

THE NEW BLOCKBUSTER BY
PHILIP WYLIE

What will happen when man's poisoned atmosphere drives him underground?.. .The startling novel of men and women trapped in

Los Angeles: A.D. 2017

A novel based on Philip Wylie's special teleplay for NBC-TV's **THE NAME OF THE GAME**

**A TERRIFYING NOVEL OF THE
NEAR-FUTURE-
WHERE LOVE, LIFE, SEX ARE
DRIVEN UNDERGROUND...**

Glenn Howard, publishing tycoon, got into his car and prepared to dictate a top-secret memo to the President of the United States.

That memo concerned a meeting he'd just attended—a gathering of key scientists and industrialists at which the true and terrifying secret of the Earth's poisoned atmosphere and waters come out. Man was on the brink of his own self-destruction. ... Glenn Howard never finished that memo. He began to feel drowsy and soon blacked out. When he awoke, it was indeed too late. **Howard had not been asleep, but unconscious for forty seven years!**

He awoke in a strange underground world, ruled by a coldblooded dictatorship, with a bizarre social and sexual code. It was all happening in **LOS ANGELES: A.D. 2017**

STRANGE AWAKENING —ON MARS?

A voice woke him.

He experienced a common sensation on awakening in a strange environment: he couldn't think where he was.

He looked around. It was the rest area he remembered —off the turnpike. But it had changed so much it was almost another place. There were cars in parking lots, but they looked to be rusted wrecks. No children. The neat signs had faded or vanished. No moving cars were visible. There was a total absence of sound.

The Martian characters whose voices had awakened him now reached the door of his car. They were groping inside for him.

And then he realized that other things were wrong. Though it was obviously early, and the sky was seemingly clear, he couldn't see the sun . . .

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CONSPIRACY

There were thirty-seven men in the room.

Their ages differed by a half century. Tall, short, skinny, overweight, blond, dark, bald, they were unlike enough to represent the major possible variations on the male theme. But in two ways, Glenn Howard thought, they were alike.

All thirty-seven were under tension.

And all, in as many different ways, shared a look of command, of authority, of that certain quality men have who stand at the top of their field, their business or profession.

Those notions briefly intrigued Glenn Howard. Power, authority personified Cleaton Connors who had been president of Petro-Chemical-Royal-Europa for—what? Ten years, about. Cleat Connors was big and he was bull-strong, he had a large head and a voice of muted thunder. He *looked* like a two-billion dollar corporation, the one with the most—also the subtlest—influence hi Congress and in other bodies both similar and very dissimilar save where national policy was involved.

Dr. Augustus J. Vance was the opposite version: a quiet man with brown hair like feathers, a face that was tan but not from the sun, an inherently brown face. A long jaw and a wide, very workable mouth. Hard to hear him speak and what one heard seemed apologetic, till one listened closely. A nervous man, a wriggler, lean, tall and perhaps much stronger than his thin frame suggested. One who rarely made a definite statement but usually prefaced or ended his assertions with a seeming disclaimer:

"I believe." "I suspect." "It is thought." "In my opinion." "According to present theory."

And yet, after listening to those qualifiers for a tune, an astute person would realize that what this scientist "believed" or "suspected" or set forth as somebody's "thought" was not in any way self-diminishing. On the contrary, the scientist was being precise, acknowledging, merely, that no branch of science has final answers and any current concept may later be changed, modified or even abandoned. This was precision itself and the man who employed it indicated, by that inverse-seeming manner, a simple fact: whatever he discussed was known by him as well as, and often far better than, by any other ecologist. Knowledge was his power-source just as money in vast and used sums was the source of the power in the twenty-six men present who were "industrialists"—"tycoons" to the ordinary man, heads of giant corporations, and, in the main, the biggest of the American giants.

Nine of the others were scientists, ecologists, biologists and one bio-physicist, Morton, from Cal Tech, Du Pont, and now, Morton Industries, a big and explosively-growing firm near Boston on "Electronics Row."

The meeting was secret.

Even the President (of, merely, United States of America) was believed not to know of this gathering. The President knew . . . because of Glenn Howard. Glenn had been invited and supplied with his "itinerary" for secret arrival here, on merit, like the others. Howard Communications added up to something less than a billion dollars worth of newspapers, radio and TV stations, trade publications of a singularly informed nature and

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other odds and ends, among them, a book publishing house. Financially, Glenn's holdings were below par for the men of industry, here. But they possessed a power that was not shared by corporate holders of mines, mills, banks, or timber and metal resources. Glenn could, if he wished, and occasionally he did, influence the minds and emotions of almost half the people in the nation, directly or by some less personal use of the "media."

No other man of industry here, or anywhere, could do that. None but the media tycoons have access to so many and with that, any comparable opportunity to make, change, direct or even erase public opinion.

It is a modern kind of leverage, one that not many men have ever possessed. Of them, few have used that force as responsibly at Glenn Howard. Yet Glenn was as shrewd as honorable. He did not flaunt his personal integrity when he used the media he owned for some valued end. This, he did seldom. But his occasional support of policies, of candidates, of crusades, always admirable, or so-intended (though results sometimes disappointed his trust) was of a careful sort. Even these, these men of fathomless cunning, had always assumed Glenn and the Howard "empire" were on "their side."

That Glenn could not be bought, they knew. But that he stood for capitalism, for the right to make money and even an

enormous sum of it, was evident: He'd done it So it was assumed that Glenn Howard could be trusted absolutely to keep this top-level gathering to himself. It did not occur to his fellow-industrialists that the secrecy of the assemblage and its membership would cause their colleague many nights of sleepless conflict that ended only when Glenn decided that, whatever was intended and whatever the outcome, he had a higher duty. So much American business muscle, and such specialized and superlative brain-power of science, in a covert meeting, meant that at least one other person ought to be told of the plan and then, the result

It was too probable that such a group gathered with such incredible efforts to disguise their collective presence,
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meant something of national moment and even, something dangerous to America. Glenn knew the President well enough to have some minutes with him, alone.

The President listened, as usual, but with rare evidence of surprise, and then, of worry, and at last, of gratitude. He knew ten or twelve of the men Glenn listed very well and another dozen well enough so that the President, too, inferred quickly that their planned session might be threatening—how, he could not guess—and that it was, to him, a kind of treachery, since it had been kept from him.

When thirty-seven men, many, personal friends, all, giants of various sorts, assemble while taking care not to leak even a hint to the White House, then, it is tune for the man who sits at the bitter desk in the Oval Room to worry.

"Not a clue about the purpose, Glenn?"

"None, Mr. President."

A long pause. A double twist of the revolving chair. "Thanks, then, for coming to me. Let me hear the story. And don't, repeat, don't, feel the way you looked when you came in." A chuckle. "Like a tattletale schoolboy. Maybe—probably, whatever the meeting decides, will be brought to me at once. I am almost sure of it But suppose it *isn't*? Suppose those Big Boys and their blackmailed scientists didn't report the minutes of the meeting to me? I'd never know. I need to. Think of yourself, Glenn, as—brave—and a very great patriot. It's hard to carry tales, but sometimes necessary, now."

A wiry hand went out. Ten days ago. . . .

Now, it was nearing noon.

The huge room was very cool, air-conditioned not just silently but excessively, to carry away the clouds of cigar and pipe and cigarette smoke. And to fend against the temperature at Boiling Wells in the Mojave Desert which, in the scanty shade was above 100 degrees and in the near-ubiquitous noon sun, incredibly higher.

At the moment, Dr. Ramus Pearson, the world authority on phytoplankton (taxonomy, distribution, physiology

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and environmental effects) was endlessly putting forward his knowledge. He did not know how to express it well for laymen. And his audience, saving the other eight scientists, but including the two military men (in mufti) were laymen, here. Most of what he was saying, Glenn already knew. That was why his mind drifted as the monologue—and interrupting demands for simplification—clattered on. Only when a new fact or concept was entered did Glenn pay attention.

"... to put it in, ah, primitive terms," Dr. Pearson said, as if translating English for a foreigner, "green plants, vegetation, on land and in the seas, take the carbon dioxide with which we pollute the air—"

Elias Gant, the aged spiderlike motor maker, cut in. "Just a moment, doctor. You said that all animals take oxygen from the air and return carbon dioxide. People, included. And all combustion does the same. A camp fire. An accidental forest fire. Burning coal or oil or gas for heat, or to raise steam. Now, why do people contend the automobile is the major guilty agent in this air-pollution, this oxygen-use that releases CO₂—when nature has done it before man—and man, by breathing, *man*, as soon as he *was* man, and all his ancestors, dinosaurs, even, if they are distant relatives? Isn't the anti-automobile-engine claim somehow a bit exaggerated?"

Pearson's "Version" of what Glenn had thought a common quality of these men, was short-fused and temper-driven.

His scholar's face now became taut and his voice reached a level near to shrill. "*Mister* Gant," he said, with an emphasis that made "mister" seem a term of derogation, "if you will give me a few minutes more, I can answer you, in a proper frame of reference, and for the fifth time."

Gant grinned like a mean monkey and waved a claw. He was too old, too rich and too thick-skinned to be in-suitable.

"If," Pearson then continued, "you now perceive the air we breathe is subject to the process I have stated, that oxygen is 'burned up' by fire and by living beings for

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their energy, and if I have made it somewhat clear that this process would, eventually, turn the atmosphere into a mix of gases in which carbon dioxide had become a major element, you may then see the air has to be regenerated, somehow, to continue to support life. And if you see, as I have tried to make plain, that the green plants of the planet use CO₂ and water, or, H₂O, to get their nourishment, an act that also releases free oxygen, you can reach my next point."

He glared in a sort of restrained way at Gant, who sneered.

"My field," Pearson went on, "phytoplankton, concerns the green plants in the seas. Algae. What the layman might call scums or slimes—masses of single-celled green organisms. These green-plant organisms in the oceans are responsible for seventy per cent, or around that, of the whole process. To clarify that, let me repeat, green land plants do only 30 per cent, roughly, of atmosphere re-oxygenation. Oceanic plants, though in the main minute, one-celled, even, visible only by microscope, do the larger part. Nearly three-quarters.

"To go on. Industrial progress had meant a constant escalation of the rate of CO₂ added to the air. In USA about 60

per cent of this exponentially rising pollution is done by the automotive vehicle. . . ."

Gant cut in again as Glenn had guessed he would. And Glenn had also guessed the man's question. Carbon dioxide was a natural additive and not, itself, toxic. So why was science in a swivel about this oxygen-plant-car matter? Pearson sighed audibly and went at it again.

If the air kept being a CO₂ dump, if green plants, land and sea, couldn't keep up with the additional carbon dioxide, hi time, the planet would get warmer. Sunshine went through CO₂ as it does through glass. But the heat that the light generate~~s~~ on the surface does not reflect back through CO₂ into space. Heat is a different thing, another wavelength, and carbon dioxide, like glass, lets in the light~~.,~~ retains the light-changed-into-heat—as in greenhouses—so, the world would warm up.

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Half-past noon.

They'd been over a vast territory of dangers to man's spaceship Earth.

The "greenhouse effect" was widely known. If it came, polar ice would melt, and glaciers everywhere and so, all land at some point below a hundred or two hundred feet would drown in the risen seas—very tough for port cities, for mankind, who had concentrated in the menaced areas.

They'd gone over the oxygen depletion bit. Keep using it faster than green plants replaced it—and smother.

They had been briefed and brilliantly, by Roy Morrison, the youngest person ever to be given a Nobel Prize, on man's degradation of his fresh waters by making them sewers and what that meant

Collin Strout had done the pesticide story—and Strout was a man with a memory for facts and figures that amazed even the tycoons, who were good at it, too, as well as by his knack for illustrating a given threat to the environment by some dramatic yet comprehensible and believable picture of what *that* (or this, this, that, the yonder folly) might lead to. Nightmares for the near future.

Pearson bumbled on. Gant and others put in wedges of question or request for simplification. Only once was Glenn's mind brought to attention.

When the man who knew the most about phytoplank-ton pointed out their delicate natures, their dependency on a special and stable environment, he also stated their environment (the seas) was becoming utterly unstable. Then he explained that man's wastes usually reach~~d~~ the seas in the end, that few of them were sorts these organisms had encountered in their hundreds of millions of years of existence, that many ocean-received compounds were known to be lethal to all life forms and, finally, shocking Glenn, that, "an estimated" five hundred thousand compounds new to nature are today being dumped in the oceans by USA. "And that frightening figure is rising."

Glenn hadn't known there were so many. He had known

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all about human dependency for breathable air on those tiny, incredibly abundant green, oceanic "phytoplankton."

And he did realize that the half million waste compounds just mentioned might in general be harmless to mammals, say, or fish or crustaceans, but lethal to single-celled beings.

Rufus Cooper, their host and the man who'd planned this meeting, looked at his watch.' Board Chairman of Cooper Copper. But in that aggregate company, the Board Chairman was boss. Big buy, Glenn reflected: genial, courteous, full of novel ideas, a man who, at sixty, could and would attract almost any female with the masculinity he projected, had, and used. A man with a personality that was self-selling—and eccentricities that were many and odd. This very room, for one thing, Glenn thought, was built for just such meetings as this meetin~~g~~—even if it was the first of its precise sort, which Glenn believed to be true.

Cooper's "ranch" was not, itself, secret, though it was remote. Nothing so extravagant could be hidden. Indeed, some of Rufus Cooper's parties were famous. Others were not given photo-coverage in the press, or TV time, though they were whispered about. Even Glenn, who'd heard much of the "spread" was amazed on arriva~~l~~—at this, his first visit.

It was actually a minor city. In multilevel ranch-type villas, detached and also in groups, two hundred guests could be accommodated in about that many suites and these were more luxurious than any motel could boast or, for that matter, many hotels. The riding ring and giant swimming pool were covered by miniature astrodomes of translucent, greenish plastic, and air-conditioned. Cooper's own "house" included a ballroom, a theatre and a dining room for two hundred. There was a gymnasium. The meeting room where the thirty-seven men sat was near the house. There was a library.

Concrete of some unfamiliar mix connected every facility and whoever wished could have an electric cart—the distances were considerable. Even the pitch-and-putt golf greens were roofed

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and air-cooled. And to supply the power-needs of this vast establishment there was a distant, inaudible but town-sized generating plant.

The whole affair was call~~ed~~ "the Kettle," a rather obvious name for the locus, Boiling Wells, but that, too, was like the owner. Cooper Copper was not just a copper mining or copper refining company.

Glenn wondered what it had cost—many, many millions—and what th& maintenance bills would be—a million a year? Maids and chauffeurs, armed guards, engineers and technicians, grounds-keepers, pilots for the twin-jet planes and the helicopters parked, now, on Cooper's airstrip where heat wriggled over long runways that ended hi mirages. And yet, and yet, there was a modesty about Cooper. He behaved as if his guests owned the desert fantasy. He was a super-host who took pains to find out all their tastes and crochets, pleasures and antipathies, and he supplied what they enjoyed.

If you liked your breakfast in bed, you got it there. Chicory in your coffee? You had it. A pretty maid to

bring the tray, cornflakes or fruit, juice or pancakes? She appeared. If you preferred red-headed ladies to blondes or brunettes, she had red hair. And if, as was true of more than a few aging males, your sexual capability (and desire) was limited to mornings, or even to moments after being wakened, your favorite style of female, your maid, would cooperate on signal and with skill as well as every sign of delight. No end to the host's "thoughtfulness"! A legend. With lesser whisperings. Senator Gilvan Kreeshow's beautiful wife, Doletta, for instance, had made one such—and told on herself. Men aroused her but by men she was never satisfied, her powerful politician-husband, included. Cooper had learned that, even, so when the Kreeshow's came to Boiling Wells, Mrs. K. had all the gratification she could bear. The Senator didn't disapprove.

Glenn, having arrived in the early morning after flying from Los Angeles to San Francisco and then going, by helicopter, to join "a hunting party in the Sierras"—his

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cover story—wondered vaguely what special luxuries Cooper would provide for him. Quite a challenge, Glenn thought, with some amusement, since his wants were normal and his only unusual aspect was the fact that, in slightly-past-middle forties, he was a bachelor. When his chopper landed some fifty miles from Boiling Wells, and as he was taken onward in a closed, air-conditioned car, he had cogitated on that, for a tune. Why was he a bachelor, still? Because he'd seen the married of many friends turn into loveless and even hateful relationships? Because he had seen how often marriage became a trap? Because he was, secretly, afraid of women? Or had never met the ideal woman? None of those.

Perhaps, the thought had come and gone, along with a wry grin, Cooper would try to guess how to be the perfect host to Glenn—and, say, guess Glenn was a covert homosexual. That would be some error! He did not want or need casual female company, however gorgeous, now. What if one was inserted into his suite? The legends were surely exaggerated. He was on a double mission, like a double agent, in a way—and that was stressful enough. He quit idle speculation and soon reached The Kettle. . . .

As Rufus Cooper glanced a second time at his watch, Glenn contemplated these men and the aim of the twenty-five. They were not "self-made men" in the old sense. A few had started at a ladder-bottom, missed higher education and made the top—but done that because, in the years between, they'd educated themselves, learning all the manners and the sophisticated ways of the rest. Of the twenty-five, half had graduate degrees of sorts appropriate to business. Cooper, for instance, had two doctorates—in law and in business management. The industrial majority, sitting in zebra-skin-upholstered chairs around this table, behaved in civilized ways. They listened, or seemed to, even when bored. When they did speak, they followed rules, almost parliamentary in form. They did not hesitate to reveal areas of ignorance when such areas existed.

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A President's cabinet, a meeting of a university faculty, could hardly be more urbane. These tycoons were not like the images held by the militant young. They were not ogres, not utterly ruthless, not the ignorant and greedy robber barons who'd fought their way to the top earlier in the century with the one aim of success. They were, instead, and for one thing, far better educated than those present-day, hostile kids even intended to become. Their goal was money, for themselves and their stockholders. But, by and large, their means to that end were neither vicious nor inhuman. These weren't "merchants of death," and they did not take the "public be damned" attitude.

The trouble was that the anti-Establishment kids had never known anybody in "the Establishment." They had a bloodthirsty image on big business men valid two or three generations ago, when the capitalist robber barons and child-exploiters enraged Karl Marx.

Rufus Cooper's first speech at this meeting came to order had amused Glenn for that reason.

"I haven't explained why I called this meeting. And I cannot thank all present adequately for the endless sacrifices they've made to be here. However, as most of you have doubtless noted, the thirty-seven of us come in three species. Nine of us are major scientists. Twenty-six, industrialists and leaders of big business. Two are military—Admiral Beacon and General Roaral. All of us, in various ways, are aware of the growing concern of Americans, of everybody, over the dangerous state of our environment.

"The twenty-six of us who represent a singularly large and potent part of business and industry are also aware that the effort to restore our world-habitat, to end pollution, will heavily, expensively and, some of you may fear, fatally involve your enterprises. We in industry have, so far, played it in various ways. A few have made expensive attempts to get off the pollution hook. More have made gestures and then tried to magnify them in the public mind to a degree not real. Others have done noth-

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ing, angered at accusations but well aware of the value of their products, whatever they may be, and sure that their industry must be continued, power, mining, and so on—however contaminating it may be. The cost of providing such goods and services without damaging the so-called eco-sphere would be too great for the market to absorb.

"Nine of us are scientists, as I said, and my thought was this:

"We, members of the Establishment, and influential ones, need a clearer insight into the precise nature of ecological damage we are doing, or may be. With that, and only with that, we can be able to join in a collective contemplation of the vast, broad and complex realities. These, I suggest, our experts, the scientists, should first set forth, as elaborately as they wish, and until the rest of us understand whatever they explain. After that, and only then, the rest of us will be able, I hope, and this is my purpose for so odd and so covert a meeting, we in business and industry can consider,

together, what we must do, what we can do, how quickly and by what means."

Cooper had then introduced each of his guests, with a short and, inevitably, impressive sketch of every man's attainments. Then he had let the scientists start talking—four hours ago.

Glenn's first reaction had been astonishment. Whatever he had expected, it was not this. For he had certainly been suspicious. He had tried to imagine what devious power-play this bizarre effort would concern. Some international cartel arrangement, some combined attempt to shift the men and women in the House and Senate—for special ends. *Priced* on some hidden but consumer-robbing scale. Even, some sort of attempt to organize industry with a view to putting down the violence, leftist, student and young-instructor "revolution" that had wracked America for years. An extra-state effort with its own enforcement agents, say.

And what was it?

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Did he, too, have a bit of the student mistrust of the Establishment—and did that cause his now-dissolved suspicions? Maybe.

But here was the Establishment—met, secretly, to try to make sense of the nation-wide, valid and increasing concern over its environmental decay.

Or, Glenn began to think as the scientists took turns describing real and possible, probable and also "unknown but knowable" horrors man was creating for his future, was the Establishment aim, here, truly that *benevolent*? The way most of the twenty-five czars of corporations put their questions, entered their comments and tried to argue with scientific fact, suggested to Glenn that perhaps, and just perhaps, the "Boiling Wells Meeting" might, when the scientists finished, be something else.

A cabal, say, to find ways and means of silencing the statistics of peril and details of imminent woe—a conspiracy of that sort.

When Cooper called a two-hour break for lunch, Glenn elected the swimming pool instead of the indoor cocktails.

There was a bar at the pool, in any case. And more. The "life guard" was a beautiful Amazon, extroverted and willing.

The poolside bar tender was brunette and petite and pretty enough for stardom. Two maids in swim suits carried drinks around and also, their selves, lovely, appetizing, pert, sexy to look at, sexier to talk to, and willing, also. Very.

He took a martini, smilingly didn't take an offering lass—and no hurt feelings.

Cooper joined him after a while and beckoned Glenn away from diving, at which he was expert.

Out of earshot at the poolside, in the greenish tint the plastic dome gave to the sunlight, Cooper said, amiably. "Want to talk to you a sec. What was your reaction to the morning?"

Glenn chuckled. "Somewhere, I read, that a human being his pain can reach a point at which the agony is so severe, nothing more can increase it." He saw Cooper didn't quite relate the idea. "You can also get just

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so scared—and then, added terrors cannot add to your fright."

Cooper laughed. "Right! But, Glenn, look! Short of the apex of your fear, most people, well, panic."

"I don't feel there's much *panic* in America, about this environment thing. Rather, the reverse. People regard the crusade for clean environs as a fad, a commie gambit, even, as anti-American, since it suggests industry must be made to reform. My—media—have followed that latter line. Said, as many ways and as often as people could stand the load, that we *better* reform. Consumer, polluter, cities, all of us."

Cooper was silent. He needed to think and Glenn watched the various little acts that gave him time without disclosing he needed tune . . . unless somebody like Glenn observed.

He wriggled his toes and then, finding a grain or two of sand between them, flicked it out. He pinched the roll of fat that was the only concentrated evidence of the fifteen or so pounds of excess weight, most of it evenly padded over his muscular body. He'd played football at college, Glenn remembered. Then Rufus dropped his feet into the water as if checking its temperature. Next, he followed an ant that somehow had found a way into this green-lidded paradise, pool, bar, dressing rooms, tables, chairs—and girls.

Finally, he pushed his damp, sandy hair back from his forehead and after that he turned back to Glenn, grinning amiably. "Getting bald. People keep telling me I need a hairpiece. Baldness, though, is a sign of virility, so I am told by my doctor."

Encounter, Glenn thought. This guy's out to get me, somehow, or change *my* views, something. It was a fact Rufus' eyes confirmed. They were large eyes and well set, light brown and direct, usually, very direct, as if Rufus Cooper feared no man, owed none, harmed nobody and loved nearly all. But that extremely attractive gaze and its facial emphasis, half smile, a sort of muscle-readiness to react just as any other or others would like, at this next

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look, wasn't quite there, Glenn thought. Rather, it was there by force, not by natural cause.

Glenn was singularly gifted in such appraisals. So are a great many men who have gained power, fortunes, high office and command, although most of them aren't as aware as was Glenn that a major factor in their success was this one, this ability to read people. Read them, then, manipulate them according to the text. And that "text" had far less to do with the words others spoke, or even their skill at feigning reinforcement, as it had to do with their motions, intonations and, above all the tiny or even fairly large movements they made in areas where they were not exerting conscious control.

This activity was becoming a science: *kenisics*.

Some people have perfect eye-control, some, though not as many, add mouth-management; of these, some are hand motion alert. But nobody is able to make every bodily motion fit every intended aim. A man (a woman!) will not need any

subconscious and computer like self-management if what he (or she) is doing or saying is completely honest, whole and so, not requiring efforts for false emphasis or diversion. But the most careful attempt at hiding a motive, fact, feeling or aim, will always involve so much, a whole body, that some part of it will give away the apparent sincerity or integrity.

A twisted foot, a spread hand, a nervous push of elbow —and the performer is revealed. Glenn had time to wonder, watching Rufus Cooper, how and when he had consciously caught on to that great truth about human communication. And it occurred to him, since he had not put the question to himself hi the past but merely accepted and enlarged his ability in the affair, that he had noticed it as a teen-ager, even at thirteen, when he began to try to press cute classmates toward more intimate and productive pleasures. By fifteen or sixteen, Glenn had become an expert at the "does-she, doesn't-she?" puzzle—up to an appropriate level of do-don't for his age and the times. , But he had not been aware that the same useful evidence was always supplied by men until after Yale, after

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Columbia, after his father died and Glenn found himself in command of a minor radio-chain that was failing in a world where TV was taking over. Then, he noticed. Always, afterward, he sharpened the capacity. Sometimes, a cleared throat could tell Glenn to dodge or to make a deal that might involve millions.

So, now, Rufus Cooper was going to try to snow him.

When Cooper finally spoke—and the period of Ms silence, of Glenn's reflection and his self-disclosure— had been less than twenty seconds. The subject they'd opened was picked up as if without interruption. Cooper, Glenn knew, wasn't aware of that lag—another clue.

"Sure, Glenn. I know you've used that big people-pusher you own, to advocate more attention to conservation, to cleaning the dirty environment and all. My statistical staff in my Chicago offices have a run-down on the way all important opinion-molders are acting, in the matter. But, look. You heard the triple-domes and super-brains this morning. You'll hear more of the same, this afternoon. What's your net reaction, so far?"

Glenn realized that Cooper implied the "net reaction" of his media and so, himself, was not one the tycoon approved, but he felt no need to play games. He didn't try to return a faintly false smile. He knew Rufus pretty well and liked him quite well though he was aware the man put his business above all else.

Glenn's reply was calm, straight and easy. "My reaction? I think it must be the same as everybody's. The more you hear about the numbers and varieties of ecological dangers, the clearer it becomes that we're in trouble. In the soup. And have to do more, much more, than at present, to get out."

Rufus nodded with an excellent attempt at agreement. He didn't realize he had briefly balled both fists. "Sure, sure. But there's one thing about these scientific fellows that always bothers me." He waited to be asked "what" and went ahead when not asked. "They're never *sure*. Maybe we'll be harmed some day if too many species of those sea-things die off and the oxygen-cycle slows down.

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Maybe the earth will warm up and the seas rise. Maybe the glaciers will return. But when? Or, which? Oh, some day, and maybe which way—hot or cold—is not now known. Maybe—"

Here, Cooper burlesqued the voice and mannerisms of one of the morning speakers, Dr. Elmer Wtntner Eddy, a biologist of great repute and also one of the few who was producing a torrent of scare-material for the public press, radio, TV, and in books and by lecturing. Eddy's high, near-stutter was mimicked to perfection. His hand-slicing gestures were only slightly exaggerated. His pauses-with-scowling were aped with no need of burlesque.

"So—gentlemen—we cannot date the future hour of any of the potential calamities I—and my colleagues— have begun to outline." Lethal scowl. "We have merely touched on some ingredients." A hand-chop as Eddy's list followed, one for each. "Thermal pollution. Radioactive pollution. Pesticides. Herbicides. Asbestos. Lead. Selenium. Mercury. Cadmium. Acids. Strong alkalis. Human overcrowding as nine tenths of us move into one per cent of the nation's space. The hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide and dioxide. Ozone—killing trees to five thousand feet around Los Angeles. Sewage. Phosphates. A-a-a-nd s-s-s-so on."

Glenn was close to roaring laughter, just on the honest side of that kind which is overdone. Rufus Cooper was a startin gly good mimic—a new thing to learn about the man. An interesting thing. Because all, or nearly all of those who are born to or achieve command are multi-faceted people. It is not odd or strange that, Glenn reflected, Elias Gant, now talking to the lovely Amazon lifeguard across the pool, was, also, a tympanist. Good enough to join any symphony orchestra, good enough to play first position in several—if he chose to quit forging steel.

Rufus Cooper saw Glenn's glance and winked. He waited with pleasure till the flattering but deserved laughter ebbed. "See what I mean?"

Glenn's brown eyes, dark, fixed on the other's light ones. "That small men go for big women?"

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"They often do—and Elias is a prime example. But, no. About our endangered environment, so-called. I was trying to show you that the men who know the most —and you'll agree that my collection is superb—haven't much *hard* information on anything really cataclysmic."

"They're scientists, is all. Of course they won't commit themselves to exact prediction. The *knowns* are ominous, but the *unknowns*—and they are millions—make it impossible for them to tell you flatly that such-and-such a calamity will happen in fourteen years, three months and two days. So?"

"So, why should American—or world industry, for that matter—spend billions and billions to try to prevent what are only possible, imaginable, theoretical 'disasters' of which not one can be firmly predicted?" He saw

Glenn was about to interrupt. "Wait a sec! Suppose we all did what these nine chaps hint we should, and as fast as they —well—hinted? It would wreck the economy. Why, Elias Gant would have to quit turning out cars and trucks and even military vehicles. Hold the works—fifteen-billion-annual-gross—to retool, and *that* only when and // a way was found to build vehicular power plants thatxlon't contaminate the *air*, soil, seas, whatever. Which is, currently, not possible to do or even imagine how to do. If all those horrors were solid not a man, here, could stay in business! Not even you—power plants supply the energy for your radio and TV. Paper-makers are the base of your newspaper chain—and terrible polluters.

"Of course," he went on, having seen disagreement rise in Glenn's eyes, "over the long pull, these messy acts have to be curbed. Grant you that. But slowly, man! Slowly. And on a sounder basis than the 'perhapses' of the egg-heads."

Glenn let that fall hi a silence of his own.

"Actually," he finally said in his quiet, deep voice, with its curiously emphatic effect for all its softness,

"actually, what we need is a planet-wide survey to find out more facts so as to set up priorities in antipolluti on efforts. Till we know which risk and risks are most dangerous

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and most imminent, we can't do anything that's sensible. Oh, spend a few hundred federal millions on sewage treatment, smoke-abatement, stream recovery—what congress does, now—is something. But it may not be within a dozen steps of the right thing, supposing we knew the priorities of peril. Knew what to get to work on most and first, because *that* thing and *those* things are what is about to hurt us most and soonest."

The speech, Glenn saw, was having a peculiar effect on Cooper. His first reaction had been negative but, soon, he had begun to stare at Glenn as if he were uttering some profound and absolute new truth, dictating a new Bible, almost. And when Glenn finished, Cooper's eyes were direct, admiring, friendly and ablaze.

"Glenn, you're a genius! Of course! So why not start plugging that very program on your media?"

Glenn smiled. "Why not? Probably should . . . *willP'*

"Terrific!" Rufus enthused. "Beautiful!"

He stood up, eyes now following the steel-maker and the lady lifeguard as they started toward a cabanna. In a moment, he looked down at Glenn with amusement. "Laura's the economy-size Miss America, all right. And doesn't she make Gant look like a malnourished tot—pot belly and toothpick legs! But she's all he could want —as he'll find out shortly—t hat is—if she hasn't already .told him."

Glenn didn't understand and showed it.

"I like all my guests to be happy and not uptight, if, especially, they're here for something besides fun. I'm not a puritan, Glenn. If a man likes young boys, other men, what-not, let him. We're a sexually uptight nation. Every one of us with hang-ups. You, even. Unmarried. I'm not just an indulgent host, Glenn! Machiavellian, in a way. You plan to put a group of people, men, as here, or women, or both, through a stressful brainstorming session—like the one we're hi—and what? The present men have been here a day, two, three, longer, for some. You just arrived as did others. But if you stay over the weekend—"

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"Afraid I can't, as I informed your people. Just, overnight. At most, two nights—"

"Right. But suppose you intended to stay a week. As some will. Males, all. Pretty soon, the libido gets churning. The more it churns, the less able they are to give their best attention, reason, thinking, judgment, to the subject of the conference. You see that?"

"Well, in a way. But I don't believe a week of celibacy would seriously interfere with the mental acuity of your average man. Especially, men like these—over forty, save one or two scientists, and up to eighty, for Cromwell Bussman, right?"

"Then, Glenn, you haven't done your sex homework. Because you're wrong. Easy to discover. Study yourself. How many days and nights of no-women—in your case and it's the most usual one—do you go o—without noticing a rising appetite? And one that keeps rising and begins to invade the rest of your noggin?"

It was, Glenn thought, something to consider. It might contain more truth than he'd realized. Of course, there was a great deal of generalized theory and discussion on the theme. America was, or had been, the most prudish (hence, dirty-minded) nation hi all time, probably. Sex, itself, had been nearly rotted out of genuine being by people who thought they were making it pure. Tabu, silence, shalt-nots, forbidden—had been reinforced by applied nastiness. Fallen women, whores, branded women, sex is filthiness unless church-sanctified or licensed. Sex is unnatural acts, abnormal, perversions, filth, filth, self-pollution, with disease, hairy-palms, madness the penalty, rot and Hell—that litany had pervaded the history of the nation until sexuality and vileness in USA were so near one that a boy masturbated in terror and shame and a girl didn't even know she could do it.

In the early part of the century a sluggish effort towards some enlightenment, some candor occurred, some clean-ing-up of the vileness vilely smeared on sexuality (by men and women of "chaste and pure minds") in

efforts to sanctify something (that merely made it diabolic). Small

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attempts were made to restore decency in an obscene nation. Even these met furious resistance, actual violence and its threat, from the "Godly."

By the Twenties, and from then, through all the decades to the new Seventies, sexuality had been the principal bait of advertising. Female allure had sold more goods and implemented more services than all the other "come-ons" in the lexicon of merchandising. And as the decades passed the symbols, pretty girls, had become more specific, less subtle, till the point was reached (long since, Glenn reflected) when you were almost told by the ads that this number in her bikini would go to bed with you if you bought such-and-such a wire fence, plough, cigarette, car, anything.

The stress between sex-as-commercial-bait and the venerable and deep-imbued doctrine of sex as the nastiest and worst possible act—that, had to snap. And the break had come, Glenn thought, not *hi* the current "sex revolution" which was largely a warmed-over version of the women's emancipation-free-love-trial-marriage of the Twenties (before his time) but in a very different way. The Supreme Court (that perhaps only-remaining mover and shaker of the Peepul) had made plain the truth (pro *tem*, at least) that no one man's definition of "pornography" was another's, necessarily, and so none could be forced by one or many on one other or many others.

Almost overnight, and in very recent times, America had turned into an audience for "stag" movies and a market for every sort of previously-banned book or picture in the world, along with cheaper, newer, rawer imitations in paperback and a vast litter of pulp magazines aimed at teenagers, male and female varieties, that put the cost of sex at sadism, by inference, or put the ancient "moral" (for the young lasses) at the end of some explicit and totally arousing account of what the lady did—with what effect on youth, Glenn had asked himself and left unanswered.

His thoughts on the matter went on when he realized Rufus had departed. Went on, because he found a new

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insight. To him "obscenity" and "pornography" defined any kind of sexual act, description or inference that was pain-making, pain-causing, physically and literally dirty, as with dirty hippies, or banal, by which, he supposed, he meant sniggering, vulgar, without manners, taste, consideration or mere humanity. Aside from that, nothing was obscene or pornographic to him and a handsome volume of colored pictures of people engaged in obviously highly delightful, passionate, desired, and gratifying sexual acts was as pure and wonderful as—the same act, with a one-posture limit, was supposed to be, when two virginal persons were at last licensed by God as man and wife to share those joys ... a sharing for which they had been so systematically corrupted, crippled and perverted that the likelihood of mere satisfaction, even after a year or two of painful trial and agony and flop, was very small.

But, here, Glenn had seen, the "flood" of "pornography" that was outraging the Godly and even getting politicians angry (in postures for their electorate) was, like the other use of sex *hi* advertising, not a change *hi* behavior but merely a use of the media to complete what they had so long invited. The lady *hi* the bra you'd get, the ads implied, if you bought the product she advertised, had tempted America too long. Buying the goods didn't ever achieve the advertised promise of the lass. Now, the "media"—books, paperbacks, movies above all, and, increasingly, TV—were performing the acts for the viewer-reader audience, but vicariously, as before.

The girl in the ad was doing her stuff on the pages. The moving picture stars, always sexy, always, or nearly, salesladies for a more affluent and abundance-owning USA, weren't selling goods, now. They had sold sex on media for that aim so long that they had to supply sex, there, at last. And that, Glenn realized, was what was "happening." Because he understood his fellow-Americans deeply and well (cherished them, too, *hi* spite of their faults, sins, blunders and ignorances) he now understood this current thing. The girl who sold the cars, cosmetics, anything-eve

rythin

g, and her sister, the "cover girl," who sold the

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magazine that sold advertising space for profit, had *fin*-ally created an appetite for what they truly offered, sex, *v* that had to be gratified. But not in reality. Not by deed. Impossible. Yet in the same way—vicariousl

y—through the media! It was a startling idea—to a media-master. And the next result, media-wise and man-woman-boy-girl-wise was already visible, Glenn mused. Once erotically stimulated by the new "candor" or the new "honesty" or what many called the new deluge of "pornography," people would have no further cushion for their heated and educated libidos but actuality. So, now, the kids were pro-miscuous or trying to resolve sexual "conflicts" by merging in "unisex," as if there were no differences. Older people were playing the apparently common and fast-increasing games lightly described as "wife swapping" or "social sex" —the politest imaginable name for what, till just a few years ago, had been called "orgy."

In this whole process, he finally reflected, there should be some guiding concept. But there was none, at present.

His own? Was he, as some said tauntingly, or even seriously, in a real or feigned, deep or blind way, "afraid of women"? Or was he a sort of sexual pirate who knew he could not settle for one and so had many? He could not say, being honest, which few are, about motives. Some, eluded him. But surely he was not afraid of women. And, as surely, he did everything he could to avoid hurting any one of them while he added all value he was able to those he came to know intimately.

He never pretended he aimed at marriage. Freely offered the truth, that marriage was out. Never urged a woman to an act with him, of any sort, or to act with him at all, if she had reservations. Never stole or borrowed the wives of friends. Rarely broke the statutory age of consent for the most conservative state, which was, of course, 21. Always entered a relationship with the greatest possible assurance on his part that it was just that, on entering, and might end with the evening. Often continued a liaison longer than he wished simply to save his partner the evident pain (in that case) of a swifter break. Was kind.

