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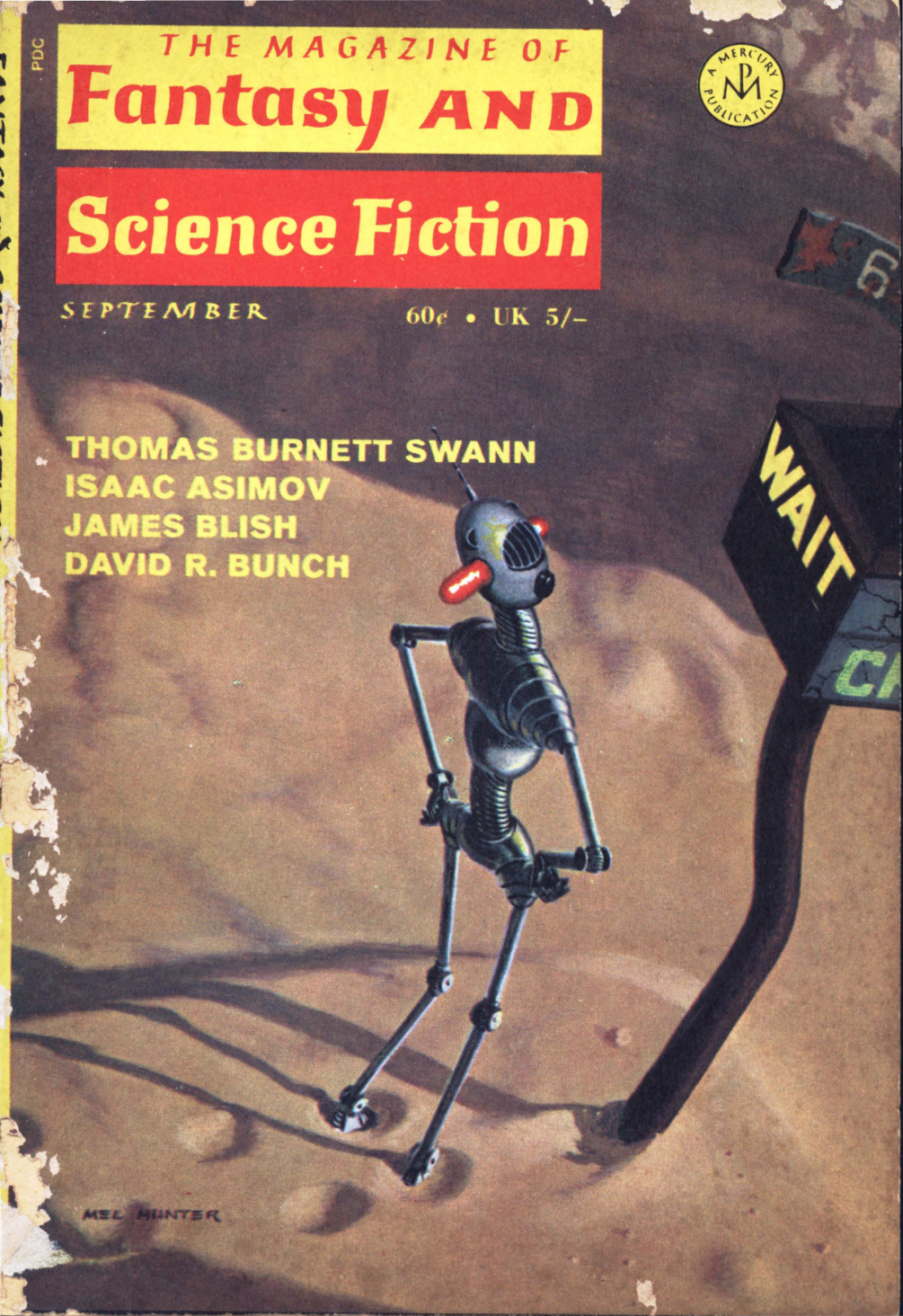

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

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The travelin' man in the story below is a Bible salesman—at a time when following the words of the Bible means imprisonment, even death.

THE TRAVELIN' MAN

by Leo P. Kelley

CHILDY COVINGTON SAT IN THE broken rocker holding her youngest, five-month-old Delight, and rocked and thought, thought and rocked. She could see herself, just barely, in the cracked and unframed mirror that hung on the wall of the run-down house. Near it, in the shadows, sat her husband, Ralph, cleaning his rifle as he had been doing every day since the mine closed down, leaving only the sound of the wind to disturb the quiet of the desolate Tennessee hills that were their home.

Childy thought about the empty mine that was haunted by the shades of men who had left everything behind and gone seeking to the cities. As she thought about little Delight, that warm bundle of soft sounds and softer flesh, she smiled. And then she frowned as she thought about Ralph, always so sober. Ralph, who seldom spoke now except to yell at one or more of their eight kids. She continued frowning as she thought about herself.

She knew she was no beauty, never had been one, not really. Not even when she was sixteen here in the hills where she had been born and now—well, now she was creeping up fast on thirty and no one could call her Miss America. To make matters worse, she knew she wasn't smart. Oh, she could stick most any kind of seed in the garden ground out back and something would eventually sprout. She had a way with seeds. She almost laughed out loud at the thought. Little Delight was proof of her skill with seeds. So were the other seven. Oh, my, weren't they just! Then, too, she

could set a trap, much as she disliked doing so, almost as good as any man. Only it was always Ralph who had to go out and check what had gotten caught in it. She had neither the heart nor the stomach for it. But she wasn't smart and she knew it.

The most recent proof of that unfortunate fact lay right over there on the oak table under the oil lamp. It had clear plastic covers and weighed, the travelin' man had told her, close to four pounds. Maybe even a few ounces over. She rocked back and forth, thinking of the day the travelin' man had arrived in his dusty Buick, while little Delight, at her breast, gurgled like a tiny geyser.

She had been standing on the sagging porch that day, staring out through the haze that hid the distant hills when she heard the *cough, sput, cough, sput* off out of sight somewhere. *Car,* she said to herself. *Maybe coming here. Got to hide the kids.*

"Calvin!" she shouted, always thinking first of her eldest who had just turned fifteen. "Mary Mae! Broderick! John Joe!"

They appeared like moles from beneath the bushes, popped out from around the corners of the house, slid down out of trees, scurried up to her with dirty hands and fearful faces.

She counted.

John Joe. Charity. Mary Mae. Calvin. Broderick. Esther. Samantha. Delight was asleep inside the house in the padded woodbox that Ralph had long ago turned into a crib.

"Calvin, you take Delight and the rest of these tads and you all hightail it clear up into the piney woods. I'll whistle when it's safe. Now you move, hear?"

They moved. With faded shirttails flying and long hair lifting on the wind, they were gone like chickens when the fox comes scratching at the coop.

And just in time!

The Buick sputtered up the road into sight and drove right up almost to the porch before it stopped, and the travelin' man got out and turned on his smile like he came by every day and they were old friends, him and Childy.

"Mornin', ma'am," he called out to her, bending to pull something out of the back seat of his car.

Childy remained silent. He didn't look like a government man, but her silence declared: "Better safe than sorry."

He puffed a lot as he lugged the big box up onto the porch. Thin, he was, though. And pale. Getting bald. Chock-full of smiles he was, like they were bubbling up inside him and bursting over the brim of his face, one right on top of the other. Childy liked his smiles. But still she said nothing.

"Goin' to be a scorcher today," he remarked, wiping the sweat from his forehead. "At least a

hundred, or I miss my guess. Could I have a drink of cold water?"

Childy went inside to get it. When she came back into the shadowy main room from the built-on kitchen where the pump was—why, there he sat at her oak table just as if he belonged! Smiles or no smiles, Childy felt herself growing resentful.

"Here," she said, thrusting the glass at him. "Here's your water. Now, what you want?"

He drained the glass. "Ah, good," he sighed. "You got a nice place here."

Liar, Childy thought. It ain't nice a'tall and you know it. "What you want way up here in the hills?"

"I'm from the Hallelujah Bible Company, Incorporated," he said, loosening his tie. "HBC has sent me high up into these hills on a mission to bring the word of God to good folk like you and your husband. He about?"

Childy shook her head. "Out hunting."

"I see. Well, never mind. I can talk to you. It'll be one fine pleasure, I assure you, ma'am. Now, if you'll just sit down right here, I have something truly special to show you." He tugged open the box which he had brought inside and plopped the enormous book on the table, right under Childy's nose.

"Family Bible," he declared, tapping it. "Printed in more colors than you can count, and it's got every single word you'll ever need to know. The Hallelujah Bible Company, Incorporated, wants you and your family to have it."

"There's only me and Ralph," Childy said uneasily, reaching out to touch the Bible's garish plastic covers that had pink roses twining on them.

The travelin' man went right on as if she hadn't spoken. "Now, you just take yourself a good gander at this page right here." He flipped the Bible open to a colorful illustration. "See, there's Jesus walking right over the water just as dry as you please. And back here—" He turned to another, equally colorful page. "Back here we got us the picture of Him feeding the multitude with but a few loaves and fishes."

"That be a good trick," Childy said. "One I sure could profit from if'n I only knew how it worked."

"Yes, ma'am, I sure do know what you mean. The cost of livin's goin' up like those rocket ships they keep sending off to the moon and Mars and all over creation."

Childy slowly turned page after page of the Bible, impressed despite her uneasiness. She glanced inside the front cover.

"That there's the place to record all your family's joys and sorrows," said the travelin' man, watching her closely. "Births and deaths. Like that."

"They's only me and Ralph," Childy lied again, quickly withdrawing her hand from the Bible.

"Things could change," said the travelin' man. "You're still young. You got your quota, ain't you? From the government, I mean?"

Childy nodded. "We can have a baby three years from now. Meantime, I—"

The travelin' man nodded sympathetically. "Meanwhile, you got to keep takin' your pills."

"I got me a coil. Chafes, it does."

"You could get an Inspector from Census Control to come up, take a look. You sure wouldn't want to get pregnant. Not before your legal time, I mean. They'd arrest you and take the nipper right away from you, quick as a racoon's wink."

"You ever hear what they do to them?"

"The nippers?" The travelin' man turned thoughtful, forgot to smile, shook his head. "The government—well, they don't say."

"Heard once that they killed them."

"I really couldn't say. Now, about this here Bible, Mrs.—"

"Covington."

"Mrs. Covington, like I said before, HBC wants you and your family—your po-*ten*tial family—to have it."

"You all givin' it to me?"

"Yes, ma'am, we are. For only a dollar a month with carryin' charges and taxes all included in the one low price."

"Ralph and me, we don't have no money. Besides, a dollar a month'd buy us a whole sack of grits."

"It weighs four pounds. A little more, as a matter of pure fact. It's a real bargain, let me tell you, Mrs. Covington. The Word—all four pounds worth—at only a measly dollar a month for thirty six months."

"It sure is a pretty thing."

"I'll just leave it with you, how'll that be? Sort of on trial. You show it to Mr. Covington when he gets back. I'll come by again in a month and if you don't want it then, why that will be the end of the entire matter. But please think on it, Mrs. Covington."

And now, rocking in her chair and holding Delight in her lap, Childy was still thinking about it.

Ralph, when she had told him about the travelin' man, had called her a fool. He could have been a spy, Ralph said. Or, worse still, a government man. And with him coming up the road in his Buick every month, why, he'd be certain to catch on sooner or later to the fact that there were kids about—unregistered ones.

Childy got up and placed Delight in the padded woodbox. "Ralph?"

"Yeah?" He wiped the last traces of oil from his rifle.

"I can't give the Bible back. You know I can't. Not now. We'll just have to pay that travelin' man his dollar a month."

"Thirty-six damned dollars!" Ralph shot at her. "Woman, why'd you have to go and write the kids' names in there on the cover?"

Childy didn't really know how to answer him. But there had been those empty lines waiting to record the births, and there were the seven kids in and out of the house—plus Delight—and, well, it had just seemed like the only proper thing to do. Not one of them had ever been properly baptized. Somehow, it had seemed to Childy the day after the travelin' man had gone away, that the names of her children just had to be set down there. Somehow, it made the kids seem more permanent to her. More real, if that were possible.

"We can use our food tokens to get kidney beans, Ralph," she said hesitantly. "Beans can be made to last. You can do all sorts of things with beans." She paused. "I got four dollars tucked away in the tea kettle." And then, firmly, "I'm going to give that travelin' man one of those there dollars when he comes back to collect."

"Kidney beans," Ralph said, "ain't very nourishing."

She went to him where he sat in the shadows and put her arms around his neck, bending over in order to do so. She looked right into his eyes. "Maybe the mine'll open up again, Ralph. Maybe some day real soon." She knew it wouldn't and she knew he knew it too. "Even if it doesn't," she continued, "you might find work down in Memphis. We could come along after you once got settled. Me and the kids." She held her breath.

"You know we can't go to Memphis. We got no registration papers for a single one of our kids. You *know* that, Childy!"

She wanted to weep because, yes, she knew it and because it hadn't even occurred to Ralph that she was offering him a chance to escape. But she wouldn't let the tears come. Ralph wouldn't be able to stand them. She said, "I been reading in the Book. I want you to hear." She went to the table and opened the Bible. "This is the Lord talking to Jacob," she explained. "He says, 'I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins.' There's more. Listen."

"No, Childy. I don't want to hear any of that old stuff. These is modern times. We've all multiplied too much. The government, it been saying so for years, telling us we got to have quotas and all. No, don't read me that old-fashioned stuff."

There was something wrong

with Ralph's voice, Childy realized. She closed the Bible and went to him quickly. "Ralph, the kids is all sound asleep in the other room."

He let her lead him to the battered sofa, and he lay down beside her and didn't trust himself to speak.

"Kings," she whispered to him in the gloom. "It says 'kings shall come out of thy loins,' Ralph. Just think on that! But even if none ever do—even if Cal and John Joe and all of us have to run for the rest of our lives, it don't really matter, Ralph. Because we have them and we love them and no government's going to make me—or you, either, Ralph—give up that chance to love. That travelin' man, he said 'things change.' Now, I been thinking about that. Maybe things will change again and they'll find room for us all somewheres. Maybe somewheres where all those rockets go that they keep sending up into the sky. Maybe there's still a chance for Cal to be a king—somewhere."

"We can't even feed them proper," Ralph whispered, as he made love to her in dark and desperate fashion. "Not now with the mine closed. We ain't bein' fair to them, Childy."

"Charity, she found herself an oriole today that had fallen out of its nest. She brought it on home. It's in a box out back. She says she's sorry for it. She says she loves the poor thing. Ralph, we're bein' fair to them. And we're teachin' them right. They're going to grow up straight and tall as—as kings. And queens."

"Oh, Childy!" Ralph cried, not out of passion but out of some dark place within himself where confusion lay nestled, a terrible and furry thing.

"Ralph, don't take on so. They get enough to eat. You trap and hunt. I got my garden. And they know we love them. Ralph, please!"

He was silent.

When Childy heard the Buick coming, a month to the day after the travelin' man had first visited her, she chased the children up into the piney woods and then sat down on the porch to wait for him to appear.

When he did, she saw at once that he was drunk. Not happy drunk, either, she noticed. No, he looked mean drunk. All his smiles had been drowned in the liquor he had consumed.

"I come for the dollar!" he said, as he stomped up onto the porch.

His tie was missing and there were dark stains on his white shirt. One shoelace was untied and it flicked about his foot as he walked.

"I'll go get it," Childy said. "You wait out here."

But he didn't. He followed her into the house, and when she

handed him the dollar she had placed beside the oil lamp, he struck her hand and it fell to the floor between them.

"Don't want no damned dollar!" he bellowed. "Give me the Bible."

"But I can pay!" Childy protested.

"Get it!" he roared.

"Can't," Childy said, stiffening. "Packed it away with the cotton quilts my Ma gave me when I got married and I lost the key to the trunk."

He struck her then and she fell back against the table. As he moved toward the trunk standing in a far corner of the room, Childy recovered and ran to him, clawing at his coat and crying out to him to take the dollar and leave her be.

He seized her wrist and twisted it and she cried out in pain. "I want that there Bible. You get it! *Now!*"

Childy saw the sun turn red in the sky as the pain seared through her. "Please," she pleaded. "Let go my arm and I'll give it to you."

"No tricks," he warned. "Get the key and open that there trunk."

"It ain't in the trunk. I got it hid up on a shelf in the kitchen. But, please. I don't understand why you want it back. I got the dollar you said I owed you. Take it and let me keep the Bible."

He muttered something threatening and Childy knew it was hopeless. She went into the kitchen and lifted the Bible down from its hiding place. And then she leaned out the open window and gave a shrill whistle that pierced the stillness of the surrounding hills.

As she came back into the room carrying the Bible, she said, "I just heard a mocking bird. They be all over these parts."

The travelin' man paid her no attention. He took the Bible from her and opened the front cover. "Figured as much!" he gloated, looking at the eight names written there and the dates of births. "I figured all along you must have kids. Illegal kids, too. Eight in all! You been a busy little lady!"

Childy's cheeks flushed and then she quickly rallied. "I'm proud of every single one of them!"

He showed her his badge.

"You ain't no Bible salesman a'tall!" she whispered, thoroughly frightened now. "You ain't from any Hallelujah Bible Company, Incorporated. You're from—"

"The Government," he snapped. "Population Inspector. And you're under arrest!"

Childy began to cry. What could she do? She couldn't run. He'd down her before she ever reached the door. And Ralph was out on his trap line and wouldn't be back for hours yet. The kids might have heard her whistled summons, but they were only tads. What could they do to help her?

"Don't look so moony, Mrs. Covington," the travelin' man said. "It ain't all that bad. The Government has authorized me to make a proposition to you. Sit down here and I'll tell it to you."

Childy listened, unable to believe what she was hearing. Then the rumors were not true. The truth was worse!

"So all you got to do," the travelin' man was explaining, "is let me give those kids of yours an injection. Then Census Central will take over—their cryogenics department."

"Cryo—?"

"Cryogenics. That means freezing. With the kids incurably sick, they'll freeze 'em and for free, by the way. Then they'll wake 'em up a hundred years or so when they've found a cure and when there's more room on one of the planets or someplace for 'em. Look at it this way. You'll be doin' 'em a favor. They'll have a chance at a lot better life than you're givin' 'em."

"No," Childy said, shocked. "I couldn't let you do that to them."

"You got yourself no choice, you know. None a'tall."

Childy realized suddenly that Ralph had been right all along. She was the biggest fool in all the hills, no doubt about it. She had to go and write the names of the kids and their birth dates in the Bible, and now she had whistled to them for help and they would come and get themselves caught . . . Oh, she was the dumb one, all right!

"Ma?" It was Calvin standing in the sunny doorway with Delight cradled in his skinny arms. "Is it okay to come in?"

"No, Cal, it ain't! *Run!*"

Calvin hesitated, his huge blue eyes fixed on the travelin' man.

"You hear me, Cal? I said *run!*"

"Don't you move, son," the travelin' man ordered. "If'n you make a move, I'll hurt your Ma." To prove the validity of his threat, he seized Childy's arm again and twisted it behind her back. "Now you just step on in here real smart like and join the party. And no tricks, mind."

Calvin entered the room and placed Delight in her crib. He turned around, his wide blue eyes still on the travelin' man, and stood there, staring. His faded denim trousers were rolled up around his bony ankles, and there was a button missing from his checkered shirt. "Who are you, mister?"

"A travelin' man, is all. Now where are the rest of the kids?"

Calvin glanced quickly at his mother. She shook her head.

The travelin' man twisted Childy's arm sharply and she gave a brief, strangled cry.

"Up in the pineys," Calvin said. "I told them to wait there till I came on down and saw that it was safe."

"You're gonna take your Ma

and me up there and, after, I got a present for you and the other kids out in my car." His laughter was the growl of a grizzly.

"Present?" Calvin asked.

"Cancer," said the travelin' man. "Anthrax, maybe."

"What're they?"

"You'll find out. I wouldn't want to spoil the surprise. Now, come on."

Childy, resigned, told Calvin to pick up Delight, and then they all left the house with Calvin leading the way toward the pineys. Behind him came the travelin' man, shoving Childy roughly forward.

She called out to Calvin to be careful and not to go down through Horse Hollow.

Calvin looked back at her over his shoulder, obviously puzzled. "Why not?" he asked. "We always—"

"You do as I say," Childy warned and quickly winked. "Don't you set foot near Horse Hollow or your father'll whip you good."

"Okay," Calvin said at last.

They walked for some time through the piney woods. They passed the abandoned mine shaft and Devil's Creek. The travelin' man alternately cursed and panted for breath, complaining all the while about the unfamiliar, God-forsaken country.

"How much farther?" he asked.

"Just down there," Calvin answered. "Down there in—"

"By the big rock," Childy said, interrupting him. "That's where the kids always hide."

They scrambled down the side of the incline, and at the bottom, Childy suddenly turned and struck the travelin' man in the face with her free hand, which she had turned into a fist. He yelped and released his grip on her.

She ran to Calvin. "We'll head down further into the Hollow. He'll chase us. Watch your step!"

They began their zigzag run with the travelin' man not far behind them, but soon the distance between them increased. When Childy heard the man's scream, she halted and looked back, holding Calvin close to her.

"He's caught in one of our traps," Calvin exclaimed.

"Just what I hoped would happen," Childy said calmly.

"You really wanted me to bring him down here to Horse Hollow, didn't you?"

"I did. I figured the chances were good for him getting himself caught in one of the traps out here by the salt lick, since he didn't know where they were like we did. You're a right smart boy, Cal. You take after your Pa, that's for certain. We got to go back now and get the kids and—and go far away from here."

"But why, Ma? Why was that travelin' man actin' like that—so mean? I don't understand one

little bit. Especially, considerin' how he had promised us all presents."

"You don't want his presents. You just got to believe me about that."

"Well, I guess I do. Only—"

"Come along, Cal."

Childy and Calvin made their way out of Horse Hollow, and when they came to the travelin' man caught in the trap, he cried out to them.

"Listen, you can't just leave me here like this. My ankle's cut through clear to the bone. I can't get the damned thing open! You got to help me!"

Childy looked down at him and felt her stomach churn and her heart beat faster. He looked so helpless—so hurt. She never could stand the sight of a critter caught in one of those traps. And this was one of the traps, she suddenly realized, that she herself had set!

"Please!" cried the travelin' man. "I didn't want this job a'tall. They made me take it. My wife—she had a baby last year. Legal like and all but it up and died on us. We heard about an outfit that took kids from the cryocribs and sold them black market to people like us, complete with forged papers and all. So we bought us one. My wife—she wanted a baby awful bad. But they found out and then they made me work for them after they took the kid away. The Government, I mean. They put me on probation. When I get myself what they call 'rehabilitated,' why then, I'll be able to quit this awful job for good."

"Ma," Calvin whispered, "we could help him. With all of us pulling on the trap, we could get it off'n him."

"No," Childy said firmly. "We can't help him. Nobody can. All we can do is pity him as we would any other poor critter that's got hisself in trouble or a trap."

She turned her back on the travelin' man, and they continued their climb up the incline. When they reached the top, Childy wanted to look back down, but she didn't.

Calvin led her to where the other children were hiding, and then they went back to the house and packed the few things they could take with them on the journey. Childy said they must all begin as soon as their Pa got home.

While she waited for Ralph and while the children played outside the house and while the sun started wearily down toward the tops of the hills, she read the Bible. She wished she could take it with her. But she knew she couldn't. It was too heavy. Too incriminating. She tossed it on the flames in the fireplace and watched it burn.

When Ralph arrived home an hour later, she told him, in a breathless rush, all that had hap-

pened. "You were right, Ralph," she concluded, with her gaze just missing his. "I'm a fool. But I sure never intended any harm when I wrote down the names."

Ralph lifted her chin and looked into her eyes. He shook his head and smiled. "The only trouble with you, Childy, is you just got blessed with an overabundance of love, and you have got to keep spreading it around. Let's go."

They told the children that they were going to find a new home that would be bright and beautiful and full of songs, and promised them that they could all be singers.

The children raced ahead, hiding and seeking while the daylight lasted. They were the first to reach the top of the hill where they were brightly silhouetted against the sky in the last of the day's sunlight.

Looking up at them, Childy felt her heart leap. She took Ralph's arm, shifting the bundle that she was carrying. "Look," she whispered to him. "Why, don't they look for all the world like kings and queens!"

Ralph looked down at little Delight in his arms. "This one's going to have her chance to turn out to be a princess, at the very least," he said. "I vow."

They moved on to where their children waited for them in the last orange blaze of the day's last light.

BOOKS

THIS TIME I WANT TO BEGIN with a small piece of self-serving, a transgression I hope I shan't commit again. In a recent *F&SF* book column, Barry Malzberg complains that SF magazines should be reviewed, but haven't been, over a period of 40 years.

Well, dammit, *I* reviewed them, as "William Atheling, Jr.", over a period of a dozen years (and with regard to an earlier point of Barry's, I didn't pull any punches, either, and still don't). And I've got a book to prove it, too—THE ISSUE AT HAND, Advent, Chicago, 1964, 136 pp., paper, $1.95—which was itself reviewed by most of the magazines; Schuy Miller even made it his lead subject for an issue of *Analog*. In penance, Barry, go buy a copy; you're losing ground rapidly—there'll be a sequel this year.

And Banks Mebane has been reviewing the magazines for years, too, and still does. Malzberg, awake!

James Branch Cabell: THE HIGH PLACE. Ballantine Books, 1970. 234 pp., paper, 95¢

This is the ninth volume in Cabell's immense BIOGRAPHY OF THE LIFE OF MANUEL, the sixth novel, and the fifth section to be substantially a work of fantasy. (See *Books*, F&SF, February 1970). The hero is a 17th-century French (that is, Poictemois) nobleman named Florian de Puysange who is a lineal descendant of Dom Manuel and also of Jurgen, both of whom make brief appearances here as ghosts.

Since JURGEN remains by far the best known of Cabell's books, many readers will remember that its titular hero made three crucial refusals. First, he declined the magical proffer of an affair with his boyhood sweetheart. Second, when he finds Helen of Troy asleep in Psuedopolis (not in Antan, as Lin Carter's introduction here has it—Jurgen never even hears of Antan), he doesn't even turn down her covers. Third, when he meets the God of his childhood, he turns away.

But Jurgen was a poet who instinctively knew better than to put dreams to the test of realization. Florian, on the other hand, is an

exemplar of the gallant attitude, which takes things, good or bad, as they come; so when he is offered the chance, through a meeting with the Devil, to marry an enchanted princess, he takes it—incidentally reviving along with her his patron saint, one Hoprig. As anyone familiar with Cabell could predict, the consequences of this double indiscretion are disastrous.

The specifics of the consequences, however, are not predictable at any point. For some reason, writing about gallantry brought out in Cabell, always a devious writer, his utmost in complex plotting (a fact which completely escaped the first reviewers of THE HIGH PLACE). But like all his works, it is written with unfailing elegance, and is both funny and sad at once. It is also pretty frank about 17th-century French sexual customs, a fact which led the New York *Herald-Tribune,* in what must be the all-time high point in moralistic criticism, to claim it had caused the Leopold-Loeb murder. It is Edmund Wilson's favorite among all Cabell's books and might well become yours; it is certainly among the top ten of his fifty.

The text is that of the final or "Storisende" revision, to which Ballantine has added the Frank C. Papé illustrations from the very limited first edition. For some reason, however, they have omitted the book's subtitle, which is "A Comedy of Disenchantment." Precisely.

Hans Stefan Santesson, ed.: CRIME PREVENTION IN THE 30TH CENTURY. Walker, 1969. 175 pp., boards, $5.95

Ordinarily I prefer not to review anthologies, but this one contains three new, original stories and one which will be new to American readers. This last is John Brunner's "Jack Fell Down," which hasn't been published before in the States. It's 38 pages long, has a complex and interesting problem, a novel and rich background, and a hard-headed solution, and is, of course, very well written. I'm not much drawn to the characters, as I often find to be the case with Brunner's work, but it's a fascinating tale all the same.

Of the new stories, Anne McCaffrey's "Apple" (27 pages) is by far the best. Where Brunner's subject is intrigue, hers is crime by ESP; and though the story is obviously indebted to Alfred Bester, it stands on its own feet very well indeed. But I wish she would throw away that maddening collection of substitutes for "said."

Stephen Dentinger's "The Future is Ours" is a short-short, with (necessarily) a one-punch ending. I could see it coming from the fourth paragraph, and so will you.

Edward D. Hoch's "Computer Cops" (17 pages) contains an interesting puzzle and a potentially interesting character; its style is wooden, but it does have some offsetting merits.

The reprints are by Miriam Allen deFord, Harry Harrison, Morris Hershman, Judith Merril, Tom Purdom and William Tenn. Most are just so-so, but the Purdom ("Toys") is a superior product, and the Harrison ("Velvet Glove") is almost as good, despite the fact that it dates from an era when Harry was still hitching simple sentences together with commas like the late Willy Ley. If you have read neither of these before, they plus the McCaffrey and the Brunner add up to a sizable bloc of good s-f.

But not, I am afraid, nearly six bucks' worth of it. Better ask your local library for it.

Howard Fast: THE GENERAL ZAPPED AN ANGEL. William Morrow, 1970. 159 pp., boards, $4.95

This calls itself a collection of new stories, so it is a little puzzling that it should bear two copyright dates. In any event, of the nine pieces included, perhaps three are marginal science fiction, the rest fantasies; and all are all too obviously parables, with all too obvious morals. One, "The Wound," gives away its only point—as did its better Conan Doyle predecessor, "The Day the Earth Screamed"—in its title; another, "Tomorrow's *Wall Street Journal*," will only remind you of how much better C. M. Kornbluth handled this old notion in "Dominoes"; not a one has any trace of structure, but instead each simply exposes its single notion, matters about it a while, and peters out. One, "The Interval," is nevertheless effective, because its catastrophe—the Earth's scenery is being struck—is seen from the point of view of a group of veteran stage people, which gives the story a tone of simultaneous detachment and specialized involvement which is eerie and convincing. Another, "The Movie House," is in conception reminiscent of minor Kafka, but sufficiently minor so that Kafka himself would have struck it off in about a page and a half. The collection as a whole, plus the flap copy, which was clearly also written by Fast, leaves no impression behind but that the author—who has earned his fame in quite different departments—thinks he is also a philosopher. On this showing, he is dead wrong.

And if I may wax petulant about facts for a moment, why *can't* we get ourselves shut of that ancient saw about the crushing gravity of Jupiter? (p. 33). That planet's field rates approximately 4G, an acceleration not much exceeding what one is subjected to in a sudden stop in an automobile.

If you weighed four times your actual weight, would you be crushed? Don't be silly.

Harry Harrison, ed.: NOVA 1. Delacorte Press, 1970. 222 + xi pp., boards, $4.95

In this anthology the ratio of new work to reprints is 13 to two, and even the two reprints will be new to the science-fiction audience. Furthermore, almost everything in the book is good; to my judgment, the standard is higher than it has been in any of the ORBIT anthologies to date, and it's substantially longer, too.

