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TWELFTH SERIES

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by **Avram Davidson**

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**THE BEST FROM FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION
TWELFTH SERIES**

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FOR GRANIA

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Introduction

The late Fred Allen (alas, that I must add "the late") once remarked that "the next generation will have eyes as big as cantaloupes, and no brains at all." This sardonic prophecy—an example, in its way, of extrapolation, on which all Science Fiction is based—was prompted by the triumph of television over radio, and held more than an echo of the belief, not confined to Mr. Allen, that the reading lamp would become a superfluous item in any household which contained a picture tube. A recent bit of intelligence from a West Coast megapolis has it that local adult illiterates (of which there are a grievously high number) almost without exception own television sets. And, although the educational courses, colloquia, seminars, and *sic cetera*, continue to proliferate in halls dedicated to the production of pedagogues, it seems that *Johnny*—poor vitamin-enriched, sports-loving, video-watching young hopeful—still *can't read*.

Who, then, is reading? Somebody must be. More books are being published in our federal union than ever before; and our federal government, though it subsidizes the production of food which will not be eaten, has yet to underwrite the writing of books which will not be read—or of any other kind. No, authorship and readership continue strictly free enterprise. What is more important is that they still continue. The rise of the paperback book has accompanied the rise of television and while both have been rising the magazine has been declining. That is, some magazines have been declining. Some, in fact, are tottering. Yet, while giants of the magazine field flounder and thresh about in great agonies like the deaththroes of dinosaurs, the Science Fiction magazines, though small, are bright of eye and bushy of tail, and scamper about quite lively.

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But let us beware of *hubris*. Though we are viable and vigorous, there are fewer of us than there were some while back. It is said that the passing of space travel from fiction into fact has diverted a muckle part of our public to the newspapers. It may be so. Still, we must own up to the truth: *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* has never made its principal appeal to those inquiring minds who are concerned with the problem of "What does a rocket push against, out there where there isn't any air?" and similar scientific speculations. Our trail was blazed by Anthony Boucher, who (together with his founding co-editor, J. Francis McComas)—in the words of Isaac Asimov—"more than anyone else, learned how to give science fiction the delicate aura of literature." Robert P. Mills, their successor, continued this tradition; and so, it is hoped, will Your Servant to Command. Our tradition is literary, our tradition is one of the Science Fiction *and* Fantasy. We hope that the antic fumes of the alembic will not hide the figures on the slide rule, nor the roar of the rockets drown out what song the sirens sing.

Some of the authors in this current collection have not appeared in previous volumes of the series, others have been published in *The Magazine* itself for the first time this year—for a few of this was their professional debut. Some names familiar from earlier volumes of this series are, regrettably, absent from here: the word "Best" is not subject to adjudication by scales or calipers, and several stories we should have liked to have included have had to be omitted for reasons which have nothing to do with their intrinsic merits.

Readers of Science Fiction and Fantasy, here and elsewhere, will welcome—we trust—the familiar names of Aandahl, Aldiss, Ballard, Blish, Davidson, Goulart, Pangborn, Stanton, Thomas, and Willhelm. We trust, too, that they will be as pleased as we were to make the literary acquaintance of Karen Anderson (as a writer of prose, that is; she is well

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known for her poetry), Terry Carr, Joseph Dickinson, Sasha Gilien, and Joanna Russ. And now we will detain you no longer. You may draw up your chair by the fire (if you have one), you may smoke if you like, and fill your glass with something good. But, friend, put away your Benzedrine: You will not need it.

Science-columnist and -lecturer, *pater familias*, patent attorney and scuba-diver, Ted Thomas denies that he has ever—unlike the p. a. in the Charles Addams cartoon—tried out a supposed death-ray-gun on passers-by. *We are not so sure . . .* At any rate, we watched him, once, cross the Delaware under water (something Washington never did), and against a damnably strong current. The air was warm, but seemed—somehow—to grow colder and colder until, at last, he emerged on the distant shore . . .

This curt and chilling tale, which seems for most of its brief length to be merely one of the best action stories you have ever read, poses a question which—once put—the readers will recognize as having echoed in their own minds forever.

TEST

by Theodore L. Thomas

ROBERT PROCTOR WAS A GOOD DRIVER for so young a man. The Turnpike curved gently ahead of him, lightly travelled on this cool morning in May. He felt relaxed and alert. Two hours of driving had not yet produced the twinges of fatigue that appeared first in the muscles in the base of the neck. The sun was bright, but not glaring, and the air smelled fresh and clean. He breathed it deeply, and blew it out noisily. It was a good day for driving.

He glanced quickly at the slim, gray-haired woman sitting in the front seat with him. Her mouth was curved in a quiet smile. She watched the trees and the fields slip by on her side of the pike. Robert Proctor immediately looked back at the road. He said, "Enjoying it, Mom?"

"Yes, Robert." Her voice was as cool as the morning.

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"It is very pleasant to sit here. I was thinking of the driving I did for you when you were little. I wonder if you enjoyed it as much as I enjoy this."

He smiled, embarrassed. "Sure I did."

She reached over and patted him gently on the arm, and then turned back to the scenery.

He listened to the smooth purr of the engine. Up ahead he saw a great truck, spouting a geyser of smoke as it sped along the Turnpike. Behind it, not passing it, was a long blue convertible, content to drive in the wake of the truck. Robert Proctor noted the arrangement and filed it in the back of his mind. He was slowly overtaking them, but he would not reach them for another minute or two.

He listened to the purr of the engine, and he was pleased with the sound. He had tuned that engine himself over the objections of the mechanic. The engine idled rough now, but it ran smoothly at high speed. You needed a special feel to do good work on engines, and Robert Proctor knew he had it. No one in the world had a feel like his for the tune of an engine.

It was a good morning for driving, and his mind was filled with good thoughts. He pulled nearly abreast of the blue convertible and began to pass it. His speed was a few miles per hour above the Turnpike limit, but his car was under perfect control. The blue convertible suddenly swung out from behind the truck. It swung out without warning and struck his car near the right front fender, knocking his car to the shoulder on the left side of the Turnpike lane.

Robert Proctor was a good driver, too wise to slam on the brakes. He fought the steering wheel to hold the car on a straight path. The left wheels sank into the soft left shoulder, and the car tugged to pull to the left and cross the island and enter the lanes carrying the cars heading in the opposite direction. He held it, then the wheel struck a

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rock buried in the soft dirt, and the left front tire blew out. The car slewed, and it was then that his mother began to scream.

The car turned sideways and skidded part of the way out into the other lanes. Robert Proctor fought against the steering wheel to straighten the car, but the drag of the blown tire was too much. The scream rang steadily in his ears, and even as he strained at the wheel one part of his mind wondered coolly how a scream could so long be sustained without a breath. An oncoming car struck his radiator from the side and spun him viciously, full into the left-hand lanes.

He was flung into his mother's lap, and she was thrown against the right door. It held. With his left hand he reached for the steering wheel and pulled himself erect against the force of the spin. He turned the wheel to the left, and tried to stop the spin and careen out of the lanes, of oncoming traffic. His mother was unable to right herself; she lay against the door, her cry rising and falling with the eccentric spin of the car.

The car lost some of its momentum. During one of the spins he twisted the wheel straight, and the car wobblingly stopped spinning and headed down the lane. Before Robert Proctor could turn it off the pike to safety a car loomed ahead of him, bearing down on him. There was a man at the wheel of that other car, sitting rigid, unable to move, eyes wide and staring and filled with fright. Alongside the man was a girl, her head against the back of the seat, soft curls framing a lovely face, her eyes closed in easy sleep. It was not the fear in the man that reached into Robert Proctor; it was the trusting helplessness in the face of the sleeping girl. The two cars sped closer to each other, and Robert Proctor could not change the direction of his car. The driver of the other car remained frozen at the wheel. At the last moment Robert Proctor sat motionless staring into

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the face of the onrushing, sleeping girl, his mother's cry still sounding in his ears. He heard no crash when the two cars collided head-on at a high rate of speed. He felt something push into his stomach, and the world began to go gray. Just before he lost consciousness he heard the scream stop, and he knew then that he had been hearing a single, short-lived scream that had only seemed to drag on and on. There came a painless wrench, and then darkness.

Robert Proctor seemed to be at the bottom of a deep black well. There was a spot of faint light in the far distance, and he could hear the rumble of a distant voice. He tried to pull himself toward the light and the sound, but the effort was too great. He lay still and gathered himself and tried again. The light grew brighter and the voice louder. He tried harder, again, and he drew closer. Then he opened his eyes full and looked at the man sitting in front of him.

"You all right, Son?" asked the man. He wore a blue uniform, and his round, beefy face was familiar.

Robert Proctor tentatively moved his head, and discovered he was seated in a reclining chair, unharmed, and able to move his arms and legs with no trouble. He looked around the room, and he remembered.

The man in the uniform saw the growing intelligence in his eyes and said, "No harm done, Son. You just took the last part of your driver's test."

Robert Proctor focused his eyes on the man. Though he saw the man clearly, he seemed to see the faint face of the sleeping girl in front of him.

The uniformed man continued to speak. "We put you through an accident under hypnosis—do it to everybody these days before they can get their driver's licenses. Makes better drivers of them, more careful drivers the rest of their lives. Remember it now? Coming in here and all?"

Robert Proctor nodded, thinking of the sleeping girl. She never would have awakened; she would have passed right

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from a sweet, temporary sleep into the dark heavy sleep of death, nothing in between. His mother would have been bad enough; after all, she was pretty old. The sleeping girl was downright waste.

The uniformed man was still speaking. "So you're all set now. You pay me the ten dollar fee, and sign this application, and we'll have your license in the mail in a day or two." He did not look up.

Robert Proctor placed a ten dollar bill on the table in front of him, glanced over the application and signed it. He looked up to find two white-uniformed men, standing one on each side of him, and he frowned in annoyance. He started to speak, but the uniformed man spoke first. "Sorry, Son. You failed. You're sick; you need treatment."

The two men lifted Robert Proctor to his feet, and he said, "Take your hands off me. What is this?"

The uniformed man said, "Nobody should want to drive a car after going through what you just went through. It should take months before you can even think of driving again, but you're ready right now. Killing people doesn't bother you. We don't let your kind run around loose in society any more. But don't you worry now, Son. They'll take good care of you, and they'll fix you up." He nodded to the two men, and they began to march Robert Proctor out.

At the door he spoke, and his voice was so urgent the two men paused. Robert Proctor said, "You can't really mean this. I'm still dreaming, aren't I? This is still part of the test, isn't it?"

The uniformed man said, "*How do any of us know?*" And they dragged Robert Proctor out the door, knees stiff, feet dragging, his rubber heels sliding along the two grooves worn into the floor.

Max Kearny—ad man, hobbyist in the occult, friend-in-need—returns in an adventure concerning a chap who has acquired the disconcerting habit of turning into an elephant on national holidays. That sort of thing plays hell with one's love life—how, after all, can you ask a girl to marry you if you know in advance that what you'll really want for Christmas is no more than a bale of hay . . . ?

PLEASE STAND BY

by Ron Goulart

THE ART DEPARTMENT SECRETARY put her Christmas tree down and kissed Max Kearny. "There's somebody to see you," she said, getting her coat the rest of the way on and picking up the tree again.

Max shifted on his stool. "On the last working day before Christmas?"

"Pile those packages in my arms," the secretary said. "He says it's an emergency."

Moving away from his drawing board Max arranged the gift packages in the girl's arms. "Who is it? A rep?"

"Somebody named Dan Padgett."

"Oh, sure. He's a friend of mine from another agency. Tell him to come on back."

"Will do. You'll have a nice Christmas, won't you, Max?"

"I think the Salvation Army has something nice planned."

"No, seriously, Max. Don't sit around some cold bar. Well, Merry Christmas."

"Same to you." Max looked at the rough layout on his board for a moment and then Dan Padgett came in. "Hi, Dan. What is it?"

RON GOULART

Dan Padgett rubbed his palms together. "You still have your hobby?"

Max shook out a cigarette from his pack. "The ghost detective stuff? Sure."

"But you don't specialize in ghosts only?" Dan went around the room once, then closed the door.

"No. I'm interested in most of the occult field. The last case I worked on involved a free-lance resurrectionist. Why?"

"You remember Anne Clemens, the blonde?"

"Yeah. You used to go out with her when we worked at Bryan-Josephs and Associates. Skinny girl."

"Slender. Fashion model type." Dan sat in the room's chair and unbuttoned his coat. "I want to marry her."

"Right now?"

"I asked her two weeks ago but she hasn't given me an answer yet. One reason is Kenneth Westerland."

"The animator?"

"Yes. The guy who created Major Bowser. He's seeing Anne, too."

"Well," said Max, dragging his stool back from the drawing board. "I don't do lovelorn work, Dan. Now if Westerland were a vampire or a warlock I might be able to help."

"He's not the main problem. It's if Anne says yes."

"What is?"

"I can't marry her."

"Change of heart?"

"No." Dan tilted to his feet. "No." He rubbed his hands together. "No, I love her. The thing is there's something wrong with me. I hate to bother you so close to Christmas, but that's part of it."

Max lit a fresh cigarette from the old one. "I still don't have a clear idea of the problem, Dan."

"I change into an elephant on all national holidays."

Max leaned forward and squinted one eye at Dan. "An elephant?"

Please Stand By

"Middle sized gray elephant."

"On national holidays?"

"More or less. It started on Halloween. It didn't happen again till Thanksgiving. Fortunately I can talk during it and I was able to explain to my folks that I wouldn't get home for our traditional Thanksgiving get-together."

"How do you dial the phone?"

"I waited till they called me. You can pick up a phone with your trunk. I found that out."

"Usually people change into cats or wolves."

"I wouldn't mind that," Dan said, sitting. "A wolf, that's acceptable. It has a certain appeal. I'd even settle for a giant cockroach, for the symbolic value. But a middle sized gray elephant. I can't expect Anne to marry me when I do things like that."

"You don't think," said Max, crossing to the window and looking down at the late afternoon crowds, "that you're simply having hallucinations?"

"If I am they are pretty authentic. Thanksgiving Day I ate a bale of hay." Dan tapped his fingers on his knees. "See, the first time I changed I got hungry after a while. But I couldn't work the damned can opener with my trunk. So I figured I'd get a bale of hay and keep it handy if I ever changed again."

"You seemed to stay an elephant for how long?"

"Twenty four hours. The first time—both times I've been in my apartment, which has a nice solid floor—I got worried. I trumpeted and stomped around. Then the guy upstairs, the queer ceramacist, started pounding on the floor. I figured I'd better keep quiet so nobody would call the cops and take me off to a zoo or animal shelter. Well, I waited around and tried to figure things out and then right on the nose at midnight I was myself again."

Max ground his cigarette into the small metal pie plate on his workstand. "You're not putting me on, are you?"

RON GOULART

"No, Max." Dan looked up hopefully. "Is this in your line? I don't know anyone else to ask. I tried to forget it. Now, though, Christmas is nearly here. Both other times I changed was on a holiday. I'm worried."

"Lycanthropy," said Max. "That can't be it. Have you been near any elephants lately?"

"I was at the zoo a couple years ago. None of them bit me or even looked at me funny."

"This is something else. Look, Dan, I've got a date with a girl down in Palo Alto on Christmas Day. But Christmas Eve I can be free. Do you change right on the dot?"

"If it happens I should switch over right at midnight on the twenty-fourth. I already told my folks I was going to spend these holidays with Anne. And I told her I'd be with them."

"Which leaves her free to see Westerland."

"That son of a bitch."

"Major Bowser's not a bad cartoon show."

"Successful anyway. That dog's voice is what makes the show. I hate Westerland and I've laughed at it." Dan rose. "Maybe nothing will happen."

"If anything does it may give me a lead."

"Hope so. Well, Merry Christmas, Max. See you tomorrow night."

Max nodded and Dan Padgett left. Leaning over his drawing board Max wrote *Hex?* on the margin of his layout.

He listened to the piped in music play Christmas carols for a few minutes and then started drawing again.

The bale of hay crackled as Max sat down on it. He lit a cigarette carefully and checked his watch again. "Half hour to go," he said.

Dan Padgett poured some scotch into a cup marked Tom & Jerry and closed the venetian blinds. "I felt silly carrying

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that bale of hay up here. People expect to see you with a tree this time of year."

"You could have hung tinsel on it."

"That'd hurt my fillings when I eat the hay." Dan poured some more scotch and walked to the heater outlet. He kicked it once. "Getting cold in here. I'm afraid to complain to the landlady. She'd probably say—'Who else would let you keep an elephant in your rooms? A little chill you shouldn't mind.'"

"You know," said Max, "I've been reading up on lycanthropy. A friend of mine runs an occult bookshop."

"Non-fiction seems to be doing better and better."

"There doesn't seem to be any recorded case of were-elephants."

"Maybe the others didn't want any publicity."

"Maybe. It's more likely somebody has put a spell on you. In that case you could change into most anything?"

Dan frowned. "I hadn't thought of that. What time is it?"

"Quarter to."

"A spell, huh? Would I have to meet the person who did it? Or is it done from a distance?"

"Usually there has to be some kind of contact."

"Say," said Dan, lowering his head and stroking his nose, "you'd better not sit on the bale of hay. Animals don't like people fooling with their food." He was standing with his feet wide apart, his legs stiff.

Max carefully got up and moved back across the room. "Something?"

"No," said Dan. He leaned far forward, reaching for the floor with his hands. "I just have an itch. My stomach."

Max watched as Dan scratched his stomach with his trunk. "Damn."

Raising his head the middle sized gray elephant squinted

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at Max. "Hell, I thought it wouldn't happen again."

"Can I come closer?"

Dan beckoned with his trunk. "I won't trample you."

Max reached out and touched the side of the elephant. "You're a real elephant sure enough."

"I should have thought to get some cabbages, too. This stuff is pretty bland." He was tearing trunkfuls of hay from the bale and stuffing them into his mouth.

Max remembered the cigarette in his hand and lit it. He walked twice around the elephant and said, "Think back now, Dan. To the first time this happened. When was it?"

"I told you. Halloween."

"But that's not really a holiday. Was it the day after Halloween? Or the night itself?"

"Wait. It was before. It was the day after the party at Eando Carawan's. In the Beach."

"Where?"

"North Beach. There was a party. Anne knows Eando's wife. Her name is Eando, too."

"Why?"

"His name is Ernest and hers is Olivia. E-and-O. So they both called themselves Eando. They paint those pictures of bug-eyed children you can buy in all the stores down there. You should know them, being an artist yourself."

Max grunted. "Ernie Carawan. Sure, he used to be a free-lance artist, specializing in dogs. We stopped using him because all his dogs started having bug-eyes."

"You ought to see Olivia."

"What happened at the party?"

"Well," said Dan, tearing off more hay, "I get the idea that there was some guy at this party. A little round fat guy. About your height. Around thirty-five. Somebody said he was a stage magician or something."

"Come on," said Max, "elephants are supposed to have good memories."

Please Stand By

"I think I was sort of drunk at the time. I can't remember all he said. Something about doing me a favor. And a flash."

"A flash?"

"The flash came to him like that. I told him to—to do whatever he did." Dan stopped eating the hay. "That would be magic, though, Max. That's impossible."

"Shut up and eat your hay. Anything is possible."

"You're right. Who'd have thought I'd be spending Christmas as an elephant."

"That magician for one," said Max. "What's his name? He may know something."

"His name?"

"That's right."

"I don't know. He didn't tell me."

"Just came up and put a spell on you."

"You know how it is at parties."

Max found the phone on a black table near the bookshelves. "Where's the phone book?"

"Oh, yeah."

"What?"

"It's not here. The last time I was an elephant I ate it."

"I'll get Carawan's number from information and see if he knows who this wizard is."

Carawan didn't. But someone at his Christmas Eve party did. The magician ran a sandal shop in North Beach. His name was Claude Waller. As far as anyone knew he was visiting his ex-wife in Los Angeles for Christmas and wouldn't be back until Monday or Tuesday.

Max reached for the price tag on a pair of orange leather slippers. The beaded screen at the back of the shop clattered.

"You a fagot or something, buddy?" asked the heavy set man who came into the room.

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"No, sir. Sorry."

"Then you don't want that pair of slippers. That's my fagot special. Also comes in light green. Who are you?"

"Max Kearny. Are you Claude Waller?"

Waller was wearing a loose brown suit. He unbuttoned the coat and sat down on a stool in front of the counter. "That's who I am. The little old shoemaker."

Max nodded.

"That's a switch on the wine commercial with the little old winemaker."

"I know."

"My humor always bombs. It's like my life. A big bomb. What do you want?"

"I hear you're a magician."

"No."

"You aren't?"

"Not anymore. My ex-wife, that flat chested bitch, and I have reunited. I don't know what happened. I'm a tough guy. I don't take any crap."

"I'd say so."

"Then why'd I send her two hundred bucks to come up here?"

"Is there time to stop the check?"

"I sent cash."

"You're stuck then, I guess."

"She's not that bad."

"Do you know a guy named Dan Padgett?"

"No."

"How about Ernie Carawan?"

"Eando? Yeah."

"On Halloween you met Dan Padgett and a girl named Anne Clemens at the party the Carawans gave."

"That's a good act. Can you tell me what it says on the slip of paper in my pocket?"

Please Stand By

"Do you remember talking to Dan? Could you have put some kind of spell on him?"

Waller slid forward off the stool. "That guy. I'll be damned. I did do it then."

"Do what?"

"I was whacked out of my mind. Juiced out of my skull, you know. I got this flash. Some guy was in trouble. This Padgett it was. I didn't think I'd really done anything. Did I?"

"He turns into an elephant on national holidays."

Waller looked at his feet. Then laughed. "He does. That's great. Why'd I do that do you suppose."

"Tell me."

Waller stopped laughing. "I get these flashes all the time. It bugs my wife. She doesn't know who to sleep with. I might get a flash about it. Wait now." He picked up a hammer from his workbench and tapped the palm of his hand. "That girl. The blonde girl. What's her name?"

"Anne Clemens."

"There's something. Trouble. Has it happened yet?"

"What's supposed to happen?"

"Ouch," said Waller. He'd brought the hammer down hard enough to start a bruise. "I can't remember. But I know I put a spell on your friend so he could save her when the time came."

Max lit a cigarette. "It would be simpler just to tell us what sort of trouble is coming."

Waller reached out behind him to set the hammer down. He missed the bench and the hammer smashed through the top of a shoe box. "Look, Kearny. I'm not a professional wizard. It's like in baseball. Sometimes a guy's just a natural. That's the way I am. A natural, I'm sorry, buddy. I can't tell you anything else. And I can't take that spell off your friend. I don't even remember how I did it."

RON GOULART

"There's nothing else you can remember about what kind of trouble Anne is going to have?"

Frowning, Waller said, "Dogs. A pack of dogs. Dogs barking in the rain. No, that's not right. I can't get it. I don't know. This Dan Padgett will save her." Waller bent to pick up the hammer. "I'm pretty sure of that."

"This is Tuesday. On Saturday he's due to change again. Will the trouble come on New Year's Eve?"

"Buddy, if I get another flash I'll let you know."

At the door Max said, "I'll give you my number."

"Skip it," said Waller. "When I need it, I'll know it."

The door of the old Victorian house buzzed and Max caught the doorknob and turned it. The stairway leading upstairs was lined with brown paintings of little girls with ponies and dogs. The light from the door opening upstairs flashed down across the bright gilt frames on which eagles and flowers twisted and curled together.

"Max Kearny?" said Anne Clemens over the stair railing.

"Hi, Anne. Are you busy?"

"Not at the moment. I'm going out later. I just got home from work a little while ago."

This was Wednesday night. Max hadn't been able to find Anne at home until now. "I was driving by and I thought I'd stop."

"It's been several months since we've seen each other," said the girl as Max reached the doorway to her apartment. "Come in."

She was wearing a white blouse and what looked like a pair of black leotards. She wasn't as thin as Max had remembered. Her blonde hair was held back with a thin black ribbon.

"I won't hold you up?" Max asked.

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Anne shook her head. "I won't have to start getting ready for a while yet."

"Fine," Max got out his cigarettes and sat down in the old sofa chair Anne gestured at.

"Is it something about Dan, Max?" The single overhead light was soft and it touched her hair gently.

"In a way."

"Is it some trouble?" She was sitting opposite Max, straight up on the sofa bed.

"No," said Max. "Dan's got the idea, though, that you might be in trouble of some sort."

The girl moistened her lips. "Dan's too sensitive in some areas. I think I know what he means."

Max held his pack of cigarettes to her.

"No, thanks. Dan's worried about Ken Westerland, isn't he?"

"That's part of it."

"Max," said Anne, "I worked for Ken a couple of years ago. We've gone out off and on since then. Dan shouldn't worry about that."

"Westerland isn't causing you any trouble?"

"Ken? Of course not. If I seem hesitant to Dan it's only that I don't want Ken to be hurt either." She frowned, turning away. She turned back to Max and studied him as though he had suddenly appeared across from her. "What was I saying? Well, never mind. I really should be getting ready."

"If you need anything," said Max, "let me know."

"What?"

"I said that—"

"Oh, yes. If I need anything. Fine. If I'm going to dinner I should get started."

"You studying modern dance?"

Anne opened the door. "The leotards. No. They're comfort-

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able. I don't have any show business leanings." She smiled quickly. "Thank you for dropping by, Max."

The door closed and he was in the hall. Max stood there long enough to light a cigarette and then went downstairs and outside.

It was dark now. The street lights were on and the night cold was coming. Max got in his car and sat back, watching the front steps of Anne's building across the street. Next to his car was a narrow empty lot, high with dark grass. A house had been there once and when it was torn down the stone stairs had been left. Max's eyes went up, stopping in nothing beyond the last step. Shaking his head and lighting a new cigarette he turned to watch Anne's apartment house.

The front of the building was covered with yards and yards of white wooden gingerbread. It wound around and around the house. There was a wide porch across the building front. One with a peaked roof over it.

About an hour later Kenneth Westerland parked his gray Mercedes sedan at the corner. He was a tall thin man of about thirty-five. He had a fat man's face, too round and plump-cheeked for his body. He was carrying a small suitcase.

After Westerland had gone inside Max left his car and walked casually to the corner. He crossed the street. He stepped suddenly across a lawn and into the row of darkness alongside Anne's building. Using a garbage can to stand on Max pulled himself up onto the first landing of the fire escape without use of the noisy ladder.

Max sat on the fire escape rail and, concealing the match flame, lit a cigarette. When he'd finished smoking it he ground out the butt against the ladder. Then he swung out around the edge of the building and onto the top of the porch roof. Flat on his stomach he worked up the slight incline. In a profusion of ivy and hollyhock Max concealed himself and let his left eye look up into the window.

Please Stand By

This was the window of her living room and he could see Anne sitting in the chair he'd been sitting in. She was wearing a black cocktail dress now and her hair was down, touching her shoulders. She was watching Westerland. The suitcase was sitting on the rug between Max and the animator.

Westerland had a silver chain held between his thumb and forefinger. On the end of the chain a bright silver medallion spun.

Max blinked and ducked back into the vines. Westerland was hypnotizing Anne. It was like an illustration from a pulp magazine.

Looking in again Max saw Westerland let the medallion drop into his suit pocket. Westerland came toward the window and Max eased down.

After a moment he looked in. Westerland had opened the suitcase. It held a tape recorder. The mike was in Anne's hand. In her other hand she held several stapled together sheets of paper.

Westerland pushed her coffee table in front of Anne and she set the papers on it. Her eyes seemed focused still on the spot where the spinning disc had been.

On his knees by the tape machine Westerland fitted on a spool of tape. After speaking a few words into the mike he gave it back to the girl. They began recording what had to be a script of some kind.

From the way Westerland used his face he was doing different voices. Anne's expression never changed as she spoke. Max couldn't hear anything.

Letting himself go flat he slid back to the edge of the old house and swung onto the fire escape. He waited to make sure no one had seen him and went to work on the window that led to the escape. It wasn't much work because there was no lock on it. It hadn't been opened for quite a while and it creaked. Max stepped into the hall and

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closed the window. Then he went slowly to the door of Anne's apartment and put his ear against it.

He could hear the voices faintly now. Westerland speaking as various characters. Anne using only one voice, not her own. Max sensed something behind him and turned to see the door of the next apartment opening. A big girl with black rimmed glasses was looking at him.

"What is it?" she said.

Max smiled and came to her door. "Nobody home I guess. Perhaps you'd like to subscribe to the Seditionist Daily. If I sell eight more subscriptions I get a stuffed panda."

The girl poked her chin. "A panda? A grown man like you shouldn't want a stuffed panda."

Max watched her for a second. "It is sort of foolish. To hell with them then. It's not much of a paper anyway. No comics and only fifteen words in the crossword puzzle. Good night, miss. Sorry to bother you. You've opened my eyes." He went down the stairs as the door closed behind him.

What he'd learned tonight gave him no clues as to Dan's problem. But it was interesting. For some reason Anne Clemens was the voice of Westerland's animated cartoon character, Major Bowser.

By Friday Max had found out that Westerland had once worked in night clubs as a hypnotist. That gave him no leads about why Dan Padgett periodically turned into an elephant.

Early in the afternoon Dan called him. "Max. Something's wrong."

"Have you changed already?"

"No, I'm okay. But I can't find Anne."

"What do you mean?"

"She hasn't showed up at work today. And I can't get an answer at her place."

Please Stand By

"Did you tell her about Westerland? About what I found out the other night?"

"I know you said not to. But you also said I was due to save her from some trouble. I thought maybe telling her about Westerland was the way to do it."

"You're supposed to save her while you're an elephant. Damn it. I didn't want her to know what Westerland was doing yet."

"If it's any help Anne didn't know she was Major Bowser. And she thinks she went to dinner with Westerland on Wednesday."

"No wonder she's so skinny. Okay. What else did she say?"

"She thought I was kidding. Then she seemed to become convinced. Even asked me how much Westerland probably made off the series."

"Great," said Max, making heavy lines on his memo pad. "Now she's probably gone to him and asked him for her back salary or something."

"Is that so bad?"

"We don't know." Max looked at his watch. "I can take off right now. I'll go out to her place and look around. Then check at Westerland's apartment. He lives out on California Street. I'll call you as soon as I find out anything."

"In the meantime," said Dan, "I'd better see about getting another bale of hay."

There was no lead on Anne's whereabouts at her apartment, which Max broke into. Or at Westerland's, where he came in through the skylight.

At noon on Saturday Max was wondering if he should sit back and trust to Waller's prediction that Dan would save Anne when the time came.

He lit a new cigarette and wandered around his apart-

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ment. He looked through quite a few of the occult books he'd collected.

The phone rang.

"Yes?"

"This is Waller's Sandal Shop."

"The magician?"

"Right, buddy. That is you, Kearny?"

"Yes. What's happening?"

"I got a flash."

"So?"

"Go to Sausalito."

"And?"

"That's all the flash told me. You and your friend get over to Sausalito. Today. Before midnight."

"You haven't got any more details?"

"Sorry. My ex-wife got in last night and I've been too unsettled to get any full scale flashes." The line went dead.

"Sausalito?" said Dan when Max called him.

"That's what Waller says."

"Hey," said Dan. "Westerland's ex-wife."

"He's got one, too?"

"His wife had a place over there. I remember going to a party with Anne there once. Before Westerland got divorced. Could Anne be there?"

"Wouldn't Mrs. Westerland complain?"

"No, she's in Europe. It was in Herb Caen and—Max! The house would be empty now. Anne must be there. And in trouble."

The house was far back from the road that ran up through the low hills of Sausalito, the town just across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco. It was a flat scattered house of redwood and glass.

Max and Dan had driven by it and parked the car. Max in the lead, they came downhill through a stretch of trees,

Please Stand By

descending toward the back of the Westerland house. It was late afternoon now and the great flat windows sparkled and went black and sparkled again as they came near. A high hedge circled the patio and when Max and Dan came close their view of the house was cut off.

"Think she's here?" Dan asked.

"We should be able to spot some signs of life," Max said. "I'm turning into a first class peeping tom. All I do is watch people's houses."

"I guess detective work's like that," said Dan. "Even the occult stuff."

"Hold it," said Max. "Listen."

"To what?"

"I heard a dog barking."

"In the house?"

"Yep."

"Means there's somebody in there."

"It means Anne's in there probably. Pretty sure that was Major Bowser."

"Hi, pals," said a high pitched voice.

"Hello," said Max, turning to face the wide bald man behind them.

"Geese Louise," the man said, pointing his police special at them, "this sure saves me a lot of work. The boss had me out looking for you all day. And just when I was giving up and coming back here with my tail between my legs—well, here you are."

"Who's your boss?"

"Him. Westerland. I'm a full time pro gunman. Hired to get you."

"You got us," said Max.

"Look, would you let me tell him I caught you over in Frisco? Makes me seem more efficient."

"We will," said Max, "if you'll let us go. Tell him we used

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karate on you. We can even break your arm to make it look good."

"No," said the bald man. "Let it pass. You guys want too many concessions. Go on inside."

Westerland was opening the refrigerator when his gunman brought Max and Dan into the kitchen.

"You brought it off, Lloyd," said Westerland, taking a popsicle from the freezer compartment.

"I studied those pictures you gave me."

"Where's Anne?" Dan asked.

Westerland squeezed the wrapper off the popsicle. "Here, We've only this minute finished a recording session. Sit down."

When the four of them were around the white wooden table Westerland said, "You, Mr. Kearny."

Max took out his pack of cigarettes and put them on the table in front of him. "Sir?"

"Your detective work will be the ruin of you."

"All I did was look through a few windows. It's more acrobatics than detection."

"Nevertheless, you're on to me. Your over protective attitude toward Miss Clemens has caused you to stumble on one the most closely guarded secrets of the entertainment industry."

"You mean Anne's being the voice of Major Bowser?"

"Exactly," said Westerland, his round cheeks caving as he sucked the popsicle. "But it's too late. Residuals and reruns."

Dan tapped the tabletop. "What's that mean?"

"What else? I've completed taping the sound track for episode 78 F Major Bowser. I have a new series in the works. Within a few months the major will be released to secondary markets. That means I don't need Anne Clemens anymore."

Dan clenched his fists. "So let her go."

"Why did you ever need her?" Max asked, looking at Westerland.

Please Stand By

"She's an unconscious talent," said Westerland, catching the last fragment of popsicle off the stick. "She first did that voice one night over two years ago. After a party I'd taken her to. She'd had too much to drink. I thought it was funny. The next day she'd forgotten about it. Couldn't even remember the voice. Instead of pressing her I used my hypnotic ability. I had a whole sketch book full of drawings of that damned dog. The voice clicked. It matched. I used it."

"And made \$100,000," said Dan.

"The writing is mine. And quite a bit of the drawing."

"And now?" said Max.

"She knows about it. She has thoughts of marrying and settling down. She asked me if \$5,000 would be a fair share of the profits from the major."

"Is that scale for 78 shows?" Max said.

"I could look it up," said Westerland. He was at the refrigerator again. "Lemon, lime, grape, watermelon. How's grape sound? Fine. Grape it is." He stood at the head of the table and unwrapped the purple popsicle. "I've come up with an alternative. I intend to eliminate all of you. Much cheaper way of settling things."

"You're kidding," said Dan.

"Animators are supposed to be lovable guys like Walt Disney," said Max.

"I'm a businessman first. I can't use Anne Clemens anymore. We'll fix her first and you two at some later date. Lloyd, put these detectives in the cellar and lock it up."

Lloyd grinned and pointed to a door beyond the stove. Max and Dan were made to go down a long flight of wooden stairs and into a room that was filled with the smell of old newspapers and unused furniture. There were small dusty windows high up around the beamed ceiling.

"Not a very tough cellar," Dan whispered to Max.

"But you won't be staying here," said Lloyd. He kept his gun aimed at them and stepped around a fallen tricycle to a

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wide oak door in the cement wall. A padlock and chain hung down from a hook on the wall. Lloyd slid the bolt and opened the door. "The wine cellar. He showed it to me this morning. No wine left, but it's homey. You'll come to like it."

He got them inside and bolted the door. The chains rattled and the padlock snapped.

Max blinked. He lit a match and looked around the cement room. It was about twelve feet high and ten feet wide.

Dan made his way to an old cobbler's bench in the corner. "Does your watch glow in the dark?" he asked as the match went out.

"It's five thirty."

"The magician was right. We're in trouble."

"I'm wondering," said Max, striking another match.

"You're wondering what that son of a bitch is going to do to Anne."

"Yes," Max said, spotting an empty wine barrel. He turned it upside down and sat on it.

"And what'll he do with us?"

Max started a cigarette from the dying match flames. "Drop gas pellets through the ceiling, fill the room with water, make the walls squeeze in."

"Westerland's trickier than that. He'll probably hypnotize us into thinking we're pheasants and then turn us loose the day the hunting season opens."

"Wonder how Lloyd knew what we looked like."

"Anne's got my picture in her purse. And one I think we all took at some beach party once."

Max leaned back against the dark wall. "This is about a middle sized room, isn't it?"

"I don't know. The only architecture course I took at school was in water color painting."

"In six hours you'll be a middle sized elephant."

Dan's bench clattered. "You think this is it?"

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"Should be. How else are we going to get out of here?"

"I smash the door like a real elephant would." He snapped his fingers. "That's great."

"You should be able to do it."

"But Max?"

"Yeah?"

"Suppose I don't change?"

"You will."

"We only have the word of an alcoholic shoemaker."

"He knew about Sausalito."

"He could be a fink."

"He's a real magician. You're proof of that."

"Max?"

"Huh?"

"Maybe Westerland hypnotized us into thinking I was an elephant."

"How could he hypnotize me? I haven't seen him for years."

"He could hypnotize you and then make you forget you were."

"Dan," said Max, "relax. After midnight if we're still in here we can think up excuses."

"How do we know he won't harm Anne before midnight?"

"We don't."

"Let's try to break out now."

Max lit a match and stood up. "I don't think these barrel staves will do it. See anything else?"

"Legs off this bench. We can unscrew them and bang the door down."

They got the wooden legs loose and taking one each began hammering at the bolt with them.

After a few minutes a voice echoed in. "Stop that ruckus."

"The hell with you," said Dan.

"Wait now," said Westerland's voice. "You can't break down the door. And even if you could Lloyd would shoot

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you. I'm sending him down to sit guard. Last night at Playland he won four Betty Boop dolls at the shooting gallery. Be rational."

"How come we can hear you?"

"I'm talking through an air vent."

"Where's Anne?" shouted Dan.

"Still in a trance. If you behave I may let her bark for you before we leave.

"You louse."

Max found Dan in the dark and caught his arm. "Take it easy." Raising his voice he said, "Westerland, how long do we stay down here?"

"Well, my ex-wife will be in Rome until next April. I hope to have a plan worked out by then. At the moment, however, I can't spare the time. I have to get ready for the party."

"What party?"

"The New Year's Eve party at the Leversons'. It's the one where Anne Clemens will drink too much."

"What?"

"She'll drink too much and get the idea she's an acrobat. She'll borrow a car and drive to the Golden Gate Bridge. While trying out her act on the top rail she'll discover she's not an acrobat at all and actually has a severe dread of heights. When I hear about it I'll still be at the Leversons' party. I'll be saddened that she was able to see so little of the New Year."

"You can't make her do that. Hypnotism doesn't work that way."

"That's what you say now, Padgett. In the morning I'll have Lloyd slip the papers under the door."

The pipe stopped talking.

Dan slammed his fist into the cement wall. "He can't do it."

"Who are the Leversons?"

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Dan was silent for a moment. "Leverson. Joe and Jackie. Isn't that the art director at BBDO? He and his wife live over here. Just up from Sally Stanford's restaurant. It could be them."

"It's a long way to midnight," said Max. "But I have a feeling we'll make it."

"We have to save Anne," said Dan, "and there doesn't seem to be anything to do but wait."

"What's the damn time, Max?"

"Six thirty."

"Must be nearly eight by now."

"Seven fifteen."

"I think I still hear them up there."

"Now?"

"Little after nine."

"Only ten? Is that watch going?"

"Yeah, it's ticking."

"Eleven yet, Max?"

"In five minutes."

"They've gone, I'm sure."

"Relax."

"Look," said Dan, when Max told him it was quarter to twelve, "I don't want to step on you if I change."

"I'll duck down on the floor by your feet. Your present feet. Then when you've changed I should be under your stomach."

"Okay. After I do you hop on my back."

At five to twelve Max sat down on the stone floor. "Happy New Year."

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Dan's feet shuffled, moved further apart. "My stomach is starting to itch."

Max ducked a little. In the darkness a darker shadow seemed to grow overhead. "Dan?"

"I did it, Max." Dan laughed. "I did it right on time."

Max edge up and climbed on top of the elephant. "I'm aboard."

"Hang on. I'm going to push the door with my head."

Max hung on and waited. The door creaked and began to give.

"Watch it, you guys!" shouted Lloyd from outside.

"Trumpet at him," said Max.

"Good idea," Dan gave a violent angry elephant roar.

"Jesus!" Lloyd said.

The door exploded out and Dan's trunk slapped Lloyd into the side of the furnace. His gun sailed into a clothes basket. Max jumped down and retrieved it.

"Go away," he said to Lloyd.

Lloyd blew his nose. "What kind of prank is this?"

"If he doesn't go," said Max, "trample him."

"Let's trample him no matter what," said Dan.

Lloyd left.

"Hell," said Dan. "How do I get up those stairs?"

"You don't," said Max, pointing. "See there, behind that stack of papers. A door. I'll see if it's open."

"Who cares. I'll push it open."

"Okay. I'll go find a phone book and look up Leversons. Meet you in the patio."

Dan trumpeted and Max ran up the narrow wooden stairs.

The elephant careened down the grassy hillside. All around now New Year's horns were sounding.

"Only two Leversons, huh?" Dan asked again.

"It's most likely the art director. He's nearest the bridge."

They came out on Bridgeway, which ran along the water.

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Dan trumpeted cars and people out of the way and Max ducked down, holding onto the big elephant ears.

They turned as the road curved and headed them for the Leverson home. "It better be this one," Dan said.

The old two story house was filled with lighted windows, the windows spotted with people. "A party sure enough," said Max.

In the long twisted driveway a motor started. "A car," said Dan, running up the gravel.

Max jumped free as Dan made himself a road block in the driveway.

Red tail lights tinted the exhaust of a small grey Jaguar convertible. Max ran to the car. Anne Clemens jerked the wheel and spun it. Max dived over the back of the car and, teetering on his stomach, jerked the ignition key off and out. Anne kept turning the wheel.

Max caught her by the shoulders, swung around off the car and pulled her up so that she was now kneeling in the driver's seat.

The girl shook her head twice, looking beyond Max.

He got the door open and helped her out. The gravel seemed to slide away from them in all directions.

"Duck," yelled Dan, still an elephant.

Max didn't turn. He dropped, pulling the girl with him.

A shot smashed a cobweb pattern across the windshield.

"You've spoiled it for sure," cried Westerland. "You and your silly damn elephant have spoiled my plan for sure."

The parking area lights were on and a circle of people was forming behind Westerland. He was standing twenty feet away from Max and Anne.

Then he fell over as Dan's trunk flipped his gun away from him.

Dan caught up the fallen animator and shook him.

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Max got Anne to her feet and held onto her. "Bring her out of this, Westerland."

"In a pig's valise."

Dan tossed him up and caught him.

"Come on."

"Since you're so belligerent," said Westerland. "Dangle me closer to her."

Max had Lloyd's gun in his coat pocket. He took it out now and pointed it up at the swinging Westerland. "No wise stuff."

