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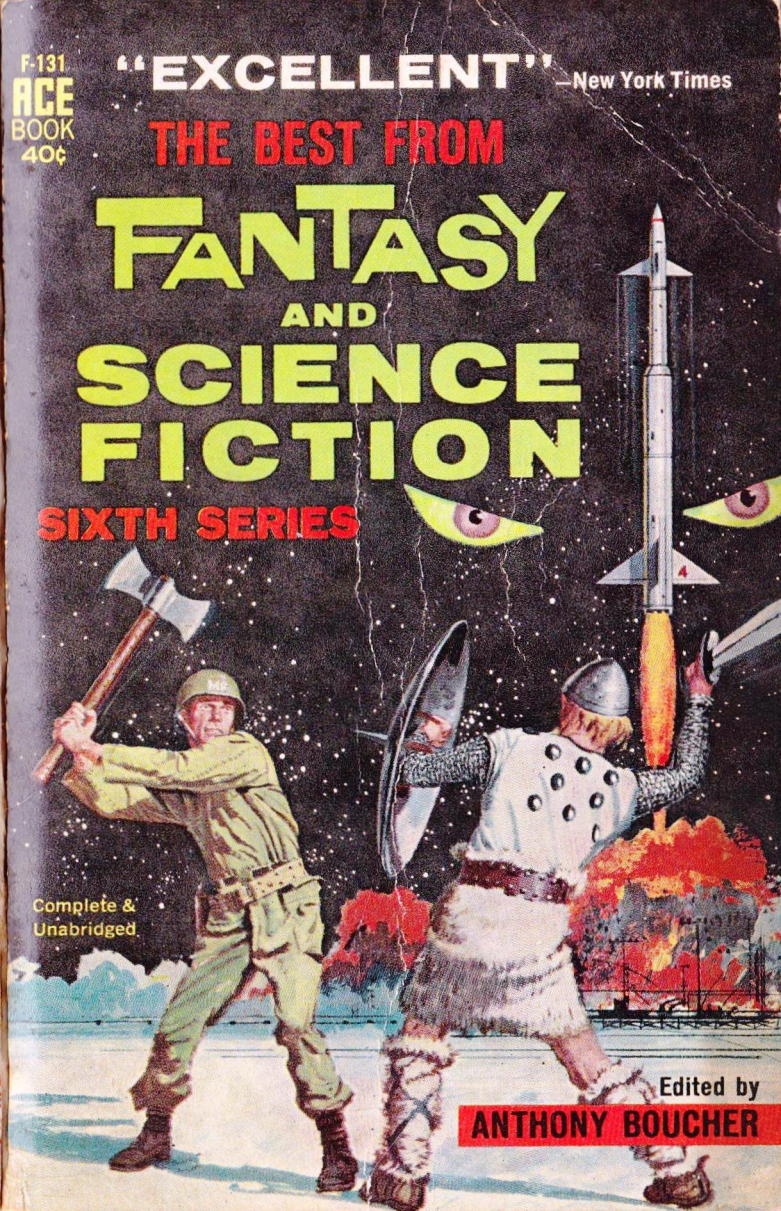

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Edited by

ANTHONY BOUCHER

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The Best From FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION

Sixth Series

Edited by

ANTHONY BOUCHER

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THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION: Sixth Series

An Ace Book, by arrangement with Doubleday & Co., Inc.

All of the characters in this book are fictitious,
and any resemblance to actual persons,
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Printed in U.S.A.

To

CONCHITA SUPERVIA

(1895-1936)

. . . rosas, llamas . . .

and, hopefully, to

the discovery of time travel

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

John W. Campbell, Jr., editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* since 1937, has probably done more toward the development of modern science fiction than any other single individual; but last year, in a rash gesture, he took the risk of completely alienating the average intelligent reader who has not yet discovered the delights of this form of imaginative literature.

Mr. Campbell wrote, in *The Saturday Review* (May 12):

"Science fiction is written by technically-minded people, about technically-minded people, for the satisfaction of technically-minded people. And these are *different* human people . . ."

Regular readers of s.f. will merely smile; but I hasten to reassure any newcomers that science fiction in general, and particularly as exemplified in this collection, is written simply by people, about people, and (one hopes) for the satisfaction of people.

The Campbell definition is true, to some extent, of a small but interesting genre-within-the-genre, which bears somewhat the same relation to s.f. as a whole that the locked-room puzzle does to the general field of the suspense novel—a limited but often brilliantly rewarding treat for specialist-connoisseurs.

In this and other overstatements (e.g., that science fiction is primarily concerned with accurate prophecy, and that any valid characterization of a scientist must, to "the standard literary critic," appear "rigid, cold-blooded, emotionless, and authoritarian-dogmatic"), Campbell was attempting to refute a series of assaults upon science fiction in the *SR*, whose editors aver that "the common charges" against s.f. are that it "is smug, dogmatic, cartoonish, and aberrant in various intellectual and psychological ways."

The rebuttal is, of course, simple: These charges are "com-

mon" only in the rarefied air breathed by *SR* editors, and even there are levelled principally by critics who feel competent to analyze an entire field of literature on the basis of a weekend's random reading.

S.f. can hold up its head even among the mandarins when it commands the support of such arbiters as Clifton Fadiman, Gilbert Highet, Jean Cocteau, and Martha Foley (who has included stories from F&SF in the two most recent volumes of her annual *Best American Short Stories*).

But most modern science fiction is not aimed primarily at the intellectual, any more than it is addressed strictly to the "technically-minded." The stories here collected are intended simply for the reader who wants entertainment . . . and finds entertainment rather more enlivening with a little imaginative stimulus thrown in, and even a touch of provocative thinking about Man and his problems, present and to come.

You'll find deliberately cartoonish moments here, and I hope they amuse you. You'll certainly find much that is intellectually aberrant; there is, thank God, nothing that the science fiction writer (and reader) more detests than stiff intellectual conformity.

But in the wide range here presented, from short-short stories to novelets, from parody to tragedy, from quiet fantasy to lively interstellar adventure, from the distant past to the even more remote future, from young novice to established major writer, I hope you'll not find a word that seems smug or dogmatic, or a thought intelligible only to the "technically-minded."

These fifteen stories are by and for people, and above all about people. Enjoy them.

ANTHONY BOUCHER

Berkeley, California

C.M. KORNBLUTH

Other publications in the science fiction field have introduced you to dianetics, deros, and denizens of antigravitic saucers; pleased and proud at last to present a comparable discovery: Functional Epistemology. In this characteristic blend of sharp satire and fast action, Cyril Kornbluth offers the ultimate in how-to publications of faintly occult selfhelp; but be sure to finish the story before deciding whether it would be advisable for You, Too (Send No Cash!), to Learn How to Live on

THE COSMIC EXPENSE ACCOUNT

THE LACKAWANNA was still running one cautious morning train a day into Scranton, though the city was said to be emptying fast. Professor Leuten and I had a coach to ourselves, except for a scared, jittery trainman who hung around and talked at us.

"The name's Pech," he said. "And let me tell you, the Peches have been around for a mighty long time in these parts. There's a town twenty-three miles north of Scranton named Pechville. Full of my cousins and aunts and uncles, and I used to visit there and we used to send picture post cards and get them, too. But my God, mister, what's happened to them?"

His question was rhetorical. He didn't realize that Professor Leuten and I happened to be the only two people outside the miscalled Plague Area who could probably answer it.

"Mr. Pech," I said, "if you don't mind we'd like to talk some business."

"Sorry," he said miserably, and went on to the next car.

When we were alone Professor Leuten remarked: "An interesting reaction." He was very smooth about it. Without the slightest warning he whipped a huge, writhing, hairy spider from his pocket and thrust it at my face.

I was fast on the draw too. In one violent fling I was standing on my left foot in the aisle, thumbing my nose, my tongue stuck out. Goose flesh rippled down my neck and shoulders.

"Very good," he said, and put the spider away. It was damnably realistic. Even knowing that it was a gadget of twisted springs and plush, I cringed at the thought of its nestling in his pocket. With me it was spiders. With the professor it was rats and asphyxiation. Toward the end of our mutual training program it took only one part per million of sulfur dioxide gas in his vicinity to send him whirling into the posture of defense, cranelike on one leg, tongue out and thumb to nose, the sweat of terrror on his brow.

"I have something to tell you, Professor," I said.

"So?" he asked tolerantly. And that did it. The tolerance. I had been prepared to make my point with a dignified recital and apology, but there were two ways to tell the story and I suddenly chose the second.

"You're a phony," I said with satisfaction.

"*What?*" he gasped.

"A phony. A fake. A hoaxer. A self-deluding crackpot. Your Functional Epistemology is a farce. Let's not go into this thing kidding ourselves."

His accent thickened a little. "Led me remind you, Mr. Norris, that you are addressing a doctor of philosophy of the University of Göttingen and a member of the faculty of the University of Basle."

"You mean a *Privatdozent* who teaches freshman logic. And I seem to remember that Göttingen revoked your degree."

He said slowly: "I have known all along that you were a fool, Mr. Norris. Not until now did I realize that you are also

an anti-Semite. It was the Nazis who went through an illegal ceremony of revocation."

"So that makes me an anti-Semite. From a teacher of logic that's very funny."

"You are correct," he said after a long pause. "I withdraw my remark. Now, would you be good enough to amplify yours?"

"Gladly, Professor. In the first place——"

I had been winding up the rubber rat in my pocket. I yanked it out and tossed it into his lap where it scrabbled and clawed. He yelled with terror, but the yell didn't cost him a split second. Almost before it started from his throat he was standing one-legged, thumb to nose, tongue stuck out.

He thanked me coldly, I congratulated him coldly, I pocketed the rat while he shuddered and we went on with the conversation.

I told him how, eighteen months ago, Mr. Hopedale called me into his office. Nice office, oak panels, signed pictures of Hopedale Press writers from our glorious past: Kipling, Barrie, Theodore Roosevelt and the rest of the backlog boys.

What about Eino Elekinen, Mr. Hopedale wanted to know. Eino was one of our novelists. His first, *Vinland the Good*, had been a critical success and a popular flop; *Cubs of the Viking Breed*, the sequel, made us all a little money. He was now a month past delivery date on the final volume of the trilogy and the end was not in sight.

"I think he's pulling a sit-down strike, Mr. Hopedale. He's way overdrawn now and I had to refuse him a thousand-dollar advance. He wanted to send his wife to the Virgin Islands for a divorce."

"Give him the money," Mr. Hopedale said impatiently. "How can you expect the man to write when he's beset by personal difficulties?"

"Mr. Hopedale," I said politely, "she could divorce him right in New York State. He's given her grounds in all five boroughs and the western townships of Long Island. But that's not the point. He can't write. And even if he could,

the last thing American literature needs right now is another trilogy about a Scandinavian immigrant family."

"I know," he said. "I know. He's not very good yet. But I think he's going to be, and do you want him to starve while he's getting the juvenilia out of his system?" His next remark had nothing to do with Elekinen. He looked at the signed photo of T.R. — *"To a bully publisher"* — and said: "Norris, we're broke."

I said: "Ah?"

"We owe everybody. Printer, paper mill, warehouse. Everybody. It's the end of Hopedale Press. Unless—I don't want you to think people have been reporting on you, Norris, but I understand you came up with an interesting idea at lunch yesterday. Some Swiss professor."

I had to think hard. "You must mean Leuten, Mr. Hopedale. No, there's nothing in it for us, sir. I was joking. My brother—he teaches philosophy at Columbia — mentioned him to me. Leuten's a crackpot. Every year or two Weintraub Verlag in Basle brings out another volume of his watchamacallit and they sell about a thousand. Functional Epistemology — my brother says it's all nonsense, the kind of stuff vanity presses put out. It was just a gag about us turning him into a Schweitzer or a Toynbee and bringing out a one-volume condensation. People just buy his books — I suppose — because they got started and feel ashamed to stop."

Mr. Hopedale said: "Do it, Norris. Do it. We can scrape together enough cash for one big promotion and then — the end. I'm going to see Brewster of Commercial Factors in the morning. I believe he will advance us sixty-five per cent on our accounts receivable." He tried on a cynical smile. It didn't become him. "Norris, you are what is technically called a Publisher's Bright Young Man. We can get seven-fifty for a scholarly book. With luck and promotion we can sell in the hundred thousands. Get on it." I nodded, feeling sick, and started out. Mr. Hopedale said in a tired voice: "And it might actually be work of some inspirational value."

Professor Leuten sat and listened, red-faced, breathing hard. "You betrayer," he said at last. "You with the smiling

face that came to Basle, that talked of lectures in America, that told me to sign your damnable contract. My face on the cover of the *Time* magazine that looks like a monkey, the idiotic interviews, the press releasements in my name that I never saw. America, I thought, and held my tongue. But — from the beginning — it was — a lie!" He buried his face in his hands and muttered: "*Ach!* You stink!"

That reminded me. I took a small stench-bomb from my pocket and crushed it.

He leaped up, balanced on one leg and thumbed his nose. His tongue was out four inches and he was panting with the terror of asphyxiation.

"Very good," I said.

"Thank you. I suchest we move to the other end of the car."

We and our luggage were settled before he began to breathe normally. I judged that the panic and most of his anger had passed. "Professor," I said cautiously, "I've been thinking of what we do when — and if — we find Miss Phoebe."

"We shall complete her reeducation," he said. "We shall point out that her unleashed powers have been dysfunctionally applied."

"I can think of something better to do than completing her reeducation. It's why I spoke a little harshly. Presumably Miss Phoebe considers you the greatest man in the world."

He smiled reminiscently and I knew what he was thinking.

La Plume, Pa.
Wednesday
4 A.M. (!)

Professor Konrad Leuten
c/o The Hopedale Press
New York City, New York

My Dear Professor,

Though you are a famous and busy man I do hope you will take time to read a few words of *grateful*

tribute from an old lady (eighty-four). I have just finished your magnificent and inspirational book *How to Live on the Cosmic Expense Account: an Introduction to Functional Epistemology.*

Professor, I *believe.* I *know* every splendid word in your book is *true.* If there is one chapter finer than the others it is No. 9, "How to be in Utter Harmony with Your Environment." The Twelve Rules in that chapter shall from this *minute* be my guiding light, and I shall practice them *faithfully* forever.

Your grateful friend,
(Miss) Phoebe Bancroft

That flattering letter reached us on Friday, one day after the papers reported with amusement or dismay the "blackout" of La Plume, Pennsylvania. The term "Plague Area" came later.

"I suppose she might," said the professor.

"Well, think about it."

The train slowed for a turn. I noticed that the track was lined with men and women. And some of them, by God, were leaping for the moving train! Brakes went on with a squeal and jolt; my nose bashed against the seat in front of us.

"Aggression," the professor said, astonished. "But that is not in the pattern!"

We saw the trainman in the vestibule opening the door to yell at the trackside people. He was trampled as they swarmed aboard, filling, jamming the car in a twinkling.

"Got to Scranton," we heard them saying. "Zombies——"

"I get it," I shouted at the professor over their hubbub. "These are refugees from Scranton. They must have blocked the track. Right now they're probably bullying the engineer into backing up all the way to Wilkes-Barre. We've got to get off!"

"*Ja,*" he said. We were in an end seat. By elbowing, crowding, and a little slugging we got to the vestibule and dropped to the tracks. The professor lost all his luggage in

the brief, fierce struggle. I saved only my brief case. The powers of Hell itself were not going to separate me from that brief case.

Hundreds of yelling, milling people were trying to climb aboard. Some made it to the roofs of the cars after it was physically impossible for one more body to be fitted inside. The locomotive uttered a despairing toot and the train began to back up.

"Well," I said, "we head north."

We found U. S. 6 after a short overland hike and trudged along the concrete. There was no traffic. Everybody with a car had left Scranton days ago, and nobody was going into Scranton. Except us.

We saw our first zombie where a signpost told us it was three miles to the city. She was a woman in a Mother Hubbard and sunbonnet. I couldn't tell whether she was young or old, beautiful or a hag. She gave us a sweet, empty smile and asked if we had any food. I said no. She said she wasn't complaining about her lot but she *was* hungry, and of course the vegetables and things were *so* much better now that they weren't poisoning the soil with those dreadful chemical fertilizers. Then she said maybe there might be something to eat down the road, wished us a pleasant good day and went on.

The professor said: "I believe that is a contribution by the Duchess of Carbondale to Miss Phoebe's reign. Several interviews mention it." We walked on. I could read his mind like a book. *He hasn't even read the interviews. He is a foolish, an impossible young man. And yet he is here, he has undergone a rigorous course of training, he is after all risking a sort of death. Why?* I let him go on wondering. The answer was in my brief case.

"When do you think we'll be in range?" I asked.

"Heaven knows," he said testily.

"Too many variables. Maybe it's different when she sleeps, maybe it grows at different rates varying as the number of people affected. I feel nothing yet."

"Neither do I."

And when we felt something — specifically, when we felt Miss Phoebe Bancroft practicing the Twelve Rules of "How to be in Utter Harmony with Your Environment" — we would do something completely idiotic, something that had got us thrown — literally *thrown* — out of the office of the Secretary of Defense.

He had thundered at us: "Are you two trying to make a fool of me? Are you proposing that soldiers of the United States Army undergo a three-month training course *in sticking out their tongues and thumbing their noses?*" He was quivering with elevated blood pressure. Two M.P. lieutenants collared us under his personal orders and tossed us down the Pentagon steps when we were unable to deny that he had stated our proposal more or less correctly.

And so squads, platoons, companies, battalions and regiments marched into the Plague Area and never marched out again.

Some soldiers stumbled out as zombies. After a few days spent at a sufficient distance from the Plague Area their minds cleared and they told their confused stories. Something came over them, they said. A mental fuzziness almost impossible to describe. They liked it where they were, for instance; they left the Plague Area only by accident. They were wrapped in a vague, silly contentment even when they were hungry, which was usually. What was life like in the Plague Area? Well, not much happened. You wandered around looking for food. A lot of people looked sick but seemed to be contented. Farmers in the area gave you food with the universal silly smile, but their crops were very poor. Animal pests got most of them. Nobody seemed to eat meat. Nobody quarreled or fought or ever said a harsh word in the Plague Area. And it was hell on earth. Nothing conceivable could induce any of them to return.

The Duchess of Carbondale? Yes, sometimes she came driving by in her chariot, wearing fluttery robes and a golden crown. Everybody bowed down to her. She was a big, fat middle-aged woman with rimless glasses and a pinched look of righteous triumph on her face.

The recovered zombies at first were quarantined and doctors made their wills before going to examine them. This proved to be unnecessary and the examinations proved to be fruitless. No bacteria, no Rickettsia, no viruses. Nothing. Which didn't stop them from continuing in the assumption embodied in the official name of the affected counties.

Professor Leuten and I knew better, of course. For knowing better we were thrown out of offices, declined interviews and once almost locked up as lunatics. That was when we tried to get through to the President direct. The Secret Service, I am able to testify, guards our Chief Executive with a zeal that borders on ferocity.

"How goes the book?" Professor Leuten asked abruptly.

"Third hundred thousand. Why? Want an advance?"

I don't understand German, but I can recognize deep, heart-felt profanity in any language. He spluttered and crackled for almost a full minute before he snarled in English: "Idiots! Dolts! Out of almost one third of a million readers, exactly one had *read* the book!"

I wanted to defer comment on that. "There's a car," I said. "Obviously it stalled and was abandoned by a refugee from Scranton."

"Let's have a look anyway." It was a battered old Ford sedan halfway off the pavement. The rear was full of canned goods and liquor. Somebody had been looting. I pushed the starter and cranked for a while; the motor didn't catch.

"Useless," said the professor. I ignored him, yanked the dashboard hood button and got out to inspect the guts. There was air showing on top of the gas in the sediment cup.

"We ride, Professor," I told him. "I know these babies and their fuel pumps. The car quit on the upgrade there and he let it roll back." I unscrewed the clamp of the carburetor air filter, twisted the filter off and heaved it into the roadside bushes. The professor, of course was a "mere-machinery" boy with the true European intellectual's contempt for greasy hands. He stood by haughtily while I poured a bottle of gin empty, found a wrench in the toolbox that fit the gas-tank drain plug and refilled the gin bottle with gasoline. He con-

descended to sit behind the wheel and crank the motor from time to time while I sprinkled gas into the carburetor. Each time the motor coughed there was less air showing in the sediment cup; finally the motor caught for good. I moved him over, tucked my brief case in beside me, U-turned on the broad, empty highway and we chugged north into Scranton.

It was only natural that he edged away from me, I suppose. I was grimy from working under the gas tank. This plus the discreditable ability I had shown in starting the stalled car reminded him that he was, after all, a Herr Doktor from a *real* university while I was, after all, a publisher's employee with nebulous qualifications from some place called Cornell. The atmosphere was wrong for it, but sooner or later he had to be told.

"Professor, we've got to have a talk and get something straight before we find Miss Phoebe."

He looked at the huge striped sign the city fathers of Scranton wisely erected to mark that awful downgrade into the city. WARNING! SEVEN-MILE DEATH TRAP AHEAD. SHIFT INTO LOWER GEAR. $50 FINE. OBEY OR PAY!

"What is there to get straight?" he demanded. "She has partially mastered Functional Epistemology — even though Hopedale Press prefers to call it 'Living on the Cosmic Expense Account.' This has unleashed certain latent powers of hers. It is simply our task to complete her mastery of the ethical aspect of F.E. She will cease to dominate other minds as soon as she comprehends that her behavior is dysfunctional and in contravention of the Principle of Permissive Evolution." To him the matter was settled. He mused: "Really I should not have let you cut so drastically my exposition of Dyadic Imbalance; that must be the root of her difficulty. A brief inductive explanation——"

"Professor," I said, "I thought I told you in the train that you're a fake."

He corrected me loftily. "You told me that you *think* I'm a fake, Mr. Norris. Naturally I was angered by your dup-

licity, but your opinion of me proves nothing. I ask you to look around you. Is this fakery?"

We were well into the city. Bewildered dogs yelped at our car. Windows were broken and goods were scattered on the sidewalks; here and there a house was burning brightly. Smashed and overturned cars dotted the streets, and zombies walked slowly around them. When Miss Phoebe hit a city the effects were something like a thousand-bomber raid.

"It's not fakery," I said, steering around a smiling man in a straw hat and overalls. "It isn't Functional Epistemology either. It's *faith* in Functional Epistemology. It could have been faith in anything, but your book just happened to be what she settled on."

"Are you *daring*," he demanded, white to the lips, "to compare me with the faith healers?"

"Yes," I said wearily. "They get their cures. So do lots of people. Let's roll it up in a ball, Professor. I think the best thing to do when we meet Miss Phoebe is for you to tell her you're a fake. Destroy her faith in you and your system and I think she'll turn back into a normal old lady again. Wait a minute! Don't tell me you're not a fake. I can prove you are. You say she's partly mastered F.E. and gets her powers from that partial mastery. Well, presumably you've completely mastered F.E., since you invented it. So why can't you do everything she's done, and lots more? Why can't you end this mess by levitating to La Plume, instead of taking the Lackawanna and a 1941 Ford? And, by God, why couldn't you fix the Ford with a pass of the hands and F.E. instead of standing by while I worked?"

His voice was genuinely puzzled. "I thought I just explained, Norris. Though it never occurred to me before, I suppose I could do what you say, but I wouldn't dream of it. As I said, it would be dysfunctional and in complete contravention of the Principle of Permissive——"

I said something very rude and added: "In short, you can but you won't."

"Naturally not! The Principle of Permissive——" He looked at me with slow awareness dawning in his eyes.

"Norris! My editor. My proofreader. My by-the-publisher-officially-assigned *fidus Achates*. Norris, haven't *you* read my book?"

"No," I said shortly. "I've been much too busy. You didn't get on the cover of *Time* magazine by blind chance, you know."

He was laughing helplessly. "How goes that song," he finally asked me, his eyes damp, " 'God Bless America'?"

I stopped the car abruptly. "I think I feel something," I said. "Professor, I like you."

"I like you too, Norris," he told me. "Norris, my boy, what do you think of ladies?"

"Delicate creatures. Custodians of culture. Professor, what about meat eating?"

"Shocking barbarous survival. *This is it, Norris!*"

We yanked open the doors and leaped out. We stood on one foot each, thumbed our noses, and stuck out our tongues.

Allowing for the time on the train, this was the 1,961st time I had done it in the past two months. One thousand, nine hundred and sixty-one times the professor had arranged for spiders to pop out at me from books, from the television screen, from under steaks, from desk drawers, from my pockets, from his. Black widows, tarantulas, harmless (*hah!*) big house spiders, real and imitation. One thousand, nine hundred and sixty-one times I had felt the arachnophobe's horrified revulsion. Each time I felt it I had thrown major voluntary muscular systems into play by drawing up one leg violently, violently swinging my hand to my nose, violently grimacing to stick out my tongue.

My body had learned at last. There was no spider this time; there was only Miss Phoebe: a vague pleasant feeling something like the first martini. But my posture of defense this 1,962nd time was accompanied by the old rejection and horror. It had no spider, so it turned on Miss Phoebe. The vague first-martini feeling vanished like morning mist burned away by the sun.

I relaxed cautiously. On the other side of the car so did

Professor Leuten. "Professor," I said, "I don't like you any more."

"Thank you," he said coldly. "Nor do I like you."

"I guess we're back to normal," I said. "Climb in." He climbed in and we started off. I grudgingly said: "Congratulations."

"Because it worked? Don't be ridiculous. It was to be expected that a plan of campaign derived from the principles of Functional Epistemology would be successful. All that was required was that you be at least as smart as one of Professor Pavlov's dogs, and I admit I considered that hypothesis the weak link in my chain of reasoning. . . ."

We stopped for a meal from the canned stuff in the back of the car about one o'clock and then chugged steadily north through the ruined countryside. The little towns were wrecked and abandoned. Presumably refugees from the expanding Plague Area did the first damage by looting; the subsequent destruction just — happened. It showed you what would just happen to any twentieth-century town or city in the course of a few weeks if the people who wage endless war against breakdown and dilapidation put aside their arms. It was anybody's guess whether fire or water had done more damage.

Between the towns the animals were incredibly bold. There was a veritable army of rabbits eating their way across a field of clover. A farmer-zombie flapped a patchwork quilt at them, saying affectionately: "Shoo, little bunnies! Go away, now! I *mean* it!"

But they knew he didn't and continued to chew their way across his field.

I stopped the car and called to the farmer. He came right away, smiling. "The little dickenses!" he said, waving at the rabbits. "But I haven't the heart to really scare them."

"Are you happy?" I asked him.

"Oh yes!" His eyes were sunken and bright; his cheekbones showed on his starved face. "People should be considerate, he said. "I always say that being considerate is what matters most."

"Don't you miss electricity and cars and tractors?"

"Goodness, no. I always say that things were better in the old days. Life was more gracious, I always say. Why, I don't miss gasoline or electricity one little bit. Everybody's so considerate and gracious that it makes up for everything."

"I wonder if you'd be so considerate and gracious as to lie down in the road so we can drive over you?"

He looked mildly surprised and started to get down, saying: "Well, if it would afford you gentlemen any pleasure—"

"No; don't bother after all. You can get back to your rabbits."

He touched his straw hat and went away, beaming. We drove on. I said to the professor: "Chapter Nine: 'How to be in Utter Harmony with Your Environment.' Only she didn't change herself, Professor Leuten; she changed the environment. Every man and woman in the Area is what Miss Phoebe thinks they ought to be: silly, sentimental, obliging and gracious to the point of idiocy. Nostalgic and all thumbs when it comes to this dreadful machinery."

"Norris," the professor said thoughtfully, "we've been associated for some time. I think you might drop the 'professor' and call me 'Leuten.' In a way we're friends—"

I jammed on the worn, mushy brakes. "Out!" I yelled, and we piled out. The silly glow was enveloping me fast. Again, thumb to nose and tongue out, I burned it away. When I looked at the professor and was quite sure he was a stubborn old fossil I knew I was all right again. When he glared at me and snapped: "Naturally I withdraw my last remark, Norris, and no chentleman would hold me to it," I knew *he* was normal. We got in and kept going north.

The devastation became noticeably worse after we passed a gutted, stinking shambles that had once been the town of Meshoppen, Pa. After Meshoppen there were more bodies on the road and the flies became a horror. No pyrethrum from Kenya. No DDT from Wilmington. We drove in the afternoon heat with the windows cranked up and the hood ventilator closed. It was at about Meshoppen's radius from La Plume that things had stabilized for a while and the Army Engin-

eers actually began to throw up barbed wire. Who knew what happened then? Perhaps Miss Phoebe recovered from a slight cold, or perhaps she told herself firmly that her faith in Professor Leuten's wonderful book was weakening; that she must take hold of herself and really work *hard* at being in utter harmony with her environment. The next morning — no Army Engineers. Zombies in uniform were glimpsed wandering about and smiling. The next morning the radius of the Plague Area was growing at the old mile a day.

I wanted distraction from the sweat that streamed down my face. "Professor," I said, "do you remember the last word in Miss Phoebe's letter? It was 'forever.' Do you suppose . . .?"

"Immortality? Yes; I think that is well within the range of misapplied F.E. Of course complete mastery of F.E. ensures that no such selfish power would be invoked. The beauty of F.E. is its conservatism, in the kinetic sense. It is self-regulating. A world in which universal mastery of F.E. has been achieved—and I now perceive that the publication of my views by the Hopedale Press was if anything a step *away* from that ideal—would be in no outward wise different from the present world."

"Built-in escape clause," I snapped. "Like yoga. You ask 'em to prove they've achieved self-mastery, just a litte demonstration like levitating or turning transparent, but they're all ready for you. They tell you they've achieved so much self-mastery they've mastered the desire to levitate or turn transparent. I almost wish I'd read your book, Professor, instead of just editing it. Maybe you're smarter than I thought."

He turned brick red and gritted out: "Your insults merely bore me, Norris."

The highway took a turn and we turned with it. I braked again and rubbed my eyes. "Do you see them?" I asked the professor.

"Yes," he said matter-of-factly. "This must be the retinue of the Duchess of Carbondale."

They were a dozen men shoulder to shoulder barricading the road. They were armed with miscellaneous sporting rifles

and one bazooka. They wore kiltlike garments and what seemed to be bracelets from a five-and ten. When we stopped they opened up the center of the line and the Duchess of Carbondale drove through in her chariot—only the chariot was a harness-racing sulky and she didn't drive it; the horse was led by a skinny teen-age girl got up as Charmian for a high-school production of *Antony and Cleopatra*. The Duchess herself wore ample white robes, a tiara and junk jewelry. She looked like your unfavorite aunt, the fat one, or a grade-school teacher you remember with loathing when you're forty, or one of those women who ring your doorbell and try to bully you into signing petitions against fluoridation or atheism in the public schools.

The bazooka man had his stovepipe trained on our hood. His finger was on the button and he was waiting for the Duchess to nod. "Get out," I told the professor, grabbing my brief case. He looked at the bazooka and we got out.

"Hail, O mortals," said the Duchess.

I looked helplessly at the professor. Not even my extensive experience with lady novelists had equipped me to deal with the situation. He, however, was able to take the ball. He was a European and he had status and that's the starting point for them: establish status and then conduct yourself accordingly. He said: "Madame, my name is Konrad Leuten. I am a doctor of philosophy of the University of Göttingen and a member of the faculty of the University of Basle. Whom have I the honor to address?"

Her eyes narrowed appraisingly. "O mortal," she said, and her voice was less windily dramatic, "know ye that here in the New Lemuria wordly titles are as naught. And know ye not that the pure hearts of my subjects may not be sullied by base machinery?"

"I didn't know, madame," Leuten said politely. "I apolgize. We intended, however, to go only as far as La Plume. May we have your permission to do so?"

At the mention of La Plume she went poker-faced. After a moment she waved at the bazooka man. "Destroy, O Phrax-anartes, the base machine of the strangers," she said. Phrax-

anartes touched the button of his stovepipe. Leuten and I jumped for the ditch, my hand welded to the brief case handle, when the rocket whooshed into the poor old Ford's motor. We huddled there while the gas tank boomed and cans and bottles exploded. The noise subsided to a crackling roar and the whizzing fragments stopped coming our way after maybe a minute. I put my head up first. The Duchess and her retinue were gone, presumably melted into the roadside stand of trees.

Her windy contralto blasted out: "Arise, O strangers, and join us."

Leuten said from the ditch: "A perfectly reasonable request, Norris. Let us do so. After all, one must be obliging."

"And gracious," I added.

Good old Duchess! I thought. *Good old Leuten! Wonderful old world, with hills and trees and bunnies and kittens and considerate people . . .*

Leuten was standing on one foot, thumbing his nose, sticking out his tongue, screaming: "Norris! Norris! Defend yourself!" He was slapping my face with his free hand. Sluggishly I went into the posture of defense, thinking: *Such nonsense. Defense against what? But I wouldn't hurt old Leuten's feelings for the world—*

Adrenalin boiled through my veins, triggered by the posture. Spiders. Crawling, hairy, horrid spiders with purple, venom-dripping fangs. They hid in your shoes and bit you and your feet swelled with the poison. Their sticky, loathsome webs brushed across your face when you walked in the dark and they came scuttling silently, champing their jaws, winking their evil gemlike eyes. *Spiders!*

The voice of the Duchess blared impatiently: "I said, join us, O strangers. Well, what are you waiting for?"

The professor and I relaxed and looked at each other. "She's mad," the professor said softly. "From an asylum."

"I doubt it. You don't know America very well. Maybe you lock them up when they get like that in Europe; over here we elect them chairlady of the Library Fund Drive. If we don't, we never hear the end of it."

The costumed girl was leading the Duchess's sulky onto the road again. Some of her retinue were beginning to follow; she waved them back and dismissed the girl curtly. We skirted the heat of the burning car and approached her. It was that or try to outrun a volley from the miscellaneous sporting rifles.

"O strangers," she said, "you mentioned La Plume. Do you happen to be acquainted with my dear friend Phoebe Bancroft?"

The professor nodded before I could stop him. But almost simultaneously with his nod I was dragging the Duchess from her improvised chariot. It was very unpleasant, but I put my hands around her throat and knelt on her. It meant letting go of the brief case but it was worth it.

She guggled and floundered and managed to whoop: "Don't shoot! I take it back, don't shoot them. Pamphilius, don't shoot, you might hit me!"

"Send 'em away," I told her.

"Never! she blared. "They are my loyal retainers."

"You try, Professor," I said.

I believe what he put on then was his classroom manner. He stiffened and swelled and rasped toward the shrubbery: "Come out at once. All of you."

They came out, shambling and puzzled. They realized that something was very wrong. There was the Duchess on the ground and she wasn't telling them what to do the way she'd been telling them for weeks now. They wanted to oblige her in any little way they could, like shooting strangers, or scrounging canned food for her, but how could they oblige her while she lay there, slowly turning purple? It was very confusing. Luckily there was somebody else to oblige, the professor.

"Go away," he barked at them. "Go far away. We do not need you any more. And throw away your guns."

Well, that was something a body could understand. They smiled and threw away their guns and went away in their obliging and considerate fashion.

I eased up on the Duchess's throat. "What was that guff about the New Lemuria?" I asked her.

"You're a rude and ignorant young man," she snapped. From the corner of my eye I could see the professor involuntarily nodding agreement. "Every educated person knows that the lost wisdom of Lemuria was to be revived in the person of a beautiful priestess this year. According to the science of pyramidology——"

Beautiful priestess? Oh.

The professor and I stood by while she spouted an amazing compost of lost-continentism, the Ten Tribes, anti fluoridation, vegetarianism, homeopathic medicine, organic farming, astrology, flying saucers, and the prose poem of Kahlil Gibran.

The professor said dubiously at last: "I suppose one must call her a sort of Cultural Diffusionist. . . ." He was happier when he had her classified. He went on: "I think you know Miss Phoebe Bancroft. We wish you to present us to her as soon as possible."

"Professor," I complained, "we have a road map and we can find La Plume. And once we've found La Plume I don't think it'll be very hard to find Miss Phoebe."

"I will be pleased to accompany you," said the Duchess. "Though normally I frown on mechanical devices, I keep an automobile nearby in case—in case of—*well!* Of all the *rude—!*"

Believe it or not, she was speechless. Nothing in her rich store of gibberish and hate seemed to fit the situation. Anti fluoridation, organic farming, even Khalil Gibran were irrelevant in the face of us two each standing on one leg, thumbing our noses, and sticking out our tongues.

Undeniably the posture of defense was losing efficiency. It took longer to burn away the foolish glow. . . .

"Professor," I asked after we warily relaxed, "how many more of those can we take?"

He shrugged. "That is why a guide will be useful," he said. "Madame, I believe you mentioned an automobile."

"I know!" she said brightly. "It was asana yoga, wasn't it? Postures, I mean?"

The professor sucked an invisible lemon. "No, madame," he said cadaverously. "It was neither siddhasana nor padmasana. Yoga has been subsumed under Functional Epistemology, as has every other working philosophical system, Eastern and Western—but we waste time. The automobile?"

"You have to do that every so often, is that it?"

"We will leave it at that, madame. The automobile, please."

"Come right along," she said gaily. I didn't look on her face. Madam Chairlady was about to spring a parliamentary coup. But I got my brief case and followed.

The car was in a nearby barn. It was a handsome new Lincoln, and I was reasonably certain that our fair cicerone had stolen it. But then, we had stolen the Ford.

I loaded the brief case in and took the wheel over her objections and we headed for La Plume, a dozen miles away. On the road she yelped: "Oh, *Functional* Epistemology—and *you're* Professor *Leuten!*"

"Yes, madame," he wearily agreed.

"I've read your book, of course. So has Miss Bancroft; she'll be so pleased to see you."

"Then why, madame, did you order your subjects to murder us?"

"Well, Professor, of course I didn't know who you were then, and it *was* rather shocking, seeing somebody in a car. I, ah, had the feeling that you were up to no good, especially when you mentioned dear Miss Bancroft. *She*, you know, is really responsible for the re-emergence of the New Lemuria."

"Indeed?" said the professor. "You understand, then, about Leveled Personality Interflow!" He was beaming.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Leveled Personality Interflow!" he barked. "Chapter Nine!"

"Oh. In your book, of course. Well, as a matter of fact I *skipped*—"

"Another one" muttered the professor, leaning back.

The Duchess chattered on: "Dear Miss Bancroft, of course, swears by your book. But you were asking—no, it wasn't

what you said. I cast her horoscope and it turned out that *she* is the Twenty-seventh Pendragon!"

"*Scheissdreck,*" the professor mumbled, too discouraged to translate.

"So naturally, Professor, she incarnates Taliesin *spiritually* and"—a modest giggle—"you know who incarnates it *materially*. Which is only sensible, since I'm descended from the high priestesses of Mu. Little did I think when I was running the Wee Occult Book Shoppe in Carbondale!"

"*Ja,*" said the professor. He made an effort. "Madame, tell me something. Do you never feel a certain thing, a sense of friendliness and intoxication and good will enveloping you quite suddenly?"

"Oh, *that,*" she said scornfully. "Yes; every now and then. It doesn't bother me. I just think of all the work I have to do. How I must stamp out the dreadful, soul-destroying advocates of meat eating, and chemical fertilizer, and fluoridation. How I must wage the good fight for occult science and *crush* the materialistic philosophers. How I must tear down our corrupt and self-seeking ministers and priests, our rotten laws and customs—"

"*Lieber Gott,*" the professor marveled as she went on. "With Norris it is spiders. With me it is rats and asphyxiation. But with this woman it is apparently everything in the Kosmos except her own revolting self!" She didn't hear him; she was demanding that the voting age for women be lowered to sixteen and for men raised to thirty-five.

We plowed through flies and mosquitoes like smoke. The flies bred happily on dead cows and *in* sheep which unfortunately were still alive. There wasn't oil cake for the cows in the New Lemuria. There wasn't sheep-dip for the sheep. There weren't state and county and township and village road crews constantly patrolling, unplugging sluices, clearing gutters, replacing rusted culverts, and so quite naturally the countryside was reverting to swampland. The mosquitoes loved it.

"La Plume," the Duchess announced gaily. "And that's Miss

Phoebe Bancroft's little house right there. Just *why* did you wish to see her, Professor, by the way?"

"To complete her re-education . . ." the professor said in a tired voice.

Miss Phoebe's house, and the few near it, were the only places we had seen in the Area which weren't blighted by neglect. Miss Phoebe, of course, was able to tell the shambling zombies what to do in the way of truck gardening, lawn mowing and maintenance. The bugs weren't too bad there.

"She's probably resting, poor dear," said the Duchess. I stopped the car and we got out. The Duchess said something about Kleenex and got in again and rummaged through the glove compartment.

"Please, Professor," I said, clutching my brief case. "Play it the smart way. The way I told you."

"Norris," he said, "I realize that you have my best interests at heart. You're a good boy, Norris and I like you——"

"Watch it!" I yelled, and swung into the posture of defense. So did he.

Spiders. It wasn't a good old world, not while there were loathsome spiders in it. *Spiders——*

And a bullet shot past my ear. The professor fell. I turned and saw the Duchess looking smug, about to shoot me too. I side-stepped and she missed; as I slapped the automatic out of her hand I thought confusedly that it was a near miracle, her hitting the professor at five paces even if he was a standing target. People don't realize how hard it is to hit a*nything* with a hand gun.

I suppose I was going to kill her or at least damage her badly when a new element intruded. A little old white-haired lady tottering down the neat gravel path from the house. She wore a nice pastel dress which surprised me; somehow I had always thought of her in black.

"Bertha!" Miss Phoebe, rapped out. "What have you done?"

The Duchess simpered. "That man there was going to harm you, Phoebe, dear. And this fellow is just as bad——"

Miss Phoebe said: "Nonsense. Nobody can harm me.

Chapter Nine, Rule Seven. Bertha, I saw you shoot that gentleman. I'm very angry with you, Bertha. Very angry."

The Duchess turned up her eyes and crumpled. I didn't have to check; I was sure she was dead. Miss Phoebe was once again in Utter Harmony with Her Environment.

I went over and knelt beside the professor. He had a hole in his stomach and was still breathing. There wasn't much blood. I sat down and cried. For the professor. For the poor damned human race which at a mile per day would be gobbled up into apathy and idiocy. Good-by, Newton and Einstein, good-by steak dinners and Michelangelo and Tenzing Norkay; good-by Moses, Rodin, Kwan Yin, transistors, Boole and Steichen . . .

A redheaded man with an Adam's apple was saying gently to Miss Phoebe: "It's this rabbit, ma'am." And indeed an enormous rabbit was loping up to him. "Every time I find a turnip or something he takes it away from me and he kicks and bites when I try to reason with him——" And indeed he took a piece of turnip from his pocket and the rabbit insolently pawed it from his hand and nibbled it triumphantly with one wise-guy eye cocked up at his victim. "He does that every time, Miss Phoebe," the man said unhappily.

The little old lady said: "I'll think of something, Henry. But let me take care of these people first."

"Yes, ma'am," Henry said. He reached out cautiously for his piece of turnip and the rabbit bit him and then went back to its nibbling.

"Young man," Miss Phoebe said to me, "what's wrong? You're giving in to despair. You mustn't do that. Chapter Nine, Rule Three."

I pulled myself together enough to say: "This is Professor Leuten. He's dying."

Her eyes widened. "*The* Professor Leuten?" I nodded. "*How to Live on the Cosmic Expense Account?*" I nodded.

"Oh dear! If only there were something I could do!"

Heal the dying? Apparently not. She didn't think she could, so she couldn't.

"Professor," I said. "Professor."

He opened his eyes and said something in German, then, hazily: "Woman shot me. Spoil her—racket, you call it? Who is this?" He grimaced with pain.

"I'm Miss Phoebe Bancroft, Professor Leuten," she breathed, leaning over him. "I'm so dreadfully sorry; I admire your wonderful book so much."

His weary eyes turned to me. "So, Norris," he said. "No time to do it right. We do it your way. Help me up."

I helped him to his feet, suffering, I think, almost as much as he did. The wound started to bleed more copiously.

"No!" Miss Phoebe exclaimed. "You should lie down."

The professor leered. "Good idea, baby. You want to keep me company?"

"What's that?" she snapped.

"You heard me, baby. Say, you got any liquor in your place?"

"Certainly not! Alcohol is inimical to the development of the higher functions of the mind. Chapter Nine—"

"Pfui on Chapter Nine, baby. I chust wrote that stuff for money."

If Miss Phoebe hadn't been in a state resembling surgical shock after hearing that, she would have seen the pain convulsing his face. "You mean . . .?" she quavered, beginning to look her age for the first time.

"Sure. Lotta garbage. Sling fancy words and make money. What I go for is liquor and women. Women like you, baby."

The goose did it.

Weeping, frightened, insulted and lost she tottered blindly up the neat path to her house. I eased the professor to the ground. He was biting almost through his lower lip.

I heard a new noise behind me. It was Henry, the redhead with the Adam's apple. He was chewing his piece of turnip and had hold of the big rabbit by the hind legs. He was flailing it against a tree. Henry looked ferocious, savage, carnivorous and very, very dangerous to meddle with. In a word, human.

"Professor," I breathed at his waxen face, "you've done it. It's broken. Over. No more Plague Area."

He muttered, his eyes closed: "I regret not doing it properly . . . but tell the people how I died, Norris. With dignity, without fear. Because of Functional Epistemology."

I said through tears: "I'll do more than tell them, Professor. The world will know about your heroism."

"The world must know. We've got to make a book of this —your authentic, authorized, fictional biography—and Hopedale's west-coast agent'll see to the film sale—"

"Film?" he said drowsily. "Book . . .?"

"Yes. Your years of struggle, the little girl at home who kept faith in you when everybody scoffed, your burning mission to transform the world, and the climax—here, now!—as you give up your life for your philosophy."

"What girl?" he asked weakly.

"There must have been someone, Professor. We'll find someone."

"You would," he asked feebly, "document my expulsion from Germany by the Nazis?"

"Well, I don't think so, Professor. The export market's important, especially when it comes to selling film rights, and you don't want to go offending people by raking up old memories. But don't worry, Professor. The big thing is, the world will never forget you and what you've done."

He opened his eyes and breathed: "You mean *your* version of what I've done. Ach, Norris, Norris! Never did I think there was a power on Earth which could force me to contravene the Principle of Permissive Evolution." His voice became stronger. "But you, Norris, are that power." He got to his feet, grunting. "Norris," he said, "I hereby give you formal warning that any attempt to make a fictional biography or cinema film of my life will result in an immediate injunction being—you say slapped?—upon you, as well as suits for damages from libel, copyright infringement and invasion of privacy. I have had *enough*."

"Professor," I gasped. "You're well!"

He grimaced. "I'm sick. Profoundly sick to my stomach at my contravention of the Principle of Permissive—"

His voice grew fainter. This was because he was rising

slowly into the air. He leveled off at a hundred feet and called: "Send the royalty statements to my old address in Basle. And remember, Norris, I warned you—"

He zoomed eastward then at perhaps one hundred miles per hour. I think he was picking up speed when he vanished from sight.

I stood there for ten minutes or so and sighed and rubbed my eyes and wondered whether anything was worth while. I decided I'd read the professor's book tomorrow without fail, unless something came up.

Then I took my brief case and went up the walk and into Miss Phoebe's house. (Henry had made a twig fire on the lawn and was roasting his rabbit; he glared at me most disobligingly and I skirted him with care.)

This was, after all, the pay-off; this was, after all, the reason why I had risked my life and sanity.

