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Introduction

Since one of the tasks of a science-fiction writer is to create richly detailed worlds of the imagination, the short novel form is unusually well suited to the science fiction medium. A short story, if it is to be cohere within its brief compass, can give no more than a single vivid glimpse of the invented world; a full-length novel often becomes so engrossed in the necessities of plot and counterplot that the background becomes obscured. But in the intermediate length, the novella of twenty to thirty thousand words, there is ample space for development of ideas and themes, without the special technical problems imposed by the novel form.

From the point of view of commercial publishing practices, the novella is an awkward item. It is usually too short to stand alone as an independent book (without the fraudulences wide margins and heavily leaded type) and yet so long that it does not fit readily into the anthologies of short fiction that are so common in the science-fiction field. Thus, some of the finest works of science fiction have languished unreprinted since their original magazine appearances years ago, and others have been reprinted only in the bulky anthologies of the 1950s, when printing costs were not what they are today.

Of the six stories in this collection, two are new to book form, one has been unavailable for nearly twenty years, and the other three have come and gone in various ephemeral editions. I hope by bringing them together here to demonstrate the versatility and range of the science-fiction novella, and to restore to print some remarkably challenging and exciting stories.

—ROBERT SILVERBERG

"Jack" Chandler is the British-born skipper of a cargo vessel that plies the Australian coast. Since about 1944 he has whiled away the long hours of maritime duty by writing science fiction, much of it, unsurprisingly, dealing with the space-going "navy" of the future. *Giant Killer* was one of his first stories, and though perhaps it is no compliment to a writer of more than a quarter of a century's standing to say so—it is almost certainly his best work, an astonishingly compelling realization of a truly alien society.

Giant Killer
A. Bertram Chandler

Shrick should have died before his baby eyes had opened on his world. Shrick would have died, but Weena, his mother, was determined that he, alone of all her children, should live. Three previous times since her mating with Skreer had she borne, and on each occasion the old, gray Sterret, Judge of the Newborn, had condemned her young as Different Ones.

Weena had no objection to the Law when it did not affect her or hers. She, as much as any other member of the Tribe, keenly enjoyed the feasts of fresh, tasty meat following the ritual slaughter of the Different Ones. But when those sacrificed were the fruit of her own womb it wasn't the same.

It was quiet in the cave where Weena awaited the coming of her lord. Quiet, that is, save for the sound of her breathing and an occasional plaintive, mewling cry from the newborn child. And even these sounds were deadened by the soft spongy walls and ceiling.

She sensed the coming of Skreer long before his actual arrival. She anticipated his first question and, as he entered the cave, said quietly, "One. A male."

"A male?" Skreer radiated approval. Then she felt his mood change to one of questioning, of doubt. "Is it . . . he—?"

"Yes."

Skreer caught the tiny, warm being in his arms. There was no light, but he, like all his race, was accustomed to the dark. His fingers told him all that he needed to know. The child was hairless. The legs were too straight. And—this was worst of all—the head was a great, bulging dome.

"Skreer!" Weena's voice was anxious. "Do you—?"

"There is no doubt. Sterret will condemn it as a Different One."

"But—"

"There is no hope." Weena sensed that her mate shuddered, heard the faint, silken rustle of his fur as he did so. "His head! He is like the Giants!"

The mother sighed. It was hard, but she knew the Law. And yet—This was her fourth childbearing, and she was never to know, perhaps, what it was to watch and wait with mingled pride and terror while her sons set out with the other young males to raid the Giants' territory, to bring back spoils from the great Cave-of-Food, the Place-of-Green-Growing-Things or, even, precious scraps of shiny metal from the Place-of-Life-That-Is-Not-Life.

She clutched at a faint hope.

"His head is like a Giant's? Can it be, do you think, that the Giants are Different Ones? I have heard it said."

"What if they are?"

"Only this. Perhaps he will grow to be a Giant. Perhaps he will fight the other Giants for us, his own people. Perhaps—"

"Perhaps Sterret will let him live, you mean." Skreer made the short, unpleasant sound that passed among his people for a laugh. "No, Weena. He must die. And it is long since we feasted—"

"But—"

"Enough. Or do *you* wish to provide meat for the Tribe also? I may wish to find a mate who will bear

me sturdy sons, not monsters!"

The Place-of-Meeting was almost deserted when Skreer and Weena, she with Shrick clutched tightly in her arms, entered. Two more couples were there, each with newborn. One of the mothers was holding two babies, each of whom appeared to be normal. The other had three, her mate holding one of them.

Weena recognized her as Teeza, and flashed her a little half smile of sympathy when she saw that the child carried by Teeza's mate would certainly be condemned by Sterret when he choose to appear. For it was, perhaps, even more revolting than her own Different One, having two hands growing from the end of each arm.

Skreer approached one of the other males, he unburdened with a child.

"How long have you been waiting?" he asked.

"Many heartbeats. We—"

The guard stationed at the doorway through which light entered from Inside hissed a warning:

"Quiet! A Giant is coming!"

The mothers clutched their children to them yet more tightly, their fur standing on end with superstitious dread. They knew that if they remained silent there was no danger, that even if they should betray themselves by some slight noise there was no immediate peril. It was not size along that made the Giants dreaded, it was the supernatural powers that they were known to possess. The food-that-kills had slain many an unwary member of the Tribe, also their fiendishly cunning devices that crushed and managled any of the People unwise enough to reach greedily for the savory morsels left exposed on a kind of little platform. Although there were those who averred that, in the latter case, the risk was well worth it, for the yellow grains from the many bags in the Cave-of-Food were as monotonous as they were nourishing.

"The Giant has passed!"

Before those in the Place-of-Meeting could resume their talk, Sterret drifted out from the entrance of his cave. He held in his right hand his wand of office, a straight staff of the hard, yet soft, stuff dividing the territory of the People from that of the Giants. It was tipped with a sharp point of metal.

He was old, was Sterret.

Those who were themselves grandparents had heard their grandparents speak of him. For generations he had survived attacks by young males jealous of his prerogatives as chief, and the more rare assaults by parents displeased by his rulings as Judge of the Newborn. In this latter case, however, he had had nothing to fear, for on those isolated occasions the Tribe had risen as one and torn the offenders to pieces.

Behind Sterret came his personal guards and then, floating out from the many cave entrances, the bulk of the Tribe. There had been no need so summon them; they *knew*.

The chief, deliberate and unhurried, took his position in the center of the Place-of-Meeting. Without orders, the crowd made way for the parents and their newborn. Weena winced as she saw their gloating eyes fixed on Shrick's revolting baldness, his misshapen skull. She knew what the verdict would be.

She hoped that the newborn of the others would be judged before her own, although that would merely delay the death of her own child by the space of a very few heartbeats. She hoped—

"Weena! Bring the child to me that I may see and pass judgment!"

The chief extended his skinny arms, took the child from the mother's reluctant hands. His little, deep-set eyes gleamed at the thought of the draught of rich, red blood that he was soon to enjoy. And yet he was reluctant to lose the savor of a single heartbeat of the mother's agony. Perhaps she could be provoked into an attack—

"You insult us," he said slowly, "by bringing forth *this*!" He held Shrick, who squalled feebly, at arm's length. "Look, oh People, at this *thing* the miserable Weena has brought for my judgment!"

"He has a Giant's head." Weena's timid voice was barely audible. "Perhaps—"

"—his father was a Giant!"

A tittering laugh rang through the Place-of-Meeting.

"No. But I have heard it said that perhaps the Giants, or their fathers and mothers, were Different Ones. And—"

"Who said that?"

"Strela."

"Yes, Strela the Wise. Who, in his wisdom, ate largely of the food-that-kills!"

Again the hateful laughter rippled through the assembly.

Sterret raised the hand that held the spear, shortening his grip on the haft. His face puckered as he tasted in anticipation the bright bubble of blood that would soon well from the throat of the Different One. Weena screamed. With one hand she snatched her child from the hateful grasp of the chief, with the other she seized his spear.

Sterret was old, and generations of authority had made him careless. Yet, old as he was, he evaded the vicious thrust aimed at him by the mother. He had no need to cry orders, from all sides the People converged upon the rebel.

Already horrified by her action, Weena knew that she could expect no mercy. And yet life, even as lived by the Tribe, was sweet. Gaining a purchase from the gray, spongy floor of the Place-of-Meeting she jumped. The impetus of her leap carried her up to the doorway through which streamed the light from Inside. The guard there was unarmed, for of what avail would a puny spear be against the Giants? He fell back before the menace of Weena's bright blade and bared teeth. And then Weena was Inside.

She could, she knew, hold the doorway indefinitely against pursuit. But this was Giant country. In an agony of indecision she clung to the rim of the door with one hand, the other still holding the spear. A face appeared in the opening, and then vanished, streaming with blood. It was only later that she realized that it had been Skreer's.

She became acutely conscious of the fierce light beating around and about her, of the vast spaces on all sides of a body that was accustomed to the close quarters of the caves and tunnels. She felt naked and, in spite of her spear, utterly defenseless.

Then that which she dreaded came to pass.

Behind her, she sensed the approach of two of the Giants. Then she could hear their breathing, and the low, infinitely menacing rumble of their voices as they talked one with the other. They hadn't seen her—of that she was certain, but it was only a matter of heartbeats before they did so. The open doorway, with the certainty of death that lay beyond, seemed infinitely preferable to the terror of the unknown. Had it been only her life at stake she would have returned to face the righteous wrath of her chief, her mate and her Tribe.

Fighting down her blind panic, she forced herself to a clarity of thought normally foreign to her nature. If she yielded to instinct, if she fled madly before the approaching Giants, she would be seen. Her only hope was to remain utterly still. Skreer, and others of the males who had been on forays Inside, had told her that the Giants, careless in their size and power, more often than not did not notice the People unless they made some betraying movement.

The Giants were very close.

Slowly, cautiously, she turned her head.

She could see them now, two enormous figures floating through the air with easy arrogance. They had not seen her, and she knew that they would not see her unless she made some sudden movement to attract their attention. Yet it was hard not to yield to the impulse to dive back into the doorway to the Place-of-Meeting, there to meet certain death at the hands of the outraged Tribe. It was harder still to fight the urge to relinquish her hold on the rim of the doorway and flee—anywhere—in screaming panic.

But she held on.

The Giants passed.

The dull rumble of their voices died in the distance, their acrid, unpleasant odor, of which she had heard but never before experienced, diminished. Weena dared to raise her head once more.

In the confused, terrified welter of her thoughts one idea stood out with dreadful clarity. Her only hope of survival, pitifully slim though it was, lay in following the Giants. There was no time to lose, already

she could hear the rising clamor of voices as those in the caves sensed that the Giants had passed. She relinquished her hold on the edge of the door and floated slowly up.

When Weena's head came into sudden contact with something hard she screamed. For long seconds she waited, eyes close shut in terror, for the doom that would surely descend upon her. But nothing happened. The pressure upon the top of her skull neither increased nor diminished.

Timidly, she opened her eyes.

As far as she could see, in two directions, stretched a long, straight shaft or rod. Its thickness was that of her own body, and it was made, or covered with, a material not altogether strange to the mother. It was like the ropes woven by the females with fibers from the Place-of-Green-Growing-Things—but incomparably finer. Stuff such as this was brought back sometimes by the males from their expeditions. It had been believed, once, that it was the fur of the Giants, but now it was assumed that it was made by them for their own purposes.

On three sides of the shaft was the glaring emptiness so terrifying to the people of the caves. On the fourth side was a flat, shiny surface. Weena found that she could insinuate herself into the space between the two without discomfort. She discovered, also, that with comforting solidity at her back and belly she could make reasonably fast progress along the shaft. It was only when she looked to either side that she felt a return of her vertigo. She soon learned not to look.

It is hard to estimate the time taken by her journey in a world where time was meaningless. Twice she had to stop and feed Shrick—fearful lest his hungry wailings betray their presence either to Giants or any of the People who might—although this was highly improbable—have followed her. Once she felt the shaft vibrating, and froze to its matte surface in utter and abject terror. A Giant passed, pulling himself rapidly along with his two hands. Had either of those hands fallen upon Weena it would have been the finish. For many heartbeats after his passing she clung there limp and helpless, scarcely daring to breathe.

It seemed that she passed through places of which she had heard the males talk. This may have been so—but she had no means of knowing. For the world of the People, with its caves and tunnels, was familiar territory, while that of the Giants was known only in relation to the doorways through which a daring explorer could enter.

Weena was sick and faint with hunger and thirst when, at last, the long shaft led her into a place where she could smell the tantalizing aroma of food. She stopped, looked in all directions. But here, as everywhere in this alien country, the light was too dazzling for her untrained eyes. She could see, dimly, vast shapes beyond her limited understanding. She could see no Giants, nor anything that moved.

Cautiously, keeping a tight hold on the rough surface of the shaft, she edged out to the side away from the polished, flat surface along which she had been traveling. Back and forth her head swung, her sensitive nostrils dilated. The bright light confused her, so she shut her eyes. Once again her nose sought the source of the savory smell, swinging ever more slowly as the position was determined with reasonable accuracy.

She was loathe to abandon the security of her shaft, but hunger overruled all other considerations. Orienting her body, she jumped. With a thud she brought up against another flat surface. Her free hand found a projection, to which she clung. This she almost relinquished as it turned. Then a crack appeared, with disconcerting suddenness, before her eyes, widening rapidly. Behind this opening was black, welcome darkness. Weena slipped inside, grateful for relief from the glaring light of the Inside. It wasn't until later that she realized that this was a door such as was made by her own people in the Barrier, but a door of truly gigantic proportions. But all that mattered at first was the cool, refreshing shade.

Then she took stock of her surroundings.

Enough light came in through the barely open doorway for her to see that she was in a cave. It was the wrong shape for a cave, it is true, having flat, perfectly regular walls and floor and ceiling. At the far end, each in its own little compartment, were enormous, dully shining globes. From them came a smell that almost drove the famishing mother frantic.

Yet she held back. She knew that smell. It was that of fragments of food that had been brought into the caves, won by stealth and guile from the killing platforms of the Giants. Was this a killing platform?

She wracked her brains to recall the poor description of these devices given by the males, decided that this, after all, must be a Cave-of-Food. Relinquishing her hold of Shrick and Sterret's spear she made for the nearest globe.

At first she tried to pull it from its compartment, but it appeared to be held. But it didn't matter. Bringing her face against the surface of the sphere she buried her teeth in its thin skin. There was flesh beneath the skin, and blood—a thin, sweet faintly acid juice, Skreer had, at times, promised her a share of this food when next he won some from a killing platform, but that promise had never been kept. And now Weena had a whole cave of this same food all to herself.

Gorged to repletion, she started back to pick up the now loudly complaining Shrick. He had been playing with the spear and had cut himself on the sharp point. But it was the spear that Weena snatched, swinging swiftly to defend herself and her child. For a voice said, understandable, but with an oddly slurred intonation, "Who are you? What are you doing in our country?"

It was one of the People, a male. He was unarmed, otherwise it is certain that he would never have asked questions. Even so, Weena knew that the slightest relaxation of vigilance on her part would bring a savage, tooth-and-nail attack.

She tightened her grasp on the spear, swung it so that its point was directed at the stranger.

"I am Weena," she said, "of the Tribe of Sterret."

"Of the Tribe of Sterret? But the Tribe of Sessa holds the Ways between our countries."

"I came Inside. But who are you?"

"Tekka. I am one of Skarro's people. You are a spy."

"So I brought my child with me."

Tekka was looking at Shrick.

"I see," he said at last. "A Different One, But how did you get through Sessa's country?"

"I didn't. I came Inside."

It was obvious that Tekka refused to believe her story.

"You must come with me," he said, "to Skarro. He will judge."

"And if I come?"

"For the Different One, death. For you, I do not know. But we have too many females in our Tribe already."

"This says that I will not come." Weena brandished her spear.

She would not have defied a male of her own tribe thus—but this Teeka was not of her people. And she had always been brought up to believe that even a female of the Tribe of Sterrett was superior to a male—even a chief—of any alien community.

"The Giants will find you here." Tekka's voice showed an elaborate unconcern. Then— "That is a fine spear."

"Yes. It belonged to Sterret. With it I wounded my mate. Perhaps he is dead."

The male looked at her with a new respect. If her story were true—this was a female to be handled with caution. Besides—

"Would you give it to me?"

"Yes." Weena laughed nastily. There was no mistaking her meaning.

"Not that way. Listen. Not long ago in our Tribe, many mothers, two whole hands of mothers with Different Ones, defied the Judge of the Newborn. They fled along the tunnels, and live outside the Place-of-Little-Lights. Skarro has not yet led a war party against them. Why, I do not know, but there is always a Giant in that place. It may be that Skarro fears that a fight behind the Barrier would warn the Giants of our presence—"

"And you will lead me there?"

"Yes. In return for the spear."

Weena was silent for the space of several heartbeats. As long as Tekka preceded her she would be safe. It never occurred to her that she could let the other fulfill his part of the bargain, and then refuse him his payment. Her people were a very primitive race.

"I will come with you," she said.

"It is well."

Tekka's eyes dwelt long and lovingly upon the fine spear. Skarro would not be chief much longer.

"First," he said, "we must pull what you have left of the good-to-eat-ball into our tunnel. Then I must shut the door lest a Giant should come—"

Together they hacked and tore the sphere to pieces. There was a doorway at the rear of one of the little compartments, now empty. Through this they pushed and pulled their fragrant burden. First Weena went into the tunnel, carrying Shrick and the spear, then Tekka. He pushed the round door into place, where it fitted with no sign that the Barrier had been broken. He pushed home two crude locking bars.

"Follow me," he ordered the mother.

The long journey through the caves and tunnels was heaven after the Inside. Here there was no light—or, at worst, only a feeble glimmer from small holes and cracks in the Barrier. It seemed that Tekka was leading her along the least frequented ways and tunnels of Skarro's country, for they met none of his people. Nevertheless, Weena's perceptions told her that she was in densely populated territory. From all around her beat the warm, comforting waves of the routine, humdrum life of the People. She knew that in snug caves males, females and children were living in cozy intimacy. Briefly, she regretted having thrown away all this for the ugly, hairless bundle in her arms. But she could never return to her own Tribe, and should she wish to throw in her lot with this alien community the alternatives would be death or slavery.

"Careful!" hissed Tekka. "We are approaching Their country."

"You will—?"

"Not me. They will kill me. Just keep straight along this tunnel and you will find Them. Now, give me the spear."

"But—"

"*You* are safe. There is your pass." He lightly patted the uneasy, squirming Shrick. "Give me the spear, and I will go."

Reluctantly, Weena handed over the weapon. Without a word Tekka took it. Then he was gone. Briefly the mother saw him in the dim light that, in this part of the tunnel, filtered through the Barrier—a dim, gray figure rapidly losing itself in the dim grayness. She felt very lost and lonely and frightened. But the die was cast. Slowly, cautiously, she began to creep along the tunnel.

When They found her she screamed. For many heartbeats she had sensed their hateful presence, had felt that beings even more alien than the Giants were closing in on her. Once or twice she called, crying that she came in peace, that she was the mother of a Different One. But not even echo answered her, for the soft, spongy tunnel walls deadened the shrill sound of her voice. And the silence that was not silence was, if that were possible, more menacing than before.

Without warning the stealthy terror struck. Weena fought with the courage of desperation, but she was overcome by sheer weight of numbers. Shrick, protesting feebly, was torn from her frantic grasp. Hands—and surely there were far too many hands for the number of her assailants—pinned her arms to her sides, held her ankles in a viselike grip. No longer able to struggle, she looked at her captors. Then she screamed again. Mercifully, the dim light spared her the full horror of their appearance, but what she saw would have been enough to haunt her dreams to her dying day had she escaped.

Softly, almost caressingly, the hateful hands ran over her body with disgusting intimacy.

Then—"She is a Different One."

She allowed herself to hope.

"And the child?"

"Two-Tails has newborn. She can nurse him."

And as the sharp blade found her throat Weena had time to regret most bitterly ever having left her snug, familiar world. It was not so much the forfeit of her own life—that she had sacrificed when she defied Sterret—it was the knowledge that Shrick, instead of meeting a clean death at the hands of his

own people, would live out his life among these unclean monstrosities.

Then there was a sharp pain and a feeling of utter helplessness as the tide of her life swiftly ebbed—and the darkness that Weena had loved so well closed about her for evermore.

No-Fur—who, at his birth, had been named Shrick—fidgetted impatiently at his post midway along what was known to his people as Skarro's Tunnel. It was time that Long-Nose came to relieve him. Many heartbeats had passed since he had heard the sounds on the other side of the Barrier proclaiming that the Giant in the Place-of-Little-Lights had been replaced by another of his kind. It was a mystery what the Giants did there—but the New People had come to recognize a strange regularity in the actions of the monstrous beings, and to regulate their time accordingly.

No-Fur tightened his grip on his spear—of Barrier material it was, roughly sharpened at one end—as he sensed the approach of somebody along the tunnel, coming from the direction of Tekka's country. It could be a Different One bearing a child who would become one of the New People, it could be attack. But, somehow, the confused impressions that his mind received did not bear out either of these assumptions.

No-Fur shrank against the wall of the tunnel, his body sinking deep into the spongy material. Now he could dimly see the intruder—a solitary form flitting furtively through the shadows. His sense of smell told him that it was a female. Yet he was certain that she had no child with her. He tensed himself to attack as soon as the stranger should pass his hiding place.

Surprisingly, she stopped.

"I come in peace," she said. "I am one of you. I am," here she paused a little, "one of the New People."

Shrick made no reply, no betraying movement. It was barely possible, he knew, that this female might be possessed of abnormally keen eyesight. It was even more likely that she had smelled him out. But then—how was it that she had known the name by which the New People called themselves? To the outside world they were Different Ones—and had the stranger called herself such she would at once have proclaimed herself an alien whose life was forfeit.

"You do not know," the voice came again, "how it is that I called myself by the proper name. In my own Tribe I am called a Different One—"

"Then how is it," No-Fur's voice was triumphant, "that you were allowed to live?"

"Come to me! No, leave your spear. Now come!"

No-Fur stuck his weapon into the soft cavern wall. Slowly, almost fearfully, he advanced to where the female was waiting. He could see her better now—and she seemed no different from those fugitive mothers of Different Ones—at whose slaughter he had so often assisted. The body was well proportioned and covered with fine, silky fur. The head was well shaped. Physically she was so normal as to seem repugnant to the New People.

And yet—No-Fur found himself comparing her with the females of his own Tribe, to the disadvantage of the latter. Emotion rather than reason told him that the hatred inspired by the sight of an ordinary body was the result of a deep-rooted feeling of inferiority rather than anything else. And he wanted this stranger.

"No," she said slowly, "it is not my body that is different. It is in my head. I didn't know myself until a little while— about two hands of feeding—ago. But I can tell, now, what is going on inside your head, or the head of any of the People—"

"But," asked the male, "how did they—"

"I was ripe for mating. I was mated to Trillo, the son of Tekka, the chief. And in our cave I told Trillo things of which he only knew. I thought that I should please him, I thought that he would like to have a mate with magical powers that he could put to good use. With my aid he could have made himself chief. But he was angry—and very frightened. He ran to Tekka, who judged me as a Different One. I was to have been killed, but I was able to escape. They dare not follow me too far into this country—"

Then— "You want me."

It was a statement rather than a question.

"Yes. But—"

"No-Tail? She can die. If I fight her and win, I become your mate."

Briefly, half regretfully, No-Fur thought of his female. She had been patient, she had been loyal. But he saw that, with this stranger for a mate, there were no limits to his advancement. It was not that he was more enlightened than Trillo had been, it was that as one of the New People he regarded abnormality as the norm.

"Then you will take me." Once again there was no hint of questioning. Then— "My name is Wesel."

The arrival of No-Fur, with Wesel in tow, at the Place-of-Meeting could not have been better timed. There was a trial in progress, a young male named Big-Ears having been caught red-handed in the act of stealing a coveted piece of metal from the cave of one Four-Arms. Long-Nose, who should have relieved No-Fur, had found the spectacle of a trial with the prospect of a feast to follow far more engrossing than the relief of the lonely sentry.

It was he who first noticed the newcomers.

"Oh, Big-Tusk," he called, "No-Fur has deserted his post!"

Hie chief was disposed to be lenient.

"He has a prisoner," he said. "A Different One. We shall feast well."

"*He is afraid of you*," hissed Wesel. "*Defy him!*"

"It is no prisoner." No-Fur's voice was arrogant "It is my new mate. And you, Long-Nose, go at once to the tunnel."

"Go, Long-Nose. My country must not remain unguarded. No-Fur, hand the strange female over to the guards that she may be slaughtered."

No-Fur felt his resolution wavering under the stem glare of the chief. As two of Big-Tusk's bullies approached he slackened his grip on Wesel's arm. She turned to him, pleading and desperation in her eyes.

"No, no. He is afraid of you, I say. Don't give in to him. Together we can—"

Ironically, it was No-Tail's intervention that turned the scales. She confronted her mate, scorn written large on her unbeautiful face, the shrewish tongue dreaded by all the New People, even the chief himself, fast getting under way.

"So," she said, "you prefer this drab, common female to me. Hand her over, so that she may, at least, fill our bellies. As for you, my bucko, you will pay for this insult!"

No-Fur looked at the grotesque, distorted form of No-Tail, and then at the slim, sleek Wesel. Almost without volition he spoke.

"Wesel is my mate," he said. "She is one of the New People!"

Big-Tusk lacked the vocabulary to pour adequate scorn upon the insolent rebel. He struggled for words, but could find none to cover the situation. His little eyes gleamed redly, and his hideous tusks were bared in a vicious snarl.

"*Now!*" prompted the stranger. "His head is confused. He will be rash. His desire to tear and maul will cloud his judgment. Attack!"

No-Fur went into the fight coldly, knowing that if he kept his head he must win. He raised his spear to stem the first rush of the infuriated chief. Just in time Big-Tusk saw the rough point and, using his tail as a rudder, swerved. He wasn't fast enough, although his action barely saved him from immediate death. The spear caught him in the shoulder and broke off short, leaving the end in the wound. Mad with rage and pain, the chief was now a most dangerous enemy— and yet, at the same time, easy meat for an adversary who kept his head.

No-Fur was, at first, such a one. But his self-control was cracking fast. Try as he would he could not fight down the rising tides of hysterical fear, of sheer, animal blood lust. As the enemies circled, thrust and parried, he with his almost useless weapon, Big-Tusk with a fine, metal tipped spear, it took all his will power to keep himself from taking refuge in flight or closing to grapple with his more powerful antagonist. His reason told him that both courses of action would be disastrous—the first would end in his being hunted down and slaughtered by the Tribe, the second would bring him within range of the huge,

murderous teeth that had given Big-Tusk his name.

So he thrust and parried, thrust and parried, until the keen edge of the chief's blade nicked his arm. The stinging pain made him all animal, and with a shrill scream of fury he launched himself at the other.

But if Nature had provided Big-Tusk with a fine armory she had not been niggardly with the rebel's defensive equipment. True, he had nothing outstanding in the way of teeth or claws, had not the extra limbs possessed by so many of his fellow New People. His brain may have been a little more nimble—but at this stage of the fight that counted for nothing. What saved his life was his hairless skin.

Time after time the chief sought to pull him within striking distance, time after time he pulled away. His slippery hide was crisscrossed with a score of scratches, many of them deep but none immediately serious. And all the time he himself was scratching and pummeling with both hands and feet, biting and gouging.

It seemed that Big-Tusk was tiring, but No-Fur was tiring too. And the other had learned that it was useless to try to grab a handful of fur, that he must try to take his enemy in an unbreakable embrace. Once he succeeded. No-Fur was pulled closer and closer to the slavering fangs, felt the foul breath of the other in his face, knew that it was a matter of heartbeats before his throat was torn out. He screamed, threw up his legs and lunged viciously at Big-Tusk's belly. He felt his feet sink into the soft flesh, but the chief grunted and did not relax his pressure. Worse—the failure of his desperate counterattack had brought No-Fur even closer to death.

With one arm, his right, he pushed desperately against the other's chest. He tried to bring his knees up in a crippling blow, but they were held in a viselike grip by Big-Tusk's heavily muscled legs. With his free left arm he flailed viciously and desperately, but he might have been beating against the Barrier itself.

The People, now that the issue of the battle was decided, were yelling encouragement to the victor. No-Fur heard among the cheers the voice of his mate, No-Tail. The little, cold corner of his brain in which reason was still enthroned told him that he couldn't blame her. If she were vociferous in *his* support, she could expect only death at the hands of the triumphant chief. But he forgot that he had offered her insult and humiliation, remembered only that she was his mate. And the bitterness of it kept him fighting when others would have relinquished their hold on a life already forfeit.

The edge of his hand came down hard just where Big-Tusk's thick neck joined his shoulder. He was barely conscious that the other winced, that a little whimper of pain followed the blow. Then, high and shrill, he heard Wesel.

"Again! Again! That is his weak spot!"

Blindly groping, he searched for the same place. And Big-Tusk was afraid, of that there was no doubt. His head twisted, trying to cover his vulnerability. Again he whimpered, and No-Fur knew that the battle was his. His thin, strong fingers with their sharp nails dug and gouged. There was no fur here, and the flesh was soft. He felt the warm blood welling beneath his hand as the chief screamed dreadfully. Then the iron grip was abruptly relaxed. Before Big-Tusk could use hands or feet to cast his enemy from him No-Fur had twisted and, each hand clutching skin and fur, had buried his teeth in the other's neck. They found the jugular. Almost at once the chiefs last, desperate struggles ceased.

No-Fur drank long and satisfyingly.

Then, the blood still clinging to his muzzle, he wearily surveyed the People.

"I am chief," he said.

"You are the chief!" came back the answering chorus.

"And Wesel is my mate."

This time there was hesitation on the part of the People. The new chief heard mutters of *"The feast . . . Big-Tusk is old and tough . . . are we to be cheated—?"*

"Wesel is my mate," he repeated. Then— "There is your feast—"

At the height of his power he was to remember No-Tail's stricken eyes, the dreadful feeling that by his words he had put himself outside all custom, all law.

"*Above* the Law," whispered Wesel.

He steeled his heart.

"There is your feast," he said again.

It was Big-Ears who, snatching a spear from one of the guards, with one swift blow dispatched the cringing No-Tail.

"I am your mate," said Wesel.

No-Fur took her hi his arms. They rubbed noses. It wasn't the old chief's blood that made her shudder ever so slightly. It was the feel of the disgusting, hairless body against her own.

Already the People were carving and dividing the two corpses and wrangling over an even division of the succulent spoils.

There was one among the New People who, had her differences from the racial stock been only psychological, would have been slaughtered long since. Her three eyes notwithstanding, the imprudent exercise of her gift would have brought certain doom. But, like her sisters in more highly civilized communities, she was careful to tell those who came to her only that which they desired to hear. Even then, she exercised restraint. Experience had taught her that foreknowledge of coming events on the part of the participants often resulted in entirely unforeseen results. This annoyed her. Better misfortune on the main stream of time than well-being on one of its branches.

To this Three-Eyes came No-Fur and Wesel.

Before the chief could ask his questions the seeress raised one emaciated hand.

"You are Shrick," she said. "So your mother called you. Shrick, the Giant Killer."

"But—"

"Wait. You came to ask me about your war against Tekka's people. Continue with your plans. You will win. You will then fight the Tribe of Sterret the Old. Again you will win. You will be Lord of the Outside. And then—"

"And then?"

"The Giants will know of the People. Many, but not all, of the People will die. You will fight the Giants. And the last of the Giants you will kill, but he will plunge the world into—Oh, if I could make you see! But we have no words."

"What—?"

"No, you cannot know. You will never know till the end is upon you. But this I can tell you. The People are doomed. Nothing you or they can do will save them. But you will kill those who will kill us, and that is good."

Again No-Fur pleaded for enlightenment. Abruptly, his pleas became threats. He was fast lashing himself into one of his dreaded fits of blind fury. But Three-Eyes was oblivious of his presence. Her two outer eyes were tight shut and that strange, dreaded inner one was staring at *something*, something outside the limits of the cave, outside the framework of things as they are.

Deep in his throat the chief growled.

He raised the fine spear that was the symbol of his office and buried it deep in the old female's body. The inner eye shut and the two outer ones flickered open for the last time.

"I am spared the End—" she said.

Outside the little cavern the faithful Big-Ears was waiting.

"Three-Eyes is dead," said his master. "Take what you want, and give the rest to the People—"

For a little there was silence.

Then—"I am glad you killed her," said Wesel. "She frightened me. I got inside her head—and I was lost!" Her voice had a hysterical edge. "I was lost! It was mad, mad. *What Was* was a *place*, a *PLACE*, and *NOW*, and *What Will Be*. And I saw the End."

"What did you see?"

"A great light, far brighter than the Giants' lights Inside. And heat, stronger than the heat of the floors of the Far Outside caves and tunnels. And the People gasping and dying and the great light bursting into our world and eating them up—"

"But the Giants?"

"I did not see. I was lost. All I saw was the End.

No-Fur was silent. His active, nimble mind was scurrying down the vistas opened up by the dead prophetess. Giant Killer, *Giant Killer*. Even in his most grandiose dreams he had never seen himself thus. And what was that name? Shrick? He repeated it to himself—Shrick the Giant Killer. It had a fine swing to it. As for the rest, the End, if he could kill the Giants then, surely, he could stave off the doom that they would mete out to the People. Shrick, the Giant Killer—

"It is a name that I like better than No-Fur," said Wesel.

"Shrick, Lord of the Outside. Shrick, Lord of the World. Shrick, the Giant Killer—"

"Yes," he said, slowly. "But the End—"

"You will go through that door when you come to it."

The campaign against Tekka's People had opened.

Along the caves and tunnels poured the nightmare hordes of Shrick. The dim light but half revealed their misshapen bodies, limbs where no limbs should be, heads like something from a half-forgotten bad dream.

All were armed. Every male and female carried a spear, and that in itself was a startling innovation in the wars of the People. For sharp metal, with which the weapons were tipped, was hard to come by, True, a staff of Barrier material could be sharpened, but it was a liability rather than an asset in a pitched battle. With the first thrust the point would break off, leaving the fighter with a weapon far inferior to his natural armory of teeth and claws.

Fire was new to the People—and it was Shrick who had brought them fire. For long periods he had spied upon the Giants in the Place-of-Little-Lights, had seen them bring from the pouches in their fur little glittering devices from which when a projection was pressed, issued a tiny, naked light. And he had seen them bring this light to the end of strange, white sticks that they seemed to be sucking. And the end of the stick would glow, and there would be a cloud like the cloud that issued from the mouths of the People in some of the Far Outside caverns where it was very cold. But this cloud was fragrant, and seemed to be strangely soothing.

And one of the Giants had lost his little hot light. He had put it to one to the white sticks, had made to return it to his pouch, and his hand had missed the opening. The Giant did not notice. He was doing something which took all his attention—and strain his eyes and his imagination as he might Shrick could not see what it was. There were strange glittering machines through which he peered intently at the glittering Little Lights beyond their transparent Barrier. Or were they on the inside of the Barrier? Nobody had ever been able to decide. There was something alive that wasn't alive that clicked. There were sheets of fine, white skin on which the Giant was making black marks with a pointed stick.

But Shrick soon lost interest in these strange rites that he could never hope to comprehend. All his attention was focused on the glittering prize that was drifting ever so slowly toward him on the wings of some vagrant eddy.

When it seemed that it would surely fall right into the doorway where Shrick crouched waiting, it swerved. And, much as he dreaded the pseudolife that hummed and clicked, Shrick came out. The Giant, busy with his sorcery, did not notice him. One swift leap carried him to the drifting trophy. And then he had it, tight clasped to his breast. It was bigger than he had thought, it having appeared so tiny only in relationship to its previous owner. But it wasn't too big to go through the door in the Barrier. In triumph Shrick bore it to his cave.

Many were the experiments that he, eager but fumbling, performed. For a while both he and Wesel nursed painful burns. Many were the experiments that he intended to perform in the future. But he had stumbled on one use for the hot light that was to be of paramount importance in his wars.

Aping the Giants, he had stuck a long splinter of Barrier material in his mouth. The end he had brought to the little light. There was, as he had half expected, a cloud. But it was neither fragrant nor soothing. Blinded and coughing, Wesel snatched at the glowing stick, beat out its strange life with her hands.

Then—"It is hard," she said. "It is almost as hard as metal—"

And so Shrick became the first mass producer of armaments that his world had known. The first few

sharpened staves he treated himself. The rest he left to Wesel and the faithful Big-Ears. He dare not trust his wonderful new power to any who were not among his intimates.

Shrick's other innovation was a direct violation of all the rules of war. He had pressed the females into the fighting line. Those who were old and infirm, together with the old and infirm males, brought up the rear with bundles of the mass-produced spears. The New People had been wondering for some little time why their chief had refused to let them slaughter those of their number who had outlived their usefulness. Now they knew.

The caves of the New People were deserted save for those few females with newborn.

And through the tunnels poured the hordes of Shrick.

There was little finesse in the campaign against Tekka's people. The outposts were slaughtered out of hand, but not before they had had time to warn the Tribe of the attack.

Tekka threw a body of picked spearmen into his van, confident that he, with better access to those parts of Inside where metal could be obtained, would be able to swamp the motley horde of the enemy with superior arms and numbers.

When Tekka saw, in the dim light, only a few betraying gleams of metal scattered among Shrick's massed spears, he laughed.

"This No-Fur is mad," he said. "And I shall kill him with this." He brandished his own weapon. "His mother gave it to me many, many feedings ago."

"Is Wesel—?"

"Perhaps, my son. You shall eat her heart, I promise you."

And then Shrick struck.

His screaming mob rushed along the wide tunnel. Confident the Tekkan spearmen waited, knowing that the enemy's weapons were good for only one thrust, and that almost certainly not lethal.

Tekka scowled as he estimated the numbers of the attackers. There couldn't be that many males among the New People. There couldn't—And then the wave struck.

In the twinkling of an eye the tunnel was tightly packed with struggling bodies. Here was no dignified, orderly series of single combats such as had always, in the past, graced the wars of the People. And with growing terror Tekka realized that the enemy spears were standing up to the strain of battle at least as well as his own few metal-tipped weapons.

Slowly, but with ever mounting momentum, the attackers pressed on, gaining impetus from the many bodies that now lay behind them. Gasping for air in the effluvium of sweat and newly shed blood Tekka and the last of his guards were pressed back and ever back.

When one of the New People was disarmed he fell to the rear of his own front line. As though by magic a fresh fighter would appear to replace him.

Then—"He's using females!" cried Trillo. "He's—"

But Tekka did not answer. He was fighting for his life with a four-armed monster. Every hand held a spear—and every spear was bright with blood. For long heartbeats he parried the other's thrusts, then his nerve broke. Screaming, he turned his back on the enemy. It was the last thing he did.

And so the remnant of the fighting strength of the Tribe of Tekka was at last penned up against one wall of their Place-of-Meeting. Surrounding them was a solid hemisphere of the New People. Snarl was answered by snarl. Trillo and his scant half dozen guards knew that there was no surrender. All they could do was to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

And so they waited for the inevitable, gathering the last reserves of their strength in this lull of the battle, gasping the last sweet mouthfuls of air that they would ever taste. From beyond the wall of their assailants they could hear the cries and screams as the females and children, who had hidden in their caves, were hunted out and slaughtered. They were not to know that the magnanimous Shrick was sparing most of the females. They, he hoped, would produce for him more New People.

And then Shrick came, elbowing his way to the forefront of his forces. His smooth, naked body was unmarked, save by the old scars of his battle with Big Tusk. And with him was Wesel, not a hair of her sleek fur out of place. And Big-Ears—but he, obviously, had been in the fight. With them came more

fighters, fresh and eager.

"Finish them!" ordered Shrick.

"Wait!" Wesel's voice was imperative. "I want Trillo."

Him she pointed out to the picked fighters, who raised their spears—weapons curiously slender and light, too fragile for hand-to-hand combat. A faint hope stirred in the breasts of the last defenders.

"Now!"

Trillo and his guards braced themselves to meet the last rush. It never came. Instead, thrown with unerring aim, came those sharp, flimsy spears, pinning them horribly against the gray, spongy wall of the Place-of-Meeting.

Spared in this final slaughter, Trillo looked about him with wide, fear-crazed eyes. He started to scream, then launched himself at the laughing Wesel. But she slipped back through the packed masses of the New People. Blind to all else but that hateful figure, Trillo tried to follow. And the New People crowded about him, binding his arms and legs with their strong cords, snatching his spear from him before its blade drank blood.

Then again the captive saw her who had been his mate.

Shamelessly, she was caressing Shrick.

"My Hairless One," she said. "I was once mated to *this*. You shall have his fur to cover your smooth body." And then—"Big-Ears! You know what to do!"

Grinning, Big-Ears found the sharp, blade of a spear that had become detached from its haft. Grinning, he went to work. Trillo started to whimper, then to scream. Shrick felt a little sick. "Stop!" he said. "He is not dead. You must—"

"What does it matter?" Wesel's eyes were avid, and her little, pink tongue came out to lick her thin lips. Big-Ears had hesitated in his work but, at her sign, continued.

"What does it matter?" she said again.

As had fared the Tribe of Tekka so fared the Tribe of Sterret, and a hand or more of smaller communities owing a loose allegiance to these two.

But it was in his war with Sterret that Shrick almost met disaster. To the cunning oldster had come survivors from the massacre of Tekka's army. Most of these had been slaughtered out of hand by the frontier guards, but one or two had succeeded in convincing their captors that they bore tidings of great importance.

Sterret heard them out.

He ordered that they be fed and treated as his own people, for he knew that he would need every ounce of fighting strength that he could muster.

Long and deeply he pondered upon their words, and then sent foray after foray of his young males to the Place-of Life-That-is-Not-Life. Careless he was of detection by the Giants. They might or might not act against him—but he had been convinced that, for all their size, they were comparatively stupid and harmless. Certainly, at this juncture, they were not such a menace as Shrick, already self-styled Lord of the Outside.

And so his store of sharp fragments of metal grew, while his armorers worked without cessation binding these to hafts of Barrier stuff. And he, too, could innovate. Some of the fragments were useless as spearheads, being blunt, rough, and irregular. But, bound like a spearhead to a shaft, they could deliver a crushing blow. Of this Sterret was sure after a few experiments on old and unwanted members of his Tribe.

Most important, perhaps, his mind, rich in experience but not without a certain youthful zest, busied itself with problems of strategy. In the main tunnel from what had been Tekka's country his females hacked and tore at the spongy wall, the material being packed tightly and solidly into another small tunnel that was but rarely used.

At last his scouts brought the word that Shrick's forces were on the move. Careless in the crushing weight of his military power, Shrick disdained anything but a direct frontal attack. Perhaps he should have been warned by the fact that all orifices admitting light from the Inside had been closed, that the main

tunnel along which he was advancing was in total darkness.

This, however, hampered him but little. The body of picked spearmen opposing him fought in the conventional way, and these, leaving their dead and wounded, were forced slowly but surely back. Each side relied upon smell, and hearing, and a certain perception possessed by most, if not all, of the People. At such close quarters these were ample.

Shrick himself was not in the van—that honor was reserved for Big-Ears, his fighting general. Had the decision rested with him alone he would have been in the forefront of the battle—but Wesel averred that the leader was of far greater importance than a mere spear bearer, and should be shielded from needless risk. Not altogether unwillingly, Shrick acquiesced.

Surrounded by his guard, with Wesel at his side, the leader followed the noise of the fighting. He was rather surprised at the reports back to him concerning the apparent numbers of the enemy, but assumed that this was a mere delaying action and that Sterret would make his last stand in the Place-of-Meeting. It never occurred to him in his arrogance that others could innovate.

Abruptly, Wesel clutched his arm.

"Shrick! Danger—from the side!"

"From the side? But—"

There was a shrill cry, and a huge section of the tunnel wall fell inward. The spongy stuff was in thin sheets, and drifted among the guard, hampering their every movement. Then, led by Sterret in person, the defenders came out. Like mountaineers they were roped together, for in this battle in the darkness their best hope lay in keeping in one, compact body. Separated, they would fall easy prey to the superior numbers of the hordes of Shrick.

With spear and mace they lay about them lustily. The first heartbeat of the engagement would have seen the end of Shrick, and it was only the uncured hide of Trilla, stiff and stinking, that saved his life. Even so, the blade of Sterret penetrated the crude armor, and, sorely wounded, Shrick reeled out of the battle.

Ahead, Big-Ears was no longer having things all his own way. Reinforcements had poured along the tunnel and he dare not return to the succor of his chief. And Sterret's maces were having their effect. Stabbing and slashing the People could understand—but a crushing blow was, to them, something infinitely horrible.

It was Wesel who saved the day. With her she had brought the little, hot light. It had been her intention to try its effect on such few prisoners as might be taken in this campaign—she was too shrewd to experiment on any of the New People, even those who had incurred the displeasure of herself or her mate.

Scarce knowing what she did she pressed the stud.

With dazzling suddenness the scene of carnage swam into dull view. From all sides came cries of fear.

"Back!" cried Wesel. "Back! Clear a space!"

In two directions the New People retreated.

Blinking but dogged, Sterret's phalanx tried to follow, tried to turn what was a more or less orderly withdrawal into a rout. But the cords that had, at first, served them so well now proved their undoing. Some tried to pursue those making for the Place-of-Meeting, others those of the New People retiring to their own territory. Snarling viciously, blood streaming from a dozen minor wounds, Sterret at last cuffed and bullied his forces into a semblance of order. He attempted to lead a charge to where Wesel, the little, hot light still in her hand, was retreating among her personal, amazon guards.

But again the cunning—too cunning—ropes defeated his purposes. Not a few corpses were there to hamper fast movement, and almost none of his fighters had the intelligence to cut them free.

And the spear throwers of Shrick came to the fore, and, one by one, the people of Sterret were pinned by the slim deadly shafts to the tunnel walls. Not all were killed outright, a few unfortunates squirmed and whimpered, plucking at the spears with ineffectual hands.

Among these was Sterret.

Shrick came forward, spear in hand, to administer the *coup de grâce*. The old chief stared wildly, then—"Weena's hairless one!" he cried.

Ironically it was his own spear—the weapon that, in turn, had belonged to Weena and to Tekka—that slit his throat.

Now that he was Lord of the Outside Shrick had time in which to think and to dream. More and more his mind harked back to Three-Eyes and her prophesy. It never occurred to him to doubt that he was to be the Giant Killer—although the vision of the End he dismissed from his mind as the vaporings of a half-crazed old female.

And so he sent his spies to the Inside to watch the Giants in their mysterious comings and goings, tried hard to find some pattern for their incomprehensible behavior. He himself often accompanied these spies—and it was with avid greed that he saw the vast wealth of beautiful, shining things to which the Giants were heir. More than anything he desired another little hot light, for his own had ceased to function, and all the clumsy, ignorant tinkerings of himself and Wesel could not produce more than a feeble, almost heatless spark from its baffling intricacies.

It seemed, too, that the Giants were now aware of the swarming, fecund life surrounding them. Certain it was that their snares increased in number and ingenuity. And the food-that-kills appeared in new and terrifying guise. Not only did those who had eaten of it die, but their mates and—indeed all who had come into contact with them.

It smacked of sorcery, but Shrick had learned to associate cause and effect. He made the afflicted ones carry those already dead into a small tunnel. One or two of them rebelled—but the spear throwers surrounded them, their slim, deadly weapons at the ready. And those who attempted to break through the cordon of guards were run through repeatedly before ever they laid their defiling hands on any of the unafflicted People.

Big-Ears was among the sufferers. He made no attempt to quarrel with his fate. Before he entered the yawning tunnel that was to be his tomb he turned and looked at his chief. Shrick made to call him to his side—even though he knew that his friend's life could not be saved, and that by associating with him he would almost certainly lose his own.

But Wesel was at his side.

She motioned to the spear throwers, and a full two hands of darts transfixed the ailing Big-Ears.

"It was kinder this way," she lied.

But, somehow, the last look that his most loyal supporter had given him reminded him of No-Tail. With a heavy heart he ordered his people to seal the tunnel. Great strips of the spongy stuff were brought and stuffed into the entrance. The cries of those inside grew fainter and ever fainter. Then there was silence. Shrick ordered guards posted at all points where, conceivably, the doomed prisoners might break out. He returned to his own cave. Wesel, when one without her gift would have intruded, let him go in his loneliness. Soon he would want her again.

It had long been Wesel's belief that, given the opportunity, she could get inside the minds of the Giants just as she could those of the People. And if she could—who knew what prizes might be hers? Shrick, still inaccessible and grieving for his friend, she missed more than she cared to admit. The last of the prisoners from the last campaign had been killed, ingeniously, many feedings ago. Though she had no way of measuring time, it hung heavily on her hands.

And so, accompanied by two of her personal attendants, she roamed those corridors and tunnels running just inside the Barrier. Through spyhole after spyhole she peered, gazing in wonderment that long use could not stale at the rich and varied life of the Inside.

At last she found that for which she was searching—a Giant, alone and sleeping. Experience among the People had taught her that from a sleeping mind she could read the most secret thoughts.

For a heartbeat she hesitated. Then—"Four-Arms, Little-Head, wait here for me. Wait and watch."

Little-Head grunted an affirmative, but Four-Arms was dubious. "Lady Wesel," she said, "what if the Giant should wake? What—?"

"What if you should return to the Lord of the Outside without me? Then he would, without doubt, have your hides. The one he is wearing now is old, and the fur is coming out. But do as I say."

There was a door in the Barrier here, a door but rarely used. This was opened, and Wesel slipped through. With the ease that all the People were acquiring with their more frequent ventures to the Inside she floated up to the sleeping Giant. Bonds held him in a sort of framework, and Wesel wondered if, for some offense, he had been made prisoner by his own kind. She would soon know.

And then a glittering object caught her eye. It was one of the little hot lights, its polished metal case seeming to Wesel's covetous eyes the most beautiful thing in the world. Swiftly she made her decision. She could take the shining prize now, deliver it to her two attendants, and then return to carry out her original intentions.

In her eagerness she did not see that it was suspended in the middle of an interlacing of slender metal bars—or she did not care. And as her hands grabbed the bait something not far away began a shrill, not unmusical metallic beating. The Giant stirred and awoke. What Wesel had taken for bonds fell away from his body. In blind panic she turned to flee back to her own world. But, somehow, more of the metal bars had fallen into place and she was a prisoner.

She started to scream.

Surprisingly, Four-Arms and Little-Head came to her aid. It would be nice to be able to place on record that they were actuated by devotion to their mistress—but Four-Arms knew that her life was forfeit. And she had seen those who displeased either Shrick or Wesel flayed alive. Little-Head blindly followed the other's leadership. Hers not to reason why—

Slashing with their spears they assaulted the Giant. He laughed—or so Wesel interpreted the deep, rumbling sound that came from his throat. Four-Arms he seized first. With one hand he grasped her body, with the other her head. He twisted. And that was the end of Four-Arms.

Anybody else but Little-Head would have turned and fled. But her dim mind refused to register that which she had seen. Perhaps a full feeding or so after the event the horror of it all would have stunned her with its impact—perhaps not. Be that as it may, she continued her attack. Blindly, instinctively, she went for the Giant's throat. Wesel sensed that he was badly frightened. But after a short struggle one of his hands caught the frenzied, squealing Little-Head. Violently, he flung her from him. She heard the thud as her attendant's body struck something hard and unyielding. And the impressions that her mind had been receiving from that of the other abruptly ceased.

Even in her panic fear she noticed that the Giant had not come out of the unequal combat entirely unscathed. One of his hands had been scratched, and was bleeding freely. And there were deep scratches on the hideous, repulsively naked face. The Giants, then, were vulnerable. There might have been some grain of truth after all in Three-Eye's insane babbling.

And then Wesel forgot her unavailing struggle against the bars of her cage. With sick horror she watched what the Giant was doing. He had taken the limp body of Four-Arms, had secured it to a flat surface. From somewhere he had produced an array of glittering instruments. One of these he took, and drew it down the body from throat to crotch. On either side of the keen blade the skin fell away, leaving the flesh exposed.

And the worst part of it was that it was not being done in hate or anger, neither was the unfortunate Four-Arms being divided up that she might be eaten. There was an impersonal quality about the whole business that sickened Wesel—for, by this time, she had gained a certain limited access to the mind of the other.

The Giant paused in his work. Another of his kind had come, and for many heartbeats the two talked together. They examined the mutilated carcass of Four-Arms, the crushed body of Little-Head. Together, they peered into the cage where Wesel snarled impotently.

But, in spite of her hysterial fear, part of her mind was deadly cold, was receiving and storing impressions that threw the uninhibited, animal part of her into still greater panic. While the Giants talked the impressions were clear—and while their great, ungainly heads hung over her cage, scant handbreadths away, they were almost overpowering in their strength. She knew who she and the People

were, what their world was. She had not the ability to put it into words—but she *knew*. And she saw the doom that the Giants were preparing for the People.

With a few parting words to his fellow, the second Giant left. The first one resumed his work of dismembering Four-Arms. At last he was finished. What was left of the body was put into transparent containers.

The Giant picked up Little-Head. For many heartbeats he examined her, turning her over and over in his great hands. Wesel thought that he would bind the body to the flat surface, do with it as he had done with that of Four-Arms. But at last he put the body to one side. Over his hands he pulled something that looked like a thick, additional skin. Suddenly, the metal bars at one end of the cage fell away, and one of those enormous hands came groping for Wesel.

After the death of Big-Ears, Shrick slept a little. It was the only way in which he could be rid of the sense of loss, of the feeling that he had betrayed his most loyal follower. His dreams were troubled, haunted by ghosts from his past. Big-Ears was in them, and Big-Tusk, and a stranger female with whom he felt a sense of oneness, whom he knew to be Weena, his mother.

And then all these phantasms were gone, leaving only the image of Wesel. It wasn't the Wesel he had always known, cool, self-assured, ambitious. This was a terrified Wesel—Wesel descending into a black abyss of pain and torture even worse than that which she had, so often, meted out to others. And she wanted him.

Shrick awoke, frightened by his dreams. But he knew that ghosts had never hurt anybody, could not hurt him, Lord of the Outside. He shook himself, whimpering a little, and then tried to compose himself for further sleep.

But the image of Wesel persisted. At last Shrick abandoned his attempts to seek oblivion and, rubbing his eyes, emerged from his cave.

In the dim, half-light of the Place-of-Meeting little knots of the People hung about, talking in low voices. Shrick called to the guards. There was a sullen silence. He called again. At last one answered.

"Where is Wesel?"

"I do not know . . . lord." The last word came out grudgingly.

Then one of the others volunteered the information that she had been seen, in company with Four-Arms and Little-Head, proceeding along the tunnels that led to that part of the Outside in the way of the Place-of-Green-Growing-Things.

Shrick hesitated.

He rarely ventured abroad without his personal guards, but then, Big-Ears was always one of them. And Big-Ears was gone.

He looked around him, decided that he could trust none of those at present in the Place-of-Meeting. The People had been shocked and horrified by his necessary actions in the case of those who had eaten of the food-that-kills and regarded him, he knew, as a monster even worse than the Giants. Their memories were short—but until they forgot he would have to walk with caution.

"Wesel is my mate. I will go alone," he said.

At his words he sensed a change of mood, was tempted to demand an escort. But the instinct that—as much as any mental superiority—maintained him in authority warned him against throwing away his advantage.

"I go alone," he said.

One Short-Tail, bolder than his fellows, spoke up.

"And if you do not return, Lord of the Outside? Who is to be—?"

"I shall return," said Shrick firmly, his voice displaying a confidence he did not feel.

In the more populous regions the distinctive scent of Wesel was overlaid by that of many others. In tunnels but rarely frequented it was strong and compelling—but now he had no need to use his olfactory powers. For the terrified little voice in his brain—from outside his brain was saying *hurry, HURRY*—and some power beyond his ken was guiding him unerringly to where his mate was in such desperate need of him.

From the door in the Barrier through which Wesel had entered the Inside—it had been left open—streamed a shaft of light. And now Shrick's natural caution reasserted itself. The voice inside his brain was no less urgent, but the instinct of self-preservation was strong. Almost timorously, he peered through the doorway.

He smelled death. At first he feared that he was too late, then identified the personal odors of Four-Arms and Little-Head. That of Wesel was there too—intermingled with the acrid scent of terror and agony. But she was still alive.

Caution forgotten, he launched himself from the doorway with all the power of his leg muscles. And he found Wesel, stretched supine on a flat surface that was slippery with blood. Most of it was Four-Arms', but some of it was hers.

"Shrick!" she screamed. "The Giant!"

He looked away from his mate and saw hanging over him, pale and enormous, the face of the Giant. He screamed, but there was more of fury than terror in the sound. He saw, not far from where he clung to Wesel, a huge blade of shining metal. He could see that its edge was keen. The handle had been fashioned for a hand far larger than his, nevertheless he was just able to grasp it. It seemed to be secured. Feet braced against Wesel's body for purchase, he tugged desperately.

Just as the Giant's hand, fingers outstretched to seize him, came down the blade pulled free. As Shrick's legs suddenly and involuntarily straightened he was propelled away from Wesel. The Giant grabbed at the flying form, and howled in agony as Shrick swept the blade around and lopped off a finger.

He heard Wesel's voice: "You are the Giant Killer!"

Now he was level with the Giant's head. He swerved, and with his feet caught a fold of the artificial skin covering the huge body. And he hung there, swinging his weapon with both hands, cutting and slashing. Great hands swung wildly and he was bruised and buffeted. But not once did they succeed in finding a grip. Then there was a great and horrid spurting of blood and a wild thrashing of mighty limbs. This ceased, but it was only the voice of Wesel that called him from the fury of his slaughter lust.

So he found her again, still stretched out for sacrifice to the Giants' dark gods, still bound to that surface that was wet with her blood and that of her attendant. But she smiled up at him, and in her eyes was respect that bordered on awe.

"Are you hurt?" he demanded, a keen edge of anxiety to his voice.

"Only a little. But Four-Arms was cut in pieces . . . I should have been had you not come. And," her voice was a hymn of praise, "you killed the Giant!"

"It was foretold. Besides," for once he was honest, "it could not have been done without the Giant's weapon."

With its edge he was cutting Wesel's bonds. Slowly she floated away from the place of sacrifice. Then: "I can't move my legs!" Her voice was terror-stricken. "I can't move!"

Shrick guessed what was wrong. He knew a little of anatomy—his knowledge was that of the warrior who may be obliged to immobilize his enemy prior to his slaughter—and he could see that the Giant's keen blade had wrought this damage. Fury boiled up in him against these cruel, monstrous beings. And there was more than fury. There was the feeling, rare among his people, of overwhelming pity for his crippled mate.

"The blade . . . it is very sharp . . . I shall feel nothing."

But Shrick could not bring himself to do it.

Now they were floating up against the huge bulk of the dead Giant. With one hand he grasped Wesel's shoulder—the other still clutched his fine, new weapon—and kicked off against the gigantic carcass. Then he was pushing Wesel through the doorway in the Barrier, and sensed her relief as she found herself once more in familar territory. He followed her, then carefully shut and barred the door.

For a few heartbeats Wesel busied herself smoothing her bedraggled fur. He couldn't help noticing that she dare not let her hands stray to the lower part of her body where were the wounds, small but

deadly, that had robbed her of the power of her limbs. Dimly, he felt that something might be done for one so injured, but knew that it was beyond his powers. And fury—not helpless now—against the Giants returned again, threatening to choke him with its intensity.

"Shrick!" Wesel's voice was grave. "We must return at once to the People. We must warn the People. The Giants are making a sorcery to bring the End."

"The great, hot light?"

"No. But wait! First I must tell you of what I learned. Otherwise, you would not believe. I have learned what we are, what the world is. And it is strange and wonderful beyond all our beliefs.

"What is Outside?" She did not wait for his answer, read it in his mind before his lips could frame the words. "The world is but a bubble of emptiness in the midst of a vast piece of metal, greater than the mind can imagine. But it is not so! Outside the metal that lies outside the Outside there is nothing. *Nothing!* There is no air."

"But there must be air, at least."

"No, I tell you. There is *nothing*.

"And the world—how can I find words? Their name for the world is—*ship*, and it seems to mean something big going from one place to another place. And all of us—Giants and People—are inside the ship. The Giants made the ship."

"Then it is not alive?"

"I cannot say. *They* seem to think that it is a female. It must have some kind of life that is not life. And it is going from one world to another world."

"And these other worlds?"

"I caught glimpses of them. They are dreadful, dreadful. *We* find the open spaces of the Inside frightening—but these other worlds are *all* open space except for one side."

"But what are we?" In spite of himself, Shrick at least half believed Wesel's fantastic story. Perhaps she possessed, to some slight degree, the power of projecting her own thoughts into the mind of another with whom she was intimate. "What are we?"

She was silent for the space of many heartbeats. Then: "*Their* name for us is *mutants*. The picture was . . . not clear at all. It means that we—the People—have changed. And yet their picture of the People before the change was like the Different Ones before we slew them all.

"Long and long ago—many hands of feedings—the first People, our parents' parents' parents, came into the world. They came from that greater world—the world of dreadful, open spaces. They came with the food in the great Cave-of-Food—and that is being carried to another world.

"Now, in the horrid, empty space outside the Outside there is—light that is not light. And this light—changes persons. No, not the grown person or the child, but the child before the birth. Like the dead and gone chiefs of the People, the Giants fear change in themselves. So they have kept the light that is not light from the Inside.

"And this is how. Between the Barrier and the Far Outside they filled the space with the stuff in which we have made our caves and tunnels. The first People left the great Cave-of-Food, they tunneled through the Barrier and into the stuff Outside. It was their nature. And some of them mated in the Far Outside caves. Their children were—*Different*."

"That is true," said Shrick slowly. "It has always been thought that children born in the Far Outside were never like their parents, and that those born dose to the Barrier were—"

"Yes.

"Now, the Giants always knew that the People were here, but they did not fear them. They did not know our numbers, and they regarded us as beings much lower than themselves. They were content to keep us down with their traps and the food-that-kills. Somehow, they found that we had changed. Like the dead chiefs they feared us then—and like the dead chiefs they will try to kill us all before we conquer them."

"And the End?"

"Yes, the End." She was silent again, her big eyes looking past Shrick at something infinitely terrible. "Yes," she said again, "the End. *They* will make it, and *They* will escape it. *They* will put on artificial skins

that will cover *Their* whole bodies, even *Their* heads, and *They* will open huge doors in the . . . skin of the ship, and all the air will rush out into the terrible empty space outside the Outside. And all the People will die."

"I must go," said Shrick. "I must kill the Giants before this comes to pass."

"No! There was one hand of Giants—now that you have killed Fat-Belly there are four of them left. And they know, now, that they can be killed. They will be watching for you.

"Do you remember when we buried the People with the sickness? That is what we must do to all the People. And then when the Giants fill the world with air again from their store we can come out."

Shrick was silent awhile. He had to admit that she was right. One unsuspecting Giant had fallen to his blade—but four of them, aroused, angry and watchful, he could not handle. In any case there was no way of knowing when the Giants would let the air from the world. The People must be warned—and fast.

Together, in the Place-of-Meeting, Shrick and Wesel faced the People. They had told their stories, only to be met with blank incredulity. True, there were some who, seeing the fine, shining blade that Shrick had brought from the Inside, were inclined to believe. But they were shouted down by the majority. It was when he tried to get them to immure themselves against the End that he met with serious opposition. The fact that he had so treated those suffering from the sickness still bulked big in the mob memory.

It was Short-Tail who precipitated the crisis.

"He wants the world to himself!" he shouted. "He has killed Big-Tusk and No-Tail, he has killed all the Different Ones, and Big-Ears he slew because he would have been chief. He and his ugly, barren mate want the world to themselves!"

Shrick tried to argue, but Big-Ears' following shouted him down. He squealed with rage and, raising his blade with both hands, rushed upon the rebel. Short-Tail scurried back out of reach. Shrick found himself alone in a suddenly cleared space. From somewhere a long way off he heard Wesel screaming his name. Dazedly, he shook his head, and then the red mist cleared from in front of his eyes.

All around him were the spear throwers, their slender weapons poised. He had trained them himself, had brought their specialized art of war into being. And now—

"Shrick!" Wesel was saving, "don't fight! They will kill you, and I shall be alone. I shall have the world to myself. Let them do as they will with us, and *we* shall live through the End."

At her words a tittering laugh rippled through the mob.

"*They* will live through the End! They will die as Big-Ears and his friends died!"

"I want your blade," said Short-Tail.

"Give it to him," cried Wesel. "You will get it back after the End!"

Shrick hesitated. The other made a sign. One of the throwing spears buried itself in the fleshy part of his arm. Had it not been for Wesel's voice, pleading, insistent, he would have charged his tormenters and met his end in less than a single heartbeat. Reluctantly, he released his hold upon the weapon. Slowly—as though loath to leave its true owner—it floated away from. him. And then the People were all around him, almost suffocating him with the pressure of their bodies.

The cave into which Shrick and Wesel were forced was their own dwelling place. They were in pitiable state when the mob retreated to the entrance—Wesel's wounds had reopened and Shrick's arm was bleeding freely. Somebody had wrenched out the spear—but the head had broken off.

Outside, Short-Tail was laying about him with the keen blade he had taken from his chief. Under its strokes great masses of the spongy stuff of the Outside were coming free, and many willing hands were stuffing this tight into the cave entrance.

"We will let you out after the End!" called somebody. There was a hoot of derision. Then: "I wonder which will eat the other first?"

"Never mind," said Wesel softly. "We shall laugh last."

"Perhaps. But . . . the People. My People. And you are barren. The Giants have won—"

Wesel was silent. Then he heard her voice again. She was whimpering to herself in the darkness. Shrick could guess her thoughts. All their grandiose dreams of world dominion had come to this—a tiny cramped space in which there was barely room for either of them to stir a finger.

And now they could no longer hear the voices of the People outside their prison. Shrick wondered if the Giants had already struck, then reassured himself with the memory of how the voices of those suffering from the sickness had grown fainter and fainter and then, at the finish, ceased altogether. And he wondered how he and Wesel would know when the End had come, and how they would know when it was safe to dig themselves out. It would be a long, slow task with only their teeth and claws with which to work.

But he had a tool.

The fingers of the hand of his uninjured arm went to the spearhead still buried in the other. He knew that by far the best way of extracting it would be one quick pull—but he couldn't bring himself to do it. Slowly, painfully, he worked away at the sharp fragment of metal.

"Let me do it for you."

"No." His voice was rough. "Besides, there is no haste."

Slowly, patiently, he worried at the wound. He was groaning a little, although he was not conscious of doing so. And then, suddenly, Wesel screamed. The sound was so unexpected, so dreadful in that confined space, that Shrick started violently. His hand jerked away from his upper arm, bringing with it the spearhead.

His first thought was that Wesel, telepath as she was, had chosen this way to help him. But he felt no gratitude, only a dull resentment.

"What did you do that for?" he demanded angrily.

She didn't answer his question. She was oblivious of his presence.

"The People . . ." she whispered. "The People . . . I can feel their thoughts . . . I can feel what they are feeling. And they are gasping for air . . . they are gasping and dying . . . and the cave of Long-Fur the spearmaker . . . but they are dying, and the blood is coming out of their mouths and noses and ears . . . I can't bear it . . . I can't—"

And then a terrifying thing happened. The sides of the cave pressed in upon them. Throughout the world, throughout the ship, the air cells in the spongy insulation were expanding as the air pressure dropped to Zero. It was this alone that saved Shrick and Wesel, although they never knew it. The rough plug sealing their cave, that, otherwise, would have blown out swelled to meet the expanding walls of the entrance, making a near perfect air-tight joint.

But the prisoners were in no state to appreciate this, even had they been in possession of the necessary knowledge. Panic seized them both. Claustrophobia was unknown among the People—but walls that closed upon them were outside their experience.

Perhaps Wesel was the more level-headed of the pair. It was she who tried to restrain her mate as he clawed and bit savagely, madly, at the distended, bulging walls. He no longer knew what lay outside the cave, had he known it would have made no difference. His one desire was to get out.

At first he made little headway, then he bethought himself of the little blade still grasped in his hand. With it he attacked the pulpy mass. The walls of the cells were stretched thin, almost to bursting, and under his onslaught they put up no more resistance than so many soap bubbles. A space was cleared, and Shrick was able to work with even greater vigor.

"Stop! Stop, I tell you! There is only the choking death outside the cave. And you will kill us both!"

But Shrick paid no heed, went on stabbing and hacking. It was only slowly, now, that he was able to enlarge upon the original impression he had made. As the swollen surfaces burst and withered beneath his blade, so they bulged and bellied in fresh places.

"Stop!" cried Wesel again.

With her arms, her useless legs trailing behind her, she pulled herself toward her mate. And she grappled with him, desperation lending her strength. So for many heartbeats they fought—silent, savage, forgetful of all that each owed to the other. And yet, perhaps, Wesel never quite forgot. For all her blind, frantic will to survive her telepathic powers were at no time entirely in abeyance. In spite of herself she, as

always, shared the other's mind. And this psychological factor gave her an advantage that offset the paralysis of the lower half of her body—and at the same time inhibited her from pressing that advantage home to its logical conclusion.