Westerland snapped his fingers near Anne's pale face.

She shivered once and fell against Max. He put his arms under hers and held her.

Dan suddenly dropped Westerland and, trumpeting once at the silent guests, galloped away into the night.

As his trumpet faded a siren filled the night.

"Real detectives," said Max.

Both Anne and Westerland were out. The guests were too far away to hear him.

A bush crackled behind him and Max turned his head.

Dan, himself again, came up to them. "Would it be okay if I held Anne?"

Max carefully transferred her. "She should be fine when she comes to."

"What'll we tell the law?"

"The truth. Except for the elephant."

"How'd we get from his place here?"

"My car wouldn't start. We figured he'd tampered with it. We hailed a passing motorist who dropped us here."

"People saw the elephant."

"It escaped from a zoo."

"What zoo?"

"Look," said Max, dropping the gun back into his pocket, "don't be so practical about this. We don't have to explain it. Okay?"

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"Okay. Thanks, Max."

Max lit a cigarette.

"I changed back in only an hour. I don't think it will happen again, Max. Do you?"

"If it would make you feel any better I'll spend the night before Lincoln's Birthday with you and Anne."

"How about Ground Hog's Day?"

"How about what?" said Anne. She looked up at Dan. "Dan? What is it?"

"Nothing much. A little trouble with Westerland. I'll explain."

Max nodded at them and went up the driveway to meet the approaching police. Somewhere in the night a final New Year's horn sounded.

There are none so blind (the Bible reminds us) as those who will not see. For many years, disguised as a technical editor for a pharmaceutical house, James Blish—than whom few people see better—observed a certain facet of the Manhattan scene with camera-keen eyes. At the end of each week he donned his white crash-helmet and motorcycled back to his home in Milford, Pennsylvania, his wife and collaborator (writer Virginia Kidd), and their three children; where the filth and fury of the New York Island was replaced by clean and sylvan quietness . . . through which, however, the memory of the blind beggars of Manhattan, like so many mute mimics of Tiresias, wandered in mystery, disquiet, and reproach . . . And then the author of *THE SEEDLING STARS*, Hugo Award-winning *A CASE OF CONSCIENCE*, *THE FROZEN YEARS*, *THE OATH* (F&SF, Oct., 1960), *THE MASKS* (F&SF, Nov., 1959), and a treasure-house of other excellent stories, sat down and wrote this perceptive account of hucksters and hawkers and others who toil darkly in the long and blazing noon.

WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?

by James Blish

THE EARLY MOTT STREET MORNING was misty, but that would burn off later; it was going to be a hot day in New York. The double doors of the boarded-up shop swung inward with a grating noise, and a black-and-white tomcat bolted out of an overflowing garbage can next door and slid beneath a parked car. It was safe there: the car had been left in distress two days ago, and since then the neighborhood kids had removed three tires and the engine.

After that nothing moved for a while. At last, a preter-

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naturally clean old man, neatly dressed in very clean rags, came out of the dark chill interior of the shop with a kettle heaped with freshly fired charcoal, which he set on the sidewalk. Straightening, he took a good long look at the day, exposing his cleanliness, the sign of his reclamation from the Bowery two blocks away, to the unkind air. Then he scuffled back into the cave with a bubbly sigh; he would next see the day tomorrow morning at the same time, if it didn't rain. Behind him, the bucket of charcoal sent up petals of yellow flame, in the midst of which the briquets nestled like dragons' eggs, still unhatched.

Now emerged the hot-dog wagons, three of them, one by one, their blue-and-orange striped parasols bobbing stiffly, pushed by men in stiff caps. The men helped themselves to charcoal from the bucket, to heat the franks (all meat) and the sauerkraut (all cabbage) and the rolls (all sawdust). Behind them came the fruit pushcarts, and then two carts heaped with vegetables of the district: minute artichokes for three cents each, Italian tomatoes, eggplants in all sizes, zucchini, peppers, purple onions.

When the pushcarts were all gone the street was quiet again, but the cat stayed underneath the late-model wreck at the curb. It was waiting for the dogs, who after a while emerged with their men: scrubby yellowish animals with long foxy noses and plummy tails carried low, hitched to the men with imaginative networks of old imitation-alligator belts and baby-carriage straps. There was also one authentic German shepherd who wore an authentic rigid Seeing-Eye harness; the man he was pulling was a powerfully built Negro who was already wearing his sign:

PRAY IN YOUR OWN WAY
EVERY DAY
TAKE A PRAYER-CARD—
THEY'RE FREE

JAMES BLISH

I AM BLIND

THANK YOU

The others still carried their signs under their arms, though all were wearing their dark glasses. They paused to sniff at the day.

"Pretty good," said the man with the German shepherd. "Let's go. And don't any of you bastards be late back."

The others mumbled, and then they too fled off toward Houston Street, where the bums were already in motion toward the Volunteers of America shop, hoping to pick up a little heavy lifting to buy cigarettes with. The bums avoided the dogs very scrupulously. The dogs pulled the men west and down the sixty steps of the Broadway-Lafayette IND station to the F train, which begins there, and they all sat together in the rear car. There was almost no talking, but one of the men already had his transistor radio going, filling the car with an hysterical mixture of traffic reports and rock-and-roll.

The cat stayed under the late-model wreck; it was now time for the children to burst out of the church and charge toward the parochial school across the street, screaming and pummelling each other with their prayer-books.

Another clean old man took in the empty charcoal bucket and the doors closed.

The dogs pulled the men out of the F train at the 47th-50th Street station on Sixth Avenue, which is the Rockefeller Center stop; they emerged, however, at the 47th Street end, which is almost squarely in the middle of Manhattan's diamond mart. Here they got out their cups, each of which contained a quarter to shake, and hung on their signs; then they moved singly, at five-minute intervals, one block north, and then slowly east.

The signs were all metal, hung at belt level, front and back, and all were black with greenish-yellow lettering. The

Who's In Charge Here?

calligraphy was also the same: curlicue capitals, like the upper case of that type font known as Hobo.

The messages, however, were varied, though they had obvious similarities in style. The one following the man with the German shepherd and the prayer-cards, for instance, said:

GOD BLESS YOU
YOU CAN SEE
AND I CAN'T
THANK YOU

Slowly they deployed along 48th Street toward Fifth Avenue, which was already teeming with people, though it was only 10 A.M. At the Fifth Avenue end, which is marked by Black, Starr and Gorham, a phenomenally expensive purveyor of such luxuries as one-fork-of-a-kind sterling, an old blind woman in the uniform of the Lighthouse sat behind a table on which was a tambourine, playing a guitar and whining out a hymn. A dog lay at her feet. Only a few feet away, still in front of one of Black, Starr and Gorham's show windows, was a young man with a dog, standing with a guitar, singing rock-and-roll at the top of his voice. Two blocks up Fifth Avenue, at the terrace of Rockefeller Center, two women and a man in Salvation Army uniforms played hymns on three trumpets in close harmony (a change from yesterday, when that stand had been occupied only by an Army officer with a baritone sax-horn which he could barely play), but they didn't matter—the men weren't working Rockefeller Center any more; having already done for that area.

The dogs ignored the old woman and the rock-and-roller as well, and so did the men. They never sang. The man with the transistor radio turned it up a little when he worked that end of the block.

JAMES BLISH

The street filled still further. As it got on toward a blistering noon, the travellers that counted came out: advertising agency account men ("—and when the client's sales forecast was under ours by fifteen per cent they went and cut the budget on us, and now poor old Jim's got his yacht posted for sale in the men's room"), the middle echelons of editors from important weekly news magazines (with the latest dirty verses about their publishers), literary agents playing musical chairs ("—went to S&S and took Zuck Stamler with him with twenty-five per cent of the contract and an option clause bound in purest brass") and an occasional bewildered opinion-maker from the trade press ("—a buck eighty-five for *spaghetti?*"). None of these ever dropped a coin in the cups, but the dogs were not disturbed; they walked their men in the heat.

I MAY SEE AGAIN
WITH A TRANSPLANT EYE
GOD BLESS YOU

The travellers settled in the St. Germain and the Three G's, except for the trade press, which took refuge in the American Bar. Secretaries stopped outside the restaurants, looked at the menus, looked at each other indignantly and swung up Fifth toward Stouffer's where they would be charged just as much. The match-players said "Viva-lal" and "Law of averages!" and "That's a good call," and damned the Administration. The girl account exec had one Martini more and told the man from the client something he had suspected for five months and was not glad to hear; the agency would not be glad to hear it either, but it never would. Rogers and Whitehead, Authors Representatives (they had never been able to decide where the apostrophe should go) had shad roe and bacon and decided to drop all their Western authors, of whom they had three. The president

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and editor-in-chief of the largest magazine enterprise in the world decided to run for president after all.

The men listened and shook their cups and walked their dogs. The transistor radio reported that the news was worse today.

At 3 P.M. the temperature was 92 degrees, the humidity 40 percent, the T.H.I. 80. The German shepherd pulled his man back toward Sixth. The other dogs followed. At the token booth the cups were checked: there was enough money to get home on. Along 48th, the restaurants emptied, leaving behind a thick miasma of smoke, tomato sauce and disastrous decisions. Tomorrow they would do for 47th Street, where the Public Relations types gathered.

The cave on Mott Street was relatively cool. The men took off their signs and sat down. The radio said something about Khrushchev, something about Cuba, and something about beer.

"Not a bad day," the big man said finally. "Lots of jangle. Did you hear that guy with the three kids decide to quit?"

The man with the radio reported: "Goin' to rain tomorrow."

"It is?" the big man said. "Hell, that's no good." He thought for a while, and then, getting deliberately to his feet, he crossed the dark chill room and kicked the German shepherd. "Who's in charge here?" The dog looked back sullenly. Satisfied, the man went back and sat down.

"Nah," he said. "It won't rain."

The suddenness with which we found ourselves whirled from virtual obscurity to our present world-famous position, delightful though it otherwise was, has prevented us from finding out by press-time just who Joseph Dickinson is. Who he is, we mean, besides being the author of this fresh and funny story about a rocketry expert, an astro-ape named Beans, an externally voluptuous Ice Maiden with a Ph.D., a General whose name may well be Blimp, a singular note-in-a-bottle; and other matters connected with a Cape closely resembling Canaveral (where it would not surprise us one bit to learn that toddlers really do learn to count by repeating Five, Four, Three, Two, One, Oh,—!).

THREE FOR THE STARS

by Joseph Dickinson

A WARM AND PLEASANT EVENING. A million stars blinked in the Florida sky (verified by the Chamber of Commerce). A million insects chirruped (denied by the Chamber).

Charles Crumpacker did not see the stars. The bar had huge windows for that specific purpose, and he avoided them. He did hear the insects, with pleasure. They reminded him of long ago nights, and a brass bed in the attic room of an old and solid white house. In the mild summer darkness there had been crickets, and the inquiring notes of a tiny owl which had nested in the eaves. Uncomplicated days, of basic pains and joys. One could weep, on a quiet night, for no reason other than quick, unidentified sorrow.

Now, Crumpacker considered, his life was no more complicated than ten million parts of a space ship. And tomorrow, if each of the ten million bits of his life functioned perfectly

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in the split second allotted it, the ship would leave the ground. The positive performance of ten million more ifs and, several months and thirty-five million miles later, it would perhaps land upon the planet Mars. A hatch would open. An astro-ape named Beans, clad in a tiny space suit, would step out to scamper about for a quarter of an hour. Summoned, then, by a raucous buzzer in the helmet of his suit, Beans would re-enter the ship, clutching his little bucket of specimens. And so, several months later, a space capsule would float by parachute gently into the sea, to bob about until picked up by cutter or copter.

"If," muttered Charles Crumpacker. He repeated the word several times, and wondered why he had not followed his boyhood dreams of crime.

As it were, due to the Crumpacker method of re-entry thermal reduction, the Crumpacker theory of alternate propulsion, the Crumpacker-Barstow studies on high speed vibration, the—oh, theories and studied out the old gazoo—the United States hoped on the following day to eliminate the gap in the race for space. Alternate propulsion was only a theory (although tests had been impressive), hence the ape. Crumpacker was glad it was to be an ape. Yet he had become so fond of the affectionate little beast in the past year that he felt its death in the chill of space might yet leave him with the guilt of murder.

At the thought of Beans, Crumpacker grinned. If the press knew the real reason for that name . . .

The Press. Crumpacker sighed. They would swarm tomorrow. There was widespread interest in the project, for the knowledge was common that this was to be a shot to end shots. The date, in fact, was known. The destination of the rocket was believed to be the moon, however, and nothing had been done to dispel the rumor. Success or failure, the greater goal was bound to provide a better press.

Only months before, the Russians had sent two monkeys

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and a mouse to the moon. It had been intended that the moon be circled, and the animals return. But the ship had passed the moon and was now God knew where in space, its occupants lonesomely dead. The SPCA had been mad as hell.

Crumpacker had a sudden horrible vision of monkey skeletons, the ghostly crew of a wandering space ship. He forced his complete concentration on the cocktail napkin. The bar's name was there, in red, and he traced the letters with his fingers. There were too many bars called The Satellite, or The Space Room, or Astro Room, even the Launching Pad. The name of this one was Pete's. Crumpacker was glad.

"Like the old maid's nipple," said Crumpacker. "It's not much, but it's sumptin."

The bartender looked up quizzically. "How's that?"

"My mother used to say that," said Crumpacker. "She was an old maid."

"Yeah?" said the bartender uneasily.

"Yeah," said Crumpacker, and pushed his glass forward. "Fill 'er up."

As he raised his glass, Crumpacker watched his hand. It shook. The ice tinkled wildly against the glass. Tired, thought Crumpacker, and knew how true it was. From center to skin, he was tired. His right eye had developed an embarrassing twitch. He had the perpetual numb and nauseous ache of fatigue. He sipped bourbon now, and wished for cold pitchers of milk and the freshly ironed sheets of an attic bed.

The elbow in his side was persistent, and finally penetrated the numbness. "I ast if you're one of them scientists," said the owner of the elbow.

Crumpacker blinked away his weariness. The man was red-faced and wiry, his hands gnarled and knobby. Crumpacker nodded. "Thought I'd seen you out there," the man continued. "Ust to work out there myself. Diggin' holes and pourin' cement and stuff like that. Seen you come out one

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day and look over one of them skyrockets that never got off the ground. Blowed all t'hell."

Crumpacker, a little smashed, asked: "Ever sleep in an attic?" Then he said never mind to the hole digger's grunt.

"You one of them who's gonna shoot at the moon? When?"

"Tomorrow, maybe."

"Gonna shoot a man up there?"

Crumpacker shook his head, looked furtively about, whispered: "Keep a secret?" The cement pourer nodded eagerly. "Mice," hissed Crumpacker.

"Mice?"

"A million mice. They'll eat the moon so the Russians can't have it."

The man's eyes widened. "Eat the—." He caught on, momentarily considered anger, then chuckled. "Pretty good," he conceded. Then he sobered. "Course, you ain't gonna hit the moon."

God Almighty, thought Crumpacker. "Maybe not," he admitted.

"Can't hit it," said the man. Crumpacker shrugged. "Wanna know why?" Crumpacker made a noise. "I'll tell ya why." Another noise from Crumpacker. "The moon's a reflection of the sun, ain't it?"

"Yep," said Crumpacker.

"Well, you know what a reflection is, don't ya? You bein' a scientist and all."

"I have a general idea," said Crumpacker.

"It ain't nothin', that's what. A reflection ain't nothin'." He tapped Crumpacker's lapel, and spoke deliberately: "And how—can ya hit—nuthin'?" And he winked knowingly, secretly.

Crumpacker said: "But—." Then he closed his mouth and gazed for the first time out of the window at the stars. There was an odd relief in such smug logic.

He sat until midnight and drank bourbon and thought of

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the world being flat and on the back of a turtle. As he was lurching out, the bartender extended a special invitation for Monday. There was to be a grand reopening under a new name: The Blast-Off. Crumpacker swore at him.

2.

The General, from a doorway ambush, took Crumpacker by surprise, as a good general should. "Do it today, eh, Crumpacker!" The General's voice was a machine gun staccato. "Give her hell today! Show Ivan, by God! Show him he doesn't own space! That's where we'll fight the next one, Crumpacker! Space, by God, there's the ticket! No room down here anymore. Not like the old days! I remember Anzio, by God—."

"I remember Babylon," said Crumpacker.

"Eh?"

"Never mind."

The General, muttering, turned in at a lavatory. No room. mused Crumpacker. No room for war. Never thought we'd run out of room for that.

Is that the Reason? Crumpacker wondered. Or is it to assure the re-election of the present administration? Or are we pioneers and space our last frontier? He laughed. Hell, I haven't even seen Niagara Falls. Or is it as a minister told me once—"for the greater glory of God"?

The Reason—must even the search for that be so complex? If I am ever asked, Crumpacker decided, I shall say that I, for one, am doing it just for the hell of it. He shook his head to dismiss his thoughts, was immediately sorry, and vowed to drink a better brand of bourbon.

In the final minutes of the countdown. Crumpacker's hangover had numbed into a faint giddiness. He was glad that things were going well. Although he grudgingly admitted that it probably wouldn't make a damn if things did foul

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up, with the sternly energetic Greta Barstow pottering about as though the telemetering receiving station were about to hatch.

Crumpacker winced into a metal folding chair. He narrowed his eyes, unblurred them on Greta Barstow. Remarkable woman. Strange woman. Neck up—uncosmeticed, tight haired, bespectacled scientist. Neck down—even a laboratory smock could not camouflage the voluptuous bust, circling in and down and around to a dandy bottom.

"Dandy bottom," mused Charles Crumpacker.

Greta Barstow turned to him her cold face of science. "I beg your pardon?"

"Perfectly all right," said Crumpacker. "Ever sleep in an attic?"

"Dr. Crumpacker," said Greta, and her voice was crackling ice, "if you can emerge from your disgusting fog, I suggest—"

"Cert'ny," said Crumpacker.

What turns your gears, Dr. Barstow? Crumpacker wondered. What makes you go? Do you have a million parts like that damned steel cigar out there? Do you have printed circuits instead of veins? A telemeter for a heart? There's something obscene about that body, Barstow. Like breasts upon an IBM machine.

He had been associated with the Great Barstow for three years. Three years of that great brain clicking, those great breasts bouncing. Never a smile, never a flirtatious feminine word or glance. Their association had produced great things, Their theory on the cosmic radiation of the Van Allen belts, their studies on high speed vibration, thermal re-entry, weightlessness . . . Yet sometimes—fleetingly—it occurred to Crumpacker that he would enjoy violating Dr. Greta Barstow in the back seat of a Model T on the edge of a moonswept golf course.

"Play golf?" asked Crumpacker, and was ignored.

He stooped to scowl at the subcarrier discriminator. It

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scowled back. How do you do it, you sunna bitch? How do you reach out and catch the heartbeat of a monkey, catch it out of the air?

I know your guts, thought Crumpacker. I know the theory and the facts. Facts, God, facts. The fact is that you thrust out your ghostly little fingers and pluck a heart beat out of space. Facts, God, facts. We can build a brain and make it work. We know why it should work and how we want it to work, and it works. Why does it?

How do we know, he considered, that like the good Doctor F., we are not creating monsters? Suppose, instead of a heartbeat, we are radioed back the faintly remembered tomtoms of a jungle tribe, a sound which has beaten in the pulse of generations of apes since once, long ago, an ancestor munched a bit of fruit and vaguely worried over the sounds made by a tribe not far removed from his.

Crumpacker smiled sadly, remembering his goodbye to Beans. The ape had clutched him affectionately about the legs. What must you think of us? the scientist wondered. We've subjected you to conditions, humiliations you were never scheduled for. You submitted humbly, and repaid us with love. You learned. You know what to do—you will, at least, react—when the hatch opens and you step out, a tiny, pathetic, unwondering creature on a dead planet. And all the time, your heart and lungs and liver, every throb and drip and sensation will spark through the power pack upon your back and leap into the ship back through nothing to us.

I wonder if you'll follow your heartbeat back, Beans, old boy? More likely you'll follow the Russian monks into eternal space. Then how long before by sheer averages you're pulled into the atmosphere of an unknown planet? Will some alien child wish on your glow as you flame into cinders and sprinkle down upon another world? Or will you plunge into the dust of a dead and airless moon, belching and breaking wind contentedly to the last? Hell, we'll probably push the

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boom button before you're a hundred feet off the ground and spread you all over the launch area. I like you, Beans. I'd hate to see you smeared.

But if—just if—you get into space, return or not—ah, Beans, what will you see? What will you feel? We've protected you against the things we know. Heat and cold and weightlessness and acceleration. You have a shield of hydrogen to protect you from the cosmic rays of the Van Allen belts. But what of the things we don't know? What belts and clouds and rays that our wildest imaginings can never reach—dear God, we're the first cave man staring into the first fire, afraid of what it means, yet extending our fingers to its heat.

"I don't want to go," Crumpacker announced suddenly.

"Go where?" asked Greta Barstow.

"To Mars."

"Fortunately," sighed Barstow, "you're not. I doubt—."

"I want to stay here," Crumpacker continued. "I want to raise children and go to church and sit on porches and read books by Horatio Alger and drink beer."

Greta Barstow's eyes glittered. "I warn you, Doctor, that I intend to complain about your drinking to General Moreland."

"I never drink to General Moreland," said Crumpacker haughtily. He turned back to the subcarrier discriminator. He shook his head, winced, and bent closer. "By God," he said happily. "It's busted."

Greta Barstow stepped quickly to his side. "What?"

"It's busted," Crumpacker repeated. "Not working. The whole thing's off for today. We can all go home and knit our space suits."

Greta examined the machine. She straightened, and sneered at Crumpacker. "Really, Crumpacker," she said. "This can be fixed in a matter of seconds."

"Rats," muttered Crumpacker. He brightened slightly. "Fix it with a hairpin, Barstow," he directed.

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"Don't be absurd. The simple replacement of a dual triode regulator. An elementary—."

Crumpacker took the front of Barstow's smock in his hand. "Goddamn you, Barstow," he said sadly. "Goddamn you and your dual triode regulator. You couldn't use a hairpin, could you?"

Greta Barstow pulled one way, Charles Crumpacker pulled the other, taking with him a sizeable chunk of smock as well as some undergarments. "No," he murmured.

Several technicians had leaped the moment cloth began to tear. When they seized Crumpacker, he was staring at the clothing he held in his hand, and still murmuring "No."

Greta Barstow was trying to cover her bosom with her hands. It was not difficult. "Not you, Barstow," said Crumpacker. "Not you." He began to weep softly. "Why, Barstow? Your damned symmetrical scientific mind? Here, gentlemen," he addressed the technicians, "souvenir nose cones."

"Give me those, snarled Greta Barstow.

They led Crumpacker away, and there was the sober silence that follows a scene. The General broke it. "All right, men," he said. "Let's get on with it. Let's do it for Charlie Crumpacker." He lowered his head. "Another martyr to the space war," he concluded impressively, and thought smugly that he had always known that Crumpacker was a nut.

The ten million parts functioned. They clicked and whirled where clicks and whirs were planned. They kissed and separated. Circuits were made and broken. Regulators regulated, relays relayed, cogs cogged. The steel cigar was lighted and with smoke and fire hoisted itself from its ash and Beans went away to Mars.

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3.

Each day intensified the interest on Earth in the small ape floating through huge space. Poems were written about him. He inspired at least three books and countless short stories. There were seven songs written. One—"Monkey Talk on Mars"—was composed of unintelligible sounds and sold two million records.

There were few minds, in the weeks that followed, that did not sometimes try to join the little ape in the black and sparkling space. And no ape ever before inspired so many people, individually and in congregation, to pray, as the Ruler of Space was deluged with pleas for the success of the project. Only small children and Crumpacker, in a rest home, prayed for the safe return of the ape.

Most important to science, but almost unnoticed by the public, were the countless reports documenting the functioning of the ape's body. Each beat of Beans's heart, each impulse of his brain, filtered back through space for analysis. Jacozzi, of the National Research Institute, sparked a major controversy by claiming to detect, after five weeks, a definite change in the pattern of Beans's brainwaves. The controversy was still raging when, at six weeks, all contact with the space ship was lost.

The American scientists, of course, maintained that even if the space ship were lost, the achievement was an unparalleled success. The Russians extended their sincerest sympathies, but mild congratulation, maintaining that nothing had been learned, after all, that their two monkeys and a mouse had not provided months earlier. The American military flatly stated that we were now ahead of the Russians in everything. The Russians sneered and sent Gagarin to the moon. The SPCA was mad as hell, and introduced a bill

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into Congress which would prohibit the use of anything other than a human in future space experiments. That organization insisted, furthermore, that the destroy button be instantly pushed, so that somewhere in space Beans would be mercifully spared a long dying.

It was pointed out to these humanitarians that the explosive packet was no longer with the ship, that its intent had not been the mercykilling of a monkey, but to prevent an erratic rocket from lunging into Miami. Once the ship had escaped the earth, the packet had left it in the final stage. Anyway, said the scientists, everyone seemed in a big hurry to fail. The ship was entirely automatic, after all. There was no reason to believe that the ship would not perform its mission and return as planned, with Beans still fat and healthy.

So for six weeks more, the scientists remained at their receivers, hoping, but failing, to re-establish contact. And then, one day, the world watched the sky.

The capsule came floating down by parachute into the sea, scarcely a hundred miles from the calculated spot. Radar spotted it miles high, and the cutter practically reached out and caught it. The scientists were cursing happily, completely losing their aplomb. The General did some mental word rattling, and muttered: "Show Ivan, by God!" Ramirez, a technician, barked his knuckles as he undid Beans from his metal home. As many hands reached to open the hatch, one of the scientists murmured reverently: "It's been on Mars. My God, and came back here." The hatch was opened. The moment's silence seemed long.

A gaunt man named Donnelly chuckled uncertainly. "He—he looks a little the worse for wear."

Crumpacker was there, his reward for gentle madness, and he touched Donnelly's shoulder reassuringly. "He's been a long way, George."

The ape blinked up at them, squinting into the sun. His

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fur seemed sparser, and splotched with white. His pinched monkey face was even thinner than before. "Beans," said Crumpacker softly. "How was it, boy?" The ape blinked rapidly a few times. Then his white teeth appeared, very slightly, in a grin. He clutched Crumpacker's hand. "Frightening," said the ape clearly. "Damned frightening." And his head lolled, senselessly.

"I don't believe it," murmured Donnelly.

The shocked silence continued after the ape had been lifted gently from the capsule and carried inside. Finally the General cleared his throat and laughed uneasily. "Damned beast sounded almost human. Guttural, of course. Just grunts and—."

"I heard him," said Ramirez. "He said—."

"Don't be a jackass!"

"His—his fur is almost white," muttered Ramirez, "and his eyes—."

"Shut up!" the General shouted. He looked at the stunned faces, changed his tone. "Men, men," he soothed. "Men, we're all overwrought. We've been under a terrible strain, working against terrible odds—."

"We're all martyrs to the goddamn space war," sighed Donnelly.

The General scowled, but let it pass, for the tension was broken. "Let's see what our ape—or whatever the hell it was—brought back," said Donnelly.

Ramirez lifted the receptacle gingerly from the capsule and placed it on the deck. The men crowded forward. Donnelly elbowed them back. "Easy, fellows," he said. "You'll all get a look."

"From another world," whispered one of the men. They gazed reverently into the container. There were mostly rocks, not unlike those on Earth, except for a strange rust-colored moss which covered several, and the bottom of the container was spread with a thin layer of purple dust. But in the middle, nestled in among the rocks, was a bottle. It was wide

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mouthed, eight or nine inches long, and of an almost translucent glass, which seemed to vary from purple to blue, like glass that has been long in the desert sun. Inside the bottle was a small scroll.

The men, murmuring, moved back in awe. "Is—is it a joke?" breathed Crumpacker.

"Could—could it have been in the ship when we launched?" asked Donnelly. "Did any of you men . . . ?" He had only to look at their faces to know the answer. He touched the bottle lightly, drew back his hand.

"Take it out," whispered Ramirez.

"Mars is a dead planet," said Crumpacker.

"Dead, hell!" said the General. "Take it out, Donnelly," he ordered. "Dead, hell! An ally!"

Donnelly took the bottle cautiously in his hand, gazed at it as it changed from purple to blue to purple in the sun. He tilted it, and the scroll dropped into his hand. "A dead planet," he said. He closed his eyes tightly, exhaled in a sobbing gasp. "My God," he said, his voice shaking. "Another civilization. What door are we about to open? What secrets are on the other side?"

"Open it," hissed Ramirez.

Slowly, slowly, Donnelly placed the bottle upon the deck. With quivering hands, he began to unroll the scroll.

"Easy, for God's sake!" cried the General.

They stared, fascinated, as Donnelly spread it between his hands. The writing on the scroll was in blue, a delicate script.

"We've communicated, by God!" shouted the General exultantly. "Wait'll Ivan hears about this, by God! If we can only decode it!"

"It—it's in Spanish," said Ramirez hesitantly.

The General snorted. "Don't be a jackass!"

"I can read it," Ramirez insisted. "It's funny Spanish, but that's what it is."

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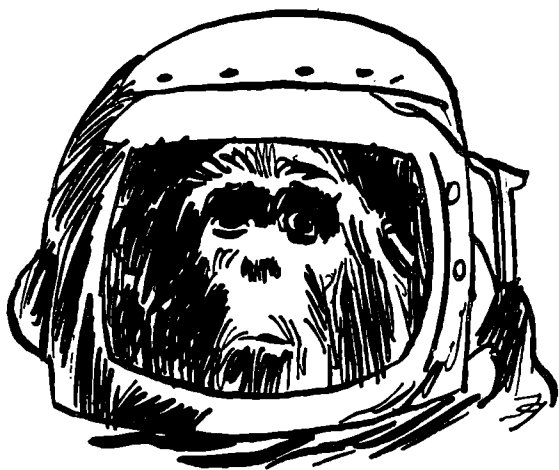
"Ramirez," said Crumpacker eagerly, "read it. What does it say?"

Ramirez squinted uncertainly at the scroll. "Well," he said uneasily.

"Hah!" said the General. "Just as I—."

Ramirez tightened his jaw. "It says—by God, it says: 'No cream today. Leave three quarts milk, and a kiss for me.' " He giggled hysterically. "It's signed 'Mary!'"

The kneeling men were silent, watching the paper as a breeze fluttered it in Donnelly's hand. At last Crumpacker began to chuckle, very softly. Oblivious to the watching men, he rose to his feet and blew a kiss at the sky.



Vance Aandahl is now nineteen, a sophomore English literature major at the University of Colorado, and plans to teach college English himself, while continuing to write. His **THE ZARL MAN** has appeared in *New World Writing* #18 (Lippincott), and **ADAM FROST** was scheduled for this April's *Playboy*. He is a basketball- and chess-player as well, and a cartoonist: "At the ripe age of twelve I nearly ran away from home to seek employment in the Disney studios." His other interests include debating, philosophy, folk songs, and literature of all sorts. With each story of Vance Aandahl's that we see, we grow increasingly amazed and impressed. Only new readers will need to be told that he is the author of **THE MAN ON THE BEACH** (F&SF, Jan., 1961) and **COGI DROVE HIS CAR THROUGH HELL** (F&SF, Aug., 1961). Rarely has such talent been matched with such youth, surely the Walt Whitman quotation-title provides each of us with the opportunity of saying to Mr. Aandahl—as Emerson did to Whitman on the publication of **LEAVES OF GRASS**—"I greet you at the beginning of a great career," to agree that "*this sunbeam were no illusion, but . . . a sober certainty.*" So many thoughts of Whitman's poem does this story evoke, that we were moved to read it once more, and in that great and beautiful dirge, that lovely lament, line after line seemed to presage elements of this striking (but of course utterly different) story. The ever-returning spring, the shades of night, the cruel hands that hold powerless the helpless soul, the long black trail, and—ever again—the strong perfumed lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green . . .

WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOMED

by Vance Aandahl

STANDING KNEEDEEP IN PRAIRIE GRASS, Robert Smith lifted his hands to the blueness of the sky, as though to touch the clouds or catch the wind, and knew that he was the last man to leave the city. Purple mountains stood to the west, and rivers ran down the piney slopes into the prairie, bringing life to the soil where they wandered. Life was everywhere, in the kaleidoscope of flowers that grew at his feet, in the angry murmur of summer locusts, in the hot silent gliding of three hawks that soared overhead. But Robert Smith knew that he was alone.

For many days, after It had found him, he had been cajoled and tempted and frightened by the inescapable buzz of its messages. He had run from the city, which was an empty place, and as he had run, It's maddening words had followed him far into the country before finally fading away. He did not know where It was. He did not know what It was. He only knew that It wanted him, just as It had wanted the others. He was alone, and he was frightened.

In the city, he had lived with three others. Each day they had hunted together, and they had been happy. But It had come and conquered his three friends; and they had gone, one by one, walking slowly away, their eyes as bright and blind as coins. He did not know where they had gone, but he knew that they were dead. It had fed upon them.

Robert Smith lowered his arms and gazed in despair toward the mountains. Already his stomach was cold with hunger. He could not live on the prairie, but in the foot-

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hills he might find fruit. With the ironic smile of one who senses death but hardly cares, he began to shuffle through the vast field of waving grass.

He was a tall man, strong and leathery, with broad shoulders and lean limbs. He wore tattered rags, stiff with sun-baked grim and sweat. His hair and beard mingled into a black cascade of filth across his chest and shoulders. Only his green eyes seemed to be alive.

He walked for hours, watching the sun pass overhead, drop toward the mountain, and paint the plains with their dark shadows. The sensuous glow of dusk filled the sky, and with it came the eddying night winds of summer. White clouds drifted near from the west and hung over the peaks, where they were suffused with lavender and gold by the dying sun. As darkness came, the wind grew cold and fast, the clouds tumbled in swollen rage across the sky, and the earth hovered in a silent moment of fear.

Suddenly, the night was very black. Robert Smith moved on, seeking some protection from the coming storm. Before he could find shelter, lightning severed the sky, the clouds opened, and he was lost in a grey torrent of rain. It pounded at his shoulders and stung his face; stunned by the impact, he staggered numbly to one side, sank to his hands and knees, and shook his head stupidly. Through the throbbing ache of his mind, passing as easily as a knife through cheese, came a strange but familiar buzzing. He rolled onto his back and clutched at his temples. But the buzzing only grew louder . . .

. . . Come to me. Where I am, it does not rain. Where I am, there is only happiness. Come to me. I am strong and good. Come to me. Come to me . . .

"No!" screamed Robert Smith, writhing in the mud. "I don't want to die!"

Slowly, the words faded, drifting away as casually and easily as they had come, leaving him exhausted and trem-

When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed

bling with terror. He forced himself to his feet and wandered blindly through the storm until, with a windy moan, it passed on to the east, leaving him alone. He stepped forward once and fell to the ground.

When Robert Smith slept, he dreamed . . .

He was a child again. Spring had come, and the whole world was dewy with life. He ran down an alley, kicking one tin can after another, stopping to pet a laughing collie, climbing onto an ashpit and scanning the neighborhood for the pure joy of seeing. Then he came to the place where the lilacs grew. It was someone's yard—he did not know whose—and it was full of lilacs, like a jungle, like the greenhouse he had once visited, so dense and green that all he had to do was stand quietly and no one would know he was there. He crawled under the foliage, burrowing through leaves and dirt until he came to the trunk of the largest bush; once there, he rolled onto his back and gazed solemnly at the vast field of green leaves that hung six inches above his nose. Through this field crept a score of tiny dust motes, each one illuminated by a thin ray from the sun, each one dotting his face with a freckle of light.

For a long time, in his dream, he did not move. It was enough to be alive, to feel the soil with his hands, to see the greenness of the leaves, to smell the perfume of the flowers. It was enough to watch a spider move from leaf to leaf, lifting one leg with care, and then another, and then leaping to another leaf. It was enough to breathe the sweet air, to watch his chest rising and falling, pulsing with the slow laconic confidence of life.

There was dew on the lilacs, and he found himself looking into one droplet that hung like a pendant from the very tip of a petal. It was faintly lavender, yet clear as glass; it shone with a strange light. Gazing at it, he saw himself mirrored in its gentle curve, smiling with the wide-eyed curiosity of any child. He was content; he was happy to be himself.

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The past and the future were nothing, and only he and the lavender mirror that hung over his face really mattered.

Suddenly, the leaves blackened and curled and drifted away; the flower turned to ash and fell into his eyes. Suddenly, he was dashing across a burning lawn, running among bonfire trees, hiding his eyes from the great white ball of flame that had engulfed the sky. Suddenly, he was only a man, running and screaming, trying now to forget, trying to find water, trying to escape, trying to escape from the flames and the strange, terrible buzzing that now came with the flames—the hideous buzzing that shrieked its message again and again . . .

. . . Come to me. You are mine, and I am yours. I am good. I can help you. Come to me. Come to me . . .

Robert Smith awoke, shouting wildly and covering his face with trembling hands. For a long while, then, he lay quietly, peering through his fingers at the night sky above. Then he arose, and marched on toward the mountains.

After two or three hours, he reached the first swell of the foothills, climbed it slowly, and descended into the little valley between it and the next. Here he found a stream and three cottonwoods. He washed himself in the cold water, scraping the mud from his clothes, and lay down in a grassy pocket between two of the trees. Like a child, he watched the breeze moving through the foliage overhead, and then fell asleep.

When he awoke, the faint warmth of sunlight was on his face. For a moment, he did not open his eyes, but only lay quietly, savoring the last luxurious moments of dreamless sleep. Then, when he parted his eyelids with the drowsy languor of one who does not want to see everything at once, the first thing that came into view was a milky flower of light—the sun, rising into the cloudy morning sky, half-hidden behind the solid wall of white that stretched from the far eastern horizon to the mountains. The next thing he

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saw was a hawk, soaring high in the sky, black as night against clouds. The third thing he saw was a face.

She was standing ten feet away, one hand touching the rutted trunk of a cottonwood—standing as slender as a reed, even in the heavy deer-hide clothes that she wore. Her face was slender too, like a thin oval, and circled with an aura of coiling black hair. Her eyes were large and darkly hued, like thunderheads; they seemed to glow with a purple light. Her nose was as gentle and perfect as her hands, but her mouth was strangely twisted by a single scar—a white scar that curled across her sun-browned cheek, cut through both lips, and furrowed to a halt at the tip of her chin. It was as though some great sculptor had fashioned her, and then, dissatisfied at having not attained complete perfection, had struck the beautiful face with his chisel.

Robert Smith turned his head and gazed at her. He had not seen a woman for three years, and he had never seen one like this. His fingers moved in the grass.

She touched her throat with one hand, seeing that he was awake. Suddenly, she ran from the tree to the top of the nearest hill, some hundred feet away. There she stood, once more like a statue, returning his unbroken gaze.

Robert Smith was neither good nor evil, for he lived in a world where morals had died with civilization; rising from the ground, he was faced with no ethical dilemma, only with a tactical problem. Could he catch the girl? Did she have friends nearby? Heedless of the possible danger, he began to ascend the slope of the hill, whistling through his nose and watching the girl with strangely sensitive eyes.

She let him come close, then laughed and ran down the far side of the hill, weaving through a field of red boulders at its base. Too excited to think, Robert Smith ran after her, his arms and legs jerking against the wind, his face locked in a tragicomic mask of desire. Through the boulder field he ran, dodging and stumbling, falling once to his knees,

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rising again, falling again, falling through the grass and into a pit, where he collapsed like a fallen puppet. He knew instantly what had happened. Clawing upright, he jumped for the edge of the pit; but it was out of reach. He fell to his knees, sobbing, ashamed of being trapped, afraid to die. In the midst of his anguish, a gentle buzzing was born. It lapped at his mind like the tide, growing with each pulse, surging forward with more power, tearing at the dykes of sanity . . .

. . . Come to me. You will not suffer with me. You can rest, you can sleep with me. Where I am there is no trap, no death. Come to me. Come to me . . .

Convulsed with horror, he shrieked. Then, slowly at first, but finally with a horrid rapidity, he began to writhe, moving rhythmically from one side of the pit to the other, floundering back and forth like an earthworm caught in the sun. At last he stopped. Only his fingers moved, twitching among the leaves, burrowing into the soil, locking and unlocking with terrible frequency.

Overhead, gazing down at him from one lip of the pit, four men shuddered at the sight, lowered their spears, and touched each other's foreheads. Kneeling on the other side, the girl with the scar trembled once and began to cry . . .

When Robert Smith awoke, his hands and feet were bound and he was lying on his back in the darkness of a hut. The only opening was a small airhole in the roof, which dropped a slanting cone of sunlight across his torso, firing the fine hairs of his chest with a reddish-gold luster. For a long while, he gazed at the airhole; it seemed to be a blue moon in the night sky of the hut, casting its magic beams across the earth, his flesh. Somehow, it reminded him of a lilac bush, a place of the long past, a place where one could lie on one's back and look upward, just as he now did.

Then the door opened, and through it hulked a great beast of a man. Silhouetted against the sunlight, his body

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was like the trunk of an oak tree; but his head was no larger than a grapefruit. He moved forward, dragging one useless, shriveled leg behind him, balancing the weight of his body on his left foot and the knuckles of his right hand. With his left hand, he pulled curiously at Robert Smith's beard. He himself was without hair—his sun-browned skin was as smooth as wax.

Robert Smith had heard of such things. Certain people of the city, who had ventured into the countryside, were wont to whisper of fearful creatures, hairless and scarred, their flesh burnt with strange colors—creatures who walked like men and sang their hunting songs to the skies. He had never believed such tales, nor had he cared for the men who told them—bright eyed youngsters who thought that words were worth food. But now he saw, with growing fear, that the stories were true.

The intruder grabbed him by an ankle and laboriously began to pull his bound body toward the door, puffing through waxen nostrils, squinting both eyes, and shaking his soft lips with each jerk. Within a few seconds, he had pulled Robert Smith into the sunlight.

Lifting his head, Robert Smith saw that he was in a village of some sort: about twenty huts, all identical, were arranged in a circle, each one facing into the center. In the compound which they delineated, there was a scattering of crude looms, tanning racks, and stone ovens, around which clustered women and children. At the very center of the compound stood three stone pillars, circled by a hedge of boulders. Flowers grew within this hedge, and words had been carefully engraved in each of the three stone pillars. Robert Smith could not read them, so he let his head drop back in the dust and looked longingly at the clear blue sky above.

Presently, he heard two voices arise from the village murmur and become distinct. Glancing sideways, he saw that

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two men had joined his jailer. Both wore buckskin clothes; both, unlike the jailer, had hair, which they wore in long braids. One of them was tall as the trees and thin as the wind, with a black spot, the size of a man's eye, which seemed to be branded on his forehead. The other was of a normal height, also thin—but not as lean and hungry as the other, and graced with the most marvelous purple eyes—eyes like those of the girls with the scar.

"Is he a nomad?" asked the tall man, pursing his lips and touching the captive's ribs with his toe.

"He wears a beard," said the other. "He's not a nomad."

"Then what is he?"

They seemed perplexed. Crouching by his side, they studied Robert Smith's features. Disdainfully, he rolled his head over and watched the women cooking.

"His hands seem soft for a nomad's," said the tall man.

"My daughter has said that his soul is possessed by the Devil."

"What does she mean?"

"When they caught him, he screamed with agony. He fainted."

When they had finished studying his features, the two men arose and turned to the jailer.

"Nomad. Is he one of your people?"

