

Farewell, Dear Brother

by Barrington J. Bayley (as by P. F. Woods)

The trouble is, I suppose, that I have always looked after my younger twin brother, even when we were kids. Consequently, even though I hated him, I couldn't leave him on the planet Celenthenis, not even when he had died.

An A\NN/A Preservation Edition.

[Notes](#)

Strangers are a nuisance. Few people have anything new to say to a man once he's settled down in life.

But occasionally someone turns up whose chance words stir up vivid memories, and set me thinking again.

A man like that turned up at a small party my wife and I gave. He was small, agile, about forty, and he may have been intoxicated. With his type, it's hard to tell. Some friends of ours had brought him along, and he clearly didn't know whose house it was he had come to.

He was one of those people who can't stop talking. I steer clear of talkers usually, but he managed to corner me and so I let him chatter volubly on for a few minutes.

Then I discovered that this one was different, from my point of view. He had just returned from an expedition to Celenthenis, the Planet of Cold.

I became more alive to him. "Oh yes," I said, "I had heard there was a second expedition. What did you think of the place?"

"Well, the cold's pretty drastic."

"Too much for you, eh?"

"Yes." He nodded emphatically, as if he could read my mind. "It's too cold for description. There's practically no temperature to the place at all. Goddammit, it's right at the dead end of creation."

I pondered over his words. The dead end of creation...

He hadn't much of a gift for word-pictures, but my imagination and memory made up for it. He was right. There's a minimal amount of energy on Celenthenis—some physicists say none at all. There's argument about that. At any rate, every atom and molecule of the whole planet is frozen immobile. No chemical changes. No energy exchanges. Nothing. It's a world without time.

What it must be like to live there, looking over its dark surface through a televisor from inside an alloy dome—any ordinary material simply crumbles away—and know that nothing happens there, ever.

It led to strange possibilities, as a matter of fact. The material of the planet is super-conducting, but nothing ever happened to cause a current. Electricity had no place there—until the explorers came. As an experiment, Professor Juker discharged a million volts into the ground. It flashed right round the planet and is still going. The whole planet is alive with that circling million volts which never decreases.

"You can't have actually *felt* cold," I said.

"No, but you can see it. Goddammit, you *can* feel it. But not with your senses. With your emotions.

Get me?"

"Yes, I think so."

"If only there was some *starlight*, or something like that. But just darkness. We could only see by the reflection of our own beams. I'd have liked to set off some hydrogen bombs, just to show the place some action."

"It wouldn't have made much difference."

"No, I guess not." He laughed. "Say, you're a good listener, aren't you?"

"Oh, I know all about Celenthenis. My brother and I were on the ship that discovered it."

He looked at me with new interest. "Say... you must be—"

"Robert Stemming." I held out my hand.

He shook it vigorously. "I never realised who I was talking to."

"As a matter of fact," I continued, "my brother is upstairs. Perhaps you would like to meet him."

He looked alarmed. "No! I mean, I've promised to have a word with somebody in the other room..." He backed away.

This time it was my turn to laugh.

I hid myself for the rest of the evening and left the guests to my expert and sociable wife. Crowds don't interest me. In recent years I've developed a liking for a peaceful, solitary life.

At about two o'clock in the morning I heard the sounds of the party diminish. The few people left were talking quietly in the lounge, and they would probably stay for another hour.

I decided to go upstairs and look at my brother.

Not many people care to meet Jack, and I can't say I blame them. There's something decidedly eerie about it all.

But I'm not afraid of him. I mounted the wooden stairs to the top of the house. Towards the attic, where we keep Jack, it gets musty. Janet never comes up here, so neither the steps nor the attic get cleaned. Cobwebs brushed me frequently. Outside the door of the attic I could hear the low hum of the apparatus on the other side.

I opened the door and went in. The attic is illuminated by a dim yellow electric light bulb which is always on because I forgot to install a switch. To the right of the door a thick power cable comes snaking through the wall and across to the other side of the room. The cable's a thick one. We need a lot of power to keep the temperature down.

And on the dirty table opposite was a silicon container, two foot on the side, surrounded by Professor Juker's refrigerators.

Closing the door, I walked across. "How are you today, Jack?" I said.

There was a definite pause, before the small speaker attached to the cannister spoke in a weary voice.

"Can't complain, Robert," it said disconsolately.