But it did not save her when her fingers, inadvertently, dug into the wound in Shrick's arm. His ear-splitting scream was compounded of pain and fury, and he drew upon reserves of strength that the other never even guessed that he possessed. And the hand gripping the blade came round with irresistible force.

For Wesel there was a heartbeat of pain, of sorrow for herself and Shrick, of blind anger against the Giants who, indirectly, had brought this thing to pass.

And then the beating of her heart was stilled forever.

With the death of Wesel Shrick's frenzy left him.

There, in the darkness, he ran his sensitive fingers over the lifeless form, hopelessly hoping for the faintest sign of life. He called her name, he shook her roughly. But at last the knowledge that she was dead crept into his brain—and stayed there. In his short life he had known many times this sense of loss, but never with such poignancy.

And worst of all was the knowledge that *he* had killed her.

He tried to shift the burden of blame. He told himself that she would have died, in any case, of the wounds received at the hands of the Giants. He tried to convince himself that, wounds or no wounds, the Giants were directly responsible for her death. And he knew that he was Wesel's murderer, just as he knew that all that remained for him in life was to bring the slayers of his people to a reckoning.

This made him cautious.

For many heartbeats he lay there in the thick darkness, not daring to renew his assault on the walls of his prison. He told himself that, somehow, he would know when the Giants let the air back into the world. How he would know he could not say, but the conviction persisted.

And when at last, with returning pressure, the insulation resumed its normal consistency, Shrick took this as a sign that it was safe for him to get out. He started to hack at the spongy material, then stopped. He went back to the body of Wesel. Just once he whispered her name, and ran his hands over the stiff, silent form in a last caress.

He did not return.

And when, at last, the dim light of the Place-of-Meeting broke through she was buried deep in the debris that he had thrown behind him as he worked.

The air tasted good after the many times breathed atmosphere of the cave. For a few heartbeats Shrick was dizzy with the abrupt increase of pressure, for much of the air in his prison had escaped before the plug expanded to seal the entrance. It is probable that had it not been for the air liberated from the burst cells of the insulation he would long since have asphyxiated.

But this he was not to know—and if he had known it would not have worried him overmuch. He was alive, and Wesel and all the People were dead. When the mist cleared from in front of his eyes he could see them, their bodies twisted in the tortuous attitudes of their last agony, mute evidence of the awful powers of the Giants.

And now that he saw them he did not feel the overwhelming sorrow that he knew he should have done. He felt instead a kind of anger. By their refusal to heed his warning they had robbed him of his kingdom. None now could dispute his mastery of the Outside—but with no subjects, willing or unwilling, the vast territory under his sway was worthless.

With Wesel alive it would have been different.

What was it that she had said—? . . . *and the cave of Long-Fur the spear maker* . . .

He could hear her voice as she said it . . . *and the cave of Long-Fur the spear maker*.

Perhaps—But there was only one way to make sure.

He found the cave, saw that its entrance had been walled up. He felt a wild upsurge of hope. Frantically, with tooth and claw, he tore at the insulation. The fine blade that he had won from the Inside gleamed dully not a dozen handbreadths from where he was working, but such was his blind, unreasoning

haste that he ignored the tool that would have made his task immeasurably shorter. At last the entrance was cleared. A feeble cry greeted the influx of air and light. For a while Shrick could not see who was within, and then could have screamed in his disappointment.

For here were no tough fighting males, no sturdy, fertile females, but two hands or so of weakly squirming infants. Their mothers must have realized, barely in time, that he and Wesel had been right, that there was only one way to ward off the choking death. Themselves they had not been able to save.

But they will grow up, Shrick told himself. *It won't be long before they are able to carry a spear for the Lord of the Outside, before the females are able to bear his children*.

Conquering his repugnance, he dragged them out. There was a hand of female infants, all living, and a hand of males. Three of these were dead. But here, he knew, was the nucleus of the army with which he would reestablish his rule over the world, Inside as well as Outside.

But first, they had to be fed.

He saw, now, his fine blade, and seizing it he began to cut up the three lifeless male children. The scent of their blood made him realize that he was hungry. But it was not until the children, now quieted, were all munching happily that he cut a portion for himself.

When he had finished it he felt much better.

It was some time before Shrick resumed his visits to the Inside. He had the pitiful remnant of his people to nurse to maturity and, besides, there was no need to make raids upon the Giants' stocks of food. They themselves had provided him with sustenance beyond his powers of reckoning. He knew, too, that it would be unwise to let his enemies know that there had been any survivors from the cataclysm that they had launched. The fact that he had survived the choking death did not mean that it was the only weapon that the Giants had at their disposal.

But as time went on he felt an intense longing to watch once more the strange life beyond the Barrier. Now that he had killed a Giant he felt a strange sense of kinship with the monstrous beings. He thought of the Thin-One, Loud-Voice, Bare-Head and the Little Giant almost as old friends. At times he even caught himself regretting that he must kill them all. But he knew that in this lay the only hope for the survival of himself and his people.

And then, at last, he was satisfied that he could leave the children to fend for themselves. Even should he fail to return from the Inside they would manage. No-Toes, the eldest of the female children, had already proved to be a capable nurse.

And so he roamed once more the maze of caves and tunnels just outside the Barrier. Through his doorways and peepholes he spied upon the bright, fascinating life of the Inner World. From the Cave-of-Thunders—though how it had come by its name none of the People has ever known—to the Place-of-Little-Lights he ranged. Many feedings passed, but he was not obliged to return to his own food store. For the corpses of the People were everywhere. True, they were beginning to stink a little, but like all his race Shrick was never a fastidious eater.

And he watched the Giants going about the strange, ordered routine of their lives. Often he was tempted to show himself, to shout defiance. But this action had to remain in the realm of wish-fulfillment dreams—he knew full well that it would bring sure and speedy calamity.

And then, at last, came the opportunity for which he had been waiting. He had been in the Place-of-Little-Lights, watching the Little Giant going about his mysterious, absorbing business. He had wished that he could understand its purport, that he could ask the Little Giant in his own tongue what it was that he was doing. For, since the death of Wesel, there had been none with whom a communion of mind was possible. He sighed, so loudly that the Giant must have heard.

He started uneasily and looked up from his work. Hastily Shrick withdrew into his tunnel. For many heartbeats he remained there, occasionally peeping out. But the other was still alert, must have known in some way that he was not alone. And so, eventually, Shrick had retired rather than risk incurring the potent wrath of the Giants once more.

His random retreat brought him to a doorway but rarely used. On the other side of it was a huge cavern in which there was nothing of real interest or value. In it, as a rule, at least one of the Giants would

be sleeping, and others would be engaged in one of their incomprehensible pastimes.

This time there was no deep rumble of conversation, no movement whatsoever. Shrick's keen ears could distinguish the breathing of three different sleepers. The Thin-One was there, his respiration, like himself, had a meager quality. Loud-Voice was loud even in sleep. And Bare-Head, the chief of the Giants, breathed with a quiet authority.

And the Little Giant who, alone of all his people, was alert and awake was in the Place-of-Little-Lights.

Shrick knew that it was now or never. Any attempt to deal with the Giants singly must surely bring the great, hot light foretold by Three-Eyes. Now, with any luck at all, he could deal with the three sleepers and then lie in wait for the Little Giant. Unsuspecting, unprepared, he could be dealt with as easily as had Fat-Belly.

And yet—he did not want to do it.

It wasn't fear; it was that indefinable sense of kinship, the knowledge that, in spite of gross physical disparities, the Giants and the People were as one. For the history of Man, although Shrick was not to know this, is but the history of the fire-making, tool-using animal.

Then he forced himself to remember Wesel, and Big-Ears, and the mass slaughter of almost all his race. He remembered Three-Eyes' words—*but this I can tell you, the People are doomed. Nothing you or they can do will save them. But you will kill those who will kill us, and that is good*.

But you will kill those who will kill us—

But if I kill all the Giants before they kill us, he thought, then the world, all the world, will belong to the People . . .

And he still hung back.

It was not until the Thin-One, who must have been in the throes of a bad dream, murmured and stirred in his sleep that Shrick came out of his doorway. The keen blade with which he had slain Fat-Belly was grasped in both his hands. He launched himself toward the uneasy sleeper. His weapon sliced down once only—how often had he rehearsed this in his imagination!—and for the Thin-One the dream was over.

The smell of fresh blood, as always, excited him. It took him all of his will power to restrain himself from hacking and slashing at the dead Giant. But he promised himself that this would come later. And he jumped from the body of the Thin-One to where Loud-Voice was snoring noisily.

The abrupt cessation of that all too familiar sound must have awakened Bare-Head. Shrick saw him shift and stir, saw his hands go out to loosen the bonds that held him to his sleeping place. And when the Giant Killer, his feet scrabbling for a hold, landed on his chest he was ready. And he was shouting in a great Voice, so that Shrick knew that it was only a matter of heartbeats before the Little Giant came to his assistance.

Fat-Belly had been taken off guard, the Thin-One and Loud-Voice had been killed in their sleep. But here was no easy victory for the Giant Killer.

For a time it looked as though the chief of the Giants would win. After a little he ceased his shouting and fought with grim, silent desperation. Once one of his great hands caught Shrick in a bone-crushing grip, and it seemed as though the battle was over. Shrick could feel the blood pounding in his head, his eyeballs almost popping out of their sockets. It took every ounce of resolution he possessed to keep from dropping his blade and scratching frenziedly at the other's wrist with ineffectual hands.

Something gave—it was his ribs—and in the fleeting instant of relaxed pressure he was able to twist, to turn and slash at the monstrous, hairy wrist. The warm blood spurted and the Giant cried aloud. Again and again Shrick plied his blade, until it became plain that the Giant would not be able to use that hand again.

He was single-handed now against an opponent as yet—insofar as his limbs were concerned—uncrippled. True, every movement of the upper part of his body brought spears of pain lancing through Shrick's chest. But he could move, and smite—and slay.

For Bare-Head weakened as the blood flowed from his wounds. No longer was he able to ward off the attacks on his face and neck. Yet he fought, as his race had always fought, to his dying breath. His

enemy would have given no quarter—this much was obvious—but he could have sought refuge with the Little Giant in the Place-of-Little-Lights.

Toward the end he started shouting again.

And as he died, the Little Giant came into the cave.

It was sheer, blind luck that saved the Giant Killer from speedy death at the intruder's hands. Had the Little Giant known of the pitifully small forces arrayed against him it would have gone hard with Shrick. But No-Toes, left with her charges, had grown bored with the Place-of-Meeting. She had heard Shrick talk of the wonders of the Inside; and now, she thought, was her chance to see them for herself.

Followed by her charges she wandered aimlessly along the tunnels just outside the Barrier. She did not know the location of the doors to the Inside, and the view through the occasional peepholes was very circumscribed.

The she came upon the doorway which Shrick had left open when he made his attack on the sleeping Giants. Bright light streamed through the aperture—light brighter than any No-Toes had seen before in her short life. Like a beacon it lured her on.

She did not hesitate when she came to the opening. Unlike her parents, she had not been brought up to regard the Giants with superstitious awe. Shrick was the only adult she could remember having known—and he, although he had talked of the Giants, had boasted of having slain one in single combat. He had said, also, that he would, at some time or other, kill all the Giants.

In spite of her lack of age and experience, No-Toes was no fool. Womanlike, already she had evaluated Shrick. Much of his talk she discounted as idle bragging, but she had never seen any reason to disbelieve his stories of the deaths of Big-Tusk, Sterret, Tekka, Fat-Belly—and all the myriads of the People who had perished with them.

So it was that—foolhardy in her ignorance—she sailed through the doorway. Behind her came the other children, squealing in their excitement. Even if the Little Giant had not at first seen them he could not have failed to hear the shrill tumult of their eruption.

There was only one interpretation that he could put upon the evidence of his eyes. The plan to suffocate the People had failed. They had sallied out from their caves and tunnels to the massacre of his fellow Giants—and now fresh reinforcements were arriving to deal with him.

He turned and fled.

Shrick rallied his strength, made a flying leap from the monstrous carcass of Bare-Head. But in mid flight a hard, polished surface interposed itself between him and the fleeing Giant. Stunned, he hung against it for many heartbeats before he realized that it was a huge door which had shut in his face.

He knew that the Little Giant was not merely seeking refuge in flight—for where in the world could he hope to escape the wrath of the People? He had gone, perhaps, for arms of some kind. Or—and at the thought Shrick's blood congealed—he had gone to loose the final doom foretold by Three-Eyes. Now that his plans had begun to miscarry he remembered the prophecy in its entirety, was no longer able to ignore those parts that, in his arrogance, he had found displeasing.

And then No-Toes, her flight clumsy and inexpert in these—to her—strange, vast spaces was at his side.

"Are you hurt?" she gasped. "They are so big—and you fought them."

As she spoke, the world was filled with a deep humming sound. Shrick ignored the excited female. That noise could mean only one thing. The Little Giant was back in the Place-of-Little-Lights, was setting in motion vast, incomprehensible forces that would bring to pass the utter and irrevocable destruction of the People.

With his feet against the huge door he kicked off, sped rapidly down to the open doorway in the Barrier. He put out his hand to break the shock of his landing, screamed aloud as his impact sent a sickening wave of pain through his chest. He started to cough—and when he saw the bright blood that was welling from his mouth he was very frightened.

No-Toes was with him again. "You are hurt, you are bleeding. Can I—?"

"No!" He turned a snarling mask to her. "No! Leave me alone!"

"But where are you going?"

Shrick paused. Then: "I am going to save the world," he said slowly. He savored the effect of his words. They made him feel better, they made him bulk big in his own mind, bigger, perhaps, than the Giants. "I am going to save you all."

"But how—?"

This was too much for the Giant Killer. He screamed again, but this time with anger. With the back of his hand he struck the young female across the face.

"Stay here!" he ordered.

And then he was gone along the tunnel.

The gyroscopes were still singing their quiet song of power When Shrick reached the Control Room. Strapped in his chair, the navigator was busy over his plotting machine. Outside the ports the stars wheeled by in orderly succession.

And Shrick was frightened.

He had never quite believed Wesel's garbled version of the nature of the world until now. But he could see, at last, that the ship was moving. The fantastic wonder of it all held him spellbound until a thin edge of intolerable radiance crept into view from behind the rim of one of the ports. The navigator touched something and, suddenly, screens of dark blue glass mitigated the glare. But it was still bright, too bright, and the edge became a rapidly widening oval and then, at last, a disk.

The humming of the gyroscope stopped.

Before the silence had time to register, a fresh sound assailed Shrick's ears. It was the roar of the main drive.

A terrifying force seized him and slammed him down upon the deck. He felt his bones crack under the acceleration. True child of free fall as he was, all this held for him the terror of the supernatural. For a while he lay there, weakly squirming, whimpering a little. The navigator looked down at him and laughed. It was this sound more than anything else that stung Shrick to his last, supreme effort. He didn't want to move. He just wanted to lie there on the deck slowly coughing his life away. But the Little Giant's derision tapped unsuspected reserves of strength, both moral and physical.

The navigator went back to his calculations, handling his instruments for the last time with a kind of desperate elation. He knew that the ship would never arrive at her destination, neither would her cargo of seed grain. But she would not—and this outweighed all other considerations—drift forever among the stars carrying within her hull the seeds of the destruction of Man and all his works.

He knew that—had he not taken this way out—he must have slept at last, and then death at the hands of the mutants would inevitably have been his portion. And with mutants in full charge anything might happen.

The road he had taken was the best.

Unnoticed, inch by inch Shrick edged his way along the deck. Now, he could stretch his free hand and touch the Giant's foot. In the other he still held his blade, to which he had clung as the one thing sure and certain in this suddenly crazy world.

Then he had a grip on the artifical skin covering the Giant's leg. He started to climb, although every movement was unadulterated agony. He did not see the other raise his hand to his mouth, swallow the little pellet that he held therein.

So it was that when, at long last, he reached the soft, smooth throat of the Giant, the Giant was dead.

It was a very fast poison.

For a while he clung there. He should have felt elation at the death of the last of his enemies but—instead—he felt cheated. There was so much that he wanted to know, so much that only the Giants could have told him. Besides—it was his blade that should have won the final victory. He knew that, somewhere, the Little Giant was still laughing at him.

Through the blue-screened ports blazed the sun. Even at this distance, even with the intervening filters, its power and heat were all too evident. And aft the motors still roared, and would roar until the last ounce of fuel had been fed into hungry main drive.

Shrick clung to the dead man's neck, looked long and longingly at the glittering instruments, the

shining switches and levers, whose purpose he would never understand, whose inertia would have defeated any attempt of his fast ebbing strength to move them. He looked at the flaming doom ahead, and knew that this was what had been foretold.

Had the metaphor existed in his language, he would have told himself that he and the few surviving People were caught like rats in a trap.

But even the Giants would not have used that phrase in its metaphorical sense.

For that is all that the People were—rats in a trap.

This novella of an altered time track was Cyril Kornbluth's last completed work of fiction, published posthumously two months after his premature death in March 1958. Had he lived to revise it, Kornbluth would surely have shorn it of some trivial errors of fact (there are, for example, no Hopi reservations near Los Alamos, or anywhere in New Mexico). Such blemishes aside, the story is authentically Kornbluthian in the power of its dark vision and the precision of its narrative texture.

Two Dooms
C. M. Kornbluth

"*. . why should we be tender*
To let an arrogant piece of flesh threat us,
Play judge and executioner all himself?
CYMBELINE, IV, 2

I

It was may, not yet summer by five weeks, but the afternoon heat under the corrugated roofs of Manhattan Engineer District's Los Alamos Laboratory was daily less bearable. Young Dr. Edward Roy-land had lost fifteen pounds from an already meager frame during his nine-month hitch in the desert. He wondered every day while the thermometer crawled up to its 5:45 peak whether he had made a mistake he would regret the rest of his life in accepting work with the Laboratory rather than letting the local draft board have his carcass and do what they pleased with it. His University of Chicago classmates were glamorously collecting ribbons and wounds from Saipan to Brussels; one of them, a first-rate mathematician named Hatfield, would do no more first-rate mathematics. He had gone down, burning, in an Eighth Air Force Mitchell bomber ambushed over Lille.

"And what, Daddy, did you do in the war?"

"Well, kids, it's a little hard to explain. They had this stupid atomic bomb project that never came to anything, and they tied up a lot of us in a Godforsaken place in New Mexico. We figured and we calculated and we fooled with uranium and some of us got radiation burns and then the war was over and they sent us home."

Royland was not amused by this prospect. He had heat rash under his arms and he was waiting, not patiently, for the Computer Section to send him his figures on Phase 56c, which was the (god-damn childish) code designation for Element Assembly Time. Phase 56c was Royland's own particular baby. He was under Rotschmidt, supervisor of weapon design track III, and Rotschmidt was under Oppenheimer, who bossed the works. Sometimes a General Groves came through, a fine figure of a man, and once from a window Royland had seen the venerable Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, walking slowly down their dusty street, leaning on a cane and surrounded by young staff officers. That's what Royland was seeing of the war.

Laboratory! It had sounded inviting, cool, bustling but quiet. So every morning these days he was blasted out of his cot in a barracks cubicle at seven by "Oppie's whistle," fought for a shower and shave with thirty-seven other bachelor scientists in eight languages, bolted a bad cafeteria breakfast, and went through the barbed-wire Restricted Line to his "office"—another matchboard-walled cubicle, smaller and

hotter and noisier, with talking and typing and clack of adding machines all around him.

Under the circumstances he was doing good work, he supposed. He wasn't happy about being restricted to his one tiny problem, Phase 56c, but no doubt he was happier than Hatfield had been when his Mitchell got it.

Under the circumstances . . . they included a weird haywire arrangement for computing. Instead of a decent differential analyzer machine they had a human sea of office girls with Burroughs' desk calculators; the girls screamed "Banzai!" and charged on differential equations and swamped them by sheer volume; they clicked them to death with their little adding machines. Royland thought hungrily of Conant's huge, beautiful analog differentiator up at M.I.T.; it was probably tied up by whatever the mysterious "Radiation Laboratory" there was doing. Royland suspected that the "Radiation Laboratory" had as much to do with radiation as his own "Manhattan Engineer District" had to do with Manhattan engineering. And the world was supposed to be trembling on the edge these days of a New Dispensation of Computing that would obsolete even the M.I.T. machine—tubes, relays, and binary arithmetic at blinding speed instead of the suavely turning cams and the smoothly extruding rods and the elegant scribed curves of Conant's masterpiece. He decided that he wouldn't like that; he would like it even less than he liked the little office girls clacking away, pushing lank hair from their dewed brows with undistracted hands.

He wiped his own brow with a sodden handkerchief and permitted himself a glance at his watch and the thermometer. Five-fifteen and 103 Fahrenheit.

He thought vaguely of getting out, of fouling up just enough to be released from the project and drafted. No; there was the post-war career to think of. But one of the big shots, Teller, had been irrepressible; he had rambled outside of his assigned mission again and again until Oppenheimer let him go; now Teller was working with Lawrence at Berkeley on something that had reputedly gone sour at a reputed quarter of a billion dollars—

A girl in khaki knocked and entered. "Your material from the Computer Section, Dr. Royland. Qheck them and sign here, please." He counted the dozen sheets, signed the clipboarded form she held out, and plunged into the material for thirty minutes.

When he sat back in his chair, the sweat dripped into his eyes unnoticed. His hands were shaking a little, though he did not know that either. Phase 56c of weapon design track III was finished, over, done, successfully accomplished. The answer to the question "Can U23B slugs be assembled into a critical mass within a physically feasible time?" was in. The answer was "Yes."

Royland was a theory man, not a Wheatstone or a Kelvin; he liked the numbers for themselves and had no special passion to grab for wires, mica, and bits of graphite so that what the numbers said might immediately be given flesh in a wonderful new gadget. Nevertheless he could visualize at once a workable atomic bomb assembly within the framework of Phase 56c. You have so many microseconds to assemble your critical mass without it boiling away in vapor; you use them by blowing the subassemblies together with shaped charges; lots of microseconds to spare by that method; practically foolproof. Then comes the Big Bang.

Oppie's whistle blew; it was quitting time. Royland sat still in his cubicle. He should go, of course, to Rotschmidt and tell him; Rotschmidt would probably clap him on the back and pour him a jigger of Bols Geneva from the tall clay bottle he kept in his safe. Then Rotschmidt would go to Oppenheimer. Before sunset the project would be redesigned! track I, track II, track IV, and track V would be shut down and their people crammed into track III, the one with the paydirt! New excitement would boil through the project; it had been torpid and souring for three months. Phase 56c was the first good news in at least that long; it had been one damned blind alley after another. General Groves had looked sour and dubious last time around.

Desk drawers were slamming throughout the corrugated, sunbaked building; doors were slamming shut on cubicles; down the corridor, somebody roared with laughter, strained laughter. Passing Royland's door somebody cried impatiently: *"—aber was kan Man tun?"*

Royland whispered to himself: "You damned fool, what are you thinking of?"

But he knew—he was thinking of the Big Bang, the Big Dirty Bang, and of torture. The judicial torture of the old days, incredibly cruel by today's lights, stretched the whole body, or crushed it, or

burned it, or shattered the fingers and legs. But even that old judicial torture carefully avoided the most sensitive parts of the body, the generative organs, though damage to these, or a real threat of damage to these, would have produced quick and copious confessions. You have to be more or less crazy to torture somebody that way; the sane man does not think of it as a possibility.

An M.P. corporal tried Royland's door and looked in. "Quitting time, professor," he said.

"Okay," Royland said. Mechanically he locked his desk drawers and his files, turned his window lock, and set out his waste-paper basket in the corridor. Click the door; another day, another dollar.

Maybe the project *was* breaking up. They did now and then. The huge boner at Berkeley proved that. And Royland's barracks was light two physicists now; their cubicles stood empty since they had been drafted to M.I.T. for some anti-submarine thing. Groves had *not* looked happy last time around; how did a general make up his mind anyway? Give them three months, then the ax? Maybe Stimson would run out of patience and cut the loss, close the District down. Maybe F.D.R. would say at a Cabinet meeting, "By the way, Henry, what ever became of—?" and that would be the end if old Henry could say only that the scientists appear to be optimistic of eventual success, Mr. President, but that as yet there seems to be nothing *concrete*. He passed through the barbed wire of the Line under scrutiny of an M.P. lieutenant and walked down the barracks-edged company street of the maintenance troops to their motor pool. He wanted a jeep and a trip ticket; he wanted a long desert drive in the twilight; he wanted a dinner of *frijoles* and eggplant with his old friend Charles Miller Nahataspe, the medicine man of the adjoining Hopi reservation. Royland's hobby was anthropology; he wanted to get a little drunk on it—he hoped it would clear his mind.

II

Nahataspe welcomed him cheerfully to his hut; his million wrinkles all smiled. ""You want me to play informant for a while?" he grinned. He had been to Carlisle in the 1880's and had been laughing at the white man ever since; he admitted that physics was funny, but for a real joke give him cultural anthropology every time. "You want some nice unsavory stuff about our institutionalized homosexuality? Should I cook us a dog for dinner? Have a seat on the blanket, Edward."

"What happened to your chairs? And the funny picture of McKinley? And—and everything?" The hut was bare except for cooking pots that simmered on the stone-curbed central hearth.

"I gave the stuff away," Nahataspe said carelessly. "You get tired of things."

Royland thought he knew what that meant. Nahataspe believed he would die quite soon; these particular Indians did not believe in dying encumbered by possessions. Manners, of course, forbade discussing death.

The Indian watched his face and finally said: "Oh, it's all right for *you* to talk about it. Don't be embarrassed."

Royland asked nervously: "Don't you feel well?"

"I feel terrible. There's a snake eating my liver. Pitch in and eat. You feel pretty awful yourself, don't you?"

The hard-learned habit of security caused Royland to evade the question. "You don't mean that literally about the snake, do you Charles?"

"Of course I do," Miller insisted. He scooped a steaming gourd full of stew from the pot and blew on it. "What would an untutored child of nature know about bacteria, viruses, toxins, and neoplasms? What would I know about break-the-sky medicine?"

Royland looked up sharply; the Indian was blandly eating. "Do you hear any talk about break-the-sky medicine?" Royland asked.

"No talk, Edward. I've had a few dreams about it." He pointed with his chin toward the Laboratory. "You fellows over there shouldn't dream so hard; it leaks out."

Royland helped himself to stew without answering. The stew was good, far better than the cafeteria stuff, and he did not *have* to guess the source of the meat in it.

Miller said consolingly: "It's only kid stuff, Edward. Don't get so worked up about it. We have a long

dull story about a horned toad who ate some loco-weed and thought he was the Sky God. He got angry and he tried to break the sky but he couldn't so he slunk into his hole ashamed to face all the other animals and died. But they never knew he tried to break the sky at all."

In spite of himself Royland demanded: "Do you have any stories about anybody who did break the sky?" His hands were shaking again and his voice almost hysterical. Oppie and the rest of them were going to break the sky, kick humanity right in the crotch, and unleash a prowling monster that would go up and down by night and day peering in all the windows of all the houses in the world, leaving no sane man ever unterrified for his life and the lives of his kin. Phase 56c, God-damn it to blackest hell, made sure of that! Well done, Royland; you earned your dollar today!

Decisively the old Indian set his gourd aside. He said: "We have a saying that the only good paleface is a dead paleface, but I'll make an exception for you, Edward. I've got some strong stuff from Mexico that will make you feel better. I don't like to see my friends hurting."

"Peyote? I've tried it. Seeing a few colored lights won't make me feel better, but thanks."

"Not peyote, this stuff. It's God Food. I wouldn't take it myself without a month of preparation; otherwise the Gods would scoop me up in a net. That's because my people see clearly, and your eyes are clouded." He was busily rummaging through a clay-chinked wicker box as he spoke; he came up with a covered dish. "You people have your sight cleared just a little by the God Food, so it's safe for you."

Royland thought he knew what the old man was talking about. It was one of Nahataspe's biggest jokes that Hopi children understood Einstein's relativity as soon as they could talk—and there was some truth to it. The Hopi language—and thought—had no tenses and therefore no concept of time-as-an-entity; it had nothing like the Indo-European speech's subjects and predicates, and therefore no built-in metaphysics of cause and effect. In the Hopi language and mind all things were frozen together forever into one great relationship, a crystalline structure of space-time events that simply were because they were. So much for Nahataspe's people "seeing clearly." But Royland gave himself and any other physicist credit for seeing as clearly when they were working a four-dimensional problem in the X Y Z space variables and the T time variable.

He could have spoiled the old man's joke by pointing that out, but of course he did not. No, no; he'd get a jag and maybe a bellyache from Nahataspe's herb medicine and then go home to his cubicle with his problem unresolved: to kick or not to kick?

The old man began to mumble in Hopi, and drew a tattered cloth across the door frame of his hut; it shut out the last rays of the setting sun, long and slanting on the desert, pink-red against the adobe cubes of the Indian settlement. It took a minute for Royland's eyes to accommodate to the flickering light from the hearth and the indigo square of the ceiling smoke hole. Now Nahataspe was "dancing," doing a crouched shuffle around the hut holding the covered dish before him. Out of the corner of his mouth, without interrupting the rhythm, he said to Royland: "Drink some hot water now." Royland sipped from one of the pots on the hearth; so far it was much like peyote ritual, but he felt calmer.

Nahataspe uttered a loud scream, added apologetically: "Sorry, Edward," and crouched before him whipping the cover off the dish like a headwaiter. So God Food was dried black mushrooms, miserable, wrinkled little things. "You swallow them all and chase them with hot water," Nahataspe said.

Obediently Royland choked them down and gulped from the jug; the old man resumed his dance and chanting.

A little old self-hypnosis, Royland thought bitterly. Grab some imitation sleep and forget about old 56c, as if you could. He could see the big dirty one now, a hell of a fireball, maybe over Munich, or Cologne, or Tokyo, or Nara. Cooked people, fused cathedral stone, the bronze of the big Buddha running like water, perhaps lapping around the ankles of a priest and burning his feet off so he fell prone into the stuff. He couldn't see the gamma radiation, but it would be there, invisible sleet doing the dirty unthinkable thing, coldly burning away the sex of men and women, cutting short so many fans of life at their points of origin. Phase 56c could snuff out a family of Bachs, or five generations of Bernoullis, or see to it that the great Huxley-Darwin cross did not occur.

The fireball loomed, purple and red and fringed with green—The mushrooms were reaching him, he

thought fuzzily. He could really see it. Nahataspe, crouched and treading, moved through the fireball just as he had the last time, and the time before that. Deja vu, extraordinarily strong, stronger than ever before, gripped him. Royland knew all this had happened to him before, and remembered perfectly what would come next; it was on the very tip of his tongue, as they say—The fireballs began to dance around him and he felt his strength drain suddenly out; he was lighter than a feather; the breeze would carry him away; he would be blown like a dust mote into the circle that the circling fireballs made. And he knew it was wrong. He croaked with the last of his energy, feeling himself slip out of the world: "Charlie! Help!"

Out of the corner of his mind as he slipped away he sensed that the old man was pulling him now under the arms, trying to tug him out of the hut, crying dimly into his ear: "You should have told me you did not see through smoke! You see clear; I never knew; I nev—"

And then he slipped through into blackness and silence.

III

Royland awoke sick and fuzzy; it was morning in the hut; there was no sign of Nahataspe. Well. Unless the old man had gotten to a phone and reported to the Laboratory, there were now jeeps scouring the desert in search of him and all hell was breaking loose in Security and Personnel. He would catch some of that hell on his return, and avert it with his news about assembly time.

Then he noticed that the hut had been cleaned of Nahataspe's few remaining possessions, even to the door cloth. A pang went through him; had the old man died in the night? He limped from the hut and looked around for a funeral pyre, a crowd of mourners. They were not there; the adobe cubes stood untenanted in the sunlight, and more weeds grew in the single street than he remembered. And his jeep, parked last night against the hut, was missing.

There were no wheeltracks, and uncrushed weeds grew tall where the jeep had stood.

Nahataspe's God Food had been powerful stuff. Royland's hand crept uncertainly to his face. No; no beard.

He looked about him, looked hard. He made the effort necessary to see details. He did not glance at the hut and because it was approximately the same as it had always been, concluded that it was unchanged, eternal. He looked and saw changes everywhere. Once-sharp adobe corners were rounded; protruding roof beams were bleached bone-white by how many years of desert sun? The wooden framing of the deep fortress-like windows had crumbled; the third building from him had wavering soot stains above its window boles and its beams were charred.

He went to it, numbly thinking: Phase 56c at least is settled. Not old Rip's baby now. They'll know me from fingerprints, I guess. One year? Ten? I *feel* the same.

The burned-out house was a shambles. In one corner were piled dry human bones. Royland leaned dizzily against the doorframe; its charcoal crumbled and streaked his hand. Those skulls were Indian-he was anthropologist enough to know that. Indian men, women and children, slain and piled in a heap. Who kills Indians? There should have been some sign of clothes, burned rags, but there were none. Who strips Indians naked and kills them?

Signs of a dreadful massacre were everywhere in the house. Bullet-pocks in the walls, high and low. Savage nicks left by bayonets—and swords? Dark stains of blood; it had run two inches high and left its mark. Metal glinted in a ribcage across the room. Swaying, he walked to the boneheap and thrust his hand into it. The thing bit him like a razor blade; he did not look at it as he plucked it out and carried it to the dusty street. With his back turned to the burned house he studied his find. It was a piece of swordblade six inches long, hand-honed to a perfect edge with a couple of nicks in it. It had stiffening ribs and the usual blood gutters. It had a perceptible curve that would fit into only one shape: the Samurai sword of Japan.

However long it had taken, the war was obviously over.

He went to the village well and found it choked with dust. It was while he stared into the dry hole that he first became afraid. Suddenly it all was real; he was no more an onlooker but a frightened and very thirsty man. He ransacked the dozen houses of the settlement and found nothing to his purpose—a child's

skeleton here, a couple of cartridge cases there.

There was only one thing left, and that was the road, the same earth track it had always been, wide enough for one jeep or the rump-sprung station wagon of the Indian settlement that once had been. Panic invited him to run; he did not yield. He sat on the well curb, took off his shoes to meticulously smooth wrinkles out of his khaki G.I. socks, put the shoes on, and retied the laces loosely enough to allow for swelling, and hesitated a moment. Then he grinned, selected two pebbles carefully from the dust and popped them in his mouth. "Beaver Patrol, forward march," he said, and began to hike.

Yes, he was thirsty; soon he would be hungry and tired; what of it? The dirt road would meet state-maintained blacktop in three miles and then there would be traffic and he'd hitch a ride. Let them argue with his fingerprints if they felt like it. The Japanese had got as far as New Mexico, had they? Then God help their home islands when the counterblow had come. Americans were a ferocious people when trespassed on. Conceivably, there was not a Japanese left alive . . .

He began to construct his story as he hiked. In large parts it was a repeated "I don't know." He would tell them: "I don't expect you to believe this, so my feelings won't be hurt when you don't. Just listen to what I say and hold everything until the F.B.I, has checked my fingerprints. My name is—" And so on.

It was midmorning then, and he would be on the highway soon. His nostrils, sharpened by hunger, picked up a dozen scents on the desert breeze: the spice of sage, a whiff of acetylene stink from a rattler dozing on the shaded side of a rock, the throat-tightening reek of tar suggested for a moment on the air. That would be the highway, perhaps a recent hotpatch on a chuckhole. Then a startling tang of sulfur dioxide drowned them out and passed on, leaving him stung and sniffling and groping for a handkerchief that was not there. What in God's name had that been, and where from? Without ceasing to trudge he studied the horizon slowly and found a smoke pall to the far west dimly smudging the sky. It looked like a small city's, or a fair-sized factory's, pollution. A city or a factory where "in his time" —he formed the thought reluctantly—there had been none.

Then he was at the highway. It had been improved; it was a two-laner still, but it was nicely graded now, built up by perhaps three inches of gravel and tar beyond its old level, and lavishly ditched on either side.

If he had a coin he would have tossed it, but you went for weeks without spending a cent at Los Alamos Laboratory; Uncle took care of everything, from cigarettes to tombstones. He turned left and began to walk westward toward that sky smudge.

I am a reasonable animal, he was telling himself, and I will accept whatever comes in a spirit of reason. I will control what I can and try to understand the rest—

A faint siren scream began behind him and built up fast. The reasonable animal jumped for the ditch and hugged it for dear life. The siren howled closer, and motors roared. At the ear-splitting climax Royland put his head up for one glimpse, then fell back into the ditch as if a grenade had exploded in his middle.

The convoy roared on, down the *center* of the two-lane highway, straddling the white line. First the three little recon cars with the twin-mount machine guns, each filled brimful with three helmeted Japanese soldiers. Then the high-profiled, armored car of state, six-wheeled, with a probably ceremonial gun turret astern—nickel-plated gunbarrels are impractical—and the Japanese admiral in the fore-and-aft hat taking his lordly ease beside a rawboned, hatchet-faced SS officer in gleaming black. Then, diminuendo, two more little recon jobs . . .

"We've lost," Royland said in his ditch meditatively. "Ceremonial tanks with glass windows—we lost a *long* time ago." Had there been a Rising Sun insignia or was he now imagining that?

He climbed out and continued to trudge westward on the improved blacktop. You couldn't say "I reject the universe," not when you were as thirsty as he was.

He didn't even turn when the put-putting of a westbound vehicle grew loud behind him and then very loud when it stopped at his side.

"Zeegail," a curious voice said. "What are you doing here?"

The vehicle was just as odd in its own way as the ceremonial tank. It was minimum motor

transportation, a kid's sled on wheels, powered by a noisy little air-cooled outboard motor. The driver sat with no more comfort than a cleat to back his coccyx against, and behind him were two twenty-five pound flour sacks that took up all the remaining room the little buckboard provided. The driver had the leathery Southwestern look; he wore a baggy blue outfit that was obviously a uniform and obviously unmilitary. He had a nametape on his breast above an incomprehensible row of dull ribbons: MARTFIELD, E., 1218824, P/7 NQOTD43. He saw Royland's eyes on the tape and said kindly: "My name is Martfield—Paymaster Seventh, but there's no need to use my rank here. Are you all right, my man?"

"Thirsty," Royland said. "What's the NQOTD43 for?"

"You can read!" Martfield said, astounded. "Those clothes—"

"Something to drink, please," Royland said. For the moment nothing else mattered in the world. He sat down on the buckboard like a puppet with cut strings.

"See here, fellow!" Martfield snapped in a curious, strangled way, forcing the words through his throat with a stagy, conventional effect of controlled anger. "You can stand until I invite you to sit!"

"Have you any water?" Royland asked dully.

With the same bark: "Who do you think you are?"

"I happen to be a theoretical physicist—" tiredly arguing with a dim seventh-carbon-copy imitation of a drill sergeant.

"Oh-hoh!" Martfield suddenly laughed. His stiffness vanished; he actually reached into his baggy tunic and brought out a pint canteen that gurgled. He then forgot all about the canteen in his hand, roguishly dug Royland in the ribs and said: "I should have suspected. You scientists! Somebody was supposed to pick you up—but he was another scientist, eh? Ah-hah-hah-hah!"

Royland took the canteen from his hand and sipped. So a scientist was supposed to be an idiot-savant, eh? Never mind now; drink. People said you were not supposed to fill your stomach with water after great thirst; it sounded to him like one of those puritanical rules people make up out of nothing because they sound reasonable. He finished the canteen while Martfield, Paymaster Seventh, looked alarmed, and wished only that there were three or four more of them.

"Got any food?" he demanded.

Martfield cringed briefly. "Doctor, I regret extremely that I have nothing with me. However if you would do me the honor of riding with me to my quarters—"

"Let's go," Royland said. He squatted on the flour sacks and away they chugged at a good thirty miles an hour; it was a fair little engine. The Paymaster Seventh continued deferential, apologizing over his shoulder because there was no windscreen, later dropped his cringing entirely to explain that Royland was seated on flour—*"white* flour, understand?" An over-the-shoulder wink. He had a friend in the bakery at Los Alamos. Several buckboards passed the other way as they traveled. At each encounter there was a peering examination of insignia to decide who saluted. Once they met a sketchily enclosed vehicle that furnished its driver with a low seat instead of obliging him to sit with legs straight out, and Paymaster Seventh Martfield almost dislocated his shoulder saluting first. The driver of that one was a Japanese in a kimono. A long curved sword lay across his lap.

Mile after mile the smell of sulfur and sulfides increased; finally there rose before them the towers of a Frasch Process layout. It looked like an oilfield, but instead of ground-laid pipelines and bass-drum storage tanks there were foothills of yellow sulfur. They drove between them—more salutes from baggily uniformed workers with shovels and yard-long Stilson wrenches. Off to the right were things that might have been Solvay Process towers for sulfuric acid, and a glittering horror of a neo-Roman administration-and-labs building. The Rising Sun banner fluttered from its central flagstaff.

Music surged as they drove deeper into the area; first it was a welcome counterirritant to the pop-pop of the two-cycle buckboard engine, and then a nuisance by itself. Royland looked, annoyed, for the loudspeakers, and saw them everywhere—on power poles, buildings, gateposts. Schmaltzy Strauss waltzes bathed them like smog, made thinking just a little harder, made communication just a little more blurry even after you had learned to live with the noise.

"I miss music in the wilderness," Martfield confided over his shoulder. He throttled down the

buckboard until they were just rolling; they had passed some line unrecognized by Royland beyond which one did not salute everybody—just the occasional Japanese walking by in business suit with blueprint-roll and slide rule, or in kimono with sword. It was a German who nailed Royland, however: a classic jack-booted German in black broadcloth, black leather, and plenty of silver trim. He watched them roll for a moment after exchanging salutes with Martfield, made up his mind, and said: "Halt."

The Paymaster Seventh slapped on the brake, killed the engine, and popped to attention beside the buckboard. Royland more or less imitated him. The German said, stiffly but without accent: "Whom have you brought here, Paymaster?"

"A scientist, sir. I picked him up on the road returning from Los Alamos with personal supplies. He appears to be a minerals prospector who missed a rendezvous, but naturally I have not questioned the Doctor."

The German turned to Royland contemplatively. "So, Doctor. Your name and specialty."

"Dr. Edward Royland," he said. "I do nuclear power research." If there was no bomb he'd be damned if he'd invent it now for these people.

"So? That is very interesting, considering that there is no such thing as nuclear power research. Which camp are you from?" The German threw an aside to the Paymaster Seventh, who was literally shaking with fear at the turn things had taken. "You may go, Paymaster. Of course you will report yourself for harboring a fugitive."

"At once, sir," Martfield said in a sick voice. He moved slowly away pushing the little buckboard before him. The Strauss waltz oom-pah'd its last chord and instantly the loudspeakers struck up a hoppity-hoppity folk dance, heavy on the brass.

"Come with me," the German said, and walked off, not even looking behind to see whether Royland was obeying. This itself demonstrated how unlikely any disobedience was to succeed. Royland followed at his heels, which of course were garnished with silver spurs. Royland had not seen a horse so far that day.

IV

A Japanese stopped them politely inside the administration building, a rimless-glasses, office-manager type in a gray suit. "How nice to see you again, Major Kappel! Is there anything I might do to help you?"

The German stiffened. "I didn't want to bother your people, Mr. Ito. This fellow appears to be a fugitive from one of our camps; I was going to turn him over to our liaison group for examination and return."

Mr. Ito looked at Royland and slapped his face hard. Royland, by the insanity of sheer reflex, cocked his fist as a red-blooded boy should, but the German's reflexes operated also. He had a pistol in his hand and pressed against Royland's ribs before he could throw the punch.

"All right," Royland said, and put down his hand.

Mr. Ito laughed. "You are at least partly right, Major Kappel; he certainly is not from one of *our* camps! But do not let me delay you further. May I hope for a report on the outcome of this?"

"Of course, Mr. Ito," said the German. He holstered his pistol and walked on, trailed by the scientist. Royland heard him grumble something that sounded like "Damned extraterritoriality!"

They descended to a basement level where all the door signs were in German, and in an office labeled wissenschaft-slichesicherheitsliaison Royland finally told his story. His audience was the major, a fat officer deferentially addressed as Colonel Biederman, and a bearded old civilian, a Dr. Piqueron, called in from another office. Royland suppressed only the matter of bomb research, and did it easily with the old security habit. His improvised cover story made the Los Alamos Laboratory a research center only for the generation of electricity.

The three heard him out in silence. Finally, in an amused voice, the colonel asked: "Who was this Hitler you mentioned?"

For that Royland was not prepared. His jaw dropped.

Major Kappel said: "Oddly enough, he struck on a name which does figure, somewhat infamously, in

the annals of the Third Reich. One Adolf Hitler was an early Party agitator, but as I recall it he intrigued against the Leader during the War of Triumph and was executed."

"An ingenious madman," the colonel said. "Sterilized, of course?"

"Why, I don't know. I suppose so. Doctor, would you—?"

Dr. Piqueron quickly examined Royland and found him all there, which astonished them. Then they thought of looking for his camp tattoo number on the left bicep, and found none. Then, thoroughly upset, they discovered that he had no birth number above his left nipple either.

"And," Dr. Piqueron stammered, "his shoes are odd, sir—I just noticed. Sir, how long since you've seen sewn shoes and braided laces?"

"You must be hungry," the colonel suddenly said. "Doctor, have my aide get something to eat for—for the doctor."

"Major," said Royland, "I hope no harm will come to the fellow who picked me up. You told him to report himself."

"Have no fear, er, doctor," said the major. "Such humanity! You are of German blood?"

"Not that I know of; it may be."

"It *must* be!" said the colonel.

A platter of hash and a glass of beer arrived on a tray. Royland postponed everything. At last he demanded: "Now. Do you believe me? There must be fingerprints to prove my story still in existence."

"I feel like a fool," the major said. "You still could be hoaxing us. Dr. Piqueron, did not a German scientist establish that nuclear power is a theoretical and practical impossibility, that one always must put more into it than one can take out?"

Piqueron nodded and said reverently: "Heisenberg. Nineteen fifty-three, during the War of Triumph. His group was then assigned to electrical weapons research and produced the blinding bomb. But this fact does not invalidate the doctor's story; he says only that his group was *attempting* to produce nuclear power."

"We've got to research this," said the colonel. "Dr. Piqueron, entertain this man, whatever he is, in your laboratory."

Piqueron's laboratory down the hall was a place of astounding simplicity, even crudeness. The sinks, reagents, and balance were capable only of simple qualitative and quantitative analyses; various works in progress testified that they were not even strained to their modest limits. Samples of sulfur and its compounds were analyzed here. It hardly seemed to call for a "doctor" of anything, and hardly even for a human being. Machinery should be continuously testing the products as they flowed out; variations should be scribed mechanically on a moving tape; automatic controls should at least stop the processes and signal an alarm when variation went beyond limits; at most it might correct whatever was going wrong. But here sat Piqueron every day, titrating, precipitating, and weighing, entering results by hand in a ledger and telephoning them to the works!

Piqueron looked about proudly. "As a physicist you wouldn't understand all this, of course," he said. "Shall I explain?"

"Perhaps later, doctor, if you'd be good enough. If you'd first help me orient myself—"

So Piqueron told him about the War of Triumph (1940-1955) and what came after.

V

In 1940 the realm of der Fuehrer (Herr Goebbels, of course—that strapping blond fellow with the heroic jaw and eagle's eye whom you can see in the picture there) was simultaneously and treacherously invaded by the misguided French, the sub-human Slavs, and the perfidious British. The attack, for which the shocked Germans coined the name *blitzkrieg,* was timed to coincide with an internal eruption of sabotage, well-poisoning, and assassination by the *Zigeunerjuden,* or Jewpsies, of whom little is now known; there seem to be none left.

By Nature's ineluctable law, the Germans had necessarily to be tested to the utmost so that they might fully respond. Therefore Germany was overrun from East and West, and Holy Berlin itself was

taken; but Goebbels and his court withdrew like Barbarossa into the mountain fastnesses to await their day. It came unexpectedly soon. The deluded Americans launched a million-man amphibious attack on the homeland of the Japanese in 1945. The Japanese resisted with almost Teutonic courage. Not one American in twenty reached shore alive, and not one in a hundred got a mile inland. Particularly lethal were the women and children, who lay in camouflaged pits hugging artillery shells and aircraft bombs, which they detonated when enough invaders drew near to make it worthwhile.

The second invasion attempt, a month later, was made up of second-line troops scraped up from everywhere, including occupation duty in Germany.

"Literally," Piqueron said, "the Japanese did not know how to surrender, so they did not. They could not conquer, but they could and did continue suicidal resistance, consuming manpower of the allies and their own womanpower and childpower—a shrewd bargain for the Japanese! The Russians refused to become involved in the Japanese war; they watched with apish delight while two future enemies, as they supposed, were engaged in mutual destruction.

"A third assault wave broke on Kyushu and gained the island at last. What lay ahead? Only another assault on Honshu, the main island, home of the Emperor and the principal shrines. It was 1946; the volatile, child-like Americans were war-weary and mutinous; the best of them were gone by then. In desperation the Anglo-American leaders offered the Russians an economic sphere embracing the China coast and Japan as the price of participation."

The Russians grinned and assented; they would take that—at *least* that. They mounted a huge assault for the spring of 1947; they would take Korea and leap off from there for northern Honshu while the Anglo-American forces struck in the south. Surely this would provide at last a symbol before which the Japanese might without shame bow down and admit defeat!

And then, from the mountain fastnesses, came the radio voice: "Germans! Your Leader calls upon you again!" Followed the Hundred Days of Glory during which the German Army reconstituted itself and expelled the occupation troops—by then, children without combat experience, and leavened by not-quite-disabled veterans. Followed the seizure of the airfields; the Luftwaffe in business again. Followed the drive, almost a dress parade, to the Channel Coast, gobbling up immense munition dumps awaiting shipment to the Pacific Theater, millions of warm uniforms, good boots, mountains of rations, piles of shells and explosives that lined the French roads for, scores of miles, thousands of two-and-a-half-ton trucks, and lakes of gasoline to fuel them. The shipyards of Europe, from Hamburg to Toulon, had been turning out, furiously, invasion barges for the Pacific. In April of 1947 they sailed against England in their thousands.

Halfway around the world, the British Navy was pounding Tokyo, Nagasaki, Kobe, Hiroshima, Nara. Three quarters of the way across Asia the Russian Army marched stolidly on; let the decadent British pickle their own fish; the glorious motherland at last was gaining her long-sought, long-denied, warm-water seacoast. The British, tired women without their men, children fatherless these eight years, old folks deathly weary, deathly worried about their sons, were brave but they were not insane. They accepted honorable peace terms; they capitulated.

With the Western front secure for the first time in history, the ancient Drive to the East was resumed; the immemorial struggle of Teuton against Slav went on.

His spectacles glittering with rapture, Dr. Piqueron said: "We were worthy in those days of the Teutonic Knights who seized Prussia from the sub-men! On the ever-glorious Twenty-first of May, Moscow was ours!"

Moscow and the monolithic state machinery it controlled, and all the roads and rail lines and communication wires which led only to— and from—Moscow. Detroit-built tanks and trucks sped along those roads in the fine, bracing spring weather; the Red Army turned one hundred and eighty degrees at last and countermarched halfway across the Eurasian landmass, and at Kazan it broke exhausted against the Frederik Line.

Europe at last was One and German. Beyond Europe lay the dark and swarming masses of Asia, mysterious and repulsive folk whom it would be better to handle through the non-German, but chivalrous, Japanese. The Japanese were reinforced with shipping from Birkenhead, artillery from the Putilov

Works, jet fighters from Chateauroux, steel from the Ruhr, rice from the Po valley, herring from Norway, timber from Sweden, oil from Romania, laborers from India. The American forces were driven from Kyushu in the winter of 1948, and bloodily back across their chain of island steppingstones that followed.

Surrender they would not; it was a monstrous affront that shield-shaped North America dared to lie there between the German Atlantic and the Japanese Pacific threatening both. The affront was wiped out in 1955.

For one hundred and fifty years now the Germans and the Japanese had uneasily eyed each other across the banks of the Mississippi. Their orators were fond of referring to that river as a vast frontier unblemished by a single fortification. There was even some interpenetration; a Japanese colony fished out of Nova Scotia on the very rim of German America; a sulfur mine which was part of the Farben system lay in New Mexico, the very heart of Japanese America—this was where Dr. Edward Royland found himself, being lectured to by Dr. Piqueron, Dr. Gaston Pierre Piqueron, true-blue German.

VI

"Here, of course," Dr. Piqueron said gloomily, "we are so damned provincial. Little ceremony and less manners. Well, it would be too much to expect them to assign *German* Germans to this dreary outpost, so we French Germans must endure it somehow."

"You're all French?" Royland asked, startled.

"French *Germans,"* Piqueron stiffly corrected him. "Colonel Biederman happens to be a French German also; Major Kappel is—hrrmph—an Italian German." He sniffed to show what he thought of that.

The Italian German entered at that point, not in time to shut off the question: "And you all come from Europe?"

They looked at him in bafflement. "My grandfather did," Dr. Piqueron said. Royland remembered; so Roman legions used to guard their empire—Romans born and raised in Britain, or on the Danube, Romans who would never in their lives see Italy or Rome.

Major Kappel said affably: "Well, this needn't concern us. I'm afraid, my dear fellow, that your little hoax has not succeeded." He clapped Royland merrily on the back. "I admit you've tricked us all nicely; now may we have the facts?"

Piqueron said, surprised: "His story is false? The shoes? The missing *geburtsnummer?* And he appears to understand some chemistry!"

"Ah-h-h—but he said his specialty was *physics,* doctor! Suspicious in itself!"

"Quite so. A discrepancy. But the rest—?"

"As to his birth number, who knows? As to his shoes, who cares? I took some inconspicuous notes while he was entertaining us and have checked thoroughly. There *was* no Manhattan Engineering District. There *was* no Dr. Oppenheimer, or Fermi, or Bohr. There *is* no theory of relativity, or equivalence of mass and energy. Uranium has one use only—coloring glass a pretty orange. There is such a thing as an isotope but it has nothing to do with chemistry; it is the name used in Race Science for a permissible variation within a subrace. And what have you to say to *that,* my dear fellow?"

Royland wondered first, such was the positiveness with which Major Kappel spoke, whether he had slipped into a universe of different physical properties and history entirely, one in which Julius Caesar discovered Peru and the oxygen molecule was lighter than the hydrogen atom. He managed to speak. "How did you find all that out, major?"

"Oh, don't think I did a skimpy job," Kappel smiled. "I looked it all up in the *big* encyclopedia."

Dr. Piqueron, chemist, nodded grave approval of the major's diligence and thorough grasp of the scientific method.

"You still don't want to tell us?" Major Kappel asked coaxingly.

"I can only stand by what I said."

Kappel shrugged. "It's not my job to persuade you; I wouldn't know how to begin. But I can and will ship you off forthwith to a work camp."

"What—is a work camp?" Royland unsteadily asked.

"Good heavens, man, a camp where one works! You're obviously an *ungleichgeschaltling* and you've got to be *gleichgeschaltet."* He did not speak these words as if they were foreign; they were obviously part of the everyday American working vocabulary. *Gleichgeschaltet* meant to Royland something like "coordinated, brought into tune with." So he would be brought into tune—with what, and how?

The Major went on: "You'll get your clothes and your bunk and your chow, and you'll work, and eventually your irregular vagabondish habits will disappear and you'll be turned loose on the labor market. And you'll be damned glad we took the trouble with you." His face fell. "By the way, I was too late with your friend the Paymaster. I'm sorry. I sent a messenger to Disciplinary Control with a stop order. After all, if you took us in for an hour, why should you not have fooled a Pay-Seventh?"

"Too late? He's *dead?* For picking up a *hitchhiker?"*

"I don't know what that last word means," said the Major. "If it's dialect for 'vagabond,' the answer is ordinarily 'yes.' The man, after all, was a Pay-Seventh; he could read. Either you're keeping up your hoax with remarkable fidelity or you've been living in isolation. Could that be it? Is there a tribe of you somewhere? Well, the interrogators will find out; that's their job."

"The Dogpatch legend!" Dr. Piqueron burst out, thunderstruck. "He may be an Abnerite!"

"By Heaven," Major Kappel said slowly, "that might be it. What a feather in my cap to find a living Abnerite."

"Whose cap?" demanded Dr. Piqueron coldly.

"I think I'll look the Dogpatch legend up," said Kappel, heading for the door and probably the big encyclopedia.

"So will I," Dr. Piqueron announced firmly. The last Royland saw of them they were racing down the corridor, neck and neck.

Very funny. And they had killed simple-minded Paymaster Martfield for picking up a hitchhiker. The Nazis always had been pretty funny—fat Hermann pretending he was young Seigfried. As blond as Hitler, as slim as Goering, and as tall as Goebbels. Immature guttersnipes who hadn't been able to hang a convincing frame on Dimitrov for the Reichstag fire; the world had roared at their bungling. Huge, corny party rallies with let's-play-detectives nonsense like touching the local flags to that hallowed banner on which the martyred Horst Wessel had had a nosebleed. And they had rolled over Europe, and they killed people . . .

One thing was certain: life in the work camp would at least bore him to death. He was supposed to be an illiterate simpleton, so things were excused him which were not excused an exalted Pay-Seventh. He poked through a closet in the corner of the laboratory—he and Piqueron were the same size. He found a natty change of uniform and what must be a civilian suit: somewhat baggy pants and a sort of tunic with the neat, sensible Russian collar. Obviously it would be all right to wear it because here it was; just as obviously, it was all wrong for him to be dressed in chinos and a flannel shirt. He did not know exactly what this made him, but Martfield had been done to death for picking up a man in chinos and a flannel shirt. Royland changed into the civilian suit, stuffed his own shirt and pants far back on the top shelf of the closet; this was probably concealment enough from those murderous clowns. He walked out, and up the stairs, and through the busy lobby, and into the industrial complex. Nobody saluted him and he saluted nobody. He knew where he was going—to a good, sound Japanese laboratory where there were no Germans.

Royland had known Japanese students at the University and admired them beyond words. Their brains, frugality, doggedness, and good humor made them, as far as he was concerned, the most sensible people he had ever known. Tojo and his warlords were not, as far as Royland was concerned, essentially Japanese but just more damn-fool soldiers and politicians. The real Japanese would courteously listen to him, calmly check against available facts. He rubbed his cheek and remembered Mr. Ito and his slap in the face. Well, presumably Mr. Ito was a damnfool soldier and politician —and demonstrating for the German's benefit in a touchy border area full of jurisdictional questions.

At any rate, he would *not* go to a labor camp and bust rocks or refinish furniture until those imbeciles

decided he was *gleichgeschaltet;* he would go mad in a month.

Royland walked to the Solvay towers and followed the glass pipes containing their output of sulfuric acid along the ground until he came to a bottling shed where beetle-browed men worked silently filling great wicker-basketed carboys and heaving them outside. He followed other men who levered them up onto hand trucks and rolled them in one door of a storage shed. Out the door at the other end more men loaded them onto enclosed trucks which were driven up from time to time.

Royland settled himself in a corner of the storage shed behind a barricade of carboys and listened to the truck dispatcher swear at his drivers and the carboy handlers swear at their carboys.

"Get the god-damn Frisco shipment *loaded,* stupid! I don't *care* if you gotta go, we gotta get it out by *midnight!"*

So a few hours after dark Royland was riding west, without much air, and in the dangerous company of one thousand gallons of acid. He hoped he had a careful driver.

VII

A night, a day, and another night on the road. The truck never stopped except to gas up; the drivers took turns and ate sandwiches at the wheel and dozed off shift. It rained the second night. Royland, craftily and perhaps a little crazily, licked the drops that ran down the tarpaulin flap covering the rear. At the first crack of dawn, hunched between two wicker carcasses, he saw they were rolling through irrigated vegetable fields, and the water in the ditches was too much for him. He heard the transmission shift down to slow for a curve, swarmed over the tailgate, and dropped to the road. He was weak and limp enough to hit like a sack.

He got up, ignoring his bruises, and hobbled to one of the brimming five-foot ditches; he drank, and drank, and drank. This time puritanical folklore proved right; he lost it all immediately, or what had not been greedily absorbed by his shriveled stomach. He did not mind; it was bliss enough to *stretch*—

The field crop was tomatoes, almost dead ripe. He was starved for them; as he saw the rosy beauties he knew that tomatoes were the only thing in the world he craved. He gobbled one so that the juice ran down his chin; he ate the next two delicately, letting his teeth break the crispness of their skin and the beautiful taste ravish his tongue. There were tomatoes as far as the eye could see, on either side of the road, the green of the vines and the red dots of the ripe fruit graphed by the checkerboard of silvery ditches that caught the first light. Nevertheless, he filled his pockets with them before he walked on.

Royland was happy.

Farewell to the Germans and their sordid hash and murderous ways. *Look* at these beautiful fields! The Japanese are an innately artistic people who bring beauty to every detail of daily life. And they make damn good physicists, too. Confined in their stony home, cramped as he had been in the truck, they grew twisted and painful; why should they not have reached out for more room to grow, and what other way is there to reach but to make war? He could be very understanding about any people who had planted these beautiful tomatoes for him.

A dark blemish the size of a man attracted his attention. It lay on the margin of one of the swirling five-foot ditches out there to his right. And then it rolled slowly into the ditch with a splash, floundered a little, and proceeded to drown.

In a hobbling run Royland broke from the road and across the field. He did not know whether he was limber enough to swim. As he stood panting on the edge of the ditch, peering into the water, a head of hair surfaced near him. He flung himself down, stretched wildly, and grabbed the hair—and yet had detachment enough to feel a pang when the tomatoes in his tunic pocket smashed.

"Steady," he muttered to himself, yanked the head toward him, took hold with his other hand and lifted. A surprised face confronted him and then went blank and unconscious.

For half an hour Royland, weak as he was, struggled, cursed feebly, and sweated to get that body out of the water. At last he plunged in himself, found it only chest-deep, and shoved the carcass over the mudslick bank. He did not know by then whether the man was alive or dead or much care. He knew only that he couldn't walk away and leave the job half finished.

The body was that of a fat, middle-aged Oriental, surely Chinese rather than Japanese, though Royland could not say why he thought so. His clothes were soaked rags except for a leather wallet the size of a cigar box which he wore on a wide cloth belt. Its sole content was a handsome blue-glazed porcelain bottle. Royland sniffed at it and reeled. Some kind of super-gin! He sniffed again, and then took a conservative gulp of the stuff. While he was still coughing he felt the bottle being removed from his hand. When he looked he saw the Chinese, eyes still closed, accurately guiding the neck of the bottle to his mouth. The Chinese drank and drank and drank, then returned the bottle to the wallet and finally opened his eyes.

"Honorable sir," said the Chinese in flat, California American speech, "you have deigned to save my unworthy life. May I supplicate your honorable name?"

"Ah, Royland. Look, take it easy. Don't try to get up; you shouldn't even talk."

Somebody screamed behind Royland: "There has been thieving of tomatoes! There has been smasheeng and deestruction of thee vines! Chil-dren you, will bee weet-ness be-fore the Jappa-neese!"

Christ, now what?

Now a skinny black man, not a Negro, in a dirty loincloth, and beside him like a pan-pipes five skinny black loinclothed offspring in descending order. All were capering, pointing, and threatening. The Chinese groaned, fished in his tattered robes with one hand, and pulled out a soggy wad of bills. He peeled one off, held it out, and said: "Begone, pestilential barbarians from beyond Tian-Shang. My master and I give you alms, not tribute."

The Dravidian, or whatever he was, grabbed the bill and keened: "Een-suffee-cient for the terrible dommage! The Jappa-neese—"

The Chinese waved them away boredly. He said: "If my master will condescend to help me arise?"

Royland uncertainly helped him up. The man was wobbly, whether from the near-drowning or the terrific belt of alcohol he'd taken there was no knowing. They proceeded to the road, followed by shrieks to be careful about stepping on the vines.

On the road, the Chinese said: "My unworthy name is Li Po. Will my master deign to indicate in which direction we are to travel?"

"What's this master business?" Royland demanded. "If you're grateful, swell, but I don't *own* you.'.'

"My master is pleased to jest," said Li Po. Politely, face-saving and third-personing Royland until hell wouldn't have it, he explained that Royland, having meddled with the Celestial decree that Li Po should, while drunk, roll into the irrigation ditch and drown, now had Li Po on his hands, for the Celestial Ones had washed theirs of him. "As my master of course will recollect in a moment or two." Understandingly, he expressed his sympathy with Royland's misfortune in acquiring him as an obligation, especially since he had a hearty appetite, was known to be dishonest, and suffered from fainting fits and spasms when confronted with work.

"I don't *know* about all this," Royland said fretfully. "Wasn't there another Li Po? A poet?"

"Your servant prefers to venerate his namesake as one of the greatest drunkards the Flowery Kingdom has ever known," the Chinese observed. And a moment later he bent over, clipped Royland behind the knees so that he toppled forward and bumped his head, and performed the same obeisance himself, more gracefully. A vehicle went sputtering and popping by on the road as they kowtowed.

Li Po said reproachfully: "I humbly observe that my master is unaware of the etiquette our noble overlords exact. Such negligence cost the head of my insignificant elder brother in his twelfth year. Would my master be pleased to explain how he can have reached his honorable years without learning what babes in their cradles are taught?"

Royland answered with the whole truth. Li Po politely begged clarification from time to time, and a sketch of his mental horizons emerged from his questioning. That "magic" had whisked Royland forward a century or more he did not doubt for an instant, but he found it difficult to understand why the proper *fung shut* precautions had not been taken to avert a disastrous outcome to the God Food experiment. He suspected, from a description of Nahataspe's hut, that a simple wall at right angles to the door would have kept all really important demons out. When Royland described his escape from German territory to Japanese, and why he had effected it, he was very bland and blank. Royland judged that Li Po privately

thought him not very bright for having left *any* place to come here.

And Royland hoped he was not right. "Tell me what it's like," he said.

"This realm," said Li Po, "under our benevolent and noble overlords, is the haven of all whose skin is not the bleached-bone hue which indicates the undying curse of the Celestial Ones. Hither flock men of Han like my unworthy self, and the sons of Hind beyond the Tian-Shang that we may till new soil and raise up sons, and sons of sons to venerate us when we ascend."

"What was that bit," Royland demanded, "about the bleached bones? Do they shoot, ah, white men on sight here, or do they not?"

Li Po said evasively: "We are approaching the village where I unworthily serve as fortune teller, doctor of *fung shui,* occasional poet and storyteller. Let my master have no fear about his color. This humble one will roughen his master's skin, tell a circumstantial and artistic lie or two, and pass his master off as merely a leper."

VIII

After a week in Li Po's village Royland knew that life was good there. The place was a wattle-and-clay settlement of about two hundred souls on the bank of an irrigation ditch large enough to be dignified by the name of "canal." It was situated nobody knew just where; Royland thought it must be the San Fernando Valley. The soil was thick and rich and bore furiously the year round. A huge kind of radish was the principal crop. It was too coarse to be eaten by man; the villagers understood that it was feed for chickens somewhere up north. At any rate they harvested the stuff, fed it through a great hand-powered shredder, and shade-cured the shreds. Every few days a Japanese of low caste would come by in a truck, they would load tons of the stuff onto it, and wave their giant radish goodbye forever. Presumably the chickens ate it, and the Japanese then ate the chickens.

The villagers ate chicken too, but only at weddings and funerals. The rest of the time they ate vegetables which they cultivated, a quarter-acre to a family, the way other craftsmen facet diamonds. A single cabbage might receive, during its ninety days from planting to maturity, one hundred work hours from grandmother, grandfather, son, daughter, eldest grandchild, and on down to the smallest toddler. Theoretically the entire family line should have starved to death, for there are not one hundred energy hours in a cabbage; somehow they did not. They merely stayed thin and cheerful and hard-working and fecund.

They spoke English by Imperial decree; the reasoning seemed to be that they were as unworthy to speak Japanese as to paint the Imperial Chrysanthemum Seal on their houses, and that to let them cling to their old languages and dialects would have been politically unwise.

They were a mixed lot of Chinese, Hindus, Dravidians, and, to Royland's surprise, low-caste and outcaste Japanese; he had not known there were such things. Village tradition had it that a *samurai* named Ugetsu long ago said, pointing at the drunk tank of a Hong Kong jail, "I'll have that lot," and "that lot" had been the ancestors of these villagers transported to America in a foul hold practically as ballast and settled here by the canal with orders to start making their radish quota. The place was at any rate called The Ugetsu Village, and if some of the descendants were teetotallers, others like Li Po gave color to the legend of their starting point.

After a week the cheerful pretense that he was a sufferer from Housen's disease evaporated and he could wash the mud off his face. He had merely to avoid the upper-caste Japanese and especially the *samurai.* This was not exactly a stigma; in general it was a good idea for *everybody* to avoid the *samurai.*

In the village Royland found his first love and his first religion both false.