"Miss Phoebe," I said to her taking it out of the brief case, "I represent the Hopedale Press; this is one of our standard contracts. We're very much interested in publishing the story of your life, with special emphasis on the events of the past few weeks. Naturally you'd have an experienced collaborator. I believe sales in the hundred thousands wouldn't be too much to expect. I would suggest as a title—that's right you sign on that line there—*How to be Supreme Ruler of Everybody. . . .*"

MILDRED CLINGERMAN

Still resolutely refusing to write one story that resembles another, Mildred Clingerman turns to the memories of her own childhood, and from that wellspring draws as fresh and clear a draft of imagination as even she has yet proffered us.

MR. SAKRISON'S HALT

IN THOSE DAYS the old Katy local was the magic carpet that transported me from one world to another. Summertime only truly began the moment the conductor lifted me aboard and urged me to "set still and be a big girl." He was never impressed with the fact that I'd been traveling two days all alone and on much bigger trains than the Katy. When he had asked after my mother and told me how anxiously my grandparents were awaiting my arrival, he'd pass on down the aisle to mysterious regions forward, and I'd be left to spy all about the coach for Miss Mattie Compton.

As often as not, there was no sign of Miss Mattie, and the only other occupants would be somnolent old men in alpaca coats who roused now and then to use the spittoons. Usually her absence meant simply that the conductor had not yet found time to eject her bodily from the Jim Crow car, but sometimes I was forced to conclude that she was resting at home that day. At such times my disappointment would be intense. And while the Katy huffed and rattled past the cotton fields and muttered gloomily over the shady creeks, I had nothing to do but hold myself steady on the slick straw seat and stretch my eyes wide to keep awake.

But mostly I was fortunate enough to catch the Katy on one of Miss Mattie's days. I'd see just the tip of a pink ribbon bobbing over the top of the high seat, and I'd hurry down the car to slide in beside her. Or perhaps the door to the coach would open and Mr. McCall, the conductor, would appear with Miss Mattie in his arms. She would be hanging as limply as a bit of old mosquito netting, staring sweetly into Mr. McCall's annoyed red face. He'd plump her down beside me and then, accommodating himself to the Katy's swaggering roll, slam out of our car again without a word.

Miss Mattie and I never bothered with formal greetings. The bond between us was so well established that we always took up again just where we'd left off the year before. She might sometimes call me by my mother's name instead of my own, but I didn't mind. (It was such a pretty name.) Almost immediately, out of the confused, jackdaw clutter of her conversation, her recognition of our shared dedication would emerge, and once again we'd plunge deeply into talk of Mr. Sakrison. Interruptions were frequent, as frequent as the Katy's stops along the line. When the Katy squealed jerkily to a halt and sat there panting, we'd press our noses against the dirty window (with its heaped-up piles of coal dust along the sill) and stare silently at the scene outside. Then, for a little while after each of the stops, I'd have to pat Miss Mattie's hands till she stopped whimpering.

Miss Mattie was pretty when she wasn't whimpering. Her face was soft and pink with fine little crumpled lines, and her blue eyes were younger than the rest of her. Sometimes when she was telling over and over again about Mr. Sakrison's strange disappearance in that young chirruping voice, I would forget that Miss Mattie was close to sixty years old.

She always wore little crocheted white gloves that somehow lent an air of dignity to the rest of her ill-assorted costume. "Outlandish," people termed Miss Mattie's getups. She mixed the styles of thirty years back with anything modish that took her fancy. In order to take Miss Mattie's fancy a piece of wearing apparel had only to be pink and fluffy. Chapel Grove's inhabitants never forgot the day Miss Mattie

appeared with a pair of pink "teddies" pinned to her gray curls. The wispy bit of lingerie hung gracefully and shamelessly behind her poor addled head for all the louts in town to see, and they followed her to her door, taunting her with ugly words.

In the main, Chapel Grove treated Miss Mattie kindly enough. She was even pointed out to visitors. But nobody ever bothered to hide the grinning and nudging that broke out wherever she appeared. There were humorists, too, who liked to josh her about Mr. Sakrison, saying rude, insulting things of him, till Miss Mattie collapsed into a damp, sobbing little heap at their feet. At such times I suffered a queer, ill-refined conviction that Chapel Grove would like to make me cry, also. Beneath the surface kindness I sensed their suspicion that I was, in some way, as different as Miss Mattie. Even my grandparents thought it was too bad that I must grow up elsewhere, and everybody smiled at my alien "accent." No matter how joyfully each summer I threw myself into the very heart of all the youthful activities there, I was aware of a subtle reserve that kept me circling just outside the true center. (Didn't they realize I belonged? Why, I'd been born there! . . . But so had Miss Mattie.)

Miss Mattie and I were both made to feel Chapel Grove's disapproval of those who do too much traveling around. Several times each year she went all the way to the State Capitol to ask the railroad officials there to help her locate Mr. Sakrison. But most of her journeys were made up to the city where one transferred to the Katy for the last four hours of the trip to Chapel Grove. The Katy rattled up there mornings and returned in the late afternoon. At least twice each week Miss Mattie boarded her for the round trip. Once arrived, Miss Mattie usually just stayed on board, if the trainmen would let her. She had no interest in the city at all. It was the journey back and forth that was important.

On the last journey we shared, the conductor did not lift me aboard the Katy or tell me to be a big girl. I was a big girl. At least I thought I was. I certainly towered over tiny Miss Mattie, and I was very conscious of the hard little buds

that were my breasts—half ashamed and half proud of the way they strained under the tight voile dress.

Miss Mattie was having one of her rare "clear" spells. She called me by my own name and traced for me, through mazy genealogical thickets, her fourth-cousinship to my mother This didn't startle me; one way or another I was related to everybody in the county. But I was startled and disappointed to hear her talking like all the other adults I knew. She seemed tired, too, and I was suddenly shaken by a dreadful fear that one day soon she'd give up her search and admit defeat.

"Oh, Miss Mattie, please," I said, "tell me about Mr. Sakrison."

She turned to look at me, and I almost cried out when I saw she was cringing as if I were one of the town bullies eager to strike the poisonous blow. I stared back at her till the tears spilled down my cheeks.

"You've grown so tall," she whispered. "I was afraid . . ."

Both of us wept openly then with a great flutter of white hankerchiefs, and afterwards I was glad to see that the weary, grown-up look had faded from her eyes. With our heads very close together and Miss Mattie's hand in mine, she told me the story again for the last time.

"You remember, my dear—I've told you so often—he had the loveliest instincts. I never knew a Yankee could be anything but a *beast,* but he was so kind, so gentle . . . I didn't mean to fall in love with him. They say such horrid things about traveling men, 'specially Yankee traveling men. He walked me home from church that night. Wouldn't come in, since I was—to Chapel Grove's way of thinking—living alone in that big house. But he kissed me. . . . We stood under that old catalpa tree, you know the one. He hugged me so hard he crushed the roses I was wearing, and the smell of the bruised petals hung over us like a fog. We made our plans and I packed all night. Had every nigra in the house pressing and mending . . . The night went so quickly, and all of us were happy, calling back and forth and singing snatches of songs.

"Early in the morning I put on my pink organdy and Mr. Sakrison called for me and we caught the Katy to go up to the city for the wedding. It was a delirious kind of morning. I've never known the Katy to slide so smoothly along. There was something different, too, about the way the sunlight slanted across the fields. I remember thinking that if I could shift those long shadows just a fraction, the way you do a vase full of roses, I'd see a lovely new view. And there was a new, wonderful taste to the air and even to the coffee I'd put up for us!

"After a while we both felt quieter inside and Mr. Sakrison held my hand and talked of all his hopes for the future. Not just our future, either. He spoke his piece for the whole world. I was proud of him. I'd never heard anybody speak so sadly about the nigras—their want and their fear. They were picking in the fields that day, I recall. . . . He put words to the little sick feelings I'd had at times, and I began to catch his vision . . . some of it, but not all. Not then."

The Katy whistled long and mournfully. Miss Mattie interrupted herself with "Hush!" and pressed her nose against the window to see if this, at last, was the station she'd been hunting for all those years. But it wasn't.

"You see," she said, "I was too happy to know or care which halt it was. The Katy would stop, as it always does, at every cow pasture almost. Sometimes Mr. Sakrison would swing off to light his cigar, though I never minded the odor of cigars. . . . Delicious, isn't it? But he said the scent caught in my hair, and he couldn't have that. He said my hair smelled of breezes in the springtime. . . . And then the Katy stopped at the dearest little halt! We'd had been aboard about two hours, I think, so it would have been almost halfway to the city. I had never noticed the place before, but then I hadn't been to the city often.

"The first thing that caught my eye was a huge camellia bush in full bloom, a red one. The fallen petals had heaped up in a ring around it, you know the way they do. I asked Mr. Sakrison to step off and cut one of the blossoms for me with his pocketknife. I didn't think the stationmaster would

mind, and there wouldn't be time enough to ask politely. But the queerest thing! The Katy just sat and huffed and puffed for the longest spell, it seemed. And things outside moved slow as molasses. There was a park with a little blue lake, and swans dipping their heads . . . and children playing. Ever so many children, and all so nicely dressed, even the little darkies. There were adults strolling there, too, all mixed in together, all colors. I wasn't a bit surprised, somehow, but I wondered at the slow, graceful movement of the scene. It was like grasses waving under water.

"Then I noticed the station itself. It was a funny little brick, octagonal building. Over the door to the waiting room it didn't say WHITE, you know. It said WAITING ROOM. ONE AND ALL. And then, while Mr. Sakrison was still cutting the blossoms, out of the station house came a colored gentleman. He walked up to Mr. Sakrison and pounded him on the back and they shook hands, and I thought to my soul they were going to embrace. . . ." Miss Mattie paused and bit her lips and twisted her hand from mine.

"Do you know, that made me angry? I looked hard at Mr. Sakrison, and for a moment he looked like any other Yankee . . . a total stranger. It was the anger that kept me sitting there staring instead of joining him. I wouldn't feel angry now. Even then—I like to remember—I fought it down and called and waved to him. But he only looked around in a puzzled kind of way . . . and walked off into the park with the man. The Katy started up again with a terrible crashing sound and fairly flew away from there.

"I was looking back, you know, and trying to reach the emergency cord . . . and weeping. I saw just the first few letters on the station sign. It said 'B R O' something. In the city I waited and waited, but Mr. Sakrison didn't come. They told me the only halt between Chapel Grove and the city that had the letters B R O was Brokaw. I hired a buggy and drove back there, but it was only a tumble-down old halt without a station house—just one of those sheltered seats. . . ."

Miss Mattie always stopped her story at this point, as she

did now. Again we murmured over all the pleasant names we could think of that the halt might have possessed. As usual Miss Mattie argued strongly for her favorite. But I didn't think the word *Brotherhood* was pretty enough. While we talked I was recalling the rest of the story—the part of it I knew from a different viewpoint. Chapel Grove's version was that the Yankee traveling man had meant to fool her from the start. She had probably given him money, they said. Her folks had left her a great pile of it. And (here they pulled down their mouths) he never had any intention of marrying her and had escaped at the first opportunity. Miss Mattie had come home then and shut herself up for months. When she did show her face again it was the silly, addled face she wore now. Look at the crazy things she did—like riding the Katy up and down the line for thirty years almost every day, looking for the halt that swallowed Mr. Sakrison!

In the long gloaming that day the Katy made many halts, and I stared fiercely with Miss Mattie in utmost concentration at each one, hoping we'd recognize *something* to tell us this one was B R O.

Sure enough, we found it. It was I who spied the swans, so white in the dusk, but it was Miss Mattie who saw the camellia bush and the man who waited beside it. When the Katy stopped Miss Mattie was off as quick as a wink, but she needn't have hurried, because the Katy just stood breathing there for a long time. I saw a petal on the camellia bush fall and fall—forever it seemed—before it touched the ground. I saw Miss Mattie leaning on the man's arm, and they turned and he waved his straw hat at me, slow as slow. And, oh, Mr. Sakrison was lovely . . . but so was Miss Mattie. She was young and plumped out, especially in the bosom, and I was suddenly ashamed and crossed my arms over my chest. I was watching the swans arching their necks when the Katy started up again very quickly as if she were getting away under full steam. Only then did I remember to look for the station sign, but I was too late.

In Chapel Grove that summer it was a nine days' wonder

the way poor old Mattie Compton had stepped off the Katy and disappeared without a trace. Since I was the last person who saw her, I was forced to tell again and again the dull facts of how the Katy stopped at a station whose name I neglected to notice, and how Miss Mattie got off there and didn't get back on board. That was all I reported. Grandmother finally put a stop to the questions with her appeal to the ladies that I was "at that delicate age," and Miss Mattie's disappearance had upset me.

It hadn't, of course.

But there were things in Chapel Grove that year that did upset me. Most nights I saw the fiery cross burning on schoolhouse hill. Grandfather went about tight-lipped and angry, cursing "flap-mouthed fools." I lay awake sometimes and listened to the hounds baying down in the bottom lands, and I wished with all my heart for money enough to ride the Katy every day, up and back, till I found the halt called B R O. There, I'd run, run and be gathered to Mr. Sakrison's heart . . . and Miss Mattie's.

The Katy local was retired years ago. There's a fine highway now to the city, and they say everybody in Chapel Grove drives there often, since it's so near. I hear everything has changed. But I read in my newspaper last week how they've locked the doors to the schoolhouse and barred with guns and flaring anger the way to the hill, and I realize how terribly far Chapel Grove still is from Mr. Sakrison's halt.

JAY WILLIAMS

Jay Williams spent his twenties as a night club comic, a theatrical press agent, a stage manager and a soldier. When he finally turned to writing, he rapidly made up for lost time: in a little over thirteen years he has published thirteen books, ranging from a songbook through juvenile mysteries to historical novels which Samuel Shellabarger has called "authentic and memorable"; he has sold countless stories and articles to the best slick and quality markets; he has written the narrative and lyrics for thirteen discs by Young Peoples' Records . . . in short, I don't know when I've had the occasion to introduce quite such a versatile creator to the readers of these collections. Mr. Williams lists as one of his chief interests "anthropology, of which I have only a layman's smattering"; but that smattering is enough to enable him to create a fresh and convincing picture of a possible Martian culture in a story serious in theme but captivatingly lighthearted in its telling.

THE ASA RULE

THEY HAD anticipated everything for the first man on Mars, except the widgits. They had made preparations for communication with any intelligent beings, for contact with strange bacteria or viruses, for food and water and air and transportation and a thousand other things. But they had never thought of the *ouljit-li*, a name which in the speech of

the aboriginal Asa meant simply *nuisances*, and which, in its transformation into *widgit* meant, for men, exactly the same thing.

"The trouble was," said Commissioner Eisenstein, heaving his two hundred pounds about until the sturdy chair beneath him crackled warningly, "we had thought of Mars as a planet, and not as a world."

The earnest young man seated opposite nodded intelligently.

The Commissioner put the tips of his fingers together and peered over them. "I don't know how it happened. The result of oversimplification, I suppose. But we had always thought of Mars as homogenous: one large sandy desert dissected by canals, one unvarying type of Martian *sapiens*. It's as if we should conceive of our earth as looking like New England and populated only by Yankees. A conception," he added, with a sigh, "all too frequently encountered in some circles, I might add. However."

He picked up his glass, swirled it once or twice, and drank from it. In spite of the other man's alert expression, it was clear to the Commissioner that his thoughts were elsewhere. An odd type, Eisenstein said to himself. What in the theatrical world would be known as a *shnook*, a gentle, sweet, mild person who wouldn't hurt a fly. Which made it difficult to think of him being sent here, hardly a gentle or mild place. However, the World Office for Martian Relations had a way of knowing its business; strangely enough, in the midst of what appeared to be bumbling bureaucracy, things got done and often done right. As witness Eisentein's own appointment to this post, from the relative quiet of an academic chair of Anthropology, a seeming piece of folly which had turned out to be rewarding both to the Commissioner and to WOMR.

Eisenstein shook his head and followed the young man's gaze. "Ah, yes," he said drily, "that's right. You haven't met my secretary yet. Come in, Lucy. This is Leonard Jackson. Mr. Jackson, Lucy Ironsmith."

Leonard sprang to his feet, something a man of his composition never should have done, for he was tall, loose-

jointed and awkward and his feet were very large. There was an uncomfortable pause while the service unit rolled out, righted the small table, sucked up the broken glass, and with its air hose dried the floor and Leonard's front. When it had returned to its position in the corner, he stammered, "I'm awfully sorry. I've always been—I mean, I ought to watch what I'm doing. I wasn't looking, I mean."

"Oh, I don't know," the Commissioner rumbled comfortably. "You were looking, and I'm sure I can't blame you."

Lucy Ironsmith—the name was a translation for convenience's sake—was worth looking at. She was not beautiful as a model or an actress is beautiful, but she was a slender and tough, a striking and capable woman. She had the clear, pale green skin and silvery hair so typical of the equatorial Martians, and her eyes, oval and dark crimson, were quick to sparkle with anger or pleasure.

She slapped the Commissioner familiarly on the shoulder, and said, in pleasantly accented English, "Enough, Sam. Mr. Jackson will think we have no manners whatever here." She touched arms with Leonard and threw herself into a seat. "WOMR?" she asked.

"Mr. Jackson has been sent to study the ecology of the tundra," the Commissioner said. "With especial reference to possible parasites of the widgit."

"Widgit control? That sounds to me like one of the Tasks of Var-am."

"Eh?" said the Commissioner. "Oh yes. We have a parallel myth. The Labors of Hercules. Quite true, it does. It is a fascinating thing to me," he went on, reaching for another drink as the service unit silently answered his beckoning finger, "how in some ways the same myths have appeared on both our worlds. I have found this to be the case where parallel rituals arose, as a result of certain similarities in group responses to environ—Oh, please excuse me, Mr. Jackson. I have not yet succeeded in shaking off my past."

"Not at all," Leonard said. "I'm really very interested in all sorts of things, and particularly in getting to know as much

as I can about Mars. I wanted to ask Miss Ironsmith—er—by the way, is it *Miss*? I mean, are you married?"

Lucy blushed a delicate brown, and for a moment her lips were pressed tight together. Then her face cleared, and she laughed.

But the Commissioner, obviously very upset, had wallowed up out of his chair and said to her, "I abase myself—*Un llam deolg*. Please forgive his impertinence." And to Leonard he said sternly, "You must apologize. Your question, I know, was lightly meant by our standards, but by the standards of Miss Ironsmith's people it was in shocking taste. It was the equivalent of asking a well-brought-up young lady from, say Akron, Ohio, whether she is a prostitute."

"Oh, my God!" Leonard cried. "I didn't—I'm sorry. I'm really terribly sorry, Miss Ironsmith."

"It was nothing. You have not been long in our world, and I certainly couldn't expect you to learn all the customs of all the peoples of Earth." She caught herself. "Ah! You see? Now it's my turn to ask forgiveness. For we call *our* world Earth in our language, and often forget when I translate."

"Well, then we're all friends," the Commissioner said, puffing out his cheeks. "Now then, Mr. Jackson. You said you plan to be here for several months, collecting and surveying. I must ask you to spend your first few weeks, at least, learning the customs and a little of the language of the Asa, the people of the tundra. You evidently have a deep-rooted investigatory streak, and it is just possible that you may offend without meaning to. And the Asa, I must tell you, are in some ways a grim and severe people."

Leonard sighed. "I'll do the best I can," he said.

Lucy, with a smile, made the little gesture which among her people signified reconciliation. "And I," she said, "will be your teacher."

Leonard went off to the rooms assigned to him, a corner apartment with two large windows looking towards the low, humpbacked hills. The sun was setting, and the slender, glossy brown leaves of the stunted trees that covered the plains for a hundred miles around were snapping shut, re-

vealing patches of ocherous earth beneath. He was a tangle of emotions, chiefly self-condemnation, annoyance, and curiosity; he was wondering just how old Miss Ironsmith was, and whether her affections were unattached.

That overwhelming curiosity of his was responsible for his being on Mars in the first place.

He was walking with Lucy, the following afternoon, along the stream that flowed near the WOMR establishment—a five-foot fissure in the earth, at the bottom of which a thread of water, almost invisible in the shade of the mosses, tinkled and chuckled—and quite without self-consciousness he explained. "I was always asking questions, when I was a kid: 'Why is this?' 'How does this work?' I grew up with the feeling that if you liked people and were decent to them, and just asked them what you wanted to know, you'd get answers."

"A naïve point of view."

"I guess so. Still, most of the time it worked. So one day, at a reception at the university, I was introduced to a man whose name I didn't catch, but I gathered he had something to do with extraterrestrial zoology. He told me about the problem here in the tundra, how the regions of the North Plain, Imun-Asa, were useless to most Martians but valuable to Earth—I'm sorry, I mean *our* Earth—as a field of research. And under the contract with your United Nations—what is it called, again?"

"*Dat-elughar*, the Ten-Fingered Hand."

"Yes, under contract with them we were permitted to set up commissions for study. But we had discovered that the widgits made such study exceedingly difficult. Of course, you know all this. I'm sorry."

"You mustn't be sorry always," Lucy said. "You are weighing yourself down with unnecessary guilt. Oh, I see. It was a form of speech, yes?"

"Yes. Well, I said to him, 'It seems to me you're going about it the wrong way. If you exterminate the widgits it may very well turn out that you'll exterminate something else you don't intend, or somehow upset the balance of things.'

He said, 'You just don't understand. It would be like exterminating houseflies. Or mosquitoes.' I said, 'If you succeeded in exterminating all of those, you'd lose many fly-catching birds, bats, and other insects.' He began to get angry, I guess, and shouted something like, 'You just haven't the faintest conception of the problem! and I said, 'I wish I could take a look at it,' and he suddenly became very calm and quiet, and said, 'Oh? Would you like to do that?' and I said, 'I've always been intensely curious about Mars.' And he said, 'Very well, I think it can be arranged.' "

"Don't tell me his name," said Lucy. "I think I can guess. When he became angry, did his face grow even redder and his white eyebrows clash together like shields? Am I right? Andrew Bulsiter, yes?"

"It was Bulsiter all right. I had to pick the Chief of WOMR for my speeches. Still," and he looked a little more cheerful, "I did get to Mars, which was what I wanted to do."

They left the stream and climbed a little rise. Before them, half a mile away perhaps, were the mounds of the Asa houses, rounded skin tents over the entrances to the underground chambers. A thread of smoke rose in the clear pale sky, and they could hear the bleating of the small goat-like animals the Asa herded.

Lucy said, "But I suppose you must—produce something, hm? Or he will have the upper laugh. Oh dear, I sometimes get my colloquialisms mixed."

"I know what you mean," Leonard said. "He certainly will."

"But you still feel as you did about people? And you are still curious, in spite of the trouble it got you into?"

"I like everything," said Leonard. He struck his hands together. "I want to *know*—everything I can find out. In our world there was so much hatred and suspicion, so much that was just the product of people refusing to look each other in the face, honestly and simply, wanting to find out about each other—we are just emerging from that time. On your world you didn't have so much of that. Martians are simpler than we are in many ways. Take this question of the widgits. Your people in the south, the Hvor, and the other

nations, the Garamids, the Osjena, and so on, all had everything they needed in their own regions. They never seemed to have any desire to subjugate other places."

"Oh, in our distant past we fought bitterly."

"Yes, I have read your history. But the Ten-Fingered Hand has been in existence for how long?"

"Two thousand years or so."

"You see? And our United Nations for less than a hundred. Even so, it still has many problems. And none of your people ever tried to do any thing about the widgits because you never had any desire to live in the tundra, or conquer it."

"There was nothing here for us," Lucy protested, with a shrug. "The Asa live here and they are happy. The *oulJit-li* don't seem to disturb them; I suppose they have learned how to live with them. Perhaps they even need them. But it is the land of the Asa, not ours, nor the Osjenok, nor anyone else's. Why should we leave our own meadows and ravines?"

"That's what I mean. And biologically there's very little difference between your species and ours; there has even been a certain amount of interbreeding . . . er—well, in any case. Yes. What I'm getting at is that there's no reason why the people of our earth can't learn the same kind of friendly, civilized behavior. Some of them did, as a matter of fact: the Hopi, the Navaho, some Polynesian people, some of the Africans—and we are all learning it, by degrees."

Lucy put her hands behind her back. Against the dark red collar of her coveralls, her verdigris skin glowed. She said, "I understand you, Mr. Jackson. I think you are right. And brave, too, to believe as you believe, judging by what I have read of your Earth's history, which is to our mind bloody, senseless, and disagreeable." Impulsively, she turned to face him, and in a softer voice she said, "I am without a house, too."

"What?" Leonard said, genuinely puzzled.

"Oh. Of course, you don't know. I am—what you asked me yesterday. Not married."

She turned away from him to hide the blood rising in her cheeks. Before he could answer, she cried, "Your pack!"

He could only gape at her.

She caught his arm. "Quick! The pack you took this morning."

Then he remembered. When they had left the commission bubble, Eisenstein had buckled a small rucksack over his shoulders, saying, "This is your widgit pack. Lucy will show you what to do with it."

Ineffectually, he tried to reach it. At the same time, he was aware of a faint humming in the air and stopped to stare across the tundra. There was a thin, pale violet cloud, like a dust cloud of an impossible color, spinning over the tops of the foot-high trees.

Lucy clawed his pack off and shook herself out of her own. She snapped open both packs and whipped out two heavy plastic suits. He roused himself sufficiently to put one on. There were gloves that snapped tight around the wrists, and a hood with a fine-mesh respirator. Lucy was already wearing hers. She put her head close to his and in a muffled voice said, "We'd better walk on to the Asa village. The widgits won't come there."

"Why?" Leonard asked.

"I don't know."

"You mean you've never asked the Asa?"

"Oh yes, we have asked them. Many investigators have asked them. They only laugh, and reply, 'We are their enemies.' "

They plodded on, and all at once the cloud was all about them. It was no longer a cloud, however, but had resolved itself into a myriad tiny insect like creatures, pink, pale blue, and violet for the most part, with gauzy small wings and round faces on which, curiously enough, the eyes were set together in the front over a small pointed snout. Their bodies were thin and soft and translucent, and when they crawled about they had the habit of stretching themselves out so that it was apparent they could penetrate very small spaces. They buzzed and hummed incessantly, and crept about over the surfaces of the plastic suits, tapped against the hoods, clung to the respirators. They were so thick it was almost impossible

to see the path, and yet they were each no larger than a housefly. In spite of the suit Leonard found himself slapping at them, trying to brush them away.

He and Lucy stumbled along the narrow path, catching the stout plastic of their suits against branches, slipping in the yellow earth. Once Lucy went to her knees. Leonard yanked her up. The high-pitched, insistent whinning of the creatures, even through the hoods, made conversation impossible, and indeed, made even coherent thought difficult. Through the transparent material of his hood, Leonard saw them clustered on his arms and legs like swarming bees; they crawled over the hood and stared round-eyed into his face. He caught himself staring back, and blundered into the tree-shrubs.

He had reached the point where he was beginning to convince himself that he could feel them tickling his arms and legs in spite of the suit—indeed, his whole body itched and tingled, as one does when someone says he has just killed a flea—when, without warning, the widgits were gone, every one; in the distance, behind him, the violet cloud vanished over the horizon. Leonard found himself at the edge of the Asa village with Lucy holding his arm, whether to support him or herself wasn't clear.

The Asa themselves, tall, almost hairless men with coarse gray skins and flat noses, stood silently about. One or two held war flails, but their leaders, the two young ritual brothers who were chosen every seven years to rule the village, stepped forward and patted their stomaches in sign of welcome.

Lucy removed her hood and gloves, and in their own tongue thanked them.

"Why do you thank us, Secretary?" said one of the brothers. "We have done nothing."

"But we are safe here from the *ouljit-li.*"

"If your cloak shelters you from the snow, do you thank the cloak?"

The other brother said, "You are always welcome, in any case. Who is this man?"

Lucy introduced Leonard, who stepped forward to touch arms with the brothers. They at once stepped back.

"You must not touch them," Lucy said. "They are—what would you say?—*uthvul* . . . taboo."

Leonard contented himself with a bow. The brothers, glancing at each other, bowed back. One of them came close to Leonard and looked into his eyes. He said something to the other.

Lucy translated, "He says you have good eyes. They like you."

"Tell them," said Leonard, "that I am grateful. I would like to be able to visit them."

The brothers replied gravely that he might come whenever he liked.

They led the way to the center of the village, pushed up the flap of a tent, and conducted Lucy and Leonard down hard-packed earthen steps into a hemispherical chamber some ten feet below the ground. A wood fire smoldered in the center with a spicy smell. A couple of elderly men brought in bowls of what looked like curdled milk and flat meat cakes. The brothers each took a bowl. One, pouring drink into a cup, offered it to Leonard.

"*Kurdush-ve, im ve tver sukh'ma,*" he said.

The second brother offered the cakes and repeated the sentence.

"Lucy whispered, "You must accept the food and reply, *'U tver uz.'* "

Leonard did so. The brothers then repeated the ritual with Lucy, and themselves gravely sat down. They ate and drank together, and then the brothers turned their backs.

"Now we must go," said Lucy. "They are about to sleep, and among the Asa no one must watch a man while he is sleeping, lest he take away his power, his life force you might say."

"Can I come back tomorrow?" Leonard asked.

"Yes, whenever you like. But you'd better begin learning a little of their language."

They climbed the stairs and left the village, which ap-

peared, except for threads of smoke rising from holes in the ground, to be lifeless. As they walked back to the stream, carrying their hoods but still wearing their suits, Leonard said, "What was the prayer they said?"

"Before we ate? It means, 'As I wish for myself, so I give to you.' "

Leonard nodded. But it wasn't until they were at the air lock of the commission bubble that he suddenly said, "Of course! It is the Golden Rule, isn't it? Do unto others, and so on. I thought the Commissioner said they were stern and violent people."

"I don't remember that he said 'violent,' " Lucy said. "Still, I have read much in the history of your earth, and I believe your Christians had such a precept, yet they were also in some ways both stern and violent."

Later that evening, remembering the Commissioner's love for ethnic parallels, Leonard told him the story. Eisenstein, lolling in his favorite chair and watching the shadows cast by the single moon then in the sky, nodded. "I know about it. There are other similarities too. After all, given the development of life on a not too dissimilar world, and assuming that it is an oxygen-carbon life that evolves eventually into a manlike creature—really a quite efficient enough form when you come to think of it—one can also assume that the basic drives of communities of such creatures would be much the same.

"The Asa are grim and hard, but not in the way you assume. That is, they are not cruel; on the contrary, they live by a rigid rule in which they must love and assist each other and even their worst enemies. They have a saying, *'Ardzil-le ur ghaurna tve'*—'Love even those who strike you.' But life is harsh in the tundra: and Asa have nothing but their *nours*, those small grazing animals you saw, some edible mosses, and the tree-shrubs on which they depend for firewood, building materials, and edible bark. They are a seminomadic people, and like some other nomads whose life is hard, they have a strong sense of justice. There are specific punishments

for specific crimes, and they never vary, nor is there any appeal from them."

He uncrossed his legs and pressed a synthetic cigar against the chair lighter. "Do you know what would have happened to you if you had touched one of the kings?"

Leonard shook his head.

"With tears in their eyes, with words of sorrow—not hypocritical, I assure you—they would have beaten you to death with their flails. 'A touch for a touch,' they would have said."

Leonard nodded. "I see their point," he murmured. He accepted a drink and a cigarette from the service unit, which announced in its small monotone, "News broadcast in ten minutes."

"No, thank you," said Leonard.

Lucy said, "I don't think I ever heard anyone say 'thank you' to a machine."

Leonard grinned.

"I think it is very nice," she added firmly.

"And what do you think after your brush with the widgits?" Eisenstein asked.

"I can understand what's involved, now," Leonard replied. "I still get the shivers when I remember it. Of course, I'd studied everything available on them, and looked at the pictures and the models, but it's not the same thing. I knew that their persistence can drive men insane, and I knew that their bites may eventually cause death. But I couldn't really appreciate it until we went through the swarm."

"And they are the most elusive creatures in the world when you want them," Eisenstein said. "Of course, they've been collected and classified, but no one has ever been able to study them. You know that in captivity they simply die; they will not, like other insects, accept an artificial environment. And so far, no one has been courageous enough to study them in their natural habitat."

"Mm. The thought of being among them without the protection of a suit is frightening. They never leave you once they've found you, do they? And I can see how research inside a widgit suit would be difficult."

"Yes," Eisenstein agreed. "Imagine Fabre doing his entomological studies in such an outfit! We have used widgit-proof machines, traveling laboratories really, but they're dreadfully expensive and cumbersome as well. You can imagine: such a machine needs television equipment, scoops, diggers, water, food, measuring instruments, almost a whole spaceship! Even so, not long ago we had a tragedy here. I can't imagine how it happened, but somehow, perhaps through an exhaust, or through one of the air filters, widgits entered one of the lab tanks. The things aren't chitinous, you know, like our insects, and consequently they can squeeze through the damnedest spaces . . . in any case, the lab's signal came in about noon, our time, and an hour later the jet was back with the crew. Even in that short time, two of the men had to have psych treatment, and a third was dead. You know, the saliva of the little beasts stimulates the leucocytes: a kind of galloping leukemia. Luckily, it doesn't happen to everyone in that short a time."

He shook his head. Leonard, leaning forward, said, "But the Asa aren't troubled by them. What's their secret?"

"I wish I knew."

"Why not simply hire teams of Asa—"

"Asa-li," Lucy corrected automatically.

"—Asa-li—well, why not have teams of them—"

"—accompany our men in the field," Eisenstein finished for him. "We thought of that, believe me. But the Asa aren't interested. They simply won't do it."

He chuckled. "They told us they had enough work of their own to do. And what could we hire them with? They say we have nothing they want. But I think it goes deeper than that. You see, the widgits are sacred. So the Asa have resisted all our efforts to destroy them. By the terms of our contract, we can't oppose them or interfere with them."

"Sacred insects?"

"It isn't so strange. Among the Australian bushmen the witchetty grub, the larva of an acacia beetle, is sacred. There is a whole clan of men who, at certain seasons, perform a ritual of the grub and ceremonially eat it. And the Egyptians

held the dung beetle in reverence, you remember, while among the Zuñi the dragonfly is a totem insect."

Leonard said, "It is hard to imagine anyone trying to eat a widgit."

"I won't go so far as to say they eat them. But there is a ritual of some sort every month, held by the widgit society, the Women of the Ouljit-li. In about a week, I think, they perform it again."

"I'd like to see that," Leaonard said soberly.

"So would I, so would a lot of anthropologists," said Eisenstein. "Unfortunately, it is held in great secrecy."

"I wonder——" Leonard began, but Lucy interrupted.

"Don't even *think* that."

"How do you know what I was thinking?" he said.

"I know," she said, "what your curiosity can get you into."

They both laughed, and Eisenstein, at first laughing with them, fell silent and looked from one to the other of the young people, tapping his chin thoughtfully.

And on the morning of the eighth day after that, Leonard was missing.

He had gone off to his apartment the night before, a little earlier than usual, claiming that he had some notes to put in order. There was no alarm nor any indication that he was gone until late in the morning, when a team left the bubble to do some excavating and discovered that the OPEN signal at a side door had been disconnected.

Lucy and Eisenstein knew at once where he had gone.

"I can't tell you how serious this is," the Commissioner said. His moonface was grave, and he strode up and down the long glass-walled chamber that served him as living room and office, twisting his hands together behind his back. "There's no question that he spied on the widgit society rites. Do you know what the punishment is for that?"

"Yes," said Lucy. "Since he has offended the widgits, he will be given to them. The Asa will take him to a secret place and leave him there unprotected. But we must do something, Sam."

"I simply cannot use force against the Asa. It would be a violation of our contract. I can't go against their laws, either." He looked at the wall chronometer. "In any case, it may be too late by now."

He stopped before her and took her by the arms. "Lucy, my dear, I don't know what to tell you. If they caught him last night, by now——"

"By now you think he is a screaming madman." She broke away from him. "I don't believe it." Her crimson eyes flashed, and she thrust out her jaw.

"You don't want to believe it."

"Nonsense." Abruptly she burst into tears. She wept passionately for exactly one minute, then stopped, blew her nose, and wiped her eyes. "You think I am a hysterical female, like one of those in Dickens, or the romances of Creuth Dedan. Well, if you have no more to do than walk up and down here until you wear a river in the floor, do so. I'm going to the village."

"I'll go with you," Eisenstein said moodily. "I don't know why. Well, I'll have to make a formal protest, anyway. Come on."

They strapped on widgit packs, but they took the Commissioner's closed tricycle which, with its tiny motor and narrow wheel base, could cover the distance along the path in minutes. At first Eisenstein considered taking along some of the station personnel, but he decided against it; he knew very well that no show of force would be enough to overawe the Asa.

The village appeared, as usual, to be deserted except for two or three boys watching the herds. But as soon as Eisenstein and Lucy had dismounted from the tricycle, the two kings appeared from their house and from other houses came the rest of the village, the women in their dark hoods and cloaks in the rear, the men in an impassive circle around the visitors.

The Commissioner made the sign of greeting, which the brother kings returned.

"You have come about the man with good eyes," said one.

"We have," Eisenstein replied. "Where is he?"

"We have given him to the *ouljit-li*. Where he may be now, we do not know."

"He was not yours to punish," Eisenstein said. "He is a citizen of our Earth. You should have given him to me."

The two kings looked at each other. Then one of them said, "Tell me, he was a man, was he not?"

"Of course."

"Then he was not yours, nor ours. He belonged only to himself. If that is so, he broke the law of his own will and deed. Hence, his punishment came upon him."

Eisenstein bit his lip and stared around the circle of men. They showed neither approval nor disapproval, but only watchful interest. For them, the matter had already been decided. He looked at Lucy out of the corner of his eye. She had the determined, angry air he had come to know after more than a year with her in the station; he knew that her mind was made up to some sudden deed, and he wished he knew what it was. Although the Asa had no visible weapons, he did not doubt they could produce them if necessary.

He said desperately, "Perhaps that is so. But Jackson meant no harm. He did not intend to violate any of your secrets."

"You speak," said one of the kings, "as if he were our enemy, as if we had punished him out of rancor or hatred. It is not so. If the Women of the Ouljit-li are watched by any man when they perform their ceremonies, the trees will die. Everyone knows this. Therefore, it is ordained that the *ouljit-li* must decide whether to destroy him or not."

"That's a pure quibble," said Eisenstein, but without conviction. He had been one of those excellent anthropologists who can identify himself with the people he is studying, and in this case, although he liked Leonard and wanted to rescue him, he knew in his heart that reason and justice were on the side of the Asa. It was Lucy, however, who ended the discussion.

In a flat voice, she said, "Look at this, you Brothers."

From the pocket of her coverall she had produced a small,

flat, wicked-looking Loeg automatic, such as was used in her country for killing wire snakes and other small game. One arm she had crossed over her body, the wrist of the other hand resting on it, the butt of the weapon against her stomach, the muzzle pointed at the two kings.

"You know what this is" she said.

One of the kings replied calmly, "It is a light-weapon. We have seen them."

"You know that I can kill one of you without touching you. So I will not be breaking the law."

"We know."

"If I kill one of you, the other must die also. Then the people will die, for the herds will no longer produce, nor the mosses grow."

Eisenstein held his breath. He had never before seen Martians threaten each other with violence. In spite of the quiet tones of Lucy and the kings, the atmosphere was charged with tension. The Asa did not move nor speak, and this too lent a dreadful suspense to the moment; if they had chattered or shouted imprecations, he would have felt better. But there was no sound from any of them, nothing but the rush of breathing of half a hundred people, and across the space in the center the soft, taut voices of the three.

Lucy said, "The man, Jackson, was my . . . friend. And it is said, 'Do all for your friend.' Tell me where he is."

"We cannot tell you that. But we think he must surely be dead—" The king who was speaking, glanced at the sun. "If they had spared him, he would have returned by now. Who can say where a man goes when he dies?"

"Then," said Lucy, in a cold, brittle voice such as Eisenstein had never heard her use, "I will kill you."

The kings eyed her without emotion. Then one said, equally coldly, "That may be so. But you will die also. For the law requires that whoever injures the herds or mosses, must die. And if you kill one of us, you will be doing that injury."

"Yes," said Lucy. "And it is also said, 'Even give your life for your friend.' "

Her voice broke. The weapon in her hand trembled, and

steadied again. Eisenstein braced himself. Then he sprang. Like many fat men, he was much swifter than he looked, and he dropped on Lucy like a meteorite. He wrapped one arm around her, and twisted as they fell together so that she came uppermost, but he held her tight against his chest.

"Let go—!" she gasped. The automatic fired, sending a dazzling golden spear straight up into the air. There was a smell of ozone. Lucy fought furiously to bring the gun lower, to point it at the kings. But Eisenstein had her hand in a grip like a vise, and the weapon dropped to the ground.

At the same moment, they all heard the voice shouting, "Hey! Wait! Hey!"

Eisenstein let go of her. Prudently, he snatched up the automatic and dropped it into his pocket. Then he helped her up. "Sorry," he muttered.

Lucy was not looking at him. Over the rise, just beyond the village, Leonard had appeared. He was scratched and dirty but apparently uninjured. He ran panting into the village and the people opened a way for him. Then, at last, they began to murmur; many of them smiled, and many touched their fists together in the sign of approval. The kings, too, smiled and nodded. Leonard shot a hasty glance at Eisenstein, and then looked at Lucy.

"I'm sorry," he said. Then he grinned apologetically. "Just a figure of speech. I didn't mean to cause any trouble. But it was worth it."

Lucy did not begin to weep, as an Earth girl might have done, nor did she show any other visible sign of relief. Having assessed the situation—that Leonard was still alive—she adjusted to it at once. She said only, "I'm glad."

Eisenstein said, "The widgits didn't bother you. I don't—"

"I'll explain later. Excuse me." Leonard turned to the brother kings. In intelligible Asak, but with an atrocious accent, he said, "*Ardzil-le ur ghaurna tve.* That's right, isn't it?"

The kings touched their fists together.

"Come on," Leonard said to Eisenstein. "I've got a report to write out."

"There was actually no clue at all in the ritual of the widgit society," he said later, as they sat over coffee in Eisenstein's office. "I'll tell you about that in detail—as much as I can, anyway—some other time."

"How did you get into it?" Eisenstein asked.

"Well, you know, we visited the village every day for the past week. I saw how the women dressed, in hoods and cloaks so that almost nothing could be seen of them. I made myself a similar outfit and wore it. Once in the village, it wasn't hard to find out where the ceremony was being held: the chanting carried up the smoke holes.

"However, I didn't last long; they caught me almost at once. They turned me over to the kings. One of the kings said that phrase to me—you know, the one you told me the night Lucy and I first went to the village. He said it three times, and I assumed that he meant they didn't hold anything against me, but were simply punishing me because that was the law.

"They held me in one of the chambers until daybreak. Then they took me out into the tundra. We came to a big dark rock that rises right out of the earth, in a valley two or three miles away—I don't know, I'm just guessing at the distance."

"I know the rock," Eisenstein said. "They call it the House of Tykh."

"They tied me up with a leather cord that was knotted one hundred and twelve times. I know. I unknotted it. Then they left me alone.

"I was scared, you know, scared and cold. I had a pretty good idea that the widgits would be along in a minute or two. And the temperature must have been down around freezing, but I was sweating. At the same time, however, I was thinking about a lot of things. I was thinking, for instance, about what the widgits were for. Do you know what I mean? They couldn't just exist, they had to have some place in the ecology of this region. I don't know what it is, but I wondered whether it might not have something to do with pollinating these shrublike trees. Because—I'm no anthropolo-

gist, but it occurred to me that rituals around sacred animals most exist because the animals are important to the lives of the people who hold them sacred."

Eisenstein snapped his fingers. "Of course! 'The trees will die.' One of the kings said that."

"Mm. Might be worth investigating, then."

"Well, go on."

"Well, the widgits showed up within five minutes or so. At first, it was bad—very bad." He grimaced, shaking his head. "I can understand how they drive men mad. I've never experienced anything like it, and I've been in some pretty awful holes. Mosquitoes, black flies, gnats, chiggers, whatever you can think of, all rolled into one wouldn't touch them. They crawled all over me; I inhaled them, swallowed them, had them in my ears, in my scalp, down my shirt collar. And they buzzed steadily, worse than the whine of a mosquito, worse than a swarm of hornets. It's a high-pitched, aggravating note: indescribable."

"All right, don't try to describe it," Eisenstein said, impatiently. "Get on."

"Yes, they bite, too, you know, and the bites itched fiercely. But at the same time—it's hard to explain, but—well, I don't know if you know it, but I'm a very curious person."

"I was aware of that," Eisenstein said.

"Oh. Well, I more or less resigned myself to insanity and death, and I thought I might as well take advantage of the fact that I was surrounded by widgits, to study them. I began looking closely at them, to see just how they used the proboscis, how they walked, how they changed size. And you know—hm—I don't know how to say this, exactly—"

He scratched his chin and laughed sheepishly. "They're cute."

"What?" Eisenstein shouted.

And, "Cute?" said Lucy in bewilderment.

"It's a fact. They have a way of bobbing their heads at each other as if they were bowing. And they look up at you with those round solemn eyes, like drunken owls. I don't know how you feel, but I've always loved owls: I think

they're funny and wise and pompous and foolish all at once. And these things looked like miniature owls.

"It's funny, but as soon as I felt that way, suddenly the widgits were gone. The whole cloud of them soared away over the rock and disappeared.

"That jolted me. Then, you know, I began to think. Suppose the widgits react to an aura, a smell perhaps, or a telepathic emanation, or a change in body temperature—I don't know what. But suppose whatever it is, it indicates to them their victims—or their enemies. If you like them and want them, you're an enemy and they vanish. If you hate them and try to avoid them, you must be legitimate prey. That would be why the king had told me seriously, 'Love even those who strike you.' Makes sense, doesn't it? And it explains why the people wanted to collect the widgits they could never find them, and even the few they got died in captivity—they were surrounded by unfriendly smells or thoughts and couldn't escape from them."

Eisenstein rubbed his face. "Then you mean, the Asa's charm against widgits consists in their simply liking the things?"

"I know it. The reason I was so late is that I couldn't resist practicing. First, I concentrated on hating them, and inside of two minutes they had come back. As soon as they arrived and began humming around my face, I thought how owlish and amusing they looked, and what nice pets they'd make. Away they went again. I did it half a dozen times, and then I suddenly realized that you would probably be looking for me. So I untied the hundred and twelve knots and began running back here."

Eisentstein rocked back in his chair. " 'Love your enemy,' " he said. "A new sort of insect repellent."

He got up. "Excuse me for a minute," he said. "I'll put a call in to Central Headquarters. You can tell them about it, and dictate your report through."

Left alone, Leonard and Lucy sat in silence. Then, at last, he said uncomfortably, "I certainly don't want to violate any

more customs. Uh—what does one usually say to—er—to a girl who has no house?"

