

*To a gorilla, man is a horribly misshapen beast.*

**EDWARD WELLEN**

He was so hideous at birth that his mother, believing a demon had possessed her, abandoned him at the jungle's edge to the demons everyone knew dwelled in the jungle. She was, as they say, little more than a child herself, one of many children of poor and unworldly farm folk, and the baby was the get of a passing stranger who had taken her by force, and she delivered the baby secretly in lonely pain and fear.

Almost she welcomed the baby's frightfulness as a sign to rid herself of the burden of child and guilt. She bit and tied off the clue that led back into the labyrinth of her womb. Then she stole home and remained silent about what had happened and even forgot in time it was anything more, as they say, than a bad dream.

The baby himself was far from silent. It was the old blind man living alone in the jungle who heard the wailing and found the baby and poked it with his stick to make sure it was not really an animal that snapped and bit, and took him in and gave him a name and brought him up.

The old blind man lived under a thatch by the side of a stream and hoed a painfully-cleared patch of vegetable garden, and set snares for smaller animals, and followed bird-song to find and eat the berries birds ate, though he never wandered too far from the smell and sound of the running water. It was on one such following of birdsong that he came upon the cross-trail infant cry.

He carried the naked slimy thing back to his thatch and dipped his little finger in fermented fruit juice and stoppered the wailing while he wondered how to keep the baby alive.

Deep in his darkness he remembered and saw the roots that would nourish a baby, and by smell and feel, though his worn heart almost failed him at having to venture out of smell and sound of the stream, he found them where they grew and brought them back in a basket he had woven. He cut out the eyes to plant for later, and for now he washed the tubers and steeped them and fed the baby the milky juice.

So the baby lived. And it thrived and fattened on boiled and mashed plants and on berries and on the meat and marrow of small animals. The old man named him Godsend and moved their home deeper into the jungle, far from anyone who might come to claim the child and take him away.

And as Godsend grew he learned all the old man knew and more. Still a small child, Godsend skilled himself in hunting with bow-and-arrow and spear as well as snare, and in making fire with firesticks, and in working metal, and in truth proved a godsend for an old blind man growing older and feebler.

And when Godsend was yet a stripling he thought to give the old man back his sight, for Godsend had studied the animals he caught and had learned the workings of bone and muscle and tissue and blood.

The old man was as full of fear as of hope, but he had come to have great faith in the boy, and even to be in awe of his mind and the work of his hands.

So Godsend forged a fine sharp blade, and the old man chewed a herb and put himself to sleep, and Godsend cut away the clouded lenses. When they unwrapped the cloth, and Godsend slipped over the old man's head a hoop of wood with two holes in which Godsend had fitted the lenses of animal eyes, the old man saw the light again and rejoiced.

But then he saw Godsend, and his heart failed him.

The boy knelt and pressed his hands on the old man's chest and leaned his weight on his hands and pumped the old man's heart back to life. But it was a short stay. The old man opened his eyes and smiled sadly and apologetically and tried to tell the boy kindly that every now and again a change took place in the seed of man, that sometimes it meant a great leap forward, sometimes a great leap backward. And that sometimes it happened that something at once terrible and beautiful took shape.

And that it seemed to him Godsend was this last, that there was a link between Godsend's bodily deformity and his soaring and questing mind.

And so, looking at Godsend with love and sorrow, the old man left him with a warning and a promise.

A warning that if he went out into the world beyond the jungle and tried to mingle with the people who lived in the wide world he would only do himself great hurt.

And a promise that if he stayed hidden in the jungle and single-mindedly sought the secrets of earth, air, water, and fire he would work wonders such as the world had never known.

Toward the end the old man's voice grew thick, for he was weary, and he closed his eyes and drifted away for good.

In the days of mourning and loneliness after he buried the old man, Godsend felt the pull of people grow stronger and stronger. The old man's warning became fainter and fainter in his mind. And at last he yielded to the pull and went with it to the edge of the jungle.

He stared out at a world of openness, of great cleared spaces for growing crops, of scatters and clusters of dwellings. And as his face hung loose in wonder he saw coming toward him the first person other than the old man.

It was a child chasing a butterfly across furrows, the lure of jeweled wings making the child forget the nearness of forbidden jungle.

Godsend felt a rush of delight. The child was beautiful, the butterfly was beautiful, the wide world was beautiful.

And as though with a will of its own Godsend's hand swooped out and caught the butterfly. And Godsend ran smiling to meet the child and give it the butterfly.

It was a girl, though he did not know that. She stopped on one foot. He called out in greeting and fluttered the hand that held the butterfly.

She whirled and ran from him screaming.

He stood stunned. Then after a time he stirred and saw the butterfly was dead and dusted it from his hand and turned and made his way back home, slowly, blindly.

It was long since he had last eaten or drunk but he did not care to think of eating or drinking. Still, his body moved him down to the stream to drink and wash and so lessen the dry tightness of his throat and the sweaty heat of his brow.

And remembering the set of the features of the one who had fled from him, and of the old man, and feeling with his hands his own, he scratched a channel from the stream to a hollow of earth. And when the hole filled with water he dammed the trench and so formed a still pool. And he looked at himself in the sweet water and grew bitter.