He had settled down; he was getting used to the Oriental work rhythm of slow, repeated, incessant effort; it did not surprise him any longer that he could count his ribs. When he ate a bowl of artfully arranged vegetables, the red of pimiento played off against the yellow of parsnip, a slice of pickled beet adding visual and olfactory tang to the picture, he felt full enough; he *was* full enough for the next day's feeble work in the field. It was pleasant enough to play slowly with a wooden mattock in the rich soil; did

not people once buy sand so their children might do exactly what he did, and envy their innocent absorption? Royland was innocently absorbed, then, and the radish truck had collected six times since his arrival, when he began to feel stirrings of lust. On the edge of starvation (but who knew this? For everybody was) his mind was dulled, but not his loins. They burned, and he looked about him in the fields, and the first girl he saw who was not repulsive he fell abysmally in love with.

Bewildered, he told Li Po, who was also Ugetsu Village's go-between. The storyteller was delighted; he waddled off to seek information and returned. "My master's choice is wise. The slave on whom his lordly eye deigned to rest is known as Vashti, daughter of Hari Bose, the distiller. She is his seventh child and so no great dowry can be expected (I shall ask for fifteen kegs toddy, but would settle for seven), but all this humble village knows that she is a skilled and willing worker in the hut as in the fields. I fear she has the customary lamentable Hindu talent for concocting curries, but a dozen good beatings at the most should cause her to reserve it to appropriate occasions, such as visits from her mother and sisters."

So, according to the sensible custom of Ugetsu, Vashti came that night to the hut which Royland shared with Li Po, and Li Po visited with cronies by his master's puzzling request. He begged humbly to point out that it would be dark in the hut, so this talk of lacking privacy was inexplicable to say the least. Royland made it an order, and Li Po did not really object, so he obeyed it.

It was a damnably strange night during which Royland learned all about India's national sport and most highly developed art form. Vashti, if she found him weak on the theory side, made no complaints. On the contrary, when Royland woke she was doing something or other to his feet.

"More?" he thought incredulously. "With *feet?"* He asked what she was doing. Submissively she replied: "Worshipping my lord husband-to-be's big toe. I am a pious and old-fashioned woman."

So she painted his toe with red paint and prayed to it, and then she fixed breakfast—curry, and excellent. She watched him eat, and then modestly licked his leavings from the bowl. She handed him his clothes, which she had washed while he still slept, and helped him into them after she helped him wash. Royland thought incredulously: "It's not possible! It must be a show, to sell me on marrying her—as if I had to be sold!" His heart turned to custard as he saw her, without a moment's pause, turn from dressing him to polishing his wooden rake. He asked that day in the field, roundabout fashion, and learned that this was the kind of service he could look forward to for the rest of his life after marriage. If the woman got lazy he'd have to beat her, but this seldom happened more than every year or so. We have good girls here in Ugetsu Village.

So an Ugetsu Village peasant was in some ways better off than anybody from "his time" who was less than a millionaire!

His starved dullness was such that he did not realize this was true for only half the Ugetsu Village peasants.

Religion sneaked up on him in similar fashion. He went to the part-time Taoist priest because he was a little bored with Li Po's current after-dinner saga. He could have sat like all the others and listened passively to the interminable tale of the glorious Yellow Emperor, and the beautiful but wicked Princess Emerald, and the virtuous but plain Princess Moon Blossom; it just happened that he went to the priest of Tao and got hooked hard.

The kindly old man, a toolmaker by day, dropped a few pearls of wisdom which, in his foggy starvation-daze, Royland did not perceive to be pearls of undemonstrable nonsense, and showed Royland how to meditate. It worked the first time. Royland bunged right smack through into a two-hundred-proof state of *samadhi*—the Eastern version of self-hypnotized Enlightenment—that made him feel wonderful and all-knowing and left him without a hangover when it wore off. He had despised, in college, the type of people who took psychology courses and so had taken none himself; he did not know a thing about self-hypnosis except as just demonstrated by this very nice old gentleman. For several days he was offensively religious and kept trying to talk to Li Po about the Eightfold Way, and Li Po kept changing the subject.

It took murder to bring him out of love and religion.

At twilight they were all sitting and listening to the storyteller as usual. Royland had been there just one month and for all he knew would be there forever. He soon would have his bride officially; he knew

he had discovered The Truth About the Universe by way of Tao meditation; why should he change? Changing demanded a furious outburst of energy, and he did not have energy on that scale. He metered out his energy day and night; one had to save so much for tonight's love play, and then one had to save so much for tomorrow's planting. He was a poor man; he could not afford to change.

Li Po had reached a rather interesting bit where the Yellow Emperor was declaiming hotly: "Then she shall die! Whoever dare transgress Our divine will—"

A flashlight began to play over their faces. They perceived that it was in the hand of a *samurai* with kimono and sword. Everybody hastily kowtowed, but the *samurai* shouted irritably (all *samurai* were irritable, all the time): "Sit up, you fools! I want to see your stupid faces. I hear there's a peculiar one in this flea-bitten dungheap you call a village."

Well, by now Royland knew his duty. He rose and with downcast eyes asked: "Is the noble protector in search of my unworthy self?"

"Ha!" the *samurai* roared. "It's true! A big nose!" He hurled the flashlight away (all *samurai* were nobly contemptuous of the merely material), held his scabbard in his left hand, and swept out the long curved sword with his right.

Li Po stepped forward and said in his most enchanting voice: "If the Heaven-born would only deign to heed a word from this humble—" What he must have known would happen happened. With a contemptuous backhand sweep of the blade the *samurai* beheaded him and Li Po's debt was paid.

The trunk of the storyteller stood for a moment and then fell stiffly forward. The *samurai* stooped to wipe his blade clean on Li Po's ragged robes.

Royland had forgotten much, but not everything. With the villagers scattering before him he plunged forward and tackled the *samurai* low and hard. No doubt the *samurai* was a Brown Belt judo master; if so he had nobody but himself to blame for turning his back. Royland, not remembering that he was barefoot, tried to kick the *samurai's* face in. He broke his worshipful big toe, but its un-trimmed horny nail removed the left eye of the warrior and after that it was no contest. He never let the *samurai* get up off the ground; he took out his other eye with the handle of a rake and then killed him an inch at a time with his hands, his feet, and the clownish rustic's traditional weapon, a flail. It took easily half an hour, and for the final twenty minutes the *samurai* was screaming for his mother. He died when the last light left the western sky, and in darkness Royland stood quite alone with the two corpses. The villagers were gone.

He assumed, or pretended, that they were within earshot and yelled at them brokenly: "I'm sorry, Vashti. I'm sorry, all of you. I'm going. Can I make you understand?

"Listen. You aren't living. This isn't life. You're not making anything but babies, you're not changing, you're not growing up. That's not enough! You've got to read and write. You can't pass on anything but baby stories like the Yellow Emperor by word of mouth. The village is growing. Soon your fields will touch the fields of Sukoshi Village to the west, and then what happens? You won't know what to do, so you'll fight with Sukoshi Village.

"Religion. No! It's just getting drunk the way you do it. You're set up for it by being half-starved and then you go into *samadhi* and you feel better so you think you understand everything. No! You've got to *do* things. If you don't grow up, you die. All of you.

"Women. *That's* wrong. It's good for the men, but it's wrong. Half of you are slaves, do you understand? Women are people too, but you use them like animals and you've convinced them it's right for them to be old at thirty and discarded for the next girl. For God's sake, can't you try to think of yourselves in their place?

"The breeding, the crazy breeding—it's got to stop. You frugal Orientals! But you aren't frugal; you're crazy drunken sailors. You're squandering the whole world. Every mouth you breed has got to be fed by the land, and the land isn't infinite.

"I hope some of you understood. Li Po would have, a little, but he's dead.

"I'm going away now. You've been kind to me and all I've done is make trouble. I'm sorry."

He fumbled on the ground and found the *samurai's* flashlight. With it he hunted the village's outskirts until he found the Japanese's buck-board car. He started the motor with its crank and noisily rolled down the dirt track from the village to the highway.

IX

Royland drove all night, still westward. His knowledge of southern California's geography was inexact, but he hoped to hit Los Angeles.

There might be a chance of losing himself in a great city. He had abandoned hope of finding present-day counterparts of his old classmates like Jimmy Ichimura; obviously they had lost out. Why shouldn't they have lost? The soldier-politicians had won the war by happenstance, so all power to the soldier-politicians! Reasoning under the great natural law *post hoc ergo propter hoc,* Tojo and his crowd had decided: fanatic feudalism won the war; therefore fanatic feudalism is a good thing, and it necessarily follows that the more fanatical and feudal it is, the better a thing it is. So you had Sukoshi Village, and Ugetsu Village; Ichi Village, Ni Village, San Village, Shi Village, dotting that part of Great Japan formerly known as North America, breeding with the good old fanatic feudalism and so feudally averse to new thought and innovations that it made you want to scream at them—which he had.

The single weak headlight of his buckboard passed few others on the road; a decent feudal village is self-contained.

Damn them and their suicidal cheerfulness! It was a pleasant trait; it was a fool in a canoe approaching the rapids saying: "Chin up! Everything's going to be all right if we just keep smiling."

The car ran out of gas when false dawn first began to pale the sky behind him. He pushed it into the roadside ditch and walked on; by full light he was in a tumble-down, planless, evil-smelling, paper-and-galvanized-iron city whose name he did not know. There was no likelihood of him being noticed as a "white" man by anyone not specifically looking for him. A month of outdoor labor had browned him, and a month of artistically composed vegetable plates had left him gaunt.

The city was carpeted with awakening humanity. Its narrow streets were paved with sprawled-out men, women, and children beginning to stir and hawk up phlegm and rub their rheumy eyes. An open sewer-latrine running down the center of each street was casually used, ostrich-fashion—the users hid their own eyes while in action.

Every mangled variety of English rang in Royland's ears as he trod between bodies.

There had to be something more, he told himself. This was the shabby industrial outskirts, the lowest marginal-labor area. Somewhere in the city there was beauty, science, learning!

He walked aimlessly plodding until noon, and found nothing of the sort. These people in the cities were food-handlers, food-traders, food-transporters. They took in one another's washing and sold one another chop suey. They made automobiles (Yes! There were one-family automobile factories which probably made six buckboards a year, filing all metal parts by hand out of bar stock!) and orange crates and baskets and coffins; abacuses, nails, and boots.

The Mysterious East has done it again, he thought bitterly. The Indians-Chinese-Japanese won themselves a nice sparse area. They could have laid things out neatly and made it pleasant for everybody instead of for a minute speck of aristocracy which he was unable even to detect in this human soup . . . but they had done it again. They had bred irresponsibly just as fast as they could until the land was *full.* Only famines and pestilence could "help" them now.

He found exactly one building which owned some clear space around it—and which would survive an earthquake or a flicked cigarette butt. It was the German Consulate.

I'll give them the Bomb, he said to himself. Why not? None of this is mine. And for the Bomb I'll exact a price of some comfort and dignity for as long as I live. *Let* them blow one another up! He climbed the consulate steps.

To the black-uniformed guard at the swastika-trimmed bronze doors he said: *"Wenn die Lichtstdrke der van einer Fl'dche kommen-den Strahlung dem Cosinus des Winkels zwischen Strahlrichtung und Flachennormalen proportional ist, so nennen wir die Fl'dche eine volkommen streunde Flache."* Lambert's Law, Optics I. All the Goethe he remembered happened to rhyme, which might have made the guard suspicious.

Naturally the German came to attention and said apologetically: "I don't speak German. What is it,

sir?"

"You may take me to the consul," Royland said, affecting boredom.

"Yes, sir. At once, sir. Er, you're an *agent* of course, sir?"

Royland said witheringly: *"Sicherheit, bitte!"*

"Yessir. This way, sir!"

X

The consul was a considerate, understanding gentleman. He was somewhat surprised by Royland's true tale, but said from time to time: "I see; I see. Not impossible. Please go on."

Royland concluded: "Those people at the sulfur mine were, I hope, unrepresentative. One of them at least complained that it was a dreary sort of backwoods assignment. I am simply gambling that there is intelligence in your Reich. I ask you to get me a real physicist for twenty minutes of conversation. You, Mr. Consul, will not regret it. I am in a position to turn over considerable information on atomic power." So he had not been able to say it after all; the Bomb was still an obscene kick below the belt.

"This has been very interesting, Dr. Royland," said the consul gravely. "You referred to your enterprise as a gamble. I too shall gamble. What have I to lose by putting you *en rapport* with a scientist of ours if you prove to be a plausible lunatic?" He smiled to soften it. "Very little indeed. On the other hand, what have I to gain if your extraordinary story is quite true? A great deal. I will go along with you, doctor. Have you eaten?"

The relief was tremendous. He had lunch in a basement kitchen with the Consulate guards—a huge lunch, a rather nasty lunch of stewed *lungen* with a floured gravy, and cup after cup of coffee. Finally one of the guards lit up an ugly little spindle-shaped cigar, the kind Royland had only seen before in the caricatures of George Grosz, and as an afterthought offered one to him.

He drank in the rank smoke and managed not to cough. It stung his mouth and cut the greasy aftertaste of the stew satisfactorily. One of the blessings of the Third Reich, one of its gross pleasures. They were just people, after all—a certain censorious, busybody type of person with altogether too much power, but they were human. By which he meant, he supposed, members of Western Industrial Culture like him.

After lunch he was taken by truck from the city to an airfield by one of the guards. The plane was somewhat bigger than a B-29 he had once seen, and lacked propellers. He presumed it was one of the "jets" Dr. Piqueron had mentioned. His guard gave his dossier to a Luftwaffe sergeant at the foot of the ramp and said cheerfully: "Happy landings, fellow. It's all going to be all right."

"Thanks," he said. "I'll remember you, Corporal Collins. You've been very helpful." Collins turned away.

Royland climbed the ramp into the barrel of the plane. A bucket-seat job, and most of the seats were filled. He dropped into one on the very narrow aisle. His neighbor was in rags; his face showed signs of an old beating. When Royland addressed him he simply cringed away and began to sob.

The Luftwaffe sergeant came up, entered, and slammed the door. The "jets" began to wind up, making an unbelievable racket; further conversation was impossible. While the plane taxied, Royland peered through the windowless gloom at his fellow-passengers. They all looked poor and poorly.

God, were they so quickly and quietly airborne? They were. Even in the bucket seat, Royland fell asleep.

He was awakened, he did not know how much later, by the sergeant. The man was shaking his shoulder and asking him: "Any joolery hid away? Watches? Got some nice fresh water to sell to people that wanna buy it."

Royland had nothing, and would not take part in the miserable little racket if he had. He shook his head indignantly and the man moved on with a grin. He would not last long!—petty chiselers were leaks in the efficient dictatorship; they were rapidly detected and stopped up. Mussolini made the trains run on time, after all. (But naggingly Royland recalled mentioning this to a Northwestern University English professor, one Bevans. Bevans had coldly informed him that from 1931 to 1936 he had lived under

Mussolini as a student and tourist guide, and therefore had extraordinary opportunities for observing whether the trains ran on time or not, and could definitely state that they did not; that railway timetables under Mussolini were best regarded as humorous fiction.)

And another thought nagged at him, a thought connected with a pale, scarred face named Bloom. Bloom was a young refugee physical chemist working on weapons development track I, and he was somewhat crazy, perhaps. Royland, on track III, used to see little of him and could have done with even less. You couldn't say hello to the man without it turning into a lecture on the horrors of Nazism. He had wild stories about "gas chambers" and crematoria which no reasonable man could believe, and was a blanket slanderer of the German medical profession. He claimed that trained doctors, certified men, used human beings in experiments which terminated fatally. Once, to try and bring Bloom to reason, he asked what sort of experiments these were, but the monomaniac had heard that worked out: piffling nonsense about reviving mortally frozen men by putting naked women into bed with them! The man was probably sexually deranged to believe that; he naively added that one variable in the series of experiments was to use women immediately after sexual intercourse, one hour after sexual intercourse, et cetera. Royland had blushed for him and violently changed the subject.

But that was not what he was groping for. Neither was Bloom's crazy story about the woman who made lampshades from the tattooed skin of concentration camp prisoners; there were people capable of such things, of course, but under no regime whatever do they rise to positions of authority; they simply can't do the work required in positions of authority because their insanity gets in the way.

"Know your enemy," of course—but making up pointless lies? At least Bloom was not the conscious prevaricator. He got letters in Yiddish from friends and relations in Palestine, and these were laden with the latest wild rumors supposed to be based on the latest word from "escapees."

Now he remembered. In the cafeteria about three months ago Bloom had been sipping tea with somewhat shaking hand and rereading a letter. Royland tried to pass him with only a nod, but the skinny hand shot out and held him.

Bloom looked up with tears in his eyes: "It's cruel, I'm tellink you, Royland, it's cruel. They're not givink them the right to scream, to strike a futile blow, to sayink prayers *Kiddush ha Shem* like a Jew should when he is dyink for Consecration of the Name! They trick them, they say they go to farm settlements, to labor camps, so four-five of the stinkink bastards can handle a whole trainload Jews. They trick the clothes off of them at the camps, they sayink they delouse them. They trick them into room says showerbath over the door and then is too late to sayink prayers; *then goes on the gas."*

Bloom had let go of him and put his head on the table between his hands. Royland had mumbled something, patted his shoulder, and walked on, shaken. For once the neurotic little man might have got some straight facts. That was a very circumstantial touch about expediting the handling of prisoners by systematic lies—always the carrot and the stick.

Yes, everybody had been so god-damn, agreeable since he climbed the Consulate steps! The friendly door guard, the Consul who nodded and remarked that his story was not an impossible one, the men he'd eaten with—all that quiet optimism. "Thanks. I'll remember you, Corporal Collins. You've been very helpful." He had felt positively benign toward the corporal, and now remembered that the corporal had turned around *very* quickly after he spoke. *To hide a grin?*

The guard was working his way down the aisle again and noticed that Royland was awake. "Changed your mind by now?" he asked kindly. "Got a good watch, maybe I'll find a piece of bread for you. You won't need a watch where you're going, fella."

"What do you mean?" Royland demanded.

The guard said soothingly: "Why, they got clocks all over them work camps, fella. Everybody knows what time it is in them work camps. You don't need no watches there. Watches just get in the way at them work camps." He went on down the aisle, quickly.

Royland reached across the aisle and, like Bloom, gripped the man who sat opposite him. He could not see much of him; the huge windowless plane was lit only by half a dozen stingy bulbs overhead. "What are you here for?" he asked.

The man said shakily: "I'm a Laborer Two, see? A Two. Well, my father he taught me to read, see,

but he waited until I was ten and knew the score? See? So I figured it was a family tradition, so I taught my own kid to read because he was a pretty smart kid, ya know? I figured he'd have some fun reading like I did, no harm done, who's to know, ya know? But I should of waited a couple years, I guess, because the kid was too young and got to bragging he could read, ya know how kids do? I'm from St. Louis, by the way. I should of said first I'm from St. Louis a track maintenance man, see, so I hopped a string of returning empties for San Diego because I was scared like you get."

He took a deep sigh. "Thirsty," he said. "Got in with some Chinks, nobody to trouble ya, ya stay outta the way, but then one of them cops-like seen me and he took me to the Consul place like they do, ya know? Had me scared, they always tole me illegal reading they bump ya off, but they don't, ya know? Two years work camp, how about that?"

Yes, Royland wondered. How about it?

The plane decelerated sharply; he was thrown forward. Could they brake with those "jets" by reversing the stream or were the engines just throttling down? He heard gurgling and thudding; hydraulic fluid to the actuators letting down the landing gear. The wheels bumped a moment later and he braced himself; the plane was still and the motors cut off seconds later.

Their Luftwaffe sergeant unlocked the door and bawled through it: "Shove that goddam ramp, willya?" The, sergeant's assurance had dropped from him; he looked like a very scared man. He must have been a very brave one, really, to have let himself be locked in with a hundred doomed men, protected only by an eight-shot pistol and a chain of systematic lies.

XI

They were herded out of the plane onto a runway of what Royland immediately identified as the Chicago Municipal Airport. The same reek wafted from the stockyards; the row of airline buildings at the eastern edge of the field was ancient and patched but unchanged; the hangars, though, were now something that looked like inflated plastic bags. A good trick. Beyond the buildings surely lay the dreary redbrick and painted-siding wastes of Cicero, Illinois.

Luftwaffe men were yapping at them: "Form up, boys; make a line! Work means freedom! Look tall!" They shuffled and were shoved into columns of fours. A snappy majorette in shiny satin panties and white boots pranced out of an administration building twirling her baton; a noisy march blared from louvers in her tall fur hat. Another good trick.

"Forward march, boys," she shrilled at them. "Wouldn't y'all just like to follow me?" Seductive smile and a wiggle of the rump; a Judas ewe. She strutted off in time to the music; she must have been wearing earstopples. They shuffled after her. At the airport gate they dropped their blue-coated Luftwaffe boys and picked up a waiting escort of a dozen black-coats with skulls on their high-peaked caps.

They walked in time to the music, hypnotized by it, through Cicero. Cicero had been bombed to hell and not rebuilt. To his surprise Royland felt a pang for the vanished Poles and Slovaks of Al's old bailiwick. There were *German* Germans, French Germans, and even Italian Germans, but he knew in his bones that there were no Polish or Slovakian Germans . . . And Bloom had been right all along.

Deathly weary after two hours of marching (the majorette was indefatigable) Royland looked up from the broken pavement to see a cockeyed wonder before him. It was a Castle; it was a Nightmare; it was the Chicago Parteihof. The thing abutted Lake Michigan; it covered perhaps sixteen city blocks. It frowned down on the lake at the east and at the tumbled acres of bombed-out Chicago at the north, west, and south. It was made of steel-reinforced concrete grained and grooved to look like medieval masonry. It was walled, moated, portcullis-ed, towered, ramparted, crenellated. The death's-head guards looked at it reverently and the prisoners with fright. Royland wanted only to laugh wildly. It was a Disney production. It was as funny as Hermann Goering in full fig, and probably as deadly.

With a mumbo-jumbo of passwords, heils, and salutes they were admitted, and the majorette went away, no doubt to take off her boots and groan.

The most bedecked of the death's-head lined them up and said affably: "Hot dinner and your beds presently, my boys; first a selection. Some of you, I'm afraid, aren't well and should be in sick bay.

Who's sick? Raise your hands, please."

A few hands crept up. Stooped old men.

"That's right. Step forward, please." Then he went down the line tapping a man here and there—one fellow with glaucoma, another with terrible varicose sores visible through the tattered pants he wore. Mutely they stepped forward. Royland he looked thoughtfully over. "You're thin, my boy," he observed. "Stomach pains? Vomit blood? Tarry stools in the morning?"

"Nossir!" Royland barked. The man laughed and continued down the line. The "sick bay" detail was marched off. Most of them were weeping silently; they knew. Everybody knew; everybody pretended that the terrible thing would not, might not, happen. It was much more complex than Royland had realized.

"Now," said the death's-head affably, "we require some competent cement workers—"

The line of remaining men went mad. They surged forward almost touching the officer but never stepping over an invisible line surrounding him. "Me!" some yelled. "Me! Me!" Another cried: "I'm good with my hands, I can learn, I'm a machinist too, I'm strong and young, I can learn!" A heavy middle-aged one waved his hands in the air and boomed: "Grouting and tile-setting! Grouting and tile-setting!" Royland stood alone, horrified. They knew. They knew this was an offer of real work that would keep them alive for a while.

He knew suddenly how to live in a world of lies.

The officer lost his patience in a moment or two, and whips came out. Men with their faces bleeding struggled back into line. "Raise your hands, you cement people, and no lying, please. But you wouldn't lie, would you?" He picked half a dozen volunteers after questioning them briefly, and one of his men marched them off.

Among them was the grouting-and-tile man, who looked pompously pleased with himself; such was the reward of diligence and virtue, he seemed to be proclaiming; pooh to those grasshoppers back there who neglected to learn A Trade.

"Now," said the officer casually, "we require some laboratory assistants." The chill of death stole down the line of prisoners. Each one seemed to shrivel into himself, become poker-faced, imply that he wasn't really involved in all this.

Royland raised his hand. The officer looked at him in stupefaction and then covered up quickly. "Splendid," he said. "Step forward, my boy. You," he pointed at another man. "You have an intelligent forehead; you look as if you'd make a fine laboratory assistant. Step forward."

"Please, no!" the man begged. He fell to his knees and clasped his hands in supplication. "Please no!" The officer took out his whip meditatively; the man groaned, scrambled to his feet, and quickly stood beside Royland.

When there were four more chosen, they were marched off across the concrete yard into one of the absurd towers, and up a spiral staircase and down a corridor, and through the promenade at the back of an auditorium where a woman screamed German from the stage at an audience of women. And through a tunnel and down the corridor of an elementary school with empty classrooms full of small desks on either side. And into a hospital area where the fake-masonry walls yielded to scrubbed white tile and the fake flagstones underfoot to composition flooring and the fake pinewood torches in bronze brackets that had lighted their way to fluorescent tubes.

At the door marked rassenwissenschaft the guard rapped and a frosty-faced man in a laboratory coat opened up. "You requisitioned a demonstrator, Dr. Kalten," the guard said. "Pick any one of these."

Dr. Kalten looked them qver. "Oh, this one, I suppose," he said. Royland. "Come in, fellow."

The Race Science Laboratory of Dr. Kajten proved to be a decent medical setup with an operating table, intricate charts of the races of men and their anatomical, mental, and moral makeups. There was also a phrenological head diagram and a horoscope on the wall, and an arrangement of glittering crystals on wire which Royland recognized. It was a model of one Hans Hoerbiger's crackpot theory of planetary formation, the *Welteislehre*.

"Sit there," the doctor said, pointing to a stool. "First I've got to take your pedigree. By the way, you might as well know that you're going to end up dissected for my demonstration in Race Science III for

the Medical School, and your degree of cooperation will determine whether the dissection is performed under anaesthesia or not. Clear?"

"Clear, doctor."

"Curious—no panic. I'll wager we find you're a proto-Hamitoidal hemi-Nordic of at *least* degree five ... but let's get on. Name?"

"Edward Royland."

"Birthdate?"

"July second, nineteen twenty-three."

The doctor threw down his pencil. "If my previous explanation was inadequate," he shouted, "let me add that if you continue to be difficult I may turn you over to my good friend Dr. Herzbrenner. Dr. Herzbrenner happens to teach interrogation technique at the Gestapo School.
Do—you—now—understand?"

"Yes, doctor. I'm sorry I cannot withdraw my answer."

Dr. Kalten turned elaborately sarcastic. "How then do you account for your remarkable state of preservation at your age of approximately a hundred and eighty years?"

"Doctor, I am twenty-three years old. I have traveled through time."

"Indeed?" Kalten was amused. "And how was this accomplished?"

Royland said steadily. "A spell was put on me by a satanic Jewish magician. It involved the ritual murder and desanguination of seven beautiful Nordic virgins."

Dr. Kalten gaped for a moment. Then he picked up his pencil and said firmly: "You will understand that my doubts were logical under the circumstances. Why did you not give me the sound scientific basis for your surprising claim at once? Go ahead; tell me all about it."

XII

He was Dr. Kalten's prize; he was Dr. Kalten's treasure. His peculiarities of speech, his otherwise-inexplicable absence of a birth number over his left nipple, when they got around to it the gold filling in one of his teeth, his uncanny knowledge of Old America, all now had a simple scientific explanation. He was from 1944. What was so hard to grasp about that? Any sound specialist knew about the lost Jewish Cabala magic, golems and such.

His story was that he had been a student Race Scientist under the pioneering master William D. Fully. (A noisy whack who used to barnstorm the chaw-and-gallus belt with the backing of Deutches Neues Euro; sure enough they found him in Volume VII of the standard *Introduction to a Historical Handbook of Race Science.)* The Jewish fiends had attempted to ambush his master on a lonely road; Royland persuaded him to switch hats and coats; in the darkness the substitution was not noticed. Later in their stronghold he was identified, but the Nordic virgins had already been ritually murdered and drained of their blood, and it wouldn't keep. The dire fate destined for the master had been visited upon the disciple.

Dr. Kalten loved that bit. It tickled him pink that the sub-men's "revenge" on their enemy had been to precipitate him into a world purged of the sub-men entirely, where a Nordic might breathe freely!

Kalten, except for discreet consultations with such people as Old America specialists, a dentist who was stupefied by the gold filling, and a dermatologist who established that there was not and never had been a *geburtsnummer* on the subject examined, was playing Royland close to his vest. After a week it became apparent that he was reserving Royland for a grand unveiling which would climax the reading of a paper. Royland did not want to be unveiled; there were too many holes in his story. He talked with animation about the beauties of Mexico in the spring, its fair mesas, cactus, and mushrooms. Could they make a short trip there? Dr. Kalten said they could not. Royland was becoming restless? Let him study, learn, profit by the matchless arsenal of the sciences available here in Chicago Parteihof. Dear old Chicago boasted distinguished exponents of the World Ice Theory, the Hollow World Theory, Dowsing, Homeopathic Medicine, Curative Folk Botany—

This last did sound interesting. Dr. Kalten was pleased to take his prize to the Medical School and

introduce him as a protege to Professor Albiani, of Folk Botany.

Albiani was a bearded gnome out of the Arthur Rackham illustrations for *Das Rheingold.* He loved his subject. "Mother Nature, the all-bounteous one! Wander the fields, young man, and with a seeing eye in an hour's stroll you will find the ergot that aborts, the dill that cools fever, the tansy that strengthens the old, the poppy that soothes the fretful teething babe!"

"Do you have any hallucinogenic Mexican mushrooms?" Royland demanded.

"We may," Albiani said, surprised. They browsed through the Folk Botany museum and pored over dried vegetation under glass. From Mexico there were peyote, the buttons and the root, and there was marihuana, root, stem, seed, and stalk. No mushrooms.

"They may be in the storeroom," Albiani muttered.

All the rest of the day Royland mucked through the storeroom where specimens were waiting for exhibit space on some rotation plan. He went to Albiani and said, a little wild-eyed: "They're not there."

Albiani had been interested enough to look up the mushrooms in question in the reference books. "See?" he said happily, pointing to a handsome color plate of the mushroom: growing, mature, sporing, and dried. He read: "'. . . superstitiously called *God Food,'"* and twinkled through his beard at the joke.

"They're not there," Royland said.

The professor, annoyed at last, said: "There might be some uncatalogued in the basement. Really, we don't have room for everything in our limited display space—just the *interesting* items."

Royland pulled himself together and charmed the location of the department's basement storage space out of him, together with permission to inspect it. And, left alone for a moment, ripped the color plate from the professor's book and stowed it away.

That night Royland and Dr. Kalten walked out on one of the innumerable tower-tops for a final cigar. The moon was high and full; its light turned the cratered terrain that had been Chicago into another moon. The sage and his disciple from another day leaned their elbows on a crenellated rampart two hundred feet above Lake Michigan.

"Edward," said Dr. Kalten, "I shall read my paper tomorrow before the Chicago Academy of Race Science." The words were a challenge; something was wrong. He went on: "I shall expect you to be in the wings of the auditorium, and to appear at my command to answer a few questions from me and, if time permits, from our audience."

"I wish it could be postponed," Royland said.

"No doubt."

"Would you explain your unfriendly tone of voice, doctor?" Royland demanded. "I think I've been completely cooperative and have opened the way for you to win undying fame in the annals of Race Science."

"Cooperative, yes. Candid—I wonder? You see, Edward, a dreadful thought struck me today. I have always thought it amusing that the Jewish attack on Reverend Fully should have been for the purpose of precipitating him into the future and that it should have misfired." He took something out of his pocket: a small pistol. He armed it casually at Royland. "Today I began to wonder *why* they should have done so. Why did they not simply murder him, as they did thousands, and dispose of him in their secret crematoria, and permit no mention in their controlled newspapers and magazines of the disappearance?

"Now, the blood of seven Nordic virgins can have been no cheap commodity. One pictures with ease Nordic men patrolling their precious enclaves of humanity, eyes roving over every passing face, noting who bears the stigmata of the sub-men, and following those who do most carefully indeed lest race-defilement be committed with a look or an 'accidental' touch in a crowded street. Nevertheless the thing was done; your presence here is proof of it. It must have been done at enormous cost; hired Slavs and Negroes must have been employed to kidnap the virgins, and many of them must have fallen before Nordic rage.

"This merely to silence one small voice crying in the wilderness? *I —think—not.* I think, Edward Royland, or whatever your real name may be, that Jewish arrogance sent you, a Jew yourself, into the future as a greeting from the Jewry of that day to what it foolishly thought would be the triumphant Jewry of this. At any rate, the public questioning tomorrow will be conducted by my friend Dr. Herz-brenner,

whom I have mentioned to you. If you have any little secrets, they will not remain secrets long. No, no! Do not move toward me. I shall shoot you disablingly in the knee if you do."

Royland moved toward him and the gun went off; there was an agonizing hammer blow high on his left shin. He picked up Kalten and hurled him, screaming, over the parapet two hundred feet into the water. And collapsed. The pain was horrible. His shinbone was badly cracked if not broken through. There was not much bleeding; maybe there would be later. He need not fear that the shot and scream would rouse the castle. Such sounds were not rare in the Medical Wing.

He dragged himself, injured leg trailing, to the doorway of Kalten's living quarters; he heaved himself into a chair by the signal bell and threw a rug over his legs. He rang for the diener and told him very quietly: "Go to the medical storeroom for a leg U-brace and whatever is necessary for a cast, please. Dr. Kalten has an interesting idea he wishes to work out."

He should have asked for a syringe of morphine—no he shouldn't. It might affect the time distortion.

When the man came back he thanked him and told him to turn in for the night.

He almost screamed getting his shoe off; his trouser leg he cut away. The gauze had arrived just in time; the wound was beginning to bleed more copiously. Pressure seemed to stop it. He constructed a sloppy walking cast on his leg. The directions on the several five-pound cans of plaster helped.

His leg was getting numb; good. His cast probably pinched some major nerve, and a week in it would cause permanent paralysis; who cared about *that?*

He tried it out and found he could get across the floor inefficiently. With a strong-enough bannister he could get downstairs but not, he thought, up them. That was all right. He was going to the basement.

God-damning the medieval Nazis and their cornball castle every inch of the way, he went to the basement; there he had a windfall. A dozen drunken SS men were living it up in a corner far from the censorious eyes of their company commander; they were playing a game which might have been called Spin the Corporal. They saw Royland limping and wept sentimental tears for poor old man with a bum leg; they carried him two winding miles to the storeroom he wanted, and shot the lock off for him. They departed, begging him to call on Company K any time, bes' fellas in Chicago, doc. Ol' Bruno here can tear the arm off a Latvik shirker with his bare hands, honest, doc! Jus' the way you twist a drumstick off a turkey. You wan' us to get a Latvik an' show you?

He got rid of them at last, clicked on the light, and began his search. His leg was now ice cold, painfully so. He rummaged through the uncatalogued botanicals and found after what seemed like hours a crate shipped from Jalasca. Royland opened it by beating its corners against the concrete floor. It yielded and spilled plastic envelopes; through the clear material of one he saw the wrinkled black things. He did not even compare them with the color plate in his pocket. He tore the envelope open and crammed them into his mouth, and chewed and swallowed.

Maybe there had to be a Hopi dancing and chanting, maybe there didn't have to be. Maybe one had to be calm, if bitter, and fresh from a day of hard work at differential equations which approximated the Hopi mode of thought. Maybe you only had to fix your mind savagely on what you desired, as his was fixed now. Last time he had hated and shunned the Bomb; what he wanted was a world without the Bomb. He had got it, all right!

... his tongue was thick and the fireballs were beginning to dance around him, the circling circles . . .

XIII

Charles Miller Nahataspe whispered: "Close. Close. I was so frightened."

Royland lay on the floor of the hut, his leg unsplinted, unfractured, but aching horribly. Drowsily he felt his ribs; he was merely slender now, no longer gaunt. He mumbled: "You were working to pull me back from this side?"

"Yes. You, you were there?"

"I was there. God, let me sleep."

He rolled over heavily and collapsed into complete unconsciousness.

When he awakened it was still dark and his pains were gone. Nahataspe was crooning a healing song

very softly. He stopped when he saw Royland's eyes open. "Now you know about break-the-sky medicine," he said.

"Better than anybody. What time is it?"

"Midnight."

"I'll be going then." They clasped hands and looked into each other's eyes.

The jeep started easily. Four hours earlier, or possibly two months earlier, he had been worried about the battery. He chugged down the settlement road and knew what would happen next. He wouldn't wait until morning; a meteorite might kill him, or a scorpion in his bed. He would go directly to Rotschmidt in his apartment, defy Vrouw Rotschmidt and wake her man up to tell him about 56c, tell him we have the Bomb.

We have a symbol to offer the Japanese now, something to which they can surrender, and will surrender.

Rotschmidt would be philosophical. He would probably sigh about the Bomb: "Ah, do we ever act responsibly? Do we ever know what the consequences of our decisions will be?"

And Royland would have to try to avoid answering him very sharply: "Yes. This once we damn well do."

The soaring imagination of Jack Vance needs little introduction here. Twice a Hugo winner, long cherished by science-fiction enthusiasts for the vivid individuality of his style and the fertility of his inventive mind, this Californian had already reached the highest rank of the field when this novella of telekinetic powers appeared late in 1951. His work since that time has served only to consolidate the position he held then.

Telek
Jack Vance

I.

Geskamp and Shorn stood in the sad light of sundown, high on the rim of the new stadium. Wooded hills rolled away to either side; behind them, far to the west, the towers of Tran cut sword-shaped notches into the sky.

Geskamp pointed east, up Swanscomba Valley, now glowing a thousand tones of gold and green in the long light of sunset. "That's where I was born, by that row of poplars. I knew the valley well in the old days." He spent a moment in far reflection. "I hate to see the changes, the old things wiped out. There"—he pointed —"by the stream was Pimssi's croft and stone barn. There, where you see the grove of oaks, that was the village Cobent. There, by Poll Point, was the valley power tank. There, the Tran aquaport crossed the river, entered the tunnel. It was considered beautiful, the aquaport, antique, overgrown with ivy, stained with lichen. And only six months ago; already it seems a hundred years."

Shorn, intending to make a delicate request, considered how best to take advantage of Geskamp's nostalgia for the irretrievable past; he was faintly surprised to find Geskamp, a big jutfaced man with gray-blond hair, indulging in sentiment of any kind. "There is certainly no recognizing it now."

"No. It's all tidy and clean. Like a park. Look up that mile of clear lawn. I liked it better in the old days. Now it's waste, nothing else." Geskamp cocked his bristling eyebrows at Shorn. "Do you know, they hold me responsible, the farmers and villagers? Because I'm in charge, I gave the orders?"

"They strike out at what's closest."

"I merely earn my salary. I did what I could for them. Completely useless, of course; there never were people so obdurate as the Teleks. Level the valley, build a stadium. Hurry, in time for their midsummer get-together. I say, why not build in Mismarch Valley, around the mountain, where only sheepherders would be disturbed, no crofts and farms to be broken up, no village to be razed."

"What did they say to that?"

"It was Forence Nollinrude I spoke to; you know him?"

"I've seen him: one of their liaison committee. A young man, rather more lofty than the average."

Geskamp spat on the concrete under his feet. "The young ones are the worst. He asked, 'Do we not give you enough money? Pay them well, clear them out. Swanscomba Valley is where we will have our stadium.' So"—Geskamp held out his hands in a quick gesticulation—"I bring out my machines, my men. We fly in material. For those who have lived here all their lives there is no choice; they take their money and go. Otherwise some morning perhaps they look out their door and find polar ice or mountains of the moon. I'd not put such refinement past the Teleks."

"Strange tales are told," Shorn agreed.

Geskamp pointed to the grove of oaks. His shadow, cast against the far side of the stadium by the level rays of the sun, followed the motion. "The oaks they brought, so much did they condescend. I explained that transplanting a forest was a job of great delicacy and expense. They were indifferent. 'Spend as much as you like.' I told them there wasn't enough time; if they wanted the stadium inside the month; finally they were aroused. Nollinrude and the one called Henry Motch stirred themselves, and the next day we had all our forest—But would they dispose of the waste from the aquaport, cast it in the sea? No. 'You hire four thousand men, let them move the rubble, brick by brick if need be; we have business elsewhere.' And they were gone."

"A peculiar people."

"Peculiar?" Geskamp gathered his bushy eyebrows into arches of vast scorn. "Madmen. For a whim—a town erased, men and women sent forth homeless." He waved his hand around the stadium. "Two hundred million crowns spent to gratify irresponsible popinjays whose only—"

A droll voice above them said, "I hear myself bespoken."

The two men jerked around. A man stood in the air ten feet above them. His face was mercurial and lighthearted; a green cap hung waggishly to the side of his head; dark hair hung below, almost to his shoulders. He wore a flaring red cape, tight green trousers, black velvet shoes. "You speak in anger, with little real consideration. We are your benefactors; where would you be without us?"

"Living normal lives," growled Geskamp.

The Telek was disposed to facetiousness. "Who is to say that yours is a normal life? In any event, our whim is your employment; we formulate our idle dreams, you and your men enrich yourselves fulfilling them, and we're both the better for it."

"Somehow the money always ends up back with the Teleks. A mystery."

"No, no mystery whatever. It is the exercise of economic law. In any event, we procure the funds, and we would be fools to hoard. In our spending you find occupation."

"We would not be idle otherwise."

"Perhaps not. Perhaps . . . well, look." He pointed across the stadium to the shadows on the far wall. "Perhaps there is your bent." And as they watched, their shadows became active. Shorn's shadow bent forward, Geskamp's shadow drew back, aimed and delivered a mighty kick, then turned, bent, and Shorn's shadow kicked.

The Telek cast no shadow.

Geskamp snorted, Shorn smiled grimly. They looked back overhead, but the Telek had moved high and was drifting south.

"Offensive creature," said Geskamp. "A law should be passed confiscating their every farthing."

Shorn shook his head. "They'd have it all back by nightfall. That's not the answer." He hesitated, as if about to add something further.

Geskamp, already irked by the Telek, did not take the contradiction kindly. Shorn, an architectural draughtsman, was his subordinate. "I suppose you know the answer?"

"I know several answers. One of them is that they should all be killed."

Geskamp's irritation had never carried him quite so far. Shorn was a strange, unpredictable fellow. "Rather bloodthirsty," he said heavily.

Shorn shrugged. "It might be best in the long run."

Geskamp's eyebrows lowered into a straight bar of gold-gray bristle across his face. "The idea is

impractical. The creatures are hard to kill."

Shorn laughed. "It's more than impractical—it's dangerous. If you recall the death of Vernisaw Knerwig—"

Vemisaw Knerwig had been punctured by a pellet from a high-power rifle, fired from a window. The murderer, a wild-eyed stripling, was apprehended. But the jail had not been tight enough to keep him. He disappeared. For months misfortune dogged the town. Poison appeared in the water supply. A dozen fires roared up one night. The roof of the town school collapsed. And one afternoon a great meteor struck down from space and obliterated the central square.

"Killing Teleks is dangerous work," said Geskamp. "It's not a realistic thought. After all," he said hurriedly, "they're men and women like ourselves; nothing illegal has ever been proved."

Shorn's eyes glittered. "Illegality? When they dam the whole stream of human development?"

Geskamp frowned. "I'd hardly say—"

"The signs are clear enough when a person pulls his head up out of the sand."

The conversation had got out of hand; Geskamp had been left behind. Waste and excess he admitted, but there were so few Teleks, so many ordinary people; how could they be dangerous? It was strange for an architect. He looked sidewise in cautious calculation.

Shorn was faintly smiling. "Well, what do you make of it?"

"You take an extreme position. It's hardly conceivable—"

"The future is unknown. Almost anything is conceivable. We might become Teleks, all of us. Unlikely? I think so myself. The Teleks might die out, disappear. Equally unlikely. They've always been with us, all of history, latent in our midst. What are the probabilities? Something like the present situation, a few Teleks among the great mass of common people?"

Geskamp nodded. "That's my opinion."

"Picture the future then. What do you see?"

"Nothing extraordinary. I imagine things will move along much as they have been."

"You see no trend, no curve of shifting relationships?"

"The Teleks are an irritation, certainly, but they interfere very little in our lives. In a sense they're an asset. They spend their money like water; they contribute to the general prosperity." He looked anxiously into the sky through the gathering dusk. "Their wealth, it's honestly acquired; no matter where they find those great blocks of metal."

"The metal comes from the moon, from the asteroids, from the outer planets."

Geskamp nodded. "Yes, that's the speculation."

"The metal represents restraint. The Teleks are giving value in return for what they could take."

"Of course. Why shouldn't they give value in return?"

"No reason at all. They should. But now—consider the trend. At the outset they were ordinary citizens. They lived by ordinary conventions; they were decent people. After the first congress they made their fortunes for performing dangerous and unpleasant tasks. Idealism, public service was the keynote. They identified themselves with all of humanity, and very praiseworthy, too. Now, sixty years later. Consider the Teleks of today. Is there any pretension to public service? None. They dress differently, speak differently, live differently. They no longer load ships or clear jungles or build roads; they take an easier way, which makes less demands on their time. Humanity benefits; they bring us platinum, palladium, uranium, rhodium, all the precious metals, which they sell at half the old price, and they pour the money back into circulation." He gestured across the stadium. "And meanwhile the old ones are dying and the new Teleks have no roots, no connection with common man. They draw ever farther away, developing a way of living entirely different from ours."

Geskamp said half-truculently, "What do you expect? It's natural, isn't it?"

Shorn put on a patient face. "That's exactly the point I'm trying to make. Consider the trend, the curve. Where does this 'natural' behavior lead? Always away from common humanity, the old traditions, always toward an elite-herd situation."

Geskamp rubbed his heavy chin. "I think that you're ... well, making a mountain out of a molehill."

"Do you think so? Consider the stadium, the eviction of the old property-owners. Think of Vernisaw

Knerwig and the revenge they took."

"Nothing was proved," said Geskamp uneasily. What was the fellow up to? Now he was grinning, a superior sort of grin.

"In your heart, you agree with what I say; but you can't bring yourself to face the facts—because then you'd be forced to take a stand. For or against."

Geskamp stared out across the valley, wholly angry, but unable to dispute Shorn's diagnosis. "I don't see the facts clearly."

"There are only two courses for us. We must either control the Teleks, that is, make them answerable to human law—or we must eliminate them entirely. In blunt words—kill them. If we don't—they become the masters; we the slaves. It's inevitable."

Geskamp's anger broke surface.

"Why do you tell me all these things? What are you driving at? This is strange talk to hear from an architect; you sound like one of the conspirators I've heard rumors of."

"I'm talking for a specific purpose—just as I worked on this job for a specific purpose. I want to bring you to our way of thinking."

"Oh. So that's the way of it."

"And with this accomplished, recruit your ability and your authority toward a concrete end."

"Who are you? What is this group?"

"A number of men worried by the trend I mentioned."

"A subversive society?" Geskamp's voice held a tinge of scorn.

Shorn laughed. "Don't let the flavor of words upset you. Call us a committee of public-spirited citizens."

"You'd be in trouble if the Teleks caught wind of you," said Geskamp woodenly.

"They're aware of us. But they're not magicians. They don't know who we are."

"I know who you are," said Geskamp. "Suppose I reported this conversation to Nollinrude?"

Shorn grinned. "What would you gain?"

"A great deal of money."

"You'd live the rest of your life in fear of revenge."

"I don't like it," said Geskamp in a brutal voice. "I don't care to be involved in any undercover plots."

"Examine your conscience. Think it over."

II.

The attack on Forence Nollinrude came two days later.

The construction office was a long L-shaped building to the west of the stadium. Geskamp stood in the yard angrily refusing to pay a trucker more than the agreed scale for his concrete aggregate.

"I can buy it cheaper in half a dozen, places," roared Geskamp. "You only got the contract in the first place because I went to bat for you."

The trucker had been one of the dispossessed farmers. He shook his head mulishly. "You did me no favor. I'm losing money. It's costing me three crowns a meter."

Geskamp waved an arm angrily toward the man's equipment, a small hopper carried by a pair of ramcopters. "How do you expect to make out with that kind of gear? All your profit goes in running back and forth to the quarry. Get yourself a pair of Samson lifts; you'll cut your costs to where you can make a few crowns."

"I'm a farmer, not a trucker. I took this contract because I had what I have. If I go in the hole for heavy equipment, then I'm stuck with it. It'll do me no more good now, the job's three-quarters done. I want more money, Geskamp, not good advice."

"Well, you can't get it from me. Talk to the purchasing agent; maybe he'll break down. I got you the contract, that's as far as I go."

"I already talked to the purchasing agent; he said nothing doing."

"Strike up one of the Teleks then; they've got the money. I can't do anything for you."

The trucker spat on the ground. "The Teleks, they're the devils who started this whole thing. A year ago I had my dairy—right where that patch of water is now. I was doing good. Now I've got nothing; the money they gave me to get out, most of it's gone in this gravel. Now where do I go? I got my family."

Geskamp drew his bushy gray-blond eyebrows together. "I'm sorry, Hopson. But there's nothing I can do. There's the Telek now; tell him your troubles."

The Telek was Forence Nollinrude, a tall yellow-haired man, magnificent in a rust cape, saffron trousers, black velvet slippers. The trucker looked across the yard to where he floated a fastidious three feet above the ground, then resolved himself and trudged sullenly forward.

Shorn, inside the office, could hear nothing of the interview. The trucker stared up belligerently, legs spread out. Forence Nollinrude turned himself a little to the side, looked down with distaste deepening the lines at the corners of his mouth.

The trucker did most of the talking. The Telek replied in curt monosyllables, and the trucker became progressively more furious.

Geskamp had been watching with a worried frown. He started across the yard, with the evident intention of calming the trucker. As he approached, Nollinrude pulled himself a foot or two higher, drew slightly away, turned toward Geskamp, motioned toward the trucker as if requiring Geskamp to remove the annoyance.

The trucker suddenly seized a bar of reinforcing iron, swung mightly,

Geskamp bawled hoarsely; Forence Nollinrude jerked away, but the iron caught him across the shins. He cried in agony, drew back, looked at the trucker. The trucker rose like a rocket, a hundred feet into the air, turned end for end, dived head-first to the ground. He struck with crushing force, pulping his head, his shoulders. But as if Nollinrude were not yet satisfied, the bar of iron rose and beat the limp body with enormous savage strokes.

Had Nollinrude been less anguished by the pain of his legs he would have been more wary. Almost as the trucker struck the ground, Geskamp seized a laborer's mattock, stalked close behind, swung. The Telek collapsed to the ground.

"Now," said Shorn to himself, "there will be hell to pay."

Geskamp stood panting, looking down at the body huddled in the finery that suddenly seemed not chosen human vestments, but the gaudy natural growth of a butterfly or flash-beetle in pathetic disarray. He became aware of the mattock he still held, flung it away as if it were red-hot, and stood wiping his hands nervously together.

Shorn knelt beside the body, searched with practiced swiftness. He found and pocketed a wallet, a small pouch, then rose to his feet.

"We've got to work fast." He looked around the yard. Possibly half a dozen men had witnessed the occurrence—a tool-room attendant, a form foreman, a couple of time-clerks, a laborer or two. "Get them all together, everyone who saw what happened; I'll take care of the body. Here, you!" He called to a white-faced lift operator. "Get a hopper down here."

They rolled the gorgeous hulk into the hopper. Shorn jumped up beside the operator, pointed. "Up there where they're pouring that abutment."

They swept diagonally up the great north wall, to where a pour-crew worked beside a receptor designed to receive concrete from loaded hoppers. Shorn jumped four feet from the hopper to the deck, went to the foreman. "There's a hold-up here; take your crew down to B-142 Pilaster and work there for a while."

The foreman grumbled, protested. The receptor was half-full of concrete.

Shorn raised his voice impatiently. "Leave it set. I'll send a lift up to move the whole thing."

The foreman turned away, barked ill-naturedly to his men. They moved with exaggerated slowness. Shorn stood tautly while they gathered their equipment and trooped down the ramp.

He turned to the lift operator. "Now."

The bedizened body rolled into the pour.

Shorn guided the dump-hose into position, pulled the trigger. Gray slush pressed down the staring face that had known so much power.

Shorn sighed slightly. "That's good. Now—we'll get the crew back on the job."

At Pilaster B-142 Shorn signaled the foreman, who glowered belligerently. Shorn was a mere draftsman, therefore a fumbler and impractical. "You can go back to work up above now."

Before the foreman could find words for an adequate retort, Shorn was back in the hopper.

In the yard he found Geskamp standing at the center of an apprehensive group.

"Nollinrude's gone." He looked at the body of the trucker who had caused the original outburst. "Somebody will have to take him home."

He surveyed the group, trying to gauge their strength, and found nothing to reassure him. Eyes shifted sullenly from his. With an empty feeling in his stomach Shorn knew that the fact of the killing could not be disposed of as easily as the body.

Shorn once more scanned the surroundings. A great blank wall rose immediately to the east; to the north were the Alban Hills, to the south the empty Swanscomba Valley.

Probably these few people were still alone in their knowledge of the killing. He looked from face to face. "A lot of people to keep a secret. If one of us talks—even to his brother or his friend, or his wife—then there's no more secret. You all remember Vernisaw Knerwig?"

A nervous mutter assured him that they did; that their urgent hope was to disassociate themselves from any part of the current episode.

Geskamp's face was working irritably. Shorn remembered that Geskamp was nominally in charge, and was possibly sensitive to any usurpation of his authority. "Yes, Mr. Geskamp? Did you have something to add?"

Geskamp drew back his heavy lips, grinning like a big blond dog. With an effort he restrained himself. "You're doing fine."

Shorn turned back to the others. "You men are leaving the job now. You won't be questioned by any Teleks. Naturally they'll know that Nollinrude has disappeared, but I hope they won't know where. Just in case you are asked—Nollinrude came and went. That's all you know. Another thing." He paused weightily. "If any one of us becomes wealthy and the Teleks become full of knowledge—this person will regret that he sold his voice." And he added, as if it were an inconsequential matter, "There's a group to cope with situations of this sort." He looked at Geskamp, but Geskamp kept stonily silent. "Now, I'll get your names—for future reference. One at a time—"

Twenty minutes later a carry-all floated off toward Tran.

"Well," said Geskamp bitterly, "I'm up to my neck in it now. Is that what you wanted?"

"I didn't want it this way. You're in a tough spot. So am I. With luck we'll come through. But—just in case—tonight we'll have to do what I was leading up to."

Geskamp squinted angrily. "Now I'm to be your cat's-paw. In what?"

"You can sign a requisition. You can send a pair of lifts to the explosives warehouse—"

Geskamp's bushy eyebrows took on an odd reverse tilt. "Explosives? How much?"

"A ton of mitrox."

Geskamp said in a tone of hushed respect: "That's enough to blow the stadium ten miles high!"

Shorn grinned. "Exactly. You'd better get that requisition off right now. Then you have the key to the generator room. Tomorrow the main pile is going in. Tonight you and I will arrange the mitrox under the piers."

Geskamp's mouth hung open. "But—"

Show's dour face became almost charming. "I know. Wholesale murder. Not sporting. I agree with you. A sneak attack. I agree. Stealth and sneak attacks and back-stabbing are our weapons. We don't have any others. None at all."

"But—why are you so confident of bloodshed?"

Shorn suddenly exploded in anger. "Man, get your head up out of the sand. What's our chance of getting every single one without exception?"

Geskamp jumped out of the company airboat assigned to his use, stalked with a set face around the stadium toward the construction office. Above him rose two hundred feet of sheer concrete, glowing in the morning sun. In his mind's eye Geskamp saw the dark cartons that he and Shorn had carried below like moles on the night previous; he still moving with reluctance and uncertainty, carried only by Shorn's fire and direction.

Now the trap was set. A single coded radio signal would pulverize the new concrete, fling a molten gout miles into the air, pound a gigantic blow at the earth.

Geskamp's honest face became taut as he wrestled with his conscience. Had he been too malleable? Think what a revenge the Teleks would take for such a disaster! Still, if the Teleks were as terrible a threat to human freedom as Shorn had half made him believe, then the mass killing was a deed to be resolutely carried through, like the killing of dangerous beasts. And certainly the Teleks only paid lip-service to human laws. His mind went to the death of Forence Nollinrude. In ordinary events there would be an inquiry. Nollinrude had killed the trucker; Geskatnp, swept by overwhelming rage and pity, had killed the Telek. At the worst a human court would have found him guilty of manslaughter, and no doubt have granted probation. But with a Telek—Geskamp's blood chilled in his veins. Maybe there was something to Shorn's extreme methods after all; certainly the Teleks could be controlled by no normal methods of law.

He rounded the corner of the tool room, noted an unfamiliar face within. Good. Home office had acted without inquisitiveness; the shifting of employees had interested no one with authority to ask questions.

He looked into the expediter's room. "Where's the draftsman?" he asked Cole, the steel detailer.

"Never showed up this morning, Mr. Geskamp." Geskamp cursed under his breath. Just like Shorn, getting him into trouble, then ducking out, leaving him to face it. Might be better to come clean with the whole incident; after all it had been an accident, a fit of blood-rage. The Teleks could understand so much, surely.

He turned his head. Something flickered at the edge of his vision. He looked sharply. Something like a big black bug whisked up behind a shelf of books. Big cockroach, thought Geskamp. A peculiar cockroach.

He attacked his work in a vicious humor, and foremen around the job asked themselves wonderingly what had got into Geskamp. Three times during the morning he looked into the office for Shorn, but Shorn had made no appearance.

And once, as he ducked under a low soffit on one of the upper decks, a black object darted up behind him. He jerked his eyes around, but the thing had disappeared under the beams.

"Funny bug," he said to the new form foreman, whom he was showing around the job.

"I didn't see it, Mr. Geskamp."

Geskamp returned to the office, obtained Shorn's home address—a hotel in the Marmion Tower—and put in a visiphone call.

Shorn was not in.

Geskamp turned away, almost bumped into the feet of a Telek standing in the air before him: a thin somber man with silver hair and oil-back eyes. He wore two tones of gray, with a sapphire clasp at the collar of his cape, and the usual Telek slippers of black velvet.

Geskamp's heart started thudding; this hands became moist. The moment he had been dreading. Where was Shorn?

"You are Geskamp?"

"Yes," said Geskamp. "I—"

He was picked up, hurled through the air. Far, fleeting below, went the stadium, Swanscomba Valley, the entire countryside. Tran was a gray and black honeycomb, he was in the sunny upper air, hurtling with unthinkable speed. Wind roared past in his ears, but he felt no pressure on his skin, no tear at his clothes.

The ocean spread blue below, and something glittered ahead—a complex edifice of shiny metal, glass and bright color. It floated high in the sunny air, with no support above or below.

Geskamp saw a glitter, a flash; he was standing on a floor of glass threaded and drawn with strands of green and gold. The thin gray man sat behind a table in a yellow chair. The room was flooded with sunlight; Geskamp was too dazed to notice further details.

The Telek said, "Geskamp, tell me what you know of Forence Nollinrude."

It appeared to Geskamp that the Telek was watching him with superior knowledge, as if any lie would be instantly known, dismissed with grim humor. He was a poor liar to begin with. He looked around for a place to rest his big body. A chair appeared.

"Nollinrude?" He seated himself. "I saw him yesterday. What about him?"

"Where is he now?"

Geskamp forced a painful laugh. "How would I know?"

A sliver of glass darted through the air, stung the back of Geskamp's neck. He rose to his feet, startled and angry.

"Sit down," said the Telek, in a voice of unnatural coolness.

Geskamp slowly sat down. A kind of faintness dimmed his vision, his brain seemed to move away, seemed to watch dispassionately.

"Where is Nollinrude?"

Geskamp held his breath. A voice said, "He's dead. Down in the concrete."

"Who killed him?"

Geskamp listened to hear what the voice would say.

III.

Shorn sat in a quiet tavern in that section of Tran where the old suddenly changes to the new. South were the sword-shaped towers, the neat intervening plazas and parks; north spread the ugly crust of three- and four-story apartments gradually blending into the industrial district.

A young woman with straight brown hair sat across the table from Shorn. She wore a brown cloak without ornament; looking into her face there was little to notice but her eyes—large, brown-black, somber; the rest of her face was without accent.

Shorn was drinking strong tea, his thin dark face in repose.

The young woman seemed to see an indication that the surface calm was false. She put out her hand, rested it on his, a quick exquisite gesture, the first time she had touched him in the three months of their acquaintance. "How could you have done differently?" Her voice became mildly argumentative. "What could you have done?"

"Taken the whole half-dozen underground. Kept Geskamp with me."

"How would that have helped? There'll be a certain number of deaths, a certain amount of destruction—how many and how much is out of our hands. Is Geskamp a valuable man?"

"No. He's a big hard-working likable fellow, hardly devious or many-tracked enough to be of use. And I don't think he would have come with me. He was to the point of open rebellion as it was—the type who resents infringement."

"It's not impossible that your arrangements are effective."

"Not a chance. The only matter for speculation is how many the Teleks destroy and whom."

The young woman relaxed somberly hack in her chair, stared straight ahead. "If nothing else, this episode marks a new place in the ... in the . . . I don't know what to call it. Struggle? Campaign? War?"

"Call it war."

"We're almost out in the open. Public opinion may be aroused, swung to our side."

Shorn shook his head gloomily. "The Teleks have bought most of the police, and I suspect that they own the big newspapers, through fronts of course. No, we can't expect much public support yet. We'll be called Nihilists, Totalitarists—"

The young woman quoted Turgenev. "If you want to annoy an opponent thoroughly or even harm him, you reproach him with every defect or vice you are conscious of in yourself."

"It's just as well." Shorn laughed bitterly. "Perhaps it's one of our big advantages, our freedom to merge into the masses. If everyone were anti-Telek, the Teleks would have an easy job. Kill everybody."

"Then they'd have to do all their own work."

"That's right, too."

She made a fluttering gesture, her voice was strained. "It's a blood penance on our century, on humanity—"

Shorn snorted. "Mysticism."

She went on as if she had not heard. "If men were to develop from sub-apes a thousand times—each of those thousand rises would show the same phases, and there would be a Telek phase in all of them. It's as much a part of humanity as hunger and fear and sex."

"And when the Teleks are out of the way—what's the next phase? Is history only a series of bloody phases? Where's the leveling-off point?"

She smiled wanly. "Perhaps when we're all Teleks."

Shorn gave her a strange look—calculation, curiosity, wonder. He returned to his tea as if to practical reality. "I suppose Geskamp has been trying to get hold of me all morning."

He considered a moment, then rose to his feet. "I'll call the job and find out what's happened."

A moment later he returned. "Geskamp's nowhere around. A message just came in for me at the hotel, and it's to be delivered by hand only."

"Perhaps Geskamp went of his own accord."

"Perhaps."

"More likely—" she paused. "Anyway, the hotel is a good place to stay away from."

Shorn clenched and unclenched his hands. "It frightens me."

"What?" She seemed surprised.

"My own—vindictiveness. It's not right to hate anyone. A person is bad because exterior forces have hurt his essentially good brain. I realize this—and yet I hate."

"The Teleks?"

"No, not the Teleks." He spoke slowly. "I fear them, good healthy fear. I kill them for survival. Those I *want* to kill, for pleasure, are the men who serve the Teleks for money, who sell their own kind." He clenched, unclenched his hands. "It's unhealthy to think like that."

"You're too much the idealist, Will."

Shorn mused, talking in a monotone. "Our war is the war of ants against giants. They have the power but they loom, we see them for miles. We're among the swarm. We move a hundred feet, into a new group of people, we're lost. Anonymity, that's our advantage. So we're safe—until a Judas-ant identifies us, drags us forth from the swarm. Then we're lost; the giant foot comes down, there's no escape. We—"

The young woman raised her hand. "Listen."

A voice from the sound-line, here running under the ceiling molding, said, "The murder of a Telek, Forence Nollinrude, liaison lieutenant, by subversive conspiracy has been announced. The murderer, Ian Geskamp, superintendent of construction at the Swanscomba Valley Stadium, has disappeared. It is expected that he will implicate a number of confederates when captured."

Shorn sat quietly.

"What will they do if they catch him? Will they turn him over to the authorities?"

Shorn nodded. "They've announced the murder. If they want to maintain the fiction of their subservience to Federal law, then they've got to submit to the regular courts. Once he's out of their direct custody, then no doubt he'll die—any one of a number of unpleasant deaths. And then there will be further acts of God. Another meteor, into Geskamp's home town, something of the sort—"

"Why are you smiling?"

"It just occurred to me that Geskamp's home town was Cobent Village, that used to be in Swanscomba Valley. They've already wiped that one off the map. But they'll do something significant

enough to point up the moral—that killing Teleks is a very expensive process."

"It's odd that they bother with legality at all."

"It means that they want no sudden showdown. Whatever revolution there is to be, they want it to come gradually, with as little dislocation as possible, no sudden flood of annoying administrative detail." He sat tapping his fingers nervously. "Geskamp was a good fellow. I'm wondering about this message at the hotel."

"If he were captured, drugged, your name and address would come out. You would be a valuable captive."

"Not while I can bite down on my back tooth. Full of cyanide. But I'm curious about that message. If it's from Geskamp he needs help, and we should help him. He knows about the mitrox under the stadium. The subject might not arise during the course of questioning, especially under drugs, but we don't want to run the risk."

"Suppose it's a trick?"

"Well—we might learn something."

"I could get it," she said doubtfully.

Shorn frowned.

"No," she said, "I don't mean by walking in and asking for it; that would be foolish. You write a note authorizing delivery of the message to bearer."

The young woman said to the boy, "It's very important that you follow instructions exactly."

"Yes, miss."

The boy rode the sidewalk to the Marmion Tower, whose seventh and eighth floors were given to the Cort Hotel. He rode the lift to the seventh floor, went quietly to the desk.

"Mr. Shorn sent me to pick up his mail." He passed the note across the desk.

The clerk hesitated, looked away in preoccupation, then without words handed the boy an envelope.

The boy returned to the ground floor, walked out into the street, where he paused, waited. Apparently no one followed him. He rode the sidewalk north, along the gray streets to the Tarrogat, stepped around the corner, jumped on the high-speed East Division sidewalk. Heavy commercial traffic growled through the street beside him, trucks and drays, a few surface cars. The boy spied a momentary gap, stepped to the outside band, jumped running into the street. He darted across, climbed on the sidewalk running in the opposite direction, watching over his shoulder. No one followed. He rode a mile, past the Flatiron Y, turned into Grant Avenue, jumped to the stationary, crouched by the corner.

No one came hurrying after.

He crossed the street, entered the Grand Maison Café.

The food panel made an island down the center; to either side were tables. The boy walked around the food panel, ignoring a table where a young woman in a brown cloak sat by herself. He ducked out an entrance opposite to where he entered, rounded the building, entered once more.

The young woman rose to her feet, followed him out. At the exit they brushed together accidentally.

The boy went about his business, and the young woman turned, went back to the rest room. As she opened the door a black beetle buzzed through with her.

She ducked, looked around the ceiling, but the insect had disappeared. She went to a visiphone, paid for sonic, dialed.

"Well?"

"I've got it."

"Anyone follow?"

"No. I watched him leave Marmion Tower. I watched behind him in—" her voice broke off.

"What's the matter?"

She said in a strained voice, "Get out of there fast. Hurry. Don't ask questions. Get away—fast!"

She hung up, pretending that she had not noticed the black bug pressed against the glass, crystal eyes staring at the visiphone dial.

She reached in her pouch, selected one of the four weapons she carried, drew it forth, closed her eyes, snapped the release.

White glare flooded the room, seared behind her closed lids. She ran out the door, picked up the dazed bug in her handkerchief, stuffed it into her pouch. It was strangely heavy, like a slug of lead.

She must hurry. She ran from the rest room, up through the café, out into the street.

Safe among the crowds she watched six emergency vans vomit Black and Golds who rushed to the exits of the Grand Maison Café.

Bitterly she rode the sidewalks north. The Teleks controlled the police, it was no secret.

She wondered about the beetle in her pouch. It evinced no movement, no sign of life. If her supposition were correct, it would be quiet so long as she kept light from its eyes, so long as she denied it reference points.

For an hour she wandered the city, intent on evading not only men, but also little black beetle-things. At last she ducked into a narrow passageway in the hard industry quarter, ran up a flight of wooden steps, entered a drab but neat sitting room.

She went to a closet, found a small canister with a screw top, gingerly pushed the handkerchief and the beetle-thing inside, screwed down the lid.

She removed her long brown cloak, drew a cup of coffee from the dispenser, waited.

Half an hour passed. The door opened. Shorn looked in. His face was haggard and pale as a dog skull; his eyes glowed with an unhealthy yellow light.

She jumped to her feet. "What's happened?"

"Sit still, Laurie, I'm all right." He slumped into a seat.

She drew another cup of coffee, passed it to him. "What happened?"

His eyes burned brighter. "As soon as I heard from you, I left the tavern. Twenty seconds later—no more —the place exploded. Flame shooting out the door, out the windows—thirty or forty people inside; I can hear them yelling now—" His mouth sagged. He licked his lips. "I hear them—"

Laurie controlled her voice. "Just ants."

Shorn assented with a ghastly grin. "The giant steps on forty ants, but the guilty ant, the marked ant, the intended ant—he's gone."