"Why," Lucy said brightly, "it's one more of those interesting parallels that Sam loves to find in our two civilizations. You say, 'May I kiss you?' "

AVRAM DAVIDSON

Stories by Avram Davidson are lamentably infrequent, wholly unlike each other, and highly to be treasured. If you remember—as I am sure you do—My Boy Friend's Name is Jello (THE BEST FROM F&SF: FOURTH SERIES) *or* The Golem (FIFTH SERIES), *you know the one certain fact about any Davidson story: that it be unpredictable, unique and delightful.*

KING'S EVIL

WHEN I FIRST saw the copy of *The Memoirs of Dr. Mainauduc, the Mesmerist* (bound in flaking leather, the spine in shreds, and half the title page missing: which is why I was able to buy it cheap), I assumed it to be a work of fiction. There is something extremely Gothick about "Mainauduc, the Mesmerist." It sets one in mind at once of Melmoth, the Wanderer. No one today would venture to invent such a name for such a person. (Unless, of course, he were writing for television or the movies, in which case he might venture anything.) But the times bring forth the man, and the man bears the name. Consider, for example, "the Jesuit Hell." This is not a theological conception, it was a man, a Jesuit, whose family name was Hell. Father Hell devised a system or theory of healing based on "metallic magnetism"; he passed it on to Franz Anton Mesmer, who almost at once quarreled with him, produced the countertheory of "animal magnetism." Mesmer begat (so to speak) D'Eslon, D'Eslon begat

Mainauduc. Full of enthusiasm, Mainauduc came to England, and settled in, of all places, Bristol. All this, I admit, sounds most improbable. Truth so often does. Who is not familiar with the bewildered cry of the novice writer, "But that's the way it *happened!*"? Not altogether trusting to my own ability to convince the reader that there really was such a person as the Jesuit Hell or such a person as Mainauduc, the Mesmerist, I refer him to Mackay's *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*; but should he (the reader) not be able to credit that this work exists either, then I must throw up my hands. Mackay, in my opinion, was really too hard on "The Magnetisers," as he called them. Himself so great a sceptic, he could have little cause for complaint if other, later, sceptics should not care to believe that any book bearing such a title ever existed. In a way, it would serve him right. . . .

In Bristol Dr. Mainauduc flourished to the degree that his reputation went on ahead of him to London. In a short time London was coming to him; he cured dukes of the dropsy and generals of the gout, he magnetized countesses into convulsions and they emerged from them free of the phthysic, while vicountesses left their vapors behind them—or so he says. At any rate he determined upon going to London and setting up something called "the Hygienickal Society . . . for Females of high Position . . . the fees, Fifteen Guineas" at his house in the capital. And he describes, amongst many other cases, one where he cured a long-seated complaint ("pronounced beyond help") entirely by proxy.

It may be that Dr. Mainauduc's success in Bristol was perhaps not quite so dazzling as his memory in later years led him to fancy. He had come up to London, to discuss his setting up practice there, at the invitation of a Mr. Wentworth, "a Bachelor of Physick," who lived in Rosemary Lane; and despite its pretty name, Rosemary Lane was not located in a pretty district. We might consider it a depressed area. And Mr. Wentworth had arranged to meet him, not in his own quarters, but at an inn called the Mulberry Tree, where

they were to dine. Mr. Wentworth had made the necessary arrangements, but Mr. Wentworth was late.

"Dr. Mainauduc? To meet Mr. Wentworth? Certainly, sir," the waiter said. "If the Doctor will only please to step in here, Mr. Wentworth will be along presently." And he led him along to a medium-sized room, with paneled walls, and a fire which seemed to beckon pleasantly from the grate, for it was the first of October, and the air was chill. He had scarcely had the time to give his full attention to the flames licking greedily at the greasy black slabs of coal when he noticed that there was someone already in the room. This person came forward from his corner, where he had been engaged in softening the nether end of one candle in the flame of another so that it might hold fast in its sconce and not wobble, with his hand extended.

"Have I, sir," he asked, with the slightest of smiles, and an air of deference and courtesy, "the honor of beholding the author of the great treatise on the magnetical fluid?"

"You are too kind, sir," said Mainauduc, indicating to the waiter with but a flick of his eye that there was no objection taken to the stranger's presence and that the waiter might leave. "I am sensible of the complaint you pay me merely by having heard of my little pamphlet." And he bowed.

"Heard of it, Doctor?" cries the other, a smallish, slender man, clad in dark garments. He holds up his finger as if to command attention, and begins to speak.

" 'The magnet attracts iron, iron is found everywhere, everything is therefore under the influence of magnetism. It is only a modification of the general principle, which establishes harmony or foments discord. It is the same agent that gives rise to sympathy, antipathy, and the passions.' Have I not the passage right, sir? My name is Blee, sir: James Blee."

"I am enchanted to meet you, Mr. Blee. I commend your memory. However—" he seated himself at right angles to the fire—"you will doubtless recall that the passage you quote is not mine. *I* was quoting from the Spaniard, Balthazar Graciano." He spread his long fingers to the blaze. "Are you a physician, sir?"

Mr. Blee perhaps did not hear the question.

"Then try my memory on this, Doctor," he said. " 'There is a flux and reflux, not only in the sea, but in the atmosphere, which affects in a similar manner all organized bodies through the medium of a subtile and mobile fluid, which pervades the universe, and associates all things together in mutual intercourse and harmony.' Were you . . . dare we hope . . . is it that . . . ?"

Dr. Mainauduc raised his dark brows.

"What is your question, Mr. Blee?"

"Can it be that London is destined to enjoy the great fortune which has hithertofore been Bristol's alone, Dr. Mainauduc? The reluctant tones of my voice must discover to you that I know I have no right to enquire, but . . ."

The mesmerist smiled. "It may be," he began; but at this moment the door was thrown open and two gentlemen entered, one nervously, the other laughing.

"Oh, pray, *pray* forgive me, Dr. Mainauduc—how d'ye do, Mr. Blee?—for my lateness," said the nervous gentleman, taking off his hat so hurriedly his wig came with it. He struggled to replace it, and, at the same time, gestured towards his companion, who rubbed his hands as he looked about the room and laughed. "This is Mr. Farmer, sir; Mr. Farmer—Dr. Mainauduc, Mr. Blee." He smiled faintly. His face was pale.

"Dr. Mainauduc, Mainauduc, very pleased. Mr. Blee, I hope you do well, well, well. Farmer by name, gentlemen," the other man said, "and farmer by profession, farmer by profession. What, what?" He then laughed once more at length and proceeded to repeat his remarks all over again. His face was ruddy.

Mr. Blee courteously asked if he had had good crops, and while Mr. Farmer was merrily discussing corn, hay, and wall-fruit with his questioner, Mr. Wentworth drew Dr. Mainauduc to one side, and spoke closely to his ear.

"The fact of the matter is that I never saw this gentleman in my life before, till just above an hour ago, when he came into the barber's where I was having my hair attended to,

and desired to be shaved. 'Tis my belief, sir, that he is some country squire unused to London ways," Mr. Wentworth said; "for when the man was finished, the gentleman said, oh, as blandly as you please, that he had no money. I presume he'd had his pocket picked, for one can see by his clothes that he *is*—"

"Oh, quite so," murmured Dr. Mainauduc.

"Have you not often wondered," Mr. Farmer chattered to Mr. Blee, "how the people do? How they live? What their lives are like? What they think, really think? Hey, sir? What, what?"

"Oh, frequently, Mr. Farmer!"

Wentworth murmured, "And so I thought best to pay for the barber, and then I really did not know how to get rid of him."

Dr. Mainauduc saw that his fellow physician was considerably embarrassed at the introduction of two extra men to what was intended for a private meeting. He assured him that he did not mind, and said that, indeed, it was just as well, for they might get a lay opinion on the subjec of introducing to London the practice of the Mesmeric therapy. And so they all four sat down to supper. There was beef and brawn and game pie and goose.

"I little thought to have this honor, Doctor," Mr. Blee said; "but, chancing to hear from Mr. Wentworth, of whose professional parts I bear the highest opinion, that *you* were to be here, I felt I must hazard it, and come to see the prophet of the newfound philosophy."

Wentworth, who had treated Blee for an amorous distemper, kept silence, but his principal guest smiled.

"Newly *re*-found philosophy, I should rather term it," Mainauduc said. "What was the laying on of hands but animal magnetism, anciently practiced? And in what other way did Elisha bring to life the dead child, but by conveyance of the magnetical fluid?" Wentworth nodded gravely.

Mr. Farmer, who had been talking with his mouth full, and smiling happily, suddenly threw down his knife. His face fell.

"Suppose—d'ye see, gentlemen—suppose a man makes

mistakes—eh?—bad ones, very bad, bad, bad. Terrible losses. What? Now, now, oughtn't he have the chance, the chance, I say, to do better? Better? What, what? Well, so he must see for himself how things go. See for himself. Eh? How things go. Terrible losses. Was it not a thing to break your heart? It broke *my* heart. I never meant it to happen so—"

"*Gaming!*" Wentworth whispered to Mainauduc.

"To what losses do you refer, Mr. Farmer?" Blee asked, in a solicitous tone. "Did I not understand you to say the harvest was *good* this year?"

"The Mesmeric method—" Wentworth began, rather loudly. Abashed, he lowered his voice. "Dr. Mainauduc is desirous of opening in London an institute for the practice of the Mesmeric method of healing. In this, it is contemplated, I am to assist him." The faintest shadow of color came and went in his face. "What think you of the scheme, gentlemen? We, that is he, should like to know."

Blee rose from the table and gave the fire a poke. The gray pyramid collapsed and the coals blazed up again, making the shadows dance. Mr. Farmer laughed.

"Is not this pleasant?" he cried. "I am so very much obliged to you for the pleasure. Pleasure. We dine simply at home. At home—eh?—we dine very simply. But there is such a degree of stiffness. Strain. Stiffness and strain."

Mr. Blee tapped the poker on the iron dogs. "Such an institution, if headed by such a man as Dr. Mainauduc, can not possibly do otherwise than succeed." The two physicians looked at one another, pleased. Their faces quickened.

"You will make a deal of money," Blee told the fire.

Wentworth looked hastily at a darned place on his hose, and crossed his legs. "It is the science, not the money. The money is not of any consequence to us."

"Not of the least consequence," Mainauduc said easily. His coat and waistcoat were of French flowered silk. Blee turned from the fire. He drew up his chair and sat, facing Dr. Mainauduc.

"Gentlemen," he said in low tones, "pray give me leave to speak openly. The alchymists strove for centuries to make

gold; that they succeeded, no one can say with certainty. But magnetism is the new alchymy. It *will* make gold, I *know* it. Already London is atremble with the reports of its success. People who would never go so far as Hackney to consult the best physician of the old school ever known, have gone all the way to Bristol to be magnetized by Dr. Mainauduc. You have only to throw open your doors in London, sir, to have your chambers thronged—with the richest . . . and the wealthiest . . ." His voice hissed upon the sibilants. He brought his dark, clever face nearer. "You will need a man of business. May I serve you?"

The two physicians looked at one another. Dr. Mainauduc's lips parted. Mr. Wentworth inclined his head to the side. And, then, as abrupt as the bursting of a bubble, the mood or spell was shattered: Mr. Farmer, seemingly from nowhere, had produced a grubby child, and was patting its head and stroking its cheeks and asking what its name was and if it would like a glass of wine—all in a tone of boisterous good cheer, his eyes popping with joy.

"Now, damme, sir!" cries Blee, jumping to his feet in a rage and overturning the chair. The child begins to weep.

"Oh, pray, don't" Farmer implores. "I love children. Don't fret, poppet."

"Take care, Mr. Farmer," Wentworth warns him. "Do you not see the child is diseased? See the lesions—it is certainly scrofulous. Have done, Mr. Farmer!"

Then the waiter came, with many apologies, for it was his child, begged their pardon, took the boy away.

"Well, we shall think of your proposal, Mr. Blee." Dr. Mainauduc sat back, languid from the food and fire, tired from his journey. "What, Wentworth, was the child with scrofulae?"

"Assuredly, sir. Shall I call it back? Perhaps you wish to examine, or treat it?" But the Doctor waved his hand. "King's Evil, is what the common people call it, you know. Scrofula, I mean to say. Some of them profess to regard it as beyond *medical* aid. They still remember that the monarchs of the former dynasty, as late as Queen Anne, used to 'touch'

for it. An interesting ceremony it must have been. The touch of an anointed king, the common people say, is the only cure for it. Now what think you, Doctor, of sympathetical mummy, or capons fed with vipers?"

Dr. Mainauduc, who had been listening with a trace of impatience, cleared his throat. Blee stood once more by the fire.

"You mentioned, sir, my pamphlet, earlier in the evening—my pamphlet entituled, *A Treatise on the Magnetickal Fluid.* Whilst I was in Paris I met the eminent American sage, Mr. Franklin, and I presented him a copy, for it seems to me evident that what he calls the positive and negative of electricity is none other than the intension and remission of which that great giant of natural philosophy, Franz Anton Mesmer, writes. Mr. Blee—Mr. *Blee?*" But that gentleman was staring, his lower lip caught up beneath his teeth, at Mr. Farmer; and Mr. Farmer was weeping.

"Directly you mentioned Franklin, Doctor, he began to shed tears," whispered Wentworth. "Do you know, Doctor, I commence to think that he is an American himself—a Loyalist—and that the 'loss' he spoke of was his property—or perhaps his son—in the Rebillion there. What think *you, sir?*"

"*I* commence to think, sir, that he is a man whom I am shortly to magnetize, for it is plain he is in need of it."

Dr. Mainauduc rose and blew out all but one of the candles. Wentworth's eyes glistened and he stepped nearer, but Blee retreated further into the gloom. Only a dull red glow now came from the fire. Dr. Mainauduc seated himself facing Mr. Farmer, touching him knee to knee. He took his hands in his.

"Attend to me now, sir," Dr. Mainauduc said.

"My head *does* ache," Mr. Farmer murmured.

"It shall presently ache no more. . . . Attend."

He gently placed Farmer's hands so they rested, palms up, on his knees, and slowly began to stroke them with the palms of his own hands. He did this for some time, then drew his hands along Mr. Farmer's arms, leaning forward, until they rested with the fingers touching the neck. Slowly his hands

passed up the sides of the man's face, then withdrew till they were opposite his eyes. Again and again he repeated these passes. The candle's light glittered on the single ring he wore, and Wentworth saw the glitter reflected in Mr. Farmer's wide-open eyes. Mr. Farmer was motionless, and the noise of his heavy breathing died away. It seemed to Wentworth, as he watched, that a smoke or vapor, like a thin mist, or the plume from a tobacco-pipe, was exuded from the mesmerist's face and hands. It moved slowly and sluggishly and hung in the air about Mr. Farmer's head.

And as Wentworth watched, he fancied that he saw strange scenes take form for fleeting moments in this miasmic suspiration: a procession of people in heavy robes and men with miters, a phantasm of silent men in violent riot, and noiseless battles on land and sea. Then all vanished, ghosts and mists alike. He heard once more the sound of Mr. Farmer's breathing, and Dr. Mainauduc had lit the candles and the light was reflected on the paneled walls.

Wentworth cleared his throat. Mainauduc looked at him, and there was terror in his eyes. He started to speak, and his voice caught in his throat.

"We had better leave, you and I," he said, at last. "Do you know who your country squire is, your Loyalist?"

"*I* know," said Blee's voice from the door. He stood there, his sallow skin gone paler than Wentworth's, but a look of determination fixed upon his face. Behind him were two broad-shouldered, shifty-looking men. "We will take charge of Mr. Farmer, if you please."

"No, I think not," Mr. Farmer said. He stood up, an air of dignity upon him. "There has been enough taking charge of Mr. Farmer, and Mr. Farmer has a task to do."

"Oh, sir, you are unwell," Blee said, in a fawning tone, and he sidled forward, followed by his minions. And then, without warning, the room was filled with men: constables with their staves in their hands, soldiers in red coats, Mr. Martinson, the magistrate, a tall young man looking very much like Mr. Farmer himself, and others.

"You had better come with us, sir, I think," said the tall young man. Mr. Farmer slumped. The air of dignity fell from him. Then he laughed vacantly.

"Very well, Fred, very well," he said. "Very well, very well. You think it best, what, what?" He shambled forward, stopped, looked over his shoulder. "These two gentlemen—" he indicated Dr. Mainauduc and Mr. Wentworth,—"treated me with great consideration. They are not to be bothered, d'ye hear?" The magistrate bowed. Mr. Farmer went out slowly, leaning on the arm of the tall man, and muttering, "Bothered, bothered, bothered . . ."

Let us return to the *Memoirs.*

"On this occasion [Mainauduc writes] the entire Atmosphere was so saturated with the Magnetickal Fluid that there was cured in another part of the House a Child suffering from a Complaint long-seated and pronounced beyond help, *viz.*, Scrofula, or King's Evil. There was not a Lesion or Scar or Mark left, and all this without my even having touched him."

As to the identity of Mr. Farmer, Dr. Mainauduc is coy. He says only that he was "a Gentleman of exceedingly high Station, exceedingly afflicted. Had I been allowed to treat him further, a Privilege denied me, he might have been spared the terrible Malady which had already begun its Ravages, and which, save for a few brief periods, never entirely left him."

Thus far, on this subject, *The Memoirs of Dr. Mainauduc, the Mesmerist,* a man of his time—or behind his time, if you prefer; or, considering that mesmerism was the forerunner of hypnotism and that the study of hypnotism led Freud on to psychoanalysis, perhaps a man ahead of his time. Could he, perchance—or could anyone—really have cured "Mr. Farmer"? It is impossible to say. If certain private papers of Frederick, Duke of York, still sealed to public inspection, could be opened, we might learn what truth there was—if any—to a curious legend concerning his father. Is it really so that he evaded all who surrounded him, and for six hours

one day in early October 1788 wandered unrecognized through London on some strange and unsuccessful quest of his own, in the month when it was finally deemed impossible to doubt any longer that he was mad—that longest-lived and most unfortunate of British Kings, George III?

FREDERIK POHL

Frederik Pohl is as good a candidate as you'll find for the title of the Compleat Science Fictionist. He has been an agent, a magazine editor, an actifan (active fan, for any non-fans in the audience), a writer (in every conceivable length, with at least seven pseudonyms and five collaborators), a book-reviewer, an anthologist . . . is there anything the man hasn't done? Of all his achievements, he is probably most noted for his novels in collaboration with C. M. Kornbluth, such as THE SPACE MERCHANTS *and* GLADIATOR-AT-LAW, *which are absolute models of the detailed, plausible creation of an ironically extrapolated future civilization. Now, to confirm his versatility and virtuosity, Mr. Pohl brings off the astonishing feat of a similar creation in under three thousand words, with a complete story and character portrait thrown in. I'm inclined to nominate this, Pohl's first story in these pages, as one of the most extraordinary jobs of effective conciseness in all of science fiction.*

THE CENSUS TAKERS

IT GETS TO BE a madhouse around here along about the end of the first week. Thank heaven we only do this once a year, that's what I say! Six weeks on, and forty-six weeks off—that's pretty good hours, most people think. But they don't know what those six weeks are like.

It's bad enough for the field crews, but when you get to be

an Area Boss like me it's frantic. You work your way up through the ranks, and then they give you a whole C.A. of your own; and you think you've got it made. Fifty three-man crews go out, covering the whole Census Area; a hundred and fifty men in the field, and twenty or thirty more in Area Command—and you boss them all. And everything looks great, until Census Period starts and you've got to work those hundred and fifty men; and six weeks is too unbearably long to live through, and too impossibly short to get the work done; and you begin living on black coffee and thiamin shots and dreaming about the vacation hostel on Point Loma.

Anybody can panic, when the pressure is on like that. Your best fieldmen begin to crack up. But you can't afford to, because you're the Area Boss. . . .

Take Witeck. We were Enumerators together, and he was as good a man as you ever saw, absolutely nerveless when it came to processing the Overs. I counted on that man the way I counted on my own right arm; I always bracketed him with the greenest, shakiest new cadet Enumerators, and he never gave me a moment's trouble for years. Maybe it was too good to last; maybe I should have figured he would crack.

I set up my Area Command in a plush penthouse apartment. The people who lived there were pretty well off, you know, and they naturally raised the dickens about being shoved out. "Blow it," I told them. "Get out of here in five minutes, and we'll count you first." Well, that took care of *that*; they were practically kissing my feet on the way out. Of course, it wasn't strictly by the book, but you have to be a little flexible; that's why some men become Area Bosses, and others stay Enumerators.

Like Witeck.

Along about Day Eight things were really hotting up. I was up to my neck in hurry-ups from Regional Control—we were running a little slow—when Witeck called up. "Chief," he said, "I've got an In."

I grabbed the rotary file with one hand and a pencil with the other. "Blue-card number?" I asked.

Witeck sounded funny over the phone. "Well, Chief," he said, "he doesn't have a blue card. He says——"

"No blue card?" I couldn't believe it. Come in to a strange C.A. without a card from your own Area Boss, and you're one In that's a cinch to be an Over. "What kind of a crazy C.A. does he come from, without a blue card?"

Witeck said, "He don't come from any C.A., Chief. He says——"

"You mean he isn't from this country?"

"That's right, Chief. He——"

"Hold it!" I pushed away the rotary file and grabbed the immigration roster. There were only a couple of dozen names on it, of course—we have enough trouble with our own Overs, without taking on a lot of foreigners, but still there were a handful every year who managed to get on the quotas. "I.D. number?" I demanded.

"Well, Chief," Witeck began, "he doesn't have an I.D. number. The way it looks to be——"

Well, you can fool around with these irregulars for a month, if you want to, but it's no way to get the work done. I said: "Over him!" and hung up. I was a little surprised, though; Witeck knew the ropes, and it wasn't like him to buck an irregular on to me. In the old days, when we were both starting out, I'd seen him Over a whole family just because the spelling of their names on the registry cards was different from the spelling on the check list.

But we get older. I made a note to talk to Witeck as soon as the rush was past. We were old friends; I wouldn't have to threaten him with being Overed himself, or anything like that. He'd know, and maybe that would be all he would need to snap him back. I certainly would talk to him, I promised myself, as soon as the rush was over, or anyway as soon as I got back from Point Loma.

I had to run up to Regional Control to take a little talking-to myself just then, but I proved to them that we were catching up and they were only medium nasty. When I got

back Witeck was on the phone again. "Chief," he said, real unhappy, "this In is giving me a headache. I—"

"Witeck," I snapped at him, "are you bothering me with another In? Can't you handle anything by yourself?"

He said, "It's the same one, Chief. He says he's a kind of ambassador, and—"

"Oh," I said. "Well, why the devil don't you get your facts straight in the first place? Give me his name and I'll check his legation."

"Well, Chief," he began again, "he, uh, doesn't have any legation. He says he's from the—" he swallowed— "from the middle of the earth."

"You're crazy." I'd seen it happen before, good men breaking under the strain of census taking. They say in cadets that by the time you process your first five hundred Overs you've had it; either you take a voluntary Over yourself, or you split wide open and they carry you off to a giggle farm. And Witeck was past the five hundred mark, way past.

There was a lot of yelling and crying from the filter center, which I'd put out by the elevators, and it looked like Jumpers. I stabbed the transfer button on the phone and called Carias, my number-two man: "Witeck's flipped or something. Handle it!"

And then I forgot about it, while Carias talked to Witeck on the phone; because it was Jumpers, all right, a whole family of them.

There was a father and a mother and five kids—*five* of them. Aren't some people disgusting? The field Enumerator turned them over to the guards—they were moaning and crying—and came up and gave me the story. It was bad.

"You're the head of the household?" I demanded of the man.

He nodded, looking at me like a sick dog. "We—we weren't Jumping," he whined. "Honest to heaven, mister—you've got to believe me. We were—"

I cut in, "You were packed and on the doorstep when the field crew came by. Right?" He started to say something, but I had him dead to rights. "That's plenty, friend," I told him.

"That's Jumping, under the law: Packing, with intent to move, while a census Enumeration crew is operating in your locale. Got anything to say?"

Well, he had plenty to say, but none of it made any sense. He turned my stomach, listening to him. I tried to keep my temper—you're not supposed to think of individuals, no matter how worthless and useless and generally unfit they are; that's against the whole principle of the Census—but I couldn't help telling him: "I've met your kind before, mister. Five kids! If it wasn't for people like you we wouldn't *have* any Overs, did you ever think of that? Sure you didn't—you people never think of anything but yourself! Five kids, and then when Census comes around you think you can get smart and Jump." I tell you, I was shaking. "You keep your little beady eyes peeled, sneaking around, watching the Enumerators, trying to make an Over; and then you wait until they get close to you, so you can Jump. Ever stop to think what trouble that makes for us?" I demanded. "Census is supposed to be fair and square, everybody an even chance—and how can we make it that way unless everybody stands still to be counted?" I patted Old Betsy, on my hip. "I haven't Overed anybody myself in five years," I told him, "but I swear, I'd like to handle you personally!"

He didn't say a word once I got started on him. He just stood there, taking it. I had to force myself to stop, finally; I could have gone on for a long time, because if there's one thing I hate it's these lousy stinking breeders who try to Jump when they think one of them is going to be an Over in the count-off. Regular Jumpers are bad enough, but when it's the people who make the mess in the first place—

Anyway, time was wasting. I took a deep breath and thought things over. Actually, we weren't too badly off; we'd started off Overing every two-hundred-and-fiftieth person, and it was beginning to look as though our preliminary estimate was high; we'd just cut back to Overing every three-hundredth. So we had a little margin to play with.

I told the man, dead serious: "You know I could Over the lot of you on charges, don't you?" He nodded sickly. "All

right, I'll give you a chance. I don't want to bother with the red tape; if you'll take a voluntary Over for yourself, we'll start the new count with your wife."

Call me soft, if you want to; but I still say that it was a lot better than fussing around with charges and a hearing. You get into a hearing like that and it can drag on for half an hour or more; and then Regional Control is on your tail because you're falling behind.

It never hurts to give a man a break, even a Jumper, I always say—as long as it doesn't slow down your Census.

Carias was waiting at my desk when I got back; he looked worried about something, but I brushed him off while I initialed the Overage report on the man we'd just processed. He'd been an In, I found out when I canceled his blue card. I can't say I was surprised. He'd come from Denver, and you know how they keep exceeding their Census figures; no doubt he thought he'd have a better chance in my C.A. than anywhere else. And no doubt he was right, because we certainly don't encourage breeders like him—actually, if he hadn't tried to Jump it was odds-on that the whole damned family would get by without an Over for years.

Carias was hovering right behind me as I finished. "I hate these voluntaries." I told him, basketing the canceled card. "I'm going to talk to Regional Control about it; there's no reason why they can't be processed like any other Over, instead of making me O.K. each one individually. Now, what's the matter?"

He rubbed his jaw. "Chief," he said, "it's Witeck."

"Now what? Another In?"

Carias glanced at me, then away. "Uh, no Chief. It's the same one. He claims he comes from, uh, the center of the earth."

"I swore out loud. "So he has to turn up in my C.A.!" I complained bitterly. "He gets out of the nuthouse, and right away—"

Carias said, "Chief, he might not be crazy. He makes it sound pretty real."

I said: "Hold it, Carias. Nobody can live in the center of the earth. It's solid, like a potato."

"Sure, Chief," Carias nodded earnestly. "But he says it isn't. He says there's a what he calls neutronium shell, whatever that is, with dirt and rocks on both sides of it. We live on the outside. He lives on the inside. His people——"

"Carias!" I yelled. "You're as bad as Witeck! This guy turns up, no blue card, no I.D. number, no credentials of any kind. What's he going to say, 'Please sir, I'm an Over, please process me'? Naturally not! So he makes up a crazy story, and you fall for it!"

"I know, Chief," Carias said humbly.

"Neutronium shell!" I would have laughed out loud, if I'd had the time. "Neutronium my foot! Don't you know it's *hot* down there?"

"He says it's hot neutronium," Carias said eagerly. "I asked him that myself, Chief. He said it's just the shell that——"

"Get back to work!" I yelled at him. I picked up the phone and got Witeck on his wristphone. I tell you, I was boiling. As soon as Witeck answered I lit into him; I didn't give him a chance to get a word in. I gave it to him up and down and sidewise; and I finished off by giving him a direct order. "You Over that man," I told him, "or I'll personally Over you! You hear me?"

There was a pause. Then Witeck said, "Jerry? Will you listen to me?"

That stopped me. It was the first time in ten years, since I'd been promoted above him, that Witeck had dared call me by my first name. He said, "Jerry, listen. This is something big. This guy is really from the center of the earth, no kidding. He——"

"Witeck," I said, "you've cracked."

"No, Jerry, honest! And it worries me. He's right there in the next room waiting for me. He says he had no idea things were like this on the surface; he's talking wild about cleaning us off and starting all over again; he says——"

"*I* say he's an Over!" I yelled. "No more talk, Witeck. You've got a direct order—now carry it out!"

So that was that.

We got through the Census Period, after all, but we had to do it shorthanded; and Witeck was hard to replace. I'm a sentimentalist, I guess, but I couldn't help remembering old times. We started even; he might have risen as far as I—but of course he made his choice when he got married and had a kid; you can't be a breeder and an officer of the Census both. If it hadn't been for his record he couldn't even have stayed on as an Enumerator.

I never said a word to anyone about his crackup. Carias might have talked, but after we found Witeck's body I took him aside. "Carias," I said reasonably, "we don't want any scandal, do we? Here's Witeck, with an honorable record; he cracks, and kills himself, and that's bad enough. We won't let loose talk make it worse, will we?"

Carias said uneasily, "Chief, where's the gun he killed himself with? His own processor wasn't even fired?"

You can let a helper go just so far. I said sharply, "Carias, we still have at least a hundred Overs to process. You can be on one end of the processing—or you can be on the other. You understand me?"

He coughed. "Sure, Chief. I understand. We don't want any loose talk."

And that's how it is when you're an Area Boss. But I didn't ever get my vacation at Point Loma; the tsunami there washed out the whole town the last week of Census. And when I tried Baja California, they were having that crazy volcanic business; and the Yellowstone Park bureau wouldn't even accept my reservation because of some trouble with the geysers, so I just stayed home. But the best vacation of all was just knowing that the Census was done for another year.

Carias was all for looking for this In that Witeck was talking about, but I turned him down. "Waste of time," I told him. "By now he's a dozen C.A.'s away. We'll never see him again, him or anybody like him—I'll bet my life on that."

POUL ANDERSON

How rarely science-fiction writers succeed in creating a wholly alien culture may be judged from any adequate study of an earthly culture of a time or place which does not form part of our direct heritage. S.f.'s aliens may have pseudopods or superscientific gadgets, but rarely so wholly different a frame of reference as man himself has achieved in other eras. Here F&SF's favorite Scandinavian skald takes us to Iceland near the end of the tenth century and convincingly depicts a truly "alien" way of life — and teaches us the tragic truth that the role of a twentieth-century time-traveler to a "primitive" culture need not necessarily be that of Prometheus the Fire-Bringer.

THE MAN WHO CAME EARLY

YES, WHEN A MAN grows old he has heard so much that is strange there's little more can surprise him. They say the king in Miklagard has a beast of gold before his high seat, which stands up and roars. I have it from Eilif Eiriksson, who served in the guard down there, and he is a steady fellow when not drunk. He has also seen the Greek fire used, it burns on water.

So, priest, I am not unwilling to believe what you say about the White Christ. I have been in England and France myself, and seen how the folk prosper. He must be a very powerful god, to ward so many realms . . . and did you say that everyone who is baptized will be given a white

robe? I would like to have one. They mildew, of course, in this cursed wet Iceland weather, but a small sacrifice to the houseelves should—No sacrifices? Come now! I'll give up horseflesh if I must, my teeth not being what they were, but every sensible man knows how much trouble the elves make if they're not fed.

. . . Well, let's have another cup and talk about it. How do you like the beer? It's my own brew, you know. The cups I got in England, many years back. I was a young man then . . . time goes, time goes. Afterward I came back and inherited this, my father's steading, and have not left it since. Well enough to go in viking as a youth, but grown older you see where the real wealth lies: here, in the land and the cattle.

Stoke up the fires, Hjalti. It's growing cold. Sometimes I think the winters are colder than when I was a boy. Thorbrand of the Salmondale says so, but he believes the gods are angry because so many are turning from them. You'll have trouble winning Thorbrand over, priest. A stubborn man. Myself I am open-minded, and willing to listen at least.

. . . Now then. There is one point on which I must correct you. The end of the world is not coming in two years. This I know.

And if you ask me how I know, that's a very long tale, and in some ways a terrible one. Glad I am to be old, and safely in the earth before that great tomorrow comes. It will be an eldritch time before the frost giants march . . . oh, very well, before the angel blows his battle horn. One reason I hearken to your preaching is that I know the White Christ will conquer Thor. I know Iceland is going to be Christian erelong, and it seems best to range myself on the winning side.

No, I've had no visions. This is a happening of five years ago, which my own household and neighbors can swear to. They mostly did not believe what the stranger told; I do, more or less, if only because I don't think a liar could wreak so much harm. I loved my daughter, priest, and after it was over I made a good marriage for her. She did not naysay it, but now she sits out on the ness-farm with her husband and

never a word to me; and I hear he is ill pleased with her silence and moodiness, and spends his nights with an Irish concubine. For this I cannot blame him, but it grieves me.

Well, I've drunk enough to tell the whole truth now, and whether you believe it or not makes no odds to me. Here . . . you, girls! . . . fill these cups again, for I'll have a dry throat before I finish the telling.

It begins, then, on a day in early summer, five years ago. At that time, my wife Ragnhild and I had only two unwed children still living with us: our youngest son Helgi, of seventeen winters, and our daughter Thorgunna, of eighteen. The girl, being fair, had already had suitors. But she refused them, and I am not a man who would compel his daughter. As for Helgi, he was ever a lively one, good with his hands but a breackneck youth. He is now serving in the guard of King Olaf of Norway. Besides these, of course, we had about ten housefolk—two Irish thralls, two girls to help with the women's work, and half a dozen hired carles. This is not a small steading.

You have not seen how my land lies. About two miles to the west is the bay; the thorps at Reykjavik are about five miles south. The land rises toward the Long Jökull, so that my acres are hilly; but it's good hayland, and there is often driftwood on the beach. I've built a shed down there for it, as well as a boathouse.

There had been a storm the night before, so Helgi and I were going down to look for drift. You, coming from Norway, do not know how precious wood is to us Icelanders, who have only a few scrubby trees and must bring all our timber from abroad. Back there men have often been burned in their houses by their foes, but we count that the worst of deeds, though it's not unknown.

I was on good terms with my neighbors, so we took only hand weapons. I my ax, Helgi a sword, and the two carles we had with us bore spears. It was a day washed clean by the night's fury, and the sun fell bright on long wet grass. I saw my garth lying rich around its courtyard, sleek cows

and sheep, smoke rising from the roof hole of the hall, and knew I'd not done so ill in my lifetime. My son Helgi's hair fluttered in the low west wind as we left the steading behind a ridge and neared the water. Strange how well I remember all which happened that day, somehow it was a sharper day than most.

When we came down to the strand, the sea was beating heavy, white and gray out to the world's edge. A few gulls flew screaming above us, frightened off a cod washed up onto the shore. I saw there was a litter of no few sticks, even a baulk of timber . . . from some ship carrying it that broke up during the night, I suppose. That was a useful find, though, as a careful man, I would later sacrifice to be sure the owner's ghost wouldn't plague me.

We had fallen to and were dragging the baulk toward the shed when Helgi cried out. I ran for my ax as I looked the way he pointed. We had no feuds then, but there are always outlaws.

This one seemed harmless, though. Indeed, as he stumbled nearer across the black sand I thought him quite unarmed and wondered what had happened. He was a big man and strangely clad—he wore coat and breeches and shoes like anyone else, but they were of peculiar cut and he bound his trousers with leggings rather than thongs. Nor had I ever seen a helmet like his: it was almost square, and came down to cover his neck, but it had no nose guard; it was held in place by a leather strap. And this you may not believe, but it was *not metal yet had been cast in one piece!*

He broke into a staggering run as he neared, and flapped his arms and croaked something. The tongue was none I had ever heard, and I have heard many; it was like dogs barking. I saw that he was clean-shaven and his black hair cropped short, and thought he might be French. Otherwise he was a young man, and good-looking, with blue eyes and regular features. From his skin I judged that he spent much time indoors, yet he had a fine manly build.

"Could he have been shipwrecked?" asked Helgi.

"His clothes are dry and unstained," I said; "nor has he

been wandering long, for there's no stubble on his chin. Yet I've heard of no strangers guesting hereabouts."

We lowered our weapons, and he came up to us and stood gasping. I saw that his coat and the shirt behind was fastened with bonelike buttons rather than laces, and were of heavy weave. About his neck he had fastened a strip of cloth tucked into his coat. These garments were all in brownish hues. His shoes were of a sort new to me, very well cobbled. Here and there on his coat were bits of brass, and he had three broken stripes on each sleeve; also a black band with white letters, the same letters being on his helmet. Those were not runes, but Roman letters—thus: MP. He wore a broad belt, with a small clublike thing of metal in a sheath at the hip and also a real club.

"I think he must be a warlock," muttered my carle Sigurd. "Why else all those tokens?"

"They may only be ornament, or to ward against witchcraft," I soothed him. Then, to the stranger. "I hight Ospak Ulfsson of Hillstead. What is your errand?"

He stood with his chest heaving and a wildness in his eyes. He must have run a long way. Then he moaned and sat down and covered his face.

"If he's sick, best we get him to the house," said Helgi. His eyes gleamed—we see so few new faces here.

"No . . . no . . ." The stranger looked up. "Let me rest a moment——"

He spoke the Norse tongue readily enough, though with a thick accent not easy to follow and with many foreign words I did not understand.

The other carle, Grim, hefted his spear. "Have vikings landed?" he asked.

"When did vikings ever come to Iceland?" I snorted. "It's the other way around."

The newcomer shook his head, as if it had been struck. He got shakily to his feet. "What happened?" he said. "What happened to the city?"

"What city?" I asked reasonably.

"Reykjavik!" he groaned. "Where is it?"

"Five miles south, the way you came—unless you mean the bay itself," I said.

"No! There was only a beach, and a few wretched huts, and—"

"Best not let Hjalmar Broadnose hear you call his thorp that," I counseled.

"But there was a city!" he cried. Wildness lay in his eyes. "I was crossing the street, it was a storm, and there was a crash and then I stood on the beach and the city was gone!"

"He's mad," said Sigurd, backing away. "Be careful . . . if he starts to foam at the mouth, it means he's going berserk."

"Who are you?" babbled the stranger. "What are you doing in those clothes? Why the spears?"

"Somehow," said Helgi, "he does not sound crazed—only frightened and bewildered. Something evil has happened to him."

"I'm not staying near a man under a curse!" yelped Sigurd, and started to run away.

"Come back!" I bawled. "Stand where you are or I'll cleave your louse-bitten head!"

That stopped him, for he had no kin who would avenge him; but he would not come closer. Meanwhile the stranger had calmed down to the point where he could at least talk evenly.

"Was it the *aitchbomb?*" he asked. "Has the war started?"

He used that word often, *aitchbomb,* so I know it now, though unsure of what it means. It seems to be a kind of Greek fire. As for the war, I knew not which war he meant, and told him so.

"There was a great thunderstorm last night," I added. "And you say you were out in one too. Perhaps Thor's hammer knocked you from your place to here."

"But where is here?" he replied. His voice was more dulled than otherwise, now that the first terror had lifted.

"I told you. This is Hillstead, which is on Iceland."

"But that's where I was!" he mumbled. "Reykjavik . . . what happened? Did the *aitchbomb* destroy everything while I was unconscious?"

"Nothing has been destroyed," I said.

"Perhaps he means the fire at Olafsvik last month," said Helgi.

"No, no, no!" He buried his face in his hands. After a while he looked up and said. "See here. I am Sergeant Gerald Roberts of the United States Army base on Iceland. I was in Reykjavik and got struck by lightning or something. Suddenly I was standing on the beach, and got frightened and ran. That's all. Now, can you tell me how to get back to the base?"

Those were more or less his words, priest. Of course, we did not grasp half of it, and made him repeat it several times and explain the words. Even then we did not understand, except that he was from some country called the United States of America, which he said lies beyond Greenland to the west, and that he and some others were on Iceland to help our folk against their enemies. Now this I did not consider a lie—more a mistake or imagining. Grim would have cut him down for thinking us stupid enough to swallow that tale, but I could see that he meant it.

Trying to explain it to us cooled him off. "Look here," he said, in too reasonable a tone for a feverish man, "perhaps we can get at the truth from your side. Has there been no war you know of? Nothing which—well, look here. My country's men first came to Iceland to guard it against the Germans . . . now it is the Russians, but then it was the Germans. When was that?"

Helgi shook his head. "That never happened that I know of," he said. "Who are these Russians?" He found out later that Gardariki was meant. "Unless," he said, "the old warlocks—"

"He means the Irish monks," I explained. "There were a few living here when the Norsemen came, but they were driven out. That was, hm, somewhat over a hundred years ago. Did your folk ever help the monks?"

"I never heard of them!" he said. His breath sobbed in his throat. "You . . . didn't you Icelanders come from Norway?"

"Yes, about a hundred years ago," I answered patiently. "After King Harald Fairhair took all the Norse lands and—"

"*A hundred years ago!*" he whispered. I saw whiteness creep up under his skin. "What year is this?"

We gaped at him. "Well, it's the second year after the great salmon catch," I tried.

"What year after Christ, I mean?" It was a hoarse prayer.

"Oh, so you are a Christian? Hm, let me think . . . I talked with a bishop in England once, we were holding him for ransom, and he said . . . let me see . . . I think he said this Christ man lived a thousand years ago, or maybe a little less."

"A thousand—" He shook his head; and then something went out of him, he stood with glassy eyes—yes, I have seen glass, I told you I am a traveled man—he stood thus, and when we led him toward the garth he went like a small child.

You can see for yourself, priest, that my wife Ragnhild is still good to look upon even in eld, and Thorgunna took after her. She was—is tall and slim, with a dragon's hoard of golden hair. She being a maiden then, it flowed loose over her shoulders. She had great blue eyes and a small heart-shaped face and very red lips. Withal she was a merry one, and kind-hearted, so that all men loved her. Sverri Snorrason went in voking when she refused and was slain, but no one had the wit to see that she was unlucky.

We led this Gerald Samsson—when I asked, he said his father was named Sam—we led him home, leaving Sigurd and Grim to finish gathering the driftwood. There are some who would not have a Christian in their house, for fear of witchcraft, but I am a broad-minded man and Helgi, of course, was wild for anything new. Our guest stumbled like a blind man over the fields, but seemed to wake up as we entered the yard. His eyes went around the buildings that enclosed it, from the stables and sheds to the smokehouse, the brewery, the kitchen, the bathhouse, the god-shrine, and thence to the hall. And Thorgunna was standing in the doorway.

Their gazes locked for a moment, and I saw her color but

thought little of it then. Our shoes rang on the flagging as we crossed the yard and kicked the dogs aside. My two thralls paused in cleaning out the stables to gawp, until I got them back to work with the remark that a man good for naught else was always a pleasing sacrifice. That's one useful practice you Christians lack; I've never made a human offering myself, but you know not how helpful is the fact that I could do so.

We entered the hall and I told the folk Gerald's name and how we had found him. Ragnhild set her maids hopping, to stoke up the fire in the middle trench and fetch beer, while I led Gerald to the high seat and sat down by him. Thorgunna brought us the filled horns.

Gerald tasted the brew and made a face. I felt somewhat offended, for my beer is reckoned good, and asked him if there was aught wrong. He laughed with a harsh note and said no, but he was used to beer that foamed and was not sour.

"And where might they make such?" I wondered testily.

"Everywhere. Iceland, too—no . . ." He stared emptily before him. "Let's say . . . in Vinland."

"Where is Vinland?" I asked.

"The country to the west whence I came. I thought you knew . . . wait a bit." He shook his head. "Maybe I can find out—have you heard of a man named Leif Eiriksson?"

"No," I said. Since then it has struck me that this was one proof of his tale, for Leif Eiriksson is now a well-known chief; and I also take more seriously those tales of land seen by Bjarni Herjulfsson.

"His father, maybe—Eirik the Red?" asked Gerald.

"Oh yes," I said. "If you mean the Norseman who came hither because of a manslaughter, and left Iceland in turn for the same reason, and has now settled with other folk in Greenland."

"Then this is . . . a little before Leif's voyage," he muttered. "The late tenth century."

"See here," demanded Helgi, "we've been patient with you, but this is no time for riddles. We save those for feasts and

drinking bouts. Can you not say plainly whence you come and how you got here?"

Gerald covered his face, shaking.

"Let the man alone, Helgi," said Thorgunna. "Can you not see he's troubled?"

He raised his head and gave her the look of a hurt dog that someone has patted. It was dim in the hall, enough light coming in by the loft windows so no candles were lit, but not enough to see well by. Nevertheless, I marked a reddening in both their faces.

Gerald drew a long breath and fumbled about; his clothes were made with pockets. He brought out a small parchment box and from it took a little white stick that he put in his mouth. Then he took out another box, and a wooden stick from it which burst into flame when scratched. With the fire he kindled the stick in his mouth, and sucked in the smoke.

We all stared. "Is that a Christian rite?" asked Helgi.

"No . . . not just so." A wry, disappointed smile twisted his lips. "I'd have thought you'd be more surprised, even terrified."

"It's something new," I admitted, "but we're a sober folk on Iceland. Those fire sticks could be useful. Did you come to trade in them?"

"Hardly." He sighed. The smoke he breathed in seemed to steady him, which was odd, because the smoke in the hall had made him cough and water at the eyes. "The truth is . . . something you will not believe. I can scarce believe it myself."

We waited. Thorgunna stood leaning forward, her lips parted.

"That lightning bolt——" Gerald nodded wearily. "I was out in the storm, and somehow the lightning must have struck me in just the right way, a way that happens only once in many thousands of times. It threw me back into the past."

Those were his words, priest. I did not understand, and told him so.

"It's hard to see," he agreed. "God give that I'm only dreaming. But if this is a dream, I must endure till I wake

up . . . well, look. I was born one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-two years after Christ, in a land to the west which you have not yet found. In the twenty-third year of my life, I was in Iceland as part of my country's army. The lightning struck me, and now . . . now it is less than one thousand years after Christ, and yet I am here—almost a thousand years before I was born, I am here!"

We sat very still. I signed myself with the Hammer and took a long pull from my horn. One of the maids whimpered, and Ragnhild whispered so fiercely I could hear. "Be still. The poor fellow's out of his head. There's no harm in him."

I agreed with her, though less sure of the last part of it. The gods can speak through a madman, and the gods are not always to be trusted. Or he could turn berserker, or he could be under a heavy curse that would also touch us.

He sat staring before him, and I caught a few fleas and cracked them while I thought about it. Gerald noticed and asked with some horror if we had many fleas here.

"Why, of course," said Thorgunna. "Have you none?"

"No." He smiled crookedly. "Not yet."

"Ah," she sighed, "you *must* be sick."

She was a level-headed girl. I saw her thought, and so did Ragnhild and Helgi. Clearly, a man so sick that he had no fleas could be expected to rave. There was still some worry about whether we might catch the illness, but I deemed it unlikely; his trouble was all in the head, perhaps from a blow he had taken. In any case, the matter was come down to earth now, something we could deal with.

As a godi, a chief who holds sacrifices, it behooved me not to turn a stranger out. Moreover, if he could fetch in many of those little fire-kindling sticks, a profitable trade might be built up. So I said Gerald should go to bed. He protested, but we manhandled him into the shut-bed and there he lay tired and was soon asleep. Thorgunna said she would take care of him.

The next day I decided to sacrifice a horse, both because of the timber we had found and to take away any curse there

might be on Gerald. Furthermore, the beast I had picked was old and useless, and we were short of fresh meat. Gerald had spent the day lounging moodily around the garth, but when I came in to supper I found him and my daughter laughing.

"You seem to be on the road to health," I said.

"Oh yes. It . . . could be worse for me." He sat down at my side as the carles set up the trestle table and the maids brought in the food. "I was ever much taken with the age of the vikings, and I have some skills."

"Well," I said, "if you've no home, we can keep you here for a while."

"I can work," he said eagerly. "I'll be worth my pay."

Now I knew he was from a far land, because what chief would work on any land but his own, and for hire at that? Yet he had the easy manner of the highborn, and had clearly eaten well all his life. I overlooked that he had made no gifts; after all, he was shipwrecked.

"Maybe you can get passage back to your United States," said Helgi. "We could hire a ship. I'm fain to see that realm."

