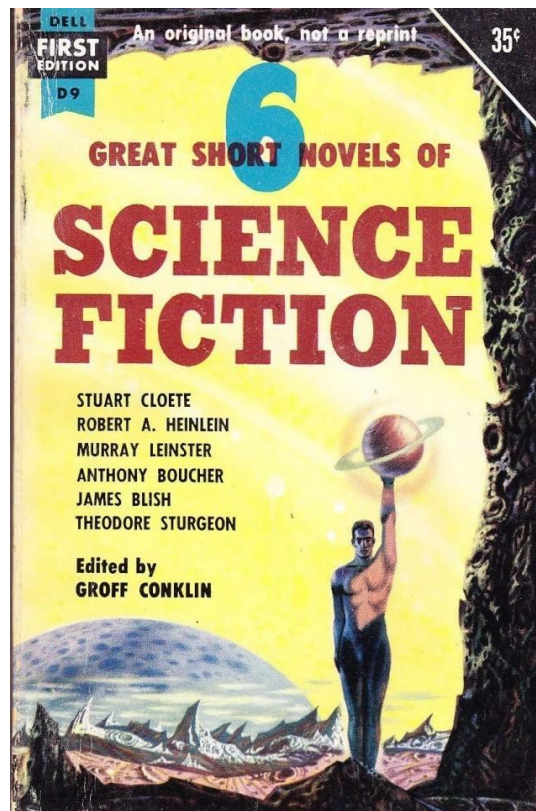


6 Great Short Novels of Science Fiction

Groff Conklin



1954

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6 Great Short Novels
of Science Fiction

Ed. by Groff Conklin

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THE BLAST, by *Stuart Cloete*

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LIER'S, April, 1946.

COVENTRY, by *Robert A. Heinlein*

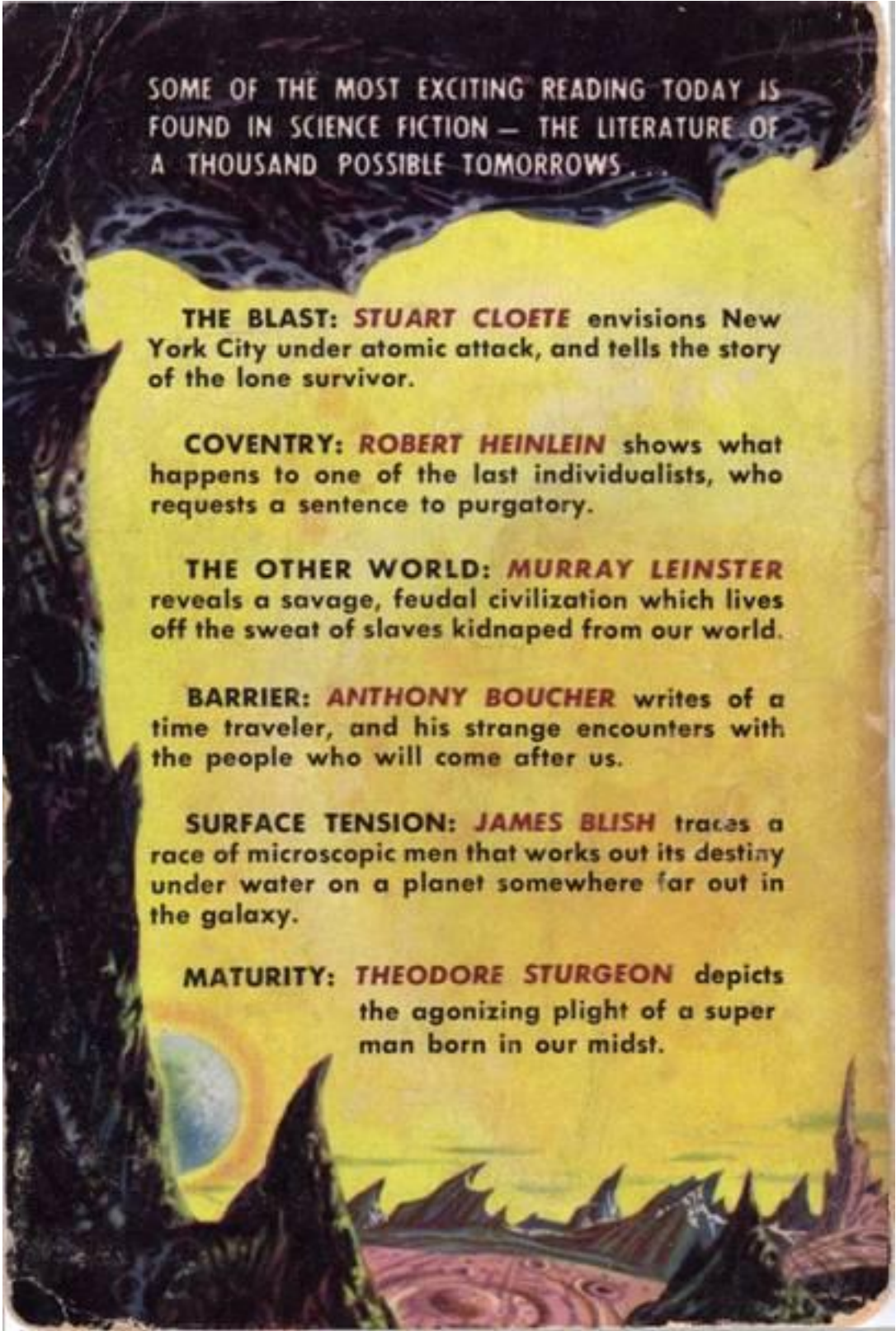
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THE OTHER WORLD, by *Murray Leinster*

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BARRIER, by *Anthony Boucher*

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SOME OF THE MOST EXCITING READING TODAY IS
FOUND IN SCIENCE FICTION — THE LITERATURE OF
A THOUSAND POSSIBLE TOMORROWS...

THE BLAST: **STUART CLOETE** envisions New York City under atomic attack, and tells the story of the lone survivor.

COVENTRY: **ROBERT HEINLEIN** shows what happens to one of the last individualists, who requests a sentence to purgatory.

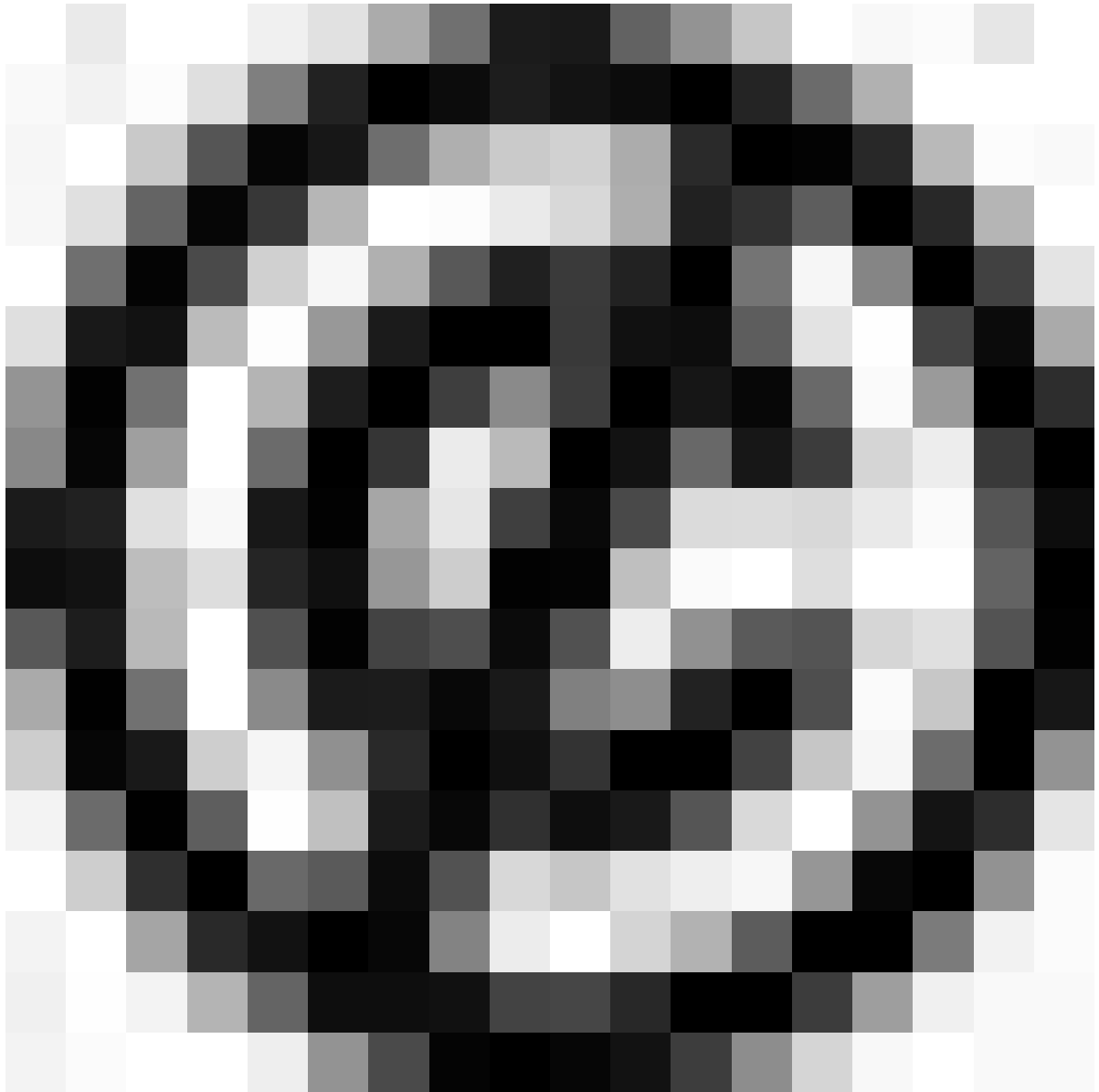
THE OTHER WORLD: **MURRAY LEINSTER** reveals a savage, feudal civilization which lives off the sweat of slaves kidnaped from our world.

BARRIER: **ANTHONY BOUCHER** writes of a time traveler, and his strange encounters with the people who will come after us.

SURFACE TENSION: **JAMES BLISH** traces a race of microscopic men that works out its destiny under water on a planet somewhere far out in the galaxy.

MATURITY: **THEODORE STURGEON** depicts the agonizing plight of a super man born in our midst.





SURFACE TENSION, by *James Blish*

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MATURITY, by *Theodore Sturgeon*

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Introduction

MORE YEARS AGO than I care to count, an uncle of mine who had a propensity for picking up books on second-hand counters presented me with a badly dogeared volume, *The Time Machine*. The author's name was Wells—H. G. Wells. I had never heard of him nor had I ever dreamed of time machines; but I sat down to look the book over, and before I knew it it was three hours later and I had had my first experience with science fiction. Literally, it was like travel through time itself, so imperceptibly did the hours pass.

Two things about this book have stayed with me through the years. I admired, first, the brilliant sweep of its imagination, and, second, its odd length. *The Time Machine* is longer than a short story—even a “long” one—and considerably shorter than a regular novel. Detective stories I was reading in those days were usually at least twice as long as Mr. Wells' masterpiece and generally about half as exciting. This seemed, even then, to point a moral: there are not many tales that need more than novelette treatment for satisfactory development, just as there are not many really meaningful, idea-rich stories that can be told in *less* than novelette length.

It seems to me that science fiction, perhaps more than any other type of fiction, has found the novelette well suited to its needs. The reason is simple. In a story about a fisherman and his vacation, or a commuter and his marital difficulties, or a schoolboy and his games, or even an explorer in far-off Africa, every element in the back ground and many in the characterizations need only be hinted at by the author. The reader will come up with clear mental pictures of what he is intended to see. He has his own mental image of what is meant by “a country lane,” “the steep canyons of New York's financial district,” “the wide, cactus-dotted desert.”

But the problem is entirely different when the author has to make his concept of life on far planets or in other dimensions real and colorful. It is a difficult thing to do; it takes skill in writing—and it takes words. Similarly, it is hard to “make real” the nature of our own world in a far-distant future, when unimaginable things may have occurred to make our current concepts of earth obsolete.

When the science fiction author has to work within the limits of the short story, he only too often has to assume certain preconceptions on the part of his readers, thus limiting his audience to a relatively small group of “fans” who have read so much science fiction that they accept the improbable as commonplace. This is what has led many critics to dismiss science fiction as narrow in scope and limited in appeal.

But the short novel, or novelette, gives the writer room enough to make his new ideas circumstantially real, and a great many stories of this length are printed by the

science fiction magazines. While the short story of 3,000 to 6,000 words is splendid for everyday plots and backgrounds, the short novel, running from 15,000 to 40,000 words, is much preferred by writers describing the wholly imaginary backgrounds and characters that are common to science fiction. It is only when given that much leg-room that they can make their unusual backgrounds and concepts convincing.

Since the novelette is a form particularly suited to science fiction, it's only natural that there should be many good ones floating around. And "floating around" is the correct way of putting it, as far as book publication goes, for most science fiction anthologists can print very few stories which might consume as much as a quarter of the total wordage allowed them. Consequently, there are dozens of high quality novelettes that have been published in the science fiction magazines and left there to molder.

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This is really not the place to outline the history, development and accomplishments of modern science fiction, or even to try and define it. You are supposed to enjoy this book, not be educated or edified by it. You are now reading for fun and not for profit, or you never would have picked this book up in the first place. Science fiction is said by some enthusiasts to be today's literature of ideas —scientific, psychological, sociological, political, metaphysical, philosophic, even theological. My feeling is that this point has been rather overemphasized, for it is important to remember that these imaginative tales, whatever their scientific base or their idea content, are written primarily for entertainment, and if they do not entertain they fail. Indeed, they do not ordinarily get published.

Still, bearing in mind that science fiction must first of all be fun to read, it can be said that its greatest claim to permanent value is its use of imaginative ideas to stir up the mind and make the reader think a bit about the nature of the world he lives in and its problems.

Let's take a brief look at the tales included and see how satisfactorily they exemplify modern science fiction. Stuart Cloete's *The Blast* is the story of a man-made catastrophe as seen through the eyes of a New Yorker. Here is one of the most vivid reconstructions—or pre-constructions—of world-wide ruin that has ever been written, all the more vivid for its intimate detail and its sense of immediacy. The story is not merely hair-raising adventure; it is packed with ideas, with social criticism. Stuart Cloete is not primarily known as a science fiction writer but as the author of numerous books and stories laid in Africa, such as *The Turning Wheels*.

Robert Heinlein's *Coventry*, an imaginative view of tomorrow's methods of correcting emotional instability, is full of entertaining possibilities for the future of our own psychological sciences. Who knows? Perhaps we should set aside a state in the Union solely for the use of psychological misfits, one where they can give full play to their primitive, "abnormal" bent for blood-and-thunder adventure in an untamed underworld of their own!

The same is true to an even greater degree of the time-travel story, *Barrier*, by the noted editor, critic and author, Anthony Boucher. Here the idea is even more overt. We know very well that the author is advocating American democracy through the device of an enthralling plot about an anti-democratic society of tomorrow.

Catastrophes, time travel, worlds of tomorrow: these only suggest the richness of modern science fiction. There are straight science-imagination stories, compounded of literally fantastic possibilities in tomorrow's science and of fine, colorful, suspenseful conflict. Such is the essence of James Blish's *Surface Tension*, the story of a painfully struggling new society created by man to work out its destinies beneath the surface of the water on a planet somewhere far in the depths of the Galaxy.

Or take Murray Leinster's hair-raising kidnap-adventure novel, *-The Other World*, about a primitive civilization paralleling our own. Here the excitement is that of savage warfare with a society that is dangerously interpenetrating ours—a story full of magic and strangeness and an uncomfortable explanation for the existence of missing persons bureaus!

Of all the stories in this collection, only one has a really familiar environment. Theodore Sturgeon's *Maturity* is about our own world. It could never have been written so effectively if it were about other times or other worlds; it is one of those tales of events that might actually be happening right now. In the editor's opinion, this is one of the most poignantly real stories about the tragedy of a superman in our midst that has ever been written.

While the present volume is the first collection of science fiction novelettes to appear as a paper-bound original book, it is to be hoped that it is far from the last. For here is a format and a price which is eminently suitable for novelette collections. We present you here with a set of six novelettes that have passed the tests of time and of enthusiastic reader evaluation. These are not just the "best" of the current month or even the current year; they are among the best science fiction novelettes ever published.

— GROFF CONKLIN

~ * ~

THE BLAST....by *Stuart Cloete*



I AM WRITING this because today I saw two girls. It was very odd after twenty years. I do not know if anyone—the word *anyone* looks funny—will ever find this, or be able to read it, or even if it will last, because it is written in pencil. Naturally there is no ink. It all dried up long ago, but there are plenty of pencils, thousands of them, pencils by the hundred thousand gross—all the best kinds, just for the picking up.

It's difficult to know where to begin. It all happened so long ago that some of the details are fogged and I'm even doubtful of the chronology. The big thing, of course, the real beginning, was the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—the atomic bomb and the bungling that followed it after the war: fear of Russia, fear of free enterprise, fear of communism, of Fascism—fear, in fact. I remember one thing in '46, and that was a senator from Florida saying that we should destroy every facility we possessed capable of producing only destructive forms of atomic energy. This made a great impression on me, just as Roosevelt's saying, "All we have to fear is fear itself," had done. But,

of course, we did not pay any more attention to this senator than we had to the late President. We entered into a kind of armament race. Strength was the thing, power politics; and atoms were power. The common man didn't really believe in it, but what could he do? When had he ever been able to prevent wars? All he did was fight them. Anyway, there was no war. There was only a state of fear. There were only rumors—stories that Russia and Spain were only a year behind us in the atomic race.

These two countries were, of course, at opposite ideological poles and were a constant threat not only to each other, but to the world. Then there was the rumor that no one believed, but which nevertheless had the psychological effect of adding to the general fear and uncertainty of mankind. It was that a group of Germans in South America had discovered new fissionable material and that the process of refining it was so simple that bombs could be made in any garage—or if not quite in a garage, in almost any small machine shop. This, if it were true, naturally would render the inspection measures discussed by the United Nations completely ineffective because, quite obviously, all small plants all over the world could not be kept under supervision.

Then came a new rumor—only it was a little more than a rumor because the same story came from several accredited sources—that the new bombs were minuscule, no bigger than a fountain pen, and could be taken anywhere and planted with impunity. This probably was untrue, but certainly the underlying principle was true. Bombs were being made that were both smaller and more powerful. We had been making them ourselves, ever since the very first ones we'd used in the New Mexico test and in Japan. We knew that there were many Germans in South America. We knew that many war criminals had escaped there, by various subterfuges and in various disguises. We knew that young Norwegian Nazis had been invited over as colonists. We knew that Russia was courting the all but openly Fascist southern republics—and knowing all this we discounted it all.

What happened next is history. I never bothered writing about it till today, because, thinking myself the only survivor, I could see little point in recording the events of the last twenty years. It is, I think, the year 1972 now; and the month—I am less certain of the months—is probably May. I deduce this from the flowering shrubs, the state of the foliage, and the fact that most of the young birds have flown from their nests.

Perhaps, too, I have avoided writing, though writing comes easily to me (it used to be my profession; I was a novelist, because of the terror of those days, which I wish to forget if possible. Even now, though the pain has been softened slightly by the passage of time, it will be difficult for me to write of the death of my wife, who, having survived the first blasts and succeeded in living with me almost a year, finally died in my arms of the Red Death, as it came to be called.

None of this, of course, is the true reason for having either not written before or for writing now. The real reason is that previously there was no one to write for; but now there is, because I have seen people. People are an audience, and some old reflex in me has been activated.

I thought I was over it all. Just as I had thought I was over women—girls. But I see that I have deceived myself and that this manuscript, this record, may be of some historic value. That is the true reason for this work that I am writing in a mixture of hope and fear.

At the time of the blast—before it, that is—I was well known as the author of several South African novels. I am of South African descent and, at that time, still had a farm in the Transvaal. I suppose I have it still—even now. This is probably what saved my life, for in the beginning, though there were others who came through the plague, most people were apparently unable to stand the conditions of life when all meat had to be hunted and savage animals roamed through the piled canyons of what had been the greatest city in the world, New York, where I lived before the blast, and still live. Of course, there were great quantities of canned goods, but fresh meat, fuel and water were difficult to obtain for those who were unaccustomed to dealing with life in the raw.

I had better go back to the blast. It was what might be called the last real event in history. I seem to be in the interesting position of having survived history, of being history itself—a kind of lonely Adam in a jungle where terror stalked by day and night.

The Adam idea is now suddenly particularly apt because of the Eves that I have seen. I wonder what Adam would have done with two Eves. Anyway, I am glad I have hidden from them, because if they have survived, others must have. It has always seemed possible to me that in remote parts of the world some groups of those people we used to call savages might have survived, saved by their isolation from the diseases set up by radioactivity and immune or partially immune, because of their diet and the lives they led, to the Red Death which spread over the North. I have evidently been right, for the two girls—they are in their early twenties from the look of them—could not have raised themselves; which again brings up the question: are those with them friends or enemies, and what is my position? Do I wish to be a friend to these strangers after twenty years alone?

The thing to do now is to continue my narrative and to describe what was certainly the end of our civilization and might have been the end of mankind—though of course man might have reappeared again by a process of natural selection in a few million years; unless this time the new animals, such as the giant wolves that stand as high as a horse, and the immense brown and white minks that attack cattle and suck their blood in a few minutes, and the many other strange beasts and birds should prove to be too much for such primitive types of man as might arise. This, at any rate, had been my opinion until I saw the two girls. It is now subject to modification.

That I have succeeded in my fight against such wild beasts as I have described is due to my possession of modern weapons. These animals, however, are quite natural-phenomena that science once predicted might arise through the effect of atomic fission on the genes and chromosomes of the embryos extant at the time of the explosion. Or at least that is the way I remember it, though at the time—that is, before it happened—I

did not pay much attention to the details about the atom in the magazines and papers, because I had no inclinations toward nuclear physics.

The center of the blast was said to have been Gramercy Park, probably the Players Club. It was estimated that three hundred thousand people were killed. Another half-million people were wounded by flying debris or burned in varying degrees. A tiny blister, however, proved as bad as a serious burn: There was no case of recovery from a burn of any size. The patient simply appeared to dissolve slowly from the nucleus of the wound. The deaths were extremely painful, and since there were neither sufficient hospital facilities nor enough drugs of any kind to stifle pain, thousands committed suicide, while others were killed by their friends in mercy killings.

All public services broke down, including fire and police, key men having been killed, water mains destroyed, telephone and telegraph communication ruined beyond repair. Our technological back was broken; our civilization writhed like a wounded snake, unable to advance and incapable of retreat. We were too complex to return to simplicity; and only then, when it was too late, did it become apparent to the man in the street on what a fragile base his life had rested and how tenuous had been his hold upon existence. "One world or no world," our greatest men had said, but no one had believed them. Having refused one world, we now had no world, and each man reacted according to his nature. Some, as I say, committed suicide, not merely because they were wounded or burned but because they were terrified. They bolted like animals, leaping from the housetops of the vast circle of buildings that surrounded the empty center of devastation. Some prayed, some cursed, some raped and murdered, their lusts liberated in final orgy. The police tried in certain parts to keep order, and shot looters and assassins till their ammunition gave out, when they were lynched by police-hating mobs. All the jewelry stores were broken into, and rings and ornaments were scattered everywhere. But now, of course, diamonds and gold were useless.

For forty-eight hours, there was madness and murder, screams, shots and shouts; the parading of loose women in stolen ermine cloaks, mink coats, stone marten stoles, with diamond tiaras on their bleached blond hair. For forty-eight hours, cars roared through the streets and tommy guns spat from the cars. Then the gasoline began to give out in the filling stations, and the ammunition began to give out for the tommy guns as it had earlier for the police, and there was no one to hold up. Gangsters could go into any store and take anything. Their women dripped with jewels, their cars were stacked with valuable furs and piled with cases of Scotch and gin and rye. They had eaten their fill of steak cooked by trembling chefs at the point of a gun. But now there were neither steaks nor chefs left, and there was no water to wash the grime from their faces and the blood from their hands. And then, as suddenly as their reign of terror had begun, it ended in terror on their part. Here was a new world that they could not understand, where all that they had ever wanted was theirs and they were carrying it off. But to where, and for what? In this world they were the suckers, and, like wild animals betrayed by this new environment, they turned upon one another in a kind of gang war of extinction.

This, of course, is all somewhat academically stated, the drama having lost its sharp cutting edge with the passing years. But there are incidents, vignettes that still stand out, separated from the general mass of somewhat amorphous memory and theory and rationalization, like the red-capped figure to be found in almost every Corot landscape. There was the girl who ran into Grand Central Station pursued by two men, whom I shot. It was as simple as that. I was going out to get canned goods from the basement of a ruined store and had a rifle in my hand. I knew the girl by sight; she was a dancer in a nearby musical show. She smiled at me and said thank you as if I had opened a door for her. And I, regretting the expenditure of my two shells, wondered if it had been worthwhile. The shots on my part, and the smile on the girl's, were out of their context here.

In a book published a few years before it happened, a number of scientists had predicted what might occur, and one of them had explained what would take place if an atomic bomb were dropped in Gramercy Park. The fact that the explosion actually did take place in Gramercy Park could have been a matter of coincidence, or luck, or it might have been suggested by the chapter in question. The depositor of the bomb may have said, "Well, if they want it there, let them have it there." He may even have had a kind of perverted sense of humor, like the guards at Buchenwald who gave towels to those of their victims who were about to be gassed, telling them the Murder House was for baths; or again, with that tidy Nazi mind, he may have wished to make fact conform to fiction. The point, however, is that the explosion did not operate quite as was expected, because, for some unknown reason, the blast did not fade out and get weaker and weaker as the distance from its center increased. Instead, it ended as if it were cut off by an invisible wall.

The best way to describe it would be to imagine the force of the blast as something tied to a string that was being swung round and round. Everything within the area covered by the string was destroyed, and everything only a few yards beyond it was left—with the exception of such minor damage as some broken windows—intact. The blast at that point appeared to take an upward direction, so that in the area beyond the destroyed center there was no further destruction except that due to fires caused by the falling debris. This destruction was somewhat haphazard; certain buildings escaped all damage while whole areas were completely gutted.

After the original reign of disorder and mayhem, the city started to reorganize itself. Emergency repairs were effected to water supplies, and local authorities were linked by provisional army field telephones. Citizens formed themselves into troops of vigilantes, and though there was some street fighting between different groups which took each other for bandit bands, order was in some degree restored. But there was no sense of security or continuity, for if there is no reason to expect tomorrow to dawn, today loses its validity. Were more bombs going to go off? What was going to happen about food, or work, or money?

People began to evacuate the city in cars, on foot, on bicycles. They left the island of Manhattan, endless black caterpillars of humanity creeping over every bridge, ap-

pearing from under the ground in every tunnel. They were migrating like lemmings. Driven by fear, they were going into the unknown where they would inevitably die.

They swarmed over the land like locusts, devastating it, marching till they were halfway to Canada. Some even reached the Canadian border, where they met Canadians marching down from Montreal and Toronto. What had taken place in New York was not an isolated phenomenon. Every big city in North America had suffered the same experience. No city except Washington was completely destroyed, but the population of all had been panicked, and the cumulative effect of these multiple bombings was much more serious than the total destruction of any single city, because all the urban populations fled to the country—which they destroyed; to the small towns and villages where, when once what was happening was understood, the villagers defended themselves with guns and even pitchforks, ex-soldiers fighting from tractors as if they were tanks. It was civil war, mass suicide. North America as a power, as a civilization, ceased to exist.

But as if even this were not enough, disaster was piled upon disaster, and the sickness hit us. First came diseases that were caused, it was said, by radioactivity. Then came the Red Death. The Red Death appears to have been general all over the civilized world.

The news of the period, naturally, was garbled; but there was some news. A few radio hams were able to receive messages. Ships at sea relayed frantic and conflicting reports. Naturally, within hours of the disaster, our air fleets set out for Europe and in a series of retaliatory raids blotted out many centers of military and industrial strength. Every big town in England had been blown up at the same time that ours were: London, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, all had ceased to exist. But fortunately the United States, anticipating the possibility of such an attack, had the foresight to be ready for it and had several fleets of immense bombers, complete with atomic bombs and personnel hidden in secret underground hangers. Anticipating the destruction of central authority, the commanding officers of these areas had sealed instructions to be opened if communication broke down.

When the attack came, the wings of retaliation were soon in the air and within hours of the first blast our world was gone. There was never in anyone's mind, apparently, the idea that any country other than Russia could have been responsible for the attack upon us.

What was forgotten was that Germany was our enemy—the enemy of Russia and America and England—and that nothing would please Germany better than the mutual destruction of the U.S.S.R. and the Western democracies. The Germans hoped this would happen and, in my opinion, engineered it—perhaps even by setting off the explosions in America, knowing that we, in our fear and bewilderment, would attack Russia in a retaliatory reflex. What the Germans did not foresee (or perhaps they did not care) was that such a war would extinguish them with the rest of mechanized mankind. Or again they—the Germans—may have had such confidence in their Spenglerian myth that they assumed they could survive.

And so, perhaps, they could have—until the Red Death came along. Then they died along with all the others.

I had thought till today that it had killed every living human being in the Western Hemisphere with the exception of myself and perhaps some Indians in the forests of the upper Amazon or Orinoco. Some of the last news that we got through was that the same disease had broken out in both Buenos Aires and Rio. This makes me think now, looking back on it, that the bacteriological war the attackers planned for us got completely out of control.

What happened in the Far East, in Australia and Asia, I have no idea. We never heard anything from there, and perhaps they, too, survived. Perhaps a new empire of Orientals arose. I doubt it, though, because I feel that they would surely have established some kind of communication with the East coast of the United States. I think it is safe to assume that sickness and death overtook everyone in the Far East as well, except for isolated tribesmen and perhaps the inhabitants of such a remote place as Lhasa, the sacred city of Tibet.

~ * ~

The two girls I saw were standing on a small hill on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 23d Street. I saw them clearly silhouetted against the skyline. They had long spears in their hands and were leading horses. One horse was a bay and the other a chestnut. The girls were staring north, shading their eyes with their hands, while the horses cropped the grass beside them. Both girls were blond. Their hair was knotted on their necks and they wore what looked like buckskin shirts and trousers. I had trouble with the dogs, Vixen and Bodo; the girls were upwind and the dogs had never smelled a woman before—or any other human being but me, for that matter—and they probably thought of me as one of themselves, since I had bred them and their parents before them and they were never separated from me, even sleeping on the same heap of skins in the cave I had built in the ruined Chelsea Hotel.

Having described the girls, I suppose I had better describe myself.

I was born in Paris, just in time to serve in the first World War. I was severely wounded and went to live in South Africa, where I farmed cattle for ten years. I then took to writing, returned to England and came from there to the United States, where I remained, apart from a few trips to England, France and the Bahamas, till the second World War, when I married a charming American girl, an artist, and continued writing while I waited for the war to end. My age and disabilities prevented my doing anything more active. Among others, I wrote and talked of the dangers of our Anglo-American retention of the bomb secret, maintaining that manufacture should cease and control be given to the United Nations. I also said that our civilization, as we knew it, was finished; and that as others were saying and writing at the same time the future presented only two alternatives: the liberation of man through atomic power or the destruction of our civilization, either by great nations in an undeclared war, which was what we feared, or by atomic bandits or nihilists.

My wife and I lived in a small studio penthouse on the eleventh floor of the Whitby Apartments on West 45th Street, opposite the Martin Beck Theater. I was over there yesterday and it is still almost intact, having been extremely well constructed sometime in the twenties. As a matter of fact, I shot a mountain lion that my dogs had driven into a basement apartment which had, when we lived there, been occupied by a drummer. Hunting big game in old apartment houses is the most dangerous form of shooting there is and makes any African safari look like child's play, because the animals are likely to attack from the immediate flank—that is, from any apartment—as you move down a passage. Hunting under such conditions would be quite impossible without dogs that first investigate the building and bay up the den of any animal that is lurking there. The losses in dogs are heavy; but I am continually breeding new ones—huge animals of mixed Saint Bernard, Newfoundland, great Dane, Irish wolf hound, bloodhound, mastiff, police dog and Husky blood—which generation by generation become larger, fiercer, and better hunters. The feral dogs—the wild stock that has survived and bred itself by mongrelization—are not much bigger than jackals or coyotes.

When I am out for a stroll, as I was today, I usually take only a couple of well-trained dogs as guards to inform me of any danger that I do not see myself, which was lucky for the girls and their horses. For had I been hunting with my pack, as I do every second day or so, the girls would undoubtedly have been torn to pieces, since this is my way of feeding my dogs. They are trained to pull down any living thing and, having done so, to break it up as English hounds did a fox. Of course, when hunting the mutations such as the giant wolf and mink and a kind of wild ox that resembles the extinct European aurochs, I use a rifle—a 450 express that I selected at Abercrombie and Fitch—which has immense striking power. The dogs, instead of attacking game that is too big for them, merely bring it to bay and hold it till I come.

From my point of view, there is a certain interest in the change in my own character because, when I first went to Africa as a young man, I was an ardent hunter. Then, at the age of thirty-five, I gave up shooting altogether. Now I, like my dogs, have reverted atavistically, and hunting is my only pleasure. My mind is less disciplined than it was when I used to write for the magazines. It drifts along strange paths, as I dig among my memories seeking for incidents and examples that will elucidate or explain what has happened. This is not a story. It has no plot. It is a testament, a form of history, a literary curiosity written for myself as a form of justification, as a debt that I, the last man of the past, must owe to an unborn future.

My narrative must drift back and forth to catch memories that are like butterflies as they flick through my mind, for I am an old man. How can I write about the death of my wife? I can't. But the description of her death will be there, threaded like every twentieth bead on the string of my life. I cannot coldly discuss killing and eating Annie, my pet dog. Nevertheless, I did kill and eat her.

We also ate Edward, the kinkajou we had had for four years, in a stew. There was no food for pet animals, and it was necessary to dispose of them all. I have never had a nicer pet than a kinkajou, a South American animal resembling, though not connected

with, a lemur. It has a long prehensile tail, a soft fur, and charming snuggly habits. It is about the size of a cat and is more or less nocturnal. We never took to cannibalism, though both cannibalism and infanticide were widely practiced and probably, under such conditions, to be condoned. Morality can exist only in a social framework. A man alone cannot be good or bad. He cannot steal, fight, lie, or murder.

Now I return to animals because it is among animals that the last twenty years of my life have been lived. In addition to the giant mutations, there was an immense increase in the wild animals indigenous to New York State, such as the timber wolf, beaver, black bear, lynx, mountain lion, deer, moose and bobcat. There were even some bison and caribou. There were also many game birds: pheasant, ptarmigan, grouse, and a new kind of American jungle fowl which evolved from ordinary poultry. The inmates of the Central Park zoo now roamed wild, too. Some lunatic, very shortly after the explosion, had thrown open every cage in the zoo, and since no one had time to deal with the liberated animals, a number of them survived and became acclimated. Now there are tigers in New York, which, in their long winter coats, resemble the great tigers of Manchuria. There are also leopards, Jaguars and a wide variety of buck and antelope which, despite the severity of the winters, have managed to survive. As happened elsewhere where their ranges overlapped, the lions were soon exterminated by the tigers. There is at least one herd of zebra and another of donkeys. Occasionally they hybridize. There are no horses, and the two that I saw today are the first I have seen for twenty years. Grizzly bears have spread from the West and are very large—even bigger, I should say, than the Kodiak bears. I have seen marks where they sharpened their claws against a tree in Central Park more than twenty feet from the ground. There are several families of polar bears living along both the Hudson and East rivers. There is a great colony of seals at Ellis Island.

The great bald eagle now nests in the abandoned cliffs of every skyscraper. There are pigeons by the millions; and ducks, wild geese and swans in all the ponds and rivers. Buzzards and kites circle everywhere.

Many of the larger carnivora live in the drains, which is probably how those from more tropical countries survived their first winter. It is of course for the same reason that I live in a cave, where the temperature is more or less stable, rather than in an apartment, of which there is certainly no shortage. It occurred to me when I moved in here that, after all, a cave was man's natural habitat, and that a house was only an artificial cave.

At least one more thing is necessary to supply a picture of this area as it is now. New York was always famous for its skyline. This skyline is now vastly changed. There are a number of large buildings—blocks of flats, hospitals and hotels—more or less intact. Rockefeller Center stands; so does the pinnacle of the Empire State Building, an eagles' aerie now. The Chrysler Building stands, but its pinnacle hangs from it at any angle. The bomb blast area is completely bare and almost as flat as a polo field. A curious thing, however, has occurred. The debris that landed on the housetops, combined with the guano from the countless birds that took to roosting on them, has formed a soil

so fertile that trees and shrubs cover the flat tops of higher buildings. This fertility accounts for the amount of game found here.

The Washington Bridge is intact and so is the Brooklyn Bridge, these two being the main migration routes for those animals which leave or come to the island of Manhattan. The polar bears, moose and caribou seem to prefer swimming, as do the tigers in the summer months.

As there have been animal mutations, so there have also been mutations among the plants. There are some great ferns as big as trees, and there is a new elm which creeps along the ground, one tree covering as much as an acre. Everything grows with great rapidity.

The scene from a hilltop or a ruin is of strange and almost incredible beauty. The game is so thick that it is reminiscent of the Sabi game reserve in the Transvaal. Standing out above the rolling greensward that covers the fallen buildings, great towers of masonry rise like ancient forts.

Everywhere there are small woods, clumps of trees, and little streams and rivers. There are large numbers of flowers, many of them completely new, at least new as wild flowers. Varieties of roses which usually had to be budded now glow wild, as do gladioli, dahlias, tulips and every other kind of bulb. Hyacinths, daffodils and crocuses cover large patches in solid mats of color; they lie like scatter rugs on the green floor of the city; and nothing more beautiful could be imagined than coming across a great striped Bengal tiger asleep on a carpet of purple crocuses in the first warm afternoon of early spring, or seeing a red and white wild ox standing belly-deep in orange gladioli. There are ferns and mosses to be found wherever water drips or runs among the rocky gullies. And in no place are they more beautiful than in the natural grotto in front of the Chelsea Hotel, where a clear spring bubbles up and falls with a delightful splash into the small lake made by the subsidence of the ground in 23d Street. It is in this lake that I keep the black bass, rainbow trout and carp that I catch when I need a change of diet. They have become adapted to this way of life and are very little different from their ancestors.

I must say that after the hardships we underwent in the beginning while we were learning to adjust ourselves, I now live very well. I have fresh meat and fish, wine and whisky when I want it, and plenty of canned food of all kinds. I only miss bread and potatoes.

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I have often thought about the question of luck—of my good luck in being left alive, for instance. But are we really sure about what is good luck and what is bad? Why was I chosen to be spared out of so many millions?

Or, on the other hand, why was I so damned as to be made to survive, to live alone in a world of death and putrescence—made to revert atavistically to a subhuman existence? What had I done to deserve a lonely hell like this, when all other men—as

I had supposed until today—were killed quickly and mercifully, or at least relatively quickly and mercifully? Now that it is all over; and my adjustments are made—now that I have gotten over my loneliness and overcompensated to the point where, having seen two fellow human beings, I hide like an animal— I go over it all again in my mind.

It was naturally a great shock for a modern man to be thrust back into prehistory, and to see how, having misused our means, we had lost our ends, which should have been, not the search for a life of more and more comfort and the possession of more and more things, but the integration of the personality—man becoming man at last. I had visualized in the last years of our era a new type of co-operative, non-predatory man living at peace with his fellows in a world of plenty made possible by modern technology. But man instead had weighted himself down with this very technology in a system that corresponded to the armor of the prehistoric reptiles and, like them, unable to change, had been forced by the very extent of its development into self-destruction.

Looking back, I realize I have not thought seriously about anything for ten years. Obviously, in the first rush of events and difficulties of adjustment there was little time for thought; it was hard enough just to stay alive. But about five years after the disaster, for a period of several years, I thought and read a great deal. I still have a very fine library that I collected at that time, and sometimes on a sunny day I sit and read in the grotto with my gun and dogs beside me. But I read mainly poetry now, stuff with a ringing meter, that I learned as a child: Tennyson, Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*, Kipling, Swinburne, and Hood. It is what critics used to call the best bad poetry. I think that unconsciously I have gone back to it so as to keep the song of words and the power of simile functioning in a mind that was becoming atrophied from disuse. For I had stopped thinking in words and was only feeling things, like an animal. I had even stopped speaking to my dogs, and controlled them by gestures and sounds: *sah* to attack, *ah* to check them, *hi-lorst* to hunt, *er* to warn, *hup* to jump. So, to regain the use of my tongue and vocal chords, I went back to the poems of my school days, taking an almost childish pleasure in watching the development of my own defense mechanisms, laughing wryly at the devices of a so-called cultured mind as it strove to fight madness alone in lovely wilderness.

Perhaps in a way these neoclinical symptoms, tricks, alibis, and fantasies are the most important part of this narrative. The real fight was not, as might be imagined, with wild beast. Indeed, as must by now have become apparent, this war with the wild game was both my way of living and my pleasure. No, the real fight was with loneliness and boredom. Alcoholism was a way out, and for a while I tried it, reeling drunk and singing through the ruined, empty streets, through the reek of putrescence. I tried it till I fell and came to with a pack of starving mongrels sniffing and growling round me as I lay in the gutter. Another few minutes—if I had taken one more drink and had been just that much drunker—and the boldest of the dogs would have been at my throat.

At one time I contemplated suicide, and here, oddly enough, I discovered a great truth: a man alone, unless he is in great pain, does not commit suicide if he still has

the means of living. Suicide is an act, when it is not done in a panic of fear which is a more or less unconscious running away, that is committed in order to impress, astonish, and dismay those who cause it. It is committed as a final act of annoyance, a kind of blackmail by which the dead hope to make the living pay. Either this, or it is a way for someone who has never been important in life to become important in death. Thus it was impossible for me, once I had made these discoveries, to kill myself.

It was about this time, and probably a part of the same mechanism—the opposite side of the same psychological penny—that I decided to collect and breed a pack of dogs as a distraction and as a means of hunting. There were a number of large dogs roaming about, some of which showed a tendency to follow me. I shot game for them, and even shot other dogs for them to eat. Some dogs had gone completely savage and, having lived on cadavers, were much more dangerous than any wild animal, for it is the half-wild animal which has lost its fear of man that is the most likely to attack him. There were some terrific fights between my dogs and these wild dogs, but by degrees the larger of the wild dogs died off and were replaced by the smaller coyotelike animal which skulks in the scrub and ruins today.

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But I must go back to the disaster, and to the events, as far as I can remember them, that preceded it.

The funny thing to me, as I look back at it, is that the atom, the smallest thing in the world, should turn out to be the biggest thing in the world. In the summer of 1946 we thought we had control of the atom and we ran some bomb tests on Bikini, a coral atoll in the Pacific. Everything went wrong about that time. It was, if one had been clever enough to see it, the beginning of the end. There was fear on every face—fear and anger. There was no kindness anywhere, because fear and kindness cannot live together. All over the world people were angry, and their anger, born of fear, became fury. I saw it only in New York, and there I withdrew myself, seeing fewer and fewer people and losing myself in the ivory tower of my storytelling, a trick that I had taught myself when I first found it necessary to escape from life—a trick at which, as life became progressively worse, I became progressively better, able to live more and more within my dreams, to love women I created in my mind, to ride horses that I bred in my brain. I needed a thousand subtleties as a defense against a future that came nearer every day, a giant who carried death in his hand.

But to get back to the experiment: There were stories about it, the best one being that some goats on the battleships had survived the blast. There are goats in New York City today. I can see goats any time I go out, and I hardly ever shoot one because their taste is too rank even for the dogs. But where are the people?

In those days, there was a world famine. Men had increased tremendously in numbers despite wars and disasters and the safety margin of nutrition was gone. This margin had never been very wide, and a world drought, combined with the effects

of war, had closed the gap. And those who talked of a continually rising standard in American terms of eating were, whether they knew it or not, talking also in terms of reduced population, for the billions who were on earth then had to live on grain rather than meat except such meat as could be grass-fed. Here is another odd paradox, for now in this savage world of animals it is grain that is the luxury—grain and fat, because most animals do not carry fat, except a little around the kidneys, and I get most of mine from bears and porcupines. I melt it down and save it in airtight jars.

But I was trying to describe those times—the hate and fear and the little love. There was not even much love between men and women. There was marriage, of course, but only three marriages in five lasted.

It is easy now, so long after the event, to be wise and see that probably we should never have employed the bomb at all—not even on Japan. Instead, we should have brought Japanese observers under safe conduct from Ireland or other neutral countries to witness the first trials in the New Mexican desert and then said, “Give up or we will do this to you.”

Now I must tell something of my own personal life. This brings me to my home, and my wife, and the life we led together before it ended, and its end—a difficult and painful thing to do, but one which must be done as a duty, for this phase, too, is coming to an end. I feel it in my bones and heart. Even the dogs feel it: at this moment Bodo, who was sitting with his head on my knee, has gone toward the door and stands there growling, with his hackles erect and his tail stiff. Vixen, more dangerous but more restrained than he, is backing him silently; her eyes are on him and on the door. My hand is on the rifle at my side. I lay it across my knees and watch the dogs.

The dogs that have been growling by the door have quieted down and come back to me. Whatever had been outside has gone and I have relaxed. I can now go on with my narrative again, continuing where I had left off.

My wife, Mildred, was an American, a very small and beautiful woman who hailed from the swamps of New Jersey that are now inhabited by every kind of savage creature. She was an artist, and our small and unpretentious apartment in the Whitby Apartments was decorated with her work. She painted and I wrote, and we amused ourselves with our pets: a miniature pinscher called Annie; a kinkajou called Edward, which was a female but did not know it; a South American bugle bird or troupiel called Sam; a golden hamster by the name of Stompie; and some sixty-odd tropical fish of various species whose names still come to me without difficulty: zebras, platties, angels, neons, moons, sword tails, clowns, guppies, gouramis, Siamese fighting fish, miniature catfish, and many others. The fish lived amid water plants in a large tank which, when lighted by a fluorescent light, looked like fairyland. My wife, who was filled with imaginations and fantasies, always said how wonderful it would be if we could only be very small (and able to breathe under water) and therefore able to walk about in so lovely a garden, sitting on the rocks and strolling over the silver sand.

We had three rooms in the apartment: a studio sitting room, a bedroom, and a small study. There were, in addition, a kitchen, a bathroom, several large closets, and

a terrace garden with plants and trees in pots and boxes, chairs, swings, and a striped awning which could be lowered or pulled up by means of ropes. The apartment was, in fact, an ordinary small New York penthouse in the theatrical district, chosen for a combination of privacy, economy and delight in the situation—this being in what was known as Times Square and corresponding in this city to the grand boulevards of my native Paris. Around us each time we took the air to buy a pack of cigarettes or a bottle of beer, were the cream of the world's artists, actors, playwrights, musicians, dancers, singers, prize fighters, cowboys. There were also pimps, gamblers and prostitutes—and their prey: the curious and the rich who sought on the West Side those diversions which the West Side sought on the East.

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I was shaving. I had been ill, and to interest myself had grown a beard which each day I marked out like a tennis court, shaving up to the soap mark. The immense white beard which now sweeps my belt buckle was thus simply born. My wife was in the kitchen washing up the things which would be needed for breakfast, and which in a more meticulous household would have been washed the previous night (when we had made tea on coming in from the theater). It was fortunate that she had left the dishes until morning; if she had not, she would have been in the bedroom and exposed to the direct rays of the blinding flash of the explosion. It is hard to recall with exactness what I felt or heard, or to differentiate between what I have reconstructed and my actual memory. My first conscious act was to run from the bathroom to meet Mildred running toward me from the kitchen. She was followed by the dog, which jumped into my arms. With one arm around my wife, and carrying the dog, I went toward the bedroom. I do not think we spoke. I do not think we even said: "What was that?" It was obvious that something had taken place that was beyond both question or explanation. I cannot even remember if the sound—an incredible, dull, slow explosion, if such a thing is possible to imagine, like the bursting of a shell which takes minutes instead of seconds to explode—or the unearthly light came first, or if they came together as lightning and thunder come when they strike near by.

It seems almost certain to me now that we both knew what it was. That it was it—the atomic bomb, the "new god" that we had talked about for so long and whose name, like that of older gods, we feared to mention, calling it *it*. It can't happen here; *it* can't happen to us.

I do not know what I felt when it happened. Fear certainly, then perhaps an odd kind of relief. *It* had happened, and we were still alive. This was the worst that could happen—that was what we thought, then. In a way, it was like walking through a barrage. A thing that seemed impossible had taken place; we had passed through a wall of death and fire. We had survived. In us then, consciously or not, was the terrible selfish joy of the survivor. Only the dog had more sense. She trembled so much that when I put her down she could not stand but fell on her side. And the kinkajou in the kitchen was uttering loud screams.

The glass from the bedroom windows was on the floor and window sill. Since some of it still stuck to the frames, it was obvious that it had not been smashed the way glass is usually broken by an explosion, but that it had been bent, like a plastic, by inward pressure and then had fallen, instead of being blown into the room. Thus all laws of physics were shattered; everything that I had learned of what, at school, we had called “heat, light, and sound” was now reversed. We and all mankind were dwelling in a vacuum universe where even Einstein must find himself a child spending his first day in a cosmic kindergarten. But this thought did not come then, as I stood with my wife in my arms, as she clung like a small bird to the only safety that she knew. We stared, not out—for we dared not—but at the familiarity of our bedroom which was bathed in an unearthly light. Only a true artist would know what I mean when I say it was a *cold* rose. Only he would know that this is not an impossibility—for by the rules all reds and pinks are warm, and it is the blues that are cold. Only he would know—and it makes me laugh as I write, for there is not an artist left alive today, not a damned soul who can understand this message from the damned.

My wife’s dressing table was intact, its mirror unshattered, her comb, brushes and other accessories as they had always been in that woman’s disorder, that asymmetry which always appalls a man. There was a lipstick lying open. There was a scattering of powder. A cut-glass perfume bottle was unstoppered. It occurred to me to ask her how she expected the perfume to retain its strength if she did not put the stopper back—a thing I had done a hundred times, to no effect. And I smiled inside my mind at the thought and turned my eyes to the bed. There we had lain. There were the marks of our lying. The sheets crumpled, the bed no doubt still warm; and *this* had happened. *This* had taken place.

Still looking, my eyes moved to the bird cage. At night we brought Sam into the bedroom so that his chuckling and calling would wake us slowly in the morning. (That was one advantage of my profession; I was no servant to time or to the shattering effect of an alarm clock. As it is to every man, my belly was my master, but I could choose my time to make the wherewithal to fill it, and use, if I so desired, a bird to wake me.) At the bottom of the cage my bird lay dead, a crumpled ball of black and yellow.

Apart from the curious cold pink glow in the room, there was a smell of hot iron. Mixed with this smell was a faint odor of ozone, a sort of seashore smell. There was also a feeling of warmth—not heat, just warmth, like that felt from the shortwave diathermy treatment that doctors used to give sometimes for a strained back. I had the feeling of being enveloped in a blanket of powerful, almost palpitating warmth. I remember thinking: Are these the fatal radioactive waves that we read about? A writer whose name I cannot recall had written a magnificent description of the bombing of Hiroshima in a magazine called *The New Yorker*, which, though it was a magazine of sophisticated humor, devoted a whole issue to his report. His description gave us a standard of comparison.

We now dared to look out of the window. The McGraw-Hill Building was still standing, and so was the Holland Hotel, but beyond them there was only an incan-

descent orange redness against which they were blackly silhouetted. This redness was the center of what can only be described as a frightful, cream-colored, cauliflower-shaped cloud. Branches of white and butter-yellow broccoli seemed to grow writhing out from this center in mushroom layers. The whole thing was vegetablelike, a vivid, livid, mushroom-cauliflower-broccoli that formed great branches which grew, changing into white trees growing out of the scarlet central heart, against a background of thick brown smoke. Everything writhed and churned, the branches becoming intricate tendrils of marblelike delicacy—orange-pink, scarlet, amber-yellow, citron; and then the veins thickened into arms so that the vegetable simile failed and one thought of the writhing arms of an octopus.

Having watched this tree of death grow, having seen it mount into the firmament, break into two parts and drift in majesty toward the west, we turned our attention to our home, which we knew already to be shattered, cracked like a mended cup which seems, as it is dropped for the last time, to retain its shape for an instant so that a memory of it can be fixed before it breaks into tiny shards.

Meanwhile, other things had happened, as we found out when we looked around more carefully. The kinkajou had stopped screaming and had gone to sleep. This was her answer to all problems and corresponded to our method of anesthesia by means of drink, drugs, or women. But some of the tropical fish were dead, floating with their white bellies in the air; and the plants which filled the big studio window had their leaves browned on the edges. Why only the edges? Why had only *some* of the fish died? I forget which now, but all of two or three varieties were dead while the others swam at ease, seeking food in the corners of the tank. We picked out the dead fish to feed to Edward when she woke, as was our habit. We scattered some food in the feed ring and watched the multicolored fish cluster near the surface to eat. I said, "Put on the kettle and we'll have some tea"; a cup of tea being my answer to any crisis—tea and aspirin.

Then suddenly I felt weak. I saw how we were going through the motions of life: feeding the animals, making tea. Mildred must have felt the same, because she said from the kitchen, "The gas is all right."

I said, "And the water?" though I had heard her fill the kettle and knew that the water was still running.

"The water's all right, too," she said.

It won't be for long, I thought; and got up and put the plug into the bath and filled it. That would give us fifty gallons or so—enough for a few days anyway. I was trying to bridge the gap between a technological past of half an hour ago and the future, trying to think what would work and what wouldn't, and making decisions that seemed very wise at the time—conditioned reflexes to disaster brought out of the past from African droughts, from memories of the last war, from stories and letters I had had about London in the blitz. The next minute I was being violently sick. Lucky I'm in here, I thought. If one had to be sick it was a good thing to be in the place where it was easiest to be sick. It all comes back to me very clearly as I relive that day.

Again I hear my wife's voice saying, "Are you all right?" And my answer: "Yes, I'm all right."

And now I became aware of the smoke and the smell. Smoke was coming in through the shattered window of the bedroom. Fires must have broken out everywhere, I thought. Probably the destruction of the explosion, though it must have caused the fires, had banked them, as it were, with falling buildings, and only now were they breaking out with real severity. I heard a great crash as something fell on the flat roof and, looking out, saw it was a big wooden beam; more things fell, half bricks, tiles, dust, something that looked as if it had once been a man. I must get that away—overboard—before Mildred saw it.

I did later, when things had stopped falling, and wondered as I handled the broken body if it was radioactive. I wondered how things had stayed in the air so long. Or was it not long; had it all happened so fast, in minutes— and what did it matter, anyway? I thought of what we had done, of filling the bath and the kettle, and decided that the debris falling on the roof was the result of a later explosion. There would no doubt be many of them. The kettle began to whistle.

I said, "Let's make the tea. We'll feel better when we've had tea."

Mildred said, "Yes," and we went into the kitchen together with the dog between us, right on our heels so that when we stopped, she bumped into us. The very act of making tea was calming.

Things still kept falling, and the air was filled with papers that rose sailing like kites on the currents between the high buildings. It was very dark and there was no light when I tried to turn on the table lamp. Neither of us said anything. The wind continued to rise, assuming almost whirlwind proportions. I began to be aware of the noise of sirens. Fire engines and ambulances and police cars were evidently out on the streets. We both said, "Listen to the fire engines." Then there was a shot and Mildred said, "Is that a shot?" and I said, "Yes." There were to be plenty more later. Then we heard a scream. The paralysis of fear was now changing to hysteria. Terrified people were rushing out to escape from themselves, to find out. We'd have to go out ourselves sometime—but not yet.

We had a second cup of tea. I was surprised how very calm I seemed; my hand hardly trembled. That amused me, not because it showed my lack of fear but because it showed my ability to control most of it. Probably the only people who were not frightened at that moment were lunatics, to whom this must all have seemed very logical and predestined. Perhaps that is why I was not more frightened, having been classified, because I had expected something of this kind to happen, as a lunatic. I was, in a way, psychologically prepared for the end of the world, but there was little satisfaction in being able to say, "I told you so," and, at the moment, no one to whom I could say it except my wife, who always believed everything I said and thought me an altogether remarkable man, thus tempering her criticism with her charm.

I went into the bedroom to try the telephone. The room was very smoky but not so bad as it might have been, for the wind had changed again. I did not know whom I was

going to call. It was just that I wanted to see if the telephone worked. I had always hated the telephone—the network of copper threads that tied all civilized mankind together in a web of misunderstanding. If there had been no telephones and no airplanes and no electricity, there would have been no atomic bomb. I held the receiver to my ear. It was dead. No phone. That, after all, was not surprising after the failure of the electric light. But as the discovery of the telephone had been hailed as a great advance of our civilization, its end—for there was no doubt in my mind that it had ended—was a definite sign that our civilization was disintegrating.

I went to look in the kitchen to see what we had to eat. There was quite a lot of stuff: cans of baked beans, boned chicken, soups, glass jars of tongue.

There were other factors that were to the good. Once the first shock had worn off, I began to consider the possibilities of life as well as I was able—began to look and see if there was anything to reconstruct with. As I say, there was a fair amount of canned food in the kitchen and there were, in addition, about ten large parcels of food that we had wrapped and were going to send to friends in England and France. It was remarkable how distant England and France seemed and how little our dearest friends now mattered. I was grateful to them for my own good impulse that had made me buy the food, and delighted with the habit of procrastination which had prevented my sending it to them.

Another good thing, though I did not realize it fully at the time, was that I had a thousand rounds of .22 ammunition for the Mauser, because we had been intending to go on a holiday and I had meant to do some target shooting. I must have thought of this, though subconsciously, because my next move was to go and see the manager of the hotel, a great deer hunter who lived in the adjoining penthouse, and ask him if he would let me have one of his heavier rifles and some ammunition. I was already aware that there would be a necessity for weapons, that civilization in terms of protection had broken down and that it must be every man for himself.

I obtained a rifle and fifty rounds of 303 ammunition without much difficulty—the manager had more guns than he could use—in exchange for a case of whisky that I had just bought. We talked around the subject of the bomb and our predicament, more or less ignoring it, which was fantastic, since the air was filled with smoke. Like me, he must have had the feeling that this was the end of everything. Actually, of course, there was nothing to say. And to talk would probably only have torn the last shreds of self-control from our naked fear. We got no further than saying it was terrible, that neither of us had been out, that we had better be careful, and that it would probably be all right.

My wife fixed some food. We had meat in the icebox, which by this time had stopped working; we had potatoes and soup. Surprisingly, the gas was still on; our supply had evidently been unaffected. And we had water; it was still running, probably from the reserve tank on the roof above us, and we did not have to use the reserve in the bath. We gave the kinkajou the dead fish from the tank and a banana, the last, and a bit of bread, and Annie had our leavings. The day passed somehow. I forget how. Night

came—a night like those of the blackouts of the war but without air-raid wardens or police. The streets were dark and lighted only by the light reflected down from the low ceiling of cloud and smoke which was illuminated by those parts of the city that were still burning. It was a night filled with strange happenings—screams, cries, shouts, shots, the noise of doors being forced; a night of black horror edged by the glare of the buildings that still burned to the south of us. The McGraw-Hill Building still stood out like a great black pinnacle against the glow of the sky. There was still the sound of sirens as fire engines and police tried to keep some semblance of order, but it was all sporadic. There was no sleep for us, but we lay down with the dog between us and tried to rest. I had the deer rifle loaded beside me, and I had a Gurkha kukri in its sheath under my pillow; I had sharpened it till it was like a razor. I have it still, having carried it since that day. I say we did not sleep, but we must have dozed off, for at dawn we were wakened by a sound truck.

An impersonal voice was giving out the news. It made me think of the town crier who had in the old days brought the news of war, of victory or disaster. It appeared that Washington was completely obliterated and that, since the federal government no longer existed, New York and all the other states were on their own. The Governor advised calm and patience. He said he would undertake to keep order and restore vital utilities. People were advised to stay where they were and wait and not rush off to the country. This news, of course, succeeded in achieving the purpose opposite to that desired and stampeded everyone, so that later in the day there was a veritable exodus of such cars as had gas in their tanks. The rest of the news was that, bad as things were, there was no cause for panic or alarm and, though the casualties in New York City were estimated to be more than seven hundred thousand, the fires were under control and we should remain calm.

The voice went on and on. Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston and every other major city had been severely damaged. But everything would be all right; this foolish catch phrase was reiterated and we were again advised to remain calm, stay at home if possible, until normalcy was restored. How this was to be done with seven hundred thousand casualties and a quarter of Manhattan destroyed was not revealed.

There were a great number of suicides. Within an hour of the blast, we saw one woman throw her child out of a high window in the Lincoln Hotel, stand naked for an instant on the parapet and then follow her child in a headfirst dive. Most suicides, however, were on the fashionable upper East Side—the working poor being more able to stand disaster; having so little, they had little to lose.

Forced by curiosity and the knowledge that the longer we waited, the harder it would be to go out, we made our way down the stairs from our eleventh-floor apartment to the street. I had often called dwellers in apartment houses “troglodytes,” and I remember thinking how right I had been as we climbed down the concrete stairs and crossed the paved passages that divided one flight from the next, pausing to rest and to listen to the strange sounds we heard. There was some drunken singing, the sound of quarrels, a hysterical woman blaming her husband for what had happened and asking him why

he did not do something about it. He did. He struck her; she fell down and got up screaming she'd "have the law on him for that"; at which he laughed and she burst out crying loudly because now there was no law. On another floor, people were having a prayer meeting and singing hymns. There was no one in the office, and the lobby was deserted.

We went into the street and found it empty. It was rather like a Sunday afternoon with everyone away, or a Saturday—a week-end—because a car was being loaded with things from a house almost opposite the hotel entrance. I had with me a heavy blackthorn stick that I always carry on account of the lameness caused by an old wound, and since we had money with us, we thought we might as well go up to the corner and see if we could buy more food. Obviously, money was no good any more, but here was the possibility the grocer would not have come to that conclusion yet; he might not have had the sense to load up his stock and take it home with him. This guess proved to be right, and we were able to buy fifty dollars' worth of canned goods: sardines, herring, salmon, tuna fish, and potted meat. We obtained a gunny sack and staggered back with our wealth.

On the way home there was the body of a man—his head had been bashed in—lying in the gutter on the corner of 45th Street, opposite a liquor store which had been raided and was completely empty. And, as we were getting our stuff in the grocery store, a girl ran screaming past us pursued by a gang of young hooligans. I judged from the noise that followed that they must have pulled her down in the next block. It was this incident which decided me to cut off Mildred's hair (she wore it long, more than shoulder length) and make her dress in dungarees. With short hair, dungarees, and a dirty face, she would pass for a youngish, rather queer-looking boy, but everyone looked queer now and she would certainly be safer.

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We lay low for a few days. This was the time that the sediment of the underworld rose to the surface and took over. The streets were the scene of unrestricted pillage, murder and fights between rival gangs. From our roof we saw some amazing sights. But by degrees, in a matter of four or five days, things improved. My friend the manager told me that he had heard that the city was full of wounded and crazed people. He asked if I had seen any and I said no. He said they were flooding up Lexington and Park avenues. He told me more of the exodus, of how the routes out of the city were packed with refugees in cars and on foot. The police were making no effort to control them, since control was impossible. But what could they have done, anyway? Given tickets? Made arrests? Broken cars were jamming the roads. People were being run down and robbed, girls abducted; other people were jumping off bridges and out of windows. But still they were moving outward like the spokes running from the shattered hub of a wheel. He asked me what I was going to do. I said I was going to stay.

Though my memory of the sequence of events that followed is somewhat confused, certain incidents stand out very clearly, the first among them being the destruction of

our pets. The fish went first, since they could not live without the light in the tank. But then they did not count as pets; they were merely a decoration and an interest—no more than that. The kinkajou was different. She was very affectionate and never bit hard enough to draw blood. Looking back on it, it seems funny now; but I had been away from farming for fifteen years or so and had gotten out of the habit of killing things. It was only with the greatest difficulty that, holding her in the crook of my left arm, I made myself hit her on the back of the head with a two-pound ball hammer. She stretched out the way animals do when struck, her legs quivered, and then she went limp. I skinned her while she was still warm, as it's much easier then, and then I cut her up for a stew. Mildred cried. The dog looked on, not at all sorry to see the kink go. She had never understood our interest in it. It was difficult to think of Annie going the same way, which she did two days later.

Dogs have been associated with man for so long, a million years perhaps, that they no longer, in the full sense, count as animals; they are extensions of man, inventions of many like the spinning jenny, the Queen Mary and the atomic bomb. Breeding livestock has always interested me, and I have learned a great deal about it since I have lived alone in the world with animals. Domestic dogs, as we knew them, were bred by continually discarding dogs that were not tractable, but my dogs now are bred two ways: the dogs of my hunting pack, which have been bred for strength and courage alone, would be capable of pulling me down if they were really starving, while my personal dogs are almost human, having been bred for both brains and courage.

In taming any animal, you must replace the mother of the young animal so that it fixes its affection on you instead of on its dam; or, in the case of animals that hunt in packs, you must become the leader of the pack.

This is what I do when I hunt with my hounds. Though I carry a rifle, a knife, and a pistol, I would not try to handle my pack without a bull whip and a short club. Every now and then a young dog, never a bitch, challenges me. Weighing as much as or more than I do, he might pull me down if I were not ready for him. On one occasion I killed—with my bare hands—a dog that weighed two hundred and five pounds (I had the curiosity to weigh him.) His name was Racketeer, and his breeding was Great Dane, police dog, Saint Bernard and Afghan.

Racketeer was a lovely beast, but suddenly he challenged me. I had put the pack onto a bear spoor. It was spring, and the spoor was very clear in the moist ground, but Racketeer wanted to follow a lynx. When I began to whip him off—this was before I carried a club—he turned on me, while the pack waited to see which would be master. I saw him crouch for the jump, and as he leaped for my throat I struck him straight in the nose with my fist. As he fell I jumped on him; leaping into the air, I brought both feet down on him, smashing his ribs. Then I raised him in my arms and threw him back to the waiting pack.

But all this discourse has been an evasion of the description of the death of Annie, my pinscher. The past is still too near to make it easy to discuss. But the way it went was this: I held her on my knee, with my left hand over her shoulder, and brought the

hammer down on her skull, cracking it with a single blow. I then cleaned and skinned her and we ate her, for though we had canned food we were trying to conserve it for the days that were to come. When it became known that I had killed my pets and eaten them, a woman burst into the apartment and called me a cannibal and a brute. She said it was like eating a human being, and I said, "We may be doing that yet." There had been cannibalism in the German concentration camps at Dachau and elsewhere, but this good woman had forgotten or had never believed it. On the other side of the same penny were the people who wanted me to kill their dogs for them because they could not bring themselves to do it. I killed a number of dogs that I had known quite well, many of them having lived in the hotel as long as I had. I charged half the dog for killing and dressing it, and became accustomed to dog soup and stew.

During this period the destroyed part of the city was walled off, the rubble of the fallen buildings being used to close off the streets. It made me think of the walled-off ghettos of the German occupation in Poland, and of the way situations tended to repeat themselves, death being enclosed by walls in both cases. It was a defense mechanism on our part against the knowledge that death had us hemmed, walled in, and was one of our final tributes to complacency, to the idea that if we could not see a thing we stopped its existing. But you could not help smelling it. All over the city there was a stench of death in the air.

Order, as I say, had been for a while somewhat restored and a few minimum services functioned, but everything worked on a kind of reflex. Policemen remained policemen because it was their habit and they did not know what else to do; for a few days garbage collectors still collected garbage for the same reason. But there was neither credit nor currency, central authority having disappeared. Public servants were paid in food from the stock that was available in the city warehouses, a system that obviously could not continue for long.

There were amazing tales of the fights put up by farmers against the influx of city dwellers who had run out of the metropolis and had flung themselves upon anything edible in the country—a swarm of human locusts that the country people resisted in every manner possible. There was a pitched battle on the Canadian border in the vicinity of Niagara Falls. The Canadians appeared to be a little better off than we were, having retained their central government, and they used troops to turn back the unwelcome thousands, many of whom had known the Falls only as a honeymoon resort. We got the story from one of the survivors and his wife. She was a lovely blond night-club singer who now looked like an old and shrunken woman; he had played a hot trumpet and was at one time internationally famous through his recordings. I recall the incident because, despite everything, he had held onto the silver trumpet that had made him famous—a remarkable young man who no doubt died tooting on his instrument.

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All this took place in the first few months. I was proved to have been wise in my decision to stay in New York: there was more food here than in the country. There were still some pigeons, and there were plenty of cats, for with the departure of mankind and the failure of all city services, the rodents had increased in a phenomenal manner and naturally the city cats had increased with them. I had eaten cat as a child (our gardener in France, who trapped them, had once given me some), and both Mildred and I found them excellent. There were still some dogs in the street, which lived, literally, by dog eating dog, and these I shot with my .22. Our system of hunting was to go out together; I went a pace in front with the .22 and Mildred followed with the heavier rifle, the 303, which she, like a gunbearer in Africa, put into my hand if I asked for it. Some of the big dogs could not be stopped by a small-bore rifle; and there were human wolves, too, who had to be destroyed. Mildred was in no danger now as a woman, having like all other surviving women, lost any visible sexual charm which she had ever had, near starvation having reduced the sexual curves that characterize women; and the sex fiends, who had run riot in the early days, raping and murdering, had either been eliminated or had been reduced by the food shortages to seeking nourishment rather than other satisfactions.

For a change, we used to fish in Central Park. Mildred, being better at it than I, would watch her float bob in the water while I stood guard with the rifle. We cooked out on the roof where, when first we had taken the apartment, I had had built a little barbecue. Water was now obtained with difficulty. Some we brought from Central Park, some we collected by damming up a section of our roof.

At this time there were very few people left in the city—only a few thousand—because everything had broken down with the breakdown of credit. People simply would not work without money. They were not even ready to save their lives by co-operative effort. So deeply had our competitive system bitten into us that they preferred to sit around and starve, or else they ran away and starved—except the few who, like ourselves, lived on what they could find or loot from the stores. The word “loot” persists, though obviously it was no longer looting. It remained, however, an operation of some danger because of the darkness of the stores and the maniacs who had taken up their abode in many of them—savages who resented any intrusion into their territory. I remember one man that I shot at Gimbel’s while Mildred held the flashlight on him. He was an immense man who ran at us roaring with rage as he brandished a meat cleaver. We had gone to Gimbel’s for caviar and *pâté de foie gras*. They had a lot of it, for apparently the other looters, having less sophisticated tastes than ours, left it alone.

For anyone who liked adventure I suppose this would have been very interesting, but to us who had become almost sedentary and were quite unaccustomed to swift movement, hard living, or even loud noises, the adjustment was most difficult. Yet in this twilight world, we succeeded in living and forming a pattern of life, even remembering the days with some semblance of accuracy. I, who had always hated a schedule of any kind, now invented one. Monday: Central Park, fishing; Wednesday and Friday:

food-looting expeditions. Inevitably, though, the human instinct being what it is, more was collected than food. We found some beautiful fur coats—stone marten, blue mink, Russian sable, and ermine. The ermine came in very handy for winter hunting in the snow. We picked up some wonderful diamond rings of fifteen or twenty carats, ruby clips, necklaces and bracelets. We both looked like pirates. We were far from clean but we were dressed in suede, silk and satin; we wore rare fur coats from which I had cut the arms to give greater freedom. We had silk sashes around our waists, carried an arsenal of daggers and pistols, and over our shoulders were slung the best guns New York could provide.

We had begun by this time to collect our big dogs. We needed them for protection and hunting. In the beginning we had a boxer and a police dog. We hunted other dogs to feed on. The transition of my wife from a charming, rather fastidious young American girl to a primeval savage was most interesting. She soon learned to use a knife and to skin an animal as well as I did. She was never a good shot, having difficulty in closing her left eye, so I got her a shotgun and a .32-caliber Colt. I told her that if anyone attacked, she was to wait till he was right on her, then push the muzzle of the pistol into his stomach—she would feel it go in—and then continue pulling the trigger till she passed out. No girl could have had better instructions. Fortunately, she never had to follow them. The only near disaster occurred once when I was some distance away, but her assailant was pulled down by the dogs, and when I arrived, the man who had approached her was dead. This reassured me because I had not been, until that moment, quite certain how the dogs would act, as they were young and unused to dangerous work.

This was about the time that we heard the first stories of the Red Death, the strange dancing disease that was, according to the information we had, sweeping not only the country, but the world. We soon saw evidences of it. In fact, one of these dancers was the second man our dogs killed. The disease was contagious. The first symptom was the appearance of great health and gaiety, which was followed by a mad happiness; we would see rosy-faced couples dancing and singing in the streets as the disease began to spread. In the later phase, the victim either fell into a coma or attacked anyone in the vicinity without warning. This is what happened one evening as we were about to cross Sixth Avenue: a man and a woman suddenly appeared and began pirouetting and jitterbugging. I hoped they would pay no attention to us, but the man saw us. I knew that we were in for trouble, for he suddenly got beyond the happy stage and became murderous. He reached me with incredible speed and had me down before I could do anything to defend myself. But as he gripped me, my wife fired three shots into him from her .32 and the dogs attacked him, the boxer grasping his thigh and the police dog his shoulder. They knocked him onto his back and quickly finished him off.

I picked up the sack I had been carrying and felt very shaken, for I was certain I had been contaminated, and now had to work out plans for a method of restraint that my wife could use which would prevent my hurting her when I reached the paroxysms of fury that were the final symptoms of the disease. I had my own theory and was

certain that if she did not touch me she would be all right. Naturally, no one knew much about the disease, but I had the idea that with restraint there was the possibility of survival, death occurring through the berserk rage, which had the effect of burning up the victim. I therefore conceived the plan of going to the local police station—we had dumped our sack of loot—and getting a pair of handcuffs and some chains. The incubation period was said to be a week, but to take no chances I found a ring bolt, fastened it in the floor of the apartment and attached the chain and handcuffs to it at once. All I had to do now, the minute I got the first symptoms, the feeling of joy and the flush that went with it, was to handcuff myself and then hope for the best. I told Mildred of this plan and gave her her instructions. She was to keep out of my reach, give me no food but plenty of water. This she was to put in a tin measuring cup and push into my reach.

The precautions I had taken frightened my wife, and I had to spend the next few days reassuring her, telling her that there was nothing to fear and that it was all done “just in case.” For my own part, I, was certain that I could not have failed to contract the disease, and so we spent our time hunting furiously for more canned provisions and collecting a reserve of wood and water. I also obtained more ammunition for the shotgun, because this was the best weapon for Mildred: a scattergun to point in the general direction of anything that frightened her was more likely to be of use than any other kind.

What follows is all that I can remember of the days that ensued. I do not actually remember them at all and have reconstructed the story from what I remember of what Mildred told me when it was over.

It seems, according to what she said, that on the seventh day—our guess about the incubation period had apparently been right—I woke in great form in the morning and began to sing opera. The remarkable thing was that I sang in tune, which was extraordinary, for I have no ear for music. This proved that I was ill. With expanded chest and wide-open mouth I stood on the roof singing to the silent city. Then I dressed, putting on a brown suit with a white pin stripe. I also put on my gaudiest tie, one that I had bought when we were working in Hollywood. It was a red-white-and-green affair made of silk, hand blocked, and about a foot wide at the wide end. I had never dared to wear it before. I then danced all by myself, tripping lightly up and down to unheard music, and then undressed and broke into a series of Zulu war dances. At this moment some glimmering of sanity must have returned to me, because Mildred said I covered my face with my hands and burst into tears; when the paroxysm was over I picked up the handcuffs, clipped them over my wrists, and lay down like a chained dog to sleep.

What came next must have been completely terrifying for my wife. I am a big man, six feet two, and I weighed two hundred pounds. Having slept for some hours, I woke in the fury that is the secondary symptom of the disease. Having circled the room to test the length of my chain, I crouched on my haunches like an animal and leaped at her. Fortunately, the right bolt held and I was dragged back, being pulled

onto my shoulders and falling on my back with my handcuffed hands between my legs. This seemed to have knocked me out for a moment, but I was only playing possum. Forgetting what I had told her, and with a wife's instinct of solicitude, she came to see if I were hurt. In a second I was up, and raising my manacled hands, I swung them down at her head in an attempt to stun her. She jumped back just in time and then decided to obey the instructions I had given her. Fetching a tin cup full of water, she pushed it into my reach with the tip of a jointed fishing rod. I seized it and tried to draw her to me, but the tip came off in my hand.