She told him about the black bug. He groaned ironically. "It was bad enough dodging spies and Black and Golds. Now little bugs—can it hear?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. It's shut up tight in the can, but sound probably gets through."

"We'd better move it."

She wrapped the can in a towel, tucked it in a closet, shut the door. When she returned, Shorn was eying her with a new look in his eye. "You thought very swiftly, Laurie."

She turned away to hide her pleasure. "I had to."

"You still have the message?"

She handed the envelope across the table.

He read, "Get in touch with Clyborn at the Perendalia."

"Do you know him?"

"No. We'll make discreet inquiries. I don't imagine there'll be anything good come out of it."

"It's so much—work."

"Easy for the giants. One or two of them manage the entire project. I've heard that the one called Dominion is in charge, and the others don't even realize there's dissatisfaction. Just as we appoint a dogcatcher, then dismiss the problem of stray dogs from our minds. Probably not one Telek in a hundred realizes that we're fighting for our lives, our futures, our dignity as human beings."

After a moment she asked, "Do you think we'll win, Will?"

"I don't know. We have nothing to lose." He yawned, stretched. "Tonight I meet Circumbright; you remember him?"

"He's the chubby little biophysicist."

Shorn nodded. "If you'll excuse me, I think I'll take a nap."

IV.

At eleven o'clock Shorn descended to the street. The sky was bright with glow from the lake-shore entertainment strip, the luxury towers of downtown Tran.

He walked along the dark street till he came to Bellman Boulevard, and stepped out onto the slipway.

There was a cold biting wind and few people were abroad; the hum of the rollers below was noticeable. He turned into Stockbridge Street, and as he approached the quarter-mile strip of night stores, the sidewalks became crowded and Shorn felt more secure. He undertook a few routine precautions, sliding quickly through doors, to break contact with any spy-beetles that might have fixed on him.

At midnight the fog blew thick in from the harbor, smelling of oil, mercaptan, ammonia. Pulling up his hood, Shorn descended a flight of stairs, pushed into a basement recreation hall, sidled past the dull-eyed men at the mechanical games. He walked directly toward the men's room, turned at the last minute into a short side corridor, passed through a door marked "Employees" into a workshop littered with bits and parts from the amusement machines.

Shorn waited a moment, ears alert for sound, then went to the rear of the room, unlocked a steel door, slipped through into a second workshop, much more elaborately fitted than the first. A short stout man with a big head and mild blue eyes looked up. "Hello, Will."

Shorn waved his hand. "Hello, Gorman."

He stood with his back to the door, looking around the molding for a black, apparently innocent, beetle. Nothing in sight. He crossed the room, scribbled on a bit of paper. "We've got to search the room. Look for a flying spy cell, like this." He sketched the beetle he carried with him in the canister, then appended a postscript. "I'll cover the ventilator."

An hour's search revealed nothing.

Shorn sighed, relaxed. "Ticklish. If there was one of the things here, and it saw us searching, the Telek at the other end would have known the jig was up. We'd have been in trouble. A fire, an explosion. They missed me once already today, by about ten seconds." He set the canister on a bench. "I've got one of the things in here. Laurie caught it; rare presence of mind. Her premise is, that if its eyes and ears are made useless—in other words, if it loses its identity on a spatial frame of reference—then it ceases to exist for the Teleks, and they can no longer manipulate it. I think she's right; the idea seems intuitively sound."

Gorman Circumbright picked up the canister, jiggled it. "Rather heavy. Why did you bring it down here?"

"We've got to figure out a counter to it. It must function like a miniature video transmitter. I suppose Alvac Corporation makes them. If we can identify the band it broadcasts on, we can build ourselves detectors, warning units."

Circumbright sat looking at the can. "If it's still in operation, if it's still broadcasting, I can find out very swiftly."

He set the can beside an all-wave tuner. Shorn unscrewed the lid, gingerly removed the bug, still wrapped in cloth, set it on the bench. Circumbright pointed to a fluorescent scale, glowing at several points. He started to speak, but Shorn motioned for silence, pointed to the bug. Circumbright nodded, wrote, "The lower lines are possibly static, from the power source. The sharp line at the top is the broadcast frequency—very sharp. Powerful."

Shorn replaced the bug in the can. Circumbright turned away from the tuner. "If it's insensitive to infrared, we can see to take it apart, disconnect the power."

Shorn frowned doubtfully. "How could we be sure?"

"Give it to me." Circumbright clipped leads from an oscillograph to the back of the tuner, dialed to the spy-beetle's carrier frequency.

The oscillograph showed a normal sine-curve.

"Now. Turn out the lights."

Shorn threw the switch. The room was dark except for the dancing yellow-green light of the oscillograph and the dull red murk from the infrared projector.

Circumbright's bulk cut off the glow from the projector; Shorn watched the oscillograph face. There was no change in the wave.

"Good," said Circumbright. "And I think that if I strain my eyes I can ... or better, reach in the closet and hand me the heat-conversion lenses. Top shelf."

He worked fifteen minutes, then suddenly the carrier wave on the face of the oscillograph vanished. "Ah," sighed Circumbright. "That's got it. You can turn the lights back on now."

Together they stood looking down at the bug—a little black torpedo two inches long with two crystalline eyes bulging at each side of the head.

"Nice job," said Circumbright. "It's an Alvac product all right. I'll say a word to Graythorne; maybe he can introduce a few disturbing factors."

"What about that detector unit?"

Circumbright pursed his lips. "For each of the bugs there's probably a different frequency; otherwise they'd get their signals mixed up. But the power bank probably radiates about the same in all cases. I can fix up a jury-rig which you can use for a few days, then Graythorne can bring us down some tailor-made jobs from Alvac, using the design data."

He crossed the room, found a bottle of red wine, which he sat beside Shorn. "Relax a few minutes."

Half an hour passed. Shorn watched quietly while Circumbright soldered together stock circuits, humming in a continuous tuneless drone.

"There," said Circumbright finally. "If one of those bugs gets within a hundred yards, this will vibrate, thump."

"Good." Shorn tucked the device tenderly in his breast pocket, while Circumbright settled himself into an armchair, stuffed tobacco in a pipe. Shorn watched him curiously. Circumbright, placid and unemotional as a man could be, revealed himself to Shorn by various small signs, such as pressing the tobacco home with a thumb more vigorous than necessary.

"I hear another Telek was killed yesterday."

"Yes. I was there."

"Who is this Geskamp?"

"Big blond fellow. What's the latest on him?"

"He's dead."

"Hum-m-m." Shorn was silent a moment, a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach. "How?"

"The Teleks turned him over to the custody of the Federal Marshal at Knoll. He was shot trying to escape."

Shorn felt as if anger were being pumped inside him, as if he were swelling, as if the pressure against his taut muscles were too great to bear.

"Take it easy," said Circumbright mildly.

"I'll kill Teleks from a sense of duty," said Shorn. "I don't enjoy it. But . . . and I feel ashamed, I'll admit . . . I *want* to kill the Federal Marshal at Knoll."

"It wasn't the Federal Marshal himself," said Circumbright. "It was two of his deputies. And it's always possible that Geskamp actually did try to escape. We'll know for sure tomorrow."

"How so?"

"We're moving out a little bit. There'll be an example made of those two if they're guilty. We'll narcotize them tonight, find out the truth. If they're working for the Teleks—they'll go." Circumbright spat on the floor. "Although I dislike the label of a terrorist organization."

"What else can we do? If we got a confession, turned them over to the Section Attorney, they'd be reprimanded, turned loose."

"True enough." Circumbright puffed meditatively.

Shorn moved restlessly in his chair. "It frightens me, the imminence, the urgency of all this—and how

few, people are aware of it! Surely there's never been an emergency so ill-publicized before. In a week, a month, three months—there'll be more dead people on Earth than live ones, unless we get the entire shooting-match at once in the stadium."

Circumbright puffed at his pipe. "Will, sometimes I wonder whether we're not approaching the struggle from the wrong direction."

"How so?"

"Perhaps instead of attacking the Teleks, we should be learning more of the fundamental nature of telekinetics."

Shorn leaned back fretfully. "The Teleks don't know themselves."

"A bird can't tell you much about aerodynamics. The Teleks have a disadvantage which is not at all obvious —the fact that action comes too easy, that they are under no necessity to think. To build a dam, they look at a mountain, move it down into the valley. If the dam gives way, they move down another mountain, but they never look at a slide rule. In this respect, at least, they represent a retrogression rather than an advance."

Shorn slowly opened and closed his hands, watching as if it were the first time he had ever seen them. "They're caught in the stream of life, like the rest of us. It's part of the human tragedy that there can't be any compromise; it's them or us."

Circumbright heaved a deep sigh. "I've racked my brains . . . Compromise. Why can't two kinds of people live together? Our abilities complement each other."

"One time it was that way. The first generation. The Teleks were still common men, perhaps a little peculiar in that things always turned out lucky for them. Then Joffrey and his Telekinetic Congress, and the reinforcing, the catalysis, the forcing, whatever it was—and suddenly they're different."

"If there were no fools," said Circumbright, "either among us or among them, we could co-inhabit the earth. There's the flaw in any compromise negotiation—the fact of fools, both among the Teleks and the common men."

"I don't quite follow you."

Circumbright gestured with his pipe. "There will always be Telek fools to antagonize common-man fools; then the common-man fools will ambush the Teleks, and the Teleks will be very upset, especially since for every Telek, there are forty Earth fools eager to kill him. So they use force, terror. Inexorable, inevitable. But—they have a choice. They can leave Earth, find a home somewhere among the planets they claim they visit; they can impose this reign of power; or they can return to humanity, renounce telekinesis entirely. Those are the choices open to them."

"And our choices?"

"We submit or we challenge. In the first instance we become slaves. In the second we either kill the Teleks, drive them away, or we all become dead men."

Shorn sipped at his wineglass. "We might all become Teleks ourselves."

"Or we might find a scientific means to control or cancel out telekinesis." Circumbright poured a careful finger of wine for himself. "My own instinct is to explore the last possibility."

"There's nowhere to get a foothold in the subject."

"Oh I don't know. We have a number of observations. Telekinesis and teleportation have been known for thousands of years. It took the concentration of telekinetics at Joffrey's Congress to develop the power fully. We know that Telek children are telekinetic—whether by contagion or by genetics we can't be sure."

"Probably both. A genetic predisposition; parental training."

Circumbright nodded. "Probably both. Although as you know, in rare instances they reward a common man by making a Telek out of him."

"Evidently telekinesis is latent in everyone."

"There's a large literature of early experiments and observations. The so-called spiritualist study of poltergeists and house-demons might be significant."

Shorn remained silent.

"I've tried to systematize the subject," Circumbright continued, "deal with it logically. The first question seems to be, does the Law of Conservation of Energy apply or not? When a Telek floats a ton of iron across the sky by looking at it, is he creating energy or is he directing the use of energy from an unseen source? There is no way of knowing offhand."

Shorn stretched, yawned, settled back in his chair. "I have heard a metaphysical opinion, to the effect that the Telek uses nothing more than confidence. The universe that he perceives has reality only to the backdrop of his own brain. He sees a chair; the image of a chair exists in his mind. He orders the chair to move across the room. His confidence and reality is so great that, in his mind, he believes he sees the chair move, and he bases his future actions on the perception. Somehow he is not disappointed. In other words, the chair has moved because he believes he has moved it."

Circumbright puffed placidly on his pipe.

Shorn grinned. "Go on; I'm sorry I interrupted you."

"Where does the energy come from? Is the mind a source, a valve or a remote control? There are the three possibilities. Force is applied; the mind directs the force. But does the force *originate* in the mind, is the force *collected, channeled through* the mind, or does the mind act like a modulator, a grid in a vacuum tube?"

Shorn slowly shook his head. "So far we have not even defined the type of energy at work. If we knew that, we might recognize the function of the mind."

"Or vice versa. It works either way. But if you wish, consider the force at work. In all cases, an object moves in a single direction. That is to say, there has been no observed case of an explosion or a compression. The object moves as a unit. How? Why? To say the mind projects a force field is ignoring the issue, redefining at an equal level of abstraction."

"Perhaps the mind is able to control the poltergeists —creatures like the old Persian genii."

Circumbright tapped the ash from his pipe. "I've considered the possibility. Who are the poltergeists? Ghosts? Souls of the dead? A matter for speculation. Why are the Teleks able to control them, and ordinary people not?"

Shorn grinned. "I assume these are rhetorical questions—because I don't have the answers."

"Perhaps a form of gravity is at work. Imagine a cup-shaped gravity screen around the object, open on the side the Telek desires motion. I have not calculated the gravitational acceleration generated by matter at its average universal density, from here to infinity, but I assume it would be insignificant. A millimeter a day, perhaps. Count the cup-shaped gravity-screen out; likewise a method for rendering the object opaque to the passage of neutrinos in a given direction."

"Poltergeists, gravity, neutrinos—all eliminated. What have we left?"

Circumbright chuckled. "I haven't eliminated the poltergeists. But I incline to the Organic Theory. That is, the concept that all the minds and all the matter of the universe are interconnected, much like brain cells and muscular tissue of the body. When certain of these brain cells achieve a sufficiently close vinculum, they are able to control certain twitchings of the corporeal frame of the universe. How? Why? I don't know. After all, it's only an idea, a sadly anthropomorphic idea."

Shorn looked thoughtfully up at the ceiling. Circumbright was a three-way scientist. He not only proposed theories, he not only devised critical experiments to validate them, but he was an expert laboratory technician. "Does your theory suggest any practical application?"

Circumbright scratched his ear. "Not yet. I need to cross-fertilize it with a few other notions. Like the metaphysics you brought up a few moments ago. If I only had a Telek who would submit himself to experiments, we might get somewhere—And I think I hear Dr. Kurgill."

He rose to his feet, padded to the door. He opened it; Shorn saw him stiffen.

A deep voice said, "Hello, Circumbright; this is my son. Cluche, meet Gorman Circumbright, one of our foremost tacticians."

The two Kurgills came into the laboratory. The father was short, spare, with simian length to his arms. He had a comical simian face with a high forehead, long upper lip, flat nose. The son resembled his father not at all: a striking young man with noble features, a proud crest of auburn hair, an extreme mode

of dress, reminiscent of Telek style. The elder was quick of movement, talkative, warm; the younger was careful of eye and movement.

Circumbright turned toward Shorn. "Will—" he stopped short. "Excuse me," he said to the Kurgills. "If you'll sit down, I'll be with you at once."

He hurried into the adjoining storeroom. Shorn stood in the shadows.

"What's the trouble?"

Shorn took Circumbright's hand, held it against the warning unit in his pocket.

Circumbright jerked. "The thing's vibrating!"

Shorn looked warily into the room beyond. "How well do you know the Kurgills?"

Circumbright said, "The doctor's my lifelong friend; I'd go my life for him."

"And his son?"

"I can't say."

They stared at each other, then by common accord, looked through the crack of the door. Cluche Kurgil had seated himself in the chair Shorn had vacated, while his father stood in front of him, teetering comfortably on his toes, hands behind his back.

"I'd swear that no bug slipped past us while I stood in the doorway," muttered Circumbright.

"No. I don't think it did."

"That means it's on one or the other of their persons."

"It might be unintentional—a plant. But how would the Teleks know the Kurgills intended to come down here?"

Shorn shook his head.

Circumbright sighed. "I guess not."

"The bug will be where it can see, but where it can't be seen—or at least, not noticed."

Their glances went to the ornate headdress Cluche Kurgill wore on one side of his head: a soft roll of gray-green leather, bound by a strip across his hair, trailing a dangle of moon-opals past his ear.

Circumbright said in a tight voice, "We can expect destruction at any time. Explosion—"

Shorn said slowly, "I doubt if they'll send an explosion. If they feel they are unsuspected, they'll prefer to bide their time."

Circumbright said huskily, "Well, what do you propose then?"

Shorn hesitated a moment before replying. "We're in a devil of a ticklish position. Do you have a narcohypnotic stinger handy?"

Circumbright nodded.

"Perhaps then—"

Two minutes later Circumbright rejoined the Kurgilis. The old doctor was in a fine humor. "Gorman," he said to Circumbright; "I'm very proud of Cluche here. He's been a scapegrace all his life—but now he wants to make something of himself."

"Good," said Circumbright with hollow heartiness. "If he were of our conviction, I could use him right now —but I wouldn't want him to do anything against his—"

"Oh, no, not at all," said Cluche. "What's your problem?"

"Well, Shorn just left for a very important meeting—the regional chiefs—and he's forgotten his code book. I couldn't trust an ordinary messenger, but if you will deliver the code book, you'd be doing us a great service."

"Any little thing I can do to help," said Cluche. "I'll be delighted."

His father regarded him with fatuous pride. "Cluche has surprised me. He caught me out just the day before yesterday, and now nothing must do but that he plunges in after me. Needless to say I'm very pleased; glad to see that he's a chip off the old block, nothing stands in his way."

Circumbright said, "I can count on you then? You'll have to follow instructions exactly."

"Quite all right, sir, glad to help."

"Good," said Circumbright. "First thing then—you'll have to change your clothes. You'd be too conspicuous as you are."

"Oh, now!" protested Cluche. "Surely a cloak—"

"No!" snapped Circumbright. "You'll have to dress as a dock worker from the skin out. No cloak would hide that headgear. In the next room you'll find some clothes. Come with me, I'll make a light."

He held open the door; reluctantly Cluche stepped through.

The door closed. Shorn expertly seized Cluche's neck, digging strong fingers into the motor nerves. Cluche stiffened, trembling.

Circumbright slapped the front of his neck with a barbful of drug, then fumbled for Cluche's headdress. He felt a smooth little object bulging with two eyes like a tadpole. He said easily. "Can't seem to find the light—" He tucked the bug into his pouch. "Here it is. Now—your pouch. I'll put it into this locker; it'll be safe till you get back." He winked at Shorn, shoved the pouch into a heavy metal tool chest.

They looked down at the sprawled body. "There's not much time," said Circumbright. "I'll send Kurgill home, and we'll have to get out ourselves." He looked regretfully around the room. "There's a lot of fine equipment here—we can get more, I suppose."

Shorn clicked his tongue. "What will you tell Kurgill?"

"Um-m-m. The truth would kill him."

"Cluche was killed by the Teleks. He died defending the code book. The Teleks have his name; he'll have to go underground himself."

"He'll have to go under tonight. I'll warn him to lay low, say in Capistrano's, until we call him, then we can give him the bad news. As soon as he's gone we'll take Cluche out the back way, to Laurie's."

Cluche Kurgill sat in a chair, staring into space. Circumbright leaned back smoking his pipe. Laurie, in white pajamas and a tan robe, lay sidewise on a couch in the corner watching; Shorn sat beside her.

"How long have you been spying for the Teleks, Cluche?"

"Three days."

"Tell us about it."

"I found some writings of my father's which led me to believe he was a member of a sub-organization. I needed money. I reported to a police sergeant who I knew to be interested. He wanted me to furnish him the details; I refused. I demanded to speak to a Telek. I threatened the policeman—"

"What is his name?"

"Sergeant Cagolian Loo, of the Moxenwohl Precinct."

"Go on."

"Finally he arranged an appointment with Adlari Dominion. I met Dominion at the Pequinade, out in Vireburg. He gave me a thousand crowns and a spy cell which I was to carry with me at all times. When anything interesting occurred I was to press an attention button."

"What were your instructions?"

"I was to become a conspirator along with my father, accompanying him as much as possible. If my efforts resulted in the arrest of important figures, he hinted that I might be made a Telek myself."

"Did he intimate how his metamorphosis is accomplished?"

“No.”

"When are you to report to Dominion again?"

"I 'am to contact him by visiphone at 2:00 P.M. tomorrow, at Glarietta Pavilion."

"Is there any password or identification code?"

"No."

Silence held the room for several minutes. Shorn stirred, rose to his feet. "Gorman—suppose I were to be metamorphosed, suppose I were to become a Telek."

Circumbright chewed placidly on his pipestem. "It would be a fine thing. I don't quite understand how you'll manage. Unless," he added in a dry voice, "you intend to turn us all in to Adlari Dominion."

"No. But look at Cluche. Look at me."

Circumbright looked, grimaced, straightened up in his seat.

Shorn watched expectantly. "Could it be done?"

"Oh. I see. Give you more nose, a longer chin, fuller cheeks, a lot of red hair—"

"And Cluche's clothes."

"You'd pass."

"Especially if I come with information."

"That's what is puzzling me. What kind of information could you give Dominion that would please him but wouldn't hurt us?"

Shorn told him.

Circumbright puffed on his pipe. "It's a big decision. But it's a good exchange. Unless he's got the same thing already, from other sources."

"Such as Geskamp? In which case, we lose nothing."

"True." Circumbright went to the visiphone. "Tino? Bring your gear over to—" He looked at Laurie: "What's the address?"

"29, 24, 14 Martinvelt."

V.

The red-haired man moved with a taut wiriness that had not been characteristic of Cluche Kurgill. Laurie inspected him critically.

"Walk slower, Will. Don't flail your arms so. Cluche was very languid."

"Check this." Shorn walked across the room.

"Better."

"Very well. I'm gone. Wish me luck. My first stop is the old workshop for Cluche's spy cell. He'd hardly be likely to leave it there."

"But aren't you taking a chance, going back to the workshop?"

"I don't think so. I hope not. If the Teleks planned to destroy it, they would have done so last night." He waved his hand abruptly and was gone.

He rode the sidewalk, aping the languorous and lofty democracy he associated with Cluche. The morning had been overcast and blustery, with spatters of cold rain, but at noon the clouds broke. The sun surged through gaps in the hurrying rack, and the great gray buildings of Tran stood forth like proud lords. Shorn tilted his head back; this was the grandeur of simple bulk, but nevertheless impressive. He himself preferred construction on a smaller scale, buildings to suit a lesser number of more highly individualized people. He thought of the antique Mediterranean temples, gaudy in their pinks and green and blues, although now the marble had bleached white. Such idiosyncrasy was possible, even enforced, in the ancient monarchies. Today every man, in theory his own master, was required to mesh with his fellows, like a part in a great gear cluster. The culture-colors and culture-tones came out at the common denominator, the melange of all colors: gray. Buildings grew taller and wider from motives of economy—the volume increased by the cube but the enclosing surface only by the square. The motif was utilitarianism, mass policy, each tenant relinquishing edges and fringes of his personality, until only the common basic core—a sound roof, hot and cold water, good light, air-conditioning, and good elevator service—remained.

People living in masses, thought Shorn, were like pebbles on a beach, each grinding and polishing his neighbor until all were absolutely uniform. Color and flair were to be found only in the wilderness and among the Teleks. Imagine a world populated by Teleks; imagine the four thousand expanded to four hundred million, four billion! First to go would be the cities. There would be no more concentrations, no more giant *gray* buildings, no directed rivers of men and women. Humanity would explode like a nova. The cities would corrode and crumble, great mournful hulks, the final monuments to medievalism. Earth would be too small, too limited. Out to the planets, where the Teleks claimed to roam at will. Flood Mars with blue oceans, filter the sky of Venus. Neptune, Uranus, Pluto—call them in, bestow warm new orbits upon them. Bring in even Saturn, so vast and yet with a surface gravity only a trifle more than Earth's—But, these great works, suppose they exhausted the telekinetic energy, wherever it originated?

Suppose some morning the Teleks awoke and found the power gone!

Then—the crystal sky-castles falling! Food, shelter, warmth needed, and no secure gray cities, no ant-hill buildings, none of the pedestrian energies of metal and heat and electricity. Then what calamity! What wailing and cursing!

Shorn heaved a deep sigh. Speculation. Telekinetic energy might well be infinite. Or it might be at the point of exhaustion at this moment. Speculation, and not germane to his present goal.

He frowned. Perhaps it was important. Perhaps some quiet circuit in his mind was at work, aligning him into new opinions—

Ahead was the basement recreation hall. Shorn guiltily realized that he had been swinging along at his own gait, quite out of character with the personality of Cluche Kurgill. Best not forget these details, he told himself guiltily; there would be opportunity for only one mistake.

He descended the stairs, strode through the hall, past the clicking, glowing, humming game machines, where men, rebelling at the predictability of their lives, came to buy synthetic adventure and surprise.

He walked unchallenged through the door marked "Employees"; at the next door he paused, wondering whether he had remembered to bring the key, wondering if a spy cell might be hidden in the shadows, watching the door.

If so, would Cluche Kurgill be likely to possess a key? It was in the bounds of possibility, he decided, and in any event would not he interpreted as suspicious.

Shorn groped into his pouch. The key was there. He opened the door, and assuming the furtive part of a spy, entered the workshop.

It was as they had left it the night before. Shorn went quickly to the tool chest, found Circumbright's pouch, brought forth the bug, set it carefully into his headdress.

Now—get out as fast as possible. He looked at his watch; Twelve noon. At two, Cluche's appointment with Adlari Dominion, chief of the Telek Liaison Committee.

Shorn ate an uncomfortable lunch in one corner of the Mercantile Mart Foodarium, a low-ceilinged acreage dotted with tables precisely as a tile floor, and served by a three-tier display of food moving slowly under a transparent case. His head itched furiously under the red toupee, and he dared not scratch lest he disturb Tino's elaborate effort. Secondly, he decided that the Foodarium, the noon resort of hurried day-workers, was out of character for Cluche Kurgill. Among the grays and dull greens and browns, his magnificent Telek-style garments made him appear like a flamingo in a chicken-run. He felt glances of dull hostility; the Teleks were envied but respected; one of their own kind aping the Teleks was despised with the animosity that found no release elsewhere.

Shorn ate quickly and departed. He followed Zyke Alley into Multiflores Park, where he sauntered back and forth among the dusty sycamores.

At two he sat himself deliberately in a kiosk, dialed Glarietta Pavilion on the visiphone. The connection clicked home; the screen glowed with a fanciful blackand-white drawing of Glarietta Pavilion, and a terse man's voice spoke. "Glarietta Pavilion."

"I want to speak to Adlari Dominion; Cluche Kurgill calling."

A thin face appeared, inquisitive, impertinent, with a lumpy nose, pale-blue eyes set at a birdlike slant. "What do you want?"

Shorn frowned. He had neglected an important item of information; it would hardly do to ask the man in the visiphone if he were Adlari Dominion, whom he was supposed to have met three day previously.

"I had an appointment for today at two," and cautiously he watched the man in the screen.

"You can report to me."

"No," said Shorn, now confident. The man was too pushing, too authoritative. "I want to speak to Adlari Dominion. What I have to say is not for your ears."

The thin man glared. "I'll be the judge of that; Dominion can't be bothered every five minutes."

"If Dominion learns that you are standing in my way, he will not be pleased."

The thin face flushed red. His hand swept up, the screen went pale-green. Shorn waited.

The screen lit once more, showing a bright room with high white walls. Windows opened on

sun-dazzled clouds. A man, thin as the first-to answer the screen, but somber, with gray hair and oil-black eyes, looked quietly at him. Under the bore of the sharp eyes, Shorn suddenly felt uneasy. Would his disguise hold up?

"Well, Kurgill, what do you have to tell me?"

"It's a face-to-face matter."

"Hardly wise," Dominion commented. "Don't you trust the privacy of the visiphone? I assure you it's not tapped."

"No. I trust the visiphone. But—I stumbled on something big. I want to be sure I get what's coming to me."

"Oh." Dominion made no play at misunderstanding. "You've been working—how long?"

"Three days."

"And already you expect the greatest reward it's in our power to bestow?"

"It's worth it. If I'm a Telek, it's to my advantage to help you. If I'm not—it isn't. Simple as that."

Dominion frowned slightly. "You're hardly qualified to estimate the value of your information."

"Suppose I knew of a brain disease which attacks only Teleks. Suppose I knew that inside of a year half or three-quarters of the Teleks would be dead?"

Dominion's face changed not a flicker. "Naturally I want to know about it."

Shorn made no reply.

Dominion said slowly, "If such is your information, and we authenticate it, you will be rewarded suitably."

Shorn shook his head. "I can't take the chance. This is my windfall. I've got to make sure I get what I'm after; I may not have another chance."

Dominion's mouth tightened, but he said mildly enough, "I understand your viewpoint."

"I want to come up to the Pavilion. But a word of warning to you; there's no harm in clear understanding between friends."

"None whatever."

"Don't try drugs on me. I've got a cyanide capsule in my mouth. I'll kill myself before you get something for nothing."

Dominion smiled grimly. "Very well, Kurgill. Don't execute yourself, swallow it by mistake."

Shorn smiled likewise. "Only as a gesture of protest. How shall I come up to Glarietta?"

"Hire a cab."

"Openly?"

"Why not?"

"You're not afraid of counter espionage?"

Dominion's eyes narrowed; his head tilted slightly, "I thought we discussed that at our previous meeting."

Shorn took care not to protest his recollection too vehemently. "Very well. I'll be right up."

Glarietta Pavilion floated high above the ocean, a fairy-book cloud-castle—shining white terraces, ranked towers with parasol roofs, gardens verdant with foliage and vines trailing down into the air.

The cab slid down on a landing fiat. Shorn alighted. The driver looked at him without favor. "Want me to wait?"

"No, you can go." Shorn thought wryly, he'd either be leaving under his own power or not be leaving at all.

A door slid back before him; he entered a hall walled with russet orange, purple and green prisms, glowing in the brilliant upper air light. In a raised alcove sat a young woman, a beautiful creature with glossy butter-colored hair, a cream-smooth face.

"Yes, sir?" she asked, impersonally courteous.

"I want to see Adlari Dominion. I'm Cluche Kurgill."

She touched a key below her. "To your right."

He climbed a glass staircase which spiraled up a green glass tube, came out in a waiting room walled

with gold-shot red rock that had never been quarried on Earth. Dark-green ivy veiled one wall; white columns opposite made a graceful frame into a herbarium full of green light and lush green growth, white and scarlet flowers.

Shorn hesitated, looked around him. A golden light blinked in the wall, an aperture appeared. Adlari Dominion stood in the opening. "Come in, Kurgill."

Shorn stepped into the wash of light, and for a moment lost Dominion in the dazzle. When vision returned, Dominion was lounging in a hammock-chair supported by a glistening rod protruding horizontally from the wall. A red leather ottoman was the only other article of furniture visible. Three of the walls were transparent glass, giving on a magnificent vista: clouds bathed in sunlight, blue sky, blue sea.

Dominion pointed to the ottoman. "Have a seat."

The ottoman was only a foot high; sitting in it Shorn would be forced to crane his neck to see Dominion.

"No, thanks. I prefer to stand." He put a foot on the ottoman, inspected Dominion cooly, eye to eye.

Dominion said evenly, "What do you have to tell me?"

Shorn started to speak, but found it impossible to look into the smoldering black eyes and think at the same time. He turned his eyes out the window to a pinnacle of white cloud. "I've naturally considered this situation carefully. If you've done the same . . . as I imagine you have . . . then there's no point in each of us trying to outwit the other. I have information that's important, critically important to a great number of Teleks. I want to trade this information for Telek status." He glanced toward Dominion whose eyes had never faltered, looked away once more.

"I'm trying to arrange this statement with absolute clarity, so there'll be complete understanding between us. First, I want to remind you, I have poison in my mouth. I'll kill myself before I part with what I know, and I guarantee you'll never have another chance to learn what I can tell you." Shorn glanced earnestly sidewise at Dominion. "No hypnotic drug can act fast enough to prevent me from biting open my cyanide—Well, enough of that.

"Second: I can't trust any verbal or written contract you make; if I accepted such a contract I'd have no means to enforce it. You are in a stronger position. If you deliver your part of the bargain, and I fail to deliver my part, you can still arrange that I be . . . well, penalized. Therefore, to demonstrate your good faith, you must make delivery before I do.

"In other words, make me a Telek. Then I'll tell you what I know."

Dominion sat staring at him a full thirty seconds. Then he said softly, "Three days ago Cluche Kurgill was not so rigorous."

"Three days ago, Cluche Kurgill did not know what he knows now."

Dominion said abruptly, "I cannot argue with your exposition. If I were you, in your position, I would make the same stipulation. However"—he looked Shorn keenly up and down—"three days ago I would have considered you an undesirable adjunct."

Shorn assumed a lofty expression. "Judging from the Teleks I have known, I would not have assumed you to be so critical."

"You talk past your understanding," said Dominion crisply. "Do you think that men like Nollinrude, for instance, who was just killed, are typical of the Teleks? Do you think that we are all careless of our destiny?" His mouth twisted contemptuously. "There are forces at work which you do not know of, tremendous patterns laid out for the future. But enough; these are high-level ideas."

He floated clear of his chair, lowered to the floor. "I agree to your stipulation. Come with me, we'll get it over with. You see, we are not inflexible; we can move swiftly and decisively when we wish."

He led Shorn back into the green glass tube, jerked himself to the upper landing, watched impatiently while Shorn circled up the steps.

"Come." He stepped out on a wide white terrace bathed in afternoon sunlight, went directly to a low table on which rested a cubical block of marble.

He reached into a cabinet under the table, pulled out a small speaker, spoke into the mesh. "The top

two hundred to Glarietta Pavilion." He turned back to Shorn. "Naturally there'll be certain matters you must familiarize yourself with."

"In order to become a Telek, you mean?"

"No, no," snapped Dominion. "That's a simple mechanical matter. Your perspective must be adjusted; you'll be living with a new orientation toward life."

"I had no idea it was quite so involved."

"There's a great deal you don't understand." He motioned brusquely. "Now to business. Watch that marble block on the table. Think of it as part yourself, controlled by your own nervous impulses. No, don't look around; fix on the marble block. I'll stand here." He took a place near the table. "When I point to the left, move it to the left; when I point to the right, move it to the right. Mind now, the cube is part of your organism, part of your flesh, like your hands and feet."

There was murmuring and a rustle behind Shorn; obedient to Dominion he fastened his eyes on the cube. "Now." Dominion pointed to the left.

Shorn willed the cube to the left. "The cube is part of you," said Dominion. "Your own body."

Shorn felt a cool tremor at his skin. The cube moved to the left.

Dominion pointed to right. Shorn willed the cube to the right. The tingling increased. It was as if he were gradually finding himself immersed in cool carbonated water.

Left. Right. Left. Right. The cube seemed to be nearer to him, though be had not moved. As near as his own hand. His mind seemed to break through a tough sphincter into a new medium, cool and wide; he saw the world in a sudden new identity, something part of himself.

Dominion stepped away from the table; Shorn was hardly conscious that he no longer made directive gestures. He moved the cube right, left, raised it six feet into the air, twenty feet, sent it circling high around the sky. As he followed it with his eyes, he became aware of Teleks standing silently behind him, watching expressionlessly.

He brought the cube back to the table. Now he knew how to do it. He lifted himself into the air, moved across the terrace, set himself down. When he looked around the Teleks had gone.

Dominion wore a cool smile. "You take hold with great ease."

"It seems natural enough. What is the function of the others, the Teleks behind on the terrace?"

Dominion shrugged. "We know little of the actual mechanism. At the beginning, of course, I helped you move the cube, as did the others. Gradually we let our minds rest, and you did it all."

Shorn stretched. "I feel myself the center, the hub, of everything—as far as I can see."

Dominion nodded without interest. "Now—come with me." He sped through the air. Shorn followed, exulting in his new power and freedom. Dominion paused by the corner of the terrace, glanced over his shoulder. Shorn saw his face in the foreshortened angle: white, rather pinched features, eyes subtly tilted, brows drawn down, mouth subtly down-curving. Shorn's elation gave way to sudden wariness. Dominion had arranged the telekinetic indoctrination with a peculiar facility. The easiest way to get the desired information, certainly; but was Dominion sufficiently free from vindictiveness to accept defeat? Shorn considered the expression he had surprised on Dominion's face.

It was a mistake to assume that any man, Telek or not, would accept with good grace the terms dictated by a paid turncoat.

Dominion would restrain himself until he learned what Shorn could tell him, then—And then?

Shorn slowed his motion. How could Dominion arrange a moment of gloating before he finally administered the *coup de grace?* Poison seemed most likely. Shorn grinned. Dominion would consider it beautifully just if Shorn could be killed with his own poison. A sharp blow or pressure under the jaw would break the capsule in his tooth.

Somehow Dominion would manage.

They entered a great echoing hall, suffused with green-yellow light that entered through panes in the high-vaulted dome. The floor was silver-shot marble; dark-green foliage grew in formal raised boxes. The air was fresh and odorous with the scent of leaves.

Dominion crossed without pause. Shorn halted halfway across.

Dominion-turned his head. "Come."

"Where?"

Dominion's mouth slowly bent into a grimace that was unmistakably dangerous. "Where we can talk."

"We can talk here. I can tell you what I want to tell you in ten seconds. Or if you like, I'll take you to the source of the danger."

"Very well," said Dominion. "Suppose you reveal the nature of the threat against the Teleks. A brain disease, you said?"

"No. I used the idea as a figure of speech. The danger I refer to is more cataclysmic than a disease. Let's go out in the open air. I feel constricted." He grinned at Dominion.

Dominion drew in a deep breath. It must infuriate him, thought Shorn, to be commanded and forced to obey a common man and a traitor to boot. Shorn made a careless gesture. "I intend to keep my part of the bargain; let's have no misunderstanding there. However —I want to escape with my winnings, if you understand me."

"I understand you," said Dominion. "I understand you very well." He made an internal adjustment, managed to appear almost congenial. "However, perhaps you misjudge my motives. You are a Telek now; we conduct ourselves by a strict code of behavior which you must learn."

Shorn put on a face as gracious as Dominion's. "I suggest, then, that we hold our conference down on Earth."

Dominion pursed his lips. "You must acclimate yourself to Telek surroundings—think, act, like a Telek."

"In due time," said Shorn. "At the moment I'm rather confused; the sense of power comes as a great intoxication."

"It apparently has not affected your capacity for caution," Dominion observed dryly.

"I suggest that we at least go out into the open, where we can talk at leisure."

Dominion sighed. "Very well."

VI.

Laurie went restlessly to the dispenser, drew tea for herself, coffee for Circumbright. "I just can't seem to sit still—"

Circumbright inspected the pale face with scientific objectivity. If Laurie condescended to even the slightest artifice or coquetry, he thought, she would become a creature of tremendous charm. He watched her appreciatively as she went to the window, looked up into the sky.

Nothing to see but reflected glow; nothing to hear but the hum of far traffic.

She returned to the couch. "Have you told Dr. Kurgill —of Cluche?"

Circumbright stirred his tea. "Naturally I couldn't tell him the truth."

"No." Laurie looked off into space. She shuddered. "I've never been so nervous before. Suppose—" Her forebodings could find no words.

"You're very fond of Shorn, aren't you?"

The quick look, the upward flash of her eyes, was enough.

They sat in silence.

"Shh," said Laurie. "I think he's coming." Circumbright heard nothing.

Laurie rose to her feet. They both watched the door latch. It moved. The door slid back. The hall was empty.

Laurie gasped in something like terror. There came a tapping at the window.

They wheeled. Shorn was outside, floating in the air.

For a moment they stood paralyzed. Shorn rapped with his knuckles; they saw his mouth form the words, "Let me in."

Laurie walked stiffly to the window, swung it open. Shorn jumped down into the room.

"Why did you scare us like that?" she asked indignantly.

"I'm proud of myself. I wanted to demonstrate my new abilities." He drew himself a cup of coffee. "I guess you'll want to know my adventures."

"Of course!"

He sat down at the table and described his visit to Glarietta Pavilion.

Circumbright listened placidly. "And now what?"

"And now—you've got a Telek to experiment on. Unless Dominion conceives a long-distance method of killing me. He's spending a restless night, I should imagine."

Circumbright grunted.

"First," said Shorn, "they put a bug on me. I expected it. They knew I expected it. I got rid of it in the Beaux-Arts Museum. Then I began thinking, since they would expect me to dodge the bug, and feel secure after I'd done so, no doubt they had a way to locate me again. Tracker material sprayed on my clothes, fluorescent in a nonvisual frequency. I threw away Cluche's clothes, which I didn't like in the first place, washed in three changes of solvicine and water, disposed of the red wig. Cluche Kurgill had disappeared. By the way, where is Cluche's body?"

"Safe."

"We can let it be found tomorrow morning. With a sign on him reading, 'I am a Telek spy.' Dominion will certainly hear of it; he'll think I'm dead, and that will be one problem the less."

"Good idea."

"But poor old Dr. Kurgill," remonstrated Laurie. "He'll never believe such a note."

"No ... I suppose not." She looked Shorn over from head to feet. "Do you feel different from before?"

"I feel as if all of creation were part of me. Identification with the cosmos, I guess you'd call it."

"But how does it work?"

Shorn deliberated. "I'm really not sure. I can move the chair the same way I move my arm, with about the same effort."

"Evidently," said Circumbright, "Geskamp had told them nothing of the mitrox under the stadium."

"They never asked him. It was beyond their imagination that we could conceive such an atrocity." Shorn laughed. "Dominion was completely flabbergasted. Bowled over. For a few minutes I think he was grateful to me."

"And then."

"And then, I suppose he remembered his resentment, and began plotting how best to kill me. But I told him nothing until we were in the open air; any weapon he held I could protect myself from. A bullet I could think aside, even back at him; a heat-gun I could deflect."

"Suppose his will on the gun and your will clashed?" Circumbright asked mildly.

"I don't know what would happen. Perhaps nothing. Like a man vacillating between two impulses. Or perhaps the clash and the subsequent lack of reaction would invalidate both our confidences, and down we'd fall into the ocean. Because now we were standing on nothing, a thousand feet over the ocean."

"Weren't you afraid, Will?" asked Laurie.

"At first—yes. But a person becomes accustomed to the sensation very quickly. It's a thing we've all experienced in our dreams. Perhaps it's only a trifling aberration that stands in the way of telekinesis for everyone."

Circumbright grunted, loaded his pipe. "Perhaps we'll find that out, along with the other things."

"Perhaps. Already I begin to look at life and existence from another viewpoint."

Laurie looked worried. "I thought things were just the same."

"Fundamentally, yes. But this feeling of power—of not being tied down—" Shorn laughed. "Don't look at each other like that. I'm not dangerous. I'm only a Telek by courtesy. And now, where can we get three pressure suits?"

"At this time of night? I don't know."

"No matter. I'm a Telek. We'll get them. Provided of course you'd like to visit the Moon. All expense tour, courtesy of Adlari Dominion. Laurie, would you like to fly up, fast as light, fast as thought, stand in

the Earthshine, on the lip of Eratosthenes, looking out over the Mare Imbrium—"

She laughed uneasily. "I'd love it, Will. But—I'm scared."

"What about you, Gorman?"

"No. You two go. There'll be other chances for me."

Laurie jumped to her feet. Her cheeks were pink, her mouth was red and half-open in excitement. Shorn looked at her with a sudden new vision. "Very well, Gorman. Tomorrow you can start your experiments. Tonight—"

Laurie found herself picked up, carried out through the window.

"Tonight," said Shorn by her side, "we'll pretend that we're souls—happy souls—exploring the universe."

Circumbright lived in a near-abandoned suburb to the north of Tran. His house was a roomy old antique, rearing like a balky horse over the Meyne River. Big industrial plants blocked the sky in all directions; the air reeked with foundry fumes, sulfur, chlorine, tar, burnt-earth smells.

Within, the house was cheerful and untidy. Circumbright's wife was a tall strange woman who worked ten hours a day in her studio, sculpturing dogs and horses. Shorn had met her only once; so far as he knew she had no interest or even awareness of Circumbright's anti-Telek activities.

He found Circumbright basking in the sun watching the brown river water roll past. He sat on a little porch he had built apparently for no other purpose but this.

Shorn dropped a small cloth sack in his lap. "Souvenirs."

Circumbright opened the bag unhurriedly, pulled out a handful of stones, each tagged with a card label. He looked at the first, hefted it. "Agate." He read the label. "Mars. Well, well." A bit of black rock was next. "Gabbro? From . . . let's see. Ganymede. My word, you wandered far afield." He shot a bland blue glance up at Shorn. "Telekinesis seems to have agreed with you. You've lost that haggard hunted expression. Perhaps I'll have to become a Telek myself."

"You don't look haggard and hunted. Quite the reverse."

Circumbright returned to the rocks. "Pumice. From the Moon, I suppose." He read the label. "No—Venus. You made quite a trip."

Shorn looked up into the sky. "Rather hard to describe. There's naturally a feeling of loneliness. Darkness. Something like a dream. Out on Ganymede we were standing on a ridge, obsidian, sharp as a razor. Jupiter filled a third of the sky, the red spot right in the middle, looking at us. There was a pink and blue dimness. Peculiar. Black rock, the big bright planet. It was—weird. I thought, suppose the power fails me now, suppose we can't get home? It gave me quite a chill."

"You seem to have made it."

"Yes, we made it." Shorn seated himself, thrust out his legs. "I'm not hunted and haggard, but I’m confused. Two days ago I thought I had a good grasp on my convictions—"

"And now?"

"Now—I don't know."

"About what?"

"About—our efforts. Their ultimate effect, assuming we're successful."

"Hm-m-m." Circumbright rubbed his chin. "Do you still want to submit to experiments?"

"Of course. I want to know why and how telekinesis works."

"When will you be ready?"

"Whenever you wish."

"Now?"

"Why not? Let's get started."

"As soon as you're ready, we'll try encephalographs as a starting point."

Circumbright was tired. His face, normally pink and cherubic, sagged; filling his pipe, his fingers trembled.

Shorn leaned back in the leather chaise longue, regarded Circumbright with mild curiosity. "Why are

you so upset?"

Circumbright gave the litter of paper on the workbench a contemptuous flick of the fingers. "It's the cursed inadequacy of the technique, the instruments. Trying to paint miniatures with a whisk broom, fix a watch with a pipe wrench. There"—he pointed—"encephalograms. Every lobe of your brain. Photographs—by x-ray, by planar section, by metabolism triggering. We've measured your energy flow so closely that if you tossed me a tennis ball I'd find it on paper somewhere."

"And there's what?"

"Nothing suggestive. Wavy lines on the encephalograms. Increased oxygen absorption. Pineal tumescence. All gross by-products of whatever is happening."

Shorn yawned and stretched. "About as we expected."

Circumbright nodded heavily. "As we expected. Although I hoped for—something. Some indication where the energy came from—whether through the brain, from the object itself, or from—nowhere."

Shorn caused water to leap from a glass, form a wet glistening hoop in the air. He set it around Circumbright's neck, started it contracting slowly.

"Hey," cried Circumbright reproachfully. "This is serious business."

Shorn snaked the water back in the glass. Circumbright leaned forward. "Where do *you* feel the energy comes from?"

Shorn reflected. "It seems to be in matter itself—just as motion seems to be part of your hand."

Circumbright sighed in dissatisfaction. He continued half-querulously. "And at what speed does telekinesis work? If it's light-speed, then the action presumably occurs in our own space-time. If it's faster, then it's some other medium, and the whole thing's unknowable."

Shorn rose to his feet. "We can check the last with comparative facility."

Circumbright shook his head. "We'd need instruments of a precision I don't have on hand."

"No. Just a stop watch and—let's see. A flare, a timer, a couple of spacesuits."

"What's your idea?" Circumbright asked suspiciously.

"I'm taking you space-walking."

Circumbright rose uncertainly. "I'm afraid I'll be frightened."

"If you're an agoraphobe don't try it."

Circumbright blew out his cheeks. "I'm not that."

"You wait here," said Shorn. "I'll be back in ten minutes with the spacesuits."

Half an hour later, they stumped out on Circumbright's little sun porch. Circumbright's outfit had been intended for a larger man; his head projected only half up into the head-bubble, to Shorn's amusement. "Ready?"

Circumbright, his blue eyes wide and solemn, nodded. "Up we go."

Earth dwindled below, as if snatched out from under their feet. Speed without acceleration. To all sides was blackness, the black of vacancy, continuing emptiness. The moon rolled over their shoulders, a pretty pocked ball, black and silver.

The sun dwindled, became a disk of glare which seemed to cast no light, no heat. "We're seeing it by its high frequencies," Shorn observed. "A kind of reverse Doppler effect—"

"Suppose we run into an asteroid or a meteorite?"

"Don't worry, we won't."

"How do you know? You couldn't stop in time."

Shorn ruminated. "No. It's something to think about. I'm not sure whether or not we have momentum. Another experiment for you to worry about. But after today I'll send some kind of shield out ahead of us, just in case."

"Where are we going?"

"Out to one of Jupiter's satellites. Look, there goes Mars." He dropped the telescopic lens in front of his eyes. "There's Io. We'll land on Io."

They stood on a dim gray table, a few feet above a tortured jumble of black scoriae. Frozen white stuff, like rock salt, lay in the crevices. The horizon was near, very sharp. Jupiter filled a quadrant of the

sky to the left.

Shorn arranged the flare and the timer on a flat area. "I'll set it for ten minutes. Now—on the count of five I'll start the timer and you start your stop watch."

"Ready."

"One . . . two . . . three . . . four ... five." He looked at Circumbright. Circumbright nodded. "Good. Now, we take ourselves out into space where we can watch."

Io dwindled to a tarnished metal disk, a bright spot.

"We're far enough, I think. Now we watch for the flare, and check the time by your stop watch. The increment over ten minutes will give us the light-distance from Io to where we're—" Shorn considered. "What are we doing? Standing? Floating?"

"Waiting."

"Waiting. After knowing the light distance, we can make our tests."

"Are we sure that we're not moving now? If we're moving, our observations will be inaccurate."

Shorn shook his head. "We're not moving. It's the way telekinesis works. I stop us dead, in relation to Io, the same way a man on roller skates stops by grabbing a post. He just—stops himself."

"You know more about it than I do."

"It's more intuition than knowledge—which is suggestive in itself. How's the time?"

"Nine minutes. Ten . . . Twenty seconds. Thirty seconds. Forty. Fifty—one—two—three—"

They looked toward lo through the telescopic visors. Circumbright counted on in the same cadence. "Four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten minutes. One—two—three—"

A brief flicker appeared from the dull disk. Circumbright clamped down on the stem of his stop watch. "Three point six seconds. Allow two tenths of a second reaction time. That gives three point four seconds. Over six hundred thousand miles. Now what?"

"Let me have your stop watch. I'll set it to zero. Now." Shorn squared himself toward Io. "Now we'll try telekinesis on a whole world."

Circumbright blinked. "Suppose there's not enough energy available?"

"We'll soon know." He looked at Io, pressed the stop watch starter.

One second—two seconds—three seconds—Io jerked ahead in its orbit.

Shorn looked at the stop watch. "Three point seven. A tenth of a second, which might be error. Apparently telekinesis works almost instantaneously."

Circumbright looked glumly out toward incandescent Sirius. "We'll play merry hell trying to get any significant results with my lab equipment. Somebody's got to invent some new tools—"

Shorn followed his gaze out toward Sirius. "I wonder what the limit of action is."

Circumbright asked doubtfully, "You're not going to try this ... knack of yours on Sirius?"

"No. We'd have to wait eight years for the light to reach us. But—" He contemplated the massive form of Jupiter. "There's a challenging subject right there."

Circumbright said uneasily, "Suppose the effort drains the source of telekinetic energy—like a short circuit drains a battery? We might be left out here helpless—"

Shorn shook his head. "It wouldn't work that way. My mind is the critical factor. Size doesn't mean much, so long as I can grasp it, take hold of all of it."

He stared at Jupiter. Seconds passed. "About now, if it's going to happen."

Jupiter quivered, floated up across twenty degrees of sky, dropped back into its former orbit.

Circumbright looked almost fearfully at Shorn. Shorn laughed shakily. "Don't worry, Gorman. I'm not out of my mind. But think of the future! All these wasted worlds moved in close, bathing in sunlight. Wonderful new planets for men to live on—"

They turned their faces toward the sun. Earth was a mist-white ball, growing larger. "Think," said Circumbright, "think of what a mad Telek could do. He could come out here as we did, pick up the Moon, toss it into North America or Europe as easily as dropping a rock into the mud. Or he could look at Earth, and it would start to move toward the sun—through the corona, and Earth would be singed, seared clean; he could drop it into a sunspot."

Shorn kept his eyes turned away from Earth. "Don't put ideas into my mind."

"It's a real problem," insisted Circumbright.

"I imagine that eventually there will be an alarm system of some kind; and as soon as it sounds, every mind will grab on to conditions as they are, and hold tight. Or maybe a corps of guardians—"

VII.

Back on Earth, in Laurie's apartment on upper Martinvelt, Shorn and Circumbright sat drinking coffee.

Circumbright was unaccustomedly nervous and consulted his watch at five-minute intervals.

Shorn watched quizzically. "Who are you expecting?" Circumbright glanced quickly, guiltily, round the room. "I suppose there's no spy beetle anywhere close."

"Not according to the detector cell."

"I'm waiting for the messenger. A man called Luby, from East Shore."

"I don't think I know him."

"You'd remember him if you did."

Laurie said, "I think I hear him now."

She went to the door, slid it back. Luby came into the room, quiet as a cat. He was a man of forty who looked no more than seventeen. His skin was clear gold, his features chiseled and handsome, his hair a close cap of tight bronze curls. Shorn thought of the Renaissance Italians—Cesare Borgia, Lorenzo Medici.

Circumbright made introductions which Luby acknowledged with a nod of the head and a lambent look; then he took Circumbright aside, muttered in a rapid flow of syllables.

Circumbright raised his eyebrows, asked a question; Luby shook his head, responded impatiently. Circumbright nodded, and without another word Luby left the room, as quietly as he had entered.

"There's a high-level meeting—policy makers—out at Portinari Gate. We're wanted." He rose to his feet, stood indecisively a moment. "I suppose we had better be going."

Shorn went to the door, looked out into the corridor. "Luby moves quietly. Isn't it unusual to concentrate top minds in a single meeting?"

"Unprecedented. I suppose it's something important." Shorn thought a moment. "Perhaps it would be better to say nothing of my new—achievements."

"Very well."

They flew north through the night, into the foothills, and Lake Paienza spread like a dark blot below, rimmed by the lights of Portinari.

Portinari Gate was a rambling inn six hundred years old, high on a hillside, overlooking lake and town. They dropped to the soft turf in the shadow of great pines, walked to the back entrance.

Circumbright knocked, and they felt a quiet scrutiny.

The door opened, an iron-faced woman with a halo of iron-gray hair stood facing them. "What do you want?"

Circumbright muttered a password; silently she stepped back. Shorn felt her wary scrutiny as he and Laurie entered the room.

A brown-skinned man with black eyes and gold rings in his ears flipped up a hand. "Hello, Circumbright."

"Hello . . . Thursby, this is Will Shorn, Laurita Chelmsford."

Shorn inspected the brown man with interest. The Great Thursby, rumored co-ordinator of the world-wide anti-Telek underground.

There were others in the room, sitting quietly, watchfully. Circumbright nodded to one or two, then took Shorn and Laurie to the side.

"I'm surprised," he said. "The brains of the entire movement are here." He shook his head. "Rather ticklish."

Shorn felt of the detector. "No spy cells."

More people entered, until possibly fifty men and women occupied the room. Among the last group was the young-old Luby.

A stocky dark-skinned man rose to his feet. "This meeting is a departure from our previous methods, and I hope it won't be necessary again for a long time."

Circumbright whispered to Shorn, "That's Kasselbarg, European Post."

Kasselbarg swung a slow glance around the room. "We're starting a new phase of the campaign. Our first was organizational; we built a world-wide underground, a communication system, set up a ladder of command. Now—the second stage: preparation for our eventual action . . . which, of course, will constitute the third stage.

"We all know the difficulties under which we work: since we can't hold up a clear and present danger, our government is not sympathetic to us, and in many cases actively hostile—especially in the persons of suborned police officials. Furthermore we're under the compulsion of striking an absolutely decisive blow on our first sally. There won't be a second chance for us. The Teleks must be"—he paused—"they must be killed. It's a course toward which we all feel an instinctive revulsion, but any other course bares us to the incalculable power of the Teleks. Now, any questions, any comments?"

Shorn, compelled by a sudden pressure he only dimly understood, rose to his feet. "I don't want to turn the movement into a debating society—but there's another course where killing is unnecessary. It erases the need of the decisive blow, it gives us a greater chance of success."

"Naturally," said Kasselbarg mildly, "I'd like to hear your plan."

"No operation, plan it as carefully as you will, can guarantee the death of every Telek. And those who aren't killed may go crazy in anger and fear; I can picture a hundred million deaths, five hundred million, a billion deaths in the first few seconds after the operation starts—but does not quite succeed."

Kasselbarg nodded. "The need for a hundred per cent *coup* is emphatic. The formulation of such a plan will constitute Phase Two, of which I just now spoke. We certainly can't proceed on any basis other than a ninety-nine per cent probability of fulfillment."

The iron-faced woman spoke. "There are four thousand Teleks, more or less. Here on Earth ten thousand people die every day. Killing the Teleks seems a small price to pay for security against absolute tyranny. It's either act now, while we have limited freedom of choice, or dedicate the human race to slavery for as long into the future as we can imagine."

Shorn looked around the faces in the room. Laurie was sympathetic; Circumbright looked away uncomfortably; Thursby frowned thoughtfully; Kasselbarg waited with courteous deference.

"Everything you say is true," Shorn said. "I would be the most ruthless of us all, if these four thousand deaths did not rob the human race of the most precious gift it possesses. Telekinesis to date has been misused; the Teleks have been remarkable for their selfishness and egotism. But in reacting to the Teleks' mistakes, we should not make mistakes of our own."

Thursby said in a cool clear voice, "What is your concrete proposal, Mr. Shorn?"

"I believe we should dedicate ourselves, not to killing Teleks, but to giving telekinesis to every sane man and woman."

A small red-haired man sneered, "The ancient fallacy, privilege for the chosen ones—in this case, the sane. And who, pray, determines their sanity?"

Shorn smiled. "Your fallacy is at least an ancient; surely there's nothing occult about sanity. But let me return to my fundamental proposition—that taking telekinesis out of monopoly and broadcasting it is a better solution to the problem than killing Teleks. One way is up, the other down; building versus destruction. In one direction we put mankind at its highest potential for achievement; in the other we have four thousand dead Teleks, if our plan succeeds. Always latent is the possibility of a devastated world."

Thursby said, "You're convincing, Mr. Shorn. But aren't you operating on the unproved premise that universal telekinesis is a possibility? Killing the Teleks seems to be easier than persuading them to share their power; we've got to do one or the other."

Shorn shook his head. "There are at least two methods to create Teleks. The first is slow and a long-range job: that is, duplicating the conditions which produced the first Teleks. The second is much

easier, quicker, and, I believe, safer. I have good reason for—" he stopped short. A faint buzzing, a vibration in his pocket.

The detector.

He turned to Luby, who stood by the door. "Turn out the lights! There's a Telek spy cell nearby! Out with the lights, or we're all done for."

Luby hesitated. Shorn cursed under his breath. Thursby rose to his feet, startled and tense. "What's going on?"

There was a pounding at the door. "Open up, in the name of the law."

Shorn looked at the windows; the tough vitripane burst out; the windows were wide open. "Quick, out the window!"

Circumbright said in a voice of deadly passion, "Somewhere there's a traitor—"

A man in black and gold appeared at the window with a heat gun. "Out the door," he bellowed. "You can't get away, the place is surrounded. Move out the door in an orderly fashion; move out the door. You're all under arrest. Don't try to break for it, our orders are shoot to kill."

Circumbright sidled close to Shorn. "Can't you do something?"

"Not here. Wait till we're all outside; we don't want anyone shot."

Two burly troopers appeared in the doorway, gestured with pistols. "Outside, everybody. Keep your hands up."

Thursby led the way, his face thoughtful. Shorn followed; behind came the others. They marched into the parking area, now flooded with light from police lamps.

"Stop right there," barked a new voice.

Thursby halted. Shorn squinted against the searchlight; he saw a dozen men standing in a circle around them.

"This is a catch and no mistake," muttered Thursby. "Quiet! No talking."

"Better search them for weapons," came another new voice. Shorn recognized the dry phrasing, the overtones of careless contempt. Adlari Dominion.

Two Black and Golds walked through the group, making a quick search.

A mocking voice came from behind the searchlights. "Isn't that Colonel Thursby, the people's hero? What's he doing in this nasty little conspiracy?"

Thursby stared ahead with an immobile face. The red-haired man who had challenged Shorn cried, "You Telek boot-licker, may the money they pay rot the hands off your wrists!"

"Easy, Walter," said Circumbright.

Thursby spoke toward the lights. "Are we under arrest?"

There was no answer—a contemptuous silence.

Thursby repeated in a sharper tone. "Are we under arrest? I want to see your warrant; I want to know what we're charged with."

"You're being taken to headquarters for questioning," came the reply. "Behave yourselves; if you've committed no crime, there'll be no charge."

"We'll never reach headquarters," Circumbright muttered to Shorn. Shorn nodded grimly, staring into the lights, seeking Dominion. Would he recognize the Cluche Kurgill whom he had invested with Telek power?

The voice called out, "Were you contemplating resistance to arrest? Go ahead. Make it easy on us—"

There was motion in the group, a swaying as if from the wind which moved the tops of the dark pine trees.

The voice said, "Very well then, march forward, one at a time. You first, Thursby."

Thursby turned slowly, like a bull, followed the trooper who walked ahead waving a flashlight.

Circumbright muttered to Shorn, "Can't you do something?"

"Not while Dominion is out there—"

"Silence!"

One by one, the group followed Thursby. An air barge loomed ahead, the rear hatch gaping like the mouth of a cave.

"Up the ramp; inside."

The hold was a bare, metal-walled cargo space. The door clanged shut, and the fifty captives stood in sweating silence.

Thursby's voice came from near the wall. "A clean sweep. Did they get everybody?"

Circumbright answered in a carefully toneless voice. "So far as I know."

"This will set the movement back ten years," said another voice, controlled but tremulous.

"More likely destroy it entirely."

"But—what can they convict us of? We're guilty of nothing they can prove."

Thursby snorted. "We'll never get to Tran. My guess is gas."

"Gas?"—a horrified whisper.

"Poison gas pumped through the ventilator. Then out to sea, drop us, and no one's the wiser. Not even `killed while escaping.' Nothing."

The aircraft vibrated, rose into the air; under their feet was the soft feeling of air-borne flight.

Shorn called out softly. "Circumbright?"

"Right here."

"Make a light."

A paper torch ignited by a cigarette lighter cast a yellow flicker around the hold; faces glowed pale and damp as toad-bellies; eyes glared and reflected, in the flare of the torch.

The row of ports was well shuttered, the hand-keys were replaced by bolts. Shorn turned his attention to the door. He had moved the planet Jupiter; he should be able to break open a door. But the problem was different; in a sense this bulging open of a door was a concept several times more advanced than movement of a single object, no matter how large. There was also a psychological deterrent in the fact that the door was locked. What would happen if he attempted to telekinecize and nothing happened? Would he retain his power?

Thursby was standing with his ear to the ventilator. He turned, nodded. "Here it comes. I can hear the hiss—"

The paper torch was guttering; in darkness Shorn was as helpless as the others. Desperately he plunged his mind at the door; the door burst open, out into the night. Shorn caught it before it fluttered away into the dark air, brought it edgewise back through the door opening.

The wind had blown out the torch; Shorn could only vaguely feel the black bulk of the door. He yelled, to be heard over the roar of the wind rushing past the door, "Stand back, stand back—" He could wait no longer; he felt reality slipping in the darkness; the door was only a vague blot. He concentrated on it, strained his eyes to see, hurled it against the metal hull, stove out a great rent. Air swept through the hold, whisked out any gas which might have entered.

Shorn took himself out the door, rose above the cabin, looked through the sky dome. A dozen Black and Gold troopers sat in the forward compartment looking uneasily back toward the cargo hold whence had come the rending jar. Adlari Dominion was not visible. Luby, the bronze-haired courier with the medallion face, sat statue-quiet in a corner. Luby was to be preserved, thought Shorn. Luby was the traitor.

He had neither time nor inclination for half-measures. He tore a strip off the top of the ship; the troopers and Luby looked up in terror. If they saw him at all, he was a white-faced demon of the night, riding the wind above them. They were shucked out of the cabin like peas from a pod, flung out into the night, and their cries came thinly back to Shorn over the roar of the wind.

He jumped down into the cabin, cut off the motors, jerked the cylinder of gas away from the ventilation system, then whisked the craft east, toward the Monaghill Mountains.

Clouds fell away from the moon; he saw a field below. Here was as good a spot as any to land and reorganize.

The aircraft settled to the field. Dazed, trembling, buffeted, fifty men and women crept from the hold.

Shorn found Thursby leaning against the hull. Thursby looked at him through the moonlight as a child might watch a unicorn. Shorn grinned. "I know you must be puzzled; I'll tell you all about it as soon as we're settled. But now—"

Thursby squinted. "It's hardly practical our going home, acting as if nothing had happened. The Black and Golds took photographs; and there's a number of us that—are not unknown to them."

Circumbright appeared out of the darkness like a pink and brown owl. "There'll be a great deal of excitement at the Black and Gold headquarters when there's no news of this hulk."

"There'll be a great deal of irritation at Glarietta Pavilion."

Shorn counted the days on his fingers. "Today is the twenty-third. Nine days to the first of the month."

"What happens on the first of the month?"

"The First Annual Telekinetic Olympiad, at the new stadium in Swanscomba Valley. In the meantime, there's an old mine back of Mount Mathias. The bunkhouses should hold two or three hundred."

"But there're only fifty of us,"

"We'll want others. Two hundred more. Two hundred good people. And to avoid any confusion"—he looked around to find the red-haired man who thought that sanity was no more than a function of individual outlook—"we will equate goodness to will to survival for self, the family group, human culture and tradition."

"That's broad enough," said Thursby equably, "to suit almost anyone. As a practical standard—" In the moonlight Shorn saw him cock his eyebrows humorously.

"Practically," said Shorn, "we'll pick out people we like."

VIII.

Sunday morning, June the first, was dull and overcast. Mist hung along the banks of the Swanscomba River as it wound in its new looping course down the verdant valley; the trees dripped with clammy condensations.

At eight o'clock a man in rich garments of purple, black and white dropped from the sky to the rim of the stadium. He glanced up at the overcast, the cloud-rack broke open like a scum, slid across the sky.

Horizon to horizon the heavens showed pure and serene blue; the sun poured warmth into Swanscomba Valley.

The man looked carefully around the stadium, his black eyes keen, restless. At the far end stood a man in a black and gold police uniform; he brought the man through the air to the rim of the stadium beside him. "Good morning, sergeant. Any disturbance?"

"None at all, Mr. Dominion."

"How about below?"

"I couldn't say, sir. I'm only responsible for the interior, and I've had the lights on all night. Not a fly has showed itself."

"Good." Dominion glanced around the great bowl. "If there are no trespassers now, there won't be any, since there's no ground-level entrance."

He took himself and the trooper to the ground. Two other men in uniform appeared.

"Good morning," said Dominion. "Any disturbance?"

"No sir. Not a sound."

"Curious." Dominion rubbed his pale peaked chin. "Nothing below the stadium?"

"Nothing, sir. Not a nail. We've searched every nook and cranny, down to bedrock, inch by inch."

"Nothing on the detectors?"

"No, sir. If a gopher had tunneled under the stadium, we'd have known it."

Dominion nodded. "Perhaps there won't be any demonstration after all." He stroked his chin. "My intuition is seldom at fault. But never mind. Take all your men, station them at the upper and lower ends of the valley. Allow no one to enter. No one, on any pretext whatever. Understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

Dominion returned to the rim of the stadium, gazed around the sunny bowl. The grass was green and well-cropped; the colored upholstery of the chairs made circular bands of pastel around the stadium.

He took himself through the air to the director's cupola, an enclosed booth hanging in a vantage point over the field on a long transparent spar. He entered, seated himself at the table, switched on the microphone. "One—two—three." He stopped, listened. His voice, channeled to speakers in the arms of each of the seats, came back to him as a husky murmur.

Other Teleks began to arrive, dropping like brilliant birds from the sky, settling to bask in the sunlight. Refreshment trays floated past; they sipped fruit juice, tea, and ate mintcakes.

Dominion left the high cupola, drifted low over the stadium. There was no expectation of filling it; thirty thousand seats would allow room for future increase. Thirty thousand Teleks was the theoretical limit that the economy of Earth could maintain at the present standard of living. And after thirty thousand? Dominion shrugged aside the question; the problem had no contemporary meaning. The solution should prove simple enough; there had been talk of swinging Venus out into a cooler orbit, moving in Neptune, and creating two habitable worlds by transferring half of Neptune's mantle of ice to dusty Venus. A problem for tomorrow. Today's concern was the creation of the Telek Earth State, the inculcation of religious awe into the common folk of Earth—the only means, as it had been decided, to protect Teleks from witless assassination.

He dropped into a group of friends, seated himself. His work was done for the day; now, with security achieved, he could relax, enjoy himself.

Teleks came in greater numbers. Here was a large group—fifty together. They settled into a section rather high up on the shady side, somewhat apart from the others. A few minutes later another group of fifty joined them, and later there were other similar groups.