"No," said Gerald bleakly. "There is no such place. Not yet."

"So you still hold to that idea you came from tomorrow?" grunted Sigurd. "Crazy notion. Pass the pork."

"I do," said Gerald. There was a calm on him now. "And I can prove it."

"I don't see how you speak our tongue, if you come from so far away," I said. I would not call a man a liar to his face, unless we were swapping brags in a friendly way, but . . .

"They speak otherwise in my land and time," he replied, "but it happens that in Iceland the tongue changed little since the old days, and I learned it when I came there."

"If you are a Christian," I said, "you must bear with us while we sacrifice tonight."

"I've naught against that," he said. "I fear I never was a very good Christian. I'd like to watch. How is it done?"

I told him how I would smite the horse with a hammer before the god, and cut his throat, and sprinkle the blood

about with willow twigs; thereafter we would butcher the carcass and feast. He said hastily:

"There's my chance to prove what I am. I have a weapon that will kill the horse with . . . with a flash of lightning."

"What is it?" I wondered. We all crowded around while he took the metal club out of his sheath and showed it to us. I had my doubts; it looked well enough for hitting a man, perhaps, but had no edge, though a wondrously skillful smith had forged it. "Well, we can try," I said.

He showed us what else he had in his pockets. There were some coins of remarkable roundness and sharpness, a small key, a stick with lead in it for writing, a flat purse holding many bits of marked paper; when he told us solemnly that some of this paper was money, even Thorgunna had to laugh. Best of all was a knife whose blade folded into the handle. When he saw me admiring that, he gave it to me, which was well done for a shipwrecked man. I said I would give him clothes and a good ax, as well as lodging for as long as needful.

No, I don't have the knife now. You shall hear why. It's a pity, for it was a good knife, though rather small.

"What were you ere the war arrow went out in your land?" asked Helgi. "A merchant?"

"No," said Gerald. "I was an . . . *engineer* . . . that is, I was learning how to be one. That's a man who builds things, bridges and roads and tools . . . more than just an artisan. So I think my knowledge could be of great value here." I saw a fever in his eyes. "Yes, give me time and I'll be a king!"

"We have no king in Iceland," I grunted. "Our forefathers came hither to get away from kings. Now we meet at the Things to try suits and pass new laws, but each man must get his own redress as best he can."

"But suppose the man in the wrong won't yield?" he asked.

"Then there can be a fine feud," said Helgi, and went on to relate with sparkling eyes some of the killings there had lately been. Gerald looked unhappy and fingered his *gun*. That is what he called his fire-spitting club.

"Your clothing is rich," said Thorgunna softly. "Your folk must own broad acres at home."

"No," he said, "our . . . our king gives every man in the army clothes like these. As for my family, we owned no land, we rented our home in a building where many other families also dwelt."

I am not purse-proud, but it seemed to me he had not been honest, a landless man sharing my high seat like a chief. Thorgunna covered my huffiness by saying. "You will gain a farm later."

After dark we went out to the shrine. The carles had built a fire before it, and as I opened the door the wooden Odin appeared to leap forth. Gerald muttered to my daughter that it was a clumsy bit of carving, and since my father had made it I was still more angry with him. Some folks have no understanding of the fine arts.

Nevertheless, I let him help me lead the horse forth to the altar stone. I took the blood-bowl in my hands and said he could now slay the beast if he would. He drew his gun, put the end behind the horse's ear, and squeezed. There was a crack, and the beast quivered and dropped with a hole blown through its skull, wasting the brains—a clumsy weapon. I caught a whiff of smell, sharp and bitter like that around a volcano. We all jumped, one of the women screamed, and Gerald looked proud. I gathered my wits and finished the rest of the sacrifice as usual. Gerald did not like having blood sprinkled over him, but then, of course, he was a Christian. Nor would he take more than a little of the soup and flesh.

Afterward Helgi questioned him about the *gun*, and he said it could kill a man at bowshot distance but there was no witchcraft in it, only use of some tricks we did not know as yet. Having heard of the Greek fire, I believed him. A *gun* could be useful in a fight, as indeed I was to learn, but it did not seem very practical—iron costing what it does, and months of forging needed for each one.

I worried more about the man himself.

And the next morning I found him telling Thorgunna a

great deal of foolishness about his home, buildings tall as mountains and wagons that flew or went without horses. He said there were eight or nine thousand thousands of folk in his city, a burgh called New Jorvik or the like. I enjoy a good brag as well as the next man, but this was too much and I told him gruffly to come along and help me get in some strayed cattle.

After a day scrambling around the hills I knew well enough that Gerald could scarce tell a cow's prow from her stern. We almost had the strays once, but he ran stupidly across their path and turned them so the work was all to do again. I asked him with strained courtesy if he could milk, shear, wield scythe or flail, and he said no, he had never lived on a farm.

"That's a pity," I remarked, "for everyone on Iceland does, unless he be outlawed."

He flushed at my tone. "I can do enough else," he answered. "Give me some tools and I'll show you metalwork well done."

That brightened me, for truth to tell, none of our household was a very gifted smith. "That's an honorable trade," I said, "and you can be of great help. I have a broken sword and several bent spearheads to be mended, and it were no bad idea to shoe all the horses." His admission that he did know how to put on a shoe was not very dampening to me then.

We had returned home as we talked, and Thorgunna came angrily forward. "That's no way to treat a guest, father!" she said. "Making him work like a carle, indeed!"

Gerald smiled. "I'll be glad to work," he said. "I need a . . . a stake . . . something to start me afresh. Also, I want to repay a little of your kindness."

That made me mild toward him, and I said it was not his fault they had different customs in the United States. On the morrow he could begin work in the smithy, and I would pay him, yet he would be treated as an equal, since craftsmen are valued. This earned him black looks from the housefolk.

That evening he entertained us well with stories of his

home; true or not, they made good listening. However, he had no real polish, being unable to compose even two lines of verse. They must be a raw and backward lot in the United States. He said his task in the army had been to keep order among the troops. Helgi said this was unheard-of, and he must be a brave man who would offend so many men, but Gerald said folk obeyed him out of fear of the king. When he added that the term of a levy in the United States was two years, and that men could be called to war even in harvest time, I said he was well out of a country with so ruthless and powerful a king.

"No," he answered wistfully, "we are a free folk, who say what we please."

"But it seems you may not do as you please," said Helgi.

"Well," he said, "we may not murder a man just because he offends us."

"Not even if he has slain your own kin?" asked Helgi.

"No. It is for the . . . the king to take vengeance on behalf of us all."

I chuckled. "Your yarns are good," I said, "but there you've hit a snag. How could the king even keep track of all the murders, let alone avenge them? Why, the man wouldn't even have time to beget an heir!"

He could say no more for all the laughter that followed.

The next day Gerald went to the smithy, with a thrall to pump the bellows for him. I was gone that day and night, down to Reykjavik to dicker with Hjalmar Broadnose about some sheep. I invited him back for an overnight stay, and we rode into the garth with his son Ketill, a red-haired sulky youth of twenty winters who had been refused by Thorgunna.

I found Gerald sitting gloomily on a bench in the hall. He wore the clothes I had given him, his own having been spoiled by ash and sparks—what had he awaited, the fool? He was talking in a low voice with my daughter.

"Well," I said as I entered, "how went it?"

My man Grim snickered. "He has ruined two spearheads,

but we put out the fire he started ere the whole smithy burned."

"How's this?" I cried. "I thought you said you were a smith."

Gerald stood up, defiantly. "I worked with other tools, and better ones, at home," he replied. "You do it differently here."

It seemed he had built up the fire too hot; his hammer had struck everywhere but the place it should; he had wrecked the temper of the steel through not knowing when to quench it. Smithcraft takes years to learn, of course, but he should have admitted he was not even an apprentice.

"Well," I snapped, "what can you do, then, to earn your bread?" It irked me to be made a fool of before Hjalmar and Ketill, whom I had told about the stranger.

"Odin alone knows," said Grim. "I took him with me to ride after your goats, and never have I seen a worse horseman. I asked him if he could even spin or weave, and he said no."

"That was no question to ask a man!" flared Thorgunna. "He should have slain you for it!"

"He should indeed," laughed Grim. "But let me carry on the tale. I thought we would also repair your bridge over the foss. Well, he can just barely handle a saw, but he nearly took his own foot off with the adz."

"We don't use those tools, I tell you!" Gerald doubled his fists and looked close to tears.

I motioned my guests to sit down. "I don't suppose you can butcher a hog or smoke it either," I said.

"No." I could scarce hear him.

"Well, then, man . . . what *can* you do?"

"I—" He could get no words out.

"You were a warrior," said Thorgunna.

"Yes—that I was!" he said, his face kindling.

"Small use in Iceland when you have no other skills," I grumbled, "but perhaps, if you can get passage to the eastlands, some king will take you in his guard." Myself I doubted it, for a guardsman needs manners that will do credit to his master; but I had not the heart to say so.

Ketill Hjalmarsson had plainly not liked the way Thorgunna stood close to Gerald and spoke for him. Now he sneered and said: "I might even doubt your skill in fighting."

"That I have been trained for," said Gerald grimly.

"Will you wrestle with me, then?" asked Ketill.

"Gladly!" spat Gerald.

Priest, what is a man to think? As I grow older, I find life to be less and less the good-and-evil, black-and-white thing you say it is; we are all of us some hue of gray. This useless fellow, this spiritless lout who could even be asked if he did women's work and not lift ax, went out in the yard with Ketill Hjalmarsson and threw him three times running. There was some trick he had of grabbing the clothes as Ketill charged. . . . I called a stop when the youth was nearing murderous rage, praised them both, and filled the beer-horns. But Ketill brooded sullenly on the bench all evening.

Gerald said something about making a *gun* like his own. It would have to be bigger, a *cannon* he called it, and could sink ships and scatter armies. He would need the help of smiths, and also various stuffs. Charcoal was easy, and sulfur could be found in the volcano country, I suppose, but what is this saltpeter?

Also, being suspicious by now, I questioned him closely as to how he would make such a thing. Did he know just how to mix the powder? No, he admitted. What size would the *gun* have to be? When he told me—at least as long as a man—I laughed and asked him how a piece that size could be cast or bored, even if we could scrape together that much iron. This he did not know either.

"You haven't the tools to make the tools to make the tools," he said. I don't know what he meant by that. "God help me, I can't run through a thousand years of history all by myself."

He took out the last of his little smoke sticks and lit it. Helgi had tried a puff earlier and gotten sick, though he remained a friend of Gerald's. Now my son proposed to take a boat in the morning and go up to Ice Fjord, where I had some money outstanding I wanted to collect. Hjalmar and

Ketill said they would come along for the trip, and Thorgunna pleaded so hard that I let her come along too.

"An ill thing," muttered Sigurd. "All men know the landtrolls like not a woman aboard a ship. It's unlucky."

"How did your father ever bring women to this island?" I grinned.

Now I wish I had listened to him. He was not a clever man, but he often knew whereof he spoke.

At this time I owned a half share in a ship that went to Norway, bartering wadmal for timber. It was a profitable business until she ran afoul of vikings during the disorders while Olaf Tryggvason was overthrowing Jarl Haakon there. Some men will do anything to make a living—thieves, cutthroats, they ought to be hanged, the worthless robbers pouncing on honest merchantmen. Had they any courage or honesty they would go to Ireland, which is full of plunder.

Well, anyhow, the ship was abroad, but we had three boats and took one of these. Besides myself, Thorgunna, and Helgi, Hjalmar and Ketill went along, with Grim and Gerald. I saw how the stranger winced at the cold water as we launched her, and afterward took off his shoes and stockings to let his feet dry. He had been surprised to learn we had a bathhouse—did he think us savages?—but still, he was dainty as a woman and soon moved upwind of our feet.

There was a favoring breeze, so we raised mast and sail. Gerald tried to help, but of course did not know one line from another and got them tangled. Grim snarled at him and Ketill laughed nastily. But erelong we were under way, and he came and sat by me where I had the steering oar.

He had plainly lain long awake thinking, and now he ventured timidly: "In my land they have . . . will have a rig and rudder which are better than this. With them, you can criss-cross against the wind."

"Ah, so now our skilled sailor must give us redes!" sneered Ketill.

"Be still," said Thorgunna sharply. "Let Gerald speak."

He gave her a sly look of thanks, and I was not unwilling

to listen. "This is something which could easily be made," he said. "I've used such boats myself, and know them well. First, then, the sail should not be square and hung from a yardarm, but three-cornered, with the third corner lashed to a yard swiveling from the mast. Then, your steering oar is in the wrong place—there should be a rudder in the middle of the stern, guided by a bar." He was eager now, tracing the plan with his fingernail on Thorgunna's cloak. "With these two things, and a deep keel—going down to about the height of a man for a boat this size—a ship can move across the path of the wind . . . so. And another sail can be hung between the mast and the prow."

Well, priest, I must say the idea had its merits, and were it not for fear of bad luck—for everything of his was unlucky—I might even now play with it. But there are clear drawbacks, which I pointed out to him in a reasonable way.

"First and worst," I said, "this rudder and deep keel would make it all but impossible to beach the ship or sail up a shallow river. Perhaps they have many harbors where you hail from, but here a craft must take what landings she can find, and must be speedily launched if there should be an attack. Second, this mast of yours would be hard to unstep when the wind dropped and oars came out. Third, the sail is the wrong shape to stretch as an awning when one must sleep at sea."

"The ship could lie out, and you could go to land in a small boat," he said. "Also, you could build cabins aboard for shelter."

"The cabins would get in the way of the oars," I said, "unless the ship were hopelessly broad-beamed or unless the oarsmen sat below a deck like the galley slaves of Miklagard; and free men would not endure rowing in such foulness."

"Must you have oars?" he asked like a very child.

Laughter barked along the hull. Even the gulls hovering to starboard, where the shore rose darkly, mewed their scorn. "Do they also have tame winds in the place whence you came?" snorted Hjalmar. "What happens if you're becalmed—for days, maybe, with provisions running out——"

"You could build a ship big enough to carry many weeks' provisions," said Gerald.

"If you have the wealth of a king, you could," said Helgi. "And such a king's ship, lying helpless on a flat sea, would be swarmed by every viking from here to Jomsborg. As for leaving the ship out on the water while you make camp, what would you have for shelter, or for defense if you should be trapped there?"

Gerald slumped. Thorgunna said to him gently: "Some folks have no heart to try anything new. I think it's a grand idea."

He smiled at her, a weary smile, and plucked up the will to say something about a means for finding north even in cloudy weather—he said there were stones which always pointed north when hung by a string. I told him kindly that I would be most interested if he could find me some of this stone; or if he knew where it was to be had, I could ask a trader to fetch me a piece. But this he did not know, and fell silent. Ketill opened his mouth, but got such an edged look from Thorgunna that he shut it again; his looks declared plainly enough what a liar he thought Gerald to be.

The wind turned contrary after a while, so we lowered the mast and took to the oars. Gerald was strong and willing, though clumsy; however, his hands were so soft that erelong they bled. I offered to let him rest, but he kept doggedly at the work.

Watching him sway back and forth, under the dreary creak of the tholes, the shaft red and wet where he gripped it, I thought much about him. He had done everything wrong which a man could do—thus I imagined then, not knowing the future—and I did not like the way Thorgunna's eyes strayed to him and rested there. He was no man for my daughter, landless and penniless and helpless. Yet I could not keep from liking him. Whether his tale was true or only a madness, I felt he was honest about it; and surely there was something strange about the way he had come. I noticed the cuts on his chin from my razor; he had said he was not used to our kind of shaving and would grow a beard. He had

tried hard. I wondered how well I would have done, landing alone in this witch country of his dreams, with a gap of forever between me and my home.

Perhaps that same misery was what had turned Thorgunna's heart. Women are a kittle breed, priest, and you who leave them alone belike understand them as well as I who have slept with half a hundred in six different lands. I do not think they even understand themselves. Birth and life and death, those are the great mysteries, which none will ever fathom, and a woman is closer to them than a man.

—The ill wind stiffened, the sea grew iron gray and choppy under low leaden clouds, and our headway was poor. At sunset we could row no more, but must pull in to a small unpeopled bay and make camp as well as could be on the strand.

We had brought firewood along, and tinder. Gerald, though staggering with weariness, made himself useful, his little sticks kindling the blaze more easily than flint and steel. Thorgunna set herself to cook our supper. We were not warded by the boat from a lean, whining wind; her cloak fluttered like wings and her hair blew wild above the streaming flames. It was the time of light nights, the sky a dim dusky blue, the sea a wrinkled metal sheet and the land like something risen out of dream-mists. We men huddled in our cloaks, holding numbed hands to the fire and saying little.

I felt some cheer was needed, and ordered a cask of my best and strongest ale broached. An evil Norn made me do that, but no man escapes his weird. Our bellies seemed all the emptier now when our noses drank in the sputter of a spitted joint, and the ale went swiftly to our heads. I remember declaiming the death song of Ragnar Hairybreeks for no other reason than that I felt like declaiming ti.

Thorgunna came to stand over Gerald where he slumped. I saw how her fingers brushed his hair, ever so lightly, and Ketill Hjalmarsson did too. "Have they no verses in your land?" she asked.

"Not like yours," he said, looking up. Neither of them

looked away again. "We sing rather than chant. I wish I had my *guitar* here—that's a kind of harp."

"Ah, an Irish bard!" said Hjalmar Broadnose.

I remember strangely well how Gerald smiled, and what he said in his own tongue, though I know not the meaning: "*Only on me mither's side, begorra.*" I suppose it was magic.

"Well, sing for us," asked Thorgunna.

"Let me think," he said. "I shall have to put it in Norse words for you." After a little while, staring up at her through the windy night, he began a song. It had a tune I liked, thus:

From this valley they tell me you're leaving,
I shall miss your bright eyes and sweet smile.
You will carry the sunshine with you,
That has brightened my life all the while. . . .

I don't remember the rest, except that it was not quite decent.

When he had finished, Hjalmar and Grim went over to see if the meat was done. I saw a glimmering of tears in my daughter's eyes. "That was a lovely thing," she said.

Ketill sat upright. The flames splashed his face with wild, running hues. There was a rawness in his tone: "Yes, we've found what this fellow can do: sit about and make pretty songs for the girls. Keep him for that, Ospak."

Thorgunna whitened, and Helgi clapped hand to sword. I saw how Gerald's face darkened, and his voice was thick: "That was no way to talk. Take it back."

Ketill stood up. "No," he said, "I'll ask no pardon of an idler living off honest yeomen."

He was raging, but he had sense enough to shift the insult from my family to Gerald alone. Otherwise he and his father would have had the four of us to deal with. As it was, Gerald stood up too, fists knotted at his sides, and said. "Will you step away from here and settle this?"

"Gladly!" Ketill turned and walked a few yards down the beach, taking his shield from the boat. Gerald followed.

Thorgunna stood with stricken face, then picked up his ax and ran after him.

"Are you going weaponless?" she shrieked.

Gerald stopped, looking dazed. "I don't want that," he mumbled. "Fists—"

Ketill puffed himself up and drew sword. "No doubt you're used to fighting like thralls in your land," he said. "So if you'll crave my pardon, I'll let this matter rest."

Gerald stood with drooped shoulders. He stared at Thorgunna as if he were blind, as if asking her what to do. She handed him the ax.

"So you want me to kill him?" he whispered.

"Yes," she answered.

Then I knew she loved him, for otherwise why should she have cared if he disgraced himself?

Helgi brought him his helmet. He put it on, took the ax, and went forward.

"Ill is this," said Hjalmar to me. "Do you stand by the stranger, Ospak?"

"No," I said. "He's no kin or oath-brother of mine. This is not my quarrel."

"That's good," said Hjalmar. "I'd not like to fight with you, my friend. You were ever a good neighbor."

We went forth together and staked out the ground. Thorgunna told me to lend Gerald my sword, so he could use a shield too, but the man looked oddly at me and said he would rather have the ax. They squared away before each other, he and Ketill, and began fighting.

This was no holmgang, with rules and a fixed order of blows and first blood meaning victory. There was death between those two. Ketill rushed in with the sword whistling in his hand. Gerald sprang back, wielding the ax awkwardly. It bounced off Ketill's shield. The youth grinned and cut at Gerald's legs. I saw blood well forth and stain the ripped breeches.

It was murder from the beginning. Gerald had never used an ax before. Once he even struck with the flat of it. He would have been hewed down at once had Ketill's sword

not been blunted on his helmet and had he not been quick on his feet. As it was, he was soon lurching with a dozen wounds.

"Stop the fight!" Thorgunna cried aloud and ran forth. Helgi caught her arms and forced her back, where she struggled and kicked till Grim must help. I saw grief on my son's face but a malicious grin on the carle's.

Gerald turned to look. Ketill's blade came down and slashed his left hand. He dropped the ax. Ketill snarled and readied to finish him. Gerald drew his *gun*. It made a flash and a barking noise. Ketill fell, twitched for a moment, and was quiet. His lower jaw was blown off and the back of his head gone.

There came a long stillness, where only the wind and the sea had voice.

Then Hjalmar trod forth, his face working but a cold steadiness over him. He knelt and closed his son's eyes, as token that the right of vengeance was his. Rising, he said. "That was an evil deed. For that you shall be outlawed."

"It wasn't magic," said Gerald in a numb tone. "It was like a . . . a bow. I had no choice. I didn't want to fight with more than my fists."

I trod between them and said the Thing must decide this matter, but that I hoped Hjalmar would take weregild for Ketill.

"But I killed him to save my own life!" protested Gerald.

"Nevertheless, weregild must be paid, if Ketill's kin will take it," I explained. "Because of the weapon, I think it will be doubled, but that is for the Thing to judge."

Hjalmar had many other sons, and it was not as if Gerald belonged to a family at odds with his own, so I felt he would agree. However, he laughed coldly and asked where a man lacking wealth would find the silver.

Thorgunna stepped up with a wintry calm and said we would pay it. I opened my mouth, but when I saw her eyes I nodded. "Yes, we will," I said, "in order to keep the peace."

"Then you make this quarrel your own?" asked Hjalmar.

"No," I answered. "This man is no blood of my own. But

if I choose to make him a gift of money to use as he wishes, what of it?"

Hjalmar smiled. There was sorrow crinkled around his eyes, but he looked on me with old comradeship.

"Erelong this man may be your son-in-law," he said. "I know the signs, Ospak. Then indeed he will be of your folk. Even helping him now in his need will range you on his side."

"And so?" asked Helgi, most softly.

"And so, while I value your friendship, I have sons who will take the death of their brother ill. They'll want revenge on Gerald Samsson, if only for the sake of their good names, and thus our two houses will be sundered and one manslaying will lead to another. It has happened often enough erenow." Hjalmar sighed. "I myself wish peace with you, Ospak, but if you take this killer's side it must be otherwise."

I thought for a moment, thought of Helgi lying with his skull cloven, of my other sons on their garths drawn to battle because of a man they had never seen, I thought of having to wear byrnies every time we went down for driftwood and never knowing when we went to bed whether we would wake to find the house ringed in by spearmen.

"Yes," I said, "you are right, Hjalmar. I withdraw my offer. Let this be a matter between you and him alone."

We gripped hands on it.

Thorgunna gave a small cry and fled into Gerald's arms. He held her close. "What does this mean?" he asked slowly.

"I cannot keep you any longer," I said, "but belike some crofter will give you a roof. Hjalmar is a law-abiding man and will not harm you until the Thing has outlawed you. That will not be before midsummer. Perhaps you can get passage out of Iceland ere then."

"A useless one like me?" he replied bitterly.

Thorgunna whirled free and blazed that I was a coward and a perjurer and all else evil. I let her have it out, then laid my hands on her shoulders.

"It is for the house," I said. "The house and the blood, which are holy. Men die and women weep, but while the

kindred live our names are remembered. Can you ask a score of men to die for your own hankerings?"

Long did she stand, and to this day I know not what her answer would have been. It was Gerald who spoke.

"No," he said. "I suppose you have right, Ospak . . . the right of your time, which is not mine." He took my hand, and Helgi's. His lips brushed Thorgunna's cheek. Then he turned and walked out into the darkness.

I heard, later, that he went to earth with Thorvald Hallsson, the crofter of Humpback Fell, and did not tell his host what had happened. He must have hoped to go unnoticed until he could arrange passage to the eastlands somehow. But of course word spread. I remember his brag that in the United States men had means to talk from one end of the land to another. So he must have looked down on us, sitting on our lonely garths, and not know how fast word could get around. Thorvald's son Hrolf went to Brand Sealskin-boots to talk about some matter, and of course mentioned the stranger, and soon all the western island had the tale.

Now if Gerald had known he must give notice of a manslaying at the first garth he found, he would have been safe at least till the Thing met, for Hjalmar and his sons are sober men who would not kill a man still under the protection of the law. But as it was, his keeping the matter secret made him a murderer and therefore at once an outlaw. Hjalmar and his kin rode up to Humpback Fell and haled him forth. He shot his way past them with the *gun* and fled into the hills. They followed him, having several hurts and one more death to avenge. I wonder if Gerald thought the strangeness of his weapon would unnerve us. He may not have known that every man dies when his time comes, neither sooner nor later, so that fear of death is useless.

At the end, when they had him trapped, his weapon gave out on him. Then he took up a dead man's sword and defended himself so valiantly that Ulf Hajlmarsson has limped ever since. It was well done, as even his foes admitted; they are an eldritch race in the United States, but they do not lack manhood.

When he was slain, his body was brought back. For fear of the ghost, he having perhaps been a warlock, it was burned, and all he had owned was laid in the fire with him. That was where I lost the knife he had given me. The barrow stands out on the moor, north of here, and folk shun it, though the ghost has not walked. Now, with so much else happening, he is slowly being forgotten.

And that is the tale, priest, as I saw it and heard it. Most men think Gerald Samsson was crazy, but I myself believe he did come from out of time, and that his doom was that no man may ripen a field before harvest season. Yet I look into the future, a thousand years hence, when they fly through the air and ride in horseless wagons and smash whole cities with one blow. I think of this Iceland then, and of the young United States men there to help defend us in a year when the end of the world hovers close. Perhaps some of them, walking about on the heaths, will see that barrow and wonder what ancient warrior lies buried there, and they may even wish they had lived long ago in his time when men were free.

RACHEL MADDUX

Stories by Rachel Maddux have appeared in Collier's, Harper's *and* Story, *but never before in a fantasy collection. She can, with luck, write a short story in a day – and has been working on a four-volume novel for eighteen years. By the time this anthology appears, that novel (reduced to one volume) will have been published; and* THE GREEN KINGDOM *(Simon & Schuster) should prove to be one of 1957's more off-trail and interesting fantasies: a blend of adventure, suspense, character study and science fiction in the Robinsonade of five lost people in a primeval Lost World in the Rockies. Her great good fortune, she says, is that she is "married to a man who understands writers": but the good fortune must be partly his as well, since his wife is a writer who understands marriage – as she demonstrates simply and touchingly in this peculiarly contemporary ghost story of a revenant who could return only in the 1950's*

FINAL CLEARANCE

"HELLO. Oh, Evvie? Nice of you to call. Oh, I was just trying to get some of these sympathy notes acknowledged. You and Ed have been swell, but honestly, you don't need to worry about me. As a matter of fact, I'm going to turn in very soon. Yes, I have my sleeping pill and my glass of brandy and my book all laid out beside the bed. I'll call you tomorrow, Evvie.

"The notes? Well, I don't see how you could help, really. It isn't anything anyone else can do for you very well. Evvie, you'd be amazed. Do you know there are at least a dozen from people I never even heard of? There's one (I must show it to you) so very touching, in the most labored handwriting, from a man who owns a fruit store where Tom used to stop on his way home. Tom never even mentioned him and this Tony what's-his-name must have poured out all his troubles . . .

"What? Yes, he was. The most wonderful. I can see him so clearly standing there chewing on an apple, giving this little man that vague smile he had and nodding his . . . nodding . . . Evvie, I'm slopping over again. Sorry. Call you in the morning."

Madeline replaced the receiver carefully and pressed the back of her hand against her lips. This treacherous blubbering that sneaked upon her without warning served no purpose. It neither assuaged grief nor eased bitterness; it did nothing but choke up her mouth and bring on another spell of vomiting.

"I won't have it," she said aloud. She reached for a cigarette and finally got the match flame aligned with the end of it. Every handkerchief she owned was a small hard ball lying in the laundry hamper. Even all of Tom's were used up now. The thing was she had to wash tomorrow, absolutely. She got up from the desk and walked into the bathroom. Even the Kleenex was gone. This very afternoon she'd been in a drugstore and hadn't remembered. She blew her nose on a piece of toilet paper and missed the wastebasket when she tried to throw the paper into it. With a grotesque kind of patience she bent over slowly to pick up the toilet paper, holding on to the wash basin against her dizziness. When the phone rang again she straightened up slowly and limited herself to a deep sigh. Against the ringing she told herself to remember that somewhere she had left a cigarette burning.

"Hello? Hello? Oh, yes, Uncle George. Why, I'm all right. How are you?"

The cigarette, she saw, was safely here in the ash try on the desk and she reached for it gratefully.

"That's very kind of you and Aunt Emily, but really I'd rather be here. I'm just more comfortable in my own place, you know. Oh *no*. Don't come. I mean, I wouldn't think of it. No, please. Why, you'd have to get the car out and everything and it's so late. Really, I'm all right. I'm fine. Certainly. I'm keeping busy, as you suggested."

That emergency frustrated, Madeline leaned back in her chair and discovered that, at a certain angle, it would produce a squeak. Now, by moving forward and back only a little, she could punctuate Uncle George's endless talk with little squeaks.

"Yes, I know you did, Uncle George (*squeak, squeak*). Tom was so fond of you both (*squeak*). Oh, you did? That's very kind of you. I'm so stupid about things like insurance (*squeak, squeak*). I know Tom would appreciate . . ."

She sat through two more cigarettes saying yes, saying no, saying thank you and squeaking the chair. It sounded exactly like a pig and for a while she played with the picture of having turned the phone over to a small white pig. She could see Uncle George talking pompously on and on, Aunt Emily hovering nearby, while at the other end of the line the neat, white pig squeaked back appropriate responses.

Even this came to an end at last and now she sat at the desk, too worn out to tackle the notes of sympathy. The big thing was, did it really matter if she washed her teeth or not? If she just fell on the bed, for once, and didn't carry on, what would happen?

"What?" Tom had said after that Anderson's party. "You mean your pores aren't cleansed? You're going to leave them clogged up all night, choking, like it says in the ads?"

Suddenly a picture of her proper little mother came into Madeline's mind and filled her with such warmth and affection that she actually smiled. Relatives had swarmed over the house after her father's death so that her mother, in order to escape them for a moment, had walked into the bathroom while she was lying in a hot tub. Her mother had closed the

door firmly and, with a sigh, had let her very proper widowhood slip from her. "If Cousin Norma asks me one more time what I'm going *to do now,* I'll spit in her eye," she said. The two of them had started giggling there in that house of death. Madeline had crawled out of the tub and put her arms around her little mother while they tried to stop the sound of their giggling lest they shock one of the relatives. She had started to shiver and they had seen then that her mother was all wet from the bath water.

Cutting as it did through so many years and such a distance the phone's ring frightened her so that she knocked her elbow against the edge of the desk and, cradling the sharp pain of it, she let the phone ring twice again before she could answer. But that fright had been as nothing to the fear which, at the sound of the voice on the telephone, had her at once on her feet. She was electrified with fear and she put out one hand to hold onto the desk while, with the other, she carefully moved the receiver away from her ear and laid it upside down on the desk. Her knees simply fell away from her and she sank into the chair staring with horror at the receiver which went on calling her name: "Madeline, darling, are you there? Muffin, are you all right? Look, it's Tom. I was afraid to walk in on you without warning. Muffin, Muffin, please say something. . . ."

The first shock over, she quickly found a furious strength to pick up the receiver. "What kind of horrible joke is this?" she said. "Who would do such a thing? What kind of person? Who is it? I said. Tell me who it is."

The voice became quieter suddenly, almost a murmur, and Madeline closed her eyes and succumbed to it. Slowly the tears slid down her cheeks and at last she held the phone against her breast and bent over it in caress until it gave a clicking sound and then the dial tone began like some huge insect caught against a windowpane.

It would stop of course if she replaced it on the cradle and, what's more, her mouth was open and she was aware of it. That was a good sign if she was aware of it, surely? After all, it was perhaps a very common thing. Anybody might

have such an experience in a state of shock. Perfectly understandable. Funny, she couldn't remember the doctor's number. Well, was that a crime?

She began to thumb through the pages of the address book. There it was. Now she must dial it carefully. Might as well get it right the first time. While she listened to the ringing, she tried to think what time it was and whether she couldn't wait until morning.

"Hello, hello," she said. "Is this the exchange? I'm trying to reach Doctor Morse. Sorry to disturb him but . . . but it's rather an emergency. What? Out? How long? Oh, I suppose so. Thirty minutes? All right. Yes, I'll give you the number."

It was printed right there before her. All she had to do was read it off.

But the footsteps. They couldn't be anyone else's. They couldn't.

She put down the phone and walked out of the room and down the hall and all the time she kept thinking: I'm not frightened at all, isn't that strange? And then, tentatively, as she heard the door open, she called, "Tom? Tom, is that you?"

At last he held her away from him and looked at her. "God, darling," he said, "you look awful. Did you really have a wretched time of it?"

"Well, naturally," she said. "What did you expect?"

"I don't know," he said. "I've been so busy filling out the questionnaires I guess I haven't thought."

"Questionnaires?"

"Yes. That reminds me, Muffin. What county was your mother born in?"

"Pasquotink. Why?"

"I couldn't remember," he said. "I've been beating my brains out trying to remember. How do you spell it?"

"Tom, stop. Wait a minute. What difference does it make how you spell Pasquotink?"

"Of course. You don't understand, do you, Muffin? Poor baby. Let's sit down. I've got quite a lot to explain."

It tore her heart the way he looked, as though somehow

he had done something naughty, and she went to him and put her hand on his shoulder. "Darling," she said, "I . . . I don't mean to be indelicate or anything, but do the . . . I mean, can you still drink coffee . . . and all that?"

"Sure," he said. "You make some, huh?"

While she was in the kitchen she could hear him walking around the living room.

"Any fruit in the house?" he called out to her.

"On the coffee table," she said. "Your uncle George sent it."

"How is the reactionary old bastard? Giving you a bad time?"

She saw him reach for an apple and bite into it with great relish. This is silly, she thought. The dead don't eat apples.

"Your uncle is driving me mad," she said. "That insufferable bore calls me every morning and every night. He's disturbed about my being bitter."

"Are you bitter, Muffin?"

"Oh well, at first, you know. I guess I got pretty hysterical. He kept telling me about all the young men who had died of heart attacks and I blew a fuse and said you hadn't di—"

"Died, darling. You're not being indelicate. It's all right. You said I hadn't died of a heart attack. Yes?"

"I said you had been worried and tormented to death by their goddamned security system and . . . I don't know. I probably was going to blow up the State Department with a bomb, or something. I don't know what I said."

"Anyhow, it bothered Uncle George, I see. It's his government and the worst his government could be responsible for is an unfortunate misunderstanding, if it takes every last nephew he's got."

"You *are* the last nephew. He keeps telling me you're all *he* had."

"The water's boiling over, Muffin."

When she came back with the coffee and the cups on a tray, Tom was standing by the pile of sympathy notes.

"What's all this?" he said.

"Just letters, darling. You know. From people."

"About me?" He sat down and began to go through them

in the most natural way. "Well, what do you know?" he said. "Old Tony."

"I haven't answered it yet. It's so touching. How does it happen you never mentioned him, Tom?"

"Tony? Didn't I ever tell you about Tony?"

"Tom, listen. I don't know if you ever told me about Tony or not. That's not what I want to hear about."

"Of course, Muffin. I'm sorry. It's just that I'm used to it already, you know, and . . . I keep forgetting."

"Tom," she said, "*please help me.*"

Instantly he was beside her, holding her, stroking her hair.

"This doesn't happen to other people, does it, Tom? Why *us?*"

"It's because of the delay, Muffin."

"The delay?"

"The delay in my clearance. You know how poor my memory is. I couldn't remember where your mother was born and——"

"Tom, are you telling me you have to be cleared for *death?*"

"Sure, Muffin. Look, let's sit down, huh? It's not really so hard to accept. Don't you remember when I was trying to get clearance before and every time I'd go to a new place to get a job we'd be so surprised that we had it to do all over again?"

"Yes, and I'd say, just the way I'm going to say right now: *but surely not here, too?*"

"That's right. We were always surprised. Well, it's just another step, you know. Just an extension of the same thing."

"Everything that comes in my mind to say, I've said before. I can remember not believing before. I can remember saying *but it's fantastic,* just like I want to say it now."

"I know exactly how you feel," he said. "That's exactly how it was with me."

"But, Tom . . ."

"Yes, Muffin?"

"Tom, if you're not . . . well, if you aren't cleared for death, then you must be alive."

"Well, no, Muffin. Not exactly. You see, I'm in Uncertainty."

"You mean they've got a cold-storage room there, *too?*"

"Sort of. Yeah, come to think of it, it's quite a bit like that place in Connecticut. Remember? Guys sitting around waiting and beefing. Say, look there; it's almost light. I've got to get out of here. Write that name down for me, will you?"

"Why?"

"Why? So I won't forget it, that's why."

"I mean why do you have to get out? What does it matter if it's light or not?"

"Because I might be seen."

"Well, what if you were?"

"You don't understand. You get seen, you get questions started, and that puts you back to the beginning again, because it all goes in your file."

"What do you care?"

"Because I was already through the first six interviews before the IBM belched up that blank natal county, mother-in-law."

"Tom. *Listen to me.* What's the hurry? Why would you want to hurry it? It's death, isn't it, after all?"

He sat and looked at her for a long time. "I don't know, Muffin," he said. "I don't know why everybody there wants it, but they all seem to."

"All?" she said. "There are lots of them?"

"Sure. And they're all impatient. I don't know why. I never thought about it. They just want to get it over with, I guess. Some of them blow their tops and they get a phony notice all of a sudden. Man, they're so proud. They made it. They're really dead. Those sorry bastards. They give everybody the big handshake, see, and they go through this door and it just leads back to the beginning again. Pretty soon they show up at the first desk again, very quiet-type fellows all of a sudden."

She had never really been crafty before and she was surprised how easily it came to her. She began to chatter about Ed and Evvie and about the sympathy notes, and all the

time she was moving about the room, pulling the cords on the venetian blinds, turning up the lights a little, silently flipping the night locks on the doors. Meanwhile, as she had hoped, Tom had got distracted by the sympathy notes.

"Hey," he said. "This one. Have you answered this one?"

"Which one, darling?"

"That sanctimonious hypocrite."

"Oh, him. No, I haven't."

"Good. This is one I want to answer myself. The opportunity of a—"

She had known the phone would ring as soon as Uncle George had had breakfast. He was so firm about believing one should get up out of bed and get the day started. Keep busy, that was the way.

"Tom, dear," she said, "would you mind? I know that's Uncle George and I really can't."

"Sure, honey," he said absentmindedly. "I'll get it."

She stuffed a napkin in her mouth, knowing exactly how it would be.

"Hello? Uncle George? This is Tom. Hey, Uncle George? Are you there?"

She turned her head away and tried to control herself when Tom walked back in the room.

"Funny thing," he said. "Must have got cut off. Say, is the coffee still hot?"

"I'll make some fresh. Why, what happened?"

"There was a thud, sort of, and then—*My God, I forgot.*"

"Did you, dear?"

"This will cost me a thousand years in Uncertainty," he said.

"Well, was it worth it?" she asked.

He turned to her in anger and then it began to sneak out of him, that reluctant, devilish laugh that he had. Suddenly they were both of them howling like fools.

They had hold of something. Not that they knew what it was or understood it yet, but they were holding tight to it. They laughed until tears rolled down their cheeks and they

fell down weakly on the couch and tumbled against one another like two rag dolls.

"God," Tom said. "I'm bushed. You know? I'm really beat."

"Of course you are, darling. Tell you what. Why don't you lie down right here for a little nap? I'll get a blanket for you."

When she came back he was lying on the couch and he mumbled sleepily while she took off his shoes. She put the blanket over him and hovered there a minute and then carefully tiptoed into the room where the telephone was. She had the tip of her tongue between her teeth while she eased the door shut so it would make no sound and then stealthily she dialed long distance.

"Mamma?" she said at last. "No, I'm all right. No, I don't care what time it is in Connecticut. Listen, Mamma. Would you do something for me absolutely and no questions asked? Mamma, do you promise? Well, promise. All right. I knew I could count on you. Now listen, Mamma. It's a matter of life and . . . It's important, Mamma. Now listen. No matter who asks you, you understand. No matter how many times. You were *not* born in Pasquotink County. Have you got it straight?"

CHARLES L. FONTENAY

Charles L. Fontenay has been in the newspaper business for twenty years and is now a rewrite man for the Nashville Tennessean. *He is also a prize-winning painter, a champion chess player, a political ghost writer, a landscape gardener and a practitioner of Chinese cookery. Recently, to fill in his spare time, he has taken to writing science fiction, of which he's been an enthusiast since his teens. His first story appeared a little over two years ago, and since then he's been selling regularly, for reasons that you'll find in this story, in which the account of one of man's most disastrous landings on alien worlds becomes a legend rich in warmth and hope.*

THE SILK AND THE SONG

ALAN FIRST SAW the Star Tower when he was twelve years old. His young master, Blik, rode him into the city of Falklyn that day.

Blik had to argue hard before he got permission to ride Alan, his favorite boy. Blik's father, Wiln, wanted Blik to ride a man, because Wiln thought the long trip to the city might be too much for a boy as young as Alan.

Blik had his way, though. Blik was rather spoiled, and when he began to whistle, his father gave in.

"All right, the human is rather big for its age," surrendered Wiln. "You may ride it if you promise not to run it. I don't want you breaking the wind of any of my prize stock."

So Blik strapped the bridle-helmet with the handgrips on Alan's head and threw the saddle-chair on Alan's shoulders. Wiln saddled up Robb, a husky man he often rode on long trips, and they were off to the city at an easy trot.

The Star Tower was visible before they reached Falklyn. Alan could see its spire above the tops of the ttornot trees as soon as they emerged from the Blue Forest. Blik saw it at the same time. Holding onto the bridle-helmet with one four-fingered hand, Blik poked Alan and pointed.

"Look, Alan, the Star Tower!" cried Blik. "They say humans once lived in the Star Tower."

"Blik, when will you grow up and stop talking to the humans?" chided his father. "I'm going to punish you severely one of these days."

Alan did not answer Blik, for it was forbidden for humans to talk in the Hussir language except in reply to direct questions. But he kept his eager eyes on the Star Tower and watched it loom taller and taller ahead of them, striking into the sky far above the buildings of the city. He quickened his pace, so that he began to pull ahead of Robb, and Robb had to caution him.

Between the Blue Forest and Falklyn, they were still in wild country, where the land was eroded and there were no farms and fields. Little clumps of ttornot trees huddled here and there among the gullies and low hills, thickening back toward the Blue Forest behind them, thinning toward the northwest plain, beyond which lay the distant mountains.

They rounded a curve in the dusty road, and Blik whistled in excitement from Alan's shoulders. A figure stood on a little promontory overhanging the road ahead of them.

At first Alan thought it was a tall, slender Hussir, for a short jacket partly concealed its nakedness. Then he saw it was a young human girl. No Hussir ever boasted that mop of tawny hair, that tailless posterior curve.

"A Wild Human!" growled Wiln in astonishment. Alan shivered. It was rumored the Wild Humans killed Hussirs and ate other humans.

The girl was looking away toward Falklyn. Wiln unslung his short bow and loosed an arrow at her.

The bolt exploded the dust near her feet. With a toss of bright hair, she turned her head and saw them. Then she was gone like a deer.

When they came up to where she had stood, there was a brightness in the bushes beside the road. It was a pair of the colorful trousers such as Hussirs wore, only trimmer, tangled inextricably in a thorny bush. Evidently the girl had been caught as she climbed up from the road, and had had to crawl out of them.

"They're getting too bold," said Wiln angrily. "This close to civilization, in broad daylight!"

Alan was astonished when they entered Falklyn. The streets and buildings were of stone. There was little stone on the other side of the Blue Forest, and Wiln Castle was built of polished wooden blocks. The smooth stone of Falklyn's streets was hot under the double sun. It burned Alan's feet, so that he hobbled a little and shook Blik up. Blik clouted him on the side of the head for it.

There were so many strange new things to see in the city that they made Alan dizzy. Some of the buildings were as much as three stories high, and the windows of a few of the biggest were covered, not with wooden shutters, but with bright, transparent stuff that Wiln told Blik was called "glaz." Robb told Alan in the human language, which the Hussirs did not understand, that it was rumored humans themselves had invented this glaz and given it to their masters. Alan wondered how a human could invent anything, penned in open fields.

But it appeared that humans in the city lived closer to their masters. Several times Alan saw them coming out of houses, and a few that he saw were not entirely naked, but wore bright bits of cloth at various places on their bodies. Wiln expressed strong disapproval of this practice to Blik.

"Start putting clothing on these humans and they might get the idea they're Hussirs," he said. "If you ask me, that's

why city people have more trouble controlling their humans than we do. Spoil the human and you make him savage, I say."

They had several places to go in Falklyn, and for a while Alan feared they would not see the Star Tower at close range. But Blik had never seen it before, and he begged and whistled until Wiln agreed to ride a few streets out of the way to look at it.

Alan forgot all the other wonders of Falklyn as the great monument towered bigger and bigger, dwarfing the buildings around it, dwarfing the whole city of Falklyn. There was a legend that humans had not only lived in the Star Tower once, but that they had built it and Falklyn had grown up around it when the humans abandoned it. Alan had heard this whispered, but he had been warned not to repeat it, for some Hussirs understood human language and repeating such tales was a good way to get whipped.

The Star Tower was in the center of a big circular park, and the houses around the park looked like dollhouses beneath it. It stretched up into the sky like a pointing finger, its strange dark walls reflecting the dual sunlight dully. Even the flying buttresses at its base curved up above the big trees in the park around it.

There was a railing round the park, and quite a few humans were chained or standing loose about it while their riders were looking at the Star Tower, for humans were not allowed inside the park. Blik was all for dismounting and looking at the inside of the tower, but Wiln would not hear of it.

"There'll be plenty of time for that when you're older and can understand some of the things you see," said Wiln.

They moved slowly around the street, outside the rail. In the park, the Hussirs moved in groups, some of them going up or coming down the long ramp that led into the Star Tower. The Hussirs were only about half the size of humans, with big heads and large pointed ears sticking straight out on each side, with thin legs and thick tails that helped to

balance them. They wore loose jackets and baggy colored trousers.

As they passed one group of humans standing outside the rail, Alan heard a familiar bit of verse, sung in an undertone:

"Twinkle, twinkle, golden star,
I can reach you, though you're far.
Shut my mouth and find my head,
Find a worm—"

Wiln swung Robb around quickly, and laid his keen whip viciously across the singer's shoulders. Slash, slash, and red welts sprang out on the man's back. With a muffled shriek, the man ducked his head and threw up his arms to protect his face.

"Where is your master, human?" demanded Wiln savagely, the whip trembling in his four-fingered hand.

"My master lives in Northwesttown, your greatness," whimpered the human. "I belong to the merchant Senk."

"Where is Northwesttown?"

"It is a section of Falklyn, sir."

"And you are here at the Star Tower without your master?"

"Yes, sir. I am on free time."

Wiln gave him another lash with the whip.

"You should know humans are not allowed to run loose near the Star Tower," Wiln snapped. "Now go back to your master and tell him to whip you."