For ten days I remained in alternating states of animal fury and animal sleep. The sitting room resembled the den of a beast. Filthy, naked except for a blanket that I used not for modesty but for warmth, I growled and sulked, wringing my fingers and licking my wrists where the steel had bitten into the flesh and worn away the skin so that it was a ring of festering sores. I drank quantities of water, cup after cup, and each time I had done so I threw the cup at Mildred's head with a clumsy two-handed throw. My ribs stood out in arcs about my chest, my stomach was sunken, my eyes stared wildly; my whole skin was pink shading into red, almost scarlet; while my face and neck, in contrast to the rest of my body, were swollen, apparently suffused with blood to the point where I was unrecognizable. For some reason, the sebaceous glands were stimulated by the fever, and hair grew in great profusion all over my body.

This, then, is the story of my illness as reported by my wife and as I remember it. On the eleventh day it ended as suddenly as it had begun. My face was now white with illness; my eyes, no longer dilated, were sunken; and, instead of having the strength of ten, I could hardly lift my hands to my head. The fever had burned itself out, and I was alive. That was my first conscious thought. I was rational. I said, "I think it's over." Mildred said, "Yes," and burst into tears. I said, "You can let me go now," and for a while it seemed doubtful that she would be able to, because she had put the handcuff key away so safely that she could not remember where it was. She found it at last in an empty flower vase.

A period of convalescence and reflection followed. It is easy to reflect when one is ill; there is nothing else to do. Our reserves of food being ample, we just sat around and talked. The ten days of my illness had been notable for the final evacuation of the hotel. As far as we knew, we were now the only people in it.

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I was now the most intelligent man in the world. I knew answers that should have been obvious by implication to everyone when the first bomb burst in the New Mexican desert. I had survived the Red Death by a miracle and was therefore even more special, because a lot of people had survived the blast, but so far as I knew, I was the only man to recover from the plague. All that came out of this period of reflection, during which I regained some measure of my strength, was the certainty that what had been wrong with us was nothing but stupidity. We had been too stupid to be afraid, or too afraid to acknowledge our fear.

What I'd feared now happened. Mildred came down with the fever. Her symptoms followed the accepted pattern of dancing and singing, but considering our differences in size (she was under five feet tall and weighed only ninety-three pounds) I could not bring myself to tie her up, with the result that when she turned on me, suddenly leaping like a tiger cat onto my shoulder and sinking her teeth into my neck, I had great difficulty in escaping her. As soon as I got my hands free I threw her down and put the handcuffs on her. Her hands were so small that she wriggled out of them till I succeeded in padding them with a handkerchief. She bit, scratched, and kicked fiercely all the time I was restraining her. Having recovered from the disease, I was "salted," as we used to say in Africa of horses that had had horse sickness, and so I was able to take better care of her than she had of me. Nor was she hard to handle because she would seize any lure, like a bath towel, that I offered to her, and worry it, which kept her occupied till I could get right up to her—for a woman, like a horse or any other animal, is less dangerous when she is quite close to you. A kick or a blow has to travel to gain strength. Nevertheless, despite all my efforts—my keeping her covered and hand-feeding her—she weakened and died the day that the fever ended, curling up in my arms so that I thought she was just sleeping and did not know she was dead till I put her down.

This description seems somewhat cold and unfeeling, but there is no way of describing such an incident except by understatement. The point was that she had been and now was not. I was almost mad with sadness and loneliness. My brave little companion was gone and her body had to be disposed of. Burial was unthinkable, for no matter how deep I might have buried her, the hunger-crazed dogs would have dug her up. So, collecting furniture from the houses in the neighborhood, I made a great pyre, rested her body on the top of it, and set it ablaze, standing watch over it with a rifle in my hands. Like a Hindu widow, she was burned—utterly destroyed with the household goods of those who had died before her.

It was then that I thought of suicide and, deciding against it, began to take to the bottle. Oddly enough, the dogs were of no help, the wet noses of their sympathy doing nothing to alleviate my sorrow. Some days of this, or weeks—time, which had been getting vaguer, now ceased to exist entirely, because if you are alone there is no time—and then I made my decision to leave a home which no longer held anything but memories. Seeking a place to live, I moved first to the Hotel Pierre because of its proximity to Central Park; and then ten years or so later I moved to this cave in the Chelsea because of the sylvan beauties of its surroundings—its grottoes, pool and springs attracting me profoundly.

Leaving home was a strange sensation. Each thing I looked at had a history. Given by friends, bought, inherited, each thing represented something other than what it was. They were objects certainly, some of them objects of art, but they were also memories. This man and that woman came to the surface of memory; this place and that place; this year and that year. We were in New Orleans then, I thought. We bought those little brass cannons on our honeymoon. We bought this picture in New York,

that ivory Buddha in Paris. What was it they said about Buddhas? That you should never use them for anything—not as paperweights or doorstops; you should just have them to look at. This was home, a collection of objects—chairs, tables, beds, chests of drawers, china, silver, pictures, books—that had been integrated into a personality by their possessors—by us. This was home in its final phase; built up slowly, it was now suddenly disintegrated.

Several times I went back to look at the apartment, to walk about in it as I had walked before, to feel the things I had handled in the past. I even collected a few things as souvenirs and took them over to the Pierre. It may have been these minor objects of art, or it may have been the location of my new abode, its convenience to 57th Street, that prompted me to make a collection of the smaller pictures in the art galleries there.

The galleries were intact, no one having bothered to loot them—jewels and gold being the things that attracted the robbers. I got some very lovely things: a Poussin, a Utrillo; I got pictures by Renoir, Ingres, Vermeer, Manet, Monet, Dali, and Winslow Homer. Later on, this picture collecting became a kind of obsession and no doubt helped me to retain my sanity, for I would hunt the more expensive apartments and houses of the city in search of works of art—pictures, *bibelots*, and books. I took things from museums and libraries, and so created a museum of my own in one of the large reception rooms of the hotel. The catholicity of my taste would no doubt have amazed the late curators of the Metropolitan or the Museum of Modern Art, but I have a very interesting collection to which, even now, I occasionally add an exceptional piece if I run across one. And it is very restful after a day's hunting in Central Park to drop in and look at the masterpieces of our vanished civilization and reflect upon the marvelous capacity of man for variability.

It is interesting to look back now and see the devices I unknowingly employed to keep going. Had I not been alone, had Mildred lived, there might have been a great excitement in this life once we had got used to it. Even as it was, I grew to enjoy it. I see that today, when the even tenor of my life has been shattered by the sudden appearance of the strangers. Had they been men, I should unquestionably have killed them, but since they were young women I could not. That I could not was not a matter of chivalry, for chivalry needs a social context in which to function. The force that stayed my finger—which was on the trigger—was one much older than chivalry, being the force that had given birth to it. These were young females of my own species. No factor can be more disturbing to any man or animal.

It is hard to imagine the sport of hunting in North America at this time unless the game is described. The mutations mentioned earlier did not all appear suddenly—first one turned up and then another. I found the first sign of anything odd about six years after the blast. I was out looking for a deer in Central Park, and I came upon what looked like a dog spoor eight inches across. My dogs, however, became very excited and went off in full cry.

As I trotted after my pack (at that time it consisted of about fifteen couples of grown dogs, and ten half- and three-quarter-grown pups who were learning their business) I

felt that they had bitten off more than they could chew. The spoor puzzled me. This was an immense beast—the stride was well over a yard—with imprints so deep that it must weigh at least half a ton. I had gone about a mile when I heard the baying of the dogs. I also heard some of them screaming the way a hurt dog does. I hurried and then, prompted by some instinct, decided to climb a tree to get a better view. It was a good thing I did because the dogs had surrounded a huge black wolf that stood as high at the withers as a horse. Three dogs were dead and, as I looked, the wolf caught another—a handsome red-colored dog called Fox—and tossed him in the air the way a good terrier does a rat. The dog fell howling with his back broken. As the wolf seized their companion, the other dogs darted in from all around to bite him, seizing his hind legs and tail, one bitch leaping at his throat. I had only the 303 with me, a rifle quite unsuited to this kind of beast had I been on the ground where he could get me, but a good enough weapon from my point of vantage in a tree. Resting the barrel along a branch, I emptied the magazine into him, and before he could decide what to do he was down and the dogs had swarmed all over him. He killed three more before he died, and hurt six. This experience taught me a very important lesson, and I never went out again without two guns, one of them a 450 express.

After seeing this animal, I was no longer surprised at the other strange beasts I saw. The atomic bomb and the radioactivity that had accompanied it were explanation enough when I thought it all out. These beasts were monsters caused by the effect of radioactivity on the genes and chromosomes of animals pregnant at the time of the blast, while other abnormal mutations were the result of some nutritional change that had taken place in the herbage. It interested me to note that I, too, felt very well and even seemed to have grown a little through eating the meat of these animals. And this diet certainly had had an effect on my hounds, the young dogs increasing in size, going up to forty inches and weighing over three hundred pounds—the size of a small lion or leopard. The aurochs, which had roamed Europe before the Romans, reappeared through some kind of throwback; and the cattle of the country—Jerseys, Guernseys, Herefords, Holsteins, and Shorthorns—bred together, increased in size, and reverted to a breed that looked like the Texas longhorn. These cattle became the chief prey of the giant parti-coloured mink.

Fortunately the mink were rare. I feared them greatly because of their savagery. They stood about five feet high at the shoulder and were some eighteen feet long, including the tail. But despite their size they could flatten themselves and creep along almost invisibly, the white marks helping them by breaking up the silhouette. They would creep closer and closer to their prey and then charge at it from close distance at incredible speed—the speed being fast enough to roll over an ox that was taken by surprise. Then, cutting the jugular with their immense needle teeth, they swiftly emptied the carcass of blood.

As far as possible, I avoided hunting such dangerous animals and confined myself to deer, wild cattle, antelopes, bison and zebras for meat for the pack and myself; and tigers, leopards, mountain lions and bears for sport and to keep my dogs in fighting

trim. There is nothing more exciting than hunting some great carnivore that has taken up its abode in a house in the vicinity. Such an animal has to be killed, because nothing is so inconvenient as a tiger or leopard making a den near one's dwelling.

One of my most interesting hunts was that of a pair of tigers in the Hotel Pierre. They were a mated couple, and I was continually getting glimpses of them in the vestibule or in the passages.

The tigers had made their den in a small pantry behind the cocktail bar; and it was the knowledge that I would lose a lot of hounds, and that any dogs would be good enough for the job provided they had courage enough to enter, which had prompted me to use my culls. I sent them into the bar. The two leaders were killed before they were through the door, the male tiger smashing them against the wall with what can only be described as a right and a left; but as he struck, I shot him, the bullet smashing his lower jaw and entering his chest. The remaining dogs went in over his body, and came out faster than they had gone in, followed by the tigress. She charged out but did not see me—I had hidden behind the bar. As she passed me I fired at her, but I missed. The dogs were now in full cry after her. As she bounded up the steps into the dining-room, followed by the dogs, I got another shot in and hit her in the loins with a high shot that broke her back. I checked the dogs as well as I could—there was no point in their attacking now—but one refused to obey and was killed. Another bullet finished the tigress.

This incident was a contributory factor in my decision to move to the Chelsea. The Park was no longer important, since the whole city was now covered with grass, and the beauty of the cave I had discovered had long tempted me. There was no place near the Chelsea where large, dangerous animals could lurk, and there were excellent facilities for my dogs.

This new home where I am now sitting deserves some notice. The cave has two chambers and is lighted by windows that I have pierced through the debris. There is a third room, on a lower level, which has no window. The temperature of this room rarely varies more than a few degrees, and this is where I sleep in the coldest and the hottest weather. I also keep my wine here, and the room has a pleasant rich, earthy smell of wine and dog and man that is very homelike. The second room is a combined sitting room and study; I have my best pictures and books here, and some wonderful small pieces of furniture. The outside room is my kitchen and workshop. I have built myself a chimney and have a bench and carpenters' tools.

But all these conveniences could have been found in most districts in the city. It was the exterior which made the situation unique. The hotel itself had collapsed and was a voluptuous green hill covered with short, cropped grass. In fine weather I have seen a herd of zebra mixed with American bison grazing over it within a few yards of me. By some combination of accidents—the explosion that destroyed New York, the civic engineering that existed before the explosion, and certain geological factors—a lovely long, finger-shaped lake appeared in 23d Street. It is fed from the spring which bubbles through my grotto, the water being first forced upward by natural pressure

through a small crevice in the fallen masonry some fifteen feet above ground level. After I had done a little minor engineering with plumbing fixtures picked up here and there and with plants and ferns collected wherever I could find them, I had created a little paradise for myself. I should add that I did no hunting within a mile of my home, thus making a reserve because I like the game for company and I find nothing more beautiful. I also had two practical reasons, one being that if any big carnivores came along they would have no difficulty in finding a meal, and the second being that, in the event of illness, I could easily kill something to eat from my own doorstep...

~ * ~

Something very awkward has just occurred. My house dogs again expressed uneasiness, and, waiting till they quieted down, I went out to see what had disturbed them. What I found justified my worst fears. The girls have found my retreat. Their spoor is all around the grotto. They even rested on the grass and dipped their toes in the pool below the trickling waterfall. This infuriates me. The impertinence of these abandoned creatures—hunting out the cave of an old and respectable man and then disporting themselves at his private spring! I have been away from people too long to feel any Robinson Crusoe-like joy at discovering the footprints of these girls; besides, Friday was not a girl, much less two girls.

Bodo and Vixen worked over the grotto, quartering it, noses to the ground, stopping occasionally with backward looks at me. I followed them and found the trail to lead east and then, climbing one of the larger hillocks to get a better view, saw the smoke of a fire about half a mile away. It gave me a very strange feeling to see the smoke of another's cooking fire. I sat down and, with my dogs beside me, spent some time watching the blue smoke curl upward like a ribbon into the sky. Once a little breeze caught it, and it made a question mark. Nothing, I thought, could be more apt unless it were a period. I was overcome by a sense of finality, of foreboding. If I am not careful, my pleasant way of life may end, my habit of years be interrupted. With a certain irony I reflected on the repetition of the human pattern. As we once feared and resented the coming of atomic power, or, for that matter, universal suffrage, the liberation of the slaves or anything else that was different, I am now upset because I am no longer alone in the world. With these thoughts in my mind, I came home and cooked my supper. I had the saddle and kidneys of a yearling moose calf cooked in bear fat, a can of spaghetti with tomato sauce, and a can of green peas. I opened a bottle of port, one of the few wines which has not begun to go off after more than twenty years. I topped it off with three brandies. I have given the dogs a good meal and now sit here, pencil in hand, to record further impressions. I am now right up to date.

The brandy has done me good. I can feel my heart beating strangely.

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Six months have passed since I have written a line. Although, as a novelist, I have always objected to the diary or near-diary form, I find on reading this over that it has a certain interest. Oddly enough, whether or not anyone is ever to read it appears to depend on me, because the young women are with me now. I would call them nice-looking—though it is quite hard for me to remember exactly what a pretty girl should look like.

I will describe them in greater detail later. At the moment my problem is one of biology and morals.

I am seventy-three years of age, and, though I am healthy and remarkably strong, I am without any desire for these young creatures of my own species. My lack of interest does not appear to be reciprocated, for in them is the warmth and burgeoning of youth. This is very embarrassing to a man of my solitary habits and advanced years. Who am I to repopulate the world with white men? And would not the world perhaps be a better place without us? On the other hand, my vanity comes in—my vanity as an author and the historian of these events: the final chapter of history as we knew it, and the opening chapter of a new kind of history. If there are to be people again, if there, are to be readers again—who might someday read this diary—it appears that I must father them. The problem perturbs me; it is an issue that I find it hard to clarify. The moral question is not whether I should live with two girls, but whether our species is worth perpetuating.

And for the life of me I cannot see what is the matter with the young Indian braves. Why can't the girls marry *them*, and live happily ever after without bothering me? Of course, the Indians may not think them attractive, but this seems hardly likely. In my opinion, the girls' interest in me is simply curiosity: I seem unique, and women love the rare and strange. It is also evident that I have prestige value among the Indians.

It is now spring again, and as I look back over the last few months I feel them worthy of some notice because of their personal interest to me. We are now in some open country in what I take to be Florida, since our war party went south and we are among palms. I have seen brown pelicans and frigate birds and so I cannot be very far wrong. I was riding Prince, my big bay, and beside me on her chestnut was Helen, the smaller of the two blondes. We galloped side by side, my long white hair and beard blowing in the wind, her yellow hair flowing like a palomino's tail. Throwing my leg across a horse again after all these years has been a strange and wonderful sensation that has really reconciled me to this new way of life.

As I rode, my thoughts went back to the day the Indians broke into my home and captured me far north in New York City.

I had finished eating and was working on my manuscript when the dogs leaped up and went almost mad with fury. They barked and snuffled under the door. As I grabbed my rifle, the door burst open and a number of young braves, accompanied by the two girls, broke in. They were all yelling and carrying weapons. The leader killed Bodo, who jumped at him as he crossed the threshold. As I raised my rifle, one of the girls tripped me. She flung herself onto me, wrapping her arms about my legs. I

fired two shots but missed with both. Looking back at the incident, I am inclined to think the three brandies may have had something to do with the poor showing I made. The brandy was wonderful '65, the so-called Napoleon, and I drank from one of those large-bellied glasses that are warmed with the hands. My missing, however, must be considered providential, for had I wounded one of the braves I might easily have been killed.

Vixen fastened her teeth onto the leg of one of the young men, but another got hold of my left arm before I could get to my feet. The Indians seemed to have decided not to hurt me and to have had a mistaken idea that I would not strike the girls if they attacked me, because the second girl now knelt on my chest. Her hair had fallen down and was hanging in my face. I was able to raise the barrel of my rifle and clip her on the jaw with it as I lay on my back, at the same time striking the other girl on the top of the head with a downward stroke from the butt. The young men now became more active, and disarmed me and tied me. I called Vixen off and gave up the battle. To tell the truth, I was curious about these Indians. I was even more curious about the two girls, who definitely were white and who spoke a kind of English—in the struggle they both swore like cavalry officers. I only hoped they did not know the meaning of the words they used. (It subsequently appeared that they did not, but had learned them from an old prospector who, having joined the Indians and finding these two orphan girls among them—their parents had died of the Red Death—had decided to pay his debt to society by teaching them his version of their own language.) The Indians were Comanches and Kiowas and had set out from Oklahoma four years ago on a kind of scouting exploration mission. They had brought the girls with them as interpreters, in case they should find any white men left alive. Their medicine men had foretold the finding of one and had said the white man would give them news.

I was at first tongue-tied in the presence of the girls, who seemed, once I had got used to the idea, incredibly beautiful and desirable. I have to some extent got over this phase, which I consider one of the few signs of senility I have shown. I had next to learn the language they called English. Apart from its Rabelaisian flavor, it had many Comanche words which the girls used to fill in the gaps, where they had forgotten what their prospector friend had taught them. As he died when they were about ten years old, they had developed a kind of special language, as children do. However, by degrees I got their story. They were the daughters of an Indian agent and his wife who had been killed on the reservation when the blast hit us. The girls had been infants then, and so knew very little about the blast. An Indian squaw had adopted them. Some time later, a prospector by the name of Adam K. Bell had joined forces with the tribe (he had been in the mountains for two years) and had instructed the girls in their mother tongue and in his version of history, geography and mathematics. They knew the multiplication tables and could add, subtract, divide and multiply—arts which made them invaluable to the Indians, who called them in when such obscure calculations were necessary. He had also taught them some excellent geology, though they could never figure out his interest in gold, which they said was quite common

in some of the mountains they had explored; and they thought it had caused the old prospector's death through frustration, though of course they did not use that word. They said he went mad when he saw it—and to express his madness they clapped their hands, jumped up and down, and pulled at their hair.

The war party that captured me had had its camp on the site of the blast. The tepees stood about where the Players Club had been. They had chosen this site because, since everything was flattened around them, they need fear no ambush. When we reached the camp, a number of warriors were seated on the grass, grazing their horses, which they held by long riatas. These were the reserve braves, as it were, who had their arms with them—bows and arrows—and could be in action in a few minutes. Farther away, other horses were being grazed under an armed, mounted guard. These men had rifles that looked like Springfields. It appeared later that they had picked them up here and there as they crossed the country—deer rifles and the like, war souvenirs and other relatively light guns. In the United States, very heavy game rifles of the sort used in Africa have always been rare; and even if the Indians had found one, they would only have fired it once because of the kick. But even though they could have found enough ordinary rifles and enough ammunition, a great number of the braves were apparently against using them. The white man's magic had, as it were, gone out of fashion with all but the boldest. As I took in the scene, I was struck by the oddness of the combination of primitive and modern weapons in the hands of the red men. Noble savages—but I wished they had been less rough with me.

More men were sitting about the cooking fires in front of the tepees. My girls—I called them that already in my mind—seemed to be the only women with the party.

I was taken before the leader, a subsidiary chief or headman called Tall Eagle. He was a powerful man of about forty, and some kind of communication with him was established with the help of the girls. I did not get to know the full story of these Indians until later, when I had mastered something of their tongue, which I speak well now though I continue to mix in words of Zulu, which disconcerts them. The war party's mission was to proceed east till they came to the Great Water and then follow it south till they came to the land of the Seminoles, with whom they wished to establish contact and discuss the formation of a union of the Indian tribes that had survived, a repetition of the Six Nations alliance—if six nations were found still to exist.

They were, however, much perturbed by the great mutations that they had found in the East, and even to encounter such animals as Bengal tigers and polar bears worried them. Fortunately, the great mutations were not common. In my first week with the Indians I had the good fortune to kill a giant mink that had attacked a party of their braves, after it had killed three members of the party and sucked the blood from two of their horses. With the help of the Indians, I skinned the animal. It took ten men to drag it out so that we could peg it.

Perhaps I should describe this hunt in greater detail because it had certain interesting qualities. I was riding with one of the girls in the vicinity of my old home in 45th Street, perhaps unconsciously bidding it farewell, when from the direction of the

Hudson River I heard shouts and yells which I knew must come from my new friends. I could also distinguish the scream of a giant mink. I was luckily carrying my 450. I had, in fact, fired a few shots from it just to get my horse used to the sound of a gun, something that he had not taken kindly to at first but seemed to be getting used to, as almost any horse will if he is swung sideways to the target so that a shot is not fired too close to his ears or face. At any rate, when I heard the noise I turned Prince's head toward the river and galloped down the soft grass of the street, which at this point runs downhill till it crosses Ninth Avenue, where it rises in a short hill. I could feel Prince change his stride as the street rose; his great quarters came under him as he drove his hind hoofs into the turf. The girl stayed close behind me.

Breasting the hill, I checked the horse, pulling him up almost into a rear because, as I stopped him, I heard a terrible cry of agony from quite near by. Swinging Prince around, I pushed him up onto a ridge and saw, on the corner of what had been Tenth Avenue, the strangest sight I have ever seen.

A giant mink stood at bay with a dead Indian in his mouth. Two other Indians lay on the ground, and there was a dead horse near by. Some mounted Indians and one loose horse were circling round the mink, who bristled with so many arrows that he looked almost like a porcupine. There were probably enough arrows to kill him in the end, but he would take days to die. The Indians with rifles were not with this party. Even if they had been, their bullets would have been too light to have much effect. The most intelligent thing the Indians could have done would have been to leave the mink alone now, because he would have settled down to suck the blood of the men and horses he had killed; but they were in no mood to give in and, uttering wild yells, they closed in on him, circling around him and shooting more arrows into him. This made it impossible for me to get a shot at him till suddenly, dropping the man he held, he did what I hoped he would do—stood up on his hind legs. He had seen me on the ridge, outlined against the sky, and wondered what I was. The mink's eyesight, fortunately, is not good. As he stood looking and sniffing, his pointed face dripping with blood, I charged down straight at him—a distance of a hundred yards or so—and, pulling up about twenty paces short of him, swung Prince broadside on and put a soft-nosed bullet into the mink's chest, midway between his short, waving forelegs. The bullet must have smashed into his backbone because he threw up his paws, almost as a man might throw up his hands, and fell backward with the Indians closing in on him, forcing their reluctant ponies up to him so that they could drive their spears into him. Once satisfied that he was dead, they expressed their pleasure.

Nothing could have suited my purpose better than this happy event, for by it I proved my value to them as a warrior. For I had realized for some time that even if they had decided to leave me behind when they left New York (they had freed me almost as soon as they caught me), I would have followed because I needed company.

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The bowl of my personal existence was shattered. Here were men again. I'd forgotten how I needed men. It was interesting how my nostrils, trained by years of hunting, now dilated at the scent of men. There were also the girls, who affected me profoundly, and the horses. Women might be a necessity in youth, but horses were a pleasure that I had never forgotten. No man was ever betrayed by a horse; no horse ever deserted him or bore false witness against him.

It took me some time to explain my ideas to the Indians, and to accustom my youngest dogs to their company. The older and more savage dogs I shot after having steeled myself by drinking half a bottle of French brandy. Actually, apart from the dogs that I could not take, I regretted most leaving my wine cellar. But I had some beautiful dogs left; I had the bay stallion Tall Eagle had given me; and I had the company of a hundred and fifty magnificent young Indians and two young white girls who were burned as brown as the Indians and distinguishable from them only by their corn-colored hair and blue eyes. All this made up for what I had lost.

I was, however, faced with an ethical problem. The Indians, who had discovered heavy rifles similar to mine in some of the stores they had entered, wished me to instruct them in their use. I could see nothing to be gained by such instruction, so I tried to explain to them that this was white man's magic and so strong that it had destroyed all the white men in the world except me, turning its forces against them in retribution for their own misuse of its power. I also pointed out that all they need do to have this great power at their disposal was to keep me alive and treat me well. I let one man fire a shot lying down, and the recoil broke his collarbone. This seemed to confirm all that I had said.

Until I was with people again, it had not occurred to me to consider my own appearance, because when a man is alone he *has* no appearance. I found a mirror and examined myself with some attention and amazement. I was as straight as I had always been, but I was much wider than I had thought possible. My arms were as big as my thighs; my chest was immense. My hair was long, reaching halfway down my back, and my beard reached my belt. Both hair and beard were snow white. My body hair, with which I was covered, was white in front of my body and shaded through silver into black along my spine. For ornament, I wore a diamond necklace around my neck; my only clothing was a khaki kilt that I wore for warmth, a leather belt in which was stuck my kukri, and a pair of leather shoes. On my upper arms I had some gold armlets made from expanding wrist-watch chains and other jeweled bracelets that I had joined together and mounted on wide leather straps—a pastime I had indulged in as a hobby. I could not think what I looked like until I suddenly remembered the steel engravings of an old Bible I had had as a child. I looked like Moses when he received the tablets. But the astonishing thing was how well I felt and how immensely strong I was—now that I had others against whom to measure myself.

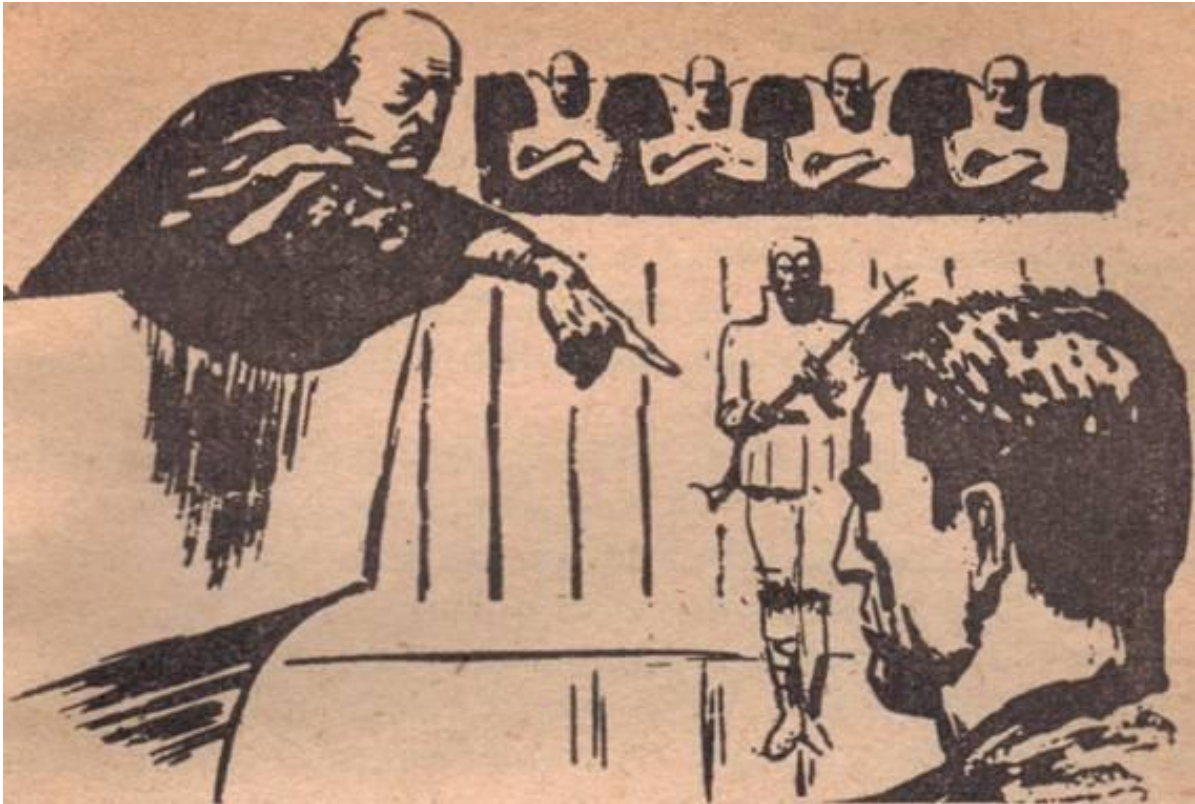
My appearance does not seem to bother the Indians and it is evident that the two girls—their names are Helen and Christine—want to marry me and are even prepared to share me if necessary, much to the amusement of the braves, who, now that we know

each other well, nudge me in the ribs and give me monosyllabic advice amplified by gestures. This situation is still unresolved and becomes daily more precarious.

My personal affairs have, however, no historic interest; and, having completed my story of the end of the white man's world, I can only say that I ride forward with optimism and can now laugh at the change of circumstance which hoisted my race with the petard of its own ingenuity and returned this great land to its original possessors. "America for the Americans," I say to Tall Eagle, and laugh. He says nothing. He thinks I am mad. But the girls laugh, because young girls laugh at anything, and it is spring again.

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COVENTRY....by *Robert Heinlein*



“HAVE YOU anything to say before sentence is pronounced on you?” The mild eyes of the senior judge studied the face of the accused. His sympathetic regard was answered by a sullen silence.

“Very well—the jury has determined the fact that you have violated a basic custom agreed to under the Covenant, and that through that act you did damage another free citizen. It is the opinion of the jury and of the court that you did so knowingly, and aware of the probability of damage to a free citizen. Therefore you are sentenced to choose between the Two Alternatives.”

A trained observer might have detected a momentary trace of dismay breaking through the mask of stoical indifference with which the young man had faced his trial. Dismay at the sentence was unreasonable; in view of his offense, the sentence was inevitable—but reasonable men do not receive the sentence.

After waiting a decent interval, the judge turned to the bailiff. "Take him away."

Before that official could reach him he stood up, knocking over his chair with the violence of his movement. He glared wildly around at the little company assembled about the long table and burst into speech.

"Hold on!" he cried. "I've got something to say first!" In spite of his rough manner there was about him, somehow, the noble dignity of a strong and untamed beast at bay. He stared at those around him, breathing heavily, as if they were, in fact, a circle of hunting dogs waiting to drag him down.

"Well?" he demanded. "Well? Do I get to talk or don't I? It'd be the best joke of this whole damned comedy if a condemned man couldn't speak his mind at the last!"

"You may speak," the senior judge told him in the same even, unhurried tones with which he had pronounced sentence, "David MacKinnon, as long as you like, and in any manner that you like. There is no limit to that freedom, even for those who have broken the Covenant. Please speak into the recorder."

MacKinnon glanced with distaste at the tiny microphone hanging near his face. The knowledge that any word spoke in its range would be broken down into typed phonetic symbols by a recording voder somewhere in the Hall of Archives inhibited his speech. "I don't ask for records," he snapped.

"But we must have them," the judge replied patiently, "in order that others may determine whether or not we have dealt with you fairly and according to the Covenant. Oblige us, please."

"Oh, very well!" He ungraciously conceded the requirement and directed his voice toward the instrument. "There's no damn sense in me talking at all—but, just the same, I'm going to talk and you're going to listen. You talk about your precious 'Covenant' as if it were something holy. I don't agree to it, and I don't accept it. You act as if it had been sent down from Heaven in a bunt of light. My grandfathers fought in the Second Revolution—but they fought to abolish superstition—not to let sheep-minded fools set up new ones.

"There were men in those days!" He looked with aversion around the ring of faces. "What is there left today? Cautious compromising, 'safe' weaklings with water in their veins. You've planned your whole world so carefully that you've planned the fun and zest right out of it. Nobody is ever hungry, nobody ever gets hurt. Your ships can't crack up and your crops can't fail. You even have the weather tamed so it rains politely—after midnight. Why you wait till midnight, I don't know—you all go to bed at nine o'clock!

"If one of you safe little people *should* have an unpleasant emotion—perish the thought!—you'd trot right over to the nearest psychodynamics clinic and get your soft little minds readjusted. Thank God I never succumbed to that dope habit. I'll keep my own feelings, thanks, no matter how bad they taste.

"You won't even make love without consulting a psychotechnician! Is her mind as flat and insipid as mine? Is there any emotional instability in her family? It's enough to make a man gag. As for fighting over a woman—if anyone had the guts to do that

he'd find a proctor at his elbow in two minutes, looking for the most convenient place to paralyze him, and inquiring with sickening humility, 'May I do you a service, sir?' "

The Bailiff edged closer to MacKinnon. He turned on the official. "Stand back, you. I'm not through yet." Then, resuming, "You've told me to choose between the Two Alternatives. Well, it's no hard choice for me. Before I'd submit to treatment, before I'd enter one of your neat little, safe little, pleasant little reorientation homes and let my mind be pried into by a lot of soft-fingered doctors —before I did anything like that I'd choose a nice, clean death. Oh, no—there is just one choice for me, not two. I take the choice of going to Coventry—and damned glad to. I hope I never hear of the United States again!

"But there is just one thing I want to ask you before I go—why do you bother to live, anyhow? I would think that any one of you would welcome an end to your silly, futile lives just from sheer boredom. That's all." He turned back to the bailiff. "Come on, you."

"One moment, David MacKinnon." The senior judge held up a restraining hand. "We have listened to you. Although custom does not compel it, I am minded to answer some of your statements. Will you listen?"

Unwilling, but less willing to appear loutish in the face of a request so reasonable, the younger man consented.

The judge commenced to speak in gentle, scholarly words appropriate to a lecture room. "David MacKinnon, you have spoken in a fashion that doubtless seems wise to you. Nevertheless, your words were wild, and spoken in haste. I am moved to correct your obvious misstatements of fact. The Covenant is not a superstition, but a simple temporal contract entered into by those same revolutionists for pragmatic reasons. They wished to insure the maximum possible liberty for every person.

"You yourself have enjoyed that liberty. No possible act, nor mode of conduct, was forbidden to you, as long as your action did not damage another. Even an act specifically prohibited by law could not be held against you unless the State was able to prove that your particular act damaged, or caused evident danger of damage, to a particular individual.

"Even if one should willfully and knowingly damage another—as you have done—the State does not attempt to sit in moral judgment, nor to punish. We have not the wisdom to do that, and the chain of injustices that have always followed, such moralistic coercion endanger the liberty of all. Instead, the convicted is given the choice of submitting to psychological readjustment to correct his tendency to wish to damage others, or of having the State withdraw itself from him—of sending him to Coventry!

"You complain that our way of living is dull and unromantic, and imply that we have deprived you of excitement to which you feel entitled. You are free to hold and express your aesthetic opinion of our way of living, but you must not expect us to live to suit your tastes. You are free to seek danger and adventure if you wish—there is danger still in experimental laboratories; there is hardship in the mountains of the

Moon, and death in the jungles of Venus—but you are not free to expose us to the violence of your nature.”

“Why make so much of it?” MacKinnon protested contemptuously. “You talk as if I had committed a murder. I simply punched a man in the nose!”

“I agree that individual deserved it,” the judge continued calmly, “and am not displeased at his misfortune, but your psychometrical tests show that you believe yourself capable of judging morally your fellow citizens and feel justified in personally correcting and punishing their lapses. You are a dangerous individual, David MacKinnon, a danger to all of us, for we cannot predict what damage you may do next.

“You refuse treatment—therefore we withdraw our society from you. To Coventry with you.” He turned to the bailiff. “Take him away.”

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MacKinnon peered out of a forward port of the big transport helicopter with repressed excitement in his heart. There! That must be it—that black band in the distance. The helicopter drew closer, and he became certain that he was seeing the Barrier—the mysterious, impenetrable wall that divided the United States from the reservation known as Coventry.

His guard looked up from the magazine he was reading and followed his gaze. “Nearly there, I see,” he said pleasantly. “Well, it won’t be long now.”

“It can’t be any too soon for me!”

The guard looked at him quizzically, but with tolerance. “Pretty anxious to get on with it, eh?”

MacKinnon held his head high. “You’ve never brought a man to the gateway more anxious to pass through!”

“Hm-m-m—maybe. They all say that, you know. Nobody goes through the gate against his own will.”

“I mean it!”

“They all do. Some of them come back, just the same.”

“Say—maybe you can give me some dope as to conditions inside.”

“Sorry,” the guard said, shaking his head, “but that is no concern of the United States, nor any of its employees. You’ll know soon enough.”

MacKinnon frowned a little. “It seems strange. I tried inquiring, but found no one who would admit that they had any notion about the inside. And yet you say that some come out. Surely some of them must talk—”

“That’s simple,” smiled the guard, “part of their reorientation is a subconscious compulsion not to discuss their experiences.”

“That’s a pretty scabby trick. Why should the government deliberately conspire to prevent me, and people like me, from knowing what we are going up against?”

“Listen, buddy,” the guard answered, with mild exasperation, “you’ve told the rest of us to go to the devil. You’ve told us that you could get along without us. You are

being given plenty of living room in some of the best land on this continent, and you are being allowed to take with you everything that you own, or your credit could buy. What the deuce else do you expect?"

MacKinnon's face settled in obstinate lines. "What assurance have I that there will be any land left for me?"

"That's your problem. The government sees to it that there is plenty of land for the population. The divvy-up is something you rugged individualists have to settle among yourselves. You've turned down our type of social co-operation; why the hell should you expect the safeguards of our organization?" The guard turned back to his reading and ignored him.

They landed on a small field which lay close under the blank black wall. No gate was apparent, but a guardhouse was located at the side of the field. MacKinnon was the only passenger. While his escort went over to the guardhouse, he descended from the passenger compartment and went around to the freight hold.

Two members of the crew were letting down a ramp from the cargo port. When MacKinnon drew near, one of them eyed him and said, "Okay, there's your stuff."

He sized up the job and said, "It's quite a lot, isn't it? I'll need some help. Will you give me a hand with it?"

The crew member addressed paused to light a cigarette before replying, "It's your stuff. If you want it, get it out. We take off in ten minutes." The two walked around him and re-entered the ship.

"Why, you—" MacKinnon shut up and kept the rest of his anger to himself. The surly louts! Gone was the faintest trace of regret at leaving civilization. He'd show them! He could get along without them.

But it was twenty minutes and more before he stood beside his heaped-up belongings and watched the ship rise. Fortunately the skipper had not been adamant about the time limit. MacKinnon turned and commenced loading his steel tortoise. Under the romantic influence of the classic literature of a bygone day he had considered using a string of burros, but had been unable to find a zoo that would sell them to him.

The vehicle he had chosen was not an unreasonable substitute for burros. It was extremely rugged, easy to operate, and almost foolproof. It drew its power from six square yards of sun-power screens on its low curved roof. These drove a constant-load motor, or, when halted, replenished the storage battery against cloudy weather or night travel. The bearings were "everlasting," and every moving part, other than the caterpillar treads and the controls, was sealed up, secure from inexpert tinkering.

It could maintain a steady six miles per hour on smooth, level pavement. When confronted by hills, or rough terrain, it did not stop, but simply slowed until the task demanded equaled its steady power output.

The steel tortoise gave MacKinnon a feeling of Crusoe-like independence. It did not occur to him that his chattel was the end product of the cumulative effort and intelligent co-operation of hundreds of thousands of men, living and dead. He had been accustomed all his life to the unfailing service of much more intricate machinery, and

honestly regarded the tortoise as a piece of equipment of the same primitive level as a woodsman's ax or a hunting knife. His talents had been devoted in the past to literary criticism rather than engineering, but that did not prevent him from believing that his native intelligence and the aid of a few reference books would be all that he would really need to duplicate the tortoise, if necessary.

His goods filled every compartment of the compact little freighter. He checked the last item from his inventory and ran a satisfied eye down the list. Any explorer or adventurer of the past might well be pleased with such equipment, he thought. He could imagine showing Jack London his knock-down cabin. "See, Jack," he would say, "it's proof against any kind of weather—perfectly insulated walls and floor, and can't rust. It's so light that you can set it up in five minutes by yourself, yet it's so strong that you can sleep sound with the biggest grizzly in the world snuffling right outside your door."

And London would scratch his head and say, "Dave, you're a wonder. If I'd had that in the Yukon it would have been a cinch!"

He checked over the list again. Enough concentrated and dessicated food and vitamin concentrates to last six months. That would give him time enough to build hothouses for hydroponics and get his seeds started. Medical supplies—he did not expect to need those, but foresight was always best. Reference books of all sorts. A light sporting rifle—vintage: last century. His face clouded a little at this. The war department had positively refused to sell him a portable blaster. When he had claimed the right of common social heritage they had grudgingly provided him with the plans and specifications and told him to build his own. Well, he would, the first spare time he got

Everything else was in order. MacKinnon climbed into the cockpit, grasped the two hand controls and swung the nose of the tortoise toward the guardhouse. He had been ignored since the ship had landed; he wanted to have the gate opened and to leave.

Several soldiers were gathered around the guardhouse. He picked out a legate by the silver stripe down the side of his kilt and spoke to him. "I'm ready to leave. Will you kindly open the gate?"

"Okay," the officer answered him, and turned to a soldier who wore the plain gray kilt of a private's field uniform. "Jenkins, tell the powerhouse to dilate—about a number three opening, tell them," he added, sizing up the dimensions of the tortoise.

He turned to MacKinnon. "It is my duty to tell you that you may return to civilization, even now, by agreeing to be hospitalized for your neurosis."

"I have no neurosis!"

"Very well. If you change your mind at any future time, return to the place where you entered. There is an alarm there with which you may signal to the guard that you wish the gate opened."

"I can't imagine needing to know that."

The legate shrugged. "Perhaps not—we send refugees to quarantine all the time. If I were making the rules, it might be harder to get out again." He was cut off by the

ringing of an alarm. The soldiers near them double-timed away, drawing their blasters from their belts as they ran. The ugly snout of a fixed blaster poked out over the top of the guardhouse and pointed toward the Barrier.

The legate answered the question on MacKinnon's face. "The power house is ready to open up." He waved smartly toward that building and turned back. "Drive straight through the center of the opening. It takes a lot of power to suspend the stasis; if you touch the edge we'll have to pick up the pieces."

A tiny, bright dot appeared in the foot of the barrier opposite where they waited. It spread into a half circle across the lampblack nothingness. Now it was large enough for MacKinnon to see the brown countryside beyond through the arch it had formed. He peered eagerly.

The opening grew until it was twenty feet wide, then stopped. It framed a scene of rugged, barren hills. He took this in and turned angrily on the legate. "I've been tricked!" he exclaimed. "That's not fit land for a man."

"Don't be hasty," he told MacKinnon. "There's good land beyond. Besides, you don't have to enter. But if you are going, go!"

MacKinnon flushed and pulled back on both hand controls. The treads bit in and the tortoise lumbered away, straight for the gateway to Coventry.

MacKinnon glanced back when he was several yards beyond the gate. The Barrier loomed behind him, with nothing to show where the opening had been. There was a little sheet-metal shed adjacent to the point where he had passed through. He supposed that it contained the alarm the legate had mentioned, but he was not interested, and turned his eyes back to his driving.

Stretching before him, twisting between the rocky hills, was a road of sorts. It was not paved, and the surface had not been repaired recently, but the grade averaged downhill, and the tortoise was able to maintain a respectable speed. He continued down it, not because he fancied it, but because it was the only road which led out of surroundings obviously unsuited to his needs.

The road was untraveled. This suited him; he had no wish to encounter other human beings until he had located desirable land to settle on and had staked out his claim. But the hills were not devoid of life; several times he caught glimpses of little dark shapes scurrying among the rocks, and occasionally beady eyes stared at him.

It did not occur to him at first that these timid little animals, streaking for cover at his coming, could replenish his larder—he was simply amused and warmed by their presence. When he did happen to consider that they might be used as food, the thought was at first repugnant to him—the practice of killing for "sport" had ceased to be customary long before his time; and inasmuch as the development of cheap synthetic proteins in the latter half of the preceding century had spelled the economic ruin of the business of breeding animals for slaughter, it is doubtful if he had ever tasted animal tissue in his life.

But once considered, it was logical to act. He expected to live off the country; although he had plenty of food on hand for the immediate future, it would be wise to

conserve it by using what the country offered. He suppressed his aesthetic distaste and ethical misgivings, and determined to shoot an animal at the first opportunity.

Accordingly, he dug out the rifle, loaded it, and placed it handy. With the usual perversity of the world as it is, no game was evident for the next half-hour. He was passing a little shoulder of rocky outcropping when he saw his prey. It peeked at him from behind a small boulder, its sober eyes wary but unperturbed. He stopped the tortoise and took careful aim, resting and steadying the rifle on the side of the cockpit. His quarry accommodated him by hopping out into full view.

He pulled the trigger, involuntarily tensing his muscles and squinting his eyes as he did so. Naturally, the shot went high and to the right.

But he was much too busy just then to be aware of it. It seemed that the whole world had exploded. His right shoulder was numb, his mouth stung as if he had been kicked there, and his ears rang in a strange and unpleasant fashion. He was surprised to find the gun still intact in his hands and none the worse for the incident.

He put it down, clambered out of the car, and rushed up to where the small creature had been. There was no sign of it anywhere. He searched the immediate neighborhood but did not find it. Mystified, he returned to his conveyance, having decided that the rifle was defective.

His recent target watched his actions cautiously from a vantage point many yards away, to which it had stampeded at the sound of the explosion. It was equally mystified by the startling events, being no more used to firearms than MacKinnon.

Before he started the tortoise again, MacKinnon had to see to his upper lip, which was swollen and tender, and bleeding from a deep scratch. This increased his conviction that the gun was defective. Nowhere in the romantic literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to which he was addicted, had there been a warning that, when firing a gun heavy enough to drop a man in his tracks, it is well not to hold the right hand in such a manner that the recoil will cause the right thumb and thumbnail to strike the mouth.

He applied an antiseptic and a dressing of sorts and went on his way, somewhat subdued. The little arroyo by which he had entered the hills had widened out, and the hills were greener. He passed around one particularly sharp turn in the road and found a broad, fertile valley spread out before him.

Much of the valley floor was cultivated, and he could make out human habitations. He continued toward it with mixed feelings. People meant fewer hardships, but it did not look as if staking out a claim would be as simple as he had hoped. However, Coventry was a big place.

He had reached the point where the road gave on to the floor of the valley when two men stepped out into his path. They were carrying weapons of some sort at the ready. One of them called out to him:

“Halt!”

MacKinnon did so, and answered him as they came abreast. “What do you want?”

“Customs inspection. Pull over there by the office.” He indicated a small building set back a few feet from the road, which MacKinnon had not previously noticed. He looked from it back to the spokesman and felt a slow, unreasoning heat spread up from his viscera, rendering his none-too-stable judgment still more unsound.

“What the deuce are you talking about?” he snapped. “Stand aside and let me pass.”

The one who had remained silent raised his weapon and aimed it at MacKinnon’s chest. The other grabbed his arm and pulled the weapon out of line. “Don’t shoot the dumb fool, Joe,” he said testily. “You’re always too anxious.” Then to MacKinnon, “You’re resisting the law. Come on—be quick about it!”

“The law?” MacKinnon gave a short, bitter laugh, and snatched his rifle up from the seat beside him. It never reached his shoulder—the man who had done all the talking fired casually, without apparently taking time to aim. The rifle was smacked from MacKinnon’s grasp, and flew into the air, landing some forty feet away.

The member of the pair who had remained silent followed the flight of the gun with detached interest and remarked, “Nice shot, Blackie. Never touched him.”

“Oh, just luck,” the other demurred, but grinned his pleasure at the compliment. “Glad I didn’t nick him, though—saves writing out a report.” He returned his stubby, curiously convoluted weapon to his belt, resumed a crisp, official manner, and spoke again to MacKinnon, who had been sitting in dumbfounded silence, rubbing his painfully smarting hands. “Well, tough guy? Do you behave, or do we come up there and get you?”

MacKinnon gave in. He drove the tortoise to the designated spot and waited sullenly for orders. “Get out and start unloading,” he was told.

He obeyed, under compulsion. As he piled his precious possessions on the ground the one addressed as Blackie separated each item into two piles, while Joe listed them on a printed form. He noticed presently that Joe listed only the items that went into the first pile. But he did not understand that he was being robbed until Blackie told him to reload the tortoise with the items from that pile, and commenced himself to carry goods from the other pile into the building. MacKinnon started to protest—

Joe punched him in the mouth, coolly and without rancor. MacKinnon went down, but got up again, fighting. He was in such a blind rage that he would have tackled a charging rhino just as readily. Joe timed his rush and clipped him again. This time he could not get up at once.

Blackie stepped over to the washstand in one corner of the office. Presently he came back with a wet towel and chucked it at MacKinnon. “Wipe your face on that, bud, and get back into the buggy. We got to get going.”

~ * ~

MacKinnon had time to do a lot of serious thinking as he drove Blackie into town. Beyond a terse answer of “Prize court” to MacKinnon’s inquiry as to their destination, Blackie did not converse, nor did MacKinnon press him to, anxious as he was to have

information. His mouth pained him from the repeated punishment it had taken, his head ached, and he was no longer tempted to precipitate action by hasty speech.

Evidently Coventry was not quite the frontier anarchy he had expected it to be. There was a government of sorts, apparently, but it resembled nothing that he had ever been used to. He had visualized a land of noble, independent spirits who gave each other wide berth and practiced mutual respect. There would be villains, of course, but they would be treated to summary, and probably lethal, justice as soon as they demonstrated their ugly natures. He had a strong, though subconscious, assumption that virtue is necessarily triumphant.

But having found government, he expected it to follow the general pattern that he had been used to all his life—honest, conscientious, reasonably efficient, and invariably careful of a citizen's rights and liberties. He was aware that government had not always been like that, but he had never experienced it—the idea was as remote and implausible as cannibalism, or chattel slavery.

Had he stopped to think about it, he might have realized that public servants in Coventry would never have been examined psychologically to determine their temperamental fitness for their duties, and, that since every inhabitant of Coventry was there—as he was—for violating a basic custom and refusing treatment thereafter, it was a foregone conclusion that most of them would be erratic.

He pinned his hope on the knowledge that they were going to court. All he asked was a chance to tell his story to the judge.

His immediate dependence on judicial procedure may appear inconsistent in view of how recently he had renounced all reliance on organized government, but it was only superficially so. He could renounce government verbally, but he could not do away with a lifetime of environmental conditioning. His cortex was canalized, whether he wished it or not, into certain evaluating habits.

He could curse the court that had humiliated him by-condemning him to the Two Alternatives, but he expected courts to dispense justice. He could assert his own rugged independence, but he expected persons he encountered to behave as if they were bound by the Covenant—he had met no other sort. He was no more able to discard his past history than his accustomed body.

But he did not know it yet.

~ * ~

MacKinnon failed to stand up when the judge entered the courtroom. Court attendants quickly set him right, but not before he had provoked a glare from the bench. The judge's appearance and manner were not reassuring. He was a well-fed man, of ruddy complexion, whose sadistic temper was evident in face and voice. They waited while he dealt drastically with several petty offenders. It seemed to MacKinnon, as he listened, that almost everything was against the law.

Nevertheless, he was relieved when his name was called. He stepped up and undertook at once to tell his story. The judge's gavel cut him short.

"What is this case?" the judge demanded, staring at MacKinnon's damaged features, his face set in grim, intolerant lines. "Drunk and disorderly, apparently. I shall put a stop to this slackness among the young if it takes the last ounce of strength in my body!" He turned to the clerk. "Any previous offenses?"

The clerk whispered in his ear. The judge threw MacKinnon a look of mixed annoyance and suspicion, then told the customs guard to come forward. Blackie told a clear, straightforward tale with the ease of a man used to giving testimony. MacKinnon's condition was attributed to resisting an officer in the execution of his duty. He submitted the inventory his colleague had prepared, but failed to mention the large quantity of goods which had been abstracted before the inventory was made.

The judge turned to MacKinnon. "Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

"I certainly have, doctor," he began eagerly. "There isn't a word of—"

Bang! The gavel cut him short. A court attendant hurried to MacKinnon's side and attempted to explain to him the proper form to use in addressing the court. The explanation confused him. In his experience, "judge" naturally implied a medical man—a psychologist skilled in social problems. Nor had he heard of any special speech forms appropriate to a courtroom. But he amended his language as instructed.

"May it please the honorable court, this man is lying. He and his companion robbed me. I was simply—"

"Smugglers generally think they are being robbed when customs officials catch them," the judge sneered. "Do you deny that you attempted to resist inspection?"

"No, your honor, but—"

"That will do. Penalty of fifty per cent is added to the established scale of duty. Pay the clerk."

"But, your honor, I can't—"

"Can't you pay it?"

"I haven't any money. I have only my possessions."

"So?" He turned to the clerk. "Condemnation proceedings. Impound his goods. Ten days for vagrancy. The community can't have these immigrant paupers roaming at large, and preying on law-abiding citizens. Next case!"

They hustled him quickly away. It took the sound of the key grating in the barred door behind him to make him realize the extent of his predicament.

~ * ~

"Hi, pal, how's the weather outside?" The detention cell had a prior inmate, a small, well-knit man who looked up from a game of solitaire to address MacKinnon. He sat astraddle a wooden bench on which he had spread his cards, and studied the newcomer with unworried eyes.

"Clear enough outside—but stormy in the courtroom," MacKinnon answered, trying to adopt the same bantering tone and not succeeding. His mouth hurt him.'

The other swung a leg over the bench and approached him with a light, silent step. "Say, pal, you must 'a' caught that in a gear box," he commented, inspecting MacKinnon's mouth. "Does it hurt?"

"Like the devil," MacKinnon admitted.

"We'll have to do something about that." He went to the cell door and rattled it, filling the building with the din. "Hey! Lefty! The house is on fire! Come a-runnin'!"

The guard sauntered down and stood opposite their cell door. "Wha' d'yuh want, Fader?" he said.

"My old school chum has been slapped in the face with a wrench, and the pain is inordinate. Here's a chance for you to get right with Heaven by oozing down to the dispensary and snagging a dressing and some neoanodyne."

The guard's expression was not encouraging. The prisoner looked grieved. "Why, Lefty," he said, "I thought you would jump at a chance to do a little pure charity like that." He waited for a moment, then added, "Tell you what—you do it and I'll show you how to work that puzzle about 'How old is Ann?' Is it a go?"

"Show me first."

"It would take too long. I'll write it out and give it to you."

When the guard returned, MacKinnon's cell mate dressed his wounds with gentle deftness, talking the while. "They call me Fader Magee. What's your name, pal?"

"David MacKinnon. I'm sorry, but I didn't quite catch your first name."

"Fader. It isn't," he explained with a grin, "the name my mother gave me. It's more a professional tribute to my shy and unobtrusive nature."

MacKinnon looked puzzled. "Professional tribute? What is your profession?"

Magee looked pained. "Why, Dave," he said, "I didn't ask you that. However," he went on, "it's probably the same as yours—self-preservation."

Magee was a sympathetic listener, and MacKinnon welcomed the chance to tell someone about his troubles. He related the story of how he had decided to enter Coventry rather than submit to the sentence of the court, and how he had hardly arrived when he was hauled into court.

Magee nodded. "I'm not surprised," he observed. "A man has to have larceny in his heart or he wouldn't be a customs guard."

"But what happens to my belongings?"

"They auction them off to pay the duty."

"I wonder how much there will be left for me."

Magee stared at him. "Left over? There won't be anything left over. You'll probably have to pay a deficiency judgment."

"Huh? What's that?"

"It's a device whereby the condemned pays for the execution," Magee explained succinctly, if somewhat obscurely. "What it means to you is that when your ten days are up you'll still be in debt to the court. Then it's the chain gang for you. You'll work it off at a dollar a day."

"Fader—you're kidding me."

“Wait and see. You’ve got a lot to learn, Dave.”

Coventry was an even more complex place than Dave had gathered up to this time. Magee explained to him that there were actually three sovereign, independent jurisdictions. The jail where they were prisoners lay in the so-called New America. It had the forms of democratic government, but the treatment he had already received was a fair sample of how it was administered.

“This place is heaven itself compared with the Free State,” Magee maintained. “I’ve been there.”

The Free State was an absolute dictatorship; the head man of the ruling clique was designated the “Liberator.” Their watchwords were duty and obedience; and arbitrary discipline was enforced with a severity that left no room for any freedom of opinion. Governmental theory was vaguely derived from the old functionalist doctrines. The State was thought of as a single organism with a single head, a single brain, and a single purpose. Anything not compulsory was forbidden.

“Honest, so help me,” claimed Magee, “you can’t go to bed in that place without finding one of their damned secret police between the sheets.”

“But at that,” he continued, “it’s an easier place to live than with the Angels.”

“The Angels?”

“Sure. We still got ‘em. Must’ve been two or three thousand die-hards that chose to go to Coventry after the Revolution—you know that. There’s still a colony up in the hills to the north, complete with Prophet Incarnate and the works. They aren’t bad hombres, but they’ll pray you into heaven even if it kills you.”

All three States had one curious characteristic in common—each one claimed to be the only legal government of the entire United States, and looked forward to some future day when they would reclaim the “unredeemed” portion; i.e., outside Coventry. To the Angels this was an event which would occur when the First Prophet returned to Earth to lead them again. In New America it was hardly more than a convenient campaign plank, to be forgotten after each election. But in the Free State it was a fixed policy.

Pursuant to this purpose there had been a whole series of wars between the Free State and New America. The Liberator held, quite logically, that New America was an unredeemed section, and that it was necessary to bring it under the rule of the Free State before the advantages of their culture could be extended to the outside.

Magee’s words demolished MacKinnon’s dream of finding an anarchistic Utopia within the Barrier, but he could not let his fond illusion die without a protest. “But see here, Fader,” he persisted, “isn’t there some place where a man can live quietly by himself without all this insufferable interference?”

“No—” considered Fader. “No, not unless you took to the hills and hid. Then you’d be all right, as long as you steered clear of the Angels. But it would be pretty slim pickin’s, living off the country. If you really want to go off and be a hermit you’d do better to try it on the Outside, where there aren’t so many objections to it.”

“No”—MacKinnon’s backbone stiffened at once—“no, I’ll never do that. I’ll never submit to psychological reorientation just to have a chance to be let alone. If I could go back to where I was before a couple of months ago, before I was arrested, it might be all right to go off to the Rockies, or look up an abandoned farm somewhere. But with that diagnosis staring me in the face—after being told I wasn’t fit for human society until I had had my emotions retailored to fit a cautious little pattern, I couldn’t face it. Not if it meant going to a sanitarium—”

“I see,” agreed Fader, nodding, “you want to go to Coventry, but you don’t want the Barrier to shut you off from the rest of the world.”

“No, that’s not quite fair— Well, maybe, in a way. Say, you don’t think I’m not fit to associate with, do you?”

“You look all right to me,” Magee reassured him with a grin, “but I’m in Coventry, too, remember. Maybe I’m no judge.”

“You don’t talk as if you liked it. Why’re you here?”

Magee held up a gently admonishing finger. “Tut! Tut! That is the one question you must never ask a man here. You must assume that he came here because he knew how swell everything is here.”

“Still—you don’t seem to like it.”

“I didn’t say I didn’t like it. I do like it; it has flavor. Its little incongruities are a source of innocent merriment. And any time they turn on the heat I can always go back through the gate and rest up for a while in a nice quiet hospital, until things quiet down.”

MacKinnon was puzzled again. “Turn on the heat? Do they supply too hot weather here?”

“Huh? Oh, I didn’t mean weather control—there isn’t any of that here except what leaks over from Outside. I was just using an old figure of speech.”

“What does it mean?”

Magee smiled to himself. “You’ll find out.”

~ * ~

After supper—bread, stew in a metal dish, a small apple —Magee introduced MacKinnon to the mysteries of cribbage. Fortunately MacKinnon had no cash to lose. Presently Magee put the cards down without shuffling them. “Dave,” he said, “are you enjoying the hospitality offered by this institution?”

“Hardly. Why?”

“I suggest that we check out.”

“A good idea, but how?”

“That’s what I’ve been thinking about. Do you suppose you could take another poke on that battered phiz of yours in a good cause?”

MacKinnon cautiously fingered his face. “I suppose so— if necessary. It can’t do me much more harm, anyhow.”

“That’s mother’s little man! Now listen. This guard. Lefty, in addition to being kind o’ unbright, is sensitive about his looks. When they turn out the lights, you—”

~ * ~

“Let me out of here! Let me out of here!” MacKinnon beat on the bars and screamed. No answer came. He renewed the racket, his voice a hysterical falsetto. Lefty arrived to investigate, grumbling.

“What the hell’s eating on you?” he demanded, peering through the bars.

MacKinnon changed to tearful petition. “Oh, Lefty, please let me out of here. Please! I can’t stand the dark. It’s dark in here—please don’t leave me alone.” He flung himself, sobbing, on the bars.

The guard cursed to himself. “Another slug-nutty. Listen, you—shut up and go to sleep or I’ll come in there and give you something to yelp for!” He started to leave.

MacKinnon changed instantly to the vindictive, unpredictable anger of the irresponsible. “You big, ugly baboon! You rat-faced idiot! Where’d ja get that nose?”

Lefty turned back, fury in his face. He started to speak. MacKinnon cut him short. “Yah! Yah! Yah!” he gloated. “Lefty’s mother was scared by a warthog—”

The guard swung at the spot where MacKinnon’s face was pressed between the bars of the door. MacKinnon ducked and grabbed simultaneously. Off balance at meeting no resistance, the guard rocked forward, thrusting his forearm between the bars. MacKinnon’s fingers slid along his arm and got a firm purchase on Lefty’s wrist.

He threw himself backward, dragging the guard with him, until Lefty was jammed up against the outside of the barred door, with one arm inside, to the wrist of which MacKinnon clung as if welded.

The yell which formed in Lefty’s throat miscarried; Magee had already acted. Out of the darkness, silent as death, his slim hands had snaked between the bars and embedded themselves in the guard’s fleshy neck. Lefty heaved and almost broke free, but MacKinnon threw his weight to the right and twisted the arm he gripped in an agonizing, bone-breaking leverage.

It seemed to MacKinnon that they remained thus, like some grotesque game of statues, for an endless period. His pulse pounded in his ears until he feared that it must be heard by others and bring rescue to Lefty.

Magee spoke at last: “That’s enough,” he whispered. “Go through his pockets.”

He made an awkward job of it, for his hands were numb and trembling from the strain, and it was anything but convenient to work between the bars. But the keys were there, in the last pocket he tried. He passed them to Magee, who loosed the guard and accepted them.

Magee made a quick job of it. The door swung open with a distressing creak. Dave stepped over Lefty’s body, but Magee kneeled down, unhooked a truncheon from the guard’s belt and cracked him behind the ear with it.

MacKinnon paused. “Did you kill him?” he asked.

“Cripes, no,” Magee answered softly. “Lefty is a friend of mine. Let’s go.”

They hurried down the dimly lighted passageway between the cells toward the door leading to the administrative offices—their only outlet. Lefty had carelessly left it ajar, and light shone through the crack, but as they silently approached it they heard ponderous footsteps from the far side. Dave looked hurriedly for cover, but the best he could manage was to slink back into the corner formed by the cell block and the wall. He glanced around for Magee, but he had disappeared completely.

The door swung open; a man stepped through, paused, and looked around. MacKinnon saw that he was carrying a black light and wearing its complement—rectifying spectacles. He realized then that the darkness gave him no cover. The black light swung his way; he tensed to spring-

He heard a dull *clunk!* The guard sighed, swayed gently, then collapsed into a loose pile. Magee stood over him, poised on the balls of his feet, and surveyed his work while caressing the business end of the truncheon with the cupped fingers of his left hand.

“That will do,” he decided. “Shall we go, Dave?”

Magee eased through the door without waiting for an answer. MacKinnon was close behind him. The lighted corridor led away to the right and ended in a large double door to the street. On the left wall, near the street door, a smaller office door stood open.

Magee drew MacKinnon to him. “It’s a cinch,” he whispered. “There’ll be nobody in there now but the desk sergeant. We get past him, then out that door and into the ozone—” He motioned Dave to keep behind him and crept silently up to the office door. After drawing a small mirror from a pocket in his belt, he lay down on the floor, placed his head near the door frame and cautiously extended the tiny mirror an inch or two past the edge.

Apparently he was satisfied with the reconnaissance the improvised periscope afforded him, for he drew himself back onto his knees and turned his head so that MacKinnon could see the words shaped by his silent lips. “It’s all right,” he breathed, “there is only—”

Two hundred pounds of uniformed Nemesis landed on his shoulders. A clanging alarm sounded through the corridor. Magee went down fighting, but he was outclassed and caught off guard. He jerked his head free and shouted, “Run for it, kid!”

MacKinnon could hear running feet from somewhere, but could see nothing but the struggling figures before him. He shook his head and shoulders like a dazed animal, then kicked the larger of the two contestants in a fashion forbidden by sportsmanship. The man screamed and let go his hold. MacKinnon grasped his small companion by the scruff of the neck and hauled him roughly to his feet.

Magee’s eyes were still merry. “Well played, my lad,” he commended in clipped syllables, as they burst out the street door, “if hardly cricket! Where did you learn *La Savate?*”

MacKinnon had not time to answer, being fully occupied in keeping up with Magee's weaving, deceptively-rapid progress. They ducked across the street, down an alley and between two buildings.

The succeeding minutes, or hours, were confusion to MacKinnon. He remembered afterward crawling along a rooftop and letting himself down to crouch in the blackness of an interior court, but he could not remember how they had gotten on the roof. He also recalled spending an interminable period alone, compressed inside a most unsavory refuse bin, and his terror when footsteps approached the bin and a light flashed through a crack.

A crash and the sound of footsteps in flight immediately thereafter led him to guess that Fader had drawn the pursuit away from him. But when Fader did return and opened the top of the bin, MacKinnon almost throttled him before identification was established.

When the active pursuit had been shaken off, Magee guided him across town, showing a sophisticated knowledge of back ways and short cuts, and a genius for taking full advantage of cover. They reached the outskirts of the town in a dilapidated quarter, far from the civic center. Magee stopped. "I guess this is the end of the line, kid," he told Dave. "If you follow this street you'll come to the open country shortly. "That's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

"I suppose so," MacKinnon replied uneasily, and peered down the street. Then he turned back to speak again to Magee.

But Magee was gone. He had faded away into the shadows. There was neither sight nor sound of him. MacKinnon started in the suggested direction with a heavy heart. There was no possible reason to expect Magee to stay with him; the service Dave had done him with a lucky kick had been repaid with interest—yet he had lost the only friendly companionship he had found in a strange place. He felt lonely and depressed.

He continued along, keeping to the shadows and watching carefully for shapes that might be patrolmen. He had gone a few hundred yards and was beginning to worry about how far it might be to open countryside when he was startled into gooseflesh by a hiss from a dark doorway.

He did his best to repress the unreasoning panic that beset him, and was telling himself that policemen never hiss, when a shadow detached itself from the blackness and touched him on the arm.

"Dave." it said softly.

MacKinnon felt a childlike sense of relief and well-being. "Fader!"

"I changed my mind, Dave. The gendarmes would have you in tow before morning. You don't know the ropes— so I came back."

Dave was both pleased and crestfallen. "You shouldn't worry about me," he protested. "I'll get along."

Magee shook him roughly by the arm. "Don't be a chump. Green as you are, you'd start to holler about your civil rights or something, and get clipped in the mouth again.

"Now see here." he went on, "I'm going to take you to some friends of mine who will hide you until you're smartened up to the tricks around here. But they're on the wrong side of the law, see? You'll have to be all three of the three sacred monkeys—see no evil, hear no evil, tell no evil. Think you can do it?"

"Yes, but—"

"No 'buts' about it. Come along!"

~ * ~

The entrance was in the rear of an old warehouse. Steps led down into a little sunken court. From this open areaway—foul with accumulated refuse—a door let into the back, wall of the building. Magee tapped lightly but systematically, waited and listened. Presently he whispered, "*Ps-s-st!* It's the Fader."

The door opened quickly and Magee was encircled by two great, fat arms. He was lifted off his feet while the owner of those arms planted a resounding buss on his cheek. "Fader!" she exclaimed. "Are you all right, lad? We've missed you."

"Now that's a proper welcome, Mother," he answered when he was back on his own feet, "but I want you to meet a friend of mine. Mother Johnston, this is David MacKinnon."

"May I do you a service?" David acknowledged with automatic formality, but Mother Johnston's eyes tightened with instant suspicion.

"Is he stooled?" she snapped.

"No, Mother, he's a new immigrant—but I vouch for him. He's on the dodge. I've brought him to cool."

She softened a little under his persuasive tones. "Well—"

Magee pinched her cheek. "That's a good girl! When are you going to marry me?"

She slapped his hand away. "Even if I were forty years younger I'd not marry such a scamp as you! Come along, then," she continued to MacKinnon, "as long as you're a friend of the Fader—though it's no credit to you!" She waddled quickly ahead of them down a flight of stairs while calling out for someone to open the door at its foot.

The room was poorly lighted with a few obsolete glow tubes and was furnished principally with a long table and some chairs, at which an odd dozen people were seated, drinking and talking. It reminded MacKinnon of prints of old English pubs in the days before the Collapse.

Magee was greeted with a babble of boisterous welcome. "Fader!" "It's the kid himself!" "How'd ja do it this time, Fader? Crawl down the drains?" "Set 'em up, Mother—the Fader's back!"

He accepted the ovation with a wave of his hand and a shout of inclusive greeting, then turned to MacKinnon. "Folks," he said, his voice cutting through the confusion, "I want you to know Dave—the best pal that ever kicked a jailer at the right moment. If it hadn't been for Dave I wouldn't be here."

MacKinnon found himself seated between two others at the table and a stein of beer thrust into his hand by a not uncomely young woman. He started to thank her, but she had hurried off to help Mother Johnston take care of the sudden influx of orders. Seated opposite him was a rather surly young man who had taken little part in the greeting to Magee. He looked MacKinnon over with a face expressionless except for a recurrent tic which caused his right eye to wink spasmodically every few seconds.

"What's your line?" he demanded.

"Leave him alone, Alec," Magee cut in swiftly but in a friendly tone; "He's just arrived inside; I told you that. But he's all right," he continued, raising his voice to include the others present. "He's been here less than twenty-four hours, but he's broken jail, beat up two customs busies, and sassed old Judge Fleishacker right to his face. How's that for a busy day?"

Dave was the center of approving interest, but the party with the tic persisted. "That's all very well, but I asked him a fair question: What's his line? If it's the same as mine, I won't stand for it—it's too crowded now."

"That cheap racket you're in is always crowded, but he's not in it. Forget about his line."

"Why don't he answer for himself?" Alec countered suspiciously. He half stood up.

It appeared that Magee was cleaning his nails with the point of a slender knife. "Put your nose back in your glass, Alec," he remarked in a conversational tone, without looking up, "or must I cut it off and put it there?"

The other fingered something nervously in his hand. Magee seemed not to notice it, but nevertheless told him, "If you think you can use a vibrator on me faster than I can use steel, go ahead—it will be an interesting experiment."

The man facing him stood uncertainly for a moment longer, his tic working incessantly. Mother Johnston came up behind him and pushed him down by the shoulders, saying, "Boys! Boys! Is that any way to behave—and in front of a guest, too! Fader, put that toad sticker away. I'm ashamed of you."

The knife was gone from his hands. "You're right, as always, Mother," he grinned. "Ask Molly to fill up my glass again."

An old chap sitting on MacKinnon's right had followed these events with alcoholic uncertainty, but he seemed to have gathered something of the gist of it, for now he fixed Dave with a serum-filled eye and inquired, "Boy, are you stooled to the rogue?" His sweetly sour breath reached MacKinnon as the old man leaned toward him and emphasized his question with a trembling finger.

Dave looked to Magee for advice and enlightenment. Magee answered for him. "No, he's not—Mother Johnston knew that when she let him in. He's here for sanctuary—as our customs provide!"

An uneasy stir ran around the room. Molly paused in her serving and listened openly. But the old man seemed satisfied. "True—true enough," he agreed, and took another pull at his drink. "Sanctuary may be given when needed, if—" His words were lost in a mumble.

The nervous tension slackened. Most of those present were subconsciously glad to follow the lead of the old man and excuse the intrusion on the score of necessity. Magee turned back to Dave. "I thought that what you didn't know couldn't hurt you—or us—but the matter has been opened."

"But what did he mean?"

"Gramps asked you if you had been stooled to the rogue—whether or not you were a member of the ancient and honorable fraternity of thieves and pickpockets!"

Magee stared into Dave's face with a look of saturnine amusement. Dave looked uncertainly from Magee to the others, saw them exchange glances, and wondered what answer was expected of him.

Alec broke the pause. "Well," he sneered, "what are you waiting for? Go ahead and put the question to him—or are the great Fader's friends free to use this club without so much as a by your leave?"

"I thought I told you to quiet down, Alec," the Fader replied evenly. "Besides, you're skipping a requirement. All the comrades present must first decide whether or not to put the question at all."

A quiet little man with a chronic worried look in his eyes answered him. "I don't think that quite applies, Fader. If he had come himself, or fallen into our hands— In that case; yes. But you brought him here. I think I speak for all when I say he should answer the question. Unless someone objects, I will ask him myself." He allowed an interval to pass. No one spoke up. "Very well, then. Dave, you have seen too much and heard too much. Will you leave us now—or will you stay and take the oath of our guild? I must warn you that once stooled you are stooled for life—and there is but one punishment for betraying the rogue."

He drew his thumb across his throat in an age-old deadly gesture. Gramps made an appropriate sound effect by sucking air wetly through his teeth and chuckled.

Dave looked around, Magee's face gave him no help. "What is it that I have to swear to?" he temporized.

The parley was brought to an abrupt ending by the sound of pounding outside. There was a shout, muffled by two closed doors and a stairway, of "Open up down there!" Magee got to his feet and beckoned to Dave.

"That's for us, kid," he said. "Come along."

He stepped over to a ponderous old-fashioned radio-phonograph which stood against the wall, reached under it, fiddled for a moment, then swung out one side panel of it. Dave saw that the mechanism had been cunningly rearranged in such a fashion that a man could squeeze inside it. Magee urged him into it, slammed the panel closed and left him.

MacKinnon's face was pressed up close to the slotted grille which was intended to cover the sound box. Molly had cleared off the two extra glasses from the table and was dumping one drink so that it spread along the table top and erased the rings their glasses had made.

MacKinnon saw the Fader slide under the table and reach up. Then he was gone. Apparently he had, in some fashion, attached himself to the underside of the table.

Mother Johnston made a great to-do of opening up. The lower door she opened at once, with much noise. Then she clumped slowly up the steps, pausing, wheezing, and complaining. MacKinnon heard her unlock the door.

"A fine time to be waking honest people up!" she protested. "It's hard enough to get the work done and make both ends meet without dropping what I'm doing every five minutes and—"

"Enough of that, old girl," a man's voice answered, "just get along downstairs. We have business with you."

"What sort of business?" she demanded.

"It might be selling liquor without a license, but it's not—this time."

"I don't. This is a private club. The members own the liquor; I simply serve it to them."

"That's as may be. It's those members I want to talk to. Get out of the way now, and be spry about it."

They came pushing into the room, Mother Johnston, still voluble, carried along by the van. The speaker was a sergeant of police. He was accompanied by a patrolman. Following them were two other uniformed men, but they were soldiers. McKinnon judged by the markings on their kilts that they were corporal and private—provided the insignia in New America were similar to those used by the United States Army.

The sergeant paid no attention to Mother Johnston. "All right, you men," he called out, "line up!"

They did so, ungraciously but promptly.

"All right, corporal—take charge!"

The boy who washed up in the kitchen had been staring round-eyed. He dropped a glass. It bounced around on the hard floor, giving out bell-like sounds in the silence.

The man who had questioned Dave spoke up. "What's all this?"

The sergeant answered with a pleased grin. "Conscription—that's what it is. You are all enlisted in the army."

"Press gang!" It was an involuntary gasp that came from no particular source.

The corporal stepped briskly forward. "Form a column of twos," he directed. But the little man with the worried eyes was not done.

"I don't understand this," he objected. "We signed an armistice with the Free State three weeks ago."