At nine o'clock the program of events got under way. A whirlpool of jewel colors glinted high in the sky. A dozen great ice prisms appeared, each frozen from water of a different color.

They commenced to revolve in a circle, rotating at the same time; shafts of colored light—red, gold-yellow, emerald, blue—played around the stadium. Then each of the prisms broke into twenty sections, and the pieces swung, swirled like a swarm of polychrome fireflies. With a great swoop, they disappeared into the sky.

The voice of Lemand De Troller, Program Director, sounded from the speakers:

"Sixty years ago, at the original Telekinetic Congress, our race was born. Today is the first annual convention of the issue of these early giants, and I hope the custom will persist down the stream of history, down the million years that is our destined future, ten million times a million years.

"Now—the program for the day. Immediately following will be a game of bump-ball, for the world championship, between the Crimean Blues and the Oslandic Vikings. Then there will be a water-sculpture contest and display, and next—arrow dueling, followed by an address by Miss Gloriana Hallen, on the Future of Telekinesis, and then lunch will be served on the turf—"

Circumbright and Shorn listened with mounting dissatisfaction. The program director finished. "—the final valediction by Graycham Gray, our chairman for the year."

Circumbright said to Shorn, "There's nothing there, no mass telekinesis in the entire program."

Shorn said nothing. He leaned back in his seat, looked up to the director's cupola.

"Ample opportunity for mass exercise," complained Circumbright "and they overlook it entirely."

Shorn brought his attention back down from the cupola. "It's an obvious stunt—perhaps too obvious for such a sophisticated people."

Circumbright scanned the two hundred and sixty-five men and women in radiant Telek costumes that Shorn had brought into the stadium, fifty at a time. "Do you suppose that the program as it stands will do the trick?"

Shorn shook his head fretfully. "Doesn't seem possible. Not enough mass participation." He looked over his shoulder to Thursby, in the seat behind him. "Any ideas?"

Thursby in brown and yellow said tentatively, "We can't very well force them to indoctrinate us."

Laurie, beside Shorn, laughed nervously. "Let's send Circumbright out to plead with them."

Shorn moved restlessly in his seat. Two hundred and sixty-five precious lives, dependent for continued existence on his skill and vigilance. "Maybe something will turn up."

The game of bump-ball was under way. Five men lying prone in eight-foot red torpedoes competed against five men in blue torpedoes, each team trying to bump a floating three-foot ball into the opposition goal. The game was lightning swift, apparently dangerous. The ten little boats moved so fast as to be mere flickers; the ball slammed back and forth like a ping-pong ball.

Shorn began to notice curious glances cast up toward his group. There was no suspicion, only interest; somehow they were attracting attention. He looked around, and saw his group sitting straight and tense as vestrymen at a funeral—obviously, uneasy and uncomfortable. He rose to his feet, spoke in an angry undertone, "Show a little life; act as if you're enjoying yourselves!"

He turned back to the field, noticed a service wagon not in use, pulled it up, moved it past his charges. Gingerly they took tea, rum punch, cakes, fruit. Shorn set the case back on the turf.

The bump-bail game ended; now began the water sculpture. Columns of water reared into the air: thousands of gallons, working into glistening soft forms. Quivering pliant water caught the sunlight, glowed deep from within the nonobjectives, the human figures, the heads, the interlocking geometric patterns.

Event followed event: competitions and displays in color, skill, ingenuity, swift reaction; arrows were pitted against arrows each trying to pierce the bladder trailed by the other. Colored spheres were raced through an obstacle course; there was an exhibition in which sparrows were released and after an interval herded into a basket by a small white tambourine.

The air over the stadium swam with fascinating colors, shapes, tapes, screens, and so passed the morning. At twelve laden buffet tables dropped from sky to the stadium turf. And now Shorn found himself on the horns of a dilemma. By remaining aloof from the tables his group made themselves conspicuous; but they risked quick detection by mingling with the Teleks.

Thursby resolved the problem. He leaned forward. "Don't you think we'd better go down to lunch? Maybe a few at a time. We stick out like a sore thumb sitting up here hungry."

Shorn nodded acquiescently. By ones and twos he sent the members of his company down to the sward. Laurie nudged him. "Look. There's Dominion. He's talking to old Poole."

Circumbright in unusual agitation said: "I hope Poole keeps his wits about him."

Shorn smiled grimly. "If Dominion makes one move—" Circumbright saw one of the dueling arrows lift easily into the air. Dominion turned away. Shorn sighed. The arrow returned to the turf.

A moment later he brought Poole back to his seat. "What did Dominion want?"

Poole was a scholarly-looking man of middle age, mild and myopic. "Dominion? Oh, the gentleman who spoke to me. He was very pleasant. Asked if I were enjoying the spectacles, and said that he didn't think he recognized me."

"And what did you say?"

"I said I didn't get out very much, and that there were many here I hardly knew."

"And then?"

"He just moved away."

Shorn sighed. "Dominion is very sharp."

Thursby wore a worried frown.

"Things haven't gone so well this morning."

"No. But there's still the afternoon."

The afternoon program began with a score of young Telek girls performing an air ballet.

IX.

Three o'clock.

"There's not much more," said Circumbright. Shorn sat hunched forward. "No."

Circumbright clenched the arms of his seat. "We've got to do something—and I know what to do."

"What?"

"Drop me down to the field. I'll pick up the arrows, and you start picking off Teleks. Dominion first. Then they'll all—"

Shorn shook his head. "It wouldn't work. You'd be throwing away your life for nothing."

"Why wouldn't it work?" Circumbright demanded belligerently.

Shorn gestured to the two hundred and sixty-five. "Do you think we could arouse a real rapport in the business of pulverizing you? No." He looked up to the director's cupola. "It's got to come from there. And I've got to arrange it." He reached over, clasped Laurie's hand, nodded to Thursby, rose to his feet, took himself by an inconspicuous route along the back wall, up to the transparent spar supporting the cupola. Inside he glimpsed the shapes of two men.

He slid back the door, entered quietly, froze in his footprints. Adlari Dominion, lounging back in an elastic chair, smiled up at him, ominous as a cobra. "Come in. I've been expecting you."

Shorn looked quickly to Lemand De Troller, the program director, a bulky blond man with lines of self-indulgence clamping his mouth.

"How so?"

"I have a pretty fair idea of your intentions, and I admit their ingenuity. Unluckily for you, I inspected the body of Cluche Kurgill, assassinated a short time ago, and it occurred to me that this was not the man whom I entertained at Glarietta; I have since reprimanded myself for not scrutinizing the catch at Portinari Gate more carefully. In any event, today will be a complete debacle, from your standpoint. I have excised from the program any sort of business which might have helped you."

Shorn said thickly, "You showed a great deal of forbearance in allowing us to enjoy your program."

Dominion made a lazy gesture. "It is as well not to bring our problems too sharply to the attention of the spectators; it might lay a macabre overtone upon the festival, for them to observe at close hand two hundred and sixty-five condemned anarchists and provocateurs."

"You should have been made very uncomfortable if I had not come up here to the cupola."

Dominion shook his head indulgently. "I asked myself, what would I do in your position? I answered, I would proceed to the cupola and myself direct such an event to suit my purposes. So—I preceded you." He smiled. "And now—the sorry rebellion is at its end. The entire nucleus of your gang is within reach, helpless; if you recall, there is no exit, they have no means to scale the walls."

Shorn felt thick bile rising in his throat; his voice sounded strange to his ears. "It's not necessary to revenge yourself on all these people; they're merely decent individuals, trying to cope with—" He spoke on, pleading half-angrily for the two hundred and sixty-five. Meanwhile his mind worked at a survival sub-level. Dominion, no matter how lazy-seeming and catlike, was keyed up, on his guard; there would be no surprising him. In any struggle Lemand De Troller, the program director, would supply the decisive force. Shorn might be able to parry the weapons of one man, but two cores of thought would be too much for him.

Decision and action came to him simultaneously. He gave the cupola a great shake; startled, De Troller seized the desk. Shorn threw a coffee mug at his head. Instantly, before the mug had even struck, he flung himself to the floor. Dominion, seizing the instant of Shorn's distraction, had aimed a gun at him, fired an explosive pellet. Shorn hit the floor, saw De Troller slump, snatched the weapon from Dominion's hand, all at once.

The gun clattered to the deck, and Shorn found himself looking into Dominion's pale glowing eyes.

Dominion spoke in a low voice. "You're very quick. You've effectively reduced the odds against yourself."

Shorn smiled tightly. "What odds do you give me now?"

"Roughly, a thousand to one."

"Seems to me they're even. You against me."

"No. I can hold you helpless, at the very least, until the program property man returns."

Shorn slowly rose to his feet. Careful. Let no movement escape his eye. Without moving his eyes from Dominion's, he lifted the coffee mug, hurled it at Dominion's head. Dominion diverted it, accelerated it, toward Shorn. Shorn bounced it back, into Dominion's face. It stopped only an inch short, then sprang

back at Shorn's head with tremendous speed. Shorn flicked it with a thought, he felt the breath of its passage and it shattered against the wall.

"You're fast," said Dominion lightly. "Very fast indeed. In theory, your reactions should have missed that."

Shorn stared at him thoughtfully. "I've got a theory of my own."

"I'd like to hear it."

"What happens when two minds try to teleport an object in opposing directions?"

Dominion frowned slightly. "A very exhausting matter, if carried to the limit. The mind with the greater certainty wins, the other mind—sometimes—lapses." Shorn stared at Dominion. "My mind is stronger than yours."

Dominion's eyes lit up with a peculiar inner glow, then filmed over. "Very well, suppose it is? What do I gain in proving otherwise?"

Shorn said, "If you want to save your life—you'll have to." With his eyes still on Dominion, he took a knife from his pocket, flicked open the blade.

It leaped from his hand at his eyes. He frantically diverted it, and in the instant his defense was distracted, the gun darted to Dominion's hand. Shorn twisted up the muzzle by a hair's-breath; the pellet sang past his ear.

Fragments of the coffee mug pelted the back of his head, blinding him with pain. Dominion, smiling and easy, raised the gun. It was all over, Shorn thought. His mind, wilted and spent, stood naked and bare of defense—for the flash of an instant. Before Dominion could pull the trigger, Shorn flung the knife at his throat. Dominion turned his attention away from the gun to divert the knife; Shorn reached out, grabbed the gun with his bare hands, tossed it under the table out of sight.

Dominion and Shorn glared eye to eye. Both of them thought of the knife. It lay on the table, and now under the impulse of both minds, slowly trembled, rose quivering into the air, hilt up, blade down, swinging as if hung by a short string. Gradually it drifted to a position midway between their eyes.

The issue was joined. Sweating, breathing hard, they glared at the knife, and it vibrated, sang to the induced quiver from the opposing efforts. Eye to eye stared Dominion and Shorn, faces red, mouths open, distorted. No opportunity now for diversionary tactics; relax an instant and the knife would stab; blunt force strained against force.

Dominion said slowly, "You can't win, you who have only known telekinesis a few days; your certainty is as nothing compared to mine. I've lived my lifetime in certainty; it's part of my living will, and now see—your reality is weakening, the knife is aiming at you, to slash your neck."

Shorn watched the knife in fascination, and indeed it slowly turned toward him like the clock-hand of Fate. Sweat streamed into his eyes; he was aware of Dominion's grimace of triumph.

No. Allow no words to distract you; permit no suggestion; bend down Dominion's own resolution. His vocal chords were like rusty wire, his voice was a croak. "My certainty is stronger than yours, because"—as he said the words the knife halted its sinister motion toward his throat—"time has no effect upon telekinesis! Because I've got the will of all humanity behind me, and you've got only yourself!"

The knife trembled, twisted, as if it were a live thing, tortured by indecision.

"I'm stronger than you are, because—I've *got to be!"* He sank the words into Dominion's mind.

Dominion said quickly, "Your neck hurts, your mind hurts, you cannot see."

Shorn's neck hurt indeed, his head ached, sweat stung his eyes, and the knife made a sudden lurch toward him. This can't go on, thought Shorn. "I don't need tricks, Dominion; you need them only because your confidence is going and you're desperate." He took a deep breath, reached out, seized the knife, plunged it into Dominion's breast.

Shorn stood looking down at the body. "I won—and by a trick. He was so obsessed by the need for defeating me mentally that he forgot the knife had a handle."

Panting he looked out over the stadium. Events had come to a halt. The spectators restively waited for word from the program director.

Shorn picked up the microphone.

"Men and women of the future—" as he spoke he watched the little huddle of two hundred and sixty-five. He saw Laurie stir, look up; he saw Circumbright turn, clap Thursby's knee. He felt the wave of thankfulness, of hero-worship, almost insane in its fervor that welled up from their minds. At that moment he could have commanded any of them to their death.

An intoxicated elation came to him; he fought to control his voice. "This is an event improvised to thank Lemand De Troller, our program director, for his work in arranging the events. All of us will join our telekinetic powers together; we will act as one mind. I will guide this little white ball"—he lifted a small ball used in the obstacle race—"through the words 'Thank you, Lemand De Troller.' You, with your united wills, will follow with the large bump-ball." He rolled it out into the center of the stadium. "With more preparation we would have achieved something more elaborate, but I know Lemand will be just as pleased if he feels all of us are concentrating on the big ball, putting our hearts into the thanks. So—now. Follow the little white ball."

Slowly he guided the white ball along imaginary block letters in the air; faithfully the big bump-ball followed.

It was finished.

Shorn looked anxiously toward Circumbright. No signal.

Once again.

"Now—there is one other to whom we owe a vote of thanks: Adlari Dominion, the capable liaison officer. This time we will spell out, 'Thank you and good luck, Adlari Dominion.' "

The white ball moved. The big ball followed. Four thousand minds impelled, two hundred and sixty-five minds sought to merge into the pattern: each a new prometheus trying to steal a secret more precious than fire from a race more potent than the Titans.

Shorn finished the last N, glanced toward Circumbright. Still no signal. Anxiety beset him; was this the right indoctrination technique? Suppose it was only effective under special conditions, suppose he had been operating on a misapprehension the entire time?

"Well," said Shorn doggedly, "once again." But the spectators would be growing restless. Who to thank this time?

The ball was moving of its own volition. Shorn, fascinated, followed its path. It was spelling a word. W-I-L-L—then a space—S-H-O-R-N—another space—T-H-A-N-K-S.

Shorn sank back into the elastic seat, his eyes brimming with tears of release and thankfulness. "Someone is thanking Will Shorn," he said into the microphone. "It's time for them to leave." He paused. Two hundred and sixty-five new telekinetics lifted themselves from the stadium, flew west toward Tran, disappeared into the afternoon.

Shorn returned to the microphone. "There're a few more words I want to say; please be patient a moment or two longer.

"You have just been witnesses—unwitting witnesses —to an event as important as Joffrey's original congress. The future will consider the sixty-year interval only a transition, humanity's final separation from the beast.

"We have completely subdued the material world; we know the laws governing all the phenomena that our senses can detect. Now we turn ourselves Ito a new direction; humanity enters a new stage, and wonderful things lie before us." He noticed a ripple of uneasiness running along the ranks of the Teleks. "This new world is on us, we can't evade it. For sixty years the Teleks have rejoiced in a state of special privilege, and this is the last shackle humanity throws off: the idea that one man may dominate or control another man."

He paused; the uneasiness was ever more marked.

"There are trying times to come—a period of severe readjustment. At the moment you are not quite certain to what I am referring, and that is just as well. Thank you for your attention and good-by. I hope you enjoyed the program as much as I did."

He rose to his feet, stepped over Dominion's body, slid back the door, stepped out of the cupola.

Teleks leaving the stadium rose up past him like mayflies, some turning him curious glances as they flew. Shorn, smiling, watched them flit past, toward their glittering pavilions, their cloud-castles, their

sea-bubbles. The last one was gone; he waved an arm after them as if in valediction.

Then he himself rose, plunged westward toward the sword-shaped towers of Tran, where two hundred and sixty-five men and women were already starting to spread telekinesis through all of mankind.

Charles De Vet lives in Minnesoto, plays a mean game of poker, and lately has been siphoning profits out of Wall Street in an enviable way. Katherine MacLean is an East Coast operative who thinks tough, logical thoughts in a way that women are not supposed to do, and writes fiction likewise. Just how this collaboration happened to come about, I have no idea, nor can I begin to guess who wrote what; but the result of this blending of remarkably different personalities and fictional styles is the short novel that follows, on outstanding example of the kind of intellectual puzzle-story that made John W. Campbell's *Astounding Science* Fiction famous.

Second Game
Charles V. De Vet and Katherine MacLean

The sign was big, with black letters that read: I'LL BEAT YOU THE SECOND GAME.

I eased myself into a seat behind the play board, straightened the pitchman's cloak about my shoulders, took a final deep breath, let it out—and waited.

A nearby Fair visitor glanced at the sign as he hurried by. His eyes widened with anticipated pleasure and he shifted his gaze to me, weighing me with the glance.

I knew I had him.

The man changed direction and came over to where I sat. "Are you giving any odds?" he asked.

"Ten to one," I answered.

"A dronker." He wrote on a blue slip with a white stylus, dropped it at my elbow, and sat down.

"We play the first game for feel," I said. "Second game pays."

Gradually I let my body relax. Its weight pulled at the muscles of my back and shoulders, and I slouched into a half-slump. I could feel my eyelids droop as I released them, and the corners of my mouth pulled down. I probably appeared tired and melancholy. Or like a man operating in a gravity heavier than was normal for him. Which I was.

I had come to this world called Velda two weeks earlier. My job was to find why its humanlike inhabitants refused all contacts with the Federation.

Earth's colonies had expanded during the last several centuries until they now comprised a loose alliance known as The Ten Thousand Worlds. They were normally peaceful—and wanted peace with Velda. But you cannot talk peace with a people who won't talk back. Worse, they had obliterated the fleet bringing our initial peace overtures. As a final gesture I had been smuggled in—in an attempt to breach that stand-off stubbornness. This booth at their Fair was my best chance—as I saw it—to secure audience with the men in authority. And with luck it would serve a double purpose.

* * *

Several Veldians gathered around the booth and watched with interest as my opponent and I chose colors. He took the red; I the black. We arranged our fifty-two pieces on their squares and I nodded to him to make the first move.

He was an anemic oldster with an air of nervous energy, and he played the same way, with intense concentration. By the fourth move I knew he would not win. On each play he had to consult the value board suspended between us before deciding what his next move would be. On a play board with one hundred and sixty-nine squares, each with a different value—in fact one set of values for offense, and another for defense—only a brilliant player could keep them all in mind. But no man without that ability was going to beat me.

I let him win the first game. Deliberately. The "second game counts" gimmick was not only to attract attention, but to give me a chance to test a player's strength—and find his weakness.

At the start of the second game, the oldster moved his front row center pukt three squares forward and one left oblique. I checked it with an end pukt, and waited.

The contest was not going to be exacting enough to hold my complete attention. Already an eidetic portion of my mind—which I always thought of as a small machine, ticking away in one corner of my skull, independent of any control or direction from me—was moving its interest out to the spectators around my booth.

It caught a half-completed gesture of admiration at my last move from a youth directly ahead of me. And with the motion, and the glimpse of the youth's face, something slipped into place in my memory. Some subconscious counting finished itself, and I knew that there had been too many of those youths, with faces like this one, finely boned and smooth, with slender delicate necks and slim hands and movements that were cool and detached. Far too many to be a normal number in a population of adults and children.

As if drawn, my glance went past the forms of the watchers around the booth and plumbed the passing crowd to the figure of a man; a magnificent masculine type of the Veldian race, thick shouldered and strong, thoughtful in motion, yet with something of the swagger of a gladiator, who, as he walked, spoke to the woman who held his arm, leaning toward her cherishingly as if he protected a great prize.

She was wearing a concealing cloak, but her face was beautiful, her hair semi-long, and in spite of the cloak I could see that her body was full-fleshed and almost voluptuously feminine. I had seen few such women on Velda.

Two of the slim, delicately built youths went by arm in arm, walking with a slight defiant sway of bodies, and looked at the couple as they passed, with a pleasure in the way the man's fascinated attention clove to the woman, and looked at the beauty of the woman possessively without lust, and passed by, their heads held higher in pride as if they shared a secret triumph with her. Yet they were strangers.

I had an answer to my counting. The "youths" with the large eyes and smooth delicate heads, with the slim straight asexual bodies, thought of themselves as women. I had not seen them treated with the subdued attraction and conscious avoidance one sex gives another, but by numbers . . . My memory added the number of these "youths" to the numbers of figures and faces that had been obviously female. It totaled to almost half the population I had seen. No matter what the biological explanation, it seemed reasonable that half . . .

I bent my head, to not see the enigma of the boy-woman face watching me, and braced my elbow to steady my hand as I moved. For two weeks I had been on Velda and during the second week I had come out of hiding and passed as a Veldian. It was incredible that I had been operating under a misunderstanding as to which were women, and which men, and not blundered openly. The luck that had saved me had been undeserved.

Opposite me, across the board, the bleach-skinned hand of the oldster was beginning to waver with indecision as each pukt was placed. He was seeing defeat, and not wishing to see it.

In eight more minutes I completed the rout of his forces and closed out the game. In winning I had lost only two pukts. The other's defeat was crushing, but my ruthlessness had been deliberate. I wanted my reputation to spread.

* * *

My sign, and the game in progress, by now had attracted a line of challengers, but as the oldster left the line broke and most of them shook their heads and moved back, then crowded around the booth and good-naturedly elbowed their way to positions of better vantage.

I knew then that I had set my lure with an irresistible bait. On a world where the Game was played from earliest childhood—was in fact a vital aspect of their culture—my challenge could not be ignored. I pocketed the loser's blue slip and nodded to the first in line of the four men who still waited to try me.

This second man played a better game than the old one. He had a fine tight-knit offensive, with a

good grasp of values, but his weakness showed early in the game when I saw him hesitate before making a simple move in a defensive play. He was not skilled in the strategy of retreat and defense, or not suited to it by temperament. He would be unable to cope with a swift forward press, I decided.

I was right.

Some of the challengers bet more, some less, all lost on the second game. I purchased a nut and fruit confection from a passing food vender and ate it for a sparse lunch while I played through the late afternoon hours.

By the time Velda's distant sun had begun to print long shadows across the Fair grounds, I was certain that word of my booth had spread well.

The crowd about the railing of my stand was larger—but the players were fewer. Sometimes I had a break of several minutes before one made a decision to try his skill. And there were no more challenges from ordinary players. Still the results were the same. None had sufficient adroitness to give me more than a passing contest.

Until Caertin Vlosmin made his appearance.

Vlosmin played a game intended to be impregnably defensive, to remain untouchable until an opponent made a misplay or an overzealous drive, of which he would then take advantage. But his mental prowess was not quite great enough to be certain of a sufficiently concealed or complex weakness in the approach of an adversary, and he would not hazard an attack on an uncertainty. Excess caution was his weakness.

During our play I sensed that the crowd about us was very intent and still. On the outskirts, newcomers inquiring cheerfully were silenced by whispered exclamations.

Though it required all my concentration the game was soon over. I looked at Vlosmin as he rose to his feet, and noted with surprise that a fine spotting of moisture brightened his upper lip. Only then did I recognize the strain and effort he had invested into the attempt to defeat me.

"You are an exceptional craftsman," he said. There was a grave emphasis he put on the "exceptional" which I could not miss, and I saw that his face was whiter.

His formal introduction of himself earlier as "Caertin Vlosmin" had meant something more than I had realized at the time.

I had just played against, and defeated, one of the Great Players!

* * *

The sun set a short time later and floating particles of light-reflecting air-foam drifted out over the Fair grounds. Someway they were held suspended above the ground while air currents tossed them about and intermingled them in the radiance of vari-hued spotlights. The area was still as bright as day, but filled with pale, shifting shadows that seemed to heighten the byplay of sound and excitement coming from the Fair visitors.

Around my booth all was quiet; the spectators were subdued—as though waiting for the next act in a tense drama. I was very tired now, but I knew by the tenseness I observed around me that I did not have much longer to wait.

By the bubbles' light I watched new spectators take their positions about my booth. And as time went by I saw that some of them did not move on, as my earlier visitors had done.

The weight that rode my stomach muscles grew abruptly heavier, I had set my net with all the audacity of a spider waiting for a fly, yet I knew that when my anticipated victim arrived he would more likely resemble a spider hawk. Still the weight was not caused by fear: It was excitement—the excitement of the larger game about to begin.

* * *

I was playing an opponent of recognizably less ability than Vlosmin when I heard a stirring and murmuring in the crowd around my stand. The stirring was punctuated by my opponent rising to his feet.

I glanced up.

The big man who had walked into my booth was neither arrogant nor condescending, yet the

confidence in his manner was like an aura of strength. He had a deep reserve of vitality, I noted as I studied him carefully, but it was a leashed, controlled vitality. Like most of the men of the Veldian race he wore a uniform, cut severely plain, and undecorated. No flowing robes or tunics for these men. They were a warrior race, unconcerned with the aesthetic touches of personal dress, and left that strictly to their women.

The newcomer turned to my late opponent. His voice was impressive, controlled. "Please finish your game," he said courteously.

The other shook his head. "The game is already as good as over. My sword is broken. You are welcome to my place."

The tall man turned to me. "If you don't mind?"

"My pleasure," I answered. "Please be seated."

This was it.

My visitor shrugged his close wrapped cloak back from his shoulders and took the chair opposite me. "I am Kalin Trobt," he said. As if he knew I had been expecting him.

In reply I came near to telling him my correct name. But Robert O. Lang was a name that would have been alien to Velda. Using it would have been as good as a confession. "Claustil Anteer," I said, giving a name I had invented earlier.

We played the first game as children play it, taking each other's pukts as the opportunity presented, making no attempt at finesse. Trobt won, two up. Neither of us had made mention of a wager. There would be more than money involved in this Game.

I noticed, when I glanced up before the second game, that the spectators had been cleared from around the booth. Only the inner, unmoving ring I had observed earlier remained now. They watched calmly—professionally.

Fortunately I had no intention of trying to escape.

* * *

During the early part of the second game Trobt and I tested each other carefully, as skilled swordsmen, probing, feinting, and shamming attack, but never actually exposing ourselves. I detected what could have been a slight tendency to gamble in Trobt's game, but there was no concrete situation to confirm it.

My first moves were entirely passive. Alertly passive. If I had judged correctly the character of the big man opposite me, I had only to ignore the bait he offered to draw me out, to disregard his openings and apparent—too apparent—errors, until he became convinced that I was unshakably cautious, and not to be tempted into making the first thrusts. For this was his weakness as I had guessed it: That his was a gambling temperament—that when he saw an opportunity he would strike—without the caution necessary to insure safety.

Pretending to move with timidity, and pausing with great deliberation over even the most obvious plays, I maneuvered only to defend. Each time Trobt shifted to a new position of attack I covered—until finally I detected the use of slightly more arm force than necessary when he moved a pukt. It was the only sign of impatience he gave, but I knew it was there.

Then it was that I left one—thin—opening.

Trobt streaked a pukt through and cut out one of my middle defenders.

Instead of making the obvious counter of taking his piece, I played a pukt far removed from his invading man. He frowned in concentration, lifted his arm—and his hand hung suspended over the board.

Suddenly his eyes widened. His glance swept upward to my face and what he saw there caused his expression to change to one of mingled dismay and astonishment. There was but one move he could make. When he made it his entire left flank would be exposed. He had lost the game.

Abruptly he reached forward, touched his index finger to the tip of my nose, and pressed gently.

* * *

After a minute during which neither of us spoke, I said, "You know?"

He nodded. "Yes," he said. "You're a Human."

There was a stir and rustle of motion around me. The ring of spectators had leaned forward a little as they heard his words. I looked up and saw that they were smiling, inspecting me with curiosity and something that could have been called admiration. In the dusk the clearest view was the ring of teeth, gleaming—the view a rabbit might get of a circle of grinning foxes. Foxes might feel friendly toward rabbits, and admire a good big one. Why not?

I suppressed an ineffectual impulse to deny what I was. The time was past for that. "How did you find out?" I asked Trobt.

"Your Game. No one could play like that and not be well known. And now your nose."

"My nose?" I repeated.

"Only one physical difference between a Human and a Veldian is apparent on the surface. The nose cartilage. Yours is split—mine is single." He rose to his feet. "Will you come with me, please?"

It was not a request.

* * *

My guards walked singly and in couples, sometimes passing Trobt and myself, sometimes letting us pass them, and sometimes lingering at a booth, like any other walkers, and yet, unobtrusively they held me encircled, always in the center of the group. I had already learned enough of the Veldian personality to realize that this was simply a habit of tact. Tact to prevent an arrest from being conspicuous, so as not to add the gaze of his fellows to whatever punishment would be decided for a culprit's offense. Apparently they considered humiliation too deep a punishment to use indiscriminately.

At the edge of the Fair grounds some of the watchers bunched around me while others went to get the tricars. I stood and looked across the park to The City. That was what it was called, The City, The Citadel, The Hearthplace, the home place where one's family is kept safe, the sanctuary whose walls have never been pierced. All those connotations had been in the name and the use of the name; in the voices of those who spoke it. Sometimes they called it The Hearth, and sometimes The Market, always *The* as if it were the only one.

Though the speakers lived in other places and named them as the homes of their ancestors, most of the Veldians were born here. Their history was colored, I might say even shaped, by their long era of struggle with the dleeth, a four-footed, hairy carnivore, physically little different from the big cats of Earth, but intelligent. They had battled the Veldians in a struggle for survival from the Veldians' earliest memories until a couple centuries before my visit. Now the last few surviving dleeth had found refuge in the frigid region of the north pole. With their physical superiority they probably would have won the struggle against the Veldians, except that their instincts had been purely predatory, and they had no hands and could not develop technology.

The City had been the one strong point that the dleeth had never been able to breach. It had been held by one of the stronger clans, and there was seldom unity among the tribes, yet any family about to bear a child was given sanctuary within its walls.

The clans were nomads—made so by the aggression of the dleeth—but they always made every effort to reach The City when childbirth was imminent. This explained, at least partly, why even strangers from foreign areas regarded The City as their home place.

I could see the Games Building from where I stood. In the walled city called Hearth it was the highest point. Big and red, it towered above the others, and the city around it rose to it like a wave, its consort of surrounding smaller buildings matched to each other in size and shape in concentric rings. Around each building wound the ramps of elevator runways, harmonious and useful, each of different colored stone, lending variety and warmth. Nowhere was there a clash of either proportion or color. Sometimes I wondered if the Veldians did not build more for the joy of creating symmetry, than because of utilitarian need.

I climbed into Trobt's thee-wheeled car as it stopped before me, and the minute I settled into the bucket seat and gripped the bracing handles, Trobt spun the car and it dived into the highway and rushed

toward the city. The vehicle seemed unstable, being about the width of a motor bike, with side car in front, and having nothing behind except a metal box that must have housed a powerful battery, and a shaft with the rear wheel that did the steering. It was an arrangement that made possible sudden wrenching turns that were battering to any passenger as unused to it as I. To my conditioning it seemed that the Veldians on the highway drove like madmen, the traffic rules were incomprehensible or nonexistent, and all drivers seemed determined to drive only in gull-like sweeping lines, giving no obvious change of course for other such cars, brushing by tricars from the opposite direction with an inch or less of clearance.

Apparently the maneuverability of the cars and the skill of the drivers were enough to prevent accidents, and I had to force my totally illogical drivers' reflexes to relax and stop tensing against the nonexistent peril.

I studied Trobt as he drove, noting the casual way he held the wheel, and the assurance in the set of his shoulders. I tried to form a picture in my mind of the kind of man he was, and just what were the motivations that would move or drive him.

Physically he was a long-faced man, with a smooth muscular symmetry, and an Asiatic cast to his eyes. I was certain that he excelled at whatever job he held. In fact I was prepared to believe that he would excel at anything he tried. He was undoubtedly one of those amazing men for whom the exceptional was mere routine. If he were to be cast in the role of my opponent: be the person in whom the opposition of this race would be actualized—as I now anticipated—I would not have wanted to bet against him.

The big skilled man was silent for several minutes, weaving the tricar with smooth swerves through a three-way tangle at an intersection, but twice he glanced at my expression with evident curiosity. Finally, as a man would state an obvious fact he said, "I presume you know you will be executed."

* * *

Trobt's face reflected surprise at the shock he must have read in mine. I had known the risk I would be taking in coming here, of course, and of the very real danger that it might end in my death. But this had come up on me too fast. I had not realized that the affair had progressed to the point where my death was already assured. I had thought that there would be negotiations, consultations, and perhaps ultimatums. But only if they failed did I believe that the repercussions might carry me along to my death.

However, there was the possibility that Trobt was merely testing my courage. I decided on boldness. "No," I said. "I do not expect to be executed."

Trobt raised his eyebrows and slowed, presumably to gain more time to talk. With a sudden decision he swung the tricar from the road into one of the small parks spread at regular intervals along the highway.

"Surely you don't think we would let you live? There's a state of war between Velda and your Ten Thousand Worlds. You admit that you're Human, and obviously you are here to spy. Yet when you're captured, you do not expect to be executed?"

"Was I captured?" I asked, emphasizing the last word.

He pondered on that a moment, but apparently did not come up with an answer that satisfied him. "I presume your question means something," he said.

"If I had wanted to keep my presence here a secret, would I have set up a booth at the Fair and invited inspection?" I asked.

He waved one hand irritably, as though to brush aside a picayune argument. "Obviously you did it to test yourself against us, to draw the great under your eye, and perhaps become a friend, treated as an equal with access to knowledge of our plans and weapons. Certainly! Your tactic drew two members of the Council into your net before it was understood. If we had accepted you as a previously unknown Great, you would have won. You are a gambling man, and you played a gambler's hand. You lost."

Partly he was right.

"My deliberate purpose was to reach you," I said, "or someone else with sufficient authority to listen

to what I have to say."

Trobt pulled the vehicle deeper into the park. He watched the cars of our escort settling to rest before and behind us. I detected a slight unease and rigidity in his stillness as he said, "Speak then. I'm listening."

"I've come to negotiate," I told him.

* * *

Something like a flash of puzzlement crossed his features before they returned to tighter immobility. Unexpectedly he spoke in *Earthian,* my own language. "Then why did you choose this method? Would it not have been better simply to announce yourself?"

This was the first hint he had given that he might have visited our Worlds before I visited his. Though we had suspected before I came that some of them must have. They probably knew of our existence years before we discovered them.

Ignoring his change of language, I replied, still speaking Veldian, "Would it have been that simple? Or would some minor official, on capturing me, perhaps have had me imprisoned, or tortured to extract information?"

Again the suppressed puzzlement in the shift of position as he looked at me. "They would have treated you as an envoy, representing your Ten Thousand Worlds. You could have spoken to the Council immediately." He spoke in Veldian now.

"I did not know that," I said. "You refused to receive our fleet envoys; why should I expect you to accept me any more readily?"

Trobt started to speak, stopped, and turned in his seat to regard me levelly and steadily, his expression unreadable. "Tell me what you have to say then. I will judge whether or not the Council will listen."

"To begin with—" I looked away from the expressionless eyes, out the windshield, down the vistas of brown short trees that grew between each small park and the next. "Until an exploring party of ours found signs of extensive mining operations on a small metal-rich planet, we knew nothing of your existence. We were not even aware that another race in the galaxy had discovered faster than light space travel. But after the first clue we were alert for other signs, and found them. Our discovery of your planet was bound to come. However, we did not expect to be met on our first visit with an attack of such hostility as you displayed."

"When we learned that you had found us," Trobt said, "we sent a message to your Ten Thousand Worlds, warning them that we wanted no contact with you. Yet you sent a fleet of spaceships against us."

I hesitated before answering. "That phrase, 'sent against us,' is hardly the correct one," I said. "The fleet was sent for a diplomatic visit, and was not meant as an aggressive action." I thought, *But obviously the display of force was intended "diplomatically" to frighten you people into being polite.* In diplomacy the smile, the extended hand—and the big stick visible in the other hand—had obviated many a war, by giving the stranger a chance to choose a hand, in full understanding of the alternative. *We showed our muscle to your little planet—you showed your muscle. And now we are ready to be polite.*

* * *

I hoped these people would understand the face-saving ritual of negotiation, the disclaimers of intent, that would enable each side to claim that there had been no war, merely accident.

"We did not at all feel that you were justified in wiping the fleet from space," I said. "But it was probably a legitimate misunderstanding—"

"You had been warned!" Trobt's voice was grim, his expression not inviting of further discussion. I thought I detected a bunching of the muscles in his arms.

For a minute I said nothing, made no gesture. Apparently this angle of approach was unproductive—and probably explosive. Also, trying to explain and justify the behavior of the Federation politicos could possibly become rather taxing.

"Surely you don't intend to postpone negotiations indefinitely?" I asked tentatively. "One planet cannot conquer the entire Federation."

The bunched muscles of his arms strained until they pulled his shoulders, and his lips whitened with the effort of controlling some savage anger. Apparently my question had impugned his pride.

This, I decided quickly, was not the time to make an enemy. "I apologize if I have insulted you," I said in Earthian. "I do not yet always understand what I am saying, in your language."

He hesitated, made some kind of effort, and shifted to Earthian. "It is not a matter of strength, or weakness," he said, letting his words ride out on his released breath, "but of behavior, courtesy.

"We would have left you alone, but now it is too late. We will drive your faces into the ground. I am certain that we can, but if we could not, still we would try. To imply that we would not try, from fear, seems to me words to soil the mouth, not worthy of a man speaking to a man. We are converting our ships of commerce to war. Your people will see soon that we will fight."

* * *

"Is it too late for negotiation?" I asked.

His forehead wrinkled into a frown and he stared at me in an effort of concentration. When he spoke it was with a considered hesitation. "If I make a great effort I can feel that you are sincere, and not speaking to mock or insult. It is strange that beings who look so much like ourselves can"—he rubbed a hand across his eyes—"pause a moment. When I say 'yag loogt'-n'balt' what does it mean to you in Earthish?"

"I must play." I hesitated as he turned one hand palm down, signifying that I was wrong. "I must duel," I said, finding another meaning in the way I had heard the phrase expressed. It was a strong meaning, judging by the tone and inflection the speaker had used. I had mimicked the tone without full understanding. The verb was perhaps stronger than *must,* meaning something inescapable, fated, but I could find no Earthian verb for it. I understood why Trobt dropped his hand to the seat without turning it palm up to signify that I was correct.

"There may be no such thought on the human worlds," he said resignedly. "I have to explain as to a child or a madman. I cannot explain in Veldian, for it has no word to explain what needs no explanation."

He shifted to Earthian, his controlled voice sounding less controlled when moving with the more fluid inflections of my own tongue. "We said we did not want further contact. Nevertheless you sent the ships—deliberately in disregard of our expressed desire. That was an insult, a deep insult, meaning we have not strength to defend our word, meaning we are so helpless that we can be treated with impoliteness, like prisoners, or infants.

"Now we must show you which of us is helpless, which is the weakling. Since you would not respect our wishes, then in order to be not-further-insulted we must make of your people a captive or a child in helplessness, so that you will be without power to affront us another time."

"If apologies are in order—"

He interrupted with raised hand, still looking at me very earnestly with forehead wrinkled, thought half turned inward in difficult introspection of his own meaning, as well as a grasping for my viewpoint.

"The insult of the fleet can only be wiped out in the blood of testing—of battle—and the test will not stop until one or the other shows that he is too weak to struggle. There is no other way."

He was demanding total surrender!

I saw it was a subject that could not be debated. The Federation had taken on a bearcat this time!

"I stopped because I wanted to understand you," Trobt resumed. "Because the others will not understand how you could be an envoy—how your Federation could send an envoy—except as an insult. I have seen enough of human strangeness to be not maddened by the insolence of an emissary coming to us, or by your people expecting us to exchange words when we carry your first insult still unwashed from our face. I can even see how it could perhaps be considered *not* an insult, for I have seen your people living on their planets and they suffered insult from each other without striking, until finally I saw that they did not know when they were insulted, as a deaf man does not know when his

name is called."

I listened to the quiet note of his voice, trying to recognize the attitude that made it different from his previous tones—calm and slow and deep. Certainty that what he was saying was important . . . conscious tolerance . . . generosity.

Trobt turned on the tricar's motor and put his hands on the steering shaft. "You are a man worthy of respect," he said, looking down the dark empty road ahead. "I wanted you to understand us. To see the difference between us. So that you will not think us without justice." The car began to move.

"I wanted you to understand why you will die."

I said nothing—having nothing to say. But I began immediately to bring my report up to date, recording the observations during the games, and recording with care this last conversation, with the explanation it carried of the Veldian reactions that had been previously obscure.

I used nerve-twitch code, "typing" on a tape somewhere inside myself the coded record of everything that had passed since the last time I brought the report up to date. The typing was easy, like flexing a finger in code jerks, but I did not know exactly where the recorder was located. It was some form of transparent plastic which would not show up on X ray. The surgeons had imbedded it in my flesh while I was unconscious, and had implanted a mental block against my noticing which small muscle had been linked into the contrivance for the typing.

If I died before I was able to return to Earth, there were several capsuled chemicals buried at various places in my body, that intermingled, would temporarily convert my body to a battery for a high powered broadcast of the tape report, destroying the tape and my body together. This would go into action only if my temperature fell fifteen degrees below the temperature of life.

I became aware that Kalin Trobt was speaking again, and that I had let my attention wander while recording, and taped some subjective material. The code twitches easily became an unconscious accompaniment to memory and thought, and this was the second time I had found myself recording more than necessary.

Trobt watched the dark road, threading among buildings and past darkened vehicles. His voice was thoughtful. "In the early days, Miklas of Danlee, when he had the Ornan family surrounded and outnumbered, wished not to destroy them, for he needed good warriors, and in another circumstance they could have been his friends. Therefore he sent a slave to them with an offer of terms of peace. The Oman family had the slave skinned while alive, smeared with salt and grease so that he would not bleed, and sent back, tied in a bag of his own skin, with a message of no. The chroniclers agree that since the Ornan family was known to be honorable, Miklas should not have made the offer.

"In another time and battle, the Cheldos were offered terms of surrender by an envoy. Nevertheless they won against superior forces, and gave their captives to eat a stew whose meat was the envoy of the offer to surrender. Being given to eat their own words as you'd say in Earthish. Such things are not done often, because the offer is not given."

He wrenched the steering post sideways and the tricar turned almost at right angles, balanced on one wheel for a dizzy moment, and fled up a great spiral ramp winding around the outside of the red Games Building.

Trobt still looked ahead, not glancing at me. "I understand, from observing them, that you Earthians will lie without soiling the mouth. What are you here for, actually?"

"I came from interest, but I intend, given the opportunity, to observe and to report my observations back to my government. They should not enter a war without knowing anything about you."

"Good." He wrenched the car around another abrupt turn into a red archway in the side of the building, bringing it to a stop inside. The sound of the other tricars entering the tunnel echoed hollowly from the walls and died as they came to a stop around us. "You are a spy then."

"Yes," I said, getting out. I had silently resigned my commission as envoy some five minutes earlier. There was little point in delivering political messages, if they have no result except to have one skinned or made into a stew.

* * *

A heavy door with the seal of an important official engraved upon it opened before us. In the forepart of the room we entered, a slim-bodied creature with the face of a girl sat with crossed legs on a platform like a long coffee table, sorting vellum marked with the dots and dashes, arrows and pictures, of the Veldian language.

She had green eyes, honeyed-olive complexion, a red mouth, and purple black hair. She stopped to work an abacus, made a notation on one of the stiff sheets of vellum, then glanced up to see who had come in. She saw us, and glanced away again, as if she had coolly made a note of our presence and gone back to her work, sorting the vellum sheets and stacking them in thin shelves with quick graceful motions.

"Kalin Trobt of Pagael," a man on the far side of the room said, a man sitting cross-legged on a dais covered with brown fur and scattered papers. He accepted the hand Trobt extended and they gripped wrists in a locked gesture of friendship. "And how survive the other sons of the citadel of Pagael?"

"Well, and continuing in friendship to the house of Lyagin," Trobt replied carefully. "I have seen little of my kin. There are many farlanders all around us, and between myself and my hearth-folk swarm the adopted."

"It is not like the old days, Kalin Trobt. In a dream I saw a rock sink from the weight of sons, and I longed for the sight of a land that is without strangers."

"We are all kinfolk now, Lyagin."

"My hearth pledged it."

Lyagin put his hand on a stack of missives which he had been considering, his face thoughtful, sparsely fleshed, mostly skull and tendon, his hair bound back from his face, and wearing a short white cotton dress beneath a light fur cape.

He was an old man, already in his senility, and now he was lost in a lapse of awareness of what he had been doing a moment before. By no sign did Trobt show impatience, or even consciousness of the other's lapse.

Lyagin raised his head after a minute and brought his rheumy eyes into focus on us. "You bring someone in regard to an inquiry?" he asked.

"The one from the Ten Thousand Worlds," Trobt replied.

Lyagin nodded apologetically. "I received word that he would be brought," he said. "How did you capture him?"

"He came."

The expression must have had some connotation that I did not recognize for the official let his glance cross mine, and I caught one slight flicker of interest in his eyes. "You say these Humans lie?" he asked Trobt.

"Frequently. It is considered almost honorable to lie to an enemy in circumstances where one may profit by it."

"You brought back from his worlds some poison which insures their speaking the truth, I believe?"

"Not a poison, something they call drugs, which affects one like strong drink, dulling a man and changing what he might do. Under its influence he loses his initiative of decision."

"You have this with you?"

"Yes." Trobt was going to waste no time getting from me anything I had that might be of value to them.

"It will be interesting having an enemy co-operate," Lyagin said. "If he finds no way to kill himself, he can be very useful to us." So far my contact with the Veldians had not been going at all as I had hoped and planned.

The boy-girl at the opposite side of the room finished a problem on the abacus, noted the answer, and glanced directly at my face, at my expression, then locked eyes with me for a brief moment. When she glanced down to the vellum again it was as if she had seen whatever she had looked up to see, and

was content. She sat a little straighter as she worked, and moved with an action that was a little less supple and compliant.

I believe she had seen me as a man.

* * *

During the questioning I made no attempt to resist the drug's influence. I answered truthfully—but literally. Many times my answers were undecidable—because I knew not the answers, or I lacked the data to give them. And the others were cloaked under a full literal subtlety that made them useless to the Veldians. Questions such as the degree of unity existing between the Worlds: I answered—truthfully—that they were united under an authority with supreme power of decision. The fact that that authority had no actual force behind it; that it was subject to the whims and fluctuations of sentiment and politics of intraalliances; that it had deteriorated into a mere supernumerary body of impractical theorists that occupied itself, in a practical sphere, only with picayune matters, I did not explain. It was not asked of me.

Would our Worlds fight? I answered that they would fight to the death to defend their liberty and independence. I did not add that that will to fight would evidence itself first in internecine bickering, procrastinations, and jockeying to avoid the worst thrusts of the enemy—before it finally resolved itself into a united front against attack.

By early morning Trobt could no longer contain his impatience. He stepped closer. "We're going to learn one thing," he said, and his voice was harsh. "Why did you come here?"

"To learn all that I could about you," I answered.

"You came to find a way to whip us!"

It was not a question and I had no necessity to answer.

"Have you found the way?"

"No."

"If you do, and you are able, will you use that knowledge to kill us?"

"No."

Trobt's eyebrows raised. "No?" he repeated. "Then why do you want it?"

"I hope to find a solution that will not harm either side."

"But if you found that a solution was not possible, you would be willing to use your knowledge to defeat us?"

"Yes."

"Even if it meant that you had to exterminate us—man, woman, and child?"

"Yes."

"Why? Are you so certain that you are right, that you walk with God, and that we are knaves?"

"If the necessity to destroy one civilization or the other arose, and the decision were mine to make, I would rule against you because of the number of sentient beings involved."

Trobt cut the argument out from under me. "What if the situation were reversed, and your side was in the minority? Would you choose to let them die?"

I bowed my head as I gave him the truthful answer. "I would choose for my own side, no matter what the circumstances."

The interrogation was over.

* * *

On the drive to Trobt's home I was dead tired, and must have slept for a few minutes with my eyes open. With a start I heard Trobt say, ". . . that a man with ability enough to be a games—chess—master is given no authority over his people, but merely consulted on occasional abstract questions of tactics."

"It is the nature of the problem." I caught the gist of his comment from his last words and did my best to answer it. I wanted nothing less than to engage in conversation, but I realized that the interest he was showing now was just the kind I had tried to guide him to, earlier in the evening. If I could get him to

understand us better, our motivations and ideals, perhaps even our frailties, there would be more hope for a compatible meeting of minds. "Among peoples of such mixed natures, such diverse histories and philosophies, and different ways of life, most administrative problems are problems of a choice of whims, of changing and conflicting goals; not *how* to do what a people want done, but *what* they want done, and whether their next generation will want it enough to make work on it, now, worthwhile."

"They sound insane," Trobt said. "Are your administrators supposed to serve the flickering goals of demented minds?"

"We must weigh values. What is considered good may be a matter of viewpoint, and may change from place to place, from generation to generation. In determining what people feel and what their unvoiced wants are, a talent of strategy, and an impatience with the illogic of others, are not qualifications."

"The good is good, how can it change?" Trobt asked. "I do not understand."

I saw that truly he could not understand, since he had seen nothing of the clash of philosophies among a mixed people. I tried to think of ways it could be explained; how to show him that a people who let their emotions control them more than their logic, would unavoidably do many things they could not justify or take pride in—but that that emotional predominance was what had enabled them to grow, and spread throughout their part of the galaxy—and be, in the main, happy.

* * *

I was tired, achingly tired. More, the events of the long day, and Velda's heavier gravity had taken me to the last stages of exhaustion. Yet I wanted to keep that weakness from Trobt. It was possible that he, and the other Veldians, would judge the Humans by what they observed in me.

Trobt's attention was on his driving and he did not notice that I followed his conversation only with difficulty. "Have you had only the two weeks of practice in the Game, since you came?" he asked.

I kept my eyes open with an effort and breathed deeply. Velda's one continent, capping the planet on its upper third; merely touched what would have been a temperate zone. During its short summer its mean temperature hung in the low sixties. At night it dropped to near freezing. The cold night air bit into my lungs and drove the fog of exhaustion from my brain.

"No," I answered Trobt's question. "I learned it before I came. A chess adept wrote me, in answer to an article on chess, that a man from one of the outworlds had shown him a game of greater richness and flexibility than chess, with much the same feeling to the player, and had beaten him in three games of chess after only two games to learn it, and had said that on his own planet this chesslike game was the basis for the amount of authority with which a man is invested. The stranger would not name his planet.

"I hired an investigating agency to learn the whereabouts of this planet. There was none in the Ten Thousand Worlds. That meant that the man had been a very ingenious liar, or—that he had come from Velda."

"It was I, of course," Trobt acknowledged.

"I realized that from your conversation. The sender of the letter," I resumed, "was known to me as a chess champion of two Worlds. The matter tantalized my thoughts for weeks, and finally I decided to try to arrange a visit to Velda. If you had this game, I wanted to try myself against your skilled ones."

"I understand that desire very well," Trobt said. "The same temptation caused me to be indiscreet when I visited your Worlds. I have seldom been able to resist the opportunity for an intellectual gambit."

"It wasn't much more than a guess that I would find the Game on Velda," I said. "But the lure was too strong for me to pass it by."

"Even if you came intending to challenge, you had little enough time to learn to play as you have—against men who have spent lifetimes learning. I'd like to try you again soon, if I may."

"Certainly." I was in little mood or condition to welcome any further polite conversation. And I did not appreciate the irony of his request—to the best of my knowledge I was still under a sentence of early death.

Trobt must have caught the bleakness in my reply for he glanced quickly over his shoulder at me.

"There will be time," he said, gently for him. "Several days at least. You will be my guest." I knew that he was doing his best to be kind. His decision that I must die had not been prompted by any meanness of nature: To him it was only—inevitable.

* * *

The next day I sat at one end of a Games table in a side wing of his home while Trobt leaned against the wall to my left. "Having a like nature I can well understand the impulse that brought you here," he said. "The supreme gamble. Playing—with your life the stake in the game. Nothing you've ever experienced can compare with it. And even now—when you have lost, and will die—you do not regret it, I'm certain."

"I'm afraid you're overestimating my courage, and misinterpreting my intentions," I told him, feeling instinctively that this would be a good time to again present my arguments. "I came because I hoped to reach a better understanding. We feel that an absolutely unnecessary war, with its resulting death and destruction, would be foolhardy. And I fail to see your viewpoint. Much of it strikes me as stupid racial pride."

Trobt ignored the taunt. "The news of your coming is the first topic of conversation in The City," he said. "The clans understand that you have come to challenge; one man against a nation. They greatly admire your audacity."

Look," I said, becoming angry and slipping into Earthian. "I don't know whether you consider me a damn fool or not. But if you think I came here expecting to die; that I'm looking forward to it with pleasure—"

He stopped me with an idle gesture of one hand. "You deceive yourself if you believe what you say," he commented. "Tell me this: Would you have stayed away if you had known just how great the risk was to be?"

I was surprised to find that I did not have a ready answer to his question.

"Shall we play?" Trobt asked.

* * *

We played three games; Trobt with great skill, employing diversified and ingenious attacks. But he still had that bit too much audacity in his execution. I won each time.

"You're undoubtedly a Master," Trobt said at the end of the third game. "But that isn't all of it. Would you like me to tell you why I can't beat you?"

"Can you?" I asked.

"I think so," he said. "I wanted to try against you again and again, because each time it did not seem that you had defeated me, but only that I had played badly, made childish blunders, and that I lost each game before we ever came to grips. Yet when I entered the duel against you a further time, I'd begin to blunder again."

He shoved his hands more deeply under his weapons belt, leaning back and observing me with his direct inspection. "My blundering then has to do with you, rather than myself," he said. "Your play is excellent, of course, but there is more beneath the surface than above. This is your talent: You lose the first game to see an opponent's weakness—and play it against him."

I could not deny it. But neither would I concede it. Any small advantage I might hold would be sorely needed later.

"I understand Humans a little," Trobt said. "Enough to know that very few of them would come to challenge us without some other purpose. They have no taste for death, with glory or without."

Again I did not reply.

"I believe," Trobt said, "that you came here to challenge in your own way, which is to find any weakness we might have, either in our military, or in some odd way, in our very selves."

Once again—with a minimum of help from me—he had arrived in his reasoning at a correct answer. From here on—against this man—I would have to walk a narrow line.

"I think," Trobt said more slowly, glancing down at the board between us, then back at my

expression, "that this may be the First Game, and that you are more dangerous than you seem, that you are accepting the humiliation of allowing yourself to be thought of as weaker than you are, in actuality. You intend to find our weakness, and you expect somehow to tell your states what you find."

I looked across at him without moving. "What weakness do you fear I've seen?" I countered.

Trobt placed his hands carefully on the board in front of him and rose to his feet. Before he could say what he intended a small boy pulling something like a toy riding-horse behind him came into the game room and grabbed Trobt's trouser leg. He was the first blond child I had seen on Velda.

The boy pointed at the swords on the wall. "Da," he said beseechingly, making reaching motions. "Da."

Trobt kept his attention on me. After a moment a faint humorless smile moved his lips. He seemed to grow taller, with the impression a strong man gives when he remembers his strength. "You will find no weakness," he said. He sat down again and placed the child on his lap.

The boy grabbed immediately at the abacus hanging on Trobt's belt and began playing with it, while Trobt stroked his hair. All the Veldians dearly loved children, I had noticed.

"Do you have any idea how many of our ships were used to wipe out your fleet?" he asked abruptly.

As I allowed myself to show the interest I felt he put a hand on the boy's shoulder and leaned forward. "One," he said.

* * *

I very nearly called Trobt a liar—one ship obliterating a thousand—before I remembered that Veldians were not liars, and that Trobt obviously was not lying. Somehow this small under-populated planet had developed a science of weapons that vastly exceeded that of the Ten Thousand Worlds.

I had thought that perhaps my vacation on this Games-mad planet would result in some mutual information that would bring quick negotiation or conciliation: That players of a chesslike game would be easy to approach: That I would meet men intelligent enough to see the absurdity of such an ill-fated war against the overwhelming odds of the Ten Thousand Worlds Federation. Intelligent enough to foresee the disaster that would result from such a fight. It began to look as if the disaster might be to the Ten Thousand and not to the one.

* * *

Thinking, I walked alone in Trobt's roof garden.

Walking in Velda's heavy gravity took more energy than I cared to expend, but too long a period without exercise brought a dull ache to the muscles of my shoulders and at the base of my neck.

This was my third evening in the house. I had slept at least ten hours each night since I arrived, and found myself exhausted at day's end, unless I was able to take a nap or lie down during the afternoon.

The flowers and shrubbery in the garden seemed to feel the weight of gravity also, for most of them grew low, and many sent creepers out along the ground. Overhead strange formations of stars clustered thickly and shed a glow on the garden very like Earth's moonlight.

I was just beginning to feel the heavy drag in my leg tendons when a woman's voice said, "Why don't you rest a while?" It spun me around as I looked for the source of the voice.

I found her in a nook in the bushes, seated on a contour chair that allowed her to stretch out in a half-reclining position. She must have weighed near to two hundred—Earth-weight—pounds.

But the thing that had startled me more than the sound of her voice was that she had spoken in the universal language of the Ten Thousand Worlds. And without accent!

"You're—?" I started to ask.

"Human," she finished for me.

"How did you get here?" I inquired eagerly.

"With my husband." She was obviously enjoying my astonishment. She was a beautiful woman, in a gentle bovine way, and very friendly. Her blond hair was done up in tight ringlets.

"You mean . . . Trobt?" I asked.

"Yes." As I stood trying to phrase my wonderment into more questions, she asked, "You're the Earthman, aren't you?"

I nodded. "Are you from Earth?"

"No," she answered. "My home world is Mandel's Planet, in the Thumb group."

She indicated a low hassock of a pair, and I seated myself on the lower and leaned an elbow on the higher, beginning to smile. It would have been difficult not to smile in the presence of anyone so contented. "How did you meet Trobt?" I asked.

"It's a simple love story. Kalin visited Mandel—without revealing his true identity of course—met, and courted me. I learned to love him, and agreed to come to his world as his wife."

"Did you know that he wasn't . . . That he . . ." I stumbled over just how to phrase the question. And wondered if I should have started it.

Her teeth showed white and even as she smiled. She propped a pillow under one plump arm and finished my sentence for me. ". . . That he wasn't Human?" I was grateful for the way she put me at ease—almost as though we had been old friends.

I nodded.

"I didn't know." For a moment she seemed to draw back into her thoughts, as though searching for something she had almost forgotten. "He couldn't tell me. It was a secret he had to keep. When I arrived here and learned that his planet wasn't a charted world, was not even Human, I was a little uncertain and lonesome. But not frightened. I knew Kalin would never let me be hurt. Even my lonesomeness left quickly. Kalin and I love each other very deeply. I couldn't be more happy than I am now."

She seemed to see I did not consider that my question had been answered—completely. "You're wondering still if I mind that he isn't Human, aren't you?" she asked. "Why should I? After all, what does it mean to be 'Human'? It is only a word that differentiates one group of people from another. I seldom think of the Veldians as being different—and certainly never that they're beneath me."

"Does it bother you—if you'll pardon this curiosity of mine—that you will never be able to bear Kalin's children?"

"The child you saw the first morning is my son," she answered complacently.

"But that's impossible," I blurted.

"Is it?" she asked. "You saw the proof."

"I'm no expert at this sort of thing," I said slowly, "but I've always understood that the possibility of two separate species producing offspring was a million to one."

"Greater than that, probably," she agreed. "But whatever the odds, sooner or later the number is bound to come up. This was it."

I shook my head, but there was no arguing a fact. "Wasn't it a bit unusual that Kalin didn't marry a Veldian woman?"

"He has married—two of them," she answered. "I'm his third wife."

"Then they do practice polygamy," I said. "Are you content with such a marriage?"

"Oh yes," she answered. "You see, besides being very much loved, I occupy a rather enviable position here. I, ah . . ." She grew slightly flustered. "Well . . . the other women—the Veldian women—can bear children only once every eight years, and during the other seven . . ." She hesitated again and I saw a tinge of red creep into her cheeks. She was obviously embarrassed, but she laughed and resolutely went on.

"During the other seven, they lose their feminine appearance, and don't think of themselves as women. While I . . ." I watched with amusement as her color deepened and her glance dropped. "I am always of the same sex, as you might say, always a woman. My husband is the envy of all his friends."

After her first reticence she talked freely, and I learned then the answer to the riddle of the boy-girls of Velda. And at least one reason for their great affection for children.

One year of fertility in eight . . .

Once again I saw the imprint of the voracious dleeth on this people's culture. In their age-old struggle with their cold planet and its short growing seasons—and more particularly with the dleeth—the Veldian women had been shaped by evolution to better fit their environment. The women's strength could not be spared for frequent childbearing—so childbearing had been limited. Further, one small child could be carried in the frequent flights from the dleeth, but not more than one. Nature had done its best to cope with the problem: In the off seven years she tightened the women's flesh, atrophying glands and organs—making them nonfunctional—and changing their bodies to be more fit to labor and survive—and to fight, if necessary. It was an excellent adaptation—for a time and environment where a low birth rate was an asset to survival.

But this adaptation had left only a narrow margin for race perpetuation. Each woman could bear only four children in her lifetime. That, I realized as we talked, was the reason why the Veldians had not colonized other planets, even though they had space flight—and why they probably never would, without a drastic change in their biological make-up. That left so little ground for a quarrel between them and the Ten Thousand Worlds. Yet here we were, poised to spring into a death struggle.

"You are a very unusual woman." My attention returned to Trobt's wife. "In a very unusual situation."

"Thank you," she accepted it as a compliment. She made ready to rise. "I hope you enjoy your visit here. And that I may see you again before you return to Earth."

I realized then that she did not know of my peculiar position in her home. I wondered if she knew even of the threat of war between us and her adopted people. I decided not, or she would surely have spoken of it. Either Trobt had deliberately avoided telling her, perhaps to spare her the pain it would have caused, or she had noted that the topic of my presence was disturbing to him and had tactfully refrained from inquiring. For just a moment I wondered if I should explain everything to her, and have her use the influence she must have with Trobt. I dismissed the idea as unworthy—and useless.

"Good night," I said.

* * *

The next evening as we rode in a tricar Trobt asked if I would like to try my skill against a better Games player.

"I had assumed you were the best," I said.

"Only the second best," he answered. "It would he interesting to compare your game with that of our champion. If you can whip him, perhaps we will have to revise our opinion of you Humans."

He spoke as though in jest, but I saw more behind his words than he intended me to see. Here at last might be a chance to do a positive service for my side. "I would be happy to play," I said.

Trobt parked the tricar on a side avenue and we walked perhaps a hundred yards. We stopped at the door of a small one-story stone house and Trobt tapped with his fingernails on a hollow gong buried in the wood.

After a minute a curtain over the door glass was drawn back and an old woman with straggly gray hair peered out at us. She recognized Trobt and opened the door.

We went in. Neither Trobt nor the old woman spoke. She turned her back after closing the door and went to stir embers in a stone grate.

Trobt motioned with his head for me to follow and led the way into a back room.

"Robert O. Lang," he said, "I would like you to meet Yondtl."

* * *

I looked across the room in the direction Trobt had indicated. My first impression was of a great white blob, propped up on a couch and supported by the wall at its back.

Then the thing moved. Moved its eyes. It was alive. Its eyes told me also that it was a man. If I could call it a man.

His head was large and bloated, with blue eyes, washed almost colorless, peering out of deep

pouches of flesh. He seemed to have no neck; almost as though his great head were merely an extension of the trunk, and separated only by puffy folds of fat. Other lappings of flesh hung from his body in great thick rolls.

It took another minute of fascinated inspection before I saw that he had no arms, and that no legs reached from his body to the floor. The entire sight of him made me want to leave the room and be sick.

"Robert O. Lang is an Earthian who would challenge you, sir," Trobt addressed the monstrosity.

The other gave no sign that I could see but Trobt went to pull a Games table at the side of the room over toward us. "I will serve as his hands," Trobt said.

The pale blue eyes never left my face.

I stood without conscious thought until Trobt pushed a chair under me. Mentally I shook myself. With unsteady hands—I had to do something with them—I reached for the pukts before me. "Do you . . . do you have a choice . . . of colors, sir?" I stammered, trying to make up for my earlier rudeness of staring.

The lips of the monstrosity quivered, but he made no reply.

All this while Trobt had been watching me with amusement. "He is deaf and speechless," Trobt said. "Take either set. I will place the other before him."

Absently I pulled the red pieces toward me and placed them on their squares.

"In deference to you as a visitor, you will play 'second game counts,'" Trobt continued. He was still enjoying my consternation. "He always allows his opponent the first move. You may begin when you are ready."

With an effort I forced myself to concentrate on the playing board. My start, I decided, must be orthodox. I had to learn something of the type of game this . . . Yondtl . . . played. I moved the first row right hand pukt its two oblique and one left squares.

Yondtl inclined his head slightly. His lips moved. Trobt put his hand to a pukt and pushed it forward. Evidently Trobt read his lips. Very probably Yondtl could read ours also.

We played for almost an hour with neither of us losing a man.

I had tried several gambits; gambits that invited a misplay on Yondtl's part. But he made none. When he offered I was careful to make no mistakes of my own. We both played as though this first game were the whole contest.

Another hour went by. I deliberately traded three pukts with Yondtl, in an attempt to trick him into a misplay. None came.

I tried a single decoy gambit, and when nothing happened, followed with a second decoy. Yondtl countered each play. I marveled that he gave so little of his attention to the board. Always he seemed to be watching me. I played. He played. He watched me.

I sweated.

Yondtl set up an overt side pass that forced me to draw my pukts back into the main body. Somehow I received the impression that be was teasing me. It made me want to beat him down.

I decided on a crossed-force, double decoy gambit. I had never seen it employed. Because, I suspect, it is too involved, and open to error by its user. Slowly and painstakingly I set it up and pressed forward.

The Caliban in the seat opposite me never paused. He matched me play for play. And though Yondtl's features had long since lost the power of expression, his pale eyes seemed to develop a blue luster. I realized, almost with a shock of surprise, that the fat monstrosity was happy—intensely happy.

I came out of my brief reverie with a start. Yondtl had made an obvious play. I had made an obvious counter. I was startled to hear him sound a cry somewhere between a muffled shout and an idiot's laugh, and my attention jerked back to the board. I had lost the game!

My brief moment of abstraction had given Yondtl the opportunity to make a pass too subtle to be detected with part of my faculties occupied elsewhere.

I pushed back my chair. "I've had enough for tonight," I told Trobt. If I were to do the Humans a service, I would need rest before trying Yondtl in the second game.

We made arrangements to meet again the following evening, and let ourselves out. The old woman was nowhere in sight.

* * *

The following evening when we began play I was prepared to give my best. I was rested and eager. And I had a concrete plan. Playing the way I had been doing I would never beat Yondtl, I'd decided after long thought. A stand-off was the best I could hope for. Therefore the time had come for more consummate action. I would engage him in a triple decoy gambit!

I had no illusion that I could handle it—the way it should be handled. I doubt that any man, Human or Veldian, could. But at least I would play it with the greatest skill I had, giving my best to every move, and push the game up the scale of reason and involution—up and up—until either Yondtl or I became lost in its innumerable complexities, and fell.

As I attacked, the complexes and complications would grow gradually more numerous, become more and more difficult, until they embraced a span greater than one of us had the capacity to encompass, and the other would win.

The Game began and I forced it into the pattern I had planned. Each play, and each maneuver, became all important, and demanding of the greatest skill I could command. Each pulled at the core of my brain, dragging out the last iota of sentient stuff that writhed there. Yondtl stayed with me, complex gambit through complex gambit.

When the strain became too great I forced my mind to pause, to rest, and to be ready for the next clash. At the first break I searched the annotator. It was working steadily, with an almost smooth throb of efficiency, keeping the position of each pukt—and its value—strong in the forefront of visualization. But something was missing!

A minute went by before I spotted the fault. The move of each pukt involved so many possibilities, so many avenues of choice, that no exact answer was predictable on any one. The number and variation of gambits open on every play, each subject to the multitude of Yondtl's counter moves, stretched the possibilities beyond prediction. The annotator was a harmonizing, perceptive force, but not a creative, initiating one. It operated in a statistical manner, similar to a computer, and could not perform effectively where a crucial factor or factors were unknown, or concealed, as they were here.

My greatest asset was negated.

At the end of the third hour I began to feel a steady pain in my temples, as though a tight metal band pressed against my forehead and squeezed it inward. The only reaction I could discern in Yondtl was that the blue glint in his eyes had become brighter. All his happiness seemed gathered there.

Soon my pauses became more frequent. Great waves of brain weariness had to be allowed to subside before I could play again.

And at last it came.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, Yondtl threw a pukt across the board and took my second decoy—and there was no way for me to retaliate! Worse, my entire defense was smashed.

I felt a kind of calm dismay. My shoulders sagged and I pushed the board away from me and slumped in my chair.

I was beaten.

* * *

The next day I escaped from Trobt. It was not difficult. I simply walked away.