My favorite, by a small margin, is Gene Wolfe's "The HORARS of War," which deals with androids who take the place of human soldiers in a Vietnam-like situation. The military gadgets in the story look quite science-fictional to me, but then I haven't been near an army for more than 25 years; for all I know, they may well already be a secret part of somebody's arsenal. But anyhow they're only peripheral; at the center are the androids—absolutely original creations—and the disguised man among them. The action is dramatic, the prose is sure, and the story ends with a ringing ambiguity which the reader must resolve—a trick which as far as I know has been pulled off successfully only twice before in s-f.

Gordon R. Dickson's "Jean Duprès" is also an action story, but at *its* center is a maddeningly frustrating situation which gradually, grimly strips the highly competent narrator of all power to do anything at all about it. The suspense is electric, and Dickson uses every means at hand to increase it, even the old-fashioned one of foreshadowing (though it is not used here to cheat in any way, but only firmly to close off still other possibilities for remedying the situation). It is nevertheless a story of high heroism, and the hero (who

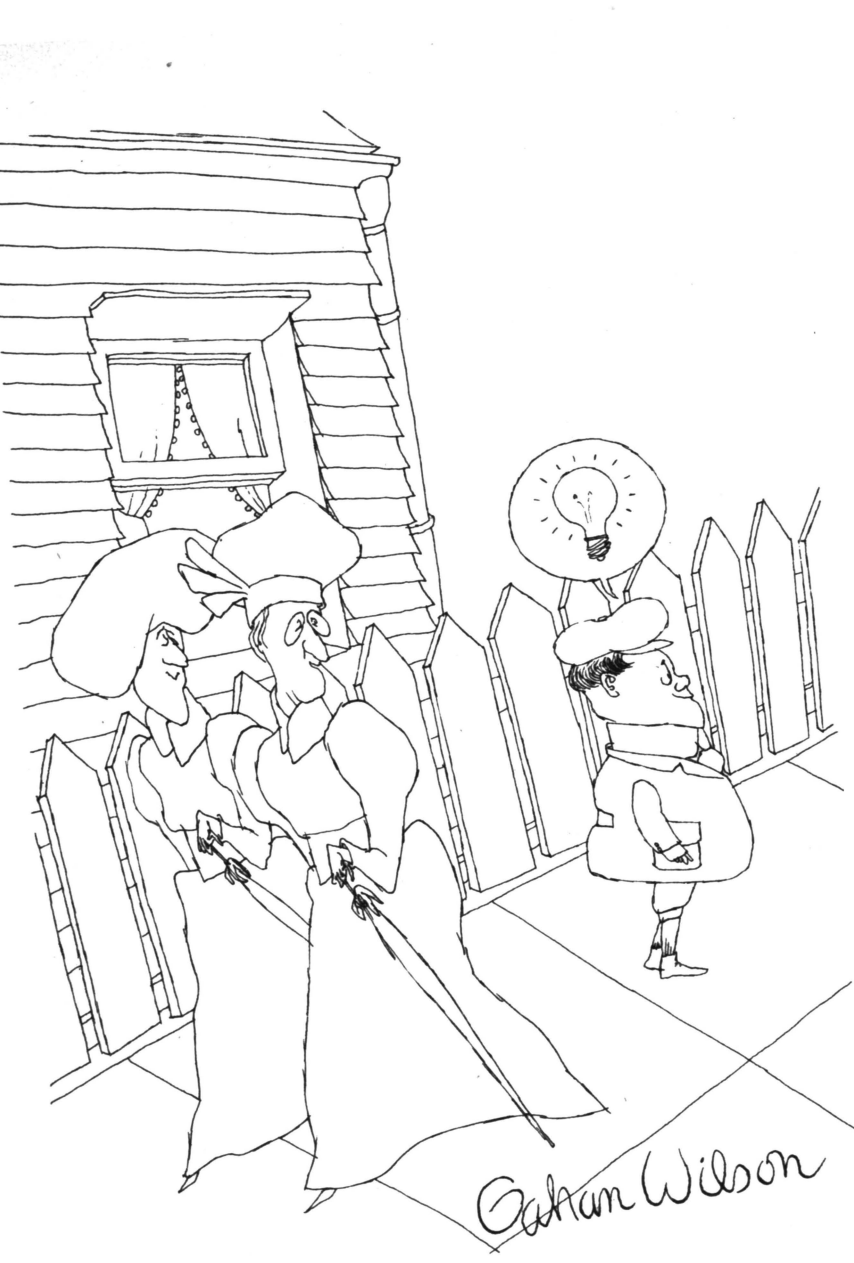
is not the narrator) is a seven-year-old boy.

Heroism is also the subject of Donald E. Westlake's "The Winner," who is a political prisoner in what looks to be, at long last, the perfectly escape-proof prison. He doesn't, in fact, win, but by the time the story is over, Westlake convince you that he's going to.

These and most of the other entries are well-made stories in the traditional sense; that is, they have firm structures, know where they are going, and get there. On the other hand, James Sallis has contributed something called "Faces and Hands" which is actually two vignettes, only slightly related to each other, and neither of which conveys anything in particular to me; and there is a Ray Bradbury poem which takes 69 lines to say "Chicago is Hell." K. M. O'Donnell takes the (verifiable) observation that cancer often strikes after a highly traumatic emotional experience, and turns it around to propose that curing the cancer would somehow impoverish the patient's soul; but he does nothing with the idea to make me credit it even temporarily. It makes an interesting contrast with John R. Pierce's "The Higher Things," which is a spoof on the surface but is packed with credible ideas and does something with them all.

The ignorant flap copy writer has struck again, making Harry Harrison the *editor* of something called DEATH WORLD—presumably a fanzine for morticians. But this collection is worth owning.

—JAMES BLISH



"Why, that's the Edison's Boy!"

William Walling is 43, a life-long Californian, and an engineer in the space systems division of Lockheed. This is his first published story, but not his first sale. That was a novel, NO ONE GOES THERE NOW, *which will be published by Doubleday. "Putting together shorter lengths is really tough for us amateurs," writes Mr. Walling, "too long winded to make the necessary compression come easily, I suppose." But he makes it look easy in this concise and suspenseful account of a lethal stalemate in deep space.*

RINGS ON HER FINGERS

by William Walling

"READY, SIR?" ASKED THE COURier pilot, watching his control board closely. "Coming up on one minute minus, now."

Grije Van Polder nodded, bumping his chin on the microphone key of his headpiece. He cursed. "Why is it so confounded dangerous? After all, *Shenandoah's* expecting us."

The pilot glanced sharply at the xenologist, then back to his instruments. "Entering an interdicted zone's touchy," he explained. "You never know; a surprise bogey could spook the Llanasans into firing . . . Best close your faceplate now."

Van Polder grumbled, snapping down the dogs of his helmet as the pilot counted to zero. The whirling vertigo of transition churned his bowels, then sudden weightlessness. The pilot motioned him into the lock chamber with a thumbs-up gesture of good luck.

He listened to the sighing suck of pumps scavenging air, wrinkling his nose at the pressure suit's legacy: a ghostly odor of machine oil combined with the taint of previous wearers. When the outer hatch opened, he clumsily launched himself into interstellar vacuum, twisting to watch the slim needle of the courier craft flicker and vanish back into n-space.

Grije Van Polder drifted in star-shot emptiness. He had been this near the galactic hub once before. An awesome spectacle, then

and now—vast star fields flung pendant from the seething, sky-filled whorl of suns and coalescent gas at the crux of the island universe.

Seconds ticked away; he tired of the view, beginning to feel apprehensive. A piloting error of one-half percentile in matching computed n-space emergence coordinates would place him beyond hope of retrieval. He would float through eternity, a frozen mummy, after his air was gone.

Then a star winked. The gentle tug of a tractor field relaxed him. The winking star became a tumbling sliver, a toothpick, a blunt-ended pencil limned in starlight. He felt pressure on his chest as pressors snubbed his momentum. He was drawn steadily toward a midship hatch of the *Shenandoah*.

"Daughters of the stars," grunted Van Polder. "How appropriate." It was an ancient Terrestrial Amerind name—one of the loveliest names ever coined.

A squad of Imperial Marines braced to attention as the flagship's inner lock cycled open. A sergeant major helped him unsuit with a brisk, "Happy to have you aboard, sir. This way, please."

Exasperated, Van Polder rescued his personal kit from a pouch in the p-suit and half ran to keep step with the long-striding marine. He was ushered into the captain's suite, minutes later, finding the slight, waspish Commodore Pleigh rising from behind a cluttered desk to shake hands.

"Trust your journey was pleasant, doctor; you'll be shown to quarters in a moment. Frankly, now that you are with us at last, there are affairs to discuss, affairs which will not keep. Will you have some coffee?"

The xenologist felt steam gather beneath his collar. "Commodore, I've been whisked half a galaxy away from my research, dumped into space like so much baggage. Might I impose upon you for the luxury of a shower, several hours to compose myself, before getting to work?"

Deep lines around the commodore's eyes tightened perceptibly. "Those hours are not available, I'm afraid. Besides, while you shower, I want you to be thinking about Llanasa."

"But, Commodore . . ."

"Doctor Van Polder," said Pleigh tiredly, "I am an unhappy man. My ship crawls with civilians—no offense intended—my hands are tied by this asinine truce, my crew is slap-happy from standing to red alert watch on watch, and I've been tearing what small amounts of hair I still possess waiting for you to arrive and save us all.

"Now, what do you know about the Llanasan Hegemony?"

Van Polder's shrug was resigned. "Only what I see on video." He sat down. "Pardon my

selfishness; you'll find me an excellent listener."

Pleigh smiled the very briefest of smiles. He poured coffee, sipping his own. "Forget what you have seen on video. I'm aware of homeworld propaganda techniques, and of the quite logical reasons behind them.

"Van Polder, we have a profound and possibly lethal stalemate on our hands. We've won many supposedly conclusive space-side engagements, while losing as many—or more—on the ground. The battle of Cerberus is typical: after our firepower, superior guidance, and ferrite-seeker warheads decimated the Llanasan fleet, we landed Imperial Marines, the toughest, best-trained troops in service. Taking Cerberus, the second link in a chain of planetary bases leading to Llanasa was vital.

"All told, we sustained in excess of one-quarter million casualties in Cerberus."

Van Polder gasped. "In a *single* engagement?"

"There were many bloody battles in Cerberus," announced Pleigh somberly. "Worse, the planet remains in enemy hands to this day, while total casualties in the Llanasan war mount toward the incredible—nearly seven million! That figure is not to be openly discussed, if you please. I tell you merely to impress upon you the scalding importance of our business out here.

"Your run-of-the-mill Llanasan warrior," he continued, "does well enough in the beginning. As battles progress, he somehow transforms himself into an all but unstoppable berserker. Inflict a mortal wound, he crawls at you; burn off one leg, he *hops* at you, weapons blazing. You cannot imagine how demoralizing that might be unless you have faced him yourself.

"We—I—expect no resolution to evolve from this truce; differences between Llanasans and Terrans are too vast. Calling you out here," said Pleigh slowly, "was a last-ditch effort to find some basis for these drastic metamorphoses. We *must* have an answer when—if—negotiations break down. Theorists have argued everything from drugs to a specific electromagnetic frequency. with which warriors are irradiated. Thus far, no one has turned up even the vaguest clue."

Van Polder frowned. "But, you've taken many prisoners."

Pleigh's lips compressed. "Llanasan prisoners," he drawled, "have a habit of dying within a few hundred hours of capture. In sheer agony! The supposition that denial of substance X, process Y, or what have you, is responsible, would seem valid."

Van Polder drummed his fingers on the commodore's desk. "Medical investigations have been made, I take it?"

"Any number. Medicorps has isolated a strain of virus which

may prove a potent BW weapon when—if—hostilities are renewed, but . . . Bio-med data will be available whenever you are ready." Pleigh rose, conducting Van Polder to the hatchway. "After you refresh yourself, I'll send a man round to fetch you. Ambassador Clive is anxious to meet you. He should be finished with today's session in an hour or so."

"Is the conference here?"

"Aboard *Shenandoah* today," affirmed Pleigh. "We alternate, day by day." The commodore sighed. "*Llanasouki* floats less than a thousand kilometers from our hull. Aboard her, no doubt, is my opposite number—a senior officer going swiftly mad soothing ruffled dignitaries while keeping his trigger-happy firecontrol men from precipitating a thermonuclear finis to our peace conference.

"Enjoy your shower, Doctor Van Polder."

Grije Van Polder thoroughly enjoyed his shower, his mind adjusting to the impact of Pleigh's calm, devastating words. He emerged from the autolave to discover that a small mountain of microfilm spools and a viewer had been deposited in his cubicle. He donned singlet and sandals, wrapping his cummerbund carelessly before sampling microfilm labels. Then he smiled.

The commodore did not want him to lack for diversion, it seemed. He plugged a random spool into the viewer. The tank lighted; an image condensed, and after a stern security warning, an impersonal voice announced the subject to be a male Llanasan—obviously a corpse—captured in the second battle of Concrellin.

Without conscious effort, Van Polder let the information seep into his mind: a relatively ordinary species of exoskeletal mammal, averaging one-hundred ninety centimeters in height, erect, quadripedal—six digits and an opposable thumb—with enormous brow ridges flaring beneath a hairless cranium. The sex organs seemed conventionally mammalian. Not a terribly exotic appearance, really. Discount the smooth external armor, covered by a faintly blue-tinged epidermis, and a suitably dressed Llanasan might pass for a tall human under poor light.

Van Polder, knowing his own mental processes better than most men, did not allow externals to influence him. Xenic mind and mores were what mattered, not whether the being was humanoid or shaped like a leafy vegetable.

His interest quickened when a female Llanasan, sleeker and more finely sculptured than the male, flashed into being within the tank. Only the mammaries and, as in the male, abdomen, sex organs and lower face were unarmored. He was informed that the female had also been taken during the

second Concrellin battle, and was then treated to a clinical portrayal of her death throes which made his forehead bead with sweat: racking convulsions, jaws clenched in agony, her limbs pinioned, flailing. Her terminal condition was appalling, ending in low-pitched screams and a final, back-arching spasm that strained the heavy strap binding her torso to the table.

Shaken, Van Polder switched off the viewer. What had a female been doing aboard a Llanasan warship? Was it their custom for women to fight alongside men? He was rummaging through the spools, plugging in one after another, when a polite tap on the hatch distracted him.

A marine bowed in the companionway. "Commodore's compliments, sir. Will you join him and the ambassador for dinner?"

The Honorable R. N. Clive was suave and polished, but his flattering, ivory-laden smile failed to mask a troubled countenance. Cordiality, however, was to him as natural as breathing. "Your reputation precedes you, Doctor," he greeted. "We're so honored to have you with us."

Through soup and salad Clive maintained a lively, conversational banter, complimenting Van Polder often. The xenologist was privately amused at the way Commodore Pleigh fretted, eyeing the diplomat as if to goad him into getting down to business. At last Pleigh could not restrain a pointed suggestion. "Perhaps Van Polder would like to hear what transpired today, Mr. Ambassador."

Clive looked startled; the thought of initiating serious conversation while dining had not occured to him. "Yes, of course. Ah, you must forgive me for broaching our mutual problem, but time does weigh against us. I fear we took a backward step again today."

"I'm anxious to learn all I can," urged Van Polder.

"Certainly, certainly. The first hour went rather well. His Radiance, the Llanasan Plenipotentiary, seemed to be having one of his better days. We are in the process of hammering out a neutral zone, you see. Surprisingly, His Radiance did not protest loss of the Achumate system beyond a few words of token argument.

"Then," Clive continued, "as he spoke, later, on Terran prisoner repatriation, his manner changed markedly. He became quite restless, then abusive. You have never seen anger, sir, until you've seen an enraged Llanasan! He stalked from the chamber, hurling epithets against the Terrestrial Imperium and its 'warmongering' allies, all but proclaiming renewal of hostilities!"

"Perhaps the inequity of repatriating human prisoners, knowing his own warriors can never return, angered him," suggested Van Polder.

Clive assured him this could never be the case. "Llanasans absolutely refuse to discuss their own captured warriors. We have grown used to that."

"I see." The xenologist pondered. "How much time elapsed between his change in mood and the walkout?"

"Oh, I should say fifteen minutes. Twenty at most."

"It has happened over and over," said Pleigh grimly.

Van Polder cleared his throat. "But, did he receive some message, some counsel which might have angered him?"

"Not unless he's telepathic," denied Clive. "No one came near him. Let me tell you what I've learned of His Radiance. He can be articulate, mannerly, and utterly charming when the mood strikes him. He has a canny, well-disciplined mind; one supposes that he enjoys diplomatic work immensely. But to see him change from congenial envoy to scowling, tongue-lashing demon is to be forever wary!

"I assure you, I'm the least xenophobic of men, Doctor, but I confess a deep-seated aversion to His Radiance. A terrible thing to say, perhaps, but how can one *deal* with such a mercurial personality, however intelligent."

"That's very understandable," placated Van Polder. "Er, have you observed this abrupt personality change in others?"

Clive blinked. "Other Llanasans? Unthinkable, Van Polder! The Llanasan delegation walks on eggs . . . Wait, perhaps I see what you're getting at . . ."

"What is it?" asked Pleigh brusquely.

"Dull of me not to have connected behavior patterns," mused Clive. "There *have* been other instances, though by no means as apparent. Last week, for example, a Llanasan speaker grew restive, broke off while addressing the conclave and left without so much as a by-your-leave. Another chap finished the speech, not missing a phrase. Extraordinary! Perhaps you've hit upon something!"

"Perhaps. Do the Llanasans come and go at will?"

"Constantly. We've simply never questioned it. Er, have you an inkling . . . ?"

"The 'how' and 'what' may come easily, sir. I suspect the 'why' might prove more elusive. Would His Radiance object if I were to attend tomorrow's session, observe firsthand?"

"Delighted to have you," encouraged Clive. "I'm not at all certain that Llanasans are able to distinguish between human beings."

"Fine. If you'll excuse me, now, I have homework to do. I'd like to learn what they have for lunch, how they celebrate birthdays, their marriage customs, how they dispose of their dead, that sort of thing."

Commodore Pleigh looked put upon. "While you study Llanasan folk dancing, Doctor, bear in mind that *Shenandoah* could at any instant become a cloud of radioactive vapor!"

Van Polder's smile was bemused. "I hope the noise doesn't wake me. Good night, Mr. Ambassador, Commodore."

The data collected from one source or another during the Llanasan campaigns proved disappointing, if not surprising. For almost three objective Terran cycles since first contact, practically all encounters had been military. The Imperium and Llanasa had, it seemed, met, growled, then scrabbled for one another's throats like predatory animals.

Facts and figures on military space tonnage, armaments, size and disposition of strategic and tactical bases, and the like, were very exhaustive. Not one iota of which helped Grije Van Polder, though he appreciated the espionage feats necessary to garner such data.

He was not interested in espionage, nor in military or any other purely external facets of Llanasan life. The tapes told nothing of folkways, history, politics, art, music or literature. Nothing! He was skilled at interpretation, adept at deducing motivations, but lacked a basis from which to derive. Solving the Llanasan enigma by the exclusive evidence of eyes and ears did not sound promising.

Van Polder slept fitfully. After breakfast alone in his cubicle, he met Clive and underwent the rigors of being gowned for the conference—an oyster-white robe emblazoned with the Terrestrial sunburst. During the ride to *Llanasouki* in the captain's barge, Clive and his aides were silent for the most part, as if apprehensive of what the meeting might bring.

The xenologist, boarding *Llanasouki* with an open mind, was struck by the severe, commonplace appearance of the alien starship—until his first glimpse of a live Llanasan! An honor guard lined the companionway; javelin-straight elite corpsmen, wearing only silver loinstraps, presented arms in perfect ranks, their glistening bodies resembling cast blued-steel. Nor had the stereo tank prepared him for their vivid yellow eyes—cat's-eyes, with vertical, dark-slitted pupils under those ominous, flaring brow ridges.

He imagined himself in combat against these tall devils, remembering Pleigh's term—berserkers! A frightening prospect under best conditions! But, what might transform Llanasan warriors, such as these, into berserkers? Drugs? Fear? Pain?

Pain! That struck a memory chord. The aborigines of Chalseanne and dozens of other planets inflicted self-punishment before

entering battle. No, it was something else, something from Terrestrial history. Ah, the Huks!—Philippine islanders who had bound their genitals with wet leather thongs which, drying, contracted and produced exquisite agony, forcing the American military of that day to devise a hand weapon of greater stopping power. Charging the ramparts of hell would be preferable to that sort of past.

Van Polder filed the thought and continued his discreet observation. A flare of odd-sounding brass heralded the Terrestrial delegation as high doors leading to the conference room slid open. About to enter, he glanced down a transverse corridor to his left and looked again more sharply. He stepped aside, allowing members of the diplomatic mission to file past.

It was—or looked to be—a Llanasan child. As he watched, a figure hurriedly took the child's hand and moved out of view. He was certain the second figure had been female.

Women and *children* aboard a warship! But, why?

First sight of His Radiance made Van Polder forget all else. A regal, commanding presence, the Llanasan Plenipotentiary stood poised center-opposite the huge, oval table, yellow eyes glowing. His silver barrel-jacket, accentuating the sweep of armored shoulders, and dark cape, flowing behind him to the polished floor, created a figure of satanic majesty.

Ambassador Clive bowed; His Radiance gravely returned the bow. Both delegations seated themselves with a single motion. Van Polder, who had been placed three seats from Clive's right hand, watched and listened to a Llanasan recapitulation of yesterday's abortive session, thinking what an excellent job the linguistic computers did in transliterating, rather than simply translating, staccato Llanasan into a semiformal Terrestrial, neither too high-flown nor too colloquial.

Surface relations seemed placid enough. Van Polder, careful not to stare, crossed glances with His Radiance several times, feeling intuitively that Clive had been wrong; the Llanasan envoy *did* recognize a new human face when he saw one. Twice during the interminable speechmaking, a member of the Llanasan team rose unobtrusively and quit the conference chamber after squirming in his seat for several minutes. Both departures were absolutely ignored.

In the captain's barge en route home to *Shenandoah* he asked, "Mr. Ambassador, do the Llanasans keep pets?"

"Pets?" Clive, mildly elated by the day's accomplishments, didn't believe Van Polder was serious. "*Pets,* Doctor?"

"Uh . . . yes. Have you seen any sort of domesticated animals aboard *Llanasouki*?"

"None whatsoever. One doubts that a warship would want pets aboard in battle. If I'm not too inquisitive, what made you ask?"

"Oh," said the xenologist airily, "just an odd notion. His Radiance has some pronounced scratches high on his left arm, inside the sleeve of his jacket. Since women and children live aboard the vessel, keeping pets doesn't seem unreasonable."

"A few women, perhaps; but *children*?" Clive eyed Van Polder archly. "What led you to imagine such a thing, Doctor?"

Van Polder blinked. "Before the conference I thought I saw a child, Mr. Ambassador. Perhaps I was mistaken."

Clive lapsed into thoughtful silence until the aide beside him said, "Your pardon, sir. While we were programming the linguistic computers, I saw large numbers of civilians aboard *Llanasouki*, women and children among them."

"Really, Mr. Denisov? Denisov is our chief linguist, Doctor. Extraordinary! Wouldn't noncombatants be deuced uncommon aboard a warship? Especially *children*?"

"Exceptionally unusual," concurred Van Polder, "when you consider the high Llanasan spaceforce casualty rate. But, many Llanasan captives were women, were they not?"

"Quite," agreed the linguist. "I spent four months interrogating prisoners while learning the language. A gruesome business! We knew they were dying, and *they* knew they were dying. Most were gallant beyond belief!"

"Gallant or . . ." Van Polder sat forward. "Tell me: were prisoners handled in special ships?"

Denisov nodded. "The nearest hospital ship, usually. We hadn't much time before, er . . . Linguistic teams were hustled to the site by courier. I was unlucky enough to draw female captives on two occasions—an *anguishing* experience. Alien enemies, certainly, but still women . . ."

"Then the Llanasan women were segregated?"

Clive looked mildly surprised. "I should hope so, Doctor!"

"Completely segregated," affirmed the linguist.

"Of course." Van Polder waxed his hands in thought. "I am aware of the extensive attempts to investigate the Llanasan death phenomenon," he said slowly. "Did you personally question prisoners as to the causes, Mr. Denisov?"

"Often," replied Denisov with a slight shudder. "The answer was always the same. He, or she, would simply face the wall and refuse to speak until terminal restraints were applied. That part was ghastly! Necessary, I suppose, but horrible!"

Grije Van Polder thanked the

linguist and complimented Clive on the day's success. When the captain's barge had been drawn into *Shenandoah's* hull, he went directly to his cubicle, shucked off his robe and stretched out on the bunk, hands behind his head. He stared at the overhead for more than an hour, fitting pieces together and taking them apart again, until a marine came with Pleigh's invitation to dinner.

Next day's session aboard *Shenandoah* was equally uneventful. A single Llanasan drifted from the conference and returned to his waiting shuttlecraft. Van Polder catalogued every symptom he exhibited before leaving.

The day following took them back to *Llanasouki.* A mild surge of tempers marked debate over possession of a certain mineral-rich system in the eighty-second sector. Other than that, there was merely droning debate.

Four Llanasan delegates got up and left. His Radiance remained calm, self-contained, but it was nerve-wracking, like watching a bomb known to be fuzed and primed. Clive wore a scowl during the ride home, suggesting repeatedly that things might remain as they were with His Radiance, knowing in his heart that they would not.

After yet another session aboard *Shenandoah,* Van Polder began to wonder if Clive might be heading for a breakdown. Worse, his nervousness was infecting members of his mission. Commodore Pleigh was badgering Clive constantly, he knew, demanding to learn when he could hope to pull his command from what he considered an impossibly compromising situation.

Nor was Van Polder neglected. He felt the pressure, the critical, almost accusatory glances. Pleigh hoped for miracles, failing to understand that he worked in the dark in attempting to analyze the motives and reactions of *aliens* whose basic drives and psychologies were unknown. He could only guess.

Therefore he guessed. He had a pair of half-formulated theories, neither of which met all conditions. But it was coming—slowly. Time was the bugaboo! If only he had time before the predictable blowup!

Another silent ride to *Llanasouki;* again the march to the conference chamber between punctilious rows of elite guards whose aspect made any human feel inferior; another exchange of protocol and a fresh set of tensions in the air.

The xenologist saw it first. One moment His Radiance was absorbed in the proceedings, the next he was squirming in his chair, the long muscle at the base of his jaw—practically the only Llanasan musculature visible because of otherwise overlying ar-

mor—working steadily, steadily.

Van Polder sat upright. He plucked a stylus from the surprised Denisov's hand and scrawled a note, passing it to the linquist with an impatient gesture. Denisov made a blank-faced grimace and slipped it before the ambassador.

Clive, too, remained expressionless, then turned to stare at the xenologist, moving his head in a subtle negative.

Van Polder slid from his chair. Bending discreetly over the ambassador's shoulder, he whispered, "We must all leave—*now*!"

Clive looked straight ahead, instructing Van Polder to resume his seat in a stage whisper. Van Polder clutched his elbow and practically levitated the diplomat. "It *has* to be this way! Say nothing, nothing at all, sir. Just *leave*!"

Faced with little choice, the white-lipped Clive spread his arms like an orchestra conductor and motioned the Terrestrial delegation to its feet. All bowed together, then followed the ashen-faced Clive from the chamber, exchanging mystified looks.

The Llanasan speaker had fallen silent. The Terrestrial walkout was greeted by deathly stillness in the alien ranks.

Safely in the corridor, Clive pounced on Van Polder. "What have you *done*, sir?"

"Please wait, Mr. Ambassador," mollified the xenologist. "I'll be happy to explain when we're back aboard the flagship."

"*If* we are not slaughtered before we reach the airlock!" snapped Clive. "Now I must go back in there and make amends."

"*No*, Mr. Ambassador!" Van Polder was adamant. "That would be the *worst* thing you could do."

Clive drew himself up in rage. "There will be an accounting, Van Polder! You shall face charges for this!" He spun on one heel and walked stiff-legged toward the airlock.

Van Polder trailed the diplomats uncomfortably, suddenly a pariah. The Llanasan honor guard was absent, not anticipating the premature Terrestrial departure. A few Llanasan spacemen, trapped in the corridor, retired against the bulkhead and watched inscrutably as the procession hurried past.

The wait at the airlock was everlasting. Van Polder heard soft, shuffling footfalls behind him, feeling the skin at the nape of his neck crawl. He looked back furtively.

A spindly youth about one-half Van Polder's stature was staring at him, the picture of young Llanasan curiosity.

The xenologist called softly, "Mr. Denisov, please come here."

Denisov appeared beside him. "What is it?"

"Let's see if we can talk to the child," murmured Van Polder.

"Really, sir, is it wise?"

"*Do as I say.*" Van Polder slowly approached the youngster. He dropped to one knee, looking into yellow cat's-eyes that showed no trace of fear, and smiled. "Greet him, Denisov. Ask his name."

The linguist reluctantly erupted a short burst of polyphonic grunts and barks. A nictitating membrane closed and opened as the youth blinked, looking upward at Denisov. Van Polder observed the ridged, imperfectly formed cranium, the stubby, armored fingers without nails. He saw a female edge along the bulkhead toward them as the child made a brief reply.

"He's called Porhla," informed Denisov. "He thinks we're strange-looking creatures—pink and soft. He wants to know why we wear brushes on our heads."

Van Polder smiled again. The woman! He *had* to get a closer look at the woman! "Tell Porhla we come from beyond the farthest star he can see, but that we're his friends even though we look different."

Denisov complied while Van Polder's mind raced. On inspiration, he reached out very casually and took the boy's armored hand in his own. The Llanasan child did not object. Van Polder stood and began walking with Porhla toward the female who watched impassively.

"Denisov, greet the woman. Tell her we think her son very intelligent and handsome." He let go the boy's hand, bowing.

The woman returned his bow gracefully, answering Denisov with no obvious reluctance.

Denisov looked happy. "She is charmed that a noble Terrestrial would stoop to compliment herself and her child."

Quite suddenly Van Polder knew what he wanted to do. He began working off his wedding band, a simple platinum ring set with a small star sapphire. He had trouble getting it off; it had been on his finger many cycles. "Ask if she would accept a gift, a token of the friendship between our peoples."

He listened to Denisov's barking, then exulted inside himself when the woman answered immediately.

"She would consider it the highest honor," interpreted the linguist.

Van Polder was delighted. He held out the ring and waited until the tall Llanasan woman extended her slim, armored hand. It was an atrocious fit; her fingers were larger than human, with smooth slip joints in the armor. Her pinkie—the sixth digit—was the only one capable of accommodating his ring.