Brother Jack, it is a hard life I have lived with you!

Ever since the day of our birth, Jack and I have been together. I arrived first, and Jack came pushing and shoving his way awkwardly right after. Or so I like to think.

Perhaps I even gave him a hand. Because I've been looking back over my shoulder and hauling him over his troubles ever since.

You could never avoid trouble, could you, Jack? It's in your nature to steep yourself in it. Show you a doubtful situation, a compromising situation, a *sneaky* situation, and you plunge right in without regard for anyone. That's why you have a hundred enemies on every inhabited planet.

I don't say you intend it. You just revel in temptation; you can't resist an opportunity to cheat. By why, Jack, why have you such a knack of doing it when a blind donkey could see you'll be found out?

I'm not exempt from Jack's ways, in fact I've borne the life-long brunt of them. Even when we were youngsters he would borrow my cycle for an hour and sell it on the other side of town for a few pounds. Then he would stall for days on end before I found out. He would always stall. And several times he stole my girl from behind my back.

That would make me really mad. But even then, Jack always seemed to get away with it. Somehow he would crawl from under like an indestructible insect. His technique was quite simple. Stall. Stay out of the way. Sooner or later, you lost the heart to hit back at him.

When we grew up we set up in business together as go-getters.

Go-getters are a kind of glorified galactic scrap merchant. All you need is backing, and a ship, and somewhere unexplored to go. Or you can take a shot in the dark, but that's pretty desperate. You arrive, look the place over, and when you come back you trade in whatever you've discovered there. There's a high premium on information in modern civilisation. If you're lucky you might sell a concession on raw materials. More often you make money on selling scientific data, so a go-getter prefers weird places. At the very least the government pays a tithe for having assayed another planet.

Let me make it clear now in regard to my complaints about my brother Jack, that we're nothing particularly fine as human beings go. The galaxy is wide and unknown, and there are thousands of free-lance go-getting teams. Usually they have a vast amount of technical knowledge haphazardly acquired, but no qualifications of any kind. Usually professional men despise them. In a nutshell, they live in a way qualified men disdain, and Jack and I were fairly representative, trading in second-hand plant and equipment when we didn't have a job.

Our relationship was what you would expect of two brothers, but looking back I can see its unpleasant tinge.

You never played straight with me, did you, Jack? It was in little things. The small deals. After not seeing you for a week or two, I would get a letter like this:

Dear Bob, the time has come I think to let you know the truth about the cheque. All that I've been telling you about it not arriving and then not cashing it is a load of ruthless lies, what really happened is that I was desperate for money and had the audacity to spend the bloody lot. Please don't think too badly of me, I know the sob-story stuff isn't much use to you, and all I can do now is try to pay it back somehow ...

And so on. Typical. A frank confession, interlarded with self-pity and promises for the future. That for five hundred pounds or so.

When I faced him, he would say: "I didn't think you'd mind, Bob. After all, we are brothers."

He was right, I didn't really mind when it was over, even though repayment was never forthcoming. After all, we *were* brothers.

Not until years later did it seem odd to me that I tacitly took Jack for a younger brother, instead of my twin. He seemed so much younger, so much more irresponsible.

And so we stuck together, and I looked after my brother. How often, Jack, did I have to pull you off the spot? I've had to kill men to save your neck. Some of the quarters you frequented weren't fussy about how they dealt with undesirables.

Do you remember the time we cracked up on the tenth world of a star with no name, only a number? You were unconscious and I wasn't sure you were still alive. But for twenty days I hauled you in your suit over the surface of that planet to make rendezvous with the liaison ship coming up behind us. I've never been through anything else as bad as that, because I didn't believe for a minute that we were going to make it and I was glad you didn't know what was happening.

Would you have done the same for me? I think so. But of course you had to be the one to get hurt, and it's been like that all along the line. You've never had much opportunity to do me favours.

It's a funny thing, Jack. As well as a predeliction to be underhand, you also have the worst possible luck.

Well, that was how we continued in life for thirty-five years. Every five years or so, I could have looked back and said that the conditions of existence were getting meaner and more desperate. Nothing *satisfying* ever turned up for me. There was no fulfilment. It was the same for Jack, but he never even thought of that sort of thing. Jack was born for the rat-race.

Year by year, we became more and more enclosed in our way of life.

Then came the time I met Janet.