For three days I followed the wall of The City, looking for a way out. Each gate was guarded. I watched unobserved and saw that a permit was necessary when leaving. If I found no other way I would make a run for it. The time of decision never came.

Meanwhile to obtain food I was forced into some contact with The City's people, and learned to know them better. Adding this new knowledge to the old I decided that I liked them.

Their manners and organization—within the framework of their culture—was as simple and effective as their architecture. There was a strong emphasis on pride, on strength and honor, on skill, and on living a dangerous life with a gambler's self-command, on rectitude, on truth, and the unbreakable bond of loyalty among family and friends. Lying, theft, and deceit were practically unknown.

I did detect what might have been a universal discontent in their young men. They had a warrior heritage and nature which, with the unity of the tribes and the passing of the dleeth—and no one to fight except themselves—had left them with an unrecognized futility of purpose. They had not quite been able to achieve a successful sublimation of their post-warrior need to fight in the Games. Also, the custom of polygamy—necessary in the old days, and desired still by those able to attain it—left many sexually frustrated.

I weighed all these observations in my reactions to the Veldians, and toward the end a strange feeling—a kind of wistfulness—came as I observed. I felt kin to them, as if these people had much in common with myself. And I felt that it was too bad that life was not fundamentally so simple that one could discard the awareness of other ways of life, of other values and philosophies that bid against one another, and against one's attention, and make him cynical of the philosophy he lives by, and dies for. Too bad that I could not see and take life as that direct, and as that simple.

The third day I climbed a spiral ramp to the top of a tower that rose above the walls of Hearth and gazed out over miles of swirling red sand. Directly beneath me stretched a long concrete ribbon of road. On the road were dozens of slowly crawling vehicles that might have been caterpillar trucks of Earth!

In my mind the pattern clicked into place. Hearth was not typical of the cities of Velda!

It was an anachronism, a revered Homeplace, a symbol of their past, untainted by the technocracy that was pursued elsewhere. This was the capital city, from which the heads of the government still ruled, perhaps for sentimental reasons, but it was not typical.

* * *

My stay in Hearth was cut short when I descended from the tower and found Trobt waiting for me.

As I might have expected, he showed no sign of anger with me for having fled into The City. His was the universal Veldian viewpoint. To them all life was the Game. With the difference that it was played on an infinitely larger board. Every man, and every woman, with whom the player had contact, direct or indirect, were pukts on the Board. The player made his decisions, and his plays, and how well he made them determined whether he won or lost. His every move, his every joining of strength with those who could help him, his every maneuver against those who would oppose him, was his choice to make, and he rose or fell on the wisdom of the choice. Game, in Velda, means Duel, means struggle and the test of man against the opponent, Life. I had made my escape as the best play as I saw it. Trobt had no recriminations.

The evening of the next day Trobt woke me. Something in his constrained manner brought me to my feet. "Not what you think," he said, "but we must question you again. We will try our own methods this time."

"Torture?"

"You will die under the torture, of course. But for the questioning it will not be necessary. You will talk."

The secret of their method was very simple. Silence. I was led to a room within a room within a room. Each with very thick walls. And left alone. Here time meant nothing.

Gradually I passed from boredom to restlessness, to anxiety, briefly through fear, to enervating frustration, and finally to stark apathy.

When Trobt and his three accompanying guardsmen led me into the blinding daylight I talked without hesitation or consideration of consequences.

"Did you find any weakness in the Veldians?"

"Yes."

I noted then a strange thing. It was the annotator—the thing in my brain that was a part of me, and

yet apart from me—that had spoken. It was not concerned with matters of emotion; with sentiments of patriotism, loyalty, honor, and self-respect. It was interested only in my—and its own—survival. Its logic told it that unless I gave the answers my questioner wanted I would die. That, it intended to prevent.

I made one last desperate effort to stop that other part of my mind from assuming control—and sank lower into my mental impotence.

* * *

"What is our weakness?"

"Your society is doomed." With the answer I realized that the annotator had arrived at another of its conclusions.

"Why?"

"There are many reasons."

"Give one."

"Your culture is based on a need for struggle, for combat. When there is no one to fight it must fall."

Trobt was dealing with a familiar culture now. He knew the questions to ask.

"Explain that last statement."

"Your culture is based on its impetuous need to battle . . . it is armed and set against dangers and the expectation of danger . . . fostering the pride of courage under stress. There is no danger now . . . nothing to fight, no place to spend your over-aggressiveness, except against each other in personal duels. Already your decline is about to enter the bloody circus and religion stage, already crumbling in the heart while expanding at the outside. And this is your first civilization . . . like a boy's first love . . . you have no experience of a fall in your history before to have recourse to—no cushioning of philosophy to accept it."

For a time Trobt maintained a puzzled silence. I wondered if he had the depth of understanding to accept the truth and significance of what he had heard. "Is there no solution?" he asked at last.

"Only a temporary one." Now it was coming.

"Explain."

"War with the Ten Thousand Worlds."

"Explain."

"Your willingness to hazard, and eagerness to battle is no weakness when you are armed with superior weapons, and are fighting against an opponent as disorganized, and as incapable of effective organization as the Ten Thousand Worlds, against your long-range weapons and subtle traps."

"Why do you say the solution is only temporary?"

"You cannot win the war. You will seem to win, but it will be an illusion. You will win the battles, kill billions, rape Worlds, take slaves, and destroy ships and weapons. But after that you will be forced to hold the subjection. Your numbers will not be expendable. You will be spread thin, exposed to other cultures that will influence you, change you. You will lose skirmishes, and in the end you will be forced back. Then will come a loss of old ethics, corruption and opportunism will replace your honor and you will know unspeakable shame and dishonor . . . your culture will soon be weltering back into a barbarism and disorganization which in its corruption and despair will be nothing like the proud tribal primitive life of its first barbarism. You will be aware of the difference and unable to return."

I understood Trobt's perplexity as I finished. He could not accept what I told him because to him winning was only a matter of a military victory, a victory of strength; Velda had never experienced defeat as a weakness from within. My words made him uneasy, but he did not understand. He shrugged. "Do we have any other weakness?" he asked.

"Your women."

"Explain."

"They are 'set' for the period when they greatly outnumbered their men. Your compatible ratio is eight women to one man. Yet now it is one to one. Further, you produce too few children. Your

manpower must ever be in small supply. Worse, your shortage of women sponsors a covert despair and sadism in your young men . . . a hunger and starvation to follow instinct, to win women by courage and conquest and battle against danger . . . that only a war can restrain."

"The solution?"

"Beat the Federation. Be in a position to have free access to their women."

Came the final ignominy. "Do you have a means of reporting back to the Ten Thousand Worlds?"

"Yes. Buried somewhere inside me is a nerve-twitch tape. Flesh pockets of chemicals are stored there also. When my body temperature drops fifteen degrees below normal the chemicals will be activated and will use the tissues of my body for fuel and generate sufficient energy to transmit the information on the tape back to the Ten Thousand Worlds."

That was enough.

* * *

"Do you still intend to kill me?" I asked Trobt the next day as we walked in his garden.

"Do not fear," he answered. "You will not be cheated of an honorable death. All Velda is as eager for it as you."

"Why?" I asked. "Do they see me as a madman?"

"They see you as you are. They cannot conceive of one man challenging a planet, except to win himself a bright and gory death on a page of history, the first man to deliberately strike and die in the coming war—not an impersonal clash of battleships, but a *man* declaring personal battle against men. We would not deprive you of that death. Our admiration is too great. We want the symbolism of your blood now just as greatly as you want it yourself. Every citizen is waiting to watch you die—gloriously."

I realized now that all the while he had interpreted my presence here in this fantastic way. And I suspected that I had no arguments to convince him differently.

Trobt had hinted that I would die under torture. I thought of the old histories of Earth that I had read. Of the warrior race of North American Indians. A captured enemy must die. But if he had been an honorable enemy he was given an honorable death. He was allowed to die under the stress most familiar to them. Their strongest ethic was a cover-up for the defeated, the universal expressionless suppressal of reaction in conquering or watching conquest, so as not to shame the defeated. Public torture—with the women, as well as warriors, watching—the chance to exhibit fortitude, all the way to the breaking point, and beyond. That was considered the honorable death, while it was a shameful trick to quietly slit a man's throat in his sleep without giving him a chance to fight—to show his scorn of flinching under the torture.

Here I was the Honorable Enemy who had exhibited courage. They would honor me, and satisfy their hunger for an Enemy, by giving me the breaking point test.

But I had no intention of dying!

* * *

"You will not kill me," I addressed Trobt. "And there will be no war."

He looked at me as though I had spoken gibberish.

My next words, I knew, would shock him. "I'm going to recommend unconditional surrender," I said.

Trobt's head which he had turned away swiveled sharply back to me. His mouth opened and he made several motions to speak before succeeding. "Are you serious?"

"Very," I answered.

Trobt's face grew gaunt and the skin pressed tight against his cheekbones—almost as though he were making the surrender rather than I. "Is this decision dictated by your logic," he asked dryly, "or by faintness of heart?"

I did not honor the question enough to answer.

Neither did he apologize. "You understand that unconditional surrender is the only kind we will accept?"

I nodded wearily.

"Will they agree to your recommendation?"

"No," I answered. "Humans are not cowards, and they will fight—as long as there is any slightest hope of success. I will not be able to convince them that their defeat is inevitable. But I can prepare them for what is to come. I hope to shorten the conflict immeasurably."

"I can do nothing but accept," Trobt said after a moment of thought. "I will arrange transportation back to Earth for you tomorrow." He paused and regarded me with expressionless eyes. "You realize that an enemy who surrenders without a struggle is beneath contempt?"

The blood crept slowly into my cheeks. It was difficult to ignore his taunt. "Will you give me six months before you move against us?" I asked. "The Federation is large. I will need time to bring my message to all."

"You have your six months." Trobt was still not through with me, personally. "On the exact day that period ends I will expect your return to Velda. We will see if you have any honor left."

"I will be back," I said.

* * *

During the next six months I spread my word throughout the Ten Thousand Worlds. I met disbelief everywhere. I had not expected otherwise. The last day I returned to Velda.

Two days later Velda's Council acted. They were going to give the Humans no more time to organize counteraction. I went in the same spaceship that carried Trobt. I intended to give him any advice he needed about the Worlds. I asked only that his first stop be at the Jason's Fleece fringe.

Beside us sailed a mighty armada of warships, spaced in a long line that would encompass the entire portion of the galaxy occupied by the Ten Thousand Worlds. For an hour we moved ponderously forward, then the stars about us winked out for an instant. The next moment a group of Worlds became visible on the ship's vision screen. I recognized them as Jason's Fleece.

One World expanded until it appeared the size of a baseball. "Quagman," Trobt said.

Quagman, the trouble spot of the Ten Thousand Worlds. Dominated by an unscrupulous clique that ruled by vendetta, it had been the source of much trouble and vexation to the other Worlds. Its leaders were considered little better than brigands. They had received me with much apparent courtesy. In the end they had even agreed to surrender to the Veldians—when and if they appeared. I had accepted their easy concurrence with askance, but they were my main hope.

Two Veldians left our ship in a scooter. We waited ten long, tense hours. When word finally came back it was from the Quagmans themselves. The Veldian envoys were being held captive. They would be released upon the delivery of two billion dollars—in the currency of any recognized World—and the promise of immunity.

The fools!

Trobt's face remained impassive as he received the message.

We waited several more hours. Both Trobt and I watched the green mottled baseball on the vision screen. It was Trobt who first pointed out a small, barely discernible, black spot on the upper lefthand corner of Quagman.

As the hours passed, and the black spot swung slowly to the right as the planet revolved, it grew almost imperceptibly larger. When it disappeared over the edge of the world we slept.

In the morning the spot appeared again, and now it covered half the face of the planet. Another ten hours and the entire planet became a blackened cinder.

Quagman was dead.

* * *

The ship moved next to Mican.

Mican was a sparsely populated prison planet. Criminals were usually sent to newly discovered Worlds on the edge of the Human expansion circle, and allowed to make their own adjustments toward

achieving a stable government. Men with the restless natures that made them criminals on their own highly civilized Worlds, made the best pioneers. However, it always took them several generations to work their way up from anarchy to a co-operative government. Mican had not yet had that time. I had done my best in the week I spent with them to convince them to organize, and to be prepared to accept any terms the Veldians might offer. The gesture, I feared, was useless but I had given all the arguments I knew.

A second scooter left with two Veldian representatives. When it returned Trobt left the control room to speak with them.

He returned, and shook his head. I knew it was useless to argue.

Mican died.

At my request Trobt agreed to give the remaining Jason's Fleece Worlds a week to consider—on the condition that they made no offensive forays. I wanted them to have time to fully assess what had happened to the other two Worlds—to realize that that same stubbornness would result in the same disaster for them.

At the end of the third twenty-four-hour period the Jason's Fleece Worlds surrendered—unconditionally. They had tasted blood; and recognized futility when faced with it. That had been the best I had been able to hope for, earlier.

* * *

Each sector held off surrendering until the one immediately ahead had given in. But the capitulation was complete at the finish. No more blood had had to be shed.

The Veldians' terms left the Worlds definitely subservient, but they were neither unnecessarily harsh, nor humiliating. Velda demanded specific limitations on Weapons and war-making potentials; the obligation of reporting all technological and scientific progress; and colonial expansion only by prior consent.

There was little actual occupation of the Federation Worlds, but the Veldians retained the right to inspect any and all functions of the various governments. Other aspects of social and economic methods would be subject only to occasional checks and investigation. Projects considered questionable would be supervised by the Veldians at their own discretion.

The one provision that caused any vigorous protest from the Worlds was the Veldian demand for Human women. But even this was a purely emotional reaction, and died as soon as it was more fully understood. The Veldians were not barbarians. They used no coercion to obtain our women. They only demanded the same right to woo them as the citizens of the Worlds had. No woman would be taken without her free choice. There could be no valid protest to that.

In practice it worked quite well. On nearly all the Worlds there were more women than men, so that few men had to go without mates because of the Veldians' inroads. And—by Human standards—they seldom took our most desirable women. Because the acquiring of weight was corollary with the Veldian women becoming sexually attractive, their men had an almost universal preference for fleshy women. As a result many of our women who would have had difficulty securing Human husbands found themselves much in demand as mates of the Veldians.

* * *

Seven years passed after the Worlds' surrender before I saw Kalin Trobt again.

The pact between the Veldians and the Worlds had worked out well, for both sides. The demands of the Veldians involved little sacrifice by the Federation, and the necessity of reporting to a superior authority made for less wrangling and jockeying for advantageous position among the Worlds themselves.

The fact that the Veldians had taken more than twenty million of our women—it was the custom for each Veldian male to take a human woman for one mate—caused little dislocation or discontent. The number each lost did less than balance the ratio of the sexes.

For the Veldians the pact solved the warrior-set frustrations, and the unrest and sexual starvation of their males. Those men who demanded action and adventure were given supervisory posts on the

Worlds as an outlet for their drives. All could now obtain mates; mates whose biological make-up did not necessitate an eight to one ratio.

Each year it was easier for the Humans to understand the Veldians and to meet them on common grounds socially. Their natures became less rigid, and they laughed more—even at themselves, when the occasion demanded.

This was especially noticeable among the younger Veldians, just reaching an adult status. In later years when the majority of them would have a mixture of human blood, the difference between us would become even less pronounced.

* * *

Trobt had changed little during those seven years. His hair had grayed some at the temples, and his movements were a bit less supple, but he looked well. Much of the intensity had left his aquiline features, and he seemed content.

We shook hands with very real pleasure. I led him to chairs under the shade of a tree in my front yard and brought drinks.

"First, I want to apologize for having thought you a coward," he began, after the first conventional pleasantries. "I know now I was very wrong. I did not realize for years, however, just what had happened." He gave his wry smile. "You know what I mean, I presume?"

I looked at him inquiringly.

"There was more to your decision to capitulate than was revealed. When you played the Game your forte was finding the weakness of an opponent. And winning the second game. You made no attempt to win the first. I see now, that as on the boards, your surrender represented only the conclusion of the first game. You were keeping our weakness to yourself, convinced that there would be a second game. And that your Ten Thousand Worlds would win it. As you have."

"What would you say your weakness was?" By now I suspected he knew everything, but I wanted to be certain.

"Our desire and need for Human women, of course."

There was no need to dissemble further. "The solution first came to me," I explained, "when I remembered a formerly independent Earth country named China. They lost most of their wars, but in the end they always won."

"Through their women?"

"Indirectly. Actually it was done by absorbing their conquerors. The situation was similar between Velda and the Ten Thousand Worlds. Velda won the war, but in a thousand years there will be no Veldians—racially."

"That was my first realization," Trobt said. "I saw immediately then how you had us hopelessly trapped. The marriage of our men to your women will blend our bloods until—with your vastly greater numbers—in a dozen generations there will be only traces of our race left.

"And what can we do about it?" Trobt continued. "We can't kill our beloved wives—and our children. We can't stop further acquisition of Human women without disrupting our society. Each generation the tie between us will become closer, our blood thinner, yours more dominant, as the intermingling continues. We cannot even declare war against the people who are doing this to us. How do you fight an enemy that has surrendered unconditionally?"

"You do understand that for your side this was the only solution to the imminent chaos that faced you?" I asked.

"Yes." I watched Trobt's swift mind go through its reasoning. I was certain he saw that Velda was losing only an arbitrary distinction of race, very much like the absorbing of the early clans of Velda into the family of the Danlee. Their dislike of that was very definitely only an emotional consideration. The blending of our bloods would benefit both; the resultant new race would be better and stronger because of that blending.

With a small smile Trobt raised his glass. "We will drink to the union of two great races," he said.

"And to you—the winner of the Second Game!"

Galaxy Science Fiction, under the inspired editorship of H. L. Gold, was not quite one year old, and looking none too permanent, when this story appeared in the summer of 1951. The author, Wyman Guin, was new; editor Gold promised us that his would be the most exciting fictional debut of the year, and he spoke sooth. The pity of it is that after offering this bizarre and wholly convincing portrait of a world of universal schizophrenia, Guin would produce no more than five or six other stories over the next decade and a half. There is talk that he is actively writing science fiction again: good news, if true.

Beyond Bedlam
Wyman Guin

THE OPENING afternoon class for Mary Walden's ego-shift was almost over, and Mary was practically certain the teacher would not call on her to recite her assignment, when Carl Blair got it into his mind to try to pass her a dirty note.

Mary knew it would be a screamingly funny Ego-Shifting Room limerick and was about to reach for the note when Mrs. Harris's voice crackled through the room.

"Carl Blair! I believe you have an important message. Surely you will want the whole class to hear it. Come forward, please."

As he made his way before the class, the boy's blush-covered freckles reappeared against his growing pallor. Haltingly and in an agonized monotone, he recited from the note:

"There was a young hyper named Phil,
Who kept a third head for a thrill.
Said he. It's all right,
I enjoy my plight.
I shift my third out when it's chill."'

The class didn't dare laugh. Their eyes burned down at their laps in shame. Mary managed to throw Carl Blair a compassionate glance as he returned to his seat, but she instantly regretted ever having been kind to him.

"Mary Walden, you seemed uncommonly interested in reading something just now. Perhaps you wouldn't mind reading your assignment to the class"

There it was, and just when the class was almost over.

Mary could have scratched Carl Blair. She clutched her paper grimly and strode to the front.

"Today's assignment in Pharmacy History is, 'Schizophrenia since the Ancient Pre-pharmacy days.' " Mary took enough breath to get into the first paragraph.

"Schizophrenia is where two or more personalities live in the same brain. The ancients of the 20th Century actually looked upon schizophrenia as a disease! Everyone felt it was very shameful to have a schizophrenic person in the family, and, since children lived right with the same parents who had borne them, it was very bad. If you were a schizophrenic child in the 20th Century, you would be locked up behind bars and people would call you—"

Mary blushed and stumbled over the daring word "—crazy".

"The ancients locked up strong ego groups right along with weak ones. Today we would lock up those ancient people."

The class agreed silently.

"But there were more and more schizophrenics to lock up. By 1950 the prisons and hospitals were so full of schizophrenic people that the ancients did not have room left to lock up any more. They were beginning to see that soon everyone would be schizophrenic.

"Of course, in the 20th Century, the schizophrenic people were almost as helpless and 'crazy' as the ancient Modern men. Naturally they did not fight wars and lead the silly life of the Moderns, but without proper drugs they couldn't control their Ego-shiftability. The personalities in a brain would always be fighting each other. One personality would cut the body or hurt it or make it filthy, so that when the other personality took over the body, it would have to suffer. No, the schizophrenic people of the 20th Century were almost as 'crazy' as the ancient Moderns.

"But then the drugs were invented one by one and the schizophrenic people of the 20th Century were freed of their troubles. With the drugs the personalities of each body were able to live side by side in harmony at last. It turned out that many schizophrenic people, called overendowed personalities, simply had so many talents and viewpoints that it took two or more personalities to handle everything.

"The drugs worked so well that the ancients had to let millions of schizophrenic people out from behind the bars of 'crazy' houses. That was the Great Emancipation of the 1990s. From then on, schizophrenic people had trouble only when they criminally didn't take their drugs. Usually, there are two egos in a schizophrenic person—the hyperalter, or prime ego, and the hypoalter, the alternate ego. There often were more than two, but the Medicorps makes us take our drugs so that won't happen to us.

"At last someone realized that if everyone took the new drugs, the great wars would stop. At the World Congress of 1997, laws were passed to make everyone take the drugs.

There were many fights over this because some people wanted to stay Modern and fight wars. The Medicorps was organized and told to kill anyone who wouldn't take their drugs as prescribed. Now the laws are enforced and everybody takes the drugs and the hyperalter and hypoalter are each allowed to have the body for an ego-shift of five days...."

Mary Walden faltered. She looked up at the faces of her classmates, started to turn to Mrs. Harris and felt the sickness growing in her head. Six great waves of crescendo silence washed through her. The silence swept away everything but the terror, which stood in her frail body like a shrieking rock.

Mary heard Mrs. Harris hurry to the shining dispensary along one wall of the classroom and return to stand before her with a swab of antiseptic and a disposable syringe.

Mrs. Harris helped her to a chair. A few minutes after the expert injection, Mary's mind struggled back from its core of silence.

"Mary, dear, I'm sorry. I haven't been watching you closely enough."

"Oh, Mrs. Harris..." Mary's chin trembled. "I hope it never happens again."

"Now, child, we all have to go through these things when we're young. You're just a little slower than the others in acclimatizing to the drugs. You'll be fourteen soon and the medicop assures me you'll be over this sort of thing just as the others are."

Mrs. Harris dismissed the class and when they had all filed from the room, she turned to Mary.

"I think, dear, we should visit the clinic together, don't you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Harris." Mary was not frightened now. She was just ashamed to be such a difficult child and so slow to acclimatize to the drugs.

As she and the teacher walked down the long corridor to the clinic, Mary made up her mind to tell the medicop what she thought was wrong. It was not herself. It was her hypoalter, that nasty little Susan Shorrs. Sometimes, when Susan had the body, the things Susan was doing and thinking came to Mary like what the ancients had called *dreams,* and Mary had never liked this secondary ego whom she could never really know. Whatever was wrong, it was Susan's doing. The filthy creature never took care of her hair, it was always so messy when Susan shifted the body to her.

Mrs. Harris waited while Mary went into the clinic.

Mary was glad to find Captain Thiel, the nice medicop, on duty. But she was silent while the X-rays were being taken, and, of course, while he got the blood samples, she concentrated on being brave.

Later, while Captain Thiel looked in her eyes with the bright little light, Mary said calmly, "Do you know my hypoalter, Susan Shorrs?"

The medicop drew back and made some notes on a pad before answering. "Why, yes. She's in here quite often too."

"Does she look like me?"

"Not much. She's a very nice little girl..." He hesitated, visibly fumbling.

Mary blurted, "Tell me truly, what's she like?"

Captain Thiel gave her his nice smile. "Well, I'll tell you a secret if you keep it to yourself."

"Oh, I promise."

He leaned over and whispered in her ear and she liked the clean odour of him. "She's not nearly as pretty as you are."

Mary wanted very badly to put her arms around him and hug him. Instead, wondering if Mrs. Harris, waiting outside, had heard, she drew back self-consciously and said, "Susan is the cause of all this trouble, the nasty little thing."

"Oh now!" the medicop exclaimed. "I don't think so, Mary. She's in trouble, too, you know."

"She still eats sauerkraut." Mary was defiant.

"But what's wrong with that?"

"You told her not to last year because it makes me sick on my shift. But it agrees in buckets with a little pig like her."

The medicop took this seriously. He made a note on the pad. "Mary, you should have complained sooner."

"Do you think my father might not like me because Susan Shorrs is my hypoalter?" she asked abruptly.

"I hardly think so, Mary. After all, he doesn't even know her. He's never on her ego-shift."

"A little bit," Mary said, and was immediately frightened.

Captain Thiel glanced at her sharply. "What do you mean by that, child?"

"Oh, nothing," Mary said hastily. "I just thought maybe he was."

"Let me see your pharmacase," he said rather severely.

Mary slipped the pharmacase off the belt at her waist and handed it to him. Captain Thiel extracted the prescription card from the back and threw it away. He slipped a new card in the taping machine on his desk and punched out a new prescription, which he reinserted in the pharmacase. In the space on the front, he wrote directions for Mary to take the drugs numbered from left to right.

Mary watched his serious face and remembered that he had complimented her about being prettier than Susan. "Captain Thiel, is your hypoalter as handsome as you are?"

The young medicop emptied the remains of the old prescription from the pharmacase and took it to the dispensary in the corner, where he slid it into the filling slot. He seemed unmoved by her question and simply muttered, "Much handsomer."

The machine automatically filled the case from the punched card on its back and he returned it to Mary. "Are you taking your drugs exactly as prescribed? You know there are very strict laws about that, and as soon as you are fourteen, you will be held to them."

Mary nodded solemnly. Great strait-jackets, who didn't know there were laws about taking your drugs?

There was a long pause and Mary knew she was supposed to leave. She wanted, though, to stay with Captain Thiel and talk with him. She wondered how it would be if he were appointed her father.

Mary was not hurt that her shy compliment to him had gone unnoticed. She had only wanted something to talk about.

Finally she said desperately, "Captain Thiel, how is it possible for a body to change as much from one ego-shift to another as it does between Susan and me?"

"There isn't all the change you imagine," he said. "Have you had your first physiology?"

"Yes. I was very good..." Mary saw from his smile that her inadvertent little conceit had trapped her.

"Then, Miss Mary Walden, how do *you* think it is possible?"

Why did teachers and medicops have to be this way? When all you wanted was to have them talk to you, they turned everything around and made you think.

She quoted unhappily from her schoolbook, "The main things in an ego-shift are the two vegetative nervous systems that translate the conditions of either personality to the blood and other organs right from the brain. The vegetative nervous systems change the rate at which the liver burns or stores sugar and the

rate at which the kidneys excrete..."

Through the closed door to the other room, Mrs. Harris's voice raised at the visiophone said distinctly, *"But, Mr. Walden…"*

"Reabsorb," corrected Captain Thiel.

"What?" She didn't know what to listen to the medicop or the distant voice of Mrs. Harris.

"It's better to think of the kidneys as reabsorbing salts and nutrients from the filtrated blood."

"Oh."

"But, Mr. Walden, we can overdo a good thing. The proper amount of neglect is definitely required for full development of some personality types and Mary certainly is one of those...."

"What about the pituitary gland that's attached to the brain and controls all the other glands during the shift of egos?" pressed Captain Thiel distractingly.

"But, Mr. Walden, too much neglect at this critical point may cause another personality to split off and we can't have that. Adequate personalities are congenital. A new one now would only rob the present personalities. You are the appointed parent of this child and the Board of Education will enforce your compliance with our diagnosis. . . ."

Mary's mind leaped to a page in one of her childhood storybooks. It was an illustration of a little girl resting beneath a great tree that overhung a brook. There were friendly little wild animals about. Mary could see the page clearly and she thought about it very hard instead of crying.

"Aren't you interested any more, Mary?" Captain Thiel was looking at her strangely.

The agitation in her voice was a surprise. "I have to get home. I have a lot of things to do."

Outside, when Mrs. Harris seemed suddenly to realize that something was wrong, and delicately probed to find out whether her angry voice had been overheard, Mary said calmly and as if it didn't matter, "Was my father home when you called him before?"

"Why—yes, Mary. But you mustn't pay any attention to conversations like that, darling."

You can't force him to like me, she thought to herself, and she was angry with Mrs. Harris because now her father would only dislike her more.

Neither her father nor her mother was home when Mary walked into the evening-darkened apartment. It was the first day of the family shift, and on that day, for many periods now, they had not been home until late.

Mary walked through the empty rooms, turning on lights. She passed up the electrically heated dinner her father had set out for her. Presently she found herself at the storage-room door. She opened it slowly.

After hesitating a while she went in and began an exhausting search for the old storybook with the picture in it.

Finally she knew she could not find it. She stood in the middle of the junk-filled room and began to cry.

The day which ended for Mary Walden in lonely weeping should have been, for Conrad Manz, a pleasant rest day with an hour of rocket racing in the middle of it. Instead, he awakened with a shock to hear his wife actually *talking* while she was *asleep.*

He stood over her bed and made certain that she was asleep. It was as though her mind thought it was somewhere else, doing something else. Vaguely he remembered that the ancients did something called *dreaming* while they slept and the thought made him shiver.

Clara Manz was saying, "Oh, Bill, they'll catch us. We can't pretend any more unless we have drugs. Haven't we any drugs. Bill?"

Then she was silent and lay still. Her breathing was shallow and even in the dawn light her cheeks were deeply flushed against the blonde hair.

Having just awakened, Conrad was on a very low drug level and the incident was unpleasantly disturbing. He picked up his pharmacase from beside his bed and made his way to the bathroom. He took his hypothalamic block and the integration enzymes and returned to the bedroom. Clara was still sleeping.

She had been behaving oddly for some time, but there had never been anything as disturbing as this. He felt that he should call a medicop, but, of course, he didn't want to do anything that extreme. It was probably something with a simple explanation. Clara was a little scatterbrained at times.

Maybe she had forgotten to take her sleeping compound and that was what caused *dreaming.* The very word made his powerful body chill. But if she was neglecting to take any of her drugs and he called in a medicop, it would be serious.

Conrad went into the library and found the *Family Pharmacy.* He switched on a light in the dawn-shrunken room and let his heavy frame into a chair. *A Guide to Better Understanding of Your Family Prescriptions. Official Edition, 2831.* The book was mostly Medicorps propaganda and almost never gave a practical suggestion. If something went wrong, you called a medicop.

Conrad hunted through the book for the section on sleeping compound. It was funny, too, about that name Bill. Conrad went over all the men of their acquaintance with whom Clara had occasional affairs or with whom she was friendly and he couldn't remember a single Bill. In fact, the only man with that name whom he could think of was his own hyperalter, Bill Walden. But that was naturally impossible.

Maybe dreaming was always about imaginary people.

SLEEPING COMPOUND: An official mixture of soporific and hypnotic alkaloids and synthetics. A critical drug; an essential feature in every prescription. Slight deviations in following prescription are unallowable because of the subtle manner in which behaviour may be altered over months or years. The first sleeping compound was announced by Thomas Marshall in 1986. The formula has been modified only twice since then.

There followed a tightly packed description of the chemistry and pharmacology of the various ingredients. Conrad skipped through this.

The importance of Sleeping Compound in the life of every individual and to society is best appreciated when we recall Marshall's words announcing its initial development:

"It is during so-called *normal* sleep that the vicious unconscious mind responsible for wars and other symptoms of unhappiness develops its resources and its hold on our conscious lives.

"In this *normal* sleep the critical faculties of the cortex are paralysed. Meanwhile, the infantile unconscious mind expands misinterpreted experience into the toxic patterns of neurosis and psychosis. The conscious mind takes over at morning, unaware that these infantile motivations have been cleverly woven into its very structure.

"Sleeping Compound will stop this. There is no unconscious activity after taking this harmless drug. We believe the Medicorps should at once initiate measures to acclimatize every child to its use. In these children, as the years go by, infantile patterns unable to work during sleep will fight a losing battle during waking hours with conscious patterns accumulating in the direction of adulthood."

That was all there was—mostly the Medicorps patting its own back for saving humanity. But if you were in trouble and called a medicop, you'd risk getting into real trouble.

Conrad became aware of Clara standing in the doorway.

The flush of her disturbed emotions and the pallor of her fatigue mixed in ragged banners on her cheeks.

Conrad waved the *Family Pharmacy* with a foolish gesture of embarrassment.

"Young lady, have you been neglecting to take your sleeping compound?"

Clara turned utterly pale. "I—I don't understand."

"You were talking in your sleep."

"I—was?"

She came forward so unsteadily that he helped her to a seat. She stared at him. He asked jovially, "Who is this 'Bill' you were so desperately involved with? Have you been having an affair I don't know about? Aren't my friends good enough for you?"

The result of this banter was that she alarmingly began to cry, clutching her robe about her and dropping her blonde head on her knees and sobbing.

Children cried before they were acclimatized to the drugs, but Conrad Manz had never in his life seen an adult cry.

Though he had taken his morning drugs and certain disrupting emotions were already impossible, nevertheless this sight was completely unnerving.

In gasps between her sobs, Clara was saying, "Oh, I can't go back to taking them! But I can't keep this up! I just can't!"

"Clara, darling, I don't know what to say or do. I think we ought to call the Medicorps."

Intensely frightened, she rose and clung to him, begging,

"Oh, no, Conrad, that isn't necessary! It isn't necessary at all. I've only neglected to take my sleeping compound and it won't happen again. All I need is a sleeping compound. Please get my pharmacase for me and it will be all right."

She was so desperate to convince him that Conrad got the pharmacase and a glass of water for her only to appease the white face of fright.

Within a few minutes of taking the sleeping compound, she was calm. As he put her back to bed, she laughed with a lazy indolence.

"Oh, Conrad, you take it so seriously. I only needed a sleeping compound very badly and now I feel fine. I'll sleep all day. It's a rest day, isn't it? Now go race a rocket and stop worrying and thinking about calling the medicops."

But Conrad did not go rocket racing as he had planned.

Clara had been asleep only a few minutes when there was a call on the visiophone; they wanted him at the office. The city of Santa Fe would be completely out of balance within twelve shifts if revised plans were not put into operation immediately. They were to start during the next five days while he would be out of shift. In order to carry on the first day of their next shift, he and the other three traffic managers he worked with would have to come down today and familiarize themselves with the new operations.

There was no getting out of it. His rest day was spoiled.

Conrad resented it all the more because Santa Fe was clear out on the edge of their traffic district and could have been revised out of the Mexican offices just as well. But those boys down there rested all five days of their shift.

Conrad looked in on Clara before he left and found her asleep in the total suspension of proper drug level. The unpleasant memory of her behavior made him squirm, but now that the episode was over, it no longer worried him. It was typical of him that, things having been set straight in the proper manner, he did not think of her again until late in the afternoon.

As early as 1950, the pioneer communications engineer Norbert Wiener had pointed out that there might be a close parallel between disassociation of personalities and the disruption of a communication system. Wiener referred back specifically to the first clear description, by Morton Prince, of multiple personalities existing together in the same human body. Prince had described only individual cases and his observations were not altogether acceptable in Wiener's time.

Nevertheless, in the schizophrenic society of the 29th Century, a major managerial problem was that of balancing the communicating and non-communicating populations in a city.

As far as Conrad and the other traffic men present at the conference were concerned, Santa Fe was a resort and retirement area of 100,000 human bodies, alive and consuming more than they produced every day of the year. Whatever the representatives of the Medicorps and Communications Board worked out, it would mean only slight changes in the types of foodstuffs, entertainment and so forth moving into Santa Fe, and Conrad could have grasped the entire traffic change in ten minutes after the real problem had been settled. But, as usual, he and the other traffic men had to sit through two hours while small wheels from the Medicorps and Communications acted big about rebalancing a city.

For them, Conrad had to admit, Santa Fe was a great deal more complex than 100,000 consuming, moderately producing human bodies. It was 200,000 human personalities, two to each body. Conrad

wondered sometimes what they would have done if the three and four personality cases so common back in the 20th and 21st Centuries had been allowed to reproduce. The 200,000 personalities in Santa Fe were difficult enough.

Like all cities, Santa Fe operated in five shifts. A, B, C, D, and E.

Just as it was supposed to be for Conrad in his city, today was rest day for the 20,000 hypoalters on D-shift in Santa Fe. Tonight at around 6.00 P.M. they would all go to shifting rooms and be replaced by their hyperalters, who had different tastes in food and pleasure and took different drugs.

Tomorrow would be rest day for the hypoalters on E-shift and in the evening they would turn things over to their hyperalters.

The next day it would be rest for the A-shift hyperalters and three days after that the D-shift hyperalters, including Bill Walden, would rest till evening, when Conrad and the D-shift hypoalters everywhere would again have their five-day use of their bodies.

Right now the trouble with Santa Fe's retired population, which worked only for its own maintenance, was that too many elderly people on the D-shift and E-shift had been dying off. This point was brought out by a dapper young department head from Communications.

Conrad groaned when, as he knew would happen, a Medicorps officer promptly set out on an exhaustive demonstration that Medicorps predictions of deaths for Santa Fe had indicated clearly that Communications should have been moving people from D-shift and E-shift into the area.

Actually, it appeared that someone from Communications had blundered and had overloaded the quota of people on A-shift and B-shift moving to Santa Fe. Thus on one rest day there weren't enough people working to keep things going, and later in the week there were so many available workers that they were clogging the city.

None of this was heated exchange or in any way emotional.

It was just interminably, exhaustively logical and boring. Conrad fidgeted through two hours of it, seeing his chance for a rocket race dissolving. When at last the problem of balanced shift-populations for Santa Fe was worked out, it took him and the other traffic men only a few minutes to apply their tables and reschedule traffic to co-ordinate with the population changes.

Disgusted, Conrad walked over to the Tennis Club and had lunch.

There were still two hours of his rest day left when Conrad Manz realized that Bill Walden was again forcing an early shift. Conrad was in the middle of a volley-tennis game and he didn't like having the shift forced so soon. People generally shifted at their appointed regular hour every five days, and a hyperalter was not supposed to use his power to force shift. It was such an unthinkable thing nowadays that there was occasional talk of abolishing the terms hyperalter and hypoalter because they were somewhat disparaging to the hypoalter, and really designated only the antisocial power of the hyperalter to force the shift.

Bill Walden had been cheating two to four hours on Conrad every shift for several periods back. Conrad could have reported it to the Medicorps, but he himself was guilty of a constant misdemeanour about which Bill had not yet complained. Unlike the sedentary Walden, Conrad Manz enjoyed exercise. He overindulged in violent sports and put off sleep, letting Bill Walden make up the fatigue on his shift. That was undoubtedly why the poor old sucker had started cheating a few hours on Conrad's rest day.

Conrad laughed to himself, remembering the time Bill Walden had registered a long list of sports which he wished Conrad to be restrained from rocket racing, deepsea exploration, jet-skiing. It had only given Conrad some ideas he hadn't had before. The Medicorps had refused to enforce the list on the basis that danger and violent exercise were a necessary outlet for Conrad's constitution. Then poor old Bill had written Conrad a note threatening to sue him for any injury resulting from such sports. As if he had a chance against the Medicorps ruling!

Conrad knew it was no use trying to finish the volley-tennis game. He lost interest and couldn't concentrate on what he was doing when Bill started forcing the shift. Conrad shot the ball back at his opponent in a blistering curve impossible to intercept.

"So long," he yelled at the man. "I've got some things to do before my shift ends."

He lounged into the locker rooms and showered, put his clothes and belongings, including his

pharmacase, in a shipping carton, addressed them to his own home and dropped them in the mail chute.

He stepped with languid nakedness across, the hall, pressed his identifying wristband to a lock-free and dialed his clothing sizes.

In this way he procured a neatly wrapped, clean shifting costume from the slot. He put it on without bothering to return to his shower room.

He shouted a loud good-bye to no one in particular among the several men and women in the baths and stepped out on to the street.

Conrad felt too good even to be sorry that his shift was over. After all, nothing happened except you came to, five days later, on your next shift. The important thing was the rest day. He had always said the last days of the shift should be a work day; then you would be glad it was over. He guessed the idea was to rest the body before another personality took over. Well, poor old Bill Walden never got a rested body. He probably slept off the first twelve hours.

Walking unhurriedly through the street crowds, Conrad entered a public shifting station and found an empty room. As he started to open the door, a girl came out of the adjoining booth and Conrad hastily averted his glance. She was still rearranging her hair. There were so many rude people nowadays who didn't seem to care at all about the etiquette of shifting, women particularly. They were always redoing their hair or make-up where a person couldn't help seeing them.

Conrad pressed his identifying wristband to the lock and entered the booth he had picked. The act automatically sent the time and his shift number to Medicorps Headquarters.

Once inside the shifting room, Conrad went to the lavatory and turned on the tap of make-up solvent. In spite of losing two hours of his rest day, he decided to be decent to old Bill, though he was half tempted to leave his make-up on. It was a pretty foul joke, of course, especially on a humourless fellow like poor Walden.

Conrad creamed his face thoroughly and then washed in water and used the automatic dryer. He looked at his strong lined face features in the mirror. They displayed a less distinct expression of his own personality with the make-up gone.

He turned away from the mirror and it was only then that he remembered he hadn't spoken to his wife before shifting.

Well, he couldn't decently call up and let her see him without make-up.

He stepped across to the visiophone and set the machine to deliver his spoken message in type: "Hello, Clara. Sorry I forgot to call you before. Bill Walden is forcing me to shift early again. I hope you're not still upset about that business this morning. Be a good girl and smile at me on the next shift. I love you. Conrad."

For a moment, when the shift came, the body of Conrad Manz stood moronically uninhabited. Then, rapidly, out of the gyri of its brain, the personality of Bill Walden emerged, replacing the slackly powerful attitude of Conrad by the slightly prim preciseness of Bill's bearing.

The face, just now relaxed with readiness for action, was abruptly pulled into an intellectual mask of tension by habitual patterns of conflict in the muscles. There were also acute momentary signs of clash between the vegetative nervous activity characteristic of Bill Walden and the internal homeostasis Conrad Manz had left behind him. The face paled as hypersensitive vascular beds closed under new vegetative volleys.

Bill Walden grasped sight and sound, and the sharp odour of make-up solvent stung his nostrils. He was conscious of only one clamouring, terrifying thought: *They will catch us. It cannot go on much longer without Helen guessing about Clara. She is already angry about Clara delaying the shift, and if she learns from Mary that I am cheating on Conrad's shift . . . Any time now, perhaps this time, when the shift is over, I will be looking into the face of a medicop who is pulling a needle from my arm, and then it'll all be over.*

So far, at least, there was no medicop. Still feeling unreal but anxious not to lose precious moments, Bill took an individualized kit from the wall dispenser and made himself up. He was sparing and subtle in his use of the make-up, unlike the horrible make-up jobs Conrad Manz occasionally left on. Bill

rearranged his hair. Conrad always wore it too short for his taste, but you couldn't complain about everything.

Bill sat in a chair to await some of the slower aspects of the shift. He knew that an hour after he left the booth, his basal metabolic rate would be ten points higher. His blood sugar would go down steadily. In the next five days he would lose six to eight pounds, which Conrad would promptly regain.

Just as Bill was about to leave the booth, he remembered to pick up a news summary. He put his wristband to the switch on the telephoto and a freshly printed summary of the last five days in the world fell into the rack. His wristband, of course, called forth one edited for hyperalters on the D-shift.

It did not mention by name any hypoalter on the D-shift.

Should one of them have done something that it was necessary for Bill or other D-shift hyperalters to know about, it would appear in news summaries called forth by their wristbands but told in such fashion that the personality involved seemed namelessly incidental, while names and pictures of hyperalters and hypoalters on any of the other four shifts naturally were freely used. The purpose was to keep Conrad Manz and all the other hypoalters on the D-shift, one tenth of the total population, non-existent as far as their hyperalters were concerned. This convention made it necessary for photoprint summaries to be on light-sensitive paper that blackened illegibly before six hours were up, so that a man might never stumble on news about his hypoalter.

Bill did not even glance at the news summary. He had picked it up only for appearances. The summaries were essential if you were going to start where you left off on your last shift and have any knowledge of the five intervening days. A man just didn't walk out of a shifting room without one. It was failure to do little things like that that would start them wondering about him.

Bill opened the door of the booth by applying his wristband to the lock and stepped out into the street.

Late afternoon crowds pressed about him. Across the boulevard, a helicopter landing swarmed with clouds of rising commuters. Bill had some trouble figuring out the part of the city Conrad had left him in and walked two blocks before he understood where he was. Then he got into an idle two-place cab, started the motor with his wristband and hurried the little three-wheeler recklessly through the traffic. Clara was probably already waiting and he first had to go home and get dressed.

The thought of Clara waiting for him in the park near her home was a sharp reminder of his strange situation. He was in a world that was literally not supposed to exist for him, for it was the world of his own hypoalter, Conrad Manz.

Undoubtedly, there were people in the traffic up ahead who knew both him and Conrad, people from the other shifts who never mentioned the one to the other except in those guarded, snickering little confidences they couldn't resist telling and you couldn't resist listening to. After all, the most important person in the world was your alter. If he got sick, injured or killed, so would you.

Thus, in moments of intimacy or joviality, an undercover exchange went on. . . . *I'll tell you about your hyperalter if you'll tell me about my hypoalter.* It was orthodox bad manners that left you with shame, and a fear that the other fellow would tell people you seemed to have a pathological interest in your alter and must need a change in your prescription.

But the most flagrant abuser of such morbid little exchanges would have been horrified to learn that right here, in the middle of the daylight traffic, was a man who was using his anti-social shifting power to meet in secret the wife of his own hypoalter!

Bill did not have to wonder what the Medicorps would think. Relations between hyperalters and hypoalters of opposite sex were punishable—drastically punishable.

When he arrived at the apartment. Bill remembered to order a dinner for his daughter Mary. His order, dialled from the day's menu, was delivered to the apartment pneumatically and he set it out over electric warmers. He wanted to write a note to the child, but he started two and threw both in the basket. He couldn't think of anything to say to her.

Staring at the lonely table he was leaving for Mary, Bill felt his guilt overwhelming him. He could stop the behaviour which led to the guilt by taking his drugs as prescribed. They would return him immediately

to the sane and ordered conformity of the world. He would no longer have to carry the fear that the Medicorps would discover he was not taking his drugs. He would no longer neglect his appointed child.

He would no longer endanger the very life of Conrad's wife Clara and, of course, his own.

When you took your drugs as prescribed, it was impossible to experience such ancient and primitive emotions as guilt. Even should you miscalculate and do something wrong, the drugs would not allow any such emotional reaction. To be free to experience his guilt over the lonely child who needed him was, for these reasons, a precious thing to Bill. In all the world, this night, he was undoubtedly the only man who could and did feel one of the ancient emotions. People felt shame, not guilt; conceit, not pride; pleasure, not desire. Now that he had stopped taking his drugs as prescribed, Bill realized that the drugs allowed only an impoverished segment of a vivid emotional spectrum.

But however exciting it was to live them, the ancient emotions did not seem to act as deterrents to bad behaviour.

Bill's sense of guilt did not keep him from continuing to neglect Mary. His fear of being caught did not restrain him from breaking every rule of inter-alter law and loving Clara, his own hypoalter's wife.

Bill got dressed as rapidly as possible. He tossed the discarded shifting costume into the return chute. He retouched his make-up, trying to eliminate some of the heavy, inexpressive planes of muscularity which were more typical of Conrad than of himself.

The act reminded him of the shame which his wife Helen had felt when she learned, a few years ago, that her own hypoalter, Clara, and his hypoalter, Conrad, had obtained from the Medicorps a special release to marry. Such rare marriages in which the same bodies lived together on both halves of a shift were something to snicker about. They verged on the antisocial, but could be arranged if the batteries of Medicorps tests could be satisfied.

Perhaps it had been the very intensity of Helen's shame on learning of this marriage, the nauseous display of conformity so typical of his wife, that had first given Bill the idea of seeking out Clara, who had dared convention to make such a peculiar marriage. Over the years, Helen had continued blaming all their troubles on the fact that both egos of himself were living with, and intimate with, both egos of herself.

So Bill had started cutting down on his drugs, the curiosity having become an obsession. What was this other part of Helen like, this Clara who was unconventional enough to want to marry only Bill's own hypoalter, in spite of almost certain public shame?

He had first seen Clara's face when it formed on a visiophone, the first time he had forced Conrad to shift prematurely. It was softer than Helen's. The delicate contours were less purposefully set, gayer.

"Clara Manz?" Bill had sat there staring at the visiophone for several seconds, unable to continue. His great fear that she would immediately report him must have been naked on his face.

He had watched an impish suspicion grow in the tender curve of her lips and her oblique glance from the visiophone.

She did not speak.

"Mrs. Manz," he finally said. "I would like to meet you in the park across from your home."

To this awkward opening he owed the first time he had heard Clara laugh. Her warm, clear laughter, teasing him, tumbled forth like a cloud of gay butterflies.

"Are you afraid to see me here at home because my husband might *walk in on us?"*

Bill had been put completely at ease by this bantering indication that Clara knew who he was and welcomed him as an intriguing diversion. Quite literally, the one person who could not *walk in on them,* as the ancients thought of it, was his own hypoalter, Conrad Manz.

Bill finished retouching his make-up and hurried to leave the apartment. But this time, as he passed the table where Mary's dinner was set out, he decided to write a few words to the child, no matter how empty they sounded to himself.

The note he left explained that he had some early work to do at the microfilm library where he worked.

Just as Bill was leaving the apartment, the visiophone buzzed. In his hurry Bill flipped the switch

before he thought.

Too late, his band froze and the implications of this call, an hour before anyone would normally be home, shot a shaft of terror through him.

But it was not the image of a medicop that formed on the screen. The woman introduced herself as Mrs. Harris, one of Mary's teachers.

It was strange that she should have thought he might be home. The shift for children was half a day earlier than for adults, so the parents could have half their rest day free.

This afternoon would be for Mary the first classes of her shift, but the teacher must have guessed something was wrong with the shifting schedules in Mary's family. Or had the child told her?

Mrs. Harris explained rather dramatically that Mary was being neglected. What could he say to her? That he was a criminal breaking drug regulations in the most flagrant manner? That nothing, not even the child appointed to him, meant more to him than his wife's own hypoalter? Bill finally ended the hopeless and possibly dangerous conversation by turning off the receiver and leaving the apartment.

Bill realized that now, for both him and Clara, the greatest joy had been those first few times together. The enormous threat of a Medicorps retaliation took the pleasure from their contact and they came together desperately because, having tasted this fantastic nonconformity and the new undrugged intimacy, there was no other way for them. Even now as he drove through the traffic towards where she would be waiting, he was not so much concerned with meeting Clara in their fear-poisoned present as with the vivid, aching remembrance of what those meetings once had really been like.

He recalled an evening they had spent lying on the summer lawn of the park, looking out at the haze-dimmed stars. It had been shortly after Clara joined him in cutting down on the drugs, and the clear memory of their quiet laughter so captured his mind now that Bill almost tangled his car in the traffic.

In memory he kissed her again and, as it had been, the newly cut grass mixed with the exciting fragrance of her skin. After the kiss they continued a mock discussion of the ancient word "sin". Bill pretended to be trying to explain the meaning of the word to her, sometimes with definitions that kept them laughing and sometimes with demonstrational kisses that stopped their laughter.

He could remember Clara's face turned to him in the evening light with an outrageous parody of interest. He could hear himself saying, "You see, the ancients would say we are not *sinning* because they would disagree with the medicops that you and Helen are two completely different people, or that Conrad and I are not the same person."

Clara kissed him with an air of tentative experimentation. "Mmm, no. I can't say I care for that interpretation."

"You'd rather be sinning?"

"Definitely."

"Well, if the ancients did agree with the medicops that we are distinct from our alters, Helen and Conrad, then they would say we are sinning—but not for the same reasons the Medicorps would give."

"That," asserted Clara, "is where I get lost. If this sinning business is going to be worth anything at all, it has to be something you can identify."

Bill cut his car out of the main stream of traffic and towards the park, without interrupting his memory.

"Well, darling, I don't want to confuse you, but the medicops would say we are sinning only because you are my wife's hypoalter, and I am your husband's hyperalter—in other words for the very reason the ancients would say we are *not* sinning. Furthermore, if either of us were with anyone else, the medicops would think it was perfectly all right, and so would Conrad and Helen. Provided, of course, I took a hyperalter and you took a hypoalter only."

"Of course," Clara said, and Bill hurried over the gloomy fact.

"The ancients, on the other hand, would say we are sinning because we are making love to someone we are not married to."

"But what's the matter with that? Everybody does it."

"The ancient Moderns didn't. Or, that is, they often did, but..."

Clara brought her full lips hungrily to his. "Darling, I think the ancient Moderns had the right idea,

though I don't see how they ever arrived at it."

Bill grinned. "It was just an invention of theirs, along with the wheel and atomic energy."

That evening was long gone by as Bill stopped the little taxi beside the park and left it there for the next user. He walked across the lawns towards the statue where he and Clara always met. The very thought of entering one's own hypoalter's house was so unnerving that Bill brought himself to do it only by first meeting Clara near the statue. As he walked between the trees, Bill could not again capture the spirit of that evening he had been remembering. The Medicorps was too close. It was impossible to laugh that away now.

Bill arrived at the statue, but Clara was not there. He waited impatiently while a livid sunset coagulated between the branches of the great trees. Clara should have been there first. It was easier for her, because she was leaving her shift, and without doing it prematurely.

The park was like a quiet backwater in the eddying rush of the evening city. Bill felt conspicuous and vulnerable in the gloaming light. Above all, he felt a new loneliness, and he knew that now Clara felt it, too. They needed each other as each had been, before fear had bleached their feeling to white bones of desperation.

They were not taking their drugs as prescribed, and for that they would be horribly punished. That was the only unforgivable *sin* in their world. By committing it, he and Clara had found out what life could be, in the same act that would surely take life from them. Their powerful emotions they had found in abundance simply by refusing to take the drugs, and by being together briefly each fifth day in a dangerous breach of all convention. The closer their discovery and the greater their terror, the more desperately they needed even their terror, and the more impossible became the delight of their first meetings.

Telegraphing bright beads of sound, a night bird skimmed the sunset lawns to the looming statue and skewed around its monolithic base. The bird's piping doubled and then choked off as it veered frantically from Bill. After a while, far off through the park, it released a fading protest of song.

Above Bill, the towering statue of the great Alfred Morris blackened against the sunset. The hollowed granite eyes bore down on him out of an undecipherable dark... the ancient, implacable face of the Medicorps. As if to pronounce a sentence on his present crimes by a magical disclosure of the weight of centuries, a pool of sulphurous light and leaf shadows danced on the painted plaque at the base of the statue:

On this spot in the Gregorian year 1996, Alfred Morris announced to an assembly of war survivors the hypothalamic block. His stirring words were, "The new drug selectively halts at the thalamic brain the upward flow of unconscious stimuli and the downward flow of unconscious motivations. It acts as a screen between the cerebrum and the psychosomatic discharge system. Using hypothalamic block, we will not act emotively, we will initiate acts only from the logical demands of situations."

This announcement and the subsequent wholehearted action of the war-weary people made the taking of hypothalamic block obligatory. This put an end to the powerful play of unconscious mind in the public and private affairs of the ancient world. It ended the great paranoid wars and saved mankind.

In the strange evening light, the letters seemed alive, a centuries-old condemnation of any who might try to go back to the ancient pre-pharmacy days. Of course, it was not really possible to go back. Without drugs, everybody and all society would fall apart.

The ancients had first learned to keep endocrine deviates such as the diabetic alive with drugs. Later they learned with other drugs to "cure" the far more prevalent disease, schizophrenia, that was jamming their hospitals. This big change came when the ancients used these same drugs on everyone to control the private and public irrationality of their time and stop the wars.

In this new, drugged world, the schizophrene thrived better than any, and the world became patterned on him. But, just as the diabetic was still diabetic, the schizophrene was still himself, plus the drugs. Meanwhile, everyone had forgotten what it was the drugs did to you—that the emotions experienced were blurred emotions, that insight was at an isolated level of rationality because the drugs

kept true feelings from ever emerging.

How inconceivable it would be to Helen and the other people of this world to live on as little drug as possible . . . to experience the conflicting emotions, the interplay of passion and logic that almost tore you apart! Sober, the ancients called it, and they lived that way most of the time, with only the occasional crude and club-like effects of alcohol or narcotics to relieve their chronic anxiety.

By taking as little hypothalamic block as possible, he and Clara were able to desire their fantastic attachment, to delight in an absolutely illogical situation unheard of in their society.

But the society would judge their refusal to take hypothalamic block in only one sense. The weight of this judgment stood before him in the smouldering words, *"It ended the great paranoid wars and saved mankind."*

When Clara did appear, she was searching myopically in the wrong vicinity of the statue. He did not call to her at once, letting the sight of her smooth out the tensions in him, convert all the conflicts into this one intense longing to be with her.

Her halting search for him was deeply touching, like that of a tragic little puppet in a darkening dumbshow. He saw suddenly how like puppets the two of them were. They were moved by the strengthening wires of a new life of feeling to batter clumsily at an implacable stage setting that would finally leave them as bits of wood and paper.

Then suddenly in his arms Clara was at the same time hungrily moving and tense with fear of discovery. Little sounds of love and fear choked each other in her throat. Her blonde head pressed tightly into his shoulder and she clung to him with desperation.

She said, "Conrad was disturbed by my tension this morning and made me take a sleeping compound. I've just awakened."

They walked to her home in silence and even in the darkened apartment they used only the primitive monosyllables of apprehensive need. Beyond these mere sounds of compassion, they had long ago said all that could be said.

Because Bill was the hyperalter, he had no fear that Conrad could force a shift on him. When later they lay in darkness, he allowed himself to drift into a brief slumber. Without the sleeping compound, distorted events came and went without reason. Dreaming, the ancients had called it. It was one of the most frightening things that bad begun to happen when he first cut down on the drugs. Now, in the few seconds that he dozed, a thousand fragments of incidental knowledge, historical reading and emotional need melded and, in a strange contrast to their present tranquillity, he was dreaming a frightful moment in the 20th Century. *These are the great paranoid wars,* he thought. And it was so because he had thought it.

He searched frantically through the glove compartment of an ancient car. "Wait," he pleaded. "I tell you we have sulphonamide-14. We've been taking it regularly as directed. We took a double dose back in Paterson because there were soft-bombs all through that part of Jersey and we didn't know what would be declared Plague Area next."

Now Bill threw things out of his satchel on to the floor and seat of the car, fumbling deeper by the flashlight Clara held. His heart beat thickly with terror. Then he remembered his pharmacase. Oh, why hadn't they remembered sooner about their pharmacases. Bill tore at the belt about his waist. The Medicorps captain stepped back from the door of their car. He jerked his head at the dark form of the corporal standing in the roadway. "Shoot them. Run the car off the embankment before you burn it."

Bill screamed metallically through the speaker of his radiation mask. "Wait. I've found it." He thrust the pharmacase out the door of the car. "This is a pharmacase," he explained. "We keep our drugs in one of these and it's belted to our waist so we are never without them."

The captain of the Medicorps came back. He inspected the pharmacase and the drugs and returned it. "From now on, keep your drugs handy. Take them without fail according to radio instructions. Do you understand?"

Clara's head pressed heavily against Bill's shoulder, and he could hear the tinny sound of her sobbing through the speaker of her mask.

The captain stepped into the road again. "Well have to burn your car. You passed through a Plague

Area and it can't be sterilized on this route. About a mile up this road you'll come to a sterlization unit. Stop and have your person and belongings rayed. After that, keep walking, but stick to the road. You'll be shot if you're caught off it."

The road was crowded with fleeing people. Their way was lighted by piles of cadavers writhing in gasoline flames. The Medicorps was everywhere. Those who stumbled, those who coughed, the delirious and their helping partners . . . these were taken to the side of the road, shot and burned. And there was bombing again to the south.

Bill stopped in the middle of the road and looked back. Clara clung to him.

"There is a plague here we haven't any drug for," he said, and realized he was crying. "We are all mad."

Clara was crying too. "Darling, what have you done? Where are the drugs?"

The water of the Hudson hung as it had in the late afternoon, ice crystals in the stratosphere. The high, high sheet flashed and glowed in the new bombing to the south, where multicoloured pillars of flame boiled into the sky. But the muffled crash of the distant bombing was suddenly the steady click of the urgent signal on a bedside visiophone, and Bill was abruptly awake.

Clara was throwing on her robe and moving towards the machine on terror-rigid limbs. With a scrambling motion, Bill got out of the possible view of the machine and crouched at the end of the room.

Distinctly, he could hear the machine say, "Clara Manz?"

"Yes," Clara's voice was a thin treble that could have been a shriek had it continued.

"This is Medicorps Headquarters. A routine check discloses you have delayed your shift two hours. To maintain the statistical record of deviations, please give us a full explanation."

"I . . ." Clara had to swallow before she could talk. "I must have taken too much sleeping compound."

"Mrs. Manz, our records indicate that you have been delaying your shift consistently for several periods now. We made a check of this as a routine follow up on any such deviation, but the discovery is quite serious." There was a harsh silence, a silence that demanded a logical answer. But how could there be a logical answer.

"My hyperalter hasn't complained and I—well, I have just let a bad habit develop. I'll see that it doesn't happen again."

The machine voiced several platitudes about the responsibilities of one personality to another and the duty of all to society before Clara was able to shut it off.

Both of them sat as they were for a long, long time while the tide of terror subsided. When at last they looked at each other across the dim and silent room, both of them knew there could be at least one more time together before they were caught.

Five days later, on the last day of her shift, Mary Walden wrote the address of her appointed father's hypoalter, Conrad Manz, with an indelible pencil on the skin just below her armpit.

During the morning, her father and mother had spoiled the family rest day by quarrelling. It was about Helen's hypoalter delaying so many shifts. Bill did not think it very important, but her mother was angry and threatened to complain to the Medicorps.

The lunch was eaten in silence, except that at one point Bill said, "It seems to me Conrad and Clara Manz are guilty of a peculiar marriage, not us. Yet they seem perfectly happy with it and you're the one who is made unhappy. The woman has probably just developed a habit of taking too much sleeping compound for her rest-day naps. Why don't you drop her a note?"

Helen made only one remark. It was said through her teeth and very softly. "Bill, I would just as soon the child did not realize her relationship to this sordid situation."

Mary cringed over the way Helen disregarded her hearing, the possibility that she might be capable of understanding, or her feelings about being shut out of their mutual world.

After lunch Mary cleared the table, throwing the remains of the meal and the plastiplates into the flash trash disposer.

Her father had retreated to the library room and Helen was getting ready to attend a Citizens'

Meeting. Mary heard her mother enter the room to say good-bye while she was wiping the dining table. She knew that Helen was standing well-dressed and a little impatient, just behind her, but she pretended she did not know.

"Darling, I'm leaving now for the Citizens' Meeting."

"Oh. . . yes."

"Be a good girl and don't be late for your shift. You only have an hour now." Helen's patrician face smiled.

"I won't be late."

"Don't pay any attention to the things Bill and I discussed this morning, will you?"

"No."

And she was gone. She did not say good-bye to Bill.

Mary was very conscious of her father in the house. He continued to sit in the library. She walked by the door and she could see him sitting in a chair, staring at the floor. Mary stood in the sun room for a long while. If he had risen from the chair, if he had rustled a page, if he had sighed, she would have heard him.

It grew closer and closer to the time she would have to leave if Susan Shorrs was to catch the first school hours of her shift. Why did children have to shift half a day before adults?

Finally, Mary thought of something to say. She could let him know she was old enough to understand what the quarrel had been about if only it were explained, to her. Mary went into the library and hesitantly sat on the edge of a couch near him. He did not look at her and his face seemed grey in the midday light. Then she knew that he was lonely, too. But a great feeling of tenderness for him went through her.

"Sometimes I think you and Clara Manz must be the only people in the world," she said abruptly, "who aren't so silly about shifting right on the dot. Why, I don't *care* if Susan Shorrs *is* an hour late for classes!"

Those first moments when he seized her in his arms, it seemed her heart would shake loose. It was as though she had uttered some magic formula, one that had abruptly opened the doors to his love. It was only after he had explained to her why he was always late on the first day of the family shift that she knew something was wrong. He *did* tell her, over and over, that he knew she was unhappy and that it was his fault. But he was at the same time soothing her, petting her, as if *he was afraid of her.*

He talked on and on. Gradually, Mary understood in his trembling body, in his perspiring palms, in his pleading eyes, that he was afraid of dying, that he was afraid *she* would kill him with the merest thing she said, with her very presence.

This was not painful to Mary, because, suddenly, something came with ponderous enormity to stand before her: *I would just as soon the child did not realize her relationship to this sordid situation.*

Her relationship. It was some kind of relationship to Conrad and Clara Manz, because those were the people they had been talking about.

The moment her father left the apartment, she went to his desk and took out the file of family records. After she found the address of Conrad Manz, the idea occurred to her to write it on her body. Mary was certain that Susan Shorrs never bathed and she thought this a clever idea. Sometime on Susan's rest day, five days from now, she would try to force the shift and go to see Conrad and Clara Manz. Her plan was simple in execution, but totally vague as to goal.

Mary was already late when she hurried to the children's section of a public shifting station. A Children's Transfer Bus was waiting, and Mary registered on it for Susan Shorrs to be taken to school. After that she found a shifting room and opened it with her wristband. She changed into a shifting costume and sent her own clothes and belongings home.

Children her age did not wear make-up, but Mary always stood at the mirror during the shift. She always tried as hard as she could to see what Susan Shorrs looked like. She giggled over a verse that was scrawled beside the mirror...

Rouge your hair and comb your face;

Many a third head is lost in this place.

... and then the shift came, doubly frightening because of what she knew she was going to do.

Especially if you were a hyperalter like Mary, you were supposed to have some sense of the passage of time while you were out of shift. Of course, you did not know what was going on, but it was as though a more or less accurate chronometer kept running when you went out of shift. Apparently Mary's was highly inaccurate, because, to her horror, she found herself sitting bolt upright in one of Mrs. Harris's classes, not out on the playgrounds, where she had expected Susan Shorrs to be.

Mary was terrified, and the ugly school dress Susan had been wearing accented, by its strangeness, the seriousness of her premature shift. Children weren't supposed to show much difference from hyperalter to hypoalter, but when she raised her eyes, her fright grew. Children did change. She hardly recognized anyone in the room, though most of them must be the alters of her own classmates. Mrs. Harris was a B-shift and overlapped both Mary and Susan, but otherwise Mary recognized only Carl Blair's hypoalter because of his freckles.

Mary knew she had to get out of there or Mrs. Harris would eventually recognize her. If she left the room quietly, Mrs. Harris would not question her unless she recognized her. It was no use trying to guess how Susan would walk.

Mary stood and went towards the door, glad that it turned her back to Mrs. Harris. It seemed to her that she could feel the teacher's eyes stabbing through her back.

But she walked safely from the room. She dashed down the school corridor and out into the street. So great was her fear of what she was doing that her hypoalter's world actually seemed like a different one.

It was a long way for Mary to walk across town, and when she rang the bell, Conrad Manz was already home from work. He smiled at her and she loved him at once.

"Well, what do you want, young lady?" he asked. Mary couldn't answer him. She just smiled back.

"What's your name, eh?"

Mary went right on smiling, but suddenly he blurred in front of her.

"Here, here! There's nothing to cry about. Come on in and let's see if we can help you. Clara! We have a visitor, a very sentimental visitor."

Mary let him put his big arm around her shoulder and draw her, crying, into the apartment. Then she saw Clara swimming before her, looking like her mother, but. . . no, not at all like her mother.

"Now, see here, chicken, what is it you've come for?" Conrad asked when her crying stopped.

Mary had to stare hard at the floor to be able to say it. "I want to live with you."

Clara was twisting and untwisting a handkerchief. "But, child, we have already had our first baby appointed to us. He'll be with us next shift, and after that I have to bear a baby for someone else to keep. We wouldn't be allowed to take care of you."

"I thought maybe I was your real child." Mary said it helplessly, knowing in advance what the answer would be.

"Darling," Clara soothed, "children don't live with their natural parents. It's neither practical nor civilized. I have had a child conceived and born on my shift, and this baby is my exchange, so you see that you are much too old to be my conception. Whoever your natural parents may be, it is just something on record with the Medicorps Genetic Division and isn't important."

"But you're a special case," Mary pressed. "I thought because it was a special arrangement that you were my real parents." She looked up and she saw that Clara had turned white.

And now Conrad Manz was agitated, too. "What do you mean, we're a special case?" He was staring hard at her.

"Because..." And now for the first time Mary realized how special this case was, how sensitive they would be about it.

He grasped her by the shoulders and turned her so she faced his unblinking eyes. "I said, what do you mean, we're a special case? Clara, what in thirty heads does this kid mean?"

