet word, and the vitality of the pattern fused the string into a tongue of red and yellow fire, which danced, curled, darted back and forth along the table till the dour man killed it with a gesture.

"And this I can do," said a hooded figure in a black cape sprinkled with silver circles. He brought forth a small tray, laid it on the table and sprinkled therein a pinch of ashes from the hearth. He brought forth a whistle and blew a clear tone, and up from the tray came glittering motes, flashing the prismatic colors red, blue, green, yellow. They floated up a foot and burst in coruscations of brilliant colors, each a beautiful star-shaped pattern, and each burst sounded a tiny repetition of the original tone—the clearest, purest sound in the world. The motes became fewer, the magician blew a different tone, and again the motes floated up to burst in glorious ornamental spangles. Another time—another swarm of motes. At last the magician replaced his whistle, wiped off the tray, tucked it inside his cloak and lapsed back to silence.

Now the other wizards surged forward, and soon the air above the table swarmed with visions, quivered with spells. One showed the group nine new colors of ineffable charm and radiance; another caused a mouth to form on the landlord's forehead and revile the crowd, much to the landlord's discomfiture, since it was his own voice. Another displayed a green glass bottle from which the face of a demon peered and grimaced; another a ball of pure crystal which rolled back and forward to the command of the sorcerer who owned it, and who claimed it to be an earring of the fabled master Sankaferrin.

Liane had attentively watched all, crowing in delight at the bottled imp, and trying to cozen the obedient crystal from its owner, without success.

And Liane became pettish, complaining that the world was full of rock-hearted men, but the sorcerer with the crystal earring remained

indifferent, and even when Liane spread out twelve packets of rare spice he refused to part with his toy.

Liane pleaded, "I wish only to please the witch Lith."

"Please her with the spice, then."

Liane said ingenuously, "Indeed, she has but one wish, a bit of tapestry which I must steal from Chun the Unavoidable."

And he looked from face to suddenly silent face.

"What causes such immediate sobriety? Ho, landlord, more wine!"

The sorcerer with the earring said, "If the floor swam ankle-deep in wine—the rich red wine of Tanvilkat—the leaden print of that name would still ride the air."

"Ha," laughed Liane, "let only a taste of that wine pass your lips, and the fumes would erase all memory."

"See his eyes," came a whisper. "Great and golden."

"And quick to see," spoke Liane. "And these legs—quick to run, fleet as starlight on the waves. And this arm—quick to stab with steel. And my magic—which will set me to a refuge that is out of all cognizance." He gulped wine from a beaker. "Now behold. This is magic from antique days." He set the bronze band over his head, stepped through, brought it up inside the darkness. When he deemed that sufficient time had elapsed he stepped through the circlet once more.

The fire glowed, the landlord stood in his alcove, Liane's wine was at hand. But of the assembled magicians, there was no trace.

Liane looked about in puzzlement. "And where are my wizardly friends?"

The landlord turned his head. "They took to their chambers; the name you spoke weighed on their souls."

And Liane drank his wine in frowning silence.

Next morning he left the inn and picked a roundabout way to the Old Town—a grey wilderness of tumbled pillars, weathered blocks of sandstone, slumped pediments with crumbled inscriptions, flagged terraces overgrown with rusty moss. Lizards, snakes, insects crawled the ruins; no other life did he see.

Threading a way through the rubble, he almost stumbled on a

corpse—the body of a youth, one who stared at the sky with empty eye-sockets.

Liane felt a presence. He leapt back, rapier half-bared. A stooped old man stood watching him. He spoke in a feeble, quavering voice: "And what will you have in the Old Town?"

Liane replaced his rapier. "I seek the Place of Whispers. Perhaps you will direct me."

The old man made a croaking sound at the back of his throat. "Another? Another? When will it cease . . ." He motioned to the corpse. "This one came yesterday seeking the Place of Whispers. He would steal from Chun the Unavoidable. See him now." He turned away. "Come with me." He disappeared over a tumble of rock.

Liane followed. The old man stood by another corpse with eye-sockets bereft and bloody. "This one came four days ago, and he met Chun the Unavoidable . . . And over there behind the arch is another still, a great warrior in cloison armor. And there—and there—" he pointed, pointed. "And there—and there—like crushed flies."