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Was generous. Was fond and thoughtful and perceptive and appreciative. Never "bought" women by wealth even though he had enjoyed the company of some call girls whom he paid in dollars and who, at that level and with his choice, were very frequently superior to nearly every other willing damsel, lass, divorcee, spinster or fugitive wife from some marriage that entitled her to such flight and fleeting ecstasies.

I love women, he told himself. I love to make it with them. If they love me to. But I am decent. I never cheat and if there has been cheating in any mating of mine, it is she who did it and failed to let me know till too late. I am fair. We are, we Americans, male and female, hornier than others—horny (as that spacecraft chap said he was, to the delight of the mass and the consternation of the dwindling bigots!) and nature made us for one and other and this relationship. I live to keep it pure and honest—or, if that's out, I would refuse to act and would even rather not live, were dirtiness or disgrace implicit in sex, were sex relations mandatory for existing which, perhaps, they are—in more ways than those implied by reproduction.

The tangle of our mores and our morals!

"Hello," a soft but resonant voice said.

CHAPTER TWO

THE VICE MASTER

The girl—woman—was in the pool. She had swum up to the edge where he sat and caught hold of the silver pull-out bar beside him. She had swum silently, her dark, long hair evidently streaming out behind, like a mermaid's, and her breathing hushed as it can be by a deft swimmer. She had blue eyes, very blue eyes, set apart a little more than usual eyes with brows that sloped, and naturally, not plucked or added to. A mouth just short of being too broad for the elegantly modeled face, the high forehead and sinuous lines down to a small, neat chin. A turned up nose with nostrils that could perhaps flare, that were mobile as she breathed from swimming—under water to here, from some other and distant point? The pool was enormous.

Her appearance was like stage magic. He had been theorizing about sex, about women as sex symbols, about the *voyeur* phase of presently erotic-peeping USA and the next one, acting. Here was the symbol, the chance to look, and, he knew, the other chance. That was why there were so many females at Boiling Springs Manor—to tempt, to serve and satisfy. In order—if Cooper meant

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what he'd just said—to act as therapeutic agents, as blotters who would simply take from brilliant, acquisitive and commanding minds, a specific handicap, a toxic distraction—and thereby leave the brains free to concentrate on—whatever. How to deal with congress, with foreign nations, with prices by fixing them but too cleverly to be caught out by Justice, with mergers, with market-dividing to end costly competition, with anything that tycoons and others in power whom they could use or who might use them might want to arbitrate, here or some other place, quietly, unobtrusively—though this place and its covert rules for assembly outdid anything in Glenn's past experience.

"I'm Bessie," she said. "Billings."

"Hello, Bessie."

"You haven't had lunch. It's after one."

He made a body movement, that of starting to rise. He hadn't realized the time and he was hungry.

"Wait a second. I came to give you a message. The meeting will be at three thirty, not, two o'clock."

He relaxed, visibly but not consciously.

So she saw the silent language as he usually did: Glenn Howard was in no hurry to get away from her, now that there was ample time to eat.

"How about, you take a dip and I bring a tray to your cabana?"

He smiled. "Have you been checked out for mind-reading? Because that's why I wasn't in any hurry to eat inside with the mob."

"You'd rather be alone?" Not any regret, but a sound of wistfulness.

"Bring two trays, Bessie."

"At once, master!"

She spun like a fish, surface-dived, crossed the pool with wide, strong strokes and wide, strong legs kicking, surfaced and shot out and up onto the edge almost standing, in one lunge.

His cabana was on the "30" row—there were five aisles

off the pool and ten such cabanas on each, fanned out so there was a view of the pool from each "porch" but designed so that a number of persons on any of the awning-shaded patios could retreat (by chair, wheeled lounge, on air mattress) to a screened place where no one could see. From there, Cooper's guests could move into the dressing rooms, unobserved and, of course, beyond to the elegant, miniature lounge-salons, soft-carpeted, pillow-drifted, couch-abundant, music-supplied, accessory-abundant chambers where one could perform in private, soundproofed luxury almost anything erotic that wasn't brutal or the cause of screams.

Perfect-host-Cooper!

And, Glenn thought, show-off Howard. For he had deliberately swum about and done a few test dives to enable him to dive when she reappeared (which she soon did, with a man servant pushing the luncheon-tray -cart). That was his signal to step up on the board, pause, rise on his toes, take the three standard steps and the leap, hit the board hard so as to shoot toward the green plastic sky above and then, in a dazzling splendor of timing and muscle, perform a front-twisting one-and-a-half somersault before entering the water as smoothly as a sea lion.

She applauded when he surfaced.

Toweled, in a robe, with the luncheon set out, the girl across the table, the man servant gone, the music low, Glenn felt a little challenged by something he slowly brought to awareness. It was as if Cooper had produced this tall, full-formed nymph by a trick, and chosen her by computer—what "type" is the Howard favorite?

Not any, Glenn reflected, and then he wondered if, perhaps, he hadn't squired a few more dark-haired girls than blondes, redheads and others, a few more near this age—twenty-five, maybe?—a few more who were taller than average, a few more who did not have the explosive breasts so much in demand (incomprehensibly, to Glenn), a few more with their deep or husky or throaty voices—long hair—and, he mused, so on. Maybe Cooper did use a computer.

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He sipped iced tea and asked her, smiling, "Is this a computer date?"

"How'd you guess?" She wasn't abashed but not quite joking, either.

"Explain."

"It's . . . partly evident, isn't it?" She said that with a slight and sudden flush. "I mean, all the girls here are here to be—available. And, well, suitable. If asked. It's pretty plain."

He thought it over. "In a generalized way. But that wasn't my question. Are you—call it—targeted?"

"Why?" There was some mockery in the blue-blue eyes.

"Because, I daresay, if I'd been asked to invent a female—the colors and shape and age and style—as the one I'd most likely want, if I wanted just someone—you'd be close."

"That's nice. What else?"

"You tell me."

They ate while she glanced up at him with varying expressions, rather, traces of them: mischief, interest, slight and passing fear, amusement, promise, hesitation, and the last, decision.

"Okay," she said, "I will. Bessie Billings isn't my exact name. That is Bessie Bitters. I am an assistant buyer for a San Francisco department store—furs and women's coat. I am, also, a sort of occasional entertainer for the firm. If I choose to be. That is, like the candidate the firm wants to get a better in with. I had three years at Berkeley and got bored with the entire youth scene—years ago. Three. Got a job. Married a professional football player who was Adonis to behold and who was very good—at football. I left and we divorced and I tried the call girl racket for an adventure and that soon turned out to be tedious, in general. My parents are not dead or divorced or anything—happily married. I see them and we're close—though I have sort of skimmed on telling them a few chapters in the diary of their loving Bessie. I have brothers, two, and sisters, two, one of each, older, one of each,

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.younger. My father is a lawyer and you-can look him up. One other qualification for being here, I>mit. Guess."

"I couldn't." He grinned. He wasn't startled and he didn't doubt. This was a citizen of the New Scene and

he suffered, though rarely, a generation-gap syndrome. "Clue me."

"Well, what else would you like about a girl you might like—what standard operating procedure of yours is involved?"

That somehow embarrassed him. "How could I know 'in advance?"

"You do, though."

"Well," he leaned back and thought, pretended to at first, then did. "I'd want her to like me, perhaps."

"Gold star! Legion of Honor! Ho Chi Minh Medal. What reward do you choose?"

"Well—maybe you." He laughed. "I thought it was a computer date—and it is! With a vengeance! But you and I never met! So how do you program that last one?"

"We never met, true. But I never miss an appearance you make on TV. Or at some big gathering. I'm a fan, and have been for years, of the great media-monarch, Glenn Howard. All *my* likes. Older. Rugged. Dark. Craggy. Very sensitive. Almost too bright for me. Rich. But an idealist and so romantic! See. That—was part of the input required."

"Again, Bessie. Input? I'm trailing."

"Any well-informed, nubile, young-to-not-so female who lives in California and moves in the more aware circles knows all about the joys and rewards of an invitation to this"—she waved as if to include the glowing coals of endless desert outdoors—"this gold-plated, copper-backed paradise. Ladies who have been done the honor are not supposed to talk—much. Just enough, to just the right . . . other damsels to create a . . . market? One hears, then. And, hearing, one realizes that one's personal tastes and pleasures, given or received, are part of the composition. You need to match somebody—or several somebodies. In several rather . . . obscure, call it, ways. So,

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if somebody, man or woman, happened to ask you if you'd ever been out to B. W. Manor or Estates, and you say no, but you'd love the trip, and then somebody asks if you'd like to meet, say, Glenn Howard—and you go all *fluttery*, that is to say, you get specifically damp—and indicate it . . . Well, here I am."

"And that," he replied softly, "is just marvelous. Do they take movies?"

"You can, if that's your bag, which I doubt. But you know better than to suggest Coop has a vault of blackmail material."

"Do I?" He rubbed his face with his hands and looked at her between his fingers.

"Of course! For one thing, there are vulnerable men, here. Women, at other parties. Not like you—difficult to . . . embarrass. And very shrewd people. For instance, I think that Mr. Gant is probably about as clever, in a big-league, *sinsister* way, as your steel trade journal says—though more pleasantly."

He looked at her thoughtfully and she allowed that very candid, very calm but total examination as if she wanted it. She'd said she did, nearly.

"Sort of," Glenn finally said, seeking words, "like a menu of women."

"But not quite."

"No? All your favorite . . . dishes."

She laughed a little but shook her head. "Where, Mr. Howard, do you pick up a menu on which a dish says, 'Eat me! Please!'"

He laughed heartily. "Sounds like a commercial!"

"Isn't. Really. Not with this 'dish.' Others—"

He had wondered. Perhaps she knew. His *curiosity* was only that. But her answer might be informative, as her refusal to answer, also, might be. "Gant and the Amazonian lifeguard?"

"Well, perhaps. Though it's her favorite role, too. I wouldn't be able to say, for that little, wizened tarantula. But the milk-rich Juno—her name in some swinging circles—is certainly the steel magnate's idea of bliss."

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Glenn was nodding. A man who makes steel makes it with a wet-nurse. A mother-symbol. Talk about oedipal complexes! And then, the idea turned around and fascinated. He'd never had a wife, children, a chance to. . .

"I wish I could," she said, reading his reverie. "If you want, I could arrange it, sometime. Hormones."

"For God's sake!"

And that, he thought, is from shock. Not from repulsion. People don't usually understand they are and remain . . . mammals. The great American big-bust fetish was visible to him *hi* that new way. An infantile regression by grown males. And a blow-up of the object to * . . what? Stimulate erotic images without attaching guilt to the source?

She answered that, too. "It's really not abnormal, Glenn. Everybody does—who's not inhibited—and gets a chance. Should we have Helga in, later tonight?"

"Later tonight, I sleep."

"Want to bet?"

"Sure. A hundred to one?"

"Dollars? Take that. Or a thousand to ten."

"Big risk—for you, Bessie—of ten bucks."

Impulse. In his suite after lunch Glenn kept saying that word to himself. Why that bet? Obviously, after the second meeting ended, the handsome young swinger was going to make an opportunity and an effort to get him to do what he had no reason not to do, what, actually, he'd felt toward and about the girl when she spoke one word from the clear, warm water at his feet—the mermaid with streaming hair and eyes so wide they held wonder, whatever they concealed. She had been genuine hi wanting to meet him—"meet"—his euphemism!

Now, assuming what was not specific but certain in some form, he was going to have to add a thousand dollars to the gift of himself, a fair exchange with the woman at no cost and surely not of money. So why the bet? Vanity? Playing hard to get? A thousand dollars was not important to him. He'd spent much more to travel to some alien and romantic land hi order to overtake a woman

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with promising eyes who had pinned the promise to the journey. Given presents more costly out of simple desire and affection.

So, did he make that bet as a brake on himself? Was there something about this prefabricated affair that turned off his subtlest senses? Or about the girl? Surely, she hadn't told everything about herself. Surely, she'd added a few white lies to her seemingly uninhibited sketch. What? He thought back and decided that, for causes too minute to become conscious and not even remembered there might be one minor duplicity. She was not Bessie Billings or Bessie, even. He'd caught that and now could be nearly sure though he couldn't remember where the evasion had shown. There might be others.

She was clever. He thought of the way she'd told him about the lady lifeguard, lady-wrestler in build yet as feminine as huge, and in perfect proportion for that signal act of bearing and nursing human children. With breasts that looked, even under her halter, like dinners. And he had been shifted from a minor revulsion (where she and Gant were considered) to a brief, flaring and unexpected rush of erotic thought. What in hell had the shrinks called it? The primal experience. All, or at least many husbands, some noted shrink had told him (or written, said in a lecture, mentioned on TV?) if they could, enjoyed the primal experience.

And right then, it reached him. Not as a new gimmick to try just as novel—he wasn't made that way. But as something that he had been made to feel—by Bessie—in the way that those others, husbands, normal men, felt. And the way the breast-fetishists, that American male majority, to judge by the girlie magazines, felt but couldn't admit.

Why had Bessie offered so much? Had she meant it? Did she expect, as her words suggested, that an affair begun here would go on when he returned to his Los Angeles offices, his home hi the Canyon, and then, went on to his other offices and abodes as seasons changed, as business required? Or was it part of her need to pretend any relationship, actual or contemplated, would be lasting,

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whatever she knew to the contrary. She was almost too knowing, too perceptive, too quick to catch mood shifts in him and exploit them (maybe) before he was aware of the shift of feeling or rise of a fantasy.

What of it, then? In that sense living is fantasy and sex relations are its purest and most intense form, or should be.

That, after all, was what the most expensive girls knew and used—along with a few of the single women and wives who had learned, by trial and final success, not counsel, that what held a lover, legal or no, was the female's perception of his fantasies and her cooperation in making them come true. Up to a point—one these wise women had to set for themselves. And that, of course, would untangle many male shames, as he thought, and hesitations, repulsions wholly induced by the anti-sexual culture so that he might or would then, trade. Her fantasies could become his missions.

But not hi marriage, usually. And if in marriage, usually, with risk. Until, Glenn thought, this present shift in America's sexual talk, reading, movie-going and true acts had commenced to be, for millions, surely, and more to come, an almost total leap into the puritanical opposite, the sad, overdetermined swing of a long-stuck pendulum to its other extreme.

As for Bessie, he would see.

It was possible that, with a few efforts to hide her origin and identity, all she had said was true.

In that event, she was some female!

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLOT

There were thirty-seven men hi the room, again.

Through its picture windows before the blinds were automatically drawn, the desert lay naked, dazzling and hot. The distant Spectral Mountains were all shades of hazy blue through purple. The valley between Glenn and them was almost devoid of plantlife—a few cacti, a patch of dessicated greasewood, and dunes, flats, hillocks, of many hues that seemed new and raw, as if from yesterday's eruption of a volcano with painted lava.

There was a difference in the attitude here, now.

Merton, the micro-biologist and ecologist, was jittery. He'd been calm hi the morning session, almost limp, turning his

big head and thick glasses toward speakers only gradually and showing almost no reaction to what was said. Now, as chairs were moved about on the thick carpet, as men sat, as ashtrays were slid into easy range, he was talking to Leo Benton, the lumber "king" with near-manic intensity. And Scone, of Scone Power and Light was slack, now, another reverse. Ballinger, the leading authority on limnological life-chains was flushed.

Drinks? Perhaps. But Glenn wasn't convinced. Merton

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looked like a speed-freak—as far as manner went and if "freak" could be applied to one whose suits and shirts were tailored, whose dress was expensive and almost glaringly perfect. Ballinger was flushed in a special way, too. Red cheek-daubs in an otherwise pallid countenance. And Ted Scone was not drunk. Glenn knew that because he knew Ted well and the intimacy provided the deduction: you couldn't get Ted drunk—not in a few hours, or in twenty-four. Something else, but what? As the meeting came to order Glenn had a grim hunch that their host catered to more than the sexual desires of his guests. Could it be—methadrine for the scientist, heroin for the lumber baron, and for the limnologist, what? Cocaine?

Glenn knew what it was to "shiver" internally, feel a coldness that was not physical.

When Rufus Cooper stood, however, things became orderly enough. His opening words were, again, urbane, abstract, unemotional and to the point. He summed up what the scientists had said and then called on Dr. Albeit Bush to speak next.

Bush was a marine biologist, senior scientist at Farhnam Institute and well known for his TV appearances where, for years, on panels and hi interviews, he had tried to explain his field to the mass audience. Bearded, reddish of hair (which was longer than anyone else's, here), eloquent and gifted hi simplifying difficult theories and facts, casual—the tweed-and-slacks professor (though, here, he wore an off-white, drip-dry jacket and trousers, no socks and sandals). Bush rose gracefully and began to talk.

"I'm a marine biologist, as you know. And my Institute, as you also probably know, has devoted the past several years to ocean research with a number of aims, many not relevant to this meeting. Many, however, are to the point "These relate to world-expectations from the sea, seven-tenths of the planet's surface. We have reached a number of definite conclusions—"

Ted Scone broke in, without opening his eyes. "That's a welcome note!"

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There was a scud of chuckling. Bush laughed, too, and went on:

"In a world that is worried about the exhaustion of its on-land resources, much hope is held for resources in and under the seas. These are, of course, enormous, largely untapped, and include sources of minerals as well as food. Our research shows, however, that many of the predictions about the sea as a resource-salvation will be disappointed. We are taking vast amounts of petroleum from the oceans and searching for more supplies. Many short minerals, in the USA, especially, can, theoretically, be recovered from the bed of the oceans. But—" he paused to ponder.

Rufus Cooper prompted him, with calm geniality. "But —the cost is or will be high? I know. My company has made dozens of studies. Copper, tin, manganese, cobalt, a score of elements seem to lie around for picking up or digging out. But it's not easy, technically."

Albert Bush nodded at his host "Not impossible, if you wish to use the oceans for multiple purposes. In fact, that idea of 'multiple uses' is both a federal slogan and the fastest road to destitution."

"Why?" Logan, the supermarket-chain genius, said that.

"Because," the scientist calmly replied, "nature isn't a multiple-use resource. If you gentlemen aren't familiar with my area, you surely are aware that the land-surfaces of this nation, in particular, are being ruined, millions of acres a year, by this 'multiple-use' myth."

Benton, the lumber man, said, "Bull," and asked to be excused for a moment.

Eyes followed him as he went out. For what? They'd just started. Surely, he didn't need to relieve himself so soon?

Bush spoke at the door through which Benton had gone. "He has his bias, here, plainly. He—his huge company—takes out yearly an immense reach of wild forest. It is _ sometimes lumbered 'selectively.' But the hauling off of the best and largest trees changes the entire ecology. He often 'scalps' a forest and then plants two trees for every

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one cut. Boasts about that in double-page, four-color ads. As if he had put back twice what he took. But even if he does plant two little trees for each board-producing »iant, there's something he cannot plant: the century that he also took away, or fifty years, and maybe two centuries."

Adams, the railroad man, spoke with vexation. "Is that accurate? Won't he go on doing the planting and cutting till, fifty years hence, say, he returns to crop his own trees? And so on, without damage or loss. Gain, even?"

Bush disregarded that for the moment. "Now 'multiple use.' The same area that is lumbered, or will be, is also used for grazing. Cattle, maybe sheep. And sheep take the ground cover off to the crowns—roots, even. Cattle are sad enough. So our forest, virgin, re-planted after selective cutting or a scalping, is ready for erosion. It takes a lot-of rain to make a tree. When the roots of the tree itself and the surrounding ground cover die, or even diminish, the rains tend to wash

away, not sink in. This same area, let's suppose, with its multiple-use license, is open to camping and hunting and therefore to whatever man does there: his trash, his toxic debris, his hard-trodden paths, his paved trailer-parks, his junk-filled brooks, the game he takes away if he is a hunter, the dead predators meant to keep a balance which his ignorant hatred of that kind leads him to destroy—the wolf, bobcat, cougar, coyote, and the rest. Now, yet another use is common here this once-balanced and self-sustaining wilderness. Somebody has mining rights."

"Like me," Rufus Cooper put in, good humoredly.

Albert Bush turned and pointed at his host soberly. "Like you. How many million acres of once untouched forest or grassland, swamp, even, or inshore waters has your big and very enterprising company left a dead place—a ruin of tailings? A mile-wide hole in a white pine forest? An underground gallery that, when the metal veins are exhausted, becomes a drain for the rain and destroys the previous ground water tables? How many offshore sulphur bores have spilled the sulphur, or dumped the low-yield portion into what reaches of once-living

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sea till, today, it is without valuable fishes or Crustacea? That's my area, of course."

Cooper was visibly distressed. But he spoke with a sort of sweetness, a dangerous sort. "Stick to it, then, for a bit. We get your forest allusion, all right."

Bush nodded, paused, shrugged. "Very well. Let's move on to Addison Lewis, here, and his tanker fleet. Shipping. Man carries about a hundred million tons of petroleum and its products on the seas, yearly. Fine! USA and many other nations need the import. How much of it, though, is spilled or washed out of bilges and left on the oceans?" Someone, Glenn saw, must have tried to interrupt but Albert Bush raised a hand, palm out and flat.

"One per cent. Not a great loss, economically. But in amount, a million tons. You've all seen how any petro-chemical liquid spreads on water. A drop of kerosene becomes a molecule-thick layer on a big area of a pond. Same, at sea. And when oil, even one molecule thick, covers an aquatic surface, it kills many life forms—you use it, that way, to destroy mosquito larvae. Also, this thin veil changes surface tension. And yet, the very organisms, phytoplankton, that we heard about this morning, live at or near the ocean surface—have to—because they need the energy of sunlight to do that job of changing the carbon dioxide we flush into the air, to oxygen, again, the most vital of all life-needs for nearly all forms, near enough to all to say—all."

He looked at a restive audience, cleared his throat and went on. "Already we have fished out many of the best and most productive areas in the oceans. Already, some animals, whales, are as near to gone as doesn't matter. What will be next? Tuna? Perhaps. And, then, too, we have already polluted, or filled so many of the estuaries where innumerable fish and Crustacea breed, that their numbers are being reduced." He looked, slowly, from face to face. What he saw evidently distressed him. "I am prepared to support those and a hundred other claims, with fact. I realize this aspect of ecology isn't being well received here. I understand the

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reason. Many of you are deeply involved in, these destructive procedures. To carry on your industries and do so without the lethal side-effects would be so costly you couldn't sell your products—"

Somebody muttered loudly, "Damn right!"

"So let me be brief. As a source of more food, whether by better fishing and netting means, or even by aquaculture—fish farming, in enclosed bays or the like—the seven seas offer very little hope of increased fecundity. We may be reaping the peak today. And what I would have said in more detail, and will, if asked, is this:

"We cannot continue our multiple-use policy anywhere—especially in the seas. If we spill enough oil, from undersea wells and tankers, or start large-scale mining with, of course, tailings and masses of other wastes and discarded material, as a certain result, we will be merely adding biological insult to the half million chemical and waste compounds we already dump at sea, directly and by way of rivers—all these, new to nature, alien to its life forms and thousands, very toxic, the least harmful one, still, replacing what was in its space, and had been there here in nature for hundreds of millions of years! Our sea foods are already loading up with poisons, lead, pesticides, mercury, radioactive isotopes of a thousand sorts. The sea, gentlemen, to sum up, needs less of the load it is getting, not more, even to remain a source of edible food, perhaps, a source of breathable air, and certainly, a source of anything but more oil, more metal, if that's how we use it on the scale contemplated. Thank you."

There was, then, a long silence.

When it became unduly long, Rufus Cooper said, quietly, "Any questions?"

One of the two military men rose, oddly, like a school boy. He glared at the scientist. "My command happens to keep me in touch with the Army Engineers. I therefore realize they have been the butt of a campaign of vilification by the conservation people, bird-watchers, old ladies in sneakers, the wilderness fools, and some scientists—all assorted nuts who have never offered a word on the

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other side. The fantastic achievements of the Corps and their scores of billions of dollars worth of general gain rising from their endeavors goes unnoted. If I understand your implication, doctor, you are telling us we are crazy, not the nuts who want to pick pussywillows? Do you, do you and your colleagues intend to go on with your un-American,

your damnable effort to be a roadblock in the path of American progress? Would you want national security set aside to allow your precious salt waters to remain open to enemy use only? And if your propaganda is correct, why hasn't it proved up? Where are those disasters chaps like you keep predicting? All you do is create panic. Confuse the citizens. And for what? Publicity?"

Glenn watched Bush. He was too angry to reply right off.

That gave Donald Royce of Royce Heavy Machines the chance to say, coldly and flatly, "I think you better answer that, A.I. And favorably. Otherwise, my firm's annual hundred thousand contribution to your Institute may—will be—cut to zero."

Bush had guts. And, Glenn knew, he was right. He stared with rising anger at Royce. "If we, we scientists, don't go on telling these things to every soul who will listen and till we get action, Mr. Royce, a time will come when you won't manufacture bulldozers, back-hoes, earth-movers or tanks. You—or your heirs, or company managers won't—be around, is all." He sat down.

Something buzzed in Glenn's mind. He saw the President and the scene was his mnemonic. The President had suggested that the scientists at this secret meeting had been "blackmailed" into attending. At the time, Glenn had not given much notice to the word. Lightly spoken, he'd thought of it as meaning something other—an arm-twisting effort at persuasion to get these nine away from their labs. A selling effort. Now, he knew what had been meant.

There were nine high-level research scientists in the room. All were dependent on grants for their work—donations, federal appropriations, and university funds,

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as well as massive disbursements from industries that expected, or at least hoped, to gain some future knowledge that might be applied in their enterprises. The twenty-five industrialists here, with their industrialist friends, and friends in politics, with their lobbies and that kind of power, could plainly do grave damage to the research of these nine specialists representing ninety thousand, by simply spreading the word. Cut the grants. Leave out this University. Shut down on that Institute. Get congress to put such-and-such money in something else.

Blackmail.

Nothing else.

And the nine men present were clearly aware of the fact now. They looked 01.

The afternoon passed.

The fighting grew more intense. The scientists who had not yet presented their views now encountered total hostility. Some fought back, like Bush. Others tried to temporize, to soothe the hostile industrialists even when they had to take back their own true assertions for that end. It was, to Glenn, sickening. About four thirty, the end came.

Bush stood, in the midst of a squabble over metallurgical plant effluents and said, loudly, acidly, above the palaver, "I wish to say, gentlemen, that I am leaving. Mr. Cooper, will you make the arrangements? My proposed stay through one more day is, obviously, a waste. I expected to be treated as what I am, an authority in a limited field. Just as others, here, are authorities in mining, manufacturing, lumbering, shipping, and whatnot. I would never argue with your knowledgeable statements in your industries. That you argue with me, and us, is—weE—childish. This is a free nation and our information is solid, open and vital. We shall continue to spread it every way we can. I shall thank our host for his—extreme hospitality. Beyond that, I have no thanks to offer and no amiable words. In the present, general mood, your sacred 'progress' will go on, until we educate the masses to its perils, or un-

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til you begin to slaughter them by your idiot refusal to face reality. You are assumed to be hard-headed, straight-thinking, objective leaders of great enterprises. I call you juvenile and I call you fools."

Two and then three scientists rose to join Bush.

Cooper, who had listened to Bush with a half-smile, now said, "I am sorry, gentlemen. I deeply appreciate your efforts, as scientists, to educate us, us infantile and moronic businessmen. I think all nine of you might better leave. When you've gone, perhaps the atmosphere will be less invidious—and personal—and we who sit here, then, may be able to benefit from your information—with the heat off."

It seemed, momentarily, possible, to Glenn.

But when Cooper escorted his nine guests from the room, the remaining men reacted in a way Glenn hadn't expected.

Words and bits of statements, of questions, flashed from man to man too fast to discern their source.

"Suppose those bastards talk?"

"What do you mean?"

"Spread word of these sessions! Tell the world the bunch of us are here to figure out how to shut them up. Or, at least, how to go on with business and avoid the whole ecology load?"

"They won't. Coop guaranteed that."

"How could he?"

"Coop? He can. He promised they'd deny they'd been here, if need be. He's a man who knows more ways to skin cats than Daniel Boone."

"Well, at least we got the bulk of what Rufus promised. We know the enemy, his positions and what he plans. That's a help."

"When my *dad* had the company, no college type ever thought of telling him he mustn't cut down trees! Jesus!"

"Or drill for oil? So Santa Barbara gets a smearing. So what? Would they give up their cars, tomorrow, all of 'em, to keep a California town free of a little oil?"

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"Or stop using electricity."

Rufus Cooper returned. He seemed undisturbed as he sat down and waited for silence.

"My staff is getting them off," he chuckled. "It was a bit hotter than I expected. Have to admire some of them. Spit in your face, knowing you could cut them down to earlevel. Well, friends, you heard most of the major story. Now we can get down to the problem. How do we handle these Jeremiahs and their growing habit of frightening Joe and Joan Doakes out of their wits?"

There was a general murmur of relief and of grim intent, too.

Cooper broke that up genially. "Getting on. I suggest we begin our strategy session in the morning. Meantime, we need . . . recreation. Be my guests. Nine, then, say?"

And the response was a shuffling of chairs, a standing up, stretching, a yawn or two and some muttered curses—all, ending by a boylike charge for the doors—and what lay beyond.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NIGHT THAT FALLS

Glenn couldn't sleep.

He'd had a ride on the hot desert with two other men—and a dude-pushing cowboy, "for safety," unneeded by Glenn. He'd swum. He'd bathed and changed. There were cocktails on the air-conditioned patio of the main house during a desert sunset that was gaudy, violent and unfelt in the cool, fresh air of the enclosure. Dinner: more alcoholic and boisterous than Glenn liked, but, still, not atypical. The twenty-five men like himself had hosted too many lavish conventions, sales sessions and "special" parties (for commercial ends, always) to fail to be able to participate in that sort of masculine, woman-aimed fun.

As the liqueurs were served and the coffee, Cooper announced the evening's possibilities.

"We're having stag movies, and then a live stag show, at ten, in the theatre. Nobody needs to attend. Any man who prefers, can go to bed in his quarters and not be disturbed. The rooms have libraries, TV, and music—tapes and taped films, assorted as to, ah, entertainment quality." They hooted at that news. "If you have found a ... companion and wish to retire with her—assuming it's a

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her'—do so. If you haven't met a special friend but would like to, we shall shortly join our ladies and your option is

total." Applause from the drunkest. "There are books in every little library, of all kinds. My personal physician, whom you've met, will be in attendance through the night and into morning, in case of hangovers requiring a

little soothing—or abatement. I haven't pointed out to all of you that, also, each suite is equipped with a set of buttons, convenient to the beds. You will note that various services are available with a push of the appropriate

button.

"If what you like to drink, from gin to genuine absinthe, isn't in your private bar, ring for it. But in that case, we may not have it since I have provided you with only every brand and variety of beverage I know of—though soft drinks are limited in your quarters. If you are afflicted with insomnia, touch the doctor's button. He'll prescribe.

"That is about it, I believe. Any questions?" There were none—only a few maudlin cheers. "Then I suggest we join the ladies—those who aren't

joined, I mean." Glenn went along. He was astonished at the array of beauty. Especially of the ladies who looked to be from twelve to seventeen, of whom there were several. He was also indignant. By and by he walked out on a terrace, alone. Bessie

hadn't been in the group hi Cooper's ballroom where, now, a rock band played. He hadn't seen her since

lunch. In the dusk, silhouetted by the floodlighted grounds, he made out another man, standing still, gazing at the rock-and-cactus garden. When the man snapped a lighter and

aised it to a cigar Glenn identified him: Coleman Cass-mund, who'd built more and larger bridges in more

lands

than any other living engineer. In the glow of the little

flame Glenn saw his face was calm, his hands steady and

his bearing—what? Aloof? Glenn knew that Cassmund and Cooper were good friends but Glenn had met the super-engineer only a few times and knew little else about

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him—mostly what was reported in the press. Cassmund was usually in Arabia, Japan, Thailand, India, or, if at home, hi Montana, Alaska, Texas or some other region where Glenn's enterprises didn't take him—away from cities, then, and often living in "construction city" with his thousands of employees, hi some hastily-thrown-together wooden town in the wilds where there was a river, perhaps a lake, or a gorge that somebody wanted bridged. Cassmund was notoriously hard to interview, a limelight-dodger second only, perhaps, to someone like Howard Hughes.

Over his cigar, he recognized Glenn. "Nice night," he said.

Glenn walked to the other's side and, without speaking, they took comfortable chairs with a small table between them.

"Wonderful."

"Like the desert?"

Glenn nodded and got out a cigarette. "Yes. And lake country, the sea, wild rivers, mountains, glaciers, upland country, bays, jungles, forests—I like them all and have no favorite."

Cassmund exhaled a velvet and elegantly scented smoke cloud. "Me, too. Seems curious. Most men, most people, have a certain kind of landscape they put above the others. I'm like you. What about the Everglades?"

Glenn smiled. "Swamps? Forgot to add them. I have fished Lostman's River, the Shark, even Alligator Lake, many times. So, yes, put me down as a swamp-fan, too."

There was a serene pause. Music came faintly mixed with laughter, two-sexed.

"Funny," the engineer finally said, looking at the cherry tip of his cigar as if it was interesting and odd. "My profession is to get people into those places. Who soon ruin them, or mostly ruin them. I remember Oppenheimer said, about making the A-bomb, that—something to this effect—'science has known sin.' I often feel building bridges is the same sort of sin."

Glenn pondered, not because his answer was unready, but to keep the pace of this discussion at Cassmund's chosen level, quiet, unhurried, calm, almost intimate.

"In that event, publishing newspapers, trade journals, operating broadcasting stations, selling ads for the printed properties, commercials, for the electronic medium—all that is sin, too."

Cassmund nodded. Perhaps three minutes passed.

Cassmund spoke again. "Rufe puts on some show."

Glenn waited and then said, "Why?"

The engineer turned and gazed at Glenn—a long, angular face, large, thin nose, leathery skin, deep-set eyes, gray, Glenn had thought earlier, when he'd studied this comparative stranger—a tall, lean man who looked like a monk, a zealot, a martyr and the kind both spiritually and intellectually consumed by a quiet, hidden flame. Little like a bridge-builder, a construction wizard.

"Why?" Cassmund ultimately repeated. "Good question. Known Rufe Cooper from postgraduate days—after M.I.T. He's a—well—hard to state. A giving guy, in a way, but also one with a monarch complex, like us all."

Glenn wanted to ask for a definition of that but did not, because he felt he might get it by not asking, and fail to, if he made any sign of pressing.

"Some men with Coop's kind of fortune do one thing, some another, as a sort of symbol to prove to the world—or, likely, themselves—they've got it made. Hearst carted a castle to California. Carnegie studded the nation with libraries. Onassis has the biggest yachts, his own stands, a wife beyond compare. Coop—Rufe—well—"

The cigar was smoked, observed, used again.

"Rufe plays Maharajah this way. Loves the desert, obviously. Enjoyed erecting this spread, like a kid. And when it was ready he started the fun hi his brand of enter-taining. Who else can collect the beautiful people, the powerful ones, the glittery ones and all others—in a luxurious, a super-de-luxe hideaway—where every possible indulgence can be served, and safely, in a place like this? And who else, billionaire over and over if you like, has

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found such a means to prove he made it? Who'd go to Rufe's incredible lengths to learn exactly what pleasures—vices, if you want, for some—are the favorites of prospective guests? And then invite the guests and supply the means."

"Nobody, I am sure. And that's it?"

"Not by half! Rufe's friendly, and that's real, unless you cross the guy. He likes people. His own tastes are almost spartan and completely normal. I often suspect he's even faithful to his wife. Who prefers the Manhattan penthouse, the villa on the Cote d'Azur. No. There's more. Haven't you been . . . approached . . . by a lady who, well, more or less fits your main and most evident . . . specifications? That lovely thing with dark hair and big, blue eyes—maybe? At the pool?"

"Yes." Glenn left it there.

"And you've seen it happen to others, in their assorted ways?" He glanced to catch the assenting nod. "So it must have been evident to you that Rufe had done a lot of very careful and secretive research. Right? Right. Very well, what came to mind, with you, next? That the whole spread, this horizontal ultra-Hilton-Sheraton might be bugged? With mikes and cameras?"

He waited and Glenn realized he was supposed to speak.

"It occurred to me. In fact, I discussed it with that water nymph you noticed. She brought up the obvious answer. There are twenty-six of us here who represent business and industry and the top of those. Bessie pointed out that no such group would come here, let alone permit Coop to seduce them, or exploit their . . . passions—"

Cassmund cut in softly. "Say it, man! Passions, sure. But you were going to say, first—?"

That astuteness interested Glenn. "Weaknesses, vices."

"Goodo! Sure. But not the sado-masochist sorts. Rufe loathes the pain-thrill bastards. So do I. So do you, I am sure." Another pause and the music stopped so they heard

only the suddenly muted laughter and its ebb, as people were, plainly, leaving for the "stag" films and the live how to follow.

"Maybe," the engineer continued, "I can't get it over to you. What men and women do here is what they most long to, insofar as Rufe can learn. And they know it's safe, whatever it may be. You see those young girls?" A head turn, sharp, and Glenn gave a shake to his shoulders, involuntarily. That caused the other to laugh in a short, basso-satiric way.

"Don't be so self-righteous, Glenn." That use of his first name wasn't even noticed, at once. The voice went on, musing, interested, adroit, calm, wonderingly but with clarity, too.

"The world is full of young girls like that Lolitas? Who mows? When should a female be laid? When she's able and also wants it? Some say so. There are societies— and there's a Summerhill—but there's no known true creed. Those kids enjoy their work and enough of the sort have grown up so that I know early sex far from 'ruined' their lives." He glanced away and went ahead, hurriedly, to evade any questions.

"Several studies of girls, raped at nine or before, you may know about. Their grown-up lives seem to be less neurotic, happier, more normal, than any control group. Don't ask me why or whether the sample says it all, says anything, maybe. However. The next point. Nobody is sure Rufe hasn't a film library of their behavior, here. Guests have brought valets, maids, who were actually electronic whizzes—and had their suites searched. Nothing found. So they are as sure as they can manage to be. But never positive. Hell. Maybe some rooms are and some people don't even imagine that Rufe bugged their erotic gambits. I doubt it. But most may be a little unsure, including men and women whom even Rufe wouldn't dare try to blackmail? Tease with the alleged tape recordings? Whatever. And Rufe loves that setup. Of course, he probably hasn't spied or bugged a soul. Not the type.

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But that's a sort of source for private power-sense Abstruse?"

Glenn waited the proper time. "Not really, I guess. If that's your meat, your bag."

"He genuinely enjoys being so—so total a host. He enjoys the fun his guests have and the fact that he is able to supply it, exactly as per blueprint. He likes people, as I said. This lavish place is fun for him because it's so much fun for others."

"A bit Roman."