As he pushed his wedding ring carefully over her long, pointed nail, all of the pieces of the Llana-

san puzzle revolved chaotically in his mind and fell together like rain to form a vivid picture.

Commodore Pleigh paced his bridge like a scalded tiger, his face livid. "I take it you have some *reason* for this, sir? You were advertised a sane, practical scientist, yet you endanger our mission, to say nothing of our lives, with your conduct!"

"Commodore, when will you let me . . . ?"

"Can we leave yet?" interrupted Clive tautly.

Pleigh consulted the chronometer, a digital readout of the starship's subjective timing system. "Not for over thirteen minutes," he said bitterly. "Remember *Shenandoah's* tonnage; it takes many ergs to transpose a vessel this size into n-space."

Van Polder grimaced. "But, there's no *need* to run . . . !"

"I believe we've heard a great sufficiency from you, sir," rasped Pleigh. "Please stand aside . . ."

A klaxon flooded the bridge with sound. A firecontrol man sang, "*Llanasouki* showing secondary blip, sir!"

"Battle stations," called Pleigh. "Automatic vector and velocity plot; automatic response. Initiate!"

"Doesn't seem to be a missile, sir; velocity's low," answered firecontrol. "It's the Llanasan gig. They request permission to come aboard."

The commodore paused. "Resume red alert status. Stand by to meet the Llanasan party. Hmm-mm!" He rubbed his jaw. "Thunderation! We may be allowed to parley after all."

Clive was immensely relieved. "Have Mr. Denisov meet them, Commodore. Tell him to be very careful what he says."

The Llanasan shuttlecraft drew up to *Shenandoah's* lock. They waited in anxious silence. Clive glanced at Van Polder, brows raised. "Er, what do you make of this, Doctor?"

Before Van Polder could answer, the vidicom buzzed. Pleigh covered a plaque and Denisov's elated face quickly condensed in the tank.

"The Llanasans have gifts for you, Mr. Ambassador . . ."

"*Gifts!*"

"It's what appears to be a large basket of jewels, sir. His Radiance wishes to express gratitude for your consideration this afternoon, and for the kindness shown one of his wives. He hopes future sessions will complete the fruitful resolution of our differences."

Clive expelled breath like a ruptured balloon. "Excellent, Denisov! Draft an immediate reply: work together, learn to know one another, that sort of thing. Good chap!"

Commodore Pleigh whirled on Van Polder. "I concede point, game, set, match and tournament," he said with an expectant

twinkle. "Please don't keep us in suspense."

"By all means, Van Polder," beamed Clive. "Nothing succeeds like success, you know."

The xenologist looked from one to the other, relishing the moment. "Sex, gentlemen," he said quietly, "has raised its lovely head.

"Restlessness, developing swiftly into acute distress; an obviously strict tabu against mentioning such distress; the scratches on His Radiance's arm; the sharp claws of the females. Tote them up," he elaborated, "and the most apparent surmise is that Llanasan sexuality does not culminate in our familiar ecstatic paroxysm—orgasm. My guess—I emphasize the term, for until proven it's merely a guess—is that our Llanasan friends are saddled with a devastating biological drive—pain!"

Commodore Pleigh was the quicker of the two. "God in Heaven! Llanasan troops were denied access to women . . . !"

"Precisely," approved Van Polder. "Nature is awfully persistent. *All* other considerations are, to her, secondary to that of perpetuating the species itself, even to the extent of destroying individual Llanasans who would not, *could* not, comply with her demands. Homosexuality must be either organically or culturally impossible, considering the tabus.

"His Radiance, every whit as meticulous in observing protocol as were you yourself, Mr. Ambassador, *forced* himself to stay in attendance until sexual pain became excruciating. Think of the most exquisite pain imaginable, magnify it tenfold and remove it to the sensitive genital area. One would imagine that our Llanasan friends couple in blind, sexual frenzy, hurrying to blot the overwhelming pain in the only manner possible within their cultural constraints.

"Fulfillment is, to them, relief, not release!"

Ambassador Clive collapsed into an astrogator's lounge with a small moan. "Then we *murdered* hundreds of thousands of helpless prisoners . . ." He shuddered. "Do you suppose they *know*?"

"Certainly they know," assured Van Polder. "An interstellar culture spanning dozens of parsecs would certainly know the fate of her captured warriors. But, remember their Spartan code; discussing sexual affairs must be the *supreme* tabu. How relieved they must be that we've at last demonstrated some tact and understanding. They've been quick to respond in kind."

"Anodyne instead of pleasure," said the amazed Pleigh. He grasped the xenologist's hand and pumped vigorously. "I insist," he said, indicating the circlet of white skin formerly shaded by the wedding band, "that you allow me to buy you a new ring, sir. And

another thing, Van Polder . . ."
"Yes, Commodore?"
"This I promise: I shall never, ever tell another dirty joke!"

REWARD OF VIRTUE

Sir Gilbert de Vere was a virtuous knight;
He succored the weak and he fought for the right,
But cherished a goal that he never could sight:
He wanted a dragon to fight.

He prayed all the night and he prayed all the day
That God would provide him a dragon to slay;
And God heard his prayer and considered a way
To furnish Sir Gilbert his prey.

And so, to comply with Sir Gilbert's demand,
But having no genuine dragons to hand,
God whisked him away to an earlier land,
With destrier, armor, and brand.

And in the Cretaceous, Sir Gilbert de Vere
Discovered a fifty-foot carnosaur near.
He dug in his spurs and he leveled his spear
And charged without flicker of fear.

The point struck a rib, and the lance broke in twain;
The knight clapped a hand to his hilt, but in vain:
The dinosaur swallowed that valorous thane,
And gallant Sir Gilbert was slain.

The iron apparel he wore for his ride,
However, was rough on the reptile's inside.
That dinosaur presently lay down and died,
And honor was thus satisfied.

But Gilbert no longer was present to care.
So hesitate God to disturb with your prayer—
He might grant your wishes, but then how you fare
Is your, and no other's affair!

—L. Sprague de Camp

Pamela Sargent is a graduate student in ancient philosophy. This, her second published story, is about a post-holocaust university, a place that should have been an island of hope and inquiry in a country decimated by plague, but which had a mysterious disease of its own . . .

LANDED MINORITY

by Pamela Sargent

MARINA KALIAPIN AWOKE AT around seven o'clock on an autumn morning feeling as though someone had shot a bullet into her brain and Novocaine into her mouth. She and Steve Meierstein had been in charge of last night's beer brewing, and Marina regretted having sampled so much of the vile brew; she suspected that Steve was probably undergoing similar torment for his overindulgence.

I just hope those bastards appreciate it, she thought as she sat up and placed her feet on the cold tile floor beside her bed. If they don't all get bombed Friday, it won't be my fault, or Steve's. Well, I'm not going near the stuff Friday, the hell with them.

Marina got up and walked over to her window. She gazed at the wheat and corn growing in the courtyard five stories below, shuddered when she recalled that she had harvest duty that coming Sunday, and shuddered again when she remembered that she had an eight o'clock class this very morning.

"I'd better get my damned show on the *road*," she said to the wall as she got a clean towel and washcloth out of her bureau drawer. Marina opened her door and ambled down the hallway to the lavatory. She was in no mood to talk to anyone; one of the reasons she had chosen to live on the fifth floor was that most of the girls were on the first two stories of the

dormitory, thus she had more privacy. It was with a feeling of dismay that she discovered Sarah Milo, wide awake and grinning as usual, standing in front of one of the bathroom mirrors.

"Hey, Mari, how's the beer coming?" Sarah shrieked, thus sending another bullet through Marina's brain.

"God, Sarah, you'll wake up the whole damn dorm. It's okay, you can all get plowed Friday, but you better ask Morty about the pot." Marina began looking under the sinks for the pails of water that should have been there, but were not.

"How the hell am I supposed to wash up before class when that damn Marcia Donovan doesn't get up and get water?" Marina asked. "Everytime it's her turn, she sleeps until there's cold martinis in hell."

"She had some trouble with Gerry last night, you know," Sarah answered while brushing her long blonde hair. "She's not feeling too happy, she was up late and all, crying and stuff."

"That dumb broad always has trouble with somebody. Why doesn't she just sleep with him and get it over with anyway?"

"Well, she has problems, you know, with sex and things," Sarah replied. "It's hard for her to get used to things, you know."

"It's easy for everybody else, I suppose," Marina said. "Well, I'll be damned if I'll go get the water. I'll just have to go to class and stink."

"Somebody told me the administration didn't want us having grass on Friday," Sarah said in a conspiratorial tone. "They don't, well, like how it looks, you know."

"Dear God, who cares? Those twelve dumb clods in town? They never come on campus, and what can the administration do to us?" Marina sat on the window sill and began to comb her hair. "I feel like cutting my eight o'clock."

"What is it?"

"Chaucer with Gavenda. I really care." Sarah stopped smiling.

"We *have* to care, Marina," she said softly. "Who else will?"

Marina carefully walked around the crops in the courtyard on the way to her class. She, with equivalent caution, avoided looking in the direction of the athletic fields where, underneath small mounds of earth, lay the bodies of more than three-fourths of her former classmates, the ever-cheerful, happy-go-lucky class of '82, surely the most outgoing class that had ever hit the campus of good old State. Marina trudged along with her Chaucer volume, remembered that she had not read the Nun's Tale, and decided in that instant that she would not attend class that morning. She trudged on, her heavy legs carrying her torso past the classroom building

and past the science tower and through the few trees the state legislature had in times past allotted money for in order to beautify the growing and expanding campus of the State University, and then Marina arrived at the hill overlooking the athletic fields, and she did what she had not done for as long a time as she cared to remember: she gazed upon the graveyard of the class of '82, and the classes of '79, '80, and '81, and the graduate students, and the faculty, and the administration; the graveyard of the ever-expanding State University.

Marina Kaliapin had arrived on campus in 1978 with about three trunks filled with what *Seventeen* had called "*the* campus gear of the year," along with two thousand other freshmen who were, in varying degrees, anxious to improve their minds, or at least to obtain the piece of parchment that would guarantee their entrance into the ever-burgeoning but high-paying bureaucracies of the United States of America. She and two thousand others had spent a month cutting their share of classes and smoking their share of pot and doing their best to break the rules of the repressive administrators who had controlled the campus, and others like it, since the early 1970's, until, in late October, large numbers of the ever-fun-loving class of 1982, and large numbers of upperclassmen, and large numbers of faculty, and large numbers of citizens of the state and of the United States and of the world began to sicken, vomit, hemorrhage, die, and putrefy; and those that survived dug the graves, and then the mass graves, and once in a while stopped to ask why? and how? and because he who seeks will find, they found their answer. They traced their answer to the biological research laboratories and those who would kill their fellows in order to conquer them and to those who either in ignorance or by design had decided to save their fellows from the Communists and the Imperialists and the Revisionists and had, indeed, done so; and through the mercy of God or perhaps an unforeseen immunity, some lived on still, to salvage and go forward.

Marina Kaliapin had been salvaged to go forward.

Marina sat, gazing upon the mottled surface of the athletic fields and asked herself for the one hundredth time why she had remained with the one hundred members of the class of '82 long after those with any sense had become dropouts, in one way or another, and answered her own question with the memory of her return home to her parents' rotting bodies and her little brother's screams of suffering and finally death. She had fled, back to the

campus, as had one hundred other freshmen; fled from the stench of the mass crematoria and from the sickened, roaming psychopaths with pus streaming from their eyelids and knives held in fingers with no nails as they sought to kill those who would live when they must die. Marina had fled, and found along with the members of the ever-so-decimated class of '82, about two hundred other students and thirty faculty members who sought to continue, to seek out knowledge, to go forward boldly, allowing each to become all he is capable of being. She had again submitted to the admonishings of the six surviving administrators, and had accepted, as had the others, the new required courses of the curriculum, and had spent three years, including summer sessions, learning about Aristotle and wheat-growing and quantum mechanics and animal husbandry and German romanticism and Chaucer and totalitarian political systems.

She would be amply rewarded.

Marina Kaliapin would receive her B.A. that June.

Marina watched as the small herd of cattle began to wander onto the athletic fields to graze. The cows nibbled at the brown bits of grass over the bodies of Sam Leibowitz and Peggy Shandler and Professor Seymour and Jeffrey Browning and Doug Korovis and Mira Alluva and Dr. Steinhardt and Chris Permaneder and the rest of the never-expanding State University.

Marina Kaliapin began to scream and tear at her face with her nails and tear at her hair with her hands, and she kept screaming until Steve Meierstein had run to the hill and grabbed hold of her arms, and Dr. Granger had arrived and slapped her and finally inserted a hypodermic needle into Marina's chubby arm in order to administer a drug which would, perhaps, mercifully relieve poor Marina temporarily of the guilt and shame and torment she felt for still being alive.

Marina awoke and stared at the greyish-white ceiling of the student infirmary and felt with her hands the marks upon her face. She groaned softly but did not attempt to sit up. She turned her head and saw Steve sitting on the bed next to the one she was occupying.

"Hey, Mari. You look like hell. What did you do, shoot something? You haven't been in the chem labs again, have you?"

Marina groaned again and turned away.

"No, Steve, I haven't been in the chem labs. I haven't been near them for a year."

"Then what's up?"

"Nothing's up. I'll sleep for a while and get out of here."

"You won't."

"I have to, Steve, I have a genetics test next week."

"You won't because Dr. Granger'll want to talk to you. He thinks you're crazy, probably."

"Oh, God, what do I have to talk to a shrink for, anyway. Who needs Granger? If we aren't nuts by now, then we're all crazy to begin with."

Steve Meierstein got up and began to pace back and forth. When he spoke again, it was in tones of controlled anger.

"Go ahead, Mari, you don't care about the university or learning anything or even graduating. You're just going to go around feeling sorry for yourself and blow your whole senior year."

"Oh, dear Jesus, I'm going to blow my whole damned senior year." Marina giggled. "Everything's blown to hell and gone and—" Marina stopped speaking when she saw Steve staring at her blankly and uncomprehendingly.

Dr. Granger came into Marina's room about an hour after Steve Meierstein had left. Marina stared at Dr. Granger for a few seconds, hating him suddenly with great intensity, hating him because he was short and had a pot belly and was stupid, at least to Marina's way of thinking. When Dr. Granger pulled up a chair and sat at the foot of the bed upon which Marina was lying, she decided that hating such an ignoramus was a waste of time. She looked at the ceiling and ignored him until he began to speak.

"Marina, I've been worried about you lately. You've lost interest in your studies and Steve tells me you don't even seem to care about graduating."

"Steve is an idiot."

"Look, Marina, you're one of our best students. Mr. Gavenda told me that you started out doing well in Chaucer this term, but now you just come to class and sit in silence, acting contemptuous of everybody or snickering during discussion."

Marina said nothing for a few seconds, remembering how Gavenda had awkwardly made love to her on the floor of his office, panting and puffing like a gorilla, and how he had spent the hour afterward in panic, thinking that the administration might find out. Worse than that, he was also stupid, as far as Marina was concerned.

"Wouldn't you, doctor?" she said finally. "Wouldn't you sneer if you were taking Chaucer and the prof came into class with a modern English translation and the whole class just sat there discussing the obvious? Or if you went to genetics and all the prof did was tell you a lot of simple crap you knew from high school? Anything I learn I have to do on my own time. This place is an idiot factory."

"Marina, you must realize that most of the students aren't at your level."

Marina sat up suddenly. "Dr. Granger," she hissed, "you know goddamn well that when I got here freshman year there were kids ten times smarter than I here, and they're not all out under the field. I think some of them are giving up because it's all so damned stupid, I mean, sitting here and pretending we're scholars. They can't be dumb. Look at Reiko Nishimoto, she came here with every scholarship around to study engineering, and now she claims she can't figure out how to get the water pipes in the dorms working so we don't have to get the stuff upstairs in buckets. Hell, she used to fix things for fun before the maintenance men would get there. She could damn well figure it out, but she probably just thinks it's just as easy to use pails."

Dr. Granger said nothing.

"Even the profs don't care any more. I wanted to do senior independent work on the *Song of Roland*, and Mr. Cotton said his Old French wasn't good enough for him to advise me on it. That's why I'm doing that dumb thing on Hemingway; at least it's easy and why should I care? Cotton used to teach Old French, for God's sake."

Dr. Granger cleared his throat. "Marina, you know that all of us here have had to do more work on practicalities, like crop-growing, and looking out for the cattle and sheep. Mr. Cotton is working on the chicken coop, and he and the others have been very busy. It's quite possible that they may not give as much time as they used to to their scholarly pursuits."

"Come on, doctor," shouted Marina, "you don't forget all your Old French after studying it for thirty years just because you're working on a chicken coop."

Dr. Granger remained silent for a few seconds. Then he stood up. He appeared quite distressed. "Marina, I think you should rest here today. You can go back to the dorms tonight if you like, but I want to see you in the morning, first thing. I must discuss a few things with you, and I haven't time now. Do you understand?"

"You bet," said Marina, lying down again. Dr. Granger left. Marina was not distressed by what the doctor had told her to do. It seemed totally irrelevant anyway. The whole campus was loaded with fools.

Marina Kaliapin had no intention of remaining on the campus.

Marina had left the infirmary and gone back to her dormitory room while most of the people on campus were sleeping. She had packed an old knapsack with some canned goods and a carton of stale cigarettes she and Steve Meierstein had found in one of the old

houses in town. She then dressed in an old sweater, slacks, and a light fall coat, and left the dormitory. By dawn, she was on the superhighway running past the campus, on her way into town. She walked along one of the white dotted lines, trying to avoid the rocks and rubble, stepping over the large cracks in the highway.

Marina Kaliapin met no traffic.

She walked into town at around seven o'clock and saw only an old man standing in the doorway of an A & P grocery store. There appeared to be no groceries inside. She walked further, to the old Army and Navy store, pushed open the door, and went inside. She had been there only a few seconds when the old man she had seen by the A & P walked inside also.

"You damn kids think you can walk in and steal everything that ain't nailed down."

"Hardly," Marina said haughtily, "I came in to purchase a canteen and some water, if the faucets here are in order."

The old man began chuckling so heartily that he seemed on the verge of wheezing. "That's pretty good, and I suppose you got money for it." He chuckled even harder. "Good money, even."

"Not at all," said Marina. "I can offer you an excellent trade." She dug into her knapsack and pulled out the carton of cigarettes. "Will these make it worth your while?" She waved the carton in front of the old man, who eyed them hungrily.

"Where'd you get those?" the old man asked. "They're all gone. Stole 'em from some house, I bet."

"What do you care?" said Marina. She tossed them to the old man, who reached out and barely managed to catch them. "Give me that big canteen over there and fill it up, please." The old man ambled toward the rest room in the back of the store, holding the canteen Marina had indicated. "By the way," Marina shouted after him, "don't try any smart stuff with your damn Bowie knife. I haven't got any more cigarettes, but I've got a switchblade." The old man growled and disappeared into the rest room. Marina listened carefully, but could hear nothing more than the running of water and the banging of the canteen against the side of the sink. The old man returned with the canteen, handed it to Marina, then tore open the carton of cigarettes and put the packets into his coat pockets.

Marina left the store, turned down the street and started to walk south. She walked until she reached an old gas station just outside of the town. She put down her knapsack, sat down beside it, and drank from her canteen.

As Marina was drinking, a Negro child came out of the garage of the service station and seated him-

self next to her. He looked around ten years old, but could have been older. He was very thin and probably undernourished. Marina looked over at him, and he gave her a toothy grin.

"Where you goin'?" he asked.

"South," Marina answered, "to the city."

"Man!" shouted the boy. "Oh, Jesus, you don't wanna go there!" He chuckled and grinned some more.

"What do you know, you're just a kid."

"I just got outta there," the boy said. He stopped grinning. "Crazy people there, ma'am," he said softly. "I know. I live there. I take messages from this old guy there to the college, you know the college?"

"Yeah, I know it," Marina said.

"The old guy gives me food and puts me up when I'm in the city. He gets it from all them old warehouses. He gave me a gun too." The boy took out a gun from under his shirt and flourished it. "That way I can shoot the crazy nuts, they give me trouble." He looked up at Marina, frowning. "And the ones that ain't crazy are dumb. The old guy, he gives me tests, on arithmetic and history and some crazy tests to see if I'm dumb. The old guy says I'm smart." The boy giggled and put his gun away.

"I have to go there, kid," Marina said.

"You gonna get killed if you do. Now me, I know my way around." The boy looked up at Marina and his eyes gleamed.

"Look, kid, I don't have anything to give you. I'm just asking you if I can go along with you."

"You can, too. You can give me something." The boy got up and looked at his feet. He kicked at a pebble. "I don't want you thinkin' I'm weird, but I had a sister once; she was crazy, always tellin' me stories like about knights. She got 'em out of books." He looked warily up at Marina. "You now them stories?"

"Yes, I do."

"The old guy don't, and I can't read too good still. You tell me them stories and I'll help you in the city."

Marina coughed and then swallowed. She looked over at the boy and smiled. "I'll be delighted," she said.

The boy jumped up and began to dance around Marina. He let out a wild yell. "Hey, *man,* I'm a knight doing battle and you be the lady, okay?"

"Yeah. My name's Marina."

"I even got a knight's name. Betcha didn't know that."

"Which one?"

"Percival. My ma named me that."

Marina got up and she and the boy began to walk south. She began to tell Percival, at his request, the story of Sir Gawaine and the

Green Knight, the story his sister had begun to tell him before she died.

It took Marina and Percival three days to reach the outskirts of the city; they slept in abandoned service stations along the way as Marina was afraid of entering any of the few houses they saw. When they reached the edge of one of the suburbs surrounding the city that had once been the home of two million people, they stayed in a house that Percival had used before. They got up at dawn and began the walk towards the city, Percival guiding Marina through the streets in best repair.

The city seemed empty of life. Marina thought it reasonable to suppose that any survivors who still had their wits about them after the plague might have assumed, as she had, that their best chance for survival lay in trying to get out and into the country. It also seemed reasonable to think that any who had stayed might have moved into the luxury apartments and hotels near the center of the city, or near the warehouses stocked with canned foods, and that these were the places to avoid. The pipes that supplied the city with water must still be in repair, Marina thought, or there would be no one left. Several tenements were either crumbling noticeably or had completely collapsed. Refuse of all kinds, some of it undoubtedly years old, littered the streets. Marina wondered how many people were left.

They reached the center of the city at around noon, but saw no one.

"Where are all the crazy nuts?" Marina asked.

"They're hiding. They know me, except the stupids sometimes forget. The old guy, he's three blocks down." The two continued to walk. Percival silently indicated with his gun the building in which his old friend lived. "The old guy's a doctor," he said softly. "So they leave him alone, in case they get sick. But they come after me sometimes."

"Hey, nigger boy!" Marina jumped. Percival quickly swung around and fired in the direction of the shout. Marina saw a body crumple to the pavement. Then she saw three men, about fifty feet away, begin to run toward herself and Percival. The boy fired again and hit one in the leg. The other two retreated.

"Come *on*," he shouted at Marina, and began to run. Marina ran too, puffing at the exertion, her heavy, muscular legs churning. They ran until they reached the building in which, apparently, Percival's friend lived. Marina collapsed inside the door.

"Hey, Percy." Marina looked up. An old woman stood in the lobby. Only her outline was visible to Marina as the woman stood in a

corner, but even so Marina could see that she was at least six feet tall.

"That's only old Mary, she's just dumb," Percival said. Mary held up a stethoscope.

"Where'd you get that?" shouted Percival.

"The doctor, he wouldn't let me have his toy," Mary sobbed. Marina got up. Mary began to cry, silently.

"Go up and see him, go on, number two on the third," Percival said. He was staring at some stains on the front of the big woman's wrinkled dress. Marina began to hurry up the stairs. She got to the third floor and opened the door that Percival had indicated. She saw the frail body of an elderly man on the floor. His face was purple and his head was covered with blood.

Marina screamed. Still screaming, she ran out the door and to the stairs. "Percival!" she screamed. "Percival!" Below she heard an inhuman cry and then two revolver shots. She ran down the stairs to the first floor and saw Mary's body, crumpled in the corner. Percival had fled. Marina ran to the door. "Percival!" she screamed down the street. There was no answer.

She turned back inside and suddenly became very sick in the lobby.

An hour later, Marina went back up to the third floor and to number two. She stared at the frail body on the floor. The blood on the old man's head had dried, and his tongue, which hung out of one side of his mouth, was black and swollen. She noted this abstractedly; then she carefully stepped over the body and looked at the late doctor's desk.

Marina noted that the doctor had been a very tidy person. She noted that he had a few books, neatly stacked, on human intelligence and psychology. She noted that he had what appeared to be tests stacked neatly in a corner of the desk, along with a few carefully plotted graphs next to the tests.

Marina Kaliapin noted that there was a sealed letter in the center of the desk.

The letter was addressed to Dr. Herman Granger of the State University.

She picked up the letter and stared at it for a few minutes before she began to laugh. she laughed loudly, chuckled as she stepped over the body on the floor, giggled as she closed the door to number two. She then sat down on the floor and looked at the letter and then opened it.

Dear Herman,

I received your last letter a month ago, and Percy has already delivered mine by now. He'll give

this one to you around the end of October, with any other data I have by then. I think the boy needs some rest, so that's why I can't send it sooner.

As for the five subjects, I can now give you this information. I hadn't tested Mr. Stewart since last May, and he has left the city, but I managed to have him check in before he left. His average I.Q. scores showed a further decline, which I expected, but the decline was much greater than I thought it would be. I'll send along some graphs and some more precise info, but roughly this is it. He's in the 80 to 100 range now, emotionally he's at the stage of a 10 to 12 yr. old. He said he's going back to Cornell, he just wants to see Cayuga Lake again and maybe look up some old profs, if they're still around. He apologized for leaving, oddly enough. I guess he hates to diminish my practice. Susan Balfour came out about the same, her total decrease for the past yr. has only been from 120 to the 90-100 range, but in most respects she seems and acts about the same, and seems to bear out your findings with the college kids. The young ones don't seem to deteriorate as fast, and some of us older ones too, I guess. I haven't seen Jerome Bagdasarian or Bill Mitchell, so nothing new there. Mary Fucillo is now at the stage of a five yr. old and I've noted a few temper tantrums from that quarter. Why she should have gone so much faster than the others I don't know, and it's distressing to me to see my old nurse go like that. She is still coming in every morning to "handle my appointments." I usually give her the blood pressure apparatus to play with and it keeps her occupied.

Herman I wish to hell I could find something to go on. I did a couple more autopsies, still nothing, and nothing on any other tests I did on some of my patients. I've been feeling pretty morbid lately, wondering why we didn't all die. I have theorized, as you might have yourself, that we all must have gotten a combination of different bacilli, virus, and chem. substances. That seems to be the only explanation for the plague hitting everywhere, and with such varied symptoms, if I recall the early broadcasts correctly. I guess we'll never know why all the labs seemed to go at once and why no one had an antidote. But this mind deterioration, I'm sure that is related to only one of these substances, something maybe designed to weaken a country gradually, and virulent as hell. Percy brought me a communication from Watnick at the labs downstate, but Watnick's mind is going and he can make no use at all of that equipment there. His last letter bordered on gibberish. So far all you and I can see is a steady deterioration of the rational functions

of the mind, and no physiological basis for it that's at all apparent.

Pardon my rambling, Herman, and forgive an old man his thoughts. Percy is still doing well, although he doesn't test at a genius level any more, poor boy. I am sorry to hear about your findings on those nine children, the two yr. old in particular, but maybe some other children the students have won't be subnormal. Probably a frail hope, but you never know. So far I, like you, notice no deterioration in other brain functions.

I've got to stop writing now, Herman. Sorry too say, I'm still not strong enough to join you at the univ., but I'm not getting any younger and I am needed here. I noted that it takes me longer to do the test you sent but I wouldn't want to base too much on that, after all I'm an old man and knew all the answers anyway really, so I might have been bored. I have a little trouble memory-wise though. Am looking forward to your next letter.

Your friend,
Eliot Moravsik

Marina Kalipin folded up the letter to Dr. Granger and put it back into the envelope. She got up and walked down the stairs to the lobby of the building. As she was in the process of hoisting her knapsack to her shoulders, she heard a noise in the doorway. She dropped the knapsack and swung around quickly, her hand on her switchblade.

Percival stood in the doorway. He held his gun close to his body and stared at her with his large brown eyes.

"Are you stayin', Marina?" he asked.

"I have a letter to deliver."

"That's my job, you know."

Marina went over to Percival and knelt beside him. "Percival, I'm from the university. I don't even know why I came here, but I have to go back. Look, there's a lot of profs there, and they can teach you stuff. I'm a lit major and I can tell you all the stories about the knights and you can read them in the library if you come along, honest."

Percival nodded solemnly at Marina. He said nothing for a few seconds, then replied, "We better leave in the night. Most of the nuts are sleepin' then." Percival looked in the direction of Mary's body, and then back to the girl. He glared defiantly. "I ain't *no* crybaby," he announced.

"I know," she said.

Marina Kaliapin returned to the campus with Percival a few days later, late in the evening. She went to the infirmary with the boy and waited in Dr. Granger's office while the doctor put Percival to bed in one of the wards. When the doctor returned, she pulled

the letter out of her knapsack and thew it on his desk. Dr. Granger picked it up.

"You read it, didn't you," he said softly. She nodded.

"Then you know."

"Yeah."

"Marina, why did you leave?"

"Everything was so damned unreal. I mean it didn't seem that anyone was doing anything constructive here and I thought maybe off-campus it would be—" She broke off. "Hell, what can you do anyway," she finished listlessly.

Dr. Granger did not speak.

"Doctor, what's the point? Why should I study stuff that I'll forget anyway when my brain rots? You're never going to find out what's wrong."

"Marina, Eliot and I may accidentally fall across an answer, or Dr. Watnick downstate, he's the real expert."

"Watnick's crazy now and Eliot's dead," Marina said.

Dr. Granger stared. He folded his arm across his desk and buried his head in it. Marina walked over to the window and looked out at the campus. Dr. Granger looked up.

"Marina, even if you do, well, forget, you can learn things for a little while. We can preserve what's in the library, and keep the student papers, in case—" Dr. Granger paused.

"And in fifty years no one will even be able to read them," Marina said. She stopped talking and remained silent.

She began to wonder how long it would take for her mind to deteriorate.

Graduation ceremonies took place in June, as was traditional. Several students had spent much time hand-lettering the one hundred bachelors' degrees of arts and science which were to be awarded.

The ceremonies took place on the hill overlooking the athletic fields. The one hundred graduates sat upon the lawn, dressed in their best, the other students sat around them where they pleased, most of them remembering their own graduation ceremonies and a few looking forward to the time that they would graduate. Father Thaddeus had kindly come on campus from town to deliver the benediction, and everyone agreed that Dean Melling had given one of the better graduation addresses of recent years. The students applauded the passage where the kindly dean had stressed the beauty of knowledge, and a few cheered when he mentioned that six new students who had emigrated to the campus from other parts of the state had decided to begin the pursuit of wisdom at dear old State in the summer. Of course, everyone regretted that so few majors were offered, but with six new students, and most of this year's graduating class deciding to

do graduate work, hope for expansion in the future became a possibility.