The human ran off. Wiln and Blik turned their mounts homeward. When they were beyond the streets and houses of the town and the dust of the roads provided welcome relief to the burning feet of the humans, Blik asked:

"What did you think of the Star Tower, Alan?"

"Why has it no windows?" Alan asked, voicing the thought uppermost in his mind.

It was not, strictly speaking, an answer to Blik's question, and Alan risked punishment by speaking thus in Hussir. But

Wiln had recovered his good humor, with the prospect of getting home in time for supper.

"The windows are in the very top, little human," said Wiln indulgently. "You couldn't see them, because they're inside."

Alan puzzled over this all the way to Wiln Castle. How could windows be inside and none outside? If windows were windows, didn't they always go through both sides of a wall?

When the two suns had set and Alan was bedded down with the other children in a corner of the meadow, the exciting events of the day repeated themselves in his mind like a series of colored pictures. He would have liked to question Robb, but the grown men and older boys were kept in a field well separated from the women and children.

A little distance away the women were singing their babies to sleep with the traditional songs of the humans. Their voices drifted to him on the faint breeze, with the perfume of the fragrant grasses.

"Rock-a-bye, baby, in mother's arm,
Nothing's nearby to do baby harm.
Sleep and sweet dreams, till both suns arise,
Then will be time to open your eyes."

That was a real baby song, the first he ever remembered. They sang others, and one was the song Wiln had interrupted at the Star Tower.

"Twinkle, twinkle, golden star,
I can reach you, though you're far.
Shut my mouth and find my head,
Find a worm that's striped with red,
Feed it to the turtle shell,
Then go to sleep, for all is well."

Half asleep, Alan listened. That song was one of the children's favorites. They called it "The Star Tower Song," though he had never been able to find out why.

It must be a riddle, he thought drowsily. *"Shut my mouth and find my head . . ."* Shouldn't it be the other way around —*"Find my head* (first) *and shut my mouth . . ."*? Why wasn't it? And those other lines. Alan knew worms, for he had seen many of the creepy, crawly creatures, long things in many bright colors. But what was a turtle?

The refrain of another song reached his ears, and it seemed to the sleepy boy that they were singing it to him.

"Alan saw a little zird,
Its wings were all aglow.
He followed it away one night.
It filled his heart with woe."

Only that wasn't the last line the children themselves sang. Optimistically, they always ended that song. *". . . To where he liked to go."*

Maybe he was asleep and dreamed it, or maybe he suddenly waked up with the distant music in his ears. Whichever it was, he was lying there, and a zird flew over the high fence and lit in the grass near him. Its luminous scales pulsed in the darkness, faintly lighting the faces of the children huddled asleep around him. It opened its beak and spoke to him in a raucous voice.

"Come with me to freedom, human," said the zird. "Come with me to freedom, human."

That was all it could say, and it repeated the invitation at least half a dozen times, until it grated on Alan's ears. But Alan knew that, despite the way the children sang the song, it brought only sorrow to a human to heed the call of a zird.

"Go away, zird," he said crossly, and the zird flew over the fence and faded into the darkness.

Sighing, Alan went back to sleep to dream of the Star Tower.

II

Blik died three years later. The young Hussir's death

brought sorrow to Alan's heart, for Blik had been kind to him and their relationship was the close one of well-loved pet and master. The deprivation always would be associated to him with another emotional change in his life, for Blik's death came the day after Wiln caught Alan with the blond girl down by the stream and transferred him to the field with the older boys and men.

"Switch it, I hope the boy hasn't gotten her with child," grumbled Wiln to his oldest son, Snuk, as they drove Alan to the new meadow. "I hadn't planned to add that girl to the milking herd for another year yet."

"That comes of letting Blik make a pet out of the human," said Snuk, who was nearly grown now and was being trained in the art of managing Wiln Castle to succeed his father. "It should have been worked while Blik has been sick, instead of allowed to roam idly around among the women and children."

Through the welter of new emotions that confused him, Alan recognized the justice of that remark. It had been pure boredom with the play of the younger children that had turned his interest to more mature experimentation. At that, he realized that only the aloofness he had developed as a result of being Blik's pet had prevented his being taken to the other field at least two years earlier.

He looked back over his shoulder. The tearful girl stood forlornly, watching him go. She waved and called after him.

"Maybe we'll see each other again at mating time."

He waved back at her, drawing a sharp cut across the shoulders from Snuk's whip. They would not turn him in with the women at mating time for at least another three years, but the girl was almost of mating age. By the time she saw him again, she probably would have forgotten him.

His transfer into adulthood was an immediate ordeal. Wiln and Snuk remained just outside the fence and whistled delightedly at the hazing Alan was given by the men and older boys. The ritual would have been more difficult for him had it not been so long delayed, but he found a place in the scheme of things somewhat high for a newcomer because he was older than most of them and big for his age. Scratched

and battered, he gained the necessary initial respect from his new associates by trouncing several boys his own size.

That night, lonely and unhappy, Alan heard the keening of the Hussirs rise from Wiln Castle. The night songs of the men, deeper and lustier than those of the women and children, faded and stopped as the sound of mourning drifted to them on the wind. Alan knew it meant that Blik's long illness was over, that his young master was dead.

He found a secluded corner of the field and cried himself to sleep under the stars. He had loved Blik.

After Blik's death, Alan thought he might be put with the laboring men, to pull the plows and work the crops. He knew he did not have the training for work in and around the castle itself, and he did not think he would be retained with the riding stock.

But Snuk had different ideas.

"I saw your good qualities as a riding human before Blik ever picked you out for a pet," Snuk told him, laying his pointed ears back viciously. Snuk used the human language, for it was Snuk's theory that one could control humans better when one could listen in on their conversations among themselves. "Blik spoiled all the temper out of you, but I'll change that. I may be able to salvage you yet."

It was only a week since Blik's death, and Alan was still sad. Dispiritedly, he co-operated when Snuk put the bridle-helmet and saddle-chair on him, and knelt for Snuk to climb on his back.

When Alan stood up, Snuk jammed spurs savagely into his sides.

Alan leaped three feet into the air with an agonized yell.

"Silence, human!" shouted Snuk, beating him over the head with the whip. "I shall teach you to obey. Spurs mean go, like so!"

And he dug the spurs into Alan's ribs again.

Alan twisted and turned momentarily, but his common sense saved him. Had he fallen to the ground and rolled, or tried to rub Snuk off against a ttornot tree, it would have

meant death for him. There was no appeal from his new master's cruelty.

A third time Snuk applied the spurs and Alan spurted down the tree-lined lane away from the castle at a dead run. Snuk gave him his head and raked his sides brutally. It was only when he slowed to a walk, panting and perspiring, that Snuk pulled on the reins and turned him back toward the castle. Then the Hussir forced him to trot back.

Wiln was waiting at the corral when they returned.

"Aren't you treating it a little rough, Snuk?" asked the older Hussir, looking the exhausted Alan up and down critically. Blood streamed from Alan's gashed sides.

"Just teaching it right at the outset who is master," replied Snuk casually. With an unnecessarily sharp rap on the head, he sent Alan to his knees and dismounted. "I think this one will make a valuable addition to my stable of riders, but I don't intend to pamper it like Blik."

Wiln flicked his ears.

"Well, you've proved you know how to handle humans by now, and you'll be master of them all in a few years," he said mildly. "Just take your father's advice, and don't break this one's wind."

The next few months were misery to Alan. He had the physical qualities Snuk liked in a mount, and Snuk rode him more frequently than any of his other saddle men.

Snuk liked to ride fast, and he ran Alan unmercifully. They would return at the end of a hot afternoon, Alan bathed in sweat and so tired his limbs trembled uncontrollably.

Besides, Snuk was an uncompromising master with more than a touch of cruelty in his make-up. He would whip Alan savagely for minor inattention, for failure to respond promptly to the reins, for speaking at all in his presence. Alan's back was soon covered with spur scars, and one eye often was half closed from a whip lash across the face.

In desperation, Alan sought the counsel of his old friend, Robb, whom he saw often now that he was in the men's field.

"There's nothing you can do," Robb said. "I just thank the Golden Star that Wiln rides me and I'll be too old for Snuk to ride when Wiln dies. But then Snuk will be master of us all, and I dread that day."

"Couldn't one of us kill Snuk against a tree?" asked Alan. He had thought of doing it himself.

"Never think such a thought," warned Robb quickly. "If that happened, all the riding men would be butchered for meat. The Wiln family has enough money to buy new riding stables in Falklyn if they wish, and no Hussir will put up with a rebellious human."

That night Alan nursed his freshest wounds beside the fence closest to the women's and children's field and gave himself up to nostalgia. He longed for the happy days of his childhood and Blik's kind mastery.

Across the intervening fields, faintly, he heard the soft voices of the women. He could not make out the words, but he remembered them from the tune:

"Star light, star bright,
Star that sheds a golden light,
I wish I may, I wish I might,
Reach you, star that shines at night."

From behind him came the voices of the men, nearer and louder:

"Human, see the little zird,
Its wings are all aglow.
Don't follow it away at night,
For fear of grief and woe."

The children had sung it differently. And there had been a dream. . . .

"Come with me to freedom, human," said the zird.

Alan had seen many zirds at night—they appeared only at night—and had heard their call. It was the only thing they

said, always in the human language: "Come with me to freedom, human."

As he had before, he wondered. A zird was only a scaly-winged little night creature. How could it speak human words? Where did zirds come from, and where did they go in the daytime? For the first time in his life, he asked the zird a question.

"What and where is freedom, zird?" Alan asked.

"Come with me to freedom, human," repeated the zird. It flapped its wings, rising a few inches above the fence, and settled back on its perch.

"Is that all you can say, zird?" asked Alan irritably. "How can I go with you when I can't fly?"

"Come with me to freedom, human," said the zird.

A great boldness surged in Alan's heart, spurred by the dreary propsect of having to endure Snuk's sadism again on the morrow. He looked at the fence.

Alan had never paid much attention to a fence before. Humans did not try to get out of the fenced enclosures, because the story parents told to children who tried it was that strayed humans were always recaptured and butchered for meat.

It was the strangest coincidence. It reminded him of that night long ago, the night after he had gone into Falklyn with Blik and first seen the Star Tower. Even as the words of the song died away in the night air, he saw the glow of the zird approaching. It lit on top of the fence and squawked down at him.

The links of the fence were close together, but he could get his fingers and toes through them. Tentatively, he tried it. A mounting excitement taking possession of him, he climbed.

It was ridiculously easy. He was in the next field. There were other fences, of course, but they could be climbed. He could go into the field with the women—his heart beat faster at the thought of the blonde girl—or he could even climb his way to the open road to Falklyn.

It was the road he chose, after all. The zird flew ahead of him across each field, lighting to wait for him to climb each

fence. He crept along the fence past the crooning women with a muffled sigh, through the field of ripening akko grain, through the waist-high sento plants. At last he climbed the last fence of all.

He was off the Wiln estate. The dust of the road to Falklyn was beneath his feet.

What now? If he went into Falklyn, he would be captured and returned to Wiln Castle. If he went the other way the same thing would happen. Stray humans were spotted easily. Should he turn back now? It would be easy to climb his way back to the men's field—and there would be innumerable nights ahead of him when the women's field would be easily accessible to him.

But there was Snuk to consider.

For the first time since he had climbed out of the men's field, the zird spoke.

"Come with me to freedom, human," it said.

It flew down the road, away from Falklyn, and lit in the dust, as though waiting. After a moment's hesitation, Alan followed.

The lights of Wiln Castle loomed up to his left, up the lane of ttornot trees. They fell behind and disappeared over a hill. The zird flew, matching its pace to his slow trot.

Alan's resolution began to weaken.

Then a figure loomed up beside him in the gloom, a human hand was laid on his arm and a female voice said:

"I thought we'd never get another from Wiln Castle. Step it up a little, fellow. We've a long way to travel before dawn."

III

They traveled at a fast trot all that night, the zird leading the way like a giant firefly. By the time dawn grayed the eastern sky, they were in the mountains west of Falklyn, and climbing.

When Alan was first able to make out details of his nocturnal guide, he thought for a minute she was a huge Hussir. She wore the Hussir loose jacket, open at the front, and the

baggy trousers. But there was no tail, and there were no pointed ears. She was a girl, his own age.

She was the first human Alan had ever seen fully clothed. Alan thought she looked rather ridiculous and, at the same time, he was slightly shocked, as by sacrilege.

They entered a high valley through a narrow pass, and slowed to a walk. For the first time since they left the vicinity of Wiln Castle, they were able to talk in other than short, disconnected phrases.

"Who are you, and where are you taking me?" asked Alan. In the cold light of dawn he was beginning to doubt his impetuousness in fleeing the castle.

"My name is Mara," said the girl. "You've heard of the Wild Humans? I'm one of them, and we live in these mountains."

The hair prickled on the back of Alan's neck. He stopped in his tracks, and half turned to flee. Mara caught his arm.

"Why do all the slaves believe those fairy tales about cannibalism?" she asked scornfully. The word *cannibalism* was unfamiliar to Alan. "We aren't going to eat you, boy, we're going to make you free. What's your name?"

"Alan," he answered in a shaky voice, allowing himself to be led onward. "What is this freedom the zird was talking about?"

"You'll find out," she promised. "But the zird doesn't know. Zirds are just flying animals. We train them to say that one sentence and lead slaves to us."

"Why don't you just come in the fields yourselves?" he asked curiously, his fear dissipating. "You could climb the fences easily."

"That's been tried. The silly slaves just raise a clamor when they recognize a stranger. The Hussirs have caught several of us that way."

The two suns rose, first the blue one, the white one only a few minutes later. The mountains around them awoke with light.

In the dawn, he had thought Mara was dark, but her hair was tawny gold in the pearly morning. Her eyes were deep brown, like the fruit of the ttornot tree.

They stopped by a spring that gushed from between huge rocks, and Mara took the opportunity to appraise his slender, well-knit frame.

"You'll do," she said. "I wish all of them we get were as healthy."

In three weeks, Alan could not have been distinguished from the other Wild Humans—outwardly. He was getting used to wearing clothing and, somewhat awkwardly, carried the bow and arrows with which he was armed. He and Mara were ranging several miles from the caves in which the Wild Humans lived.

They were hunting animals for food, and Alan licked his lips in anticipation. He liked cooked meat. The Hussirs fed their human herds bean meal and scraps from the kitchens. The only meat he had ever eaten was raw meat from small animals he had been swift enough to catch in the fields.

They came up on a ridge and Mara, ahead of him, stopped. He came up beside her.

Not far below them, a Hussir moved, afoot, carrying a short, heavy bow and a quiver of arrows. The Hussir looked from side to side, as if hunting, but did not catch sight of them.

A quiver of fear ran through Alan. In that instant, he was a disobedient member of the herd, and death awaited him for his escape from the fields.

There was a sharp twang beside him, and the Hussir stumbled and fell, transfixed through the chest with an arrow. Mara calmly lowered her bow, and smiled at the fright in his eyes.

"There's one that won't find Haafin," she said. "Haafin" was what the Wild Humans called their community.

"The—there are Hussirs in the mountains?" he quavered.

"A few. Hunters. If we get them before they run across the valley, we're all right. Some have seen us and gotten away, though. Haafin has been moved a dozen times in the last century, and we've always lost a lot of people fighting our way out. Those little devils attack in force."

"But what's the good of all this, then?" he asked hopelessly. "There aren't more than four or five hundred humans in Haafin. What good is hiding, and running somewhere else when the Hussirs find you, when sooner or later there'll come a time when they'll wipe you out?"

Mara sat down on a rock.

"You learn fast," she remarked. "You'll probably be surprised to learn that this community has managed to hang on in these mountains for more than a thousand years, but you've still put your finger right on the problem that has faced us for generations."

She hesitated and traced a pattern thoughtfully in the dust with a moccasined foot.

"It's a little early for you to be told, but you might as well start keeping your ears open," she said. "When you've been here a year, you'll be accepted as a member of the community. The way that's done is for you to have an interview with The Refugee, the leader of our people, and he always asks newcomers for their ideas on the solution of that very problem."

"But what will I listen for?" asked Alan anxiously.

"There are two different major ideas on how to solve the problem, and I'll let you hear them from the people who believe in them," she said. "Just remember what the problem is: to save ourselves from death and the hundreds of thousands of other humans in the world from slavery, we have to find a way to force the Hussirs to accept humans as equals, not as animals."

Many things about Alan's new life in Haafin were not too different from the existence he had known. He had to do his share of work in the little fields that clung to the edges of the small river in the middle of the valley. He had to help hunt animals for meat, he had to help make tools such as the Hussirs used. He had to fight with his fists, on occasion, to protect his rights.

But this thing the Wild Humans called "freedom" was a strange element that touched everything they were and did. The word meant basically, Alan found, that the Wild Humans

did not belong to the Hussirs, but were their own masters. When orders were given, they usually had to be obeyed, but they came from humans, not Hussirs.

There were other differences. There were no formal family relationships, for there were no social traditions behind people who for generations had been nothing more than domestic animals. But the pressure and deprivations of rigidly enforced mating seasons were missing, and some of the older couples were mated permanently.

"Freedom," Alan decided, meant a dignity which made a human the equal of a Hussir.

The anniversary of that night when Alan followed the zird came, and Mara led him early in the morning to the extreme end of the valley. She left him at the mouth of a small cave, from which presently emerged the man of whom Alan had heard much but whom he saw now for the first time.

The Refugee's hair and beard were gray, and his face was lined with years.

"You are Alan, who came to us from Wiln Castle," said the old man.

"That is true, your greatness," replied Alan respectfully.

"Don't call me 'your greatness.' That's slave talk. I am Roand, The Refugee."

"Yes, sir."

"When you leave me today, you will be a member of the community of Haafin, only free human community in the world," said Roand. "You will have a member's rights. No man may take a woman from you without her consent. No one may take from you the food you hunt or grow without your consent. If you are first in an empty cave, no one may move into it with you unless you give permission. That is freedom.

"But, as you were no doubt told long ago, you must offer your best idea on how to make all humans free."

"Sir——" began Alan.

"Before you express yourself," interrupted Roand, "I'm going to give you some help. Come into the cave."

Alan followed him inside. By the light of a torch, Roand showed him a series of diagrams drawn on one wall with soft stone, as one would draw things in the dust with a stick.

"These are maps, Alan," said Roand, and he explained to the boy what a map was. At last Alan nodded in comprehension.

"You know by now that there are two ways of thinking about what to do to set all humans free, but you do not entirely understand either of them," said Roand. "These maps show you the first one, which was conceived a hundred and fifty years ago but which our people have not been able to agree to try.

"This map shows how, by a surprise attack, we could take Falklyn, the central city of all this Hussir region, although the Hussirs in Falklyn number almost ten thousand. Holding Falklyn, we could free the nearly forty thousand humans in the city and we would have enough strength then to take the surrounding area and strike at the cities around it, gradually, as these other maps show."

Alan nodded.

"But I like the other way better," Alan said. "There must be a reason why they won't let humans enter the Star Tower."

Roand's toothless smile did not mar the innate dignity of his face.

"You are a mystic, as I am, young Alan," he said. "But the tradition says that for a human to enter the Star Tower is not enough. Let me tell you of the tradition.

"The tradition says that the Star Tower was once the home of all humans. There were only a dozen or so humans then, but they had powers that were great and strange. But when they came out of the Star Tower, the Hussirs were able to enslave them through mere force of numbers.

"Three of those first humans escaped to these mountains and became the first Wild Humans. From them has come the tradition that has passed to their descendants and to the humans who have been rescued from Hussir slavery.

"The tradition says that a human who enters the Star Tower can free all the humans in the world—if he takes with

him the Silk and the Song."

Roand reached into a crevice.

"This is the Silk," he said, drawing forth a peach-colored scarf on which something has been painted. Alan recognized it as writing, such as the Hussirs used and were rumored to have been taught by humans. Roand read it to him, reverently.

" 'REG. B-XII. CULTURE V. SOS.' "

"What does it mean?" asked Alan.

"No one knows," said Roand. "It is a great mystery. It may be a magical incantation."

He put the Silk back into the crevice.

"This is the only other writing we have handed down by our forebears," said Roand, and pulled out a fragment of very thin, brittle, yellowish material. To Alan it looked something like thin cloth that had hardened with age, yet it had a different texture. Roand handled it very carefully.

"This was torn and the rest of it lost centuries ago," said Roand, and he read. " *'October 3, 2 . . . ours to be the last . . . three lost expeditions . . . too far to keep trying . . . how we can get . . .'* "

Alan could make no more sense of this than he could of the words of the Silk.

"What is the Song?" asked Alan.

"Every human knows it from childhood," said Roand. "It is the best known of all human songs."

"*'Twinkle, twinkle, golden star,'* " quoted Alan at once, " *'I can reach you, though you're far. . . .'* "

"That's right, but there is a second verse that only the Wild Humans know. You must learn it. It goes like this:

"Twinkle, twinkle, little bug,
Long and round, of shiny hue.
In a room marked by a cross,
Sting my arm when I've found you.
Lay me down, in bed so deep,
And then there's naught to do but sleep."

"It doesn't make sense," said Alan. "No more than the first verse—though Mara showed me what a turtle looks like."

"They aren't supposed to make sense until you sing them in the Star Tower," said Roand, "and then only if you have the Silk with you."

Alan cogitated a while. Roand was silent, waiting.

"Some of the people want one human to try to reach the Star Tower and think that will make all humans miraculously free," said Alan at last. "The others think that is but a child's tale and we must conquer the Hussirs with bows and spears. It seems to me, sir, that one or the other must be tried. I'm sorry that I don't know enough to suggest another course."

Roand's face fell.

"So you will join one side or the other and argue about it for the rest of your life," he said sadly. "And nothing will ever be done, because the people can't agree."

"I don't see why that has to be, sir."

Roand looked at him with sudden hope.

"What do you mean?"

"Can't you or someone else order them to take one course or another?"

Roand shook his head.

"Here there are rules, but no man tells another what to do," he said. "We are free here."

"Sir, when I was a small child, we played a game called Two Herds," said Alan slowly. "The sides would be divided evenly, each with a tree for a haven. When two of opposite sides met in the field, the one last from his haven captured the other and took him back to join his side."

"I've played that game, many years ago," said Roand. "I don't see your point, boy."

"Well, sir, to win, one side had to capture all the people on the other side. But, with so many captures back and forth, sometimes night fell and the game was not ended. So we always played that, then, the side with the most children when the game ended was the winning side.

"Why couldn't it be done that way?"

Comprehension dawned slowly in Roand's face. There was

something there, too, of the awe-inspiring revelation that he was present at the birth of a major advance in the science of human government.

"Let them count those for each proposal, eh, and agree to abide by the proposal having the majority support?"

"Yes, sir."

Roand grinned his toothless grin.

"You have indeed brought us a new idea, my boy, but you and I will have to surrender our own viewpoint by it, I'm afraid. I keep close count. There are a few more people in Haafin who think we should attack the Hussirs with weapons than believe in the old tradition."

IV

When the armed mob of Wild Humans approached Falklyn in the dusk, Alan wore the Silk around his neck. Roand, one of the oldsters who stayed behind at Haafin, had given it to him.

"When Falklyn is taken, my boy, take the Silk with you into the Star Tower and sing the Song," were Roand's parting words. "There may be something to the old traditions after all."

After much argument among those Wild Humans who had given it thought for years, a military plan had emerged blessed with all the simplicity of a non-military race. They would just march into the city, killing all Hussirs they saw, and stay there, still killing all Hussirs they saw. Their own strength would increase gradually as they freed the city's enslaved humans. No one could put a definite finger on anything wrong with the idea.

Falklyn was built like a wheel. Around the park in which stood the Star Tower, the streets ran in concentric circles. Like spokes of the wheel, other streets struck from the park out to the edge of the city.

Without any sort of formation, the humans entered one of these spoke streets and moved inward, a few adventurous souls breaking away from the main body at each cross street.

It was suppertime in Falklyn, and few Hussirs were abroad. The humans were jubilant as those who escaped their arrows fled, whistling in fright.

They were about a third of the way to the center of Falklyn when the bells began ringing, first near at hand and then all over the city. Hussirs popped out of doors and onto balconies, and arrows began to sail in among the humans to match their own. The motley army began to break up as its soldiers sought cover. Its progress was slowed, and there was some hand-to-hand fighting.

Alan found himself with Mara, crouching in a doorway. Ahead of them and behind them, Wild Humans scurried from house to house, still moving forward. An occasional Hussir hopped hastily across the street, sometimes making it, sometimes falling from a human arrow.

"This doesn't look so good," said Alan. "Nobody seemed to think of the Hussirs being prepared for an attack, but those bells must have been an alarm system."

"We're still moving ahead," replied Mara confidently.

Alan shook his head.

"That may just mean we'll have more trouble getting out of the city," he said. "The Hussirs outnumber us twenty to one, and they're killing more of us than we're killing of them."

The door beside them opened and a Hussir leaped all the way out before seeing them. Alan dispatched him with a blow from his spear. Mara at his heels, he ran forward to the next doorway. Shouts of humans and whistles and cries of Hussirs echoed back and forth down the street.

The fighting humans were perhaps halfway to the Star Tower when from ahead of them came the sound of shouting and chanting. From the dimness it seemed that a solid river of white was pouring toward them, filling the street from wall to wall.

A Wild Human across the street from Alan and Mara shouted in triumph.

"They're humans! The slaves are coming to help us!"

A ragged shout went up from the embattled Wild Humans. But as it died down, they were able to distinguish the words

of the chanting and the shouting from that naked mass of humanity.

"Kill the Wild Humans! Kill the Wild Humans! Kill the Wild Humans!"

Remembering his own childhood fear of Wild Humans, Alan suddenly understood. With a confidence fully justified, the Hussirs had turned the humans' own people against them.

The invaders looked at each other in alarm, and drew closer together beneath the protection of overhanging balconies. Hussir arrows whistled near them unheeded.

They could not kill their enslaved brothers, and there was no chance of breaking through that oncoming avalanche of humanity. First by ones and twos, and then in groups, they turned to retreat from the city.

But the way was blocked. Up the street from the direction in which they had come moved orderly ranks of armed Hussirs. Some of the Wild Humans, among them Alan and Mara, ran for the nearest cross streets. Along them, too, approached companies of Hussirs.

The Wild Humans were trapped in the middle of Falklyn.

Terrified, the men and women of Haafin converged and swirled in a helpless knot in the center of the street. Hussir arrows from nearby windows picked them off one by one. The advancing Hussirs in the street were almost within bowshot, and the yelling, unarmed slave humans were even closer.

"Your clothes!" shouted Alan, on an inspiration. "Throw away your clothes and weapons! Try to get back to the mountains!"

In almost a single swift shrug, he divested himself of the open jacket and baggy trousers and threw his bow, arrows and spear from him. Only the Silk still fluttered from his neck.

As Mara stood openmouthed beside him, he jerked at her jacket impatiently. Suddenly getting his idea, she stripped quickly. The other Wild Humans began to follow suit.

The arrows of the Hussir squads were beginning to fall among them. Grabbing Mara's hand, Alan plunged headlong toward the avalanche of slave humans.

Slowed as he was by Mara, a dozen other Wild Humans raced ahead of him to break into the wall of humanity. Angry hands clutched at them as they tried to lose themselves among the slaves, and Alan and Mara, clinging to each other, were engulfed in a sudden swirl of shouting confusion.

There were naked, sweating bodies moving on all sides of them. They were buffeted back and forth like chips in the surf. Desperately, they gripped hands and stayed close together.

They were crowded to one side of the street, against the wall. The human tide scraped them along the rough stone and battered them roughly into a doorway. The door yielded to the tremendous pressure and flew inward. Somehow, only the two of them lost their balance and sprawled on the carpeted floor inside.

A Hussir appeared from an inside door, a barbed spear upraised.

"Mercy, your greatness!" cried Alan in the Hussir tongue, groveling.

The Hussir lowered the spear.

"Who is your master, human?" he demanded.

A distant memory thrust itself into Alan's mind, haltingly.

"My master lives in Northwesttown, your greatness."

The spear moved in the Hussir's hand.

"This is Northwesttown, human," he said ominously.

"Yes, your greatness," whimpered Alan, and prayed for no more coincidences. "I belong to the merchant, Senk."

The spear point dropped to the floor again.

"I felt sure you were a town human," said the Hussir, his eyes on the scarf around Alan's neck. "I know Senk well. And you, woman, who is your master?"

Alan did not wait to find out whether Mara spoke Hussir.

"She also belongs to my lord Senk, your greatness." Another recollection came to his aid, and he added, "It's mating season, your greatness."

The Hussir gave the peculiar whistle that served for a laugh among his race. He beckoned to them to rise.

"Go out the back door and return to your pen," he said kindly. "You're lucky you weren't separated from each other in that herd."

Gratefully, Alan and Mara slipped out the back door and made their way up a dark alley to a street. He led her to the left.

"We'll have to find a cross street to get out of Falklyn," he said. "This is one of the circular streets."

"I hope most of the others escape," she said fervently. "There's no one left in Haafin but the old people and the small children."

"We'll have to be careful," he said. "They may have guards at the edge of the city. We outtalked that Hussir, but you'd better go ahead of me till we get to the outskirts. It'll look less suspicious if we're not together."

At the cross street, they turned right. Mara moved ahead about thirty feet, and he followed. He watched her slim white figure swaying under the flickering gas lights of Falklyn and suddenly he laughed quietly. The memory of the blonde girl at Wiln Castle had returned to him, and it occurred to him, too, that he had never missed her.

The streets were nearly empty. Once or twice a human crossed ahead of them at a trot, and several times Hussirs passed them. For a while Alan heard shouting and whistling not far away, then these sounds faded.

They had not been walking long when Mara stopped. Alan came up beside her.

"We must have reached the outskirts," she said, waving her hand at the open space ahead of them.

They walked quickly.

But there was something wrong. The cross street just ahead curved too much, and there was the glimmer of lights some distance beyond it.

"We took the wrong turn when we left the alley," said Alan miserably. "Look—straight ahead!"

Dimly against the stars loomed the dark bulk of the Star Tower.

V

The great metal building stretched up into the night sky, losing itself in the blackness. The park around it was unlighted, but they could see the glow of the lamps at the Star Tower's entrance, where the Hussir guards remained on duty.

"We'll have to turn back," said Alan dully.

She stood close to him and looked up at him with large eyes.

"All the way back through the city?" There was a tremor in her voice.

"I'm afraid so." He put his arm around her shoulders and they turned away from the Star Tower. He fumbled at his scarf as they walked slowly back down the street.

His scarf! He stopped, halting her with a jerk. The Silk!

He grasped her shoulders with both hands and looked down into her face.

"Mara," he said soberly, "we aren't going back to the mountains. We aren't going back out of the city. We're going into the Star Tower!"

They retraced their steps to the end of the spoke street. They raced across the last and smallest of the circular streets, vaulted the rail, slipped like wraiths into the shadow of the park.

They moved from bush to bush and from tree to tree with the quiet facility of creatures born to nights in the open air. Little knots of guards were scattered all over the park. Probably the guard had been strengthened because of the Wild Human invasion of Falklyn. But the guards all had small, shaded lights, and Hussirs could not see well in the dark. The two humans were able to avoid them easily.

They came up behind the Star Tower and circled it cautiously. At its base, the entrance ramp was twice Alan's height. There were two guards, talking in low tones under the lamps that hung on each side of the dark, open door to the tower.

"If we could only have brought a bow!" exclaimed Alan in

a whisper. "I could handle one of them without a weapon, but not two."

"Couldn't both of us?" she whispered back.

"No! They're little, but they're strong. Much stronger than a woman."

Against the glow of the light, something projected a few inches over the edge of the ramp above them.

"Maybe it's a spear," whispered Alan. "I'll lift you up."

In a moment she was down again, the object in her hands.

"Just an arrow," she muttered in disgust. "What good is it without a bow?"

"It may be enough," he said. "You stay here, and when I get to the foot of the ramp, make a noise to distract them. Then run for it—"

He crept on his stomach to the point where the ramp angled to the ground. He looked back. Mara was a lightness against the blackness of the corner.

Mara began banging against the side of the ramp with her fists and chanting in a low tone. Grabbing their bows, both Hussir guards moved quickly to the edge. Alan stood up and ran as fast as he could up the ramp, the arrow in his hand.

Their bows were drawn to shoot down where Mara was, when they felt the vibration of the ramp. They turned quickly.

Their arrows, hurriedly loosed, missed him. He plunged his own arrow through the throat of one and grappled with the other. In a savage burst of strength, he hurled the Hussir over the side to the ground below.

Mara cried out. A patrol of three Hussirs had been too close. She nearly reached the foot of the ramp, when one of them plunged from the darkness and locked his arms around her hips from behind. The other two were hopping up the ramp toward Alan, spears in hand.

Alan snatched up the bow and quiver of the Hussir he had slain. His first arrow took one of the approaching Hussirs, halfway down the ramp. The Hussir that had seized Mara hurled her away from him to the ground and raised his spear for the kill.

Alan's arrow only grazed the creature, but it dropped the spear, and Mara fled up the ramp.

The third Hussir lurched at Alan behind its spear. Alan dodged. The blade missed him, but the haft burned his side, almost knocking him from the ramp. The Hussir recovered like lightning, poised the spear again. It was too close for Alan to use the bow, and he had no time to pick up a spear.

Mara leaped on the Hussir's back, locking her legs around its body and grappling its spear arm with both her hands. Before it could shake her off, Alan wrested the spear from the Hussir's hand and dispatched it.

The other guards were coming up from all directions. Arrows rang against the sides of the Star Tower as the two humans ducked inside.

There was a light inside the Star Tower, a softer light than the gas lamps but more effective. They were inside a small chamber, from which another door led to the interior of the tower.

The door, swung back against the wall on its hinges, was two feet thick and its diameter was greater than the height of a man. Both of them together were unable to move it.

Arrows were coming through the door. Alan had left the guards' weapons outside. In a moment the Hussirs would gain courage to rush the ramp.

Alan looked around in desperation for a weapon. The metal walls were bare except for some handrails and a panel from which projected three metal sticks. Alan wrenched at one, trying to pull it loose for a club. It pulled down and there was a hissing sound in the room, but it would not come loose. He tried a second, and again it swung down but stayed fast to the wall.

Mara shrieked behind him, and he whirled.

The big door was closing, by itself, slowly, and outside the ramp was raising itself from the ground and sliding into the wall of the Star Tower below them. The few Hussirs who

had ventured onto the end of the ramp were falling from it to the ground, like ants.

The door closed with a clang of finality. The hissing in the room went on for a moment, then stopped. It was as still as death in the Star Tower.

They went through the inner door, timidly, holding hands. They were in a curved corridor. The other side of the corridor was a blank wall. They followed the corridor all the way around the Star Tower, back to the door, without finding an entrance through that inner wall.

But there was a ladder that went upward. They climbed it, Alan first, then Mara. They were in another corridor, and another ladder went upward.

Up and up they climbed, past level after level, the blank inner wall gave way to spacious rooms, in which was strange furniture. Some were compartmented, and on the compartment doors for three levels, red crosses were painted.

Both of them were bathed with perspiration when they reached the room with the windows. And here there were no more ladders.

"Mara, we're at the top of the Star Tower!" exclaimed Alan.

The room was domed, and from head level all the dome was windows. But, though the windows faced upward, those around the lower periphery showed the lighted city of Falklyn spread below them. There was even one of them that showed a section of the park, and the park was right under them, but they knew it was the park because they could see the Hussirs scurrying about in the light of the two gas lamps that still burned beside the closed door of the Star Tower.

All the windows in the upper part of the dome opened on the stars.

The lower part of the walls was covered with strange wheels and metal sticks and diagrams and little shining circles of colored lights.

"We're in the top of the Star Tower!" shouted Alan in a triumphant frenzy. "I have the Silk and I shall sing the Song!"

VI

Alan raised his voice and the words reverberated back at them from the walls of the domed chamber.

"Twinkle, twinkle, golden star,
I can reach you, though you're far.
Shut my mouth and find my head,
Find a worm that's striped with red,
Feed it to the turtle shell,
Then go to sleep, for all is well."

Nothing happened.

Alan sang the second verse, and still nothing happened.

"Do you suppose that if we went back out now the Hussirs would let all humans go free?" asked Mara doubtfully.

"That's silly," he said, staring at the window where an increasing number of Hussirs was crowding into the park. "It's a riddle. We have to do what it says."

"But how can we? What does it mean?"

"It has something to do with the Star Tower," he said thoughtfully. "Maybe the *'golden star'* means the Star Tower, though I always thought it meant the Golden Star in the southern sky. Anyway, we've reached the Star Tower, and it's silly to think about reaching a real star.

"Let's take the next line. *'Shut my mouth and find my head.'* How can you shut anyone's mouth before you find their head?"

"We had to shut the door to the Star Tower before we could climb to the top," she ventured.

"That's it!" he exclaimed. "Now, let's *'find a worm that's striped with red'!"*

They looked all over the big room, in and under the strange crooked beds that would tilt forward to make chairs, behind the big, queer-looking objects that stood all over the floor. The bottom part of the walls had drawers and they pulled these out, one by one.

At last Mara dropped a little disc of metal and it popped

in half on the floor. A flat spool fell out, and white tape unrolled from it in a tangle.

"Worm!" shouted Alan. "Find one striped with red!"

They popped open disc after metal disc—and there it was: a tape crossed diagonally with red stripes. There was lettering on the metal discs and Mara spelled out the letters on this one.

"EMERGENCY. TERRA. AUTOMATIC BLASTDOWN."

Neither of them could figure out what that meant. So they looked for the *"turtle shell,"* and of course that would be the transparent dome-shaped object that sat on a pedestal between two of the chair-beds.

It was an awkward job trying to feed the striped worm to the turtle shell, for the only opening in the turtle shell was under it and to one side. But with Alan lying in one cushioned chair-bed and Mara lying in the other, and the two of them working together, they got the end of the worm into the turtle shell's mouth.

Immediately the turtle shell began eating the striped worm with a clicking chatter that lasted only a moment before it was drowned in a great rumbling roar from far down in the bowels of the Star Tower.

Then the windows that looked down on the park blossomed into flame that was almost too bright for human eyes to bear, and the lights of Falklyn began to fall away in the other windows around the rim of the dome. There was a great pressure that pushed them mightily down into the cushions on which they lay, and forced their senses from them.

Many months later, they would remember the second verse of the song. They would go into one of the chambers marked with a cross, they would sting themselves with the bugs that were hypodermic needles and sink down in the sleep of suspended animation.

But now they lay, naked and unconscious, in the control room of the accelerating starship. In the breeze from the air conditioners, the silken message to Earth fluttered pink against Alan's throat.

C. S. LEWIS

C. S. Lewis, of Magdalene College, Cambridge, is one of the outstanding lay theologians of the Church of England; but he is better known as the creator of two distinguished series of imaginative stories: the fantasies of Narnia for children, of which the latest is THE LAST BATTLE *(Macmillan, 1956), and for adults that unique group of science fiction novels which began with* OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET *(Macmillan, 1943). His first story in any fantasy collection is unrelated to either of these series; it's a quietly disturbing sketch of—But the nature of the subject matter is, for the first part of the story, Mr. Lewis' secret.*

THE SHODDY LANDS

BEING, AS I believe, of sound mind and in normal health, I am sitting down at 11 P.M. to record, while the memory of it is still fresh, the curious experience I had this morning.

It happened in my rooms in college, where I am now writing, and began in the most ordinary way with a call on the telephone. "This is Durward," the voice said. "I'm speaking from the porter's lodge. I'm in Oxford for a few hours. Can I come across and see you?" I said yes, of course. Durward is a former pupil and a decent enough fellow; I would be glad to see him again. When he turned up at my door a few moments later I was rather annoyed to find that he had a young woman in tow. I loathe either men or women who speak as if they were coming to see you alone and then spring

a husband or a wife, a fiancé or a fiancée on you. One ought to be warned.

The girl was neither very pretty nor very plain, and of course she ruined my conversation. We couldn't talk about any of the things Durward and I had in common because that would have meant leaving her out in the cold. And she and Durward couldn't talk about the things they (presumably) had in common because that would have left me out. He introduced her as Peggy and said they were engaged. After that, the three of us just sat and did social patter about the weather and the news.

I tend to stare when I am bored, and I am afraid I must have stared at that girl, without the least interest, a good deal. At any rate I was certainly doing so at the moment when the strange experience began. Quite suddenly, without any faintness or nausea or anything of that sort, I found myself in a wholly different place. The familiar room vanished; Durward and Peggy vanished. I was alone. And I was standing up.

My first idea was that something had gone wrong with my eyes. I was not in darkness, nor even in twilight, but everything seemed curiously blurred. There was a sort of daylight, but when I looked up I didn't see anything that I could very confidently call a sky. It might, just possibly, be the sky of a very featureless, dull, grey day, but it lacked any suggestion of distance. "Nondescript" was the word I would have used to describe it. Lower down and closer to me, there were upright shapes, vaguely green in colour, but of a very dingy green. I peered at them for quite a long time before it occurred to me that they might be trees. I went nearer and examined them; and the impression they made on me is not easy to put into words. "Trees of a sort," or, "Well, trees, if you call *that* a tree," or, "An attempt at trees," would come near it. They were the crudiest, shabbiest apology for trees you could imagine. They had no real anatomy, even no real branches; they were more like lampposts with great, shapeless blobs of green stuck on top of them. Most children could draw better trees from memory.

It was while I was inspecting them that I first noticed the

light: a steady, silvery gleam some distance away in the Shoddy Wood. I turned my steps toward it at once, and then first noticed what I was walking on. It was comfortable stuff, soft and cool and springy to the feet; but when you looked down it was horribly disapointing to the eye. It was, in a very rough way, the colour of grass; the colour grass has on a very dull day when you look at it while thinking pretty hard about something else. But there were no separate blades in it. I stooped down and tried to find them; the closer one looked, the vaguer it seemed to become. It had in fact just the same smudged, unfinished quality as the trees: shoddy.

The full astonishment of my adventure was now beginning to descend on me. With it came fear, but, even more, a sort of disgust. I doubt if it can be fully conveyed to anyone who has not had a similar experience. I felt as if I had suddenly been banished from the real, bright, concrete, and prodigally complex world into some sort of second-rate universe that had all been put together on the cheap; by an imitator. But I kept on walking toward the silvery light.

Here and there in the shoddy grass there were patches of what looked, from a distance, like flowers. But each patch, when you came close to it, was as bad as the trees and the grass. You couldn't make out what species they were supposed to be. And they had no real stems or petals; they were mere blobs. As for the colours, I could do better myself with a shilling paintbox.

I should have liked very much to believe that I was dreaming, but somehow I knew I wasn't. My real conviction was that I had died. I wished—with a fervour that no other wish of mine has ever achieved—that I had lived a better life.

A disquieting hypothesis, as you see, was forming in my mind. But next moment it was gloriously blown to bits. Amidst all that shoddiness I came suddenly upon daffodils. Real daffodils, trim and cool and perfect. I bent down and touched them; I straightened my back again and gorged my eyes on their beauty. And not only their beauty but—what mattered to me even more at that moment—their, so to speak,

honesty; real, honest, finished daffodils, live things that would bear examination.

But where, then, could I be? What world could have shoddy trees and grass and wildflowers, but true daffodils?

"I give it up," thought I. "Let's get on to that light. Perhaps everything will be made clear there. Perhaps it is at the centre of this queer place."

I reached the light sooner than I expected, but when I reached it I had something else to think about. For now I met the Walking Things. I have to call them that, for "people" is just what they weren't. They were of human size and they walked on two legs; but they were, for the most part, no more like true men than the Shoddy Trees had been like trees. They were indistinct. Though they were certainly not naked, you couldn't make out what sort of clothes they were wearing, and though there was a pale blob at the top of each, you couldn't say they had faces. At least that was my first impression. Then I began to notice cutious exceptions. Every now and then one of them became partially distinct; a face, a hat, or a dress would stand out in full detail. The odd thing was that the distinct clothes were always women's clothes, but the distinct faces were always those of men. Both facts made the crowd—at least, to a man of my type—about as uninteresting as it could possibly be. The male faces were not the sort I cared about; a flashy-looking crew—gigolos, fripoons. But they seemed pleased enough with themselves. Indeed they all wore the same look of fatuous admiration.

I now saw where the light was coming from. I was in a sort of street. At least, behind the crowd of Walking Things on each side, there appeared to be shop-windows, and from these the light came. I thrust my way through the crowd on my left—but my thrusting seemed to yield no physical contacts—and had a look at one of the shops.

Here I had a new surprise. It was a jeweller's, and after the vagueness and general rottenness of most things in that queer place, the sight fairly took my breath away. Everything in that window was perfect; every facet on every diamond distinct, every brooch and tiara finished down to

the last perfection of intricate detail. It was good stuff too, as even I could see; there must have been hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of it. "Thank Heaven!" I gasped. "But will it keep on?" Hastily I looked at the next shop. It *was* keeping on. This window contained women's frocks. I'm no judge, so I can't say how good they were. The great thing was that they were real, clear, palpable. The shop beyond this one sold women's shoes. And it was still keeping on. They were real shoes; the toe-pinching and very high-heeled sort which, to my mind, ruins even the prettiest foot, but at any rate real.

I was just thinking to myself that some people would not find this place half as dull as I did, when the queerness of the whole thing came over me afresh. "Where the Hell," I began, but immediately changed it to "Where on earth"—for the other word seemed, in all the circumstances, singularly unfortunate—"Where on earth have I got to? Trees no good; grass no good; sky no good; flowers no good, except the daffodils; people no good; shops, first class. What can that possibly mean?"

The shops, by the way, were all women's shops, so I soon lost interest in them. I walked the whole length of that street, and then, a little way ahead, I saw sunlight.

Not that it was a proper sunlight, of course. There was no break in the dull sky to account for it, no beam slanting down. All that, like so many other things in that world, had not been attended to. There was simply a patch of sunlight on the ground, unexplained, impossible (except that it was there), and therefore not at all cheering; hideous, rather, and disquieting. But I had little time to think about it; for something in the centre of that lighted patch—something I had taken for a small building—suddenly moved, and with a sickening shock I realised that I was looking at a gigantic human shape. It turned round. Its eyes looked straight into mine.

It was not only gigantic, but it was the only complete human shape I had seen since I entered that world. It was female. It was lying on sunlit sand, on a beach apparently, though there was no trace of any sea. It was very nearly

naked, but it had a wisp of some brightly coloured stuff round its hips and another round its breasts; like what a modern girl wears on a real beach. The general effect was repulsive, but I saw in a moment or two that this was due to the appalling size. Considered abstractly, the giantess had a good figure; almost a perfect figure, if you like the modern type. The face—but as soon as I had really taken in the face, I shouted out,

"Oh, I say! There you are. Where's Durward? And where's this? What's happened to us?"

But the eyes went on looking straight at me and through me. I was obviously invisible and inaudible to her. But there was no doubt who she was. She was Peggy. That is, she was recognisable; but she was Peggy changed. I don't mean only the size. As regards the figure, it was Peggy improved. I don't think anyone could have denied that. As to the face, opinions might differ. I would hardly have called the change an improvement myself. There was no more—I doubt if there was as much—sense or kindness or honesty in this face than in the original Peggy's. But it was certainly more regular. The teeth in particular, which I had noticed as a weak point in the old Peggy, were perfect, as in a good denture. The lips were fuller. The complexion was so perfect that it suggested a very expensive doll. The expression I can best describe by saying that Peggy now looked exactly like the girl in all the advertisements.

If I had to marry either I should prefer the old, unimproved Peggy. But even in Hell I hoped it wouldn't come to that.

