

The Quest of the Holy Grille

By ROBERT F. YOUNG

Next time you get into your autom— er, we mean, manmobile, make sure you know who's driving: you, or it. Here's a comic, satiric, outrageously original story that may advance pedestrianism by years.

HOUSING had never been one to go chasing after girlhicles. Girlhicles were forever having visions and were forever telling you about them, and anyway, there were more important things in life than getting your oil changed. He much preferred the peace and quiet of his garage to the roar and bustle of the highways, and he had always been content to spend most of his evenings at home, meditating upon the nature of manmobilekind.

Of late, however, a strange restlessness had come over him. Part of it, he knew, could be attributed to the season of the year, but the other part could not be. It was this second part that troubled Housing the most, because it drove him to ask himself certain questions that he couldn't even begin to answer. These questions were three in number, and were as follows : (1) If the purpose of manmobilekind wasn't for boyhicles to chase girlhicles, what *was* the purpose of manmobilekind? (2) If Godmobile liked regular menmobiles as much as everybody said He did, why had He created truckmenmobiles? And (3) Did human beings, as vehicular beings maintained, rationalize everything *they* did, in order to convince themselves that *they* had free will; or did vehicular beings rationalize everything *they* did, in order to convince themselves that *they* had free will?

On a Friday evening late in April Housing went next door to visit his friendhicle Axle, hoping through the catharsis of conversation to rid himself of his growing doubts. Axle was getting ready to go out, and his youngest servo-pilot—an attractive young female (by people standards)—had just finished giving him a wash job and was rubbing him down with a chamois cloth. "Hi, Housing," he said to our herohicle. "What're you doing away from the garage this late at night?"

Axle wasn't in the least bit like Housing. He was downright rakish in appearance, and had H.P. written all over him. Housing, on the other wheel, was the quiet type, conservative of line and unostentatious of color tone, and to look at him you'd never guess the strength and determination that was inbred in his every bolt and bearing.

He chose to ignore his friendhicle's snide remark, and after his servo-pilot—a handsome young male (by people standards)—joined Axle's and began giving her an assist with the polishing job, he said reprovingly, "I should think, Axle, that you could stay home one night out of the year at least."

Roguish glints danced in Axle's wide-apart headlights. "I couldn't stay home on a night like this even if I wanted to, old palhicle. Why, the girlhicles would go out of their transmissions. They'd tow me right out of my garage!"

"Girlhicles! Is that all you ever think about, Axle?"

"Practically. Did you come over to borrow something, Housing? If I remember right, the last time you came over you were out of Simonize. Did you run out of it again?"

"There you go, Axle—ascribing materialistic motives to everything a manmobile does. No, I didn't run out of Simonize, and I no longer permit any of my servo-pilots to Simonize me in any case. When I want the job done I go to a professional servo-Simonizer and get it done right. I came over to talk."

"Well go ahead then—talk. I like to talk—especially about you know what."

"The subject I had in transmission," Housing said coldly, "does concern girlhicles, but not in the vulgar sense you take for granted. As it happens, I've been doing considerable thinking lately about

boyhicle-girlhicle relationships as they pertain to the purpose of manmobilekind, and some rather serious doubts have arisen in my transmission. I—I thought that it might help me to get things straightened out if I talked the matter over with a practical manmobile-about town like you."

AXLE grunted deep in his crankcase. "Housing, do you know what's really wrong with you? You stay home too much. You're becoming a regular garage plant. Why, you're almost two years old and I'll bet you haven't had your oil changed yet! It's bad enough that young and healthy young menmobiles like us should have to be tied down to a public parking meadow eight hours a day, five and sometimes six days a week just so our elder servo-pilots can provide us with the luxuries of life without deliberately tying ourselves down after we get home. We *owe* it to ourselves to go out and have a good time. Look, why don't you come along with me tonight?—it'll do you good. You can do your talking on the highway. I'll listen—I promise."

"I'm—I'm not sure I should. I—I don't exactly fit into the highway crowd. And besides, you'll only go hotwheeling it after the first girlhicle who comes along."

"No I won't—honest." As though everything were all settled, Axle's servo-pilot went into the servo-quarters to get ready, and Housing's servo-pilot got behind Housing's wheel. "Well, what do you say, old palhicle?" Axle went on. "Want to ramble with me?"

Still uncertain, Housing said, "My bad piston's been acting up lately. I really don't think I ought to—"

"You and your bad piston! Do you know what I think, Housing? I think that bad piston of yours is just an excuse you made up so you can hang around the garage all the time."

"It is not! It's a reprocarnation defect. It doesn't get enough oil. It never did."

"I still say it's an excuse."

Housing started himself up in a huff. "All right. Just to show you it's not an excuse, I *will* ramble with you."

"Fine. Come on, old palhicle—let's go!"

They stopped at a swank service cafe for a bite to eat, Axle had 10.5 gallons of hi-test, two quarts of hyperlube, and a can of Lard-ol. Housing had 12.3 gallons of regular, a quart of superlube, and two cans of Lard-ol. Afterward, he had the waiter polish his windshield and check his tires. He felt much better when he and Axle hit the highway again. By this time night had fallen, and a big fat moon was pulling into the black-topped parking meadow of the sky.

"This is the life!" Axle shouted over his right tailfin. "This *is* what we were reprocarnated for. Whooo-eee!"

The highway was a four-lane one. Housing pulled into the passing lane and synchronized his speed with Axle's. "Are you sure, Axle?" he said eagerly. "Are you sure it wasn't for a much finer purpose?"

"What could be finer than this? Look at that moon! Feel that wind! Feast your headlights on that girlhicle up ahead! Whooooooo-eeeeee!"

"I mean," Housing persisted, "a purpose that would justify all the trouble Godmobile went to to create us and to endow us with so many wonderful gifts. It does not seem to me that he would have gone to such pains just so boyhicles could zoom the highways and chase girlhicles. It just doesn't. You see, Axle, it's different with us than it is with people and other lower forms of life. When boys chase girls they do it not only because it's their natural instinct but because it's people's way of procreating themselves. But we menmobiles don't Procreate that way. We procreate through reprocarnation, and regardless of whether boyhicles get their oil changed, manmobilekind will go right on increasing in numbers. So when we chase girlhicles we're not really accomplishing anything. We're not furthering manmobilekind's interests in any way, shape, or manner. Some—sometimes it seems to me as though we're imitating our own servo-pilots."

"Why Housing—you're actually being sacrilegious. I didn't think you had it in you. Hey, look, up ahead!—she's winking at us!"

Housing, too, had seen the flirtatious blinking of the girlhicle's taillights, but he chose to ignore it. "I'm not being in the least bit sacrilegious," he said. "I'm just being curious—that's all. And it's good for

menmobiles to be curious. Where would we be today if Dearborn manmobile hadn't been curious? If he hadn't been dissatisfied with the *status quo* and set his servo-pilots to work experimenting with mass-reprocaration methods? Why, there'd still be only a few hundred thousand of us instead of millions and millions, and our servo-pilots would be so poor they wouldn't be able to afford to build decent highways for us to roll on or decent garages for us to live in. Of course, it's unfortunate that truckmenmobiles profited too, but you can't blame Dearborn manmobile for that. And anyway, everything would have been all right if all of him had gotten into manmobilekind's meltstream, because then truckmenmobiles would behave themselves and so would we. But to get back to what I was saying. Surely Godmobile wouldn't have gone to such pains to create us and to endow us with so many wonderful gifts just so boyhicles could chase girlhicles. He must have had a higher—a nobler—purpose, and—"

"Look!—she's turning off into that side road. Come on, Housing, let's follow her."