Mr. Cooke of the mathematics department awarded the degrees to the graduates.

Marina Kaliapin had graduated with highest honors.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the other students rushed over to congratulate the graduates. Many of them were looking forward to the day's festivities, which included a reception in the faculty lounge and a party that evening in the married students' dormitory. Marina, of course, received many congratulations for she was, after all, one of the brightest students and seemed destined to make her mark on the world.

Excitedly, students discussed their future plans.

"I heard Mr. Gavenda asked you to assist him in his teaching, Mari," Reiko Nishimoto gushed. "I wish I knew all that stuff about lit."

"Are you going for a doctorate, Mari?" Sarah Milo asked. "I'm lucky they let me in part-time for a master's, and Jim has to work in the stables full-time or he can't stay. What'll you specialize in?"

Marina Kaliapin slowly smiled. "I'm going to do medieval lit," she replied. She detached herself from the crowd of well-wishers, caught sight of Percival, and waved. He waved back vigorously.

At the far end of the athletic fields, the small herd of cattle grazed contentedly. Beyond them, the decaying superhighway ran past the campus. Two cows had wandered from the rest of the herd onto the superhighway, and they were busily inspecting the clumps of grass that had grown through the cracks in the asphalt. In the middle of the fields, a few sheep chomped at the grass.

BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES

(20th Century-Fox)

Beneath the Planet of the Apes is less fortunate than its predecessor, *Planet of the Apes*, which opened just before *2001*, and which did not get the licks it deserved in the general brouhaha surrounding the Kubrick film. The sequel, however, is fair game now that we have nothing good to shout about. It shares all the faults of the first film, without even the small credit due the first for slight originality.

BtPotA begins with the last ten minutes of PotA. Again Charlton Heston rides off with Nova (Miss Stellar Flash in the Pan of 1968), and discovers he is on the Earth of the Future rather than Some Other Planet where the anthropoids speak excellent English; this discovery via a half-buried Statue of Liberty. Riding on, he disappears in a flash of fake fire, and Nova, who is making a habit of it, discovers James Franciscus, another astronaught (sic) who slid through the same time warp. They repeat the adventures of the first film almost chase by chase, winding up in a petrified underground New York City (the big laugh is a "New York is a Summer Festival" sign) inhabited by crazed mutants who wear human masks which when removed reveal faces like anatomical blood stream charts. These unfortunates have Mental Powers, make war with the intelligent simians, and worship a live doomsday bomb. Here we find Heston again, who obviously has a one-week-work-only clause in his contract, and in a final shootout the whole thing goes up via the bomb; a relief, I should think, for all concerned.

The only positive notes are an appealing performance by Kim Hunter as a lady chimpanzee scientist, and the beautifully conceived non-human artifacts, architecture, and costumes of the simian civilization, both repeats from the original. Otherwise it's downhill all the way, with Franciscus giving an uncanny Heston imitation throughout, the underground city looking like a class in creative papier-mache, and all logic thrown to the winds. An unabashed attempt to cash in on the commercial success of *Planet of the Apes*, the sad thing is that it will probably succeed.

David R. Bunch (THAT HIGH-UP BLUE DAY . . ., March 1968; (A SCARE IN TIME, Sept. 1968) again demonstrates his talent with a short-short that is somewhere between poetry and petition of complaint: a unique style and a powerful story.

Tough Rocks and Hard Stones

by David R. Bunch

EVERY MORNING AT ABOUT alarm time he thought of the rocks. It would hit him like a stab. But there was no one to tell him if the tower pile of rocks would hold that day, no one to inform him if in the sky or in the piled-up mounds of time or in the trick-mind of a whim-God that day some action might be caused, some little crumbly bit of a chip or sliver going perhaps that might set the whole thing moving down.

So he went on under the threat always of the rocks falling, and he did what he could. He dressed neatly. He polished his shoes often enough. He whistled a tune when he thought it the right thing to do to let everyone within hearing distance think of him as nonchalant. Under the surface though, on one side of him at all times, have no doubt of it, he was an eager beaver! And he was properly deferential to the boss and all the boss's children and all the boss's friends, and, oh! how it all succeeded! He *was* successful at the business.

Yet there was no one to whom to tell the story of the rocks. Truly no one. Except the mirror maybe. Sometimes he talked to the mirror in the still and stopped night, in the more than aloneness, the truly bradded-down loneliness, of his own room. Checking an appearance, a countenance, his honesty sometimes, he would tell the mirror that there were some rocks about ready to fall. And the mir-

ror would acknowledge back usually, after a while, and say, "Yes, truly, *truly,* there are some rocks about to fall.—Some might say you are crazy to think that about rocks. But though I am merely a mirror, I reflect what I see. I think there are some rocks, and if they're not falling now, surely they will. Just you wait!"

He didn't know whether he felt better or worse after these talks with the mirror. But at least it's nice to know you're not crazy, if even just from the confirmation of a mirror saying it that you are not.

One time, long ago, after just a tiny few drinks on the way home from a *big* conference on business, he had tried to talk with his wife. It had all seemed possible on the way home from a *big* conference on business, after just the tiny few drinks, to talk with the wife about these rocks. But once there and started, with the drinks dying and her glaring, it wasn't so easy to make headway with the story of the rocks to the wife. It had soon begun to seem silly. He remembered she had said first, "Drunk! Come home drunk! Son of a bitch! My husband, the father and support of little children, comes home drunk."

But near the end of the conference she had said, "About the first week we were married, remember? I told you, you silly fouled-up bastard, that you needed a psychiatrist. *Remember?*" Then she had chortled in a little victory that kind of crow-chortle he had come to loathe.

His daughters were no better, really, in the long run than the hard-rock spouse, old battle-axe ball-and-stones-and-chain. At first, when the two were tiny, growing up, he had had high hopes and tall expectations that they would be different and more understanding about the rocks. Only mostly, for refinement, he called them stones when he talked of them to his daughters. Sometimes he would say, getting home from work dead-tired, entirely disillusioned, altogether hollowed-out in thought and with that big near-emptiness that felt puffy and filled with spider web all around his heart place, "The stones were real heavy today down there, and tough—hard to lift and hard to break." When the girls, his daughters, still had their baby fat, sometimes they would seem to identify with this talk of stones by their father—hard to lift and hard to break. They might even laugh and say, "Poor Daddy, his stones are tough." But later they grew sophisticated about it all and they would just say, "Mama, Daddy's just lazy, isn't he? Doesn't like to go to work to make money for us to buy nice things. Goes down to an air-conditioned office all day, sits on his behind, and then complains about it. Isn't he a nut!?"

Came a year then he turned

thin, though the rocks were still unfallen, so far as anyone knew. His wife said, "How nice! Now you can wear those after-six natural-drape suits and look thin, not potty, with me at night when we go for steaks after you've taken me to an entertainment." His daughters said, "Daddy's just as thin-gutty and drawn-out looking as our very own boyfriends up at our colleges. Only he's got the big advantage on them going for him of having those iron-gray temples turning white. And he's pale too, more than they are."

They found him in his little bed one morning in the little room that he slept in all alone, and he was truly thin. He did not move nor speak as he was going right on calmly through the alarm that should have set him to hopping. The covers lay upon him smooth and straight; both his arms were outside and placed rigidly along his flatness. And his eyes looked at the ceiling, straight and steady, both eyes seeming to line up on two small distant spots that were straight up just a little to either side of his very pale thin nose. But the eyes looked past all things to something illimitable distances up and far away. And there was no one in all the world now, or ever had been or probably ever would be, who could say what was really going on here or had gone.

The wife and the daughters tried, though, to piece it out when they found him. And they cried, of course they cried. *"Son of a bitch!"* the wife finally screamed, though tears were still furrowing the stiff make-up that she used now to asphalt over the faults and folds and pot-holes in her face that was growing old. "So you've finally gone and left me. And with the babies only half reared." But truly the girls were healthy and buxom and more than half through "the college of their choice" at two different places. The eldest finally said, pulling the covers gently back to reveal the board man underneath, "Poor Daddy, he looks just like a big road-surface roller had just finished running over him, all the way." The youngest said, "I think Daddy looks more like about a half-million tons of rocks had been falling on him. And for a long time." And this, for some reason, set the three of them to laughing, illogically, all at once, and almost hysterically.

Of course they gave him a big, *big* rock finally out in Happy Rest, one of the largest and flashiest in all of that grim green place. For they were a family of means, actually, with the securities, the properties, the annuities, the bank accounts and the paid-up "Rock of Gibraltar" insurance policies that he left them when he went; and they were three to care about things like that. *Oh, very much!*

Here is the chilling conclusion to Dr. Swann's novel about a young Englishman who becomes involved in a tangle of mysterious events on the Caribbean island of Oleandra

The Goat Without Horns

by Thomas Burnett Swann

2ND OF 2 PARTS

SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE

I address this history not to my fellow dolphins, for it is Charlie's history more than my own. He is the subject and the hero, and it is to him and for him that I write. Obviously I did not witness all of his adventures on the island of Oleandra, since many took place on land instead of in the water. But Charlie told me much of what I could not see, and the rest I surmised.

Oleandra was a curious island, a big volcanic cone, long since dead. It was owned by ELIZABETH MEYNELL, an English widow who lived in a large red house inside the crater. There were no docks or jetties, and I first saw Charlie as he descended a rope ladder from Mrs. Meynell's schooner into a dugout canoe. Perhaps I was listening to my third ear and hoped instinctively to frighten him away from Oleandra; at any rate, I gave the canoe a nudge and Charlie dropped beside it into the water. When he spied a four-foot dolphin instead of a shark, he laughed, and, before making his way back to the boat and the island, touched me as if to say "there is no strangeness in your wet, dark skin to me." I said goodbye. To Charlie the words must have seemed a squeak, but he guessed my intention. "You can't understand me," he said (and I understanding every word!), "but I think we will meet again."

CHARLIE SORLEY is nineteen, a lighthearted boy, both poetic and athletic. After the death of his family, he comes to Oleandra from Eng-

land to tutor the daughter of Mrs. Meynell. Elizabeth Meynell turns out to be a striking, graceful woman, who looks more thirty than forty-five.

Charlie is completely charmed by Mrs. Meynell, less so by her daughter JILL, a probably pretty girl with a curt, tomboyish manner. Besides two servants, the only other occupants of the island are the Carib Indians, a strange, seemingly cruel bunch, to whom Jill is somehow drawn, and their foreman, a tall, fiercely beautiful man named CURK.

During his first weeks on the island, Charlie renews his friendship with the dolphin, GLOOMER, swims with and even learns to ride the dolphin. His progress with Jill is slow. She seems influenced more by the Caribs, especially Curk, and she has a strange, almost instinctive dislike of Gloomer. Charlie gets through to Jill a bit when she shows him her "favorite place," a Carib burial vault thick with tarantulas, and learns, to his surprise, that it was Curk's idea for Jill to have a tutor and that the tutor is expected to give her children! The more Charlie learns about Curk, the more he is mystified; Telesphorus, one of the servants, has referred to Curk as the "master" of the house, and the Carib natives call him The Man Who Swims With The Sharks.

However, the main thing on Charlie's mind is Mrs. Meynell. He has fallen in love with Elizabeth, and the attractive widow seems happily appreciative and responsive. After an exhilarating day in which he coaxes Elizabeth down to the water to meet Gloomer—she is partially an invalid—he goes to her room, hoping to spend the night. She promises him an hour or two and they sweetly make love.

She was no longer the great lady of the house, but one, who like himself, had lit her loneliness with a lantern of love.

Ebbing into sleep, he wondered if he heard or dreamed her words.

"Thank you my dear. Now you must go."

He was shocked into wakefulness.

"Because—?"

"Of him."

VIII

The next morning, Jill had intercepted him on his way to the lagoon. His thoughts during and after a sleepless night, had been of Elizabeth and The Man Who Swam With The Sharks. They were not pleasant thoughts; Charlie was jealous, blindingly and helplessly jealous for the first time in his life. But Jill had looked so chastened that he had stopped to talk to her.

She had not stopped him to talk.

"Curk wants us," she had said, and he had followed her not unwillingly to her banyan tree, for he wished at last to confront this Carib, this king, this rival who loomed so fearsomely between him and Elizabeth . . .

He was a man who appeared to be about forty, thought Charlie,

and then at once he began to amend his impression. God, not man, was the word, but one of those elemental Aztec gods who sent showers to the parching fields only after they had been propitiated by the sacrifice of a thousand captives. He was beyond man's law because he was beyond man; both more and less. Lordly in strength but no more compassionate than a waterspout.

And his age? Forty was too precise. As with Mrs. Meynell there were no lines to mark the passage of years, of griefs, triumphs, defeats. His hair, combed long behind his head and braided around the bone of an animal, was thick, glossy, and black as the sharks with which he was said to swim. Aquamarine pendants hung from his pierced ears and the deep incisions cut in his cheeks were outlined and darkened with coal; he was savage but not a savage. A keen intelligence, analyzing, evaluating, glittered in his eyes. He was not such a god as Charlie could worship, nor such a man as he could judge, like, despise, or even comprehend.

Charlie stood beneath his immensity without cowering, met his gaze without blinking, but feared him as he had feared no other man. Inscrutable, unsmiling, neither dispensing nor denying his favor, Curk had emerged from the shower-of-gold trees, thrusting aside a branch which barred his path and scattering the petals like a whirlwind.

Jill advanced to meet him. She smiled and started to speak: "Curk."

He stopped her with a raised hand. "It is almost time for the Goat without Horns."

She was not affronted by his rebuff. He whom she worshipped had withheld his smile, but what he had told her explained his solemnity.

Fear and eagerness mingled in her face and made her, in one of her startling shifts of mood, more woman than child. At that moment she was as unknowable as Curk. She seized Charlie's hand and drew him beside her onto the ground. He did not have to be told that he should bow his head.

He saw the bare brown feet of the man who loomed above them. Long and narrow, with pointed toes and toenails trimmed like sharp little knives. He felt his warmth. His nostrils caught an overpowering scent of musk, almost like that of the male deer which wishes to attract a female, and also, infuriatingly, a hint of frangipani, as if he had come from Elizabeth's arms.

When he spoke, his voice was deep and resonant with at moments a veiled tenderness. It was a voice like muffled thunder.

"It is almost time for the Goat without Horns," he repeated.

"Truly, Curk?"

"You know what you must do, my daughter. Are you prepared?"

"Yes, my father."

Curk placed a hand on either head: "I, Carib king to Carib princess, pronounce you mate of the Englishman. Obey him as becomes a woman but command him as becomes a princess. May you flourish in the favor of the Omnipotent Turk and restore our people to their ancient glory."

Then he was gone, bruising the petals with silent feet.

It was Jill who broke the silence, who began to command him as became a Carib princess. With peremptory hands she raised him to his feet. She caught his head and kissed him on the mouth and said in a voice which no longer faltered, "Our differences don't matter. Curk has joined us. You are to make love to me. You will father my children and the Carib kings will live through us."

Awe had left him along with the awful presence. Englishmen, even modest ones like Charlie, are used to governing empires. The Caribbean was almost an English sea. Anger flared in him. Who was a Carib chieftain with slit cheeks and braided hair to tell him he was married to this child—no, not married, mated? And who was the child to tell him that he must give her children—she whom he had disliked, then pitied, but hardly loved, or even thought of loving?

He fought down his anger even as he spoke. "You don't even know what you're talking about when you tell me to make love to you. Jill, you're fifteen years old. Not yet a woman. And if you were, I must still make my own choice."

She looked at him without comprehension. "But Curk has joined us. Curk, my *father.* Don't you understand?"

"No, I don't understand. I thought your father was an English adventurer."

She shrugged with contempt. "Did you expect my mother to tell you that she betrayed her husband? Oh, don't look so shocked. She should have betrayed him. He was a weakling. But English ladies are reticent about such matters. And I *do* know how to make love. I've seen the Carib couples in the mangrove swamp and how they embrace and writhe and become one with each other. A Carib boy chased me only last year, and I wanted to stop for him, but I fled because it was for Curk to choose my lover."

Now it was Charlie who clasped her shoulders and reasserted his mastery. "Jill, I came here to be your tutor. I want to be your friend. That's all. I don't care what your father says. You love him because he's strong. Do you want me to be less strong? To do what I'm told and not what I must? You said you first liked me because I made my own law when

I punished you. Surely I can break somebody else's law imposed on me against my will."

She lowered her head. "I'm so confused. It was simple before you came to the island. When I heard you were coming—and why—I was furious. But I was curious too. And then I saw you in the lagoon that first time and how beautifully you swam with that ugly animal, and how—how good you looked without any clothes, all muscle and sinew like Curk. And yesterday, after you punished me, even after you didn't like my cave, I wanted you. Besides, everybody obeys Curk. I thought you would too. I thought you would want to." She stared at him with unsettling candor. "Is it my mother you love? Curk does. She's the only soft thing he loves."

He parried the question with indignation. "Do I have to love anybody right now?"

"But don't you at least desire my body?" She was beginning to sound like a girl in a French novel, the source no doubt of her information concerning "love" and "desire." But he was far from laughing at her.

"Not yet. Perhaps in a few years. But even then no one can order me to desire you. I must be my own master. I must be like Curk in that respect."

She was crying now, crying anguishedly with all the imprisoned tears of her thwarted childhood, of a little girl who had grown up with a father whose god was strength and to whom beauty was the sweep of a shark instead of a sea gull. She was like the living figures the Greeks had believed to be imprisoned in stone. Pygmalion had not created Galatea, he had released her from her marble cage, and he, Charlie, the unwilling sculptor, had struck a telling blow with his chisel and a face stared forth from the marble. The cage was cracked but not yet broken.

He knelt beside her and laid a hand on her head. He had always been unself-conscious with his hands, his movements; one who touched as well as spoke his affection. He did not stop to think that his touch might now be a cruelty instead of a solace because it was one of pity instead of love.

"Jill, how can I help you?"

"By making love to me."

"But you don't really love me. You couldn't in so short a time. And you said yourself how different we are."

"But I don't have to love you. Not in the way you mean. Or mother means. Quoting poems from Tennyson and exchanging flowers. Flowers wilt anyway. What are they supposed to symbolize? Curk said we must *make* love, and that's not the same thing as loving, is it? I want you and that's enough."

"No, it isn't enough."

"And anyway," she blurted, "I think I do love you. I like to look at you. I like to feel your hand on my head. Even if I don't understand you. I wasn't angry when you didn't like my tree house and my friends. I was sorry for you. I wanted to teach you not to be afraid. Isn't that a kind of loving?"

"That's friendship, Jill. It might become love. But not for a long time." He was all tenderness with her now; he wanted to salve her pride, soothe her heart, stop her tears. But without encouraging her to expect his love.

"Jill, I'm going to leave Oleandra. The boat from Martinique will come in a few weeks. I'm going back to England." A shower-of-gold tree arched above their heads, its gilt, acorn-shaped buds mingling with its full and falling blossoms: a cornucopia perpetually spilling abundance toward the earth. He would break a spray from the tree and place it in her hand. He would leave her this token of his deep and growing esteem. But even as he lifted his hand he thought how she hated bright colors, poems, flowers which wilted.

A tiny fiddler crab zigzagged over the ground near his feet, an ugly animal, with a claw too big for its spindly body. Somehow it had wandered too far from the lagoon and the weight of its claw made its passage a slow and meandering one. He caught it carefully so that it could not bite him and held it out to Jill.

She took it with a cry of pleasure, not by its claw but its entire body, and cradled it in her palm as he might have cradled a small bird. The claw snapped once and then subsided as the little animal seemed to be eased of its fear.

He turned to leave her.

"Charlie," she cried after him. "You called me a little girl, but I am a Carib princess. And you're rejecting me? Once and for all?"

"Once. For all? Only the years can say." He felt that the years would deepen his friendship for her but make no essential change in its nature. But he could not leave her without hope.

"If Curk knew, he would never let you leave the island. He would kill you, I think, to save my honor. I won't tell him that you didn't make love to me. Or that you're going to try to leave. It will be our secret. The only secret I've ever kept from him."

"Thank you, Jill."

"I don't want to deceive him. But I don't want him to hurt you either. When the boat comes, he mustn't know you're going on board. You can't get the Caribs to row you out in their dugouts, and you can't row yourself alone. You will have to swim, but the current is very strong, to say nothing of the sharks. You must get your dolphin to help you. And Charlie—"

"Yes, Jill?"

"We shall have to pretend that we have made love. You know how a man and a woman look at each other afterwards? Touch each other sometimes with their hands and sometimes only with their eyes?" She put her arms around him and kissed him, and he tasted the salt from her tears and wished for both of their sakes that he could love her, he who had never loved without being loved in return but could guess the pain because he had lost those who had loved him.

"Now I'm going into my tree house. Curk will think we're there together. He's gone to the mangrove swamp." She stopped and tenderly placed the fiddler on the ground and pointed him in the direction of the lagoon. "I can't take him into my house. They need water and light. But he was a *lovely* gift."

Charlie sat, head in hands, elbows on knees, in the great settle of the living room. The shame he was causing Jill and the necessity for him to leave her—and her island—wracked him with a twofold pain. It was not that he fancied her hopelessly in love with him. He had never comprehended his own beauty; he had never thought of himself as an irresistible Lord Byron, whose smiles were an invitation, whose touch was a conquest. Jill had quite astonished him by speaking of love, and he stoutly believed that her pride and not her heart was the more wounded. Her girlish fancy had made him an object of love. It could as easily unmake him, once he had left the island.

But he had made her betray Curk, who was both her father and her god. He had made her violate her own harsh but somehow admirable integrity. It pained him to pain her, and yet if she did not help him to deceive Curk, his escape was impossible. The consequences of his deception—of his pretending to have made love to a girl whom he had not so much as kissed—he could not foresee. Curk had said that it was almost time for the Goat without Horns. Meaningless words to Charlie. Electrifying words to Jill.

And here he sat, islanded in the Red House from the horrors of the larger island, comforted by the sheer Englishness of the architecture which he had once found depressingly bland, and by his nearness to his only understanding human friend this side of England.

Elizabeth came into the room with only the scent of frangipani to announce her presence. She walked so silently that even her voluminous skirt failed to rustle. This particular skirt was dusky blue, with a multitude of silver stars in clusters like Milky Ways. "She walks in beauty like the night of cloudless climes and

starry skies . . ." Her eyes were remote with the remnants of sleep. He looked up at her with silent pleading. She sank beside him on the tall-backed settle, where Arthurian knights, subdued in color but vivid with action, jousted above their heads.

"You're troubled about Jill?" Her drowsiness vanished as soon as she saw his pain. The warmth and sweetness of her, the inexpressible comfort of one who so resembled his mother as she had looked when he was a small child, sent tears coursing down his cheeks. A young man crying can be a ridiculous sight. But Charlie's tears were not effeminate. They were not the facile tears of a coward or a crybaby, but the natural, manly expression of a grief beyond words.

"Yes."

"She's still hard and antagonistic?"

"Oh, Elizabeth, it's much worse than that. She thinks she's married to me! Curk came out of the trees and placed his hands on our heads and spoke a few words, and then Jill said we were to bear his grandchildren. Is he really her father?"

She did not seem particularly surprised by Jill's behavior, and she did not try to evade a question whose answer would convict her of adultery.

"Yes, my dear, he is really her father. You see I am truly a bad woman, just as I warned you. No, not bad. Weak. I loved Curk once. He still compels me with his sheer physical presence, though I know him to be—heartless. You've seen him yourself. You can imagine what he must have seemed to me when we first met. He glittered with barbaric splendor. You men like every woman to be a saint or a harlot. It so simplifies your treatment of us. The pedestal or the brothel. But most of us are mixed of sky and clay. There is something about us which yearns toward a handsome savage. We hope to tame him and at the same time hope to be mastered by him. It's no longer thought proper to admire wicked Lord Byron, but every woman I know has a copy of his poems which she hides from her husband. My own husband was a weakling, querulous and drunken, an aimless wanderer who was always sailing from places instead of to them. He had cut a handsome figure as a young man, and I had married him not unwillingly at my parents' urging. But he was hollow. I think he only liked Oleandra because at first I disliked it so intensely. We used to come ashore from our yacht and he would bring gifts to the Caribs in return for the heady rum they brewed for their festivals.

" 'One day we'll settle here,' he used to taunt me, 'and these shall be your guests as well as your servants.' "

"And then I met Curk, who was strong where his countrymen and my own husband were weak, and I gave myself to him in a frenzy of love without tenderness or guilt. One year later my husband died, and I, who had nothing in England except my husband's fortune—no surviving family and few friends after our years of wandering—returned to Oleandra because of Curk. Then it was known as Shark Island. I changed the name to sound like the loveliest of flowers. I imported workers and material from England and built the Red House and the cottages for my servants. And for the Caribs if they would only use them, but they preferred to stay in the mangrove swamp and dream in the sun or torture their dogs. And I have lived here all these years, lonely beyond words, yet loving—no, desiring—a man who had no knowledge of kindness, who came to me only because I was an Englishwoman and my beauty somehow attracted him—he said that I was the one star he would allow in the blackness of his chosen night. And because I could give him a child. Oh, he had fathered children on many a Carib maiden, I had no doubt of that. He was not a man to sleep alone. But he wanted *my* child, a child half English. 'My race is degenerate,' he used to say. 'I am its only strength. Yours is the power of England and the world. You must give me a son who is worthy of an empire.' "

"I gave him Jill and never recovered my health. I fell prey to fevers of mind and body and became as you see me now, bedridden much of the time, melancholy all of the time, denied even the company of my daughter. For Curk took to her as soon as he found that I could bear him no more children. He treated her like the son I had failed to give him. Her dress, her hair, her manners. How little I was allowed to teach her! When Curk himself suggested a tutor from England, I wrote to Mr. Lane at once. To have another civilized being on the island! I was selfish. I thought of myself as well as Jill. And, yes, I even foresaw the possibility of her falling in love with you. But only in time, only when she was a young woman and not a tomboy who looked like a sailor lad. It seemed to me a possible salvation for her. A boy like you from England. A boy who could one day take her back with him. Jill is a strange girl in many ways. To you she probably seems abrupt and cruel. But what is cruelty in her father is, I think, very different in her. She told me you had seen her spiders. I saw them once myself and have never been back to her tree house. To you and me they seem horrible. But she loves them. What is more, she has never been bitten. And if she finds beauty in them where we like birds and

flowers, is she cruel? Mistaken? Or simply different? The heartless things she said about your dolphin—forgive her for them, Charlie. She genuinely believed him to be a vicious animal. Curk had taught her so. Furthermore—" and here she hesitated—"if you find certain qualities of, shall I say, womanliness in me, you may discover a few of them also in Jill. Do you know that I found her last night with *Sonnets from the Portuguese*? She had slipped it out of my library and never expected me to visit her in her room. She quickly hid it under the pillow and doesn't yet know that I caught her memorizing the most beautiful sonnet of all."

"How do I love thee . . ."

"What else?" She paused and shuddered. "But what you tell me of Curk is monstrous—monstrous. He dares to call you married? And to speak of the Goat without Horns?"

"What did he mean, Elizabeth?"

"I don't know," she said flatly. "I have heard the phrase many times since I came here. It seems to be a sacrifice, a propitiation of the Shark God worshiped by the Caribs. And somehow you and Jill are to participate. Perhaps he wishes to make you fertile parents who will bear him many grandsons."

"Goats are used in sacrifices all over the world. A goat without horns could be—"

"A native child."

"Or Jill's first-born, if it were a girl. But I'm not going to make love to her!"

"Of course you're not, my dear." She clasped him against her breast and rocked him like a child. She seemed to him then not an invalid but the elemental earth mother, all-wise, all-encompassing, her intuition more powerful than man's intelligence. "But Curk's wrath will be beyond belief. He has rarely been crossed. I have sometimes deceived him in some small matter but never openly defied him. Once a young Carib quarreled with him over a girl. They fought with staves and Curk, as always, won. The loser was thrown into the sea. He was a strong swimmer, but whenever he neared the shore he was driven back by Carib children with stones until he tired and sank. The sharks devoured his body."

"Jill has promised not to tell Curk that I refused her. I am to leave the island on the next boat from Martinique."

"Then you may trust her to keep her word, even if she must lie to her father." She held him to her with the urgency of a mother losing her child and a mistress losing her lover. He had been an open and affectionate child, never ashamed to be embraced by his mother in public, never ashamed

to embrace, and he did not lie passively in Elizabeth's arms but returned her embrace with equal ardor: half child, half lover. "Such a little time we have had to be friends, my dear. But of course you must go. It means your life."

"And you will come too, Elizabeth! I will be your Robert Browning and carry you to safety! And Jill," he added with considerably less fervor. "Together we may be able to steal a dugout and row out to the boat from Martinique."

"Do you really think that all three of us could leave this island without Curk's knowledge? Besides, Jill wouldn't want to go, and I—I lack the strength, my dear. I haven't the courage of our beloved Mrs. Browning. You must go alone with forgiveness in your heart for the sad, sick woman who brought you into such peril."

"For the great and gallant lady who has kept her courage and her beauty in spite of everything."

IX

When Charlie came to me after his rejection of Jill and his meeting with Mrs. Meynell, he came to ask my help in escaping from Oleandra. He stripped down to his trousers, then shrugged, and even though on the side of the lagoon nearest to the Red House, removed them too, as well as his undergarments.

"To hell with the ladies. We've got a lot of traveling to do," he said. "I don't want to scratch you with bell-bottom trousers." He had still been wearing the rakish sailor garb which Jill had found for him on the one occasion when she had shown good taste. Nudity, however, was the proper state for swimming. Can you imagine a dolphin in pantaloons or even a loincloth? Of course, when he glided above me, holding my fin, his trousers did not hurt, but when he held me tightly for a dive or a leap, the coarse cloth of his britches—or even an undergarment with buttons—fretted my sensitive skin.

"Gloomer," he said, "I know there's a passage to the sea, or you couldn't have gotten in here in the first place. You've got to show it to me, though how I'm going to explain all this to you—"

I was already on my way to the passage. He had no time to ask me where I was heading—only to grasp my fin. He could hardly conceive that I had understood every word which he had just said to me. But I gave him no chance for questions. We reached an escarpment of sheer, plantless rock, and I shook free of him and dove a few feet under the surface to indicate the opening to the sea.

I returned to the surface and he supported himself with one hand on my flank and looked at me in a funny way.

"Gloomer, you understand a lot

more English than I realized. You knew the word 'passage,' didn't you?"