"Right! The emperor can furnish his favorites with everything, including almost anything. Exception. No slaves. Nobody ever came here under pressure, or stayed, if they found they wanted out. That, too, is like Rufe. Everybody has to be pleased, or the gig's no good. A bummer. You see a single unhappy, bored, let alone worried—nonguest-guest?"

Glenn acknowledged he hadn't.

"Then, that's it. Rufe's brand of super-yacht, his imported castle, his private island, is to be the most perfect host in all time. And in his terms, he is, I'd think."

"I see."

"You don't But you will. Something*!! happen."

Cassmund rose, stretched, and offered a "Good night" as he left the terrace.

Three hours later, Glenn was still restless.

It was past midnight and he'd read a while in bed, switched off the lights, tried to sleep and failed, then read some more and repeated that routine. He became wider awake than ever. That damned Cassmund, he found himself thinking, A very nice and very fascinating guy, he added. But he was awake on Cassmund's account. Something would happen, he'd said. Nothing had. So his vigil continued and it involved images of Bessie, not surprisingly.

At twelve thirty, when he'd doused the bedside lamp a third time, something did happen, something at first so faint and slight he wasn't sure it related to him.

A door closed audibly. A woman sighed audibly. But there was no woman in the bedroom or the living room, either. Then a woman murmured, "I'm late!" in subdued self-reproach. No answer.

At the foot of Glen's bed, on a bare segment of wall, a light appeared and expanded, dimly then with growing intensity. Soon Glenn identified it. An oblong of light with curved corners, about two feet by three—as if from a slide-projector. It wobbled, focused and suddenly offered a picture. Of Bessie.

She had entered a room and closed a door. Some other room. This was, then, a projection, a movie—live, or taped? He watched, propping his head up with more pillows.

The image sharpened, its colors became genuine. Bessie had stepped away from the door in that other room, wherever it was (or had been). She wore an evening dress, blue to match her eyes, bright earrings, diamonds, maybe, and bracelets. Now she turned a little and said, "Unzip me, darling!" said it unevenly, hushily, excitedly. Nobody appeared and she reached over her bare shoulder to unzip herself, took off the dress.

"Now my bra," she half whispered.

She removed it.

"Panties?"

It was a strip act, then. Or a movie of one. Or a scene on some sort of closed-circuit TV, the viewing-tube flat, and so set in the wall he hadn't noticed it. There were many ways to get the effect: after all, he was in the business.

Bessie was soon nude. And soon in bed, lying on a blue, silken spread.

"Touch me," she whispered.

And touched herself.

"That mole is between the two nice places, isn't it, dear?" She took her hint

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And she began to pant lightly. It didn't have to be happening now, Glenn thought, eyes fixed on the scene; but it seemed to be. He shut his eyes hard. Rufe! This was Rufe's gift, Glenn's slice of the general hospitality.

"Now roll me over."

She did that. Her auto-erotic behavior became intensified, varied. "Does it turn you off?"

It did not. She rolled onto her back again.

"Now, down there, Glenn, my love!"

Glenn, my love!

He was ready to call, push all the buttons, find a way to join this passionate but solitary revel.

"Yes, yes, yes," she moaned. "More, Glenn, faster! That's wonderful! Oh—darling!"

She had aroused herself to a point where she might soon be beyond need of him. She then held still, looked straight into the camera and called, huskily, hungrily, pantingly, "The door. At the left of the picture. In the corner. It's invisible, but you just push, Glenn. I'm on the other side. Please, darling."

Why didn't he go?

It was like watching torture you could end with a word. But he kept watching.

"Please, Glenn. Hurry! Take me. Let me take you. All of you. Of it. Oh, my love—if you don't hurry—!"

If I don't, Glenn thought in some corner of his inflamed brain, then what?

"I'll have to take you, take it, take your lovenes— somehow!"

He sat still . . .

In a little while the screen went dark; he heard a giggle. "You missed out, darling!" And then a bushy panting. Then a click and nothing.

Glenn dropped back on the bed, weak, dazed, self-belittling, anguished, and raging with desire that had to be postponed.

Unless he pushed a button.

Could he demand Bessie, that way?

Some other girl, girls, of course.

Did he want that?

No.

Then—why?

The very enormity of the question began to occupy him and, soon, to reduce his desire. Why?

She had wanted him.

That, he knew.

She had accepted a symbol. And, that way, shown him that he had suddenly and unexpectedly perceived at lunch, about himself, about males, and mammals. A les-on, then? An insight she'd keenly understood—and im-plemented—since he'd sat like a stone, just staring? Irony?

He wrestled with the enigma. Why had he refused?

And in time, answers of a sort came up, in his mind, like slot-machine symbols. Bells and lemons and oranges and bars.

It was too much. And too contrived. Too specific. Too -mechanical. As if people could be manipulated like puppets.

By Rufe Cooper. For generous hospitality—and some deep, weird power-sense he derived, that way.

You can, Glenn thought, "give" a man a girl.

Friends had done it for him and vice versa.

Girls can give themselves, and do, and ought to.

You can buy the ~~m~~—and treat them as goods, the ~~n~~— if you wished, though Glenn could not: they remained ~~w~~omen and sentient, with dignity and personality and their desires had to be met in the encounter or Glenn would abandon the attempt.

Here?

Her desire had been, heaven knew, gratified. For a ~~w~~hile. Two hours.

What of his own?

It began to grow light. He had been thinking like a ~~f~~ur-nace long past three o'clock.

He found the end of the thought:

I can't let myself add to ~~C~~oop's sense of power. Not this way.

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I shall leave, tomorrow, finding out, first, where I can reach Bessie.

Then, perhaps, some day, I'll see Bessie.

Perhaps.

And . . . some day. Maybe.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BLACK MIRACLE

Glenn attended the morning meeting. He told himself that it was necessary for a clearer understanding of the intentions these men had, or would formulate. Actually, he knew, that excuse was partly ~~alibi for~~—what? Cowardice? His departure, premature, might be made awkward. It might even seem suspicious. And if the company at Boiling Wells knew Glenn would report their schemes to the President—! What?

There were many "*what's*." Some of the twenty-five Establishment members were very ruthless. A traitor (and Glenn would be that, to them) deserved any fate. ~~There'd~~ be an accident, Glenn thought, before he had any chance to forward his information. Car smash. A shooting by unidentified hoods. Any of a thousand things that would leave no Glenn Howard. That risk, he could skip: he'd taken such chances before now. But in order to get away soon and neatly, without arousing any suspicion in order to prepare his report for the White House, for one pair of eyes, only, Glenn needed some reason that he didn't have.

His prearranged exit pattern (Coop's words) was

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simple and everybody in the group had such a plan. Meanwhile, someone knew a number, where "the boss" could be reached, since the chances were high that, over any three- to four-day period, an emergency or a problem could come up that would require the head of ~~this~~—this steel company, that chemical complex, this auto maker, that newspaper chain owner.

When, at noon, the recess was called, Glenn followed Rufus Cooper to the ~~miniltilfs~~, a pitch-and-putt golf course that permitted a few drives and some wood shots from tees and fairway spots all partly enclosed and air-cooled.

Overtaking Cooper, Glenn said, "I'm leaving shortly, Rufe. Wanted to say thanks and good-bye."

Flat and short and, Glenn expected, sure to cause an argument if not suspicion. When the other man halted and turned abruptly, Glenn realized he wasn't even able to dissemble as he had hoped. He could feel the tenseness of his face-muscles and almost see the will-to-move he forbade his eyes as it gave his purpose away in too taut a stare.

Worse, Cooper said nothing for a moment but used it to examine Glenn's face carefully, as if it were a map he needed to read and remember for survival.

After that he said, slowly smiling and yet doing that ruefully, "I guess I overdid the host effort for you, Glenn. I'm sorry."

So Cooper thought it was Bessie who was the cause of this departure! And Glenn realized his poor effort at dissembling, his strain to appear positive, sure, honorable and ~~least of all~~—a sort of double agent making an attempt at getting over some guarded border ~~that~~ look, which he could feel as false, led the brilliant Rufus Cooper to an instant and totally wrong conclusion.

Glenn recovered fast and seized the opportunity. He made his voice a little uncomfortable, regretful, bashful, for a man.

"I guess, Rufe, I can't make the grade of these Western World Playboys." Then he hurriedly added, to nail down his excuse, the false one ~~or~~, perhaps, to state something else that was true, "Not the lady's fault. Just

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~~the~~ overwhelmed "~~he~~ waved at the ranch in general ~~overwhelming~~ effect of your ~~pad~~."

Cooper was truly apologetic. "~~The~~ lady ~~was~~ very sad, this morning. Red-eyed and tears. She really has had a special passion for you, for some tune."

"And she's enchanting. I'd thought of asking her, or you, before leaving, if I might call her, later, one day ~~—~~"

Cooper grinned at his foresight. "She hoped that Said if she didn't see you again, to give you her number in Palo Alto.

Unlisted. Sure you can't stick around? Do one rather splendid young woman a lot of good. And we need your advice ~~not~~ that you haven't chipped in this morning . . ."

Politely, Glenn declined.

He was leaving, not as a member of this group who jumped the gun, in, maybe, a suspicious manner, but as a clumsy Lothario. Great!

An hour later, his luggage ~~hi~~ his car, Glenn stopped at a filling station that also advertised "EATS." His "Return" pattern had been neatly designed and he was sure that there were twenty-five other men with different but equally

inconspicuous arrangements for getting to— wherever, without leaving a sign of where they'd been. One of Cooper's limousines drove him through The Devil's Bowling Alley and past Satan's Sandpile to a spot near Route 127 below Te copa. The road wasn't on any map nor where the sand heaps that looked to have been unchanged for eons. Within these was a cave and in it, cars. One was Glenn's, a rebuilt Toronado—which, so far as any others knew, Glenn had driven there, himself, or driven near there.

His silent chauffeur checked the Toronado, transferred Glenn's luggage, walked him through the other, circuitous exit and left, raising no dust, which meant Cooper's private and hidden track had been treated with some silicon product, Glenn thought, not the usual revealing asphalt. He reached 127 shortly and began his rapid but near-professional surge toward Los Angeles. Traffic was

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moderate, both ways, and Interstate 15 would get him into the city in a couple of hours.

Before he reached it, however, and after a sketchy hamburger and coffee, he realized two facts:

He was very tired.

He also had work to do: work to prepare the information he would forward to the President, personally, at the earliest. And the whole adventure just ended seemed tangles, blurred, confused, with extraneous matters making it worse, the one main example being Bessie.

The sky was cloudless. The desert shimmered, heat waves trembling like invisible ribs and the sun glaring down on the wasteland and the thin highway as if it meant to melt the cars, trucks and the mountains, too. His air-conditioner fought back, set at maximum, and Glenn was comfortable enough except for the fact that he had to look out at the road, the sticky asphalt, the two lanes of traffic —his, the oncoming—and that gaze meant he could not evade seeing the land beyond, the sweltering, many-hued, grotesque and so, as people said, "tormented" region south of Death Valley.

When he was sure no tail had attached itself, he put in a call on his radiophone. He used his private office number, direct, to his secretary. Poor name for her, he often thought, since Lenore was a person he regarded as a silent partner, almost, and a lass with unbelievable skills.

"Yes, Chief?" He couldn't make her quit calling him Chief, or Boss, or even, "Milord," sometimes.

"I'm two hours out, or maybe a bit more. Inform my—• you know." A passing truck made conversation impossible and Glenn, still driving fast and now with one hand, saw a rest area, or what seemed one, just ahead. He slowed. "I want to make a few notes, Lenore, for my own use, I'll pull off, I think, to get out of the diesel-drone and the rusty mufflers. So I can tape record the stuff, while it's fresh. Maybe, four or so, when I come in?"

"Nothing else? Nothing special?"

"Only that. But it's important, for—me. Unless there's something at your end?"

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She chuckled and made the joke: "Your kingdom runs better with you absent. I have it all. See you around four and drive carefully, if you can bring yourself to it."

That was it.

He slowed for the presumed rest area and found it shaded by sturdy roofs with room for about fifty cars, a place with drinking fountains, rest rooms, picnic tables and a rock garden of cacti, mainly. Four dusty cars were parked there, which gave him ample space to stop hi the shade, with several slanted spaces between his car and the others. Two families were having lunch, courtesy of California's Road Department, one car contained a sleeping fat man, another, two youngsters who were necking —to be courteous, Glenn thought, they at least seemed to be one of each sex though, he knew, a closer look might reveal two males, alleged, or girls. Odd times!

He got out and walked into the furnace heat for a drink of quite cool water. He stretched. Then he went back to the silver-gray Toronado (with modifications) and started his tape recorder. Curiously, the act seemed to waken him and shuck off fatigue so that he could marshall the maui items from which he could, later, boil down what he would tell the President.

His radiophone call could have been monitored.

If so, nothing would be learned.

Nobody, going over his talk with Lenore, would realize that it had been arranged earlier and for special ends. Two of them.

Lenore would now have signaled his hunting friends hi the Sierras, by radio, and, in still another opaque dialogue, let them know that their co-hunter, Glenn Howard, had now given up the chase and was homing on L.A. Those two hunters had one guide. Glenn had never been near them, of course, but they were friends, good friends, reliable. If a pal needed a cover for a few days, they'd furnish it. Glenn would have done as much, had done as much, for one of the pair. The guide was as trustworthy. All three, if asked, would Rive very convincing accounts

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of the shoot and of the bigger game territory investigated by them, with Glenn. Till just a while ago.

Usually these ploys were to enable a friend to enjoy an uninterrupted period with a lady, not his wife, though, perhaps, a wife. Nobody in this small brotherhood ever asked why, however. Those engaged in such generous alibi-arranging needed only to move in areas where it would never be noted that they were three, or four, and :claimed to be

one more. And they had but one more need: to learn the time when their invisible companion would surface. The means for that, they left to him. He could be in some mountain lodge, with his beauty; he could be across the border in Mexico; he could be on a business trip in another city and there, keeping out of sight, or well, disguised. He could be, and one friend had been, only a few miles from his Pasadena home, alone, in a quiet motel, sleeping and reading and having a highball or two—out of it, for simple respite.

Lenore's second mission would be to set up a way and the means by which, later that day, or at night, or next day, her "Chief could communicate with the President, that, or, if the White House said so, Lenore would arrange Glenn's flight to New York—and he could manage the trip to Washington.

Grinning over such thoughts, Glenn set the tape recorder spinning and pinned the mike where it couldn't be seen by stray people. He had that much respect for Cooper's acumen.

His words flowed.

The twenty-five industrialists were named. The nine dentists. The admiral. The general. Glenn went on:

"The first aim was to find out what science considered the gravest dangers to our environment. The experts did a shockingly good job. The others tried to refute them. When they failed, the nine were virtually thrown out. The meeting turned to ways and means of evading, halting, diverting, and otherwise sabotaging the whole environmental recovery effort.

"This morning's discussion developed many schemes.

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More will doubtless be developed later. But I feel those already considered will make it plain that this group intends enough harm to indicate whatever action the President sees fit to take. Some of the programs suggested:

"A fund for efforts to be made by them. This was agreed on and a hundred million was subscribed. Including a half million by me. For obvious reasons.

"Five top corporate enthusiasts for conservation and backers of antipollution were discussed. Plans to change their public attitude were drawn up. Cancel orders. Get colleagues to do same. Drive down stocks. Etc. The usual 'asset-destroying' corporate means for kills.

"Lists of other industrial and commercial peers were drawn—and their motives for reducing environmental 'panic' were noted. These names were divided among present group on the basis of intimate and personal friendship, business connections, power over, etc. Each man would undertake to spread the policies developed at Boiling Wells to the others, by pressure, where nothing else served. This list of associates includes pretty much all of the top 100 corporations in USA and half the next 400 at least.

"You, Mr. President, are not to know of this secret cabal. You are merely expected to realize slowly that your current antipollution bills, proposals and plans are meeting ever-heavier opposition by business and industry. You are to see funds that support you, your party, people in congress on the clean-environment-wagon, and others like them, governors, etc., are slowly drying up. That is, all politicians will in time realize that they are financially sunk if they run on any such platform.

"There was a shocking discussion of bribing scientists. This seems more possible than I'd have believed. A lot of big men in the sciences are going to become rich, and soon, for denying all claims of dangers of pollution, pointing out absence of supportive data, calling their associates, 'hysterics,' 'wild men,' 'panic-prone,' etc.

"An idea of mine was considered. It was obvious from the day-long testimony of the nine scientists that no one

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has a clear or even any idea of the actual and overall ecological perils. Until a vast study on a worldwide basis is made, we will not even be able to know the proper priorities for a true, that is, logical and informed effort to save ourselves.

"This study must become a national and immediate goal, of course. It will be very expensive and hard to sell congress—perhaps demanding ten years and a trillion over the period. (My papers and stations will start plugging for that needed effort) I mentioned it to Rule Cooper and he was enthusiastic. Why?

"He presented it this A.M. as a marvelous stall! For while the others kicked it around. Finally, they tossed it out on the grounds that, though it would stun congress, etc., it might ultimately, begin to work because it was scientifically sensible, logical and sound!

"These men are not interested in logic, even sanity, let alone mankind—in any long-term future. I'd say they can't even think for a longer future than ten years, if that. This is the basic flaw in them, us, America—our fiscal year' mental limits, our 'get-it-now' views, our unconcern, our obliviousness to posterity, our own, any-body's.

"It's almost a Biblical thing. Our concentration on temporal things' has finally cost us all awareness of lasting values, let alone, eternal ones. Beyond growth in population, expansion and increase of goods and services, luxuries, too, and income, of course, as well as 'security* whatever can be measured by money), the American people actually have no positive goal of any scope or size. This is the flaw. The Boiling Wells meeting merely showed how it is served by men whose goal is the same, bigger profits from bigger companies, because that is the only business there is, actually, in

their minds. Any of their social or economic or extranational contributions are regarded far less as duties, far more as advertising, is 'image-making,' worth the (small) cost. "This is a general view. I now shall try to record as many specific statements—with attribution to the speaker

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—as I can. To do this I have delayed my drive to L.A. But it will be useful to you to know 'who said what' and this, I wish to enter while it's fresh in my head."

Glenn began doing that.

It was an appalling list, a record of truly criminal intentions of leading citizens—a word-of-mouth assassination—or a program for that—of their own nation's future, for their own, and everybody's brief, immediate prosperity—and despite the ultimate calamity thereby assured.

Glenn entered a hundred quotes, plans, schemes, promises, agreements, connivings, with their spokesman or innovator, by name. It was, even to him, an incredible thing. Neither he nor his people would ever have so acted or guessed these others would. . . .

Glenn jerked himself upright. He realized he had been listening to a trailing, dull voice, his own. So his interval of keenness had been limited. Now, he was more tired than he could remember being. Sleepy—as if he'd taken pills. He peered at the rest area. Kids were playing in the shade. A baby was being nursed by a pretty—from this distance—mother. He stared at that scene and couldn't think why: a sort of haze was rising over the barren land. Dust-devils ran little, scary routes and vanished. The smoke from a passing double-trailer eddied toward and around his car. He told himself he should get out and move around. But to what good, in that molten landscape? He told himself that a short nap would be refreshing. It was a pleasing thought. He wondered, briefly, if something was wrong with his car—if carbon monoxide was anaesthetizing him. He saw his sleepy face in the rear-view mirror and there was no flush, so, no CO danger. His head lolled slightly. No sleep to speak of, last night. And that was his last conscious thought.

* * *

A voice woke him.

He experienced the common sensation on awakening in a strange environ: he couldn't think where he was.

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A second voice was louder. "Yeah, a guy, in there!" The rest area, Glenn thought, and looked ahead to certify that recollection. It had changed so much that he thought, for a second, it was another place. There were cars in parking slots but they looked to be rusted wrecks. No children. The neat signs had faded or vanished. The quite charming cactus-and-rock landscaping was buried

in sand. That scan took only seconds. In a next second he realized no cars were passing, none were even audible. It had to be a dream, or a hallucination. The two voices drew his eyes to the side, finally. They'd sounded—what? Excited? Alarmed? Hostile?

Emotional, at least. And as he turned he saw the pair, his stupefaction was complete.

Big men. They wore plastic or glass helmets and suits of some unfamiliar fabric. On their backs were dazzling cylinders, and their belts held several unfamiliar objects, weapons? a pair of small loud-speakers? handcuffs?

Maybe he was insane.

The thought left him inert. What he saw happening could not happen and so, he devoted what reason he had left to an inner effort, a silent battle, to recover his senses. He began to perspire and realized his light clothes smelled dusty. The Toronado wasn't silver-gray now, but golden-brown, covered with an inch of fine dust. Only one window and the windshield were even fairly clear, as if the wind had kept them swept, more or less.

The Martian characters now reached a door and peered.

Their voices were amplified, so they could hear each other through the big, glass bubbles over their heads.

Other things were wrong, too. No sunshine. Where had the sun gone? Was it that late?

Glenn struggled harder than most men would be able to, in his effort to resolve this scene. It couldn't be real.

Maybe having a stroke was like this.

And what did the beefy pair want? Plainly, they were closing on his car and him.

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He almost panicked when he asked himself if he could move. Find out. The engine wasn't running. The car, however, was chilly—again, impossible. He leaned and raised the door lever so that a shove opened it wide. Then he blacked out.

CHAPTER SIX

A TRIP TO TOWN

When the door of the Toronado swung wide and Glenn lost consciousness, the two men stopped short.

"Guy's alive," one said, dully—a slow man's reaction to the impossible.

"Get the portable, Gregg, or he soon won't be!"

Gregg, under orders, was quick. He ran towards a van hidden from the Toronado by the ruins of what had been a spacious rest room. The vehicle was box like, painted white and bore the words, on both sides: LA PD EXTERIOR PATROL. The policeman, then, opened a chamber at the side of the van, took out a neatly packaged and quite heavy object, a bundle, with which he ran back to the car.

Without words or delay, the two men opened the wrapped case, withdrew a face mask attached to a

flexible hose, clapped the mask over Glenn's mouth and moved a lever that sent air hissing from a small tank. Gregg's Chief, Swenton, made sure that the noseclamps held and the bite plate kept the stranger's mouth open. He then checked the man's pulse, grinned a little, though bleakly, and gave a next order. "Pull up the Aero and get out a stretcher."

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Two minutes after that, Glenn, on the stretcher, was carefully hoisted through an airlock and placed on a frame which held it above the flooring. Doors were shut, both men climbed into the front of the vehicle, both gave a long glance back at their rescued stranger and Swenton switched on the radio. He was recognized by a familiar voice, that of the Captain. "Yes, Swenton? Find anything?"

"Yeah. But not an animal like the chopper people thought they saw. A man."

There was a silence. "You boys been doping up?"

"No, skipper. Guy was in a car should be a museum piece. Right off the old road where they said there was a goat, or deer, or what the hell ever, it *wasn't*." He stopped.

"Go on, man. A character outside, in a car that stopped back then. Alive. Who, for God's sake?"

"Nobody from L.A. Not by the clothes. Your great grandpa maybe wore his kind. Wasn't suited. No air supply in the old car."

"You're crazy!"

"Something is. He pushed his door open and, of course, passed out. We put bun on the portable, loaded him in the Aero-wagon and"—after a look at Gregg—"we're set to unsuit Fully cleared and ready."

"Then, come on in. If this is a joke, you'll never make another. Wait! Papers?"

Swenton glanced guiltily at Gregg, who shrugged. "Yeah," he lied.

"Okay. Come in."

Gregg knew the next order before it was spoken. With a shrug, he shot through the door which closed fast and trudged across to the Toronado. He wondered why they'd not thought about papers. Once in a while, some looney did get outside. But with papers. This dreek was from some other city. Or if there were any, unknown but habitable holes, from one such. Outside patrol was, Gregg felt, a foolish thing, way to bring a man down a notch. You never picked up anybody, or almost. He hadn't heard of an escapee brought back for—three

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years? Dead, of course. He leaned into the front part of the car. Keys in place. Gregg was mechanical to the extent he had any marked capability. He understood the situation and quickly found the key that opened the glove compartment. He had seen the tape recorder and recognized it for what it was. There was a brief case behind the front seat. He took everything.

When he had returned to the vehicle and it had been flushed by compressed air till it could be set on "Normal," which made a faint hissing only, Swenton started the electric motor and pulled onto the road.

Going was slow for the first few miles as the area lay in the outer limits of search. Sand had made small dunes on the battered and potholed pavement and there were places that had to be skirted as flash floods had torn away the original one-lane-each-way pavement. When they came up on what had been Interstate 15, they made better time. A single lane was kept fairly open on that venerable road and any hampering damage was repaired, at least in time and to a degree.

The vehicle began to travel at thirty miles an hour, its motor whining faintly, air supply singing in, the two officers, by then, "desuited" and comfortable.

Once, the sun came out That startled them both. Of course, it had happened before, and been reported by other patrols, but to Swenton, at least, it seemed that this sudden surge of light was more intense (and lasted longer) than any he'd experienced or any others had described.

Air clearing a little? Could be. . . .

Glenn Howard had recovered consciousness soon after the van had turned into the feeder-road.

He heard the two talk. He found he could see clearly through the sides of the vehicle, but didn't know they were opaque from the other side. He raised on his neck far enough to check the fact that the pair of nightmare bubble-heads he'd assumed to be dream-figures, weren't. One drove and the other manipulated gadgets. Something hissed, the motor wasn't an internal combustion kind, and

his sense Of threat in the first view of the pair, together

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with his blackout when he opened the door, made him wary.

He felt it would be a mistake to announce his recovery, at least right away. From the soon-overheard radio discussion, he gathered more information, all coherent and yet unfathomable. He slid his eyes to the side and looked out at the desert.

It was the same.

. It was—until he saw objects that should have been "the same" but were not.

Power poles were down.

Here and there, he spotted a car or truck, off the road, and looking like wrecks. Rusted, fabric rotted, tops collapsed, signs on commercial vehicles faded, flaked, unreadable. For a brief stretch they passed a railroad siding and on it, he saw a few freight cars. Empty, save for one in the open doors of which were burst bales of, perhaps, cotton. And beside these, almost certainly, the bones of human legs and ribs with a skull—if an y—in the darker interior.

When the vehicle swung onto the Throughway, Glenn identified that But Interstate 15 was not really recognizable. Deceased and rusted vehicles lay in tangles on both sides of the cleared track the truck followed. Here and there, retaining wall sections had fallen. At first he Imagined the vehicular straggle was the result of long-ago chain collisions. In a little while he realized these decaying heaps had been shoved aside to make the open surface they were using.

He concentrated.

It seemed clear that something was wrong with him.

He told himself to lie limp because he needed time. He feared any attention.

A dream? Impossible. He was awake and knew it.

Mania? He had never heard of this vivid and coherent kind of madness.

Bodily dysfunction? Toxemia?

He checked his nervous command, muscles, senses, by a progression of little acts. Nothing seemed impaired.

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He then went over the past hours and days. He recalled the Boiling Wells interlude perfectly. Remembered, verbatim, what he'd said to Lenore. As far as he was able to discern, his memory, his other senses and bodily functions were intact.

It was everything else that was wrong.

The two cops, if they were that, in bubble-heads. Like the fancied "little men from flying saucers." The thought even amused him somewhat, despite his confusion. He had never had any patience with the "flying saucer" people, "addicts," he called them, "faithsickeners, not healers," "mind-blowers." Now, his own mind had been blown, so to speak.

Assume his observations were correct. What were the then-logical inferences?

The bubble-cops were, in that case, breathing portable air. Ergo, the outside air was not breathable. It had been the thing that knocked him out as the car door opened.

Or, had it?

There'd been no time for outside air to reach him. So, then, the air in his car had done the job. Absurd! But what other explanation—granting his present line and approach were of any use?

He was on Interstate 15 and, he judged, near the Barstow bypass. When his senses told him they'd turned into it, he risked raising his head higher—for seconds, only, and while some impediment occupied the attention of the two in front—a fall of bricks, he gathered.

Barstow wasn't much help. There were profiles of its downtown buildings, vague stretches of houses, a glimpse of some sort of factory, but it was unsatisfactory.

There was a lot of dust in the air over the city, especially. There was a general haze that blurred distance, even, in a half mile. The sun hit the hot land in freeform patches but it looked weak, save for one or two brilliantly illuminated but undefined spots. The sky, which he could glimpse from either side, was pretty cloudy, smoggy, maybe, and, even where the overcast seemed minimal, not as blue as it ought to have been.

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In short, wrong. Further, they—he, anyhow—hadn't seen one other vehicle or one Irving person. Just those bones in that aged and useless freight car. Metal was rusted in every place he'd seen it, chrome flaked off bumpers, rails thick and orange-brown. As if, and his heart skipped, the world were dead.

I am not superstitious.

He grinned when he realized he'd insisted on that inner assertion about ten times.

What else to do?

Wait, he thought, and see.

In time, at least something happened. One of the two men up front talked into a mike.

"Patrol Six, now approaching Los Angeles, East Gate Entrance with captive."

(Captive!)

"Come in, Patrol Six! We are ready!"

When the van stopped, at last, one man had put on his helmet and gear. He stepped down and talked to another, out of Glenn's view. He caught a word or two but not enough to make sense. The man jumped aboard again, the van moved ahead and, for a moment, Glenn had a glimpse of a sort of enclosed guardpost and a large sign that read:

LOS ANGELES

EAST GATES AND LOCKS

2013

He couldn't make anything of that. The broad but hardly typical daylight went dark. The vehicle had entered a tunnel. No other way to figure. It stopped. There was a sound of heavy duty motors at work and of heavy objects moving slowly. A clang. Much hissing followed. They moved ahead a short way. Then the machine-and-weighty-object routine was repeated.

Again, the van finally stopped and its front door was opened. Both men left, without their helmets. Now, the rear portal yawned and one of his "captors" called, "You come to, yet, Mac?"

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He almost answered. But he decided instead to feign unconsciousness a bit longer. Whatever was happening, these two morons wouldn't be much help. Somebody higher up would be needed.

Playing limp, eyes shut to slits, Glenn perceived that he was in a tunnel, all right, a poorly lighted one. The van—a sort of minimal ambulance, was standing beside a ramp. The ramp led up to a pair of double doors, metal and heavy, Glenn thought, and behind them, as they opened, he saw several people dressed in white, like surgeons and nurses. The two geeks carefully slid out the stretcher and its bewildered occupant. They were lifted onto a hospital-like table under the gauze-masked and staring-eyed gaze of this crew in white. It was appalling. They began trundling him down a dun corridor—f or what?

Nothing pleasant

He had to be hallucinating.

Change that!

Time to get talking and stop this horror!

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHAT MAN CAN ORCHESTRATE HIS DREAMS

Glenn waited only till his cart was trundled into a bright room which was, clearly, meant for surgical procedures. Six or seven white-clad, masked figures hovered around him and began, silently, to take places and select instruments for some purpose he could not imagine. . He opened his eyes and sat up.

The effect was odd. Everybody stepped back as if in fear.

"My name is Glenn Howard," he said calmly, but that, by effort "President of Howard and Associates. I am on my way to Los Angeles and my mission is of national and top priority. Where am I? What is all this? I demand an explanation!" They listened to that with no visible reaction. Men and women, so white-swathed that only their eyes gave clues to what they felt. And their eyes were not quieting.

There was a short silence before one of them spoke, a man, with a cold and unemotional stare.

"I'm Dr. Forret, head of this team. As you must know, having been outside, you survived. You were rescued. Now, we must decontaminate you and, since you ap-

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patently have no proper permit or papers, we must also ascertain your physical state to be sure you can be maintained here, at all. You surety understand?"

"I do not. *Nothing!* I am in perfectly good health. I had a complete check-up in December, last year, ninety-seven—"

Somebody snickered.

"Please lie down," Dr. Forret said.

Glenn did not. "Look here! For your own sakes, check on me! I may seem confused—but you're more so!"

"He's slightly 'confused.'" The ironic voice of a nurse.

"But you are making a terrible *mistake?*" Glenn said loudly. "Whatever medical—or other—procedure you have in mind—it's all wrong! Check with the Governor. The Mayor. The President, if necessary. You have the wrong man, the wrong orders, and you will be in a horrible spot if you don't learn that at once!"

The head of the team said coldly, "Will you please name these . . . highly placed . . . associates?"

Glenn did so.

That is, he named the president, governor—and got no further.

Dr. Forret nodded and strong hands pushed Glenn flat on the table.

For a moment, both the panic-impulse and reason were one: he'd have to fight.

There was instant tumult in the room. Glenn made it almost to the door, leaving two clobbered males on the

floor behind him and carrying a third on his back. He didn't quite reach the door. One of the three nurses interposed herself and as he threw down the man he'd carried, she brought a small object near his face. There was a snick and a tiny cloud of aerosol spray emerged. The nurse stepped back and Glenn, after a single and necessary breath, dropped to the smooth surfaced floor, unconscious. When he next roused he was to another room and so completely restrained he could not move his limbs or body or even his head.

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As soon as he could evaluate his situation, he had no desire to move. He was taped and wired by dozens of tubes and tiny cables. He could feel the dull pain of various needles in his arms and legs. He could sense the many places where electrodes had been glued to his skin including places on his head, temples, face, chest and neck. The pains were trivial. But any movement, even had it been possible, would surely have caused some probing needle to plunge deeper or rip out.

He lay still and tried to think.

He was a very imaginative man. He was, erudite—none of his thousands of able and scores of brilliant employees had any comparable range of knowledge. He was, also, sensitive, which was no help, here. There was no cowardice in Glenn, either. But there are times when mere physical courage, however great, is not of value. This was one.

There seemed to be no act, no word, no idea that he could employ, at whatever unknowable risk, to resolve this situation. It was nightmarish, unreal—yet real to him. It was menacing in so many ways he couldn't guess at their numbers or sorts. His own good health had left him little experience of such hospital procedures as this appeared to be. A broken bone or two, a shoulder, separated in a football game, checkups, and that was it. But he had visited friends in various dire straits and so he had seen, at least, what a person underwent in rooms for "intensive care," those special, last-resort chambers where every known life-support facility is at hand.

Even so, no such place he'd seen was as complex as this and nowhere had he seen a tenth of this number of appliances. He felt as if some tube or some wire was enquiring into every organ and even every cell he was made of. He could hear the pulse of pumps, the humming of electrical motors and, from his fixed position, he could even see the backs of dials and gauges, of meters and luminous oscilloscopes which were his agitation, changed hues and cast into some room beyond all kinds of recorded data.

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So he assumed.

He thought no one was in the same room and that was true.

He could hear feet outside the room, moving in a corridor, clearly. And faintly, he could hear the occasional awakening of a P.A. system, voices, remote and hollow, paging with numbers.

The fact that he was conscious for that actually very short period, must have registered on the instruments for, within a minute of waking, he felt a surge of warm fluid into an arm-vein and lost a sensation, seconds later.

When next he woke he was lying on a bare bench in a small, square room full of steam. The steam was hot and medicated. Soon, a voice ordered:

"Breathe deeply!"

It was so calm and yet commanding, Glenn did as required.

"Again!"

"Look here," Glenn said, in what he tried to make a shout "This is a *mistake! Dangerous for you!*"

"Again, deep breath! You have five more minutes only, in this final proceeding. Breathe deeply!"

Glenn did. He did because he realized the voice was recorded. Nobody was listening to him. Rather, perhaps, this room was monitored. Further, if he had only five minutes to go, it seemed sensible to follow the automated commands. He knew he was alone in this strange steam-room because what he was breathing seemed not steam, but a compound that people would not safely inhale for long. There, he was correct. But the pungent steam he drew into his lungs had a peculiar effect. Each breath revived him, made his mind clearer, improved his muscle tone and, at the end, he felt restored completely.

That end was abrupt.

With a tremendous, sucking *whoosh*, the chamber was cleared of steam. It was a box, he thought, walled in some plastic material, high, with a recessed light up there in the center. No visible doors.

Then, a door opened.

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"Proceed into the waiting room."

He went through the door and as he did so, encountered a robe that came down on a hanger, from above.

The room was simply furnished. A sofa, a chair, a table with a pitcher of water and a glass. He was thirsty but he looked about a bit more before moving ahead. One end of the room was open except for vertical strands of faintly glinting material, almost threadlike and set about four inches apart. Beyond that apparently decorative and certainly easily crossed barrier was a dim-lit corridor from which sounds of distant activities came.

He crossed to the pitcher and poured the glass full. His perspiration had been cleared away by the sudden exit of air

from the other room. He felt clean and realized that the evacuation of steam had been, at the end, preceded by warm water droplets—an instant bath, hi effect, leaving him as he felt now: clean and dry, too; the last result of that tornado. He stuck his tongue in the glass. There was no taste at all save of rather flat water, as if it had been boiled and cooled.' If it was drugged, would it matter? His thirst was excessive. And if the mechanical voice could be believed, the ordeal was over. How long had it lasted? Without a watch, without any sense of time relative to his periods of insensibility, he couldn't guess. If he had been told the procedures lasted only thirty-two minutes, he would not have believed that. He drank three glasses of water and nothing ill followed. His thirst was assuaged.

Next, wearing the brownish, clean robe, he walked to the vertical "threads" that acted as a merely visual barrier between himself and the corridor.

A figure in white passed by, sex indeterminable.

"Hello," he called. "Would you please—"

No answer, no reaction.

He was alone again. He decided to step into the corridor.

The threadlike bars did not yield to his casual touch.

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He grasped the m—and nearly cut his palms in an ensuing attempt to spread them so as to get through. He wrapped his hands hi folds of his robe, grasped one of the shiny, sixteenth-inch (or less!) filaments in both hands and exerted his full strength. This was strength enough, hi a pinch, to break or bend any material of such thickness he knew of. After repeated efforts, one strand bent a little but not nearly enough to make an opening.

Pantbg, he stepped back and stared at the strange stuff.

At that point, Glenn might, given time, have deduced his situation, or, at least, reached some close approximation of it. Unfortunately, he wasn't given time.

He would have needed it because he had been engaged with his present astonishments and vicissitudes, up to this moment. He'd had no chance to put together the facts he had observed, the outdoor landscape, the state of every man-made thing he'd seen, the dreary sky, the air-filled vehicle, the brief words from the medical man before Glenn had lunged. And, also, this novel, this nonexistent but very palpable material of such fineness yet such incredible strength. Two men, uniformed like the two who'd brought him from his car, but not hi breathing gear, now tramped to the open end of the room and stared at him.

"We're taking you out," one said. "Make trouble—and you come out cold."

The other man was touching the slightly-bent filament. "Look, Mac. The guy bent this Super-Fab!"

"Nobody could," Mac said and then examined the spot. "Be damned! Not ten men hi LA could of! *Some geezer!*"

If that was ,the case, Glenn thought, it shouldn't be hard to take this pah*.

He watched. They touched a button and the threadlike barrier rose hi a frame, opening the end of the room. The cops, or soldiers, or whatever they were, came in. Glenn sprang. There was a soft pop and a thousand threads wrapped around him. It was as if he'd been seized

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by a hundred octopi all with tentacles almost spider-web-fine but, together, completely immobilizing. He thought of Gulliver in Lilliput as he was carried into the hall and dumped on a seat in a vehicle he wasn't able to see clearly. He couldn't even turn his head. It zoomed off along the corridor and into another one, much wider, where, he thought, people moved about and where, for certain, other vehicles passed this one and still others overtook it and swept on.