Don't ask me how I managed to hit it off, because she, to use a phrase, is way out of our class. She is the daughter of Professor Juker, a name that means something in academic circles. But manage it I did, and then I felt I'd found something.

It had been worth crawling out of the womb, just ahead of complaining Jack, after all.

Soon we were planning to marry.

There was still the question of her father, however, and I admit I felt apprehensive on the day he came with Janet to see Jack and me in our dingy office in the back room of a third floor on Stain Street. Go-getters aren't always considered the best of choices for a well set-up young lady.

Imagine my relief to find that Professor Juker is a short, dumpy fellow with a cropped beard who doesn't care a hang about one's station in life. He's only interested in what you can do. Inside ten minutes we were talking shop and enjoying it.

"Well," he said at last, "what work have you fellows got at present?"

Jack sighed. "None," I admitted.

"Nothing lined up?"

"We *have* got a lead, though it's rather confidential. We happened to get a tip-off about a ship that passed the fringe of the Montgomery Cloudbank. As you know, the temperature inside the cloudbank is thought to be practically nonexistent."

Juker nodded.

"They detected a solid body inside the bank," I continued. "It couldn't be a sun, so it must be a stray planet. They even gave it a name. Celenthenis."

"There's always a profit in low temperature physics," Jack put in. "It's just that we haven't got the capital."

Juker's eyes had already started forward with interest. It transpired that low temperatures were his special province, and he agreed enthusiastically that the field was by no means exhausted. Ultimate zero is too remote to be normally obtained. The Montgomery cloudbank is an isolated case and no one had come across anything like it before.

Juker suddenly became adamant about investigating the planet. Before we knew it he was putting up money and planning to accompany us.

We snapped up the proposal like hungry wolves. "You won't regret it," Jack said eagerly, getting hold of the wrong end of the stick as usual. "You'll get your money back, all right."

The Professor scarcely seemed to hear the remark, so Jack started talking about the special equipment we would need, while Janet sat on the edge of the desk and swung her legs.

Juker also made a list of stuff he wanted to take with him. Jack glanced at it.

"I know places in San Francisco where I might get some of this cheap," he said. "It'll need Bob or me to swing the deal, though."

"San Francisco?" Juker said in surprise. "Can't you get it here in London?"

Jack shrugged his skinny shoulders. "You don't understand. San Fran is one big junkheap, for people like us. It would be worth the fare."

"All right, go ahead," Juker told him.

"I'll come with you to sign the cheques," Janet said, speaking for the first time in half an hour.

"Er—yeah, I guess somebody ought to," Jack muttered.

And there we were, set up. It seemed to me that Juker was being a mite too trusting, but on reflection he had nothing to lose, had he? If we didn't play straight with him, he'd know he didn't want me for a son-in-law.

But we did play straight. We all worked hard, collecting our gear together and fitting out our ancient ship with the drive cartridges necessary to make the jump to Montgomery. That's what takes the money in go-getting: not the ship, since most free-lancers of long standing have a crate of some description, but the cartridges to power it. The further you want to go, the more expensive the cartridges you need.

Several times Jack and Janet went on expeditions to gather equipment. One thing Jack does know better than I do is how to drive a bargain. And I felt happy for the first time in my life, thinking of how things were going to be when we got back. Looking back now, I feel slightly ashamed of the way I walked around with my head in the clouds.

There came the day when Juker, Jack and I ferried our ship out to Stand-off Station, spending a few hours there getting clearance. I enjoyed that brief wait in Stand-off as I had rarely done before. It was crowded with go-getters, as usual. The hardened and scarred, the young and inexperienced, the sly and clever, and, amazingly, the ingenuous who had managed to remain so even after years at the game. The outward-going bustle of men bent on galactic prospecting is something you never forget. The veneer of civilisation is off, but just the same some of the genuine fragments of it can be discerned.

I spoke to one old fellow there who said he was on his way to a rich seam of time-gems, the stones which refract through time instead of space. Why, that old El-Dorado has been a joke for years! Naturally he couldn't be made to divulge where it was. Already he had said too much, for it has been known for a go-getter to set off with half a dozen others hot on his drive-trail.

Then there are the incoming teams, exuberant, disappointed, or just plain exhausted. They fill the taverns of Stand-off, to lay down their heads on the tables, fill themselves with cheap whisky, or shake it up with the bar whores.