As a matter of fact, I had already convinced him that I did understand a few English words. When he said "dive," I dove. Or "come," I came. Or "stop," I stopped. But till now he had thought of himself like those dog fanciers who teach their pets some twenty or thirty commands and imagine that they have achieved a major breakthrough in communications, though I must repeat that he never patronized me, never tried to teach me tricks, never treated me as less than an equal. It was simply inconceivable to him that I should understand an English vocabulary almost as large as his, and it was my misfortune that my pronunciation was unintelligible to him. Even when I called him Charlie, he did not recognize his name, which resembled a human wheeze.

Now I answered him with a Delphinese "yes"—actually a kind of prolonged clicking of my jaws, with no help from my airhole—hoping thereby to teach *him* a word but failing as usual. Then I made what I hoped was an approximation of the English "yes" which came out, even to my ears, between a squeak and a hiss—sort of an "iss." Finally I had to fall back on gestures. Dolphins, though markedly free with their bodies, have no movements to signify assent or dissent. We are far too literate. But for Charlie's sake I made the ridiculous motion of shaking my head up and down with a vehement splash.

"Yes!" he cried. "You're saying 'yes.' You understand practically everything I say, don't you?"

Another tremendous splash.

He gave me a hug. "Why you sly old fox." (Some English idioms still elude me; how I resembled a fox it was hard to comprehend, and how he could be calling me "sly" and "old" and complimenting me at the same time, as the hug indicated, defied explanation.) "I've told you everything about myself and you've taken it all in, haven't you? And I don't even know a thing about you except—except that you're the best friend I ever had!" It is quite extraordinary for an Englishman to be rhapsodic about friendship to your face. Generally, you have to surmise if he likes you by the warmth with which he calls you "old chap" (or "sly old fox").

"You could know everything about me if you chose," I wanted to say. "And my race and all of what we know. How would you like to hear what Aristotle said to a dolphin in the year 333 B.C.? ('You ought to be living on the land. Where am I going to put you in my encyclopedia?') Just let me teach you!" I was moved, honored, and frustrated at the same time and wanted desperately to tell

him, but I reclined in the water and contented myself with looking pleased.

And then he told me the events of the day, which I have already told you, and how he had to leave the island in time to meet the boat from Martinique, which came the third day of each month, usually in the morning (depending on the winds). It was due in a little less than three weeks. We would have to arrive early at the sea entrance of the passage and wait in the water until it arrived and swim out to meet it before any Carib dugouts could precede or impede us.

It was not a foolproof plan. I was not as trusting as Charlie and Mrs. Meynell that Jill would remain tight-lipped about her rejection. I could see her running to daddy Curk and demanding immediate vengeance on the wretched boy who had dared to reject a Carib princess. And even if she chose not to betray Charlie, Curk had an uncanny way of appearing where he was unexpected and knowing what was meant to be unknown to him. But it seemed the only possible plan. Had I been able to converse with Charlie, I might have suggested a devious safeguard. Why not *satisfy* the foolish girl, pretend that he meant to stay on the island with her, and thus avoid suspicion? After all, though boyish and bony, she was not exactly a hag, and Charlie needed experience in that direction. Mrs. Meynell, I felt, in spite of her beauty, was too old for him. But we dolphins look on sexual matters far more freely than do Englishmen. Perhaps it was just as well that I had to hold my jaws and silence my airhole.

Once I saw him safely on board his boat, I would, of course, follow him to Martinique. And what then? He had talked alarmingly of a return to England. Perhaps, though, a little time on the pleasant French island would convince him that not all of the West Indies were like Oleandra. Let him book passage on one of those island-plying vessels, and I would follow in his wake and meet him on many-beached Tobago or fortressed Antigua, and we would frolic through the pearly, perilous seas till I was an aged thirty like the Old Bull, and then he could build a hut above a quiet lagoon and we would commune when we could no longer frolic, and when I died he would deliver me to the islandless deep and to the watery Elysium of the Great Triton. In spite of Darwin, he worshiped his own God and believed in his own heaven, but perhaps in time he would come to prefer mine, since the Great Triton, also known as Davy Jones, is half man and has welcomed many a sailor into his realm.

And if he did choose England? I refused to consider the prospect. There are dolphins who are born

in those chilly northern waters and flourish in them. Perhaps I could learn. Certainly I could keep up with his ship, even one of those new iron steamships with paddle wheels and screen propellers. But England's beaches are for holidays, not permanent living, and I could hardly expect Charlie to settle, say, at Brighton just to keep me company. He would probably return to Cambridge and finish his degree, and the fresh water Cam River was out of the question for my home. Lord Byron had kept a bear at Cambridge, but the bear had lived in his attic. I chose not to think about England.

We traversed the entire passage to the sea, I guiding him through a darkness only my eyes could pierce, around the occasional convolutions and across a tiny underground lake which shone like a fallen sky with starry noctilucae, while Charlie cried out with the wonder of the place. At one point the passage was entirely filled with water, but he clutched me tightly (I being grateful for no bell-bottom trousers or buttons), held his breath, and trusted me to return him soon to the air. Once again there was space above our heads, and then the passage narrowed to the width of a single body, and he loosed my fin and followed me into the Caribbean, protected from its turbulence by a great rock jutting between us and the sea but feeling the current pull at his body. If this were the day for our escape, Charlie could cling on the leeward side of the rock, unseen by prowling Caribs, while I watched for the necessary schooner. But no, he had nearly three more weeks to spend with that girl and her gracious, beauteous but pliant mother.

We did not linger in the sea because I wanted no snooping shark to catch our scent and follow us into the lagoon. Once we had returned to the lagoon, each of us a little scratched from the final ingress into the sea but buoyed with what seemed an excellent plan of escape, Charlie said:

"Gloomer, you're getting slimmer and faster every day. I'll bet you're the fastest dolphin in the West Indies!"

I made deprecating noises, but I was immensely pleased. I was no longer a plump dolphin who ate to forget his grief. Not that I had forgotten my mother. I grieved for her every day. But my concern for Charlie was stronger than my grief. And there was something else. I felt that I had to be in the best possible shape for our escape. Suppose, in the next two weeks, I swam too near the shore or snoozed in the mangrove swamp and suddenly found myself with spears being hurled at me. Suppose the Caribs took after me in dugouts as I was carrying Charlie to the passage or from the passage

to the boat from Martinique. A plump dolphin would be little use to himself or his friend. I was not yet quite an adult. I still had some growth ahead of me, but I was rapidly becoming among dolphins what Charlie was among boys: a redoubtable combination of youth, agility and energy. Might the Great Turk help any hammerhead I rammed in the belly!

"But, Gloomer, you've scratched your beautiful skin!" Charlie cried.

I dove to the bottom of the lagoon and returned with a particularly insignificant piece of seaweed between my jaws.

"Should I rub it on you?"

I presented my wounded flank. He crushed the plant in his hand and a white juice flowed out like milk from a cactus. Very gently his big hands massaged my wound and the smart disappeared.

But his own shoulder revealed a welt which he had overlooked. I snorted indignantly and pointed my snout. (To what gesticulations our language barrier had reduced me!)

"Oh, that's nothing."

He was not even going to medicine himself. I caught his arm between my jaws and guided his still milky hand to his own wound.

He smiled. "I didn't know how much it was hurting until it stopped. Thank you, Gloomer. You're a physician as well as a friend."

"And a historian," I would have liked to add. I earnestly wanted him to know that I intended to compose his history as my life's chief work. It was the greatest compliment I could pay him.

When Charlie left me, I felt my usual wistfulness but also a momentary exhilaration. We were united by a great adventure, and the very danger was provocative to a dolphin who had gloomed and moped for several months. I had little doubt that I could rescue Charlie from that dangerous island, and the comradeship of adventure promised to bind us as tightly as the halves of a closed clam.

But exhilaration soon yielded to anxiety. Hardly had Charlie climbed the hill to the Red House than I saw a black dorsal fin scything the surface, and almost at the same time I opened my mouth and tasted the rankness of shark in the water. I thought at first that the fellow had followed my scent through the passage. But there had been no sharks in the area when Charlie and I had emerged into the sea. Furthermore, this was a relatively small fellow, a five-foot, adolescent hammerhead, and I did not think he would deliberately have sought out a confrontation with a dolphin. Either he had blundered into the passage in spite of his poor eyesight, or he had been directed or summoned. Sharks are hopelessly stupid and

unteachable. They operate purely on the level of instinct, swim, kill, eat, and rest. But instinct can be manipulated by a clever human. How else are ignorant pigeons made to carry messages? I surmised the manipulations of Curk.

At any rate, the lagoon was no longer a place for joyful frolicking. I charged directly at the interloper; maybe I could startle him back through the passage if he could remember its whereabouts. He skittered out of my path with much more fright than fight. I would have overtaken and engaged him if I had known for certain that he was a loner and not the first of a school. His eyes, widely spaced and protrusive, made him very vulnerable to my buttings. But I strongly suspected that he would soon be followed by larger friends. The Man Who Swam With The Sharks would hardly deign to swim with a single insignificant hammerhead. It behooved me to find a sanctuary, a place where no shark or sharks, however large, could threaten me, and no Caribs could threaten Charlie. In other words, a sea cave which contained both earth and water and whose entrance could be concealed. I set out for the mangrove swamp. If no sanctuary existed, I would build one among those marvelously adaptable roots and that soft, sodden earth. Perhaps it was at that moment that I became an adult.

Generally a mangrove swamp is a paradise for adventurous dolphins. We can navigate among its canals much better than big, lumbering, dim-eyed sharks and visit with lackadaisical sea cows, who never lose their tempers and who look as if they are listening to our histories even when they have fallen asleep. We can feast ourselves on delicacies not found in the open sea—tiny crabs and eels of swallowable dimensions—and the egrets, the herons, the mangrove bushes themselves, with their cigar-shaped fruit, delight our sense of color, movement, and variety. However, we also know the perils, the moccasins, the strangling vines, the danger of getting lost from the sea or grounded in a mud flat and baked by the sun when the tide recedes, and in this particular swamp, the shiftless and bloodthirsty Caribs.

Fortunately, they were few in number—twenty adults and ten children—and they were not very venturesome; because of their native indolence, which they cultivated as other men cultivate talents, they subsisted rather than lived. They had built their shacks on the solid ground near the main path and managed to deface only a small area by littering garbage in their front yards and penning goats and pigs in their back yards. Curk himself ruled them but disdained their company and, as I have said, lived in one of the Eng-

lish cottages near the Red House.

In my explorations, I came a little too close to a shack and a horrid child pelted me with rotten banana skins. He had been torturing his dog until I arrived; Carib dogs look like their masters, lean and shifty, but who can blame them, poor things, with such models? Garbage is their only diet and even then they must scavenge in refuse heaps while children tweak their ears and parents kick them in the stomach. I caught a particularly decomposed banana skin between my jaws and returned it with force and frenzy, striking the child in the face. While he was blubbering his indignation, the tortured dog gave him a good nip on the leg and made his escape. So did I. Sanctuary did not lie in these parts.

I found what I was seeking nearer the lagoon. Guided by instinct more than eyesight, I thrust my nose through a tangle of greenery, which yielded to disclose a chamber so extraordinary that I thought: I have entered the palace of the Great Triton. This is his anteroom and soon his attendant mermen will appear to escort me to Elysium! I was vexed that I had been allowed to die before I had rescued Charlie. Then I realized with an immense relief that I was not, after all, in his palace, but rather in a place of his choosing and under his protection. The nacreous light reflected his sublimity and surely betokened the fact that here lay asylum for Charlie and me.

The roof was not of earth or vegetation, for I was not in a mangrove cave. With a twinkling of wonder I saw that it was mother-of-pearl. I was confronting a miracle shown to few dolphins and fewer men, a gigantic conch shell as big as a series of small caves. Such shells had thrived in the days when dolphins first took to the sea. Later the owners had become extinct, but here and there, beyond the waves and buried under the earth or hidden by vegetation, a shell remained, undimmed and undiminished, and I knew that I had found the best of sanctuaries. Envision a huge pink conch rather like the kind used by the natives as horns, but infinitely larger, with a pool and a dry ledge of shell just inside the long slit of the entrance; and with a series of connected water-filled chambers winding downwards and out of sight. I followed the narrowing chambers down to the last and smallest, which ended with the point of the shell, and then I ascended, whorl after whorl, darkness to dimness to light, into the highest chamber with its projecting shelf. Clearly, the Great Triton had directed me to asylum.

But we dolphins have a favorite epigram: "The Great Triton helps helpless little ones, but big ones must help themselves." Perhaps I

was still young enough to deserve a measure of help, but only if I made the most of such. If a shark should follow my scent from the lagoon, there was nothing to keep him from charging through the thin screen of mangrove trees. The sublimity of the place would not deter him. Such creatures have no sense of propriety—and no sense of deity. The formidable and finny god Tark is worshiped by the Caribs and not by the sharks themselves, who are much too stupid to think that the world did not create itself for the sole purpose of housing them in its waters and providing fish (and sailors) for their bellies.

With snout, flippers, and tail, I began to construct a barrier. I tangled the mangroves to such an extent that a shark would, I hoped, hesitate to entangle himself and, losing patience, prowl in other parts. In case he persisted and broke through the vines, I dredged up rocks from the bottom of the water outside the conch and pushed them into a crude barricade which retained a passage only large enough for Charlie or me. Once inside, we could finish our wall with a few more stones and also break our scent. You know how skillful we are with our snouts, or in crude human jargon, "bottle noses." We are always having to catch and carry to amuse human beings, and I was not the first of my race to put such a skill into building a wall without hands. When I left my conch—shell house—and I left it provisioned with bananas (for Charlie) and fish (for me) in case of a siege—I observed with pride that no ordinary, weak-eyed, weak-brained shark could spot or suspect a cave behind the entanglement of mangroves and the rock wall. Then I returned to the lagoon to see if the hammerhead had been joined by friends. Otherwise, I felt that I could no longer tolerate his presence. I had not given chase or battle since the death of my mother. Since that time I had lost weight and gained strength. I wished both to test my new prowess and to secure the lagoon at least temporarily for Charlie, in case he should scramble in for a swim.

But in the lagoon a disquieting sight awaited me: five hammerheads, including the original invader. I could hardly take on the lot of them. I had found my sanctuary none too soon. They flickered toward me, retreated, advanced, retreated, keeping always a space of water between us. As often as not a dozen sharks will encounter a lone dolphin and not attack him. Then one of them will suddenly change his mind and begin that great deadly sweep, and the others will forget their cowardice because of their superior numbers and attack, though at random and without any plan of

battle such as killer whales devise. But not today. Assured that I was alone and no threat to them, they moved across the lagoon and began to feed in the fishy shallows.

I was not so much frightened by their presence as infuriated. The lagoon had belonged to Charlie and me. Here we had become friends. Here I could look after him. Then I remembered what I should not have forgotten, that all of the island including the lagoon belonged to Curk, and now he was simply reclaiming what he had not needed for a while. I had no doubt that it was he who had summoned the sharks. Was it almost time for the Goat without Horns? If so, the "goat" could hardly be Jill's first-born daughter. What else then? Though ignorant of Carib customs, I wracked my brain for a historical precedent in other lands. Some of the ancient Minoans, I recalled, though commendably kind to dolphins and fond of portraying us in their frescoes, had not always been so gracious to each other—indeed, to their own kings. Every year they had chosen a new king, and as soon as he had impregnated the queen, he had been sacrificed to secure the fertility of the fields.

X

Three weeks and four days: had he been so long on the island? The nights had passed in a mist of love; the days in lessons with Jill—polite, always polite now, but strained with awkward silences and reproachful eyes. Occasionally a visit to the lagoon (but no more swims—the sharks were idle but ever-threatening). Soon, the boat from Martinique. Soon, his flight from Oleandra—from danger and, alas, from love.

Dinner that night was one whose silences were broken only by the gracious but halfhearted sallies of Elizabeth. Guilt was a fourth guest in the room. Charlie was unashamed of his love for Elizabeth, indeed, proud; but Jill reminded him, with every gesture and every silence, that he had rejected her in favor of her mother, wounded her pride and broken her heart. Had she told her father? Did she mean to tell him? It was she who had summoned guilt to the banquet, guilt and apprehension.

Charlie marveled at Elizabeth's composure. She surmounted not only the awkwardness of the occasion, but the folds and intricacies of a dress whose magnificence was matched by its magnitude. Its green-silver silk, trimmed with red roses to the tip of the train, rippled and coruscated in the light of the candelabrum. The sweet and artful dishevelment of her hair—the golden ringlets escaping down her back: He thought of Rapunzel in the old fairy tale whose hair

had become a ladder for a knight to climb in order to rescue her from the witch who kept her imprisoned. No longer did he think of her as an older woman, beautiful but august, who had engaged him to tutor her daughter. She was his own beloved Elizabeth, to whom he was drawn with an idealistic yearning which did not need to deny her faults, and also with the sheer physical hunger of an inexperienced but ardent boy for a beautiful and deliberately seductive woman.

Even Jill had worn a dress to dinner: cream silk patterned with daffodils. She had also combed her hair and, short though it was, she looked distinctly feminine, though ill at ease. She was trying to rearrange the long skirt and accommodate herself and her dress to the chair. As for Charlie he was none too comfortable himself in his long frock coat of broadcloth with velvet-laced lapels, together with waistcoat and gold Prince Albert watch chain. Except for Elizabeth's sallies, the three of them seemed locked into a tableau of formal clothes and stiff manners. He felt that if they spoke at all, they should speak epigrams out of Congreve or Sheridan.

It was then that the drum began in the Carib village. The candelabrum, with its host of roseate angels, swayed above their heads; the goblets tinkled on the table. It did not play to summon or lament, but rather to exult: Storms reverberated in its exultance, and the wind which compelled the waves, and a torrid tropic sun, and animals too—birds and fish, eagles and barracudas, the swiftest, the strongest—all things wild, unfettered, elemental, uniting in a fierce paean of joy.

"It's nothing to be frightened of," said Jill tartly, though no one had expressed any fright. "It's just a simple drum four feet high and made of bamboo, with a black goatskin pegged across the top."

"Nobody's frightened," said Charlie. "Just mystified. Is it Curk playing?"

"Who else?"

"Is it for a festival of some kind?"

"It could just as easily be for a funeral. The drum plays on both occasions."

He was sick of evasions and reticences. "The funeral of the Goat without Horns?"

She stared at him as if she expected Tark to punish his blasphemy with a waterspout hurled from the depths. "I don't know what you mean."

"What I mean is this. First, the sharks. Now the drum. Jill, what in the name of Tark is going to happen?"

"The boat from Martinique is due in three days, as you doubtless know. I expect you'll go aboard her and leave our little island to its—mysteries."

"Well, at any rate we've had enough mystery for one night," Elizabeth interjected, reasserting her supremacy over the table. "Let's imagine that we're dining with William Morris, who said that beauty and simplicity were the same thing." Plainly she feared the frankness of Charlie's questions or Jill's answers. She embraced the room with an expressive sweep of her hand, and Charlie contemplated the plain, scrubbed, but ruggedly beautiful oak of the table, the willow-patterned china, the small chairs with plaited osier seats, the red Gothic sideboard, the tapestry of gold thread on woolen twill, illustrating Chaucer's illustrious women. And most of all, the room itself with its high ceiling and exposed beams.

But his thoughts were not with Morris.

"And you even have a fireplace," he forced himself to remark. "Morris still loves an open fire, they say. It sets him off on one of his stories. And he will never let anyone paint the natural bricks or clutter the mantel in any of his houses." He was trying to think of Morris; he was trying not to think about the black land crabs steamed in greens which lay untouched on his plate and, according to the dictates of his stomach, untouchable; he was mostly thinking about Elizabeth and, what with sharks and drums and Goats without Horns, wondering if he could prevail upon her to leave the island with him.

"Yes, I had to have a fireplace, though it's rather absurd in this warm climate. Still, the nights do get chilly at times, and then I light my fire. It makes me feel as if I were back in England again."

"And I noticed something else," said Charlie. "All the food stays hot until it reaches the table. You took Morris' advice about where to build the kitchen."

"Build it close to the dining room!" Most English houses separated the kitchen from the dining room with a host of lesser chambers, and the last guests to be served usually received cold squabs in coagulated gravy or blackberries swimming in melted ices.

Suddenly Jill flung back her chair and sprang to her feet, overlooking Telesphorus who, muffled in his hood and muffled of step, had crept behind her to refill her goblet with port. The copper flagon fell from his hand and bounced soundlessly but wetly over the rug, dispersing drops like a garden sprinkler. While his father bustled apologetically from the kitchen to dry up the spilled wine, Jill glared at Charlie and her mother, as if to lock them into a single conspiracy.

"You and your poets. How can you talk about William Morris tonight?" Where was the Jill to

whom he had given the fiddler crab, the wistful girl who had accepted his rejection with grave resignation?

He was losing patience. "Jill, do you know what is going to happen tonight? If you do, I wish you would enlighten us."

"No." The answer was sullen as well as ambiguous. He had supposed her to be in her father's confidence, but her explosion and evasiveness suggested uncertainty or perhaps a knowledge too terrible either to contain or share.

"But the Caribs haven't had a festival for years," said Elizabeth, "and unfortunately they don't have many funerals. Unless they happen to knife each other in a moment of pique, they just make love or lie in the sun like alligators and live to a lecherous old age."

"You have no right to talk about them like that," Jill shouted. "They're a poor little remnant of a great people, and you ought to dwell on their past instead of criticizing them now." She flounced out of the room, rushing no doubt to muss her hair and don her sailor togs.

Telesphorus had vanished into the kitchen with his father, who was muttering parental rebukes while his son was pleading, "But I didn't dent the flagon." Charlie and Elizabeth looked at each other with a shared helplessness which made Charlie, at least, feel much less helpless. He took her hand.

"Has she told him I rejected her?" Charlie asked.

"I don't think so."

"Does he know about us?"

"No. His pride will admit no rivals. His pride, I say, not his heart. You see," she added, a little wistfully, "it isn't love he feels for me. It's possession. I am no longer a necessity or a novelty to him, only a habit. All I can say for myself is that I am a difficult habit for him to break."

She put a cautioning finger to her lips as Telesphorus returned to serve the dessert of papaya balls soaked in rum and lime juice. The little orange globes swam in transparent amethyst goblets, like suns in a galaxy.

Charlie recaptured her hand as soon as the boy had returned to the kitchen. "Elizabeth, I'm not sorry. I shall never be sorry, unless Curk harms you. But that's not going to happen. You're coming to England with me." At this point hand-holding seemed to him singularly inadequate. He raised her hand to his lips and kissed her fingertips and deliberated if he could attain the mouth before the next entrance of the domestics.

"It's you, my dear, who may be hurt."

"I don't think so," he said stoutly, if not with complete conviction. "What is Curk's strength, really? Mystery, more than anything else, wouldn't you say? Nobody knows him, not even you, af-

ter sixteen years. But if we could see through him, mightn't we find just a big bully who rules over a scraggly bunch of savages?"

"No, Charlie. Whatever he is, he's not like us. His mystery, I'm afraid, is as terrible as we imagine. If you ever doubt that, look in the lagoon where you swim with your friend. This morning from my bedroom I saw a sight to freeze my blood. Jill was clambering over some tumbled rocks, black and lava-like, which spilled right down into the water. She scurried over them with the agility of her tarantulas, carrying a basket under her arm. There was a final rock which jutted over the water like a small ledge. She knelt, drew off the cover from the basket, and removed a fish. Three black fins converged on the bait.

" 'Jill,' I cried, but she could not—or would not—hear me from such a distance.

"As gently as a dog from his master's hand, the first of the hammerheads took the fish. His companions did not disturb his feast. Restraint among sharks. Unthinkable! Then I saw that Jill was not alone. A solitary figure loomed on the cliff above her head. She had known that he was close to her. She looked up at him and he smiled and nodded his approval."

"You think he's trained them not to harm her?"

"At least when he's close to her. I think he has actually taken her swimming with them in the sea. If she swam alone, who can say? They're almost totally instinctive, and Curk is the only man I ever knew who could control that instinct."

Charlie shuddered. "And Jill thinks they're beautiful. She trusts them as she does her spiders."

"You're very fond of her, aren't you?"

"In a way, I am. Fond of and sorry for."

"Find her, will you, Charlie? She won't have gone far at night. Not even Jill ventures beyond the village after dark."

"What shall I say to her?"

"That we miss her in the house. Try to convince her not to tell her father that she is—how shall I say—not with child by you."

She was sitting under the acacia trees and looking as if she would like to cry but did not intend to let Charlie or anyone else see her a second time in so undignified and undisguised a state. She had not mussed her dress or her hair, and she might have been an English schoolgirl who had been neglected at her first ball. She spoke in a whisper, but the drum had stopped, and he could understand her in the stillness of the night, whose only voice was the piping of an occasional tree frog.

She met him with an accusation. "You've come to ask me if I

told my father about your scorning me."

"No."

"But mother asked you to ask me, didn't she?"

"I came because I wanted to."

"You think I'm still angry because you preferred mother. You see, I know you spent the night with her. Two nights, in fact. At first I was furious with both of you. I almost went to Curk. I wanted him to hurt you, and mother too. But then I realized why it was you couldn't love me. Because you had already loved mother. Since that very first night, I think. It was wrong of you to love her, but she is very beautiful and you were lonely. And I took you to her myself, didn't I? In a sense, you were being faithful to your first love. A woman likes a man to be faithful. Even to her rival, at first. Then, when she finally wins him, her triumph is doubled. Otherwise, she will value him lightly as too easily won. I only wish I had been first."

He noticed a subtle but significant change in her use of the word "love" which he could not ascribe to her reading. She no longer sounded as if she were speaking about copulation among the Caribs.

"I do love her," he said. "She's like a Christmas evergreen hung with garlands and berry-chains. Even when she's still, she somehow twinkles and dazzles."

"And I do forgive you. I guess I'm more of a young fir tree. Hard and prickly."

"A sapling, I should say, and strong rather than prickly. But have you also forgiven your mother for—being fond of me?"

She shrugged helplessly. "I stay angry with her about half the time. I used to think it was because she was so different from me, soft and pampered and frilly, with a wastefully large bosom. But since you came, I think it's because I'm so different from *her*. Yes, I've forgiven her for loving you. But not for being beautiful and golden and loved by you."

"But you have your own kind of beauty. Your mother is a bird of paradise. You're a—" The poet in him strained for a metaphor which would please her, "—a quicksilver tarpon. Quicker than a dolphin!" (Indeed!)

He patted her shoulder, a brother with a younger sister, and said nothing, because there was nothing more of comfort which he could say. His gesture was protective and instinctive and totally lacking in amorous intent.

She lifted the arm from her shoulder. "You're just making it worse. If we're going to be buddies, I think we should restrict ourselves to a manly handshake."

"But that was a manly pat," he tried to explain. "The kind I give Gloomer."

"But it means something differ-

ent to me. You feel as if you're just patting me hello or maybe keeping me warm. But I tremble all over like a—" he awaited one of her stark metaphors, "—a shower-of-gold petal caught in a breeze."

"No embraces then. Just handshakes."

"Well, maybe now and then a *little* one." She replaced his arm and did not set limits on the duration of its visit. "Now I've kept two secrets for you," she said at last. "Your rejecting me and your fondness for my mother. That makes us very special friends, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does."

"As close as you and that dolphin?" Having discussed his love for her mother with surprising candor, she was a little girl again, pleading for affection.

Charlie could not lie even to be tactful (if I were one of the old, land-dwelling dolphins with limbs, I would have hugged him for his honesty).

"Gloomer is my best friend. Remember, I met him before I met you. But you're special to me too."

She looked pensive. "I suppose I'll have to be content, though it would be so much nicer to be *very* special. It isn't flattering when you lose out to a dolphin, though maybe this one can be trusted after all. At least, he hasn't tried to eat you, and he's had a great many chances. The way you undress, he wouldn't have even had to worry about indigestion from cloth or buttons. I did notice a scar on your shoulder, though. Did he nip you there?"

"I bruised myself on a rock, and Gloomer healed me with some juice from seaweed." He trusted her—for the moment—but he was not going to tell her about the passage to the sea. Girls of fifteen had been known to change their minds; Jill had changed her mind as often as the sea changed its moods. The simile seemed to him unoriginal but nonetheless applicable.

"If he only weren't so ugly." She deliberated. "And yet you like your women all golden and fluffy. I would expect you to make friends with a parrot fish instead of a dolphin. Or perhaps—"

"My children, it is time."

They had not been aware of Curk's approach until he knelt behind them and enfolded them in a single embrace. They both started to their feet. He smiled. It was a night of smiles, encouraging, conspiratorial, wistful, and now triumphant.

"For the Goat without Horns?" Jill's voice faltered with rare fear. Was it possible that she did not know the nature of the ritual?

"Yes."

"Where, my father?"

"On the Cliff That Looms Like a Shark." His words were forbidding but his voice held the tender-

ness of a devoted parent. His arm around Charlie's shoulder was almost paternal. It was also irresistible. It held and compelled him toward the place for which, knowingly or not, he had been bound since he had read the advertisement in the *London Times*.

Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.

XI

Wordlessly they exchanged their clothes for the garments offered to them by the wordless Curk, the garments of the festival. With the joyous abandonment of a moth which sheds its chrysalis, Jill shed her ankle-long frock, her Englishness, and her innocence, for a tight leather tunic with beads woven into intricate designs of sea anemones and coral forests. With abandonment which was anything but joyous, Charlie exchanged his frock coat for a loin cloth like that of Curk.

"I'm a bloody savage," he thought.

Curk surveyed them with familial pride. He seemed to make no distinction between them now that he thought them mates.

"It is time, my children. You are ready—and worthy."

No one spoke as they climbed the side of the cliff, but Charlie's mind was a coliseum of conflicting selves. The gladiator in him said: Act now, break loose from this magnificent but slit-cheeked savage before he delivers you to his friends; attack him or flee from him. The martyr said: If he meant to harm you, would he treat you like a son? Besides, there is no escape from him on this island. At least go with him to the cliff and learn his intention.

The path was precipitous and seemed to have been oftener climbed by goats than men. There were treacherous stones which slipped from under your feet and sheer vertical rises with only roots for hand- or foot-holds. But there were resting places of verdurous moss overhung with frangipani trees, and the air was sweet with the fragrance so beloved by Elizabeth. Yet it seemed the wrong scent for such a night and place. There should be—what? Incense, perhaps, frankincense or myrrh. Something a little acrid and—sacrificial.

Charlie had often been mountain climbing in Scotland, and there were no difficulties for him on this small cliff, except that of keeping up with Jill, who had played her solitary games in just such places, if not in this very place. Curk did not seem to climb or scramble so much as to ascend. There was no effort in his movements, no labored breaths or pauses to rest; there was assurance and ease and most of all dignity. Instead of a slit-cheeked savage,

he seemed the genius of the mountain, vouchsafing guidance to those who aspired to his heights.

The top of the cliff was hidden for most of the climb. Then, suddenly, they stood among pine-knot torches, a forest of writhing brilliances. The darkness had been protective; the light was a nakedness and a confrontation.