"That's not your worry," countered the sergeant, "nor mine. We are picking up every able-bodied man not in essential industry. Come along."

"Then you can't take me."

"Why not?"

He held up the stump of a missing hand. The sergeant glanced from it to the corporal, who nodded grudgingly and said, "Okay—but report to the office in the morning and register."

He started to march them out when Alec broke ranks and backed up to the wall, screaming. "You can't do this to me! I won't go!" His deadly little vibrator was exposed in his hand, and the right side of his face was drawn up in a spastic wink that left his teeth bare.

"Get him, Steeves," ordered the corporal. The private stepped forward, but stopped when Alec brandished the vibrator at him. He had no desire to have a vibroblade between his ribs, and there was no doubt as to the uncontrolled dangerousness of his hysterical opponent.

The corporal, looking phlegmatic, almost bored, leveled a small tube at a spot on the wall over Alec's head. Dave heard a soft *pop!* and a thin tinkle. Alec stood motionless for a few seconds, his face even more strained, as if he were exerting the limit of his will against some unseen force, then slid quietly to the floor. The tonic spasm in his face relaxed and his features smoothed into those of a tired and petulant, and rather bewildered, little boy.

"Two of you birds carry him," directed the corporal.

The sergeant was the last to leave. He turned at the door and spoke to Mother Johnston. "Have you seen the Fader lately?"

"The Fader?" She seemed puzzled. "Why, he's in jail."

"Ah, yes—so he is." He went out.

~ * ~

Magee refused the drink Mother Johnston offered him.

Dave was surprised to see that he appeared worried for the first time. "I don't understand it." Magee muttered, half to himself, then addressed the one-handed man. "Ed, bring me up to date."

"Not much news since they tagged you, Fader. The armistice was before that. I thought from the papers that things were going to be straightened out for once."

"So did I. But the government must expect war if they are going in for general conscription." He stood up. "I've got to have more data. Al!" The kitchen boy stuck his head into the room.

"Whatcha want, Fader?"

"Go out and make palaver with five or six of the beggars. Look up their king. You know where he is?"

"Sure. Over by the auditorium."

"Find out what's stirring, but don't let them know I sent you."

"Right, Fader. It's in the bag." The boy swaggered out.

"Molly."

"Yes, Fader?"

"Will you go out and do the same thing with some of the business girls? I want to know what they hear from their customers." She nodded agreement. He went on, "Better look up that little redhead that has her beat up on Union Square. She can

get secrets out of a dead man. Here”—he pulled a wad of bills out of his pocket and handed her several—”you better take this grease. You might have to pay off a cop to get back out of the district,”

Magee was not disposed to talk and insisted that Dave get some sleep. He was easily persuaded, not having slept since he entered Coventry. That seemed like a lifetime past; he was exhausted. Mother Johnston fixed him a shakedown in a dark, stuffy room on the same underground level. It had none of the hygienic comforts to which he was accustomed—air conditioning, restful music, hydraulic mattress, nor soundproofing—and he missed his usual relaxing soak and auto-massage, but he was too tired to care. He slept in clothing and under covers for the first time in his life.

He woke up with a headache, a taste in his mouth like tired sin, and a sense of impending disaster. At first he could not remember where he was—he thought he was still in detention Outside. His surroundings were inexplicably sordid; he was about to ring for the attendant and complain when his memory pieced in the events of the day before. Then he got up and discovered that his bones and muscles were painfully stiff, and—which was worse—that he was, by his standards, filthy. He itched.

MacKinnon entered the common room and found Magee sitting at the table. He greeted Dave. “Hi, kid. I was about to wake you. You’ve slept almost all day. We’ve got a lot to talk about.”

“Okay—shortly. Where’s the ‘fresher?’”

“Over there.”

It was not Dave’s idea of a refreshing chamber, but he managed to take a sketchy shower in spite of the slimy floor. Then he discovered that there was no air blast installed, and he was forced to dry himself unsatisfactorily with his handkerchief. He had no choice in clothes. He must put back on the ones he had taken off or go naked. He recalled that he had seen no nudity anywhere in Coventry, even at sports—a difference in customs, no doubt. He put his clothes back on, though his skin crawled at the touch of the once-used linen.

Mother Johnston had thrown together an appetizing breakfast for him. He let coffee restore his courage as Magee talked. It was, according to Fader, a serious situation. New America and the Free State had compromised their differences and had formed an alliance. They quite seriously proposed to break out of Coventry and attack the United States.

MacKinnon looked up at this. “That’s ridiculous, isn’t it? They’d be outnumbered enormously. Besides, how about the Barrier?”

“I don’t know—yet. But they have some reason to think that they can break through the Barrier—and there are rumors that whatever it is can be used as a weapon, too, so that a small army might be able to whip the whole United States.”

MacKinnon looked puzzled. “Well,” he observed, “I haven’t any opinion of a weapon I know nothing about, but as to the Barrier—I’m not a mathematical physicist, but I was always told that it was theoretically impossible to break the Barrier—that it was

just a nothingness that there was no way to touch. Of course, you can fly over it, but even that is supposed to be deadly to life.”

“Suppose they had found some way to shield from the effects of the Barrier’s field,” suggested Magee. “Anyhow, that’s not the point for us. The point is: they’ve made this combine; the Free State supplies the techniques and most of the officers; and New America, with its bigger population, supplies most of the men. And that means to us that we don’t dare show our faces anyplace, or we are in the army before you can blink.

“Which brings me to what I was going to suggest. I’m going to duck out of here as soon as it gets dark and light out for the gateway before they send somebody after me who is bright enough to look under a table. I thought maybe you might want to come along.”

“Back to the psychologists?” MacKinnon was aghast.

“Sure—why not? What have you got to lose? This whole damn place is going to be just like the Free State in a couple of days—and a Joe of your temperament would be in hot water all the time. What’s so bad about a nice quiet hospital room as a place to hide out until things quiet down? You don’t have to pay any attention to the psychiatrists—just make animal noises at ‘em every time one sticks his nose into your room until they get discouraged.”

Dave shook his head. “No,” he said slowly, “I can’t do that.”

“Then what will you do?”

“I don’t know yet. Take to the hills, I guess. Go live with the Angels if it comes to a showdown. I wouldn’t mind them praying for my soul as long as they left my mind alone.”

They were each silent for a while. Magee was mildly annoyed at MacKinnon’s bull-headed stubbornness in the face of what seemed to him a reasonable offer. Dave continued busily to stow away grilled ham while considering his position. He cut off another bite. “My, but this is good,” he remarked, to break the awkward silence, “I don’t know when I’ve had anything taste so good. Say—”

“What?” inquired Magee, looking up and seeing the concern written on MacKinnon’s face.

“This ham—is it synthetic, or is it *real meat*?”

“Why, it’s real. What about it?”

Dave did not answer. He managed to reach the refreshing room before that which he had eaten left him.

~ * ~

Before he left, Magee gave Dave some money with which he could have purchased for him things that he would need in order to take to the hills. MacKinnon protested, but the Fader cut him short. “Quit being a damn fool, Dave. I can’t use New American money on the Outside, and you can’t stay alive in the hills without proper equipment.

You lie doggo here for a few days while Al or Molly picks up what you need, and you'll stand a chance—unless you'll change your mind and come with me?"

Dave shook his head at this and accepted the money.

It was lonely after Magee left. Mother Johnston and Dave were alone in the club, and the empty chairs reminded him depressingly of the men who had been impressed. He wished that Gramps or the one-handed man would show up. Even Alec, with his nasty temper, would have been company—he wondered if Alec had been punished for resisting the draft.

Mother Johnston inveigled him into playing checkers in an attempt to relieve his evident low spirits. He felt obligated to agree to her gentle conspiracy, but his mind wandered. It was all very well for the senior judge to tell him to seek adventure in interplanetary exploration, but only engineers and technicians were eligible for such billets. Perhaps he should have gone in for science, or engineering, instead of literature; then he might now be on Venus, contending against the forces of nature in high adventure instead of hiding from uniformed bullies. It wasn't fair. No—he must not kid himself; there was no room for an expert in literary history in the raw frontier of the planets; that was not human injustice, that was a hard fact of nature, and he might as well face it.

He thought bitterly of the man whose nose he had broken and thereby landed himself in Coventry. Maybe he was an "upholstered parasite," after all—but the recollection of the phrase brought back the same unreasoning anger that had gotten him into trouble. Involuntarily he let his cortex drop out of his circuit of consciousness, and he let himself be dominated by his throbbing, emotional thalamus—the "old brain" of his prehistoric, tooth-and-claw ancestors, with its undelayed reactions and unreasoned evaluations. He was glad that he had socked that so-and-so! What right had he to go around sneering and calling people things like that?

He found himself thinking in the same vindictive spirit of his father, although he would have been at loss to explain the connection. As a matter of fact, the connection is not superficially evident, for his father would never have stooped to name-calling. Instead, he would have offered the sweetest of smiles and quoted something nauseating in the way of sweetness and light. For Dave's father was one of the nastiest little tyrants that ever dominated a household under the guise of loving kindness. He was of the more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger, this-hurts-me-more-than-it-does-you-son school, and all his life had invariably been able to find an altruistic rationalization for always having his own way. Convinced of his own infallible righteousness, he had never valued his son's point of view on anything, but had dominated him in everything—always from the highest moralistic motives.

He had had two main bad effects on his son: the boy's natural independence, crushed at home, rebelled blindly at every sort of discipline, authority, or criticism which he encountered elsewhere and subconsciously identified with the not-to-be-criticized paternal authority. And secondly, through years of association he imitated his father's

most dangerous social vice—that of passing unself-critical moral judgments on the actions of others.

When Dave was arrested for breaking a basic custom—to wit, atavistic violence—his father washed his hands of him with the statement that he had tried his best to make a man of him, and could not be blamed for his son's failure to profit by his instruction.

A faint knock caused them to put away the checkerboard in a hurry. Mother Johnston paused before answering. "That's not our knock," she considered, "but it's not loud enough to be the nosies. Be ready to hide."

MacKinnon waited by the fox hole where he had hidden the night before, while Mother Johnston went to investigate. He heard her unbar and unlock the upper door, then she called out to him in a low but urgent voice, "Dave! Come here, Dave—hurry!"

It was Fader, unconscious, with his own bloody trail behind him.

Mother Johnston was attempting to pick up the limp form. MacKinnon crowded in, and between the two of them they managed to get him downstairs and to lay him on the long table. He came to for a moment as they straightened his limbs. "Hi, Dave," he whispered, managing to achieve the ghost of his debonair grin, "somebody trumped my ace."

"You keep quiet!" Mother Johnston snapped at him, then in a lower voice to Dave, "Oh, the poor darling—Dave, we must get him to the doctor."

"Can't... do ... that," muttered the Fader. "Got ... to get to the ... gate—" His voice trailed off. Mother Johnston's fingers had been busy all the while, as if activated by some separate intelligence. A small pair of scissors, drawn from some hiding place about her large person, clipped away at his clothing, exposing the superficial extent of the damage. She examined the trauma critically.

"This is no job for me," she decided, "and he must sleep while we move him. Dave, get that hypodermic kit out of the medicine chest in the 'fresher."

"No, Mother!" It was Magee, his voice strong and vibrant. "Get me a pepper pill. There's—"

"But, Fader—"

He cut her short. "I've got to get to the doctor, all right, but how the devil will I get there if I don't walk?"

"We would carry you."

"Thanks, Mother," he told her, his voice soft. "But the police would be curious. Get me that pill."

Dave followed her into the 'fresher and questioned her while she rummaged through the medicine chest. "Why don't we just send for a doctor?"

"There is only one doctor we can trust, and that's *the* doctor. Besides, none of the others are worth the powder to blast them."

Magee was out again when they came back into the room. Mother Johnston slapped his face until he came around, blinking and cursing. Then she fed him the pill.

The powerful stimulant, esoteric offspring of common coal tar, took hold almost at once. To all surface appearance Magee was a well man. He sat up and tried his own pulse, searching it out in his left wrist with steady, sensitive fingers. "Steady as a metronome," he announced. "The old ticker can stand that dosage, all right."

Magee waited while Mother Johnston applied sterile packs to his wounds, and then said good-by. MacKinnon looked at Mother Johnston. She nodded.

"I'm going with you," he told the Fader.

"What for? It will just double the risk."

"You're in no fit shape to travel alone—stimulant or no stimulant."

"Nuts. *I'd* have to look after *you*."

"I'm going with you."

Magee shrugged his shoulders and capitulated.

Mother Johnston wiped her perspiring face and kissed both of them.

~ * ~

Until they were well out of town their progress reminded MacKinnon of their nightmare flight of the previous evening. Thereafter they continued to the north-northwest by a highway which ran toward the foothills, and left the highway only when necessary to avoid the sparse traffic. Once they were almost surprised by a police patrol car, equipped with black light and nearly invisible, but the Fader sensed it in time and they crouched behind a low wall at the side of the road.

Dave inquired how he had known the patrol was near. Magee chuckled. "Damned if I know," he said, "but I believe I could smell a cop staked out in a herd of goats."

The Fader talked less and less as the night progressed. His usually untroubled countenance became lined and old as the effect of the drug wore off. It seemed to Dave as if this unaccustomed expression gave him a clearer insight into the man's character—that the mask of pain were his true face rather than the unworried features Magee habitually showed the world. He wondered for the nth time what the Fader had done to cause a court to adjudge him socially insane.

This question was uppermost in his mind with respect to every person he met in Coventry. The answer was fairly obvious in most cases; their types of instability were gross and showed up at once. Mother Johnston had been an enigma until she had explained it herself. She had followed her husband into Coventry. Now that she was a widow she preferred to remain with the friends she knew and the customs and conditions she was adjusted to, rather than change for a possibly less pleasing environment.

Magee sat down beside the road. "It's no use, kid," he admitted, "I can't make it."

"The hell we can't. I'll carry you."

Magee grinned faintly.

"No, I mean it," Dave persisted. "How much farther is it?"

"Matter of two or three miles, maybe."

“Climb aboard.” He took him pickaback and started on.

The first few hundred yards were not too difficult; Magee was forty pounds lighter than Dave. After that the strain of the additional load began to tell. His arms cramped from supporting Magee’s knees; his arches complained at the weight and the unnatural load distribution; and his breathing was made difficult by the clasp of Magee’s arms around his neck.

Two miles to go—maybe more. Let your weight fall forward and your foot must follow it, else you fall to the ground. It’s automatic—as automatic as pulling teeth. How long is a mile? Nothing in a rocketship, thirty seconds in a pleasure car, a ten-minute crawl in a steel snail, fifteen minutes to trained troops in good condition. How far is it with a man on your back, on a rough road, when you are tired to start with?

Five thousand two hundred and eighty feet—a meaningless figure. But every step takes twenty-four inches off the total. The remainder is still incomprehensible—an infinity. Count them. Count them till you go crazy—till the figures speak themselves outside your head, and the jar!—jar!—jar! of your benumbed feet beats in your brain.

His world closed in, lost its history and held no future. There was nothing, nothing at all but the torturing necessity of picking up his foot again and placing it forward. No feeling but the heartbreaking expenditure of will necessary to achieve that meaningless act.

MacKinnon was brought suddenly to awareness when Magee’s arms relaxed from around his neck. He leaned forward and dropped to one knee to keep from spilling his burden, then eased it slowly to the ground. He thought for a moment that the Fader was dead—he could not locate his pulse, and the slack face and limp body were sufficiently corpselike, but he pressed an ear to Magee’s chest and heard with relief the steady *flub-dub* of the heart.

He tied Magee’s wrists together with his handkerchief and forced his own head through, the encircled arms. But he was unable, in his exhausted condition, to wrestle the slack weight into position on his back.

Fader regained consciousness while MacKinnon was struggling. His first words were, “Take it easy, Dave. What’s the trouble?”

Dave explained. “Better untie my wrists,” advised the Fader, “I think I can walk for a while.”

And walk he did, for nearly three hundred yards, before he was forced to give up again. “Look, Dave,” he said after he had partially recovered, “did you bring along any more of those pepper pills?”

“Yes—but you can’t take any more. It would kill you.”

“Yeah, I know—so they say. But that isn’t the idea—yet. I was going to suggest that you might take one.”

“Why, of course! Good grief, Fader, but I’m dumb.”

Magee seemed no heavier than a light coat, the morning star shone brighter, and his strength seemed inexhaustible. Even when they left the highway and started up the cart trail that led to the doctor’s home in the foothills, the going was tolerable and

the burden not too great. MacKinnon knew that the drug burned the working tissue of his body long after his proper reserves were gone, and that it would take him days to recover from the reckless expenditure, but he did not mind. No price was too high to pay for the moment when he at last arrived at the gate of the doctor's home—on his own two feet, his charge alive and conscious.

~ * ~

MacKinnon was not allowed to see Magee for four days. In the meantime, he was encouraged to keep the routine of a semi-invalid himself in order to recover the twenty-five pounds he had lost in two days and two nights, and to make up for the heavy strain on his heart during the last night. A high caloric diet, sun baths, rest, and peaceful surroundings, plus his natural good health, caused him to regain weight and strength rapidly, but he “enjoyed ill health” exceedingly because of the companionship of the doctor himself—and Persephone.

Persephone's calendar age was fifteen. Dave never knew whether to think of her as much older or much younger. She had been born in Coventry, and had lived her short life in the house of the doctor, her mother having died in childbirth in that same house. She was completely childlike in many respects, being without experience in the civilized world Outside, and having had very little contact with the inhabitants of Coventry, except when she saw them as patients of the doctor. But she had been allowed to read unchecked from the library of a sophisticated and protean-minded man of science. MacKinnon was continually being surprised at the extent of her academic and scientific knowledge—much greater than his own. She made him feel as if he were conversing with some aged and omniscient matriarch, then she would come out with some naive conception of the outer world, and he would be brought up sharply with the realization that she was, in fact, an inexperienced child.

He was mildly romantic about her. Not seriously, of course, in view of her barely nubile age, but she was pleasant to see, and he was hungry for feminine companionship. He was young enough himself to feel a continual interest in the delightful differences, mental and physical, between the male and the female of his species. The cock-bird strutted and preened his feathers.

Consequently it was a blow to his pride as sharp as had been the sentence to Coventry to discover that she classed him with the other inhabitants of Coventry as a poor unfortunate who needed help and sympathy because he was not quite right in his head.

He was furiously indignant, and for one whole day he sulked alone, but the human necessity for self-justification and approval forced him to seek her out and attempt to reason with her. He explained carefully, with complete emotional candor, the circumstances leading up to his trial and conviction, and embellished the account with his own philosophy, then awaited her approval.

It was not forthcoming. "I don't understand your viewpoint," she said. "You did him a very real damage when you broke his nose, yet he had done you no damage of any sort. Apparently you expect me to approve that."

"But, Persephone," he protested, "you ignore the fact that he called me a most insulting name."

"I don't see the connection," she said. "He made a noise with his mouth—a verbal label. If the condition designated by the verbal label does not apply to you, the noise is meaningless. If the noise is a label customarily used to designate a condition which is true in your case—if you *are* the thing that the noise refers to, you are neither more nor less that thing by reason of someone uttering the verbal label. In short, the noise has not damaged you."

"But what you did to him was another matter entirely. You broke his nose. That is damage. In sheer self-protection, the rest of society must seek you out and determine whether or not you are so unstable as to be likely to damage someone else in the future. If you are, you must be treated or leave society—whichever you prefer."

"You think I'm crazy, don't you?" he accused.

"Crazy? Not the way you mean it. You haven't paresis, or a brain tumor, or any other lesion that the doctor could find. But from the viewpoint of your semantic reactions you are as socially *unsane* as any fanatic witch burner."

"Come, now—that's hardly just!"

"What is justice?" She picked up the kitten she had been playing with. "I'm going in—it's getting chilly." And off she went, her bare feet noiseless in the grass.

~ * ~

Had the science of semantics developed as rapidly as psychodynamics, and its implementing arts of propaganda and mob psychology, the United States might never have fallen into dictatorship, then been forced to undergo the Second Revolution. All of the scientific principles embodied in the Covenant which marked the end of the revolution were formulated as far back as the first quarter of the twentieth century.

But the work of the pioneer semanticists, C. K. Ogden in England and Alfred Korzybski in the United States, were known to but a handful of students, whereas psycho-dynamics, under the impetus of repeated wars and the frenzy of high-pressure merchandising, progressed by leaps and bounds. It is true that the mathematical aspects of semantics, as developed by Albert Einstein, Eric T. Bell, and others, were well known, even popular, but the charlatans who practiced the pseudoscience of sociology refused to apply the methods of science to their monopoly.

Semantics, "the meaning of meaning," as Ogden expressed it, or "theory of evaluations" as Korzybski preferred to call it, gave a method for the first time of applying the scientific viewpoint and procedure to every act of everyday life. Because semantics dealt with spoken and written words as a determining aspect of human behavior, it was at first mistakenly thought by many to be concerned only with words and of

interest only to professional word manipulators, such as advertising copywriters and professors of etymology. A handful of unorthodox psychiatrists alone attempted to apply it to personal human problems, but their work was swept away by the epidemic mass psychoses that destroyed Europe and returned the United States to the Dark Ages.

The Covenant was the first scientific social document ever drawn up by a man, and due credit must be given to its principal author, Colonel Micah Novak, the same Novak who served as staff psychologist in the revolution. The revolutionists wished to establish in the United States the maximum personal liberty possible for every one. Given the data—the entire social matrix—how could they accomplish that?

First they junked all previous concepts of justice. Examined semantically, justice has no referent—there is no observable phenomenon in the space-time-matter continuum to which one can point and say, “This is justice.” Science can deal only with that which can be observed and measured. Justice is not such a matter; it can never have the same meaning to one as to another; any “noises” said about it will only add to confusion.

But damage, physical or economic, could be pointed to and measured. Citizens were forbidden by the Covenant to damage another, and laws were passed to anticipate such damage. Any act not leading to damage, physical or economic, to some person, they declared to be legal.

As they had abandoned the concept of justice, there could be no rational standards of punishment. Penology took its place with lycanthropy and other forgotten witchcrafts. Yet, since it was not practical to permit a probable source of danger to remain in the community, social offenders were examined and potential repeaters were given their choice of psychological readjustment, or of having society withdraw itself from them—Coventry.

During the formulation of the Covenant, some assumed that the socially insane would naturally be forced to undergo hospitalization for readjustment, particularly since current psychiatry was quite competent to cure all nonlesioned psychoses and cure or alleviate lesional psychoses, but Novak set his face against this and opposed it with all the power of his strong and subtle intellect. “Not so!” he argued. “The government must never again be permitted to tamper with the mind of any citizen without his consent, or else we set up a means of greater tyranny than we have ever experienced. Every man must be free to reject the Covenant, even if we think him insane!”

The next time MacKinnon looked up Persephone he found her in a state of extreme agitation. His own wounded pride was forgotten at once. “Why, my dear,” he said, “whatever in the world is the matter?”

Gradually he gathered that she had been present at a conversation between Magee and the doctor, and had heard, for the first time, of the impending military operations against the United States. He patted her hand. “So that’s all it is,” he observed in a relieved voice. “I thought something was wrong with you yourself.”

“ ‘That’s all.’ David MacKinnon, do you mean to stand there and tell me that you knew about this and don’t consider it worth worrying about?”

“Me? Why should I? Anyhow, what could *I* do?”

“What could you do? You could go Outside and warn them—that’s what you. could do. As to why you should— Dave, you’re impossible!” She burst into tears and ran from the room.

He stared after her, mouth open.

Persephone did not appear at lunch. MacKinnon asked the doctor where she was.

“Had her lunch,” the doctor told him between mouthfuls. “Started for the gateway.”

“What! Why did you let her do that?”

“Free agent. Wouldn’t have obeyed me, anyway. She’ll be all right.”

Dave did not hear the last, being already out of the room, and running out of the house. He found her just backing her little monocycle runabout out of its shed. “Persephone!”

“What do you want?” she asked with a frozen dignity beyond her years.

“You mustn’t do this! That’s where the Fader got hurt!”

“I am going. Please stand aside.”

“Then I’m going with you.”

“Why should you?”

“To take care of you.”

She sniffed. “As if anyone would dare to touch me.”

There was a measure of truth in what she said. The doctor and every member of his household enjoyed a personal immunity unlike that of anyone else in Coventry. As a natural consequence of the set-up, Coventry had almost no competent medical men. The number of physicians who committed social damage was small. The proportion of such that declined psychiatric treatment was negligible, and this negligible remainder were almost sure to be unreliable bunglers in their profession. The doctor was a natural healer, in voluntary exile in order that he might enjoy the opportunity to practice his art in the richest available field. He cared nothing for dry research; what he wanted was patients that he might make well.

He was above custom and above law. In the Free State the Liberator depended on him for insulin to hold his own death from diabetes at arm’s length. In New America his beneficiaries were equally powerful. Even among the Angels of the Lord the Prophet himself accepted the dicta of the doctor without question.

But MacKinnon was not satisfied. Some ignorant fool, he was afraid, might do the child some harm without realizing her protected status. He got no further chance to protest; she started the little runabout suddenly and forced him to jump out of its path. When he had recovered his balance she was far down the lane.

Persephone was back in less than four hours. He had expected that; if a person as elusive as Fader had not been able to “reach the gate at night, it was not likely that a young girl could do so in daylight.

His first feeling was one of simple relief, then he eagerly awaited an opportunity to speak to her. During her absence he had been turning over the situation in his mind. It was a foregone conclusion that she would fail; he wished to rehabilitate himself in her eyes; therefore, he would help her in the project nearest her heart—he himself would carry the warning to the Outside!

Perhaps she would ask for such help. In fact, it seemed likely. By the time she returned he had convinced himself that she was certain to ask his help. He would agree—with simple dignity—and off he would go, perhaps to be wounded or killed, but a heroic figure even if he failed.

He pictured himself subconsciously as a blend of Sidney Carton, the White Knight, the man who carried the message to Garcia—and just a dash of D'Artagnan.

But she did not ask him—she would not even give him a chance to talk with her.

She did not appear at dinner. After dinner she was closeted with the doctor in his study. When she finally reappeared she went directly to her room. He finally concluded that he might as well go to bed himself.

To bed, and then to sleep, and take it up again in the morning— But it's not as simple as that. The unfriendly walls stared back at him, and the other, critical half of his mind decided to make a night of it. Fool! She doesn't want your help. Why should she? What have you got that Fader hasn't got—and better? To her you are just one of the screw-loose multitude you've seen all around you.

But I'm not crazy! Just because I choose not to submit to the dictation of others doesn't make me crazy. Doesn't it, though? All the rest of them in here are lamebrains; what's so fancy about you? Not all of them. How about the doctor, and— Don't kid yourself, chump, the doctor and Mother Johnston are here for their own reasons; they weren't sentenced. And Persephone was born here.

How about Magee? He was certainly rational—or seemed so. He found himself resenting, with illogical bitterness, Magee's apparent stability. Why should he be any different from the rest of us?

The rest of us? He had classed himself with the other inhabitants of Coventry. All right, all right, admit it, you fool. You're just like the rest of them; turned out because the decent people won't have you—and too damned stubborn to admit that you need treatment.

But the thought of treatment turned him cold and made him think of his father again. Why should that be? He recalled something the doctor had said to him a couple of days before: "What you need, son, is to stand up to your father and tell him off."

He turned on the light and tried to read. But it was no use. Why should Persephone care what happened to the people Outside? She didn't know them; she had no friends there. If he felt no obligations to them, how could she possibly care? No obligations? You had a soft, easy life for many years—all they asked was that you behave yourself. For that matter, where would you be now if the doctor had stopped to ask whether or not he owed you anything?

He was still wearily chewing the bitter cud of self-examination when the first cold and colorless light of morning filtered in. He got up, pulled a robe around him and tip-toed down the hall to Magee's room. The door was ajar. He stuck his head in and whispered, "Fader. Are you awake?"

"Come in, kid," Magee answered quietly. "What's the trouble? No can sleep?"

"No—"

"Neither can I. Sit down."

"Fader, I'm going to make a break for it. I'm going Outside."

"Huh? When?"

"Right away."

"Risky business, kid. Wait a few days and I'll try it with you."

"No, I can't wait for you to get well. I'm going out to warn the United States!"

Magee's eyes widened a little, but his voice was unchanged. "You haven't let that spindly kid sell you a bill of goods, Dave?"

"No. Not exactly. I'm doing this for myself. It's something I need to do. See here, Fader, what about this weapon? Have they really got something that could threaten the United States?"

"I'm afraid so," Magee admitted. "I don't know much about it, but it makes blasters look sick. More range. I don't know what they expect to do about the Barrier, but I saw 'em stringing heavy power lines before I got winged. Say, if you do get Outside, here's a chap you might look up; in fact, be sure to. He's got influence." Magee scrawled something on a scrap of paper, folded the scrap and handed it to MacKinnon, who pocketed it absentmindedly and went on:

"How closely is the gate guarded, Fader?"

"You can't get out the gate; that's out of the question. Here's what you will have to do—" He tore off another piece of paper and commenced sketching and explaining.

Dave shook hands with Magee before he left. "You'll say good-by for me, won't you? And thank the doctor? I'd rather just slide out before anyone is up."

"Of course, kid," the Fader assured him. "Well—watch out for that first step; it's a honey!"

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MacKinnon crouched behind the bushes and peered cautiously at the little band of Angels filing into the bleak, ugly church. He shivered, both from fear and from the icy morning air. But his need was greater than his fear. These zealots had food—and he must have it.

The first two days after he left the house of the doctor had been fair enough. True, he had caught cold from sleeping on the ground; it had settled in his lungs and slowed him down. But he did not mind that now, if only he could refrain from sneezing or coughing until the little band of faithful were safe inside the temple. He watched them

pass—dour-looking men, women in skirts that dragged the ground and whose work-lined faces were framed in shawls. The light had gone out of their faces. The very children were sober.

The last of them filed inside, leaving only the sexton in the churchyard, busy with some obscure duty. After an interminable time, during which MacKinnon pressed a finger against his upper lip in a frantic attempt to forestall a sneeze, the sexton, too, entered the grim building and closed the doors.

MacKinnon crept out of his hiding place and hurried to the house he had previously selected on the edge of the clearing, farthest from the church.

The dog was suspicious, but he quieted him. The house was locked, but the rear door could be forced. He was a little giddy at the sight of food when he found it—hard bread and strong, unsalted butter made from goat's milk. A misstep two days before had landed him in a mountain stream. The mishap had not seemed important until he discovered that his food tablets were a pulpy mess. He had eaten them the rest of that day, then mold had taken them and he had thrown the remainder away.

The bread lasted him through three more sleeps, but the butter melted and he was unable to carry it. He soaked as much of it as he could into the bread, then licked up the rest, after which he was very thirsty. He found one more stream, but was forced to leave it when it left the hills and entered cultivated country.

Some hours after the last of the bread was gone he reached his first objective—the main river to which all other streams in Coventry were tributary. Some place downstream it dived under the black curtain of the Barrier, and continued seaward. With the gateway closed and guarded, its outlet constituted the only possible egress.

In the meantime it was water, and the thirst was upon him again, and his cold was worse. But he would have to wait until dark to drink; there were figures down there by the bank—some in uniform, he thought. One of them made fast a little skiff to a landing. He marked it for his own and watched it with jealous eyes. It was still there when the sun went down.

The early-morning sun struck his nose and he sneezed. He came wide awake, raised his head and looked around. The little skiff he had appropriated floated in midstream. There were no oars. He could not remember whether or not there had been any oars. The current was fairly strong; it seemed as if he should have drifted clear to the Barrier. Perhaps he had passed under it—no, that was ridiculous.

Then he saw it, less than a mile away, black and ominous—but the most welcome sight he had seen in days. He was too weak and feverish to enjoy it, but it renewed the determination that kept him going.

The little boat scraped against bottom. He saw that the current at a bend had brought him to the bank. He hopped awkwardly out, his congealed joints complaining, and drew the bow of the skiff up onto the sand. Then he thought better of it, pushed it out once more, shoved as hard as he was able and watched it disappear around the meander. No need to advertise where he had landed;

He slept most of that day, rousing himself once to move out of the sun when it grew too hot. But the sun had cooked much of the cold out of his bones, and he felt much better by nightfall.

Although the Barrier was only a mile or so away, it took most of the night to reach it by following the river bank. He knew when he had reached it by the clouds of steam that rose from the water. When the sun came up he considered the situation. The Barrier stretched across the water, but the juncture between it and the surface of the stream was hidden by billowing clouds. Some place, down under the surface of the water—how far down he did not know—somewhere down there the Barrier ceased, and its raw edge turned the water it touched to steam.

Slowly, reluctantly and most unheroically, he commenced to strip off his clothes. The time had come and he did not relish it. He came across the scrap of paper that Magee had handed him, and attempted to examine it. But it had been pulped by his involuntary dip in the mountain stream and was quite illegible. He chucked it away.

He shivered as he stood hesitating on the bank, although the sun was warm. Then his mind was made up for him; he spied a patrol on the far bank.

Perhaps they had seen him; perhaps not. He dived.

Down, down, as far as his strength would take him. Down, and try to touch bottom, to be sure of avoiding that searing, deadly base. He felt mud with his hands. Now to swim under it. Perhaps it was death to pass under it, as well as over it; he would soon know. But which way was it? There was no direction down here.

He stayed down until his congested lungs refused. Then he rose part way and felt scalding water on his face. For a timeless interval of unutterable sorrow and loneliness he realized that he was trapped between heat and water-trapped under the barrier.

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Two private soldiers gossiped idly on a small dock which lay under the face of the Barrier. The river which poured out from beneath it held no interest for them, they had watched it for many dull tours of guard duty. An alarm clanged behind them and brought them to alertness. "What sector, Jack?"

"This bank. There he is now—see!"

They fished him out and had him spread out on the dock by the time the sergeant of the guard arrived. "Alive or dead?" he inquired.

"Dead, I think," answered the one who was not busy giving artificial resuscitation.

The sergeant clucked in a manner incongruous to his battered face and said, "Too bad. I've ordered the ambulance; send him up to the infirmary, anyhow."

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The nurse tried to keep him quiet, but MacKinnon made such an uproar that she got the ward-surgeon.

"Here! Here! What's all this nonsense?" the medico rebuked him, while reaching for his pulse.

Dave managed to convince him that he would not quiet down nor accept a soporific until he had told his story. They struck a working agreement that MacKinnon was to be allowed to talk—"But keep it short, mind you!"—and the doctor would pass the word along to his next superior, and in return Dave would submit to a hypodermic.

The next morning two other men, unidentified, were brought to MacKinnon by the surgeon. They listened to his full story and questioned him in detail. He was transferred to corps area headquarters that afternoon by ambulance. There he was questioned again. He was regaining his strength rapidly, but he was growing quite tired of the whole rigmarole and wanted assurance that his warning was being taken seriously. The latest of his interrogators reassured him. "Compose yourself," he told Dave, "you are to see the commander this afternoon."

The corps area commander, a nice little chap with a quick, birdlike manner and a most unmilitary appearance, listened gravely while MacKinnon recited his story for what seemed to him the fiftieth time. He nodded agreement when David finished. "Rest assured, David MacKinnon, that all necessary steps are being taken."

"But how about their weapon?"

"That is taken care of—and as for the Barrier, it may not be as easy to break as our neighbors think. But your efforts are appreciated. May I do you some service?"

"Well, no—not for myself, but there are two of my friends in there—" He asked that something be done to rescue Magee, and that Persephone be enabled to come out if she wished.

"I know of that girl," the general remarked. "We will get in touch with her. If at any time she wishes to become a citizen, it can be arranged. As for Magee, that is another matter—" He touched the stud of his desk visiphone. "Send Captain Randall in."

A neat, trim figure in the uniform of a captain of the United States army entered with a light step. MacKinnon glanced at him with casual, polite interest, then his expression went to pieces. "Fader!" he yelled.

Their mutual greeting was hardly sufficiently decorous for the sanctum sanctorum of a commanding general, but the general did not seem to mind. When they had calmed down, MacKinnon had to ask the question uppermost in his mind. "But see here, Fader, all this doesn't make sense—" He paused, staring, then pointed a finger accusingly, "I know! You're in the Secret Service!"

The Fader grinned cheerfully. "Did you think," he observed, "that the United States army would leave a plague spot like that unwatched?"

The general cleared his throat. "What do you plan to do now, David MacKinnon?"

"Eh? Me? Why, I don't have any plans—" He thought for a moment, then turned to his friend. "Do you know, Fader, I believe I'll turn in for psychological treatment, after all. You're on the Outside—"

"I don't believe that will be necessary," interrupted the general gently.

"No? Why not, sir?"

"You have cured yourself. You may not be aware of it, but four psychotechnicians have interviewed you. Their reports agree. I am authorized to tell you that your status as a free citizen has been restored, if you wish it."

The general and Captain "the Fader" Randall managed tactfully between them to terminate the interview. Randall walked back to the infirmary with his friend.

Dave wanted a thousand questions answered at once. "But, Fader," he demanded, "you must have gotten out before I did."

"A day or two."

"Then my job was unnecessary!"

"I wouldn't say that," Randall contradicted. "I might not have gotten through. As a matter of fact, they had all the details before I reported. There are others— Anyhow," he continued, to change the subject, "now that you are here, what will you do?"

"Me? It's too soon to say. It won't be classical literature, that's a cinch. If I wasn't such a dummy in math I might still try for interplanetary."

"Well, we can talk about it tonight," suggested Fader, glancing at his telechronometer. "I've got to run along, but I'll stop by later."

He was out the door with an easy speed that was nostalgic of the thieves' kitchen.

Dave watched him, then said suddenly, "Hey! Fader! Why couldn't I get into the Secret Ser—"

But the Fader had gone. He could only ask himself.

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THE OTHER WORLD....*by* *Murray Leinster*



DICK BLAIR dug up a Fifth Dynasty tomb in Lower Egypt and found that one object, and one only, had been spoiled by dampness in a climate which preserved all the other objects in the tomb to perfection. Almost simultaneously, in New York, a plumber carrying a kit of tools turned into a doorway on Eighth Avenue and was never seen again, living or dead. Shortly after, a half-ton of dried figs vanished inexplicably from a locked warehouse in Smyrna, and—in New York—a covered barge complete with a load of bricks and building materials evaporated into thin air while a night watchman gazed goggle-eyed. His account of the event was not believed.

There were other pertinent events even before these. One year in New York's history of the number of missing persons who had no reason to vanish went up to four times

normal. Most missing persons have their reasons for disappearing, but there are always a few who seem neither to have been murdered or to have absconded. This year the number of such cases was unprecedented, and there was no explanation for it at all.

There was the time seventy-five years before when the four prettiest members of a theatrical chorus went upstairs to doff their winter wraps in the home of a rich man who was giving a party, and never came down again. Then there was that indubitable were-wolf which was killed in Avino province in Italy, in the 1850's. It was classed only tentatively as wolf because it had some oddities of conformation, but it had intelligence at least equal to that of the peasants on whom it had preyed for two weeks before its destruction. It had killed and partly or wholly devoured twenty-two human beings in two weeks. The scientists of the time were very much annoyed when enraged peasants stormed the place where it was held for examination and burned the carcass to ashes.

Before that, there was the well-attested disappearance of the carriage of a semi-royal princeling in the Tyrol. It went around a curve in the carriage-road, and riding-footmen a hundred yards behind found it utterly gone when they rounded the curve in their turn. Six horses, a coachman and footman, and two of the princeling's mistresses—one of whom was said to be the most beautiful woman in Europe at the time—vanished in the twinkling of an eye and no trace was ever found of any of them. And still earlier there was that shipload of immigrants to the United States which was sighted only forty miles off Sandy Hook, pressing forward with all sail set on a perfectly fair day, which never reached harbor and from which not one particle of wreckage was ever found.

When these items are put together, they add up convincingly to mere nonsense. The farther back into history one delves, the less credible the affairs become.

[What follows has been cast in the form of fiction for obvious reasons. For one thing, it is extremely unlikely to be quoted in any newspaper. For another, it is extremely undesirable that any considerable group of people should take it for fact while any sizable residue of unexplained disappearances occur.—Murray Leinster]

But Dick Blair dug up a Fifth Dynasty tomb in Egypt and found that exactly one object had been ruined by dampness in a rock-hewn vault in which every other object had remained absolutely dry from the time of its entombment. That object meant the second discovery of the Other World and an explanation—*an* explanation—for very many mysteries which date back to the time of the Fifth Dynasty, five thousand years ago.

When he got back to New York, Dick Blair was very busy for a while, but at last, one night, he took a mass of greenish clay to his friend Tom Maltby. Dick was then only partly bleached out from the Egyptian sun, where he had dug out a previously untouched Fifth Dynasty tomb. But civilization already bored him. He was inclined to mourn the humdrumness of life in New York.

"This," he told Maltby, "is a hunk of dirt. It's colored with oxides, and once upon a time it contained something made by a worthy Egyptian at least five thousand years ago. At the Museum we're pretty good at re-forming objects that have been corroded

past recognition, but we have to have at least a sliver of metal to work on. The X-rays say this is absolutely gone.”

He handed over the X-ray negatives. They showed the distribution of the denser metallic oxides in the lump of clay. Maltby looked at them interestedly.

With a sliver of the original metal left,” Dick observed, “we run a contact down to it, use it as a cathode, run about a quarter-ampere to it for six months or so, and the oxides break down and the metal goes back to the shape it was originally in. It’s amazing how detailed the things get sometimes. We even find the original decorations. But this one beats us.” [This is literally true, and standard museum practice. Provided that the corroded metal in the clay has not been disturbed, excellent reversals of rusting processes are obtained and artifacts which would have been unrecognizable are regularly restored to a condition suitable for exhibition and study.—Murray Leinster.]

Maltby nodded.

“That’s what I want. I said I’d try to work out an improvement on your system. It’s in my line.”

Maltby was a consulting engineer specializing in the prevention of electrolytic damage by earth-currents. Every public utility has at least one engineer whose specialty is the prevention of damage of this type. Maltby was tops in the field. He’d checked the destruction of a very famous bridge, he had doctored a very modern skyscraper whose foundation-piles were being corroded even in their concrete sheaths, and his process for restoring rusted objects underground was not unlike museum methods for rebuilding prehistoric relics.

He put down the dried clay and mixed two drinks. Dick Blair settled down comfortably.

“That hunk of dirt is now officially your property,” he observed, “which is my doing. It may be a copper pot or pan or anything at all. I can’t figure out how it rusted. The place was absolute, stony, dessicated desert without a drop of water for miles. The tomb was bone-dry and nothing else showed any trace of damage by moisture. Where’d the moisture come from?”

Maltby sipped at his drink. Dick went on:

“More oddities about that tomb— Its occupant wasn’t a king, but he was fitted out for the afterlife in royal style! There were more imported objects in that tomb than you could shake a stick at. There was stuff from Cyprus, from Phoenicia, from Ethiopia, from Mycenae, and slathers of regular Egyptian stuff. The writings in the tomb are weird. He was a sort of royal physician and miracle-worker, who happened to be cousin to the Pharaoh. There was a papyrus on medicine which is going to raise the devil! You simply can’t translate it except as a description of the circulation of the blood— forty-seven hundred years before modern men knew of it. Another scroll is crazier. It describes animals which simply don’t exist. The prize is a description of a small horse with three toes. I may add that the eohippus did not survive until his time. How’d he get such an idea?”

Maltby shrugged.

"Fairy tales can't always be wrong," he said. "Make enough fantastic statements, and some are bound to be right. You'd have trouble showing me there was modern knowledge fifty centuries ago, papyri or no papyri."

Dick Blair grinned. "The old chap in the tomb had modern ideas. I don't know whether you know it, but there were Pharaohs who never had even civil wars, much less foreign ones. He claimed , he handled that for his cousin. Anybody who even thought evil of the king died mysteriously. And he boasted of the dirt he did to the King of Cyprus of his time. Magic, but modern."

Maltby raised his eyebrows. Dick went on zestfully:

"His funeral boasts say that a King of Cyprus had a pretty daughter and the then Pharaoh sent a message demanding her for his harem. The King of Cyprus refused. So before his whole court he vanished in a pool of quicksilver. My old gent declares he worked that. The King of Cyprus' son got ready to fight, but instead he and all his family—including the princess—died in a palace which poured out flames at every window. The next ruler was suitably abject and sent tribute. Nearly the same process happened in Phoenicia, Ethiopia and Mycenae."

Maltby looked at the lump of clay. He said mildly, "Such a potent magician must have put a curse on his tomb in case anybody should rob it. Don't tell me he omitted that!"

Dick grinned again, and then said in sudden half-seriousness: "Speaking of curses, an odd thing happened in Alexandria while I was there. The very pretty daughter of one of the richest men in town vanished from her bed, with two maid-servants watching her. She vanished in a pool of quicksilver. They screamed like all hell, and all her father did was throw dust on his head and die of a broken heart. That one made the newspapers, but the old *sheykhs* of Alexandria weren't surprised. They said it happens occasionally and has since time began. The funny thing is that the quicksilver business—"

He stopped and looked startled. Maltby said: "That King of Cyprus you mentioned?"

"Y-Yes," said Dick blankly. "I never thought of the connection before. Odd, isn't it?"

Maltby said deliberately, "I know a chap who is digging into criminology. He's a queer duck. He has all the money in the world, but he's working like a beaver to set himself up as a consulting criminologist. And he says that he can't understand some records he's found. It seems there are several records of things disappearing in pools of quicksilver right here in New York. It doesn't make sense, and nobody's ever believed it. I must tell him about the King of Cyprus."

Dick blinked.

"That's crazy! In the Middle East quicksilver is considered more or less magical—"

"Mirages on a motor-road look like quicksilver," observed Maltby. "I've seen a film of gas, formed in an electrolyte, look like it too... Now I'm going to set up my apparatus for your hunk of clay."

He got out his gadgets. He had devised this particular set-up to work out his corrosion-reversal process for buildings. It was laboratory-size only, but it would serve for the clay. There was a plastic box with electrodes at its sides. He packed the relic

into the box, filling the unoccupied space with more clay. A high-frequency oscillator came into play.

"There's no metal in this stuff to serve as a cathode," he observed, "and it's just as well. I'm setting up a standing wave in the middle of this clay mass. There'll be a constant potential difference between the middle and the outer surface. When the clay's moistened there'll be a steady flow of plating-out current from every direction toward the center. Presently some particle of metal will establish itself. Maybe several. I may have a dozen centers of potential—they'll establish themselves wherever the oxide is densest. Then we'll see what happens. I think the result should be pretty good, but it'll take time."

"At the museum," said Dick, "we figure on six months."

"I estimate two weeks," said Maltby, drily. "My current-flow depends on the ions present, not on power fed to it. I'm not feeding current in at all. It makes its own."

He arranged a moistening solution so that the clay would gradually acquire an even moisture-content. He turned on the oscillator and brushed off his hands.

"Now we wait. Have another drink?"

"No-o," said Dick. "Just what did you mean by that quicksilver business? It's odd to hear a story like that in New York. I didn't believe the one in Alexandria, though the local inhabitants did. And it's absurd to link them with an ancient papyrus with the same yarn in it!"

"I didn't mean a thing," admitted Maltby. "You spoke of a girl vanishing, and quicksilver, and of a forgotten king vanishing, and quicksilver. So I remembered Sam Todd telling me about a safe that was opened only a month ago in a perfume factory, and the flasks of essential oils worth up to hundreds of dollars an ounce vanishing in as many tiny pools of quicksilver. It seemed odd, so I mentioned it. That's all."

"I'd like to talk to this Sam Todd," said Dick. "I hate to be silly, but that's too damned queer—"

~ * ~

Dick Blair went about his business, which was partly that of relaxation just now. He'd been through a grueling grind in Egypt, and probably had a few tropical germs in his system which it would be a good idea to get out. He gave a lecture or two, wrote a magazine article, and kept himself available for consultation if needed by the Museum staff. But mostly he rested.

He met Sam Todd and found him a kindred soul who was, at the moment, almost ready to achieve his great ambition—to become a consulting criminologist with something to offer his clients. His material on quicksilver-pool disappearances and thefts was fascinating. The list went back for over seventy-five years. The tales were so impossible that it was only rarely that they had ever reached print, and that made it the more remarkable that on at least a dozen occasions the same story was told by persons who could not have heard of the others. A famous stallion vanished and when a groom

looked in his stall there were four little pools of quicksilver descending to the floor. The horse was gone. There were other quicksilver droplets scattered here and there about the straw bedding on the floor, but they vanished too. No quicksilver was found when the stall was searched afterward. The old Delmonico's was robbed of priceless wines. The wine bottles disappeared in round and oblong pools of quicksilver, which afterwards vanished too. Only one person saw them. There was the disappearance of an obscure dancer—by no means talented—who had been said to be the prettiest girl on the New York stage that season. Her dresser, and a stage-hand called by the dresser's shrieks, claimed that they saw quicksilver as the girl vanished. That quicksilver could not be found, either.

The only common factor in all the tales was the absence of a sequel. Not one of the vanished things, whether persons or goods, had ever been found again. No *corpus delicti*. No underworld boastings. Nothing.

All of this brought Dick's curiosity to the point where it became almost an obsession. Then he met Nancy Holt. Sam Todd had employed her to do research for him; she would be part of his staff when he opened his office. He thought a great deal of her brains, but the only personal fact he had noted about her was that she used a strictly personal perfume, which she said was made from a recipe of her grandmother's.

But Dick Blair saw her as the one girl on earth whom he could not possibly let anybody else marry. He fell hard the first time he saw her. By the third time he was sunk so completely that she knew it too. And then he had an occupation which was at once relaxing and absorbing. He got busy trying to make her fall in love with him.

Meanwhile, the electrolytic reconstruction of the object in the plastic box went on. After four days, X-rays showed half a dozen small bits of solid metal in the clay. In six they had joined, three of them to form the beginning of a round flat disk, and the others still separated at odd angles to it. In eight days they were all joined. There was an irregular disk some four inches in diameter. It had a rod projecting from one side, and there were two branches from the rod. In ten days the object was recognizable. It was a ceremonial mirror with a cruciform handle, a *crux ansata*, part of an Egyptian Pharaoh's royal regalia through all the years down to Alexander the Great. Its significance was that the Pharaoh was monarch not only of this world, but of the Other World beyond.

The outlines of the one in the clay were still rough. It was still being re-formed by the current the standing-waves induced. Two days later the X-rays showed an odd, disk-shaped shadow that Maltby could not understand. On the fourteenth day he had still made no sense of it at all, but the X-rays indicated that all metal in the clay had been returned to its original shape. The object was as completely restored as Maltby's apparatus could make it. He called Dick on the phone to come and uncover it, with the precautions an archaeologist would take.

Dick arrived at Maltby's flat, "Dammit, I tried to get Nancy to come along, but Sam had some photographs he wants made in the Police Museum. She's busy listing

the subjects for the photographer. Bludgeons and sashweights and ice-picks and other objects used by various murderers to express their lethal impulses. Damn!"

"That clay mess," said Maltby mildly, "seems to have yielded a *crux ansata*. Interesting?"

"Rather early for such things," said Dick restlessly. "And that mummy shouldn't have had one in his tomb. He wasn't a king."

"I can't make out," said Maltby, "a disk that the X-rays show in the clay. It appeared quite suddenly at the very end of the process, and it's quite opaque to X-rays. Even copper lets a little hard radiation go through. Any ideas?"

Dick shook his head, still thinking of Nancy. When Maltby dumped the clay out of the plastic box, though, his interest rose. He spurned a proffered knife and briskly cut a wooden spatula to carve the clay with. He looked at the X-ray negatives and placed the clay block just so. Then he made curiously surgeon-like incisions and laid the clay back cleanly. In only seconds he lifted out the golden-copper crux exactly as shown by the X-rays, and regarded it with astonishment.

"It's perfect," he said blankly, "—and there's glass!"

The four-inch disk had seemed a solid mass of metal. Now the center was plainly transparent. They could see through it. Dick put it to one side and probed for the other disk, supposedly six inches from it, which should still be buried in the clay.

It wasn't there.

He searched for minutes, until the clay lump was dissected into portions in which the imaged second disk could not be hidden.

"Queer," said Dick. "We'll use the X-ray again later. I want to look over this thing. Extraordinarily early for good glass! Really clear glass didn't turn up until late in Roman times. Maybe it's crystal."

He picked it up impatiently. He cleaned the transparent surface from the front. He reached behind to clean the back, and his face went bewildered. He could feel the back of the mirror. It was metal. But he couldn't see his fingers. He saw through them. Beyond them.

"Now, what the devil—"

He held up the thing and looked through it. He could see Maltby and the other side of the room. He took a book and slid it past the back of the supposed glass. It did not impede the view at all. He still saw Maltby and the other side of the room. The book seemed to be perfectly transparent as it passed before the window-like center of the disk. Then Maltby made an astounded exclamation.

"Here! Look at this!" he said sharply.

He took the *crux ansata* from Dick. He turned it over. He laid it on his desk glass side down. There was an extraordinary optical phenomenon. An infinitely thin layer of the desk's surface seemed to be lifted up six inches above the desk. Beneath it could be seen the copper back of the disk. There was empty space above it, and then a film of desk-top. Which, of course, simply could not be.

"You see through it," said Maltby, rather pale, "but there's a space that the light seems to dodge around. It skips from the front side of the disk to a spot six inches this side of it. There's that much distance that the light doesn't have to pass through. Things look six inches nearer. See?"

He held the right side up and held it over the desk-top. The desk-top did look nearer. He pressed down—and gasped. He was looking at wood-fibres inside the substance of the wood. Then his hand dropped, and he was looking inside the desk, through the top. He was examining the contents of the top desk drawer from a point above the desk's writing-surface.

The two of them babbled at each other. For twenty minutes or more they made absurd experiments. The fact remained. You looked into the transparent surface of the disk, and your sight skipped the opaque metal of the other surface and started on from six inches out in mid-air. Nothing in that six-inch space was an impediment to vision. The mirror could be held against a six-inch wall and anything beyond the wall would be visible. It was as if the light received on a small, circular area in mid-air curved through some unknown dimensions and returned to its proper line at the surface of the disk.

They had agreed on so much when Dick Blair said:

"What happens if you push something through?"

He thrust his finger toward himself, staring at its end through the unbelievably ancient instrument. His finger seemed to approach to the observed six inches. Then the impossible happened. He had no sensation, but he saw inside his finger. He saw inside the flesh. He saw the bone. He saw nerve-ends and capillaries—

He jerked his hand away and stared at Maltby. But Maltby was paler than Dick himself.

"I was—looking at your finger from the side," said Maltby with difficulty. "The end of it vanished. And where it vanished, the end of it—looked like quicksilver."

They doubted their own sanity, but there could be no doubt of the fact. They pushed a pencil into the impalpable place in-mid-air. The pencil disappeared. Looked at from the side, the spot where it vanished seemed a blob of quicksilver, which moved when the pencil was moved. From the proper side of the device, they saw into the inside of the pencil.

They pushed a watch, running, into that space. Dick saw its machinery in busy movement—or half its machinery. When it was withdrawn it was unharmed.

It was Dick who without warning suddenly thrust his whole hand up to the wrist into the enigmatic space. He looked at the bones and cross-section of the muscles and tendons of his wrist, while Maltby at one side saw a changing blob of quicksilver-like reflection the shape of the seemingly cut-off flesh. And then Dick said in a queer voice: "I feel something."

He stood rigid for an instant. Then he jerked his hand out. He had something in his fingers.

It was a living green leaf, freshly plucked from what must have been a tree. It was a perfectly plausible leaf. There were only two things in the least odd about it. One was that it had been plucked from nothingness in an apartment three floors above the street and remote from any vegetation at all. The other was that it wasn't the leaf of any species of plant known on earth.

It was Dick Blair who pointed out jerkily that the thing which looked into desks and through desk-tops and into flesh and bone had been used by its long-dead owner to study anatomy and accounted for the five-thousand-year-old description of the circulation of the blood. He could look directly into the inside of a living body. Then Maltby made incoherent noises about dimensions being at right angles to other dimensions and a field of force which made them interchangeable.

Then Dick said, stridently, that the significance of the *crux ansata* as a symbol of power over the other world had plainly once possessed a literal sense. There was another world somehow continuous to this one. It had been speculated upon since Plato was in diapers. This leaf had come from it. Which, he continued, might be an unjustified inference from inadequate data, but he was damned if he didn't believe it, and anyhow he was going to put his hand in that round space again and see what turned up—

He did. He sweated as he fumbled. He broke off a spray of leaves from an unseen source, and dragged them back. It was the eeriest of sensations to stand in a lighted, well-furnished room with all one's surroundings completely artificial, and to reach into vacancy in that well lighted room and produce from nothingness a batch of fresh foliage completely unlike any earthly leaves.

This grab into the unseen brought back something else, too. Coiled about the branch as if feeding on a leaf, there was a tiny living thing. It was perhaps six inches long. It had enormous, inquisitive eyes, and filmy wings. At the impact of the bright lights it blinked wisely and uncoiled itself and launched itself into the air. They both saw it clearly. It hovered delicately, like a hummingbird, and then darted to the window and out.

It was very small and quite harmless, but it was a serpent, a snake. It had wings. It flew. And winged serpents are not native to Earth.

The two men were quite literally babbling to each other when the bell rang and Sam Todd stumbled into the room. His face was ashen-white. He looked as if he had been drinking for weeks and had the horrors.

"Dick," he said thickly. "I—was looking for you. I had Nancy at the Police Museum. We snatched a bite to eat and I—called a cab for her. Just as it was pulling up I—smelled something queer. Not that—special perfume she used, but—something else. I looked around and—Nancy was vanishing. The top half of her was gone into thin air and there—was a big blob of—quicksilver where her waist was, and it dropped to the ground and—she was gone! Maybe I'm crazy but that's what happened..."

Dick Blair cried out furiously, because he knew as well as Sam that no thing and no person which had vanished in a pool of quicksilver had ever been seen again.

Then Sam lifted his head, twitching.

“Queer smell,” he said thickly. “Like—lush green stuff. I smell it now! My God, I smell it now! This is what I smelled when Nancy vanished...”

And then Dick and Maltby realized that their nostrils, too, were filled with an odor they had been too excited to notice before. Its origin was obvious enough. It came from *crux ansata*. And it was the smell of a jungle at night—in the heart of New York City.

~ * ~

For three days Maltby worked like a madman, while Dick Blair went practically insane. The worst of it was, of course, that Maltby could promise nothing. He did not dare to chip away any part of what might be called the transparent surface of the instrument from the past. He had to analyze without injuring the object he analyzed, for fear of destroying it altogether. He checked the light it transmitted, and found it circularly polarized. He checked the specific gravity of the entire object to six decimal places, and checked that against the density of a morsel scraped from the end of the handle. The whole instrument was made of bismuth bronze—copper and bismuth together. Normal bronze contains zinc or tin. It became certain that only one substance was involved, and that it was the bismuth-copper alloy. There was no insert of other substance to give the instrument its properties.

In the end, microscopic examination showed that, on the fine line of division where the transparent and opaque parts ran together, there was one irregularity. There was a place where for half a thousandth of an inch the metal was in an inbetween state—not quite the material of the handle, and not quite the enigmatic surface through which one looked *around* normal space.

That was the clue. Maltby worked on it for twenty-four hours straight, and had a one-inch ring of transparency in a flat slab of quarter-inch copper-bismuth alloy. It was not a duplicate of the entire *crux ansata* effect, but only of a part. The *crux ansata* seemed to look into another world and then back again to Earth at a remove of six inches in space. The peephole Maltby made looked only into another world. But that was a lot.

Looking through it, Maltby saw at first only spreading tree branches and thick foliage, speckled with sunshine from an unseen source. He touched a pencil experimentally to the transparent surface and nothing happened. The transparency was not penetrable.

He called Sam Todd on the phone and commanded him to get hold of Dick and bring him there. He worked on

When they burst, into his apartment he wavered on his feet from pure weariness. But he had a second bit of copper-bismuth alloy. This one was quite opaque. But there was a spot where you could push a lead pencil into it, and it vanished and you could pull it out again if it were not allowed to go in all the way. Moreover, if you looked

through the peephole into the other world, in the direction of this second opaque spot, in between the illogical foliage you could see the part of the pencil which disappeared from Earth. It enlarged and grew smaller as it was pushed or pulled from Earth, and if it were pushed all the way through it could be seen to go tumbling through the tree branches toward the ground below this jungle.

"I've got a beginning," said Maltby drearily. "I've gotten what is probably a sort of cockeyed alignment of cop per crystals with' bismuth, in a crazy allotropic state. Normally, light-bending seems to call for one arrangement and matter-bending calls for another. Just for simplicity I'm assuming that this—this Other World is occupying the same space as Earth, and that it's a matter of bending light to get it into that world, and to get it to come out again. It has to bend through an angle we normally can't conceive of. And I'm guessing that matter more or less bends in the same fashion. That's not clear, but I'm so tired I don't think very straight."

Dick said tensely, "What have you got ready for us?"

"I've got a one-inch peephole you can look into the other world with, and a space an inch across that you can push things through into the other world. I know how to make them, now. If I can stay awake, I can make a doorway somebody can go through."

"Get to work!" commanded Dick. "Nancy's there! You've got to get to work!"

"Agreed," grunted Maltby, "but I haven't slept for so long I can't remember it. You take this peephole and go somewhere high and look around. While I make a door way for you, you'd better be stocking up on information."

Sam Todd said, "And guns. But I'll attend to that!"

"Since you may use a taxi," added Maltby, "you'd better carry only the peephole. If you took the thing that matter can go through, you might be driving down Fifth Avenue in our world and drive through the space a tree occupies in the other. And the tree trunk might try to come through into the cab."

"How long will it take to make the doorway?" demanded Dick.

"Maybe three hours, maybe four."

The three of them separated instantly. Dick went raging to The Empire State Building and rode to its top; where he quite insanely held a small slab of copper alloy to his eye, and looked into the Other World.

Below him there was terrain identical with Manhattan Island in form and size and shape. But it was covered with foliage of which not one leaf was recognizable. To the south there were marshes where on Earth he saw tall buildings; and flowing streams, in the Other World, coursed merrily across the paths of streets in this.

At first he saw but one sign of humanity. That was a great villa, apparently of brick, with wide and spacious lawns. But he saw no human figures about it. It was too far away, on the Brooklyn shore. Then, here and there on the twin of Manhattan Island, he saw trails winding apparently at random through the heavy woods. It was a sunny day in the Other World. Everything seemed utterly tranquil and utterly at peace. And Dick, staring with desperate intentness, made notes which identified this trail—meandering from side to side—roughly with Fifth Avenue almost beneath him,

and that trail with Twenty-Ninth Street. By sighting with both eyes open, one looking at Earth and the other into the Other World, he identified the position of the one vast villa as roughly south of the Navy Yard.

Then he saw movement on the trail a thousand feet below his eyrie. In the Other World a horse-drawn vehicle plodded slowly between giant tree trunks in the space otherwise occupied by Altman's. There were two human figures in the vehicle, and at first he thought them naked, before he saw loin-cloths about their middles. Behind the vehicle trotted a four-legged creature far too large to be a dog. But the equipage turned beneath over hanging branches and he lost sight of it.

He went uptown to Radio City. Again from a vast height he surveyed endless forests. From here, though, he saw plowed fields which before had been invisible. More, in the middle of a virgin wilderness, he saw the sunlight glinting on acres upon acres of glass. It looked extraordinarily as if hothouses sufficient to supply a small town with foodstuffs were in existence. And he thought, but he was not sure, that he saw horses pulling plows. There were two of them. If men guided them, they were too far away to be seen with the naked eye.

It seemed all peace and serenity there. But Dick, staring from a great height, knew such hatred and horror as made him tremble. This Other World lay beside the earth that men knew, in that greater cosmos men have not yet begun to visualize. And Dick had an idea of the perverted significance that had been given it. Eons since, other men had found a way to pass between the worlds. Men had moved to the Other World, with the power to return to Earth where and when they wished. And man is the most predatory of animals; his favorite prey is other men.

That first discovery had unquestionably taken place far back in the dim dawn of history, when all of civilization lay in Egypt. A scientist or a magician of that time had doubtless made the first crossing between the worlds. Perhaps he told his king and was duly slaughtered for reward, after the king had made the discovery his own. At first, perhaps, the Other World had seemed to the king merely a possible refuge from rebellious nobles or an unruly people. A fugitive king, driven from his throne by his own tyranny, could retire to the Other World and be in safety from all his enemies. He could take his women and his slaves and build a palace in which to live in perfect security. Perhaps some king did do this, fleeing from successful civil war. But in exile he would crave revenge. And what could be more obvious than to make a doorway back to Earth which would open into the bedroom of his former palace, where his successor on the throne lay asleep behind guarded doors?

Then Dick remembered a scrap of history almost lost in the mists of time. He himself had first translated an ancient papyrus which told of such a thing. There had been such a king who had gone into the after world and bided his time, and had come again to rule Egypt in terror and blood when all his enemies died in a single night.

That was unquestionably it. The later kings of the Fifth Dynasty had ruled more ruthlessly than any other kings of Egypt. Magic slew their enemies. Disasters overwhelmed their foes. There was no treasure they could not lay hands upon, nor any

human being they could not seize or slaughter. All Earth was at their mercy, when they could walk at will into the most secret, most guarded, most hidden retreat of the normal Earth.

They would be the masters, then, those men of the Other World. They would not need to fight battle for loot, when loot could be taken without hindrance. They need not capture cities for slaves, when slaves could be stolen in absolute safety from any place where men lived.

Dick could only guess at the development of so purely parasitic a society. The robbery of gold would soon cease to have meaning. Gold would have no more value than a clod of earth, when it could be taken as easily. Jewels would have no more value than so much glass. But fine fabrics and soft carpets, and luxuries of food and drink, and horses and strong men for slaves and pretty girls for playthings—those things would have value. And there would be no great nation of the parasitic Other World. It would be absurd for them to rob each other with the Earth to loot, so they would not need to combine in defense against each other. Their society would be anarchic. They would set up villas, as time went on, wherever Earth cities promised easy supplies of luxuries and slaves. The master of one villa would owe no allegiance to any other. Yet how would they keep the loyalty of their guards, because guards against the slaves they must have?

There Dick's imagination failed him, but such faint imaginings as he could contrive were enough to make him half-mad when he got back to Maltby's place.

Sam Todd came in. He had brought guns. He began to divide with Dick, but Dick said grimly:

"No division, Sam. I'm going through the doorway alone as soon as Maltby has it done. You've got to stay behind. I may need some help I can't anticipate. I need somebody cruising about—watching through the peephole we already have—ready to give me help if it's needed. And if both of us go through, who's going to tell the authorities about this business and bring help along?"

Sam laughed without amusement.

"Tell the authorities?" he asked sardonically. "How long would they listen before they'd usher me into a padded cell? Oh, it could be done in time, but I'd need to spend weeks convincing them that I wasn't crazy and the peephole wasn't a trick, and then they'd refer to higher authority and they'd need to be convinced, and then they'd decide that the democratic procedure was to send an observer or an ambassador through— We'll get Nancy back and then talk about such things!"

"But you'll stay behind to help me when I need it!" snapped Dick. "You know damned well you can do that better than Maltby! And you've more reason to do it as well as more money to spend if it's needed. You stay behind! Look here!"

He spread out his notes on the correspondence of locations. Plowed fields near Seventieth Street, Manhattan. The great villa south of the Navy Yard on the Brooklyn shore. What looked like an enormous stretch of hothouses in the Sixties on the East Side. A road leading past the Empire State Building, curving through Altman's.

Sam accepted the memorandum. What Dick had said was true enough, but so was what he'd said himself. To wait for action by authority would be sheerest folly. There couldn't be any more delay. The two of them had to work as private adventurers to try to go to her help. There were plenty of others who needed help too, no doubt. But for speed there would have to be action without hindrance.

Presently Maltby brought in a sheet of copper foil, neatly rolled. He said wearily:

"Here it is. It's just a doorway. You can't look through it, but somebody can go through."

"I'll go through where Nancy did," said Dick grimly. "We'll get a cab and you show me the exact spot, Sam."

"All right, but we've got to arrange a way to communicate--"

"In the taxi," snapped Dick. "Come on!"

Maltby spoke like a sleepwalker, tonelessly, "We'll have to hold this thing sideways to the way we're going."

"Right! I'll carry it. Coming?"

Sam Todd picked up his burden of weapons in a bag and gun-case. They went downstairs. The street seemed incredibly normal. Dick carried the rolled-up foil. They got into the cab, and it started downtown.

This was three days after the disappearance of Nancy Holt in the seeming of a pool of quicksilver. Dick Blair knew that if his guesses were right, the disappearances of humans were for their enslavement. Nancy had been a slave for three days. Sam spoke to him, and he nodded, but he hardly heard what Sam was saying.

At Thirtieth Street, Sam opened his bag and began to pass its contents to Dick. Two automatics, with ammunition. A riot-gun—a sawed-off shotgun with shells loaded with buckshot. Two small objects which were tear-gas bombs. Bars of chocolate. A canteen.

"There," said Sam to the taxi driver. "Draw up to the curb, right there."

It was a perfectly normal street in downtown New York. There was asphalt pavement, a concrete curb and sidewalk, and a street-light. There was a hydrant. A barber-shop and a small stationery store occupied the street-level shops in a building which rose skyward.

The taxi stopped. The driver turned.

"We're not getting out," said Sam smoothly. He pointed ahead. "Hasn't that car ahead got a flat?"

The taxi driver looked front. Sam unrolled the copper foil.

"Remember how to leave messages for me," he said crisply.

Dick Blair touched his pockets, where his weapons and ammunition were. He picked up the sawed-off shotgun. Without a word, he stepped into the two-foot by three-foot sheet of copper-bismuth foil. He stepped *down*.

Maltby was asleep, his face lined with exhaustion. He did not see what was happening.

Dick Blair vanished in a pool of quicksilver.

There was bright sunshine where he found himself. There were gigantic trees, rising apparently to the height of the buildings which had surrounded the taxicab only seconds before. He tumbled down three or four feet and fell on his hands and knees on the ground. There was sparse brushwood here, and when he straightened up he saw a crude wooden platform, built of hewn planks. It had a cage-like structure of beams upon it, with a door now open. The door had a clumsy but effective latch so that it could not possibly be opened from the inside, but could be opened from without by a mere tug on a leather thong. In any case the cage was empty and deserted, but it had been made by men.

There was music that seemed like bird-song everywhere. The brushwood was green. The particular bush on which he first cast his eyes was not only green, but leafless. It was a mass of slender, branching boughs, each one green as a grass-blade as if its stems had adapted their bark to perform the function of leaves. There was a small, strange flower only inches tall which waved long cilae with remarkable energy, like those marine creatures which fumble endlessly for plankton. But this waved slime-coated threads to catch dust-motes which actually had wings and were insects smaller than gnats.

Overhead, the sky was blue. Something flew, and it was small and nearby, but its outlines were not those of a bird. Something howled suddenly, making an enormous din, and a feathered creature scuttled into view with a duck-like gait, stopped, made that monstrous tumult fitted to a being many times its size, and waddled on again upon some unguessable errand.

It went across a wagon-trail that meandered through this forest, curving erratically, avoiding the larger trees. He moved to it, grimly intent, and examined the wheel tracks. They were wide, as of wooden wheels without metal tires. The horse-tracks were of unshod hoofs. And where whitish dust lay in the road, he saw other tracks. They looked like the tracks of dogs, except that no dog was ever so huge. Great Danes might have such monstrous pads, but surely no lesser breed.

Then a rhythmic squeaking sound came through the music of tiny vocalists. Dick whirled. It sounded like the noise of a squeaky wheel upon a wooden axle. There were thudding hoof-beats, and then a cart came along the trail. It was a wholly ordinary cart, with a wholly ordinary horse in frayed but ordinary harness. A half-naked man, in a loin-cloth only, with hair to his shoulders and an unkempt beard, drove the horse. Behind him a beast like a wolf—only bigger—paced leisurely.

Dick stepped out into the road with automatic leveled.

“Hold up, there!” he said coldly. “I want some information!”

The bearded man gasped.

“My Gawd! Where’d you come from?”

He wasn’t afraid. He was amazed. His mouth dropped open and he stared blankly. The horse stopped.

The beast trotted around the cart and looked at Dick. It was very much like a wolf. It was hairy and sharp-nosed, with pricked-up ears. But no wolf ever had such eyes of such keen intelligence. It looked at Dick estimatingly. It was thinking, in the way in which a man thinks when he comes upon a strange thing.

The man in the cart said quickly:

"The critter has savvy like us. Get me?"

The beast turned its head and looked at the man in the cart. It snarled a little. The sound was bloodcurdling. The man in the cart paled. He seemed to go all to pieces.

The beast trotted toward Dick without haste and without fear. Its eyes were intent. He swung the pistol upon it. It stopped dead, regarding him. No, not him, the pistol. It was looking at the pistol. It made noises which were partly growlings and partly whines. They sounded oddly like speech. The man in the cart said, shaking, "It—wants to know where you come from."

"Never mind," said Dick harshly. "I want to know where new-caught prisoners are taken! Where?"

The beast understood. Plainly, impossibly, it understood. It made more noises. The man said, in panic: "No! Please! Y'don't understand—" He was talking to the beast. The beast turned its head and looked at him. That was all. The man sobbed. He caught the reins around the corner of the cart. He prepared to descend.

"The devil!" snapped Dick. "I want an answer to my question! Where are new-caught prisoners taken?"

The man, shaking in every limb, crawled down to the ground. He moved slowly, abjectly, toward Dick.

"It—it ain't any use to kill me," he panted. "I—ain't done you any harm—"

Out of the corner of his eye as he watched the man, Dick saw a flashing movement. He whirled and the automatic went off. The beast was in mid-leap and the heavy bullet tore into its chest, checking it in mid-air. It fell, inches short of Dick. It struggled convulsively. "Kill it!" panted the man shrilly. "Before it howls—" The beast essayed to scream, dying as it was. Dick shot again. It stiffened and was still. The man from the cart wrung his hands. He seemed stunned by catastrophe.

"Migawd!" he said in a thin voice. "Oh, Migawd! That finishes me! Killin' it didn't do no good—"

"Hold on!" raged Dick. "I tell you I want to know where new-caught prisoners are taken! Answer me!"

The gun-muzzle bore savagely on the other man. Five minutes ago Dick had been in a taxicab on a street of the most civilized city in the world. But he was not in that city now, nor bound to its code of conduct or its laws.

"I came here from New York. A girl was brought here three days ago. Where is she?"

The other man turned to him in incredulous hope.

"You come from N'York? You weren't brought? Can you get back? Gawd! Can you get back?"

"Yes, when I take that girl with me," rasped Dick. "Where is she?"

The other man fawned upon him. He scrambled up into the cart. He drove it invitingly close to Dick. His eyes were pleading and hopeful and terrified by turns.

“Which way, fella? Which way to get back? W-We got to move fast before somebody comes!”

There was a movement. A second beast came loping around the nearest bend in the trail. Its legs and chest were wet. The man squealed and lashed the horse crazily. It bolted ahead. The beast stopped and regarded Dick with the same intent air of estimation without terror that the other beast had shown. The horse and cart jolted and bounced out of sight down the trail. The beast looked at its dead fellow, and suddenly darted for the underbrush beside the trail. Dick’s pistol crashed. The thing made gurgling noises. It toppled to the ground, kicking in utter silence, then lay still.

These dead beasts made Dick’s flesh crawl. They had looked at him as men would look. The first beast had given commands to the bearded man—who spoke of his own kind as slaves. The man was subject to the beast. It had commanded him to get out of the wagon and keep Dick’s attention on him, and while Dick looked at the man the beast had sprung. The second beast had deduced from the body of the first that Dick had killed it, and was darting to cover when a bullet stopped it. It had acted exactly as a man would have acted if he heard a shot and raced to see what had caused it, and then found himself facing an armed and unexpected enemy.

Dick had thought earlier of making a prisoner of some inhabitant of this Other World, and of forcing him to lead the way to where Nancy might be held captive. But if men were subject to beasts, and accompanied everywhere by the beasts their masters...

Then his mind clicked on the few things it had to work on. He’d seen a man and cart and beast from the top of the Empire State Building. He’d seen a man and cart and beast here. He’d killed the beast and another had come shortly after. That was now dead too. So there might be another man and cart-

He marched savagely along the trail in the direction from which the second beast had come. Cart-tracks showed that it was a frequented highway. Beast-tracks in occasional patches of dust showed plainly, as well as the hoof-prints of horses. He saw tiny pellets of wetness. They would be drops from the wetted pelt of the second dead beast. Dick found himself hurrying a little.

Half a mile, between leaves of unknown species and genera, brushwood which had leaves and no leaves, and berries of very improbable color. Something with a preposterous number of legs slithered across the highway. It saw him and squeaked and insanely whirled and went back across the highway and vanished, having exposed itself twice to danger. A furry biped eight inches tall ran behind a tree trunk and peered at him through large blue eyes which were not in the least human. The bird-notes which filled the air kept on in a constant tide of sound.