He could not see out from where he lay, except at an angle too high to observe the people. But he heard their voices. He heard soft music as it came from some places they quickly passed. It seemed to be a sort of arcade. There were streetlike lamps, a fluorescent sort, set overhead out of his view. Colored lights glowed and were passed. Twice, he saw electric signs of a sort, a treble clef in pne case, a foaming glass in another, indicating shops, perhaps.

The vehicle finally stopped. . . .

* * *

Half an hour had passed.

Glenn sat, pinioned, in the metal chair. The hot light burned into his eyes. Dimly, behind the table, he could see the two faces.

Captain Marlon. Sergeant Bate.

"Repeat, and tell the truth this time!"

Glenn answered in dread. "My name is Glenn Howard. Glenn Howard. My address, 3636 Corona Canyon, Los Angeles. The date is October 15—or 16—1971."

"The day?"

"If it's the fifteenth, Friday. The sixteenth, Saturday."

A voice cut in from a loud speaker. "That checks, "captain."

Marlon, heavy, drak, with much shining evidence of rank, replied, apparently by mike. "Okay, Bleeker. So his yarn checks as to day and date. What of it?" He addressed Glenn again.

"Repeating a question, *Mister Liar*. Where were you coming from, did you say?"

"I didn't. It's confidential. If you'll call the White House —*please!*" The last word was entreating. It did no good. The "effect" came again.

It was stronger, each time. What caused it, he could not imagine. But something seemed to grab his nerves and brain. His body became a blaze as if really in a fire. And worse, with each increment of this torture, his sense of doom became stronger, as if his brain knew that what was happening to his body would be stepped up until, at some unguessable but not too distant moment, the degree of this total torture would destroy his mind, and that, even if his body somehow lived on. It was horrible. It could not be stood much longer, even by Glenn. While the "current" was on, of course, he could not make a sound. Could not breathe. Could only feel the increase of his agony and terror. It stopped.

Glenn sagged and gasped.

The two police-inquisitors exchanged a few words.

Marlon spoke while Glenn was still sucking air and drooling, while sweat still blinded him. "Okay. Now look. We're hi a hurry. You can have your choice. Either come clean about where you were, or else, brother, we'll start shoving up these treatments till your control goes out and you'll scream the truth—and probably keep screaming for years, afterward!"

It seemed possible.

Glenn knew what he was going, to do: tell them where he had been. He knew, however, that would only lead to the question he dared not answer: what was his mission at Boiling Wells? For he thought, now, to the extent he was able to think, that this whole affair was somebody's infernal attempt to wring from him the fact that he was going to "squeal" about his mission at Boiling Wells, to the President.

It was not, of course, a rational idea. It did not account for all that had happened. But once he was under torture, he was not capable of rational processes. The plain intent of wringing from him who he was, where he'd been and—surely, in the end—on what

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errand—left him with the mistaken conviction that, somehow, he had been forced into a series of nightmarish hallucinations that became reality only here and now, as the interrogation began.

Given time to think, Glenn would soon have realized that solution made no sense. If "they" had done all this to him to make him admit he was going to tell the President about the meeting in the desert, they already must have guessed that. He was, in such a case, completely in their power. They could make bun dream as he had been and imagine such bizarre images were real. Why, then, all that, to preface—this?

But he had no time. The thirty minutes of torture had seemed hours, already. His frantic, fighting mind was unable to find a moment for recovery, analysis, or anything but the heightening dread of the next application of their unbelievable torments. He was beginning to get his breath now, and trying to brace for the next, icy question. He saw the Captain lean forward to frame it.

It wasn't spoken.

A voice belted over the loud speaker. "Marlon!"

The Captain flinched. "Yes, Chief?"

"Hold everything!"

"Yes, sk. But—"

"How is the prisoner?"

"Tough."

"How many jolts?"

"Eleven!"

"Jesus Christ Almighty!"

Marlon spoke defensively. "Orders were to hurry the guy—"

"All right! All right. They were wrong!"

"Wrong, Chief?"

"Yes. And forget that! Is the man in any shape at all?"

"For what, sir?"

The high, penetrating voice went even higher. "The Mayor wants to talk to Mr. Howard, right away!" Glenn stared at his inquisitors. They were, of course, frightened. But they merely looked blank. As they

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had looked, the whole time. He caught Marlon's eye. He grinned faintly. The Captain gaped.

The Chief of Police, Glenn presumed, yelled again, "Are you on? The Mayor—*"

"Yes, Chief. He's stood up, so far, pretty well. Seems at least—well—mind's working. He can probably walk."

"Christ, man, he's got to be hi good shape! They didn't even know we'd started on him! The order to hurry it was from me, damn it to hell! Probably lose the job! I'll send Doc Weddin in. Do what you can. He's to get Class A clothes, so help me God! An Alpha-plus, no less! He's actually some big shot—!"

This shift did not surprise Glenn. That it shocked the LAPD Chief was deserved and if some of these cold bastards lost rank, fine! Glenn smiled now and tried to stand. When he couldn't, the Captain said, angrily, "Oh, God!"

The sergeant ran around the table and helped Glenn rise. He was pale, sick and fawning. "Come on, my friend. Let's try to get a little strength in those legs."

The Doctor arrived in a short while.

Glenn was given a quick examination and two hypos. The police physician kept tabs on his pulse while the drugs worked. Glenn felt as if he was recovering from total prostration to find vigorous health—and in ten minutes, when a capsule and a dose of some exotic-tasting liquid were added to his medication, he realized he was becoming a little high, even. As if he were—not two-martini-high but—what?

As if he'd been given a shot of morphine—as when he'd had that shoulder after the eighty-yard run and the spill in the end zone, the unnecessary and violent butting that put him out of the game for the rest of that year. It was a good feeling, a little too good, and maybe a "good" LSD trip might start that way. Everything so sharp, colors so vivid, sounds so clear and musical.

He went through the next interval in that uplifted state, saying little and only when there were questions.

They took him to a shop and chose clothing—a sort of

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lightweight, tight but stretchy garment for his legs and torso, partly transparent. An open, cape-like jacket, both garments in shades of orange-brown, one lighter, and the cape, about like his hair, perhaps not quite so dark. Then there was a ride in a series of these arcade-like streets where he saw lots of people, not so brightly or sleekly dressed, a few excepted.

In this delightful and dreamlike state he noticed a few things but none bothered him. The pedestrians were almost all people from twenty to forty or so. No kids. School, he assumed. And the women were very attractive. The men, fit. Their garments, like his, weren't designed to hide much. Women's breasts were not just visible as shapes but often truly visible through transparent bodices—his word. Men's genitals showed as contour and, often, the pubic hair of both sexes could be seen as a dark or light or in-between triangle.

His own clothes allowed the same visibility but, at the moment, it did not greatly trouble Glenn.

He observed that these "streets"—they were far longer "than any arcade—were mean. Shops were small. The largest of the business places were cafeterias. And there were graffiti on bare walls, on store fronts, which he made not much sense of though he presumed they were obscene in intent and certainly they were in English. The overhead "roof," too, where the street lights were fixed, seemed to be rock, naked, gouged, scraped and without any effort at rearranging, smoothing. Like mines, he thought.

But it didn't matter.

People, police, very polite, were escorting him with respect, sometimes pointing out an item of interest—a theatre, a fountain, a statue of some President unheard of, a side street that "led, as the swift-transit showed, to a distant and open square that was brilliantly lighted and seemed very gaudy compared to the rest of the streets and plazas. "Corporation Offices," one of his companions said, proudly, it seemed.

But Glenn merely smiled, nodded, as his blissful state continued. He was aware of the physician, in the

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same vehicle and watching him attentively, but nothing mattered to Glenn, really.

He was being given a suitable reception, he knew.

Everything would soon be straightened out.

The car—electric; a sort of bus—stopped. There was an ornate doorway. Inside, in a marble-walled hall, an elevator portal. The cage took Glenn and two others, one, the doctor, up for a storey or so. The automatic doors opened. A blue-walled, blue-carpeted hall. A white arch and doors that opened by themselves when somebody made chimes ring, inside. Beyond, was a fair sized room, with blue upholstered furniture, white walls and a blue and white, wall-to-wall carpet, quite deep. Nothing excessively elegant but, in all, a neat and decent place compared to the part of the region he'd seen.

There was a receptionist. When Glenn saw her, which was not instantly because she'd left her post, a glass-topped desk with a shaded lamp, to come toward the three, he quit looking at anything or anybody else.

"Welcome to LA," this girl or woman said.

Lights in the reception room rose with a golden tint as she spoke.

"Thank you," he said. And he still stared.

A brown-eyed girl with blond hair that fell below her shoulders. An almost completely see-through costume. A figure that was not quite full, save for the breasts, which were larger than her height and her rather boyish body indicated—lovely, aureoles as pink as a pomade he's seen in France and bright, strawberry

nipples. A lovely girl whose eyes were slanted like another's, Bessie's, but so brown, so direct, so intimate—not Bessie's blue-blue and changing eyes.

She moved quite near, hand out, and he took it and pulled a little. The mouth smiled and its pretty shape became another, but one not less attractive. He couldn't quite get the feelings her voice gave him, not instantly, but in it there was a gentleness, a compassion, warmth, maybe passion, and something else, restrained, sad, maybe. She was stunning and he said so.

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"You are perfectly gorgeous! I'd like to kiss you!"

She said, "You may kiss me. If you like. But not too much—too soon, Mr. Howard. I'm Leandra Smith. Mayor Baker's special secretary and personal aide." She turned away. "What?"

"He has had two milligrams of Aphron, Miss Smith. Perhaps he should have something to counteract it?"

The girl—perhaps she was twenty-five, Glenn thought, but her body was about eighteen—looked at him a moment and laughed. "I think not, Doctor. The Mayor won't be ready till the commissioners and the others are all here. That'll take twenty minutes. I think Mr. Howard and I will be . . . alright"

•TO stand by, then?"

She nodded. He and the others left

Glenn was now aware that a vestige of his normal self was returning. He was ashamed of what had happened. He followed Miss Smith across the room and sat where she showed he should, by a smooth arm-wave. He found it was a divan and stared as she sat beside him, quite close. They studied each other in the again-dimming light and for a few breaths.

"You liked me," she finally said, deep in voice, gentle in its volume, pleased, he was sure.

"I am totally confused," he answered finally. "Yes. That was clear, embarrassingly so."

"Not at all. Quite gorgeously."

"Where am I?"

"Los Angeles, Mr. Howard. But what you must realize is, that a very strange thing has happened to you—and so to us."

Glenn laughed quite jubilantly. "That, Miss Smith, will be your lifetime record for understatement!"

"In some twenty minutes," she said, after smiling with his mirth and nodding her swinging tresses to agree with him, "the Mayor and some city officials will meet you. I was asked, in the interval, to put myself at your disposal." She saw his baffled look. "Exactly. You have been tortured and we are very apologetic about it. After-

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ward, you were drugged to speed your recovery. You had, for one thing, a fairly large dose of Aphron. It's a sexual stimulant. That's why—your erection on seeing me was—complementary, of course, if embarrassing to you. You'll get over that sort of embarrassment, we hope. If your—erotic appetite is—well—overriding, we can make love, to tone it down for the while, or I can get you a counteractive shot, which will be equally effective."

Glenn, following but staggered, finally decided she meant what she said. Certainly his sensations en route to this place, and on arrival in this room were evidence of her honesty. He couldn't understand her willing, even eager—if he judged her expression rightly—offer to be the agent of his tension-reduction. It was so open and so meant and yet, hi any woman he'd known before, it couldn't have been done that way, directly, and at once, unless the offer were motivated by some other purpose. He gazed at her and she smiled and he decided he didn't understand anything.

She seemed to have meant what she said and that meaning was not guileful but open and simple, as if she'd known he'd been given a hunger-drug and so, had presented him with a basket of fruit, with the finest and fanciest pastries ever baked, something superlative. She was waiting, he finally perceived, for an answer.

"I'm ashamed to say that you, more than any drug, make any noble effort on my part seem silly. However, if you promise to make a later date, I think, for now, I can—well—manage."

She nodded with a different smile—admiration? It looked to be.

"Fine. Later then. As a matter of fact, I'm to escort you, or vice versa, hi old-fashioned terms, to the Mayor's home for dinner, tonight. Very well. My next assignment, which is nothing like that first one—and that, indeed, wasn't exactly assigned, but left to me—is very difficult."

"I hope not," he said quickly.

"Beg pardon?"

"I don't want to cause you any difficulty of any sort, Miss Smith." That cleared her puzzled look.

"Leandra. First names, here, are the rule."

"Glenn, then."

"Yes, Glenn. You see, I know a good deal about you,"

"That's hardly fair."

"I'll explain how, later. It's only—say—what you team of people from reading."

"I suppose. Well? Suppose you try your 'difficult' task and give me a chance to make it easy?"

"You're very nice. But I'm scared, a little. It's going to be a shock for you."

"In the last—whatever—hours or days—I've had plenty of shocks—"

Her face was briefly torn by emotion. "That electronic chair! I know! I've heard!" She shuddered.

He patted her shoulder. "It was a mistake. I survived. So let's forget it."

She looked at him while she pinned her thoughts in place. "Well, look, Glenn. You think you were on a feeder road to Route 15 to Los Angeles and it was Friday, October 15, 1971. Correct?"

"I know I was. Earlier today. Or eke yesterday."

"But you fell asleep? Passed out? Someone hit you? -Drugged you? Took you away in your car?"

He listened thoughtfully. "I was in a rest area. Parked. Dictating. I dozed off, is all."

"But when you woke—there had been—changes?"

"There sure had been! Looked as if I'd slept a half a 'Century!'"

It was only a figure of speech and unconsciously

derived, at that. He hadn't yet clearly faced that look of lapsed time. But she was nodding, slowly, over and over. She said, "Yes. Nearly." "What?" His voice cracked on that one word.

"Now, take it easy, Glenn. That is the fact. I realize you haven't thought of it or your—behavior, here—would have been—different"

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"I certainly had not—thought—of that!" His head had fallen forward. He turned it without lifting it. "Is that true?"

"Yes."

"How did it happen?"

She rose and walked about the room as she went on— looking at him with expressions of sympathy from

time to time. "That, we don't know. Of course, our top scientists will be on it. Suspended animation*?"

Perhaps. There was a bad sandstorm the night of October 15, 1971. It may be your car was buried. At least, records indicate that was possible: three days of sand flying and that 'rest area' was under a dune.

Then, later, the sand blew away to form other dunes across the road. We have traced that event, those events. Your car wasn't where it had been 'lost'—that's what was assumed. Not in that area, it seems.

Blew on? Hidden by a next dune? Blew back—all these years later?"

"How many? Exactly?"

"Exactly forty-six, to the day and hour, when you were discovered by the exterior patrol."

Glenn couldn't accept any of it, really. But, he thought with a sort of wildness, he should pretend to believe it, provisionally. "I vanished? And reappeared, same spot, forty-six years later, alive, in good shape, in fact? Or fair shape. Then—"

She sat beside him once more. "Then, we started to blunder." She smiled uncomfortably and he grinned encouragement "Your papers, driver's license, I think you called it, the papers for that ancient car, your clothes, all made sense—if one accepted the idea that they were real. Hard to. On the other hand, the corporation— government, your word for that—has reason to be suspicious of—well—absolute strangers with phoney stories, who reach or approach LA from outside, from no known take-off point. People who won't or don't explain themselves—except—under tortu—" she broke off. "I can't bear to think you went through that! And so far! It's hideous."

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"It's over," he answered calmly, and let his arm cover her assenting shoulders. "Go on, Leandra."

"I'll try. There's not much more I know to tell. You had a taperecorder."

"I sure did. And—?"

"It's being read. Will it matter? You seem anxious! Will it matter, whatever you dictated—forty-six years ago?"

"No. Guess not." He began to think perhaps she was telling the truth. Or what seemed to be the truth. Still—forty-six years! Suspended animation—how? Nuts! Something here needed explaining, still. But, his mind said, suppose that is the fact? Everything falls in place, then, right?

Take that under reservation. Everything, then, would seem to fall in place—but what clarity would that lend? Even Rip Van Winkle, he thought, with characteristic mirth and irony, had only managed twenty or so years.

"Why are you laughing?"

"Ever hear of Rip Van Winkle?"

"I don't believe I—" She was so serious, he felt

"Never mind. A joke. So?"

«So—it's what you'd have called 'A.D.' 2017."

Glenn's mind threw up an image, that of the lettering and numerals he'd caught sight of as the first van stopped to enter something marked "East Gate" and dated—that was it!—dated "2013." So the gate had been finished four years

ago! Somehow that trivial recollection did more than all his other memories, so far, to make him begin to believe he had, in some way not they or he yet was close to understanding, managed that "suspended animation"—or whatever—and leaped to this later age, alive, unchanged and normal, even. *Maybe*,

He repeated what she'd said. "Anno Domini twenty seventeen. October—what?"

"Fifteenth, still. Five to three o'clock, P.M."

His mind swirled and spattered again, "You mean, I've only been—alive, recovered, awake, for a couple of hours, or less! That—just isn't possible!"

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"I guess it seems impossible. You were—well—drugged, most of that time. You've been in LA for just about two hours, maybe fifteen minutes more."

"Fantastic! Why—I spent hours in that—chair—"

Again, she was shaken. "Thirty-one minutes," she said, brokenly. "A record—most would have—disintegrated—much sooner—ten minutes—fifteen—"

"Let's skip that thing for good, okay?" She had covered her face with her hands. She nodded silently and drew a breath before going on.

"Fine with me. Very well!" She glanced at a wrist watch he hadn't noticed because it was largely transparent, glass and plastic, with minute, though readable, crimson hands.

"You're pretty wonderful—making it as easy for me as you can!" Her smile was near to blinding, to breathtaking, as few actual smiles are, yet so many are said to be. It told him she was irresistible. Or did the drug "talk" still? She went on rapidly, and he concentrated.

"You have accepted the facts about time. That was my main assignment: to get you to realize the strange fact of time-lapse. There's not much more I can add before the Mayor will be ready. But maybe this will help. After your disappearance—there was a terrific search, of course—the whole environment of the world began to deteriorate."

"As predicted by nine bright scientists—" he said to himself.

"Let me finish. It may be useful—in the Mayor's session. Mayor Robert Baker, by the way. You'll meet the rest and get their names. Anyhow. A time came when some people, at least, realized that, soon, or in due course, anyhow, the air was actually going to be too poisonous for breathing."

"Everywhere?"

She gestured him not to interrupt while she said, "Yes. The whole earth. So people, some, began to plan to go underground, to dig enormous subterranean areas where masses could live, with regenerated air, water, and

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so on. Now, please, don't comment. This is one such city-shelter. It was done in the teeth of public opposition here, and, in many places, as covertly as possible. Disguised as 'defense work' and so on. The end came abruptly—and those areas that were ready, or near enough, were occupied as fast as possible. People had been secretly tagged to go underground in some such emergency but they often failed to make it. Others were then accepted. There was only an hour's warning, about—in Los Angeles—"

He was stunned. He asked, "And that happened—?"

Her answer was muffled. Obviously, this account was painful for her. He thought she said, "Nineteen ninety-one," but wasn't sure.

"How many—here—underground—?"

"Under twelve thousand."

"And that's all?"

"For Los Angeles, and around that part of California—yes. That's all. Now. There were hardly half that many, at first. We're building up population as we increase facilities. And, of course, eugenically. Many of the people who got here safely were—damaged. So were some of their children. Me, for one. I probably can't have babies. But I'm a Useful Person, so—"

She was weeping!

She'd said, "Useful Person" as if the words were capitalized or in quotes. The inference he drew was too shocking to accept. While he tried to reject it, chimes sounded, soft and melodious: four notes.

She made a strangled effort to speak. He took her in his arms as if she were a hurt child. "Mayor's summons," she whispered.

Then, with tremendous will and great skill at control, she pulled herself together to become the calm, polite, if that was still acceptable as a definition—the alluring and strangely ready damsel who'd caused his embarrassing response. "I'll take you in."

They crossed the room and a large, ornamented door opened.

CHAPTE EIGHT

THE BIG WELCOME

There were about fifteen people in the room—all, at the far end. As he followed Leandra through the door, they rose. Most of the group had been seated behind a large, monocolored table, green, in a green-and-off-white, official-looking chamber. Four doorways, in all Extra, comfortably-soft-seeming chairs, but of a single material, stood along the walls.

The people were middle-aged but on the young side mostly. One man had white hair. One of the four

women seemed elderly. They were of differing heights and faces but, in all, of typically "American" sorts. Businesslike in aspect, Glenn thought, walking down the long, green carpet toward the group. The Mayor in the center, on the arm chair; rather, standing in front of it. Looking forty, about, with black hair and greenish grey eyes, smiling, composed, intelligent in every seeming way, courteous in expression, and something more. But that, not guess-able.

As Glenn moved toward them the Mayor's eyes shifted and he raised his brows.

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Behind him, Leandra said, "Mission accomplished, Bob."

"Thank you, m'dear." The Mayor's attention returned to Glenn. "Welcome to Los Angeles, Mr. Howard!"

"Thank you, Mr. Mayor."

They shook hands.

For some minutes there were introductions, pleasant sounds of greeting, congratulations, expressions of marvel and of intense curiosity, too.

Glenn was not good at names, ranks, even at remembering faces. It was, he'd often thought, his most conspicuous and certainly most embarrassing fault. He had others, he was human, but his inability to take note of names, remember them, to file faces in his mind quickly, often surprised others and often made people indignant. Glenn could never be a politician. He would fail to identify so many people of importance in any campaign that the resulting injured feelings would lose him his best advocates in any election.

Now, he hardly tried.

They were, he realized, dressed like himself. The Mayor's pubic hair, for example, matched his black, wavy locks and his small moustache. Offices registered better in Glenn's brain. He met a District Delegate from Washington. (So there was an underground Capital!) Five or six commissioners were next—of usual sorts: transport, finance, taxation, engineering, the waste department (not very efficient, Glenn had noted) and a secretary of health—a woman, brown-haired, attractive and—a woman showing her enticements through her light and shining garb. She clearly approved of what she saw of Glenn in the same category. Her glance of search and then her raised eyes were two hazel invitations. They said, *later*.

That sort of thing intruded into what should have been his concentrated effort to remember who was who—and what. Granting his situation was the one he now nearly accepted, he was forced to note, perhaps first, that some immense change had taken place in—sex, sex

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relations, sex exhibited, sexuality flaunted precisely, at least, where quality warranted. And these garments were, plainly, everyday sorts, street clothes. He found he was wondering more what evening dress—if any—would be, than giving attention to the faces, queries, comments.

These, however, weren't too difficult to field mechanically.

As his mind drifted, he took hands, cool, warm, strong, small, and heard his "party voice" make responses.

"Thanks, I feel fine."

"Yes, it's strange."

"Glad to be 'aboard,' commissioner!"

And so on.

The initial business ended, finally.

Glenn found himself in a chair, at the table across from the Mayor with the others ringed around.

Soon, silence fell. The Mayor, plainly, was about to become his official self.

He didn't rise but when the voices dropped away he bowed towards Glenn and said,

"Welcome, again, to USA, Incorporated."

"To—*what!*"

The Mayor started slightly and then recovered his aplomb. He smiled, deliberately, Glenn felt: "The nation, Glenn—and I'm Bob, by the way—is now a single corporation."

Glenn nibbed his nose with a knuckle and said nothing.

"All the changes—from your time to now—will be shown you, Glenn, beginning shortly. All the main ones.

What happened to shift the nation from what you know to what you will now discover. A tragic yet fascinating period of history. Man almost became extinct. But of that, more later. My associates and I, unfortunately, are up against a busy schedule this afternoon. I believe you know you have been invited to dine this evening, with my wife and me?" He saw Glenn knew that. "Very well. For reasons of business, what I'd like to say now, and really ought to, will be postponed till the evening. Then, too, you'll be readier for it. At this moment, however—" he

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glanced at his watch, "—the President wishes to make his greeting."

Glenn stared.

"Yes. Of United States. President Mallet, George Mallet, formerly head of the Steel Corporation of USA.

Great man. Ready, Harrison?"

"All set!"

"Just swing your chair around, Glenn," the Mayor said. And with that, the lights in the long room dimmed. The opposite wall was bare—not even a picture adorned it, not a stand or vase broke its blank surface. As Glenn swiveled around, that end wall was bathed in light—from behind. The effect gave him a prod he followed to the previous night and the drama on the bedroom wall at The Kettle. Only, this time, the "screen" was about thirty feet wide and ten feet high and as an image appeared, blurred for a second and then focussed, Glenn found himself grinning at his recollection and its form. "Last night" was forty-six years plus a day hi the past! Apparently.

What came on the vast screen in perfect color was also recognized by Glenn. He said, aloud, "The Oval Room!"

The Mayor's voice corrected him. "It's an exact copy, Glenn, but underground."

"Oh."

Then the President walked in. President—what? Mallet. Remember it! George Mallet. Former head of the steel company, of all that had remained of steel companies in this destitute USA, Inc., Glenn prompted himself, wryly.

The President sat at the remembered desk and looked into the camera, or whatever it was: a man of fifty with a square face, gray eyes, a command look, expectably, but a rotound belly and thin wrists. White hair with a black streak, possibly natural but hi any event, arresting; shrewd wrinkled around bold and slightly bleak irises, topped by a political smile, warm, somewhat paternal, rehearsed and well learned, Glenn observed.

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"Welcome to USA, Incorporated, Mr. Howard! Glenn, may I say?" He swung about and said, "Nothing on my monitor!"

An off screen voice, agitated, said, "I thought Frank had told you. We cannot pick up LA today."

"Oh?" The President looked back, at them, at the camera, at an invisible Glenn, at the world, for all Glenn knew. It was all happening a bit fast. A bit much, Glenn felt. So, he thought, Okay, President, George shoot!

The President did.

"First, with my welcome, on behalf of the nation, let me express my amazement—and gratitude—over the peculiar . . . miracle . . . that brings you to us. I had hoped we'd converse, now. That being electronically impossible, let me be brief. First, Glenn, your properties, in their present and I must say greatly augmented—relatively, at least—state, will be returned to you in toto. Second, the Board of Trustees wishes me to inform you that, in a hasty intercommunicative meeting, they have . elected you, provisionally but unanimously, to the Board. Save for my own office, this is the highest status attainable by any American citizen. Third, and I wish we could exchange words over this, we trust that you will not object to your being made the subject of a sort of study, of some experiments, in the months ahead. These will not be arduous nor painful—the contrary, indeed." His smile, now, was almost lascivious, Glenn thought.

Experiments!

The Mayor, sitting beside Glenn, evidently sensed his stiffening and resentment He patted Glenn's shoulder amiably.

"Nothing to fret you, fellow! Tell you later—the details."

The President had paused to don spectacles so as to read from a paper. What he then read was a sort of order, quasi-military, to his subordinates in the residual USA—a proclamation, perhaps, Glenn revised "order"—formally installing Glenn Howard, provisionally, as a citizen, Board member and the future head of *all* communications in USA, Inc., save those of a military or other

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restricted nature. Finishing that document he looked straight at Glenn (and, evidently, at all USA watching this broadcast) to say further:

"You will be provided with Board-Level quarters as soon as these can be refurbished. For the moment, a mere commissioner level apartment is available. We apologize. We are particularly pleased to have you with us, Glenn—and call me George—because our present news-and-directional-orienting programs have nowhere near the effective reach and range your record shows you can achieve. Finally, we congratulate you on your singular overall rating. Remarkable! And priceless to us all! Every facility you wish will be furnished to brief you on both the history between your date and this, and our present lifeways, systems, the establishment, and our aims. We count on you, once you're informed, for great things!"

The man looked off and saw, evidently, his time was up. He gave Glenn—or the camera—a sort of salute, bowed, and faded out.

The lights went up. There was vigorous applause. Glenn swiveled about and met shiny eyes, envious faces, a number of sycophantic looks, a few narrowed stares. He was as bewildered as before.

People began to shake hands and depart The brown-eyed lady official said that since the Mayor had grabbed him for dinner, maybe she could have him for lunch, the next day. Or dinner. Even—a late snack?

He thanked her, promised nothing.

A man said, "When you start touring the city, don't miss my show. Air and water regeneration plant."

"And mine!" a second commissioner put in. "Power plants. H-reactors, you know."

Glenn registered that. "I didn't! Sounds like the solution we needed—back hi my time:"

The second speaker—Glenn thought his name was Bolton Loaden—smiled and flashed spectacles as he nodded, also. "'Came too late, except for the survivors."

Glenn kept shaking hands, exchanging good-byes and

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promises to see this, that, go here, and there. But the words just spoken made a special mark. "How many—survived?" He threw the query at Bolton Loaden, which name later proved nearly right. Oddly, it stopped the polite farewell.

Bob had heard and finally said, "Worldwide, Glenn? Or USA?"

"Well, both?"

"Nobody really knows. Where there was enough preparation—underground facilities—all national policy was secretive. About the construction. And, then, how it served after the crunch. And nations are still quietly sitting on that. Not much intercommunication. No cause. All any country can do, now, is just maintain its living. And every one of the technological nations, of course, is a little afraid some other one has more people. Natural pride. No war likely, of course. Just—the expectable silence. Did USA start with a million survivors? Did the USSR manage anything like that? And how manj people have they, now?"

Glenn scowled, "Can't even give—an order of magnitude?"

Bob Baker shook his dark-thicketed head slowly. "When you meet with the Board—and that'll be in January unless there's a special session—you may get figures. But if you imagine the world population peaked around five billion in the late eighties, and that even before the Last Day, hardly a fifth had survived, you can begin to get an idea."

Glenn began to. He was silent and shaken. "It's hard to make that sort of leap."

"Precisely," Bob smiles. "And so, since you have a couple of hours between now and changing for dinner, we thought, if you agreed, that a series of—he nodded at the wall that had for a while become a screen—"displays from the past, major events of a disastrous sort —might be your best, initial experience. Leandra will be with you to explain what you need explained. The material is ready—and we're under some pressure—"

"T think that would be very useful." Glenn said.

CHAPTER NINE

TAPES FROM HELL

They sat in two chairs, side by side.

Leandra had a remote-control gadget which she used to cut off the scenes, to repeat them, to select from an evidently great but special library scenes she'd already arranged, or, occasionally, something else to clear up Glenn's perplexities or add to his comprehension.

The show convinced Glenn beyond any further doubt that his present was real and no dream, hallucination or other, unnamable phenomenon.

When it was useful, Leandra would cut out the sound so they could talk. It was often useful.

"We'll start," she said, "hi 1977. That was the year of the first big disaster. This is Bombay."

Bombay was, he thought, unchanged from his knowledge of it. He'd never been there but he had seen many photos, spent time hi New Dehli, visited Calcutta and some other cities in India. He was now looking down a broad street at a mass of people running towards the camera. Behind them was nothing that seemed ominous, a rolling smog of a bluish hue, but one that any breeze might blow into any city, Glenn felt. Yet the hordes

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in their white dhotis, their saris, their turbans, were trying, it seemed, to escape the mist. As they came closer, their united yelling was deafening. Glenn bent toward the girl and she cut that din.

"The smog?" he asked. "They were running from that?"

She nodded. Now, silently, the great screen showed why.

The camera was now on some higher place, the top of a vehicle, or a balcony. And the seething horde could be seen into the distance. But as the cloud overwhelmed the most distant myriads, they feLL

That was all.

Glenn thought there must have been a hundred thousand people in view, hi that few minutes. And the pursuing smog rolled forward, nearer, faster than the running people could go. In fact, they were their own impediment. The slow ones were knocked down and trampled, while the swift, strong and agile clawed through the nearer masses to try to get clear. The result was the usual one in a panic. Mere numbers and crowd compression, frenzied ruthlessness and utterly selfish effort, made the great mob slow down. Glenn saw, as the front of the multitude came nearer, a horrible thing. There were palms on both sides of the street, wide walks, and then buildings shops and stores and offices, most of them white

and flat faced.

The human pressure began to sway, then slant and finally topple the palm trees, which meant human bodies in hundreds were being shattered against the rough trunks. And then, here and there, he saw the white fronts of buildings turning red. Which, again, meant only one thing: crushed human beings on the sides of this route were being hauled against the walls until they burst and became paintbrushes, swept along by the masses, and recoloring the

This hideous scene continued until, a little short of the camera, their agonized faces individually clear, the foremost—so, last—of the multitude were overtaken by the bluish mist and fell, jerking and kicking gagging, trying to rise only to collapse with the attempt, till the last one

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was quiet and the great avenue was paved deep under its dead, the white-clad and red-blotched masses of its dead. Leandra switched on the sound again. None came from this area but a horror of screaming seemed to rise from every direction in the distance.

Then, suddenly, the camera must have tipped over for the picture swung in an arc—and went out. The screen was empty. The sound stopped, too. "What was it?"

The girl gave that smile which states no smile is appropriate. She looked at a small book in which were notes, gave her gadget a number of clicked punches and then answered by a new tape.

First, Glenn saw a gentleman, tall, with an oddly bulging brow and what proved to be the most steady and compassionate eyes he could remember, as he talked into dozens of mikes and was captured by as many movie and TV cameras at what was clearly an airport, perhaps Kennedy. He was near to exhaustion and seemed strangely troubled even before he spoke. Questions were belted at him by the media-mob.

Finally he talked into mikes and cameras as was now shown Glenn. "I've been asked, perhaps ordered, officially, it appears, not to give out any public information until after I have been interviewed by certain Washington people."

There were boos. Voices yelled things like, "Public domain!" Or, "The people must have facts!" Even, "Another bribed scientist, doctor?"

Whatever he heard, the man, who was perhaps seventy, decided to ignore the official "orders."

"Okay!" he shouted and his eyes were alive. "There is nothing secret—can't be—about the disaster. As you know there have been oceanic blooms—massive multiplications of microscopic sea animals and plants—before. Like the red tides often observed off Florida in the Gulf killing millions of fish. Something similar occurred in the waters of eastern India, the Indian Ocean and the southern part of the Arabian Sea. In past weeks, thousands of

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square miles have been covered by a 'bloom' of a new strain of phytoplankton, a hybrid, or else a mutated form of a familiar organism. I must skip the technical details. No time!" His eyes had focussed on some distant activity before he said that.

"Millions of tons of these organisms, billions, appeared in the upper ten feet or so, of these seas. They continued to multiply till they literally smothered, or crowded themselves to death. Dead, they burst and each single cell then let out a tiny but fantastically toxic bit of gas. This was about as dense as air, with the same mass, and so it floated above the area." His gaze wandered. He flinched a little and went on:

"The simple movement of a normal weather front brought the poisoned air ashore. It moved inland from Mysore to the Gulf of Bombay at lethal strength. For seventy to a hundred miles inland, it remained a killer. How many scores of millions it destroyed here one day remains uncertain, though it included practically everybody along that coastal distance and inland to seventy or more miles. Turbulent weather dissipated it then, and its later effects haven't been severe. One thing: this phenomenon should be understood because it can happen again, in many forms, *anyplace*" He looked down and said, "Yes."

He was arrested!

Glenn turned to Leandra but saw her eyes fixed on the screen, where the light-effect had changed.

He looked. What he saw was a reproduction of one of his own newspapers, one of the biggest, *The Midwest Sentinel*. First, a banner headline:

FAMED BIOLOGIST MAKES ERRONEOUS REPORT

Dr. Robbel Biltman in Custody for Own Good

White House Urges Public to Keep Calm

as False Rumor Sweeps Nation.

There was much more of the same sort.

Among the rapid series of sound-and-color events that

followed, Glenn found that Willen Deever, not Angelo Katz, whom he'd named for the spot, had taken over the "Howard Empire," as it was now called.

And Glenn realized that his TV, radio, newspaper and other publishing properties had evidently taken the very opposite position from the one he had planned on that drive toward Los Angeles that had, indeed, ended there—and nearly half a century too late!

He did not need to be told much more to know that the conspiracy of the twenty-five industrial czars at Boiling Wells had succeeded. Here, six years later, was ample proof. A single, brave scientist had told a set of truths, against orders of some official sort—but immediately, the world of industry, and the media, with the full approval of several federal spokesmen had launched a massive campaign to mislead and befuddle the American public.

While he mused bitterly on that, the lights went up.

He turned to the girl with a questioning look.

"You get the point, here—?"

"I sure do! The warning that one man, Biltman—I knew him, I believe, slightly—gave, on his return from India ... so I thought: news that was scotched as quickly and as thoroughly as possible. Right? An actually horrible, biological disaster! But local! So what was the policy of the USA? Make the folks ignore the warning—the statement that such things could or might or would happen elsewhere, everywhere, anytime."

She bent her head slightly in assent. Shrugged. Looked at him gravely. "That was the first big one. But there'd been plenty of little ones, which hadn't been used as warnings. Even your media didn't get the point, really, while you were the chief. Radiation deaths—"

"But accidental. And few. Only individuals—"

"—making clear what any massive radiation release could do." She saw his perplexity. "Nobody seemed to be even sane, looking back from here! The whole country was being used as a thoroughway for all sorts of lethal material.

Trucks loaded with atomically blazing hot materials

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—so hot they boiled and had to be carried in water-cooled, lead containers—were roaring through cities and towns all the time. In 1978, I think, one of them was wrecked and the radioactive cargo ran out into a river ... let me see ... the Muskingum, I think, in Ohio. I didn't include any tapes on that. It was 'relatively' a small thing. Ten thousand eventual deaths. Three or four times as many ill, maybe half permanently injured."

"From the stuff in one truck"

She stared at him as if he might have been joking. "The partly 'burned-up' tubes in a power reactor, it was. Going to New York State for recovery of unused fuel—uranium and plutonium. One truck, yes, its cargo spilled into a river at night. The people on the Ohio River were evacuated in time—clear to Cincinnati.

Below there, they just kept away from the water, for weeks."

He didn't say anything.

"See what I mean? If you, personally, didn't know what was moving on the highways, or what it could do if it was smashed open, as in this minor case, lots of people in your corporation knew. And you could have. After all, Hiroshima and—that other city—made the effects plain. And even you—"

"I knew," Glenn said quietly. "In a way. About the haulage. Radioactive cargo—all the rest—acids—explosives. And about radiation burns, death. I knew, all right, and so did every informed person. We even knew there'd be trouble—perhaps as bad as that Ohio thing—sooner or later. Not what. Not when. Not where. We'd had lots of accidents in those days. Planes crashed. There were big fires. We'd gone through wars and had one going at the time I"—he paused.—"vanished. So, now, I think we were conditioned. There were the riots, too. Campus and other sorts. Bombings. Not to mention that we killed sixty thousand of ourselves in vehicular crashes that year, and bashed about two million, crippling maybe a quarter of them. And we remained unphased! Cost of having cars, we felt. Never happen to me in my car—that sort of feeling."