His grip hurt her and she began to cry again. She broke away. "You're the hypoalters of my appointed father and mother. I thought maybe when it was like that, I might be your real child. . . and you might want me. I don't want to be where I am. I want somebody. . ."

Clara was calm now, her sudden fear gone. "But, darling, if you're unhappy where you are, only the Medicorps can reappoint you. Besides, maybe your appointed parents are just having some personal problems right now. Maybe if you tried to understand them, you would see that they really love you."

Conrad's face showed that he did not understand. He spoke with a stiff, quiet voice and without taking his eyes from Mary. "What are you doing here? My own hyperalter's kid in my house, throwing it up to me that I'm married to his wife's hypoalter!"

They did not feel the earth move, as she fearfully did.

They sat there, staring at her, as though they might sit forever while she backed away, out of the apartment, and ran into her collapsing world.

Conrad Manz's rest day fell the day after Bill Walden's kid showed up at his apartment. It was ten days since that strait jacket of a conference on Santa Fe had lost him a chance to blast off a rocket racer. This time, on the practical knowledge that emergency business conferences were seldom called after lunch, Conrad had placed his reservation for a racer in the afternoon. The visit from Mary Walden had upset him every time he thought of it. Since it was his rest day, he had no intention of thinking about it and Conrad's scrupulously drugged mind was capable of just that.

So now, in the lavish coolness of the lounge at the Rocket Club, Conrad sipped his drink contentedly and made no contribution to the gloomy conversation going on around him.

"Look at it this way," the melancholy face of Alberts, a pilot from England, morosely emphasized his tone. "It takes about 10,000 economic units to jack a forty-ton ship up to satellite level and snap it around the course six times. That's just practice for us. On the other hand, an intellectual fellow who spends his spare time at a microfilm library doesn't use up 1,000 units in a year. In fact, his spare-time activity may turn up as units gained. The Economic Board doesn't argue that all pastime should be gainful. They just say rocket racing wastes more economic units than most pilots make on their work days. I tell you the day is almost here when they ban the rockets."

"That's just it," another pilot put in. "There was a time when you could show that rocket races were necessary for better spaceship design. Design has gone way beyond that. From their point of view we just burn up units as fast as other people create them. And it's no use trying to argue for the television shows. The Board can prove people would rather see a jet-skiing meet at a cost of about one-hundredth that of a rocket race."

Conrad Manz grinned into his drink. He had been aware for several minutes that pert little Angela, Alberts' soft-eyed, husky-voiced wife, was trying to catch his eye. But stranded as she was in the buzzing traffic of rockets, she was trying to hail the wrong rescuer. He had about fifteen minutes till the ramp boys would have a ship ready for him. Much as he liked Angela, he wasn't going to miss that race.

Still, he let his grin broaden and, looking up at her, he lied maliciously by nodding. She interpreted this signal as he knew she would. Well, at least he would afford her a graceful exit from the boring conversation.

He got up and went over and took her hand. Her full lips parted a little and she kissed him on the mouth.

Conrad turned to Alberts and interrupted him. "Angela and I would like to spend a little time together. Do you mind?"

Alberts was annoyed at having his train of thought broken and rather snapped out the usual courtesy. "Of course not. I'm glad for both of you."

Conrad looked the group over with a bland stare. "Have you lads ever tried jet-skiing? There's more genuine excitement in ten minutes of it than an hour of rocket racing. Personally, I don't care if the Board does ban the rockets soon. I'll just hop out to the Rocky Mountains on rest days."

Conrad knew perfectly well that if he had made this assertion before asking Alberts for his wife, the

man would have found some excuse to have her remain. All the faces present displayed the *aficionado's* disdain for one who has just demonstrated he doesn't *belong.* What the strait-jacket did they think they were—some ancient order of noblemen?

Conrad took Angela's yielding arm and led her serenely away before Alberts could think of anything to detain her.

On the way out of the lounge, she stroked his arm with frank admiration. "I'm so glad you were agreeable. Honestly, Harold could talk rockets till I died."

Conrad bent and kissed her. "Angela, I'm sorry, but this isn't going to be what you think. I have a ship to take off in just a few minutes."

She flared and dug into his arm now. "Oh, Conrad Manz! You . . . you made me believe . . "

He laughed and grabbed her wrists. "Now, now. I'm neglecting you to fly a rocket, not just to talk about them. I won't let you die."

At last she could not suppress her husky musical laugh. "I found that out the last time you and I were together. Clara and I had a drink the other day at the Citizens' Club. I don't often use dirty language, but I told Clara she must be keeping you in a *strait-jacket* at home."

Conrad frowned, wishing she hadn't brought up the subject. It worried him off and on that something was wrong with Clara, something even worse than that awful *dreaming* business ten days ago. For several shifts now she had been cold, nor was it just a temporary lack of interest in himself, for she was also cold to the men of their acquaintance of whom she was usually quite fond. As for himself, he had had to depend on casual contacts such as Angela. Not that they weren't pleasant, but a man and wife were supposed to maintain a healthy love life between themselves, and it usually meant trouble with the Medicorps when this broke down.

Angela glanced at him. "I didn't think Clara laughed well at my remark. Is something wrong between you?"

"Oh, no," he declared hastily. "Clara is sometimes that way. . . doesn't catch a joke right off."

A page boy approached them where they stood in the rotunda and advised Conrad that his ship was ready.

"Honestly, Angela, I'll make it up, I promise."

"I know you will, darling. And at least I'm grateful you saved me from all those rocket jets in there." Angela raised her lips for a kiss and afterwards, as she pushed him towards the door, her slightly vacant face smiled at him.

Out on the ramp, Conrad found another pilot ready to take off. They made two wagers—first to reach the racing course, and winner in a six-lap heat around the six-hundred-mile hexagonal course.

They fired together and Conrad blasted his ship up on a thunderous column of flame that squeezed him into his seat.

He was good at this and he knew he would win the lift to the course. On the course, though, if his opponent was any good at all, Conrad would probably lose, because he enjoyed slamming the ship around the course in his wasteful, swashbuckling style much more than merely winning the heat.

Conrad kept his drive on till the last possible second and then shot out his nose jets. The ship shuddered up through another hundred miles and came to a lolling halt near the starting buoys. The other pilot gasped when Conrad shouted at him over the intership, "The winner by all thirty heads!"

It was generally assumed that a race up to the course consisted of cutting all jets when you had enough lift, and using the nose brakes only to correct any overshot. "What did you do, just keep your power on and flip the ship around?" The other racer coasted up to Conrad's level and steadied with a brief forward burst.

They got the automatic signal from the starting buoy and went for the first turn, nose and nose, about half a mile apart. Conrad lost 5,000 yards on the first turn by shoving his power too hard against the starboard steering jets.

It made a pretty picture when a racer hammered its way around a turn that way with a fan of outside jets holding it in place. The other fellow made his turns cleanly, using mostly the driving jets for steering.

But that didn't look like much to those who happened to flip on their television while this little heat was in progress. On every turn, Conrad lost a little in space, but not in the eye of the automatic televisor on the buoy marking the turn. As usual, he cut closer to the buoys than regulations allowed, to give the folks a show.

Without the slightest regret, Conrad lost the heat by a full two sides of the hexagon. He congratulated his opponent and watched the fellow let his ship down carefully towards earth on its tail jets. For a while Conrad lolled his ship around near the starting buoy and its probably watching eye, flipping through a series of complicated manoeuvres with the steering jets.

Conrad did not like the grim countenance of outer space. The lifeless, gem-like blaze of cloud upon cloud of stars in the perspectiveless black repelled him. He liked rocket racing only because of the neat timing necessary, and possibly because the knowledge that he indulged in it scared poor old Bill Walden half to death.

Today the bleak aspect of the Galaxy harried his mind back upon its own problems. A particularly nasty association of Clara with Bill Walden and his snivelling kid kept dogging Conrad's mind and, as soon as stunting had exhausted his excess of fuel, he turned the ship to earth and sent it in with a short, spectacular burst.

Now that he stopped to consider it, Clara's strange behaviour had begun at about the same time that Bill Walden started cheating on the shifts. That kid Mary must have known something was going on, or she would not have done such a disgusting thing as to come to their apartment.

Conrad had let the rocket fall nose-down, until now it was screaming into the upper ionosphere. With no time to spare, he swivelled the ship on its guiding jets and opened the drive blast at the uprushing earth. He had just completed this wrenching manoeuvre when two appalling things happened together.

Conrad suddenly knew, whether as a momentary leak from Bill's mind to his, or as a rapid calculation of his own, that Bill Walden and Clara shared a secret. At the same moment, something tore through his mind like fingers of chill wind. With seven gravities mashing him into the bucket-seat, he grunted curses past thin-stretched lips.

"Great blue psychiatrists! What in thirty strait-jackets is that three-headed fool trying to do, kill us both?"

Conrad just managed to raise his leaden hand and set the plummeting racer for automatic pilot before Bill Walden forced him out of the shift. In his last moment of consciousness, and in the shock of his overwhelming shame, Conrad felt the bitter irony that he could not cut the power and kill Bill Walden.

When Bill Walden became conscious of the thunderous clamour of the braking ship and the awful weight of deceleration into which he had shifted, the core of him froze. He was so terrified that he could not have thought of reshifting even had there been time.

His head rolled on the pad in spite of its weight, and he saw the earth coming at him like a monstrous swatter aimed at a fly. Between his fright and the inhuman gravity, he lost consciousness without ever seeing on the control panel the red warning that saved him: *Automatic Pilot.*

The ship settled itself on the ramp in a mushroom of fire. Bill regained awareness several seconds later. He was too shaken to do anything but sit there for a long time.

When at last he felt capable of moving, he struggled with the door till he found how to open it, and climbed down to the still hot ramp he had landed on. It was at least a mile to the Rocket Club across the barren flat of the field, and he set out on foot. Shortly, however, a truck came speeding across to him.

The driver leaned out. "Hey, Conrad, what's the matter? Why didn't you pull the ship over to the hangars?"

With Conrad's make-up on. Bill felt he could probably get by. "Controls aren't working," he offered noncommittally.

At the club, a place he had never been to before in his life. Bill found an unused helicopter and started it with his wrist band. He flew the machine into town to the landing station nearest his home.

He was doomed, he knew. Conrad certainly would report him for this. He had not intended to force the shift so early or so violently. Perhaps he had not intended to force it at all this time. But there was

something in him more powerful than himself... a need to break the shift and be with Clara that now acted almost independently of him and certainly without regard for his safety.

Bill flew his craft carefully through the city traffic, working his way between the widely spaced towers with the uncertain hand of one to whom machines are not an extension of the body. He put the helicopter down at the landing station with some difficulty.

Clara would not be expecting him so early. From his apartment, as soon as he had changed make-up, he visiophoned her. It was strange how long and how carefully they needed to look at each other and how few words they could say.

Afterwards, he seemed calmer and went about getting ready with more efficiency. But when he found himself addressing the package of Conrad's clothes to his home, he chuckled bitterly.

It was when he went back to drop the package in the mail chute that he noticed the storage-room door ajar. He disposed of the package and went over to the door. Then he stood still, listening. He had to stop his own breathing to hear clearly.

Bill tightened himself and opened the door. He flipped on the light and saw Mary. The child sat on the floor in the corner with her knees drawn up against her chest. Between the knees and the chest, the frail wrists were crossed, the hands closed limply like—like those of a foetus. The forehead rested on the knees so that, should the closed eyes stay open, they would be looking at the placid hands.

The sickening sight of the child squeezed down on his heart till the colour drained from his face. He went forward and knelt before her. His dry throat hammered with the words, *what have I done to you,* but he could not speak.

The question of how long she might have been here, he could not bear to think.

He put out his hand, but he did not touch her. A shudder of revulsion shook him and he scrambled to his feet. He hurried back into the apartment with only one thought. He must get someone to help her. Only the Medicorps could take care of a situation like this.

As he stood at the visiophone, he knew that this involuntary act of panic had betrayed all that he had ever thought and done. He had to call the Medicorps. He could not face the result of his own behaviour without them. Like a ghostly after-image, he saw Clara's face on the screen. She was lost, cut off, with only himself to depend on.

A part of him, a place where there were no voices and a great tragedy, had been abruptly shut off. He stood stupidly confused and disturbed about something he couldn't recall.

The emotion in his body suddenly had no referent. He stood like a badly frightened animal while his heart slowed and blood seeped again into whitened parenchymas, while tides of epinephrine burned lower.

Remembering he must hurry, Bill left the apartment. It was an apartment with its storage-room door closed, an apartment without a storage-room.

From the moment that he walked in and took Clara in his arms, he was not worried about being caught. He felt only the great need for her. There seemed only one difference from the first time and it was a good difference, because now Clara was so tense and apprehensive. He felt a new tenderness for her, as one might feel for a child. It seemed to him that there was no end to the well of gentleness and compassion that was suddenly in him. He was mystified by the depth of his feeling. He kissed her again and again and petted her as one might a disturbed child.

Clara said, "Oh Bill, we're doing wrong! Mary was here yesterday!"

Whoever she meant, it had no meaning for him. He said, "It's all right. You mustn't worry."

"She needs you, Bill, and I take you away from her."

Whatever it was she was talking about was utterly unimportant beside the fact that she was not happy herself. He soothed her. "Darling you mustn't worry about it. Let's be happy the way we used to be."

He led her to a couch and they sat together, her head resting on his shoulder.

"Conrad is worried about me. He knows something is wrong. Oh, Bill, if he knew, he'd demand the worst penalty for you."

Bill felt the stone of fear come back in his chest. He thought, too, of Helen, of how intense her shame

would be. Medicorps action would be machine-like, logical as a set of equation; they were very likely to take more drastic steps where the complaints would be so strong and no request for leniency forthcoming. Conrad knew now, of course. Bill had felt his hate.

It was nearing the end. Death would come to Bill with electronic fingers. A ghostly probing in his mind and suddenly. . .

Clara's great unhappiness and the way she turned her head into his shoulder to cry forced him to calm the rising panic in himself, and again to caress the fear from her.

Even later, when they lay where the moonlight thrust into the room an impalpable shaft of alabaster, he loved her only as a succour. Carefully, slowly, smoothing out her mind, drawing it away from all the other things, drawing it down into this one thing. Gathering all her mind into her senses and holding it there. Then quickly taking it away from her in a moaning spasm so that now she was murmuring, murmuring, palely drifting. Sleeping like a loved child.

For a long, long time he watched the white moon cut its arc across their window. He listened with a deep pleasure to her evenly breathing sleep. But slowly he realized that her breath had changed, that the body so close to his was tensing. His heart gave a great bound and tiny moths of horror fluttered along his back. He raised himself and saw that the eyes were open in the silver light. Even through the make-up he saw that they were Helen's eyes.

He did the only thing left for him. He shifted. But in that terrible instant he understood something he had not anticipated. In Helen's eyes there was not only intense shame over shifting into her hypoalter's home; there was not only the disgust with himself for breaking communication codes.

He saw that, as a woman of the 20th Century might have felt, Helen hated Clara as a sexual rival. She hated Clara doubly because he had turned not to some other woman, but to the other part of herself whom she could never know.

As she shifted, Bill knew that the next light he saw would be on the adamant face of the Medicorps.

Major Paul Grey, with two other Medicorps officers, entered the Walden apartment about two hours after Bill left it to meet Clara. Major Grey was angry with himself. Important information on a case of communication breaks and drug refusal could be learned by letting it run its course under observation. But he had not intended Conrad Manz's life to be endangered, and certainly he would not have taken the slightest chance on what they found in the Walden apartment if he had expected it this early.

Major Grey blamed himself for what had happened to Mary Walden. He should have had the machines watching Susan and Mary at the same time that they were relaying wrist-band data for Bill and Conrad and for Helen and Clara to his office.

He had not done this because it was Susan's shift and he had not expected Mary to break it. Now he knew that Helen and Bill Walden had been quarrelling over the fact that Clara was cheating on Helen's shifts, and their conversations had directed the unhappy child's attention to the Manz couple. She had broken shift to meet them. . . looking for a loving father, of course.

Still—things would not have turned out so badly if Captain Thiel, Mary's school officer, had not attributed Susan Shorrs' disappearance only to poor drug acclimatization. Captain Thiel had naturally known that Major Grey was in town to prosecute Bill Walden, because the major had called on him to discuss the case. Yet it had not occurred to him, until eighteen hours after Susan's disappearance, that Mary might have forced the shift for some reason associated with her aberrant father.

By the time the captain advised him, Major Grey already knew that Bill had forced the shift on Conrad under desperate circumstances and he had decided to close in. He fully expected to find the father and daughter at the apartment, and now... it sickened him to see the child's demented condition and realize that Bill had left her there.

Major Grey could see at a glance that Mary Walden would not be accessible for days even with the best treatment. He left it to the other two officers to hospitalize the child and set out for the Manz apartment.

He used his master wristband to open the door there, and found a woman standing in the middle of the room, wrapped in a sheet. He knew that this must be Helen Walden. It was odd how ill-fitting Clara Manz's softly sensual make-up seemed, even to a stranger, on the more rigidly composed face before

him. He guessed that Helen would wear colour higher on her cheeks and the mouth would be done in severe lines. Certainly the present haughty face struggled with its incongruous make-up as well as the indignity of her dress.

She pulled the sheet tighter about her and said icily, "I will not wear that woman's clothes."

Major Grey introduced himself and asked, "Where is Bill Walden?"

"He shifted! He left me with... Oh, I'm so ashamed!"

Major Grey shared her loathing. There was no way to escape the conditioning of childhood—sex relations between hyperalter and hypoalter were more than outlawed, they were in themselves disgusting. If they were allowed, they could destroy this civilization. Those idealists—they were almost all hypoalters, of course—who wanted the old terminology changed didn't take that into account. Next thing they'd want children to live with their actual parents!

Major Grey stepped into the bedroom. Through the bathroom door beyond, he could see Conrad Manz changing his make-up.

Conrad turned and eyed him bluntly. "Would you mind staying out of here till I'm finished? I've had about all I can take."

Major Grey shut the door and returned to Helen Walden.

He took a hypothalamic block from his own pharmacase and handed it to her. "Here, you're probably on very low drug levels. You'd better take this." He poured her a glass of pop from a decanter and, while they waited for Conrad, he dialed the nearest shifting station on the visiophone and ordered up an emergency shifting costume for her.

When at last they were both dressed, made up to their satisfaction and drugged to his satisfaction, he had them sit on a couch together across from him. They sat at opposite ends of it, stiff with resentment at each other's presence.

Major Grey said calmly, "You realize that this matter is coming to a Medicorps trial. It will be serious."

Major Grey watched their faces. On hers he saw grim determination. On Conrad's face he saw the heavy movement of alarm. The man loved his wife. That was going to help.

"It is necessary in a case such as this for the Medicorps to weigh your decisions along with the scientific evidence we will accumulate. Unfortunately, the number of laymen directly involved in this case—and not on trial—is only two, due to your peculiar marriage. If the hypoalters, Clara and Conrad, were married to other partners, we might call on as many as six involved persons and obtain a more equitable lay judgment. As it stands, the entire responsibility rests on the two of you."

Helen Walden was primly confident. "I don't see how we can fail to treat the matter with perfect logic. After all, it is not *we* who neglect our drug levels. . . They *were* refusing to take their drugs, weren't they?" she asked, hoping for the worst and certain she was right.

"Yes, this is drug refusal." Major Grey paused while she relished the answer. "But I must correct you in one impression. Your proper drug levels do not assure that you will act logically in this matter. The drugged mind *is* logical. However, its fundamental datum is that the drugs and drugged minds must be protected before everything else." He watched Conrad's face while he added, "Because of this, it is possible for you to arrive logically at a conclusion that. . .death is the required solution." He paused, looking at their white lips. Then he said, "Actually, other, more suitable solutions may be possible."

"But they *were* refusing their drugs," she said. "You talk as if you are defending them. Aren't you a Medicorps prosecutor?"

"I do not prosecute *people* in the ancient 20th Century sense, Mrs. Walden. I prosecute the acts of drug refusal and communication breaks. There is quite a difference."

"Well!" she said almost explosively. "I always knew Bill would get into trouble sooner or later with his wild, antisocial ideas. I never *dreamed* the Medicorps would take *his* side."

Major Grey held his breath, almost certain now that she would walk into the trap. If she did, he could save Clara Manz before the trial.

"After all, they have broken every communication code. They have refused the drugs, a defiance aimed at our very lives. They—"

"Shut up!" It was the first time Conrad Manz had spoken since he sat down. "The Medicorps spent weeks gathering evidence and preparing their recommendations. You haven't seen any of that and you've already made up your mind. How logical is that? It sounds as if you *want* your husband dead. Maybe the poor devil had some reason, after all, for what he did." On the man's face there was the nearest approach to hate that the drugs would allow.

Major Grey let his breath out softly. They were split permanently. She would have to trade him a mild decision on Clara in order to save Bill. And even there, if the subsequent evidence gave any slight hope. Major Grey believed now that he could work on Conrad to hang the lay judgment and let the Medicorps' scientific recommendation go through unmodified.

He let them stew in their cross-purposed silence for a while and then nailed home a disconcerting fact.

"I think I should remind you that there are a few advantages to having your alter extinguished in the *mnemonic eraser.* A man whose hyperalter has been extinguished must report on his regular shift days to a hospital and be placed for five days in suspended animation. This is not very healthy for the body, but necessary. Otherwise, everyone's natural distaste for his own alter and the understandable wish to spend twice as much time living would generate schemes to have one's alter sucked out by the eraser. That happened extensively back in the 21st Century before the five-day suspension was required. It was also used as a 'cure' for schizophrenia, but it was, of course, only the brutal murder of innocent personalities."

Major Grey smiled grimly to himself. "Now I will have to ask you both to accompany me to the hospital. I will want you, Mrs. Walden, to shift at once to Mrs. Manz. Mr. Manz, you will have to remain under the close observation of an officer until Bill Walden tries to shift back. We have to catch him with an injection to keep him in shift."

The young medicop put the syringe aside and laid his hand on Bill Walden's forehead. He pushed the hair back out of Bill's eyes.

"There, Mr. Walden, you don't have to struggle now." Bill let his breath out in a long sigh. "You've caught me. I can't shift any more, can I?"

"That's right, Mr. Walden. Not unless we want you to."

The young man picked up his medical equipment and stepped aside.

Bill noticed then the Medicorps officer standing in the background. The man was watching as though he contemplated some melancholy distance. "I am Major Grey, Bill. I'm handling your case."

Bill did not answer. He lay staring at the hospital ceiling.

Then he felt his mouth open in a slow grin.

"What's funny?" Major Grey asked mildly.

"Leaving my hypoalter with my wife," Bill answered candidly. It had already ceased to be funny to him, but he saw Major Grey smile in spite of himself.

"They were quite upset when I found them. It must have been some scramble before that." Major Grey came over and sat in the chair vacated by the young man who had just injected Bill. "You know, Bill, we will need a complete analysis of you. We want to do everything we can to save you, but it will require your co-operation."

Bill nodded, feeling his chest tighten. Here it came. Right to the end they would be tearing him apart to find out what made him work.

Major Grey must have sensed Bill's bitter will to resist.

His resonant voice was soft, his face kindly. "We must have your sincere desire to help. We can't force you to do anything."

"Except die," Bill said.

"Maybe helping us get the information that might save your life at the trial isn't worth the trouble to you. But your aberration has seriously disturbed the lives of several people. Don't you think you owe it to them to help us to prevent this sort of thing in the future?" Major Grey ran his hand through his whitening hair. "I thought you would like to know Mary will come through all right. We will begin shortly to

acclimatize her to her new appointed parents, who will be visiting her each day. "That will accelerate her recovery a great deal. Of course, right now she is still inaccessible."

The brutally clear picture of Mary alone in the storage-room crashed back into Bill's mind. After a while, in such slow stages that the beginning was hardly noticeable, he began to cry. The young medicop injected him with a sleeping compound, but not before Bill knew he would do whatever the Medicorps wanted.

The next day was crowded with battery after battery of tests. The interviews were endless. He was subjected to a hundred artificial situations and every reaction from his blood sugar to the frequency ranges of his voice was measured. They gave him only small amounts of drugs in order to test his reaction to them.

Late in the evening. Major Grey came by and interrupted an officer who was taking an electro-encephalogram for the sixth time after injection of a drug.

"All right. Bill, you have really given us co-operation. But after you've had your dinner, I hope you won't mind if I come to your room and talk with you for a little while."

When Bill finished eating, he waited impatiently in his room for the Medicorps officer. Major Grey came soon after.

He shook his head at the mute question Bill shot at him. "No, Bill. We will not have the results of your tests evaluated until late tomorrow morning. I can't tell you a thing until the trial in any case."

"When will that be?"

"As soon as the evaluation of your tests is in." Major Grey ran his hand over his smooth chin and seemed to sigh.

'Tell me, Bill, how do you feel about your case? How did you get into this situation and what do you think about it now?" The officer sat in the room's only chair and motioned Bill to the cot.

Bill was astonished at his sudden desire to talk about his problem. He had to laugh to cover it up. "I guess I feel as if I am being condemned for trying to stay sober."

Bill used the ancient word with a mock tone of righteousness that he knew the major would understand.

Major Grey smiled. "How do you feel when you're sober?"

Bill searched his face. "The way the ancient Moderns did,I guess. I feel what happens to me the *way* it happens to me, not the artificial way the drugs let it happen. I think there is a way for us to live without the drugs and really enjoy life. Have you ever cut down on your drugs, Major?"

The officer shook his head.

Bill smiled at him dreamily. "You ought to try it. It's as though a new life has suddenly opened up. Everything looks different to you.

"Look, with an average life span of a hundred years, each of us only lives fifty years and our alter lives the other fifty. Yet even on half-time we experience only about half the living we'd do if we didn't take the drugs. We would be able to feel the loves and hatreds and desires of life. No matter how many mistakes we made, we would be able occasionally to live those intense moments that made the ancients great."

Major Grey said tonelessly. "The ancients were great at killing, cheating and debasing one another. And they were worse sober than *drunk."* This time he did not smile at the word.

Bill understood the implacable logic before him. The logic that had saved man from himself by smothering his spirit. The carefully achieved logic of the drugs that had seized upon the disassociated personality, and engineered it into a smoothly running machine, where there was no unhappiness because there was no great happiness, where there was no crime except failure to take the drugs or cross the alter sex line. Without drugs, he was capable of fury and he felt it now.

"You should see how foolish these communication codes look when you are undrugged. This stupid hide-and-seek of shifting! These two-headed monsters simpering about their artificial morals and their endless prescriptions! They belong in *crazy* houses! What use is there m such a world? If we are all this sick, we should die. . ."

Bill stopped and there was suddenly a ringing silence in the barren little room.

Finally Major Grey said, "I think you can see, Bill, that your desire to live without drugs is incompatible with this society. It would be impossible for us to maintain in you an artificial need for the drugs that would be healthy. Only if we can clearly demonstrate that this aberration is not an inherent part of your personality can we do something medically or psycho-surgically about it."

Bill did not at first see the implication in this. When he did, he thought of Clara rather than of himself, and his voice was shaken. "Is it a localized aberration in Clara?"

Major Grey looked at him levelly. "I have arranged for you to be with Clara Manz a little while in the morning." He stood up and said good night and was gone.

Slowly, as if it hurt him to move, Bill turned off the light and lay on the cot in the semi-dark. After a while he could feel his heart begin to take hold and he started feeling better. It was as though a man who had thought himself permanently expatriated had been told, "Tomorrow, you walk just over that hill and you will be home."

All through the night he lay awake, alternating between panic and desperate longing in a cycle with which finally he became familiar. At last, as rusty light of dawn reddened his silent room, he fell into a troubled sleep.

He started awake in broad daylight. An orderly was at the door with his breakfast tray. He could not eat, of course. After the orderly left, he hastily changed to a new hospital uniform and washed himself. He redid his make-up with a trembling hand, straightened the bedclothes and then he sat on the edge of the cot.

No one came for him.

The young medicop who had given him the injection that caught him in shift finally entered, and was standing near him before Bill was aware of his presence.

"Good morning, Mr. Walden. How are you feeling?"

Bill's wildly oscillating tensions froze at the point where he could only move helplessly with events and suffer a constant, unchangeable longing.

It was as if in a dream that they moved in silence together down the long corridors of the hospital and took the lift to an upper floor. The medicop opened the door to a room and let Bill enter. Bill heard the door close behind him. Clara did not turn from where she stood looking out the window. Bill did not care that the walls of the chill little room were almost certainly recording every sight and sound.

All his hunger was focused on the back of the girl at the window. The room seemed to ring with his racing blood. But he was slowly aware that something was wrong, and when at last he called her name, his voice broke.

Still without turning, she said in a strained monotone, "I want you to understand that I have consented to this meeting only because Major Grey has assured me it was necessary."

It was a long time before he could speak. "Clara, I need you."

She spun on him. "Have you no shame? You are married to my hyperalter—don't you understand that?" Her face was suddenly wet with tears and the intensity of her shame flamed at him from her cheeks. "How can Conrad ever forgive me for being with his hyperalter and talking about him? Oh, how can I have been so *mad?"*

"They have done something to you," he said, shaking with tension.

Her chin raised at this. She was defiant, he saw, though not towards himself—he no longer existed for her—but towards that part of herself which once had needed him and now no longer existed. "They have cured me," she declared.

"They have cured me of everything but my shame, and they will help me get rid of that as soon as you leave this room."

Bill stared at her before leaving. Out in the corridor, the young medicop did not look him in the face. They went back to Bill's room and the officer left without a word. Bill lay down on his cot.

Presently Major Grey entered the room. He came over to the cot. "I'm sorry it had to be this way. Bill."

Bill's words came tonelessly from his dry throat. "Was it necessary to be cruel?"

"It was necessary to test the result of her psycho-surgery. Also, it will help her over her shame. She

might otherwise have retained a seed of fear that she still loved you."

Bill did not feel anything any more. Staring at the ceiling, he knew there was no place left for him in this world and no one in it who needed him. The only person who had really needed him had been Mary, and he could not bear to think of how he had treated her. Now the Medicorps was efficiently curing the child of the hurt he had done her. They had already erased from Clara any need for him she had ever felt.

This seemed funny and he began to laugh. "Everyone is being cured of me."

"Yes, Bill. That is necessary." When Bill went on laughing Maor Grey's voice turned quite sharp. "Come with me. It's time for your trial."

The enormous room in which they held the trial was utterly barren. At the great oaken table around which they all sat, there were three Medicorps officers m addition to Major Grey.

Helen did not speak to Bill when they brought him in.

He was placed on the same side of the table with an officer between them. Two orderlies stood behind Bill's chair. Other than these people, there was no one in the room.

The great windows were high above the floor and displayed only the blissful sky. Now and then Bill saw a flock of pigeons waft aloft on silver-turning wings. Everyone at the table except himself had a copy of his case report and they discussed it with clipped sentences. Between the stone floor and the vaulted ceiling, a subtle echolalia babbled about Bill's problem behind their human talk.

The discussion of the report lulled when Major Grey rapped on the table. He glanced unsmiling from face to face, and his voice hurried the ritualized words: "This is a court of medicine, co-joining the results of medical science and considered lay judgment to arrive at a decision in the case of patient Bill Walden. The patient is hospitalized for a history of drug refusal and communication breaks. We have before us the medical case record of patient Walden. Has everyone present studied this record?"

All at the table nodded.

"Do all present feel competent to pass judgment in this case?"

Again there came the agreement.

Major Grey continued, "It is my duty to advise you, in the presence of the patient, of the profound difference between a trial for simple drug refusal and one in which that aberration is compounded with communication breaks.

"It is true that no other aberration is possible when the drugs are taken as prescribed. After all, the drugs *are* the basis for our schizophrenic society. Nevertheless, simple drug refusal often is a mere matter of physiology, which is easy enough to remedy.

"A far more profound threat to our society is the break in communication. This generally is more deeply motivated in the patient, and is often inaccessible to therapy. Such a patient is driven to emotive explorations which place the various ancient passions, and the infamous art of *historical gesture,* such as 'give me liberty or give me death', above the welfare of society."

Bill watched the birds flash down the sky, a handful of heavenly coin. Never had it seemed to him so good to look at the sky. *If they hospitalize me,* he thought, *I will be content forever to sit and look from windows.*

"Our schizophrenic society," Major Grey was saying, "holds together and runs smoothly because, in each individual, the personality conflicts have been compartmentalized between hyperalter and hypoalter. On the social level, conflicting personalities are kept on opposite shifts and never contact each other. Or they are kept on shifts where contact is possible no more than one or two days out of ten. Bill Walden's break of shift is the type of behaviour designed to reactivate these conflicts, and to generate the destructive passions on which an undrugged mind feeds. Already illness and disrupted lives have resulted."

Major Grey paused and looked directly at Bill. "Exhaustive tests have demonstrated that your entire personality is involved. I might also say that the aberration to live without the drugs and to break communication codes *is* your personality. All these Medicorps oflicers are agreed on that diagnosis. It remains now for us of the Medicorps to sit with the laymen intimately involved and decide on the action to be taken. The only possible alternatives after that diagnosis are permanent hospitalization or. . . total

removal of the personality by mnemonic erasure."

Bill could not speak. He saw Major Grey nod to one of the orderlies and felt the man pushing up his sleeve and injecting his nerveless arm. They were forcing him to shift, he knew, so that Conrad Manz could sit in on the trial and participate.

Helplessly, he watched the great sky blacken and the room dim and disappear.

Major Grey did not avert his face, as did the others, while the shift was in progress. Helen Walden, he saw, was dramatizing her shame at being present during a shift, but the Medicorps officers simply stared at the table. Major Grey watched the face of Conrad Manz take form while the man who was going to be tried faded.

Bill Walden had been without make-up, and as soon as he was sure Manz could hear him. Major Grey apologized.

"I hope you won't object to this brief interlude in public without make-up. You are present at the trial of Bill Walden."

Conrad Manz nodded and Major Grey waited another full minute for the shift to complete itself before he continued.

"Mr. Manz, during the two days you waited in the hospital for us to catch Walden in shift, I discussed this case quite thoroughly with you, especially as it applied to the case of Clara Manz, on which we were already working.

"You will recall that in the case of your wife, the Medicorps diagnosis was one of a clearly localized aberration. It was quite simple to apply the mnemonic eraser to that small section without disturbing in any way her basic personality. Medicorps agreement was for this procedure and the case did not come to trial, but simply went to operation, because lay agreement was obtained. First yourself and eventually" Major Grey paused and let the memory of Helen's stubborn insistence that Clara die stir in Conrad's mind, "Mrs. Walden agreed with the Medicorps."

Major Grey let the room wait in silence for awhile. "The case of Bill Walden is quite different. The aberration involves the whole personality, and the alternative actions to be taken are permanent hospitalization or total erasure. In this case, I believe that Medicorps opinion will be divided as to proper action and," Major Grey paused again and looked levelly at Conrad Manz, "this may be true, also, of the lay opinion."

"How's that, Major?" demanded the highest ranking Medicorps officer present, a colonel named Hart, a tall, handsome man on whom the military air was a becoming skin. "What do you mean about Medicorps opinion being divided?"

Major Grey answered quietly, "I'm holding out for hospitalization."

Colonel Hart's face reddened. He thrust it forward and straightened his back. "That's preposterous! This is a clear-cut case of a dangerous threat to our society, and we, let me remind you, are *sworn* to protect that society."

Major Grey felt very tired. It was, after all, difficult to understand why he always fought so hard against erasure of these aberrant cases. But he began with quiet determination.

"The threat to society is effectively removed by either of the alternatives, hospitalization or total erasure. I think you can all see from Bill Walden's medical record that his is a well-rounded personality with a remarkable mind. In the environment of the 20th Century, he would have been an outstanding citizen, and possibly, if there had been more like him, our present society would have been better for it.

"Our history has been one of weeding out all personalities that did not fit easily into our drugged society. Today there are so few left that I have handled only one hundred and thirty-six in my entire career. . . ."

Major Grey saw that Helen Walden was tensing in her chair. He realized suddenly that she sensed better than he the effect he was having on the other men.

"We should not forget that each time we erase one of these personalities," he pressed on relentlessly, "society loses irrevocably a certain capacity for change. If we eliminate all personalities who do not fit, we may find ourselves without any minds capable of meeting future change. Our direct ancestors were largely the inmates of mental hospitals. . . we are fortunate *they* were not erased. Conrad Manz," he

asked abruptly, "what is your opinion on the case of Bill Walden?"

Helen Walden started, but Conrad Manz shrugged his muscular shoulders. "Oh, hospitalize the three-headed monster!"

Major Grey snapped his eyes directly past Colonel Hart and fastened them on the Medicorps captain. "Your opinion, Captain?"

But Helen Walden was too quick. Before he could rap the table for order, she had her thin words hanging in the echoing room. "Having been Mr. Walden's wife for fifteen years, my sentiments naturally incline me to ask for hospitalization. That is why I may safely say, if Major Grey will pardon me, that the logic of the drugs does not entirely fail us in this situation."

Helen waited while all present got the idea that Major Grey had accused them of being illogical. "Bill's aberration has led to our daughter's illness. And think how quickly it contaminated Clara Manz! I cannot ask that society any longer expose itself, even to the extent of keeping Bill in the isolation of the hospital, for my purely sentimental reasons.

"As for Major Grey's closing remarks, I cannot see how it is fair to bring my husband to trial as a threat to society, if some future change is expected, in which a man of his behaviour would benefit society. Surely such a change could only be one that would ruin our present world, or Bill would hardly fit it. I would not want to save Bill or anyone else for such a future."

She did not have to say anything further. Both of the other Medicorps officers were now fully roused to their duty. Colonel Hart, of course, "humphed" at the opinions of a woman and cast his with Major Grey. But the fate of Bill Walden was sealed.

Major Grey sat, weary and uneasy, as the creeping little doubts began. In the end, he would be left with the one big stone-heavy doubt. . . could he have gone through with this if he had not been drugged, and how would the logic of the trial look without drugs?

He became aware of the restiveness in the room. They were waiting for him, now that the decision was irrevocable. Without the drugs, he reflected, they might be feeling—what was the ancient word, *guilt?* No, that was what the criminal felt.

Remorse? That would be what they should be feeling. Major Grey wished Helen Walden could be forced to witness the erasure. People did not realize what it was like.

What was it Bill had said? "You should see how foolish these communication codes look when you are undrugged. This stupid hide-and-seek of shifting. . . ."

Well, wasn't that a charge to be *inspected* seriously, if you were taking it seriously enough to kill the man for it? As soon as this case was completed, he would have to return to his city and blot himself out so that his own hyperalter, Ralph Singer, a painter of bad pictures and a useless fool, could waste five more days. To that man he lost half his possible living days. What earthly good was Singer?

Major Grey roused himself and motioned the orderly to inject Conrad Manz, so that Bill Walden would be forced back into shift.

"As soon as I have advised the patient' of our decision, you will all be dismissed. Naturally, I anticipated this decision and have arranged for immediate erasure. After the erasure, Mr. Manz, you will be instructed to appear regularly for suspended animation."

For some reason, the first thing Bill Walden did when he became conscious of his surroundings was to look out the great window for the flock of birds. But they were gone.

Bill looked at Major Grey and said, "What are you going to do?"

The officer ran his hand back through his whitening hair, but he looked at Bill without wavering. "You will be erased."

Bill began to shake his head. "There is something wrong," he said.

"Bill . . ." the major began.

"There is something wrong," Bill repeated hopelessly. "Why must we be split so there is always something missing in each of us? Why must we be stupefied with drugs that keep us from knowing what we should feel? I was trying to live a better life. I did not want to hurt anyone."

"But you *did* hurt others," Major Grey said bluntly. "You would do so again if allowed to function in your own way in this society. Yet it would be insufferable to you to be hospitalized. You would be shut

off forever from searching for another Clara Manz. And—there is no one else for you, is there?"

Bill looked up, his eyes cringing as though they stared at death. "No one else?" he asked vacantly. "No one?"

The two orderlies lifted him up by his arms, almost carrying him into the operating room. His feet dragged helplessly.

He made no resistance as they lifted him on to the operating table and strapped him down.

Beside him was the great panel of the mnemonic eraser with its thousand unblinking eyes. The helmet-like prober cabled to this calculator was fastened about his skull, and he could no longer see the professor who was lecturing in the amphitheatre above. But along his body he could see the group of medical students. They were looking at him with great interest, too young not to let the human drama interfere with their technical education.

The professor, however, droned in a purely objective voice.

"The mnemonic eraser can selectively shunt from the brain any identifiable category of memory, and erase the synaptic patterns associated with its translation into action. Circulating memory is disregarded. The machine only locates and shunts out those energies present as permanent memory. These are there in part as permanently echoing frequencies in closed cytoplasmic systems. These systems are in contact with the rest of the nervous system only during the phenomenon of remembrance. Remembrance occurs when, at all the synapses in a given network 'y', the permanently echoing frequencies are duplicated as transient circulating frequencies.

"The objective in a total operation of the sort before us is to distinguish all the stored permanent frequencies, typical of the personality you wish to extinguish, from the frequencies typical of the other personality present in the brain."

Major Grey's face, very tired, but still wearing a mask of adamant reassurance, came into Bill's vision. "There will be a few moments of drug-induced terror, Bill. That is necessary for the operation. I hope knowing it beforehand will help you ride with it. It will not be for long." He squeezed Bill's shoulder and was gone.

"The trick was learned early in our history, when this type of total operation was more often necessary," the professor continued. "It is really quite simple to extinguish one personality while leaving the other undisturbed. The other personality in the case before us has been drug-immobilized to keep this one from shifting. At the last moment, this personality before us will be drug-stimulated to bring it to the highest possible pitch of total activity. This produces utterly disorganized activity, every involved neutron and synapse being activated simultaneously by the drug. It is then a simple matter for the mnemonic eraser to locate all permanently echoing frequencies involved in this personality and suck them into its receiver."

Bill was suddenly aware that a needle had been thrust into his arm. Then it was as though all the terror, panic and traumatic incidents of his whole life leaped into his mind. All the pleasant experiences and feelings he had ever known were there, too, but were transformed into terror.

A bell was ringing with regular strokes. Across the panel of the mnemonic eraser, the tiny counting lights were alive with movement.

There was in Bill a fright, a demand for survival so great that it could not be felt.

It was actually from an island of complete calm that part of him saw the medical students rising dismayed and white-faced from their seats. It was apart from himself that his body strained to lift some mountain and filled the operating amphitheatre with shrieking echoes. And all the time the thousand eyes of the mnemonic eraser flickered in swift patterns, a silent measure of the cells and circuits of his mind.

Abruptly the tiny red counting lights went off, a red beam glowed with a burr of warning. Someone said, "Now!" The mind of Bill Walden flashed along a wire as electrical energy, and, converted on the control panel into mechanical energy, it spun a small ratchet counter.

"Please sit down," the professor said to the shaken students. "The drug that has kept the other personality immobilized is being counteracted by this next injection. Now that the sickly personality has been dissipated, the healthy one can be brought back rapidly.

"As you are aware, the synapse operates on the binary 'yes-no' choice system of an electronic

calculator. All synapses which were involved in the diseased personality have now been reduced to an atypical, uniform threshold. Thus they can be re-educated in new patterns by the healthy personality remaining. .. . There, you see the countenance of the healthy personality appearing."

It was Conrad Manz who looked up at them with a wry grin. He rotated his shoulders to loosen them. "How many of you pushed old Bill Walden around? He left me with some sore muscles. Well, I did that often enough to him. . . ."

Major Grey stood over him, face sick and white with the horror of what he had seen. "According to law, Mr. Manz, you and your wife are entitled to five rest days on your next shift. When they are over, you will, of course, report for suspended animation for what would have been your hyperalter's shift."

Conrad Manz's grin shrank and vanished. *"Would* have been? Bill is—gone?"

"Yes."

"I never thought I'd miss him." Conrad looked as sick as Major Grey felt. "It makes me feel—I don't know if I can explain it—sort of *amputated.* As though something's wrong with me because everybody else has an alter and I don't. Did the poor son of a strait-jacket suffer much?"

"I'm afraid he did."

Conrad Manz lay still for a moment with his eyes closed and his mouth thin with pity and remorse. "What will happen to Helen?"

"She'll be all right," Major Grey said. "There will be Bill's insurance, naturally, and she won't have much trouble finding another husband. That kind never seems to."

"Five rest days?" Conrad repeated. "Is that what you said?" He sat up and swung his legs off the table, and he was grinning again. "I'll get in a whole shift of jet-skiing! No, wait—I've got a date with the wife of a friend of mine out at the rocket grounds. I'll take Clara out there; she'll like some of the men."

Major Grey nodded abstractedly. "Good idea." He shook hands with Conrad Manz, wished him fun on his rest shift, and left.

Taking a helicopter hack to his city. Major Grey thought of his own hyperalter, Ralph Singer. He'd often wished that the silly fool could be erased. Now he wondered how it would be to have only one personality, and, wondering, realized that Conrad Manz had been right—it *would* be like imputation, the shameful distinction of living in a schizophrenic society with no alter.

No, Bill Walden had been wrong, completely wrong, both about drugs and being split into two personalities. What one made up in pleasure through not taking drugs was more than lost in the suffering of conflict, frustration and hostility. And having an alter—any kind, even one as useless as Singer meant, actually, *not being alone.*

Major Grey parked the helicopter and found a shifting station. He took off his make-up, addressed and mailed his clothes, and waited for the shift to come.

It was a pretty wonderful society he lived in, he realized.

He wouldn't trade it for the kind Bill Walden had wanted.

Nobody in his right mind would.

From its title, one might guess that this story belongs to the Poe-Machen-Lovecraft school of weird fiction. Not so: the title is altogether appropriate, but the story is honest science fiction, a dazzling, hyperkinetic vision of futurity. Roger Zelazny, who is probably the most gifted of the talented crop of science-fiction writers who emerged in the 1960s, has been laden with Hugos and Nebulas for assorted other works, but this novella, which has generally been neglected in the handing out of praise and trophies, strikes me as close to his finest story.

The Graveyard Heart
Roger Zelazny

They were dancing,

—at the party of the century, the party of the millennium, and the Party of Parties,

—really, as well as calendar-wise,

—and he wanted to crush her, to tear her to pieces. . . . Moore did not really see the pavilion through which they moved, nor regard the hundred faceless shadows that glided about them. He did not take particular note of the swimming globes of colored light that followed above and behind them.

He felt these things, but he did not necessarily sniff wilderness in that ever-green relic of Christmas past turning on its bright pedestal in the center of the room—shedding its fireproofed needles and traditions these six days after the fact.

All of these were abstracted and dismissed, inhaled and filed away. . . .

In a few more moments it would be Two Thousand. Leota (nee Lilith) rested in the bow of his arm like a quivering arrow, until he wanted to break her or send her flying (he knew not where), to crush her into limpness, to make that samadhi, myopia, or whatever, go away from her graygreen eyes. At about that time, each time, she would lean against him and whisper something into his ear, something in French, a language he did not yet speak. She followed his inept lead so perfectly though, that it was not unwarranted that he should feel she could read his mind by pure kinesthesia.

Which made it all the worse then, whenever her breath collared his neck with a moist warmness that spread down under his jacket like an invisible infection. Then he would mutter "C'est vrai" or "Damn" or both and try to crush her bridal whiteness (overlaid with black webbing), and she would become an arrow once more. But she was dancing with him, which was a decided improvement over his last year/her yesterday.

It was almost Two Thousand.

Now . . .

The music broke itself apart and grew back together again as the globes blared daylight. Auld acquaintance, he was reminded, was not a thing to be trifled with.

He almost chuckled then, but the lights went out a moment later and he found himself occupied.

A voice speaking right beside him, beside everyone, stated:

"It is now Two Thousand. Happy New Year!"

He crushed her.

No one cared about Times Square. The crowds in the Square had been watching a relay of the Party on a jerry-screen the size of a football field. Even now the onlookers were being amused by blacklight close-ups of the couples on the dance floor. Perhaps at that very moment, Moore decided, they themselves were the subject of a hilarious sequence being served up before that overflowing Petri dish across the ocean. It was quite likely, considering his partner.

He did not fare if they laughed at him, though. He had come too far to care.

"I love you," he said silently. (He used mental dittos to presume an answer, and this made him feel somewhat happier.) Then the lights fireflied once more and auld acquaintance was remembered. A buzzard compounded of a hundred smashed rainbows began falling about the couples; slow-melting spirals of confetti drifted through the lights, dissolving as they descended upon the dancers; furry-edged projections of Chinese dragon Idtes swam overhead, grinning their way through the storm.

They resumed dancing and he asked her the same question he had asked her the year before.

"Can't we be alone, together, somewhere, just for a moment?"

She smothered a yawn.

"No, I'm bored. I'm going to leave in half an hour."

If voices can be throaty and rich, hers was an opulent neckful. Her throat was golden, to a well-sunned turn.

"Then let's spend it talking—in one of the little dining rooms."

"Thank you, but I'm not hungry. I must be seen for the next half hour."

Primitive Moore, who had spent most of his life dozing at the back of Civilized Moore's brain, rose to his haunches then, with a growl. Civilized Moore muzzled him though, because he did not wish to spoil things.

"When can I see you again?" he asked grimly.

"Perhaps Bastille Day," she whispered. "There's the Liberte, figalite, Fraternite Fete Nue . ."

"Where?"

"In the New Versailles Dome, at nine. If you'd like an invitation, I'll see that you receive one. ..."

"Yes, I do want one."

("She made you ask," jeered Primitive Moore.)

"Very well, you'll receive one in May."

"Won't you spare me a day or so now?"

She shook her head, her blue-blonde coif burning his face.

"Time is too dear," she whispered in mock-Camille pathos, "and the days of the Parties are without end. You ask me to cut years off my life and hand them to you."

"That's right."

"You ask too much," she smiled.

He wanted to curse her right then and walk away, but he wanted even more so to stay with her. He was twenty-seven, an age of which he did not approve in the first place, and he had spent all of the year 1999 wanting her. He had decided two years ago that he was going to fall in love and marry—because he could finally afford to do so without altering his standards of living. Lacking a woman who combined the better qualities of Aphrodite and a digital computer, he had spent an entire year on safari, trekking after the spoor of his star-crossed.

The invitation to the Bledsoes' Orbiting New Year—which had hounded the old year around the world, chasing it over the International Dateline and off the Earth entirely, to wherever old years go—had set him back a month's pay, but had given him his first live glimpse of Leota Mathilde Mason, belle of the Sleepers. Forgetting about digital computers, he decided then and there to fall in love with her. He was old-fashioned in many respects.

He had spoken with her for precisely ninety-seven seconds, the first twenty of which had been Arctic. But he realized that she existed to be admired, so he insisted on admiring her. Finally, she consented to be seen dancing with him at the Millennium Party in Stockholm.

He had spent the following year anticipating her seduction back to a reasonable and human mode of existence. Now, in the most beautiful city in the world, she had just informed him that she was bored and was about to retire until Bastille Day. It was then that Primitive Moore realized what Civilized Moore must really have known all along: the next time that he saw her she would be approximately two days older and he would be going on twenty-nine. Time stands still for the Set, but the price of mortal existence is age. Money could buy her the most desirable of all narcissist indulgences: the cold-bunk.

And he had not even had the chance of a Stockholm snowflake in the Congo to speak with her, to speak more than a few disjointed sentences, let alone to try talking her out of the ice-box club. (Even now, Setman laureate Wayne Unger was moving to cut in on him, with the expression of a golf pro about to give a lesson.)

"Hello, Leota. Sorry, Mister Uh."

Primitive Moore snarled and bashed him with his club.

Civilized Moore released one of the most inaccessible women in the world to a god of the Set.

She was smiling. He was smiling. They were gone.

All the way around the world to San Francisco, sitting in the bar of the stratocruiser in the year of Our Lord Two Thousand—that is to say: two, zero, zero, zero-Moore felt that Time was out of joint.

It was two days before he made up his mind what he was going to do about it.

He asked himself (from the blister balcony of his suite in the Hundred Towers of the Hilton-Frisco Complex):

Is this the girl I want to marry?

He answered himself (locking alternately at the traffic capillaries below his shoe tops and the Bay): Yes.

Why? he wanted to know.

Because she is beautiful, he answered, and the future will be lovely. I want her for my beautiful wife in the lovely future.

So he decided to join the Set.

He realized it was no mean feat he was mapping out. First, he required money, lots of money—green acres of Presidents, to be strewn properly in the proper places. The next requisite was distinction, recognition. Unfortunately, the world was full of electrical engineers, humming through their twenty-hour weeks, dallying with pet projects—competent, capable, even inspired—who did not have these things. So he knew it would be difficult.

He submerged himself into research with a unique will: forty, sixty, eighty hours a week he spent—reading, designing, studying taped courses in subjects he had never needed. He gave up on recreation.

By May, when he received his invitation, he stared at the engraved (not fac-copy) parchment (not jot-sheet) with bleary eyes. He had already had nine patents entered and three more were pending. He had sold one and was negotiating with Akwa Mining over a water purification process which he had, he felt, fallen into. Money he would have, he decided, if he could keep up the pace.

Possibly even some recognition. That part now depended mainly on his puro-process and what he did with the money. Leota (nee Lorelei) lurked beneath his pages of formulas, was cubed Braque-like in the lines on his sketcher; she burnt as he slept, slept as he burned.

In June he decided he needed a rest.

"Assistant Division Chief Moore," he told the face in the groomer (his laudatory attitude toward work had already earned him a promotion at the Seal-Lock Division of Pressure Units, Corporate), "you need more French and better dancing."

The groomer hands patted away at his sandy stubble and slashed smooth the shagginess above his ears. The weary eyes before him agreed bluely; they were tired of studying abstractions.

The intensity of his recreation, however, was as fatiguing in its own way as his work had been. His muscle tone did improve as he sprang weightlessly through the Young Men's Christian Association Satellite-3 Trampoline Room; his dance steps seemed more graceful after he had spun with a hundred robots and ten dozen women; he took the accelerated Berlitz drug-course in French (eschewing the faster electrocerebral-stimulation series, because of a rumored transference that might slow his reflexes later that summer); and he felt that he was beginning to sound better—he had hired a gabcoach, and he bake-ovened Restoration plays into his pillow (and hopefully, into his head) whenever he slept (generally every third day now)—so that, as the day of the Fete drew near, he began feeling like a Renaissance courtier (a tired one).

As he stared at Civilized Moore inside his groomer, Primitive Moore wondered how long that feeling would last.

Two days before Versailles he cultivated a uniform tan and decided what he was going to say to Leota this time:

—I love you? (Hell, no!)

—Will you quit the cold circuit? (Uh-uh).

—If I join the Set, will you join me? (That seemed the best way to put it.)

Their third meeting, then, was to be on different terms. No more stake-outs in the wastes of the prosaic. The hunter was going to enter the brush. "Onward!" grinned the Moore in the groomer, "and Excelsior!"

She was dressed in a pale blue, mutie orchid corsage. The revolving dome of the palace spun singing zodiacs and the floors fluoresced witch-fires. He had the uncomfortable feeling that the damned flowers were growing there, right above her left breast, like an exotic parasite; and he resented their intrusion with a parochial possiveness that he knew was not of the Renaissance.

Nevertheless . . .

"Good evening. How do your flowers grow?"

"Barely and quite contrary," she decided, sipping something green through a long straw, "but they cling to life."

"With an understandable passion," he noted, taking her hand which she did not withdraw. "Tell me. Eve of the Microprosopos—where are you headed?"

Interest flickered across her face and came to rest in her eyes.

"Your French has improved, Adam—Kadmon . . . ?" she noted. "I'm headed ahead. Where are you headed?"

"The same way."

"I doubt it—unfortunately."

"Doubt all you want, but we're parallel flows already."

"Is that a conceit drawn from some engineering laureate?"

"Watch me engineer a cold-bunk," he stated.

Her eyes shot X-rays through him, warming his bones.

"I knew you had something on your mind. If you were serious . . ."

"Us fallen spirits have to stick together here in Malkuth—I'm serious." He coughed and talked eyetalk. "Shall we stand together as though we're dancing. I see Unger; he sees us, and I want you."

"All right."

She placed her glass on a drifting tray and followed him out onto the floor and beneath the turning zodiac, leaving Setman Unger to face a labyrinth of flesh. Moore laughed at his predicament.

"It's harder to tell identities at an anti-costume party."

She smiled.

"You know, you dance differently today than last night."

"I know. Listen, how do I get a private iceberg and a key to Schlerafenland? I've decided it might be amusing. I know that it's not a matter of genealogy, or even money, for that matter, although both seem to help. I've read all the literature, but I could use some practical advice."

Her hand quivered ever so slightly in his own.

"You know the Doyenne?" she said asked.

"Mainly rumors," he replied, "to the effect that she's an old gargoyle they've frozen to frighten away the Beast come Armageddon."

Leota did not smile. Instead, she became an arrow again.

"More or less," she replied coldly. "She does keep beastly people out of the Set."

Civilized Moore bit his tongue.

"Although many do not like her," she continued, becoming slightly more animated as she reflected, "I've always found her a rare little piece of chinoiserie. I'd like to take her home, if I had a home, and set her on my mantel, if I had a mantel."

"I've heard that she'd fit right into the Victorian Room at the NAM Galleries," Moore ventured.

"She was born during Vicky's reign—and she was in her eighties when the cold-bunk was developed—but I can safely say that the matter goes no further."

"And she decided to go gallivanting through Time at that age?"

"Precisely," answered Leota, "inasmuch as she wishes to be the immortal arbiter of trans-society."

They turned with the music. Leota had relaxed once more.

"At one hundred and ten she's already on her way to becoming an archetype," Moore noted. "Is that one of the reasons interviews are so hard to come by?"

"One of the reasons. . . ." she told him. "If, for example, you were to petition Party Set now, you would still have to wait until next summer for the interview-provided you reached that stage."

"How many are there on the roster of eligibles?"

She shut her eyes.

"I don't know. Thousands, I should say. She'll only see a few dozen, of course. The others will have been weeded out, pruned off, investigated away, and variously disqualified by the directors. Then, naturally, she will have the final say as to who is in."

Suddenly green and limpid—as the music, the lights, the ultrasonics, and the delicate narcotic fragrances of the air altered subtly—the room became a dark, cool place at the bottom of the sea, heady and nostalgic as the mind of a mermaid staring upon the ruins of Atlantis. The elegiac genius of the hall drew them closer together by a kind of subtle gravitation, and she was cool and adhesive as he continued:

"What is her power, really? I've read the tapes; I know she's a big stockholder, but so what? Why can't the directors vote around her. If I paid out—"

"They wouldn't," she said. "Her money means nothing. She is an institution.

"Hers is the quality of exclusiveness which keeps the Set the Set," she went on. "Imitators will always fail because they lack her discrimination. They'll take in any boorish body who'll pay. That is the reason that People Who Count," (she pronounced the capitals), "will neither attend nor sponsor any but Set functions. All exclusiveness would vanish from the Earth if the Set lowered its standards."

"Money is money," said Moore. "If others paid the same for their parties . . ."

". . . Then the People who take their money would cease to Count. The Set would boycott them. They would lose their elan, be looked upon as hucksters."

"It sounds like a rather vicious moebius."

"It is a caste system with checks and balances. Nobody really wants it to break down."

"Even those who wash out?"

"Silly! They'd be the last. There's nothing to stop them from buying their own bunkers, if they can afford it, and waiting another five years to try again. They'd be wealthier anyhow for the wait, if they invest properly. Some have waited decades, and are still waiting. Some have made it after years of persisting. It makes the game more interesting, the achievement more satisfying. In a world of physical ease, brutal social equality, and reasonable economic equality, exclusiveness in frivolity becomes the most sought-after of all distinctions."

" 'Commodities,'" he corrected.

"No," she stated, "it is not for sale. Try buying it if money is all you have to offer."

That brought his mind back to more immediate considerations.

"What is the cost, if all the other qualifications are met?"

"The rule on that is sufficiently malleable to permit an otherwise qualified person to meet his dues. He guarantees his tenure, bunk-wise or Party-wise, until such a time as his income offsets his debt. So if he only possesses a modest fortune, he may still be quite eligible. This is necessary if we are to preserve our democratic ideals."

She looked away, looked back.

"Usually a step-scale of percentages on the returns from his investments is arranged. In fact, a Set counselor will be right there when you liquidate your assets, and he'll recommend the best conversions."

"Set must clean up on this."

"Certainement. It is a business, and the Parties don't come cheaply. But then, you'd be a part of Set yourself—being a shareholder is one of the membership requirements—and we're a restricted corporation, paying high dividends. Your principal will grow. If you were to be accepted, join, and then quit after even one objective month, something like twenty actual years would have passed. You'd be a month older and much wealthier when you leave—and perhaps somewhat wiser."

"Where do I go to put my name on the list?"

He knew, but he had hopes.

"We can call it in tonight, from here. There is always someone in the office. You will be visited in a week or so, after the preliminary investigation."

"Investigation?"

"Nothing to worry about. Or have you a criminal record, a history of insanity, or a bad credit rating?"

Moore shook his head.

"No, no, and no."

"Then you'll pass."

"But will I actually have a chance of getting in, against all those others?"

It was as though a single drop of rain fell upon his chest.

"Yes," she replied, putting her cheek into the hollow of his neck and staring out over his shoulder so that he could not see her expression, "you'll make it all the way to the lair of Mary Maude Mullen with a member sponsoring you. That final hurdle will depend on yourself."

"Then I'll make it," he told her.

". . . The interview may only last seconds. She's quick; her decisions are almost instantaneous, and she's never wrong."

"Then I'll make it," he repeated, exulting.

Above them, the zodiac rippled.

Moore found Darryl Wilson in a bannat in the Poconos. The actor had gone to seed; he was not the man Moore remembered from the award-winning frontier threelie series. That man had been a crag-browed, bushy-faced Viking of the prairies. In four years' time a facial avalanche had occurred, leaving its gaps and runnels across his expensive frown and dusting the face fur a shade lighter. Wilson had left it that way and cauterized his craw with the fire water he had denied the Bed Man weekly. Rumor had it he was well into his second liver.

Moore sat beside him and inserted his card into the counter slot. He punched out a Martini and waited. When he noticed that the man was unaware of his presence, he observed, "You're Darryl Wilson and I'm Alvin Moore. I want to ask you something."

The straight-shooting eyes did not focus.

"News media man?"

"No, an old fan of yours," he lied.

"Ask away then," said the still-familiar voice. "You are a camera."

"Mary Maude Mullen, the bitch-goddess of the Set," he said. "What's she like?"

The eyes finally focused.

"You up for deification this session?"

"That's right."

"What do you think?"

Moore waited, but there were no more words, so he finally asked, "About what?"

"Anything. You name it."

Moore took a drink. He decided to play the game if it would make the man more tractable.

"I think I like Martinis," he stated. "Now—"

"Why?"

Moore growled. Perhaps Wilson was too far gone to be of any help. Still, one more try ...

"Because they're relaxing and bracing, both at the same time, which is something I need after coming all this way."

"Why do you want to be relaxed and braced?"

"Because I prefer it to being tense and unbraced."

"Why?"

"What the hell is all this?"

"You lose. Go home."

Moore stood.

"Suppose I go out again and come back in and we start over? Okay?"

"Sit down. My wheels turn slowly but they still turn," said Wilson. "We're talking about the same thing. You want to know what Mary Maude is like? That's what she's like—all interrogatives. Useless ones. Attitudes are a disease that no one's immune to, and they vary so easily in the same person. In two minutes she'll have you stripped down to them, and your answers will depend on biochemistry and the weather. So will her decision. There's nothing I can tell you. She's pure caprice. She's life. She's ugly."

"That's all?"

"She refuses the wrong people. That's enough. Go away."

Moore finished his Martini and went away.

That winter Moore made a fortune. A modest one, to be sure.

He quit his job for a position with the Akwa Mining Research Lab, Oahu Division. It added ten minutes to his commuting time, but the title. Processing Director, sounded better than Assistant Division Chief, and he was anxious for a new sound. He did not slacken the pace of his force-fed social acceptability program, and one of its results was a January lawsuit.

The Set, he had been advised, preferred divorce male candidates to the perpetually single sort. For

this reason, he had consulted a highly-rated firm of marriage contractors and entered into a three-month renewable, single partner drop-option contract, with Diane Demetrics, an unemployed model of Greek-Lebanese extraction.

One of the problems of modeling, he decided later, was that there were many surgically-perfected female eidolons in the labor force. His newly-acquired status had been sufficient inducement to cause Diane to press a breach of promise suit on the basis of an alleged oral agreement that the option would be renewed.

Burgess Social Contracting Services of course sent a properly obsequious adjuster, and they paid the court costs as well as the medfees for Moore's broken nose. (Diane had hit him with The Essentials of Dress Display, a heavy, illustrated talisman of a manual, which she carried about in a plastic case—as he slept beside their pool—plastic case and all.)

So, by the month of March Moore felt ready and wise and capable of facing down the last remaining citizen of the nineteenth century.

By May, though, he was beginning to feel he had over-trained. He was tempted to take a month's psychiatric leave from his work, but he recalled Leota's question about a history of insanity. He vetoed the notion and thought of Leota. The world stood still as his mind turned. Guiltily, he realized that he had not thought of her for months. He had been too busy with his auto-didactics, his new job, and Diane Demetrios to think of the Setqueen, his love.

He chuckled.

Vanity, he decided; I want her because everyone wants her.

No, that wasn't true either, exactly. . . . He wanted—what?

He thought upon his motives, his desires.

He realized, then, that his goals had shifted; the act had become the actor. What he really wanted, first and foremost, impure and unsimple, was an in to the Set—that century-spanning stratocruiser, luxury class, jetting across tomorrow and tomorrow and all the days that followed after—to ride high, like those gods of old who appeared at the rites of the equinoxes, slept between processions, and were remanifest with each new season, the bulk of humanity living through all those dreary days that lay between. To be a part of Leota was to be a part of the Set, and that was what he wanted now. So of course it was vanity. It was love.

He laughed aloud. His autosurf initialed the blue lens of the Pacific like a manned diamond, casting the sharp cold chips of its surface up and into his face.

Returning from absolute zero, Lazarus-like, is neither painful nor disconcerting, at first. There are no sensations at all until one achieves the temperature of a reasonably warm corpse. By that time though, an injection of nirvana flows within the body's thawed rivers.

It is only when consciousness begins to return, thought Mrs. Mullen, to return with sufficient strength so that one fully realizes what has occurred—that the" wine has survived another season in an uncertain cellar, its vintage grown rarer still—only then does an unpronounceable fear enter into the mundane outlines of the bedroom furniture—for a moment.

It is more a superstitious attitude than anything, a mental quaking at the possibility that the stuff of life, one's own life, has in some indefinable way been tampered with. A microsecond passes, and then only the dim recollection of a bad dream remains.

She shivered, as though the cold was still locked within her bones, and she shook off the notion of nightmares past.

She turned her attention to the man in the white coat who stood at her elbow.

"What day is it?" she asked him.

He was a handful of dust in the wines of Time. . . .

"August eighteen, two thousand-two," answered the handful of dust. "How do you feel?"

"Excellent, thank you," she decided. "I've just touched upon a new century—this makes three I've visited—so why shouldn't I feel excellent? I intend to visit many more."

"I'm sure you will, madam."

The small maps of her hands adjusted the counter-pane. She raised her head.

"Tell me what is new in the world."

The doctor looked away from the sudden acetylene burst behind her eyes.

"We have finally visited Neptune and Pluto," he narrated. "They are quite uninhabitable. It appears that man is alone in the solar system. The Laka Sahara project has run into more difficulties but it seems that work may begin next spring now that those stupid French claims are near settlement. , . ." Her eyes fused his dust to planes of glass.

"Another competitor, Futuretime Gay, entered into the time-tank business three years ago," he recited, trying to smile, "but we met the enemy and they are ours—Set bought them out eight months ago. By the way, our own bunkers are now much more sophistica—"

"I repeat," she said, "what is new in the world, doctor?"

He shook his head, avoiding the look she gave him.

"We can lengthen the remissions now," he finally told her, "quite a time beyond what could be achieved by the older methods."

"A better delaying action?"

"Yes."

"But not a cure?"

He shook his head.

"In my case," she told him, "it has already been abnormally delayed. The old nostrums have already worn thin. For how long are the new ones good?"

"We still don't know. You have an unusual variety of M.S. and it's complicated by other things."

"Does a cure seem any nearer?"

"It could take another twenty years. We might have one tomorrow."

"I see." The brightness subsided. "You may leave now, young man. Turn on my advice tape as you go."

He was glad to let the machine take over.

Diane Demetrios dialed the library and requested the Setbook. She twirled the page-dial and stopped.

She studied the screen as though it were a mirror, her face undergoing a variety of expressions.

"I look just as good," she decided after a time. "Better, even. Your nose could be changed, and your brow-line . . .

"If they weren't facial fundamentalists," she told the picture, "if they didn't discriminate against surgery, lady—you'd be here and I'd be there.

"Bitch!"

The millionth barrel of converted seawater emerged, fresh and icy, from the Moore Purifier. Splashing from its chamber-tandem and flowing through the conduits, it was clean, useful, and singularly unaware of these virtues. Another transfusion of briny Pacific entered at the other hand.