Then a stream. It was possibly twenty feet wide and swift-running. The trail led into it and out on the other side. Some thirty feet beyond the water there was a second horse and cart, and a second more than half-naked man. This man sat apathetically

in stillness. The horse was still. The man, red-haired and with a monstrous red beard which was utterly untended, waited dully as if in numbed obedience to orders. There was no beast in sight. Dick had killed the beast which should have been here.

He halted on the near side of the stream and lifted an automatic suggestively.

"You!" he said coldly. "I'm going to ask some questions! You'll answer them! Understand?"

The man raised his eyes. They fixed themselves dully upon Dick. It was seconds before surprise dawned in them. For a time, then, there was merely blank amazement. Then other emotions passed over his features in succession. Hope, and sudden recollected despair, and then a burning fury.

"Where'd you come from?" demanded the red-beard in a croaking voice. "The *ruhks* ain't stripped you. Did you—did you come from some'rs by yourself, or—" Then his voice dulled again. "No ... You just busted outa a cage-trap ..."

The fury died in him. He drooped.

"Go on some'rs else," he said dully. "I ain't seen you. The *ruhks*'ll track you down by smell, an' they'll kill you. That's best anyways. Go on!"

Dick said evenly:

"I've just killed two beasts that look like wolves. One was wet, as if he'd forded this stream. Are those beasts *ruhks*?"

The red-beard's eyes lighted again, this time in delight.

"Killed two of 'em? Good! Swell!" He suddenly cursed in a terrible, gleeful passion. "If only every one was dead there'd be some killin' around here! Fella! You got guns? I hope you kill plenty of 'em before they get you! I hope you kill thousan's of 'em—" Then he said eagerly, "Did y'break outa a trap-cage, or—"

He trembled, unable to express a hope so remote that it could not be imagined.

"I came through a thing one of my friends made," said Dick. "I was in New York half an hour ago. My friends can get through to here whenever they wish."

The red-beard blasphemed in fierce joy.

"How about other carts and *ruhks* coming along?" snapped Dick. "Is it safe to stand and talk?"

The red-beard suddenly grinned. He clucked to his horse. The horse moved forward and went into the stream. It halted in the middle.

"Wade out an' climb in," panted the red-headed man. "They'll track you by smell to this here stream. Then they'll hunt for where you come out. You ride with me an' I'll put you down miles away, ah' you can get back to your friends. Tell 'em to fire the palace with gasoline an' kill them *ruhks*. We'll tend to the rest!"

When Dick waded out into the stream and then swung into the vehicle, he saw that the red-beard's back above his filthy breechclout was scarred in an intricate, crisscross pattern as if by long-healed sores which could only have been made by a lash. And there were other scars, which had been made by the teeth of beasts.

He clucked to the horse again. The animal pulled ahead to shore. Presently they were proceeding at a slow walk along the trail. And the red-headed man, in a hoarse

and confidential whisper, spoke of destruction to be wrought upon a palace—which must be the villa on the Brooklyn shore—and then of tortures unspeakable to be inflicted upon overseers.

It was quite impossible, for the moment, to get from him anything but expressions of his hate.

After a time, the red-bearded man grew coherent. He was not actually mad. In the seven-mile ride between monster tree trunks, Dick came to understand that there are experiences one can have, after which self-control and a normal manner would be impossible. Yet too great a change from sane behavior would have a penalty on this Other World, where there were penalties for madness as for illness or crippling injuries or a rebellious spirit or anything which made a slave less than wholly useful.

The picture the red-beard painted was only partly like the pattern Dick had imagined. There were human masters, to be sure. They lived in the palace on the other side of the river. The red-bearded man had been a slave for years, but had never seen a member of the race or family he had been enslaved to serve. He had only rarely seen more than one overseer. Years ago he'd been an electrician in New York, and on his way home one night along Fourth Avenue, he suddenly felt himself falling, and all the world swirled about him and he was in a cage of wooden bars, in a forest like this of monster trees and unfamiliar vegetation. Over his head an object rose, and drew back, and minutes later another man fell into the cage with him. The other man freakishly broke his arm in falling. They did not know where they were, and they did not know what had happened to them. They shouted for help, and some beast snarled horribly, nearby. Then they were silent in terror. And all that night they thought themselves insane, and all night long the beast prowled about outside the cage.

When dawn came, they saw it. It was one of the wolf-like creatures called *ruhks*. It regarded them with businesslike, icy, intelligent eyes. Presently, in the dawn light, there came others of the animals—a dozen or more. In their midst marched a man with a spear, and with a pistol in a holster about his waist. He wore a long, knee-length robe rather than garments they would recognize. He looked at the two caged men without interest or mercy. The *ruhks* made whining, barking noises to each other. Their tone was unmistakably conversational. The robed man stood back, and one of the creatures pulled on a leather thong and the cage-door opened. The two captives shivered in horror. They pleaded with the man among the beasts, but he ignored them. Now they shrank back in the cage and he gestured to them to come out. When they did not, he prodded them out with his spear.

Outside, the beasts pushed between them, separated them, and then roughly flung them to the ground. Then, deliberately—and apparently under the orders of one of their own number, who stood back and made noises at the rest—the animals ripped off every article of their clothing. The red-bearded man was numb with horror, but the other man screamed.

The thing that dazed the red-bearded man, then, was the manner of the beasts. They showed no ferocity, though they looked ferocious enough. They were businesslike

and matter-of-fact, like animals going through a well-rehearsed trick. They released the stripped men.

Their leader looked at the other captive's broken arm and turned its head to the man with the spear. The beast made more specific sounds. The man with the broken arm was—somehow it was clear—the subject of a comment or a question. The man with the spear shrugged.

The beasts—the *ruhks*—tore the man with the broken arm to bits. It was hard for the red-bearded man, telling this to Dick, to convey the horror of their matter-of-factness. The beasts killed his fellow-prisoner and devoured him without snarlings, without competition, as men would have divided a new-killed steer. Then, still matter-of-factly, they closed around the red-bearded man and herded him before them.

The red-bearded man had been marched for miles, with the beasts around him and the man with the spear ignoring him. Once the red-beard was sick, from sheer horror and fear. The beasts drove him on with bared fangs.

In the end he arrived at a slave pen, the crudest possible shed of logs within a palisade. He was turned into it. There were other humans there, men and women denned together on straw in a structure in all essentials a stable for domestic animals. They were themselves domestic animals, they told him. They had been of all possible walks of life originally. Each had been through the same experience—of falling into a cage-trap, of being stripped by the *ruhks* who came to herd them to the slave-pen, of being driven like captured wild animals, and of being treated thereafter as beasts of burden.

Dick interrupted, here, to demand if Nancy had been brought to that slave-pen. The red-beard swore that she had not. No new prisoner had been brought to the slave-pen for much longer than three days.

Because they had hands, the red-beard went on, they were driven by the *ruhks*' to harness horses, to plow-fields, to perform all the necessary tasks of the production of food and the gathering of fuel. The spear-armed man gave orders. The *ruhks* saw to it that the slaves carried them out. Some of the food and a little of the fuel they were allowed to keep and use. Most went to the river-shore, to boats rowed by men in chains, which took them elsewhere. They were guarded in the slave-pen by *ruhks*. When sent on errands, like the red-beard and the other man Dick had seen, a *ruhk* accompanied them. At such times they were subject to their four-footed guards. But the man with the spear was not their master. He was their overseer. Their master—or masters, they did not know which—lived in a palace on the other side of the river. What they knew of the palace they had learned from a slave sent to labor with them, brought to their pen across the river in one of the boats rowed by men in chains. What he told them, shivering, was not pleasant. And in a matter of days he was given to the *ruhks*.

The sun sank down among the giant trees on Manhattan Island as this tale unfolded. Sundown drew near. Then the red-beard drew rein.

"Here," he said bitterly, "You get out here. I'm a slave. I couldn't go back to livin' like a human again. I'll go on an' tell my story. I'll say my *ruhk* told me to wait an'

went off, an' I waited till I got scared I'd be hunted as a runaway, so I started on an' I seen him an' another *ruhk* layin' in the road dead. That's all I'll tell 'em."

"That's right," said Dick grimly.

The red-bearded man drove on, chuckling to himself.

Dick ground his teeth as the horse and cart went out of sight in the gathering darkness. He had started wrong. It had seemed quite logical to plunge into the Other World after Nancy, and to force some inhabitant to lead him to her. The primitiveness of what he'd seen from the top of the Empire State Building had made him feel that the Other World would be all savagery. It was savagery, to be sure! But was not a kind he prepared for.

The *ruhks*, alone, made his original plan sheer suicide. They had obviously been the dominant species on this planet when some ancient Egyptian magician first stepped through a doorway of his own making to this world. Intelligence alone would have ensured their dominance, but they could not use tools to rise above the cultural grade of pure savagery. When the first Egyptians appeared, undoubtedly they strove to prey upon them. Undoubtedly they failed. And somehow—Dick could not imagine a process offhand—somehow an unholy compact had been arrived at. It continued until this day. With the master race to provide shelter and security and luxuries they could not contrive for themselves, it would be a mutually admirable compact which made them loyal slave-guards. That such a compact would be kept was not wholly reasonable, but Dick had to accept the apparent fact. They would not be domesticated, like dogs. They would feel no reverence for humanity as such. But as slave-guards they would have reasonable outlet for beastly instincts of cruelty. And the masters of this world would value them highly. While they were loyal, no slave revolt could possibly succeed nor any slave hope to run away.

They and their masters would surely apply every trick five thousand years had developed, to track down and destroy the one man who had entered their world without being enslaved. As for Nancy—It was still true that no person or object which had disappeared with an accompanying tale of quicksilver had ever been seen again.

Dick tried not to think of what was Nancy's most probable fate. He fanned the sick hatred that had been growing all during the red-beard's tale. Among the things Sam Todd had provided him with was a compass with luminous dial. Dick set out doggedly to find his way through the night by its means.

~ * ~

A girl vanished in Paris. A prominent commissar disappeared in Prague. Two workmen, weaving their way home tipsily from a wineshop in Madrid, dropped utterly out of sight. There was a disappearance of cheeses in Belgium, of wine in Bordeaux and Athens and Malaga. A *dahabeah* lost half its cargo of dates in mid-Nile, and its crew saw quicksilver in the hold and dived howling overboard. In Damascus a shop in the Street of the Goldsmiths missed a bit of tapestry thickly interspersed with gold thread.

In Baghdad a flask of attar of roses vanished into thin air. A sweetshop in London was robbed of its most expensive confections. A farmer lost two mules in Maryland. In Philadelphia a trusted employee seemed to evaporate under the most suspicious of circumstances; his accounts were correct to the last penny. In Denver a schoolboy did not come home from high school, in New Orleans the father of eight children disappeared, in Antofagasta a beautiful young girl vanished. ^

Over a very large part of the Earth, things which men had made and treasured, people whom others cared for and depended on, ceased to exist as far as the normal world was concerned. But nobody considered that anything requiring a new explanation had occurred; such things had been happening for five thousand years. Nobody thought to look for any common factor linking them. Nobody at all thought of the possibility of another world, beside this one in hyperspace and identical with it save in flora and fauna and population. Among all the two and a quarter billion humans on Earth, only Sam Todd and Maltby even guessed at such a thing.

Instantly after Dick Blair vanished in a pool of quicksilver, the taxi driver turned back his head and blinked. Three men had been in the cab. Now there were two.

"Hey!" said the taxi driver. "What happened to the other guy?"

"He got out," said Sam briefly. He rolled up the sheet of metal foil and looked at Maltby, sunk in sleep. "Now go back to where we came from."

The driver looked at him dubiously, and turned back to the wheel.

Sam reflected unhappily as the cab went uptown again. He re-examined the preparations that had been made for Dick's adventure. He was dissatisfied. The need for speed was great, of course, and of course since Nancy had gone into the Other World somebody had to go after her as quickly as possible. But still things were wrong.

He piled Maltby out of the cab at his house. He dragged him to his apartment and dumped him on his bed. Then he picked up the little copper-alloy window that Dick had used for his preliminary survey of the Other World. He remembered the location Dick had assigned to the villa, which must be in some sense the headquarters of the local interdimensional thieves. He went downstairs and got a taxicab and started for the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Huddled back in the cab, he glued his eye to the little peephole. As an experience, that ride was unique. The cab followed straight streets and traffic lanes in normal New York. But Sam Todd's eyesight traveled in a straight line through jungle, a jungle of giant trees through which his vision seemed to float eerily. He saw brushwood of unknown varieties, and deep, shadowed glades where there was no undergrowth but only a carpet of rotted leaves. Once he came out into a tiny natural clearing and saw a relatively small tree, barely forty feet high, with foliage which was not green at all, but heliotrope; the other trees seemed to shrink from it as if its vicinity were poisonous. There were occasional glimpses of trails cut through the forest, but they were rare, and once Sam saw a wooden cage, rotting away, which had no meaning to him.

But then the taxicab seemed to leave the earth and soar upward, and he jerked his eye away from the metal window and saw that it was actually sweeping up the ramp of the Brooklyn Bridge.

In the Other World there was, of course, no bridge at all, so that Sam looked down from the viewpoint of a bird in flight. He saw the river which was the counterpart of the East River flowing beneath him. He saw the great brick villa on the gently sloping farther shore. He saw a galley—propelled by many oars—pulling away from a small dock, and he saw a luxurious, old-fashioned carriage with four horses moving back toward the villa with trotting four footed forms running beside it.

Then the taxi soared down from the crest of the bridge, and trees rose to engulf it, and Sam winced as his eye at the peephole told him he was about to crash into great masses of foliage.

Presently the taxicab stopped by the Navy Yard. He paid the driver and got out. He was excited, now, because he'd seen signs of more than untouched wilderness. He stuffed the window in his pocket and walked a block. Then he put the peephole to his eye again. He saw a garden, plainly artificial and plainly watered and tended with the prodigal use of labor. He stood still, gazing. When he lowered the peephole, he saw three children and a fat woman staring at him suspiciously. He hastily put away the bit of metal and walked on.

He went into a tiny confectionery store and into the phone booth. He dropped in a coin and dialed at random. In the privacy of the booth he looked into the Other World while the voice of a telephone operator exasperatedly told him over and over that there was no such exchange and would he please hang up the receiver. But he was seeing walkways of smooth marble leading through fancifully trained foliage, and fountains, and statuary, and—

He saw a slave. The slave was utterly unkempt, with uncombed beard and hair, with no garment save a loin-cloth. But he wore gold-rimmed spectacles. He worked busily at the fertilization of a vine of climbing roses which was a veritable blanket of blooms. He finished that task and walked seemingly within a yard of Sam Todd in a telephone booth in the Navy Yard section of Brooklyn. As he passed, Sam saw ghastly scars upon his body. Some were the marks of lashes, and some were the marks of teeth.

There was somebody tapping on the glass of the phone booth door with a coin. Sam confusedly put the peephole in his pocket and went out. The woman who had tapped said acidly:

“When a person can't get their number, it's a pity they won't let somebody else use the phone!”

The street outside was incredible. Sam had just seen enough of the Other World to make his own seem unreal. As he looked at dingy store-fronts, he seemed to see the wraiths of flowers and fountains and intricately trimmed shrubbery in the midst of shops and delicatessens. He had an idea of the location of the villa now, though. He oriented himself carefully and walked toward the place where the villa should be in the other cosmos.

A great, warehouse-like building blocked his way. But there was an office-building of sorts nearby. There was a phone booth in its untidy lobby. He took refuge in the booth and again surveyed the Other World.

He was within yards of the villa—which was gigantic— and within feet of a terrace where a little girl played with a kitten. She was a rather thin little girl, with delicate features, dressed in a healthily brief garment Sam could not identify. She treated the kitten with the extravagant affection normal in six-year-olds. But within two yards of her stood two giant, wolf-like creatures, watching her. A little distance back stood six men in knee-length robes, with swords and shields in an antique style, and highly incongruous automatic pistols in holsters at their waists. Behind them again there was an elderly woman with a worried air, and behind her a row of young girls with bare feet and arms, each of them carrying a toy.

The six-year-old played absorbedly, but presently dropped the kitten with a sigh of quaintly adult weariness and then clapped her hands. The kitten darted away. Instantly there was movement all about. The two wolf-like creatures moved nearer to the child. The worried-looking woman gave agitated, inaudible commands. The line of young girl slaves moved forward. As each drew near to the child, the wolf-like creatures regarded her coldly. Each slave, in turn, knelt and offered the toy she carried. The six-year-old contemplated them solemnly and waved them aside one by one. There was a girl with a swollen face, as if she had been struck a violent blow. She offered a squirming puppy. It was waved away. Extraordinarily elaborate dolls were offered. Every conceivable device for the amusement of a six-year-old girl was offered for approval by the row of slave girls who knelt abjectly, trembling, in their turns.

The child graciously accepted a mechanical toy of sheet-tin, brightly-colored. It was of the sort which is sold in five-and-ten-cent stores. The slave wound it and put it before the child. She backed away. The wolf-creatures moved back to their former positions. The child solemnly watched the toy perform its jerky, mechanical antics.

Then one of the wolf-creatures snarled suddenly. Its eyes were fixed upon Sam Todd's tiny copper-and-bismuth window. The beast flung itself before the child. There was swirling, rushing movement, and the child had been caught up swiftly and was being raced away.

Sam blinked and drew back. He assured himself of his safety and turned to stare in all directions through the peephole.

In the Other World more beasts were racing into view. There must have been fifty of them who came boiling up from somewhere, fangs bared and snarling. Men appeared, racing, buckling on pistol-belts over their robes.

Then there was stillness. Sam was bewildered. He turned the peephole in every direction. In the Other World, the spot from which he looked out was the exact center of a circle of snarling beasts and cold-eyed men, who held weapons ready.

Then he swallowed. The peephole was evidently visible in that other world. They didn't know that nothing could be shoved through it. They were prepared to fight—but he could not guess what they expected to happen next.

Then an extraordinary device came into view. It was thin and spidery and skeleton-like. It moved upon eight slender, shining wheels. A man in a robe ran panting beside it. He wore extraordinary goggles which should have blinded him. There was a curious, light, jointed girder at the forefront of the spidery device, and a large disk at its end. That disk could be set at any angle and moved in any direction by the girder. The man in the goggles shouted, but Sam could not hear him. The armed men, though, pointed. The spidery vehicle swerved straight at him.

For a moment he looked out of his phone booth. Everything about him seemed normal and commonplace and slightly dingy. But he felt hunted. Then he saw a tiny, a trivial oddity. The open door of the office building showed bright against the daylit street. Against that lighted background Sam Todd saw two small opaque specks in midair. They moved toward him, undulating up and down like the eyes or the goggles of a man running. In a flash of cold horror he understood everything.

The spidery vehicle carried a disk which was a portable doorway between worlds. The rest of the device was simply a carrier for that doorway, so that it could be pushed or pulled. The man in the goggles could see in both worlds as Sam could. And with the swinging, movable disk he could seize anything on Earth as a man may net a goldfish in a globe from which it cannot escape. He could take anything or anyone away from Earth into the Other World forever. And against this, Sam had no defense.

He flung open the phone booth and bolted. There was but one way to flee—to the open, blessed, asphalted street of Brooklyn, with its trucks and cars and hydrants and dusty shop windows. He had to plunge straight toward the space the goggled man occupied in the Other World. He probably had to run through the very substance of that man and his device. But, gasping, he rushed.

He reached the doorway. He thought he saw a momentary glow of light behind him as if the disk in the Other World had become a doorway, and light from the Other World sky shone for an instant into the lobby. But then he was outside.

At first he ran. But people stared, and he knew that if he ran on he would be stopped forcibly and questioned, and that while he panted out his utterly impossible story he would vanish before his captors' eyes in a pool of quicksilver, as Nancy had vanished.

He slowed to a fast walk. Sweat poured out on his skin. Once he turned and put the peephole to his eye and saw the spidery thing turning swiftly to pursue him over the clear lawn of the villa of the Other World.

It was nightmarish. It was worse. He felt stark panic. But there was a sure refuge if he could find it-

Twenty yards, and he dared to turn again. His actions were peculiar, and a demand for an explanation of his actions would be utterly fatal. But the device had to go around a massive plantation of shrubs on the villa lawn. He hurried, in an agony of haste, yet not daring to hasten too much.

Then he reached the subway entrance. As he swung to descend, someone coming up the stairs bumped into him. His hat fell off. He did not try to retrieve it. He plunged downward, but in spite of himself his head jerked around.

He saw his hat disappear in a curious coruscation, as of a pool of quicksilver.

As Sam rode back to New York underground, he felt cold all over and shivered violently, even while he sweated profusely. He sweated so much, indeed, that other passengers on the subway train looked at him oddly because he wiped his face so often.

~ * ~

In the Other World there was moonlight. It came down through the trees with a harsh bright radiance such as it seemed no mere moonlight could possess. But when Dick found an open space through which he could see the sky, the moon appeared wholly like the orb which circles Earth. The stars seemed the same, too. There was a Milky Way, and there were large bright heavenly objects which had the appearance of planets. It seemed unbelievable that the Other World could so completely resemble Earth in all its conformation and still not be the same.

The night noises were wholly unlike those of the world of men. The cries in this jungle darkness sounded strangely like bells, from tiny shrill nearby tinklings to single, deep-toned, far-away tollings as of illimitable grief.

But Dick had not gone far before he heard noises with which he felt almost familiar. They were beast-cries. But they were not the meaningless howlings of mere brutishness. Somehow he knew that they were the cries of *ruhks*. He had enough knowledge of this Other World, now, to guess at what would happen.

When the red-beard told his story—if the first man Dick had met hadn't babbled out his tale first—a coldly merciless hunt would begin for Dick. *Ruhks* would logically be entrusted with the night-search. They would find his trail entering the stream. And when no trail appeared on the farther side, the *ruhks* would divide. They would hunt through the jungle on either bank of the stream, both upstream and down, for the spot where he had come out.

The one thing that could go wrong, of course, was that his scent might be detected in red-beard's cart. If that happened, red-beard would die, and Dick soon after.

But he heard the *ruhk* cries in the night. The compass direction was wrong for beasts actually on his trail. They had, then, gone on to the spot where Nancy had come into this cosmos. Dick heard them calling to one another from separated places. He'd guessed their tactics, and what he heard confirmed his guess. He headed for a point between the separating parties of those who sought his trail. This was a world of slaves and masters and there would be no system of swift communications. A man does not do skilled work under the lash. A slave telegrapher is unthinkable, and slave telephone maintenance crews are unimaginable. When human beings are classed as animals, only the labor of animals can be had from them.

So Dick went on through the darkness. The noises all about him compounded themselves into a sort of muted bedlam. There were the sounds as of bells, and at startling intervals something made a noise as of drums, and now and again the hunting *ruhks* howled their reports of futility. Dick reached the stream and waded it. A little beyond, he blundered into thick, squashy vegetation with a scent like that of garlic, only more pungent, and his feet crushed the pulpy leaves and he reeked of the smell as he went on. He was offensive to his own nostrils. But even so he smelled the reek of a slave-pen a good half-mile downwind from it. He veered aside.

Presently he heard the lapping of waves through the darkness. He pressed forward cautiously. The glitter of moonlight on water warned him, and he went very tentatively down the last steep slope to the East River. The shore was wilderness. The water was completely tranquil. He waded into it and began a cautious march along the shoreline. Here there was little or no breeze. His scent would not be carried far, and that out over the river. He waded for a very long time, keeping from ten to thirty feet from the water's edge. Twice he disturbed private affairs of the inhabitants of the jungle. Once there was an ecstatic splashing in the water before him, and he advanced with care, and something sputtered alarmedly and flashed up the beach—he did not see it clearly, but it was very long and furry—and went crashing to safety among the trees. The other time was when he came on an animal fishing. It prowled upon the beach, staring absorbedly into the river, and as Dick came near it plunged from the beach and with a sweeping motion of an extraordinarily long paw sent a two-foot fish writhing through the air toward the land, with an accompanying shower of moonlit drops of spray. Then Dick loomed up and it fled. He heard the beached fish flapping convulsively as he went by.

Then, less than a quarter-mile farther on, the moonlight showed him a small wharf going out into the water. His eyes were well-used to the moonlight now. He saw a boat tethered to the wharf. Its thwarts were occupied by drooping, naked rowers. There were two *ruhks* on the wharf, squatted on their haunches like wolves or dogs.

Dick went quietly ashore. He made certain of his two tear-gas bombs and swung the sawed-off shotgun around and threw off the safety-catch. He had fired three shots from an automatic pistol and had been lucky. But one does not want to depend on luck when it is dark and animals may be charging. A sawed-off shotgun is better.

He went as silently as possible along the beach. But he touched a brushwood branch, and one of the *ruhks* turned its head. Dick was still. Presently the *ruhk* yawned and looked away. Dick went on. He did not really hope to reach the wharf undiscovered, of course—

He did not. A *ruhk* stared in his direction and stood up quickly while he was better than two hundred yards away. Dick broke into a run toward the wharf. Fortunately, the beach here was all of ten feet wide.

He was in full stride when both *ruhks* were up and staring keenly at him from their positions on the stem of the wharf. They could not see him quite clearly because of the background of brush behind him. One of them yelped questioningly. Since he was not

another *ruhk* he should have been—to the creatures of this world—a fugitive. That he ran toward them instead of away was unsettling. He covered nearly fifty yards before the *ruhk* yelped again. Seventy-five before it snarled. A hundred before both animals trotted ashore to intercept him. And the *ruhks* were slave guards. They felt contempt for men. They stood poised and waiting while he plunged on still nearer. It was not possible for them to be afraid of him. It was unlikely that they would even feel the need for caution.

They stood on the wharf-stem, snarling in indecision. Dick was actually within seventy yards before the first of them emitted a high howl and plunged at Dick.

He pulled the trigger of the sawed-off shotgun when it was twenty yards away, and practically tore it apart. The other leaped crazily aside into the brush. Dick ran on, leaping over the dying creature, and whirled as the second *ruhk* leaped from behind. The riot-gun crashed again. At such short range, the heavy pellets hit in a compact mass of destruction and then caromed outward from each other with all the effect of an explosion.

Dick reached the planks of the wharf as a beastly howl came from the trail which led to this landing-place. He saw four-footed figures rushing toward him, and tossed a tear-gas bomb, and ran out to the end of the wharf as the bomb created a cloud of mist around the shore end.

Human figures cringed, below him in the boat. He saw dull, animal eyes and matted shocks of hair and naked bodies on which the moonlight shone. This was a galley. At one time it had been an oared cutter of a United States warship, and doubtless its disappearance from its proper place on Earth had caused some concern. Now a dozen chained men slumped over their oars upon its thwarts. They looked up at Dick, and cringed. He heard scrabblings on the wharf-planking, and fired furiously. A beast screamed. There were splashes. Dick fired again. *Ruhks*, plunging toward him, had run into the nearly stationary wall of tear-gas, and were blinded. Some went overboard. A man in a white, knee-length robe came stumbling out of the tear-gas cloud. He carried a spear and there was a pistol slung about his waist, but he wiped streaming eyes and tried to see—if only so he could run away.

Dick moved savagely toward the tear-gas and shot the gun's magazine empty. He came back carrying the spear and the overseer's pistol. With the sharp blade of the spear he sawed at the ropes which held the boat to the wharf. It floated free and he jumped down into its stern. None of the dozen chained men stirred. They simply looked at him in numb terror.

"Row, damn you!" raged Dick. "Get away from here!"

There was a splashing nearby. A blindly swimming *ruhk* snarled in the water. Dick killed it in cold ferocity. He turned back to the rowers. He opened his mouth to threaten them again. But suddenly the oars were beginning to dip, and suddenly they fell into cadence, and suddenly the boat swept away from the wharf and began to move out into the river. And Dick felt a dozen pairs of eyes staring at him incredulously.

"Look!" he snapped. "Somebody back on the real Earth has found a way to come through to this world, and how to get back. I came through to find a girl who's been kidnapped as I suppose you were! Play along with me and you'll get back too!"

There was silence. The rowers pulled automatically. They were living automatons. On the shore near the wharf there was a snarling, yelping tumult. *Ruhks* created a monstrous din. Then one of them seemed to silence the others and emitted high, keening cries which would carry a vast distance over the water on a night as still as this.

Then one of the rowers said dully:

"Telling 'em. They'll give us to the *ruhks*, now!"

A man near the bow cursed. The rowing kept on. Then another man said, marveling:

"He killed a *ruhk*!"

Dick said sharply:

"I'll kill some more!" He held up the overseer's pistol. "I've got an extra pistol. Who wants it?"

More silence. Then a voice said in a whisper:

"Could kill *ruhks* with that."

"Or overseers," said another in a hushed tone.

"Could kill anybody," said yet another, as if dazed. "With a pistol, a fella could kill 'em ..."

Babbling. Sudden, lustful babblings. The oars stroked irregularly, Dick barked at them as the babblings rose to uproar.

"Silence there!" Instant stillness. These men were cowed to where they were hardly men. The rowing took up its regular cadence once more. "There was a girl vanished from New York three days ago," said Dick harshly. "She wasn't taken to the slave pen back yonder. Where was she taken?"

A long pause, and then a voice said fumblingly:

"We didn't take her across the river. We ain't taken nobody across but *ruhks* an' overseers."

"Then she's still on Manhattan Island," rasped Dick. "How many other slave pens there?"

Another voice, heavily:

"One up by the hothouses. That's upriver. Across from Blackwell's Island—or what looks like Blackwell's."

The use of the name, alone, was an indication of the length of time the man who used it had been a slave here on the twin of Earth. Blackwell's became Welfare Island many years ago.

"We'll head for there, then," said Dick grimly.

The rowing went on. It was spiritless and dazed. Dick found a tiller and swung the boat about. A man said humbly:

"Give me that extra pistol, fella? There's a overseer I got to kill. He gave my girl to the *ruhks*. Lend it to me?"

"I'm getting some more," said Dick. "First—"

A man near the bow whimpered.

" 'Nother boat ... It's got *ruhks* in it ..."

Dick strained his eyes. He saw the boat, upstream, coming down, heading out on the wide, moonlit river. It came as if headed for the villa on the other shore, down where the Navy Yard should have been. It was impossible to see the size of the boat, but it could only have come from somewhere on Manhattan Island opposite Welfare. It could have come from that other slave pen. It could be carrying Nancy to the villa now. At least, its crew might know what had happened to her.

He swung the tiller over.

"Pull hard," he directed.

The two boats neared each other steadily. The other did not change its course. Its rowers—doubtless chained like these—rowed in the steady apathy Dick's own crew had shown. But now, slowly, a trace of spirit was coming to his crew. Presently a voice whispered:

"We goin' to take that boat?"

"Yes," said Dick. "I want to find out about that girl."

The voice said hungrily:

"Fella—let me have anyway that spear! I'm dead anyways, now, but maybe—"

Dick silently passed it to him, and he seized the haft of it without slackening his stroke on the oar.

The other boat was a hundred yards away. A voice called from it in a language Dick did not know. He did not answer. It was fifty yards away. Twenty-five. Its helmsman called again, this time obsequiously, as if the arrogance of a boat holding to a collision course implied that some mighty personage must be in it. Dick grimly shifted his own tiller as the other boat gave way, to keep collision inevitable. Under his breath he said:

"Pull hard!"

The helmsman of the other boat snapped agitated orders. There came animal noises from it. Sounds which were neither yelps nor snarlings, but something in between and somehow conversational. The *ruhks* in the other boat were calling to supposed fellow beasts in this.

Then, in panic, the other helmsman swung his boat clean around to avoid a head-on collision, and Dick swerved and crashed along the other craft's stern. So near, he could see a robed figure at the tiller and two uneasy *ruhks* balancing themselves as if to spring and regarding him and his craft with anxiety.

As the stern of his own boat scraped the other, Dick fired twice, point-blank. Then there was screaming, snarling uproar, and a man rose, grabbing at his pistol-holster, and there was deadly battle in the waist of Dick's boat where a wounded *ruhk* had sprung on board. Dick fired again, and the thing was ended.

He called sharply to the other crew: "Hold up, there! Back water! Try to get away and we'll sink you!"

The captured craft lay still, its chained rowers shivering and in dread.

Of course, Nancy wasn't in it. They'd never heard of her.

Dick had tried not to think of this possibility, but he could not help it. There were two slave pens on Manhattan Island, but Nancy had not been taken to either of them. She had not been carried to the palace of the masters on the Brooklyn shore in either of the now-captured cutters. Of the remaining possibilities, for her to have been devoured by *ruhks* because of an injury was most likely, and the bare suspicion drove all thoughts of humanity out of Dick's mind.

Certainly the slaves of this Other World knew nothing of her. There was but one way to learn definitely—no, two. If Dick could capture an overseer alive, he might force the man to tell him Nancy's fate if he knew it. And if that failed, then the palace itself—

Now, though, he had two dozen men to command. They were doomed, of course. No slave who had witnessed the killing of an overseer or a *ruhk* could be allowed to live, because his tale would inspire the others to wishful thinking. More, no slave who had seen an armed free man could be allowed to spread such tidings of hope.

So Dick acted with the ruthlessness that knowledge justified. He now had twenty-four followers, chained to their seats in the two cutters. He did not free them from their shackles. Instead, with the second boat following docilely because its crew could do nothing else, he made for a point on the Manhattan shore close to that small splinter of rock which lies southward of Welfare Island. As the boats headed for that spot, he took a notebook from his pocket and wrote grimly in its pages. It was a report to Sam Todd. It was a demand for arms. It told very curtly what had happened, but essentially, primarily, emphatically, it was a demand for arms to make a slave-revolt not only possible but successful. Arms with which, by massacre, to make this Other World no longer a place from which thieves and slavers preyed on the world of men. Now that five thousand years of mysteries and crimes were solved, those mysteries and crimes must end. They must!

He landed on Manhattan opposite the little splinter-islet. He tore out the pages on which he'd written his account and pinned them to the bark of the largest nearby tree with a thorn longer than his hand from a nearby bush. Sam would hunt the tree-trunks hereabouts from Earth, looking through his peephole from the equivalent space—it was a park in New York—as early as tomorrow morning. He might even hunt them up tonight. When he saw a message at the arranged place, he would use the doorway Maltby had contrived, and retrieve it. He would obey it as nearly as he could.

Then Dick took his two boats up the river past all observation. He found a secure hiding-place for both boats on a shore which should have been the Bronx. Then, and only then, he began to free his followers from their shackles. He had delayed that until he could tell them confidently that the means of fighting would soon be on the way.

It was late, by the time they were well hidden and free. The slaves had among them now two spears and two automatic pistols, besides Dick's own. These were not arms enough. So Dick commanded them to cut saplings and make substitute spears,

sharpening the points with the steel blades of the spears. And if any could make bows or arrows—but that would take time.

Time was of the essence, of course. And arms were essential. At the moment they were probably safe. There would be no regular patrol of men or *ruhks* on the mainland, where no slave pen lay. But they could be found, and ultimately would be. If the freed slaves tried flight inland, of course they would be tracked down. That was a function of the *ruhks*.

So he asked grim questions of his followers. He began to outline the beginnings of his plans. The men were cowed, and they had been almost spiritless. But they were desperate beyond the desperation of mankind. Their hate was a burning flame. So Dick made plans to utilize their desperation and hate as substitutes for the spirit that had been driven out.

~ * ~

Back on Earth there was the barest beginning of a possibility of change. Sam Todd—still sweating when he thought of his experience in Brooklyn—went to the park which was the Manhattan shore opposite the splinter-island south of Welfare. It was dark when he arrived, but he sat on a bench and put a copper alloy peephole inconspicuously to his eye. He did not at first see the sheets of paper that Dick had pinned to the trunk of a tree for him to find. There was no light but moonlight in the forest where the big tree stood. But even so, Sam made a discovery which was disheartening. In the world of men there had been a fill-in at that spot. The park area had been raised in level by earth piled high, with grass and concrete walkways laid on top. Fifteen feet back from the shoreline of the Other World, the ground-levels in the other world were completely different. Sam discovered, even before he saw the impaled sheets of paper, that any message Dick had left for him would be buried deep beneath publicly maintained park lawn. Actually, the scribbled sheets were stuck to a tree trunk under a drinking fountain on Earth. To get at them would have required an excavation besides an interdimensional door, and it could not be accomplished without either permission or discovery. In short, Sam simply could not pick up Dick's message at all.

But he had the twin to the metal peephole. It was a miniature interdimensional door. Maltby had made it to be sure he could. And sitting on the park bench Sam wrote painfully in his turn:

"There's an earth-fill covering up your papers. I can't get to them. But I have been looking around Maltby's place. Two miles northeast of here there is a pond in the world, you're in. There is a cart-trail past it. Just beyond the first bend in that trail to northward of the pond, there is an unusually large tree with mottled bark. That tree grows through the space Maltby's apartment occupies on Earth. Come there. I'll have something fixed up so you can come back—with Nancy, I hope.—Sam."

He fumbled in his pocket. The only suitable container was his wallet. He emptied that and put his message inside it. He put the end of his handkerchief between the

zipper teeth and caught the cloth firmly. He rolled up the wallet into a cylinder and managed to squeeze it through the tiny round alloy doorway which corresponded to the alloy eye. Feigning to drink at the drinking fountain, he released the handkerchief by which the wallet dangled in the Other World. Then, through the peephole, he watched. The wallet fell at the foot of the very tree in the Other World to which Dick's report and demand for arms was fastened. Dick could not fail to find it when he came to make sure his message had been retrieved by Sam. The handkerchief showed up plainly.

As an emergency way to explain to Dick why his message hadn't been removed, and to arrange a better means of communication, it was an excellent idea. But it did not take into account certain facts.

The *ruhks* were slave guards. The slaves were cowed. But sometimes pure horror made them cunning. So the shoreline of Manhattan Island was trotted over, at least once in twenty-four hours, by a keen-nosed *ruhk* with the intelligence of a man. Being beasts with undiminished feral instincts, they made those rounds with all the satisfaction of hunting animals. They savored the smells of the jungle. Sometimes they snapped up an unwary wild thing and devoured it. But discovery of the scent of man on the shoreline was the purpose of the patrol.

Two hours after Sam dropped his message for Dick to find, a *ruhk* came padding through the darkness on that particular errand. He picked up instantly the scent of Dick's footprints where he had landed and selected a tree to hold his message. Slaverling a little—because unaccompanied humans on unlawful errands were the lawful prey of *ruhks*—the beast followed the human trail. He did not find Dick. He did find two messages. One was impaled on a thorn on a tree-trunk. One was the wallet on the ground.

The *ruhk* made sure that Dick had returned to the water. Then he picked up the wallet and set off at full speed to find the nearest overseer. The conversational noises of the *ruhk* were quite equal to an exact account of what he had found, so that an overseer and *ruhks* soon retrieved the other message. Both were sent across the river in a double-banked galley, specially summoned by light-signals from the shore.

The master of all the slaves and *ruhks* of these parts, and the lord of all local overseers, had already had two frights that day. One was the unprecedented appearance of an armed free man in the Other World, a matter of great gravity. The other alarming event had been the appearance of a between-worlds peephole in his very palace, as if enemies capable of interdimensional travel spied upon him for purposes of their own.

He had the notes translated, because he had never bothered to learn any language but the language of his ancestors. He puzzled over the interpretation of the two. He was annoyed, and he was frightened. He gave orders for the finding of the place where—according to Sam Todd—a doorway for passage between worlds was to be opened by those who were not of his race and hence were enemies to him and all his kind. He gave explicit commands about that. Then he ordered an adequate ambush prepared about the place where the messages had been left.

Then the master of the villa relaxed again, as bustling preparations began for the execution of his commands. But he could not relax completely. He wondered if the disappearance of six *ruhks* with no explanation whatever —some three days before this most upsetting day—had any connection with today’s events.

He was not aware that just before the six *ruhks* disappeared, Nancy Holt had vanished from the sidewalk where she waited for a taxicab. Nor was he aware that as she vanished Sam Todd had stared helplessly at a dwindling pool of quicksilver. But the master, in his palace on the Brooklyn shore, wouldn’t have thought that matter significant even if he’d known about it.

~ * ~

Sam Todd was in the parkway beside the East River Drive at sunrise. He was unreasonably uneasy. He had been unable to sleep. He sat on a dew-wet park bench shivering a little with the morning chill. As the dawn-light strengthened, he put the peephole to his eye.

The sun came slowly up over the eastern edge of the Other World. Splendid sunrise colorings silhouetted the green forests of the Brooklyn hills, almost solid at the upper surface save where giant trees of a species unknown on earth threw up lacy fountains of foliage like spray. The surface of the East River was oily smooth, and reflected the reds and golds and violets of the fading night sky so that it looked like rainbows going into solution. Mists hung here and there over the tree-tops, and seeped out from the jungle’s edge to make the shoreline mysterious.

Dick Blair’s small squadron crept along the shore, barely out from the beaches. The rowers strove to be silent. Often they were hidden in the mists, and sometimes they were only vaguely visible, like ghosts. But now and again the sun’s red rays smote fully on them. Then the crimson light made their bodies the color of blood.

Presently, the two oared boats checked their motion. One turned in toward the land. Its bow touched, and Dick Blair stepped ashore. All was stillness and silence. Somewhere a fish leaped, and the “plop” of its splash was somehow shocking. The rowers seemed not to breathe. Dick looked, and listened, and then in the fathomless hush of morning his nostrils wrinkled suddenly. He smelled something. The hair rose by instinct at the back of his neck. He smelled beasts.

He stood still on the beach. He spoke in a low tone to the men behind him. They had been tense. Their bodies grew tenser still.

He stepped into the underbrush.

The silence held, save that somewhere in the forest far away a staccato bellowing noise set up and almost instantly thereafter ceased. Something stepped delicately into view on the shore of the island out in the river, spread long, angular wings, and suddenly soared out over the water barely two yards above it. A tiny twittering noise came from a tree-top. One of the men in the boats shifted his position suddenly, and his oar splashed.

As if that small sound had been a signal, all hell broke loose where Dick had disappeared. There was the startling, thunderous crash of an explosion, which echoed and reechoed among the trees. A beast screamed. A second shot and a third, and then an automatic pistol roared itself empty and another took up the unholy task—and then there was a ghastly uproar of snarlings and screams and men shouting and more shots. Then the deeper bellowing of a sawed-off shotgun.

Dick came plunging from the brushwood, grinning savagely. Leaping forms came after him. He halted to fire twice, plunged on again, and splashed into the water and the bow of the beached boat.

The naked men shoved off in panic. He stepped along to the stern and sat down, saying composedly, “Don’t get too far away! We’ve got a chance to kill some *ruhks*, now.”

He began to reload his weapons. The brush erupted snarling forms. They howled their fury. Dick said: “Act confused and scared. Make it convincing!” The rowers of his own boat splashed and fumbled. Some of their awkwardness was confusion in reality, but not all. Neither cutter was more than ten yards from the shore, and both looked as if their crews were helpless from pure terror. Men bellowed from the brush, and the *ruhks* plunged into the water. Dick said hungrily:

“Out a little farther! Lure ‘em! We’ll kill ‘em if we can get ‘em swimming!”

The two cutters, splashing and clumsy and in seeming hysteria, went erratically out from the shore into the brightening dawn. Snarling beasts, intelligence forgotten in the instinct to kill, swam after them.

“Now!” roared Dick.

There were only two spears and two pistols besides his own weapons in the boats. But the men suddenly turned upon their pursuers. The *ruhks* could not yet believe that slaves would defy them. The slaves themselves almost failed of belief. One man in Dick’s own boat screamed and fled blindly from the bow, trampling on his fellows, and in glassy-eyed fear went on over the stern. But there was an aching blood-lust in the others. As the beasts swam snarling closer, they yelled in triumph when they found their oar-blades and sharpened saplings would reach. A man shrieked with joy when a sharp-pointed pole sank in a *ruhk*’s furry body and the beast uttered raging cries and snapped at the thing which impaled it. Another man howled with glee as his flailing oar broke a *ruhk*’s back and the thing screamed.

There were almost no shots. Dick held his own weapons in reserve. Once a *ruhk* got its paws over a gunwale and he raised a pistol, but a clubbed oar literally cracked its skull open. He almost relaxed, then. The other boat was close, and one *ruhk* did get on board it before three sharpened stakes impaled it simultaneously. No other came so near to close combat.

But the *ruhks* were intelligent. Devilishly, viciously intelligent. They had attacked in over confidence, urged on by blood-lust and the shouts of men on shore. Overseers, those men would be. But Dick’s own boat had killed six *ruhks* in a bare two minutes of tumultuous slaughter. A seventh paddled weakly toward shore. The other boat

had done almost as well. The remaining beasts snarled horribly, but one among them yelped and growled meaningfully, and the rest obeyed. They did not retreat, but they did draw off, just beyond the reach of spears or oar-blades. There they swam, raging.

The light grew momentarily stronger. The men in the boats now snarled and jeered in their turn at the animals they had feared so terribly. The *ruhks* made bloodcurdling sounds, their eyes blazing, just out of reach. One of them snapped at an oar-blade. The men shouted and paddled fiercely to come to grips again. It was full dawn, now, and though the sunshine was yet a deep orange there was brightness everywhere. The dew-wet trees looked golden-green and stark, sharp shadows played as the naked men derided the *ruhks* and strove with burning eyes to lure them within spear-stroke or to overtake them.

But it was not right. The *ruhks* were brainy and they knew what they did. Dick realized it with a start. The overseers were not even shooting from the shore, and they had pistols and the range would not be much over fifty yards. There must be something else—

Dick jerked his head about and saw the answer. Around the southern tip of Welfare Island a large boat sped. It was a galley of two banks of oars, converted from a coasting-schooner with clean, sharp lines. Its masts had been cut away, its deck removed and its bulwarks cut down. It floated lightly on the water. It was open to the sun save for decking at its bow and stern and a railed walkway in between, over the heads of the slaves at the oars. Overseers ran up and down that walkway, now, their whips cracking mercilessly, and the long and clumsy oars bent as the slaves pulled the galley on. Sixty men pulled the oars—lash-scarred, chained, maniacs in despair. There were half a dozen robed men at the stern, besides one who handled a wholly modern small ship's wheel. There were others, with *ruhks*, at the galley's bow. A dozen men with firearms to four pistols and a shotgun—and one of the pistols was empty and another had only three bullets left. But the larger galley had no need to fight. It could merely ride down the smaller craft and spill their crews.

That was evidently its intention. When Dick shouted his discovery, tumult broke out, alike on the shore and from the swimming beasts. The *ruhks* on the larger galley howled an answer. Dick leaped to his feet and shouted, and the two cutters struck out in flight.

But there was no escape. They might beach, to be sure. But on the Manhattan shore there were *ruhks* and overseers. In jungle-fighting, the beasts would have it all their own way. If the boats beached on the long narrow East River island, the *ruhks* would even more surely have them in the end. They would be ferried there in monstrous numbers, and they had the grisly cunning of werewolves.

The sun shone brightly, now. It was day, and the two small fleeing craft and the larger, vengeful one in pursuit made a strange picture against the shores which showed only jungle. And of all insane preoccupations, Dick Blair at this moment tore leaves out of his notebook and shredded them to confetti, and tossed them in the air.

Then Dick gave orders to his own crew. The other cutter drew nearer at his hail. Without slacking their straining effort to keep ahead, the cutters raced along with their oar-tips almost touching, as if for mutual comfort. Then, when the bigger craft was barely fifty yards behind, they turned together for the farther Manhattan shore. The galley swung triumphantly. Closer. Forty yards. Thirty. Twenty. Ten. It would ride them down-

Dick flung the second of his tear-gas bombs. It was a perfect target and a perfect throw. The bomb landed on the bow-deck of the galley, in the very thick of the men who waited so zestfully to do murder. It exploded with a totally inadequate "plop!" and dense white vapor spouted out. And Dick's tossing of paper fragments bore its fruit: for by it he had gauged the faint breeze exactly. The tear-gas cloud hung almost stationary. The galley rode through it. The mist rolled all along the length of the bigger boat, blinding overseer and slave and *ruhks*. When the galley came out of the quite inconsiderable cloud, its oars beat erratically and out of rhythm, its overseers' whips no longer flailed, it lost way and veered crazily. And then the two cutters plunged to its sides and the slaves swarmed over the low gunwale.

What followed was not pretty. The former slaves, armed with sharpened poles and two spears and clubbed oars, raged the length of the galley, killing. *Ruhks*, unable to see, died fighting blindly. Overseers fought hopelessly with no eyesight. The men with whips, who from the walk over the rowers' benches had lashed on the slaves to work, were so helpless in their blindness that the men of the cutters laughed at them, stripped their whips and weapons from them, and flung them down to their still-chained fellows. The eyes of the rowers streamed copiously, but with howls of joy they tore their tyrants to pieces.

It seemed a matter of no more than seconds. Certainly not more than two minutes elapsed between the time when the cutters were in full flight and the time when the revolted slaves had grown from two dozen men in small boats, freed by Dick, to more than eighty with the oared galley of the master of the villa in their possession. Sixty of them still wept uncontrollably from the tear-gas they'd taken with their masters. But they grinned and howled and clanked their chains in glee, careless of possible retribution.

The men from the cutter were not blinded. The gas mist was gone before they boarded. But the eyes of some began to smart from traces of the stuff drifting up from the rowers' space. So Dick got the galley under way again to make a breeze to clear the last of it.

~ * ~

Sam Todd, white-faced, sitting on a bench in East Side Park in the New York City of Earth, put down the little metal peephole through which he had watched the battle in the dawnlight. Behind him, early morning cars whirled past on the double highway. Around him innumerable buildings poured plumes of steam and sooty smoke toward

the sky. A puffing tug towed coal barges over the very spot where, in the Other World, Dick Blair and a crew of freed slaves took account of their victory.

Sam Todd dazedly got up from the park bench. He knew that his message to Dick had not been picked up by Dick. The ready ambush told that somebody else had intercepted it, and made a trap for Dick and the naked scoundrels now obeying his orders.

Then cold chills went up and down Sam Todd's spine. Not one message, but both must have been intercepted. And his had told Dick how to find the tree which, in the Other World, grew through the space Maltby's flat occupied on Earth. And the folk who kidnapped slaves would have found it necessary to learn English.

Sam himself had risen before dawn to see if Dick received his note. Now he knew somebody else had received it. He went white and sick, and suddenly he plunged blindly across the East River Drive without regard to the traffic. Brakes squealed about him but he did not hear them. A car's bumper nudged his calf, but he did not feel it. Trembling and panting he found a phone booth at the nearest corner, darted inside, and dialed Maltby's number with fingers that shook uncontrollably. He sweated as the phone buzzed, stopped, buzzed and stopped, in monotonous assurance that it was ringing. Presently Sam hung up and dialed the same number again.

There was no answer.

In a taxi on the way to Maltby's place, his teeth chattered. But he couldn't bring himself to use the peephole to look into the Other World. Only at the very last instant, when the cab turned into the last block, could he nerve himself to look. Then he had the cab stop short. He got out and put the peephole to his eye.

He saw the virgin jungle of the Other World. Nothing else. He moved slowly and timorously along the street, the early morning sounds of New York seeming very loud indeed. He looked into the Other World, and then examined his surroundings in this so that he would not run into a blank wall.

Before the building in which Maltby lived, he stopped again. Shivering, he regarded the corresponding space in the Other World. He saw jungle, which here had little undergrowth and was merely a carpet of rotted leaves. He saw the mottled bole of the great tree he had described to Dick. Then he saw tracks in the dead leaves and wood mold on the ground. Something had come here on narrow, tired wheels like bicycle-wheels. It was gone. It had accomplished what it came for.

Sam Todd went heavily into the apartment building and into Maltby's flat. It was quite empty. Maltby was gone. More, all of his experimental apparatus was gone, too. Everything that had been used to make the doorway between worlds was missing.

Sam knew that there had been many small pools of quicksilver glistening in this place recently. Maltby was now a slave in the Other World. The doorway he'd made for Dick to go through was taken. No more doorways could be made, because Maltby had been the only man who knew how to make them. Dick Blair was beyond help, Nancy—if she still lived—was beyond hoping for, Maltby would shortly be tortured to make him tell everything he knew, and Sam Todd was helpless.

The telephone rang in Maltby's apartment. It rang again. Sam swallowed, looking at it.

Then he turned and went tip-toeing out of the flat. He was now the only man on Earth who knew that the Other World existed. He dared not talk about it, but he had to do something about it. His first impulse was to run away. He'd slept here last night. When Maltby was missed, he'd be asked about it. Naturally. As a man of ample means and a known student of criminology, the questioning would be very polite, of course. But he'd slept here. He'd gone out before dawn. He'd returned—and Maltby was missing. More: when Dick Blair was reported missing, Sam and Maltby had been the last two persons to see him. And Nancy Holt-

It would strike the police as a series of remarkable coincidences. They would expect him to explain them reasonably. When he couldn't, they would begin to get suspicious. And if he told the truth— There was nothing that could be more damning, in the eyes of the cops, than for Sam to tell the exact and literal truth. It would look like a very clumsy attempt to feign insanity.

His metal peephole would be considered a clever fake. It would be cut into to solve the mystery of its construction, and thereby be destroyed. The little door through which pencils and wallets could be thrust into the Other World would be considered also a device of modern prestidigitation. Sam Todd would be jailed until he explained the vanishing of his friends. In the Other World Maltby would be subject to fiendish tortures, and Sam Todd's name would come out of his babblings. When newspapers were snatched into the Other World, they would presently reveal Sam Todd's exact whereabouts and that the police accused him of faking insanity. Shortly the newspapers would print the news of his inexplicable escape from a locked cell. Then there would be nobody at all on Earth who knew anything about the Other World, and things would go on as before—theft and blood and agony and murder for thousands of years to come.

Sam went to his hotel and up to his suite. He began to pack for hiding, and for combat. He had been studying weapons as a part of his work. He took what weapons he had ammunition for, and all their ammunition. And he took what money he could find. There wasn't enough. He was in the act of debating whether or not to cash a check at the hotel desk when his telephone rang.

He jumped. It rang again.

He swallowed, with some difficulty. His mind was in the Other World. He felt hunted. He tried not to think of Maltby, but Maltby would have to scream out every secret thought he knew when the Other Worldlings began to work on him. He knew Sam's address and how to call him by phone.

The phone rang a third time.

Sam went quickly out of the door, sweating. He carried two bags. He left the telephone ringing.

Minutes later, he was at his bank. He cashed a large check. He cursed himself for knowing that he looked very pale. He cursed himself still more for being unable to devise a plan to save Maltby or even Dick.

He tried to close his mind and not think of such things. He went to Penn Station and paid off his taxi, then went by subway to Grand Central and left that with the passengers of an incoming train, apparently one of them. He took another taxi to a medium-priced hotel and registered as from out of town, asking for a room as high from the street as possible. Doggedly and bitterly, he meant to do what he could to fight the Other World. Within hours—days at most—the police would be hunting him. From the Other World he would be hunted, too. He had just two weapons—a one-inch peephole through which he could look into the Other World, and a one-inch space on a copper plate through which he could thrust things into the other cosmos. He had nothing else.

With the peephole he would learn the ways of the Other World. Slowly, carefully, he could find where doorways were placed and how they were made sometimes to be open and sometimes shut. In time he would be able to drop written word to some slave, guiding him to such a doorway and instructing him in its use. He might be able to drop small sharpened steel rods to serve as daggers. He should be able to pour down inflammable stuff and start incendiary fires to cover a break by such a slave. If once an interworld doorway fell into his hands, he would manage to get it underground where in the Other World it could not be found, or else to some upper floor of a skyscraper. And then he would act as the situation required. With one full-sized doorway opening into the other cosmos and freed slaves to tell what went on there, he could not fail to cause conviction and armed exploration.

From his eighth-floor room in the hotel he looked exhaustively out over jungle and placid waters. He saw only those, and once the reflection of sunlight from the villa's roof. There was nothing to be learned from aloft. So Sam took a deep breath and equipped himself with arms so that he would be inconspicuously a walking arsenal. It was wryly humorous to think that if the police found him his weapons would be proof of criminality, and if a between-worlds door closed on him the weapons would be useless. But he carried them just the same. He went down to the street to begin his search.

Then an idea struck him. He could give himself more time before the police hunted actively for him. He stepped into a phone booth and dialed his original hotel.

"Desk?" he said briskly. "Todd speaking. I have suite 406, you know. I've been suddenly called out of town. Cleveland and possibly Chicago afterward. Hold my mail for a forwarding address, won't you? I'll wire it."

The desk-clerk said hurriedly: "Yes, sir. But Mr. Todd! Your secretary has called three times in the past hour. She says it is desperately important for you to call her at once, sir. Extremely urgent."

Sam's hair stood upon his head. Nancy Holt was his secretary. Four days ago she'd vanished in a pool of quicksilver. And nobody who vanished like that ever came back. Nobody! It would be a trap—

"Very well," said Sam Todd, his throat tightening. "I'll call her. Did she leave a number?"

"No sir."

"Thanks," said Sam.

He hung up, his lips twisted. Then the oddity of it hit him. Nancy hadn't left a phone number. She didn't need to, of course. He knew the number of her phone. But anybody impersonating Nancy, or Nancy under duress, would have left a number. Anybody who forced Nancy to call would think it suspicious if she didn't leave a number Sam could call. So—incredibly enough—it was possible that it was straight. Or it was possible that some compulsion more terrible than he could guess at would have enslaved Nancy's mind as well as her body.

It was a decision of importance vastly greater than merely his own safety. Sam felt that the wrong decision might mean slavery and degradation and shame and horror for generations yet unborn. He had to play it out.

He called her number from the other side of town, with a taxi waiting to carry him away the instant he dashed out of the booth. He heard the crisp buzzings that meant her phone was ringing. Then her voice. It was unquestionably Nancy's voice, strained and tense.

"Hello?"

"Nancy!" he said hoarsely. "This is Sam Todd."

He heard her give a cry of pure relief.

"Sam! I've been going crazy, trying to reach Dick, and I couldn't—the Museum doesn't know where he is—and—"

"He went after you," said Sam flatly.

She laughed without amusement, almost hysterically.

"He couldn't. He couldn't, Sam! He's going to think I'm crazy—"

"Another world," said Sam. "Manhattan Island with no buildings on it. Slaves. Animals like dogs or wolves that have as much sense as men. Jungle all around. Right?"

"Sam!" she gasped. "How did you know?"

"Dick's gone there," he repeated. "The people who live there just kidnapped Maltby. How'd you get back?"

He kept listening for a false note in her voice. There weren't any false notes. Either this was the first escape in five thousand years, or it was Nancy made into a traitor to Earth and all her kind.

"Sam!" she panted. "They have ways like doors from that world to this. They set traps for people to drop into!. I—I got back through one of those traps. It was—like the one I fell into when I was on the street with you. If—you hurry we can get the trap and—"

Sam said flatly, "Where is the trap? In terms of this world, Nancy. Where were you when you got back?"

"A little alley between two old houses—" She told him, almost incoherently, the exact location. "Why?"

"I'll be seeing you," he said. "Right away. That's what you want, isn't it?"

"Y-Yes. I brought back a slave with me. A man who was a slave there. Where are you, Sam?"

"I'm on the way," said Sam grimly. "I'll be right over,"

He hung up. He went out and got into the cab. He stopped it two blocks from where she said she'd come back to earth. There was again an office building handy. Sam bribed an elevator operator and was admitted to a men's room normally accessible only to tenants of the building. In privacy, there, he peered through his peephole. He looked directly into the Other World from a height above the jungle trees. At first he saw nothing, but there was a small gap among the branches through which he glimpsed squared, fresh lumber. It was a crude and clumsy cage, of hand-hewn timbers mortised together so that anything inside could not possibly get out. He stared at it, and saw a movement nearby. There were beasts around it. The wolf-like beasts he'd seen at the villa and engaged in the galley fight of that morning. There were several beasts. At one time he saw three, one lying peacefully on the ground, and one sitting up thoughtfully licking at its paw, and another pacing restlessly up and down.

He went very pale indeed. He went down to the street again and rode the six blocks to Nancy's home. He approached it cautiously, several times using the peephole in his handkerchief as if he had a speck of dust in his eye.

The part of the Other World corresponding to Nancy's apartment-house was empty of beasts or cages or beings of the Other World. The space corresponding to her apartment itself was empty of anything but tree branches. But there were Other World beasts waiting where she said she'd returned to Earth. And she'd brought back a man.

It was Sam's duty to be suspicious, but he felt rather sick. He liked Nancy. He'd been naive before, when he went to Brooklyn, and he'd almost been picked up. There were just two possibilities here. It might be quite straight, and a break of incredible importance, or—Nancy had been in the Other World for four days, and she might have been the victim of contrivances or concoctions developed during five thousand years of pure villainy, and she might have become enslaved in the most literal possible sense.

Sam took a deep breath. He hoped desperately that everything was all right. But he held his pistols fast as he went into the apartment-house. He was unhappily ready to kill Nancy as an act of kindness, if it should be necessary.

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There was sunshine streaming in a window. There was dust on a polished table on which the sunbeams smote. There was a man with shaggy, uncombed hair and beard seated at the table, clad in a quilted dressing gown which obviously belonged

to Nancy. He was eating ferociously with his fingers. Nancy was nowhere in sight. The man looked up. Sam backed against a wall and said: "Well?"

His fingers were very ready to pull the triggers. The man stared at Sam. He swallowed convulsively and spoke. "You Sam Todd?"

"Yes," said Sam. "I am. Who're you?"

"Name's Kelly," said the long-haired man huskily. "I been a slave—yonder. She got me back here. She's—washin', I guess. She said she felt filthy."

Nancy's voice called, "Sam?"

"Here!" said Sam. It didn't seem like a trap.

"Just a minute!" she called. "Get Kelly to tell you!"

"Right. Go ahead," said Sam to the man. But he kept his back against the wall.

"I was a slave," said the man in the dressing, gown. "I— here!" He stood up and slipped off the garment. He wore a loin-cloth underneath, and nothing else. There were horrible, criss-cross, purplish marks upon his back, laid over and over each other. "They're floggin's," he said briefly. "The overseer said I was hard to break an' the *ruhks*'d get me sure. But they didn't. I was choppin' wood when this *ruhk* come up an' told my guard a master wanted me. So I went with the *ruhk*."

"What's a *ruhk*?" asked Sam warily. The man drew the dressing gown about his shoulders and sat down again.

"A creature of the devil!" said Kelly in a hard voice. "Critters that look like police dogs, only twice their size. They got sense like men. They can talk to each other an' we slaves hadda learn to understan' their orders."

Sam waited. He felt very lonely. It had seemed to him that he was the only man left with the purpose of fighting the Other World. He wanted to believe this man, but he did not quite dare. Not yet.

"The *ruhk* took me to—her." He nodded in the general direction from which Nancy's voice had come. "There she was. White as a sheet but game, talkin' to the *ruhks* who were lookin' at her an' waggin' their tails an' crawlin' on the ground when she looked at them. I never seen a *ruhk* wag his tail before. An' she was dressed." He was eating again, but at Sam's expression he explained: "Slaves get stripped soon as they're caught. Men an' women both. That's a sign they're slaves. Overseers wear things like shirts. Long ones. But she was dressed like N'York, so she wasn't no slave, an' she wasn't no master, either."

The word "master" evidently referred to males and females alike, of a class of humans concerning which Kelly had evidently only indefinite ideas.

"When I got there, she says to me, 'I—I'm here and I don't know where here is, and—I'm afraid I've gone insane. These—animals seem to understand when I talk. Can you—tell me what's happened?' "

That was convincing. It sounded like Nancy.

"What had happened?" asked Sam. His hands weren't clenched so tightly on his pistol-butts, now.

“She’d found herself in a cage-trap,” said Kelly. “Same as me. When they want slaves they set a trap somewheres where only one fella at a time is likely to be. Or they fix it for times when there won’t be many folks around. You get in the trap-space an’ somethin’ drops over you, an’ you are—yonder.. There’s a *ruhk* watchin’ the trap. Always. He makes sure you don’t do nothin’ funny. Me—when I was caught the *ruhk* just snarled every time I moved, then some more *ruhks* come with a overseer. They turned me outa the trap an’ the *ruhks* threw me, neat, an’ tore my clothes off. I thought they was gonna kill me, but when I was stripped they marched me to the slave pen. A man that’s been stripped an’ herded by *ruhks* has all the starch took out of him somehow. For a woman it’s worse. It took a long time to figger out why when she—” again the nod toward the other room “—found herself in a cage-trap the *ruhk* on watch pulled the latch an’ let her out right away an’ whined anxious tryin’ to say he was sorry. Acted like a puppy, she said. There was moonlight enough for her to see his tail waggin’ like crazy. Come mornin’, she started to walk away, scared, an’ he follered her, an’ presently a couple more *ruhks* come up, trailin’ by scent, an’ they acted like bashful puppies, too.”

Kelly took a mouthful of food. What he said was not reasonable, but Sam found that he believed it. He tried to guess at an explanation.

“It was the next day before she asked ‘em pretty if they would bring her somebody human to talk to. She’d found out they could understand better’n dogs. As good as men. They just can’t say words, not havin’ the throat for it. Anyhow, one of ‘em run off an’ brought her me. An’ I told her where she was an’ what’d happened as best I knew, but it took two days to figure out what made them *ruhks* act like they did. They caught some animals an’ brought ‘em when she said she was hungry. I managed to make a fire an’ cook. The *ruhks* hung around like they were crazy about her. When we got things figured out, we made ‘em crazy about me!”

He laughed suddenly.

“What was it?” asked Sam.

“Her grandma’s perfume,” said Kelly sardonically. “The perfume she used that she had made up after her grandma’s recipe. They’re crazy about it. When I’d told her everything I knew, she said she must smell like the masters they had—the masters that boss *ruhks* an’ overseers together. I never seen a master, but she said the *ruhks* acted like cats with the smell of catnip, or dogs with the smell of—what is it? Anise? Maybe *ruhks* are bred to be crazy about that scent, like dogs are bred to be crazy about the scent of different animals they’re s’posed to hunt. She said if that kinda breedin’ was kept up long enough—”

“Five thousand years, more or less,” said Sam quietly. “That’s long enough to breed in a special instinct, all right! And it’s clever. Damnably clever! That’s why they can trust the beasts. That’s why there can’t even be a revolt of overseers; much less slaves! Go on!”

“That’s all,” said Kelly. “When she had it all figured out—she had a little perfume thing in her purse. She sprayed some smell-stuff on me. Her kind. Them *ruhks* got

bewildered, then. I'd been a slave, an' all of a sudden I was a master. All of a sudden they loved me. They hadda do like I said. It was bred in 'em. An' still underneath the master-smell I stunk like a slave! Funny, huh? So that part was okay an' we told 'em to take us to a cage-trap that was set, an' we went in, an' they let down the thing on us, an' we were back in New York. We stepped off an' I was in a fix without enough clo'es on to walk a block. She grabbed a taxi an' we come here."

He poured a huge glass of milk—it was strange to see this brawny, hairy man drinking milk—and turned from the table.

"I'm goin' back," he added coldly. "We kinda agreed on that. She's goin' to get some more of that perfume—gallons an' gallons of it—an' I got use for it! We got those particular *ruhks* waitin' by that trap for us. I don't know how long they will. We got to hurry. We need guns ..."

Sam felt sick again, but now it was relief. This narrative had just that quality of convincing unreason that nobody in the world would devise to deceive him. So much more plausible stories could have been contrived! And he had been so horribly afraid that Nancy would have been enslaved in a fashion akin to drug-addiction!

She came in the room, smiling.

She had been his secretary for almost a year, and he had admired her efficiency and respected her intelligence, but he hadn't thought about her as a girl. She was helping him get set to be a consulting criminologist. But for four days he'd felt horrible self-reproach because she'd been the victim of a crime literally within arms' reach of him, and he'd been unable to help her. Now—she was beautiful.

She was freshly bathed and brushed. She was dressed in a sort of whipcord costume. She looked tense, but without fear. She looked at him, smiled, and then said urgently:

"Sam! You said Dick's in the Other World after me! Where and how, Sam? We've got to catch up with him and give him some of that master-scent so he'll be safe from the *ruhks*! And we've simply got to do something about the slaves, Sam! People from right here are made into work-animals and—and worse, Sam! Kelly told me!"

Sam Todd released his two pistols. He took a deep breath.

"List what you need, Nancy," he said grimly. "I'll get a suit for Kelly first. I've got plenty of money for that and anything else we need. Then—Kelly, can we move that doorway if we've both got the master-smell on us?"

"If you mean the thing we come through, sure!" said Kelly. "There's always a *ruhk* on guard over them things in case somebody managed to get outa a cage after bein' caught. An' in case a slave got loose an' found one. No slave is ever loose outside a slave pen without a *ruhk* guardin' him. But *ruhks* won't bother us, now!"

"I've already ordered the perfume made up," said Nancy crisply. "I phoned a drug-store that makes it up for me. This time I ordered all they could make. It should be ready any minute."

"Then—clothes for Kelly," snapped Sam, "so we can get to the trap and into it, and we'll go. Call and nag them about the scent while I see what I can do."

He went downstairs and found the superintendent of Nancy's apartment house. He bargained with him extravagantly. He came back with a coat and sweater and trousers—none of them clean.

"No shoes," he reported. "You're a nature-boy, Kelly, but in this part of town it's allowable to be a little crazy. The scent?"

"It's ready," said Nancy.

They went out together, Kelly wriggling a little from the unaccustomed feel of clothing on his legs and body.

They got the scent-stuff from the drugstore, where it had been compounded, and a number of smaller empty bottles to transfer it to for dispensing.

"Now," said Sam, as the cab started off again, "Here's some money. It's advance salary. Nancy, I want you to go to some small town and stay there until Dick and I get back. New York City isn't safe for you. But it's not likely that there'll be *ruhk*-Egyptian set-ups anywhere but near big towns. You'll be safest in a small one."

Nancy said firmly, "I'm safe in the Other World, Sam. *Ruhks* would fight for me. And Dick's there!"

"I could give you the peephole so you could watch out," said Sam miserably, "but I can't hope to get what we'll need without it. If from this world I can look into the Other World with it, from the Other World I should be able to look back into this. And I'm going to need to do just that!"

"Of course you will!" agreed Nancy comfortably. "But since Dick went after me, not even knowing what he'd find, it's only fair for me to go after him, since I do know! I'm going!"

Kelly said woodenly:

"Even with the stuff on me, fella, they minded her better than me. She's right that they'll fight for her. If you got a gun for her—we need her. And fella—for what I'm goin' back there for, I'll take anybody along that'll help!"

Sam fumbled out pistols and shells for Kelly. He'd made himself into a walking arsenal, and he proved it. The cab swerved suddenly and stopped. The driver looked around. He saw the weapons being passed over. Sam's eyes fell upon him and he swallowed and said:

"I—didn't see nothin'. I didn't see a thing!"

But Sam knew that he had seen. And the passing-out of pistols in a taxicab in New York has only one meaning. People who are not planning hold-ups do not exchange or examine pistols in taxicabs. But Sam could do nothing. He shrugged his shoulders and passed over a twenty-dollar bill. No matter what the driver did or did not do, if the cage-trap doorway was where it had been, and if the beasts were subject to Kelly and himself, it wouldn't matter about the police. It wouldn't matter anyhow, after he'd vanished in a pool of quicksilver.

They got out of the cab, and it jerked away with the flag still down. The brakes squealed at the corner, where a traffic cop was on duty. Sam saw the cab stop within

inches of the cop, and saw the chauffeur jabber excitedly. The cop jerked his head around. He fumbled at his hip and started toward them.

Sam put the peephole to his eye. Yes. The cage-trap, with its doorway open. Six beasts—*ruhks*—waited on the ground about it. Sam saw exactly where the doorway was, and how it was contrived to work.

The cop blew his whistle shrilly. A radio-car, going crosstown, swerved sharply. It turned against all traffic rules and darted toward Sam. The taxi stayed in the middle of the intersection, the driver staring avidly back.

“Okay, Kelly,” said Sam wearily. “We go through the door, and fast. Nancy, you haven’t a gun and they can’t do a thing. Just act dumb. Come on, Kelly! Here goes!”

He stepped into place, Kelly beside him. Something seemed to flash into being over their heads and to drop soundlessly upon them. As the other cosmos came swiftly into view—actually, it seemed to be unveiled about them—Sam knew that to Nancy they had seemed to vanish in a double pool of quicksilver.

Bloodcurdling snarls filled the air. Six *ruhks* gazed at him with feral, deadly eyes. They were monstrous creatures, far larger than any wolves could be. Sam felt an angry horror of them. Then Kelly said harshly:

“I washed! Damn! Where’s that smell-stuff?”

Sam fumbled, and went cold. He’d been watching the driver. Then he’d been watching the traffic cop. He’d been scared for Nancy. His blood felt icy in his veins as he realized that he hadn’t even brought the scent-stuff out of the cab. He said bitterly:

“We muffed it! But they’ve got to come in the door, these beasts. Maybe we can kill them all before they call somebody—”

But he didn’t even hope it. And then something fell against him, hard, and Nancy was with them in the cage, and the snarling of the *ruhks* did not change at all but rather grew louder. Because she didn’t have the master-scent on her, either. She too had bathed and changed.

~ * ~

The galley lay at anchor in the Hudson, having stroked its way past the top of Manhattan Island. The two cutters trailed astern. Men fished, moved restlessly about, and uneasily scanned the river and the shores for signs of pursuit. But most of them talked. They babbled. They shouted, perhaps because as slaves they had been forbidden to speak.

Some had been so long enslaved and so broken in spirit that they babbled hysterically and then were struck dumb and cringed and looked fearfully over their shoulders. But there was one group in earnest, low-voiced discussion, and there were a few in grim consultation with Dick.

There had been only the three boats in all the harbor which should have been New York. The cutters had been used as ferries from Manhattan to the villa on the Brooklyn shore. The larger galley carried heavy stores, and on rare occasions one of that family

of aloof and remote persons who were the masters of the palace and the overseers and the slaves and *ruhks*. But there were no motor-boats. There were no airplanes. There were no cars or other means of fast transportation—or pursuit.

“*Ruhks*, prob’ly, can keep pace with us on shore,” said a man with a crooked nose, “but there’s nothin’ else that can. We can go any place we want an’ they can’t stop us.”

Another man said sourly:

“Go what place? An’ do what when we get there?”

There was silence. A shout astern, A fisherman hauled to the deck a fishlike creature almost his own length. It writhed and snapped on the planking.

“The masters can get all the boats they want,” pointed out Dick. “They can drag PT boats into this world if they feel like it.”

“Who’ll run ‘em?” demanded a man with a scarred face. “Not slaves! They don’t even know which of us knows how to do what, and *they* can’t run machinery! It didn’t matter when all they wanted was slaves to row and dig and cut wood. They didn’t use PT boats then, and they can’t use ‘em now. They can’t even use galleys until they train new crews—if they know how to do that!”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” admitted Dick. “It makes sense, though. But we can count on their having plenty of guns. Maybe grenades. Certainly machine-guns.”

“Yes?” demanded the man with the scarred face. “They’d have to get slaves to teach ‘em how to use grenades. They’d have to find slaves who knew how. And then —would they trust grenades in slaves’ hands, or use them themselves on slaves’ instructions? And how about machine-guns? They can’t use them and don’t dare trust slaves to teach them. They’ll stick to regular guns. What we can’t lick are the *ruhks*.”

Dick said shortly, “We did today.”

“Sure! Twice. But once we had ‘em swimmin’,” said another man gloomily. “The other time you had tear-gas. Got any more tear-gas?”

“N-No,” admitted Dick. “But if I could get in touch with my friends—”

There was sardonic, mirthless laughter. If any man in the Other World had been able to get in touch with his friends on Earth, the fact of the Other World’s existence wouldn’t have remained a secret, and it would have been the object of the research of all the scientists on Earth for centuries or millenia. All Earthly science would have been focussed upon it, and it would have been reached and conquered long ago.

“What keeps the *ruhks* loyal?” demanded Dick. “Why do they work for the masters? If they’re so intelligent, why don’t they go off and be happy savage beasts?” Nobody knew the secret.

“I never saw a master,” growled a short, brawny man, “but the *ruhks* do. Every *ruhk* gets to stay at the palace a while every so often. The overseers see to that! And let me tell you, the overseers are scared of the *ruhks*, too! Plenty scared! It ain’t but three or four years ago that a overseer was given to the *ruhks* to play with. They had a swell game with him. I watched. First time I ever enjoyed watchin’ a *ruhk* game! There’s some trick the masters got to keep the *ruhks* crazy about ‘em—”

"Wait a minute!" said Dick sharply. "Overseers are scared of them? And still give them orders? Why do *ruhks* take orders from them and not from slaves?"

A tall man said with precise, academic detachment:

"It's the robes. Police dogs learn to obey any man in uniform. Only overseers wear robes. That's a uniform. Maybe the cloth has a special smell the *ruhks* recognize, but a robe would be enough. Slaves are nearly naked. A new-caught slave is stripped at once. That's what makes him a slave in the *ruhks*' minds."