The jailer glanced slyly at Robert Smith. He rubbed his wrists and licked his lips, but did not speak.

"Do you know?" asked the tall man.

The nomad shook his head, neither in negation nor affirmation, but rather with a quivering motion, as though it were a melon on a stalk.

The man with purple eyes laughed. "The nomad is brainless. Let us ask the man himself."

"Why? He would only lie."

Robert Smith continued to stare at the women cooking. Without moving, he said, "I am from the city."

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For a moment, there was silence.

"The ruined city?"

"Yes."

"Why did you come?" The man with purple eyes frowned savagely. "To rape our women?"

"I was driven out."

"Who did it?"

Robert Smith rolled his head over and smiled laconically at his captors. "I don't know. Something."

The two men looked at each other in solemn curiosity.

"He's mad," said the tall one. "What do we do?"

"I don't know," said the other. "We should probably ask the Rev."

"That means a long wait."

"Yes, Joseph, but we mustn't act rashly."

Once again, the tall man turned to Robert Smith.

"Do you know the Faith? Is the Savior's Word known in the city?"

During all this while, Robert Smith had been trying to seem calm and disdainful. In the city, only cool pride could save a captured man from death. In the thirty years that he had lived there, Robert Smith, with great showings of hauteur, had saved himself from torture three times. But now, a bound captive in a strange village, he was suddenly assailed with doubts. He did not understand these men. Their words were nonsense.

"Come," said the man with purple eyes, "attest to your beliefs."

"Are you a Christian?" asked the tall man, smiling gently now.

Robert Smith, bewildered by these seemingly kind yet meaningless questions, could only shrug his shoulders and smile back.

"Yes," said the purple eyes. "We had best wait for the Rev."

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"What do you think? Is he truly ignorant? Or is he trying to hide his animal sins behind . . . behind a shield of innocence?" The tall man smiled, proud of his words.

"The Rev shall know."

Together, they departed. As soon as they had gone, the hulking jailer arose from the dust, where he had been playing with a handful of dried grass. Grunting ferociously, he dragged Robert Smith back into the hut and locked the door.

For many hours he lay quietly, somethings pondering the strange questions that he had been asked, sometimes thoughtlessly watching the blue moon of the airhole above, sometimes sleeping fitfully. His stomach was cold and knotted with hunger, but he knew that they would not starve him. When the moon had darkened to cobalt, and the far wall of the hut was lined with cracks and chinks of smoldering red sunset, his jailer entered, carrying a bowl of gruel. With him came the girl, almost pale with fear. Motioning for the nomad to leave, she took the bowl and lifted it to Robert Smith's lips. When he was through, he rolled over on his side and tried to ignore her; presently, though, she spoke.

"What is your name?"

"Robert Smith."

"They say that you come from the city."

He grunted.

"Please talk to me."

He rolled over. "Why?"

"I thought that you would ask me why I came."

"Why did you come?" He spoke listlessly, aping her words without emotion.

"I came to help you. You tried to hurt me, so now I must help you."

"What?" He was curious.

"That is the way. I must teach you."

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"Do you really want to help me?" He spoke cautiously.

"Yes".

"Would you free me?"

"Oh, no. Then you would only try to hurt me again."

"No," he said, licking his lips. "No, not at all. I just want to escape."

"I shall help you in another way. I shall teach you about God."

"Who's he?"

"He is your Father."

"Oh."

"He is my Father too."

Robert Smith signed and lay back in the dust.

"Please," she said, "Listen to the words of my people." She arose, went to the door, and called for the nomad. He came and pulled Robert Smith to the open door of the hut. The girl sat next to him.

All the men of the village, some thirty of them, had gathered around the little wall that circled the three stone pillars. Each one fell to his knees and crossed his hands on the wall. For a while, they kneeled there, doing nothing. Then a middle-aged man, rather nondescript in the fading light of dusk, appeared from behind one of the huts. Dressed in long brown robes, he walked to the wall, stepped solemnly over it, and raised his right hand to his forehead. Then he kneeled before each of the three pillars, mumbling strange words to himself.

"Isn't it beautiful," said the girl, touching her forehead as she spoke.

"I don't understand," said Robert Smith. "What are they doing?"

"Watch."

The man in brown robes had turned. Facing the men of the village, he touched his forehead; they arose together,

and each man touched the forehead of the one to his right. Then they began to speak, chanting in unison.

"I believe in the great holy Father, Who has made me and the flowers.

"And I believe in the great holy Father's holy Son, Joseph Christ, Who was born of a flower, Who suffered the pain of the fires for two hundred years, Who died in the Greatest Fire, Who returned to his great holy Father in the blue skies, where He may watch me live among the flowers.

"And I believe in the holy Flower, the holy Flowery Church of Christianity, the forgiveness of sins, the transcendence of the body, and the holy eternal life."

Then they dropped to their knees and bowed their heads—all but the man in the brown robes; he stooped and picked a handful of flowers. Going to the wall, he walked from man to man, placing a petal in the hair of each, mumbling quietly to himself. When he was through, he took three flowers and placed one at the base of each pillar. Then he turned and touched his forehead; each man arose and touched the forehead of the one to his right. Once again they began to chant.

"I believe in the great holy Father . . ."

"They've already done that," said Robert Smith, perplexed by the ceremony.

"Quiet," whispered the girl. "They must do it three times."

"Why?" he asked. "What does it mean?"

"It means everything," she murmured. "Those words are the most beautiful words men have ever known. Good men have spoken them for thousands of years, even before the great fires, and they are far older than that."

Robert Smith licked his lips. "But what do they mean? Why haven't I heard them before? Who is this father and . . ."

"The great holy Father and the holy Son and the holy Flower—they are God." Her purple eyes shone in the last

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rays of the sun. "Watch and listen. That is all you need to do."

In the morning, after eating another bowl of gruel, Robert Smith was visited again by the two men who had questioned him. With them came the girl, still shy and frightened.

"Robert Smith," said the tall man, "did you think carefully last night?"

He grunted noncommittally. During the night, his bonds had cut into the flesh of wrists and ankles. He was cold and stiff with pain.

"You told us that you know nothing of God. But they say that you are possessed by the Devil. How can that be?"

"I don't know."

"They say that you rolled with agony in the pit—that your mouth foamed with madness and your eyes burned with the light of the great fires."

For a long while, Robert Smith stared at his captors. When he finally spoke, his voice trembled.

"Who is the devil? What is he like?"

"He is the source of all man's sin, the destroyer of life."

"Does he talk . . . talk to men?"

"He tempts all men."

"Does he tell them to come to him?"

"Yes, yes, of course. The Devil is the great tempter."

"If men go to the devil, does he hurt them? Does he kill them?"

"Yes. You are right." The tall man spoke with somber certainty. "The Devil will destroy you."

"But how can one fight the devil?"

Suddenly, the girl pushed forward. "You must go to God instead! If only you have faith, you will be saved!"

"But, but who is this god?"

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"He is the great holy Father and the holy Son and the holy Flower. He is Salvation."

"Can he save me from the devil?"

"Yes. He can save all men, even you."

"Then I must go to him."

"Yes," cried the girl. "You must come into the Light of God!"

"Just a minute," said the man with the purple eyes, who seemed to be the girl's father. "We can't do anything until the Rev returns."

"But father," cried the girl. "Can't you see? He wants to save himself! Can't we teach him to worship with us?"

"Yes," said the tall man. "I think that we must take some sort of action. The Rev won't return for at least a week; and we certainly won't hurt this man by leading him to God."

"Perhaps not," said the girl's father. "But remember, he tried to rape my child. Perhaps he's just another nomad. It would be a great sin to allow a nomad to worship God."

"I only want him to know," said the girl. "We won't allow him to worship with us, or to walk freely through the village. But we can teach him about God! Besides . . ."

"Quiet," said the tall man. He turned to Robert Smith. "Are you truly possessed by the Devil?"

Robert Smith swallowed hard. He didn't understand these people, nor did he like them. But they seemed to know about It; they seemed to think that they could save him.

"Yes," he said. "The devil talks to me; and in the city, I have seen all of my friends, destroyed by the devil."

"Oh!" the girl cried out. All three of them touched their foreheads.

"Do you truly wish to renounce the Devil?"

"Yes, yes, of course."

"And do you wish to embrace Christianity instead? Do you wish to enter the kingdom of God?"

For a moment, Robert Smith hesitated. Perhaps god was

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no better than devil; perhaps this was some kind of trap. Then he remembered the look he had seen in the eyes of his friends—men who had gone quietly to It. He knew that he had no choice.

"Yes, I wish to do those things."

"Well," said the tall man, "he seems sincere enough. But he knows nothing. It will be like teaching a child."

"Yes," said the girl, her purple eyes flashing with excitement. "I know. Like a child."

The days that followed were full of monotony and frustration for Robert Smith. After living in the ruined city all his life, he was fascinated by the beauty of the countryside; he longed to run across the grassy meadows, to climb the piney mountain slopes, to hunt with the men of the village. But he was kept under a close guard. During the nights, they bound him with ropes and locked him in the hut. When morning came, he was brought food. Then the nomad untied his feet and led him to the top of a hill, a few hundred feet from the village, where he had to sit quietly and listen to the incessant chatter of the gir. She told him nothing. She spoke only in riddles.

"Has the Devil talked to you?" she would ask, eyes full of anxiety.

"No," he would answer, gazing thoughtlessly across the rolling green fields. "Not since the time in the pit."

She would laugh then, and clap her hands.

For one entire day, they talked about God.

"He is your Father," she said. "He is my Father, and your Father, and all men's Father. He is the Father of the world, for He made everything when there was nothing. And He has given us the flowers. They are our comfort and protection."

"How could anyone do all that?"

"God is perfect. He knows everything. He is everywhere. He can do anything."

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"But why can't we see him?"

"You can," she cried. "You must! If you only open your heart, you will see all His divine goodness and mercy!"

But Robert Smith could not see God. Sitting on the hill, gazing across the land or into the sky, he would try with all his strength to see the divine Father. He could see the green summer grass, undulating in countless waves toward the horizon; he could see a river, wandering in aimless beauty, eddying into little ponds and lakes, where trees grew and birds sang; he could see the colors of the great mountains, whose purple peaks, even under the summer sun, were covered with a fleet of far distant clouds. But he could not see God, no matter how hard he tried.

They spent many days on the hill, talking about Joseph Christ and the holy Flower, speaking of sin (which he did not understand), or merely exchanging information about each other's childhood. One day, he told her about the lilacs.

"Why, that's wonderful!" she cried. "And it proves something, too: even you, Robert, who never knew about God—even you could see Him when you were an innocent child!"

"No. I just liked flowers. Lilacs. I just liked to lay down under the lilacs and forget about everything."

"But it made you happy?"

"Yes."

"Then you must have known, somewhere in your heart, that God had given you those lilacs."

He smiled at her. The scar that crossed her mouth no longer bothered him, as it once had. And her eyes were like the lilacs, only darker—like lilacs after sunset.

"Perhaps," he said, "I did."

She laughed gently. "I know where lilac bushes grow. Down by the river."

"Really?"

"Yes. But they aren't in bloom now."

"Can we go? May I see them?"

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She shook her head. "No, Robert. The Rev would not approve."

"Who is the Rev?"

Suddenly, she became very grave. "He is God's leader among men. He teaches us the songs of God; he helps us find true faith. He is a very wise and very good man."

"Why isn't he in the village?"

"He and ten other men went to the north, a month ago, to look for nomads and new kinds of flowers."

Robert Smith wrinkled his brow.

"We use the nomads for slaves. But the new flowers—the new flowers will make our poor lives happier."

They sat in silence. Then she glanced excitedly at him.

"When the Rev comes back, I'm sure he'll let you worship with us! Soon you'll be one of the village!"

"Will I be free to go?"

"Yes. But . . . but you won't want to go." She looked sadly away, toward the river. Then she leaned back and rested against the slope of the hill. "Maybe we can go to the lilac bushes—some time soon. Would you like that?"

"Yes," he said, smiling.

The next day, when they went once more to the hill, she began whispering to the nomad. At first he seemed confused, but then he nodded his melon head, sat down in the grass, and began to hunt for pebbles.

"Come," she said, turning to Robert Smith. "We can go to the lilacs. The nomad won't tell anyone."

For the first time in weeks, Robert Smith felt free. He stood up and looked at her; then he laughed gently and smiled. Together, they ran down the far slope of the hill until they came to the little stream that wandered there; together, they ran along its bank, sometimes stopping to gasp for breath, sometimes slipping in the grass. Laughing at each other, she in her buckskin jacket, he with his hands tied behind his back, they raced around a curve in the course of

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the stream to a green wall—a wall of lilacs, so thick and high that it hid the mountains, so wide that it seemed to be the ramparts of an entire fortress.

"It's a forest," he cried. "It's a forest of lilacs!"

"Yes," she said, giggling at his childish joy. "Do you like them?"

"Yes. But where are the flowers?"

"They aren't in bloom. They soon will be, though. You can see the buds."

Going closer, he saw a thousand points of soft purple appear in the wall of green; where the light of the sun fell on them, they glowed like tiny eyes. He ran forward and eagerly sniffed at them.

"Untie my hands," he cried.

For a moment, the girl hesitated.

"Please!"

"First you must promise," she said, "not to run away."

"I promise," he cried, turning his back to her so that she could untie his hands.

"No," she said, smiling gently. "You must promise with a flower."

"Yes," he said, "with a flower."

She went to the riverbank and found a tiny yellow flower there, which she picked carefully and brought to him.

"You must hold it in your mouth when you promise, and then you must swallow it." She put it on his tongue.

His mind had already soared into the past, into the green world of lilacs and alleys and laughing collies, into the world of his childhood. He was a boy again, racing up and down the sidewalk with his friends, wrestling with them in the sweet green grass. Something was in his mouth. He could see his mother, holding a plateful of doughnuts in her hands, and for a moment he thought that a doughnut was in his mouth. But it was smaller than a doughnut; it did not taste like a doughnut. It seemed almost tasteless, and it felt flimsy and flat on

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his tongue . . . suddenly, for only a brief moment, he seemed to know where he was and what was in his mouth. The place was dark, and all he could see were distant candle-lights, his own folded hands, and the face of a man in robes . . . in robes . . . in robes he was dressed, and when had Robert Smith seen a man dressed in robes? Once long ago and once now and once a week ago . . .

"Do you promise?"

His reverie shattered and dissolved. He was standing by a stream with a girl, and in his mouth was a flower.

"Yes," he murmured, "I promise. I promise not to run away . . ." Then he swallowed the flower, quickly, so as not to taste it. She stepped behind him and untied the ropes that held his hands. When they were free, he held them in front of him and flexed his wrists.

"Come," she said. She led him into the forest of lilacs. He followed her slowly, only half conscious, only half aware of the world he was in. His mind went struggling back into the past, trying to reconstruct the momentary image that he had seen, trying to grasp something that now seemed terribly important.

They sat down in a clearing. She picked a leaf and brushed it against her lips; but he did nothing.

"Why are you so quiet?" she asked, her eyes suddenly widening with fear.

"I think," he said slowly, "that I have . . . have worshiped God before—when I was very young . . ."

"When you were young? In the city?"

"Yes . . ."

"Oh! But . . . but how do you know?"

"I remembered . . . something . . . when you made me promise with the flower."

She did not speak, but there was a question in her gentle smile.

"It was inside; and it was dark. There was a man in

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robes. But . . . but instead of flowers there were candles . . .”

“Candles! But candles burn! Candles mean flame!”

“Yes, but . . .”

“And flame means the Great Fire! You weren’t worshipping God! You were . . . you were worshipping the Devil! You were damning yourself to the eternal flame! You . . .”

“Quiet!” he shouted at her, angry for the first time. “I don’t care what you think! I don’t care what you say! It was . . . it was good. The candles were good.”

“Stop talking like a nomad! You act . . . you act as though you knew about religion! I’m teaching you!” Her hands trembled. She leaned forward and touched his forehead; then she touched hers. “You must be patient,” she said. “You must believe what I tell you.”

“Why?” he asked. “Because you tell it? Or because it’s right? Perhaps nothing is right.” He rolled back in the leaves and pushed at his temples. “Why, why, why? . . .”

Suddenly the buzzing came to him, entering his mind, as it always did, when he was in anguish, heightening that anguish to madness, twisting him with torment . . .

. . . Come to me. There are no “whys” where I am. Where I am, there is only rest and peace. Come to me. Come to me . . .

He writhed on the ground until It left him. When he opened his eyes, the girl was crying.

“It is the Devil! You’re nothing but a creature of the Devil!”

He leaped to his feet and grabbed her. She struggled to escape, but his arms pulled her against him, and his mouth closed on hers. Then, with the strength of fear, she shoved him away and disappeared into the bushes.

“Come back!” he cried. “Come back! I don’t want to hurt you! I don’t, I don’t . . .”

He rushed after her, ripping his clothes on the branches that seemed to hold him back. Then he burst into the

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sunlight, and saw her running along the stream, already far ahead of him.

"Come back!" he cried. "I love you! I don't want to hurt you!"

He ran after her, along the stream and up the hill, where he found her huddling behind the broad bole of the nomad's body.

"Kill him," she whispered. "Kill him . . ."

As she rushed down the hill, toward the village, the nomad clumsily lifted his spear and giggled at Robert Smith. There was a moment of hesitation, and then the spear hissed by his ear; he darted past the nomad and sprinted down the hill. For only a moment he paused, and then he rushed into the compound, where the girl was standing proudly beside her father. In a moment, Robert Smith was pinned to the ground by three young men of the village.

Above his face hovered a spear. Drowning in sudden fear, he could only faintly hear the voice of the girl's father:

"Robert Smith! You have sinned again! You have turned upon the innocent child who tried to help you! The Rev has returned, and he shall be your judge."

They lifted him to his feet. Trembling, he looked into the great, shaggy, leonine face of the man they called the Rev—a man who stood nearly seven feet tall, a man whose eyes gazed down at Robert Smith with frightening confidence.

"You have sinned at the very feet of God," he said, murmuring softly through two craggy lips. "You must be made to repent for the evil in your soul. You must be made to suffer seven times the suffering of death . . ."

"No!" cried Robert Smith, dropping to his knees and groveling shamelessly at the feet of the huge man. "I didn't hurt her! I didn't want to . . ."

As his eyes misted with fear, he suddenly felt It touch his mind once again, pause for a moment, and enter with a buzzing fury . . .

VANCE AANDAH

. . . Come to me. You must come to me. All of you must come to me, for I am God. I am God. Come to me . . .

When it had faded away, he lifted his weeping face from the dust and looked at his captors. They stood like statues, captives themselves, neither moving nor speaking. Their eyes were strangely dead, like the eyes of the blind, like strange gray stones . . .

"You're dead!" he screamed. "It killed you, It killed you!"

"Quiet!" thundered the Rev, breaking their silence with a majestic toss of his great head. "It is our God. He has called us." He paused, lifting his face to the blue skies above. "Come, my people, come with me to God." He turned, and as he turned, the people of the village turned with him. Slowly, his open hand left aloft, he began walking toward the east; with him, like an army of the dead, went the people of the village.

"Stop!" cried Robert Smith, staring in horror. "It wants to kill you! Stop!"

They did not hear him. They were lost in Its power.

"Help me," cried Robert Smith, turning to the half dozen nomads who stood watching him. "Help me save them!"

One of the nomads giggled and lifted his spear. "Kill," said another.

Robert Smith wheeled and ran. Behind him, the nomads squealed and wheezed with excitement; he could hear them lumbering in pursuit. Rocks and a spear sailed over his head. With each step, he widened the distance between himself and his sluggish pursuers, but before he could reach the army of villagers, he felt his left shoulder burst open with sudden, flaming pain. He stumbled once, but kept running until he reached the people of the village.

Behind him, the nomads had ceased their pursuit. Looking back, he saw one of them lift a spear from the dust—a spear whose crude stone point glistened red in the sun.

Robert Smith staggered on. Vaguely, he realized that two

When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed

of the men were helping him. Then, as darkness flooded the gray spinning haze before his eyes, he felt them lift his sagging body and bear it aloft . . .

He awoke to the stars. They swam through the night sky with each pulsing wave of pain, dancing the mad, chaotic dance of his own death. Then a silhouette blotted them out, and he saw that the girl was kneeling over him, and the girl who loved him as a child and hated him as a man, gazing into his face with eyes that no longer glowed purple, eyes that now were dead.

"Robert Smith," she said, "we have come to the Gates of Heaven. When the sun rises, we shall go to God. Are you ready? Have you repented?" She spoke with toneless disinterest, like some kind of machine.

"Help me," he whispered. "I'm dying . . ."

"God will help you," she said, "if you repent." Then she was gone, and all he could see were the stars spinning through the night sky.

When next he awoke, the sun was hot on his face, and he was alone. The others had left him to die. Somehow, the pain was gone; but half of his body was numb and senseless. Struggling to his knees, he saw that he was on a hill, not far from the ruined city. Twenty feet away two great boulders formed the portal of a cave—a cave made by the hand of man, a cave whose depths emitted a strange light. Instantly, he knew that he had come to the gates of heaven—to the den of the creature that tormented him; and as soon as he knew, It came easily into his mind. He had no strength to struggle, no strength to battle the power of Its buzzing commands . . .

. . . Now you must come to me. Now you must join me

. . .

It took control of his body, making him stumble forward, forcing him into the cave, directing him down a long, winding passage, through door after door of dull lead, each of

VANCE AANDAHL

which It opened before him and closed behind him, pushing him relentlessly on, into the depths of Its lair. He finally came to the largest door, twenty feet in height, that slid open with the slow grandeur of death, revealing, as it opened, a room that had no visible limits, a room that stretched as far as he could see.

Even in his stupor, he knew what It was. It was not what he might have expected, neither the creature of his nightmares nor the devil of the Christians. It was something less mysterious, yet something far more terrible—It was man, yet more than man . . .

Without thinking, without caring, Robert Smith walked forward. It had prepared a chair for him, and there he sat. He could see thousands of others, each in his own chair, each gray and shriveled, each half hidden in the spiderweb of wires and feeding tubes that stretched from chair to chair. All of their minds were joined, welded together by the same ingenious science that had nearly destroyed mankind with its flaming bombs. Each man was a neuron, and each wire was a synapse . . .

Robert Smith could faintly feel a thousand tiny needles pierce his forehead and drill into his skull. But before It consumed him, before It digested him for Its own inscrutable purposes, he had time to scream one word . . .

The comely Karen Anderson, wife to Poul and mother to Astrid, has just turned thirty and doesn't care who knows it. Her first professional appearance was here, with *In Memoriam*: Henry Kuttner (May, 1958), although she had been active in SF fandom for four years prior to that; and plays poker regularly with these two great men, Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas, the original editors of *F&SF*. Her first appearance here in prose tells a little-known chapter in the curious history of *The Sphinx*—that curious beast, part man and part lion; sometimes winged and sometimes not; and sometimes given to the asking of riddles. The habitat of *The Sphinx* was Greece and Egypt. The habitat of the Andersons is Orinda, California.

LANDSCAPE WITH SPHINXES

by Karen Anderson

THE PRIDE WAS A SMALL ONE, even as sphinxes go. An arrogant black mane blew back over Arctanax's shoulders and his beard fluttered against his chest. Ahead and a little below soared Murrhona and Selissa, carrying the remnants of the morning's kill. It was time the cubs were weaned.

The valley lifted smooth and broad from the river, then leaped suddenly in sandstone cliffs where the shadows seemed more solid than the thorny, gray-green scrub. A shimmer of heat ran along wind-scoured edges.

In the tawny rocks about the eyrie, the cubs played at stalk-the-unicorn. They were big-eyed, dappled, and only half fledged. Taph, the boy, crept stealthily up a sun-hot slab, peeking around it from time to time to be sure that the moly blossom still nodded on the other side. He reached the top and shifted his feet excitedly. That moly was about to

KAREN ANDERSON

be a dead unicorn. The tip of his tail twitched at the thought.

His sister Fiantha forgot the blossom at once. Pounce! and his tail was caught between her paws; he rolled back down on top of her, all claws out. They scuffled across baked clay to the edge of a thornbush and backed apart.

Taph was about to attack again when he saw the grown-ups dip down from above. He leaped across Fiantha and bounced toward the cave mouth. She came a jump and a half behind. They couldn't kiss Murrhona and Selissa because of the meat in their jaws, so they kissed Father twice instead.

"Easy, therel Easy!" Arctanax coughed, but he was grinning. "Get back into the cave, the two of you. How often do I have to tell you to stay in the cave?" The cubs laughed and bounced inside.

Selissa dropped the meat she had been carrying and settled down to wash her face, but Murrhona called her cubs over to eat. She watched critically as they experimented with their milk-teeth on this unfamiliar substance.

"Hold it down with your paw, Fiantha," she directed. "If you just tug at it, it'll follow you all over the floor. Like Taph—No, Taph, use your side teeth. They're the biggest and sharpest." And so the lesson went. After a while both cubs got tired of the game and nuzzled for milk.

Selissa licked her right paw carefully and polished the bridge of her broad nose. There was still a trace of blood smell; she licked and polished again.

"You can't rush them," she said rather smugly. "I remember *my* first litter. Time and again I thought they'd learned a taste for meat, but even when they could kill for themselves—only conies and such, but their own kill—they still came back to suck."

"Oh, I remember how put out you were when you realized you still had to hold quiet for nursing," Murrhona smiled lazily. She licked down a tuft behind Fiantha's ear and re-

Landscape with Sphinxes

settled her wings. "But I really hate to see them grow up. They're so cute with their little spots."

Selissa shrugged and polished the bridge of her nose again for good measure. If you wanted to call them *cute*, with their wings all pinfeathers and down shedding everywhere—I Well, yes, she had to admit they were, in a way. She licked her paw once more, meditatively, put her chin down on it and dozed off.

An hour later Fiantha woke up. Everybody was asleep. She stretched her wings, rolled onto her back, and reached her paws as far as she could. The sun outside was dazzling. She rubbed the back of her head against the cool sandstone floor and closed her eyes, intending to go back to sleep, but her left wing itched. When she licked at it, the itch kept moving around, and bits of down came loose on her tongue.

She rolled over on her stomach, spat out the fluff, and licked again. There—*that* did it!

Fully awake now, she noticed the tip of Arctanax's tail and pounced.

"Scram," he muttered without really waking. She pounced again just as the tail-tip flicked out of reach. Once more and she had it, chewing joyously.

"Scram, I said!" he repeated with a cuff in her general direction. She went on chewing, and added a few kicks. Arctanax rolled over and bumped into Selissa, who jumped and gave Fiantha a swat in case she needed it. Fiantha mewed with surprise. Murrhona sprang up, brushing Taph aside; he woke too and made a dash for Selissa's twitching tail.

"Can't a person get *any* rest around here?" grumbled Arctanax. He heaved himself up and walked a few feet away from his by now well-tangled family.

"They're just playful," Murrhona murmured.

"If this is play, I'd hate to see a fight," said Selissa under

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her breath. She patted Taph away and he tumbled enthusiastically into a chewing match with Fiantha.

"Go to sleep, children," Murrhona suggested, stretching out again. "It's much too hot for games."

Fiantha rolled obediently away from Taph, and found a good place to curl up, but she wasn't the least bit sleepy. She leaned her chin on a stone and looked out over the valley. Down there, in the brown-roasted grass, something moved toward a low stony ridge.

There were several of them, and they didn't walk like waterbuck or unicorn; it was a queer, bobbing gait. They came slowly up the ridge and out of the grass. Now she could see them better. They had heads like sphinxes, but with skimpy little manes, and no wings at all; and—and—

"Father, *look!*" she squeaked in amazement. "What kind of animal is that?"

He got up to see. "I don't know," he replied. "Never saw anything like it in all my born days. But then, we've had a lot of queer creatures wandering in since the glaciers melted."

"Is it game?" asked Taph.

"Might be," Arctanax said. "But I don't know any game that moves around in the middle of the day like that. It isn't natural."

"And the funny way they walk, too," added Fiantha.

"If they're silly enough to walk around like that at mid-day," Arctanax said as he padded back to an extra-cool corner of the cave, "I'm not surprised they go on two legs."

Joanna Russ sees in her story's theme (battered and squeezed by legions of hack-writers) no mere exercise in gothick terrors or eldritch horrors, but the "promise of endless love and endless time." What is no less remarkable is that she makes us see it, too. True in atmosphere as well as detail in respect to period (the 1880s) and place (San Francisco), this story of the killing sunlight and the living night, of Emily and Charlotte and Martin and William, Japanese lanterns and wolfsbane, and of passion burning cold as ice, is beautifully written: we predict it will become a classic of its kind.

MY DEAR EMILY

by Joanna Russ

San Francisco, 188—

I am so looking forward to seeing my dear Emily at last, now she is grown, a woman, although I'm sure I will hardly recognize her. She must not be proud (as if she could be!) but will remember her friends, I know, and have patience with her dear Will who cannot help but remember the girl she was, and the sweet influence she had in her old home. I talk to your father about you every day, dear, and he longs to see you as I do. Think! a learned lady in our circle! But I know you have not changed . . .

EMILY CAME HOME FROM SCHOOL in April with her bosom friend Charlotte. They had loved each other in school, but they didn't speak much on the train. While Emily read Mr. Emerson's poems, Charlotte examined the scenery through opera-glasses. She expressed her wish to see "savages."

JOANNA RUSS

"That's foolish," says Emily promptly.

"If we were carried off," says Charlotte, "I don't think you would notice it in time to disapprove."

"That's very foolish," says Emily, touching her round lace collar with one hand. She looks up from Mr. Emerson to stare Charlotte out of countenance, properly, morally, and matter-of-course young lady. It has always been her style.

"The New England look," Charlotte snaps resentfully. She makes her opera-glasses slap shut.

"I should like to be carried off," she proposes; "but then I don't have an engagement to look forward to. A delicate affair."

"You mustn't make fun," says Emily. Mr. Emerson drops into her lap. She stares unseeing at Charlotte's opera-glasses.

"Why do they close?" she asks helplessly.

"I beg your pardon?" blankly, from Charlotte.

"Nothing. You're much nicer than I am," says Emily.

"Look," urges Charlotte kindly, pressing the toy into her friend's hand.

"For savages?"

Charlotte nods, Emily pushes the spring that will open the little machine, and a moment later drops them into her lap where they fall on Mr. Emerson. There is a cut across one of her fingers and a blue pinch darkening the other.

"They hurt me," she says without expression, and as Charlotte takes the glasses up quickly, Emily looks with curious sad passivity at the blood from her little wound, which has bled an incongruous passionate drop on Mr. Emerson's cloth-bound poems. To her friend's surprise (and her own, too) she begins to cry, heavily, silently, and totally without reason.

He wakes up slowly, mistily, dizzily, with a vague memory of having fallen asleep on plush. He is intensely miserable, bound down to his bed with hoops of steel, and the memory

My Dear Emily

adds nausea to his misery, solidifying ticklishly around his bare hands and the back of his neck as he drifts towards wakefulness. His stomach turns over with the dry brushy filthiness of it. With the caution of the chronically ill, he opens his eyelids, careful not to move, careful even to keep from focusing his gaze until—he thinks to himself—his bed stops holding him with the force of Hell and this intense miserable sickness goes down, settles . . . Darkness. No breath. A glimmer of light, a stone wall. He thinks: *I'm dead and buried, dead and buried, dead and—* With infinite care he attempts to breathe, sure that this time it will be easy; he'll be patient, discreet, sensible, he won't do it all at once—

He gags. Spasmodically, he gulps, cries out, and gags again, springing convulsively to his knees and throwing himself over the low wall by his bed, laboring as if he were breathing sand. He starts to sweat. His heartbeat comes back, then pulse, then seeing, hearing, swallowing . . . High in the wall a window glimmers, a star is out, the sky is pale evening blue. Trembling with nausea, he rises to his feet, sways a little in the gloom, then puts out one arm and steadies himself against the stone wall. He sees the window, sees the door ahead of him. In his tearing eyes the star suddenly blazes and lengthens like a knife; his hands over his face, longing for life and strength to come back, the overwhelming flow of force that will crest at sunrise, leaving him raging at the world and ready to kill anyone, utterly proud and contemptuous, driven to sleep as the last resort of a balked assassin. But it's difficult to stand, difficult to breathe: *I wish I were dead and buried, dead and buried, dead and buried— But there!* he whispers to himself like a charm, *There, it's going, it's going away.* He smiles slyly round at his companionable, merciful stone walls. With an involuntarily silent, gliding gait he moves toward the door, opens the iron gate, and goes outside. Life is coming back. The trees

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are black against the sky, which yet holds some light; far away in the West lie the radiant memories of a vanished sun. An always vanished sun.

"Alive!" he cries, in triumph. It is—as usual—his first word of the day.

Dear Emily, sweet Emily, met Martin Guevara three days after she arrived home. She had been shown the plants in the garden and the house plants in stands and had praised them; she had been shown the sun-pictures and had praised *them*; she had fingered antimacassars, promised to knit, exclaimed at gaslights, and passed two evenings at home, doing nothing. Then in the hall that led to the pantry Sweet Will had taken her hand and she had dropped her eyes because you were supposed to and that was her style. Charlotte (who slept in the same room as her friend) embraced her at bedtime, wept over the handtaking, and then Emily said to her dear, dear friend (without thinking):

"Sweet William."

Charlotte laughed.

"It's not a joke!"

"It's so funny."

"I love Will dearly." She wondered if God would strike her dead for a hypocrite. Charlotte was looking at her oddly, and smiling.

"You mustn't be full of levity," said Emily, peeved. It was then that Sweet William came in and told them of tomorrow's garden-party, which was to be composed of her father's congregation. They were lucky, he said, to have acquaintances of such position and character. Charlotte slipped out on purpose, and Will, seeing they were alone, attempted to take Emily's hand again.

"Leave me alone!" Emily said angrily. He stared.

"I said leave me alone!"

And she gave him such a look of angry pride that, in fact, he did.

My Dear Emily

Emily sees Guevara across the parlor by the abominable cherry-red sofa, talking animatedly and carelessly. In repose he is slight, undistinguished, and plain, but no one will ever see him in repose; Emily realizes this. His strategy is never to rest, to bewilder, he would (she thinks) slap you if only to confuse you, and when he can't he's always out of the way and attacking, making one look ridiculous. She knows nobody and is bored; she starts for the door to the garden.

At the door his hand closes over her wrist; he has somehow gotten there ahead of her.

"The lady of the house," he says.

"I'm back from school."

"And you've learned—?"

"Let me go, please."

"Never." He drops her hand and stands in the doorway. She says:

"I want to go outside."

"Never."

"I'll call my father."

"Do." She tries and can't talk; I wouldn't *bother*, she thinks to herself, loftily. She goes out into the garden with him. Under the trees his plainness vanishes like smoke.

"You want lemonade," he says.

"I'm not going to talk to you," she responds. "I'll talk to Will. Yes! I'll make him—"

"In trouble," says Mr. Guevara, returning silently with lemonade in a glass cup.

"No thank you."

"She wants to get away," says Martin Guevara. "I know."

"If I had your trick of walking like a cat," she says, "I could get out of anything."

"I *can* get out of anything," says the gentleman, handing Emily her punch, "out of an engagement, a difficulty. I *can* even get *you* out of anything."

JOANNA RUSS

"I loathe you," whispers Emily suddenly. "You walk like a cat. You're ugly."

"Not out here," he remarks.

"Who has to be afraid of lights?" cries Emily energetically. He stands away from the paper lanterns strung between the trees, handsome, comfortable and collected, watching Emily's cut-glass cup shake in her hand.

"I can't move," she says miserably.

"Try." She takes a step towards him. "See; you can."

"But I wanted to go *away!*" With sudden hysteria she flings the lemonade (cup and all) into his face, but he is no longer there.

"What are you doing at a church supper, you hypocrite!" she shouts tearfully at the vacancy.

Sweet William has to lead her in to bed.

"You thought better of it," remarks Martin, head framed in an evening window, sounds of footsteps outside, ladies' heels clicking in the streets.

"I don't know you," she says miserably, "I just don't." He takes her light shawl, a pattern in India cashmere.

"That will come," he says, smiling. He sits again, takes her hand, and squeezes the skin on the wrist.

"Let me go, please?" she says like a child.

"I don't know."

"You talk like the smart young gentlemen at Andover; they were all fools."

"Perhaps you overawed them." He leans forward and puts his hand around the back of her neck for a moment. "Come on, dear."

"What are you talking about!" Emily cries.

"San Francisco is a lovely city. I had ancestors here three hundred years ago."

"Don't think that because I came here—"

My Dear Emily

"She doesn't," he whispers, grasping her shoulder, "she doesn't know a thing."

"God damn you!"

He blinks and sits back. Emily is weeping. The confusion of the room—an over-stuffed, over-draped hotel room—has gotten on her nerves. She snatches for her shawl, which is still in his grasp, but he holds it out of her reach, darting his handsome, unnaturally young face from side to side as she tries to reach round him. She falls across his lap and lies there, breathless with terror.

"You're cold," she whispers, horrified, "you're cold as a corpse." The shawl descends lightly over her head and shoulders. His frozen hands help her to her feet. He is delighted; he bares his teeth in a smile.

"I think," he says, tasting it, "that I'm going to visit your family."

"But you don't—" she stumbles—"you don't want to . . . sleep with me. I know it."

"I can be a suitor like anyone else," he says.

That night Emily tells it all to Charlotte, who, afraid of the roué, stays up and reads a French novel as the light drains from the windows and the true black dark takes its place. It is almost dawn and Charlotte has been dozing, when Emily shakes her friend awake, kneeling by the bed with innocent blue eyes reflecting the dying night.

"I had a terrible dream," she complains.

"Hmmm?"

"I dreamed," says Emily tiredly. "I had a nightmare. I dreamed I was walking by the beach and I decided to go swimming and then a . . . a thing, I don't know . . . it took me by the neck."

"Is that all?" says Charlotte peevishly.

"I'm sick," says Emily with childish satisfaction. She pushes

JOANNA RUSS

Charlotte over in the bed and climbs in with her. "I won't have to see that man again if I'm sick."

"Pooh, why not?" mumbles Charlotte.

"Because I'll have to stay home."

"He'll visit you."

"William won't let him."

"Sick?" says Charlotte then, suddenly waking up. She moves away from her friend, for she has ready more bad fiction than Emily and less moral poetry.

"Yes, I feel awful," says Emily simply, resting her head on her knees. She pulls away in tired irritation when when her friend reaches for the collar of her nightdress. Charlotte looks and jumps out of bed.

"Oh," says Charlotte. "Oh—goodness—oh—" holding out her hands.

"What on earth's the matter with you?"

"He's—" whispers Charlotte in horror, "he's—"

In the dim light her hands are black with blood.

"You've come," he says. He is lying on his hotel sofa, reading a newspaper, his feet over one arm and a hand trailing on the rug.

"Yes," she answers, trembling with resolution.

"I never thought this place would have such a good use. But I never know when I'll manage to pick up money—"

With a blow of her hand, she makes a fountain of the newspaper; he lies on the sofa, mildly amused.

"Nobody knows I came," she says rapidly. "But I'm going to finish you off. I know how." She hunts feverishly in her bag.

"I wouldn't," he remarks quietly.

"Ah!" Hauling out her baby cross (silver), she confronts him with it like Joan of Arc. He is still amused, still mildly surprised.

My Dear Emily

"In your hands?" he says delicately. Her fingers are loosening, her face pitiful.

"My dear, the significance is in the feeling, the faith, not the symbol. You use that the way you would use a hypodermic needle. Now in your father's hands—"

"I dropped it," she says in a little voice. He picks it up and hands it to her.

"You can touch—" she says, her face screwing up for tears.

"I can."

"Oh my God!" she cries in despair.

"My dear." He puts one arm around her, holding her against him, a very strong man for she pushes frantically to free herself. "How many times have I said that! But you'll learn. Do I sound like the silly boys at Andover?" Emily's eyes are fixed and her throat contracts; he forces her head between her knees. "The way you go on, you'd think I was bad luck."

"I—I—"

"And you without the plentiful lack of brains that characterizes your friend. She'll be somebody's short work and I think I know whose."

Emily turns white again.

"I'll send her around to you afterwards. Good God! What do you think will happen to her?"

"She'll die," says Emily clearly. He grasps her by the shoulders.

"Ah!" he says with immense satisfaction. "And after that? Who lives forever after that? Did you know that?"

"Yes, people like you don't die," whispers Emily. "But you're not people—"

"No," he says intently, "no. We're not." He stands Emily on her feet. "We're a passion!" Smiling triumphantly, he puts his hands on each side of her head, flattening the pretty

JOANNA RUSS

curls, digging his fingers into the hair, in a grip Emily can no more break than she could break a vise.

"We're passion," he whispers, amused. "Life is passion. Desire makes life."

"Ah, let me go," says Emily.

He smiles ecstatically at the sick girl.

"Desire," he says dreamily, "lives; *that* lives when nothing else does, and we're desire made purely, desire walking the Earth. Can a dead man walk? Ah! If you want, want, want . . ."

He throws his arms around her, pressing her head to his chest and nearly suffocating her, ruining her elaborate coiffure and crushing the lace at her throat. Emily breathes in the deadness about him, the queer absence of odor, or heat, or presence; her mouth is pressed against the cloth of his fashionable suit, expensive stuff, a good dollar a yard, gotten by—what? But his hands are strong enough to get anything.

"You see," he says gently. "I enjoy someone with intelligence, even with morals; it adds a certain— And besides—" here he releases her and holds her face up to his— "we like souls that come to us; these visits to the bedrooms of unconscious citizens are rather like frequenting a public brothel."

"I abhor you," manages Emily. He laughs. He's delighted.

"Yes, yes, dear," he says, "but don't imagine we're callous parasites. Followers of the Marquis de Sade, perhaps—you see Frisco has evening hours for its bookstores!—but sensitive souls, really, and apt to long for a little conscious partnership." Emily shuts her eyes. "I said," he goes on, with a touch of hardness, "that I am a genuine seducer. I flatter myself that I'm not an animal."

"You're a monster," says Emily, with utter conviction. Keeping one hand on her shoulder, he steps back a pace.

"Go." She stands, unable to believe her luck, then makes

My Dear Emily

what seems to her a rush for the door; it carries her into his arms.

"You see?" He's pleased; he's proved a point.

"I can't," she says, with wide eyes and wrinkled forehead . . .

"You will." He reaches for her and she faints.

Down in the dark where love and some other things make their hidingplace, Emily drifts aimlessly, quite alone, quite cold, like a dead woman without a passion in her soul to make her come back to life.

She opens her eyes and finds herself looking at his face in the dark, as if the man carried his own light with him.

"I'll die," she says softly.

"Not for a while," he drawls, sleek and content.

"You've killed me."

"I've loved."

"Love!"

"Say 'taken' then, if you insist."

"I do! I do!" she cried bitterly.

"You decided to faint."

"Oh the hell with you!" she shouts.

"Good girl!" And as she collapses, weeping hysterically, "Now, now, come here, dear . . ." nuzzling her abused little neck. He kisses it in the tenderest fashion with an exaggerated, mocking sigh; she twists away, but is pulled closer and as his lips open over the teeth of inhuman, dead desire, his victim finds—to her surprise—that there is no pain. She braces herself and then, unexpectedly, shivers from head to foot.

"Stop it!" she whispers, horrified. "Stop it! Stop it!"

But a vampire who has found a soul-mate (even a temporary one) will be immoderate. There's no stopping them.

Charlotte's books have not prepared her for *this*.

JOANNA RUSS

"You're to stay in the house, my dear, because you're ill."