And, as I watched, the background—the absurd little bit of sea-beach—began to change. The giantess stood up. She was on a carpet. Walls and windows and furniture grew up around her. She was in a bedroom. Even I could tell it was a very expensive bedroom though not at all my idea of good taste. There were plenty of flowers, mostly orchids and roses, and these were even better finished than the daffodils had been. One great bouquet (with a card attached to it) was as good as any I have ever seen. A door which stood open be-

hind her gave me a view into a bathroom which I should rather like to own, a bathroom with a sunk bath. In it there was a French maid fussing about with towels and bath salts and things. The maid was not nearly so finished as the roses, or even the towels, but what face she had looked more French than any real Frenchwoman's could.

The gigantic Peggy now removed her beach equipment and stood up naked in front of a full-length mirror. Apparently she enjoyed what she saw there; I can hardly express how much I didn't. Partly the size (it's only fair to remember that) but, still more, something that came as a terrible shock to me, though I suppose modern lovers and husbands must be hardened to it. Her body was (of course) brown, like the bodies in the sun-bathing advertisements. But round her hips, and again round her breasts, where the coverings had been, there were two bands of dead white which looked, by contrast, like leprosy. It made me for the moment almost physically sick. What staggered me was that she could stand and admire it. Had she no idea how it would affect ordinary male eyes? A very disagreeable conviction grew in me that this was a subject of no interest to her; that all her clothes and bath salts and two-piece-swim-suits, and indeed the voluptuousness of her every look and gesture, had not, and never had had, the meaning which every man would read, and was intended to read, into them. They were a huge overture to an opera in which she had no interest at all; a coronation procession with no Queen at the centre of it; gestures, gestures about nothing.

And now I became aware that two noises had been going for a long time; the only noises I ever heard in that world. But they were coming from outside, from somewhere beyond that low, grey covering which served the Shoddy Lands instead of a sky. Both the noises were knockings; patient knockings, infinitely remote, as if two outsiders, two excluded people, were knocking on the walls of that world. The one was faint, but hard; and with it came a voice saying, "Peggy, Peggy, let me in." Durward's voice, I thought. But how shall I describe the other knocking? It was, in some curious way, soft,

"soft as wool and sharp as death," soft but unendurably heavy, as if at each blow some enormous hand fell on the outside of the Shoddy Sky and covered it completely. And with that knocking came a voice at whose sound my bones turned to water: "Child, child, child, let me in before the night comes."

Before the night comes—instantly common daylight rushed back upon me. I was in my own rooms again and my two visitors were before me. They did not appear to notice that anything unusual had happened to me, though, for the rest of that conversation, they might well have supposed I was drunk. I was so happy. Indeed, in a way I was drunk; drunk with the sheer delight of being back in the real world, free, outside the horrible little prison of that land. There were birds singing close to a window; there was real sunlight falling on a panel. That panel needed repainting; but I could have gone down on my knees and kissed its very shabbiness —the precious real, solid thing it was. I noticed a tiny cut on Durward's cheek where he must have cut himself shaving that morning; and I felt the same about it. Indeed anything was enough to make me happy; I mean, any Thing, as long as it really was a Thing.

Well, those are the facts; everyone may make what he pleases of them. My own hypothesis is the obvious one which will have occurred to most readers. It may be too obvious; I am quite ready to consider rival theories. My view is that by the operation of some unknown pyschological—or pathological—law, I was, for a second or so, let into Peggy's mind; at least to the extent of seeing her world, the world as it exists for her. At the centre of that world is a swollen image of herself, remodeled to be as like the girls in the advertisements as possible. Round this are grouped clear and distinct images of the things she really cares about. Beyond that, the whole earth and sky are a vague blur. The daffodils and roses are especially instructive. Flowers only exist for her if they are the sort that can be cut and put in vases or sent as bouquets; flowers in themselves, flowers as you see them in the woods, are negligible.

As I say, this is probably not the only hypothesis which will fit the facts. But it has been a most disquieting experience. Not only because I am sorry for poor Durward. Suppose this sort of thing were to become common? And how if, some other time, I were not the explorer but the explored?

WILL STANTON

Like every other human experience, it took different forms in retrospect, depending (as always) on how it directly affected the person concerned. This is the way it seemed to the boy, because it was his birthday.

THE LAST PRESENT

I LEFT THE HOUSE about ten o'clock that morning. I had leather puttees over my hiking breeches, and a knapsack for my lunch, and my field glasses in a case slung over my shoulder. The hand ax and a knife and canteen were fastened to my belt—my mother kidded me about that.

"Do you expect one belt to hold up all that and your pants, too?" she said. "That's asking a lot."

I didn't make any excuses. After all she'd bought me most of the stuff herself.

"I want you back by four," she said; "I've got something I want you to do. That's four o'clock sharp, now, not any later and not any earlier." I had a pretty good idea what it was all about, after all it was my birthday. But neither of us let on. I went down the front steps and out to the street.

It was pretty quiet for a Saturday morning—a couple of people in their front yards raking leaves, but none of the kids around. I walked halfway down the block and went into the alley across the field in back of Pokey Michael's house. Pokey was my best friend. We'd done a lot of exploring together and hiking up the mountain, and we had plans for building a boat as soon as we got time for it.

I crossed the creek and started on the trail up the mountain. Ordinarily Pokey would have been going with me and probably some other friends, but this Saturday they had made some kind of excuse. I was pretty sure I'd be seeing most of them back at my house around four o'clock. Almost every year my folks had some kind of surprise for my birthday, and I thought this time it would probably be a barbecue in the back yard for all my friends, and of course cake and ice cream and favors.

I got to Rocky Ridge just twenty-eight minutes after I'd left the house by my watch. I'd done it in better time before, but I wasn't trying to set any records. From there I could see a good bit of town—the roofs, anyway. You couldn't see my roof, or Pokey's—too many trees, but you could see Spud Ashley's roof and the window of his room. With field glasses you could even send semaphore signals back and forth—we planned to learn the code some day.

When I'd rested a minute, I hit the trail again for the steepest part of the climb. It was scrub oak through there and heavy underbrush so you couldn't see twenty feet to either side. All the time I was climbing I kept thinking about my birthday present—it was going to be a rifle I was pretty sure. Not an air rifle, I'd had one of those for years, but a real one, a .22.

The main reason I thought I was going to get it was the way my folks joked about giving me something else. "You're so crazy about hiking and camping," my mother said, "you ought to have something you could use outdoors. Like woolen underwear."

"That's no present," my dad said. "He'd rather have something from a hardware store—maybe something that would help him earn some spending money. What I had in mind was a lawn mower." Just as if I couldn't have borrowed one if I wanted to. No, I felt that if I wasn't going to get the rifle they wouldn't have joked about it.

Finally I came to the place where our special trail began. We'd blazed a tree to mark it, or actually what we'd done was blaze a tree up the path a ways. You'd start at the tree

and come back fifty paces and head to the right, only we'd made it a rule never to leave the trail twice in the same place so as to make a path anybody could follow. Each time we'd take a little different route until we came to a big rock out of sight of the main trail and that's where our secret trail really began. We'd cut it through the thick brush, and after a couple hundred yards it led to a cave that nobody outside our club had ever seen. Of course the mountain was full of caves, probably some that had never been discovered, but this was our special one.

Looking through the brush in front of it you could see Rocky Ridge. What that meant was that we had a communication system with the whole town. Say Spud was home, he could get a telephone call from one of the other fellows and semaphore the call to the Ridge. Then whoever was there could relay the message to the cave. That way if any other gang of kids from town tried to sneak up on us or anything, they wouldn't have much luck.

I built a fire and fixed my lunch. I had a can of spaghetti I cooked in my mess kit, and a banana and cupcakes and water from my canteen. After lunch I rolled a corn-silk cigarette. We had agreed that none of us in the society would ever use tobacco until we'd finished high school, but if anyone wanted to have a corn-silk smoke after a meal it was relaxing, and we didn't see how it could do any harm.

Usually from the cave you could hear the train whistle at two-ten, but that afternoon I missed it. I didn't think my watch could be far off—I had it regulated so it only gained five minutes a week but that day I didn't hear the train whistle. At two-thirty I made sure the fire was out and cleaned up camp. That gave me plenty of time to take it easy going down the trail and still get home by four. It had been a good day—warm for October, and not much wind. I got to the Ridge by three-twenty and stopped for a minute to rest and take a look around. It was quiet. Generally on a Saturday you could hear the noise of horns and traffic from downtown, but there wasn't a sound. Only birdcalls and rustling in the underbrush, but nothing mechanical or human.

Ordinarily you're so used to human sounds you don't even hear them. But when they stop you notice it. You can tell right away. I didn't wait any longer—I started down the trail again, walking fast.

I crossed the creek and started running through the field in back of Pokey's and up the alley to the street. Then I stopped. The street was the same as in the morning—I mean the houses and trees. But there weren't any people in sight and there was something else—something crazy. It was furniture. All along the street, in front of every house there was a table or stand of some kind, with guns piled on them. It was like all the people had gone through their houses and taken every gun and knife and weapon and piled them out front for the garbage man or somebody to pick up. But why would they do it—and all at the same time? I stood there for a minute or more just looking up and down the street. Then I heard the first noise.

It was coming from an empty car parked across the street. Somebody had left the radio going and there was a man's voice. I couldn't make out what he was saying, it was too hard to understand. But he seemed to be giving orders—telling people what to do.

I stood there watching the car for a minute and then I heard the other sound—the tapping. Like somebody trying to get my attention and then waiting and then starting again. I whirled around. It was Pokey's father crouched behind their front window, tapping on the glass. He had been light-heavyweight champ of the Marines, so Pokey said, but he looked old and small. He was motioning me not to come any closer. I couldn't tell where Pokey was, or his mother, or anybody else on the block. I was all alone.

Then all I knew was I was running. With my knapsack and field glasses bouncing up and down and the canteen slapping against my leg. I had to get home whatever happened. Ten houses to go—it seemed to take forever. Then I was crashing through the hedge and across the lawn and up the steps. The last thing I saw—the last thing I remember

was our card table set up on the grass with a gun on it. A new one—a rifle—a .22.

I've told the story I don't know how many times now, at night when we lie on our bunks talking in whispers. Then I tell them about the hike and the cooking lunch and so on. All it amounted to was kid stuff, but they want me to tell it, over and over. It's because I had those few hours, I guess, when I was still free to do as I pleased after everyone else knew.

It's what I think about more than anything else. Whenever I wake up I keep my eyes closed for a minute to see if I can smell pine needles and hear the train whistle—the two-ten train. Then I'll know I just dozed off after lunch and I can go down the trail and they'll be waiting for me—Pokey and my folks with the birthday party and all.

The light is coming in the windows, turning the walls and ceiling gray, and another day is started. A lot of them here have given up—they say there's nothing left to hope for. Maybe they're right, but I keep waiting.

Someday I'll hear the train whistle, and then all this will be over and I can go home.

WARD MOORE

Ordinarily the longest story in a collection would be apt to have the longest introduction. But Ward Moore weaves so urgent a spell here that I'd like merely to say that Mr. Moore is one of the handful of unquestionable artists now writing in this field of what he calls "improbabilia," and that this story reveals his artistry at its best.

NO MAN PURSUETH

ONE OF THE minor symptoms Hesione noticed that Sunday morning was the way all the later editions of the papers were folded with the front pages outside, instead of the comic sections. FIVE MORE PLANES VANISH, said a conservative headline. AMNESIA VICTIMS' STORIES IN WEIRD COINCIDENCE, announced another. PRETTY GIRL AMNESIAC ATTACKED; INCOHERENT, proclaimed a tabloid. Hesione bought a *Herald Tribune* and discarded most of it on the stool beside her, keeping only the news and drama sections.

"Just a cup of coffee, please," she said to the clerk, smiling automatically at him as if he were in the audience—which of course potentially he was. "I'll decide after whether I'm hungry or not."

She did little more than glance through the article on the theater page headed, *Hesione Hadstone's "Lady Cicely" Still Fresh and Bright After 24 Weeks; Shaw's Brassbound Ideally Suited to Her Talents; Will Play Lady Macbeth Next*

Season. She did not even read it through again, but turned back to the news as she sipped her second cup of coffee.

The five lost planes—a TWA between Chicago and Los Angeles, a Delta bound for Memphis, a B-51 taking off from La Guardia, and two small private planes, one in Vermont, the other in Ohio—made it 29 for the week and 81 since the disaster became epidemic. The CAA was still trying to make up its mind whether to order all planes grounded. Senators argued that Communist sabotage was responsible, in spite of last week's news, leaking through the Iron Curtain, of planes disappearing in the Soviet Union and China, just as all over the rest of the world. Neither meteorologists nor aeronautical engineers had satisfactory explanations to offer.

As for the amnesiacs, there was still no connection established with the vanishing planes except the coincident number of cases which had begun to be heard of in the last months, at the same time the plane losses jumped. The newspapers called them amnesiacs, but as near as Hesione could make out, they were merely men and women—astonishingly, children also—who appeared to suffer peculiar hallucinations during some sort of blackout lasting for anything from a few minutes to several days. There was no apparent pattern in their experiences giving a clue to the cause. Drivers of cars turned up on roads they had never intended to take, often miles from prospective destinations. They had been driving along normally—all agreed on this—either fast or slowly according to inclination, when suddenly the familiar scene was replaced by an utterly strange one. Sometimes their cars were on no road at all, but bouncing over plowed fields or rocky river beds. Even when the tires remained on thoroughfares, they were no longer like those of the moment before. Concrete changed to blacktop or tarred sand, gravel, stone blocks or packed earth. Often the wayside signs were in strange languages.

The amnesiacs, seized by terror, babbled on their return of people in unusual costumes—"fancy dress" was the commonest phrase used in description, and often the only one in their stories that made sense—who were rarely friendly, more often

hostile, and always unaccountable. The bewildered wanderers, fleeing their nightmare either in cars or on foot, suddenly found themselves back in the United States, dazedly begging help or explanation.

Others had similar experiences. Housewives, going from refrigerator to deep-freeze cabinet, stepped into unknown rooms or unaccustomed streets. A step or two might find them back in their own kitchen, convinced they had suffered a momentary delusion; sometimes they moved in alien surroundings for days before they walked back into the familiar, five or fifty or five hundred miles from home.

"Makes you wonder, huh, Miss Hadstone?"

Hesione started, then turned her you-are-one-of-my-public smile on the man reading the *Herald Tribune* over her shoulder. He was no one she knew, though he looked faintly like an unsuccessful agent, but for the last five years she had gotten used to being recognized by strangers. She nodded, not too encouragingly (seedy characters often tried to borrow money; men often thought actresses—stars or walk-ons—were easy pick-ups), but not too discouragingly either. He might not be a customer for Shaw or Shakespeare, but popularity never hurt anyone on the stage.

"And they're scared. Everyone's scared. Because they can't figure it out."

"It's frightening," said Hesione simply.

"Only because no one knows what's happening," agreed the man, seating himself on the stool beside her and taking off his hat to show thin, muddy hair brushed in evenly spaced stripes over a glossy bald head. "Because they're unwilling to know."

"Unwilling?" Hesione inflected incredulously. "Surely everyone is frantic to find out."

"Are they?" he asked comfortably. "Yet when someone wants to tell them, they jeer."

Hesione raised her eyebrows.

"Peterberry," said the man, introducing himself, "Alonso Peterberry. Sometimes known as America's Number Three Science Fiction Fan."

"Oh," murmured Hesione, drawing back a little from contamination.

"Sure," confirmed Mr. Peterberry proudly. "I'll let Sam and" (could the word be *furry*?) "fight it out for first and second, but did either of them ever put out a zine like *Fan Dango*? Of course there was more egoboo in the *Fantods*—that was *printed*, but I had to drop it for a spell of gafia. And it's the consensus of opinion that *Dango* tops anything else in" (did he say *fapper*?).

"Oh," repeated Hesione, hoping that the word might be common to her language and his.

"Well," said Mr. Peterberry, "I've sent the explanation to every prozine in the world and I bet they'll all print it. Even Gold and Boucher."

"That's very interesting, Mr. Peterberry," said Hesione, gathering up her *Herald Tribune* and reached for her check.

"Well, don't you want to know about it?"

"Oh yes, but the truth is, I'm in a rush——"

"I'll condense it. The time-space continuum has been warped."

"I beg your pardon?"

He took a grimy envelope from his pocket, looked at it with a certain fresh curiosity, then tore it in half. With a pencil he drew a straight line across each of the halves. "One dimension," he explained. "A one-dimensional space continuum."

"I see," conceded Hesione, unseeing.

He stood one of the scraps of envelope upright so that the lines impinged perpendicularly on each other. "A one-dimensional space continuum warped," he instructed triumphantly.

"But . . ."

"Imagine four dimensions instead of one. Length, breadth, height and time. A *time*-space continuum. Do the same thing. That's what's happened. Plane—or car or man—going along this line"—he pointed a gnawed finger—"in our normal time-space continuum. He hits the point of fracture here. Suddenly he's in a different continuum. When he returns—if

he does—he is no longer at the place of departure. Because the earth revolved (haven't checked fully, but so far there seem to be cases of eastbound travelers) and time passes. Logical?"

"Yes," agreed Hesione, dazed. "But . . ."

"Now you want to know what caused the warp."

"Not at all. I mean, I—"

"All I can say is that it must be a tremendous force, like solar energy. Of a kind not known to physicists. Might account for some of the old miracles better than Velikovsky."

"I see."

"Comes from knowing s.f.," said Mr. Peterberry complacently. "Been a pleasure, Miss Hadstone."

She ordered a third cup of coffee and two eggs. She had slept wretchedly, overstimulated by the hysterical response of the Saturday-night audience and preyed on by the pervasive fear everyone had felt increasingly for the past month. If she were not neurotic about it she would certainly have taken a sleeping pill, but ever since Catherine . . .

So this Sunday morning, instead of sleeping properly till noon and then reading Brooks Atkinson's wonderful piece about her while she breakfasted in bed, she had gotten up at the ungodly hour of nine and gone to a drugstore counter for coffee. She had thought a walk in the spring air might refresh her; instead she had met Mr. Peterberry. Who only confused her more.

Should she go back to the hotel and have the car brought over for a drive out Long Island or up in Westchester? It might be better to take a walk after all—tire herself out. No show tonight; bed at eight or nine at the latest; sleep the clock around. Escape.

The street of brownstone houses converted into shops was so commonplace . . . too commonplace. Suppose she walked into . . . whatever the amnesiacs walked into? Mr. Peterberry's warped something-or-other. I'm 41 years old, she thought, and I'm scared. Wanting to cry, Mama, Mama. Sanctuary.

Silly, because sanctuary was for those who committed

crimes and fled from vengeance to places of refuse. She had never done anything more heinous than drive sixty in a thirty-mile zone. And she had paid the fine. I'm losing my mind.

Sanctuary was also converted brownstone, two of them this time, remodeled into the cool silence of the Church of the Former Rain, presumably with parsonage or synodal offices or welfare services—or all three—abovestairs. There were not more than a couple of dozen worshipers or idlers in the hard pews, gently sniffing the stale, old-linen-and-bleach smell. Someone was pummeling "Sheep May Safely Graze" on an untuned piano. Dear Johann Sebastian, thought Hesione, I bleed for you with every pounded key. Except for funerals I have not been in a house of worship twice in twenty-five years; if I had to break my routine I could at least have chosen something Episcopalian or Congregational or Unitarian. Let me correct you, Mr. Peterberry: it is not time-space that has been warped. Just me.

"—sinners, all of us," shouted the man, his volume much too great for the room and the number of his listeners. Nor was he placing his voice properly. Hesione had a nebulous idea that ministers were taught such things as part of their training. Maybe only those of the more conventional sects; the creed of the brownstone faithful probably considered such preparation insincerity.

"—guilt, awful, unrepented guilt—"

Sex, thought Hesione, swiftly glancing back over a singularly blameless life. They're all mad on the subject except Shaw; if I could have played Lady Cicely sixty years ago . . .

"—good stands alone, but evil begets evil. Oh, my friends, dear fellow sinners, I am a pitifully ignorant man with no pretensions to wordly learning. I know nothing of science; the jargon of physics or psychoanalysis is far over my head. But I know this, and I tell it to you so you may ponder it and heed: the catastrophes of the moment, the disaster and the fear of disasters which shake the world, and which science cannot explain, are the result of evil, of all the collective evil that has been done since Adam——"

I suppose they would all turn around and stare if I slipped

out now. Think I was trying to evade the collection. Why did I come in? Oh yes; I was scared. . . .

"—like an iceberg, so deceptive, so majestic, so perilous, floating along apparently untroubled by the dashing waves, suddenly turning over and showing the hideous face of evil for all to see, generating a tremendous, unbelievable force. Oh my friends, I say to you, this is the world. The world of man, the world of sinners, the world of wickedness and guilt. It has been sailing along untroubled—seemingly untroubled—for century after century, but all the while the evil was accumulating, deed upon deed, sin upon sin, until at last in our day the weight has become too much to bear and the wicked world has turned turtle. What can right it again? Repentance, only repentance——"

Repent in dust and hydrogen. Guilt. The jargon of psychoanalysis wasn't over *her* head; practically all her friends had gone to the couch for absolution. Paul had for years—perhaps he was still going. She knew so little of Paul, even of what he felt and thought, yet their marriage was satisfactory to both of them; it had endured fifteen years on a basis of mutual respect. So unlike the first awful adventure with Maurice—she could not think of him as her husband and the father of her child—which had ended only when Catherine had . . .

Maurice had been a truly wicked man—full of aggressions, the analysts would say. He had tried first to seduce her as he had Catherine; only when she had rebuffed him for months did he suggest marriage. And then, while she was still carrying Peggy, he had begun again with Catherine. Her own sister. And Catherine had taken too many sleeping pills. Even after twenty years the horror shook Hesione.

Whatever was being played on the piano was unfamiliar to her. At any rate, having less vitality than Bach, it was more readily murdered. The collection plate, like an ancient warming pan without a lid, was thrust over her knees. She fumbled in her bag, dropped a dollar into the plate, and left.

Between the time Hesione met Mr. Peterberry and the time she left the Church of the Former Rain, a jet fighter disap-

peared near Denver, 33 amnesiacs walked into other worlds, and 52 came back from excursions which had lasted from a few seconds to several days. While she rode in a taxi to Fifty-Seventh Street, a stratocruiser vanished; while she heard a piano recital by Haydn, Schubert, Weber, Berlioz, Brahms and Ravel, 4 planes were lost, 41 amnesiacs went, and 38 returned.

As she reached her hotel another—But the anesthesia of repetition made the occurrences constantly less meaningful. It even dulled her fear into a fatalism; if there was a trap door to another space-time somewhere in the middle of the lobby, well, it was there.

Lila was waiting in her room. "Thought you might need me, Miss Zioney. Want I should run you bath?"

"Why are you so good to me, Lila? I didn't expect to see you till tomorrow afternoon. Yes, please. Did you order yourself something?"

Lila answered her questions consecutively as she moved toward the bathroom and Hesione sank gratefully into the long chair. "You pays me well and you ain't too hard to get along with. It don't hurt me none to come downtown and see what you need. No'm, I don't hold with devillin' room service soon's you back's turned."

When she came out of the bathroom Hesione said, "Well, devil up room service now, will you? And for goodness sake get something to eat along with your martinis. And something nice for me. A pot of coffee and . . . and a steak, I think, and a fattening dessert. And lay out my nightgown, will you? I'm going to sleep and sleep."

Lila, in the long chair, had nearly finished her third martini, and Hesione, in bed, was toying with her pastry, when the phone rang. Lila rose, but Hesione picked up the receiver. "Mrs. Drummond? I have a person-to-person call from San Fernando, California."

Paul—since she was Miss Hadstone to everyone else in the world. Something was wrong—Peggy? Maybe Paul was just—

"Hello, Hezzy?"

"Paul! What is it? Peggy . . .?"

"Yes, but she's all right now. Really Hezzy."

"What happened?"

"Sleeping pills. Esther Daniels, her room—"

"Sleeping pills? Oh no, Paul."

"It could have been an accident. They don't know yet—"

"They? The *police?*"

"No, no. The doctors. She's at the Cedars. Completely out of danger. Believe me, Hezzy."

"Paul, does Esther Daniels know *why?*"

"Look, I tell you it may have been pure accident. Anyway, no. She hasn't the faintest idea what would have made Peggy do a thing like that. If she did. She called me right after she called the doctor. I got down to the Cedars ten minutes after they brought Peggy there."

"Thanks, Paul. Listen, I'm coming right home."

"Of course. Even if it was an accident she'll want you. And if it wasn't, she'll want you still more."

Hesione was faintly embarrassed at her husband's unaccustomed emotion. "I'll fly," she said. "Tonight."

"Yes. I'll meet you at Burbank and run you right out to the hospital. Gaetano can't squawk; Belle can carry on for a week."

"I'm sure Jules won't make any trouble; I'll call him right away. Did you see her?"

"Peggy? No. But the doctor assured me she was absolutely out of danger."

"All right. I'll wire what plane. See you in the morning."

"Goodnight then."

"Good—Oh Paul. I can't!"

"What? I don't understand. Hello? Hello!"

"Paul, I'm afraid. No, terrified. I can't get on a plane. Not since this thing—with all of them disappearing."

"Yes, yes. You're right. You mustn't. I forgot. Now look Hezzy, everything will be all right. I'll keep calling you, and as soon as Peggy's up to it you can call her. She's in room—"

"No, I'll come. I must come. Only not by air. I'll drive."

"But that's impossible. It takes so long."

"Not if Lila comes with me and we take turns. Will you help me drive to California, Lila? Peggy needs me." She looked across the room. Lila was methodically packing a suitcase.

"Ready when you are."

"I'll phone you in . . . say four hours. That'd be eight, your time."

"Fine. But——"

"Good-bye. I must hurry."

What could have made Puggy—in her stress she reverted to the old childish nickname she had used affectionately for her daughter until the girl had astonished her with raging tears, proclaiming she hated, hated, hated that awful name—what could have made Peggy do such a thing? Hesione, consciously loosening her grip on the wheel and then unconsciously tightening it, pressed just a little harder on the gas pedal. She was not—she took a small pride in never having been—a doting mother; she did not tell herself that Peggy was beautiful, popular, brilliant, talented, happy, with everything to live for. To Hesione's detached eye Peggy was homely—rather pleasantly and sometimes even charmingly homely—and inclined to shyness and moods. She didn't know if her daughter was popular; she suspected she wasn't—except perhaps equivocally, as the daughter of a well-known actress—and she doubted she had any particular talents. But still . . .

"Why would she do something like that?"

"Man," answered Lila succinctly. "Ain't none of them worth it, but women go right on bothering with them anyway. Want me to take over now?"

Hesione glanced at the clock. "I'll stop at the next town and phone Paul. Then we'll change. Men? I wouldn't think Peggy . . ." She wouldn't have thought Catherine was the type either. Peggy was the niece Catherine had not lived to see. What nonsense; heredity.

Suppose Peggy had become involved as Catherine had? Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love.

But women? She shrank a little in distaste; she was Lady Cicely for the fastidious moment, eternally vestal. But she was also Lady Macbeth: I know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me—though to be accurate Peggy had been on formula almost from the first. She must be getting groggy with tiredness and worry, she decided; phone . . .

It took so long to put the call through that, as she stood in the narrow booth, her knees trembled. Paul not home, called urgently to the hospital: Your stepdaughter, Dr. Drummond; perhaps you'd better—then suddenly Paul, "Hello? Hello?"

The connection was bad, and the operator kept cutting in to ask for more quarters and dimes; she fumbled in her purse, listening to his encouragement; there was no use her calling the hospital; tomorrow. Peggy was much improved; don't wear yourself out, Hezzy. . . .

She slipped off her shoes and lay down on the back seat; Lila tucked the robe around her. Last night . . . last night was so far away. In Act One she played one of a trio with Captain Brassbound and Sir Howard; it wasn't until Act Two that she got the long solo passages, and Act Three with its duets (Granville Barker said you were supposed to play Shaw like opera, pausing after each speech as though expecting an ovation for an aria). She had been so overstimulated after the curtain she couldn't sleep; now she couldn't sleep either.

"Lila?"

"Yes, Miss Zioney?"

"If I'd brought her East with me . . . But there seemed so many good reasons—I don't know. I asked her if she wanted to come. Talked it over carefully. It would have meant trying to make new friends, and Peggy—Besides, she didn't seem to mind."

"She twenty, ain't she?"

"Yes. Almost twenty-one."

"You was twenty, did you expect you mamma to tell you what to do and what not?"

"Mother was dead; there was only my older sister Catherine and me. Besides, I was married at nineteen."

"See what I mean?"

"I'm not sure. You mean I have no more responsibility for Peggy after a certain age?"

"Something like that. You does you job when they young, and that's all you can. Try to sleep now, so's you can drive come morning."

Do your job when they're young, thought Hesione; I did. Puggy had everything. From pediatricians to progressive schooling. And it wasn't always easy, what with Maurice at the beginning, and working at the Pasadena Playhouse afterward; and then just working. And Paul wasn't making any money when we got married. I remember how I hesitated, wondering if it was fair to her. But just when does the time come when you are no longer responsible?"

" 'I've had enough of your duty and Howard's duty,' " she murmured.

"What's that, Miss Zioney?"

"What? Oh. Nothing; from Act Three."

"You better go to sleep."

"Uh-huh."

Should she have taken the plane after all, in spite of her terror? Suppose Peggy . . . Suppose she . . . got *worse*? Whatever the cause of her despondency (here Hesione brushed aside the consciousness she was accepting the theory there had been no accident), news that her mother's plane had vanished would hardly lighten it. Duty? Actually, Lady Cicely was more duty-ridden than the other two; her duties were diffused where theirs were concentrated and poisonously ingrown. Everybody in the play lied to themselves; Cicely was a hateful, hard, cold, superficial bitch over whom Shaw had thrown a veil of sparkling words and generations of hardworking actresses had lent an appeal not inherent. The infantile or self-starting school of acting: identify yourself with the part. Thank heaven, next year she would play a real woman, Lady Macbeth . . . I have given suck, and know how tender 'tis . . .

She woke with a start, moaning; wretched, chilled, with a cramp in her neck and a drugged desire for more sleep, much more sleep. She drew her knees closer, struggling to compress her body still farther into the fetal position and plunge back into unconsciousness through sheer will.

"Zanesville, Ohia," announced Lila. "You rested some?"

Hesione groaned. "I'll never be rested again."

"Breakfast'll fix you up."

Hesione shuddered. "Food—uh! But I'll call Paul—No, what time is it? Five—too early. I'll call the hospital, though."

"And we need gas. And you going to have at least a cup of coffee."

"All right. See if you can find a filling station with a lunch counter." she sat up and yawned. "I feel like a scarecrow. Last year's scarecrow."

"You feel better directly. How's that place look?" Without waiting for an answer, Lila drove up to the gas pump of an all-night lunchroom with a winking pink neon: TRUCKERS WELCOME. Hesione found her shoes, slipped on her coat, before opening the door to the chilly air. She hesitated when no attendant appeared, then shrugged. In the rest room she bathed her eyes and face in cold water, refusing to look at the grime; she'd been in dressing rooms where it was worse.

"We'll go to the counter and order, then I'll telephone." She heard self-consciousness in her voice and glanced quickly at Lila to see if she had noticed it. But people in small restaurants, particularly those in little towns, were sometimes rude to colored people. If Lila went in alone they might ignore her or even refuse to serve her.

A knobby-faced man leaned across the counter's varicose linoleum, chewing gum just briskly enough to show glimpses of a flashing gold tooth. "Can someone put gas and oil in our car while we eat?" Hesione asked, disliking him at sight.

He looked at her with tepidly lustful appraisal. "Yup. Looie—Looie! Customer." He looked at her again, and she thought his leer faded, not from lack of interest but from lack of energy. "What'll it be?"

"Lila?"

"I could go for a steak, kind of rare; French fries and coffee."

"Just coffee for me," said Hesione.

"Just coffee?" asked the counterman with lazy insolence.

"Two coffees, a rare steak and french fried potatoes."

"No steak. Got hamburger, though."

The counterman's double—except that he wore greasy coveralls and a cap—slouched in. "Ya want gas and oil?"

"Please. Fill it with ethyl and check the oil. Have you a phone here?"

"Booth's outside."

"Can you let me have five dollars' worth of quarters, please?"

She shivered in the phone booth, so tidily steel, glass, and mass-produced in the midst of the casual filling station. While she was confessing to the long-distance operator she didn't know the number of the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, Looie appeared with the oil stick held delicately between finger tips to show it was down a quart. She nodded quickly, nervously, apprehensive lest she be involved in explaining what brand and gravity of oil she wanted just as her connection went through.

"Hello? Yes. This is Mrs. Drummond. Hesione Hadstone. My daughter, Peggy Mallest—can you tell me how she is? Yes, I'll wait, of course." To Looie, still standing there, she said, "Thirty weight. Any good Pennsylvania."

Hospital routine wormed its way through the operator's demands for more quarters. Finally Hesione was told—reluctantly, she thought—that Peggy was sleeping normally; if Mrs. Drummond wanted more specific information it might be advisable to call Dr. Pletzel about eleven in the morning. "But—" she began, and then, faced by the hopelessness of it all, listened resignedly to the click of the broken connection and the operator's cheerfully aloof inquiry.

She started for the counter and her coffee, then thinking of the steamy, sweetish grease rising in the humid room, her stomach turned. A radio came to life with too much volume . . . "definite grounding of all planes unless . . ." then a

kindly hand turned it low again. She stared at a billboard advertising cigarettes, its colors faded and beaten by the spring rains and winds. Neither the sign nor its message had any interest for her, yet its heroic images and lifelessness were a soothing contrast to the humanity of the lunchroom. She sighed, taking a step forward. Loose gravel crunched under her shoes. She stumbled, regaining her balance swiftly and knew, even before she felt the strange texture through the thin soles, that she was no longer in the vicinity of Zanesville, Ohio.

Incongruously, her first thought was that now Lila would have to pay for her breakfast and the gas and oil. It was only after she suffered sympathetically the uneasiness turning to anxiety and then horror that Lila would feel and her frantic searching and calling, that she felt the force of the shock. I've done it, I've stepped through the time-space fracture or whatever it is. I'm lost.

Paul . . .? Peggy . . . ? She must get back. She must. Right away. (Many had; she was sure some of them had been gone only seconds.) If she stood very still and considered. (There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.) Just one step—one single step—was all she had taken. Surely it was retraceable. It had to be. Surely . . . Slowly, very carefully, moving the heel delicately, into the precise spot it had occupied only the moment before. Perhaps? Oh, *please* . . .

The step breathlessly taken, she was still . . . It hadn't worked. Unreasonably, it hadn't worked. What would? Something—something must. How did you get back. Because she had to. She *had* to. Run? Run, run. Run anywhere—anywhere. Run in a straight line (a straight line on a crumpled envelope), and somewhere, somehow, she would break out, back into reality.

It had been night when she left the phone booth; now it was gray-skyed day. Not only the place but the time—as though to make it finally impossible to get back. But it wasn't impossible. Others had gotten back. Accidentally of

course; well, the accident would have to happen to her too. Running couldn't help; probably nothing she did deliberately could help.

The rows of identical buildings looked faintly familiar. Not as some particular place, but representative . . . Barracks? What was that factory over there, with those chimneys? (Although it didn't look like a factory she had ever seen, but a factory whose picture she had looked at. Why should she look at the picture of a factory?) And the high, barbed-wire fences?

"What are you doing here? Don't you know it is forbidden?"

She faced him in panic, his tight features blurring in her staring eyes. His black uniform—black? Who wore black uniforms?—jaunty, yet somehow wilted. His pale eyes searched her face, lipless mouth pressed hard upon itself. Most frightening of all to Hesione was the realization that though she knew no more than a few words of his language, yet she understood everything he was saying perfectly, even when he used colloquialisms. It gave her the powerless sense of being hypnotized.

"Answer please, miss. No one has business here."

She shook her head numbly. The man came close, eyes still probing. She felt the warmth of his breath in loathsome intimacy. He grasped her wrist and turned back her sleeve to the elbow, scrutinizing the skin of her forearm. Satisfied, he let it fall.

"Your pardon, gracious lady, but these brutes are always up to tricks. Of course I can see you are of good blood but—Well, we hope to be on our guard; they are like apes. Excuse me. Zimmer; Underofficer Zimmer, at your service. You are perhaps of the theatrical company from Dresden? The *Merry Widow* company?"

Hesione made a hoarse, croaking noise in her throat. She understood every voice he was saying, every reference he made as soon as it was spoken. (She knew about the *Merry Widow* company from Dresden the moment he mentioned it; even hazily visualized the tenor and basso; their names were just barely beyond her recall.) But if she spoke, it would be

in English, to betray herself. She nodded; pointed to her throat.

"Oho. A touch of laryngitis perhaps. O thousand pities. But you should be in your quarters, resting, for tonight's performance. Why did you get leave then, and how did you get here? No, no—don't try to answer and perhaps strain your throat. Forgive me. Allow me the great honor of escorting you back. What an interesting costume you are wearing. Perhaps it is a new French style? It is interesting, don't you think, how the French have sloughed off so much of their decadence since our Leader's victory? Perhaps you have played for the troops on the Western Front, or the occupation forces? Those lucky fellows, not to be stuck in a hole like this, herding the subhuman brutes. None visible at the moment, thank God; we've just shipped out today's batch—destination unknown."

Underofficer Zimmer laughed and paused in his garrulity to offer his arm, but not with such complete assurance that she was unable to pretend not to see it. I must break away, she told herself in frozen despair. Every moment I'm with him makes discovery more certain. And then what? Where can I run in this awful place?

"You see that building over there? That's where we dispose of the trash. A thousand a day, but this is only a beginning, you understand; we get more efficient with practice. And our great scientific advances. Eventually the whole problem which has baffled the realm for centuries will be solved through the application of science and the genius of our Leader. You must be proud, gracious miss, to be contributing to this great work of purification by entertaining the Leader's troops. However I can see you are; I know something of race and racial traits; there is a Valkyrie touch in your walk and look. Do not think me impertinent, please. We are superior creatures because we speak out the truth boldly and without shame."

Save me, Hesione begged of no one. Save me.

"Yes, without shame; our ordeal as a folk has cleansed us of hypocrisy. Naturally there are still some immature individuals who have not yet learned the logic of destiny. This is

probably why our work is not publicized. A mistake in my opinion; I would rub their noses in reality, like a puppy one teaches to understand. Not that I'm criticizing my superiors. Just anticipating. I hope I'm not boring you, gracious miss? But how could one of good racial stock be bored by anything having to do with race-healthiness? Even to think it would be unbecoming."

Hesione willed herself to scream, to end it all. She opened her mouth, but only a faint hiss came forth.

"No, no, dear lady, do not strain your throat, I beg. Do try a warm aspirin gargle and keep your neck well covered. The health of all folk-colleagues is a most precious asset of the realm and must be guarded zealously. Hrrmph. Well, let us talk of lighter things—did you notice the flower beds by the main gate? Charming. Scientifically designed to produce lovely blooms from frost to frost. Beauty is science and science beauty. Speaking of science again, take note of those piles over there. You know these brutes have actually been wearing clothes of excellent quality while racially pure folk have been swindled by them into buying shoddy materials. See how neatly they are arranged according to size. And the shoes—men's here, women's there, and that fine large assortment of children's shoes; every size down to the smallest infant's—"

This time the scream came out, loud and shrill and uncontrollable. Hesione ran blindly, screaming, screaming. Faintly she heard Underofficer Zimmer's surprised expostulations; she had the feeling that someone—not Zimmer; no, Zimmer was left far behind—was calling on her to halt. Halt! Passage was forbidden. Then the sound of a shot, and shouting, angry words.

She ran through a gate miraculously open, turned a corner without quite realizing how or why, raced between windowless buildings. She knew her flight to be pointless; no escape from this place could be possible. The only atonement for even having seen it, breathed its air, been touched by its miasma, was to die in it. Let them catch, question, torture and kill her as quickly as possible.

Yet she ran on.

Jake Cooperman had told her once that some celebrants added to the Passover service a prayer or lamentation of remembrance for the six million martyrs. It had seemed to her at the time that this was an unfortunate thing, this keeping of bitter memories alive, an unforgiving thing. Now, running still, gasping, she wondered exactly how one went about forgiving the neat pile of children's shoes. . . .

A man in a steel helmet, grinning, suddenly stood before her, the rifle in his hands pointing, deadly. She screamed once more, effortlessly, uglily. She turned, tripped, fell. Fell, still screaming.

Fortunately for the easing of her hysteria, the darkness into which she fell, as soon as she got used to it, was only comparative; there was a moon and stars. The air was cold, bitingly cold, sawing at her lungs. Scattered trees loomed before her; the ground was rough. Not far off the shoulder of a mountain blotted out the stars. Wherever she was, she was sure it was nowhere near in either time or place to the horror she had just left. Shuddering, she tried not to remember it. . . .

She had no idea of direction. The Big Dipper was to her right; she decided to walk west, the way she was headed, which seemed to be downhill as well. Without evidence, she was nevertheless sure she was back in the world she had stepped out of a few hours—or was it only a few minutes? earlier. Though certainly this hilly country was not the flat Ohio where she had phoned—

Peggy! Perhaps days had passed and she . . . Oh, God, what had she done to be punished like this? She was immediately ashamed of the false drama, but her panic was real enough. Part of her mind told her she had escaped from the unspeakable, a miracle had rescued her; but she knew this to be an illusion. She had gotten away, but the place still existed; she was still trapped and would always be tied to it.

I should be thankful, she told herself; I should be grateful. (Lord, I believe; help Thou my—) If only I'd been brought back to some less lonely, less forbidding spot. I don't ask for the car and Lila; just somewhere where there are people and

houses and telephones and warmth. "Help!" she cried aloud, but the sound was weak and unconvincing, embarrassed.

A tangle of thorns snagged her clothes and scratched her hands. A dog barked sharply somewhere to her right; questioningly, then in an angry paroxysm of short yaps. She had a vision of a snarling beast knocking her down and tearing at her throat. "If I were only the crying type," she whispered. "If I were only the crying type."

Numb with fear and cold she walked fatalistically toward the sound of the barking. "Help me, I'm lost," she called tentatively, and then monotonously, because it was easier to keep on than to stop, and somehow soothing to indulge in the rhythmic repetition, "Help me, I'm lost; help me, I'm lost."

The barking became frantic as a dull spot of yellow light flickered ahead. "Who's there? I said, who's there?"

"Help me, I'm lost."

"Down, Billy; down! They anyone with you, missus?" The dog's noise choked to a surge of welling growls.

"No. No one. Can you please help me to get to a telephone?"

"Telephone? One at Wilson's store—You a foreigner?"

"No, of course n—Oh, you mean, do I come from around here? No, I don't. I . . ." She felt helpless to explain herself to his suspicious caution. Undoubtedly he had never heard of the amnesiacs; to ask reasonably, "Where am I?" would more likely bring hostility than answer. "Please, I'm cold. Could I come in and get warm?" she asked meekly.

The Mackenzie kitchen, to which she was at length reluctantly admitted, was heavy with the rancid smell of stale pork fat. Its plastered walls, originally yellow or perhaps pale brown, were dark with a greasy sheen. On one was a picture of President Coolidge. Hesione had a sinking moment of fear that she had returned to the 1920s, but the calendar close by the taciturn Vermonter reassured her; it was the current year. It was also with the compliments of Fisher's Hay, Feed & Grain, Hazard, Ky.

She had no idea of the distance from Zanesville, Ohio to Hazard, Kentucky, or for that matter whether the Mackenzies

were a mile or fifty from Hazard, but it certainly must be greater than the short space she had walked and run since she had left the phone booth. Had she covered ground while unconscious? Or was there some simple explanation for the discrepancy? Science fiction's number-three fan had talked of the earth's revolution and the passage of time, but did this work out quite right? He probably had a pat answer. Compared to the Mackenzies, Mr. Peterberry would have appeared comforting and homey.

The Mackenzies had no TV or radio—no electricity—and didn't read newspapers. ("The Word's sufficient for us," said Mr. Mackenzie, looking uncompromisingly over white-stubbled cheeks, while Mrs. Mackenzie nodded stringy gray hair until her large belly wobbled. "Sin enough in the world, without reading about it.")

"How far is it to the telephone?" she asked. "I'd gladly pay you to take me there." She touched the soft leather of her shoulder bag, reassured. Suppose she had dropped it somewhere?

"Who do you want to telephone?"

Hesione's first resentment was swept away in panic. If I start explaining, I'm done for, she thought. Maybe the Mackenzies don't hang witches, but they certainly won't do anything to aid one. "My daughter is very ill and I must reach her. Please help me."

Mr. Mackenzie grunted. "All help is from the Lord," he said at length. "Anyway, it'll be light soon."

"All right," said Hesione, defeated. "I'll walk. How far is it?"

"Maybe two miles across ground; good five by road."

Two miles in the unmarked night, stumbling for lost paths, bayed at by dogs—it was impossible. Well, five miles on a strange road . . . I'm being punished, she thought; the Mackenzies and that non-union preacher; my sins pursue me. What have I done? I did not allow Maurice to seduce me; I came to my marriage bed undeflowered. I've never had an affair. I'm not taking credit for it; I was never really—not *really*, even in the case of Nick—tempted. I don't believe

I'm a frigid woman; I've never felt reluctant when Paul (but nowadays we're so little together), in fact I've often been quite glad; it seems so *right* when you're as fond of someone as I am of Paul. I just don't have those uncontrollable appetites. Or at least I'm not uncontrolled by them. Lady Cicely.

Yet I do feel I'm being punished, and not unjustly. Freud set himself out to exorcise guilt feelings, but perhaps guilt feelings serve some necessary purpose. Oh God, I'm guilty of whatever You like, but please get me to a phone so I can call Peggy and Lila and Paul.

"Well, missus, I suppose it'd be only Christian charity to haul you to Wilson's if you're of a mind to pay for the gas. About five dollars'd be right, I guess."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Mackenzie. Thank you."

He tramped out of the kitchen, heavy-footed with righteousness. Mrs. Mackenzie asked, "How many children you got?"

"One." The answer that was no answer. (Why don't you get rid of it? Maurice had demanded over and over. Ruin your figure. What do you think you'll look like by the time you're seven months along? And she might have, if it hadn't been for those two girls in the newspaper stories; septicemia; I was afraid to die. Oh, Peggy) Maurice hadn't wanted children at all; by the time she married Paul they would have drastically interfered with her life. Had she wanted them? Hesione Hadstone will now answer the sixty-four dollar question while balancing on a slack wire two hundred feet above the heads of the audience without a safety net below.

Mrs. Mackenzie clucked and then said complacently, "Had sixteen myself before I got beyond it. Nine livin'."

The quantitative answer was no answer either; was Mrs. Mackenzie's moral quotient sixteen, or even nine times greater than Hesione's? Doubtless Mr. Mackenzie never suggested abortion, but she had heard and read dark stories of infanticide among the most God-fearing mountain folk——

She stopped her thoughts cold, sickened and ashamed. Mr. Mackenzie, in bleach-spotted, thready blue denims, gave a

little nod that was half a bow signifying he was at her service and half a peremptory command to follow him outside. "Might's well come along for the ride, Mother," he said to his wife.

On the back seat of a shivering Model A, a folded blanket had adapted so successfully to the shape of the broken springs that it had long since worked itself into uselessness. The daylight was almost full, revealing the long-weathered, never-painted, sagging, shamed-looking house, the rock-strewn yard, and inadequate barn. Why shouldn't they want five dollars to take her five miles, Hesione asked herself; they needed it and she didn't.

