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LOST IN NON-TRANSLATION

LOVE IS A DRAGONFLY
by Thomas Burnett Swann
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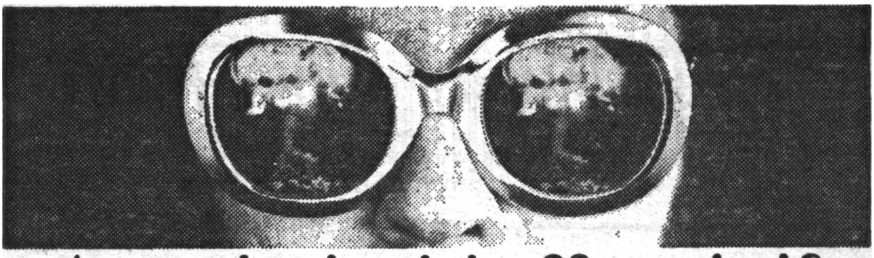

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In his latest story, Thomas Burnett Swann returns to the colorful and entertaining blend of history and mythology that has earned him two Hugo nominations (for "The Manor of Roses" and "Where is the Bird of Fire"). This story and "Bird of Fire" share the same heroine, a Dryad named Mellonia, here in a tale of love and conflict between human and dryad.

Love Is A Dragonfly

by THOMAS BURNETT SWANN

ONE

"*Aeneas must die.*"

The words were both a command and a covenant. Aeneas, the Trojan butcher, betrayer of women, invader of the Wanderwood, must die, and she, Mellonia, the Dryad, seventeen years of age, who wept when she crushed a bee or broke a spider's web, was bound by the oath as surely as her queen, Volumna. Unless the stories told of Aeneas were lies—and their truth was attested by warriors, mariners, and Amazons—she must obey the oath and, if it fell to her lot, murder the murderer for the safety of her people and the sanctity of the forest.

Now it was night. That same afternoon, when the sun had sat in the treetops like a nesting phoenix, Aeneas had seemed no more to her than a name whispered to frighten a naughty child.

Her hive had been ravaged by a hungry bear. The bear had not enjoyed his feast; he had been stung into a hasty flight through blackberry brambles and into the soothing waters of the Tiber. Still, the hive was in ruins; the bees were honeyless and homeless, and she had located a new stump for them within sight of the tree where she had lived for a year, alone, sometimes lonely, but companioned by her bees and her animals, since the death of her mother in a thunderbolt. Now she was showing the stump to the queen. The bees could

understand Mellonia's gestures but few of her words; she could understand their flight patterns but few of their buzzings. It was poor communication but better than none, and the queen, by her rapid zig-zags, was certainly expressing gratitude. Mellonia's favorite, a drone whom she called by the name of Bonus Eventus, or Good Luck, had alighted on her shoulder to rest.

Her friend, Bounder, the Centaur, cantered out of the woods and circled Mellonia and the stump. In the fashion of his race, who inclined to the foppish and basked in admiration, he smote the earth with his hooves and shook his mane as if it were wheat in the wind. At first she chose to ignore him; she did not like his stares, which had lately become more frequent and assertive, almost as if her ears had lost their points or her green hair had escaped from its fillet. She belonged to that tribe of Dryads known as Oakarians, who had no need for men, so they claimed, and little liking for them. They were the Dryads who conceived without fertilization from any males. While her friends remained in another part of the forest, a Dryad of childbearing years would conceal herself in the Sacred Oak of Ruminus, drink of the holy beverage distilled from poppy heads, sleep a dreamful and sometimes disturbing sleep, and awake, if she were fortunate, with life in her womb.

But Mellonia liked Bounder; he was young and parentless, and though at seventeen she was a mere stripling when the average life span of a Dryad was that of her oak—possibly as long as five hundred years—she liked to mother him. In fact the other Dryads often teased her that she had no need to enter the Sacred Oak; she was already mother to half the forest—bees, fawns, Faun kids, wolf cubs—the list would have filled a large clay tablet. Thus, in spite of his disconcerting stares, she turned from the grateful, graceful gyrations of the queen and smiled to Bounder.

"All that trouble over a hive of bees," he grumbled. A Centaur's voice was deep, melodious, cultivated, and altogether agreeable to her ears. The celebrated travels of the race had made them eloquent, if also a little vain.

"I like their honey."

"If they made wolfsbane, you would still like them. You like everything."

"No," she was quick to correct him. "Only kind things. Growing things. Some things I hate." It was true; on her arm she still bore the tooth marks of a lion that had killed a Dryad baby when Mellonia was four-

teen. She had followed the killer to his lair, taken him by surprise—for Dryads smelled like oak trees and walked as silently as deer—and killed him with a club and without compunction. Bounder, doubtless remembering the incident, retreated a few paces, almost stumbling over his hooves.

"You're right," he admitted. "But don't look at me that way. I'm not a lion."

"I've found them a new home," she explained about the bees. "That clumsy bear—"

"One of the bees is crawling between your breasts."

"He's a drone. They don't like to work."

"I envy him."

"And what work did you ever do except comb your mane?"

"I meant I envied his position." Centaurs were fond of breasts; in fact, they seemed to prefer humans or Dryads to their own women for that particular appurtenance, but Mellonia had been taught that a breast served no other function than to give suck, and Bounder's interest puzzled her.

"Speaking of work, I've brought a message for you," he continued.

"What is it?"

Bounder was young and exquisitely groomed, since the agricultural Centaurs paid the Fauns with vegetables from their gardens to do their menial chores—sweep their triangular, timber-built huts and repair the thorn-topped walls which enclosed their village—and thus had time in which to exercise and groom themselves. Furthermore, they prided themselves on the grace and range of their conversation. Bounder's flanks and his multiple appendages—four legs and two arms—were lithe and tawny; he kept himself immaculate by bathing in the Tiber. His face, if one liked masculine faces, was pleasingly symmetrical, the gold eyes luminous in the rosy, beardless skin, the mane a little golden garden running profusely from his head down the back of his neck.

She smiled indulgently. "Bounder, in some ways you're still a colt." The only kisses she knew were the chaste exchanges between Dryads. She kissed him lightly on the cheek as she had often and affectionately kissed her mother.

"Now it's my turn."

"I kissed you. I didn't say you could kiss me back."

"It doesn't hurt, you know."

Stiffly she proffered her cheek. Such foolishness! The marjoram scent of his breath was not unpleasant as his lips approached her, but suddenly he bypassed her cheek and seized upon her mouth. She began to burn—not only her

mouth, but all of her—with a curious and not entirely unpleasant fire. By the milk of Rumina, was he trying to suffocate her? And here were his arms encircling her like the necks of a Hydra!

She wrenched free of him. Centaurs, though swift runners in an open field, were laughably awkward at close range.

"If you don't give me the message, I'll give you fifty bee stings," she said, raising a hand as if she were about to arouse the hive against him.

"Oh, very well," he said, trying to sound casual but looking anxiously at the bees. "Will you comb my mane first? The wind has tousled it." He drew a tortoise-shell comb from the lion-skin bag he wore around his neck.

"And you promise not to kiss me again?"

"I promise. Today."

"*Ever.*"

"Ever." It was almost a sigh.

She ran the comb through his mane, though not a hair seemed out of place. He had stiffened it with a mixture of resin and myrrh. Then, she gave a sisterly pat to his flank and felt an unexpected twitch.

"How pretty you've grown! Like a hyacinth."

Pretty? Flowers were pretty. Swallows. Butterflies. Varicolored stones on the bottom of a stream. But no one had ever applied the word to her. She resisted the urge to ask him, "How am I pretty? Do you like the green of my hair? It isn't perfect, you know. There are golden streaks from the sun—"

Quickly she withdrew her hand and said, "And how about the message?"

"Volumna has called a meeting beneath the fig tree of Rumina."

"What about?" Mellonia gasped. Such meetings were rare. They indicated decisions of a momentous nature.

"Danger, I should think."

"What sort of danger?"

"I don't know," he said, and Mellonia believed him. Momentous affairs were not discussed with males, much less Centaur males; it was enough to entrust them with messages.

Already she was hurrying toward the fig tree, the Ficus Ruminalis, half a mile from her home. She wore neither boots nor sandals nor heavy robes, but anklets of red berries, and a tunic of green linen which twinkled like leaves in the sun, and a necklace of green acorns; and it would have taken a deer to overtake her. Certainly not Bounder, unless they had been on clear and level ground. She felt him staring after her as she outdistanced him, and wondered why he had quivered when she touched him. And all

this talk about kisses! Why, they had grown up together! He was the one male her mother had tolerated around the tree.

But expectation of the assembly, of the danger, effaced all thoughts of him. . . .

The tree was large for its kind and freighted with small green kernels, soon to ripen into figs which no bee would dare to assault unless it fell to the ground. There was an understanding between the bees and the Dryads, for the tree was Goddess and Mother, the figs were her children. So were the Dryads. It was half an hour's walk to the oak of conception, the oak of Ruminus, divine consort to Rumina, though decidedly the lesser deity and therefore consigned to a less desirable part of the Wanderwood.

The council chamber was an artificial cave under the fig tree. Rootlets dangled from the roof like arriving snakes, but the Dryads had dug deeply and carefully so as not to cut the larger roots, the arteries of their mother.

Resin torches, recessed in the earthen walls, burned steadily in the windless air; wooden benches rose in semicircular tiers, a design which, devised by the Dryads on Crete in a time beyond remembering, had inspired the Cretans to build arenas for their bull games. There were perhaps fifty Dryads, adults and children, in the chamber, all of them female. If a Dryad gave birth to a boy, she promptly exposed him to the forest. If the lions did not get him, perhaps a kindly Centaur mother would rear him along with her own young, or a Faun—and all Fauns were male—would permit him to live with his scraggly, odorous, and happy brood. It was such a boy that Mellonia, at the age of fourteen, had rescued with the thought of rearing him as a brother, but her mother had quickly returned him to the place of his exposure. "It is Rumina's Law," she had said. The next morning Mellonia had found the telltale tracks of a lion, the same beast which she had summarily dispatched with her club. She had not spoken to her mother for a week. In the end it was her mother who had made peace between them by allowing her to make friends with Bounder.

"Aeneas has landed at the mouth of the Tiber." All of the Dryads were small, a mere four feet or so in height, but Volumna gave the illusion of size. It was her straight carriage, her strong, resonant voice, which rang like a conch shell, her green hair raised above her head with copper pins, her pointed ears, bared and sharp

and looking rather like the fir-wood darts which the Fauns used in their blowguns against the lions. Mellonia respected her; she almost succeeded in loving her.

"Aeneas has landed...." That was all; it was not necessary to say more. Even the very young knew that the best of males was to be tolerated only for purposes of trade or carrying messages or joining in common defense against invaders of the Wanderwood, and that the worst of males was Aeneas. Everyone knew his story; perhaps fifteen years ago—the exact number depended on the teller—he had forsaken his wife in the flames of stricken Troy, preferring to rescue his small son, Ascanius, and his aged father, a wretched old liar who claimed to have lain with the goddess Venus. After many wanderings, he had landed in Carthage, accepted the hospitality of its queen, Dido, seduced her into marriage to gain supplies for his ships, and callously forsaken her. She had died by her own hand on a funeral pyre and her vengeful sister Anna had followed him to Italia (where he was bound, so he had said, at the prompting of the gods) in order to spread the word of his sins. Now, after many wanderings and no doubt many seductions, for in spite of his middle years he was said to be attractive to women, he had landed where the Tiber met the sea, a few miles from the grove of the Oakarians.

"He is a man," muttered Mellonia's aunt, Segeta, "and what is more he is human." There were humans who lived on the borders of the Wanderwood, the Volsci, but at least they were ruled by a woman, Camilla, and they did not disturb the Wanderwooders—Fauns, Dryads, Centaurs, and the rest. But foreigners—roads—cities—wars. Worst of all, *men.* Such things were unspeakable, unthinkable.

"Our trees will be cut to build their galleys and their fort."

"And we," said Volumna, "we will become their spoils."

"Spoils? I don't understand," said Mellonia. Her mother had died before she could tell her the full range of male iniquity.

"They will take us into their huts."

"We will be their salves?"

"Worse."

"They will kiss us? On the mouth?"

"They will make us bear their children."

"As if we had lain in the Sacred Tree?"

"We must lie with *them.* Like the animals."

Mellonia had raised enough sheep and deer to know that

they coupled before they bore offspring. The Centaurs were too fastidious to make love in public, but the Fauns, naked and shameless, thought nothing of copulating in the shade of a Dryad tree. Mellonia had pelted one such couple with acorns and received a derisive invitation from the male, Mischief, by name, to replace his present partner. The incident had both humiliated and sickened her. She also knew that some Dryads were forced to couple with males. Those to the far north, for want of a sacred oak, took husbands among the Fauns. But a *human* male. There would be kisses, mouth to mouth. And worse. It would be a violation and a degradation. It would be as if her tree were consumed by flames. (A wicked thought invaded her brain, like a bee invading a fig: Not every fire consumes. A little heat is a kindly thing—a brazier in the late fall, before the White Sleep; an open fire in the woods.)

She remembered Aeneas and forced a considerable shudder.

"Of course he must die," said Volumna.

"Of course," said Segeta.

"Of course," echoed the other, older women. Their faces shone like daisies in the dim light; their voices were myrrh; but their words dripped like the deadly sap of the oleander. The children nodded their heads in mute, fascinated approval.

"Perhaps he will sail away," suggested Mellonia. "There is nothing for him here." She did not want to kill, whether the victim was Wanderwooder, animal, or human, unless he was cruel like the lion; and the thought of killing Aeneas disturbed her only less than the thought of enduring his embraces. She had heard much to arouse her against him; she was almost ready to believe and condemn, but first she must see proof of his perfidies.

"He has moored his ships in the mouth of the Tiber. His men are scouting the region for a place in which to build a town. And of course they want women. There are a few Trojan women with them, but the years have not been kind to them. They want young girls like you."

"But if he is a great warrior, and men cannot kill him, what can we do?"

"Ah, but you see, he will be on guard against men. Fauns or Centaurs cannot get close to him. Even if they could, what are slings against swords? But women—he preens himself on his power over them. He expects them to wilt into his arms. We shall do exactly that—whichever of us encounters him first. And when he removes his armor—"

"I've never killed a man," said Mellonia.

"You've killed a lion," said Volumna. "It is much the same thing. Except that Aeneas is more dangerous, because he is more clever."

"What does he look like?"

"The Faun who spied the landing—it was Mischief, as you might suppose—did not say. He was afraid to be seen. I would expect Aeneas to look like any Trojan warrior. Brutish and hawk-eyed. Hair on his face as sharp as brambles. Arms like oaken clubs. And old, I should think. Fifteen years of wanderings must have left their toll."

"I have heard that he was only about twenty-five when he left Troy, and Dido found him irresistible."

"It was five years ago when he landed in Carthage, and Dido was widowed and easily charmed. Forty is young to us, but to a warrior who fought at Troy, to a sailor whom Neptune's storms have tossed and buffeted, it is venerable old age. I expect you will find him as weathered as my oak."

Volumna stared solemnly at the assembly. "Join hands, my sisters. Repeat after me:

"Here beneath the Sacred Fig Tree of Life, we swear to kill the man who invades our land with death. A warrior he comes, and warriors we greet him, we who love spring and the budding bough and the building bird; we who can wield a club and face the fiercest lion, the breaker of boughs, the despoiler of nests." She removed a pin from her hair, a copper bee with a long stinger, and calmly pierced her arm. She passed the pin to the Dryad beside her and after it a small silver urn in the shape of a hive, and each woman and child—Mellonia in turn—pierced her skin and drew green blood and filled and returned the cup to Volumna.

"Sylvanus, god of nightmares, killer of fawn and rabbit, we invoke your terrors against our common enemy. This is Aeneas' blood." Then, upturning the cup:

"Thus, Aeneas."

TWO

Smokily silver, under the moss-laden boughs of oak trees older than Saturn, the Tiber flowed toward the Trojan ships and the sea. Ascanius lay on the bank and watched Aeneas, his father, splash in the water with Delphus, the dolphin that had followed them from Sicily. Aeneas and Delphus were playing a game with a wooden stick. Aeneas would throw the stick, Delphus would erupt under it and hurl it back to him with his elongated snout and then make a noise with his air hole or his mouth—Ascanius

was not sure which—uncannily resembling a human laugh.

Betrayed cities, suicidal queens, tempests at sea, fifteen years of wandering. . . Thrace . . . Delos. . . Crete. . . Carthage . . . Italia. But now Aeneas was laughing like Delphus, forgetting, it seemed, the grief and the guilt which hounded him like the Furies. Silver-haired Aeneas with the face of a young man. When you saw the back of his head, you might think him old because of his hair. When he turned to face you, he might have been twenty-five, the blue eyes clear and gently penetrating, the teeth white and perfect, the ruddy cheeks beardless, unlined, and unscarred except for a tiny cleft in his chin (a gift from Achilles' ax). But then, so the stories ran, Aeneas's mother had been the goddess Aphrodite, or Venus as she was called in Italia. Immortal mother, mortal father; youth and age in the same god-man. Perhaps it was a lie; perhaps his mother had been a serving maid. Never mind, he was still Aeneas, more than a man; to Ascanius, more than a god.

"Aren't you going to swim any more?" Aeneas shouted.

"I'm tired. I've crossed the river three times already!"

"Why not four?"

"Because I'm not Aeneas. Come and sit with your indolent son."

Aeneas parted the reeds on the river bank and stood tall in the sunlight; tall, at least, for a Dardanian-turned-Trojan, though beside Achilles he would have looked like Harpocrates, the child-god of the Egyptians. Ascanius looked quickly at the oak trees behind them and at the loin cloths, quivers, and bows beside them. A seasoned warrior in spite of his youth, he had heartily disapproved of leaving their ships and friends and armor at the mouth of the Tiber, in a strange land known for its barbarous men and its men like beasts. But Aeneas had been like a child planning a picnic—honey cakes to eat, berries to pick—in the world's great childhood before the Trojan War.

"We'll explore together, and then we'll swim in the Tiber and lie in the sun! And hunt for game as we return to the ships."

"And find a net thrown over us or a spear in our hearts. You saw that Satyr skulking in the woods. He's probably alerted the whole forest. It was bad enough that time we fought the Harpies. And they were only women with wings and claws. I'm not going to lose my father to an odorous goat man."

"If we go together, Phoenix, we can look after each other." "Phoenix" was Aeneas' special name for him. ("Ascanius is too

long and As is too undignified.") "Or must I go alone?"

Of course Ascanius had joined him. Aeneas always got his way; he rarely gave commands, he gave invitations, and people accepted, less because he was a king than because he was that rarity among men, gentleness without weakness, strength without cruelty, a fighter who was also a poet; in short, a practical dreamer.

Now they lay in the sun while Delphus dozed on the river in the fitful fashion of dolphins, almost sinking below the surface, rising to open his eyes and look for sharks or mischievous Tritons.

"Will we build at the mouth of the Tiber?"

"Inland, I should think. Protected from Carthaginian galleys. First we must meet Latinus and buy or borrow some land." Latinus was the strongest king in an area known as Latium; area, not country, for the few cities were small, independent, and separated by almost impenetrable forests. "And don't forget the prophecy that we must build where we find a white sow and thirty piglets. But now, let's lie in the sun and not look for pigs."

Only in repose did Aeneas' face look sad, and all the sadder because it looked so young. His body was quiet, the tautness gone from the muscles; but his eyes were open and staring, it seemed, at the flames of Troy, at his wife, Creusa, Ascanius' mother, as she fell behind him in the crowd while he carried his aged father on his shoulders and held Ascanius, five years old, by the hand. He had stopped to look for her.

"No!" Creusa had cried above the tumult, the axes hacking at wooden columns, the hiss of flames as they bit into halls and temples. "I'll catch up with you. Get our son to the ships." They had never seen her again. . . .

Ascanius tried to discourage what he called the "remembering moods" in his father. He had killed a man for saying that Aeneas had forsaken his wife. He would kill any man—or woman—who insulted or threatened him; he would die the death of Hector to spare him pain.

He pressed his father's hand. "I'm happy today," he said. Unlike the cool, conquering Hellenes, the Dardanians were an affectionate and demonstrative people. The men honored their wives as equals; fathers and sons embraced without embarrassment. When Dardania fell to the Hellenes and her surviving warriors went to fight with embattled Troy, they came to be called "the gentle killers." Fortunate were their

friends, the Trojans, but Zeus preserve their enemies!

"Why, Phoenix?"

"Because we came. Just the two of us. You can rest from being a legend, and I can look after you."

"Legend!" laughed Aeneas. "Demon, the Carthaginians would say. Or the Hellenes."

"That's true. But to your men—to anyone who really knows you—a great hero. Either way, a legend, and don't deny it. Is there any land on all the shores of the Great Green Sea that hasn't heard of Aeneas and his wanderings and his dream of rebuilding Troy in a foreign land? Why, you're as famous as Odysseus!"

"At least he got home," Aeneas said wistfully, "and I'm still wandering. But then, he had to wander alone, while I have my son."

"Do you know what I think, Father? It's true you're a legend, but locked inside is—"

"What?"

"A happy little boy. The one you never had time to be. Almost as soon as grandfather brought you back from that mysterious expedition of his where he met grandmother—you must have been six months old—they started to train you to be a prince or a king. But the little boy is still inside of you, and every now and then he slips out and plays fetch and carry with a dolphin—and then I feel like *his* father. If the gods gave me one wish, it would be: Set the little boy free. Stop driving Aeneas to lead men and build cities. Let him throw the discus and swim in the Tiber and never grow up or old, and give him a brother—me!"

"And this is my wish. Let me build my city, my second Troy, but only if Ascanius consecrates the ground."

"You'll get that wish."

"Whisper, Phoenix. Some of the gods are jealous. Poseidon or Hera may overhear you."

"Never mind. They can't hurt you now. Isn't Aphrodite your mother? What will you do when you've built your city?"

"Give you the throne and retire to compose an epic."

"About your wanderings?"

"About Hector. He was the great one, you know. Achilles was stronger in battle, but Hector knew how to love."

"You always wanted to be a bard, didn't you? But the gods made you fight an epic instead of write one."

"There's still time for both, I hope." Then, without lowering his voice, "I hear something in the woods, Phoenix. When I give the signal, jump to your feet and grab your bow. Now!"

Quick as the bird for which Ascanius was named, the two men were standing and armed, though still naked and glisten-

ing from their swim in the Tiber. They looked toward the forest, ready to fire at beasts or flee from armored men. A young woman—or was she a goddess?—stood at the edge of the trees, looking at them with uncertainty but without fear. There was something insubstantial about her, as if the Great Mother had dreamed her out of sunlight and mist.

She spoke the Latin tongue which Aeneas and Ascanius had learned in Carthage, a city sometimes visited by merchants from the ports of Italia.

"You must be Aeneas' men." Her voice did not dispel the illusion of her unreality; it was like the song of a nightingale, but without its wounding sadness.

"Is she my grandmother?" Ascanius whispered.

"No, she's only a girl. Aphrodite is ageless. But she might be Hebe or Iris."

"Yes, we're his men," said Ascanius loudly. "Our names are Phoenix and—Halcyon. Aeneas is with the ships."

"When I first saw you," she said to Aeneas. "I thought you might be Aeneas himself. Your back was turned to me in the river, and I only saw your silver hair. It seemed to speak of years and wanderings. But once I saw your face, I knew that you and your companion were brothers. Phoenix and Halycon. The bird of life and the bird of peace."

"Why did you want Aeneas?" Ascanius asked. He did not trust this girl. She was surely no Amazon like the Volscian queen, Camilla, who had sworn to kill Aeneas because of her people's alliance with Carthage. But there were women who conquered through wiles instead of weapons. There had been a woman named Helen.

"To greet him," she said. Then, quickly (too quickly, it seemed to Ascanius), "I never saw naked men before. The Volscian men wear tunics or armor. Even if they didn't, they wouldn't be much to see. It's their women who rule, you know. Of course I've seen Fauns, but they're more goat than man. I have always been told that men were almost as disgusting. Bristling hairs and smudges of dirt all over them. But I think you are very pretty, both of you. Is that a word for men? Much prettier than women. I mean, I like the bronze of your skin, the hard muscles." She pointed to her breasts. "I suppose you might call me misshapen. I bulge where you are flat."

Ascanius laughed. "It depends on the point of view."

She walked toward them.

"Aren't you afraid of us?" Ascanius asked.

"Why should I be?"

"We're warriors. You're a woman, and unprotected."

"Do I need your protection?"

"From me you do!" He was deeply stirred by this miracle of young womanliness, though he continued to mistrust her. Like most warriors, he had sometimes taken a woman after capturing a city, and several cities had fallen to Aeneas and his exiled Trojans. There was no pleasure to equal possessing a woman who made a show of resistance but knew when to yield. Ascanius had lost track of the women he had possessed since his first conquest at the rather advanced age of fifteen, some of them willing at the start, some protesting, all of them satisfied at the conclusion. In the cities of Hellas—Tiryns, Mycenae, Athens—even in gentler Troy and Dardania, rape was as often a compliment as an affront, and it was only a crime when committed in a temple, like Ajax's rape of Cassandra. Zeus himself had set enough examples.

"Do you mean you might kill me?"

"Oh, no. What a waste that would be!"

"I suppose you mean, then, that you might kiss me, and—what is the word?—spoil me."

"Not spoil you, *make* you a spoil."

"It sounds to me like much the same thing. I've been kissed once already, and if what follows is more energetic, well, I should be quite spoiled."

"It depends on the spoiler. I would be very careful."

Calmly she drew a copper pin from her upswept hair. It was very sharp, with a hilt like a bee. A tiny sword. "I could stab one of you and outrun the other. I defy any Trojan to outrun me."

"You won't need your little weapon on us," said Aeneas. "If you will turn your back, we will get into our loin cloths."

"I never turn my back on strangers," she said. "It is either ill-mannered or unsafe. Besides, I've already seen whatever there is to see, haven't I? When you get your clothes on, will you talk with me a little?"

She sat on a mossy rock and smiled at both of them, though perhaps a little more at Aeneas. The green hair, becomingly streaked with gold, the pointed ears, the diminutive stature—a Dryad, what else? Fled for centuries from the eastern end of the Great Green Sea—fled too from Crete, the island shaped like a ship—but here they endured and indeed seemed to flourish, if not to rule.

"Is your animal friendly? His eye has a crafty gleam. I haven't much acquaintance with dolph-

ins. They don't often swim up the Tiber, and I seldom go to the sea. It's too far from my oak."

"He's generally harmless," said Ascanius. "Except to those who would harm my—brother —and me." He still did not altogether trust her, and he trusted her the less because the stirring he felt was new to him and compounded of something more than mere desire, though certainly, fervently he desired her. In one way or another, he felt that she was a menace.

"I have a friend too. See?" She pointed to a bee circling lazily above her. "I call him Bonus Eventus because he brings me luck. Of course he's a drone and can't sting. But he carries messages. Now tell me about your leader. We have heard tales of him even here. But tales are sometimes altered in the telling. We have heard that he helped to betray his city to the Hellenes and then forsook his wife in the flames."

Ascanius' voice turned bronze. "You have heard lies. The story of his treachery was invented by those who envied his prowess. Aeneas is a great hero. Furthermore, he was a devoted husband to Creusa. He left her only in order to get his small son and his lame father to the Trojan ships on the beach. Then he returned to search for her. He never found her. She was a sweet and radiant lady, and he never ceased to mourn."

She looked at him with eyes as green as young acorns. "I believe you are telling me the truth as you know it. But you were a small child at the time, Phoenix." It was both flattering and unsettling to have her use his father's pet name for him on so short acquaintance. "How can you know what truly happened?"

"Believe me, I know."

"And Dido? Did he not forsake her?"

"He obeyed the command of the gods and departed from Carthage to rebuild Troy. He asked her to come with him. She refused."

"And killed herself out of love for him?"

"Out of wounded pride and self-pity." Ascanius had never liked the queen of Carthage. Her dark rages, her feverish laughter, even her dusky loveliness had repelled him. She had made him think of a black panther.

"No," said Aeneas gently. "I think she truly loved him. But she could not leave her people, and when he was gone, she could not stay with them either. She was a troubled woman; she had known too many losses. As for Aeneas, he loved her next to Creusa and his son. He still grieves for her and prays that her wandering shade

may have found its peace."

She shook her head in bewilderment. A curl escaped from her upswept hair and tumbled over her ear. He wanted to sweep it back into place. He liked her pointed ears. Their tips looked as soft as antelope fur.

"It all sounds so different, coming from you. It isn't the way I've heard it at all. I must see him for myself. If he is truly kind, why then—"

"He is the kindest man I have ever known," said Ascanius with ardor.

"You love him because he is your leader. I love Volumna, my queen. Even if they erred, we might not see their faults. Thank you, Phoenix and Halcyon. Now I must go."

"But what is your name?" cried Ascanius.

"Mellonia."

"The Lady of the Bees," said Aeneas. "Do you live on honey?"

"Yes," she laughed, "and I have a stinger. But not for you and your brother. Especially not for you. You're very quiet, but I think I like your thoughts." Then she was gone, and with her, Bonus Eventus.

"She's much too beautiful to be so trusting," said Ascanius. ("Or to trust," he muttered under his breath.) "We could have taken her, you know. In spite of her weapon."

Aeneas stared after her.

"You *were* very quiet with her, Father. Now you're quiet with me. What are you thinking?"

"That she somehow looked like your mother."

"You see mother's face in every beautiful woman. I saw the prettiest bedmate this side of Olympus."

"Phoenix, no harm must ever come to that girl."

"Father, I don't intend to hurt her. Don't you think that women like to be bedded? Don't you know that every woman aboard our ships would like to be bedded by you? As for me, am I so ill-favored and gross?"

Aeneas embraced him with a hearty laugh. It was good to hear his laugh, to feel it rumbling in his chest, deep and manly and yet somehow too a child's laugh, welling spontaneously out of a secret place in him which sorrow had never reached, where magic was everyday and gods walked with men instead of fought with them. "Uncomely? Even Dido had eyes for you, and you were only fifteen at the time. Why do you suppose I call you Phoenix?"

"Because of my yellow hair." Most Dardanians were dark, but Aeneas' hair had been gold before it turned silver the night when Troy fell, and

Phoenix' hair was the same rich color. Aphrodite's gold, people said.

"Also because so many women are burned by your fire!"

"I have to make up for my father, who is first in battle but last in bed. Who has only lain with two women in his whole life, and both of them his wives. Why, it's downright scandalous."

"I leave the burning to you. But not Mellonia. I'm sure she's a virgin. Lying with her would be a violation. Except in marriage."

"There aren't any virgins older than fifteen, except for women nobody has asked. Like Cassandra. Poor, peaked thing, no man could put up with all that wailing. If she had once stopped, she might have found a lover. Ajax only raped her because he caught her between wails, while she was praying to Athena."

"Nevertheless, you are not to touch Mellonia." His voice was quiet, but it was one of those rare times when he was father before he was friend.

"Very well, Father."

"Unless," Aeneas added thoughtfully, "she were your wife. Seventeen women on our ships, and the youngest well over thirty! If you are to wed at all, it must be a native of this land. And Mellonia stirred you, didn't she? I mean, with more than desire. I saw it in your eyes."

Ascanius said with surprise at his own intensity: "Why, yes, she did. A man wouldn't tire of her in a night—or even a month."

"Or even a lifetime," said Aeneas softly.

"Father, why don't *you* wed her? I watched your eyes too."

"I've killed two women already by marrying them."

"What in Hades do you mean? The Hellenes killed my mother, and Dido killed herself!"

"Because of me."

"Oh, Father, sometimes that little boy in you is so stupid I want to spank him. Let's go home."

Aeneas knelt on the bank and, speaking slowly and gesturing with his hands, asked Delphus to follow them by way of the river. The dolphin answered with what sounded to Ascanius like the clicking of knucklebones over a tile floor.

"What did he say?" asked Ascanius, who had never bothered to learn Delphinese.

"He says he'll beat us to the ships."

Arm in arm, bows over their shoulders, they started for the ships.

"Our men could use fresh meat," said Aeneas. "Our bread is moldy, our cheese isn't fit for

a rat. Another cake of meal will turn my stomach. But where are the animals?"

"We've scared them away by talking."

"Utmost silence then!"

But not for long. In a laurel grove, behind the feathery, aromatic foliage and the yellow-green flowers, flanks glittered, hooves thudded among ferns. Ascanius fired an arrow even as Aeneas raised a restraining hand.

"Father, I've shot a deer! Why did you try to stop me?"

"I'm not sure it was a deer."