"Axle—you promised."

But Axle didn't even hear him. "Let's go, old palhicle. Maybe she's got a girl friendhicle who talks the same language you do."

RESIGNEDLY, Housing followed his friendhicle into the side road. Ahead, the girlhicle's rearend swayed voluptuously in the beams of Axle's headlights. She was built all right—even Housing had to admit that. And she knew how to roll, too. Nevertheless, he wished he'd stayed home. It wasn't right to be out chasing girlhicles when there was so much wrongdoing in the world. You never knew from one day to the next when someone was going to take a sudden dislike to you and sidswipe you or ram you head-on. As far as that went, you never knew from one day to the next when you were going to take a sudden dislike to someone and sidswipe *him* or ram *him* head-on. Or when you were going to take a sudden dislike to yourself, for that matter, and go tumbling wheels over hardtop across some field. Oh, if only Dearborn manmobile had been reprocarated *in toto!* Oh, if only Gear and 2Ton and Running Board hadn't stolen into the Dearborn parts bank, where he was awaiting transportation to the nearest reprocaration plant, and acetylened him and swiped his Grille! Oh, if only—

"Watch where you're going, Housing!" Axle called over his trunk. "You nearly rolled into the ditch."

"Never mind me, Axle. You just mind yourself."

The side road was a well-kept-up one. Occasionally, they passed garages and servo-quarters, and once they passed a used-people lot. Then, for a while, they wheeled through a woods. Housing was glad when the woods was behind them. He didn't like trees. No self-respecting manmobile did. He hated trees almost as much as he hated snow. How could you help but hate them? How could you compare the unpremeditated pattern of a tree with the streamlined contours of a man- or womanmobile and arrive at any other conclusion than that the tree was ugly? And how could you condone such presumptuous obstacles to progress in any case?

Oh well, trees were nothing to worry about any more. They were on their way out, and make no mistake about it. You couldn't stop progress. True, there were a few regressive people who tried to every now and then, but with so many progressive people working against them they didn't stand a chance.

Ahead, a fluorescent fountain glowed in the dark garden of the night. Housing recognized it as the lights of the new suburban recreation building which one of the local servo-pilots had built, and his cylinders warmed. He loved bright lights and new suburban business places, not only because of the reassuring quality of the former and the beauty of the latter, but because of the comfortable concrete meadows on which the latter invariably stood.

In the present instance, the meadow was a spacious one, and there were about fifty men - and womenmobiles of various ages congregated there in neat rows. When the girlhicle turned off the highway, Axle and Housing followed suit, and when she rolled across the meadow and parked on the farther side where there were lots of empty resting places, Axle rolled over and parked beside her. Housing, somewhat diffident when it came to girlhicles, rolled over and parked beside Axle. The girlhicle had

brought a spare servo-pilot along—a female one — and both servo-pilots stepped out on the meadow, where they were joined a few moments later by Axle's and Housing's servo-pilots. Presently, the quartet divided into two couples, and the couples headed for the building, from which came sporadic thundering and crashing noises.

HOUSING experienced another one of the bad moments he had been having of late. Had he and Axle and the girlhicle arrived on the scene of their own volition, he wondered, or had the four servo-pilots planned the evening in advance and come here of their own free will? On the surface, the latter eventuality would seem to be the case, for two of the servo-pilots were male and two of them were female, and all of them apparently knew one another; whereas, in the case of Axle, Housing, and the girlhicle, only Axle and Housing knew each other, and the logical fourth Party wasn't even present.

To get at the real truth, of course, it was necessary to go *beneath* the surface; but the trouble was, Housing couldn't get beneath the surface any more. The last few times he had tried, his transmission had balked and he had sunk deeper into the mire of pseudo-reality. So this time, he didn't bother to try. He just waited till the moment went by and then pretended that it had never come along.

Axle had already started up a conversation with the girlhicle. In fact, he had already found out her name. It was Dyna. Housing thought it was a nice name. She seemed like a nice girlhicle, too. "Who's your friendhicle?" he heard her ask Axle.

"This is Housing," Axle said. "Housing—meet Dyna."

"Come over and park closer to me, Housing," Dyna said. "There aren't any people looking right now. I have something important to tell both of you."

Housing complied. He found himself liking her better every minute.

"Now," she said, after he turned himself back off, "I want both of you boyhicles to promise me solemnly that you won't think I'm nothing but a common runabout when you hear the truth."

"I promise, dollhicle," Axle said.

"So do I," said Housing. "What is the truth, Dyna?"

"The truth is, I lured you here."

Housing gasped. "Lured us here!"

AXLE (in an aside to Housing): "You clunkhead!—of course she lured us here. Don't you know *any* thing about girlhicles?"

DYNA: "I lured you here for a purpose. A very special purpose. I knew that all I had to do to get one or both of you to follow me was to give you a few taillight winks. So I did. And you did. You see, I need someone to help me, and I thought this would be a good place to tell you My Story."

HOUSING: "To help you do what?"

DYNA: "To help me find the Holy Grille."

AXLE: "Oh, come on! Menmobiles have been searching for the Holy Grille ever since the Acetylenation, and not one of them's seen the slightest sign of it."

DYNA: "That's because they didn't know where to look."

AXLE: "And you do?"

DYNA: "I certainly do."

AXLE: "I don't believe you. I don't believe there's any such thing as a Holy Grille. If you ask me, that story about Gear and 2Ton and Running Board stealing it because they didn't want truckmenmobiles like themselves to become sissified *is* all made up."

HOUSING: "Now who's being sacrilegious, Axle?"

AXLE: "I'm merely being honest, and you know it, Housing. Deep down inside, no one believes the Grille exists, except maybe in a spiritual sense. They just pretend they believe."

DYNA "But you do believe, don't you. Axle, that modern manmobile owes everything he is to Deerborn manmobile?"

AXLE: "Of course I do."

DYNA: "Then how do you explain away the fact that modern manmobile has evil in him? Did the evil

come from Deerborn manmobile?"

AXLE: "Of course it didn't. Deerborn manmobile was all good, and when he was reprocarnated his good was distributed throughout the melt and handed down through successive melts to all of manmobilekind. Everybody knows that."

DYNA: "Then how can evil exist? Surely you don't believe that the evil that remained from past reprocarnations was strong enough to triumph over the good of Deerborn manmobile, do you?"

AXLE: "Of course I don't."

DYNA: "Then you have no choice but to admit that the only way evil could still exist would be for some of the good of Deerborn manmobile to be missing—the good that is his Grille."

AXLE (in another aside to Housing): "Oh boyhicle!—have we got a kookhicle on our wheels! And such a lovely dollhicle too! (To Dyna): "I still don't believe there's any such thing as a Holy Grille."

HOUSING: "Well I do."

DYNA: "Do you, Housing? I'm glad. Now I know that someone at least will help me find it."

HOUSING: "You haven't said where it is yet, Dyna."

DYNA: "It's in the Holy Land, of course,"

HOUSING: "In—in Deerborn?"

DYNA: "No—not in the Holy City itself. If it had been, it probably would have been found long ago, because that's where everybody's been looking for it. It's in a parts bank west of Deerborn."

HOUSING: "But how do you know?"

AXLE (in a third aside to Housing): "She'll get to her vision soon enough without you prompting her."