It was not long before we left behind the blare of gaudy music, the unshaded lights and unwashed clearance officials. We were off into the galactic dark, where the stars were like electrons in a plasma and the few thousand spaceships rayed off from Stand-off Station like a scattering of invulnerable neutrinos.

After about a month we came to the edge of Montgomery Cloudbank.

It was an awesome sight.

From most vantage points in the galaxy you can see stars in every direction. It's only from a few places like the Cloudbank that you find yourself confronted with a deep vasty expanse of darkness. Actually the dust and gas compassing the Cloudbank is of course itself more tenuous than any vacuum we can make in the laboratory, but since it stretches for thousands of light-years that's easily enough to obscure the stars on the other side.

A peculiarity of the Montgomery Cloudbank is that it excludes stars anywhere within its compass. Nobody knows why. The consequence is that the interior of the cloud is not heated up, like most banks such as the Coalsack. With any luck, we might find that deep within the Cloudbank there was no thermal activity at all.

We stood at the viewplate and studied the Cloudbank from close up. Jack regarded it dourly. Juker's eyes gleamed.

"Promising!" he exclaimed. "It looks promising!"

We set up the mass detector, and after locating the pinpoint concentration of matter within the cloud, plunged right in.

At once we were in the dark, nosing through unrelieved blackness.

Juker watched the ship's sensors anxiously. "The temperature's going down," he announced.

“Yeah, well what do you expect?” Jack growled.

I should explain that after a month in transit, Jack and I were both apt to be on edge. On this occasion I was in uncommonly good humour, which probably made Jack even more irritable.

Juker frowned as the record dropped even lower. “We might have some difficulties to contend with,” he warned. “We took precautions, I know, but—well, quite frankly at sub-zero temperatures materials just don’t behave the same.”

“I know that,” Jack said. “You’re not telling us the hull is going to crumble away, are you? It’s painted with atom-bond.”

“That will help, admittedly. Well, we shall see. We may have to keep feeding energy into the plating to maintain its strength.”

Jack grunted, glanced at me and chuckled. “If anything happens I’ll just go to bed and pull the covers over me.”

“As for me,” I said when Juker had left the room, “If it gets cold I’ll just think of getting back and cuddling up to Janet.”

He gave me a funny look, as if the joke wasn’t appreciated. “I knew you’d say that. You’ve done nothing but talk of that girl all the trip.”

“Well, why not?” I said defensively. “You’re just jealous.”

“Hmm. It’s not that. It just seems to be preying on your mind, that’s all. Don’t let yourself get neurotic over it.”

I was mildly surprised, but didn’t answer. Jack sat down and started fiddling aimlessly with the knobs on the control board. He talked on for a bit in the desultory, strained way he sometimes has, but it became more and more vague and I didn’t really listen.

Professor Juker spent most of his time monitoring the skin sensors. They didn’t all record hull conditions, many of them were long-range scanners, which he pointed in all directions. He was anxious to know just how much radiation energy did trickle through that blanket of dust and gas.

One day he came triumphantly into the control room. “I’ve been watching the sternwards detector for the past hour,” he said. “The reception in that direction is now nil!”

Nil. Along with all the other directions. We were completely cut off from the outside universe. There was a region of hundreds of light-years completely lacking in energy.

It was still some days after that announcement that we came upon Celenthenis.

Professor Juker was able to say with certainty that not one photon of energy ever touched upon that world, or ever had done so in apprehendable history, until our arrival. We cast our laser beams upon it, sweeping its dead surface from hundreds of miles away. Soon we were able to make our second assertion: not only was it out of reach of external energy, for some reason it had no internal heat of its own.

There was not one calory, not one quantum of heat in the whole planet.

Here it was, locked away in itself, no warmth, no life, no movement. Just timeless death.

“This is it, lads!” Professor Juker said, slapping us both on the back. “The Planet of No Temperature!

The matter down there has mighty different properties from the stuff we're used to, I assure you. It's a magic place."

Warily, we set ourselves down on the surface.

It was as Juker had predicted: we needed extra safeguards to keep our ship in one piece. Our first hour, spent in installing a micro-heating system to all parts of the ship, was a tense period.

At last the ordeal was over and we were safe. Gathering in the control room, we turned the external television scanners to view the terrain.

Searchlights atop the ship cast a circle of illumination a hundred yards across. Beyond that we could see nothing, but only *sense* the dark and the cold stretching away in a vacuum.