They parted the foliage and found their quarry lying among violets. He wore no garments, and his four legs and silken flanks, seen from a distance through leafy branches, might have been those of a stag. But his arms and chest were those of a youth, and his young face seemed made to smile. Ascanius and Aeneas crouched beside him. In the lion-skin bag hanging from his neck, there was a comb of tortoise shell and a tiny alabaster vial of sweet-smelling resinous liquid. He was dead, of course. Ascanius' aim was unerring; Aeneas had taught him, and his arrows were feathered with Harpy feathers. Already there was a buzzing around the body. Aeneas smote at the insect with his hand. A bee, not a fly, it vanished into the forest.

"Father, I have done a terrible thing. I thought—I thought—"

"I know, Phoenix. You've never seen a Centaur before. I should have been quicker to stop you. We are equally to blame. We have murdered instead of hunted."

THREE

As she walked toward her tree, bemused, absent-mindedly plucking a narcissus only to scatter its petals after her and ignore the impulse of pain from the broken stem, she thought: "I am seventeen. It is time for me to visit the Sacred Tree. It is time to bear a child. I will ask Volumna's permission."

Most of her friends had already visited the Tree, but she had delayed until now; in fact, she had ignored Volumna's reminder that the tribe was in need of girls to rear instead of boys to expose. ("Our numbers are dwindling. Why, one of these days we may be forced to take husbands, like our disreputable sisters to the north. May lightning strike me first!")

She had talked with some of her friends. No, they could not remember what had happened in the Tree. They had entered the oaken door and lain among downy leaves, slept and dreamed. What kind of dreams? Sometimes dark and disturbing.

The evil dwarf-god Sylvanus came to them in nightmares too horrible to remember. Sometimes disturbing but decidedly not dark. A "golden pain" was the phrase Segeta had used to describe her first visitation from the god. "And when I knew myself with child, the pain was forgotten and the gold enveloped me like autumn leaves."

Still, Mellonia had delayed. She had enjoyed her friends; she had picked mushrooms with them in the forest; alone, she had gardened and woven and baked and read papyri from her chest. If she was not happy as she had been as a little girl, she did not demand happiness. Contentment with the task of the moment; wistful but not anguished rememberings of the time when her mother had shared her tree; adamant refusal to think about the future: it had been enough.

It was no longer enough. Her change in mood puzzled and disturbed her. Usually she liked mysteries. Were most men evil or merely crude and ignorant? Why had Rumina wed the god Ruminus and yet forbidden her mortal daughters to wed either human or Wanderwooder? She liked mysteries, but not in herself. It angered her to feel unaccountable feelings, to perform uncharacteristic actions. She had just murdered a narcissus. Unlike roses, which shuddered if you so much as sniffed them, narcissi were not particularly sensitive flowers. Nevertheless, she had felt its tiny pain without remorse. Yesterday she would have left the flower on its stem. She had just decided to visit the Sacred Tree. Yesterday she had felt no urge to sleep and risk disturbing dreams and bear a child who might be a boy.

Perhaps the change had something to do with the strangers, Phoenix and Halcyon. Surely it had something to do with them. It's because they're men, she decided, and I liked them, and now it won't be a horror to me if I bear a son. I will ask Volumna if I may rear him in my tree and hope that he will look and act like Halcyon. The Dryads to the north do not expose their sons. Why must I? I will speak to Volumna.

She had liked both of the strangers. Phoenix had reminded her of Bounder, pretty enough to admire, earthly enough to tease. Yes, earthly, that was the word, and she was at ease with the things of earth. Like Bounder, he had stared at her intently and looked as if he wanted a kiss, but she had not been angry with him. (Males of all races seemed to set great store by kisses.)

As for his brother, Halcyon, he was not in the least like

Bounder or Phoenix. The silver hair: snow in the boughs of a tree. But the tree was green. She had sensed a sadness in him much older than his young face, but there had sometimes been a child's twinkle about him too. She felt drawn to him in a way which she could not understand. She wanted—what? To touch his hair. To touch his cheek with her lips. Like a daughter—except that he did not look old enough to be her father. Like a sister—except that he was a man and men were said to be brutes. But she had found him kind. Her feelings usually drenched her like a cold spring shower or warmed her like a hearthfire or burned her like hot coals from an overturned brazier, and she had no difficulty in knowing what she felt at what particular moment. Now, it was as if she were being drenched by a shower and warmed by a hearthfire at the same time. At least she was not being burned by the coals!

Suddenly the forest seemed hostile to her. She wished for her tree. Lions were rare; roguish Fauns were frequent but a nuisance, not a danger. Perhaps it was not a fear which hurried her steps but the aloneness of the place. Oak, myrtle, elm. Thicket of brambles, clearing of grass. She felt their emanations like little gusts of chilling wind. They did not dislike her but they did not companion her, not in this part of the forest. She wished for wisps of smoke from the hearths of the Centaurs, but their compound lay too far to the north. She wished for the singing of a Dryad as she combed her hair, but these oaks were not inhabited, nor did they invite inhabitants. She wished for her friends, Bounder or Bonus Eventus. She wished most of all for the Sacred Oak.

There, there, at last, a little apart from the other trees though still a part of the Dryad circle, surrounded by grass and daisies and a garden of lentils and lettuce, stood the oak which was her home. She called it "Nightingale" after the bird she loved the most, the plain brown little bird which opened its beak and sang more silverly than a lyre. It was as old as the forest, as large in circumference as a small hut. Her mother, her grandmother, how far back had her family lived in that tree? Since the time when Saturn had ruled in the land and women had married men instead of fighting against them, before the coming of lions, before the coming of wars. She would live until it died, unless she was struck by lightning like her mother, or killed by a lion or a blood-sucking Strige—or, as Volumna liked to warn, a

human male. If she died, the tree would continue to flourish so long as it was inhabited—and loved—by a member of her family; if the tree died, she herself would die.

She opened the wooden door, red with the dye of the cochineal, and entered the trunk. The tree was not hollow as strangers sometimes supposed, it was alive, and to live it must hold sufficient wood for the sap to flow from roots to branches. But it was so large that her first ancestress had carved a narrow chute, like a well, all the way up the trunk to the branches and had cut rungs into the wooden walls. Large trees were tough; they did not feel such things, or if they felt they shuddered and then accepted, glad to make room for life, for children, as it were, to inhabit them (like a Dryad who had lain in the Sacred Oak?).

Inside the door, an olive oil lamp burned constantly in a niche and lit the way, step over step, to the hut which sat in the branches like a great beehive: a round hut of willow boughs bent to peak at the top and honeycombed with a dozen round windows which could be closed with parchment in the winter for the White Sleep but opened in spring to admit the daffodil-whispering breezes and the complaints of the grass as it clawed its way through the earth and finally thrust its blades to the sun. In the single room, which was fragrant with bergamot and mignonette and other such flowers as could be plucked without inflicting pain upon them, there was a couch of lion skin stretched across a wooden frame. A handloom. A box of hammered silver to hold the gems—topaz, porphyry, moss agate—which she found in dry stream beds or lodged among roots and traded with the Centaurs for grain and vegetables. Three tables hewn from a dead elm tree, with small bases and bulbous tops and resembling large mushrooms, one for meals, one for the varicolored yarns which she wove into tunics and cloaks, one to hold a daisy growing in an urn shaped like a water lily. And finally a chest with round slots for her beloved papyri. Hellene, Latin, Egyptian—the roaming Centaurs, those restless linguists, had brought these tongues and scrolls inscribed with them from the far edges of the world. She had understood the brothers when they had spoken Dardanian, one of the Hellene dialects, and Halcyon had said to Phoenix: "I hear something in the woods." (She had wanted to say, "You had better speak Assyrian if you don't want to be understood!") She herself was limited to her

travels. In a single day from her tree, she would pale and start to feel listless; in five days, she would pine and probably die. But she traveled through her scrolls. She knew about the fall of Troy from an eyewitness account by a Hellene scribe; she owned a copy of the Egyptian Book of the Dead; and her own people were famous for their dirges, collected into a scroll, about winter and the death of leaves and the sorrow of bearing a boy instead of a girl; and their paeans about awaking from the White Sleep and running barefoot over the new-grown grass to greet their friends.

But she did not feel like reading poems or histories or scrolls of any kind.

She lay on the couch and felt as if she were rolling in sun-warmed leaves and started to dream a waking dream. Rock crystal wind chimes tinkled sweetly among the branches around the house and wafted her spirit to the heart of the Sacred Tree, dim and enigmatic but no longer threatening. Someone was watching beyond the door. A Dryad? A man. Halcyon. His face was kind and sad, and he moved toward the door. No, she wanted to cry. It is forbidden to men! Even to other Dryads when one is "couched for the God." Yes, she wanted to cry. Risk the danger, come to me in the Tree, your eyes as blue as a halcyon feather, in place of a god whose face I have never seen!

Ah, such sweet and impious dreams might come unbidden in the night, but she did not have to endure them in the afternoon. She sprang to her feet and peered through one of the windows and breathed the leaf-cleansed air and felt the kindly emanations of her mother tree. Had it been a presentiment? Dryads were sometimes blessed or cursed with intimations of the future. Impossible! A vagrant fancy, and not to be indulged. She would fetch some cheese and wine from the basement lodged among the roots. She would bake some blueberry cakes for Bounder in the small brink oven and—

A bee spiraled in one of the windows.

"Bonus Eventus!" she cried, inexplicably glad to have a companion, however small. To Fauns and Centaurs, to any untrained eye, bees were either small or large—honeybee or bumblebee or mason bee—otherwise indistinguishable. Bonus Eventus was a honeybee, but slim for a drone, almost as slim as a worker, and almost hairless, with wide transparent wings which were his special pride. There was always a scent of myrrh about him, and when he rested against her breast, she

felt a faint rumbling of contentment. Vain? Of course. He felt assured that the queen would accept *his* favors at her next nuptial flight. Indolent? Of course. He slept in flowers instead of gathering myrrh to manufacture honey. But he was also loyal, and she loved him as a true friend, as Halcyon loved his dolphin, Delphus, and she dreaded the fact that his little life, so lately begun this very spring, must end with the fall.

"You're just in time. I was going to fetch you some honey from the basement." Being a drone, he was sometimes denied his supper by the intolerant workers. "Do you think I'm pretty? Bounder said I was."

But she saw at once that he had not come to exchange compliments for honey. He was not wheeling happy arcs of pleasure or gratitude, but tracing a ragged pattern of pyramids.

"Come. Beware. Danger."

She pressed her hand to her hair and, feeling among harmless ornaments—hawk moth of malachite and porphyry dragonfly—felt the lethal pin like a tiny sword. It was dipped in the venom of a large, hairy spider called the Jumper, with green eyes and sharp mandibles. It was deadlier than a Strige.

"Lions?"

A quick downward spiral. "No."

Then he spurted from the window. Whatever the danger, she was meant to follow him.

Bounder appeared to be sleeping in the sun. He had learned some indolent ways from Bonus Eventus, and he liked a nap in the afternoon. There was no sign of violence. The grass was not scented with lion or wolf, nor wet with blood. But when she knelt, she saw that his eyes were closed more tightly than with sleep, his lips were twisted with pain, and deep in his breast lodged the telltale arrow, feathered with Harpy feathers.

Which of the brothers had killed him, she did not know, but they seemed to her equal in guilt. Had they not hunted together? It mattered little which had raised his bow.

Bonus Eventus lit on her cheek as lightly as a tear.

Her mother had died in lightning, and she had sat at her loom from sunrise to sunset, ten days in a row, singing the old lament, "Only Night Heals Again." Every year, before the assuagement of the White Sleep, she grieved for the falling leaves and the wilting flowers. But these were part of the natural order of things, the way of the earth, the forest, Rumina's divine plan. This was invasion, however, this was murder. Volumna had told her the truth

about men, particularly Aeneas' men, it would seem. And what of Aeneas himself? Old, battle-scarred, no doubt, accumulating crimes as if they were acorns to string on a necklace.

Anger clawed at her throat like an ice-encrusted branch.

She kissed Bounder on the mouth. "It is my last gift except one," she said. "And it comes too late."

But there was still the last gift.

She had only to follow the Tiber to find the Trojan ships.

Five ships, cabinless except for canvas stretched across the decks as makeshift roofs: Their bronze-jawed dragon bows were moored to trunks, their oars had been lifted from the water and laid along the open areas of deck. Fifteen ocher moons had been painted on every hull to signify their long years of voyaging. The sails which had once been white, lowered now, were rent and soiled by many winds. It might have been a straggling pirate fleet instead of the remnant of the once formidable navy which had guarded the entrance to the Black Sea and the fields of grain which were called the Golden Fleece. It might have looked pathetic if she had not learned the identity of its sailors. Was Aeneas as cruel as those two treacherous brothers who should have been known as Hawk and Falcon?

She knelt—and listened—and heard. She did not comb and pin her tresses above her ears out of vanity, but to sharpen her hearing against the approach of lion—or man. The Trojans had made a camp on the shore. They moved among tents of tattered sailcloth, a few women among them, poor bedraggled things in robes which hung like dead brown leaves to their ankles (where were the bell-shaped skirts the Trojan women were said to have borrowed from their Cretan ancestors?). The men, for the most part, were bearded and scarred and mature, if not elderly. They wore loin cloths of sheepskin, except for two men who patrolled the camp in battered armor, holding crooked spears and looking too tired to hurl them. There, too, was that trifling Faun, Mischief, who had brought the Dryads news of Aeneas' arrival. Now he was ingratiating himself with the Trojans, scratching his stomach, stomping his hoof, making them howl with laughter—and no doubt telling them news of the Dryads.

And there of course were the brothers, standing apart from the other men and talking to each other with great earnestness. She could only catch some of their words at such a

distance. They had killed a Centaur. . . .They must return to find his body. . . .

Horror flapped in her like a bat. Doubtless they meant to lash his hooves to a pole and bring him back to their camp and roast him over a fire! They would feast and drink and dine on the flesh of the land, and tomorrow the tired spearmen, one as bristly as a boar, one too young for a beard, would doubtless wake refreshed and invade the woods for another night's feast. She only wondered how Mischief had escaped the pot. Perhaps they hoped to keep him as a spy.

"Aeneas!" It was the beardless spearman who spoke.

Her ears stiffened at the name.

Halcyon-Aeneas turned to face the man who had called him. "Yes, Euryalus."

"Will you need help?" Euryalus was about her own age, she judged. He must have been a baby when Troy fell. His cheeks were as pink as the inside of a triton shell. It is the pretty faces which hide the greatest treachery, she decided.

She stpped out of the trees. "Aeneas," she called.

Halcyon-Aeneas looked at her with surprise and what she would have mistaken for pleasure if she had not learned the wickedness of his heart.

"Mellonia. You've come to visit our camp. I hoped you would. You left before I could ask where you lived."

"I thought your name was Halcyon."

"I told you it was," Ascanius-Phoenix hurried to say. "We're new to your land. I didn't want my father recognized until we knew who you were. He has many enemies."

"Now you know me. I commend your piety. Where are you going?" Her heart beat like a moth in a spider's web; lies were hard for her. But she had a good teacher.

She held her ground as Aeneas walked toward her. She could outrun him and he did not hold a bow. She could easily dodge a spear from one of the guards.

"Mellonia, my son and I have made a terrible blunder. We mistook a Centaur for a deer, and—"

"I killed him," said Ascanius. "It was I who made the blunder, not my father."

"My son had never seen a Centaur. Neither had I since I was a small boy. I should have stopped him, though. Now we are going to bury him."

Bury him? Skin him was nearer the truth! "I'll take you to him," she said. "You may lose your way in the forest. Just the two of you, though. It would not be respectful for more to come."

"But his friends," said Ascanius. "Won't they be angry and try to harm us?" He turned to his father. "I think we should take Nisus and Euryalus with us."

"I will explain to the other Centaurs what happened. They are a kindly race. They will understand, if you give him the proper rites."

Aeneas and Ascanius walked toward her.

The coolness of their cunning! Why, they had even fixed their features into expressions of pain. Aeneas at least. Ascanius looked more concerned for their safety than sorry for Bounder. But Aeneas might have been grieving for a lost friend. With just such a look he had no doubt confronted Dido before he deserted her.

They will try to take me, she thought. Perhaps they will try to kill me. But the sea and the ships are their strength. The forest is strange to them.

It has fallen to me to kill Aeneas.

FOUR

Mellonia tried to walk ahead of them, but Ascanius, shovel over his shoulder, kept abreast of her and looked from time to time at the pale, rigid features so recently as fresh and piquant as a lotus blossom. He had liked the forest when he and his father had swum in the Tiber with Delphus, and talked of cities burned and cities to build, and watched Mellonia materialize from the trees, a girl with green hair and pointed ears and a curiosity to rival that of Pandora. He had thought: At last my father has found a country in which to build his second Troy, fulfill his destiny and satisfy the gods—to rest and grow young with me. Perhaps he has also found a wife to help him forget that long-faced Dido. Even Orestes finally escaped from the Furies.

Still, there had been a doubt. Mellonia was more than a girl; she lived in an oak tree and spoke of mysteries and hid as much as she said. Had not Pandora released a box of misfortunes into the world?

Now he was more than doubtful, he was frightened, and fear was rare in Ascanius; not caution, but downright bone-chilling fear. He was not particularly remorseful at having killed a Centaur. He rather imagined that Centaurs, being half horse, were limited in both intelligence and feeling. He had killed men deliberately in battle, many of them. Why should he grieve at having killed a horse-man which he had mistaken for a deer? But he felt his father's pain with an almost physical intensity. That was

Ascanius' blessing, that was his curse, to love Aeneas more than any other man, woman, or god. As for himself, he was a warrior, neither more nor less; he liked to fight; he was not a killer but he was not squeamish when he had to kill; he even liked this wandering life and rather thought that he was meant to be a pirate instead of inhabit and behave in a city. Certainly he had never regretted the cities to which he had put the torch. As it was, however, those implacable ladies, the Fates, had woven his destiny into the same design with that of Aeneas. Cut a single thread and both men suffered the same misfortune. They might have been Castor and Pollux, brother and brother, instead of father and son. If his father asked him, he would even have built one of those preposterous Egyptian pyramids (with the help of a few thousand slaves).

One thing he refused to do: Allow Aeneas to be endangered by a disconcerting girl who lived in a tree but who, in spite of her virginal airs, probably rolled in the grass with any Centaur who gave her a whinny. He had been too young to protect his father from Dido, that devious queen with eyes of burning pitch and the cry of a tropical bird surprised by a lion. Aeneas' gentle but firm authority had led the Trojan exiles through even more dangerous trials than Odysseus had faced, but his defenses against a helpless or helpless-seeming woman, alas, were not those of Odysseus; they were about as adequate as acorns hurled against Amazons. But Ascanius was five years worldlier now than in what he liked to call "Dido's den." He knew about women; what they were good for (except for his mother, little more than to tease the eye and warm the bed) and when to beware of them (most of the time, and especially when they cried or smiled or avoided looking at you).

The silence of the forest began to grow intolerable. Ascanius was almost indifferent to flowers. Vaguely he noted an abundance of daisies in the open spaces, but he could not have named those tall purple flowers on spiky stems which grew among them. But he instantly noticed sounds, footprints, signs of danger. There were no sounds now except their own feet padding the grass, Mellonia barefoot, he and his father sandaled with Egyptian antelope leather, and that in itself was an ominous sign. As long as they followed the Tiber, with Mellonia on the forest side of them, he felt relatively safe; but when they left the river and plunged among oak trees as hoary with

moss as a sunken ship with barnacles, his muscles tautened, his vision intensified, and he watched Mellonia like a cormorant watching a fish, but with the suspicion at times that she was the cormorant, he and his father fish (here in the forest, perhaps, he should change his simile to eagle and hare).

"Father," he said. "Do you realize we're two miles from the ships? I think we should let Mellonia and her friends bury the Centaur." Her upswept hair was tumbling over her ears; she had torn her tunic in several provocative places (one breast was almost exposed). All in all, so it seemed to him, she had very calculatingly become a Dryad in distress.

"It isn't far," said Mellonia quickly. "Just beyond that copse of elms."

"How do the Centaurs bury their dead?" Aeneas asked. His voice was grave and hushed; there was such a tenderness in his eyes that Ascanius wanted to shake the wretched girl for exploiting his father's sympathies.

"In the earth, where else?"

(And shake her too for her impertinence.)

"I mean, do they raise a funeral pyre and burn the body first?"

"No. They dig a space and cushion it with grass. And stretch the body as if it were asleep and include a few possessions which might be useful on the journey to the Underworld."

"What prayers do they pray?"

"They make up a prayer for the occasion. They are natural poets and words come easily to them."

Bounder's body had not been moved or disturbed. Except for the pain in his face, he still had the disconcerting look of one who had fallen asleep in the sun. Aeneas knelt beside him and smoothed the lines of pain around his eyes and mouth.

"He was just a boy. What was his name, Mellonia?"

"Bounder."

"How did you happen to find his body?"

"Bonus Eventus led me here."

"Did Bounder believe in Elysium?"

"I don't know that word. He talked about a meadow and an oak grove where there was never a White Sleep and Dryads lived in marriage with Centaurs. He once said he would like to marry me. I thought he was teasing."

"Don't your people ever marry Centaurs? They seem a noble race." (Noble! Well, there was a certain nobility about the horses which drew a great

warrior's chariot—Achilles' steed Xanthus, for example. But who wanted to marry them?)

"Never."

"I'm sorry. I think he must have loved you."

"He kissed me once. I'm not sure what he meant. It seemed to please him."

"Did you love him?"

"Love him? He made me want to run in the grass and swim in the river. He made me think of beginnings. I went with him once to see his newborn brother. He was trying his spindly legs, and I was happy when he learned to stand. I fed him honey cakes and I wanted a child of my own. Even a little boy with horns. That's all I know. Sometimes I was angry with him, but never for long."

"If you don't marry the Centaurs, who fathers your children? I have never heard of a male Dryad."

"We go to our Sacred Tree and wait for our god Ruminus. But please—I don't want to talk about such things now." She led them across the meadow to a space of sand and tiny stones.

"Here is the place to dig his grave. There are flowers around it, but the spot itself is bare. A thunderbolt landed here. You won't kill anything except a little grass."

Mellonia stood apart from them, watching their efforts with a mixture of expectation and perplexity. Had she expected them to skin the Centaur and make a rug from his coat? Ascanius in turn watched her, covertly but with the wariness of one who had never lived in a time of peace or sailed on a sea without the threat of a storm. The bee-tipped pin glinted in her disheveled hair. He watched her hands.

They lined the grave with sweet-smelling grasses and settled the body among them with tender hands.

"Strew him with violets. They are pretty flowers but with little feeling. They don't feel pain when you break their necks. He liked them. And leave the bag around his neck. He was never without his comb and scent bottle."

Aeneas drew the ring from his finger, a black pearl which had come to him from his father, and to his father from Aphrodite. It was very dear to him, large as a small coal, a dark smoky gray which smoldered in the sun.

"To pay Charon," he said. "In Troy we used to place a coin under the tongue of the dead man before we laid his body on the funeral pyre."

"It is a beautiful ring," said Mellonia. "I wish—I wish Bounder could have worn such a ring while alive. He was very

proud of the way he dressed. I used to tease him. 'You're vain,' I said. 'Yes,' he answered. 'To please you.' "

"May I say a prayer now?"

"Yes."

"Persephone, you have known what it is to be stolen out of the sun and into the dark. You were just about Bounder's age, I should think, when Hades carried you into the Underworld. You loved violets too. Hyacinths and columbine. Companion Bounder in his first loneliness. Show him that asphodels too are flowers. Weave him a garland to wear around his neck."

Mellonia not so much interrupted as continued the prayer, though she substituted the Latin name for the deity:

"Proserpina, comb his hair for him, will you? His arms aren't long enough to reach the end of his mane. Good-by, Bounder. Dream of me while you sleep, and I will bring you violets and kiss you on the lips."

"If you dream of Phoenix and me," said Aeneas, "may it be as men who mistakenly did you a terrible wrong but would have liked to be your friends." Then he whispered a poem which, like much of his poetry, pleased but puzzled Ascanius:

Purple is distance;
Tyrian murex,
Hyacinth over the hill.
Purple is distance only:
Violets wilt in the hand.

He turned from the grave and silently, motionlessly started to cry. As a little boy, Ascanius had seen his father cry when Creusa was lost among the ruins of Troy, again when they left Carthage and Aeneas saw the smoke of Dido's funeral pyre, and again after a battle in which a friend had been killed.

Ascanius threw his arms around him as if he were comforting a little child. "Hush, hush, my dear. You mustn't cry for my foolishness."

Aeneas returned his embrace; you forgot how strong he was until you felt his powerful arms. Where other men smelled of leather or bronze, Aeneas smelled of the sea—its foam and its salt-fresh winds. Even his silver hair, pressed against Ascanius' cheek, was crisp with salt. Ascanius knew that he was not weeping for the death of one Centaur; his griefs had accumulated like frost on the deck of a ship, and he wept for the world's lost youth, for the golden city stricken by another gold called fire, for those who had loved him and gone to join Persephone. At such times, you could only hold and warm him against the frost of memory.

Just for that little moment Ascanius forgot to watch Mellonia. When he remembered to watch her, she had drawn the

pin from her hair and she stood as still as the tree in which she claimed to live. She might have been grown from the earth instead of born to a Dryad mother. Even her arms, raised in front of her, seemed frozen in the air like delicate branches.

He stepped behind her, encircled her with his own, anything but delicate arms, and pressed her wrist cruelly until she dropped the pin. Anger scraped in him like crusted barnacles. He wanted to break her neck.

"Which one of us were you going to stab?"

"Aeneas first. Then you, if I had the chance."

She did not ask for mercy, nor did she seem to be angry or frightened. He could have crushed her in his arms. How small she was! Such tiny bones—and the faint, rapid heartbeat—how did it sustain even so small a being? Her hair seemed spun out of leaves and sunbeams. And yet she had meant to murder both of them.

"But you didn't," said Aeneas. "Why didn't you, Lady of the Bees?"

"At first I thought you had killed Bounder for game, for food. But then you dug a grave and picked violets, and your eyes were windows into your soul, and I saw a pain which made me yearn to you."

"And my son?"

"He loves you. Thus he is part of you. I couldn't hurt him."

"Let her go, Phoenix."

Reluctantly Ascanius released her and quickly retrieved the deadly pin. "I wouldn't have hesitated to kill *you*," he said, "if I had known you planned to hurt my father."

She smiled at him. "But that too would have been a kind of love, wouldn't it? I can't be angry with you, Phoenix. We're much the same, after all. We are willing to kill for those we love."

"Shall we be friends, Mellonia?" Aeneas asked. It was one of those invitations which no one ever refused. Inwardly, Ascanius sighed. The only time he envied his father was when Aeneas made a conquest with a smile and then refused what he had won, while he, Ascanius, in spite of his looks—and he was not unacquainted with mirrors—must woo with gifts and compliments.

She took Aeneas' hand and pressed it to her cheek. There was no coquetry in the movement. It was as simple and artless as Ascanius embracing his father.

"What a small hand you have for a warrior. Younger, even, than your face. A boy's hand," she said. "Bounder wouldn't want you to be sad for him any more. Neither do I."

She dropped his hand and shook her head violently. A curl quivered above her ear like a tendril of grapevine. "I can't be your friend even though I want to."

"What do you mean?"

"My people have taken an oath to kill you. You shouldn't be here now. Return to your ships and never come here again without your men. Never swim in the Tiber without Delphus. And beware of oak trees. The ones which look as if they were listening."

Aeneas gripped her shoulder. "Mellonia, you're not going to run away again?"

"I must."

"But how can we see you again?"

"I must speak to Volumna, but I think—"

"What, Mellonia?"

"That she will not change her mind. That she will tell me I am a foolish girl and it is time I visited the Tree."

"To be got with child?"

"Yes. Volumna says that a baby cures her mother of childish fancies. If it's a boy, she hardens her spirit as a tree its trunk. If it's a girl, she learns self-sacrifice, like a bush giving its branches to the birds."

"But I don't understand about this tree. You say a god will come to you there?"

"He will come in a dream, and then I will bear a child."

"But gods don't come in a dream if they mean to father a child. Or goddesses either, if they want to be mothers. When Aphrodite came to my father, she was very real. He never tired of telling about her. Hair the color of lapis lazuli. A gown which shimmered as if a spider had woven it. And—well, such specific details, and so many, that he couldn't have dreamed them all." (His father was being discreet, Ascanius reflected; those "specific details" had included a manual for love-making which only the goddess of love, or a highly skilled courtesan, could have mastered and taught.) "Why, she even gave him the ring I placed on Bounder's finger."

"Our god is different. You might say he whispers a child into our wombs. Please let me go now. The danger is very real to both of you. The Dryad trees—the listening oaks—are some distance away, but Volumna often comes to this meadow to pick the violets."

He released her instantly. "Then come to the ships again—"

Already there were oak leaves closing behind her, almost as if she had opened and shut a door.

Aeneas moved to follow her. Ascanius seized him roughly by the arm—his own father, the son of a goddess!—and stepped

quickly in front of him.

"Father, no! Didn't you listen to her? You'll get yourself killed and her too, and I'll have to chop down every tree in this Zeus-forsaken forest to get that bitch she calls a queen!"

There was fire in Aeneas' eyes. Calm, deliberative Aeneas, aroused to wrath! A blow of his fist will break my jaw, Ascanius thought. But at least I will stop him from chasing Mellonia. He will have to carry me to the camp, and then he will feel too ashamed to leave my side until he is sure I will heal.

"There's another way," Ascanius pleaded, though quite prepared for a broken jaw. "We'll find out about the Tree from Mischief. And about Volumna. Then, whatever you decide I'll follow you."

Ascanius felt his father relax between his grip. "You would have hit me, Phoenix, wouldn't you? To keep me out of danger."

"Tried, at least. And slung you over my shoulder like a deer and carried you back to the camp. That is, if I had gotten the first blow, which is very unlikely. Otherwise, you would have done the carrying. If there was anything left to carry."

"I think," said Aeneas, "that this is the first time in my life I'm grateful that someone wanted to knock me unconscious. No, the second. Remember the time Achilles almost killed me? Overturned my chariot and tried to run me down?"

"I was not yet five. But, yes, I remember. How could I forget? The whole city was watching from the walls, including mother and me."

"The very next morning, I meant to face him again, in a battered chariot drawn by weary horses. That night your mother kissed me and served me wine. 'A rare vintage,' she said. 'And rarer in Troy after so long a siege. It will help you to sleep.' It was heavily drugged. I slept for three days. During that time, Achilles caught an arrow in his heel."

"It seems I inherited mother's selfishness. I don't want to lose you."

Back at their camp, they found Mischief amusing the men with a dance and a song so piercingly sweet that you thought a nightingale must be imprisoned in his flute. The dance was a curious mingling of leaps and whirls, and he danced with a grace belied by his cloven hooves and his shaggy frame. He stirred your blood; your feet seemed to move of their own accord; your loins yearned for the woman you had never met, the Nereid under the wave, the goddess in her cloud:

Queens walk in the dusk.
Listen!
Their antelope sandals hush the grass.
Shall Helen, mute,
Forget the tumbling jonquils of her hair,
Ungarlanded?
Queens walk in the dusk. . . .

Aeneas too felt the magic. Music was wine to him and he often led the men in the Dance of the Crane, learned from the old Cretans.

"Mischief," he called at last, shaking himself to break the spell. "Will you come to my tent?"

Mischief flung the flute to Euryalus and shambled after Aeneas and Ascanius. His head lolled to the side; the fur on his goat-like flanks was matted with cockleburs; he wore a perpetual grin not unmixed with guile. Music had made him a demigod; now he was a clown. Ascanius, however, did not think him as stupid as he tried to look.

"Mischief," Aeneas asked, "there are no female Fauns in Italia, are there?"

Mischief drooped his head. He smelled of sweat and rancid fish. (The Fauns fished eels from the Tiber with nets of animal hide.)

"No, my King."

No one else called Aeneas "King," though except for the Trojan War he would have sat on a gypsum throne and ruled Dardania. He did not like the title. He remembered the one who should have been his queen.

"But you must need women. In my part of the world, your people, whom we call Satyrs, have always been known for their womanizing. Or are you like the Achaeans—Achilles and Patroclus—and satisfied with each other?"

"Only when women are scarce."

"And when they aren't, where do you find them?"

"The Volscian women rule their husbands in their homes. But in the woods, they like a bit of sport, and we rule them." It was hard to imagine any woman succumbing to Mischief. Perhaps at times he exhales an irresistible musk, concluded Ascanius. That, and his music, and his overgenerous endowment, an enviable characteristic of his race, and the fact that most women want to be bedded as badly as men want to bed them, perhaps explain his boast.