DYNA: "When I asked both of you to promise you wouldn't think I'm nothing but a common runabout, I did so for a very good reason. You see. I'm a virginhicle. All my life I've stayed home nights like a good girihicle should, hoping that Godmobile would reveal Himself to me in some way and tell me how I could serve Him. I began to despair when He didn't, and four weeks ago I determined to fast until He did, So I stayed off the highways altogether and went without gas and grease and oil. I refused to touch so much as a single can of Lard—or or a single drop of anti-freeze. Night after night, in the loneliness of my garage, I wailed and moaned and cried, asking Godmobile over and over again to show me some way that I, His devoted maidenhicle, could serve Him. And then one night, after I'd all but given up hope, a beam of the purest radiance I have ever seen came through the garage roof, and as I parked there staring, the Holy Grille appeared before my headlights, dazzling them with its shining splendor. And a Voice said, "Know you that before you shines an authentic three-dimensional projection of the Holy Grille and that to your headlights and to your headlights alone has it been revealed. And know you also that in two weeks time there will come rolling down the highway in your wake the manmobile who is foreordained to help you find the real Grille and rescue it from the wheels of the truckmanmobile in whose care it has been entrusted. You are then to take it to the nearest Reprocarnation Mill and see to it that it gets into manmobilekind's melt stream so that all future models of car - and truckkind will contain *all* of Deerborn manmobile instead of only 87.6 percent of him and the sideswiping and the ramming and the willful rolling-over that goes on among manmobilekind will be brought to an end. You will tell this manmobile what you are being told now, and you will go with him to a place in the Holy Land which will be revealed to you at the end of this message, and he will help you rescue the Grille and afterwards assist you in getting it into manmobilekind's meltstream' . . . The trouble is," Dyna concluded, "the Voice said 'one manmobile', and I ended up with two, and now I don't know which one of you it meant."

"Why it meant me, of course!" Housing said, so excited that he could hardly keep from turning himself on and throwing himself into gear and taking off for the Holy Land then and there, No wonder he'd been feeling restless! No wonder he'd been experiencing doubts! Godmobile had been testing him all along—testing him to see whether he was fit for the job. And he *was* fit for it. He was, he was, he was! "You do believe the Voice meant me, don't you, Dyna?" he rushed on. "Because I *am* the one. I am, I—am, I am!"

"Well you certainly seem to be. Housing, but—"

"I am. I am, I am—"

"But just the same, I think it *would* be a good idea if Axle goes along too. He's big and husky, and we may need his help. The truckmanmobile the Voice mentioned is a big ten-ton straight-job, and he lives right in the parts bank where the Grille is. His name is Torque, and he claims he's a reincarnation of Running Board and Gear and 2Ton. Whether he really is or not, I don't, know, but he's going to be hard to handle. Will—will you go with us, Axle?"

Axle appeared to be deep in thought, and didn't answer right away. At length, he said, "Where is this parts bank of yours, dollhicle?"

"It's near Redskin Run. If we start now, we can get there by Sunday morning. We can roll till midnight tonight and park over in an open-air apartment lot. By noon tomorrow we can be in Buffalo, and then we can cross into Ontario and roll to Detroit by way of Canada. We can make Detroit by nightfall, and then we can roll for a while longer and park overnight a few miles beyond Redskin Run. Will you come, Axle? Will you? Please?"

"Sounds like it might be fun at that."

Dyna's grille glowed. "Oh, it will be. It'll be lots of fun. You must come, Axle. You must!"

Abruptly Axle made up his transmission. "All right, dollhicle—count me in."

Housing was disappointed. He had hoped to have Dyna all to himself. He had so many things to tell her, so many hopes and fears to share with her. Actually, though, Axle's presence wouldn't make much difference. Dyna and Axle had nothing whatsoever in common, whereas she and Housing had everything in common. He could hardly wait to get her alone so he could talk to her about Godmobile.

THEY reached Utica, N. Y. before midnight, and after rolling through the city they pulled into a spacious open-air apartment lot and released their servo-pilots for the night. The servo-pilots paired off and headed for the office where they rented two of the little servo-quarter structures that bordered the lot. All of them were about the same age, and they seemed to be having a ball.

Axle had parked some distance from Dyna and Housing, and had already fallen into a deep doze. Housing didn't feel in the least bit sleepy. His chassis was taut, and he was eager for morning to come so he could hit the highway again. The Holy Grille hovered before his headlights, resplendent and beautiful, its transcendent radiance seeping through and through him, purifying him down to his tiniest bearing and his minutest cotter pin.

What a beautiful night it was!

Never had the stars parked so profusely in the black-topped parking meadow of the sky, Never had the moon been Simonized so bright. As Housing gazed up at it, it became as one with the Holy Grille, and the Grille hovered over the whole wide world, aglow with its passionate yearning to become a part of manmobilekind so it could turn manmobilekind's baser metal into gold. Yes, yes!—the Millennium was just around the corner. Soon now, evil would be a thing of the past. There would be no more sideswiping and no more ramming and no more willful rolling-over. Menmobiles would love menmobiles and truckmenmobiles would love truckmerunobile, and menmobiles and truckmenmobiles would love each other and everywhere you looked there would be love, love, love!

Unable any longer to confine his thoughts to his transmission, he said to Dyna. "What a wonderful thing it is to be a manmobile!"

For a moment he thought she was asleep. She wasn't, though. "Huh?" she said.

"I said 'what a wonderful thing it is to be a manmobile!' And think of how much more wonderful it will be when evil has been cleansed from the melt-stream. But it's wonderful even now. I didn't realize quite how wonderful until I met you, Dyna. Oh, how I wish I'd met you long ago! My life was just a dreary routine of starts and stops—I see that now. There was no magic anywhere, and now—why now, there's magic everywhere I look. In the moon. In the stars. In—in your headlights."

"Axle didn't seem to see it."

"Axle's not receptive to magic. I'm afraid that too much loose living has blunted his perceptions, I feel sorry for him in a way. He doesn't know what he's missing."

"Have you known him long, Housing?"

"All my life. We came off the reprocarnation line together. We rode the same piggy-back together. And the servo-pilots we chose lived right next door to each other, which automatically made us neighbors. But there's a lot of difference between us. We're as different as day is from night."

"I noticed that right away."

"For instance, I don't think menmobiles take themselves seriously enough, and Axle thinks they take themselves too seriously. He says that it's dishonest for them to go around pretending that they want to love one another when actually the only man-mobile they really love or care what becomes of is himself. According to him, any manmobile who tries to do manmobilekind a good turn is a clunkhead, because manmobilekind isn't worth the trouble. You can see how mixed up he is. Maybe going after the Holy Grille will straighten him out."

"I'm glad he decided to come with us."

"Take his attitude toward girlhicles," Housing rushed on. "He thinks that all girlhicles are boyhicle-crazy. Well he's wrong there, Dyna. Maybe a lot of girlhicles are, but not all of them. Take yourself, for instance. You're different. I knew it the minute I met you. You're the sort of girlhicle a boyhicle dreams about in his lonely garage at night. The sort of girlhicle a boyhicle would lay down his life for. The right boyhicle, I mean. You see, Dyna, the brutal truth is that most boyhicles regard a girlhicle as someone to chase. But there are a few who regard her as someone to cherish. And Godmobile meant for girlhicles like you to be cherished. That's one of the reasons he sent Deerborn manmobile to earth—so there would be enough good boyhicles to cherish the good girlhicles. And then Gear and 2Ton and Running Board went and spoiled everything. But we're going to right their wrong, Dyna. Once we get the Grille into the meltstream, not only will all future boyhicles be good, but all future girlhicles will be good also. Everybody will be good. And Godmobile in all His glory will look down from the heights of Mesabi and exclaim, 'Lo, the Millennium is on wheel: Rejoice all you men- and womenmobiles—rejoice!' Aren't you thrilled to be one of His instruments, Dyna—Aren't you?"

Silence.