"I'm not," Emily says, pulling the sheet up to her chin.

"Of course you are." The Reverend beams at her, under the portrait of Emily's dead mother which hangs in Emily's bedroom. "You've had a severe chill."

"But I have to get out!" says Emily, sitting up. "Because I have an appointment, you see."

"Not now," says the Reverend.

"But I *can't* have a severe chill in the *summer!*"

"You look so like your mother," says the Reverend, musing. After he has gone away, Charlotte comes in.

"I have to stay in the damned bed," says Emily forcefully, wiggling her toes under the sheet. Charlotte, who has been carrying a tray with tea and a posy on it, drops it on the washstand.

"Why, Emily!"

"I have to stay in the damned bed the whole damned day," Emily adds.

"Dear, why do you use those words?"

"Because the whole world's damned!"

After the duties of his employment were completed at six o'clock on Wednesday, William came to the house with a doctor and introduced him to the Reverend and Emily's bosom friend. The street lamps would not be lit for an hour but the sun was just down and a little party congregated in the garden under remains of Japanese paper lanterns. No one ever worried that these might set themselves on fire. Lucy brought tea—they were one of the few civilized circles in Frisco—and over the tea, in the darkening garden, to the accompaniment of sugar-tongs and plopping cream (very musical) they talked.

"Do you think," says the Reverend, very worried, "that it might be consumption?"

"Perhaps the lungs are affected," says the doctor.

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"She's always been such a robust girl." This is William, putting down the teapot which has a knitted tube about the handle, for insulation. Charlotte is stirring her tea with a spoon.

"It's very strange," says the doctor serenely, and he repeats "it's very strange" as shadows advance in the garden. "But young ladies, you know—especially at twenty—young ladies often take strange ideas into their heads; they do, they often do; they droop; they worry." His eyes are mild, his back sags, he hears the pleasant gurgle of more tea. A quiet consultation, good people, good solid people, a little illness, nothing serious—

"No," says Charlotte. Nobody hears her.

"I knew a young lady once—" ventures the doctor mildly.

"No," says Charlotte, more loudly. Everyone turns to her, and Lucy, taking the opportunity, insinuates a plate of small-sized muffins in front of Charlotte.

"I can tell you all about it," mutters Charlotte, glancing up from under her eyebrows. "But you'll *laugh*."

"Now, dear—" says the Reverend.

"Now, miss—" says the doctor.

"As a friend—" says William.

Charlotte begins to sob.

"Oh," she says, "I'll—I'll tell you about it."

Emily meets Mr. Guevara at the Mansion House at seven, having recovered an appearance of health (through self-denial) and a good solid record of spending the evenings at home (through self-control). She stands at the hotel's wrought-iron gateway, her back rigid as a stick, drawing on white gloves. Martin materializes out of the blue evening shadows and takes her arm.

"I shall like living forever," says Emily, thoughtfully.

"God deliver me from Puritans," says Mr. Guevara.

"What?"

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"You're a lady. You'll swallow me up."

"I'll do anything I please," remarks Emily severely, with a glint of teeth.

"Ah."

"I will." They walk through the gateway. "You don't care two pins for me."

"Unfortunately," says he, bowing.

"It's not unfortunate as long as *I* care for me," says Emily, smiling with great energy. "Damn them all."

"You proper girls would overturn the world." Along they walk in the evening, in a quiet, respectable rustle of clothes. Halfway to the restaurant she stops and says breathlessly:

"Let's go—somewhere else!"

"My dear, you'll ruin your health!"

"You know better. Three weeks ago I was sick as a dog and much you cared; I haven't slept for days and I'm fine."

"You look fine."

"Ah! You mean I beginning to look dead, like you." She tightens her hold on his arm, to bring him closer.

"Dead?" says he, slipping his arm around her.

"Fixed. Bright-eyed. Always at the same heat and not a moment's rest."

"It agrees with you."

"I adore you," she says.

When Emily gets home, there's a reckoning. The Reverend stands in the doorway and sad William, too, but not Charlotte, for she is on the parlor sofa, having had hysterics.

"Dear Emily," says the Reverend. "We don't know how to tell you this—"

"Why, Daddy, *what?*" exclaims Emily, making wide-eyes at him.

"Your little friend told us—"

"Has something happened to Charlotte?" cries Emily. "Oh

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tell me, tell me, what happened to Charlotte?" And before they can stop her she has flown into the parlor and is kneeling beside her friend, wondering if she dares pinch her under cover of her shawl. William, quick as a flash, kneels on one side of her and Daddy on the other.

"Dear Emily!" cries William with fervor.

"Oh sweetheart!" says Charlotte, reaching down and putting her arms around her friend.

"You're well!" shouts Emily, sobbing over Charlotte's hand and thinking perhaps to bite her. But the Reverend's arms lift her up.

"My dear," says he, "you came home unaccompanied. You were not at the Society."

"But," says Emily, smiling dazzlingly, "two of the girls took all my hospital sewing to their house because we must finish it right away and I have not—"

"You have been lying to us," the Reverend says. *Now*, thinks Emily, *Sweet William will cover his face*. Charlotte sobs.

"She can't help it," Charlotte brokenly. "It's the spell."

"Why, I think everyone's gone out of their minds," says Emily, frowning. Sweet William takes her from Daddy, leading her away from Charlotte.

"Weren't you with a gentleman tonight?" says Sweet Will firmly. Emily backs away.

"For shame!"

"She doesn't remember it," explains Charlotte; "it's part of his spell."

"I think you ought to get a doctor for *her*," observes Emily.

"You were with a gentleman named Guevara," says Will, showing less tenderness than Emily expects. "Weren't you? Well—weren't you?"

"Bad cess to you if I was!" snaps Emily, surprised at herself. The other three gasp. "I won't be questioned," she

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goes on, "and I won't be spied upon. And I think you'd better take some of Charlotte's books away from her; she's getting downright silly."

"You have too much color," says Will, catching her hands. "You're ill but you don't sleep. You stay awake all night. You don't eat. But look at you!"

"I don't understand you. Do you want me to be ugly?" says Emily, trying to be pitiful. Will softens; she sees him do it.

"My dear Emily," he says. "My dear girl—we're afraid for you."

"Me?" says Emily, enjoying herself.

"We'd better put you to bed," says the Reverend kindly.

"You're so kind," whispers Emily, blinking as if she held back tears.

"That's a good girl," says Will, approving. "We know you don't understand. But we'll take care of you, Em."

"Will you?"

"Yes, dear. You've been near very grave danger, but luckily we found out in time, and we found out what to do; we'll make you well, we'll keep you safe, we'll—"

"Not with *that* you won't," says Emily suddenly, rooting herself to the spot, for what William takes out of his vest pocket (where he usually keeps his watch) is a broad-leaved, prickly-faced dock called wolfsbane; it must distress any vampire of sense to be so enslaved to pure superstition. But enslaved they are, nonetheless.

"Oh, no!" says Emily swiftly. "That's silly, perfectly silly!"

"Common sense must give way in such a crisis," remarks the Reverend gravely.

"You bastard!" shouts Emily, turning red, attempting to tear the charm out of her fiancé's hand and jump up and down on it. But the Reverend holds one arm and Charlotte the other and between them they pry her fingers apart and William puts his property gently in his vest pocket again.

"She's far gone," says the Reverend fearfully, at his angry

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daughter. Emily is scowling, Charlotte stroking her hair.

"Ssssh" says Will with great seriousness. "We must get her to bed," and between them they half-carry Emily up the stairs and put her, dressed as she is, in the big double bed with the plush headboard that she has shared so far with Charlotte. Daddy and fiancé confer in the room across the long, low rambling hall, and Charlotte sits by her rebellious friend's bed and attempts to hold her hand.

"I won't permit it; you're a damned fool!" says Emily.

"Oh, Emmy!"

"Bosh."

"It's true!"

"Is it?" With extraordinary swiftness, Emily turns round in the bed and rises to her knees. "Do you know anything about it?"

"I know it's horrid, I—"

"Silly!" Playfully Emily puts her hands on Charlotte's shoulders. Her eyes are narrowed, her nostrils widened to breathe; she parts her lips a little and looks archly at her friend. "You don't know anything about it," she says insinuatingly.

"I'll call your father," says Charlotte quickly.

Emily throws an arm around her friend's neck.

"Not yet! Dear Charlottel"

"We'll save you," says Charlotte doubtfully.

"Sweet Charrie; you're my friend, aren't you?"

Charlotte begins to sob again.

"Give me those awful things, those leaves."

"Why, Emily, I *couldn't*!"

"But he'll come for me and I have to protect myself, don't I?"

"I'll call your father," says Charlotte firmly.

"No, I'm *afraid*." And Emily wrinkles her forehead sadly.

"Well—"

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"Sometimes I—I—" falters Emily. "I can't move or run away and everything looks so—so strange and *horrible*—"

"Oh, here!" Covering her face with one hand, Charlotte holds out her precious dock leaves in the other.

"Dear, dear! Oh, sweet! Oh thank you! Don't be afraid. He isn't after you."

"I hope not," says the bosom friend.

"Oh no, he told me. It's me he's after."

"How awful," says Charlotte, sincerely.

"Yes," says Emily. "Look." And she pulls down the collar of her dress to show the ugly marks, white dots unnaturally healed up, like the pockmarks of a drug addict.

"Don't!" chokes Charlotte.

Emily smiles mournfully. "We really ought to put the lights out," she says.

"Out!"

"Yes, you can see him better that way. If the lights are on, he could sneak in without being seen; he doesn't mind lights, you know."

"I don't know, dear—"

"I do." (Emily is dropping the dock leaves into the washstand, under cover of her skirt.) "I'm afraid. Please."

"Well—"

"Oh, you must!" And leaping to her feet, she turns down the gas to a dim glow; Charlotte's face fades into the obscurity of the deepening shadows.

"So. The lights are out," says Emily quietly.

"I'll ask Will—" Charlotte begins . . .

"No, dear."

"But, Emily—"

"He's coming, dear."

"You mean Will is coming."

"No, not Will."

"Emily, you're a—"

"I'm a sneak," says Emily, chuckling. "Sssssh!" And, while

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her friend sits paralyzed, one of the windows swings open in the night breeze, a lead-paned window that opens on a hinge, for the Reverend is fond of culture and old architecture. Charlotte lets out a little noise in her throat; and then—with the smash of a pistol shot—the gaslights shatters and the flame goes out. Gas hisses into the air, quietly, insinuatingly, as if explaining the same thing over and over. Charlotte screams with her whole heart. In the dark a hand clamps like a vice on Emily's wrist. A moment passes.

"Charlotte?" she whispers.

"Dead," says Guevara.

Emily has spent most of the day asleep in the rubble, with his coat rolled under her head where he threw it the moment before sunrise, the moment before he staggered to his place and plunged into sleep. She has watched the dawn come up behind the rusty barred gate, and then drifted into sleep herself with his face before her closed eyes—his face burning with a rigid, constricted, unwasting vitality. Now she wakes aching and bruised, with the sun of late afternoon in her face. Sitting against the stone wall, she sneezes twice and tries, ineffectually, to shake the dust from her silk skirt.

Oh, how—she thinks vaguely—how messy. She gets to her feet. *There's something I have to do.* The iron gate swings open at a touch. *Trees and gravestones tilted every which way. What did he say? Nothing would disturb it but a Historical Society.*

Having tidied herself as best she can, with his coat over her arm and the address of his tailor in her pocket, she trudges among the erupted stones, which tilt crazily to all sides as if in an earthquake. Blood (Charlotte's, whom she does not think about) has spread thinly on to her hair and the hem of her dress, but her hair is done up with fine feeling, despite the absence of a mirror, and her dress is dark gray; the spot looks like a spot of dust. She folds the coat into a neat package and uses it to wipe the dust off her shoes,

then lightens her step past the cemetery entrance, trying to look healthy and respectable. She aches all over from sleeping on the ground.

Once in town and having ascertained from a shop window that she will pass muster in a crowd, Emily trudges up hills and down hills to the tailor, the evidence over her arm. She stops at other windows, to look or to admire herself; thinks smugly of her improved coloring; shifts the parcel on her arm to show off her waist. In one window there is a display of religious objects—beads and crosses, books with fringed gilt bookmarks, a colored chromo of Madonna and Child. In this window Emily admires herself.

"It's Emily, dear!"

A Mrs. L—— appears in the window beside her, with Constantia, Mrs. L——'s twelve-year-old offspring.

"Why, dear, whatever happened to you?" Mrs. L——, noticing no hat, no gloves, and no veil.

"Nothing; whatever happened to you?" says Emily cockily. Constantia's eyes grow wide with astonishment at the fine, free audacity of it.

"Why, you look as if you'd been—"

"Picknicking," says Emily, promptly. "One of the gentlemen spilled beer on his coat." And she's in the shop now and hanging over the counter, flushed, counting the coral and amber beads strung around a crucifix.

Mrs. L—— knocks doubtfully on the window-glass.

Emily waves and smiles.

Your father—form Mrs. L——'s lips in the glass.

Emily nods and waves cheerfully.

They do go away, finally.

"A fine gentleman," says the tailor earnestly, "a very fine man." He lisps a little.

"Oh very fine," agrees Emily, sitting on a stool and kicking the rungs with her feet. "Monstrous fine."

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"But very careless," says the tailor fretfully, pulling Martin's coat nearer the window so he can see it, for the shop is a hole-in-the-wall and dark. "He shouldn't send a lady to this part of the town."

"I was a lady once," says Emily.

"Mmmmmm."

"It's fruit stains—something awful, don't you think?"

"I cannot have this ready by tonight," looking up.

"Well, you must, that's all," says Emily calmly. "You always have and he has a lot of confidence in you, you know. He'd be awfully angry if he found out."

"Found out?" sharply.

"That you can't have it ready by tonight."

The tailor ponders.

"I'll positively stay in the shop while you work," says Emily flatteringly.

"Why, Reverend, I saw her on King Street as dirty as a gypsy, with her hair loose and the wildest eyes and I *tried* to talk to her, but she dashed into a shop—"

The sun goes down in a broad belt of gold, goes down over the ocean, over the hills and the beaches, makes shadows lengthen in the street near the quays where a lipping tailor smooths and alters, working against the sun (and very uncomfortable he is, too), watched by a pair of unwinking eyes that glitter a little in the dusk inside the stuffy shop. (*I think I've changed*, meditates Emily.)

He finishes, finally, with relief, and sits with an *ouf!* handing her the coat, the new and beautiful coat that will be worn as soon as the eccentric gentleman comes out to take the evening air. The eccentric gentleman, says Emily incautiously, will do so in an hour by the Mansion House when the last traces of light have faded from the sky.

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"Then, my dear Miss," said the tailor unctuously, "I think a little matter of pay—"

"You don't think," says Emily softly, "or you wouldn't have gotten yourself into such a mess as to be this eccentric gentleman's tailor." And out she goes.

Now nobody can see the stains on Emily's skirt or in her hair; street lamps are being lit, there are no more carriages, and the number of people in the streets grows—San Francisco making the most of the short summer nights. It is perhaps fifteen minutes back to the fashionable part of the town where Emily's hatless, shawless state will be looked on with disdain; here nobody notices. Emily dawdles through the streets, fingering her throat, yawning, looking at the sky, thinking: *I love, I love, I love—*

She has fasted for the day but she feels fine; she feels busy, busy inside as if the life inside her is flowering and bestirring itself, populated as the streets. She remembers—

I love you. I hate you. You enchantment, you degrading necessity, you foul and filthy life, you promise of endless love and endless time . . .

What words to say with Charlotte sleeping in the same room, no, the same bed, with her hands folded under her face! Innocent sweetheart, whose state must now be rather different.

Up the hills she goes, where the view becomes wider and wider, and the lights spread out like sparkles on a cake, out of the section which is too dangerous, too low, and too furtive to bother with a lady (or is it something in her eyes?), into the broader bystreets where shore-leave sailors try to make her acquaintance by falling into step and seizing her elbow; she snakes away with unbounded strength, darts into shadows, laughs in their faces: "I've got what I want!"

"Not like me!"

"Better!"

My Dear Emily

This is the Barbary Coast, only beginning to become a tourist attraction; there are barkers outside the restaurants advertising pretty waiter girls, dance halls, spangled posters twice the height of a man, crowds upon crowds of people, one or two guides with tickets in their hats, and Emily—who keeps to the shadows. She nearly chokes with laughter: *What a field of ripe wheat!* One of the barkers hoists her by the waist onto his platform.

"Do you see this little lady? Do you see this—"

"Let me go, God damn you!" she cries indignantly.

"This angry little lady—" pushing her chin with one sun-burned hand to make her face the crowd. "This—" But here Emily hurts him, slashing his palm with her teeth, quite pleased with herself, but surprised, too, for the man was holding his hand cupped and the whole thing seemed to happen of itself. She escapes instantly into the crowd and continues up through the Coast, through the old Tenderloin, drunk with self-confidence, slipping like a shadow through the now genteel streets and arriving at the Mansion House gate having seen no family spies and convinced that none has seen her.

But nobody is there.

Ten by the clock, and no one is there, either; eleven by the clock and still no one. *Why didn't I leave this life when I had the chance!* Only one thing consoles Emily, that by some alchemy or nearness to the state she longs for, no one bothers or questions her and even the policemen pass her by as if in her little corner of the gate there is nothing but a shadow. Midnight and no one, half-past and she dozes; perhaps three hours later, perhaps four, she is startled awake by the sound of footsteps. She wakes: nothing. She sleeps again and in her dream hears them for the second time, then she wakes to find herself looking into the face of a lady who wears a veil.

"What!" Emily's startled whisper.

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The lady gestures vaguely, as if trying to speak.

"What is it?"

"Don't—" and the lady speaks with feeling but, it seems, with difficulty also—"don't go home."

"Home?" echoes Emily, stupefied, and the stranger nods, saying:

"In danger."

"Who?" Emily is horrified.

"He's in danger." Behind her veil her face seems almost to emit a faint light of its own.

"You're one of them," says Emily. "Aren't you?" and when the woman nods, adds desperately. "Then you must save him!"

The lady smiles pitifully; that much of her face can be seen as the light breeze plays with her net veil.

"But you must!" exclaims Emily. "You know how; I don't; you've got to!"

"I don't dare," very softly. Then the veiled woman turns to go, but Emily—quite hysterical now—seizes her hand, saying:

"Who are you? Who are you?"

The lady gestures vaguely and shakes her head.

"Who are you!" repeats Emily with more energy. "You tell me, do you hear?"

Sombrely the lady raises her veil and stares at her friend with a tragic, dignified, pitiful gaze. In the darkness her face burns with unnatural and beautiful color.

It is Charlotte.

Dawn comes with a pellucid quickening, glassy and ghostly. Slowly, shapes emerge from darkness and the blue pours back into the world—twilight turned backwards and the natural order reversed. Destruction, which is simple, logical, and easy, finds a kind of mocking parody in the morning's creation. Light has no business coming back, but light does.

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Emily reaches the cemetery just as the caldron in the east overflows, just as the birds (*idiots!* she thinks) begin a tentative cheeping and chirping. She sits at the gate for a minute to regain her strength, for the night's walking and worry have tried her severely. In front of her the stones lie on graves, almost completely hard and real, waiting for the rising of the sun to finish them off and make complete masterpieces of them. Emily rises and trudges up the hill, slower and slower as the ground rises to its topmost swell, where three hundred years of peaceful Guevaras fertilize the grass and do their best to discredit the one wild shoot that lives on, the only disrespectful member of the family. Weeping a little to herself, Emily lags up the hill, raising her skirts to keep them off the weeds, and murderously hating in her heart the increasing light and the happier celebrating of the birds. She rounds the last hillock of ground and raises her eyes to the Guevaras' eternal mansion, expecting to see nobody again. There is the corner of the building, the low iron gate—

In front of it stands Martin Guevara between her father and Sweet Sweet Will, captived by both arms, his face pale and beautiful between two gold crosses that are just beginning to sparkle in the light of day.

"We are caught," says Guevara, seeing her, directing at her his fixed, white smile.

"You let him go," says Emily—very reasonably.

"You're safe, my Emily!" cries Sweet Will.

"Let him go!" She runs to them, stops, looks at them, perplexed to the bottom of her soul.

"Let him go," she says. "Let him go, let him go!"

Between the two bits of jewelry, Emily's life and hope and only pleasure smiles painfully at her, the color drained out of his face, desperate eyes fixed on the east.

"You don't understand," says Emily, inventing. "He isn't dangerous now. If you let him go, he'll run inside and then

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you can come back any time during the day and finish him off. I'm sick. You—"

The words die in her throat. All around them, from every tree and hedge, from boughs that have sheltered the graveyard for a hundred years, the birds begin their morning noise. A great hallelujah rises; after all, the birds have nothing to worry about. Numb, with legs like sticks, Emily sees sunlight touch the top of the stone mausoleum, sunlight slide down its face, sunlight reach the level of a standing man—

"I adore you," says Martin to her. With the slow bending over of a drowning man, he doubles up, like a man stuck with a knife in a dream; he doubles up, falls—

And Emily screams; what a scream! as if her soul were being haled out through her throat; and she is running down the other side of the little hill to regions as yet untouched by the sun, crying inwardly: I need help! help! help!—She knows where she can get it. Three hundred feet down the hill in a valley, a wooded protected valley sunk below the touch of the rising sun, there she runs through the trees, past the fence that separates the old graveyard from the new, expensive, polished granite—Charlotte is her friend, she loves her: Charlotte in her new home will make room for her.

As often happens in a Will Stanton story, an almost ordinary person here has an almost ordinary adventure, and the whole turns out to be most extraordinary. . . .

THE GUMDROP KING

by Will Stanton

AT FIRST RAYMOND THOUGHT it was a flying saucer when it flashed over his head and disappeared behind the trees. He took a couple of steps in that direction and then he decided it probably wasn't a saucer at all—it had looked more like a cereal bowl. He turned and walked down the path to the lion trap. It was empty—it usually was. Once he had almost captured a kangaroo, but it got away.

Beyond the trap was the place where the treasure chest was buried. He dug it up to make sure it was all right and buried it in a safer place. Then he walked along the creek, looking for lucky stones. It was about half an hour before he came to the clearing where the saucer was.

The pilot was sitting back against a stump, chewing a piece of grass. He was about Raymond's size or a little smaller. He had pointed ears and was wearing a tight fitting green suit. Raymond approached him warily.

"You a new kid?" he asked.

The other smiled. "My name is Korko," he said. "I guess I'm new—I've never been here before. As a matter of fact I don't seem to know where I am."

"You're in the woods in back of my house," Raymond said. He pointed to the spaceship. "Is that yours?"

"Uh huh," Korko said, "I'm refueling—solar energy." He grinned, "I forgot to fill the spare tanks before I left."

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Raymond nodded. "Sometimes I forget things. I forgot to brush my teeth this morning."

Korko stretched out his legs. "Well, they can't expect you to remember everything. There's just too much."

"That's what I tell my sister," Raymond said. "But then I forget to put on my overshoes and she gets mad."

"You can't expect too much from sisters, can you?" Korko said. He folded his hands behind his head and looked up into the sky. "I keep mine in a cage most of the time," he added, "haven't you ever thought of that?"

Raymond picked up a branch and started peeling the bark off it. "I guess it wouldn't be very nice—locked up in a cage all by yourself."

"I never said she was by herself," Korko pointed out, "I put some tigers in too."

"Tigers?" Raymond said, "aren't you afraid they'll eat her up?"

Korko shook his head slowly. "No, I'm not. Not the kind of tigers you get these days."

Raymond held out his hand. "Would you like a gum-drop?"

"Thank you." Korko took one and chewed it thoughtfully. "It's delicious, I've never had anything like it."

"Take another," Raymond said.

"You're a good fellow," Korko said, "do you have a wife?"

"No, I live with my sister Molly. But she's going to get married soon—a fellow named Walter. I don't like him."

"Ah—" Korko folded his arms. "You don't like him. What does Walter do?"

"He's a developer," Raymond said. "After they get married he's going to develop this farm."

"I see. Just how do you do that?"

"You put in a road," Raymond said. "Then you cut down all the trees and build houses."

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Korko twisted around so as to see all the clearing. "I like it better with the trees," he said.

"So do I—so does Molly. But Walter says you can't fight progress."

"Aha—progress," Korko nodded his head wisely. "They tried that in my country too but I soon put a stop to it, I can tell you that."

"I don't see how you can."

"When you're king you can do any blasted thundering thing you want," Korko said. "I told you I was king, didn't I? Wait a minute—" He disappeared into the spaceship. In a moment he was back with a shiny crown that seemed badly out of shape. "I'm very fond of tin," he said, "but it does bend so. I must have sat on it." He went over it with his fingers, pressing it back into shape.

"Of course, my official crown is gold," he said; "this is a lightweight crown for traveling." He put it on the back of his head. "How does it look?"

"Just fine," Raymond said.

"I'm glad you think so. People keep telling me I'm a splendid looking king, but then they'd say just about anything." He poked the ground moodily with a stick.

"Have a gumdrop," Raymond said.

Korko smiled. "You're a good friend, Raymond." He put the gumdrop in his mouth. "Isn't there somebody else your sister could marry—somebody you like?"

"There's Bartholomew," he said. "I think Molly likes him too. Only he doesn't have enough money to get married. He's a painter."

"How much money does it take to get married?"

"I don't know," Raymond said. "There's going to be an exhibit next month—Bartholomew says if he wins a prize then people will start to buy his pictures."

Korko waved his hand. "It's as good as done. Tell him to

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enter another picture. He might as well get second prize too."

"I'll tell him," Raymond said. He stepped over to the spaceship. "I don't suppose we could go for a ride?"

Korko shook his head. "Not while it's refueling. Of course if you just want to go someplace here on the planet we could use teleportation."

"Well," Raymond said, "I had a friend named Piggy—he moved away last year. I thought it might be nice to see him."

"Good old Piggy," Korko said. "Do you want to go to his house or would you rather bring him here?"

"Can you really do that?" Raymond asked. "Make a person travel all that distance?"

"Certainly," Korko said. "Put any person any place you want to. It's easy as that—" he rubbed his middle finger against his thumb. "As easy as—" He tried again.

Raymond snapped his fingers. "As that?"

"Show me how you do it," Korko said. "I never have been able to get the hang of it." Raymond showed him. "I guess I'll have to keep practicing," Korko said. "Where does your friend Piggy live?"

Raymond closed his eyes. He remembered Piggy had moved out West—all the way to Idaho. If only he could remember the name of the town!

"Moscow," he said suddenly, "that's where he lives. Can we go there?"

"We're there," Korko said.

They were standing in the center of a large table, surrounded by a circle of a dozen men, frozen in the chairs, staring at the two of them.

"Surprise!" Korko cried happily. "Which one is Piggy?"

Raymond nudged him in the ribs. "This isn't the right place."

"Excuse us please," Korko said. The room vanished and

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they were back in the clearing. Raymond let out his breath.

"What enormous people you know," Korko said. "They must be giants."

"I don't know them," Raymond said, "I don't even know where we were."

"Here's a souvenir I brought back." Korko handed him a small paperweight. "Notice the pretty design."

"It looks like a sickle," Raymond said, "and a hammer. But we shouldn't keep this—not without paying."

"Aha," Korko took off his crown, looked at it and put it back on. "Not without paying. What do we pay with?"

Raymond held out a nickel. "I guess this should be enough. anyhow it's all I've got."

"I'll take it to them," Korko said. "You wait right here," and he was gone.

In a moment he was back smiling happily. "How fast they get things done," he said. "Just in the little time since we were there—the table tipped over, chairs smashed up and soldiers all around. I picked out the fattest man and gave him the money. He jumped back and threw it on the floor." He shook his head admiringly. "It's a pleasure to do business with such fine exciting people."

He walked over to the ship and looked inside. "Enough fuel for a takeoff," he announced. "Better be going."

"You have to go home?" Raymond asked.

"First I have to move closer to the sun," Korko said, "for solar energy. It will take about 12 hours to store up enough for the trip home."

Raymond picked up a stone and examined it carefully. "Then I won't be seeing you again?"

"Well, I really should be getting home," Korko said. He looked at Raymond for a moment. "I don't suppose you have any gumdrops left? I'd give anything to know how to make them."

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"I have a whole sack of them back at the house," Raymond said.

"You have?" he grinned delightedly. "I could have my royal alchemist work out the formula. I'll be here first thing in the morning."

"Goodbye Korko." Raymond turned and headed back toward his house.

Molly was in the kitchen when he got there. "You're late," she said; "what have you been doing all afternoon?"

Raymond got himself a drink of water. "I talked with a new kid," he said. "We went to see Piggy, but he wasn't there."

"Honestly Raymond. Piggy moved to Idaho last year—you knew that. Some of the stories you make up—" She shook her head. "Wash your hands now, supper's ready."

Raymond took his place at the table. "Aren't you going to eat?"

"I'm going out to dinner with Walter," she said.

Raymond scowled. "I don't like Walter much. I wish he'd leave us alone. I wish we could keep the farm just the way it is."

"I know," Molly said, "I do too." She sat down and rested her arms on the table. "But you've got to understand, Raymond, we can't afford to keep up this big place for just the two of us."

"You could marry Bartholomew," he said. "Then he could live here and help keep the place up."

"All he can do is support himself. Nobody wants to buy his paintings."

"They will." Raymond swallowed a mouthful of potato and took a gulp of milk. "Next month his picture is going to win first prize. Then everybody will want to buy them."

Molly reached out and smothered back a lock of his hair. "You're just like Dad always was," she said, "impractical and

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optimistic. I don't know—" She traced a crack in the table top. "Maybe that's the best way to be."

"Sure it is," Raymond said. "Bart's going to win first prize. Second prize too."

She smiled. "It's wonderful to have big dreams, but somebody has to be practical. The thing you want most isn't always what's best. You're doing so well in school it would be a shame if you couldn't go to college. That takes a lot of money. Now go on and finish your supper—I have to change."

Raymond was sitting on the front steps when Walter arrived. Molly came to the door. "Right on time," she said.

Walter came up the walk. He was handsomely dressed and knew it and he walked slowly enough so everybody could tell. He glanced coldly at Raymond and turned to Molly. "Look at the condition of the boy's clothes," he said. "Does he have to go around looking like a tramp?"

"I know," she said, "but after all, Walter, it's vacation and he plays hard."

"Then perhaps it's time he learned to work hard," Walter said, "instead of mooning around all day. I think maybe a good stiff military school might be the answer."

"Walter—he's only a child."

"Only a child, is he—" He reached down and picked up the paperweight Raymond had been holding. He looked at it more closely and held it out to Molly, his hand trembling with fury. "Just how do you explain this? Young man—answer me!" His voice was choked with indignation, "Where did this come from?"

Raymond looked down at the steps. "I got it from a kid I know," he said.

Walter turned to Molly, "You hear that?" he demanded. "That's the sort of trash and riff-raff you allow him to associate with."

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"Walter, I'm sure it doesn't mean anything," she said. "Children collect all kinds of things."

"Do they indeed?" Walter slipped the paperweight into his pocket. "Well, this particular thing is going to be turned over to the proper authorities first thing in the morning."

"Whatever you think best." Molly started down the steps. "Goodnight Raymond, we won't be late."

"Okay," he said. He picked up a paper sack from the floor beside him and took out some gumdrops.

"Another thing," Walter said, "you can just stop eating that stuff—ruining your teeth—running up dental bills. You'd better not forget."

Raymond studied the candy thoughtfully.

"Raymond, where are your manners?" Molly asked. "Walter spoke to you. Say goodnight."

"Goodnight Molly," he dropped the gumdrops back in the sack. "Goodbye Walter," he said.

Edgar Pangborn's silence on the science fiction front in the last year or so was due to his finishing a largish project—**THE TRIAL OF CALLISTA BLAKE**, a non-science fiction novel having to do with capital punishment, which St. Martin's brings out this fall. The novelet herewith has to do, not with the end of a man, but with the birth of one . . . and it is a pleasure to welcome Mr. Pangborn back.

THE GOLDEN HORN

by Edgar Pangborn

MOHA, WHERE I WAS BORN, is mainly a nation of farms, grouped around their stockade villages throughout the hill and lake and forest country. I grew up in Skoar, one of Moha's three cities, which lies in a cup of the hills near the Katskil border. Even there things moved with the seasons and the Corn Market trade; wilderness whispers at the city's borders, except where the two roads, the Northwest and the East, carry their double stream of men, mule-wagons, soldiers, tinkers, wanderers.

Farming's heartbreak work in Moha, same as everywhere. The stock give birth to as many mules as anywhere else, the labor's long sweat and toil and disappointment wearing a man down to old age in the thirties, few farmers ever able to afford a slave. But the people scrape along, as I've seen human beings do in places worse than Moha. I'm older, I've traveled, I've learned to write and read in spite of that mystery's being reserved to the priests. Looking back, I sometimes wonder if Moha wasn't the happiest land I ever knew.

The other cities—I've never visited them—are Moha City and Kanhar, both in the northwest on Moha Water. Their

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harbors can take big vessels up to thirty tons, the ships that trade with Levannon and the Katskil ports on the Hudson Sea. Moha City is the capital and Kanhar is the largest, twenty thousand population not counting slaves. Fifty miles south of Kanhar is Skoar, and there I was born squalling and redheaded in one of those houses that are licensed but still supposed not to exist. In such places they don't have time for kids, but since I was a well-formed chunk of humanity and not a mue, the policers took me from my mother, whoever she was, when I was weaned, and dumped me in the Skoar orphanage, where I stayed until I was nine, old enough to earn a living.

I'm thinking now of a day in middle March when I was past fourteen, and slipped away before dawn from the Bull-and-Iron where I worked as yard-boy, bond-servant of course, two dollars a week and board. I was merely goofing off. We'd gone through a tough winter with smallpox and flu, near-about everything except the lumpy plague, and a real snow in January almost an inch deep—I've never seen such a heavy fall of it before or since. There was even a frost in February; people called it unusual. In the stable loft where I slept I just thought it was damn cold. I remember looking out the loft window one January morning and seeing icicles on the sign over the inn door—a noble sign, painted for Old Jon Robson by some journeyman artist who likely got bed and a meal out of it along with the poverty-talk that Old Jon saved for such occasions. A fine red bull with tremendous horns, tremendous everything, and for the iron there was a long spear sticking out of his neck and he not minding it a bit.

The wolves sharpnosed in close that winter. Mostly grays, but a pack of blacks wiped out an entire farm family in Wilton Village near Skoar. Old Jon Robson would tell every new guest the particulars of the massacre, and he's probably doing it yet, along with tales about a crazy redheaded yard-

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boy he had once. Well, Old Jon had connections in Wilton Village, knew the family the wolves killed and had to make a thing of it, clickety-yak. I never knew him to keep his mouth shut more than two minutes—one day when he was sick with a sore throat. He wouldn't shut it when he slept, either. He and Mam Robson had their bedroom across the wagon-yard from my loft, and in mid-winter with the windows shut tight I could still hear him sleep, like an ungreased wagon-wheel.

Before sun-up that March day I fed the mules and horses. I reasoned that somebody else ought to get his character strengthened by doing the shoveling. It was a Friday anyhow, so all work was sinful, unless you want to claim that shoveling is a work of necessity or piety, and I disagree. I crept into the main kitchen of the inn, where a yard-boy wasn't supposed to appear. Safe enough. Everybody would be fasting before church—the comfortable way, in bed. The slave-man Judd who was boss of the kitchen wasn't up yet, and the worst he'd have done would have been to flap a rag and chase me ten steps on his gimp leg. I found a peach pie and surrounded it for breakfast. You see, I'd skipped fasting and church a good deal already—easy because who cares about a yard-boy?—and the lightning hadn't located me yet. In the store-room I collected a chunk of bacon and a loaf of oat bread, and started thinking. Why not run away for good?

Who'd be bothered? Maybe Jon Robson's daughter Emmia would, a little. Cry, and wish she'd been nicer to me. I worked on that as I stole out of the inn and down the long emptiness of Kurin Street, dawn still half an hour away. I worked on it hard. I had myself killed by black wolf, and changed that to bandits, because black wolf wouldn't leave any bones. There ought to be bones for somebody to bring back. Somebody who'd say to Emmia: "Here's all that's left of poor redheaded Davy, except his Katskil knife. He did

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say he wanted for you to have that if anything happened to him." But bandits wouldn't have left the knife, rot them. I had a problem there.

Emmia was older than me, sixteen, big and soft like her papa only on her it looked good. How I did cherish and play with that rosy softness in the night!—all in my fancy, dumb-virgin as a baby cockerel, alone in my loft.

I was gulping by the time I passed the town green, but as I neared the Corn Market, in North District and not far from the place where I knew I could climb the city stockade with no guard seeing me, most of that flapdoodle drained out of my head. I was thinking sharp and practical about running away for real, not just goofing off the way I'd done other times.

A bond-servant, one grade better than a slave, I'd be breaking the law if I ran, and could be made a true slave for it, likely with a ten-year term. I told myself that morning what they could do with the law. I had the bacon and bread in a sack strapped across my shoulder. My Katskil knife hung in a sheath under my shirt, and all the money I'd saved during the winter, five dollars in silver, was knotted into my loin-rag. Up in the woods on North Mountain where I'd found a cave in my lone-wanderings the year before, other things lay hidden—ten dollars safely buried, an ash bow I'd made myself, brass-tipped arrows, fishlines with a couple of real steel hooks. Maybe I'd really do it, I thought. Maybe today.

I shinnied over the stockade without trouble and started up the mountain. I was being pulled two ways then. The Emmia who talked in my heart wasn't whimpering over bones. I was thinking about the real soft-lipped girl who'd probably want me to turn back, stick it out through my bond-period, get civilized, make something of myself. Who might not mind, might even like it, if I told her or showed her what I felt about her instead of just mooning at her through

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doorways like a stunned calf. The forest pulled the other way.

Climbing the steep ground from the city in the morning hush, I decided I'd merely stay lost a day or two as I'd done before. Other times it had usually been my proper monthly day off, not always. I'd risked trouble before and talked my way out of it. I'd stay this time, say until the bacon was gone, and spend that time polishing the fresh whopmagullion I'd have to tell, to celebrate my return and soften the action of Old Jon's leather strap on my rump. The decision itself perked me up. When I was well under cover of the woods and the time was right, I climbed a maple to watch the sunrise.

It was already beyond first-light, the fire not yet over the rim. I'd missed the earliest bird-calls, now their voices were rippling back and fourth across the world. I heard a white-throat sparrow in a bush; robin and wood-thrush, loveliest of all bird singers, were busy everywhere. A cardinal flew by me, a streak of flame, and a pair of smoky-white parrots broke out of a sycamore to skim over the tree-tops. In a sweet-gum nearby I caught sight of a pair of white-face monkeys who didn't mind me at all. When I looked away from them I saw the golden blaze begin.

For the first time that I can remember, I wanted to know, Where does it come from, the sun? What happens over there when it's set afire every morning? Why should God go to all that trouble to keep us warm?

Understand, at that time I had no learning at all. I'd scarcely heard of books except to know they were forbidden to all but the priests because they'd had something to do with the Sin of Man. I figured Old Jon was the smartest man in the world because he could keep accounts with the beadboard that hung in the taproom. I believed, as the Amran Church teaches everyone to believe, that the earth is a body of land three thousand miles square, once a garden and perfect, with God and the angels walking freely

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among men, until the time almost four hundred years ago when men sinned and spoiled everything; so now we're working out the penance until Abraham the Spokesman of God, who died on the Wheel at Nuber in the year 37, returns to judge His people, saving the few elect and sending the rest to fry forever in the caverns of Hell. And on all sides of that lump of land spread the everlasting seas all the way to the rim of the world. The Book of Abraham, said the teacher-priests, doesn't tell how far away the rim is, because that's one of the things God does not wish men to know.

Doubts I did have. I thought it remarkable how the lightning never did arrive no matter how I sinned, even on Fridays. The doubts were small; young grass trying to work up through the brown old trash of winter.

I understood of course—all children far younger than fourteen understood it—that while you might get away with a lot of sinning on the sly, you agreed out loud with whatever the Church taught or else you didn't stay alive. I saw my first heretic-burning when I was nine, after I'd gone to work at the Bull-and-Iron. In Moha they were always conducted along with the Spring Festival. Children under nine weren't required to attend.

I watched the dawn from my maple, the birth and growing of the light. Surely I was not watching what happened in my mind, for the thought was living in me, and I not knowing how it could have come; the thought, What if someone traveled all the way to watch the firing of the sun?

Nowadays I understand that thoughts do not come to you. You make them, they grow in you until the time arrives when you must recognize them.

Down out of my maple then, up the long rise of the mountain in deep forest, where the heat of the day is always mild. I walked and climbed slowly, not wishing to

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raise a sweat, for the smell of it can drift a surprising distance, and black wolf and brown tiger may get interested. Against black wolf I had my knife. He dislikes steel. Brown tiger cares nothing for knives—a flip of his paw is sufficient—though he's said to respect arrows, thrown spears and fire, usually. I've heard tell of brown tiger leaping a fire-circle to make a meal of hunters. It could be true, for his hunger must be immense and compelling in a bad season when moose and deer and bison have gone scarce. I was not thinking much about those ancient enemies when I climbed North Mountain that morning. The question-thought was in me, saying, What if *I* were to go beyond the rim, where the sun is set afire? . . .

My cave was a crack in a cliff, broadening inside to a room four feet wide, twenty deep. The cleft ran up into darkness, and must have broken through to the outside, for a small draft like the pull of a chimney kept the air fresh. Sometimes I wished the entrance was narrower—black wolf could have got in, maybe even tiger. I'd cleared out a few copperheads when I first found the cave, and had to be watchful against them too, or rattlers, slithering back to reclaim it. The approach was a ledge that widened in front of the cave, with enough earth to support a patch of grass, and the cave was located well around the east shoulder of the mountain, so that the city was shut away. I could safely build a fire at night behind the rocks at the cave entrance, and I always did. You need a sleep-fire for safety, and the knack of waking at the right moments to refresh it. I'd long ago lifted a flint-and-steel from the Bull-and-Iron kitchen where it didn't seem real decorative. I usually doused my fire before dawn. No sense painting smoke on bright sky to stir up the curious.

That morning I first made sure about my bow and arrows and fishing gear. They hadn't been disturbed. And yet I felt a strangeness. Not snakes and not intruders. Some

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eastern sunlight was entering; I could see as well as I needed to for safety, but something nagged me. I stood a long time moving only my eyes. I moistened my nose, but caught no wrong scent.

When I found the trouble at last, far at the back on one of the cave walls where sunlight didn't reach, and where my glance must have touched it unknowingly while I was looking at my gear, I was no wiser. It was simply a small drawing made by the point of some softer, reddish rock. I goggled at it, trying to imagine it had been there always. No such thing. That cave was mine, the only place on earth I'd ever felt I owned, and I knew it like the skin of my body. This had been done since my last visit, in December before winter set in.

Two stick-figures, circles for heads with no faces, single lines for legs and arms and bodies, both with male parts indicated. I'd heard of hunters' sign-messages. But what did this say that a hunter could want to know? The figures held nothing, did nothing, just stood there.

The one on my right was in human proportion, with slightly bent elbows and knees in the right places, all his fingers and toes. The other stood to the same height, but his legs were far too short without a knee-crook, and his arms too long, dangling below his crotch. He had only three toes for each foot, a big one and two squeezed-up little ones. His fingers were blunt stubs, though the artist had gone to a lot of trouble drawing good human fingers for the other jo.

No tracks in the cave or on the ledge. Nothing left behind.