The altar was one of the high places of the Old Testament, but pagan, Philistine, not Israelite, not dedicated to Yahweh, for its stones were shaped into the semblance of a deity with the head and shoulders of a shark and the body of a man, a reversal of the fish-tailed Dagon whose temple Samson had leveled. The Caribs—the twenty adults from the village—had assembled beside the altar. Noisy chatterers by day, indolent and decadent, they stood now with the stillness of stones as their king, his daughter, and his—disciple? captive?—approached them. In the torchlight it was possible to imagine them to be their own ancestors at the height of their power before the coming of the Spaniards. Barbaric with black slit cheeks and with golden earrings in the form of sharks, and yet with a ghost of sublimity imparted by their adoration of Curk. He was their master; he was their god as well as Tark; only he could remember the old way and conjur them momentarily out of their indolence and decadence.

The Caribs moved from the altar and out of the torchlit circle and hovered like vertical shadows beyond the light. Curk moved into the circle with Jill and Charlie. He lifted his arms to pray in a gesture immemorially older than the familiar kneeling of Christians, yet in his words rang cadences learned from the Bible.

"We have fallen from the mountaintops," he said. "Travailed in the valleys of shadow while inferior beings frolicked among our cloudlands. Combated demons and felt the scream of their shafts. But the time has come for the fallen to arise; the conquerors to fall. Our god has not forsaken us, nor has he suffered wounds from the spears of the conquerors. He has walked with us in our exile, quietly, quietly, until we could not hear his tread. But quietness is not his accustomed way. Through me he thunders; through me he speaks to you.

" 'Curk,' he has said. 'Give me a gift to delight my heart, and I will uplift your people to their old eminence.'

" 'Father,' I replied. 'What gift shall my people and I, thus fallen, find to pleasure you?'

" 'I am lonely,' he said. 'In the sea I find no companion except my sharks; on the mountaintops, I walk without comrades, though the goats roam in herds and the hawk has her nest of young. I,

though a god, may suffer a human travail. Find me a daughter and son to bear a child in my name. Consecrate him to me, who shall be his father and brother, teacher and friend. Then you shall climb the mountain of your lost mornings.'

" 'Father,' I said. 'I will do this thing. I will bring you my own flesh, my own beloved daughter, whom I have reared to your glory. I will bring you the stalwart youth whose strength has quickened her loins. I will yield you these, my children, to be your children, and they in turn will yield you their unborn child.' "

An Ancient of Days he stood, though his face showed little age; a vessel of his god's command. His voice held the roll of thunder, his arm might have hurled a thunderbolt. And yet he wept. He who had swum with the sharks wept mortal tears.

He lowered his arms and the god was gone from him.

He held out his hands and drew Jill and Charlie into a single embrace. Slowly, with infinite tenderness, he kissed Jill on the mouth.

"My daughter. You are without fear?"

"I am without fear, my father."

"My son, you shall fear for a little and then be fearless forever."

They had come to the edge of the cliff, the lights behind them, the sea before them, an opaque mirror of reflected torches and vast shadows, windless, motionless, flawless. The breaking of the mirror was without sound, but it seemed to resound in Charlie's ears. The reflected lights rippled, the shadows shifted, nothing more; but Charlie felt a horror of total loss, a desecration of Curk's prayer and the solemnity of the night. For the breakers were hammerheads.

The Caribs stiff with reverence; the prayer like a psalm; the motionless lagoon—these had been design and order; these had been beautiful. But chaos had come with the sharks, and to Charlie the ultimate horror was the fact that to everyone else they completed rather than broke the ritual, finished the magic circle to conjur Deity.

At the silent prompting of Curk, his hand outstretched to command and conjur, the Caribs joined him at the edge of the cliff. Exalted and exultant, they saw their god epitomized in the creature most dear to him. Both sharks and men, it seemed, had gathered for mutual homage to the god who swam in the sea like a shark or climbed the cliffs like a man.

Even Jill seemed to find a rightness in the coming of the sharks. She watched them without fear; tall and proud, a chieftain's child, ready to sacrifice herself like Jephthah's daughter.

The devil take such a ritual!

thought Charlie. The devil is *in* the ritual. He had climbed the cliff and he meant to return the way he had come—with Jill. He touched her arm, not to steady her, for she did not need to be steadied—her grace was flawless—but to beseech her back to his world. But she was beyond his supplication.

Then, she was beyond his touch. Quicksilvering the night, she dove from the cliff. The Goat without Horns. . .

At last he could act. At last he knew how to act. He did not stop to rationalize: she has fed the sharks from her own hands. Perhaps they will not harm her even when she dives among them. He saw a friend, more beloved than he had realized, in what seemed to him deadly peril. He had no choice. He would dive after her.

But even as he leaned from the cliff, he felt the implacable hands of Curk around his waist.

"Look, my son."

She was swimming with the sharks. She swam beside them, between them, among them, rested her hand on a cruel, misshapen head. She rippled the torchlight reflections, catching the light in her hair, herself like a newly lit torch. Light among darkness, she swam in that black-magicked sea and received no hurt.

They rose and sank around her, took her caresses, taking, always taking; giving neither love nor affection but taking the sensuous warmth from her hand, the hypnotic rhythm from her body.

She was laughing now; she dove, frolicked, flaunted her newfound powers. The motion of the sharks increased. They splashed beside her, nuzzled her, prodded her. The water began to foam and churn.

"I'm going to ride them!" she cried. "Like Charlie with his dolphin. Which one shall I ride?"

"Daughter!"

The word was command and caution. He had briefly loaned her his power; her immunity was not yet perfect.

"Yes, my father?"

"Enough. You have swum with the sharks and will again. Swim now to the beach. At once, my child, but without haste."

She obeyed with reluctant strokes, looking over her shoulder at her new friends and coaxing them to escort her on her journey.

Charlie watched her until she had climbed onto the beach, and Curk watched her until she had sought the path to the cliff and was hiddden from both the lagoon and the place of the altar. Until it appeared that she could not see him.

"And now, my son. You too. . ."

Needless to say, I had swum as close to the sharks and the cliff as I had dared. I was well aware that

they could scent me, just as I could have scented any one of them, and together their rank, indescribable smell of blood and rotten melons assaulted my nostrils and almost turned my four stomachs. But they were not at the moment concerned with a lone dolphin. They were hearkening first to the man on the cliff, then to Jill.

I must admit that I watched her with real trepidation. For the first time, I felt a grudging fondness for her and a fear for her safety. Nobody, not even Curk's daughter, not even Curk, should trust a shark. But at least she had pleased herself and her father and, I hoped, completed the ritual for that dreaded night.

Dreadful night, I should say. It was then that I saw Charlie's fall or, because of my limited vision, that final part of the fall which he somehow turned into a partial dive.

I knew who had thrown him. I hated the thrower with a hatred which was sheer malevolence and which totally belied the popular notion of dolphins as playful and benign. I hated the thrower as I had hated the shark which had killed my mother. But anger was a wicked luxury unless I put it to work. For Charlie.

Evidently he had been flung, outward and downward, with such force that he would land with a stupefying splash and would excite the sharks to immediate attack. But he was as agile in the air as on the land, and he managed to strike the lagoon with arms in front of him and to break the water without a frenzy of splashing. Quickly but quietly he rose to the surface among the slow-moving fins and slowly began to swim for the beach. When the sharks converged behind him, a ridiculous image flashed into my brain: six black pirate sails behind a Spanish treasure ship. Left to themselves, they might have followed him to shore and let him escape out of sheer lethargy or curiosity. Sharks have no sense of beauty, but they do have a sense of rhythm, and the gliding body of Charlie lulled them and soothed them. Hypnotically he swam; hypnotized they followed but did not attack him.

It was then that I felt the compulsion hurled from the cliff, a sheer animal energy which spoke to the sharks on the one level they could understand, that of pure instinct: KILL. For me, it was like being enveloped in the inky cloud of a squid, noxious, suffocating to the mind if not to the lungs.

I put my anger to use. I streaked toward Charlie at thirty knots and reached him ahead of the sharks.

He grasped my fin, he gasped my name, and we set out for my sanctuary like a triton from the jaws of a whale. I could have attained the beach without diffi-

culty, but once Charlie climbed ashore, the Caribs would doubtless come screaming down from the cliff, and he would have been rescued only to be recaptured while I was trapped by the sharks. Thus, I chose the swamp.

With the additional weight of Charlie, I could not hope to outrun the sharks in a long chase. But they floundered for several seconds before they began their pursuit. They were frightened; the smell of dolphin always disturbs them, and for all they knew I might be one of a herd. They were also bewildered. Curk's command was penetrating their tiny brains, but where was the man to be killed? Once their nostrils had told them that there was only one dolphin, who had joined his scent to that of the man, I had skirted around them and aimed for the mangrove swamp.

By the time I reached the swamp, they were close behind me; their smell was more than offensive, it was horrendous, and I could hear the ominously gentle rippling of water parted by fins.

But the swamp befuddled them. It was not their habitat; its meandering canals baffled their poor vision. They tangled themselves in the snaky mangrove roots; they became separated and frightened; and I, after circling, crisscrossing, and losing, I trusted, the last of them, made for the sanctuary.

I nuzzled my way through the concealment of vegetation and revealed the opening in my stone barricade. Then I withdrew and helped, or rather shoved, Charlie through the opening and followed him, restoring the vegetation behind me with my tail and, once I saw him safely on the ledge, lifting the stones in place with my beak to shut the entrance. Charlie handed them to me one at a time from the ledge.

"If you aren't the cleverest fellow," he said, patting my head when the last stone was in place. "You've saved my life, you know. I thought there was only one Goat without Horns—or one and a half, counting Jill's hypothetical baby—but there seem to have been two, and I was the edible one."

Well, yes, he was and I had. But how could a friend do otherwise? I told him so in my best English.

"I keep thinking you're trying to tell me things," he said. "But I just can't understand what you're saying. Forgive me, old chap. And now I think we deserve a rest, don't you?" As for me, I felt no fatigue, but a marvelous exhilaration at having rescued my friend and brought him to my house. As for Charlie, he discovered my provisions and decided that he would rather eat than rest. The fish were some I had caught in the lagoon and beheaded with a

neat chomp of my jaws. The bananas I had stolen from the Caribs, who had left a succulent bunch too close to a canal and within reach of my versatile snout. English schoolboys, like dolphins, can always eat, even when they have almost been eaten. "I guess we must just stay here for three days and then try to slip through to the passage and meet the boat."

Yes, that was the sensible thing to do. I acquiesced with my usual ungainly nod and pointed to another fish, meaning to suggest that he try it with his seventh banana. He misunderstood—purposely, I fear, since the fish was raw—and passed it to me, along with a banana, which he thoughtfully removed from its skin. The fish was a tasty mullet which I devoured with much relish, though I wanted to lecture him on the nutritional advantages of raw fish and the need for a balanced diet.

"And once on board, I shall lead a party ashore and rescue Elizabeth!" By now he was thoroughly enjoying our adventure. "And take Jill with us by force, if we have to."

I snorted; I have never been one to hide my emotions.

He came to her defense. "I don't think she had the least notion what was going to happen. Not to me anyway. Only to herself. Why else did Curk wait until she couldn't see him when he threw me to the sharks? He knew how horrified she would be. By now he's no doubt told her that I fell or jumped in to save her and got myself eaten."

I looked at him thoughtfully and concluded that for once his trust might be justified. No one who looked and talked like Charlie could fail to turn a young girl's heart. No, Jill could not have known what her father intended for him. He was a hero unaware of his heroism. Stripped of his English tweeds and his sailor's garb, dressed in a loin cloth, he had ceased to be English; he had become Rousseau's Noble Savage (you see, I know my human philosophy as well as my human history).

While I was admiring Charlie and Charlie was vindicating Jill, we finished my entire stock of provisions down to one last overripe banana and a small, gristly looking fish.

"Gloomer, we have gorged ourselves," announced Charlie. "Tomorrow we shall have to go foraging among the mangroves. You don't think the sharks will—?"

The attack was more than sudden, it was instantaneous. My barricade did not so much yield as dissolve. We had been invaded; we were on the verge of being devoured; and the invader and devourer was a huge hammerhead, the ugliest if not quite the cruelest of all the sharks. Nature is sometimes deceptive; she

has concealed poison in the beautiful, tapering leaves of the oleander, but in the hammerhead, she wrought to reveal the soul. With his cruel flat head like a mallet and his wide-spaced, ogling eyes, he is what he seems: both scavenger and killer.

My first thought was: Charlie, press yourself against the wall. He can't get to you on the back of the ledge. My second thought was to join Charlie. Many a dolphin while chasing an elusive fish has dived into a boat or onto a beach. I could breathe on the ledge and remain fairly comfortable until my skin began to dry. My third thought, which coincided with rather than succeeded the second, was that the Great Triton had created sharks in error, or perhaps inherited them from an older Creation, and dolphins were meant to rectify the error or the inheritance. This one looked huge, but size might work against him in so small a space. Had not the lumbering galleons of the Spanish Armada reeled before the swift small pinnaces of England?

The shark was surrounded by the debris of the barricade—leaves, bits of mangrove branches, stones—and still a little confused by his new and constrictive surroundings. He had doubtless scented me by now, probably seen me, but not yet attacked me. He was four times my length; his skin was hard and prickly with innumerable spines. The teeth in his flattened head were a multiple horror. I chose to go for his eyes, which were peculiarly vulnerable because they protruded from his head. If I could blind him, he could still scent me. But the pain might drive him from the shell, and the loss of one sense would at least limit his maneuverability. I rammed him in the left eye, and he recoiled with a suddeness which sent a small wave rolling over the ledge. Charlie, by the way, was leaning from the ledge with a sharp stone which he had rescued from the debris and awaiting his chance.

Now for the other eye. But he was growing warier and more at ease in the narrow confines of our battleground. He made a slow, calculated circuit of the chamber to gauge its shape and size, and all the while he thrashed his head and tail to discourage attack. Now, now, I thought, and lunged at his other eye. But I badly misjudged his speed and took a terrific blow from his tail. I found myself bruised and breathless, across the chamber from him. If he had caught me then, he could have finished with his teeth what his tail had begun. I was not wounded but I was winded.

A blur of images, again the horrible thrashing, Charlie on the ledge with empty hands, a stone which had somehow struck its mark and lodged in the one good

eye. (Charlie, Charlie, stay on the ledge! You've done all you can to help me.)

Charlie was out of stones. He was climbing into the water to replenish his supply and possibly, no probably, lure the attacker until I had recovered my wind. (Idiot, stay where you are!)

I was forced into a dangerous expedient to regain the shark's attention. I flicked him insolently with my tail and dove into the second and smaller chamber. He could block my passage back to the air. Remember, I breathe through lungs, instead of gills. He could also attack Charlie. But I counted on his anger to spur him after me, and his ignorance of how the chambers diminished in size.

There was scarcely room for him in the second chamber. His body full-length, stretched from wall to wall. I dipped and rolled and somehow eluded both his teeth and the bruising walls, and dove as if I were entering the third and lowest chamber. Again he followed me. The smell of shark was rank in my lungs; he was like a plague of darkness descending on a happy land. At the last possible second, I somersaulted up from the entrance and over him and watched his enormous momentum carry him into the lowest, smallest chamber of the shell. He could not turn; he could only try to back up; and I dove at his tail and caught it between my teeth. He thrashed like a boar in a net, strained away from me, and crammed his wide head into the lowest reach of the shell. His wounded eyes received an additional wounding, and whenever he tried to back, I assaulted his tail with my own by no means negligible teeth and shredded the leathery skin.

In the end, he destroyed himself. It was not my attacks nor Charlie's stones. It was his own rage. He literally beat himself to death against the hard, unyielding shell—or so I judged from his convulsive agonies. The Great Triton had led me to the one battleground in which I could triumph over such an awesome adversary.

I did not remain to watch his final convulsions. I instinctively hated all sharks, and this shark had threatened my friend, but hatred ceases when the hated one dies without dignity in pain and humiliation.

I broke the surface in the highest chamber, my airhole working furiously, my body aching as if I had just been spewed from Edgar Allan Poe's maelstrom. I must have looked as if I had lost the fight.

"Gloomer, are you all right, old man?'" He spoke from the ledge, amidst a pile of dripping stones.

"Iss."

"Iss. Yes? Yes! You're speaking English!"

"Isssss."

"You have been all along, haven't you, and I haven't been understanding. My God, old man, tell me what happened below!"

"Ease daid."

"Dead, you say? You've killed him, Gloomer? You've saved my life again!" He surveyed my bruises. "We must get you some of that healing seaweed. That is, as soon as we can get out of here. And how we shall talk, once I catch onto your English a little better."

But there were other sharks in the lagoon, and Curk and the Caribs were waiting for Charlie, and I was tired, and—

Below us we heard a muffled rumbling, scraping, creaking, as when a sunken vessel, shaken by an earthquake, lumbers toward the surface. The water reddened with blood. Charlie looked at me with consternation.

"You did kill him, didn't you?"

I remembered an adage taught to me by the Old Bull. "Confidence kills sharks; overconfidence kills dolphins."

Charlie grasped a stone; I waited with sick expectancy, no longer, I feared, a hero to my hero; tired to the bone, exhausted of stratagems, ready to fight but expecting to lose.

"Never mind, we'll get him this time. But Gloomer. It . . . isn't . . . the . . . hammerhead."

It was the mutilated body of Curk.

XII

Charlie and Jill had met in the dining room for their last dinner in the Red House. Tomorrow the schooner would come from Martinique; tomorrow they would depart for England. Was it only a night ago that they had dined, he with apprehension, she with a restless anticipation, to the beat of a Carib drum? To Charlie, tonight should have been a time to rejoice; Curk was dead; the sharks had left the lagoon. The Caribs, bereft of their leader, had departed from the island in their dugout canoes on another lap of their journey to oblivion. But what to him had been a victory had been to Jill a tragedy. She had lost her father; she had lost her adopted people, loved in spite of their degeneracy; and Charlie could not rejoice. He could only try to console.

She sat with moist eyes, gallantly withholding her tears, and she might have been one of those English girls, brave and silent, who sent their sweethearts, brothers, and fathers to die in England's interminable little wars. He was glad that she did not know the full and ghastly circumstances of her father's death. She only knew that Charlie had come to the Red House in the dead of night, looking like a drowned sailor, and found her with Elizabeth as they sobbed in each other's arms, for him, not Curk, because they

thought that he had drowned in the lagoon.

"Elizabeth, Jill," he had gasped. "Curk is dead." He was too weary to delay his shattering news, but at least he could soften it with evasions and omissions. "Gloomer took me to a half-submerged cave in the mangrove swamp, but Curk came after me. We fought on a ledge and he fell into the water. Gloomer killed him to save my life."

Jill had shrieked and run from the room.

"Dear God, we must hide you," Elizabeth had cried. "The Caribs will want your scalp."

"Not any more. They intercepted me on my way here from the swamp. I told them what had happened—there was nothing else I could do—and took them to Curk's body. I thought they would kill me on the spot, but they seemed to lose all spirit. They didn't throw spears at Gloomer, and they didn't try to stop me from coming to you. They almost seemed afraid of us. I think they felt as if their god had let them down, and they were disgraced because of him. Disgraced and frightened."

But that was last night. He had waited for Jill all morning, gone to look for her in the afternoon, and found her under the banyan tree. He had even dared the tarantulas to bring her back with him. She had neither reproached nor questioned him. She had scarcely spoken to him. Now, at last, she spoke in a firm if wistful voice.

"I saw Curk try to kill you, Charlie. I was just at the edge of the beach when he flung you over the cliff. You see, I had lingered to watch the sharks. They seemed so beautiful and peaceful when I swam with them. I thought they were my friends. Believe me, I didn't know what he meant to do. When you killed him, you and Gloomer were simply protecting yourselves."

"You mustn't think harshly of your father," Charlie said. He had never grown used to hearing her speak of "Curk" instead of "Father." "It's true he tried to sacrifice me. But I honestly believe that he felt he was sending me directly to his god. It was the greatest honor he could pay to an Englishman."

"I try to think of it that way. I still love him, and I couldn't if I thought he was only cruel."

"Cruel isn't a word for a man like Curk. He didn't think in terms of good and bad, kind and cruel, but of strength and weakness."

"I know that, Charlie. And I was getting to be like him, wasn't I? But I like your way better now. You're strong *and* good. When we get to England, will I ever see you? Will you come down from Cambridge to see the girl who dressed like a pirate?"

"As often as I can!"

"I know you will as long as I'm with mother," she said without reproach. "You do love her, don't you?"

"Yes."

"I must pack now. All the gowns I never wore. I shall have to wear them in London. Do they still wear wigs at the balls?"

"Only the masquerades."

"On the voyage home, I will let my hair grow out. It grows fast and I should be presentable in a few months."

"You're more than presentable as you are. In a few months you'll be ravishing. The young men will flock around you like bees around a shower-of-gold tree."

"Do you know, I've never been farther than Martinique."

"You've a lot to see. But then, you've seen a lot, too. Right here on Oleandra."

"I could be content here, I think. I wouldn't miss the Caribs. Did you see how they turned away from me after Curk was dead? And how they carried their belongings down to the sea and loaded their dugouts and sailed away without even saying goodbye? They had only tolerated me because of Curk."

"He was their soul."

"Now they're soulless. They'll settle on another island and grow lazier and meaner, and get themselves killed off completely. And I did like them so much! I guess I saw them through Curk's eyes. As they had once been, in the old days. As they were at the festival, when Curk was praying to Tark. Charlie, will you excuse me? I don't want you to see me cry."

She fled from the table and he sat alone in the forlorn, beautiful, beloved room where he had loved a woman and liked a girl, grieved for his mother and joyed in his friendship for me, Gloomer. He sat alone with the spirit of William Morris, with the oaken table and the red sideboard, and the tall, raftered ceiling.

He was lying in bed, his body a confusion of aches from his recent flight, his mind a confusion of thoughts in which the overriding throught was a question: Should he visit Elizabeth in the bedroom where she had secluded herself all day? He did not know if she were grieving for the death of Curk or rejoicing in her liberation; he did not know if she were waiting for him or avoiding him. The usually decisive Charlie felt himself inappropriately cast in the role of a Hamlet instead of a Childe Roland. Really, he thought, I have no right to intrude unless she sends for me. After all, when she wants someone she's rarely reticent. On the other hand, she may feel called on to mourn for the sake of appearances, when what she really wants is to—well, to *visit* with me.

"Master." It was Telesphorus, taper in hand, hovering in the door and looking as if he would flee should Charlie so much as raise his voice. He was not accustomed to disturbing English gentlemen, in their thoughts or in their sleep.

"Yes, Telesphorus. Have you a message for me?" The boy always looked so thin and woebegone that Charlie felt an urge to sit him down at a table and fatten him with partridges and puddings.

The thin little face brightened in the voluminous folds of his hood. His bare feet projected as usual from his robe but looked as if they might be withdrawn as quickly as the feelers of a snail.

"The mistress says, will you come to her room, please?"

Charlie was already on his feet and lighting a taper from the one in Telesphorus' hands . . .

She had not only retired, she had drawn the curtains around her bed. The room lay in darkness except for Charlie's taper and a thin mist of moonlight.

"Put out the candle, my dear. I've been weeping, I'm afraid. I don't want you to see my bloodshot eyes." She squeezed his hand and drew him between the curtains, which fell into place with a silken rustle and closeted them in a private night.

"Dearest Charlie, what horrors you've seen. And because of me."

He could scarcely see her in the dim light. She seemed not a woman but a disembodied spirit, and he felt like the knight forsaken on the cold hillside by La Belle Dame Sans Merci. There was not even a scent of frangipani to make her tangible.

Only when he took her in his arms did he feel assured of her presence. "Elizabeth, it's you who have seen the horrors. For fifteen years. A man like Curk—"

"A man? I know what he was, my dear. You were right to keep the truth from Jill. But I can guess what really happened. How he came after you, and not as a man. And how he died in combat with Gloomer. I've suspected the truth for years. There are Carib folk tales about such beings. But I told myself they were cruel, stupid myths. How could I live with such a one and *know* the truth about him?"

"Is it over now? The horror, I mean. Is Jill really free of him? I don't mean of loving him—after all, he was her father—but of becoming like him?"

"She was never in danger herself. Only the males are so afflicted—or honored, in the eyes of the Caribs. That was the reason Curk wanted me to bear him a son. When I failed, he wanted a grandson."

"And if Jill should marry in England and have a son?"

"She can bear a dozen sons without danger of perpetuating

the—affliction. Only had she been with child—a male child—when she swam with the sharks would there have been a danger. You see, the ritual was more than prayers and torchlight, it was actually meant to be a transformation of the unborn child. I know as much from the folk tales. And because I myself once swam with the sharks, except that I loathed and feared them, while Jill adores them—or did, until they threatened you. That was before I took to my bed. That was why I took to my bed. And because of Curk's rage when I bore him a daughter. Had I borne him a son—"

"He would have been like Curk?"

"Yes."

Charlie shook his head. "No one would believe us in England, or even on Martinique. There's nothing in Darwin's science to account for such beings. He writes of evolution. This is devolution."

"Nonetheless, they are very real. There were similar beings in Europe before the Church destroyed them. We called them werewolves. Darwin is right, I think, that men evolved from the beasts, but from many beasts—wolves, bears, sharks—and not just apes. In Curk's case, we have both the evolving man and the ancestral beast in the same person."

He held her with a wild tenderness. "Don't talk about him any more. Leave him where he belongs. In the past. In the world's past."

She made a faint pretense of pushing him away from her, but quickly yielded to his insistent arms. "Charlie, I am fifty years old. You are nineteen. Here, we can love each other and no one will ridicule us. In England, we would be ridiculous. Like a French couple. One of those aging literary ladies like George Sand with her young lover."

"Then we'll stay here. But you don't look aging, you look blooming! And I can grow a mustache and look at least twenty-five. No one would say a thing except how lucky I was to win such a beautiful bride."

"My beauty is very important to you, isn't it, my dear?"

"I love your proud, gallant soul. But I love your beauty too. How can I reach your soul except through your body?"

"Keats said much the same thing to Fanny Brawne, and both of you are right, of course. 'Why may I not speak of your Beauty, since without that I could never have loved you. I cannot conceive any beginning of such love as I have for you but Beauty.' "

Charlie continued the letter without a pause. " 'There may be a sort of love for which, without the least sneer at it, I have the highest respect and can admit it in others; but it has not the richness, the bloom, the full form, the en-

chantment of love after my own heart.' "

"You knew it, by heart, of course. I knew that you would. It's impossible for young men to love any other way, and I must confess that your own kind soul would not have stirred me so much if you had looked like Telesphorus' father instead of your golden self. But blooming or not, I can't stay on Oleandra with you now. Jill must return to England for an education and eventually a marriage."

"Can't I still tutor her on Oleandra? That was the reason you brought me here, and I am willing to remain."

"It's a little awkward when mother and daughter are in love with the same young man. And I myself have English yearnings—for the opera, the theatre, the ballroom. The season in London and the season at Bath. Icicles under the eaves. Daffodils bringing the spring. 'O to be in England now that April's there . . .' "

"Then I'm going with you, and I promise to pester you until you become my bride!"

"Your bride? Charlie, you're still a moralist at heart, aren't you? You want to make me an honest woman. I'm deeply touched. But hearthfires don't become me. Neither does arguing, my dear. Stay with me tonight. Tomorrow you may change your mind about several things."

He was awakened by the chirping of sugar birds among the morning glories. He opened the curtains to the bed and walked to the window. The diminutive birds, like winged daffodils, flickered among the blossoms and shook the dew from the petals into minikin showers.

"Elizabeth, wake up! The birds have come back. And you have your daffodils!"

She stirred toward wakefulness. A sunbeam fell on her face. He gasped and she opened her eyes.

"I'm sorry, my dear. I can see that you see. I wish it were otherwise. I wish I were what you loved."

She was still beautiful as a woman of fifty; she would have challenged a Michelangelo to capture the complexity of character, the variety of experience, in the lines of her forehead and the wrinkles around her eyes. She was a woman who had sometimes been bitter and sometimes unfaithful, sometimes happy and usually kind; an unloving wife but a loving if not always a wise mother. He was not frightened of her, but he was frightened for her. On this island of dark miracles, shock and grief, he supposed, had aged her in two nights.

She drew him beside her and touched his cheek with moth-light fingers. "Don't be sad. I wanted you to see me like this. This is the way I am. The beauty you loved

was an illusion. You once called me the Lady of the Frangipanis. I am such a lady in a very literal sense. When Curk first came to me—it was my first visit to his island—he brought me a tiny vial of transparent blue elixir like a draught from the sea above a coral reef in the morning sun. 'The Spaniards looked for a fountain of youth,' he said. 'It was all around them and they never even saw it. It was in the nectar of the flowers they trampled under their boots. Frangipani and shower-of-gold and—but the rest is my secret. How old do you think I am?'

" 'Thirty-five? Forty? There are no guides in your face. Not the least wrinkle. Only your eyes look somehow—very old.'

" 'I am seventy-four. Would you like to look always as you do now? I can't promise you immortality—you will live perhaps to a hundred. But your skin will maintain the illusion of youth until you die. One drop a day, and time will be your friend.'

" 'And what do you ask in return?'

" 'I want to make love to an English woman and I want her to bear my child.'

"Thus I was bound to him, Charlie, in spite of his cruelties—and also because I loved him. He could have had me without any gift of youth, but he thought that he had to buy me. He thought of English women as high and proud, a race of conquerors and colonizers who looked upon Caribs, even their kings, as savages who needed to be civilized. Later, I could have escaped my desire for him, but not my wish to be desirable. Charlie, I love all beautiful things. A sonnet by Mrs. Browning. A tapestry woven by William Morris. I can't be wrinkled and old and forgotten. Do you understand?"

"Of course I do," he faltered, as pity warred with desire. "But old things are usually best."

"Only on a shelf with other old things."

"But I don't love you for your face, Elizabeth!"

"You love me for my soul? Perhaps. But you have to look through my face to see my soul. You yourself have said as much. I don't say that you must love me less now. But differently. Look upon me as one who understood your grief for your mother and almost but not quite managed to fill her place."

He took her in his arms and she held him with a last wild yearning. "Good-bye, my dear, good-bye. We shall never meet again like this, but I do love you, Charlie."

They stood in the rocky enclave facing the sea, where Charlie had landed one month, one love, ago. Charlie, Elizabeth, and Jill; the old man and Telesphorus tether-

ing the donkeys to outcroppings of rock. Except for Telesphorus and his father, who would stay on the island and care for the house, they were going back to England. Charlie was going back to Cambridge. (Oh, my friend, how may I follow you to those icy northern seas? Look in the wake of whatever ship you board, and I will begin the journey to bring you luck—but England is far and her seas are bleak, in spite of the Gulf Stream's warmth.)

The sailors were rowing manfully and swearing whenever a wave broke across their bow and no doubt wondering what had happened to those shifty Caribs whose one skill and one duty was coming to meet the schooner.