"Aren't yov, Dyna ? ktrn't

A faint snore reached his ear-valves, Why, she had fallen asleep. She was probably exhausted—poor girlhicle. Tenderness suffused him from the treads of his tires to the tip of his antenna, and he yearned to move closer so that he could touch hubcaps with her. But he didn't dare start himself up for fear of awakening her, so he stayed where he was.

From the highway came the sporadic roar of tractormanmobile-and-trailerett. A long ways off a chorus of frogs went *Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax—brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax*. A nightwind sighed in a nearby stand of trees. Housing dozed. Presently, he slept.

THEY were on the highway again before sunrise. After breakfasting at a small service cafe, they stopped some distance farther on and waited in a pleasant parking meadow while their servo-pilots refueled themselves in a roadside restaurant. A little past midday, they reached Buffalo; and not long afterward they crossed into Canada. The day, which had broken crisp and clear, was a lovely one, and a bracing wind was blowing in over the lake.

Dyna was strangely silent. She was second in line. Axle was first, and Housing brought up the rear. Housing thought that he should be the one to lead, but he hadn't said anything when they started out because he didn't know the way.

Becoming bored, he tuned in on his radio. Menmobiles communicated altogether differently from the way people did, employing a medium that people didn't even know existed, and people talk was unintelligible to him except when it reached him via radio waves. Even then, it seldom made much sense. At the moment, there was a bulletin coming over the station to which his servo-pilot was listening. Something about four runaway teenagers who among them were "driving" a 196 - Hermes hardtop, a 196 - Cheboygan convertible, and a 196 - Mayflower station wagon. Startled, Housing recognized himself, Axle, and Dyna. So their servo-pilots thought they were running away!

Housing underwent another one of his bad moments. Maybe their servo-pilots *were* running away. Maybe Dyna had supplied herself, Housing, and Axle with a make-believe objective in order to explain their sudden decision to take off for Michigan. Nonsense! The rescue of the Holy Grille wasn't a false objective. It was as real an objective as it was a noble one. And as for Dyna's having discovered the Grille's location by means of a vision, what could be more logical than that? Girlhicles had visions every day, and almost all of them turned out to be true. It was the servo-pilots who were doing the rationalizing. Either that, or their parents were doing it for them.

Housing felt better.

THE trio had supper in Windsor; then, after being pawed over by some unpleasant customs-people, they entered Detroit. Housing wanted to visit the Holy City, but Dyna said there wasn't time, and that they could visit it on the way back. Leaving Detroit behind them, they continued on to Redskin Run. It was after midnight when they pulled into a comfortable apartment lot a little ways beyond the city and settled down for the night.

Housing's bad piston had begun to act up, but he didn't feel at all tired. He was above such common manmobile frailties as reciprocation defects and exhaustion, not only because of the sublime nature of his and Dyna's mission, but because of Dyna herself. Every since morning he had been discovering new aspects of her to admire, and sometime during the day his admiration had subtly transmuted to love. Not the ordinary kind of love that boyhicles experienced toward girlhicles, but a fine and noble kind of love that uplifted him and made him want to go out and accomplish great deeds for her in order to be worthy of asking her for her wheel.

Unfortunately, she didn't feel the same way toward him, or if she did, she kept the way she felt a deep dark secret. Oh, she was nice to him and all that, but she paid him no more attention than she did Axle—if indeed she paid him as much—and every time he looked at her with his oil pump in his headlights she invariably looked away.

Probably, he reflected, she was hiding the way she truly felt in order not to hurt Axle's feelings. After all, Axle was an outsider in a way, and couldn't be expected to share Housing's and Dyna's enthusiasm for the quest which the three of them had undertaken. Therefore, he had to be made to feel wanted, and Dyna—understanding girlhicle that she was—was doing the making.

Sometimes you could carry a good thing too far, though. Take right now, for instance. Axle and Dyna were parking at one end of the apartment lot, carrying on an earnest conversation of some kind, and here was parking all by his lonesome way down at the other end.

Piqued, he looked to see whether any people were watching; then he turned himself on, threw himself into gear, rolled across the blacktop, and stopped at Dyna's side. "My, but it's a nice night," he said. "I like the Holy Land, don't you?" She was saying something to Axle in a low voice, but it could not have been very important because she broke off almost immediately. "Do you, Housing?" she asked. "Haven't you ever been here before?"

"Housing's a great one for sticking close to the garage," Axle said.

"Even so, I'd have bet my gearteeth that a devoted young manmobile like him would have made at least one pilgrimage to the Holy Land by this time."

"You would?" Housing asked. "Why?"

"Why because of the hermithicles, of course."

As might be expected, the Holy Land was full of hermithicles. "To tell you the truth, I *have* always wanted to come out here and visit some of them," Housing said, "but somehow I never got around to it."

"I told you he was a great one for hanging around the garage," Axle said.

Dyna said, "Well anyway, Housing, better late than never. You've heard of Broken Gasket, haven't you?"

"Naturally I've heard of him. He's one of the most famous hermithicles in Americar. Gosh, I'd give my right wheel to talk to *him*!"

"Well you're in luck. He lives less than ten miles from here—in an abandoned motor pool in a

deserted Interregnum camp. I visited him a few days after I came off the reprocarnation line.

Housing was both incredulous and indignant. "Broken Gasket less than ten miles away, and we're parking *here*?"

"Well, it is after midnight, you know. And besides, as I said, I've already visited him."

"What—what did he talk about?"

"Oh, lots of things. About Deerhorn manmobile. About the purpose of manmobilekind. About the meaning of life. .But I was just a kidhicle at the time, and a lot of it went over my transmission. But it wouldn't go over yours, Housing."

"Do—do you think he'd—he'd do you—"

"Mind if you dropped in on him now? No. I don't think he'd mind at all. They say he never sleeps, and he's probably wide awake this very minute."

"Well come on!" Housing shouted. "What are we waiting for?"

"I said he wouldn't mind if *you* dropped in on him, Housing. Not all of us. Anyway, I'm beat myself."

"So am I," Axle said.

"Then the two of you won't care if I go alone? I'll only be gone a little while and—"

"Of course we won't," Dyna said. "Why don't you take one of my servo-pilots with you in case you get stuck?"

"Thank you, Dyna. That's very considerate of you."

"I'll send one of them out."

AFTER she gave him the necessary directions to get to Broken Gasket's hermitage, he backed up to where he'd been parking and summoned his own servo-pilot. A moment later, the pilot came out of one of the servo-quarter structures and climbed dutifully behind the wheel, and presently one of Pyna's two plots—the female one—came out of one of the other structures and joined Housing's. In a matter of minutes, Housing was off down the moonlit highway, burning rubber around the curves and racing the wind on the straightaways.

The side road that led to the Interregnum camp was rutted and muddy, but he didn't mind. Tonight he was above such minor things as ruts and mud, and when his bad piston began to throb he hardly even noticed. It was hard to believe that only a little over twenty-four hours ago he had been moping in his garage, utterly unaware of his noble destiny.

The deserted Interregnum camp was one of many similar people places that dated back to the period of manmobile's history when reprocarnation had come to a standstill and had remained at a standstill, save for the reprocarnation of certain species of truckmenmobiles and the emergence from the meltstream of an unusual number of mutants (most of which had long since been assimilated by the dominant species), for four years. A rusted wire-mesh fence surrounded it, interrupting itself briefly when it came to the road. The gate was gone—if there had ever been one—and Housing was able to roll through the entrance without stopping. Rundown streets that were little more than muddy lanes ran between row after row of decaying two-storied servo-quarters, which were dead-ringers for one another for the most part and which looked out upon the moon-lit scene with lensless rectangular headlights. Repelled, Housing wondered why Broken Gasket would put up with such deplorable surroundings. Then he remembered that all hermithicles deliberately chose the most demoralizing sites for their hermitages that they could find in order that their aloneness would be more acute and bring them closer to Godmobile.