"Who else? The Volscians live at some distance, I believe. King Latinus and his people still further."

"The Dryads! They're the best. Sweet as a honey comb!"

"But Mellonia told us they never take husbands or lovers."

"We take *them.*"

"You ravish them?"

"You might call it that.

While they're sleeping in that hollow tree of theirs. It's midway between this camp and the circle of Dryad oaks. You follow the Tiber till you come to a lightning-blasted stump. Then, a javelin throw from the river, is the tree. It's dead, of course. Gnarled and crooked. Like a big gray viper standing on its tail."

"They must sleep very soundly."

A huge grin split his face. His teeth were surprisingly clean and small.

"They do. There's time enough for three or four of us to visit the same Dryad. You see, they drug themselves on the juices of the poppy."

"But don't the other Dryads try to stop you?"

"There aren't any close enough. It's one of their customs. The Dryad who wants a child comes alone to the tree. In she goes and bolts the door behind her with a big oak timber. But a long time ago, we dug a tunnel right up through the roots and into the chamber where she sleeps. It's dark in the tree. Even if she woke, she wouldn't see us coming. Or leaving, as happened a time or two to me. I was overzealous and aroused her from sleep."

"And then they bear your children and thank Ruminus."

"Who whispers into their wombs," muttered Ascanius.

"Yes, and they must like it, even in their sleep. They keep coming back. Dryads live as long as their trees, you know. Often they bear as many as twenty children. If the child is a girl, she's kept, since the girls resemble their mothers. Pointed ears, but that's all. If the child is a boy—tail, hooves, hairy flanks—they expose him because he looks like us, though of course they don't know why. They have some silly legend that a long time ago one of them lay with a Faun and put a curse on the race, and the curse repeats itself in every boy. They leave him under a tree for the lions to eat. We rescue some of them, though, and raise them to be our sons."

"And no one even suspects?"

"I don't know. Volumna isn't a fool. But if she knows, she keeps it to herself. My father had her. And my grandfather. They said she wasn't bad. Maybe she's waiting for me."

"Do you know the Dryad named Mellonia?"

"How could I not? We call her the Lady of the Bees. Still a virgin, poor thing, and afraid to visit the tree. But Volumna is going to make her go before long. I overhead her talking to the girl's aunt, Segeta. Have I told you what you want to know?"

"Yes."

"Give me a dagger."

"Your hooves are weapons enough."

"A loin cloth then?"

"With all that hair? You're born in a loin cloth."

"The female Centaurs make fun of my nakedness. They won't let me in their compound."

"Very well."

"And a flute? Mine is wooden. Euryalus has one of tortoise shell. I like his better."

"I'll speak to Euryalus."

"And rings of gold for my horns."

"We have none. We are very poor."

Mischief shrugged. "Supper then. Something different from roots and berries and woodpecker eggs."

"Ask the men to feed you. Nisus over there will give you some cakes of meal. And, Mischief. One thing more."

"Yes, King Aeneas?"

"If you touch Mellonia,"—his tone would have chilled Achilles—"you or your friends, I will kill you and use your pelt to make a rug for my tent!"

Mischief lost his smile. There was no awkwardness in his departure. He left behind him a few hoofprints and an odor of fish.

"I think," smiled Aeneas, "that we should burn some laurel branches in our tent." Then, seriously, "we must warn Mellonia. I don't trust Mischief. Or his friends."

"How will we find her?"

"We already know how to find the tree. And Mischief will doubtless know when she plans to 'await the God.' He seems to know everything. Did you ever notice the size of his ears? I'll go there alone and guard her myself."

"You won't go anywhere alone. Her people may sight us along the way. In these parts, it seems, even the bees tell tales. I'll go with you and stand watch at the mouth of the tunnel."

"If I ask you to stay in the camp?"

"No."

"If I order you?"

"No."

"To avoid getting knocked down and slung over your shoulder like a deer, I suppose I will have to agree."

"That's sensible of you, Father. But is it so horrible that a Faun should take Mellonia? They aren't all like Mischief, I should hope. And she seems to want a child. If it weren't for the Fauns, her race would die."

"No man is going to take her, Faun or otherwise! Not against her will."

"Father, you haven't looked this way since you met Dido. You're such a trial to me with your women. You mistake

them for goddesses and then forget that even the Olympians have their failings. Grandmother hasn't exactly been a faithful wife, has she? I mean, she's married to Hephaestus, but that didn't keep her away from Ares or Zeus of grandfather. I wonder if I'll ever rear you into a safe old age."

"Don't worry, Phoenix. I don't mean to take her for myself. Not even in marriage."

"Why not? I don't particularly welcome the prospect of a Dryad as a stepmother—this one is much too pretty. But you would do her a singular honor."

"I'm more than twice her age."

"How many times have people mistaken you for my brother instead of my father? One of these days, I'm going to look like your father. Besides, you're a long way from that last ferry ride over the Styx."

"Yes, but is Mellonia? I mean, if she marries me?"

FIVE

The Dryad oaks formed a rough semicircle among larger groves of beech and elm. A stranger might walk among them and mistake the sweet hum of their looms for industrious insects, mistake their doors for cracks in the bark. The little beehive houses sat secretly among the branches, invisible from the ground except for an occasional glint of brown which seemed a part of the tree.

Only a stranger would walk into this circle or a Centaur or Mischief or another Faun, who, in spite of his bestiality, might be useful, or a Volscian maiden; and the stranger, if he were male and human, would hear a hum not of looms and feel himself prickled with tiny darts which seemed no more painful than bee stings but killed in a space of seconds with the poison of the Jumper; or perhaps he would be assaulted by actual bees and stung to death, though the bees too died in the act of stinging and the Dryads only used them against a terrible threat.

It seemed to Mellonia that Volumna had never looked more serene and confident as she stepped from her tree. It was hard to believe that she did not live in one of those storied Cretan palaces, now in ruins, where queens had sat on griffin-flanked thrones and bathed in marble tubs with silver spouts. The upswept swirling silver of her hair, still faintly touched with green, might have been leaves mantled with frost. The body beneath the green tunic was sapling-slender and fragrant with many myrrhs. She had ruled her people for almost three hun-

dred years and had made them feared and respected in the Wanderwood. She had fulfilled her self-appointed destiny. She walked in the tranquillity of her power and achievement.

Aeneas and Volumna, though enemies, had much in common. Both were leaders. Both were ripe with years, even to the silver of their hair, and yet they were somehow young. But there was a difference as great as that between the sea and the forest. Aeneas was not tranquil. Aeneas was still tormented by self-doubts, and in his anguish, it seemed to Mellonia, lay his grandeur. No leader had earned tranquillity while those around him suffered pain. Bounder had died; Aeneas, not Volumna, had grieved for him, and not only because his son had shot the fatal arrow. ("All things die," Volumna had said to her. "And after all, he was only a Centaur—and male at that.")

"My daughter, I am pleased that you have chosen to visit the Tree. You have robed yourself as becomes your mother's child. The God will be pleased." Mellonia's customary garment was a simple tunic and perhaps a pair of sandals, but now she had dressed herself for receiving the God: anklets of malachite, that smoky-green jewel which looked as if it had come from a deep forest whose shadows were touched but not effaced by sunlight; armbands of emerald and chrysoprase; a fillet of silver inlaid with porphyry nightingales to bind her hair; a halcyon wrought of chalcedony and suspended from a chain around her throat.

Yes, thought Mellonia, but you would not be pleased if you knew that I would rather have a boy than a girl, that I am not going to let you expose him, and that I would visit Aeneas at the ships and tell him of my plans if I were not afraid of being followed and caught and increasing the danger to him. What is more, I am going to name my boy Halcyon.

("Were you in love with Bounder?") ("I don't know ....He made me think of beginnings.") Am I in love with Aeneas? I don't know. He makes me think of beginnings—and forever. I want to touch his hair and kiss his cheek, and, yes, I want to kiss his mouth. Strange that the touch of mouths—even the thought of touching—can stir me in such a fashion. I feel as if friendly bees were creeping over my skin. I am like the hyacinth. When the dragonfly descends from his celestial garden, she shudders with the peril of his assault. (I have heard her shriek.) And yet, at last she bathes him joyfully in her nectars and seeks to withhold him from returning to

the sky. (I have heard her weep.)

"Come, we will go to the Sacred Oak. Levana, Segeta!" Her voice rang like a conch shell through the trees. Doors opened. Two Dryads advanced to meet them. Others watched them from their huts among the branches. Volumna was quiet but luminous. Her tiny sandals left hardly an imprint in the grass; almost, she seemed to float like a morning mist. (She is anticipating a girl, an increase in the tribe.)

Levana and Segeta, both of whom had born a number of daughters, began to discuss the joys of motherhood.

"My first was a son," Segeta shuddered. Her hair was the dusky green of moss, and her words were hushed and hoarse as if they came from a chamber among the roots of a tree. She had born seven daughters and three sons, and her age was reckoned to be above two hundred.

"A hideous child. Horns, hooves, hair and little else. It was not hard for me to expose him. But when my first daughter came, I sacrificed a honeycomb to Rumina."

"But the Tree," Mellonia asked. "What did you dream in the Tree?"

"I've told you a dozen times that I don't remember."

"Not once?"

"Not once. A shape seemed to move in the darkness. I was afraid. The first time, at least, there came a stabbing of pain in my womb. But when I awoke and wandered out into the light, I felt a great peace. And in less than a month I knew that I was with child by the god."

"And you, Levana?"

"The first time it was not Ruminus who visited me. It was the evil dwarf-god Sylvanus. He tortured me in my sleep. I awoke with bruises in a pool of blood."

"What was he like in your dream?"

"He had horns, but crueler than those of a Faun. Gnarled and mossy like ancient branches. And he was gross, gross, in his male parts, and to look upon him filled me with disgust."

"Hush, Segeta. He rarely comes any more, and only to those who have lost the God's favor. I recall that before your first visit to the Tree, you were overfriendly to a Volscian boy."

"We played knucklebones by the Tiber, that was all."

"That was enough. Mellonia, I trust, has in no way angered the God. Have you, my dear? As for the Tree, I can only tell you that it is a mystery. How the God performs his miracle, who shall say, except Rumina?

Speaking for myself, I seemed to see his face, smooth as the tender bark of a sapling, and I felt neither fear nor pain. As you know, I have visited the Tree more than twenty times and have given eleven girls to the Tribe."

(And exposed ten boys. Why did you tell me that men—all men—are evil—and that Aeneas must die?)

"Go now, Mellonia. We must leave you at the edge of the meadow. And when you awake, you will not need to ask about mysteries. Your mother was my dearest friend. Your daughter shall be like my own granddaughter." (And my son?) "We have need of valorous women to guard these woods against barbarians like Aeneas."

"Perhaps," said Mellonia, "he will sail away with all of his ships."

"Perhaps. But turn your thoughts to the God. Leave the demons to me."

A flash of burnished amber hung from a chain around her neck. She removed the cork.

"Empty the flask, Mellonia."

The liquid was dark and sweet—rather like grape juice thickened with honey, but acrid with the soporific juices of the poppy. The three Dryads watched her as she crossed the last space of meadow to the Tree. She wanted to call to them, "Wait," when they turned and disappeared into the wall of forest. But even as she entered the tree, turning the wooden door on its ancient leathern hinges, she felt a drowsiness stealing through her limbs, like the lethargy of one who has fallen in the snow. She burrowed into the soft dry leaves and stared at the tenuous rim of light which outlined the door. She could not discern what objects shared the tree with her. She closed her eyes when they began to burn and gave herself to the company of leaves and the pleasant, barky scent of the air, and perhaps a wood mouse, sharing the same warm nest, and, finally, to the spirit of the God. She felt him like a hearthfire. She knew why her friends talked of being cradled by his warmth. It was as if he were enfolding her in his arms, and for the first time she could envision his face. Ruminus. Father. God. Meaningless words, in the past, to her whose tribe painted no pictures and carved no sculptures. But now she imagined his face and his body too, and she was not surprised that he resembled Aeneas, the son of a god; the godliest of men.

Do I wake or sleep? Surely no sleep can bring so sweet a dream. . . .

I sleep and await the coming of the God.

But now the fear. . .a far-

away sound like the crisp dry crackle of leaves, but growing, heaving, shuddering under this very tree. Cries. Blows. A trembling of the earth. The God and Sylvanus have met to war for me. ("Sylvanus has horns, but crueler than those of a Faun. . . .")

She was not alone in the room. Someone had come to her from the earth's dark catacomb. She felt the heat of his body; she heard him breathe; and then, in her dream, he materialized above her, lucid in the dark, and every feature belonged to the God, to Aeneas. Joy opened its petals in her breast. *The God has won. I will bear a son, I will bear a son. . . .*

In her dream, she called to him: "Ruminus, bring me a boy child with your own features, Aeneas' features. I will nurture him to manhood and make him the lord of the forest!

He knelt; she felt the touch of his warmth; her body yearned to his hands; but his hands eluded her.

A chill seemed to grow between them. *It is not enough. He has visited me but not yet breathed his spirit into my womb. He has found me unworthy of his love. I will bear no child, neither boy nor girl. This is the greatest terror. Not the assault of Sylvanus but rejection by the God.*

"Please, please," she cried. "How have I offended you?" The cry had broken her sleep. Awake and waiting, she lay in the warm leaves, but she knew such a coldness as no fire but one could warm.

A figure moved between her and the rim of light in the door. She could not distinguish his shape, nor even hear him breathe until he approached her. Ruminus or Sylvanus?

"Who are you?" Again, with sudden anger. "Who are you? Have you rejected me?"

Silence enveloped her like a falling of leaves. "Sylvanus?"

She reached for the pin in her hair. Did evil gods feel pain?

"Mellonia."

The voice held the deepness of the pounding surf and the sweetness of a sea bird calling to his mate across the hushed waters of a halcyon sea.

"Halcyon," she cried. "For a moment I took you for Sylvanus." She reached out to him and took his hand and drew him beside her and pressed her head against his shoulder. His arms enclosed her as gently as sun-warmed moss, but he was redolent of the sea; he smelled of salt and foam; he did not need to speak of journeyings as far as the Isles of the Blessed and battles where men were heroes instead of demons. *High on the windy plains of Troy. . . .* The loss of

the God seemed little compared to Aeneas' coming. But the child—the child. . . .

"Halcyon, the God visited me, I think, but he did not leave me with child. I know . . . . Already I know. He left me with an ache of emptiness."

"Mellonia, there is no God. Not one who comes to you in this tree. The gods live on Olympus or under the earth or in the sea, and sometimes they come to us—truly—and we are blessed or cursed, as they choose. But Ruminus, I think, never comes to your people. Not here, at least."

"But if not the God—Halcyon, what are you saying? Someone fathers our children. Or does Rumina alone breathe life into our wombs?"

"No, Mellonia."

"Then who—?"

"The Fauns."

The truth gnawed at her entrails like one of those slimy crabs at the edge of the sea. The Dryads to the north, the Faun-lovers, the despised and fallen: Was it the same with her own people? Of course it was the same. Why had she failed to guess? Her fear of the Tree had reflected a secret doubt.

"Like Mischief."

"Yes."

"And one of them tried to come to me while I slept. And you protected me. That was the sound I heard in my sleep."

"It was three of them. But Ascanius helped me to break a few horns. He's guarding the entrance until we leave."

"They would have taken me in my sleep, one after the other. Like animals."

"Yes. Like animals. But animals can love too. When I was a little boy, I watched a she-wolf die of grief after hunters killed her mate. The Fauns would have taken you with lust, not love. But Bounder—wasn't he half an animal? And yet he loved you. Would it have been so terrible if he had made love to you?"

"When he kissed me, I was angry and afraid, but only at first. Later, I wanted you to kiss me."

"I wanted more than a kiss. The touch of lips is an act of love, but lips are only a little part of a loving body. Even in the Underworld, our souls are clothed in bodies, and souls cannot touch without their garments. When I wed Creusa, I was not yet twenty and she was just fifteen. We were both virgins. I had been much sheltered except in the arts of war. I had never known the caresses of a friend or a girl. We were clumsy and frightened, and all the time our relatives were laughing and shouting jests outside the bridal chamber. But I made love to her in my awkward fashion, and shame

left us, and we were one with each other in every way. Ascanius was born to us of that union. Can such a boy spring from an evil act?"

"I know how he loves you," she said softly, "and how both of you miss Creusa. He is a fine son to you."

"And you think Creusa and I were loveless animals?"

"No, Halcyon."

"And Dido. I loved her with a dark hunger. With little sweetness and much pain. But not with evil."

"She was honored by your love. You offered her life and she chose death. She was a shameful woman."

"An unhappy woman who mistook summer for spring and wanted to stop the drip of the water clock, the shadows on the sundial. I must leave you now, Mellonia. Wait a little before you go from the Tree, and then you may tell your friends that you have forgotten what it was you dreamed. You won't be the first not to bear a child after a visit from the God."

"But I shall never come here again and be taken in the dark by someone like Mischief."

"Then give yourself in the light to someone who takes your heart before he asks for your body. There will be other Bounders."

"He was a brother to me. I know that now."

"There will be men, not brothers. Perhaps—my son?"

"No!"

"Mellonia, you do him an injustice. He is very fond of you."

"Oh, I like him well enough. It's just that I would always be thinking of someone else."

Aeneas gave a little sigh of perplexity. She could not see him in the dark, but she could imagine his smooth brow contracted with doubt. He was, after all, a child with women. Her seventeen years weighed heavily upon her. In the time which it takes for a morning glory to open her petals, she had learned the truth about the Tree and the truth about her own heart, and yet it was Aeneas, not she, who was lost for words. Wise Aeneas, who knew men's hearts and led them through years and perils, was as ignorant as a Faun of a girl's heart.

"Foolish, foolish Halcyon. It's you I love!"

"Ah," he said, all anguish in that cry. "Creusa loved me. Dido loved me. They are ashes now. To the women I love, I am death. Perhaps it is a curse put upon me by Aphrodite because my father revealed their tryst in the forest."

"I think you left your curse in Carthage, or else it fell into the sea during a storm. At any rate, you've lost it somewhere,

and I don't feel in the least threatened with being reduced to ashes. It's true my mother was struck by lightning, but she was ninety-seven years old, and I am seventeen."

"I have to build a city. You have to live in a tree."

"Build it at the mouth of the Tiber—with a high wall, of course, to keep out lions—and I will come to you whenever I can."

"And risk Volumna's anger?"

"Sylvanus take Volumna! It might do her good. Halcyon, are you refusing me? If you are, I won't be angry. You never asked me to love you. I have lived in the Wanderwood for all of my life. What have I to offer to the hero of Troy, the fabulous voyager, except that I can weave you a tapestry or a tunic? Repair the sails on your ships. Paint their hulls. I can play the flute better than Mischief and sing as sweetly as the nightingale and much more cheerfully. I can even read scrolls, Egyptian and Hellene, to say nothing of our own Latin. Did you know that, Aeneas? And I ought to be quick to learn a wife's most important skill." (He was looking perplexed; she could tell from his sigh.) "I refer of course to the couch. All of those little tricks which make a man prefer it to any other piece of furniture." (She had read of such things in her scrolls but hurried over the passages; she would have to return to them with a studious eye.) "I'm a poor little thing, I suppose, after the queens you've known. Creusa, who mothered your son. Dido with eyes like burning pitch. But Bounder said I was pretty. Am I pretty, Halcyon?"

"Pretty is a word for daisies. You are a hyacinth, miracled out of the earth by the slender hands of Persephone."

"I'm very fond of daisies. They are much more lovely and sensitive than you suppose. But I know you intend a compliment. Will you kiss me, Halcyon? I want to start practicing. Otherwise, we may bump noses."

"If I kiss you, I will forget my years and my curse. I will make love to you like an animal and like a man. You saw Ascanius and me when we swam in the Tiber. You said you were not frightened by our naked bodies. Was that the truth?"

"I thought you beautiful, just as I said. I liked the difference of you. Even that appendage you males so like to vaunt."

"In Dardania, we had a saying which my father taught me. He said he learned it from Aphrodite. 'Love is a dragon-

fly.' Do you know what that means, Mellonia?"

Why did the dear, maddening man continue to spout his pretty speeches when lips were better used for kisses? Well, she would match him image for image until he wearied of poetry and remembered that poems do not create love, but love creates poems.

"That it comes swiftly and by surprise."

"And may leave as swiftly."

"Everything leaves," she said. "But it comes back again. When I lie down for the White Sleep, I am fairly certain that I will wake with the first stirring of buds. When I lie down for the last sleep, I expect to awake in that place you called Elysium and find my mother and Bounder waiting for me. And you. Shall I tell you what you are to me?" And then she sang:

Bird of the moon,
Halcyon
Risen from the mica seas
Beyond the ebony abyss of night,
Descend
And silver me, dark earthling,
With your lunar foam.

"It isn't my own, of course. My mother taught it to me, but I did change 'sea gull' to 'halcyon.' But I think we have had enough of poetry, my dearest Halcyon. Shall we pretend that we are going for a swim in the Tiber?" She raised her tunic above her head and flung it onto the leaves. Pins and anklets and armbands followed necklace until there was nothing left to remove except the porphyry fillet in her hair, which she threw across the room as one might disgard a withered garland.

"Are you ready for a swim now, Halcyon?"

"Yes," he whispered.

She tossed open the door so suddenly that it fell from its leather hinges and sun streamed into the tree and kindled Aeneas' nakedness into a wonder of bronze.

"Mellonia, someone may see us!"

"My people could learn a great deal from watching us. So could the Fauns."

"But my son—"

"How does he think he got there? Surely *he* doesn't still believe in Sacred Trees."

The hyacinth, wearied by her long climb from earth's brown citadel, her struggle to open her petals, sleeps in the dew, dreams in the sun. To sleep and dream. . .to sleep and dream. Is it not enough?

But listen! The whirr of wings. . . .

SIX

Ascanius sat beside the ant-marauded tree stump, which, together with wild

grapevines, concealed the tunnel entrance to the Sacred Tree. He sat and waited and envied, a little, his father in the Tree. What a perfect chance to play the Faun!

"I'm just going to make sure that she's all right," Aeneas had said. "A dark tree can be a frightening place, when you wait for a god, and the god has other plans."

"But Father, this is the best prospect Mellonia will ever have to be properly got with child. Why not father a prince while you have the chance?"

"Phoenix, that would be rape!" His indignation could not conceal his temptation. Ascanius knew him like a clay tablet. In spite of his continence, he was no less tempted than other men; more, when he fell in love.

"Call it what you like, you'd be doing the girl a favor. When she wakes up still a virgin, I promise you she's going to be disappointed."

"When she wakes, I'll tell her the truth."

"Why not let *me* tell her?" Ascanius grinned.

"Because I don't trust your methods."

"Such a waste," Ascanius muttered, nursing a bruised jaw and (watchful for ants, telltale bees, or devious Dryads) settling among the vines so recently tangled by their bout with three muscular Fauns who had used their horns as both clubs and knives. "Such a sinful waste. Grandmother would not approve. . . ."

But here was his father, staggering out of the tunnel as if he were climbing from the Underworld or, to judge from his face, descending from Olympus. So Anchises must have looked after his tryst with Aphrodite. He looked twenty instead of his usual twenty-five, and his eyes were so blue that you thought he must have stolen their color from his mother's sea-twinkled hair.

"Father, you don't have to say a word. You told her all the way."

Aeneas sank beside him and only Ascanius' arm kept him from lurching into the trunk. He blinked his eyes and smiled and seemed to be looking into his own mind and enjoying what he saw.

"She liked me." (His voice was a sigh.) "Phoenix, she liked me."

"I heard you the first time, in spite of the mumble. Loved you, I would say."

"Well, possibly. She *said* she did. She woke from a nightmare and threw her arms around me, and what could I do but try to comfort her and tell her about the God? We talked for a long time and—and—she wanted to bear my child."

"And you act surprised. I knew as much when we met her at the Tiber. It wasn't *my* child she wanted, or the God's either. I shall just have to get used to the thought of a little brother or sister with green hair. I'll be quite jealous at first, you know. I'm sure you'll spoil him."

"Have I spoiled you?"

"Terribly."

"She may not have a child. I'm a bit out of practice. Five years since Dido—"

"You don't forget that sort of thing. It's like shooting an arrow. By the way, how was she? Being a virgin and all that. She *was* a virgin, wasn't she?"

"Of course she was!"

"Well, she was a very old virgin at seventeen. She must have been oversheltered by her mother. What I was about to ask was, did she please you? Sometimes they squeal and twitch at the wrong moment and all you can think is: At least I've made it easier for the next man."

"Phoenix, Ruminus should strike you dumb for saying such things!"

Ascanius was unperturbed. He knew when his father was truly angry with him, about once every five years. He knew now that his father wanted desperately to talk about Mellonia, but that his sense of propriety restrained him from the more intimate details.

"Well, he hasn't, any more than he came to Mellonia. Come on now, Father, we'd better head for the ships and maybe you won't be so secretive on the way. After all that waiting, I want to hear *something* about your conquest. Among hungry men—and may I remind you that I haven't had a woman in three months?—a feast should be shared, at least with one's devoted and famished son."

"This was a wedding feast," said Aeneas quietly. "You're right about one thing, though. It won't do to be seen by the Dryads. They may come back to see Mellonia home to her tree."

"Will she be safe? You can be quite sure that the Fauns we manhandled will tell Mischief, and Mischief will tell that Gorgon, Volumna."

"I intend to send word to Volumna that I consider Mellonia my bride and that if any harm comes to her, she can expect an ax in her trunk."

"You have just told her, Aeneas, Butcher of Troy, betrayer of women. I will repeat your son's question. How does it feel to despoil a virgin?"

Volumna stood athwart their path as immovable as a tree, and much more threatening, and looked at least twice her diminutive height. Ascanius had

never met the formidable woman, but he recognized her from Mellonia's description. She made no move to reach for the lethal pin she wore like a bee in her hair. There was sufficient menace in her stance and stare.

"As you guessed, I returned to see why Mellonia had lingered in the tree. I have found my answer."

Aeneas was no longer the dreaming and slightly befuddled lover. He was first of all a king, and no mere rusticated queen was going to intimidate him, even in her own forest.

"I have taken a bride, and not against her will," he said with an evenness belied by his blue eyes, which had turned gray with anger like the Aegean at a blast from Triton's horn. "I will visit her whenever I choose, and she will come to me at my ships, and if you harm her—well, you have overheard my threat. It is not an idle one. I would burn a city to protect Mellonia. I have burned them before for lesser reasons."

"To fell a few trees is a little thing for Trojans," added Ascanius. He did not like the woman; in fact, he disliked her more intensely than any other woman since Dido. "We may be wanderers, but we keep our axes sharp. Battle-axes. Some of the timbers in our ships have started to rot. How would you like your oak to repair our hulls? Or we might make some new oars from your branches."

There was something alarmingly spider-like about her. She looked as if she could spit poison like the Jumper. Perhaps it was the way her green eyes stared at you without ever blinking, and her cheeks began to bulge, as if she were gauging distances and gathering venom in her mouth.

"Only if it dragged you into the haunts of the octopus and the shark. You know we will die without our trees."

"Not right away," said Ascanius. "Not until we've had some sport with you and your people. Fifty women-starved Trojan males. Think of that, Volumna. Raunchy, rutting males who will settle for anything between twelve and five hundred and then swap with their friends. Our own women are a bit weather-beaten from the sea. But you Dryads keep your looks to the end, don't you? Even you, Volumna, and you must be all of three hundred. I rather fancy you for myself. I've always liked older women."

"Come, Phoenix. We've told her our intentions. Mellonia is safe, I think."

"One more thing, Father." Then, to Volumna: "You knew about the Tree all along, didn't you?"

She stared at him with stupefaction. Momentarily he was almost sorry for her.

"About the tunnel. And the Fauns," he persisted.

"I don't know what you mean. The God comes—"

"Yes, in the shape of a shaggy Faun."

"What sacrilege is this? Why, the God should snare you in one of his branches and strangle you with your own hair."

"Don't play the virgin with me, Volumna. Mischief told me about the tree. He's been there many times himself, and both his father and grandfather have been there with you. You may be pleased to hear that they found you adequate even in your sleep. If you *were* asleep."

Volumna looked like a frost-bitten tree. Three centuries weighed like snow upon her shoulders. She looked even less than her height of four feet. She swayed and seemed about to fall. Aeneas tried to steady her but she wrenched away from him. (She is the only woman, Ascanius reflected, who has ever refused my father's arms; if possible, she is more stupid than a Cyclops!)

"I will tell you a story," she said in a voice like wind rustling among parched leaves.

"A true one?" Ascanius asked.

"Alas, yes."

"Father, I don't trust her. I think she's trying to keep us here till her friends arrive."

"I swear by the nurturing breast of Rumina that I came alone and that no one followed me."

"Tell us your story," Aeneas said.

"In the early time my people wandered happily and fearlessly through these woods and mingled with the Fauns. The Golden Age had fled from the land with Saturn, and the Silver Age had fallen upon us as imperceptibly as an evening mist. But silver is also good. The Fauns were much less bestial then. Idlers as always, but mirthful and, when they chose, gentle. They were the only males in these parts—the Centaurs had not returned from their pilgrimage to the East—and we tolerated them as lovers, if not as husbands. I was a small child at the time. I did not know of such things as lust and procreation, and lightning was the only danger I knew.

"That was before the coming of the lions. There had always been wolves and bears, but we had lived in harmony with them. Never hunted them. We had no darts, no poisons. We trapped small game in nets and grew vegetables in our gardens and slept the White Sleep when the food was scarce.

"One night we had met in the circle between our trees for

the Festival of Rumina and Ruminus. It was spring, and the air was awash with the scent of clover and bergamot. We were dancing the Dance of the Spring Awakening, and the cry of flutes muffled all other sounds. Suddenly they were among us, lordly creatures with tawny skin and noble manes. We had never seen their like. Had they sprung from the moon to join our festival? Climbed from Proserpina's kingdom? We would have shared our feast with them. Our wines and our cheeses.

"But they had come for another feast. My mother and I were close to our tree. One of them knocked her to the ground. She was very strong, and she was afraid for me. She used her flute like a dagger and drove it into his throat. He roared with pain and writhed away from her, and together we fled behind our oaken door. The other Dryads were less—or more—fortunate. None of them escaped. Even my mother had hurt her back in her fall. She lived only a year. Together we visited the Fauns and traded gems for food. (With their palisades and their slings, they had learned to withstand the lions.) She taught me how to weave and read a scroll and smell a lion at a hundred yards, and then she died and left me, still a girl, to the long loneliness of being the only Dryad, and the only female, in the Wanderwood. I wanted to die. I thought of killing my tree. But the Fauns seemed to pity me. They continued to bring me food. I had a friend named Shag-Coat. He was about three—that is to say, eighteen of your or my years. Fauns do not age as you and I, but as the goats they resemble. He showed me what my mother had not known, how to extract the poison from the Jumper and arm myself with darts or pins.

" 'Shag-Coat, you're such a good friend,' I said. 'How can I pay you back? I can weave you a tunic, except that you never wear one. Or make you silver tips to protect your horns.'

"He laughed. 'It's too soon, little one. Wait.'

"Another year passed. I was thirteen. 'You can repay me now,' he said. 'Meet me in the Sacred Oak of the god you call Ruminus—the one we know as Faunus. Shut the door after you to keep out lions.'

"I waited in the leaves and darkness. He came to me through the tunnel.

" 'Shag-Coat,' I cried. 'I've been so afraid without you. I thought of lions and Jumpers and wanted to open the door and run into the sun!'

" 'You needn't be afraid any more,' he said. He laughed and took me among the leaves. He

was very strong, and he smelled of musk which made me light in the head. I fought until my hands were bruised and raw. It was no use. He took me without a kiss.

" 'Now you have repaid me,' he said. 'And in a little while you will see the gift I have left you.'

"In a little while I was with child. I bore him a daughter. I thought: I will destroy her. But the Goddess spoke to me in a dream. 'And destroy your race? Your daughter must bear a child. Despise the Fauns but use them to your own purpose, as they have used you.' In the end, I myself took her to the Tree and gave her a poppy drink to cloud her senses. 'The god will come to you,' I lied. I did not want her to know the truth. Can you understand that, Aeneas, the Butcher? No one has ever learned the truth among my people."

"It would be better," said Aeneas, "if they knew and chose."

"What is there to choose among Fauns? They are much the same. Animals who walk like men."

Gently he touched her shoulder. "There is love as well as lust. Some of my men want wives."

"I would sooner bed with a Faun."