Charlie was alternately waving encouragement to them and trying to coax Elizabeth to take a seat on a rock which he had brushed clean for her at the cost of ruining his handkerchief, a bright-blue square of silk which was now diminished to brown.

"You must sit down and rest," he urged. "You know how it tires you to ride a burro."

"I'm too excited to sit." Brilliant as bougainvillea in a gown of many colors, she was smiling and waving to the men in the boat and looking as if she never went to bed until morning, and not at all when she could dance or play chemin de fer. Not only had she partaken generously of her elixir—two drops instead of one—and repaired the ravages of her brief abstinence, she had sent Telesphorus to search Curk's house; and the staunch little fellow, rooting through the loft, had returned with several precious flagons, a supply for many years, which Elizabeth promptly designated "my special wine—nobody else likes it."

In such a sea, on such a precipitous island, a longboat could not land; it could merely hover and try not to crash. The stalwart if simian rowers, at the expense of three broken oars and uncountable twisted muscles, somehow managed to hold her off the rocks. Their oaths turned to cries of delight when they recognized Elizabeth, the mysterious Lady of Frangipanis come to welcome them—no, to judge by her trunks, come to return with them to Martinique.

Boarding the boat would have been worse than a problem, it would have been an impossibility for Elizabeth had she remained a bedridden invalid. But when a lusty young seaman held out his arms to her, she made the considerable leap across several frothing feet of water to land and linger within his harboring arms. Jill, of course, had no difficulty. With the grace of a flying fish, she jumped and landed to the cheers though not the embraces of the sailors. Once Charlie had followed her—

as yet he was lingering on the island—the rowers would deposit them aboard the schooner and then return for their trunks—small ones in view of the traveling conditions—which would somehow be handed or heaved from shore (and hopefully not spilled) by Telesphorus and his father.

The old man was red-eyed and Telesphorus was openly bawling at the loss of their beloved mistress.

"Good-bye, my dears," Elizabeth called. "Keep the house ready for Jill and me, and we'll come back to you, we promise." Then, a a seeming afterthought, "And, mind you, load my 'special wine' carefully. Davy Jones doesn't need it, and neither do the sharks!"

All this time Charlie had lingered on the shore, though by now the sailors were swearing at him like the Caribs on his arrival. He knelt on a rock, leaned over the water, and gave me a parting pat even while foam from the surf splattered his face. He did not know that I intended to follow him to England (hoped, I should say). He would never have allowed me to attempt so dangerous a trip.

"Gloomer," he said. "I'm coming back one day. Will you still be in our lagoon?"

"Gnu." How could I stay in the lagoon and also follow him to England?

"What's that you say?" he cried.

To ease his mind, I told him my first falsehood. "Iss."

"Good-bye, old friend. Best friend." His face was wet and not with the spray. Humans have one advantage over dolphins. We have no tears to ease us out of our sadness, and we seem to be smiling even when we are saddest.

I swam under him as he jumped aboard the boat, and frolicked around the boat as it battled toward the schooner. I spun in the air, made those clicking noises which humans suppose to be laughter, and all in all attempted to tease my friend from his melancholy (and to forget the tears I could not shed). But he looked at me with a wan, sorrowful smile, not at the island, not at the schooner, not even at the newly radiant Elizabeth, but at me, always at me, and his look was enough to break my heart.

They were almost at the schooner now. The friendly captain was booming a welcome. Seeing Elizabeth among his passengers, he straightened his cap and jacket, smoothed his whiskers.

"Elizabeth," Charlie said. "Can you use a caretaker for the Red House? If you had a dependable one, you would never need to sell it. He would keep it up so well that you would want to come back for sure, at least for a visit now and then."

"Charlie, do you really want to stay?"

"I'm afraid Gloomer will try to follow me all the way to England. He would never be happy in those cold northern waters. Besides, I love the house. You're coming back—you said so yourself."

"So am I," said Jill. "After I've learned some wiles from mother."

"You're fine as you are." He gave her a wet, brotherly kiss.

"Your kiss says I'm not. But I shall expect a different kind when you see me again."

"Stay, then, Charlie," said Elizabeth, oblivious to the rowers, who were more intent on this curious domestic drama than they were on reaching their ship. "I'll miss you, though, in England. One's first love is very precious, and I am honored to have been your first. Equally precious is one's last love, and that is what you are to me."

He seized her hand and held it against his cheek. "You won't be lonely in London?"

Charlie, Charlie, I wanted to cry. Do you really think this beautiful, sentimental, and mischievous lady will ever be lonely in London or anywhere else, or want for young men to pay her court? It was well that I said nothing, or that, had I spoken, I would not have been understood. In a way I was unfair to her. She really believed that Charlie was her last love. Whatever she said, she believed at the time. It was just that she sometimes changed her mind.

He was already removing his clothes. Shoes, middy jacket, and bell-bottom trousers, but not, fortunately, his undergarments.

"Forgive me, Elizabeth and Jill. But I can't swim to shore with all this clutter."

The rowers had almost stopped rowing.

"What's the lad doin'?"

"Strippin' for a swim, I reckon."

"Before the ladies? Blimey, 'e's no gentleman. E's one of us!"

Then he was in the water, waving over his shoulder and calling a last good-bye to his departing friends, and turning to meet and greet me with a radiant, "Hello, Gloomer, I've come back. I told you I would, didn't I?"

"Isss."

A big wave almost inundated him. I dove under him and he clasped my dorsal fin and we swam for the island and the passage and our own green lagoon.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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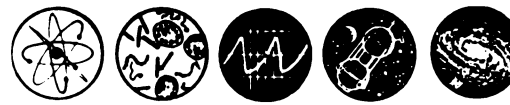

THE LOPSIDED SUN

by Isaac Asimov

LAST FALL, A LARGE-CIRCULATION MAGAZINE wanted to get an article on eclipses that they could run in conjunction with a Solar eclipse that was to take place the following spring over the United States.

It occurred to the magazine to get me to do the job, and you can bet I was willing to do so. Writing about eclipses was apple-pie-and-mother for me, and I had never appeared in the pages of this particular magazine and I wanted to do so.

But the fact that I had never done anything for the magazine was naturally a source of insecurity for the editors. They wanted to talk to me and asked me to come visit their offices.

I did so, and listened to them explain very carefully what they wanted. I nodded and said I understood and that I would try to strike the very note they were asking for.

But then one of the editors thought a bit and said, "Could you describe a total eclipse for us? How would it look? What would you see? What is it like?"

"All right," I said, and calling on the skills that years and years of writing had made second nature, I described a total eclipse in the most moving imaginable terms. By the time I was through I had them (and myself) all but dissolved in tears.

"Good," they said, "write that article for us, just as you told it."

I did, and they liked it (and said so), paid for it, published it and all was absolutely well.

In fact, during the whole transaction, there was only one moment during which a bit of nervousness made itself felt. While I was describing the total eclipse in poignant detail, I was uneasily aware that all could be ruined by a single simple question.

What if someone in my audience had said, "But, Dr. Asimov, have you ever seen a total eclipse?"

For of course I hadn't.

But then, as I told you, I called upon my writing skills and I was a fiction writer to begin with.

Naturally, I must not allow a narrow escape like that to shake my nerve, so, like the thrown rider climbing back on the horse, I will now turn, unrepentant, to the Sun again.

To anyone who is so foolish as to try to look at the Sun in its glory, it must seem to be an eternally featureless circle of brilliant white light. Indeed, there have been theologians who maintained that if it weren't exactly that, it would represent a flaw in the perfection of God's handiwork, and who therefore resisted any suggestion that such flaws might exist.

It was one of the unsettling aspects of Galileo's astronomical discoveries that, in 1610, he reported the existence of spots on the face of the Sun. Once that troubling fact was reported, and despite considerable clerical shock, others saw them at once. Indeed some spots are huge enough to be made out with the unaided eye. When the Sun is very close to the horizon on a particularly clear day, and is ruddily dim enough to be looked at without harm, large Sunspots can sometimes be made out.

Sunspots are easy to see because they are regions that are cooler than the surrounding Solar surface and that therefore seem dark in comparison. Black-on-white is impossible to miss.

But what about the reverse situation? What if there are local regions of the Sun's surface that are *hotter* than surrounding areas? If so, they would be unusually bright, but whiter-on-white is a lot harder to see than black-on-white, and, in point of fact, no one saw hot regions on the Sun for two and a half centuries after the cool regions were detected.

The honor of the later discovery belongs to Richard Christopher Carrington, an English astronomer who kept painstaking track of Sunspots over prolonged periods of time, working out the exact time of rotation of the Sun at different latitudes. (A gaseous body does not rotate all in one piece as a solid body perforce must.)

In 1859, Carrington noted a short-lived brilliant flare-up on the face of the Sun. It was as though a tiny star had made itself visible on that face for some five minutes. Carrington reported it and suggested a cause. At this time, astronomers were considering the possibility that the Sun might use as the source of its radiation the kinetic energy of

impacting meteors, and Carrington felt he had been lucky enough to see the impact of a particularly large meteor.

It was a very interesting guess, but wrong.

If whiter-on-white is hard to see in general, this may not be so at all wavelengths. That is, the general increase in brightness in a particular hotspot may, for some reason, be greater at some wavelengths than others. If the Sun were viewed by the light of the wavelength particularly affected, a flare-up that would be difficult or even impossible to see over the entire spectrum, might suddenly become unmistakably conspicuous.

In 1889, the American astronomer, George Ellery Hale, invented the "spectroheliograph," a device whereby the Sun could be photographed by light coming through a spectroscope so arranged that all light, except over a small stretch of wavelengths, is excluded. In that way, the Sun could have its picture taken by hydrogen-light or by calcium-light. Seen by calcium-light it was easy to find out, for instance, that there were calcium-rich regions here and there on the Sun, standing out like clouds in a summer sky on Earth.

Using the spectroheliograph, one tends to get static pictures of the Sun and misses short-lived events; that is, it is difficult to tell whether a particular spot on the photograph has just come into being or is soon to pass—unless you take a number of closely-spaced stills.

In 1926, Hale (still alive, still active, still ingenious) devised a modification of the instrument that enabled one to watch events by the light of a spectral line over a period of time. This "spectrohelioscope" made it a lot easier to detect swift changes.

Before the 1920's were out, then, it became apparent that, by hydrogen light, there were flareups rather commonly associated with Sunspots. There were what seemed to be explosions, sudden flashes of hot hydrogen, that might be at full heat for five to ten minutes and be utterly gone after half an hour to an hour.

These were "Solar flares" and, looking backward, it was understood that what Carrington had seen seventy years before had been an unusually bright one.

When a flare is on the side of the Sun facing us, there's not much to be seen but a brightening and spreading patch. Occasionally, though, one catches a flare coming into being at the edge of the Sun. Then one can see, in profile, a huge surge of brilliant gas climbing at a rate of 600 miles a second or so, and reaching a height of some five thousand miles above the Sun's surface.

Small flares are quite common and in places where there is a large

complex of Sunspots, as many as a hundred a day can be detected, especially when the spots are growing. Very large flares of the kind that approach visibility in white light (like Carrington saw) are rare, however; and only a few occur each year.

The spectra associated with these flares indicate temperatures of up to 20,000° C. as compared with 6000° C. for the undisturbed surface of the Sun and 4000° C. for the dark center of Sunspots.

Solar flares are important in connection with a more general activity of the Sun's surface. Energy is somehow transferred from the Sun's glowing surface to the thin Solar atmosphere, or "corona." That energy must be distributed among the atoms of the corona which are far fewer in number than are those of the surface. This means that the energy per atom is far higher in the corona than on the Sun's surface and "energy per atom" is what we mean by "temperature."

It is not surprising then, that where the surface temperature of the Sun is 6000° C., the coronal temperatures can be as high as 2,000,000° C. The intensity and wavelength of radiation from any body depends upon its temperature, and the corona delivers more radiation (per unit mass) than the Sun's surface does. It is only because the corona has so small a mass that it seems so faint. What's more, coronal radiation is far more energetic than surface radiation is, and it is from the corona that Solar x-rays arise.

Nor is electromagnetic radiation all that flows out of the Sun. The turbulent Solar atmosphere sends matter streaming upward, and small quantities of it inevitably manage to escape even the Sun's tremendous gravity. There is a constant drizzle of particles moving outward and, apparently, lost to the Sun forever.

In absolute terms, the mass of particles lost in this fashion is enormous by Earthly standards, for it comes to a million tons per second. By Solar standards, it is nothing, for if this loss were to continue indefinitely at its present rate, it would take 600 trillion years for the Sun to lose 1 percent of its mass.

These particles, spreading outward from the Sun in all directions, make up the so-called "Solar wind."

The Solar wind extends to the Ear and beyond, of course, but the Earth's small globe intercepts only a tiny part of all the particles cast out by the Sun. Of the million tons of particles lost by the Sun each second, about ¾ of a pound strikes the Earth. This is not much in terms of mass, but it means that every second something like a hundred trillion trillion solar particles reach the vicinity of the Earth.

If the Earth were without atmosphere or magnetic field, those par-

ticles that reach the vicinity of the Earth would go on to strike the surface of the planet. They strike the surface of the Moon, for instance, and the samples of rock brought back by the astronauts contain quantities of helium that can have originated only in the Solar wind.

The particles in the Solar wind are naturally representative of the material in the Sun. The Sun is very largely hydrogen, with most of what is left being helium. At the temperature of the corona through which the Solar wind passes, atoms of hydrogen and helium are broken down to a mixture of atomic nuclei and electrons. The hydrogen nucleus is a proton and the helium nucleus an alpha particle.

The protons are much more massive than the electrons and much more numerous than the still more massive alpha-particles, and if both mass and number are taken into account, it is clear that the major component of the Solar wind are its protons. Any increase in the density of the wind due to something happening back on the Sun may be called a "proton event."

Since the Earth has a magnetic field, the electrically charged particles of the Solar wind (one positive charge for protons, two for alpha particles and one negative charge for electrons) are deflected along the magnetic lines of force. That means they move in a tight spiral from one magnetic pole to the other, back and forth over and over. It is these moving particles, held in place by the magnetic lines of force that make up what used to be called the Van Allen belts but are now more often called the "magnetosphere."

The magnetosphere dips closest toward the Earth's surface at the magnetic poles, and it is there that the charged particles most easily leak out of the magnetosphere and into the Earth's upper atmosphere. The interaction of the charged particles and the atoms of the upper atmosphere produce the shifting curtains and streamers of the aurorae.

Well, then, what happens when a flare lights up a portion of the Solar surface? There is a localized rise in temperature and a localized increase in turbulence that result in the sending of a blaze of energy and a rash of particles into the corona immediately above the flare. The coronal temperature rises and there is an increase in its production of ultra-violet radiation and x-rays at the affected spot. The additional rush of particles also produces a kind of gust in the solar wind so that the Solar flare could, in effect, result in a proton event.

The intensification of the Solar wind above a particularly large flare can be so great that the speeding protons become energetic enough to count as mild cosmic rays.

If the Solar flare shoots up into the Sun's atmosphere in the direction, more or less, of Earth, there is a burst of energetic radiation toward us

that reaches our planet in minutes, and there is also a gust in the Solar wind that reaches us in a couple of days. When the gust of Solar wind reaches the Earth's magnetic field, there is a sudden brightening and extending of the aurora.

The radiation from the flare and the subsequent flood of charged particles upsets the situation in Earth's upper atmosphere. It may produce wild static in electronic equipment or it may wipe out (temporarily) some of the charged layers in the upper atmosphere, causing radio waves to pass upward into space instead of being reflected downward toward the ground. Radio transmission can then fade out altogether, and radar may grow useless.

These manifestations are usually termed "magnetic storms" because one of the symptoms is a wild irregularity of the needle of the magnetic compass in response to all the jolts being undergone in the region of the magnetic poles.

Variations in the magnetic compass and intensification of the aurorae are interesting but not, in today's society, very significant. The possible disruption of radio transmission is another matter. It can seriously annoy our electronically-oriented population and industry. At particularly pathological moments (say, during wars or threats of war) the possibility that radar may go awry, that radio-controlled missiles may wander off course, and that communications of all sorts may be distorted or destroyed, can be a serious source of worry.

Then, too, astronauts in space or on the Moon's surface, may be caught in the aftermath of a flare, be subjected to an intense gust of the Solar wind, and suffer radiation sickness.

With this in mind, it would naturally become a matter of great interest to be able to predict the coming of flares long enough in advance to keep men out of space, to protect men on the Moon, and to set up alternate methods of communication in a war-zone.

It would help if we knew what caused flares in the first place, but we don't. Since flares are characteristically found in connection with Sunspots, we might suppose that if we knew what caused Sunspots, we might deduce what caused flares—but we don't know what causes Sunspots, either.

But suppose we reason like this—

Sunspots represent an asymmetry on the Sun. A Sunspot forms at some particular place on the Sun's surface and not on others. Why should that happen? Why shouldn't all parts of the Sun's surface be alike? After all, the Sun is a nearly perfect sphere and, as nearly as we can theorize, it is radially symmetrical. That is, working from the

center outward, properties change equally no matter what direction we choose.

On Earth, we have weather. We have storms developing in one place and calm in another; zephyrs here and tornadoes there; drought yonder and floods elsewhere. But all this is the result of a tremendous asymmetry—the fact that one side of the Earth faces the Sun's heat and the other does not, at any given time, and that even on the side facing the Sun there are variations in the length of time of exposure and the direction from which the Sun's rays are received.

On the Sun, however, there is no such overwhelming asymmetry in evidence. Why, then, does it have "weather" in the form of Sunspots?

To be sure, the Sun rotates, so there is a difference with respect to the centrifugal effect as related to latitude. There is no centrifugal effect at the pole, and maximum effect at the equator, with intermediate values in between. The rotation may also set up asymmetries in the deeper layers of Solar material, too.

It would not be surprising, then, if the Sunspots were somehow connected with latitude, and that turns out to be correct. Sunspots tend to appear only between 5° and 30° north and south latitude.

Within that latitude range there is a complex regularity. The Sunspots increase in numbers to a maximum, then decrease to a minimum, then increase to a maximum again, with a period of eleven years. Immediately after a minimum, spots appear at about 30° north and south latitude. Then, as they increase in numbers from year to year, they tend to shift toward the equator. At periods of maximum, they are at an average latitude of 15° and continue to shift toward the equator as they decrease in number again. As the cycle dies within 5° of the equator, a new set begins to appear at 30°.

Nobody knows why the cycle works in that way, but can it be that it is the result of some asymmetry more complicated than that introduced by the Sun's rotation? If so, where might that asymmetry come from? One possibility is that it is imposed from the outside and the finger of suspicion points to the planets.

But how can the planets affect the Sun? Surely only by way of their gravitational fields. Those fields might raise tides on the Sun, and make it lopsided.

The Moon, for instance, raises tides on the Earth because the side of the Earth near the Moon receives a stronger Lunar pull than the side on the opposite side of the Moon. It is this difference in pull that produces the tidal effect.*

**See TIME AND TIDE, F & SF, May 1966*

The size of the tidal effect depends upon three things. First, upon the mass of the tide-producing body, of course, since the greater the mass, the greater the gravitational pull. Second, upon the diameter of the body experiencing the tides, since the greater the diameter, the greater the difference in gravitational pull experienced on opposite sides. Third, upon the distance of the body experiencing the tides from the tide-producing body. The greater the distance, the weaker the gravitational pull of the latter on the former, and the smaller the difference in pull on the two sides of the former.

Taking all these factors into account, we can set up the following table:

system	*relative tidal effect*
Moon-on-Earth	7,000
Sun-on-Earth	3,200
Earth-on-Sun	1

The tidal effect of the Earth on the Sun is only a ten-thousandth that of the Sun and Moon, combined, on Earth, but perhaps this effect, though tiny, is not entirely insignificant.

What about the tidal effects of other planets? Taking the Earth's tidal effect on the Sun as unity, it isn't difficult to work out the relative tidal effects of the other planets on the Sun. Here are the results:

planet	*relative tidal effect on Sun*
Mercury	0.7
Venus	1.9
Earth	1.0
Mars	0.03
Jupiter	2.3
Saturn	0.11
Uranus	0.0021
Neptune	0.0006
Pluto	0.000002

The four greatest tidal effects, then, are those of Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Jupiter. All the remaining planets put together produce a tidal effect about a fifth that of Mercury, the least of the big four. We might threfore give the name "tidal planets" to Mercury, Venus, Earth and Jupiter.

As these planets circle the Sun, each produces a pair of tiny bulges on the Sun (one bulge on the side of the Sun toward itself, another on the opposite side). These bulges may be tiny indeed, measured perhaps only in centimeters, but even that much rise and fall of the Sun's vast surface could be significant.

With four separate bulges on each side of the Sun, continually changing position with respect to each other as the planets move, there might just conceivably be some crucial moment when, as a result of the combination of bulges, a particular section of the Sun's surface rises or falls with unusual speed. Can it be, then, that it is at that point and at that time that the sequence of changes that produces a Sunspot is set in motion? Perhaps, too, there is some long-range pattern in the shifting bulges that accounts for the Sunspot-cycle and the regular shift in latitude.

Of course, it is hard to try to correlate the appearance of a particular Sunspot with a particular combination of tidal bulges. The appearance is too slow. But what about flares? Flares come and go quickly and sizable flares are not very common. Can large flares be correlated with not-very-common planetary positions?

Perhaps!

Dr. J. B. Blizard, a physicist at the University of Denver, has studied the connection of proton events with planetary conjunctions; that is, with situations in which two or more of the tidal planets take up positions such that a line through them points toward the Sun. The tidal effect would then add up; there would be an unusually high bulge in the Sun's surface, and perhaps if that passes near a region of Sunspot turbulence, it would set off a flare.

In any case, over the period between 1956 and 1961, Blizard noted a sufficient number of positive correlations—that is, of flares coming near the time of conjunction—to make matters look interesting. He calculated that there was only one chance in two thousand of the correlations being just coincidence. What's more, he began a series of predictions of the occurrence of flares in the future, supposing them to come at the time of later conjunctions (which are easy to calculate) and achieved 60 percent accuracy.

And here, then, is where we can return to the subject of astrology, which I discussed in last month's article. I said in that article that astrologers would naturally seize on any scientific rationale, however faint, for justifying their folly, and I suspect that Blizard's work will be right up their alley.

For years now, astronomers and non-astronomers have wondered

about the effect of the Sunspot cycle on Earth. Was there more Solar radiation at Sunspot minimum? Was there sufficiently more, perhaps, to produce droughts, cut down the food supply, affect prices, start inflations or depressions, make wars more likely, and so on?

When flares were discovered, they seemed even more likely than Sunspots themselves to affect Earth. After all, they bathed the atmosphere in charged particles and that might affect rainfall which in turn might affect crops which in turn might affect— Besides, who knows what more subtle changes might rise and fall with the quantity of charged particles striking Earth.

Now comes along Dr. Blizard who makes it seem that the rise and fall in the Solar wind may depend upon planetary position and "planetary position" is a magic phrase to astrologers. I can look forward to the following chain of reasoning.

1—The planetary positions control the occurrence of Solar flares.

2—Through the Solar flares, the planetary positions control the nature of the Solar wind.

3—Through the Solar wind, the planetary positions control and effect certain subtle changes on Earth.

4—Because of all this, the planetary positions at the moment of a child's birth may affect all the course of its future life.

I am sure that astrologers will not hesitate to use this line of reasoning to justify the specificity of the following items taken from the astrological column of a recent edition of my newspaper:

"Aries. Give sympathy, not money, to friend in financial dilemma. This loan won't be repaid."

"Scorpio. Don't trust investment tip; there are factors at work your adviser doesn't know about."

To be sure, there may be some among my valued Gentle Readers who will be swayed by this and who will wonder whether there isn't *something* in this chain of reasoning starting from planetary position and ending in Aries giving sympathy and Scorpio turning on the distrust.

If so, repress the thought. I am quite certain that with very little ingenuity I could invent a chain of reasoning that is just as valid and plausible, connecting the pattern of burping of a herd of hippopotami amid the reeds of the River Nile with the rise and fall of the steel output in the mills of Gary, Indiana.

Question: Would you be willing to experience two or three minutes of sheer hell each day if it meant the other 23-plus hours would be sheer heaven? The men in the story below answered yes, and to learn how they fared, you should immediately start reading . . .

THE ULTIMATE THRILL

by Albert Teichner

THE GREAT YACHT SWUNG AT its moorings until the two men on deck were facing the gleaming hillsides of Monte Carlo. Poplos, his tanned, curiously unlined face revealing deep contentment, sank into a chair and grinned: "Two million dollars, Bazin, two million dollars is what your advice may have given me."

Bazin, older-looking and nervous, turned to his host and wonderingly considered the man's youthfulness. "If you admit two million, it must have been four."

Roaring with laughter, Poplos leaped up and strode to the railing. "No, my friend, I neither poor-mouth nor boast any more." He thumped his silver-haired chest. "Bazin, I can now afford *inside myself* to be honest at all times!"

Bazin rubbed a skeletal hand across his pinched brow. "And I believe you, Poplos. You are like a miracle performed by the devil."

"You should have been a poet, Bazin, you see so far." Eyes narrowing, he threw himself back into the chair. "Here is what I ask myself: You are by the world's standards," and he waved contemptuously toward the land, "a very wealthy man, but *I*, I am much wealthier. We've never been allies—or enemies. So why did you send me word that Lebanon Petrol would be a fiasco and, moreover, that if I shifted into

Tangier Specialties the concession profit wouldn't be lost? I saved a million on fact one and made a million on fact two! I owe you something now. In what financial transaction do you want—"

"No money." Weary but eager, he leaned forward. "Here is what *I* ask myself: You are seventy-seven, six years older than I, but now look ten years younger than I am. This was not true about a decade back. As you once were, I am now—a sickly man, not sick but sickly."

Poplos gave a modest shrug. "We all get older—"

"No, no, not *all* of us—you alone get younger!"

Poplos was again up on his feet, striding along the rail, then swinging back toward Bazin. "Yes, there is some truth to your statement." He came to a sudden decision. "All right, Bazin, you have mixed intelligent selfishness with some kindness for me, so I should tell something. At first, this change was completely in my mind, but it quickly meant steady physical improvement, and today even my instinctive satisfactions, old man, are as strong as they were three decades ago."

Bazin's fingers grasped at each other. "What made the difference?"

"Ah, no, that I am not free to say."

"Then you have given me nothing in return!" He lit a Turkish cigarette and exhaled a cloud of bitter smoke. "Nothing!"

"I certainly no longer need false depresso-stimulants like tobacco, Bazin! No! Why should I be indebted when I did not ask for your advice and you lost nothing by giving it?" He caught himself up short. "Nor do I need to throw my weight around like this for pseudo-stimulation! Forgive me, Bazin. I myself cannot tell you what has happened, not even what I understand of it. Now wait, don't get excited until I finish—there is someone who can, if he is willing."

"Where is this man?"

"It becomes *very* expensive."

"What does money count for against youthfulness? Where is he?"

"I cannot give you that information."

"But—"

"I can ask him, and if he's so inclined, he'll contact you. My recommendation should count for something, just as someone else's did when I asked to move into the circle of the perversely blessed and—"

Suddenly, a look of utter horror seized him and he turned away, hands gripping the railing. For a moment Bazin, as alarmed as he was skeptical, stared at the heaving shoulders, then ran to Poplos' side. "Can I help—?"

Poplos turned to him, heavy breathing subsiding as a beatific

smile slowly came across his face. "No, everything is all right, becoming all right. Perhaps some day, Bazin, you will understand." He stared at a sleek motor launch in which there was one passenger, a young woman holding back her blonde hair against the wind's capriciousness. At first unwillingly, Bazin joined in watching her. Her beauty became all the more pronounced as the boat came closer.

"Despite the two million, my friend, you will have to leave now," Poplos grinned. "I am about to have another visitor."

"You say he will contact me?"

Poplos nodded. "Yes. He told me that if I ever recommended someone, he would use the name Santini for the new relationship. Still at Paris?"

"As ever, Boulevard Malesherbes."

"Excellent." He slapped him on the back. "And remember, no matter what his eventual charges, it will be worth them. There are so few of us!"

The launch had now pulled alongside and the stunning blonde came skipping up the ladder. A vague attempt at introductions was made by their host, but she came by Bazin as if he hardly existed, eyes riveted on Poplos. Riding back to Monte on the launch, Bazin saw that look in her eyes as if she were still passing him. Money alone could not buy an expression like that; she actually desired Poplos for himself!

For the next two days Paris was intolerable. All Bazin could concentrate on was the grinding traffic below his office windows, the clacking of stenographers' heels, and a dyspepsia that endlessly grew along with his anxiety. Would that "Santini" call? What could Poplos mean about it all beginning in the mind? And why, he wondered, do I keep thinking of Faust selling his soul to the Devil?

On the third day a cable came from Istanbul.

> I will be at Grand Hotel, Geneva, this evening. Be there at twenty hours and I shall discuss what may be of mutual advantage.
>
> Santini

He angrily crumpled up the cable. The conceit, the effrontery of this man in so addressing someone whose family had been *giving* commands for eight generations! When he calmed down, though, he compromised: an evening phone call to Signor Santini would do.

But then, as he recalled the adoring eyes of Poplos' young blonde, he realized he would have to swallow his pride and follow instructions.

In Geneva that night when he asked for Santini, the desk clerk offhandedly indicated that the suite was on the third floor. Nor

did the corridor of that level bespeak a man with a particular position in life to maintain.

But the appearance of Santini himself was more impressive.

He was tall, very serious of mien, and the sharply focused highlights of his eyes seemed immovable. "Please come in, Monsieur Bazin. I have read of you with interest." The deep voice had the same steadiness as the eyes.

"I have never sought publicity." He took the chair offered him, and Santini sat down in one close by, facing him.

"Perhaps I did not make myself clear. When Monsieur Poplos communicated with me, I did, frankly, some intensive research on you. You are a good prospect and I can safely reveal *some* details at this time."

Bazin shrugged. "But I thought I was sufficiently established not to require a full credit check. Do you sell art masterpieces or rare furs on the side?"

Santini did not choose to laugh. "This will end up much more costly than mere luxuries, my friend. I do know enough of the world's financial markets to know you can afford me. What I sought to establish was your weakness, not your strength—and your need. Yes, you will accept and benefit from my services. I have never been wrong. All subjects have been men of worldly accomplishment, and the secret I share with them is much too valuable for them to ruin their ideal situation by talking out of turn."

He took a deep breath and, as he began exhaling, spoke with the diaphragm control of an actor. "You have been amazed by Poplos' age reversal. I have done as much—and more—for others. As a token of your good faith, you will now give three thousand dollars or its equivalent in any hard currency or a cheque for that amount. You are warned that with time, as you see the success of the treatments, you will be paying more, much more, and that these fund transfers will have to be in cash. I understand such things as cash carry no fingerprints."