Dyna's directions had been vague as to the exact location of the motor pool, and for a while Housing feared he wasn't going to be able to find it. Probably he wouldn't have found it if Broken Gasket hadn't spotted him and called out. Even then, he didn't see it right away, no doubt because he was looking for something a little more prepossessing than a sagging barn-like structure with half its roof torn off and one whole wall caved in. Then he heard the voice again—"Over here, over here!"—and saw the motor pool and rolled up the narrow road that led to the door. "Come around to the side," the voice said.

Housing complied. Presently his headlights made out the big manmobile who was parking just within

the caved-in wall, and he rolled up to within several yards of him and came to a stop. "Are —are you Broken Gasket?" he asked.

"I am."

Awed, Housing gazed at the venerable grille and the lensless headlights. Broken Gasket was a mutant, and very very old. His windshield was cracked and his tires had rotted almost completely away. The tarpaulin that once had covered his broad back hung from his ribs in tatters, His big olive-drab body was flaking in many places, and there were innumerable holes in it where it had rusted through. It had been years since he had rolled and it was obvious that he would never roll again,

IT was some time before Housing could speak again, Then he said. "Forgive me for calling on you at such a late hour, Broken Gasket, but certain matters have been bothering me lately, and I'd like to ask you a few questions."

"Turn off your headlights:" Broken Gasket said.

Housing did so. A second later he felt his and Dyna's servo-pilots scramble into his back seat. He wasn't surprised. Boys and girls were as bad as boyhicles and girlhicles. Every time they got the chance they—

He became aware that Broken Gasket was addressing him "Couldn't you have waited till morning?"

"No sir. This was the only chance I had. In the morning I'm going to rescue the Holy Grille."

He described Dyna's vision. When he finished, Broken Gasket gave a grunt of approval.

BROKEN GASKET: "It's wise to pay attention to young girlicles' visions. Lots of them use them to further their own selfish ends, but just the same the young manmobile who doesn't take them seriously risks losing out on a lot of things. Especially when the girlhicle is a virginhicle."

HOUSING: "How did you know that Dyna's a virginhicle?"

BROKEN GASKET: "Because she'd have to be in order to see the Grille—even in a vision. You say it's in a parts bank?"

HOUSING: "Yes sir. About twenty miles from here. It's guarded by a ten-ton truckmanmobile named Torque."

BROKEN GASKET : "Oh yes —I've heard of him. The self-designated reincarnation of Running Board, 2Ton, and Gear. I had no idea he was the Grille's keeper, though. If he really is, you're going to have your wheels full getting it away from him."

HOUSING: "I have help, Dyna is with me, and so is Axle, my best friendhicle."

BROKEN GASKET: "Where are they now?"

HOUSING: "Back at the apartment lot where we're spending the night,"

BROKEN GASKET: "Humph."

HOUSING: "I beg your pardon, sir?"

BROKEN GASKET: "Never mind. What's your name, young manmobile? You neglected to introduce yourself."

HOUSING: "I'm Housing."

BROKEN GASKET: "Well Housing, you're not the first young manmobile to set out in quest of the Holy Grille, and you probably won't be the last. So don't be too disappointed if you don't find it."

HOUSING: "Oh, I'll find it all right, sir—if I can only recognize it when I see it. That's the part that worries me."

BROKEN GASKET: "That's the part that should worry you the least. You are a virginhicle, aren't you?"

HOUSING: "Yes—yes sir."

BROKEN GASKET: "Then you've nothing to worry about. Now, let's get down to your main reason for coming here. You said that certain matters had been bothering you and that you wanted to ask me some questions. What are they?"

HOUSING: "There are three of them altogether. The first one is, What is the purpose of manmobilekind?"

BROKEN GASKET: "Why, to create beauty, of course. To streamline the grille of the earth and macadam and blacktop it and get rid of trees and grass and flowers and other obnoxious growths. To make the world a better place for future generations of manmobilekind to roll on."

HOUSING: "But nobody's *doing* anything about it, sir. All boyhicles do is chase girlhicles, and all girlhicles do is let boyhicles catch them. And the same goes for older men- and women-mobiles. Oh, there are a few exceptions in both cases, but hardly enough to count. So if the purpose of manmobilekind is to create beauty, why aren't we creating it?"

BROKEN GASKET: "But we *are* creating it, Housing. We're creating it by our very presence. We're creating it through people. Our inbuilt charisma inspires them to go out and do the very things we most want them to do. Take a look at the world around you, Housing. Every day there are fewer trees and fewer fields and fewer flowers and more highways and more parking meadows and more service cafes. Every day beauty becomes more abundant—and all we regular manmobiles have to do is park by and watch it grow. We don't even have to go to the trouble of issuing orders."

HOUSING: "Then there is nothing wrong in boyhicles chasing girlhicles?"

BROKEN GASKET: "Well yes—there *is* altogether too much ramming around going on in the world. Part of the reason is that it's not practicable as yet for all young men- and women-mobiles to settle down in double garages because as yet the average head of the servo-household simply can't afford to support two of us. And then, of course, another part of the reason is that Deerborn manmobile's Grille hasn't been reprocarinated yet, and as a result our morality isn't quite what it should be. But we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that to a considerable degree it's natural for boyhicles to chase girlhicles and for girlhicles to let boyhicles catch them,"

HOUSING: "But *why* is it, sir? What purpose does it serve? When people get together, they create more of their kind, but with us it doesn't work that way. We reproduce through reprocarination. It seems to me that—

BROKEN GASKET: "But you're *comparing* us to people. You shouldn't do that, Housing. It's demeaning for one thing, and it's misleading for another. You shouldn't think that just because people reproduce themselves sometimes when they get their oil changed that it's wrong for us to get our oil changed just because we don't."

HOUSING "But you said—"

BROKEN GASKET; "I said that there was too much ramming arotiud going on in the world. And there is. But a natural instinct is a natural instinct, and until manmobilekind is ennobled by the reprocarination of the Grille, we might just as well accept ourselves for what we are—a race of beings who are almost, but not quite, perfect. There, that should take care of your first question, Now, the next one?"

HOUSING: "It's this, sir : If Godmobile likes regular menmobiles like us as much as everybody says He does, why did He create truckmenmobiles ?"

BROKEN GASKET: "For two reasons, Housing. *One*: He wanted regular menmobiles to be free from the burden of heavy labor ; *two*: He wanted to strengthen regular menmobiles through adversity, In other words, He knew that there would be plenty of hard work involved in beautifying the grille of the earth and He wanted us to have things easy; but on the other wheel He didn't want us to have things so easy that we'd take our burgeoning young utopia too much for granted, He wanted us to keep on our center treads, and He knew that the best way to do it, was by putting an enemy in our midst. And now let's get down to your final question, Housing, so you can be on your way. I've got a hunch what it'll be,"

HOUSING: "I'm—I'm afraid it's kind of sacrilegious, sir. Do— do people rationalize everything *they* do or do we rationalize everything *we* do, and do *we* have free will or do *they*?"

BROKEN GASKET; "That's what I thought it would be. Two out of every three men- and women-mobiles who come to see me ask that same thing. And yet of all the questions that are put to me, it's the easiest one of all to answer. I think that what confuses everybody most is the fact that generally speaking most menmobiles comply to people's laws and that the majority of them devote a large amount of their time to taking people to work, waiting for them in public parking meadows and then taking them home again. But think for a moment. Aren't their laws as beneficial to us as they are to them? And isn't

90 percent of their work performed either directly or indirectly for our benefit?"