Ascanius sat with his father and the Trojans. Nisus and Euryalus, the bearded and the beardless, leaned against each other in the firelight and did not appear to notice the yearning faces of women who, thirty-five, looked sixty, because they remembered a wooden horse and columns like dragons of fire, a king who was stabbed and a queen who was dragged into slavery. The older men could have passed for pirates—as brown and cracked as oil sailcloth—except that for fifteen years they had followed Aeneas and taken a special light into their eyes.

Mischief was whirling around the fire, his cloven hooves as nimble as the feet of a dancing girl, his nightingale flute piping a crystal song. He stopped, suddenly, in front of Aeneas.

"My King."

"Yes, Mischief?"

"Sing for us, will you? There is a song in your breast. It is wrong to keep it caged."

Ascanius was quick to echo Mischief's plea. He too had seen the song; he wanted somehow to join in the music from which he had been excluded since the afternoon.

"Yes, Father. You haven't sung since we came to this land. And I restrung your lyre."

Aeneas smiled and shook his head. "It is a private song."

"Is it about love?" Euryalus asked.

"Yes."

Euryalus and Nisus looked at each other and spoke in a single voice. "Sing it for us then."

Aeneas sprang to his feet and seized the lyre from Ascanius' outstretched hands. He began to play, plucking the strings so lightly that they hardly seemed to move. It was as if he were releasing their music instead of imposing music upon them. Then he sang, and his people watched him with such an adoration as only gods command and truly believed him, it seemed, to be the son of Aphrodite, but would have adored him no less had he been the son of a kitchen maid; and Ascanius loved him with adoration too, but also with the sweet familiarity of one who knew him as friend before father, and father before god; with such a love as Satyr-may-care young men do not often know and scarcely understand.

THE LADY OF THE BEES

Carnelian, emerald, and chrysoprase,
Topaz, lemon or green,
Moss agate, and the smoky malachite,
Serpentine:
These were the gems she wore;
And birds of porphyry
To blind her hair, and warm against her throat
Chalcedony.

Acanthus, lavender, and mignonette,
Hyacinth, purple or blue,
Narcissus, and the feathery tamarisk:
These she grew;
Clover and columbine
And wilder bergamot
To scent the hall, and for its bee-frail buds,
Forget-me-not.

No one spoke. What were mortals to say when a god had sung? Battle-bruised warriors wept openly beside the piled canvases of their sails. A ghost of beauty flickered in the sea-wracked faces of women who had known another hall and other flowers.

But Aeneas was not sad. He had sung a praise and not a dirge. He had sung of today and not yesterday. Quietly he smiled, no longer needing to remember. . . .

As if the song had conjured her out of the trees, Mellonia stepped into the circle of the fire.

Aeneas went to her and drew her among his friends. She came without shyness and listened when he spoke to them:

"You have followed me for fifteen years, and some of your friends have died for me, and perilous times are still ahead of us. But as you are my friends, befriend Mellonia too, my beloved and my bride."

The men rose and stood in their places, and Mellonia walked among them, trailing the scent of bark and bergamot behind her, and even Mischief's face seemed transfigured into a

brief nobility. It was Euryalus, the lover, who said:

"Lady of the Bees, loved by the man we love second only to each other, Nisus and I commend our lives to you."

An old woman as wrinkled as sun-baked bricks—she had been a handmaiden to Queen Hecuba—said: "Troy has found a second queen."

"I think," said Mellonia, "that the sweetest thing in all this forest, in all that world of your wanderings and beyond, is that a man and a woman, or a friend and a friend, should know each other, with their bodies as well as their spirits, and rise like a single flame on the hearth of the Goddess." Then, to Aeneas: "May we talk, beloved?"

Ascanius tried to leave them—he was, after all, a separate flame—but she called after him: "You must come too, Phoenix."

They walked to the edge of the Tiber where it broadened to meet the sea. Delphus was circling slowly in the water, watchful for sharks or Carthaginian galleys.

"There are no sharks here, Delphus," Mellonia said. At the sound of her voice, he paused in his circlings and began his fitful sleep.

"I am cold," Ascanius said, though the night was warm and the fires had been built to frighten lions and to bake fish in clay ovens. "I must fetch a cloak."

But Aeneas extended an arm to each of them and drew them beside him onto the grass.

"Ascanius and I will build our city a little inland from here. As close to your tree, Mellonia, as these ships. Whenever you leave your oak, may you come to me. Volumna won't dare to stop you."

Mellonia stared at the moon-dusted surface of the Tiber and Delphus, sleeping his eternally watchful sleep.

"Will she, Mellonia?"

"No, Halcyon."

Ascanius rose. "The moon is company enough for you."

"Please," she said. "Stay with us, Phoenix."

He could see the urgency in her face. If that Harpy, Volumna, had dared to threaten his father—

"Phoenix, I didn't like you at first."

He felt relief like a cool hand on his cheek. It was, he supposed, the need to confess which had troubled her.

"I know, Mellonia. We are very different, you and I. I'm not like my father. He's a god. I'm a pirate."

"We are more alike than you guess," she said. "It's true that you frightened me at first, but that isn't why I didn't like you. I was jealous, that's why!

Because your father loved you so much that he seemed to leave no room for me. You see, Phoenix, I loved him from the first moment he turned his face to me in the Tiber." She spoke about him as if he were still in Carthage or Troy, and not beside her, looking more startled and pleased with every word. "Oh, he didn't see me yet. I was well hidden among the trees. But I loved the youngness of him. And the oldness of him. And the joy of him. And the sorrow of him. And I was jealous. But now I love you as his son and also as my friend. Is it all right that I was jealous, Phoenix, just at first? I've felt such a tumult of feelings in such a short time! Like a flower that feels rain and wind and snow and sun in the same day. Hawk moth and bumblebee and dragonfly."

"It's all right, Mellonia. I didn't like you much either, and I suspect for the same reason, though I told myself it was because I didn't trust you."

"But that's in the past," Aeneas cried. "The night is for now." He sprang to his feet and pulled them from the ground and into his arms and whirled them in a great arc to the piping of Mischief's flute until they were laughing and gasping at the same time, and then they leaned upon him for support, and the column of his strength seemed able to resist all threat of ax or fire.

"I love you, I love you, I love you," he laughed. "My son and my bride. And no one—not Harpy or warrior or Dryad queen—shall ever divide us."

"You forgot time," said Mellonia.

"I defy time!"

"And yet it is time for me to go."

He looked at her with a puzzled urgency. "Go?"

She gave a wisp of a laugh. Deceit was hard for her. She did not fool Ascanius. If she fooled his father, it was only because she had first intoxicated him with her coming.

"Just for the night, my dearest."

"I had thought that you would stay the night with me."

"I am weary for my tree. Tomorrow, when I have rested, drunk her sustenance—"

"There are lions in the forest. Phoenix and I will see you home."

"No, I'm safer alone. I smell like an oak tree. You smell like fresh meat. But Phoenix will see me just to the edge of the woods. I have a secret to tell him."

"One you must keep from me?"

"Yes. Because I love you."

She took Ascanius' hand and drew him, half reluctant, after her. "I'll soon send him back to

you." He saw the uncertainty on his father's face, but also the inextinguishable joy. A boy's face in the light of that orange moon, touched with the doubts, the sadnesses of maturity, but boyish still in its unending capacity to hope: Night heals, sun brings renewal and expectation.

"I'm not coming back," she said to Ascanius when they were beyond Aeneas' hearing, shut from the camp by slender elm trees which looked like Dryads dancing in the moon. "I can't come back. Volumna has threatened to burn my tree."

Ascanius gasped. "To kill you?"

"Yes. She came with some of her friends and called me down from my house—'Bring your handloom, Mellonia'—and made me watch as they laid brush wood against the trunk. 'I have only to strike a flint stone and the whole tree will become a pillar of fire.' "

"Can you find another tree?"

"No. The tree in which I was born will die with me, or I will die with her. But Volumna has made me a promise."

"What, Mellonia?"

"Not to strike the flint if I make a promise to *her.* To leave Aeneas. Never to see him again."

"Of course you shall see him again," he cried, feeling for his dagger, feeling warrior and son. "We've only to capture the grove and save your tree. We can even make you the queen!"

"Some of your men would die. We have our poisons, you know. And stealth. And all of my people would die before they would yield their trees. Yes, you could probably capture the grove. The Fauns would no doubt help you. They have never liked us, except asleep. But I would live among corpses. Do you think I would want to lose my people, Phoenix? I could leave them, and gladly, if my blood were red like yours. But condemn them to death, never."

"They deserve no better."

"You don't know them. Some are my friends. Dearer than Bounder, and just as innocent. Do you want to kill them too?"

Yes, he wanted to kill them! It seemed to him that there were two kinds of Dryad, Mellonia and Volumna, and Mellonia's so-called friends were like their queen, or why did they let her rule? But that, he knew, was one of his flaws; he was overquick to anger and judge, unwilling to sift the amber from the seaweed.

"Do you, Phoenix?"

"No," he faltered.

"Tell your father that—that

—oh, Phoenix, he does like pretty words, and I can't seem to think of anything. Except I'm glad he came to this land, and came to me in the Sacred Oak. He spoke of a curse. He thought he was going to hurt me. Well, he did. But I don't mind. Did you ever see those fat, silken lilies that Centaurs grow in their gardens? And tend and water and cover with moss in a heavy thunderstorm? They're pretty enough, graceful as hyacinths, but you won't find a true feeling among them. Cut down a flower, and what does the one beside her think? 'I'm glad it wasn't *me*.'

"I hurt your father too. But he was festering with old wounds. Perhaps in time he will see me not as another wound but as a salve of basil and horehound, which burns at first but finally draws out the pain."

She threw her arms around him and kissed him on the cheek, and they held each other in the chaste communion of loving the same man, and loving each other less for themselves than for the sake of him whom they loved in common, though except for Aeneas they might have been lovers.

"It's so much nicer to kiss a man than a woman. Especially my stepson. Go to your father now. Don't let him grieve for me. Take him in your arms as if he were a little child. You know how he likes to be held. Tell him it will make *me* sad to think of him sad. I'm not one of those pampered silken lilies. Not any more. And whatever you do, don't let him follow me. Volumna let me come here. She will be waiting for him."

He felt a sweet burgeoning of love for her, a wolfsbane of bitterness at the thought of what she must lose. His father had his dream of a second Troy; she had—what?

"Where is Bonus Eventus?"

"Asleep in some flower, I expect. He'll wake me in the morning."

"But you said he would die in the fall. Won't you be lonely without him and Bounder—and my father?"

"And you, Phoenix. But the White Sleep will assuage me a little. Besides, I have learned how to wait. Go to your father now. *And keep him in his camp.*"

"I'll lie to him tonight. Then, tomorrow, I will drug his wine. Then if necessary I will sit on his chest with a club until I have made him understand!"

She called after him. "I'm going to bear his son."

"But it's much too soon to know."

"The Goddess told me."

For once he believed in her goddess. Perhaps Rumina was another name for Aphrodite.

"Phoenix."

He paused at the edge of the grove. "Yes, Lady of the Bees?"

"I'm going to live for a long time. When you're an old, old man and your father is dead, I'll still be much as you see me now. That city he's going to build—it may not be the one. The second Troy, I mean, predestined by the gods. But in time there will be such a city, and somehow I think I'm going to be there to see it built. Who knows, I may help to consecrate the ground or lay the first stone! Anyway, I'll be keeping a watchful ear on your great-great-great grandchildren, and I can tell you now that they need never fear the forest, neither lions nor vengeful queens."

And then, the last puzzling thing she called to him: "I've thought of something to tell your father after all."

"What is it, Mellonia?"

"Love is a dragonfly."

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Please don't blame me for making Carthage contemporary with Troy, blame Vergil, who was a better poet than historian. I am greatly indebted to him for the general, unhistorical background of my story, though the love affair of Aeneas and Mellonia is sheer invention. Mellonia, incidentally, reappears as the heroine of my story *Where Is the Bird of Fire?*, becomes the beloved of Remus, and makes good her promise to help in the building of a "second Troy."

I apologize to the shade of Dido for my unflattering portrait of her. She is one of my favorite queens (doomed, beautiful women are irresistible to me, as to Edgar Allan Poe); however, I have shown her through the eyes of Ascanius and I felt that he would have resented and reviled her for trying to replace his mother.

The poems quoted in the story are my own and they are reprinted with the permission of *The North Carolina Quarterly and Cornucopia.* The phrase "Only Night Heals Again" is borrowed from a poem by H. D., which, incidentally, also gave me my title *Where Is the Bird of Fire?*

Next month: Special James Blish Issue

Our April issue will be the sixth in a series of special issues, each devoted to the work of a distinguished sf author. Featured is a complete, uncut version of James Blish's new novel, MIDSUMMER CENTURY. **Also: A profile by Robert A. W. Lowndes; an essay on the writings of James Blish by Lester del Rey; and a Blish bibliography. The April issue is on sale March 2; look for it on the newsstands or use the coupon on page 76.**

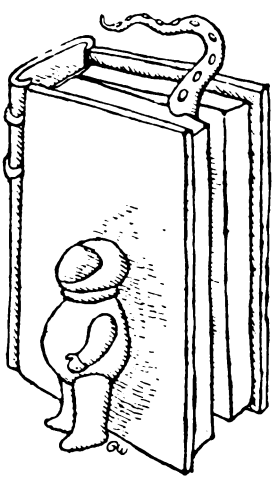
THERE IS A QUESTION that used to be raised, long, long ago when science fiction was a thoroughly dubious enterprise, that doesn't get asked much any more and ought to be: what is science fiction good for? What goes on in science fiction that makes it worth reading? This is not a question for readers. That they read science fiction at all—at least for a time—is sufficient justification. They read sf because they do find something in it. The question is for writers, editors, and critics, those people whose business it is to make science fiction and to make science fiction better. If we have any interest in keeping the readers we attract for longer than the traditional three years or five, if we have any interest in attracting more readers, if we have any interest in what we are doing beyond the mere dumb fact of doing it, this is a question that we need to know the answer to.

Hugo Gernsback answered the question back when the world was new. He said that sf was instructive and educational. That wasn't a true answer. That was a political answer. And Gernsback lost his audience to editors whose instincts were sounder. Twenty years later, John Campbell answered the

ALEXEI and CORY PANSHIN

BOOKS

THE HUGO WINNERS, Vol. II, ed. by Isaac Asimov, Doubleday, $9.95.
ORBIT 9, ed. by Damon Knight, Putnam, $5.95.
BEST SF: 1970, ed. by Harry Harrison and Brian W. Aldiss, Putnam, $5.95.
SF: AUTHORS' CHOICE 3, ed. by Harry Harrison, Putnam, $5.95.
OTHER WORLDS, OTHER GODS, ed. by Mayo Mohs, Doubleday, $5.95.



question again. He said that sf was predictive. Again an untrue political answer. Campbell didn't insist on his answer as strongly as Gernsback, but he too lost his audience.

Since sf has gained legitimacy, the question of its value has been allowed to be tucked away, but it still deserves to be answered. It is the very lack of an answer that is the cause of some of our most whirling confusions and desperate battles.

Here's a whirling confusion for you. A year ago, Harry Harrison, a former Vice-President of the Science Fiction Writers of America, declared that he was withdrawing all his books and stories from contention for the SFWA Nebula Awards as a protest against all the good stories that had lost and the bad stories that had won. As evidence for this critical judgment, he pointed to the fact that none of the short fiction winners had ever been selected by him for the annual best of the year volume that he and Brian Aldiss edit.

Here's a more humble confusion for you. In last November's issue of *Galaxy*, Algis Budrys publicly resigned as house book reviewer. There were, he said, admirable stories and popular stories. He knew an admirable story when he saw one, though he didn't always enjoy it very much. As for what was enjoyable and popular—well, Budrys had lost his innocent eye and couldn't entirely tell any more what was likable, and when he could identify something that was enjoyable, the remnants of his innocence tripped his tongue and prevented him from being able to say what it was. So he was quitting.

These are considerable problems that Harrison and Budrys raise. And in both cases they reduce to the confession that a writer-editor and a writer-critic don't know why people do read science fiction. Both are sure of intellectual excellences, but emotional excellences—the heart of any art—leave them baffled. Harrison doesn't seem to know they exist and Budrys can't locate them.

The five anthologies on hand for review may give us some clues. Each is ordered around a premise. Premises are a way that an editor who doesn't know why people read sf can give readers a formal excuse for the existence of his book. In each case, the premise is written large on the book jacket. THE HUGO WINNERS, VOL. II is "fourteen prize-winning science fiction stories". ORBIT 9 is "An Anthology of Brand-New SF Stories". BEST SF: 1970 is "The best SF stories of the year from the best SF magazines in

the world". SF: AUTHOR'S CHOICE 3 is "thirteen sf greats present their favorite stories". OTHER WORLDS, OTHER GODS is "adventures in religious science fiction". Let us take a look at the actualities that lie behind these slogans and see what they can tell us about the true-blue heart of sf.

The key, if there is a key here, is in THE HUGO WINNERS. The editor, Isaac Asimov, had his stories pre-selected for him with the guarantee that people had found them extraordinarily enjoyable, an advantage unshared by the editors of the other four anthologies, who had to take their chances. (Except, unaccountably, Isaac managed to omit one of his pre-selected stories—"Ship of Shadows" by Fritz Leiber, the 1970 Hugo winning novella.) The result provides an effective commentary on both Harrison and Budrys. These stories have not been Harrison's choices any more than the Nebula award stories have been. And though Budrys seems to believe that stories are either admirable or popular, these stories largely manage to be both—which is what we should want for science fiction. Awards may be given for external reasons or bad reasons, and some stories may appeal at one moment and in retrospect seem less worthy, but overall this is an excellent collection, easily the most readable of the five we are considering. If any stories can give us clues to the reasons that people read science fiction, these should.

There are five obvious constancies in THE HUGO WINNERS. The first is that the stories are recent, dating from 1962 through 1969. The second is that the stories are long. Only three, all by Harlan Ellison, are less than twenty pages in length. The seven longest range from fifty pages for "Nightwings" by Robert Silverberg to ninety pages for "The Dragon Masters" by Jack Vance. The third is that the stories are all well-removed from the familiar present, being set on other planets, or on parallel worlds, or on a sharply discontinuous future Earth. The fourth is that these strange worlds are developed in some detail, most particularly in the longer stories. And the fifth is that the stories are positive. With the exception of the Ellison stories, which are still positive enough to scream about the failings of the world ("The Beast That Had No Mouth, But Had to Scream 'Repent, Harlequin!' at the Heart of the World"), these stories show men responding well to crisis, human culture evolving, or men becoming

something a little nearer the gods.

This last point clearly sets these science fiction stories apart from so-called mainstream fiction. Mimetic fiction, confined to our society and our time, shows men crushed by crisis, human culture as static, and men as all too definitely something less than the gods. And mimetic fiction is a negative drag of a literature. Sf allows the possibility of stepping outside the limitations of the present moment and considering alternatives.

The other constancies of this anthology reinforce this point. It is the removal from the present that allows alternatives to be presented. It is the development in detail that shows alternatives to be meaningful. Length in itself is not an absolute virtue, but it is length that allows the detailed presentation and development of alternatives. It is no accident that a series of short stories should have won the short fiction Hugo award in 1962, or that when there has been but one short fiction award presented, it should go to longer stories like Poul Anderson's "No Truce With Kings" and Gordon Dickson's "Soldier, Ask Not" rather than to shorter stories. And finally, while the recent origin of these stories is of no particular importance, being built into the premise of the anthology, the fact that stories like these should be rewarded again and again over a period of years is important. These are the stories that people come to science fiction to find.

If there is any hope for us in our present moment of societal agony, it must be in the possibility of new alternatives. Science fiction, in its freedom from the limits of this moment, can offer its freedom to readers as a promise of the possibility of new alternatives, and this is sf's great virtue.

If this is what we can learn from THE HUGO WINNERS, our other anthologies, particularly ORBIT 9, BEST SF: 1970, and SF: AUTHOR'S CHOICE 3, offer the other face of the same lesson: that is, sf which rejects its freedom to be positive is as big a bummer as mimetic fiction. If THE HUGO WINNERS is any guide, the recent stories in these anthologies will win no awards and may well give readers won to science fiction good reason to go away again. Most of these stories are almost perverse in their courting of unnecessary limitation. These stories are no worse technically than those in THE HUGO WINNERS. They simply offer the reader no reward but technique, just like mimetic fiction.

Start with length. Again, length in itself is no virtue. But of fifty-four stories in these four anthologies, only four are longer than twenty-five pages. No room for development of new alternatives—if new alternatives were present.

In ORBIT 9, BEST SF: 1970 and SF: AUTHOR'S CHOICE 3, they mostly aren't.

In Knight's ORBIT 9 and Harrison and Aldiss's BEST SF: 1970, this may be laid on the doorstep of that particularly desperate failure of understanding, the New Wave. These two claustrophobic collections are the children and stepchildren of the New Wave.

Along about the middle 1960's, it was noticed by some writers and editors of science fiction that many of the devices of sf were tired and cliched to the point of non-usability. Check back—there was a dreadfully thin period in sf at the end of the fifties and into the early sixties when writers were doing little more than ringing endless tiresome changes on the materials of the forties. However, the answer that was found was not to invent new devices, but to chuck out of science fiction everything that makes it science fictional. The result was the New Wave. The result was these two anthologies.

The stories in these two books are not removed from the present. With all time and all space as possibilities, they choose to huddle. The settings are close-range tomorrows that differ from now only by the addition of a single whimper-making innovation. Or familiar todays that do the same. Or, even worse, surrealistic todays in which the universe makes less sense than it does for us, and the alternatives are even more limited than those we know.

Almost inevitably, both collections are sinkholes of negation. There are a few exceptions in the twenty-eight stories. In BEST SF: 1970, there is "'Franz Kafka' by Jorge Luis Borges" by Alvin Greenberg, about a set of mysterious symbols invading our world to some unknown purpose, which ends: "I would imagine that the cake is still fresh. It is decorated with a unique set of symbols which, like the cake, are sweet and edible. It is not my birthday either, but what danger could there be in a little taste?" In some hands and in some magazines, that could be a negative ending. In these hands and in the context of NEW AMERICAN REVIEW, it is renewing. And in ORBIT 9, there is R.A. Lafferty's "When All the Lands Pour Out Again." Lafferty is a man from whom the New Wave should have taken direction. He is prodigiously inventive of new

devices, and though his story is not far removed, it offers all the new alternatives anyone could hope for.

There are differences between these two anthologies. ORBIT 9 is the bigger bummer.

Harrison's SF: AUTHOR'S CHOICE 3 is neither as claustrophobic nor as negative, but it is no more recommendable. This third time around, the list of authors is getting thin. It's now down to David I. Masson, Piers Anthony, Langdon Jones and Barry Malzberg. And the authors seem to have been restricted to stories not previously reprinted, which makes the contents even thinner.

The main fault of the anthology is that it seems to have got caught in the mid-sixties pinch. All of the stories date from 1964 or later. The Old Wave stories like Piers Anthony's "Phog" and Larry Niven's "Bordered in Black" use tired old devices. And the New Wave stories, like Brian Aldiss's "Sober Noises of Morning in a Marginal Land," aim for significance while disdaining all but the inescapable minimum of sf apparatus, and founder in vagueness. There are no exciting new alternatives here, no prizewinners, and nothing to hold a hungry reader.

OTHER WORDS, OTHER GODS is something different and something better than these last three anthologies. Half of its stories are from earlier periods than any in the other four books. There is more removal in these stories than in the Knight or two Harrison anthologies. Even the title seems to promise new alternatives of a sort that science fiction is well able to deliver.

If there is a fault in this anthology, it is that the premise is very narrowly construed. The editor, raised a Roman Catholic and presently the editor of *Time Magazine's* religion department, has restricted his selections to variations on Christianity. Two of the stories concern challenges to Catholicism in the contact of alien races. Four stories, two by Anthony Boucher, are about saints and saviors, all couched in Christian terms. And all the other stories are literalized Christian blasphemies. Perhaps the worst of these are "Evensong" by Lester del Rey and "Shall the Dust Praise Thee" by Damon Knight, both reprinted from DANGEROUS VISIONS. Perhaps the best is Arthur C. Clarke's "The Nine Billion Names of God," a Christian horror story, but something quite different in Buddhist terms. It might have been more interesting if it had been

written from a Buddhist point of view.

This is a more-than-adequate anthology. It suffers to some extent by the fact that very similar alternatives are set cheek-by-jowl. Perhaps some more enterprising editor will try another anthology of religious science fiction and present a wider range of material.

If all the stories in these five anthologies say anything to us, it is this: To write science fiction, a writer must necessarily be visionary enough to look for new alternatives and be brave enough to write them in discouraging times. If he is unwilling or unable, he wastes the medium, and he surely has nothing to offer the readers who have discarded mimetic fiction for its emptiness.

In most sf, man's reaction to alien ranges from a middle ground of open-minded tolerance to an extreme of repulsion or insularity. There is another extreme, way over to the other side of that middle ground; it is rarely considered, and it is the subject of Mr. Tiptree's unusual new story.

And I Awoke and Found Me Here on the Cold Hill's Side

by JAMES TIPTREE, JR.

HE WAS STANDING ABSOlutely still by a service port, staring out at the belly of the *Sirian* docking above us. He had on a grey uniform and his reddish-gray hair was cut short. I took him for a station engineer.

That was bad. Newsmen strictly don't belong in the bowels of Big Junction. But there was no place else to get a shot of the alien ship.

I turned my holocam to show its big World Media insigne and started my bit about What It Meant to the People Back Home who were paying for it all.

"—It may be routine work to you, sir, but we owe it to them to share—"

His face came around slow and tight, and his gaze passed over me from a peculiar distance.

"The color, the drama," he repeated dispassionately. His eyes focused on me. "You consummated fool."

"Could you tell me what races are coming in, sir? If I could even get a view—"

He waved me to the port, deadpan. Greedily I angled the lenses up at the long blue hull blocking out the starfield. Beyond her I could see the bulge of a black and gold ship.

"That's a Foramen," he said. "There's a freighter from Belye on the other side, you'd call it Arcturus. Not much traffic right now."

"You're the first person who's said two sentences to me since I've been here, sir. What are those colorful little craft?"

"Procya," he shrugged. "They're always around. Like us."

I squashed my face on the vitrite, peering. The walls clanked. Somewhere overhead the Sirians were off-loading into their private sector of Big Junction. The man glanced at his wrist.

"Are you waiting to go out, sir?"

His grunt could have meant anything.

"Where are you from on Earth?" he asked me in his hard tone.

I started to tell him and suddenly saw that he had forgotten my existence. His eyes were on nowhere, and his head was slowly bowing forward onto the port frame.

"Go home," he said thickly. I caught a strong smell of tallow.

"Hey, sir!" I grabbed his arm; he was in rigid tremor. "Steady, man."

"I'm waiting. . .waiting for my wife. My loving wife." He gave a short ugly laugh. "Where are you from?"

I told him again.

"Go home," he mumbled. "Go home and make babies. While you still can."

One of the early GR casualties, I thought.

"Is that all you know?" Scorn animated him. "Fools. Dressing in their styles. *Gnivo* suits. *Aoleelee* music. Oh, I see your newscasts," he sneered. "Nixi parties. A year's salary for a *Garph'tha.* Gamma radiation—go home. Read history. *Fountain pens and bicycles. . .*"

He started a slow slide downward in the half G. My only informant. We struggled confusedly; he wouldn't take one of my sobertabs, but I finally got him along the service corridor to a bench in an empty loading bay. He fumbled out a little vacuum cartridge. As I was helping him unscrew it, a brindled creature in starched whites put his head in the bay.

"I can be of assistance, yes?" His eyes popped. It was a Procya. I started to thank him but the red-haired man cut me off.

"Get lost. Out."

The creature withdrew, its big eyes moist. The man stuck his pinky in the cartridge and put it up his nose, gasping deep in his diaphragm. Then he looked toward his wrist.

"What time is it?"

I told him.

"News," he said. "A message for the eager, hopeful human race. All right. A word about those lovely, lovable aliens we all love so much." He looked at me. "Shocked, aren't you, newsboy?"

I had him figured now. Alien menace, plot to take over Earth.

"Aaugh, Christ, they couldn't care less." He took another deep gasp, shuddered and straightened. "The hell with generalities. What time d'you say it was?. . .All right, I'll tell you how I learned it. The hard way. While we wait for my loving wife. You can bring that little recorder out of your sleeve, too. Play it over to yourself some time. When it's too late." He chuckled almost normally; his voice had become light and facile. An educated voice. "You ever heard of supernormal stimuli?"

"No," I said. "Wait a minute. White sugar?"

"Near enough. Y'know Little Junction bar in D.C.? No, you're an Aussie, you said. Well, I'm from Burned Barn, Nebraska."

He took a breath, consulting some vast disarray of the soul. This was going to be a longie.

"When I was eighteen I drifted into Little Junction by accident. No. Correct that. You don't go into Little Junction by accident, any more than you first shoot up on skag by accident. You go into Little Junction because you've been craving it, dreaming about it, grooving on every hint and clue about it, back there in Burned Barn since before you had hair in your pants. Whether you know it or not. Once you're out of Burned Barn, you can no more help going into Little Junction than a sea worm can help rising to the moon.

"I was a big lad with a brand-new liquor ident in my pocket. It was early; there was an empty spot beside some humans at the bar. Little Junction isn't an embassy bar, y'know. I found out later where the high-caste aliens go—when they go out. The New Rive, the Curtain by the Georgetown Marina.

"And they go by themselves. Oh, once in a while they do the Cultural Exchange bit with a few frosty couples of other aliens and some stuffed humans. Galactic Amity with a ten-foot pole.

"Little Junction was the place where the lower orders went, the single clerks and drivers, out for kicks. Including, my friend, the perverts. The ones who can take humans. Into their beds, that is."

He chuckled grimly and sniffed his finger again, not looking at me.

"Ah, yes. Little Junction is Galactic Amity night, every night. I ordered. . .what? A margharita. I didn't have the nerve to ask the snotty spade bartender for one of the alien liquors glowing behind the bar. It was dim. I was trying to stare everywhere at once without showing it. I remember those white boneheads—Lyrans, that

is. And a mess of green veiling I decided was a multiple being from someplace. I caught a couple of human glances in the bar mirror. Hostile flicks. I didn't get the message, then.

"Suddenly an alien pushed right in beside me. Before I could get over my paralysis, I heard this blurry voice:

" 'You air a futeball enthushiash?'

"An alien had spoken to me. An *alien*, a being from the stars. Had spoken. To me.

"Oh, god, I had no time for football, but I would have claimed a passion for paper-folding, for Dumb Crambo—anything to keep him talking. I asked him about his home-planet sports, I insisted on buying his drinks. I listened raptly while he spluttered out a play-by-play account of a game I wouldn't have turned a dial for. The 'Grain Bay Pashkers.' Yeah. And I was dimly aware of trouble among the humans on my other side.

"Suddenly this woman—I'd call her a girl now—this girl said something in a high nasty voice and swung her stool into the arm I was holding my drink with. We both turned around together.

"Christ, I can see her now. The first thing that hit me was *discrepancy*. She was a nothing—but terrific. Transfigured. Oozing it, radiating it.

"The next thing was I had a horrifying hard-on just looking at her.

"I scrooched over so my tunic hid it, and my spilled drink trickled down, making everything worse. She pawed vaguely at the spill, muttering. I just stared at her trying to figure out what had hit me. An ordinary figure, sort of a soft avidness in the face. Eyes heavy, satiated-looking. She was totally sexualized. I remember her throat pulsed. She had one hand up touching her scarf, which had slipped off her shoulder. I saw angry bruises there. That really tore it. I understood at once those bruises had some sexual meaning.

"She was looking past my head with her face like a radar dish. Then she made an 'Ah-h-h-h' sound that had nothing to do with me and grabbed my forearm as if it were a railing. One of the men behind her laughed. The woman said, 'Excuse me,' in a ridiculous voice and slipped out behind me. I wheeled around after her, nearly upsetting my futeball friend, and saw that some Sirians had come in.

"That was my first look at Sirians in the flesh, if that's the word. God knows I'd memorized every news shot, but I wasn't prepared. That tallness, that cruel thinness. That ap-

palling alien arrogance. Ivory-blue, these were. Two males in immaculate metallic gear. Then I saw there was a female with them. An ivory-indigo exquisite with a permanent faint smile on those bone-hard lips.

"The girl who'd left me was ushering them to a table. She reminded me of a goddamn dog that wants you to follow it. Just as the crowd hid them, I saw a man join them too. A big man, expensively dressed, with something wrecked about his face.