I gave it up—nothing else to do. Somebody'd been here since December, and he was honest because he never touched my gear, and likely meant me no harm. Last year I'd brought a horse-shoe and slipped it into the jumble of rocks before the cave. Now I made certain it was still in place—it was;

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anyway I'd never heard of a trick like this being pulled by witches or spooks.

I worked awhile, gathering fresh balsam to sleep on, and a supply of firewood against the night. Then I shrugged off shirt and loin-rag—but not my knife, naturally—and lay out naked in the sunny grass, drowsing, daydreaming, not wondering much now about my visitor because I supposed he was long gone. I let other thoughts range wide, into the open sky and beyond the limits of the day.

I thought of journeying.

A patch of land three thousand miles square, and the everlasting seas. Hudson Sea, Moha Water, the Lorenta Sea, even the great Ontara Sea in the northwest—all those, said the teacher-priests, are mere branches of the great sea, dividing the known world into islands. From travelers' talk—oh, I think all the best of my education up to fourteen came from evenings at the Bull-and-Iron when I was minding the fireplace in the taproom or lending a hand serving drinks with my ears flapping—I knew that in some places the Hudson Sea is only a few miles wide; small craft cross it readily in good weather. And I knew that some thirty-ton ships of Levannon sail coastwise through Moha Water to the Lorenta Sea, then south for trade with Nuin—Old City and Land's End, the easternmost part of the known world, except for a few of the outlying Cod Islands. Long, dangerous, roundabout, that northern passage, especially bad in the Lorenta Sea, where winds can be hellish or at other times fog may lie thick for days, hiding both shores—and as for the shores, wilderness on both sides, red bear and brown tiger country not meant for man. Yet that route was safer, travelers said, than the southern course down the Hudson Sea and along the Conicut coast, for at the end of that course the Cod Islands pirates with their devilish little scoon-rigged fighter craft were somehow able to smell out every third vessel

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worth the taking, and they couldn't be bothered with prisoners unless there were women aboard.

I thought, If thirty-tonners of Levannon make that northern passage for the sake of trade, why can't they sail farther, much farther? What's stopping them? Sure, I was ignorant. I'd never seen even the Hudson Sea, and couldn't picture it. Likely I'd never heard the word "navigation" at that time. I had no notion of the terror and the vastness of open sea when the land's gone and there's no mark to steer by unless someone aboard knows the mystery of guessing position from the pattern of the stars. But an ignorant boy can think. And I thought, If nobody dares sail beyond sight of land, and if the Book of Abraham doesn't say, how can anyone, even the priests, claim to *know* what's out there? Can't there be other lands before you come to the rim?

I thought, How do they even know there is a rim? If it goes on forever—

And I thought, If *I* were to sail east toward the place of sunrise—

Nay, but suppose I traveled at least to Levannon, where a young man might sign aboard one of those thirty-tonners. Suppose I started this morning . . .

I thought of Emmia.

I'd glimpsed her once at her window, birth-naked for bedtime, prettier than any flower. That was the year before. I'd sneaked out of my loft sore and angry from a licking Old Jon gave me—a mule got loose in the vegetable patch, not my fault but he wouldn't hear of it. That night I swore I'd run away and the hell with all of them. But from the street my eye caught the glow of candle-light at a window at the side of the inn on the second floor, that I knew was Emmia's. A thick-stemmed jinny-creeper vine ran up that side of the building, spreading leaf-patterns over many of the windows, and hers was one, and behind the ghostly dark patches of the pointed leaves her sweet body was moving. I saw her

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let free red-brown hair to tumble over her shoulders, and she combed it, watching herself no doubt in a mirror I couldn't see. Then she must have suddenly noticed the curtain was still open, for she came to close it. Not in any hurry. She couldn't have seen me, my skinny carcass squinched into the shadow of the next building. She stood gazing out into the dark a short while, long enough to bewitch me as if I'd never seen her before, the slow grace of her motion, her round lifted arm, deep-curved waist and the warm triangle and the division between her big breasts a line of tender darkness.

Naked women weren't news to me, though I'd never had one. Skoar had peep-shows like any civilized city, including penny-a-look ones that I could afford. But this was Emmia, whom I saw every day in her smock or slack-pants, busy at a hundred tasks around the inn and scolded by her ma for laziness half the time, candle-making, mending, dusting, overseeing the slave help when Mam Robson was sick, waiting on table, coming out to the barn and stable sometimes to help me collect hens' eggs, even lend a hand feeding the critters and milking the goats. This was Emmia, and like sudden music I loved her.

I couldn't run away then, nor think of it. She drew the curtain, her candle died, I stole back to my loft forgetting Old Jon's beating and all my wrath. I fell asleep that night imagining the pressure and savor of her beside me on my pallet in the hay—well, and part of the time I had myself inheriting the inn and Old Jon's fortune, and Old Jon's dying speech with a blessing on the marriage would have made a skunk weep and forgive all his enemies. Though many times later I risked going out to stare at that window after dark, it never happened again. But the image lived in me, was with me on my ledge before the cave as morning glided toward noon.

My ears must have caught the knowledge first, then my right hand firming on my knife while my mind was still

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beclouded by love and fancy. Then everything in me said, Look out! Wake up! I opened my eyes and turned my head slowly enough like a creature rousing in the natural way.

My visitor was there, a short way up the ledge, and he smiled.

Anyway I think he smiled, or wanted to. His mouth was a poor gash no longer than the mid-joint of my forefinger, in a broad flat hairless face. Monstrously dirty he was, and fat, with a heavy swaying paunch. Seeing his huge long arms and little stub legs, I thought I knew who he was.

He did have knees but they scarcely showed, for his lower legs were as big around as his thighs, blocky columns with fat-rolls drooping from the thigh-sections. Baldheaded as a pink snake, hairless to the middle, but there at his navel a great thatch of twisty black hair began and ran all the way down his legs to his stubby three-toed feet. He wore nothing at all, poor jo, and it didn't matter. So thick was that frowsy hair I had to look twice before I was sure he was male. He had no ears, just small openings where they should have been. And he had no nose—none at all, you understand? Simply a pair of slits below the little sorrowful black eyes that were meeting my stare bravely enough. He said: "I go away?"

I'd been about to draw my knife and shriek at him to go away. I didn't. I tried to move slowly, getting on my feet. Whatever my face was doing, it made him no more frightened than he was already.

In spite of those legs he stood tall as I, maybe five feet five. He was grief and loneliness standing in the sun, ugly as unwanted death.

A mue.

In Moha, and all countries I've since known, the law of

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church and state says flat and plain: *A mue born of woman or beast shall not live.*

Well, law is what men make it, and you heard tales. A woman with a devil's aid might bribe a priest to help conceal a mue-birth, hoping (always a vain hope according to the tales) that the mue might outgrow its evil and appear human instead of devil-begotten. I think, by the way, that Nuin and Katskil are the only countries which require that the mother of a mue must be killed. In Moha, I know, the law explains that a demon bent on planting mue-seed is well known to enter women in their sleep and without their knowledge, therefore they aren't to blame unless witnesses can prove the contrary, that they performed the act with the demon awake and knowingly. At the Bull-and-Iron I'd heard plenty of such tales about mues born in scret—single-eyed, tailed, purple-skinned, monkey-sized, four-armed, or anything else the story-teller cared to imagine I guess—growing up in secret and finally taking to the wilderness, where it was the duty of any decent citizen to kill them on sight—a dangerous undertaking even if they seemed defenseless, for the stories claimed that the demon who fathered the mue was likely enough to be watching over his offspring, perhaps in the shape of an animal, a snake or wolf or tiger.

He said again: "I go away?"

His voice was deep, slow, blurred, hard to understand. He didn't move except for an idle swinging of his arms. Sprouting huge out of his soggy body—why, those arms could have torn a bull in quarters.

"No, don't go."

"Man," he said. "Boy-man. Beautiful."

I'm not, of course. I'm puggy-nosed, freckled, knotty-muscled, small but limber. It didn't occur to me at first that he meant me, but he was studying me sharply with those sad little pouch eyes, as I stood there with nothing on but my knife-belt, and there was nothing else he could have

meant. I suppose I understand now that anything in the natural human shape would have looked beautiful to him. I knew he could see the bumpy racing of my heart; glancing down, I could see it myself, a crazy bird's-wing flutter below the flare of my bottom ribs. Out of the uproar in my head I could find nothing to say except: "Thanks for the picture. I like it." I saw he didn't know the word "picture". "Lines," I said, and pointed to the cave. "Good."

He understood then; smiled and chuckled and gobbled. "You come me," he said. "I show you good things, I."

Go with him? Father Abraham, no! And maybe meet his father? I should—but I couldn't think. I pulled on my shirt and loin-rag, trying to watch not only the mue but the ledge behind him, and the region behind my back too. I said: "W-w-wait!" and I stepped into my cave.

Out of his sight, I was taken with a fit of trembling, sick and silly. Then I had my knife out and was hacking away a good half of that loaf of oat bread. I know I had some notion of buying him off. I recall thinking that if his father was in wolf-shape, maybe the bacon would do some good. But I didn't take it; I set it, and the rest of the loaf, back on the rock ledge with my bow and arrows, and my fingers were reaching for the luck-charm at my neck. It wasn't there. I remembered I'd dropped it in my sack because the string had broken the day before and I couldn't find another. Now I slid the sack over my shoulder, and took some comfort from feeling the charm, the little male-female god-thing, lumpy through the cloth of the sack.

A clay trifle. I've learned since then that they carve such trash down in Penn, to sell to travelers for souvenirs, and likely it came from there. It was given me by my mother, or by somebody in the house where I was born, for I'm told it was on a string around my neck when I was taken to the orphanage, and there they laughed at it some but let me keep it. Emmia was often curious about it—such things

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aren't common in Moha. Once, when we were looking for hens' eggs in the barn loft, she caught hold of it and asked me, a bit red-faced and whispery, if I knew what it meant. I was thirteen; it was before I'd seen her in her window. I knew and didn't know what *she* meant, was scared of the difference in her face and of the queer sweet-smelling warmth that reached me from her nearness, and so nothing came of what might have been a lively hour if my thoughts had grown a little closer toward those of a man. Oh, I don't believe in luckcharms nowadays. Luck, good or bad, simply happens; you can't make it, or push it around with charms and words and all that jibberty-mumble. But in those days I more than half believed in it. And since I did, it helped to stop my trembling, as I carried out that half-loaf to—him. Carried it out, knowing with not a trace of doubt what I ought to do, meant to do, what the law said I must do.

He didn't reach for it. Those nostril-slits flared, though, and his gaze followed my fingers like a dog's when I broke off a small piece of the bread and ate it myself. I held out the rest to him and he accepted it, carried it to his pitiful mouth. I got a glimpse of his teeth, brownish, small, close-set, weak-looking. He gnawed awkwardly. His eyes never left me as he munched, and snuffled, and slobbered. He kept grunting "Good, good!" and trying to smile with his mouth full. Merciful winds, it was nothing but common oat bread! And with all that fat, he couldn't have been going hungry.

At fourteen I couldn't understand that it wasn't bread he was starved for. I know it now.

The bread gone, he gave his wet mouth a swipe and said: "You come me now? Good things. Show good things, I." He walked a few steps up the ledge, looking back. Like a dog.

Yes, I followed him.

He walked better than I expected. His knees could bend only a few inches, but the stub legs were powerful to hold

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up all that weight, and they could pump along at surprising speed. On the level, it was a stiff-legged waddle. But on the steep ground, as we climbed around toward the northern side of the mountain, his arms would swing forward touching the earth, a four-legged scramble that carried him up the rises about as fast as I cared to walk. And he was quiet, in the same way I'd learned to go quiet in the woods. He knew this country, got his living out of it, must have known it a good while. I couldn't guess his age, however, and hardly tried to.

North Mountain mue, I've got no other name for him. He would never have owned one. What the hell, like other orphanage kids I never had a last name myself, and don't miss it. I'm just Davy.

Don't think my kindness—if it was kindness, that business with the bread—came from anything good in me. It didn't. It came partly from fear, partly from an ugly sort of planning. From the year of teaching by the priests that every child in Moha is required to sweat out before he's twelve, and from the Bull-and-Iron tales, I knew that mues weren't in the same class with demons or ghosts or elves, but solid flesh in spite of being the get of devils. They couldn't vanish or float through walls; they didn't have the evil eye. If you got near one you'd see and smell him, he couldn't use spells or witch-signs [though his father might] because God wouldn't allow that to a miserable mue, and he would die for good when you put a knife in him. The law said when, not if. It said you must if you could; if you couldn't, you must notify the Church at once, so that he could be hunted down by men properly equipped and with the protection of a priest.

I walked on behind him, up through the deeper forest on the north side of the mountain, and more and more I hated and resented him, cursing the luck that made me the one to find him, imagining his demon father behind every

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tree, and sickened the way anyone might be sickened by ugliness, terror, strangeness and a foul smell.

We reached a level area, a flanking ridge of the mountain's north side where the trees stood great and old, spaced well apart but casting thick shade from interlacing branches. Most of them were pines, that through the years had built a heavy carpet; here anyone could walk soft as a breeze. My ears, and they are keen, could barely hear the mue a few steps ahead of me as his blobby feet pressed the pine needles. I myself moved more quietly than that. I felt that he didn't like it here. He could shamle along faster on sloping ground. In this place anything could overtake him. He padded on at his best poor speed, with constant glances to left and right—truly like someone who knew nothing more about the shadows than I did.

The stories didn't say there was *always* a demon attending a mue.

It would be easiest, and I knew it, here on the level. Six inches of double-edge Katskil steel, honed to the limit as mine always was, will go through anything made of flesh. I was watching the best spot, below his last rib on the left side. If a no-way human thing, or being, was observing us, he or it might read my thought. It might not be in animal shape at all. But as for the mue—well, if I failed to kill at the first stab, at least I'd have time to dodge his frightful arms, and run faster than he could hope to do, while the blood drained out of him. Mue blood. Devil-fathered blood.

I slid my knife free. I lowered it quickly out of sight inside the mouth of my sack, afraid he might turn suddenly before I was ready, afraid of other eyes. I lessened the distance between us, calculating angles, arm-length, the lie of the ground. It would be best if I stooped slightly and drove my knife upward.

He coughed slightly, a little throat-clearing, a completely human sound. It hurt me somehow, angered me too, for

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surely he had no right to do things in the human way. Anyhow there was no hurry; plenty more of this partly open area where it would be safest to do it. I saw no change in the tree-pattern up ahead. I told myself to wait till I felt more ready. I told myself how easy it would be. Just wait a minute . . .

I saw myself back at the Bull-and-Iron telling my true-tale. I wouldn't brag, nay, I'd speak with a noble calm. I could afford it. I'd be the Yard-Boy Who Killed A Mue.

They would send out a mission, priests, hunters and soldiers, to find the body and verify my story. I'd go along, and they'd find it. A skeleton, with those awful leg-bones, would be enough—and that's all it would be, for in the time it took the mission to argue and get going, the carrion-ants would finish what other scavengers began, the old necessary wilderness housecleaning. The skeleton would do. They'd set out doubting me, snickering behind their hands. Then the laughs would look sick, and I'd be a hero.

It came to me that this was no gaudy daydream of the kind that had filled my head with rosy mists at other times. This was what would happen in sober fact. I'd be questioned and examined afterward by the priests, maybe the Bishop of Skoar, the Mayor, even the Colonel of the army garrison. Why, possibly the Kurin family, absolute tops in the Skoar aristocracy, would hear of me and want to learn more. If they liked me, I'd be a bond-servant no longer. With them for my patrons I'd be the same as rich.

I would go to Levannon, on a roan horse. Two attendants—no, three, one to ride ahead and make sure of a room for me at the next inn, never mind who had to be tossed out; and a maid-servant to bathe me and keep the bed warm. In Levannon I would *buy* me a ship, a thirty-tonner. And wouldn't I wear a green hat with a hawk's feather, a red shirt of Penn silk, my loin-cloth silken too, none of your damned scratchy linsey rags, maybe white with small golden

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stars and crosses! Real leather moccasins with ornaments of brass.

I saw Old Jon Robson ashamed of past unkindness but quick to get in on the glory. I'd let him. It would suit my dignity. Clickety-yak, he knew all along the boy had wonderful stuff in him, only needed an opportunity to bring it out, what he'd always said, clickety clickety, and me looking calm, friendly, a little bit bored. Poor Old Jon!

And Emmia: "Davy, weren't you *terrified*? O Davy darling, what if *he'd* killed *you*?" Maybe not just "darling"; maybe she'd call me "Spice," which girls didn't say in my native city unless they meant come-take-it. "Davy, Spice, what if I'd lost you?" "Nay, Emmia, it wasn't anything. I had to do it." So, since she'd called me that, it wasn't the taproom where she spoke, but her bedroom, and she'd let down her lovely hair to cover the front of her in make-believe modesty, but I put my hands below her chin—you know, gentle, nevertheless the hands that had killed a mue—parting that flowing softness to let the pink flower-tips peep through . . .

The mue halted and turned to me. "Bad place," he said, pointing at some of the enormous trees, to remind me how anything might lurk behind them. "No fear, boy-man. Bad thing come, I help, I." He tapped the bulges of his right arm. "Fight big, you, I. You, I—word?—fra—fre—"

"Friends," I said, or my voice said it for me.

"Friends." He nodded, satisfied, turned his broad back to me and went on.

I pushed my knife into its sheath and did not draw it again that day.

The big-tree region ended. For a while our course slanted downhill through smaller growth; now and then a gap in the tree-cover let me glance out across rolling land to the north and east. Then we came to a place where the master growth was no longer trees but the wild grape. Monstrous

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vines looped and clung in their slow violence throughout a stand of maple and oak, the trees twisted into tortured attitudes by the ceaseless pressure. Many of the trees were dead but still provided firm columns to uphold their murderers. In the upper shadows I saw flashes of brilliance, not birds but the flowers called orchids whose roots grow on the branches never touching earth. Moss hung there too, a gray-green strangeness; I had never seen more than a little of it on the Skoar side of the mountain, but here it grew dense, making me think of dusty curtains swaying to a breeze I could not feel.

In this man-forgotten place, the mue stopped, glanced up into the vine-bound branches and studied my legs and arms, bothered. "You can't," he said, and showed me what he meant by catching a loop of vine and swarming up hand over hand till in a moment he was thirty feet above ground. There he swung, and launched his great bulk across a gap, catching another loop, and another. A hundred feet away, he shifted his arms so quickly I could not follow the motion, and came swinging back above me. Now I'm clever in the trees, but my arms are merely human, not that good. He called down softly: "You go ground? Not far. Bad thing come, I help quick."

So I went ground. It was nasty walking—thicket, ground-vines, fallen branches, dead logs where fire-ants would be living. The fat black-and-gold orb spiders liked this place and had their dainty-looking homes everywhere; their bite can't kill, but will make you wish it would. I had to think of snake and scorpion too, and listen for any noise in the brush that wasn't my own. I struggled through maybe a quarter-mile of that stuff, knowing the mue was near me but often unable to see or hear him, before I came up against a network of cat-brier, and there I was stopped.

Ten-foot elastic stems, tougher than moose-tendon and barbed every inch, growing so close they'd built a sort of

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basket-weave. Brown tiger himself, with his shoe-leather hide and three inches of fur, would never try it. Then beyond that Barricade I saw what could have been the tallest tree in Moha.

A tulip-tree twelve feet through at the base and I'm not lying. The wild grape had found it long ago and gone rioting up into the sunshine, but might not kill the giant for another hundred years. My mue was up there, calling, pointing out a place on my side where a stem of the vine thick as my wrist grew up straight for thirty feet and connected with the strands around the tulip-tree. Well, that I could manage. I shinnied up, and worked over to the great tree along a dizzy-sagging horizontal vine. The mue grasped my foot and set it gently on a solid branch.

As soon as he was sure of my safety he began climbing, and I followed—I don't know how far **up**, call it sixty feet more. It was easy enough, like a ladder. The side-branches had become smaller, the vine-leaves thicker in the increase of sunshine, when we reached an obstruction of crossed sticks and interwoven vine. No eagle's nest as I foolishly thought at first—no bird ever moved sticks of that size.

The mue walked out on the branch below this structure and hoisted himself to the next limb. Up beside him, I could understand it. A nest, yes, five feet across, built on a double crotch, woven as shrewdly as any willow basket I ever saw in the Corn Market, and thickly lined with gray moss. He let himself down into his home and his sad mouth grinned. I grinned back—I couldn't help it—and followed, with more caution than I needed, for the thing was solid as a house. It *was* a house.

He talked to me.

I felt no sense of dreaming, as people sometimes say they do in a time of strangeness. But didn't you, in childhood, play the game of imaginary countries? Promise your-

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self, say, that if you passed through the gap of a forked tree-trunk you'd be in a different world? Then if you did in the flesh step through such a tree, you learned that you must still rely on make-believe, didn't you? And that hurt, some. It cut a few of the threads of your fancy. But suppose that after passing through your tree-fork, you had been met in solid truth by—oh, a gnome, dragon, fairy-tale princess . . . But time moved curiously for me there in the mue's nest, and all the inner life of me—thought, vision, ignorance, wonder—was the life of someone who had not existed before that day. I think we never do know yesterday any better than we know tomorrow.

He was fingering my shirt. "Cloth?" he said, and I nodded. "Is beautiful." A rarely dirty old shirt, I'd patched it myself a dozen times. But he liked that word "beautiful" and to him I suppose it meant many things it wouldn't to you or me. "See you before," he told me. "Times ago."

He must have meant he'd watched me secretly on my other visits to North Mountain, from high in a tree or rock-still in a thicket. To guess it would have scared me gutless; learning of it now I only felt silly, me with my sharp eyes and ears and nose—studied all this time and never a hint of it.

Then he was telling me about his life. I won't try to record much of his actual talk, the jumbled half-swallowed words, pauses when he could find no word at all. Some of it I couldn't understand, gaps that caught no light from my few clumsy questions.

He was born somewhere in the northeast. He waved that way; from our height, it was all a green sea under sunshine. He said "ten sleeps", but I don't know what distance he could have covered in a day at the time he left his birthplace. His mother, evidently a farm woman, had born him secretly in a cave in the woods. "Mother's man die before that"—I think he was speaking of his father, or should

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I say the man who would have been his father if he had not been devil-begotten?

Describing his mother, all he could say was "Big, good." I could piece it out from Bull-and-Iron tales. She must have been some strapping stout woman who'd been able to hide her pregnancy in the early months. The law says every pregnancy must be reported to the authorities at once, no pregnant woman may ever be left alone after the fifth month, and a priest must always be present at the birth to do what's necessary if the birth should be a mue. She evaded that somehow—maybe the death of her husband made it simpler—and bore him and nursed him in secret, raised him to some age between eight and ten with no help except that of a great dog.

The dog was probably one of the tall gray wolfhounds that farm families need if they live outside the village stockade. The bitch guarded the baby constantly while his mother could not be with him, and grew old while he grew up, his closest companion, nurse, friend.

His mother taught him speech, what he had of it, weakened now by years of disuse. Above all, she taught him that he was different, that he must live always in the woods and forever avoid human beings because they would kill him if they found him. She taught him to get a living from the wilderness, hunting, snaring, learning the edible plants and avoiding the poisonous; how to stalk; more important, how to hide. Then, some time between his eighth and tenth year as I understood it—"she come no more."

He waited a long while. The dog stayed with him of course, hunted with him and for him, never let him out of her sight until—grown old no doubt but unchanging in devotion because the gray wolfhounds are like that—she was killed fighting off a wild boar.

After that he knew or felt that his mother must have died too, and he had to go away. He couldn't explain the

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need—"I must go, I." So he made his journey of ten sleeps. I tried to ask him about years. He knew the world dimly, but had never thought of counting the times when the world cooled into the winter rains. Looking back, guessing, I believe he wasn't much more than twenty-five.

During the journey of ten sleeps a hunter had sighted him, shot an arrow into his back, loosed a dog at him. "I must kill the dog, I." He lifted his stub hands with the fingers curling tightly inward to show me how it had been done. A harsh lesson, and it hurt him to remember it, that proof of his mother's teaching, that dogs can sometimes be almost as dangerous as men. "Then man come for me with sharp-end stick, man beautiful." That word again. And again his hands came up, the fingers squeezing life out of a remembered throat. After which he trembled and covered his face, but was watching me I think through a slit between those same curious fingers.

I said: "I would not kill you."

When his hands fell I thought he looked puzzled, as though he had known that all along, no cause for me to say it.

"I show you good thing." He was solemn, lifting himself from the nest and climbing down the tree, this time all the way to the ground. Here a floor of smallish rocks made a circle spreading five or six feet from the base of the tree to the edge of the complete cat-brier barrier, a little fortress. The rocks were all about a foot in diameter, most of them with a flattened part, overlapping so that the brier had no chance to force its way through them. Nature never build a rock-pile like that; I knew who had—and what a labor, searching out the size and kind he wanted, hundreds of them, transporting them up and down his grape-vine path!

He was watching me more intently, maybe not so trustingly. He said: "Wait here." He stumped off to the other side of the great tree, and I heard the noise of rocks being

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carefully moved. His body stayed out of sight, but his hands appeared beyond the trunk at my left and set down a slab of stone the size of my head—dull reddish, and I noticed the glint of an embedded quartz pebble. Not then with any ugly intent, just thinking ahead of his poor limited mind the way anyone might, I guessed that would be the marker-stone of some hidey-hole. A moment later he returned to me, carrying a thing whose like I have never seen elsewhere in the world.

Not even in Old City of Nuin, where I later lived awhile, and learned writing and reading, and more about Old Time than it's safe for a man to know.

I thought when I first saw the golden shining of it in his dirty hands that it must be a horn such as hunters and cavalry soldiers use, or one of the screechy brass things—cornets they're called—that I'd heard a few times when Rambler gangs passed through Skoar and gave us their gaudy entertainments in the town green. But this was none of those poor noisemakers.

The large flared end a foot across, the two round coils and straight sections of the pipe between bell and mouth-piece, the three movable pegs (I call them pegs though it doesn't quite rightly describe them) built with impossible smoothness and perfection into the pipe—all these things, and the heavy firmness of the metal, the unbelievable soft gleaming of it, made this a marvel that no one of our world could build.

Ancient coins, knives, spoons, kitchenware that won't rust—such objects of Old-Time magic metal are upturned in plowing now and then, even today. I knew about them. If the thing is simple and has an obvious use, the rule in Moha is finders keepers, if the finder can pay the priest for his trouble in exorcising the bad influence. Mam Robson had a treasure like that, a skillet-thing four inches deep, of shiny gray metal light and very hard that never took a spot of

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rust. It had been found in plowing by her grandfather, and handed down to her when she married Old Jon. She never used it, but liked to bring it from her bedroom now and then to show the guests, and tell how her mother did use it for cooking and took no harm. Then Old Jon would crash in with the story of how it was found as if he'd been there, clicket-clickety, the Mam watching sidelong and her gloomy horse-face saying *he* wasn't a man who'd ever find her such a thing, not him, miracle if he ever got up off his ass except to scratch. Well, and if the Old-Time object is something for which no reasonable man can imagine a use—a good many are said to be like that—naturally the priest will keep it, and bury it where it can work no damage, men suppose.

Ignorant as I was, I knew before the mue let me take it in my hands that I was looking on a work of ancient days that might be not for any man to touch. It is not gold of course, but as I've said, a metal of Old Time that has no name in our day. I've seen true gold in Old City; its weight is much greater, the feel of it altogether different. But I still call this a golden horn, because I thought of it so for a long time, and now that I know better the name still seems to me somehow true.

"Mother's man's thing," the mue said, and at length passed it to me. He was not happy while, dazed and afraid and wondering, I turned it about in my hands. It gathered light from this shady place and made itself a sun. "She bring me. I little, I. I to keep. She said, I to keep, I." He started once or twice to take it back, the motion uncompleted, and I was too deep in bewilderment to let it go. Then he said: "You blow." So he knew at least that it was a thing for music.

I puffed my cheeks and blew, and nothing happened—a breath-noise and a mutter. The mue laughed, really laughed. Expecting it. He took it from me hastily. "Now I blow, I."

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His miserable mouth almost disappeared in the cup, and he did something with his cheeks, not puffing them at all but tightening them till his flat face altered with carven lines. And I heard it speak.

There is no other voice like that on earth. Have you seen an icicle breaking sunshine to a thousand jewels of colored light, and can you in a waking dream imagine that icicle entering your heart with no common pain but with a transfiguration so that the the light lives within you, not to die until your own time of dying? You see, it is foolish—I have learned something of music since my childhood, even a great deal as such things are measured, but words will not give you what I know. I've heard the viols they make in Old City that are said to follow a design of Old Time. I've heard singers, a few of them with such voices as men imagine for angels. But there's no other voice like that of the golden horn. And the more I know of music, the less able am I to speak anything of it except in music's own language. Words! Can you talk of color to a man blind from birth? Could I know anything of the ocean until the day came when I stood on the beach and my own eyes saw the blue and gold, the white of foam, the green depth and the gray of distance, and I heard the sigh and thunder, the joy and the lamentation of wave on sand and wind on wave?

The one long note the mue first played—soft, loud, soft, low in pitch—shook me with unbelief. As you might be shaken if the curtain of stars and night were swept aside, and you saw—how should I know what you would see? He pressed one of the pegs, and blew another note. Another peg, another note. Two pegs at once, another. All pure, all clear and strong, changing, fading and swelling and dying out. A single note to each breath—he had no thought of combining them, no notion of melody; I think he never even moved one of the pegs while he blew. I understood presently, in spite of my own thick ignorance, that he, poor jo, had no

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knowledge at all of the thing he held in his hands. How could he?

Mother's man's thing—had his father known more? A miracle of Old Time, found—where? Hidden away—how? Hidden away surely, I thought, for how could a man play this horn where others heard and not be known at once for a possessor of magic, brought before priests and princes to tell of it, and play it, and no doubt lose it to their itching hands? A miracle of Old Time, carried off to be a toy for a mue-child in the wilderness . . .

"She said, I to keep, I. Good?"

"Good. Yes, good."

He asked, not happily: "You blow now?"

"I daren't."

He seemed relieved by that. He chuckled, and padded away behind the tree hugging the horn. I stayed where I was, hot and cold within. I watched the slab of reddish rock till his hands reached out for it. I heard the chink as it was set in place, and I knew the golden horn had to be mine.

It had to be mine.

He came back smiling and rubbing his lips, no longer concerned about his treasure, while I could think of nothing else. But a mean sort of caution kept me from saying anything more about it. And there was meanness, calculation, in the friendliness I showed him from then on. Almost certain what I meant to do, pushed toward it (so I excused myself) as if by a force outside of me, I acted a part. I grinned, nodded, made noises like his, stared around me as though his dwelling-place were a wonder of the world, while inside me I could think of nothing except how to get at that rock-pile in his absence.

For one thing I will give myself a small trace of honor. I did not again plan to kill him. The power had burned

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out of that. The idea was there, yes—even painfully strong at moments when he trustingly turned his back or looked away from me, and I remembered how fast my hand was, how quickly I could run, and how I would be praised and honored, not punished, for destroying him. Maybe I understood, without reasoning it through, that I just don't have it in me to kill another being for any reason except hunger or self-defense—anyway I never have, and I've been tempted to it a few times in my travels since that day. Whatever the reason, I did reject the thought of killing him, not purely from cowardice, so for what it's worth, that's my scrap of virtue.

All the same I'm not going to enjoy writing the next page or two. I could lie about what happened—how would you know the difference? Anybody can lie about himself; we all do it every day, trying like sin to show the world an image with all the warts rubbed off. Writing this story for you, some-way I don't want to lie. Merely writing it seems to make the warts your business, so I won't draw myself as a saint or a hero or a wise man. Better just remember, friends, that a lot of the time I've acted almost as bad as you do, and be damned to it.

We climbed up from the cat-brier fortress into the tulip-tree, and I got clever. I asked: "Where is water?"

He pointed off into the jungle. "You want drink? I show you, I."

"Wash too," I said, hoping to get him interested in a brand-new idea. You can see how clever it was—if he ever got serious about washing himself, he had a long project ahead of him. "Washing is good," I said, and touched my arms and face, which happened to be pretty clean. "Dirt comes off in water. Is good, good. Wash."

I think he'd known the word once, though obviously it wasn't one of his favorites. He worked on it, studying my crazy gestures, frowning and mumbling. Then he studied

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his own skin, what you could see of it through the crust, and all of a sudden the great idea got to him. "Wash!" he said, and chuckled till he drooled, and wiped that away among the other smears. "Wash! I wash *all* me, be like you!"

Well . . . I did have the decency to feel sick. I'm sure he imagined, for a while at least, that I knew how to work some magic with water which would take away his ugliness and make him man-beautiful. I'd never intended that, and now I didn't see how to change the idea or explain it.

And he couldn't wait. He practically pushed me along the grape-vine route, down outside the cat-briers and off through the woods. This time he stayed with me on the ground instead of swinging ahead above me. I think he wanted to keep close, so that he could go on reminding me with grins and mumbles about our wonderful project.

We walked mostly downhill as I'd expected, and it was bad going until he turned off to follow a deer-trail out of the wild-grape area and into a clearer space, which suited me fine. I wanted distance from his home, lots of it. The trees had become well spaced, no more vines overhead, the ground reasonably clear. In country like this I could run like a bird before the wind. Not too soon, we reached the brook he had in mind, and traveled a comfortable distance further before arriving at a pool big enough for bathing, a quiet and lovely place of filtered sunlight and the muttering of cool water. We both studied the tracks of animals who had come to drink here, and found no record of danger, only deer, fox, wildcat, porcupine, whiteface monkey. I dropped my clothes on the bank and slipped into the water, slow and noiseless the way I like to go, while he watched me, scared and doubtful, not quite believing anyone could really do a thing like that.

I beckoned to him with grins and simple words, made a show of scrubbing myself to show him how it was done. At last he ventured in, the big baby, an inch at a time. The

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pool was narrow but long, nowhere deeper than three feet. I'm glad to remember I didn't try to persuade him to try swimming—with his poor legs he'd probably have drowned. But I showed him he could walk or stand in the water and still have his head well above it. Gradually he caught on, found himself all the way in and began to love it.

I frolicked around, burning and impatient inside, my head full of just one thing. When I was sure he was really enjoying himself and wanted to go on with the great washing thing, I let him see me look suddenly and anxiously toward the afternoon sun. He understood I was thinking about time and the approach of evening. I said: "I must go back. You stay here, finish wash. I must go fast. You stay."

He understood but didn't like it. When I'd nipped out on the bank he started to follow, very slow, clumsy, timid in the water. "No," I said—"you finish wash." I pointed to the plentiful dirt still on him, made motions of sloshing water on my back. "All dirt bad. Washing good, good. You finish wash. I will come back."

"I finish wash, then I be—"

"Finish wash," I said, cutting that off—so I'll never know, and didn't want to know, whether he really imagined that washing would make him man-beautiful. "I must go now before sun go down."

"To smoke-place, big sticks?" He meant Skoar and its stockade.

"Yes." And I said again, as plain and friendly (and treacherous) as I could: "I will come back . . ."

I don't know if he watched me out of sight, for I couldn't look behind me. Presently I was running, as quickly and surely as I had ever done in my life, remembering all the landmarks without thinking of them. Up across the easy ground, that was hard for him, and into the grape-vine jungle, pulled accurately and fast as if I were bound to the golden horn by a tightening cord.

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Up the grape-vine into the tulip-tree, and down inside the brier fortress, finding that red rock at once and lifting it aside. The horn lay there wrapped in gray-green moss that was like a cloth, and with hardly a glance to delay me I shoved it still wrapped into my sack, and was up over the grape-vine, and out, and gone. If the mue had followed me at his best speed, and I'm sure he didn't follow at all, I would still have been gone on my way before ever he came in sight of his home. Yes, I was very clever.

And now, in no danger from him at all, I was running faster than ever. Like a crazed hunted animal without sense or caution. Wolf or tiger could have taken me then with no trouble—but you need to be strangely alive in order to write words on paper; you notice I'm still living. I couldn't escape that driving need to run until I had gone all the way around the east side of the mountain, past the ledge that led to my cave, and had caught sight of the Skoar church-spires. Then I collapsed on a fallen log gulping for air.

The skin of my belly hurt horribly. I twitched my shirt aside and found red-burning skin and the puncture mark. Why, somewhere, during my mad running after I had stolen the horn, I must have blundered through an orb-spider's web, the thing had bitten me, and I hadn't even known it until now.

It wouldn't kill me. I'd had a bite from one of them before, on the arm. Needles were doing a jerking jig all over me, and my guts ached. I wouldn't sleep much, I knew. Tomorrow it would become an infernal itch for a while, and then stop hurting.

I wondered, as if someone had spoken aloud to stab me with the thought, whether I'd ever sleep well again.

I took out the horn with wobbling hands, unwrapping it from the moss. O the clear splendor, and the shining! Forest daylight flowed into it and was itself a silent music. And the horn was mine. Wasn't it?

The Golden Horn

I raised it to my lips, trembling but compelled. It amazed me—still does—how naturally the body of the horn rests against my body, and my right hand moves without guidance of thought over those three pegs. Did the faraway makers of the horn leave in it some Old-Time magic that even now tells the holder of the horn what he must do?—oh, foolishness; they simply remembered the shape and the needs of a human body, the way the maker of a simple knife-hilt will remember the natural shape of a human hand. But still, still—that kind of thinking and remembering, planning for necessity but also dreaming your way into the impossible until it changes and becomes true and real in your hand, isn't that a kind of magic? And so, many of us are magicians but have never noticed it; anyway I give you the thought if you'll have it.

I did not dare blow into the horn; then I did so in spite of myself, not puffing or straining but breathing gently and, by accident I think, firming my lips and cheeks in what happened to be the right way. It spoke for me.

It was mine.

Only one note, and soft, so light was the breath I dared to use. But it was clear and perfect, the sunlight and the shining transformed to sound, and I knew then there was music hidden here that not the mue, maybe not anyone since the days of Old Time, had ever dreamed of until it came into my hands. And, sick and scared and miserable though I was, I knew it was for me to bring forth that music, or die.

Then I shook with common fright, for what if even that small sound of the horn could travel by some magic around the mountain where the true owner—?

But *I* was the true owner. It was mine.

I returned it to the sack and stumbled on down the mountain toward the city. The spider-bite was making me dizzy and slow, a bit feverish. Once I had to stop and heave, all

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blackness surging around me—any hunting beast could have had me for nothing. That cleared, and I went on. Near the edge of the forest, a hundred yards or so from the stockade, I holed up in a thicket, enough sense left in me to know I must wait for dark and the stockade guards' supper-time.

That was a bad hour. I crouched hugging the horn against my middle where the spider-bite jabbed me with fire-lances. I vomited again once or twice. I couldn't stand it to think of the mue, his friendliness, his human ways, for that would start me wondering what sort of thing *I* was.

There are tales of brain-mues. The most frightful kind of all, for they grow up in the natural human shape, and no one knows they are devil-begotten until, perhaps when they are full-grown, they go through a change that is called madness, behaving like wild beasts, or sometimes forgetting who or where they are, seeing and believing all manner of outrageous things until their infernal origin becomes known to everyone and they must be given over to the priests. What if I—

I could not examine nor tolerate the thought then. It stayed, at the fringes of my mind, a black wolf waiting.

Yes, a bad hour. Maybe it was also the hour when I started changing into a man.

The spider-bite was still a blazing misery under my shirt when it grew dark enough for me to move. All I remember about the agony of climbing the stockade is that when I reached the top of it I had to scrounge back out of sight and wait for a patrolling guard to walk on, and then waste my strength cussing his lights and gizzard when he met another guard and they spent ten minutes beating their gums. But that ended, I was in the city, the heavy burden in my sack unharmed, and I sneaked along easily enough to the Bull-and-Iron, keeping close in the shadow of the buildings.

The Golden Horn

I saw a light in Emmia's window, though it wasn't late enough for her bedtime, and when I crept into the stable she was there, doing my work for me with a lantern. She'd just done watering the mule-team an hour late, and turned to me quick and sore with a finger at her lips. "They think I'm in my room. I swear this is the last time I cover up for you, Davy. What are we going to *do* about you? Don't you live here any more, Mister Independent?" I couldn't answer. It took all I had merely to look at her and try to appear human while I squirmed my sack off and set it on the stable floor. I wished there was more shadow. I pulled my shirt open, and even in the dim lantern light she noticed the red patch on my belly. "Davy darling, what happened?" She dropped the water-bucket and hurried to me, with no more thought of scolding, or of anything except helping me. "What is it?"

"Orb-spider."

"Davy, *boy!* You silly jerk, the way you go wandering off where all those awful things are, I swear if you was only small enough to turn over my knee—" and she went on so, quite a while, the warm soft-mother kind of scolding that doesn't mean a thing.

"I didn't goof off, Emmia, I thought it was my regular day off—"

"Oh, *shed* up, Davy, you didn't think never any such thing, why've you got to lie to me? But I won't tell, I said I'd covered up for you, only more fool me if ever I do it again, and you're lucky it's Friday, you wasn't missed. Now look, you go straight up to your bed and I'll bring you a mint-leaf poultice for that nasty bite. The things you get into! Here, take my lantern up with you, I won't need it. Now you—"

"Kay," I said. There was that about Emmia—she was sweet as all summertime, but if you wanted to say anything to her, you had to work a mite fast to get it in. I tried to scoop up my sack without her noticing, but she could

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be sharp too sometimes, and I was clumsy with the lantern and all.

"Davy, merciful winds, whatever have you got *there?*"

"Nothing."

"Nothing! There you go again, and the thing as big as a house. Davy, if you've gone and taken something you shouldn't—"

"It's nothing!" I was yelling at her, and hurrying for the loft ladder. "If you got to know, it's some special wood I picked up, to carve something for—for your name-day, if you got to know."

"Davy! Little Spice!" So here she comes for me all in a warm rush. I swung the sack around behind me before a kiss landed—not on my mouth, where I wanted it, because I ducked, but on my eyebrow anyhow, and anyhow a kiss. Well, "little Spice" doesn't mean the same or even half as much as just "Spice." "Please forgive me, Davy, I'm *sorry!* Me scolding you, and all the time you're sick with that awful bite. Herel!" I looked up, and she kissed me again, sudden-sweet, full on the mouth.

When my arms tightened around her she pulled away, staring at me deep, her eyes swimming in the lantern-light. She looked surprised, as if nothing like that had ever crossed her mind. "Why, Davy!" she said, dreamy-voiced. "Why, Davy-boy . . ." But then she pulled her wits together. "Now then, straight up to bed with you, and I'll bring you that poultice soon as I can sneak the stuff and slip away with it. I'm not supposed to be here, you know."

I climbed to the loft, not too easily. I was thinking of other things she'd be bringing me, up that ladder. I couldn't make it seem real, yet my heart went to racing and thundering for other reasons than sickness from the bite and memory of what I'd done to a friend.

I hid the sack in the hay near my pallet, carelessly be-

The Golden Horn

cause dizziness and fever from the spider's poison had grown worse. Besides, I had a half-desire to show someone that horn and tell my story. Who but Emmia? Of all the South District boys I knew—few enough, for I never ran with the street gangs—there wasn't a one that I thought would understand or keep quiet about it. I could picture myself being called yellow for not killing the mue and wicked for not reporting it . . .