HOUSING: "But why do we have to keep our sentience a secret? Why do we have to pretend to be slaves when we're actually masters?"

BROKEN GASKET "Primarily for the benefit of people's morale. The more free will they think they have, the higher their morale becomes, and the higher their morale becomes, the harder they work for *us*. But if you still think they really have free will, just ask yourself the following common-sense questions

"One: If they had free will, would they bring up their offspring to love and revere us to the extent that whenever we wish to go somewhere and none of our legal servo-pilots is available all we have to do to get someone behind our wheel is to glow at the first teenager who comes along? "Two: If they had free will, would they frequently go without the bare essentials of life in order to garage us and keep us well?"

"Three: if they had free will, would they give our ever growing highways precedence over any and all obstacles that lie in their path?"

"Four: If they had free would they use the extent of their servitude to us as a barometer on which to gauge their worth to their society?"

"Five: If they had free will, would they sometimes tear down traditional buildings, dig up their own dead, and sacrifice the corners of their towns and cities in order to keep us well-supplied with apartment lots, parking meadows, and service cafes

"Six: If they had free will, would they allow us to permeate the air that they breathe with the very poison that most aggravates one of their major inbuilt obsolescences?"

"Seven: if they had free will, would they permit us to maim and murder their own children?"

"If they had free will, Housing, would they do even so much as *one* of these things?"

Housing tea as though a great weight had been lifted from his fenders. Simultaneously, he felt as though he could conquer the whole world. Only he wasn't going to conquer it—he was going to save it. "Well of course they wouldn't. Broken Gasket," he said. "Of course they wouldn't. I never looked at it that way before. When you look at it that way, reality makes sense."

"That's what reality is, Housing. A way of looking at things. Our way is the right way, of course, but we have to let people think that their way is right, because it's essential to our wellbeing that they believe they have free will. So we put up with their arrogance, and that's why sometimes it *seems* that they have free will. But fortunately, the application of the merest smidgin of common sense conclusively demonstrates that they haven't."

Housing felt his own and Dyna's servo-pilots climb back into his front seat. He started himself up in response to the former's touch. "You've helped me more than I can say, Broken Gasket," he said, "and I won't keep you up any longer. Nothing can stop me now. Torque won't have a chance against me." He turned on his headlights and backed up several respectful wheelturns, imprinting the noble grille before-him on his memory so that he would never forget it. "Thank you for giving me your valuable time sir. Good by."

"Good by, Housing," Broken Gasket said. "Godmobilespeed."

WHEN Housing got back to the apartment lot, Axle and Dyna were sound asleep. Some how he had the impression that they were parking a lot closer together than they were when he left, but he was exhausted by this time and knew that he probably wasn't seeing straight. Mere seconds after his and Dyna's servo-pilots returned to their respective servo-quarter structures, he was traveling the highways of Nod.

The sound of a horn awoke him. It was Dyna's. "Install your servo-pilot, Housing," she said. "It's almost dawn."

Her two servo-pilots were already in place, and Axle's was coming across the blacktop, rubbing his eyes. A moment later Housing's appeared and got dutifully behind Housing's wheel. It seemed to Housing that he'd only been asleep for minutes, and he was in something of a smog; then he remembered where he was going and what he was going to do, and the smog dispersed and he was as wide awake and alert as could be. His bad piston gave him a hard time when he first started up, and the pain throbbed all

through him, but soon his oil began flowing freely, and he was his normal self again.

They stopped at an all-night service cafe for an early breakfast, then set out on the final stage of their journey. Dyna led the way, Housing came next, and then Axle. Night was still on wheel, but in the east the stars were pulling out of the parking meadow of the sky, and the blacktop was beginning to pale.

The moon was Simonizing the land with the last of her silvery luminescence as she wheeled rapidly toward the big double garage of the western horizon.

Shadow and silver made ephemeral patterns on Dyna's graceful tonneau, and to Housing, it seemed that she never been lovelier. Did he dare ask her for her wheel after their mission was accomplished? Would she consent to take up garage-keeping with him, and would they be able to obtain a common set of servo-pilots? Would they live happily together ever after? Oh, to have her at his side forever! Oh, to come home nights to a double garage and find her waiting for him! *Thou art all fair, my lovehicle; and there is no rust spot on thee. Come with me from Michigan, my bridehicle, with me from Michigan*

...

THE QUEENHICLE OF CHEBOYGAN: *I was asleep, but my oil pump waked: it is the voice of my belovedhicle that let knocketh . . .* KING SOLOMANMOBILE: *How beautiful are thy wheels with tires! . . . The pins of thy axletrees are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning reprocreationman . . . Thy gastank is like a heap of chrome set about with bearings .* THE QUEENHICLE OF CHEBOYGAN: *I am my belovedhicle's and—*

"Hey!" Axle hollered. "You're rolling on the shoulder. Wake up, Housing!"

Housing's tires squealed as he swerved back onto the macadam. Unfortunately, he swerved back onto it too far, and nearly sideswiped a passing tractormanmobile-and-trailerette. "Clunkhead!" the tractormanmobile shouted. "Why don't you watch where you're going?"

HOUSING was both hurt and angry. Sometimes it seemed that everybody was out to give him a hard time. Was that the way it always was with menmobiles like him? Did other menmobiles resent them out of spite and jealousy and just plain meanness? He refused to believe it. Menmobiles were basically good, and so were truckmenmobiles. And once the Holy Grille was introduced into the meltstream the goodness would be bolstered and would come into its own.

Maybe you ought to take the lead now, Housing," Dyna called back to him. "We'll be there pretty soon."

"Sure thing." Housing said, giving himself more gas and pulling into the passing lane.

"Keep on the lookout for an intersection with a big provender market on the corner. When you reach it, turn left."

He pulled in ahead of her, and she dropped back. He felt big and strong and grave. He had always wanted to be a leader, but always before he had been thwarted. Except once, when he'd transported his eldest servo-pilot in a Saint Patrick's Day parade and been the first manmobile in line. But the moment had been irreparably marred when a bee got under his hardtop and caused him to panic and lose control and go crashing into a beer tent.

But all that was in the past. He was a real leader now. As though to prove to him how much they trusted his judgment, Dyna and Axle dropped farther back—so far back, in fact, that he could not hear what they were saying to each other. It made him feel proud for them to have so much faith in him. He'd show them that their faith wasn't ill-found. He'd—

Oops !—he was rolling on the shoulder again. He swerved back onto the macadam, hoping Dyna and Axle hadn't noticed. Again, he swerved back onto it too far, and this time he nearly sideswiped a passing busmanmobile. The busmanmobile didn't say anything, though. Busmanmobiles were good-natured and seldom let anything get under their sheet metal. You couldn't ask for nicer vehicles.

All of the stars had pulled out of the parking meadow of the sky by now, and the pink parking lights of the new day were showing in the east. The occasional garages and servo-quarters bordering the highway lacked the sharpness of line they would acquire when the day got into higher gear, and morning mist was beginning to rise from fields and pastures. Housing kept a sharp headlight out for the

intersection, and at length he saw it in the distance. He slowed, then, so that Dyna and Axle could catch up with him, and when the trio reached the intersection they waited till the light turned green; then they turned left, one by one, Housing still in the lead.

"The parts bank should be about two miles down the road," Dyna said, "so go slow, Housing. We'll roll past it first, and give it the once-over. Then we'll U-turn, and talk things over."