Bazin wanted to laugh at the obviousness of the swindle but once more caught himself; Poplos' appearance was no swindle. "A strange demand for a first meeting."

"No. It starts our relationship off in the best manner possible—in that honesty you will get all you want. And all I want is money."

Shrugging again, Bazin took out his chequebook and made out a cheque to the Swiss bank number Santini indicated. A little crinkle of pleasure played about the man's eyes as he read the figure, then vanished.

"You will perhaps forgive me, monsieur—wealth is my one uncontrolled vice, as age is evidently yours. I now begin. We are often

told that, enjoyed within reasonable limits, the thrill of sex can keep us young. Much as I have found sex to my satisfaction on occasion, I regret to say this is nonsense. All men age despite, sometimes even because of, their indulgences. No, the reverse is true—keeping young permits us to enjoy sex."

"I suppose that may just possibly be part of the truth."

Santini set his thin lips into the tiniest of smiles. "Like most Frenchmen, your principal mental skill flowers in cynical doubt."

"And what, if any, may be *your* nationality?" Bazin demanded, riled.

"Basically—none. You know me as Santini. The one or two other clients you may meet know me by other names, and there are still others you will never meet who know other names. Attempts to track me down have failed, so any secret I share with you is as safe as yours is with me." He paused, then added in a hammering monotone, "Please do not interrupt me now until I have had my say.

"The body has no chance to be young unless the mind is young and vital. Consciousness is what keeps the mind vital, and only one thing keeps consciousness at the highest point of vitality—the knowledge of death. I now picture a stream of damned-up words straining at your vocal chords as you think, 'Nonsense, every man knows of death, that he, too, is going to die!' But not *really*.

"Man *tells* himself on the basis of what he has seen happen to others that he, too, will die some day—he does not *know* it; the experience of words is not the experience of experience. Nobody really believes he is going to die—he cannot imagine experiencing his own death. Nature is wise in this, for such knowledge, fully and continuously felt, would destroy us. Instead, the mind intermittently glimpses death out of the corner of one eye, and this gives *some* vitality to human consciousness. Now then, I pose you a question: What might give you heightened consciousness without destroying you?"

"Nothing, I suppose. No, I won't merely suppose." While Santini watched him unblinkingly, Bazin stroked his long chin and concentrated on the problem all that analytical capacity which had made him a master of market strategy. "The best would be a knowledge of death fully but not continuously felt?"

Santini rubbed his neat, manicured hands together. "An excellent beginning for our dialogue! Usually it takes much longer for the client to see this point."

"I'm only logically deducing one possibility from what you have stated, not necessarily agreeing."

"Why not agreeing?"

Bazin shook his head. "It might be of value, but I do not see how it is possible."

"It *is* possible. Before I proceed, Monsieur Bazin, this is not to be confused with an implosive therapy, despite superficial similarities."

"I do not know this implosive."

"And you don't have to."

"But I now insist."

"Good enough, we are still in areas where you have the right and ability to insist on understanding what is happening."

"I always will."

"The right, yes, the ability, no."

"Bah, Monsieur Santini, always these uncertainties, first from Poplos, then from you!"

"Are his actions and appearance uncertain?"

Bazin twitched a smile of concession. "No."

"Well, implosive therapy has among its elements the driving of the patient to experience his fear in its full anguish and thus conquer it, rather than telling him there is nothing to fear or distracting his attention elsewhere or taking many other possible approaches. In any case, my procedure has only a superficial similarity. I now pose you another question: Would you be willing to experience, on the average, two or three minutes of sheer hell each day if it meant the other 23-plus hours would be sheer heaven?"

His eyes, limpid brown yet sharper in their highlights than ever, stared, unblinking, into those of Bazin who, determined not to be mastered, stared back like one mirror responding to another. "Always these intriguing but fanciful hypotheses! Certainly I would accept such a bargain."

"Not impossible, it's happening every day. I understand you witnessed such an episode on Monsieur Poplos' yacht."

"His sudden fright? It *did* happen!" Now he was an infinitely shrinking mirror under that gaze and, severely shaken, had to turn away. "That would be the sheerest masochism if it were deliberate."

"Again, not so. Masochism destroys the self. If I torture or permit the torture of any part of my nervous system, I may at first attain heightened sensibility, but the longer-range effect is a deadening, I repeat, a deadening of sensibility. Consciousness shrinks rather than grows. The same is true of drugs: awareness may at first expand but then it rapidly atrophies—the mind's law of diminishing returns, you might say."

As the man went on, Bazin became more fascinated with what he heard. Like most Frenchmen, he loved argumentation which involved long chains of logical interlocks even if he did not accept the original premises; but now the very force of that ongoing reasoning was making him wonder

whether there might even be something to the premises.

And then Santini shattered the spell. "Hypnotic sessions will be necessary for the proper idea implantation. Brief but intensive hypnosis."

Basin threw up his hands. "Ah, no! You now go too far. I am not surrendering my mind to you like that girl with Svengali!"

Santini roared with laughter. "It always happens, this wild reaction from you moguls of all creation. There are only two things to say now. One—when you come out of hypnosis, I can't control your whole mind through post-hypnotic suggestion, nor can I pump information adverse to your interest from you during the less-than-an-hour sessions."

"How reassuring!"

"If you will permit me to finish. Point two—you may verify my claims elsewhere. Ask Poplos. Do you think he is my puppet? Many powerful men have been subjected to hypnotic therapies which put them in longer trances, and have you heard of abuses by these therapists?"

"Those therapists are beside the present point. And, while Poplos is impressive—"

"Ah, you would like additional distinguished verification."

"Yes, somewhat more."

"Well, I don't let all my clients intermingle." Bazin snickered at the anticipated evasion. "But you're entitled to meet somebody besides Poplos, so go to Sir Giles Lockyear and get his view."

"That sounds preposterous!" Gold-mining, oil, diamonds—he almost said aloud what he was thinking: Lockyear could buy Poplos and me together and still have a fortune to spare.

Yawning, Santini rose. "Don't call Sir Giles, he'll call you. I believe he's at Glasgow this week. This has been an extremely valuable encounter because I now know you are a hypnotizable subject, Bazin. You'll be back in Paris tomorrow?"

"Tonight."

"Excellent, monsieur!" And then, before all the remaining buts, ifs and maybes could be considered, he was seeing his guest to the door, refusing to discuss anything further.

Bazin returned to Paris, dazed by the evening's experience, knowing it was all impossible and all possible, totally bluff and totally in earnest. He had considerable difficulty falling asleep, and when Claude awakened him at eight, it seemed as if he had just gone to bed. "I gave no orders for this!" he snapped at his valet.

"Ah, monsieur, there is a telephone call."

"I don't answer every lunatic."

"But, Monsieur Bazin," he gestured toward the phone on the end table. "It is the private line!"

That brought him bolt upright;

the number was only available to a few of his associates. "Who is it?"

"A mystery. Not from the office, and he does not give his name, and how could he get the number? He says, 'Glasgow calling—' "

Bazin grabbed the receiver. "Out, Calude!"

"Monsieur Bazin?" came a tightly modulated English voice.

"Yes."

"Here is Sir Giles Lockyear."

A hearty chuckle came on the line. "Leon Bazin? Giles Lockyear here, always read of your activities with interest. A mutual friend suggested we meet. Only spent about twenty percent of my life in your country, so I hope my French isn't too feeble."

"But it is flawless!" And it was. "Yes, a meeting was suggested, Sir Giles."

"Today I'll be here at my shipyards late. If you could be in Glasgow about five this afternoon."

Bazin groaned inwardly, but this was too great an honor to refuse. "Agreed, Sir Giles."

Most of the day was devoted to sleep, a small nap in the limousine to Orly and longer ones on the London and Glasgow hops. By the time he was ushered into Sir Giles Lockyear's presence, he felt as rested as he ever could feel these days.

But against the backdrop of an enormous window that made his shipyard an extension of the wallpaper, Sir Giles readily dominated the meeting. Tall, lithe, and pure white at the temples, he was the embodiment of suave power. He languidly gestured toward the window. "So sorry I couldn't meet you at the Antibes place. Not particularly profitable nowadays, but this was my first business and so my last love, and how old do you think I am?"

The suddenness of the question jarred Bazin, particularly since, in the rush of events, he had neglected to have any research done. "A question calling for some discretion," he smiled.

"—and more honesty."

"Exactly." Lockyear's face showed some deep wrinkles but none of the quiver chronic to aged flesh. "Sixty-two, sixty-three."

"Eighty-two," was the matter-of-fact reply. "Let's get right down to business. Your Signor Santini goes by the name of Lovchok with me, and elsewhere there are undoubtedly other names for other clients. It is not my affair, and, despite fourteen years with this great man, I know little of him save that, as he always is first to point out, money is his only real personal vice. I do not pry into the personal side. I would advise you not to either. He has cost me millions and been worth every bit of it."

He spoke even more glowingly about the rejuvenating effects of Santini's method than had Poplos.

Once every eight weeks they would meet, and in less than an hour Lovchok somehow planted all the post-hypnotic suggestions that would trigger the death experience once or twice a day. These were, as far as Lockyear could see, totally at random and the trigger could be anything from a word, any preordained word, to a glance at one's watch or a passing cloud.

"Fairly frequently it will be in the presence of others," sighed Sir Giles, "but they will observe nothing more than an extremely brief mood shift. You see, the conscious mind only loses control for, oh, ten seconds; then it starts regaining control even though the death horror is continuing. Utterly extraordinary result, gaining a pound of pleasure for a pence of pain!"

As dusk fell and the great searchlights came up on the ways, Sir Giles continued to explain what happened. Occasionally Bazin asked a question, was patiently heard out, then was answered. At the end of two hours he was completely convinced and said so.

"Of course," said Sir Giles. "It would be insanity for anyone who could afford it not to grab the opportunity. Incidentally, he has told me he only takes unmarried men since a wife might suspect something odd going on, but just how many of us there are I've never determined."

Sir Giles invited him to dinner, but Bazin was already fearful of missing some contact with Santini and, profusely apologetic, pleaded the press of business as an excuse. When he reached the Boulevard Malesherbes at three in the morning, he awakened Claude to demand whether there had been any telephone calls.

"But no, Monsieur Bazin," he pleaded, "I would have left the message. Nothing except this afternoon—"

"Yes? Yes?"

"Chief Engineer Cibot of the Lyon Works wanted to know whether you will be inspecting next week."

"Forget it, if you find nothing better to say! Go back to sleep."

Bazin went to bed disappointed. The next afternoon the tension was ended with a call from Santini. He was staying in a hotel near the Invalides and wanted Bazin to visit him at five.

Santini's face seemed gaunter than ever as he welcomed his new patient. The intent eyes already showed a little of the power the session would bring out in them, but Bazin, in a last flare-up of resistance, said, "You claim, monsieur, to have the same number of patients always."

"I say clients, not patients, but, yes, you are correct."

"And that you only acquire new ones to maintain that number. Which means you lose some."

"Three in the past twenty years, two of them since I reached my maximum number fifteen years ago. I assume you are going to ask how I lost them if the death-method keeps one so young."

"Well, yes."

"Those three died in accidents. You are replacing Kronk, the steel man, who died four months ago. A motorcycle—"

"Ah, yes, I remember." It had been a case that attracted much attention. An old multimillionaire noted for his adolescent activities, van Kronk had been a motorcycling fanatic for close to ten years. "These obituaries, people were shocked to realize just how old he was."

"Exactly. He'd been a client for seventeen years and still would be if a rock in the road hadn't decided otherwise."

"Santini," smiled Bazin, "remind me to stop asking questions! You always have the proper answers."

From that moment on he followed instructions unquestioningly, sitting down to face the therapist and letting those dark-brown, almost jet, eyes, take all his attention. Somewhere metal seemed to be glittering, and a voice kept generating its own echoes until eyes, glitter, and sound absorbed each other into an infinitely shrinking circle, like snakes devouring one another.

Forty-five minutes later he came out of the trance on the third snap of fingers. It was as if he had enjoyed a full night's sleep. "You feel well?" asked Santini.

"Magnificent!"

"I am glad—even though your present joy is transient, illusory. The real is yet to come." He wrote something down on a blank card. "There will be no complications, but if you ever want to report something, you may call this Geneva number, an answering service, and leave a discreet message that Monsieur Rivarol is seeking Monsieur Santini. I will next contact you in about three weeks. After that reinforcement session we will establish the permanent eight-week routine."

The next day nothing happened to Bazin, leaving his hopes and fears equally unfulfilled. But on the morning after that, as he read the word *steel* in a financial report, he felt a monstrous panic surge up in him, and he knew that within a few minutes he would be dead of suffocation. His hands only trembled at their usual rate, but internally he seemed to be living through an earthquake which was ending the world. *My heart cannot beat this fast without tearing itself apart and I cannot breathe at all and my brain pounding its skull I CANNOT BREATHE THIS IS MY DEATH MY DEATH DEATH IS!*

And then some little bit of con-

scious mind was telling him it wasn't so, it was only an illusion, but that knowledge took nothing away from death, every bit of his being except that little laser-sharp spot in his mind knew he was dying or already dead. His desk and the papers on it glittered with unearthly beauty, so near and yet for the rest of eternity so far away, and the air before him and the desk had the same glitter, all reality an unbearably lovely straw just beyond his drowning reach.

Then the anxiety was gone and, blinking, he could see that everything in visible range was attainable. Thin sweat covered his body. *I am alive and I am as real as the desk and the papers and the air, everything that I now know to be so unbearably beautiful and forever unique.*

It was a bit like the exhilaration felt in childhood after the self-challenge of holding his breath until one hundred had been counted—but much more powerful. As it subsided into a vague tingling, he returned to his work, absorbing the corporate report at lightning speed. Everything was crystal clear, he chuckled, reversing that American song he'd once heard, a clear day *because* he had seen forever. So much silly, profound joy.

But something was wrong now, too. Both Santini and Lockyear had said there wouldn't be anxiety about when the next death-attack might occur. Yet here he was, flinching every few minutes at the chance the next second would trigger those first seconds of sheer hell before consciousness could begin diluting the terror!

Then at four, as he reached for the telephone to call Lyon, it did come.

I am going to walk to the window and fall from the window in the next instant. My body turning through five stories of space to splinter beside a plane tree, sewer-filled doll, crumple-boned thing, me forever mere nothing, now dead, thing.

You are not dying, said the little point in his brain, *only living the fact of its possibility throughout all of your being save this voice.* And again the wild climax of exhilaration. *I am living, I AM being more alive than before my dying,* this subsiding into an infinite plentitude of well-being.

For the rest of the day, he felt no anxiety; had not Santini said there would be two attacks at most per day? The next day he woke up more at ease with himself than he had been in twenty years. As soon as he was fully conscious, the flinching did come, but it was weaker than before.

That afternoon he experienced the one attack of the day, and the tiny time zone of torment was followed by a rapture even greater than the earlier ones. And that anxious anticipating, like a child's

turning away from imagined blows, became weaker and weaker.

By the fourth day anxiety was all gone, and he moved from strength to strength. His step seemed firmer, his hand less shaky.

In the second week Claude began to look at him curiously and when his master said, "Enough! I am not a creature in the zoo for your contemplation!" Claude volubly apologized: "Oh, no, Monsieur Bazin, I was only thinking you look so much healthier lately. As you looked seven or eight years ago."

"Thank you, Claude, as always you are very kind."

So his well-being was now more than self-delusion. Decades ago Bazin had read somewhere that a sure measure of true aging was the elasticity of skin at places such as the back of the hand between thumb and index finger. The more time it took a pinched-up bit of flesh there to subside, the more of its lifetime that flesh had exhausted. Every few months he had tried it. Now this lugubrious test of progess to the grave had reversed itself; everywhere in his body there was a slight yet perceptible improvement of tone.

By the time three weeks had elapsed with their several dozen tiny immersions in death's totality, the change was no longer slight. Even his loins began stirring in a way he had resigned himself nevermore to experience.

On schedule Santini contacted him and he hastened to the appointed place, this time a right-bank hotel near the Place Vendome. Wildly excited, Bazin threw 50,000 francs down on a table. There were tears in his eyes. "Monsieur Santini, my life is transformed. No amount of money has the value of what you give!"

Santini smiled thinly. "I am sure we will continue to give each other what we most value, but the calmer you are now, the easier it will be to reach the proper state for reinforcing the death image."

"I can only try."

His experiences and impressions came tumbling forth in a hectic flood. From time to time Santini, nodding, would ask a curt question, then return to silence. But at the end of fifteen minutes he put his hand up with all the grace of a Roman policeman halting traffic. "Enough, monsieur. Now to the future."

This time offering no resistance, Bazin felt himself slip easily toward the trance state, then was within it, disappeared from view. The last thing he had seen was an ormolu clock on a mantelpiece, its hands both pointing at four, and it was the first thing he saw immediately afterwards, both hands now at five. Santini gave his shoulder an affectionate pat. "Longer than usual, my friend,

but the next session is in eight weeks, and this is the first time we prepare for so long an absence. In the future, our sessions will go more rapidly."

Bazin waved his hands about in joyous disparagement. "The time does not concern me. I am happy—and it is not a silly happiness you have permitted me to find."

In the succeeding weeks his strength continued to grow and while, naturally, much of his body's aging was irreversible, enough of it was subject to change to cut more years off his appearance. The cadaverous sinks of cheeks and sockets were firmly filled in. If his fingers remained skeletally thin, they no longer quivered, and if no wrinkles had completely disappeared, the skin about them had become firm with returning life.

Then, just a week before his renewal trance was due and thirteen years after his last, fumbling night with a woman, he acquired a mistress.

At the next session, which took place in a Lucerne hotel, he began to tell about the young blonde stenographer in his office who had been the subject of impotent speculation for him these last two years. ("She has completed the return to my youth which you so gloriously commenced!") But Santini demanded he stop. "Monsieur Bazin, I am truly happy for you, but I need not pry into your private affairs and time is short."

"Now who is the grim man of affairs, all work and no play?" Bazin chuckled. "It is unjust that you yourself cannot benefit from the marvels you perform."

"When I need these benefits, I shall obtain them," he said drily, "but I am still young and my knowledge must be used at present to satisfy other needs before I bestow its benefits on all mankind—if any other men can learn how to practice my art."

He became more affable. "I do not care for personal gushing but I will explain this much, monsieur. Many years ago I went through psychoanalysis, and my doctor was enormously pleased at the results, declaring me close to being *angstrein,* as neurotically cleared as it was possible for a human to get. I came out of that experience with ferociously clear insight into myself and knew that one block was not to be conquered: my need and love for the power of money. That, stupid though it may be, is what I live for still." His mood had slowly changed to one of grimmest determination. "Some day I shall live otherwise."

"Not stupid," Bazin shrugged, already thinking of Angelique's body, soft and cool yet warmly white, past this upcoming hour of self-loss and some possible later seconds of horror, that jet-black pinprick on the gleaming surface

of his life, past them to that body waiting at midnight to flower beneath him between the almost ungraspable sleekness of silk sheets. "Nothing is better than money, my dearest friend, except for a few of the things it can buy."

It was Santini's turn to shrug as he stared intently into his eyes and began the session. When it was completed Santini looked slightly tired, and Bazin decided not to risk providing annoyance with any more personal questions.

He had reason to remember that tired look two months later when no word came from Santini. For two days he refused to worry, but on the third the thought of Santini's being ill occurred to him. Although younger than most, perhaps all, of his clients, Santini was not immune to every ill of the flesh. After all, he couldn't rejuvenate himself directly. Or could he?

The next day Bazin had no brush with death. Of itself this was not disturbing; there had been a few other such days. What really had him worried was the nature of the death throes when they did return the following day; some subtle weakening of the afterglo was perceptible.

The vague weakening again was present in the next day's two tiny bouts with death, so that evening he telephoned the Geneva number. When he said he wanted to leave a message for M. Santini the operator hesitated: "I cannot remember such a name on our list."

"What?" he demanded, in a panic now.

"Please, monsieur. I said I don't—ah, yes, here it is!"

Bazin felt tremendously relieved. "Thank you, madame."

"Your message?"

"That Monsieur Rivarol awaits word from Monsieur Santini."

Again he had needlessly panicked. Santini was a code name for his exclusive use, so the operator would have never before received a call on it. If the death seconds had still been coming full force, he would have been clearheaded enough to see that instantly.

The next day there was no reply from Santini. Then, deep in the night, only minutes after finally achieving sleep, Bazin had a nightmare. He was dying, his whole being shook with the knowledge of what was happening, and soon, equally in dream, he had the realization that this dying would not end in real death but would itself end. Only it did not end, the dying remained undiminished by knowledge.

When he finally awoke there was *none* of the usual exhilaration, and he knew that only Santini could save him from what was happening. This time he telephoned Glasgow. The junior secretary of Sir Giles Lockyear to

whom he was finally referred after giving his name to several other people regretted to say that Sir Giles was on the Riviera and, in any case, could speak to no one.

This proved to be the case when he contacted Antibes. "Sir Giles is not feeling well," explained the senior secretary.

"When can I speak to him?

"Perhaps I will be able to bring your call to his attention in a fortnight."

"What! You dare—"

"Monsieur Bazin, anger will not—"

"Tell him this concerns Santini-Lovchok."

"Santini? This has no significance—did you say Lovchok?"

"YES!"

"Please attend one moment, sir."

A minute later Sir Giles came on. "Bazin, you there?"

"Yes, something awful—"

"No, not on the line!" he cried. "You must come here so we can pool information."

"I can't, I must await word."

"There will be no word, do you understand me?"

"No."

"A death. I cannot say more."

"I will be there."

While his hired plane carried him south, Bazin had a visit from death. The large cabin with all its empty seats, row on row, was going to be his coffin and the Rhone Valley the place in which his body broke, but there was going to be *no* coffin, said the little voice of consciousness, no body broken to splinters. His breath came and went with sublime ease, death's rapture released him to life's, and if his exaltation was not that to which he had become accustomed these past months, it was at least great enough to steel him to face the ordeal ahead. *Who* had died?

At Antibes, on a broad terrace overlooking the Mediterranean, he heard the answer. Sir Giles, shriveled and suddenly looking all of his eighty-odd years, had shooed away his oversolicitous staff people. "Lovchok, your Santini, that's the man who died."

The color drained from Bazin's face. "Impossible! What are you scheming?"

"No scheme," Sir Giles wheezed angrily. "If I didn't need your help as much as you need mine, I'd have you thrown out right now! Three weeks ago he was supposed to contact me—my eight weeks had elapsed. In all these years this egomaniac genius never missed making the contact."

"I'm almost a week overdue. It can't be!"

"It can and is. And wait until two more weeks are past to know how terrible the lack of death is." He broke into a coughing fit but waved back the lackeys who started approaching. "After ten days I put my intelligence staff to work on our problem. First, I and

an identikit artist laboriously built up Lovchok's portrait. This is part of what he found out."

He handed Bazin a clipping from a London paper dated seven weeks back.

MYSTERIOUS DEATH
IN SOUTH KENSINGTON

Ronaldo Suarez, a citizen of Panama, was found dead yesterday morning in his rooms at the Crescent Hotel, Crescent Gardens. Police say that the dead man's face was contorted with apparently ungovernable fear and that so far no other, more precise cause of death has been established. Mr. Suarez, aged 50, seems to have been in excellent health.

20,000 pounds in banknotes were found in false bottoms of the dead man's luggage and authorities have reason to believe a similar amount will be located at various banks. No source of these funds has been ascertained for Mr. Suarez.

Mr. Rodney Worthington, manager of the Crescent Hotel, said that the dead man had taken rooms there about a dozen times over the past decade, never staying for more than about five days on any single visit.

Sir Giles fumed with impatience until Bazin finished the long article which consisted mainly of vague speculation. "That Suarez was our Santini-Lovchok—now keep still, Bazin, it's not hopeless if we attack the matter calmly—my people (who haven't the faintest idea why I'm really interested) have expended a small fortune obtaining every scrap of information about him. There were just a few small jottings in his handwriting around the suite, and they indicated he had been frightened by a bout of impotence with some pick-up somewhere a week previously, his first such sexual fiasco. The autopsy revealed absolutely nothing wrong with him—he must have been as hypercautious about his health as about everything else. I am convinced that Lovchok-Suarez tried to hypnotize *himself* into experiencing death and overshot the mark!"

"He did seem oddly tired the last time."

"And died only a few days later! There you are! Bazin, there's an excellent chance you were his last client. There must be some clue you noticed then or earlier, some clue to his procedure to pool with me—"

"Nothing! Maybe Poplos—"

Lockyear's groan ended in a hacking cough. "That stupid fool drowned himself yesterday! Haven't you noticed these past two weeks how many old men of great wealth have died in Western Europe?"

Bazin could not restrain a Gal-

lic shrug. "It is the way with old men."

"No, no, no! Too many all at once! Three American financial giants who have made their homes in Europe for many years *and* Sheik Rawzi, a man worth billions, he was 90, just had a child 3 years ago, and I have established the fact that, no matter where he traveled, every eighth week he was back in Western Europe or Turkey. Dead last week in Cannes!"

Bazin was stunned. "We could be the last surviving clients!"

"Possibly—I don't know. I do know *I* will survive no matter what happens—but how much better if some substitute hypnotist for that reckless Lovchok can be found! Then I can live as well as survive—you, too, Bazin, if you can supply clues."

"But I *can't*!" he exclaimed desperately. "Santini was so secretive—"

The sun gleamed black, all light was black while all dark and shadow came ablaze in a fiery negation of reality. *I am dying this is what death's world looks like until all is blackness* . . . You are not dying. Blackness. There is always light . . .

The air and the Mediterranean and the terrace were real again. The renewed vital juices poured through him, not with the strength they had, but still a glorious thing, each cell generating a vigor more fundamental than any mere outpouring of adrenalin.

Lockyear's usually aristocratic eyes bugged outward with the dirty hunger of a voyeur, and then tears came into them. "You still have some of it, Bazin. Good, wasn't it? Ah, yes! I'll have to do my best. I'm bringing the world's greatest specialists in hypnosis here. I will pay them to the point where they have to produce results. Try, try to remember, and afterwards I shall contact you in Paris." Then, old and weak, he waved for Bazin to leave him to the ministrations of his staff, still apprehensively hovering about the palms at the other end of the terrace.

There followed three days of nervous waiting for word from Lockyear, three days in which no ennobling vision of death's vileness came to Bazin, only spasms of anxiety that brought old age creeping back up his limbs like scurvy rising slowly toward the heart. In an outburst of rage at his mistress' inability to arouse him any more, he threw her out. An hour later, swept by fear and remorse, he drowned her threats with parting gifts of cash and real estate.

There could be little hope now.

And even that hope went when Lockyear finally telephoned. "They're watching me everywhere!" the older man screamed. "Maybe monitoring right now, Bazin, but I had to tell you. The

great 'experts,' they took my money all right, but then they all insisted it was impossible, you can't make man experience death, you can't this, you can't that. Professors! I had them flown in from the States, Mexico, a Tokyo man. They treated me like a senile fool, and when I said I could present them with another case, they mumbled about collective self-delusion! I'm not finished, though, I'll have you down in a few days."

The next day the radio reported Sir Giles Lockyear's sudden death from a brain hemorrhage.

Now certain his own end was a matter of days, Bazin devoted all his time to what he knew best, the making of money. After another week, though, his decline seemed to have halted. Could it be possible that, having been in death therapy a much shorter period than any of the others, he was going to survive? With that came the final upsurge of hope: He would have to search out everyone with the slightest knowledge of the man who had been so many men.

He wrote a cryptic advertisement which declared in large bold type:

THE PASSING TRANCES
OF DEATH
ARE THE LASTING
LIBERATION OF LIFE

and asked that information be forwarded to a Paris postal box for an extremely generous reward.

This was placed in the principal financial journals of Western Europe, as well as many other publications, and Bazin gave up all business activities to read the responses.

There were over three hundred of them, some in languages of which he was totally ignorant. These he had to decipher at a crawl with dictionaries, but all received his personal attention. The majority of the letters revealed the writers to be lunatics, while the others indicated he was, and a few managed to encompass both revelations. The more abusive the letter, the longer it tended to be, in some cases covering twenty sheets. At the end of a fortnight completely devoted to such reading, Bazin was too enraged at humanity's stupidity and viciousness to worry further about getting across any message of hope.

Having set aside the last nauseating missive, he turned to the newspapers he had missed, and there on the first page of one from Paris was the story that ended his rage. At the top was a passport-type photo of Santini himself! The hooded eyelids gave no hint of the power that had lain beneath them.

THE MYSTERY FORTUNE OF
EUROPE'S MYSTERY MAN

So far over 90,000,000 francs in diamonds, cash and bonds have been uncovered in the Swiss accounts of a strange

international figure, M. Rolando Suarez, who last September was found dead in his London hotel suite. Banking officials refuse to release precise details, but it has been privately ascertained that one group of safety deposit boxes alone contained five million U.S. dollars. It is believed that further hoards may be tracked down in the next few weeks.

Who was M. Suarez? Nobody knows. Even his ostensible Panamanian nationality is now being subjected to scrutiny.

How did he accumulate this vast fortune, mostly in easily transportable diamonds, without any government discovering his financial status? Again, nobody knows.

Some investigators insist he must have been a crucial Mafia pivot in the world drug trade. Others, with equally uncertain support, speak of espionage, a fabulous one-man diamond mine hidden from the trade, and Nazi war funds.

Blackmail, on a scale unprecedented in history, has received particular attention because there is some reason to believe Suarez had contact at various times with some of the world's richest men, all now dead. What sinister hold would induce such men to disgorge vast sums without attempting tax adjustments?

One thing is certain from a cryptic note found in a Zurich vault. Suarez, also identified elsewhere as Sorel, Lovchok, Bernheim and Rastignac, was planning to use his accumulated wealth to seize strategic control of several great corporations. He evidently anticipated gaining allies in that effort.

"The notes are too brief and guarded for us to grasp his precise plan," asserts an official who insists on anonymity. "However, this fantastic man did have the audacity to write, 'When I am the richest man in the world, the world will be enriched.' "

But the utmost fantasy was reached when speculation appeared in lower police echelons on the Riviera that Suarez may have known how to give rich benefactors endless youth, the conquest of death.

"Utter idiocy," said a spokesman for the Paris Surete last night. "Everyone in a half-dozen countries investigating this strange affair agrees on that one point. There can be no endless youth, no conquest of death, only some corrupt hold on men of great wealth. Blackmail, yes. Sex, possibly highly perverted, yes. Extortion, yes. But only in the mind of M. Suarez himself could there have been delusions concerning eternal youth. Although ob-

viously cautious and sagacious in every other matter, he left the greatest intestate fortune of all time. There is not the slightest scrap of a will anywhere!"

Bazin pinched the skin on the back of his hand, watched it subsiding terribly slowly, and then read the last sentence over and over again, knowing that he was forever past both rage and hope, and that, whether death came for him soon or late, he could now only die laughing.

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