A chill shook me as I slipped off my loin-rag. I kept my shirt on as I crawled under my blanket, and there's a kind of blank stretch when my wits were truly wandering. I know I was trying to fold the blanket double for warmth and making a slithery mess of it when a second blanket was spread over me. Emmia had come back so softly that in sickness and confusion I hadn't seen or heard her. The blanket was wool-soft, full of the special girl-scent of her. From her own bed, and me a dirty yard-boy, and a thief. "Emmia—"

"Hush! You're a bit fevery, Davy. Be a good boy now and let me put on this poultice, ha?" Well, I wouldn't stop her, her hands gentle as moth-wings easing down the blankets, pressing the cloth with some cool minty stuff where my flesh was burning. "Davy, what was you raving about? Something about where the sun rises—but it's only evening." She brought the blanket back up to my chin, and pushed my arms under it, and I let her, like a baby. "You was talking about going somewhere, and where the sun rises, and funny stuff. You're real light in the head, Davy. You better get to sleep."

I said: "What if a man could go where the sun rises, and see for himself?" Yes, maybe I was light in the head, but it was clearing. I knew where I was, and knew I wanted to tell her and ask her a thousand things. "You go to church better than I do, Emmia, I guess you never miss—is there anything says a man can't go looking, maybe for other lands,

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go out to sea, maybe a long long way—?" I believe I went on that way quite a while."

There was no harm in it. She blamed most of it on the fever, which I wasn't feeling any more, and the rest on a boy's wildheadedness. She sat by me with a hand resting light on the blanket over my chest, and now and then said little things like "You're all right, Davy-boy," and "It must be nice to travel a bit, I always wished I could . . ."

I felt better merely from the talk. When I quit, the fever from the bite was gone. Leaving the other fever, which I understood fairly well for fourteen, enough to realize that something was wrong with it.

I knew what men did with women. Any South District kid knows that. I knew it was what I wanted with Emmia. I knew she knew it, and wasn't angry. My trouble was fear, cold shadow-fear. Not of Emmia surely—who'd be afraid of Emmia, gentle as spring night, and her face in the dim glow of the lantern a little rose? "Are you warm enough now, Davy?"

"I'm warm. I wish—I wish—"

"What, Davy?"

"I wish you was always with me."

She moved quickly, startling me, and was lying beside me, the blankets between us, lying on my right arm so that it couldn't slide around her, and when my other arm tried to she caught my wrist and held it awhile. But her lips were on my forehead and I could feel her breathing hard. "Davy, Spice, I oughtn't to do this, mustn't. Little Davy . . ." She let go my wrist. Our hands could wander then, and mine didn't dare. Hers did, straying over the blanket, resting here and there light and warm.

And nothing happened. I knew what ought to happen. It was almost as if someone in deepest shadow was muttering over and over: "I show you good things, I."

And I thought, What if she rolls over and bumps against

The Golden Horn

that horn?—it's right behind her. And, what if Mam Robson, or Judd, or Old Jon—

She sat up brushing a wisp of hay out of her hair and looking angry, but not at me. "I'm sorry, Davy. I'm being foolish."

"We didn't do anything, S-s—"

"What?"

"We didn't do anything, Spice."

"You mustn't call me that. It's my fault, Davy."

"We haven't done anything."

"I don't know what got into me."

"I wanted you to."

"I know, but . . . We must forget about it." Her voice was different, higher, too controlled, scared. "They'd all be after us."

"Let's run away, you and me."

"Now you're really talking wild." But at least she didn't laugh. No, she sat quiet three feet away from me, her smock tucked neat and careful over her knees, and talked to me awhile, sweet and serious. About how I was a good, dear boy except for my wildness, and was going to be a good man, only I must prove myself, and remember that being a man wasn't all fun and freedom, it was hard work too, and responsibility, minding what people said and she meant not only the priests but everybody who lived respectable, learning how to do things the right way, and not dreaming and goofing off. I must work out my bond-period, and save money, and then I'd be free and I could go apprentice and learn a good trade, like for instance inn-keeping, and then some time—why, maybe some time—but right now, she said, why didn't I set myself something sort of difficult to do, a real task, to prove myself, and stay right with it? Not goofing off.

"Like what for instance?"

"Like—oh, I don't know, Davy dear. You should pick it yourself. It should be something—you know, difficult but

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not impossible, and—and good and honest of course. Then I'll be proud of you. I know I'm right, Davy, you'll see. Now I'm going to say good night, and you go straight to sleep you hear? And we won't talk about any of this in the morning, either. I wasn't here, understand? You was here all day, and fed the stock yourself." She took up the lantern. "Good night, Davy."

"Good night," I said, and could have tried for another kiss, but instead I lay there like a boy wondering if she'd give me one, which she didn't. She left the lantern by the top of the ladder, blew it out, and was gone.

I slept, and I woke in a place full of the black dark of horror. The loft, yes—gradually I knew that, as a dream drained away from me. Some of me, though, was still running mush-footed through a house something like the Bull-and-Iron but with ten thousand rooms, and the black wolf followed me, slow as I was because he could wait, and snuffling in noises like words: "Look at me, look at me, look at me!" If I looked, he would have me, so I went on, opening doors, every new room strange but with no window, no sunrise-place. Not one of the doors would latch. Sometimes I leaned my back against one, hearing him slobber and whisper at the crack: "Look at me!" He could open it as soon as I took my weight away, and anyway I must go on to the next door, and the next . . . When I knew I was awake, when I heard my own rustling against the hay and recognized the feel of my pallet, my own voice broke loose in a whimper: "I'm not a brain-mue. I'll prove it, I'll prove it!"

I did get myself in hand. By the time I thought I had courage enough to fumble after the lantern and my flint-and-steel, I no longer needed the light. It was just the loft, with even a trace of moonlight in the one high window. I could wipe the sweat from my body (remembering too late that it was Emmia's blanket) and think awhile.

The Golden Horn

Something difficult, and good, and honest. I knew soon enough what that had to be. Then it hardly even troubled me that I couldn't tell Emmia of it afterward, for there was much about it that wouldn't seem right to her and so couldn't be explained. I understood there would always be many things I would not be telling to Emmia . . .

When the square of moonlight began to change to a different gray I was dressed and ready, the sack with the horn over my shoulder. Nothing remained of the spider-bite but a nasty itch, and that was fading out.

I went down the ladder, out and away, across the city in the still heavy dark, over the stockade and up the mountain with barely enough light to be sure of my course. I traveled slowly, but I was passing my cave (not pausing even to see if the ants had got after my bacon) when the first-light glory told me that sunrise would arrive within the hour. I didn't see it—when it happened I was passing through that solemn big-tree region where yesterday I might have killed the mue. If I were the killing kind.

In the tangled ugly passage where the grape-vines thickened overhead, I caught a wrong smell. Wolf smell.

My knife came out, and was steady in my fingers. My back chilled and tingled, but I think I was more angry than anything else. Angry that I must be halted or threatened by a danger that had nothing to do (I thought) with my errand. I didn't stop, just worked on through the bad undergrowth watching everywhere, sniffing, as nearly ready as I could be, seeing that no one is ever quite ready to die. All the way to the cat-briers.

The black wolf was directly below the strand of grape-vine that hung down outside the mue's tulip-tree, and she was dead. I stepped up to the huge carcass and prodded it with my knife. She stretched maybe six feet from nose to tail-tip, an old one, scarred, dingy black, foul. Her neck was broken. I proved to myself, lifting and prodding, that

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her neck was broken—if you don't believe it, remember you never saw my North Mountain mue, and his arms. The patches and spatters of blood on the rocks, the ground, the dangling grape-stem, were not hers.

Her body was beginning to stiffen, and cold. It must have happened yesterday, maybe when he came back from the pool, careless perhaps, wondering why he hadn't started changing to man-beautiful.

I set down my sack and climbed the tulip-tree. I called to him a few times. It troubled me that I hadn't any name for him. I called: "Friend? I'm coming up, friend. I brought something back to you." He didn't answer. I knew why, before I reached the branch above his nest and looked down. The carrion ants were already at work, earning their living. I said: "I brought it back. I did steal it, friend, but I brought it back."

I don't remember how many other things I said that would never be answered.

I went back through the forest to my cave, with my golden horn, and the day passed over me. Much of the time I wasn't thinking at all, but in other hours I was. About the thirty-tonners that sail out of Levannon for the northern passage, and then eastward—for the safe Nuin harbors, yes, but eastward, toward the place where the sun is set afire for the day. And I would not go to Levannon on a roan horse, with the blessing and the money of the Kurin family and three attendants, and a serving-maid to warm the bed for me in the next inn. But I would go.

In the afternoon, in the strong light on my ledge, I took out my golden horn, and learned a little. Not a great deal—that day I touched only the fringes of it, but I did discover many notes that the mue had not shown me, and when I ceased to be afraid, the cliff rang, and the voice was clearer than any fancied voice of angels, and it was mine.

The Golden Horn

Late in the day, I did something like what my poor mue had done. I went up the mountainside well away from my ledge, and with a flat rock I scooped out a pocket in the ground, scattering the earth and wiping out my traces, leaving my golden horn with nothing to mark the place except what was written in my memory. My sack, as well as the mue's gray moss, was wrapped around it, for I knew it was only a little while before I would be coming back for it. In the meantime there was a need.

I waited a long time outside the stockade that night. It must have been midnight, or past, when I climbed it, and crossed the city once more, and stood a foolish while in the darkness watching Emmia's dark window, and the jinny-creeper vine, and hearing the city's last noises dwindle away into nothing. I remember being astonished, so changed was the world (or if you like, myself), that I had never before even dreamed of climbing that vine to her window.

Now it seemed to me that I was afraid of nothing, I was only waiting for a little deeper quiet, a heavier sleep in the old grimy city that had nothing to do with me. Then my hands were on the vine, and I was climbing up through a harmless whisper of leaves, and opening her window all the way, and crossing the sweet-smelling room where I'd never entered before—but her soft breathing told me where she was, and that she slept.

I would have liked to stand there by her bed a long time, feeling her nearness without touching her, just able to make out a little of her face and her arm in the hint of moonlight. I leaned down and spoke her name a few times softly before I kissed her, and she came awake quickly, like a child. "Emmia, it's just me, Davy. Don't be afraid of anything. I'm going away, Emmia."

"No. What—how—what are you doing here? What—"

I closed her mouth, awhile, the best way. Then I said: "I did something difficult, Emmia, and I think it was good

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and honest too, but I can't ever tell you what it was, so please—please—don't ever ask me."

And so, of course, she asked me, fluttery and troubled and scared but not angry, not pulling away from me. I knew what to do, and words were no part of it, except that many times, after our first plunge into the rainbow, she called me Spice. Other words came later, maybe an hour later: "Davy, you're not going away for true, are you? Don't ever go away, Davy."

"Why, Emmia," I said—"love-package, honey-spice, what nonsense! Of course I'll never go away."

I think and hope she knew as well as I did that for love's sake I was lying.



If you are puzzled by any faintly familiar time, place, person, thing, or national characteristic in this indescribable gouache of big business, politics, ensorcelment and young love, please remember that the totally irrational nature of our continuum *does* have its rational counterparts in other continuums.

—R.P.M.

THE SINGULAR EVENTS WHICH OCCURRED IN THE HOVEL ON THE ALLEY OFF OF EYE STREET

by Avram Davidson

IN 1961, THE YEAR WHEN THE DRAGONS were so bad, a young man named George Laine, an industrial alchemist by profession, attended the coronation of the new president in Washington. The guilds were in high favor with the president-select, John V (the first of that name since John IV C. Coolidge), who sent to each and every of their delegation, as a mark of his esteem, garments of vertue worthy of the occasion, viz. a silken hat, a pair of golashes with silvern buckles, a great-coat with a collar of black samite, cuff-links enchased in gold, and a pen-and-pencil set of malachite and electrum which it were guaranteed to write under water and over butter: both, as it happened, essential to the practice of industrial alchemy.

The ceremonies proceeded without any untowardness. The Supreme Justice of the Chief Court placed on the President's head the sacred beaver with the star-spangled band and declared that "Regardless of rape, crude, choler, or national ore or gin, any resemblance is purely coincidental." The

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Chairman of the Board of Augurs of the Federal Reserve System pronounced a curse in weirdman and in womrath on anyone who should presume to send gold o'er the white-waved seas. The new Veep, wearing the ritual ten-gallon hat, and mounted on a palomino, cantered up and down before the Selector College, and uttered the prescribed challenge: "Whosoever doth deny that the Honorable John V Fitz-Kenneth is the rightful Chief Executive of Thiscountry lies, and is an S.O.B." The out-going Jester raised the liturgical *hwyl* of *We want Wilkie*, and was smitten twice with a slapstick and thrice with a bladder, both wielded by his successor. The Fall River Chamber of Commerce and Horror presented the ceremonial breakfast of cold mutton soup, sliced bananas, and an axe: it was ceremoniously refused. A Boston Brahmin, clad in cutaway, *dhoti*, and sacred thread, offered a salver bearing two curried codfish balls; the new President ate both whilst the Brahmin intoned,

Eat it up, wear it out,
Make it do, or do without;

after which he, the B.B., hurried to wash himself in sacred 6% Charles water to remove the impurity of feeding with a lower caste.

George Laine and his fellows of the alchemists and other guilds were not forgotten even afterwards; for Prex Jax (as the newsguild had already termed him *in parvo*) sent them out great smoking helpings of buffalo hump, bear paws, caponized peacocks, pemmican, ptarmigan, succotash, and syllabub, from the high table where he was dining with his notables, including Surgeon-General Doctor Caligari, who had just been raised to Cabinet rank.

It was during these moments of revelry and mirth that George choked on a quartern of orange in an Old Fashioned Cocktail, all went black before his face, and, on awakening

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to find himself bound with silken cords in a hovel on an alley off of Eye Street, knew that he had been ensorcelled.

There was a bim looking bemused at him with a bodkin in her bosom, and he wotted well it were for lack of wit anent her that he bode bound: for who was she but Yancey-Courtney Belleregarde, a Drum Majorette, 1/c, who had been sitting in his lap that time he raised the dram-glass to his lips.

"I say, that bodkin must hurt something dreadful," he said (not having attended the N.Y. High School of Gallanterie Trades in vain); "untie me and I'll have it out for you in a trice: there's a good gel, do."

The bim smiled scornfully. Her lips were as red as the chassis of a new-model Jaguar of the first enameling. "Not on your tin-type, Cully," she said. "Rats. Nit." She spoke in the Archaic tongue of the bim-folk, which is akin to elf-talk, and cognate with 23 Skiddoo (unlawful for a man to know until he has passed his finals in The Deep School, and been awarded the right to wear the Navel Plug, with two Pips).

"Nix on the soft-soap, Charlie," she said; "I only keep the bodkin there because these, now, sorcelsacquets don't have any pockets in them, as if you didn't know. Oh you kid!" she concluded, archly. And with this she withdrew the bodkin, dipped its prickle into a pot labelled *Poyson Moste Foule*, and approached the supine young industrial alchemist with the tip of her tongue held between her teeth.

"Slip me the Formula for the Transmutation of Borax Without the Use of Cockatrice-egg," she said (speaking with some difficulty, her tongue, as we have already noted, you clod, being between her teeth), "and we'll be back in the Grand Ballroom of the Mayflower in lots of time to see Ed Finnegan made a K.T.V.; afterwards we can tiptoe up to any of the thirty-odd double rooms which my Company keeps rented at all times, and you may have your wicked

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will o' me without fearing the House-Dick, because I'll put a Cheese-it spell on the door, see, which it's proof against Force, Force-Fields, Stealth, Mort-Main, Nigromancy, Mopery, and Gawk: so give, Cully, give."

A cold sneer crossed George's hot lips. "I say, what an absolutely rotten proposal!" he exclaimed. "You know perfectly well that I have sworn by the most frightful oaths to remain true in mind and deed to Alchymy, Ltd., of Canada, and to keep myself physically clean, mentally straight, and morally pure! I suppose you're one of these simply awful party girls which one hears that General Semantics, Inc., of Delaware, keeps on their payrolls to entrap, ensorcel, enviegat, enchaunt, enduce, endive, and endamage clean-living young chaps into betraying secrets. Well, I shan't, do you hear? Better I should die. So there!"

But the bim, far from being one whit abashed by this manly defiance, laughed as coarsely as the position of her tongue would permit. "Well, if that don't take the cake," she snickered. "Gee, what a simpl!" and made feint as though she would withdraw George's Plug, two Pips or no two Pips.

"No, really, don't touch me, do you hear?" George said, stoutly, trying to roll over on his stomach, "I'm really most frightful ticklish, and besides, without the Plug I should swell up with lint in simply no time; funny thing about me, I'm very susceptible to navel lint, always was, from a child."

But the silken cords held him faste.

"The Formula for the Transmutation of Borax Without the Use of Cockatrice-egg," she said, inexorably, making little jabs at him with the bodkin dip't in Venom.

George mimicked her: " '-Uthe of Cockatwithe-egg'!"

Unguardedly she laughed, releasing the tip of her tongue from between her teeth, and thus . . . Those who are Cupboard Certified Auditors of The Deep School will understand *thus*, and those who are *not* needn't imagine for one minute

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that we are going to reveal for free, secrets for which others have paid good money, no siree. Suffice it, then, to say that in a trice George had leapt out of his bonds, flung the bodkin from the bim's hands with such force that it pierced the door and hung quivering. This produced a startled cry from behind the door, which George flung open, revealing a man, a tape-recorder, and a flash-camera. The man cringed, then assumed an expression combining both defiance and a falsely hearty air of good will.

"Weh-hell, Laine," he burred.

"What," demanded George, sternly, "is the Assistant Director of Research for the Middle Atlantic States Division of Alchymy, Ltd., of Canada, doing cowering behind the door of a hovel on an alley off of Eye Street, with a tape-recorder and a flash-camera; what?"—a question which, put like that, might make any man pause before answering.

Mr. Marcantonio Paracelcus (for such was his name), paused before answering. He swallowed. "It was a Test, you see, George."

"I fail to see."

"Well, it was a *test*. The Company is considering you for an important new job. In order to find out how you would shape up under pressure, we have tested you. I am, um, happy to say that you have passed the Test."

George said, "Oh, good. Then I get the job. *What* job?"

Mr. Marcantonio Paracelcus seemed to find some difficulty in answering this question. Whilst he stood there, came a buzz and a clatter, and that which George had hitherto considered to be merely a tallboy-sized TV set opened up, revealing itself to be an Observation Armoire containing a microphone, *two* tape-recorders, an automatic closed-circuit television camera, and Dr. Roger Bacon Buxbaum, Chief Director of Research for the Middle Atlantic States Division of Alchymy, Ltd., of Canada. Marcantonio Paracelcus, on

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perceiving his superior, turned ashen, livid, and pale, in the order.

"The job in question, George," said Dr. Buxbaum, "is that which until a moment ago was held by a gentleman you now see cowering behind the door; but which is no longer so held. On realizing that you were being considered for his position, he determined on this unworthy method of discrediting you: hence, the tape-recorder, on which he hoped to capture the sound of your voice as you revealed the Formula for the Transmutation of Borax Without the Use of Cockatrice-egg; hence the flash-camera with which he hoped to capture the sight of you in a," and here the benign, balding Buxbaum blushed a bit, "compromising position with this young female person here. Little did he know," the urbane researcher winked, and placed his right forefinger by the right side of his nose, "that we were onto his jazz from the word Go . . .

"And to think that he would sully the semi-sacred season of the Coronation by his meretricious machinations; fie, sir, do you call yourself a Thiscountrean? But I forebear harshness; modern science had taught us that such a one as you is really sick, and needs help. Come along now—Georgel Expect to see you for lunch, day after tomorrow, at the Alembic, one sharp!"

George went pink with pleasure, for what was the Alembic but the most expensive eatery favored by the upper echelons of the M.A.S.D. of Alchymy, Ltd. (Canada); and this invite betokened his full acceptance into the post previously held by his unfortunate predecessor, who even now, sniveling miserably, was being firmly guided out by the elbow. George's feelings of sorrow, which did him credit, were tempered by the reflection that, after suitable treatment at the Company's Rehabilitation Farm in North Baffin Land, the man might still prove capable of many years of devoted service; though, of course, in a minor capacity.

For a moment all was silent in the hovel on the alley off

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of Eye Street. George eyed the bim. The bim eyed the floor. After a while she spoke. "I suppose you hate me," she said.

"No, I—"

"I suppose you think I'm miserable and treacherous."

"No, I—"

"I suppose you think I would really have stuck you with a poysoned bodkin, don't you? Well, the jar only contained a Sophronia Finkelstein preparation for the treatment of tired skin and subcutaneous tissues; so there."

George said, "No, I fully realize that as a bim, and as a sorceress under contract to General Semantics, Inc., of Delaware, you were only carrying out your duty. And now, if you don't mind, I wonder if I might use your phone to call a taxi?"

Fancy his astonishment when she burst into tears.

"We have no phone," she wept. "I'm not a bim. I never worked for General Semantics. My parents couldn't afford to send me to Sorcery School. How I put you under that spell and brought you here, my old Auntie Eglantine was a white witch and I picked up some little piddly old spells from her, is all. I am really just a Drum Majorette, 1/c. Oh, I wish I were dead! A hoo, hoo, hoo!"

George, at first with awkwardness, then with growing appreciation for the task, patted her hands, her shoulders, and the general area of the small of her back. "To tell you the truth, Miss Yancey-Courtney," he said, "I would just purely hate it if you were to be a bim. I mean, like, those hairy feet? And their toe-nails *glow* in the dark? Why, a man couldn't hardly relish his victuals, let alone keep his mind on his Transmutations . . . Of course, I'm just speaking speculatively, I mean; having always kept myself physically pure, mentally clean, and morally square, according to the terms of my Triune Oath to the Company, which I have never regretted," he said, regretfully.

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"Of course," she murmured, wiping her eyes on his shirt-tail.

"Listen," she said, "do you know when it was that I first felt a revulsion I was barely able to conquer at the infamous Marcantonio Paracelcus's proposal? It was when the Veep rode in. When he gave out the Challenge I could see you clench your fists until your knuckles went what I mean *white*; as if you were just *daring* any old Recounter to challenge the Selection!"

"Hm," said George, grimly.

"I'll bet you must be awfully strong."

George, modestly, said, well, shoving all that lead and gold around, *you* know. She said that she could well imagine. There was a pause. Then he asked what time it was. She said it was 7:45, why? He said that if they hurried, they could still get to see Ed Finnegan dubbed a K.T.V. She said, yes, they could, couldn't they? She asked if he was very fond of Ed Finnegan. There was a pause. He said that as a matter of fact he couldn't stand Ed Finnegan.

"Neither can I!"

"All those trained wombats!"

"And that incessant, hearty laugh!"

There was another pause. Then, "My, those are handsome galoshes!" she said.

"Gift of the President."

"Pipe the silvern buckles, will yuh?"

"Mmm."

"But don't you think you'd be more comfortable if you took them off?"

"The buckles?"

"Oh you silly! The *galoshes*!"

"I might at that."

And he did. And he was.

Outside, the Northern Lights hissed and crackled (or, again, it might have been the dragons, which were so bad

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that year); outside, the noise of revelry continually rose and fell in the streets; but inside, all was quiet in the hovel on the alley off the Eye Street.



The kind of artistry found in this story by Brian W. Aldiss who won a Hugo last year for his HOTHOUSE series will surprise no one except those who are about to read him for the first time. This story of Derek Ende, his brave—or bootless—voyage to a future and hazardous Ultima Thule; his adventuring in the fleshpots; relations with his Lady; and that Lady's own singular (and deeply significant) experiments are the work of: *Item* . . . The Literary Editor of the *Oxford Mail*, an erudite daily whose book reviews are among the top in Britain. *Item* . . . The President of the British Science Fiction Association. *Item* . . . The editor of PENGUIN SCIENCE FICTION ONE (1961), an unprecedented success, and of PENGUIN SCIENCE FICTION TWO (forthcoming). *Item* . . . The author of THE PRIMAL URGE (Ballantine Books), "a novel somewhat too hot for British publishers to handle;" THE BRIGHTFOUNT DIARIES (bibliophilia); THE LONG AFTERNOON OF EARTH (Signet), based on his HOTHOUSE series—F&SF (HOTHOUSE, Feb., 1961; NOMANSLAND, Apr., 1961; UNDERGROWTH, July, 1961; TIMBERLINE, Sept., 1961; and EVERGREEN, Dec., 1961); and his latest, A GARDEN WITH FIGURES, just completed, a plotless novel, which (says his British agent, whose name ought to be Ashenden, but is actually Carnell) "will give reviewers and psychiatrists food for discussion for years to come." *Item* . . . The star, in whole, and in part, of two BBC TV shows. *Item* . . . The possessor of a great sense of humor, not evident in, because not appropriate to, the story below; but evident in one of our own most favorite stories, the one about hunting a brontosaurus, POOR LITTLE WARRIOR! (F&SF, April, 1958). Whenever, in the future, we think of this

newest Brian Aldiss story, we shall think of a refrain from a hauntingly beautiful old Scots ballad—sung by the beautifully haunting voice of the beautiful and haunting Joan Baez . . . “I am a man upon the land/I am a silky in the sea. . . .”

A KIND OF ARTISTRY

by Brian W. Aldiss

I

A GIANT RISING FROM THE FJORD, from the grey arm of sea in the fjord, could have peered over the crown of its sheer cliffs and discovered Endehaaven there on the edge, sprawling at the very start of the island.

Derek Flamifew Ende saw much of this sprawl from his high window; indeed, a growing ill-ease, apprehensions of a quarrel, forced him to see everything with particular clarity, just as a landscape takes on an intense actinic visibility before a thunderstorm. Although he was warmseeing with his face, yet his eye vision wandered over the estate.

All was bleakly neat at Endehaaven—as I should know, for its neatness is my care. The gardens are made to support evergreens and shrubs that never flower; this is My Lady's whim, that likes a sobriety to match the furrowed brow of the coastline. The building, gaunt Endehaaven itself, is tall and lank and severe; earlier ages would have found its structure impossible: for its thousand built-in paragravity units ensure the support of masonry the mass of which is largely an illusion.

Between the building and the fjord, where the garden contrived itself into a parade, stood My Lady's laboratory, and

My Lady's pets—and, indeed, My Lady herself at this time, her long hands busy with the minicoypu and the agoutinis. I stood with her, attending the animals' cages or passing her instruments or stirring the tanks, doing always what she asked. And the eyes of Derek Ende looked down on us; no, they looked down on her only.

Derek Flamifew Ende stood with his face over the receptor bowl, reading the message from Star One. It played lightly over his countenance and over the boscises of his forehead. Though he stared down across that achingly familiar stage of his life outside, he still warmsaw the communication clearly. When it was finished, he negated the receptor, pressed his face to it, and flexed his message back.

"I will do as you message, Star One. I will go at once to Festi XV in the Veil Nebula and enter liason with the being you call the Cliff. If possible I will also obey your order to take some of its substance to Pyrylyn. Thank you for your greetings; I return them in good faith. Good-bye."

He straightened and massaged his face: warmlooking over great light distances was always tiring, as if the sensitive muscles of the countenance knew that they delivered up their tiny electrostatic charges to parsecs of vacuum, and were appalled. Slowly his boscises also relaxed, as slowly he gathered together his gear. It would be a long flight to the Veil, and the task that had been set him would daunt the stoutest heart on Earth; yet it was for another reason he lingered: before he could be away, he had to say a farewell to his Mistress.

Dilating the door, he stepped out into the corridor, walked along it with a steady tread—feet covering mosaics of a pattern learnt long ago in his childhood—and walked into the paragravity shaft. Moments later, he was leaving the main hall, approaching My Lady as she stood gaunt, with her rodents scuttling at beast level before her and Vatna Jo-

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kull's heights rising behind her, gray with the impurities of distance.

"Go indoors and fetch me the box of name rings, Hols," she said to me; so I passed him, My Lord, as he went to her. He noticed me no more than he noticed any of the other parthenos.

When I returned, she had not turned towards him, though he was speaking urgently to her.

"You know I have my duty to perform, Mistress," I heard him saying. "Nobody else but a normal-born Earthborn can be entrusted with this sort of task."

"This sort of task! The galaxy is loaded inexhaustibly with such tasks! You can excuse yourself forever with such excursions."

He said to her remote back, pleadingly: "You can't talk of them like that. You know of the nature of the Cliff—I told you all about it. You know this isn't an excursion: it requires all the courage I have. And you know that only Earthborns, for some reason, have such courage . . . Don't you, Mistress?"

Although I had come up to them, threading my subservient way between cage and tank, they noticed me not enough even to lower their voices. My Lady stood gazing at the grey heights inland, her countenance as formidable as they; one boscis twitched as she said, "You think you are so big and brave, don't you?"

Knowing the power of sympathetic magic, she never spoke his name when she was angry; it was as if she wished him to disappear.

"It isn't that," he said humbly. "Please be reasonable, Mistress; you know I must go; a man cannot be forever at home. Don't be angry."

She turned to him at last.

Her face was high and stern; it did not receive. Yet she had a beauty of some dreadful kind I cannot describe, if

weariness and knowledge can together knead beauty. Her eyes were as grey and distant as the frieze of snow-covered volcano behind her, O My Lady! She was a century older than Derek: though the difference showed not in her skin—which would stay fresh yet a thousand years—but in her authority.

"I'm not angry. I'm only hurt. You know how you have the power to hurt me."

"Mistress—," he said, taking a step toward her.

"Don't touch me," she said. "Go if you must, but don't make a mockery of it by touching me."

He took her elbow. She held one of the minicoypus quiet in the crook of her arm—animals were always docile at her touch—and strained it closer.

"I don't mean to hurt you, Mistress. You know we owe allegiance to Star One; I must work for them, or how else do we hold this estate? Let me go for once with an affectionate parting."

"Affection! You go off and leave me alone with a handful of parthenos and you talk of affection! Don't pretend you don't rejoice to get away from me. You're tired of me, aren't you?"

Wearily he said, as if nothing else would come, "It's not that . . ."

"You see! You don't even attempt to sound sincere. Why don't you go? It doesn't matter what happens to me."

"Oh, if you could only hear your own self-pity."

Now she had a tear on the icy slope of one cheek. Turning, she flashed it for his inspection.

"Who else should pity me? You don't, or you wouldn't go away from me as you do. Suppose you got killed by this Cliff, what will happen to me?"

"I shall be back, Mistress," he said. "Never fear."

"It's easy to say. Why don't you have the courage to admit that you're only too glad to leave me?"

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"Because I'm not going to be provoked into a quarrel."

"Pah, you sound like a child again. You won't answer, will you? Instead you're going to run away, evading your responsibilities."

"I'm not running away!"

"Of course you are, whatever you pretend. You're just immature."

"I'm not, I'm not! And I'm not running away! It takes real courage to do what I'm going to do."

"You think so well of yourself!"

He turned away then, petulantly, without dignity. He began to head towards the landing platform. He began to run.

"Derek!" she called.

He did not answer.

She took the squatting minicoypu by the scruff of its neck. Angrily she flung it into the nearby tank of water. It turned into a fish and swam down into the depths.

II

Derek journeyed toward the Veil Nebula in his fast light-pusher. Lonely it sailed, a great fin shaped like an archer's bow, barnacled all over with the photon cells that sucked its motive power from the dense and dusty emptiness of space. Midway along the trailing edge was the blister in which Derek lay, senseless over most of his voyage.

He woke in the therapeutic bed, called to another resurrection day that was no day, with gentle machine hands easing the stiffness from his muscles. Soup gurgled in a retort, bubbling up towards a nipple only two inches from his mouth. He drank. He slept again, tired from his long inactivity.

When he woke again, he climbed slowly from the bed and

exercised for fifteen minutes. Then he moved forward to the controls. My friend Jon was there.

"How is everything?" Derek asked.

"Everything is in order, My Lord," Jon replied. "We are swinging into the orbit of Festi XV now." He gave the coordinates and retired to eat. Jon's job was the loneliest any partheno could have. We are hatched according to strictly controlled formulae, without the inbred organisations of DNA that assure true Earthborns of their amazing longevity; five more long hauls and Jon will be old and worn out, fit only for the transmuter.

Derek sat at the controls. Did he see, superimposed on the face of Festi, the face he loved and feared? I think he did. I think there were no swirling clouds for him that could erase the clouding of her brow.

Whatever he saw, he settled the lightpusher into a fast low orbit about the desolate planet. The sun Festi was little more than a blazing point some eight hundred million miles away. Like the riding light of a ship it bobbed above a turbulent sea of cloud as they went in.

For a long while, Derek sat with his face in a receptor bowl, checking ground heats far below. Since he was dealing with temperatures approaching absolute zero, this was not simple; yet when the Cliff moved into a position directly below, there was no mistaking its bulk; it stood out as clearly on his senses as if outlined on a radar screen.

"There she goes!" Derek exclaimed.

Jon had come forward again. He fed the time coordinates into the lightpusher's brain, waited, and read off the time when the Cliff would be below them again.

Nodding, Derek began to prepare to jump. Without haste, he assumed his special suit, checking each item as he took it up, opening the paragravs until he floated, then closing them again, clicking down every snap-fastener until he was entirely encased.

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"395 seconds to next zenith, My Lord," Jon said.

"You know all about collecting me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I shall not activate the radio beacon till I'm back in orbit."

"I fully understand, sir."

"Right. I'll be moving."

A little animated prison, he walked ponderously into the air lock.

Three minutes before they were next above the Cliff, Derek opened the outer door and dived into the sea of cloud. A brief blast of his suit jets set him free from the lightpusher's orbit. Cloud engulfed him like death as he fell.

The twenty surly planets that swung round Festi held only an infinitesimal fraction of the mysteries of the galaxy. Every globe in the universe huddled its own secret purpose to itself. On some of those globes, as on Earth, the purpose manifested itself in a type of being that could shape itself, burst into the space lanes, and rough-hew its aims in a civilized extra-planetary environment. On others, the purpose remained aloof and dark; only Earthborns, weaving their obscure patterns of will and compulsion, challenged those alien beings, to wrest from them new knowledge that might be added to the pool of the old.

All knowledge has its influence. Over the millennia since interstellar flight had become practicable, mankind was insensibly moulded by its own findings; together with its lost innocence, its genetic stability went out of the galactic window. As man fell like rain over other planets, so his strain lost its original hereditary design: each center of civilization bred new ways of thought, of feeling, of shape—of life. Only on old Earth itself did man still somewhat resemble the men of prestellar days.

That was why it was an Earthborn who dived head-first to meet an entity called the Cliff.

The Cliff had destroyed each of the few spaceships or lightpushers that had landed on its desolate globe. After long study of the being from safe orbits, the wise men of Star One evolved the theory that it destroyed any considerable source of power, as a man will swat a buzzing fly. Derek Ende, going alone with no powering but his suit motors, would be safe—or so the theory went.

Riding down on the paragravs, he sank more and more slowly into planetary night. The last of the cloud was whipped from about his shoulders and a high wind thrummed and whistled round the supporters of his suit. Beneath him, the ground loomed. So as not to be blown across it, he speeded his rate of fall; next moment he sprawled full length on Festi XV. For a while he lay there, resting and letting his suit cool.

The darkness was not complete. Though almost no solar light touched this continent, green flares grew from the earth, illuminating its barren contours. Wishing to accustom his eyes to the gloom, he did not switch on his head, shoulder, stomach, or hand lights.

Something like a stream of fire flowed to his left. Because its radiance was poor and guttering, it confused itself with its own shadows, so that the smoke it gave off, distorted into bars by the bulk of the 4G planet, appeared to roll along its course like burning tumbleweed. Further off were larger sources of fire, impure ethane and methane most probably, burning with a sound that came like frying steak to Derek's ears, and spouting upwards with an energy that licked the lowering cloud race with blue light. At another point, blazing on an eminence, a geyser of flame wrapped itself in a thickly swirling mantle of brown smoke, a pall that spread upwards as slowly as porridge. Elsewhere, a pillar of white fire burnt without motion or smoke; it stood to the right of where Derek lay, like a floodlit sword in its perfection.

He nodded approval to himself. His drop had been success-

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fully placed. This was the Region of Fire, where the Cliff lived.

To lie there was content enough, to gaze on a scene never closely viewed by man fulfillment enough—until he realised that a wide segment of landscape offered not the slightest glimmer of illumination. He looked into it with a keen warm-sight, and found it was the Cliff.

The immense bulk of the thing blotted out all lights from the ground and rose to eclipse the cloud over its crest.

At the mere sight of it, Derek's primary and secondary hearts began to beat out a hastening pulse of awe. Stretched flat on the ground, his paragravs keeping him level to 1G, he peered ahead at it; he swallowed to clear his choked throat; his eyes strained through the mosaic of dull light in an effort to define the Cliff.

One thing was sure: it was large! He cursed that although photosistors allowed him to use his warm-sight on objects beyond the suit he wore, this sense was distorted by the eternal firework display. Then in a moment of good seeing he had an accurate fix: the Cliff was three quarters of a mile away! From first observations, he had thought it to be no more than a hundred yards distant.

Now he knew how large it was. It was enormous!

Momentarily he gloated. The only sort of tasks worth being set were impossible ones. Star One's astrophysicists held the notion that the Cliff was in some sense aware, so they required Derek to take them a pound of its flesh. How do you carve a being the size of a small moon?

All the time he lay there, the wind jarred along the veins and supporters of his suit. Gradually, it occurred to Derek that the vibration he felt from this constant motion was changed. It carried a new note and a new strength. He looked about, placed his gloved hand outstretched on the ground.

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The wind was no longer vibrating. It was the earth that shook, Festi itself that trembled. The Cliff was moving!

When he looked back up at it with both his senses, he saw which way it headed. Jarring steadily, it bore down on him.

"If it has intelligence, then it will reason—if it has detected me—that I am too small to offer it harm. So it will offer me none and I have nothing to fear," Derek told himself. The logic did not reassure him.

An absorbent pseudopod, activated by a simple humidity gland in the brow of his helmet, slid across his forehead and removed the sweat that formed there.

Visibility fluttered like a rag in a cellar. The slow forward surge of the Cliff was still something Derek sensed rather than saw. Now the rolling mattresses of cloud blotted the thing's crest, as it in its turn eclipsed the fountains of fire. To the jar of its approach even the marrow of Derek's bones raised a response.

Something else also responded.

The legs of Derek's suit began to move. The arms moved. The body wriggled.

Puzzled, Derek stiffened his legs. Irresistibly, the knees of the suit hinged, forcing his own to do likewise. And not only his knees: his arms too, stiffly though he braced them on the ground before him, were made to bend to the whim of the suit. He could not keep still without breaking bones.

Thoroughly alarmed he lay there, flexing contortedly to keep rhythm with his suit, performing the gestures of an idiot.

As if it had suddenly learnt to crawl, the suit began to move forward. It shuffled forward over the ground; Derek inside went willy-nilly with it.

One ironic thought struck him. Not only was the mountain coming to Mohammed; Mohammed was perforce going to the mountain . . .

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III

Nothing he could do checked his progress; he was no longer master of his movements; his will was useless. With the realisation rode a sense of relief. His Mistress could hardly blame him for anything that happened now.

Through the darkness he went on hands and knees, blundering in the direction of the on-coming Cliff, prisoner in an animated prison.

The only constructive thought that came to him was that his suit had somehow become subject to the Cliff. How, he did not know or try to guess. He crawled. He was almost relaxed now, letting his limbs move limply with the suit movements.

Smoke furred him about. The vibrations ceased, telling him that the Cliff was stationary again. Raising his head, he could see nothing but smoke—produced perhaps by the Cliff's mass as it scraped over the ground. When the blur parted, he glimpsed only darkness. The thing was directly ahead!

He blundered on. Abruptly he began to climb, still involuntarily aping the movements of his suit.

Beneath him was a doughy substance, tough yet yielding. The suit worked its way heavily upwards at an angle of something like sixty-five degrees; the stiffeners creaked, the paragravs throbbed. He was ascending the Cliff.

By this time there was no doubt in Derek's mind that the thing possessed what might be termed volition, if not consciousness. It possessed too a power no man could claim: it could impart that volition to an inanimate object like his suit. Helpless inside it, he carried his considerations a stage further. This power to impart volition seemed to have a limited range: otherwise the Cliff would surely not have bothered to move its gigantic mass at all, but would have forced the suit to traverse all the distance between them. If this reason-

ing were sound, then the lightpusher was safe from capture in orbit.

The movement of his arms distracted him. His suit was tunneling. Giving it no aid, he lay and let his hands make swimming motions. If it was going to bore into the Cliff, then he could only conclude he was about to be digested: yet he stilled his impulse to struggle, knowing that struggle was fruitless.

Thrusting against the doughy stuff, the suit burrowed into it and made a sibilant little world of movement and friction which stopped directly it stopped, leaving Derek embedded in the most solid kind of isolation.

To ward off growing claustrophobia, he attempted to switch on his headlight; his suit arms remained so stiff he could not bend them enough to reach the toggle. All he could do was lie there helplessly in his shell and stare into the featureless darkness of the Cliff.

But the darkness was not entirely featureless. His ears detected a constant *slither* along the outside surfaces of his suit. His warmth sight discerned a meaningless pattern beyond his helmet. Though he focussed his boscises, he could make no sense of the pattern; it had neither symmetry nor meaning for him . . .

Yet for his body it seemed to have some meaning. Derek felt his limbs tremble, was aware of pulses and phantom impressions within himself that he had not known before. The realisation percolated through to him that he was in touch with powers of which he had no cognisance—and, conversely, that something was in touch with him that had no cognisance of his powers.

An immense heaviness overcame him. The forces of life laboured within him. He sensed more vividly than before the vast bulk of the Cliff. Thought it was dwarfed by the mass of Festi XV, it was as large as a good-sized asteroid . . . He could picture an asteroid, formed from a jetting ex-

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plosion of gas on the face of Festi the sun. Half-solid, half-molten, it swung about its parent on an eccentric orbit. Cooling under an interplay of pressures, its interior crystallised into a unique form. So, with its surface semi-plastic, it existed for many millions of years, gradually accumulating an electrostatic charge that poised . . . and waited . . . and brewed the life acids about its crystalline heart.

Festi was a stable system, but once in every so many thousands of millions of years, the giant first, second, and third planets achieved perihelion with the sun and with each other simultaneously. This happened coincidentally with the asteroid's nearest approach; it was wrenched from its orbit and all but grazed the three lined-up planets. Vast electrical and gravitational forces were unleashed. The asteroid glowed: and woke to consciousness. Life was not born on it: it was born to life, born in one cataclysmic clash!

Before it had more than mutely savoured the sad-sharp-sweet sensation of consciousness, it was in trouble. Plunging away from the sun on its new course, it found itself snared in the gravitational pull of the 4G planet, Festi XV. It knew no shaping force but gravity; gravity was to it all that oxygen was to cellular life on Earth; yet it had no wish to exchange its flight for captivity; yet it was too puny to resist. For the first time, the asteroid recognised that its consciousness had a use, in that it could to some extent control its environment outside itself. Rather than risk being broken up in Festi's orbit, it sped inwards, and by retarding its own fall performed its first act of volition, an act that brought it down shaken but entire on the planet's surface.

For an immeasurable period, the asteroid—but now it was the Cliff—lay in the shallow crater formed by its impact, speculating without thought. It knew nothing except the inorganic scene about it, and could visualise nothing else, but that scene it knew well. Gradually it came to some kind of terms with the scene. Formed by gravity, it used gravity

as thoughtlessly as a man uses breath; it began to move other things, and it began to move itself.