"Would you call it slightly insane?"

"Maybe. Now."

There was a pause. She clicked her remote-control program-selecting instrument.

"Next," she said, "you'll see something of the cold years?"

"Cold years?"

"In the Eighties. Yes. Three, in succession."

On the screen now were pictures of cities, of vast fields under cultivation, forests, towns and suburbs. Leandra hadn't switched on the sound. She explained while he watched the flow of ever more wintery scenes. One was of Manhattan, still identifiable in a long shot by some familiar skyscrapers; then, Chicago, similarly recognizable. Other cities, with unfamiliar, new structures. All under blizzards. And soon, some of these and many nonurban vistas appeared in weak sunshine, but they were not free of snow and ice.

"It was warming up, the earth, in 1970 to '71," he said.

"A tenth of a degree per year?"

"I seem to recall. Anyhow, there was an argument about which way the world temperature would go finally?" Her question was almost a statement.

"Yes, I know. I heard it all"—his grin was wry—"only yesterday, so to speak. The increasing load of dust and moisture in the air versus the rising carbon-dioxide amounts. One would surely overtopple the other—and the relative temperature balance we enjoyed at the time."

"Well, the dust did and the earth finally got about five degrees colder than normal."

"I see. And a two degree drop would have done it?"

"They said so. Five, did, anyhow."

The sound came on and for fifteen minutes he sat, horrified but enthralled. Before his eyes his nation and the world froze up. Bits from TV newscasts were inserted as explanatory material, making the rest very lucid and very appalling. The display reminded Glenn that, once before, there had been a "year without summer"—after

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the explosion of Rrakatoa, when its world-scattered dust had cut down the sunlight reaching the earth. Now he saw three such years, but worse ones.

He saw New York City under thirty feet of snow. He saw snowflakes drifting down on the Panama Canal. He saw the first "summer" come—and the great grain fields of the planet, along with the rice paddies, unplanted because they were still snow-covered or, if not, muddy and frozen in June and July; and when some melted that August they could not be planted because in a few weeks the snows fell again.

And the second summer was colder.

By then, half the world had starved or was starving. He was shown it, starvation in Africa, Asia, South America. The "have" nations were sharing nothing at all. They, too, were on short rations.

And he was witness to the conferences that began to take place when a second cold summer was certain—international gatherings in which political and scientific delegates united in attempts to end this icy slaughter of mankind. The results were displayed in due course—every attempt imaginable was made to reduce the causes of the atmospheric burden of dust and high altitude moisture. Jets and the SSTs were grounded. Smoke and steam emissions were either captured and solidified, condensed, or else their sources were forbidden to operate if that was possible. Otherwise, they were allowed to proceed on a basis of minimal essential production.

World economy came unstuck before the second spring. Nobody knew what the value of a dollar or a pound or a franc would be from one hour to the next Banks closed. Trading ceased. Exchanges closed. Breadlines stretched into invisible distances even in USA. Glaciers began to form in valleys in the Catskills, Poconos, Ozarks. Where there were glaciers in the Rockies, Sierras, and elsewhere, they grew fantastically and began to menace centers, of population. That happened in Europe, too, and in every continent, including Australia, to the smallest degree.

The third spring and summer of cold were represented

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by scenes of numbing horror: masses of dead and frozen bodies in big cities around the world, starvation on unbelievable scales; the spread of plagues long since regarded as conquered or at least under control: typhus on the East Coast, cholera hit the Latin American nations, bubonic, in great splotches on a world map, the West Coast of USA among them.

Then the theme of doom began to change.

The worldwide effort to reduce the atmospheric load of sun-screening particles, of dust, of moisture, of myriad complex chemical sorts, began to pay off. The winter after the third nonsummer was mild, generally. With the spring, land areas that could be planted emerged from their frosted or snow-bound state. That next summer there were crops, and adequate crops, since the suddenly arable regions were extensive, but the mouths to feed had dwindled from five billion to far less than two billion.

This series ended with music and a vast spread of waving wheat, wide reaches of blossoming groves, ranges where cattle were on the increase, in sum, a sound and sight of victory—at the cost already made clear.

"That," Leandra sighed as she turned the lights up, "was the biggest one because no later eco-calamity could kill as many. There weren't as many left as the dead."

He said nothing. His eyes were straight ahead and haunted.

"The time's getting short," she went on, unemotionally. "I think, next, the acid rains."

He turned, then, saying nothing but with some sign of incomprehension or request hit his haggard features.

"The chemical causes were so complex we can skip them. Yes, that's what they were called. Sometimes the caustic rains weren't actually 'acid.' But they were bad. Here."

Clicks. Dimmed lights and Glenn was staring at a landscape fairly familiar. He placed it as the California

Coast up near Big Sur. He was looking at what he would have called a "commune." Adults and children, perhaps a hundred or more, living near the sea amongst the evergreens

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in tents and shacks, wearing all sorts of rather dirty clothes, but seemingly decently nourished people and evidently happy, or at least serene. They tended fires where whole hogs roasted on long spits of metal that young men and women turned by hand. The kids were running about, playing ball games, and a group was dancing in a sort of free style way, though a long-haired and quite lovely woman with a smudged nose was trying to lead that happy, unorganized ballet.

Then the camera and sound track brought distant thunder from the sea and with it, surprisingly anxious expressions for many of the grown people. The thunder grew louder and, with a series of cuts, the camera iris'd in on a little girl, about seven, with pretty red hair and blue eyes who was running and laughing but soon came to a stop. She clasped her cheek and took away her hand as if her cheek were white hot. She screamed.

The camera now shifted and showed a wider scene— together with the child. She was standing, alone, on the ocean side edge of the group. She continued screaming but no one paid any heed. Instead, the adults were fleeing for cover and only some of them, in that flight, even tried to summon or carry children inside.

The child was shown closeup again. It was raining. She was screaming and now running in a small circle. Where each drop struck her skin, the place turned red instantly, and the red circle spread with the downward coursing of the raindrop. The rain was scalding the little girl. In a minute she tripped. When she had fallen, she kicked and rolled as if soaked in gasoline and lighted. In the next minute she lost consciousness.

The broad scene came back. Children lay everywhere, some screaming as they died, others already limp. The rain fell hard now. Thunder cracked and rolled and lightning stabbed occasionally through the swift-collected gloom. The tents were swaying and screams overrode the thunder as, evidently, people in the shacks were victims of leaky roofs.

The first tent went—uncovering its dozen

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or more huddled and now-racing, rolling, yelling inhabitants. The thing was merciless, fantastic, horrible.

"That was the first time the acid rains hit this country," she said quietly.

"I see."

She looked at her watch.

Glenn made a gesture of protest: he'd seen too much.

She ignored it.

"Those rains were rare but they fell for some years. And finally the last thing happened. This excavated area was about half its present size. It was paid for by corporations and federal funds and dug as covertly as possible. The public refused to believe that 'underground habitats' made any sense. The acid rains grew rarer. Besides, no one could prove they'd be needed at all, let alone, when— if ever. By then, of course, the nation—what was left— was in bad shape, psychologically and politically. USA was under a sort of martial law. Whole States had had riots that put local governments down—murdered many people. Only the federal government at cabinet level, the biggest corporations and the military, by this time, were still workable and organized."

"I see."

He did, somewhat. The screen now showed him a broad street in Los Angeles, he thought, though there were buildings of sorts he had never seen. But most of the area was recognizable and several smaller business buildings along this boulevard seemed to date from before the Seventies. There was traffic in the foreground and middle distance—odd-looking cars and vans—non-air-polluting designs, he surmised. But, far off beyond the lens range, came a sound like wind in a cave, soon identifiable as a wail, a mass screech-and-groan.

Now, the scene shifted to a sort of kiosk in the foreground, a metal entry something like that of subways in New York. Here, there was swift action. People were arriving in the odd cars and showing some sort of passes to guards—men in uniform with short rifle-like weapons.

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A voice, a narrator's, came over this scene as the growing sounds beyond were muted.

"This is the entrance to our present Los Angeles on the Western side. The great wind has started. By morning, those still alive in USA will be in such places as this. All others will be dead. At this moment, the people being allowed entrance are those, only, with credentials—a select group in every way—and in proper numerical balance for the continuation of subterranean life at its scientifically best levels. A half hour has passed since their warnings were sent out. You will soon see that the entry, which had been open for twenty minutes, approximately, will be stormed."

Glenn saw that.

Something—the "great wind"—was causing the distant commotion, the mass outcry, to draw nearer. Now, abruptly, about two hundred people, mostly male, many teen-agers, rushed the entry.

When they reached a distance of perhaps a hundred feet, they were hit by something invisible and they seemed to vibrate on their feet for seconds before falling. Dead, and dark-hued. He had no time to ask about the cause, the weapon. A bulldozer of enormous size, with a man in a high-up enclosed control-cabin pushed into the scene and scraped not only the mass of purplish bodies but the many abandoned cars out of camera range. To clear the kiosk for others, obviously.

Others came.

Families. Men, alone, of varying ages. Women, many with children. A few teen-agers, students, Glenn somehow assumed. If they had credentials, they were rushed into the kiosk, out of sight to—**h**e assume **d**—elevators, stairs, some means of descent into the dug "city."

Of these, some had no credentials to show, because they had **failed** to carry them on the **n**: persons. This growing group was hustled into a wood or metal walled pen where Glenn had thought till that moment, construction must have been in progress beyond the broad sidewalk.

Not so. It was a pen for just this sort of problem.

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"It is now nearing noon," the narrator broke into the din. "The fatal wind has reached the downtown area of LA. The crowd trying to outrun it is now but a few blocks from this entry. In the next moments it will be seen that the underground quarters are not going to be filled by their quota, by the chosen and permit-carrying ranks. Those who claimed to have such identification but not to have it on their persons were, as you see, set aside in a holding area. They will be admitted. After them, anybody who is able to be brought **hi** and down will be accepted until the closing and final seconds.

The temporarily halted group streamed from a door **hi** the walled area and out of sight beneath the kiosk.

A drunk was yanked in from the increasing flow of pedestrians. A busload of school kids was disembarked and hauled inside—mostly Oriental and Negro children and all, about seven or eight, scared to the edge of hysteria, or beyond. The guards, four or five **hi** view, now, were rough but not unnecessarily. A prostitute came into view, painted, shouting, "It's my street and no cop or soldier can spoil a girl's business!" She was pulled to safety.

A couple of cops were taken in by force—the use of weapons at their backs. A carload of kids, who seemed high on something, was pushed inside. Soon, earlier rejectees were overwhelmed by the approaching masses and very soon, one of the guards **fe**L. A steamy, brownish breeze stirred a lone, nearby pepper tree. The other guards donned masks but these proved useless.

The last shot was from the kiosk and, Glenn thought, made behind some airtight barrier.

What it showed was much like the Bombay scene, though the difference lay **hi** the fact that these were fellow citizens, which, he eventually reflected, was not a decent distinction. The main mass of people rushing from the mist was brought down some forty yards short of the

The city became increasingly silent—outside microphones, Glenn thought **crazily**.

The browned fog came over the region in front of the kiosk.

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camera. Nothing moved. Glenn believed he glimpsed leaves falling in a slow shower from the pepper tree.

Over this **he** heard the narrator say, quietly, now:

"The underground work was incomplete. Only **half**, or slightly more, of the assigned occupants were able to reach their four entries. All night, at an escalating speed, this brown wind sped eastward. By morning it had reached the Great Lakes and by noon it went on over the Atlantic. It was not anticipated by anyone. Its nature was never wholly determined. None of the prepared sites save for a few were **hi** a wholly ready state. Several failed **hi** the hours and days ensuing. Six hundred and ten of those who made it safely here, died **hi** the next 48 hours. Use of **facilities** that were ready, along with the implementation of those not at that point, was enormously hampered by the failure of numbers of preselected specialists to reach safety. Nearly a third of those saved who survived the ensuing month were without valuable skills. The first years were, therefore, **difficult**. But Los Angeles survived."

CHAPTER TEN

THE CITY WITH NO DAY: EVENING

The lights in the Mayor's office came up.

Glenn sat with his head bowed, hands holding his **jaws** and temple bones, eyes shut

"I'll be back in a few minutes," the girl said softly. He made a motion of acknowledgement and then, involuntarily, watched her go. Lithe **kgs**, neat, round bottom, straight back and **rhythmic** swing of that mixed **gold-and-silver** hair, the motions of a woman meant to allure, **hi** his time, but now, unconscious? Habit? Training? Innocent and natural?

He was surprised to find himself able to consider any such matter after what he had just seen—**been** through, more accurately, he thought to himself.

This is how the world ends.

Not with a bang but a whimper.

If T. S. Eliot had said nothing else in his strange and **difficult** verse, those two words would stick for a while: bang and whimper.

But the poet had **nt** said *scream*.

And the world hadn't ended—**quite**.

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Glenn gave himself over to an agony of self-reproach in the form of questions driven at his conscience:

Why didn't we pay attention to the little warnings?

Why didn't we act when we knew that the atmosphere of the earth, the waters, salt and fresh, and the land and the

snows and ice of the poles were pervaded with DDT, mercury, radioactive elements?

Why didn't we even attempt to find out what other planet-wide poisons were present and what combinations of all the half-million chemical compounds man *knew* he was dumping into his living space were adding to that awful sum?

Were we mad?

Why was I shown these examples of what so soon and so catastrophically followed my last day, there?

(I was on my way to use my power and influence to demand just that: a complete survey of what I had at last seen as a near-fatal state of the environment—which it proved to be!)

Will they hold me accountable for the hideous sins of my era?

Is that why I had to bear these spectacles?

And were there more? Of course! She'd said as much! How many? Hundreds? Thousands? How many millions went to what kinds of screaming death, sacrifices to "progress?" "Technology?" "Civilization?"

What was that basically wrong with us all?

In the young woman's absence Glenn wrestled with such self-queries. For he felt, knowing the consequences *now*—of all his generation, his establishment, the system—he felt forced to understand. It wouldn't be possible, Glenn briefly felt—and then, in a rush, one answer came to him.

It was a strange one, new to Glenn and one that Glenn felt might serve, in some degree, at least, if he were made the villain-symbol, the whipping boy, for the terrible and nearly unanimous sin of his "civilization."

The answer related to *time*.

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He lifted his head from its mourning posture and his face showed a certain calm as Leandra returned.

This time, he didn't ogle or erotically respond.

This time, his eyes merely noted her changed appearance and resumed their lucid but *inturned* shining.

"What is it?" she asked, softly, a little fearfully, and as if he might have lost his sanity in her short absence, unsure of him and his mind—well aware of the shock to which she had subjected him, on command.

"I was thinking," Glenn replied, in a very steady tone, "that what you showed me had to happen." He felt her negative reaction as a tensing of body, caught in an eye-corner. She stood in front of him and waited to recover some lost assurance. "It *had* to?"

"Yes. Why, Leandra? because of this; for a million years or more, from the time some species became our own, men were sufficiently intelligent to try to better their state, in a world that seemed utterly hostile, or all but that. We slowly managed, right? We made tools, captured fire, learned better and better ways to hunt, by cooperation, and to treat hides, polish stones and bones and bend wood for arms and implements and clothes. And at last we learned about seeds and agriculture, having already domesticated a few animals."

He waited for an answer, his eyes raised to hers. "Yes, Glenn. And thanks for that 'Leandra!' Go on."

"Not hard, and not much to add. Civilizations rose and vanished and left, or failed to leave, their added cultural discoveries. Thousands and thousands of years after the first field was planted and the first lasting 'village' of stone was erected—the ancestral city, call it—man began to gain in technology—though, for centuries and centuries his gains were pragmatic—windmills, water wheels, roads, carts drawn by horses, spinning, all the metallurgical steps, from, say, ancient Greece to about the 1600's. Even then, men had not actually commenced to be 'scientists.' Up to then, the laws of nature on which the progress of man had been based were neither understood, nor widely, and not yet systematically, investigated. You with me?"

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She seemed slightly impatient *now*—the watchglance to show it.

He ignored the signs and - sat with little movement as he continued:

"About a century and a half ago, men began to be scientists, to look rationally into natural law. That was the start of the gigantic explosion which, actually, only became exponential and incomprehensible to men with the twentieth century. In the 1900s any decently educated man still understood the principles behind the technology he then had attained, steam power, locomotives, telegraphy, telephone, the first plane flights, high explosives and the weapons they led to, trolley cars and so on. But, as the next brief decades passed, scientific knowledge exploded until the parallel might be measured by the H-bomb, as greater than the A-bomb, and that, compared to the prior explosives, TNT, dynamite, gun cotton—"

"I don't see—" she interrupted. "And, anyway, we have to go to your place to dress, and then the Mayor's home *hi* a couple of hours. We'll walk. You can tell me . . ."

• So they entered the rather impressive square in front of the city hall, Glenn thought it was, and turned into a wider street than those he'd seen. There were people, all sorts, on the sidewalks and in the shops they passed. Small vehicles hummed by, going both ways, but not in numbers that would be called even "light" traffic, by Glenn's scale.

For a time he was so full of his thought that he gave *lit-the* attention to his surroundings. Novel, of course; but to Glenn, the novelties could be appraised later—while his insight had to be stated, as a way to firm it up and to test it.

"In America, as in all other civilized or 'advanced*' nations, man's knowledge and his applications of that for his technological wonders shifted humanity in one lifetime—from an understandable world to one so terribly complex and technically varied that hardly any one man was able to *eraso* the *maior* *concents* of science, the *oure* *knowledge*, that was applied to this period, one a single life could span. Do you see that?"

^she said, "Of course. Not the part that seems to hit you so hard. We turn right at the next corner." "Well, maybe I can't express it well enough. Though it's simple. Humanity tried, for what seemed unarguable reasons, to 'conquer nature' and make human life less *subject* to natural *menaces* and calamities, from disease *to* crop-failure and the adversity of

nature. Mankind actually began to achieve those goals of conquest, in his term, because he began to make use of his reason for scientific study, experiment, research and so gained truth-finding and knowledge-accrual. When he had done that for about a century, the effort suddenly burst into every field of knowledge and produced concepts so valid that man's understanding of such gains, for a million years and more, probably became impossible. Who, for instance, in 1913, could understand Einstein's first theories? Who, next, understood what part of them, derived from that whole, underlay the atom bomb? How many people with color TV sets, in 1970 or '71, could furnish you with a clear account of electro-magnetic radiation propagation as it was applied to permit the building of their TV sets? Only those physicists, engineers and technicians trained to know. The rest of us were 99.999% ignorant, there. . "Or anywhere else. Who understood the medical advances? Who knew the mechanism of immunity, as of its state in 1971? Or the facts then known by geneticists?"

She guided him into a narrower and- relatively darker street. "I get the point of the public ignorance. So what's that meant to say?"

"Two things. The lesser one is, if the masses, however highly educated, don't understand the concepts underlying what they have and use and take for granted every day and every night, and these concepts are constantly added to by new and even less understood 'advantages,' 'benefits,' health aids and machines to save physical labor, tedious mental work—well, how can they see what else is happening?"

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"What is?"

"Every technical step forward, in the long past of man, was made without any realization that it had some sort of backlash effect on nature. Always, to some degree, adverse. Or so nearly always as not to matter. Then, in this one-life time-period, what was merely knowledge and called 'science,' was exploited for practical ends, more human blessings, greater jumps in that conquest of nature, but, still, in the old, innocent, blind, ignorant way —without any reference to all knowledge, the whole of science. Don't you see? You develop a new and faster and cheaper way to make steel, the oxygen process, say, and you build the new plants. Start them up. But do you ask all science including biology and ecology about the total effect of these furnaces on the environment? You do not! It doesn't even enter your head to do so! Economically, and from the mere standpoint of reduced man-hours-of-sweat, it's a leap ahead. What the plant's effluents, wastes, liquid and gaseous, will do to the air and earth and water where they are spewed, isn't even a relevant-seeming matter. Never was—so far as most men had noted. That countless civilizations and cultures committed ecological suicide just that way hadn't occurred to a soul except in special, visible instances. I mean, the fact that all civilized advances were innately counterproductive went unseen. There was no historical, scientific, visible, aware precedent of the. absolute fact of that counteradaptive result"

"But—ecologists—?"

"Yes! Ecology—which draws upon all the information, data, proven fact and sound theory in every science and every branch of science—had a name, and some specialist scientist-spokesmen, and some actual researchers— but as of when? 111 look it up. But it didn't even reach any people but certain biologists, with any wide comprehension, till, at the earliest, after the Second World War. Nineteen fifty, say. And that's the whole point!"

He fell silent and she took a few smooth steps before she got it. She was anything but a dull woman. When she

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understood, she stopped dead and restrained him, too, seizing an arm. "Yes. I do see! You mean that the entire "—impetus—force—direction—and the entire 'general' knowledge and viewpoint—were concentrated on 'progress,' on 'nature-conquest,' right up till the middle of the twentieth century! And that there was no public aware-Bess of the ecological costs—not even in science—till mid-century?"

"Exactly."

"And that only about . . . twenty-eight? . . . years elapsed between the time any trained and specialized group, a tiny one, calling themselves 'ecologists,' began to realize the stupendous damage man had done, was doing, and intended to do in mightier ways in the years ahead—a situation that wasn't even much contemplated by science itself till too late?"

He merely nodded.

She turned him into a lane, flanked by what seemed three-story apartments, crowded, noisy, evil-smelling, littered and in every way poor. His attention now concentrated on this dingy neighborhood while she went on talk-ing.

"I don't believe that has been entered in our history texts. In fact, I'm sure not! And it's so obvious! By the time some few men began to discover—and then try to tell the public—that civilized man was in deep trouble, close to self-extinction, because of this exploitation of science, this one-way blind trend of 'technical progress,' so much had to be learned, just to understand the implications of those ecologists' statements, that it couldn't be teamed at all."

He nodded and averted his gaze to the ugly flats.

"The whole drive of the species was one way, and when the new data showed it was suicidal, nobody could understand their technologies, so, the damage being done was even more incomprehensible."

"Exactly."

By and by she slowed and stopped him, again.

"What a tragedy!" she murmured. "And how ironic!"

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Almost a farce! Look, Glenn. Don't spread that idea around, for now!"

"Why not, for God's sake? It's true. Simple. Logical."

"But your fellow Board members and the rest of the corporation top people still won't understand the idea. It doesn't fit in with their programs and plans."

"I don't understand that, Leandra."

"Then, just believe me! Let's put it this way. The number of people now alive is pretty small, compared to your time and later years. So our capacity for production and our plans for better living conditions—our current industrial expansion, call it, by your terms—is no longer on a scale big enough to threaten an already ruined surface-air-sea-water environment I mean, the earth's surface, the biosphere, is slowly recovering even though present technology isn't attempting to limit whatever wastes and so on are deposited above us. Too small in overall amount to matter. In plain English, Glenn the USA Corporation, and all other foreign bodies like it, don't need to worry about today's polluting because it's assumed to be trivial, dispersible and reducible by nature to manageable substances. Present thinking is much like pre-ecological industrial thinking. But for a different reason."

Glenn heard more than she'd said. "Are you trying to tell me something more, or—other?"

She shook her head. "No. Just the situation now. If you started a crusade to limit the present, small-scale harm being done to the surface environment, the Board would be hostile. And perhaps rightly. Temporarily, They must have to weigh any current outdoor damage against efforts to support the surviving people, and to better their living conditions. Especially since the outside is gaining in the ecological sense."

"Maybe." She walked him on, talking quietly. "How much recovery has occurred, they don't say. Maybe don't measure, with any exactness. Because you can't breathe the air, even now, after all these years spent below ground. Or drink the water. Or grow edible crops. All our

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food is raised under enormous plastic 'hangars'—a mile long apiece and half as wide, and hundreds of them! With regenerated air, cleaned irrigation water, controlled everything."

"I see." He had several questions in mind, then. But the basic one concerned the fact, if it was fact, that the biosphere was slowly "recovering" while man went on polluting it, on a minor scale. But still, after his experiences, the act seemed mad, diabolic, and if essential, one that Glenn wanted to understand that way. He had no chance to put more questions. Leandra nodded at a brightly lighted dead end of this lane, this narrow street fit only for pedestrians.

"That's the Mayor's gate."

It seemed strange that the abode of so important a man would have this location.

This grubby lane and these beat-up buildings with their plainly overcrowded interiors. She half explained that unvoiced perplexity:

"You'll find the whole of L.A. like this. Grade C Irving space next to Grade A homes. Yes, we're all graded, A, B, C, D: and below that, you are released—that is, painlessly lulled. Because"—she saw his shock and took it lightly—"we came here—my parents, since I was born here—so used to mass death, and under such restrictions for ways merely to exist, at first, that we couldn't maintain your sentimentality. Sentimentality?"

She pushed a button beside a tall, ivory-white door high a wan that blocked the lane completely and rose, solid, to the bare-rock ceiling of the city, some forty feet above. In the time they waited, she said, "You called it humanitarian. Keeping alive every worthless person, every mere human vegetable, every senile living zero, every person high constant and unrelievable agony. What a horrible burden! What a waste to sustain nonpeople! What a cost in human time and money and materials! It is something—on the public scale—like not having your arm set, even when you broke it on purpose, or carelessly!"

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Glenn accepted that, in a way. He had delicately sponsored euthenasia, within limits, in his media. But the then-frightening contrary arguments came to mind. Who decides you should be painlessly "put away" if you cannot decide, or will not, or if your family refuses even though their doctors are ready and willing to put the sufferer to sleep—which had been a crime, at that?

There was a certain cold-bloodedness here. And, from the faces he'd glimpsed, people had a strange but nearly universal look of blankness, lack of feeling. He tried for a clearer concept. They seemed to be bland, and inert, high some way faintly cheerful if they knew you observed, but for no apparent reason. Not stoical Glenn felt, but—as if stoicism wasn't even needed to face their day-to-day life—as if, he mused, they all had similar thoughts and feelings and these were experienced at a diminished level from the feelings of past people.

Glenn straightened his shoulders as the door opened and a servant—the man's costume and manner made that evident—bowed them in.

"The Mayor," he murmured, "is waiting for you in the central parlor."

Glenn could see the long hall behind the fellow: an elegantly carpeted, beautifully painted corridor with stanzas of flowers, framed paintings and a small wall fountain, halfway along. Obviously, the Mayor had a home which nothing he'd seen so far had remotely suggested.

"Remember," the girl murmured so softly the servant could not hear, "you are taking me home. Early. You're tired!"

That, Glenn thought, was one true thing.

He followed the girl, wondering.

CHAPTER ELEVEN THE HOUR BEFORE, A FLASH-BACK

She had taken him from the Mayor's office to his apartment and then back to the office where he waited while she had changed to evening clothes in her "almost-next-door" place, which he had not seen.

That adventure, because it was one, now bemused him while the Mayor showed off his incredibly luxurious residence.

...

They went away from the office and the nightmare cinema in a little electric car. She parked it in front of a decent-looking brick building and led him up two flights of stairs to his apartment where he would change to evening clothes. She seemed excited and she had the key.

What had happened was appealing, tempting, strange.

From the hall he was ushered into a good-sized living room. The lights were on, indirect and from sources in the walls and around the tops of them. There was a comfortable amount of furniture, big chairs, a huge divan facing what must be a TV-like, or movie like screen, since it was off-white and bare of pictures. There was a wall of shelves and books.

An open door led to a dark room, a bedroom, he assumed. Another, to a bath. And there was a panel in

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the wall beside the entrance which held two vertical rows of buttons with printed notations of their function. She followed him in and spun around as if to say, "See me, I'm lovely!" and then she said, "I bet you'd like a drink!"

"I certainly would! I've needed one, since arriving. Or several! Nobody offered. . . so I didn't ask."

She laughed and went to the panel. From an enclosed recess beside it she took out a phone like device.

Then she studied the list and pushed a button.

A voice, female, modulated, came instantly. "Yes, Mr. Howard?"

"This is Miss Smith. Mr. Howard will have a drink." She looked back smilingly, and with a question.

He said, "Bourbon, if it's possible. A double."

"Two double bourbons," she told the instrument, "with double Aphrons, added."

Aphron, again. He thought to reject the drug, eyed the girl in her strange, half-transparent costume—the feminine version of his own—and said nothing.

She hung up and sat on the divan, patting him to join her there which he did.

"Nobody drinks alcoholic things anymore. I never did, so this'll be new for me. You heard me add Aphron—it's customary, for late afternoon or early evening. If one is paired or will be. There is bourbon—and probably everything else of that sort. It was brought down after you were identified. From the city above. Nobody's there. A lot of useable things come down from there, like looting, only there's nobody to claim you stole anything. I happened to realize you surely drank alcohol. So I told the Mayor."

He smiled, "Thanks."

"It's lucky I was in the office when we learned who you were. You see, I majored in history, in college. In my Senior year we were given a twenty-five year period to cover for a final thesis. If we had no choice, we merely got randomly assigned periods. I chose 1950 to 1975, the me when you rose to such . . . importance. It was all American history, but I wanted to know what it was like

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before the big calamities occurred. When my mother and dad were young, and when their parents had grown up, and all. Interesting people, my grandparents. Tell you about them, someday. Anyhow. You cannot major hi that twenty-five years, that last, great interval without learning at least something about a press lord and media czar"—she laughed at his look of distress—"without, that is, running across a lot of stuff about the head of Howard Associates."

"I see." It was getting to be his constant response.

The drinks came.

He raised his in a toast which she caught onto and returned. He downed half the outsized drink and

recognized a faint added flavor to what he knew was Jack Daniel's; not true bourbon, but, in his view, near enough and far superior.

She choked on her drink.

But she finished it while explaining the equipment in his living room.

As did he, refusing her suggestion of another.

He had been weary and near to a state of shock, of collapse, of mandatory rest. Now, all that vanished. He felt great. Fresh. And very male.

The lovely girl took on an almost transcendent quality, as if she shone from within and as if her already nearly irresistible physical appeal was becoming utterly irresistible. Her brown eyes fixed on him with plain amorousness and soon she rose.

"Let me show you the rest of this place," she said.

That led to a whirlwind tour of the apartment during which she pointed gaily to each item she thought needed notice and described it, usually in a single word. She was charming in that inviting, delighted near-dance.

The tour moved from the living room to the bedroom where she switched on beautifully shadowed lamps before she beckoned him in.

Here, she continued her antic proceedings with warmth and speed.

"Bedroom," she said, as if that was required.

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"Bed," and she pointed to the large bed, and the silken coverlet spread on it.

"Girl," she said next, and flung herself, smiling and overtly inviting, on the bed.

She reached behind her back and undid fastenings, he realized, because her next word came after two sweeping movements that took off her garments.

"Nude girl," she truly stated.

Her arms reached out.

"Yours."

She could see, of course, as before, the complex effect.

Glenn started toward her without the slightest hesitation, but, just before he embraced the beautiful person with the willing, wanting, yet innocently pure smile, he stopped.

His eyes began to move about the dim walls of this room. His exultant feeling died. He walked away from the lady and started looking about, closely.

The bugs were well camouflaged, minute tubes with shiny lenses, little electronic sound pickup devices, but he found several.

"The experiment?" he finally said, turning to her at last.

She was crying and getting dressed.

He said, "Never mind. I meant it, darling. Only it occurred to me that I'm not for public lovemaking. Too personal and too important."

"I meant it, too," she half sobbed. "I forgot, myself, there would be—"

"Peeping Toms!" he said, harshly. "Voyeurs."

Her bright hair swung in negation as she sniffled, took a handkerchief from an unnoted pocket and blew her nose. Scientists, Glenn. Not-duty people. Nobody is dirty-minded, any more. If I'd remembered—and thought at all—I'd have known how you'd feel. I'm horribly sorry! Not to say—the lifted face and its first, next smile again dazzled him—disappointed."

"So am I." He gave her a grin that was sympathetic as well as ardent. "Later? How do we get some privacy?"

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"I don't know," she answered, unevenly. "Maybe it'll be permitted."

"I could go around," he suggested, staring at one of the camera-like objects he'd uncovered, "and smash them all."

"Don't do that!" She was frightened, to his surprise.

"No? Why?"

"I guess," she said, standing and feeling with her bare feet for her slippers, "you don't understand at all. As long as you're being studied, you do what they require. They will make sound tapes and visuals of all you do, that they want to record. Eventually, providing the scientists get all the data they want, and providing you are given back all that the President-promised, you'll be as free as anybody else."

He began to understand. "Big Brother, eh?"

She laughed feebly. "George Orwell? 1984? I read the contemporary books, hundreds, of course. But I doubt if anybody in this city, even any member of the Board, would have the faintest idea of what 'Big Brother' meant!"

"In other words, I'm actually a prisoner. Under limited parole. As well as under observation, by remote electronics, wherever I go?"

"That's right."

"And, apparently, everybody's in that boat. Or, at least, subject to spot checks, at random and unknown times?"

"Except the A-Class Alpha-plus people. Which you'll be, if things go all right."

"And what, exactly, is Alpha-plus?"

"Any man or woman with an A thru C Class rating who also has undamaged genes is an Alpha. The Alpha-plus-ses have genes of new and added and valuable sorts. You're one."

"How in hell do you know that?"

"You got a complete workup, didn't you? Or maybe you don't remember. Don't understand. As you came in, you went thru the physical screening and so on. They had to be sure you weren't bringing in any outside poison, or disease—erm, virus—that they couldn't deal with. And at

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the same time they automatically made a complete gene-portrait—from blood and other samples."

"Other? Oh. I was out cold, mostly."

"Yes. Biology, and other sciences, and their medical uses, are far ahead of 1971. After all—I"

"I guess they are!" He led her back to the less distressful frustration of the front room. He sat with her on the divan—with a cautious space between them.

"You can perhaps understand—" she began.

There was a break. He suddenly wished for a cigar and without thinking, glanced about She'd said, "Vacuobox," in that one-word dance of explaining his apartment and its fixtures and that is what he looked at, because he recalled its resemblance to a humidor. It was on a table, oval, near the divan. It held, he found, cigars—and cigarettes.

"Another bit from your history courses?"

She smiled, somewhat shyly. "Yes. And maybe I should tell you more. About that Alpha-plus thing."

He found the cigar excellent and fresh-seeming though, he was sure, it was forty-six years old, minimally. The arts of preserving or of flavor-renewal had advanced, evidently, too. He blew smoke, realizing no one he'd seen had smoked anything, so far: like drinking, perhaps, a dead custom.

"It smells wonderful," she murmured.

"You were about to explain my high marks in genes?"

"Yes. I wasn't, at first. I thought, we'd make love, and then I'd tell. Because I have a selfish interest in doing just that, with you, and often, and for endless days or more! You see—I'm possibly sterile."

"I gathered that, somewhere. So?"

"But there is a slight chance I might not be. One that would require a male with a very high and very vigorous sperm index. Which you have. And an Alpha—because, except for that matter of never yet getting pregnant, my genes are fine."

He tried to digest that. Other—lovers? Well . . . partners. No luck. Try Glenn Howard, right off, given the chance.

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"It was like that," she said softly, "till I saw you. There at the foyer doors—and looking at me—and so madly desirous!"

That shocked Glenn slightly. She ignored his look. "It meant I did it—to you. I know I'm attractive, of course. But even if I've sometimes had such instant effect, Glenn, I never had such a tremendous response. Never. Doesn't that mean anything?"

"I guess so," he replied slowly. "Things have changed, tho."

"Yes, they have." She seemed lost in reverie, then, and he waited, smoking quietly, to hide a churning under his visible features.

She finally spoke, with care and slowly. "You see, even when the world population was—what did you used to say? . . . exploding?—and when people were at least aware that had to be stopped, no laws were passed to restrict child-producing, and none would have been enforced, if passed."

"Difficult, naturally. But we were trying to teach people to have smaller families."

Her locks swung in that negating way, again, and light flickered over them as from tinsel, from all the hues of Christmas tinsels, gold to silver, and others, he found himself noticing. She went on:

"Suppose every couple had agreed to have just two children? Or suppose laws demanded that, and were enforced? What would next happen?"

"You tell me."

"The Joneses would have two normal kids, boy and girl, say. Across the street, the Griggs would have two defectives. Kids with inherited, that is, genetic disabilities. Mental retardation. Bifodas or other crippling things. Hemophilia. There were many hundreds of inheritable defects!"

"I know. So?"

"The Joneses would realize their normal boy and girl were going to grow up and have to support the two Griggses, all their lives, right?"

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"I suppose they would."

"And the Joneses of the world begin to protest. Because that wouldn't be fair, at all. Besides, from a genetic standpoint, it would merely continue an already intolerable situation."

"I guess I see. We were producing a lot of—"

"Runts. Culls. The feeble minded!" She was disturbed, now, nearly angry. "The more your 'humane' values held, and the more your medical arts advanced, the more of these genetic nothings were allowed to live, even to breed—! The

world's gene pool was becoming degraded and faster in 'advanced' nations than anywhere else. Dis-advantaged peoples, you called them, still had their genetically mined tots swept away by natural causes—mere physical liabilities that led to early death. Not in America! You were cherishing, and wasting billions, on a system' which guaranteed the ruination of your human stock!"

He looked at his cigar and it trembled so he set it down because he could keep his voice steady, at least. "You seem pretty sure of that datum."

"Perfectly! You can find it in the books right here. We picked them to help you catch up, by reading. Anyway." She pulled herself together and discarded her anger by an act of will. "Anyway. Down here, we didn't start out breeding better pigs and dogs and cattle than you free people! We couldn't afford to! Life wasn't just what you called 'cheap'—though always for other people—"

"There was a distinction," he put in, coldly.

"Was there? Life was cheap in China? India? How cheap was American life on America's highways? How cheap was an American when he was allowed to have increasing chances at being defective? How valuable is life when you have a system that insures it will be mentally less and less capable, physically more and more damaged, every next generation?"

She waited for his answer, eyes hot and direct.

He had no answer.

People, hi his "tune," had been aware of the horrors of the population explosion. Who, however, had foreseen

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that, if control were somehow managed, the next great and shocking problem would be genetic management—the prevention of national, racial, species decay—owing to the leaps of medicine and owing to what this woman, this girl, rightly called "sentimentality"?

We weren't even near to any answers! his mind shouted.

If we hadn't ruined our environment, we'd have become a race of cripples and morons.

So, maybe, this was the best way of solving it all!

A curdling thought!

For, already, after his hours in the new world, Glenn had a feeling that besides the known, inferred and guessed aspects of this way of life, all such, horrifying, repellent, even abominable, to him, there would be many, many more.

What he already knew, he then reflected, should have been enough to have made this beautiful companion odious, unattractive, a sort of nonwoman, a thing. Yet . . . that was not so! Why?

"Time for you to change," she said. "Then back to my place—you'll wait at the Mayor's—and we'll just be at his house at eight thirty, late, but not too."

That, in sum, was the "adventure" over which Glenn mused while Bob showed off his astonishing home and its grounds.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE BUSINESS OF AMERICA IS . . .