"But they're supposed to be intelligent," objected Dick. "Would that be enough—"

"Why not?" asked the tall man. "They're intelligent, but they're not educated. Illiterate peasants would accept a badge like that. In fact, they do. They obey any man in a policeman's uniform. It doesn't mean lack of brains. It just means lack of information. There are no schools for *ruhks*. They're intelligent like men with limited educations." Then he said deliberately: "Yes. I think that any of us with an overseer's robe—we might need a bath, too— would be obeyed within limits by the *ruhks*. I would be quite willing to try to deceive them. I think it could be done at least for a time."

"Good!" said Dick. "We'll pick a few among ourselves to impersonate overseers, then. Right?"

The tall man said, "Overseers shave. That's another badge. No slave ever has a blade he could use to shave— or cut his throat with."

Dick fumbled mentally. He had an idea. It might or might not work. He put it forward diffidently. But to his surprise, there was no enthusiasm.

"That's not what we want," growled the man with the broken nose. "Get back to Earth? Sure! But only after we wipe out this gang! If I was by myself, I'd jump at the chance to escape. But there's a lot of us here, and I aim to see some *ruhks* an' overseers get theirs before I duck!"

Growled agreement echoed his words. A man who has been enslaved and degraded wants two things above all others. One is freedom, to be sure, but the other is to get back his self-respect, which means the destruction of the cause of his degradation.

"We'll try the trick I mentioned," said Dick, grimly. "I've got a pocket-knife of sorts. We'll hone it up for shaving and use the robes of the overseers we've killed, and make more if we find suitable stuff on board, here. Let's get to work."

His counsellors rose. But the tall man lingered. He touched Dick on the shoulder.

"Just a moment. I used to be professor of physics. If you can tell me how your friend set about making that doorway between worlds... It can't call for elaborate apparatus if it could be worked out five thousand years ago, as you explained."

Dick began helplessly to tell him what he knew. It was not much. Maltby had explained that the trick was a freak orientation of the molecules of an alloy. The tall man listened. Dick added that Maltby, working drearily and close to exhaustion, had said that what we call dimensions happen actually to be merely a set of directions in which the forces we know of work. Forms of energy interchange at right angles to each other. Electricity and magnetism, for example. One wraps wire around an iron core, so that a current in the wire will always be at right angles to the length of the

core. The magnetic field which results is parallel to the core and at right angles to the current-flow.

The tall man said, "Of course. It goes farther than that. There's what they call the three-finger rule in elementary physics. Go on! What's next?" [This of course, is the well-known principle by which dynamos; motors, ammeters, etc., work. The three-finger rule will be found in some form in any physics textbook which treats of electricity and magnetism.—Murray Leinster.]

Dick frowned, trying to recall what Maltby had said. When Maltby had made his explanation, however, he had been already tired and Dick had been close to madness because of Nancy's disappearance. He hadn't really tried to understand the abstract principles Maltby was wearily putting into words.

"All I can remember," said Dick, "is that he said that the three forms of energy you mentioned as following the three-finger rule—electricity, magnetism, and kinetic energy—simply have to operate at right angles to each other. And he said that if two of them or all three were interdependent and yet somehow the apparatus was contrived so that they were not at right angles in our cosmos, then the whole system would tend to rotate into a cosmos in which they could be at right angles. And that such a system could be made to bend anything introduced into it into other cosmos. Does that make sense to you?"

The tall man clasped his hands feverishly.

"Of course! Of course! Go on!" Then as Dick looked at him in doubt, he said irritably. "The most obvious thing in the world!"

"I—suppose so," said Dick doubtfully. "Anyhow, Maltby said he thought he could produce the set-up he wanted with electricity and magnetism and so on because there wasn't any—" He paused and said uncertainly, "Hall effect? Because there's no Hall effect in liquids?"

The tall man tensed.

"There isn't! Go on!"

"I don't remember anything else," admitted Dick ruefully. "The only thing that had seemed strange to him was that the *cruz ansata* we started with had bismuth in it. Actually, it was a freak bronze. Very early, perhaps earlier than the Fifth Dynasty. The Egyptians didn't have tin at the beginning, you know. Egyptology is my specialty, though, and I could tell him that they had bismuth and antimony almost as early as they had copper. They used antimony for *kohl*—for eye-shadow, for the women to make their eyes look larger," he finished unnecessarily.

The tall man stared at him, his eyes intent. He reached up and thoughtfully tugged at one ear.

"I shall have to think," he said slowly. "I think I see the principle. Copper is just a trifle diamagnetic, and bismuth is much more so. Yes ... But—"

"Maltby," added Dick, "was pretty much astonished to know that the ancients knew one metal would displace another from solution. They actually electroplated gold and silver—using meteoric iron to displace the noble metals because it was consid-

ered magic.” [This is fact. Electroplated objects have been found in ancient Egyptian tombs—Murray Leinster.]

The tall man’s eyes were still intent.

“That would be it,” he said slowly. “Yes. No Hall effect in liquids. Displacement-deposition from liquids. The same as electroplating of a mixed metal. Absolutely. Given copper and bismuth, I think I could do it myself.” Then his features turned wry. “Where’ll I find some bismuth? The masters won’t let it loose, one may be sure! I’ve no idea even where its ore is found or what it looks like! But any drugstore on Earth could supply me with at least some bismuth compounds!” He asked hopelessly. “Would you know bismuth ore?”

Dick shook his head.

“Given time, we might find a slave who could. Probably not here, though. In some other slave pen of some other villa. Which gives an aspect of reason to my acquired instinct to kill overseers and *ruhks*. I shall concentrate on that. We will try to destroy our master here, and then wage a holy war on others—for bismuth!”

“We’re going to try to capture a doorway back to Earth from a cage-trap,” protested Dick.

The tall man shook his head, in turn.

“Our masters are fools—our master and all the others,” he observed dispassionately. “They waste all the intelligence of their slaves by brutality which has no purpose but the protection of their stupidity. But they are not such fools as to keep any slave-traps out, with doorways to Earth in them, while there’s a galley full of slaves at large and in revolt! They’ll have called in all slave-traps and the doorways in them. Every one will be at the villa. And they’ll destroy every one of them if they have to run away from us to get help to destroy us. In absolute emergency they might even retreat to Earth. But I don’t think they’d like Earth!”

He grinned at that idea and went to the others. Dick turned his attention to the immediate problem of preparing to shave and otherwise disguise as many slaves as they had costumes for, to play the part of overseers.

Men continued to fish and to babble at the top of their voices. The galley was perhaps two hundred yards from shore, but this was the shore that was the Bronx on Earth. It was separate alike from Manhattan Island and from the Long Island equivalent where Queens should have existed, and on which the villa of the master stood. With all the known boats of the villa in their hands, Dick’s followers had no reason to fear bullets from the shore.

But now, suddenly, a naked figure appeared on a bluff where deep water apparently came close to the land. The figure was bent low and running. Behind it, gaining at every bound, there was the snarling shape of a *ruhk*. The naked man ran like a deer, reached the edge of the bluff no more than three yards ahead of the beast, and leaped magnificently. The *ruhk* seemed to falter in its stride, and then plunged savagely after the man. Its faltering had come with a glimpse of the galley at anchor offshore. But it plunged. Man and beast were in the air at the same time, though the man splashed and

went deep before the *ruhk* touched water. The beast had estimated with cold ferocity that he should be able to overtake and kill the man before help could come from the galley.

The man stayed under for seconds. The *ruhk* rose almost instantly and paddled dog-fashion, snarling as it looked about for the man to reappear. On the galley and in the cutters howlings arose. Dick's voice straightened out the confusion. Men piled into a single cutter and hastily shipped oars, while one with a spear crouched at the bow, grinning savagely. The cutter got under way.

The fugitive broke water, flinging back his head. The *ruhk* started for him, blood-curdling sounds coming from its throat. The man in the water faced it. He dived, suddenly. The men in the cutter strained at their oars as they had never strained even under their overseer's lashes. The *ruhk* growled and made for where the man had been. It swam, of course, but diving was not a part of its instinct or of its intelligence.

It screamed suddenly, and thrashed violently in the water. The man's head momentarily appeared, five feet away. He gasped for breath and dived again. The *ruhk* suddenly swam powerfully for the shore. But the man rose behind it. He grabbed fiercely at its tail. His other arm rose and fell, and rose and fell, and the *ruhk* whirled, snarling, and a confusion of spray and foam erupted.

From the galley, Dick could see nothing but spray and battling portions of man and beast. The cutter sped for the spot, its crew straining every nerve. Then, abruptly, a sobbing cry sounded, and there was only stillness with ripples around something quite unrecognizable.

Then the man's head popped up. The men in the cutter extended hands to him as the boat's bow reached the floating thing. The spearman in the bow stabbed it and stabbed it and stabbed it. It did not stir.

Minutes later the cutter came back with the man who had been swimming. He was pale, but grinning. He held fast to one arm with the hand of the other, to stop the blood that came welling out from a deep bite in the flesh. A galley slave shouted, "Bring him here! I'm a doctor!"

They handed him up. Cloth that would have made part of an overseer's robe went to make a bandage—a tight compress dipped in the salt tidal water overside for lack of a better antiseptic. Dick went to the improvised surgery and asked questions.

The newly-escaped slave, still grinning, told his tale. He had been sent—with a *ruhk* as guard—to carry a message to the nearest other villa up the Hudson. It should have been a two days' journey. There was a small, one man boat still at the villa, and it had put him and his guard ashore. He'd started up-river. He'd made the journey before. As the trail ran close by the water, over a rise in the ground he caught a glimpse of the galley and the cutters at anchor. He knew of the bluff beyond him and the deep water below it. The *ruhk*, its eye-level lower than his, had not seen the galley. When it heard the chattering, babbling noise the exuberant slaves were making, it stopped short to listen. The slave had gone on. When it growled to him to stop, he'd started to run. It had been close, but he'd made it to the water.

“And I was in the Pacific, once,” he said, grinning more widely still. “Stationed on an atoll with a lotta natives that could swim from ‘way back. I learned some tricks from them. I’d been figurin’ on tryin’ a getaway anyhow. I hadda dagger-thorn hid in my hair. I figured if I could kill a shark, I oughta handle a *ruhk*. An’ I did ...”

The dagger-thorn was a monstrosity, all of ten inches long with a point like a needle. Since slaves were never barbered, he had been able to conceal it in his long hair. No tree of Earth ever bore such thorns, but here—

“What was the message you carried?” asked Dick. His face was tense. Their situation was bad enough without help coming to this villa from others.

The messenger brought out a packet neatly wrapped in modern oiled silk. Inside was a brightly-polished section of chromium-plated brass tubing, with a cork in each end. The corks yielded readily. A rolled-up sheet tumbled into Dick’s hand.

“It’s no good,” said the messenger. “It’s crazy picture-writing. I know that much!”

But Dick regarded it professionally. It was a parchment-like paper, the most beautiful and thick and glossy of hand-made writing material. It was written on in colored inks, very beautifully, and the beginning and end glittered with gold-dust or gold-filings dropped upon adhesive ink while it was still wet. It was written in hieroglyphic Egyptian characters.

They were not all familiar to Dick, to be sure. There were forms which doubtless dated back to the Fifth Dynasty, but the pictographs had been debased, and the language had undoubtedly changed, and there were probably abbreviations and quite certainly some entirely new words. But it was definitely derived from ancient Egyptian—and Dick was one of no more than a hundred men on all of Earth who would be able to puzzle out its meaning.

“I think,” said Dick, “that I’ll be able to decipher this. It’s possibly a break. It’s especially a break because they’d never dream either that it wouldn’t be delivered, or that anybody but one of themselves would be able to read it. I only hope it’s explicit about their plans!”

It was explicit, but it took him two hours to work out the meaning. He had to guess at words that had no parallel in ancient times from the stylized ideographic elements of the writing. But he read it.

He was pale when he had finished. It was not a message to encourage him. It called for action in a hurry. And it meant that no help could possibly be had from Earth, unless he was prepared to call down on the civilized planet such turmoil and devastation as would make even the lootings and enslavings of the past five thousand years seem trivial.

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The *ruhks* which snarled at Sam Todd and Nancy and Kelly were intelligent animals, whose minds worked exactly in the pattern of illiterate intelligent peasants. When the three humans appeared in the cage-trap, they did not recognize Nancy as a member of

the master-race because she no longer had the master-race scent upon her. Common-sense logic, that.

Sam snapped to Kelly:

“Look! I’ll hold the doorway if they try to get in. You heave Nancy up back through the doorway! The cops’ll grab her and take her somewhere else—”

Then he heard a very tiny hissing sound. It was the sound of a woman’s purse perfume dispenser. A curiously clean, pungently pleasant smell smote his nostrils.

And the snarlings died. Snuffings took their place. The *ruhks* were puzzled. Then they were abashed. And Nancy said to them severely:

“You should be ashamed! You know better than to snarl at anyone with this scent on them!”

And the *ruhks*, their ears flattened abjectly, groveled and whimpered before her. They made whining conversational noises. Kelly said curtly:

“They say they’re sorry. Spray some of that stuff on me.”

Sam Todd gasped a little. Then he turned to Nancy. She was very pale, but she smiled with a tiny silver object in her hand.

“You forgot, Sam. But I wanted to come here particularly to give the master-scent to Dick. So I brought it!”

And she showed him the jug in which all of one drug store’s supply of the needed odorous substances had been combined to make a gallon of master-scent solution.

Their actions, now, were based upon a complete change in the situation. Kelly stepped out of the cage-trap. He was clad in garments which to the *ruhks* meant that he should be flung to the ground and stripped, but he smelled of godhead. They fawned upon him. Sam Todd stepped out next, his hands gripping pistols. But though his suspicions did not lessen, his apprehension inevitably died away as the beasts groveled at his feet.

But as a matter of sheer common sense he refused to take any further action at all—even the dismantling of the doorway-between worlds which had dropped them into the cage—until he had filled all the empty small bottles in his pocket from the larger container. He had Nancy slip off her jacket, too, and hold it underneath as he poured, so that if any stray drops should spill, they would add to her divinity in the opinion of the *ruhks*. And his hands trembled a little, and drops did spill, so that when he had finished pouring all the air around Nancy was redolent of the fragrance that five thousand years of breeding had turned into a talisman of godhead that no *ruhk* could possibly deny. She was in no danger from anything or anybody as long as a *ruhk* was near her.

“See if these beasts know anything about the galley,” Sam told Kelly. He couldn’t speak to them directly because he wouldn’t understand their yelping.

While Kelly spoke authoritatively to the fawning beasts, Sam went to the cage-trap. There was a round disk which was the doorway, at the roof of the cage. There was a pole by which it could be lifted out of reach from below. His hands in his pockets still holding his pistols, Sam inspected it. If it wasn’t lifted in time, an agile man might

climb back out. But most men would be far too terrified to think of such a thing immediately.

Kelly came over.

"The galley's somewhere in the Hudson," he reported. "They heard howlings that carried the news. That's all they knew."

There, again, would be an oddity. Wolf-howlings would carry news even faster than messengers, if *ruhks* were searching for a thing over a large area.

"That's good enough," said Sam morosely, "but we've got a job ahead of us. We've got to get this damned doorway off the end of this pole and find out how to carry it through what'll be the streets of New York without bringing fat women and stray cats and odd brickwork through it. Then we'll go to the nearest precinct police-station—I'll find it with the peephole—and rob it of tear-gas bombs and maybe some riot-guns. We'll use this same doorway for that. And then—"

He fumbled in his pocket. He put the peephole to his eye. He saw out into the street in New York from which the three of them had come. There were many police around, now. It seemed that he could reach out and touch any one. He flinched involuntarily. But they did not see him, of course. They were hunting feverishly for the three people who had disappeared so mysteriously.

Sam regarded them wryly. Then he shrugged and put away the peephole. With Kelly, he experimented cautiously. It was simple enough, however. The disk was a doorway on one face only. Objects could enter it only from one side, on Earth, and that side was unsubstantial—like, when he thought of it, the phantom disk six inches from the disk of the *crux ansata*. With the other side forward they could walk through the jungle unconcernedly, even though they marched through the space occupied on Earth by solid buildings. Of course anything that ran into the reverse face of the disk, in the Other World, would emerge on Earth ...

As a matter of fact, it is rather likely that some small fauna such as flying midges and the like did suddenly find themselves in a totally strange world of streets and stone buildings. And they would never be able to adjust themselves to it at all.

The three humans headed roughly west, and presently there were some little, glittering pools of quicksilver in a precinct police station, and some tear-gas bombs were missing on Earth. Then some other glitterings, and Sam and Kelly had two riot-guns apiece, and ammunition for them. The men off duty in the squad-room would later catch the devil for letting such things be stolen under their very noses, but Sam and the other two went on. Six great, deadly beasts trotted all about them, sometimes breasting the brushwood ahead and sometimes trailing a little behind, but always coming back to sniff at the master-scent it was bred into them to adore, and to wag their huge, shaggy tails worshipfully.

Presently even Sam almost took them for granted. He began to worry. He was going to need a boat. He could steal anything he needed from Earth. In the present emergency he had no qualms. But how could he get a boat big enough for his purposes through an interdimensional doorway designed to be a trap only for men?

From time to time he looked through the peephole for guidance through the other-dimensional New York. And then, on the bank of the Hudson as it existed on Earth, he found the answer. There was a small boathouse in a most unlikely place, storing canoes for apartment-house dwellers nearby. The boathouse was locked.

It was two hours after their arrival through the doorway before they reached the Hudson, and it took an hour and a half to make a platform and fix the outboard motor to it and lash it across the two canoes. But then they pushed off. They had a catamaran with a motor driving it from between the two canoes. It was moderately seaworthy, and not even very slow. When it moved out from the shore the *ruhks* howled at being left behind.

Sam pulled on the cranking-cord of the motor. Rather surprisingly, it caught instantly and ran smoothly. The improvised craft swung out into the river and headed upstream. The *ruhks*, howling their desolation, crashed through the brushwood, following. But presently they were lost to sight.

The motor made a steady roar. Sam headed out for a longer look up and down the river, and they had not gone far when they saw the galley. It was at anchor off Manhattan Island somewhere near what would be Seventieth Street on Earth. There was no movement visible. The two cutters were tethered to its stern.

The double canoe headed on a straight course for it. The tide was at full flood and the motor roared valiantly. It made excellent speed, but as they drew near men howled defiance at them. Oar-blades waved menacingly.

"Dick ought to recognize me, anyhow," said Nancy uneasily. "What do you suppose—"

Then Kelly stood up in the bow of the right-hand canoe. He bellowed. His voice rose above the din of shouting and the motor together. The shouting died. There were not too many men on the galley—not many more than a dozen. They stared blankly as the motor cut off and the double canoe floated up to the galley under its own momentum. Kelly matter-of-factly climbed over the side. The other two heard his voice, harsh and argumentative. They saw him strip off his coat and sweater, showing the lash-marks on his skin. But his most convincing argument was the riot-guns he handed over in the most casual way in the world.

He came back to the rail.

"The gang's gone ashore. Some are dressed up like overseers. They took all the guns an' spears they had. They're hopin' to rush the slave pen and then fight off the *ruhks* until they find out where a cage-trap is, an' then they'll try to get hold of the doorway an' get guns through that."

"We've got to go after them!" cried Nancy. "With the scent—"

"All right," snapped Sam. "Come along if you're coming! Any of you other men who want to come along too, do so. Make it quick!"

Kelly spoke ungently, and climbed down. Half the men on the galley followed. He snapped again, and the rest followed sheepishly.

"They got nothin' to fight with," he said tonelessly. "All that have are plenty anxious to come."

The catamaran's motor sputtered. It headed for the beach. It touched, and men splashed to the shore. Nancy looked at them and shivered a little. She had seen Kelly naked save for a loin-cloth and with stripes on his flesh, but he had come as a human being when she was in terror of the *ruhks*—even though they fawned on her. These men, scarred and gaunt and terrible, were another matter. Kelly said briefly. "Put some scent on 'em. Better pass out a bottle or two. When they see how it works—"

It was late afternoon, near to sunset. The extraordinarily assorted group started on through the jungle. Kelly and Sam had riot-guns and pistols. Two others had riot-guns. Then Sam brought out the rest of the arsenal he had been carrying. He saw one man caress a stubby pistol as if it were an infinitely precious thing.

They went on. Giant trees. Strange, improbable underbrush. Unfamiliar cries in the treetops. Discordant bellow-ings at unpredictable intervals in the distance.

They had gone perhaps half a mile when they heard shots ahead. Many shots. Then they began to run. The shooting rose in volume. Sam panted to a galley slave:

"How many guns did our gang have?"

"F-Fourteen," gasped the slave. "The rest were spears."

"Plenty more'n that up there!" said Sam. "Faster!"

They pelted toward the tumult. The sounds grew louder. They heard shrieks. There must have been fifty weapons in action up ahead.

There were. It was only logical that there should be. Because an expedition specially ordered by the master of the villa had been brought to Manhattan Island early that morning to kidnap Maltby. It had been composed exclusively of overseers and *ruhks*. It had captured Maltby, but it couldn't get back to the villa because the big galley was in revolt. So the party, in very bad temper, had taken refuge in the slave compound ahead.

Dick Blair and his party of pseudo-overseers and the slaves they would pretend they had recaptured—all of them together ran into forty armed men in the slave camp, every man armed with spear and pistol against the fourteen firearms of the attackers. And there were the *ruhks*.

It was sheer slaughter. It was a retreat from the beginning. It would have been a rout save that no man would turn his back while there remained a chance to kill a *ruhk* or an overseer with a bullet. So no armed man would run away. And no unarmed slave would actually flee while he hoped for one of the armed men to be killed so that he would have a firearm to use.

Leaping forms in the brush alongside the trail. Snarls and rushings. Then the *ruhks* stopped short. They tried to fawn on Sam Todd and Nancy and on Kelly. They whimpered and groveled before the slaves who had come from the galley with these three of Earth. The slaves fired vengefully. *Ruhks* whimpered, and were killed. Some ran away, howling. Five milleniums of breeding to be worshippers of creatures bearing that particular scent made too strong a compulsion. They could not attack or resist a

creature that more than two thousand of their generations had learned must be obeyed. Frenzied panic seized the beasts—because godlings slew them.

The tumult came nearer as the smaller party ran. A slave, staggering with two *ruhks* at his flanks, fell as they came upon him. Sawed-off shotguns freed him. Nancy flicked droplets of the magic odorous stuff upon him. Then he was safe. They ran on. And they came upon pandemonium.

There was shooting ahead where the pitifully few men with firearms fought in the jungle to make a retreat possible. But jungle fighting was the *ruhks* specialty. The spear-armed slaves had had to close up together, back to back, making a hedge of spear-points against the *ruhks*, who could creep close and spring almost unseen in the shadowy undergrowth. *Ruhks* died, to be sure, but men died too. Yet there were many more men than weapons, and no weapon went unused because its owner fell.

It was all stark confusion and lunatic noise. When the newcomers plunged toward the embattled, despairing slaves, *ruhks* leaped—and then groveled before them. They made yelping sounds which warned off other *ruhks*.

They plunged into the mass of fighting men. And those who had just come from the galley had come to believe in their immunity from the *ruhks*. Roaring laughter, they plunged among the animals, killing zestfully. Sam and Nancy forced their way through the close-packed crowd of slaves who waited for spears that they might fight with them. Nancy battled through them to Dick, and drenched him with the master-scent. She panted in his ear. Sam thrust ahead of him and his riot-gun crashed.

“Sprinkle that damned stuff!” he roared over his shoulder at Nancy. “Get busy!”

Kelly was already at it. Sam brought down a robed overseer, and a slave darted forward to get his weapons. A *ruhk* pounced from behind a tree-trunk—and then could not attack as the odor reached its nostrils. The slave squirmed over and fired upward. The beast screamed.

And then, strangely, even the slaves not yet redolent of divinity ceased to be attacked. There was the master-scent about this spot. The *ruhks* drew off, whimpering, and the overseers commanded them to attack, and they yelped and whined. Then Kelly ran out from the knot of slaves. Godhead was upon him. He reeked of deity to the beasts. He commanded attack upon the overseers, waving on the animals with gestures.

That did it. Where a knot of naked slaves had fought despairingly, resolved only to fight until they were killed, and where robed men had angrily but still cautiously pressed upon the rebels, now the tide turned abruptly. Nancy ran about among the slaves, incongruously slapping at them with a scent-drenched lacy handkerchief. Dick groped to understand her panted, inadequate explanation, and suddenly caught her meaning. He bellowed to his followers and led a furious charge.

The retreat that had been almost a rout became an attack again. This time the *ruhks* were with the slaves. They flung themselves upon the robed men—all the robed men not infallibly declared by *ruhk* nostrils to be divine. The overseers knew terror and horror akin to madness. They broke and ran, and those whom the slaves did not

overtake the *ruhks* did. With each dead overseer there was another slave armed with spear or pistol or both, and the flight of the overseers ended before the swiftest of them could reach the slave pen again.

There were more overseers there, but not many, and there were robed men among those who approached. The disguise of the slaves had seemed vain, before, but it was not vain now. Approaching, with *ruhks* fawning upon them, they entered the barred gate. They left the *ruhks* outside. They killed the overseers who had remained at the slave camp. The *ruhks* guards inside the pen groveled before them. They killed those, too. And they let in other humans who went about among the stupefied slaves, sprinkling them with sweet-smelling stuff until every slave reeked of the odor which to *ruhks* was sanctity.

Then they let in the *ruhks*—and killed them. For five thousand years the *ruhks* had been the victims of a discovery made when magicians first moved between worlds. The scent had ensured their absolute loyalty to a race which ruled over *ruhks* and overseers and human slaves alike. And now they could not believe that men with the smell of the gods upon them could destroy them. Some whimpered as the slaves stabbed and shot. A few fought half-heartedly, almost paralyzed by the instinct five thousand years had made immutable. Some seemed to go insane at the impossibility they saw and smelled, their own massacre by men who smelled like those they must worship. But they died. All of them.

~ * ~

Night had fallen, now, and great fires blazed in the slave pen. In their crimson light, hordes of more than half-naked men and women howled and leaped and gloried in the havoc that had been wrought. Some of them prowled among the dead bodies of the *ruhks*, clubbing and stabbing the dead things when they could persuade themselves that a spark of life remained in a furry carcass.

But Dick rounded up the men who on the galley had seemed instinctively leaders. There was a man with a scarred face, and a short and brawny man, and one who had been a professor of physics.

Dick found Maltby and freed him and Nancy doused him with scent. They found the spidery device that no slave should ever see—and Sam knew something of it. So Dick told his followers what he wanted to do next, and they scattered and rounded up suitable men from the rejoicing mob. It was a still-shouting gang which went back through the jungle toward their ship. They carried torches, and they pushed and pulled and wrestled through the jungle the device by which anything at all that was desired by the masters of this world could be brought here from Earth. Sam Todd had even found on a dead overseer a curious pair of goggles which he recognized.

He marched through the jungle with those goggles in place over his eyes, and he was able to see at the same time the flame-lit trunks of mighty trees as bare-bodied men swaggered through the jungle, and the electric-lit streets and motor traffic of crosstown streets in that Manhattan Island which was on Earth.

The triumphant men reached the river, and torches flared upon its flood. They got the cutters ashore, made a platform of oars between them, wrestled the spidery device upon it, and the double canoe towed it out to the galley. By main strength they loaded it on the galley, and then it was up anchor and down the long, moonlit jungle shore of Manhattan Island. Sam Todd returned the alloy peephole to Dick. With the goggles from a dead overseer which looked more efficiently between two worlds, he conned the galley through the night, guided by the lights on Earth.

The galley beached alongside a barren rock at midnight, and men sweated and strained to get the spidery thing ashore on what should have been Governor's Island. Sam led men off into the darkness, again guided by lights on another planet which happened to be the twin of this. Because, of course, Governor's Island on Earth is an army post and an air field, and in these days it is kept equipped for any emergency. There would be guns and ammunition and hand grenades and other things more precious than fine gold to the men of the galley and cutters. The Army lost valuable equipment that night, before Sam Todd came back and gleeful men made trip after trip to load their booty on the galley and in the smaller craft.

Dick did not share in that. He had to talk to Nancy, to suggest anxiously that, as soon as the loading of the galley was finished, she let him put her back on Earth down by the Battery, which was just across the stream from here. Of course the place that *should* have been the Battery on the Other World was dark forest from which eerie cries and a curious semblance of the sound of bells came faintly. But she resolutely refused to go back to Earth. When he told her why neither he nor any other man from the galley would go back to Earth to stay, just yet, she shuddered and seized upon the explanation as an additional reason why she should remain.

They were a little awkward with each other because Dick had merely resolved that nobody else could possibly be allowed to marry Nancy, and had not explained the matter to her. But suddenly he said anxiously, "Of course we'll have to slip back long enough to get married—"

And then that was all right too.

~ * ~

When the galley's oars spread out and she and the cutters went on through the dark once more, Dick had things to do. He called each cutter's crew alongside and gave specific instructions. Then the expedition really began.

The moon sank low, though the waters were still streaked with flashes of its light. All three craft hugged the Manhattan shore, at first. When the dim lights of the villa first became visible, though, one of the cutters turned and streaked straight across to the Brooklyn shore. Lest any *ruhks* sight them and give the alarm, men landed and marched along the shore so that *ruhks* would sight them and creep up to spring—and remain to grovel and to die.

The galley made fast at the wharf on the Manhattan shore where Dick had killed his first overseer and taken the first cutter. A scented, murderous band of armed men

marched along the trail to the slave pen inland from it. Nancy, for once, willingly stayed behind. She talked to Maltby, bringing him up to date on her adventures.

A wounded *ruhk* came staggering down the trail and out upon the wharf. A member of the galley-guard walked casually toward it. It smelled divinity. It staggered feebly toward him, making noises which told of disaster at the slave pen.

The sentry killed it.

Meanwhile the second cutter went on up-river well past the villa, and cut straight across like the first, and landed most of its crew. And Dick's plan went forward.

It was simple. Men moved through the jungle to make a great half-circle behind the villa, far past the range of human guards. There would be *ruhk* patrols there. The *ruhks* would detect the men and instantly become subject to them. In ones or twos, they would be killed as they groveled. In greater numbers, they might be led back to the cutters and their boat-guards on the shore. Or they could simply be commanded to go to the boat guards and obey them. They would do so.

As the night wore on, there were no more *ruhks* patrolling the forest behind the villa, and it did not matter if there were. There was a single shot from a slave pen where gardener-slaves were imprisoned. And after that a line of freed slaves with a strange smell on them went through the jungle to where a cutter waited with firearms for every man who wanted them. Every man did, and many women, too. But the villa did not take alarm.

In the villa, the master was not disturbed. He was, at worst, annoyed. A man had been found spying upon the villa through an interdimensional window. Later he was found free on Manhattan Island, with arms in his hands. He had escaped capture. He had left a note for someone, pinned to a tree trunk with a dagger-thorn. Apparently some independent experimenter had discovered that there was an Other World and had managed to reach it and arranged to communicate with fellows still on Earth. When this fact was discovered, a note from an Earthling companion could not reach the thorn-pinned message without attracting attention—hence the discovery must still be a secret on Earth. The master of the villa had astutely commanded that this companion be seized. The number of persons in the secret would be learned from him, and where they were to be found. If practicable, they would be brought to this Other World and given to the *ruhks* as a suitable reward for their meddling. If there were many, the measures long ago decided upon for use in case of a discovery by Earthlings would be used.

No word had reached the villa of the capture of either cutter or even of the capture of the galley—which had taken place with Welfare Island screening the battle from the villa. The master of the villa was merely annoyed. He had not been kept informed by the regular procedure of events as they happened. Some overseers would be given to the *ruhks* for this inefficiency!

When the galley crossed the river during the last hours of darkness, it was loaded to the limit with beings who had been civilized men one, two, five or seven years before. Now they were half-naked, hairy, murderous incarnations of vengeance. And every man

had a modern repeating rifle with ammunition for it, and those with experience in such matters had hand grenades besides.

Runners to the two cutters learned of the number of men they had freed and armed. Strong parties went inland just in case anybody tried to leave the villa on the land side.

Then the sun rose. It lighted a world of green forest and blue waters and seeming infinite peace.

There was the tiny, popping sound of a single shot. Then the army of former slaves moved on the villa.

From nearby, the villa was very splendid and very spacious. It was built of brick in the style of gimcrack magnificence most approved of some sixty or seventy-five years ago in these same United States of America. In a parasitic race such as the slavers from antiquity there would be no racial culture nor racial art in any form. The gardens were vast, intricately laid out and tended with infinite expenditure of labor. There were trees bent and trained into preposterous resemblances to animals and to men. There was statuary looted from Earth, and there were sunken gardens, and reflection pools which reflected nothing in particular.

Over this lawn and into these gardens the freed slaves surged. There were shoutings here and there where a man with past experience in combat led some others toward the villa and guided them so they were not exposed to fire from the windows.

A sudden crackling of rifle fire from the huge mansion. No parley, of course. The slaves could not be treated with. There could be no terms of surrender. In all probability the master of the villa did not even think of it. After all, in five thousand years some slave revolts must have been attempted and one or two may have attained to some success. Certainly overseers knew there could be no surrender for them. They were frightened, to be sure, and they were doomed and knew it. But they made no vain attempts to delay the attack which nothing could delay.

They shot from the upper windows. Slaves fell. But there was instinctive discipline among the attackers. Not everywhere, but in spots. Groups of men flung themselves down behind flower beds and hedges, and a single flash of a gun from a window brought storms of lead. Those volleys smashed the glass and the sash and filled the opening with death. This was a tactic the defenders, who did not know combat but only murder, could not cope with. Many robed men died from these volleys fired by the quite impromptu combat units of the attackers.

The horde of hairy avengers infiltrated the gardens. There was an elaborate maze of clipped hedge in which fifty men crawled to within a hundred yards of the house. There were tall beds of ornamental plants which sheltered dozens more. There were screens of shrubs. There were fountains whose stone basins were bulletproof breastworks. There were graceful terraces which were cover.

The sound of shooting became a steady, popping noise. There was little other sound. The slaves filtered forward here, and trickled closer there, and when a shot came from the house there was a hail of lead in reply.

Presently the forward movement ceased. Every bit of cover near the house was filled with men all ready for the kill. Then, suddenly, it seemed that the ground erupted *ruhks*— the palace beasts. The animals brought to the villa to see their master and smell the scent of godhead had been filled with ecstasy at his sight and smell. Now he sent them out to disperse the rebel slaves.

They ran into a withering fire. A dozen went down or rolled over, snapping at their wounds. The balance reached the attackers. And then they cowered and quivered in bewilderment, because they could not attack these men ...

A desperate rush of robed men on their heels. If they could cut through the ring of slaves, presumably thrown into confusion by the charge of *ruhks*, they could swing sidewise about the mansion, taking the attackers in flank and rolling them up before them, while fire from the windows could begin again.

Perhaps against some antagonists it would have served well enough. But there was a leavening of former professional fighting men among the slaves. The charge of the *ruhks* had been a fiasco. The survivors quivered with uneasiness but made no attack whatever once they were among the slaves. Those hard-bitten men ignored them unless to kill them with scornful satisfaction. So the charge of the overseers was no better. Indeed, it was worse, because as the last of them raced out into the open a lobbed grenade fell among them.

A man with matted red hair stood up, yelling defiantly. He heaved another grenade. It went in a window and exploded inside. Howls of joy arose. Another grenade in another window. A third and fourth—

And then there was one tremendous roar of fury, and the slaves swarmed into the building from every side and through every opening, grenades blasting a way for them.

There were noises inside, for a while, but not for very long. In one place there was a nursery suite, and shivering young slave-girls shrilly told the invaders that they were slaves, too, and they were unharmed. Another place a giant overseer stood at bay with a spear, his pistol empty, and a grinning young man with icy gray eyes snapped for others to stand back and fought it out, using bayonet tactics with a rifle that had no bayonet on it against an eight-foot spear. The rifleman won, after fighting his way inside the spear's length. He killed his antagonist with a gun butt. Some overseers hid, and were dragged out and killed, and others barricaded themselves in a cellar, not realizing what would happen when grenades with pulled-out pins were dropped down among them.

There was one room where women of the master race were found, very frail and delicate to look at, splendidly dressed in soft stuffs. They were dead, preferring that to the fate their servants had administered to so many slaves, and which they feared for themselves.

The last of the fighting took place in what must have been the armory of the villa. The last surviving overseers fought desperately, here. When at last a surging tide of ex-slaves poured in upon them, the reason was clear. Here were the doorways between worlds. Here were the passageways to Earth. And while the slaves battered their way

in, the master of the villa had been destroying them. Seared by a flame, apparently the freakish molecular orientation ceased to be. A great bonfire of garments and furniture burned in the middle of the stone floor. And there was a child here, an imperious, wide-eyed six-year-old girl, clinging to a man with the delicate features of that inbred race of masters. There was already but one of the doorways to Earth remaining. But the child's father, while his servants fought until they were killed, emptied some small bag of treasure. He strung glittering necklaces about the child's neck. He filled the small pockets of her healthily brief jumper full of gems, and then he thrust her forcibly through a great disk of copper alloy some three feet in diameter. She vanished. And then he heaved the disk into the mounting flames, seized a weapon from the floor, and plunged into the fighting. He, with the others, was dead within minutes.

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What followed freedom was inevitably an anticlimax. There were some of the freedmen who—their vengeance sated—demanded immediate return to Earth. There were others—especially women—who bitterly protested against return. Many men, also, were ashamed. And the number who felt that their vengeance was complete grew smaller as hours passed. Most found themselves still lusting to kill more *ruhks* and overseers, and there were not a few who hungrily discussed the fact that there were other villas in the Other World. There was one up the Hudson near Albany. There was one near Philadelphia, and one near Boston. There were other men in slave pens—

Then Dick Blair showed the translation of the message in hieroglyphic script he had gotten from a messenger sent to take it up-river. The translation was explicit.

From Zozer, son of Haton, of the race of lords of men and *ruhks*, to Khafre, son of Siut, the son of Zozer's uncle, greeting:

There is a slave from the land of slaves (Earth, or New York) at large in my land. He came from the land of the slaves by his own contrivance, not by being enslaved. There is one other who remains in the land of the slaves who knows of his coming.

I have sent *ruhks* and servants to seize him and to bring his companion from the land of the slaves for questioning. Do you have the news writings of the slave-people near you brought to your interpreters each day to be searched for word of this event or of the discovery by the slave-people of our world.

If such news should appear, tell all of our race, that they may spread fire and death and pestilence in the land of the slaves, in every house and every city, so that they will forget to think of our land in their study of their own griefs. Do this in the manner arranged in the time of our fathers.

Do not do this unless the news writings speak of our world.

Farewell.

Zozer, the son of Haton, of the race of lords of *ruhks* and men, to Khafre, son of Siut the son of Zozer's uncle.

Dick said bluntly:

“There are other villas and certainly other slaves. This business started in Egypt, and it spread. And the one thing these masters are afraid of is that on our Earth the people will find out about them and come and wipe them out. So if they’re spoken of on Earth, they’ll start to work to destroy it. They won’t wipe out humanity, of course. But they can put a fire in every cellar of every house, in every warehouse, every building, every fuel store, every petroleum tank. They can put germs into all drinking water, foul all food, and spread disease beyond any possibility of our stopping them. They could steal bombs from any store of bombs on earth, and introduce and explode them anywhere they pleased.

“Nobody could stop them. The price of our going back to Earth is just that sort of catastrophe everywhere there are villas on this world. They wouldn’t destroy humanity, but they’d come damn near destroying civilization before they were through. So—let’s start smashing them up from here. We’ll go upriver and smash the villa up there. We’ll have more men, then. We’ll smash the villas at Boston and Philadelphia. We’ll spread out, smashing the slave pens and killing the *ruhks* until at least our own country’s safe from their revenge! And maybe we’ll carry on past that. If we destroy every slave pen and free every slave on this world, we can go back to Earth as conquerors instead of victims—”

He glared about him. The argument was hot. But before sunset of the day of victory, he saw men carrying bodies out of the villa and arranging to bury them, as if there were no question but that life was to go on here. He became busy planning the expedition up-river. It would be a good deal simpler than the affair here had been. For one thing, it would be an absolute surprise. A hundred armed men with the master-scent upon them would be ample. No *ruhk* would give warning of their coming. No force of overseers would be gathered to oppose them ...

The tall man who had been a professor of physics stopped him as he left a conference where Sam had made it clear that he was going to be in the expedition up-river.

“Nobody really plans to go back to Earth,” he told Dick dryly. “I don’t. No man or woman who’s ever been a slave will want to go back. They’d be ashamed. The thing to do is to arrange, very discreetly, for someone to buy bulldozers and tractors and clothes and books and safety razors and canned goods and get them through some doorway to here. There’s gold and jewelry enough in the palace yonder to pay for everything we need. And send us some bismuth. I’ve been talking to your friend Maltby. We can make doorways we can even get small ocean-going craft through. We’ve a job here that’s worth doing. In five thousand years those devils have set up villas in maybe hundreds and possibly thousands of places. They’ve got to be cleared out!”

Dick said, “Still, if people want to go back ...”

“They can’t go back right away!” said the tall man. “We put it to a vote. No question. Everybody stays, at least for a while. Actually, I doubt that any of us will ever go. We’ll get to realizing what will happen if Earth ever learns about this planet. Can you picture the stampede of the nations for pieces of this world? Can you picture them dumping

bombs through doorways on us, or piling into this world to go dump bombs back on Earth?"

Dick winced. Then the tall man said:

"We can stop any war on Earth. I think we will. We've had enough of killing and cruelty. I think—"

"I've been talking to several people," admitted Dick. "They are inclined to think as you do."

"Surely," said the tall man. "But for the time- being we'll just tell ourselves we're staying here until we free all the other slaves, and make sure there's no interdimensional attack on Earth in case we want to go back. We'll need somebody to buy things for us, and maybe to advise us from time to time. We'll need somebody around who never was a slave. We're apt to be pretty extreme."

"To tell the truth," said Dick, "I thought I'd go back with Maltby and arrange for buying the sort of stuff we need here, and—well—get married, and come back ..."

The tall man nodded.

That was the way it was. They returned the spidery device to its former storage-place in the villa. It would never again be used to rob Earth. They began to clean up the bloodstains. There were hundreds of things to be done. Dick, himself, had a list of literally thousands of items that would somehow, without creating curiosity, have to be bought for this Other World.

A cutter rowed them across to the Manhattan shore just at sundown. There was a doorway there which they would ultimately set up in a closet in the house Dick and Nancy would presently acquire for the benefit of the people in the Other World.

None of the brawny figures with them showed any sign of wanting to go back to New York with them. They were going up-river in the morning, to attack another villa. They grinned when Maltby went back to Earth. He had borrowed Sam Todd's clothes; Sam was wearing a loincloth and a riot gun and enjoying it. Nancy went through. Kelly went through, with a parcel. Dick went through and they were in New York, in a narrow, smelly small alley only feet from a well-frequented street.

"Wedding present," said Kelly. "I picked it up at the first slave pen we took. Thought you might like it."

"What is it?" asked Nancy.

"A *crux ansata*," said Dick. "On Earth it belongs to Maltby, but Kelly rates it as spoils of war. He's right. It is. Maltby shan't have it. I'll turn it into a hand-mirror for you to look at yourself in."

"Kelly," said Nancy. "Don't you want to stay for the wedding?"

"No," said Kelly laconically. "I got a date up-river."

Maltby went out of the alley into the street.

"See you next week," said Dick.

"Okay," said Kelly. "Good luck."

He vanished in a pool of quicksilver. There didn't seem to be anything else to say. Dick took Nancy's hand and went out of the alley. He held up three fingers and whistled at a passing vehicle.

"Taxi!" said Dick.

~ * ~

BARRIER....*by Anthony Boucher*



THE FIRST DIFFICULTY was with language.

That is only to be expected when you jump five hundred-years, but it is nonetheless perplexing to have your first casual query of: "What city is this?" answered by the sentence: "Stappers will get you. Or be you Slanduch?"

It was significant that the first word John Brent heard in the State was "Stappers." But Brent could not know that then. It was only some hours later and fifty years earlier that he was to learn the details of the Stapper system. At the moment all that concerned him was food and plausibility.

His appearance was plausible enough. Following Derringer's advice he had traveled naked—"the one costume common to all ages," the scientist had boomed; "Which would astonish you more, lad: a naked man, or an Elizabethan courtier in full apparel?"—and commenced his life in the twenty-fifth century by burglary and the theft of a complete

outfit of clothing. The iridescent woven plastics tailed in a half-clinging, half-flowing style looked precious to Brent, but seemed both comfortable and functional.

No man alive in 2473 would have bestowed a second glance on the feloniously clad Brent, but in his speech, he realized at once, lay danger. He pondered the alternatives presented by the stranger. Stappers would get him, unless he was Slanduch. Whatever Stappers were, things that “get you” sounded menacing. “Slanduch,” he replied.

The stranger nodded. “That bees O.K.,” he said, and Brent wondered what he had committed himself to. “So what city is this?” he repeated.

“*Bees*,” the stranger chided. “Stappers be more severe now since Edict of 2470. Before they doed pardon some irregularities, but now none even from Slanduch.”

“I be sorry,” said Brent humbly, making a mental note that irregular verbs were for some reason perilous. “But for the third time—”

He had thought the wall beside them was solid. He realized now that part of it, at least, was only a deceptive glasslike curtain that parted to let forth a tall and vigorous man, followed by two shorter aides. All three of these wore robes similar to the iridescent garments of Brent and his companion, but of pure white.

The leader halted and barked out, “George Starvel?”

Brent saw a quiet sort of terror begin to grow on his companion’s face. He nodded and held out his wrist.

The man in white glanced at what Brent decided must be an identification plaque. “Starvel,” he announced, “you speaked against Barrier.”

Starvel trembled. “Cosmos knows I doed not.”

“Five mans know that you doed.”

“Never. I only sayed—”

“You only! Enough!”

The rod appeared in the man’s hand only for an instant. Brent saw no flame or discharge, but Starvel was stretched out on the ground and the two aides were picking him up as callously as though he were a log.

The man turned toward Brent, who was taking no chances. He flexed his legs and sprang into the air. His fingertips grasped the rim of the balcony above them, and his feet shot out into the white-robed man’s face. His arm and shoulder muscles tensed to their utmost. The smooth plastic surface was hell to keep a grip on. Beneath, he could see his adversary struggling blindly to his feet and groping for the rod. At last, desperately, Brent swung himself up and over the edge.

There was no time to contemplate the beauties of the orderly terrace garden. There was only time to note that there was but one door, and to make for it. It was open and led to a long corridor. Brent turned to the nearest of the many identical doors. Apartments? So—he was taking a chance; whatever was behind that door, the odds were better than with an armed policeman you’d just kicked in the face. Brent had always favored the devil you don’t know—or he’d never have found himself in this strange world. He walked toward the door, and it opened.

He hurried into an empty room, glancing back to see the door shut by itself. The room had two other doors. Each of them opened equally obligingly. Bathroom and bedroom. No kitchen. (His stomach growled a comment.) No people. And no exit from the apartment but the door he had come through. ‘

He forced himself to sit down and think. Anything might happen before the Stapper caught up with him, for he had no doubt that was what the white-robed man must be.

What had he learned about the twenty-fifth century in this brief encounter?

You must wear an identification plaque. (Memo: How to get one?) You must not use irregular verbs (or nouns; the Stapper had said “mans”). You must not speak against Barrier, whoever or whatever that meant. You must beware white-robed men who lurk behind false walls. You must watch out for rods that kill (query: or merely stun?). Doors open by selenium cells (query: how do they lock?). You must—

The door opened. It was not the Stapper who stood there, but a tall and majestic woman of, at a guess, sixty. A noble figure—“Roman matron” were the words that flashed into Brent’s mind.

The presence of a total stranger in her apartment seemed nowise disconcerting. She opened her arms in a broad gesture of welcome. “John Brent!” she exclaimed in delighted recognition. “It beed so long!”

~ * ~

“I don’t want a brilliant young scientific genius!” Derringer had roared when Brent answered his cryptically worded ad. “I’ve got ‘em here in the laboratory. They’ve done grand work on the time machine. I couldn’t live without ‘em, and there’s not a one of ‘em I’d trust out of this century. Not out of this decade. What I want is four things: A knowledge of history, for a background of analogy to understand what’s been going on; linguistic ability, to adjust yourself as rapidly as possible to the changes in language; physical strength and dexterity, to get yourself out of the scrapes that are bound to come up; and social adaptability. A chimpanzee of reasonably subhuman intelligence could operate the machine. What counts is what you’ll be able to do after you get there.”

The knowledge of history and the physical qualities had been easy to demonstrate. The linguistic ability was a bit more complex; Derringer had contrived an intricate series of tests involving adjustment to phonetic changes and the capacity to assimilate the principles of a totally fictitious language invented for the occasion. The social adaptability was measured partly by an aptitude test, but largely, Brent guessed, by Derringer’s own observation during the weeks of preparation after his probationary hiring.

He had passed all four requirements with flying colors. At least Derringer had grinned at him through the black beard and grunted the reluctant “Good man!” that was his equivalent of rhapsodic praise. His physical agility had already stood him in

good stead, and his linguistic mind was rapidly assimilating the new aspects of the language (there were phonetic alterations as well as the changes in vocabulary and inflection—he was particularly struck by the fact that the vowels *a* and *o* no longer possessed the diphthongal off-glide so characteristic of English, but were pure vowels like the Italian *e* and *o*), but his social adaptability was just now hitting a terrific snag.

What the hell do you do when a Roman matron whom you have never seen, born five hundred years after you, welcomes you by name and exclaims that it haves beed a long time? (This regular past participle of *be*, Brent reflected, gives the speaker something the quality of a Bostonian with a cold in the nose.)

For a moment he toyed with the rash notion that she might likewise be a time traveler, someone whom he had known in 1942. Derringer had been positive that this was the first such trip ever attempted; but someone leaving the twentieth century later might still be an earlier arrival in the twenty-fifth. He experimented with the idea.

“I suppose,” Brent ventured, “you could call five hundred years a long time, in its relative way.”

The Roman matron frowned. “Do not jest, John. Fifty years be not five hundred. I will confess that first five years seemed at times like five centuries, but after fifty—one does not feel so sharply.”

Does was of course pronounced *dooze*. All r’s, even terminal, were lightly trilled. These facts Brent noted in the back of his mind, but the fore part was concerned with the immediate situation. If this woman chose to accept him as an acquaintance—it was nowise unlikely that his double should be wandering about in this century—it meant probable protection from the Stapper. His logical mind protested, “Could this double have your name?” but he shushed it.

“Did you,” he began, and caught himself. “Doed you see anyone in the hall—a man in white?”

The Roman matron moaned. “Oh, John! Do Stappers seek you again? But of course. If you have comed to destroy Barrier, they must destroy you.”

“Whoa there!” Brent had seen what happened to one person who had merely “speaked against Barrier.” “I didn’t ... doedn’t ... say anything against Barrier.”

The friendliness began to die from her clear blue eyes. “And I believed you,” she said sorrowfully. “You telled us of this second Barrier and swore to destroy it. We thinked you beed one of us. And now—”

No amount of social adaptability can resist a sympathetic and dignified woman on the verge of tears. Besides, this apartment was for the moment a valuable haven, and if she thought he was a traitor of some sort—

“Look,” said Brent. “You see, I am—there isn’t any use at this moment trying to be regular—I am not whoever you think I am. I never saw you before. I couldn’t have. This is the first instant I’ve ever been in your time.”

“If you wish to lie to me, John—”

"I'm not lying. And I'm not John—at least not the one you're thinking of. I'm John Brent, I'm twenty-eight years old, and I was born in 1914—a good five and a half centuries ago."

According to all the time travel fiction Brent had ever read, that kind of statement ranks as a real stunner. There is a deathly hush and a wild surmise and the author stresses the curtain-line effect by inserting a line-space.

But the Roman matron was unmoved. The hush and the surmise were Brent's an instant later when she said, with anguished patience, "I know, John, I know."

"Derringer left this one out of the rule book," Brent grunted. "Madam, you have, as they say, the better of me. What does A do now?"

"You *do* be same John!" she smiled. "I never beed able to understand you."

"We have much in common," Brent observed.

"And because I can't understand you, I know you be you." She was still smiling. It was an odd smile; Brent couldn't place its precise meaning. Not until she leaned toward him and for one instant gently touched his arm.

He needed friends. Whatever her wild delusions, she seemed willing to help him. But he still could not quite keep from drawing back as he recognized the tender smile of love on this dignified ancient face.

She seemed to sense his withdrawal. For a moment he feared a gathering anger. Then she relaxed, and with another smile, a puzzled but resigned smile, said, "This be part of not understanding you, I guess. Cosmos knows. But you be so young, John, still so *young* ..."

She must, Brent thought with sudden surprise, have been a very pretty girl.

The door opened. The man who entered was as tall as the Stapper, but wore the civilian's iridescent robes. His long beard seemed to have caught a little of their rainbow influence; it was predominantly red, but brown and black and white glinted in it. The hair on his head was graying. He might have been anywhere from forty-five to a vigorous and well-preserved seventy.

"We have a guest, sister?" he asked politely.

The Roman matron made a despairing gesture. "You don't recognize him? And John—you don't know Stephen?"

Stephen slapped his thigh and barked—a sound that seemed to represent a laugh of pleasure. "Cosmos!" he cried. "John Brent! I told you, Martha. I knew he wouldn't fail us."

"Stephen!" she exclaimed in shocked tones.

"Hang the irregularities! Can't I greet John with the old words that comed—no, by Cosmos—*came* from the same past he came from? See, John—don't I talk the old language well? I even use article—pardon me, *the* article."

Brent's automatic mental notebook recorded the fact, which he had already suspected, that an article was as taboo as an irregular verb. But around this self-governing notation system swirled utter confusion. It might possibly have been just his luck to

run into a madwoman. But two mad brains in succession with identical delusions were too much. And Stephen had known he was from the past.

"I'm afraid," he said simply, "this is too much for me. Suppose we all sit down and have a drink of something and talk this over."

Stephen smiled. "You remember our bond, eh? And not many places in State you'll find it. Even fewer than before." He crossed to a cabinet and returned with three glasses of colorless liquid.

Brent seized his eagerly and downed it. A drink might help the swirling. It might—

The drink had gone down smoothly and tastelessly. Now, however, some imp began dissecting atoms in his stomach and shooting off a bombardment stream of particles that zoomed up through his throat into his brain, where they set off a charge of explosive of hitherto unknown power. Brent let out a strangled yelp.

Stephen barked again. "Good bond, eh, John?"

Brent managed to focus his host through the blurring lens of his tears. "Sure," he nodded feebly. "Swell. And now let me try to explain—"

The woman looked sadly at her brother. "He denies us, Stephen. He says that he has never seed me before. He forgets all that he ever swore about Barrier."

A curious look of speculation came into Stephen's brown eyes. "Bees this true, John? You have never seed us before in your life?"

"But, Stephen, you know—"

"Hush, Martha. I sayed in *his* life. Bees it true, John?"

"It bees. God knows it bees. I have never seen ... seed either of you in my life."

"But Stephen—"

"I understand now, Martha. Remember when he telled us of Barrier and his resolve?"

"Can I forget?"

"How doed he know of Barrier? Tell me that."

"I don't know," Martha confessed. "I have wondered—"

"He knowed of Barrier then because he bees here now. He telled me then just what we must now tell him."

"Then for Heaven's sake," Brent groaned, "tell me."

"Your pardon, John. My sister bees not so quick to grasp source of these temporal confusions. More bond?" He had the bottle in his hand when he suddenly stopped, thrust it back in the cabinet, and murmured, "Go into bedroom."

Brent obeyed. This was no time for displaying initiative. And no sooner had the bedroom door closed behind him than he heard the voice of the Stapper. (The mental notebook recorded that apartment buildings must be large, if it had taken this long for the search to reach here.)

"No," Stephen was saying. "My sister and I have beed here for past half-hour. We seed no one."

"State thanks you," the Stapper muttered, so casually that the phrase must have been an official formula. His steps sounded receding. Then they stopped, and there was the noise of loud sniffs.

“Dear God,” thought Brent, “have they crossed the bulls with bloodhounds?”

“Bond,” the Stapper announced.

“Dear me,” came Martha’s voice. “Who haves beed in here today, Stephen?”

“I’m homeopath,” said the Stapper. “Like cures like. A little bond might make me forget I smelled it.”

There was a bark from Stephen and a clink of glasses. No noise from either of them as they downed the liquor. Those, sir, were men. (Memo: Find out why such unbelievable rotgut is called *bond*, of all things.)

“State thanks you,” said the Stapper, and laughed. “You know George Starvel, don’t you?”

A slightly hesitant “Yes” from Stephen.

“When you see him again, I think you’ll find he haves changed his mind. About many things.”

There was silence. Then Stephen opened the bedroom door and beckoned Brent back into the living room. He handed him a glass of bond and said, “I will be brief.”

Brent, now forewarned, sipped at the liquor and found it cheerfully warming as he assimilated the new facts.

~ * ~

In the middle of the twenty-fourth century, he learned, civilization had reached a high point of comfort, satisfaction, achievement—and stagnation. The combination of atomic power and De Bainville’s revolutionary formulation of the principles of labor and finance had seemed to solve all economic problems. The astounding development of synthetics had destroyed the urgent need for raw materials and colonies and abolished the distinction between haves and have-nots among nations. Schwarzwald’s *Compendium* had achieved the dream of the early Encyclopedists—the complete systematization of human knowledge. Farthing had regularized the English language, an achievement paralleled by the work of Zinsmeister, Timofeov, and Tamayo y Sárate in their respective tongues. (These four languages now dominated the earth. French and Italian had become corrupt dialects of German, and the Oriental languages occupied in their own countries something the position of Greek and Latin in nineteenth-century Europe, doomed soon to the complete oblivion which swallowed up those classic tongues in the twenty-first.)

There was nothing more to be achieved. All was known, all was accomplished. Nakamura’s Law of Spatial Acceleration had proved interplanetary travel to be impossible for all time. Charnwood’s Law of Temporal Metabolism had done the same for time travel. And the Schwarzwald *Compendium*, which everyone admired and no one had read, established such a satisfactory and flawless picture of knowledge that it was obviously impossible that anything remained to be discovered.

It was then that Dyce-Farnsworth proclaimed the Stasis of Cosmos. A member of the Anglo-Physical Church, product of the long contemplation by English physicists

of the metaphysical aspects of science, he came as the prophet needed to pander to the self-satisfaction of the age.

He was curiously aided by Farthing's laws of regularity. The article, direct or indirect, Farthing had proved to be completely unnecessary—had not languages as world-dominant as Latin in the first centuries and Russian in the twenty-first found no need for it?—and semantically misleading. "Article," he had said in his final and comprehensive study *This Bees Speech*, "bees prime corruptor of human thinking."

And thus the statement so beloved in the twentieth century by metaphysical-minded scientists and physical-minded divines, "God is the cosmos," became with Dyce-Farnsworth, "God bees cosmos," and hence, easily and inevitably, "God bees Cosmos," so that the utter scientific impersonality became a personification of Science. Cosmos replaced Jehovah, Baal and Odin.

The love of Cosmos was not man nor his works, but Stasis. Man was tolerated by Cosmos that he might achieve Stasis. All the millennia of human struggle had been aimed at this supreme moment when all was achieved, all was known, and all was perfect. Therefore this supernal Stasis must at all costs be maintained. Since Now was perfect, any alteration must be imperfect and taboo.

From this theory logically evolved the State, whose duty was to maintain the perfect Stasis of Cosmos. No totalitarian government had ever striven so strongly to iron out all doubt and dissension. No religious bigotry had ever found heresy so damnable and worthy of destruction. The Stasis must be maintained.

It was, ironically, the aged Dyce-Farnsworth himself who, in a moment of quasi-mystical intuition, discovered the flaw in Charnwood's Law of Temporal Metabolism. And it was clear to him what must be done.

Since the Stasis of Cosmos did not practice time travel, any earlier or later civilization that did so must be imperfect. Its emissaries would sow imperfection. There must be a Barrier.

The mystic went no further than that dictum, but the scientists of the State put his demand into practical terms. "Do not ask how at this moment," Stephen added. "I be not man to explain that. But you will learn." The first Barrier was a failure. It destroyed itself and to no apparent result. But now, fifty years later, the fears of time travel had grown. The original idea of the imperfection of emissaries had been lost. Now time travel was in itself imperfect and evil. Any action taken against it would be praise to Cosmos. And the new Barrier was being erected.

"But John knows all this," Martha protested from time to time, and Stephen would shake his head sadly and smile sympathetically at Brent.

"I don't believe a word of it," Brent said at last. "Oh, the historical outline's all right. I trust you on that. And it works out sweetly by analogy. Take the religious fanaticism of the sixteenth century, the smug scientific self-satisfaction of the nineteenth, the power domination of the twentieth—fuse them and you've got your State. But the Barrier's impossible. It can't work."

“Charnwood claimed there beed no principle on which time travel can work. And here you be.”

“That’s different,” said Brent vaguely. “But this talk of destroying the Barrier is nonsense. There’s no need to.”

“Indeed there bees need, John. For two reasons: one, that we may benefit by wisdom of travelers from other ages; and two, that positive act of destroying this Barrier, worshiped now with something like fetishism, bees strongest weapon with which we can strike against State. For there be these few of us who hope to save mankind from this fanatical complacency that race haves failed into. George Starvel beed one,” Stephen added sadly.

“I saw Starvel— But that isn’t what I mean. There’s no need because the Barrier won’t work.”

“But you telled us that it haved to be destroyed,” Martha protested. “That it doed work, and that we—”

“Hush,” said Stephen gently. “John, will you trust us far enough to show us your machine? I think I can make matters clearer to Martha then.”

“If you’ll keep me out of the way of Stappers.”

“That we can never guarantee—yet. But day will come when mankind cans forget Stappers and State, that I swear.” There was stern and noble courage in Stephen’s face and bearing as he drained his glass to that pledge.

~ * ~

“I had a break when I landed here,” John Brent explained on the way. “Derringer equipped the machine only for temporal motion. He explained that it meant running a risk; I might find that the coast line had sunk and I’d arrive under water, or God knows what. But he hadn’t worked out the synchronized adjustment for tempo-spatial motion yet, and he wanted to get started. I took the chance, and luck was good. Where the Derringer lab used to be is now apparently a deserted warehouse. Everything’s dusty and there’s not a sign of human occupation.”

Stephen’s eyes lit up as they approached the long low building of opaque bricks. “Remember, Martha?”

Martha frowned and nodded.

Faint light filtered through the walls to reveal the skeletal outlines of the machine. Brent switched on a light on the panel which gave a dim glow.

“There’s not much to see even in a good light,” he explained. “Just these two seats—Derringer was planning on teams when he built it, but decided later that one man with responsibility only to himself would do better—and this panel. These instruments are automatic—they adjust to the presence of another machine ahead of you in the time line. The only control the operator bothers with is this.” He indicated the double dial set at 2473.

“Why doed you choose this year?”

“At random. Derringer set the outer circle at 2400—half a millennium seemed a plausible choice. Then I spun the inner dial blindfolded. When this switch here is turned, you create a certain amount of temporal potential, positive or negative—which is as loose as applying those terms to magnetic poles, but likewise as convenient. For instance if I turn it to here”—he spun the outer dial to 2900—“you’ll have five hundred years of positive potential which’ll shoot you ahead to 2973. Or set it like this, and you’ll have five centuries of negative, which’ll pull you back practically to where I started from.”

Stephen frowned. “*Ahead* and *back* be of course nonsense words in this connection. But they may be helpful to Martha in visualizing it. Will you please show Martha the back of your dial?”

“Why?” There was no answer. Brent shrugged and climbed into the seat. The Roman matron moved around the machine and entered the other seat as he loosed the catch on the dial and opened it as one did for oiling.

Stephen said, “Look well, my dear. What be the large wheels maked of?”

“Aceroid, of course. Don’t you remember how Alex—”

“Don’t remember, Martha. Look. What *be* they?”

Martha gasped. “Why, they ... they be aluminum.”

“Very well. Now don’t you understand—*Ssh!*” He broke off and moved toward the doorway. He listened there a moment, then slipped out of sight.

“What does he have?” Brent demanded as he closed the dial. “The ears of an elkhound?”

“Stephen haves hyper-acute sense of hearing. He bees proud of it, and it haves saved us more than once from Stappers. When people be engaged in work against State—”

A man’s figure appeared again in the doorway. But its robes were white. “Good God!” Brent exclaimed. “Jiggers, the Staps!”

Martha let out a little squeal. A rod appeared in the Stapper’s hand. Brent’s eyes were so fixed on the adversary that he did not see the matron’s hand move toward the switch until she had turned it.

~ * ~

Brent had somehow instinctively shut his eyes during his first time transit. *During*, he reflected, is not the right word. *At the time of?* Hardly. How can you describe an event of time movement without suggesting another time measure perpendicular to the time line? At any rate, he had shut them in a laboratory in 1942 and opened them an instant later in a warehouse in 2473.

Now he shut them again, and kept them shut. He had to think for a moment. He had been playing with the dial—where was it set when Martha jerked the switch? 1973, as best he remembered. And he had now burst into that world in plastic garments of the twenty-fifth century, accompanied by a Roman matron who had in some time known him for fifty years.

He did not relish the prospect. And besides he was bothered by that strange jerking, tearing sensation that had twisted his body when he closed his eyes. He had felt nothing whatsoever on his previous trip. Had something gone wrong this time? Had—

"It doesn't work!" said Martha indignantly.

Brent opened his eyes. He and Martha sat in the machine in a dim warehouse of opaque brick.

"We be still here," she protested vigorously.

"Sure we're still here." Brent frowned. "But what you mean is, we're still *now*."

"You talk like Stephen. What do you mean?"

"Or are we?" His frown deepened. "If we're still now, where is that Stapper? He didn't vanish just because you pulled a switch. How old is this warehouse?"

"I don't know. I think about sixty years. It beed fairly new when I beed a child. Stephen and I used to play near here."

"Then we could have gone back a few decades and still be here. Yes, and look—those cases over there. I'd swear they weren't here before. After. Whatever. *Then*, when we saw the Stapper." He looked at the dial. It was set to 1973. And the warehouse was new some time around 2420.

Brent sat and stared at the panel.

"What bees matter?" Martha demanded. "Where be we?"

"Here, same like always. But what bothers me is just *when* we are. Come on; want to explore?"

Martha shook her head. "I want to stay here. And I be afraid for Stephen. Doed Stappers get him? Let's go back."

"I've got to check up on things. Something's gone wrong, and Derringer'll never forgive me if I don't find out what and why. You stay here if you want."

"Alone?"

Brent suppressed several remarks concerning women, in the abstract and the particular. "Stay or go, I don't care. I'm going."

Martha sighed. "You have changed so, John—"

~ * ~

In front of the warehouse was an open field. There had been buildings there when Brent last saw it. And in the field three young people were picknicking. The sight reminded Brent that it was a long time since he'd eaten.

He made toward the trio. There were two men and a girl. One man was blond, the other and the girl were brilliantly red-headed. The girl had much more than even that hair to recommend her. She— Brent's eyes returned to the red-headed man. There was no mistaking those deep brown eyes, that sharp and noble nose. The beard was scant, but still there was no denying—

Brent sprang forward with an eager cry of "Stephen!"

The young man looked at him blankly. "Yes," he said politely. "What do you want?"

Brent mentally kicked himself. He had met Stephen in advanced age. What would the Stephen of twenty know of him? And suddenly he began to understand a great deal. The confusion of that first meeting started to fade away.

"If I tell you," he said rapidly, "that I know that you be Stephen, that you have sister Martha, that you drink bond despite Stappers, and that you doubt wisdom of Barrier, will you accept me as a man you can trust?"

"Cosmic eons!" the blond young man drawled. "Stranger knows plenty, Stephen. If he bees Stapper, you'll have your mind changed."

The scantily bearded youth looked a long while into Brent's eyes. Then he felt in his robe, produced a flask, and handed it over. Brent drank and returned it. Their hands met in a firm clasp.

Stephen grinned at the others. "My childs, I think stranger brings us adventure. I feel like someone out of novel by Varnichek." He turned back to Brent. "Do you know these others, too?"

Brent shook his head.

"Krasna and Alex. And your name?"

"John Brent."

"And what can we do for you, John?"

"First tell me year."

Alex laughed, and the girl smiled. "And how long have you beed on a bonder?" Alex asked.

A bonder, Brent guessed, would be a bond bender. "This bees my first drink," he said, "since 1942. Or perhaps since 2473, according as how you reckon."

Brent was not disappointed in the audience reaction this time.

~ * ~

It's easy to see what must have happened, Brent wrote that night in the first entry of the journal Derringer had asked him to keep. He wrote longhand, an action that he loathed. The typewriter which Stephen had kindly offered him was equipped with a huge keyboard bearing the forty-odd characters of the Farthing phonetic alphabet, and Brent declined the loan.

We're at the *first* Barrier—the one that failed. It was dedicated to Cosmos and launched this afternoon. My friends were among the few inhabitants not ecstatically present at the ceremony. Since then they've collected reports for me. The damned contrivance had to be so terrifically overloaded that it blew up. Dyce-Farnsworth was killed and will be a holy martyr to Cosmos forever.

But in an infinitesimal fraction of a second between the launching and the explosion, the Barrier existed. That was enough.

If you, my dear Dr. Derringer, were ever going to see this journal, the whole truth would doubtless flash instantaneously through your mind like the lightning in the laboratory of the Mad Scientist. (And why couldn't I have met up with a Mad Scientist

instead of one who was perfectly sane and accurate ... up to a point? Why, Dr. Derringer, you fraud, you didn't even have a daughter!)

But since this journal, faithfully kept as per your instructions, is presumably from now on for my eyes alone, I'll have to try to make clear to my own uninspired mind just what gives with this Barrier, which broke down, so that it can't protect the Stasis, but still irrevocably stops me from going back.

Any instant in which the Barrier exists is impassable: a sort of roadblock in time. Now to achieve Dyce-Farnsworth's dream of preventing all time travel, the Barrier would have to go on existing forever, or at least into the remote future. Then as the Stasis goes on year by year, there'd always be a Barrier-instant ahead of it in time, protecting it. Not merely one roadblock, but a complete abolition of traffic on the road.

Now D-F has failed. The future's wide open. But there in the recent past, at the instant of destruction, is the roadblock that keeps me, my dear Dr. Derringer, from ever beaming on your spade beard again.

Why does it block me? I've been trying to find out. Stephen is good on history, but lousy on science. The blond young Alex reverses the combination. From him I've tried to learn the theory back of the Barrier.

The Barrier established in that fractional second, a powerful magnetic field in the temporal dimension. As a result, any object moving along the time line is cutting the magnetic field. Hysteresis sets up strong eddy currents which bring the object, in this case me, to an abrupt halt. Cf. that feeling of twisting shock that I had when my eyes were closed.

I pointed out to Alex that I must somehow have crossed this devilish Barrier in going from 1942 to 2473. He accounts for that apparent inconsistency by saying that I was then traveling *with* the time stream, though at a greater rate; the blockage lines of force were end-on and didn't stop me.

~ * ~

Brent paused and read the last two paragraphs aloud to the young scientist who was tinkering with the traveling machine. "How's that, Alex? Clear enough?"

"It will do." Alex frowned. "Of course we need whole new vocabulary for temporal concepts. We fumble so helplessly in analogies—" He rose. "There bees nothing more I can do for this now. Tomorrow I'll bring out some tools from shop, and see if I can find some acreoid gears."

"Good man. I may not be able to go back in time from here; but one thing I can do is go forward. Forward to just before they launch that second Barrier. I've got a job to do."

Alex gazed admiringly at the machine. "Wonderful piece of work. Your Dr. Derringer bees great man."

"Only he didn't allow for the effects of tempo-magnetic hysteresis on his mechanism. Thank God for you, Alex."

“Willn’t you come back to house?”

Brent shook his head. “I’m taking no chances on curious Stappers. I’m sticking here with Baby. See that the old lady’s comfortable, will you?”

“Of course. But tell me: who bees she? She willn’t talk at all.”

“Nobody. Just a temporal hitchhiker.”

Martha’s first sight of the young Stephen had been a terrible shock. She had stared at him speechlessly for long minutes, and then gone into a sort of inarticulate hysteria. Any attempt at explanation of her status, Brent felt, would only make matters worse. There was nothing to do but leave her to the care—which seemed both tender and efficient—of the girl Krasna, and let her life ride until she could resume it normally in her own time.

He resumed his journal.

~ * ~

Philological notes: Stapper, as I should have guessed, is a corruption of *Gestapo*. *Slanduch*, which poor Starvel suggested I might be, had me going for a bit. Asking about that, learned that there is more than one State. This, the smuggest and most fanatical of them all, embraces North America, Australia, and parts of Eastern Asia. Its official language is, of course, Farthingized English. Small nuclear groups of English-speaking people exist in the other States, and have preserved the older and irregular forms of speech. (Cf. American mountaineers, and Spanish Jews in Turkey.) A Slanduch belongs to such a group.

It took me some time to realize the origin of this word, but it’s obvious enough: *Auslandsdeutsche*, the Germans who existed similarly cut off from the main body of their culture. With these two common loan words suggesting a marked domination at some time of the German language, I asked Alex—and I must confess almost fearfully—“Then did Germany win the war?”

He not unnaturally countered with, “Which war?”

“The Second World War. Started in 1939”

“Second?” Alex paused. “Oh, yes. Stephen once telled me that they—you used to have numbers for wars before historians simply called 1900’s Century of Wars. But as to who won which ... who remembers?”

~ * ~

Brent paused, and wished for Stephen’s ears to determine the nature of that small noise outside. Or was it pure imagination? He went on:

These three—Stephen, Alex, and Krasna—have proved to be the ideal hosts for a traveler of my nature. Any devout believer in Cosmos, any loyal upholder of the Stasis would have turned me over to the Stappers for my first slip in speech or ideas.

They seem to be part of what corresponds to the Underground Movements of my own century. They try to accomplish a sort of boring from within, a subtle sowing

of doubts as to the Stasis. Eventually they hope for more positive action; so far it is purely mental sabotage aimed at—

~ * ~

It was a noise. Brent set down his stylus and moved along the wall as quietly as possible to the door. He held his breath while the door slid gently inward. Then as the figure entered, he pounced.

Stappers have close-cropped hair and flat manly chests. Brent released the girl abruptly and muttered a confused apology.

"It bees only me," she said shyly. "Krasna. Doed I startle you?"

"A bit," he confessed. "Alex and Stephen warned me what might happen if a Stapper stumbled in here."

"I be sorry, John."

"It's all right. But you shouldn't be wandering around alone at night like this. In fact, you shouldn't be mixed up in this at all. Leave it to Stephen and Alex and me."

"Mans!" she pouted. "Don't you think womans have any right to fun?"

"I don't know that fun's exactly the word. But since you're here, milady, let me extend the hospitality of the camp. Alex left me some bond. That poison grows on you. And tell me, why's it called that?"

"Stephen telled me once, but I can't— Oh yes. When they prohibited all drinking because drinking makes you think world bees better than it really bees and of course if you make yourself different world that bees against Stasis and so they prohibited it but they kepted on using it for medical purposes and that beed in warehouses and pretty soon no one knowed any other kind of liquor so it bees called bond. Only I don't see why."

"I don't suppose," Brent remarked, "that anybody in this century has ever heard of one Gracie Allen, but her spirit is immortal. The liquor in the warehouses was probably kept under government bond."

"Oh—" she said meekly. "I'll remember. You know everything, don't you?"

Brent looked at her suspiciously, but there was no irony in the remark. "How's the old lady getting on?"

"Fine. She bees sleeping now at last. Alex gived her some dormitin. She bees nice, John."

"And yet your voice sounds worried. What's wrong?"

"She bees so much like my mother, only, of course, I don't remember my mother much because I beed so little when Stappers taked my father and then my mother doedn't live very long but I do remember her some and your old lady bees so much like her. I wish I haved knowed my mother goodlier, John. She beed dear. She—" She lowered her voice in the tone of one imparting a great secret. "She cooked!"

Brent remembered their tasteless supper of extracts, concentrates, and synthetics, and shuddered. "I wish you had known her, Krasna."

"You know what cooking means? You go out and you dig up roots and you pick leaves off of plants and some people they even used to take animals, and then you apply heat and—"

"I know. I used to be a fair-to-middling cook myself, some five hundred years ago. If you could lead me to a bed of coals, a clove of garlic, and a two-inch steak, milady, I'd guarantee to make your eyes pop."

"Garlic? Steak?" Her eyes were wide with wonder. "What be those?"

Brent explained. For ten minutes he talked of the joys of food, of the sheer ecstatic satisfaction of good eating that passes the love of woman, the raptures of art, or the wonders of science. Then her questions poured forth.

"Stephen learns things out of books and Alex learns things in lab but I can't do that so goodly and they both make fun of me only you be real and I can learn things from you, John, and it bees wonderful. Tell me—"

And Krasna, with a greedy ear, listened.