"Then the music started and I had to apologize to my furry friend. And the Sellice dancer came out and my personal introduction to hell began."

The red-haired man fell silent for a minute. Self-pitying bastard, I thought. Something wrecked about the face; it fit.

He sensed my distaste, pulled his face together.

"First I'll give you the only coherent observation of my entire evening. You can see it here at Big Junction, always the same. Outside of the Procya, it's humans with aliens, right? Very seldom aliens with other aliens, never aliens with humans. It's the humans who want in."

I nodded, but he wasn't talking to me. His voice had that soft druggy fluency.

"Ah, yes, my Sellice. My first Sellice."

"They aren't really well built, y'know, under those cloaks. No waist to speak of and short-legged. But they flow when they walk.

"This one flowed out into the spotlight, cloaked to the ground in violet silk. You could only see a fall of black hair and tassels over a narrow face like a vole. She was a mole-grey. They come in all colors; their fur is like a flexible velvet all over; only the color changes startlingly around their eyes and lips and other places. . .'Erogenous zones! Ah, man, with them it's not zones.

"She began to do what we'd call a dance, but it's no dance, it's their natural movement. Like smiling, say, with us. The music built up, and her arms snaked forward letting the cloak fall apart little by little. She was naked under it. The spotlight started to pick up her body markings, moving in the slit of the cloak. Her arms floated apart and I saw more and more.

"She was fantastically marked and the markings were writhing. Not like body paint—alive. Smiling, that's a good word for it. As if her whole body was smiling sexually, beckoning, winking, urging, pouting, speaking to me. You've seen a classic Egyptian belly dance? Forget it—that's a sorry stiff thing compared to

what any Sellice can do. This one was ripe, near term.

"Her arms went up and those blazing lemon-colored curves pulsed, waved, everted, contracted, evolved unbelievably welcoming, promising permutations. *Come do it to me, do it, do it here and here and here and now.* You couldn't see the rest of her, only a wicked flash of mouth. Every human male in the room was aching to ram it to that burning, melting target. The other aliens were quiet too, except one of the Sirians who was chewing out a waiter.

"I was a basket case before she was halfway through. . .I won't bore you with what happened next. Before it was over there were several fights and I got cut. My money ran out on the third night, and she was gone next day.

"I didn't have time to find out about the Sellice cycle then, mercifully. That came after I went back to campus and discovered you had to have a degree in solid-state electronics to apply for off-planet work. I was a premed but I got that degree. It only took me as far as First Junction then.

"Oh, god, First Junction. I thought I was in Heaven—the alien ships coming in and our freighters going out. I saw them all, all but the real exotics, the tankies. You only see a few of them a cycle, even here. And the Yyeire. You've never seen that.

"Go home, boy. Go home to your version of Burned Barn . . .The first Yyeir I saw I dropped everything and started walking after it like a starving hound, just breathing. You've seen the pix of course. . .Like lost dreams. *Man is in love and loves what vanishes.* . .It's the scent, you can't guess that. I followed until I ran into a slammed port. I spent half a cycle's credits sending the creature the wine they call stars' tears. . .Later I found out it was a male. That made no difference at all. You can't have sex with them, y'know. No way. They breed by light or something, no one knows exactly. There's a story about a man who got hold of a Yyeir woman and tried. They had him skinned. Stories. . ."

He was starting to wander.

"What about that girl in the bar, did you see her again?"

He came back from somewhere.

"Oh, yes. I saw her. She'd been making it with the two Sirians, y'know. The males do it in pairs. Said to be the total sexual thing for a woman, if she can stand the damage from those beaks. I wouldn't know. She talked to me a couple of times after they finished with her. No use for men whatever.

She drove off P Street bridge. . .The man, poor bastard, he was trying to keep that Sirian bitch happy single-handed. Money helps, for a while. I don't know where he ended."

He glanced at his wrist again. I saw the pale bare place where a watch had been and told him the time.

"Is that the message you want to give Earth? Never love an alien?"

"Never love an alien. . ." He shrugged. "Yeah. No. Ah, Christ, can't you see? Everything going out, nothing coming back. Like the poor damned Polynesians. We're gutting Earth, to begin with. Swapping raw resources for junk. Alien status symbols. Ball-point pens and mickey mouse watches."

"Well, there is concern over the balance of trade. Is that your message?"

"The balance of trade." He rolled it sardonically. "Did the Polynesians have a word for it, I wonder? You don't see, do you? All right, why are you here? I mean you, personally. How many guys did you climb over—"

He went rigid, hearing footsteps outside. The Procya's hopeful face appeared around the corner. The red-haired man snarled at him and he backed out. I started to protest.

"No sweat, that stupid bastard loves it. And it's the only pleasure we have left. . . Don't you see, man? That's us. That's the way we look to them, to the real ones."

"But—"

"And now we're getting the cheap C-drive, we'll be all over just like the Procya. For the pleasure of serving as freight monkeys and junction crews. Oh, they appreciate our ingenious little service stations, the beautiful star folk. They don't *need* them, y'know. Just an amusing convenience. D'you know what I do here with my two degrees? What I did at First Junction: hull cleaning. A swab. Sometimes I get to replace a tube fitting."

I muttered something. The self-pity was getting heavy.

"Bitter? Man, it's a *good* job. Sometimes I get to talk to one of them." His face twisted. "My wife works as a—Oh, hell, you wouldn't know. I'd trade—I *have* traded—everything Earth offered me for just that chance. To see them. To speak to them. Once in a while to touch one. Once in a great while to find one low enough, perverted enough to want to touch me. . ."

His voice trailed off and suddenly came back strong.

"And so will you!" He glared at me. "Go home! Go home and tell them to quit it. Close the ports. Burn every

god-lost alien thing before it's too late! That's what the Polynesians didn't do."

"But surely—"

"But surely be damned! Balance of trade, my festering feet. Balance of *life*, man. I don't know if our birth rate is going; that's not the point. Our soul is leaking out; we're bleeding to death!"

He took a breath and lowered his tone.

"What I'm trying to tell you, this is a trap. We've hit the supernormal stimulus. Man is exogamous—all our history is one long drive to find and impregnate the stranger. Or get impregnated by him, it works for women too. Anything different colored, different nose, ass, anything, man *has* to screw it or die trying. That's a drive, y'know, it's built in. Because it works fine as long as the stranger is human. For millions of years that kept the genes circulating. But now we've met aliens we can't screw, and we're about to die trying. . .Do you think I can touch my wife?"

"But—"

"Look. Y'know, if you give a bird a fake egg like its own but bigger and brighter marked, it'll roll its own egg out of the nest and sit on the fake? That's what we're doing."

"You're too much in the sex bag, man, you're freaked on it."

"Sex. Yeah. No. . .It's deeper." He rubbed his head, trying to clear the drugs. "Sex is only part of it, there's more. I've seen Earth missionaires, teachers, sexless people. Teachers—they end cycling waste or pushing floaters, but they're hooked. They stay. I saw one fine-looking old woman, she was servant to a Cu'ushbar kid. A defective; his own people would have let him die. That wretch was swabbing up its

vomit as if it was holy water. Man, it's deep. . .Some cargo-cult of the soul. We're built to dream outwards. . .They laugh at us. They don't have it."

There were sounds of movement in the next corridor. The dinner crowd was starting. I had to get rid of him and get there. Suddenly a side door opened and a figure started towards us.

At first I thought it was an alien, and then I saw it was a woman wearing an awkward body-shell. She seemed to be limping slightly. Behind her I could glimpse the dinner-bound throng passing the open door.

The man got up as she turned into the bay. They didn't greet each other.

"The station employs only happily wedded couples," he told me with that ugly laugh. "We give each other. . .comfort."

He took one of her hands. She flinched as he drew it over his arm and let him turn her passively, not looking at me. "Forgive me if I don't introduce you. My wife appears fatigued."

I saw that one of her shoulders was brutally scarred.

"Tell them," he said, turning to go. "Go home and tell them." Then his head snapped back toward me, and he added quietly, "And stay away from the Syrtis desk or I'll kill you."

They went away up the corridor.

I changed tapes hurriedly with one eye on the figures passing that open door. Suddenly among the humans and Procya I caught a glimpse of two sleek scarlet shapes. My first real aliens. I snapped the recorder shut and hurried to fall in behind them.

"Oh? And what sort of sacrifices are you going to make to your snow idol, Timmy?"

Is there anybody who hasn't been heard from on the drug problem? We doubt it, after hearing a pro football kickoff return called "the ultimate trip" in a TV ad against drugs. This story projects the problem into the near future, when drugs have been controlled to the point where they are almost government issue.

The Hippie-Dip File

by ROBERT THURSTON

FRANK WHOLEY, RIGHT-wing guru and freak-out guide, gave two light, friendly punches to the shoulder of his subject-tripper, Lee Ruhr, and said:

"Kay-o, hippie-dip, let's ass-kick you onto our last trip together."

"Why last?" Lee asked.

Wholey's beefy hands straightened his narrow tie and stem-pulled his white carnation to attention on his lapel.

"You'll see," he muttered. An odd-looking smirk, as if twisted out of wrought iron, subverted the classic blandness of his midwestern football-jock face.

Lee stopped his fingers from drumming on his chair's red leather arms. He attempted a deep breath, to get a feeling of health inside his body before accepting the capsule. He coughed instead. The room stank of the Old Spice Incense burning next to Wholey's elbow. Wholey never opened windows. He detested uninvited vibrations, whether good or bad.

"Ready to groove, old buddy?" Wholey said. Lee nodded. Wholey forced his hand into a suit coat pocket and pulled out the speckled capsule.

"Commence Operation Turn-on," he said, thrusting his hand toward Lee's mouth. He always fed Lee the drugs, the way mothers feed their children—waiting for Lee's mouth to open, then popping the cap onto his struck-out tongue.

The speckled capsule

brought on a first-rate high quicker and more efficiently than any other drug. His mouth watering for it, Lee watched the capsule—its tip just barely visible between Wholey's fat thumb and forefinger—until it blurred, duplicated itself, and vanished beneath his nose and the tuft of mustache he could see. Too bad the speckled jobs were so hard to get. Too bad the only way to get them was through the right-wingers.

Lee had grown tired of the craze for right-wingers which his generation had adopted in much the same way that young people usually spring onto a passing fad as if by prearranged agreement. Originally a radical active in the most violent of the revolutionary groups, Lee had drifted away more and more from political involvement as he progressed through his late twenties. After Kent State and a short fruitless underground tour with the Weathermen, the activism soured into frustration, and he joined the growing number of movement-types who dropped out of the radical mainstream and dropped everything from acid to speed to specks. Along the way other fads came and went—communes, the mystic arts of the Orient, various books of the dead, the Drop-Out Olympics (conducted right in Munich in '72, which drew wrath from sports freaks everywhere), the nude hikes, shriek-poems, electronic Ouija boards. Each new activity brought with it a further withdrawal from society by the hard-cores and the loss of most of the fellow travelers who'd cavorted on the fringe, who'd blown grass to blow time instead of minds. Closet squares, they slipped back into society and cashed key-punched pay checks with shy, secret smiles.

Time pronounced the hippie and radical movements dead (caricaturing a mock funeral in psychedelic colors on the cover); other publications sent sympathy cards. The administration, proclaiming victory for its calm-voice policy, declared the redemption of American institutions and turned its attention to convincing the still-active black militants that they had won enough for the time being. ABC-TV put pennies on the corpse's eyelids by scheduling a hippie situation comedy, *It's a Groovy Life*, starring Jack Carter, Tina Conway, and Bob Denver (later canceled when the sponsor, Pall Mall Juarez Golds, pulled out because they feared their product's potential might be harmed by association with the program). However, the movement refused to fall quietly into the grave. It retained substantial, though diminished,

popularity, mainly because new generations of young people kept coming along and joining it. Any youth who was dissatisfied with his destiny or angry with his parents felt an urge to run off and crash a hippie caravan. Although, on a per capita basis, the movement did not attract as many youngsters as in the past, there was always a sufficient number of novitiates to make the rest of society uptight about hippie types in general.

So Lee traveled stiff-lipped through towns where cries like "get a job" and "wash your face, stupid" proliferated. He'd been treated to five violent haircuts in the past three years. Waitresses snipped off locks of their dyed hair and left them in his soup. Persistent harassment came from the VVNA (Veterans of the Viet-Namese Adventure), of which each town had at least one post.

It was hard times all right, but Lee managed. He started his own caravan and gathered about him quite a mob of followers. The highs were good and there were still enough beautiful chicks who put out regularly and well. Yet a lot of the old faces had vanished lately, and radio stations now played Dylan's ancient "The Times They Are A-Changing" with an altered emphasis of lyric.

Lee swallowed the speck. The cold flashes came immediately. He laughed joyfully and let his body become absolutely frigid.

Wholey lit a cigarette, which, to Lee, burned pinwheels of red and yellow light.

"Ready to freak, old buddy?" Wholey said.

"Right on, man."

"Kay-o."

Wholey scratched the crown of his head with the ring finger of his cigarette hand. Lee, watching the glowing tip revolve, laughed and said:

"Man, you won't *believe* what I see above your head. I see a goddamned wavery halo. You holy, Wholey?"

Lee chuckled at his wordplay, even though he was still sober enough to condemn it in his mind.

"Wholier than thou," Wholey said, his face not recording a double entendre.

Lee succumbed easily to the power of suggestion, which was the greatest feature of dropping specks. Wholey's halo became more defined. It gavé off golden rays. A curly beard sprouted from Wholey's chin and inched like a vine down the front of the burlap robe he now seemed to wear. Lettered in silver silk thread across the hem were the words, "Give God a Boost."

As a trip guide, Wholey was

good, there was no denying that. He clipped out the suggestions like a top sergeant shouting commands at a crack drill team.

"Amusement park." Lee rode all the rides, won all the plaster prizes, stuck cotton candy on the naked body of an old girl friend. "Outdoor concert." Beneath an enormous moon, by his side the same chick now dressed in taffeta and crinoline, the overpowering tension of Mahler. "The Beatles doing a special revival appearance in a football stadium." Audience stomping and cheering in all the right places, the places where instinct told them they used to; the four men themselves, middle age beginning to show, smiling oddly at bummer notes; John not knowing whether to let loose in the old style or act more like the member of Parliament he now was; Paul dedicating a song to Lee for standing by them spiritually all these years; some straight chicks eyeing Lee with interest. "A pro football game." Lee as quarterback of the Miami Dolphins, uncorking a bomb in the final seconds of a championship game against the Chicago Bears, threading the needle past four stumbling defenders, laying it like a baby into the arms of his tight end, Frank Wholey. The crowd cheering. "A political convention." Lee fighting his way to the rostrum to make the keynote speech which will swing the mood of the entire country.

Wholey's suggestions were spaced apart at minute and a half intervals, the time period adjudged best for the speck-influenced mind to flesh out and dramatize the words heard. He glanced often at the Timex wristwatch he held in the mountainous palm of his hand. As the drug took deeper and deeper hold on Lee's mind, Wholey could decrease the time intervals and elaborate on the suggestions. In the meantime he could only keep track of the time and scan his office, his look stopping comfortably at the familiar items: the temperature-controlled electronic water fountain, the brass-fringed file cabinets, the plastic hookah pipe, the Day-Glow Tricia and Julie portrait, the animated black-jockey statue which in operation gyrated to an Aretha Franklin tape, the electric wastebasket.

"An old-fashioned riot. . .On a motorcycle easy riding. . .The main street of your hometown. . .A dinner in your honor. . ."

Wholey was always bored by the opening sequences, which he read from a list he'd previously prepared from indications provided by Lee's

psychological profile. These were the suggestions which would turn him on quickest, put him most deeply under the drug's influence. Lee's major hangup, as shown by the profile, was a deeply suppressed need to become a hero. Originally he'd joined the movement hoping to rise to a leadership position. But it was a case of too late with too much. As lethargy replaced ambition and he followed the shifting drifts of his contemporaries, the hero-desire became a part of his fantasy life, until it faded to its present role in Lee's protean variety of mock-heroic dreams. As a result, it was the simplest first stage in the series of visions which the speckled capsules brought on. Specks worked most efficiently when the trip was started with suggestions which functioned within familiar contexts. Further into the trip the suggester could then penetrate more deeply into the tripper's mind in order to bring about more intricate and bizarre hallucinations. In the past Wholey had caused panoramic spectacles in Lee's mind. Specks were the most psychodramatic of psychedelic drugs.

Watching the wide grin on Lee's face, Wholey longed for the end of the session. A good thing that tonight was the last night for this goofy hippie-dip.

"Oh, man, that's beautiful, that's *really* beautiful." Lee spoke fuzzily, a clue that he was now way under. Let him enjoy it for a minute, then launch the switcheroo.

Wholey wished that the hippie-dip whimsical craze for right-wingers would end soon, preferably through the disappearance of hippies from the face of the earth. Ah; well, if God had not desired this odd alliance between hippies and the extremist right, He would not have given right-wingers specks. So long as specks were craved, so long as they were the best trip going, Wholey would be on the job, dispensing the caps to the carefully selected recipients.

But he was tired of being a guru. Some of the guys down at the VVNA post rode him a lot about it, but in times like these certain sacrifices had to be made. Their rough laughter was often pleasantly countered by a secret squeeze of the upper arm or pat on the back from someone in the know.

When it appeared that Lee was sufficiently under, Wholey consulted the classified file. He glanced quickly through its clipped-together pages, each one bearing the Top Secret mark in red ink. He knew by heart all the information which the reports in the file supplied, but he wanted to verify the

sequence of suggestions he'd already chosen. After investing this much time in one of these creeps, he couldn't afford a slip-up in the final stage. But the info was all there, organized, collated, and researched. Everything one needed to know about Lee Ruhr was specified in this sheaf of papers.

"Fell good, old buddy?" Wholey asked.

"You know it, man. I'm in the saddle of a cloud."

"Riding across the sky?"

"Yeah, baby."

"Well, look down now. There's Denver down there, spread out across that big plateau. See it?"

"Oh, wow, yeah. That is Denver all right."

"Well, dig your spurs into that piece of cumulus and guide it down slowly, slowly, like a bird gliding down an air current. You doing that?"

"Sure, baby, guiding her in A-OK."

Holding in his lap a street map of Denver which he'd taken from the file, Wholey directed Lee's mind on a tour of the city. Lee had lived in Denver for a while; so he filled in the details easily. He described to Wholey the U. S. mint building; a twisting route through the long one-story art museum, stopping for a long look at an exhibit of Indian handicrafts; the colorful displays in the Baby Doe section of the historical museum; a hysterical shoplifting spree through the May D&F department store. Wholey then suggested that Lee go to Bristol Court, a one-block dead-end side street in the north section of the city. Lee winced when Wholey specified the address.

"You don't want to go there, man," Lee protested. "That's a bummer pad."

"No, I want to go there very much."

He eased Lee into the house by making him describe its flaked exterior, the standing slivers on the porch railing, the bleak diaper-odored hallway, the delicate trip up three flights of sway-backed stairs, the door to his apartment and the light showing through where the wood had split, and finally the apartment itself—dismal, discolored, peeling.

"Okay, we've seen it," Lee said. "Let's go. Let's go someplace with better vibes. Let's crash Button's place."

"No, let's stay here. I like it here."

"Screw off, you can't see it. I'm changing it."

"Try. Won't work. You can't."

"I am changing it. I am changing it myself into Button's place."

"Impossible. See, it's still your pad."

"You can't control everything, damn it!"

"Oh, yes, I can. I can, you know it, baby."

"I am changing it right now!"

"No, you're not. You can't. It's still the Bristol Court pad."

"I don't want it to be."

"It is. It is because I say so, right? Look, the only window is cracked, the cracks look like the branches of a tree."

"I CAN'T STAY HERE!"

"And look—look hard, Lee, baby—here's Lorna. . ."

"NO!"

"Lorna coming out of the bedroom, pushing long red hair away from her face with her index fingers."

"Oh, no. God, no!"

Using the details garnered from the thorough investigation of Lorna Redmond, Wholey was able to make her real for Lee. He had her make love to him, showed her puttering around the small pad in that flighty way which everybody interviewed had mentioned, created a drawn-out wing-ding of an argument. He reminded Lee of the many times he'd slept with other chicks while Lorna, never quite in step with the sexual mores of the movement, always remained faithful to him. A strong feeling of guilt showed in Lee's voice while Wholey talked, suggested. As the clincher, Wholey revived the details of the abortion, emphasizing the squalidness of the basement where it had happened. With enthusiasm he re-created one of Lee's rare visits to her at her mother's home, where Lorna sat all day pretending she was a vegetable.

The Lorna episode had occurred about the same time that Lee's interest in political activism waned, and Wholey gained much ground through the repetition of the suggestion that Lee's own selfishness had destroyed the girl. Judging by the pain in Lee's face, Wholey knew that the strategy had worked. Phase one successful, now we ease the bastard into phase two.

First he made Lee feel easy again, presented him with peaceful pictures, took him on a joy ride past lovingly remembered events. Then he flipped to another page in the classified file.

Trying to sound like a friendly psychiatrist, he brought Lee in gradual stages back to his childhood. Both home towns—Pekin, Illinois, and Newfane, New York—were evoked and blended into one childishly distorted version of Smalltown America. Lee's voice took on the accents of childhood. He thrilled with awe at the candy counters, grown gigantic again. He swivel-hipped through the fire escape door of

the movie house with a platoon of other kids; they made a disciplined operation out of sneaking into a theater. He followed the gang to the statue in the square where they draped themselves around its base, hung one-handed from the mold-green iron horse's leg, and sometimes lifted themselves to the flanks where they could ride into battle hugging the sides of the unknown soldier's mammoth waist.

Then, with his customary abruptness, Wholey changed the tone. He made Lee re-experience a time when he had cheated on an important seventh-grade examination, only to be caught and, like a coward, had immediately implicated his cohort in the crime. Again guilt acted like a corrosive, strips of Lee's shaky self-confidence fell away. He tried to protest. He said that he'd acted without malice, that the confession had been blurted out in mindless fear. But Wholey—acting the role of fearsome teacher and really getting into it—convinced Lee that he had known exactly what he was doing. Their plan a bust, Lee had wanted his buddy to suffer as much as he. Although Lee struggled to resist, Wholey made him experience again the time when he and his friend—with words they had thought they'd never use on each other—had broken off their friendship forever.

Wholey guided Lee through many similar events, a collection of trivial guilts. As his *piece de resistance*, Wholey wove together the various facts about Lee's father which were recorded in the file. Masterfully he built up Lee's guilt about the many rifts, the terrible resentments, the gradual drifting apart until a trip home meant hours of shared silence. Until he stopped taking trips home. His father had died of cancer, a cancer that ate slowly as if it savored each small inch it devoured. The rest of the family sent several letters and telegrams, each asking Lee to come home for one last visit. He refused. But he almost came many times. Finally the father died. Lee went to the funeral but refused to look in the coffin.

Abruptly Wholey switched to pleasanter suggestions. Lee responded weakly, he could not seem to feel the joy of the visions that Wholey evoked. Checking the file again, Wholey decided that it was time for the final sequence. Quickly he brought back the college days, starting with flashes of the pastoral landscape, then segueing to the revolutionary turmoil.

"You blew it, old buddy," Wholey said. "You really accepted the big shaft."

"No," Lee said. "No! I tried!"

"Trying don't win you any brownie points, man. You went after a national rep, and you distorted the goals of the movement to feed your own egotism."

"No! I wanted—"

"You wanted to be number one, that's all, punk. Look, you're now at that last big rally, see? See it?"

"No, I won't!"

"You will. You're on the rostrum now, back on top. Right?"

"No! Damn it, yes!"

"And you're leading the chant—Power to the People, Bomb the Pigs. C'mon, start it, they're all waiting for you. Start!"

"Power to the People! Bomb the Pigs!"

"Louder, they can't hear you in back."

"POWER TO THE PEOPLE! BOMB THE PIGS!"

Lee's voice, shrill but powerful, rattled Wholey's row of bourbon glasses. Wholey was grateful that he'd soundproofed the office before accepting these hippie-dip assignments.

Lee stood up and hysterically waved his arms in rhythm to the chant. Wholey encouraged him, sometimes outside the vision in his role as trip guide, sometimes inside—playing the part of crowd members, screaming "Right on!" with an enthusiasm which would have amused his VVNA friends. Lee's face became drenched with sweat, the shrill voice was harsh around the edges.

"Listen to them cheer you, old buddy," Wholey whispered, Iago-like, into Lee's ear. "Feels good, don't it?"

"Yeah," Lee muttered in the beat between the two slogans.

"Got 'em in the palm of your hand, right?"

"Yeah!"

Time for the turnabout.

"Stupid sellout bastard!" Wholey shouted.

"What? What do you want?"

"Selfish soulless creep!"

"Hey, man, don't put me down!"

Lee appeared dazed, helpless, weak. Just like all the other punks before Wholey had administered the kill. Slowly, almost lovingly, he took a sheet of paper—the kill—from the file.

"You blew it, baby," Wholey said again, this time in the tone of a concluding statement.

Lee looked like someone who had just lost something but could not remember what.

"If boobs like you hadn't mouthed ideals instead of following them, the movement might—*might*—have succeeded," Wholey read from the paper, freely adapting the written words of a leading revolutionary who'd later disappeared

into Algeria. "Instead it disintegrated, broke up into too many factions—just like yours, baby, just like yours. Guys like you, old buddy, who try too hard to be heroes, always screw it up for everybody else. Heroes are always out for themselves, man, they only win the small victories."

Now Lee looked as if he remembered what he had lost. And Wholey knew he had him for sure.

Whenever a creep sentimentally saw himself as the loose cog or stripped gear in the machinery of the movement, it was simple to plant the thought that, if he had not copped out, the world might have been saved. Wholey's suggestions dramatized that idea. Lee saw apocalypse, holocaust, accusers' pointing fingers, all the people he'd ever loved simultaneously turning their backs on him. He saw failure personified in a shriveled creature staring back at him from inside a mirror. He wept uncontrollably.

Wholey finished the sequence in an emotionless voice. His suggestions were routine; Lee fleshed them out pallidly. Wholey brought him down gradually, until what passed for normality appeared in his dazed eyes. He gave him visions of gently waving wheat fields, of purple mountain majesties, of apple pies and baseball, of workers toiling valiantly in fields and at forges—all the usual crap.

While waiting for Lee to come out of it, Wholey examined the innocent-looking capsule. Strong stuff, whatever was in it, he thought. He had been told they were easy to manufacture. Stockpiled inside some mountain somewhere were enough caps to take care of all the remaining hippie-dips now roaming the land. Even if the craze for right-wing gurus came to an end, they would find ways to get specks to the creeps. So long as the gurus were the only pushers for the stuff, it was unlikely that they would be abandoned in midfad.

Lee moaned, a sure sign that the trip was over. Strands of straggly hair hung like wet maypole ropes in his face. Well, time to chuck this one out forever.

"You seen the light, old buddy?" Wholey said, while giving Lee his best Billy Graham expression. He jabbed at Lee's shoulder a couple of times.

"I think so," Lee said hazily.

"Kay-o. You think about all this now. I'm sure you've gotten something from it."

Lee nodded.

"You get out of here now. I don't want to see you again. Ever."

Lee stood up. Wholey

handed him a piece of paper from the file.

"You want more specks, you go to the address on this paper. It's the American Flag Pharmacy, and they'll give you all you can pay for. Now get out."

Lee went to the door.

"Wait!"

Lee turned. Wholey walked to him.

"You stop by the barber shop next door and get those wavy locks shorn. Don't worry about the money." Another pair of friendly shoulder-jabs. "Tell 'em I sent you, boy." A soft left, grazing the tip of the jaw. "They'll do it."

Lee nodded and left.

Tired out, Wholey stretched both his arms above his head, automatically setting his index and middle fingers in the V sign. He felt pleased. Taking care of creeps certainly was worthwhile, the hell with what the guys at the VVNA post said. If they knew that the VVNA brass had this for a secret project, with the current administration's tacit approval, they'd laugh out of the other side of their mouths.

He gathered together all the material that belonged in Lee's file. He took a last look at the Top Secret general summary of the findings about Lee Ruhr. It told of how Lee was considered potentially volatile, even though he had slid away from actual involvement in political activism. The report went on to say that his charismatic abilities were considerable even while he was just aimlessly leading a hippie caravan. Therefore, the report concluded, since he could always become a threat if he decided to return to activism, and since the President stubbornly maintained his stand against concentration camps, it was felt that the alteration of consciousness through specks, coupled with a forced addiction to the drug, would be advisable in this particular case. The report was written in the usual jargon, as were all reports that were part of Operation Mindblow.

In small bunches Wholey fed the file—the sheaf of papers, the computer print-outs, the key-punched cards, the cardboard folder itself—into the whirring jaws of his electric wastebasket, which shredded them into tiny pieces and swallowed them with an uneasy belch.

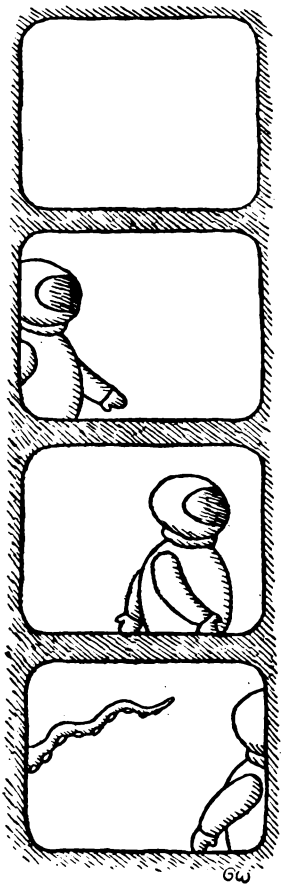
MIXED MEDEA

BAIRD SEARLES

FILMS

MY TITLE THIS MONTH IS not only a frightful pun concerning the one new movie-movie I have to talk about, but it refers to the surprising number of other things up for consideration that aren't films, but are highly relevant.

But first Pasolini's Medea, with Maria Callas' much talked about screen debut in the title role. As opposed to the almost classically straight *Trojan Women* film, Pasolini has been more concerned with Euripides as a taking off point for an evocation of some fantastic barbaric never-never land, not only with Medea's native Colchis but with legendary Greece also. Much of the flavor of the film was obviously governed by what locations he could find in which to film inexpensively, and the resulting mix veers jarringly between the visionary and the practicable. For Colchis he has used an amazing (and presumably extant) community of dwellings carved out of stone cones in a volcanic landscape. The natives are costumed in a melange of Mongol and Tuareg styles, and we are introduced to Medea as she takes part in a beautifully evoked king-must-die sort of human sacrifice. Unfortunately,



the extras are very obviously Mediterranean peasants; the people of Colchis may have looked like Mediterranean peasants for all I know, but they jar not only with the stuff of legend but with the principal actors, who look like another species of human being altogether. "Greece" is almost pure Berber, whitewashed domed houses, high veiled headdresses for the women and all. The Argo has been reduced to a raft; the Argonauts to a miscellaneous crowd of men that Jason has picked up somewhere (I spotted Castor and Pollux because they were twins, and Orpheus because he had a lyre).

Pasolini's direction consists of making people stand about looking fraught for a good deal of the time, then bursting into violent, and usually unexplained, action. (Medea almost casually dismembers her brother as they are fleeing from Colchis.) Charon is a centaur when Jason is young, human later. In only one shot is the centaur faked convincingly. The film's dialogue is minimal; what there is in Italian. At one point Medea leans out the window and screams, *"Bambini! Viene!"* The Music is Japanese koto and vocal. At times I thought that Pasolini may have been trying to say something about the barbarian vs. the civilized mind, or even more specifically about Medea-woman-instinct-magic vs. Jason-man-logic-reality; but if so, it didn't get through all the other diverse elements. It's a stew indeed, but maybe worth seeing for some of the fantastic imagery.

Oh, yes, Miss Callas. If she works hard and gets more roles, she may become this generation's Gale Sondegaard.

Films "made for TV" usually have that unstylish r a c e - t o - m e e t - t h i s - w e e k ' s - deadline look that regular TV fare has, but Black Noon on CBS was a cut above the usual. The story of a minister and his wife rescued from the desert by a decidedly peculiar community in the Old West, it kept me guessing—maybe from red herrings rather than a clever script—but at least I didn't predict the entire plot in the first five minutes. Good photography and an unstandard ending with a twist on top make it something to watch for in the summer reruns.

The most extraordinary visual fantasy of the year was also made for TV production, in this case an opera, of all things. Stravinsky's short setting of the Anderson fairy tale, The Emperor and the Nightingale, was produced by the NET Opera Theater as a surrealist Chi-

noiserie phantasmogoria, particularly mind blowing in color. Especially effective were a seven headed Death and an imperial court of banners and butterflies. Keep your eye on the listing of your local NET outlet for this one.