"Right," Housing said.

The sun was just beginning to wheel into the sky when a bend in the secondary highway brought the bank into sight. It was quite a large one, and was surrounded by a high chickenwire fence. Parts of every description were scattered everywhere, some of them in heterogeneous piles but most of them just lying on the ground. There were wheels and rearends and windshields; transmissions and crankshafts and doors; bumpers and shock absorbers and fans. In addition, there were several skeletal chassis and a number of badly rusted tonneaus. Housing shuddered. All he could think of was an abattoir.

Just within the entrance stood a small shed-like building. As he rolled by he gave the structure and its immediate surroundings a thorough scrutiny, suspecting that it would be in this section of bank that the Grille would be kept. But he saw no sign of it. Parking next to the shed was a truckmanmobile whom he identified instantly as Torque. As he went by, the truckmanmobile gave him a dirty look, and he knew that Dyna, Axle, and himself had their work cut out for them

WHEN another bend in the highway hid the parts bank from view, he U-turned, and waited for the others to join him. "Did you see it anywhere, Housing?" Dyna asked, pulling up behind him.

"Not a sign of it. It must be behind the shed."

"There's a dirt road that runs back into the fields not far from the fence—Axle and I spotted it when we went by. Why don't you roll back into it for a ways and see if you can't see behind the shed."

"Aren't you and Axle Coming along?"

"Well wait for you here."

Axle had pulled up behind Dyna. "It's a real narrow road, Housing," he said. "You'll have to look sharp to see it."

"I'll find it oh Housing said.

He set off down the highway again. In his absorption with the parts bank he'd missed the road on the first time by, but he didn't miss it this time. The trouble was, it was more of a cow path than a road, and he hadn't rolled up it ten yards before his undercarriage and his flanks were smeared with mud. But he persisted, gunning himself out of ruts and mudholes and ignoring the renewed throbbing of his bad piston, until he got far enough back to see behind the shed. Just as he had suspected, the grilles were stored there. There was a great big pile of them, both old ones and new ones. In the strict sense of the word, of course, the new ones were radiators, not grilles, manmobile having adapted himself through successive reprocarnations to a point where his grille and radiator were no longer one unit, but two. In Deerborn manmobile's day, vehicular beings had been far less complicated creatures than they were today.

Abruptly he gasped as a shard of dazzling light leaped forth and pierced his headlights. Another shard followed, and another and another and another. Slowly, disbelievingly, he made out the Holy Grille. It was leaning against the rear wall of the shed some distance from the ordinary grilles, and its brightness put the rising sun to shame. Its fretwork was pure gold, its frame pure silver. Its radiator cap was pure platinum and was ringed with rubies. Both frame and fretwork were lavishly encrusted with diamonds. Housing had never seen anything so beautiful in all his life.

AFTERWARD, he couldn't remember how he got back to the highway. He must have had a rough time of it, though, because when he rejoined Dyne and Axle he was plastered with mud from hardtop to

wheel and his bad piston was throbbing so painfully that he could hardly talk. Even worse, he had developed a loose connecting rod, and it was knocking to beat the band. "It's—it's there!" he gasped, "Behind the shed! I saw it! It's beautiful! We've got to get it! We've got to, we've got to, we've got to!"

"All right," Dyna said, "here's my plan. I'll go on ahead and make believe to Torque that I'm interested in some of the parts that are piled at the rear of the bank. You and Axle give me five minutes, then come rolling down the highway and through the gate and around to the back of the shed. Housing, you roll up to where the Grille is and have your servo-pilot put it in your back seat. Axle, you park behind Housing so Torque won't be able to see what's going on. As soon as the Grille is in Housing's back seat, both of you take off. I'll be right behind you. Remember now—five minutes?"

After she left, Axle said, "That rod of yours sounds pretty bad, Housing. Maybe you should forget about this crazy caper and go and get it fixed."

"My rod is perfectly all right, and this isn't a crazy caper, Axle. Manmobilekind's whole future will be determined by the success or failure of our mission."

"All right—be noble then. See who cares."

After that, they waited in silence. When the five minutes were up they set off down the highway, Housing in the lead. The day was well into first gear now, but owing to its being Sunday, traffic was still relatively thin. Mist was rising everywhere. As the two menmobiles rounded the bend, Housing saw that Dyna had succeeded in luring Torque away from the gate and that the coast was clear. Disregarding the pain of his bad piston and the knocking of his loose rod, he gunned himself for all he was worth and roiled the rest of the way to the gate in two seconds fiat. Then he zoomed into the bank and around to the back of the shed, Axle following at a respectable distance.

Seen at close range, the Grille was even more resplendent and beautiful than when seen from afar, and Housing suffered a momentary paralysis of thought and motion. Recovering, he rolled as close to the hallowed object as possible, and his servo-pilot leaped from behind his wheel. But when the servopilot tried to pick up the Grille it wouldn't budge. Housing saw then that it had sunk into the soft ground and was firmly embedded. The servo-pilot managed to loosen it, and began working it back and forth. "Axle," Housing called over his fender, "send your servo-pilot to give us a wheel." But Axle was parking too far away to hear, and Housing's own tonneau hid what was happening from his friendhicle's headlights.

Abruptly the Grille came free, and Housing gave a sigh of relief. He waited until it was ensconced in his back seat and until his servo-pilot was reinstalled in his front seat; then he gunned himself and turned around. At this juncture, a terrifying roar came from the rear of the bank, and Housing saw Torque approaching through the morning mist, Dyna just behind him. Axle saw Torque's approach, too, and was off through the gate like a meteor, and Dyna somehow managed to pass the big truckmanmobile and follow Axle. All of which left poor Housing holding the bag—or rather, the Grille.

Housing would have been more than glad to follow Dyna and Axle if he only could have, but Torque was now between him and the gate. Worse, Torque had turned, and was bearing down on him, roaring with rage. But was Housing daunted? He was not. He knew there was only one thing to do, and he did it. He called Torque's bluff, and opened himself up and sent himself hurtling straight toward the big truckmanmobile's massive grille.

Through Torque's windshield he glimpsed Torque's servopilot's terrified face and knew that he had won even before Torque's steering wheel began turning wildly in the pilot's hands. The big truckmanmobile skidded and nearly turned over as he tried desperately to get out of Housing's way. For a moment the worn tire treads lost traction altogether; then they caught and sent the huge body lumbering toward the shed. Seeing an opening between his antagonist and a pile of rusted bumpers, Housing veered to the right and tried to get through it. But unfortunately the opening wasn't quite wide enough, and he sideswiped one of the big truckmanmobile's rear wheels. A moment later, Torque crashed into the shed, knocking down one whole wall and half of the roof, and sending generators, starters, oil pumps, carburetors, and spark plugs flying in seventeen different directions at once. Housing's left front fender was caved in, his left front door was hanging on one hinge, and something awful had happened inside his crankcase; but he was free, and in a matter of seconds he was out of the bank and hotwheeling it down

the highway, the Holy Grille cradled gently in his back seat.

HE expected to find Dyna and Axle waiting for him at the intersection, but he saw no sign of them when he got there. Probably they'd continued on to Redskin Run and would be waiting for him near the Redskin Run Reprocreation Plant. But could he make it to Redskin Run? It was a good twenty miles distant, and he was leaking oil badly, his whole left side was numb, and he seemed to be running on only seven cylinders.

Grimly, he made a right turn and set out. He *had* to make it, and that was all there was to it. Now that he'd rescued the Grille, it was his moral responsibility to make sure that it got into the meltstream.