He turned his watery blue gaze back to Liane. "Return, young man, return—lest your body lie here in its green cloak to rot on the flagstones."

Liane drew his rapier and flourished it. "I am Liane the Wayfarer; let them who offend me have fear. And where is the Place of Whispers?"

"If you must know," said the old man, "it is beyond that broken obelisk. But you go to your peril."

"I am Liane the Wayfarer. Peril goes with me."

The old man stood like a piece of weathered statuary as Liane strode off.

And Liane asked himself, suppose this old man were an agent of Chun, and at this minute were on his way to warn him? . . . Best to take all precautions. He leapt up on a high entablature and ran crouching back to where he had left the ancient.

Here he came, muttering to himself, leaning on his staff. Liane dropped a block of granite as large as his head. A thud, a croak, a gasp—and Liane went his way.

He strode past the broken obelisk, into a wide court—the Place of Whispers. Directly opposite was a long wide hall, marked by a leaning column with a big black medallion, the sign of a phoenix and a two-headed lizard.

Liane merged himself with the shadow of a wall, and stood watching like a wolf, alert for any flicker of motion.

All was quiet. The sunlight invested the ruins with dreary splendor. To all sides, as far as the eye could reach, was broken stone, a wasteland leached by a thousand rains, until now the sense of man had departed and the stone was one with the natural earth.

The sun moved across the dark-blue sky. Liane presently stole from his vantage-point and circled the hall. No sight nor sign did he see.

He approached the building from the rear and pressed his ear to the stone. It was dead, without vibration. Around the side—watching up, down, to all sides; a breach in the wall. Liane peered inside. At the back hung half a golden tapestry. Otherwise the hall was empty.

Liane looked up, down, this side, that. There was nothing in sight. He continued around the hall.

He came to another broken place. He looked within. To the rear hung the golden tapestry. Nothing else, to right or left, no sight or sound.

Liane continued to the front of the hall and sought into the eaves; dead as dust.

He had a clear view of the room. Bare, barren, except for the bit of golden tapestry.

Liane entered, striding with long soft steps. He halted in the middle of the floor. Light came to him from all sides except the rear wall. There were a dozen openings from which to flee and no sound except the dull thudding of his heart.

He took two steps forward. The tapestry was almost at his fingertips.

He stepped forward and swiftly jerked the tapestry down from the wall.

And behind was Chun the Unavoidable.

Liane screamed. He turned on paralyzed legs and they were leaden, like legs in a dream which refused to run.

Chun dropped out of the wall and advanced. Over his shiny black back he wore a robe of eyeballs threaded on silk.

Liane was running, fleetly now. He sprang, he soared. The tips of his toes scarcely touched the ground. Out the hall, across the square, into the wilderness of broken statues and fallen columns. And behind came Chun, running like a dog.

Liane sped along the crest of a wall and sprang a great gap to a shattered fountain. Behind came Chun.

Liane darted up a narrow alley, climbed over a pile of refuse, over a roof, down into a court. Behind came Chun.

Liane sped down a wide avenue lined with a few stunted old cypress trees, and he heard Chun close at his heels. He turned into an archway, pulled his bronze ring over his head, down to his feet. He stepped through, brought the ring up inside the darkness. Sanctuary. He was alone in a dark magic space, vanished from earthly gaze and knowledge. Brooding silence, dead space . . .

He felt a stir behind him, a breath of air. At his elbow a voice said, "I am Chun the Unavoidable."

Lith sat on her couch near the candles, weaving a cap from frog-skins. The door to her hut was barred, the windows shuttered. Outside, Thamber Meadow dwelled in darkness.

A scrape at her door, a creak as the lock was tested. Lith became rigid and stared at the door.

A voice said, "Tonight, O Lith, tonight it is two long bright threads for you. Two because the eyes were so great, so large, so golden . . ."

Lith sat quiet. She waited an hour; then, creeping to the door, she listened. The sense of presence was gone. A frog croaked nearby.

She eased the door ajar, found the threads and closed the door. She ran to her golden tapestry and fitted the threads into the raveled warp.

And she stared at the golden valley, sick with longing for Ariventa, and tears blurred out the peaceful river, the quiet golden forest. "The cloth slowly grows wider . . . One day it will be done, and I will come home. . . ."

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