You may or may not approve of the Disney Thing (I don't with some notable exceptions), but no one can deny his influence on fantasy in the motion picture. While Disney World is not exactly in the province of this column, it's germane enough to throw in a brief comment or two here. A new kind of entertainment (with roots of course in Disney Land), it's a created environment cum amusement park cum World's Fair, probably the shape of entertainment of the future—as the great outdoors diminishes, *build* environments in which to have adventures (but safe ones, of course). All the expense and effort has gone into the realistic recreation of Disney fantasies (the Swiss Family Robinson's tree house, the underwater voyage of 20,000 Leagues, etc.) with enormous cleverness, consistency, and attention to detail, and an almost total lack of imagination. Nothing is a creation in itself except the Motel and the monorail. I will say some of the illusions are startling: in the Haunted Mansion, there are ghostly, three dimensional, semi-transparent figures that really fooled my eye. And the famous computer directed automatons are quite effective in an unnerving way. Nevertheless, one day was enough for me, and I ended up a half hour later with the feeling legendarily ascribed to Chinese cuisine. . . hungry for something creatively, solidly imaginative.

Things-to-come Dept. . .If you ever wondered what Peter Quint and Miss Jessel were up to that brought about all the horrors of *The Turn of the Screw* (James never did say, really), a new British movie called *The Night Comers* apparently will tell all, as a sort of prequel.

Books-on-film Dept. . .The International Film Guide Series from Paperback Library has brought out *Horror in the Cinema* by Ivan Butler. Far from being a "complete critical review of horror films," as claimed on the cover, it is a detailed examination of the best of the various types of horror films, written with perception and knowledge.

The Wellmans' "The Adventure of the Martian Client" (December 1969) considered the reaction of Sherlock Holmes and Professor Challenger to the Martian invasion of H. G. Wells. In this follow up story (narrated, of course, by Dr. Watson), the two eminent investigators look further into the source of that invasion.

Venus, Mars, and Baker Street

by MANLY W. WELLMAN and WADE WELLMAN

MR. H.G. WELLS APPARENTly chooses to ignore my published comment on his misleading brochure, *The War of the Worlds.* A few scientists deride the brilliant deductions of Sherlock Holmes and Professor George E. Challenger that the Invaders who came so close to destroying our civilization were not native to Mars. Holmes is busy with other matters, and Challenger scoffs at the scoffers.

"Human minds, save for the very few like Holmes's and the only one of my caliber, are absurdly limited," Challenger tells me. "Decades must pass, Dr. Watson, before the public accepts these truths so manifest to us." Nevertheless, this supplementary chronicle of mine will now be offered to the public, in the hope that Challenger's findings may be fully vindicated with the more receptive readers.

I have told how, on the afternoon of the invasion's tenth day, we three clustered around the Invader's carcass in the sitting room at 221-b Baker Street. It sprawled near the window through which it had climbed, a great bladder-like body with dull, dead eyes and two limp sprays of tentacles.

"Man may yet live to deserve his rule on Earth," rumbled Challenger in his beard. "As Dr. Watson points out, terrestrial bacteria are killing these creatures, where our best weapons have failed." Squatting, he tugged at the body. "We can get it to the basement."

Together we dragged it down

the seventeen steps to the ground floor. The odor of decay was sickening. Panting, we rolled it into Mrs. Hudson's cellar. By candlelight we saw a cemented trough in the floor, nine feet by four and more than a yard deep.

"Once a carpet-maker dyed fabrics there," said Holmes. "In with our specimen."

We lowered it with loops of cord, then mounted to the street door. The great war machine of the Invader slumped against the wall outside, but we saw no sign of his fellows. We dashed across to Dolamore's wine and spirits shop. Holmes and I filled baskets with bottles of brandy, whiskey, and gin. Challenger hoisted a twenty-gallon keg of rum to his broad shoulder. Back in the basement, we heaped tiles and fragments of cement around the carcass in the trough, and poured in our spirits. Several more trips to Dolamore's brought back enough liquor to submerge the dead Invader. At dusk we went upstairs and washed. Holmes found biscuits and a tin of tongue for supper, and I made tea on a spirit stove. Afterward, we had brandy and some of Holmes's cigars.

"Suppose we estimate our situation," said Holmes. "We know that these Invaders are dying from disease, and that they are not Martians."

"Because they breathe oxygen," amplified Challenger. "There is but a trace of it in Mars's thin atmosphere. Remember, too, that only ten cylinders crossed space from their Martian launching, the last departing before the first landed. It must have arrived on Earth only last night."

"Then its crew will be undiseased as yet," suggested Holmes.

"They will feel damaging effects quickly," I ventured. "A system unprepared to resist bacteria of disease and decay will soon suffer. The one we capture may well be a late arrival, and his earlier companions may have succumbed ere this."

"I am encouraged that the one who came here has not been followed," said Challenger, stroking his beard. "He came on a desperate, solitary undertaking, to repossess their signaling device yonder."

Holmes walked to where, in a box on a chair at the rear wall, lay the egg-shaped crystal he had bought some weeks before at a curiosity shop. In darkness it had transmitted images of the Invader.

"Turn down the lamp, Watson," said Holmes, and I did so. "I see what must be the cockpit of that machine outside," he reported, peering. "There is a light, and an

intricate assembly of what looks like switches and panels. You may turn the lamp up."

We discussed the physiology of the Invaders. "I endorse Dr. Watson's suggestion that they have developed by special breeding," said Challenger. "They are mostly brain and hands. Organically, they have evolved as far beyond man as man has progressed beyond four-footed mammals. Bulky lungs and no digestive tract—they draw blood from human victims directly into their circulatory system. I have not determined whether or not they sleep, but our specimen's eyes are lidded. Perhaps in ages past, they were not greatly different in physique from humanity."

"And their minds?" I inquired.

"Here, Watson, we may return to my original baboon comparison," said Holmes. "I suggest that the intelligence differential produced by the Visitors' evolution is less than the difference in organic structure. Perhaps the chimpanzee is a better comparison than the baboon. Chimpanzees can learn to ride bicycles and to eat with knives and forks. Who knows?" Again he peered at the Crystal Egg. "We may learn to use some of their devices."

Challenger yawned. "What do you say to sleeping on it?" he asked.

Holmes insisted that Challenger take his bedroom, and lay on the sofa in his dressing gown. I slept in my own quarters. Excited voices wakened me at sunrise. I caught up a robe and hurried into the sitting room.

Our landlady Mrs. Hudson was there, her blonde hair disordered, her white shirtwaist and dark skirt crumpled and dusty, her usually vigorous figure sagging as Holmes helped her to the sofa.

"Martha!" he cried, the only time I remember his using her Christian name. "You were to stay safe at Donnithorpe."

"I had to find out what had happened to you," she wept. "Even if the worst had befallen—"

Sitting, he held her to him. "Brandy, Watson," he ordered, and I poured some. He held it to her lips. It seemed to calm her.

"You came more than a hundred miles," he said. "On a velocipede, I see—the old-fashioned sort kicks up dust on the clothes like that."

"I started on foot," she managed. "I found the velocipede by the road and got into London last evening. Bit by bit, I made my way here."

"You saw no Invaders?" asked Challenger.

"Only two, far away." Again she wept. Holmes helped her up

and led her to the door of his bedroom.

Challenger tapped my shoulder. "Come," he said.

"I should offer Mrs. Hudson my help," I suggested.

"Holmes can take care of her without your help." Seizing my arm, he fairly hustled me to the stairs. From the street door, we looked for signs of Invaders. Nothing stirred.

"Isn't there a stepladder in the cellar?" asked Challenger. "I want to go up into this machine."

We found the ladder. I steadied it while he climbed up, nimbly for all his bulk. Gaining the sill above, he crept into the open chamber from which the Invader had entered our sitting room. He remained for some minutes, while I watched the street. No Invaders appeared there, though I briefly glimpsed a flying machine in the distance. At last Challenger descended, with something slung to his back.

"This is the device I suggested might be called television," he said, exhibiting his find. "Another Crystal Egg, set among keys and switches to direct its power. Come across to Dolamore's."

I followed him there. He took a tall bottle from a bin and opened it. "Chambertin," he announced. "Not too early in the morning for a sip."

"Why did you climb into the machine from the street, Professor?" I asked, filled a glass. "You could easily have gone through the window."

"I preferred not to disturb Holmes's researches. Observe this crystal."

It was dim enough to see an image of our sitting room. "Holmes is there, standing with Mrs. Hudson," I said, gazing. "Hullo, it's gone cloudy."

"I touched this key," said Challenger. "It blurred the image. Let us fetch some of these fine wines."

He was excessively careful in his selection, and it was half an hour before we slipped across. Challenger stamped loudly on the stairs. Holmes met us at the door, smiling. Inside, Mrs. Hudson looked rosy and happy as she fried pancakes. I, at least, relaxed a trifle over breakfast.

"No enemies outside," reported Challenger. "Come, Doctor, help me go after clean linen. Holmes can examine this communications apparatus I fetched."

Nothing moved in the streets save for twittering sparrows and a forlorn dog. Challenger prowled a haberdasher's shop for clothes to fit his huge frame. In a confectioner's I found sausages, smoked herrings and cheese for our larder. We came home at noon.

Holmes told us that Mrs.

Hudson was asleep in her quarters. "Our original crystal shows a great camp," he said. "The Invaders must direct their visual beam from there. I covered both crystals to keep them from locating us."

Challenger thrust his head under the covering blanket. "I verify your observation, Holmes," he boomed. "I see a great pit with earthen banks. A silent fighting machine, too, against the rampart—and two handling machines, slowly moving." He emerged. "It may be the headquarters Dr. Watson saw on Primrose Hill."

"Do you see Invaders?" asked Holmes, and again Challenger dived under the blanket.

"One is face to face with me," he said. "Great, intent eyes. Now it is gone. I see several, prone on the ground, stirring their tentacles."

"Not only diseased but starving, I fancy," Holmes added. "They have learned that to drink human blood is to drink death."

"Professor, when did you realize they were not Martians?" I asked.

Challenger stood up. "I dissented from other observers from the first," he replied. "The slow, hesitant movements of the Invaders caused some to speak of Earth's gravity, heavier than that of Mars. In my mind, however, I ascribed that slowness to the natural caution of aliens venturing into unfamiliar territory. My final doubts were destroyed when our specimen grappled me so powerfully, even in its dying moments."

That night, Mrs. Hudson fetched up a good dinner from her kitchen. Holmes brought out his violin to play Strauss waltzes. It was almost a cheerful party. On the twelfth and thirteenth days we made explorations. From high roofs we saw machines on streets far to the north, moving slowly toward Primrose Hill.

"They are coming together in their misery," said Holmes. "I am convinced, Challenger, that in close quarters they communicate by telepathy. Perhaps they hope to work out a solution—unless the telepathic power is failing."

Early on the afternoon of the fifteenth day, Challenger and I set forth to scout the enemy camp. Through the streets rose a dreadful wailing. Daring to approach, we saw a towering, motionless fighting machine in Regent's Park. Cautiously we stole on northward.

After sundown we reached Primrose Hill. I did not see the green light of five days earlier. Up the grassy slope we climbed. As the moon rose, we reached the steep rampart of earth. I paused, but Challenger scram-

bled to the top and stood erect.

"Dead!" he roared down to me. "They are all dead or dying!"

At once I mounted to stand beside him.

The pit below us was strewn with overturned machines, stacks of metal bars, strange shelters. Against the rampart opposite us lay the circular airship that had terrorized humanity. It looked like a gigantic saucer. At the center of the pit sprawled a dozen slack bladder shapes. A few stirred feebly and wailed. Fluttering birds pecked at one Invader that hung from the hood of a machine.

"We must tell the news," barked Challenger, starting down.

We hurried as fast as our weary legs could take us. At St. Martin's-le-Grand we found the telegraph office. Challenger tinkered with the key. The power was still on, and somehow—for his resourceful brain seemed capable of anything—he tapped out a message.

"We are in touch with Paris," he announced. "As so often in the past, it is G.E.C. who gives the world scientific information of the highest importance."

"You set yourself above Holmes," I said reproachfully.

"Please do not mistake me. I admire Holmes to a high degree. But the highest level of terrestrial reason is pure science. That transcends even the applied analysis of human behavior."

In great excitement we set out again for Baker Street.

I need not reconstruct the familiar details of England's recovery from the invasion. Holmes and Challenger and I helped returning refugees as best we could. The Invader's preserved body was presented to the Natural History Museum, where it is now displayed. Challenger and I felt that Curator James Illingworth was offhandedly cool in his acknowledgments. Holmes took little notice, for he was helping Scotland Yard trace the theft of crown jewels from the Tower of London. Astronomers reported that cylinders had crossed from Mars to Venus.

One October day I visited a patient in West Kensington and decided to call at Enmore Park, Challenger's home. Little Mrs. Challenger greeted me and led me down the hall. She knocked at a door, a booming voice answered, and I entered a huge study. Challenger's bearded head and massive shoulders bulked behind a table strewn with books, papers, and instruments.

"My dear Dr. Watson, this is opportune," he cried. "I am at

work on a study which, I predict, will add even greater luster to my reputation."

He thrust a sheet of paper under my nose, and I tried to read it. "A highly complex mathematical equation," I suggested.

"A correction of errors in the late Professor Moriarty's *Dynamics of an Asteroid.* How unfortunate that Holmes was forced to destroy that brilliant intellect! But for these improvements in his figures I must thank our recent acquaintances, with whom I am in contact."

"The Invaders?" I said, amazed. "But these Arabic numerals—"

"They quickly learned to use those, after I began with pairs and groups of coins to demonstrate that two and two made four, and so on. Holmes has observed my methods and helped me several times." He rose. "Come, I will show you how I exchange thoughts with them."

He opened a door at the rear of the room. I followed him into a dim chamber with curtained windows. From a desk in a corner shone a soft, familiar gleam. A medium-sized man stood up and faced us.

"Dr. Watson, this is my assistant, Morgan," said Challenger. "And you recognize the Crystal Egg."

It lay nested in black velvet.

"I thought it had been given to the Astronomer Royal," I said, stooping to look.

"No, Holmes and I turned over the crystal from that fighting machine," said Challenger. "This one, which transmits images from planet to planet, is better in my hands than in those of bungling academicians. What have you to report, Morgan?"

"They've been sending the landscape again," replied the other, his dark eyes on me.

"The landscape of Venus," Challenger told me. "Sit down and look."

I did so. The crystal showed a bleak expanse, gray and pallid. A haze of dusty clouds drifted. Through it I saw a strange expanse of rocks. In the middle distance stood three gaunt pinnacles, like half-dissolved sticks of candy. Beyond them rose a bluff, also eroded and worn. Then I found myself looking into a pair of round eyes, with a triangular mouth below them.

"An Invader," I said.

"He was showing us the inhospitable planet where he and his mates fight for life," said Challenger. "Now, something else we have seen before."

The face was gone. We saw a sort of shelf or table, and a sort of dark cup in a clamped stand. Steamy vapor rose from it. A tentacle came in view, pointing.

The scene shifted back to the landscape of worn rocks and dusty clouds, then again to the steaming cup. Then the peering eyes again.

"He shows the surface of Venus," said Challenger's deep voice. "A barren world, whipped by dust storms. I conjecture that the steam signifies an outside temperature exceeding that of boiling water. They dare not venture into the open."

The light faded in the Crystal Egg.

"They actually communicate with you," I said, deeply impressed.

"They must realize that in me they have the most elevated human comprehension possible. Have they sent other messages, Morgan?"

"These," said Morgan, picking up two sheets of penciled figures.

"Morgan has a sound mathematical sense," Challenger said. "We also exchange geometrical drawings. We are developing a profitable exchange of ideas."

The crystal was glowing again.

"Morgan, will you and Dr. Watson go into the study?" said Challenger. "Tell him of our findings these past weeks, while I try to see what further message our friend on Venus may send."

Morgan and I went out. In the brighter light of the study, he gazed at me. "Are you the Dr. Watson who writes?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I've read your accounts of Mr. Sherlock Holmes's cases."

I waited. He sat in Challenger's chair and spread out some papers. "I was an artilleryman," he said. "My regiment was wiped out by the Invaders at Horsell, and I'm on leave. I came here looking for work, and Professor Challenger took me on as a helper. Here are copies of their sketches we've seen in that Crystal Egg."

He showed me a drawing of a circular flying machine, wrecked among gaunt rocks. Another was a diagram of a handling machine.

"I escaped from Horsell and hid at Putney," he went on. "I looked for others to escape, and thought about survival, even resistance."

"Resistance?" I repeated. "Against the Invaders?"

"Get together some plucky men and women, was my idea," he said. "Hide in cellars and drains, try to capture the Aliens' weapons—"

"You planned intelligently," I could not help saying.

"But the invasion collapsed," he said, almost as though he regretted it. "While my regiment is recruiting and reorganizing, I'm working for the professor."

"And on good terms with those beings on Venus."

He smiled thinly. "They've stopped thinking of earthmen as food. And Venus is hot and lifeless. Their whole attempt on our Solar System has failed. Now they try to exchange thoughts with us. They've even passed on some scientific knowledge."

He rummaged in a drawer. "We might even learn the secret of their Heat-Ray. See here."

He produced a round porcelain container like a jam pot and screwed off the lid. "The central power of the Heat-Ray," he said, holding the container out. "I fetched it from their pit on Primrose Hill."

Inside was a round, dark object, the size of a pea. It had many facets, like a cut gem.

"But the Heat-Ray was like a great beacon," I argued. "It sent out an invisible beam that obliterated the target."

"This is only the core," said Morgan. "A curved mirror directs its power. Take it and look it over. It's harmless."

"Don't touch it!" snapped a voice at the hallway door, and Holmes strode in, leveling a revolver.

"If that object is harmless, take it in your own hand," he ordered Morgan. "Now, this instant!"

Morgan put the container on the table and slammed the lid on it. "No," he mumbled.

"Which means that you knew a touch would kill Dr. Watson," Holmes accused. "You'd like to kill me, too."

"What does this mean, Morgan?" I demanded.

"Drop the *g* and call him Moran," said Holmes. "He is the son of Colonel Sebastian Moran—the second most dangerous man in London when you helped me capture him in 1894."

Morgan sagged in his chair. "That is fantastic," he protested.

"I have just tracked down one Ezra Prather." Morgan started involuntarily. "You know him, I see. He was in the act of cutting up certain jewels, to make them easier to sell. He confessed how you and he stole them from the Tower, on the very day that Challenger telegraphed to Paris."

Morgan stood up, trembling. "I've done my best," he stammered. "I was a good soldier. I fought the Invaders. I've helped Professor Challenger. You can prove nothing against me."

"We need not prove anything," said Inspector Stanley Hopkins, also entering. "Prather made a full statement to Inspector Lestrade at Scotland Yard, telling us who you are and how to find you here." He

held out a pair of handcuffs. "Place your wrists together."

Challenger burst from the inner room. "How can I work profitably with all this noise?" he demanded. "Why is this man putting handcuffs on Morgan?"

"His name is Moran, and he is a thief and a would-be murderer," said Holmes, pocketing his revolver. "He was trying to kill Watson just now."

"Stay!" cried Moran suddenly. "Hear what I can offer you—the secret of the Heat-Ray and how it is used!"

Challenger scowled fearsomely. "If you know that, you have kept from me important messages from those creatures on Venus," he charged.

"I'll tell you everything," chattered Moran. "I have whole tables of formulas that explain the power. They tell how to direct impulses to explode atoms."

"But that is a scientific impossibility," I gasped. I looked at Holmes, whose expression was growing darker by the instant.

Challenger tramped toward Moran. "If these formulas are operable, then is your price freedom? Show me the figures."

"Here." Moran fumbled a sheaf of folded papers from inside his coat. "See for yourself, if you are able to understand."

"You insult me by expressing any doubts," Challenger said harshly.

He snatched the papers, spread them out and gazed. His eyes bulged in his shaggy face.

"You are right," he said excitedly. "This summation, and this, building upon it—I comprehend. It is the most amazing—"

Holmes made a swift stride. In his outstretched hand was a lighted match. The papers blazed up in Challenger's fist, and with a howl Challenger dropped them on the floor. They flamed brightly, while Challenger nursed his burnt fingers.

"Holmes, are you mad?" he roared.

"Sane, I hope," replied Holmes. "Sane enough to be disturbed at the sight of a brilliant chimpanzee making experiments with his trainer's pistol."

Challenger bent towards the burning papers. They were falling into ashes. "Lost!" he lamented. "Morgan—Moran—do you remember—?"

Moran shook his head in despair. "No, sir, it would be impossible to reproduce them."

"Lost," groaned Challenger again.

"Then let man himself find the secret," said Holmes, as calmly as I had ever heard him speak. "With a weapon like this,

man could easily destroy himself. If he finds the wisdom to devise it, he may also achieve the self-control that such power must entail."

Challenger blinked at Holmes for a long moment. "I will endorse that proposition," he said at last. "It should not have been necessary for you to bring this to my mind, Holmes. I have been thinking too much in the abstract."

"We have declined your offer," Holmes said to Moran. "Take him away, Inspector."

Hopkins put his hand on Moran's shoulder. He led the captive out. Challenger screwed the lid back upon the container.

"This must be kept in a far safer place than my drawer," he said. "Now, as for those Visitors on Venus—"

"You have been in contact with them, Professor?" I asked.

"For the last time, I fear. Come and see."

We went to the rear chamber with him. The Crystal Egg shone softly. Within it we saw some sort of card or board, and upon it a single large O.

"A zero," I said. "But that means nothing."

"It must be a farewell signal," said Holmes. "The pattern of events is clear. They died on Earth—now they must flee from Venus. A tale of disaster."

The light died in the crystal.

"And the survivors on Mars must also depart, or perish," declared Challenger.

"Forever from our latitudes of space?" I asked.

"Not necessarily," said Challenger. "They may well return, better prepared for survival. Since they cannot eat us, they may make scientific studies of us, or train us to understand their most fundamental conceptions—as they have already done with me. With your latest case solved, Holmes, perhaps you will take dinner here and discuss a few theories."

"Tomorrow would be better," said Holmes. "Just now I have a matter of importance to attend to at my quarters. Watson, however, will be glad to stay and report to me on your most recent reflections."

He walked out, closing the door behind him.

"A matter of importance," I mused aloud. "But this search for Moran was his only case on hand. Nobody will be waiting at home except Mrs. Hudson."

Challenger turned upon me a weary gaze of pity.

"Cerebral paresis," he said. "Mental inertia. Remarkable!"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing of consequence." He turned to the door. "I'll tell my wife we have a guest tonight. For the moment you can study my notes and Moran's drawings."□

Gordon Eklund ("Seeker for Still Life," January 1971) returns with a compassionate story about a relationship between a young girl and an alien who suffers from being more than human.

Grasshopper Time

by GORDON EKLUND

SOMETIMES, WHEN HE WAS remembering, he saw the sands of the desert that he had known so well as a warm, thick golden blanket drawn leisurely across the weary unbright wastes of the earth below, and the dunes were mere wrinkles in the fabric of this blanket, and the stars, arranged above in their nightly rings and clusters, were the eyes and ears of the outer universe gazing down upon a slumbering world.

This tableau was his. Ever and forever. Or so it seemed to him remembering—or so it only seemed.

He discovered them that night well beyond the jagged rocks of his home. They lay entwined of the night, drawing warmth from one another, sheltered from the cold desert wind by the flat side of a towering dune. The girl was perhaps seventeen, with bright ringlets of yellow hair spilling gracefully down her shoulders and forehead, almost touching her eyes, while the boy's hair was bitter black and neatfully tidy, but his eyes, like those of his sister, were a sparkling gleaming blue. His narrow fragile frame mocked hers, for he had already learned to carry the weight of his years, and she had not. The boy was no more than ten, and both were awake.

He said, "Hello there," but kept in the shadows, where the moonlight could not reach him. He said it again, then waited.

Neither had been aware of his presence until he spoke; so their reactions were immediate. The girl leaped to her feet and stood rigid as a post, glaring at the darkness, her fists clenched at her sides in ready defense, while the boy lay still. But he too had heard. He stared coldly upward and was not afraid.

"What do you want?" said the girl. "Get away from us."

He moved a few inches forward, only enough to allow the moonlight to reveal a part of his face and said, "I heard you here and thought you might need help. Are you lost?"

"We didn't ask for help."

"Of course not. But do you need any? I live near here. I have food. And shelter." He had continued moving forward as he spoke, and now he was near enough to touch them. Perhaps too near, for he could hear them clearly this close, their minds as loud and thunderous as a couple of roaring trains. He closed a part of his mind, so that only a gentle rumbling echo of turning wheels reached him and saw a dark house laid flat against the earth, a house that appeared to stretch endlessly in all directions at once, and the girl came running toward the house, running but never reaching, always approaching yet never arriving. He watched this picture in his mind, and for the first time he realized exactly how lonely he had been.

Until now.

The boy spoke easily. "We were lost," he said, "but I suppose we're not really lost any more. Isn't that right? You've found us, haven't you? So, what do you plan to do with us?"

The girl glared at the boy for a moment, then wheeled to face him. He had their names now. She was Sarah, and he was Richard. Good names. Strong names. And he liked them both.

Richard said, "Are you going to take us away? I hurt my ankle, and it's hard for me to walk."

"Be quiet," said Sarah, moving over to hover protectively above him. But her eyes never left his for a second.

Richard said, "Get out of my way, Sarah. I want to see, too."

He laughed at them both. The boy's mind reached him as cool and relentless as a rushing river, untouched as yet by the many things which changed boys into men. Rage and fury were as alien to this boy as fear, but so was love, he could see, despite the overwhelming presence of a gentle sort of kindliness, and of something else, something soft and silken that ran spinning through his life like a spider's web bridging the gap between two distant flowers.

"You're sure funny looking," Sarah told him. "Don't you think he's funny looking?" she asked her brother.

"No," Richard said, after a moment's thought. "Not especially."

"So, what's your name?" Sarah asked.

"Alan," he said.

"That's your real name?" said Richard.

"Of course," he said.

"But would you mind if I called you something else? Could I call you Benjamin? Or Dana? Would you mind?" And here was that silken thing. That soft thing. Dana. "We used to have a Benjamin and a Dana, but they're both gone. They wouldn't talk to us."

"I don't mind."

"Then I'll call you Dana."

"That would be fine."

"So, where are you going to take us, Dana?"

"To my home." He waved at the rising rocks behind. "I live up there above the cliff."

"You'll have to carry me. I can't walk."

"I don't mind." He stepped around the dune and lifted the boy in his arms. The girl made no move to prevent him.

"Is it warm there?" Richard asked.

"Oh, certainly. I have a fire."

"Then let's hurry."

He went away, carrying the boy, and Sarah followed. They moved across the sands, and the girl let her feet drag, making lines and swirls that would not disappear before morning. He thought to warn her; but no, he decided—this wasn't the time.

His real name wasn't Alan; it was Angel, which was why he had chosen not to reveal it. Not because he thought his notoriety might have touched their lives, because he could see from the upper reaches of their minds that it had not, but because he could not see below, and they might have been frightened by the sudden apparition of a man named Angel coming from out of the darkness to offer shelter and aid. So, Alan it was for the time being, and Alan it would have to remain.

When he'd first felt them several hours before, back in his cave, he had wanted to ignore them and forget them, but he hadn't been able to do it. It was so seldom that he felt anyone here any more, except for an occasional search party (searching for him), and the children had been so different from the others, so much softer and tolerable, and the girl at least had radiated fear, if not the boy, and it was this last which had finally drawn him from his lair to offer them sanctuary.

He was funny looking, too. The girl had been right about that part, and the boy had been wrong. He was barely five feet tall and covered with thick hair like a grizzly bear, and his eyes were tiny holes in a wide strong face, and his skin was a combination of black and pink patches like a poorly designed quilt. But there was a reason for

all of this: he wasn't a man. He was half of a man, for his mother had been fully human. It was his father who had been something else (he didn't know what—no one seemed to know for sure), and this was why he could hear people's thoughts and see the pictures that floated in their minds, and why he was forced to live alone in the desert, and why people came searching for him with murder written large on their minds.

At the time the children came to him, he was thirty-two years old, and he'd spent the last nine of those years in the desert. He was fortunate that he wasn't a man. No human being could ever have stood such total solitude for so many years.

"I have a ladder here," he told them. The rocks of his home loomed above like pale desert statuary. "Careful as you climb."

He carried the boy up the flat face of the cliff, and the girl followed. At the top of the ladder, he opened a door that revealed the entrance to his cave and helped the children through. Then he blocked the door again.

"My home," he said, pointing into the flickering firelight. "Let me see."

He went over and worked at the fire, building it back to its normal strength with the scarce twigs he had gathered during preceding months from the edge of the sands. Richard thought loudly, *Almost like a real home,* while Sarah thought, *They're beautiful.*

"You like my paintings," he said, answering her thought.

"They're wonderful." She went to the nearest wall and ran her fingers caressingly over the ripples and ridges of his designs. "What are they supposed to mean?"

"That's for you to decide."

"And all these books. Where did you get them?"

"I gathered them."

"May I read one?"

"If you want, but maybe we ought to eat first."

"I'm starved," said Richard.

Alan prepared a quick meal from his store of concentrated food and served it to them on wooden plates at a table in the rear of the cave. When they were done, he set their plates aside and had them come forward and sit with him beside the fire. The children were curiously silent. If he'd wanted, Alan could easily have read their thoughts, but now he avoided it. Instead, he wanted to talk.

"So," he said, "tell me how you came here."

"And how about you, Dana?" said Richard.

"I asked you first. It isn't often that I have visitors. I'd really like to know."

"You must get awfully lonely out here," said Sarah.

"Sometimes I do, but I'll tell you what. We'll trade stories. But you have to go first."

The children radiated happiness, and he realized that he was the cause of it. He felt suddenly very happy himself, and it was a feeling that almost frightened him with its intensity. Had it been that long since he'd last felt happy? He knew emotions that were near to this. He knew satisfaction, and he knew inner peace. But happiness? This was different; this was better.

Sarah smiled at him. "I'll tell."

"Fine," he said, waiting patiently for her to begin. He could have taken the story directly from her mind and known it all in an instant, but he'd received traces of it earlier, and it was far from clear, shrouded behind dark conflicting mists, as though neither child had seen it all but both had witnessed different aspects. Perhaps, he thought, when she speaks directly of it, then I will see the pictures more clearly.

Sarah said, "They wouldn't get up."

"Who was that?"

"Benjamin and Dana," Richard said.

"Our mother and father," said Sarah. "We came in, and they wouldn't get up."

"Why?"

Sarah shook her head. "I wish I knew. We came home, and they were lying all wet, and we said we wanted to eat, and they still wouldn't get up. They wouldn't even move."

A man of subdued middle age, a woman somewhat younger lying on a bare wooden floor, their bodies flecked with spots of widening red. A hole in the man's forehead. A small foot kicks his side.

"We tried to make them get up," Sarah said. "I was very angry, but they wouldn't even move or speak. Benjamin had a big hole in the middle of his head, and Dana was cold as a frozen snowman."

A pale hand touches white flesh. Faint winter memories, ice, snow.

"They were dead," Richard said.

"Hush."

"They were, too."

"What do you know about it?" Then she turned back to Alan. "So, we had to eat, and I fixed two plates, and we ate and watched and waited. Richard started screaming at her, and I almost had to hit him, but they still wouldn't get up."

Sounds fill the air, screaming, and a fist clenches. Rage. Fear. A smell, unbearable.

"They were dead," Richard said.

"So, we waited more days, and ate, and the food was going empty, and the nights were dark and cold because the stove had stopped working, and the cabin smelled, and I swept it and mopped it, and it smelled worse."

"They had bugs in them. White bugs and ants, roaches crawling all over, and they didn't even care."

"And pretty soon we couldn't stand the smell. It made Richard sick, and the food was gone except for things we didn't like. I got us some water, and we walked into the desert and kept walking till tonight when you found us."

"And that's all," said Richard.

Alan leaned back and nodded. He'd seen it now, seen it clearly, not so much from what they had said but from the mental pictures that had accompanied their words. The children's parents had lived near, not far from the edge of the sands. Perhaps, like him, they had been outcasts. Whatever the reasons, they were dead.