"You know," Brent muttered, more to himself than to Krasna as he finished his exposition of life lived un-statically, "I never gave a particular damn about politics, but now I look back at my friends that liked Hitler and my friends that loved Stalin and my friends that thought there was much to be said for Franco ... if only the boys could avoid a few minor errors like killing Jews or holding purge-trials. This was what they all wanted: the Perfect State—the Stasis. God, if they could see—!"

At his feet Krasna stirred restlessly. "Tell me more," she said, "about how womans' garments beed unstatic."

His hand idled over her flowing red hair. "You've got the wrong expert for that, milady. All I remember, with the interest of any red-blooded American boy, is the way knees came and went and breasts came and stayed. You know, I've thought of the first point in favor of Stasis: a man could never catch hell for not noticing his girl's new dress."

"But why?" Krasna insisted. "Why doed they change— *styles*?" He nodded, "—change styles so often?"

"Well, the theory—not that I ever quite believed it—was to appeal to men."

"And I always wear the same dress—well, not *same*, because I always put on clean one every morning and sometimes in evening too—but it always looks same, and every time you see me it will be same and—" She broke off suddenly and pressed her face against his knee.

Gently he tilted her head back and grinned down at her moist eyes. "Look," he said. "I said I never believed it. If you've got the right girl, it doesn't matter what she wears."

He drew her up to him. She was small and warm and soft and completely unstatic. He was at home with himself and with life for the first time in five hundred years.

~ * ~

The machine was not repaired the next day, nor the next. Alex kept making plausible, if not quite intelligible, technical excuses. Martha kept to her room and fretted,

but Brent rather welcomed the delay. There was no hurry; leaving this time several days later had no effect on when they reached 2473. But he had some difficulty making that point clear to the matron.

This delay gave him an opportunity to see something of the State in action, and any information acquired was apt to be useful when the time came. With various members of Stephen's informal and illicit group he covered the city. He visited a Church of Cosmos and heard the official doctrine on the failure of the Barrier—the Stasis of Cosmos did not permit time travel, so that even an attempt to prohibit it by recognizing its existence affronted Cosmos. He visited libraries and found only those works which had established or upheld the Stasis, all bound in the same uniform format which the Cosmic Bibliological Committee of 2407 had ordained as ideal and static. He visited scientific laboratories and found brilliant young dullards plodding away endlessly at what had already been established; imaginative research was manifestly perilous.

He heard arid stretches of intolerable music composed according to the strict Farinelli system, which forbade, among other things, any alteration of key or time for the duration of a composition. He went to a solly, which turned out to be a deceptively solid three-dimensional motion picture, projected into an apparently screenless arena (*Memo: ask Alex how?*) giving something the effect of what Little Theater groups in his day called Theater in the Round. But only the images were roundly three-dimensional. The story was a strictly one-dimensional exposition of the glories of Stasis, which made the releases of Ufa or Artkino seem relatively free from propaganda. Brent, however, suspected the author of being an Under-grounder. The villain, even though triumphantly bested by the Stappers in the end, had all the most plausible and best written speeches, some of them ingenious and strong enough to sow doubts in the audience.

If, Brent thought disgustedly, anything could sow doubts in this smug herd of cattle. For the people of the State seemed to take the deepest and most loving pride in everything pertaining to the State and to the Stasis of Cosmos. The churches, the libraries, the laboratories, the music, the sollies, all represented humanity at its highest peak. We have attained perfection, have we not? Then all this bees perfect, and we love it.

"What we need," he expostulated to Alex and Stephen one night, "is more of me. Lots more. Scads of us pouring in from all ages to light firecrackers under these dopes. Every art and every science has degenerated far worse than anything did in the Dark Ages. Man cannot be man without striving, and all striving is abolished. God, I think if I lived in this age and believed in the Stasis, I'd become a Stapper. Better their arrogant cruelty than the inhuman indifference of everybody else."

"I have brother who bees Stapper," said Stephen. "I do not recommend it. To descend to level of cows and oxes bees one thing. To become jackals bees another."

"I've gathered that those rods paralyze the nerve centers, right? But what happens to you after that?"

"It bees not good. First you be treated according to expert psychoanalytic and psychometric methods so as to alter your concepts and adjust you to Stasis. If that fails, you be carefully reduced to harmless idiocy. Sometimes they find mind that bees too strong for treatment. He bees killed, but Stappers play with him first."

"It'll never happen to me," Alex said earnestly. "I be prepared. You see this?" He indicated a minute plastic box suspended around his neck. "It contains tiny amount of radioactive matter sensitized to wave length of Stappers' rods. They will never change my mind."

"It explodes?"

Alex grinned. "Stay away from me if rods start waving."

"It seems," Brent mused, "as though cruelty were the only human vice left. Games are lost, drinking is prohibited—and that most splendid of vices, imaginative speculation, is unheard of. I tell you, you need lots of me."

Stephen frowned. "Before failure of Barrier, we often wondered why we never seed time travelers. We doubted Charnwood's Law and yet— We decided there beed only two explanations. Either time travel bees impossible, or time travelers cannot be seed or intervene in time they visit. Now, we can see that Barrier stopped all from future, and perhaps you be only one from past. And still—"

"Exactly," said Alex. "And still. If other travelers came from future, why beed they not also stopped by Barrier? One of our friends searched Stapper records since breakdown of Barrier. No report on strange and unidentified travelers anywhere."

"That means only one thing." Stephen looked worried. "Second Barrier, Barrier you telled us of, John, must be successful."

"The hell it will be. Come on, Alex. I'm getting restless. When can I start?"

Alex smiled. "Tomorrow. I be ready at last."

"Good man. Among us, we are going to blow this damned Stasis back into the bliss of manly and uncertain striving. And in fifty years we'll watch it together."

Krasna was waiting outside the room when Brent left. "I knowed you willed be talking about things I doedn't understand."

"You can understand this, milady. Alex has got everything fixed, and we leave tomorrow."

"We?" said Krasna brightly, hopefully.

Brent swore to himself. "We, meaning me and the old lady. The machine carries only two. And I do have to take her back to her own time."

"Poor thing," said Krasna. Her voice had gone dead.

"Poor us," said Brent sharply. "One handful of days out of all of time ..." For one wild moment a possibility occurred to him. "Alex knows how to work the machine. If he and the old—"

"No," said Krasna gravely. "Stephen sayes you have to go and we will meet you there. I don't understand...But I will meet you, John, and we will be together again and we will talk and you will tell me things like first night we talked and then—"

"And then," said Brent, "we'll stop talking. Like this."

Her eyes were always open during a kiss. (Was this a custom of Stasis, Brent wondered, or her own?) He read agreement in them now, and hand in hand they walked, without another word, to the warehouse, where Alex was through work for the night.

One minor point for the Stasis, Brent thought as he dozed off that night, was that it had achieved perfectly functioning zippers.

~ * ~

“Now,” said Brent to Stephen after what was euphemistically termed breakfast, “I’ve got to see the old lady and find out just what the date is for the proposed launching of the second Barrier.”

Stephen beamed. “It bees such pleasure to hear old speech, articles and all.”

Alex had a more practical thought. “How can you set it to one day? I thought your dial readed only in years.”

“There’s a vernier attachment that’s accurate—or should be, it’s never been tested yet—to within two days. I’m allowing a week’s margin. I don’t want to be around too long and run chances with Stappers.”

“Krasna will miss you.”

“Krasna’s a funny name. You others have names that were in use back in my day.”

“Oh, it bees not name. It bees only what everyone calls red-headed girls. I think it goes back to century of Russian domination.”

“Yes,” Alex added. “Stephen’s sister’s real name bees Martha, but we never call her that.”

John Brent gaped. “I... I’ve got to go see the old lady,” he stammered.

~ * ~

From the window of the gray-haired Martha-Krasna he could see the red-headed Krasna-Martha outside. He held on to a solid and reassuring chair and said, “Well, madam, I have news. We’re going back today.”

“Oh thank Cosmos!”

“But I’ve got to find out something from you. What was the date set for the launching of the second Barrier?”

“Let me see—I know it beed holiday. Yes, it beed May 1.”

“My, my! May Day a holiday now? Workers of the World Unite, or simply Gathering Nuts in May?”

“I don’t understand you. It bees Dyce-Farnsworth’s birthday, of course. But then I never understand ...”

In his mind he heard the same plaint coming from fresh young lips. “I ... I understand now, madam,” he said clumsily. “Our meeting—I can see why you—” Damn it, what was there to say?

“Please,” she said. There was, paradoxically, a sort of pathetic dignity about her. “I do not understand. Then at littlest let me forget.”

He turned away respectfully. "Warehouse in half an hour!" he called over his shoulder.

The young Krasna-Martha was alone in the warehouse when Brent got there. He looked at her carefully, trying to see in her youthful features the worn ones of the woman he had just left. It made sense.

"I comed first," she said, "because I wanted to say good-by without others."

"Good-by, milady," Brent murmured into her fine red hair. "In a way I'm not leaving you because I'm taking you with me and still I'll never see you again. And you don't understand that, and I'm not sure you've ever understood anything I've said, but you've been very sweet."

"And you will destroy Barrier? For me?"

"For you, milady. And a few billion others. And here come our friends."

Alex carried a small box which he tucked under one of the seats. "Dial and mechanism beed repaired days ago," he grinned. "I've beed working on this for you, in lab which I was supposed to be re-proving Tsvetov's hypothesis. Temporal demagnetizer—guaranteed. Bring this near Barrier and field will be breaked. Your problem bees to get near Barrier."

Martha, the matron, climbed into the machine. Martha, the girl, turned away to hide watering eyes. Brent set the dial to 2473 and adjusted the vernier to April 24, which gave him a week's grace. "Well, friends," he faltered. "My best gratitude—and I'll be seeing you in fifty years."

Stephen started to speak, and then suddenly stopped to listen. "Quick, Krasna, Alex. Behind those cases. Turn switch quickly, John."

Brent turned the switch, and nothing happened. Stephen and Krasna were still there, moving toward the cases. Alex darted to the machine. "Cosmos blast me! I maked disconnection to prevent anyone's tampering by accident. And now—"

"Hurry, Alex," Stephen called in a whisper.

"Moment—" Alex opened the panel and made a rapid adjustment. "There, John. Good-by."

In the instant before Brent turned the switch, he saw Stephen and Krasna reach a safe hiding place. He saw a Stapper appear in the doorway. He saw the flicker of a rod. The last thing he saw in 2423 was the explosion that lifted Alex's head off his shoulders.

The spattered blood was still warm in 2473.

Stephen, the seventy-year-old Stephen with the long and parti-colored beard, was waiting for them. Martha dived from the machine into his arms and burst into dry sobbing.

"She met herself," Brent explained. "I think she found it pretty confusing."

Stephen barked: "I can imagine. It bees only now that I have realized who that woman beed who comed with you and so much resembled our mother. But you be so late. I have beed waiting here since I evaded Stappers."

"Alex—" Brent began.

"I know. Alex has given you magnetic disruptor and lost his life. He need not man to die so young. He need good friend ... And my sister has given and lost too, I think." He gently stroked the gray hair that had once been red. "But these be fifty-year-old sorrows. I have lived with my unwept tears for Alex; they be friends by now too. And Martha has wept her tears for ..." He paused, then: "Why have you need so long?"

"I didn't want to get here too long before May Day—might get into trouble. So I allowed a week, but I'll admit I might be a day or so off. What date is it?"

"This be May 1, and Barrier will be launched within hour. We must hurry."

"My God—" Brent glared at the dial. "It can't be that far off. But come on. Get your sister home and we'll plunge on to do our damndest."

Martha roused herself. "I be coming with you."

"No, dear," said Stephen. "We can do better alone."

Her lips set stubbornly. "I be coming. I don't understand anything that happens, but you be Stephen and you be John, and I belong with you."

~ * ~

The streets were brightly decorated with banners bearing the double loop of infinity, the sacred symbol of Cosmos that had replaced crescent, swastika, and cross. But there was hardly a soul in sight. What few people they saw were all hurrying in the same direction.

"Everyone will be at dedication," Stephen explained. "Tribute to Cosmos. Those who stay at home must beware Stappers."

"And if there's hundreds of thousands thronging the dedication, how do we get close to Barrier to disrupt it?"

"It be all arranged. Our group be far more powerful than when you knowed it fifty years ago. Slowly we be honeycombing system of State. With bribery and force when necessary, with persuasion when possible, we can do much. And we have arranged this."

"How?"

"You be delegate from European Slanduch. You speak German?"

"Well enough."

"Remember that has been regularized, too. But I doubt if you need to speak any. Making you Slanduch will account for irregular slips in English. You come from powerful Slanduch group. You will be gladly welcomed here. You will occupy post of honor. I have even accounted for box you carry. It be tribute you have brought to Cosmos. Here be your papers and identity plaque."

"Thanks." Brent's shorter legs managed to keep up with the long strides of Stephen, who doubled the rate of the moving sidewalk by his own motion. Martha panted along resolutely. "But can you account for why I'm so late? I set my indicator for April 24, and here we are rushing to make a date on May 1."

Stephen strode along in thought, then suddenly slapped his leg and barked. "How many months in 1942?"

"Twelve, of course."

"Ha! Yes, it beed only two hundred years ago that thirteen-month calendar beed adopted. Even months of twenty-eight days each, plus Year Day, which belongs to no month. Order, you see. Now invaluable part of Stasis—" He concentrated frowningly on mental arithmetic. "Yes, your indicator worked exactly. May 1 of our calendar bees April 24 of yours."

Chalk up one slip against Derringer—an unthinking confidence in the durability of the calendar. And chalk up one, for Brent's money, against the logic of the Stasis; back in the twentieth century, he had been an advocate of calendar reform, but a stanch upholder of the four-quarter theory against the awkward thirteen months.

They were nearing now the vast amphitheater where the machinery of the Barrier had been erected. Stappers were stopping the few other travelers and forcing them off the moving sidewalk into the densely packed crowds, faces aglow with the smug ecstasy of the Stasis, but Brent's Slanduch credentials passed the three through.

The representative of the German Slanduch pushed his way into the crowd of eminent dignitaries just as Dyce-Farnsworth's grandson pressed the button. The magnificent mass of tubes and wires shuddered and glowed as the current pulsed through it. Then the glow became weird and arctic. There was a shaking, a groaning, and then, within the space of a second, a cataclysmic roar and a blinding glare. Something heavy and metallic pressed Brent to the ground.

The roar blended into the excited terror of human voices. The splendid Barrier was a mass of twisted wreckage. It was more wreckage that weighted Brent down, but this was different. It looked strangely like a variant of his own machine. And staring down at him from a warped seat was the huge-eyed head of a naked man.

A woman in a metallic costume equally strange to this age and to Brent's own straddled the body of Dyce-Farnsworth's grandson, who had met his ancestor's martyrdom. And wherever Brent's eyes moved he saw another strange and outlandish—no, out-timeish—figure.

He heard Martha's voice. "It bees clear that Time Barrier haves been erected and destroyed by outside force. But it haves existed and created impenetrable instant of time. These be travelers from all future."

Brent gasped. Even the sudden appearance of these astounding figures was topped by Martha's speaking perfect logical sense.

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Brent wrote in his journal: The Stasis is at least an admirably functional organism. All hell broke loose there for a minute, but almost automatically the Stoppers went into action with their rods—odd how that bit of crook's cant has become perfectly literal truth—and in no time had the situation well in hand.

They had their difficulties. Several of the time intruders were armed, and managed to account for a handful of Stoppers before the nerve rays paralyzed them. One machine was a sort of time-traveling tank and contrived to withstand siege until a suicide squad of Stoppers attacked it with a load of what Stephen tells me was detonite; we shall never know from what sort of a future the inhabitants of that tank came to spatter their shredded flesh about the amphitheater.

But these events were mere delaying action, token resistance. Ten minutes after the Barrier had exploded, the travelers present were all in the hands of the Stoppers, and cruising Stapper bands were efficiently combing all surrounding territory.

(The interesting suggestion comes amazingly from Martha that all time machines capable of physical movement were irresistibly attracted to the amphitheater by the tempo-magnetic field only such pioneer and experimental machines as my Derringer, which can move only temporally, would be arrested in other locations. Whether or not this theory is correct, it seems justified by the facts. Only a few isolated reports have come in of sudden appearances elsewhere at the instant of the Barrier's explosion; the focus of arrivals of the time travelers was the amphitheater.)

The Chief of Stappers mounted the dais where an infinity-bedecked banner now covered the martyred corpse of young Dyce-Farmworth, and announced the official ruling of the Head of State: that these intruders and disrupters of the Stasis were to be detained—tested and examined and studied until it became apparent what the desire of Cosmos might be.

(The Head of State, Stephen explained, is a meaningless figurehead, part high priest and—I paraphrase—part Alexander Throttlebottom. The Stasis is supposedly so perfect and so self-sustaining that his powers are as nominal as those of the pilot of a ship in drydock, and all actual power is exercised by such subordinates as the Editor of State and the Chief of Stappers.)

Thanks to Stephen's ingenuity, this rule for the treatment of time travelers does not touch me. I am simply a Slanduch envoy. Some Stopper search party has certainly by now found the Derringer machine in the warehouse, which I no longer dare approach.

With two Barriers now between me and 1942, it is obvious that I am keeping this journal only for myself. I am stuck here—and so are all the other travelers, for this field, far stronger than the first, has wrecked their machines beyond the repairing efforts of a far greater talent than poor Alex. We are all here for good.

And it must be for good.

I still believe firmly what I said to Stephen and Alex: that this age needs hundreds of me to jolt it back into humanity. We now have, if not hundreds, at least dozens; and I, so far as we yet know, am the only one not in the hands of the Stappers. It is my clearest duty to deliver those others, and with their aid to beat some sense into this Age of Smugness.

~ * ~

"But how?" Brent groaned rhetorically. "How am I going to break into the Stappers' concentration camp?"

Martha wrinkled her brows. "I think I know. Let me work on problem while longer; I believe I see how we can at littlest make start."

Brent stared at her. "What's happened to you, madam? Always before you've shrunk away from every discussion Stephen and I have had. You've said we talk of things you know nothing about. And now, all of a sudden—boom!—you're right in the middle of things and doing very nicely thank you. What's got into you?"

"I think," said Martha smiling, "you have hitted on right phrase, John."

Brent's puzzled expostulation was broken off by Stephen's entrance. "And where have you been?" he demanded. "I've been trying to work out plans, and I've got a weird feeling Martha's going to beat me to it. What have you been up to?"

Stephen looked curiously at his sister. "I've beed out galping. Interesting results, too."

"Galping?"

"You know. Going about among people, taking samples of opinion, using scientific method to reduce carefully choosed samples to general trends."

"Oh." (Mr. Gallup, thought Brent, has joined Captain Boycott and M. Guillotin as a verb.) "And what did you learn?"

"People be confused by arrival of time travelers. If Stasis bees perfect, they argue, why be such arrivals allowed? Seeds of doubt be sowed, and we be carefully watering them. Head of State haves problem on his hands. I doubt if he can find any solution to satisfy people."

"If only," Brent sighed, "there were some way of getting directly at the people. If we could see these travelers and learn what they know and want, then somehow establish contact between them and the people, the whole thing ought to be a pushover."

It was Martha who answered. "It bees very simple, John. You be linguist."

"Yes. And how does that—"

"Stappers will need interpreters. You will be one. From there on you must develop your own plans, but that will at littlest put you in touch with travelers."

"But the State must have its own linguists who—"

Stephen barked with pleasure and took up the explanation. Since Farthing's regularization of English, the perfect immutability of language had become part of the Stasis. A linguist now was a man who knew Farthing's works by heart, and that was all. Oh, he might also be well acquainted with Zinsmeister German, or Tamayo y Sárate Spanish; but he knew nothing of general linguistic principles, which are apt to run completely counter to the fine theories of these great synthesists, and he had never had occasion to learn adaptability to a new language. Faced by the strange and incomprehensible tongues of the future, the State linguist would be helpless.

It was common knowledge that only the Slanduch had any true linguistic aptitude. Brought up to speak three languages—Farthing-ized English, their own archaic dialect, and the language of the country in which they resided—their tongues were deft and

adjustable. In ordinary times, this aptitude was looked on with suspicion; but now there would doubtless be a heavy demand for Slanduch interpreters, and a little cautious wire-pulling could land Brent the job.

"And after that," said Stephen, "as Martha rightly observes, you be on your own."

"Lead me to it," grinned John Brent.

~ * ~

The rabbitty little State linguist received Brent effusively. "Ah, thank Cosmos!" he gasped. "Travelers be driving me mad! Such gibberish you have never heard! Such irregularities! Frightful! You be Slanduch?"

"I be. I have speaked several languages all my life. I can even speak pre-Zinsmeister German." And he began to recite *Die Lorelei*. "*Die Luft ist kühl und es dunkelt, und ruhig fließt der Rhein—*"

"Terrible! *Ist!* Such vile irregularity! And articles! But come, young man. We'll see what you can do with these temporal barbarians!"

There were three travelers in the room Brent entered, with the shocked linguist and two rodded Stappers in attendance. One of the three was the woman he had noticed in that first cataclysmic instant of arrival, a strapping Amazonic blonde who looked as though she could break any two unarmed Stappers with her bare fingers. Another was a neat little man with a curly and minute forked beard and restless hands. The third—

The third was hell to describe. They were all dressed now in the conventional robes of the Stasis, but even in these familiar garments he was clearly not quite human. If man is a featherless biped, then this was a man; but men do not usually have greenish skin with vestigial scales and a trace of a gill-opening behind each ear.

"Ask each of them three things," the linguist instructed Brent. "When he comes from, what his name bees, and what be his intentions."

Brent picked Tiny Beard as the easiest-looking start. "O. K. You!" He pointed, and the man stepped forward. "What part of time do you come from?"

"A pox o' thee, sirrah, and the goodyears take thee! An thou wouldst but hearken, thou might'st learn all."

The State linguist moaned. "You hear, young man? How can one interpret such jargon?"

Brent smiled. "It bees O. K. This bees simply English as it beed speaked thousand years ago. This man must have beed aiming at earlier time and prepared himself... Thy pardon, sir. These kerns deem all speech barbaric save that which their own conceit hath evolved. Bear with me, and all will be well."

"Spoken like a true knight!" the traveler exclaimed. "Forgive my rash words, sir. Surely my good daemon hath led thee hither. Thou wouldst know—"

"Whence comest thou?"

"From many years hence. Thousands upon thousands of summers have yet to run their course ere I—"

"Forgive me, sir; but of that much we are aware. Let us be precise."

"Why then, marry, sir, 'tis from the fifth century."

Brent frowned. But to attempt to understand the gentleman's system of dating would take too much time at the moment. "And thy name, sir?"

"Kruj, sir. Or as thou wouldst be formal and courtly, Kruj Krujil Krujilar. But let Kruj suffice thee."

"And what most concerneth these gentlemen here is the matter of thine intentions. What are thy projects in this our earlier world?"

"My projects?" Kruj coughed. "Sir, in thee I behold a man of feeling, of sensibility, a man to whom one may speak one's mind. Many projects have I in good sooth, most carefully projected for me by the Zhurmandril. Much must I study in these realms of the great Elizabeth— though 'sblood! I know not how they seem so different from my conceits! But one thing above all else do I covet. I would to the Mermaid Tavern."

Brent grinned. "I fear me, sir, that we must talk at greater length. Much hast thou mistaken and much must I make clear. But first I must talk with these others."

Kruj retired, frowning and plucking at his shred of beard. Brent beckoned to the woman. She strode forth so vigorously that both Stappers bared their rods.

"Madam," Brent ventured tentatively, "what part of time do you come from?"

"Evybuy taws so fuy," she growled. "Bu I unnasta. Wy cachoo unnasta *me*?"

Brent laughed. "Is that all that's the trouble? You don't mind if I go on talking like this, do you?"

"Naw. You taw howeh you wanna, slonsoo donna like I dih taw stray."

Fascinating, Brent thought. All final consonants lost, and many others. Vowels corrupted along lines indicated in twentieth-century colloquial speech. Consonants sometimes restored in liaison as in French.

"What time do you come from, then?"

"Twenny-ni twenny-fie. N were am I now?"

"Twenty-four seventy-three. And your name, madam?"

"Mimi."

Brent had an incongruous vision of this giantess dying operatically in a Paris garret. "So. And your intentions here?"

"Ai gonno intenchuns. Juh wanna see wha go."

"You will, madam, I assure you. And now—" He beckoned to the green-skinned biped, who advanced with a curious lurching motion like a deep-sea diver.

"And you, sir. When do you come from?"

"Ya studier langue earthly. Vyerit todo langue isos. Ou comprendo wie govorit people."

Brent was on the ropes and groggy. The familiarity of some of the words made the entire speech even more incomprehensible. "Says which?" he gasped.

The green man exploded. “Ou existier nada but dolts, cochons, duraki v this terre? Nikovo parla langue earthly? Potztausend Sapperment en la leche de tu madre and I do mean you!”

Brent reeled. But even reeling he saw the disapproving frown of the State linguist and the itching fingers of the Stappers. He faced the green man calmly and said with utmost courtesy, “ ‘Twas brillig and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble over the rivering waters of the hither-andthithering waters of pigeons on the grass alas.” He turned to the linguist. “He says he won’t talk.”

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Brent wrote in the never-to-be-read journal: It was Martha again who solved my green man for me. She pointed out that he was patently extraterrestrial. (Apparently Nakamura’s Law of Spatial Acceleration is as false as Charnwood’s Law of Temporal Metabolism.) The vestigial scales and gills might well indicate Venus as his origin. He must come from some far distant future when the earth is overrun by inhabitants of other planets and terrestrial culture is all but lost. He had prepared himself for time travel by studying the speech of earth— langue earthly—reconstructed from some larger equivalent of the Rosetta Stone, but made the mistake of thinking that there was only one earthly speech, just as we tend imaginatively to think of Martian or Venusian as a single language. As a result, he’s talking all earthly tongues at once. Martha sees a marked advantage in this, even more than in Mimi’s corrupt dialect—

~ * ~

“Thou, sir,” said Brent to Kruj on his next visit, “art a linguist. Thou knowest speech and his nature. To wit, I would wager that thou couldst with little labor understand this woman here. One who hath so mastered our language in his greatest glory—”

The little man smirked. “I thank thee, sir. In sooth since thou didst speak with her yestereven I have already made some attempts at converse with her.”

Mimi joined in. “He taws fuy, but skina cue.”

“Very well then. I want you both, and thee in particular, Kruj, to hearken to this green-skinned varlet here. Study his speech, sir, and learn what thou may’st.”

“Wy?” Mimi demanded belligerently.

“The wench speaks sooth. Wherefore should we so?”

“You’ll find out. Now let me at him.”

It was slow, hard work, especially with the linguist and the Stappers ever on guard. It meant rapid analysis of the possible origin of every word used by the Venusian, and a laborious attempt to find at random words that he would understand. But in the course of a week both Brent and the astonishingly adaptable Kruj had learned enough of this polyglot *langue earthly* to hold an intelligible conversation. Mimi was hopelessly lost, but Kruj occasionally explained matters to her in her own corrupt speech, which he had mastered by now as completely as Elizabethan.

It had been Stephen's idea that any project for the liberation of the time travelers must wait until more was learned of their nature. "You be man of good will, John. We trust you. You and mans like you can save us. But imagine that some travelers come from worlds far badder even than ours. Suppose that they come seeking only power for themselves? Suppose that they come from civilization of cruelty and be more evil than Stappers?"

It was a wise point, and it was Martha who saw the solution in the Venusian's amazing tongue. In that melange of languages, Brent could talk in front of the linguist and the Stappers with complete safety. Kruj and the Venusian, who must have astonishing linguistic ability to master the speech of another planet even so perversely, could discuss matters with the other travelers, and could tell him anything he needed to know before all the listening guards of the State.

All this conversation was, of course, theoretically guided by the linguist. He gave questions to Brent and received plausible answers, never dreaming that his questions had not been asked.

As far as his own three went, Brent was satisfied as to the value of their liberation. Mimi was not bright, but she seemed to mean well and claimed to have been a notable warrior in her own matriarchal society. It was her feats in battle and exploration that had caused her to be chosen for time travel. She should be a useful ally.

Kruj was indifferent to the sorry state of the world until Brent mentioned the tasteless and servile condition of the arts. Then he was all afire to overthrow the Stasis and bring about a new renaissance. (Kruj, Brent learned, had been heading for the past to collect material for a historical epic on Elizabethan England, a fragment of prehistoric civilization that had always fascinated him.)

Of the three, Nikobat, the Venusian, seemed the soundest and most promising. To him, terrestrial civilization was a closed book, but a beautiful one. In the life and struggles of man he found something deep and moving. The aim of Nikobat in his own world had been to raise his transplanted Venusian civilization to the levels, spiritual and scientific, that had once been attained by earthly man, and it was to find the seed of inspiration to accomplish this that he had traveled back. Man degenerate, man self-complacent, man smug, shocked him bitterly, and he swore to exert his best efforts in the rousing.

Brent was feeling not displeased with himself as he left his group after a highly successful session. Kruj was accomplishing much among the other travelers and would have a nearly full report for him tomorrow. And once that report had been made, they could attempt Martha's extraordinary scheme of rescue. He would not have believed it ordinarily possible, but both he and Stephen were coming to put more and more trust in the suggestions of the once scatter-brained Martha. Stephen's own reports were more than favorable. The Underground was boring beautifully from within. The people of the State were becoming more and more restless and doubting. Slowly these cattle were resuming the forms of men.

Brent was whistling happily as he entered the apartment and called out a cheery “Hi!” to his friends. But they were not there. There was no one in the room but a white-clad Stapper, who smiled wolfishly as he rose from a chair and asked, “You be time traveler, be you not?”

This was the most impressive Stapper that Brent had yet seen—impressive even aside from the startling nature of his introductory remark. The others, even the one he had kicked in the face, or the one who killed Alex, Brent had thought of simply as so many Stappers. This one was clearly an individual. His skin was exceptionally dark and smooth and hairless, and two eyes so black that they seemed all pupil glowed out of his face.

Brent tried to seem casual. “Nonsense. I be Slanduch envoy from Germany, staying here with friends and doing service for State. Here bees my identification.”

The Stapper hardly glanced at it. “I know all about your ‘linguistic services,’ John Brent. And I know about machine finded in deserted warehouse. It beed only machine not brokeed by Barrier. Therefore it comed not from Future, but from Past.”

“So? We have travelers from both directions? Poor devil will never be able to get back to own time then.” He wondered if this Stapper were corruptible; he could do with a drink of bond.

“Yes, he bees losea here in this time like others. And he foolishly works with them to overthrow Stasis.”

“Sad story. But how does it concern me? My papers be in order. Surely you can see that I be what I claim?”

The Stapper’s eyes fixed him sharply. “You be clever, John Brent. You doubtless traveled naked and clothed yourself as citizen of now to escape suspicion. That bees smartest way. How you getted papers I do not know. But communication with German Slanduch will disprove your story. You be losed, Brent, unless you be sensible.”

“Sensible? What the hell do you mean by that?”

The Stapper smiled slowly. “Article,” he drawled.

“I be sorry. But that proves nothing. You know how difficult it bees for us Slanduch to keep our speech entirely regular.”

“I know.” Suddenly a broad grin spread across the Stapper’s face and humanized it. “I have finded this Farthing speech hellishly difficult myself.”

“You mean you, too, be Slanduch?”

The Stapper shook his head. “I, too, Brent, be traveler.”

Brent was not falling for any such trap. “Ridiculous! How can traveler be Stapper?”

“How can traveler be Slanduch envoy? I, too, traveled naked, and man whose clothes and identification I stealed beed Stapper. I have finded his identity most useful.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“You be stubborn, Brent. How to prove—” He gestured at his face. “Look at my skin. In my century facial hair haves disappeared; we have breeded away from it. Where in this time could you find skin like that?”

“A sport. Freak of chromosomes.”

The black eyes grew even larger and more glowing. "Brent, you must believe me. This bees no trap for you. I need you. You and I, we can do great things. But how to convince you"—he snapped his fingers. "I know!" He was still for a moment. The vast eyes remained opened but somehow veiled, as though secret calculations were going on behind them. His body shivered. For a moment of strange delusion Brent thought he could see the chair through the Stapper's body. Then it was solid again.

"My name," said the Stapper, with the patience of a professor addressing a retarded class, "bees Bokor. I come from tenth century after consummation of terrestrial unity, which bees, I believe, forty-third reckoning from date of birth of Christian god. I have traveled, not with machine, but solely by use of Vunmurd formula, and, therefore, I alone of all travelers stranded here can still move. Hysteresis of Barrier arrests me, but cannot destroy my formula as it shatters machines."

"Pretty story."

"Therefore I alone of travelers can still travel. I can go back by undestroyed formula and hit Barrier again. I'll hit Barrier twice, I exist twice in that one point of time. Therefore each of two of me continues into present."

"So now you be two?" Brent observed skeptically. "Obviously I be too sober. I seem to be seeing single."

Bokor grinned again. Somehow this time it didn't seem so humanizing. "Come in!" he called.

The Stapper in the doorway fixed Brent with his glowing black eyes and said, "Now do you believe that I be traveler?"

Brent gawped from one identical man to the other. The one in the doorway went on. "I need you."

"It isn't possible. It's a gag. You're twin Stappers, and you're trying to—"

Bokor in the chair said, "Do I have to do it again?"

Brent said, "You may both be Stappers. You may turn out to be a whole damned regiment of identical multiple births. I don't give a damn; I want some bond. How about you boys?"

The two Bokors downed their drinks and frowned. "Weak," they said.

Brent shook his head feebly. "All right. We'll skip that. Now what the sweet hell do you need me for?"

Bokor closed his eyes and seemed to doze. Bokor Sub-One said, "You have plans to liberate travelers and overthrow Stasis. As Stapper I have learned much. I worked on changing mind of one of your Underground friends."

"And you want to throw your weight in with us? Good, we can use a Stapper. Or two. But won't the Chief of Stappers be bothered when he finds he has two copies of one man?"

"He will never need to see more than one. Yes, I want to help you—up to a point. We will free travelers. But you be innocent, Brent. We will not overthrow Stasis. We will maintain it—as ours."

Brent frowned. "I'm not sure I get you. And I don't think I like it if I do."

"Do not be fool, Brent. We have opportunity never before gived to man, we travelers. We come into world where already exists complete and absolute State control, but used stupidly and to no end. Among us all we have great knowledge and power. We be seed sowed upon fallow ground. We can spring up and engulf all about us." The eyes glowed with black intensity. "We take this Stasis and mold it to our own wishes. These dolts who now be slaves of Cosmos will be slaves of us. Stapper, whose identity I have, bees third in succession to Chief of Stappers. Chief and other two will be killed accidentally in revolt of travelers. With power of all Stappers behind me, I make you Head of State. Between us we control this State absolutely."

"Nuts," Brent snorted. "The State's got too damned much control already. What this world needs is a return to human freedom and striving."

"Innocent," Bokor Sub-One repeated scornfully. "Who gives damn what world needs? Only needs which concern man be his own, and his strongest need bees always for power. Here it bees gived us. Other States be stupid and self-complacent like this. We know secrets of many weapons, we travelers. We turn our useless scholastic laboratories over to their production. Then we attack other States and subject them to us as vassals. And then the world itself bees ours, and all its riches. Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler, Gospodinov. Tirazhul—never haves world knowed conquerors like us."

"You can go to hell," said Brent lightly but firmly. "All two of you."

"Do not be too clever, my friend. Remember that I be Stapper and can—"

"You be two Stappers, which may turn out to be a little awkward. But you could be a regiment of Stappers, and I still wouldn't play ball. Your plan stinks, Bokor, and you know what you can do with it."

Bokor Sub-One took the idiom literally. "Indeed I do know, Brent. It willed have beed easier with your aid, but even without you it will succeed." He drew out his rod and contemplated it reflectively. "No," he murmured, "there bees no point to taking you in and changing your mind. You be harmless to me, and your liberation of travelers will be useful."

The original Bokor opened his eyes. "We will meet again, Brent. And you will see what one man with daring mind can accomplish in this world." Bokor and Bokor Sub-One walked to the door and turned. "And for bond," they spoke in unison, in parody of the conventional Stapper's phrase, "State thanks you,"

Brent stood alone in the room, but the black-eyed domination of the two Bokors lingered about him. The plan was so damned plausible, so likely to succeed if put into operation. Man has always dreamed of power. But damn it, man has always dreamed of love, too, and of the rights of his fellow man. The only power worthy of man is the power of all mankind struggling together toward a goal of unobtainable perfection.

And what could Bokor do against Kruj and Mimi and Nikobat and the others that Kruj reported sympathetic?

Nevertheless there had been a certainty in those vast eyes that the double Bokor knew what he could do.

The release of the travelers was a fabulous episode. Stephen had frowned and Brent had laughed when Martha said simply, "Only person who haves power to release them bees Head of State by will of Cosmos. Very well. We will persuade him to do so." But she insisted, and she had been so uncannily right ever since the explosion of the second Barrier that at last, when Kruj had made his final report, Brent accompanied her on what he was certain was the damnedest fool errand he'd got himself into yet.

Kruj's report was encouraging. There were two, perhaps three, among the travelers who had Bokorian ideas of taking over the State for their own purposes. But these were far outweighed by the dozens who saw the tremendous possibilities of a reawakening of mankind. The liberation was proved a desirable thing, but why should the Head of State so readily loose disrupters of his Stasis?

Getting to see the Head of State took the best part of a day. There were countless minor officials to be interviewed, all of them guarded by Stappers who looked upon the supposed Slanduch envoy with highly suspicious eyes. But one by one, with miraculous consistency, these officials beamed upon Brent's errand and sent him on with the blessing of Cosmos.

"You wouldn't like to pinch me?" he murmured to Martha after the fifth such success. "This works too easy. It can't be true."

Martha looked at him blankly and said, "I don't understand it. But what be we going to say?"

Brent jumped. "Hey! Look, madam. This was all your idea. You were going to talk the Head of State into—"

But a Stapper was already approaching to conduct them to the next office, and Brent fell silent.

It was in the anteroom of the Head of State that they met Bokor. Just one of him this time. He smiled confidentially at Brent and said, "Shocking accident today. Stapper killed in fight with prisoner. Odd thing—Stapper been second in succession to Chief of Stappers."

"You're doing all right," said Brent.

"I be curious to see what you plan here. How do you hope to achieve this liberation? I talked with Head of State yesterday and he bees strongly opposed."

"Brother," said Brent sincerely, "I wish I knew."

In a moment Bokor ushered them into the sanctum sanctorum of the Head of State. This great dignitary was at first glance a fine figure of a man, tall and well built and noble. It was only on second glance that you noticed the weak lips and the horribly empty eyes. The stern and hawk-nosed Chief of Stappers stood beside him.

"Well!" the latter snapped. "Speak your piece!"

Brent faltered and glanced at Martha. She looked as vacant and helpless as ever she had before the Barrier. He could only fumble on and pray that her unrevealed scheme would materialize.

"As you know, sir," he began, "I, as interpreter, have beed in very close contact with travelers. Having in my mind good of Cosmos and wishing to see it as rich and fully developed as possible, it seems to me that much may be accomplished by releasing travelers so that they may communicate with people." He gulped and swore at himself for venturing such an idiotic request.

The empty eyes of the Head of State lit up for a moment. "Excellent idea," he boomed in a dulcet voice. "You have permission of State and Cosmos. Chief, I give orders that all travelers be released."

Brent heard Bokor's incredulous gasp behind him. The Chief of Stappers muttered "Cosmos!" fervently. The Head of State looked around him for approval and then reverted to formal vacancy.

"I thank State," Brent managed to say, "for this courageous move."

"What bees courageous?" the Head demanded. His eyes shifted about nervously. "What have I doed? What have I sayed?"

The Chief of Stappers bowed. "You have proclaimed freedom of travelers. May I, too, congratulate you on wisdom of action?" He turned to Bokor. "Go and give necessary orders."

Martha did not say a word till they were outside. Then she asked, "What happened? Why in Cosmos' name doed he consent?"

"Madam, you have me there. But you should know. It was all your idea."

Understanding came back to her face. "Of course. It bees time now that you know all about me. But wait till we be back in apartment. Stephen haves right to know this, too. And Martha," Martha added.

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They had left Bokor behind them in the sanctum, and they met Bokor outside the building. That did not worry Brent, but he was admittedly perturbed when he passed a small group of people just off the sidewalk and noticed that its core was a third Bokor. He pulled Martha off the moving path and drew near the group.

Bokor was not being a Stapper this time. He was in ordinary iridescent robes. "I tell you I know," he was insisting vigorously. "I am ... I be Slanduch from State of South America, and I can tell you deviltry they be practicing there. Armament factories twice size of laboratories of Cosmos. They plan to destroy us; I know."

A Stapper shoved his way past Brent. "Here now!" he growled. "What bees going on here?"

Bokor hesitated. "Nothing, sir. I was only—"

"Was, *huh?*"

"Pardon, sir. *Beed*. I be Slanduch, you see, and—"

One of the men in the crowd interrupted. "He beed telling us what all State needs to know—plans of State of South America to invade and destroy us."

“Hm-m-m!” the Stapper ejaculated. “You be right, man. That sounds like something to know. Go on, you.”

Bokor resumed his rumor mongering, and the Stapper lent it official endorsement by his listening silence. Brent moved to get a glimpse of the Stapper’s face. His guess was right. It was another Bokor.

This significant byplay had delayed them enough so that Brent’s three travelers had reached the apartment before them. When they arrived, Stephen was deep in a philosophical discussion with the Venusian of the tragic nobility of human nature, while Kruj and Mimi were experimenting with bond. Their respective civilizations could not have been markedly alcoholic; Kruj had reached the stage of sweeping and impassioned gestures, while Mimi beamed at him and giggled occasionally.

All three had discarded the standardized robes of the Stasis and resumed, in this friendly privacy, the clothes in which they had arrived—Kruj a curiously simplified and perverted version of the ruffled court costume of the Elizabethan era he had hoped to reach, Mimi the startling armor of an unfamiliar metal which was her uniform as Amazon warrior, and Nikobat a bronze-colored loincloth against which his green skin assumed an odd beauty.

Brent introduced Martha’s guests to their hostess and went on, “Now for a staff meeting of G.H.Q. We’ve got to lay our plans carefully, because we’re up against some stiff opposition. There’s one other traveler who—”

“One moment,” said Martha’s voice. “Shouldn’t you introduce me, too?”

“I beg your pardon, madam. I just finished that task of courtesy. And now—”

“I be sorry,” her voice went on. “You still do not understand. You introduced Martha, yes—but not me.”

Stephen turned to the travelers. “I must apologize for my sister. She haves goed through queer experiences of late. She traveled with our friend John and meeted herself in her earlier life. I fear that shock has temporarily—and temporally—unbalanced her.”

“Can none of you understand so simple thing?” the woman’s voice pleaded. “I be simply using Martha’s voice as instrument of communication. I can just as easily—”

“ ‘Steeth!’ Kruj exclaimed. “ ‘Tis eke as easy and mayhap more pleasant to borrow this traveler’s voice for mine explications.”

“Or,” Mimi added, “I cou taw li thih, but I do’ like ih vey muh.”

Stephen’s eyes popped. “You mean that you be traveler without body?”

“Got it in one,” Brent heard his own voice saying. “I can wander about any way I damned please. I picked the woman first because her mind was easy to occupy, and I think I’ll go on using her. Brent here’s a little hard to keep under control.”

Stephen nodded. “Then all good advice Martha haves beed giving us—”

“Bees mine, of course.” The bodiless traveler was back in Martha now.

Brent gasped. “And now I see how you wangled the release of the travelers. You got us in by usurping the mind and speech of each of the minor officials we tackled, and then ousted the Head of State and Chief of Stappers to make them give their consent.”

Martha nodded. “Exactly.”

"This is going to be damned useful. And where do you come from, sir? Or is it madam?"

"I come from future so far distant that even our Venusian friend here cannot conceive of it. And distinction between *sir* and *madam* bees then meaningless."

The dapper Kruj glanced at the hulking Amazon beside him. "'Twere a pity," he murmured.

"And your intentions here, to go on with the State linguist's questionnaire?"

"My intentions? Listen, all of you. We cannot shape ends. Great patterns be shaped outside of us and beyond us. I beed historian in my time. I know patterns of mankind even down to minute details. And I know that Stephen here bees to lead people of this Age of Smugness out of their stupidity and back to humanity."

Stephen coughed embarrassedly. "I have no wish to lead. But for such cause man must do what he may."

"That bees ultimate end of this section of pattern. That bees fixed. All that we travelers can do bees to aid him as wisely as we can and to make the details of the pattern as pleasing as may be. And that we will do."

Stephen must have been so absorbed in this speech that his hearing was dulled. The door opened without warning, and Bokor entered.

"'Swounds!" Kruj cried out. "A Stapper!"

Stephen smiled. "Why fear Stappers? You be legally liberated."

"Stapper, hell!" Brent snorted. "Well, Bokor? You still want to declare yourself in with your racket?"

Bokor's deep eyes swept the room. He smiled faintly. "I merely wished to show you something, Brent. So that you know what you be up against. I have finded two young scientists dissatisfied with scholastic routine of research for Cosmos. Now they work under me and they have maked for me—this." He held a bare rod in his hand.

"So it's a rod. So what next?"

"But it bees different rod, Brent. It does not paralyze. It destroys." The point of the rod wavered and covered in turn each individual in the room. "I want you to see what I can accomplish."

"You suvvabih!" Mimi yelled and started to rise.

"State thanks you, madam, for making up my mind. I will demonstrate on you. Watch this, Brent, and realize what chance you have against me." He pointed the rod firmly at Mimi.

"Do something!" Martha screamed.

It all happened at once, but Brent seemed to see it in slow motion even as he moved. Mimi lunged forward furiously and recklessly. Kruj dived for her feet and brought her to the floor out of the line of fire. At the same time Brent threw himself forward just as Bokor moved, so that the rod now pointed directly at Brent. He couldn't arrest his momentum. He was headed straight at Bokor's new instrument of death. And then the rod moved to Bokor's own head.

There was no noise, no flash. But Bokor's body was lying on the floor, and the head was nowhere.

"That beed hard," said Martha's voice. "I haved to stay in his mind long enough to actuate rod, but get out before death. Matter of fractions of seconds."

"Nice work, sir-madam," Brent grunted. He looked down at the corpse. "But that was only one of him."

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Brent quoted in his journal: Love, but a day, and the world has changed! A week, to be more exact, but the change is nonetheless sudden and impressive.

Our nameless visitant from the future—they seem to need titles as little as sexes in that time—whom I have for convenience labeled Sirdam, has organized our plans about the central idea of interfering as little as possible—forcing the inhabitants of the Stasis to work out their own salvation. The travelers do not appear openly in this great change. We work through Stephen's associates.

There are some 40 of us (I guess I count as a traveler; I'm not too sure what the hell my status is by now), which means each of us can take on five or ten of Stephen's boys (and girls), picking the ones whose interests lie closest to his own special fields. That means a working force of Under grounders running somewhere above 200 and under 500 ... fluctuating constantly as people come under or escape from Stapper observation, as new recruits come in, or (as will damnably happen despite every precaution) as one of our solid old-timers gets his mind changed and decides Stasis bees perfect after all.

The best single example to show the results we obtain is the episode of Professor Harrington, whose special department of so-called learning is the preservation of the Nakamura Law of Spatial Acceleration, which had so conclusively proved to the founders of the Stasis the impossibility of interplanetary travel.

This fell obviously within Nikobat's field. A young scientist affiliated with the Underground—a nephew, I have since learned, of Alex's—expounded the Nakamura doctrine as he had learned and re-proved it. It took the Venusian less than five minutes to put his finger on the basic flaw in the statement—the absolute omission, in all calculations, of any consideration of galactic drift. Once this correction was applied to the Nakamura formulas, they stood revealed as the pure nonsense which, indeed, Nikobat's very presence proved them.

It was not Nikobat but the young man who placed this evidence before Professor Harrington. The scene must have been classic. "I saw," the young man later told us—they are all trying desperately to unlearn Farthing-ized English—"his mouth fall open and gap spread across his face as wide as gap he suddenly findin in universe."

For the professor was not stupid. He was simply so conditioned from childhood to the acceptance of the Stasis of Cosmos that he had never questioned it. Besides, he had doubtless had friends whose minds were changed when they speculated too far.

Harrington's eyes lit up after the first shock. He grabbed pencil and paper and furiously checked through the revised equations again and again. He then called in

a half dozen of his best students and set them to what was apparently a routine exercise—interpolating variations for galactic drift in the Nakamura formulas.

They ended as astonished as their instructor. The first one done stared incredulously at his results and gasped, “Nakamura beed wrong!”

That was typical. The sheep are ready to be roused, each in his individual way. Kruj has been training men to associate with the writers of the Stasis. The man’s knowledge of literature of all periods, and especially of his beloved Elizabethan Age, is phenomenal and his memory something superhuman. And four writers out of five who hear his disciples discourse on the joys of creative language and quote from the Elizabethan dramatists and the King James Bible will never be content again to write Stasis propaganda for the sollies or the identically bound books of the State libraries.

I have myself been contributing a fair amount to the seduction of the world by teaching cooks. I was never in my own time acknowledged as better than a fair-to-middling non-professional, but here I might be Escoffier or Brillat-Savarin. We steal plants and animals from the scientific laboratories, and in our hands they become vegetables and meat; and many a man in the street, who doesn’t give a damn if his science is false and his arts synthetic, has suddenly realized that he owes the State a grudge for feeding him on concentrates.

The focus of everything is Stephen. It’s hard to analyze why. Each of us travelers has found among the Under-grounders someone far more able in his own special field, yet all of us, travelers and Undergrounders alike, unquestioningly acknowledge Stephen as our leader. It may be the sheer quiet kindliness and goodness of his nature. It may be that he and Alex, in their organization of this undercover group of instinctive rebels, were the first openly to admit that the Stasis was inhuman and to do something about it. But from whatever cause, we all come to depend more and more on the calm reliability of Stephen.

Nikobat says—

~ * ~

Brent broke off as Kruj Krujil Krujilar staggered into the room. The little man was no longer dapper. His robes were tattered, and their iridescence was overlaid with the solid red of blood. He panted his first words in his own tongue, then recovered himself. “We must act apace, John. Where is Stephen?”

“At Underground quarters. But what’s happened?”

“I was nearing the building where they do house us travelers when I beheld hundreds of people coming along the street. Some wore our robes, some wore Stappers’. And they all—” He shuddered. “They all had the same face— a brown hairless face with black eyes.”

Brent was on his feet. “Bokor!” The man had multiplied himself into a regiment. One man who was hundreds—why not thousands? millions?—could indeed be a conqueror. “What happened?”

"They entered the building. I knew that I could do nothing there, and came to find you and Stephen and the bodiless one. But as I came along the street, lo! on every corner there was yet another of that face, and always urging the people to maintain the Stasis and destroy the travelers. I was recognized. By good hap those who set upon me had no rods, so I escaped with my life."

Brent thought quickly. "Martha is with Stephen, so Sirdam is probably there, too. Go to him at once and warn him. I'm going to the travelers' building and see what's happened. Meet you at the headquarters as soon as I can."

Kruj hesitated. "Mimi—"

"I'll bring her with me if I can. Get going."

~ * ~

The streets were mad. Wild throngs jammed the moving roadways. Somewhere in the distance mountainous flames leaped up and their furious glitter gleamed from the eyes of the mob. These were the ordinary citizens of Stasis, no longer cattle, or rather cattle stampeded.

A voice blared seemingly out of the heavens. Brent recognized the public address system used for vital State messages. "Revolt of travelers haves spreaded to amphitheater of Cosmos. Flames lighted by travelers now attack sacred spot. People of Cosmos: Destroy travelers!"

There was nothing to mark Brent superficially as a traveler. He pushed along with the mob, shouting as rabidly as any other. He could make no headway. He was borne along on these foaming human waves.

Then in front of him he saw three Bokors pushing against the mob. If they spied him—His hands groped along the wall. Just as a Bokor looked his way, he found what he was seeking—one of the spying niches of the Stappers. He slipped into safety then peered out cautiously.

From the next door he saw a man emerge whom he knew by sight—a leading dramatist of the sollies, who had promised to be an eventual convert of Kruj's disciples. Three citizens of the mob halted him as he stepped forth.

"What bees your name?"

"Where be you going?"

The solly writer hesitated. "I be going to amphitheater. Speaker have sayed—"

"When do you come from?"

"Why, from now."

"What bees your name?"

"John—"

"Ha!" the first citizen yelled. "Stappers have telled us to find this John. Tear him to pieces; he bees traveler."

"No, truly. I be no traveler; I be writer of sollies."

One of the citizens chortled cruelly. "Tear him for his bad sollies!"

There was one long scream—

~ * ~

Fire breeds fire, literally as well as metaphorically. The dwelling of the travelers was ablaze when Brent reached it. A joyous mob cheered and gloated before it.

Brent started to push his way through, but a hand touched his arm and a familiar voice whispered, “Ach-tung! Ou vkhodit.”

He interpreted the warning and let the Venusian draw him aside. Nikobat rapidly explained.

“The Stappers came and subdued the whole crowd with paralyzing rods. They took them away—God knows what they’ll do with them. There’s no one in there now; the fire’s just a gesture.”

“But you— How did you—”

“My nerve centers don’t react the same. I lay doggo and got away. Mimi escaped, too; her armor has deflecting power. I think she’s gone to warn the Underground.”

“Then come on.”

“Don’t stay too close to me,” Nikobat warned. “They’ll recognize me as a traveler; stay out of range of rods aimed at me. And here. I took these from a Stapper I strangled. This one is a paralyzing rod; the other’s an annihilator.”

~ * ~

The next half-hour was a nightmare—a montage of flames and blood and sweating bodies of hate. The Stasis of Stupidity was becoming a Stasis of Cruelty. Twice groups of citizens stopped Brent. They were unarmed; Bokor wisely kept weapons to himself, knowing that the fangs and claws of an enraged mob are enough. The first group Brent left paralyzed. The second time he confused his weapons. He had not meant to kill.

He did not confuse his weapons when he bagged a brace of Bokors. But what did the destruction of two matter? He fought his way on, finally catching up with Nikobat at their goal. As they met, the voice boomed once more from the air. “Important! New Chief of Stappers announces that officers of Chief of Stappers and Head of State be henceforth maked one. Under new control, travelers will be wiped out and Stasis preserved. Then on to South America for glory of Cosmos!”

Brent shuddered. “And we started out so beautifully on our renaissance!”

Nikobat shook his head. “But the bodiless traveler said that Stephen was to destroy the Stasis. This multiple villain cannot change what has happened.”

“Can’t he? We’re taking no chances.”

The headquarters of the Underground was inappositely in a loft. The situation helped. The trap entrance was unnoticeable from below and had gone unheeded by the mobs. Brent delivered the proper raps, and the trap slid open and dropped a ladder. Quickly they mounted.

The loft was a sick bay. A half-dozen wounded members of Stephen’s group lay groaning on the floor. With them was Kruij. Somewhere the little man had evaded the

direct line of an annihilator, but lost his hand. Blood was seeping out of his bandages, and Mimi, surprisingly feminine and un-Amazonic, held his unconscious head in her lap.

"You don't seem to need warning," Brent observed.

Stephen shook his head. "We be trapped here. Here we be safe for at littlest small while. If we go out—"

Brent handed him his rods. "You're the man we've got to save, Stephen. You know what Sirdam's said—it all depends on you. Use these to protect yourself, and we'll make a dash for it. If we can lose ourselves in the mob as ordinary citizens, there's a chance of getting away with it. Or" —he turned to Martha-Sirdam—"have you any ideas?"

"Yes. But only as last resort."

Nikobat was peering out the window. "It's the last resort now," he said. "There's a good fifty of those identical Stappers outside, and they're headed here. They act as though they know what this is."

Brent was looking at Stephen, and he saw a strange thing. Stephen's face was expressionless, but somewhere behind his eyes Brent seemed to sense a struggle. Stephen's body trembled with an effort of will; and then his eyes were clear again. "No," he said distinctly. "You do not need to control me. I understand. You be right. I will do as you say." And he lifted the annihilator rod.

Brent started forward, but his muscles did not respond to his commands. Force his will though he might, he stood still. It was the bodiless traveler who held him motionless to watch Stephen place the rod to his temple.

"This bees goodest thing that I can do for mans," said Stephen simply. Then his headless corpse thumped on the floor.

Brent was released. He dashed forward, but vainly. There was nothing men could do for Stephen now. Brent let out a choking gasp of pain and sorrow.

Then the astonished cries of the Undergrounders recalled him from his friend's body. He looked about him. Where was Nikobat? Where were Kruj and Mimi?

A small inkling of the truth began to reach him. He hurried to the window and looked out.

There were no Bokors before the house. Only a few citizens staring dazedly at a wide space of emptiness.

At that moment the loud-speaker sounded. "Announcement," a shocked voice trembled. "Chief of Stappers haves just disappeared." And in a moment it added, "Guards report all travelers have vanished."

The citizens before the house were rubbing their eyes like men coming out of a nightmare.

~ * ~

"But don't you see, madam— No? Well, let me try again." Brent was not finding it easy to explain her brother's heroic death to an untenanted Martha. "Remember what your inhabitant told us? The Stasis was overthrown by Stephen."

"But Stephen bees dead."

"Exactly. So listen: All these travelers came from a future wherein Stephen had overthrown the Stasis so that when Stephen destroyed himself, as Sirdam realized, he likewise destroyed that future. A world in which Stephen died unsuccessful is a world that cannot be entered by anyone from the other future. Their worlds vanished and they with them. It was the only way of abolishing the menace of the incredibly multiplied Bokor."

"Stephen bees dead. He cans not overthrow Stasis now."

"My dear madam— Hell, skip it. But the Stasis is damned nonetheless in this new world created by Stephen's death. I've been doing a little galping on my own. The people are convinced now that the many exemplars of Bokor were some kind of evil invader. They rebound easy, the hordes; they dread the memory of those men and they dread also the ideas of cruelty and conquest to which the Bokors had so nearly converted them.

"But one thing they can't rebound from is the doubts and the new awarenesses that we planted in their minds. And there's what's left of your movement to go on with. No, the Stasis is damned, even if they are going to erect yet another Barrier."

"Oh," Martha shuddered. "You willn't let them."

Brent grinned. "Madam, there's damned little letting I can do. They're going to, and that's that. Because, you see, all the travelers vanished."

"But why—"

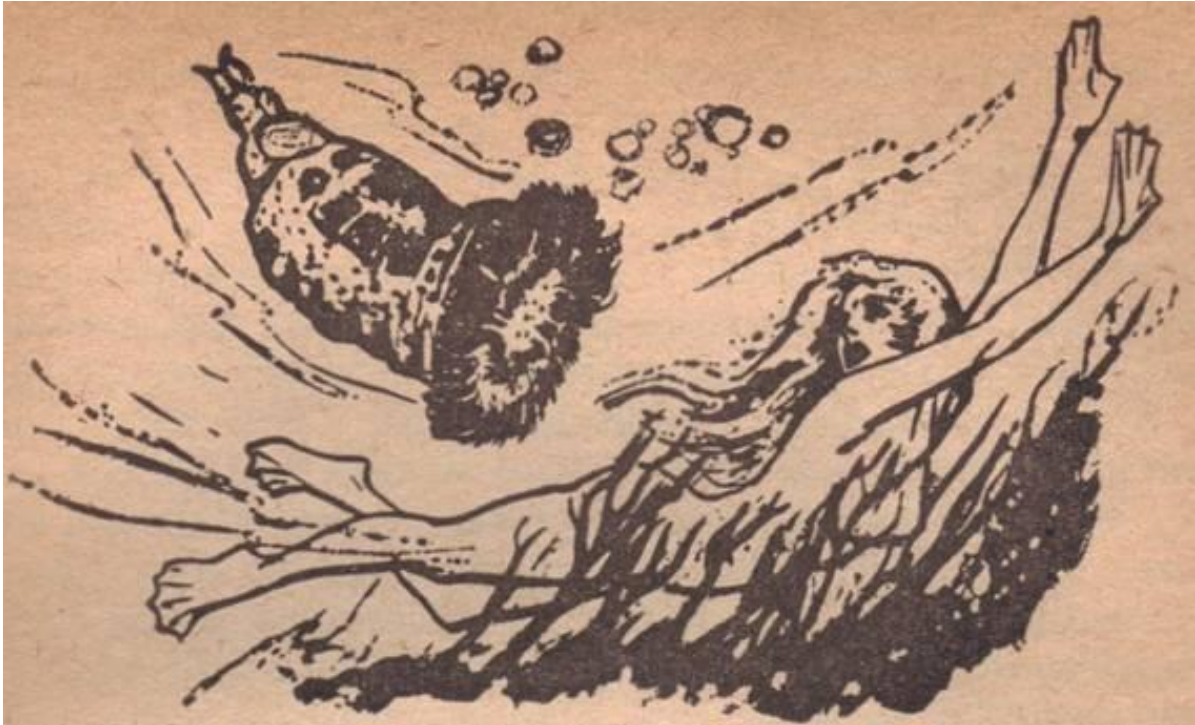
Brent shrugged and gave up. "Join me in some bond?" It was clear enough. The point of time which the second Barrier blocked existed both in the past of the worlds of Nikobat and Sirdam, and in the past of this future they were now entering. But if this future road stretched clear ahead, then travelers—a different set from a different future, but travelers nonetheless—would have appeared at the roadblock. The vanishing Bokors and Nikobat and the rest would have been replaced by another set of stranded travelers.

But no one, in this alternate unknown to Sirdam in which Stephen died a failure, had come down the road of the future. There was a roadblock ahead. The Stasis would erect another Barrier ... and God grant that some scientific successor to Alex would create again the means of disrupting it. And the travelers from this coming future—would they be Sirdams to counsel and guide man, or Bokors to corrupt and debase him?

Brent lifted his glass of bond. "To the moment after the next Barrier!" he said.

~ * ~

SURFACE TENSION....*by James Blish*



DR. CHATVIEUX took a long time over the microscope, leaving la Ventura with nothing to do but look at the dead landscape of Hydrot. Waterscape, he thought, would be a better word. From space, the new world had shown only one small, triangular continent, set amid endless ocean; and even the continent was mostly swamp.

The wreck of the seed-ship lay broken squarely across the one real spur of rock which Hydrot seemed to possess, which reared a magnificent twenty-one feet above sea level. From this eminence, la Ventura could see forty miles to the horizon across a flat bed of mud. The red light of the star Tau Ceti, glinting upon thousands of small lakes, pools, ponds and puddles, made the watery plain look like a mosaic of onyx and ruby.

"If I were a religious man," the pilot said suddenly, "I'd call this a plain case of divine vengeance."

Chatvieux said: "Hmn?"

"It's as if we'd been struck down for—is it *hubris*, arrogant pride?"

"Well, is it?" Chatvieux said, looking up at last. "I don't feel exactly swollen with pride. Do you?"

"I'm not exactly proud of my piloting," la Ventura admitted. "But that isn't quite what I meant. I was thinking about why we came here in the first place. It takes a lot of arrogance to think that you can scatter men, or at least things very much like men, all over the face of the galaxy. It takes even more pride to do the job—to pack up all the equipment and move from planet to planet and actually make men, make them suitable for every place you touch."

"I suppose it does," Chatvieux said. "But we're only one of several hundred seed-ships in this limb of the galaxy, so I doubt that the gods picked us out as special sinners." He smiled dryly. "If they had, maybe they'd have left us our ultraphone, so the Colonization Council could hear about our cropper. Besides, Paul, we try to produce men adapted to Earthlike planets, nothing more than that. We've sense enough to know that we can't adapt men to a planet like Jupiter, or to a sun, like Tau Ceti."

"Anyhow, we're here," la Ventura said grimly. "And we aren't going to get off. Phil tells me that we don't even have our germ-cell bank any more, so we can't seed this place in the usual way. We've been thrown onto a dead world and dared to adapt to it. What are the panatropes to do with our carcasses—provide built-in waterwings?"

"No," Chatvieux said calmly. "You and I and all the rest of us are going to die, Paul. Panatropic techniques don't work on the body; that was fixed for you for life when you were conceived. To attempt to rebuild it for you would only maim you. The panatropes affect only the genes, the inheritance-carrying factors. We can't give you built-in waterwings, any more than we can give you a new set of brains. I think we'll be able to populate this world with men, but we won't live to see it."

The pilot thought about it, a lump of cold blubber collecting in his stomach. "How long do you give us?"

"Who knows? A month, perhaps."

The bulkhead leading to the wrecked section of the ship was pushed back, admitting salt, muggy air, heavy with carbon dioxide. Philip Strasvogel, the communications officer, came in, tracking mud. Like la Ventura, he was now a man without a function, and it appeared to bother him. He was not well equipped for introspection, and with his ultraphone totally smashed, unresponsive to his perpetually darting hands, he had been thrown back into his own mind, whose resources were few. Only the tasks Chatvieux had set him to had prevented him from setting like a gelling colloid into a permanent sulk.

He unbuckled from around his waist a canvas belt, into the loops of which plastic vials were stuffed like cartridges. "More samples, Doc," he said. "All alike—water, very wet. I have some quicksand in one boot, too. Find anything?"

"A good deal, Phil. Thanks. Are the others around?"

Strasvogel poked his head out and hallooed. Other voices rang out over the mud-flats. Minutes later, the rest of the survivors of the crash were crowding into the panat-

rope deck: Saltonstall, Chatvieux' senior assistant, a perpetually sanguine, perpetually youthful technician willing to try anything once, including dying; Eunice Wagner, behind whose placid face rested the brains of the expedition's only remaining ecologist; Elfftherios Venezuelos, the always-silent delegate from the Colonization Council; and Joan Heath, a midshipman whose duties, like la Ventura's and Phil's, were now without meaning, but whose bright head and tall, deceptively indolent body shone to the pilot's eyes brighter than the home sun.

Five men and two women—to colonize a planet on which “standing room” meant treading water.

They came in quietly and found seats or resting places on the deck, on the edges of tables, in corners. Joan Heath went to stand beside la Ventura. They did not look at each other, but the warmth of her shoulder beside his was all that he needed. Nothing was as bad as it seemed.

Venezuelos said, “What’s the verdict, Dr. Chatvieux?”

“This place isn’t dead,” Chatvieux said. “There’s life in the sea and in the fresh water, both. On the animal side of the ledger, evolution seems to have stopped with the crustacea; the most advanced form I’ve found is a tiny crayfish, from one of the local rivulets, and it doesn’t seem to be well distributed. The ponds and puddles are well-stocked with small metazoans of lower orders, right up to the rotifers—including a castle-building rotifer like Earth’s *Floscularidae*. In addition, there’s a wonderfully variegated protozoan population, with a dominant ciliate type much like *Paramoecium*, plus various Sarcodines, the usual spread of phytoflagellates, and even a phosphorescent species I wouldn’t have expected to see anywhere but in salt water. As for the plants, they run from simple blue-green algae to quite advanced thallus-producing types—though none of them, of course, can live out of the water.”

“The sea is about the same,” Eunice said. “I’ve found some of the larger simple metazoans—jellyfish and so on—and some *Palinuridae* almost as big as lobsters. But it’s normal to find salt-water species running larger than fresh-water. And there’s the usual plankton and nanno-plankton population.”

“In short,” Chatvieux said, “we’ll survive if we fight.”

“Wait a minute,” la Ventura said. “You’ve just finished telling me that we wouldn’t survive. And you were talking about us, the seven of us here, not about the genus Man, because we don’t have our germ-cell banks any more.”

“We don’t have the banks. But we ourselves can contribute germ-cells, Paul. I’ll get to that in a moment.” Chatvieux turned to Saltonstall. “Martin, what would you think of taking to the sea? We came out of it once.”

“No good,” Saltonstall said immediately. “I like the idea, but I don’t think this planet ever heard of Swinburne, or Homer either. Looking at it as a colonization problem alone, as if we weren’t involved in it ourselves, I wouldn’t give you an Oc dollar for *epi oinopa ponton*. The evolutionary pressure there is too high; the competition from other species is prohibitive; seeding the sea should be the last thing we attempt. The colonists wouldn’t learn a thing before they’d be gobbled up.”

"Why?" la Ventura said. Once more, the death in his stomach was becoming hard to placate.

"Eunice, do your sea-going Coelenterates include anything like the Portuguese man-of-war?"

The ecologist nodded.

"There's your answer, Paul," Saltonstall said. "The sea is out. It's got to be fresh water, where the competition is less formidable and there are more places to hide."

"We can't compete with a jellyfish?" la Ventura asked.

"No, Paul," Chatvieux said. "Not with one that formidable. The panatropes make adaptations, not gods. They take human germ-cells—in this case, our own, since our bank was wiped out in the crash—and modify them genetically toward those of creatures who can live in any reasonable environment. The result will be manlike, and intelligent. It usually shows the donors' personality patterns, too, since the modifications are usually made in the morphology, not mind, of the resulting individual.

"But we can't transmit memory. The adapted man is worse than a child in his new environment. He has no history, no techniques, no precedents, not even a language. In the usual colonization project, the seeding teams more or less take him through elementary school before they leave the planet to him, but we won't survive long enough to give such instruction. We'll have to design our colonists with plenty of built-in protections and locate them in the most favorable environment possible, so that some of them will survive learning by experience alone."

The pilot thought about it, but nothing occurred to him which did not make the disaster seem realer and more intimate with each passing second. Joan Heath moved slightly closer to him. "One of the new creatures can have my personality pattern, but it won't be able to remember being me. Is that right?"

"That's right. In the present situation we'll probably make our colonists haploid, so that some of them, perhaps many, will have a heredity traceable to you alone. There may be just the faintest of residuums of identity—panatropy's given us some data to support the old Jungian notion of ancestral memory. But we're all going to die on Hydrot, Paul, as self-conscious persons. There's no avoiding that. Somewhere we'll leave behind people who behave as we would, think and feel as we would, but who won't remember us—or the Earth."

The pilot said nothing more.

"Saltonstall, what do you recommend as a form?"

The panatropist pulled reflectively at his nose. "Webbed extremities, of course, with thumbs and big toes heavy and thornlike for defense until the creature has had a chance to learn. Smaller external ears, and the eardrum larger and closer to the outer end of the ear-canal. We're going to have to reorganize the water-conservation system, I think; the glomerular kidney is perfectly suitable for living in fresh water, but the business of living immersed in fresh water, inside and out, for a creature with a salty inside means that the osmotic pressure inside is going to be higher than outside, so that the kidneys are going to have to be pumping virtually all the time. Under the circumstances we'd

best step up production of urine, and that means the antidiuretic function of the pituitary gland is going to have to be abrogated.”

“What about respiration?”

“Hmm,” Saltonstall said. “I suppose book-lungs, like some of the arachnids have. They can be supplied by intercostal spiracles. They’re gradually adaptable to atmosphere-breathing, if our colonist ever decides to come out of the water. Just to provide for that possibility, I’d suggest retaining the nose, maintaining the nasal cavity as a part of the otological system, but cutting off the cavity from the larynx with a membrane of cells that are supplied with oxygen by direct irrigation, rather than by the respiratory system. Such a membrane wouldn’t survive for many generations, once the creature took to living out of the water even for part of its life time; it’d go through two or three generations as an amphibian, and then one day it’d suddenly find itself breathing through its larynx again.

“Also, Dr. Chatvieux, I’d suggest that we have it adopt sporulation. As an aquatic animal, our colonist is going to have an indefinite life-span, but we’ll have to give it a breeding cycle of about six weeks to keep up its numbers during the learning period; so there’ll have to be a definite break of some duration in its active year. Otherwise it’ll hit overpopulation before it’s learned to cope with it.”

“Also, it’d be better if our colonists could winter over inside a good, hard shell,” Eunice Wagner added in agreement. “So sporulation’s the obvious answer. Many other microscopic creatures have it.”

“Microscopic?” Phil said incredulously.

“Certainly,” Chatvieux said, amused. “We can’t very well crowd a six-foot man into a two-foot puddle. But that raises a question. We’ll have tough competition from the rotifers, and some of them aren’t strictly microscopic; for that matter even some of the protozoa can be seen with the naked eye, just barely, with dark-field illumination. I don’t think your average colonist should run much under 250 microns. Give them a chance to slug it out.”

“I was thinking of making them twice that big.”

“Then they’d be the biggest animals in their environment,” Eunice Wagner pointed out, “and won’t ever develop any skills. Besides, if you make them about rotifer size, it will give them an incentive for pushing out the castle-building rotifers, and occupying the castles.”

Chatvieux nodded. “All right, let’s get started. While the panatropes are being calibrated, the rest of us can put our heads together on leaving a record for these people. We’ll micro-engrave the record on a set of corrosion-proof metal leaves, of a size our colonists can handle conveniently. We can tell them, very simply, what happened, and plant a few suggestions that there’s more to the universe than their puddles. Some day they may puzzle it out.”

“Question,” Eunice Wagner said. “Are we going to tell them they’re microscopic? I’m opposed to it. It may saddle their entire early history with a gods-and-demons mythology that they’d be better off without.”

“Yes, we are,” Chatvieux said; and la Ventura could tell by the change in the tone of his voice that he was speaking now as their senior on the expedition. “These people will be of the race of men, Eunice. We want them to win their way back into the community of men. They are not toys, to be protected from the truth forever in a fresh-water womb.”

“Besides,” Saltonstall observed, “they won’t get the record translated at any time in their early history. They’ll have to develop a written language of their own, and it will be impossible for us to leave them any sort of Rosetta Stone or other key. By the time they can decipher the truth, they should be ready for it.”

“I’ll make that official,” Venezuelos said unexpectedly.

And then, essentially, it was all over. They contributed the cells that the panatropes would need. Privately, la Ventura and Joan Heath went to Chatvieux and asked to contribute jointly; but the scientist said that the microscopic men were to be haploid, in order to give them a minute cellular structure, with nuclei as small as Earthly rickettsiae, and therefore each person had to give germ-cells individually—there would be no use for zygotes. So even that consolation was denied them: in death they would have no children, but be instead as alone as ever.

They helped, as far as they could, in the text of the message which was to go on the metal leaves. They had their personality patterns recorded. They went through the motions. Already they were beginning to be hungry, but there was nothing on Hydrot big enough to eat.

After la Ventura had set his control board to rights—a useless gesture, but a habit he had been taught to respect, and which in an obscure way made things a little easier to bear—he was out of it. He sat by himself at the far end of the rock ledge, watching Tau Ceti go redly down.

After a while Joan Heath came silently up behind him, and sat down too. He took her hand. The glare of the red sun was almost extinguished now, and together they watched it go, with la Ventura, at least, wondering somberly which nameless puddle was to be his Lethe.

He never found out, of course. None of them did.

~ * ~

Old Shar set down the thick, ragged-edged metal plate at last, and gazed instead out the window of the castle, apparently resting his eyes on the glowing green-gold obscurity of the summer waters. In the soft fluorescence which played down upon him, from the Noc dozing impassively in the groined vault of the chamber, Lavon could see that he was in fact a young man. His face was so delicately formed as to suggest that it had not been many seasons since he had first emerged from his spore.

But of course there had been no real reason to have expected an old man. All the Shars had been referred to traditionally as “old” Shar. The reason, like the reasons for everything else, had been forgotten, but the custom had persisted. The adjective at

least gave weight and dignity to the office—that of the center of wisdom of all the people, as each Lavon had been the center of authority.

The present Shar belonged to the generation XVI, and hence would have to be at least two seasons younger than Lavon himself. If he was old, it was only in knowledge.

“Lavon, I’m going to have to be honest with you,” Shar said at last, still looking out of the tall, irregular window. “You’ve come to me at your maturity for the secrets on the metal plates, just as your predecessors did to mine. I can give some of them to you—but for the most part, I don’t know what they mean.”

“After so many generations?” Lavon asked, surprised. “Wasn’t it Shar III who first found out how to read them?”

The young man turned and looked at Lavon with eyes made dark and wide by the depths into which they had been staring. “I can read what’s on the plates, but most of it seems to make no sense. Worst of all, the plates are incomplete. You didn’t know that? They are. One of them was lost in a battle during the final war with the Eaters, while these castles were still in their hands.”

“What am I here for, then?” Lavon said. “Isn’t there anything of value on the remaining plates? Do they really contain ‘the wisdom of the Creators’, or is *that* myth?”

“No. No, it’s true,” Shar said slowly, “as far as it goes.”

He paused, and both men turned and gazed at the ghostly creature which had appeared suddenly outside the window. Then Shar said gravely, “Come in, Para.”

The slipper-shaped organism, nearly transparent except for the thousands of black-and-silver granules and frothy bubbles which packed its interior, glided into the chamber and hovered, with a muted whirring of cilia. For a moment it remained silent, probably speaking telepathically to the Noc floating in the vault, after the ceremonious fashion of all the protos. No human had ever intercepted one of these colloquies, but there was no doubt about their reality; humans had used protos for long-range communication for generations.

Then the Para’s cilia buzzed once more. Each separate hair-like process vibrated at an independent, changing rate; the resulting sound waves spread through the water, intermodulating, reinforcing or cancelling each other. The aggregate wave-front, by the time it reached human ears, was eerie but recognizable human speech.

“We are arrived, according to the custom.”