It was not difficult to hide his preoccupation while Bob Baker showed him his front rooms, his terrace, pool and lawn. Glenn had only to express praise as each new wonder was disclosed. The Mayor was a man of taste—in everything. And his status allowed him a near-incredible range for the exercise of his appreciation.

There were three enormous front rooms on the "ground" floor. They had high ceilings. They were opulently carpeted and each was immaculately furnished in its period: one of Louis Sixteenth, for the first salon, the center room "moderne" in a somewhat more functional but far more sybaritic manner than "moderne" meant hi 1971, and the third, a dining hall, Eighteenth Century English, with even a handsome fireplace and a real fire. All three rooms could be thrown together for entertaining.

Glenn looked, commented with enthusiasm, or the adequate sound of that, and followed his host to the terrace. Though bemused by his time with Leandra, Glenn interrupted what were not thoughts but racing feelings often enough to note some specific treasures. Holbeins, a Utrillo, two Degases, a magnificent Win slow Homer in the hall.

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Museum pieces, he almost said—and saw, in time, that, of course, they were. The museums of the city above them had stood empty, open, with no guards, curators, or public art lovers, for near fifty years. If they could bring down liquor for a man from the past, they could have brought down pictures, furniture, rugs and carpets, tapestry, anything.

"Beautiful!" Glenn murmured as he completed a survey of the dining hall.

"It is," Bob agreed with pride. "My wife and I both enjoy the decorative arts and painting. But when your residence is ready, Glenn, this'll look like nothing. Let's go out on the terrace."

There, Glenn's reverie was broken. His flaring feelings about Leandra were set aside. For the "terrace" seemed, at first view, to be outdoors, on a serene, starlit evening. The stars were a little hazed but in the

right places and on the grassy lawn beyond the terrace, moonlight shone, and moonlight glinted, too, on a small but lovely lake, by-yond. It staggered Glenn.

He heard Bob's chuckle. "Look real?"

Just then Glenn had realized it was not real—could not be. "Yes."

Bob was busy with a panel on the terrace wall and Glenn stood, spellbound, watching the results.

The blue, star-set "sky" paled. Dawn came in a low line of crimson, as it does for people flying east over the Pacific hi a night that slowly has a crimson rim ahead and one which rapidly builds into sunrise and soon , the Coast It was splendid and when Bob said, "Now, we'll have it set," the deepening sky took on the colors, in the opposite direction, of a sunset, with clouds of every hue between yellow and purple, and the clouds moved along realistically while their brilliance waxed, waned, faded and left them dark against a "sky" with the first stars showing.

"This," Bob said with quiet pleasure, "is more or less standard. The lake—pond, if you will—is filled with regenerated fresh water, five million gallons. At seventy de-

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greens—for swimming. There are bass, if you like to fish, which I do."

They strolled ahead, close up, Glenn saw that the trees and flowers were artificial and so were the birds in the trees. But his host activated a switch somewhere and recorded bird songs filled the evening air. Glenn began to believe he could smell orange blossoms and sniffed so meaningfully that Bob said, "Right Beyond my lake there is a plastic partition—nonrefractive and nonreflecting, totally transparent. Behind it is a real garden with orchids —Eula likes them—some fruit trees, citrus, apricot, and some vegetables—as well as strawberries. The atmosphere beyond the plastic divider is pretty damp and hot but we run a little air current through the garden-hangar so that perfume of the oranges and lemons and limes is carried to the ' outdoors,' here."

"It's fantastic!"

"Not really. As a Board member you'll have a really fabulous domicile. Incidentally, the citizens who don't rate one of the three 'A' Classifications don't know—must never learn—that we who rate have such places."

"Oh?" It wasn't sharp but it was nonetheless significant.

"Certainly. After all, the nation's a corporation, Glenn! Those in top management are rewarded, just as always. With homes such as this—and other benefits. For any B or C people who show talent and start to rise, there's a hint, and just a hint, always, that ability and effort are re* warde d—in some unstated way. Each step up shows a surprising improvement in living space, furnishings, small luxuries and then larger ones, till, say, a graduate C Class student who comes along fast for ten years, even less, gets the one thing he does know about"

He waited so Glen asked, "Which is—?"

"He is moved from the C Registry to B, for erotic companions." Bob saw that Glenn hadn't heard of the reward. "You didn't look over the service buttons in your temporary quarters—for which I apologize? Best we could do at the moment"

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"There were at least twenty. I saw that And Leandra— your secretary, Miss Smith—used one to order drinks. But I actually didn't have much tune—"

Bob grinned. "I know." He saw Glenn's flush. "Don't get in a blitzing mood, Glenn! Of course we were paying scientific attention! Too bad you thought of and found our observing equipment when you did!"

Glenn was angry—what the state meant by "blitzing," he'd guess. "Perhaps I have no right to privacy, Bob, but, by God, feeling people were looking— and now, you—"

"Hold it!" The dark, seemingly pleasant man was sharp. Accustomed to command. He meant what he had, virtually, ordered. "We value you, friend. Greatly. We are dissatisfied with the way we use the media currently. We are sure your genius will remedy that trouble, once you under-* stand us and once you take over your enterprise s—what's here, in other cities—and the rest of the non-restricted communication channels and publications. That is one great reason for, well, the welcome you got. But for a while, Glenn we have to observe you. Most of the time, at east." He threw an arm over Glenn's shoulder and started to propel him back toward the terrace and the sensational mansion. "For one thing, your heritage—manners, morals and customs—are, to us, attitudes from the distant past." "Forty-six years? That is distant?" "Things changed so much, so fast, it could be compared to a couple of centuries, on your scale, Glenn. Suppose you were a sociologist, psychologist, historian, what-not in, say, 1970 and suddenly Lincoln appeared, or George Washington—^alive, in their prime by some odd chance haven't yet understood. Wouldn't you have a lot of . experts . . . who would be utterly determined to, well, study those two, or either one, closely?"

"I suppose, but . . ." Glenn shrugged. "I'm merely a business man. Not a historical personage, hero, great man—"

"You'll do." Bob smiled and patted Glenn's back.

Then he heard a husky voice and turned.

His wife and Leandra had appeared in the modernistic

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salon. Bob waved and took time to say, "Look fellow. You had certain ethics that no longer exist. Also, sex morals. We're not entirely satisfied with our own creed. We hope, and some of us feel sure, you can find some flaws there so we can improve—well—public morale, call it."

They then joined the ladies.

Eula Baker was perhaps thirty-two. She had an immense heap of brilliant, dark hair, a smallish but very pretty face and pale eyes, azure. She was plump but graceful. She knew how to use her body every instant for max-imum attention-calling and for the utmost sexual declaration. Her voice was one of those throaty, sexy sorts that Glenn thought were heard only on TV commercials, only, so to speak, as the result of endless repetitions of the advertising copy to get the one repeat with the most "come on." But Eula never had any lesser register.

They went in for dinner and it was a fine meal, formally served but without formal or matching talk. Glenn felt that Leandra was somewhat quiet, for her, and that she often thought with care before she entered any part of the fast-shifting conversation. Not that she was awed or scared, but just careful. Eula wasn't. She made it more than clear that she was attracted to Glenn sexually, and also with intent Bob seemed not to mind, rather, almost to support his somewhat overvoluptuous wife's pitch.

When Eula—who had gotten on a first name basis in minutes—began asking Glenn about his "love life" in exceedingly familiar and not acceptable terms, Glenn's flush amused her. He answered as truly as he thought he should but it didn't satisfy his hostess.

"They said you'd be prudish," she said, rather hotly and when the desert was served. "But that won't last I promise! You need a complete reeducation, Glenn! And I plan to help it along!"

Everybody laughed. Even Leandra. Genuinely.

Bob said, "That's been arranged. He's to spend the next few days looking at our town. Including our educational system."

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Eula smiled. "Better start him with sex, in kindergarten!"

It didn't occur to Glenn she meant that literally.

After dinner, Eula took Leandra away on some joint and evidently amusing enterprise, though, of course, both women also departed to leave the two men alone.

And, for two hours, they were alone.

They were difficult hours for Glenn.

Bob began with an outline of the Corporation that USA had become. He went on to detail the manner in which it "governed" America.

"As," Glenn said, at one point, "a feudal state. Fascists."

"Feudal? Fascist?" Bob had to ponder to recall the meaning of one or perhaps both words. "Well, in a way.

You see, Glenn, when conditions began to worsen, particularly after the three cold years, I think you—T

"Yes." Grimly said.

"—the country fell into increasing chaos. Gigantic riots. Political organization at the local and state level came unstuck. The larger industries, businesses—and, of course, the military—had, finally, the only operational bases left. I believe young Americans in your time were unruly. Campus riots? Leftist bombings? That sort of thing?"

He waited for acknowledgement and went on, "The harder the federal government and the corporations still functional tried to keep order, keep goods and services turned out and distributed, the more violently the young people—that is, perhaps, finally, three quarters of them—battled this hated 'establishment and system,' the 'military-industrial totalitarians'—their terms. Also, the matter of preparing underground habitats became incendiary. The masses refused to think such efforts would ever be useful—boondoggles, they called them. The masses were enraged at the very idea because, clearly, if what they refused to believe would happen, somehow happened, obviously what was being readied or planned underground couldn't hold a tenth—a fiftieth, maybe fewer—of those living in the final years. Had it not been for heavy industry

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especially, and the military, which had some solidity, the enraged multitudes would literally have prevented the efforts that were made. If you see?" Glen was heartsick. But he could "see," in a way. "There are now sixty cities like L.A.," Bob went on. "Some are larger. Up to fifty thousand people, now. Many are mere towns—two to five thousand from a start of half that, about, and as a rule. We lost quite a few of them. too. Not ready enough. Unexpected disasters. Lake Erie flooded Cleveland one night, years back. Houston-Dallas lost their regenerators for days, and the people perished. St. Louis suffered a quake—and lost its safe atmosphere, too."

Bob knocked on wood, Glenn saw, with surprise. "In any event," the youngish and urbane Mayor went on, "we—that

is my forebears and the industrialists and officers and the then-President—with the reliable groups—the professional military divisions and fleets—did the best they could to prepare. The great wind—you saw it?—was unexpected. Sudden. Overwhelming. My parents were lost, though dad was Board Chairman of Western Nuclear Power Conglomerate. This place—not so large as now—wasn't actually ready—but ready enough. However, the necessity of a strong central government had existed for a decade. The Corporation is merely the inevitable result. You'll find your colleagues on the Board are superb men. Our national motto is 'Serve!' We're dedicated to the recovery of the nation! But that took, takes, and will take for any foreseeable future, rigid laws, rigid enforcement, and the requirement that every citizen permitted to exist is worthy, for the overall aim of the unit. The eugenics—you'll learn of—and so on. You're going to find it a great honor, privilege and a tremendous labor, to be one of the Board! I know you'll serve him a capacity not just needed, because it's been absent, but with patriotism and pride." It went on and on—that talk.

Bob plainly assumed that Glenn, as the head of a great corporation, however "ancient," was, by that fact, the sort
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of man like those on the current Board. Not free Americans—there was no freedom, there weren't even elections—but a sort of semibenevolent yet absolute tyrant A monarch. Born to rule and rule without any humane requirements. A sort of intelligent Hitler with what were regarded, at least, to be "idealistic" aims. And aims carried out with no regard for any individual.

The longer he listened the more he found he was hating it all. And the greater his hate, the more evident it became that any sign of that must be bidden. Nobody was going to fight the Corporation or even criticize it, and remain a "Useful Person." Including Glenn. And if one wasn't that, one—stopped existing.

Glenn was relieved when Bob suggested they "hunt up the ladies."

An elevator took them to the floor above. A few paces down a gold-and-white hallway to a door, one of several, brought them to their quarry. Bob opened the door without knocking, lifted a finger to his lips and, grinning, led Glenn into the most ornate and the most lewdly decorated bedroom he had ever imagined, even, thought to try to imagine. They stole over the layers of carpeting till they stood behind the two ladies who were intently watching a half-life-sized screen as they sat in deeply upholstered, silk-covered chairs and sipped occasionally from tall glasses with a pinkish liquid that had a perfumed smell

That was when Glenn found out what the "Registry" meant

On the screen, posturing, turning, smiling, and, on command by Eula, often stripping, was shown a series of men! Athletic and white, muscular and black, oriental, young, even a boy or two of fifteen, at most, and also men of maturity. The two silent men watched this spectacle for quite a while, Bob with amusement, Glenn, hoping he didn't show what he felt

It had taken him a little time even to understand.

The men in the pictures, on screen, were being reviewed for choice. Eula ran the show, talking into some instrument

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that carried her words to an unseen stage manager or manageress.

"Not Elman!" Eula would say. "I had him last week and his thing's short! Really!"

"Not I'm tired of odd types. Especially Orientals."

"Well—is that Bill Sailing?" A voice said it was. "Tell-him to peel! Great. Let him get himself a little stimulated." The man on the screen began to do that Eula turned to Leandra. "Now, dear, that's one you can't possibly resist!"

"He's very handsome," Leandra said, uncomfortably. "But, honestly, Eula, I don't want or need any of these lovely men—for nos?."

Eula laughed huskily. "Still determined to take our handsome Glennie-boy home? After being shut out?"

"I—I—well—yes."

"I bet you fail to make a goal, again!"

"I'll take the chance."

At least, Glenn thought, she's embarrassed.

He wanted to interrupt this scene but Bob apparently enjoyed it. He shook his head in the dun-lit chamber when Glenn showed signs of interfering. The pictures went on sickeningly. But ultimately Eula said crossly, "Let it go, for the moment! Leandra, here, can't decide—and I'll check back for mine later."

When Bob then spoke, his wife was entirely unperturbed. Not so, Leandra. As Eula turned on brighter lights, she was flushed crimson. Glenn thought her whole body was probably blushing. And, before any further talking—or games—could be commenced, Glenn took the only course he could bear, firmly and yet very courteously.

"I'm very tired, Mrs. Baker, Eula, dear. And I promised to take Leandra home, too."

Eula didn't rise. She eyed Glenn with lust and then made it a pretty laugh. "Or vice versa. Very well, you

two." A few minutes later they were walking on the now-quiet streets. When they drew near the building in which Glenn had an apartment, he said, rather painfully, "I *am* tired, Leandra. And that's the truth." "It isn't," she replied softly, "very surprising. So—all

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right, *ni* go on to my little cave. No need to go with me. Nobody is ever in any danger—anytime—here. Girls alone are safe. They didn't need to be *hi* your period, I recall. Have a good sleep. But listen, Glenn Howard! Suppose I could arrange for us to have the cameras and stuff shut off, when we want? Okay?" His heart bumped his ribs. "Very okay!"

"Night!"

Glenn was asleep when Leandra, after a struggle with herself, phoned Bob.

The instrument showed his face to her, hers to him.

He said, "No luck?"

She hook her head, sadly. It took an effort to speak. "None. He's tired—and no wonder!"

"Still, you're . . . you. Did you ever before fail—?"

"Not when I was that near. And even half that wanting, too. But I th"k I may know the trouble."

"Yes?" The Mayor was very alert, now.

"They used to—men *hi* his day—to have their own, well, special types. Some went for redheads. Or blonde s— blue-eyed, not brown, like me. Brunettes."

"I see!" It sounded as if he didn't. As if the idea of having a favored "type" of woman had never entered his head—which was true. However, he accepted it as a fact for the man from olden times. It even amused him a little. "You were going to be his guide, the next days—"

"Yes," she tried not to sound strangled.

"Fine. Instead, you'll arrange for other guides. Varied —types? Right?"

"Yes."

When he cut off, she wept for a long while. It wasn't like her. It wasn't even possible before, she thought. But she kept crying. Jealousy, she told herself, doesn't exist. But that didn't help. This, she finally thought sadly must be what they used to call "love." And it Was proving very painful. Maybe, she thought, it was Well to be rid of it.

That was no help, either.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CRAVEN NEW WORLD.... ?

Glenn had taken a shower, found pajamas of a sort on his bed, remembered to look over his button-panel in order to ask to be waked at seven and, when that was suggested, to order coffee and toast, butter (they had it), and juice (that, too, was available).

He barely managed to get back to his bedroom and (here he was asleep as he collapsed on his very pneumatic bed. Later on, he would realize that he'd been sustained through the long hours of that first, shocking day mainly by drugs, the rest, by his always tremendous stamina. But once he was alone in his own rather handsome apartment, with, so far as he knew, all commitments met, he collapsed. He could have gone on if he'd had to—a thought he pursued a little beyond its glimmering start

When or where in his dream he was kissed, he wasn't sure. But he woke up and was being kissed: lightly, but with a diminishing lightness. The lips were soft, expert, arousing and the scent as well as the sensation, wholly feminine. Glenn was a trained waker-upper. His consciousness arrived with an explosive jolt; but he responded in one of two ways whenever it brought, at the same time, a

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sense of apprehension. War, business problems, many acts of great peril performed for motives of duty, patriotism and in the service of friends, or for causes, had been his schools in the waking art

First, he would decide before acting, whether to open his eyes or not. Now, he decided not. Except, then, for a slight and brief inhalation, an eyelid flicker, he might be asleep, still, to the observer—the kissing girl-woman, presumably. Not Leandra—some other scent, sense.

There was a question with first priority: where was he? A common, waking quandary. But most persons with that sudden absence of self-location use the *n*- eyes to get clues. Glenn simply thought It wasn't hard to recall in the past as now; that took little time. Assuming he hadn't dreamed it all, the remembered situation was enough to make most men leap from bed. He remembered but managed to feign sleep a while longer, forcing his limbs and body to remain limp.

The kiss became more intense. Fingers began to trace delicately on his chest, then his belly. Sexy fingers.

The perfume was faintly astringent, but musky, too; sexy, again. Glenn opened his eyes a slit—not enough

to lift his rather long, thick, glinting lashes. Not enough to uncover his eyes for a beholder. She was young. She was perhaps a maid; her dress was a sort of French-maid version of the high-style standard for female garments, but as transparent in the same regions as evening frocks of the A people. The lesser classes weren't dressed in clothing equally ornamental or equally transparent in the most erotic areas. A room maid in the costume of an A person? Maybe. She was young. She had dark hair and this she wore long, in a waving mist, something new to him in the new city. Her ministrations became increasingly precise.

He thought he'd better start to wake up—and moaned softly, as a prelude.

The response was a moan and a passionate one with trimmings that were oral, tender, yet forceful and not in the least maidenly.

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Many men, most, he believed, of his age, in his pristine shape, invariably woke in a condition that was erotically ready. For Glenn, it was merely how you woke up—unless you had had, the night before, enough of lovemaking to last beyond a sleep. The night before—according to the language of Glenn's body—had been the one so frustrated at Rufe Cooper's Teakettle, the wall-screen and the Billings lass, Bessie. Forty-six years meant nothing to his muscles, arteries, heart, nerves—an irrelevant detail his brain was able, barely, to accept—pro tem.

Things had now come near to a point of no return. The lass was moaning, writhing, kissing. Glancing at him, now and then was a pixie face, impish, but now nearly demonic, owing to passion that had to be as real as odd. He saw black eyes, a thin body, small breasts and muscular but-tocks as she shifted her position; on fire, this thin elf of a wench, sixteen. She looked delighted, more sure of her conquest and only holding back its finale to tease him, or increase her urgency, or, maybe, to wait for his waking.

He almost went on faking sleep.

Instead, he reached suddenly, grabbed a handful of her abundant, silk-thin tresses and said, "Hey!"

What happened was surprising. The girl whirled about. She'd shed her easily removed two-piece costume somewhere in her antic and naked, with a great smile breaking like sunshine, she said, "Ah! Monsieur! Bon jour! Je vous baisez encore, oui? Je l'adore. Magnifique!"

"Now," he said, his voice deep and amused as he moved swiftly out of instant reach, "why in hell did I think of French maid before I even saw anything but that lovely hair and your back elevation?"

She rocked back on folded legs and for a moment her face was disconcerted, dashed, but only for a moment. "Aha! I am French! Rather, my mother and father. Who were visiting Los Angeles a long while ago. And so, saved. I am Lysette."

"The cutest damn Lysette who ever woke me up that way, at least as far as I recall!"

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She laughed. Then, for another brief space, she gazed at his body, specifically, and said, at the end, "Non?" Glenn had remembered his surroundings in time. He waved an arm about in a circle. "Too much audience!"

She shrugged and that was gallic, too. "Me? I do not mind? You? How silly! In another minute or two—"

"Yes," he said, wryly. "Look, Lysette. Is the coffee here? The toast? Juice? Or did you come in alone, first?"

That brought silver mirth. "In the living room." She tossed a light robe at him and he donned it while she dressed—in the same time. Glenn had already noted how quickly the current dress-style came off, and went back on. She moved toward the door. "Is there anything— else?"

He gave a negative head-motion. The door was opened. "You do not like French girls? Or young ones? Or, maybe, brunettes?"

"What a dreadful thought!"

"I can be rung for, anytime. La-la—'voir!" The bell-jingle laughter went away on the silent hall carpeting.

Glenn consumed his modest breakfast, his routine one, thoughtfully. Then he dressed, choosing from the rather elaborate wardrobe a "suit" with the most sombre and dark hue and the minimal area of transparency. In an hour, he was to start a tour of the city. That would be his routine for some days.

He looked forward to it with interest

To pass time, he examined the titles of the books that covered a whole wall. Pretty complete selection, he thought, for the time Leandra had. If he read them all, he'd know as much about modern, underground L.A. and how it came into being, as anybody was allowed to know, he thought. There was, on another wall, a map of the city, dated 2015. He studied it with attention that soon wandered—in a way it would, at odd times, and would for a long time, he imagined.

The map blurred and he looked into space. In his mind, he was back in 1971 and in his own Howard Building, that giant and modernistic skyscraper in downtown L.A.

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He saw people and among them, of course, Linda, his super-bright secretary. He had planned things to do for this day—and then with a shock he came back to reality. He sat down, wondering about them all: friends, relations, men he admired and trusted, important men, men and women he employed, the best, and paid to be, editors, writers, every sort

of radio and television professional and technician, pilots for his own and company planes—the faces were numberless and for each, the same sad thought came.

When and how, where and in what way did it end for Max, Bill, Sam, Stan, Maxie, Hank, Lana, Ethel, Lillian, Sue, Tony, another Sam, and on, and on. One unanswerable question for all—one, for most if not all—with some unknowable but horrifying answer.

His door chimes sounded. He abandoned that miserable reverie and crossed the room. His eyes sparkled with expectation—Leandra—but when he swung the door wide and he began his planned embrace, his intended sign of capitulation, it was another girl, woman.

Tall, as was Leandra, five eight, about, with blonde hair, too, but blue eyes and much more emphatic contours. Scandinavian, he thought. And very beautiful, classically so. Perfect features, wonderfully deep blue near-violet eyes and a voice that was the young, fresh, true sound that Eula Baker had, in some imitated, exaggerated, or artificial and specifically *meant* form. "Good morning, Mr. Howard. I'm your guide for the day. My name's Donna Bronson." She had seen his commencement of a hug and how it had been checked and it made her smile, directly— and sympathetically? Seemed so to him—anyhow, a smile with some understanding that what he'd commenced was intended for—Leandra. She must know that, but not mind.

"Come in, then, and hello!"

She came in with grace. Ballet? Not that sort. She moved with natural ease, with the sure use of strength under that perfect skin, under the tissues that curved it, and covered the muscles her motions guaranteed—invisible sinews,

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as in many women, the sound ones with that lush yet not plump, not quite soft type. Her hair was all one sort of blond, though—like grain, like some tinted wood-heart, apple or maybe pear. Not white, not tow-colored, but evenly pale and lively. He always noticed a woman's hair if he had noticed the woman at all; eyes, then hair. Hers wasn't coarse but not fine-spun, either. It looked heavy around her shoulders, as if lifting it would give a sense of weight.

He realized that he was staring at her, rather looking at her like some sort of inspector. He should have felt embarrassed but she did not allow that. She just let him eye her, not smiling, not anything—though maybe she did faintly show she enjoyed what in any normal case was rudeness.

"If I were very young, and ill-mannered, I'd whistle," he finally said.

"Whistle?"

"Unmannerly young men in my day—and grown ones, too, for that matter—when they saw an extraordinarily attractive damsel, would whistle."

"Oh? How? Show me?" It was very calm, very interested.

He gave a wolf whistle.

She chuckled, pleasantly but with restraint. "How funny!"

He whistled again. ^ "How appropriate! Will you sit? Coffee?"

"Thank you."

She sat. He summoned more coffee. If they should hurry she'd have told him. There was that about this woman—for she was in her late twenties. She was candid and you knew it. She didn't kid, hide anything, dodge, cheat or, on the other hand, she wasn't utterly serious or solemn, either. She knew and enjoyed herself—quietly.

Seated, she looked at him almost as lengthily and nearly as closely as he'd done. "You are a very attractive man," she said. Somebody had told her that and Glenn didn't deny it—to do so would have been idiotic. But he wasn't

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vain about his rugged and yet sensitive face, his fine eyes, high forehead, mobile countenance, deep voice, tallness, strength, any of it. Mostly, it was a born thing. The rest was merely simple to achieve by adequate care of luckily superb endowments.

"And you," he said, after a moment, "are not one of those icy blondes, either. Usually, girls like you, seem sort of f—oh—I can't really say—"

"But you must! You meant to!" Her eyes might have flickered with mirth, but not for long and not with the unkind sort.

"You know all about me? That I came here and got a workup only yesterday?"

"All that, yes. So?"

"Well, then, day before, 1971, for me, there was a great deal of American talk, and some envy, of Swedish girls and Scandinavian sex freedom. Girls in posters who had—"

"My form? Color? I'm Swedish, by descent"

"And I always felt those beauties were kind of f—me-*chanical*? Like toys, big dolls, wind-up-and-dance, or whatever? Not *there*, quite completely."

"Sexually?" She was damned shrewd, Glenn thought, and a bit ahead. She saw he meant—exactly, sexually. "Maybe many were. Are. Not only my sort, Swedish, blonde, with a figure that has those measurements—the near to extreme ones. We haven't had any sexual relations, Mr. Howard, have we?" She watched him blush slightly. "So you don't know now? Well, that you will have to learn for yourself—though I will be happy to cooperate!" She chuckled pleasantly.

And that did it. She wasn't the cool kind, for sure.

And yet—!

The coffee came to his annoyance.

His annoyance turned into surprise at being that

And surprise to anger. Frustrated anger. Bessie. Leandra. Lysette—a near thing! And now, Donna. *Happy to*

cooperate. His narrowed eyes roamed around the top of the walls where the bugs were, probably.

She was pouring coffee for him, then herself, as if she

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had always poured coffee for him, with this ease, with calm, with her cool-daffodil-milky-sldn covering a passion and a willingness. They couldn't know about Bessie. The others, they knew all about. Sooner or later, audience or not, he knew.

She sat down and sipped before saying, "Your sexual frustrations have frustrated us." Said it amiably, even, he realized, compassionately.

"You read minds?"

She smiled gently. "Not at all. Your behavior—with your record, what I have of it—adds up."

He decided to try to change the subject. "I know that I'm to get a guided tour. But not of what. Or in what order."

"We begin with education. The part of it we feel you most need to know: sex education. Public grade school and then high school. You see, there's where perhaps the greatest social changes have happened. And we feel that if you see the educational process you will understand a great deal about modern attitudes and behavior that are unfamiliar to you. Your—culture—was, of course, basically anti-sexual—"

"Not for everybody! And there was a 'sex revolution' going on—"

"With mistaken aims." She folded her legs under herself like a big cat, a mature cat, not a fat cat but with that mystifying self-confidence secure cats have. "We know that a sexually ungratified human being is emotionally and intellectually disturbed and so ... inefficient ... for one thing; unable to devote his or her best to any other activity, whatever."

Glenn smiled and that stopped her. "I have had a friend who held that theory."

She was quietly severe. "It is no theory, now. Fact. Again, in your time, the simple truth that male and female, from birth, have sexual desires and the capacity for their gratification—something various authorities had proven and communicated to the public in your day but was not given any public value. Even notice."

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He shrugged. "A few groups of people were trying to put that circumstance to use. Give sexual opportunities to children of eight or over—if my reporters were correct."

"Eight years too later She sounded "teach-ish" he thought

Again, all he could do was shrug. She continued in that rather teacher-to-pupil manner. "All sorts of neuroses in your era were traced to sexual desires of children for parents—unfulfillable, owing to your taboos." She waited till she saw he wasn't going to argue. "But whoever even suggested that those destructive characteristics might never have occurred, if there had been no taboos? Our researches have shown the mere theory occurred to few people in your time. Gordon and Phillips made the observation. And your 'groups' did make the effort—but at age eight and over—it was far too late."

He settled back in his chair and let her talk. She began to explain the hardships of the early years, in this underground area. There was not food enough, water enough of a potable sort, for everybody, at times. There was even a possible threat of air-shortage, as one main regenerating plant failed and another seemed likely to. The population had to be reduced to the numbers that could be sustained. That meant the elderly, who couldn't contribute anything, and defective infants, cripples and chronically diseased people—had to be sacrificed.

It also meant that more knowledge about genetics, more, even, than the considerable amount gathered by research from Glenn's day to the final day of refuge, was required. In that field science had made great strides. This pre-faced her next subject, the necessity of applying the old and new knowledge to the population. Glenn had, of course, heard something about that, already. He said so and then put the questions that had left him puzzled:

"Marriage is out, then? But Bob Baker—"

"We marry if we wish; and divorce is simple, too."

"But"—his perplexity was great—"only if you match up genetically?"

She was slightly impatient. "Not at all! The female,

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sometimes, may be allowed to have a child, rarely two, by her husband. Many women are allowed no children. Many males are not permitted to father offspring. The genetic result would be dangerous. Or risky. Minimally, unsatisfactory. You don't seem to see! Reproductive mating has nothing, nothing whatever to do with marriage, or with people not married. A huge computer is programmed with the genetic profile, every tiny datum, of each person after birth, or for those alive before the computer was available. This gives a 'cross-match*' rating. It classifies the Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas and Omegas—who cannot breed—in ways that show exactly which women should be allowed to have a child, two, or, rarely, three. Not four—we cannot sustain that high a population growth for now, and some years ahead. With the females classified, and the males similarly, it is quite simple for the computer to print out not only which woman should have what number of children, but, equally important, which males of those many categories would be the best fathers. When you have that information, then, you cannot err in a mating meant to reproduce."

He got it, quite clearly enough for his judgment, about there. She amplified till he broke in:

"But, God Almighty! That's stock breeding! What animals are made to do—for just such ends! Best of breed in each next foaling, litter, hatch!"

"You seem to find that wrong?"

"I do, by Jesus, I do! And why? Can a machine actually evaluate the human qualities that are human? Mind, spirit,

imagination, logic, intellect, learning-ability, *personality* —the nonmechanical, nonphysical qualities that make a person specifically appealing, devoted, trustworthy, lovable to specific others?"

"What you think of as a 'machine' can make sure its infant-results will not have any of the thousand genetic liabilities that most persons had in some degree in your day. That surely is a positive value."

"Admitted. But how does one remain *human* when one is, say, married, in love with the spouse, and gets a notice

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from the Corporation that next Tuesday, the wife will start bedding Mr. Jack Pierce, stranger. Or the husband will, on next Wednesdays and Saturdays, for four months, undertake to impregnate the following Class C Beta females, listed by name and address below? I suppose no marriage is even dented by those orders?"

She sighed. "It isn't like that, for one thing. *Why* it's not, you'll learn at the schools—and soon. We have a lovely little resort on a lake where, for five days every month, nominated people gather. Good food, music, sports, and evenings of love-making. The mood is almost, I'd think, like what you might call religious—but happy-religious. Why? Because we are brought up from birth to know all about sex, and sexual or erotic relationships. No sadism, no masochism. Just that any two people once 'graduated,' you'd say, can have sex relations any tune they want, married or not, if both want. And no jealousy because there's no double standard, no—what was it called?—'cheating' possible, no inhibition s—no reason for them." He tried to interrupt. "Wait! Another factor. All men and women, unless on one of those fertile holidays or on special permit, is kept medically sterile. Simple drug treatments. You therefore cannot get pregnant or cause a woman to become pregnant, unless you're allowed, because all males and females receive medication that makes both highly fertile only when desired. Then they're made abounding in superactive sperm and, ovary-wise, ideally ready for fertilization."

For a long time he sat silently.

What he finally said, rather suddenly and without inner preface, was, "You married?"

She laughed heartily. "Of course! And I have two kids. But a three-child permit! So—look out!"

"Look out?"

"You're an Alpha-plus, as I believe you know. There are only seventeen males with that rating hi the city. So you are found to be very, very, very popular—and duty-bound by *law*, to be very, very, very generous." Her smile was radiant. "Now do you see?"

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"No."

She sighed and tried another tack. "Look at it this way. You're a woman and want to become a mother. You may or may not have found and married a man you like to live with and raise kids with—if allowed. You—and he, naturally want as near 'perfect* sons or daughters as possible. Back in your genetic Dark Ages people didn't even think of what bad inheritance the married pair might pass along. Didn't know, usually. Couldn't know, often. So when the flawed babies came, it was regarded as bad luck. Act of God, maybe. But suppose you could know, as mother, as husband, how to avoid all these genetic miseries? Would a man and wife be 'loving' to let her bear offspring that both *knew* might be or likely would be defective? When that risk need no longer be run by any mother or her husband?"

"If human beings were rational—" he began.

"But they can be! What you overlook, here, is that your idea of a married couple today still envisages them as they felt in the past. Suppose, though, that both the husband and wife have grown up from infancy, having erotic relations with anyone desired at any time? Suppose they expect to continue in that, after marriage? Now do you understand?"

Intellectually, Glenn supposed he did. Emotionally, he found this system repugnant. "I'll have to think and learn more to form any opinion," he finally said. "Suppose we start the tour?"

She seemed reluctant to leave but she assented.

The tour was designed to start with kindergarten sex classes. It did not. Donna drove her small car toward the East Grade School but she braked when half way and turned into a building complex that housed High School classes, only. She had seemed increasingly uncomfortable in the latter part of the drive and as she parked in the paved yard where there were scores of similar "electro's," Glenn realized she was in pain.

She stepped down and gave him a grimace for a smile. "I can't go farther till I use the John." She added, as she

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writhed visibly, "Look around if you want. I'll be on the top floor for a good while, damn it!"

She ran into the building.

Glenn got out and studied the car. It was not very interesting. Evidently they'd found a way to make a battery that would furnish all the speed and the distance needed in these dug-out cities. The body was plastic, not metal, the engine an electric motor of a fairly conventional sort and the whole vehicle was made to last, not for looks. Most of the cars he'd seen were the same. After all, he thought, a "city" of less than twelve or even up to fifty thousand didn't require anything faster or of longer range . . . whatever that was. Trucks were similarly powered and there were some fancier cars, but a car-buff of his days, Glenn thought, would be fearfully disappointed. All those supersized, streamlined, glittering vehicles of science fiction or of motor-magazine prediction had never been developed. No point. By and by he walked into the building. She'd told him to look around and made it clear her difficulty would require some interval for management.

The school building was made of concrete, prestressed. No sign of metal reinforcement appeared at the far end, where a wall had been breached and an addition was rapidly—and very silently—rising. No building or apartment had windows, at least as far as he'd seen: nothing to look at but another "interior," mean streets with rather dim lighting.

He went along a first floor corridor, noting the distance between classroom doors and estimating the size of the rooms

from that. He came to a flight of stairs and went up. A second flight led him to the top floor—three stories seemed the standard for everything, nearly. On the first floor, the subject of the classes had been spelled on doors and those courses had sounded familiar: history, math, advanced math, special science, geography, advanced English. But the third floor studies were different as he immediately saw. They were devoted to what he would have called

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"sex education" though the lettered doors were shockingly explicit He walked along on a soundless, rubber like tile and saw the toilet entry from which Donna would emerge. He strolled on past, looking for a place to wait and soon reached a door marked "Senior Sexual Training" which seemed the most far-out of a half dozen such listings. Also, he could now hear what was going on in that room, as its rear door fit poorly. He had seen other examples of haphazard construction. There were spaces above and under this door and the door itself hung on a slight angle making a crack from its middle to the top. Young male and female voices came quite clearly from these several crevices.

Glenn stopped there because of the title of the class and the guilty chance to eavesdrop. There was nobody else in the long corridor and he rationalized: his own lack of privacy meant that privacy wasn't important in the new LA, and he had a "quid-pro-quo" right to get back his own.

What he first heard was a teacher's voice:

"Very well, class!" Lights went up hi the room as the cracks showed Glenn.

"Now. A five minute rest period while I outline the day's next exercise. The girls will, of course, shift up a number. Odds will advance with evens. Sevens move to tens. Nines to twelves and so on."

Glenn listened in a daze.

The calm, slightly flat voice of the teacher went on. "Before we engage again there will be a demonstration. The class is to watch closely . . ."

He stood there, fixed, till a hand touched his shoulder. He jumped and eased the door to, as he turned to face Donna with vast embarrassment. She beckoned him from the entry. She was amused—and more so, when she read his expression, saw his shocked condition.

They started down the hall "Well!" she said. "You sure pooped up the program!"

He didn't reply.

"We planned to start you in kindergarten. Where the children are allowed erotic play of any sort but the painful. Then we would have moved to the child-adult games—"

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. They had reached the stairs and as they went down he said, "I see. It just doesn't quite fit into my—well— moral background."

"No. But you never faced the need of genetic management."

"No." Glenn stopped on the second staircase. "This— this instruction—partner-shifting—has that aim?"

"Of course! If you are going to have your children by assigned males, or one at a time of the right class—or if you also want to marry, and then have somebody's two kids to rear part of the time, as your own—you obviously must be nonspecific, nonmonogamous, and promiscuous."

"And that is the way we really are?"

She didn't answer but led him to the car and then, when its door slammed, sat without starting the motor. "That is the way we somewhat are, at least. Psychologists and physiologists and other scientists still aren't certain. What they are sure of is that the earlier one's erotic realizations start, and the more frequent the encounters, the more potent both sexes will be and the longer throughout life."

"Kinsey said that."

"Kinsey?" The name wasn't known to her. "Back then?"

"Before—'back then.' Decades. But nobody paid any attention, or almost nobody. Sex acts of any sort with children led to years hi prison. Also, normal acts with an underage girl."

"Underage? Which was—?"

"Different hi different states. Fourteen or fifteen, the lowest for girls, I think. Twenty-one, in some states."

"My God in the NonBlueSky! Twenty-one—and not even—!"

"The law said so. Young people broke it more and more—"

"Fantastic! And you never realized that your antisexual ways were a major cause of your"—she spread her hands —" of all this? That a person needs sex and must have it as often as he-she wants, with whoever is wanted and wants you? Don't you realize any restraint there was unnatural? Perverse? The most horrible sin to the body and nervous

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system? Such a frustration that most people, trying to follow the prohibitions, were quite literally—insane?"