The waste products were used in pseudoceramicware. The man who designed the doubleduty Purifier was rich.

The temperature was 82° in Oahu. The million-first barrel splashed forth. . .

They left Alvin Moore surrounded by china dogs.

Two of the walls were shelved, floor to ceiling. The shelves were lined with blue, green, pink, russet (not to mention ochre, vermilion, mauve, and saffron) dogs, mainly glazed (although some were dry-rubbed primitives), ranging from the size of a largish cockroach up to that of a pigmy warthog. Across the room a veritable Hades of a wood fire roared its metaphysical challenge into the hot July of Bermuda.

Set above it was a mantelpiece bearing more dogs.

Set beside the hellplace was a desk, at which was seated Mary Maude Mullen, wrapped in a green and black tartan. She studied Moore's file, which lay open on the blotter. When she spoke to him she did not look up.

Moore stood beside the chair which had not been offered him and pretended to study the dogs and the heaps of Georgian kindling that filled the room to overflowing.

While not overly fond of live dogs, Moore bore them no malice. But when he closed his eyes for a moment he experienced a feeling of claustrophobia.

These were not dogs. There were the unblinking aliens staring through the bars of the last Earthman's cage. Moore promised himself that he would say nothing complimentary about the garish rainbow of a houndpack (fit, perhaps, for stalking a jade stag the size of a Chihuahua); he decided it could only have sprung from the mental crook of a monomaniac, or one possessed of a very feeble imagination and small respect for dogs.

After verifying all the generalities listed on his petition, Mrs. Mullen raised her pale eyes to his.

"How do you like my doggies?" she asked him.

She sat there, a narrow-faced, wrinkled woman with flaming hair, a snub nose, an innocent expression, and the lingering twist of the question lurking her thin lips.

Moore quickly played back his last thoughts and decided to maintain his integrity in regards china dogs by answering objectively.

"They're quite colorful," he noted.

This was the wrong answer, he felt, as soon as he said it. The question had been too abrupt. He had entered the study ready to he about anything but china dogs. So he smiled.

"There are a dreadful lot of them about. But of course they don't bark or bite or shed, or do other things. . . ."

She smiled back.

"My dear little, colorful little bitches and sons of bitches," she said. "They don't do anything. They're sort of symbolic. That's why I collect them too.

"Sit down"—she gestured—"and pretend you're comfortable."

"Thanks."

"It says here that you rose only recently from the happy ranks of anonymity to achieve some sort of esoteric distinction in the sciences. Why do you wish to resign it now?"

"I wanted money and prestige, both of which I was given to understand would be helpful to a Set candidate."

"Aha! Then they were a means rather than an end?"

"That is correct."

"Then tell me why you want to join the Set."

He had written out the answer to that one months ago. It had been bake-ovened into his brain, so that he could speak it with natural inflections. The words began forming themselves in his throat, but he let them die there. He had planned them for what he had thought would be maximum appeal to a fan of Tennyson's. Now he was not so sure.

Still . . . He broke down the argument and picked a neutral point—the part about following knowledge like a sinking star.

"There will be a lot of changes over the next several decades. I'd like to see them-with a young man's eyes."

"As a member of the Set you will exist more to be seen than to see," she replied, making a note in his file. ". . . And I think we'll have to dye your hair if we accept you."

"The hell you say! —Pardon me, that slipped out."

"Good." She made another note. "We can't have them too inhibited—nor too uninhibited, for that matter. Your reaction was rather quaint." She looked up again.

"Why do you want so badly to see the future?"

He felt uneasy. It seemed as though she knew he was spying.

"Plain human curiosity," he answered weakly, "as well as some professional interest. Being an engineer—"

"We're not running a seminar," she observed. "You'd not be wasting much time outside of attending Parties if you wanted to last very long with the Set. In twenty years—no, ten—you'll be back in kindergarten so far as engineering is concerned. It will all be hieroglyphics to you. You don't read hieroglyphics, do you?"

He shook his head.

"Good," she continued, "I have an inept comparison.—Yes, it will all be hieroglyphics, and if you should leave the Set you would be an unskilled draftsman—not that you'd have need to work. But if you were to want to work, you would have to be self-employed—which grows more and more difficult, almost too difficult to attempt, as time moves on. You would doubtless lose money."

He shrugged and raised his palms. He had been thinking of doing that. Fifty years, he had told himself, and we could kick the Set, be rich, and I could take refresher courses and try for a consultantship in marine engineering.

"I'd know enough to appreciate things, even if I couldn't participate," he explained.

"You'd be satisfied just to observe?"

"I think so," he lied.

"I doubt it." Her eyes nailed him again. "Do you think you are in love with Leota Mason? She nominated you, but of course that is her privilege."

"I don't know," he finally said. "I thought so at first, two years ago. . . ."

"Infatuation is fine," she told him. "It makes for good gossip. Love, on the other hand, I will not tolerate. Purge yourself of such notions. Nothing is so boring and ungay at a Set affair. It does not make for gossip; it makes for snickers.

"So is it infatuation or love?"

"Infatuation," he decided.

She glanced into the fire, glanced at her hands.

"You will have to develop a Buddhist's attitude toward the world around you. That world will change from day to day. Whenever you stop to look at it, it will be a different world—unreal."

He nodded.

"Therefore, if you are to maintain your stability, the Set must be the center of all things. Wherever your heart lies, there also shall reside your soul."

He nodded again.

". . . And if you should happen not to like the future, whenever you do stop to take a look at it, remember you cannot come back. Don't just think about that, feel it!"

He felt it.

She began jotting. Her right hand began suddenly to tremble. She dropped the pen and too carefully drew her hand back within the shawl.

"You are not so colorful as most candidates," she told him, too naturally, "but then, we're short on the soulful type at present. Contrast adds depth and texture to our displays. Go view all the tapes of our past Parties."

"I already have."

". . . And you can give your soul to that, or a significant part thereof?"

"Wherever my heart lies . . ."

"In that case, you may return to your lodgings. Mister Moore. You will receive our decision today."

Moore stood. There were so many questions he had not been asked, so many things he had wanted to say, had forgotten, or had not had opportunity to say, . . . Had she already decided to reject him? he wondered. Was that why the interview had been so brief? Still, her final remarks had been encouraging.

He escaped from the fragile kennel, all his pores feeling like fresh nail holes

He lolled about the hotel pool all afternoon, and in the evening he moved into the bar. He did not eat dinner.

When he received the news that he had been accepted, he was also informed by the messenger that a small gift to his inquisitor was a thing of custom. Moore laughed drunkenly, foreseeing the nature of the gift.

Mary Maude Mullen received her first Pacificware dog from Oahu with a small, sad shrug that almost turned to a shudder. She began to tremble then, nearly dropping it from her fingers. Quickly, she placed it on the bottommost shelf behind her desk and reached for her pills; later, the flames caused it to crack.

They were dancing. The sea was an evergreengold sky above the dome. The day was strangely

young.

Tired remnants of the Party's sixteen hours, they clung to one another, feet aching, shoulders sloped. There were eight couples still moving on the floor, and the weary musicians fed them the slowest music they could make. Sprawled at the edges of the world, where the green bowl of the sky joined with the blue tiles of the Earth, some five hundred people, garments loosened, mouths open, stared like goldfish on a tabletop at the water behind the wall.

"Think it'll rain?" he asked her.

"Yes," she answered.

"So do I. So much for the weather. Now, about that week on the moon—?"

"What's wrong with good old mother Earth?" she smiled.

Someone screamed. The sound of a slap occurred almost simultaneously. The screaming stopped.

"I've never been to the moon," he replied.

She seemed faintly anr-sed.

"I have. I don't like it."

"Why?"

"It's the cold, crazy lights outside the dome," she said, "and the dark, dead rocks everywhere around the dome," she winced. "They make it seem like a cemetery at the end of Time. . . ."

"Okay," he said, "forget it."

".,. . And the feeling of disembodied lightness as you move about inside the dome—"

"All right!"

"I'm sorry." She brushed his neck with her lips. He touched her forehead with his. "The Set has lost its shellac," she smiled.

"We're not on tape anymore. It doesn't matter now."

A woman began sobbing somewhere near the giant seahorse that had been the refreshment table. The musicians played more loudly. The sky was full of luminescent starfish, swimming moistly on their tractor beams. One of the starfish dripped salty water on them as it passed overhead.

"We'll leave tomorrow," he said.

"Yes, tomorrow," she said.

"How about Spain?" he said. "This is the season of the sherries. There'll be the Juegos Florales de la Vendimia Jerezana. It may be the last."

"Too noisy," she said, "with all those fireworks."

"But gay."

"Gay," she sighed with a crooked mouth. "Let's go to Switzerland and pretend we're old, or dying of something romantic."

"Necrophilist," he grinned, slipping on a patch of moisture and regaining his balance. "Better it be a quiet loch in the Highlands, where you can have your fog and miasma and I can have my milk and honeydew unblended."

"Nay," she said, above a quick babble of drunken voices, "let's go to New Hampshire."

"What's wrong with Scotland?"

"I've never been to New Hampshire."

"I have, and I don't like it. It looks like your description of the moon."

A moth brushing against a candle flame, the tremor.

The frozen bolt of black lightning lengthened slowly in the green heavens. A sprinkling of soft rain began.

As she kicked off her shoes he reached out for a glass on the floating tray above his left shoulder. He drained it and replaced it.

"Tastes like someone's watering the drinks."

"Set must be economizing," she said.

Moore saw Unger then, glass in hand, standing at the edge of the floor watching them.

"I see Unger.

"So do I. He's swaying."

"So are we," he laughed.

The fat bard's hair was a snowy chaos and his left eye was swollen nearly shut. He collapsed with a bubbling murmur, spilling his drink. No one moved to help him.

"I believe he's over indulged himself again."

"Alas, poor Unger," she said without expression, "I knew him well."

The rain continued to fall and the dancers moved about the floor like the figures in some amateur puppet show.

"They're coming!" cried a non-Setman, crimson cloak flapping. "They're coming down!"

The water streamed into their eyes as-every conscious head in the Party Dome was turned upward. Three silver zeppelins grew in the cloudless green.

"They're coming for us," observed Moore.

"They're going to make it!"

The music had paused momentarily, like a pendulum at the end of its arc. It began again.

"Good night, ladies, played die band, good night, ladies . . .

"We're going to live!"

"We'll go to Utah," he told her, eyes moist, "where they don't have seaquakes and tidal waves."

Good night ladies . . .

"We're going to live!"

She squeezed his hand.

"Merrily we roll along," the voices sang, "roll along..."

"'Roll along,'" she said.

" 'Merrily,' " he answered.

"O'er the deep blue sea!"

A Set-month after the nearest thing to a Set disaster on record (that is to say, in the year of Our Lord and President Cambert 2019, twelve years after the quake), Setman Moore and Leota (nee Lachesis) stood outside the Hall of Sleep on Bermuda Island. It was almost morning.

"I believe I love you," he mentioned.

"Fortunately, love does not require an act of faith," she noted, accepting a light for her cigar, "because I don't believe in anything."

"Twenty years ago I saw a lovely woman at a Party and I danced with her."

"Five weeks ago," she amended.

"I wondered then if she would ever consider quitting the Set and going human again, and being heir to mortal ills."

"I have often wondered that myself," she said, "in idle moments. But she won't do it. Not until she is old and ugly."

"That means forever," he smiled sadly.

"You are noble." She blew smoke at the stars, touched the cold wall of the building. "Someday, when people no longer look at her, except for purposes of comparison with some fluffy child of the far future—or when the world's standards of beauty have changed—then she'll transfer from the express run to the local and let the rest of the world go by."

"Whatever the station, she will be all alone in a strange town," said Moore. "Every day, it seems, they remodel the world. I met a fraternity brother at that dinner last night—pardon me, last year—and he treated me as if he were my father. His every other word was 'son' or 'boy' or 'kid,' and he wasn't trying to be funny. He was responding to what he saw. My appetite was considerably diminished.

"Do you realize we're going?" he asked the back of her head as she turned away to look out over the gardens of sleeping flowers. "Away! That's where. We can never go back! The world moves on while we sleep."

"Refreshing, isn't it?" she finally said. "And stimulating, and awe-inspiring. Not being bound, I mean. Everything burning. Us remaining. Neither time nor space can hold us, unless we consent.

"And I do not consent to being bound," she declared.

"To anything?"

"To anything."

"Supposing it's all a big Joke."

"What?"

"The world. —Supposing every man, woman, and child died last year in an invasion by creatures from Alpha Centauri, everyone but the frozen Set. Supposing it was a totally effective virus attack. . . ."

"There are no creatures in the Centauri System. I read that the other day."

"Okay, someplace else then. Supposing all the remains and all the traces of chaos were cleaned up, and then one creature gestured with a flipper at this building." Moore slapped the wall. "The creature said: 'Hey! There are some live ones inside, on ice. Ask one of the sociologists whether they're worth keeping, or if we should open the refrigerator door and let them spoil.' Then one of the sociologists came and looked at us, all in our coffins of ice, and he said: "They might be worth a few laughs and a dozen pages in an obscure periodical. So let's fool them into thinking that everything is going on Just as it was before the invasion. All their movements, according to these schedules, are preplanned, so it shouldn't be too difficult. We'll fill their Parties with human simulacra packed with recording machinery and we'll itemize their behavior patterns. We'll vary their circumstances and they'll attribute it to progress. We can watch them perform in all sorts of situations that way. Then, when we're finished, we can always break their bunk timers and let them sleep on—or open their doors and watch them spoil.'

"So they agreed to do it," finished Moore, "and here we are, the last people alive on Earth, cavorting before machines operated by inhuman creatures who are watching us for incomprehensible reasons."

"Then we'll give them a good show," she replied, "and maybe they'll applaud us once before we spoil."

She snubbed out her cigar and kissed him good night. They returned to their refrigerators.

It was twelve weeks before Moore felt the need for a rest from the Party circuit. He was beginning to grow fearful. Leota had spent nonfunctional decades of her time vacationing with him, and she had recently been showing signs of sullenness, apparently regretting these expenditures on his behalf. So he decided to see something real, to take a stroll in the year 2078. After all, he was over a hundred years old.

The Queen Will Live Forever, said the faded clipping that hung in the main corridor of the Hall of sleep. Beneath the banner line was the old/recent story of the conquest of the final remaining problems of Multiple Sclerosis, and the medical ransom of one of its most notable victims. Moore had not seen the Doyenne since the day of his interview. He did not care whether he ever saw her again.

He donned a suit from his casualware style locker and strolled through the gardens and out to the airfield. There were no people about.

He did not really know where he wanted to go until he stood before a ticket booth and the speaker asked him, "Destination, please."

"Uh—Oahu. Akwa Labs, if they have a landing field of their own."

"Yes, they do. That will have to be a private charter though, for the final fifty-six miles—"

"Give me a private charter all the way, both ways."

"Insert your card, please."

He did.

After five minutes the card popped back into his waiting hand. He dropped it into his pocket.

"What time will I arrive?" he asked.

"Nine hundred thirty-two, if you leave on Dart Nine six minutes from now. Have you any luggage?"

"No."

"In that case, your Dart awaits you in area A-11."

Moore crossed the field to the VTO Dart numbered "Nine." It flew by tape. The flight pattern, since it was a specially chartered run, had been worked out back at the booth, within milliseconds of Moore's naming his destination. It was then broadcast-transferred to a blank tape inside Dart Nine; an auto-alternation brain permitted the Dart to correct its course in the face of unforeseen contingencies and later recorrect itself, landing precisely where it was scheduled to come down.

Moore mounted the ramp and stopped to slip his card into the slot beside the hatchway. The hatch

swung open and he collected his card and entered. He selected a seat beside a port and snapped its belt around his middle. At this, the hatchway swung itself shut.

After a few minutes the belt unfastened itself and vanished into the arms of his seat. The Dart was cruising smoothly now.

"Do you wish to have the lights dimmed? Or would you prefer to have them brighter?" asked a voice at his side.

"They're fine just the way they are," he told the invisible entity.

"Would you care for something to eat? Or something to drink?"

"I'll have a Martini."

There was a sliding sound, followed by a muted click. A tiny compartment opened in the wall beside him. His Martini rested within.

He removed it and sipped a sip.

Beyond the port and toward the rear of the Dart, a faint blue nimbus arose from the sideplates.

"Would you care for anything else?" Pause. "Shall I read you an article on the subject of your choice?" Pause. "Or fiction?" Pause. "Or poetry?" Pause. "Would you care to view the catalog?" Pause. "Or perhaps you would prefer music?"

"Poetry?" repeated Moore.

"Yes, I have many of—"

"I know a poet," he remembered. "Have you anything by Wayne Unger?"

There followed a brief mechanical meditation, then:

"Wayne Unger. Yes," answered the voice. "On call are his Paradise Unwanted, Fungi of Steel, and Chisel in the Sky."

"Which is his most recent work?" asked Moore.

"Chisel in the Sky."

"Read it to me."

The voice began by reading him all the publishing data and copyright information. To Moore's protests it answered that it was a matter of law and cited a precedent case. Moore asked for another Martini and waited.

Finally, " 'Our Wintered Way Through Evening, and Burning Bushes Along It,'" said the voice.

"Huh?"

"That is the title of the first poem."

"Oh, read on."

"(Where only the evergreens whiten...)

Winterflaked ashes heighten
in towers of blizzard.
Silhouettes unseal an outline.
Darkness, like an absence of faces,
pours from the opened home;
it seeps through shattered pine
and flows the fractured maple.

Perhaps it is the essence senescent,
dreamculled from the sleepers,
it soaks upon this road
in weather-born excess.

Or perhaps the great Anti-Life
learns to paint with a vengeance,
to run an icicle down the gargoyle's eye.

For properly speaking,
though no one can confront himself in toto,
I see your falling sky, gone gods,
as in a smoke-filled dream of ancient statues burning,
soundlessly, down to the ground.

(. . . and never the everwhite's green.)'"

There was a ten-second pause, then: "The next poem is entitled—"

"Wait a minute," asked Moore. "That first one—? Are you programmed to explain anything about it?"

"I am sorry, I am not. That would require a more complicated unit."

"Repeat the copyright date of the book."

"2016, in the North American Union—"

"And it's his most recent work?"

"Yes, he is a member of the Party Set and there is generally a lapse of several decades between his books."

"Continue reading "

The machine read on. Moore knew little concerning verse, but he was struck by the continual references to ice and cold, to snow and sleep.

"Stop," he told the machine. "Have you anything of his from before he joined the Set?"

"Paradise Unwanted was published in 1981, two years after he became a member. According to its Forward, however, most of it was written prior to his joining."

"Read it."

Moore listened carefully. It contained little of ice, snow, or sleep. He shrugged at his minor discovery. His seat immediately adjusted and readjusted to the movement.

He barely knew Unger. He did not like his poetry. He did not like most poetry, though.

The reader began another.

" 'In the Dogged House,'" it said.

" 'The heart is a graveyard of crigas,
hid Jar from the hunter's eye,
where love wears death like enamel and dogs crawl in to die . . .'"

Moore smiled as it read the other stanzas. Recognizing its source, he liked that one somewhat better.

"Stop reading," he told the machine.

He ordered a light meal and thought about Unger. He had spoke with him once. When was it?

2017 . . . ? Yes, at the Free Workers' Liberation Centennial in the Lenin Palace.

It was rivers of vodka. . . .

Fountains of juices, like inhuman arteries slashed, spurted their bright umbrellas of purple and lemon and green and orange. Jewels to ransom an Emir flashed near many hearts. Their host, Premier Korlov, seemed a happy frost giant in his display.

... In a dance pavilion of polaroid crystal, with the world outside blinking off and on, on and off—like an advertisement, Unger had commented, both elbows resting on the bartop and his foot on the indispensable rail.

His head had swiveled as Moore approached. He was a bleary-eyed albino owl. "Albion Moore, I believe," he had said, extending a hand. "Quo vadis dammit?"

"Grape juice and vodka," said Moore to the unnecessary human standing beside the mix-machine. The unformed man pressed two buttons and passed the glass across the two feet of frosty mahogany. Moore twitched it toward Unger in a small salute. "A happy Free Workers' Liberation Centennial to

you."

"I'll drink to liberation." The poet leaned toward and poked his own combination of buttons. The man in the uniform sniffed audibly.

They drank a drink together.

"They accuse us"—Unger's gesture indicated the world at large—"of neither knowing nor caring anything about un-Set things, un-Set people."

"Well, it's true, isn't it?"

"Oh yes, but it might be expanded upon. We're the same way with our fellows. Be honest now, how many Setmen are you acquainted with?"

"Quite a few."

"I didn't ask how many names you knew."

"Well, I talk with them all the time. Our environment is suited to much improvement and many words—and we have all the time in the world. How many friends do you have?" he asked.

"I just finished one," grunted the poet, leaning forward. "I'm going to mix me another."

Moore didn't feel like being depressed or joked with and he was not sure which category this fell into. He had been living inside a soap bubble since after the ill-starred Davy Jones Party, and he did not want anyone poking sharp things in his direction.

"So, you're your own man. If you're not happy in the Set, leave."

You're not being a true tovarisch," said Unger, shaking a finger. "There was a time when a man could tell his troubles to bartenders and barfriends. You wouldn't remember, though—those days went out when the nickel-plated barmatics came in. Damn their exotic eyes and scientific mixing!"

Suddenly he punched out three drinks in rapid succession. He slopped them across the dark, shiny surface.

"Taste them! Sip each of them!" he enjoined Moore.

"Can't tell them apart without a scorecard, can you?"

"They're dependable that way."

"Dependable? Hell yes! Depend on them to create neurotics. One time a man could buy a beer and bend an ear. All that went out when the dependable mix-machines came in. Now we join a talk-out club of manic change and most unnatural! Oh, had the Mermaid been such!" he complained in false notes of frenzy. "Or the Bloody Lion of Stepney! What jaded jokes the fellows of Marlowe had been!"

He sagged.

"Aye! Drinking's not what it used to be."

The international language of his belch caused the mix-machine attendant to avert his face, which betrayed a pained expression before he did so.

"So I'll repeat my question," stated Moore, making conversation. "Why do you stay where you're unhappy? You could go open a real bar of your own, if that's what you like. It would probably be a success, now that I think of it—people serving drinks and all that."

"Go to! Go to!' I shan't say where!" He stared at nothing. "Maybe that's what I'll do someday, though," he reflected, "open a real bar. ..."

Moore turned his back to him then, to watch Leota dancing with Korlov. He was happy.

"People join the Set for a variety of reasons," Unger was muttering, "but the main one is exhibitionism, with the titillating wraith of immortality lurking at the stage door, perhaps. Attracting attention to oneself gets harder and harder as time goes on. It's almost impossible in the sciences. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries you could still name great names—now it's great research teams. The arts have been democratized out of existence—and where have all the audiences gone? I don't mean spectators either.

"So we have the Set," he continued. "Take our sleeping beauty there, dancing with Korlov-"

"Huh?"

"Pardon me, I didn't mean to awaken you abruptly. I was saying that if she wanted attention Miss Mason couldn't be a stripper today, so she had to join the Set. It's even better than being a threelie star, and it requires less work—"

"Stripper?"

"A folk artist who undressed to music."

"Yes, I recall hearing of them."

"That's gone too, though," sighed Unger, "and while I cannot disapprove of the present customs of dress and undress, it still seems to me as if something bright and frail died in the elder world."

"She is bright, isn't she?"

"Decidedly so."

They had taken a short walk then, outside, in the cold night of Moscow. Moore did not really want to leave, but he had had enough to drink so that he was easy to persuade. Besides that, he did not want the stumbling babbler at his side to fall into an excavation or wander off lost, to miss his flight or turn up injured. So they shuffled up bright avenues and down dim streets until they came to the Square. They stopped before a large, dilapidated monument. The poet broke a small limb from a shrub and bent it into a wreath. He tossed it against the wall.

"Poor fellow," he muttered.

"Who?"

"The guy inside."

"Who's that?"

Unger cocked his head at him.

"You really don't know?"

"I admit there are gaps in my education, if that's what you mean. I continually strive to fill them, but I always was weak on history. I specialized at an early age."

Unger jerked his thumb at the monument.

"Noble Macbeth lies in state within," he said. "He was an ancient king who slew his predecessor, noble Duncan, most heinously. Lots of other people too. When he took the throne he promised he'd be nice to his subjects, though. But the Slavic temperament is a strange thing. He is best remembered for his many fine speeches, which were translated by a man named Pasternak. Nobody reads them anymore."

Unger sighed and seated himself on a stair. Moore joined him. He was too cold to be insulted by the arrogant mocking of the drunken poet.

"Back then, people used to fight wars," said Unger.

"I know,"' responded Moore, his fingers freezing; "Napoleon once burnt part of this city."

Unger tipped his hat.

Moore scanned the skyline. A bewildering range of structures hedged the Square—here, bright and functional, a ladder-like office building composed its heights and witnessed distances, as only the planned vantages of the very new can manage; there, a day time aquarium of an agency was now a dark mirror, a place where the confidence-inspiring efficiencies of rehearsed officials were displayed before the onlooker; and across the Square, its purged youth fully restored by shadow, a deserted onion of a cupola poked its sharp topknot after soaring vehicles, a number of which, scuttling among the star fires, were indicated even now—and Moore blew upon his fingers and jammed his hands into his pockets.

"Yes, nations went to war," Unger was saying. "Artilleries thundered. Blood was spilled. People died. But we lived through it, crossing a shaky Shinvat word by word. Then one day there it was. Peace. It had been that way a long time before anyone noticed. We still don't know how we did it. Perpetual postponement and a short memory, I guess, as man's attention became occupied twenty-four hours a day with other things. Now there is nothing left to fight over, and everyone is showing off the fruits of peace—because everyone has some, by the roomful. All they want. More. These things that fill the rooms, though," he mused, "and the mind how they have proliferated! Each month's version is better than the last, in some hypersophisticated manner. They seem to have absorbed the minds that are absorbed with them. . . ."

"We could all go live in the woods," said Moore, wishing he had taken the time to pocket a battery crystal and a thermostat for his suit.

"We could do lots of things, and we will, eventually—I suppose. Still, I guess we could wind up in the woods, at that."

"In that case, let's go back to the Palace while there's still time. I'm frozen."

"Why not?"

They climbed to their feet, began walking back.

"Why did you Join the Set anyhow? So you could be discontent over the centuries?"

"Nay, son," the poet clapped him on the shoulder. "I'm an audience in search of an entertainment."

It took Moore an hour to get the chill out of his bones.

"Ahem. Ahem," said the voice. "We are about to land at Akwa Labs, Oahu."

The belt snaked out into Moore's lap. He snapped it tight.

A sudden feeling prompted him to ask: "Read me that last poem from Chisel again."

" 'Future Be Not Impatient,'" stated the voice:

" 'Someday, perhaps, but not this day.
Sometime; but then, not now.
Man is a monument-making mammal.
Never ask me how.'"

He thought of Leota's description of the moon and he hated Unger for the forty-four seconds it took him to disembark. He was not certain why.

He stood beside Dart Nine and watched the approach of a small man wearing a smile and gay tropical clothing. He shook hands automatically.

". . . Very pleased," the man named Teng was saying, "and glad there's not much around for you to recognize anymore. We've been deciding what to show you ever since Bermuda called." Moore pretended to be aware of the call. ". . . Not many people remember their employers from as far back as you do," Teng was saying.

Moore smiled and fell into step with him, heading toward the Processing Complex.

"Yes, I was curious," he agreed, "to see what it all looks like now. My old office, my lab—"

"Gone. of course."

". . . our first chamber-tandem, with its big-nozzled injectors—"

"Replaced, naturally."

"Naturally. And the big old pumps . . ."

"Shiny and new."

Moore brightened. The sun, which he had not seen for several days/years, felt good on his back, but the air conditioning felt even better as they entered the first building. There was something of beauty in the pure functional compactness of everything about them, something Unger might have called by a different name, he realized, but it was beauty to Moore. He ran his hand along the sides of the units he did not have time to study. He tapped the conduits and peered into the kilns which processed the by-product ceramicware; he nodded approval and paused to relight his pipe whenever the man at his side asked his opinion of something too technically remote for him to have any opinion.

They crossed catwalks, moved through the temple-like innards of shut-down tanks, traversed alley-ways where the silent, blinking panels indicated that unseen operations were in progress. Occasionally, they met a worker, seated before a sleeping trouble-board, watching a broadcast entertainment or reading something over his portable threelie. Moore shook hands and forgot names.

Processing Director Teng could not help but be partly hypnotized—both by Moore's youthful appearance and the knowledge that he had developed a key process at some past date (as well as by his apparent understanding of present operations)—into believing that he was an engineer of his own breed, and up-to-date in his education. Actually, Mary Mullen's prediction that his profession would some day move beyond the range of his comprehension had not yet come to pass—but he could see that it was the direction in which he was headed. Appropriately, he had noticed his photo gathering dust in a small lobby, amid those of Teng's other dead and retired predecessors.

Sensing his feeling, Moore asked, "Say, do you think I could have my old job back?"

The man's head jerked about Moore remained expressionless.

"Well—I suppose—something—could be worked . . ." he ended lamely as Moore broke into a grin and twisted the question back into casual conversation. It was somehow amusing to have produced that sudden, strange look of realization on the man's bored face, as he actually saw Moore for the first time. Frightening, too.

"Yes, seeing all this progress—is inspiring." Moore pronounced. "It's almost enough to make a man want to work again. —Glad I don't have to, of course. But there's a bit of nostalgia involved in coming back after all these years and seeing how this place grew out of the shoe-string operation it seemed then—grew into more buildings than I could walk through in a week, and all of them packed with new hardware and working away to beat the band. Smooth. Efficient. I like it. I suppose you like working here?"

"Yes," sighed Teng, "as much as a man can like working. Say, were you planning on staying overnight? There a weekly employees' luau and you'd be very welcome." He glanced at the wafer of a watchface clinging to his wrist. "In fact, it's already started," he added.

"Thanks," said Moore, "but I have a date and I have to be going. I just wanted to reaffirm my faith in progress. Thanks for the tour, and thanks for your time."

"Any time," Teng steered him toward a lush Break Boom. "You won't be wanting to Dart back for awhile yet, will you?" he said. "So while we're having a bite to eat in here I wonder if I could ask you some questions about the Set. Its entrance requirements in particular. ..."

All the way around the world to Bermuda, getting happily drunk in the belly of Dart Nine, in the year of Our Lord twenty seventy-eight, Moore felt that Time had been put aright.

"So you want to have it?" said/asked Mary Maude, uncoiling carefully from the caverns of her shawl.

"Yes."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because I do not destroy that which belongs to me. I possess so very little as it is."

The Doyenne snorted gently, perhaps in amusement. She tapped her favorite dog, as though seeking a reply from it.

"Though it sails upon a bottomless sea toward some fabulous orient," she mused, "the ship will still attempt to lower an anchor. I do not know why. Can you tell me? Is it simply carelessness on the part of the captain? Or the second mate?"

The dog did not answer. Neither did anything else.

"Or is it a mutineer's desire to turn around and go back?" she inquired. "To return home?"

There was a brief stillness. Finally:

"I live in a succession of homes. They are called hours. Each is lovely."

"But not lovely enough, and never to be revisited, eh? Permit me to anticipate your next words: T do not intend to marry. I do not intend to leave the Set. I shall have my child—' By the way, what will it be, a boy or a girl?"

"A girl."

'"—I shall have my daughter. I shall place her in a fine home, arrange her a glorious future, and be back in time for the Spring Festival."' She rubbed her glazed dog as though it were a crystal and pretended to peer through its greenish opacity. "Am I not a veritable gypsy?" she asked.

"Indeed."

"And you think this will work out?"

"I fail to see why it should not"

"Tell me which her proud father will do," she inquired, "compose her a sonnet sequence, or design her mechanical toys?"

"Neither. He shall never know. He'll be asleep until spring, and I will not. She must never know either."

"So much the worse."

"Why, pray tell?"

"Because she will become a woman in less than two months, by the clocks of the Set—and a lovely woman, I daresay—because she will be able to afford loveliness."

"Of course."

"And, as the daughter of a member, she will be eminently eligible for Set candidacy."

"She may not want it."

"Only those who cannot achieve it allude to having those sentiments. No, she'll want it. Everyone does. —And, if her beauty should be surgically obtained, I believe that I shall, in this instance, alter a rule of mine. I shall pass on her and admit her to the Set. She will then meet many interesting people—poets, engineers, her mother. . . ."

"No! I'd tell her, before I'd permit that to happen!"

"Aha! Tell me, is your fear of incest predicated upon your fear of competition, or is it really the other way around?"

"Please! Why are you saying these horrible things?"

"Because, unfortunately, you are something I can no longer afford to keep around. You have been an excellent symbol for a long time, but now your pleasures have ceased to be Olympian. Yours is a lapse into the mundane. You show that the gods are less sophisticated than schoolchildren—that they can be victimized by biology, despite the oceans of medical allies at our command. Princess, in the eyes of the world you are my daughter, for I am the Set. So take some motherly advice and retire. Do not attempt to renew your option. Get married first, and then to sleep for a few months—till spring, when your option is up. Sleep intermittently in the bunker, so that a year or so will pass. We'll play up the romantic aspects of your retirement. Wait a year or two to bear your child. The cold sleep won't do her any harm; there have been other cases such as yours. If you fail to agree to this, our motherly admonition is that you face present expulsion."

"You can't!"

"Read your contract."

"But no one need ever "know!"

"You silly little doll face!" The acetylene blazed forth. "Your glimpses of the outside have been fragmentary and extremely selective—for at least sixty years. Every news medium in the world watches almost every move every Setman makes, from the time he sits up in his bunker until he retires, exhausted, after the latest Party. Snoopers and newshounds today have more gimmicks and gadgets in their arsenals than your head has colorful hairs. We cant hide your daughter all her life, so we won't even try. We'd have trouble enough concealing matters if you decided not to have her—but I think we could outbribe and outdrug our own employees.

"Therefore, I call upon you for a decision."

"I am sorry."

"So am I," said the Doyenne.

The girl stood.

From somewhere, as she left, she seemed to hear the whimpering of a china dog.

Beyond the neat hedgerows of the garden and down a purposefully irregular slope ran the unpaved pathway which wandered, like an impulsive river, through neck-tickling straits of unkempt forsythia, past high islands of mobbed sumac, and by the shivering branches, like waves, of an occasional ginkgo, wagging at the overhead gulls, while dreaming of the high-flying Archaeopteryx about to break through its heart in a dive, and perhaps a thousand feet of twistings are required to negotiate the two hundred feet of planned wilderness that separates the gardens of the Hall of Sleep from the artificial ruins which occupy a full, hilly acre, dotted here and there by incipient Jungles of lilac and the occasional bell of a great willow—which momentarily conceal, and then guide the eye on toward broken pediments, smashed friezes, half-standing, shred-topped columns, then fallen columns, then faceless, handless statues, and finally, seemingly random heaps of rubble which lay amid these things; here, the path over which they moved then forms a delta and promptly loses itself where the tides of Time chafe away the memento mori quality that the ruins first seem to spell, acting as a temporal entasis and in the eye of the beholding. Setman, so that he can look upon it all and say, "I am the older than this," and his companion can reply, "We will pass again some year and this too, will be gone," (even though she did not say it this time) feeling happier by feeling the less mortal by so doing; and crossing through the rubble, as they did, to a

place where barbarously ruined Pan grins from inside the ring of a dry fountain, a new path is to be located, this time an unplanned and only recently formed way, where the grass is yellowed underfoot and the walkers must go single file because it leads them through a place of briars, until they reach the old breakwall over which they generally climb like commandos in order to gain access to a quarter mile strand of coved and deserted beach, where the sand is not quite so clean as the beaches of the town—which are generally sifted every third day—but where the shade is as intense, in its own way, as the sunlight, and there are flat rocks offshore for meditation.

"You're getting lazy," he commented, kicking off his shoes and digging his toes into the cool sand. "You didn't climb over."

"I'm getting lazy," she agreed.

They threw off their robes and walked to the water's edge.

"Don't push!"

"Come on. I'll race you to the rocks."

For once he won.

Loafing in the lap of the Atlantic, they could have been any two bathers in any place, in any time.

"I could stay here forever."

"It gets cold nights, and if there's a bad storm you might catch something or get washed away."

"I meant," she amended, "if it could always be like this."

" 'Verweile doch, du hist so schon,"' he reminded.

"Faust lost a bet that way, remember? So would a Sleeper. Unger's got me reading again—Hey! What's the matter?"

"Nothing!"

"There's something wrong, little girl. Even I can tell."

"So what if there is?"

"So a lot, that's what. Tell me."

Her hand bridged the narrow channel between their rocks and found his. He rolled onto his side and stared at her satin-wet hair and her stuck-together eyelashes, the dimpled deserts of her cheeks, and the bloodied oasis of her mouth. She squeezed his hand.

"Let's stay here forever—despite the chill, and being washed away."

"You are indicating that—?"

"We could get off at this stop."

"I suppose. But—"

"But you like it-now? You like the big charade?"

He looked away.

"I think you were right," she told him, "that night-many years ago."

"What night?"

"The night you said it was all a Joke—that we are the last people alive on Earth, performing before machines operated by inhuman creatures who watch us for incomprehensible purposes. What are we but wave-patterns of an oscilloscope? I'm sick of being an object of contemplation!"

He continued to stare into the sea.

"I'm rather fond of the Set now," he finally responded. "At first I was ambivalent toward it. But a few weeks-years—ago I visited a place where I used to work. It was—different. Bigger. Better run. But more than that, actually. It wasn't just that it was filled with things I couldn't have guessed at fifty or sixty years ago. I had an odd feeling while I was there. I was with a little chatter-box of a Processing director named Teng, and he was yammering away worse than Unger, and I was just staring at all those tandem-tanks and tiers of machinery that had grown up inside the shell of that first old building—sort of like inside a womb—and I suddenly felt that someday something was going to be born, born out of steel and plastic and dancing electrons, in such a stainless, sunless place—and that something would be so fine that I would want to be there to see it. I couldn't dignify it by calling it a mystical experience or anything like that. It was just sort of a feeling I had. But if that moment could stay forever . . . Anyhow, the Set is my ticket to a performance I'd like to see."

"Darling," she began, "it is anticipation and recollection that fill the heart—never the sensation of the moment."

"Perhaps you are right. ..."

His grip tightened on her hand as the tunnel between their eyes shortened. He leaned across the water and kissed the blood from her mouth.

"'Verweile doch ..."

". . . Du bist so schon"

It was the Party to end all Parties. The surprise announcement of Alvin Moore and Leota Mathilde Mason struck the Christmas Eve gathering of the Set as just the thing for the season. After an extensive dinner and the exchange of bright and costly trifles the lights were dimmer. The giant Christmas tree atop the transparent penthouse blazed like a compressed galaxy through the droplets of melted snow on the ceiling pane.

It was nine by all the clocks of London.

"Married on Christmas, divorced on Twelfth Night," said someone in the darkness.

"What'll they do for an encore?" whispered someone else.

There were giggles and several off-key carols followed them. The backlight pickup was doubtless in action.

"Tonight we are quaint," said Moore.

"We danced in Davy Jones' Locker," answered Leota, "while they cringed and were sick on the floor."

"It's not the same Set," he told her, "not really. How many new faces have you counted? How many old ones have vanished? It's hard to tell. Where do old Setmen go?"

"The graveyard of the elephants," she suggested. "Who knows?"

" 'The heart is a graveyard of crigas,'" recited Moore,
"hid far from the hunter's eye,
where love wears death like enamel
and dogs crawl in to die."

"That's Unger's, isn't it?" she asked.

"That's right, I just happened to recall it"

"I wish you hadn't. I don't like it."

"Sorry."

"Where is Unger anyway?" she asked as the darkness retreated and the people arose.

"Probably at the punchbowl—or under the table."

"Not this early in the evening—for being under the table, I mean."

Moore shifted.

"What are we doing here anyhow?" he wanted to know. "Why did we have to attend this Party?"

"Because it is the season of charity."

"Faith and hope, too," he smirked. "You want to be maudlin or something? All right, I'll be maudlin with you. It is a pleasure, really."

He raised her hand to his lips.

"Stop that!"

"All right."

He kissed her on the mouth. There was laughter.

She flushed but did not rise from his side.

"If you want to make a fool of me—of us," he said, "I'll go more than halfway. Tell me why we had to come to this Party and announce our un-Setness before everyone? We could have just faded away from the Parties, slept until spring, and let our options run out."

"No. I am a woman and I could not resist another Party—the last one of the year, the very last—and wear your gift on my finger and know that deep down inside, the others do envy us—our courage, if

nothing else—and probably our happiness."

"Okay," he agreed, "I'll drink to it—to you, anyway." He raised his glass and downed it. There was no fireplace to throw it into, so as much as he admired the gesture he placed it back on the table.

"Shall we dance? I hear music."

"Not yet. Let's just sit here and drink."

"Fine."

When all the clocks in London said eleven, Leota wanted to know where Unger was.

"He left,' a slim girl with purple hair told her, "right after dinner. Maybe indigestion"—she shrugged—"or maybe he went looking for the Globe."

She frowned and took another drink.

Then they danced. Moore did not really see the room through which they moved, nor the other dancers.

They were all the featureless characters in a boot; he had already closed. Only the dance was real—and the woman with whom he was dancing.

Time's friction, he decided, and a raising of the sights. I have what I wanted and still I want more. I'll get over it.

It was a vast hall of mirrors. There were hundreds of dancing Alvin Moores and Leotas (nee Mason) dancing. They were dancing at all their Parties of the past seventy-some years—from a Tibetan sid lodge to Davy Jones' Locker, from a New Years Eve in orbit to the floating Palace of Kanayasha, from a Halloween in the caverns of Carlsbad to a Mayday at Delphi—they had danced everywhere, and tonight was the last Party, good night, ladies. . . .

She leaned against him and said nothing and her breath collared his neck.

"Good night, good night, good night," he heard himself saying, and they left with the bells of midnight, early, early, and it was Christmas as they entered the hopcar and told the Set chauffeur that they were returning early.

And they passed over the stratocruiser and settled beside the Dart they had come in, and they crossed through the powdery fleece that lay on the ground and entered the smaller craft.

"Do you wish to have the lights dimmed? Or would you prefer to have them brighter?" asked a voice at their side.

"Dim them."

"Would you case for something to eat? Or something to drink?"

"No."

"No."

"Shall I read you an article on the subject of your choice?" Pause. "Or fiction?" Pause. "Or poetry?" Pause.

"Would you care to view the catalog?" Pause. "Or perhaps you would prefer music?"

"Music," she said. "Soft. Not the kind you listen to."

After about ten minutes of near-sleep, Moore heard the voice:

"Hilted of flame,
our frail phylactic blade
slits black
beneath Polestar's
pinprick comment,
foredging burrs
of mitigated hell,
spilling light without illumination.
Strands of song,
to share its stinging flight,
are shucked and scraped
to fit an idiot theme.
Here, through outlocked chaos,

climbed of migrant logic,
the forms of black notation
blackly dice a flame."

"Turn it off," said Moore. "We didn't ask you to read."

"I'm not reading," said the voice, "I'm composing."

"Who-?"

Moore came awake and turned in his seat, which promptly adjusted to the movement.-A pair of feet projected over the arm of a double seat to the rear.

"Unger?"

"No, Santa Claus. Ho! Ho!"

"What are you doing going back this early?"

"You just answered your own question, didn't you?"

Moore snorted and settled back once more. At his side, Leota was snoring delicately, her seat collapsed into a couch.

He shut his eyes, but knowing they were not alone he could not regain the peaceful drifting sensation he had formerly achieved. He heard a sigh and the approach of lurching footfalls. He kept his eyes closed, hoping Unger would fall over and go to sleep. He didn't.

Abruptly, his voice rang out, a magnificently dreadful baritone:

"I was down to Saint James' Infir-r-rmary," he sang. "I saw my ba-a-aby there, stretched out on a long whi-i-ite ta-a-able—so sweet, so cold, so fair—"

Moore swung his left hand, cross-body at the poet's midsection. He had plenty of target, but he was too slow. Unger blocked his fist and backed away, laughing.

Leota shook herself awake.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Composing," he answered, "myself."

"Merry Christmas," he added.

"Go to hell," answered Moore.

"I congratulate you on your recent nuptials. Mister Moore."

"Thanks."

"Why wasn't I invited?"

"It was a simple ceremony."

He turned.

"Is that true, Leota? An odd comrade in arms like me, not invited, just because it wasn't showy enough for my elaborate tastes?"

She nodded, fully awake now.

He struck his forehead.

"Oh, I am wounded!"

"Why don't you go back to wherever you came from?" asked Moore. "The drinks are on the house."

"I can't attend midnight mass in an inebriated condition."

Moore's fingers twitched back into fists.

"You may attend a mass for the dead without having to kneel."

"I believe you are hinting that you wish to be alone. I understand."

He withdrew to the rear of the Dart. After a time he began to snore.

"I hope we never see him again," she said.

"Why? He's a harmless drunk."

"No, he isn't. He hates us—because we're happy and he isn't."

"I think he's happiest when he's unhappy," smiled Moore, "and whenever the temperature drops. He loves the cold-bunk because it's like a little death to sleep in it. He once said, 'Each Setman dies many deaths. That's what I like about being a Setman.'

"You say more sleep won't be injurious—" he asked abruptly.

"No, there's no risk."

Below them. Time fled backward through the cold. Christmas was pushed out into the hallway, and over the threshold of the front door to their world—Alvin's, Leota's, and Unger's world—to stand shivering on the doorsill of its own Eve, in Bermuda.

Inside the Dart, passing backward through Time, Moore recalled that New Year's Eve Party many years ago, recalled his desires of that day and reflected that they sat beside him now; recalled the Parties since then and reflected that he would miss all that were yet to come; recalled his work in the time before Time—a few months ago—and reflected that he could no longer do it properly—and that Time was indeed out of joint and that he could not set it aright; he recalled his old apartment, never revisited, all his old friends, including Diane Demetrios, now dead or senile, and reflected that, beyond the Set which he was leaving, he knew no one, save possibly the girl at his side. Only Wayne Unger was ageless, for he was an employee of the eternal. Given a month or two Unger could open up a bar, form his own circle of outcasts and toy with a private renaissance, if he should ever decide to leave.

Moore suddenly felt very stale and tired, and he whispered to their ghostly servant for a Martini and reached across his dozing wife to fetch it from the cubicle. He sat there sipping it, wondering about the world below.

He should have kept with life, he decided. He knew nothing of contemporary politics, or law, or art; his standards were those grated on by the Set, and concerned primarily with color, movement, gaiety, and clever speech; he was reduced again to childhood when it came to science. He knew he was wealthy, but the Set had been managing all his finances. All he had was an all-purpose card, good anywhere in the world for any sort of purchase, commodity or service-wise. Periodically, he had examined his file and seen balance sheets which told him he need never worry about being short of money. But he did not feel confident or competent when it came to meeting the people who resided in the world outside. Perhaps he would appear stodgy, old-fashioned, and "quaint" as he had felt tonight, without the glamour of the Set to mask his humanity.

Unger snored, Leota breathed deeply, and the world turned. When they reached Bermuda they returned to the Earth.

They stood beside the Dart, just outside the flight terminal.

"Care to take a walk?" asked Moore.

"I am tired, my love," said Leota, staring in the direction of the Hall of Sleep. She looked back.

He shook his head. "I'm not quite ready."

She turned to him. He kissed her.

"I'll see you then in April, darling. Good night."

"April is the crudest month," observed Unger. "Come, engineer, I'll walk with you as far as the shuttle stands."

They began walking. They moved across the roadway in the direction opposite the terminal, and they entered upon the broad, canopied walk that led to the ro-car garage.

It was a crystalline night, with stars like tinsel and a satellite beacon blazing like a gold piece deep within the pool of the sky. As they walked, their breath fumed into white wreathes that vanished before they were fully formed. Moore tried in vain to light his pipe. Finally, he stopped and hunched his shoulders against the wind until he got it going.

"A good night for walking," said Unger.

Moore grunted. A gust of wind lashed a fiery rain of loose tobacco upon his cheek. He smoked on, hands in the pockets of his jacket, collar raised. The poet clapped him on the shoulder.

"Come with me into the town," he suggested. "It's only over the hill. We can walk it."

"No," said Moore, through his teeth.

They strode on, and as they neared the garage Unger grew uneasy.

"I'd rather someone were with me tonight," he said abruptly. "I feel strange, as though I'd drunk the draught of the centuries and suddenly am wise in a time when wisdom is unnecessary. I—I'm afraid."

Moore hesitated.

"No," he finally repeated, "it's time to say good-bye. You're traveling on and we're getting off. Have fun."

Neither offered to shake hands, and Moore watched him move into the shuttle stop.

Continuing behind the building, Moore cut diagonally across the wide lawns and into the gardens. He strolled aimlessly for a few minutes, then found the path that led down to the ruins.

The going was slow and he wound his way through the cold wilderness. After a period of near-panic when he felt surrounded by trees and he had to backtrace, he emerged into the starlit clearing where menaces of shrubbery dappled the broken buildings with patterns of darkness, moving restlessly as the winds shifted.

The grass rustled about his ankles as he seated himself on a fallen pillar and got his pipe going once more.

He sat thinking himself into marble as his toes grew numb, and he felt very much a part of the place; an artificial scene, a ruin transplanted out of history onto unfamiliar grounds. He did not want to move. He just wanted to freeze into the landscape and become his own monument. He sat there making pacts with imaginary devils: he wanted to go back, to return with Leota to his Frisco town, to work again. Like Unger, he suddenly felt wise in time when wisdom was unnecessary. Knowledge was what he needed. Fear was what he had.

Pushed on by the wind, he picked his way across the plain. Within the circle of his fountain. Pan was either dead or sleeping. Perhaps it is the cold sleep of the gods, decided Moore, and Pan will one day awaken and blow upon his festival pipes and only the wind among high towers will answer, and the shuffling tread of an assessment robot be quickened to scan him—because the Party people will have forgotten the festival melodies, and the waxen ones will have isolated out the wisdom of the blood on their colored slides and inoculated mankind against it—and, programmed against emotions, a frivolity machine will perpetually generate the sensations of gaiety into the fever-dreams of the delirious, so that they will not recognize his tunes—and there shall be none among the children of Phoebus to even repeat the Attic cry of his first passing, heard those many Christmases ago beyond the waters of the Mediterranean.

Moore wished that he had stayed a little longer with Unger, because he now felt that he had gained a glimpse of the man's perspective. It had taken the fear of a new world to generate these feelings, but he was beginning to understand the poet. Why did the man stay on in the Set, though? he wondered. Did he take a masochistic pleasure in seeing his ice-prophecies fulfilled, as he moved further and further away from his own times? Maybe that was it.

Moore stirred himself into one last pilgrimage. He walked along their old path down to the breakwall. The stones were cold beneath his fingers, so he used the stile to cross over to the beach.

He stood on a rim of rust at the star-reflecting bucket-bottom of the world. He stared out at the black humps of the rocks where they had held their sunny colloquy days/months ago. It was his machines he had spoken of then, before they had spoken of themselves. He had believed, still believed, in their inevitable fusion with the spirit of his kind, into greater and finer vessels for life. Now he feared, like Unger, that by the time this occurred something else might have been lost, and that the fine new vessels would only be partly filled, lacking some essential ingredient. He hoped Unger was wrong; he felt that the ups and downs of Time might at some future equinox restore all those drowsing verities of the soul's undersides that he was now feeling—and that there would be ears to hear the piped melody, and feet that would move with its sound. He tried to believe this. He hoped it would be true.

A star fell, and Moore looked at his watch. It was late. He scuffed his way back to the wall and crossed over it again.

Inside the pre-sleep clinic he met Jameson, who was already yawning from his prep-injection. Jameson was a tall, thin man with the hair of a cherub and the eyes of its opposite number.

"Moore," he grinned, watching him hang his jacket on the wall and roll up his sleeve, "you going to spend your honeymoon on ice?"

The hypogun sighed in the medic's husky hand and the prep-injection entered Moore's arm.

"That's right," he replied, leveling his gaze at the not completely sober Jameson. "Why?"

"It just doesn't seem the thing to do," Jameson explained, still grinning. "If I were married to Leota you wouldn't catch me going on ice. Unless—"

Moore took one step toward him, the sound in his throat like a snarl. Jameson drew back, his dark eyes widening.

"I was joking!" he said. "I didn't . . ."

There was a pain in Moore's injected arm as the big medic seized it and jerked him to a halt.

"Yeah," said Moore, "good night. Sleep tight, wake sober."

As he turned toward the door the medic released his arm. Moore rolled down his sleeve and donned his jacket as he left.

"You're off your rocker," Jameson called after him.

Moore had about half an hour before he had to hit his bunker. He did not feel like heading for it at the moment. He had planned on waiting in the clinic until the injection began to work, but Jameson's presence changed that.

He walked through the wide corridors of the Hall of Sleep, rode a lift up to the bunkers, then strode down the hallway until he came to his door. He hesitated, then passed on. He would sleep there for the next three and a half months; he did not feel like giving it half of the next hour also.

He refilled his pipe. He would smoke through a sentinel watch beside the ice goddess, his wife. He looked about for wandering medics. One is supposed to refrain from smoking after the prep-injection, but it had never bothered him yet, or anyone else he knew of.

An intermittent thumping sound reached his ears as he moved on up the hallway. It stopped as he rounded a corner, then began again, louder. It was coming from up ahead.

After a moment there was another silence.

He paused outside Leota's door. Grinning around his pipe, he found a pen and drew a line through the last name on her plate. He printed "Moore" in above it. As he was forming the final letter the pounding began again.

It was coming from inside her room.

He opened the door, took a step, then stopped.

The man had his back to him. His right arm was raised. A mallet was clenched in his fist.

His panted mutterings, like an incantation, reached Moore's ears:

"'Strew on her roses, roses, and never spray a yew

... In quiet she reposes—"'

Moore was across the chamber He seized the mallet and managed to twist it away. Then he felt something break inside his hand as his fist connected with a jaw. The man collided with the opposite wall, then pitched forward onto the floor.

"Leota!" said Moore. "Leota . . ."

Cast of white Parian she lay, deep within the coils of the bunker. The canopy had been raised high overhead. Her flesh was already firm as stone—because there was no blood on her breast where the stake had been driven in. Only cracks and fissures, as in stone.

"No," said Moore.

The stake was a very hard synthowood—like cocobolo, or quebracho, or perhaps lignum vitae—still to be unsplintered. . . .

"No," said Moore.

Her face had the relaxed expression of a dreamer, her hair was the color of aluminum. His ring was on her finger. . . .

There was a murmuring in the comer of the room.

"Unger," he said flatly, "why—did—you—do it?"

The man sucked air around his words. His eyes were focused on something nameless.

". . . Vampire," he muttered, "luring men aboard her Flying Dutchman to drain them across the years. . . . She is the future—a goddess on the outside and a thirsting vacuum within," he stated without emotion. "'Strew on her roses, roses . . . Her mirth the world required—She bathed it in smiles of glee . . .' She was going to leave me way up here in the middle of the air. I can't get off the merry-go-round and I can't have the brass ring. But no one else will lose as I have lost, not now. '. . . Her life was turning, turning, in mazes of heat and sound—' I thought she would come back to me, after she'd tired of you."

He raised his hand to cover his eyes as Moore advanced upon him.

"To the technician, the future—"

Moore hit him with the hammer, once twice. After the third blow he lost count because his mind could not conceive of any number greater than three.

Then he was walking, running, the mallet still clutched in his hand—past doors like blind eyes, up corridors, down seldom-used stairwells.

As he lurched away from the Hall of Sleep he heard someone calling after him through the night. He kept running.

After a long while he began to walk again. His hand was aching and his breath burned within his lungs. He climbed a hill, paused at its top, then descended the other side.

Party Town, an expensive resort—owned and sponsored, though seldom patronized by the Set—was deserted, except for the Christmas lights in the windows, and the tinsel, and the boughs of holly. From some dim adytum the recorded carols of a private celebration could be heard, and some laughter. These things made Moore feel even more alone as he walked up one street and down another, his body seeming ever more a thing apart from him as the prep-injection took its inevitable effect. His feet were leaden. His eyes kept closing and be kept forcing them back open.

There were no services going on when he entered the church. It was warmer inside. He was alone there, too.

The interior of the church was dim, and he was attracted to an array of lights about the display at the foot of a statute. It was a manger scene. He leaned back against a pew and stared at the mother and the child, at the angels and the inquisitive cattle, at the father. Then he made a sound he had no words for and threw the mallet into the little stable and turned away. Clawing at the wall, he staggered off a dozen steps and collapsed, cursing and weeping, until he slept.

They found him at the foot of the cross.

Justice had become a thing of streamlined swiftness since the days of Moore's boyhood. The sheer force of world population had long ago crowded every docket of every court to impossible extremes, until measures were taken to waive as much of the paraphernalia as could be waived and hold court around the clock. That was why Moore faced Judgment at ten o'clock in the evening, two days after Christmas.

The trial lasted less than a quarter of an hour. Moore waived representation; the charges were read; he entered a plea of guilty, and the judge sentenced him to death in the gas chamber without looking up from the stack of papers on his bench.

Numbly, Moore left the courtroom and was returned to a cell for his final meal, which he did not remember eating. He had no conception of the juridical process in this year in which he had come to rest. The Set attorney had simply looked bored as he told him his story, then mentioned "symbolic penalties" and told him to waive representation and enter a simple plea of "guilty to the homicide as described." He signed a statement to that effect. Then the attorney had left him and Moore had not spoken with anyone but his warders up until the time of the trial, and then only a few words before he went into court. And now—to receive a death sentence after he had admitted he was guilty of killing his wife's murderer—he could not conceive that justice had been done. Despite this, he felt an unnatural calm as he chewed mechanically upon whatever he had ordered. He was not afraid to die. He could not believe in it.

An hour later they came for him. He was led to a small, airtight room with a single, thick window set high in its metal door. He seated himself upon the bench within it and his gray-uniformed guards slammed the door behind him.

After an interminable time he heard the pellets breaking and he smelled the fumes. They grew stronger.

Finally, he was coughing and breathing fire and gasping and crying out, and he thought of her lying there in her bunker, the ironic strains of Unger's song during their Dart-flight recurring in his mind:

"I was down to Saint James Infir-r-rmary.

I saw my ba-a-aby there,

Stretched out on a long whi-i-ite ta-a-ble—

So sweet, so cold, so fair . . ."

Had Unger been consciously contemplating her murder even then? he wondered. Or was it something lurking below his consciousness? Something he had felt stirring, so that he had wanted Moore to stay with him—to keep it from happening?

He would never know, he realized, as the fires reached into his skull and consumed his brain.

As he awoke, feeling very weak upon white linen, the voice within his earphones was saying to Alvin Moore:

". . . .Let that be a lesson to you."

Moore tore off the earphones with what he thought was a strong gesture, but his muscles responded weakly. Still, the earphones came off.

He opened his eyes and stared.

He might be in the Set's Sick Ward, located high up in the Hall of Sleep, or in hell. Franz Andrews, the attorney who had advised him to plead guilty, sat at his bedside.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Oh, great! Care to play a set of tennis?"

The man smiled faintly.

"You have successfully discharged your debt to society," he stated, "through the symbolic penalty procedure."

"Oh, that explains everything," said Moore wryly. Finally: "I don't see why there had to be any penalty, symbolic or otherwise. That rhymer murdered my wife."

"He'll pay for it," said Andrews.

Moore rolled onto his side and studied the dispassionate, flat-featured face at his elbow. The attorney's short hair was. somewhere between blond and gray and his gaze unflinchingly sober.

"Do you mind repeating what you Just said?"

"Not at all. I said he'd pay for it."

"He's not dead!"

"No, he's quite alive—two floors above us. His head has to heal before he can stand trial. He's too ill to face execution."

"He's alive!" said Moore. "Alive? Then what the hell was I executed for?"

"Well, you did Mil the man," said Andrews, somewhat annoyed. "The fact that the doctors were later able to revive him does not alter the fact that a homicide occurred. The symbolic penalty exists for all such cases. You'll think twice before ever doing it again."

Moore tried to rise. He failed.

"Take it easy. You're going to need several more days of rest before you can get up. Your own revival was only last night."

Moore chuckled weakly. Then he laughed for a long, long time. He stopped, ending with a little sob.

"Feel better now?"

"Sure, sure," he whispered hoarsely. "Like a million bucks, or whatever the crazy currency is these days. What kind of execution will Unger get for murder?"

"Gas," said the attorney, "the same as you, if the alleged-"

"Symbolic, or for keeps?"

"Symbolic, of course."

Moore did not remember what happened next, except that he heard someone screaming and there was suddenly a medic whom he had not noticed doing something to his arm. He heard the soft hiss of an injection. Then he slept.

When he awakened he felt stronger and he noticed an insolent bar of sunlight streaking the wall opposite him. Andrews appeared not to have moved from his side.

He stared at the man and said nothing.

"I have been advised," said the attorney, "of your lack of knowledge concerning the present state of law in these matters. I did not stop to consider the length of your membership in the Set. These things so seldom occur—in fact, this is the first such case I've ever handled—that I simply assumed you knew

what a symbolic penalty was when I spoke with you back in your cell. I apologize."

Moore nodded.

"Also," he continued, "I assumed that you had considered the circumstances under which Mister Unger allegedly committed a homicide—"

"'Allegedly,' hell! I was there. He drove a stake through her heart!" Moore's voice broke at that point.

"It was to have been a precedent-making decision," said Andrews, "as to whether he was to be indicted now for attempted homicide, or be detained until after the operation and face homicide charges if things do not go well. The matter of his detention then would have raised many more problems—which were fortunately resolved at his own suggestion. After his recovery he will retire to his bunker and remain there until the nature of the offense had been properly determined. He has volunteered to do this of his own free will, so no legal decision was delivered on the matter. His trial is postponed, therefore, until some of the surgical techniques have been refined—"

"What surgical techniques?" asked Moore, raising himself into a seated position and leaning against the headboard. His mind was fully alert for the first time since Christmas. He felt what was coming next. He said one word.

"Explain."

Andrews shifted in his chair.

"Mister Unger," he began, "had a poet's conception as to the exact location of the human heart. He did not pierce it centrally, although the accidental angling of the stake did cause it to pass through the left ventricle. —That can be repaired easily enough, according to the medics.

"Unfortunately, however, the slanting of the shaft caused it to strike against her spinal column," he said, "smashing two vertebrae and cracking several others. It appears that the spinal cord was severed. . . ."

Moore was numb again, numb with the realization that had dawned as the lawyer's words were filling the air between them. Of course she wasn't dead. Neither was she alive. She was sleeping the cold sleep. The spark of life would remain within her until the arousal began. Then, and only then, could she die. Unless—

". . . Complicated by her pregnancy and the period of time necessary to raise her body temperature to an operable one," Andrews was saying.

"When are they going to operate?" Moore broke in.

"They can't say for certain, at this time," answered Andrews. "It will have to be a specially designed operation, as it raises problems for which there are answers in theory but not in practice. Any one of the factors could be treated at present, but the others couldn't be held in abeyance while the surgery is going on. Together, they are rather formidable—to repair the heart and fix the back, and to save the child, all at the same time, will require some new instrumentation and some new techniques."

"How long?" insisted Moore.

Andrews shrugged.

"They can't say. Months, years. She's all right as she is now, but—"

Moore asked him to go away, rather loudly, and he did.

The following day, feeling dizzy, he got to his feet and refused to return to bed until he could see Unger.

"He's in custody," said the medic who attended him.

"No he isn't," replied Moore. "You're not a lawyer, and I've already spoken with one. He won't be taken into legal custody until after he awakens from his next cold sleep—whenever that is."

It took over an hour for him to get permission to visit Unger. When he did, he was accompanied by Andrews and two orderlies.

"Don't you trust the symbolic penalty?" he smirked at Andrews. "You know that I'm supposed to think twice before I do it again."

Andrews looked away and did not answer him.

"Anyhow, I'm too weak and I don't have a hammer handy."

They knocked and entered.

Unger, his head turbaned in white, sat propped up by pillows. A closed book lay on the counterpane. He had been staring out of the window and into the garden. He turned his head toward them.

"Good morning, you son of a bitch," observed Moore.

"Please," said Unger.

Moore did not know what to say next. He had already expressed all that he felt. So he headed for the chair beside the bed and sat on it. He fished his pipe from the pocket of his robe and fumbled with it to hide his discomfort. Then he realized he had no tobacco with him.

Neither Andrews nor the orderlies appeared to be watching them.

He placed the dry pipe between his teeth and looked up.

"I'm sorry," said Unger. "Can you believe that?"

"No," answered Moore.

"She's the future and she's yours," said Unger. "I drove a stake through her heart but she isn't really dead. They say they're working on the operating machines now. The doctors will fix up everything that I did, as good as new." He winced and looked down at the bedclothes.

"If it's any consolation to you," he continued, "I'm suffering and I'll suffer more. There is no Senta to save this Dutchman. I'm going to ride it out with the Set, or without it, in a bunker—die in some foreign place among strangers." He looked up, regarding Moore with a weak smile. Moore stared him back down. "They'll save her!" he insisted. "She'll sleep until they're absolutely certain of the technique. Then you two will get off together and I'll keep on going. You'll never see me after that. I wish you happiness. I won't ask your forgiveness."

Moore got to his feet.

"'We've got nothing left to say. We'll talk again some year, in a day or so."

He left the room wondering what else he could have said.

"An ethical question has been put before the Set—that is to say, myself," said Mary Maude. "Unfortunately, it was posed by government attorneys, so it cannot be treated as most ethical questions are to be treated. It requires an answer."

"Involving Moore and Unger?" asked Andrews.

"Not directly. Involving the entire Set, as a result of their escapade."

She indicated the fac-sheet on her desk. Andrews nodded.

" 'Unto Us a Babe is Born,'" she read, considering the photo of the prostrate Setman in the church. "A front-page editorial in this periodical has accused us of creating all varieties of neurotics—from necrophilists on down the line. Then there's that other photo—we still don't know who took it—here, on page three—"

"I've seen it."

"They now want assurances that ex-Setmen will remain frivolous and not turn into eminent undesirables."

"This is the first time it's ever happened—like this."

"Of course," she smiled, "they're usually decent enough to wait a few weeks before going anti-social—and wealth generally compensates for most normal maladjustments. But, according to the accusations, we are either selecting the wrong people—which is ridiculous—or not mustering them out properly when they leave—which is profoundly ridiculous. First, because I do all the interviewing, and second, because you can't boot a person half a century or so into the future and expect him to land on his feet as his normal, cheerful self, regardless of any orientation you may give him. Our people make a good show of it, though, because they don't generally do much of anything.

"But both Moore and Unger were reasonably normal, and they never knew each other particularly well. Both watched a little more closely than most Setmen as their worlds became history, and both were highly sensitive to those changes. Their problem, though, was interpersonal."

Andrews said nothing.

"By that, I mean it was a simple case of jealousy over a woman—an unpredictable human variable. I

could not have foreseen their conflict. The changing times have nothing to do with it. Do they?"

Andrews did not answer.

". . . Therefore, there is no problem," she continued. "We are not dumping Kaspar Hausers onto the street. We are simply transplanting wealthy people of good taste a few generations into the future—and they get on well. Our only misstep so far was predicated upon a male antagonism of the mutually accelerating variety, caused by a beautiful woman. That's all. Do you agree?"

"He thought that he was really going to die . . ." said Andrews. "I didn't stop to think that he knew nothing of the World Legal Code."

"A minor matter," she dismissed it. "He's still living."

"You should have seen his face when he came to in the Clinic."

"I'm not interested in faces. I've seen too many. Our problem now is to manufacture a problem and then to solve it to the government's satisfaction."

"The world changes so rapidly that I almost need to make a daily adjustment to it myself. These poor—"

"Some things do not change," said Mary Maude, "but I can see what you're driving at. Very clever. We'll hire us an independent Psych Team to do us a study indicating that what the Set needs is more adjustment, and they'll recommend that one day be set aside every year for therapeutic purposes. We'll hold each one in a different part of the world—at a non-Party locale. Lots of cities have been screaming for concessions. They'll all be days spent doing simple, adjustive things, mingling with un-Set people. Then, in the evening we'll have a light meal, followed by casual, restful entertainment, and then some dancing—dancing's good for the psyche, it relaxes tensions. —I'm sure that will satisfy all parties concerned." She smiled at the last.

"I believe you are right," said Andrews.

"Of course. After the Psych Team writes several thousand pages, you'll draft a few hundred of your own to summarize the findings and cast them into the form of a resolution to be put before the board."

He nodded.

"I thank you for your suggestions."

"Any time. That's what I'm paid for."

After he had left, Mary Maude donned her black glove and placed another log on the fire. Genuine logs cost more and more every year, but she did not trust nameless heaters.

It was three days before Moore had recovered sufficiently to enter the sleep again. As the prep-injection dulled his senses and his eyes closed, he wondered what alien judgment day would confront him when he awakened. He knew, though, that whatever else the new year brought, his credit would be good. He slept, and the world passed by.