“And welcome,” said Shar. “Lavon, let’s leave this matter of the plates for a while, until you hear what Para has to say; that’s a part of the knowledge Lavons must have as they come into their office, and it comes before the plates. I can give you some hints of what we are. First Para has to tell you something about what we aren’t.”

Lavon nodded, willingly enough, and watched the proto as it settled gently to the surface of the hewn table at which Shar had been sitting. There was in the entity such a perfection and economy of organization, such a grace and surety of movement, that he could hardly believe in his own new-won maturity. Para, like all the protos, made him feel unfinished.

"We know that in this universe there is logically no place for man," the gleaming, now immobile cylinder upon the table droned abruptly. "Our memory is the common property of all our races. It reaches back to a time when there were no such creatures as men here, nor any even remotely like men. It remembers also that once upon a day there were men here, suddenly, and in some numbers. Their spores littered the bottom; we found the spores only a short time after our season's Awakening, and inside them we saw the forms of men, slumbering.

"Then men shattered their spores and emerged. At first they seemed helpless, and the Eaters devoured them by scores, as in those days they devoured anything that moved. But that soon ended. Men were intelligent, active. And they were gifted with a trait, a character, possessed by no other creature in this world. Not even the savage Eaters had it. Men organized us to exterminate the Eaters, and therein lay the difference. Men had initiative. We have the word now, which you gave us, and we apply it, but we still do not know what the thing is that it labels."

"You fought beside us," Lavon said.

"Gladly. We would never have thought of that war by ourselves, but it was good and brought good. Yet we wondered. We saw that men were poor swimmers, poor walkers, poor crawlers, poor climbers. We saw that men were formed to make and use tools, a concept we still do not understand, for so wonderful a gift is largely wasted in this universe, and there is no other. What good are tool-useful members such as the hands of men? We do not know. It seems plain that so radical a thing should lead to a much greater rulership over the world than has, in fact, proven to be possible for men."

Lavon's head was spinning. "Para, I had no notion that you people were philosophers."

"The protos are old," Shar said. He had again turned to look out the window, his hands locked behind his back. "They aren't philosophers, Lavon, but they are remorseless logicians. Listen to Para."

"To this reasoning there could be but one outcome," the Para said. "Our strange ally, Man, was like nothing else in this universe. He was and is unfitted for it. He does not belong here; he has been—adopted. This drives us to think that there are other universes besides this one, but where these universes might lie, and what their properties might be, it is impossible to imagine. We have no imagination, as men know."

Was the creature being ironic? Lavon could not tell. He said slowly: "Other universes? How could that be true?"

"We do not know," the Para's uninfected voice hummed.

Shar had resumed sitting on the window sill, clasping his knees, watching the come and go of dim shapes in the lighted gulf. "It is quite true," he said. "What is written on the plates makes it plain. I'll tell you what they say.

"*We were made*, Lavon. We were made by men who were not as we are, but men who were our ancestors all the same. They were caught in some disaster, and they

made us, and put us here in our universe—so that, even though they had to die, the race of men would live.”

Lavon surged up from the woven spyrogyra mat upon which he had been sitting. “You must think I’m a fool!”

“No. You’re our Lavon; you have a right to know the facts. Make what you like of them.” Shar swung his webbed toes back into the chamber. “What I’ve told you may be hard to believe, but it seems to be so; what Para says backs it up. Out unfitness to live here is self-evident:

“The past four Shars discovered that we won’t get any farther in our studies until we learn how to control heat. We’ve produced enough heat chemically to show that even the water around us changes when the temperature gets high enough. But there we’re stopped.”

“Why?”

“Because heat produced in open water is carried off as rapidly as it’s produced. Once we tried to enclose that heat, and we blew up a whole tube of the castle and killed everything in range; the shock was terrible. We measured the pressures that were involved in that explosion, and we discovered that no substance we know could have resisted them. Theory suggests some stronger substances— *but we need heat to form them!*

“Take our chemistry. We live in water. Everything seems to dissolve in water, to some extent. How do we confine a chemical test to the crucible we put it in? How do we maintain a solution at one dilution? I don’t know. Every avenue leads me to the same stone door. We’re thinking creatures, Lavon, but there’s something drastically wrong in the way we think about this universe we live in. It just doesn’t seem to lead to results.”

Lavon pushed back his floating hair futilely. “Maybe you’re thinking about the wrong results. We’ve had no trouble with warfare, or crops, or practical things like that. If we can’t create much heat, well, most of us won’t miss it; we don’t need any. What’s the other universe supposed to be like, the one our ancestors lived in? Is it any better than this one?”

“I don’t know,” Shar admitted. “It was so different that it’s hard to compare the two. The metal plates tell a story about men who were travelling from one place to another in a container that moved by itself. The only analogy I can think of is the shallops of diatom shells that our youngsters use to sled along the thermocline; but evidently what’s meant is something much bigger.

“I picture a huge shallop, closed on all sides, big enough to hold many people—maybe twenty or thirty. It had to travel for generations through some kind of space where there wasn’t any water to breathe, so that the people had to carry their own water and renew it constantly. There were no seasons; no ice formed on the sky, because there wasn’t any sky in a closed shallop.

“Then the shallop was wrecked somehow. The people in it knew they were going to die. They made us, and put us here, as if we were their children. Because they had to

die, they wrote their story on the plates, to tell us what had happened. I suppose we'd understand it better if we had the plate Shar III lost during the war, but we don't."

"The whole thing sounds like a parable," Lavon said, shrugging. "Or a song. I can see why you don't understand it. What I can't see is why you bother to try."

"Because of the plates," Shar said. "You've handled them yourself now, so you know that we've nothing like them. We have crude, impure metals we've hammered out, metals that last for a while and then decay. But the plates shine on, generation after generation. They don't change; our hammers and our graving tools break against them; the little heat we can generate leaves them unharmed. Those plates weren't formed in our universe—and that one fact makes every word on them important to me. Someone went to a great deal of trouble to make those plates indestructible, and to give them to us. Someone to whom the word 'stars' was important enough to be worth fourteen repetitions, despite the fact that the word doesn't seem to mean anything."

Lavon stood up once more.

"All these extra universes and huge shallows and meaningless words—I can't say that they don't exist, but I don't see what difference it makes," he said. "The Shars of a few generations ago spent their whole lives breeding better algae crops for us, and showing us how to cultivate them, instead of living haphazardly on bacteria. Farther back, the Shars devised war engines, and war plans. All that was work worth doing. The Lavons of those days evidently got along without the metal plates and their puzzles, and saw to it that the Shars did, too. Well, as far as I'm concerned, you're welcome to the plates, if you like them better than crop improvement—but I think they ought to be thrown away."

"All right," Shar said, shrugging. "If you don't want them, that ends the traditional interview. We'll go our—"

There was a rising drone from the table-top. The Para was lifting itself, waves of motion passing over its cilia, like the waves which went silently across the fruiting stalks of the fields of delicate fungi with which the bottom was planted. It had been so silent that Lavon had forgotten it; he could tell that Shar had, too.

"This is a great decision," the waves of sound washing from the creature throbbed. "Every proto has heard it, and agrees with it. We have been afraid of these metal plates for a long time, afraid that men would learn to understand them and to follow what they say to some secret place, leaving the protos. Now we are not afraid."

"There wasn't anything to be afraid of," Lavon said indulgently.

"No Lavon before you had ever said so," the Para said. "We are glad. We will throw the plates away."

With that, the shining creature swooped toward the embrasure. With it, it bore away the remaining plates, which had been resting under it on the table-top, suspended delicately in the curved tips of its supple ventral cilia. Inside its pellucid body, vacuoles swelled to increase its buoyancy and enable it to carry the heavy weight.

With a cry, Shar plunged toward the window.

"Stop, Para!"

But Para was already gone, so swiftly that it had not even heard the call. Shar twisted his body and brought up on one shoulder against the tower wall. He said nothing. His face was enough. Lavon could not look into it for more than an instant.

The shadows of the two men began to move slowly along the uneven cobbled floor. The Noc descended toward them from the vault, its single thick tentacle stirring the water, its internal light flaring and fading irregularly. It, too, drifted through the window after its cousin, and sank slowly away toward the bottom. Gently its living glow dimmed, flickered in the depths, and winked out.

~ * ~

For many days, Lavon was able to avoid thinking much about the loss. There was already a great deal of work to be done. Maintenance of the castles, which had been built by the now-extinct Eaters rather than by human hands, was a never-ending task. The thousand dichotomously-branching wings tended to crumble with time, especially at their bases where they sprouted from one another, and no Shar had yet come forward with a mortar as good as the rotifer-spittle which had once held them together. In addition, the breaking through of windows and the construction of chambers in the early days had been haphazard and often unsound. The instinctive architecture of the Eaters, after all, had not been meant to meet the needs of human occupants.

And then there were the crops. Men no longer fed precariously upon passing bacteria snatched to the mouth; now there were the drifting mats of specific water-fungi and algae, and the mycelia on the bottom, rich and nourishing, which had been bred by five generations of Shars. These had to be tended constantly to keep the strains pure, and to keep the older and less intelligent species of the protos from grazing on them. In this latter task, to be sure, the more intricate and far-seeing proto types cooperated, but men were needed to supervise.

There had been a time, after the war with the Eaters, when it had been customary to prey upon the slow-moving and stupid diatoms, whose exquisite and fragile glass shells were so easily burst, and who were unable to learn that a friendly voice did not necessarily mean a friend. There were still people who would crack open a diatom when no one else was looking, but they were regarded as barbarians, to the puzzlement of the protos. The blurred and simple-minded speech of the gorgeously engraved plants had brought them into the category of pets—a concept which the protos were unable to grasp, especially since men admitted diatoms on the half-frustrule were delicious.

Lavon had had to agree, very early, that the distinction was tiny. After all, humans did eat the desmids, which differed from the diatoms only in three particulars: their shells were flexible, they could not move (and for that matter neither could all but a few groups of diatoms), and they did not speak. Yet to Lavon, as to most men, there did seem to be some kind of distinction, whether the protos could see it or not, and that was that. Under the circumstance he felt that it was a part of his duty, as the hereditary leader of men, to protect the diatoms from the few who poached on them, in defiance of custom, in the high levels of the sunlit sky.

Yet Lavon found it impossible to keep himself busy enough to forget that moment when the last clues to Man's origin and destination had been lifted, on authority of his own careless exaggeration, and borne away.

It might be possible to ask Para for the return of the plates, explain that a mistake had been made. The protos were creatures of implacable logic, but they respected Man, were used to illogic in Man, and might reverse their decision if pressed—

We are sorry. The plates were carried over the bar and released in the gulf. We will have the bottom there searched, but ...

With a sick feeling he could not repress, Lavon knew that that would be the answer, or something very like it. When the protos decided something was worthless, they did not hide it in some chamber like old women. They threw it away—efficiently.

Yet despite the tormenting of his conscience, Lavon was nearly convinced that the plates were well lost. What had they ever done for Man, except to provide Shars with useless things to think about in the late seasons of their lives? What the Shars themselves had done to benefit Man, here, in the water, in the world, in the universe, had been done by direct experimentation. No bit of useful knowledge had ever come from the plates. There had never been anything in the plates but things best left unthought. The protos were right.

Lavon shifted his position on the plant frond, where he had been sitting in order to overlook the harvesting of an experimental crop of blue-green, oil-rich algae drifting in a clotted mass close to the top of the sky, and scratched his back gently against the coarse bole. The protos were seldom wrong, after all. Their lack of creativity, their inability to think an original thought, was a gift as well as a limitation. It allowed them to see and feel things at all times as they were—not as they hoped they might be, for they had no ability to hope, either.

“La-von! Laa-vah-on!”

The long halloo came floating up from the sleepy depths. Propping one hand against the top of the frond, Lavon bent and looked down. One of the harvesters was looking up at him, holding loosely the adze with which he had been splitting free from the raft the glutinous tetrads of the algae.

“I’m up here. What’s the matter?”

“We have the ripened quadrant cut free. Shall we tow it away?”

“Tow it away,” Lavon said, with a lazy gesture. He leaned back again. At the same instant, a brilliant reddish glory burst into being above him, and cast itself down toward the depths like mesh after mesh of the finest drawn gold. The great light which lived above the sky during the day, brightening or dimming according to some pattern no Shar ever had fathomed, was blooming again.

Few men, caught in the warm glow of that light, could resist looking up at it—especially when the top of the sky itself wrinkled and smiled just a moment's climb or swim away. Yet, as always, Lavon's bemused upward look gave him back nothing but his own distorted, hobbling reflection, and a reflection of the plant on which he rested. Here was the upper limit, the third of the three surfaces of the universe.

The first surface was the bottom, where the water ended.

The second surface was the thermocline, the invisible division between the colder waters of the bottom and the warm, light waters of the sky. During the height of the warm weather, the thermocline was so definite a division as to make for good sledding and for chilly passage. A real interface formed between the cold, denser bottom waters and the warm reaches above, and maintained itself almost for the whole of the warm season.

The third surface was the sky. One could no more pass through that surface than one could penetrate the bottom, nor was there any better reason to try. There the universe ended. The light which played over it daily, waxing and waning as it chose, seemed one of its properties.

Toward the end of the season, the water gradually became colder and more difficult to breathe, while at the same time the light grew duller and stayed for shorter periods between darkneses. Slow currents started to move. The high waters turned chill and started to fall. The bottom mud stirred and smoked away, carrying with it the spores of the fields of fungi. The thermocline tossed, became choppy, and melted away. The sky began to fog with particles of soft silt carried up from the bottom, the walls, the corners of the universe. Before very long, the whole world was cold, flocculent with dying creatures.

Then the protos encysted; the bacteria, even most of the plants—and, not long afterward, men, too—curled up in their oil-filled amber shells. The world died until the first current of warm water broke the winter silence.

“La-von!”

Just after the long call, a shining bubble rose past La-von. He reached out and poked it, but it bounded away from his sharp thumb. The gas bubbles which rose from the bottom in late summer were almost invulnerable—and when some especially hard blow or edge did penetrate them, they broke into smaller bubbles which nothing could touch, leaving behind a remarkably bad smell.

Gas. There was no water inside a bubble. A man who got inside a bubble would have nothing to breathe.

But, of course, it was impossible to enter a bubble. The surface tension was too strong. As strong as Shar’s metal plates. As strong as the top of the sky.

As strong as the top of the sky. And above that—once the bubble was broken—a world of gas instead of water? Were all worlds bubbles of water -drifting in gas?

If it were so, travel between them would be out of the question, since it would be impossible to pierce the sky to begin with. Nor did the infant cosmography include any provisions for bottoms for the worlds.

And yet some of the local creatures did burrow *into* the bottom, quite deeply, seeking something in those depths which was beyond the reach of Man. Even the surface of the ooze, in high summer, crawled with tiny creatures for which mud was a natural medium. Man, too, passed freely between the two countries of water which were divided

by the thermocline, though many of the creatures with which he lived could not pass that line at all, once it had established itself.

And if the new universe of which Shar had spoken existed at all, it had to exist beyond the sky, where the light was. Why could not the sky be passed, after all? The fact that bubbles could sometimes be broken showed that the surface skin that formed between water and gas wasn't completely invulnerable. Had it ever been tried?

Lavon did not suppose that one man could butt his way through the top of the sky, any more than he could burrow into the bottom, but there might be ways around the difficulty. Here at his back, for instance, was a plant which gave every appearance of continuing beyond the sky.

It had always been assumed that the plants died where they touched the sky. For the most part, they did, for frequently the dead extension could be seen, leached and yellow, the boxes of its component cells empty, floating embedded in the perfect mirror. But some were simply chopped off, like the one which sheltered him now. Perhaps that was only an illusion, and instead it soared indefinitely into some other place—some place where men might once have been born, and might still live ...

The plates were gone. There was only one other way to find out.

Determinedly, Lavon began to climb toward the wavering mirror of the sky. His thorn-thumbed feet trampled obliviously upon the clustered sheathes of fragile stippled diatoms. The tulip-heads of Vortae, placid and murmurous cousins of Para, retracted startledly out of his way upon coiling stalks, to make silly gossip behind him.

Lavon did not hear them. He continued to climb doggedly toward the light, his fingers and toes gripping the plant-bole.

"Lavon! Where are you going? Lavon!"

He leaned out and looked down. The man with the adze, a doll-like figure, was beckoning to him from a patch of blue-green retreating over a violet abyss. Dizzily he looked away, clinging to the bole; he had never been so high before. He had, of course, nothing to fear from falling, but the fear was in his heritage. Then he began to climb again.

After a while, he touched the sky with one hand. He stopped to breathe. Curious bacteria gathered about the base of his thumb where blood from a small cut was fogging away, scattered at his gesture, and wriggled mindlessly back toward the dull red lure.

He waited until he no longer felt winded, and resumed climbing. The sky pressed down against the top of his head, against the back of his neck, against his shoulders. It seemed to give slightly, with a tough, frictionless elasticity. The water here was intensely bright, and quite colorless. He climbed another step, driving his shoulders against that enormous weight.

He might as well have tried to penetrate a cliff.

Again he had to rest. While he panted, he made a curious discovery. All around the bole of the water plant, the steel surface of the sky curved upward, making a kind of sheathe. He found that he would insert his hand into it—there was almost enough

space to admit his head as well. Clinging closely to the bole, he looked up into the inside of the sheathe, probing it with his injured hand. The glare was blinding.

There was a kind of soundless explosion. His whole wrist was suddenly encircled in an intense, impersonal grip, as if it were being cut in two. In blind astonishment, he lunged upward.

The ring of pain travelled smoothly down his upflung arm as he rose, was suddenly around his shoulders and chest. Another lunge and his knees were being squeezed in the circular vise. Another—

Something was horribly wrong. He clung to the bole and tried to gasp, but there was—nothing to breathe.

The water came streaming out of his body, from his mouth, his nostrils, the spiracles in his sides, spurting in tangible jets. An intense and fiery itching crawled over the surface of his body. At each spasm, long knives ran into him, and from a great distance he heard more water being expelled from his book-lungs in an obscene, frothy sputtering. Inside his head, a patch of fire began to eat away at the floor of his nasal cavity.

Lavon was drowning.

With a final convulsion, he kicked himself away from the splintery bole, and fell. A hard impact shook him; and then the water, which had clung to him so tightly when he had first attempted to leave it, took him back with cold violence.

Sprawling and tumbling grotesquely, he drifted, down and down and down, toward the bottom.

~ * ~

For many days, Lavon lay curled insensibly in his spore, as if in the winter sleep. The shock of cold which he had felt on re-entering his native universe had been taken by his body as a sign of coming winter, as it had taken the oxygen-starvation of his brief sojourn above the sky. The spore-forming glands had at once begun to function.

Had it not been for this, Lavon would surely have died. The danger of drowning disappeared even as he fell, as the air bubbled out of his lungs and readmitted the life-giving water. But for acute dessication and third degree sunburn, the sunken universe knew no remedy. The healing amnionic fluid generated by the spore-forming glands, after the transparent amber sphere had enclosed him, offered Lavon his only chance.

The brown sphere was spotted after some days by a prowling ameba, quiescent in the eternal winter of the bottom. Down there the temperature was always an even 4°, no matter what the season, but it was unheard of that a spore should be found there while the high epilimnion was still warm and rich in oxygen.

Within an hour, the spore was surrounded by scores of astonished protos, jostling each other to bump their blunt eyeless prows against the shell. Another hour later, a squad of worried men came plunging from the castles far above to press their own noses against the transparent wall. Then swift orders were given.

Four Para grouped themselves about the amber sphere, and there was a subdued explosion as the trichocysts which lay embedded at the bases of their cilia, just under the pellicle, burst and cast fine lines of a quickly solidifying liquid into the water. The four Paras thrummed and lifted, tugging.

Lavon's spore swayed gently in the mud and then rose slowly, entangled in the web. Nearby, a Noc cast a cold pulsating glow over the operation—not for the Paras, who did not need the light, but for the baffled knot of men. The sleeping figure of Lavon, head bowed, knees drawn up to its chest, revolved with an absurd solemnity inside the shell as it was moved.

"Take him to Shar, Para."

The young Shar justified, by minding his own business, the traditional wisdom with which his hereditary office had invested him. He observed at once that there was nothing he could do for the encysted Lavon which would not be classifiable as simple meddling.

He had the sphere deposited in a high tower room of his castle, where there was plenty of light and the water was warm, which should suggest to the estivating form that spring was again on the way. Beyond that, he simply sat and watched, and kept his speculations to himself.

Inside the spore, Lavon's body seemed rapidly to be shedding its skin, in long strips and patches. Gradually, his curious shrunkeness disappeared. His withered arms and legs and sunken abdomen filled out again.

The days went by while Shar watched. Finally he could discern no more changes, and, on a hunch, had the spore taken up to the top of the tower, into the direct daylight.

An hour later, Lavon moved in his amber prison.

He uncurled and stretched, turned blank eyes up toward the light. His expression was that of a man who had not yet awakened from a ferocious nightmare. His whole body shone with a strange pink newness.

Shar knocked gently on the walls of the spore. Lavon turned his blind face toward the sound, life coming into his eyes. He smiled tentatively and braced his hands and feet against the inner wall of the shell.

The whole sphere fell abruptly to pieces with a sharp crackling. The amnionic fluid dissipated around him and Shar, carrying away with it the suggestive odor of a bitter struggle against death.

Lavon stood among the shards and looked at Shar silently. At last he said:

"Shar—I've been above the sky."

"I know," Shar said gently.

Again Lavon was silent. Shar said, "Don't be humble, Lavon. You've done an epoch-making thing. It nearly cost you your life. You must tell me the rest—all of it."

"The rest?"

"You taught me a lot while you slept. Or are you still opposed to 'useless' knowledge?"

Lavon could say nothing. He no longer could tell what he knew from what he wanted to know. He had only one question left, but he could not utter it. He could only look dumbly into Shar's delicate face.

"You have answered me," Shar said, even more gently than before. "Come, my friend; join me at my table. We will plan our journey to the stars."

~ * ~

There were five of them around Shar's big table: Shar himself, Lavon, and the three assistants assigned by custom to the Shars from the families Than, Tanol and Stravol. The duties of these three men—or, sometimes, women—under many previous Shars had been simple and onerous: to put into effect in the field the genetic changes in the food crops which the Shar himself had worked out in laboratory tanks and flats. Under other Shars more interested in metal-working or in chemistry, they had been smudged men—diggers, rock-splitters, fashioners and cleaners of apparatus.

Under Shar XVI, however, the three assistants had been more envied than usual among the rest of Lavon's people, for they seemed to do very little work of any kind. They spent long hours of every day and evening talking with Shar in his chambers, poring over records, making mysterious scratch-marks on slate, or just looking at simple things about which there was no obvious mystery. Sometimes they actually worked with Shar in his laboratory, but mostly they just sat.

Shar XVI had, as a matter of fact, discovered certain rudimentary rules of inquiry which, as he explained it to Lavon, he had recognized as tools of enormous power. He had become more interested in passing these on to future workers than in the seductions of any specific experiment, the journey to the stars perhaps excepted. The Than, Tanol and Stravol of his generation were having scientific method pounded into their heads, a procedure they maintained was sometimes more painful than heaving a thousand rocks.

That they were the first of Lavon's people to be taxed with the problem of constructing a spaceship was, therefore, inevitable. The results lay on the table: three models, made of diatom-glass, strands of algae, flexible bits of cellulose, flakes of stonewort, slivers of wood, and organic glues collected from the secretions of a score of different plants and animals.

Lavon picked up the nearest one, a fragile spherical construction inside which little beads of dark-brown lava—actually bricks of rotifer-spittle painfully chipped free from the wall of an unused castle—moved freely back and forth in a kind of ball-bearing race. "Now whose is this one?" he said, turning the sphere curiously to and fro.

"That's mine," Tanol said. "Frankly I don't think it comes anywhere near meeting all the requirements. It's just the only design I could arrive at that I think we could build with the materials and knowledge we have."

"But how does it work?"

"Hand it here a moment, Lavon. This bladder you see inside at the center, with the hollow spirogyra straws leading out from it to the skin of the ship, is a bouyancy

tank. The idea is that we trap ourselves a big gas-bubble as it rises from the bottom and install it in the tank. Probably we'll have to do that piecemeal. Then the ship rises to the sky on the bouyancy of the bubble. The little paddles, here along these two bands on the outside, rotate when the crew—that's these bricks you hear shaking around inside—walks a treadmill that runs around the inside of the hull; they paddle us over to the edge of the sky. Then we pull the paddles in—they fold over into slots, like this— and, still by weight-transfer from the inside, roll ourselves up the slope until we're out in space. When we hit another world and enter the water again, we let the gas out of the tank gradually through the exhaust tubes represented by these straws, and sink down to a landing at a controlled rate."

"Very ingenious," Shar said thoughtfully. "But I can foresee some difficulties. For one thing, the design lacks stability."

"Yes, it does," Tanol agreed. "And keeping it in motion is going to require a lot of footwork. On the other hand, the biggest expenditure of energy involved in the whole trip is going to be getting the machine up to the sky in the first place, and with this design that's taken care of—as a matter of fact, once the bubble's installed, we'll have to keep the ship tied down until we're ready to go."

"How about letting the gas out?" Lavon said. "Will it go out through those little tubes when we want it to? Won't it just cling to the walls of the tank instead? The skin between water and gas is pretty difficult to deform—to that I can testify."

Tanol frowned. "That I don't know. Don't forget that the tubes will be large in the real ship, not just straws as they are in the model."

"Bigger than a man's body?" Than said.

"No, hardly. Maybe as big, though, as a man's head."

"Won't work," Than said tersely. "I tried it. You can't lead a bubble through a pipe that small. As Lavon said, it clings to the inside of the tube and won't be budged. If we build this ship, we'll just have to abandon it once we hit our new world."

"That's out of the question," Lavon said at once. "Putting aside for the moment the waste involved, we may have to use the ship again in a hurry. Who knows what the new world will be like? We're going to have to be able to leave it again if it is impossible to live in."

"Which is your model, Than?" Shar said.

"This one. With this design, we do the trip the hard way—crawl along the bottom until it meets the sky, crawl until we hit the next world, and crawl wherever we're agoing when we get there. No aquabatics. She's treadmill-powered, like Tanol's, but not necessarily man-powered; I've been thinking a bit about using diatoms. She steers by varying the power on one side or the other; also we can hitch a pair of thongs to opposite ends of the rear axle and swivel her that way, but that would be slower and considerably less precise."

Shar looked closely at the tube-shaped model and pushed it experimentally along the table a little way. "I like that," he said presently. "It sits still when you want it to. With Than's spherical ship, we'd be at the mercy of any stray current at home or in

the new world—and for all I know there may be currents of some sort in space, too, gas currents perhaps. Lavon, what do you think?”

“How would we build it?” Lavon said. “It’s round in cross-section. That’s all very well for a model, but how do you make a really big tube of that shape that won’t fall in on itself?”

“Look inside, through the front window,” Than said. “You’ll see beams that cross at the center, at right angles to the long axis. They hold the walls braced.”

“That consumes a lot of space,” Stravol objected. By far the quietest and most introspective of the three assistants, he had not spoken until now since the beginning of the conference. “You’ve pretty well got to have free passage back and forth inside the ship. How are we going to keep everything operating if we have to be crawling around beams all the time?”

“All right, come up with something better,” Than said, shrugging.

“That’s easy. We bend hoops.”

“Hoops!” Tanol said. “On *that* scale? You’d have to soak your wood in mud for a year before it would be flexible enough, and then it wouldn’t have the strength you’d need.”

“No, you wouldn’t,” Stravol said. “I didn’t build a ship-model, I just made drawings, and my ship isn’t as good as Than’s by a long distance. But my design for the ship is also tubular, so I did build a model of a hoop-bending machine—that’s it on the table. You lock one end of your beam down in a heavy vise, like so, leaving the butt sticking out the other side. Then you tie up the other end with a heavy line, around this notch. Then you run your rope around a windlass, and five or six men wind up the windlass, like so. That pulls down the free end of the beam until the notch engages with this key-slot, which you’ve pre-cut at the other end. Then you unlock the vise, and there’s your hoop; for safety you might drive a peg through the joint to keep the thing from springing open unexpectedly.”

“Wouldn’t the beam you were using break after it had bent a certain distance?” Lavon asked.

“Stock timber certainly would,” Stravol said. “But for this trick you use *green* wood, not seasoned. Otherwise you’d have to soften your beam to uselessness, as Tanol says. But live wood will flex enough to make a good, strong, single-unit hoop—or if it doesn’t, Shar, the little rituals with numbers that you’ve been teaching us don’t mean anything after all!”

Shar smiled. “You can easily make a mistake in using numbers,” he said.

“I checked everything.”

“I’m sure of it. And I think it’s well worth a trial. Anything else to offer?”

“Well,” Stravol said, “I’ve got a kind of live ventilating system I think should be useful. Otherwise, as I said, Than’s ship strikes me as the type we should build; my own’s hopelessly cumbersome.”

"I have to agree," Tanol said regretfully. "But I'd like to try putting together a lighter-than-water ship sometime, maybe just for local travel. If the new world is bigger than ours, it might not be possible to swim everywhere you might want to go there."

"That never occurred to me," Lavon exclaimed. "Suppose the new world *is* twice, three times, eight times as big as ours? Shar, is there any reason why that couldn't be?"

"None that I know of. The history plates certainly seem to take all kinds of enormous distances practically for granted. All right, let's make up a composite design from what we have here. Tanol, you're the best draftsman among us, suppose you draw it up. Lavon, what about labor?"

"I've a plan ready," Lavon said. "As I see it, the people who work on the ship are going to have to be on the job full-time. Building the vessel isn't going to be an overnight task, or even one that we can finish in a single season, so we can't count on using a rotating force. Besides, this is technical work; once a man learns how to do a particular task, it would be wasteful to send him back to tending fungi just because somebody else has some time on his hands."

"So I've set up a basic force involving the two or three most intelligent hand-workers from each of the various trades. Those people I can withdraw from their regular work without upsetting the way we run our usual concerns, or noticeably increasing the burden on the others in a given trade. They will do the skilled labor, and stick with the ship until it's done. Some of them will make up the crew, too. For heavy, unskilled jobs, we can call on the various seasonal pools of idle people without disrupting our ordinary life."

"Good," Shar said. He leaned forward and rested linked hands on the edge of the table—although, because of the webbing between his fingers, he could link no more than the fingertips. "We've really made remarkable progress. I didn't expect that we'd have matters advanced a tenth as far as this by the end of this meeting. But maybe I've overlooked something important. Has anybody any more suggestions, or any questions?"

"I've got one," Stravol said quietly.

"All right, let's hear it."

"Where are we going?"

There was quite a long silence. Finally Shar said: "Stravol, I can't answer that yet. I could say that we're going to the stars, but since we still have no idea what a star is, that answer wouldn't do you much good. We're going to make this trip because we've found that some of the fantastic things that the history plates say are really so. We know now that the sky can be passed, and that beyond the sky there's a region where there's no water to breathe, the region our ancients called 'space.' Both of these ideas always seemed to be against common sense, but nevertheless we've found that they're true."

"The history plates also say that there are other worlds than ours, and actually that's an easier idea to accept, once you've found out that the other two are so. As

for the stars—well, we just don't know yet, we haven't any information at all that would allow us to read the history plates on that subject with new eyes, and there's no point in making wild guesses unless we can test the guesses. The stars are in space, and presumably, once we're out in space, we'll see them and the meaning of the word will become clear. At least we can confidently expect to see some clues—look at all the information we got from Lavon's trip of a few seconds above the sky!

"But in the meantime, there's no point in our speculating in a bubble. We think there are other worlds somewhere, and we're devising means to make the trip. The other questions, the pendant ones, just have to be put aside for now. We'll answer them eventually—there's no doubt in my mind about that. But it may take a long time."

Stravol grinned ruefully. "I expected no more. In a way, I think the whole project is crazy. But I'm in it right out to the end, all the same."

Shar and Lavon grinned back. All of them had the fever, and Lavon suspected that their whole enclosed universe would share it with them before long. He said:

"Then let's not waste a minute. There's a huge mass of detail to be worked out still, and after that, all the hard work will just have begun. Let's get moving!"

The five men arose and looked at each other. Their expressions varied, but in all their eyes there was in addition the same mixture of awe and ambition: the composite face of the shipwright and of the astronaut.

Then they went out, severally, to begin their voyages.

~ * ~

It was two winter sleeps after Lavon's disastrous climb beyond the sky that all work on the spaceship stopped. By then, Lavon knew that he had hardened and weathered into that temporarily ageless state a man enters after he has just reached his prime; and he knew also that there were wrinkles engraved on his brow, to stay and to deepen.

"Old" Shar, too, had changed, his features losing some of their delicacy as he came into his maturity. Though the wedge-shaped bony structure of his face would give him a withdrawn and poetic look for as long as he lived, participation in the plan had given his expression a kind of executive overlay, which at best gave it a mask-like rigidity, and at worst coarsened it somehow.

Yet despite the bleeding away of the years, the spaceship was still only a hulk. It lay upon a platform built above the tumbled boulders of the sandbar which stretched out from one wall of the world. It was an immense hull of pegged wood, broken by regularly spaced gaps through which the raw beams of the skeleton could be seen.

Work upon it had progressed fairly rapidly at first, for it was not hard to visualize what kind of vehicle would be needed to crawl through empty space without losing its water; Than and his colleagues had done that job well. It had been recognized, too, that the sheer size of the machine would enforce a long period of construction, perhaps as long as two full seasons; but neither Shar and his assistants nor Lavon had anticipated any serious snag.

For that matter, part of the vehicle's apparent incompleteness was an illusion. About a third of its fittings were to consist of living creatures, which could not be expected to install themselves in the vessel much before the actual takeoff.

Yet time and time again, work on the ship had had to be halted for long periods. Several times whole sections needed to be ripped out, as it became more and more evident that hardly a single normal, understandable concept could be applied to the problem of space travel.

The lack of the history plates, which the Para steadfastly refused to deliver up, was a double handicap. Immediately upon their loss, Shar had set himself to reproduce them from memory; but unlike the more religious of his ancestors he had never regarded them as holy writ, and hence had never set himself to memorizing them word by word. Even before the theft, he had accumulated a set of variant translations of passages presenting specific experimental problems, which were stored in his library, carved in wood. But most of these translations tended to contradict each other, and none of them related to spaceship construction, upon which the original had been vague in any case.

No duplicates of the cryptic characters of the original had ever been made, for the simple reason that there was nothing in the sunken universe capable of destroying the originals, nor of duplicating their apparently changeless permanence. Shar remarked too late that through simple caution they should have made a number of verbatim temporary records—but after generations of green-gold peace, simple caution no longer covers preparation against catastrophe. (Nor, for that matter, did a culture which had to dig each letter of its simple alphabet into pulpy water-logged wood with a flake of stonewort encourage the keeping of records in triplicate.)

As a result, Shar's imperfect memory of the contents of the history plates, plus the constant and millennial doubt as to the accuracy of the various translations, proved finally to be the worst obstacle to progress on the spaceship itself.

"Men must paddle before they can swim," Lavon observed belatedly, and Shar was forced to agree with him.

Obviously, whatever the ancients had known about spaceship construction, very little of that knowledge was usable to a people still trying to build its first spaceship from scratch. In retrospect, it was not surprising that the great hulk still rested incomplete upon its platform above the sand boulders, exuding a musty odor of wood steadily losing its strength, two generations after its flat bottom had been laid down.

The fat-faced young man who headed the strike delegation to Shar's chambers was Phil XX, a man two generations younger than Shar, four younger than Lavon. There were crow's-feet at the corners of his eyes, which made him look both like a querulous old man and like an infant spoiled in the spore.

"We're calling a halt to this crazy project," he said bluntly. "We've slaved away our youth on it, but now that we're our own masters, it's over, that's all. Over."

"Nobody's compelled you," Lavon said angrily.

"Society does; our parents do," a gaunt member of the delegation said. "But now we're going to start living in the real world. Everybody these days knows that there's no other world but this one. You oldsters can hang on to your superstitions if you like. We don't intend to."

Baffled, Lavon looked over at Shar. The scientist smiled and said, "Let them go, Lavon. We have no use for the faint-hearted."

The fat-faced young man flushed. "You can't insult us into going back to work. We're through. Build your own ship to noplacel!"

"All right," Lavon said evenly. "Go on, beat it. Don't stand around here orating about it. You've made your decision and we're not interested in your self-justifications. Good-bye."

The fat-faced young man evidently still had quite a bit of heroism to dramatize which Lavon's dismissal had short-circuited. An examination of Lavon's stony face, however, seemed to convince him that he had to take his victory as he found it. He and the delegation trailed in-gloriously out the archway.

"Now what?" Lavon asked when they had gone. "I must admit, Shar, that I would have tried to persuade them. We do need the workers, after all."

"Not as much as they need us," Shar said tranquilly. "I know all those young men. I think they'll be astonished at the runty crops their fields will produce next season, after they have to breed them without my advice. Now, how many volunteers have you got for the crew of the ship?"

"Hundreds. Every youngster of the generation after Phil's wants to go along. Phil's wrong about that segment of the populace, at least. The project catches the imagination of the very young."

"Did you give them any encouragement?"

"Sure," Lavon said. "I told them we'd call on them if they were chosen. But you can't take that seriously! We'd do badly to displace our picked group of specialists with youths who have enthusiasm and nothing else."

"That's not what I had in mind, Lavon. Didn't I see a Noc in these chambers somewhere? Oh, there he is, asleep in the dome. Noc!"

The creature stirred its tentacle lazily.

"Noc, I've a message," Shar called. "The protos are to tell all men that those who wish to go to the next world with the spaceship must come to the staging area right away. Say that we can't promise to take everyone, but that only those who help us to build the ship will be considered at all."

The Noc curled its tentacle again, and appeared to go back to sleep.

~ * ~

Lavon turned from the arrangement of speaking-tube megaphones which was his control board and looked at the Para. "One last try," he said. "Will you give us back the history plates?"

"No, Lavon. We have never denied you anything before, but this we must."

"You're going with us though, Para. Unless you give us back the knowledge we need, you'll lose your life if we lose ours."

"What is one Para?" the creature said. "We are all alike. This cell will die; but the protos need to know how you fare on this journey. We believe you should make it without the plates, for in no other way can we assess the real importance of the plates."

"Then you admit you still have them. What if you can't communicate with your fellows once we're out in space? How do you know that water isn't essential to your telepathy?"

The proto was silent. Lavon stared at it a moment, then turned deliberately back to the speaking tubes. "Everyone hang on," he said. He felt shaky. "We're about to start. Stravol, is the ship sealed?"

"As far as I can tell, Lavon."

Lavon shifted to another megaphone. He took a deep breath. Already the water seemed stifling, although the ship hadn't moved.

"Ready with one-quarter power ... One, two, three, *go*."

The whole ship jerked and settled back into place again. The raphe diatoms along the under hull settled into their niches, their jelly treads turning against broad endless belts of crude nematode leather. Wooden gears creaked, stepping up the slow power of the creatures, transmitting it to the sixteen axles of the ship's wheels.

The ship rocked and began to roll slowly along the sandbar. Lavon looked tensely through the mica port. The world flowed painfully past him. The ship canted and began to climb the slope. Behind him, he could feel the electric silence of Shar, Para, and the two alternate pilots, Than and Stravol, as if their gaze were stabbing directly through his body and on out the port. The world looked different, now that he was leaving it. How had he missed all this beauty before?

The slapping of the endless belts and the squeaking and groaning of the gears and axles grew louder as the slope steepened. The ship continued to climb, lurching. Around it, squadrons of men and protos dipped and wheeled, escorting it toward the sky.

Gradually the sky lowered and pressed down toward the top of the ship.

"A little more work from your diatoms, Tanol," Lavon said. "Boulder ahead." The ship swung ponderously. "All right, slow them up again. Give us a shove from your side, Tol—no, that's too much—there, that's it. Back to normal; you're still turning us! Tanol, give us one burst to line us up again. Good. All right, steady drive on all sides. It shouldn't be long now."

"How can you think in webs like that?" the Para wondered behind him.

"I just do, that's all. It's the way men think. Overseers, a little more thrust now; the grade's getting steeper."

The gears groaned. The ship nosed up. The sky brightened in Lavon's face. Despite himself, he began to be frightened. His lungs seemed to burn, and in his mind he felt his long fall through nothingness toward the chill slap of the water as if he were

experiencing it for the first time. His skin itched and burned. Could he go up *there* again? Up there into the burning void, the great gasping agony where no life should go?

The sandbar began to level out and the going became a little easier. Up here, the sky was so close that the lumbering motion of the huge ship disturbed it. Shadows of wavelets ran across the sand. Silently, the thick-barreled bands of blue-green algae drank in the light and converted it to oxygen, writhing in their slow mindless dance just under the long mica skylight which ran along the spine of the ship. In the hold, beneath the latticed corridor and cabin floors, whirring Vortae kept the ship's water in motion, fueling themselves upon drifting organic particles.

One by one, the figures wheeling about the ship outside waved arms or cilia and fell back, coasting down the slope of the sandbar toward the familiar world, dwindling and disappearing. There was at last only one single Euglena, half-plant cousin of the protos, forging along beside the spaceship into the marches of the shallows. It loved the light, but finally it, too, was driven away into deeper, cooler waters, its single whiplike tentacle undulating placidly as it went. It was not very bright, but Lavon felt deserted when it left.

Where they were going, though, none could follow.

Now the sky was nothing but a thin, resistant skin of water coating the top of the ship. The vessel slowed, and when Lavon called for more power, it began to dig itself in among the sand-grains and boulders.

"That's not going to work," Shar said tensely. "I think we'd better step down the gear-ratio, Lavon, so you can apply stress more slowly."

"All right," Lavon agreed. "Full stop, everybody. Shar, will you supervise gear-changing, please?"

Insane brilliance of empty space looked Lavon full in the face just beyond his big mica bull's-eye. It was maddening to be forced to stop here upon the threshold of infinity; and it was dangerous, too. Lavon could feel building in him the old fear of the outside. A few moments more of inaction, he knew with a gathering coldness at the pit of his stomach, and he would be unable to go through with it.

Surely, he thought, there must be a better way to change gear-ratios than the traditional one, which involved dismantling almost the entire gear-box. Why couldn't a number of gears of different sizes be carried on the same shaft, not necessarily all in action all at once, but awaiting use simply by shoving the axle back and forth longitudinally in its sockets? It would still be clumsy, but it could be worked on orders from the bridge and would not involve shutting down the entire machine—and throwing the new pilot into a blue-green funk.

Shar came lunging up through the trap and swam himself to a stop.

"All set," he said. "The big reduction gears aren't taking the strain too well, though."

"Splintering?"

"Yes. I'd go it slow at first."

Lavon nodded mutely. Without allowing himself to stop, even for a moment, to consider the consequences of his words, he called: "Half power."

The ship hunched itself down again and began to move, very slowly indeed, but more smoothly than before. Overhead, the sky thinned to complete transparency. The great light came blasting in. Behind Lavon there was an uneasy stir. The whiteness grew at the front ports.

Again the ship slowed, straining against the blinding barrier. Lavon swallowed and called for more power. The ship groaned like something about to die. It was now almost at a standstill.

"More power," Lavon ground out.

Once more, with infinite slowness; the ship began to move. Gently, it tilted upward. Then it lunged forward and every board and beam in it began to squall.

"Lavon! Lavon!"

Lavon started sharply at the shout. The voice was coming at him from one of the megaphones, the one marked for the port at the rear of the ship.

"Lavon!"

"What is it? Stop your damn yelling."

"I can see the top of the sky! From the *other* side, from the top side! It's like a big flat sheet of metal. We're going away from it. We're above the sky, Lavon, we're above the sky!"

Another violent start swung Lavon around toward the forward port. On the outside of the mica, the water was evaporating with shocking swiftness, taking with it strange distortions and patterns made of rainbows.

Lavon saw Space.

~ * ~

It was at first like a deserted and cruelly dry version of the bottom. There were enormous boulders, great cliffs, tumbled, split, riven, jagged rocks going up and away in all directions, as if scattered at random by some giant.

But it had a sky of its own—a deep blue dome so far away that he could not believe in, let alone compute, what its distance might be. And in this dome was a ball of reddish fire that seared his eyeballs.

The wilderness of rock was still a long way away from the ship, which now seemed to be resting upon a level, glistening plain. Beneath the surface-shine, the plain seemed to be made of sand, nothing but familiar sand, the same substance which had heaped up to form a bar in Lavon's own universe, the bar along which the ship had climbed. But the glassy, colorful skin over it—

Suddenly Lavon became conscious of another shout from the megaphone banks. He shook his head savagely and asked, "What is it now?"

"Lavon, this is Tol. What have you gotten us into? The belts are locked. The diatoms can't move them. They aren't faking, either; we've rapped them hard enough to make them think we were trying to break their shells, but they still can't give us more power."

"Leave them alone," Lavon snapped. "They can't fake; they haven't enough intelligence. If they say they can't give you more power, they can't."

"Well, then, you get us out of it," Tol's voice said frightenedly.

Shar came forward to Lavon's elbow. "We're on a space-water interface, where the surface tension is very high," he said softly. "This is why I insisted on our building the ship so that we could lift the wheels off the ground whenever necessary. For a long while I couldn't understand the reference of the history plates to 'retractable landing gear,' but it finally occurred to me that the tension along a space-water interface—or, to be more exact, a space-mud interface—would hold any large object pretty tightly. If you order the wheels pulled up now, I think we'll make better progress for a while on the belly-treads."

"Good enough," Lavon said. "Hello below—up landing gear. Evidently the ancients knew their business after all, Shar."

Quite a few minutes later—for shifting power to the belly treads involved another setting of the gear box—the ship was crawling along the shore toward the tumbled rock. Anxiously, Lavon scanned the jagged, threatening wall for a break. There was a sort of rivulet off toward the left which might offer a route, though a dubious one, to the next world. After some thought, Lavon ordered his ship turned toward it.

"Do you suppose that thing in the sky is a 'star'?" he asked. "But there were supposed to be lots of them. Only one is up there—and one's plenty for *my* taste."

"I don't know," Shar admitted. "But I'm beginning to get a picture of the way the universe is made, I think. Evidently our world is a sort of cup in the bottom of this huge one. This one has a sky of its own; perhaps it, too, is only a cup in the bottom of a still huger world, and so on and on without end. It's a hard concept to grasp, I'll admit. Maybe it would be more sensible to assume that all the worlds are cups in this one common surface, and that the great light shines on them all impartially."

"Then what makes it seem to go out every night, and dim even in the day during winter?" Lavon demanded.

"Perhaps it travels in circles, over first one world, then another. How could I know yet?"

"Well, if you're right, it means that all we have to do is crawl along here for a while, until we hit the top of the sky of another world," Lavon said. "Then we dive in. Somehow it seems too simple, after all our preparations."

Shar chuckled, but the sound did not suggest that he had discovered anything funny. "Simple? Have you noticed the temperature yet?"

Lavon had noticed it, just beneath the surface of awareness, but at Shar's remark he realized that he was gradually being stifled. The oxygen content of the water, luckily, had not dropped, but the temperature suggested the shallows in the last and worst part of autumn. It was like trying to breathe soup.

"Than, give us more action from the Vortae," Lavon said. "This is going to be unbearable unless we get more circulation."

There was a reply from Than, but it came to Lavon's ears only as a mumble. It was all he could do now to keep his attention on the business of steering the ship.

The cut or defile in the scattered razor-edged rocks, was a little closer, but there still seemed to be many miles of rough desert to cross. After a while the ship settled into a steady, painfully slow crawling, with less pitching and jerking than before, but also with less progress. Under it, there was now a sliding, grinding sound, rasping against the hull of the ship itself, as if it were treadmilling over some coarse lubricant the particles of which were each as big as a man's head.

Finally Shar said, "Lavon, we'll have to stop again. The sand this far up is dry, and we're wasting energy using the treads." •

"Are you sure we can take it?" Lavon asked, gasping for breath. "At least we are moving. If we stop to lower the wheels and change gears again, we'll boil."

"We'll boil if we don't," Shar said calmly. "Some of our algae are dead already and the rest are withering. That's a pretty good sign that we can't take much more. I don't think we'll make it into the shadows, unless we do change over and put on some speed."

There was a gulping sound from one of the mechanics. "We ought to turn back," he said raggedly. "We were never meant to be out here in the first place. We were made for the water, not for this hell."

"We'll stop," Lavon said, "but we're not turning back. That's final."

The words made a brave sound, but the man had upset Lavon more than he dared to admit, even to himself. "Shar," he said, "make it fast, will you?"

The scientist nodded and dived below.

The minutes stretched out. The great red gold globe in the sky blazed and blazed. It had moved down the sky, far down, so that the light was pouring into the ship directly in Lavon's face, illuminating every floating particle, its rays like long milky streamers. The currents of water passing Lavon's cheek were almost hot.

How could they dare go directly forward into that inferno? The land directly under the "star" must be even hotter than it was here!

"Lavon! Look at Para!"

Lavon forced himself to turn and look at his proto ally. The great slipper had settled to the deck, where it was lying with only a feeble pulsation of its cilia. Inside, its vacuoles were beginning to swell, to become bloated, pear-shaped bubbles, crowding the granulated protoplasm, pressing upon the dark nuclei.

"Is ... is he dying?"

"This cell is dying," Para said, as coldly as always. "But go on—go on. There is much to learn, and you may live, even though we do not. Go on."

"You're—for us now?" Lavon whispered.

"We have always been for you. Push your folly to the uttermost. We will benefit in the end, and so will Man."

The whisper died away. Lavon called the creature again, but it did not respond.

There was a wooden clashing from below, and then Shar's voice came tinnily from one of the megaphones. "Lavon, go ahead! The diatoms are dying, too, and then we'll be without power. Make it as quickly and directly as you can."

Grimly, Lavon leaned forward. "The 'star' is directly over the land we're approaching."

"It is? It may go lower still and the shadows will get longer. That's our only hope."

Lavon had not thought of that. He rasped into the banked megaphones. Once more, the ship began to move, a little faster now, but still seemingly at a crawl. The thirty-two wheels rumbled.

It got hotter.

Steadily, with a perceptible motion, the "star" sank in Lavon's face. Suddenly a new terror struck him. Suppose it should continue to go down until it was gone entirely? Blasting though it was now, it was the only source of heat. Would not space become bitter cold on the instant—and the ship an expanding, bursting block of ice?

The shadows lengthened menacingly, stretching across the desert toward the forward-rolling vessel. There was no talking in the cabin, just the sound of ragged breathing and the creaking of the machinery.

Then the jagged horizon seemed to rush upon them. Stony teeth cut into the lower rim of the ball of fire, devoured it swiftly. It was gone.

They were in the lee of the cliffs.

Lavon ordered the ship turned to parallel the rock-line; it responded heavily, sluggishly. Far above, the sky deepened steadily, from blue to indigo.

Shar came silently up through the trap and stood beside Lavon, studying that deepening color and the lengthening of the shadows down the beach toward their world. He said nothing, but Lavon was sure that the same chilling thought was in his mind.

"Lavon."

Lavon jumped. Shar's voice had iron in it. "Yes?"

"We'll have to keep moving. We must make the next world, wherever it is, very shortly."

"How can we dare move when we can't see where we're going? Why not sleep it over—if the cold will let us?"

"It will let us," Shar said. "It can't get dangerously cold up here. If it did, the sky—or what we used to think of as the sky—would have frozen over every night, even in summer. But what I'm thinking about is the water. The plants will go to sleep now. In our world that wouldn't matter; the supply of oxygen there is enough to last through the night. But in this confined space, with so many creatures in it and no supply of fresh water, we will probably smother."

Shar seemed hardly to be involved at all, but spoke rather with the voice of implacable physical laws.

"Furthermore," he said, staring unseeingly out at the raw landscape, "the diatoms are plants, too. In other words, we must stay on the move for as long as we have oxygen and power—and pray that we make it."

"Shar, we had quite a few protos on board this ship once. And Para there isn't quite dead yet. If he were, the cabin would be intolerable. The ship is nearly sterile of bacteria, because all the protos have been eating them as a matter of course and there's no outside supply of them, any more than there is for oxygen. But still and all there would have been some decay."

Shar bent and tested the pellicle of the motionless Para with a probing finger. "You're right, he's still alive. What does that prove?"

"The Vortae are also alive; I can feel the water circulating. Which proves that it wasn't the heat that hurt Para. *It was the light*. Remember how badly my skin was affected after I climbed beyond the sky? Undiluted starlight is deadly. We should add that to the information from the plates."

"I still don't get the point."

"It's this. We've got three or four Noc down below. They were shielded from the light, and so must be alive. If we concentrate them in the diatom galleys, the dumb diatoms will think it's still daylight and will go on working. Or we can concentrate them up along the spine of the ship, and keep the algae putting out oxygen. So the question is: which do we need more, oxygen or power? Or can we split the difference?"

Shar actually grinned. "A brilliant piece of thinking. We may make a Shar of you yet, Lavon. No, I'd say that we can't split the difference. There's something about daylight, some quality, that the light Noc emits doesn't have. You and I can't detect it, but the green plants can, and without it they don't make oxygen. So we'll have to settle for the diatoms—for power."

"All right. Set it up that way, Shar."

Lavon brought the vessel away from the rocky lee of the cliff, out onto the smoother sand. All trace of direct light was gone now, although there was still a soft, general glow on the sky.

"Now then," Shar said thoughtfully, "I would guess that there's water over there in the canyon, if we can reach it. I'll go below again and arrange—"

Lavon gasped.

"What's the matter?"

Silently, Lavon pointed, his heart pounding.

The entire dome of indigo above them was spangled with tiny, incredibly brilliant lights. There were hundreds of them, and more and more were becoming visible as the darkness deepened. And far away, over the ultimate edge of the rocks, was a dim red globe, crescented with ghostly silver. Near the zenith was another such body, much smaller, and silvered all over ...

Under the two moons of Hydrot, and under the eternal stars, the two-inch wooden spaceship and its microscopic cargo toiled down the slope toward the drying little rivulet.

The ship rested on the bottom of the canyon for the rest of the night. The great square doors were thrown open to admit the raw, irradiated, life-giving water from outside—and the wriggling bacteria which were fresh food.

No other creatures approached them, either with curiosity or with predatory intent, while they slept, although Lavon had posted guards at the doors. Evidently, even up here on the very floor of space, highly organized creatures were quiescent at night.

But when the first flush of light filtered through the water, trouble threatened.

First of all, there was the bug-eyed monster. The thing was green and had two snapping claws, either one of which could have broken the ship in two like a *spyrogyra* straw. Its eyes were black and globular, on the ends of short columns, and its long feelers were as thick through as a plant-bole. It passed in a kicking fury of motion, however, never noticing the ship at all.

“Is that—a sample of the kind of life we can expect in the next world?” Lavon whispered. Nobody answered, for the very good reason that nobody knew.

After a while, Lavon risked moving the ship forward against the current, which was slow but heavy. Enormous writhing worms, far bigger than the nematodes of home, whipped past them. One struck the hull a heavy blow, then thrashed on obliviously.

“They don’t notice us,” Shar said. “We’re too small. Lavon, the ancients warned us of the immensity of space, but even when you see it, it’s impossible to grasp. And all those stars—can they mean what I think they mean? It’s beyond thought, beyond belief!”

“The bottom’s sloping,” Lavon said, looking ahead intently. “The walls of the canyon are retreating, and the water’s becoming rather silty. Let the stars wait, Shar; we’re coming toward the entrance of our new world.”

Shar subsided moodily. His vision of space had disturbed him, perhaps seriously. He took little notice of the great thing that was happening, but instead huddled worriedly over his own expanding speculations. Lavon felt the old gap between their two minds widening once more.

Now the bottom was tilting upward again. Lavon had no experience with delta-formation, for no rivulets left his own world, and the phenomenon worried him. But his worries were swept away in wonder as the ship topped the rise and nosed over.

Ahead, the bottom sloped away again, indefinitely, into glimmering depths. A proper sky was over them once more, and Lavon could see small rafts of plankton floating placidly beneath it. Almost at once, too, he saw several of the smaller kinds of protos, a few of which were already approaching the ship—

Then the girl came darting out of the depths, her features blurred and distorted with distance and terror. At first she did not seem to see the ship at all. She came twisting and turning lithely through the water, obviously hoping only to throw herself over the mound of the delta and into the savage streamlet beyond.

Lavon was stunned. Not that there were men here— he had hoped for that, had even known somehow that men were everywhere in the universe—but at the girl's single-minded flight toward suicide.

"What—"

Then a dim buzzing began to grow in his ears, and he understood.

"Shar! Than! Stravol!" he bawled. "Break out crossbows and spears! Knock out all the windows!" He lifted a foot and kicked through the big bull's-eye port in front of him. Someone thrust a crossbow into his hand.

"Eh? What's happening?" Shar blurted.

"Eaters!"

The cry went through the ship like a galvanic shock. The rotifers back in Lavon's own world were virtually extinct, but everyone knew thoroughly the grim history of the long battle man and proto had waged against them.

The girl spotted the ship suddenly and paused, obviously stricken with despair at the sight of the new monster. She drifted with her own momentum, her eyes alternately fixed upon the ship and jerking back over her shoulder, toward where the buzzing snarled louder and louder in the dimness.

"Don't stop!" Lavon shouted. "This way, this way! We're friends! We'll help!"

Three great semi-transparent trumpets of smooth flesh bored over the rise, the many thick cilia of their coronas whirring greedily. Dicrans—the most predacious of the entire tribe of Eaters. They were quarreling thickly among themselves as they moved, with the few blurred, pre-symbolic noises which made up their "language."

Carefully, Lavon wound the crossbow, brought it to his shoulder, and fired. The bolt sang away through the water. It lost momentum rapidly, and was caught by a stray current which brought it closer to the girl than to the Eater at which Lavon had aimed.

He bit his lip, lowered the weapon, wound it up again. It did not pay to underestimate the range; he would have to wait until he could fire with effect. Another bolt, cutting through the water from a side port, made him issue orders to cease firing.

The sudden irruption of the rotifers decided the girl. The motionless wooden monster was strange to her, but it had not yet menaced her—and she must have known what it would be like to have three Dicrans over her, each trying to grab away from the others the largest share. She threw herself toward the bull's-eye port. The three Eaters screamed with fury and greed and bored in after her.

She probably would not have made it, had not the dull vision of the lead Dicran made out the wooden shape of the ship at the last instant. It backed off, buzzing, and the other two sheered away to avoid colliding with it. After that they had another argument, though they could hardly have formulated what it was that they were fighting about. They were incapable of saying anything much more complicated than the equivalent of "Yaah," "Drop dead," and "You're another."

While they were still snarling at each other, Lavon pierced the nearest one all the way through with an arbalest bolt. It disintegrated promptly—rotifers are delicately

organized creatures despite their ferocity—and the surviving two were at once involved in a lethal battle over the remains.

“Than, take a party out and spear me those two Eaters while they’re still fighting,” Lavon ordered. “Don’t forget to destroy their eggs, too. I can see that this world needs a little taming.”

The girl shot through the port and brought up against the far wall of the cabin, flailing in terror. Lavon tried to approach her, but from somewhere she produced a flake of stonewort chipped to a nasty point. Since she was naked, it was hard to tell where she had been hiding it, but its purpose was plain. Lavon retreated and sat down on the stool before his control board, waiting while she took in the cabin, Lavon, Shar, the other pilots, the senescent Para.

At last she said: “Are—you—the gods—from beyond the sky?”

“We’re from beyond the sky, all right,” Lavon said. “But we’re not gods. We’re human beings, just like you. Are there many humans here?”

The girl seemed to assess the situation very rapidly, savage though she was. Lavon had the odd and impossible impression that he should recognize her: a tall, deceptively relaxed, tawny young woman, someone from another world, but still ...

She tucked the knife back into her bright, matted hair—aha, Lavon thought confusedly, that’s a trick I may need to remember—and shook her head.

“We are few. The Eaters are everywhere. Soon they will have the last of us.”

Her fatalism was so complete that she actually did not seem to care.

“And you’ve never co-operated against them? Or asked the protos to help?”

“The protos?” She shrugged. “They are as helpless as we are against the Eaters. We have no weapons which kill at a distance, like yours. And it is too late now for such weapons to do any good. We are too few, the Eaters too many.”

Lavon shook his head emphatically. “You’ve had one weapon that counts, all along. Against it, numbers mean nothing. We’ll show you how we’ve used it. You may be able to use it even better than we did, once you’ve given it a try.”

The girl shrugged again. “We have dreamed of such a weapon now and then, but never found it. I do not think that what you say is true. What is this weapon?”

“Brains,” Lavon said. “Not just one brain, but brains. Working together. Co-operation.”

“Lavon speaks the truth,” a weak voice said from the deck.

The Para stirred feebly. The girl watched it with wide eyes. The sound of the Para using human speech seemed to impress her more than the ship itself, or anything else it contained.

“The Eaters can be conquered,” the thin, burring voice said. “The protos will help, as they helped in the world from which we came. The protos fought this flight through space, and deprived Man of his records; but Man made the trip without the records. The protos will never oppose Man again. I have already spoken to the protos of this world, and have told them that what Man can dream, Man can do, whether the protos wish it or not.

“Shar, your metal records are with you. They were hidden in the ship. My brothers will lead you to them.

“This organism dies now. It dies in confidence of knowledge, as an intelligent creature dies. Man has taught us this. There is nothing that knowledge ... cannot do. With it, men ... have crossed ... have crossed space ...”

The voice whispered away. The shining slipper did not change, but something about it was gone. Lavon looked at the girl; their eyes met. He felt an unaccountable warmth.

“We have crossed space,” Lavon repeated softly.

Shar’s voice came to him across a great distance. The young-old man was whispering: “But—*have* we?”

Lavon was looking at the girl. He had no answer for Shar’s question. It did not seem to be important.

~ * ~

MATURITY....by *Theodore Sturgeon*



Dr. Margarett Wenzell, she of the smooth face and wise eyes and flowing dark hair, and the raft of letters after her name in the medical "Who's Who," allowed herself to be called "Peg" only by her equals, of whom there were few. Her superiors did not, and her inferiors dared not. And yet Dr. Wenzell was not a forbidding person in any way. She had fourteen months to go to get to her thirtieth birthday; her figure hadn't changed since she was seventeen, and her face, while hardly suited for a magazine cover, was a natural for a salon study. She maintained her careful distance from most people for two reasons. One was that, as a gland specialist, she had to make a fetish of objectivity; and the other was the fact that only by a consistent attitude of impersonality could she keep her personal charm from being a drawback to her work. Her work meant more to her than anything else in life, and she saw to it that her life stayed that way.

And yet the boy striding beside her called her “Peg.” He had since he met her. He was neither her superior nor her inferior, and he was certainly not her equal. These subconscious divisions of Dr. Wenzell’s had nothing to do with age or social position. Her standards were her own, and since Robin English could not be judged by any of them—or by anyone else’s standards, for that matter—she had made no protest beyond a lift of the eyebrow. It couldn’t be important.

He held her arm as they crossed the rainy street. He always did that, and he was one of the half-dozen men she had met in her life who did it unconsciously and invariably.

“There’s a taxi!” she said.

He grinned. “So it is. Let’s take the subway.”

“Oh, Robin!”

“It’s only temporary. Why, I’ve almost finished that operetta, and any day now I’ll get the patent on that power brake of mine, and—” He smiled down at her. His face was round and ruddy, and it hadn’t quite enough chin, and Peg thought it was a delightful face. She wondered if it knew how to look angry or—purposeful.

“I know,” she said. “I know. And you’ll suddenly have bushels of money, and you won’t have to worry about taxis—”

“I don’t worry about ‘em anyhow. Maybe such things’ll bother me when your boy friend gets through with me.”

“They will, and don’t call him my boy friend.”

“Sorry,” he said casually.

They went down the steps at the subway terminal. Sorry. Robin could always dismiss things with that laconic expression. And he *could*. Whether he was sorry or not wasn’t important, somehow; it was the way he said it. It reduced the thing he was sorry for to so little value that it wasn’t worth being sorry about.

Peg stood watching him as he swung up to the change booth. He walked easily, with an incredible grace. As graceful as a cat, but not at all like a cat. It was like the way he thought—as well as a human being, but not like a human being. She watched the way the light fell on his strange, planeless, open face, and his tousled head of sandy horsehair. He annoyed her ever so much, and she thought that it was probably because she liked him.

He stood aside to let her through the turnstile, smiling at her and whistling a snatch of a Bach fugue through his teeth. That was another thing. Robin played competent piano and absolutely knocked-out trumpet; but he never played the classics. He never whistled anything else.

~ * ~

There was no train in. They strolled up the platform slowly. Peg couldn’t keep her eyes off Robin’s face. His sensitive nostrils dilated, and she had the odd idea that he was smelling a sound—the echoing shuffle of feet and machinery in the quiet where there should be no quiet. As they passed the massive beam-and-coil-spring bumper

at the fold of the track, Robin paused, his eyes flicking over it, gauging its strength, judging its materials. It had never occurred to her to look at such a thing before. "What does *that* matter to you, Robin?"

He pointed. "First it knocks the train pigeontoed. Then she'll nose into the beam there and the springs behind it will take up the shock. Now why do they use coils?"

"Why not?"

"Leaf springs would absorb the collision energy between the leaves, in friction. Coil springs store the energy and throw it right back... oh! I see. They took for granted when they designed it that the brakes would be set. Big as those springs are, they're not going to shove the whole train back. And then, the play between the car couplings would—"

"But Robin—what does it matter? To you, I mean. No," she said quickly as a thick little furrow appeared and disappeared between his eyes. "I'm not saying you shouldn't be interested. I'm just wondering exactly what it is about such devices that fascinates you so."

"I don't know," he said. "The... the integration, I suppose. The thought that went into it. The importance of the crash barrier to Mrs. Scholtz's stew and Sadie's date, and which ferry Tony catches, and all the other happenings that can happen to the cattle and gods that use the subways."

Peg laughed delightedly. "And do you think about all of the meanings to all of the people of all of the things you see?"

"I don't have to think of them. They're there, right in front of me. Surely you can see homemade borscht and a good night kiss and thousands of other little, important things, all wrapped up in those big helical springs?"

"I have to think about it. But I do see them." She laughed again.

"What do you think about when you listen to Bach?"

He looked at her quickly. "Did I say I listened to Bach?"

"My Gestapo told me." She looked at him with puzzlement. He wasn't smiling. "You whistle it," she explained.

"Do I? Well, all right then. What do I think of? Architecture, I think. And the complete polish of it. The way old J. S. burnished every note, and the careful matching of all those harmonic voices. And... and—"

"And what?"

He laughed, a burst of it, a compelling radiation which left little pieces of itself as smiles on the faces of the people around them. "And the sweating choirboys who had to pump the organ when he composed. How they must have hated him!"

~ * ~

A train came groaning into the station and stopped, snicking its doors open. "Watch them," said Robin, his quick eyes taking inventory of the people who jostled each other out of the train. Not one in fifty is seeing anything. No one knows how far apart these

pillars are, or the way all these rivets are set, or the cracks in the concrete under their feet. They're all looking at things separated from them in space and time—the offices they have left, the homes they're going to, the people they will see. Hardly any of them are consciously here, *now*. They're all ghosts, and we're a couple of Peeping Toms."

"Robin, Robin, you're such a *Child*!"

"To you, of course. You're older than I am."

"Four days." It was a great joke between them.

"Four thousand years," he said soberly. They found a seat. "And" I'm not a child. I'm a hyper-thymus. You said so yourself."

"You won't be for very much longer," said Dr. Margaretta Wenzell. "Dr. Warfield and I will see to that."

"What are you doing it for?"

"You'll find out when we send the bill."

"I know it isn't that."

"Of course not," she said. Her remark tasted badly in her mouth. "It's just... Robin, how long have you had that suit?"

"Uh... suit?" He looked vaguely at the sleeve. "Oh, about three years. It's a good suit."

"Of course it is." It was, too. She remembered that he had gotten it with prize money from a poetry contest. "How many weeks room rent do you owe?"

"None!" he said triumphantly. "I rewired all the doorbells in the apartment house and fixed Mrs. Gidget's vacuum cleaner and composed a song for her daughter's wedding reception and invented a gadget to hold her cook book under the kitchen shelf, with a little light that goes on when she swings it out. Next thing I knew she handed me a rent receipt. Wasn't that swell of her?"

"Oh," said Peg weakly. She clutched grimly at the point she was trying to make. "How much are you in debt?"

"Oh, that," he said.

"That."

"I guess ten-twelve thousand." He looked up. "Kcans Yppans. What are you driving at?"

"*What* did you say?"

He waved at the car card opposite. "Snappy Snack. Spelled backwards. Always spell things backward when you see them on the car cards. If you don't, there's no telling what you might miss."

"Oh, you blithering *idiot*!"

"Sorry. What were you saying?"

"I was getting to this," she said patiently. "There doesn't seem to be anything you can't do. You write, you paint, you compose, you invent things, you fix other things, you—"

"Cook," he said, as she stopped for breath; and he added idly, "I make love, too."

"No doubt," said the gland specialist primly. "On the other hand, there doesn't seem to be anything you've accomplished with all of these skills."

"They're not skills. They're talents. I have no skills."

~ * ~

Peg saw the distinction, and smiled. It was quite true. One had to spend a little time in practice to acquire a skill. If Robin couldn't do promisingly the first time he tried something, he would hardly try again. "A good point. And that is what Dr. Warfield and I want to adjust."

"Adjust, she says. Going to shrivel up all the pretty pink lobulae in my thymus. The only thymus I've got, too."

"And about time. You should have gotten rid of it when you were thirteen. Most people do."

"And then I'll be all grim and determined about everything, and generate gallons of sweat, and make thousands of dollars, so that at age thirty I can go back to school and get that high school diploma."

"Haven't you got a high school diploma?" asked Peg, her appalled voice echoing hollowly against her four post-graduate degrees.

"As a senior," smiled Robin, "I hadn't a thing but seniority. I'd been there six years. I didn't graduate from school; I was released."

"Robin, that's *awful*!"

"Why is it awful? Oh—I suppose it is." He looked puzzled and crestfallen.

Peg put her hand on his arm. It had nothing to do with logic, but something in her was wrenched when Robin looked hurt. "I suppose it doesn't matter, Robin. What you learn, and what you do with it, are really more important than *where* you learn."

"Yes... but not *when*. I mean, you can learn too late. I know lots of things, but the things I don't know seem to have to do with getting along in the world. Isn't that what you mean by 'awful'? Isn't that what you and Dr. Warfield are going to change?"

"That's it. That's right, Robin.

Oh, you're such a strange person!"

"Strange?"

"I mean... you know, I was sure that Mel Warfield and I would have no end of trouble in persuading you take these thymus treatments."

"Why?"

With a kind of exasperation she said, "I don't think you fully realize that the change in you will be drastic. You're going to lose a lot that's bad about you—I'm sure of that. But you'll see things quite differently. You... you—" She fought for a description of what Robin would be like without his passionate interest in too many things, and her creative facilities bogged down. "You'll probably see things quite differently."

He looked into her eyes thoughtfully. "Is that bad?"

Bad? There never was a man who had less evil about him, she thought. "I think not," she said.

He spread his hands. "I don't think so either. So why hesitate? You have mentioned that I do a lot of things. Would that be true if I got all frothed up every time I tried something I'd never tried before?"

"No. No, of course not." She realized that it had been foolish of her to mix ordinary practical psychology into any consideration of Robin English. Obviously gland imbalances have frequent psychological symptoms, and in many of these cases the abnormal condition has its own self-justifying synapses which will set up a powerful defense mechanism when treatment is mentioned. Equally obviously, this wouldn't apply to Robin. Where most people seem to have an inherent dislike of being changed, Robin seemed to have a subconscious yearning for just that.

He said, "We get off at the next station."

"I know."

"I just wanted to tell you."

"Where to get off?"

In utter surprise, he said "Me?" and it was the most eloquent monosyllable she had ever heard. For the first time it occurred to her to wonder consciously what he thought of her. It hadn't seemed to matter, before. What was she, in his eyes? She suddenly realized that she, as a doctor meeting a man socially, had really no right to corner him, question him, analyze and diagnose the way she had over the past few weeks. She couldn't abide the existence of a correctible condition in her specialty, and it was probably the essence of selfishness for her to do it. He probably regarded her as meddling and dominating. She astonished herself by asking him, point-blank.

"What do I think of you?" He considered, carefully. He appeared not to think it remarkable that she could have asked such a question. "You're a taffy-puller."

"I'm a what?"

"A taffy-puller. They hypnotize me. Didn't you ever see one?"

"I don't think so," she breathed. "But—"

"You see them down on the boardwalk. Beautifully machined little rigs, all chrome-plated eccentrics and cams. There are two cranks set near each other so that the 'handle' of each passes the axle of the other. They stick a big mass of taffy on one 'handle' and start the machine. Before that sticky, homogeneous mass has a chance to droop and drip off, the other crank has swung up and taken most of it. As the crank handles move away from each other the taffy is pulled out, and then as they move together again it loops and sags; and at the last possible moment the loop is shoved together. The taffy welds itself and is pulled apart again." Robin's eyes were shining and his voice was rapt. "Underneath the taffy is a stainless steel tray. There isn't a speck of taffy on it. Not a drop, not a smidgin. You stand there, and you look at it, and you wait for that lump of guff to slap itself all over those roller bearings and burnished con rods, but it never does. You wait for it to get tired of that fantastic juggling, and it never does. Sometimes gooey little bubbles get in the taffy and get carried around

and pulled out and squashed flat, and when they break they do it slowly, leaving little soft craters that take a long time to fill up; and they're being mauled around the way the bubbles were." He sighed. "There's almost too much contrast—that competent, beautiful machinist's dream handling what? Taffy—no definition, no boundaries, no predictable tensile strength. I feel somehow as if there ought to be an intermediate stage somewhere. I'd feel better if the machine handled one of Dali's limp watches, and the watch handled the mud. But that doesn't matter. How I feel, I mean. The taffy gets pulled. You're a taffy-puller. You've never done a wasteful or incompetent thing in your life, no matter what you were working with."

She sat quietly, letting the vivid picture he had painted fade away. Then, sharply, "Haven't I!" she cried. "I've let us ride past our station!"

~ * ~

Dr. Mellett Warfield let them in himself. Towering over his colleague, he bent his head, and the light caught his high white forehead, which, with his peaked hairline, made a perfect Tuscan arch. "Peg!"

"Hello, Mel. This is Robin English."

Warfield shook hands warmly. "I *am* glad to see you. Peg has told me a lot about you."

"I imagine she has," grinned Robin. "All about my histones and my albumins and the medullar and cortical tissues of my lobulae. I love that word. Lobulae. I lobule very much, Peg."

"Robin, for Pete's sake!"

Warfield laughed. "No—not only that. You see, I'd heard of you before. You designed that, didn't you?" He pointed. On a side table was a simple device with two multicolored disks mounted at the ends of a rotating arm, and powered by a little electric motor.

"The Whirltoy? Robin, I didn't know that!"

"I don't know a child psychologist or a pediatrician who hasn't got one," said Warfield. "I wouldn't part with that one for fifty times what it cost me—which is less than it's worth. I have yet to see the child, no matter how maladjusted, glandular, spoiled, or what have you, who isn't fascinated by those changing colors. Even the color-blind children can't keep their eyes off it because of the changing patterns it makes."

Peg looked at Robin as if he had just come in through the wall. "Robin... the patent on that—"

"Doesn't exist," said Warfield. "He gave it to the Parent's Association."

"Well, sure. I made mine for fun. I had it a long time before a friend of mine said I ought to sell the idea to a toy manufacturer. But I heard that the Parent's Association sent toys to hospitals, and I sort of figured maybe kids that needed amusement should have it, rather than only those whose parents could afford it."

"Robin, you're crazy. You could have—"

"No, Peg," said Warfield gently. "Don't try to make him regret it. Robin... you won't mind if I call you Robin... what led you to design the rotors so that they phase over and under the twentieth-of-a-second sight persistence level, so that the eye is drawn to it and then the mind has to concentrate on it?"

"I remember Zeitner's paper about that at the Society for Mental Sciences," said Peg in an awed tone. "A brilliant application of optics to psychology."

"It wasn't brilliant," said Robin impatiently. "I didn't even know that that was what it was doing. I just messed with it until I liked it."

A look passed between Warfield and Peg. It said, "What would he accomplish if he ever really tried?"

Warfield shook his head and perched on the edge of a table. "Now listen to me, Robin," he said, gently and seriously. "I don't think Peg'll mind my telling you this; but it's important."

Peg colored slightly. "I think I know what you're going to say. But go ahead."

~ * ~

"When she first told me about you, and what she wanted to try, I was dead set against it. You see, we know infinitely more about the ductless glands nowadays than we did—well, even this time last year. But at the same time, their interaction is so complex, and their functions so subtle, that there are dozens of unexplored mysteries. We're getting to them, one by one, as fast as they show themselves and as fast as we can compile data. The more I learn about the ductless glands, the less I like to take chances with them. When Peg just told me about you as a talented young man whose life history was a perfect example of hyper-thymus—immaturity, I think was the word she used—"

"Da! Also goo!" laughed Robin. "She might have been kind enough to call it, say, a static precociousness."