And now he realized that the old man had tried to explain to him at the end that he was a biological sport, a freak of nature, and for this reason he could never make a comfortable place for himself in the everyday company of mankind but must live out his life away from the eyes of people.

That is, unless he wished, for the sake of money (a thing hard for Godsend to grasp), to make a show of himself and endure staring eyes and mocking voices. But it had been the old man's thinking that it was better for Godsend to stay in the jungle where there was no need for money to buy his other needs.

Godsend knew the old man was right and he told himself he would never go out among people. But out of bitterness and pride Godsend also vowed that he would create for himself here in the jungle something much more than mere self-sufficiency.

Above all else the power of light filled Godsend's mind as he grew to manhood, and he played with lenses and saw how he might wedge and unweave bands of light. He saw quickly he needed lenses that would not rot away as the eye lenses of animals rotted, and he thought of the hardness and translucency of the stones on the bed of the stream and along the banks.

So he shaped and polished both clear stones and tinted stones, and found silver in the earth, and played with burning glasses and prisms and mirrors. He learned to capture and store sunlight and to release it in a spear of light that cut and fused and drilled and vaporized stone and metal.

Once he made a distorting mirror that twisted his features into normality. He smiled into it briefly, then smashed it to bits.

But throwing away those bits of sky-jungle-himself did not stop him from thinking of kinship and alien-ship.

From time to time he stole to the edge of the jungle and looked out upon the farms and villages. He could see how they grew at the expense of his jungle, for year by year they nibbled at it. But the jungle was vast and he could always move deeper into it and its thick cover hid him even from the silver-winged machines that had begun to thread the air.

He watched people through a telescope and found that by means of crystals he could listen to those he could not see (though by means of his beams of light he came to see even those who lived on the far side of the world, when they put shiny spheres into near space) and he smiled his twisted smile to see how they misused the earth's treasures.

But night after night he picked out the other planets and the stars. He felt more kinship with night and night's blazing jewels than with his fellow beings. Too, it helped him feel less earthbound, for he envied the people who flew with silver wings over the great roundness of the earth. So the years passed.

And then one night he saw a flash that fireballed as it 'burned a luminous trail through the air toward him. It rumbled and hissed and struck nearby with a shock that hurled him to the ground and slammed the breath from him.

He gulped air and got up and looked around. A cloud of dust and steam and smoke fixed it for him.

When he reached it he found a fresh clearing and a crater, and in the crater a darkly glowing rock twice his height in diameter. The rock smelled of hot iron and nickel. He had viewed science telecasts on the scanner screen he had built and he knew what this must be: a meteorite, a piece of some shattered planet of this solar system.

His heart warmed to it; like himself, it was alien yet akin.

He went back for his laser and his power pack to slice the rock open and see what lay at the meteorite's heart.

He had not thought to tune in to learn how the others of the world were taking this blow and boon from space; he had failed to consider they must have sensed it. He knew his oversight when, just as he was beginning to cut through the meteorite, he heard a plane loudening. He darted out of sight as the plane droned into sight.

The plane swooped and circled, and Godsend knew it was mapping and photographing the print of destruction and the crater and the meteorite. And he saw it would not be long before people hacked through to the heart of his jungle and found his home and his workshop and ended his safe apartness.

There would be staring eyes and mocking voices.

For a moment a savage fury possessed him. He would wipe them out with his laser beam if they invaded his jungle. He could not hope to win against the whole world, but he could at least show the world a freak was not a thing to take lightly.

No. There was another way. From under the thick cover of his jungle he gave the plane his frightful smile, then turned and stole back to his workshop.

He stripped his home and shop of all the goods and gadgets he wished and needed to save—his tools and instruments, and his memory crystals and his computer, and his radio and television receivers, and his telescope and microscope, and his supply of preserved foods—and loaded them on a makeshift ground-effect sled. He vaporized his home and shop.

Then, covering his traces as he went, he sledded to the crater. By now the plane had gone. He put on his tinted goggles and played his laser beam on the rock.

He worked the rock into a shell, smooth on the inside, save for one section that he left a molten mass as though the drive had fused on landing or as though its fusion had caused the crash. He stowed his things aboard, vaporized the sled, then fitted the openings in the shell with an air lock and a quartz window.

Now the sky-rock would pass as a ship from space and he himself would pass as a visitor from space.

He even picked out the star. He had worked through the day and it was night again. And there was the star he would tell them he came from. No; there was the star he would point to. It would have to seem to take him a while to learn to speak their tongues.

Now it should not appear strange to them when they came and found him here that he looked alien. How else should a being from space look?

But if they still found him a thing of horror, a thing to stare at and mock, he had an answer. Not fury, hot or cold; he was beyond that. He was already working out in his mind a simple star drive to build—or seem to rebuild—in his spaceship. He dreamed of it till dawn.

It was well he had hurried, for the people did not hack the long way through the jungle to the place where the object from space had landed. Instead, at dawn, they flew back over the place and a number of them parachuted into the crater.

Godsend came forth.

He made a sign of peace and smiled.

His horrible smile did not cause them to turn and run from him. Nor did they mock. They stepped slowly forward in awe and reverence.

Godsend let out his breath.

No hurry to build the drive. There would be time for space. The night was always there with its stars. Right now the star he had been born under was shining bright.