Wilson's store, after miles of road such as she had believed no longer existed except possibly in the less traveled parts of Central America, was exactly what could have been predicated from the Mackenzie home. Hesione was enjoined to smoke or chew George Washington, to take Carter's Little Pills, to use Ivory. Evidently Mr. Wilson did not consider business hours immutable; he showed no resentment at being summoned to open his doors at sunrise so she could use his telephone. He and the Mackenzies showed an appreciative and critical interest in Hesione's call, standing in a close semicircle as though to substitute for the nonexistent booth, politely staying just clear of the swing of her elbow as she deposited coins.

"California," commented Mr. Wilson. "Recollect Marthabelle Mimms? *She* went to California, ten, twelve years back. Turned out bad."

Miss Mallest was still sleeping normally; if she would call Dr. Pletzel at eleven . . .

"Even showing them in the schools," said Mrs. Mackenzie. "Giving innocent children ideas."

She resisted the temptation to call Paul; there was no point in disturbing him, he could tell her no more than the hospital had. The self-denial created a feeling of apprehension: suppose they *had* told him something they kept from her? Holding down her uneasiness, she began struggling with the adamant politeness of operators and supervisors to get through to

Lila at a lunchroom and service station on the outskirts of Zanesville.

No, unfortunately she didn't have the name of the business or of the proprietor. It was a small place on the highway, west of the city and—

"I am sorry, I have no way of . . ."

But this was vitally important, Hesione insisted; she was trying to get to her daughter who was in serious—

"I am sorry, I . . ."

What about the numbers of all lunchrooms on the highway west of—

"I am sorry, I have no listing . . ."

She understood, but couldn't the supervisor consult the yellow pages as subscribers were urged to do? She knew the futility of allowing the slightest edge in her voice, but it was hard to be calm and patient. She tried to visualize the girl or woman behind the trained voice, to put the appropriate persuasiveness in her own as she tried another suggestion.

Forty minutes later she was finally talking to Lila. Her audience offered advice freely on possible routes, disagreeing amiably, but Hesione had the feeling their geography was even shakier than hers or Lila's. "It's not but twenty miles to 119," Mr. Wilson said.

"County road closer," grunted Mr. Mackenzie.

Lila said, "You hold on, Miss Zioney. I'll find out from the station man."

It was almost three hundred miles, which meant nearly a full day's driving. "Be careful, Lila, "she implored. "Oh, for heaven's sake, do be careful."

"Near as I can make out, being careful don't count one way or the other. If you going to get yourself lost, it just happens, that's all. But don't you worry; nothing's going to happen to me. They got a hotel round there you can get some sleep?"

She turned to query them. No, there was nothing like that short of Hazard, but Miz Wilson might let her use the spare room and take dinner with them if she wasn't too choosy.

Hesione had tried to sleep (Oh Catherine; Oh Peggy), but Mrs. Wilson's tiptoed entrances were dramatically responsive to her open eyes; helpfully ("Don't suppose you're used to a bed like this or these old-time goose-down comforters. Maybe you'd like some coffee or a snack now? We got some real fancy canned stuff in the store they're too ignorant around here to buy"), or conversationally ("It must be a real soft life. Being an actress, I mean; sleeping all day and showing yourself all dressed up on the stage only maybe two, three hours a night, speaking just what's wrote down for you. Always thought I ought to have been one myself; everybody says my figure isn't bad; When I was a kid I was always in the school play"). And although she was amused at Mr. Wilson blundering in with wide eyes and apologies implying a regular custom of visiting the spare room, his arrivals and exits had not helped her relax.

In the afternoon she bathed her eyes and tried the telephone again. Dr. Pletzel's authoritative assurance was chastening, as though she had dared to doubt, hysterically and impiously, that all was well as soon as the doctor had been called. Paul's calm, friendly voice provided a different kind of relief, as he begged her to take it easy, now that Peggy was all right. She was a very lucky woman, she told herself, to have Paul, so understanding and reliable, so—so unimpetuous and undemanding. Maurice would have been unstrung and frenzied, blaming it all on her. But then Maurice would never have been separated from her by three thousand miles; could never have been persuaded to accept a reasonable, expedient arrangement if it interfered with his appetites or needs.

She had set a time for Lila's coming and then added an hour to it, to discount her eagerness. She tried not to stare down the road, straining to see in each sluggish car the familiar lines of her own. And then, when she was sickeningly sure disaster had struck, Lila was there. "Oh *darling,*" Hesione cried. "Oh darling, darling." And Lila patted her over and over. "It's all right, Miss Zioney. It's all right." And she had been so thankful to pay the Wilsons and go.

She drove most of the night in spite of her tiredness, glad to be racing away from all that had happened, racing toward Peggy. They crossed the river at Cairo and Lila took over again while Hesione slept in the back seat, really slept this time, deeply and darkly, dreaming that Maurice kept the Wilsons' store and refused to let her telephone. She drove all day through cornfields and flat lands, through dusty pastures and rows of slack barbed wire seemingly designed to protect nothing. Then Lila took over again, and night fell, and she was sleepless once more. "I wish there was a moon," she was saying, when Lila, clutching the wheel as though fighting a blown tire, exclaimed, "Something's wrong. Something's real wrong."

Hesione knew it, herself, for the car lurched and seemed to drop a foot or two; when the wheels resumed their interrupted traction, what she felt through the springs and shock absorbers was not the smooth concrete on which they had been riding, but the jarring impact of cobblestones, worn round and disparate.

Her first thought was, Why did it have to happen to me *again*? Once ought to be enough; you'd think you'd build up immunity or something. Like smallpox. Surely she had never heard of another victim repeating. If it were punishment and not just blind chance, wouldn't you think—Suppose it was neither punishment nor chance, but something else? A warning? A first and second warning? Why? Her mind was scrabbling around in absurdities.

Maybe you didn't get the opportunity to return if you fell through a second time?

Lost forever?

"You all right? I mean—"

"I—I'm all right, Lila."

Lila cut the motor and turned off the lights. A full moon shone in the sky where no moon had been. Hesione could see roof tops, and there were murmuring city noises drifting in. Oh, why . . . ?

"This what happen to you before, Miss Zioney?"

"I'm pretty sure. Oh Lila, what will we do? What will we do now?" She realized she was whispering, afraid speaking aloud would bring down new misfortunes.

Lila sighed deeply. "Well, you come out of it once. So they's ways. I read every day about people getting back."

"Maybe they don't tell us about the others. Oh . . . Aren't you afraid?"

"Me? Scared stiff. We get to California, I'm going to sit and just shake for a week. Right now I got no time. We got to figure what to do. Back the car real slow?"

"I don't think that helps; I tried walking backward, before. These fractures or holes—whatever it is people are falling through—must move. A man told me something about the world moving and time passing; the hole that was in one place a second ago may be miles away by now. We got in by accident; it'll be an accident if we get out."

"We'll get out—don't you doubt it. Meantime, we can't just set here. Where we, anyhow?"

Where? Another Shaw play—the unfrocked priest: In hell. Dramatic. Weren't people always complaining about actors being more stagy off stage than on? "I—About fifty years back or so, I think. I don't know. These cobblestones. Maybe more. Or in some place where—What's that?"

"Just a cat, Miss Zioney. Don't be so jumpy. On the fence over there."

Hesione peered out. They were in a narrow street. No, an alley, probably; it was hard to tell, despite the moonlight, since there was no accustomed frame of reference. Behind the fences were lighted house windows, but the lights had a yellow quality to which she was unused; gas or oil lamps. Her first experience had taken her about fifteen years into the past; this one must be much earlier. Did that mean—

The cat's crooning moans turned in a searing second into shrieks of pain.

"Lila! What happened?"

A light gradually glowed into full illumination of the large window opposite. A big head, cigar stub clamped between teeth set in a square-cut gray beard peered out. "Got him!"

A less imposing face peered alongside. "Perfect shot, Hannes. Haul in your prize."

Hannes grunted. (Just like Mr. Mackenzie, thought Hesione; I wonder if Mr. Mackenzie would look like him with a beard?) "I'm hauling, Anton. Master God, you think I have the wind of a bassoonist? Or arms like an accordion player? Here it comes now, the dirty beast. Up, my fine mewler; up, my great howler. How do you like your little trip through the air? Why don't you screech now, lovesick one? Why don't you yowl, dangling so prettily? Try it in C sharp, why don't you?"

Hesione watched pudgy hands methodically pulling in line. At the end of the line was an arrow, and the arrow pierced the still feebly writhing body of the cat. "Master, you're a superb marksman," said Anton admiringly.

Hannes grunted again, without disturbing his cigar. "Hit him in the middle register, ay? Teach him to be a tenor, ha? Fifteen this week. Who says the nobility and gentry are the only huntsmen? And all due to your inventive genius, my friend. Ah, if you could only orchestrate so deftly."

"What they saying, Miss Zioney? You understand this funny talk?"

It was a shock. Naturally (naturally?) she understood. Not so well as the time before, for Anton's accent and Hannes' vocabulary threw her off sometimes, but quite well enough. How did it happen Lila couldn't?

"They—they're joking. Sort of."

"Joking, huh? Pulling up that miserable cat like a fish; like nasty little kids—only much worse. Kids are only real mean for a short time, but men can work at it. Joking."

The window shut with a bang, cutting off the laughter at some new quip. "Lila, Lila—let's get out of here. Quickly."

"You think they any better somewhere else?" She stepped on the starter and Hesione wondered if the men up there heard the anachronistic noise, but neither head turned toward them, nor was the window reopened. "Should I put the lights on?"

"I wouldn't." (One anachronism at a time.) "Just drive very slowly."

Even at their crawling pace the car jolted and bumped over the cobbles. Hesione's dread of discovery was far from the terror she had felt, trapped in the concentration camp—the personal, immediate fear of humiliation, torment, death. Now her panic was only for not reaching Peggy, of perhaps never seeing Peggy again, of not being able to say, My dearest, my baby, it was all my fault, all of it—forgive me!

For no one in this musty old city (was her guess right, was this Vienna?) would do them injury, would be more than incredulously curious about two visitors from fifty or seventy-five years in the future, driving an impossible machine through their streets. If she was truly trapped she had nothing to fear for herself; Hapsburg Vienna loved actresses—

"What way would you say now, Miss Zioney?"

They had come out of the narrow alley onto a broad boulevard. Hesione looked at the soft-stone or brick house fronts, the soft pulsing light of the gas street lamps, the soft outlines of an odd cab carriage pulled by gently clopping horses. "Go straight," she decided, "and let's stick to one direction. See if we can get out into the country."

"Don't see why there might be less of these holes in town." She kept the car headed straight, still grumbling. "After a while we'll run out of gas, and then what? Just as well stay put and wait for one of them holes or whatever to catch up with us."

"I was only thinking there'd be fewer people to notice us. It would be pretty awkward to be seen and have to explain. They'd think we were crazy." But she was not really engaged with their possible embarrassment; at the moment she was puzzling over Lila's incomprehension of the two men's conversation. Why had she been able to understand them and Lila not? What was there inside her that could communicate so easily with savage cruelty? And before that, with absolute evil? She shook her head.

"Something wrong, Miss Zioney? I mean, something new wrong?"

"I don't believe so, Lila," she said gently. "Does it seem to you the houses are thinning out?"

"Do appear like we coming to a park or something. No more street lamps up ahead. Think it's safe going on like this without our lights?"

"Oh, safe," murmured Hesione. "What's safe?"

Soon they were in the midst of trees, long avenues of trees that shut out the moonlight. The cobbles gave way to a graveled road easier on the springs. Without asking Hesione again, Lila switched on the headlights. A startled hare, caught in the beams as the road curved, jumped for the bushes.

"People is the same everywhere, ain't they?"

She had wanted to confess her fault to Peggy, to lay her guilt before the girl and ask absolution. Absolution for what? What had she done? She was willing to concede she had been wicked or sinful or whatever the right term was, but specifically in what? How?

The fact remained that Lila and the men had not spoken the same language, while she had. At least she had understood it. She understood the language of evil, but Lila seemed to understand the nature of the men who perpetrated the evil: people is the same everywhere, ain't they? "Lila," she began.

"Yesm?"

"Lila, you must be—good."

"Well, I had three husbands, counting only regular weddings. And—"

"Oh, I don't mean that." Sex, sex; everyone was mad with it, thought of nothing else day and night. Of all the pursuits engaging the attentions and emotions of human beings, why was this one function set apart as an object of obsession? "I mean really good. Kind and loving. But . . . Oh, I don't know exactly what I mean."

"You tired and worried. Relax, everything going to be all right."

"I hope so."

The wood or park or whatever it was, came to an end. Instead of gravel road there was a rutted dirt one, and the previous slow pace became even slower. Lila said, "Before

we run out of gas we going to run out of nourishment. What do you suppose we can do about eating around here?"

"Do without," replied Hesione grimly. "We daren't leave the car or become separated. Just stick to it till we're out, back where we came from, or until there's no hope left."

"That's show business," said Lila.

Had she deliberately withdrawn herself from Catherine? Had she been the superior, the virtuous maiden, condescending toward the betrayed sister, arrogantly protecting her wifely status against the viciousness of Maurice and the weakness of Catherine? But she hadn't, she hadn't, she assured herself. That was twisting everything around. Maurice had been a wicked man, a betrayer, a seducer, a lecher, a man of ungoverned desires. No matter what her impulse of self-condemnation for real or imagined shortcomings, natural enough when confronted by these visions of wickedness, no one on earth could say Catherine—yes, her own dear Catherine—was anything but weak, or that it was possible to excuse Maurice's immorality.

Lila braked. "I'm sure as can be we not going right."

"But Lila, there can't be any right or wrong way of getting out. It's all chance."

"Maybe." There was an obstinate quality in Lila's voice. "But the Lord helps those that help theirselves—not just those who hope for the best."

Hesione Hadstone, Hesione Mallest, Mrs. Paul Drummond, Cicely Waynefleet, Lady Macbeth, would have been reasonable, rational, firm. She said, "All right, Lila. If you've got a hunch, follow it."

Lila wrenched the steering wheel hard over to the right and drove off the road into a field of hay. The right front tire hit a rock, and the car twisted sharply. Lila stepped on the gas, driving with a new, uncanny certainty. And then, as they hit another rock and the car wobbled on three wheels, they were in full daylight on ordinary concrete, not more than forty feet from a black and white marker, U.S. 60.

Still shaky, but heartened by her next series of telephone

calls ("Mrs. Drummond, believe me, I'm not keeping anything from you. Your daughter is completely out of danger. I think it better you don't speak to her on the phone; I'll cancel my orders if it upsets you too much, but I hope you won't insist.") ("Honestly Hezzy, old Pletzel's telling the truth. Maybe he's a little nuts about the psychological angle, but I've seen Peggy and she's all right. Doesn't want to talk much; Pletzel thinks she may spill everything—if there's anything to spill—when she sees you. But a day won't make any difference, may even be better Pletzel says. So don't wear yourself out; take it as easy as you can."), Hesione stopped in Amarillo for a real bed, a real bath, a real meal. She recognized that she really enjoyed eating, that she thought about food, instead of merely accepting it. She didn't believe she was a glutton (she preferred the word to the prettier gourmand), but unless she were to get fat—an unlikely possibility with her metabolism—it was the only passion without complications.

Falling asleep, she pondered over the second breaking through what Mr. Peterberry called the time-space continuum. She had gotten back, twice; why had none of the lost airplanes ever returned? Was the explanation purely material—no landing fields in the world of the past (but not all adventured into the remote past; she herself had gone, the first time, into a world where there were landing fields), no fuel if they ran out?—or was the answer more subtle? Something to do with what spiritualists called being earthbound? It seemed silly. . . . Maybe a few could come back, but conditions had never been exactly right . . .?

But the vanishing airplanes were not her chief concern. Punishment (leaving aside the question for what) yes, but punishment—if it was punishment and not just senseless torment—should have a purpose. At least, if everything she had heard and read had validity. The scene she and Lila had witnessed ought to convey a lesson, bring its point home to her. But she had never been cruel to animals. Not unkind or indifferent even. Paul's great Danes, though she did think them something of an affectation and an extravagance, she always

accepted; in turn they bounded at her and cavorted for her in what seemed to be genuine pleasure. She remembered a story she had once read about a condemned criminal who had dreamed the wrong dream; was it possible she was being punished the wrong punishment?

Was it possible that in some unreasonable way—what had reason to do with any of this? Planes falling into nothing; people disappearing and reappearing; her own experience—the punishment was not connected with any wrong, but was simply an inevitably corollary to her life? Crudely, was she somehow paying for her success? Did the horrible scene represent some sort of compensation—No, it didn't fit. Besides, she had already paid for her success in hard work and lots of other ways. This was some puritanical notion.

Besides, why should her punishment and Lila's be identical? If they were. Lila hadn't understood . . . There was no use going over that again. Lila had been able to find her way out; she had had to wait for fortune. Election, Calvinists called it, while Lila had Grace. . . . Maybe all that—shades of a multitude of earnest theologians—had nothing to do with it. . . . Troubled, she fell asleep and dreamed she was ten feet tall while Peggy and Catherine, Maurice, Paul and Lila were midgets who ran from her screaming in fear.

Next morning she dismissed—or almost dismissed—her speculations as morbid vapors. Only one plane had been lost the day before, and three times as many amnesiacs had returned as had vanished. "Maybe it's coming to an end," she said to Lila. "Maybe it's nearly over. If the preacher was right the balance may have been restored, or nearly; Mr. Peterberry's breaks in time and space may be closing up."

As the day passed her confidence increased; the clear mountain air seemed too thin and pure to hold traps and pitfalls. They drove through New Mexico all day, pausing only for food and gasoline, and through Arizona all night, going faster now, excited not only by the comparatively long period of immunity, but at their nearness to the goal.

Then, after they crossed the river into Blythe, and Hesione

had gone looking for a phone for the last time, she once more walked into another world.

It was a strange world this time, a grotesque world bearing little resemblance to reality of any kind. No, reality was not the word; this was real enough, but it was somehow subjective. Not like a dream, but like her projection of a character in a play. That was it; now that the first dismaying shock to her conviction that it would not happen again had softened, she realized she was somehow in a theater. A theater she had never seen or heard of or conceived existing. Reinhardt, she thought; no, Dali—no, no; chaos, Hell . . . I don't know . . .

Somewhere in the vast distance there was a roll of thunder which echoed, dying away in explosive mutters. "Do you solemnly swear (or affirm)?" "Do you solemnly swear (or affirm)?" "Or affirm . . . or affirm . . . or affirm . . ."

From under her feet, or at least from some depths around her, a harsh feminine voice squeaked, "Oh yes, your honor, I seen him, I recognized him. He had a cap on; I seen him shooting with a gun as it went by; I'd know him out of a hunnerd; he was an Eyetalian or some other kind of a foreigner. Oh yes, sir, your honor." And then the lightning was bayonets, hundreds and thousands and millions of bayonets all moving forward in even rows. The bayonets turned into wriggling snake-like creatures, and someone was shouting, "Fresh eels today; fresh eels today; I got fresh eels today."

The thin voice of an old man slashed from the sky like sleet. "Motion denied. Objection overruled. Denied. Overruled. Denied. Overruled. Denied. . . ."

Now the voice of the eel caller, calm but passionate, speaking with a strong accent: "Everybody that knows these two arms knows very well that I did not need to go in between the street and kill a man to take the money——"

"Irrelevant . . . irrelevant . . . irrelevant . . ."

"This is what I say: I would not wish to a dog or to a snake, to the most low and misfortunate creature on the earth—I would not wish to any of them what I had to suffer

for things that I am not guilty of. But my conviction is that I have suffered for things that I am guilty of."

The old man's voice came through again, chuckling like hail. "Did you see what I did to those two anarchist bastards today?" It was taken up and repeated, as by a quartet in close harmony, "Did you see what I did to those two anarchist bastards today?" And then as by a great polyphonic choir, reaching from horizon to horizon, but lost to all dignity and shrieking in a simian chatter, "Did you see what I did to those two anarchist bastards today?"

Soft and cottonlike came the whisper, ". . . a grave breach of decorum . . ."

Hesione put her hands to her head. She had been prepared, she had steeled herself, for some new scene of iniquity. Well, there was undoubtedly iniquity here, though she as yet had no clear notion of what it was all about, but the pervasive, over-riding impression she was getting was one of . . . What? Obstinacy rather than malevolence; refusal to understand; lack of comprehension; stupidity . . . No, it was a lack—something missing—but a deeper lack than any of these . . .

The accented voice, still calmer, spoke again. "If it had not been for these things, I might have lived out my life talking at street corners to scorning men. I might have die, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. Never in our full life could we hope to do so much work for tolerance, for joostice, for man's understanding of man, as now we do by accident. Our words—our lives—our pain nothing! The taking of our lives—the lives of a good shoemaker and a poor fish peddler—all! That last moment belongs to us—that agony is our triumph!"

This part at least was from something she's been in—when was it?—years and years ago. Patricia, sister of the female lead. The speech was a quotation from a man who had died in the electric chair—Vanzetti. What had Vanzetti to do with her?

The colossal stage on which she was standing began shrinking, and she became aware of the proscenium arch, drops,

flies, wings. They drew in closer rapidly as they diminished in size, but she had no sense of peril, or that any wonder was happening. In fact she felt it quite natural for her to have gotten here, and that she could do as Lila had done—not on a hunch this time, but under direction—in finding her way out. When she was ready. Not yet.

She moved up toward the center of the stage, speaking as though compelled by an urgent excitement, yet in full command. "Go get some water, and wash this filthy witness from your hand. Why did you bring these daggers from the place? They must lie there: go carry them, and smear the sleepy grooms with blood."

Somehow there was no necessity to play the rest of the scene; it was as though she had perfected her Lady Macbeth except for these lines she had to rehearse a final time before opening night. The footlights (somehow she had not noticed the footlights earlier, or they had been too far away) dimmed to a pale gray line which receded, and strangely suffused the eastern sky. She walked off, sure-footed despite the gloom, despite the unearthly quality of the surroundings, despite the terror which had run just below the surface of her mind till just a moment ago.

There was no backstage, no dressing rooms, no walls or doors, nothing but looming shapes and shadows which she stepped around. Instead of the firm boards underfoot, she sank into packed sand; she was not surprised to find that the light on the horizon was dawn, or that the shapes around her were giant cacti, mesquite, thornbushes.

She walked sure-footed, despite the sand, knowing she was going in the right direction, undistributed by the strangest thing of all: that there was no barrier, no sharp translation, no jolting change from one world to another. She knew that in a matter of hours she would come to a highway. It was over; the holes in space and time were healing; either sealed already, or rapidly becoming so. In either case she knew she would come upon no more of them.

"Oh, Peggy," she cried; "Oh Peggy dear."

Her guilt did not make her wretched; the instant knowledge

of it (instant? She had known it for years, lived with it daily. She had simply refused to see it) gave her, not absolution, but remoteness, as though it had long since been accounted for. Like a sentence commuted to time served. She had never played any role but Hesione Hadstone; she was a ham. How she had prided herself on the range between Lady Cicely and Lady Macbeth—what a foolish delusion. They were merely two facets of the ruthless, selfish, callous—Hesione.

Peggy, Catherine, Paul, Lila . . . *Maurice.*

"Oh God," she said. "Maurice."

For it was not Maurice who had been the monster. It was herself. The young Hesione, pretty and graceful (but not so pretty as Catherine), talented (everyone said so; even Catherine admitted it; what did talent matter to Catherine, so much more poised, attractive, and sensitive?), and envious. So envious of Catherine that jealousy burned into her bones. Sympathy did not mitigate her new clarity of judgment as she looked back on her youthful, untouched self (untouched? Was she today any different? It was not everyone else who was obsessed by sex, it was she; she was so aware of it that she saw it everywhere; not all the perfumes of Arabia could remove it from her consciousness; her aloofness and control were compulsive, like women who washed their hands a hundred times a day) tantalizing poor slow, stupid Maurice. Granted his wants were quick and brutish, still they represented love of a kind, perhaps the only kind he was capable of. (No; that wasn't quite accurate, even as a supposition; a remnant of her self-righteousness dictated that thought; let it stand simply that Maurice's lusts represented love of a kind.) What had her calculated chastity represented? If his panting pursuit had been so wicked, how was she to define her own part? Innocence compounding a felony? Or—what was the legal term?—practicing entrampment?

And Catherine? Oh, how superior, how smug she had felt toward Catherine. Poor, susceptible Catherine, who had recklessly yielded to Maurice's importunities, and then been displaced and superseded, relegated to the abandoned role,

who—in the face of all prudence—had been tempted again. Because she did not hoard herself with decent caution, but was vulnerable in a way Hesione never could be. Catherine had been incapable of judging Maurice; she could give or withhold, and she had chosen to give. Freely.

Why, marveled Hesione, not crushed but finally enlightened, I was the one who killed her. "Oh Catherine," she said aloud. "How could you have been so patient?"

Filled with strange energy, she plodded on through the sand. "I never gave out love in my life," she exclaimed, amazed. "Never."

Maurice. Catherine. Peggy. Peggy . . .

Peggy had been such a *cute* baby. Such a declaration of independence from Maurice; from men, from sex. Such a justification of the higher, the nobler in her, to contrast with Maurice's bestiality. And then Peggy had been merely cute; not beautiful, not brilliant, not talented. So she had been so tolerant, so understanding, so *amused* by Peggy. Forgive my inferior offspring, she had said in effect, my unremarkable daughter, my funny little child. Applaud my gentle wit as I substitute one vowel for another: Peggy—Puggy. When Maurice had proved useless (what had she done to make him useful, except to demonstrate her superiority to him?) she had worked to get things for the child: the clothes and the care. But she would have worked anyway; she had taken credit for self-sacrifice when she had offered up no self. No love.

It was the same for everyone; Paul, Lila, everyone. Paul was such a reasonable, understanding, undemanding husband—the antithesis of Maurice. Yet the two attitudes were only reactions to her own inviolability. She was untouched by Maurice's demands; Paul made no demands because she was untouchable. She gave out no love because she had no love to give out.

The preacher had been right; the evil had become overweighty, the world had turned over, ripping open the neat seams which had kept the present untouched by the past and one place distinct from another. And what was evil? Cruelty,

self-righteousness, stupidity, insensitivity, yes—but in the end it was essentially lack of love. Her excursions had not been haphazard nor accidental; they were designed and pointed, induced for her particular benefit. The self-righteous persecution of Vanzetti, the playful savagery of the two musicians, the Nazi horrors, were of her making. The piles of children's shoes were on her conscience.

For a moment she rebelled. Surely not? There were degrees, weren't there, and didn't infinite differences of degree produce a difference in kind?

Did this absolve her? Was she about to introduce witnesses to her good character, or her excellent intentions, or her stupidity or ignorance? She accepted the guilt of the shoes.

And the other guilts. And all the other guilts.

One thing she had not understood fully till now; she had not been suffering punishment. You didn't do, or fail to do, and then pay for it as casually as you put nickels in a parking meter. She had not been punished; she had been shown the protean face of evil and she had recognized it, because it was not strange to her.

The sun was up now; the desert would be blazing hot in an hour. It didn't matter. The holes were closed for her and they were closing for everyone else as well. She guessed this meant no revolution in human nature, no substitution of the rule of love for the rule of greed. It only meant—she thought—that the balance had been momentarily righted, and good and evil stood, for an instant, level. It probably didn't mean anyone would profit long or greatly, but perhaps all—even those who had not fallen through the holes—would be a little more aware, a little more tentative.

Walking through sand which seemed to have become firmer, she caught sight of cars on the highway ahead.

It wouldn't take her more than fifteen or twenty minutes to reach it. She had no idea where she was. She might be a hundred or two hundred or five hundred miles from the hospital and Peggy and her chance, not to undo; what was done could not be undone, but to do anew and freshly. The

distance didn't matter; if she couldn't begin today she would tomorrow. And there would be no faltering.

In the sky a great plane's aluminum glinted in the sun. It flew westward purposefully, and Hesione sensed that the pilot, for the first time in a long while, had no fear of suddenly disappearing.

RON SMITH

The shortest story in this collection (under four hundred words!) deserves an outsize note to introduce its author, who has never appeared in book form before. Science fiction vaunts a phenomenon known as the fanzine: *the non-profit amateur magazine published by and for the intense enthusiast who cannot possibly absorb too much about his chosen field of interest. The phenomenon is not quite peculiar to s.f.*: Opera News, The Baker Street Journal, *and* The Record Collector *are examples of fanzines in other fields which I would not be without. But no other field can boast so many specimens, or so many good ones; and one of the best, distinguished for its book reviews, its scholarly articles on criticism and bibliography, and its surprisingly able non-professional fiction, bears the title (more cumbersome even than F&SF's) of* Inside and Science Fiction Advertiser. *Now young New Yorker Ron Smith, editor-publisher of* Inside, *displays a neat understatement in twisting a classic theme, which indicates that he may well follow in the long line of fans (such as Bradbury, Kornbluth, and Pohl, to mention only those in this volume) who have established themselves in the front rank of pros.*

I DON'T MIND

YOU PROBABLY think it bothers me, but it doesn't. I've got books and records, plenty to eat and a nice place to lay around and be lazy and soak up a little culture—things I never had before.

Yes, sir, I came out of it all right. I'm better off and happier than I ever was. And I'm glad she's here. It would be damned lonely if I didn't have her around to talk to once in a while. I've never known much loneliness, always had company, and I wouldn't want to know it now. I like talking to women.

But, of course, the only reason she's here is because no one else did come out of it. At least, as far as we know.

Everyone else is . . . well, gone.

So, for the sake of companionship, we got together in this place. We've got everything we need—and we live in the best section of New York, too. At least, what was the best section when there were people around to compare.

Sometimes I get homesick, but it would be such a long trip back—with no easy way of getting there and nothing there anyway. Besides, she doesn't want to leave.

And, as I said, I enjoy her company.

Of course I don't see her much. She does a lot of walking, likes to be alone. But I have my books, a bottle of wine always handy. There's always something to occupy my mind. I enjoy myself. I don't mind at all.

But I do like to sit and talk to her at night about the books we've read and the places she's been. She doesn't like to talk about the places I've been, so I never mention it.

We sometimes have a few drinks while we're talking and I joke with her to keep her spirits up and then we go to bed. She has her own bedroom across the hall. We each have separate bathrooms. It's better that way.

Occasionally, just before she leaves, she looks at me with a strange far-off look in her eyes and starts to say something: "Kafur . . ." and lets it trail off.

I smile and say good night and she goes to her room.

But I don't mind at all. Not at all.

Why, I remember back in the old days when I was with the Sultan. I used to wander around the harem all the time, and I didn't mind at all.

POUL ANDERSON

The late Howard Roberts created one of the greatest characters in (so his publishers assure us) science-fantasy in his tales of Cronkheit the Barbarian and the Hybolic Age; and this seems a fitting moment to review the Cronkheit bibliography. As we all know, the stories first appeared in the old Unspeakable *and other pulps of the 1930's. A few (five stories and a historical essay on the Hybolic Age) were first assembled into book form in the Roberts omnibus,* SCULL-RACE AND OTHERS *(Miskatonic, 1946). Since 1950 Pixy Press has undertaken the valuable task, in collaboration with J. Wellington Wells and other noted Hybolic scholars, of publishing the entire Cronkheit canon; and it may be useful to list these books in the order in which they should be read, their Cronkheitian chronology, rather than by dates of publication. Those published to date are:* THE COMING OF CRONKHEIT *(Pixy, 1953);* CRONKHEIT THE BARBARIAN *(Pixy, 1954);* TALES OF CRONKHEIT, *revised by J. Wellington Wells (Pixy, 1956; chronologically overlapping the first two volumes);* THE SWORD OF CRONKHEIT *(Pixy, 1952);* KING CRONKHEIT *(Pixy, 1953); and* CRONKHEIT THE CONQUEROR *(Pixy 1950; paper reprint, Deuce, 1953). I do not understand how the following episode, surely the most revelatory of all the chronicles of Cronkheit, has been so far omitted from the collected canon.*

THE BARBARIAN

Since the Howard-de-Camp system for deciphering preglacial inscriptions first appeared, much progress has been

made in tracing the history, ethnology, and even daily life of the great cultures which flourished till the Pleistocene ice age wiped them out and forced man to start over. We know, for instance, that magic was practiced; that there were some highly civilized countries in what is now Central Asia, the Near East, North Africa, southern Europe, and various oceans; and that elsewhere the world was occupied by barbarians, of whom the North Europeans were the biggest, strongest, and most warlike. At least, so the scholars inform us, and being of North European ancestry they ought to know.

The following is a translation of a letter recently discovered in the ruins of Cyrenne. This was a provincial town of the Sarmian Empire, a great though decadent realm in the eastern Mediterranean area, whose capital, Sarmia, was at once the most beautiful and the most lustful, depraved city of its time. The Sarmians' northern neighbors were primitive horse nomads and/or Centaurs; but to the east lay the Kingdom of Chathakh, and to the south was the Herpetarchy of Serpens, ruled by a priestly cast of snake worshipers—or possibly snakes.

The letter was obviously written in Sarmia and posted to Cyrenne. Its date is approximately 175,000 B.C.

MAXILION QUAESTOS, sub-sub-sub-prefect of the Imperial Waterworks of Sarmia, to his nephew Thyaston, Chancellor of the Bureau of Thaumaturgy, Province of Cyrenne:

Greetings!

I trust this finds you in good health, and that the gods will continue to favor you. As for me, I am well, though somewhat plagued by the gout, for which I have tried [*here follows the description of a home remedy, both tedious and unprintable*]. This has not availed, however, save to exhaust my purse and myself.

You must indeed have been out of touch during your Atlantean journey, if you must write to inquire about the Barbarian affair. Now that events have settled down again, I can, I hope, give you an adequate and dispassionate account of

the whole ill-starred business. By the favor of the Triplet Goddesses, holy Sarmia has survived the episode; and though we are still rather shaken, things are improving. If at all times I seem to depart from the philosophic calm I have always tried to cultivate, blame it on the Barbarian. I am not the man I used to be. None of us are.

To begin, then, about three years ago the war with Chathakh had settled down to border skirmishes. Now and then a raid by one side or the other would penetrate deeply into the countries themselves, but with no decisive effect. Indeed, since these operations yielded a more or less equal amount of booty for both lands, and the slave trade grew brisk, it was good for business.

Our chief concern was the ambiguous attitude of Serpens. As you well know, the Herpetarchs have no love for us, and a major object of our diplomacy was to keep them from entering the war on the side of Chathakh. We had, of course, no hope of making them our allies. But as long as we maintained a posture of strength, it was likely that they would at least stay neutral.

Thus it stood when the Barbarian came to Sarmia.

We had heard rumors of him for a long time. An accurate description was available. He was a wandering soldier of fortune from some kingdom of swordsmen and seafarers up in the northern forests. He had drifted south, alone, in search of adventure or perhaps only a better climate. Seven feet tall, and broad in proportion, he was one mass of muscle, with a mane of tawny hair and sullen blue eyes. He was adept with any weapon, but preferred a four-foot double-edged sword with which he could cleave helmet, skull, neck, and so on down at one blow. He was also said to be a drinker and lover of awsome capacity.

Having overcome the Centaurs singlehanded, he tramped down through our northern provinces and one day stood at the gates of Sarmia herself. It was a curious vision—the turreted walls rearing up over the stone-paved road, the guards with helmet and shield and corselet, and the towering near-naked giant who rattled his blade before them. As their pikes

slanted down to bar his way, he cried in a voice of thunder:

"I yam Cronkheit duh Barbarian, an' I wanna audience widjer queen!"

His accent was so ludicrously uneducated that the watch burst into laughter. This angered him; flushing darkly, he drew his sword and advanced stiff-legged. The guardsmen reeled back before him, and the Barbarian swaggered through.

As the captain of the watch explained it to me afterward: "There he came, and there we stood. A spear length away, we caught the smell. Ye gods, *when* did he last bathe?"

So with people running from the streets and bazaars as he neared, Cronkheit made his way down the Avenue of Sphinxes, past the baths and the Temple of Loccar, till he reached the Imperial Palace. Its gates stood open as usual, and he looked in at the gardens and the alabaster walls beyond, and grunted. When the Golden Guardsmen approached him upwind and asked his business, he grunted again. They lifted their bows and would have made short work of him, but a slave came running to bid them desist.

You see, by the will of some malignant god, the Empress was standing on a balcony and saw him.

As is well known, our beloved Empress, Her Seductive Majesty the Illustrious Lady Larra the Voluptuous, is built like a mountain highway and is commonly believed to be an incarnation of her tutelary deity, Aphrosex, the Mink Goddess. She stood on the balcony with the wind blowing her thin transparent garments and thick black hair, and a sudden eagerness lit her proud lovely face. This was understandable, for Cronkheit wore only a bearskin kilt.

So the slave was dispatched, to bow low before the stranger and say: "Most noble lord, the divine Empress would have private speech with you."

Cronkheit smacked his lips and strutted into the palace. The chamberlain wrung his hands when he saw those large muddy feet treading priceless rugs, but there was no help for it, and the Barbarian was led upstairs to the Imperial bedchamber.

What befell there is known to all, for of course in such in-

terviews the Lady Larra posts mute slaves at convenient peepholes, to summon the guards if danger seems to threaten; and the courtiers have quietly taught these mutes to write. Our Empress had a cold, and had furthermore been eating a garlic salad, so her aristocratically curved nose was not offended. After a few formalities, she began to pant. Slowly, then she held out her arms and let the purple robe slide down from her creamy shoulders and across the silken thighs.

"Come," she whispered. "Come, magnificent male."

Cronkheit snorted, pawed the ground, rushed forth, and clasped her to him.

"Yowwww!" cried the Empress as a rib cracked. "Leggo! Help!"

The mutes ran for the Golden Guardsmen, who entered at once. They got ropes around the Barbarian and dragged him from their poor lady. Though in considerable pain, and much shaken, she did not order his execution; she is known to be very patient with some types.

Indeed, after gulping a cup of wine to steady her, she invited Cronkheit to be her guest. After he had been conducted off to his rooms, she summoned the Duchess of Thyle, a supple, agile little minx.

"I have a task for you, my dear," she murmured. "You will fulfill it as a loyal lady in waiting."

"Yes, Your Seductive Majesty," said the Duchess, who could well guess what the task was and thought she had been waiting long enough. For a whole week, in fact. Her assignment was to take the edge off the Barbarian's impetuosity.

She greased herself so she could slip free if in peril of being crushed, and hurried to Cronkheit's suite. Her musky perfume drowned out his odor, and she slipped off her dress and crooned with half-shut eyes: "Take me, my lord!"

"Yahoo!" howled the warrior. "I yam Cronkheit duh Strong, Cronkheit duh Bold, Cronkheit what slew a mammot' singlehanded an' made hisself chief o'duh Centaurs, an' dis's muh night! C'mere!"

The Duchess did, and he folded her in his mighty arms. A moment later there was another shriek. The palace attendants

were treated to the sight of a naked and furious greased Duchess speeding down the jade corridor.

"Fleas he's got!" she cried, scratching as she ran.

So all in all, Cronkheit the Barbarian was no great success as a lover. Even the women in the Street of Joy used to hide when they saw him coming. They said they'd been exposed to clumsy technique before, but this was just too much.

However, his fame was so great that the Lady Larra put him in command of a brigade, infantry and cavalry, and sent him to join General Grythion on the Chathakh border. He made the march in record time and came shouting into the city of tents which had grown up at our main base.

Now admittedly our good General Grythion is somewhat of a dandy, who curls his beard and is henpecked by his wives. But he has always been a competent soldier, winning honors at the Academy and leading troops in battle many times before rising to the strategic-planning post. One could understand Cronkheit's incivility at their meeting. But when the general courteously declined to go forth in the van of the army and pointed out how much more valuable he was as a coordinator behind the lines—that was no excuse for Cronkheit to knock his superior officer to the ground and call him a coward, damned of the gods. Grythion was thoroughly justified in having him put in irons, despite the casualties involved. Even as it was, the spectacle had so demoralized our troops that they lost three important engagements in the following month.

Alas! Word of this reached the Empress, and she did not order Cronkheit's head struck off. Indeed, she sent back a command that he be released and reinstated. Perhaps she still cherished him enough to be an acceptable bed partner.

Grythion swallowed his pride and apologized to the Barbarian, who accepted with an ill grace. His restored rank made it necessary to invite him to a dinner and conference in the headquarters tent.

It was a flat failure. Cronkheit stamped in and at once made sneering remarks about the elegant togas of his brother officers. He belched when he ate and couldn't distinguish

the product of one vineyard from another. His conversation consisted of hour-long monologues about his own prowess. General Grythion saw morale zooming downward, and hastily called for maps and planning.

"Now, most noble sirs," he began, "we have to lay out the summer campaign. As you know, we have the Eastern Desert between us and the nearest important enemy positions. This raises difficult questions of logistics and catapult emplacement." He turned politely to the Barbarian. "Have you any suggestion, my lord?"

"Duh," said Cronkheit.

"I think," ventured Colonel Pharaon, "that if we advanced to the Chunling Oasis and dug in there, building a supply road——"

"Dat reminds me," said Cronkheit. "One time up in duh Norriki marshes, I run acrost some swamp men an' dey uses poisoned arrers——"

"I fail to see what that has to do with this problem," said General Grythion.

"Nuttin'," admitted Cronkheit cheerfully. "But don't innerup' me. Like I was sayin'——" And he was off for another dreary hour.

At the end of a conference which had gotten nowhere, the general stroked his beard and said shrewdly: "Lord Cronkheit, it appears your abilities are more in the tactical than the strategic field."

The Barbarian snatched for his sword.

"I mean," said Grythion quickly, "I have a task which only the boldest and strongest leader can accomplish."

Cronkheit beamed and listened closely for a change. He was to be sent out with his men to capture Chantsay. This was a fort in the mountain passes across the Eastern Desert, and a major obstacle to our advance. However, in spite of Grythion's judicious flattery, a full brigade should have been able to take it with little difficulty, for it was known to be undermanned.

Cronkheit rode off at the head of his men, tossing his

sword in the air and bellowing some uncouth battle chant. Then he was not heard of for six weeks.

At the close of that time, the ragged, starving, fever-stricken remnant of his troops staggered back to the base and reported utter failure. Cronkheit, who was in excellent health himself, made some sullen excuses. But he had never imagined that men who march twenty hours a day aren't fit for battle at the end of the trip—the more so if they outrun their own supply train.

Because of the Empress's wish, General Grythion could not do the sensible thing and cashier the Barbarian. He could not even reduce him to the ranks. Instead, he used his well-known guile and invited the giant to a private dinner.

"Obviously, most valiant lord," he purred, "the fault is mine. I should have realized that a man of your type is too much for us decadent southerners. You are a lone wolf who fights best by himself."

"Duh," agreed Cronkheit, ripping a fowl apart with his fingers and wiping them on the damask tablecloth.

Grythion winced, but easily talked him into going out on a one-man guerrilla operation. When he left the next morning, the officers' corps congratulated themselves on having gotten rid of the lout forever.

In the face of subsequent criticism and demands for an investigation, I still maintain that Grythion did the only rational thing under the circumstances. Who could have known that Cronkheit the Barbarian was so primitive that rationality simply slid off his hairy skin?

The full story will never be known. But apparently, in the course of the following year, while the border war continued as usual, Cronkheit struck off into the northern uplands. There he raised a band of horse nomads as ignorant and brutal as himself. He also rounded up a herd of mammoths and drove them into Chathakh, stampeding them at the foe. By such means, he reached their very capital, and the King offered terms of surrender.

But Cronkheit would have none of this. Not he! His idea of warfare was to kill or enslave every last man, woman, and

child of the enemy nation. Also, his irregulars were supposed to be paid in loot. Also, being too unsanitary even for the nomad girls, he felt a certain urgency.

So he stormed the capital of Chathakh and burned it to the ground. This cost him most of his own men. It also destroyed several priceless books and works of art, and any possibility of tribute to Sarmia.

Then he had the nerve to organize a triumphal procession and ride back to our own city!

This was too much even for the Empress. When he stood before—for he was too crude for the simple courtesy of a knee bend—she exceeded herself in describing the many kinds of fool, idiot, and all-around blockhead he was.

"Duh," said Cronkheit. "But I won duh war. Look, I won duh war, I did. I won duh war."

"Yes," hissed the Lady Larra. "You smashed an ancient and noble culture to irretrievable ruin. And did you know that one half our peacetime trade was with Chathakh? There'll be a business depression now such as history has never seen before."

General Grythion, who had returned, added his own reproaches. "Why do you think wars are fought?" he asked bitterly. "War is an extension of diplomacy. It's the final means of making somebody else do what you want. The object is *not* to kill them all off—how can corpses obey you?"

Cronkheit growled in his throat.

"We would have negotiated a peace in which Chathakh became our ally against Serpens," went on the general. "Then we'd have been safe against all comers. But *you*—You've left a howling wilderness which we must garrison with our own troops lest the nomads take it over. Your atrocities have alienated every civilized state. You've left us alone and friendless. You've won this war by losing the next one!"

"And on top of the depression which is coming," said the Empress, "we'll have the cost of maintaining those garrisons. Taxes down and expenditures up—It may break the treasury, and then where are we?"

Cronkheit spat on the floor. "Yuh're all decadent, dat's

what yuh are," he snarled. "Be good for yuh if yer empire breaks up. Yuh oughtta get dat city rabble o' years out in duh woods an' make hunters of 'em, like me. Let 'em eat steak."

The Lady Larra stamped an exquisite gold-shod foot. "Do you think we've nothing better to do with our time than spend the whole day hunting, and sit around in some mud hovel at night licking the grease off our fingers?" she cried. "What the hell do you think civilization is for, anyway?"

Cronkheit drew his great sword so it flashed before their eyes. "I hadda nuff!" he bellowed. "I'm t'rough widjuh! It's time yuh was all wiped off duh face o' duh eart', an I'm jus' duh guy t' do it!"

And now General Grythion showed the qualities which had raised him to his high post. Artfully, he quailed. "Oh no!" he whimpered. "You're not going to—to—to fight on the side of Serpens?"

"I yam," said Cronkheit. "So long." The last we saw of him was a broad, indignant, flea-bitten back, headed south, and the reflection of the sun on a sword.

Since then, of course, our affairs have prospered and Serpens is now frantically suing for peace. But we intend to prosecute the war till they meet our terms. We are most assuredly not going to be ensnared by their treacherous plea and take the Barbarian back!

THEODORE STURGEON

Mr. Sturgeon says that this is a science fiction story and he can, by God, prove it. You may decide that it's fantasy . . . or possibly a mystery . . . or conceivably a surrealist view of straight reality. In other words, it's a story outside of any ordinary commercial category, a story that creates its own genre—and one of the most distinguished stories that F&SF has had the pleasure of publishing.

AND NOW THE NEWS . . .

THE MAN'S NAME was MacLyle, which by looking at you can tell wasn't his real name, but let's say this is fiction, shall we? MacLyle had a good job in—well—a soap concern. He worked hard and made good money and got married to a girl called Esther. He bought a house in the suburbs and after it was paid for he rented it to some people and bought a home a little farther out and a second car and a freezer and a power mower and a book on landscaping, and settled down to the worthy task of giving his kids all the things he never had.