That it should be other than alone in the universe had never occurred to the Cliff. Now it knew there was other life, it accepted the fact. The other life was not as it was; that it accepted. The other life had its own requirements; that it accepted. Of questions, of doubt, it did not know. It had a need; so did the other life; they should both be accommodated, for accommodation was the adjustment to pressure, and that response it comprehended.

Derek Ende's suit began to move again under external volition. Carefully it worked its way backwards. It was ejected from the Cliff. It lay still.

Derek himself lay still. He was barely conscious.

In a half daze, he was piecing together what had happened.

The Cliff had communicated with him; if he ever doubted that, the evidence of it lay clutched in the crook of his left arm.

"Yet it did not—yet it could not communicate with me!" he murmured. But it had communicated: he was still faint with the burden of it.

The Cliff had nothing like a brain. It had not "recognised" Derek's brain. Instead, it had communicated with the only part of him it could recognise; it had communicated direct to his cell organisation, and in particular probably to those cytoplasmic structures, the mitochondria, the power sources of the cell. His brain had been by-passed, his own cells had taken in the information offered.

He recognised his feeling of weakness. The Cliff had drained him of power. Even that could not drain his feeling of triumph. For the Cliff had taken information even as it gave it. The Cliff had learnt that other life existed in other parts of the universe.

Without hesitation, without debate, it had given a frag-

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ment of itself to be taken to those other parts of the universe. Derek's mission was completed.

In the Cliff's gesture, Derek read one of the deepest urges of living things: the urge to make an impression on another living thing. Smiling wryly, he pulled himself to his feet.

He was alone in the Region of Fire. The occasional mournful flame still confronted its surrounding dark, but the Cliff had disappeared; he had lain on the threshold of consciousness longer than he thought. He looked at his chronometer, to find it was high time he moved towards his rendezvous with the lightpusher. Stepping up his suit heating to combat the cold that began to seep through his bones, he revved up the paragrav unit and rose. The noisome clouds came down and engulfed him; Festi was lost to view. Soon he had risen beyond cloud or atmosphere.

Under Jon's direction, the space craft homed onto Derek's radio beacon. After a few tricky minutes, they matched velocities and Derek climbed aboard.

"Are you all right?" the partheno asked, as his master staggered into a flight seat.

"Fine—just weak. I'll tell you all about it as I do a report on spool for Pyrylyn. They're going to be pleased with us."

He produced a yellowy grey blob of matter that had expanded to the size of a large turkey and held it out to Jon.

"Don't touch this with your bare hands. Put it in one of the low-temperature lockers under 4Gs. It's a little souvenir from Festi XV."

IV

The Eyebright in Pynnati, one of Pyrylyn's capital cities, was where you went to enjoy yourself on the most lavish scale possible. This was where Derek Ende's hosts took him, with Jon in self-effacing attendance.

They lay in a nest of couches which slowly revolved, giving them a full view of other dance and couch parties. The room itself moved. Its walls were transparent; through them could be seen an ever-changing view as the room slid up and down and about the great metal framework of the Eyebright. First they were on the outside of the structure, with the bright night lights of Pynnati winking up at them as if intimately involved in their delight. Then they slipped inwards in the slow evagination of the building, to be surrounded by other pleasure rooms, their revelers clearly visible as they moved grandly up or down or along.

Uneasily, Derek lay on his couch. A vision of his Mistress's face was before him; he could imagine how she would treat all this harmless festivity: with cool contempt. His own pleasure was consequently reduced to ashes.

"I suppose you'll be moving back to Earth as soon as possible?"

"Eh?" Derek grunted.

"I said, I supposed you would soon be going home again." The speaker was Belix Ix Sappose, Chief Administrator of High Gee Research at Star One; as Derek's host of the evening, he lay next to him.

"I'm sorry, Belix, yes—I shall have to head back back for home soon."

"No 'have to' about it. You have discovered an entirely new life form; we can now attempt communication with the Festi XV entity, with goodness knows what extension of knowledge. The government can easily show its gratitude by awarding you any sort of post here you care to name; I am not without influence in that respect, as you are aware. I don't imagine that Earth in its senescent stage has much to offer a man of your calibre."

Derek thought of what it had to offer. He was bound to it. These decadent people did not understand how anything could be binding.

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"Well, what do you say, Ende? I'm not speaking idly." Belix lx Sappose tapped his antler system impatiently.

"Er . . . Oh, they will discover a great deal from the Cliff. That doesn't concern me. My part of the work is over. I'm just a field worker, not an intellectual."

"You don't reply to my suggestion."

He looked at Belix with only slight vexation. Belix was an unglaat, one of a species that had done as much as any to bring about the peaceful concourse of the galaxy. His backbone branched into an elaborate antler system, from which six sloe-dark eyes surveyed Derek with unblinking irritation. Other members of the party, including Jupkey, Belix's female, were also looking at him.

"I must get back to Earth soon," Derek said. What had Belix said? Offered some sort of post? Restlessly he shifted on his couch, under pressure as always when surrounded by people he knew none too well.

"You are bored, Mr. Ende."

"No, not at all. My apologies, Belix. I'm overcome as always by the luxury of Eyebright. I was watching the nude dancers."

"I fear you are bored."

"Not at all, I assure you."

"May I get you a woman?"

"No, thank you."

"A boy, perhaps?"

"No, thank you."

"Have you ever tried the flowering asexuals from the Cp-hids?"

"Not at present, thank you."

"Then perhaps you will excuse us if Jupkey and I remove our clothes and join the dance," Belix said stiffly.

As they moved out onto the dance floor to greet the strepent trumpets, Derek heard Jupkey say something of which he

caught only the words "arrogant Earthborn." His eyes met Jon's; he saw that the partheno had overheard also.

In an instinctive dismissive gesture of his left hand, Derek revealed his mortification. He rose and began to pace round the room. Often he shouldered his way through a knot of naked dancers, ignoring their complaints.

At one of the doors, a staircase was floating by. He stepped onto it to escape from the crowds.

Four young women were passing down the stairs. They were gaily dressed, with sonant-stones pulsing on their costumes. In their faces youth kept its lantern, lighting them as they laughed and chattered. Derek stopped and beheld the girls. One of them he recognised. Instinctively he called her name: "Eval"

She had already seen him. Waving her companions on, she came back to him, dancing up the intervening steps.

"So the brave Earthborn climbs once more the golden stairs of Pynnatil Well, Derek Ende, your eyes are as dark as ever, and your brow as high!"

As he looked at her, the strepent trumpets were in tune for him for the first time that evening, and his delight rose up in his throat.

"Eval . . . And your eyes as bright as ever . . . And you have no man with you."

"The powers of coincidence work on your behalf." She laughed—yes, he remembered that sound!—and then said more seriously, "I heard you were here with Belix Sappose and his female; so I was making the grandly foolish gesture of coming to see you. You remember how devoted I am to foolish gestures."

"So foolish?"

"Probably. You have less change in you, Derek Ende, than the core of Pyrylyn. To suppose otherwise is foolish, to know how unalterable you are and still to see you doubly foolish."

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He took her hand, beginning to lead her up the staircase; the rooms moving by them on either side were blurs to his eyes.

"Must you still bring up that old charge, Eva?"

"It lies between us; I do not have to touch it. I fear your unchangeability because I am a butterfly against your grey castle."

"You are beautiful, Eva, so beautiful!—And may a butterfly not rest unharmed on a castle wall?" He fitted into her allusive way of speech with difficulty.

"Walls! I cannot bear your walls, Derek! Am I a bulldozer that I should want to come up against walls? To be either inside or outside them is to be a prisoner."

"Let us not quarrel until we have found some point of agreement," he said. "Here are the stars. Can't we agree about them?"

"If we are both indifferent to them," she said, looking out and impudently winding his arm about her. The staircase had reached the zenith of its travels and moved slowly sideways along the upper edge of Eyebright. They stood on the top step with night flashing their images back at them from the glass.

Eva Coll-Kennerley was a human, but not of Earthborn stock. She was a velure, born on the y-cluster worlds of the dense Third Arm of the galaxy, and her skin was richly covered with the brown fur of her kind. Her mercurial talents were employed in the same research department that enjoyed Belix Sappose's more sober ones; Derek had met her there on an earlier visit to Pyrylyn. Their love had been an affair of swords.

He looked at her now and touched her and could say not one word for himself. When she flashed a liquid eye at him, he essayed an awkward smile.

"Because I am oriented like a compass towards strong

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men, my lavish offer to you still holds good. Is it not bait enough?"

"I don't think of you as a trap, Eva."

"Then for how many more centuries are you going to refrigerate your nature on Earth? You still remain faithful, if I recall your euphemism for slavery, to your Mistress, to her cold lips and locked heart?"

"I have no choice!"

"Ah yes, my debate on that motion was defeated: and more than once. Is she still pursuing her researches into the transmutability of species?"

"Oh yes, indeed. The mediaeval idea that one species can turn into another was foolish in the Middle Ages; now, with the gradual accumulation of cosmic radiation in planetary bodies, it is correct to a certain definable extent. She is endeavouring to show that cellular bondage can be—"

"Yes, yes, and this serious talk is an eyesore in Eyebright! You are locked away, Derek, doing your sterile deeds of heroism and never entering the real world. If you imagine you can live with her much longer and then come to me, you are mistaken. Your walls grow higher about your ears every century, till I cannot, cannot—oh, it's the wrong metaphor!—cannot scale you!"

Even in his pain, the texture of her fur was joy to his warm-sight. Helplessly he shook his head in an effort to shake her clattering words away.

"Look at you being big and brave and silent even now! You're so arrogant," she said—and then, without perceptible change of tone, "because I still love the bit of you inside the castle, I'll make once more my monstrous and petty offer to you."

"No, please, Eva!"

"But yes! Forget this tedious bondage of Earth, forget this ghastly matriarchy, live here with me. I don't want you forever. You know I am a eudemonist and judge by standards

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of pleasure—our liaison need be only for a century or two. In that time, I will deny you nothing your senses may require.”

“Eva!”

“After that, our demands will be satisfied. You may then go back to the Lady Mother of Endehaaven for all I care.”

“Eva, you know how I spurn this belief, this eudemonism.”

“Forget your creed! I’m asking you nothing difficult. Who are you to haggle? Am I fish, to be bought by the kilo, this bit selected, this rejected?”

He was silent.

“You don’t really need me,” he said at last. “You have everything already: beauty, wit, sense, warmth, feeling, balance, comfort. *She* has nothing. She is shallow, haunted, cold—oh, she needs me, Eva . . .”

“You are apologising for yourself, not her.”

She had already turned with the supple movement of a velure and was running down the staircase. Lighted chambers drifted up about them like bubbles.

His laboured attempt to explain his heart turned to exasperation. He ran down after her, grasping her arm.

“Listen to me, will you, damn you!”

“Nobody in Pyrylyn would listen to such masochistic nonsense as yours! You are an arrogant fool, Derek, and I am a weak-willed one. Now release me!”

As the next room came up, she jumped through its entrance and disappeared into the crowd.

V

Not all the drifting chambers of Eyebright were lighted. Some pleasures come more delightfully with the dark, and these pleasures were coaxed and cossetted into fruition in shrouded halls where illumination cast only the gentlest

ripple on the ceiling and the gloom was sensuous with ylang-ylang and other perfumes. Here Derek found a place to weep.

Sections of his life slid before him as if impelled by the same mechanisms that moved Eyebright. Always, one presence was there.

Angrily he related to himself how he always laboured to satisfy her—yes, in every sphere laboured to satisfy her! And how when that satisfaction was accorded him it came as though riven from her, as a spring sometimes trickles down the split face of a rock. Undeniably there was satisfaction for him in drinking from that cool source—but no, where was the satisfaction when pleasure depended on such extreme disciplining and subduing of himself?

Mistress, I love and hate your needs!

And the discipline had been such . . . so long, also . . . that now when he might enjoy himself far from her, he could scarcely strike a trickle from his own rock. He had walked here before, in this city where the hedonists and eudemonists reigned, walked among the scents of pleasure, walked among the ioblepharous women, the beautiful guests and celebrated beauties, with My Lady away in him, feeling that she showed even on his countenance. People spoke to him: somehow he replied. They manifested gaiety: he tried to do so. They opened to him: he attempted a response. All the time, he hoped they would understand that his arrogance masked only shyness—or did he hope that it was his shyness which masked arrogance? He did not know.

Who could presume to know? The one quality holds much of the other. Both refuse to come forward and share.

He roused from his meditation knowing that Eva Coll-Kennerley was again somewhere near. She had not left the building, then! She was seeking him out!

Derek half-rose from his position in a shrouded alcove. He

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was baffled to think how she could have traced him here. On entering Eyebright, visitors were given sonant-stones, by which they could be traced from room to room; but judging that nobody would wish to trace him, Derek had switched his stone off even before leaving Belix Sappose's party.

He heard Eva's voice, its unmistakable overtones not near, not far . . .

"You find the most impenetrable bushels to hide your light under . . ."

He caught no more. She had sunk down among tapestries with someone else. She was not after him at all! Waves of relief and regret rolled over him . . . and when he paid attention again, she was speaking his name.

With shame on him, like a wolf creeping towards a camp fire, he crouched forward to listen. At once his warm-sight told him to whom Eva spoke. He recognised the pattern of the antlers; Belix was there, with Jupkey sprawled beside him on some elaborate kind of bed.

". . . useless to try again. Derek is too far entombed within himself," Eva said.

"Entombed rather within his conditioning," Belix said. "We found the same. It's conditioning, my dear."

"However he became entombed, I still admire him enough to want to understand him." Eva's voice was a note or two astray from its usual controlled timbre.

"Look at it scientifically," Belix said, with the weighty inflections of a man about to produce truth out of a hat. "Earth is the last bastion of a bankrupt culture. The Earth-borns number less than a couple of millions now. They disdain social graces and occasions. They are served by parthenogenically bred slaves, all of which are built on the same controlled genetic formula. They are inbred. In consequence, they have become practically a species apart. You can see

it all in friend Ende. As I say, he's entombed in his conditioning. A tragedy, Eva, but you must face up to it."

"You're probably right, you pontifical old pop," Jupkey said lazily. "Who but an Earthborn would do what Derek did on Festi?"

"No, no!" Eva said. "Derek's ruled by a woman, not by conditioning. He's—"

"In Ende's case they are one and the same thing, my dear, believe me. Consider Earth's social organisation. The partheno slaves have replaced all but a comparative handful of true Earthborns. That handful has parcelled out Earth into great estates which it holds by a sinister matriarchalism."

"Yes, I know, but Derek—"

"Derek is caught in the system. The Earthborns had fallen into a mating pattern for which there is no precedent. The sons of a family marry their mothers, not only to perpetuate their line but because the productive Earthborn female is scarce now that Earth itself is senescent. This is what the Endes have done; this is what Derek Ende has done. His 'mistress' is both mother and wife to him. Given the factor of longevity as well—well, naturally you ensure an excessive emotional rigidity that almost nothing can break. Not even you, my sweet-coated Eval"

"He was on the point of breaking tonight!"

"I doubt it," Belix said. "Ende may want to get away from his claustrophobic home, but the same forces that drive him off will eventually lure him back."

"I tell you he was on the point of breaking—only I broke first."

"Well, as Teer Ruche said to me many centuries ago, only a pleasure-hater knows how to shape a pleasure-hater. I would say you were lucky he did not break; you would only have had a baby on your hands."

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Her answering laugh did not ring true.

"My Lady of Endehaaven, then, must be the one to do it. I will never try again—though he seems under too much stress to stand for long. Oh, it's really immoral! He deserves better!"

"A moral judgement from you, Eva!" Jupkey exclaimed amusedly to the fragrant gloom.

"My advice to you, Eva, is to forget all about the poor fellow. Apart from anything else, he is barely articulate—which would not suit you for a season."

The unseen listener could bear no more. A sudden rage—as much against himself for hearing as against them for speaking—burst over him, freeing him to act. Straightening up, he seized the arm of the couch on which Belix and Jupkey nestled, wildly supposing he could tip them onto the floor.

Too late, his warm sight warned him of the real nature of the couch. Instead of tipping, it swivelled, sending a wave of liquid over him. The two unglatts were lying in a warm bath scented with ylang-ylang and other essences.

Jupkey squealed in anger and fright. Kicking out, she caught Derek on the shin with a hoof; he slipped in the oily liquid and fell. Belix, unaided by warm sight, jumped out of the bath, entangled himself with Derek's legs, and also fell.

Eva was shouting for lights. Other occupants of the hall cried back that darkness must prevail at all costs.

Picking himself up—leaving only his dignity behind—Derek ran for the exit, abandoning the confusion to sort itself out as it would.

Burningly, disgustedly, he made his way dripping from Eyebright. The hastening footsteps of Jon followed him like an echo all the way to the space field.

Soon he would be back at Endehaaven. Though he would always be a failure in his dealings with other humans,

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there at least he knew every inch of his bleak allotted territory.

ENVOI

Had there been a spell over all Endehaaven, it could have been no quieter when My Lord Derek Ende arrived home."

I informed My Lady of the moment when his lightpusher arrived and rode at orbit. In the receptor bowl I watched him and Jon come home, cutting north west across the emaciated wilds of Europe, across Denmark, over the Shetlands, the Faroes, the sea, alighting by the very edge of the island, by the fjord with its silent waters.

All the while the wind lay low as if under some stunning malediction, and none of our tall trees stirred.

"Where is my Mistress, Hols?" Derek asked me, as I went to greet him and assist him out of his suit.

"She asked me to tell you that she is confined to her chambers and cannot see you, My Lord."

He looked me in the eyes as he did so rarely.

"Is she ill?"

"No."

Without waiting to remove his suit, he hurried on into the building.

Over the next two days, he was about but little, preferring to remain in his room. Once he wandered among the experimental tanks and cages. I saw him net a fish and toss it into the air, watching it while it struggled into new form and flew away until it was lost in a jumbled background of cumulus; but it was plain he was less interested in the riddles of stress and transmutation than in the symbolism of the carp's flight.

Mostly he sat compiling the spools on which he imposed the tale of his life. All one wall was covered with files full of these spools: the arrested drumbeats of past centuries. From

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the later spools I have secretly compiled this record; for all his unspoken self-pity, he never knew the sickness of merely observing.

We parthenos will never understand the luxuries of a divided mind. Surely suffering as much as happiness is a kind of artistry?

On the day that he received a summons from Star One to go upon another quest for them, Derek met My Lady in the Blue Corridor.

"It is good to see you about again, Mistress," he said, kissing her cheek.

She stroked his hair. On her nervous hand she wore one ring with an amber stone; her gown was of olive and umber.

"I was very upset to have you go away from me. The Earth is dying, Derek, and I fear its loneliness. You have left me alone too much. However, I have recovered myself and am glad to see you back."

"You know I am glad to see you. Smile for me and come outside for some fresh air. The sun is shining."

"It's so long since it shone. Do you remember how once it always shone? I can't bear to quarrel any more. Take my arm and be kind to me."

"Mistress, I always wish to be kind to you. And I have all sorts of things to discuss with you. You'll want to hear what I have been doing, and—"

"You won't leave me any more?"

He felt her hand tighten on his arm. She spoke very loudly.

"That was one of the things I wished to discuss—later," he said. "First let me tell you about the wonderful life form with which I made contact on Festi."

As they left the corridor and descended the paragravity shaft, My Lady said wearily, "I suppose that's a polite way of telling me that you are bored here."

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He clutched her hands as they floated down. Then he released them and clutched her face instead.

"Understand this, Mistress mine, I love you and want to serve you. You are in my blood; wherever I go I never can forget you. My dearest wish is to make you happy—this you must know. But equally you must know that I have needs of my own."

Grumpily she said, withdrawing her face, "Oh, I know that all right. And I know those needs will always come first with you. Whatever you say or pretend, you don't care a rap about me. You make that all too clear."

She moved ahead of him, shaking off the hand he put on her arm. He had a vision of himself running down a golden staircase and stretching out that same detaining hand to another girl. The indignity of having to repeat oneself, century after century.

"You're lying! You're faking! You're being cruel!" he said. Gleaming, she turned.

"Am I? Then answer me this—aren't you already planning to leave Endehaaven and me soon?"

He smote his forehead.

He said inarticulately, "Look, you must try to stop this recrimination. Yes, yes, it's true I am thinking . . . But I have to—I reproach myself. I could be kinder. But you shut yourself away when I come back, you don't welcome me—"

"Trust you to find excuses rather than face up to your own nature," she said contemptuously, walking briskly into the garden. Amber and olive and umber, and sable of hair, she walked down the path, her outlines sharp in the winter air; in the perspectives of his mind she did not dwindle.

For some minutes he stood in the threshold, immobilized by antagonistic emotions.

Finally he pushed himself out into the sunlight.

She was in her favourite spot by the fjord, feeding an

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old badger from her hand. Only her increased attention to the badger suggested that she heard him approach.

His boscses twitched as he said, "If you will forgive a cliché, I apologise."

"I don't mind what you do."

Walking backwards and forwards behind her, he said, "When I was away, I heard some people talking. On Pyrylyn this was. They were discussing the mores of our matrimonial system."

"It's no business of theirs."

"Perhaps not. But what they said suggested a new line of thought to me."

She put the old badger back in his cage without comment.

"Are you listening, Mistress?"

"Do go on."

"Try to listen sympathetically. Consider all the history of galactic exploration—or even before that, consider the explorers of Earth in the pre-space age, men like Shackleton and so on. They were brave men, of course, but wouldn't it be strange if most of them only ventured where they did because the struggle at home was too much for them?"

He stopped. She had turned to him; the half-smile was whipped off his face by her look of fury.

"And you're trying to tell me that that's how you see yourself—a martyr? Derek, how you must hate me! Not only do you go away, you secretly blame me because you go away. It doesn't matter that I tell you a thousand times I want you here—no, it's all my fault! I drive you away! That's what you tell your charming friends on Pyrylyn, isn't it? Oh, how you must hate me!"

Savagely he grasped her wrists. She screamed to me for aid and struggled. I came near but halted, playing my usual impotent part. He swore at her, bellowed for her to

be silent, whereupon she cried the louder, shaking furiously in his arms.

He struck her across the face.

At once she was quiet. Her eyes closed: almost, it would seem, in ecstasy. Standing there, she had the pose of a woman offering herself.

"Go on, hit me! You want to hit me!" she whispered.

With the words, with the look of her, he too was altered. As if realising for the first time her true nature, he dropped his fists and stepped back, staring at her sick-mouthed. His heel met no resistance. He twisted suddenly, spread out his arms as if to fly, and fell over the cliff edge.

Her scream pursued him down.

Even as his body hit the water of the fjord, it began to change. A flurry of foam marked some sort of painful struggle beneath the surface. Then a seal plunged into view, dived below the next wave, and swam towards open sea over which already a freshening breeze blew.



There is a tradition to the effect that nothing gives editors greater pleasure than discovering new talent. As a matter of fact, nothing gives editors greater pleasure than a free meal, with drinks, over which they can pontificate. *Next* to this, however, comes discovering new talent. Sasha Gilien's first story arrived like a breath of fresh green air and tickled the daylights out of us. (We have been all dark, inside, ever since, but what the dickens. Eh?) Our first inquiry about him drew the surmise that he was a pseudonym for someone else—identity unknown. But while we were still conjecturing, fresh data arrived. "Brooklyn born (in the year '25), [says our Mr. Pettifogle], ex-Marine, UCLA (Theater Arts), ex-schoolteacher (Eng. and Lit.), co-founder—co-publisher—Exec. Editor—*L.A. Magazine* (since taken over by *Harpers*), gourmet and dining-out authority, Mr. Gilien now devotes himself to writing full-time." We hope that a lot of time will henceforth be devoted to writing for F&SF, because for ingenuity and sparkle and all around good writing—as witness this zany-genius tale of reincarnation and duel personality—Mr. G. is hard to beat.

TWO'S A CROWD

by Sasha Gilien

I STAYED WITH CHARLES KLEINGOLD for twenty minutes after he lay dead on his living-room sofa. It wasn't that I got sentimental about him; it was just so comfortable in the quiet room that I hated to go back and start the same thing over again with someone else, at least right away. As soon as his brain fluttered to a halt from lack of oxygen, I knew the little red light over his name started to blink on

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the big board, and they'd be buzzing me to come in and get my new assignment.

"Let them buzz," I thought as I looked at him lying there with his mouth open. "After thirty-five years with Charlie, a few more minutes won't matter. Poor old Charlie; we really had some laughs."

Eventually, of course, I went back. Nothing had changed. The big board was still blinking away while the boys scurried up and down taking off the old name-plates and putting on new ones. The old plates are turned over to Records where they are filed alphabetically, and as word comes in of new germinations, assignments are made, and a new i.d. plate is put on the board over one of the little lights. Things seemed a bit more hectic, though, since the last time I was there thirty-five years ago, a result, I suppose, of the so-called population explosion. And of course our department never gets the appropriations it needs to keep it properly staffed, so that it creaks along, doing the best it can, but becoming more inefficient each year.

The loudspeaker crackled, and I heard the clerk calling my code designation, "E-Ag477, E-Ag477, Assignments." No time off between jobs anymore, especially for E classifications. Out of the corpse and into the egg before you had a chance to recoup your energies from the last hitch.

"Come in, son," said the Director as I opened the door to his office. "You did a nice job with that Korngold fellow."

"Kleingold."

"Whatever his name was. I don't know why they terminated him when they did, but I don't ask questions; I just hand out assignments. They took away my assistant a few years ago. It's all I can do to keep up." He looked weary, suddenly, and I was glad I didn't have his office job and his worries.

"Here you are," he said, reaching into a drawer and

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handing me the blue envelope. "Eighty-nine years on this one. Have fun."

Outside the office I opened the envelope and took out the punched card. The name was Arthur Mayhew, 1766 North Glenville Drive, Bel-Air, California. At least I was going to be well off, with that address, and now all I needed was a nice quiet pregnancy so I could get some rest. We always get there the moment the ovum is fertilized and of course there's not too much activity while it's developing. The real work starts at birth.

The conception went off smoothly, despite the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Mayhew to block it, and I settled down for nine months of quiet which I certainly needed after Charlie Kleingold's busy life.

"I think a mistake's been made," I heard someone say in a blurry voice.

"It looks like it, all right. What are you doing here?"

"This is my assignment." He showed me his card. Sure enough, it was for Arthur Mayhew at the same address, but the code read I-Wi843. Some clerk, or maybe even the Director, had snarled things up so that two of us were given identical assignments. The ridiculous thing about it was our codes. His classification indicated Introvert-Withdrawn, and my E-Ag number puts me in the Extrovert-Aggressive category. Unfortunately, there would be no way of getting back to the office until Arthur Mayhew's little red light blinked on the board.

"Friend," I said, "the office rarely goofs. However, they really managed it this time."

"What's to be done?"

"Not much, I'm afraid—why don't you just keep out of the way and let me handle things?"

"But I've got my job to do," he said in an apologetic voice that grated on me.

"We'll see."

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There's no point in arguing with somebody like that. I could see he was one of the types who are like rock when they get stubborn. Damn it, if they had to send someone else, why couldn't they send someone with the same classification as mine? With two of us in him, Arthur Mayhew could push his way to the top of the world.

At first it wasn't much of a problem. In fact, for a while we were united in a common hope that we'd soon be released. About a month after conception, when Mrs. Mayhew found that she was pregnant, there was talk of "taking care of it," which would mean we could forget about the whole thing. But Mr. Mayhew put his foot down on that project, and Mrs. Mayhew resigned herself to an offspring, as much as she hated the idea. After that, we avoided each other as much as we could until the delivery. I took over then; Arthur came out screaming and kicking, and for the first three months things went my way. The Mayhews were convinced they had a rugged little customer on their hands; someone who demanded attention every minute of the day. If yammering didn't get it, he'd toss his stuffed animals across the room, or, using the ultimate weapon, he'd deliberately mess up his diapers. He was in particularly good form when visitors came to view him; giggling and crowing for them, and clapping his little hands, but going into a black rage when they left.

All this time I-Wi843 sat around in his mealy-mouthed way and sulked. I ignored him while I went about my business with Arthur, who was developing into a beautiful Extrovert-Aggressive. But one night he came to me and pleaded for a chance to do some work, and like the good-hearted fool I am, I agreed to allow him twenty-four hours at the controls. The change in Arthur was immediate. He lay there for hours staring at the ceiling, and when Annie, the nursemaid, came into his room to feed him, he shrank down in the corner of his crib, terrified. Even his toys seemed to

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frighten him. He didn't cry or anything; just lay there in a cringe, wishing that everybody would leave him alone.

When the twenty-four hours were up, the sneaky bastard absolutely refused to let go. "What are you going to do about it?" he smirked.

I suddenly realized that there wasn't much I could do, once he had the switch. And he knew it, too, because he said with a smile, "For an Extrovert-Aggressive, you're pretty naive."

"My goodness," said Annie, who had raised Mrs. Mayhew when she was a child, "I've never seen a baby change like that. He doesn't run a fever, but I don't think he's well."

"He has changed, hasn't he? It's sort of nice, though, to have him quiet for a change. I might as well take him to Dr. McCleod tomorrow; he's due for a check-up anyway."

Dr. McCleod, who had delivered Arthur, found him in good health, although he, too, was surprised at the baby's quiet melancholy. He prescribed a food supplement and told Mrs. Mayhew not to worry, which she wasn't going to do anyhow.

Mealymouth had complete possession of the controls, and Arthur Mayhew became a shy withdrawn child who never made any friends, happy only when he could be by himself. He rarely spoke. His parents were able to reach him less and less as he drew into his own little world, and his teachers worried about his social development, which seemed to be nil. Of course, I was furious about the whole thing and spent all my time looking for my chance to step in and take over; I wanted to put some life into the boy.

It finally came when he was twelve. Mealymouth must have forgotten that I was around; one night he relaxed a little too much. I wrenched the controls away and hung on.

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"All right, friend, you've had it. He's all mine," I said, elbowing him out of the way. He looked at me reprovingly, and just stood there, but I knew he'd always be around, waiting.

I started right off the next morning by having Arthur come to breakfast, slam down his spoon, and bellow, "Boy, am I sick of this lousy oatmeal!"

"What did you say?" asked Mr. Mayhew incredulously. This was the first time he'd gotten more than a mumbled "morning" in five years.

"I said I'm sick of this lousy oatmeal. What's in the paper, Pop?"

"Are you all right, Arthur?"

"Sure I'm all right. I just asked what's in the paper."

"Arthur, there's something—"

"O.K. skip it. I'm late to school, anyway." With that, Arthur picked up his books and went out, leaving Mr. Mayhew gawking over his *Los Angeles Times*.

During the day, when Mrs. Kramer stepped out for a moment, Arthur created a sensation in his class by standing on his desk and doing a creditable imitation of the teacher, followed by a rapid fire tap routine involving hair-raising slides to the edge. His classmates howled, but I think they were a little frightened by the intensity of Arthur's performance. I couldn't help it, though; after all this time of inactivity, I was bursting with energy and new ideas, so Arthur careened on his merry way, completely undisturbed by outside reaction. When Mrs. Kramer hurried in to quell the racket, she was amazed to find that, of all children, it was the Mayhew boy who was responsible. Since she was exceedingly progressive in her educational ideas, Mrs. Kramer was delighted to see the child finally coming out of his shyness and taking part in the social life of his peer group. It wasn't for several days that she began to feel that perhaps the boy was overdoing it a bit. I had him disrupt

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classes, organize a small gang of boys called "Artie's Avengers" which terrorized teachers and students alike, and become known as the freshest kid ever to have gone to Oakglen School. At home he became unmanageable, doing precisely as he pleased, despite his parents' modest attempts at discipline. He was loud, brash, and insulting, finally causing the faithful Annie to leave the Mayhews and seek employment elsewhere.

"Will you kindly tell me what's happened to our son, Clyde?" said Mrs. Mayhew one evening after a particularly violent episode where Arthur had unqualifiedly bested Mr. Mayhew in a battle of wills. This had led to the necessity of the latter physically picking up his boy and locking him in his room. From upstairs there now issued spasmodic blasts on the alto saxophone Arthur had taken (without permission) from school.

"I honestly don't know, honey, but I'm getting a little sick of that kid. I can't understand it; he was such a timid boy. Remember how we used to worry that he would never assert himself? Maybe it's that damn progressive school he goes to."

The Mayhews held out for another year before they shipped him off to Cleves Military Academy, which specialized in rich boys who needed iron-handed guidance. Colonel Cleves had yet to meet the lad he couldn't quash, charging liberally for his talent. However, Cadet Arthur Mayhew proved to be a formidable opponent, and if the Colonel hadn't been so jealous of his reputation, he'd have sent him packing at the end of the first quarter. For one thing, Arthur had a good 30 I.Q. point advantage over the Colonel, and since I do some of my best work during the teens, Arthur was usually triumphant. "Artie's Avengers" came back to life, their leader more fearless and arrogant than ever. He organized a raucous little dance band for which he played the sax and sang, and he managed to become the vortex

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of every rebellious activity, rapidly besmirching the fair name of Cleves, whose motto was, "Obedience Is The Highest Good."

Everything was working out so nicely that I completely forgot about old Mealy-mouth who lurked about in the background. That's where I made my mistake. He inched up one night and simply took over, just like that. Once he had the switch, there was nothing I could do, and poor Artie's personality went into low gear almost at once.

He woke up crying.

"Hey, Artie what the hell happened?" Donald Gross, his roommate was looking at him, embarrassed.

"I—I don't like it here. I want to go home."

Donald stared at him blankly.

"Just leave me alone, will you?" He turned his face to the wall and pulled the blanket over his head.

He was still there after breakfast when Colonel Cleves stormed in. "On your feet, Mayhew," he roared. "What is this, open mutiny?"

He strode over to the bed and tore back the blankets, revealing Arthur pressing himself against the wall, trying to shut out all the noise. There was nothing the Colonel liked more than seeing a frightened boy.

"Stop sniveling, Mayhew, and get up." He turned to Captain Prosser, his aide. "Captain, see that this cadet is at Morning Formation, and be sure he reports to my office at 1600 hours. That's all."

When the Colonel was gone, old Captain Prosser, who was somewhat dazed by Arthur's behavior, helped him dress and silently accompanied him out to the Grinder where the members of his company stood wondering what kind of gag Arthur was pulling now. He quietly took his place in the ranks and dreamily went through the military folderol the Colonel loved so much. At the first break he drifted off behind the bleachers and thought about running away. His gang

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soon followed him, horsing around, waiting for him to say something.

"What do you want?" he said, his face white.

"I don't think he's fooling. He's sick or something," Donald Gross said.

There was an uncomfortable shuffling among the boys, and then Arthur's faithful lieutenant, Buddy Baust said, "Come on, Artie, what's the gimmick?"

"Please leave me alone," he was almost sobbing.

The whistle blew, and everyone ran back to formation. The rest of the day Arthur tried to avoid the other boys, going so far as to hide in his closet during lunch and through all his afternoon classes. He was flushed out by Captain Prosser, who marched him to the Colonel's office at 4 o'clock. The Colonel was so pleased to see Arthur cowed that he was surprisingly gentle with him, merely reminding him that at Cleves a boy toed the line or would live to regret it forever.

Arthur's old buddies rapidly dropped away. He spoke to no one, including Donald Gross, rarely smiled, except to himself, and spent every free moment lying on his bed, staring at the wall. The Colonel sent home a glowing report on Arthur's behavior, assuring the Mayhews that their son was adjusting nicely, and that they would be hugely pleased at his new attitude. As a matter of fact, when his parents visited him on Parade Day, he had nothing to say to them. He had gradually adopted a hunched-over posture, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and a voice so low it was barely audible. The Mayhews were stunned by the change, but there was something so pathetic about him that they were saddened, rather than pleased.

During the drive home Mrs. Mayhew said, "Clyde, I think that idiotic Colonel Cleves has broken Arthur's spirit. Do you think we should take him out of there?"

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"It's just another year, dear. Let's let him finish at the Academy. Maybe it's a phase."

It bothered the hell out of me to see what had become of Artie since Mealymouth had taken over; the kid seemed miserable. On Graduation Day, when all the seniors were putting their arms over each other's shoulders and shaking hands in sentimental goodbyes, Arthur snatched his diploma and rushed off to his parents' car, flopping down in the back seat, waiting for them to drive home. That did it! I lost my head altogether and grabbed Mealymouth's arm, twisting it until he dropped the switch. We both grappled for it, and found that he was stronger than he looked. All this time, of course, Arthur was having a fit in the back seat, moaning and groaning until Mr. Mayhew pulled over and stopped the car. By the time he and his wife had gotten the boy out in the fresh air, I had complete possession of the switch. Mealymouth lay on his back, panting.

"Arthur, what's wrong?"

Artie grinned. "I'm fine, soaks—I mean folks. Just glad to be shet of ol' Cunnel Cleves, the biggest son-of-a-bitch to evah disgrace the gloorious unifohm of Yew Ess Ahmy. Kin Ah drive, Pappy?"

"My God," said Mrs. Mayhew, "you don't know how you frightened us just now. It looked like a seizure."

"C'mon, Pappy, honey, let li'l ol' Artie drive."

"Will you stop that silly Southern accent, Arthur?" said his father. "No, you can't drive. Now get in."

Arthur ran around the front of the car, jumped into the driver's seat, and started the motor. "All aboard that's going aboard," he shouted, moving the car a few feet. "Artie's driving. Wanna ride?"

Mr. Mayhew gave his wife a look of dismay, and they got in. Artie leaned over the wheel as if he were making a getaway and had the Buick up to ninety-five miles an hour by the time they were back on the highway. He punched the

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horn excitedly and laughed, "I'm a car drivin' fool just outta school," and sped down the highway like a madman. He drove like that for about fifteen minutes when a highway patrol car edged him over to the side.

It was great to be working again, but I felt uneasy with Mealmouth over there glaring balefully at me.

"You know, you're ruining the boy."

"The hell I am. You're the one that ruined him. If you hadn't shown up, Artie would be doing just fine, like he is now." He had gall, telling me I was wrecking the kid.

"Well, I don't care what you say; we can't go on fighting each other this way. Neither of us can relax for a minute."

"So?"

"I had an idea."

"So?"

"Instead of fighting, why don't we take turns or something. Like on a regular basis."

I thought it over for a minute. It wasn't a bad idea, except I couldn't trust that guy.

He knew what I was thinking. "I swear you can trust me this time. I'll trust you. We could change off every week."

"Make it every day, and it's a deal."

We shook on it, and for the first time we had a friendly talk. It turned out that Mealmouth wasn't a bad guy after all, just conscientious. It wasn't his fault they'd made a mistake back at the office. Or maybe it was me they'd made the mistake about. Anyway, it's been a few years now that we've been taking daily shifts, and we get along beautifully, switching over ever twenty-four hours like clock-work. Of course it's a little rough on Arthur. They'll never let him out of this place until his little red light blinks on, and that won't be for another sixty-eight years.

Kate Wilhelm is the mother of Douglas and Richard, and very sweet. What is more to the point, she can write, too. She writes here of space travel, but not of voyages through space alone. "You must take what you want in life, but you must pay for it," says an old proverb. Kate Wilhelm tells of two men who took what they wanted—and of the price each paid—and went on paying.

THE MAN WITHOUT A PLANET

by Kate Wilhelm

IT WAS INEVITABLE that they should meet one day. From the Iowa farm to the university, to the practical field work in Arabia, Canada, and Tibet, and now to the new fields of Mars, each step had led unalterably to this second. Rod accepted it fatalistically as if for years he had been preparing for that one moment when he stepped through the curved hatchway and his eyes by-passed all else and stopped on the man in seat Thirteen. The eyes that returned his stare were slaty, blank, hopeless, not appealing, not apologizing, not anything; merely eyes that saw or didn't see—but didn't flinch. Rod let his gaze drop and mumbled an indistinguishable something to the man who nudged his legs from behind.

During the day chairs were demagnetized and moved and fastened once more in new patterns like atoms encircling a nucleus, now around a card table, now around the community dining table, now before the quartz port that let them gasp at the first sight of Earth fully illuminated. Chair Thirteen alone was permanently fastened.

When the atomic clocks indicated enough hours for the day to have ended, the chairs became beds back in their

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original places and opaque screens turned each chair-bed into a tiny private room. It was first class traveling, dumb-bell style.

Before Rod succumbed to the mandatory sedation a faint, almost invisible, glow that the psychologists insisted upon played tricks on his eyes and he saw again his first glimpse of the dumb-bell hanging motionless against the black of space. The patterned black and white squares of the balls on either side of the connecting rod rearranged themselves, and became a pair of slate grey eyes that stared without expression.

"Hydroponics," a thick, shapeless man said, "section one-aught-nine-seven. What's your line?"

Rod answered automatically, "Geology, mine exploration." It was the third day and he was feeling depressed and unfriendly; the very solidity of the hydroponics man was an irritant to his nerves. He became aware of the changing pattern of the circular room as the three women on the passenger list detached themselves from one another and regrouped. One of them smiled brightly at him and eased her chair beside his.

"Geology!" she exclaimed. "That's always fascinated me!"

As she rushed headlong into conversation, Rod felt his dislike for her threaten to break out on his face, his whole body demanding a smoke. And he wasn't even an habitual smoker. Her eyes were the color of peeled, over-ripe grapes. They stopped and narrowed and he knew she was watching the man from seat Thirteen as he was released for his mid-day pacing. A silence fell throughout the room, only to be thrust back with sustained effort, and now the throb of voices had a new, higher pitch as the owners purposefully pretended ignorance of the fact that the prisoner was receiving the amount of exercise doctors had agreed was essential for physical well being.

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The moist purple eyes of the woman veiled whatever she was thinking. "Filth!" she mouthed looking past Rod.

With a dry bitter taste on his tongue Rod adjusted his chair and leaned back closing his eyes, fighting something he couldn't visualize much less verbalize.

Sometimes the curtain around Thirteen was drawn for hours at a time, until one of the ship's crew opened it. Only so many hours of privacy were allowed him. Other times he singled out an individual and his eyes followed that one until he drew his own curtain. Mostly he sat, or reclined, and looked at nothing. He could have been any age from thirty to sixty-five, but they knew he was forty-nine. His hair was white, his skin tanned by the ship's lamps, his eyes clear. A perfect specimen of man, never sick, never needing more than the annual check-up that was his by law. A man who could expect to live another forty years, barring an accident to the dumb-bell itself.

Fifth day. Rod and one other passenger, Williard Benton, had a vague, surface friendship that helped relieve the monotony. They talked intermittently throughout the days, but the greatest pleasure of the trip was to be had in the precious, rationed time in the "bath room". Rod watched the hand of the timer in its inexorable sweep and when it clicked into the final moment, he felt cheated. It was more than the familiar feeling of cleanliness, he reflected, as the moist warm air filled his pores; it was the feeling of space, of being alone with all that room. In there one could move his arms about; he could sing and hear an echo reverberate ever so slightly; he could see farther than the width of his shoulders or the length of his legs and still be completely alone. It was space, private space, that made the bath room the most treasured luxury of the trip to Mars. It was a bit of the familiar Earth he had left; a bit of the life he would rejoin; in there he could forget he was thousands of miles

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out in a cold, empty nothingness where he was the alien. It took so little to recapture what was of Earth, of home.

Back in his chair-bed with the drawn curtain and a film ready to view, he felt a quick stab of remorse that he felt so exhilarated and yet peaceful after his short breathing spell when that other poor devil. . . . Somehow his finger was on the button marked Thirteen and without being consciously aware of it, he pushed. Immediately he regretted his own stupidity and he hit the cancel button, but not, he was certain, before a call registered on a similar panel of the chair arm of Thirteen. He lay rigidly alert, waiting for a sign, for a return call, for any indication that his action had been noted. There was nothing, and gradually he relaxed again.