Inside the circle the ground was fairly level, but broken and uneven, forming slabs and runs which seemed to be leading away into its own mysteries. I saw that at one point near the perimeter it broke into a shallow crevice. Add to this its colour: a dull, dark green.

And the sky? We just couldn't see anything above. Remember that in the ordinary sense of the word Celenthenis has no sky, in that nothing reaches it from outside so that for practical purposes nothing exists for it above its own surface.

Summing up my impressions of it, I can only say that it looked sullen and suicidal.

Needless to say, none of us took time to gawp, or to be poetical about it, or even excited, because now we had to get down to a serious job of work, which we did without delay or question.

Juker was happy to take charge of most of the experiments, and I must say he made a more thorough job of it than we would have done. That's how it should be, of course, he being a professor, but I couldn't help reflecting how many go-getters had received only a fragment of what a planet's actually worth through having an inadequate knowledge of some field or other. Watching the Professor at work, I got an insight into a real scientific mind, instead of just hit-and-miss merchants like us.

His enthusiasm was enormous. Piece by piece we manhandled equipment outside, bringing it back inside when it looked like being damaged by the lack of temperature. Eventually we rigged up minimal heaters for all of it, but until then Jack and I had some pretty heavy work to do.

Then we just helped Juker in the dozens of experiments he had planned. He had brought specimens of every conceivable material with him, and was investigating their properties in null-heat conditions. We had to leave the samples outside for a while before absolutely all their heat leaked away, but when we began testing Juker became more and more pleased.

"Boys," he said, "this is where the study of matter should begin. Up to now its nature has been obscured by always being in a state of heat. For the first time I have an opportunity to study it in a state of rest."

It was soon after this that he discharged the million volts into the planet. For some hours he built up an accumulation from the ship's generator, then let it all rip in a millisecond. Hours later, it hadn't dropped one volt. The planet was full of electricity, zipping round in a world where all materials were super-conductive and there was zero resistance.

Jack's imagination was caught by it. "What do you think of that!" he said. "It'll still be here in a million

years!”

Personally, I began to look forward to the hour when we would take off. You do begin to feel the deadness of the place, as the guest at my party said. If you think the Moon is lifeless, you should go to Celenthenis.

By the third day I was making definite plans for the future. “What are you going to do when Janet and I are married?” I asked Jack once when the Professor was in the storeroom. “You can stay with us if you like. We’ll probably buy a big house, what with the money we’ll make on this trip and all.”

He made evasive gestures with his hands. “Maybe. You never can tell how things will work out, though.”

“What do you mean by that?” I asked, watching him closely.

“Nothing.”

“Anyway,” I said, “you’re welcome.” Perhaps it was over-generous of me, but I was feeling expansive and forgetful of past difficulties. I sat down to read while he paced aimlessly about.

Suddenly he said: “Come on, the Prof wants us to take some more readings off the voltmeter. Let’s go outside.”

“Just one of us can do that.”

“Yeah, but—come on, it’ll do you good to go outside for a while.”

I stood up and we went to the lock, got into our space-suits and cycled ourselves outside.

Briefly I gazed around me at the circle of light. When you’re aware of how empty, airless and cold everything is outside your suit, you can hear every tiny sound of its working, the air system especially. Then we walked over to read the voltmeter which Juker had left in contact with the ground to keep a check on the super-conducting discharge.

It still read exactly what it had read hours before. Something like one million volts.

“Well, that’s that,” I said in satisfaction.

“Bob,” Jack said nervously. “There’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you.”

“What?”

“Well, it’s about me and Janet.”

An icy feeling passed through my stomach. “What do you mean, *you* and Janet?”

“She’s not going to marry you. She and I—we sort of got together.”

I didn’t take it in for a minute. Then it trickled through and thoughts whirled round in my head.

I didn’t answer, but I looked at him.

“Honest, I didn’t mean to,” he said quickly. “It just happened, that’s all. It was on the trip to San Francisco. There was nothing we could do about it.”

He was avoiding my gaze. “You don’t mean,” I said in a whisper, “*you* two are married—and didn’t tell me?”

“Well, no, not exactly, but as good as.”

He edged away as fury began to mount in me. “It just happened—”

“Happened, hell!” I snarled. “You mean you saw a chance and pushed it for all you were worth; I’ll bet you really worked on it!”