He had habits and he had hobbies, like everybody else and (like everybody else) his were a little different from anybody's. The one that annoyed his wife the most, until she got used to it, was the news habit, or maybe hobby. MacLyle read a morning paper on the 8:14 and an evening paper on the 6:10, and the local paper his suburb used for its lost dogs and auction sales took up forty after-dinner minutes. And when he read a paper he read it, he didn't mess with it. He

read Page 1 first and Page 2 next, and so on all the way through. He didn't care too much for books but he respected them in a mystical sort of way, and he used to say a newspaper was a kind of book, and so would raise particular hell if a section was missing or in upside down, or if the pages were out of line. He also heard the news on the radio. There were three stations in town with hourly broadcasts, one on the hour, and he was usually able to catch them all. During these five-minute periods he would look you right in the eye while you talked to him and you'd swear he was listening to you, but he wasn't. This was a particular trial to his wife, but only for five years or so. Then she stopped trying to be heard while the radio talked about floods and murders and scandal and suicide. Five more years, and she went back to talking right through the broadcasts, but by the time people are married ten years, things like that don't matter; they talk in code anyway, and nine-tenths of their speech can be picked up anytime like ticker tape. He also caught the 7:30 news on Channel 2 and the 7:45 news on Channel 4 on television.

Now it might be imagined from all this that MacLyle was a crotchety character with fixed habits and a neurotic neatness, but this was far from the case. MacLyle was basically a reasonable guy who loved his wife and children and liked his work and pretty much enjoyed being alive. He laughed easily and talked well and paid his bills. He justified his preoccupation with the news in a number of ways. He would quote Donne: "*. . . any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind . . .*" which is pretty solid stuff and hard to argue down. He would point out that he made his trains and his trains made him punctual, but that because of them he saw the same faces at the same time day after endless day, before, during, and after he rode those trains, so that his immediate world was pretty circumscribed, and only a constant awareness of what was happening all over the earth kept him conscious of the fact that he lived in a bigger place than a thin straight universe with his house at one end, his office at the other, and a railway track in between.

It's hard to say just when MacLyle started to go to pieces, or even why, though it obviously had something to do with all that news he exposed himself to. He began to react, very slightly at first; that is, you could tell he was listening. He'd *shh*! you, and if you tried to finish what you were saying he'd run and stick his head in the speaker grille. His wife and kids learned to shut up when the news came on, five minutes before the hour until five after (with MacLyle switching stations) and every hour on the half-hour, and from 7:30 to 8 for the TV, and during the forty minutes it took him to read the local paper. He was not so obvious about it when he read his paper, because all he did was freeze over the pages like a catatonic, gripping the top corners until the sheets shivered, knotting his jaw and breathing from his nostrils with a strangled whistle.

Naturally all this was a weight on his wife Esther, who tried her best to reason with him. At first he answered her, saying mildly that a man has to keep in touch, you know; but very quickly he stopped responding altogether, giving her the treatment a practiced suburbanite gets so expert in, as when someone mentions a lawn mower just too damn early on Sunday morning. You don't say yes and you don't say no, you don't even grunt, and you don't move your head or even your eyebrows. After a while your interlocutor goes away. Pretty soon you don't hear these ill-timed annoyances any more than you appear to.

It needs to be said again here that MacLyle was, outside his peculiarity, a friendly and easygoing character. He liked people and invited them and visited them, and he was one of those adults who can really listen to a first-grade child's interminable adventures and really care. He never forgot things like the slow leak in the spare tire or antifreeze or anniversaries, and he always got the storm windows up in time, but he didn't rub anyone's nose in his reliability. The first thing in his whole life he didn't take as a matter of course was this news thing that started so small and grew so quickly.

So after a few weeks of it his wife took the bull by the horns and spent the afternoon hamstringing every receiver in

the house. There were three radios and two TV sets, and she didn't understand the first thing about them, but she had a good head and she went to work with a will and the can-opening limb of a pocket knife. From each receiver she removed one tube, and one at a time, so as not to get them mixed up, she carried them into the kitchen and meticulously banged their bases against the edge of the sink, being careful to crack no glass and bend no pins, until she could see the guts of the tube rolling around loose inside. Then she replaced them and got the back panels on the sets again.

MacLyle came home and put the car away and kissed her and turned on the living-room radio and then went to hang up his hat. When he returned the radio should have been warmed up but it wasn't. He twisted the knobs a while and bumped it and rocked it back and forth a little, grunting, and then noticed the time. He began to feel a little frantic, and raced back to the kitchen and turned on the little ivory radio on the shelf. It warmed up quickly and cheerfully and give him a clear sixty-cycle hum, but that was all. He behaved badly from then on, roaring out the information that the sets didn't work, either of them, as if that wasn't pretty evident by that time, and flew upstairs to the boys' room, waking them explosively. He turned on their radio and got another sixty-cycle note, this time with a shattering microphonic when he rapped the case, which he did four times, whereupon the set went dead altogether.

Esther had planned the thing up to this point, but no further, which was the way her mind worked. She figured she could handle it, but she figured wrong. MacLyle came downstairs like a pallbearer, and he was silent and shaken until 7:30, time for the news on TV. The living-room set wouldn't peep, so up he went to the boys' room again, waking them just as they were nodding off again, and this time the little guy started to cry. MacLyle didn't care. When he found out there was no picture on the set, he almost started to cry too, but then he heard the sound come in. A TV set has an awful lot of tubes in it and Esther didn't know audio from video. MacLyle sat down in front of the dark

screen and listened to the news. *"Everything seemed to be under control in the riot-ridden border country in India,"* said the TV set. Crowd noises and a background of Beethoven's "Turkish March." *"And then—"* Cut music. Crowd noise up: gabble-wurra and a scream. Announcer over: *"Six hours later, this was the scene."* Dead silence, going on so long that MacLyle reached out and thumped the TV set with the heel of his hand. Then, slow swell, Ketelbey's "In a Monastery Garden." *"On a more cheerful note, here are the six finalists in the Miss Continuum contest."* Background music, "Blue Room," interminably, interrupted only once, when the announcer said through a childish chuckle *". . . and she meant it!"* MacLyle pounded himself on the temples. The little guy continued to sob. Esther stood at the foot of the stairs wringing her hands. It went on for thirty minutes like this. All MacLyle said when he came downstairs was that he wanted the paper—that would be the local one. So Esther faced the great unknown and told him frankly she hadn't ordered it and wouldn't again, which of course led to a full and righteous confession of her activities of the afternoon.

Only a woman married better than fourteen years can know a man well enough to handle him so badly. She was aware that she was wrong but that was quite overridden by the fact that she was logical. It would not be logical to continue her patience, so patience was at an end. That which offendeth thee, cast it out, yea, even thine eye and thy right hand. She realized too late that the news was so inextricably part of her husband that in casting it out she cast him out too. And out he went, while whitely she listened to the rumble of the garage door, the car door speaking its sharp syllables, clear as *Exit* in a playscript; the keen of a starter, the mourn of a motor. She said she was glad and went in the kitchen and tipped the useless ivory radio off the shelf and retired, weeping.

And yet, because true life offers few clean cuts, she saw him once more. At seven minutes to three in the morning she became aware of faint music from somewhere; unaccountably it frightened her, and she tiptoed about the house looking

for it. It wasn't in the house, so she pulled on MacLyle's trench coat and crept down the steps into the garage. And there, just outside in the driveway, where steel beams couldn't interfere with radio reception, the car stood where it had been all along, and MacLyle was in the driver's seat dozing over the wheel. The music came from the car radio. She drew the coat tigher around her and went to the car and opened the door and spoke his name. At just that moment the radio said ". . . *and now the news*" and MacLyle sat bolt upright and *shh'd* furiously. She fell back and stood a moment in a strange transition from unconditional surrender to total defeat. Then he shut the car door and bent forward, his hand on the volume control, and she went back into the house.

After the news report was over and he had recovered himself from the stab wounds of a juvenile delinquent, the grinding agonies of a derailed train, the terrors of the near-crash of a C-119, and the fascination of a cabinet officer, charter member of the We Don't Trust Nobody Club, saying in exactly these words that there's a little bit of good in the worst of us and a little bit of bad in the best of us, all of which he felt keenly, he started the car (by rolling it down the drive because the battery was almost dead) and drove as slowly as possible into town.

At an all-night garage he had the car washed and greased while he waited, after which the automat was open and he sat in it for three hours drinking coffee, holding his jaw set until his back teeth ached, and making occasional, almost inaudible noises in the back of his throat. At nine he pulled himself together. He spent the entire day with his astonished attorney, going through all his assets, selling, converting, establishing, until when he was finished he had a modest packet of cash and his wife would have an adequate income until the children went to college, at which time the house would be sold, the tenants in the older house evicted, and Esther would be free to move to the smaller home with the price of the larger one added to the basic capital. The lawyer might have entertained fears for MacLyle except for the fact that he was jovial and loquacious throughout, behaving like

a happy man—a rare form of insanity, but acceptable. It was hard work but they did it in a day, after which MacLyle wrung the lawyer's hand and thanked him profusely and checked into a hotel.

When he awoke the following morning he sprang out of bed, feeling years younger, opened the door, scooped up the morning paper and glanced at the headlines.

He couldn't read them.

He grunted in surprise, closed the door gently, and sat on the bed with paper in his lap. His hands moved restlessly on it, smoothing and smoothing until the palms were shadowed and the type hazed. The shouting symbols marched across the page like a parade of strangers in some unrecognized lodge uniform, origins unknown, destination unknown, and the occasion for marching only to be guessed at. He traced the letters with his little finger, he measured the length of a word between his index finger and thumb and lifted them up to hold them before his wondering eyes. Suddenly he got up and crossed to the desk, where signs and placards and printed notes were trapped like a butterfly collection under glass—the breakfast menu, something about valet service, something about checking out. He remembered them all and had an idea of their significance—but he couldn't read them. In the drawer was stationery, with a picture of the building and no other buildings around it, which just wasn't so, and an inscription which might have been in Cyrillic for all he knew. Telegram blanks, a bus schedule, a blotter, all bearing hieroglyphs and runes, as far as he was concerned. A phone book full of strangers' names in strange symbols.

He requested of himself that he recite the alphabet. "A," he said clearly, and "Eh?" because it didn't sound right and he couldn't imagine what would. He made a small foolish grin and shook his head slightly and rapidly, but grin or no, he felt frightened. He felt glad, or relieved—most happy anyway, but still a little frightened.

He called the desk and told them to get his bill ready, and dressed and went downstairs. He gave the doorman his parking check and waited while they brought the car round.

He got in and turned the radio on and started to drive west.

He drove for some days, in a state of perpetual, cold, and (for all that) happy fright—roller-coaster fright, horror-movie fright—remembering the significance of a stop sign without being able to read the word STOP across it, taking caution from the shape of a railroad-crossing notice. Restaurants look like restaurants, gas stations like gas stations; if Washington's picture denotes a dollar and Lincoln's five, one doesn't need to read them. MacLyle made out just fine. He drove until he was well into one of those square states with all the mountains and cruised until he recognized the section where, years before he was married, he had spent a hunting vacation. Avoiding the lodge he had used, he took back roads until, sure enough, he came to that deserted cabin in which he had sheltered one night, standing yet, rotting a bit but only around the edges. He wandered in and out of it for a long time, memorizing details because he could not make a list, and then got back into his car and drove to the nearest town, not very near and not very much of a town. At the general store he bought shingles and flour and nails and paint—all sorts of paint, in little cans, as well as big containers of house paint—and canned goods and tools. He ordered a knock-down windmill and a generator, eighty pounds of modeling clay, two loaf pans and a mixing bowl, and a war-surplus jungle hammock. He paid cash and promised to be back in two weeks for the things the store didn't stock, and wired (because it could be done over the phone) his lawyer to arrange for the predetermined eighty dollars a month which was all he cared to take for himself from his assets. Before he left he stood in wonder before a monstrous piece of musical plumbing called an ophicleide which stood, dusty and majestic, in a corner. (While it might be easier on the reader to make this a French horn or a sousaphone—which would answer narrative purposes quite as well—we're done telling lies here. MacLyle's real name is concealed, his home town cloaked, and his occupation, disguised, and dammit it really was a twelve-keyed, 1824, fifty-inch, obsolete brass ophicleide). The storekeeper explained how his

great-grandfather had brought it over from the old country and nobody had played it for two generations except an itinerant tuba player who had turned pale green on the first three notes and put it down as if it was full of percussion caps. MacLyle asked how it sounded and the man told him, terrible. Two weeks later MacLyle was back to pick up the rest of his stuff, nodding and smiling and saying not a word. He still couldn't read, and now he couldn't speak. Even more, he had lost the power to understand speech. He had paid for the purchases with a hundred-dollar bill and a wistful expression, and then another hundred-dollar bill, and the storekeeper, thinking he had turned deaf and dumb, cheated him roundly but at the same time felt so sorry for him that he gave him the ophicleide. MacLyle loaded up his car happily and left. And that's the first part of the story about MacLyle's being in a bad way.

MacLyle's wife Esther found herself in a peculiar position. Friends and neighbors offhandedly asked her questions to which she did not know the answers, and the only person who had any information at all—MacLyle's attorney—was under bond not to tell her anything. She had not, in the full and legal sense, been deserted, since she and the children were provided for. She missed MacLyle, but in a specialized way; she missed the old reliable MacLyle, and he had, in effect, left her long before that perplexing night when he had driven away. She wanted the old MacLyle back again, not this untrolleyed stranger with the grim and spastic preoccupation with the news. Of the many unpleasant facets of this stranger's personality, one glowed brightest, and that was that he was the sort of man who would walk out the way he did and stay away as long as he had. Ergo, he was that undesirable person just as long as he stayed away, and tracking him down would, if it returned him against his will, return to her only a person who was not the person she missed.

Yet she was dissatisfied with herself, for all that she was the injured party and had wounds less painful than the pangs of conscience. She had always prided herself on being a good

wife, and had done many things in the past which were counter to her reason and her desires purely because they were consistent with being a good wife. So as time went on she gravitated away from the "what shall I do?" area into the "what ought a good wife to do?" spectrum, and after a great deal of careful thought, went to see a psychiatrist.

He was a fairly intelligent psychiatrist which is to say he caught on to the obvious a little faster than most people. For example he became aware in only four minutes of conversation that MacLyle's wife Esther had not come to him on her own behalf, and further, decided to hear her out completely before resolving to treat her. When she had quite finished and he had dug out enough corroborative detail to get the picture, he went into a long silence and cogitated. He matched the broad pattern of MacLyle's case with his reading and his experience, recognized the challenge, the clinical worth of the case, the probable value of the heirloom diamond pendant worn by his visitor. He placed his finger tips together, lowered his fine young head, gazed through his eyebrows at MacLyle's wife Esther, and took up the gauntlet. At the prospects of getting her husband back safe and sane, she thanked him quietly and left the office with mixed emotions. The fairly intelligent psychiatrist drew a deep breath and began making arrangements with another head-shrinker to take over his other patients, both of them, while he was away, because he figured to be away quite a while.

It was appallingly easy for him to trace MacLyle. He did not go near the lawyer. The solid foundation of all skip tracers and Bureaus of Missing Person, in their *modus operandi,* is the piece of applied psychology which dictates that a man might change his name and his address, but he will seldom —can seldom—change the things he does, particularly the things he does to amuse himself. The ski addict doesn't skip to Florida, though he might make Banff instead of an habitual Mount Tremblant. A philatelist is not likely to mount butterflies. Hence when the psychiatrist found, among MacLyle's papers, some snapshots and brochures, dating from college days, of the towering Rockies, of bears feeding by

the roadside, and especially of season after season's souvenirs of a particular resort to which he had never brought his wife and which he had not visited since he married her, it was worth a feeler, which went out in the form of a request to that state's police for information on a man of such-and-such a description driving so-and-so with out-of-state plates, plus a request that the man not be detained nor warned, but only that he, the fairly intelligent psychiatrist, be notified. He threw out other lines, too, but this is the one that hooked the fish. It was a matter of weeks before a state patrol car happened by MacLyle's favorite general store: after that it was a matter of minutes before the information was in the hands of the psychiatrist. He said nothing to MacLyle's wife Esther except good-by for a while, and this bill is payable now, and then took off, bearing with him a bag of tricks.

He rented a car at the airport nearest MacLyle's hideout and drove a long, thirsty, climbing way until he came to the general store. There he interviewed the proprietor, learning some eighteen hundred items about how bad business could get, how hot it was, how much rain hadn't fallen and how much was needed, the tragedy of being blamed for high markups when anyone with the brains God gave a goose ought to know it cost plenty to ship things out here, especially in the small quantities necessitated by business being so bad and all; and betwixt and between, he learned eight or ten items about MacLyle—the exact location of his cabin, the fact that he seemed to have turned into a deaf-mute who was also unable to read, and that he must be crazy because who but a crazy man would want eighty-four different half-pint cans of house paint or, for that matter, live out here when he didn't have to?

The psychiatrist got loose after a while and drove off, and the country got higher and dustier and more lost every mile, until he began to pray that nothing would go wrong with the car, and sure enough, ten minutes later something had. Any car that made a noise like the one he began to hear was strictly a shot-rod, and he pulled over to the side to worry about it. He turned off the motor and the noise went right

on, and he began to realize that the sound was not in the car or even near it, but came from somewhere uphill. There was a mile and a half more of the hill to go, and he drove it in increasing amazement, because that sound got louder and more impossible all the time. It was sort of like music, but like no music currently heard on this or any other planet. It was a solo voice, brass, with muscles. The upper notes, of which there seemed to be about two octaves, were wild and unmusical, the middle was rough, but the low tones were like the speech of these mountains themselves, big up to the sky, hot, and more natural than anything ought to be, basic as a bear's fang. Yet all the notes were perfect—their intervals were perfect—this awful noise was tuned like an electronic organ. The psychiatrist had a good ear, though for a while he wondered how long he'd have any ears at all, and he realized all these things about the sound, as well as the fact that it was rendering one of the more primitive fingering studies from Czerny, Book One, the droning little horror that goes: *do mi fa sol la sol fa mi, re fa sol la ti la sol fa, mi sol la* . . . etcetera, inchworming up the scale and then descending hand over hand.

He saw blue sky almost under his front tires and wrenched the wheel hard over, and found himself in the grassy yard of a made-over prospector's cabin, but that he didn't notice right away because sitting in front of it was what he described to himself, startled as he was out of his professional detachment, as the craziest-looking man he had ever seen.

He was sitting under a parched, wind-warped Englemann spruce. He was barefoot up to the armpits. He wore the top half of a skivvy shirt and a hat the shape of one of those conical Boy Scout tents when one of the Boy Scouts has left the pole home. And he was playing, or anyway practicing, the ophicleide, and on his shoulders was a little moss of spruce needles, a small shower of which descended from the tree every time he hit on or under the low B♭. Only a mouse trapped inside a tuba during band practice can know precisely what it's like to stand that close to an operating ophicleide.

It was MacLyle all right, looming well fed and filled out. When he saw the psychiatrist's car he went right on playing, but, catching the psychiatrist's eye, he winked, smiled with the small corner of lip which showed from behind the large cup of the mouthpiece, and twiddled three fingers of his right hand, all he could manage of a wave without stopping. And he didn't stop either until he had scaled the particular octave he was working on and let himself down the other side. Then he put the ophicleide down carefully and let it lean against the spruce tree, and got up. The psychiatrist had become aware, as the last stupendous notes rolled away down the mountain, of his extreme isolation with this offbeat patient, of the unconcealed health and vigor of the man, and of the presence of the precipice over which he had almost driven his car a moment before, and had rolled up his window and buttoned the door lock and was feeling grateful for them. But the warm good humor and genuine welcome on MacLyle's sunburned face drove away fright and even caution, and almost before he knew what he was doing the psychiatrist had the door open and was stooping up out of the car, thinking, merry is a disused word but that's what he is, by God, a merry man. He called him by name but either MacLyle did not hear him or didn't care; he just put out a big warm hand and the psychiatrist took it. He could feel hard flat calluses in MacLyle's hand, and the controlled strength an elephant uses to lift a bespangled child in its trunk; he smiled at the image, because after all MacLyle was not a particularly large man, there was just that feeling about him. And once the smile found itself there it wouldn't go away.

He told MacLyle that he was a writer trying to soak up some of this magnificent country and had just been driving wherever the turn of the road led him, and here he was; but before he was half through he became conscious of MacLyle's eyes, which were in some indescribable way very much on him but not at all on anything he said; it was precisely as if he had stood there and hummed a tune. MacLyle seemed to be willing to listen to the sound until it was fin-

ished, and even to enjoy it, but that enjoyment was going to be all he got out of it. The psychiatrist finished anyway and MacLyle waited a moment as if to see if there would be any more, and when there wasn't he gave out more of that luminous smile and cocked his head toward the cabin. MacLyle led the way, with his visitor bringing up the rear with some platitudes about nice place you got here. As they entered, he suddenly barked at that unresponsive back, "Can't you hear me?" and MacLyle, without turning, only waved him on.

They walked into such a clutter and clabber of colors that the psychiatrist stopped dead, blinking. One wall had been removed and replaced with glass panes; it overlooked the precipice and put the little building afloat on haze. All the walls were hung with plain white chenille bedspreads, and the floor was white, and there seemed to be much more light indoors here than outside. Opposite the large window was an oversized easel made of peeled poles, notched and lashed together with baling wire, and on it was a huge canvas, most non-objective, in the purest and most uncompromising colors. Part of it was unquestionably this room, or at least its air of colored confusion here and all infinity yonder. The ophicleide was in the picture, painstakingly reproduced, looking like the hopper of some giant infernal machine, and in the foreground, some flowers; but the central figure repulsed him—more, it repulsed everything which surrounded it. It did not look exactly like anything familiar and, in a disturbed way, he was happy about that.

Stacked on the floor on each side of the easel were other paintings, some daubs, some full of ruled lines and overlapping planes, but all in this achingly pure color. He realized what was being done with the dozens of colors of house paint in little cans which had so intrigued the storekeeper.

In odd places around the room were clay sculptures, most mounted on pedestals made of sections of tree trunks large enough to stand firmly on their sawed ends. Some of the pedestals were peeled, some painted, and in some the bark texture or the bulges or clefts in the wood had been carried

right up into the model, and in others clay had been knived or pressed into the bark all the way down to the floor. Some of the clay was painted, some not, some ought to have been. There were free forms and gollywogs, a marsupial woman and a guitar with legs, and some, but not an overweening number, of the symbolisms which preoccupy even fairly intelligent psychiatrists. Nowhere was there any furniture per se. There were shelves at all levels and of varying lengths, bearing nail kegs, bolts of cloth, canned goods, tools and cooking utensils. There was a sort of table but it was mostly a workbench, with a vise at one end and at the other, half finished, a crude but exceedingly ingenious foot-powered potter's wheel.

He wondered where MacLyle slept, so he asked him, and again MacLyle reacted as if the words were not words, but a series of pleasant sounds, cocking his head and waiting to see if there would be any more. So the psychiatrist resorted to sign language, making a pillow of his two hands, laying his head on it, closing his eyes. He opened them to see MacLyle nodding eagerly, then going to the white-draped wall. From behind the chenille he brought a hammock, one end of which was fastened to the wall. The other end he carried to the big window and hung on a hook screwed to a heavy stud between the panes. To lie in that hammock would be to swing between heaven and earth like Mahomet's tomb, with all that sky and scenery virtually surrounding the sleeper. His admiration for this idea ceased as MacLyle began making urgent indications for him to get into the hammock. He backed off warily, expostulating, trying to convey to MacLyle that he only wondered, he just wanted to know: no, *no*, he wasn't tired, dammit; but MacLyle became so insistent that he picked the psychiatrist up like a child sulking at bedtime and carried him to the hammock. Any impulse to kick or quarrel was quenched by the nature of this and all other hammocks to be intolerant of shifting burdens, and by the proximity of the large window, which he now saw was built leaning outward, enabling one to look out of the hammock straight down

a minimum of four hundred and eighty feet. So all right, he concluded, if you say so. I'm sleepy.

So for the next two hours he lay in the hammock watching MacLyle putter about the place, thinking more or less professional thoughts.

He doesn't or can't speak (he diagnosed): aphasia, motor. He doesn't or can't understand speech: aphasia, sensory. He won't or can't read and write: alexia. And what else?

He looked at all that art—if it *was* art, and any that was, was art by accident—and the gadgetry: the chuntering windmill outside, the sash-weight door closer. He let his eyes follow a length of clothesline dangling unobtrusively down the leaning center post to which his hammock was fastened, and the pulley and fittings from which it hung, and its extension clear across the ceiling to the back wall, and understood finally that it would, when pulled, open two long, narrow horizontal hatches for through ventilation. A small door behind the chenille led to what he correctly surmised was a primitive powder room, built to overhang the precipice, the most perfect no-plumbing solution for that convenience he had ever seen.

He watched MacLyle putter. That was the only word for it, and his actions were the best example of puttering he had ever seen. MacLyle lifted, shifted, and put things down, backed off to judge, returned to lay an approving hand on the thing he had moved. Net effect, nothing tangible—yet one could not say there was no effect, because of the intense satisfaction the man radiated. For minutes he would stand, head cocked, smiling slightly, regarding the half-finished potter's wheel, then explode into activity, sawing, planing, drilling. He would add the finished piece to the cranks and connecting rods already completed, pat it as if it were an obedient child, and walk away, leaving the rest of the job for some other time. With a wood-rasp he carefully removed the nose from one of his dried clay figures, and meticulously put on a new one. Always there was this absorption in his own products and processes, and the air of

total reward in everything. And there was time, there seemed to be time enough for everything, and always would be.

Here is a man, thought the fairly intelligent psychiatrist, in retreat, but in a retreat the like of which my science has not yet described. For observe: he has reacted toward the primitive in terms of supplying himself with his needs with his own hands and by his own ingenuity, and yet there is nothing primitive in those needs themselves. He works constantly to achieve the comforts which his history has conditioned him to in the past—electric lights, cross-ventilation, trouble-free waste disposal. He exhibits a profound humility in the low rates he pays himself for his labor: he is building a potter's wheel apparently in order to make his own cooking vessels, and since wood is cheap and clay free, his vessel can only cost him less than engine-turned aluminum by a very low evaluation of his own efforts.

His skills are less than his energy (mused the psychiatrist). His carpentry, like his painting and sculpture, shows considerable intelligence, but only moderate training; he can construct but not beautify, draw but not draft, and reach the artistically pleasing only by not erasing the random shake, the accidental cut; so that real creation in his work is, like any random effect, rare and unpredictable. Therefore his reward is in the area of satisfaction—about as wide a generalization as one can make.

What satisfaction? Not in possessions themselves, for this man could have bought better for less. Not in excellence in itself, for he obviously could be satisfied with less than perfection. Freedom, perhaps, from routine, from dominations of work? Hardly, because for all that complexity of this cluttered cottage, it had its order and its system; the presence of an alarm clock conveyed a good deal in this area. He wasn't dominated by regularity—he used it. And his satisfaction? Why, it must lie in this closed circle, himself to himself, and in the very fact of non-communication!

Retreat . . . retreat. Retreat to savagery and you don't engineer your cross-ventilation or adjust a five hundred-foot gravity flush for your john. Retreat into infancy and you don't

design and build a potter's wheel. Retreat from people and you don't greet a stranger like . . .

Wait.

Maybe a stranger who had something to communicate, or some way of communication, wouldn't be so welcome. An unsettling thought, that. Running the risk of doing something MacLyle didn't like would be, possibly, a little more unselfish than the challenge warrented.

MacLyle began to cook.

Watching him, the psychiatrist reflected suddenly that this withdrawn and wordless individual was a happy one, in his own matrix; further, he had fulfilled all his obligations and responsibilities and was bothering no one.

It was intolerable.

It was intolerable because it was a violation of the prime directive of psychiatry—at least, of that school of psychiatry which he professed, and he was not going to confuse himself by considerations of other, less-tried theories—*It is the function of psychiatry to adjust the aberrate to society, and to restore or increase his usefulness to it.* To yield, to rationalize this man's behavior as balance, would be to fly in the face of science itself; for this particular psychiatry finds its most successful approaches in the scientific method, and it is unprofitable to debate whether or not it is or is not a science. To its practitioner it is, and that's that; it has to be. Operationally speaking, what has been found true, even statistically, must be Truth, and all other things, even Possible, kept the hell out of the toolbox. No known Truth allowed a social entity to secede this way, and, for one, this fairly intelligent psychiatrist was not going to give this—this *suicide* his blessing.

He must, then, find a way to communicate with MacLyle, and when he had found it, he must communicate to him the error of his ways. Without getting thrown over the cliff.

He became aware that MacLyle was looking at him, twinkling. He smiled back before he knew what he was doing, and obeyed MacLyle's beckoning gesture. He eased himself out of the hammock and went to the workbench, where a

steaming stew was set out in earthenware bowls. The bowls stood on large plates and were surrounded by a band of carefully sliced tomatoes. He tasted them. They were obviously vine-ripened and had been speckled with a dark green paste which, after studious attention to its aftertaste, he identified as fresh basil mashed with fresh garlic and salt. The effect was symphonic.

He followed suit when MacLyle picked up his own bowl and they went outside and squatted under the old Engelmann spruce to eat. It was a quiet and pleasant occasion, and during it the psychiatrist had plenty of opportunity to size up his man and plan his campaign. He was quite sure now how to proceed, and all he needed was opportunity, which presented itself when MacLyle rose, stretched, smiled, and went indoors. The psychiatrist followed him to the door and saw him crawl into the hammock and fall almost instantly asleep.

The psychiatrist went to his car and got out his bag of tricks. And so it was late in the afternoon, when MacLyle emerged stretching and yawning from his nap, he found his visitor under the spruce tree, hefting the ophicleide and twiddling its keys in a perplexed and investigatory fashion. MacLyle strode over to him and lifted the ophicleide away with a pleasant I'll-show-you smile, got the monstrous contraption into position, and ran his tongue around the inside of the mouthpiece, large as a demi-tasse. He had barely time to pucker up his lips at the strange taste there before his irises rolled up completely out of sight and he collapsed like a grounded parachute. The psychiatrist was able only to snatch away the ophicleide in time to keep the mouthpiece from knocking out MacLyle's front teeth.

He set the ophicleide carefully against the tree and straightened MacLyle's limbs. He concentrated for a moment on the pulse, and turned the head to one side so saliva would not drain down the flaccid throat, and then went back to his bag of tricks. He came back and knelt, and MacLyle did not even twitch at the bite of the hypodermics: a careful blend of the non-soporific tranquilizers Frenquel,

chlorpromazine and Reserpine, and a judicious dose of scopolamine, a hypnotic.

The psychiatrist got water and carefully sponged out the man's mouth, not caring to wait out another collapse the next time he swallowed. Then there was nothing to do but wait, and plan.

Exactly on schedule, according to the psychiatrist's wrist watch, MacLyle groaned and coughed weakly. The psychiatrist immediately and in a firm quiet voice told him not to move. Also not to think. He stayed out of the immediate range of MacLyle's unfocused eyes and explained that MacLyle must trust him, because he was there to help, and not to worry about feeling mixed-up or disoriented. "You don't know where you are or how you got here," he informed MacLyle. He also told MacLyle, who was past forty, that he was thirty-seven years old, but he knew what he was doing.

MacLyle just lay there obediently and thought these things over and waited for more information. He didn't know where he was or how he had gotten here. He did know that he must trust this voice, the owner of which was here to help him; that he was thirty-seven years old; and his name. In these things he lay and marinated. The drugs kept him conscious, docile, submissive and without guile. The psychiatrist observed and exulted: oh you azacyclonol, he chanted silently to himself, you pretty piperidyl, handsome hydrochloride, subtle Serpasil . . . Confidently he left MacLyle and went into the cabin where, after due search, he found some decent clothes and some socks and shoes and brought them out and wrapped the supine patient in them. He helped MacLyle across the clearing and into his car, humming as he did so, for there is none so happy as an expert faced with excellence in his specialty. MacLyle sank back into the cushions and gave one wondering glance at the cabin and at the blare of late light from the bell of the ophicleide; but the psychiatrist told him firmly that these things had nothing to do with him, nothing at all, and MacLyle smiled relievedly and fell to watching the scenery go by, passive as a Pekingese. As they passed the general store MacLyle stirred, but said nothing

about it. Instead he asked the psychiatrist if the Ardsmere station was open yet, whereupon the psychiatrist could barely answer him for the impulse to purr like a cat: the Ardsmere station, two stops before MacLyle's suburban town, had burned down and been rebuilt almost six years ago; so now he knew for sure that MacLyle was living in a time preceding his difficulties—a time during which, of course, MacLyle had been able to talk. He crooned his appreciation for chlorpromazine (which had helped MacLyle be tranquil) and he made up a silent song, o doll o' mine, scopolamine, which had made him so very suggestible. But all of this the psychiatrist kept to himself, and answered gravely that yes, they had the Ardsmere station operating again. And did he have anything else on his mind?

MacLyle considered this carefully, but since all the immediate questions were answered—unswervingly, he *knew* he was safe in the hands of this man, whoever he was; he knew (he thought) his correct age and that he was expected to feel disoriented; he was also under a command not to think—he placidly shook his head and went back to watching the road unroll under their wheels. "Fallen Rock Zone," he murmured as they passed a sign. The psychiatrist drove happily down the mountain and across the flats, back to the city where he had hired the car. He left it at the railroad station ("Rail Crossing Road," murmured MacLyle) and made reservations for a compartment on the train, aircraft being too open and public for his purposes and far too fast for the hourly rate he suddenly decided to apply.

They had time for a silent and companionable dinner before train time, and then at last they were aboard, solid ground beneath, a destination ahead, and the track joints applauding.

The psychiatrist turned off all but one reading lamp and leaned forward. MacLyle's eyes dilated readily to the dimmer light, and the psychiatrist leaned back comfortably and asked him how he felt. He felt fine and said so. The psychiatrist asked him how old he was and MacLyle told him, thirty-seven, but he sounded doubtful.

Knowing that the scopolamine was wearing off but the other drugs, the tranquilizers, would hang on for a bit, the psychiatrist drew a deep breath and removed the suggestion; he told MacLyle the truth about his age, and brought him up to the here and now. MacLyle just looked puzzled for a few minutes and then his features settled into an expression that can only be described as not unhappy. "Porter," was all he said, gazing at the push button on the partition with its little metal sign, and announced that he could read now.

The psychiatrist nodded sagely and offered no comment, being quite willing to let a patient stew in his own juice as long as he produced essence.

MacLyle abruptly demanded to know why he had lost the powers of speech and reading. The psychiatrist raised his eyebrows a little and his shoulders a good deal and smiled one of those "You-tell-me" smiles, and then got up and suggested they sleep on it. He got the porter in to fix the beds and as an afterthought told the man to come back with the evening papers. Nothing can orient a cultural expatriate better than the evening papers. The man did. MacLyle paid no attention to this, one way or the other. He just climbed into the psychiatrist's spare pajamas thoughtfully and they went to bed.

The psychiatrist didn't know if MacLyle had awakened him on purpose or whether the train's slowing down for a watering stop had done it, or both; anyway he awoke about three in the morning to find MacLyle standing beside his bunk looking at him fixedly. He closed his eyes and screwed them tight and opened them again, and MacLyle was still there, and now he noticed that MacLyle's reading lamp was lit and the papers were scattered all over the floor. MacLyle said, "You're some kind of a doctor," in a flat voice.

The psychiatrist admitted it.

MacLyle said, "Well, this ought to make some sense to you. I was skiing out here years ago when I was a college kid. Accident, fellow I was with broke his leg. Compound. Made him comfortable as I could and went for help. Came back, he'd slid down the mountain, thrashing around, I

guess. Crevasse, down in the bottom; took two days to find him, three days to get him out. Frostbite. Gangrene."

The psychiatrist tried to look as if he was following this.

MacLyle said, "The one thing I always remember, him pulling back the bandages all the time to look at his leg. Knew it was gone, couldn't keep himself from watching the stuff spread around and upward. Didn't like to; *had* to. Tried to stop him, finally had to help him or he'd hurt himself. Every ten, fifteen minutes all the way down to the lodge, fifteen hours, looking under the bandages."

The psychiatrist tried to think of something to say and couldn't, so he looked wise and waited.

MacLyle said, "That Donne, that John Donne I used to spout, I always believed that."

The psychiatrist began to misquote the thing about send not to ask for whom the bell . . .

"Yeah, that, but especially *'any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind.'* I believed that," MacLyle repeated. "I believed more than that. Not only death. Damn foolishness diminishes me because I am involved. People all the time pushing people around diminishes me. Everybody hungry for a fast buck diminishes me." He picked up a sheet of newspaper and let it slip away; it flapped off to the corner of the compartment like a huge grave-moth. "I was getting diminished to death and I had to watch it happening to me like that kid with the gangrene, so that's why." The train, crawling now, lurched suddenly and yielded. MacLyle's eyes flicked to the window, where neon beer signs and a traffic light were reluctantly being framed. MacLyle leaned close to the psychiatrist. "I just had to get un-involved with mankind before I got diminished altogether, everything mankind did was my fault. So I did and now here I am involved again." MacLyle abruptly went to the door. "And for that, thanks."

From a dusty throat the psychiatrist asked him what he was going to do.

"Do?" asked MacLyle cheerfully. "Why, I'm going out there and diminish mankind right back." He was out in the

corridor with the door closed before the psychiatrist so much as sat up. He banged it open again and leaned in. He said in the sanest of all possible voices, "Now mind you, doctor, this is only one man's opinion," and was gone. He killed four people before they got him.

RAY BRADBURY

Ray Bradbury is probably best known for embittered if poetic tales expressing distrust and even fear of the technological future—and indeed of the technological present. But here, in a brief story that is virtually a prose poem, Mr. Bradbury greets with ringing affirmation, in past, present, and future, the vaulting indomitable technology of Man.

ICARUS MONTGOLFIER WRIGHT

He lay on his bed and the wind blew through the window over his ears and over his half-opened mouth so it whispered to him in his dream. It was like the wind of time hollowing the Delphic caves to say what must be said of yesterday, today, tomorrow. Sometimes one voice gave a shout far off away, sometimes two, a dozen, an entire race of men cried out through his mouth, but their words were always the same:

"Look, look, we've done it!"

For suddenly he, they, one or many, were flung in the dream, and flew. The air spread in a soft warm sea where he swam, disbelieving.

"Look! Look! It's done!"

But he didn't ask the world to watch, he was only shocking his senses wide to see, taste, smell, touch the air, the wind, the rising moon. He swam alone in the sky. The heavy earth was gone.

But wait, he thought, wait now!

Tonight—what night is this?

The night before, of course. The night before the first flight of a rocket to the moon. Beyond this room on the baked desert floor one hundred years away the rocket waits for me.

Well, does it now? Is there *really* a rocket?

Hold on! he thought, and twisted, turned, sweating, eyes tight, to the wall, the fierce whisper in his teeth. Be certain-sure! You, now, who *are* you?

Me? he thought. *My* name?

Jedediah Prentiss, born 1938, college graduate 1959, licensed rocket pilot, 1965. Jedediah Prentiss . . . Jedediah Prentiss . . .

The wind whipped his name away! He grabbed for it, yelling!

Then, gone quiet, he waited for the wind to bring his name back. He waited a long while, and there was only silence, and then after a thousand heartbeats, he felt motion.

The sky opened out like a soft blue flower. The Aegean Sea stirred soft white fans through a distant wine-colored surf.

In the wash of the waves on the shore, he heard his name.

Icarus.

And again in a breathing whisper.

Icarus.

Someone shook his arm and it was his father saying his name and shaking away the night. And he himself lay small, half turned to the window and the shore below and the deep sky, feeling the first wind of the morning ruffle the golden feathers bedded in amber wax lying by the side of his cot. Golden wings stirred half alive in his father's arms, and the faint down on his own shoulders quilled trembling as he looked at these wings and beyond to the cliff.

"Father, how's the wind?"

"Enough for me, but never enough for you . . ."

"Father, don't worry. The wings seem clumsy, now, but my bones in the feathers will make them strong, my blood in the wax will make it live!"

"My blood, my bones, too, remember; each man lends his

flesh to his children, asking that they tend it well. Promise you'll not go high, Icarus. *The* sun, or *my* son, the heat of one, the fever of the other, could melt these wings. Take care!"

And they carried the splendid golden wings into the morning and heard them whisper in their arms, whisper his name or a name of some name that blew, spun, and settled like a feather on the soft air.

Montgolfier.

His hands touched fiery rope, bright linen, stitched thread gone hot as summer. His hands fed wool and straw to a breathing flame.

Montgolfier.

And his eye soared up along the swell and sway, the oceanic tug and pull, the immensely wafted silver pear filling with the shimmering tidal airs channeled up from the blaze. Silent as a god tilted slumbering above French countryside, this delicate linen envelope, this swelling sac of oven-baked air would soon pluck itself free. Draughting upward to blue worlds of silence, his mind and his brother's mind would sail with it, muted, serene among island clouds where uncivilized lightnings slept. Into that uncharted gulf and abyss where no birdsong or shout of man could follow, the balloon would hush itself. So cast adrift, he, Montgolfier, and all men, might hear the unmeasured breathing of God and the cathedral tread of eternity.

"Ah . . ." He moved, the crowd moved, shadowed by the warm balloon. "Everything's ready, everything's right. . . ."

Right. His lips twitched in his dream. Right. Hiss, whisper, flutter, rush. Right.

From his father's hands a toy jumped to the ceiling, whirled in its own wind, suspended, while he and his brother stared to see it flicker, rustle, whistle, heard it murmuring their names.

Wright.

Whispering: sky, cloud, space, wing, fly . . .

"Wilbur, Orville? Look; how's *that?*"

Ah. In his sleep, his mouth sighed.

The toy helicopter hummed, bumped the ceiling, murmured eagle, raven, sparrow, robin, hawk; murmured eagle, raven, sparrow, robin, hawk. Whispered eagle, whispered raven, and at last, fluttering to their hands with a susurrance, a wash of blowing weather from summers yet to come, with a last whir and exhalation, whispered hawk.

Dreaming, he smiled.

He saw the clouds rush down the Aegean sky.

He felt the balloon sway drunkenly, its great bulk ready for the clear running wind.

He felt the sand hiss up the Atlantic shelves from the soft dunes that might save him if he, a fledgling bird, should fall. The framework struts hummed and chorded like a harp.

Beyond this room he felt the primed rocket glide on the desert field, its fire-wings folded, its fire-breath kept, held ready to speak for two billion men. In a moment he would wake and walk slowly out to that rocket.

And stand on the rim of the cliff.

Stand cool in the shadow of the warm balloon.

Stand whipped by tidal sands drummed over Kitty Hawk.

And sheathe his boy's wrists, arms, hands, fingers with golden wings in golden wax.

And touch for a final time the captured breath of man, the warm gasp of awe and wonder siphoned and sewn to lift their dreams.

And spark the gasoline engine.

And take his father's hand and wish him well with his own wings, flexed and ready.

Then whirl and jump.

Then cut the cords to free the great balloon.

Then rev the motor, prop the plane on air.

And crack the switch to fire the rocket fuse.

And together in a single leap, swim, rush, flail, jump, sail and glide, upturned to sun, moon, stars, they would go above Atlantic, Mediterranean; over country, wilderness, city; town; in gaseous silence, rifling feather, rattle-drum frame, in volcanic eruption, in timid, sputtering roar; in start, jar, hesitation, then steady ascension, beautifully held, wonderously

transported, they would laugh and cry each his own himself. Or shout the names of others unborn or others long-dead and blown away by the wine wind or the salt wind or the silent hush of balloon wind or the wind of chemical fire. Each feeling the bright feathers stir and bud deep-buried and thrusting to burst from their riven shoulder blades. Each leaving behind the echo of their flying, a sound to encircle, recircle the earth in the winds and speak again in other years to the sons of the sons of their sons, asleep but hearing the restless midnight sky.

Up, yet further up, higher, higher! A spring tide, a summer flood, an unending river of wings!

A bell rang softly.

No, he whispered, I'll wake in a moment. Wait. . . .

The Aegean slid away below the window, gone; the Atlantic dunes, the French countryside dissolved down to New Mexico desert. In his room near his coat stirred no plumes in golden wax. Outside no wind-sculptured pear, no trap-drum butterfly machine. Outside only a rocket, a combustible dream, waiting for the friction of his hand to set it off.

In the last moment of sleep, someone asked his name.

Quietly, he gave the answer as he had heard it during the hours from midnight on.

"Icarus Montgolfier Wright."

He repeated it slowly so the questioner could remember the order and the spelling down to the last letter.

"Icarus Montgolfier Wright.

"Born nine hundred years before Christ. Grammer school: Paris, 1783. High school: Kitty Hawk, 1903. Graduation from Earth to Moon, this day, God willing, August 1, 1965. Death and burial, with luck, on Mars, summer 1999 in the Year of our Lord."

Then he let himself drift awake.

An hour later, crossing the desert tarmac, he heard someone shouting again and again and again: "Jedediah Prentiss . . . !"

And if no one was there or if someone was there behind him, he could not tell. And whether it was one voice or

many voices young or old, near or very far away, calling and shouting to him, he could not tell either. He did not turn to see.

For the wind was slowly rising and he let it take hold and blow him all the rest of the way across the desert to the rocket that stood waiting there.

*

THE WOODS GROW DARKER

We feared the incubus, the hex;
Passing a pond, we crossed two sticks
Against the green-haired water-nix.

Once woods were dark with goblin forms,
But boughs of oak and ash were charms
Against the witch, the nightmare swarms.

We are much wiser now; such fears
Have been an old wives' tale for years.
We have more modern fears these years:

We fear the mind's rank Freudian fen,
The death unleased from cyclotron,
The Iron Curtain closing down,

The spy, the ships from space . . . we scurry
Through mental woods grown dark and eerie,
With not even twigs of ash to carry.

LEAH BODINE DRAKE

BRIGHT DESTRUCTION

Once there were hornstones hurled from Mercury,
And sardonyx chalcedonius
And saphirs streamed from Mars and Uranus,
Flung from the falling temples of the sky.

Blende and beryl wander in the air.
High onyx hangs above Osiris' head,
Carving the earth where he is lying dead,
Static, like old chants suspended there.

Jupiter will edge Behemoth's bier
With ivory wonders, gold, and stolen jade,
When Saturn rings the jungles in its fear,
When Venus watches bright destruction made
To Neptune's own, Leviathan, the sea—
Bewildering in strange calamity.

WINONA MC CLINTIC

BLAZE OF GLORY

Little Willie made a slip
While landing in his rocket ship.
See that bright, actinic glare?
That's our little Willie there.

RANDALL GARRETT

FREE FLIGHT

The sick surmise that we should not survive
Clouded the start. Then, with the flight begun,
We saw, in the mere flush of being alive,
How we could be, before the thing was done,
In our own right new subjects of the sun,
Freer than the full flight of human will.
The old restraints of earth were on the run.
And heaven all ours to harvest. Later still

Our minds, as the extreme event drew near,
Loosened the long links of assertiveness
And as the irremeable line was crossed
Lost their last hold. Now without pride or fear
We contemplate mankind's supreme success
With the supreme detachment of the lost.

P. M. HUBBARD

THE ANTI-CLIMAX

Surviving the bomb and the alien planes,
The mammals were exterminated.
Etymological history explains
The plots of the emmets who overran Man.
From atom and evil,
Through arts mediaeval,
Tiny tenants of planets their limits advance
To ethical puberty.
Man lost the shrubbery, determinated,
And fated to perish of ants in the plants.

WINONA MC CLINTIC

INTERVIEW

"I would like to go back to Earth again," he said,
"And her trememdous skies. I would like to see
A world that is blue and green (with some seasonal red)
And various shades of brown. I remember" (he
Scratched here his chin) "that moon, as seen from Earth,
In its comprehensible stages (now hot gold,
Now threadbare linen) of pulsating girth.
I am," he said, "as yet not very old,
But it is hard to remember just Earth's look.
A man cannot carry the sight of a world in his head
(And that's forgetting the smell and the taste and the voice),
And most of what I say I got out of a book.
One world is enough. Still, if I had my choice,
I would like to go back to Earth again," he said.

BIRD FERGUSON

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