He looked at her closely, admiring the blonde .shine of the woman, her lovely calm that hid her lovelier nonc ahn, her pure white skin—the raspberry tip of her nipples.

"We evidently were insane," he finally agreed. "As you say: witness all this."

"Which is getting saner every day!"

"Is it?"

"You can question that?"

"I can question it, yes. But not answer myself, yet."

"You'd better realize how much knowledge and experience has gone into our culture, our sexual customs, everything, before you decide wrongly. The Board will expect a new member to be in tune—"

It sounded threatening. "I daresay." He passed it off without the indignant comment he'd formed in his mind. "But h's difficult to see how human beings can become choiceless"

"Choiceless? Oh. People have choices. It's all right as long as it doesn't interfere with the overall condition.

Everybody has fantasies, for instance, and acts them out. Marriages sometimes, in fact often, end in separation and marriages to new spouses. Some things are very exciting to some people. Not others."

He shrugged and she stared at him with a misty-eyed wonder. "You, for instance, from my viewpoint.

You're twice my age, not counting forty-six added years. Almost a grandfather appeal; and I never got over making love— at eight and nine—with my girl-friend's grandfather! It slanted me to older men. Even old

ones. I never had a chance at either of my own two grandfathers—and never stopped regretting that! They 'd died. So that's why I feel an added heat for you. I would pretend you were mother's or dad's father.

See?"

"In a way."

"I have that fantasy about you, of course! To make love to your great grandfather—in his prime! What a dreamy

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thing! And then I began to chum till I had those cramps! No man ever got me that upset. Aroused."

"I'm sorry."

"Why? At what's the outmost, for me? I'm fun, too—as you must be able to realize."

"I'm sure—" It was lame.

"Miss Edmunds, the teacher—you saw her? With Jim Sether? Well, she's substituting for me . . ."

"What!"

"Of course. Why not? I have an M.A. and am getting . a Ph.D. in Sexual Ed. Demonstration. My next thesis is on orgasm capacity for females. Is that so—dreadful?" • He found it difficult to respond. "A shock, say," he finally muttered.

She sagged. "I guess I've really blotted my book! Put you off!"

"It's all so new to me—" He tried to sound apologetic. Actually, he was beginning to feel slightly afraid. These people were not human beings, in his sense.

"I think," she said tightly, "I will take you to your apartment—and go home. The strain's too much—the failure—!"

Her eyes showed him what she meant. He had left that slightly open door in a state of violent and visible arousal. He was no longer in that state.

She dropped him after a relatively fast trip to his place. But as he said good-bye and thanked her, she had recovered enough to laugh, her way: "I may still get you on a fertile vacation!"

There were workmen in his apartment. Three men in plain and suddenly familiar garb: denim overalls with many pockets, blue, with blue shirts. The head man spoke after Glenn used his key and swung the door open, "Be through in five minutes, Mr. Howard. I'm the foreman, here. Jim Peters."

They shook hands. Glenn's enquiring eye brought immediate explanation: "Just making some electrical-electronic shifts. The ... the people upstairs thought you'd

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appreciate it." He beckoned Glenn into the bedroom and indicated a newly installed switch beside the big, luxurious bed. "They want to observe you as much as you'll allow. But if you flip this switch, every observational device will cut out and you'll have privacy." He stared at Glenn with interest and, perhaps, veiled amusement. "They hope you won't. But you can. And it's straight."

Glenn felt embarrassed—because of his embarrassment at being watched. Evidently nobody else shared that sensation.

The other man shrugged. "Miss Smith, Mayor's Secretary, just phoned. You're to call back."

He got Leandra, voice and picture hi natural color, on the visaphone. "Hi?" she was smiling. But not quite the radiant way she usually had smiled at him.

"Hi!" he answered.

Her next words depressed him. "You like red-headed damsels?"

"I like girls. A girl, here, especially."

That somehow brought her to an unexpected halt. He watched her recover her self-control and when she spoke, she was very businesslike. "Have your lunch—the panel shows you what to push for your order. At two, a Miss El-ma Baren is calling. The hospital, since you gave up the school."

Miss Baren was all any redhead could be: green eyes, the same creamy skin that Donna possessed, a witchy way and a restlessness he noticed at once. A trained nurse.

The hospital was interesting. So was the lady.

He saw part of a transplant operation—eyes. He watched an injured man receiving a new left leg and a new kidney. He

understood these things—the rejection factor had been resolved. All sorts of elaborate nerve-connections could be made—even for eyes! Colds were halted by a single shot hi the arm. Disease, however, was rare in L.A. But his final view was of a "Still" Room and that altered his rising marvel at medical advances.

An elderly man, accompanied by a weeping wife, kissed her at the glass door of the Still Room and entered. He lay
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down. A white-clad nurse entered and gave him an injection. He looked toward his sobbing wife, a grey-haired woman, toil-worn, nervous, kindly, and somehow lost. He waved and blew a kiss but his effort at repeating that failed. His arm dropped. His eyes closed. Glenn and his redheaded guide watched silently, Glenn not yet aware of what they watched: not aware that the elderly woman, the man's wife, was quietly given a small glass of medicine which she drank after a wordless protest His guide took him away but the woman remained and, Glenn thought, began to recover from her grief.

"What was *that* therapy?"

"Therapy?" Miss Baren was astonished. "He was erased."

"Killed?"

"Of course! He had one of the relatively few cancers we cannot cure. It had reached the painful stage. He no longer could work—he was some sort of a checker. So—"

"Jesus!" Glenn was stricken. "And his wife—a nice, sweet, kindly, hard-working woman—!"

"They gave her Mone~~mm~~mon."

"What?"

"A drug. She won't remember the misery you saw her feeling. Only that her husband didn't have to suffer for ages. She won't—with repeated doses, if needed—ever recall her grief. Just the happy times they had. And her present will be largely what she will be aware of, anyhow."

Glenn said to himself, "Monstrous!"

"What?" It was quick, fiery and hostile.

"I said, 'marvellous.' Euthanasi~~a~~—and no mourning afterward! Just a rub-out!"

"I thought you said something else?"

"You're wrong." By then Glenn had begun to know that any sign of outrage at the current system was not acceptable. Miss Elma Baren let ft go, changed the subject to the usual one. They'd have dinner—there was a special restaurant for Class A's. She was B, but had an exception permit. Then some movies—at her place.

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He gathered, on the way to the restaurant, that the 'movies' would be designed to make him so ardent—together, doubtless, with Aphron in the roast beef, or what not—that Miss Baren would get herself loved.

She nearly was, without erotic movies. But not quite. Through an interesting meal, a meal with several dishes he couldn't identify but found delicious, with an invisible source of music that seemed not recorded, but was, and that seemed to arouse the rather shingly clad 'beautiful people types'—his description of the diners—to an elated and also amorous mass-condition. It did not affect Glenn, however. His mind was wrestling with the memory of that "Still Room." For such chambers were not devoted wholly to ending lives that couldn't be saved and would be agonizing. Criminals were "erased" there. Miss Baren had filled him in, since he feigned a positive interest, and he had hidden his sense of horror. Crimes were rare, but they occurred. Thieving, a few sexual attacks of a sadistic sort, or, at least, of unwanted kinds. And people who'd been injured in ways that could not be well enough healed to permit them to return to their special job or profession, these, too, were erased. Flawed infants, also rare owing to medical advance and genetic screening, didn't get to the Still Rooms; they were simply erased in the crib wards. All an-ticorporate attitudes brought erasure. Some fumbling at work, if repeated often enough and if the fumbler wasn't useful in some lower job, meant death. It seemed to Glenn that they could hardly count on the very small population growth their city extension and production increased allowed. But he knew these things would be computerized and if there happened to be a period of excess "youth-to-middle age erasures," there would be a matching increment of breeding on those "fertility vacations."

It made Glenn a less than attentive dinner companion.

And when he told Miss Baren that, thank you very truly, he was too tired for her apartment and the movies, she tried to force him, it seemed, to go with her, anyhow.

He would get some drugs, she said, to cut out his wear-

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ness. She would bet anything that he wouldn't be able to look at her private show of motion tapes for half an hour and not demand sex with her. Or with somebody.

"They are of me, making love. With some very lovely men. And some girls."

"Girls?"

"Dorothea and Frances and Delma and I do it all the time. You'll be literally wild when you see me with one of them."

Afterward, Glenn realized why that offer was made. Stag films in his time were usually or at least often of female lesbian acts; not of male homosexuals, but female. And stag shows included men and women, groups, the odd animal film, which he detested. But lesbian relations were • favorites of stag audiences. This, then, was an effort to try to reach him that way.

At the time, he hadn't understood.

When she stopped her car to let him out, she was, for a moment, somewhat grim. When he finished his "thank-you's" and "nice evenings" she said:

"Look. I know something got you off me. But not *what*. Just bear this in mind, Glenn Howard! You are going to have to live our way, and soon! And 'our way' doesn't mean freezing up every time a desirable woman practically begs you to bed her!"

"Sorry," Glenn had answered.

And he had nearly said more. For he had at least realized that the four-letter Anglo-Saxon terms were now universally used and with no sense of indecency. "Shit," he mused, walking into his apartment, had been in the standard version of the Holy Bible, the version once most used, as had "piss"—till a bunch of inconceivably filthy-minded people, thinking themselves pure, had edited their very Bible to suit their state of mind, their abomination-in-excelsis.

To be what the self-styled called "clean-minded," Glenn had often reflected, one had to have the dirtiest mind possible. For most of what the "clean-minded," the "pure," the "decent" thought of as obscene was as pure

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and as normal, as natural, as necessary as sunlight; but it had to be utterly defiled so people could manage, or pretend to manage, a life of the so-called clean sort! Still, though the beautiful lasses of this new era could say "screw," (of its more literal synonym) exactly as a flower-lover might say "roses," Glenn found that the dirty-minded strictures of his day made it hard for him to be honest and so, to say what were the only right words for those right acts and their rightful variations.

He threw himself on the bed, exhausted, and switched his lights low, letting the damned bugs run, if they were on. In time, a key turned in the other room and the unmistakable voice of Lysette called, "Night maid?"

"Skip it!"

She came right in. "I could take off your clothes, bathe your back. I promise that is all!"

"Scram!"

She tried it: "Scram!" she giggled. "Does that mean something nice that I—we started—?"

"It means get the hell out, darling! I'm bushed."

"Oh-ho! Goodie!" She got out. Maybe she had misinterpreted the sense of "bushed." After half an hour he rose, showered and undressed so he could lie down, nude, as was his habit. But sleep wasn't capturable. The enormous stresses of the last days and hours were so short a time. Such hard things to accept, let alone, digest, pitched him into a waking nightmare of memories. He tried to understand what was current and real while he also mourned his vanished life, dead loves and friends, old ways—everything he had lost.

It was late morning, a clock said, when he woke. He felt rested. They let me sleep, he thought. And he thought, it would always be like that: they let me, they arrange, they forbid, they live your life and cut it off when they will. But he would, if he fell in with this fantastic and yet grim world—debauched, maybe, and for most, impoverished—be me of them. He couldn't. Wouldn't.

An odd thought—already "odd" he mused—came to

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him: would the twenty-five industrial and business czars at Boiling Wells all become Board members of USA, Inc., given his chance? He imagined most would, but wasn't sure of unanimity. Even their dedication to profits, wealth, growth and their motivated skepticism about science, their obduracy, their ignorant and chance-accepting will to go on as-is, didn't quite omit the fact that they were Americans and not this sort—a breed Glenn vaguely discerned as fascist, as dictatorship in committee form.

His phone rang. He leaped and lifted the ear-part as the picture glowed. It was Bob Baker. Grinning.

"Got a good rest, eh?"

"Thanks. Yes."

"You looked disappointed. Who'd you expect? Never mind! She's busy as the devil I'm sending a Miss Lillian Chin to show you the engineering highlights. She's a graduate physicist—and if you don't go rocket over her looks, you're a pansy! However, should your morning and early afternoon, ah ... date . . . peter out, we have a Miss Theeman on tap for the late afternoon and evening. A 'look at the world outside. She's a chemist. And she's also, lucky guy, adorable. We want you to be happy."

Glenn had several suggestions, but Bob had cut off.

In the later morning, with the fabulously lovely Lillian Chin—Chinese-Hawaiian-Swedish, she said—Glenn watched the giant rock-boring machines chew house-sized holes into the stony face of a city-limit wall, bare rock and fairly hard. He was duly impressed by the rig and its power.

He was more impressed by his quick but vivid look at the control room of the West Gate fusion reactor and an even quicker glimpse, through inky-dark goggles at the fiery plasma which produced ten million kilowatts for LA. Lillian Chin impressed him, too, but uncomfortably. At lunch in a closed booth she openly invited him to make love. When he reacted with embarrassment, she produced a letter which he read with rising dismay.

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"Dear Mr. Howard:

"I would immensely appreciate your doing my wife and me a favor I feel no honorable man could refuse. We have one child—we are both Alphas. To have another by an Alpha-plus would be a reward beyond dreaming. If this day is not suitable, some other, perhaps? However, today, my wife has a special dispensation, a fertility grant, and would be easily made with child by your cooperation. If it pleases, we will be always grateful. And you will find no more adroit, happy, versatile and passionate woman than Lillian."

It was signed, "George Jackson, Chief, Reactor Division."

"Miss Chin" had watched attentively while he read the missive. And she had seen her answer. She shed tears but did

not cry aloud. She left without finishing her meal and was replaced by a Miss Amette Billgiver, a dazzling brunette who was intellectual, informed, verbal and had the lust of a nymphomaniac. She took him in an air-tight elevator to the top of a skyscraper, built since his day, where there was a balcony with transparent plastic sides and top from which they could gaze in the afternoon sun at the mist-strangled skyline of the old city. It was from this balcony, he learned, that they had for years maintained weather measuring gauges and devices. Now, the balcony was only used for he view. VIP visitors sometimes wanted this dramatic vista of the remains of Los Angeles. Many of the mist-piercing silhouettes of tall buildings were familiar to Glenn. Others were not—being newer.

"The heart of L.A.," his guide explained, "was never burned. Two major fires driven by the Santa Ana winds destroyed several of the suburbs but not the center. Lucky rains, both tunes, saved it. And later, the air didn't support combustion quite so well. Besides, vegetation returned and tayed green, after the cold years."

He gave the great view his full and desolate attention. But Miss Theeman soon distracted him. Her approach—
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and Glenn now believed it a curse to have the perfect genes of an Alpha-plus—was physical, direct, and not subject to long or repeated discouragement of an equally physical sort—hand removing, kiss-evading, and rejected body-rubbing.

Before sunset, they returned to ground level and donned breathing gear. That was a relief as the helmets and suiting prevented her greedy efforts. She led him through a series of passages and corridors, old and recent, into what he finally realized was the main floor of Carton-Embrey, the big downtown central edifice of the most lavish department store hi the city—one only hi the planning stage at his "cut-off tune," a term he found more useful than "death," or even "long sleep," "suspended animation," any other of that sort.

The gear allowed them to converse—but over mikes.

He had little to say. But the cloying, pressing, intimately physical brunette kept him partly distracted, even hi this dust-laden, mined, half-dark and once-gaudy store: she talked about sex acts. They tramped through aisles, from one department to another. Much of the array of goods had been "looted," of course, though only for practical ends, or largely that.

Gloria Theeman had started that tour with a set monologue:

"The men's styles, you'll note, were of the last date—quite different from 1971—and beginning"—she shook dust from a male dummy—"to have the sexual emphasis that increased as humanity became free." She began to ad lib, there.

He went to and through a bridal arcade and he was shocked at what brides and bridesmaids wore hi the late eighties. He briefly took charge of the direction to look at a sports shop. Most of the weapons were missing but all the other grown-up toys from golf clubs to hunting bows hung hi their old arrangements, dust-wrapped, spider-webbed and sombre. At the gem boutique Glenn saw, with mild amazement, that most glass cases were unbroken and be-jeweled bracelets, expensive pendants, diamond-set phis

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lay untouched: no use to the people underneath.

The way back led across an open street and Glenn looked at the vapor-streaked, purpling sky. His eyes fixed on a moving dot and his unconscious mind followed it: a bird, a tern, he thought—without realizing how strange that doubtless was. He didn't make that connection because his dark and ever-erotic companion took advantage of his stance, his stillness and upward gaze, to reach under his clothes and start intimately playing with him. He had to disengage her by force and found she was very strong. So, luckily, was he—far stronger.

Again, as on nights before, he got rid of the lady.

He claimed a headache and fatigue and she finally stopped pressing for dinner "at my place—which isn't under scrutiny." She was less annoyed, even, than the other female guides; and they, considering their efforts and apparent passion, weren't as enraged as any woman of his era would have been at such cold rejection. People, he began to see, were pretty bland. They showed emotion only in low levels and only in moments of high stimulus—to sexual ardor, to grief, to—anything.

Again alone, he had a solitary meal, and, again, it was excellent: fresh celery and tomatoes, among other things; a pear, an apple and cheese, for desert. Nobody troubled him as he spent the next hours reading about the present city and, later on, naked again, he went to bed and soon slept.

The girl who soon waked him was, perhaps, fourteen. She had golden ringlets, blue eyes, arched brows and she had used Lysette's way of waking him—only, now, he hadn't found it necessary to feign slumber so as to gather himself, orient his mind, before pretending to be roused.

Her youth almost sickened him and surely scared him.

She left, quickly, laughing at him in a faintly mocking way.

Afterward, wide awake, frantic hi the way any man would be at such a point, Glenn finally understood what was happening. He had been self-conscious with Leandra,

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the city and its mechanics, institutions, even to a snatch of a view of the dead skyscrapers above, but always in the company of a woman of the utmost appeal, yet, in each case, one of a different sort. They

were trying to find out his "type"! and camera-furious. He had then been sent forth to view

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THOSE WHO ARE BRAVE

Glenn would have denied that he was a complex man or, for that matter, a sensitive one. The first would have seemed flattery, the other a weakness he would have felt he did not have. But he would readily have confessed to a temper though it rarely took charge of him.

Now, aware of the reason for his changing female guides, rage sent him pacing the room and even speaking in broken phrases, aloud. By sheer luck rather than owing to caution, these blasts of self-reproach, mixed with elaborate profanity, were not at any time directed at the establishment, the system, or its representative, Bob. What channeled his emotion was his own obtuseness in not catching on, sooner, to the purpose that had led to his present state of extremity. He berated himself, kicked furniture, paced and muttered till, calming gradually, he said to himself in a tone of rebuke, "And if you'd only said yes to the one you really wanted, right at first—!"

With final, muttered, "You fool! Idiot!" he sat in the divan and after a moment, selected a cigar. When it was lighted he leaned back to laugh—at himself, silently.

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He jumped inches when his visaphone chimed.

He had completely forgotten that his fury had been observed, every sight and sound recorded for "scientific" purposes, whatever those might be. And now, his observers were summoning him! Why? he wondered and answered himself: To explain that last act—overdetermination may be not allowed, in their view.

He strode to the visaphone as it chimed again, snatched up the sound-receiver and, as the visual screen began to glow, snarled, "Yes? Who is it? What do you want?"

Then the image came in focus. It was Leandra, in her bed, tousled and evidently just roused. She began to smile as he chopped his harsh words off and her smile changed from amusement to a very different thing, a warm, sleepy, loving expression. "Hello, Glenn," she said. "Would you like me to come over?"

He couldn't answer, couldn't speak at all.

"I see you do," she said, huskily. "Ten-twelve minutes?"

He nodded, wordless, still.

Then he crossed to the panel and ordered two double Jack Daniels with double Aprons and anything else the answering voice might deem appropriate for refreshment "and an extended evening," as Glenn euphemistically put it

The drinks came minutes before the girl.

Leandra arrived in an all-transparent gownlike costume, faintly blue, diaphanous and shimmering. He once more opened his door with a prepared embrace but this time he carried it out. She whispered, "Darling . . . !"

He whispered the same word at the same moment.

It was almost an hour before they even touched the two waiting drinks. All the next day she stayed with him. His guided tour was enjoyed at home though in its way much was a novel journey, expertly conducted.

After that Leandra was assigned to Glenn as his "erotic companion" as well as the replacement for other "types." They spent a week on the rest of his educational trips in

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the city. Before then they'd agreed they had fallen in love on first sight.

Glenn thought of the idyl as a honeymoon and one that would last into a distant or an endless future. For, even though his antipathy for the new "culture" increased with every passing day, he did not relate it to his relationship with Leandra. She, of course, knew how brief and tentative their shared love would be. But for a time, because it was genuine love on her part as on his, she suppressed her knowledge of reality and let herself feel, think, act and be the woman *he* now imagined her to be. She was, in truth, her real self then—discarding the outer facts and rules and customs from her consciousness and expressing in ways and to degrees he had not imagined possible their mated unity—as if it could be forever maintained.

The crack came all too soon and in a manner she had not expected.

Leandra took him, one evening, to see an aspect of life in this city about which she had explained nothing.

Hand in hand they tramped the dismal streets until, rounding a corner, they faced the marquee of what seemed a run-down movie theatre. Over its entrance was a large, painted sign that said:

"MEL'S MINIMAL MUSIC: THE MELLOW MORTICIANS"

She "bought" two tickets and they went through the dim lobby, passing between brass standards and their burden of

slack silk ropes to a heavy, flaked, rose-hued door where Glenn could sense rather than hear a beat of hard music that might have been called, half a century earlier, "acid rock." When Leandra pushed the tickets into a slot the door yawned and they were almost knocked down by the belting music.

She put her hands to her ears. Her expression was blank but her head-movement showed that he was to follow. They entered and the sound damping portal shut. It was a murky place but slowly he made out a dance hall with a

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bar and tables on one side and at the opposite end a platform where eight "Mellow Morticians" played what Glenn felt was, indeed, minimal music. It consisted of two notes, one a half-tone higher than the first, and nothing more save that the pair of tones sometimes was played at a different octave and, even, though infrequently, at other points in the same key.

But that was just Glenn's first observation. His greater, his overwhelming impression took time.

The dancers—and there were perhaps a hundred couples—were performing the same dance that had been all but universal in 1971. They were, he thought, frugging. Their long hair flew, male and female hair, their hips slashed and oscillated, their heads jerked and they faced each other without touching, faces inane, involuted, each one dancing only with himself or herself, even turning to new partners with a look which seemed to mean they either did not know they'd switched or did not care.

For a moment which his eyes adjusted to the swirling, psychedelic lights, he thought it was just as it had been among the under-thirties in Glenn's "period." Then the single exception hit him. Every dancer here was elderly. The long beards and locks of the men were white, or gray, and often thin; and some were bald though these, he realized, were few, and bald only because in their solo concentration on jerking' and writhing they had lost shabby wigs: several were being heedlessly trampled and kicked aside in this stylized and unconscious frenzy. The women were as old—crones, fat droolers who flopped pendulous breasts like flippers, and scrawny females, without teeth. White locks shook out dandruff like flour prostheses glinted and banged; canes and crutches kept time; glass eyes were lost and crushed. But these aged freaks danced on, some sweating in runnels, others too aged and dry to ooze; all, hard-breathing, winded, yet, relentlessly obeying the beat.

These, then, were people who had gone on from their politicized or radicalized youth, their hair dangling rebellion, their uniform and their rituals—gone on with this same dance, frugging into old age, their late sixties, their

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eighties, without change. They were still unclean and the chamber reeked of their bad breath and whole-body bro-modrosis. Over that rotted armpit odor were smells of cigarette smoke, of sweetly acrid pot, coiling wreaths of tobacco, marijuana which seemed to flinch and thrust as the waves of sound, amplified to a pitch that informed the skulls of the stone deaf among them, shook the air and the walls, the horrid people.

As soon as he could manage, he took Leandra out. And when his ears stopped ringing, when he had somewhat cleared his lungs with deep drafts of the even-temperated, clean (but lifeless) air of the city, he said, "My God! What is *that* for?"

"A lesson," she replied, looking at him attentively.

"In what?"

"Irrelevance," she answered.

She said nothing more about the scene. She did not need to for Glenn's insight. Here was the cruelest mockery imaginable. Here, those youths in the Sixties and Seventies who had found science, hence, all provable knowledge, "irrelevant"—and history, too—the people who had set themselves apart from all others "over thirty," were seen in that same interval which they had been utterly contemptuous of in spite of its inevitability, given time. Here was that arrogant, vain "new youth culture" carried on near fifty years, unchanged—and by that, revealed for what it had been: nothingness, a rebellion without aim, nihilism itself, a road that was no road because it began and ended where the groupies and hippies, yippies, new leftists, SDS monsters and others stood. A road, they said, when it was only a length of walled-in pavement, a prison yard that had no direction, started nowhere, ended where it could accommodate them all, at another noplac. It was, as they had said a short while ago, as Glenn remembered time, "Where it's at."

Exactly, he'd thought

They who believed history "irrelevant" could never know where anything was "at," Glenn had long since reflected.

For to know that, one must know where it "was at." And since their world was composed of technological

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artifacts, of bastard exploitations of parts of science, which never took the whole into consideration, their regard of science and technology, as equally "irrelevant" with history, meant, quite inescapably, they did not actually have the faintest sense of where it or they were "at," even when they thought they did. Worse, they had no intention of finding out. Everything they certainly needed to know to judge where they and the world were at, they rejected, as irrelevant. And that double rejection meant, of course, they had no means left even to rebel with any valuable or real or acceptable achievement, for, not knowing where it was, or where it is "at," in their monodimensional "now," they could not even claim they had means to wonder, let alone, determine, where it would be "at," in any next day, week, let alone, man's years to follow.

When, later that evening, they returned to his apartment, he was in a mood she had *not* previously observed. She saw quickly that the n: customary routine was not to be. He would not order their double whisky with double doses of Aphro and then hurry her to love making into another night so erotic and so compelling, so repetitive and yet so diverse that they would be lost in each other for hours.

He simply entered the living room behind her and sprawled on the divan, his face drawn, his attention turned inward.

She switched off the observing instruments and quietly sat down, but not beside him. Instead, she settled gracefully on a nearby, deeply upholstered chair and waited to learn what his wishes would be.

"It's so cruel!" he finally said, with quiet force.

"What is, dear?"

"Those old people, dancing, for one thing. But they are merely one thing. The whole system is cruel. Impersonal! Breed babies like stock! Erase human beings the moment they become useless for production, or the instant they are found guilty of criticism! Turning human beings into robots, then! Machines! With no means of self-expression or

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even self-direction. Just—animals, tamed to obey, for the end of increasing their numbers and their obedience! It's damnable!"

He then glanced anxiously at the high part of the walls.

"I turned it all off," she said gentry.

"Thank God!"

She moved beside him, now. "I know what you mean," she said softly. "And others know." As his eyes met hers she put her life on the line! "They are organizing to rebel. We are."

For several heartbeats there was silence. Then, Glenn said, "Oh."

Her face showed fear. "I thought, Glenn—?"

"That you could seduce me into—helping?"

"Oh, God, no! Never that!"

Then he smiled. "I'm sorry. I know. It was love."

"Yes."

"And now?"

"What else?"

He thought for a while. "All right Any plans—for me?":*

"Plans?" She was so honestly, so obviously puzzled that, if Glenn had had any further reservations, which he did not, he would have been assured about her one more, un-needed time.

He hugged her and whispered into her ear, "The n— hadn't we better make some?"

"Now?"

"Why not?"

"Weil, because none of us ever got as far as to think you might help."

"You didn't?"

Her eyes were glowing, ardent, trusting and yet sad. "Well, I at least told you."

"So," he responded, grimly, "I know. What, exactly?"

"That very secretly, in every major city, men and women are planning, rather getting together to plan a way to beat, to break the Corporation."

"Of which I am expected to be a Board Member, soon."

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She nodded and put her head against his shoulder. In a muffled voice, she said, "Where, of course, there, you could become the keystone of the revolt."

"Who is closes t—inside—now?"

"Me," she whispered.

He pulled away and took her shoulders, saw she was silently weeping, watched her tears leak slowly down her cheeks and then the cause hit him.

"I think I understand," Glenn said, with an emptiness in his voice. "If I—you and I—work against them, we'll have to play everything their way."

"Yes."

"You and I can't go on, this way."

"No." Her chin was lifted and her eyes were rifle-straight. "We couldn't have, anyhow."

That startled him for an instant. Afterward, he nodded. "I suppose that's true. I simply was so—"

"—me, too. So much in love I wouldn't look ahead even a day."

"And all it means, then," he finally answered, "is giving up each other, which we'd have had to, anyhow."

"Not—entirely."

"No." Glenn kissed her fiercely. "Not entirely. Just enough to spread my damned Alpha-plus around, according to the directions of the system."

She nodded. In his arms, later, she felt cold, and since his own heart was in that state, they could for a time only hold each other, hi search for a warmth that no longer could be easily found.

Leandra, not Glenn, ended that miserable spell. She giggled.

"If there's anything funny . . . ?" he said soberly.

"You won't think so," Leandra replied—and giggled again.

"Try me."

"Well I can just imagine how difficult it will be for you to make love to all those Alpha-plus hungry females— when you will always wish it was me."

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"So much, that, maybe"—he smiled faintly—"it'll turn out I can't!"

"Drugs'll fix that."

"So? Doubtless true. **K** it is—what's funny?"

"Really it isn't, I guess. But I just thought. **F**m the one who's supposed to be the authority on Glenn Howard. You know! Even when you said you didn't care anymore whether the switch was on or off. Whether 'they*' watched us, or not. It still was mostly—off. So I am supposed to be able to report all sorts of ultimate things about you. Preference **s**—what you find—distasteful—"

"About you, nothing."

She kissed him for that. "All right But it puts me in a position to—well—choose—anyhow, recommend—"

"Other women!"

"Yes."

"Be damned!" He shifted his position. "All right. You select my ladies and I'll be as unfaithful to you as, in every case, I'm able. My beloved's orders carried out, right?"

She said, "Goody!" and didn't mean it.

Now, though, Glenn knew, everything had changed. Everything important insofar as love went And everything about his place in the new Los Angeles. He had become a covert rebel. He had been **hi** a risky position from the start. His situation, from now on, would be infinitely more dangerous. But this had to be, since he felt that any attempt to crush the Corporation was worth more lives than all those in this city and more loves than, he thought, there would ever be again—if this system prevailed to the end of time.

She began to talk as they lay side by side, awake and alert because they could not sleep.

"The group began to form about two years ago," **L**e-andra began in a murmur. "Some of the top scientists, some executives **hi** minor positions, but nobody inside, or nearer there, than I. I had a friend, a woman friend, who let me know. I joined. And when I, did I found a reason for rebellion that I hadn't imagined possible. Glenn!" She

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raised on an elbow and whispered the bitter words: "For over two years the air outside has been perfectly safe!"

"What!"-

"Perfectly safe. People could live on the surface, now. All this staying underground isn't necessary."

"But I—!"

"Let me explain. The Board, the Corporation, our— rulers—they know that if everybody in the underground cities, or even lots of us, found out that fact—there'd be a rush from these caverns—these hell-holes. No force could prevent that exodus! And once we were out—or, accurately, once whoever got out alive was out—no such government as this one could maintain control. The Board—and the police-military who support it—couldn't handle a liberated, external population. Couldn't track them down —out there! Even the police-military themselves—if they really knew it was safe on the surface—would disintegrate. That's sure. So they are obliged to keep the truth, about the surface being all right, from spreading. Of course, it leaked, finally. You see?"

He saw. That act of unspeakable repression had been done simply to hang on to the reins of power. It was not difficult to "see," but only incredible as a human act, and utterly insupportable.

"Good God!" he eventually whispered.

"What?"

"Why ... a while back—I was in a street up above—in breathing gear—and I spotted a bird!"

"I never saw a live bird," she murmured.

He comforted her. "I know. It was a tern. And there must be other things alive there, too. Which people will see. So the big lie cannot be enforced for long, can it?"

"I'm afraid," she answered, "it can. I even think, now, that if you finally prove up, and become a Board Member, your main job will be to keep the lid on that situation."

He felt a stir of excitement. "That's it! And if I do reach that post—if I am given charge of all communications—except the classified lines—why I, myself, could—"

"You could," she answered, gently.

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He embraced her with fervor; but **L**eandra pulled away. "We mustn't," she whispered. "Not, if you and I are going to start playing the roles we must. Instead, save your lovely desires, darling, for morning. And somebody else."

"Like who?"

"Oh, how about Lysette? She's cute."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ABSOLUTE POWER, ABSOLUTE CORRUPTION

On the last day of November Glenn received notice that an emergency meeting of the Board of Directors of USA, Inc. would be held on December 10th. In addition to the engraved and gold-leaf-imbedded lettering of the formal notice, there came a letter from the President saying that Glenn Howard would attend the special session as a full-fledged and highly esteemed Board member and Director of all Public Communications Media in the Corporation (United States) because "said Glenn Howard had shown his rapid assimilation of masses of information and his fresh and exceedingly helpful grasp of his now officially confirmed Directorship as well as remarkable skill, loyalty, realism and patriotism."

"Et cetera," Glenn disgustedly said to himself—not aloud. For he was now at end-November, occupying the Director's Suite in the Home Offices of Howard Associates as they had been built, underground, by his business heirs, for occupancy when and if the dreaded surface-departure-time ever came. And in a sense his heirs had done well by —the company Glenn had. owned. His three subterranean floors covered about five acres **hi** the middle of the new

L.A. and underneath his second L.A. edifice, a skyscraper that made his 1971 building look like a small box with a few windows.

Running the media and above all the nation-wide super-TV programs like those he'd seen—wall-sized, often—wasn't any problem. His news and information people were skilled at guessing what the Board would want reported, or want kept quiet; and, too, when the Board member criticisms or ideas came, these scores of experts were clever at following all such, and also, making the sourest or dulllest brainstorm from above seem minimally either one.

USA was heavily wired before the final day, for some thousands of channels, and its visaphone system had replaced the old talk-hear phones long before the Death Wind rose. As Glenn gathered facts about his "empire" and as he became acquainted with his staff and then the rest of his people he found he was adored by his female employees and greatly liked by the males. For though Glenn was clearly a Corporation devotee and a stickler for its rules, he, as a person, had a kind of confident, easy and amiable way of giving orders, of (rarely) rebuking personnel, of making suggestions or criticisms, that was quite atypical of the subchiefs of the departments and of all other bosses, hi 2017. He was also amusing hi a new way, to everybody.

He plainly enjoyed more than most the constant sexual relationships that were the principal pleasures and rewards by this sex-avid, sexually near-inexhaustible folk. His part was so public that it might have been trying for the most uninhibited of the populace. And he evidently had a deep, nearly universal fondness for the women with whom he was obliged, with some minor power of choice, to sleep—the ladies selected by the Commissioner of Genetic Control who, however, was guided by Leandra to a degree the man never imagined.

Except for the frequent sense of ache when his Alpha-plus activities—or business pressures—made long gaps between the tunes he was able to spend with Leandra,

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Glenn now began to feel (because, largely, he forced himself toward the feeling) that being with so many lovely females was, indeed, fun, or, say, exciting in a way! In a sufficient way, so that Glenn soon understood the hold this regulated and registered but enormously permissive and constantly stimulated cultural factor furnished the controllers, the Board and the President. After all, as he said to Leandra one night, "ancient religions were founded on sex-openness and the act; later religions found that by grabbing the whole sexual-relations performance and subjecting it to the utmost repression possible, these faiths, Christian, Communist, and so on, could keep their people in an even greater thrall. When a church forbade all sexual behavior but one sort, and called all else sin, evil, pornographic, obscene, filthy and so on, permitting only the church-sanctified "right" act, the pressure of the actual sexual nature of female and male was, always, high and liable to blow up the containing authority, the church, and its dogma. But not soon! You were born and immediately church-baptized or state-enslaved. Your infant lusts were harshly put down and you were perhaps circumcised by church mandate with the notion that barbarism would lessen friction and so, the temptation to the next, natural act, masturbation. Adult-child sex acts were horrors to church and state, with ex-communication and prison the penalty. Premarital or extramarital sex was forbidden and the ban was backed by mountains of ancient doctrine, punished by ten thousand statutes. Even the church-wed were still, often, expected to make love only to try to cause pregnancy and any other such effort, especially if its impregnating likelihood was abolished, had to be evil. Or illegal. And both. Even the position for making love in these religious faiths was limited to one, and that, not the one with the widest human preference, either. Mere "modesty" had become something other than the occasional shyness people often feel: it was mandatory and involved hiding the body save for face and hands. Communist nations were more puritanical than the Puritans.

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All that, swept away!

And, Glenn found, after he had willfully adjusted to the pain involved in repressing his (never allowable) desire to be faithful to Leandra, that the modern attitudes here were not always and entirely productive of the impersonality, the autonomism, of the absence of feeling he'd first thought was universal.

And he'd tasted the strange exhilaration of accidentally encountering girls and women who had attracted him sexually and who, when they felt the same way, had arranged for privacy, often, right away and in such places as were meant for those pleasures, a thousand little off-street chambers with their varied Class ratings and "engaged" or "unoccupied" signs. These "love-nooks," or some other handy place, provided Glenn and this or that stranger a place for passionate sexual acts—which, once or twice—were enjoyed without exchanging names till afterward.

He was sure that, in some ways, this license for love-making was beneficial. One such factor was plain; nobody was what had been called "up-tight" in old L.A. Not, at* least, in all the ways that, it appeared now, were always basically sexual and owing to fear, frustration, taboos, and the rest, those crushing, perverted sex stigmas, church-designed, and power-granting to the church, or to the civil authorities. But this advantage, to the great degree Glenn could discern, was still not freedom, not completely, not this brand of sexual openness and the approval of any and all sexual self-expressions with any mate consenting who qualified.

These cultural liberties were allowed simply because they produced a specific docility in the vast, privileged majority. But something was lost in all their sexual relations, not because they were sterile, unless certified and treated to be other, but for a subtler reason. The birth control feature was all right. Man's—woman's—hunger to make love had never related to begetting. People had done it for thousands of years, in some places, unaware that sexual relations caused pregnancy. The negative factor was illusive but there, always, even on the "fertile holidays," one

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of which Glenn had already attended. What was lost, he thought, was the power of personal choosing—w

high, though enormous, still, was yet limited by Class standings and genetic ratings.

What was perhaps lost for him and as surely, he believed, as for Leandra, was the chance to have only one partner, if one wished that. But among A Class and some B's and of them, all who were Alphas, let alone, Alpha-pluses, it was not thinkable to be monogamous, and was such a criminal act even to try that one was erased for the effort.

"So I felt," Glenn finally said to Leandra, "the way a whore must have felt—at least to a degree. An expensive call girl, say; one, not emotionally ruined or sexually shattered. A girl who enjoyed lovemaking to the limit, and in most ways, with all sorts of males (or, many sorts), who had incessant sexual relations but not often—or, at least, not frequently enough—with the male (or males) she preferred. Gigolos are in that boat," Glenn added.