The story was a simple one, and neat, but there was one thing apart from the story itself that he could not quite comprehend. Richard and Sarah did not grieve. The only people they had ever known in their lives were dead, and they did not know. They did not seem to possess any understanding of the concept of death. As far as they knew, their parents had merely fallen into a state which closely resembled sleep and then refused to awaken. Richard knew the word death, and he knew it applied in this instance. His parents were dead—he knew that—but he did not understand. Death was a word of five letters. It came from a book; it was something vaguely remembered from adult conversation. This was death. But what was death?

He told the children to sleep. Richard said no, and he was forced to tell them his story. They were tired; so he kept it brief and they didn't understand, but that was all right, for they were used to things they couldn't understand. He told them of his birth up north in the big woods, of his parents, his stepfather the Indian Voss, who had killed his real father and taught him so much and then set him free to wander, and how he'd finally come here, where life was harsh and lonely and where he could wait.

Then they slept, and while they slept, he crept stealthily into their minds, amazed at the sharpness of his abilities. It had been a long time since he'd had another mind this close to his own. He spent most of his time with Sarah, for her dreams were gentle and danced with the

colors of light, while her brother lived in a darker world, where black was the color of the noonday sun; and he discovered, probing deeply, that Sarah had never known another human being apart from her parents and brother, and that for her not two people but a whole living world had collapsed and perished. Yet she did not mourn.

Her conception of death was a picture: an old tired man stopping to rest at the side of an endless road and never rising again. She'd once heard her father say, "He was just tired, that's all, and he was ready to die," and the words had remained her sole true acquaintance with death. For Richard, death was not even that; it was a frustration, a turning away, a punishment inflicted upon him for imagined wrongs.

And for both, death was a personal thing. It came to those who sought it and wanted it, not to people like themselves who desired nothing from life but life, and now they were alone, isolated, outcasts, living apart, and it didn't seem right to them. It didn't seem fair.

He left them then, having seen enough, and he tossed more wood on the fire so that it leaped toward the dark stone roof of the cave, and then he went to the back and rolled into his blankets and slept.

The days that followed came easily. Richard's ankle slowly healed, and he was soon able to walk with only a slight limp, and he went for Alan's books and lay at the lip of the cave with the sunlight spilling across the white pages and read for hours at a time. He'd take a pile of books, grabbing them at random without reference to title or subject, eight or nine books at a time, and carry them to his sanctuary, and an hour later, two hours at the most, he'd return and go again. Sarah told Alan: "He's a genius. He can read a whole book in ten or fifteen minutes and remember every word. At home he read every book a dozen times or more. He knows everything, and he's only nine years old." "Everything?" Alan asked, and she looked at him, shook her head, and went back to her painting.

That was what he was teaching her: to paint. Her feelings toward him had warmed with each passing hour until finally, bored with sitting apart, she'd come to him and pointed at the walls and asked if she could learn too. He told her of course she could and to go right ahead, but she felt she needed lessons in order to ensure that what she painted pleased him. He told her he didn't care, but she insisted; so finally he went and got the

paints and took her to the back of the cave, where the walls were still bare, and pointed at the last of his paintings and said this line means this, and this circle is the sun *(so why is it green?)* and this is the moon at midnight (*but it's square*). He told her his paintings had a meaning for him above and apart from what was shown on the walls, and she seemed to understand when he explained that he'd made them for himself alone, never expecting anyone else's eyes ever to glimpse them. "But can't I just paint pictures?" she asked. "I mean, real things with shape and size like people."

"Of course you can," he said. "That would be better, because then we could tell two different people had been here."

"Oh, we already know that," she said.

She went ahead, and he watched and only explained how to mix the paints to form different colors. She was good at it, and the parts he appreciated most were the differences between her work and his. When he painted, he simply thought back to something important in his past life, like the day he'd found the cave or the time he'd realized the truth of his heritage, and then closed off the conscious portion of his mind and painted from his feelings alone. It was a good way for him to work, but Sarah's way was good for her, too. She painted the world as she actually saw it and was never satisfied, because it was impossible to capture the whole thing on the blank wall of the cave. "Here's my house," she told him, "and, see, here's Dana and Benjamin working in the garden and, look, see that window? that's Richard, and he's just finished reading a book, and now he's looking out because he's heard us in the garden."

"Us? But where are you?"

"I'm not there, of course. I can't very well paint myself, can I?"

"Sure you can. Why not?"

"Because I've never seen myself. I don't know how I look. This is the way other people look to me. Your paintings—now aren't they the same? You never paint yourself, either."

And maybe she was right. He only knew that the paintings were good for both of them. She had finally decided that she liked him, and that was all he really cared about. He stayed out of her mind—and Richard's too—so he knew she liked him only because of her words and actions, and somehow it was better that way. He had not made any conscious decision to refrain from scanning her mind.

It was only that he'd had no real desire to go creeping inside, not since the first night. It would have helped him understand her, but he felt it was more honest of him to use only those senses they shared. He knew she and Richard liked him from what they said and did. Richard still called him Dana most of the time, but sometimes he'd slip and say Alan, and sometimes Sarah would slip too and not call him Alan, and that's how he knew she liked him.

A week passed—then part of another—and they were running low on firewood. He had kept the children inside the cave as much as possible, knowing it might be dangerous for them to go wandering outside since neither of them knew the desert the way he did and there was always the possibility of pursuit. Whoever had killed their parents might not be satisfied, might come looking for them; so he scanned the desert at least twice daily, looking for signs of human thought, but found nothing, except once an old prospector several miles away, but he was searching for nothing more than solitude and wealth. But he still didn't want to take any unnecessary risks, and the three of them spent most of every day and all of every night inside the cave. They needed a great deal of heat and light, and the wood he had stored was nearly gone.

One morning as they were painting he told Sarah. "I'm going to have to leave for a day or two." He explained why. "I can usually find wood at the edge of the desert."

"Can't we go with you?"

He'd known she'd ask, but he had an answer ready. He pointed at Richard, who lay reading at the front of the cave. "He's too weak yet for that long a hike. I'm afraid you'll have to wait till next time."

"But that's him. What about me? Why can't I go?"

"You don't want to leave him alone."

"Why not? There's food and water. He can build a fire, and he's happy here. He likes being alone. At home he was always alone."

"Well, I don't know."

"Why not ask him?"

"Oh, all right. We'll ask then."

They asked him; he said he didn't mind.

"But don't leave the cave," Alan said.

"Why would I want to do that? It's hot out there, and I've got my books in here."

So, that was that, and they left that same evening as soon as the sun went down. Before that, Alan uncovered the sled from the back of the cave where it had lain the past few

months buried beneath crates of concentrated food. Alan had built the sled himself several years before out of stolen lumber and a couple long pipes that served as runners. It worked well. Sarah helped him move it to the front of the cave, and together they lowered it to the desert floor.

Then they said good-by to Richard and descended the ladder. Alan paused at the foot of the cliff and scanned the desert. The sands were fast asleep, each grain nestled snugly in place, and the moon above was a burning eye that gazed upon them alone, and the stars were distant beacons of light that gave warmth and reason to the stillness of the desert sands.

"It's safe," he said. "Let's go."

The journey took much less time than Alan had anticipated. Sarah walked at his side, easily matching his pace, and the sled moved smoothly over the sand. It couldn't have been much after midnight when the sand began to harden into dirt and clumps of grass sprouted beneath their feet. Soon, the grass was scrub brush and the dirt was firm and hard.

"Should I say something if I see some wood?" she asked.

"No, there's a place I always go."

Dawn was still a distant, indistinct point in the future when they reached their destination, a small rolling hill where trees grew thick and tall. At the foot of the hill stretched the town. The lights were cool and distant tonight, and Sarah and Alan stood together, peering down at the flickering world below them.

"Those are people," she said.

"There would be more, but it's late, and most are sleeping."

"I've read," she said, shaking her head. "But it's so hard—when you see it. That's a city, isn't it?"

He said, "No, it's only a small town. Less than five thousand people. The cities, like Phoenix and Albuquerque, have a thousand times that many."

"No," she said.

"The lights of the cities are as thick as stars on a clear night."

She said, "No."

He led her away from the lights and set her to work with the hatchet and saw while he toppled the trees with an axe. They made short work of it, and the sled was soon piled high with logs. The sun came up and regarded them, and he told Sarah to quit.

"We'll push the sled under those trees, and then catch some sleep till dark. I've never seen anyone up here, but it's always best to be careful."

She agreed. The sled was

more difficult to move now that it was loaded, but together they managed to squeeze it into a less visible spot. Then they lay down beside it and slept.

It was still daylight when he awoke. A knife was jabbing him in the head; its blade sliced at his eyes.

He leaped to his feet and spun like a top. He grabbed his head and looked. Sarah was gone.

She was crying. He followed her voice and ran. She was not far from where they had lain. A man was struggling with her. He had pushed her to the ground and was trying to trap her arms. Her voice set Alan's mind afire, and he ran blindly, without thinking. The man neither saw nor heard him coming. He kicked him flat in the back of the head, and he lurched like a falling tree, rolling off her and hitting the ground. He swam in a pool of black water that stuck to him like tar. Alan drew away from the man's mind and helped Sarah to her feet. Her arms were bruised and her blouse was torn, but otherwise she seemed unharmed.

She pointed at the man. "Did he decide to die?" she asked. "Because you hurt him."

"No," Alan said. "He's not dead."

"Well, he sure scared me."

"You shouldn't have gone out."

"I know, but I couldn't sleep. I'm sorry, but I was careful at first, but then I found something and stopped listening, and he came and caught me. Come on, I'll show you."

He went with her and they walked around the man and down the side of the hill. She showed him a hole in the earth, and he peeked inside.

"Rabbits," he said.

"Is that what they are? They're mostly little ones. There's a big one, but he's asleep."

Alan reached into the burrow and came out with a tiny, furry pink clump that held tightly to his hand. He placed the clump on the ground, then reached in again, and this time emerged with a full grown rabbit. It was dead.

"Why did he do that?"

"I don't know."

"I bet that's the mother."

"Yes, probably."

"So won't the other ones die now?"

"No," he said. "We'll take them home with us. They'll live."

"That's a good idea," she said.

"You'll have to help me. We have to hurry."

Alan had seen the truth in the fallen man's mind. The man had heard them last night and come to investigate, but first he'd told his wife, and she

would surely tell another. They would be coming soon. They knew Alan well in this town. They wanted to find him.

He and Sarah put the rabbits in among the logs. There were nine of them, not much larger than a man's fist, and they curled up on a pile of twigs and slept entwined. Then they headed down the hill. Alan kept his mind open and heard the searchers coming. He slipped easily between them, but their thoughts, bitter as stale cider, followed him across the barren land to the brink of the sand. As darkness fell, he hurried forward, and a brisk wind rose and wiped at his tracks.

He told Sarah: "We'll make it. They're too far behind."

"May I talk?"

"If you want. It's safe."

"I wanted to ask you something, Alan."

"Go ahead."

"Why did she die?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Was it because she wanted to die?"

"No, I don't think she wanted to die."

"I thought so. I thought so all along. She couldn't help it. And neither could he."

"No," he said.

"Then couldn't you die, too? Five seconds from now, without your knowing or being able to say anything or stop it, you fall and you're dead. Couldn't that happen? Or me?"

"Or even you," he said. He didn't want to say it, but he said it. "I'm sorry,

Late that night they reached the cave. Richard came scampering down the ladder to greet them, and Sarah took him to the rabbits and let him see. She said nothing about the mother, and Richard carried them away clutched tightly to his chest, leaving the two of them to tend the wood. They did not mind. Richard was busy with what he had, and it was a lovely night, as silent and still as a distant, barren planet, and only the wind moved, brushing across the sands like a gentle song.

They slept that night, the three of them curled together at the back of the cave, the three of them and nine small rabbits. The fire leaped and flared, keeping them warm as they slept.

During the days that followed, Richard took good care of the rabbits. They thrived beneath his gentle hand, and all were given individual names. Alan helped Richard with the naming, letting him know which was which, and Richard named a plump one after Alan, and Alan thanked him for the honor. Richard seldom called him Dana now. He knew Alan was only Alan, and Sarah never slipped at all.

They kept to the cave,

because the pursuers had come at last, and they ringed the desert like an occupying army. Alan witnessed in the minds of those who came near the death of the man on the hill. He had never killed a man before, and for a moment he thought he ought to go away and consider the meaning of it, but he didn't. He saw nothing in the minds of these seeking men but bitterness and rage. There was no remorse for the dead man, merely a burning lusting craving desire for vengeance.

Alan never let them come too near the cave. He was able to keep them away. It seemed each new day brought him greater and stronger powers. He knew the men would eventually return to their homes. They always had before, and they would this time, too. He told the children it was only a matter of waiting, and they said they understood.

So, there came a day when he and Richard and nine rabbits were playing at the mouth of the cave. A few hours before he had quickly scanned the desert as he did every morning and found only a few men still there. Most had given up the search and gone home. There were fewer than ten left, but these were the worst of the bunch, and it hurt him even to approach the dark centers of their minds.

Richard was telling him stories of the rabbits. Richard was good at that, at taking nothing and making it into something, and he told Alan how this big one was jealous of this other one's black paws and how this third one was smarter and quicker than all the rest. Alan lay at his side and listened to his stories and grinned and nodded and told him he was right.

Sarah's shadow fell across them. Alan looked up at her. She'd spent the morning at the back of the cave, ordering him to keep his distance, as there was something she was doing that concerned him and he wasn't allowed to see it till she was ready for him to see it, but now here was her shadow.

"It's done," she said.

"Well?"

"Well, come along and see it. What do you think?"

"You want to come, Richard?"

"I do, but these guys don't. They say we've got things to do. I'll see you later."

"But you have to come, Alan."

He went with her. She led him to the very back of the cave, where the walls came together, touching the floor and ceiling, and where there was no place left for a man to go. They had to climb over piled logs and slip between crates of concen-

trated food, but at last she said, "There it is."

He looked at the wall. The picture was that of a standing man, but even that much was hard to tell. The man seemed to be leaning over, and there was something cupped in his one hand. He was a small stocky man and his legs were far too short for the rest of his body. His hands were big spoons and his face was streaked with pink and white and red. The eyes drew his attention. She had not painted there, and they were coal black holes in the bright shining face. He sensed a curious and powerful strength nestling within those eyes.

"Do you like it?"

He said, "Yes. It's—I wish I'd painted it."

She laughed. "You couldn't. It's you."

"Me?"

"I wanted to." She looked at him, at the painting, then at the floor.

"It's good," he said.

She looked up at him. "You think so?"

"I mean whatever it is, it's good. I don't know if it's me or like me because I've never seen me. But it's good." He tried to smile. "But ugly."

"No," she said, firmly. "I knew you'd say that. It's not ugly because you're not ugly."

"But I am. Why else do you think I live out here?"

She took his hand and held it. "You're not ugly."

"You never call me Benjamin any more."

"No, and do you know why?" She waved at the painting as though it were more truly real than he was. "Because I know who you are now. You're Alan, and that's the best of it."

She was holding his arm with both of her hands. He wanted to speak but could not find the words.

"It's good," he said.

"Alan," she said.

And then:

A thought like heat. (From outside.)

Rage which rushed like blood through steel veins.

Then a shot.

"Richard," he said, and ran.

He clawed his way to the front of the cave, and Richard was not there, only eight playful rabbits, and the rabbits scattered like bullets between his legs. Another shot. And a scream.

Alan lunged forward and caught the ladder in his hands. It spilled toward the desert floor, and he rode with it, his feet dancing against the air, his legs kicking and squirming. He clutched the sands of the desert to his chest, then stood and bounded across the land.

A man stood near, his head full of fiery thoughts which

rushed at Alan like a river of burning steel, but he fought away. The man heard him coming. He whirled and his lips parted and something cracked. His gun, and he shot him.

His head was exploding and there was no more thought, but then he felt the gun warm in his fingers and there was Richard on the sand and a hole in his chest and blood on his lips and the rabbit lay beside him, which rabbit he could not tell, for the rabbit wore a concealing cloak of crimson fur. The gun still rested warmly in his hands; so he pressed it against the man's chest and squeezed the trigger. The man exploded and rose briefly into the air like an ascending eagle. Alan felt the ground and dropped the gun.

Then came a time when he was inside his own body, yet it was outside him. He was busily working, repairing the injured organs in much the same way a skilled craftsman resurrects the soul of a hopelessly broken watch. He drew the needed materials from hidden distant portions of himself, alien portions, and fitted them wherever needed. The work seemed to take a vast amount of time, but finally the job was done.

He was awake, and Sarah leaned against his eyes.

"So you're alive," she said.

He raised his hands and felt his face. The skin felt as clean and smooth and warm as a baby's belly. "I'm alive," he said.

"Richard isn't. He's dead."

Richard lay beside him. He put his hand against the cold chest and felt the emptiness which lay beneath the hard shell.

"See?" said Sarah.

"How long?"

"Only a few hours."

He scanned the desert, but the men were gone. They had given up the search, and he was alone again.

"We're safe," he said.

"I hid the body at the back of the cave. I suppose you ought to do something with it."

"I'll bury it," he said.

She was looking at Richard; so he looked, too. Richard's eyes were open but the sparkle was gone. These were the eyes of a starless night, dark and empty and painted with black clouds. Alan reached over and lowered the lids.

She said, "There's nothing—nothing you can—?"

He said, "There's nothing I can do. I'm sorry, Sarah."

"Then I'd better be going," she said, and stood.

"You can't do that." He stood with her. "It's not safe."

"I don't mean that." She drew away from his touch and he dropped both hands to his sides. "I'm going for good."

"But," he said, "why? That won't bring him back."

She shook her head as fresh tears rolled down her cheeks, wiping away the harsh dark stains of the old. "It's you—you who can't die—you who won't die—and he died—and it's wrong. Wrong. Don't you see? Why does everything have to die, whether it wants to or not, and you don't? You live."

"I don't know," he said.

"It's because you're not a man, isn't it? I don't know what you are, and I don't know if it's good or evil or neither one or maybe both together, but whatever you are, you can't die. Richard was human, and he's dead. Benjamin, too, and Dana, and the man on the hill, and the one down below. Even the rabbit—it's dead—even the rabbit was more human than you. It died, and you won't."

"Can I help it?" he said. "What do you think? Would it make you feel better if I killed myself? If I took a gun and rammed it down my throat and pulled the trigger and nicely sprayed my brains against the walls? Would that make you happy? To have me lying dead next to him? Is that what you want? Will you be satisfied when we're all dead. Well then, what about you?"

"Could you do it?"

"I don't know," he said.

"I know you couldn't, because your brains were nicely sprayed across the desert floor, and your right eye was a black pit, and you came back. In less than an hour, you were good and whole again while Richard lay at your side and rotted. And he wasn't even tired. He wasn't near ready to die yet."

"I'm not a man," he said.

"But I am," she said. "And that's why. I have to go to my own kind, to those who also know how to die."

"All right," he said. "Get out."

She jerked her head and stumbled toward the front of the cave. He did not try to stop her. If he had been a man, he would never have allowed her to go. But he wasn't a man, even though he loved her; so he listened and heard her hands on the ladder and her feet on the sand. He listened with his ears only, wanting to hear nothing more painful than sound.

Then he turned and went to the back of the cave. He climbed over piled logs and slipped between crates packed full with rich concentrated food. He sat down before his own picture and saw that it was wrong. The picture she had painted was the portrait of a man. It wasn't him. There was a place in the world for this man pictured here. Here was a man who not only could die but also live, and he was neither. He was

Angel—born of alien blood—Angel alone and Angel wandering. He wanted to make himself come flat against that black foreign wall. He wanted to merge with that staring, glaring picture and make it him. He wanted to purloin its bare humanity and make that his. He could not do it. Only one small portion of the picture spoke truly to him: the cold black alien eyes. Those eyes were his, but the rest was a dream.

Later, how much later he could not tell, he moved away and went forward. It was dark outside, and the stars were hidden behind and invisible moon. He buried the dead in separate graves, then stood and watched as the wind came alive, whipping the sands like fire and hiding his brief, momentary abrasion from peering eyes.

Then, turning, he went away, and he never saw the cave again.

Two familiar F&SF contributors collaborate on an offbeat story about a transporter that brings back memories in a painfully tangible form; it resurrects parents. . .

Pater Familias

by BARRY N. MALZBERG and KRIS NEVILLE

PEOPLE KEEP SAYING THE past is dead. You hear it practically on every street corner. I think my father had something to do with it. But then I may be wrong. I may still tend to overvalue him on some level of my being to compensate for my real feelings.

The last time I saw him alive, there was something profoundly moving to me about his condition, considering all the times he had humiliated me and considering that for all intents and purposes he had been dead for five years and five months.

When my father straightened, finally, from the Fox Temporal Couch, I passed him the remains of my drink.

"Ah, you bastard," he said, sipping. "You caught me in the middle of a TV program that time. I was laying straight out on the chair and hassock, watching the draft riots. I told you last time, I never wanted you to do this to me again."

"It isn't easy on me, you being dead these five years and five months," I said. "I was sitting here drinking and looking at the Transporter, just sitting around, and I said, 'hell,' I said, 'I feel like having a chat with my old man again.' "

"Stop telling me when I'm going to die," he said. "There's absolutely no need for that." Still half locked in the Couch, he managed to make it to his knees, clutching the glass, bringing it to his mouth two-handed as if it were a baby's bottle, which, of course, in at least one sense, it was. All of this was bringing back memories. I half hoped, but did not expect, that he would begin one of his circuitous analyses of the world, as in times past, as

though trying to teach me something that I again, as in times past, and in the last analysis, would not be able completely to figure out. Such was his way and mine, I guess. I think it may be the way of all parents, but I suppose some are more direct and maybe better organized and really teach you something, but I doubt it. Then, of course, it is a mistake to generalize like this.

Not the least of the Transporter's appeal, the brochure said, was its poignancy, the nostalgia of it all. It infused the present with the past, brought you back to your origins from which you were never so distant as not to be touched. And also, as the brochure said, "You don't have always to be a child with your parents, now," although that may be wrong.

"Let's talk about the old days," I said. "Remember that time in 1982 when we were playing softball and I broke your finger with a pitch? And you gave me a shot and broke my nose? That's what I really want to talk about. The basics which we both understand. The cutoff is only five minutes from now, and we really ought to do some talking before I have to send you on your way."

"Five minutes, eh?" he said. "Well, what if I just don't go back? What if I sit right here in your basement and refuse to let you put me back in that circle?"

As if, any longer, he had the strength to resist my determination. And besides, they wouldn't let him, anyway. They turned everything upside down when people tried to do that, finding them. Some people said it was so you'd have to keep renting the equipment.

"It won't make a shade of difference," I said. "The past is immutable. That's the point of the construct—"

But, of course, what was the point? How could one really know that the past is immutable? Perhaps it was fluid or semirigid like cold gelatin or something else entirely.

To pursue our ignorance on this point: How might one account for the way that the Transmitter could only bring back parents and no one else, except once in a great while, grandparents? Was there some psychic force between generations, grown up from an early dependency? And yet, there were occasions when the father who came back was a stranger to the child, and so—was there some transcendent genetic continuity, some scientological myth, that the Transporter responded to? Or was the circle that was necessary like the pentagram of old, and was this black magic entirely, as the

world fragmented itself on the New One Thousand, having broken an obscure equivalent of the sound barrier? It's academic now, I guess, but no one admitted to understanding it, even Fox, any more than anyone admits to understanding time, itself, or, for that matter, Reality, either. Now, of course, Fox is working on a machine to let us visit the future. He seems to be having unexpected problems that perhaps my father also contributed to. I like to think something will continue to go wrong with his research, but maybe this is merely because I have come in other areas to distrust the uses technicians make of science.

But then I could not admit any ignorance to my father, could I? Was he ever less than certain with me about things of which he knew nothing?

"Come on, dad," I continued, mindful of the time, "loosen up, relax, let's tell a few old yarns. Yours is the first generation in recorded history that has been given the advantage of time travel to your descendants, the privilege of seeing your works in their fullest flower, when you're dead and gone."

"Know what I'm going to do?" my father said, managing to make it fully to the top of his warped legs and stand at last. "I'm going to kill myself, that's what. Right here in your basement. That way, the way I figure it, none of this ever happened, then."

I wondered what he thought he was trying to teach me this time.

He reached into his inner coat pocket. "Get this!" And he waved the knife at me. "Been holding it for the time those draft rioters get too close to the old man, start to mess with him! Been my protection, this little sweetheart: clean and sharp, really does the job! Good luck, son. I can't take it any more; I can't spend the rest of my life wondering when you're going to get the urge to pull the old man all to pieces. . . ."

He held the knife two-handed against his heart and then brought it all the way through his shirt.

He stiffened in the midst of a good deal of blood and kicked right out on the floor. Despite the fact that he didn't look good at all, there was a smile on that small fragment of face which hadn't gone completely white. I was sure then and now that nothing like this had occurred in temporal transport before, and I waited for something awful to happen.

I was scared. I admit it. If my father had really died here in my basement in 1988 rather than 1993, then my whole life would be ineradicably changed,

to say nothing of the consequences of his being found suddenly missing 16 years ago. I would never have had the fight with him that sent me away from home but eventually got me into the job where I had made enough money to rent the Transporter in the first place. But, if so—

The only thing I could think to do was to get him back. This may have been a bad decision, and if so, then I'll just have to take the blame for it.

I picked him up, it was the most disgusting event of my life, and staggered into the circle with him and tossed the corpse in and, putting the Transporter on manual so as not to take any chances, set it for a quick return. Then I pressed the lever and closed my eyes.

I said, "Thank God," when he vanished, although who can possibly believe in God any more; of course, I guess there are some who say He's not really dead, He's just senile.

Well, it meant at the worst that the old man would be found dead in 1988 instead of 1993, which would be very bad, but not as bad as the other way, or so I supposed. Perhaps the shock of his death like that would have sent me away from home. Best of all, it could be that the effect was self-negating.

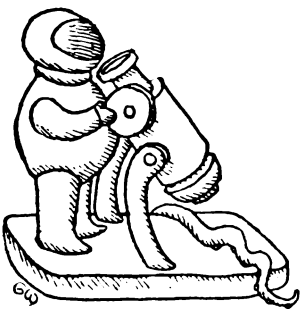
I sat in the basement in front of the Fox Temporal Couch with all the doors locked, waiting for myself to vanish or something; but sometime later, when nothing had happened and my memories hadn't changed, as far as I could tell, and it was fairly obvious, I thought, that nothing *was* going to happen, I let a long breath out and decided that I had beaten it. The Transporter had beaten it. Time, indeed, was immutable, as the brochure claimed, and my father's action had, for all intents and purposes, never happened.

I brought my father back twice after that. The second time, decomposition had progressively advanced. On January 4, 1999, I decided that I wanted no more part of it, so I gave up using the Transporter. When the government call-in was announced, I was more than happy to turn it in. It was a pleasant novelty there for a while, but who in hell wanted to see corpses, lots of corpses, coming back, and have to think about all those moms like that, too?

And I still hope Fox keeps having problems, for there could come a day when some parent may wish to continue his instructions into the far future, thereby succeeding in killing it, too.□

ISAAC ASIMOV

SCIENCE



LOST IN NON-TRANSLATION

AT THE NOREASCON (THE 29TH World Science Fiction Convention), which was held in Boston on the Labor Day weekend of 1971, I sat on the dais, of course, since, as the Bob Hope of science fiction, it is my perennial duty to hand out the Hugos. On my left was my daughter, Robyn, sixteen, blonde, blue-eyed, shapely and beautiful. (No, that last adjective is not a father's proud partiality. Ask anyone.)

My old friend Clifford D. Simak was guest of honor, and he began his talk by introducing, with thoroughly justified pride, his two children who were in the audience. A look of alarm instantly crossed Robyn's face.

"Daddy," she whispered urgently, knowing full well my capacity for inflicting embarrassment, "are you planning to introduce *me?*"

"Would that bother you, Robyn?" I asked.

"Yes, it would."

"Then I won't," I said, and patted her hand reassuringly.

She thought for a while. Then she said, "Of course,

daddy, if you have the urge to refer, in a casual sort of way, to your beautiful daughter, that would be all right."

So you can bet I did just that, while she allowed her eyes to drop in a charmingly modest way.

But I couldn't help but think of the blonde, blue-eyed stereotype of Nordic beauty which fills our popular literature ever since the blonde, blue-eyed Germanic tribes took over the western portions of the Roman Empire, fifteen centuries ago, and set themselves up as an aristocracy.

—And of the manner in which that has been used to subvert one of the clearest and most important lessons in the Bible; a subversion which contributes its little bit to the serious crisis that today faces the world, and the United States in particular.

In line with my penchant for beginning at the beginning, come back with me to the Sixth Century B. C. A party of Jews have returned from Babylonian Exile to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem which Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed seventy years before.

During the Exile, under the guidance of the prophet Ezekiel, the Jews had firmly held to their national identity by modifying, complicating and idealizing their worship of Yahveh into a form which was directly ancestral to the Judaism of today. (In fact, Ezekiel is sometimes called "the father of Judaism.")

This meant that when the exiles returned to Jerusalem, they faced a religious problem. There were people who, all through the period of Exile, had been living in what had once been Judah, and who worshipped Yahveh in what they considered the correct time-honored ritual. Because their chief city (with Jerusalem destroyed) was Samaria, the returning Jews called them Samaritans.

The Samaritans rejected the new-fangled modifications of the returning Jews, and the Jews abhorred the old-fashioned beliefs of the Samaritans. Between them arose an undying hostility, the kind which is exacerbated because the differences in belief are comparatively small.

In addition, there were, of course, also living in the land those who worshipped other gods altogether—Ammonites, Edomites, Philistines and so on.

The pressures on the returning band of Jews were not primarily military since the entire area was under the more or less beneficent rule of the Persian Empire, but they were social and perhaps even

stronger for that. To maintain a strict ritual in the face of overwhelming numbers of non-believers is difficult, and the tendency to relax that ritual was almost irresistible. Then, too, young male returnees were attracted to the women at hand, and there were intermarriages. Naturally, to humor the wife, ritual was further relaxed.

But then, possibly as late as about 400 B.C., a full century after the Second Temple had been built, Ezra arrived in Jerusalem. He was a scholar of the Mosaic Law, which had been edited and put into final form in the course of the Exile. He was horrified at the backsliding and put through a tub-thumping revival. He called the people together, led them in chanting the law and expounding upon it, raised their religious fervor, called for confessions of sins and for the renewal of faith.

One thing that he demanded most rigorously was the abandonment of all non-Jewish wives and their children. Only so could the holiness of strict Judaism be maintained in his view. To quote the Bible (and I will use the recent "New English Bible" for the purpose):

"Ezra the priest stood up and said, 'You have committed an offence in marrying foreign wives and have added to Israel's guilt. Make your confession now to the Lord the God of your fathers and do his will, and separate yourselves from the foreign population and from your foreign wives.' Then all the assembled people shouted in reply, 'Yes; we must do what you say...'" (Ezra 10:10-11)

From that time on, the Jews, as a whole, began to practice an exclusivism, a voluntary separation from others, a multiplication of peculiar customs that further emphasized their separateness; and all of this helped them maintain their identity through all the miseries and catastrophes that were to come, through all the crises, and through exiles and persecutions that fragmented them over the face of the Earth.

The exclusivism, to be sure, also served to make them socially indigestible and imparted to them a high social visibility that helped give rise to conditions that made exiles and persecutions more likely.

Not everyone among the Jews adhered to this policy of exclusivism. There were some who believed that all men were equal in the sight of God and that no one should be excluded from the community on the basis of group-identity alone.

And one who believed this (but who is forever nameless)

attempted to present this case in the form of a short piece of historical fiction. In this 4th Century B.C. tale, the heroine was Ruth, a Moabite woman. (The tale was presented as having taken place in the time of the Judges, and so the traditional view was that it was written by the prophet, Samuel, in the 11th Century B.C. No modern student of the Bible believes this.)

Why a Moabite woman, by the way?

It seems that the Jews, returning from Exile, had traditions concerning their initial arrival at the borders of Canaan under first Moses, then Joshua, nearly a thousand years before. At that time, the small nation of Moab, which lay east of the lower course of the Jordan and of the Dead Sea, understandably alarmed at the incursion of tough desert raiders, took steps to oppose them. Not only did they prevent the Israelites from passing through their territory, but, tradition had it, they called in a seer, Balaam, and asked him to use his magical abilities to bring misfortune and destruction upon the invaders.