He didn't once think of the policemobiles till he heard the sirens. Immediately, he brought his speed back up to maximum and began to roll in earnest, ignoring the hideous commotion that was going on in his crankcase. It would never do to permit the policemobiles to catch up with him. They themselves wouldn't bother him—indeed, in most cases they would probably sympathize with him—but their servo-pilots would arrest his, and take the Grille back to the parts bank, where it would fall into the wheels of Torque again.

Spotting a side road, he managed to turn into it before the first of the policemobiles came into sight. A few moments later he came to a lane that wound into a deep woods, and he turned up it and rolled till he came to a small clearing. Then he stopped, and turned himself off. The sirens climbed a crescendo, and faded slowly away. For the moment, at least, he was safe.

But he was on his last axles, and he knew it ; and he knew also that whatever he decided to do next he must do right away, else he'd never be able to do it at all.. He could hear his precious oil going *drip-drip-drip* on the wet and rotting leaves beneath his undercarriage. Feeling was beginning to return to his left side, and his caved-in fender and hi smashed door were an intermittent mass of pain, His bad piston seemed to be on fire, and his crankcase was a vast and gnawing ache.

His servo-pilot was listening to the radio. Hopeful of finding a way out of his predicament, Housing tuned in. The situation was even worse than he'd thought “—and a crazier stunt you never heard of in all your life. Four teenagers driving a 196 Hermes hardtop, a 196 Cheboygan convertible, and a 196 Mayflower station wagon stormed a junkyard twenty miles west of Redskin Run a little while ago and made off with—of all things!—an ancient Model Z radiator. Harry Bradigan, the owner, informed police that in escaping one of the teenagers drove straight at the big all-purpose straightjob Bradigan was driving, forcing him to crash into his auto-accessories shop in order to avoid a collision. The boy sideswiped the truck before getting away, and the Hermes hardtop he was driving sustained considerable damage. In addition, Bradigan was able to get his license number, and the police are combing the highways for him and his companions right now. Bradigan, who suffered a broken collar bone when his truck crashed into the auto-accessories shop, says that they could have had the radiator for nothing if they'd been decent enough to ask him for it, but that now he's going to see to it that they pay for it—as well as for the damages to the truck and the shop—if it's the last thing he ever does. The authorities suspect that the four teenagers are the same four who came up missing Friday night in New York State. Kids will do anything for kicks nowadays, won't they?"

DISGUSTED with himself, Housing tuned out. He'd never once thought about his license plates—his transmission had been too high in the clouds. Darn people anyway! What business did they have giving menmobiles numbers?

Hearing the sound of rolling tires, he looked behind him. He was about to start himself up and make a break for it when he recognized the two vehicles approaching through the woods as Dyna and Axle. Relieved, he settled back on his springs. The day was saved after all.

"We gave the policemobiles the slip and doubled back and followed the trail you left with your oil," Axle said, pulling up on one side of him while Dyna pulled up on the other. "From the looks of you, Housing, Torque must have sideswiped you but good."

"I sideswiped *him*," Housing said. And then, "I'm—I'm afraid I broke something when I did it, though." He started himself up so they could hear what he sounded like. He sounded awful. Like a bunch of tin cans rolling down a hill. "See?" he said, turning himself back off.

"Oh Housing," Dyna wailed. "we've got to get you to a servo-mechanic right away!"

"I'll say we have," Axle said, "But first I want to see the Grille. I didn't get a look at it in the parts bank."

"Neither did I," Dyna said.

Axle pulled closer to Housing and peered into his back seat. Abruptly he gave a snort, and backed up. "Housing, you clunk-head!—that's nothing but a beat-up old radiator!"

"Well I didn't expect *you* to see it for what it really is," Housing said. "*You* look, Dyna. Tell me what *you* see."

Dyna also peered into Housing's back seat. There was a pause. Then, "I—I see a beat-up old radiator," she said.

Horrified. Housing gasped, "But you said you were a virginhicle!"

"I—I am a virginhicle."

"What's her being a virginhicle got to do with it?" Axle demanded.

"Only innocent men - and womenmobiles can see the Grille, Broken Gasket told me so. You seduced her, didn't you, Axle. You, my best friendhicle!"

Dyna cried, "But he *didn't* seduce me, Housing. It wasn't that way at all. I couldn't help myself. I—I—"

Housing felt sick. "You threw yourself at him, didn't you. That's why you were so eager to get me to go and see Broken Gasket last night. You wanted to get rid of me so you could be alone with Axle. Some virginhicle you are!"

"But I was a virginhicle, Housing. Honest I was!"

"'Was' is right. Go away, both of you, and leave me alone!"

"But we can't just leave you here, Housing," Axle said. "You need a servo-mechanic."

"I don't want a servo-mechanic! I'm going to the Redskin Run Reprocarnation Plant and reprocarnate the Grille."

"You'll never make it in your condition, you clunkhead. You'll break down before five miles."

"I'll make it all right. There's more ways than one to get there."

"Please forgive me. Housing," Dyna pleaded. "I wanted to be a holy girlhicle—honest I did. But I just wasn't strong enough."

"I do forgive you," Housing said, "That's the whole point. You were weak—that's all. That's why it's more important to me now than ever that the Grille be reprocarnated. It's not right for boyhicles and girlhicles to be only 87.6 percent good, They should be 100 percent good. And I'm going to see to it that in the future all boyhicles and girlhicles and all men - and womenmobiles *are* 100 percent good. Now go away and leave me alone!"

"All right, Housing," Axle said, "if that's the way you want it, we will. But I'm going to send back a servo-mechanic to take care of you. So you just stay where you are until he gets here and forget about that piece of junk in your back seat. You're a sick manmobile, Housing,"

"Go away, go away, *go* away!"

AFTER they had gone, Housing sighed. Upon the fenders of menmobiles such as he invariably fell the moral responsibility for the whole vehicular race.

He waited till the sun wheeled higher into the sky, till morning traffic was at its thickest; then he started himself up, returned to the side road, and rolled back to the highway. Ignoring the protests of his pain-racked body, he opened himself up wide. There were plenty of menmobiles available, but a mere

manmobile wouldn't do. He needed a tractormanmobile - and trailerette. Presently he saw one approaching. Ejecting his servo-pilot, he swerved into the opposite lane. He met the tractormanmobile head-on, and when the impact telescoped him he molded himself around the Holy Grille and made it an inseparable part of himself. They could never take it away from him now. Never. And when he was reprocarnated, it would be reprocarnated too.

* * *

Housing retained awareness till the very end. He retained it while he was being hauled to the Redskin Run scrap yard. He retained it while he was being stripped of the various parts and pieces of him that were still usable. He retained it while he lay for weeks and months, rusting in the sun and the rain. He retained it when the huge press squeezed him to a fraction of his former size. He retained it while he was being transported to the Redskin Run Reprocarnation Plant stock yard. He retained it when the big magnet crane picked him up and dropped him into one of Heat #4986's charging pans. He retained it during the brief trip up to the open-hearth floor. He retained it when the charger picked up the charger pan and shoved it through the middle door of Furnace #28 and dumped him on the limestone-littered furnace floor. He retained it during the rest of the scrap charge. He retained it during melting stage, rejoicing now as he felt Deerborn manmobile's metal mingling with his own. He retained it when the molten ore from the blast furnaces came cascading into the melt. He began to spread out then, to permeate the bath; to become, with the Holy Grille, a part of future manmobilekind. To become the basis of the new order that would endure when his and Deerborn manmobile's atoms were at last distributed throughout the whole of manmobilekind. The goodness of the Grille became more and more manifest as it blended with the old. Finally the oxygen lances came on, and the last particles of Housing became one with the vehicular race.

THE END