"Please don't tease me about it, Robin."

"Oh. Sorry. Go on, Mel." Peg smiled at the way Warfield's eyebrows went up. She had done the same thing, for the same reason, the first time Robin called her "Peg."

"Anyhow, I certainly had no great desire to follow her suggestion—shoot you full of hormones and sterones to help you reorganize your metabolism and your psychology. After all, interesting as these cases are, a doctor has to ration his efforts. There are plenty of odd glandular situations walking around in the guise of human beings. In addition, I had no personal interest in you. I have too much work to do to indulge a Messiah complex.

"But Peg got persistent. Peg can be *very* persistent. She kept bringing me late developments. I didn't know whether you were a hobby or an inverted phobia of hers. With some effort I managed to remain uninterested until she brought me those blood analyzes."

"I'll never get over my disappointment about what she did with those blood specimens," said Robin soberly.

"Disappointment? Why?"

"I had hoped she was a vampire."

"Go on, Mel. Don't try to keep up with him."

"It wasn't until I found out that you wrote 'The Cellophane Chalice'—and mind you, I never did like poetry, but that was *different*—and that you also"—he ticked them off on his fingers—"wrote the original continuity for that pornographic horror of a comic strip 'Gertie and the Wolves,' did the pipe-cleaner figurines that were photographed to illustrate 'The Tiny Hans Anderson,' dropped a sackful of pine oil into the fountain at Radio City purely because you wanted to see thirty thousand gallons of bubbles, got thrown in the pen for it and while there saved the lives of two prisoners and a guard by slugging it out with a homicidal maniac in the bull pen; composed 'The Lullaby Tree'... by the way, how was it Rollo Vincente got all the credit—and the money—for that song? It was Number One on the hit list for sixteen weeks."

"He did a swell job," said Robin. "He wrote it down for me."

"Robin can't read music," Peg said tiredly.

"Oh Lord," said Warfield reverently. "I also learned that you invented that disgusting advertising disease 'Stoplight Acne' and gave it for free to an advertising copywriter—"

"Who is now making twenty thousand a year," said Peg.

"The guy was desperate," said Robin. "Besides, he gave me my gold trumpet."

"Which is in hock," said Peg.

"Oh, why go on?" said Warfield. "Most important, I learned that you didn't eat regularly, that you suffered from recurrent eviction, that you continually give away your possessions, including your overcoats, with such bland illogic that once you spent four months in the hospital with pneumonia and complications—"

"Four winter months, I might point out," said Robin. "So help me, I don't know how I'd have gotten through that winter otherwise. That was well worth the price of an overcoat."

"So Peg began to make a social issue of it. She said that you were a fountainhead of art, science, and industry and that the dispersal of your talents was a crime against humanity. At this stage I would be inclined to agree with her even if she weren't Peg." Warfield looked at the girl, and the way he did it made Robin raise his eyebrows.

"So now that we have your cooperation, we'll go ahead, for the greater honor and glory of humanity and creative genius, as Dr. Wenzell here once phrased it. But I want you to thoroughly understand that although there is every chance of success, there might be no result at all, or... or something worse."

"Like what?"

"How do I know?" said Warfield sharply, and only then did Peg realize what a strain this was to him.

"You're the doctor," said Robin. Suddenly he walked up to Warfield and touched his chest gently. He smiled. He said, "Mel, don't worry. I'll be all right."

Peg's emotional pop-valve let go a hysterical giggle. Warfield turned abruptly away and roughly tore a drawer open and pulled out a thin sheaf of documents. "You'll have to sign these," he said roughly. "I'm going to get the solutions ready. Come on, Peg."

~ * ~

In the laboratory, Peg leaned weakly against the centrifuge. "Don't worry, Mel," she quoted mistily.

"From the time of Hippocrates," growled Warfield, "it has been the duty and practice of the physician to do everything in his power to engender confidence in the patient. And he—"

"Made you feel better."

After a long pause Warfield said, "Yes, he did."

"Mel, I think he's right. I think he *will* be all right. I think that what he has can't be killed. There's too *much* of it!"

She suddenly noticed that Warfield's busy hands had become still, though he didn't turn to look at her. He said "I was afraid of that."

"What?"

"Oh, I—skip it."

"Mel, what's the matter?"

"Nothing of any importance—especially to you. It's just the way you talk about Robin... the way your voice sounds—"

"That's utterly ridiculous!"

Warfield chuckled a little. "Not that I can blame you. Really I can't.

That boy has, without exception, the most captivating—"

"Mel, you're being offensive. You certainly know me well enough to know that my interest in Robin English is purely professional—even if I have to include the arts among the professions. Personally he doesn't appeal to me. Why, he's a *child!*"

"A situation which I shall adjust for you."

"That was the n-nastiest thing anyone ever said to me!" she blazed.

"Oh, Peg." He came to her, wiping his hands on a towel. He threw it away—a most uncharacteristic gesture, for him—and put his hands gently on her shoulders. She would not meet his eyes. "Your lower lip is twice as big as it ought to be," he said softly. "I am sorry, darling."

"Don't call me darling."

"I lost my good sense. May I ask you to marry me again?"

"M-marry me again?"

"Thank the powers for that sense of the ridiculous! May I ask you again? It's about time."

"Let's see—what is the periodicity? You ask me every nineteen days, don't you?"

"Aloud," he said gravely.

"I—" At last she met his eyes. "No. No! Don't talk about it!"

He took his hands off her shoulders. "All right, Peg."

"Mel, I wish you wouldn't keep bringing this up. If I ever change my mind, I'll speak up."

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "I believe you would."

"It's just that you—Oh Mel, everything's so balanced now! My work is finally going the way I want it to go, and I just don't *need* anything else." She held up a hand, quickly. "If you say anything about ductless glands I'll walk out of here and *never* see you again!"

"I won't, Peg."

There was a strained silence. Finally Peg said, "Are you almost ready?"

Mel nodded and went back to the bench. "You can bring him in now."

Peg went out into the reception office. Something white and swift swished past her face, went rocketing up into the corner of the ceiling, hovered, and then drifted down to the floor in slow spirals. "What in—"

"Oh—Sorry, Peg," Robin said, grinning sheepishly. He went and picked up the white object, and held it out to her. "Tandem monoplane," he explained. "The Langley principle. If Langley had only had a decent power plant, aviation history would have been drastically different. The thing is really airworthy."

"Robin, you're impossible. Mel's ready. Where's the thing he asked you to sign?"

"Hm-m-m? Oh, that—this is it."

"You made that airplane out of it?"

"Well, I wanted to see if I could do it without tearing the paper. I did too." He disassembled the aircraft busily, and smoothed the papers. "They're all right, see?"

"I ought to make you stand in the corner," she said, half angrily.

"O.K. It's a long time till Christmas. You won't hold that over my head."

She looked at him and suddenly, violently, resented Mel for what he had intimated. "Come on, Robin," she said softly. She took his hand and led him into the laboratory.

~ * ~

"Sit down, Robin," said Warfield without looking up.

"Per—dition!" said Robin, wide-eyed. "You've got more glassware here than the Biltmore Bar. As the hot, cross Bunsen said to the evaporator, 'Be still, my love.'"

Peg moaned. Warfield said "And what did the evaporator say to that?"

"'Thank you very much.' You see," said Robin solemnly, "It was a retort courteous."

"Do you think," gasped Peg, "that we'll be able to put a stop to that kind of thing with these treatments?"

"I'm afraid not," said Robin instantly. "The generation of puns is not a phenomenon of the immature mind. The repetition of them is."

"There is probably a flaw in that," said Peg. "I have my hopes, anyway."

"Of course there's a flaw in it. But didn't it sound nice?"

"Here," said Warfield, handing him a glass. "Bottoms up."

Robin rose, accepted the glass, bowed from the waist, and said, "Well, here's to champagne for my real friends and real pain for my sham friends. Exit wastrel." And he drained the glass.

"Now if you'll rope him and throw him," said Warfield, approaching with a hypodermic.

Robin sat, quite relaxed, as the needle sank into his arm.

"Never felt a thing," he said briskly, and then collapsed on the floor. Peg caught his head before it could strike, and lowered it gently. Kneeling beside him, she took his wrist. His pulse felt as if it had lost its flywheel.

"Post-pituitary syncope," said Warfield. "I half expected that. He'll be all right. It's compensated for. There just isn't any way of slowing down neopituitrin. Watch what happens when the pineal starts kicking up."

Peg suddenly clutched at the limp wrist. "He's... he's—Oh Mel, it's stopped."

"Hang on, Peg. Just a few more seconds, and it should—"

Under Peg's desperate fingers, the pulse beat came in full and strong, as suddenly as if it had been push button tuned. With it, Peg began to breathe again. She saw Warfield wipe his eyes. Sweat, probably.

Robin's eyes opened slowly, and an utterly beatific expression crossed his face. He sighed luxuriously. "Beautiful," he said clearly.

"What is it, Robin?"

"Did you see it? I never thought of that before. It's the most perfectly functional, aesthetically balanced thing produced by the mind of man." Sheer wonder suffused his face. "I *saw*one!"

"What was it?"

"A baseball bat!"

Warfield's chin came up. "Well I'll be... Peg, don't laugh." Peg was hardly likely to. "You know, he's about right?"

"I'll think about aesthetics later," said Peg with some heat. "Is he going to be all right?"

"That's all of the immediate reactions that I suspected. There'll be some accelerated mental states—melancholia and exuberance alternating pretty rapidly and pretty drastically. He'll have to have some outlet for stepped-up muscular energy. Then he'll sleep."

"I'm glad it's over."

"Over?" said Warfield, and went out. She called after him, but he went straight out the office door.

~ * ~

Robin sat up and shook his head violently. "How did—"

Peg took his upper arm. "Sit up, Robin. Up and go." She raised him, but instead of regaining the chair he rose and pulled away from her. He paced rapidly down the

laboratory, turned and came back. His face held that pitiable, puzzled look, with the deep crease between his brows. He walked past her, his eyes distant; then he whirled suddenly on her. His smile was brilliant. "Peg!" he shouted. "I didn't expect to see you here!" His eyes drifted past her face, gazed over her shoulder, and he turned and looked around the walls. "Where, incidentally, is 'here'?"

"Dr. Warfield's. Mel's laboratory."

"Mel. Oh... Mel. Yes, of course. I must be getting old."

"Perhaps you are."

He put his hand on his chest, just below his throat. "What would my thymus be doing about now? Trying to think of something quotable to say as its last words?"

"It may be some time," she smiled. "But I imagine it's on its way out. Get your coat on. I'll go home with you."

"What on earth for?"

She considered, and then decided to tell him the truth. "You're full of sterones and hormones and synthetic albuminoids, you know. It isn't dangerous, but glandular balance is a strange thing, and from the treatment you just got you're liable to do anything but levitate—and knowing you," she added, "even that wouldn't surprise me."

"Gosh. I didn't realize that I might be a nuisance to people."

"You didn't realize... why, there was a pretty fair list of possibilities of what might happen to you in that release you signed."

"There was? I didn't read it."

"Robin English, I *don't* know what I'm supposed to do with you."

"Haven't you already done it?" He shrugged. "What's the odds? Mel said I'd have to sign it, and I took his word for it."

"I wish," said Peg fervently, "that I could guarantee the change in your sense of values the way I can the change in your hormone adjustment. You're going to have to be educated! And let this be the first lesson—*never* sign anything without reading it first! What are you laughing at, you idiot?"

"I was just thinking how I would stall things if I go to work for some big outfit and have to sign a payroll," he chuckled.

"Get your coat," said Peg, smiling. "And stop your nonsense."

~ * ~

They took a taxi, after all. In spite of Robin's protests, Peg wouldn't chance anything else after Robin:

Nearly fainted on the street from a sudden hunger, and when taken to a restaurant got petulant to the point of abusiveness when he found there was no tabasco in the place, advancing a brilliant argument with the management to the effect that they should supply same to those who desire it even if what the customer *had* ordered was four pieces of seven-layer cake.

Ran half a block to give a small boy with a runny nose his very expensive embroidered silk handkerchief.

Bumped into a lamp-post, lost his temper and swung at it, fracturing slightly his middle phalanx annularis.

Indulged in a slightly less than admirable remorseful jag in which he recounted a series of petty sins—and some not so petty at that—and cast wistful eyes at the huge wheels of an approaching tractor-trailer.

Went into gales of helpless laughter over Peg's use of the phrase "Signs of the times" and gaspingly explained to her that he was suffering from sinus of the thymus.

And the payoff—the instantaneous composition of eleven verses of an original song concerning one "Stella with the Springy Spine" which was of a far too questionable nature for him to carol at the top of his voice the way he did. She employed a firmness just short of physical force and at last managed to bundle him into a cab, in which he could horrify no one but the driver, who gave Peg a knowing wink which infuriated her.

After getting in his rooms—a feat which required the assistance of Landlady Gridget's passkey, since he had lost his, and the sufferance of a glance of wild surmise from the good lady—Robin, who had been unnaturally silent for all of eight minutes shucked off his coat and headed for the studio couch in one continuous movement. He rolled off his feet and onto the couch with his head buried in the cushions.

"Robin—are you all right?"

"Mm-m-m."

She looked about her.

Robin's two-and-kitchenette was a fantastic place. She had never dreamed that the laws of gravity would permit such a piling-up of miscellany. There were two guitars on an easy-chair, one cracked across the head. A clarinet case with little holes punched in it lay on the floor by the wall. Curious, she bent and lifted the lid. It was lined with newspaper, and in it were two desiccated bananas and a live tarantula. She squeaked and dropped the cover.

Leaning against the far wall was a six-foot square canvas, unfinished, of a dream-scape of rolling hills and pale feathery trees. She looked away, blinked, and looked back. It could have been a mistake. She sincerely hoped that it was; but it seemed to her that the masses of those hills, and the foliage, made a pretty clear picture of a... a—

"No," she whispered. "I haven't got that kind of a mind!"

~ * ~

There was a beautifully finished clay figurine standing proudly amongst a litter of plasticine, modeling tools, a guitar tuner and a flat glass of beer. It was a nude, in an exquisitely taut pose; a girl with her head flung back and a rapt expression on her face, and she was marsupial. On the bookcase was a four-foot model of a kayak made of whalebone and sealskin. Books overflowed the shelves and every table and chair

in the place. There were none in the sink; it was too full of dishes, being sung to by a light cloud of fruit flies. It was more than she could stand. She slipped out of her coat, moved a fishbowl with some baby turtles in it, and an 8 mm projector, off the drainboard and went to work. After she had done all the dishes and reorganized the china closet, where ivy was growing, she rummaged a bit and found a spray gun, with which she attacked the fruit flies. It seemed to be a fairly efficient insecticide, although it smelled like banana oil and coagulated all over the sink. It wasn't until the next day that she identified the distinctive odor of it. It was pastel fixatif.

She tiptoed over to the arch and looked in at Robin. He had hardly moved. She knew he was probably good for twelve hours sleep.

She bent over him and gently pushed some of his rough hair away from his eyes. She had never seen eyes, before, which had such smooth lids.

Robin smiled while he slept. She wished she knew why.

Carefully she removed his shoes. She had to step very close to the couch to do it, and something crunched under her foot. It was a radio tube. She shook her head and sighed, and got a piece of cardboard—there was no dustpan—and a broom and swept up the pieces. Among them she found a stuffed canary and a fifty-dollar bill, both quite covered with “Aug,” or dust whiskers. She wondered how many times Robin had sat on that couch, over that bill, eating beans out of the can and thinking about some glorious fantasy of his own.

She sighed again and put on her coat. As she reached the door she paused, debating whether, if she left a note anywhere in this monumental clutter, he would find it. She wanted him to call her as soon as he awoke, so she could have an idea as to his prognosis. She knew well that in his condition, with his particular treatment, that the imbalances should be all adjusted within twelve hours. But still—

Then why not wake him and remind him to call?

She suddenly realized that she was afraid to—that she was glad he was asleep and... and harmless. She felt that she could name what it was she was afraid of if she tried. So she didn't try.

“*Blast!*” she, said half aloud. She hated to be hesitant, ever, about anything. She hated to be puzzled, or afraid.

She would leave word with the landlady to wake him early in the morning, she decided abruptly.

She felt like a crawling coward.

She turned to the door, and Robin said brightly, “Good-by, Peg darlin’. Thanks for everything. You’ve been swell. I’ll call you when I wake up.”

“You young demon!” she ejaculated. “How long have you been awake?”

“I haven’t been asleep,” he said, coming to the archway. He chuckled. “I’m sorry to say you are right about the canvas. I forgot about the disgusting thing’s being so conspicuous.”

“Oh, that’s all... why did you pretend to be asleep?”

“I felt something coming and didn’t want it to.”

"I... don't know what you mean; but why didn't you let it come?"

He looked at her somberly. Either it was something new, or she had never noticed the tinge of green in his eyes. "Because you wouldn't have fought me."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

The lower half of his face grinned. "You like most of the things I do," he said. "I like you to humor me in those things. Those things are"—he put his fingertips to his chest, then flung them outward—"like this—fun, from here out. I don't want to be humored from here *in*."

Over his shoulder she saw the big canvas. From this distance it was even more specific. She shuddered.

"Good-by, Peg."

It was a studied dismissal. She nodded, and went out, closing the door softly behind her. Then she ran.

~ * ~

Dr. Margaretta Wenzell was highly intelligent, and she was just as sensitive. Twice she appeared at Mel Warfield's laboratory at the hour appointed for Robin's succeeding treatments. Once Robin did not speak to her. The second time she went, Robin did not show up. On inquiry, she learned from the information desk at the medical center that Robin had been there, had asked if she were in Dr. Warfield's office, and having been told that she was, had turned around and walked out. After that she did not go again. She called up Warfield and asked him to forward Robin's case history and each progress report. Mel complied without asking questions; and if Dr. Wenzell spent more time poring over them than their importance justified, it was the only sign she gave that it mattered to her.

It mattered—very much. Never had Peg, in consultation or out, turned a patient over to another doctor before. And yet, she was conscious of a certain relief. Somehow, she was deeply certain that Robin had not ceased to like her. Consciously, she refused to give any importance to his liking for her, but in spite of that she derived a kind of comfort from an arduously-reached conclusion that Robin had reasons of his own for avoiding her, and that they would come out in good time.

She was astonished at the progress reports. She could deduce the probable changes in Robin from the esoteric language of the reaction-listings. Here a sharp drop in the 17-kesteroids; there a note of an extraordinary effect of the whole metabolism, making it temporarily immune to the depressing effect of the adrenal cortices in colossal overdoses. An entry in the third week of the course caused Peg two sleepless nights of research; the pituitrin production was fluctuating wildly, with no apparent balancing reaction from any other gland—and no appreciable effect on the patient. A supplementary report arrived then, by special messenger, which eased her mind considerably. It showed a slight miscalculation in a bio-chemical analysis of Robin's blood which almost accounted for the incredible activity of the pituitaries. It continued to worry

her, although she knew that she could hardly pretend to criticize Mel Warfield's vast experience in the practice of hormone therapy.

But somehow, somewhere deep inside, she did question something else in Mel. Impersonality had to go very closely with the unpredictable psycho-somatic and physiological changes that occurred during gland treatments; and in Robin's case, Peg doubted vaguely that Mel was able to be as detached as might be wished. She tried not to think about it, and was bothered by the effort of trying. And every time she felt able to laugh it off, she would remember Mel's odd statement in the laboratory that day—but then, he had taken such a quick and warm liking to the boy. Could he possibly resent him on her behalf? Again she felt that resurgence of fury at Mel—and at herself; and again she wished that she could be left alone; she wanted to laugh at herself in the rôle of *femme fatale*, but laughter was out of order.

The progress reports were by no means the only source of information about Robin, however. In the tenth day of his treatment, she noticed an item in the "Man About Town" column in the *Daily Blaze*:

Patrons of the Goose's Neck were treated to a startling sight this a.m. when Vincent (The Duke) Voisier came tearing into the place, literally bowling over a table-full of customers—and their table—in the process of hauling Vic Hill, song writer extraordinary, out to the curb. The center of attention out there seemed to be a tousle-headed character by the name of Robin English, who told this snooper mildly that Mr. Voisier was going to produce his show. At that moment The Duke and Hill came sailing out of the bistro, scooped up this Robin English and hurled him into a taxicab, leaving your reporter in a cloud of carbon monoxide and wild surmise. Now followers of this column know that Brother Voisier is usually as excitable as the occupant of Slab 3 at the City Morgue. My guess is missed if show business isn't about to be shown some business. Voisier is a rich man because of his odd habit of taking no wild chances...

And then there was a letter from a book publisher tactfully asking for a character reference prior to giving one Robin English an advance on an anthology of poems. She answered immediately, giving Robin an A-1 rating, and only after sending it off did she realize that a few short weeks ago she would not have considered such a thing. Robin's reliability was a strange and wonderful structure, and his record likewise.

At long last, then, came his phone call.

"Peg?"

"Wh... oh, Robin! Robin, how are you?"

"Sharp as a marshmallow, and disgustingly productive. Will you come over?"

"Come over?" she asked stupidly. "Where?"

"Robin's Roost," he chuckled. "My McGee hall closet and bath. Home."

"But Robin, I... you—"

"Safe as a tomb," he said solemnly.

"Don't intimate anything otherwise," she said as sharply as she could; but something within her rose delightedly at the overtones of amusement in his voice.

"I'm a big grown-up man now," he said. "Restrained, mature, reliable and thoroughly unappetizing. Come over and I won't be anything but repulsive. Impersonal. Detached. No... say semi-detached. Like a brownstone front. A serious mein. Well, if it's before dinner I'll have a chow mein."

"Stop!" she gasped. "Robin, you're mad! You're delirious!"

"Delirious and repressing, like a certain soft drink. Four o'clock suit you?"

It so happened that it did not.

But "All right, Robin," she said helplessly, and hung up.

~ * ~

She discovered that she had cleared her afternoon so efficiently that she had time to go home and change. Well, of course she had to change. That princess neckline was—not daring, of course, but—too demure. That was it; demure. She did not want to be demure. She wanted to be businesslike.

So she changed to a navy sharkskin suit with a wide belt and a starched dicky at the throat, the severest thing in her wardrobe. It was incidental that it fitted like clasped hands, and took two inches off her second dimension and added them to her third. As incidental as Robin's double-take when he saw it; she could almost sense his shifting gears.

"Well!" said Robin as he stepped back from the door. "A mannequin, kin to the manna from heaven. Come *in*, Peg!"

"Do you write your scripts out, Robin? You *can't* generate those things on the spur of the moment!"

"I can for moments like this," he said gallantly, handing her inside.

It was her turn for a double-take. The little apartment was scrupulously clean and neat. Books were in bookcases; it had taken the addition of three more bookcases to accomplish that. A set of shelves had been built in one corner, very cleverly designed to break up the boxlike proportions of the room, and in it were neatly stacked manuscripts and, up above, musical instruments. There was more livestock than ever, but it was in cages and a terrarium—she wondered where the white rats had been on her last visit. Imprisoned in the bathtub, no doubt. There was a huge and gentle pastel of a laughing satyr on the wall. She wondered where the big oil was.

"I painted ol' Splay-foot over it," said Robin.

"You include telepathy among your many talents?" she asked without turning.

"I include a guilty conscience among my many neuroses," he countered. "Sit down."

"I hear you're getting a play produced," she said conversationally, as he deftly set out a beautiful tray of exotic morsels—avocado mashed with garlic juice on little toast squares; stuffed olives sliced paper-thin on zwieback and chive cheese; stems of fennel stuffed with blue-cheese; deviled eggs on rounds of pimento, and a strange and lovely dish of oriental cashews in blood-orange pulp.

"It isn't a play. It's a musical."

"Oh? Whose book?"

"Mine."

"Fine, Robin. I read that Vic Hill's doing the lyrics."

"Well, yes. Voisier seemed to think mine were—Well, to tell you the truth, he called in Hill for the name. Got to have a name people know. However, they are my lyrics."

"Robin. Are you letting him—"

"Ah—shush, Peg! No one's doing anything to me!" He laughed. "Sorry. I can't help laughing at the way you, looking like a Vassar p.g., ruffle up like a mother hen. The truth is that I'm getting plenty out of this. There just don't seem to be enough names to go around on the billing. I wrote the silly little thing at one sitting, and filled in the music and staging just to round it off—sort of an overall synopsis. Next thing you know this Voisier is all over me like a tent, wanting me to direct it as well; and since there's a sequence in there—sort of a duet between voice and drums in boogie-beat—that no one seems to be able to do right, he wants me to act that part too." He spread his hands. "Voisier knows what he is doing. Only you can't have one man's name plastered all over the production. The public doesn't take to that kind of thing. Voisier's treating the whole deal the way he handles his trucking concern and his insurance business and his pharmaceutical house—like a business. Show business is still business."

"Oh—that's better. And what about this anthology of poems?"

"Oh, that. Stuff I had kicking around the house here." His eyes traveled over the neat shelves and bookcases. "Remarkable what a lot of salable, material I had here, once I found it by cleaning up some."

"What else did you find?"

"Some gadgets. A centrifugal pump I designed using the business end of a meat grinder for the impeller. A way to take three-dimensional portraits with a head clamp and a swivel chair and a 35 mm camera, A formula for a quick-drying artist's oil pigment which can't contract the paint. A way to drill holes through glass—holes a twenty-five thousandth of an inch or less in diameter—with some scraps of wire and a No. 6 dry cell. You know—odds and ends."

"You've marketed all these?"

"Yes, or patented or copyrighted them."

"Oh Robin, I'm *so* glad! Are you getting results?"

"Am I?" The old, lovely, wondering look came into his face. "Peg, people are crazy. They just give money away. I honestly don't have to think about money any more. That is, I never did; but now I tell people my account number and ask them to send their check to it for deposit, and they keep piling it in, and I can't cash enough checks to keep up with it. When are you going to ask me why I've been keeping away from you?"

The abruptness of the question took Peg's breath away. It was all she had been thinking about, and it was the reason she had accepted his invitation. She colored. "Frankly, I didn't know how to lead up to it."

"You didn't have to lead up to it," he said, smiling gravely. "You know that, Peg."

"I suppose I know it. Well—why?"

"You like the eatments?" He indicated the colorful dishes on the coffee table.

"Delicious, and simply lovely to look at. But—"

"It's like that. This isn't food for hungry people. Canapes like these are carefully designed to appeal to all five senses—if you delight in the crunch of good zwieback the way I do, and include hearing."

She stared at him. "I think I'm being likened to a... a smorgasbord!"

He laughed. "The point I'm making is that a hungry man will go for this kind of food as happily as any other. The important thing to him is that it's food. If he happens to like the particular titillations offered by such food as this, he will probably look back on his gobbling with some regret, later, when his appetite for food is satisfied and his psychic—artistic, if you like—hungers can be felt." Robin grinned suddenly. "This is a wayward and wandering analogy, I know; but it does express why I kept away from you."

"It does?"

"Yes, of course. Look, Peg, I can see what's happening to me even if I am the patient. I wonder why so many doctors overlook that? You can play around with my metabolism and my psychology and ultimately affect such an abstract as my emotional maturity. But there's one thing you can't touch—and that is my own estimate of the things I have learned. My sense of values. You can change my approach to these things, but not the things themselves. One such thing is that I have a violent reaction against sordidness, no matter how well justified the sordidness may have been when I did the sordid thing, whatever it was. In the past, the justification has been the important thing. Now—and by 'now' I mean since I started these treatments—the reaction is more important. So I avoid sordidness because I don't want to live through the reaction afterward, and not so much because I dislike doing a sordid thing."

"That's a symptom of maturity," said Peg. "But what has it to do with me?"

"I was hungry," he said simply. "So hungry I couldn't see straight. And suddenly so full of horse sense that I wouldn't reach for the pretty canapes until I could fully appreciate them. And now—sit down, Peg!"

"I... have to go," she said in a throttled voice.

"Oh, you're wrong," he said, not moving. He spoke very quietly. "You don't have to go. You haven't been listening to me. You're acting defensive when I've laid no siege. I have just said that I'm incapable of doing anything in bad taste—that is, anything which will taste bad to me, now or later. And you are acting as if I had said the opposite. You are thinking with your emotions instead of your intellect."

Slowly, she sank back into her chair. "You take a great deal for granted," she said coldly.

"That, in effect, is what the bread and cheese and pimentos and olives told me when I told them about these trays," he said. "Oh, Peg, let's not quarrel. You know that all I've just said is true. I could candy-coat all my phrases, talk for twice as long, and say half as much; and if I did you'd resent it later; you know you would."

"I rather resent it now."

"Not really." He met her gaze, and held it until she began to smile.

"Robin, you're impossible!"

"Not impossible. Just highly unlikely."

He sprang to pour coffee for her—and how did he know that she preferred coffee to tea? he had both—and he said, "Now we can talk about the other thing that's bothering me. Mel."

"What about Mel?" she said sharply.

He smiled at her tone. "I gather that it's the other thing that's been bothering you?" She almost swore at him.

"Sorry," he said with his quick grin, and was as quickly sober. "Warfield's very much in love with you, Peg."

"He—has said so."

"Not to me," said Robin. "I'm not intimating that he has poured out his soul to me. But he can't conceal it. What he mostly does is avoid talking about you. Under the circumstances, that begins to be repetitious and—significant." He shrugged. "Thing is, I have found myself a little worried from time to time. About myself."

"Since when did you start worrying about yourself?"

"Perhaps it's symptomatic. This induced maturity that I am beginning to be inflicted with has made me think carefully about a lot of things I used to pass off without a thought. No one can escape the basic urgencies of life—hunger, self-preservation, and so on. At my flightiest moments I was never completely unaware of hunger. The difference between a childish and a mature approach to such a basic seems to be that the child is preoccupied only with an immediate hunger. The adult directs most of his activities to overcoming tomorrow's hunger.

"Self-preservation is another basic that used to worry me not at all as long as danger was invisible. I'd dodge an approaching taxi, but not an approaching winter. Along comes a few gland-treatments, and I find myself feeling dangers, not emotionally, and now, but intellectually, and in the future."

"A healthy sign," nodded Peg.

"Perhaps so. Although that intellectual realization is a handy thing to have around to ward off personal catastrophies, it is also the raw material for an anxiety neurosis. I don't think Mel Warfield is trying to kill me, but I think he has reason enough to."

"*What?*" Peg said, horrified.

~ * ~

"Certainly. He loves you. You—" he broke off, and smiled engagingly. She felt her color rising, as she watched his bright eyes, the round bland oval of his almost chinless face.

"Don't say it, Robin," she breathed.

“—you won’t marry him,” Robin finished easily. “Whom you love needn’t enter into the conversation.” He laughed. “What amounts of wind we use to avoid the utterance of a couple of syllables! Anyway, let it suffice that Mel, for his own reasons, regards me as a rival, or at least as a stumbling block.” His eyes narrowed shrewdly. “I gather that he has also concluded that your chief objection to me has been my... ah... immaturity. No, Peg, don’t bother to answer. So if I am right—and I think I am—he has been put in the unenviable position of working like fury to remove his chief rival’s greatest drawback. His only drawback, if you’ll forgive the phrase, ma’am,” he added, with a twinkle and the tip of an imaginary hat. “No fun for him. And I don’t think that Brother Mel is so constituted that he can get any pleasure out of the great sacrifice act.”

“I think you’re making a mountain out of—”

“Peg, Peg, certainly you know enough about psychology to realize that I am not accusing Mel of being a potential murderer, or even of consciously wanting to hurt me. But the compulsions of the subconscious are not civilized. Your barely expressed annoyance at the man who jostles you in a crowded bus is the civilized outlet to an impulse for raw murder. Your conditioned reflexes keep you from transfixing him with the nearest nail file; but what about the impulses of a man engaged in the subtle complexities of a thing like the glandular overhaul I’m getting? In the bus, your factor of safety with your reactions can run from no visible reaction through a lifted eyebrow to an acid comment, before you reach the point where you give him a light tap on the noggin and actually do damage. Whereas Mel’s little old subconscious just has to cause his hand to slip while doing a subcutaneous, or to cause his eye to misread a figure on the milligram scale, for me to be disposed of in any several of many horrible ways. Peg! What’s the matter?”

Her voice quivering, she said quietly, “That is the most disgusting, conceited, cowardly drivel I have ever had to listen to. Mel Warfield may have the misfortune to be human, but he is one of the finest humans I have ever met. As a scientist, there is no one in this country—probably in the world—more skilled than he. He is also a gentleman, in the good old-fashioned meaning of the word—I *will* say it, no matter how much adolescent sneering you choose to do—and if he is engaged on a case, the case comes first.” She rose. “Robin, I have had to take a lot from you, because as a gland specialist I knew what an advanced condition I had to allow for. That is going, to stop. You are going to find out that one of the prices you must pay for the privilege of becoming an adult is the control of the noises your mouth makes.”

Robin looked a little startled. “It would be a little dishonest of me to think these things without expressing them.”

She went on as if she hadn’t heard. “The kind of control I mean has to go back further than the antrums. All of us have mean, cowardly thoughts from time to time. Apparently the maturity you’re getting is normal enough that you’re developing a man-sized inferiority complex along with it. You are beginning to recognize that Mel

is a better man than you'll ever be, and the only way you can rationalize that is to try to make him small enough to be taking advantage of you."

"Holy cow," breathed Robin. "Put down that knout, Peg! I'm not going to make a hobby of taking cracks at Mel Warfield behind his back. I'm just handing it to you straight, the way I see it, for just one reason—to explain why I am discontinuing the course of treatment."

She was halfway to the door as he spoke, and she brought up sharply as if she had been tied by a ten-foot rope. "Robin! You're not going to do anything of the kind!"

"I'm going to do exactly that," said Robin. "I'm not used to lying awake nights worrying about what someone else is likely to do. I'm doing all right. I've come as far in this thing as I intend to go. I'm producing more than I ever did in my life before, and I can live adequately on what I'm getting and will get for this music and these patents and plays and poems, to live for the rest of my life if I quit working tomorrow—and I'm not likely to quit working tomorrow."

"Robin! You're half hysterical! You don't know what you're talking about! In your present condition you can't depend on the biochemical balance of your glandular system. It can only be kept balanced artificially, until it gradually adjusts itself to operation without the thymus. In addition, the enormous but balanced overdoses of other gland extracts we have had to give you must be equalized as they recede to normalcy. You simply *can't* stop now!"

"I simply will stop now," he said, mimicking her tone. "I took the chance of starting with this treatment, and I'll take the chance of quitting. Don't worry; no matter what happens your beloved Mel's nose is clean, because of that release I signed. I'm not going to sue anybody."

She looked at him wonderingly. "You're really trying to be as offensive as you possibly can, aren't you? I wonder why?"

"It seems the only way for me to put over a point to you," he said irritably. "If you must know, there's another reason. The stuff I'm producing now is good, if I can believe what I read in the papers. It has occurred to me that whatever creativeness I have is largely compounded of the very immaturity you are trying to get rid of. Why should I cut off the supply of irrationality that produces a work of art like my musical comedy? Why should I continue a course of treatment that will ultimately lead me to producing nothing creative? I'm putting my art before my course, that's all."

"A good pun, Robin," said Peg stonily, "but a bad time for it. I think we'll let you stew in your own juice for a while. Watch your diet and your hours, and when you need professional help, get in touch with me and I'll see what I can do about getting Mel to take you on again."

"Nice of you. Why bother?"

"Partly sheer stubbornness; you make it so obvious you want nothing of the kind. Partly professional ethics, a thing which I wouldn't expect a child, however precocious, to understand fully."

He went slowly past her and opened the door. "Good-by, Dr. Wenzell."

“Good-by, Robin. And *good* luck.”

~ * ~

Later, in her office at the hospital, Peg’s phone rang. “Yes?”

“Peg! I’ve just received a note, by messenger, from Robin English.”

“Mel! What did he say?”

“He inclosed a check for just twice what I billed him for, and he says that he won’t be back.”

“Mel, is it safe?”

“Of course it’s not safe! The pituitary reactions are absolutely unpredictable—you know that. I can’t prognosticate anything at all without the seventy-two-hour checkups. He might be all right; I really wouldn’t know. He’s strong and healthy and tremendously resilient. But to stop treatment now is taking unfair advantage of his metabolism. Can’t you do anything about it?”

“Can’t *I* do anything?”

“He’ll listen to you, Peg. Try, won’t you? I... well, in some ways I’m glad to have him off my neck, frankly. It’s been... but anyway, I’ll lose sleep over it, I know I will. Will you see if you can do anything with him?”

A long pause.

“Hello; Peg—are you still there?”

“Yes, Mel... let him go. It’s what he wants.”

“Peg! You... you mean you won’t see him?”

“N-no, I—can’t, Mel. I won’t. Don’t ask me to.”

“I hardly know what to say. Peg, what’s the matter?”

“*Nothing’s* the matter. I won’t see him, that’s all, and if I did it wouldn’t do any good. I don’t care what hap—Oh, Mel, do watch him! Don’t let anything... I mean, he’s *got* to be all right. Read his stuff, Mel. Go see his plays. You’ll be able to f-find out that way.”

“And if I don’t like the looks of what I find out, what am I supposed to do about it?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know. Call me up whenever you find out anything, Mel.”

“I will, Peg, I’m—sorry. I didn’t realize that you... I mean, I knew it, but I didn’t know you felt so—”

“Good-by, Mel.”

She hung up and sat and cried without hiding her face.

~ * ~

Robin’s first novel was published five months later, while his musical, “Too Humorous To Mention,” was eight weeks old and just at the brilliant beginning of its incredible run, while “The Cellophane Chalice,” his little, forgotten book of verse, went into its

sixth printing, and while three new songs from “Too Humorous” were changing places like the shells in the old army game, on the Hit Parade in the one-two-three spots. The title of one of them, “Born Tomorrow,” had been bought at an astonishing figure by Hollywood, and royalties were beginning to roll in for Robin’s self-tapping back-out drill bits.

The novel was a strange and compelling volume called “Festoon.” The ravings of the three critics who were fortunate enough to read it in manuscript made the title hit the top of the best-seller lists and stay there like a masthead. Robin English was made an honorary doctor of law by a college in Iowa, a Kentucky Colonel, a member of the Lambs Club and a technical advisor to the American Society of Basement Inventors. He dazedly declined a projected nomination to the State Senate which was backed by a colossal round robin; wrote a careful letter of thanks to the municipality of Enumclaw, Washington, for the baroque golden key to the city it sent him because of the fact that early in his life he had been born there; was photographed for the “Young Men of the Month” page of *Pic*, and bought himself a startlingly functional mansion in Westchester County. He wrote a skillful novella which was sold in Boston and banned in Paris, recorded a collection of *muezzin* calls, won a pie-eating contest at the Bucks County Fair, and made a radio address on the evolution of modern poetry which was called one of the most magnificent compositions in the history of the language. He bought a towboat and had a barge built in the most luxurious pleasure-yacht style and turned them over to the city hospitals for pleasure-cruises to Coney Island for invalid children. Then he disappeared.

He was a legend by then, and there was plenty of copy about him for the columnists and the press agents to run, so that in spite of his prominence, his absence was only gradually felt. But gradually the questions asked in the niteries and on the graveyard shifts at newspaper offices began to tell. Too often reporters came back empty handed when assigned to a new R. E. story—*any* new R. E. story. An item in the “Man About Town” column led to a few readers’ letters, mostly from women, asking his whereabouts; and then there was a landslide of queries. It was worth a stick or two on the front pages, and then it suddenly disappeared from the papers when all the editors were told in a mimeographed letter that Mr. English’s business would be handled by his law firm, which had on proud exhibition a complete power of attorney—and which would answer no queries. All business mail was photostated and returned, bearing Robin’s rubber-stamped signature and the name of his lawyers. All fan mail was filed.

The categories of men who can disappear in New York are extreme. The very poor can manage it. The very rich cannot; but those richer than the very rich can manage it, with care. Robin did it.

And then the rumors started.

The role of “Billy-buffoon” which he had taken in his musical was a mask-and-wig part, and it was said that his understudy didn’t work at every performance. English was reported to have been seen in Hollywood; in Russia; dead; and once even on Flatbush Avenue. Robin’s extraordinary talents, in the gentle hands of idle talk, took

on fantastic proportions. He was advisor to three cabinet members. He had invented a space drive and was at the moment circling Mars. He was painting a mural in the City Morgue. He was working on an epic novel. He had stumbled on a method for refining U-235 in the average well-equipped kitchen, and was going crazy in trying to conceal that he knew it. He was the author of every anonymous pamphlet cranked out to the public everywhere, from lurid tracts through political apassionatae to out and out pornography. And of course, murders and robberies were accredited to his capacious reputation. All of these things remained as engagingly fictional as his real activities had been; but since they had nothing like books and plays and inventions to perpetuate them, they faded from the press and from conversation.

~ * ~

But not from the thoughts of a few people. Drs. Wenzell and Warfield compiled and annotated Robin English's case history, with as close a psychological analysis as they could manage. Ostensibly, the work was purely one of professional interest; and yet if it led to a rational conclusion as to where he was and what he was doing, who could say that such a conclusion was not the reason for the work? In any case, the book was not published, but rested neatly in the active files of Mel Warfield's case records, and grew. And then there was one Voisier, himself a mysterious character about whom little was known except his aquiline features and unbuttoning eyes and his wealth, all of which were underestimated. Voisier thought about Robin a great deal; and because he was Voisier, he was able to gain scraps of information not available to most people. The conclusions he drew from two or three of these, one afternoon, led to the ringing of Peg's phone.

"Dr. Wenzell?"

"Yes?"

"Voisier speaking. Do you know Robin English?"

"Voisier, the producer? Oh, how do you do? Yes, I—have met Robin English."

"Do you happen to know where he is?"

"Does anyone?" she countered. "I understand that his lawyers—"

Voisier's soft chuckle slid over the wire and came out of the receiver like little audible smoke rings. "I have encountered his lawyers. Dr. Wenzell, I have to find out where he is."

"What has that to do with me?" Peg asked cautiously.

"There is some connection between you and Robin English," said Voisier smoothly. "Just a moment—I'm not trying to find out what it is, and I don't care. I know only that it is a matter of professional interest to you and a Dr. Mellet Warfield; and I *don't* care what it is. I'll be frank with you; I must see him purely on a business matter. It will be to his advantage—all of his dealings with me have been, you know. After all. I discovered him."

"You discovered him the way the atom bomb was discovered by the mayor of Hiroshima," said Peg tartly.

Voisier laughed urbanely. "Very good." Peg was figuratively conscious of the swing of his boom as he changed his conversational tack. "Please, Dr. Wenzell—let's not get off on the wrong foot. I'm sorry if I seem to pry. Will you take lunch with me tomorrow?"

"I'm sorry. I'm busy tomorrow."

"Dinner this evening, then. That would be better."

"I am completely tied up, thank you," said Peg, over the rustle of silk in his voice. "And besides, I do not know where Robin English is or what he is doing. Good-b—"

"I know what he is doing," said Voisier quickly.

"You—"

Through a smile, Voisier's easy voice said, "Of course. I don't know where he is, that's all. I thought that with what I know and what you know we might be able to locate him. For his own good, of course. I gather that you would like very much to know where he is."

"What's he doing?"

"I *can't* tell you over the phone!" he said, in the voice in which one says "You *mustn't* play with Daddy's watch!"

"I wish you—" said Peg sharply, and then sighed. "When can I see you?"

"Thank you *very* much, doctor," he said abjectly, and was that a touch of relief in his voice? "Dinner tonight, then—unless you are busy, in which case... ah... cocktail time is practically here. I could meet you this afternoon, if you could—"

"Thank you," she said, and startingly, she blushed at the eagerness she heard in her own voice. "How soon can you get here?"

"Very soon. I know where it is. I'll see you in a moment. And thanks again."

He hung up, and Peg sat looking at the bland cornerless bulk of her cradled telephone. Robin, Robin English. She formed his name with silent lips, and smiled a little. "Robin," she whispered, "I'm going to catch you by the ear and stand you in a corner for doing this to me." Robin was a child—such a child.

Her assistant came in. "A Mr. Voisier to see you doctor."

"Thank you, Helen. Ask him—*Voisier!* Good heavens, I didn't expect him so quickly! Yes, show him in. Show him right in!"

~ * ~

Voisier appeared at the door, rather as if he had been projected there. He looked over the office, more rapidly than he appeared to be doing it, and then let his gaze slide to rest on her face. He smiled.

"Mr. Voisier?"

"I am very glad to meet you, doctor." He came forward, and she noticed that the Homburg he carried was not black, but a very dark brown. Like his eyes.

"You got here very quickly, Mr. Voisier."

"I was just downstairs when I called."

She frowned briefly, realizing that she had been told that he had come to the hospital perfectly confident that he could talk her into seeing him. She wondered why she didn't mind too much. "Sit down a moment," she said. "I'll be ready to leave in a second."

He thanked her, and surprised her by not taking the chair she indicated at the end of her desk and close to her, but one in the corner. He sat down, ignoring the magazines on the end table next to him, and rested a part of the weight of his eyes on her as she worked, stacking the reports on her desk and putting them away.

When her desk was clear she paused a moment, thinking, and then dipped into the file drawer and brought out her copy of Robin's case history. She did not open it—she knew every line in it—but sat running her fingers over the binding, wondering whether to bring it with her.

"Bring it along," said Voisier, his eyes on the ceiling.

"I knew someone else who acted telepathic," said Peg with a little quirk of the lips. "All right."

The way he helped her on with her coat and handed her through the door made her feel like reaching for a lace train to drape over her arm as she walked. They did not speak as they went down in the elevator. She wanted to study his face, but he was studying hers, and strangely, she did not want to meet his eyes.

Parked in front of the hospital was a low-slung limousine, beautifully kept, not too new. A chauffeur with a young, impassive face opened the door and Peg got in, feeling the lack of a velvet carpet and a fanfare or two. Voisier followed, and the car slid silently into traffic. Voisier gave no orders to the chauffeur, which was another indication to Peg of how sure he had been that she would come out with him. She wondered if he had made reservations wherever they were going. She never knew, because they pulled up in front of Lelalo's, and both the doorman and the head waiter greeted Voisier effusively and she realized that they would at any time, reservation or no reservation. They were shown to a very comfortable corner table. Peg asked for an Alexander; Voisier did not order at all, but a silvery cocktail was brought and set down before him.

Finally she met his eyes. He seemed relaxed, but watchful, and his gaze was absolutely unswerving. She gritted her teeth and said lightly, "Have you read any good books lately?"

His eyes dropped to the case history lying on the table between them. "No," he said.

"Tell me what you know."

He drummed idly on the table with long, flexible fingers. "Robin is in the trucking business," he said.

"Oh?"

"Yes. And in insurance. Air freight. Distilling. Drugs. A few others."

"For goodness' sake! But that doesn't sound like Robin!"

"What doesn't sound like Robin?"

"Robin is almost exclusively a creative person. Business—organizing, money-making itself—these have never had any interest for him."

"They have now," said Voisier in a slightly awed tone.

"If he did go into business," said Peg carefully, "it would be like that—diversification, and excellent results in everything he tried. That is, if he's still... I mean, if he hasn't changed. How do you know this?"

~ * ~

"I can't understand how he's doing it," Voisier said, ignoring her question. "He has bought out a bunch of independent truckers, for example. Standardized their equipment, rerouted and scheduled them, put in the latest equipment for servicing all the way, so that he has practically delay-proof service. He pays his employees eight per cent more than... than other firms, and works them four less straight-time hours per week. Yet his rates are twelve per cent per hundredweight under those of any of his competitors. Am I boring you?"

"You are not."

"He has hit the insurance business in an unusual way. He has a counseling service made up of insurance men so carefully chosen and so highly paid that his agency is a factor to be reckoned with by every company in the East. His specialty is in advising clients—the thousand-dollar policyholder to banking insurance—on ways and means of combining policies to get the maximum coverage from the smallest premium. His charge is nominal; it doesn't seem to be a money-making proposition, much, at all. But he is getting an increasing power to throw large blocks of insurance business any way he wants to. He does it to the benefit of the policyholder and well within the law. In other words, what he is machinating for is influence. And since nobody can possibly predict what he is going to do next, the agency is a Damocletian sword over us... uh... over the insurance companies."

"Mr. Voisier—wait. How do you know all this?"

"The most amazing thing of all is what he is doing in the drugs business. He has tapped a source of hard-to-get biochemicals that is something remarkable. Some sort of synthesis... nerve mind. I'm running along like a *Wall Street Journal* excerpt and I'm not going to start reciting things from the *Journal of the Chemical Institute*."

"Have you seen him?"

"I have a picture of him. He spoke at a trucker's union meeting with his independent chain proposal recently. It's a good shot, and though he's changed a little since I last saw him, there's no mistaking him. He was using the name of Reuben Ritter—not that that's a matter of any importance, since elsewhere he is known as Schwartz, Mancinelli, Walker, Chandler, and O'Shaughnessy. Where he goes after the meetings and an occasional dinner he attends, no one knows. He only goes out on business and he always leaves a highly competent authority behind to handle the details."

"May I see the picture?"

"Certainly." Voisier took out a fine-tooled Moroccan wallet and leafed through it. He pulled out a four-by-five print and handed it to her.

"It *is* Robin," she said instantly, shakily; and then she pored over the picture, her eyes tearing down into it. A slight sound from Voisier made her look up; he was regarding her with a quizzical grin. She went back to the picture.

It was Robin, all right; and he stood before a flat table obviously in a loft which was converted to a meeting hall. He was half-leaning against the table, and his head and one arm were raised, and his face was turned to the right of the camera.

Yes, it was Robin, all right; but Robin subtly changed. His features were—was it older? They were the features of a young man; but there was a set of purpose about the profile that was unfamiliar to her. Two slightly out-of-focus faces in the background, watching him with something approaching raptness, added to the completely authoritative, unselfconscious pose of the speaker. And Peg knew that from that picture alone, something within her would never again let her speak of Robin as "that child." It was a jarring realization, for "Robin" and "Childishness" were all but inseparable associations in her mind.

She became conscious of Voisier's long white hand hovering in front of her. She looked up and clutched the picture. "You want it back?"

"I'd... oh, I have the negative. Go ahead." The quizzical smile appeared again.

~ * ~

Peg slipped the picture into her pocketbook, closed it tightly, and only when she felt Voisier's amused eyes on her hands did she relax her grip on the clasp. She said, "How do you think I can help you locate him?"

Voisier put the tips of his fingers together and eyed her over them. "In that book of yours," he said, indicating the thick binder of prognosis carbons, "you probably have information which would help us to predict at least what sort of surroundings Robin English would find for himself. I know what businesses he's in, and pretty much how he's conducting them. Certainly we could draw some pretty shrewd conclusions." He paused, and looked thoughtfully at the second joints of his fingers, one after the other. "All I have to do is see him once. Just once," he said as if to himself. When I do, I can find out where he is living, what he is doing every hour, where he is liable to str... ah... jump next."

"You almost said 'where he will strike next,' " Peg said.

"Did I? I didn't know. That's ridiculous, of course."

"I suppose it is," she said slowly, watching his face. "Mr. Voisier, you have a remarkably easy way about you."

"I? Thank you."

"You're easy to talk with, and you talk easily. You divert the conversation to your chosen ways so *very* easily. You have still not told me why you want to locate Robin English."

"Everyone wants to know where Robin English is. Don't you read the papers?"

"I doubt, somehow, that you are motivated by intellectual curiosity. I don't think you want to produce another play of his, particularly, or sell a story to the press and scoop the town, or—obviously not this—give him pointers on his new business ventures. I hate to be blunt with anyone," she said with a sudden rush of warmth, "but I must ask you—what are you after?"

He spread his hands. "I like the boy. Brilliant as he is, he is getting himself into a little hot water with certain of the interests with which he is competing. In the business world, as in the world of nations, there is room enough for everybody, providing everybody will co-operate. It is impossible to co-operate with a man who cannot be reached."

"It is impossible to retaliate, also."

Voisier held up a deploring hand. "Retaliate is too strong a term. Active as he is, it is inconceivable that he can keep himself hidden much longer. It is infinitely more desirable that I get to him before any of the others—I who have demonstrated so conclusively that I have his interests at heart. I like the boy."

"You like the boy." The picture of Robin in the union hall rose before her eyes. That was no boy. "Mr. Voisier, you are telling me that he is in danger, aren't you?"

He shrugged. "He *is* playing a dangerous game."

"Dangerous game? Danger from what?"

"I have not made up a roster, doctor."

She stared at him. "Mr. Voisier—just what business are *you* in?"

"I'm a producer. Surely you know that."

"Yes. I have just remembered that I heard you once mentioned in connection with the trucking business, and again, there was something to do with drugs—"

"You have a proclivity," said Voisier casually, "of connecting yourself, in one way or another, with remarkable people. I, like Robin English, am a man of some diversification."

She sat quietly for a moment, and thought. As Voisier had predicted, little pieces were beginning to fit here and there. Robin's progress had been so carefully charted, and prognosis made in such detail, that the information Voisier had given her was highly indicative. If she could talk it over with Mel—

"I can't piece all this together on the spot," she said.

"Why don't you get in touch with your associate, Dr. Warfield?"

"You *must* be psychic," she said wryly. "Let me phone him."

Without seeming to move quickly, Voisier was on his feet and assisting her out of the chair before she knew she was moving. "By all means," he said. "And if you can impress the urgency of the matter on him, it will be to Robin's benefit."

"I'll see," she said.

She went to the phone booth and called, and Mel was out, and when she returned to the table Voisier was gone. So was his limousine. So was Robin's case history.

~ * ~

"Mel, I don't know how I could have been such a fantastic idiot," she said brokenly.

She was in his office, hunched up in a big wing chair, and for the first time in years looking small and childish and frightened.

"Don't blame yourself, Peg," said Warfield gently. "No one would expect that kind of prank from a man like that."

"It w-was awful," she almost whispered. "He made such a *fool* of me! I called the waiter immediately, of course, and he acted surprised to see me at all. He absolutely denied having seen such a thing as that case book at all. So did the head waiter. So did the doorman. They simply looked at me as if I were crazy, exchanging wondering glances at each other in between times. Mel... Mel, I don't *like* that man, that Voisier!"

"I wouldn't wonder."

"No—aside from that slick little piece of larceny. There's something evil about him."

"That's an understatement, if ever I heard one," Mel said. "I don't know much about that man—no one does—but the things I know aren't too good. I wonder if you knew that Chickering Chemical was his?"

"That drug firm that was peddling hashish as a tonic?"

"Not a tonic. A facial—mud pack, I think it was. It didn't harm the skin. Didn't do it any good, either. It was sold in small and adulterated quantities at a fantastic price, but it was hashish all right."

"But all the officers of that company are in jail?"

"All they could get anything on."

"How do you know this?"

"One of their lab assistants went to pharmaceutical school with me. Silly fool, he was, but a very likable character. He could be bought, and he was. He was paid well, and he didn't care. I did what I could to help him when the whole mess happened, but he was in too deep. He had no cause to lie to me, and he told me that Voisier was the man behind the whole rotten deal."

"Why didn't he give some evidence against Voisier?"

"No evidence. Not a scrap. Voisier's much too clever to leave loose ends around. Witness the trick he pulled on you. And besides—my imbecile of a friend rather admires him."

"Admires him—and Voisier got him into the penitentiary?"

"He blames only himself. And it seems that Voisier has a certain likable something about him—"

Peg thought of that saturnine face, and the compelling eyes of the man. She remembered his tactile glance, and the incredible flexibility of his voice. "Oh." She shook herself. "I can't afford the luxury of sitting here and saying how awful it all is," she said firmly, putting away her handkerchief. "What are we going to do?"

"Why do anything? Robin English is no longer our responsibility, if it's Robin you're worried about. As far as the book is concerned, I have the original, so that's a small loss."

"When does your responsibility to a person end?" she demanded hotly.

"That depends," he said, looking at the ceiling, "on what the person in question means to you. If it's a patient, and that patient, of sound mind, decides to go to another doctor or to stop treatment altogether, there is no law or ethic which demands that I try to hold him. If, on the other hand, the person is a... well, of personal interest, it's a different matter."

"And you feel that Robin can look out for himself?"

"He's demonstrated that pretty well so far. He must include self-preservation and the ability to act on it among his other talents."

"Mel—this isn't like you!"

"Isn't it, though!"

"Mel!" she cried, shocked, "If it weren't for us he wouldn't be in this trouble! He's hooked up with Voisier in some way, and—"

Mel put his hands on her shoulders and pushed her back in her chair. He looked at her somberly and then sighed. "Peg," he said finally, "I've got to say this. I deeply regret the day I ever set eyes on Robin English. You haven't been yourself since the day you met him."

She thought of the extraordinary statement Robin had made at tea that day, about Mel Warfield's desire to kill him. She looked up at Warfield with horror in her face.

"Listen to me," he said. "You're all tangled up in your emotions, and you can't think straight. You think Robin's mixed up with Voisier in some business way. Isn't it obvious what Robin is doing? You know that Voisier is mixed up in a dozen different businesses, two-thirds of which are shady in some way or another. You were told by Voisier himself that Robin is engaged in some of these same fields. I think you'll find that Robin is engaged in all of them. I think that if you are fool enough to mix yourself into anything this big and this dirty, you'll discover that Robin is out to undercut Voisier in everything the man is doing."

"Why? Why on earth should he do that?"

"I wouldn't know. Probably because he recognizes Voisier as his own brand of genius, with many years' start on him. Without doubt he feels crushed by Voisier—feels that the world isn't big enough for both of them. The 'why' of it isn't important. The fact remains that if he is not doing such a fantastic thing, he isn't in any danger and you needn't worry about him. If he is, then he must be outdoing Voisier on the dirtiest of his rackets."

"No, Mel—no! Robin wouldn't do that!"

"Someone is. How many new addiction cases has your hospital admitted in the past three months?"

"Well, there is a decided upswing, but what has that—"

"Robin *could* be responsible. It would have to be a one-source deal—someone previously unknown, without a record that can be checked, with a tremendous organizing ability and personal compulsion, and a lot of scientific skill. Most of the drugs found on these poor devils are synthetic."

"But Robin never did an evil thing in his life!"

"He has done many things recently he never did in his life. I tell you, Peg, the responsibility I feel in this matter is a far greater one than anything that could happen to Robin English. If I'm right in all this, I have been instrumental in loosing something rather terrible in the world. And if I'm right and he's tackling Voisier by playing the man's own game, the odds are pretty strong that Voisier's too big for him. In which case—good riddance." He lowered his voice. "I'm sorry, Peg. Truly I am. I've been going round and round in smaller and smaller circles over this thing, and I've had enough."

~ * ~

Peg was feeling absolutely bewildered. "But I have only just told you about Voisier and this—"

"I've known about it for weeks, Peg. Let the thing take its course."

She rose, trembling. "You're wrong, Mel," she whispered. "You've *got* to be wrong."

"I'm afraid not," he said sadly. "I sincerely wish I were."

"I've got to see him."

"No, Peg! He might... he... can't you see that he's turned into a man who takes what he wants?"

"Does that make a difference?" Peg asked in a strange voice. "I can't let this happen to him. I'm going to find out where he is and see him. I'm responsible for this whole horrible thing and so are you. But through your stupid mulish jealousy you've argued yourself into blaming him!"

Warfield went white. "Responsible? He had the seeds of this in him all along. He simply never had the courage to do an honestly evil thing until we so generously matured him. Maturity is a strange thing, Peg. Like other riches, it is dangerous in unskilled hands. It isn't something that can be achieved all in a lump. We gave him a kind of maturity which gathered all the loose threads of his personality into something monolinear—something productive. But we didn't give him the power to use the years of experience he had had before we got to him. He's a bulldozer with a skilled idiot at the controls. But he is no longer a glandular case. If you want me to change my attitude at all, prove to me that he is still suffering from imbalance of any kind. That's in my field. That I can handle."

"I'll have to see him."

"Do you know where he is?"

"Nobody does. But I'll find him."

"I know where he is. But I will certainly not tell you."

"*You* know?"

"He came to see me four months ago." Warfield wet his lips. "He—had a word or two to say about you. He was apparently suffering from some sort of a delusion. He explained carefully to me that he had no use for you, that there was no longer any reason for me to want to... to kill him, and... you don't seem surprised."

"He told me about that the last time I saw him," she said, shaken.

"You *knew* about that?"

"*Did* you try to kill him, Mel?"

"It was an accident, Peg. Really it was. And he compensated for it. Splendidly. I don't know how he found out about it—the man's incredibly sharp."

Peg felt turned to ice, and her voice was ice as she said, "It was the post-pituitrin excess, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but that couldn't have anything to do with this Voisier business. I tell you it was an accident. I didn't realize that I'd made a mistake in the solutions until after he'd left the office that particular day. It didn't affect his progress, except temporarily; and when he stopped his treatments, he was practically normal." He stopped and wet his lips again, and then suddenly ran to her. "Peg! Peg, what's the matter?" For she had suddenly turned white, and was rocking on her feet. He put an arm about her shoulders and led her back to her chair. She slumped down, shook herself, and looked up at him with a swift, scornful glance that was almost a physical force.

"How do you *dare* to call yourself a doctor?" she breathed. She opened her handbag with shaking fingers and took out the photograph Voisier had given her. She handed it to him without glancing at it. "Look at that and tell me he's not still glandular," she said.

He looked, and then stared. "It's Robin, all right," he said, and then, with a ghost of his old grin, "Getting to be quite a glamour boy in his old age, hm-m-m?"

"He is? Have you noticed why?"

"What am I supposed to look for?"

"Look at his jaw."

"Nice jaw."

"You don't remember Robin. You don't remember that round baby face?"

"I wasn't in love with the man," Warfield said nastily.

"He didn't have much jaw," she said, her voice quivering. "Can't you see what's happening? That used to be *Robin*, with the charming, chinless face!"

Warfield's breath sucked sharply. He walked over to the window and for a long moment stood with his back to her, staring out.

"What do you diagnose, doctor?" she said acidly.

"Ac—" he began, and couldn't make it. He swallowed and coughed. He cleared his throat. He said, "Acromegaly."

"Acromegaly," she echoed sweetly. "His pre-pituitary has gone wild, he's suffering from hypertrophy of the chin and probably of the hands, and you say he's not glandular." Suddenly she was across the room, had spun him about and was clutching his lapels. "What are you going to *do*? Are you going to let him go on doing whatever crazy thing a glandular imbalance is forcing him to, so that he'll be killed by Voisier? Or are you going to stand by while he gets around Voisier some way and then turns into a monster and dies?"

"I have to think," said Warfield. "Oh, Peg. Peg—"

"You can't think," she said wildly. "Why do you suppose Voisier stole that book? With what he knows, and with what that book contains, he'll track Robin down in a matter of hours! Do you really know where he is?"

"Yes," Warfield whispered. "A piece of his strange kind of braggadocio. He was defiant, and yet he seemed afraid of me. He promised to keep in touch with me whatever he did, so that if I ever wanted to... kill him I could come and face him with whatever it was. He swore to keep away from you. He has moved four times since he stopped taking the treatments, and each time he has called or written to give me the address. I don't know why." Warfield raised his eyes to hers. "I don't know anything about any of this," he said brokenly. "It's all mad. We're being played like chessmen, Peg, by a lunatic against a devil."

"Is he in town?"

Warfield nodded.

"Well?"

Warfield looked at her. She was a statue now, a dark-crowned bloodless figure. "I'll go with you."

"I'll see him alone."

"I'll go with you all the same, then, and wait."

"Very well. Only hurry."

~ * ~

Warfield slipped out of his laboratory smock and into a coat without another word. Outside the office he stopped and said, "Peg...please—" but she walked steadily down to the elevators, and he shrugged and followed her.

They caught a cab almost immediately, and Warfield gave the driver a Riverside address. Peg sat staring blindly ahead of her. Mel slumped in a corner and looked at his wrists, dully.

Peg broke the silence only once—to ask in a deceptively conversational voice if anything had been learned that she didn't know about the treatment of acromegaly. Warfield shook his head vaguely. She made a sound, then, like a sob, but when Warfield looked at her she still sat, dry-eyed, staring at the driver's coat collar.

They pulled up in front of one of those stately old cell-blocks of apartment houses that perch on the slanted, winding approaches to the Drive. They got out, and a doorman, a bit over life-size, swung open both leaves of a huge plate glass and bronze door to let them into the building.

"Mr. Wenzell," said Warfield to a wax-faced desk clerk.

"What?" said Peg.

"He... it amuses him to use your name," said Warfield, as if he were speaking out of a mouthful of sal ammoniac.

"Mr. Wenzell is out," said the clerk. "Can I take a message?"

"You can take a message right to Mr. Wenzell, who is not out," said Warfield. "Tell him his two doctors are here and must see him."

"Tell him," said Peg clearly, "that Margareta Wenzell is here."

"Yes, Mrs. Wenzell," said the clerk with alacrity.

"Why must you make this painful as well as unpleasant?" gritted Warfield. Peg smiled with her teeth and said nothing.

The clerk returned from the phone looking as if he had learned how to pronounce a word he had only seen chalked on fences before. "Fourteen. Suite C. The elevators—"

"Yes," growled Warfield. He took Peg's elbow and walked her over to the elevators as if she were a window-dummy.

"You're hurting me."

"I'm sorry. I'm—a little upset. Do you have to go through with this weird business?"

She didn't answer. Instead she said, "Stay down here, Mel."

"I will not!"

She looked at him, and said a thousand words—hot-acid ones—in the sweep of her eyes across his face.

"Well," he said, "all right. All right. Tell you what. I'll give you fifteen minutes and then I'm coming up." He paused. "Why are you looking at me like that? What are you thinking about?"

"That corny line about the fifteen minutes. I was thinking about how much better Robin would deliver it."

"I think I hate you," said Warfield hoarsely, quietly.

Peg stepped into the elevator. "That was *much* better done," she, said, and pushed the button which closed the doors.

On the fourteenth floor she walked to the door marked "C" and touched the bell. The door swung open instantly.

"Come in!" grated a voice. There was no one standing in the doorway at all. She hesitated. Then she saw that someone was peering through the crack at the hinge side of the door.

"Come in, Peg!" said the voice. It was used gently now, though it was still gravelly. She stepped through and into the room. The door closed behind her. Robin was there, with a gun. He put it away and held out both hands to her. "Peg! It's *so* good to see, you!"

"Hello, Robin," she whispered. Just what gesture she was about to make she would never know for she became suddenly conscious of someone else in the room. She wheeled. There was a girl on the chesterfield, who rose as Peg faced her. The girl didn't look, somehow, like a person. She looked like too many bright colors.

"Janice," said Robin. It wasn't an introduction. Robin just said the one word and moved his head slightly. The girl came slowly across the room toward him, passed him, went to the hall closet and took out a coat and a hat and a handbag with a long strap. She draped the coat over her arm and opened the door; and then she paused and shot

Peg a look of such utter hatred that Peg gasped. The door closed and she was alone with Robin English.

"Is *that* the best you can do," she said, without trying to keep the loathing out of her voice.

"The very best," said Robin equably. "Janice is utterly stupid. She has no conversation, particularly when I want none. What she has to recommend her, you can see. She is a great convenience."

A silly, colorful little thought crept into Peg's mind. She looked around the room.

"You're looking for a smorgasbord tray," chuckled Robin, sinking into an easy-chair and regarding her with amusement. "Why won't you look at me?"

Finally, she did.

He was taller, a very little. He was much handsomer. She saw that, and it was as if something festering within her had been lanced.

There was pain—but oh! the blessed relief of pressure! His face was—*Oh yes*, said Dr. Wenzell to herself, *pre-pituitary. Acromegaly*. She said, "Let me see your hands."

He raised his eyebrows, and put his hands in his pockets. He shook his head.

~ * ~

Peg turned on her heel and went to the hall closet. She dipped into the pockets of an overcoat, and then into a topcoat, until she found a pair of gloves. She came back into the room, examining them carefully. Robin got to his feet.

"As I thought," she said. She held up the left glove. The seam between the index and second fingers was split. And they were new gloves. She threw them aside.

"So you know about that. You would, of course."

"Robin, I don't think this would have happened if you had continued your treatments."

He slowly took out his hands and stared at them. They were lumpy, and the fingers were too long, and a little crooked. "A phenomenal hypertrophy of the bony processes, according to the books," he said. "A development that generally takes years."

"There's nothing normal about this case. There never was," said Peg, her voice thick with pity. "Why did you let it go like this?"

"I got interested in what I was doing." Suddenly he got to his feet and began to stride restlessly about the room. She tried not to look at him, at his altered face, with the heavy, coarse jaw. She strained to catch the remnants of his mellow voice through the harshness she heard now.

He said, "It was all right during those months when I wrote 'Too Humorous To Mention' and 'Festoon' and invented the back out drills and all that. But everything got too easy. I could do anything I wanted to do. All of the things I had ever dreamed about doing I could do—and so easily! It was awful. I tried harder things, and they came easy too. I couldn't seem to apply myself on anything that couldn't be seen or

touched, though perhaps if I had been able to go into higher mathematics or something purely abstract like that, I wouldn't be—well, what I am now.

"I began to be afraid. The one thing I couldn't whip was Mel Warfield. I was afraid of him. He hated me. I don't think he knew it, but he hated me. I wanted you. There was a time when I could have—but I was afraid of him. He had too much power over me. Too much thumb-pressure on that hypodermic of his, or the addition of some little drop of something in a test tube, and he could do anything he wanted with me. I'd never been afraid for myself before. Maybe it was part of that maturity you were talking about."

"I imagine it was."

Robin sat down heavily, clasped his hands, stared at them, put them in his pockets again. "I was glad to take the risk, mind you. It wasn't that. Anything in my condition that was suddenly too much for his skill to cope with—any accident like that couldn't frighten me. It was knowing that he hated me, and somewhere underneath he wanted me out of the way—preferably dead. Anyway—I got out. I kept him informed as to where I was, because I was ready for him. I was ready to kill him first if he came after me. But no hypodermics. No solutions. So—I went on with my work, and then it all got old, right away. I could do anything I wanted to do. Peg—can you imagine how horrible that can be? Never to know you might fail? To have such a clear conception of what the public wants in a play or a poem or a machine that you can make it and know from the start that it will be a success? I knew a man once, who had photography for a hobby. He got to be so good that he stopped printing his negatives. He'd *know* they were perfect. He pulled 'em out of the hypo and dried 'em and filed 'em. Often he sold them without looking at them. It killed his hobby. He took up electronics, which was more his speed. But I'm that way about everything."

"You got bored."

"Bored. Oh, Peg, if you only knew the things I tried! Finally I dropped out of sight. I got a kick out of the papers then. For a while. Know what I was doing when the whole world thought I was doing something fantastic? I was reading. I was holed up in the back room of my Westchester place with all the books I had ever wanted to read. That's all. They let me get out of myself—for a while. For a while." He stopped and wiped sweat off his lip. "But it happened again. It got so that a page or two would tell me an author's style, a paragraph or two told me his plot. Technical books the same; once I got the basics the whole thing was there. Or maybe I thought it was. Maybe I just lost interest. It was as if I were being pursued by a monster called Understanding. I understood everything I looked at or thought about. There was nothing I could see or say or do or read or think about where I couldn't predict the end result. I didn't want to give anything any more, either, the way I did with the Whirltoy. Do you know what I wanted? I wanted to fail. I didn't think I could. I don't think so now. If I purposely botched a thing up, that would be a success of a sort. So for a long time I did nothing."

He fell silent. Peg waited patiently. She had had dozens of questions to ask, and half of them were already answered.

"Then I began to think about Voisier. You know Voisier?"

She nodded. "Robin—wait a minute. You hate Voisier. I think you're trying to ruin him. But you hated Mel Warfield. Why didn't you try to—"

"Warfield? By then, he wasn't big enough. Voisier was the only man I ever met whom I thought could beat me." He sighed. "Now I think he won't do it." And suddenly, Robin smiled. The smile sat badly on that heavy face. "Peg, there's an alternative to unquenchable, inevitable success. That is to play a game in such a way that you never can know how it ends. That's what I'm doing."

"Voisier's trying to find you."

"Is he now? How do you know?" For the first time Robin's face and voice showed real animation. All the twisted ravings of the past few minutes had come out of him like toothpaste out of a tube."

~ * ~

Peg told him about Voisier's calling the hospital, and what had happened at Lelalo's, where he had stolen the case history.

"Good," said Robin. "Oh, fine. This means that things are shaping up better than I thought. Faster. Uh—excuse me a moment."

He went to the desk in the corner, sat down, and began to write rapidly.

"This maturity thing," he said, phrasing between the lines he was writing, "I think you and Warfield overlooked something. I'm the patient. Do doctors listen to patients?"

"They do."

"You realize, don't you, that humans die before they're fully mature?"

"You mean in the sense that their bones do not completely ossify?"

"That's it. And there's a psychological factor, too." He paused, thought a while, wrote for a moment, and then went on. "Puppies and kittens and lion cubs—they're terribly foolish, in a pretty kind of way. They have their mock battles and they chase their balls of paper and get wound up in milady's yarn, don't they?"

"They do, but—"

"Humans, with few exceptions, *always* are puppyish, to a degree. There is even a parallel in the proportions of head to body, even allowing for the larger brain pan of *homo sapiens*. An adult human being has proportions comparable to a half-grown colt or dog in that respect. Now—did you ever hear of a full-grown gorilla acting kittenish? Or a bison bull, or a lion? Life for them is a serious business—one of sex, hunger, self-preservation and a peculiar, 'don't tread on me' kind of possessiveness.

"Peg—let's face it. That's what's happened to me. I can't go back. I don't see how I can go on this way. I'm mature now. But I'm mature like an animal. However, I can't stop being human. A human being has to have one thing—he has to be happy, or he has to think he knows what happiness is. Happiness for me is unthinkable. There is nothing for me to work toward. All of my achievements are here"—he tapped his head—"as good as done when I think of them, because I know I can do them. No goal,

no aspiration—the only thing left is that little game of mine, the one where, according to the rules, I can't ever really know the result."

"Voisier?"

"Voisier." He picked up the phone, dialed rapidly. He listened. "Come on back," he said. He hung up. "That was Janice. She'll be here in fifteen minutes. You'd better go, Peg."

The door buzzer began to shrill. Robin leaped across the room; the gun was in his hand again. He opened the door and stood behind it, peering out at the hinge side as he had before. Mel walked in.

"Peg—are you all right?"

"A little bewildered."

"Of course she's all right," said Robin in a tone that insulted both of them. Mel stared at him. Robin went over to the desk, picked up the sheets he had written and, folding them, handed them to Peg. "Promise me you won't read these until you get back to Mel's office."

"I promise."

Mel spoke up, suddenly—and with great effort. "English—You know what that condition is?" He indicated Robin's face.

"He does, Mel," said Peg. "Don't—"

Warfield pushed her hand off his arm impatiently. "Robin, I'm willing to do what I can to arrest it, and there's a chance... not much, you understand—"

Robin interrupted him with a sudden, thunderous guffaw—quite the most horrible sound Peg had ever heard. "Why sure, Mel, sure. I'll be a bit busy this afternoon, but say tomorrow, if we can get together?"

"Robin!" said Peg joyfully. "You *will*?"

"Why not?" He chuckled. "Don't make an appointment today. Call me tomorrow." He took the note back from Peg, and scribbled on it. "Here's the number. Now go on. Beat it, you two. Maybe I ought to say something like 'Bless you, my children' but I—Oh, beat it."

Peg found herself in the hall and then at the door. "But Robin—" she said weakly; but by then the door was closed and Mel was guiding her into the elevator.

~ * ~

At Mel's office a few minutes later, she unfolded Robin's note with trembling fingers. It read:

Peg dear,

Here is where a mature human being gets kittenish, if he has to kill himself in the attempt.

What I have been doing to Voisier is to drive him crazy. He's a bad apple, Peg. Very few people realize just how bad. I knew today would be the payoff when you told me how he had stolen the book and all that. He played you for bait. I told you he

was almost as clever as I am. He knew that if he could worry you enough, you'd find me some way. My guess is that he simply had you followed until you found me. Then he'd wait until you had gone—he's waiting as I write this. When he's sure there are no witnesses, he'll come and finish his business with me.

This is my game, Peg. The only one I can think of where I'll never know who won. If you call the police about now, chances are they'll find him here. Make it an anonymous tip, and *don't* use this note as evidence of any kind. Voisier is going to get his; Janice is here and besides, the place is equipped with a very fine wire recorder. I'll handle all the dialogue. I'm sorry about all those dope fiends I had to supply to undercut his rotten racket. Take care of 'em.

And down in the corner, where he had ostensibly written his phone number, were these words: "Sorry I can't keep that appointment. The condition is already arrested."

Peg phoned the police. The police found Robin English dead. Robin English left everything he had to Peg and Warfield equally. And in due course Voisier was electrocuted for the murder. The recording found in his apartment, coupled with the testimony of one Janice Brooks, was quite sufficient. Voisier's defense, that Robin was torturing him, held no water; for where is a law that specifies mental torture as grounds for justifiable homicide?

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