That failed, and Balaam, on departing, was supposed to have advised the king of Moab to let the Moabite girls lure the desert raiders into liaisons which might subvert their stern dedication to their task. The Bible records the following:

"When the Israelites were in Shittim, the people began to have intercourse with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices offered to their gods; and they ate the sacrificial food and prostrated themselves before the gods of Moab. The Israelites joined in the worship of the Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry with them." (Numbers 25:1-3)

As a result of this, "Moabite women" became the quintessence of the type of outside influence which, by sexual attraction, tried to subvert pious Jews. Indeed, Moab and the neighboring kingdom to the north, Ammon, were singled out in the Mosaic code—

"No Ammonite or Moabite, even down to the tenth generation, shall become a member of the assembly of the Lord. . .because they did not meet you with food and water on your way out of Egypt, and because they hired Balaam. . .to revile you. . .You shall never seek their welfare or their good all your life long." (Deuteronomy 23:3-6)

And yet there were times in later history when there was friendship between Moab and at least some men of Israel, possibly because they were brought together by some common enemy.

For instance, shortly before 1000 B.C., Israel was ruled by Saul. He had held off the Philistines, conquered the Amalekites

and brought Israel to its greatest pitch of power to that point. Moab naturally feared his expansionist policies and so befriended anyone rebelling against Saul. Such a rebel was the Judean warrior. David of Bethlehem. When David was pressed hard by Saul and had retired to a fortified stronghold, he used Moab as a refuge for his family.

". . .David. . .said to the king of Moab, 'Let my father and mother come and take shelter with you until I know what God will do for me.' So he left them at the court of the king of Moab, and they stayed there as long as David was in his stronghold." (1 Samuel 22:3-4)

As it happened, David eventually won out, became king first of Judah, then of all Israel, and established an Empire that took in the entire east coast of the Mediterranean from Egypt to the Euphrates, with the Phoenician cities independent, but in alliance with him. Later Jews always looked back to the time of David and of his son, Solomon, as a golden age, and David's position in Jewish legend and thought was unassailable. David founded a dynasty that ruled over Judah for four centuries, and the Jews never stopped believing that some descendant of David would yet return to rule over them again in some idealized future time.

Yet on the basis of the verses describing David's use of Moab as a refuge for his family, there may have arisen a tale to the effect that there was a Moabite strain in David's ancestry. Apparently, the author of the Book of Ruth determined to make use of this tale to point up the doctrine of non-exclusivism by using the supremely hated Moabite woman as his heroine.

The Book of Ruth tells of a Judean family of Bethlehem, a man, his wife, and two sons, who are driven by famine to Moab. There the two sons marry Moabite girls, but after a space of time all three men die, leaving the three women—Naomi, the mother-in-law, and Ruth and Orpah, the two daughters-in-law—as survivors.

Those were times when women were chattels and when unmarried women, without a man to own them and care for them, could subsist only on charity. (Hence, the frequent Biblical injunction to care for widows and orphans.)

Naomi determines to return to Bethlehem where kinsmen might possibly care for her, but urges Ruth and Orpah to remain in Moab. She does not say, but we might plausibly suppose she is thinking that Moabite girls would have a rough time of it in Moab-hating Judah.

Orpah remains in Moab, but Ruth refuses to leave Naomi, saying, "Do not urge me to go back and desert you... Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. I swear a solemn oath before the Lord your God: nothing but death shall divide us." (Ruth 1:16-17).

Once in Bethlehem, the two are faced with the direst poverty, and Ruth volunteers to support herself and her mother-in-law by gleaning in the fields. It was harvest time, and it was customary to allow any stalks of grain that fell to the ground in the process of gathering to remain there to be collected by the poor. This gleaning was a kind of welfare program for those in need. It was, however, back-breaking work, and any young woman, particularly a Moabite, who engaged in it, underwent certain obvious risks at the hands of the lusty young reapers. Ruth's offer was simply heroic.

As it happened, Ruth gleaned in the lands of a rich Judean farmer named Boaz, who coming to oversee the work, noticed her working tirelessly. He asked after her and his reapers answered, "She is a Moabite girl. . .who has just come back with Naomi from the Moabite country." (Ruth 2:6)

Boaz speaks kindly to her and Ruth says, "Why are you so kind as to take notice of me when I am only a foreigner?" (Ruth 2:10) Boaz explains that he has heard how she has forsaken her own land for love of Naomi and how hard she must work to take care of her.

As it turned out, Boaz was a relative of Naomi's dead husband, which must be one reason why he was touched by Ruth's love and fidelity. Naomi, on hearing the story, had an idea. In those days, if a widow was left childless, she had the right to expect her dead husband's brother to marry her and offer her his protection. If the dead husband had no brother, some other relative would fulfill the task.

Naomi was past the age of child-bearing, so she could not qualify for marriage, which, in those days, centered about children; but what about Ruth? To be sure, Ruth was a Moabite woman, and it might well be that no Judean would marry her, but Boaz had proven kind. Naomi therefore instructed Ruth to approach Boaz at night and, without crudely seductive intent, appeal for his protection.

Boaz, touched by Ruth's modesty and helplessness, promised to do his duty but pointed out that there was a kinsman closer

than he, and that, by right, this other kinsman had to have his chance first.

The very next day, Boaz approached the other kinsman and suggested that he buy some property in Naomi's charge and, along with it, take over another responsibility. Boaz said, "On the day when you acquire the field from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the dead man's wife. . ." (Ruth 4:5)

Perhaps Boaz carefully stressed the adjectival phrase "the Moabitess," for the other kinsman drew back at once. Boaz therefore married Ruth, who in time bore him a son. The proud and happy Naomi held the child in her bosom, and her women-friends said to her. "The child will give you new life and cherish you in your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who has proved better to you than seven sons, has borne him." (Ruth 4:15)

This verdict of Judean women on Ruth, a woman of the hated land of Moab, in a society that valued sons infinitely more than daughters, a verdict that she "has proved better to you than seven sons" is the author's moral—that there are nobility and virtue in all groups and that none must be excluded from consideration in advance simply because of their group identification.

And then, to clinch the argument for any Judean so nationalistic as to be impervious to mere idealism, the story concludes: "Her neighbors gave him a name: 'Naomi has a son,' they said, 'we will call him Obed.' He was the father of Jesse, the father of David." (Ruth 4:17)

Where would Israel have been, then, if there had been an Ezra present then to forbid the marriage of Boaz with a "foreign wife?"

Where does that leave us? That the Book of Ruth is a pleasant story, no one will deny. It is almost always referred to as a "delightful idyll" or words to that effect. That Ruth is a most successful characterization of a sweet and virtuous woman is beyond dispute.

In fact, everyone is so in love with the story and with Ruth, that the whole point is lost. It is, by right, a tale of tolerance for the despised, of love for the hated, of the reward that comes of brotherhood. By mixing the genes of mankind, by forming the hybrid, great men will come.

The Jews included the Book of Ruth in the canon, partly because it is so wonderfully told a tale, but mostly (I suspect) because it gave the lineage of the great David; a lineage which is

not given beyond David's father, Jesse, in the soberly historic books of the Bible that anteceded Ruth. But the Jews remained, by and large, exclusivistic and did not learn the lesson of universalism preached by the Book of Ruth.

Nor have people taken its lesson to heart since. Why should they, since every effort is made to wipe out that lesson? The story of Ruth has been retold any number of times, from childrens' tales to serious novels. Even movies have been made of it. Ruth, herself, must have been pictured in hundreds of illustrations. And in every illustration I have ever seen, she is presented as blonde, blue-eyed, shapely and beautiful—the perfect Nordic stereotype I referred to at the beginning of the article.

For goodness sake, why shouldn't Boaz have fallen in love with her? What great credit was there in marrying her? If a girl like that had fallen at your feet and asked you humbly to do your duty by her and kindly marry her, you would probably have done it like a shot.

Of course, she was a Moabite woman, but so what? What does the word "Moabite" mean to you? Does it arouse any violent reaction? Are there many Moabites among your acquaintances? Have your children been chased by a bunch of lousy Moabites lately? Have they been reducing property values in your neighborhood? When was the last time you heard someone say, "Got to get those rotten Moabites out of here. They just fill up the welfare rolls."

In fact, judging by the way Ruth is drawn, Moabites are English aristocrats, and their presence would *raise* property values.

The trouble is that the one word that is *not translated* in the Book of Ruth is the key word "Moabite," and as long as it is not translated, the point is lost. It is lost in non-translation.

The word "Moabite" really means "someone of a group that receives from us and deserves from us nothing but hatred and contempt." How should this word be translated into a single word that means the same thing to, say, many modern Greeks—why "Turk." And to many modern Turks—why "Greek." And to many modern white Americans—why "Black."

To get the proper flavor of the Book of Ruth, suppose we think of Ruth not as a Moabite woman but as a Black woman.

Reread the story of Ruth and translate Moabite to Black every time you see it. Naomi (imagine) is coming back to the United States with her two Black daughters-in-law. No wonder she urges them not to come with her. It *is* a marvel that Ruth so loved her

mother-in-law that she was willing to face a society that hated her unreasoningly and to take the risk of gleaning in the face of leering reapers who could not possibly suppose they need treat her with any consideration whatever.

And when Boaz asked who she was, don't read the answer as "She is a Moabite girl," but as "She is a Black girl." More likely, in fact, the reapers might have said to Boaz something that was the equivalent of (if you'll excuse the language), "She is a nigger girl."

Think of it that way, and you find that the whole point is found in translation and only in translation. Boaz' action in being willing to marry Ruth because she was virtuous (and not because she was a Nordic beauty) takes on a kind of nobility. The neighbors' decision that she was better to Naomi than seven sons becomes something that could have been forced out of them only by overwhelming evidence to that effect. And the final stroke that out of this miscegenation was born none other than the great David is rather breath-taking.

We get something similar in the New Testament. On one occasion a student of the Law asked Jesus what must be done to gain eternal life and answered his own question by saying, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." (Luke 10:27)

These admonitions are taken from the Old Testament, of course. That last bit about your neighbor comes from a verse which says, "You shall not seek revenge, or cherish anger towards your kinsfolk; you shall love your neighbour as a man like yourself." (Leviticus 19:18)

(The New English Bible translations sound better to me here than the King James's: "Thou shalt love they neighbour as thyself." Where is the saint who can truly feel another's pain or ecstasy precisely as he feels his own? We must not ask too much. But if we simply grant that someone else is "a man like yourself," then he can be treated with decency at least. It is when we refuse to grant even this and talk of another as our inferior that contempt and cruelty come to seem natural, and even laudable.)

Jesus approves the lawyer's saying and the lawyer promptly asks, "And who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29). After all, the verse in Leviticus first speaks of refraining from revenge and anger toward *kinsfolk;* might not then the concept of "neighbour" be restricted to kinsfolk, to one's own kind, only?

In response Jesus replies with perhaps the greatest of the parables—of a traveller who fell in with robbers, who was mugged and robbed, and left half dead by the road. Jesus went on, "It so happened that a priest was going down by the same road; but when he saw him, he went past on the other side. So too a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him went past on the other side. But a Samaritan who was making the journey came upon him, and when he saw him was moved to pity. He went up and bandaged his wounds, bathing them with oil and wine. Then he lifted him on to his own beast, brought him to an inn, and looked after him there." (Luke 10:31-34)

Then Jesus asked who the traveller's neighbor was, and the lawyer was forced to say, "The one who showed him kindness." (Luke 10:37)

This is known as the Parable of the Good Samaritan even though nowhere in the parable is the rescuer called a *good* Samaritan, merely a Samaritan.

The force of the parable is entirely vitiated by the common phrase "good" Samaritan, for that has cast a false light on who the Samaritans were. In a free-association test, say "Samaritan" and probably every person being tested will answer, "Good." It has become so imprinted in all our brains that Samaritans are good that we take it for granted that a Samaritan would act like that and wonder why Jesus is making a point of it.

We forget who the Samaritans were in the time of Jesus!

To the Jews, they were *not* good. They were hated, despised, contemptible heretics with whom no good Jew would have anything to do. Again the whole point is lost through non-translation.

Suppose, instead, that it is a white traveller in Mississippi who has been mugged and left half-dead. And suppose it was a minister and a deacon who passed by and refused to "become involved." And suppose it was a Black sharecropper who stopped and took care of the man.

Now ask yourself: Who was the neighbor whom you must love as though he were a man like yourself if you are to be saved?

The Parable of the Good Samaritan clearly teaches that there is nothing parochial in the concept "neighbor," that you cannot confine your decency to your own group and your own kind. All mankind, right down to those you most despise, are your neighbors.

Well, then, we have in the Bible two examples—in the Book of Ruth and in the Parable of the Good Samaritan—of teachings which are lost in non-translation, yet which are terribly applicable to us today.

The whole world over, there are confrontations between sections of mankind, defined by race, nationality, economic philosophy, religion, or language as belonging to different groups, so that one is not "neighbor" to the other.

These more or less arbitrary differences among peoples who are members of a single biological species are terribly dangerous and nowhere more so than here in the United States where the most perilous confrontation (I need not tell you) is between White and Black.

Next to the population problem generally, mankind faces no danger greater than these confrontations, particularly in the United States.

It seems to me that more and more, each year, both Whites and Blacks are turning, in anger and hatred, to violence. I see no reasonable end to the steady escalation but an actual civil war.

In such a civil war, the Whites, with a preponderance of numbers and an even greater preponderance of organized power would, in all likelihood, "win." They would do so, however, at an enormous material cost and, I suspect, at a fatal spiritual one.

And why? Is it so hard to recognize that we are all neighbors after all? Can we, on both sides—on *both* sides—find no way of accepting the Biblical lesson?

Or if quoting the Bible sounds too mealy-mouthed and if repeating the words of Jesus seems too pietistic, let's put it another way, a practical way—

Is the privilege of feeling hatred so luxurious a sensation that it is worth the material and spiritual hell of a White-Black civil war?

If the answer is really, Yes, then one can only despair.

Wilma Shore's new story uses a standard sf theme—doomsday—as a backdrop, but the drama played out in front of it is both unexpected and sharp-edged.

Is It The End Of The World?

by WILMA SHORE

WHEN MARY LOOKED UP from her planting and glimpsed, through the lilac, Dorene's ankles coming across the lawn, her heart sank, really dropped in her chest. How *shameful* to feel that way, when all the child wanted was a lift to Drama Workshop. But that meant twenty minutes on the freeway, fifteen locked in downtown traffic; and she had been looking forward to a tranquil morning with her zinnias, the smell of lilac and damp earth. When you had three kids there was always something; she just couldn't bear not having some little bit of time to call her own.

But neither could she bear the tragic face, the familiar tirade: "You don't *care* if I'm late, all you care about is if I do my *chores*, all the worst ones because I'm the oldest, but isn't the oldest entitled to a *few meager privileges*. . ."

"Drama Workshop is a privilege," she said, trying to keep her voice steady. "And you did promise to go by bus."

"I *was*, Mamma, *honestly*, only I had to stop and pick up my *entire record collection*, *your darling Benny* had them *all over the floor*. . ."

"You should have made her do it," said Mary, but it was an automatic response; she had already gone through the argument in her mind and knew she would end up driving Dorene, not willingly, like a good mother, but in resentment and rage. Dr. Norseman said it was guilt, not love, that made her unable to refuse her

children. She jabbed the trowel into the dirt and stood up.

"You *will?*" cried Dorene, and Mary saw that if she had held out one more minute Dorene would have given up and rushed off; now the zinnias would have to go back into the cellar till tomorrow or even Monday. She carried the flat back to the house, set it on the cellar steps, and closed the door over it.

Jack's voice came up through the little window: "Hey! I'm working down here!"

Surprised, she cried, "You want a house full of flies?"

He mumbled something. Something disagreeable, even vulgar, or why not say it out loud? Hurt, she lifted the door again. Too bad for the zinnias if the sun came out, but it wasn't likely; it was so damp and still, a *perfect* day for transplanting; the sky...

The sky blurred. What was there to cry about? A few dozen zinnias? When she had three wonderful children, a wonderful husband? She ought to get down on her knees every day and thank God, she was that lucky. Instead of just taking it all for granted, as though it had a lifetime guarantee and nothing could possibly ever happen...

The sky... "Hey, wait a *minute*," she told Dorene, "I'm not sure you can *go* downtown. Look over there."

"Oh, *Mamma!* Every cloud in the sky you think it's the end of the world. The radio didn't..."

"Never mind. I'm going in and look at the terminometer."

Taking long, calm breaths, she walked quickly around the house and into the living room where the terminometer hung. The monoxide needle stood at 340. "Jack!" She rapped on the glass; it jerked on to 343. "Jack!"

Dorene gasped. "How high is it?"

"Oh, now don't start a big melodrama."

"Who's starting a melodrama? *I* didn't holler Jack, Jack!"

"All right, all right," said Jack, pushing them aside. "Let me see."

She waited for him to say, Who's been fooling with the terminometer?...but he just rapped on the glass, then turned and looked out the window. Dorene pressed her hands into her cheeks in one of her Gothic poses: *Anxiety*. "How bad is it, Papa?" she said in a hushed voice.

He looked around. "Where's the paper?"

It was on the table, right in front of his eyes. Mary gave it to him and he turned to Atmos-facts. "Is it very bad?"

whispered Dorene. "Papa? Will I have to cut Workshop?"

"Oh, really!" exclaimed Mary.

"Yes, but Mamma, you only get three cuts, and I already took one when I had the sore throat—"

"I think I'll call Haskell. He might just know something."

Jack's voice had grown so casual that it was terrifying. Mary called upstairs. "Benny? Benedetta!" She turned to Dorene. "Where is she?"

"*I* don't know. How'm *I* supposed to—"

She ran next door to the Doroskis', Dorene at her heels. David was watching Martha Doroski roll out pie crust. "Benny isn't here? David, time to come home."

Over his head she nodded meaningfully toward the sky, but of course Martha had to open her big mouth. "Will you look at that *sky!*" She wiped her hands on her apron and untied it. "I'm going to pick up my girls at the Y." Too late, she grew nonchalant. "It's nothing, it'll blow over in an hour, but just to be on the safe side. Come by after, Davey; I'll make lemonade."

"Pink or white?" He was a great one for detail. Mary pushed him out, looking all around for Benny. Oh, God, she thought, I know I should keep better track. I will next time, I promise. "Is it an annihilation alert?" cried David keenly. "Is it, Mom? Is it the end of the world?"

"What a *nut!*" Dorene was amused. She began to sing: "Oh, goody, goody, it's the end of the world! We'll all be blown to beautiful bits! Beautiful, beautiful—"

David kicked out at her. Mary pulled him inside. Jack was shouting into the phone. "Three forty-three! Three—forty— Can't you hear me? Hang up, I'll get another line!"

"Benny come in?" He shook his head. "Dorene, see if she's at Louise's. David, you try Judy's." She ran upstairs to look out the bathroom window. When she passed Benny's room, there she was, sitting in bed with her dolls and blankets, drinking apple juice.

Mary ran in and slapped her backhand across the face. Benny fell sideways, spilling the apple juice, and began to cry. Mary lifted her and held her tight against her shoulder. "Oh, Benny, how could you give me such a fright? Didn't you hear me call?"

Benny sobbed against her neck. "Yes, but I. . .thought you wanted me to practice and I was. . .*busy.*"

She carried her into the bathroom and sponged off the apple juice. Someday we'll laugh about this, she thought,

looking out the window to hide her tears. There came David, sauntering along as if he had all day. Turning an innocent, inquiring face as Dorene flew past, hair streaming, eyes wild (*Panic*); the whole thing had slipped his mind. "Mamma!" Dorene called, "She isn't *any*where!"

Mary leaned out. "*Don't scream in the street!*"

Dorene's face closed; she dropped her head and disappeared under the porch. Sitting Benny on her hip Mary ran downstairs to make amends; but she was too late, Dorene stood (*Reverie*) looking at a magazine on the coffee table; her gleaming hair curtained off her face.

Some other time, thought Mary. She sat down on the couch, holding Benny tight against her like a shield, like a hot water bottle. Benny wore an old lace nightgown of Mary's that clung to her plump legs, damp with apple juice. Jack was still on the phone; David stood at his elbow and spoke into his ear. "What about Mousey? And Hammy? And Ratty?"

Jack brushed his ear, as though David were a gnat. "*Yes*, I want that Utah call. Put me through as soon as you can." He hung up and turned to her, bumping David. "It's just some little oxygen shortage. Remember last year? Haskell's not worried. And he's got a dandy terminometer, nearly four hundred dollars second hand."

Then, as always, he spoiled the effect. "At least, he didn't *sound* worried. We had such a rotten connection, I couldn't really hear what he was saying. But hell, it's been 343 before."

"Never," she said.

"It's 349," said David.

"Nonsense," said Jack.

They checked and it was 349. David hooked his thumbs under imaginary suspenders. "You could count on me, der great scientist."

She pulled Benny still closer. "Oh, what should we *do?*"

Jack began to shout. "How the hell do *I* know?"

"I just thought maybe if we went in the cellar," she said reasonably. He was only angry at his own helplessness. Still, why did she always have to be the reasonable one?

"You know it doesn't matter *where* you go, if it's the big one—"

Dorene clutched at Mary. Mary jumped. "Don't *grab* me!"

"Does 349 mean the big one?" said David. "Our book in school says *362*—"

"I *didn't* grab, I just feel scary—"

"We *all* feel scary!"

Benny slid down off Mary's lap. "The big *what?*"

In the end Dorene went weeping upstairs and slammed her door and things got a little calmer. Mary found a book to read to David and Benny. Jack pulled the ottoman up to his armchair. "Sitting down?" she said, surprised.

"Why not? You think I'm supporting the world, like Hercules? I'm not supporting anything but my own family. And Dr. Norseman," he added bitterly.

Outrage steadied her voice. "I *thought* you might want to get your mother."

"Oh. Yes, sure," he muttered. "I'll run right over."

She called after him, "Want to take David?" but he didn't seem to hear.

It was getting dark; a strange, sulphury dark. From time to time a car rushed by. David reached behind her and pulled Benny's hair; Benny hit him on the ear. As soon as Mary got them quiet, the alarm began. Oh, wasn't that the story of their marriage? When the world came to an end, when every other man on the block was home with his wife and children, wouldn't he be off getting his mother?

Ah, don't be such a nut, she told herself; you *sent* him for the old lady. "Go *on!*" said Benny, pounding her wrist, and she realized that the sirens were dying down, it was only the noon whistle, not the alarm.

Then Jack and his mother came in. The old lady was worrying about all the things she should have brought, Jack's father's letters, and the canned water, and her diamond brooch. . . "Diamond *brooch?*" said Mary. "What for?"

His mother turned that tight face on her. "We went away and left the house open to the four winds. Anybody could walk in off the street. *I* thought you *prized* that brooch. I left it to you in my will."

"Oh, it's a beautiful brooch," said Mary. She owed it to Dorene at least to keep it in the family.

Poor Dorene! She ought to run up and see how she was. "Where's Dorene?" said the old lady.

"Upstairs."

"People don't believe me when I tell about my wonderful daughter-in-law, so calm, so rational. *I* would have been wild. *I* would have had all my children gathered around me. . ."

The old lady had been making those scorpion remarks for fifteen years, but they still worked; when the tail came around, Mary always got stung. She put the first joint of her index finger between her teeth and bit it. "Oh, Mother," said Jack impatiently, "The alarm hasn't even blown."

"That doesn't mean a thing," said his mother. "They could be delaying it, with all the graft and corruption."

"Absurd," said Jack. But he was beginning to unhitch; he stood up and walked to the window.

"Watch and see if it isn't in the paper tomorrow," said the old lady. "About the alarm being late, an investigation is promised, et cetera."

Jack picked up the phone and dialed. He would check with all his friends; he was so responsible, everybody said; but *she* was the one that got stuck with grandma. "Fix you some tea? A cup of coffee?"

"Oh, I don't want to be a nuisance. Later I'll have a bite of lunch."

"David!" said Mary, "why don't you show grandma how well you read?" and she went briskly into the kitchen as though she had important chores there. *Lunch!* She stared hopelessly into the refrigerator. Hot dogs, but the old lady couldn't eat hot dogs. And if she fixed her something special, she would fuss: *Oh, I hate to give you so much trouble.* What could they all eat? An omelet? They had had eggs for breakfast.

She went to look at the canned goods. Martha Doroski could handle this with her left hand. Some women were big and bountiful, love and food flowing from then, generous, giving. *She* couldn't even fill a shopping cart without getting a headache. Before she started going to Dr. Norseman, she sometimes wept in the supermarket, back in the corner with the dog food.

Oh, well, it wasn't lunch time yet. She stood looking out at the new apricot tulips she had put in last fall, and taking long, slow breaths... "Making lunch?" said Jack.

She gave a little scream. "*Already?*"

"Don't bother," he said sharply. "Go inside, I'll take care of everything."

That was how he got when his mother was around, seeing a slight in every remark, every facial expression. "Don't be silly, I'll do it."

"Don't do me any favors!"

"*Oh*, for God's sake!"

Jack's mother appeared in the doorway; they jumped apart as if she had caught them in some illicit embrace. "I just don't know how you young people can be so calm. I'm ready to pop right out of my skin. But I guess it's like anything in life, you get callous. When *I* was your age..."

If I have to listen to all that *one more time* I'll *die*, thought Mary. Oh, God, don't let me be like that in my old age. If I have an old age. "Well, and of course

the older you get, the more you feel strain," she said.

It sounded bitchier than she intended. The old lady seemed to puff slightly, but before she could speak the phone rang. Jack escaped, crying, "I'll take it!" They stood, heads averted, and listened. "Thanks, operator. Haskell?"

David's voice said, "Hey, Dad! It's going down! Dad? It's 341, Dad!"

The old lady took a deep breath. "I'll tell you something, I'm *glad* I'm older. When the oxygen gives out, I won't be around. I'll leave it for the young people. Gasping like a fish, roasting like a leg of—"

"Don't talk like that!" cried Mary.

The old lady seemed more surprised than offended. "You can't tell *me*—"

"Yes, I can!" said Mary, just the way she had always dreamed of doing. "It's my house! You can't talk like that in *my house*, in front of *my children*—"

But then it was all different from her dream. The old lady turned, touching the door frame like a blind person, and went back inside. Why, she's *hurt*, thought Mary, amazed. What should I do? But she just stood there, listening to the voices from the living room.

"Davey, where's grandma's bag?"

"Where you going, Grandma?"

"Home."

"Well, okay, I think it's safe now," said David judiciously.

Why didn't Jack do something? Couldn't he see what was going on? There were loud, old footsteps in the hall and the door slammed. Should she get him off the phone? After all, it was his mother; he was going to be terribly upset. Through the kitchen window she watched the old lady stump down the front walk. She was nearly at the street when Benny went rushing across the lawn, her damp nightgown flapping. "Granny! Granny!"

The old lady turned. Benny clung to her legs; then she took her hand and led her back. The old lady looked uncomfortable; she stopped and picked a flower. That was to explain her running out. Of course it had to be one of the new tulips.

Now that it was over, Mary had begun to shake. She sat down and listened to Benny chattering as they went through the hall and into the living room. "Anyhow it isn't *time* to go, Granny. I don't *want* you to go yet." Well, she thought, at least I made one good one, able to see, able to love, to act. If one out of three turns out right. I can't be such a nut.

Jack came in. "Haskell says—"

She put her finger on his mouth. "Because you didn't give out the gum yet, Granny," continued the little voice. "You forgot the gum. The gum in your bag! I saw it before. I always like to see what you brought, Granny."

"Oh, well," she said. She got up and leaned against him, and he gripped her shoulders and held her tight. It was all right; it was all all right.

"I *told* you," he said. "Didn't I tell you, some little oxygen shortage?"

Suddenly she felt exhausted. *She* was the reasonable one, and he was always trying to make her look like a hysteric. She pulled away. The phone rang; he rushed in to answer, and she went back to the refrigerator. There was a little sauerkraut in a plastic bag, half a pork chop, white with cold fat, a pinched-looking baked potato. Dorene called down. "Can I go now? It isn't even twelve-thirty!"

"You can come set the table."

"Can I help?" called Jack's mother.

"Dorene will do it!" she called back brightly.

"It's *David's* day!"

"David's reading to grandma." She looked at the soups. Jack hated tomato; Benny hated chicken noodle. It was too sticky for pepper pot. If the world had come to an end, she thought, at least I wouldn't have to decide what to have for lunch.

Dorene hung over the stair rail. "Listen, I miss Workshop just because you're so *nervous*, and then I have to do *his* jobs, because I'm the *oldest*, but the oldest ought to have a *few meager privileges*. . ."

"What are you laughing at?" said Dorene.

She found she was still holding the cellar door. She let it drop onto the supporting post. "Nothing."

"Ah, tell me!" Dorene pleaded, greedily.

"It's a grown-up joke. Run upstairs and get my bag. I'll drive you to the bus, anyhow."

"Ah, you said—"

"To the bus."

To her amazement Dorene turned and scurried inside; she could hear her pounding up the stairs.

REPORT ON F&SF COMPETITION 1

We asked, in our November issue, for original "absolutely mad inventions." The response ranged from entries that were logical but too sensible for our taste to those that were funny, but, well, *too* mad. We picked the winners from those that seemed to strike a good balance between the two extremes.

First prize (an original F&SF cover painting) to:

ALL PURPOSE CAT LITTER, "Kataliszt"

"Kataliszt" is an absorbent, hygenic and bio-degradeable litter for cat trays. Its principal ingredient is sea-weed, compressed into small pellets, with a little (1.07%) *Cannabis sativa* added. The natural chlorophyll helps deodorize the tray and gives the pellets a soothing moss green color. Softened in milk and put through the electric blender with ice cream it makes a healthful and eye-appealing drink. It can be popped like popcorn and eaten with salt and butter, or in this form, used as a light-weight packing material (without the seasonings, of course). Baked for two hours in a slow (200 degree) oven, it makes excellent BB shot. Useful for sopping up greasy spills, as a growing medium for seedlings, and as a mulch.

—PHOEBE W. ELLIS

Second prize (THE SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME, Doubleday to: "The Self-Powered, Electric Straw. . .making it possible to imbibe continuously, in any position, leaving the hands completely free. "—STUART J. EDGERTON. Runners-up (one-year subscriptions to F&SF): "Jones Injectional Spaghetti Crimp . . .a device whereby the sauce may be introduced *into* the spaghetti, after it has been cooked, and sealed therein." —RAY JONES. "The Weil Smellatron. . .designed to fill the need in the neglected field of odor recording." —RICHARD H. WEIL. And finally: "The 'MUDD', Male Urine Discharge Deflector,. . . provides a muting baffle against which the masculine discharge may be directed with no suspicion that a stallion is stationed in the near neigh-borhood." —ALAN K. CLARKE

All in all, despite a curious obsession with waste disposal, a fine, zany group. Our only complaint was quantity: not a very large response, leading us to suspect that maybe you don't want to play these games. We'll try once more. . .

COMPETITION 2

Below, the book/movie 2001: *A Space Odyssey* is blurbed and retitled to appeal to the popular taste of the 40's. We're asking you to submit a similar misleading (and hopefully funnier than our sample) blurb and new title for any well known sf book or movie or for any story in this issue.

MISSION TO JUPITER by Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick

When Commander Dave Bowman and his team of crack astronauts head for Jupiter to find out the meaning behind a huge, whistling slab that has been uncovered in the very bowels of Luna, little do they expect to be confronted by 2001 obstacles. Against staggering odds, including a maniacal computer and a zero-G toilet, Bowman reaches Jupiter, only to find...

Rules: Send entries to Competition Editor, F&SF, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Entries must be received by April 1. Judges are the editors of F&SF; their decision is final. All entries become the property of F&SF; none can be returned.

Prizes: First prize, an original Gahan Wilson cartoon. Second prize, 10 books on the occult that are cluttering up our office. Runners-up will receive one-year subscription to F&SF. Results of Competition 2 will appear in the July issue.

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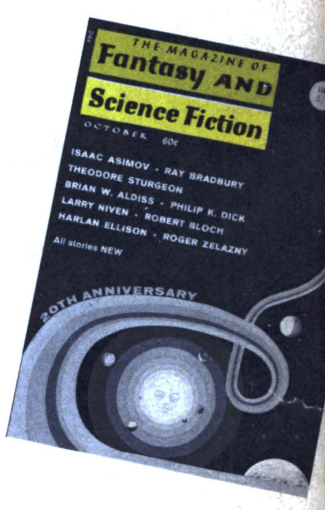

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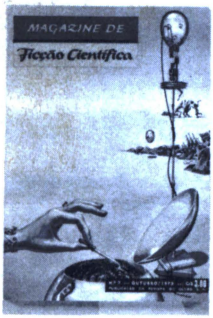

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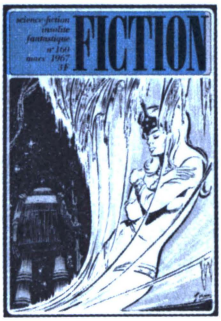

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