He looked wretched, like he always does when he’s caught out.

“But this time,” I said, my breath coming short, “this time—”

As I spoke, I saw how clever Jack had been. When he confesses, he has to do it from a distance, or at least be able to stay out of the way for a while. But where could he go on board our ship?

So he had inveigled me outside. He knew that as long as he can slow things down, it will go easier for him. Angry as I was, I knew it, too. There comes a point when you just haven’t got the heart any more.

But whatever I might have known intellectually, I was still incensed. “This time,” I said, “I’m going to kill you.”

Jack turned and ran, lumbering away in his spacesuit. Standard technique. I put all my strength into lumbering along after him. I knew I wasn’t going to kill him, but I was determined I was going to drag him back inside that ship and turn brother Jack into a blood pudding.

There was no pretence about that. He must have felt it too, because his flight became desperate. At first he lumbered erratically, making little random turns to try to take advantage of the broken ground, but I gained on him. Suddenly he made straight for the perimeter of the light circle.

I saw his stratagem. He would skulk out in the dark for a while, where I couldn’t find him. When he deemed he had been away long enough for me to cool down, he would return.

Nearing the edge of the circle, Jack’s movements became more purposeful. He reached the shallow crevice I had noticed earlier, and started to clamber down it. Once he had climbed up the other side, he would be safe.

With that move, Jack made his mistake.

The ground beneath us was alive with a million volts. Since electricity takes the shortest route it showed no inclination to flow through us provided we walked over the top of it. You may have observed on Earth that birds alight on naked power cables with no ill effects.

Climbing part-way down one wall of the crevice, Jack reached across to touch the opposite wall, intending to haul himself up the other side. That made him a bridge.

A million volts flashed instantly through him.

Though I saw the flash, nothing came over the intercom. I kept running, but when I looked down into the crevice there was not much to see.

Automatically I glanced at the meter on my way back to the ship. The voltage had depreciated noticeably.

Taking into account the way Jack had behaved all his life, I suppose an end like that was destined to overtake him eventually. Still, I was his brother, and I felt unhappy about it.

There was more to come yet.

When I broke the news to Juker I decided not to tell him the part about Janet. It's not nice to disclose a thing like that about a man's daughter.

I felt sadly, strangely miserable because of the death of my brother. Loneliness assailed me. I felt that I was right back where I started, but without even his company.

Juker noticed. He was very sympathetic.

"You mustn't let it overpower you," he advised kindly. "What's gone is gone. There's still plenty ahead in the future."

Bleakly, I nodded. Juker didn't know about the other edge of the sword.

Celenthenis oppressed me more and more.

Both Juker and I continued our work. By now we had amassed a formidable number of graphs, charts and measurements about no-temperature materials. Results were everything we had hoped.

For some time Juker had been thinking about the problem of transferring Celenthenis material to Earth, and he decided it could be done. Assembling the refrigerating apparatus in the storeroom, he put on a suit and went outside.

A few minutes later he was back with a chunk of dull, greenish rock wrapped in a jacket of hydrogen ice. "I chipped it off one of those big slabs," he explained. "We can give it a really detailed study in here."

Carrying it into the storeroom, he slipped the hydrogen jacket into the quadruple-hulled container he had prepared. Carefully he poked electrode probes through the ice, an awkward job, because of the clutter of refrigerators. A number of oscilloscopes started wiggling the moment he made contact.

"This rock has an electric charge on it, like the rest of the planet," Juker told me. "This is to see if it's been modified in any way since I pumped it into the ground."

Taking a step back, he glanced at the oscilloscopes.

His glance protracted itself into a prolonged stare.

"Great Scott," he muttered.

"What's up?" I asked. The 'scope sweeps had surprised me, too, but after all it was an unusual world.

"Robert, those signals are brain waves."

With a jolt, I realised why they seemed vaguely familiar. I had seen films of electroencephalography, of course.

"The alpha rhythm is quite clear," Juker commented, peering closer. "Some of the others are a bit scrambled—but that's probably because we're getting two or more on one scope." He started speaking quickly. "Don't you see what's happened? It's Jack! When the current swept through him, it was modulated by the electrical rhythms of his nervous system." He slapped his hands together excitedly. "It's just what *could* happen in a zero-temperature environment!"

"You don't mean he's still alive?"