"So I am pimping for you?" She laughed merrily at the archaic word. "Is that it? But didn't girls with panderers often love them only?"

"Sure."

"So—come to bed! And next afternoon, I have a truly elegant, delicious and very passionate trick for you, darling! Name of Estrabanna. Shut your eyes and pretend it's me—same measurements as mine, same multicolored hair at this length—and she'll wear my perfume. Okay?"

"Okay. But I think, maybe, I ought to solicit a few guys for you. After all, I'm not around you enough—"

"What an idea! Didn't you ever realize—?"

He halted and lifted his head in "their" bed. "I didn't. But I suppose I should have. After all, we're—"

Her hand blocked more words. The bugs weren't cut off, this night, and he had nearly caused the deaths. Because, as she'd realized in tune and he'd seen, a second later, he'd been about to mention that they had some reason for what had up to then been regarded as a 'normalizing' of Glenn.

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Sexual pleasures unbounded did not make up for their extreme pleasure, and, too, often, though it mattered little, the extreme pain of marriage and fidelity,—or, maybe, if people could not honestly be faithful through married years, that discretion that then kept the extramarital bliss unknown to a spouse.

He had wrestled with the conflict before. He wished he could someday learn more about the feelings of others who had never known any different sex mores. Even Leandra perplexed him. He knew she and he shared a deep sense of what he called "love." But she had reverted to her indoctrinated ways without much trauma. Maybe she had had other lovers throughout their short affair and surely her necessary return to her old behavior had not caused her the same degree of pain he endured. It was necessary, as was his sexual activity, to maintain that "normal" posture, and not any great strain for her.

But there was a sting in Glenn's spirit, somewhere. He couldn't acknowledge jealousy—he had never been faithful, himself. But he couldn't feel comfortable knowing that his lovely and intelligent Leandra was out having adventures with others, even strangers, as was he. Fun. Thrilling. And you found even a picked-up beauty sometimes related to you in more ways than those that were merely exciting and a wonderful, a happy release. Some became not just alluring women, then, not gorgeous professional call girls, but individuals, who expressed their inner selves and —shared your self, as special, separate beings.

Then, too, those women with whom one had intercourse, for the permitted aim of becoming pregnant, didn't just go through their and your intimacies as if you were mutually pleased by a meal and also hungry, or as if the thrilling (always!) events were for kicks and nothing else. The fact that they were with you to bear children changed each such woman. She felt special, elect, and felt you, her male of the hour, was as special. That gave those relationships a strange, extra quality that was a lovingness. These women would invariably pretend that their time with you wasn't limited, but that you'd keep meeting to make love

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forever, or for a long time. And when they became pregnant (which was almost always and very soon, because of the drugs now controlling hormones and the reproductive process) they would try to keep sleeping with you, if that were possible. Their legal and moral and civil duty was done as was yours. But they'd phone, make a point of meeting you somewhere, and then their eyes would say, or they would say aloud, "Come! Let's get in bed again! You must and I must because you are the father of my child and I, its mother, so the new life needs my erotic arousal by you, to produce a warrant of the truth: fatherhood, motherhood."

Leandra had even suggested that Glenn's willingness to respond to that strange, nonverbal yet valid-seeming plea was a "waste," since her list of girls and grown women who were both lovely and could be or had been given a permit and the medication for his Alpha-plus insemination, was a very long list, and also, open-ended. Yet he continued covertly to "waste himself" on those he'd gotten with child. After all, he rationalized, with the Aphron and allied medication he had become incredibly potent, fantastically desiring, and no day passed, or no day and night but that he made love to at least two or three women.

He also found it incomprehensible that Leandra, at first by seeming accident but later, with an "explanation," watched these matings. And her "reason" was not quite as satisfying to Glenn as it seemed to be, to her. "If you don't want me actually in the room, dear, we can use the visa-phone and my wide screen. Then, I can have my lover do what you and your 'she' are doing and think it is you, especially—" she'd smiled openly, sincerely, with an expectancy of

understanding, "since your girl will be one I chose for you—and so, me, in a way."

He'd refused. She had insisted.

And she'd made her point by saying, "It would be regarded as totally normal by 'them,' darling. And so would a two-way screened display. You watching me and the man I have. Wouldn't that be—exciting? And close? Closer than *not* being with each other?"

He agreed to having the facilities installed. But he found it hard to share Leandra's feelings. Watching her at some moment of intense, multiple orgasm, with a male he had not even seen, while her gaze was not on the man but on the photophonic transmitter so that she climaxed with her eyes seeking his, finding them, even, was anguish for him.

Granting, as he had to, that all this was done to conceal a purpose as valuable as, Glenn had told himself, more valuable than, thousands of lives and endless loves, he still felt diminished by this arrangement.

In later discussions he had asked Leandra, "Did you ever make love with a woman?"

"Didn't you ever, with a male? Man? Boy?"

Leandra had sighed, then, sitting in his living room and sharing their usual double drink. "I was about to ask you why? But I guess I know: Me, the history major." She gazed at him fondly for a while and finally said, "In your times, I know, homosexuals were regarded as criminals, perverts or worse. And it is, as a basic sexual means to satisfaction, still seen to be abnormal when exclusive, in men. It may also be males aren't as sexually open, and for cause, as we."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning, in all our human past, a woman had to mate with, marry, the best of those males who offered. But a man, any one as similarly bewitching as you, and as I, too, had the chance to pick from hordes of females. Women hadn't, anyhow, in a million human past years. So? So she may be genetically—what?—more open to all sexuality as appealing—because she must settle for somebody who—risks. If it's so—and it's good anthropology, isn't it?—a normal female may be far less—oh—put off, say, by the idea of making love with another female—*han men are."

He thought that over. Then he smiled a little. "There was a myth," he said slowly, "in my era, that claimed any woman who once was thoroughly made love to by another, never, after that, was interested hi men, at least, that much."

Leandra's response surprised and even alarmed him. It

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was to go to the wall panel, push a button and request that Lysette come up for some sex teaching. Glenn tried to prevent it but Leandra smiled and refused.

"Your 'myth* wasn't true, of course. But did you ever *see* women making sexual love?"

"In stag movies, sure. And once or twice when parties got out of control."

"You love me?" The slanted brown eyes were direct, hot, honest

"Yes."

"But you never loved another woman—?"

"I have so! And for quite long spells. Not, though, long enough to make them my wife, wives."

Leandra was trembling with a curious unawareness of it, and she said, only, "Then, watch a woman you love, making love with a woman, girl, you at least enjoy and like."

He did.

And what Leandra had meant became clear. It did teach Glenn. Whether or not he could apply the lesson with parallel effect, he could not say. But the long-haired, dark, French-descended Lysette and Leandra, naked and engaged in their most skilled efforts to rouse the most intense and complete erotic pitch in each other, communicated by no words but in a language of sensing and doing, in a kinetic reciprocation, were stunning. Glenn realized why stag shows were so largely this scene. It wasn't that such passion was freer, because free of such things as pregnancy or disease—or failure, brutality, clumsiness—which released them, but something else.

They took time and took time to "learn" each other. They found places, pressures, durations, wishes for returns to once-stimulated sites, preferences, manners desired, and all similar coordinates that Glenn didn't know could be so important. And when one wished to come, she indicated that, aware that the other would be even more delighted when her turn came.

Afterward, Leandra lay still, smiling at Glenn. Lysette smiled, too—at Leandra. And Glenn, hi a state of extreme

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physical desire, simply stared. Finally, he said, "Thank you both. That was a sort of graduate lesson. I think you taught me a lot."

Lysette turned to him, her jingle-bell laughter and her not "naughty" but sexy eyes blazing. "Monsieur! If that is so, you must prove it to us *bothT'*

Glenn felt dazed and his answer surprised him. "That's wonderful of you. But I think, maybe, I need help?"

A sort of critical teacher? For one, and then the other?"

Leandra spoke sleepily though she was far from that state. "Yes. I hoped for that. I shall be your girl guide with Lysette—I'm hostess, right? Then, perhaps, with that practice, you and she will—make Leandra go far, far out."

In the weeks afterward Glenn found a certain sense of repulsion he'd had in this area was actually a sense of guilt or fear, of bias owing to imperceived truths. He forgave his stag-movie-addicted friends a great deal. He also knew that, when carrying out his civic duties as an Alpha-plus, if he ever fell short of the goal,

he would ask for aid. For Lysette. Even, Leandra. But the removal of that inhibition, the insights it gave him to employ, still failed to convert Glenn to the sex games and their constancy, their delight, as a completely ideal set of mores, or of "normals." Jealousy, rare in him before, ebbed away completely, now. He could watch Leandra and a lover and merely take delight in her ecstatic attainment and her ensuing repose. Happy in his beloved's joy.

And when Lysette was with child by him, he could and did respond to her desire as she brought his breakfast, came up to "dust," or to turn down the bed at night. Only —as Leandra had said—it was a "waste": pregnant women had "odd fantasies." But what was odd, Glenn wondered and dared not ask, about a mother-to-be of a man's child wanting that real father again—or, in Lysette's case— wanting the chance to make oral love, not to protect her inhabited womb, but to show she could always gratify her child's father?

The whole thing was muddled, he knew.

How, he could not discover, for a long while.

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He'd once written an (unsigned) article in his largest, mass-circulation magazine, saying that mankind had never yet found out its meant, innate or ideal, sex mores. It was true of current (then) behavior with its fundamentalist repression by means of filthifying all sex as a barrier. True among promiscuous adults, hi "unisex" groups, and everywhere. Nobody knew the right code and all the known codes had been unsuccessful save, perhaps, for some pre-literate peoples like the Polynesians. But even their extraordinarily effective creed, that let the children learn sex together in special houses, let the adolescents sleep with one another at will, and then ended in marriages that rarely were failure s—even they hadn't a sexual pattern that technological man could use.

For a constantly unfaithful spouse was simply moved into the lover's home. The deserted partner found another quickly. And besides, two or three times a year, villages celebrated with other villages and their feasts involved a cancellation of the usual custom. For some days, any man or woman could make love with any other in the visiting or visited village. That would not work in Los Angeles! Besides, Polynesians loved all babies and children! So that vital matter of "tender loving care" was perfectly resolved. But what about those scores of millions of Americans who did not, could not or would not love even their own offspring, let alone, the whole world's? What about the sickening adult minority, that great one, of children born against the intent and will of their parents?

In Los Angeles, in 2017, people did treasure all children and cared for them lovingly, in their homes, or in special child-adult apartments where everybody was a father or mother to all young people. But it wasn't quite the Polynesian kind of lovin'ness: that natural art was gone, after the missionaries arrived and made love a sin and vile. What, then, was hauntingly inadequate or wrong or even vicious, here? The answer, as a general feeling, was easy. Everything was done to suit a wholly impersonal, an actually apersonal aim: improve the breed by preventing the genetically flawed from having children. Was that all?

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Not quite! When sex was classified and regulated till it lost some spontaneity and had no lasting linkage, when it was ordered for a scientific end, however rational, and even though the people were, from birth, manipulated, reared, pleased sexually so as to make that ultimate end seem proper and "rational"—something left you, something that is male for males, Glenn knew, and female for them. Couldn't they, he speculated, rear children with enough genetic knowledge so they'd pick suitable mates themselves?

But the answer was a negation, I might pick Leandra but she would be wrong from the overview, being unlikely to bear. I would not pick Lysette for a wife; only, for a doll. She would rate genetically a better choice than my Leandra. And, in any case, from the mathematical and genetic viewpoint, as an Alpha-plus male, it would be sensible, even necessary, for me to impregnate as many women as possible, or, at least a great many.

This, he thought, was the opposite of castration. He and others were not desexed but sexually augmented, used, pushed, made supersexed, in a way which, given that view, was not too different from castration. You could not. Or you must, incessantly. Either one was a state you weren't able to choose, or change. And this pan-sexual society was reared to make that prosexual activity acceptable.

Such mental self-chastisement and questioning occupied him as he lay beside the sleeping Leandra on the night when he'd almost given away the fact that he and she were behaving "normally" for some purpose. He was wide awake. And he realized, finally, it was owing to the fact that he had never before realized that while "his" Leandra was now taking lovers, as was he, for the sake of appearances, she had done that even in their interval of what he'd assumed a complete sharing of each other only. That shocked him and he muttered her name.

She woke and sat up so he asked her.

"One or two," she said, sleepily. "Or three. Or so. I had to keep myself in line, of course. So I did. Why?"

"I just wondered."

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It hurt. But he wasn't going to show the pain. She raised her arms up hi the dark, presently, and laughed. "I was just thinking. Your partners are my choices, mainly. So you suggested tonight that maybe you ought to choose some for me? It was sarcasm, surely. But look! Mr. Glenn Howard, you are becoming a very big person in USA. On the Board, even! You meet many fascinating men. So, yes, do send me some! It would make me enjoy it more because it would be you—indirectly."

He said, "Sure. I guess so."

He didn't mean it. Or, did he? Was he pleased his "infidelities" were Leandra chosen? Did that or anything matter except smashing USA, Inc.? He couldn't judge.

And he fell asleep wearily, much later, worrying now about the lass Leandra was assigning to him for the next afternoon. He couldn't imagine her, whoever, however lovely, as Leandra by proxy. Or could he—if he tried?

Wasn't he relieved that she chose for him?

But why didn't this seem enough, or, right?

And his answer came:

Men and women just are not interchangeable—like spare parts. Each is a whole, and each, unique. When you lost that awareness you lost—your very self.

And, here in this place, that loss was a principal aim of education and of all else the remnant civilization was told, shown, allowed to discuss, even, to think about. No person is a true proxy for any other.

Males and females can mate indiscriminately. They can be induced, if caught early, to do so—and even within special limits. But something vital was suppressed, mashed, taken away utterly, by that rule.

All men are part of the Maine, as Donne said. But each is his own part and like no other. To pretend otherwise is to diminish the "Maine," the whole cosmos.

But nobody, his mind went on while Leandra again fell asleep, even guesses how it will be from where it is and they *are*. This "new world" was like Huxley's, in a way: promiscuity was a mere custom, accepted, constant and enjoyed; but Huxley had imagined sex-as-fun because

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le'd also imagined his new people would create their offspring in lab glassware. Orwell foresaw this power of a central, tyrannical government, all-seeing and entirely upended so love was hate, truth was lies, and so on. Here, there was no Big Brother, but a Board of Directors. The "big-brother-is-watchin-g-you" was selective, here, far from common and not employed to create universal dread so much as for "scientific" reasons.

Glenn pursued those ideas of dire prophets with some hope of help for his own mind. One could say both Orwell and Huxley were "close," in one way, for each: Sex loosed and dictatorship absolute, true. But who saw the real image of the greatest, most certain and by far the worst events in a short future, the *eco-cataclysms* that had occurred in less than a half century? *Malthus*? He had come closer than those later-day doom-designers.

Enough was *known* by 1971, and years earlier, to guarantee man had actually or nearly so contaminated and disordered and denuded and destroyed his habitat and the *chain-of-life* he depended on even to breathe, to have a steady earth temperature, for water he could safely use for his needs, for food enough—let alone, food sufficiently non-toxic—with all sorts of other truths, thousands—mown surely enough in the Sixties, his own "period," to make it absolutely certain man's ways, technological, "scientific" (but not truly that) his "civilization" and those aspiring to its bounties, could not be sustained by any means whatever at the going rate or for very long at any similar rate. His expected numbers, his plans for providing for them, or even some of them, added up to zero, to the impossible. The only missing datum was—when?

And that was the cause of the failure. "Not in my life," we said, Glenn mused sadly. After me—the deluge?

Apocalypse. After me. And mine. Later. Sometime in the century beyond us. But there had been no excuse for the illusion, the insane myth. Now, this. And was this, USA, *lac.*, what he found as a mere result of the clear truth no one could bear to glance at, save a handful of scientists, biologists, specialists, there?

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Who could tell? Other nations were similarly governed, bred, by even more ghastly means. Some would perish of their very inhumanity. Would any recover—and if so, recover what? That dignity of man which abides only in his opportunity to determine who he is, what he does, how he thinks, insofar as that liberty does not lead him to impinge on the same freedom of others? A truth that the young revolutionaries of Glenn's age didn't manage to grasp, he thought sourly. They sought identity, they said, and in that process they fled from any and every means of self-identification. They dared not face what they were and who they were not, that they imagined they were and imagined as so great!

Would this "culture" be mandatory in some end of time that was not so near ecological extinction? Could man even have survived without some absolutist government? Would man, even assuming, as Glenn did, he had the innate ability? Would he order his genetics, voluntarily, when the necessity became clear? (But it was, in my time!) Could man be *led* somehow to his requisite deeds, shedding his numberless ideas of God, the gods, his dogmas that were icily fixed against the plain face of truth? And, supposing that inspired leadership managed to gain a majority assent, could such a new culture succeed, and yet retain its self, its individual identity? He believed it to be thinkable. It just hadn't happened. This had. This zombie state breeding better—what? Zombies, what else. He thought of the new world bitterly. What it demanded: Conformity to the altered and horrible laws, he thought, horrible in their use to keep the populace busy, breeding better people and to remove all the Useless—those people who couldn't produce a service worth

their upkeep. But Glenn never could decide whether or not there was any **rightness** in this matter, ever. It was very easy, however, to see where the Big Lie went beyond belief and beneath contempt, here. Particularly, in the current, largest example, Glenn **felt**. Earth's air regenerated, the surface habitable, but that was suppressed to keep the troglydites in their pits and so

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completely subject to the corporate will, to the Stalin-like, Hitler-like, **communist-and-fascist** system of domination by propaganda or else by removal. Sex is fun. Babies must be bred. We live **hi** cities underground because there is no other way to live. Our cities are growing and our population, as are our living standards. No foreign nation can threaten us because we have a store of weapons of **ani-hilation** that will not harm us with radioactive residues, even if used. Secret weapons, to maintain the power of USA, Inc., if it is ever challenged, which is unlikely. Make love, not war; love is great, war unthinkable; and not now even possible. Obey the rules and enjoy being—but disobey—and YOU KNOW! . . .

The police. Glenn did know.

Guns were out of date. The force now had sidearms that ejected, almost soundlessly, an "A" shot which merely brought instant unconsciousness to a person **hit**— anywhere. A "B" shot killed in an hour, unless medical reversal of its effect was ordered and came **hi** time. A "C" load killed **instanter**. And for mobs they had the "Sub-son," that incredible gadget on fast trucks—a grim gadget Glenn had seen in the tape scenes he'd been shown that first day. One he now understood.

The machine on the truck made sound. The sound began as a low roar and descended as its volume rose. In seconds, it was subaudible, not heard by human ears, but, now, a killer. Lethal sound was known in Glenn's "period." But it had short range and couldn't be aimed. Now, a sound-chamber formed a parabolic reflector for the subsonic blast, aiming it to the degree selected and, at a mile, and thirty degrees, this blast of sound could set every person in its beam shaking, to death, in seconds.

The police could preset their sidearms as desired. They were on A, normally. They would knock the target person out. But they could be shifted to B *in* a split second, and as swiftly, to C. Pistols and revolvers were obsolete, here. So was tear gas; so were machine guns and grenades and cannon—they now had better weapons. Adjustable arms and armament for one, or a mob.

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All "painless." Civilized, they called that improvement. But, the propaganda was backed up by those arms and their **painlessness** was not any less coercive.

And Glenn, in his executive suite, as Director of Media, now understood the propaganda very well. "Carrot and stick" in modern guise. You ate the carrot here, though, ate it any time you saw an opposite-sexed person who would share it and had the right grade. The stick was used rarely, and in three different degrees of violence: knock out, knock out to die, unless the judgment was soon reversed (and medically implemented); and kill. Finally, the **blandness** of the public was more a matter of conditioning than fear of force. **Aphron** kept sexual desires high and potency great. There was nothing else—such as **Soma**, Huxley's routine chemical pacifier. Nothing needed, evidently. Just **sex**—and knowing about the menacing weapons—presented by what his "empire" now supplied *in* all media as news, as fiction, as informative articles, as scientific findings in appropriate journals—and as such, translated into lay terms, when and if the findings corresponded to the corporate program and policies. . . .

* * *

Glenn had looked forward to his trip to Washington. He knew he would go by plane. He could then, he'd believed, look at the continent from whatever the altitude and perhaps see something of its condition: uninhabited, yes, but perhaps showing life, forests, something?

He went by night.

He saw nothing. His plane took off vertically, climbed to a fantastic height, leveled off and sped like a rocket, with two men shut away on the flight deck and no steward or stewardess. It landed twice, in darkness, though Glenn had realized before his take-off that the L.A. field was small and dark so the guidance system was either a "black light" sort or an equivalent. Airlocks or chambers all the way to the plane. Two Board Members were picked up en route: a Dr. Boyd Evans who headed the Biological Division of USA, Inc. and a **Rogeman** Tuttle, Commissioner for Transportation. Both men had the same "com-

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mand look" Glenn had noticed (so long ago! so recently in seeming!) common to the industrialists gathered at Boiling Wells. Both welcomed Glenn with heartiness and with shrewd, cunningly veiled observations; and both, soon, went to work on portfolios of papers—getting set for the Board, tomorrow.

The Washington landing was soft and the airport, hi darkness. They were ushered through an airtight corridor to small, underground cars and let out beneath the New Sherhilt Hotel, the best in the world, Glenn had heard. The three men went upstairs into a lobby that was much [ike hotel lobbies a half century ago, and they signed a register, while other Board members waited to greet them or waited for their luggage or for an elevator.

As Glenn sighed, his back was slapped. "Hello, pal!"

Glenn turned, a little baffled, and more so, when he saw a face he half-recognized, a handsome face, an intelligent face, two deep-set eyes, nearly black, and a smile he clearly recalled. Before the other had finished some sort of "glad you're aboard" thing, Glenn first thought he looked like the father of a once-known young man. Then it clicked and no gap was left after the other man's trite welcome.

"Good God!" Glenn half-shouted, "Kingman Moss-maker!"

"Good for you! Glenn Howard! Great! Yes! Come and have a drink!"

Dazed, Glenn followed the elderly but vigorous-looking friend to an old-fashioned bar. Dazed, because Glenn knew Kingman. Had known him for some years, back then!

Kingman Mossmaker, onetime "infant prodigy," had entered Harvard at fifteen, graduated in three years and hi those same years made a fortune estimated at twenty millions by brilliant financial coups in the Market, by small-business purchases, and from money invested hi new processes and Inventions that "wiser" financiers wouldn't sponsor but which soon proved enormously profitable. At twenty-two, when Glenn had first met this young genius, he was a tycoon. Glenn and Kingman had

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become friendly, then, soon fond of one another, and for the next four years, they were good friends, though they didn't meet often, as their interests were different, their home offices on opposite coasts, and partly because Kingman loathed southern California.

Now they sat face to face over drinks—which, in this superhotel, were available for all. But their ages were reverse d—an occasion for kidding, to start with.

"Crazy!" Kingman said, delighted with this matter. "You're in the forties—right? And I'm—"

"Seventy-two." Glenn had already calculated that. "But looking fifty."

"No need to flatter, son!"

They chortled.

And, as that evening passed, as Kingman introduced "Young Glenn" to on-hand and arriving Board members, Glenn felt a surge of exultation and hope. This once-"youthful" billionaire had owned a reputation for integrity surpassed by none. He'd had a wife and two kids, twins, and loved them. No playboy. His patriotism, like his huge charitable donations, were two of his trade marks. So, Glenn reasoned, here was an ally—in Glenn's covert aims.

He was mistaken. A merry evening. Bed. Girls offered but rejected. Breakfast.

The Board Meeting, chaired by the President, opened at ten the next morning.

George, the President, called it to order. . "We will," he began, "have time for any other urgent business, later on. I know some of you have pressing problems. But the emergency matter comes first." He braced and made a "solemn-oracle" pose. "Gentlemen, I have positive evidence that a conspiracy is being launched in several major cities and some minor ones. Let me say— and please don't interrupt with those astonished noises!— its extent is apparently great, hundreds may be involved, already, including some pretty highly placed people. These—and here's the point—have heard 'rumors' that the air on the earth has regenerated to a point which makes surface living possible for people."

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Somebody broke in, "Rumors, Mr.—ah—George?"

The President waved the man for silence and looked squarely at Glenn. "Have you heard any such thing, Glenn?"

"How could I have? After all, I get the reports of the scientists and those include the 'outside' data. Nobody has suggested so wild an idea—and if they did—I'd think such a person was—misinformed—or nutty."

"Nutty? Oh! Insane. Well, Glenn. You're on the Board, now. And you're about to see what that means and demands, too. The air—the surface is livable! Safe. Has been, for two years."

Glenn knew all eyes were on him, boring into him, seeking, with the special expertise of all top and able executives, to discover (and to leap on) any sign of cover-up. This, then, was his ultimate test. None would be harder— none could be. But Glenn had prepared for it and prepared well. He expected the fact to be disclosed, guessed this special meeting probably related to it, and now he reacted as he would have, being "himself," and with such limited experience of the new USA as he'd had.

"But if that's the case," he said at once, "why do we—?"

The Board smiled as one, and the President grinned. He spoke for all. "Why do we stay underground, Glenn? Good question! Because—"

And Glenn heard why, which he knew, already. But as the President explained, he nodded occasionally, seriously, and in due time, he put a question or two. When the President had finished an account well-known to the others, and answered Glenn's queries, he was still facing Glenn! addressing the new member who, manifestly, had now accepted the Board policy unreservedly and was giving it deep thought.

Glenn was first to offer a positive idea—and that, too, was expected.

"I think, Mr.—George"—a titter—"the problem falls in my Division. Offhand, I might suggest two approaches. The media take notice of the rumor and massively reject

it as idiocy." Voices murmured negatives. "Or we set up -a series of all-media events, with examples, of the fact—we will call it—that the atmosphere is improving slightly. Words and pictures, tapes with sound. I mean"—he thought briefly—"we start with some statement, real and accurate if available, about the toxicity of the planet's air at the moment of the Death Winds. A rabbit, just as an example, would then perish in a tenth of a second. Now, as we would show, a rabbit can live for two seconds. I mean—this would be a two-thousand-per-cent improvement and yet it would mean that human life support was very, very far from us. We could broadcast and project several such experiments, with enthusiasm over our showing of slight improvement, yet, by clear inference, show life on the surface to be —oh—plainly—centuries, thousands of years—away, still."

The idea was as nearly applauded as are good thoughts at such conclaves.

Attention was turned to the subject of searching out the "traitors."

Some suggestions sickened Glenn who had thought himself proof against the Corporate inhumanity.

Any known or suspected conspirators, the Commissioner of Finance felt, should at once be put in the electronic seat and forced to name their associates.

Another Board member suggested the silent, unexplained destruction of suspects—as a way of mysteriously stopping, by fear, any further plotting.

"Public evisceration" was another idea. This, Glenn learned, having so far missed it hi his "catch-up" reading, had been a legal means of trying to keep order, used in the "last era." It consisted, simply, hi public execution, by di sembowelment, of suspect or guilty people, all who opposed current laws and rules or spoke against them. The sentenced victims were sliced open enough to die slowly, hi the utmost agony, where masses of people were forced to gather and watch.

There were more and more vicious ideas.

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Glenn knew they had to be set aside if his now-multi-tudes of fellow-rebels were to have any chance of success. He addressed the Board after much listening: "May I suggest," he began, "though I'm a freshman, here, a perhaps subtler and even more effective plan? Suppose that my already-adopted idea is allowed to be put in effect for—oh—four weeks, maybe? The result? Most Americans will be convinced the air isn't breathable. All these—traitors—meantime, will be alerted to the suspicion that our media-program indicates we know, or suspect something—about them, their plot, who they are, perhaps, and so on. That is a panic state, one we make, but not openly, not surely, for them.

"Up to now, these—treacherous people—must feel pretty safe. Why?" He shot that word in, to halt evident efforts at dispute. "Why, gentlemen? Because our sum of information about them amounts to a few fairly certainly known traitors, a few more suspects, but we have no data that shows even the extent of the plot. With the use of all our surveillance methods—of which I've had experience—" That brought laughter. "With that ability, meanwhile, we can uncover many more individuals, whole groups, and their plans, up to that time. After all, they will hardly be so numerous as to cause us real alarm, or so well organized as to have any feasible plans for revolt or whatever. We can assume, being shrewd men, they're at the start of some sort of planning. We can know, from that, it will take months, even years, for their scheme to become a real threat.

"Now!" Glenn said it with force as his listeners were restless. There was more to hear. They waited.

"We must note next that the Corporation relies, must rely, on numbers of rather—shall I say, emotionally perverse and reluctant?—personnel? Scientists, especially. People essential for our rate of progress. I refer to hypothetical specialists who sometimes openly resent the— mandatory, high-minded, selfless rules of the Corporation. But they are rare types, education-wise, and thus are not erased owing to special value. This I assumed—correctly,

I see. We would not want to lose all or any such men and women, and thus slow our national will and purposes, if we could avoid it. Right? Right! Any gross or hasty effort to—ah—unzip this underground effort might well end hi a deliberate, or wanton, perhaps accidental or some other sort of needless erasure, with consequent technical and scientific losses we could ill sustain. As media chief, I am sure I can erase any creeping suspicions, rumors, of the sort we are concerned with—at least, hi the minds of the vast majority. Given tune, that way, as well as the rumor-quelling effects I've promised I can deliver. And we can certainly manage to pinpoint all guilty persons and, that done, determine who among them must and can be erased and who, if there be any, might well be preserved, confined and electronic-chair-directed, if need be, so as to go on working at their specialist projects for the general good. Given time, indeed, and some honorable citizen may well expose the whole cabala!"

It was thought to be a brilliant set of suggestions. . . .

* * *

Three weeks later, Glenn went, by a series of dodges, all, alibied ingeniously, to the final meeting.

This was held, as prior gatherings had been, in an "Old L.A." end of a huge storm drain, a vast sewer into which a secret opening had been dug from underground L.A.—a roofless canal when it came near the sea. It was a long-ago engineering triumph that had sluiced Los An-geles's sometimes heavy rains into the sea—at a volume that prevented earlier and common disasters of flooding, mud-slides and canyon avalanches. The superdrain was open for a final mile, with one excepted stretch. Across some two hundred and fifty yards of the deep, concrete-paved, high-walled vent, a plastic, hydroponic-food-raising "hangar" had been carried, by a high wind, long ago.

This material roofed over the storm drain and, as leaves, mud and dust collected, it became opaque, its transparency spoiled by the debris. But that fact was either unsuspected or disregarded by the authorities. There was no reason for any close inspection; the overhung drain did

not connect with the new L.A.; and the stuff on the plastic swags acted as camouflage from any plane-surveying party.

No human being would have found it or, surely, used it, who did not first know the air was safe, outside. The Freedom Fellowship—named by Glenn—gathered there, the L.A. chapter and visitor delegates. Glenn was head of the national group. In public, members used those initials "F.F." as signs and recognition symbols, but with many shifts.

Glenn presided at the final meeting.

It was strange, stagey. The heads of the L.A. groups were present when Glenn stepped out of the starlight into the covered, concrete oblong. There were lights, but only of candles, as ushers seated the last arrivals. Glenn rose from his chair in front and spoke hi total darkness.

"We are holding this last meeting before we'd like to," he began, "but my connections make it clear we have little time left. Next week, as the L.A. brass meets at the big studio hi my building to celebrate the reappointment of the President and also my own addition to the Board, I shall make a short speech of thanks. I will end it with a military salute, not usual but still seen, sometimes, and with the motto, "Service!" said hi that way. These will be your signals to break out and lead out all persons possible. A lot of us will fail. Those who get out will go to the pre-pared hiding areas, as they have been instructed. Search will be swift and thorough but—as you know—our mere exit and the fact that we are being hunted, hence alive, will tell the nation—the world, hopefully—that life outside is possible. Further, I have rigged an automatic tape-program source, that will not be readily found or stopped, o rebroadcast the news on every channel and in all media possible. We believe, we can be sure, that news of our revolt and of the survival of many, will cause rebellion and an end to the special, massive, but typical lie that has, for two and more years, condemned us to underground living, to our past slavery. But the broadcasts will merely reaffirm our act. I see no other hope for the end of the

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long-lasting, world-wide tyranny, by lies and by every infamy. Farewell! And on to Freedom!"

Candles lighted up. People moved in their round glimmers. They had not cheered or applauded. They were, Glenn knew, terrified. But resolute. Everything they owned, life, loved ones if such they had, human destiny, itself, depended on their courage. So there was no need to cheer or applaud, but need, only, to be brave. . . .

* * *

Three Board members happened to be in L.A. on the night of the Celebration.

In the rose-and-gold studio where the VIPs sat on gilded chairs in front of and above some two hundred special guests, Glenn looked over that elegantly clad and often near-transparently gowned audience and listened absently to the speeches. He watched a small monitor, as the audience could watch on a huge one, where, in full color and grandeur, other cities were parading their VIPs and performing their same ceremonies. The hook-up, was nation-wide, reflex, with ample power at appropriate stations to cover the world, thrice around.

Glenn knew he was tense, pale and so, visibly uneasy. He had finally found himself in a situation where his will and control were inadequate for his purposes. He could hope that his state would be attributed to this, his first national exposure as "himself," not, as the mere executive head of the media, shown as that. But though it was the interpretation plainly put on his jitters, and though he was kidded about that loss of cool, Glenn felt in himself some deeper anxiety that he could not name.

As the ceremonies progressed, as bands played, as incredibly agile damsels from Seattle-Portland performed the most acrobatic and sexual ballet he'd ever dreamed of, he kept sending the worried searchlight of his mind over his concealed plans, people, events.

Nobody had betrayed the Freedom Fellowship.

The national exit scheme was, surely, known in every group and all groups were now at or near their exit-points.

The police-military weren't out in unusual numbers, though they were out in rare quantity, for security reasons; plainly, a common precaution, nothing more.

Yet the night was frantic within Glenn.

When, at last, he reached the code words of his own, amusing, bright, "thank you" speech, Glenn was soaked in sweat. Still, he delivered the command in a calm, clear tone: Saluting with elegance, he cried, "Service!"

Then he heard a click and the man nearest him, as he started towards his seat, collapsed.

Glenn knew it all, then.

They had been betrayed. Perhaps from the start. But how? By whom?

Leandra?

She'd be at his place, the new one, the "palace" he lived in, watching on the Super-TV. He found himself thinking that he had to see her, and as he thought, he was taking measures against any second lethal weapon-click. He stepped behind Mayor Bob Baker instead of going on to his chair. So the next shot missed him but brought down a guard who

had rushed up behind the VIPs on the platform. Bob whirled and Glenn slugged him. Bob folded and Glenn then had a shield that got him safely out of the studio and its instant pandemonium.

Bob was heavy but Glenn was strong.

He used his shield to get from the building, in another way. He yelled at nearby guards, "I'm getting the Mayor to a hospital! He's been shot!"

That achieved a better result than he'd expected. A police speed-van rolled up and took Bob and Glenn inside. It started for the East Gate hospital. But it did not get there. Instead, the van soon disgorged the two policemen, both victims of a weapon Glenn had grabbed—and the vehicle sped on toward Glenn's "palace." It was guarded, but the police van was not expected to be hostile, so both guards died, unaware of why or how.

In one of the "female visitors suites" he found Leandra where he'd expected to.

She was dead.

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He left his shimmering miracle-abode by a rear door and found the van was already in police possession. On foot, by circuitous streets and alleys, he reached his own, designated point of exit. He saw some two hundred or more men and women had gathered there—pale, stunned, pinned by guards' weapons. So Glenn knew that this exit had been discovered and stopped up. So had all the others, he was sure. He checked his position and crept back into shadows, barely in time. From a distance, two trucks howled toward this place, a small plaza, mouldy and desecrated by graffiti, dirty, no likely site for a mass exit, yet, a main one. Useless.

The first police vehicle blasted lights on the cowering group of Fellows. The second, skidding to a stop beside the first, was only an ominous silhouette to Glenn, but one that soon growled with a deep, brazen sound which fell lower but became more painful as it descended to inaudibility, where its waves began to affect the freedom-seekers.

Glenn had seen it, once, on tape.

Now, he saw it, live.

The group of human beings, their majority male and yet at that, a bare majority, so near to victory, faced failure and death palely, silently, helplessly. When the roar went below audible—sensing they began to tremble, to vibrate, as if shaken, shaken rapidly, a centimeter or so each way, and thus, they died.

When they were down and motionless, the terrible machine slowed and reversed its scale till its sound rose from bass toward an ear-shattering baritone. Then it stopped.

Glenn had no more plans.

Leandra had not betrayed them.

Probably, he thought, as the grinding roar grew bearable and diminished, "they," the Corporation, had always known. Probably, he guessed, and he felt, correctly, all the "bugs" had never been turned off. and they'd heard of the rebellion when he, Glenn, first had heard . . . from Leandra. . . .

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Everything was lost now—except a soon-doomed memory of love. . . .

* * *

Glenn found, as the "subson" rose toward a final pitch and then diminished, that it wasn't unfamiliar, as sound. And he realized he was now sitting, not standing. Moreover, it was daylight, not night in a dark corner of an alley.

The noise was a departing sort—as a huge, triple-trailer bellowed into the distance.

He stretched, yawned, thought of his nightmare and then tried to shake it off.

A few people had left the Rest Area. Others were entering.

His taperecorder was humming. He shut it off: better finish dictating at the office.

But as he regained the road he found he couldn't drive with his usual speed. The haunting dream kept his attention from any concentrated effort at driving.

And as he neared Los Angeles he found certain ordinary sights made him slow even more, to look. Factory chimneys streaming smoke gave him a strange sense of anguish. A dry brook-bed with the bleached trash it had brought to this point, in wet weather—shocked Glenn. So did a suburban street, slummish, tawdry and crammed with too many people—that, slowed and dazed Glenn.

Finally, topping the last mountain, Glenn found he iced to stop just to "regroup" as he often put it—to gather his wits and regain some degree of composure. pulling off the road, he got out and saw, in the ditch, a copy of one of his own papers, today's, the October 15, 1971 edition—something thrown from a passing car from one of the endless multiple, two-way streams of vehicles, hurled into a deep layer of cans, bottles, packaging material, trash, the usual pavement-side paving of everywhere—USA.

It was late enough and smoggy enough so that Greater Los Angeles was lighting its lamps. A sea of acrid, slow, stirred and stinging mist half buried the vast prairie of

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lights, so that those along the far coast were dimmed almost completely. But their position still showed where the land ended and the Pacific began.

Glenn coughed a little, looked at the trees amidst which he'd walked and saw they were dead trees, smog-murdered. Then, trying to recover from his nightmare, he gazed with a sort of hope at the immensity of the lighted city below.

It was silent. And soon the incessant sound of traffic seemed to die out, strangely. Silence fell.

Then, the city screamed.

From millions of throats came a death scream, death-groan, a howl and bellow, all mingled into a single orgasm of agony, as if Los Angeles, with every city on earth, was dying by torture, soon to be voiceless and still. . . .

THE END