Sixth day, seventh, eighth. All were alike, all like the first. There was nothing but the routine of staying alive until the ship put in on Deimos. Yet for Rod each day became an interminable endurance contest. Add a million to infinity, he thought, and infinity's all the same for that. Add one day to a lifetime, and the lifetime could still be infinity. He cut off the confused thoughts and found his eyes burning from the intensity of his stare at the man in seat Thirteen.

It wasn't possible for a human to maintain that calm quiescence, that exterior of absolute acceptance. The others, also, seemed to have a growing awareness of him, awareness tinged with resentment against him, as if his stoicism were an affront to them personally. Conversations were more sporadic, less good natured, arguments more heated and bitter. This despite the tranquilizers that were part of their diets. Rod and Will Benton lingered over it during one of their frequent talks.

"What would we be after six months of this?" Benton mused doing knee bends effortlessly.

"Dead," Rod snapped. Even Benton's amiable, but determined, exercising grated on him. The other fellow never

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really exercised; he only walked, back and forth, back and forth.

Abruptly he asked. "Will, what do you think about him?"

There was no surprise on the short man's face as he reached high over his head and held the pose to a silent count of his own making. "Must be hell," was all he said.

"I mean, about what he did. I suppose there never was any doubt . . ."

"None. He was quite matter of fact about the whole thing." His voice was coolly impersonal as if talking about a figure who had lived and died during the Renaissance.

"Yeah," Rod grunted, chewing his lip, thinking abstractedly that he'd become a chain smoker when he could get them again. He had known. He had been over and over the testimony, had memorized every word ever printed concerning it. The man never bothered to deny anything, admitted that he had foreseen the possible consequences, and then had gone ahead. Rod sighed and regarded his index finger as if it were a thing apart from him, as if it were responsible for the way it lingered over the button, and even—three times—pushed it.

Benton dropped into his chair and studied Rod with a quizzical expression. "It's got you, hasn't it? Him, I mean."

Rod merely grunted again, and he continued. "Don't let it. It'll tear you apart. It's all decided, has been for twenty-three years, and nothing you could do would change any of it. The UN has refused to take it up at all for seven years in a row now. And it's just."

"I know, but that poor devil . . ."

"That poor devil," Benton drawled, but the tone of his words did little to mask the murderous hatred that lurked beneath, "killed seventeen men in his crew. None of them needed to die. He killed to get into space. He killed to stay there, out front where the glory money was. By murdering UN space personel from six countries he almost got

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the United States blown off the earth. And believe me, together they could have done just that. I know; it was my business to know."

Rod frowned and with an effort erased it and attempted a grin. "Ok, friend," he said, "the cure took. Punishment to fit the crime, and all that. Ok."

Benton leaned forward and patted his arm lightly.

Rod lay behind his curtain after lunch and thought about it.

Twenty-five years ago it had been. The fourth ship to aim for Mars, and it was failing, as had every expedition before it. There were mutterings that this one was it. One more false start and the whole economic structure of the UN Space Development Agency would collapse, it was rumored. Eighteen men looked failure in the face and of them one saw the way to success. One, but only one, could ride the ship to Mars and return it to the space station. For one there would be enough air in the meteor-ruined storage tanks. Eighteen of them could return to Earth as failures, but one could make the entire trip. One did. And he returned to Earth, the UN flag firmly planted on the rocky surface of Mars, his only mission in life accomplished.

Because of him the United States had been forced to turn the other cheek. Would it have been so if he had been French, or Polish, or English even? But he had been an American. All the long dormant fears of nuclear war were fanned once more. All the rivalry among the big powers stirred, and zombi-like left the flimsy tombs of treaties and agreements to stalk again among nations. Russian and Chinese rockets quivered, grew erect, and waited for the push of a button. American rockets slid from deep graves, proud but defeated as nation after nation hurled rocks of insult at the mighty now humbled. And the Americans turned their bewildered wrath upon the one who had brought shame to

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two hundred million. The planet's number one criminal was handed over to the UN.

It was the Chinese delegate, flat eyed and expressionless, who summoned the wisdom of Confucius and the cruelty of Khan to propose the sentence. He was to be sent back to the space he had fouled, to live the rest of his years between worlds.

Twenty days. Twenty-five. The ship moved without a murmur, drawing closer to the rust-colored planet where radars stared at its progress with open mouthed, blank looks. The plunge toward the surface was checked and the retro-rockets changed the course for the landing. They would be there before dinner. Curiously Rod, a nondrinker, desired a stiff drink above all else. Earlier he could have had it, but now, alone, sealed off and strapped into his bed, the thirst for a drink overwhelmed him.

What impossible demands did *his* body make? Rod's finger found Thirteen with no help from his eyes and this time he held it until there was an answering light.

"Are you all right?"

There was a prolonged silence, but it was the silence of a man breathing in hurried gasps as if each might be the last.

"Can you hear me?" Rod spoke slowly as if to a foreigner unfamiliar with his dialect.

"Y . . . yes. Who . . . ?"

"Never mind. Would you do it again?" His voice was quick and husky to his own ears as if everything depended on that one answer, as if his entire life had been arranged so that he might have this instant in which to ask it. He was unaware that he was holding his breath.

There was another silence, and then a faint, "Yes."

"You really think they would have called it all off?" he demanded harshly. "You actually think you saved space for the world?"

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"The UN was falling apart . . . Three ships had been wiped out . . . There was no more money appropriated . . . What I think now, what I knew then . . . I don't know any more. Maybe they would have sent the fifth, and the sixth, and however many it would have taken. I don't know now. But I knew then! We all knew! Don't you remember . . . ? Who are you? Do I know you?"

"No! They brought you back to Earth once and you got away. I saw you and told them. Do you remember?"

He did fully, the scene undimmed by the intervention of twenty years. The man ran and fell and his arms were outstretched, fingers clawing at the ground, coming away with hands full of the rich loam where corn would stand in two months. The seven year old boy saw him with a feeling of revulsion and disgust and hatred so strong that he was sick in his hiding place among the trees at the edge of the field. The man didn't protest or struggle when they came and took him, but his hands tightened over the two balls of compressed earth.

Rod passed his hand over his eyes and the rerun faded until it was gone. He thought in the interval the man had turned off, but the voice came once more.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Sorry it was you, that it was anyone." He didn't say goodbye, but Rod knew that he was gone, that he wouldn't answer again.

The landing was smooth and a slight gravity became real instead of the effect of the slow adagio the ship danced to the applause of no one. Rod didn't look in the direction of seat Thirteen as the passengers milled about the curved door being sealed against the airlock of Deimos-port. As he approached the door he turned and snapped his fingers in annoyance.

"Forgot my samples," he muttered and walked back to his chair. Two plastic encased packets of Earth-type dirt that were to be aged under the pitiless atmospheric conditions of

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Mars lay on his chair seat. Carelessly he picked them up and slipped them into his pocket. Benton turned to wave as he stepped through the airlock.

Rod passed close by seat Thirteen and as he did, he let fall on it one of the small packets of Iowa's loam. At the door he turned and for a moment the slate gray eyes seemed to glitter a bit, perhaps in recognition, or even forgiveness, and then the hand moved and the curtain was around the chair-bed.

Rod stepped out and looked up through the transparent top of the airlock at the world waiting for him. He didn't look back at the dumb-bell again. Anyone watching him would have thought he was murmuring to himself about the great, desolate world hanging over his head, but his thoughts were, "He understands. A man, even a man in a boy's body, has to do what he must, and be able to live with it afterwards."

The bleakness left his eyes, grey like his father's, as he strode quickly and confidently through the airlock.

From England, a tale of an onrushing horde, and a strange garden that stood in its path . . .

THE GARDEN OF TIME

by J. G. Ballard

TOWARD EVENING, when the great shadow of the Palladian villa filled the terrace, Count Axel left his library and walked down the wide rococo steps among the time flowers. A tall, imperious figure in a black velvet jacket, a gold tie-pin glinting below his George V beard, cane held stiffly in a white-gloved hand, he surveyed the exquisite crystal flowers without emotion, listening to the sounds of his wife's harpsichord, as she played a Mozart rondo in the music room, echo and vibrate through the translucent petals.

The garden of the villa extended for some two hundred yards below the terrace, sloping down to a miniature lake spanned by a white bridge, a slender pavilion on the opposite bank. Axel rarely ventured as far as the lake, most of the time flowers grew in a small grove just below the terrace, sheltered by the high wall which encircled the estate. From the terrace he could see over the wall to the plain beyond, a continuous expanse of open ground that rolled in great swells to the horizon, where it rose slightly before finally dipping from sight. The plain surrounded the house on all sides, its drab emptiness emphasising the seclusion and mellowed magnificence of the villa. Here, in the garden, the air seemed brighter, the sun warmer, while the plain was always dull and remote.

As was his custom before beginning his regular evening stroll, Count Axel looked out across the plain to the final rise, where the horizon was illuminated like a dis-

tant stage by the fading sun. As the Mozart chimed delicately around him, flowing from his wife's graceful hands, he saw that the advance columns of an enormous army were moving slowly over the horizon. At first glance, the long ranks seemed to be progressing in orderly lines, but on closer inspection, it was apparent that, like the obscured detail of a Goya landscape, the army was composed of a vast confused throng of people, men and women, interspersed with a few soldiers in ragged uniforms, pressing forward in a disorganised tide. Some laboured under heavy loads suspended from crude yokes around their necks, others struggled with cumbersome wooden carts, their hands wrenching at the wheel spokes, a few trudged on alone, but all moved on at the same pace, bowed backs illuminated in the fleeting sun.

The advancing throng was almost too far away to be visible, but even as Axel watched, his expression aloof yet observant, it came perceptibly nearer, the vanguard of an immense rabble appearing from below the horizon. At last, as the daylight began to fade, the front edge of the throng reached the crest of the first swell below the horizon, and Axel turned from the terrace and walked down among the time flowers.

The flowers grew to a height of about six feet, their slender stems, like rods of glass, bearing a dozen leaves, the once transparent fronds frosted by the fossilised veins. At the peak of each stem was the time flower, the size of a goblet, the opaque outer petals enclosing the crystal heart. Their diamond brilliance contained a thousand faces, the crystal seeming to drain the air of its light and motion. As the flowers swayed slightly in the evening air, they glowed like flame-tipped spears.

Many of the stems no longer bore flowers, and Axel examined them all carefully, a note of hope now and then crossing his eyes as he searched for any further buds. Final-

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ly he selected a large flower on the stem nearest the wall, removed his gloves and with his strong fingers snapped it off.

As he carried the flower back onto the terrace, it began to sparkle and deliquesce, the light trapped within the core at last released. Gradually the crystal dissolved, only the outer petals remaining intact, and the air around Axel became bright and vivid, charged with slanting rays that flared away into the waning sunlight. Strange shifts momentarily transformed the evening, subtly altering its dimensions of time and space. The darkened portico of the house, its patina of age stripped away, loomed with a curious spectral whiteness as if suddenly remembered in a dream.

Raising his head, Axel peered over the wall again. Only the furthest rim of the horizon was lit by the sun, and the great throng, which before had stretched almost a quarter of the way across the plain, had now receded to the horizon, the entire concourse abruptly flung back in a reversal of time, and now appearing to be stationary.

The flower in Axel's hand had shrunk to the size of a glass thimble, the petals contracting around the vanishing core. A faint sparkle flickered from the centre and extinguished itself, and Axel felt the flower melt like an ice-cold bead of dew in his hand.

Dusk closed across the house, sweeping its long shadows over the plain, the horizon merging into the sky. The harpsichord was silent, and the time flowers, no longer reflecting its music, stood motionlessly, like an embalmed forest.

For a few minutes Axel looked down at them, counting the flowers which remained, then greeted his wife as she crossed the terrace, her brocade evening dress rustling over the ornamental tiles.

"What a beautiful evening, Axel." She spoke feelingly, as if she were thanking her husband personally for the great ornate shadow across the lawn and the dark brilliant air.

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Her face was serene and intelligent, her hair, swept back behind her head into a jewelled clasp, touched with silver. She wore her dress low across her breast, revealing a long slender neck and high chin. Axel surveyed her with fond pride. He gave her his arm and together they walked down the steps into the garden.

"One of the longest evenings this summer," Axel confirmed, adding: "I picked the perfect flower, my dear, a jewel. With luck it should last us for several days." A frown touched his brow, and he glanced involuntarily at the wall. "Each time now they seem to come nearer."

His wife smiled at him encouragingly and held his arm more tightly.

Both of them knew that the garden was dying.

Three evenings later, as he had estimated (though sooner than he secretly hoped), Count Axel plucked another flower from the time garden.

When he first looked over the wall the approaching rabble filled the distant half of the plain, stretching across the horizon in an unbroken mass. He thought he could hear the low, fragmentary sounds of voices carried across the empty air, a sullen murmur punctuated by cries and shouts, but quickly told himself that he had imagined them. Luckily, his wife was at her harpsichord, and the rich contrapuntal patterns of a Bach fugue cascaded lightly across the terrace, masking other noises.

Between the house and the horizon the plain was divided into four huge swells, the crest of each one clearly visible in the slanting light. Axel had promised himself that he would never count them, but the number was too small to remain unobserved, particularly when it so obviously marked the progress of the advancing army. By now the forward line had passed the first crest and was well on its way to the second; the main bulk of the throng pressed

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behind it, hiding the crest and the even vaster concourse spreading from the horizon. Looking to left and right of the central body, Axel could see the apparently limitless extent of the army. What had seemed at first to be the central mass was no more than a minor advance guard, one of many similar arms reaching across the plain. The true centre had not yet emerged, but from the rate of extension Axel estimated that when it finally reached the plain it would completely cover every foot of ground.

Axel searched for any large vehicles or machines, but all was amorphous and uncoordinated as ever. There were no banners or flags, no mascots or pike-bearers. Heads bowed, the multitude pressed on, unaware of the sky.

Suddenly, just before Axel turned away, the forward edge of the throng appeared on top of the second crest, and swarmed down across the plain. What astounded Axel was the incredible distance it had covered while out of sight. The figures were now twice the size, each one clearly within sight.

Quickly, Axel stepped from the terrace, selected a time flower from the garden and tore it from the stem. As it released its compacted light, he returned to the terrace. When the flower had shrunk to a frozen pearl in his palm he looked out at the plain, with relief saw that the army had retreated to the horizon again.

Then he realised that the horizon was much nearer than previously, and that what he assumed to be the horizon was the first crest.

When he joined the Countess on their evening walk he told her nothing of this, but she could see behind his casual unconcern and did what she could to dispel his worry.

Walking down the steps, she pointed to the time garden. "What a wonderful display, Axel. There are so many flowers still."

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Axel nodded, smiling to himself at his wife's attempt to reassure him. Her use of "still" had revealed her own unconscious anticipation of the end. In fact a mere dozen flowers remained of the many hundred that had grown in the garden, and several of these were little more than buds—only three or four were fully grown. As they walked down to the lake, the Countess's dress rustling across the cool turf, he tried to decide whether to pick the larger flowers first or leave them to the end. Strictly, it would be better to give the smaller flowers additional time to grow and mature, and this advantage would be lost if he retained the larger flowers to the end, as he wished to do, for the final repulse. However, he realised that it mattered little either way; the garden would soon die and the smaller flowers required far longer than he could give them to accumulate their compressed cores of time. During his entire lifetime he had failed to notice a single evidence of growth among the flowers. The larger blooms had always been mature, and none of the buds had shown the slightest development.

Crossing the lake, he and his wife looked down at their reflections in the still black water. Shielded by the pavilion on one side and the high garden wall on the other, the villa in the distance, Axel felt composed and secure, the plain with its encroaching multitude a nightmare from which he had safely awakened. He put one arm around his wife's smooth waist and pressed her affectionately to his shoulder, realising that he had not embraced her for several years, though their lives together had been timeless and he could remember as if yesterday when he first brought her to live in the villa.

"Axel," his wife asked with sudden seriousness. "Before the garden dies . . . may I pick the last flower?"

Understanding her request, he nodded slowly.

One by one over the succeeding evenings, he picked the

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remaining flowers, leaving a single small bud which grew just below the terrace for his wife. He took the flowers at random, refusing to count or ration them, plucking two or three of the smaller buds at the same time when necessary. The approaching horde had now reached the second and third crests, a vast concourse of labouring humanity that blotted out the horizon. From the terrace Axel could see clearly the shuffling, straining ranks moving down into the hollow towards the final crests, and occasionally the sounds of their voices carried across to him, interspersed with cries of anger and the cracking of whips. The wooden carts lurched from side to side on tilting wheels, their drivers struggling to control them. As far as Axel could tell, not a single member of the throng was aware of its overall direction. Rather, each one blindly moved forward across the ground directly below the heels of the person in front of him, and the only unity was that of the cumulative compass. Pointlessly, Axel hoped that the true centre, far below the horizon, might be moving in a different direction, and that gradually the multitude would alter course, swing away from the villa and recede from the plain like a turning tide.

On the last evening but one, as he plucked the time flower, the forward edge of the rabble had reached the third crest, and was swarming past it. While he waited for the Countess, Axel looked down at the two flowers left, both small buds which would carry them back through only a few minutes of the next evening. The glass stems of the dead flowers reared up stiffly into the air, but the whole garden had lost its bloom.

Axel passed the next morning quietly in his library, sealing the rarer of his manuscripts into the glass-topped cases between the galleries. He walked slowly down the portrait corridor, polishing each of the pictures carefully, then tidied his desk and locked the door behind him. During the after-

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noon he busied himself in the drawing rooms, unobtrusively assisting his wife as she cleaned their ornaments and straightened the vases and busts.

By evening, as the sun fell behind the house, they were both tired and dusty, and neither had spoken to the other all day. When his wife moved toward the music room, Axel called her back.

"Tonight we'll pick the flowers together, my dear," he said to her evenly. "One for each of us."

He peered only briefly over the wall. They could hear, less than half a mile away, the great dull roar of the ragged army, the ring of iron and lash, pressing on towards the house.

Quickly, Axel plucked his flower, a bud no bigger than a sapphire. As it flickered softly, the tumult outside momentarily receded, then began to gather again.

Shutting his ears to the clamour, Axel looked around at the villa, counting the six columns in the portico, then gazed out across the lawn at the silver disc of the lake, its bowl reflecting the last evening light, and at the shadows moving between the tall trees, lengthening across the crisp turf. He lingered over the bridge where he and his wife had stood arm in arm for so many summers—

"Axel!"

The tumult outside roared into the air, a thousand voices bellowed only twenty or thirty yards away. A stone flew over the wall and landed among the time flowers, snapping several of the brittle stems. The Countess ran towards him as a further barrage rattled along the wall. Then a heavy tile whirled through the air over their heads and crashed into one of the conservatory windows.

"Axel!" He put his arms around her, straightening his silk cravat when her shoulder brushed it between his lapels.

"Quickly, my dear, the last flower!" He led her down the steps and through the garden. Taking the stem between her

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jewelled fingers, she snapped it cleanly, then cradled it within her palms.

For a moment the tumult lessened slightly and Axel collected himself. In the vivid light sparkling from the flower he saw his wife's white, frightened eyes. "Hold it as long as you can, my dear, until the last grain dies."

Together they stood on the terrace, the Countess clasping the brilliant dying jewel, the air closing in upon them as the voices outside mounted again. The mob was battering at the heavy iron gates, and the whole villa shook with the massive impact.

While the final glimmer of light sped away, the Countess raised her palms to the air, as if releasing an invisible bird, then in a final access of courage put her hands in her husband's, her smile as radiant as the vanished flower.

"Oh, Axel!" she cried.

Like a sword, the darkness swooped down across them.

Heaving and swearing, the outer edge of the mob reached the knee-high remains of the wall enclosing the ruined estate, hauled their carts over it and along the dry ruts of what had once been an ornate drive. The ruin, formerly a spacious villa, barely interrupted the ceaseless tide of humanity. The lake was empty, fallen trees rotting at its bottom, and old bridge rusting into it. Weeds flourished among the long grass in the lawn, over-running the ornamental pathways and carved stone screens.

Much of the terrace had crumbled, and the main section of the mob cut straight across the lawn, by-passing the gutted villa, but one or two of the more curious climbed up and searched among the shell. The doors had rotted from their hinges and the floors had fallen through. In the music room an ancient harpsichord had been chopped into firewood, but a few keys still lay among the dust. All the books had been toppled from the shelves in the library, the

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canvases had been slashed, and gilt frames littered the floor.

As the main body of the mob reached the house, it began to cross the wall at all points along its length. Jostled together, the people stumbled into the dry lake, swarmed over the terrace and pressed through the house towards the open doors on the north side.

One area alone withstood the endless wave. Just below the terrace, between the wrecked balcony and the wall, was a dense, six-foot-high growth of heavy thornbushes. The barbed foliage formed an impenetrable mass, and the people passing stepped around it carefully, noticing the belladonna entwined among the branches. Most of them were too busy finding their footing among the upturned flagstones to look up into the centre of the thornbushes, where two stone statues stood side by side, gazing out over the grounds from their protected vantage point. The larger of the figures was the effigy of a bearded man in a high-collared jacket, a cane under one arm. Beside him was a woman in an elaborate full-skirted dress, her slim serene face unmarked by the wind and rain. In her left hand she lightly clasped a single rose, the delicately formed petals so thin as to be almost transparent.

As the sun died away behind the house a single ray of light glanced through a shattered cornice and struck the rose, reflected off the whorl of petals onto the statues, lighting up the gray stone so that for a fleeting moment it was indistinguishable from the long-vanished flesh of the statues' originals.

The fourteen years which Terry Carr spent as a science fiction amateur before writing his first professional SF story (he is now twenty-five) were obviously not wasted. In that germinal period he gained a mastery of field and form which yet eludes many who have been writing and successfully selling for even longer. At the moment it would be difficult to cite any recent short story which portrays an alien (in the SF sense of an intelligent extraterrestrial) as vividly and convincingly as this one does, or the alienness of another planet with as much subtle economy. "There are jelly-stains on the back of this MS [Terry Carr wrote in his accompanying letter], which merely proves that I am still the same simple, unspoiled country boy that I was before I moved to the big city and started submitting to men with beards"—a reference to this editor's pronounced pogonitropic, and no other, tendencies. "I have a feeling somebody is going to say that 'Hop-Friend' is an answer to 'water-brothers,' [in Robert Heinlein's *STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961) but it ain't. The vague parallel didn't even strike me till I'd finished. Anyway, a hop-friend would be a beer-brother . . . I hope you like it." We sure do.

HOP-FRIEND

by Terry Carr

ON THE TENTH DAY of the construction job out on the edge of Syrtis Major they found a Marshie watching them. He might have been there ever since they'd trucked in their equipment and thrown up a bubble and temporary toilets, but they never did find out.

The Marshies flicked in and out of sight so rapidly that

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you had to be looking right where they appeared to see them at all, most of the time. They hopped around like fireflies, stopping for two seconds or two minutes, standing almost still with their angular birdlike heads cocked to one side, and then they'd be gone, turning up almost instantly fifteen feet away, still with their heads cocked looking at you. They were unnerving to most of the Earthmen, and a couple of years back one nervous kid in Iguana, near the Bald Spot, had taken a shot at one of them—missed him and burned hell out of one wall of a building. The Marshies hadn't been around the Earth towns much since then.

Not that they had ever been especially chummy. The Marshies were partially telepathic and they could manage the Earth languages well enough, but they seldom bothered. For the most part they just didn't seem interested. Every now and then you'd see one of them pause for a minute in the settlements, and maybe he'd say, "Hi, Harry," or "Nice weather this year," but they never stopped to talk about anything. The Earthmen had been on the planet for over ten years, but all the government could tell you about the Marshies was that they had some towns out in the mountains somewhere, they were trisexual, and their lifespan was about thirty years.

Walt Michelson had been wondering about them ever since he'd landed on the planet back with the first wave, when he'd come with his parents. Michelson had been twelve then, busy looking around and asking questions every time his eyes lit on something. When he was fourteen he saw a Marshie—one of them landed right next to him at his brother's funeral and stood completely still for almost ten minutes while the service droned on. It had been out on the flatlands, where the heavy brown dust was sometimes two inches deep and you had to raise your voice to be heard in the thin air. The Marshie had watched the interment rites silently,

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standing off to one side, and when it had all been over he had looked at Michelson and said "Yes," and disappeared.

Michelson's father had been a building contractor . . . a pretty good one, successful enough that he could have sent Walt back to Earth by the time he was eighteen. But Walt hadn't wanted to go; all he remembered of Earth was how crowded it was, how many policemen there were, how many laws and taxes and taboos build up over the centuries. When he'd been on Earth his father hadn't had much money, and that colored his feelings toward the home planet too, but basically he liked Mars because there was *room* here . . . no walls, real or legislated, to keep a man standing still. So he'd stayed on Mars, and learned the building trades, and he was a foreman this year and would be more next year. He didn't give a damn about Earth.

Now he was working on building a town out here at the base of the hills, on a site which somebody had decided would be an important trade outpost. Some of the drainage from the icecap reached this area, too, so there might be some chance for agriculture. The city had been planned in detail back at Dry Puget, but nobody had thought that there were any Marshies in the area.

They'd noticed him first by the puffs of dust rising in a line leading from the foothills straight to the building site. The Marshies traveled in a peculiar half-leaping half-flying fashion, and when they touched down and jumped off again they kicked up small clouds of dust. One of the workmen saw those clouds coming toward them and reported to Michelson, who got his binocs and watched the Marshie coming. He wasn't long in arriving.

He lit right outside the bubble and stood looking for a minute, then disappeared and skipped right in through one of the airlocks where they were removing the dirt from the diggings inside. He turned up next to the big shovel for a few seconds, disappeared when one of the men suddenly yelled,

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reappeared over by the lumber yard next to the foundation work going on in the south quarter, then outside the truck depot, and finally at the door of the contractor's office where Michelson had been going over the drawings for the street layout. Michelson looked up at him and the Marshie cocked his head and stared back.

The Marshie was a faded orange in color, his body covered with a heavy fur through which the powerful muscles showed clearly. His eyes, large and liquid black, were set on the sides of his head, and his nose and mouth were almost indistinguishable under the fur of the face. He had long legs, thin but powerful, giving him a stature of over seven feet; his large brown wings folded down over his back softly like a cloak. He was indistinguishable from any other Marshie that Michelson had ever seen, but that was undoubtedly because the Marshies were so seldom around.

As the Marshie continued to stand silently looking at him Michelson was struck with the humor of the tableau, and he grinned and nodded. "Welcome to our humble diggings," he said.

The Marshie disappeared, leaving two deep footprints in the dirt outside the door where he had kicked off. Michelson got up and went to the door, saw the alien light a couple of times going across the large inner yard, and then he apparently hopped out through the airlocks again. Michelson raised his binocs from the strap around his neck, but he was unable to track the Marshie's dust-clouds in their erratic jumps out on the flat. They seemed to head toward the hills again but he couldn't be sure.

Michelson shrugged and turned back to the plans on the desk. The Marshie was no immediate problem to him; if he continued to show up there might be trouble among the construction workers—the Marshies appeared and disappeared so abruptly that they could upset a whole crew in a few

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hours—but for the moment Michelson wasn't going to worry about it. He had a more pressing problem.

One of the field men had found that the northeast quarter was right over a large water-deposit and it would require some pretty drastic structural modifications or maybe even abandoning that part of the site altogether. There was bed-rock not too far down, and the yearly icecap drainage collected there; the water wasn't enough to be useful as a supply for the planned city, but the pocket was large enough to undermine any foundations they might try to put in there.

He'd already checked the specifications and found that any pumping system they could install to periodically drain the pocket would be in a cost bracket making it necessary to get an okay from the builder clear back in Dry Puget . . . and that could hold up the work long enough to make them miss their deadline. No, there had to be some way to block the seepage before the water got to the pocket, so that it could be drained once and for all.

Dammit, it was just his luck to run into trouble with water on Mars, where that was the last thing you expected. Well, tomorrow he'd get together with a couple of the surveyors and see what could be done.

The Marshie was back the next day, shortly after the sun rose darkly over the low hills. There was so little light at that early hour that no one saw him coming and the first thing they knew of his presence was when he landed for a moment in an airlock and a driver slammed on his brakes to avoid hitting him—which wasn't really necessary, since the Marshie had jumped off again immediately, but a human driver's muscular reactions weren't geared for Marshie pedestrians. The Marshie skipped on in through the interconnecting locks.

He came down beside Michelson as he was going across the yard toward the diggings, and Michelson stopped. He

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turned and cocked his head at the alien, mocking his stance, and after a moment said, "I'll give you a gate pass if you want."

The Marshie regarded him with his big dark left eye and shook his wings lightly. "Hello, Walt," he said, and skipped off. Michelson shrugged and went on across the yard, but the Marshie came back a minute later, touched down and said, "They aren't so humble," and disappeared again.

Mike Deckinger, who was in charge of the trucks, was nearby and he came over frowning. "He's going to drive us nuts if he keeps that up," he said. "We could tighten up the airlock sequence and maybe keep him out that way."

Michelson shook his head. "That would just slow down the works. Leave him alone; he's just looking."

"Yeah, but why?" said Deckinger, and walked off.

Harris and Loening, the two surveyors, were waiting for Michelson at the diggings. They were good men, both in their thirties and well-trained both on Earth and this planet. Harris was heavyset, with a ruddy, swarthy face and close-cropped black hair; Loening was taller, broad-shouldered, with bony, angular features and dark eyes that seemed to peer out from shadowed caves. Michelson explained the problem to them.

"I want to go outside and see if we can trace the drainage," he concluded. "Find a place where we can dam or rechannel it."

"That'll involve drilling," Loening said.

Michelson raised an eyebrow at him. "Probably. Unless you want to try a dousing rod." Loening grunted disgustedly.

"Well, let's take a walk out there first anyway," Harris said. They started back across the yard toward the north airlocks. Since they might be out for some time they each donned facemasks and picked up small tanks of oxygen before they checked through.

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The Marshie hopped through ahead of them.

He passed them in the second lock and was waiting for them when they emerged onto the flat outside. He stood off about twenty feet, ruffling his wings in a way which seemed impatient to Michelson, and skipped back and forth past them as they set off toward the low hills, following the line of the water as closely as it had been traced in the preliminary survey. Loening walked stolidly, his head down and frowning, but Harris didn't seem to pay any attention to the alien. Michelson watched for him as he walked, and thought.

This hop-guy seemed a lot more interested in the construction works than the Marshies had ever been before. What was that he had said back in the compound? "They aren't so humble." What did that mean?

He'd come in from the hills, and the Marshies were supposed to live somewhere in a mountainous area. This one, maybe? Perhaps the Marshies were taking a definite interest in this site because the Earthmen had finally started getting near their own area.

And if so, just what kind of an interest were they taking?

The water had been traced back to the foot of the hills, but no further. On foot in the low Martian gravity the Earthmen made it that far in about half an hour. There was a thin, cold wind out here which cut through their heavy jackets and ruffled Michelson's light hair, but it didn't stir the dust very much. The air on Mars lacked body; once you got used to it you could breathe it well enough if you didn't exert yourself, but if you wanted to smoke a pipe you had to do it when you were inside a bubble or it would go out every time.

They stopped and rested at the base of the first hill, where dry rocks had tumbled down the slope during the ages and collected at the bottom. Loening loosened his

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pack and swung it off his shoulder to the ground. He nodded up at the rising hills and said, "The first thing to do is scout around there and chart the rock stratifications."

"Do you think the drainage comes through the mountains?" Michelson asked him.

"Might; can't tell offhand. We've been walking on solid rock for a mile or more—that means the water is under rock for a ways out there, and the channel could turn off anywhere. Maybe it skirts the hills; that's one thing I want to check. If the stratifications here show that these hills rose during an upheaval, the chances are that the water channel does go around them."

Michelson nodded. "Well, we can get the preliminary scouting done faster if we split up. I'll try going through the pass up there."

Loening and Harris rose with him, and they set off separately. As Michelson started up the slope he heard Harris call to him, "If you see our Marshie again, ask him where the hell the water comes from."

Michelson grinned back down at him. "I think I will," he said.

He climbed slowly up the rough slope, now and then cutting in his oxygen supply for a few breaths. The rocks here were bulky and weathered—the kind of weathering that happened, on Mars, only with the passage of ages. They stood out like silent gray beasts against the morning shadows. Michelson was soon out of sight of their starting-point, but he followed the natural pass and made a rough map as he went, noting the rock formations and what he could see of the stratifications. It was all a jumble, as far as he could tell; some of the sheer rocksides seemed to show evidence of having been pushed up as Loening had suggested and others didn't. And the direction of the stratifications varied apparently without pattern. Well, figuring out the pattern would be the surveyors' job.

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At a small level spot he stopped to rest, and as he sat looking over his rough-sketched map he heard a sound and the Marshie said beside him, "Most of these hills have been here for two million years."

Michelson looked up, carefully registering no outward surprise. "Whose years?" he said. "Yours or mine?"

The Marshie shook his wings and hopped a little way to one side, still regarding him with one dark eye. "We do not count years."

Michelson nodded at him. "Do you have names?"

"No," said the Marshie, and disappeared. Michelson waited for him to show up again, but after a few minutes he shrugged and stood up to go. It looked like there was still a lot of area to be covered up here.

The Marshie landed again. "I am faster than you," he said.

"That's true," Michelson said. He started walking on upward through the rocks. "Do you live near here?"

"Perhaps," said the Marshie. "I am faster than you."

"Near" could mean fifty miles to a Marshie, Michelson reflected. Well, it had been a fair answer then.

"Where does the water come from?" he said.

The Marshie disappeared.

He didn't show up again for the rest of the day. Michelson followed the pass up into the hills for a mile or two, and then he retraced his steps back down to the point of departure. Loening was waiting for him, and Harris returned shortly. They set off again back across the dusty flat to the bubble.

"It's a mess," Loening said. "The rocks vary in age from maybe a couple thousand years to God knows how old, and there are fifty different types. It doesn't tell us much." He ran his fingers through his dry brown hair, frowning.

"Our hop-friend told me they were mostly a couple of

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million years old," Michelson said. "At least in the area where I was."

"Yeah?" said Harris. "Did he say anything else?"

Michelson shook his head. "I asked him about the water, but he wouldn't answer me; he just shoved off and disappeared. You can't hold a conversation with someone who's liable to be gone at any moment. You get to stuttering."

"I never talked with a Marshie," Harris said. "They're telepathic, aren't they?—maybe they take one look into me and don't like me."

"Don't try to understand them," Loening said over his shoulder as he walked on ahead through the dust. "The only good thing about the damn Marshies is that they stay away from us most of the time."

"I don't know about that," said Michelson, and the three men fell silent, conserving their breath for walking.

But Michelson was thinking about the Marshie. Harris was right—they didn't usually talk with Earthmen. They would hop around and watch interestedly, and sometimes they would say a word or two, usually only enough to acknowledge your existence, but there was no communication between the two species. Yet this one was, comparatively, talking a blue streak. Why?

Michelson was becoming more and more sure that the Marshies had a settlement somewhere nearby. Back in the hills, probably—and Michelson was almost willing to bet that the water drainage ran right through those hills. It figured that the Marshies would settle somewhere where water was handy; on Mars that would be a prime requisite for the Marshies as well as the Earthmen. And if the Marshies were up in those hills, what did they think of the new Earth city being built right on the edge of the flat?

Maybe they hadn't decided yet.

The Marshies, come to think of it, knew a lot more about the Earthmen than they knew about the natives. The Mar-

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shies had stayed away from the Earth settlements, watching, and now the Earthmen were accidentally forcing a meeting between them; that must be shaking up the hoppers. And so, apparently, they were taking a final look at the Earthmen . . . and maybe soon they'd make a decision. He wished he knew what their alternatives were.

They took a landcar out the next day, loaded with a burn-drill. The small red sun was still low over the horizon when they checked through the locks, and they threw a long gray shadow over the dust as they rode toward the hills. There had been no sign of the Marshie yet today, but Michelson was watching for the puffs of dust which would herald his arrival.

They set up the drill half a mile from the hills. It worked on the same principle as their blasters, boring a small hole straight down through the dirt and rock and, by the resistance offered, registering the various strata through which it passed. They found the water fifty feet down, under the layer of rock which formed the floor of the desert here.

They moved on to the base of the hills and again drilled, and again they found the water. Loening drew a straight line on a map of the area, and it passed directly from the building site through the two drilling-points. Extended, it would run through the mountains.

"We'll have to take the drill up into the hills," Loening said. "Flex your muscles—it's heavy."

They mounted it on rollers and made the ascent, and when they had got it to the first level spot in the pass they were all puffing with exertion despite the oxygen-masks they had donned. They sat and rested while Harris and Loening debated whether to drill here or try moving the drill further back into the hills. And the Marshie arrived.

He came down the pass in three quick hops and stopped next to the drill, which he regarded for a moment in his

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cocked-head stance. Then he skipped away and came back a few minutes later, landing next to Michelson.

"It is not a weapon," he said.

"No, it's a drill," Michelson said. "We're looking for water."

"Yes," said the Marshie, and hopped twenty feet back up the pass. There he stood motionless, looking at the Earthmen. Marshies could stand still for hours, completely unmoving, when they felt like it; only the Marshie's liquid-dark eyes moved, flicking from one to another of the Earthmen in turn, and continually back to rest on the drill which sat before them. Harris sat staring back at him, but Loening coldly ignored his gaze, looking almost sullenly down at his feet. Michelson rose and walked slowly toward the creature.

"We're trying to find the path of the water," he said. "Can you help us?"

The Marshie's head jerked to one side and the big, dark eye focussed on Michelson. After a moment he said, "I know where the water is."

"We want to dam the water, to keep it from our city," Michelson said. "If you help us, we can be sure we don't divert it from your own use."

The Marshie hopped to one side, paused, and hopped off the slope out of sight. Michelson waited for several minutes, but he did not return. Michelson shrugged and went back to his companions.

"I think you've frightened him," Loening said. "They don't play our games."

"They haven't so far," Michelson admitted. "But I think they live in these hills, and they're going to have to take notice of that city we're building. It's about time we started cooperating with each other."

"Whether we like it or not?" said Loening.

Michelson nodded "If that's their attitude—or ours. Per-

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sonally, I think we might have a lot to offer each other; this could be the first step."

"The Marshies don't *step*," Loening said. "They hop. They skitter around like grasshoppers." His mouth was drawn back in a disgusted grimace. He took a breath and stood up. "Anyway, you can go on talking about cultural exchange with grasshoppers, but I think we'd better lug this drill up a bit further if we want to get anything concrete done today."

The three men began to attach the pulling-straps to their shoulders, but before they started their further ascent the Marshie came back. He landed beside them and said immediately, "I can tell you where the water is. You want to be friends."

Michelson dropped the strap and looked at the Marshie, wondering for a moment if the creature was serious. But of course it was useless to try to see what was in a hopper's mind, as Loening had said. At any rate, no matter how difficult it was to communicate with the Marshies, they did not lie.

He turned to Loening and said, "You and Harris take the drill back down to the landcar—the grasshoppers have landed."

He spent hours following the Marshie through the hills, back over five miles into the rocky, desolate terrain. There was silence in those mountains—not just the silence of a thin atmosphere, but the silence of emptiness, of desertion. The gray shadows fell along their path like dull pastel silhouettes, and the Marshie hopped back and forth past Michelson, silent but seemingly impatient. There was an air of excitement about this fur-covered creature—an almost child-like eagerness in his rough, inhuman voice when he occasionally stopped and and said. "We will be friends, Walt, when I show you the water."

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Well, of course he was interpreting the creature's attitude in his own terms, and it probably didn't make sense. But the Marshie hurried him along the rocky path.

They came down into a small hollow among the rocks, and the Marshie said, "Here is the water." There was an expanse of mud—the heavy brown dust of Mars, with water flowing slowly through it. It covered the floor of this tiny valley, and on its surface Michelson saw a thin green moss-like growth. It was like an expanse of quicksand, like an antiseptic swamp—for there were none of the heavier forms of vegetation of Earth, no insects skimming the surface. Here amid the chill dark rocks of Mars was a branch of the annual drainage of the ice-cap, and it seemed pitifully antilimactic to Michelson.

"You can stop the water here," said the Marshie. "We are friends?"

Michelson looked around him, across the muddy expanse at the hills which rose again immediately beyond. "Your home is back there?" he asked.

"Yes." The Marshie hopped once, twice, twenty feet at a time, and hopped back again. "We are friends?" he said again.

"Of course," Michelson said. And then a thought came to him and he said, "Do you know what friendship is?"

The Marshie's eye regarded him softly for a moment. "We know something of it. But we do not have a word for it."

Michelson was suddenly aware that this small, muddy valley was a strangely unimpressive scene for a meeting of races. He felt alone and unimportant standing amid the ages-old rocks of this world with the furry Martian. This was not, after all, his world; he had lived most of his life here, and had come to think of it as his home far more than he thought so of Earth, but here in the quiet gray rock-shadows he felt fully for the first time that this desolate world belonged to the hoppers—to the Martians. And with-

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out quite realizing what he was doing he cut in his oxygen supply, though he wasn't really short of breath.

The Marshie hopped away without a word, leaving him alone there.

Harris and Loening surveyed the area thoroughly in the days that followed, and Michelson sent some men out to begin construction of a dam there, meanwhile making preparations for draining the waterpocket beneath the city. It kept him busy for several days, and it wasn't until two weeks later, when the dam-construction was started, that he began to wonder seriously why the Marshie had not been around again. No one had seen him out at the dam site either.

Michelson took an aircar out to the site soon after and checked the progress of the work there. They had moved machinery in and set up temporary quarters there for the work-crew; the area was bustling with activity. Michelson looked at the footprints of the workmen in the Martian dust, heard the noise of the machines and the voices around him, and thought of that silent day when he had stood here alone with the Marshie. Two weeks ago . . . it seemed like months.

He left, and took the aircar up to scout the area. The Marshies' city was supposed to be somewhere further up the pass; he hoped he could spot it from the air. He flew low, droning through the massive rocky crags, watching the ground through binocs. He had penetrated fifteen miles further into the mountains and was almost ready to give up when he found it.

The dwellings were cut into the rock, in vertical lines up and down the cliffside. There were perhaps twenty or twenty-five of them; certainly no more. He landed the aircar at the base of those cliffs and approached slowly.

He needn't have bothered; they were empty. Some things had been left behind—a few small objects, delicately carved

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from stone, some pelts of the Marshies' own fur which had perhaps been used for added warmth during the winter, one or two pieces of what might have been furniture—but the area was definitely deserted. He couldn't tell offhand how long the Marshies had been gone, but he was sure it was no more than two weeks.

He left the dwellings untouched, not even picking up any of the small stone carvings to bring back with him. Perhaps later they could send out a government expedition to catalog and study what had been left. He walked slowly back to his aircar, looking at the depressions in the floor of the canyon left by the Marshies' footprints.

A fluttering behind him caused him to turn in surprise, and he saw a Marshie regarding him calmly. This could have been the same one, but he seemed a bit more heavily built, his fur somewhat darker.

"Hello," Michelson said. "We are friends?"

The Marshie continued to look silently at him for a moment, his heavy, dark wings folded like shadows around him. Then he said, "Some of us too are insane." And he disappeared with a quick jump and flutter of brown wings.

After a while Michelson turned and continued walking to the aircar, leaving the footprints of his boots behind him in the dust.



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