Doubtfully, he shook his head. “That’s going a bit too far—”

Then he cut himself short. The ’scope waves had suddenly altered, just like they do in electro-encephalography when mental activity changes.

After that there was no help for it. Professor Juker constructed a frequency analyser to differentiate between the various waves, then rigged up a speaker and microphone. It did not take many minutes of ranging through the waveband before we hit on Jack’s speech frequency.

Quavering, I held the microphone in my right hand. “Jack?”

A second or two later, I heard a familiar voice. “Is that you, Bob?” it said uncertainly.

Juker and I looked at one another, shocked beyond expectation. I had no need to ask further questions.

The modulations of the million-volt pulse had been quite complete. Jack’s entire pattern of personality, memory and and thought had been transferred to it, and was now humming unimpeded in a continuous circuit of the planet. There was no fragment of Celenthenis that you might break off that was not Jack.

So that was how I continued to be my brother’s keeper. After all, we had planned to take material back to Earth. What else could we do, but take him home with us?

Faintly, I heard the front door open and close as one of the guests left downstairs. I gazed at the chunk of green rock, visible more to the imagination than the eye, amidst Juker’s hydrogen-ice apparatus, and thought of how helpless and quiescent Jack was now.

In all the years we had been together, it was not until those few remaining days on Celenthenis and the journey back to Earth, that I gave consideration to my relationship with Jack.

Did I ever love my brother?

A hard question. I don’t think there is love between brothers. We took each other for granted. There were things I didn’t like about him, but all the hard feelings tended to be of short duration.

On the other hand, whenever I hated my brother I had the sinking feeling that I was exactly like him.

The difference being, that when I cheat I cover my tracks.

As it was, I had come out of it all right. I had Janet, hadn’t I? She wouldn’t even speak to this lump of rock, not once. She married me.

A bitch? You might say so. It might appear odd that I’d still take up with her. But isn’t human nature frail in any case? Take the best and leave the worst.

It’s no use to fret.

We lived fairly comfortably on the proceeds from Celenthenis. As I said, I’ve settled down. It suits me.

Moving closer, I said: “Are you *sure* everything’s all 1 right, Jack?”

“Well,” he answered. “My mind’s been getting a bit fuzzy lately. I think a trace of heat must be getting

through.”

I nodded. That was inevitable. If the temperature rose even a fraction of an appreciable amount, though, the rock would cease to become conductive and that would be the end of Jack.

“For another thing,” he said, “you know the main version of me is still on Celenthenis, I’m a sort of detached fragment.”

“You’re still a complete replica, Jack.”

“I know. But, well—frankly, I sometimes feel an urge to be re-united with myself. Merge with the main current.”

“You want to go back?”

“I wouldn’t mind.”

“Well, Jack,” I said after a moment. “I don’t know. Janet might not think we can afford the cartridges for another trip to Montgomery Cloudbank.”

“You mean you won’t take me?” he said in a piteous voice.

“You know *I* would, whatever it cost. But there’s still Janet.”

“Bring her up here,” he said eagerly. “I’ll persuade her, Bob, I know I can. We were close once, remember?”

I didn’t need the reminder.

“You know what she’s like. Wild horses wouldn’t drag her up here. She never comes.”

Silence, but I could feel the hurt in it. Eventually Jack spoke again in a strained voice.

“Look, Bob, I... well, I do want to go back to Celenthenis and I’m sure once she speaks with me she’ll agree. But it isn’t just that. I really want to speak to her, you know. It isn’t pleasant the way she ignores me. I know she’s married to you now, but—I just want to say goodbye, that’s all. You can’t begrudge me that.”

I was genuinely touched.

“Please, Bob, *please* bring her up here. Just once.”

“I’ll try,” I promised.

A faint sigh of relief came from the speaker. “Bring her up here, and that’s the last thing I’ll ever ask of you.”

Turning, I went through the unpainted door, down the rickety stairs, within range of the sounds, light and perfumes of the living rooms and what remained of our smart society guests. Idly, I calculated the cost of another trip to Celenthenis.

I waited for all the guests to leave before I put the idea to Janet. She twisted her handkerchief in a distraught manner.

“It’s too much,” she said shortly. “We can’t spare the money.”

“But he’s my brother.”

Crossly she patted her hair back into place. “That lump of rock—can’t you find some other way of getting rid of it? Throw it in the sea or something? As a matter of fact I’ve been meaning to get the thing out of the house.”

She stood up, smoothed her skirt and bent to study her make-up in the mirror. I stared at her aghast.

“Janet,” I began as she touched her eyebrow with a wetted finger, “he wants to talk to you.”

“You won’t catch me going up there!”

“It isn’t much to ask,” I pleaded. “He’s a person, Janet, someone you once . . . had relations with. Doesn’t that mean anything to you? He only wants to say goodbye, so there’s no bitterness.”

She turned on her stiletto heel and stalked from the room. Before I knew it I was on my feet too, following after her and arguing.

Don’t ask me to explain the state I was in. Nothing seemed more important to me than that I carried out what I was convinced was my brother Jack’s last request. For an hour I talked earnestly in our bedroom. Janet seemed to grow more weary by the minute.

At last I said: “He’s still *alive*. Don’t you understand?”

And that, of course, was exactly what she never had understood. Perhaps, I thought, people never are alive to her.

“What is it to do with me?” she complained, ready to burst into tears.

Then, resigned and tired, Janet dragged herself to her feet and came with me to the back part of the house.

I sensed how scared she was as we ascended the stairs, and kept my hand touching her arm. Poor kid, I thought. Then I opened the door and led her into the musty, humming attic.

She gazed around her, frightened by the alienness of everything she saw. She was completely out of her depth.

“Jack,” I said, “here’s Janet.”

There was a barely perceptible pause.

Then a voice came hoarsely through the speaker which shook even me by the intensity of its hatred and bitterness. “You finally arrived, you filthy slut, did you?” it said. “How bloody nice!”

It seemed to gather its breath, then vomited a paralysing stream of obscenity and execration. Through it all I seemed to hear the resentment, the disappointment, which Jack had harboured all this time. I realized that everything Janet meant to me, she must have meant to him. She had filled the void of his life, just as she had filled mine. And *that* was why Jack wanted to speak to Janet.

He never gives up. If he can’t have it one way, hell have it the other.

Janet let out a small, terrified cry, turned and fled. I heard her sharp heels clattering on the stairs.

“Why did you do that?” I exploded.

“Just to give her a few nightmares,” he answered sardonically. “By the way, I’ve a confession to make. You know everything I said about taking Janet away from you? It wasn’t even true!”

That was all I got out of him. I stood there, absolutely stunned. I had never taxed Janet about her defection; I was afraid of appearing jealous.

Now that Jack had made his confession, I suddenly realized how utterly ridiculous was the notion that Janet would ever have had an affair with him, or even, at that stage, been unfaithful to me at all. She just wasn't that sort.

And yet I had believed it. Jack had gauged exactly what would take place in my mind, even to the years-long silence. In his crooked way he had a real genius for it.

In those few seconds the full tragedy of Jack became clear to me. His envy, resulting in a cruel taunt. Then, after the unforeseen outcome, endless brooding. Poor brother, he was deranged with it!

I dashed downstairs, but Janet was already leaving. She went without even taking her beautiful clothes, her expensive jewelry. She packed a small case, slammed the front door without a word and was gone.

Next day I called on Professor Juker. Without talking much about Janet I told him about Jack.

He nodded thoughtfully, knocked the ash out of his pipe and put it away.

"You're right," he said. "That fact is, we can't hope to keep him alive indefinitely. The temperature's bound to rise, even if only marginally, and it will be no consolation to him to know that the main current is still flowing on Celenthenis. It's only common humanity to save his life."

Juker put up the money for the costly cartridges, and I flew the ship. As for Jack, I didn't even ask him if he still wanted to go. I wasn't giving him the option, because I knew that once he was gone I could have Janet back.

Landing on Celenthenis, I stood outside the airlock, took the green rock in my gloved hand and flung it as far as I could.

I didn't even see it land.

Farewell, brother Jack, may you have a long life! The Montgomery Cloudbank is a huge affair and doesn't move much, so it ought to be a long one. You'll live until Celenthenis warms up, so you'll probably still be there when Earth is gone.

Be grateful for the enclosing dark. When the stars start to shine through, your cold vigil will be over.

As for me, I'm happier with my flesh and blood. I'll enjoy Janet for a few years, then let this body of mine gutter quietly out.

Sometimes I hear her whimpering in the night, but I reach out to her, wake her and comfort her, and it's all right.

The End.

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